

ARA

The Bulletin of The Association for Roman Archaeology

December 2007

Issue Eighteen



Aerial view of Whitley Castle Roman fort, Northumberland, looking south, February 1971. (See Editorial).

Photo: © Cambridge University Collection of Air Photographs.

Although British archaeology has moved into the new millennium, there remain concerns over the practice of the discipline. These relate to rescue and research, government and local authority archaeology, and the implication of the *Planning Policy Guidance Note 16* (PPG16) in developer funded projects. There are issues of sampling, fieldwork and mitigation strategies, and with storage, analysis and publication, and dare we say it, standards, questionable practice and system failure. These are all facets of a real, modern profession made up of dedicated and (mostly) underpaid archaeologists, half of whom are women. We need to be reminded that the involvement of women in archaeology has advanced exponentially since J. P. Droop famously commented nearly a century ago in his *Archaeological Excavation* (1915) "whether in the work of excavation it is a good thing to have co-operation between men and women". At that time hardly a single woman was involved in the practice, but since, more and more have joined the profession. Looking back, the lives and careers of certain great British pioneers stand out; these are women who faced innumerable challenges and difficulties in a male dominated field. They were great field archaeologists, and they were backed up by women working as university teachers, museum curators, artists and photographers. In the field of Roman studies this Bulletin's articles on Tessa Wheeler and recent work at Leicester pays tribute to the early work of one of these great pioneers, Dame Kathleen Kenyon, who succeeded Sir Mortimer Wheeler as Director of the London Institute of Archaeology. But we have also been careful that Wheeler's star should not eclipse the great work of his wife Tessa, commemorated at the Institute and again in this Bulletin. Another product of the Institute, Dr. Grace Simpson, is also honoured below, and we have paid tribute to the long and impressive career in Romano-British archaeology of Lady Aileen Fox.

In 2007 the ARA completed its

series of four study tours of the emperor Hadrian's great frontier in Britain – Hadrian's Wall, concluding with the system of western coastal defences around Cumbria. This tour will be described in the next Bulletin. Connected with this system, although not part of it, were two upland forts, Hardknott Castle and Whitley Castle, visited by the ARA for the first time. The surviving multiple defences of Whitley Castle form a remarkable spectacle in today's mountain landscape (see cover photo), but we know tantalisingly little about the fort's history. English Heritage has now embarked on a major survey of the site and its surroundings, led by senior investigator, Stuart Ainsworth. This will involve non-invasive techniques to survey the earthworks, and geophysics and satellite technology to work out the plan and sequence of development for the fort structures and extra-mural *vicus*. The project also seeks to discover what happened after the garrison had gone – particularly in the fifth century. The presence of organic remains preserved in waterlogged deposits – leather shoes were found in an excavation fifty years ago – is also very likely.

2006 and 2007 also saw two conferences on Hadrian's Wall, held by the Arbeia Society at South Shields, near Arbeia Roman Fort. The first in November 2006, was a major review of the latest research on the Wall. At a civic reception in the town hall David Breeze gave a

magisterial outline of research since 1848 and the original publication and subsequent revisions of J. Collingwood Bruce's *Handbook to the Roman Wall*. This was the occasion to officially launch the fourteenth edition (2006) edited by David Breeze. This will be reviewed in the next Bulletin. Other important contributions were made on 'The direction of planning of the eastern sector' by John Poulter and signalling, by David Woolliscroft. James Crow and Paul Austen spoke on the forts and Paul Bidwell and Tony Wilmott on the turrets and the *Vallum*. Artefacts and coins were reviewed by Lindsay Allason-Jones and David Shotton. Rachel Newman and Richard Hingley gave stimulating contributions on the Wall as an archaeological resource and its relevance for theoretical archaeology. The 2007 conference focused on religion and funerary evidence.

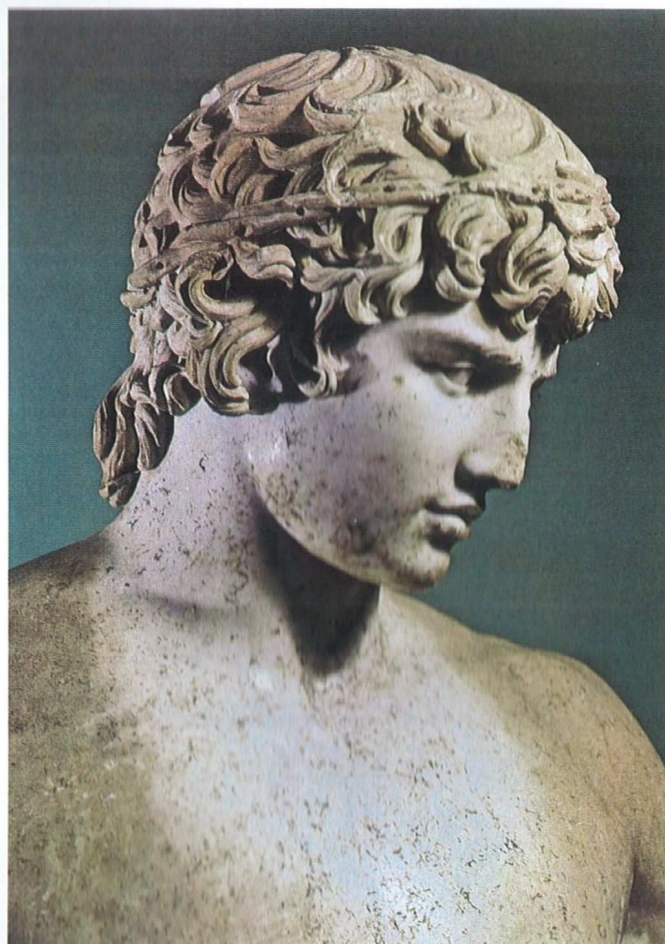


Fig. 1. Detail of the marble statue of Antinous, probably with the attributes of Dionysos or Apollo, with holes for the metal leaves of a wreath. Discovered in a building near the Temple of Apollo, Delphi, in 1894. c. AD 130-8. Height: 1.98 m. Archaeological Museum, Delphi.
Photo: © John Dekopoulos.

ARA

The Bulletin of The Association for Roman Archaeology

ISSUE EIGHTEEN DECEMBER 2007

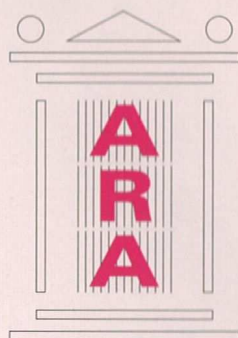
Price to non-members – £3.00

CONTENTS

	Pages
Editorial	2, 3, 54 and Cover
The Chester Amphitheatre Project	4 to 6
Tessa Verney Wheeler, Archaeologist: an Introductory Note	7 to 10 and 17
Statuettes and Figurines in Roman Britain	11 to 17
Grace Simpson (1920 – 2007)	18 to 21
The Roman Bridge at Corbridge	21
Aileen Fox and her Contribution to Romano-British Archaeology	22 to 25
ARA Events in 2005 and 2006	26 to 45
Book Review – Roman Sussex	45 to 47
Recent Excavations in Roman Leicester	47 to 53

Published annually by
The Association for Roman Archaeology

ISSN 1363-7967



Designed and Printed by
Applegraphics, Hampshire – 01962 793150.

