

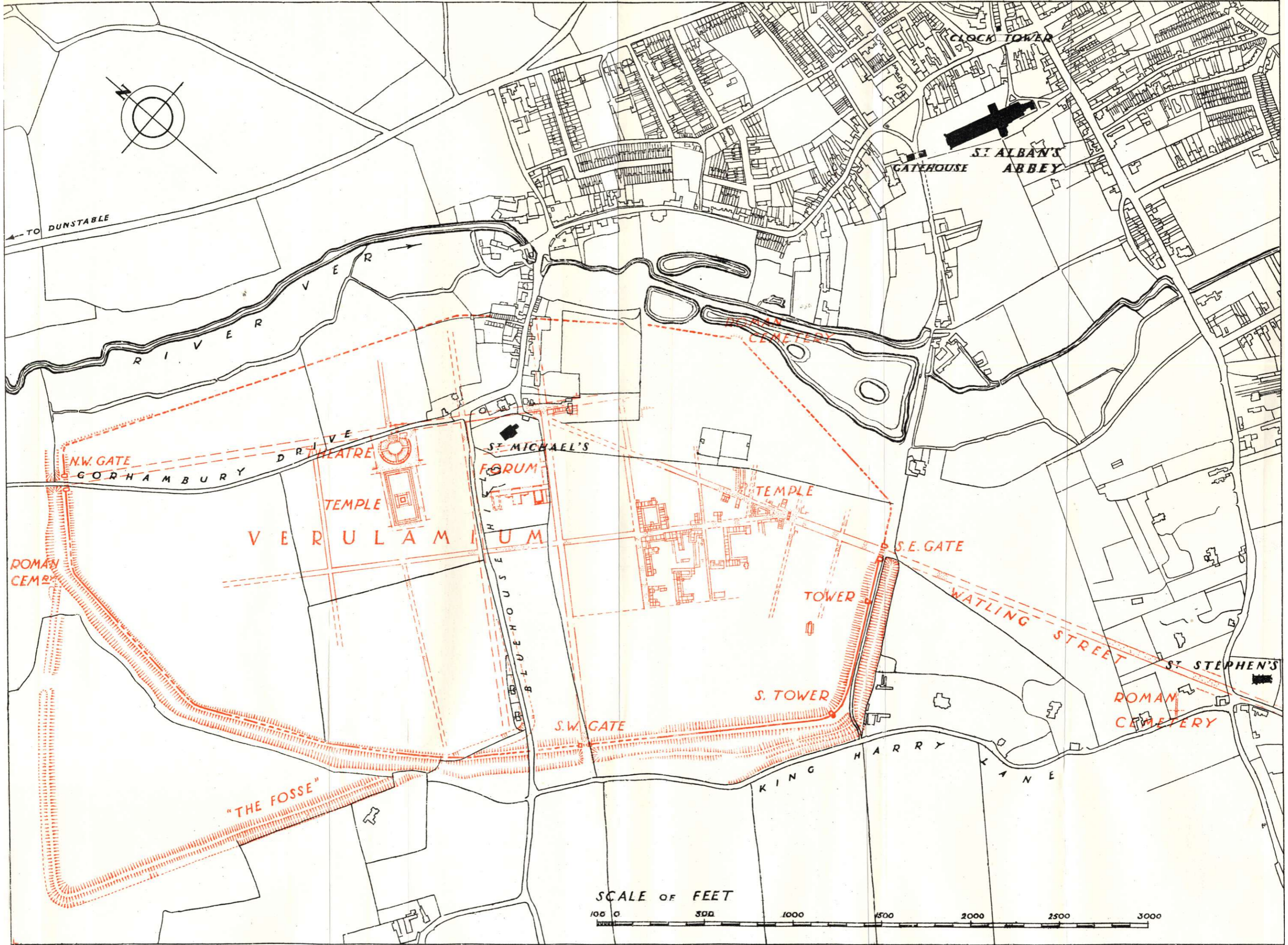


ST ALBANS & HERTFORDSHIRE
Architectural & Archaeological Society

We are grateful to St Albans Museums for their permission to re-publish the images from the Verulamium excavations collection.

