

<b>Institution: University of Reading</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 17A Geography, Environmental Studies &amp; Archaeology: Archaeology</b>
<b>Title of case study: Silchester Town Life Project: enhancing public awareness, knowledge and understanding of the archaeology of Iron Age and Roman Britain</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Through an extensive and innovative programme of participation and dissemination, the University of Reading's long-term research at the Iron Age and Roman site of Calleva Atrebatum in Silchester, Hampshire, continues to change public awareness of the subtle interactions between natives and Romans in Britain and the potential of contextual and environmental archaeology for understanding town life. External interest in the Silchester Town Life Project has been cultivated, sustained and expanded over 17 years and its reach is remarkable: in the REF period alone, it has stimulated over 30,000 visits to the annual six-week excavation at Calleva and more than 30,000 unique visitors to the project website in 2012-13 alone, as well as attracting regular and extensive media coverage and considerable charitable grants and donations. Through this combination of excellent research and accessibility, the project has made a sustained and far-reaching contribution to enhancing the public's understanding of Iron Age to Roman urban life in Britain at the same time as pioneering new approaches to inclusiveness and access in archaeology.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b> The Silchester Town Life Project (1997-), led by Professor Michael Fulford (at Reading since 1974), is characterising urban life within a Romano-British town from its very beginning in the Late Iron Age to its end by the mid- 7<sup>th</sup> century AD. It comprises a research and training excavation, led by Fulford and Research Fellow Amanda Clarke, and post-excavation analysis and publication. For six weeks each summer, a team of 100-150 students and volunteers has been excavating part of one block (or <i>insula</i>) within the site of Calleva, under the supervision of professional archaeologists. Extending over 3,000 square metres in area, this is among the largest and longest running open-area research and training excavations in the UK.</p> <p>The research at Silchester has produced a rich characterisation of the development of households, from the Iron Age (1<sup>st</sup> century BC), the early conquest and mid-Roman periods, through to the eventual abandonment of Calleva in the early medieval period. The research and its results are multifaceted, but two key findings can be highlighted here:</p> <p><b>(i) Iron Age origins and continuing 'native' influence on the Roman town</b></p> <p>The research has found evidence for a regular Iron Age layout, subsequently obliterated by the establishment of the Roman street grid on a completely different alignment in the later 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. However, it has also shown that despite the imposition of the Roman street grid, inhabitants continued to build their houses on the Iron Age alignment over successive generations. There is significant evidence for ritualised deposition (burial), in particular the placement of infants, articulated dog skeletons and other objects in wells, pits and under floors. This structured ritual activity occurs in the Iron Age and throughout the Roman period.</p> <p><b>(ii) Evidence for daily life: environmental and contextual data</b></p> <p>The project has uncovered detailed evidence on the nature of the daily life of Calleva's inhabitants by excavating not just the buildings but also their backyards, and by systematically exploiting the latest scientific techniques. The findings have shed light on areas such as food preparation and consumption (via the analysis of pollen, plant and animal bone data), as well as activity areas such as metal working or stabling (via chemical analysis and micromorphology). The presence of 'Roman' food types is now well documented in Iron Age contexts.</p> <p>The general public has traditionally seen Roman towns very much as Mediterranean-style impositions, but this research has highlighted the native contribution to urbanism in Britain and revealed a more complicated and nuanced picture of daily life.</p>
<p><b>3. References to the research</b></p> <p>These publications have been internally assessed as of at least 2* quality.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fulford, M. and Clarke, A. 2011. <i>Silchester: City in Transition. The Mid-Roman Occupation of Insula IX c. AD 125-250/300. A Report on Excavations Undertaken Since 1997</i>. London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies Britannia Monograph 25. Pp xviii + 524. Listed in REF 2 DOI: 10.1017/S0068113X1200030X</li> <li>Fulford, M. 2008. Nero and Britain: the Palace of the Client King at Calleva and Imperial Policy</li> </ul>

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Towards the Province after Boudicca, *Britannia* 39, 1-13; DOI: 10.3815/006811308785917105

- Clarke, A., Fulford, M., Rains, M. and Tootell, K. 2007. Silchester Roman town Insula IX: Development of an Urban Property, c. AD 40-50 – c. AD 250, *Internet Archaeology* 21 [http://intarch.ac.uk/journal/issue21/4/toc.htm] URL: http://intarch.ac.uk/journal/issue21/
- Fulford, M. & Timby, J. 2000. *Late Iron Age and Roman Silchester. Excavations on the Forum-Basilica 1977, 1980-86*. London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies Britannia Monograph 15. Pp xxvi+613; DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3558555
- Fulford, M, Clarke, A. and Eckardt, H. 2006. *Life and Labour in Late Roman Silchester. Excavations in Insula IX Since 1997*. London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies Britannia Monograph 22. Pp xviii+404. ISBN: 9780907764335
- Lodwick, L. 2013. Condiments before Claudius: New Plant Foods at the Late Iron Age Oppidum at Silchester, UK, *Veget. Hist & Archaeobot.* (http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs00334-013-0407-1)

AHRB Grant: Professor Michael Fulford, Silchester Roman city: Development of on-line archive for Insula IX Town Life Project, Dates: (1999-2004/£155,752).