Another important facet of Hadrian's life was his relationship with Antinous. Hadrian's reaction to the sudden and early death of Antinous in Egypt in AD 130, led to the latter's deification and the production of statues, temples and vast building projects all over the empire. In 2006 a major exhibition of Roman sculptures of Antinous was held for the first time in Britain, at the Henry Moore Institute, Leeds, with pieces loaned from all over the world. The statue unearthed at Delphi in 1894, still one of Greece's most celebrated antiquities (Fig. 1), was represented by the cast made by the French excavators immediately after discovery. The illustrated catalogue, *Antinous: the face of the Antique*, is edited by Penelope Curtis. The site of Antinous' death in the Nile was commemorated by the founding by Hadrian of the city of Antinoopolis. This vast site, now in a very ruinous condition, was visited by the ARA on our Egyptian tour in September 2007 and will be described in the next issue.

A further major exhibition, *Hadrian: Empire and Conflict*, will be held at the British Museum from July to October 2008. The exhibition will explore the life, love and legacy of

Hadrian and provide fresh insights into the sharp contradictions and challenges of his character and reign. Objects from 35 museums worldwide and recent excavations will be shown. Further details of this exhibition will be in *ARA News*.

One of the most spectacular recent discoveries has been the colossal marble statue of Hadrian found at the Graeco-Roman city of Sagalassos in southern Turkey, in July 2007. During the Roman imperial period the city became metropolis of Pisidia, an area well known for the production of grain, olives and high quality tableware – Sagalassos red slip ware. Work on surveying the city started in 1985, under a British-Belgian team led by Stephen Mitchell. Since 1990, Sagalassos has become a large-scale interdisciplinary excavation and survey of the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, directed by Professor Marc Waelkens, who is exposing the monumental city centre and has nearly completed four major restoration projects on standing structures. The project has also included an intensive survey of the vast territory beyond the city, concentrating on the period from Alexander the Great to the seventh

continued on page 54 ►

Hon. Chairman: Grahame Soffe BA,
Tel: 01367 244857

Hon. Vice-Chairman: Mike Stone BA, Cert Ed, MITG,
26 Awdry Close, Chippenham, Wiltshire, SN14 0TQ. Tel: 01249 446385

Director: Bryn Walters BA,
75 York Road, Swindon, Wiltshire, SN1 2JU. Tel/Fax: 01793 534008

Hon. Treasurer: David Evans PhD,
Gunley Stables, Marton, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 8JL. Tel: 01938 561398

Hon. Archivist: Anthony Beeson,
c/o The Art Library, Central Library, College Green, Bristol, BS1 5TL. Tel: 0117 968 3493

Trustees:
Anthony Beeson, David Evans, Don Greenwood, Sam Moorhead,
Grahame Soffe, Michael Stone, Bryn Walters

Hon. Membership Secretary: Don Greenwood BA,
12 Harewood Close, York, YO30 5XQ. Tel: 01904 670995

Editor Bulletin: Grahame Soffe BA,
26 Bromsgrove Cottages, Faringdon, Oxfordshire, SN7 7JQ. Tel: 01367 244857

Research Adviser: Professor Martin Henig,
Institute of Archaeology, 36 Beaumont Street, Oxford, OX1 2PG

Internet Web Site:
www.associationromanarchaeology.org/

The views expressed herein are not necessarily the views of the ARA Board

© Copyright remains with individual Authors, and the ARA Board cannot accept responsibility for the accuracy or content of such articles

Any Member requiring a copy of the Memorandum and Articles of Association should apply in writing to the Director at the office address

The Association for Roman Archaeology Limited is a Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee
Company Registered No. 3218318 (Wales) British Registered Charity No. 1056599
Registered Office: The Association for Roman Archaeology Limited, 75 York Road, Swindon, Wiltshire, SN1 2JU

THE CHESTER AMPHITHEATRE PROJECT

by Tony Wilmott

The Roman amphitheatre at Chester lies on high ground on the banks of the river Dee, just outside the south-east corner of the legionary fortress of *Deva*. It was built in a commanding position, visible to anyone approaching from the south and west and from the river. This siting would have been very deliberate, as the amphitheatre, as one of the grandest and most important building types invented by the Romans, expressed Roman identity and power in a way few other structures could.

Despite its size, the amphitheatre had disappeared from sight and knowledge long before antiquarian interest in the Roman history of Chester began. It was discovered by W. J. Williams in 1929 during the installation of heating to the Dee House convent school. The discovery did not come a moment too soon, as at the same time it was intended to straighten Little St. John's Street, the road on the northern side of the amphitheatre which had preserved the lines of the north wall of the building for at least a millennium. The existence and extent of the amphitheatre was confirmed in the following years by excavations carried out on the line of the road by R. N. Newstead and J. P. Droop. The road scheme was dropped in 1933, and the idea of excavation was kept alive by the Chester Archaeological Society. From 1959 to 1969 extensive excavations of the northern half of the amphitheatre by F. H. Thompson were funded by the Ministry of Works / Department of the Environment, and culminated in the consolidation of the northern half of the site, and its opening as a public monument in 1972.

The displayed portion was laid out in a style which is very much of its time. The Roman walls were supported by concrete poured against their rear faces, and the

seating banks were grassed. The arena was laid to gravel. The southern half of the amphitheatre was retained by a severe concrete retaining wall 4 m high, surmounted by a further 2 m high brick wall, defining the grounds of Dee House, the Grade 2 listed building

which occupies a large part of the site of the southern side of the amphitheatre. The display of the amphitheatre has long looked tired, and with Dee House standing empty, the future of the amphitheatre site has frequently been discussed within the last twenty years, and different proposals have been drawn up for the monument, all involving some element of excavation and display. In 2000, Keith Matthews of Chester Archaeology undertook an evaluation of the conserved area of the amphitheatre, demonstrating that the monument may not have been as totally excavated as had been believed, and that Thompson's

conclusions were unsafe. In 2003 the concept of a joint English Heritage / Chester City Council project to investigate the amphitheatre was agreed, to include an archaeological research framework, a non-invasive survey of the amphitheatre and its environs and excavation within the amphitheatre area. Three areas were excavated (Fig. 1) – one (A) included half of the area partially excavated by Thompson (Fig. 2), another (B) in a previously unexcavated area near St. John's church, and a third (C) in the centre of the arena.

The results of excavation have been spectacular, comprehensively overturning the Thompson

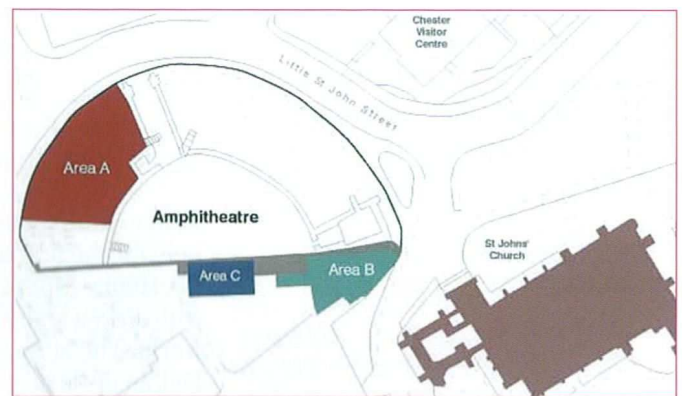


Fig. 1. Plan of the three excavation areas (the narrowest diameter of the amphitheatre is 90 m – north is at the top).
Photo courtesy of English Heritage / Chester City Council.



