Ancient Baldock: the story of an Iron Age and Roman town

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Baldock High Street from the tower of St Mary's church; the ancient town lay off to the left (east)

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Front cover: an imaginative reconstruction of Roman Baldock around AD 200 by Donna Watters

Back cover: a reconstruction of the ash wood and bronze wine-mixing 'bucket' from the chieftain's burial excavated at Clothall Common in 1981

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Ancient Baldock?

The small market town of Baldock has long been a notorious bottleneck for traffic travelling north to south and east to west: the old Great North Road and Icknield Way (later the A1 and A505) crossed in the town centre. Those who stopped in the town will have noticed that as well as the numerous Georgian buildings, there are also surviving late medieval buildings and a magnificent thirteenth-century church. The more informed visitor and most local residents will know that the town was founded by the Knights Templar in the 1140s and that its name was a jocular reference to Baghdad, even then an Arab market city, famous throughout Christendom. The Templars hoped that their new town of *Baldoce* would be a successful market place too.

What the casual visitor—and many residents—will not have found out is that the story of Baldock goes back much farther than the unhappy reign of King Stephen. Although the place had long been deserted when the Knights were given land in the Manor of Weston to establish the new market town, a thousand years earlier it was already a bustling market town, with a wealth based on its agricultural hinterland, light industry and its religious cults. And even then, it was an old, long-established settlement. Several local rulers (chieftains or even kings) were buried here in the first century BC and it existed when Julius Caesar visited the region in 54 BC, although we will never know if he actually came to Baldock.

The aim of this booklet is to tell people about the fascinating story of the ancient town as it existed from the first century BC, before the Roman conquest of Britain, to the sixth century AD, long after Britain ceased to be part of the Roman Empire. It draws on more than eighty years of archaeological excavation and investigation by numerous people, including the authors of this booklet. If you want to find out more, there is a list of further reading at the end.

The site of the ancient town in 2003

Now be prepared to step back over two thousand years to the funeral of a chieftain whose name is lost to history...

The old chief is dead...

An Iron Age funeral

They placed the chief's body, wrapped in its bear skin, on the funeral pyre. It took a while for the flames to take hold, but when they were roaring up into the sky, it became difficult to see into the centre of the fire. Attendants occasionally poked the burning wood with long sticks, but it still took most of the day to turn everything to ash. While this was going on, his family and friends poured expensive wine from overseas into a couple of special bronze and wood “buckets” (really more like tall punch bowls), ate sucking pig roasted on iron frames (called firedogs) by the side of the pyre and stew from a great bronze cauldron, and listened to poems telling stories of the chief's glorious exploits. How he had stolen an entire herd of cattle from the enemies to the south when he was young, how he had married the beautiful daughter of a chief, who had given him plenty of sons, how none of the menfolk of the tribe could wield a sword the way he did.

Eventually, the fire died out. The attendants raked out the ashes, looking for the

One of the firedogs from The Tene chieftain’s burial

gleaming bits of bone that were the chieftain's earthly remains (and also picking up the claws from the bearskin by mistake). They laid out one of the roast pigs on the floor of a circular pit. Next to it, they placed the cauldron and around that went the "buckets", some bronze dishes and the tall Roman pottery amphora that the wine had been transported in. The firedogs were put over the cauldron, the pit was filled in and a mound built over it to mark the site of the grave.

The grave under excavation in January 1968

A 1960s excavation

All this happened around 100 BC or soon after. Although the chief was a wealthy and important man, his name has long been forgotten. He lived and died during what archaeologists call the Iron Age, the last part of the long prehistory of Britain. Nobody could read or write and although tales continued to be told about him for years, eventually people's memories of him faded, the mound over his grave disappeared and it was not until its site was being bulldozed for a new road (an extension to The Tene) in December 1967 that we know anything about him.

The driver of the bulldozer found what he thought was scrap metal (it was one of the firedogs), which he sold for £5. By chance, it was spotted in a builder's yard in Dunstable by Les Matthews, a local archaeologist, who was told where it had been found. He informed John Moss-Eccardt, curator of Letchworth Museum, whose detective work led him to the exact site of the discovery. He told the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments, which sent a team led by Ian Stead to excavate the site, starting on New Year's Day 1968. The remarkable finds from the grave can now be seen in Letchworth Museum.

Archaeologists call this sort of grave a Welwyn-type burial after a discovery there in the early twentieth century. Most of them date from after about 50 BC, making the Baldock burial one of the earliest of the type, if not the very first.

Ditches, pits and posts

An Iron Age *oppidum*: the first town in Britain?

The landscape around Baldock was the scene of frantic activity during the lifetime of the old chief and had been for many years before that. People were showing that they were in control of their locality by carrying out huge public building works, digging ditches and piling up the chalk dug out from them to one side. They stretched over hill and coombe, linking ancient places like Arbury Banks in Ashwell and Wilbury in Letchworth with newer places, especially the growing community at Baldock.

Some of these ditches ran in groups of three, others were just single. None of them actually enclosed anything, but they all served to control how people moved through this part of the country. They were being funnelled into particular places and prevented from reaching others. Nothing quite like it had ever been seen before.

One of the most important parts of this landscape was built around 200 BC and consisted of a line of enormous circular pits, about two metres in diameter and two metres deep, with no gaps between them at ground level. They ran in an east-south-easterly direction from the springs where the River Ivel rises, across the slope to the north-east of Baldock and turned to the east-north-east just beyond the ancient trackway towards Wallington. They continued on into the hills, where modern archaeologists have lost sight of them.

All of this work required a lot of effort and must have needed careful planning and organisation. The people who decided to carry it out were obviously powerful, wealthy individuals. What they created was something new. Archaeologists call it an *oppidum*, which is a Latin word for 'town'; although they are still arguing about whether we should call this sort of place a town, it was certainly larger than a mere village. Baldock seems to have been the first to be built, and was as much as a hundred years older than better known sites at *Camulodunon* (Colchester) and *Verlamion* (St Albans). We can think of it as the first town in Britain.

A land of the dead

By the middle of the first century BC, the line of pits had been filled in. A massive timber post was placed at the centre of each pit. They may have been carved and painted, but we will never know this for certain. What we do know is that no houses were built to their north, where there were only burials, creating a special zone for the dead.

Although the posts were set about two metres apart, they may have been linked by timber rails and there was only one formal way through, at a point where eight pits had been filled in without first inserting posts. There, a broad area was marked off

with ditches either side, running for 140 metres, half to the south and half to the north of the posts. At the northern end stood a circular building, surrounded by cremations in shallow pits. This may have been a temple or a mortuary house, a place where the dead were laid out (sometimes for months) before their funeral.

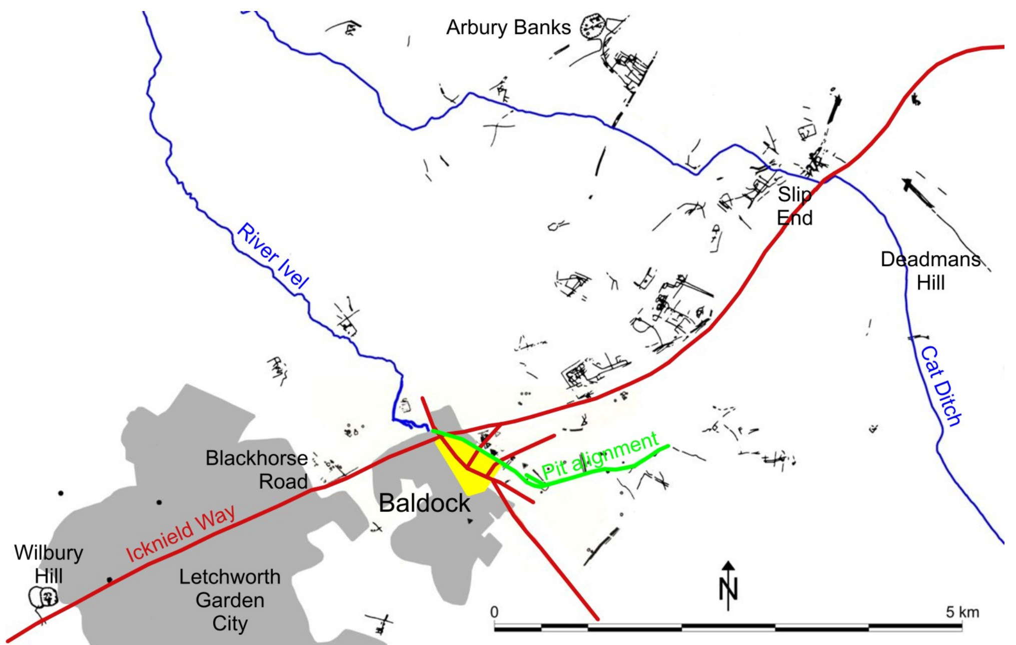
Excavating part of the pit alignment in 1981

