TOWNS IN THE DARK?

URBAN TRANSFORMATIONS FROM LATE ROMAN BRITAIN TO ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

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Front cover detail: Life amongst the ruins in 5th-6th century Leicester
(copyright University of Leicester Archaeological Services and Mike Codd).

Background image: The collapsed wall of the Roman macellum, with subsequent
Anglo-Saxon structure (SFB) built over and within it (visible on back cover).

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Preface

What became of towns following the official end of 'Roman Britain' at the beginning of the 5th century AD? Did towns fail? Were these ruinous sites really neglected by early Anglo-Saxon settlers and leaders? Developed new archaeologies offer alternative pictures to the traditional images of urban decay and loss revealing diverse modes of material expression, of usage of space, and of structural change. The focus here is to draw together still scattered data to chart and interpret the changing nature of life in towns from the late Roman period through to the mid-Anglo-Saxon period (broadly AD 300 to 600).

Urban archaeology is constantly developing and en route improving our understanding of life within towns from the origins of the Iron Age oppida through to the modern industrial and commercial cityscapes. Arguably, the period least understood is that following the end of Britain as a Roman territory in the early 5th century, through to the emergence of new powers and new towns in the later Anglo-Saxon period (8th to 10th centuries AD). Traditionally this period has been seen as one of complete urban dereliction and ruin, the towns apparently left abandoned by the departing Romans (Collingwood and Myres 1937), and with a selection subsequently re-settled from the 7th century onwards (Hodges and Hobley 1988). This view is becoming outdated, inaccurate, and overly simplistic as new evidence, along with new ways of interpretation, points to vastly altering and changing townscapes – and yet ones revealing a continuity of life within them.

Take for example Leicester, a town where I have spent much of my professional archaeological career working. Here the traditional view of abandonment of the town in the 5th and 6th centuries held true until a series of major urban excavations from 2004-2006 revealed the clearest evidence yet for settlement and activity within the intra-mural area in the early post-Roman period. The image on the front cover of this book is an interpretation of results from a major urban excavation I supervised (Freeschool Lane), and which is soon to be published. The scene depicted is determined to be one of continued life amongst the ruins. There are apparent social or class levels within the society: at the lowest the squalor of a road-side beggar, contrasting with craft activities, and some organised labour/workforce. Perhaps the figure on the horse represents a member of one of the new local elite. Most importantly, this reconstruction drawing seeks to show a 5th-/6th-century ex-Roman town with people actively living within. Too often other reconstructed images (e.g. Canterbury or London) are zoomed out to a bird's-eye perspective to display the entire ruined town – to highlight that expected view of decline and abandonment of the once glorious Roman urban centres – not showing that life within them was continuing.

It is important to draw the academic picture back to the last century of Roman rule to test the often cited view of towns already in 'decline' by c.AD 300, and to ask: how did the townscape adjust to major changes throughout the empire, and what is the emerging picture of Late Roman town life? 'Towns' in the sense of classical Roman centres – fine buildings, public monuments and services, etc – may have failed by the mid-5th century, but were they really empty ruinous shells? Or did life continue within them – as suggested in the front page image – in a vastly different style to what had gone before? These questions form the core to this present research which builds upon my professional and academic experience and my personal academic interest, to explore, question, and analyse this unique phase of urban redefinition. It is the aim of this study to trace and debate this evidence for life within towns – rather than tracing 'town life' – to fully characterise towns over three centuries of dramatic change:

- AD 300-450 – a period that sees major urban transformations and an official end to Roman control of Britain
- AD 450-600 – a timespan marked by the appearance of 'Anglo-Saxons' in Britain, divisions between east and west, new structures and peoples within the townscapes

My study is timely, given the large body of evidence from recent major excavations in English city centres and research-led projects across the country. This material expands greatly on what earlier scholars took into consideration and so requires a careful collation and assessment. Sadly, many data remain largely unpublished, but many are nonetheless accessible and their detailed analysis generates significant scope for modelling urbanism from AD 300-600. This will show that life did indeed continue within some towns beyond AD 410 – if in vastly altering and differing forms and durations. It is the purpose of this book to establish the type of settlements seen and in what forms, and the varied usages of the urban space that emerged, to establish why life in some towns failed, and why others persisted.

Chapter 1:

Introduction and Methodology

1.1 Research Background

Towns are constantly evolving, developing, declining, or regenerating. As complex socio-economic spaces, their development sequences are intricate and diverse and no two towns and populations are the same. In Britain, urban change was perhaps never more pronounced than in the late Roman period (4th to early 5th century) and the early Anglo-Saxon period (5th and 6th centuries). Romano-British towns have in the past been too readily labelled either as having declined and failed by the beginning of the 4th century (Faulkner 2004), or stayed vigorous throughout the 4th century, perhaps even first witnessing a 'golden age' (de la Bedoyère 2000), that lasted into the 5th century (Dark 1994, 2000). More recent studies have tended towards a more balanced view, arguing that the 4th century sees political and economic changes in the wider Empire that radically alter towns, including the emergence of more regionalised differences (Mattingly 2006: 326). The 5th century sees a formal end to Roman administration, economy and society, but exactly when or how rapidly Roman 'withdrawal' occurs is still a matter of major academic debate. Towns had formed a key component of the Roman imperial provincial economy and society, but what were the characteristics of these towns in the late Roman period and for how long did they continue in the same style following the removal of Roman control, technology, and taxation?

Documentary sources are all but non-existent for this period in Britain, with the more extensive continental sources such as the later 4th-century historian Ammianus Marcellinus (27.8) only offering passing reference. One of the few useful, but later, British sources are the writings of Gildas in *De Excidio Britanniae*, where the state of towns is described as:

> Lamentable to behold, in the midst of the streets lay the tops of lofty towers, tumbled to the ground, stones of high walls, holy altars, fragments of human bodies, covered with livid clots of coagulated blood, looking as if they had been squeezed together in a press.
>
> Gildas XIV: 15-19

Can we view this image presented to us by Gildas as accurate? It is obviously a shocking vision, designed to criticise the ruling kings or tyrants. The view depicted is seen by scholars as too generalised, but it does imply a loss and destruction, while at the same time showing signs at least that towns were visible entities. Due to the difficulties of identifying and interpreting the archaeological evidence, this period has in the past been too easily simplified, relegated, or overlooked, with town life dismissed simply as decline and failure (Reece 1980; Faulkner 2004). This view may have been dominant in the early 20th century perhaps because of imperialist perspectives and issues of 'Romanisation' (Haverfield 1912), in which the bright value of Rome was overplayed (Collingwood and Myres 1937), with Rome's monumental light removed in the 5th century.

