6

Roman religious sites in the landscape

DAVID BIRD

The discovery of a second temple at Wanborough, together with other recent work at Farley Heath, Betchworth, Godstone and Frensham, has drawn renewed attention to Roman religious sites in Surrey. New interpretations have also suggested that other sites may have had a ritual significance. As a result, we now know of several certain or possible religious sites in the county. This paper aims to review the evidence for these sites and consider their functions in an attempt to understand the way they were placed in the landscape. At the same time consideration is given to the reasons why some sites had temples while others apparently did not.

Introduction

Discussion of Romano-British religion often concentrates on the buildings and associated objects, and there has been much less consideration of the settings of the temples, and the reasons why particular places had temples at all (Derks 1998, 131, but see Wilson 1973 and Blagg 1986). Several sites are now known in Surrey that may have been of religious significance in the Roman period, some of which may have had temples that have not yet been discovered, while others almost certainly did not (fig 6.1). The understanding of these sites requires consideration of other places in southern Britain and further afield; it is valid to use parallels from the western Empire, as it is clear that religious practices and beliefs were generally very similar. In the Roman period local deities were assimilated to the Roman gods, and temples as such were largely a Roman introduction: they were homes for the gods. Nevertheless, although Romano-Celtic temples are often spoken of as though they are all similar across the country, closer examination suggests that their locations vary from area to area and this may indicate that there are locally significant customs, perhaps *civitas*-related.

Pre-Roman religion in Britain seems to have been mostly a matter of worshipping the gods and goddesses of the locality, and for most people this continued in the Roman period. In a sense the whole landscape was sacred. Miranda Green talks of 'the endowment with sanctity of natural features – a river, spring, lake, tree, mountain or simply a particular valley or habitat. The gods were everywhere' (Green 1986, 22; cf Henig 1984, 168). It will, however, be evident that there were sites of special ritual significance in prehistory at least as far back as the Neolithic. We are now used to the idea that some of them were placed with careful consideration of their place in the landscape. In the Roman period most attention centres on temples, and it is more difficult to assess the setting of other sites that may have had religious significance. It is also necessary to try to take account of what the landscape would have been like at the time, but this is also difficult, as we know so little about the landscape of Surrey in the Roman period. An attempt to explore what evidence we have for the London area suggests that there would have been marked differences across the Surrey landscape then just as there are today (Bird 1996), but at present we can do little more than make informed guesses based on the known sites and the geological background.

The purpose of temples

In the Roman period, religion was practised on a daily basis in the home, and we know of small household shrines from places like Ostia and Herculaneum. By their nature they would be difficult to recognize on British archaeological sites, although a few candidates have been identified in towns (Boon 1983). We quite often have evidence for shrines at villas, for instance Rapsley (Hanworth 1968, 17; cf Bird 1987, 175), and there were of course temples in towns and probably all larger settlements. It is likely that there were also local wayside shrines (Henig 1984, 59); it would be difficult to find archaeological evidence for such things but examples are shown on samian bowls (fig 6.2) (Ludowici & Ricken 1948, Tafn 62, 12; 69, 2; 70, 5; for a reconstruction see Zelle 2000, 65). They may have been quite a regular feature of the landscape, particularly at cross-roads.

If there were household shrines then rural temples must have served a special purpose. If we now have a reasonable idea of their numbers and distribution then they will have been too far apart for everyday use. Indeed where there is evidence of the reasons for offerings, it is clear that circumstances out of the ordinary were involved: stolen property recovered; a journey or business deal successfully accomplished; health restored (a major concern) (Henig 1984, 151). A special trip to the temple might be made on such an occasion, and there is also evidence for annual or more frequent ceremonies; there was in fact a Roman religious calendar with regular festivals, and enough to show that there would have been something similar in native tradition (Henig 1984, 26–32). Animal bones recovered at British temple sites suggest sacrifices at certain times of year (Legge *et al* 2000), and these occasions were probably rather like medieval fairs. Literary evidence from Italy hints at what might

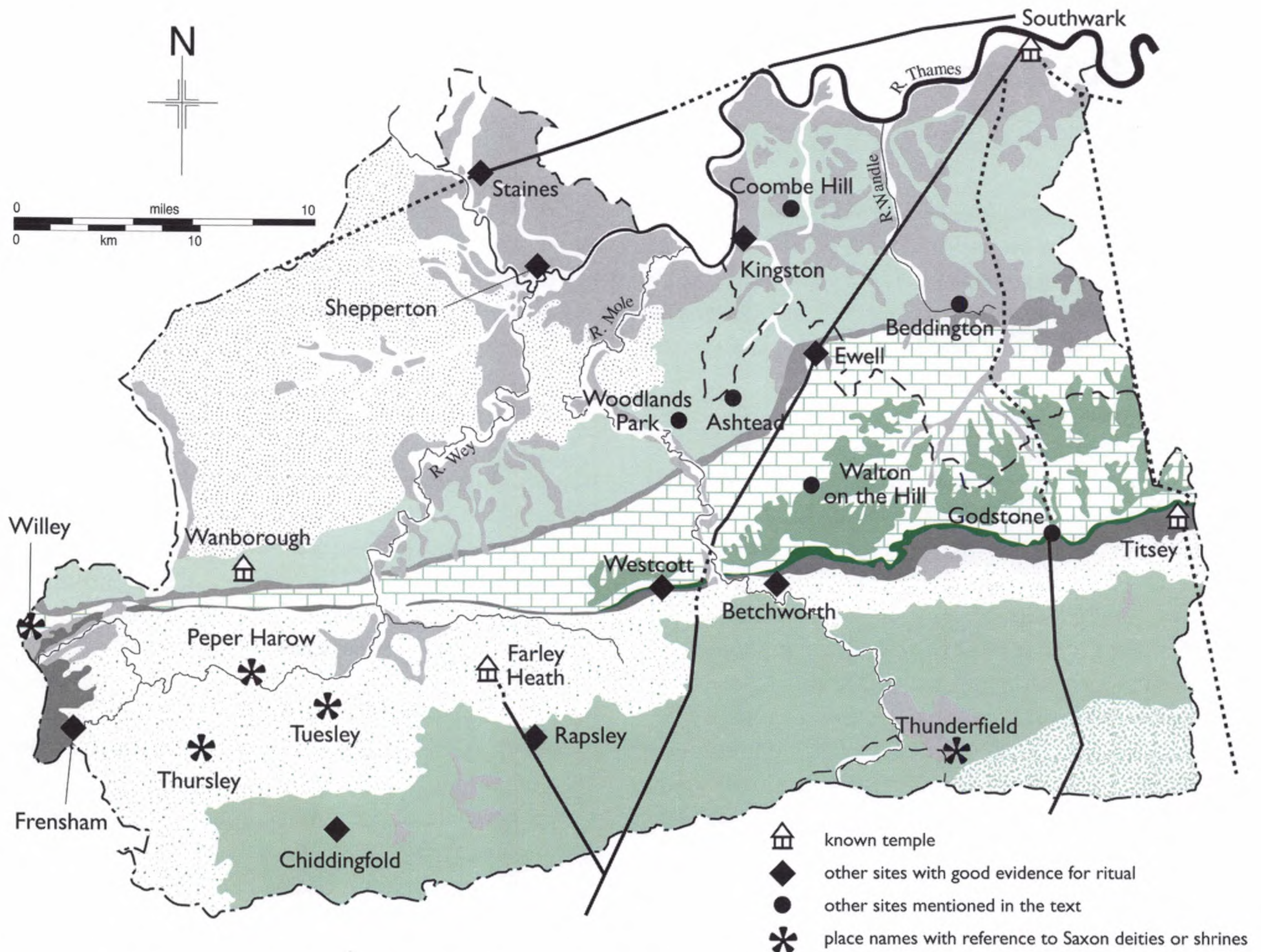


Fig 6.1 Locations of places mentioned in the text. For key to geological background see map on page x.

have been involved, as in this extract from one of Pliny the Younger's letters (see also the extract from letter 4.1, quoted below).

