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The 'end of the gods' in late Roman Britain

Simon Esmonde Cleary

Keywords. *Romano-Celtic temple,* fanum*, Bath, Caerwent, Lydney, Uley, late Roman, ancillary building,* temenos*, ritual deposition, coins, bracelets, curse-tablets,* defixiones*, animal bones, 5th* c.*, Anglo-Saxon, Christian.*

Résumé. *The 3rd and 4th* c. *did not mark a period of abandonment or discontinuity for temples of the* fanum *type in Roman Britain, rather it was a period of continued use with sites being created and some existing sites substantially expanded or modified. This is particularly true of the region either side of the Bristol Channel in south-western Britain, but holds good for other regions also. The temples and the ancillary buildings at a number of these sites are considered, along with the evidence for the deposition of classes of material: coins; bracelets; curse-tablets/* defixiones*; animal bones. It is argued that the real 'end of the gods' supervened not in the 3rd or the 4th* c. *but rather in the 5th as part of the complex of changes consequent upon the ending of Roman rule in the island, and that Romano-British temple sites did not influence either 'Anglo-Saxon' pagan ritual sites or the location of Christian churches of the Augustinian mission from A.D. 597.*

Mots-clés. *Temple romano-celtique,* fanum*, Bath, Caerwent, Lydney, Uley, bâtiments annexes,* temenos*, dépôt rituel, monnaies, bracelets, tabelettes de défixion, os animaux, Ve* s.*, anglo-saxon, chrétien.*

Résumé. *En* Britannia*, les IIIe et IVe* s. ne marq*uent pas une période d'abandon ou d'interruption du fonctionnement des temples de type* fanum*, car c'est plutôt une période d'utilisation continue avec des sanctuaires qui sont créés ou d'autres déjà existants qui se sont développés ou ont été transformés. C'est particulièrement le cas pour la région située de part et d'autre du « canal de Bristol » au sud-ouest de la Bretagne, mais ceci est aussi valable pour d'autres régions. Les temples et bâtiments annexes de certains sites sont évoqués dans cet article, et le dépôt de diverses catégories de mobilier (monnaies, bracelets, tablettes de défixion, os animaux) y a été mis en évidence. L'auteur estime que « la fin des dieux » n'a pas eu lieu aux IIIe et IVe* s. *mais plutôt au Ve* s.*, et qu'elle fait partie des changements complexes survenus dans l'île après la chute du pouvoir romain. Les sanctuaires romano-celtiques n'ont pas non plus influencé les sites « anglo-saxons » observant des rituels païens, ni l'emplacement des églises chrétiennes implantées lors de la mission d'Augustin de Canterbury en 597 apr. J.-C.*

This paper will seek to outline the evidence for the practice of the cults of the traditional religions during the later Roman period in Britain, running from the middle of the 3rd c. to the middle of the 5th c. The term 'traditional religions' is preferred to 'pagan' since it emphasises the plurality of these cults and their long-standing place in Romano-British culture and society. By comparison with the situation in later Roman or late-antique Gaul which forms the main concern of this dossier, the narrative for religion in this period in Britain has developed along very different lines. The gods and their temples have never been seen by modern workers as under existential threat either from invading 'barbarians' in the 3rd c. or from militant Christians and their bishops in the 4th c. and on into the 5th c. The wider context to religious developments south of Hadrian's Wall has been seen as far more peaceable and merits some consideration to see how it has affected perceptions of the traditional religions in the 3rd and 4th c.

For Britain the 3rd c. has not usually been seen as a period of crisis to match that in Gaul and Germany or elsewhere in the West. The literary sources do not involve Britain in the tales of invasion from across the Rhine. Militarily the century seems to have been peaceful on the northern frontier of Hadrian's Wall, with only the construction of the series of forts of the 'Saxon Shore' around the south-eastern coasts of the island showing that there may have been a new threat from across the North Sea. Accordingly, the 3rd c. has generally been regarded as a time of peace and increasing prosperity for Britain, with no serious dislocations and culminating in the 'Golden Age' of Roman Britain from the end of the 3rd c. into the first half of the 4th c. There has therefore been no warrant for considering the 3rd c. as a turning-point for religious observance or its archaeological manifestations; rather it is seen as a period of overall continuity from the situation established through the 1st and 2nd c. This is not to say that there was no change, but that any change was gradual rather than brutal, and internally driven rather than imposed by external agency.

The narrative for the 4th c. has likewise differed from that traditionally put forward for Gaul. Such textual evidence as there is does not sustain any argument for widespread and profound Christian evangelisation of the island, a picture supported by the limited evidence for Christian places of worship or material from the archaeology (Petts, 2003). For

the 4th c. the texts vouchsafe Britain no insular equivalent of Martin of Tours or Victricius of Rouen undertaking extensive campaigns of evangelisation (though the latter did visit Britain at the end of that century); they speak rather of an ecclesiastical hierarchy that seems somewhat under-developed. In the 5th c., though the heresiarch Pelagius was of British origin his theological development seems to have taken place on the Continent. Patrick, apostle of Ireland, was of Romano-British origins, but his evangelising mission's links were with the Church in Gaul rather than Britain. It was the Church in Gaul that sent over Germanus of Auxerre in 429 to combat the Pelagian heresy in the island, but sadly Constantius of Lyon's image of the mission is unreliable so cannot be taken as an accurate picture of the religious balance in early 5th c. Britain. The archaeology of 4th c. Christianity is indeed present, but it seems limited in extent, giving no grounds for supposing that the worshippers of the 'pale Galilaean' had put to flight the ancient gods (Petts, 2003). By contrast, an alternative narrative that gained some currency was that of a 'pagan revival' in the second half of the 4th c., provoked according to some authors by the religious policies of the emperor Julian (e.g. Toynbee, 1953, p. 3). Though there are few, if any, who would now take that position, that such a position was ever tenable points to the fact that there is a substantial amount of evidence for the persistence of the traditional religions and of their places of worship down to the end of the Roman period in Britain. So those working on religions in late Roman Britain have always been conscious that their narratives have differed radically from those across the Channel.