Fig. 2. Aerial view of Area A excavation showing the plan layout of the two amphitheatres.
Photo courtesy of English Heritage / Chester City Council.

interpretation. The first part of the first amphitheatre (1a) to be built was a stone outer wall. A large dump of redeposited natural clay was tipped against the inner face of this wall. This was probably derived from the creation of the arena, which was a large ellipse, hollowed into the ground. It is probable that a stone wall was built to revet the sides of the hollowed-out arena, and the bank of excavated spoil was used to form the first seating bank. Like many British amphitheatres, the first phase at Chester probably featured wooden benches placed upon a sloping earthen bank. Four major entrances were provided to the arena, which appear to have continued in use for the whole lifetime of the amphitheatre, and it is probable that all access to seating was through these entrances.

The second phase (1b) is the one about which we now know most. Much of the seating bank of Amphitheatre 1a was dug away, leaving a broad terrace only slightly above original ground level upon which a system of timber-framed seating was erected. The survival of timber, sometimes as stain, sometimes in virtually mineralized form (Fig. 3), has enabled us to understand the mechanics of construction. Timber slots were cut into the terrace, running radially out from the arena wall, linked by two ring-beam slots on the inner and outer ends of the beams. This was the timber structure found by Thompson and interpreted as a

timber amphitheatre. Into these slots were placed pre-fabricated timber frames. These included a base plate and a pair of uprights, and to the rear, nearest the outer wall, diagonal braces. These frames were not jointed, but simply nailed together, and it is the positions of the nails that show the frames were prefabricated. Preliminary identification of grain patterns of timber preserved in the corrosion products of the nails suggests that at least some of the timber used was beech. Once the frames were erected (working in an anti-clockwise direction), the foundation slots were backfilled. Within this backfill was found a coin dating to AD 96, providing an unrivalled *terminus post quem* for Amphitheatre 1b. It is probable that the arena was now deepened, being excavated down to the level of bedrock, as the timber frames were now buried to at least 1.2 m depth in red stony sand, the geological layer which sits naturally between sandstone bedrock and the upper clay, in order to weigh down the frame for the seating. The arena wall would have been rebuilt, achieving its final form.

The four principal entrances were retained and supplemented by new access to the rear seats. One of the most important findings was a robbed stone footing running along a 6 m stretch of the exterior face of the outer wall. This was cut through external surfaces of phase 1a, but the fact that these were few suggests that the earlier phase was not long lived.

It almost certainly represented the base of an external stone staircase providing access to the rear of the auditorium. The foundation featured three small buttresses, which may indicate the use of decorative blank relieving arches along the face of the outer wall of the stairway. This is seen on the external stairways

on the amphitheatre at Pompeii. The addition of external stairs would now allow the social stratification within the allocation of seats which was normal in amphitheatres, with the less privileged accessing the rear seats via the rear wall first, and then the wealthy and influential processing into their seats via the four main entrances.

The space between the outer walls of Amphitheatre 1 and Amphitheatre 2 measured 1.8 m wide, and preserved deposits outside Amphitheatre 1, which were accumulated when it was in use. This is hugely important, as such deposits have not survived elsewhere in the Roman empire. The stratigraphy is complex, incorporating a variety of deposits, surfaces and structures, which are yet to be fully analysed. Postholes may represent external booths and stalls, possibly short lived, and erected from time to time for festivals. A kerbed road ran round the building. One of the major components of these deposits is a characteristic yellow sand, which is not native to the site. This material, laid in a series of interleaved deposits, may represent sand used in the arena and cleared out on occasion. Suggestive of this is that the material was very thick (up to 1 m) near the northern main entrance, spreading and becoming shallower the further from a main entrance it spread. It is clear that accumulated material against the outer wall of the amphitheatre was occasionally removed, after which deposition started again. Close to the north entrance of the amphitheatre was a small, three-sided, stone-built structure with a plastered and painted interior. This was probably a



Fig. 3. The timber framework of the seating of amphitheatre 1b can be seen as mineralised timber in section.
Photo courtesy of English Heritage / Chester City Council.



Fig. 4. A miniature samian bowl decorated with gladiatorial scenes. Probably purchased as a souvenir.
Photo: © David Heke.

small shrine. Shrines in analogous positions occur at the amphitheatres at Caerleon and at *Carnuntum*, Austria while a furnished burial was found here at the amphitheatre at Mérida, Spain. The shrine was built upon and sealed by successive yellow sand deposits. Finds from this area give indications of the behaviour of spectators. Animal bone including chicken and beef ribs, and fragments of the portable clay ovens known as 'clibani' suggest the consumption of snack food, while miniature samian bowls depicting gladiators may have been sold as souvenirs (Fig. 4).

These deposits were cut by the foundation of the outer wall of Amphitheatre 2. This was far larger and more impressive than its predecessor. The outer wall was a massive construction consisting of a sandstone foundation 2.7 m wide founded on sandstone bedrock in a 1.3 m deep trench. The upstanding masonry consisted of well-dressed stone blocks bonded with brown lime mortar, and was of superior workmanship to that of the first building. The four principal entrances were probably in the same positions as the first structure, and served the same purpose. The rear seats were reached by way of *vomitoria*, two of which were provided between each pair of main entrances. The *vomitoria* were each flanked by a pair of walls almost as thick, but not as deeply founded, as the outer wall. These supported vaulted stairways which led to the upper seating within



Fig. 5. Stone base for a half-round pilaster adorning the outer face of amphitheatre 2. Photo courtesy of English Heritage/Chester City Council.



Fig. 6. Stone block from the centre of the arena. Photo courtesy of English Heritage/Chester City Council.

the structure of the building. So massive were the walls that they probably supported stone seating. The external face of the outer wall was furnished with features interpreted by Thompson as buttresses. These were placed at regular intervals: one either side of each *vomitorium* and a single example between each *vomitorium*. On examination it became clear that the 'buttresses' consisted of large stone blocks placed at ground level around the façade of the building, but without foundations. In two cases, semi-circular pads of white mortar adhered to the upper face (Fig. 5).

The foundation stone was fissured around the mortar pad, crushed by the weight of what stood on it. This can only have been a half-round engaged column of the sort seen elsewhere, including at Capua or El Djem in Tunisia.

Beyond the external face of the outer wall was a series of between five and six successive metallised road surfaces, the earliest of which was contemporary with the construction of the amphitheatre. These road surfaces show no sign of the piecemeal activities that took place around the first building, and it is possible that a formal open space existed.

Excavation in the centre of the arena gave a clue to the nature of the spectacles enjoyed there. A large stone block was found close to the centre of the arena. This had in its centre a lead plug, which had secured an iron fitting (Figs. 6 and 7). It is possible that this, and other stones which were found in the northern part of the arena in the 1960s, had been used to secure the animal victims of the arena.



