

The Archaeology of Wiltshire's Towns

An Extensive Urban Survey

DUROCORNOVIUM

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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** In 1976 the Department of the Environment sponsored a study of the archaeology of Wiltshire's historic towns, aiming to assess the relative importance of the towns at different points in time as a basis for future archaeological research. This resulted in the publication of "*Wiltshire Towns: the archaeological potential*" (Haslam 1976). Since then, the book has been one of the key references for archaeologists monitoring urban development and its impact in the county.
- 1.2** A massive increase in the amount of data available and changes in legislation such as the introduction of PPG 16 have meant that a reappraisal of the situation is now due. The Extensive Urban Survey of Wiltshire has been commissioned by English Heritage to address the need. The survey aims to map the development of all of Wiltshire's and Swindon's historic towns (Fig. 1) and to examine the extent and vulnerability of the surviving archaeology and built heritage to development.
- 1.3** The origins of urban centres in England reach back to the Iron Age when the need for mutual defence concentrated populations, skills, industry and trade into fortified areas. During the Roman occupation new urban centres were linked by an efficient road system. In the Saxon period, defended towns and royal boroughs were developed and later medieval towns grew around markets as economic conditions improved or were 'planted' as planned new centres.
- 1.4** The first towns in Wiltshire appeared during the Romano-British period but all are now greenfield sites although some may have given rise to nearby settlements. Most modern towns in the county have their roots as Saxon villages or defended settlements such as Cricklade and Wilton. Many of the villages grew into small towns after the Norman invasion, often focussed around a castle or a market and in the early thirteenth century 'planted boroughs', in which individual plots of land were sold by the major landowner.
- 1.5** The definition of a town for inclusion in the survey follows the criteria laid out in Heighway (1972), by which the settlement must possess certain facilities such as defences, a mint, a market, a street plan or a judicial centre. It should also demonstrate urban attributes such as a high population, a diversified economic base and a central or key location. For the purposes of this survey however, the towns should meet these criteria historically, even if they no longer do so. This allows, for example, the inclusion of the five Roman towns in the county. The full list of towns included in the survey and the criteria for inclusion are covered in the project design (Wiltshire County Archaeology Service 1999).
- 1.6** The area of study in each modern town is defined by the size of the town as it stood in 1945, encompassing both the historic core of the town and the older industrial and suburban development. In the case of the Roman towns however, the area of study is limited to the known or conjectured extent of the entire settlement (Fig. 2). In a county such as Wiltshire this is generally based on those results gained during fieldwork and excavation rather than historical sources.

2 HISTORICAL SOURCES

- 2.1 This is a desk-based study, using material available within the County Council research facilities in Trowbridge namely the Sites and Monuments Record, The Trowbridge Reference Library; the Wiltshire and Swindon Record Office, and the Wiltshire Buildings Record.
- 2.2 In the case of the Roman towns data has been drawn from a number of academic studies, excavation reports and surveys, together with information from the SMR.
- 2.3 Since the level of information regarding each Roman town and the methods of its acquisition has varied substantially, it has been found appropriate to put together an historical description of the process, reproducing survey plans where available.

3 LOCATION AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 3.1 The Roman town of Durocornovium lies at the eastern edge of modern day Swindon at a point approximately 21 kilometres south-east of Cirencester. The town lies on the line of the Roman Ermin Street, at the junction with the road from the Roman town at Mildenhall (*Cunetio*). It is situated in the flat clayland section of the route, framed by the northern scarp of the Marlborough Downs to the south and the Blunsdon ridge to the north.
- 3.2 The line of Ermin Street passes through the middle of the site and archaeological investigations have revealed that the extent of the town includes a number of fields under the ownership of Lotmead Farm, Covingham Farm and Nythe Farm. The River Cole and the Dorcan Stream run through the settlement.
- 3.3 The underlying geology consists of Kimmeridge Clay and alluvium near the Dorcan Stream.

