

WINCHESTER STUDIES

*General editor: Martin Biddle*



3.i

*VENTA BELGARUM:*  
PREHISTORIC, ROMAN, AND  
POST-ROMAN WINCHESTER  
VOLUME 1



Fragment of an imperial inscription reading ... NTO ... found in Insula VIII. The letters, one Roman foot high (290 mm), are the largest known from Roman Britain (580 x 580 mm; photograph by John Crook; © Hampshire Cultural Trust/Winchester City Council). For discussion, see below, **615**, pp. 832–5 and Illus. 7.73 and 7.74.

WINCHESTER STUDIES 3.i

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*VENTA BELGARUM:*  
PREHISTORIC, ROMAN, AND  
POST-ROMAN WINCHESTER

*by*

FRANCIS M. MORRIS *and* MARTIN BIDDLE

*With contributions by*

Geoffrey Dannell, Stephen Greep, Martin Henig,  
W. H. Manning, Richard Reece, Janet Webster, *and* others

*and illustrations by*

Simon Hayfield, Nicholas Griffiths, *and* others

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In memory of Nigel McNair Scott (1945–2023)  
for his outstanding support and encouragement



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## GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

The first general account of *Venta Belgarum*, Roman Winchester, published by Francis Haverfield in 1900 in *The Victoria County History of Hampshire*, included a plan of 'Roman Remains' showing the outline of the town walls and the sites of a few discoveries within the walls.<sup>1</sup> It was however half a century later, with the appointment in 1947 of Frank Cottrill (1908–84) as curator of the Winchester City Museums, that modern archaeological techniques began to be employed in the investigation not only of the walls but also of the remains of the Roman town within.

In 1951 a series of trenches were cut at various points along the walls under the direction of Mr Cottrill, initially by the Winchester College Archaeological Society and later by workmen and local volunteers.<sup>2</sup> In 1953 the Winchester Archaeological Society sponsored what we would now call 'open-area' excavations within the walls (the first of their kind in Winchester) under the direction of Isobel Smith and Margaret Bennet-Clark.<sup>3</sup>

In 1960 it became clear that the Cathedral Car Park immediately north of the cathedral in the centre of the city was to be developed for a new hotel. At the time this was thought to be the site of the New Minster church, burial place of Alfred, king of Wessex, and his dynasty. A series of steps were then rapidly taken at both national and local level to ensure that the site was archaeologically excavated before it was developed. The excavation (site name CACP) which took place in the summer and autumn of 1961 revealed, in addition to important tenth- to eleventh-century buildings in the precinct of New Minster, a Roman north–south street flanked to the west by the east range of the forum of *Venta Belgarum* and to the east by a major Roman town house.<sup>4</sup> These discoveries were followed in 1962 by the formation of the Winchester Excavations Committee and in 1976 by the publication of the first volume of the Committee's series of seventeen volumes of Winchester Studies, published initially by Oxford University Press and now by Archaeopress in Oxford.

The present volume, Winchester Studies 3.i, devoted to prehistoric, Roman, and post-Roman Winchester, is the work of many years and many hands as the preliminary pages make clear, but the principal role is that of Francis Morris who has gathered together, edited, and interpreted the work of all those who have observed and commented on the remains of *Venta Belgarum* since Christopher Wren junior in 1683 first identified as Roman a tessellated floor discovered in digging the foundations for Charles II's palace on the site of the medieval castle.<sup>5</sup>

1 June 2023

Martin Biddle

<sup>1</sup> Haverfield 1900, with plan facing p. 286.

<sup>2</sup> Cunliffe 1962.

<sup>3</sup> Bennet-Clark 1954, especially, p. 315: 'until the 1953 excavation ... the Roman street-plan was a blank ... [and no] area had been uncovered systematically layer by layer down from the present surface to the natural soil.'

<sup>4</sup> Biddle and Quirk 1962 (= *I Interim*) in *Archaeological Journal* 119 (1962). The Winchester Excavations Committee, founded in 1962, published annual 'Interim Reports' on the excavations of 1962–71 in *The Antiquaries Journal* from Vol. 44 (1964) to Vol. 55 (1975): *II–X Interim*.