A key reason relates to the fragile and discrete nature of the surviving archaeological evidence, often lost or damaged in modern towns through truncation or inadequate excavation methodologies – leaving a gap that too easily matches the ruin and voids evoked by Gildas. Towns after Rome therefore were long interpreted as ruinous shells, left empty until the 'rebirth' of some towns in the 7th and 8th centuries (see papers in Hodges and Hobley 1988). It is a picture that in fact until the 1980s strongly prevailed, but is now one being constantly revisited through more developed urban archaeological investigations and analysis.

There are many signs of progress. The major excavations at Winchester by Martin Biddle in the 1960s (Biddle 1964-1970) were the first to show the value of organised, professional urban excavations (Hill 1987: 46). This urban archaeological profile was raised illustrating the finite archaeological resource, especially by the Council for British Archaeology's *The Erosion of History* (Heighway 1972). Government-funded urban units in Oxford, York, and London began to be formed (Ottaway 1992: 12), and led the way to a refinement of methods employed, and to a fuller and better understanding of archaeological sequences. The papers in *Urban Archaeology in Britain* (Schofield and Leech 1987), and Martin Carver's *Underneath English Towns* (1987), and Patrick Ottaway's *Archaeology in British Towns* (1992) were essentially the product of these earlier excavations, and demonstrated the growing quality of knowledge in urban archaeology.

Ottaway's study is focused on British towns, though, unlike Carver, he approaches urban development framed by chronological periods – dividing the Roman from the Anglo-Saxon town – rather than assessing broad change through time. He does raise important questions such as issues of 'ends' and 'decline' in late Roman towns: 'the Roman period is often taken to end in *c*.410…the date is still a convenient one to use when assessing the decline of town life in Roman Britain and the fate of town sites in the post-Roman period' (Ottaway 1992: 111). He argues for a slow decline as advocated by Reece: 'the evidence as it appears to us today is not so much for a violent bang, but rather for a feeble whimper as the urban economy expired

and townsfolk drifted away to the countryside to become subsistence farmers' (*ibid*: 118). This is an oversimplified view, and one that will be tested in this research by looking at the types of public and private buildings maintained and utilised throughout the 4th century, and potentially into the 5th century.

Carver (1993: 40) notes that 'five hundred puzzling years separate the ordered formality of the Roman *civitas* capital from the Anglo-Saxon city…and archaeological investigation can throw much light on them'. He rightly stresses that the use of space will change throughout time, and that it is not 'a natural or organic evolution, but maybe controlled by ideological and political factors' (*ibid:* 39). It remains to be seen within this research whether there are new powers dictating settlement within 5th-6th-century towns in Britain. Certainly Carver raises a crucial point that investigations of this period should be viewed not as tracing 'decline', but as exploring changing investment strategies of new powers: 'when new evidence for the 5th to 8th centuries is examined closely we shall see a redistribution of wealth and investment following new political priorities, rather than decline or impoverishment' (*ibid*: 98).

The introduction of PPG16 (Planning Policy Guidance Note 16) in 1990 (and its subsequent modified forms) radically changed the face of archaeology across Britain. The 'polluter pays' policy led to the emergence of many private archaeological units, competing against one another in a commercial environment. It could be suggested that this is a detriment to the archaeology (i.e. lower standards), but on the contrary, units abide to stringent levels of archaeological practice (set by the Institute for Field Archaeologists, and monitored by the City Archaeologist within the relevant local city council). Since the early 2000's the larger commercial units are also actively involved in refining and setting regional resource assessments and research agendas. A good example is the *East Midlands Archaeological Resource Assessment* (Cooper 2006), that draws upon both commercial and academic inputs (see Section 1.2). Until recently access to those 'grey-literature' sources has been difficult, but this is changing. In recent years a large number of reports from commercial projects are continually uploaded onto the Archaeological Data Service's Online Access to the Index of Archaeological Investigations (OASIS, see http://oasis. ac.uk/). There are still exploring and indexing problems, but commercial archaeology projects are to be seen as a huge resource.

Commercial, developer-funded projects will almost always have more limitations on retrieving the archaeological data, when compared to academic research-led projects (especially on time-scale and funding – see Fulford and Holbrook 2011). The archaeological evidence from the late 4th century through to the 10th century largely consists of timber remains that are often poorly preserved – or at least survive poorly in urban contexts. Therefore, they are only generally visible in large-scale, open-area excavations – unfortunately something of a rarity. No matter how good the research agendas are for a region or for a town, the excavations are virtually always dictated within areas of targeted commercial redevelopment. From my own urban archaeology experience it is often a case of good fortune to discover even an Anglo-Saxon post-hole within the middle of a modern city containing an assortment of later truncations from medieval pitting, Victorian cellars, and 20th century deep concrete piling!

The data remain inconsistent, but there are some towns that have seen recent major phases of urban redevelopment (notably London, Canterbury, and Leicester) and a concomitant substantial increase in archaeological data. Three clear examples (Caistor-by-Norwich, Wroxeter, and Silchester) do not have modern towns overlying the remains, and so these have the luxury of potentially accessing the data whenever there are suitable research projects proposed and/or finances secured (each have already revealed significant new discoveries on 4th- and 5th-century town life, adding much to wider debates. Other towns have seen relatively little urban redevelopment: 'there have been few major interventions in town centres compared with pre-PPG 16 rescue excavation in the period of the 1960s to 1980s' (Fulford and Holbrook 2011: 335). However, this does enable the backlog of previous excavations in larger sites to be fully published (see, for example, Lincoln and the Lincoln Archaeology Series – e.g. Jones *et al*. 2003). Even excavations from over 60 years ago continue to be hotly debated and dating disputed, as at Verulamium in recent publications (Neil 2003, Frere 2011) and a recent major conference ('AD 410 The End of Roman Britain', conference held at the British Museum, March 2010).

