

Epilogue

Having travelled through 2,000 years of history, viewed over a dozen village locations and peeped into the past of several private houses, we now must close *The Silchester Story*. Who knows what events will shape the evolution of our parish over coming decades, centuries and millennia?

We began with a landscape shaped by natural forces and aeons of erosion. Upon a prominent spur of gravel, our ancient forebears identified an ideal site for settlement. Elevated ground commanded the countryside, granting an early glimpse of approaching opponents and providing an area for both fortification and agriculture.

For many centuries this territory witnessed periods of conflict and violence. From Iron Age inter-tribal skirmishes to 17th century civil war, a military presence or military activity would have been oppressively familiar to our ancestors.

Thankfully, for more than three centuries, time has passed more peacefully over this corner of north Hampshire. The Iron Age ditches are now fascinating features, partly overgrown with vegetation. The Roman walls, weathering gently, appear timeless, part of the natural landscape. They serenely watch over slumbering Calleva, its secrets hidden beneath a tapestry of hedgerow and meadow. Wide skies frame our ancient site against the distant crest of the Candovers. Silchester Common, no longer exploited for gravel, provides recreation. Swathes of gorse have ceded ground to games pitches. A profusion of paths permit access for birdwatchers, botanists, dog walkers and those who simply cherish the countryside.

Within this idyll, it might be all too easy

to ignore the origins of our parish. What centuries ago started life as one of the country's earliest towns, fortified to deter invasion, has evolved into a quiet village nestling amid unthreatening fields, heath and woodland.

Over the last 60 years the size of Silchester has swelled. Many who now live in the parish boast no historic local connections stretching back beyond the mid-20th century. But paradoxically it is often comparative newcomers who are most intrigued by an area's history, seeking to obtain information about its past and to safeguard its heritage for the future. This book is part of that process.

It is not only natural curiosity that compels us to look back to our origins. There is something unique about our parish. It offers a direct physical link with the distant past. Few can stroll around the Roman walls without feeling affinity for those who toiled to fashion formidable defences. When we touch the dry masonry we place our hands where our forebears placed theirs. On a balmy summer evening we gaze over green fields and imagine the wisps of smoke from a hundred ancient hearths. But those who lived here are long since gone, leaving a silent legacy with its unique aura of mystery, charm and tranquillity.

The vast majority of residents would agree that Silchester is indeed a perfect place in which to live. Somehow the cares of the workaday world fade away when we immerse ourselves amongst the flora and fauna of the Common or enjoy a reverie at the Roman site. To take a stroll we need not scale high mountains nor trudge through tedious plains. We savour gentle scenery enhanced by the history around us.

This special quality of the parish was recognised by James Thomson when he published *The Book of Silchester* in 1924. As we have been on an historical journey, it is fitting to conclude with an historical observation: an observation which remains as true today as it was when, a century ago, the village of Silchester was a smaller and sleepier settlement.

The district is like all that belonged to the philosophic Little Bear in the nursery story. The hills around are neither too high nor too low, but just right. The climate is neither too mild nor too severe, but just right; in short, it is a parish perfect in its variety of scenery; all of which combine to make it a haven of retreat from the cares and turmoil of the outer world.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Work on collating the information to form the basis of *The Silchester Story* largely took place throughout the years 2020 and 2021. During this time there were several spells of lockdown due to the Covid pandemic. Some facilities such as museums and record offices were either closed or operating under severe restrictions. As a result, we became highly dependent on the Internet. We could both hold virtual meetings and explore a wealth of material on Wikipedia and other websites. Unaware of how this project would develop, we did not always keep a record of every website visited. Also, we are acutely conscious that some such as Wikipedia are not always wholly accurate and apologise if we have inadvertently reproduced erroneous information.

Against this general background, we set out below our principal sources for the various sections of this book and acknowledge the help we have received from a wide variety of people.

The Parish in the 21st century

We are grateful to Stephen Hodgson who provided valuable material concerning both wildlife and the ecological importance of Silchester Common. Hampshire Record Office permitted us to consult the slim nineteenth century volumes written by S Chandler and J Plummer, while *The Book of Silchester* by James Thomson is available in the reference sections of both Basingstoke and Tadley libraries. Thanks are due to Hampshire Libraries both for permitting an image to be made of the book's title page and also for researching the author's background.

Robina Rand helped enormously with the Florence Davidson material, usefully explaining the provenance of the typed manuscripts made available to us, while Mike Cole provided some biographical details. Carol Stevens of Tadley and District History Society (TADS) provided further useful information and referred us to the Society's republication of *The History of Tadley*, available on the Internet. We are also indebted to Katie Amos of Reading Borough Libraries who was particularly helpful, locating an original copy of *The History of Tadley* along with Florence Davidson's *History of Silchester*, and kindly providing the images used in 1.4.