This paper will therefore seek to review the archaeological evidence for the traditional religions in Britain over a two-hundred-year period. Its main focus will be on developments at temples/sanctuaries, which for Britain means largely buildings of the 'Romano-Celtic' type; *fana* or *de tradition indigène* to our colleagues studying Gaul, since this was largely the focus of the Lille conference. It will then also go on to fields of study which in recent decades have proved particularly innovative and informative for Britain, the analysis of the evidence for 'ritual deposition' at temple sites. This will show that the gods were still being paid reverence, though in ways often less easy to link to specific deities. Temples of the 'eastern' or 'mystery' cults such as Mithraism are accordingly not dealt with here, neither is the evidence for religious practices in the private sphere such as at houses, nor the evidence for 'ritual' behaviour other than at temples. The evidence and analysis in this contribution will seek to show that the traditional religions, and by extension their deities, were still flourishing through the later 3rd and 4th c., so the paper will close by a consideration of the period when the gods of Roman Britain and their worship do seem to end, the first half of the 5th c.

TEMPLES AND SANCTUARIES

Ever since M. J. T. Lewis published his survey of temples in Roman Britain, including charts to show their life-spans (Lewis, 1966, esp. p. 51 tabl. 6), it has been clear that many, probably most, of the then known temples in Britain were active in the 4th c. This could either be temples founded earlier continuing in use, or it could be new temple foundations towards the end of the 3rd c. or in the earlier 4th c. The considerable amount of excavation and re-excavation on temple sites over the last half-century has done nothing to disturb that picture, rather it has strengthened it. Such general surveys as there have been of temples in the later Roman period have shown that the later 3rd and 4th c. are characterised by a continuing level of temples in use (Watts, 1998, esp. ch. 2; Smith, 2001, § 5.3, esp. p. 144-145). Construction of new temples does decline in the 4th c., but still occurs. In both the number of existing temples continuing in use and in the number of new constructions there is a clear distinction between urban and rural, with urban numbers significantly lower than those for rural sanctuaries. Possible reasons for this will be discussed below. If there is a clear urban/rural difference in pattern, we are as yet much less able to analyse regional patterns or other features that may preferentially lead to (re-)construction or abandonment. Before commencing on looking at regional trends it is perhaps worth pointing out that the distribution of this form of temple or *fanum* within Britain is markedly skewed within Britain, being essentially a phenomenon of the south-east of the island, with few north-west of a line from the Humber to the Severn estuaries (fig. 196).

One region where there does seem to be a concentration of activity in this period is in the south-west of Britain, in the lands to either side of the Bristol Channel, a region that will recur frequently in this paper. It was the location of what has become one of the classic temple complexes of Roman Britain ever since its excavation in the 1930s, Lydney, Glos (Wheeler, Wheeler, 1932), summarised in appendix II (fig. 197). The excavators dated the construction of the temple and complex to the years after 367, very much supporting the notion of a 'pagan revival'. But more recent excavations show it to have been constructed probably in the later 3rd c. (Casey, Hoffmann, 1999). West of Lydney was one of the few urban temples to have been constructed *ex nihilo* in the 4th c., at the *civitas*-capital of Caerwent, Glamorgan (*Venta*, *civitas* of the Silures). The site was a privileged one, lying immediately across the road running along the eastern side of the *forum* and fronting onto the main east-west road, nevertheless it had remained vacant. Originally excavated in 1908, re-excavation from 1984-1988 showed that around 330 a double-square *fanum* was constructed in the centre of the plot, with a wall defining a rectangular *temenos* (fig. 198). This precinct was entered on the centre of the south side from the main east-west road of the city through a long, rectangular transverse hall with an apse at its eastern end, reminiscent of the fore-hall to the *aula palatina* at Trier/Trèves (Brewer, 1993, p. 68-69). Across the estuary of the Severn and intervisible on a clear day with Lydney, lay the temple and associated complex of buildings at Uley, Glos, on a hilltop close to the disused ramparts of an Iron Age hillfort (the site is summarised in appendix III). The complex had a long history of use, going back to an enclosure of the late Iron Age, very probably religious in nature. But the 4th c. was arguably the period of greatest elaboration of the complex, with the temple enclosed on three sides by ancillary structures and on the fourth fronted by a large open area, presumably for numbers of worshippers (fig. 199). The plentiful evidence for ritual deposition will be discussed below. South of Uley lay one of the greatest religious complexes of Roman Britain, Bath (*Aquae Sulis*), summarised in appendix I. Exploiting the hot springs that gush to the surface

Fig. 196 – *Distribution of sites mentioned in the text (DAO : H. Buglass).*

in this part of the valley of the river Avon, Bath had been endowed from the Neronian period with one of the most remarkable thermal complex in the Western Provinces (fig. 200), consisting of a classical-style temple within its precinct to the north of the sacred spring, with a massive thermal baths to the south (Cunliffe, Davenport, 1985; Cunliffe dir., 1988). That the temple precinct, the sacred spring and the baths were still in use in the 4th c. is clear from structural additions and modifications, particularly to the temple precinct (Cunliffe, Davenport, 1985, p. 53-65) and the continuing deposition of coins and