Fig. 7. Part of the scene of gladiators (as winged putti) fighting over a block like that found at Chester. From the mosaic at Bignor Roman villa, West Sussex. Photo: © Trustees of Bignor Roman Villa, by permission of the Tupper family.

TESSA VERNEY WHEELER, ARCHAEOLOGIST: AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE

by Lydia Carr

Tessa Verney Wheeler was a small, self-effacing woman, married to the tall and enormously charismatic Dr., later Sir (Robert Eric) Mortimer Wheeler. Her early death in 1936, modest personality, and gender have all led to her being almost forgotten in the history of archaeology.

But her character and abilities are too striking for us to allow her to vanish into the footnotes of Sir Mortimer's life without a word. Known to contemporaries as an exemplary excavator and teacher, our modern vantage point also reveals her as one of the great early women archaeologists, pushing forward the boundaries of both the discipline and the role of women within it. Perhaps Tessa Wheeler herself would not have agreed with this high-sounding assessment, but it is certainly one her husband would have recognized. In his autobiography *Still Digging*, he calls his early working life that of 'the Wheelers', and there Tessa is always his partner and equal, one who 'trebles' his own abilities. When we examine their most important joint excavation, the great work at the Roman city of *Verulamium* (near St. Albans, Herts.) in the early 1930s, we can only agree with him.

The Wheeler partnership, professional and otherwise, began at University College London (UCL) around 1912. Tessa was at that time a young undergraduate, reading history and filling exercise books with careful notes on constitutional history and the kings of France. Her mother Annie Kilburn, peregrinating and adventurous in her youth, had settled down when Tessa was three, to the domestic comforts of a common-law marriage with the London chemist Theophilus Morgan Davis, and Tessa grew up with them in a quiet London suburb. Her

childhood has a faint air of the Dulwich of P. G. Wodehouse; bourgeois in the best way, a little stuffy, and affectionate.

The Wodehousian plot seemed complete with the appearance on the scene of John Mowlam, the heir to a London building firm and in every way a most eligible prospect. An 'understanding' developed, the kind of pre-engagement popular in the period. Tessa's stepfather encouraged her to go to UCL and gain a degree first, still an unusual step for a young woman at the time and impossible at all but at a few universities. And it was there, serving as the Secretary-Treasurer of the UCL Literary Society, that she met one of its vice-presidents, Rik Wheeler (as he was called then, and as we shall refer to him here). He was the recent recipient of an MA from UCL, committed to the infant subject of archaeology, young, intelligent and penniless. He was also handsome, charming, and utterly determined. Their engagement threw her mother into a panic. But Tessa was displaying for the first time the quiet firmness that characterized her life. She and Rik were married without fanfare in 1914.

A marriage in that year meant a life necessarily postponed. Rik had joined the UCL Officer Training



Fig. 1. The Wheeler family in 1914/15 during Rik's army training. Photo courtesy of the Wheeler Family Archive.



Fig. 2. Michael Wheeler in 1921. On the back of the photograph he has written: 'In the workshop [of the National Museum of Wales]. Note the Bronze Age [object] which I am mending!' Photo courtesy of the Wheeler Family Archive.

Corps in 1914, and in 1915 was posted to the Royal Field Artillery. During training in Britain, his wife and their new son, Michael, managed to follow him from camp to camp (Fig. 1). Wartime service in France followed for Rik, though Tessa spent the war at home as one of the first female income tax surveyors, an occupation referred to with becoming respect by later newspaper reporters. With the advent of peace, her husband returned to formally receive his doctorate and the Military Cross, and their life as a family tardily began.

Rik's first major appointment was as the Keeper of Archaeology in the old National Museum of Wales at Cardiff, and the family moved there rather suddenly in 1920. Tessa threw herself into their new Welsh life with enthusiasm. Wives were still expected to further their husbands' careers through their own personal efforts, in a way we would only associate with a politician's wife today. Tessa's behaviour was, from the first, more than this. Their very earliest days in Cardiff were spent completely in the museum's temporary quarters at the Cardiff Library – literally speaking. With some difficulty in finding a cheap flat quickly, the family discreetly camped out in the Museum offices until they



Fig. 3. *Segontium*, 1922. Rik (left) and Tessa Wheeler (2nd from right) showing Dame Margaret Lloyd George the excavations, with Wilfrid Hemp (Inspector of Ancient Monuments for Wales) behind. Photo after R. E. M. Wheeler, *Still Digging* (1955).

found more traditional housing (Fig. 2).

The National Museum provided Tessa and Rik with six happy and fruitful working years. For Tessa especially they were an apprenticeship, during which she advanced from a brief, stock mention by Rik in the acknowledgements of their excavation of the Roman fort of *Segontium* (near Caernarfon in North Wales) in 1921-22 (Fig. 3), to independently directing and publishing the excavation of the amphitheatre of the Roman legionary fortress of Caerleon (*Isca*)

in South Wales in 1927-28 (Fig. 4). By the time Rik accepted the Keepership of the London Museum in 1927, Tessa was an accomplished autonomous excavator with extensive practical experience (though she still moved when her husband's job did). In London, that brought her professional acknowledgement from the Society of Antiquaries, who made her their second elected female Fellow in 1927. She had been a frequent presence as her husband's guest prior to that point, and quickly became intimately involved with the running of the society.

The Antiquaries brought the



Fig. 5. Tessa Wheeler brushing Roman stone slab paving at the Lydney temple excavations, 1928-9. Photo: R. E. M. Wheeler, courtesy of the Rt. Hon. Viscount Bledisloe.

Wheeler's excellent excavation opportunities. Through them, Rik and Tessa excavated and co-published the Romano-British temple complex of Nodens at Lydney Park, Gloucs., in 1928-29 (Fig. 5). A number of fine mosaics were re-excavated on the site. Tessa's fascination with mosaics was longstanding, and during a brief family holiday in Italy a few years earlier she had made a point of learning more about how to lift and conserve them.

This lightning tour of the Wheelers' early years together has now brought us as far as 1930, and the beginning of the *Verulamium* excavations. A closer focus on this, their largest piece of joint work, is both appropriate and irresistible. The St. Albans and Hertfordshire Architectural and Archaeological Society and the St. Albans City Council had approached the Society of Antiquaries for archaeological advice, with the result that the *Verulamium* Excavation Committee was set up. The site of *Verulamium*, still preserved extensive earthworks of the late Iron Age *oppidum* and Roman structures such as the theatre and town walls. Limited excavations in the garden of St. Michael's Church vicarage had also shown Roman foundations, unsurprising, as the church had been built over the site of the Roman forum and basilica. Plans to turn a large site near the church into a public park



Fig. 4. Tessa Wheeler (right of centre) and her excavation team at the Roman amphitheatre at Caerleon, 1927. V. E. Nash-Williams, who was to become a doyen of Roman archaeology in Wales is seated on the right wearing a trilby. Photo courtesy of Nigel Young.

provided the municipal impetus for a larger, more scientific excavation, and the Wheelers at the London Museum were invited to take charge. Aided by a large, disparate but distinguished staff of volunteers, students, and hired help, they worked the site from 1930-33, and rapidly produced *Verulamium: A Belgic and Two Roman Cities* (1936). It was the first major volume to attempt from archaeological evidence a 'reconstruction of the social and economic evolution of a major civic unit during the four and a half critical centuries in which Britain passed from Belgic prehistory into Roman history and thence again into the darkness of Saxon 'protohistory'.

