

Excavations on the Line of the Wheathampstead By-Pass 1974 and 1977

by C. SAUNDERS and A.B. HAVERCROFT

with

Some thoughts on the *oppida* at Wheathampstead and Verulamium

by C. SAUNDERS

Introduction

In 1974 it became clear that the By-pass road so long awaited by the residents of Wheathampstead, would eventually be constructed. In view of the relationship of the proposed route to the Wheathampstead *oppidum* it was considered desirable that trial excavations should take place along the line of the proposed route between the area of the known site and the River Lea. It was hoped that such an excavation would show whether the area had been occupied, or used for a cemetery in the Belgic period and if there had ever been any form of defense bounding the *oppidum* on its northern side. Accordingly this work was carried out in the autumn of 1974, with the assistance of a grant from the Department of the Environment and eight trial trenches were cut, (Trenches 1-8) using a Drott tractor-shovel to remove the ploughsoil (Fig. 1). Before excavation commenced the route of this area was walked by members of the St. Albans and Hertfordshire Architectural and Archaeological Society and a number of worked flints of Mesolithic-Neolithic/Bronze Age date were recovered from the surface. No features contemporary with these finds were identified in the subsequent excavations. These revealed some evidence of Belgic activity but this was limited to two small ditches (Features 5 and 6); there was also earlier pottery from a layer of hillwash (Feature 7).

During the excavation many problems were caused by a series of features easily interpreted as pits and ditches but which were barren of finds and were filled with various clays and silts. Eventually these features were realised to be of natural origin resulting from the solution of the underlying chalk and also from periglacial activity and to confirm this a section was excavated mechanically into the chalk so that a full profile could be studied (Fig. 2E).

The 1974 results showed that extensive excavation would be unnecessary and that there was no defensive system bounding the *oppidum* on its northern side within the area examined. Here matters remained until the summer of 1976, when during the extensive drought of that year, aerial reconnaissance showed various cropmarks across the river on the north side of the valley. These were by no means clearly defined and it was uncertain whether they resulted from geological or archaeological features. When, in the spring of 1977 road construction began, it immediately became apparent that the cropmarks recorded the previous summer were in fact those of a complex ditch system associated with Belgic occupation and covering an extensive area,

which at a conservative estimate must be at least 16 hectares. Unfortunately it proved impossible to persuade the County Council's contractor to allow time for excavation on selected areas of the road line but most of the sensitive area was covered by an embankment and not entirely graded away. It was however possible to record three trenches in detail (Trenches A-C). These formed the drainage ditches for the new road (Fig. 1) and were dug mechanically by the contractor but they did provide useful cuts through many features, which subsequently were trimmed back to vertical sections and much pottery recovered. The majority of these ditches contained Belgic pottery although two (Features 43 and 44) were certainly of Medieval date. Worked flints were also found on this side of the valley both in unstratified contexts and in Belgic features and of particular interest is a small Mesolithic assemblage found in a residual context in Feature 36.

The Excavations¹

In view of the circumstances of the excavations, particularly that of 1977, it seems unnecessary to give detailed accounts and explanations of all the features found, and what follows is a 'catalogue' of features and associated finds. The form numbers given to the Belgic pottery are those used by Dr I. Thompson in her doctoral thesis on *Belgic Grog-tempered Pottery in South-Eastern England* and we are grateful to Dr Thompson for discussing the pottery with us and contributing a synopsis of the forms and comments on the significance of the pottery (p. 29). This description of finds and features includes those found during road construction in the general area of the 1974 excavations.

All the illustrated finds have been numbered consecutively by category and are so listed below after a brief description of the relevant feature. Most of the pottery recorded is of Belgic date and to avoid unnecessary description only significant variations from the norm are described in detail. Practically all this pottery is in the local grog tempered fabric with colours ranging normally from black-grey to brown-buff with variations in hardness and coarseness and colour often apparent in a single vessel. Where pottery of various dates occurs in the same feature this is listed in chronological order. Material of all categories which has not been illustrated is recorded briefly under the appropriate heading and unstratified material listed in the same way at the end of this section. This descriptive section is followed by general summaries and comments on the material found (p. 29).