Around 30 BC, another wealthy individual was buried in the town, this time in an enormous enclosure north of the posts. Like the old chief of about sixty-five years before, he took a wine “bucket” and roast piglets into the afterlife, but he also had a coat of iron mail armour, possibly a gift from the Roman world, bronze jewellery and wooden furniture decorated with bronze studs. He may even have served as a foreign prince as an officer in the Roman army. He died around the time a local ruler stopped issuing coins and it is possible that he actually was the Ađđedomarus named on them. A slightly later ruler, Andoco… (we do not know his full name), who lived between 10 BC and AD 10, may also have been based in Baldock, as more of his coins have been found here than anywhere else.

The post arrangement lasted for thirty or forty years before it was taken away. In places, the growing town expanded to the north of the line the posts had marked, especially where roads had been laid down through the line. In other places, though, the line continued to be respected as a boundary through to the end of the Roman period.

The Roman conquest

It is too easy to imagine that the invasion by Roman forces in the summer of AD 43 brought about an instant and huge change to Britain. People did not instantly start talking Latin, wearing togas or putting mosaic floors into their homes. Nor did thousands of people from Italy settle the island. For many people, including the majority of inhabitants of Baldock, the most noticeable change was probably how they paid taxes and who they paid them to, more than anything else.



The Baldock *oppidum* at the time of the Roman conquest

Slowly, other things did change. A new infrastructure was soon created for ruling a Roman province, with a carefully maintained road system, law courts, formal local government and a regular money supply. Consumer goods that had only been affordable by the wealthy were now available in the market place and the low level inter-tribal warfare that had been going on for centuries was ended. People became more prosperous.

Baldock seems to have been ignored by the invading army, probably because its rulers posed no threat (they may even have been among the eleven kings who surrendered to the Emperor Claudius in AD 43), and there was never a Roman fort in the town. But within a few years, people were using Roman style pottery, some imported from overseas, building their homes in Roman styles and even cooking in Roman ways.

Becoming Roman

The ancient settlement from the air in 1991

The late first-century Roman historian, Cornelius Tacitus, described how a people near the Rhine became so used to the luxuries available to inhabitants of the Empire that they became Roman without even noticing it. The same would have been true for many people in Britain, especially those in the south-east who had been in close contact with Gaul (France) and the Empire. The second chieftain's burial found in Baldock in 1980 contained fragments of iron mail armour and pieces of bronze, which chemical analysis has shown was made from Alpine copper, probably somewhere inside the Roman Empire. It is intriguing to speculate that this chieftain, who died around 30 BC, had received his armour while serving as an officer in the Roman army or even as a diplomatic gift from the Emperor Augustus.

Lower down the social scale, things must have changed more slowly. Even so, more and more houses were being built in the continental, rectangular style from the early first century AD and imported pottery became increasingly available. It is difficult to know to what extent the inhabitant of the town thought of themselves as 'Britons' rather than 'People of Baldock' or 'Catuvellauni' (meaning "the people good in battle"), but they eventually came to see themselves as definitely 'Roman'.

Roman Government

The western provinces of the Empire were organised at a local level into self-governing *civitates*, areas that often corresponded with former tribal territories and pre-Roman kingdoms. Baldock fell within the *civitas* of the Catuvellauni, the old tribal group. It was administered from *Verulamium*, a Roman city that acquired special privileges (most importantly, tax concessions) soon after its foundation. This is where the main law courts were situated, where the more important government offices could be found and where official business would take place. We can think of it as the Romano-British equivalent of a county town.

Baldock was a town at the lowest end of self-government. Technically known as a *vicus*, it had the right to its own council (*ordo* or *curia*) and the enigmatic lead seals reading C.VIC that have sometimes been found in the town were probably issued either by *C*.... *Vicus* or by the *Curia* of *Vic*...; either way, the town's ancient name is probably hidden in the abbreviation.

Home and garden

We know less than we would like about houses in the ancient town. This is partly because many of the areas that archaeologists have excavated were on land that has been farmed for centuries, regular ploughing removing the old ground surfaces. But it is also a reflection of the nature of the buildings in the first place. Many were timber framed, with posts resting on beams laid on the underlying chalk rather than inserted into postholes, because the bedrock provides a solid base. Some were built from a material known as cob, which is basically sun-dried clay and straw, rather like adobe bricks. They work well when kept dry, but dissolve back into clay when wet. There is evidence, though, that more substantial houses with masonry foundations were sometimes built.

The simplest type of house was the most ancient: the timber roundhouse. They consisted of a circular wall up to 15 m in diameter, onto which a conical thatched roof was placed. The wall did not need deep foundations and often, the only trace of these buildings is a shallow gully defining its line. In most cases, the door faces south-east, giving plenty of light during the morning and early afternoon: these houses did not have windows. There was usually a fire in the centre of the floor, over which the cooking would be done, often in an iron cauldron. Although a lot of people, including some archaeologists, call these buildings ‘huts’, they were often large and spacious, providing comfortable homes. In fact, the floor area of many ancient roundhouses exceeded that of the average modern house. So it is quite wrong to call them ‘huts’—a hut is something we have for storage at the bottom of the garden. Most of the houses in the Iron Age settlement were of this type and they continued to build in the Roman town up to as late as the third century AD.

The robbed-out foundations of a town house with projecting towers on Bakers Close

The second type of building was rectangular. It had developed first during the Iron Age in continental

Foundations of the corner of a substantial building found at The Tene in 1968

Europe, but was becoming popular in Britain by the first century BC. The simplest types consisted of one or two rooms and covered a similar floor area to a typical roundhouse. Unlike roundhouses, some of them had wooden shingles or tiles rather than thatched roofs. They were probably also provided with windows and there is no evidence that they were aligned to face the morning sun. Many would have been single-storey but some of them would have had a second storey and would have resembled late medieval timber-framed houses, a few of which can still be seen in Baldock.

Rectangular houses could be made more elaborate by adding a second storey, wings and features such as verandas and towers, a distinctly Roman practice. They can also be made from building stone or brick. A particularly impressive house once stood on Baker’s Close, which geophysical and observational survey has shown to have had two square projecting towers and side wings. Close to the centre of the town and a major complex of religious buildings, it may have been the town-house of a wealthy resident. One of the most impressive Roman door-keys ever found in Britain, with its lion’s head handle, must once have locked an equally impressive door of a building that stood on Clothall Common.

Virtually all of the houses so far found in the town were set in spacious plots of land, quite unlike most other Roman towns, where the houses of the poor, especially, were crammed close together. Baldock must have resembled something more like an early Garden City. Some of these plots may have been used as vegetable gardens and orchards, but it is just as likely that some were laid out as ornamental gardens for their owners to spend leisure time.

Roads

The settlement had always been served by tracks, some of them long distance routes, but during the late first century BC to early first century AD, efforts were made to formalise them. Ditches were dug on one or both sides—partly for drainage, but also partly to define their edges—and a surface of gravel laid down. After the Roman conquest, the make-up of the road became more elaborate, with extra layers beneath the surface and a camber (curve) to aid drainage. Unusually, at least some of the roads in the town were still being maintained long after Roman rule ended early in the fifth century.