The Wheelers' assessment of the development of *Verulamium*, and especially of its catastrophes, has now been somewhat superseded by the work of their successors, Sheppard Frere and Rosalind Niblett. But the value of their years at St. Albans lies in more than the simple synthesis of history. The 'Wheeler method', particularly associated today with the military regimentation of an excavation grid of squares, a strict attention to stratigraphy and the relationships of small finds, appears here for the first time. Elements of it are present from *Segontium* onwards, but *Verulamium* is the moment when it reaches the

first stage of a higher evolution, and we can recognize it across the years.

The 'Wheeler method' had a pedagogic side as well. Excavations had a purpose beyond exposing features and recording small finds; they were chances to engage the next generation of archaeologists in what was still a new academic discipline. Some students at *Verulamium* were young women who became the most formidable archaeologists of their generation, especially Kathleen Kenyon, who went on to independently excavate the Roman theatre. Another young woman, a little her junior, was Margaret Drower. Today a well-known Egyptologist, in the 1930s she was a young student sharing a tent on a site she recalls fondly. Like all the Wheeler excavations, it was conducted with an eye to financial economy, but full of high spirits. Her memories of a day excavating are typical of many accounts; in the mornings Rik would go round on horseback or by car, overseeing the



Fig. 7. The hypocaust mosaic (building IV, 8 room 7) as it is preserved today at *Verulamium*. Photo courtesy of Lydia Carr.

site and evaluating the work he saw. In what might be a memory of his earliest days in London as an art student, his critiques were always constructive but also often scathing. After lunch, Tessa would make the same rounds as her husband, soothing tempers and hurt feelings. More practically, she would also show how to avoid or correct a mistake through practical demonstration. Margaret Drower remembers her as the teacher, and Rik as the overseer. Though he was always ready to do his share as leader, she was the one who really took on the practical labours of an excavation. The Wheelers played up their different approaches, and a mother-father dichotomy was often remarked on in the museums and sites they had charge of. Like all good leaders, they knew the value of presenting a memorable image. Occasionally Tessa would take the mornings instead of Rik, and in the afternoons he would face unusually sanguine workers with a suspicious 'Has Tess been round already?'

There are two photographs of *Verulamium* that summarize Tessa's work there and elsewhere. The first (Fig. 6), shows her brushing a mosaic floor over a completely preserved hypocaust in the bath suite of a rich town house, which today is still seen *in situ*. The laying and recording of mosaics is an excellent metaphor for Tessa's life as an archaeologist – lapidary, precise, requiring great concentration and technical skills (Fig. 8). Tessa took special responsibility for the mosaics



Fig. 6. Tessa Wheeler brushing the mosaic floor over a complete hypocaust of the bath suite of a town house at *Verulamium* (building IV, 8, room 7 tepidarium).

Photo courtesy of St. Albans Museums.



Fig. 8. Tessa Wheeler's painting (1931) of the central panel of a bust of Oceanus on mosaic 8 from building IV, 8, *Verulamium*.
Photo courtesy of the Society of Antiquaries.

of *Verulamium*, to the dismay of several Italian mosaicists brought over at some expense. She watched them carefully as they lifted the first few, and thereafter they found their services were no longer required. The beautifully preserved floors on

graphed, rarely showed those taking them this much of a smile, and it has a strange effect – the pretty, reserved woman seen in other pictures suddenly appears as a confident, tremendously appealing hobgoblin, in her element and enjoying herself hugely.

The Wheelers' next major excavation campaign, on the great Iron Age hillfort and Roman temple of Maiden Castle, Dorset (Fig. 10), was marred after two years by Tessa's sudden death in 1936 after a routine operation. She was only forty-two. The Maiden Castle excavations and the final published report were subsequently dedicated to her memory. She was buried, though, at St. Albans, and it is there, and in the careers of her students, that her most lasting memorial can be

display today are her testament (Figs. 7 and 8).

The other *Verulamium* photograph (Fig. 9) shows another side of this enigmatic woman, the side that inspired the devotion and hard work of almost everyone she came in contact with. She is grinning in a trench over an excavated Roman building, pointing at an infant burial in a tile-lined cist. Tessa, who hated being photo-



Fig. 10. Tessa Wheeler with camera in hand, discusses photography with Rik during excavations at the Maiden Castle hillfort, 1934 or 35.
Photo courtesy of Grahame Soffe.

seen.

Where does this brief biographical note leave us? There is not space here for the detailing of the Wheelers' personal life; there is barely room to outline their professional partnership. What we can be sure of is that in Tessa and her husband, we have an unusually clear view of an archaeological marriage and a woman archaeologist, at the point between the effacement of the professional woman, and her emancipation. Had Tessa Verney Wheeler been born twenty years earlier and done exactly the same work, we might hardly have known she existed. Had she been born twenty years later, we might have the same gap in our knowledge – but it would have been filled by a woman working under the name Tessa Verney.



Note:

The author is a postgraduate student at Exeter College, University of Oxford, researching the career of Tessa Wheeler.

continued on page 17 ►



Fig. 9. Tessa Wheeler at the *Verulamium* excavations, cigarette in hand, pointing out a Roman tile cist containing a late third-century infant burial in building III, 2, room 4.
Photo courtesy of St. Albans Museums.

STATUETTES AND FIGURINES IN ROMAN BRITAIN

by Martin Henig

Miniature sculptures cast in moulds by the 'lost wax method' from alloys of copper (normally a heavy leaded bronze) and more rarely in precious metals are amongst the most attractive objects surviving to our day from Roman times.¹ The distinction between statuettes and figurines is not entirely clear-cut; the former tend to be hollow cast and about a foot in height, veritable miniature sculptures, while figurines are generally solid and often measure only an inch or so.

None of them have received anything like as much attention from archaeologists working on Roman Britain as has statuary carved in stone. This is a pity because, like the engraved gems previously discussed in two issues of *ARA*, these small works of art are often complete and in good condition so that we can appreciate them more or less as they came out of the bronze-smith's workshop. Many of them depict deities and were either dedicated as votive offerings in temples, (as previously recounted in the *Bulletin*) or were venerated in domestic shrines. But bronze figurines could also be employed decoratively, to serve as genre figures in houses, the equivalent of the images to be seen on many mantle-pieces today, while still others were appliqués attached to vessels of various shapes or else used as steelyard-weights or key handles. All in all the range of material is a wonderful introduction to different aspects of Roman life.

The manufacture of statuettes and figurines goes back long before Roman times and Greek and Etruscan smiths were adept at making miniature images, for instance of deities and animals. In fact it is from the Etruscans and neighbouring north Italian peoples that the tradition of figural art spread, first to Gaul and then to the British Isles. This Iron Age tradition is well exemplified by images of boars (for instance from Hounslow, Middlesex)

and nude so-called 'Venuses' from Aust-on-Severn, South Gloucestershire (Fig. 1) and Henley Wood, Somerset. The nude goddesses are especially interesting examples of the erosion of the Classical tradition of Italy in western Europe during the last few centuries BC. The Aust Venus has sometimes been described (by Barry Cunliffe for example) as Iberian, but genuine Iberian goddesses are never portrayed nude. It is easier to see it, and others like it, as work of the period of Roman intervention in Britain in the early and middle first century.²



Fig. 1. Bronze nude 'Venus' figurine with glass eyes from Aust-on-Severn, S. Gloucs. Ht. 14.6 cm.
Photo © British Museum.