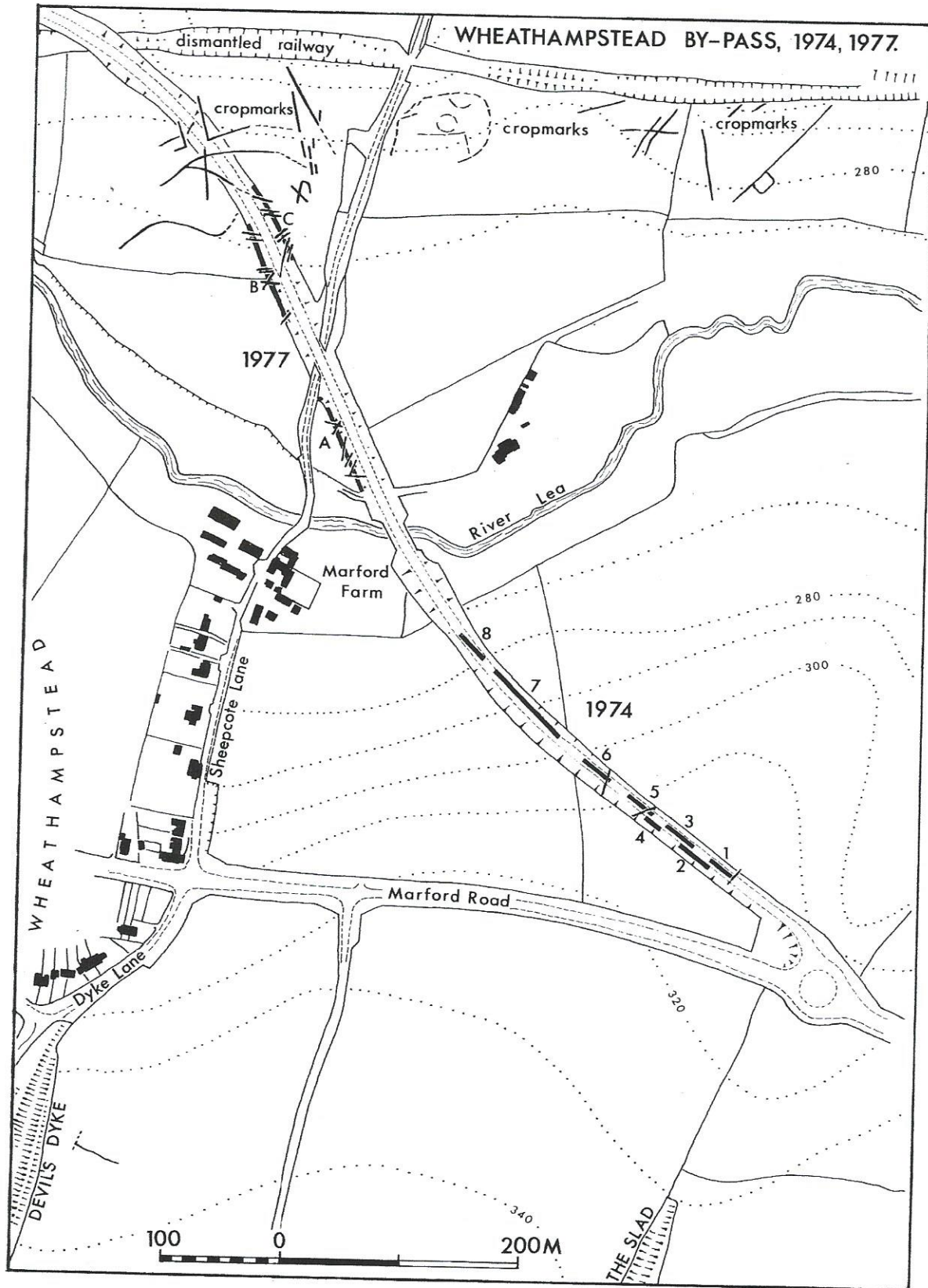


Fig. 1 Plan showing Areas excavated in 1974 (Trenches 1-8) and 1977 (Trenches A-C).
 (Based upon the 1971 Ordnance Survey 1:2500 map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Crown Copyright reserved).



Fig. 6 Bronze Ring (1), Iron Objects (2) and Worked Flints (3-23) (½).

Summary and Comments on the Finds

Pre-Belgic Pottery

A total of 72 sherds of pre-Belgic character were recovered; of these 56 came from Feature 7 and others came from Features, 21, 26, and 33. There were 10 unstratified sherds. Many of the sherds are very abraded and, where associated, occurred with Belgic pottery. With the exception of a fine ware sherd from Feature 7 all of the sherds have red/brown/black surfaces and contain varying amounts of angular flint grit, although at least two fabric types appear to be present in Feature 7 some sherds being finer and more sandy. The surfaces of some of these relatively finer sherds have faint suggestions of finger impressions and in one case an incised line but this may not be deliberate decoration. In the present state of local knowledge it seems unwise to suggest any firm date for this pottery except to say that it falls somewhere within the first half of the first millennium B.C. The evidence from Feature 7 does suggest that the pottery there was associated with agricultural activity and there must be a contemporary settlement in the near vicinity, although there was no occupation on the line of the new road.

Belgic Pottery

Thirty six of the fifty three recorded features produced Belgic pottery, representing by volume well over 90 per cent of all the finds from the excavations. The total weight of pottery recovered was 37.04 kilos (2465 sherds) and this was made up of 244 rim sherds, 124 base sherds and 2097 body sherds. 1303 of the sherds could not be classified beyond a division between storage jars (462 sherds, weighing 12.14 kilos) and others (841 sherds, weighing 5.48 kilos).

Of particular interest is the deliberate use of a bracken leaf impression on No. 144 (Fig. 11) (Professor G.W. Dimbleby kindly confirmed the identification). The leaf had been impressed before firing perhaps as some form of identification mark. A similar bracken leaf 'stamp' has also been noted on a vessel of comparable date from the King Harry Lane cemetery at St Albans (information from Miss V. Rigby). Another mark, also made deliberately before firing, occurs on No. 155 (Fig. 12). This mark takes the form of an uneven incised V laid on its side and can be paralleled at Prae Wood (Thompson forthcoming). The only other mark is an illegible graffiti on No. 135 (Fig. 11).

Much of the pottery is abraded, usually on one side of the sherd and it does seem possible that much of the pottery may have been left, for a little time at least, either on the ground surface or in open features.

The Belgic Pottery:

Synopsis of Forms and Comment

by Isobel Thompson

Synopsis of Forms

A1: The commonest pedestal base form, found everywhere and with no dating value.

**B1-1:* Rims of plain everted-rim necked jars. Found everywhere; no dating value. These look very like Prae Wood examples.

**B1-2:* Tall plain everted-rim jars with offset neck. No. 24 a particularly large example. The form is common in Herts centres; again no dating value.

**B1-4:* Long-necked version of B1 jars. Mostly 1st century A.D., and mostly found in Herts.

**B3-1:* Rims from wide-mouthed everted-rim jars with bulges between cordons on the shoulder. Another standard form.

B3-5: Round cordoned jars with tall narrow neck. A common Herts-Beds form, not much found elsewhere. Not at Prae Wood, but at Verulam Hills Field and Gorhambury.

B3-6: Tall jars with shoulder cordons, not narrow rims. Very common in Herts, but not elsewhere; no dating value. A.D. 5-50 at Prae Wood, like all these.

B3-8: Tall necked narrow-mouthed jars, cordoned and often angled on the shoulder. Another form quite common in Herts but not elsewhere; date is often post-43 but often not.

B5-1: Tall plain barrel jars with small bead rim. Not common; an Essex-Herts type, always grey, burnished, and nearly always pre-43 (but the only Prae Wood example is A.D. 30-50).

**C1-2:* Coarse rounded jar with bead rim; rims only. Ubiquitous coarse jar form. Many at Prae Wood in grog, A.D. 5-50, and can be later, in grog as well as shell, in Herts.

C5-3: Globular jars with dished rim and rilling on girth. Rare except at Prae Wood and immediate area, many A.D. 5-50, and in early Verulamium levels in Insula XVII (cf. Richardson 1944 Fig. 11, nos. 22-9).

**C6-1:* Storage jars. These begin in the later 1st century B.C. and can survive in grog to the end of the 1st century A.D.

**C7-1:* Rilled everted-rim jars, the Herts coarse ware type found in thousands, but rare elsewhere. These examples are very like Prae Wood ones.

C7-4: One, possibly a rilled bowl with wide rim, a type known only at Braughing so far, not Prae Wood; not an unlikely form to find elsewhere.

**D1-1:* Bowl with offset neck and often one cordon. Very common in Herts; A.D. 5-50 at Prae Wood.

**D1-2:* D1 with exaggerated neck. Like B1-4, mostly found in Herts. Dating as D1-1; begins late 1st century B.C.

D2-3: Squat bowls with deep vertical neck above globular body, neck cordoned or corrugated. Only 6 examples known, close to major production centres: one from Prae Wood, and three others also from Herts.

D3-3: Plain lidded bowls or barrels. Strictly a native form although sometimes rims are found in post-conquest contexts. Not common, and scattered; four known from Prae Wood. This rim, No. 111 could of course have belonged to a cordoned version (D3-4); the same comments would apply.