This is in conjunction with research grants from the AHRC, British Academy and Jisc (£449,141) for a total of £604,893. Awards have also been granted from the Headley Trust, the Calleva Foundation and GML Ltd (Total: £528,260). Full details are available upon request.

#### 4. Details of the impact

Silchester is unique in the UK as a sustainable and extremely long-running archaeological research project. The project's impact beyond academia arises not only from the dissemination of research findings, but also directly from the programme of active inclusion which has led to the participation of new constituents in archaeological research, as well as visitors, from a broad range of backgrounds, ages and levels of experience. The initiative has therefore had impacts as diverse as enhancing the public's understanding of Iron Age to Roman urban archaeology and of archaeology as a discipline, to the inclusion of disabled people in archaeological fieldwork. In terms of this variety, as well as the sheer number and range of participants and visitors (see below), the project has achieved outstanding reach.

#### Impact directly through the excavation

The public response to the research activity and its findings is evident in:

- the numbers choosing to visit the annual six-week excavation (approximately 30,000 over 36 excavation weeks in the REF period);
- the number of repeat individual visits (c.40 per cent of the total);
- the group visits by learned societies and other organisations (approximately 12 per six-week period);
- the inclusion of Silchester into tours by heritage tourism firm Andante Travels (see Section 5), and
- the number of repeat visits by (approximately five) learned societies and other organisations each year.

Large numbers of visitors (30 per cent) come from beyond Berkshire and Hampshire, many of them from overseas.

**Outreach** has always been an important part of the research and training activity at Silchester, but increasingly so since the research team attracted £50,000 of support from the Heritage Lottery Fund for an innovative Access and Education project (2004-06). This project provided the foundations for the outreach programme in the REF period, formalising informational resources and services for visitors and incorporating visitor feedback into their further development. An important feature of the outreach programme is the diversity of the reach, with visitors ranging from primary-school children (c.600 children each year over the REF period) to hard-to-reach teenagers (via the Aimhigher programme) and members of the University of the Third Age.

These visitor services have **enhanced understanding** of the Calleva site, its history and the archaeological activity for all age and interest groups. Responses to a visitor survey in 2012 (sample size 206) indicated that visitors had learnt of the 'sophistication of Iron Age life' and the nature of the Iron Age to Roman transition (Brittain 2012; see also *Guardian* article and blog

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responses below).

The project has also had an **impact on schoolteachers and their pupils** in relation to the delivery of the Key Stage 2 curriculum by consistently enhancing and supporting access to local Roman archaeology over 17 years.

The **impact on local amateur societies** is diverse. For example, members of the Basingstoke Archaeological and Historical Society have visited the site, heard lectures from the project leaders, benefited from student help with pottery analysis and received input into a video project from Fulford. Some have also been trained in archaeological techniques on site (see Section 5).

The project's innovative approach to social inclusion has also influenced beneficiaries through **active participation of members of the public** in the field research itself (more than 1,100 non-Higher Education Institute participants over the REF period). These participants include c.150 A-level students of whom around 30 per cent chose to study Archaeology at university (Brittain 2012). In many cases, these students were unsure about archaeology as a career before coming to Silchester, and their participation in the excavation informed their career choice: "it has definitely confirmed my desire to study archaeology at university"; "I thank you for allowing me to enter university with a clearer mind and understanding of what is expected of me" (A-level students 2012, Brittain 2012 – see Section 5). The specific training in Roman archaeology provided by the Silchester project is recognised by the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, which for many years has offered fieldwork bursaries to sixth-form students. The Society sees Silchester's contribution as "invaluable to the Society and the future of the subject area in building up links with and encouraging the interest of pupils who will go on to study and work in archaeology" (See Testimonial, Section 5).

In addition to school pupils and university students, the project has **encouraged the participation of adult volunteers**, including disabled and retired individuals. The inclusion of disabled participants at Silchester was especially pioneering and in collaboration with departmental colleagues had a considerable impact on professional practice through the development of best-practice guidelines (Gilchrist & Phillips 2007: *Inclusive, Accessible Archaeology*, [www.britarch.ac.uk/accessible](http://www.britarch.ac.uk/accessible); Creighton & Phillips 2011: *Disability and the Archaeological Profession*). Silchester acted as the pilot study and was integral to the design of these projects.

### **Impact through dissemination of research findings**

The unique, long-term nature of the Silchester excavation has resulted in a dissemination programme of considerable **reach**, which can be shown to have impacted on a wide range of **beneficiaries**. This dissemination is a key element of project design, with an increasing public engagement strand in the last 10 years.