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Based upon the Ordnance Survey Map, with the sanction of the Controller of E.M. Stationery Office.

The Verulamium Excavations: 1930 to 1936

IN response to a widely expressed wish for the publication of a map showing Verulamium in its relation to the more modern St. Albans, and the extent of the excavations carried out up to the present time, Mr. A. W. G. Lowther has kindly drawn us the necessary plan. This we now offer to our readers together with a summarized account of each year's work.¹

The Verulamium district comes into history in the year 54 B.C., when Julius Caesar pursued Cassivellaunus, king of the Catuvellauni and overlord of South-eastern Britain, to his woodland lair which was long believed to be Verulamium, though it now appears to have been some little distance from the later Roman city. Verulamium itself was probably not founded until some decades after Caesar's invasions, but was already established as a British royal city by the end of the first century B.C. At the time of the Roman invasion in force under the Emperor Claudius in A.D. 43, Verulamium was a flourishing centre, and before A.D. 61 it had received the highest civic status that Rome could bestow upon a city of this kind, being created a *municipium*, an honour that, so far as we know, was not shared by any other city in Roman Britain. This distinction carried with it the rights of Roman citizenship, and was awarded only to those native cities which had of their own accord achieved a degree of size, wealth and civilization worthy of the Roman name.

In the year A.D. 61, however, Verulamium was laid in ashes by Boadicea (Boudicca), Queen of the Iceni, while the Roman army was busy in the difficult hill countries of the north and north-west. The triumph of the East Anglian tribesmen was short-lived, for the Roman legions very soon wreaked a terrible revenge and Boadicea, seeing that all was lost, took her own life.

The century following the rebellion was probably the most prosperous in the whole existence of the city and was the period that saw the erection of the wall-defences and the public buildings.

¹ For the full and official report of the excavations see *Verulamium : a Belgic and two Roman Cities*, by R. E. M. Wheeler, D.Lit., V.P.S.A., and T. V. Wheeler, F.S.A., pub. by the Society of Antiquaries, 1936.

When the Romans left Britain to its own resources itSwO^WxcC^^ftyrCf^ m u«
 *xx ^^ificiiY/bfir aWAre Sl-nfcTay-ccr-ircH^ia^ri¹¹
 into a decline. Subsequently, as it became more and more ruinous, it formed a useful quarry from which the monastic builders were able to take all the building material they required, and we are told that in the early part of the eleventh century two successive abbots overthrew what remained standing and filled up the subterranean crypts " because they had become refuges for thieves.