> I am told by the soothsayers that I must rebuild the temple of Ceres which stands on my property; it needs enlarging and improving, for it is certainly very old and too small considering how crowded it is on its special anniversary, when great crowds gather there from the whole district on 13 September and many ceremonies are performed and vows made and discharged. But there is no shelter nearby from rain or sun, so I think it will be an act of generosity and piety alike to build as fine a temple as I can and add porticoes – the temple for the goddess and the porticoes for the public. (Letter 9.39, to Mustius; Radice 1963, 258–9)

It is interesting that Pliny says that vows were made and discharged on such occasions, which may suggest that one could wait for some time to take the appropriate action in fulfilment of a vow. The system of making and paying vows is known throughout the Empire (Henig 1984, 32–3); in Britain it is clearly demonstrated for example by the lead tablets at Uley (Tomlin 1993) and inscriptions with the formula VSLLM, standing for *votum solvit laetus libens merito*, that is, 'paid his vow joyfully, freely and deservedly' (Hassall 1977, 80). It is likely that at Surrey sites the use of organic materials for the writing of vows means that the evidence is lost. This idea is supported by finds from Wanborough: two 'ox-goads' (Bird 1994, 128) and two recently discovered seal-box lids (Joanna Bird, pers comm). Discoveries at Vindolanda now suggest that the former may actually have been used as pens (Birley 2002, 35), while it has been proposed that seal-boxes at Great Walsingham were used to contain the wax seals of written vows (Bagnall Smith 1999, 50). Finds of seal-box lids are rare in Surrey, so it is interesting that another example is known from a possibly sacred site at Ewell (Orton, 1997, 105). In this area of poor quality building stone there may also have been wooden inscriptions recording the payment of the vows; inscriptions on wood certainly existed, as an official example from Hadrian's Wall makes clear (Collingwood & Wright 1965, 596, no 1935), but of course such survivals are very rare.

It was apparently possible for the vows to be made, and paid, to any deity at many temples, even though there is a tendency among modern writers to claim a particular dedication for each one. Henig (1984, 148)

notes the lack of exclusiveness even at sites apparently closely related to a specific cult. Some vow-makers at the temple 'of Mercury' at Uley had to be reminded that this was the appropriate deity rather than Mars or Silvanus, or referred to him as Mars Mercury (Tomlin 1993, 121–3). Perhaps we should be thinking more in terms of a deity of the locality, who could therefore be worshipped in many different guises, appropriate to different activities and needs. Even some of the exotic Eastern religions are represented by finds at standard Romano-Celtic temples, as at Woodeaton (Henig 1984, 162); a Christian object was dedicated at Uley (Henig 1993, 109).

Pliny's letters also throw light on the role of the local landowner or the community in the construction and upkeep of temples. There are of course no first-hand accounts from Roman Britain but the evidence from Roman Italy is relevant, bearing in mind that the native religious world of this area had a great deal in common with Britain, as the way in which Roman gods were assimilated with British deities demonstrates. These two further extracts are especially interesting:

> Close to my property is the town of Tifernum on Tiber which adopted me as its patron when I was scarcely more than a child [...] The people always celebrate my arrivals, regret my departures, and rejoice in my official titles, and so to express my gratitude [...] I defrayed the cost of building a temple in the town. As this is now completed, it would be sacrilegious to postpone its dedication any longer. So we shall be there for the day of the dedication, which I have decided to celebrate with a public feast, and we may have to stay on for the day following. (Letter 4.1, to Calpurnius Fabatus, Pliny's wife's grandfather; Radice 1963, 109)

> [At the source of the Clitumnus] is a holy temple of great antiquity in which is a standing image of the god Clitumnus himself clad in a magistrate's bordered robe [...] The bridge which spans the stream marks the sacred water off from the the ordinary stream: above the bridge boats only are allowed, while below bathing is also permitted. The people of Hispellum, to whom the deified Emperor Augustus presented the site, maintain a bathing place at the town's expense and also provide an inn. (Letter 8.8, to Voconius Romanus; Radice 1963, 216–7)

These letters draw attention particularly to the role of the 'élite' as sponsors; the temple on the landowner's property, but used by the whole district; a town or community owning a sacred site, providing baths and an inn for worshippers. Woolf (1998, 162) shows that in Roman Gaul the élite in towns were the same people as in the countryside. It was of course expected of them that they would demonstrate their standing in the local community by the building of public monuments (for example Woolf 1998, 1–2; 231). It can readily be argued that in a like manner the known temples in Britain reflect the involvement of local landowners or the Romano-British 'élite'. Henig (1984, 141) points out that 'temples with their cult images and altars, arches, screens and columns, were built or given by officials, merchants and gentry, to enhance their prestige in the community'. According to Tacitus, Agricola encouraged the Britons to build temples, *fora* and noble houses when he was Governor (Woolf 1998, 216–8 with discussion). These temples need not have been classical.

There is a tendency to describe the religion of the Romano-British countryside as 'native' with the implication that it is peasant and local, and that rural temples are different from town temples. In fact the standard 'rural' temple, the Romano-Celtic type, is common in towns, as for example at Silchester (Boon 1974, 152–8). The evidence available from inscriptions and offerings shows that there was no noticeable difference in cult practices between Romano-Celtic temples and more classical types (Henig 1984, 14; cf Cheesman 1994, 33–4). Indeed the architecture of a largely classical temple at Bath can be described as 'idiosyncratic and celticising' (Henig 2002, 48). Although largely restricted to the north-western Empire, Romano-Celtic temples are essentially a

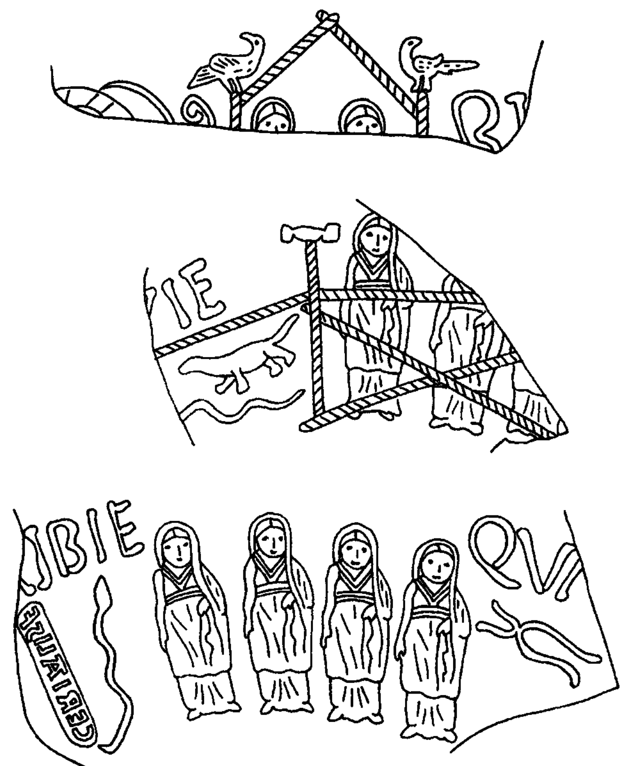


Fig 6.2 Wayside shrines on samian bowls stamped by Cerealis of Rheinzabern. The inscriptions indicate that they were set at two-, three- or four-way junctions. Drawing by Joanna Bird

Roman period phenomenon (Smith 2001, 10; Derks 1998, 183), and what might be called the higher echelons of society, either individually or as a ruling group of an area (*pagus* or *civitas*), must have played a major role in their construction (Derks 1998, 184).

The temples use Romano-British building techniques: they are mostly stone built, or with stone foundations, have tiled roofs, and are in general very reminiscent of villas. We must surely accept that this indicates the involvement of the people who would think in terms of building like this and know where to find the materials and expertise – and the money. There is also a need to take more account of someone owning the land in some way – we have enough evidence from Roman Britain to indicate that land could be owned privately (Bird 1996, 222), and perhaps some was also held in common by a *civitas*. The élite is also likely to have provided the priests for these temples, as can be shown for Gaul (Woolf 1998, 233–4) and Germany (Carroll 2001, 44). The size and embellishment of Christian churches usually reflects the importance of the church and the interest and support of local worthies. It may be that in Roman Britain the sites which have temples are like the bigger churches, ones where someone has taken an interest and put in resources. If this is the case then there will be other Roman-period sacred sites with no obvious marker in the shape of a temple.