E1-4: Plain carinated cups. First half of the 1st century A.D.; none earlier. Several at Prae

- Wood, and a fairly common form.
- E3-1:* Plain wide-mouthed everted-rim cups, the cup form of B1 and D1. Very common.
- E3-4:* Squat plain everted-rim cups without offset. Not common and usually hand-made but not always; scattered distribution. None noted at Prae Wood; can be early or late.
- E3-5:* Small narrow-mouthed everted-rim cups with offset. Found widely, several at Prae Wood in all layers.
- G1-1:* Straight-walled platters copying Gallo-Belgic form Camulodunum 1. The only usually pre-conquest form of platter copy.
- G1-3:* G1-1 with a bead rim. Mostly found in Hertfordshire and especially at Prae Wood: rare elsewhere.
- G4:* Girth beakers. The grog-tempered G4 is found mostly in Herts and across the Chilterns; not Essex or Kent. Very common at Prae Wood, A.D. 5–50; usually red-surfaced.
- G5-1:* Plain barrel-shaped butt-beakers. Not as common as the offset neck, but several are known from Herts. The form hardly survives the conquest for long. Compare Verulam Hills Field (Anthony 1968 Fig. V, Nos. 14 and 15): the same horizontal burnished lines as on No. 132 here.
- G5-2:* Decorated barrel-shaped butt-beakers. Again known at Prae Wood and Verulam Hills Field.
- G5-5:* Rouletted offset-neck butt-beakers. Common, and can be pre- or post-conquest.
- G5-6:* Fragments of butt-beakers.
- G6:* Grog-tempered jug copies. No. 123 is in the brown fabric with red surfaces that is common in jug copies. This example cannot be directly related to an imported original: it is one of many instances of an individual attempt at making a jug in the native fabric.
- S1:* Strainers. Always a wide-mouthed bowl shape with everted rim and offset neck, and fine holes pierced in the base before firing. Only 8 examples known; native but not very early; scattered sites, including Crookhams (cf. Rook 1968 Fig. VI, 24).

Comment

The pottery appears to be a homogeneous assemblage, and bears a very strong resemblance to that from Wheeler's excavations at Prae Wood. The fabric is the typical sandy grog-tempering of Herts, usually grey and often well burnished; deliberately red-surfaced copies of Gallo-Belgic forms are noticeable, but the patchy orange-grey colouring of later Prae Wood levels is lacking. The range of forms includes common Herts types; many girth beaker and butt-beaker copies, as at Prae Wood, where imports were rare but copies common; and forms that are rare outside Prae Wood (C5-3, G1-3). Those forms marked * above also occurred in the late 1st Century B.C. pottery found by Wheeler at Wheathampstead; these are only the most common and undatable forms. The present assemblage should correspond to Prae Wood's limits of c. A.D. 5–50, without much sign of a late bias within this range.

Roman Pottery

1 rim and 42 sherds, weighing 0.55 kilos were excavated from Features 29, 31, 33, 40, 41, 52 and 53. Although all of this pottery is of Roman type it is not certain if its presence necessarily indicates a post-conquest date for the features in which it was found. Some of the pieces could be pre-conquest imports, especially the Dressel 2-5 amphora and the white slipped sherds. Of particular interest is the possible flagon in Verulamium Region fabric from Feature 53 as the kilns around and to the south of Verulamium cannot have started production much before A.D. 50. The dish or platter rim, Feature 52 No. 200, in fine, hard grey ware, also appears to be a post-conquest type and the presence of these two vessels, along with the presence of definite Roman tile fragments from Feature 27, shows that occupation of the site must have continued for a few years after the Roman Conquest. All the finds are noticeably fragmentary but not particularly abraded.

Medieval Pottery

1 rim and 11 sherds, weighing 0.08 kilo were found in Features 43 and 44 and at least two vessels are present, one of which probably occurs in both features. All the sherds are in a Hertfordshire 'greyware' fabric and of 13th–14th century date.

Copper Alloy

The only find was a small ring from Feature 33 (Fig. 6, 1).

Iron

5 pieces were recovered from Features 2, 17, 21, 27 and 41. The fragments included a small piece of binding, nails, and a perforated strip (Fig. 6, 2).

Worked Flint

With the exception of one burnt impure quartzite pebble from Feature 53, and three calcined flints from Feature 44, all the stone from the excavations was worked flint or knapping debris. 13 features produced a total of 57 flints, with 30 of these coming from a Belgic gully (Feature 36) and although obviously derived this group is remarkably consistent. The presence of a bladelet core, axe trimming flakes and blades indicates a date within the Mesolithic period and other flints from this period have come from the churchyard of St Helen's, Wheathampstead (Saunders and Havercroft 1982, 110). A further 144 flints were recovered mainly from fieldwalking on the southern side of the river and the frequency of retouched flakes suggests that these date mainly from the Neolithic-Bronze Ages. It is unfortunate that recognisable implements are generally missing.

Worked flints were found in the ditches excavated in 1932–3 (although these were never published and their present whereabouts is unknown) and these were considered by Dr K.P. Oakley to be, like the worked flints found beneath the Park Street Roman Villa, of Belgic date. (O'Neil, 1945, 63). This now seems unlikely; the so-called 'general Belgic layer' at Park Street must represent a pre-Villa soil which formed over a long period (it contained unpublished pre-Belgic pottery) and the strong blade component of the flintwork found in it suggests

that some, if not all, of the flints, belong to the Mesolithic period.

The table below summarises the identifications and contexts of the flints.

Type	Feature No.	Publication No.	Total No. of Type
Bladelet Core	F.36	3	1
	Unstratified	15	1
Core	Unstratified	—	1
Truncated blade	F.36	4	1
Blade (?) denticulated	F.7	21	1
Blade (?) awl	Unstratified	—	1
Blades	F.7	22	2
	F.36	5-9	6
	F.44	—	1
	F.52	—	1
	Unstratified	23	2
Broken Blades	F.37	—	1
	F.41	—	1
Snapped (?) blades	F.33	—	1
	F.36	10	1
Retouched blade	Unstratified	20	1
End Scraper	F.39	11	1
Axe Flake	F.32	—	1
Retouched Flakes	F.29	—	1
	F.40	—	1
	Unstratified	12-14, 18, 19	25
Retouched Flake (?) awl	Unstratified	16	1
Retouched Flake (?) edge of axe	Unstratified	—	1
Retouched Flake-but end removed	Unstratified	17	2
Flake-inverse retouch	Unstratified	—	1
Axe-trimming flake	F.17	—	1
	F.36	—	3

Flakes	F.7	—	3	
	F.33	—	1	
	F.36	—	4	
	F.40	—	1	
	F.44	—	6	
	F.52	—	1	
	Unstratified	—	79	
	Large Flake	Unstratified	—	1
	Flake butt-end missing	Unstratified	—	1
	Flake (?) axe	Unstratified	—	1
Debris	F.6	—	1	
	F.7	—	1	
	F.33	—	1	
	F.36	—	13	
	Unstratified	—	25	

Fired Clay

5 fragments of Roman tile were recovered from Feature 27 and the Medieval Feature 44 and a further 7 possible fragments were found in Features 23, 29, and 35 but these are small and very abraded and positive identification is not possible. An intrusive roof tile fragment, possibly of Post-Medieval date came from Feature 52. 13 other fragments of fired clay were found in Features 13, 33, 35, 41, 52 and 53. These fragments may be burnt daub but could have been derived from ovens or other structures. Much of this material was also very abraded.

Animal Bone

Animal bone was very rare, and this like the absence of metalwork results from the acidity of the subsoil. Very fragmentary remains came from Features 13, 15, 16, 17, 21, 33 and 52 and consisted of 12 bone fragments and 3 teeth. A fragment of calcined bone was found in Feature 17.