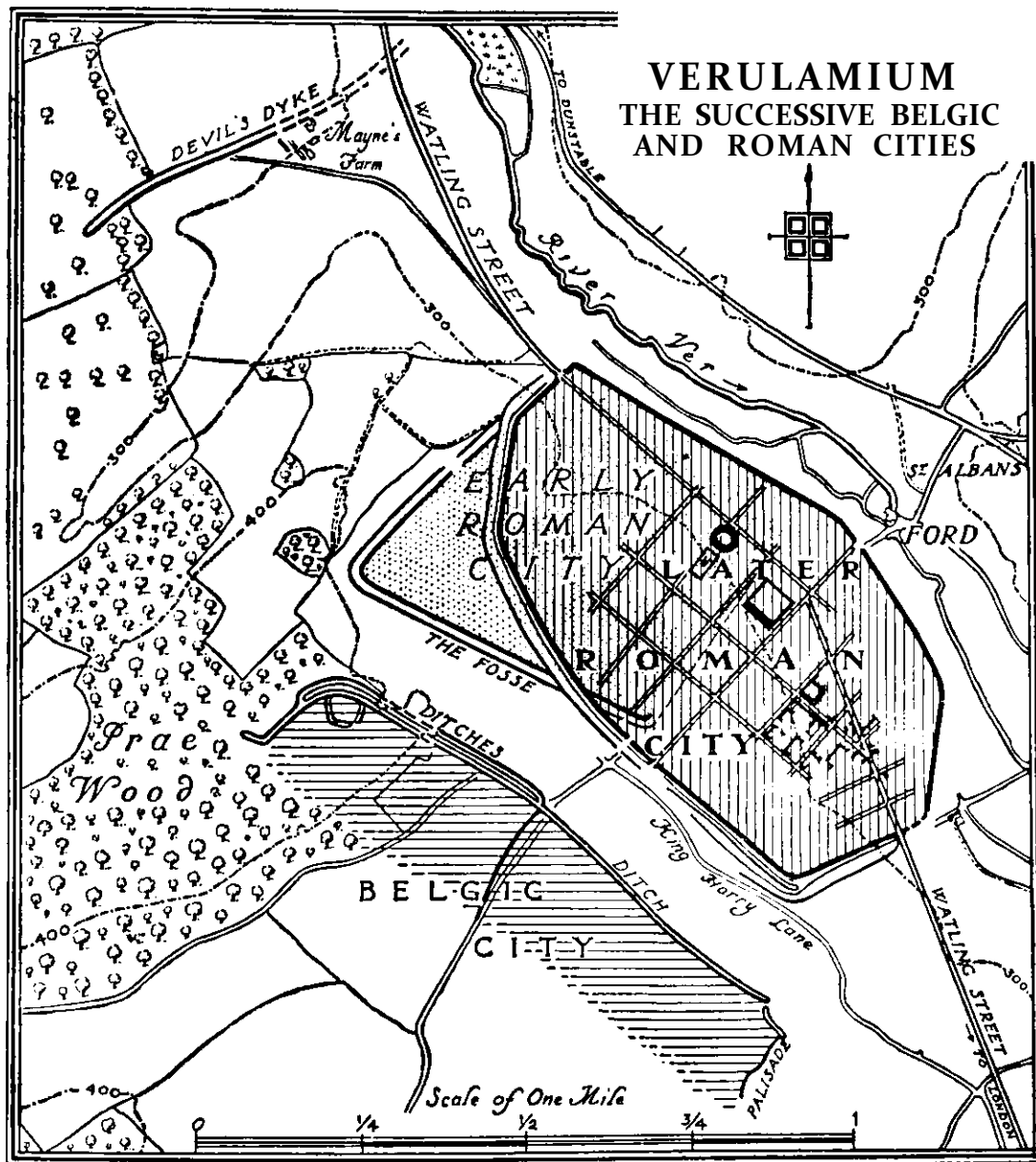
The outline and extent of Roman Verulamium can be traced by what remains of the defences of wall, bank and ditch, originally some two miles in length and enclosing about 200 acres. Certain excavations on a small scale have been carried out upon the site at various times, but the opportunity for systematic work did not come until 1929. On August 2nd of that year the St. Albans City Council acquired from the Earl of Verulam 104 acres, comprising half the area of the Roman city, and later they approached the Society of Antiquaries, with the result that a Verulamium Excavation Committee was formed with the Marquess of Salisbury as President, Sir Charles Peers as Chairman, and Dr. R. E. Mortimer Wheeler and the late Mrs. Wheeler as Directors of Excavations. Councillor I. H. Ironmonger and the late Alderman W. S. Green contributed generously to the necessary funds to enable work to be begun in the summer of 1930.

Several learned Societies have subscribed year by year, but the heavy cost of the work has been in the main met by the donations of visitors to the site.

1930.

The main axis of the Roman city was the Watling Street, which in Saxon times had been diverted at St Stephen's for the greater convenience of traffic to the Abbey on the neighbouring hill top.

