NEAR THE HEART OF ROMANO-BRITISH *DUROVERNUM*: EXCAVATIONS AT 70 STOUR STREET, CANTERBURY

DAMIEN BODEN AND JAKE WEEKES

In the Autumn of 2013 a small parcel of land fronting the former Kent County Council office buildings at 70 Stour Street, Canterbury, was excavated in advance of the extension and redevelopment of the existing buildings by Quinn Estates Ltd. The excavation, although limited, revealed an intriguing glimpse into the early development of Romano-British Canterbury, and the temple precinct that lay at its heart.

Four trenches were excavated along the south-east side of Stour Street (centred on TR 14713 57718) which reached the level of the prehistoric and Romano-British archaeology (Figs 1 and 2). Much of this south-west area of the Romano-British temple precinct at Canterbury was excavated in the late 1970s and early 1980s, with interim publications in Archaeologia Cantiana. In lieu of more detailed reports, however, some general suggestions about how the excavation results at 70 Stour Street fit with those of earlier interventions can be made. Of key relevance here is the site at 69A Stour Street (Bennett 1980; 1981, see Fig. 1, CB/R IV), the adjacent property to the south-west of the 70 Stour Street trenches, excavated in 1980, and excavations at Adelaide Place (CB/R V), in 1981 (Bennett 1981). More recent work at 68 Stour Street, which lies at the junction with Adelaide Place, only added slightly to the picture when deposits were revealed beneath a cellar floor (Boden 2014). From a slightly broader perspective, the 1970s excavations carried out on relatively large areas of the precinct to the east, to the rear of 77-9 Castle Street (CB/R I and II; Bennett 1976; 1978), together with reports to the north-east of the site at Beer Cart Lane (CB/R III; Bennett 1979), provide circumstantial evidence for the development of the precinct as a whole. As do the Time Team excavations at Blue Boy Yard early this century (Parfitt undated), to the north of Beer Cart Lane. It is first necessary to give a basic account of the late Iron Age and Romano-British sequence from 70 Stour Street.

The archaeological sequences

The earliest archaeological features to be identified were both located towards the south-eastern corner of Trench 1 (Fig. 3), a nearly circular post-hole (1111) and a small, shallow stake-hole (1114). These cut into natural clay from 8.49m AOD. Post-hole 1111 was c.0.50m across, cut with steep sides and a rounded base to a

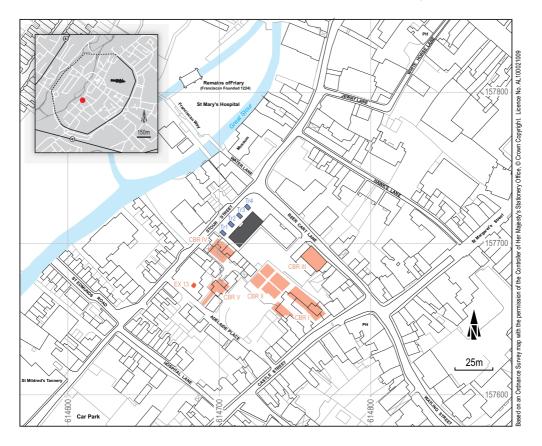


Fig. 1 Location plan: 70 Stour Street (in black) and earlier adjacent and nearby excavations (in brown).

depth of 0.50m and contained a primary fill of a dark clayey silt (1113) overlain by silty clay (1110). Stake-hole 1114 was sub-circular, 0.11m across and 0.15m deep, filled with dark clayey silt, from which a single potsherd in an unidentified fabric was collected.

The truncated remnant of an early soil overlay the fills of these features, a c.0.10m thick layer of mid greenish and yellowish brown, silty clay (1105), from which three potsherds dated to between c.AD 43-300 were recovered.

The first metalled surfaces

The earliest secure evidence of a metalled surface was in Trench 1. At the north-western end of the trench, a lens of natural silty clay, at most 0.02 m thick, overlying the natural river gravels at 8.50 m AOD, was used as the bedding for metalling of irregular gravel in a gritty silty clay matrix (1107), just c.0.04 m thick. More of the same surface (1104) overlay the early silt (1105) to the south, again c 0.04 m thick.