Some thoughts on the *oppida* at Wheathampstead and Verulamium

by C. SAUNDERS

In recent years much has been written on the subject of *oppida* in Late Pre-Roman Iron Age Britain and in the present context it seems desirable to review briefly the nature of the sites at Wheathampstead and Verulamium in the light of some current opinion and to examine critically the evidence available from these two sites.

What Were *Oppida*

Oppidum is a Latin term adopted by Prehistorians and Protohistorians to describe what can be termed from a Roman archaeologist viewpoint 'indigenous nucleated settlements' (Hassall, 1979) and lately such sites have been increasingly interpreted as proto-urban or urban settlements at the head of a hierarchy of settlement types. It has been stated that the simplest way of defining such sites is as a 'defended town with with an economy largely dependant on semi-industrialised manufacturing and trade' (Avery, 1976, 41) but the use of the term *oppidum* raises problems for there appears to be no general agreement as to exactly what Roman writers described as such. In Latin, *oppidum* is the general word for a town but its meaning when used by Roman writers in describing Britain does not relate satisfactorily to its current archaeological usage and its use in Gallic contexts is not always clear. The term is used twice with reference to

Britain; firstly by Caesar to describe the stronghold of Cassivellaunus which he captured in 54 B.C. and secondly by Suetonius in describing Vespasian's campaigns in the south-west of Britain A.D. 43/44. In the first case Caesar does define his terms, he describes the *oppidum* as being protected by forest and swamp, a place to which a good number of people and cattle have recently convened; and that in this case *oppidum* for the Britons means a stronghold in a forest fortified with a bank and ditch to which they habitually convened to avoid enemy incursions, (Hawkes, 1980, 138). In the second case, the twenty *oppida* of Suetonius are not specified but it does seem a justifiable archaeological inference that these were hillforts, especially as some of these in the appropriate area can be shown to have been attacked by the Roman army (most notably Maiden Castle, Dorset (Wheeler, 1943) but other cases are also known). Such is the British evidence; across the channel in Gaul, Caesar described the population as living in 'aedificia isolated farms or other buildings, vici, villages, and *oppida*. The word *oppida* may mean a temporary refuge, or a fortified town and it is sometimes difficult to make a distinction without archaeological evidence.' (Brogan, 1973, 201). In this context Dr. Spratling (1973, 126) has pointed out that *oppidum* means nothing more

than a fortified place and that *urbs* was used by Caesar to describe such centres as Alesia and Gergovia. In a general European Late La Tène context *oppida* have been listed as defended sites of over 25 hectares (Collis, 1975), while in France *oppida* have been distinguished from the largest urbanised *vici* by reason of their *defensive* positions and an administrative function, (Nash, 1976).

Although the continental evidence would confine the definition of *oppida* to defended sites, in Britain this is not, in terms of archaeology the case, despite the contemporary references (and cf. Avery's definition noted above). Here another definition had been advanced—'Communities appear to have come together in large nucleated settlements, defended or undefended, which for convenience are generally referred to as *oppida*. *Oppida* were essentially centres within which certain services were concentrated, for example, exchange, redistribution, manufacture and, no doubt, the legal, administrative and religious systems, all necessary for efficient articulation of an increasingly complex society' (Cunliffe and Rowley, 1976), and such a viewpoint now seems generally accepted. Here we return to 'indigenous nucleated centres' and to the present author it seems unfortunate that the term *oppidum* is used although this is now so entrenched in the literature that its abandonment would be difficult.

Oppida in Britain

Professor Cunliffe (1976a, 1976b, 1978) has attempted the definition and classification of British *oppida* which he divides into three categories—1. *Enclosed Oppida*, may have been constructed as early as the first half of the 1st century B.C. and are defended sites occupying earlier re-defended hill top positions, or valley side or riverside locations. It is to this class that the Wheathampstead, Devils Dyke/Moat/Slad complex may belong. 2. *Territorial Oppida*, such as Camulodunum (Colchester) developed at a later date and distinguished by their enclosing, but intermittent dyke systems which run for large distances and contain territories of considerable extent. 3. Lastly there are *Unenclosed Nucleated Settlements*, such as Pre-Roman Verulamium appears to be.

Little is known about the internal arrangements of any of these types for their large size means that considerable excavation, on a scale which has yet to be achieved, is necessary for real understanding. At Colchester it might be possible to interpret the Sheepen Area (Hawkes and Hull, 1947; Niblett forthcoming) as an industrial/commercial zone, Gosbecks as a religious focus, and Lexden as a cemetery area (Dunnett, 1975, 17) but the evidence of aerial photography suggests that these zones were contained within a network of fields and individual farmsteads (Wilson, 1975, Fig. 11). Something similar may be advanced for Verulamium (see below p. 34) though it lacks the complex dyke system of Camulodunum. The earlier '*Enclosed Oppida*' are even less understood and this makes any consideration of the nature of Wheathampstead extremely difficult.

Wheathampstead as an *Oppidum*

According to Wheeler the *oppidum* was enclosed by the Devil's Dyke to the west, and the east by the Moat and

the Slad. Of these features Devil's Dyke is clearly man made and consists of a massive ditch up to 40 metres wide with a vertical depth of some 12 metres flanked on either lip by a bank, that on the eastern side being the larger. A section cut through this feature in 1932 produced only a single find, a sherd of wheel turned Belgic pottery associated with a hearth in the bottom of the ditch, covered by the primary silting. Unfortunately this sherd cannot now be traced but it would seem unwise to date such a large feature *by a single sherd of pottery*. It is valid to question whether Devil's Dyke forms one side of an enclosure, particularly in view of the opinion (Dyer, 1973, 188; 1976, 158) that the Moat and Slad are natural features. Without excavation this contention cannot be proved but even if these features are natural this does not necessarily negate the concept of an enclosure using in part natural features. Whatever their nature it is difficult to support the statement that 'the 90 to 100 acre enclosure that it was claimed to enclose did not exist' (Dyer, 1976, 158); the case is unproven either way. Wheathampstead has been listed by Cunliffe as an *Enclosed Oppidum* although he does note Dyers opinion. (cf. also Rodwell, 1976, 335).

The excavation and observation work reported above, has shown that there was never any form of defensive work on the northern side of the *oppidum* and if we are dealing with an enclosed site then it seems most likely that the northern boundary was the River Lea. If Devil's Dyke continues beyond its present northerly termination there is some evidence for a course down Dyke Lane and Sheepcote Lane to the River. Today, an apparent hedge bank on the western side of Sheepcote Lane shows in the section where it has been cut by a modern drive, a layer of chalk. It is likely that this chalk was thrown up from a ditch since naturally it is covered by a deposit of drift. At one time Mortimer Wheeler and O.G.S. Crawford also considered that the Dyke ran down to the river by this course but this opinion was never published and may have been revised (unpub. field notes in the Verulamium Museum). On the eastern side of the enclosure the Slad heads towards a marked re-entrant in the 300 ft. contour beyond which the ground today is extremely wet and would have been more so in the past. To the south the statement that 'The earthwork, if it was ever completed here, has in part been wiped out, although its course seems to be hinted at by the direction of a farm lane' (Wheeler and Wheeler, 1936, 19) still holds good.