4 HISTORICAL OUTLINE

- 4.1 After the Roman invasion in AD 43 a large number of the major towns we know today were created using the already existing pattern of communities in Britain. This ensured that the new province could be governed effectively by the Roman Empire. Durocornovium is likely to have been in the territory under the control of the native tribe known as the '*Dobunni*' (Frere 1997) whose centre of government under the Roman occupation was at Cirencester (*Corinium*). Durocornovium is mentioned in the Antonine Itinerary (Passmore 1922), a Roman document dating to the 3rd Century AD giving routes throughout the Roman empire and the distances between the various named settlements on those routes.
- 4.2 As with many Roman towns, knowledge of the extent and nature of the settlement has grown in an irregular manner over a lengthy period, and an initial overview of survey and research may be helpful.
- 4.3 The site is recorded in the 17th century by the antiquarian Aubrey (Walters, Phillips and Greene 1973) who described the remains of houses, coins and black ashe. He is reported to have found two thousand coins dating to the 1st and 2nd centuries AD in

an earthen pot, at a location known as Customs Gap, situated to the south of Nythe Farm.

- 4.4 The site was also known to the 19th century antiquarian Colt Hoare (Colt Hoare 1821), who believed the site was that of 'Nidum', another Roman settlement mentioned in the Antonine Itinerary. Passmore (1948) disproved this theory and was the first archaeologist to correctly identify the site as Durocornovium, later confirmed by Rivet (Walters, Phillips and Greene 1973). Colt Hoare published a plan of the site (Fig.3) which is now very informative.
- 4.5 There is then little on record until the 1920's when a local archaeologist AD Passmore dug testpits apparently at diverse locations, presumably attempting to verify the extent of the town (Passmore 1922). These investigations revealed substantial settlement evidence at Covingham, Lotmead, and Nythe Farms including stone and rubble foundations, and a thick layer of dark earth up to two feet containing Roman pottery, bone and ash. Regular fieldwalking carried out by Passmore prior to these excavations also revealed the presence of a number of Roman features, such as wells and a series of ditches (Passmore 1922).
- 4.6 Through the 1950's, 60's and 70's a number of individuals responded to the threat posed by the expansion of Swindon and the associated upgrading of the A419, the Roman Ermin Street. When electricity was provided to the local farms in 1956, observations carried out by Owen Meyrick, on behalf of the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works, revealed large quantities of Romano-British pottery and tile (Meyrick 1960).
- 4.7 Trial excavations were carried out by Ernest Greenfield in 1966 in the form of two hundred and sixteen test pits, each measuring 3 feet square. The test pits revealed a number of finds and features including part of the Roman road, three possible stream beds, mortar, occupation layers, pits, ditches, postholes and an adult inhumation burial (Anon. 1967).
- 4.8 The most substantial phase of work commenced in 1966 under the direction of John Wachter and continued for 10 years. It concentrated on a section of Ermin Street close to the centre of the town, and revealed details of the highway, the associated street grid forming the *insulae* or blocks of the town, and most importantly the nature of the buildings fronting the Roman highway (Anderson 2001).
- 4.9 Towards the end of this period, aerial surveillance began to make its contribution, particularly in the drought of 1976. A remarkable discovery was the site of a *mansio* (the accommodation for travelling officials), also the evidence of a street grid. (Burnham and Wachter 1990). A useful overview was produced in 1985 by Sparey-Green, in which he attempted to define the limits of the town, using in particular observations of dark soil spreads and the extent of the street grid (reproduced here as fig 4).

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK IN THE AREA OF THE TOWN

5.1 Archaeological activity has taken place in the area of Durocornovium over a long period of time, in the form of seasonal excavation, archaeological watching briefs and aerial photography (Fig.5).

5.2 The following is a list of known archaeological events that have taken place at Durocornovium. This list is drawn from information in the County Sites and Monuments Record, the excavations register, and the fieldwork reports kept in the County Archaeology Section in Trowbridge. The location of the majority of these events is far from clear, since only brief descriptions of the work have normally been published. Some references are so obscure that not even an approximate location has been plotted.