Sacred sites without temples

It is clear that temples are associated with sacred sites, that is, they are not themselves essential; this can be demonstrated by the examples of carefully planned regular enclosures which have temples placed off centre, implying the presence of something more important in the middle. The point is very well illustrated by the story of pagans being upset by St Martin cutting down a sacred tree, whereas they had been resigned to the loss of the temple, and the off-centre temple at Drevant in France, whose name apparently comes from *Derventum*, 'the meeting place by the oak tree' (Knight, 1999, 118 and fig 40, 114). In Britain a comparable example would be the temple at Gosbecks (Smith 2001, 229), and the point is also made by the replacement of one temple at Wanborough by another in a nearby but different position (Williams 2000, 437; forthcoming). Roman period temple-less sacred sites can be clearly demonstrated in Gaul (Derks 1998, 132) and in north-west Spain (the most 'Celtic' part of Hispania) (Keay, 161–2). Derks (1998, 200) notes that 'the essence of a Roman sanctuary is not the presence of a temple, but a clearly recognizable enclosure, marking the boundary between the sacred terrain and its profane surroundings'.

There were certainly some local sites regarded as sacred which would not have had temples, represented for example by the pewter plates deposited in a watery environment at Shepperton Ranges in the late Roman period (Poulton & Scott 1993). A similar explanation might account for the discovery of coins and other objects at a stream crossing in Kingston (Hammerson 1996, 154–5; Hawkins 1996, 49–50). Findspots of large numbers of scattered coins or groups of finds such as brooches should be examined more generally to see if they could point to sites of religious significance that never 'grew' temples (cf Derks 1998, 132–3). Sacred sites indicated only by scatters of votive finds could be the explanation for two sites recently found in Surrey, at Frensham and Godstone, both marked out by Roman coins and other objects. At Frensham work led by David Graham has plotted several hundred coins and excavation has produced fragments of sceptre binding (fig 6.3) and a special bronze vessel together with at least 65 miniature pots, some set in pits with burnt material. There can be little doubt that these are evidence for ritual. Tests on one of the first pots to be found has suggested the presence of cannabis (Graham 2000; 2001). At Godstone there are again many coins, but also brooches (fig 6.4) and other

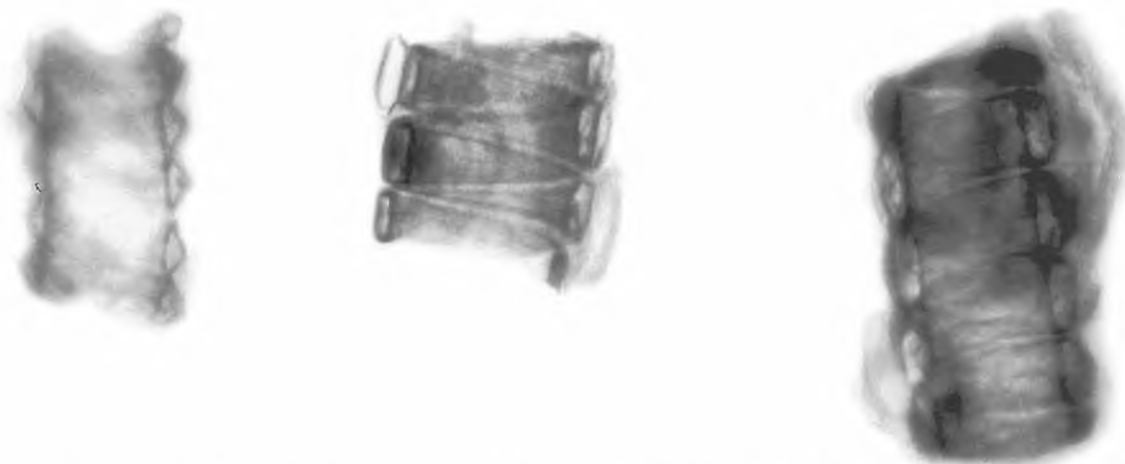


Fig 6.3 Frensham: X-radiographs of fragments of iron sceptre binding. By courtesy of Museum of Farnham, illustration prepared by Brian Wood

Fig 6.4 Brooches from Godstone; another sixteen brooches have recently been found at this site. Scale 1:1. Drawing by David Williams

objects, found in a carefully recorded metal detector survey by David Hunt (David Hunt and David Williams, pers comm; coins identified by Roger Bland and brooches and other objects by Joanna Bird).

In both cases it may be that there is a temple yet to be found; the distribution of votive offerings at temple sites indicates that they were often placed or later spread outside the temple and may be scattered in a wide area away from it. For example, at Woodeaton many of the finds were even outside the temenos boundary (Goodchild & Kirk 1955, fig 12, 36) and there is similar evidence at Farley Heath (Poulton in prep); at Uley there were finds from the temple, but many more in the area around it (Woodward & Leach 1993, 329–31; cf Smith 2001, 24–6). There are suitable hilltop locations near the object scatters at both Frensham and Godstone, but in neither case is there evidence for a building. The Godstone hilltop is not open to trial work, but an appropriately placed enclosure has been identified on aerial photographs at Frensham. Here, testing has proved negative but there is evidence for nearby buildings (Graham 1986; 2001). It will be of great

interest to see if future work can establish that this is an example of a sacred site without a formal temple building. The site at Muntham Court in Sussex may also fit better in this category; the so-called temple building is hardly convincing, especially as it is on an Iron Age occupation site (Bedwin 1980, 192; Smith 2001, 250).

It is possible that there was such a site at Betchworth, where evidence has been found suggestive of ritual at a number of periods, dating back to the Neolithic (Williams 1997). In the mid-1st century AD an elongated D-shaped enclosure was laid out, with an extra ditch cutting off the apsidal end (fig 6.5); cut into the outer edge of the main ditch at its western junction with the cross-ditch were a group of five ovens, with a sixth high in the ditch fill. The western side of the main ditch also contained a large amount of pottery, some certainly Roman. Although