In contrast to commonly held perceptions of monumental, clean and masonry-built 'Roman' towns, the Silchester excavation has revealed a rich picture of daily, dirty life and rituals in provincial Britain. The research has changed the public's understanding of the Iron Age and the continuing impact of the indigenous population on life at Silchester and on Roman Britain more widely (see Brittain 2012, Section 5). Calleva provides evidence for pre-conquest, proto-urban development, and a society already adopting Roman foods and cuisine before the Roman conquest. Excavation has evidenced the organised planning of the town in the Iron Age, the radical change imposed in the Roman period and the continuity of Iron Age ideologies into the Roman era.

The dissemination of results from the project extends well beyond traditional academic publications, as part of a readjustment of views of Roman Britain in the light of the latest evidence. Its findings have been integrated into **non-academic syntheses** representing Roman Britain, including, most recently, Charlotte Higgins' *Under Another Sky: Journeys in Roman Britain* (Cape, 2013). A recent review of the book (*The Guardian*, 24 July 2013) notes that: 'British aristocrats were influenced by Roman tastes long before the Romans arrived; yet when they did arrive, traditional British culture and religion persisted stubbornly, as is shown by the roundhouses that mess with the Roman grid-planning in a town such as Silchester – round pegs in square holes'.

The new insights afforded by the Silchester Town Life Project mean that it has also regularly informed and illustrated both **radio** (e.g. *The Romans in Britain*, BBC Radio 3, 2010; *Dreaming the*

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City, BBC Radio 4, 2013) and **TV programmes** attracting audiences of over two million (e.g. *Inside Out*, BBC1, 2010; *The Story of Ireland*, BBC2, 2011; *A History of Ancient Britain*, BBC2, 2011; *Digging for Britain*, BBC2, 2011). The appetite for new information and the importance of revising public views of the Roman period in Britain has led to reports in *The Guardian* (2010, 2012), *The Times* (2008-12), *BBC History Magazine* (2013), *Spiegel Online* (2009, 2011) and BBC South (2013). The project website and blog ([www.reading.ac.uk/silchester](http://www.reading.ac.uk/silchester)) received over 30,000 unique visitors in 2012-13, 20 per cent of them from outside UK, while the research team has more than 1,000 followers on Twitter.

In addition, members of the research team pursue an active agenda of dissemination of the research findings through **talks and lectures** to local, regional and national groups and societies; Audience numbers between 2008 and 2013 are estimated to be in excess of 3,000.

The findings also influence **professional practice**. For example, the County Archaeologist for Hampshire states that the research at Silchester 'influences the agendas I apply in my curatorial roles though the planning system, site management and environmental education'. (See Section 5)

Interest in the activity and findings of the Silchester Town Life Project is therefore pervasive across very many different constituencies. Evidence of that interest and the impact of the project lies not just in the figures quoted above, but also in the significant financial support (more than £393,000 in total in 2008-13) that the initiative consistently attracts from charities and individuals, such as the Calleva Foundation, the Headley Trust, GML and the Horne Foundation. Funding at this level from private sources is unusual, and reflects the donors' interest not just in the research but in the beneficial impact the Silchester experience has on the personal and professional development of participants.

The benefits are likewise wide-ranging beyond the academic world. The County Archaeologist notes the research project's 'contribution to [regional] **quality of life** (through recreation, education and study) ... in helping people to enjoy their local heritage' (see Section 5). The research activity creates opportunities for participation by the general public, including young people considering study and career options, and disabled volunteers previously excluded from involvement in archaeological excavation. It provides a platform on which to develop professional practices which reach well beyond the Silchester Town Life Project itself (such as disability guidelines).

English Heritage considers that there is 'no project in recent years which has produced such a rounded and comprehensive record of Romano-British town life' and that it 'has set exemplary standards in post-excavation analysis, publication and public engagement' (See Section 5).

##### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- Brittain, S. 2012. Silchester Excavation Visitor Survey – UROP report. Reading: University of Reading.
- <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2012/jul/31/silchester-iron-age-roman-britain> with blog responses
- Testimonial from teacher, Silchester Church of England Primary (Impact on education) (\*)
- Deputy Director of Andante Travel (Impact on historical tour industry) (\*)
- Former Chairman, Basingstoke Archaeological and Historical Society (Impact on Archaeological education to amateur societies) (\*)
- Secretary for Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies (Quality of training in archaeology) (\*)
- Inspector of Ancient Monuments, English Heritage, Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments, SE Region (Quotation on quality of post-excavation analysis, publication and public engagement) (\*)
- Gilchrist, R. & Phillips, T. 2007: *Inclusive, Accessible Archaeology* ([www.britarch.ac.uk/accessible](http://www.britarch.ac.uk/accessible))
- Creighton, J. & Phillips, T. 2011: *Disability and the Archaeological Profession*

(\*) Contact details provided separately