Event	Year	Site Name/Location	Event Type	Excavator	Reference
1	c. 1689	Customs Gap	Field survey	Aubrey	Passmore 1922
2	1819	Durocornovium	Survey	Colt Hoare	Colt Hoare 1821
3	c. 1922	Covingham, Lotmead and Nythe Farms	Test Pits	Passmore	Passmore 1922
4	1956	Covingham, Lotmead and Nythe Farms	Watching Brief	Meyrick	Meyrick 1960
5	1965	?	Excavation	Woodward	Wessex Archaeology 2000
6	1965- 7	?	Excavation	Coombs	Wessex Archaeology 2000
7	1966	Durocornovium	Excavation	Greenfield	Anon.1967
8	1966	Nine Acre Field	Rescue excavation	Swindon Archaeological Society	Wessex Archaeology 2000
9	1967	Durocornovium	Excavation	Swindon Archaeological Society	Wessex Archaeology 2000
10	1967	Nine Acre Field	Excavation	Swindon Museum	Wessex Archaeology 2000
11	1967	Nine Acre Field	Excavation	Greenfield	Anon.1968
12	1968	Durocornovium/site of Roman ford	Rescue excavation	Swindon Archaeological Society	Wessex Archaeology 2000
13	1968	Nine Acre Field	Excavation	Greenfield	Wessex Archaeology 2000
14	1967- 76	Nine Acre Field	Excavation	Wacher, Anderson	Anderson 2001
15	1970	Durocornovium	Excavation	Swindon Archaeological Society	Wessex Archaeology 2000
16	1970	Line of by-pass	Rescue excavations	Swindon Archaeological Society	Phillips 1971 Wessex Archaeology 2000
17	1970	Durocornovium/site of Roman ford	Excavation	Swindon Archaeological Society	Wessex Archaeology 2000
18	1971- 3	Durocornovium/ cemetery site	Rescue excavations	Swindon Archaeological Society	Wessex Archaeology 2000
19	1975	Durocornovium	Test excavations	Gingell	Wessex

					Archaeology 2000
20	1976	Durocornovium/ <i>mansio</i> site	Aerial and field survey	Swindon Archaeological Society	Phillips and Walters 1977
21	1976- 7	Nine Acre Field/ floodwater lagoon	Rescue excavations	Swindon Archaeological Society	Wessex Archaeology 2000

6 ARCHAEOLOGY: SITES AND EVIDENCE

6.1 *SMR Entries - Prehistoric (fig. 6)*

6.1.1 There is little evidence of pre-Roman activity. Two Neolithic axe fragments are on record (**DU001** and **DU002**) found close to the line of Ermin Street in different parts of the town. A Neolithic polished axe was found south of Covingham Farm (**DU003**). There are no indications from aerial photography of prehistoric settlement or field-systems.

6.2 *SMR Entries - Roman (figs. 7-9)*

6.2.1 All of the twenty-one archaeological events listed above recovered material which has helped to define the extent of Roman Durocornovium. It is of considerable regret that publication of the results has been minimal, often consisting of a brief description of a season's work lacking precise locational data. Excavators in the main have produced no more than brief interim statements, leaving little opportunity for a synthesis of this mass of material.

6.2.2 Fortunately, the results of a decade of excavation (1966-76) have now been published in full (Anderson 2001) and provide detailed insight into the origins and development of the core of the settlement alongside Ermin Street (**DU004**). These excavations, originated in the mid-1960s by John Wachter, indicated that the Roman road was built in the Neronian period, some ten years or more after the initial conquest of Roman Britain in AD43. There was evidence of one wooden building at this period. The presence of a quantity of metalwork and the dumping at the end of the earliest phase of large quantities of pottery may indicate a military presence. There have as yet been no indications of ditches belonging to a Roman fort.

6.2.3 A great deal of iron and glass slag have been found in the roadside ditch and on occupation surfaces, which suggests that some form of industrial activity must have been taking place at an early date on the site. After an interval of twenty years or more, timber buildings were again erected, with intense building through the 2nd and 3rd centuries to the west of Ermin Street.

6.2.4 A greater part of the evidence unearthed in this excavation campaign relates to the occupation of the site in the late 3rd and 4th centuries. The excavators refer to the settlement as covering a considerable area 'with the main concentration of substantial building with stone foundations fronting onto Ermin Street, but with others, less densely packed, at some distance from the main road' (Anderson 2001, 347). The

trend here indicates a much larger expanse of these stone buildings east of Ermin Street, presumably linking the *mansio* and other buildings which have been revealed by air photography. The extensive nature of the excavations revealed details of the widening of Ermin Street (up to 18 metres across in places) and the development of a street grid revealed by the discovery of four side streets.

