

ST ALBANS (H)

TL 13 07 (Verulamium) Zone 7

This section covers the Roman town of Verulamium, now mostly an open site, and the modern area of St Albans, and has been placed here to follow on directly from Prae Wood, as there is considerable evidence, although scattered and fragmentary, of 'Belgic' settlement traces beneath the Roman town. Wheeler noted that 'during the first generation of the Roman occupation [up to the Flavian period], about 70% of the pottery in normal use was still Belgic in type and fabric' (Wheeler and Wheeler 1936, 181), and the same persistence of grog-tempered pottery in the traditional forms was found by Frere in excavations in the Roman town, 1955-1961. Roman fabrics take over very quickly in the expansion of the town in the Flavian period: but not until then.

i Frere's map of 'Belgic settlement' at Verulamium (Frere 1979, 275; fig.121) summarises the evidence for pre-conquest occupation in the valley and elsewhere. The numbers I have added relate to the following, with some additional discoveries:

1 Mint mould debris found scattered below the Roman NE defences, Insula XVII, with 'sherds of brown or grey combed Belgic ware, some of them fused, three fragmentary crucibles, and some pieces of imported Roman greyish-white wares (probably amphorae)' (Frere 1957, 7).

2 Traces of a rectangular ditched enclosure were found under the forum; only two small incomplete parts are known, with a sharp corner, and its layout and function are obscure; 'the lower levels of silt produced Claudian pottery' (Frere 1957, 9).

3 'Belgic pits' on the site of Insula XXVII building 4: one was full of mint moulds including one which showed each 'sheet' of fired clay to have a layout of 7x7 circular depressions with one extra to make up the 50 total. 'An adjoining pit' contained TN plates, 'some with stamps' (Frere 1958, 13). These have not been published; the plates were not found directly associated with the moulds.

4 More moulds, from Insula XIX, in St Michael's Street at TL 137 074, recovered by the Verulamium Museum staff in the Six Bells car park (Frere 1961, 75).

5 Insula XXVIII: 'a very large and deep Belgic excavation', interpreted as a quarry for potting clay; a drainage gully containing even more fragments of mint moulds; and 'Belgic cremations' (Frere 1961, 75, & pl.XXIV) not further described.

The interim reports also mention a 'Belgic wooden building': traces of two sleeper beams and chalk floors, with a small piece of mint mould, and many burnt flints, at Site K.VII, close to 1 above (Frere 1958, 2). 'An early, probably Belgic, ditch', unconnected with anything else, was found in 1960 in Insula XIX, site K.X (Frere 1961, 79, & fig.1).

6 The King Harry Lane cemetery lies between Prae Wood and the valley bottom, outside the Silchester or SW gate of the Roman town, and was excavated as part of an extensive building programme. 463 'Belgic' burials were found, almost all cremations