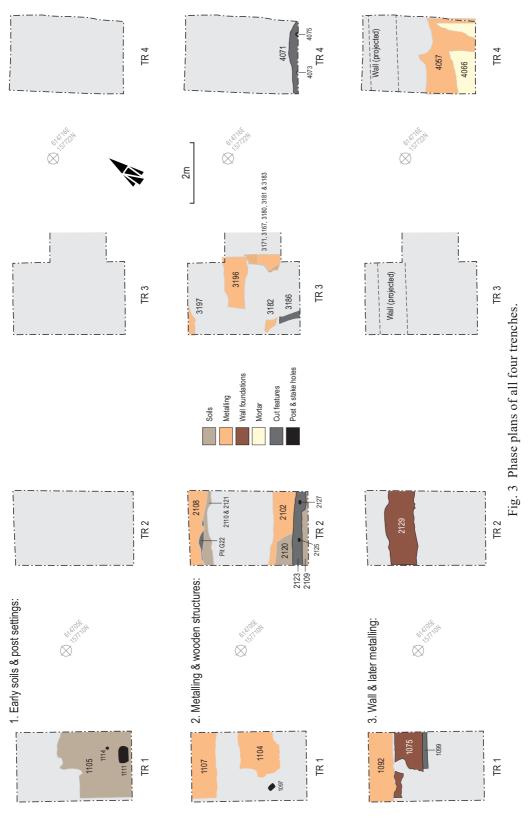
At the north-west end of the trench this initial metalling was topped by a gritty, silty clay (1106), up to 0.14m thick, which contained four sherds of Dr15/17 Samian



Fig. 2 Plan of trenches at 70 Stour Street.

ware (c.AD 43-85), while across the south-eastern extent of the trench the metalling was overlain by a 0.08m thick deposit of dirty, silty clay (1100); this produced nine sherds of pottery with a date range of c.50-150. Deposit 1106 formed the bedding for a second flint metalling in a similar matrix (1103), up to 0.14m thick, its upper surface lying at around 8.60-65 AOD.

Further remnants of early metalling were seen in Trench 3, presenting a fragmented 'jigsaw' of what (no doubt) had once been extensive and thus more readily comprehensible surfaces of mainly small to medium grade angular gravel in silty gritty clay matrices. Metalling 3197, located in the north-western corner of the trench, was a very small patch cut away by later features, impossible to contextualise, as were deposits 3196 and 3183, both located on the north-eastern side of the trench and not more than 0.05m thick. Metalling 3197 lay at 8.45-8.53m AOD, deeper than the natural gravel generally in this trench, at 8.65m AOD. All of the other early surfaces in Trench 3 ranged between c.8.60m and 8.75m AOD, suggesting that 3197 in fact lay within a truncated archaeological feature of some sort.



Metalling 3183, and the southern edge of 3196, were overlain by a c.0.04m thick layer of firm, slightly compacted, silty clay (3181) which contained some small flint pebbles and charcoal, and much oyster shell; this material produced a single potsherd dated to c.43-70. Deposit 3181 was itself overlain by a 0.01-0.12m thick layer of crushed stone (3180), which contained a sherd dated to c.70-120, which in turn formed the bedding of a further thin gravel surface remnant (3167, its surface ranging from 8.77 to 8.89m AOD). Above surface 3167, a 0.03m thick layer of compacted, silty clay (3171) had formed, which contained small fragments of mortar, ceramic building material and charcoal.