There was certainly some importation of bronzes from the Roman Empire in the earlier first century AD including a fine image of a boar and also a genre figure, a cupid with a goose, from the Lexden Tumulus, Colchester and such imports from Mediterranean lands (especially Italy and Southern Gaul) will have continued through the Roman period.³ Later imports after AD 43 include a splendid classical image of Vulcan, the smith god, from Richborough, Kent (now in the Ashmolean Museum) and from the River Thames at London Bridge, a number of figurines, including an

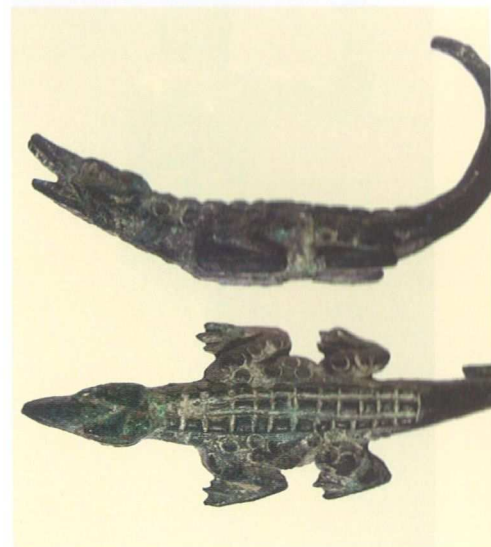


Fig. 2. Bronze crocodile from the Fullerton villa, Hants. L. c.6 cm. Photo courtesy of the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

attractive representation of the god Apollo (in the British Museum).⁴ Amongst other imports we should note the recently found bronze from the villa site at Fullerton, Hampshire, depicting a crocodile with its tail raised over its back (Fig. 2) as on the well known Augustan bronze coins of Nemausus.⁵ In addition there are several fine statuettes of larger size, including a martial figure from Baylam Mill, Suffolk, with skilfully inlaid details, such as copper lips and silver sulphide (*niello*) ornament on his breastplate, possibly representing the emperor Nero in the character of Alexander the Great rather than the god Mars. Graham Webster plausibly suggested to me that it may have been kept with the standards in the shrine of a first century fort.⁶ This was assuredly the case of a gilded statuette of Hercules conflated with Commodus from the Hadrian's Wall fort at Birdoswald (Fig. 3).⁷

However, of greater interest are the figurines which display distinctive features of insular design which reflect the life and religious faith of the people of the province.

Manufacture

There is plenty of evidence both direct and indirect, that figurines were made in Britain by the lost wax process, in which a clay mould was



Fig. 3. Gilded bronze statuette of Hercules-Commodus from Birdoswald fort, Hadrian's Wall, Cumbria. Ht. 49 cm. British Museum.
Photo © Grahame Soffe.

fitted over a wax core in the form of the figure; the wax was melted and drained out and replaced by a molten alloy of copper, typically for the Roman period, heavily leaded. Remains of such moulds have been excavated, notably at Gestingthorpe, Essex.⁸ In addition there are a few inscriptions naming smiths, all of whom have names suggesting they are of British or Gaulish origin and,



Fig. 4. Bronze inscribed figurine of Mars from the Foss Dyke, Lincs. Ht. 25 cm. British Museum.
Photo © Grahame Soffe.

in all cases, the figurines seem to have been intended for dedication in local shrines. The most important of these finds is a figurine of Mars from the Foss Dyke (Fig. 4) which has already appeared in *ARA* but is worth showing again as the best evidence for the way an image was commissioned in Britain.⁹ A bronze-smith (*aerarius*) called Celatus made it for the Colasuni brothers, charging them 25 denarii but himself giving the pound of bronze required at the cost of 3 denarii. Clearly a figurine such as this, standing with its base to a height of some 25 cm was not cheap. Other smiths known by name include Glaucus who signed the base of a figurine found at Martlesham, near Ipswich, Suffolk. It showed Mars Corotiacus, mounted upon his steed and was commissioned by a local woman called Simplicia.¹⁰ Cintusmus the *aerarius* who dedicated a plaque to Silvanus Callirius at a small temple at Colchester may have made the little figurine of a stag found with it.¹¹

The God of the Smiths

In assessing the range of the figurines priority should be given to one type in particular because it was clearly designed to portray the smith god himself, called Vulcan by the Romans, and indeed in Britain too, as can be seen on the silver votive plaques from Stony Stratford, Bucks. and Barkway, Hertfordshire, where the image of the god is accompanied by his name.¹² One of the most striking and accomplished figurines from Roman Britain is the example from Catterick, Yorkshire (Yorkshire Museum) whose clothing is executed with the crisp linearity which rather recalls the stone carvings of the Carlisle school.¹³ The face has well defined features with staring eyes and the hair and beard are rich and luxuriant (Fig. 5). It is hard to be certain of date but this fine bronze could be as late as the time of Constantine. Others are almost certainly much earlier in date. A figurine from North Bradley, Wiltshire (Devizes Museum) (Fig. 6), also depicts Vulcan and displays patterning in the folds of his clothing which is a feature of insular

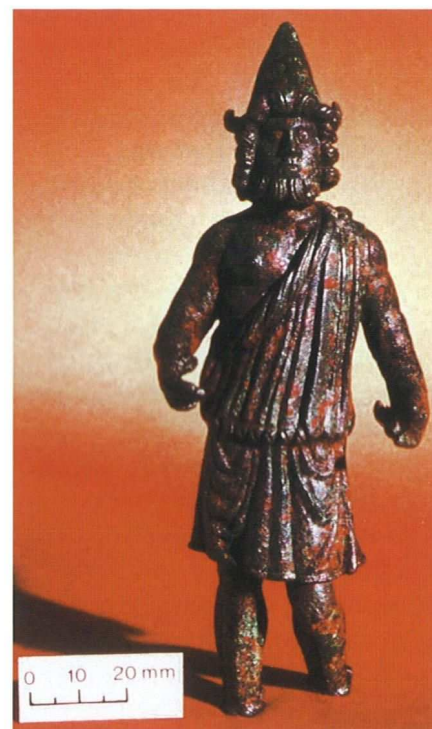


Fig. 5. Bronze figurine of Vulcan from Catterick, Yorks. Ht. 14.5 cm. Photo: Ancient Monuments Laboratory © English Heritage.

art but the smith felt less assured when depicting the face, beard and hair. Clearly the tradition here is different.¹⁴ The North Bradley figurine is stylistically related to another figurine from Badbury, likewise Wiltshire (Fig. 7), but this time probably portraying a Genius.¹⁵ The folds on the mantle and pleats of the tunic show a similar assurance in

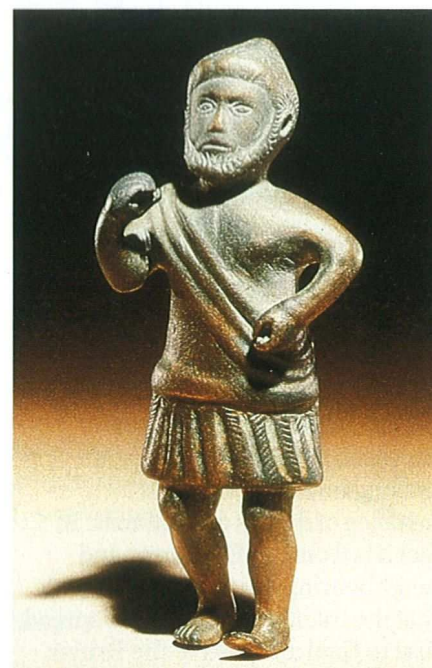


Fig. 6. Bronze figurine of Vulcan from North Bradley, Wilts. Ht. 10.6 cm. Devizes Museum. Photo courtesy of Martin Henig.