- 6.2.5** The dating evidence indicated that stone is not employed as building material on the site until circa AD200. Even then, it is likely that timber superstructures were common and Wachter's excavations revealed details of these with sarsen stones placed to raise buildings above the ground. This characteristic presumably reflects the damp nature of the site and perpetual problems with flooding.
- 6.2.6** Several finds indicate the importance of the Roman road passing through the settlement. There is a great deal of evidence for transportation mainly in the form of horseshoes, hipposandals, bridle bits and lynch pins.
- 6.1.7** Further observations were carried out by the Swindon Archaeological Society at SU 194854 (**DU005**) during road construction work on the Lower Wanborough Plain. Two side roads were revealed running west from Ermin Street as well as two inhumations, an iron working area, walls of buildings, a tessellated floor, a pit containing Romano-British pottery and decorated wall plaster from the upper levels of a ditch (Phillips 1971).
- 6.1.8** Whilst the above work focused attention on intensive use of the roadside strip in the Roman period, investigations along the line of the Dorcan brook in the early 1970s began to indicate the extent of the town in an easterly direction. A discovery of particular importance was road metalling identified in the sides of the Dorcan Brook, a clear indication of an extensive street grid (**DU014**, Phillips & Walters 1977).
- 6.1.9** A wide ditch was excavated in 1976 which may be defensive. This feature lay at right angles to Ermin Street on the road's western side. To the north of the ditch and running parallel to it a rampart was recorded and pottery from the ditch has been found to date to the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. (**DU006**, Anderson 2001,21)
- 6.1.10** Discoveries also came to light during alterations to the land surrounding the Roman town. Drainage work carried out in 1976-7 near the course of the old River Dorcan (**DU007**, Anon.1977/8) revealed pottery sherds dating to the 2nd - 4th centuries, coins dating to the 3rd and 4th centuries, ironwork and bronze fragments. The recutting of a ditch at Covingham Farm led to the discovery of four silver Republican denarii and a brooch (**DU008**, Anon.1977/8).
- 6.1.11** Aerial photographs revealed the plan of the '*mansio*' building showing it to measure 35 metres by 45 metres, consisting of ranges of rooms and corridors enclosing two courtyards. A corridor connects the building to a further structure, interpreted as a bath-house. (**DU010**, Phillips & Walters 1977). This structure has not yet been excavated but a large number of '*styli*' or writing implements have been retrieved from the site suggesting that an administrative building existed in the settlement.

- 6.1.12** According to Burnham and Wachter (1990), it is possible that a temple may have existed at Durocornovium as a lead ‘*defixio*’ or curse was found. These ‘*defixiones*’ were normally attached to the outside of temples in the hope that the named deity would carry out the demands listed in the curse. Unfortunately, the curse discovered at Durocornovium is far from complete and neither the name of the deity or the individuals giving or being cursed are mentioned.
- 6.1.13** A fragment of a female head from a pipe-clay figurine has also been discovered and it is thought that this may represent the head of a mother goddess or local deity. It is possible that this find indicates religion at a more domestic level in the town. Several other figurines have been discovered, including a statuette of the Roman god Mercury (Anderson 2001, 153).
- 6.1.14** The town appears to have possessed at least three cemeteries. One was discovered in 1922 west of Ermin Street, and contained three cremations and five inhumations (**DU011**, Anon 1973, 135). Another was discovered to the west of the road in St Paul's Drive during the construction of a housing estate (**DU012**, Anon 1972, 124). Another cemetery was revealed during construction work at the southern end of the Romano-British town between 1965 and 1970, to the north of Dorcan Stream in Insula IV. The cemetery contained seven inurned cremation burials, six being in vessels dated to the second quarter of the second century AD. There were also 23 inhumations (**DU013**, Anderson 2001, 342).
- 6.1.15** A number of discoveries give helpful indications of the possible extent of the town. Exposures of road metalling in the sides of Dorcan Brook and the old hedge line, observed by Phillips and Walters in the early 1970s, indicate that the town extended a considerable distance to the east (**DU014**, Phillips 1977).
- 6.1.16** Also east of the town, pottery sherds were discovered next to the remains of a square enclosure during observations carried out by the Swindon Archaeological Society after the recutting of the bed of Liden Stream (**DU009**). The bank of the square enclosure on the south side of the stream was recorded as 1 metre high (Anon 1972).
- 6.1.17** Five sherds of pottery have been recorded from a location 300m north of all known structures (**DU015**) and more pottery has been reported from a location north-east of Lotmead Farm (**DU016**). The same farm also produced twenty plus 3rd - 4th century coins and a little pottery, noted by metal detectorists in 1999 (**DU023**). A more substantial quantity of evidence was recovered at Redlands Farm in 2000. 275 Romano-British pottery sherds was found during fieldwalking together with a quantity of ceramic building material and a Pennant sandstone tile (**DU022**).
- 6.1.18** South of the town a metal detectorist rally in 2000 produced quantities of coins dating from the 2nd century to the 4th century AD, also pottery dating from the late 1st century to the 4th century. A small quantity of roof tile as well a decorated box flue-tile was recorded. It is suggested that the site was of a rural roadside settlement. (**DU017**). Further south still and also close to Ermin Street, a pipe trench cut through a black occupation layer. Near the centre were the remains of a building comprised