At a distance of 125 yards to the south of the Roman defences a trench was cut, revealing the original road-way and the fact that, at first only ten feet wide, it had three times been re-metalled and improved, being widened eventually to thirty feet. At its entry into the Roman city the road was spanned by a gateway



Based upon the Ordnance Survey Map, with the sanction of E.M. Stationery Office.

which was excavated in the same year. The gateway was designed on an ambitious scale, being 100 feet in breadth, with boldly projecting **round**-fronted towers flanking a fourfold entry, the two central openings being for wheeled traffic and the two lateral openings being for foot passengers. The gate itself has long been razed to the ground, and owes its partial survival beneath the surface only to the astonishing depth and solidity of its substructure. The foundations of the fronts of the towers were carried down nearly five feet into the natural soil.

The gateway is contemporary with the city-wall and, from the evidence of coins and pottery found, may be dated between the years A.D. 125 and 150. A most interesting "find" was made here, a bronze die for striking silver coins of the time of the Emperor Hadrian. It is the upper or "trussel" die used for striking reverses. Within the legend *ADVENTVS AVG* is shown Hadrian being received by Rome, a reverse used on *denarii* of A.D. 134 to 138. This is the first and only Roman die ever found in Britain.

In the interior of the town other Roman buildings and streets were also uncovered, notably the foundations of a dwelling-house set at an angle between two minor streets of the city. This house had been rebuilt at least twice during the Roman occupation, the first time being at the beginning of the second century. To this period belongs the mosaic floor of a projecting apsidal room, which is now to be seen in the museum on the site. The motive is that of the scallop-shell in an unusually elaborate setting with a wave-pattern border in the Greek style. This mosaic dates from c. A.D. 130-150, and is a very fine example of the period.

An adjacent building with a street frontage appears to have been a shop, or possibly a wayside tavern, with a verandah facing the street and consisting of three small rooms, behind which lay a cellar that was almost intact. This cellar, after serving its purpose for some two centuries, was filled up and disused about A.D. 300, and to this fact we owe its remarkable state of preservation. Along three sides are the traces of the timber shelving with which it was equipped, while there are indications also of a massive timber structure which may

have been a crane for lowering and raising heavy goods. A noteworthy feature of this cellar was a window with whitewashed and widely splayed sill and jambs.

By permission of the Earl of Verulam one of the Roman cemeteries in Gorhambury Park was discovered near the north gate of the city, lying as usual outside the walls, and partially explored. Eight inhumation burials were found with ornaments and pottery of late third or early fourth century date. In most cases the dead had been interred in a crouched position within oblong coffins. In one instance the skeleton of a man was accompanied by a small cup on which had been roughly scratched at the time of the burial MAURUSI, being without doubt the name of the deceased (i.e.,

This belonged to Maurusius ").

1931.

This was a busy year, as work began in March and did not end until November.

By permission of the Earl of Verulam the prehistoric earthworks in Prae Wood and the line of the Fosse were explored. The conclusions to be drawn from this work will, perhaps, best be summarized in dealing with the year 1932.

So far as the walled city is concerned, the St. Albans City Council placed under the custody of H.M. Office of Works those stretches of the defences upon their property, for preservation as a national monument. These defences, consisting of internal bank, brick-coursed flint wall, berm and ditch or ditches, can confidently be dated to A.D. 120-150. The bank was from forty-five to fifty feet broad, the wall was nine feet nine inches wide at the footings, diminishing to seven feet above, but its original height cannot be determined with any certainty; the greatest surviving height is twelve feet six inches above the footings.

On the south the wall is fronted by a single ditch. On the south-west side the ground beyond the Roman city rises, and here, owing to this tactical weakness, the defences were strengthened by a multiple ditch system. At the junction of these two systems the ditches were opened up to their original contours and are now preserved in that state, forming a remarkable example of Roman fortification.

Two wall-towers were found, one at the south-west corner of the wall, the other some 200 feet west of the south gateway, and behind each of them is a guard-chamber.

