

**DUROVIGUTUM**  
**ROMAN GODMANCHESTER**

**H. J. M. Green**

Compiled, collated and edited by

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Cover: Reconstruction painting of the *mansio* brewery in the 3rd century AD by Michael Green

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*For my family*



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## Preface

This publication is the first time that all of Michael Green's investigations into Roman Godmanchester have been distilled into a single book. It has been my privilege to know Michael for many years and to appreciate the significant contribution he has made to Cambridgeshire's and Roman archaeology, as well as the much wider impact his learning and incisiveness has brought to the interpretation and public understanding of archaeology in general.

**Diggers reveal picture of life one thousand years ago**

★ For several years now, Mr. H. J. M. Green, of St. Ives, an architectural student in London and a member of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, has carried out research into the history of Godmanchester and the Roman history of the town in particular. Early this year he appealed for volunteers to help him excavate in an attempt to locate the old defence wall of Godmanchester. After two weeks of digging with the helpers who came forward, Mr. Green gave us this progress report, revealing a fascinating picture of life in Godmanchester over a thousand years ago:

During the past fortnight a series of archaeological excavations have been in progress at Godmanchester under my direction. The purpose was to answer certain questions about the history and character of Roman Godmanchester; and in particular to examine the defences of the Roman town and to explore further the large Roman building, probably an inn, in the vicinity of Pinfold-lane.

Modern Godmanchester is closely built over, and all the excavations have been in private gardens or yards. The work has necessarily been on rather a small scale, but it has been possible to examine thoroughly several areas of the town.

century A.D. It was initially laid out in the normal way with changing rooms at one end, with cold rooms, hot rooms, and stoke holes at the far end.

But while the building was still only at foundation level, the plan was completely reversed and the stoke hole was modified to contain a small changing room and cold room with an entrance hall, and the rest of the building was altered accordingly.

We will never know what happened to make necessary this change in plans, but it is possible to guess.

**Town planning**



Ten triumphant smiles, and no wonder, for these volunteer excavators have unearthed part of a Roman building buried undisturbed for over a thousand years in the garden of Mr. and Mrs. B. Conington of Pinfold-lane, Godmanchester. They were under the direction of Mr. H. J. M. Green (top row, second from left).

*Newspaper cutting from 1957, reporting on H.J.M. Green's excavations of the bath house in Godmanchester*

Michael's campaign of investigation into Godmanchester's history began in 1951 when he was a young man. He was the son of a dentist who practiced in St Ives, and from an early age Michael was intrigued by the history all around him as he grew up. His focus on Godmanchester began with a visitation, in that he felt the previous inhabitants of the town came out as a great crowd to greet him, and required him to tell their story. At the same time he trained as an architect but gained employment within the Ministry of Works as an Inspector of Ancient Monuments, so the archaeological investigation of Godmanchester was only a part-time vocation, rather than the day job. He asked advice of an eminent archaeologist, one Mortimer Wheeler, who told him to stick to one site, but to excavate it thoroughly. This maxim Michael Green followed over more than 30 years in his endeavours to understand the origins and historical development of the towns of *Durovigutum* and later Godmanchester. As and when piecemeal opportunities arose he responded with small-scale excavations, largely undertaken by volunteers, and was mindful of the need to record accurately so that the results could in due course be brought together into a comprehensive understanding of the Roman town. Much of his approach pre-empted the development of what became known as urban archaeology, in ensuring that dispersed, limited excavation areas would be recorded in a manner that when an adjacent plot became available for investigation, the results of the new excavation could be married up to the previous one from many years earlier.

Of even more importance to the discipline of archaeology, however, was Michael's ability to analyse his field data, and through in-depth reading of related topics, deliver interpretations that took the field results well beyond the simple technical report of what physical evidence had remained in the ground. His identification of a glass merchant's stall and the detail of what was included in the merchandise, or his explanation of the importance of the dairy industry and the processes involved in this as demonstrated from evidence he excavated at Godmanchester, or his revealing of a local deity from the temples and offerings left to *Abandinus*, and the belief system of the contemporary local area, are all wonderful examples of how archaeologists should take their subject matter beyond the mundane into a more comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic basis for how society functioned at the time. This ability to interpret the evidence, to read into the physical remains an understanding of the society that generated them, is a lesson that many archaeologists today could learn from.