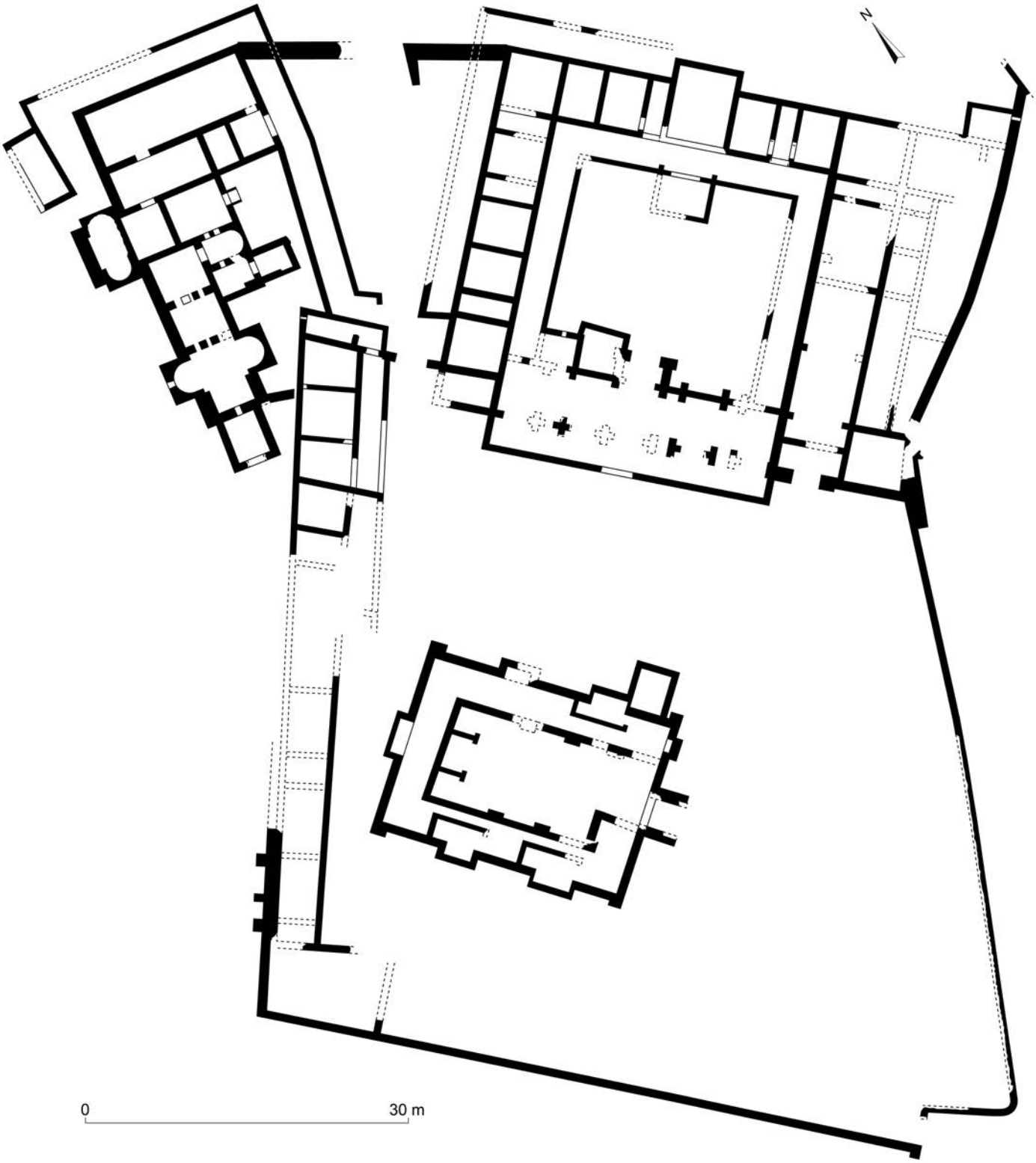

Fig. 197 – *Lydney, plan of the 4th c. temple and ancillary buildings (DAO : H. Buglass).*

probably other artefacts into the sacred spring (see below). Just to the north-east of Bath on the Roman road now known as Fosse Way was the 'small town' of Nettleton Scrubb, Glos, with an elaborate octagonal temple still in use and undergoing modifications from the 4th c. into the 5th c. (Wedlake, 1982). South-west of Bath was another octagonal temple at Pagans Hill (fig. 201), like Uley accompanied by ancillary structures, and probably constructed in the late 3rd c. (Rahtz, Watts, 1989). Pagans Hill was one of a significant group of temples with evidence for activity in the 4th c., most of which will be