Unlike newly created towns, such as *Verulamium* or *Londinium*, Roman Baldock did not have a gridiron street pattern. Instead, the roads that had been established during the first century BC continued to be used. In places, they form a rough grid, but a quick glance at the plan shows that it was largely haphazard, with roads going in all directions.

This does not mean that there was no sense to the layout: most modern European towns are just as haphazardly laid out, but we can find our way around them. This is because we recognise landmarks, streets and the distinction between different zones. With a long-vanished town, it is much more difficult to understand how people would have made their way though the streets, but it is clear that some of the roads were through roads, while others were cul-de-sacs serving just one or two houses.

Gravel road surface on Clothall Common

The most noticeable road is the Icknield Way, an ancient long-distance route-way that ran to the north of the town. It was much wider than any of the other streets, up to ten metres across. It may have been used as a drove road, along which animals would be driven to different pastures or to market. Whether it is really was as ancient as many people believe has been questioned, but it was clearly an important communications route across North Hertfordshire by the end of the Iron Age, when it passed along the northern foot of the chalk hills. Parts of it have been excavated in Baldock and further west, at Blackhorse Road in Letchworth.

In the town, roads were generally about six metres wide, more than enough to allow carts travelling in opposite directions to pass. They usually had a ditch on

either side, although whether this was always for drainage or sometimes to define the boundaries of properties bordering the road is difficult to say. In places where roads ran uphill, they were sometimes worn into deep hollows. This was a result of the volume of traffic, made worse by torrents of water during heavy rain storms. At Hartsfield School, the main road up the hill had worn into a hollow about a metre and a half deep, which filled up with silts in the later Roman period. Documents from the Middle Ages suggest that it was still in use long after the Roman period, by which time it must have been very difficult to use, especially in wet weather, when it would have been very muddy.

The silt-filled hollow way at Hartsfield School

The roads were usually surfaced with gravel, probably dug from the valley of the River Ivel of from small deposits found on the chalk hills. The surface of one road survived at Stane Street, where it had been laid over earlier graves whose fills later slumped. In most other places, surfaces were ploughed away centuries ago. Beneath the gravel surface, there was usually a layer of coarser pebbles to provide a solid foundation and to improve drainage.

The roads that linked the town with other places were similar to those inside the town. Main roads were built on a low mound or *agger*, though, which raised them above the surrounding countryside. This improved drainage, but it also made the roads a more imposing feature of the landscape. A section was excavated through one of these trunk roads, going from Baldock towards *Verulamium*, at Jack's Hill near Graveley in 1989, revealing the *agger* and drainage ditch. The maintenance of these main roads was the responsibility of the local council at *Verulamium*. Interestingly, the excavation at Jack's Hill also revealed the side ditch of a much earlier road on the same alignment. This earlier road dated from the Earlier Iron Age, before the fifth century BC, showing the great antiquity of this and, by implication, other cross-country routes.

There was also a complex network of minor roads and tracks that have not left such substantial traces. The ancient ridgeway that ran to the south-east of the town, from modern Wallington Road, along South Road and the path towards Baldock Road and Willian is just such a road; it probably links the town with the villa at Purwell Mill, Hitchin, to the south-west. Most of these minor roads are virtually undetectable to the archaeologist as they often leave no trace until discovered during excavation.

Making a living

It is difficult to know how everyone made a living in a place like Baldock. We tend to assume that most people were farmers because most skeletons seem to show a life of hard, heavy work causing wear and tear on the bones, forgetting that town life generates a host of other manual jobs. There are some skeletons that do not, though, and these were probably people who did not have to do manual labour.

Manual work

From what we know of society in Roman Britain, there would have been a need for all sorts of other workers. In the manual trades, we can see that there were specialist potters, blacksmiths, jewellers, miners, tilers and so on. Although some goods, such as high-quality pottery, had to be brought into the town from manufacturers elsewhere, some goods were certainly made locally. There is good evidence for metal working, both with iron and copper alloy; mortar and plaster used local minerals, which were probably quarried in the Weston Hills; timber for buildings, furniture and fuel required managed woodland; many goods must have been made in the town and some would have been sold to people living in villages, villas or farms in the surrounding countryside.

We can detect these types of work through their products. The two main sources of pottery used in the town—Harrold in Bedfordshire and Much Hadham in Hertfordshire—were professional organisations, running a factory scale of production. Their potters were full-time workers in the industry. In the town itself, there are metalworking furnaces belonging to blacksmiths, who must have made most of the iron goods found during excavation.

A malting kiln, possibly evidence for brewing

The professions

Not all types of work have left such obvious traces, though: Roman Britain was a complex society with non-manual professions, such as lawyers, priests and doctors. There must have been such people in Baldock, but they are difficult to recognise in the archaeology of the town. The temples must have had priests and other workers; they seem to have

been an important part of the local economy, perhaps attracting pilgrims from further afield, who would have needed places to stay, votive offerings to make and perhaps even souvenirs to take home.

E S Applebaum's reconstruction of the town, drawn around 1930, is still close to what we believe it was like

The evidence for literacy in the form of pen nibs, styli, seals and seal-boxes, graffiti and a curse tablet suggests that there were people who could read and write, perhaps for professional purposes. The lead seals reading *C.VIC* that emanated from the town council would have been issued by a staff of bureaucrats and clerks, just like a modern council. There would have been doctors who would need to read and write as well as quacks and witch-doctors, who would pass off written spells on the gullible or desperate.

This variety of occupation is something that is easily overlooked amongst the mundane rubbish studied by archaeologists. In many ways, this is because domestic activities often produce more rubbish than non-manual work, while manual work tends to produce a lot of the sorts of residues that we can excavate centuries later.

Farming

There is little doubt that farming was one of the most important elements of the Roman economy, even in towns. Most towns were smaller than many modern villages and Baldock is no exception. At its greatest extent, the population was probably no more than 500 and no building was more than a few minutes' walk from fields. One of the more unusual aspects of the town is the way that so many houses were set in extensive plots, evidently so that the inhabitants could grow crops and keep livestock, even if it was only on a small scale. Most people were perhaps able to supplement their incomes by producing food that they could sell at market or eat themselves.

Trade and industry

Although Baldock was self-sufficient in many things, especially food, Roman Britain was a consumer society in which people bought fashion items. Most of these were made elsewhere: pottery in large factories across the province as well as overseas, fine jewellery and sculpture from artists based in large cities and so on. Goods of all sorts were transported throughout the empire and trade was an important element in the Roman economy.

The town was surrounded by arable fields and even inside the town, many of the large plots around people's homes were probably smallholdings. A lot of people would have produced much of their own food, growing crops, tending orchards and bee-hives, and keeping a few domestic animals. Some foods would have to be bought from market, though. Although we do not know where the town’s market was held, it must have been close to the centre. Here, people could buy local produce they could not grow themselves as well as more exotic foodstuffs imported from farther afield. Oysters, which only live in seawater, were a popular snack and were perhaps brought in from the Essex coast or Thames estuary; more exotic foods would be imported from southern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.

The markets also sold craft products that most people would not have made for themselves. Brooches were popular items of jewellery for both men and women, while bracelets were popular with women and girls. They were usually made by local craftspeople, some of whose furnaces have been found in the town. Furniture would also be sold, but being made from wood, it decayed long ago, so archaeologists usually cannot find it except when they find the decorative metal studs that sometimes adorned the furniture of the wealthy.

Pottery was one of the most important household items and very little, if any, was actually made in Baldock. There were kilns nearby in Hitchin and further afield at Much Hadham (near Bishops Stortford) and *Verulamium* (St Albans). More expensive high quality pottery was brought from Oxfordshire, the Nene Valley near Peterborough and even the continent. Glass vessels were probably made in London or imported from the Continent and North Africa.