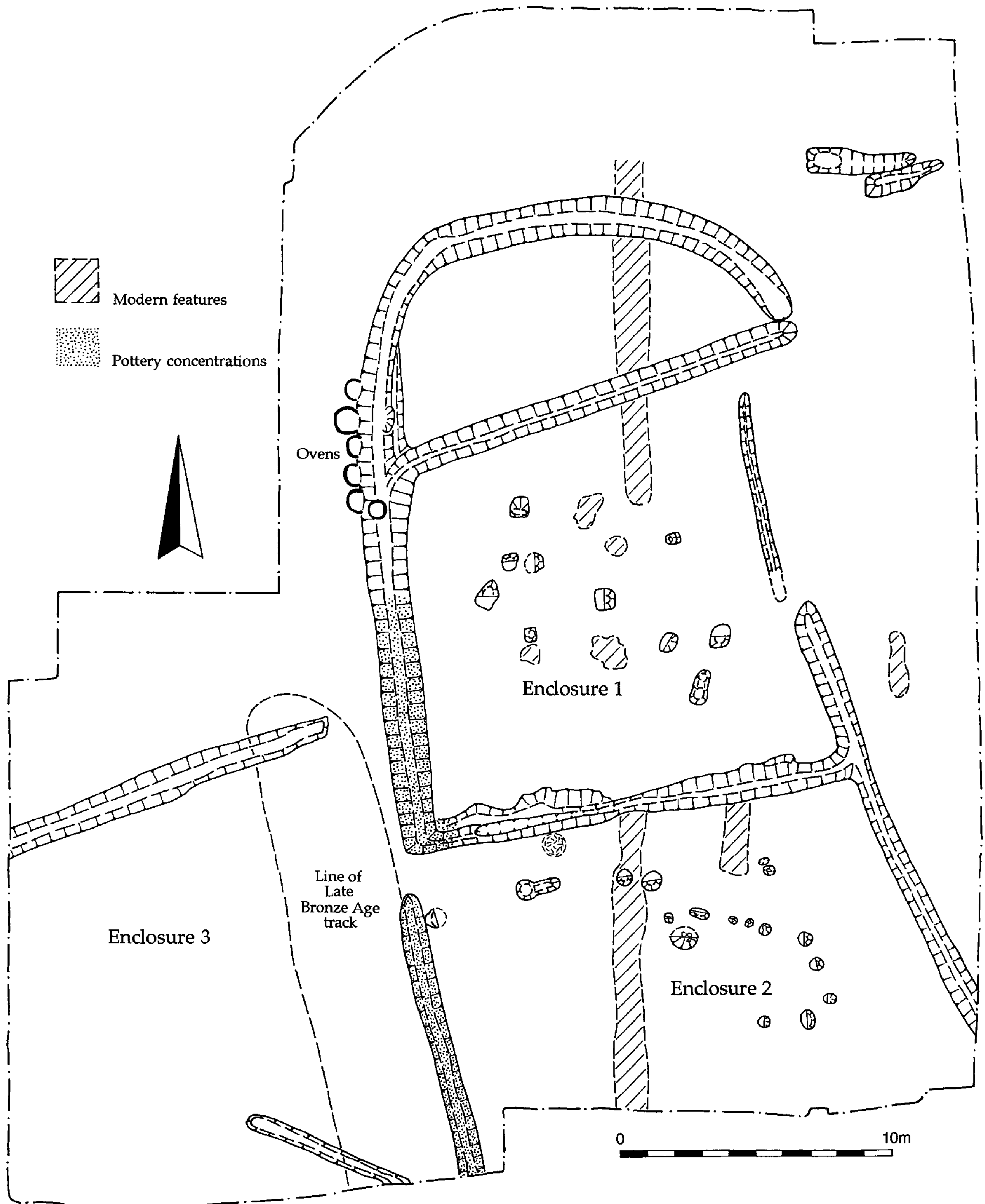


Fig 6.5 Betchworth: plan of the site in the Roman period. Drawing by David Williams

there were pits and postholes within the enclosure there was nothing that could be interpreted as a building and little room for one, but one pit had a burnt deposit with two animal jaws and there was also cremated animal bone in the western ditch. A ritual explanation is suggested for some of these discoveries and it may well be that it should be extended to the whole site. There is a parallel of a sort at Quinton in Northamptonshire, where a ritual explanation is offered for a similarly shaped and dated, although smaller, enclosure (Friendship-Taylor 1999). In this context it is of interest to note an earlier find from a sandpit some 500–600m to the west of the Betchworth site. This was a pottery sherd with an applied figure of a deity, whose attributes mark him as Jupiter or a native equivalent (Toynbee 1959; Webster 1989, 21); the vessel must have been intended for some ritual use.

Other non-temple sacred sites may be indicated by survivals into the Saxon period. Although there have been some suggestions to the contrary, few would doubt that the late Romano-British countryside remained essentially pagan in outlook. From this it follows that in the sub-Roman period there might have been some continuity of use at the main sacred sites. As already shown, temples as such were not required and so their demolition or collapse need not indicate abandonment of the ritual use of the site. It is interesting that each of the main rural temples in Surrey has produced evidence for some sort of activity even in the medieval period: coins at Wanborough and Farley Heath, pottery at Titsey (Graham 1936, 95; Williams 2000, 437; Williams forthcoming; Rob Poulton, pers comm; cf Poulton in prep). It is now also accepted that we should not think in terms of the British population of Surrey as being totally replaced by 'Anglo-Saxons'; in fact an accommodation of some sort is likely. It must therefore be possible that some of the shrines known to us from Saxon place-names, as at Peper Harow and Willey (if this was *Cusan weoh*) (Gover *et al* 1934, 175; 207), may actually be Romano-British (or even earlier) in origin. A place like Thunderfield ('Thunor's open space': Gover *et al* 1934, 295), deep in the Weald, might have originated as a sacred grove. Its possible later use as a meeting place might reflect earlier activity as suggested below in connection with Wanborough, and the equation of Thunor with a Jupiter-like native god, appropriate to such a setting (Bird 1994, 97), would not be difficult.

It is clearly not easy to assess the setting of religious sites when it cannot even be shown with certainty that they were of religious significance. This is especially the case when the site is actually part of the landscape. If a particular hilltop, or tree or spring is regarded as sacred, then it will have been an important feature in the landscape but we might now have no way of knowing that this was so (see, for example, recent discussion of the Caburn in Sussex: Drewett & Hamilton 2001). It is also difficult to analyse the landscape effect of features such as ritual shafts. In Surrey these seem only to have been recorded in the Ewell area (Cotton 2001, 36–7), which may hint at some aspect we cannot now comprehend. As Cotton notes, the idea is related to ritual deposits in wells, such as in Staines and Southwark, but in these last two cases we must be dealing with a ritual marking termination of use. This practice has origins stretching well back into prehistory.

The location of temples

When considering Roman religious sites in the landscape, it is usually therefore necessary to concentrate on temples. Clearly some sites were fixed by circumstances, in particular those thought to have healing powers. A medieval example may help to illustrate how this would have happened:

> A few miles from Prato, on a hill above the river Bisenzio, there was a little spring – 'situated in the place called *Il Palco*' – which provides an admirable example of the manner in which legends are created. Apparently its waters had some healing properties and on 8 June 1308 the Council of Prato decided to buy the land around it and to compensate the owner for the damage which his trees and vines had suffered 'from the multitude of persons going to bathe in the spring'. The land was bought for 638 *lire*, 15 *soldi*, and within thirty years a legend had already sprung up, and a little shrine was built. The spring, it was said, possessed healing powers because 'the martyr Proculus, as he was passing through the territory of Prato during his flight from the cruelty of the heathen, by his prayers miraculously produced out of the earth a living spring, which from that day forth has been called the *fontana procula*. And many sick men drink of this water, and are healed of their fever.' (Origo 1963, 245)

In this way some temple sites would effectively choose themselves, particularly at healing springs, but in other cases there might be considerable scope for choosing the exact site. If the temple was set up to the god of the locality or the particular group of people occupying an area (perhaps the same thing), then there might be many suitable locations to choose from. Given that the known temples in Britain reflect the involvement of local landowners or the Romano-British 'upper class', it is possible to think in terms of deliberate attempts to place temples within the landscape or manage their settings, and to see this in the context of the ways in which sacred sites were placed in towns for, as noted

above, many of the same people will have been involved. There is good evidence that temples could be established on town sites previously used for some other, non-religious purpose, for example Caerwent (Anon 2001, 237), Verulamium (Henig 1984, 158–9), perhaps the Poultry site in London (Rowsome 2000, 45), Xanten and Cologne (Carroll 2001, 49); note also Pliny's letter 4.1, quoted above. The same may therefore be true for the countryside (cf Derks 1998, 169). There is a tendency to identify any earlier evidence on a Romano-Celtic temple site as evidence for ritual; Smith (2001, 15–16) points to the dangers inherent in this approach, and his summary of the evidence shows the flimsy ground on which some of the so-called Iron Age shrines is based (2001, 167–86). On the other hand a reasonable case can be made for pre-Roman ritual use of some temple sites (for example Farley Heath: Poulton in prep). The question still arises as to why certain sites were chosen for temples in the Roman period.

There can be no doubt that in the Roman world some buildings were sited with special regard to their setting. A splendid example is the Augustan monument at La Turbie, commemorating the conquest of the Alpine areas, magnificently sited overlooking the Riviera coast (Bedon *et al* 1988, 20). Perhaps more thought-provoking is the triumphal arch at Medinaceli in Spain, which was sited impressively at the edge of a steep downward slope (Collins 1998, 183–4), and this, like some temples it seems, was also at a major administrative boundary. These sites are far from Britain, of course, but the same basic planning tradition came to apply throughout the western Empire, as is shown by town plans (Ward Perkins 1974, 31). This approach can be demonstrated in Britain with regard to the placing of temples in the landscape, for instance in the way some temples are sited with respect to roads or high places. Presumably the hilltop temples were intended to be seen for quite some distance, and it has been argued that some of the Somerset hilltop temples were intervisible (Woodward 1992, 24). Being able to see the shrine from a nearby town or other important spot may have been important, and a temple is certainly likely to have been a prominent landmark. It is generally agreed that Romano-Celtic temples would have had towers, with red tile roofs (Wilson 1975, 4–8), so presumably this was something of a statement in the landscape, and they might have been painted white or red, making them even more prominent (see eg Blagg 1986, 19). They also had defined sacred enclosures, which will often have been visible in some way. A concern for the details of the appearance can be demonstrated in Pliny's letter about the old temple of Ceres, already mentioned above. In discussing the porticoes, it goes on:

> At the moment I can't think of anything I want from you, unless you will draw me a plan suitable for the position. They cannot be built round the temple, for the site has a river with steep banks on one side and a road on the other. On the far side of the road is a large meadow where they might quite well stand facing the temple; unless you can think of a better solution from your professional experience of overcoming difficulties of terrain. (Letter 9.39, to Mustius; Radice 1963, 258–9)

In general, temples or sacred sites are found at characteristic locations:

- in towns, at town gates and at prominent sites near towns;
- by roads;
- at boundaries;
- on hilltops or prominent locations, including hillforts;
- at or near earlier monuments such as barrows;
- by water, especially springs;
- associated with trees and groves;
- at or near villas.