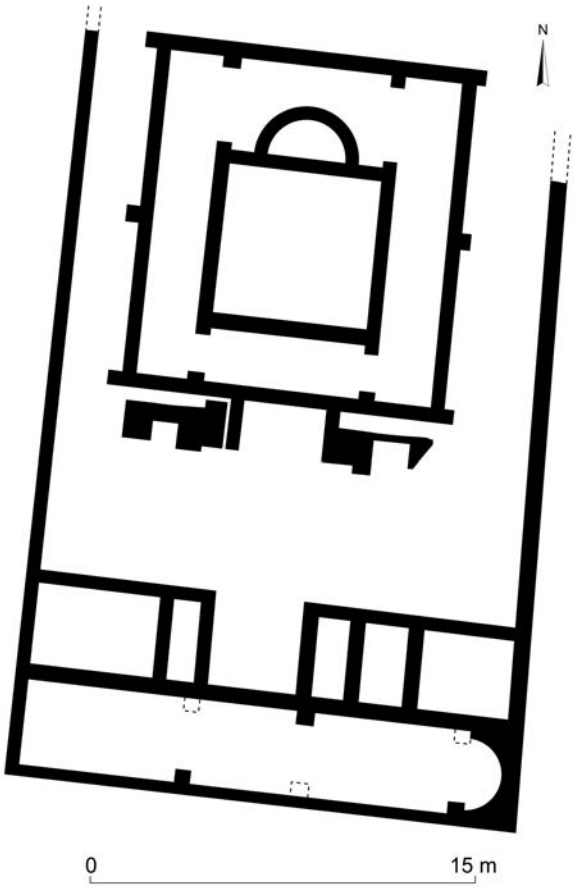

Fig. 198 – *Caerwent, plan of the 4th c. temple and ancillary buildings (DAO : H. Buglass).*

mentioned below either in connection with ritual deposition or with the 5th c. These include Brean Down, Henley Wood and Lamyatt Beacon (fig. 204), with further south again another site excavated by M. Wheeler, the shrine group within the massive earthwork defences of the disused hillfort of Maiden Castle, Dorset (Wheeler, 1943). Here M. Wheeler dated the construction of the double-rectangle *fanum* to after 364 on the basis of coin evidence, but since there is evidence for Roman-period activity before that date it may be that Wheeler's date will be subject to change in the light of any future excavations. There is clear evidence that this south-western area of Britain saw very active continuation of the observances of the traditional religions through the period with which we are concerned. The rural bias of these sites is also clear, with only the Caerwent temple lying at a major urban centre; Nettleton Scrubb being a 'small town'; Bath being exceptional because the 'small town' there was probably in large measure a dependency of the religious complex.

Recent surveys of the later history of temples in south-eastern Britain, specifically the counties of Surrey, Sussex and Essex has shown a variable pattern of abandonment, continuation and new construction (Bird, 2008; Rudling, 2008; Smith, 2008). The site at Farley Heath where a double-square temple lay within a polygonal *temenos* probably continued in use into the later Roman period (Lowther, Goodchild, 1943). On the other hand the important late Iron Age to earlier Roman site at Wanborough shows limited evidence for activity in the 4th c. compared with its *floruit* in the 2nd c. (O'Connell, Bird, 1994, p. 27). In Sussex the two temples, one a double-rectangle the other polygonal, set within the ramparts of the Iron Age hillfort at Chanctonbury Ring, continued in use into the 4th c., though perhaps on a lesser scale than in the 2nd c. (animal bones deposits from the site and commented on below). The fate of the temple and *temenos* at Lancing Down is now unrecoverable due to the early date of the excavation and the subsequent depredations on the site (Rudling, 2008, p. 111-114). Kent has not been treated to a separate survey, but one of the most important sites in the county was that at Springhead (*Vaginacis*) where the main road to London (now Watling Street) passed the head of the Ebbsfleet estuary. Excavations in the 1950s and 1960s uncovered a major religious complex at the heart of the settlement and related to the spring-head, comprising a walled *temenos* enclosing two major double-rectangle temples, a smaller double-rectangle *fanum* and a range of smaller ancillary structures (Burnham, Wacher, 1990, 193-198 for summary and plan). More recent excavations in advance of the 'TGV' line from the Channel Tunnel to London uncovered more of the 'small town' around the religious focus, including at least one more probable temple (Andrews *et al*., 2011). As elsewhere the main phase of construction and use for the religious complex was the 1st and 2nd c., with an apparent diminution of activity, with the complex apparently abandoned by around the middle of the 4th c. (Andrews *et al*., 2011, p. 209-211).

North of the Thames in modern Essex, the most important Roman site was Colchester (*Camulodunum*), and early *colonia* and location of the *templum divo Claudio constitutum* (Tacitus, *Annals of Imperial Rome*, XIV, 31). Because of the later Norman castle donjon constructed on the *podium* of the temple it is not now possible to reconstruct the later history of the largest and most lavish of all temples in Roman Britain, though it has been argued that by the 4th c. the temple had been cleared away and the *podium* was used for some other purpose (Drury, 1984, esp. p. 31-37), though this is disputed (Crummy, 1997, p. 120) leaving the possibility that the carcass of the temple remained standing. What happened to the other temples in and around Colchester is uncertain, though the large extra-mural temple at Sheepen seems to have remained in use into the 4th c.; the lack of rubble perhaps suggesting it was dismantled in the late Roman period or later (Hull, 1958, p. 230). Other major temples in Essex certainly flourished in the late Roman period, with an elaborate, octagonal temple being constructed early in the 4th c. just to the north-east of the defences of the 'small town' at Chelmsford (*Caesaromagus*) (Wickenden, 1992), lasting through the rest of the century and possibly into the early 5th c. (fig. 202). At Great Chesterford also an extra-mural temple 1 km to the east of the town saw important activity in the 4th c. Enclosed within a trapezoidal walled *temenos* the double-square *fanum* was extensively reconstructed in the earlier part of the 4th c. and the site remained in use down to the end of the Roman period (Miller, 1995). One of the most prominent religious sites in the later Iron Age and earlier Roman period in Essex had been the temple at Harlow within a *temenos* consisting of two courtyards, the one surrounding the temple itself, the other in front of it. There is evidence for use in the 4th c. but the excavators were of the opinion that by the latter part of that century it was in a state of dilapidation (France, Gobel, 1985, p. 48).