We can see the effects of trade within Britain by looking at the distribution of manufactured goods. Pottery from individual factories tended to be distinctive, so products from known sources can be found at sites within the area in which they were traded. For instance, pottery from the factories at Much Hadham in Hertfordshire and Harrold in Bedfordshire reached Baldock from the late first to early fifth centuries; by the fourth century, both factories were trading their goods over a much wider area.

On the other hand, a popular import from the continent, samian ware (a glossy red type of pottery made in moulds), is found throughout the first and second centuries AD, but after AD 200, products from factories in Oxfordshire became more popular and imports soon stopped. In fact, continental trade declined in general from the third century on, and the British pottery industry became dominated by just a few large manufacturers.

While we can see the remains of this type of trade, other types are less obvious. Some imported foodstuffs can be recognised from their containers: wine, raisins and *garum* (a pungent but popular fish relish) were transported throughout the empire in pottery amphorae, the form of the container showing where it came from. Some amphorae helpfully have painted 'labels' telling us what they contained, how much of it there was and where it came from. Slaves were an important item of trade, but short of finding documents mentioning them, they remain invisible to the archaeologist.

Glass bottles like these were not made locally

It is even more difficult to recognise what was being traded out from Baldock. Presumably the rich agricultural hinterland provided foodstuffs that could be exported; perhaps, given the town's importance as a centre for the brewing industry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was even a place where *cervisa*, local ale, was made. There may also have been workshops where artisans produced jewellery (unfinished copper alloy brooches and bone pins in various stages of manufacture have been found), but so far we have not found any evidence for a single product dominating local manufacturing.

Local people would have been able to trade their products and services in return for other goods or for cash. They were able to sell their foodstuffs and luxury goods to other townspeople, either by bartering or for money. After a hundred years of inflation, prices were fixed by the Emperor Diocletian (284-306), so we know how much various items cost. As well as the things archaeologists can find in the ground, there were things we cannot see: the services provided by doctors, lawyers, scribes and other professionals, and the purchase of slaves. There were taxes to pay to the government, sacrifices to make to the gods and the funerals of loved ones, all of which needed money. Some aspects of life have not changed much in two thousand years!

Food and cooking

Foods

During the Iron Age, there was a much narrower choice of food than today or even in the Roman period and fewer ways to prepare it. Most cooking was done over an open fire in the centre of the house; this enabled roasting on spits and stewing in great cauldrons to be done. These are precisely the things found in the old chieftain's burial at The Tene. The very wealthy could afford exotic imports from the Roman Empire, but most people would have to rely on what could be grown locally, especially on their own land. Although most of the main food animals we eat today were already available—beef, pork, lamb and chicken—there were fewer types of vegetables and fruit.

A *mortarium* (grinding bowl) that was so well used, a hole has been worn in the base

Following the Roman conquest, though, many new food plants became available. As well as things we think of today as basics, such as onions and carrots, more exotic foodstuffs such as raisins, pepper and other spices were imported. The discovery of pottery amphorae suggests that items such as olive oil, wine and *garum* (a pungent fish-based relish) were being bought by those who could afford them.

The animal bones found in excavations show how meat eating changed after the Roman conquest. Many of the bones come from butchered meat and show how the animal was cut up to prepare it as food. The cuts of meat available in Roman Baldock were very different from those of the Iron Age and were the types that could be found in big cities and forts: local people evidently developed the taste for fine Roman meats.

Cooking techniques and dining

New types of cooking and preparing food also became popular. For the first time, people had burners on which they could sit cooking vessels or ovens in which they could bake. Bronze skillets allowed people to fry food, while the *mortarium*, a bowl with grits inside to grind food to a paste when making sauces, became an important utensil in many households. This shows that Roman ways of preparing food caught on quickly and, we must assume, Roman (or at least Roman style) recipes.

The way in which people ate their meals also changed. Wealthy households would have eaten from silver platters and bowls, but they are found only rarely by archaeologists. Less well-off households would eat from pewter, which looks a little like silver, but which is much cheaper to buy; they are also rarely found as the metal can be recycled. Most of the time, we find pottery bowls, dishes and platters. The better quality types—usually samian ware before the third century and Oxfordshire colour-coated wares afterwards—were often imitations of metal originals. They would have been a second-best dinner service, for use every day by richer families, or the best crockery for poorer people. Poorer families would also have used wooden vessels, but these have not survived at Baldock for archaeologists to find.

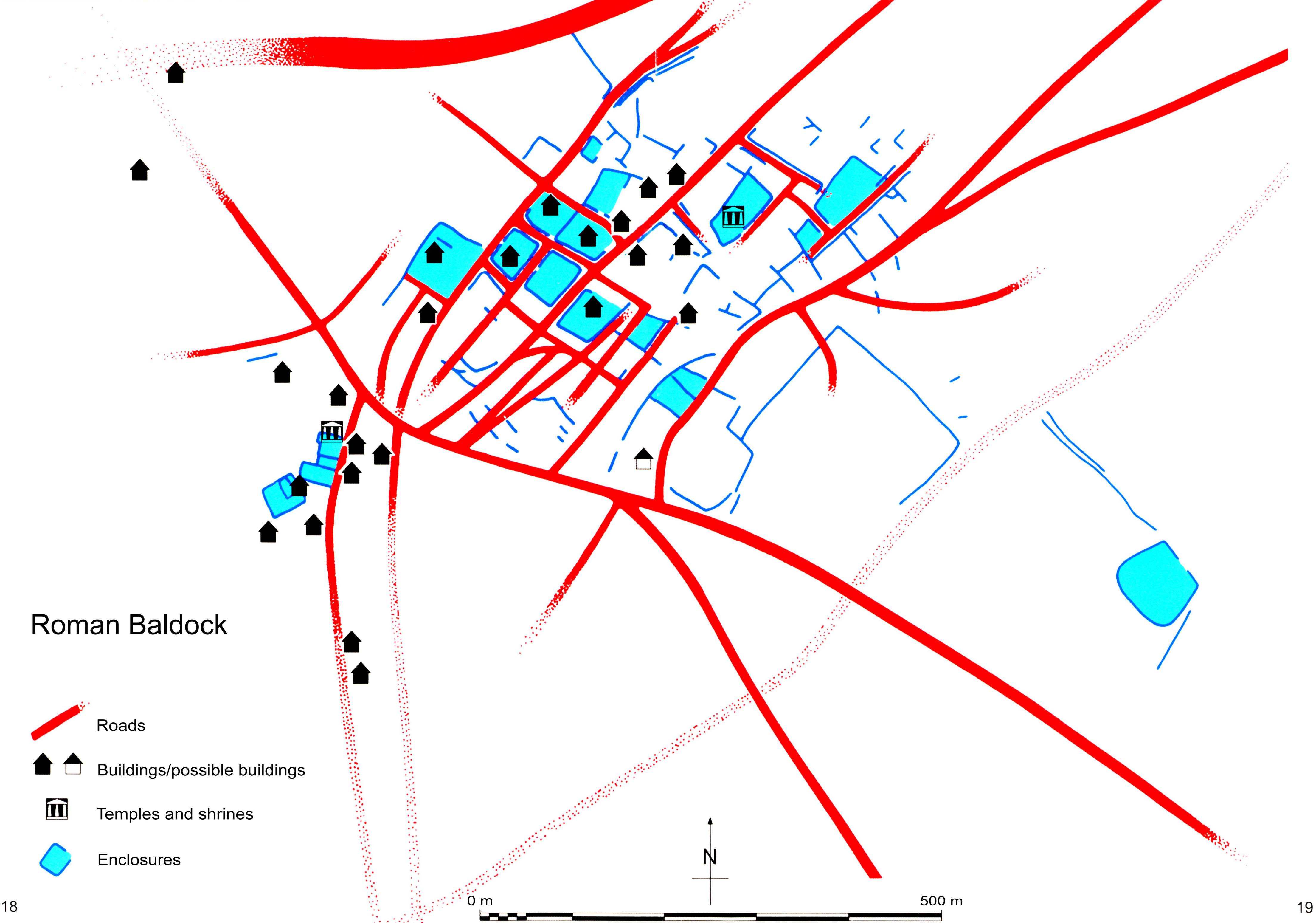
A possible chalk-lined oven found at 65 High Street in 1988

In the Late Iron Age and early Roman period, people seem to have eaten from their own individual bowls and platters, perhaps serving themselves from large dishes placed in the centre of the table. During the third century, they began to eat from larger vessels, perhaps sharing from the same dishes. We do not know why this happened, but it has been thought that the growth of religions like Christianity, which stressed the importance of communal meals, may have had something to do with the change.

