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# Silchester, Hampshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Ref: 108710.01  
June 2015



## **Silchester, Hampshire**

### **Archaeological Watching Brief Report**

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## Quality Assurance

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# Silchester, Hampshire

## Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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## Silchester, Hampshire

### Archaeological Watching Brief Report

#### Summary

Wessex Archaeology (WA) were commissioned by English Heritage (the Client) to undertake an archaeological watching brief during improvement works to a footpath within the grounds of the Scheduled Monument of Silchester (hereafter the Site), centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 464298 162240. The improvement works comprised of the removal of a tree stump and the excavation of six postholes for new railings for the footpath.

The Scheduled Monument of Silchester Roman City Walls and Amphitheatre (SM no. 1011957) comprises the Late Iron Age oppidum and Roman town of Calleva Atrebatum and associated earthworks which together extend over an area of c.129ha. The Roman walls, gates and earthworks which form part of the Roman town defences are one of the best known preserved examples in England and remains of the amphitheatre and associated earthworks are also upstanding.

No archaeological features, deposits or finds were identified during the watching brief. All intrusive works on the Site were located within an earthwork bank and the up cast material formed from the removal of the tree stump and the six excavated postholes comprised of a single organic topsoil deposit.



## **Silchester, Hampshire**

### **Archaeological Watching Brief Report**

#### **Acknowledgements**

Wessex Archaeology would like to thank Andy Turner of English Heritage Trust (formerly English Heritage) for commissioning and the work and for his help and assistance during the course of the project.

The field work was undertaken by Neil Fitzpatrick. This report was written by Ruth Panes with report illustrations prepared by Nancy Dixon. The project was managed on behalf of Wessex Archaeology by Andy Crockett.



# Silchester, Hampshire

## Archaeological Watching Brief Report

### 1 INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Project background

- 1.1.1 Wessex Archaeology (WA) were commissioned by English Heritage (the Client) to undertake an archaeological watching brief the removal of a tree stump and improvement works to a footpath within the grounds of the Scheduled Monument of Silchester (hereafter the Site), centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) 464298 162240.
- 1.1.2 The works involved the excavation of six postholes (**Plates 1 to 5**) in order to construct new railings for a footpath situated on the bank and ditch of an earthwork, associated with a small stream running north-west to south-east across the Site. The footpath, located on the periphery but within the grounds of the monument, serves as a public access around the monument.
- 1.1.3 The Scheduled Monument of Silchester Roman City Walls and Amphitheatre (SM no. 1011957) includes the Late Iron Age oppidum and Roman town of Calleva Atrebatum and associated earthworks and amphitheatre. The monument is one of the best known preserved examples in England. The Site is owned by Hampshire County Council (HCC) and managed by English Heritage.

#### 1.2 Site location, topography and geology

- 1.2.1 The works were situated on an artificial bank on the south-eastern edge of the monument boundary within an area under 0.01ha. A small stream running north-west to south-east intersects the Site, the stream derives from a natural spring located c.200m to the north-west. Immediately to the south-east of the Site is Church Lane and immediately to the north-west is the scheduled monument site. The Site is surrounded by agricultural land and open countryside. The church of Saint Mary the Virgin is located c.120m to the north-east of the Site.
- 1.2.2 The Scheduled Monument of Silchester covers an area of c.129 ha and is located c.1km north-east of the modern village of Silchester in Hampshire.
- 1.2.3 The underlying geology is recorded as London Clay Formation Sand (BGS 2015) with overlying superficial deposits of Sand and Gravel belonging to the Silchester Gravel Member formation.

### 2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1.1 The following text is summarised from the List Entry Description for the Scheduled Monument of The Late Iron Age oppidum and Roman town of Calleva Atrebatum and associated features (SM no. 1011957) (Heritage Gateway 2012).