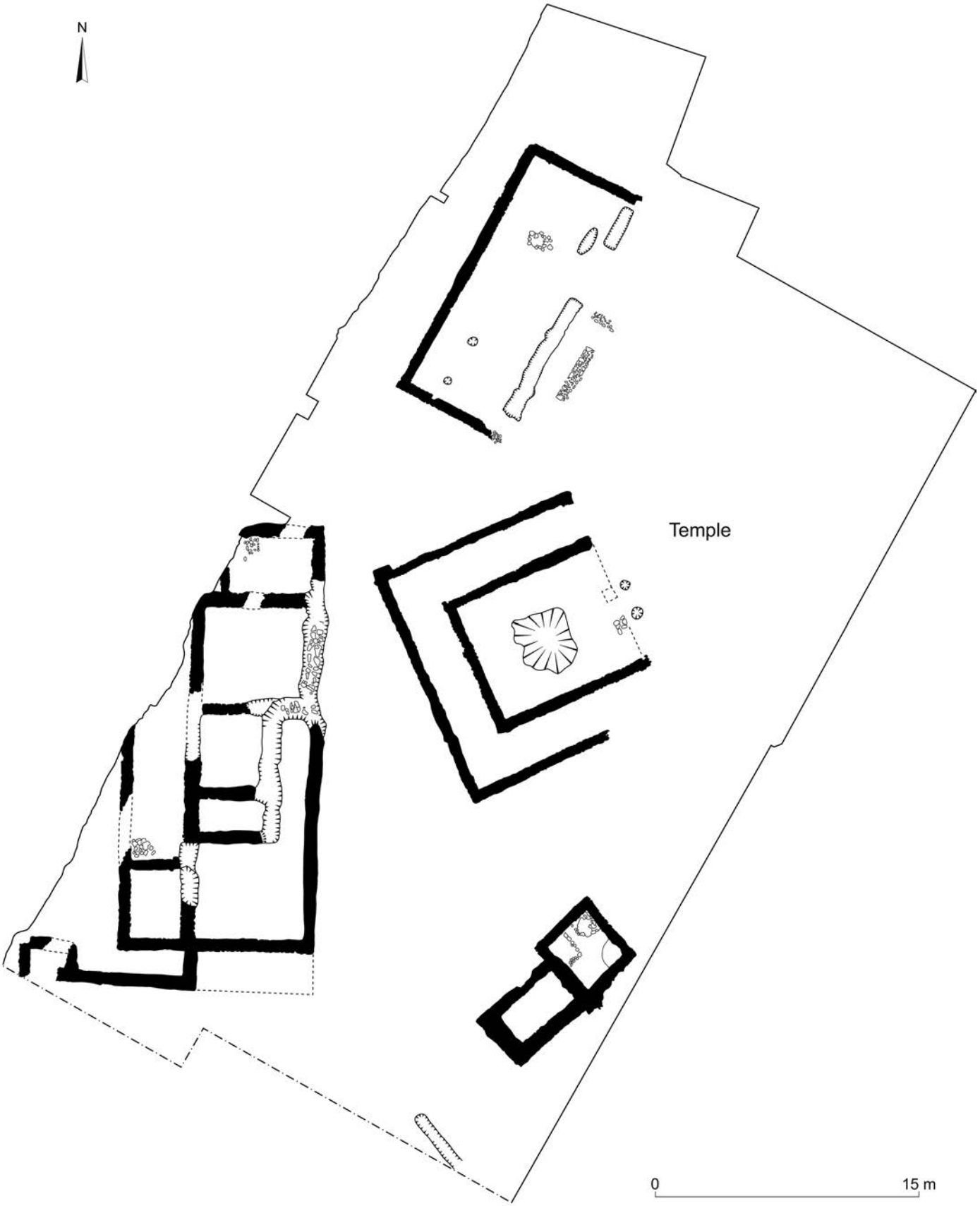

Fig. 199 – *Uley, plan of the temple and ancillary buildings in the early/mid 4th c. : phase 5a-b (DAO : H. Buglass).*