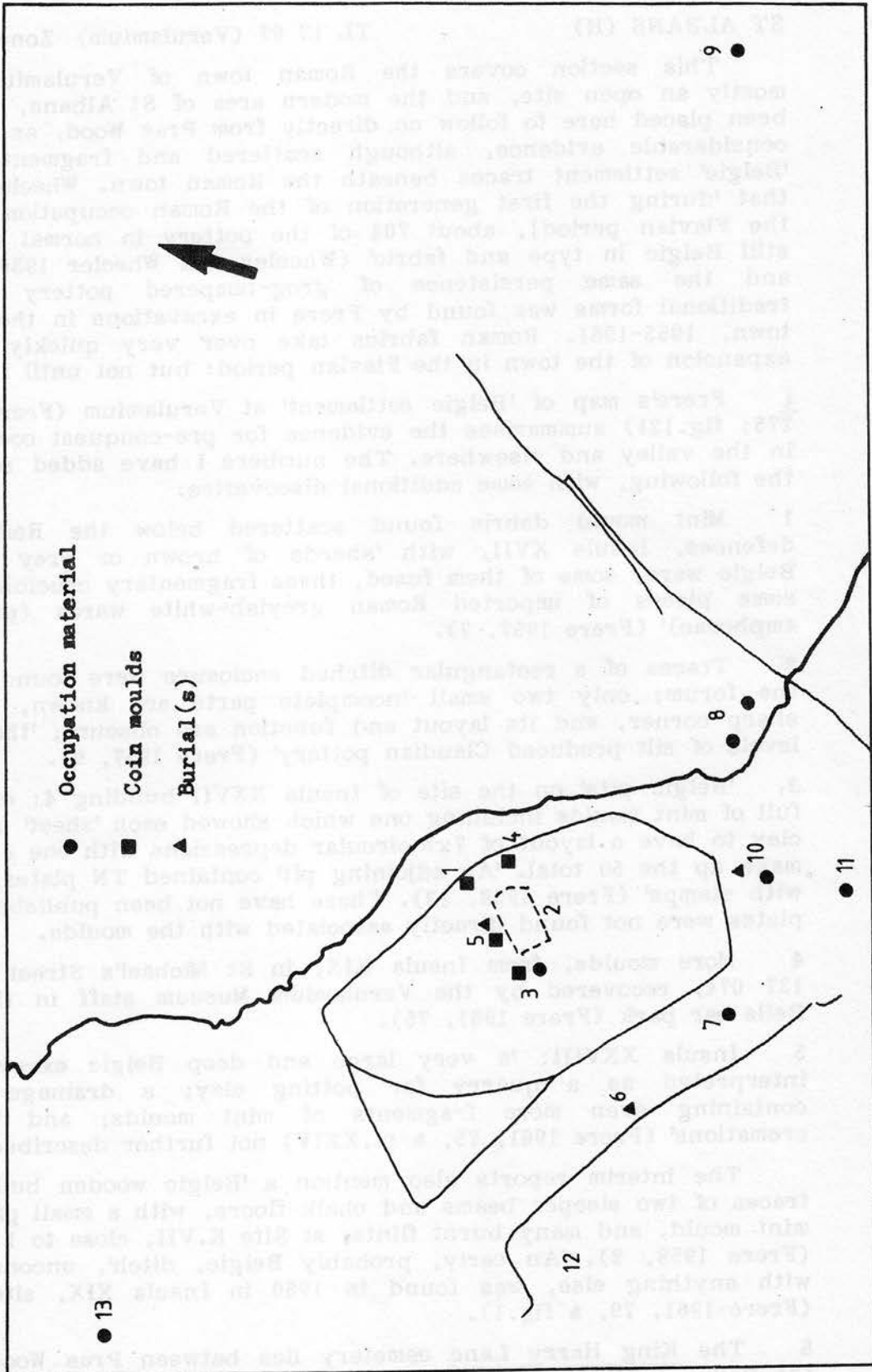
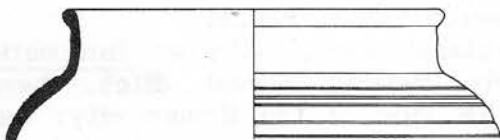


Fig.121: Sites in and around St. Albans (after Frere 1979).

with grave goods, often clustering around richer graves; there were also 18 inhumations, with fewer grave goods. The site is important for the associations of its pottery, with Colchester, thistle and similar brooch types, other metalwork, Gallo-Belgic imports, and 5 samian vessels. Only a summary has so far appeared (Stead 1969), with a plan and one grave-group: a Cam.113 butt-beaker, a G5-2 copy, a small bronze Colchester brooch, a bronze thistle brooch, iron toilet-set, and iron shears. The unpublished coarse pottery is, as one might expect, of Prae Wood types and fabrics, with, often, the red surfaces on the finer wares; the site will provide a useful set of those forms preferred for use in burials at Prae Wood. A Dressel I amphora body also came from the cemetery (W. Rodwell 1976a, 321).