The evidence for health of the Roman population from the excavated burials, the industrial activities that took place in the town, the in-depth study of a Roman *mansio* and related bath complex, the domestic architecture and town planning, the town defences and their incompleteness pointing to insecurity during 3<sup>rd</sup> century insurrection, the hoard of jewellery, are all essential elements of Godmanchester's story. The human dimension in Michael's analysis is always at the forefront of his publications.

The archive that was created consists of a fully indexed, and carefully organized collection of site notebooks, original plans and sections, photographs, correspondence, specialist reports, phased plans, analytical documents, artefact catalogues and much more (see examples reproduced below as a sample of the archive). This huge resource is as much a legacy of Michael's investigations as the annual interim reports and selected publications which are drawn together in this volume to allow easy access in a single collation of his detailed work at Godmanchester. The archive is there for others to study and it would be a fitting tribute for all the years of detailed investigation that he undertook, if this dynamic legacy of Michael's was used to inspire a new generation of archaeologists to engage with the excavated data and bring their own interpretations to help understand the origins and history of Godmanchester.<sup>1</sup>

### Notes on the edited volume

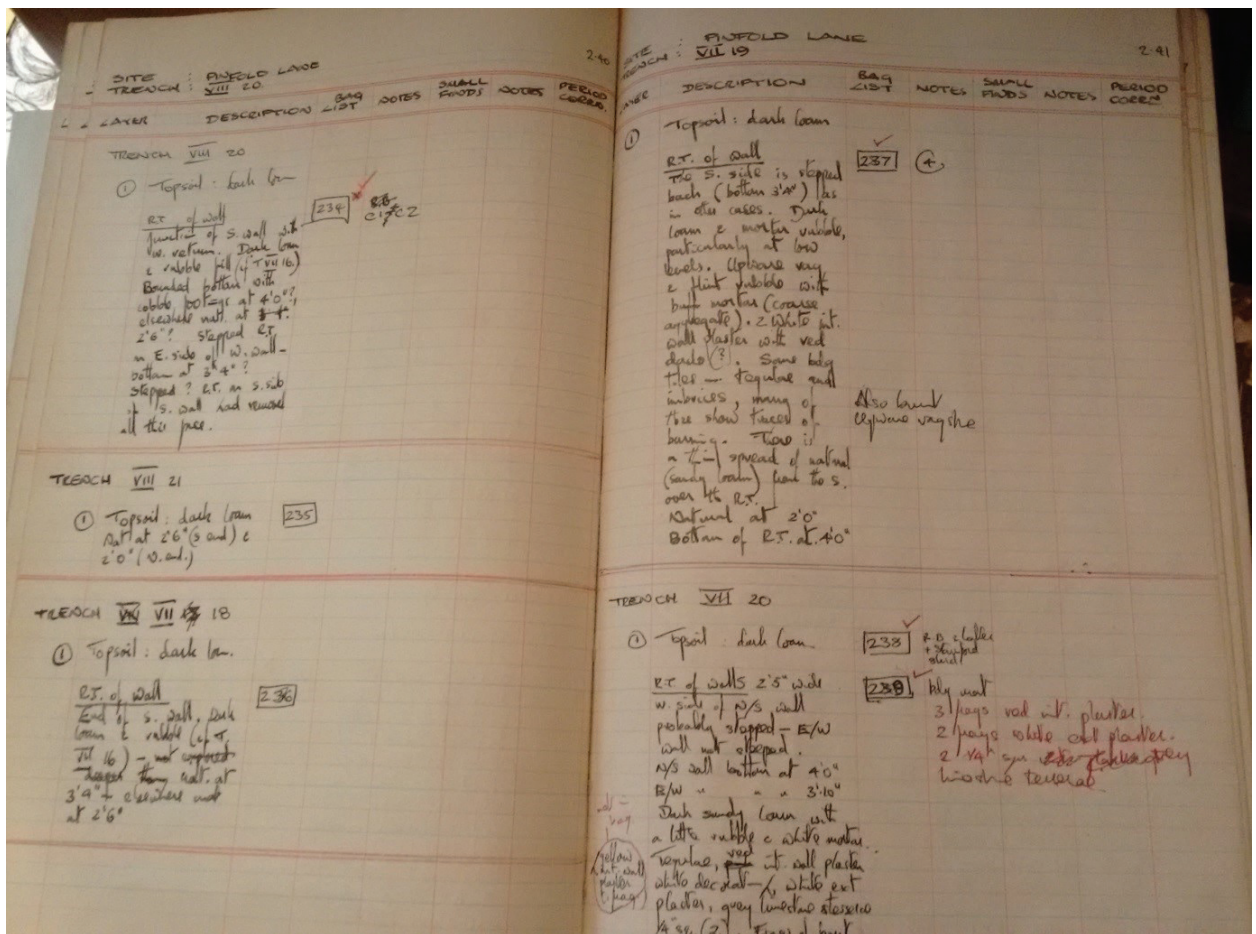
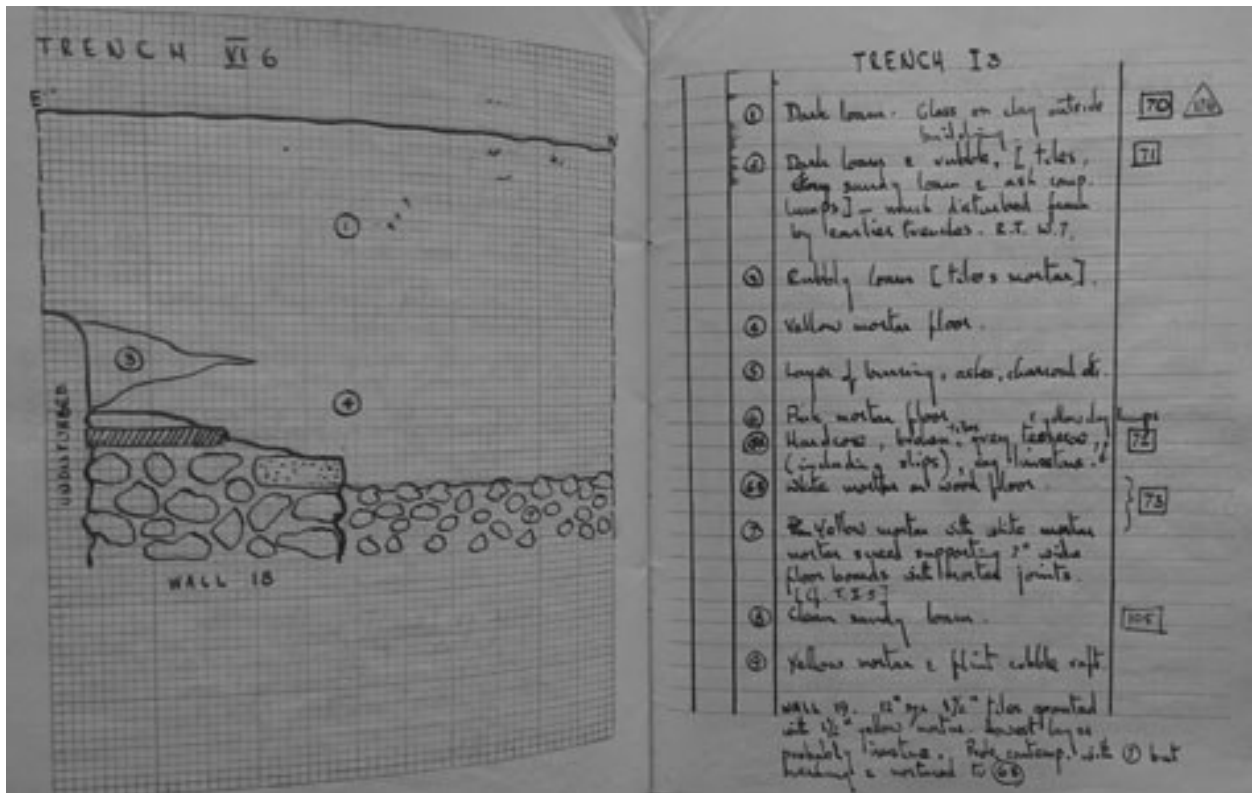
The text presented in the following chapters and appendices is very largely one written by Michael Green, with some additional contributions from particular specialists. The narrative has been compiled from two main syntheses that Michael wrote<sup>2</sup>, whilst annual notes in the *Journal for Roman Studies* provided a chronological progression of results, and several articles that were published provide a more comprehensive interpretation and discussion of specific elements, contemporary with their publication dates. All of these have been compiled and reproduced here, so that a student of Roman small towns, or someone who wishes to get a sense of *Durovigutum* and place it within its context, can appreciate the developing and changing understanding that Michael had of the town over 50 years of investigation and analysis.

