



SILCHESTER:
CHANGING VISIONS OF A ROMAN TOWN
INTEGRATING GEOPHYSICS AND ARCHAEOLOGY:
THE RESULTS OF THE SILCHESTER MAPPING PROJECT
2005–10







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THE RESULTS OF THE SILCHESTER MAPPING PROJECT
2005–10

BY

John Creighton with Robert Fry

Britannia Monograph Series
No. 28

Published by the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies
Senate House Malet Street London WC1E 7HU
2016



BRITANNIA MONOGRAPH SERIES NO. 28

Published by the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies
Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU

This monograph was published with the aid of a grant from the University of Reading

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British Library Catalogue in Publication Data
A catalogue record of this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978 0 907764 42 7

Front cover illustration: A photograph of Henry Hodge's Great Plan, finalised in 1909
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Back cover illustration: The revised plan of Silchester, showing Insulae numbers, superimposed over the Environment Agency LiDAR data

Produced by Past Historic, Kings Stanley, Gloucestershire

Printed in Great Britain by Henry Ling Limited, Dorchester



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DIGITAL MATERIAL

An archive has been deposited with the Archaeological Data Service under the project title '**Silchester Mapping Project 2005-10**'. This includes: GIS files, a digital version of the foldout plan, and a multi-layered PDF where different layers of information can be turned on and off to see how the interpretation links to the aerial photography, etc.

<http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/>

doi: 10.5284/1038434





ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Funding for this work came from three main sources. First, the University of Reading provided me with the time and space within which to conduct the research. The resource ultimately comes from the Higher Education Funding Council for England, which provides us with research funds based on our overall departmental research quality, so I have to thank all of my colleagues for helping create the well-resourced environment within which to work. Secondly, a HEFCE initiative creating Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning led to a major investment programme. I set up an interdisciplinary centre promoting undergraduate research engagement, and one strand of that involved significant funds to purchase the kind of equipment which undergraduates would not normally gain access to. Within the Department of Archaeology this led, amongst other things, to an increase in the amount of geophysical equipment we could use. Students began research placements and dissertations involving geophysics and through this we managed to survey the interior of the town. Thirdly, a British Academy Research Development Award enabled the survey to ‘go-large’ and extend out beyond the walls. Much of this later work was carried out by Rob Fry whose productivity, in the days before vehicle-based multi-probe arrays, was extraordinary and his contribution has been immense. Surveying the town and its environment was just the beginning. What followed was the digitisation of past excavations and all the other datasets to help to interpret all of the features which were emerging, for which there was no external funding. Bringing the volume together and drafting the final sections of synthesis would not have been possible without a visiting fellowship of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut at the Römisch-Germanische Kommission in Frankfurt, for which I thank the DAI President, Professor Dr Friederike Fless, the RGK Director, Eszter Bánffy, and David Wigg-Wolf.

The fieldwork would not have been possible without the community and consent of the people of Silchester, the landowners, managers and tenants of the living landscape within and around the walls. In particular I would like to thank: Robin Edwards, Hampshire County Council; Roy and Graham Best, Clappers Farm; Nick and Biddy West, Old Manor House; John Cook and Jon Stacey, Church Lane Farm; Alastair Blacknell and the Englefield Estate; Charles and Ben Kolowoski of Chitty Farm; and the owners of many of the horses whose paddocks we occasionally invaded: Duncan Hodge, Brocas Lands Farm; Paddy and Mel Bowring, The Mount; Mr Carlini and Tony Martin of Rye House; Charles Smythe of Rye Cottage; Graham Hutton, the Old House; Stella Balderston, Sawyers Land; and Richard Massey, West End Farm. Mike Fulford kindly introduced me to many of them.

I would like to thank English Heritage for their permission to work on the scheduled area, and their inspector, Richard Massey for his continued encouragement.

In relation to the fieldwork: during the summer of 2006 Laura Cripps assisted by Rob Fry supervised participants from the Silchester Field School in the collection of data from the interior of the city, the data being processed by myself; and in 2008–9 the survey of the exterior was undertaken, led by Rob Fry with the assistance of Nick Crabb, Lee Calderbank, Alice James, Matt Berry and other occasional volunteers, the data being processed by Rob Fry. Throughout the project Dave Thornley provided invaluable support, and helped us optimise our walking techniques, significantly reducing the time it took to survey grids. Tim Astin provided advice



on the use of Ground Penetrating Radar and Electrical Resistance Tomography. Tim Phillips provided occasional and valued support throughout various stages of the project.

Over the years three undergraduates undertook surveys as part of their dissertations, Rob Fry (2007, pl. X) trying out multiple techniques in what became our ‘test area’ spanning Insulae II and IX; Jenny Saffrey (2008) exploring the temple area in the paddocks south of Manor Farm; and Nick Crabb (2009) in the area around the Amphitheatre. Their raw data have been incorporated within this project.