People usually ate with their fingers, using knives to cut slices from larger items. Spoons are also found, which would have been useful for stews and food coated in runny sauces; some examples from Baldock are very elaborate and were perhaps used only on special occasions by wealthy households.

Recipes

Most people have heard of the strange things eaten by the Romans, like dormice in honey, but this recipe is found in a cookbook from Rome that would have been intended only for the wealthiest of households. In truth, we do not know whether any of the elaborate recipes we know about from Roman writers would have been attempted in ancient Baldock: many of them use ingredients that may not even have been available in Britain. Even so, the changes to cuts of meat available in the town and the use of *mortaria* shows that at least some Roman style recipes were popular.


Roman Baldock
Roads
Buildings/possible buildings
Temples and shrines
Enclosures
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500 m

Some of that old-time religion

A strange temple

The temple at Wynn Close during excavation in the 1970s

During Ian Stead's excavations at Clothall Common, a large enclosure with a roundhouse at its centre was found. Roundhouses were the typical buildings of the Bronze Age and Iron Age, but by the end of the first century AD, they must have looked very old-fashioned and provincial to the increasingly Roman inhabitants of Baldock. Fewer and fewer were being built, as people wanted rectangular buildings, like those they could see at *Verulamium* and *Londinium*. So it is really surprising to find a large roundhouse being built just a few years before AD 200.

The enclosure it stood in did not respect the existing pattern of boundaries and was not rectangular, unlike neighbouring properties. A massive gateway to the south-east provided the main entrance to the enclosure. Finds inside the site (which now lies beneath Wynn Close) include several pits containing the largest collection of third-century spearheads from Britain, a rattle used in religious ceremonies, model axes, a spear and an antler, the kinds of miniatures that were used as votive offering, as well as a single adult male burial. These suggest that the site was a temple, perhaps connected with a hunting or warrior god.

But why was it built in a style that was more than a hundred years out of date? Most of the temples found in other towns were rectangular: some were in the Romano-Celtic style, like the one at Bakers Close mentioned below, and a few were of Classical style. Some were polygonal. But a roundhouse temple dating to the late second century AD appears unique in Roman Britain. Its architect must have chosen the style and evidently wanted it to be seen as harking back to the distant past, perhaps even to a time before the Roman conquest. It was almost defiant in its refusal to be Roman, which makes us wonder how outsiders would have thought of it. Did they look on the people of Baldock as unpatriotic or as Romano-sceptics? As country bumpkins or as ultra-traditionalists? We may never know, but it is fascinating to ask such questions.

And an ordinary temple

Foundations of the temple at Bakers Close visible as parch marks in the dry summer

Bakers Close is an area of parkland that has not been built over since the end of the Roman period. When the weather is really dry in the summer, it is possible to make out brown lines in the grass which, when seen from above, show the outlines of building foundations. One of them is a typical Romano-Celtic temple, which consists of a large rectangle enclosing a smaller. We believe that the inner rectangle is the *cella* or inner sanctuary of the temple, where the god's (or goddess's) statue would have been kept, while the outer foundations show where a covered colonnade once surrounded the shrine. Worshippers would have stood outside the temple, with only the priests or priestesses being allowed inside. Sacrifices took place on an altar in front of the temple and closer to the main road that ran past it.

We do not know what sort of god or goddess was worshipped here and no excavations have ever taken place on Baker's Close to show us the date of the building. It was a type that was typical from the first century BC right through to the fourth century AD and was the commonest type of temple in Roman Britain. Nearby, there are other buildings that may have been part of a much larger religious complex.

What about the Christians?

There would almost certainly have been a Christian community in Roman Baldock and, by the middle of the fourth century, everybody was supposed to be Christian. One of the town's cemeteries, in The Tene, was probably their burial ground, as it resembles certainly Christian cemeteries in places like Dorchester. We have not yet found their church, which could have been anywhere in the town. During the construction of the bypass in 2003, a signet ring inscribed with the Christian prayer *VIVAS* ('may you live') was found.

Despite pagan religions being outlawed in the fourth century, many of the burials in the cemeteries at California, Royston Road and Icknield Way East show signs that they were of pagans. At least one of these cemeteries continued to be used until after AD 500, while the Christian cemetery had closed down over fifty years earlier. We suspect that the Christians moved away to a place that did not have such strong pagan traditions, establishing a community in Hitchin during the fourth century.

Cemeteries

At least twenty-one cemeteries are known to have existed in the town, of which twelve have been excavated more-or-less completely. The number is exceptional for a Roman town of this character or indeed for any town in Roman Britain and the number of burials excavated is enormous: almost two thousand have been found, a number that it probably unique in the Roman Empire outside Egypt. They give us a unique insight into the health of the town's population, beliefs about the afterlife and the size of the town.

The earliest human remains date from before the establishment of the *oppidum* and show that people were being buried in places considered special by the fifth century BC. Early burials were made across the site of the town, but by the later first century BC, a special zone had been set aside purely for burial. This lay to the north-east of the pit alignment that ran up the slope to the north of the *oppidum*. Over perhaps fifty years, a number of square enclosures were created, each with a wealthy cremation burial at its centre, many surrounded by others of less wealth. Beyond them, to the north and east, more open cemeteries were laid out, containing either inhumations (bodies buried directly in the ground) or cremations, with no mixing of types.

By the middle of the first century AD, this system had broken down. As the town grew, it expanded onto this burial zone and the square enclosures were built over. New cemeteries were established around the town, mixing inhumations and cremation burials. One of the older cemeteries, at Westell Close, did continue in use, but as a purely cremation cemetery. Many of these new cemeteries lay beside roads on the edges of the town, as in towns across the Roman Empire.

The variety of burial rites is enormous: as well as the basic differences between cremation and inhumation, we find cremations in ceramic urns, wooden boxes, leather or textile bags, and directly into pits in the soil, inhumations in coffins, in shrouds, face up, face down, on their side, contracted and even decapitated. No one rite is restricted to any one cemetery and it is clear that there was a great deal of personal choice in how to dispose of the dead.

A first-century AD cremation from Clothall Road. As well as pots, the bones of food animals can be seen

During the third century, cremation went out of fashion for reasons we do not understand. One possibility is that religions that placed an emphasis on bodily resurrection, such as

Christianity and Mithraism, were becoming popular, but this cannot be the whole story. One or two cremations were still being performed into the fourth century, the last so far known being around AD 350 at Icknield Way East. In its place, new cemeteries containing only inhumations were established at California and The Tene. The latter is especially interesting as it falls into a class of organised cemeteries that developed in Britain only in the second half of the fourth century and which may indeed be associated with Christian populations. At California, on the other hand, the burials were arranged in many different directions, numerous graves cut or even re-used earlier graves (perhaps they were family plots) and a variety of rites (including decapitation) is seen that makes it all but certain that the people buried there cannot have been Christian. Intriguingly, it is this cemetery that provides the latest evidence for the town at Baldock: the last burials to be made there were deposited around the middle of the sixth century AD.

Murder most foul?

During the excavation of the California cemetery in 1983, the body of a young woman was found, with a newborn baby laid beside her. Family tragedies of this kind must have been common at a time when many diseases that we can treat today were incurable and would kill their victims and when many women and babies died during childbirth. In fact, most of the time, we cannot tell from a skeleton what the person died from.

A Roman murder victim?