- 2.1.2 Calleva is thought to have originated as an oppidum, a nucleated settlement, in the Late Iron Age. The Atrebates, after whom the town was named, came to southern Britain from Gaul and it is thought that their leader, Commius, probably made the town his base after dispute with and flight from Julius Caesar in about 50BC, joining some of his people who had earlier settled in Britain. Recent excavations on the site of the later Roman basilica, near the centre of the town, have indicated two main phases of pre-Roman occupation, the earliest dating from the mid-first century BC, when wooden round houses were constructed. Towards the end of the first century BC, the round houses were replaced by a more formal, rectilinear arrangement of streets, plots and timber buildings. Coins of Eppillus, a successor to Commius, bearing the mark CALLE or CALLEV were most probably minted at Calleva, and other finds, including amphorae and fine pottery, show that trade with the continent was taking place in this period.
- 2.1.3 The Iron Age settlement was protected by outlying earthworks to the west and south, some of which are the subject of separate schedulings, and by a closer, irregular western arc of banks and ditches, represented by earthworks west of Rye House and in Rampier Copse; the latter, known as the outer earthwork, is probably of slightly later date since one of the earthworks appears to be truncated by the banks and ditch in Rampier Copse. It has been suggested that a second defensive earthwork circuit, the Inner Earthwork, may date from the period immediately before the Roman invasion.
- 2.1.4 This, however, appears to have been largely levelled during the early stages of construction of the Roman town; its course is known from crop marks and excavation and is also marked by subsidence of the later town walls where they cross the infilled ditch. Soil accumulation above one Late Iron Age street suggests that Calleva was briefly abandoned before Roman rebuilding started in the second half of the first century AD, while a short period of military occupation may also have preceded the construction of the new town. As a Roman town, Calleva was a civitas capital by the end of the first century AD, a regional administrative centre for the Atrebates, reflecting its earlier status and continuing importance in the government of the new province.
- 2.1.5 The first century AD amphitheatre, which has been partly excavated, was built beyond the wall at the north east corner of the town. The remaining buildings ranged from small, undivided, rectangular structures to larger, sub-divided buildings with one or more wings abutting or enclosing courtyards. On stone foundations, the upper parts of many of these buildings may have been of stone or timber-framed construction, no more than a single storey high. The buildings would have provided shops, offices and workshops as well as living accommodation for the town's inhabitants.
- 2.1.6 A defensive circuit of rampart and double ditches was constructed towards the end of the second century AD. This was remodelled and strengthened by the addition of a wall to the front of the rampart in the third century AD. Crop-marks and excavation have shown that the street grid extended beyond the area enclosed by the town defences as far as the earlier Outer Earthwork to the west. A short-lived additional western earthwork was also constructed, probably in the earlier period of the town's history, which may have been intended to enclose a cemetery.
- 2.1.7 The end of Roman Calleva is obscure. A few isolated finds, including a Roman column reused as a tombstone and inscribed in Celtic ogham script, suggest that the town was occupied until about the fifth century AD but thereafter it appears to have been largely deserted.
- 2.1.8 Silchester is mentioned in the Domesday book but the earliest surviving building of the post-Roman village is the 12th and 13th century Church of St Mary, near the east gate of





the Roman town. Evidence of a mid 12th century timber building was found during excavation within the Roman amphitheatre, together with indication of a palisade on the top of the bank, suggesting that the site was reused as a defensive stronghold. The north western corner of Silchester deer park, probably enclosed in the 13th century, lies within the town's eastern limits but the greater part of the park lies further to the east. The focus of the village, however, moved westward to its present site on Silchester Common, leaving the Roman town to revert to open country.

### **3 AIMS**

#### **3.1 General aims and objectives**

3.1.1 The aims of the watching brief were:

- *to determine the presence or absence of archaeological remains and,*
- *should remains be present, to ensure their preservation by record to the highest possible standard;*
- *to confirm the approximate date or date range of the remains, by means of artefactual or other evidence;*
- *to determine or confirm the approximate extent of any remains;*
- *to determine the condition and state of preservation of the remains;*
- *to determine the degree of complexity of the horizontal and/or vertical stratigraphy present; and*
- *to prepare a report on the results of the watching brief.*

### **4 METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1 Watching brief**

4.1.1 The fieldwork comprised of the monitoring of all intrusive groundworks associated with the improvement works and was carried out over the course of one day on 15th April 2015. The watching brief was carried out in accordance with the relevant guidance given in the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists' *Standard and Guidance for an Archaeological Watching Brief* (CIfA 2014a).

4.1.2 A total of six postholes were excavated during the works up to a maximum depth of 0.6m in order to position posts to support new railings as part of the improved pedestrian access.

4.1.3 A continuous archaeological presence was maintained by an experienced archaeologist during all intrusive works undertaken within the Site in line with Planning Conditions and in accordance with the guidance of English Heritage.

4.1.4 A full photographic record was maintained, using digital cameras equipped with an image sensor of not less than 10 megapixels. Digital images will be subject to managed quality control and curation processes which will embed appropriate metadata within the image and ensure long term accessibility of the image set.

### **5 FINDS**

5.1.1 No finds were recovered during the watching brief.



## 6 ENVIRONMENTAL

6.1.1 No deposits suitable for environmental sampling were recorded on the Site.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

7.1.1 The watching brief conducted on the Site encountered no buried archaeological remains. The groundworks were located in an area of earthworks and all intrusive works were limited to the excavation of a single organic topsoil deposit which contained no artefacts.

## 8 WA PROCEDURES

### 8.1 Copyright

8.1.1 The full copyright of the written/illustrative archive relating to the Site will be retained by Wessex Archaeology Ltd under the *Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988* with all rights reserved.

### 8.2 Security Copy

8.2.1 In line with current best practice (e.g. Brown 2011), on completion of the project a security copy of the written records will be prepared, in the form of a digital PDF/A file. PDF/A is an ISO-standardised version of the Portable Document Format (PDF) designed for the digital preservation of electronic documents through omission of features ill-suited to long-term archiving.

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Plate 1: Posthole 1



Plate 2: Posthole 2


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Plate 3: Posthole 3



Plate 4: Posthole 4



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Plate 5: Posthole 5

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