In general, urban excavations normally reveal complex, diverse sequences of activity, which, for the 4th to 7th centuries, are hard to identify archaeologically initially. But, despite the increase in archaeological data, the evidence does not appear to point to a clearly identifiable direction that life in towns was taking (i.e. continuity or collapse), meaning the data can be read in differing ways – too often either from a pessimistic or from an optimistic perspective (Ward-Perkins 1997). It is therefore of vital importance to avoid research geared just to an individual town, but to compare sequences in varied contexts and other areas and regions around Britain to enable a more coherent reading of the patchy but growing archaeological record.

Put simply, debates about the end of Roman Britain persist on establishing not just whether Roman towns survived into the 5th and 6th centuries (Ward-Perkins 1996), but also whether decay begins well before the withdrawal of Roman rule (Reece 1980, Faulkner 2004). The focus of this current research takes a new approach to trace and debate the nature of life within towns. The study is undertaken by reassessing and plotting the archaeological evidence over a range of case studies across late Roman to Anglo-Saxon Britain.

1.2 Research Aims and Questions

The research aims to tackle critical national research priorities highlighted in three key English Heritage documents: *Thematic Research Strategy for the Urban Historic Environment* (EH 2010), *Research Strategy for the Roman-Period Historic Environment* (Wilson 2012: 12-15), and *Strategic framework for Historic Environment Activities and Programmes in English Heritage* (English Heritage 2008).

The following research priorities will be targeted:

- Understanding key transitions. Interface between Late Roman and Post-Roman periods, 'approaches that look...beyond the early fifth century to explain both the transitions and individual site histories are required' (English Heritage 2010: RM3). Character of change in the 4th century, emphasis on urban data sets, recognising and understanding 5th century data, refining chronological models. Assessment of cultural indicators for transition (English Heritage 2008: 11112.510).
- Holistic approaches to Roman-period landscapes. Overcoming gaps and biases in data, recognition of regional diversity (English Heritage 2010: RM2).
- Unlocking potential of unpublished data and getting the most out of the data. Utilising commercial archaeology 'grey literature', incorporation of developer-funded sites into works of synthesis (English Heritage 2010: RM4). Review and analyse unpublished historic environment investigations to ensure that past resources are not wasted (English Heritage 2008: 11113.110).
- Historic characterisation. Map-based method to see an overview of a character of landscapes and developments. Utilise Urban Archaeological Databases (Wilson 2012, English Heritage 2010: 3.2).

More specific and regionalised themes for research have been highlighted in a series of English Heritage funded Archaeological Resource Assessments and Research Agendas across Britain. The resource agendas generally cover one or more of the targeted case study towns, and even if they do not cover a specific targeted town within this research, they do raise important wider research themes and issues. They are in various states of completion – the first fully published was for the Eastern counties (Glazebrook 1997), but others remain in preparation (notably the South-East). The various frameworks currently available are listed in Table 1.

Within these regional assessments it is clear that a number of key research questions emerge. For the East Midlands, Vince highlights the importance of all aspects of the period from the 5th to 9th centuries: 'there are very few aspects of the 5th to 9th-century archaeology of the East Midlands which would not benefit from further research' (Vince 2006: 161). But he does specify three key priority themes, the first of which this research targets – the Roman/Anglo-Saxon transition: 'we should therefore take the traditional model of Romano-British history of the late 4th and 5th centuries as one of a number of possible models for this period and test them against evidence derived from archaeology' (*ibid*: 162). A crucial point he makes is the importance to have an understanding of late Roman settlement as well as the Anglo-Saxon period, since the earlier settlement will have heavily influenced the later settlement. More specific research needs are to look for the identification of estate centres, to assess the maintenance and upkeep of Roman roads and the establishment of new routes from the 5th to 9th centuries, and to assess the Anglo-Saxon use of late Roman walled towns (*ibid*: 165).

The West Midlands research agendas highlight the importance of looking at the emergence of towns and the territorial organisation and settlement patterns. Wroxeter is highlighted as helpful to 'question the nature of sub-

Table 1: Regional Archaeological Resource Assessments currently available

REGION	RELEVANT SITES COVERED	REFERENCE
East Midlands	Leicester, Lincoln	Cooper 2006; Knight *et al.* 2011
West Midlands	Wroxeter	Watt 2011
South-West	Cirencester, Dorchester, Exeter, Winchester	Webster 2007
Eastern Counties	Verulamium, Caistor-by-Norwich	Glazebrook 1997; Brown and Glazebrook 2000; Medlycott 2011
North-East	Hadrian's Wall	Petts and Gerrard 2006
North-West	Chester	Brennand 2007
Wales	Caerwent	http://www.archaeoleg.org.uk
Yorkshire and Humber	York, Aldborough, Catterick	Roskams and Whyman 2005; Roskams and Whyman 2007
South-East	London, Canterbury, Silchester	http://www.kent.gov.uk/leisure_and_culture/heritage/south_east_research_framework.aspx?theme=mobile

Roman continuity and the degree and character of British cultural life in the 5th to 7th centuries' (Webster 2007: 1). The issues of ethnicity and cultural identity also feature in the South-West Regional Research Framework, a region that encompasses case studies Cirencester and Winchester. The Eastern Counties Research Agenda notes the importance of Verulamium, as well as the need to: 'become more adept at recognising sites with long stratigraphies spanning the 4th and 5th centuries' (Going 1997: 41). Also flagged are issues of identifying what was happening in the latest stratigraphic 'Roman' levels, and to assess what Roman industries are evident within late Roman towns.

