Oppida PREMIÈRES VILLES AU NORD DES ALPES

Éducation et culture
Culture 2000

Saint Albans

The later Romano-British town of Verulamium, nowadays Saint Albans, was the locus of extensive pre-Roman settlement. Its British name appears on coins of the ruler Tasciovanus as Verlamion (Niblett 2001). Two Late Iron Age enclosed settlements have been investigated on the plateau edge overlooking the valley of the river Ver, one at Prae Wood, the other at Gorhambury. Part of a ditch of a third enclosure (the Saint Michael's enclosure), which yielded coin mould fragments, has been found in the valley bottom beneath the Roman forum. A Late Iron Age cremation cemetery (the necropole indicated in the tick-boxes) has been excavated at King Harry Lane in the valley beneath Prae Wood, whilst across the river, a cult enclosure and rich burial/mausoleum have been found at Folly Lane. Traces of metalworking have been found several points within the valley (Bryant and Niblett 1997).

Several linear earthworks are associated with the complex: (1) the Wheelers' ditch at Prae Wood; (2) the Devil's Dyke across the Ver valley north of Gorhambury; and (3) the Beech Bottom dyke which runs from the opposite side of the river across the intervening plateau to the Wheathampstead. The Devil's Dyke and Beech Bottom dyke are embanked to the south and presumed to face northward.

The term oppidum has in the past been attributed both to Wheathampstead and to the Prae Wood site, both of which were investigated in the 1930s (Wheeler and Wheeler 1936). At least one subsequent commentator (Thompson 1979) distinguishes between the "hill fort" of Wheathampstead and the "oppidum" of Prae Wood. Nowadays, the term oppidum is usually applied to the entire St Albans complex.

Prae Wood and King Harry Lane
The earthwork now known as Wheeler's Ditch runs ENE–WSW along the plateau edge for 1.5 km to Prae Wood, where it turns to the south-west as if forming two sides of a large enclosure. Two phases are identified: a primary phase with a single ditch either without a bank, or with only disontinuous banking on its inner lip. Small in size (c 3m in width, less than 2 m deep), it is not considered a significant defensive structure (Wheeler and Wheeler 1936). In the earlier first century AD, an outer ditch was established in the NW corner, the inner ditch was recut and a wooden palissade was constructed on its inner lip, which the Wheelers suggested represented the hasty construction of military fortifications. This is now thought unlikely.

Within the area bounded by the Wheeler earthwork, there are smaller enclosures, including one in the NW corner at Prae Wood. This was partly excavated in the 1930s, dating the occupation to the early-mid first century AD. Beneath Prae Wood is the King Harry Lane cemetery, in use from c. 10/1 BC to AD 40/50, and with over 400 burials (Stead and Rigby 1989). Other Late Iron Age burials are known in the valley, at St Stephens and Hills Field.

The Beech Bottom Dyke
A ditch running WSW-ESE from near Folly Lane towards Wheathampstead. It is 30m wide and even partially filled achieves a depth of 10m. Embankments are recognized to either side, but the more important is to the south. It can be traced for nearly 2km. It is usually interpreted as a boundary work, but Bryant (2007) has suggested that it may instead mark a major ceremonial route leading towards the St Michael's enclosure at centre of the complex.

The Devil's Dyke and Gorhambury
A ditch running NE–SW across the river valley well to the north of the Prae Wood and then doubling back south-east along the plateau edge. The total length is a little under 2km (Bryant 2007). Attached to the western edge of the plateau section of the earthwork is the enclosure at Gorhambury (Neal et al. 1990), which was first occupied in the early first century AD and later developed into a Roman villa. A section of linear earthwork excavated near the Gorhambury enclosure was 23m wide and 10m from top of bank to bottom of ditch, making it much more substantial than Wheelers' Ditch.

Folly Lane
In 1991, a rich burial set centrally within a rectangular ditched enclosure was discovered and susequently at Folly Lane (Niblett 1999). It dates to the mid first century AD. It thought likely to be the

burial/mausoleum of a prominent citizen or even the rulers of St Albans just after the Conquest (e.g Creighton 2000; 2006).

It is now thought that Iron Age Verlamion developed as a ritual complex, possibly originating as a periodic meeting place at the boundaries of different groups (Bryant 2007; Haselgrove and Millett 1997; Niblett 1999). Much of the valley bottom close to the river was probably marshy in the Late Iron Age and would have provided a context for ritual activity. St Albans seems to have become a place of major political importance in the late first century BC, when the area was ruled by Tasciovanus, who had probably united several smaller groups. Tasciovanus minted coins at St Albans and almost certainly entered into a treaty with Rome (Haselgrove 1987; Creighton 2000; 2006). However, the complex seems to have declined in political importance in the early first century AD with a transfer of power to Camulodunum. The extensive linear earthworks observed at Verulamium are sometimes considered precursors of the developments at Camulodunum (Cunliffe 2005).

- Localisation Google Earth (Saint Albans)
- Localisation Google Earth (tous les oppida)

SITUATION ADMINISTRATIVE

Nom usuel :	Saint Albans	**Département :**	Hertfordshire
Commune :	Saint Albans	**Région :**	East
Lieu-dit :	Prae Wood	**Pays :**	Royaume-Uni
Nom antique :	*Verulamium*	**Civitas :**	Catuvellauni

TOPOGRAPHIE ET REMPARTS

Superficie :	700 ha	**Architecture de rempart :**	
Topographie :	-	**1 - Talus massif**	
Nb de phases du rempart :	2	**2 - Talus massif**	
Nb de portes connues :	-		
Nb de portes fouillées :	-		

OCCUPATION INTERNE DE L'OPPIDUM

Atelier monétaire | Zone cultuelle / Sanctuaire | Zone d'habitat | Zone artisanale

ENVIRONNEMENT DE L'OPPIDUM

Habitat rural | Nécropole | Sanctuaire | Tombe aristocratique | Voie

CHRONOLOGIE DU SITE

Chronologie relative :	**Occupation du site :**
Augustéen	La Tène finale (LT D)
Chronologie absolue : -	Haut-Empire
	Antiquité tardive

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GESTION ET MISE EN VALEUR

L'oppidum de Saint-Albans est accessible, mais la plupart des vestiges encore visibles datent de l'époque romaine, puisque le site est une des cités antiques les mieux connues d'Angleterre.

Créé en 1939, le Verulamium Museum est une annexe du musée de Saint-Albans qui se consacre entièrement au passé romain du territoire. Quelques vestiges de l'âge du fer sont exposés, mais ils sont peu nombreux. Les vestiges antiques sont valorisés dans un parc de 100 hectares.
Nombreuses animations, notamment pour les scolaires.
Le musée est ouvert toute l'année sauf entre Noël et le jour de l'an.

Pour en savoir plus, contacter le musée :
Verulamium Museum - St. Michael's Street - St. Albans
Hertfordshire - AL3 4SW – UK / Tel : 01727 751810 / mail : museums@stalbans.gov.uk
Site internet : http://www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk/Sites/Verulamium-Museum

(Camille Daval – ArchéoMédia, avril 2008)

PHOTOTHEQUE

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Pip Stephenson / Colin Haselgrove