With his usual good fortune, or perhaps by excavating more than is apparent from the published account (Thompson, 1979) Wheeler was able with limited excavation, to locate two 'drainage ditches' within the enclosure and close to Devil's Dyke. These were found 'to be packed with potsherds and other debris' but this is the only known evidence of occupation and cannot be taken to demonstrate 'intensive occupation' (Cunliffe, 1978, 90) for the interior as a whole. No other traces of occupation have been found between the Devil's Dyke and the Slad either by fieldwalking or aerial survey. In 1980 an extensive area immediately to the west of the Moat was mole drained but no finds or features were located during the course of this work. The recent excavation revealed six features of possible Belgic date between the Marford Road and the river but clearly there

was no *intensive* occupation of this area, and the pottery from Feature 5 seems to be later than that recovered in 1932–3. The exact nature of any occupation within the assumed enclosure is therefore an open question and it is possible that substantial open areas exist between zones of dense occupation though on present evidence this cannot be proved. It is of course, also possible that the occupation located by Wheeler is earlier or later than any primary use of any enclosure.

If Wheathampstead is an *Enclosed Oppidum* then it is clear that the available evidence is so tenuous that it can add little to any general discussion of this type of site. A recent reconsideration of the finds made in 1932–33 (Thompson, 1979) has generally confirmed the early dating proposed by the Wheelers although 'It is not yet possible to give a date for the beginning of this early period, but there is nothing to suggest that the *terminus post quem* can be placed earlier in the 1st century B.C. than the time of Caesar, and the brooch suggests the post-Caesarian period. Wheathampstead's chief chronological interest is not whether it was the stronghold of Cassivellaunus, for there is nothing specific to indicate whether it was or not, and such a supposition does not, besides, cast any light on the absolute dating of these finds' (Thompson, 1979).

Much as the author may agree with Dr Thompson, it seems appropriate in this *Journal* to consider Cassivellaunus, for he has been linked in the popular mind locally with Wheathampstead ever since the Wheelers' excavations. In fairness to Wheeler he did only suggest, not affirm the role of the site in 54 B.C. but from such suggestions do legends grow. The whole question of Caesar in Britain has formed the subject of a stimulating study by Professor Hawkes (1977) and his map (Map 11) labelled 'Oppidum Cassivellauni—the location problem' summarises graphically the issue, but the Ravensburgh Castle solution, as the oppidum captured in 54 B.C., needs more excavation to prove the point (Hawkes, 1977, 175, for Ravensburgh Castle, Dyer, 1976). Such attempts to relate the account of Caesar to the observation of archaeologists must by the very nature of the archaeological evidence be ever open to doubt. The idea that Wheathampstead was the Catuvellaunian Capital later transferred to a new site at Verulamium is equally impossible to prove or disprove, with the available evidence. Hawkes has pointed out that the *oppidum* captured by Caesar in 54 B.C. was not *the oppidum* of Cassivellaunus but *an oppidum* and *not his capital*, (Hawkes, 1980, 183). Wheathampstead could therefore be one of several *oppida* controlled by Cassivellaunus even if it was not the scene of the events of 54 B.C. If it was not the *oppidum* mentioned by Caesar, the possibility remains that it could have been the Catuvellaunian Capital prior to Verulamium. However the limited evidence seems more in accord with the type of *oppidum* which from Caesar's description would appear to be a stronghold resorted to in times of danger rather than an urbanised or semi-urbanised settlement such as Verulamium was later. Whether we should think in terms of capitals as urban places at this period is another matter for there is little evidence that by the time of Caesar trade in this area had reached a level to provide one of the stimuli to urban growth which it was to do later in the

century. Certainly in Caesar's Gaul some tribes had a 'greatest oppidum' and in Britain later coins inscribed with mint marks infer the presence of capitals, an inference confirmed by the historian Dio's description of Camulodunum at the time of the Roman conquest as *the* royal town of Cunobelinus (Hawkes, 1980, 139). It is clear that the status of the Devil's Dyke/Moat/Slad complex can be resolved only by further excavation and fieldwork.

Another problem which needs to be considered, though the present evidence may not allow a solution, is whether occupation at Wheathampstead was continuous from the second half of the 1st century B.C. until the mid-1st century A.D. The excavations reported above strongly suggest that in the 1st century A.D. the major settlement was on the northern side of the river with the area to the south probably used for agriculture. It is uncertain how long occupation continued to the south and whether it was continuous. There is no evidence that the northern site was defended and this seems to correlate with Verulamium where it is difficult to see the known dykes as forming a defensive system. It may be that by the first century A.D. and with the Catuvellaunian conquest of the Trinovantian area, defences were considered to be unnecessary.

Pre-Roman Verulamium

Although it had often been assumed that Verulamium was the site of Cassivellaunus' *oppidum* the Wheelers' excavations of 1930–34 showed that this was not the case and that Belgic occupation at Verulamium could not have begun before the time of Tasciovanus. The possibility of the *oppidum* underlying the site of the Roman city was discounted and attention focused on the plateau to the south where evidence of a substantial settlement was discovered. Attention was first drawn to this area by the presence of visible earthworks in Prae Wood and most of the excavations took place in this area. As a result pre-Roman Verulamium is often referred to as 'Prae Wood' but this area forms only one component of a much larger settlement and this complex as a whole is best named *Verlamion* after legends on some of Tasciovanus' coins.

The model produced as a result of the work of 1930–34 saw the Belgic 'City' as being confined to the plateau and divided into two regions with the western (Prae Wood) area being an area of habitation (Region 1). This was separated by a palisade from Region 2 which was thought to be a large enclosure for stock of perhaps agriculture. Both regions were bounded on their north-eastern side by a ditch some 4 metres wide and 1.5 metres deep ('Wheelers Ditch') interpreted as a defensive work constructed early in the life of the settlement and which was reinforced along the boundary of Region 1 at the time of the Roman Conquest, (Wheeler and Wheeler, 1936, 40 ff.).

Since the 1930's evidence has been steadily accumulating to show that this model of *Verlamion* represents a far too simple picture.

This is not the place to discuss this major *Unenclosed Nucleated Settlement* in detail for this must await the publication of Dr I.M. Stead's excavation of the King Harry Lane Cemetery, Professor Frere's work at

Verulamium, and the results of Mr D.S. Neal's work at Gorhambury and from elsewhere. It does however seem relevant to look at this accumulating evidence in general terms, especially as in 1978 Professor Cunliffe could write that 'While it must be admitted that little is yet known of these Belgic *oppida* in Britain the work at Verulamium has defined the main characteristics of this type of site.' (Cunliffe, 1978, 90). If this is the case then *Verlamion* is worthy of more attention than it has received in the past.