When the bones were sent to the specialist for study, though, a more complicated picture began to emerge. The woman's skull was broken when excavated, which is not unusual, as the pressure of soil can make them collapse. When put back together, it soon became clear that she had suffered several blade injuries to the left side of her head, especially around the eye. She also had a fractured rib that had not begun to heal. These injuries must have contributed to her early death. Not enough survived of the fragile newborn infant bones to know if it had also been attacked.

What are we to make of this sort of discovery? We can invent all sorts of stories to explain why she was killed (and perhaps her baby, too). Might her jealous husband have learned that the baby was not his? Had she been set upon by highwaymen on her way back to town? Did a burglar creep into her house and kill her and her baby while they slept? Shocking stories like this would have been as commonplace in Roman Britain as they are today and remind us of how little human nature has changed.

People

We do not know the people of ancient Baldock as personalities; although we have found the bones or ashes of over 1800 of them, they are all anonymous. We can only learn the names of the town's inhabitants through graffiti and other bits of writing. To learn something about their personalities, we would need to have longer written texts, such as letters. So far, none have been discovered, but perhaps one day some will.

A forgotten tragedy: a woman who died in childbirth, with her stillborn triplets

We can still learn something about people from just their names, though. Roman citizens, for instance, would have the classical *tria nomina* (three names) that advertised this special status to the world. Some people continued to bear Celtic names long after the Roman conquest, perhaps as a matter of pride in being a Briton, perhaps because they were traditional family names or perhaps because they were the names of popular heroes. So we have Celtic names like Meleniu and Vatila alongside Roman names like Belleninus and Iucundus.

We can also look at the population as a whole, using the burials excavated in the town. They show that many more people died at a younger age than today, with a lot of children under five years old dying. In most cases, they would have caught illnesses that can be cured today. If they survived beyond their fifth birthday, though, they stood a good chance of living into their forties or even later.

Nevertheless, a significant number of women died between their teens and their late thirties. These are the ages when women have children and it is likely that a great many died in childbirth. There is a first century AD grave from a cemetery at Stane Street which contains a woman and three stillborn babies, one still inside the mother; it was rare to survive giving birth to twins until modern times, so triplets would have been an even greater danger.

People could still live to an advanced age. There are several examples of toothless individuals who must have been very elderly when they died. Several of them were buried with special feeding jars with spouts that are usually described as babies' bottles. The idea that in the past, most children never knew their grandparents is quite wrong.

Tacita is cursed…

The so-called Baldock curse

It was widely believed in the Roman world that a curse, properly written and given magical power, could do real harm to a person: most people were very superstitious. At Bath, large numbers of curses written on lead plaques were found during the excavation of the temple baths. It is less well known that one of the first such curses found in Britain comes from Baldock and was contained in a cremation burial pit excavated in Walls Field in 1930.

The curse tablet was difficult to read and to give it extra magical power, it was written in mirror writing. It reads: VIITVS / QVOMODO SANIIIS / SIGNIIFICATVR / TACITV DIIFICTA, which is not terribly good Latin for “Tacita, or whatever else she's known as, is cursed to be rancid pus”. It’s not exactly a kind thought! We really do not know why it was put in this particular grave, dug around the year AD 100, but it had been properly folder over and had nails driven through it to ‘fix’ or ‘nail’ the curse to the person. It may be that this was the grave of Tacita or it may be that those who arranged this burial believed that she had a hand in the person's death, so that this was their attempt at revenge. Placing a curse in a grave was also thought to give it greater power

It tells us a lot more than that Tacita had made an enemy, though. It shows that there were people in Baldock who could read and write in Latin, the language of the invaders. It also shows that people were doing things—making curses—in a thoroughly Roman way and that there were people in the town with Roman rather than Celtic names. What we don't know is whether this means that Tacita was actually a Roman woman who had settled locally rather than a native Briton born into a family that had acquired a Roman name. Whatever she did to upset the unnamed person who cursed her is old gossip, long since forgotten.

Fashion

People have always wanted to look good by dressing well, having the sorts of clothes, jewellery and hairstyles that show other people that they are at the forefront of fashion and can afford to be so. In a consumer society, styles can change very quickly and this was as true of Roman Britain as it is of modern Britain. In fact, it is partly thanks to the speed at which fashions changed that archaeologists can sometimes date things quite precisely.

The so-called *Dea Nutrix* or Nursing Goddess; she has an elaborate hairstyle that was fashionable in the late second century AD

One of the most common fashion items found by archaeologists was the brooch. At a time when buttons were not used for fastening clothes, brooches were used by both men and women to hold cloaks in place. Some ancient brooches resemble safety pins because they were used in exactly the same way, but unlike safety pins, most were decorated elaborately and were usually made of bronze, less commonly of iron, although more expensive types were made from silver or gold. They were designed to be seen and some, such as the gold crossbow brooches worn by senior government officials in the fourth century, very clearly showed how important someone was.

Women's hairstyles were also designed to show off their wealth. People would learn about the latest fashions in Rome by studying newly minted coins with portraits of the empress, just as people today look at celebrities' photographs in magazines for inspiration. These very complex hairdos had to be held in place with hair pins made from bone (where we would now use plastic) or from metal. Like brooches, hairpins were pieces of jewellery with designs that often went out of fashion quickly.

A bone hairpin dating from the third or fourth century

A day in the country

Ancient Baldock was a market town which would have attracted farmers from some distance to sell their wares. Wealthy townspeople, though, liked to be able to escape to the countryside, where life was slower and they could relax from the stresses of day-to-day business, just as we do today. Some of them might own land in the countryside that was looked after by a bailiff; occasionally they might need to travel out to visit their tenants.

Poorer people, many of whom had moved into the town to make a better living, would still have had relatives living on farms or working for gentlemen farmers. They might arrange to marry someone from their extended family or a friend of the family. There would have been a constant flow of people in and out of town for both business and pleasure.

Villas

There are several villas in the countryside around Baldock. Some of them were little more than farmhouses built in an Italian style, but others were more elaborate. There are large villas at Purwell in Great Wymondley and at Radwell, which must have belonged to rich people. A sculpted marble head may have been found on the site of the Radwell villa and gives a hint about the owner's wealth and status. There are even sites, such as at Wallington, that are enormous. We should think of these as the Roman equivalent of the English Country House.

The marble head from Radwell

Some villas were occupied as family homes throughout the year. Others were holiday retreats, even hunting lodges, set in carefully maintained gardens. The Purwell villa seems to have been part of a huge estate that encompassed Walsworth and Great Wymondley, with peasant farmers working the land as tenants for the owners. On the other hand, the villa at Little Wymondley bypass was probably no more than a prosperous farm, with owners who worked their own land.

Senuna: a rediscovered goddess

In 2002, a hoard of temple treasure was found by a metal detectorist near Ashwell, a short distance north-east from Baldock. The hoard comprised gold jewellery and gold and silver leaf-shaped plaques dedicated to a previously unknown goddess called Senuna. Her name—the "old lady"—perhaps means that she was thought of as being wise. As many of the plaques show an image of the Roman goddess Minerva, one of whose attributes was wisdom, but bear inscriptions to Senuna, it is possible that they were identified with each other. Minerva also had attributes connected with water and healing, crafts and music, and warfare. The location of the site together with many of the finds made during the subsequent archaeological excavation of the find-spot could be taken to reflect these attributes, which may also have been considered attributes of Senuna.

Excavation at the site near Ashwell in 2006; this is where the temple treasure was found

The excavation by the North Hertfordshire Archaeological Society, under the direction of Gil Burleigh, with the support of the British Museum, took place from 2003 to 2006. It was not of the temple or shrine itself, but a nearby place where offerings were made to the goddess over hundreds of years. Ceremonies performed on the site included ritual feasting at funerals, when the bodies of the deceased were laid out in a small roofed building before being transported elsewhere for cremation and burial. Later, some of the ashes of the deceased were brought back to the site to be scattered or buried in little pits during further feasting and commemoration of the dead.