As editor my first task was to tie down exactly where each excavation had been located, and how extensive the trenching had been. This required trying to marry up crucial locational points on the site plans with the most contemporary Ordnance Survey map of the town, and then layering the scanned site plans into a GIS, all ably undertaken by Caroline Malim. The second was to see how the features revealed in the excavations fit within the modern street plan, so the hypothetical layout of early forts or later walled town could be validated against excavated evidence. The coloured maps show our plotting of Michael's interpretations of fort and town defences, whereas the line drawings retain Michael's originals.

<sup>1</sup> The artefacts are mostly stored as part of Cambridgeshire County Council's archaeological facility, and it is intended for the paper archive to be curated at Huntingdon Record Office.

<sup>2</sup> Essentially his publications 'Roman Godmanchester' 1975, in Rodwell, W. and Rowley, T. (eds) *British Archaeological Reports 15: Small Towns of Roman Britain*, and 'A Villa Estate at Godmanchester' 1978 in Todd, M (ed), *Studies in the Romano-British Villa*





Example pages from site notebooks in H J M Green's Godmanchester archive

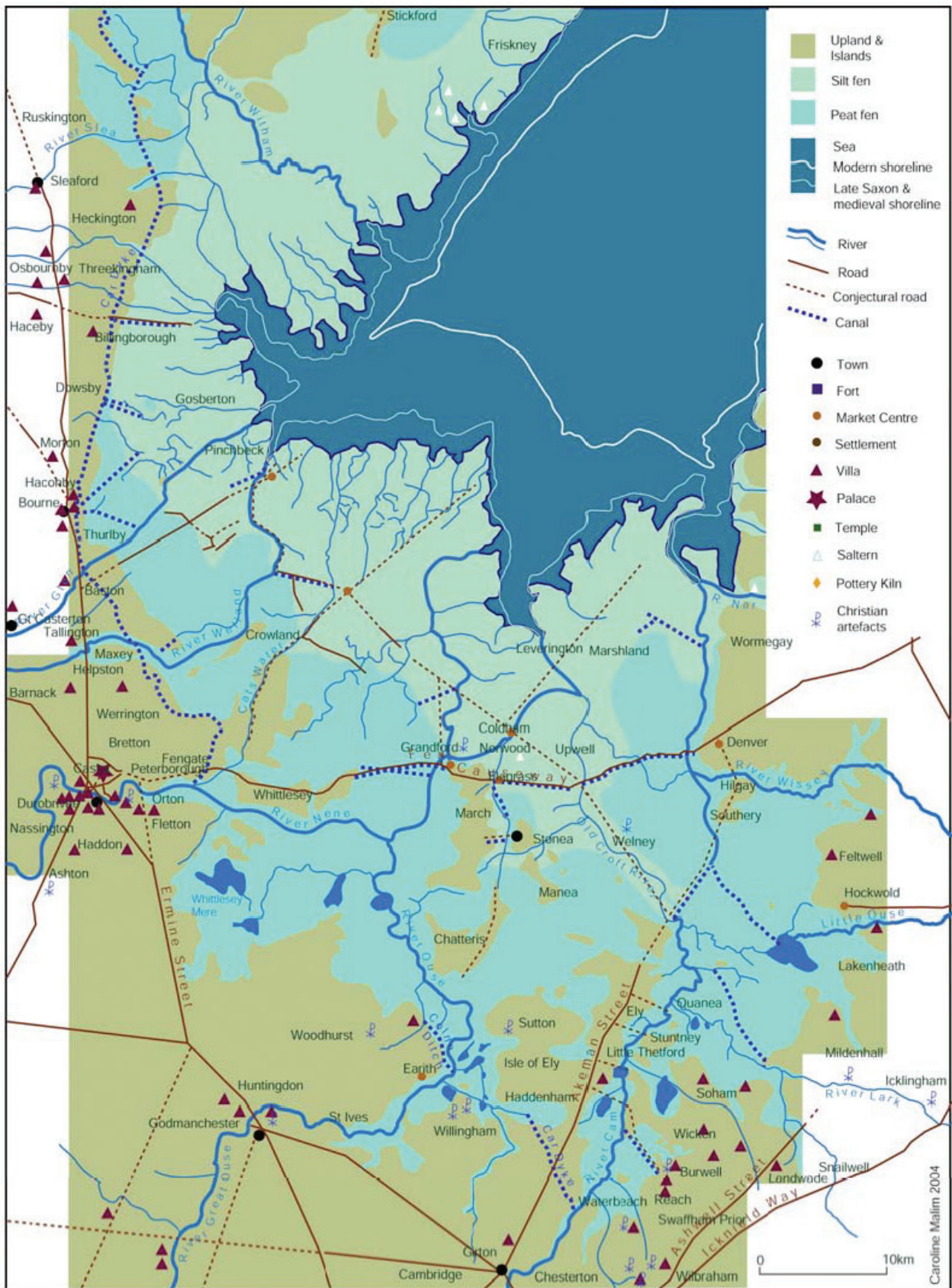
Time did not allow me to spread out the archive and try to conduct detailed analysis of the site record to compare with Michael's synthesis, but the archive and his contextual analysis of the site record exist for others to study if they so wish. What is presented in this volume is instead a collection of the various levels of understanding that were achieved by Michael during his long period of investigation and post-excavation analysis, incomplete in many cases, and in others now detached from the physical evidence on which his textual interpretation must have originally relied. To the discerning reader there will be inconsistencies, perhaps even some apparently contradictory statements which reflect the long duration over which the study of Roman Godmanchester has been conducted. A final full and complete analysis of every site and each assemblage has not been possible, but a great deal has been achieved and it is this achievement which the volume is designed to celebrate.