Fig. 7. Bronze figurine of a Genius from Badbury, Wilts. Ht. 7.1 cm.
Photo © Institute of Archaeology, Oxford.

modelling, but the face is again mask-like and impassive.

The Iron Age Tradition

These Wiltshire bronzes appear to have been, in part, derived from the pre-Roman Iron Age tradition figurines as can be seen in some rather curious bronzes in a cache from Southbroom near Devizes, almost certainly dating from the first century but discarded and buried by the temple priests as late as the third century.¹⁶ The Southbroom cache, which includes a Vulcan figurine as well as other deities, shows how the schematised image exemplified by the Aust-on-Severn and Henley Wood goddesses took on new features in the form of dress and attributes. This is Romano-British art at its simplest. The next stage is represented by enrichment of body modelling, hair and clothing as presented by another representation of a genius from Earith, Cambridgeshire.¹⁷ This bronze, like that from Catterick, is of very considerable value as a work of art.

Not many statuettes of local manufacture remain, but one of first century date depicting a stag, is known to have been found at a temple site in the Brighton area, Sussex.¹⁸ The haunches of the animal and the antlers are modelled in naturalistic style but the head with its

large circular eyes and the patterned swathes of hair covering its neck are a sign of its Celtic pedigree; It was presumably the familiar of a hunting deity. A statuette of Mercury depicting the god in the act of alighting comes from the sanctuary at Gosbecks near Colchester (Fig. 8).¹⁹ It is highly accomplished in its workmanship, but again it was clearly modelled and cast by a Gaulish or even a British smith, preserving something of the élan of the native tradition.



Fig. 8. Bronze statuette of Mercury from the temple complex at Gosbecks, Colchester. Ht. 53 cm.
Photo © Colchester Museums.

Figurines showing Deities

Figurines are much commoner than statuettes and attest the popularity of particular deities, especially Mercury of whom figurines are attested at several temple sites, for instance those at Great Walsingham, Norfolk, Lamyatt Beacon, Somerset and Uley, Gloucestershire.²⁰ Many of these images show pronounced native features in their appearance, especially their physiognomy, but even the classical-looking figurine of

the god from King Harry Lane, Verulamium, standing on his pedestal and accompanied by his ram, cockerel and tortoise, was decked out with a neck torque.²¹ Perhaps this is the place to mention a silver gilt cockerel from Cirencester (Fig. 9) which probably once accompanied a silver figurine of Mercury and is a reminder that not all images were cast in bronze; some were in precious metals.²² Equally popular in Roman Britain was Mars, of whom conventional standing figures both clothed and nude are frequently found, for instance, the example from the Foss Dyke at Lincoln already mentioned and also at Lamyatt Beacon.²³ There is also a striking portrayal of Mars as a striding, virile warrior (*Mars Gradivus*) found with a cache of votive silver gilt leaves dedicated to Mars from Barkway, Hertfordshire,²⁴ but in Britain he was also widely venerated as a rider-god. These horse and rider groups, when complete, consisted of paired figurines, a horse and its rider, which had to be manufactured separately. The inscribed base from the representation of Mars Corotiacus from Martlesham has already been mentioned. The circular temple at Brigstock, Northamptonshire, has yielded a number of figurines of the type. Several of the horses from this site are especially convincing in their spirited workmanship; one of the best from the site is a horse with grooved and patterned mane standing with one foot planted on a circular object.²⁵ This fine bronze however, is relatively restrained in execution compared to a remarkable representation of Mars riding a spirited mount with a long



Fig. 9. Silver gilt cockerel from Cirencester. Ht. 2.9 cm.
Photo © Institute of Archaeology, Oxford.



Fig. 10. Bronze figurine of Mars riding a horse, from Cambridgeshire. L. 9.3 cm. Photo courtesy of the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

mane knotted into plaits (Fig. 10). Both horse and rider are executed with remarkable attention to line and texture, characteristic of Roman insular art as it had been in the Iron Age. This is a recent find from Cambridgeshire submitted for examination under the Portable Antiquities Scheme. Goddesses are also represented on temple sites, including Venus and Minerva. There are examples of the former, both clearly of native workmanship, from



Fig. 11. Tinned bronze figurine, probably of *Tarvos Trigaranus* from the temple complex at Maiden Castle, Dorset. Ht. 9.5 cm. Dorset County Museum. Photo © Jonathan Gooding.

Woodeaton, Oxfordshire and of the latter from Lamyatt Beacon.²⁶

Animal familiars

Thereomorphic images, where deities are represented in animal form, include a silver coloured tinned bronze from Maiden Castle, Dorset, in the form of a three-horned bull with pronounced dewlaps, topped by three bird-like creatures with the heads of women (one of the heads is missing) (Fig. 11),²⁷ probably representing the bull with three egrets shown in a limestone relief upon the Monument of the Nautae Parisiaci in Paris where it is labelled as *Tarvos Trigaranus* (Fig. 12).²⁸ The number three was of great importance in Celtic lands and its power is evident in three-horned bulls such as the figurine from Holbrook, Suffolk, which wears a band of cloth, a *dorsuale*, around its waist, a feature of Roman cult, showing that the animal had been

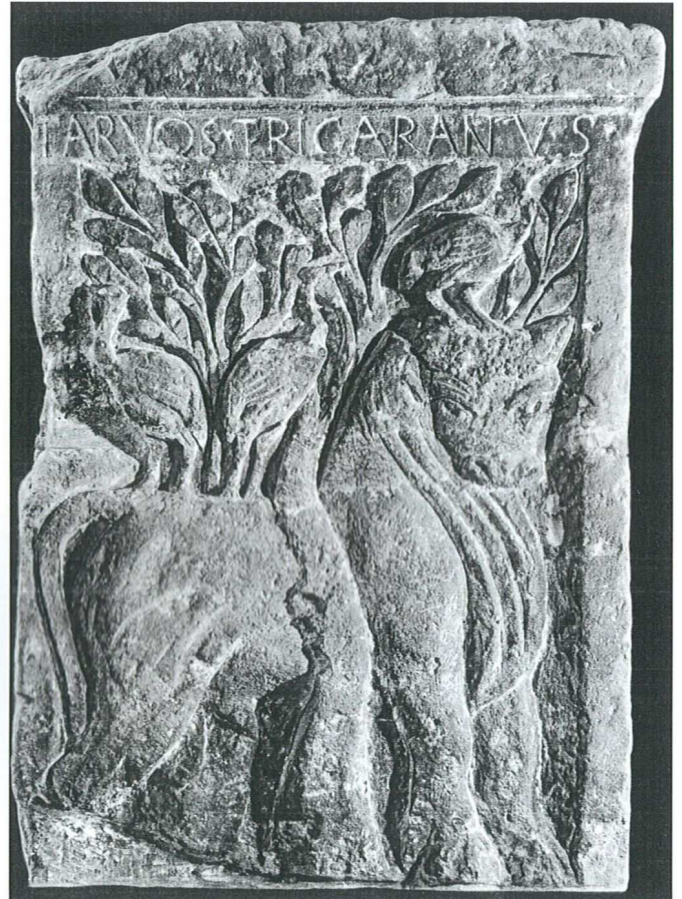


Fig. 12. Limestone relief of *Tarvos Trigaranus* from the Monument of the Nautae Parisiaci, Paris. Musée de Cluny. Photo: Jean Suquet, courtesy of Martin Henig.