Figure 14 is a provisional attempt to present in simple visual terms the current position. Underlying the Roman City is an apparent cluster of find spots of coin moulds, which seem to surround, at least on two sides a rectangular ditched enclosure. Two large groups of moulds are known, firstly a scatter underlying the Claudian fort rampart in Insula XVII associated with crucibles and adjacent to, and probably associated with, a timber building of rectilinear plan with timber slots and chalk floors (Frere, 1958, 2; Rodwell, 1978, 33). The second group of moulds, the largest known from *Verlamion*, was found in a pit in Insula XXVII, adjoining which was a pit containing *terra nigra* platters (Frere, 1958, 13; Anthony, 1961a). Smaller groups of moulds are also known from this general area; from Insula XXVII (Frere, 1957, 6 n. 4) Insula XXVIII, in a Belgic gully (Frere, 1961, 75 n. 6) and from two adjacent positions in Insula XVIII (Anthony, 1961b, 37) and XIX (Verulamium Museum 1976 (site 74.6)). Away from this cluster of findspots, which is situated some 800 metres from Prae Wood and forms a rough triangle enclosing some 5 hectares, are three other widely dispersed findspots. The most secure of these produced two fragments, the first ever to be found at Verulamium, although their significance was not realised at the time. These fragments came from beneath the Chester Gate and were apparently associated with the hearth recorded by the Wheelers (Wheeler and Wheeler, 1936, 68, A.XXIII). Fragments of mould are also reported to have been found during roadworks at the top of Bluehouse Hill, close to Prae Wood² and another very small fragment was found on the Abbey Orchard in 1968³. These three positions greatly extend the area over which coin moulds have been found and interestingly the Abbey Orchard fragment can be associated with occupation denoted by pits on the northern side of the River Ver. In all cases where the moulds can be dated none appear to be earlier than the time of Cunobelin and the location of Tasciovanus' mint is not known.

The possible enclosure around which the majority of coin moulds cluster is only known from a single corner of a substantial ditch which appears to have been at least 4 metres wide (Frere, 1957, 9, Pl. VII). This enclosure, if such it is, appears to underlie the later Roman Forum and the lower levels of ditch silt produced Claudian pottery. If this is a Belgic and not an early Roman feature⁴, it possibly represents a focal point, either religious or secular; Frere has even speculated that the enclosure could mark the limits of a 'palace' area (Frere, 1964, 103). If in some way the layout of the Roman City did reflect what had gone before then it is perhaps worth noting that the excavation of the earliest Roman temple known to have been built at Verulamium, that in Insula

XVI produced two Belgic coins (Lowther, 1937).

If the central area of Roman Verulamium was in some way a focal, or central point, of the earlier *Verlamion*, then the areas explored by the Wheelers can be seen in a completely different perspective; no longer is Prae Wood central but peripheral. Although it must be admitted that this is speculation only and that the Wheelers were adamant that no pre-Roman settlement was found within the area of their excavations, it is now impossible to establish how much of the area they investigated was excavated down to the *surface of the undisturbed natural*. The surviving excavation records suggest that this was a relatively small proportion of the total area involved. Furthermore, the remains of Verulamium mean that aerial survey is unlikely to reveal evidence of an earlier period beneath the major part of the Roman City. Aerial survey is also useless where areas are covered by woodland or buildings so that the detail shown on Fig. 14 remains incomplete. In such circumstances and in the present state of knowledge speculation, or hypothesis is therefore inevitable. It must however be noted that the extensive excavations directed by Professor Frere only revealed secure evidence of Belgic activity in Insula XVII and in Insula XXVIII (coin moulds excepted); a building in the former and a pit, gully and five cremation burials in the latter. If as might be the case, and as is possible at Wheathampstead we are dealing with a large area, within which areas of activity likely to survive in the archaeological record may be very dispersed, then pre-Roman features might well have escaped detection within the excavated areas of Verulamium.⁵

The pattern of features in Fig. 14 and surrounding Verulamium has been mapped from field survey, excavation and aerial survey and is shown here in a simplified form commensurate with the scale of the map. It is possible that some, if not many, of the cropmarks are of Roman rather than pre-Roman date and this cannot be proved without excavation, but it should be noted that finds of Belgic pottery have been made in areas where no cropmarks are visible, or have been recorded, so it is possible that Belgic settlement areas may have escaped detection. What can be made of this pattern? Firstly, if the majority of these features are Belgic then it is clear that an enormous area is involved. Secondly, it is obvious that a variety of features are represented—rectilinear enclosures, trackways, boundaries and ? field systems. It was noted above how the contemporary oppidum at Camulodunum showed differing zones of land use apparently set within areas of farms and fields and it does seem that a similar pattern is emerging here. Some differing uses will now be examined.

Three areas of Belgic burial have been identified; of these the most important is the King Harry Lane Cemetery (Stead, 1969) where the whole of the cemetery appears to have been excavated. This work produced 463 cremation burials which had normally consisted of an urned cremation, buried in a small pit and accompanied by one or more accessory vessels and brooches. Social stratification seems to have been evident for some cremations had been heaped up on the floor of larger pits (the method used in the richer burials of Welwyn type) and some of these had been placed in the centre of rec-