of chalk walls and floors. 2nd century sherds also found (DU021, Anon 1972). Romano-British pottery sherds have also been found at Foxbridge Farm (DU024).

6.1.19 To the west 2nd-4th century sherds and a stone layer were noted in St Paul's Drive (DU018, Anon 1981) South-west of Nythe Farm a rhombic-shaped enclosure including a wall has been recorded. Finds include coarse-ware and New Forest colour-coated pottery (DU019). At Kingfisher Drive a short length of ditch was found, filled with Roman pottery sherds and animal bones. Large stones capped the ditch fill (DU020).

6.1.20 Several of the finds retrieved from the areas adjacent to Ermin Street suggest that a number of crafts and trades were being carried out in the town. Only nine agricultural tools were found during excavation, two of which were involved with the processing of wool (Fitzpatrick 2000). A total of sixteen woodworking tools however, have been found as well as eight metalworking tools.

7 COMPONENTS OF THE TOWN

7.1 In spite of an intensive period of excavation in the 1960s and 1970s and the information gleaned from air photography, the overall form and extent of Durocornovium is far from clear. Corney (2001, 10) describes the site as 'centred upon a planned core covering at least 16ha'. He goes on to indicate that the occupation may indeed extend over an area of up to 25ha. These comments indicate the nature of the problem and what follows therefore is a tentative description of the elements of the town as currently understood, with clear implications for the targets needed in any future research programme (Fig. 10).

7.2 COM1 Settlement area – Excavation has proven the intensive nature of settlement along the line of Ermin Street illustrated by the unraveling of evidence for buildings ranging in date from the 1st to the 4th centuries AD. If we take into account the indications of buildings and earthwork features recorded by Colt Hoare, there is evidence for development of a lateral strip along some 750 metres of the main road. The additional evidence of the discovery of pottery, tile and the manifestation of dark soil deposits indicates occupation in an overall linear development for some 1700 metres.

7.3 The upgrading of the A419, associated alterations to the Dorcan stream and the digging of the flood lagoon have concentrated both rescue excavation and recording events on the line of Ermin Street, with less attention paid to the lateral spread of Roman occupation, that is to the north-east and south-west. A picture has therefore emerged of a town which is generally elongated and possibly that impression is incorrect. The discovery of the mansio some 130 metres distant from Ermin Street and elements of the street grid stretching out some 300 metres bring into question the traditional view of the shape and extent of the urban settlement. It is possible that even Corney's upper figure of 25ha is a conservative estimate. An overall size of 60ha is perfectly possible based on the distribution of Roman finds and features so far recorded.