Silchester over the Centuries

Information on the geological background was obtained from *Silchester Common* published by Silchester Parish Council in the year 2000, authored by Ray Bullock and others. It was supplemented by further details from Wikipedia.

There are numerous sources rich with material on Iron Age and Roman Silchester. We were heavily reliant on *Silchester Revealed*, Professor Michael Fulford's most recent (2021) publication. We also consulted his English Heritage guide *Silchester Roman Town*. Another valuable source was *Silchester: The Roman Town of Calleva* (1974) by George C Boon. Further useful information is also contained in *Silchester: Changing Visions of a Roman Town* (2016) by Creighton and Fry, available for free download on the Internet. These publications also offered some details about the history of Silchester after the departure of the Romans, the interest of antiquarians and the confusion over the exact location of the Roman Calleva. In addition, Michael Fulford gave us his time most generously, reviewing several parts of our manuscript and offering numerous helpful suggestions.

In the year 2000 a *Millennium Document* was prepared under the sponsorship of Silchester Millennium Committee. Those involved in its preparation included Holly Baker, Steve Spillane, David Missel and the late Andrew Chandler and Nick Tuthill. Matt Dearden undertook much of the research and did the writing up. The document, running to over 20,000 words, was intended as a comprehensive guide for an informative walk around the parish, complete with extensive historical notes. In the event it was not published, but we have drawn extensively on the wealth of information contained therein.

Other sources for details of events century by century include the various editions of the guide to *St Mary the Virgin Silchester*, the manuscripts of Florence Davidson, certain other local publications and *The Victoria County History* (accessed online). The church guide contains information relating not only to the structure of the building but also to interesting people connected with the

parish over the centuries. We have provided details of the history of the guide and its various authors in 3.4.

Turning to specifics, Paul and Sarah Roper inspired the Thomas Dicker chapter, providing a most appropriate illustration. Thanks are due to Ann-Marie Dalton who, on behalf of the trustees, assisted us with information about the Richard Hyde Charity.

It has been important to chart the interest of antiquarians in Silchester. We were able to consult Wikipedia to ascertain some biographical details. We also referred to *The Recovery of Roman Britain 1586 to 1906* (2008) by Richard Hingley, made available for free download. Hampshire Cultural Trust kindly gave us permission to reproduce the William Stukeley drawings.

Much of the information concerning the first Duke of Wellington is available in general history books and over the Internet. We are grateful to Jane Branfield, the Wellington Estate archivist, for providing information relating to the ennoblement of Arthur Wellesley and the purchase of the Manor of Silchester in 1828. She gave us encouragement and most helpfully located and provided extracts from correspondence held in the Wellington archive.

The history of Silchester would be incomplete without considering the history of activity on the Roman site. We received some useful information from the Society of Antiquaries and are grateful to Reading Museum (Reading Borough Council) for the use of photographs of the Calleva excavations, the Silchester Eagle and the Silchester Horse.

Approaching the 20th century, we drew on more recent knowledge. Census details are available to the public. Useful facts can be found on the Silchester Parish Council website. Silchester Cricket Club has records and memorabilia going back well into the 19th century. Robert Dodd assembled this information for us, helped by Paul Hearn, Mike Baldock and Mike Cole. Silchester Football Club also has records going back to its foundation at the very beginning of the 20th century. Paul Evans provided most of the material for this section.

The chapters on individuals relied on various sources. Robina Rand pointed out the connection of WH Hudson with Silchester and passed on to us some useful local knowledge. Details of the Whistler family were obtained from www.whistlerhistory.com, a website compiled and maintained by Diana Whistler of Vancouver who sent us an encouraging email. The activities of Lt Col Karlake were mentioned in the books by Creighton and Fry, Thomson, and Boon mentioned above. Additional information was

gleaned from various websites. Similarly, the Internet yielded a short biography of the architect Norman Evill and we consulted a variety of websites to learn more about the Arts and Crafts movement, Edwin Lutyens, Folly Farm and the Daneshill Brick and Tile Company.

We are grateful to all the people mentioned above for the time and trouble they have taken to help us write a comprehensive narrative, spanning Silchester's development over the centuries.

Finally in this section we should also acknowledge our gratitude to Silchester Parish Council for making available to us Michael Knight's memoir *Silchester Through the Ages – The Life and Times of a Village*. This is a valuable document for a local historian. As it consists of 30 A4 pages, in the interests of space and balance we decided to condense it. Sadly, many of its old black-and-white photographs would not reproduce well enough for inclusion in this book.