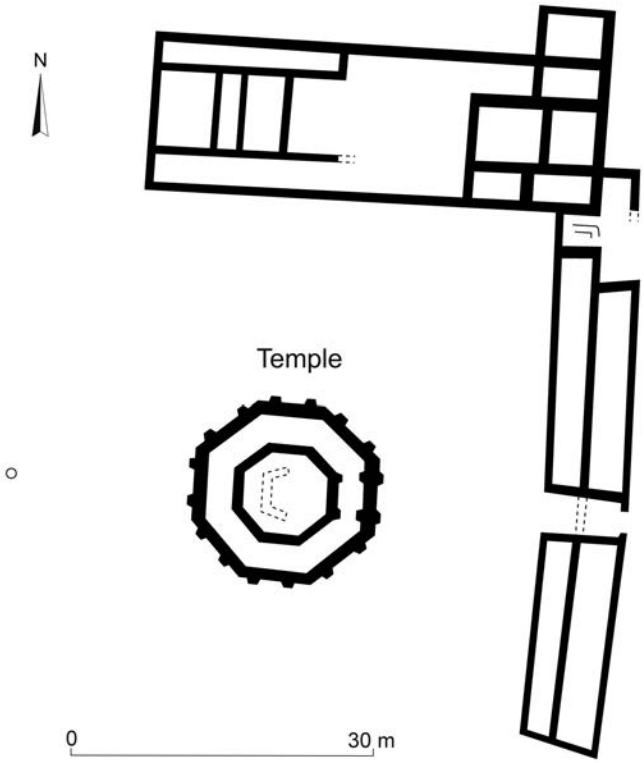

Fig. 200 – *Pagan's Hill, plan of the 4th c. temple complex (DAO : H. Buglass).*

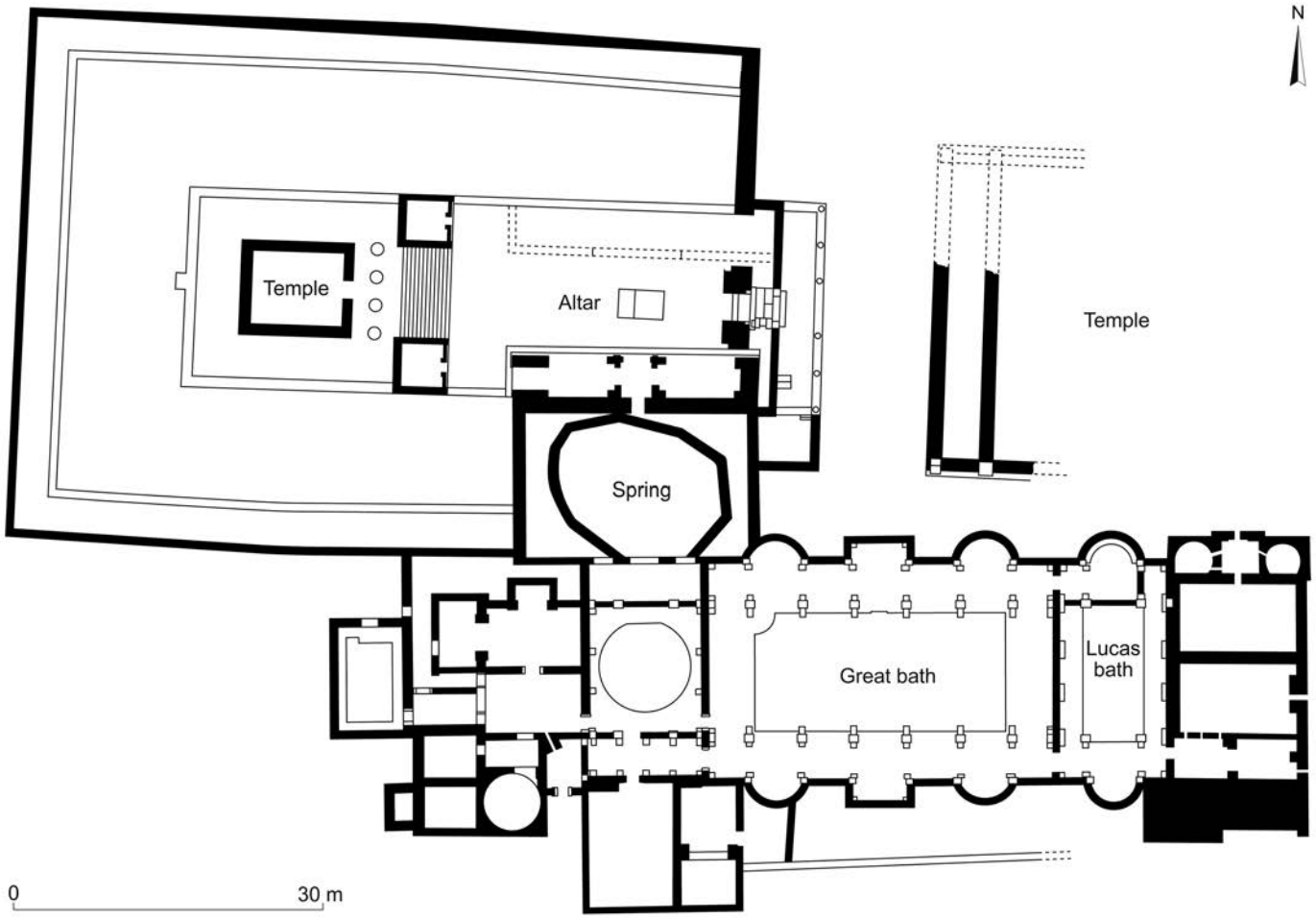

Fig. 201 – *Bath, plan of the temple and thermal complex in the mid 4th c. (DAO : H. Buglass).*