In relation to the digitisation, Duncan Sayer spent many hours on the initial processing of the Society of Antiquaries’ plans. Pete Brewer helped set up the initial GIS framework for the project. Rob Fry carried out the initial digitisation and first-line interpretation of the geophysical results with subsequent work integrating the dataset being done by myself. Elements of the GIS, where copyright permits, will be deposited within the Archaeology Data Service.

Library research: I want to thank Adrian James and Heather Rowland at the Society of Antiquaries of London as well as Gabriele Rasbach at the Römisch-Germanische Kommission.

I would like to thank Paul Bidwell, Simon Esmonde Cleary, Hella Eckardt, Steve Preston and Rob Fry for their comments on the full text, and John Pearce and Richard Bradley for comments on individual chapters; the work has benefited significantly from their attention. I would also like to thank Paul Bidwell, John Peter Wild and especially Lynn Pitts for their work and support throughout the editorial and production process with the Roman Society.

Finally, I would like to thank Alejandro Bria Mas, to whom this volume is dedicated, for his support and encouragement.

IMAGE PERMISSIONS

I would like to thank the following for the use of their images or data: Jean and Martin Norgate for their image of Isaac Taylor’s map (FIG. 3.3); Adrian James at the Society of Antiquaries of London for arranging the photography of some early prints (FIGS 2.1, 3.4, 3.5, 3.9); the Environment Agency’s Geomatics division for the LiDAR data (FIG. 3.14, and the background to other images); John Gater and Chris Gaffney for the reproduction of their early geophysical survey at Silchester by GSB (FIG. 3.15); English Heritage/Historic England for the reproduction of their geophysical surveys over the Forum area and the western cemetery (FIGS 3.16, 4.2, 4.3, 13.4); the NMR/Historic England for the reproduction of the photographs in FIG. 14.5 (© Crown copyright HE).

The cartography behind all the modern maps and plans is derived from the OS Landline and Digimap Carto datasets. These are © Crown Copyright 2008. These are Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied services.



SUMMARY

Silchester (*Calleva Atrebatum*) is a Roman town in Hampshire, in central southern Britain. Unlike many, the site was abandoned in the post-Roman period leaving it as a largely greenfield site now. The Amphitheatre, Town Wall and some Outer Defences all remain visible for the visitor to see. The town has been highly influential in the development of Romano-British archaeology due to the large-scale excavation by the Society of Antiquaries in 1890–1908 which developed an overall plan of the site.

This volume draws together for the first time all the fieldwork known to have taken place, from the earliest located trenches in the 1720s up until the modern campaigns of Michael Fulford (1974–present). The cut-off date is 2013. It integrates this work with a new geophysical survey of the interior and vicinity to provide a new overarching narrative for the town.

The volume starts with a historiography of work on the city from earliest antiquarian investigations through to recent campaigns; and this sense of historiography and changing interpretations of the site permeates the later discussion, showing how new discoveries have transformed understandings.

The core of the volume contains the empirical data. Work has taken place digitising all the past excavation plans, and combining this with other datasets including: two major fieldwalking campaigns, the aerial photographic plots, landscape analysis from earlier maps from the Ordnance Survey and earlier sources, LiDAR, other mapping data, and finally 217 ha of new geophysical prospection in and around the town. An atlas has been created which shows these data in a variety of formats, together with a detailed text outlining all the past interventions within each sheet, and providing a summary of the discoveries together with references to their later reinterpretation where relevant.

The final sections provide essays in interpretation, with thematic reviews of: the defences and linear earthworks; the development of the *oppidum*; the interpretation of Roman military metalwork; an interpretation of the evidence for the mortuary landscape of the town; discussions of urban infrastructure, trade, industry and public entertainment. Finally, a narrative overview is provided reviewing how the town's remains have been interpreted within an historical setting.

There are methodological innovations differentiating the signal strength of features in the fluxgate gradiometry data to map 'hotspots' representing possible cremation pyre areas, middens, and industrial activities to develop our understanding of the mortuary landscape and also that of shops and workshops within the town; these techniques could readily be applied to other large-scale surveys of Roman cities which have already been undertaken.

The work provides the first overall synthesis of the city since Boon (1974). The new work includes a significantly revised impression of the development and chronology of the earthworks surrounding the town and maps all the Later Iron Age finds and evidence for the development of the street-grid from both excavation data and geophysics. Several new cemetery areas have been discovered, including a series of large Later Iron Age or Early Roman burial enclosures. Features have been identified which may represent elusive evidence for large-scale tanning operations near the town. Finally, there are traces on the gravel terrace edge of a series of parallel lines which may be indicative of a circus, though ground-truthing is required to test that.



The overall urban assessment and synthesis enable Silchester to be seen alongside the other recent comprehensive reviews of major cities in south-east Britain, such as *Verulamium* (Niblett and Thompson 2005) and Colchester (Radford *et al.* 2013).