In Trench 2, an apparently sterile mixture of clay, gravel and silt overlay the natural gravel. This clay-rich mixed deposit (2110/2121), though ostensibly 'natural' in appearance, is thought to have been redeposited in order to raise the level of the ground in this area. A remnant survived near the north-west end of the trench, about 0.25m thick; it was at least 0.30m thick (the upper surface at c.8.85m AOD) across the south-east end of the trench, and was here overlain by a 0.03m thick layer of lighter clayey silt (2109). A 0.03m thick deposit of dark silty clay (2120), 0.63m wide, which lay across the full width of the trench further to the north was probably part of the same mixed occupation layer. Deposit 2109 contained frequent small charcoal and oyster fragments as well as two potsherds from a native combed jar (c.50 BC-AD 150) and eight sherds dated to c.AD 70-110/120; deposit 2120 produced two sherds dated to c.AD 80-150/75.

At the north-west end of Trench 2, the make-up layer (2110/2121) was cut by a shallow feature of indeterminate shape (2119), in excess of 1.30m long, and 0.34m wide, with steep sides and a flattish base to a depth of 0.20m. The primary fill was a dark silty clay (2117) with frequent small to medium sized pieces of flint gravel and occasional large fragments of ceramic building material; this fill was overlain by a dark, compacted silty clay (2140).

A thin layer of flint metalling (2102) capped the silty clay (2120) nearer the south-east end of Trench 2. This remnant of metalling was 0.05m thick, between 0.76 and 0.90m wide and extended across the full width of the trench, its upper surface at an average of c.8.90m AOD. This material was found to contain a gold quarter stater (SF28) dated to c.AD 20-40, naming the South-Eastern late Iron Age overlord Cunobelinus (Fig. 4).

At the north-west end of the trench, feature 2119 and earlier deposits were completely sealed by a 0.10m thick layer of gravel metalling (2108), its upper surface at approximately 8.95m AOD.



Fig. 4 The gold coin of Cunobelinus.

Wooden structure(s)

Along the southern edge of Trench 2, the thin occupation/tread deposits (2109/2120) of the previous surface were cut by a ground beam-slot (2123) which extended across the full width of the trench, aligned roughly north-east/south-west, 0.33m wide and 0.20m deep, and steep sided to a flat base. The feature contained a flint gravel packing (2122) along its north-western side and the silt-filled impression of a probable c.0.25m wide and 0.18m deep timber ground beam (2111) running along its north-eastern side, along with a clayey silt fill generally (2124). Two subcircular post-holes (2125; 2127) cut the base of the beam-slot, both c.0.20m wide and 0.25m deep, and each containing a gravelly, silty fill. A single sherd from a combed jar dated to c.70-150 was recovered from deposit (2124) and three sherds, one from a combed jar (c.50 BC-AD 150), one dated to c.AD 43-80 and one dated to c.AD 80-175, were collected from deposit (2111).

Another very similar beam-slot directly cut the natural gravels in Trench 4 (4071) again with integral post settings, again along the south-eastern side of the trench. The feature had a maximum width of 0.30m, and steep, concave sides to a slightly concave base 0.15m deep. The two near circular post-holes (4073; 4075) were 0.15m-0.20m wide and 0.24m-0.27m deep, filled by gritty silts and clays, which were in turn overlain within the entire linear feature by gritty, clayey silt.

At the south-east end of Trench 3, the side of a further feature (3186), thought to be the truncated remnant of another linear, was recorded, c.0.70m in extent with a steep edge and a flat base 0.14m deep. This contained fills likely to derive from disturbed metalling and tread, with silty clays full of flint pebbles, fragments of ceramic building materials, charcoal and oyster shell, but no finds.

Masonry wall and associated features

In Trench 1, occupation deposit 1100 and metalling 1103 were cut by a roughly north-east/south-west aligned construction trench (1075). The foundation trench was 0.95m wide and contained the remains of the wall foundation (1074) constructed of large flint pebbles and nodule fragments bonded and overlain by an off-white, soft lime mortar which showed the impressions of squared masonry on in its upper surface. Deposit (1100) was also cut by a small, almost rectangular post-hole (1097) to the south-west, and by a shallow, narrow gully (1099), a drain, which extended along the south-eastern side of the wall foundation. Post-hole 1097 was just 0.12m deep and contained a dark clayey silt fill (1096). Drain 1099 survived to 1.20m long and was 0.18m wide, cut with a concave profile, and also filled by a clayey silt (1098).