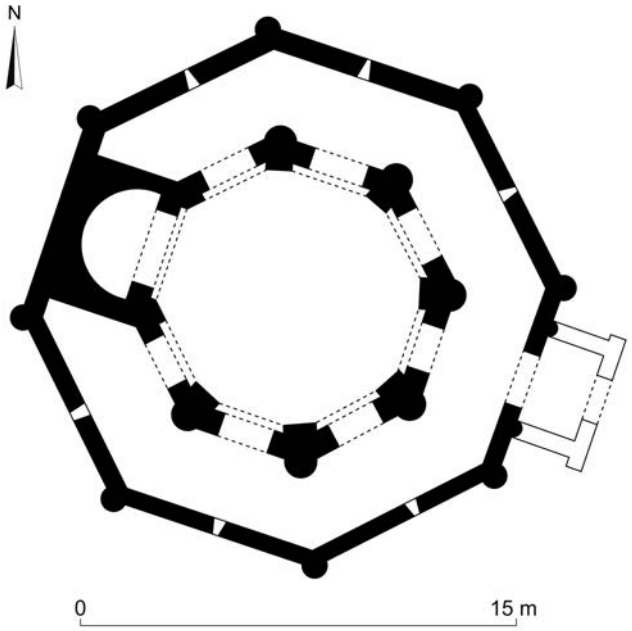

Fig. 202 – *Chelmsford, plan of the 4th c. temple (DAO : H. Buglass).*

The midlands of England have not been the subject of any recent synthesis of the evidence for religious activity. Nevertheless, the evidence from individual sites is congruent with that from the regions we have already surveyed, suggesting a mixture of abandonment, decline, continued activity and new creation. An area that has a particularly rich body of evidence is roughly that of the modern county of Hertfordshire, immediately west of Essex which we have just considered, so the two counties could be read together. The heart of this area was the major city of *Verulamium* (beside modern Saint Albans), where intra-mural temples seem still to have been in use. The major double-rectangle temple within a rectangular, walled *temenos* in *Insula* XVI and associated with the theatre was certainly used through the 4th c. (fig. 203), with a new entrance to the precinct sealing coins of the House of Theodosius (Lowther, 1937). In the southern part of the city the 'Triangular Temple' was also in use into the later Roman period (Wheeler, Wheeler, 1936, p. 113-120). Outside the walls the temple beside the important Conquest-period burial at Folly Lane seems to have fallen into neglect by the early 4th c. (Niblett, 1999, p. 72). Nevertheless, *Verulamium* does provide us with the best group of evidence for continued use of temples at an urban site in Roman Britain. In the countryside around *Verulamium* was the recently-excavated site at Friar's Wash, Redbourn, where two double-rectangle temples were placed side by side with a common party-wall; they were associated with a smaller rectangular building, quite possibly a shrine, and a circular structure of a type known from other Romano-British religious sites. As elsewhere the principal phase of use seems to have been in the 2nd c., and though there is a little evidence for use in the 4th c. the state of the buildings by then is open to question (*Wessex Archaeology*, 2009). Circular structures were also a feature of two sites further north in Northamptonshire, Brigstock (Greenfield, 1963), where there was a circular shrine and a polygonal one, both apparently in use into the 4th c. The nearby and similar site at Colleyweston also had circular and polygonal shrines, though the excavation

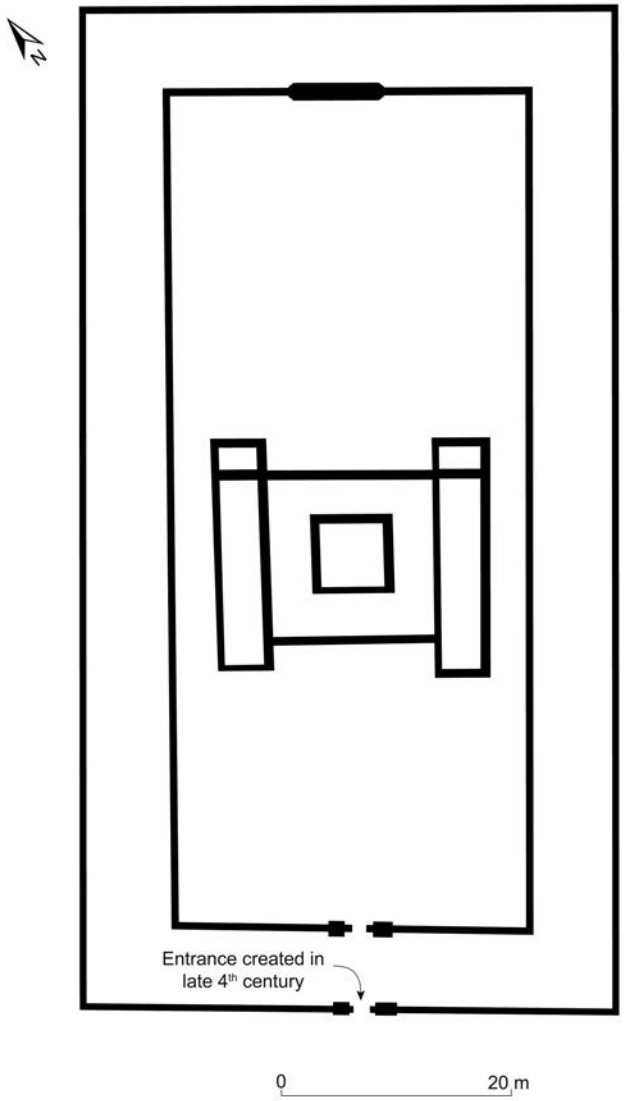

Fig. 203 – Verulamium*, plan of the temple and* temenos *in* Insula *XVI in the 4th c. (DAO : H. Buglass).*

was summary, and it is not certain that the site outlived the 3rd c. (Knocker, 1965).

Further west, recent geophysical survey and excavations on the temple precinct at Frilford, Oxon, first excavated in the 1930s have shown that it was larger and more complex than had previously been appreciated, with a major feature related to the use of water as well as a number of ancillary structures (Bradford, Goodchild, 1939); the 4th c. may have been a/the major period of use of the site (Kamash *et al*., 2010). Another Oxfordshire temple, Woodeaton, has long been known for the large number of 4th c. coins and other found around it in its walled *temenos* (Goodchild, Kirk, 1954). Further north, in present-day Warwickshire, was the complex at Coleshill, with the temple dating to the 2nd c. but at its most elaborate at the turn of the 3rd and 4th c. and set in a walled *temenos* containing two ancillary lesser structures and with a bath-house nearby (Magilton, 2006).