From these various studies, and the clear gaps or difficulties within academic debate (reviewed in Chapter 2), my research questions are:

- What did life in towns consist of and how did it change throughout the 4th, 5th, and 6th centuries?
- How long were typically 'Roman' structures and space used and maintained?
- How was town space utilised by the new 'Anglo-Saxon' populations?

More specifically the central research aims are to:

- assess the changing nature of Romano-British towns through detailed evaluation of archaeological and historical data
- categorize areas of occupation and usage and assess socio-economic significances across time
- assess images of 'decay' (waste space, dark earth) and sequences of material display
- consider the impact of evolving religion and power structures
- model data via Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to show spatial patterns of settlement and usage of intra-mural space
- identify the changing demands of late Roman to early medieval 'urbanism' in Britain.

1.3 Structure of the Book

This book is a published version of my PhD thesis, and takes on the following structure: This research is articulated around a series of key regional case studies selected for their actual and potential contribution to offering a more secure image of life within towns throughout the three centuries under study. Within the South-East: London, Canterbury and Colchester; the South-West: Silchester, Winchester, Cirencester; and the Midlands: Leicester, Lincoln, and Wroxeter. Their study is framed by a review of the data sources (Section 1.4), and the research methodology (Section 1.5). This highlights the sources available to study – both written and archaeological – and problems in their analysis and use such as the dating of artefacts (and therefore of settlements).

Chapter 2 is a detailed literature review to set the current perspectives and studies into a context from which it is possible to frame and direct my research. Focus is mainly on critiquing academic viewpoints, from the early 20th-century archaeologists of Haverfield and Collingwood; to the 1960s and 1970s boom in urban archaeology from Frere (1966) and Wacher (1976); 1980s rescue archaeology debates by Reece (1980) and Esmonde Cleary (1989); through to the debates of Dark (2000) and Faulkner (2004), and more recent studies (Sami and Speed 2010; Rogers 2011).

Chapters 3 to 5 contains the detailed case study analyses. Each chapter divides the case studies into the three specific geographical regions and contains a detailed review of the archaeological evidence and chronologies of activity, within each town from AD 300 – 600. Crucial here is the accessibility of evidence for late Roman, sub-Roman, and Anglo-Saxon settlement within these Roman walled towns, to facilitate a clearer understanding of the Roman to Anglo-Saxon transition. It is important to assess the reasons for living within a 'town', and to assess how far was life in towns based on authority, defence, economic need or even convenience. Within the broad theme of tracing settlement within towns, close analysis of the archaeological data seeks to characterise these settlements. The towns will be discussed within the context of their regional hinterland and in relation to other urban centres within the region. Where possible, artefactual and settlement evidence will be mapped using GIS to trace patterns of the use of intra-mural areas.

Drawing core results from the previous chapters, Chapters 6 and 7 analyse the nature, form, and scope of towns and their environs across the study period. It is within these chapters that a wider discussion takes place, and models of settlement change are proposed.

Chapter 6 looks at towns from c. AD 300 to c. 400, detailing the use of late Roman buildings and the importance of defensive circuits. For the late 4th century it is crucial to establish the character and depth of urbanism: how secure are these as points of administration and population? How long and in what way were public and private buildings maintained into and through the 4th century? How many still functioned in the 5th – and why? Do these structures take on new roles and functions? Town defences appears an important component of late Roman towns and their role to those living within and around the town is vital, but were they maintained, did all towns have visible defences, or could they even be manned adequately?

Chapter 7 deals with AD 400 – 600, a period historically associated with the first appearance of new Anglo-Saxon populations within eastern England. Key here is to understand the longevity of the remaining 'Roman' structures in townscapes and to identify what type – if any – of new structures and buildings emerge. Three models of change are proposed. After this an analysis of identified building types and their locations within ex-Roman centres is offered on 'Anglo-Saxon' structures

(Sunken-Featured Buildings and halls). This chapter will also assess how once public and private areas of the Roman town were re-used by new populations, and if there is evidence for active and inactive zones or a zoning of commercial and residential areas, or signs of an enduring class system. To what extent do Roman street grids survive into the 5th and 6th centuries? Is it possible to identify levels of population? How were the towns perceived, and what administrative role did they play? The role of towns around AD 600 begins to change with the re-emergence of the Church – and this is briefly reviewed in this chapter.

Finally, Chapter 8 reviews the key findings, and evaluates and debates the trajectories proposed in Chapters 6 and 7. The notable achievements this work has produced are outlined, followed by a summary of the remaining gaps and issues.

1.4 Data Sources

This section looks specifically at the types of material available, the modes and methods of study, analysis and interpretation, and identifies current gaps and biases in our data sources.

There are two clear types of data available – archaeological and historical. Both have useful elements to help aid interpretation of the period AD 300 – 600. However, written sources are severely lacking (especially in the 5th and 6th centuries, see Yorke 1993), prompting a greater reliance upon the archaeological evidence, which itself has its limitations.

Written Sources

There are only two British documentary sources from the 5th and 6th centuries. The most useful is that of Gildas, whose *De Excidio Britanniae* is a criticism of the kings (or tyrants) and Church in the 6th century AD. It provides a basic narrative chronicling the events leading to the Anglo-Saxon invasion and subsequent conquest, describing the Anglo-Saxons as:

> …our foes in the east…destroying the neighbouring towns and lands, it reached the other side of the island, and dipped its red and savage tongue in the western ocean.
>
> Gildas XIV: 1-3

Towns are mentioned in his chronicle of events (see quote in Section 1.1), but very little detail is offered on these. He places the blame for the loss of towns on the Anglo-Saxons, and, based on these writings, it appears that life within towns had come to a swift end by the 450s, seeing much destruction and desolation by the mid-5th century between the native British and the Anglo-Saxon incoming populations.