Other deities were also honoured at the site, including Apollo, the *Dea Nutrix* (a nursing mother goddess), Mercury, Roma (the embodiment of the city of Rome), Venus and Victory. The Senuna-Minerva treasure was gathered up from a nearby temple and deliberately buried on the site some time in the fourth century AD, perhaps at a time when pagan temples were being shut down by the newly powerful Christians. This religious site was part of a much larger settlement, with origins in the Iron Age, located at what may have been the northern edge of the territory of Baldock.

Baldock and the wider world

Ancient Baldock was not an island: it was part of a wider community, which grew as Britain became part of the Roman Empire. Although the settlement developed at first as the main centre of a local chieftain or king, by the end of the first century BC, it was part of the larger kingdom of the Catuvellauni, whose main centre was at *Verlamion* (St Albans). Over the next fifty years, local rulers conquered the land to the east (modern Essex) and established their capital at *Camulodunon* (Colchester). As political power gradually crept further away from the town, it was drawn into larger political networks.

The Roman conquest of AD 43 was the biggest of these changes. At the time of the invasion, the Catuvellaunian kingdom was the most powerful in the south-east and its defeat marks the beginning of Roman rule. In Britain, power was concentrated first at *Camulodunum*, the new Roman city built at Colchester, but by the end of the first century, the merchant city of *Londinium* (London) had become the seat of provincial government. The Roman governor was in constant contact with the local authorities throughout the new province of *Britannia* as well as with the Emperor in Rome. This was achieved by a system known as the Imperial Post, a network of messengers paid by the government. They would ride between posting stations (called *mansiones*), where they would change their horses or pass the letters on to the next messenger in the chain. In this way, messages could get from one end of the Empire to the other in a matter of days.

A fragment from a third-century marble frieze found in Hitchin in 1853; it may once have adorned the mausoleum of a wealthy land-owner

A government office

During investigations behind The Engine public house in 1991, a pair of parallel walls running for over 14 metres was found close to the crossroads of the Icknield Way with Stane Street. They had been built some time in the late third or early fourth century. Too big to be part of an ordinary house, they may have been part of some kind of official building. It was thought at the time that it could be a *mansio*, partly because it was close to the crossroads. Other possibilities include a tax office, offices for the town council or law courts.

The end of the town

Roman Baldock, like Roman Britain, did not come to a crashing halt because the legions “went home”: this was their home and had been for a hundred years or more, as most new recruits were the sons of soldiers from local garrisons during the fourth century. Some troops were moved overseas to defend what the government thought were more important frontiers and some were taken on campaigns by usurpers trying to take control of the Empire or parts of it, but there had never been an army unit stationed in Baldock. Instead, the West suffered total economic collapse as the government stopped sending pay to civil servants and the military. Britain stopped being part of the Empire because Rome was no longer prepared to pay for it.

So how did this affect the people of Baldock? The most obvious sign was that the market no longer sold mass-produced consumer goods, either because the companies making them had gone bust or the merchants who traded them would not sell to people with no money to pay for them. Instead, cottage industries sprang up locally, producing poor quality imitations of these goods.

With no central command for the army, defence of Britain became chaotic and some time before the middle of the fifth century, a decision was made to employ German mercenaries. Most were settled around the coast to control raids by pirates, but some were posted inland to protect towns. At Blackhorse Farm a kilometre north of Baldock, some Germans took over a farm that had been occupied for five hundred years. They were the first English neighbours of the Britons of North Hertfordshire and were perhaps employed to protect them. But within a hundred years, they had gone.

An unusual handmade handled cup from a fifth-century grave

Baldock continued to be occupied for over a century, but the economic disaster of the early fifth century had long-lasting impacts. Town life was impossible without trade and many of the inhabitants probably left to work on farms in the surrounding countryside, perhaps to work for immigrant English landlords. By about 550, there was little left to show that there had once been a thriving community here: the last people to live at Baldock were buried around this time. Soon the site was completely deserted and became farmland. By 1066, it was just an insignificant corner of the parish of Weston.

The Medieval Town

The Knights Templar

The medieval parish church

During the tempestuous reign of King Stephen (1135-1156), a religious order with properties in England, the Knights of the Temple of Solomon, asked for permission to set up a new market town. They were given land in the Manor of Weston by Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Pembroke, and soon established a town with a street pattern based on a cross. To create their streets, they had to divert the long-established Roman road from *Verulamium* to meet the road from the nearby market town of Hitchin, close to where they built a new church. They jokingly called their new town *Baudac*, which is the medieval French name for Baghdad, a city the crusaders had wanted to capture but had never seen; over time, the English-speaking population came to call it Baldock, as if the name meant “bald oak”, which it did not. In Italian, the name of Baghdad is still written Baldacco and the word gave us Baldachin, a sumptuous embroidered cloth

The Templars were members of an order of religious knights that had been set up to protect travellers to the Holy Land, originally based in Jerusalem itself. The order attracted rich knights and donations from wealthy benefactors: eventually, it became so wealthy that it attracted the attention of the king of France, who had the order disbanded and its property confiscated with the connivance of the Pope.

Although the Templars have long been a popular subject for conspiracy theories and, most recently, form one of the themes in the best selling *The Da Vinci Code*, there is no truth in the idea that they possessed secret knowledge that posed a threat to the church. Although their experience of the Holy Land gave them a deep respect for Islamic culture and learning, they were typically pious medieval Christians who would never have entertained heretical thoughts. The church they built at Baldock is a typical Hertfordshire parish church with no hidden mystic symbols!

The discovery of ancient Baldock

The ancient settlement at Baldock had long been forgotten, although occasional finds of Roman pottery and coins were noted during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. That all changed when Romano-British burials were discovered in 1925 following the first deep steam-ploughing of Walls Field. Over the next seven years, Percival Westell, the first curator of Letchworth Museum, and his assistant Erik Shimon Applebaum excavated a number of sites that soon made it clear that an extensive town had existed on the site in the Roman period, its origins going back into the Late Iron Age. The Second World War disrupted all archaeological work in the town and after Westell died in 1943, his successor Albert T Clarke carried out some rescue excavation work. He discovered a skeleton in Pinnock's Lane and domestic remains on the former Kayser Bondor factory site (now Tesco).

Following the unexpected discovery of the 'chieftain's' burial, the Ministry of Public Building and Works made funds available to John Moss-Eccardt of Letchworth Museum to excavate at Brewery Field. Large-scale campaigns were also led by Ian Stead, who had led the team that excavated the chieftain's burial at The Tene. He dug a series of 135 trial trenches on Upper Walls Common (now the Clothall Common estate), revealing the extent of the settlement to the north-east. In 1970 and 1971, he worked on a large area on the south-western edge of the common and in 1972, moved to Walls Field, to investigate an area proposed for a new school (that was eventually built on a different site to the north-east, now Hartsfield School).

Erik Applebaum excavating a skeleton at Grosvenor Road West in 1932

Excavating a cemetery at Clothall Common in 1986

By the late 1970s, it was widely believed that as much was known about Roman Baldock as could ever be learned and in 1979, the Department of the Environment refused to fund further excavations when work was about to begin on the Clothall Common estate, although the Ancient Monuments Laboratory carried out a geophysical survey of the common, revealing buried ditches and pits, showing the locations of roads, enclosures and probable houses. When work on the estate began in 1980, North Hertfordshire Archaeological Society needed to be mobilised quickly, under the leadership of North Hertfordshire Museums. This new work between 1978 and 1994 was directed by Gil Burleigh and revealed more about the character and history of the settlement. Much of the fieldwork during the 1980s was focused on a series of burial grounds that formed a ring around the town.

Since 1994, North Hertfordshire District Council has no longer run excavations as it decided to wind up its field unit, although it continues to employ an archaeologist in the Museums Service. Instead, all archaeological work in Baldock is now undertaken by commercial units. As a result of requirements in planning legislation to minimise the damage to buried remains, much of the work is small scale and, being carried out by archaeological companies that may not have a research interest in the area, it can sometimes be difficult to fit these results into the bigger picture. Even so, large-scale excavation was carried out in 1994 by The Heritage Network on the area to the west of the Royston Road cemetery, where further burials were discovered.