The wall foundation continued into Trench 2, where metallings were cut by the same, linear, steep-sided and flat-based construction trench (2129), here some 0.80m wide and 0.53m deep. The cut was again filled by large, angular and sub-angular flint nodule fragments, as well as large, rounded and sub-angular flint pebbles (2128) which were overlain by patches of light to mid brown, hard, sandy mortar. In Trenches 3 and 4 robber cuts confirmed the original continuation of the wall.

Later metalled surfaces and use

In Trench 4 the fill of the defunct beam-slot was overlain by a thin and patchy

deposit of light grey, soft, gritty, clayey silt with patches of a dark loose, gritty silt (4067) which extended over most of the southern half of the trench. This material was overlain by a compacted, off-white, sandy mortar deposit (4066), up to 0.04m thick and again extending over most of the southern half of the trench. The mortar contained a single potsherd dated to c.AD 43-300. Deposit (4066) was overlain by a 0.02-0.11m thick layer of fairly compacted flint gravel (4057), a disturbed metalling which extended over the southern half of the trench up to between 8.90 and 9.95m AOD. The gravel contained a fragment of Dr31 Samian (c.AD 150-200). A mottled, soft, sandy and gritty silt (4047/4056) had built up over this surface, up to 0.08m thick. This material contained many small fragments of mortar, opus signinum, ceramic building material, stone, charcoal, oyster and animal bone.

The latest surviving metalling in Trench 1 (1092) abutted and partially overlay the north-western face of wall 1074. This surface was composed of small rounded pebbles and was 0.05m thick, its upper level at 8.72m AOD, and it extended beyond the north-western end of the trench.

A number of Roman coins were recovered in residual contexts resulting from early medieval robbing of masonry from the site, including identifiable issues in Trenches 1-3 (**Table 1**).

TABLE 1. ROMAN COINS FOUND AT 70 STOUR STREET

SF53	Copper Alloy	Dupondius of Marcus Aurelius: AD 166. Reverse: P XX IMP IIII COS III; Roma.
SF15	Copper Alloy	Barbarous radiate c .AD 270-290. Reverse: illegible.
SF17	Copper Alloy	<i>Nummus</i> of the House of Valentinian I, AD 375, ae3. Reverse: SECVRITAS REIPVBLICAE. Mint Arles, 2nd officina.
SF26	Copper Alloy	Eugenius, <i>c</i> .AD 392-394. Reverse: VICTORIA AVGGG. Mint Arles.

INTERPRETATION (Fig. 5)

In order to properly contextualise the archaeology of this site it is first important to note the variation in levels of the superficial geology lying at the base of the trench sequences. A gradual dropping away of the level from north-west to south-east is recorded. The compacted natural gravel in Trench 4 lay at around 8.70m AOD, in Trench 3 at 8.65, in Trench 2 at 8.60, and in Trench 1 a dipping profile of thickening natural clay overlay the ancient river gravels, its upper surface at *c*.8.40m AOD. This mostly gradual slope is likely to represent an existing localised landform that would have been the 'blank canvas' for the Roman-period architects of the temple *temenos* and precinct. With this in mind, the Roman period archaeology at 70 Stour Street can be interpreted as follows.

The earliest features, post- and stake-holes in Trench 1, are likely to be first-century AD in date, spanning the late Iron Age and early Roman period, or earlier, since they were either surmounted by, or perhaps cut from within, the early soil