Gildas' version of events details the arrival of 'Anglo-Saxon' mercenaries in Britain as part of a Late Roman treaty. Following this, at some point these troops rebelled and invited in fellows from across the sea, and so began fully the Adventus Saxonum (the arrival of the Saxons). This basic chronology has largely formed the basis for all future studies, from Bede writing in the 8th century, to Gibbon in the later 18th century, and the many historians and archaeologists of the 20th and 21st centuries. A key event of the 5th century (following the formal 'end' to Roman Britain in AD 410) is the appeal to Aetius, dated to around 446-54 (Dark 2000: 35). According to Gildas only after this date did 'Saxons' arrive as foederati (mercenaries), the rebellion occurring some time after this, possibly in the late 5th century. This is an important point on assessing the dates of the earliest Anglo-Saxon settlements dated archaeologically. It hints at an active, organised system of authority still looking East and possibly still based in the old Romano-British towns. Gildas listed 28 towns (perhaps mainly in the west), and describes them (but does not name them) with an emphasis on their defences (II: 3).

Gildas' text is of great value, though its understanding and interpretation is difficult. The date of composition varies, with the latest estimates ranging from the AD 480s (Higham 1994), to around 500 (George 2009: 8), or to the 540s (Dark 2000: 36). Much has been made on the limits of the validity and usefulness of Gildas (George 2009: 48), but his work is certainly useful as a broad outline or chronology where much information can be gleaned: 'the outline of events can be discerned through careful examination of Gildas's text' (Higham 1994: 203).

There are other British sources available such as Confessio of St. Patrick that may have been written in the later 5th century. The life of St. Patrick was an eventful one but critically it reveals a continued Roman society with towns and villas still active in the west of the island. However, the usefulness of the document is in question as it is undated (Dumville 1977: 173-192). Other British sources of potential 5th- or 6th-century date are of even less reliability and credibility, while stone inscriptions are useful (especially in Wales), as is place-name evidence (Barrow 1978). The only other sources are a number of continental texts who offer only passing reference to events in Britain – such as Procopius, Orosius, and Zosimus – most of whom never visited Britain. The Vita Germani, a text by Constantius of Lyon, records St. Germanus' mission to Britain in c. AD 429. This is the last record of a formal Roman visit to Britain until St. Augustine's visit in AD 597 to convert the Saxons.

Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (The Ecclesiastical History of the English People) was completed by AD 731 and contains a narrative history of the conversion of the English people to Christianity from the AD 590s to the early 8th century. The work essentially draws upon and expands that of Gildas. His worked helped form the core narrative and thinking ever since, stating that the Germanic tribes entering Britain consisted of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes: '*Aduenerant autem de tribus Germaniae populis fortioribus, id est Saxonibus, Anglis, Iutis*' (Bede I: xv). It was written from a moral Christian

standpoint mixing fact and fiction, but does remain a valuable resource.

Later British sources, such as the Tribal Hidage (late 7th century), Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (9th century onwards), and Historia Brittonum (9th century) all offer useful elements, and some may draw upon earlier 5th- and 6th-century documents. However, they add little to help aid our understanding of life in the 5th and 6th centuries that the earlier source of Gildas does not already cover.

Archaeological Evidence

Such restricted documentary data necessarily demand a greater – almost total – reliance on physical evidence and close scrutiny of its context, nature and meaning. However, identifying this evidence is a complex and difficult task as the surviving evidence is generally very slight, often surviving poorly in difficult urban settings.

Until the 1960s, when urban archaeology began to evolve into its current professional state, the excavation strategies meant that the post-Roman archaeological layers were often termed 'truncation', and so were left unrecorded (Vince 1990: viii). The attitudes of archaeologists began to change as recognition of the importance of this evidence was realised with improving methodologies; for example, the excavations undertaken by Barker at Wroxeter from 1966 to 1994 (White and Barker 1998) revealed evidence for a re-use of the Roman basilica buildings across the 5th and 6th centuries, dramatically changing our understanding of towns in the early 'post-Roman' period. The profile of early medieval archaeology also improved in the 1970s following the amazing discoveries at sites like Coppergate, York, and at Winchester. Methodologies and research agendas began to be formed and discussed in important publications such as Urban Archaeology in Britain (Schofield and Leech 1987), Underneath English Towns (Carver 1987), and Archaeology in British Towns (Ottaway 1992). These were all published around the time of the introduction of PPG16, a major turning point in British Archaeology, leading to a huge increase in excavated sites through the dominance of developer-funded excavation projects.

Even with the skills now learnt archaeologists are limited on where to excavate within towns. Most urban excavations are developer-funded and so are dictated not by research agendas but by the demands of modern redevelopment (for example, the recent Whitefriars in Canterbury (Hicks and Houliston 2005) and the Highcross Project in Leicester (Coward and Speed 2007; Gnanaratnam 2009; Higgins et al. 2007)). In recent years there has been a move to integrate developer-funded projects into regional and national archaeological research agendas – especially within the regional Archaeological Resource Assessments. This is a major step forward, but the choice of where to excavate will almost always be dictated by modern consumer demands. However, there are exceptions such as academic research projects like the Insula IX Silchester

project (Fulford et al. 2006), and the Wallingford Burh to Borough Project – the latter also utilising developer-led data too (Christie et al. 2009).

Despite advances in excavation skills and archaeological understanding, the physical remains of the 4th and 5th centuries often remain slight and discrete. Perhaps archaeology of this period – and more so for the 5th century – should be viewed as an equivalent to prehistoric archaeology in that it is often difficult to identify and interpret – essentially it is 'trace archaeology' (Carver 1987: 6). The structural and settlement evidence, consisting of post-holes, beam-slots, ephemeral traces of shallow layers, or pits, are all that remain of timber buildings. In some cases (such as a 3rd-century building in Insula IX at Silchester) the structural element can be completely lost to later truncation (ploughing, etc.), leaving just a hearth and rubbish pits to define its edges (Fulford 2012a: 259). The superstructures and repairs to walls are almost always lost to us given the limited stratigraphy surviving.