### **General context**

The figures reproduced below place *Durovigutum* in its contemporary environmental landscape and social context, and provide a regional location for the Roman town and military forts. They show the town's proximity to the fens, its position in relation to prehistoric routes and the contemporary fen environment, the crucial importance as a posting station along the Great North Road of Ermine Street, and its strategic significance along the navigable Great Ouse River. These maps provide the wider context for location of sites as described in Chapter 1, and also for the more specific setting of the town in relation to exploitation of local resources discussed in Chapters 1, 2 and 6.

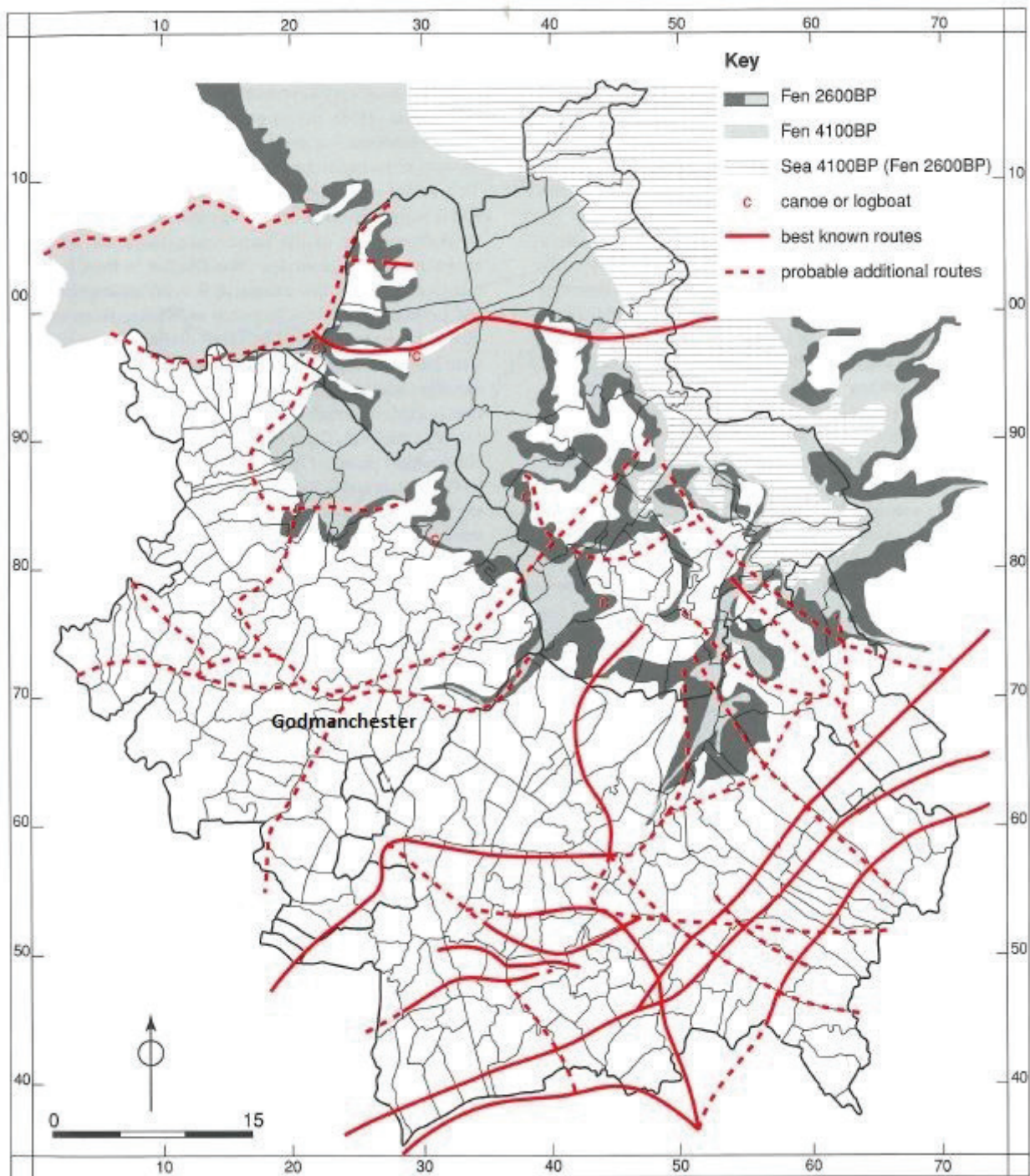
Tim Malim  
September 2017



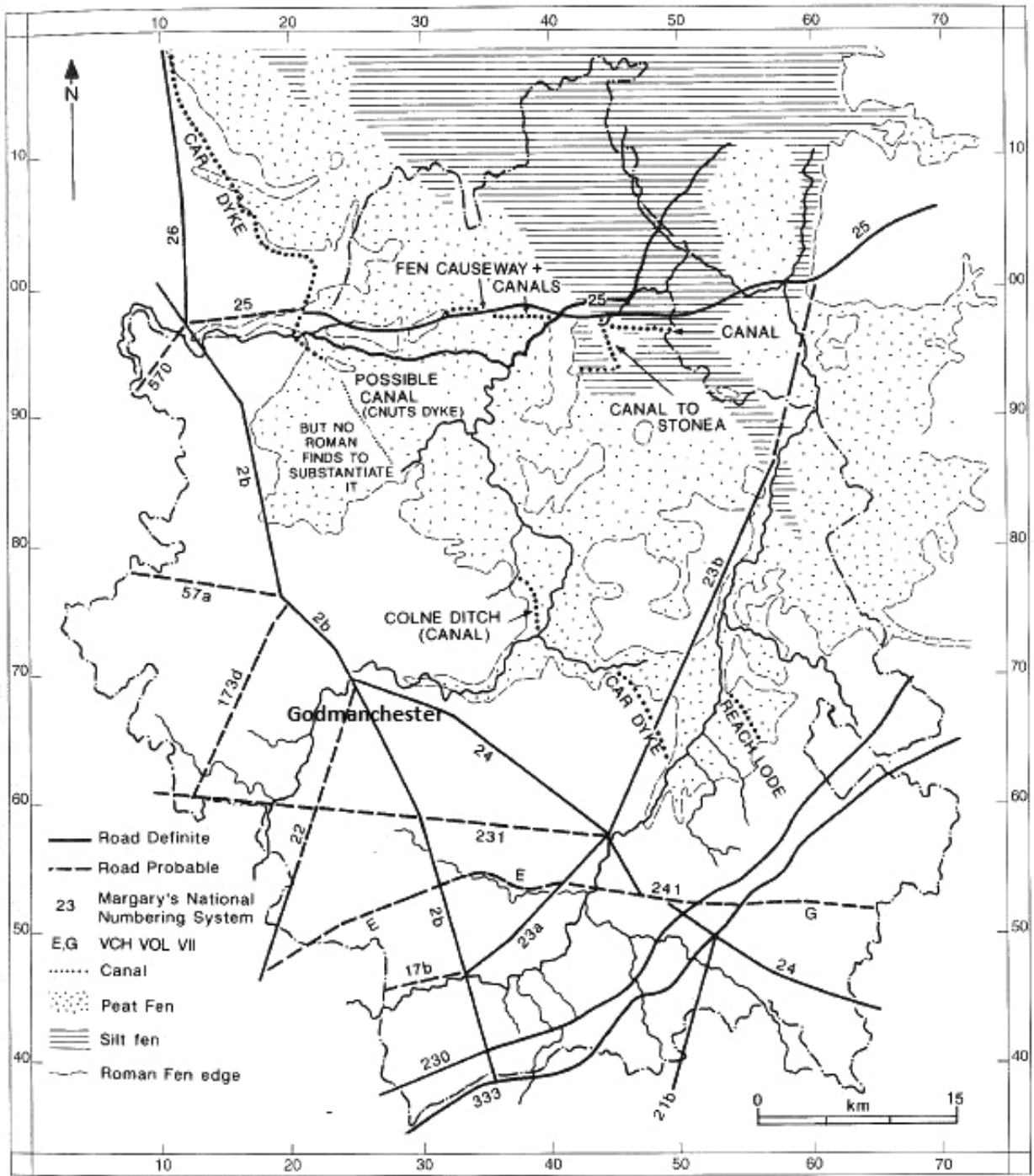


Roman Godmanchester located at the south-western edge of the fens (from Stonea and the Roman Fens by Tim Malim 2005, Tempus Publishing, drawn by Caroline Malim)





*Prehistoric routes in Cambridgeshire with parish boundaries and changing fen environment shown (from Prehistoric Trackways by Tim Malim, No. 11 in Kirby, T. & Oosthuizen, S. (eds) 2000 An Atlas of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire History Centre for Regional Studies, Anglia Polytechnic University) (drawn by Sarah Wroot)*