The Past around the Parish

Michael Fulford raised questions about the origins of Flex Ditch, helping us to challenge the interpretations of others. His research, including accessing the LiDAR data, and observations were invaluable.

Tadley Tracks, Tadley Facts by Roger Searing, Pat Minter and TADS yielded various snippets of Silchester information. In particular the book contains a useful section on the Impstone. *Under Another Sky: Journeys in Roman Britain* (2015) by Charlotte Higgins recounts the author's visit to the Roman site and the myth about the giant named Onion.

The Silchester Common information came from a wide variety of sources. Particular thanks are due to John Cook, who in 1978 gifted Silchester Common to Silchester Parish Council. With typical kindness he readily made available the plan reproduced in this book, together with associated documents, and personally explained the background and history of the transaction. We also are indebted to Mick Oram for making his collection of old photographs available to us.

We have already mentioned the guide to *St Mary the Virgin Silchester*. Input and observations from Robina Rand and Mike Cole, together with other local knowledge made 3.4 a far more rounded chapter.

In 1989 the Methodist church in Silchester celebrated its 150th anniversary. Its minister at the time, the late Rev Roger Greene, compiled *Methodist Chapel Silchester 1839–*

1989 to commemorate the occasion. This publication provided a useful history of the rise of nonconformity and the establishment of Methodism. We also drew on it in relation to chapters 2.8 and 2.13.

Both the writings of Florence Davidson and James Thomson's *Book of Silchester* provided the background to the building of what is now the Calleva Arms. Details of Silchester School and Silchester Village Hall came from the *Millennium Document*. A press report in the *Basingstoke Gazette* gave a detailed account of the unveiling of Silchester War Memorial.

We are pleased to give credit to the tremendous work done by Mike Baldock. He has extensively researched the background of the servicemen from Silchester who lost their lives in the First and Second World Wars. In respect of the former, he was assisted by Paul Hearn and the late Philip Pearce. We have based our brief pen portraits on the numerous articles Mike Baldock has written, first published in Silchester Parish Magazine. We are also grateful to him for bringing to our attention the RAF plane crash during the Second World War.

Details about the origins of the Village Hall came largely from the *Millennium Document*. We give our thanks to Peter Howell who provided comprehensive information about the origins and development of the Pavilion.

We acknowledge help from Thames Water in respect of the Water Tower and Silchester Sewage Treatment Works. Similarly British Telecom assisted with the origins of the telephone exchange built in the grounds of Macartneys.

Finally in this section we give our thanks to John Young, formerly of Rampiers for outlining the history, construction and use of Culham Mill.

The Past in Private Houses

A most important source has again been the *Millennium Document* which contains a large amount of information about the people who lived in some of the village's larger houses. A link to the University of Glasgow's Whistler etchings project provided an intriguing snippet of information about Henry Newnham Davis.

Information about the Goddard family came largely from the website: www.jmgoddard.myfreeola.uk. Additionally, as the Goddards were such a prominent family in Silchester,

references to certain members appeared in several other sources.

Above all, throughout this section we are indebted to numerous individuals who came forward with memories or intriguing facts about individual properties that might not be more generally known. These included Ian and Laura Alexander; Jonathan Biggins and Sarah Mozley-Biggins; Susie Burrell Williams; Jenny Mackinder; Kevin O'Byrne; Robert and Annette Radley; Paul and Sarah Roper; David Ruck; Mark Smith; Neil Smithers; Nick and Biddy West.

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We also acknowledge encouragement and assistance from several contributors who wish to remain anonymous.

A project such as this book cannot succeed without the time and effort of a large number of people. Others who have given assistance include Leslie Brewin and Marjorie Dean. Mike Cole shared the fruits of some of his research and we valued the local knowledge of Steve Spillane.

It will be abundantly clear that we are indebted to a large number of people. We have tried to acknowledge all who have contributed but apologise if inadvertently we have overlooked anyone who has assisted with comments, documents or photographs which we may not have been able to use.

As we finalised the manuscript its layout and consistency were considerably enhanced by Dorothy Collard of Writers Inc, Basingstoke, who did an initial proof read. Members of that writing group also gave useful comments on certain draft chapters. Grace Hewson undertook a final proof read.

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Finally, we record our sincere thanks to both Silchester Parish Council and the Silchester Association. Quite simply without the funding these two bodies made available it would have been impossible to produce this book.



THE AUTHORS



Stephen Bibby is the author of three novels and two children's books. He has lived opposite Silchester Common for 35 years.



Lynne Jones has lived in Silchester for 46 years. She loves exploring all the footpaths and is often seen out walking (very quickly) around the village.



Dennis West was born in 1940, from an early age developing an indefatigable curiosity and a love of the countryside. Having moved to Silchester he was inspired to study the parish's history.