Many temple sites fit more than one category. Thus Titsey is on a road, near a spring, set on a locally high spot, possibly at a boundary and not far from a villa.

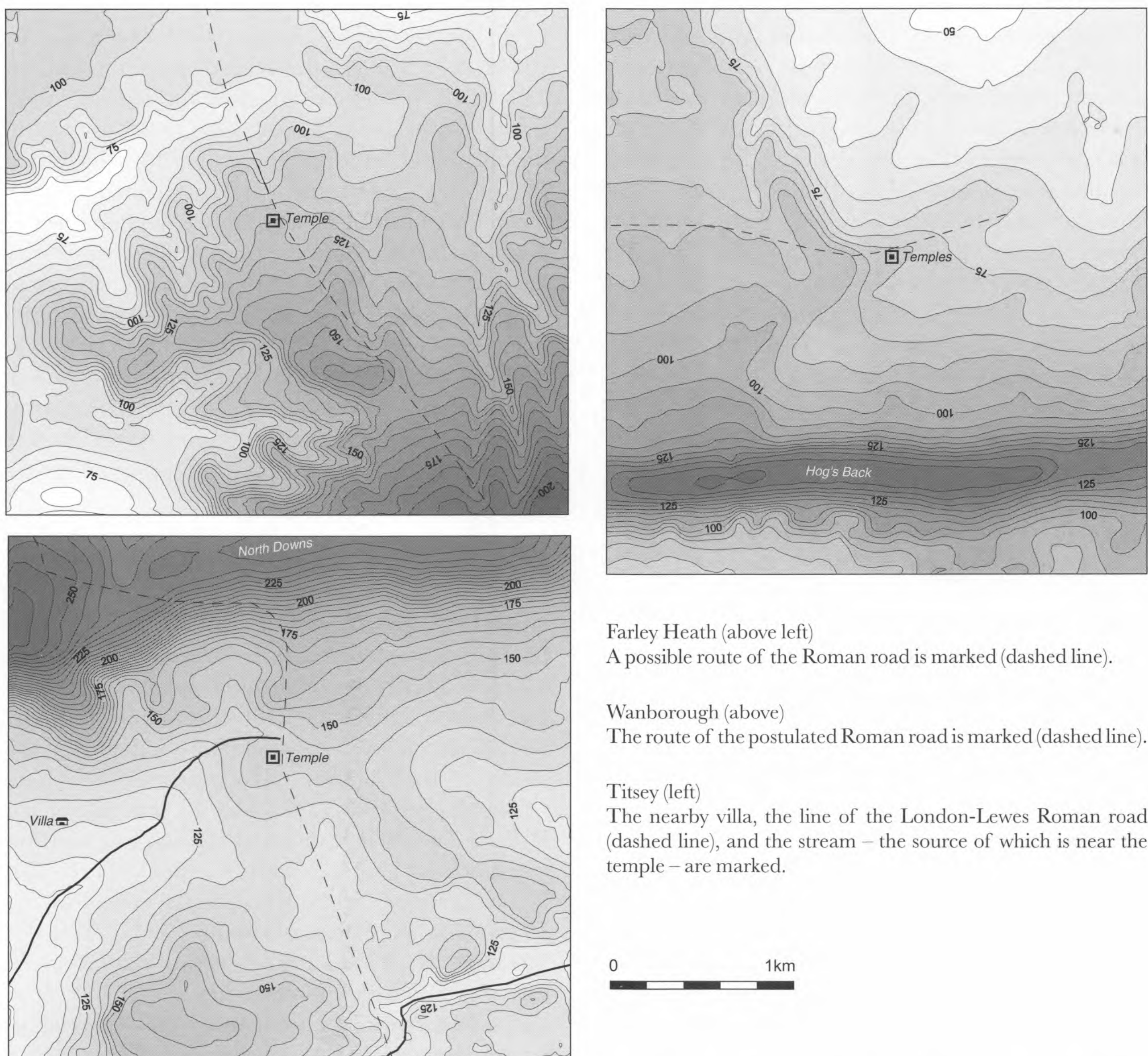
All towns will have had temples and various finds suggest that there were probably several in Southwark (Haynes 2000, *passim*). The most recent discovery is a small inscription dedicated to the spirits of the Emperors and to Mars Camulos by one Tiberinius Celerianus (Anon 2002; Bird 2004, this volume, fig 5.2), whose choice of a god from his homeland (northern France) probably again demonstrates the eclectic nature of offerings and the option to pay off vows at a local sacred site. Recent large-scale fieldwork at places like Heybridge and Ashford has demonstrated that less formal 'small towns' probably all had temples (Atkinson & Preston 1998, 103; Booth & Lawrence 2000, 480; cf Booth 1998, 12). There can therefore be no doubt that there was a sacred site of some sort within the settlement at Staines; perhaps it was the base of the healer whose presence is demonstrated by a collyrium stamp (Jackson 1996). A ritual use of the King William IV site in Ewell has also been proposed (see further below). Interestingly, at all the sites mentioned (except of course Staines), the location of the temple site is highlighted by its position relative to the road system.

Town temples were presumably used for state or official ceremonies and some may have served specialist groups such as craftsmen. In some cases it may be that town temples also served wider communities, so that the journey for special occasions in this

case was into town rather than to a rural location. This may explain the surprising lack of rural temples in central southern England, which contrasts strongly with areas like Surrey and Somerset (Watts & Leach 1996, 9–10). Is this because temples tend to appear in the countryside more often when there are no convenient towns to supply the need? Or perhaps the elite put most of their effort into towns in the more urbanized areas? It may of course be simply that the current picture is false, because the relevant temples await discovery.

Temples at gates were no doubt associated with travel but probably also reflected the sacredness of an important boundary. The new Southwark inscription noted above was found at a site near Tabard Street which has also produced evidence for two possible Romano-Celtic temples placed on the dry land just to the south of the two gravel 'islands' that formed the basis for the main settlement area. It was immediately adjacent to the point where Stane Street and Watling Street joined before crossing into this area and as such may have been seen as at a gate or boundary as well as marking an important road junction. Temples alongside roads are quite common, as might be expected, but in some cases it is possible that their siting has affected or been affected by the course of the road, as perhaps at Tabard Street. Thus the Titsey temple is right next to the London–Lewes road, but sited at a point where the road changed direction; the effect may have been as though the long straight stretch from the south was heading directly at the temple. The original sacred feature here may well have been the nearby spring that marks the source of the Eden, so the choice of this site on a slight rise (fig 6.6) rather than one a little further north on the top of the scarp slope of the Downs may be significant.

A ritual explanation may also help to explain the unnecessary double bend taken by Stane Street in Ewell, perhaps to go round the King William IV site. A similar effect may be noted at Springhead and



Farley Heath (above left)
A possible route of the Roman road is marked (dashed line).

Wanborough (above)
The route of the postulated Roman road is marked (dashed line).

Titsey (left)
The nearby villa, the line of the London-Lewes Roman road (dashed line), and the stream – the source of which is near the temple – are marked.