Roman roads and canals in Cambridgeshire with contemporary fen environment indicated (from Roman Communications by Tim Malim, No. 21 in Kirby, T. & Oosthuizen, S. (eds) 2000 *An Atlas of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire* History Centre for Regional Studies, Anglia Polytechnic University) (drawn by Sarah Wroot)





## Foreword

Two visitations preceded my work at Godmanchester. The first was when I was stationed in army barracks in Colchester, and the second when I was in a house in York; I was approached by the elders of the city and asked to tell their story. I had no stake in either of these towns and so declined. However, when I visited Godmanchester, close to where I was brought up in St Ives, I was met by a huge crowd of people on the boundary line as I cycled along. They were singing and dancing and followed me back home.

I began helping the local archaeologist, Mr. Hunnybun who was digging a trench in No 2 Pinfold Close where the Collingtons lived. When Mr Hunnybun retired I picked up his shovel and carried on for almost the next 70 years digging trenches 3ft x 6ft.

The first major piece to emerge was the coin of Nero in the rubbish pit associated with the second Roman fort. Starting with the bathhouse, discovering the first and so far only brewery in the Roman empire, went on to elucidate all the major buildings of the town, including two forts, the first from 43AD conquest, and the second half-legionary fort built to control Boudicca and her insurrection after the 9th legionary forces had been ambushed and wiped out along Ermine Street.

On site I was always conscious of the people of the town who wanted to communicate their lives – their different ways of life – whether a farmer, a shop-keeper, an artisan, a soldier – so that each site would reveal his activity, whether as a cheese and butter maker, a glass-blower, a potter, an inn-keeper, or a slave-girl who had stolen her owner's jewellery and thrown it into a pit in the hope of recovering it later. Imported fine glass was used in the mansion, the rest-house for soldiers, administrators, government officials, who moved up and down the Great North Road. A small wooden temple was attached to the mansio. A Christian family built their villa on the side of the River Ouse, and later a Saxon church was built over their family burial ground.

It is the revelation of the lives of these people through their buildings and artefacts which date from Roman times into the so-called Dark Ages and beyond which makes the site of Godmanchester so unique.

Michael Green, 2015



*The author with the coin of Nero in the 1950s*