7.4 COM2 The Street Grid -The core of this is Ermin Street itself, which was clearly subject to considerable modification and widening in the Roman period as evidenced

by the excavations in the core of the settlement. The street grid was observed during these excavations and has also been seen where exposed by the Dorcan brook and undoubtedly encloses the mansio revealed by aerial survey. This grid does not show well from the air and has not been pursued by means of targeted excavation trenching. Where in evidence, it is clearly a planned system and in no way dissimilar to the famous grid system so clearly visible at Roman Silchester. The mansio itself conforms in orientation with the reconstructed grid, but it is noticeable that other buildings revealed as cropmarks are at a slight angle to it. Further, some of the side streets revealed in the principal excavations along Ermin Street appear not to line up with the grid. The implication arising from this is that the mansio represents a period of investment in the town (perhaps at the time of the Emperor Hadrian) and ushered in a phase of town planning in which the street grid was re-engineered.

- 7.5 COM3 Public Buildings.** The mansio is a formal public building, clearly of architectural merit and indicative of investment by the Roman administration in the development of a town, part of the widespread process of Roman civilisation. Flanking the mansio is a rather more tentative indication of another architectural structure, interpreted as a bath building. It must be said there is some conflict in the alignment of these two features and it may be argued that the potential bath building has been levelled before the construction of the mansio itself. Is this another indication of re-organisation? The unknown factor is the other public features which the town may have possessed. This lack of evidence is partly the result of the poor yield from aerial survey, partly the development - led concentration of excavation on the less formal structures (presumably trading posts) flanking Ermin Street.
- 7.6 COM4 Cemetery area.** On the southwest margin of the town evidence of a Roman cemetery has emerged – in the area now occupied by one of Swindon's many housing estates. Presumably a greater part of it was lost during housing development. Casual finds during home improvement projects may slowly yield further evidence.
- 7.7 COM5 Roadside Commerce.** The Anderson and Wachter excavations particularly explored a substantial length of activity along the line of Ermin Street, which demonstrated not only the potential military origins for the settlement but also an intensive degree of civilian settlement throughout the Roman period. As the excavation report demonstrates by the number of small finds recovered, the degree of human activity in the zone was substantial. The excavators noted the rarity of agricultural tools on the site, but are unable to point to evidence for a variety of local industries which one might have expected in this location. Not surprisingly, there is a significant number of finds relating to transportation – horseshoes, bridle bits etc. but the greater number of finds are described as items of personal use, rather than specific to trades (Anderson, 2001 349-350). Nevertheless, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this is a trading settlement along the line of a major road, which clearly from the quantity of material possessions flourished. Commercial activity must have been the source of this wealth.
- 7.8 COM6 Defences.** There is a hint of town defences emerging from the excavations adjacent to the Ermin Street. Corney suggests that the evidence may indicate ‘a stone gateway, possibly with associated curtain wall and ditch’ (Corney 2001, 12). No signs of any town defences are visible from the air and any attempted reconstruction would be entirely speculative.

8 ASSESSMENT

8.1 *Summary of Research*

- 8.1.1.** Despite the fact that this site has been recognised since the 17th century, no attempt was made to record its features systematically prior to its partial destruction during the outward expansion of Swindon. Worthy attempts were made by individuals to carry out either recording or rescue excavation activities (1950 – 1976) but even those writing up the major campaign of excavations conducted between 1967 – 76 were unable to relocate and synthesize the results of the many other individual archaeological events.
- 8.1.2** From the point of view of excavation therefore the result has been a focus on the area threatened by the upgrading of the A419, which has at least had the benefit of revealing a great deal about the nature of the roadside settlement. With the considerable recovery of building plans these excavations constitute a major archive of information for the Romano-British occupation of the Swindon area.
- 8.1.3** Aerial photography has since the late 70s made some contribution with the spectacular discovery of the plan of mansio, but the area has the wrong type of geology and landuse to reveal much more. However, aerial photography combined with the examination of the street grid exposed on the banks on the Dorcan brook has had a very significant effect on our understanding of the potential extent of this town.
- 8.1.4** Sparey-Green's attempt to define the extent of the settlement in 1985 relied to a substantial degree on the visibility of the dark soil deposits indicating Romano-British occupation. This was a valuable piece of work, regrettably not matched by any subsequent campaign of field surface collection.