Fig 6.6 Shaded contour maps showing the settings of the temples at Farley Heath, Wanborough and Titsey, (heights in metres and facing uphill, north at the top). Illustration by David and Audrey Graham. (© Crown Copyright NC/04/25242)

Silchester and in all these cases is likely to be deliberate, to give prominence to the sacred sites (Bird 2002a). This apparently deliberate highlighting of temples is perhaps a good pointer to how other aspects that we cannot now see might have been managed (sacred trees, water, etc). It is often suggested that the Titsey temple was established by the owner of the nearby villa, and it no doubt attracted offerings from passers by. It is difficult to be sure how much archaeological excavation there has been within the *temenos*, and the area around the temple itself was evidently much disturbed in the medieval period, so no meaningful assessment can be made of the quality or quantity of offerings (Graham 1936, *passim*). The presence of 'box-tiles' (Graham 1936, 94) near the temple may imply associated buildings including a bath-house. The temples at Farley Heath and Wanborough may also have been close to roads, as was the site already noted above at Godstone.

Temples at tribal boundaries seem to be common in Gaul (Fauduet 1993, 26–8), but in Britain it would be difficult to be sure because of the lack of certainty about the boundaries. The suggestion has been made for Woodeaton and some others (Henig 1984, 162), and it is possible that Titsey was at the Atrebatic/Cantiaci boundary (Detsicas 1983, 145). This boundary may, however, have been further west. As boundaries are of course linear, they are another example where considerable choice was available as to exact location of a temple. Other temples may be at boundaries we cannot usually hope to recognize, because they are smaller category divisions, like *pagi*. It would be interesting, for example, if Frensham was at a *pagus* boundary, thus prefiguring the later county boundary. It could also be argued that Farley Heath was seen as at the boundary with the Weald (cf Poulton in prep and Derks 1998, 136–7).

A thorough survey of British temples for the English Heritage Monument Protection Programme led to the conclusion that rural temples show a preference for sites which are prominent in the landscape: 'Examples commonly occur on hillsides or ridges of land, from which they could see or be seen; a few lie on the summit of a hill. Some were built in old hillforts and prehistoric earthworks, eg Lydney. The average height of country temples is *c* 120m above sea level.' (Ebbatson 1989, 7) The same phenomenon is noted in Gaul, and it is suggested that the high places are intended to mark the superiority of the gods and emphasize their protective presence. The temples would often have been visible from living or working places (Derks 1998, 137–8).

The location of the Farley Heath temple was presumably chosen for its height, which has interesting implications for the nature of the vegetation at the time. If it was intended to be seen at a distance then the surrounding area must then have been heathland. Like other hilltop sites the temple was not at the highest point, which presumably indicates the direction or directions from which it was intended to be seen. It is at the head of the slope from west, north and east (fig 6.6), which perhaps reinforces the view that it marked the boundary with the Weald beyond. Other hilltop religious sites in Surrey might be at Woodlands Park near Leatherhead (Lowther 1963), where the position implies a temple more than anything else, and perhaps Coombe Hill near Kingston, where again the location does not seem right for a villa and there were apparently many finds of coins (Bird 2000, 167 n4). The Chiddingfold site (see below) is also on a prominent local hill, with wide-ranging views. In all these cases there is of course the danger of a circular argument, and more definite evidence is required to prove that a ritual site existed.

It is sometimes argued that hillfort locations are deliberately chosen for temples (Woodward 1992, 22–6) but this may be chance – the location may be chosen for the high spot regardless of the hillfort. This might be demonstrated by the Henley Wood temple, for example: it is adjacent to but not within the hillfort at Cadbury Congresbury (Watts & Leach 1996, 7–8). Similarly the temple at Maiden Castle is obviously within the hillfort, but the fact that it would have been visible from the town at Dorchester may have been more important. There is no evidence to suggest temples (or indeed sacred sites) at any of the Surrey hillforts. The county also seems to lack clear evidence for ritual associated with earlier monuments like barrows, although the site at Betchworth, discussed above, must have had some sort of marker if, as seems likely, it is a continued use of an earlier sacred place.

It seems clear from both archaeological and written evidence that sacred sites associated with water, especially those at a spring, usually had a reputation for healing (Henig 1984, 155). The resulting pilgrimages ensured that such sites usually gave rise to a larger complex or settlement (Green 2000). Bath is the obvious outstanding British example (and note also the details given above in Pliny's letter about the source of the Clitumnus). Following Clive Orton's recent suggestion (1997, 115–7) that the King William IV site in Ewell had a ritual function, we might one day be able to add this settlement to the list: it is an obvious site for ritual, at the source of the Hogsmill, where offerings have been found (Bird *et al* 1994, 203–4; cf Bird 2002a). Spring-related sacred sites may also have existed at Titsey, as noted above and at Chiddingfold, encouraged by the existence of an abundant spring arising within a few feet of a hilltop (Bird 2002b). Derks points out that water would have been required at all sacred sites, for ritual

washing and other purposes, so that the presence of a well or pond should not on its own be regarded as indicating that this was the focus of the site (Derks 1998, 196).

It has already been demonstrated that the positions of some temples or other evidence suggests a sacred tree as the focus of a ritual site. A special tree or grove-related shrine seems most likely at Wanborough in view of the location of the site on the sticky London Clay. Even today this area is well-wooded. The two temples are set on a rise (fig 6.6) but if a hilltop was required then surely the nearby Hog's Back ridge would have been used. It may be that the site was meant to be or at least to feel secret, hidden in woodland. Further work is needed to establish how access was gained to the site; there is some sign of an approach from the east, and there may be a link to a London–Winchester road nearby.

If it were set in a sacred grove, Wanborough would be unusual, as temples within such a setting seem to be uncommon in Britain. A sacred grove or clearing in a wood was a *nemeton.* Clive Cheesman discusses this in the Wanborough site report (1994, 33–4), saying that 'it is this sort of temple which is most readily associated with public activity and business', and noting that such a sanctuary is precisely where we would expect the 'bank' aspect implied by the thousands of coins found at the site (cf Smith 2001, 28; Knight 1999, 119). He also notes that 'Salway [...] goes on to draw more parallels between the roles of classical and Celtic sanctuaries, based on their operation as a focus of community feeling, and a stage for the enactment of drama'. In this context we might note the results of a geophysical survey carried out by English Heritage (Linford & Linford 1997); this showed a curving feature forming a semi-circle in the area south of the known temples (fig 6.7). Recent excavation has shown that this was a metalled track, but its course is undoubtedly curious and it is possible that it was curving round something that has left no archaeological trace. The shape undoubtedly calls to mind a theatre, which would certainly not be out of place on such a site. It need not have been more than a simple box-frame structure, similar to those discussed by Derks (1998, 192–3); for example the theatre at Möhn in the Eifel is marked by no more than a curving wall (Cüppers 1990, 480).

Villa-related shrines may also have been placed with some regard to their setting. The Rapsley shrine is placed carefully between the buildings (Hanworth 1968, 17). We do not know enough about other Surrey sites to draw conclusions but it might be noted that at Lullingstone in Kent the temple-mausoleum and smaller temple seem to be sited for effect, on the ground above the villa (Meates 1979, 119–127). The temple-mausoleum reminds us