7 Settlement debris is known from King Harry Lane, from a ditch 500 yds SW (Stead 1969, 50); and from an enclosure and 5 hearths in the gardens of houses, TL 134 065; 'the pottery dates between 20 BC and 70 AD' (HAR 1971, 56). VerM has material salvaged from builders' trenches, storage jar sherds and:



[17] C7-1. Plot 93: orange with pale grey core, black and red grog, dark grey outside, pale grey inside.

8 Construction of a branch of the Abbey School in 1968 found 'Belgic features and pottery', including a piece of a perforated fired clay 'brick', as at Prae Wood (Wheeler & Wheeler 1936, pl.LVI). 'At least 34 sherds of Belgic pottery' were found in residual contexts at TL 1434 0678, W of the first site and nearer the river, in 1975, with a fragment of a fire bar, while crop marks are known adjacent to these two sites in the Abbey grounds (Saunders and Havercroft 1978, 16). Two rim sherds of indeterminate form are illustrated (op.cit. fig.10 nos.10, 11).

9 Salisbury Avenue, some distance to the E on the other side of St Albans (TL 167 075), produced a small quantity of good native pottery in June 1940 (P. Corder 1941b, 238), with charcoal and fired clay lumps. This material is in VerM:

- 1 C6-1. Not seen, but evidently red-brown, grog, with combing as on Prae Wood examples.
- 2 B1-4. Softish red-grey, grog, brown-grey surfaces.
- 3 D1-1. Pale grey grog, grey smooth surfaces.
- 4 B3-6. Grey grog, once burnished.
- 5 E1-4. Grey grog, buff inside, smooth grey outside.
- 6 B1-3. Grey grog, worn to buff-pink inside; neck once burnished.
- 7 B3-6. Reddish grog, red-brown surfaces, smooth outside.
- 8 S5. Coarse soft brown-grey grog, no surface treatment.
- 9 TN plate base, worn.

With this pottery is part of a C7-1 rilled jar in dark grey grog and buff surfaces; large combed body sherds from the storage jar, no.1; plain rims, and a second century Roman grey ware jar of debased B3-1 form.

10 This may be ii.2 below.

11 Three vessels found in a ditch E of Watling Street in 1936 at 'Brescia' Field (P. Corder 1941a, fig.3 nos.1-3). These are pre-conquest in appearance:

- 1 D3-4. Brown.
- 2 B5-3. Dark brown.
- 3 C7-1. Red-black.

12 PRAE WOOD.

13 GORHAMBURY.

ii Evidence for the continued use of native forms and fabrics in the period between the conquest and c.AD 61-70, as noted above, is summarised below:

1 Wheeler illustrates a few pots from his excavations in the Roman town (Wheeler & Wheeler 1936). Fig.34:

54 G5-3, 'brownish-black' ware, with an inhumation burial on the edge of the early Watling Street ditch, beneath the 'triangular temple' on the SE side of the Roman city; native, but later than the road ditch so c.AD 50.

55 C3. HM, dark brown. 'From a Claudian deposit under the SW Gate.

56-9 C1-4. HM or roughly turned, dark brown. All from a 'Claudian deposit under building II.1', near the 'triangular temple'. Slight structural remains of 'a wattle-&-daub hut or huts' and a hearth were found; the HM rims were with samian of c.AD 50-70 and earlier, two platter copies, combed storage jar sherds, 'part of an early jug with undercut flange', and a Claudian coin (Wheeler & Wheeler 1936, 86). The layer above was Flavian.

60 B3-8. 'From a late Belgic group in Prae Wood, c.AD 20-40.' This is now in many small pieces, in soft dark grey grog, hand-finished; it is not marked, so the 'late Belgic group' is unknown but may have been the South Ditch area.