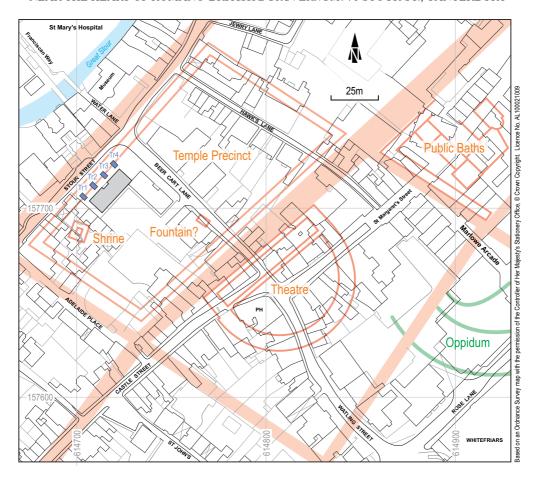


Fig. 5 Interpretation with evidence from previous excavations of walls and shrine as previously published. No. 70 Stour Street trenches, with wall and projection overlaid, in relation to major features of early Roman Canterbury and to the Iron Age *oppidum*.

horizon. The latter is perhaps part of the typical 'grey loam', seen at the base of many Iron Age to Roman sequences in Canterbury. The soil may well have been truncated in antiquity to the level at which it was discovered, thus only surviving where the natural landform dipped.

Previous nearby excavations at 69A Stour Street and Adelaide Place both identified an early 'pebble-studded' soil overlying natural brickearth, strewn with late Iron Age occupation debris and cut by two small pits. Three mid-to-late first-century AD ovens were also identified cutting this horizon at one or both sites (Bennett 1981, 279). This could accord with the truncated early soil and features seen in Trench 1 at 70 Stour Street. The *Time Team* excavations at Blue Boy Yard reported a similar deposit at the base of the sequence there, in this case no doubt truncated to this level by later disturbance.

The levelling of the early soil and the lens of natural clay in Trench 1 is taken as the interface for the first metalling of the area, in Trenches 1 and 3; subsequent use of

this probably extensive surface is represented by compacted soil horizons and tread in both trenches. At least one, and possibly more episodes of resurfacing and soil build-up and tread are suggested by the evidence in Trench 3 in particular. This phase of activity, based on a qualitative reading of the combined pottery evidence, could date from the third quarter of the first century AD to the early second century. This in fact accords reasonably well, especially given the drop in the level of the natural and truncated soil in Trench 1, with the early metallings reported at 69A Stour Street and Adelaide Place, further to the south-west, where the laying of a 'dump of brickearth' sealed early features and was surmounted by the first metalled surface in that area, dated to 'c.AD 70-80' (presumably a *terminus post quem*; Bennett 1981, 279).

It is worth noting here that some of the earliest Romano-British features reported in previous excavations within the precinct area were in fact small streets. As might be expected, these lay on the early street alignment at Canterbury, superseded in about AD 110 (see Weekes 2020). One of these streets was seen during the 1977 excavations to the north-west of Castle Street, revealing wheel-ruts and horses' hoof marks, but just 2.1m wide (Bennett 1978, 275). The early deposits and features on those sites nearest to 70 Stour Street at 69A, and at Adelaide Place, were also associated with small streets, again only about 2m wide. That at 69A apparently lay on a similar alignment to modern day Stour Street, while the Adelaide Place street was approximately at right angles. All these early streets were associated with early metalled surfaces (Bennett 1978, 275; 1979, 271; 1981, 279). It may well be significant for interpretations at 70 Stour Street, therefore, that the early street at 69A was reported as cut by the masonry wall of the later precinct (see below), as this raises the possibility that at least some of the earliest metallings at the north end of 70 Stour Street Trenches 1 and 3 were in fact also surfaces of the same street. The earliest in a sequence of six metalled surfaces was reported from excavations to the south-east of 70 Stour Street, in the direction of Castle Street, in 1977 (Bennett 1978, 275), and an apparently extensive sequence was also seen at 3 Beer Cart Lane, adjacent and to the north-east of the Castle Street sites, there given a broad date from the first to the fourth centuries (Bennett 1979, 270-1). All may belong to this same early phase. The primary metalling at Beer Cart Lane was reportedly associated with a wall, not of monumental scale but probably part of a building, which had been demolished and was sealed by at least two later metallings (ibid.). There is a real possibility, therefore, that a street layout and associated buildings and yard surfaces may in fact have preceded the formalising of the temple temenos at Canterbury.