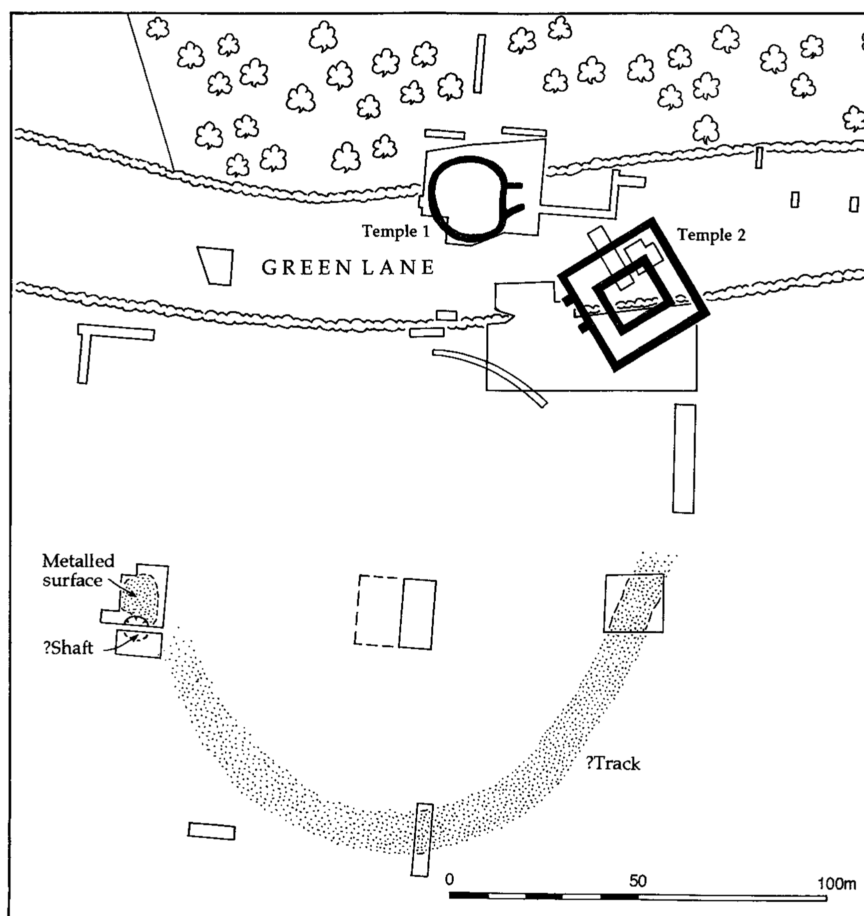


Fig 6.7 Wanborough: plan of the temples and other features. Not all are contemporary. Drawing by David Williams

that there might be sacred landscapes associated with death rituals too, and that cemeteries associated with villas might be some distance away, as at Bancroft near Milton Keynes, where there is a distance of some 200 metres between the villa buildings and the burial ground (Williams & Zeepvat 1994, fig 5 opp 6). In a similar fashion to Lullingstone, this was set higher up the slope and would have been a prominent landmark. It is rare for this relationship to be shown by excavation because of the separation between the sites, but it should be kept in mind. It might explain some of the evidence for extra buildings in the area near the Beddington villa, for example, and indicate the original location of the lead and stone coffins now in the church (Bird 2000, 167 n3). At Keston in Kent the tower tomb is closer to the villa (Philp *et al* 1991, 67, fig 17), but there can be no doubt that such a monument would itself be something of a statement in the landscape, similar to a circular temple. Elaborate roadside cemeteries with mausolea, such as at Great Dover Street in Southwark (Mackinder 2000), also bring a ritual element into everyday surroundings, and must have existed along the roads outside every sizeable settlement. Even much more ordinary burials may often have been placed with care for their setting; there is a marked line of cremations north of Farley Heath (Bird 1987, 179 fig 7.7) which may indicate burial beside a road.

There may therefore have been many sites of ritual significance in Surrey in the Roman period. Some will have been very local, or settlement-specific, others were free-standing and of varying importance. Analysis of the currently known temples in the South East suggests that only a few of the rural temples were well appointed with evidence for extensive offerings (different excavation standards and opportunities of course make it difficult to be certain). These include Weycock Hill, Wanborough, Farley Heath, Hayling Island, Chanctonbury Ring and perhaps Lancing Down and Titsey (summaries and references in Smith 2001, 192–266 *passim*; cf Rudling 2001). At Lancing the possibly associated burials and relatively few known votive finds (Bedwin 1980, 190–1) might perhaps suggest a temple-mausoleum; Titsey has been discussed above. It is noticeable that these sites tend to be placed in such a way that they fill gaps between the larger settlements. This may imply that they served particularly the rural communities, with urban needs provided for by temples in towns, apart from special spring-based healing shrines as at Springhead and perhaps Ewell and Chiddingfold. Alternatively, perhaps they were the most important sacred sites of a large district, a *civitas* or a *pagus*, serving a widespread population with special ceremonies on an occasional basis. It will be apparent, however, that much more evidence is needed before it will be possible properly to understand the way in which these sites functioned and related to one another. Too few sites have been examined to modern standards, and it is probable that many more sites have yet to be located; we should remember that the religious significance of the Wanborough site was unknown until 1985.

Future research

As with the Roman period in general, there is much still to be learned about Roman religious sites in Surrey.

- The possibility of continuity of use of sacred sites from the Iron Age or even earlier needs careful assessment. How might the sites have been marked in earlier periods?
- The origins of material at temple sites should be contrasted to nearby sites of the period to explore the possibility that this would show the catchment area for worshippers.
- Analysis of existing knowledge may allow the location of temple sites in towns and roadside settlements to be identified. Particular attention should be paid to road junctions or changes of course within the settlements.
- Information currently available should be reassessed, especially concentrations of brooches and coins. There may also be new information available as a result of the activities of the Finds Liaison Officer appointed under the Portable Antiquities Scheme.
- Detailed study of potential non-temple sites is needed in an attempt to confirm that they did not have temples; if this is thought to be the case, how might the site have been marked?
- The setting of temples should receive careful analysis, including views to and from the site.
- Environmental evidence is crucial and should always be a priority. It is possible that offerings at some sites were largely of organic material which would otherwise be difficult to recognize.
- Attention is needed to the means of access to the Wanborough and Chiddingfold sites.
- The possibility of continuity of use into the Saxon period should be explored.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am particularly grateful to Joanna Bird for advice and encouragement; Jon Cotton, David and Audrey Graham, Sarah Hemley, Martin Henig, Alex Main, Rob Poulton, David Rudling, Alex Smith, David Williams and the staff of neighbouring Sites and Monuments Records (Kent, West Sussex, Hampshire and Greater London) are also thanked for their assistance in various ways.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anon [R Brewer & P Guest], 2001 Caerwent: Venta Silurum, *Current Archaeol,* **15.6,** 232–40

Anon, 2002 Londoners' stone sheds light on city's cosmopolitan ways, *Brit Archaeol,* **68,** 5

Atkinson, M, & Preston, S J, 1998 The Late Iron Age and Roman settlement at Elms Farm, Heybridge, Essex, excavations 1993–5: an interim report, *Britannia,* **29,** 85–110

Bagnall Smith, J, 1999 Votive objects and objects of votive significance from Great Walsingham, *Britannia,* **30,** 21–56

Bedon, R, Chevallier, R, & Pinon, P, 1988 *Architecture et urbanisme en Gaule Romaine. Tome 1. L'architecture et la ville (52 av. JC–486 ap. JC),* Paris

Bedwin, O, 1980 Excavations at Chanctonbury Ring, Wiston, West Sussex 1997, *Britannia,* **11,** 173–222

Bird, D G, 1987 The Romano-British period in Surrey, in *The archaeology of Surrey to 1540* (eds J Bird & D G Bird), 165–96

——, 1996 The London region in the Roman period, in J Bird *et al* 1996, 217–32

——, 2000 The environs of Londinium: roads, roadside settlements and the countryside, in Haynes *et al* 2000, 151–74

——, 2002a Roads and temples: Stane Street at Ewell, *London Archaeol,* **10.2,** 41–5

——, 2002b Chiddingfold Roman villa: a suggested reinterpretation, *SyAC,* **89,** 245–8

——, 2004 Surrey in the Roman period: a survey of recent discoveries, in *Aspects of archaeology and history in Surrey: towards a research framework for the county* (eds J Cotton, G Crocker & A Graham), SyAS, 65–76

Bird, D G, Crocker, G, McCracken, J S, & Saich, D, 1994 Archaeology in Surrey 1991, *SyAC,* **82,** 203–19

Bird, J, 1994 Other finds excluding pottery, in O'Connell & Bird 1994, 93–132

Bird, J, Hassall, M, & Sheldon, H (eds), 1996 *Interpreting Roman London. Papers in memory of Hugh Chapman*

Birley, A, 2002 *Garrison life at Vindolanda. A band of brothers*

Blagg, T, 1986 Roman religious sites in the British landscape, *Landscape Hist,* **8,** 16–25

Boon, G C, 1974 *Silchester: the Roman town of Calleva*

——, 1983 Some Romano-British domestic shrines and their inhabitants, in *Rome and her northern provinces* (eds B Hartley & J Wacher), 33–55

Booth, P, 1998 The regional archaeological setting of the Roman roadside settlement at Wilcote – a summary, in A R Hands, *The Romano-British roadside settlement at Wilcote, Oxfordshire. II. Excavations 1993–96,* BAR Brit Ser, **265,** 8–20

Booth, P & Lawrence, S, 2000 Ashford. Westhawk Farm, *Current Archaeol,* **14.12,** 478–81