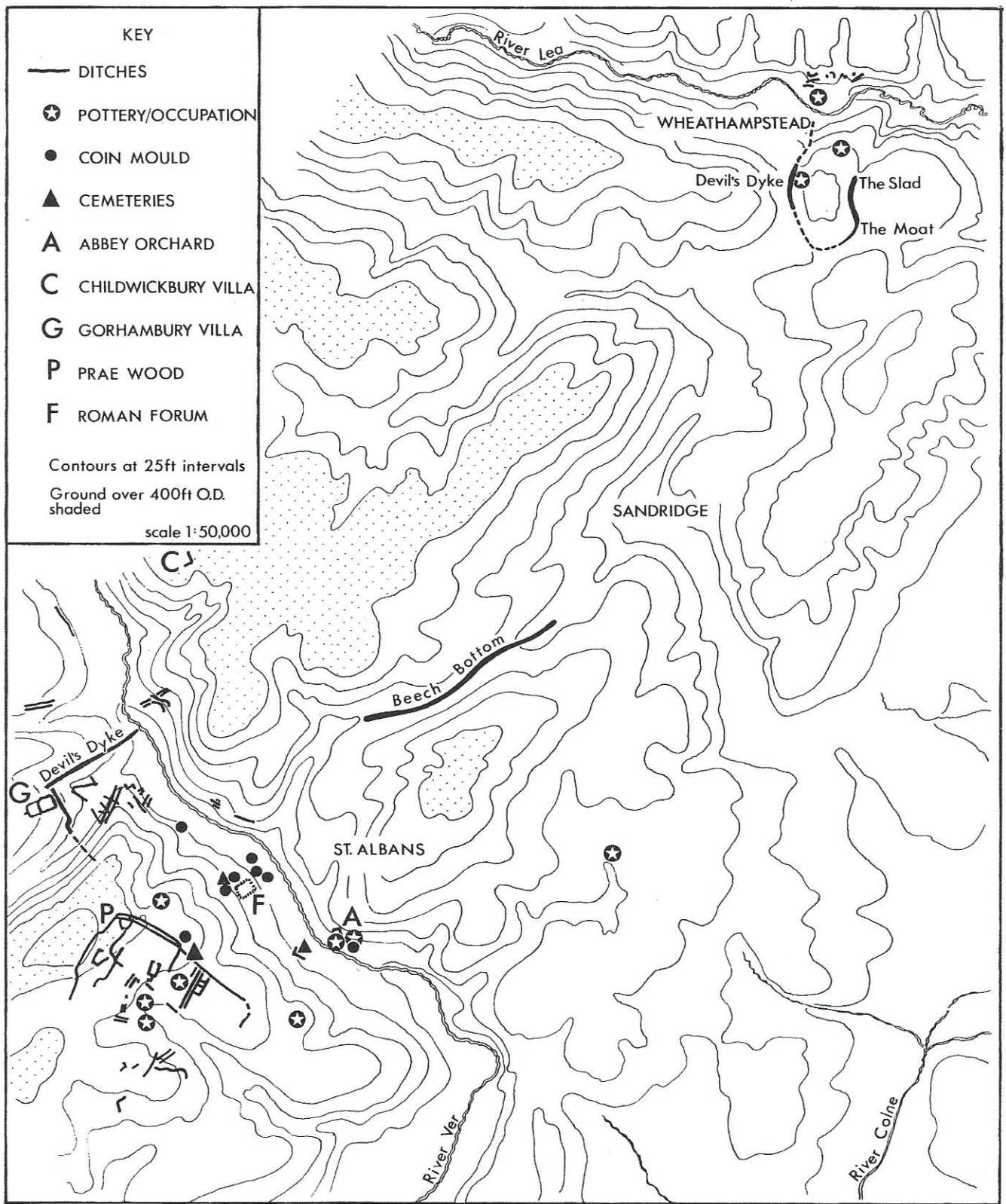


Fig. 14 Map of the *Oppida* at Wheathampstead and Verlamion.
(Based upon the 1961 Ordnance Survey 1:25000 map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, Crown Copyright reserved).

tilinear ditched enclosures with lesser (poorer) satellite burials clustered around. This cemetery also produced 18 inhumation burials, three of which had been placed in the ditches of the rectilinear enclosures. A considerable amount of imported Gallo-Belgic pottery was included among the grave goods and this has been studied by Miss V. Rigby (1981) and although a detailed report has yet to appear, it would seem to date generally from the Tiberio-Claudian period.

Elsewhere, 5 cremation burials have been recorded from Insula XXVIII although excavation here was not extensive enough to show if a much larger number was involved (Frere, 1961, 75, Fig. 2). Three of the burials had been placed in the filling of a Belgic gulley and two more in the top of a pit which might suggest a change of use in the area; a large clay pit was probably also earlier.

Another small cemetery is known from Verulam Hills Field (Anthony, 1968). Here 21 cremation burials were found set in shallow pits in the natural gravel and the cemetery was set within the angle of two substantial ditches. Within the apex of these ditches evidence of occupation was found and this spread over a restricted area of approximately 5 metres by 10 metres within which was a line of post-holes. Fifteen bronze coins (2 of Tasciovanus and 13 of Cunobelinus) were found in this general area.

Hunn (1980) in his recent reconsideration of the Prae Wood earthworks has suggested that there might be a phase pre-dating the earliest features identified by the Wheelers, represented by his feature 11, but the unravelling of the complicated sequence in this area must await further excavation. What is clear is that the situation on the plateau as now revealed by excavation, fieldwork and aerial survey suggests that the complexities are just beginning to become apparent and that changing land use throughout the Belgic period must be borne in mind. Two rectangular enclosures, both of which may be associated with ditched trackways are known here and seem generally comparable with Wheeler's Enclosure A which produced occupation debris and a possible round house site. These sites can be compared with the pre-Roman phases at Gorhambury where a series of ditched enclosures contained a Belgic farmstead. Buildings of circular, rectangular and aisled form have been identified and some phases may predate the introduction of imported Gallo-Belgic pottery. (Neal, 1978, 37, Fig. 9, 10; Grew, 1980, 373, Fig. 11, 12; Grew, 1981, 345). A similar rectangular enclosure/trackway complex also has been recorded some 3 kilometers to the north of Verulamium near Beaumont Hall Farm, Redbourn, and another enclosure might precede the Roman Villa at Childwickbury (Fig. 14).

The Verulamium Dykes—Devil's Dyke and Beech Bottom Dyke

Devil's Dyke

To the north west of Verulamium a visible dyke adjacent to Maynes Farm and known as Devil's Dyke has long been known. This was partially explored by the Wheelers who suggested that it ran down to the river but at no point was a complete section excavated and there is no secure evidence for the date of this earthwork. The one critical

point where some stratigraphical information might have been forthcoming, where the Roman Watling Street crosses the line of the Dyke, is said to have been too disturbed for the relationship between the two to be established (Wheeler and Wheeler, 1936, 15). In its present form the Dyke consists of a ditch 10 metres wide with a flanking bank placed on either side, the south-eastern being the larger. The Wheelers established by excavation the terminal point of this Dyke at the south-western end but recent work by Mr D.S. Neal has shown that another dyke runs from this locality in a south-easterly direction, heading generally for Prae Wood. This has a ditch some 10 metres wide with a bank on its south-western side. Excavations have shown that this dyke is later in date than the establishment of the Belgic farmstead beneath Gorhambury Villa, indicating that here at least the Dyke system was not a primary feature of the Belgic landscape⁶. Neither are as massive or occupy a topographical situation, comparable with the other Verulamium dyke, that known as Beech Bottom.

Beech Bottom Dyke

This Dyke has been seen as providing a physical link between Verulamium and Wheathampstead (e.g. Cunliffe, 1978, 91; Fig. 6.6) but this involves an exaggerated view of the length of the Dyke. The known section consists of a length of 1,980 metres, for 1,580 metres of which it is clearly visible as a major component of the landscape (from N.G.R. TL1623 0955 to TL1497 0880) but to the south of the junction with Harpenden Road the line is less visible and has not been traced beyond TL1460 0873 approx). Where well preserved, the Dyke consists of a massive ditch up to 30 metres wide and 10 metres deep with a bank on either margin, that on the southern side being the larger, in which respect it compares with the Devil's Dyke at Wheathampstead (Wheeler and Wheeler, 1936, 16, Pl. VII). According to Wheeler, the course of the Dyke to the north east of its apparent termination was picked up by the St. Albans—Wheathampstead Road (St Albans Road, Sandridge) and 'For some distance north eastwards of the latter point the Wheathampstead road is sunk and clearly overlies a former continuation of the dyke . . .' (Wheeler and Wheeler, 1936, 16). This sounds convincing but it is equally clear on the ground that the road is sunk in a precisely similar manner to the south-west of the assumed junction with the Dyke and the sunken nature of the road cannot therefore be taken as positive proof that it overlies a filled in ditch. To the south of the junction with Harpenden Road only slight indications are visible but these together with observations made during the cutting of deep sewer trenches in 1932 showed that the Dyke continued for 400 metres beyond that point. It was from one of these trenches, immediately to the west of the Harpenden road that a hoard of Roman *denarii* came. This was found at a depth of 4.3 metres and the hoard could not have been deposited until the dyke at this point already contained some 3 metres of filling. This hoard seems to date to the period A.D. 120–40 by which time it is said, the Dyke was not only in existence but also partially filled (Wheeler and Wheeler, 1936, 18). What is not clear from the Wheelers' account is the nature of the filling in which the hoard was found. Com-

parison of the published profile of Beech Bottom (which has never been excavated) with the excavated section of the Wheathampstead Devil's Dyke, suggests that the hoard was unlikely to have been deposited in a naturally silted layer and the Dyke at this point had clearly been *deliberately filled*. It is possible then, that the coin hoard was either deposited when the ditch already had been partly and deliberately filled or that the hoard had originally been deposited elsewhere and incorporated into the filling of the ditch with a load of backfill. In any event it is unwise to take the coin hoard as necessarily indicating the date of the Dyke.