61 B3-8. 'Found with coins of Vespasian' beneath the triangular temple, and in a harder, grey-brown, more Roman ware.

Fig.36:

74 D1-1;

75 D2-1. Both of 'dark brown ware', from the Fosse rampart, 'with pottery mainly of late Belgic type (c.AD 40-60)'.

Also worth noting is a TN plate of Cam.13 form, unworn but broken, in VerM and labelled 'Ver. 1931. North Gate West Tower', apparently from the clay-lined 'hearth or oven' beneath the Roman gate-tower, and 'in association with mint mould fragment'. Wheeler says the hearth contained mostly 'Belgic' pottery, but also sherds of pre-Flavian samian, the TN plate, a 'carrot-shaped' amphora, and two 'poor-men's' brooches (Wheeler and Wheeler 1936, 68); the layer above still contained some native pots, and late 1st century material.

2 The jar found in a pit E of Watling Street in 1940 (P. Corder 1941a, fig.3 no.4) is of B3-1 form but typologically similar to the Roman development of this form; Corder thought its stratigraphical position Claudian. This may be (10) on Frere's plan; cf. P. Corder 1941a, 152.

3 Insula XVII: a useful pre-Boudiccan group has been published from here (Richardson 1944, figs.11 & 12) which illustrates similarities and differences in comparison with Prae Wood deposits. It came from two gullies and a thin spread of occupation material, with some road metalling and stake-holes, on top of natural beneath buildings XVII.1 and 2. With the native pottery was some Claudio-early Neronian samian, several Roman vessels, two Colchester brooches and a coin of Tasciovanus. The layer above was of a wooden building that had burnt down, with Neronian and pre-Flavian pottery in the burnt debris, and the author tentatively identified this with the Boudiccan destruction. There is no proof of this, of course, but the material in the Period I layer is consistent with the dates AD 43-61. Richardson (1944, 105) put the end of Period I at AD 50/55. The Period I samian comprised Drag. forms 30, 27, 24/25 and 15/17, of Claudian and Neronian dates. The pottery from the destruction layer above contained a much larger proportion of Roman wares.

The coarse pottery came from the two gullies and the occupation scatter around them; it was treated as a homogeneous group, since Claudian samian was found at the bottom of one of the gullies.

- 1-2 Cam.8, TN.
- 3 Cam.14, TN.
- 4 G1-8.
- 5 G1-3.
- 6-8 G1-1.
- 9 G3-1.
- 10 not in series. Jug rim in soft orange ware.
- 11 L1.
- 12 D2-3, unusual shape.
- 13 Roman grey ware flanged-rim bowl.
- 14 shell-tempered everted rim.
- 15-7 B1-1.
- 18 D1-3.
- 19 B1-1.
- 20-1 B1-1.
- 22 C5-3. Contrary to the report, this is not a rare form at Prae Wood.
- 23 D3-2.
- 24 (C5-1), shell-tempered.
- 25 C5-1.
- 26-9 C5-3.
- 30-3 Roman buff sandy jar rims.
- 34 C7-2.
- 35 C7-1.
- 36 B1-2.
- 37 wall-sided mortarium.
- 38-9 C6-1.
- 40 C6-1.

- 41 fragment of white rouletted butt-beaker.
- 42 white ware butt-beaker rim.
- 43 G5-6,
- 44 G5-5; both local rim forms.
- 45-6 (G5-6) base fragments.

Many of the commonest Prae Wood forms are represented: G1-1, G5-6, C5-3, C6-1, C7-1; but not B1-6 or G2-3, which are prominent in most Prae Wood groups and are special forms of local manufacture.