Nearer to 70 Stour Street, partial remains of an ambulatory and *cella* for a small timber shrine, in the classic Romano-Celtic form, were recorded at 69A as being built in the first century AD and continuing in use until demolition in the third (Bennett 1981, 280); exactly how this building and use related to the precinct development is unclear from currently available information. Bennett reports that all the early surfaces at 69A and Adelaide Place were 'sealed by further dumped deposits' (*ibid.*), and we have noted that at some stage the level of the ground surface was certainly raised in Trench 2 at 70 Stour Street, and, by inference, in Trench 3, where the evidence was apparently lost to later disturbance. Such a make-up deposit may similarly have extended as far as Trench 1 and beyond.

In any case, while the dating of this development is difficult to discern, it is clear

that a wooden structure, or structures, at 70 Stour Street at least were cut from this raised level, through the make-up material in Trench 2, and into the higher natural gravels in Trench 4. The thin occupation layers on top of the make-up layer in Trench 2 contained pottery giving a combined date range of about AD 80-120. While the evidence remains slight, this date for a levelling up and new structures would actually accord with the building of the first theatre to the north-east, a potentially significant correlation.

It is possible that the beam-slots in Trenches 2 and 4 at 70 Stour Street represent separate buildings, perhaps further shrines like that seen at 69A, but the similar design, alignment and contemporaneity of the features at 70 Stour Street rather suggest that they formed a single linear structure; perhaps the original north-west demarcation of the *temenos* precinct. The remnant of a feature on the same alignment in Trench 3, and perhaps even truncated post-holes in Trench 1, could be further evidence of the same structure or earlier iterations. It seems likely that the thin metalling in Trench 2 at least was laid down as part of the same development, perhaps abutting the structure.

All of the foregoing allows for a range of interesting hypotheses for the large masonry precinct wall materially evidenced in Trenches 1 and 2 and marked out by robber cuts in Trenches 3 and 4 at Stour Street. The 70 Stour Street wall must be considered equivalent to that seen at 69A, where it was interpreted as the inner, stylobate foundation, thought to bound the entire precinct. This double wall arrangement had first been recorded to the rear of properties in Castle Street in 1976 (Bennett 1976, 238-9), when a large street was discovered that (significantly) aligned with the rear wall of the theatre and indeed the early street pattern more generally. To the north-west of this main street were large robber trenches of the precinct walls, the inner wall being interpreted as colonnaded on large stone blocks. Excavation at Adelaide Place in 1980 (Bennett 1980, 270-1) demonstrated that the double-wall arrangement continued on the south-west side of the precinct. The projected outer wall was not seen at 69A or 70 Stour Street. This of course could be a function of the location of the trenches, but it still must be admitted that there is as yet a lack of proof that the double-wall configuration continued on to the north-west side of the precinct. More interesting is the suggestion that the precinct was enlarged towards the north-west when the masonry wall or walls were built, if the timber structure evidenced at 70 Stour Street was indeed a boundary of an earlier, smaller temenos.

Bennett reports a 'well-defined construction horizon' extending across both Adelaide Place and 69A sites, which accords well with the make-up layers for the metalled surface in Trench 4 at 70 Stour Street. Recent work at 68 Stour Street, which lies at the junction with Adelaide Place, added slightly to this picture, when similar deposits were revealed beneath a later cellar (Boden 2014). The metalled surface in Trench 4 was clearly laid after the timber-framed building therein had been removed, and the fact that it indeed lay on a substantial mortar bedding deposit in itself suggests some association with a major building project. If this was the newly walled precinct, or the addition of a stylobate, for example, it could be significant that the metalling in Trench 4 post-dated the middle of the second century, containing a potsherd dated AD 150-200.

The precinct and associated features certainly continued to be developed in later

phases, as evidenced by the probable mortar-lined tanks, thought to be associated with fountains or other water features, at 3 Beer Cart Lane; the large 'D' shaped tank there was set into 'the final metalling' which had been laid over the water pipes feeding the feature (Bennett 1979, 270-1). Perhaps broadly contemporary with these refurbishments is the latest surviving, pebbly surface in Trench 1 at 70 Stour Street, which post-dated the precinct wall, and could therefore date to the third century or later. Evidence of fourth-century activity in the precinct appears to have been completely removed by later disturbance at 70 Stour Street.