Fig. 13. Bronze figurine of a reclining hound, a familiar of Mars Nodens, from the Lydney Park temple complex, Gloucs. L. 8.5 cm. Photo courtesy of the Society of Antiquaries.

prepared for sacrifice.²⁹ Hounds were familiars of Mars Nodens and shown here is the finest of the figurines from Nodens' sanctuary at Lydney Park, Gloucestershire, portraying a reclining hound (Fig. 13).³⁰ It is thought that therapeutic qualities were attributed to the animal, perhaps trained to lick the afflicted limbs of those seeking a cure. Hounds were associated with other deities including in Britain, Apollo *Cunomaglus* (Hound prince), as well

as Diana. There is no way of telling which particular deity the charming figurine of a hound sitting on its haunches, found at Newchurch, Isle of Wight, was meant to evoke.³¹ Much more terrifying is the ferocious man-devouring wolf-like creature, certainly from Oxfordshire and possibly from Woodeaton, a true creation of the Celtic subconscious.³²

Bronzes in the Home

In the home, bronze figures might well have served either a religious or a decorative purpose. In the former instance they would have been displayed within house-shrines (*lararia*) and it is assumed that the very spirited figurine of Venus, nude apart from a drape knotted over her loins, excavated in the cellar of a house in Verulamium (Fig. 14) was employed in this way.³³ This statuette was based on a Hellenistic prototype and as she is holding an apple in her right hand perhaps one is supposed to think of the Judgement of Paris; if so it suggests that the person who owned it understood something of classical mythology. It is a highly accomplished work but the proportions of the body, which seems to be somewhat pear shaped, suggest a provincial smith was responsible. On the other hand, the representation of a muse from



Fig. 14. Bronze figurine of Venus from Verulamium. Ht. 20.5 cm.
Photo © Verulamium Museum.

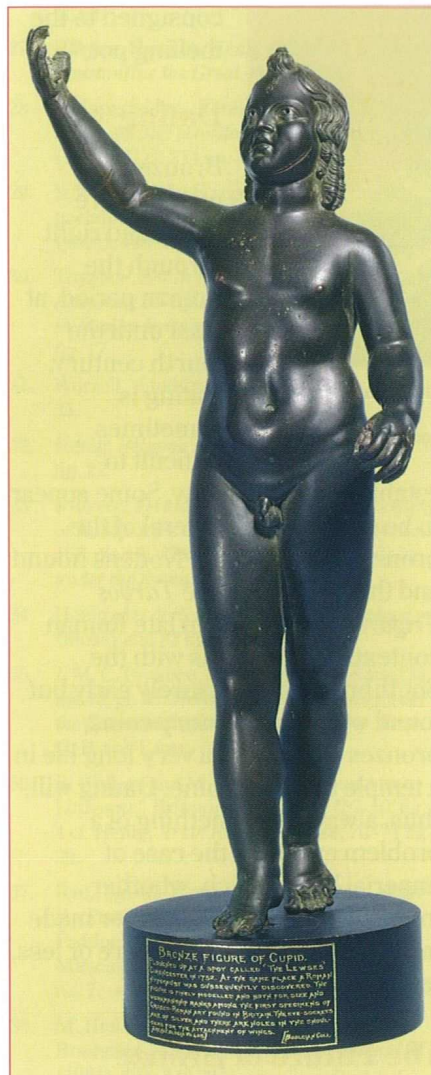


Fig. 15. Bronze statuette of Cupid from Cirencester. Ht. 40.5 cm.
Photo courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

Silchester was probably purely decorative, though this too of course, reveals its owner's culture, as does the larger statuette from London showing either Ulysses or Hercules shooting with a bow.³⁴ The crocodile from Fullerton mentioned above must also belong with such genre items. Of greater use was a Cupid statuette from Cirencester (Fig. 15) which evidently served as a lamp stand in a wealthy town house.³⁵ This is one of the finest specimens of Roman art from Britain, with noteworthy features, such as his crisply rendered hair with top-knot and ringlets (Fig. 16).

Appliqués

A word needs to be said about appliques, attachments to furniture and the like. Amongst the finest examples of such an attachment, and

clearly imported, is the now famous bust of Bacchus-Antinous which is one of the finest works of art from Littlecote Park.³⁶ This is clearly of Hadrianic date. It may be contrasted with an appliqué from Tarrant Hinton, Dorset, in the form of a satyr bust with stylised hair and nebris and another from Cirencester portraying the bust of Venus with almond-shaped eyes and curious geometric and patterned toupee in a Celtic manner.³⁷ Another striking study is a key handle in the form of a lion devouring a man, from excavations at Brampton, Norfolk (Fig. 17), which although probably imported, may have struck a chord with people whose mythology included man-eating monsters (see above).³⁸ Several supports from miniature tripod stands, zoomorphic in character and for the most part Roman in style, include an especially elegant example whose upper part represents a water-bird, perhaps a goose rather than a swan, and the foot is that of a feline and a similar but smaller support from Cirencester in the form of a harpy on a similar foot; more fully feline are the tripod-supports from Wroxeter, Cirencester and London.³⁹ The steelyard weight in the likeness of a bust of Constantine's first wife Fausta, from Kingscote, Gloucestershire (Fig. 18), combines local style with reference to the wider Roman world.⁴⁰ The empress wears a patterned mantle

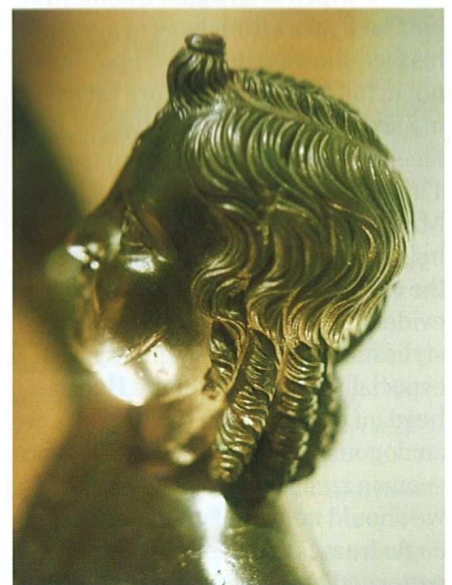


Fig. 16. Detail of the Cupid statuette from Cirencester showing the crisply rendered hair in high relief.
Photo © Grahame Soffe.