The north gate of the city was excavated and found to be identical in plan with the south gate excavated in the previous year. It measures 100 feet in width and consists of two roadways (now almost wholly underlying the Gorhambury drive) and two footways, the whole flanked by two round-fronted towers.

The Watling Street inside the city was explored, and it was found that 180 yards northwards from the south gate it entered a square from which radiated three other streets. In the middle of this square were discovered the remains of a monumental arch at least thirty-five feet across. This has the distinction of being the first Roman triumphal arch discovered in Britain.

Several buildings were uncovered, adjoining one of which was found a great quantity of horse-bones—parts of five very aged horses which had been hacked apart and stripped of their flesh. The palaeontologist who examined them suggests that they may be relics of a Roman sausage factory. Another building dating from C. A.D. 300 covered some three-quarters of an acre of ground, and consisted of three ranges of rooms which looked inwards to an internal corridor or verandah with a central garden.

The very fine mosaic pavement depicting the head of Neptune was found in this year and is now in the Verulamium museum. The date is c. A.D. 160-190. The "Rose and Star" mosaic, found in the same year and preserved in the museum, is late second century.

Among the mass of pottery and objects recovered was an unique silver token made from a *denarius* of Augustus of c. 8 B.C. It was found in circumstances which suggest that it was lost before the end of the second century A.D. The head of Augustus has been filed away, and the resulting flat surface bears the incised inscription MITHRAS OROMASDES round the word PHREN. This may have been an amulet, or perhaps some kind of pass to obtain admission to Mithraic worship or to show membership of one of the Mithraic degrees.

1932.

For the exploration of prehistoric Verulamium it was necessary to investigate its association, if any, with two stretches of ditch or dyke which lie a short distance away. These are the Devil's Dyke, adjoining Maynes Farm, and Beech Bottom, the latter being two miles to the north-east of Prae Wood. The lucky find of a hoard of coins in the filling of the Beech Bottom dyke, immediately west of the St. Albans-Harpندن Road, furnished a clue that led to excavation of another Devil's Dyke, on the south-eastern outskirts of Wheat-hampstead. From the evidence furnished by these sites the following conclusions emerge.

Before the latter part of the first century B.C. a large and heavily fortified Belgic *oppidum* was established beside a ford in the Upper Lea valley at Wheat-hampstead. This was probably the headquarters of Cassivellaunus at the time of Caesar's invasion in 54 B.C.

The adjacent tract of country between the Lea valley and a fordable point on the Ver valley, five miles away, was wholly or partly bounded by a formidable dyke, the present Beech Bottom.

Later, at the end of the first century B.C., Verulamium was established as a lightly fenced city of considerable extent on the plateau above a ford of the River Ver, and then or subsequently the frontier dyke was extended across the Ver (Devil's Dyke, north of Prae Wood).

It may have been at the time of the Roman invasion of A.D. 43 that the inhabitants of Celtic Verulamium hurriedly added fortifications to their earlier boundary-dyke in and about Prae Wood.

In 1932, at a point where a road from the forum must have emerged from the town-walls on its way towards Silchester and the west, the remains of the south-west gate were laid bare. Naturally less imposing than the north and south gateways that spanned the Watling Street, it measured only seventy feet across, with one central carriage-way and two footways, the whole flanked by two square towers. As there is no local stone in Hertfordshire, Verulamium had long been a quarry for subsequent builders, but three blocks

of freestone were found, one being carved with the moulding of an architrave and thus telling something of the architecture of the gateway.

The building that contained the Neptune pavement was further explored and was found to be an E-shaped house containing thirty-three rooms on the ground floor. The west wing included a bath-range, similar to the Turkish baths of to-day. The mosaic floor of the *tepidarium* was found in almost perfect condition and, with the hypocaust system beneath, has been preserved *in situ*. This pavement is contemporary with the Neptune mosaic referred to above ; c. A.D. 160-190.