CONCLUSION: MORE QUESTIONS

Despite typical limitations of access to the Iron Age and Romano-British evidence, a function of nearly two millennia of disturbance and a trench plan based on the developer's foundation requirements, it has been possible to provisionally integrate the findings from the four separate trenches at 70 Stour Street, as well as provisionally linking this particular site narrative with the reports from other nearby excavations.

The late Iron Age use of the area remains unclear. The coin minted at *Camulodunum* found in a later feature adds to a known corpus of such finds from the area, ranging in date from the early first century BC onwards (see Bennett 1976, 240, and Holman undated), but none in securely contemporaneous contexts. Some sort of, potentially ritualised, concentration of such material is suggested, but then so are pits, ovens and the like. The use of the three ditches of the Iron Age 'oppidum' enclosure to the east of the later precinct area is in fact equally enigmatic, with interleafing evidence of apparently domestic, industrial and funereal activity, and an uncertain chronology. Indeed, an initial function of the precinct as a high-status funerary enclosure in the late Iron Age could be a valid hypothesis to test in Canterbury (cf. Folly Lane, St Albans: Niblett 1999).

The provision of early streets within the precinct area is intriguing if some sort of ritual continuity is posited. It seems rather to speak of typically organic development of the early street layout in the town (cf. Weekes 2020), and not the ritual delineation of a *temenos* based on Iron Age ancestor cult. Should we allow for the possibility that the area only became a temple precinct following initial development of streets with town houses and courtyards?

The evidence for levelling up of the precinct area and installation of a possible wooden boundary structure at 70 Stour Street is perhaps a more certain origin for the temenos, being defined and laid out at the same time as the first theatre in Canterbury with which it would have been typically connected in Gallo-Roman style. Such a boundary would have lain to the south-east of the road seen at 69A, and possibly 70 Stour Street, a road that was in all likelihood an 'upgrade' of the prehistoric valley route.

We might also hypothesise that the monumentalising of the precinct with 'outer temenos wall and inner stylobate' could have been associated with the building of the second theatre in the late second or early third century, a considerable 'makeover' that may also have extended the precinct to the north-west. The question of whether this extension did indeed consist of a double wall surrounding the entire precinct, or just on the Theatre and Watling Street sides, must await

actual evidence. The possibility that there was only one wall on the Stour Street side should be borne in mind. Such a 'front and back' to the precinct, with the main streets faced by special forms of embellishment, would be neither unprecedented nor particularly surprising; it would actually be even more interesting from an anthropological perspective.

REFERENCES

Bennett, P., 1976, '78-9 Castle Street, Canterbury', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 92, 238-40. Bennett, P., 1978, '77-79 Castle Street, Canterbury. Stage 2', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 94, 275-7.

Bennett, P., 1979, 'No. 3 Beer Cart Lane', Archaeologia Cantiana, 95, 270-3.

Bennett, P., 1980, '68-69a Stour Street', Archaeologia Cantiana, 96, 406-10.

Bennett, P., 1981, '68-69a Stour Street', Archaeologia Cantiana, 97, 279-81.

Boden, D., 2014, '68 Stour Street, Canterbury, Kent, Excavation and Watching Brief report', unpubl. CAT report no. 2014/155.

Holman, D., in Parfitt undated.

Niblett, R., 1999, *The Excavation of a Ceremonial Site at Folly Lane, Verulamium*, Britannia Monograph no. 14, London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies.

Parfitt, K., undated, 'Excavations in Blue Boy Yard, Canterbury', *Time Team* Trench 5, August 2000 archive report.

Weekes, J., 2020, 'Excavations in Westgate Gardens, Canterbury, revealing the changing character of Roman Watling Street, and *Durovernum's* evolving street layout', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 141, 260-74.