<sup>5</sup> See Part 4, Gazetteer 3, No. 124, below, p. 558.



## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

I began working with Martin Biddle in August 2011, having been introduced by David Davison and Rajka Makjanic of Archaeopress. I had recently published my DPhil thesis with Archaeopress, who then occupied the office next door to WEC's in Summertown, north Oxford. I started as a contract research assistant to Martin, working first on the forthcoming publication of his 1978 excavations at the chapter house of St Albans Abbey. I subsequently moved on to editing the immense volume on the Anglo-Saxon minsters of Winchester (Winchester Studies 4.i). Both books were co-authored by Martin and his late wife Birthe Kjølbbye-Biddle, who had sadly died the previous year.

I was greatly impressed with the Biddles' working methods, including their emphasis on long drawn sections showing the layers in the sides of trenches as revealed by excavation. I was also fascinated by Martin's many colourful tales of twentieth-century archaeological history. These included: cycling round the country in his boyhood to visit digs; working at Jericho with Dame Kathleen Kenyon; and dining with Max Mallowan and giving a tutorial to HRH then Prince Charles whilst at Oxford.

When Martin asked if I would co-author with him the present Roman volume of Winchester Studies, I of course jumped at the chance, starting in January 2014. The principal task was the production of reports on the pre-medieval phases of fourteen sites excavated by the Winchester Excavations Committee in 1961–71; this required a great deal of work to do justice to the immense quantity and quality of the excavation and post-excavation records. Many of the reports on the Roman objects or finds from the excavations were prepared initially in the 1970s to early 1990s, then coordinated principally by Prue Skinner, a long-term volunteer at the Winchester Research Unit, though these had to be revised and updated and some new reports had to be prepared. The finds specialists were unfailingly enthusiastic, generous with their time, and prompt in submitting their new and updated reports. The archaeological illustrations were drawn, revised, and laid out by Simon Hayfield, a former member of the Research Unit. Nick Griffiths, a renowned archaeological illustrator and another former member of the Research Unit, supervised the drawing of many of the finds and also drew several of the most complex objects to be illustrated in the volume, such as the wooden statuette of a woman, the Roman vessel glass, the samian pottery, the pot sherds bearing graffiti, and the triangular antler comb. I am very grateful to both Simon and Nick and thoroughly enjoyed working with them over several years.

When I started, the Winchester Studies team in Oxford was small, comprising me, Martin, and Beatrice Clayre (who is working on the castle volume of Winchester Studies). We were soon joined by Clare Chapman, and later by Meg Kirkpatrick and Sam Rudd. In Winchester, the Winchester Excavations Committee archive was initially managed single-handedly by Katherine Barclay, later assisted by Pru Kemball, Ben Emery, and most recently Sarah Price–

Sinclair. The team in Oxford and Winchester have all helped immensely in the preparation of this volume.

I am very grateful to Kate Adcock for undertaking the substantial task of copy-editing the volume, and to Clare Chapman and Archaeopress for seeing it smoothly through the publication process.

Among those mentioned above and listed on p. xii and the many contributors to this volume, I'd personally like to thank: Ian Cartwright, John Crook, and Claudia Wagner for providing photographs; Penny Copeland for her work on the pottery drawings; Jo Bailey, Sam Butcher, Geoff Denford, Robin Iles, Helen Rees, and Ross Turle, all former or current staff of Winchester City Museum/Hampshire Cultural Trust; as well as Giles Darkes, Tracy Matthews, Paul McCulloch, Patrick Ottaway, Robert Peberdy, Ken Qualmann, John Sills, Edmund Thomas, and Peter Webster.

My work on this volume would not have been possible without the generous support of The de Laszlo Foundation, and other donors to the work of the Winchester Excavations Committee.

I'd like to end by thanking my family, especially my parents, my partner Victoria, and children Cora, Lara, and Hugh, who will at long last be able to see the book I have been working on for so many years (the whole of Lara's and Hugh's lives so far). Finally, I extend my gratitude and thanks to Martin himself for putting his trust in me to work with him on this project and for providing me with all necessary advice, assistance, and support along the way.

Lindfield, West Sussex  
1 June 2023

Francis M. Morris

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