In fully urban contexts (i.e. not 'greenfield'), large-scale excavations are rare, so that often excavations only consist of small trenches (more of a 'key-hole' or peep-hole view into the past), where the identification and a more rounded interpretation can be lost. While on large open-area rural excavations this is less of a problem, within urban settings things are vastly different, and this has to be acknowledged as biasing and limiting how we might perceive life in towns after Roman rule. For the majority of towns that thrive today, there is the further 'burden' of another 1300 years of pitting, robbing, cellaring, and site clearance, which may have fully or partly removed the fragile archaeological evidence. Some excavations of Roman towns are research projects (the leading examples being Wroxeter and Silchester), both on 'greenfield' sites, without the added complication of modern towns overlying the remains. The time-scale and size of the areas investigated at these sites is much longer and larger than any commercial project could hope for (the Silchester Insula IX project continues to run annually after over a decade). Both have produced substantial evidence of 'Roman'-style buildings long into the 5th and 6th centuries.

Even once these various excavation projects have been completed, many can often see substantial delays in their eventual publication, or may never be fully published. Access to the unpublished data is becoming easier through Urban Archaeological Databases (UAD) that contain records of excavations and locations of historical artefacts from the Historic Environment Records (some linked to English Heritage's intensive and extensive urban surveys). Many allow access to the basic versions on-line (see http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk/Gateway/CHR/), and all are available directly from the relevant local council. Another notable improvement is access to over 3000 unpublished grey literature fieldwork reports through OASIS (http://oasis.ac.uk, or http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/library/greylit). The numbers are ever increasing and will make for a highly accessible and useful resource in time. Individual

archaeological units are also more focused at maintaining a strong web presence with news on discoveries often now being updated on a regular basis.

Dating Activity: Closing the Material Culture Gap

The problem of actually identifying activity is further compounded by difficulties in closely dating the material culture. Artefact chronologies have in truth been based largely on the historical sources and so struggle to establish just how long Roman material culture objects remained in use for, and how early Anglo-Saxon pottery and artefacts appeared in towns. What is still unclear is what were the levels of material culture exchange between the old and new populations within Britain during this period of transition? How far were these old 'identities' retained or lost?

In the semi-distant past, study of the material artefacts was too often dismissed: 'Pottery and architectural remains tell us nothing' (Collingwood and Myres 1936: 295) in assessing towns after Rome. Attempts to see a fusion of Roman and Anglo-Saxon pottery styles (e.g. Dunning *et al*. 1959; Roberts 1982; Rodwell 1970) have since proved unlikely (Kennett 1978; Leahy 2007), and so essentially there is a wide contrasting split between the material culture of the late Roman period, and that of the early Anglo-Saxon period – creating therefore a material culture 'gap'.

The key issue here, therefore, is whether there is a genuine gap? Faulkner and Reece argue for such a case between AD 375 – 475, and stress that we should not seek to fill a void that cannot be filled (Faulkner and Reece 2002: 75). Others, however, such as Brooks, put the gap down to an archaeological 'invisibility' (Brooks 1988: 101). Should the lack of evidence be taken at face value? Or are the changes in material culture, and the archaeology, much more discrete? Certainly the issue of how long typically 'Roman' artefacts remained in use into the early 5th century remains open to debate. However, any artefacts used as tools for dating archaeologically visible activity have a limited use, as structures may have sequences that exceed the conventional date range of pottery and coins, as recently illustrated by the long sequence at Bath (Gerrard 2007).

Coins and pottery are crucial dating tools in Roman archaeology, yet both have major restrictions from the late 4th century onwards. The latest 'Roman' occupation layers are usually dated by coins for which the last official issues dry up c.AD 402. In reality, such coins may have continued into the 5th century (given the lack of new issues minted or brought to Britain), although their mode of use will have changed (Reece 2002: 63). The difficult issue for archaeologists, which is hard to resolve, is when did they actually enter the archaeological record? Recent work examining the wear on coins to gain an idea of their likely lifetime in circulation at Silchester, suggests an average of around 10 to 20 years after being issued (Besley 2006: 83). Wider studies on coin hoards in Britain further indicate increasing numbers of very late coins now being identified,

though their longevity as coins remains open for (analysis and) debate (Wells 2007: 7).

Regarding ceramics, it is widely accepted that pottery production ceased at the end of Roman Britain (Esmonde Cleary 1989: 85-91), although some have argued that 'Roman' pottery cannot be securely dated from the latter half of the 4th century onwards (Faulkner and Reece 2002: 59). Certainly there was a major breakdown of the economic system, but day-to-day transactions may have continued, perhaps commercially, into the 5th century. Studies on late pottery assemblages in Somerset and Dorset argue that the interpretation of the likes of Faulkner and Reece is fundamentally flawed, as pottery assemblages of Black Burnished Ware can be linked to other archaeological evidence that suggests continued production from the late 4th century into the early 5th century (Fulford and Allen 1996; Gerrard 2004: 71). Elsewhere, research focused on East Yorkshire has also traced late Roman ceramic sequences (Wyman 2001). This raises important questions of the longevity of other late Roman pottery production sites within 5th-century Britain. Problematic is the scale and market – did these shrink? If so, why? Were they tied to urban prosperity or to state or military control?

The appearance of 'Anglo-Saxon' material culture in towns (pottery, brooches, jewellery, or bone objects) is traditionally placed to after AD 450, where chronologies are offered crudely on unreliable written sources as discussed above. Most of the archaeological chronologies offered for ceramics and metalwork derive mainly from burial data rather than from domestic sites. This means that the settlement chronologies remain unrefined, and the material evidence can often only be broadly dated to the '5th to 6th centuries' (i.e. they are stylistically 'Early' Anglo-Saxon rather than 'Mid' or 'Late' Anglo-Saxon). Actually closely dating isolated artefacts remains problematic, however, but artefacts found within closely controlled and well-excavated archaeological sequences offer much more potential on refining artefactual chronologies. Pottery chronologies of the early Anglo-Saxon period are slowly improving, with studies on the analysis of thin-sections from over 6,000 examples collated (Vince 2005). This research has noted slight variations in pottery types of early Anglo-Saxon date: normally it is of low technology and hand-made, often poorly fired and dark grey or black in appearance; the vessels are usually plain and undecorated of simple form (Kennett 1978: 12), with little discernible change in pottery style and manufacture until the introduction of Ipswich or Maxey ware in the seventh century (Vince 2005: 228). The crucial factor here regarding pottery styles is the variety between local styles, suggesting regionalised production and distribution. Cremation vessels are often the most numerous surviving, and detailed typology studies can produce good artefact sequences over long periods. For example at the large Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Cleatham in Lincolnshire, over 1,200 cremations were excavated, many with inter-cutting urns, these produced clear phasing from the 5th to 7th centuries (Leahy 2007).