Archaeology and finds

A bronze brooch from the middle of the first century AD

Archaeological remains are a finite resource: once destroyed, they can never be replaced. If artefacts are taken from a site and not recorded for posterity, they are as good as destroyed, since their value to the archaeologist is what they can tell us about the past, not how much they can be sold for. Because of the importance of ancient Baldock, special protection has been given to parts of the settlement, but all of it is potentially important and archaeologists keep a careful watch on proposals for new development. When building work does take place, it is carefully monitored and sometimes full excavation is needed to record the ancient remains.

Scheduled Ancient Monuments

The government recognises that some places are more important than others and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport maintains a list (or Schedule) of those monuments considered most worth protecting. There are penalties for damaging these sites, which cannot be developed or excavated without special permission, and activities like metal detecting are strictly prohibited on them.

Three parts of Baldock have been singled out for this special degree of protection: Walls Field and Baker's Close in the centre of the town, and Blackhorse Farm to the north. The first two are at the centre of the ancient settlement; Walls Field has been Scheduled since 1946 and Baker's Close since 1985. They will remain valuable open spaces in the centre of the modern town and continue to protect the archaeological evidence that they cover.

Metal detecting

Metal detecting has become an immensely popular hobby in recent years and the finds made by detectorists have added vastly to our knowledge of the heritage of North Hertfordshire. The shrine of Senuna, for instance, was discovered as a result of metal detecting. But it is only when the finds made by detectorists are reported to the relevant authorities that they have any value towards a better understanding of our shared heritage: a collection of artefacts hidden in a cupboard is useless to the archaeologist and the public at large. By reporting them, information about

these discoveries is made available to the wider community, which then benefits from the knowledge gained.

A Roman brooch with a glass ‘gemstone’

There is now a scheme for reporting finds made by metal detecting, by digging the garden or in any way (a lot are made by people walking their dogs), known as the Portable Antiquities Scheme. It can be found on the web at http://www.finds.org/ and has a local Finds Liaison Officer based at Verulamium Museum, St Albans, Herts AL3 4SW, telephone 01727 751826. The Finds Liaison Officer should be the first port of call for any find.

More important still is the Treasure Act of 1996. If a metal object contains precious metal (gold and silver), it is likely to be classed as Treasure, as are groups of prehistoric metalwork, coin hoards and associated objects. Potential Treasure finds must be reported to the local coroner within 14 days of discovery; this can be done through the Finds Liaison Officer. If a find is declared Treasure, a museum may want to acquire it, in which case the finder will be awarded a fair market value as compensation, assessed by independent valuers. If not, it is returned to the finder. The law is complex and it carries heavy penalties (a fine and/or imprisonment): it is worth taking anything that may be Treasure to the local Finds Liaison Officer.

Archaeology in North Hertfordshire

North Hertfordshire District Council

North Hertfordshire District Council has run an archaeological service since it was established in 1974, taking on expertise already provided for many years by Letchworth Museum. From 1974, a Keeper of Field Archaeology was employed by the museum, a post which has continued to the present day. For further information please write to Archaeological Service, Museums Resource Centre, Burymead Road, Hitchin, Herts SG5 1RT or telephone 01462 434896.

North Hertfordshire Archaeological Society

The North Hertfordshire Archaeological Society was founded in 1960 and from its inception has been actively involved in excavations throughout the District. It arranges a series of lectures between September and May, field trips during the summer and occasional fieldwork, including excavations. For more information and to join, visit http://www.nharchsoc.org/

A timeline of ancient Baldock

200 BC	The first ditch systems and pit alignments were built to define the new *oppidum.*
100 BC	The funeral of the chieftain buried at The Tene took place.
55-4 BC	Julius Caesar was in Britain and in 54 BC visited this area.
20 BC	The town began to expand rapidly.
AD 43	The Roman conquest of Britain began.
c 100	The town reached its maximum size, with a population of about 500.
c 175	The temple was built at Wynn Close.
c 250	The town entered a long decline and began to shrink.
380	Christianity was declared the sole legal religion in the Roman Empire.
411	Britain ceased to be part of the Roman Empire.
c 450	A group of Saxons (English) settled at Blackhorse Farm, north of the town.
c 550	The last inhabitants of the town died and were buried at California.
c 1145	Gilbert de Clare donated a part of his manor of Weston to the Knights Templar to build their new town of *Baudac*.
1925	W Percival Westell, curator of Letchworth Museum, first identified the Roman settlement at Baldock.

Finding out more

Further reading

Two major technical reports have been published, one detailing the excavations carried out between 1968 and 1972 by the then Ministry of Works and the other an assessment of the work done between 1978 and 1996, focusing mainly on the many burials excavated in the town. They are:

Stead, I & Rigby, V *Baldock: the excavation of a Roman and Iron Age settlement, 1968-1972*. London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies (Britannia Monograph 6), 1986

The book contains an extensive bibliography allowing the interested reader to follow up specific topics in more detail.

The data from the 1982 excavation at Wallington Road cemetery is available in Burleigh, G R & Fitzpatrick-Matthews, K J *Excavations at Baldock 1978-1994, volume 1: an Iron Age and Romano-British cemetery at Wallington Road.*

Letchworth Garden City: North Hertfordshire District Council and North Hertfordshire Archaeological Society.

Two other informative publications are:

Burleigh, G R A late Iron Age oppidum at Baldock, Hertfordshire. *In:* Holgate, R ed *Chiltern archaeology: recent work*. Dunstable: The Book Castle, 1995

Burleigh, G R The plan of Romano-British Baldock. *In:* A E Brown ed, *Roman small towns in eastern England and beyond*. Oxford: Oxbow, 1995

For a more general account, there is Ros Niblett's book *Roman Hertfordshire* Wimborne: Dovecote Press, 1995

Places to go, things to see

Letchworth Museum (Broadway, Letchworth Garden City, Herts SG6 3PF) displays many of the more important artefacts found during excavations in Baldock. The chieftain's burial discovered in 1967, complete pots, jewellery, religious objects and coins can all be seen. Open 10 am to 5 pm, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday (closed public holidays). Telephone (01462) 685647; email enquiries letchworth.museum@north-herts.gov.uk; web http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/letchworth_museum_and_art_ gallery.htm

Baldock Museum (Hitchin Street, Baldock, Herts SG7 6AX) is a small volunteer-run museum operated by Baldock Local History Society. It focuses mainly on the more recent history of the town, but it occasionally has temporary archaeological exhibitions. Open 10 am to 3 pm Wednesday and 2 to 4 pm Sunday. Telephone (01462) 892640; web http://www.baldockhistory.org.uk/baldock-museum-visit.html

Ashwell Village Museum (Swan Street, Ashwell, Baldock, Herts SG7 5NY) has a small display about the Senuna temple treasure hoard and the excavation of its find-spot. Other displays deal with life in an English village from the Stone Age to the present day. Open Sundays and Bank Holidays, 2.30 to 5 pm. Telephone (01462) 742956; web http://www.ashwell.gov.uk/museum.htm

The British Museum (Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3DG) displays the complete Senuna temple treasure hoard. Telephone 020 7323 8299; web http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk

There is almost nothing to see of ancient Baldock. The centre of the town lies beneath Walls Field, Bakers Close, part of The Tene and Pinnocks Lane, where buried remains still exist but none has been uncovered for display. During the summer, it is often possible to see the foundations of buildings as parch marks in the grass of Bakers Close, but there is unfortunately little else visible.

Nevertheless, much of the later historic market town has survived, with listed buildings dating from the fifteenth through to the twentieth centuries. The broad High Street and White Horse Street were the sites of the market, which is still held on Wednesdays, and the annual Michaelmas Charter Fair, held on 2nd and 3rd of October. There is a modern fair held on the third Saturday in May as part of the annual Baldock Festival.

A reconstruction of the ash wood and bronze wine-mixing bucket from the chieftain's burial excavated at Clothall Common in 1981

Dedicated to all those who have worked on the archaeology of Baldock