To return to the route of the Dyke: according to Wheeler 'its further course south-westwards towards the Ver may safely be inferred from the sharply defined re-entrant contour which marks the junction of the transverse and the main valley' (Wheeler and Wheeler, 1936, 16). Wheeler, followed by more recent authorities (*inter alia* Frere, 1979, Fig. 1; Cunliffe, 1978, Fig. 6.6) assumed that the Dyke ran down this valley to the River Ver, but this does not appear to have been the case. Observations during housing construction in the 1950s revealed no trace of the Dyke in this valley and it may well have terminated at the re-entrant. At its other end the Dyke may well have stopped close to its present visible end.

A further complication has recently been introduced by Rodwell (1976, 335) who in a tantalising passage states that the historical topography of the landscape around Wheathampstead and Verulamium suggests that much of the ancient morphology of the area is still reflected in existing features, although this is not pursued, 'Suffice it to say that the relationship of Dyke Lane, field boundaries and *particularly the parish boundary* (our italics) to the southern end of Devil's Dyke is highly suggestive of a southward continuation of this earth-work . . .' (as indicated on Rodwell, 1976, Fig. 49). He then continues that there would be 'no difficulty in proposing a tentative, though feasible, line which would link the Devil's Dyke with Beech Bottom Dyke. Furthermore, a comparison of the excavated sections of these two features reveals a similarity which may be more than pure coincidence. It therefore may be tentatively suggested that the land block between the rivers Ver and Lea was closed at its western (open) end by a continuous boundary dyke, and that the Wheathampstead *oppidum* might be seen as an attached settlement enclosure'.

If the course of the parish boundary is significant to all this speculation then there is one piece of evidence which needs consideration. In A.D. 1060 Edward the Confessor granted an estate to Westminster Abbey the bounds of which are for a great deal of the distance those of the present parishes of Harpenden and Wheathampstead. Devil's Dyke is clearly mentioned in this charter the topography of which has been ably studied (WEA, 1973, 3). This eleventh century boundary ran from 'Maerforde' to the 'Headic' that is from Marford to Devil's Dyke and then from the 'Headic' along the valley into the Deers Clearing. This valley is the shallow one along which Dyke Lane runs and the boundary was in the valley bottom along the line of the present parish boundary running as this does today to Nomansland Common (the Deers Clearing). Clearly when this charter was

drawn up there was no dyke along the boundary at this point!

In the present state of knowledge we can do no more than speculate on the relationship between Devil's Dyke, Wheathampstead and Beech Bottom Dyke but it is true that both appear to be similarly constructed and occupy a similar topographical position—i.e. in the bottom of a shallow valley. Until these features have been securely dated a task which calls for further excavation and a great deal of good fortune this will always remain a tantalising problem.

Conclusions

The problems of Wheathampstead and Verulamium can be resolved only by further excavation and research but the evidence presented above shows that the problems are of great complexity. In such a short review many areas have been left unexplored but some may be briefly considered here as relevant to the problem. Firstly, settlement which might immediately precede the earliest Belgic occupation of Wheathampstead is practically unknown. Secondly, the status of *Verlamion* is, beyond doubt, that of an important centre but there is little real evidence as yet to describe this as an *urban* centre. Trade there clearly was as the imported pottery shows but except for coin-moulds and pottery there is no good evidence for manufacturing or industrialised production although there is evidence for intensive agriculture (Dimpleby, 1978, 112). Thirdly, if such an *oppidum* represents the highest point in a hierarchical settlement pattern then the other levels of this hierarchy await identification in the area, although the occupation to the north of the River Lea at Wheathampstead is clearly something very different from the farmsteads in the Welwyn area (Rook, 1968a, 1968b, 1970a, 1970b) and those at *Verlamion* itself. Fourthly, the whole question of the relationship of the known dyke systems to the two areas needs further work. If a major dyke such as that recently discovered at Gorhambury can have remained undetected in an area which has seen a considerable amount of archaeological activity over the past fifty years then future fieldwork might result in further discoveries.

The future of the newly discovered complex at Wheathampstead is at present uncertain. The area involved does have an outstanding planning permission for the extraction of gravel although it is now recognised as an Archaeological Area for local Preservation in the St Albans District Plan.

FOOTNOTES

1. The excavations of 1974 were made possible by the kind permission of the Ayot Estate, through their agents, Smith-Wooley and Co., and in particular by Messrs. M.P. and L.P. Goldsmith of Samuels Farm. The work in 1977 received assistance from Mr T.M. Jeffrey at that time Archaeological Officer in the County Planning Department and from the County Surveyors Department. During the 1974 season Miss P.J. Spencer and Mr R.J. Fellow acted as site supervisors and Mr P. Crane did much of the surveying. In 1977 the greater part of the excavation work was carried out by Mr P. Crane and Mr J.G. McDonnell, and Mr S.W. Lamb, of Marford Farm kindly allowed the site hut to be erected on his land and provided assistance in other ways. All the illustrations of pottery and other finds are the work of Mrs C. Pollak and Miss F. Paget provided great assistance with the reconstruction of the pottery. Our thanks also to Mrs A. Watson for discussing the worked flints with us and to all those not named here who provided assistance in various ways.

2. Information from Mr J.H. Brown of the Verulamium Museum. These fragments cannot now be traced.
3. Previously described (Saunders and Havercroft, 1978, 16) as 'part of a perforated baked clay brick' but re-examination of this very small fragment suggests that it is part of a coin mould. Excavations on the Abbey Orchard were carried out by the St Albans & Hertfordshire Architectural and Archaeological Society in 1968. Further Belgic pottery and a baked clay 'firebar' was found nearby in 1975 to the south of a ditched enclosure, (Saunders and Havercroft, 1978, 16).
4. This has been interpreted as part of a Roman fort ditch, (Branigan, 1973, 33) but the sharp corner is unlike Roman military work. In the authors opinion, this ditch cannot be associated with that found beneath Verulamium Car Park or with the deep deposits below the Verulamium Museum. The very small excavation within the Forum in 1979, described in this volume (pp 000), (Saunders, 1982) revealed no evidence of pre-Roman occupation.
5. Mrs B.R.K. Niblett, who is currently working on the material and archives from the Wheelers' excavations, has drawn my attention to the early ditch beneath the Macellum in Insula XVII (Richardson, 1944, 82, Fig. 2) which could be earlier than the published accounts suggest. There is another possible ditch of early date immediately to the north of the Theatre (Kenyon, 1934, 214).
6. Further work by Mr Neal in 1982 revealed another dyke in this area, running from the termination of this Dyke in a north easterly direction.

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