Other Anglo-Saxon artefacts suffer similar limitations with chronologies, as all are linked into the same framework as the pottery. Leeds (1913) studies on metalwork objects still remain standard texts, and bone objects have seen little recent studies (Walton Rogers 2007: 111). Studies of other artefacts, such as tracing the distribution of late Roman buckles and belt-fittings, and Anglo-Saxon metalwork, has identified differing types of cultural identities (represented by brooch styles in England, and plots of Irish place-names and ogham-inscribed stones in Wales – Laycock 2008). These appear to indicate differing ethnic groups defined within each province from the 4th to 5th centuries, or at least varied groups bringing in distinctive forms of material culture. Mucking in Essex, a large open-area excavation, revealed a long shifting occupation sequence (Hamerow 1993). Again the ceramic sequences formed there have helped to refine the regional chronologies.

These various studies thus clearly demonstrate that there is progress, but much potential for further study still exists, with refinement of pottery forms, brooches, and bone objects; and the problem persists on establishing the earliest date for 'Anglo-Saxon' activity and settlement within towns, as noted, the evidence currently relates more to cemeteries than to settlement sites. Perhaps the populations of the early 5th century were simply continuing to use 4th-century material, or were using objects that do not generally survive within the archaeological record (namely organic materials). Cooper terms the people living during this time the 'blank generation' (1996: 85); it is only with the introduction of a new people and culture in the mid- to late 5th century come the new 'Anglo-Saxon' artefacts, but these are also stifled by broadly phased chronologies. Thus, there remains a wide, contrasting split between the material culture of the late Roman period, and that of the early Anglo-Saxon period: creating a material
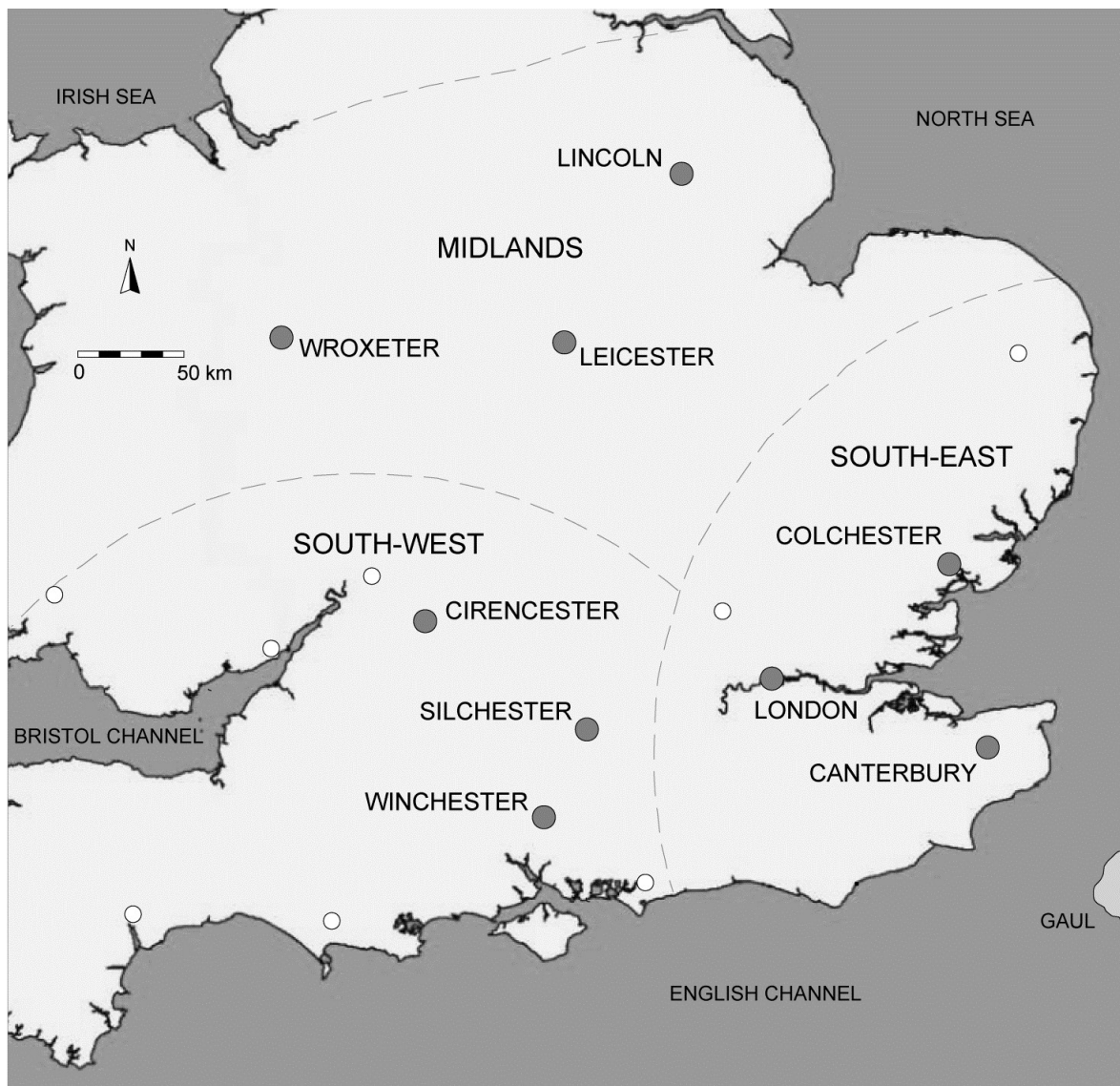

FIGURE 1: CASE STUDY TOWNS AND REGIONS. THE SOUTH-EAST (LONDON, CANTERBURY, COLCHESTER); THE SOUTH-WEST (CIRENCESTER, SILCHESTER, WINCHESTER); THE MIDLANDS (LEICESTER, LINCOLN, WROXETER). OTHER MAJOR TOWNS SHADED.

culture 'gap'. Arguably, we are causing headaches for ourselves by assigning labels such as 'sub-Roman' or 'Anglo-Saxon' to the pottery and other objects, which almost force and cement a period-divide. Surely it is better to let the archaeology speak for itself.