8.2 *The Growth of the Town*

8.2.1 Evidence for 1st century occupation.

- 8.2.1.1** The growth of Durocornovium occurred between the 1st and 4th centuries AD. Excavation has shown that the town had a complex development and a number of possible chronological phases have been suggested.
- 8.2.1.2** It seems likely that the settlement had a military origin as the town was situated on one of the principal Roman roads in Britain and is positioned at an interval where a fort would be expected, being only 21 kilometres away from Cirencester. No direct evidence for a fort has been retrieved, however, several finds of a military nature have been discovered in the area and even if a fort did not exist at this exact spot it is believed that one existed close by.
- 8.2.1.3** The town itself is likely to have grown up as a '*vicus*', a settlement which developed as a result of the presence of a fort and thrived by carrying out trade and providing supplies for the soldiers stationed nearby. The finds of iron and glass slag in the 1st century roadside ditch suggest that industrial activities were being carried out in the town and this may have been for the benefit of a nearby fort, however, this would need to be proved. The presence of large amounts of imported pottery dumped in the roadside ditch also reflects evidence found elsewhere for the

abandonment of a fort. The ditch was found to have been abandoned and filled in at around AD80 so if a fort did exist near the site, it is likely that it ceased use at around this time.

8.2.1.4 In the 1st and 2nd centuries the growth of the town appears to have been focused along the line of Ermin Street. At least one building is known to have been built up to the very edge of the road and it is likely that many more exist. There are indications that at this time town planning was taking place at Durocornovium and aerial photography has revealed a number of side streets leading off to the west and east of Ermin Street.

8.2.2 Evidence for 2nd and 3rd century occupation

8.2.2.1 The next stage of development at Durocornovium seems to have taken place in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. There appears to be more intensive occupation at this time and it is possible that the '*mansio*' and supposed defences may have been built during this period. A number of courtyard buildings have been found to date to this time. Roman law stated that accommodation and a change of horses had to be provided at regular intervals for officials travelling along the imperial routes in the province. Many Roman settlements grew up around these way-stations and this may have been the case at Durocornovium, although this still remains to be proved.

8.2.3 Evidence for late Roman occupation

8.2.3.1 Occupation continues into the 4th century at the site but it is not clear for how long and there is very little evidence for the later periods at the site. Building techniques suggest that the area was prone to flooding and it is possible that this was the reason for the abandonment of the settlement.

8.3 The Archaeological Potential

8.3.1 Although a substantial sector of the Roman town has been recorded by excavation prior to its destruction in the course of development and road improvement schemes, in the overall picture this represents a total area of some 3ha within the town which may extend to at least 40ha and possibly 60ha. There is therefore very considerable potential for establishing the extent of the town and its structure.

8.3.2 One of the components of future research will be the pursuit of the roadside settlement along Ermin Street. The northern area of the town (north west of Nythe Farm on either side of the A419) is revealed as a wide dark soil deposit and can be seen as a positive earthwork feature west of the main road. The question arises as to whether this area will show the same characteristics as the roadside zone explored to the south-east or whether it will turn out to be more of an agricultural settlement. The same theme will need to be pursued south of the excavated area, where Colt Hoare plotted earthworks between the two Roman roads and recent activity (para. 6.2.12) produced evidence of considerable occupation.

8.3.3 The origins of the settlement will always be of interest, particularly in the light of the location of the site in the original Roman campaign to settle Southern Britain. If there is a fort under the Roman town (indications were found in terms of artefacts) it will

be a fascinating discovery and its archaeological features might be reasonably well preserved beneath later civilian deposits. Possible defences of the site are also a worthy subject of investigation and may relate to the line of any early fortification.

8.3.4 The cropmark representation of the mansio indicates the presence of an elegant public building and the question arises as to whether there is a formal section of the town defined by the street grid in which further public structures may come to light. Aerial photography is clearly not yielding the necessary results and geophysical technique may be the solution to this problem.

8.3.5 Beyond the limits of the town itself, there are indications of Romano-British features and structures to the east, south and west of the town. Little evidence is available from aerial photography, again because of the nature of the clay plain on which Durocornovium sits. Field surface collection has clearly been effective and far more investigation is necessary to establish the nature of this Roman hinterland.

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