1933-

An area of three-quarters of an acre, excavated by student helpers, was notable for showing five periods of occupation, dating from the beginning of the Roman period.

North of the triumphal arch was found a temple, triangular in shape, being thirty feet wide at the southern end and widening to eighty feet at the northern end. A visitor approaching from the south would be confronted by the plastered and red-painted walls of the building and, passing through the entrance in the south wall, would find an internal ambulatory surrounding a triangular courtyard and supported by columns veneered with Ketton stone. In this courtyard was an altar, and at the northern end of the ambulatory there stood in Roman times a statue of the presiding deity. Behind the altar was found the skull of an ox, presumably that of the animal sacrificed when the temple was dedicated. The presence of a quantity of charred Italian pine-kernels suggests that possibly Attis and Cybele were the tutelary deities.

1934.

The existence of a Roman theatre² at Verulamium had been known since 1847, when it was partially explored. Situated in Gorhambury Park, it lies outside the area acquired by the St. Albans City Council, but Lord Verulam not only gave permission for the building to be completely excavated, but also very generously provided the necessary funds.

² Literature on the subject can be obtained at the theatre.

Under the direction of Miss K. M. Kenyon work was started in 1933, but it was not until 1934 that it was carried to a most successful conclusion. The theatre, the only one known in Britain, now stands revealed almost in its entirety and will be permanently preserved. It stands in the northern half of the second-century Roman city, fronting the Watling Street which underlies the present Gorhambury drive. Robbed extensively, probably by the Normans, down to the Roman ground level, we are left to-day with what was formerly below the surface.

Built c. A.D. 140, its plan was improved some twenty years later. During the course of the third century the theatre seems to have fallen completely into ruin, but at the end of that period it was rebuilt and enlarged by the addition of a new outer wall. By the second half of the fourth century the building was again in ruins and the site was being used as the municipal rubbish dump, as evidenced by the masses of broken pottery and other debris found by the excavators.

Adjoining the theatre on the west was a temple of Romano-Celtic type, which was explored by Mr. A. W. G. Lowther in 1934. This consists of a building of about A.D. 90, 53 ft. by 53 ft. externally, containing a small *cella* nineteen feet square internally, the whole surrounded by a colonnade dating from the latter half of the third century, the total area covered being 300 ft. by 160 ft.³

1935.

Mr. Lowther excavated a part of St. Germain's Farm. One corner of the *insula* occupied by the Forum was found to be inside this area and a small part of the buildings lying on the east side of the Forum was investigated.⁴

A Romano-British cemetery on the brow of St. Stephen's Hill was explored by Dr. Norman Davey and Mr. V. F. Rees, the latter giving every facility to dig his own grounds at "Halsmede," where he himself worked untiringly. First used during the closing years of the first century A.D., the cemetery, or at least a portion of it, is still in use as the burial

³ For a full description see *Antiquaries Journal*, Vol. XVII, No. 1.

⁴ For a full description see *Antiquaries Journal*, Vol. XVII, No. 1.

ground for St. Stephen's parish. Three burning chambers were found, as well as two inhumations and about one hundred burial groups.

1936.

Mr. Rees continued his excavations at " Halsmede and discovered a further twenty-six burial groups.

Mr. Lowther dug the site where a pavilion is to be built.

OBJECTS FOUND DURING THE EXCAVATIONS.

The St. Albans Corporation proposes to build a special museum on or near the site of Verulamium, to house the objects found during the excavations. In the meantime, a few of the objects, including three of the mosaic pavements, can be seen in a temporary museum on the site. The main bulk of the objects is, however, stored temporarily in the University of London Institute of Archaeology, Inner Circle, Regent's Park, London, N.W.1, where, though not normally open to the public, it can be seen on application to the Secretary of the Institute. The collection is notable, not only for the extent of its Roman material, but particularly for the quantity of pre-Roman (Belgic) pottery, etc., which it includes.