1.5 Methodology

The approach taken here is largely archaeological, drawing on a growing databank of work and finds. I draw also principally on a set of specific sites. Next we discuss the study time frame, and case studies methods of data collection / analysis.

Study Period: Definitions and Labels

From the above discussion, problems span the period AD 300-600 in terms of dating, visibility and society. This research deliberately takes this 300 year period as a block, to chart better urban fluctuations. Concentrating on one century will divide the results – especially since, as highlighted above, towns were evolving and non-static entities. Also, this study period spans historical phases, and so importantly offers a dialogue between Roman and Anglo-Saxon archaeology – too often seen as separate disciplines / study zones.

A reflection of the complexity can be seen in the wide ranging labels assigned to this period in the past: is there a period of 'sub-Roman' society? Or should classic phrases based on a reliance of fragmentary and obscure textual references like 'Dark Ages', 'Brittonic Age' (Snyder 1996, 1998; White 2007), or 'Age of Arthur' (Morris 1973) be used? These contrast with 'Late Antiquity' (Alcock 1971; Dark 2000; Harris 2003) that implies a longer link to

Rome, whereas 'post-Roman' suggests a clear break. All the labels are important indicators on how archaeologists and historians have viewed this period.

The problems of labels are a result of the regionalised nature of 5th- to 6th-century Britain. For example in Eastern England there may arguably have been a much shorter, or even no 'sub-Roman' phase; whereas in Western Britain a sub-Roman phase may have continued for much longer. It is possible that these phases need to be further refined throughout the course of the book, although we will avoid seeking to over complicate matters. All periods will need some definition, but the period from AD 400 – 600 especially is difficult simply because of the wide range of regional diversities.

Study Zones

This research explicitly avoids discussion and generalisation based on one or a few sites. It instead draws on a representative and more reliable set of sites gathered in distinct geographical zones in Britain. These sites and zones will provide a coherent cross-section of site types and evidence forms.

The research is organised around three case study zones: the South-East, South-West, and Midlands (Figure 1). These areas are broadly defined, and some towns could sit easily in more than one regional zone (such as Silchester or Winchester). The divide is used to break up the case studies into three geographical blocks, within each three differing urbanisms are presented. Three separate case studies (each a major Roman town) are chosen to illustrate the differing urban archaeologies and fortunes. Each case study is either a *civitas* capital or other major Roman town:

*   South-East: London, Canterbury, Colchester
*   South-West: Winchester, Cirencester, Silchester
*   Midlands: Leicester, Lincoln, Wroxeter

Close investigation is limited to just three case studies within each area to allow full and detailed analysis of the evidence; crucial given the discrete and complex nature of the surviving archaeology. The selected sites naturally have different archaeologies – and different archaeological strengths – to draw upon. Some show evidence of continuity of a changing 'Roman' town life into the 5th century (Silchester, Wroxeter), others of a shifting settlement (Cirencester, Lincoln, London), and others of new forms of settlement (Canterbury, Leicester, Colchester, Winchester). Of course towns did not operate in isolation during the Roman period, being a central element of the state and the economy, linked into the surrounding area or 'hinterland'. The towns will therefore be framed into their wider regional backgrounds with discussion of the regional themes and trends. Data from other towns will be utilised where relevant, valid, or useful in Chapters 6 and 7.

A review of the archaeological background and research potential of each case study, and analysis of each town's place and role throughout the Late Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods will be covered in the case study chapters in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. The data for each case study town are presented more fully in Appendix 1. It is broken into late Roman (c.AD 300 - 410), and early Anglo-Saxon (c.AD 410 – 600), broadly as a result of the very different types of archaeological evidence seen. Full references to each site / find are provided.

Modelling and Plotting Life in Towns using GIS

Given the variance in each case study town an overarching policy of modelling and plotting the data cannot be employed. However, the data have been collected and analysed in the same way. Principally the data have been accessed through Historic Environment Records (HER), unpublished excavation reports, and wider published synthesis. The data are then catalogued using Microsoft Access 2007, recording the NGR location, followed by information that may be useful viewed spatially (e.g. dates for building usage, types of structures, finds locations). In some cases the data have been projected spatially using a Geographical Information System (GIS) through ArchGIS v10.

GIS is often used in modern urban morphology analysis (Moudon 1997), though the data from modern cities is far developed and plentiful than what is possible from the patchy archaeological data available on late Roman / sub-Roman urban contexts. Spatial analysis has also been undertaken on numerous post-medieval urban centres (Koster 1998: 7). GIS analysis is clearly a useful tool to aid interpretation of the historic urban environment, but there will inevitably be gaps in the data, so there should not be a complete reliance upon it.

The use of GIS within archaeological research is, arguably, still limited and usually focused on landscape studies, though the close analysis of data within single towns has been utilised in some aspects of urban archaeology. For example, it is used within existing Urban Archaeology Databases such as Lincoln, Leicester, and Canterbury, though the data are often crude and unrefined. Only through careful analysis can meaningful patterns be traced using these databases. Spatial analysis on the scale for this research, and within the specific period (AD 300 – 600), has not been attempted before, perhaps because of limited data, or means to analyse data in this way was not available until more recent years. Faulkner's (1998a) thesis research on room use within Roman buildings in towns is perhaps the closest related study, though his results are only projected in bar chart form, without any spatial consideration.

Of course there will be limits with any interpretation, since none of the urban centres have been completely excavated, and so the evidence will be projected and dictated from where excavations have taken place. However, it is important to note that the data employed also include finds locations recorded within the HERs, which are often from chance discoveries from the later 19th and 20th-centuries, often outside of modern excavated areas, but can still often substantially aid interpretation.