Carroll, M, 2001 *Romans, Celts and Germans. The German provinces of Rome*

Cheesman, C, 1994 The coins, in O'Connell & Bird 1994, 31–92

Collingwood, R G, & Wright, R P, 1965 *The Roman inscriptions of Britain. I. Inscriptions on stone*

Collins, R, 1998 *Spain. An Oxford archaeological guide*

Cotton, J, 2001 Prehistoric and Roman settlement in Reigate Road, Ewell: fieldwork conducted by Tom K Walls 1945–52, *SyAC,* **88,** 1–42

Cüppers, H (ed), 1990 *Die Römer in Rheinland-Pfalz*

Derks, T, 1998 *Gods, temples and ritual practices. The transformation of religious ideas and values in Roman Gaul*

Detsicas, A, 1983 *The Cantiaci*

Drewett, P, & Hamilton, S, 2001 Caburn. Sacred mount or classic hillfort, *Current Archaeol,* **15.6,** 256–62

Ebbatson, L, 1989 *Monuments Protection Programme. Single monument description. Romano-Celtic temples,* English Heritage

Fauduet, I, 1993 *Les temples de tradition celtique en Gaule Romaine*

Friendship-Taylor, R M, 1999 *Iron Age and Roman Quinton. The evidence for the ritual use of the site (Site 'E' 1978–1981)*

Goodchild, R, & Kirk, J R, 1955 The Romano-Celtic temple at Woodeaton, *Oxoniensia,* **19** [1954], 15–37

Gover, J E B, Mawer, A, & Stenton, F M, 1934 *The place-names of Surrey,* English Place-Name Society, **11**

Green, M, 1986 *The gods of the Celts*

Green, M A, 2000 On the road, *Brit Archaeol,* **52,** 14–17

Graham, D, 1986 A note on the recent finds of Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman material and a site at Frensham Manor noted in an aerial photograph, *SyAC,* **77,** 232–5

——, 2000 A Roman coin deposit on Frensham Common, *SyAS Bull,* **338,** 6–7

——, 2001 Frensham Manor, *SyAS Bull,* **352,** 12–13

Graham, J G, 1936 A Romano-Celtic temple at Titsey, and the Roman road, *SyAC,* **44,** 84–101

Hammerson, M J, 1996 Problems of Roman coin interpretation in Greater London, in J Bird *et al* 1996, 153–64

Hanworth, R, 1968 The Roman villa at Rapsley, Ewhurst (parish of Cranleigh), *SyAC,* **65,** 1–70

Hassall, M W C, 1977 Altars, curses and other epigraphic evidence, in *Temples, churches and religion: recent research in Roman Britain* (ed W Rodwell), BAR Brit Ser, **77,** 79–89

Hawkins, D, 1996 Roman Kingston upon Thames, a landscape of rural settlements, *London Archaeol,* **8.2,** 46–50

Haynes, I 2000 Religion in Roman London, in Haynes *et al* 2000, 85–101

Haynes, I, Sheldon, H, & Hannigan, L (eds), 2000 *London under ground. The archaeology of a city*

Henig, M, 1984 *Religion in Roman Britain*

——, 2002 *The heirs of King Verica. Culture and politics in Roman Britain*

Henig, M [with contributions from M Hassall & J Bayley], 1993 Votive objects: images and inscriptions, in Woodward and Leach 1993, 89–112

Jackson, R, 1996 A new collyrium-stamp from Staines and some thoughts on eye medicine in Roman London and Britannia, in J Bird *et al* 1996, 177–87

Keay, S J, 1988 *Roman Spain*

Knight, J K, 1999 *The end of antiquity. Archaeology, society and religion AD 235–700*

Legge, A, Williams, J, & Williams, P, 2000 Lamb to the slaughter: sacrifice at two Roman temples in southern England, in *Animal bones, human societies* (ed P Rowley-Conwy), 152–7

Linford, P K, & Linford, N T, 1997 Wanborough Roman temple, Green Lane, Wanborough, Guildford, Surrey, report on geophysical survey, 1997, Ancient Monuments Laboratory Report, **100/97,** unpublished

Lowther, A W G, 1963 An enamelled bronze roundel of the Romano-British period, *Proc Leatherhead Dist Local Hist Soc,* **2.3,** 69–72

Ludowici, W, & Ricken, H (eds), 1948 *Katalog VI meiner Ausgrabungen in Rheinzabern 1901–1914. Die Bilderschüsseln der römischen Töpfer von Rheinzabern: Tafelband,* Speier

Mackinder, A, 2000 *A Romano-British cemetery on Watling Street. Excavations at 165 Great Dover Street, Southwark, London,* Museum London Archaeol Service Archaeol Stud Ser, **4**

Meates, G W, 1979 *The Roman villa at Lullingstone, Kent. Vol I: the site,* Monogr ser Kent Archaeol Soc, **1**

O'Connell, M, & Bird, J, 1994 The Roman temple at Wanborough, excavation 1985–1986, *SyAC,* **82,** 1–168

Orton, C, 1997 Excavations at the King William IV site, Ewell, 1976–77, *SyAC,* **84,** 89–122

Origo, I, 1963 *The merchant of Prato Francesco di Marco Datini*

Philp, B, Parfitt, K, Willson, J, Dutto, M, & Williams, W, 1991 *The Roman villa site at Keston, Kent. First report (excavations 1968–1978)*

Poulton, R, in prep Farley Heath Roman temple

Poulton, R, & Scott, E, 1993 The hoarding, deposition and use of pewter in Roman Britain, in *Theoretical Roman archaeology first conference proceedings* (ed E Scott), 115–32

Radice, B, 1963 *The letters of the Younger Pliny*
Rowsome, P, 2000 *Heart of the city. Roman, medieval and modern London revealed by archaeology at 1 Poultry*
Rudling, D, 2001 Chanctonbury Ring revisited. The excavations of 1988–91, *Sussex Archaeol Collect,* **139,** 75–121
Smith, A, 2001 *The differential use of constructed sacred space in southern Britain, from the Late Iron Age to the 4th century AD,* BAR Brit Ser, **318**
Tomlin, R S O, 1993 The inscribed lead tablets: an interim report, in Woodward & Leach 1993, 113–30
Toynbee, J M C, 1959 A Romano-British pottery-sherd with applied decoration from Betchworth, *SyAC,* **56,** 160–1
Ward-Perkins, J B, 1974 *Cities of ancient Greece and Italy. Planning in classical antiquity*
Watts, L, & Leach, P, 1996 *Henley Wood, temples and cemetery. Excavations 1962–69 by the late Ernest Greenfield and others,* CBA Res Rep, **99**
Webster, G, 1989 Deities and religious scenes on Romano-British pottery, *J Roman Pottery Stud,* **2,** 1–28
Williams, D, 1997 Betchworth: excavations at Franks' sandpit, *SyAS Bull,* **307,** 2–8
——, 2000 Wanborough Roman temple, *Current Archaeol,* **14.11,** 434–7
——, forthcoming Green Lane, Wanborough: excavations at the Roman religious site, 1999, *SyAC*
Williams, R J, & Zeepvat, R J, 1994 *Bancroft: a Late Bronze Age/Iron Age settlement, Roman villa and temple-mausoleum. I: excavations and buildings materials,* Buckinghamshire Archaeol Soc Monogr, **7**
Wilson, D R, 1973 Temples in Britain: a topographical survey, *Caesarodunum,* **8,** 24–44
——, 1975 Romano-Celtic temple architecture, *J Brit Archaeol Assoc,* 3 ser, **38,** 3–27
Woolf, G, 1998 *Becoming Roman. The origins of provincial civilization in Gaul*
Woodward, A, 1992 *Shrines and sacrifice*
——, & Leach, P, 1993 *The Uley shrines. Excavation of a ritual complex on West Hill, Uley, Gloucestershire: 1977–9,* Engl Heritage Archaeol Rep, **17**
Zelle, M, 2000 *Götter und kulte,* Führer und schriften des Archäologischen Parks Xanten, **21,** Köln

Dr D G Bird, Head of Heritage Conservation, Sustainable Development, Surrey County Council, County Hall, Kingston upon Thames KT1 2DY