4 Insula XIV: the 1950s excavations through the centre of Roman Verulamium on the line of Bluehouse Hill found scatters of early post-conquest as well as some pre-conquest material (interims in Antiquaries Journal, 1956-1962). One major sequence from the excavation of a row of shops in Insula XIV had been published (Frere 1972) and may serve as a sample. Frere (1972, iii) describes the first regular city as being planned and laid out 'in or soon after 49', after an apparent military post was abandoned. This date for the new town of c.AD 50 in fact fits well the terminus ante quem of c.AD 50 for the later groups at Prae Wood in Area XXII-XXIII. Period I in Insula XIV covers the dates AD 43-61, but the first timber-framed row of shops was built c.AD 49/50, using military prefabrication techniques (Frere 1972, 19). Some pre-building occupation was found beneath the first shops, but including Claudian pottery, while the Watling Street ditch had silted when the timber framing was put up (Frere 1972, 13-14). The pre-building deposits, AD 43-49, consist of spreads of occupation material, containing some Gallo-Belgic and Claudian samian sherds. The first timber buildings were burnt down in AD 61 and not rebuilt until c.AD 75, only pits being dug on the site in the intervening period, and well dated by samian.

I have not seen the pottery from the early layers, and the published descriptions do not distinguish temper; fig.100 in Frere 1972 illustrates 'Belgic coarse pottery in later layers', nos.35-42:

35 G4. Several examples but scattered in pieces in late 1st and early 2nd century layers.

36-40 Jar rims, residual in layers down to the 4th century.

41 this pedestal base is not 'Belgic' but Roman in form, and in 'hard... pinkish-buff ware', ?not grog-tempered. Deposit c.AD 105.

42 another typologically post-conquest pedestal base, in 'smooth burnished grey-black ware', repaired with lead and in a deposit of c.AD 85-105.

'Pottery from layers dated before AD 49', nos.43-46:

- 43 jug, not grog-tempered, with cream slip.
- 44 coarse jar of odd form with rilling, possibly shelly.
- 45 G3-1, grey.
- 46 G1-11, grey.

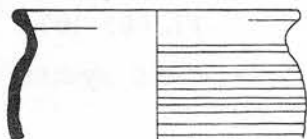
'Pottery from layers dated c.AD 49', nos.47-51:

- 47 B3-1, grey.
- 48 C5-1, red-brown.
- 49-50 C7-1, grey-brown.
- 51 Claudian mortarium.

None of this is very substantial; quantities of pottery only appear in the period of the first timber building, AD 49-60, when the non-Roman forms are jar rims of B1-1, B3-1 and B1-5 forms.

5 St Michael's: a bowl of form D1-1, grey grog-tempered, was found associated with the 1st century 'timber tower' built on alluvium of the river Ver, and beneath a 'raft' of branches containing Flavian coins (Anthony 1970, fig.11 no.22). This Period I layer was dated, from coins, c.AD 43-64, and included poppy beakers and other Roman wares, including a Drag.29 and a bowl of St Remy ware. The site is near the NE gate of the Roman city, just E of the Hemel Hempstead road on the line of the city wall. Evidence of the use of the area for arable farming before the conquest has been analysed by Dimbleby (1978, 112).

6 Flamsteadbury: observations on the line of a methane gas trench in September 1967 found a little occupation debris with grog-tempered sherds at TL 085 127; also orange sherds between Hemel Hempstead road and Potters Crouch Road, a rilled sherd from a ditch trace near the Silchester road, and more debris at the Prae Wood end. The fragments are in VerM, including one pot illustrated here, found with rough grog-tempered sherds and a white ware sherd in a ditch:



[27] C7-1. Pale grey grog, thick, orange and patchy black surfaces; hard.

The Prae Wood-Verulamium complex is one of the key centres of settlement in the period before the Roman conquest, showing a great expansion in wealth and population in the period c.AD 1-43; earlier settlement is known only at Wheathampstead and probably Gorhambury, but it is certainly in the vicinity. The Prae Wood complex is extensive, as in the Welwyn or Braughing areas (the other two main Herts. centres so far fairly well known) but unlike Braughing Prae Wood was not rich in imported pottery, only in their copies. The Roman town was first laid out in the valley from c.AD 50, until when native occupation of the Prae Wood site *continued*; *crop marks*, some of which at least will belong to the period, have been noted particularly N and W of St Albans (C. Saunders in Dimbleby 1978, 114; Havercroft 1977).