It would be possible to go on at greater length by enumerating other temple sites where there is evidence for 4th c. activity, but this would on the whole be of lesser quality than the sites already presented. The point should be clear: there is no major

break or hiatus in the development of temple sites in Roman Britain through the 3rd and 4th c.: whenever it was that the gods had an end it was not then. Equally, it should be clear that the Roman period in Britain saw no simple, linear progression in the provision of religious sites, building from origins in the 1st c. to a culmination in the 4th c. On the contrary, there was a cycle of construction, use and abandonment across the Roman period, with some major sites which originated in the later Iron Age not lasting into the later Roman period, as at Hayling Island (Hampshire). Equally, there were many sites with origins in the later Iron Age that by the 4th c. were largely abandoned, as at Wanborough or Gosbecks, Colchester. It is worth noting that it was possible for sites apparently to lose their religious significance, even after an extended period of cultic use. But also it is evident that the 4th c. was a period when some new temples were constructed and already existing temples or underwent significant reconstruction or refurbishment. The evidence most certainly does not allow us to entertain any notion of a growth of Christianity at the expense of the traditional religions; neither the evidence for the numbers of sites of the traditional religions still frequented nor the relative feebleness of the evidence for Christianity allows such a conclusion to be drawn.

One class of structure that deserves some more consideration is that labelled above 'ancillary buildings'. The particular ones to be considered here are not the smaller structures that are often considered to be lesser shrines or sanctuaries associated with the principal temple, but the groups of major buildings of 'secular' form to be found at a small number of sites, yet again particularly in the region to either side of the Bristol Channel. Once more Lydney provides us with the best example (Wheeler, Wheeler, 1932, plate LI). To the north of the temple and with its main entrance facing the north side of the temple was a courtyard building, the 'Guest House'. The south (entrance) side consisted of a single-aisled rectangular room. The west and north sides consisted of a series of rooms opening off a colonnade, with a principal room in the centre of the northern side. To the east of the courtyard were further structures, only partially explored. Immediately east of the temple was a building consisting of a long range of rooms fronted by a corridor, the 'Long Building'. To the north of this and west of the 'Guest House' was a bath-complex of some pretension. The excavators saw this set of buildings as having been provided to afford accommodation and creature comforts to visitors, pilgrims, to the temple of Nodens; the 'Guest House' and the bath-house (Wheeler, Wheeler, 1932, p. 44-57). The 'Long Building' they saw as having a more directly spiritual purpose, suggesting that it functioned as an *abaton*, a place for incubation or sleep in which dreams were sent by the divinity to be interpreted by the priests. They recognise that there is no definite proof of this, pointing out that the building could as well have been a range of shops. Again Uley provides a parallel (Woodward, Leach dir., 1993, ch. 3). There, to the west of the temple was a building. Structure I, interpreted by the excavators as 'shops'. To the south-east of the temple part of a rectangular building was excavated, Structure IV, interpreted as 'domestic', and apparently demolished early in the 4th c. North-east of the temple was another large building, only partly excavated, Structure X, which the excavators suggested might be a hostel and baths, clearly on the model of Lydney. Structure X was demolished in the mid 4th c. and its rubble then used as the place of deposition of many of the 'votive' finds from Uley. Though there is a superficial similarity to Lydney, it is clear that not all the buildings were necessarily in use at the same time, nor that they were for the accommodation of travellers/pilgrims. Another south-western site with similar ancillary structures is Pagans Hill (Rahtz, Watts, 1989). East of the octagonal temple was a range consisting of pair of long, rectangular buildings to either side of an entrance into the precinct. To the north of the temple and linked to the eastern range was a rectangular building with internal divisions into rooms and resembling the *pars urbana* of a relatively modest *villa*. The functions of these buildings are unknown. One last temple in this south-western group that may be similar is Nettleton Scrubb, where the excavator suggested that the octagonal temple was likewise associated with three neighbouring structures, Buildings 8, 9, 10 (Wedlake, 1982, p. 36-67). Nettleton has indeed been used as one of the four case-studies in a recent publication reviewing the evidence for pilgrimage in the context of the traditional religions (Kiernan, 2012), adding to the growing debate on this subject (*cf.* Elsner, Rutherford dir., 2010).

Though we know a considerable amount about the plans of temples and of other structures associated with them, and as we shall see below we can sometimes find evidence for cultic practices at these sites, we conversely know very little about either the deities worshipped or their attributes. The 'epigraphic habit' had never taken strong hold in the south and east of Britain, and by the 4th c. had almost entirely died out. Thus, though we can for the 2nd c. sometimes identify the presiding deity or deities of a site from an inscription, that source is for the 4th c. denied us. Instead, we must turn to what can be derived from the occasional pieces of evidence for the practice of worship.

RITUAL/STRUCTURED DEPOSITION

A manifestation of religious activity that has recently been attracting considerable attention for the entire Roman period in Britain is that of the ritual deposition of objects and other material, both at known religious sites such as temples, but also more widely as an expression of religious behaviour. That temple sites attracted such behaviour has been known since at least the time of the excavations at Lydney (Wheeler, Wheeler, 1932, ch. X). In the past such behaviour was frequently described and explained as 'ritual' or 'votive' deposition, based on the sacred nature of the locations at which it occurred and on the nature of the objects deposited, either because the objects had a specifically religious nature or because objects were deposited in large numbers in ways unlike those on domestic sites. Lydney demonstrated both these tendencies with individual finds such as the bronze statuettes of deities and the bronze representations of dogs, or the quantities of coins and bracelets from the site. More recently the preferred term has been 'structured' deposition, a term borrowed from the archaeology of later prehistory (Hill, 1995), which emphasises the composition of a deposit and the context of its deposition over the individual objects. This discussion will borrow from both traditions of study by looking first at individual sites where there is good evidence

for the deposition of material, examining both the objects and other material and where they were deposited. It will then look at particular classes of objects from a range of sites and also the evidence to be derived from deposits of animal bones.

A number of individual sites where there was deposition of significant quantities of material in the later Roman period may be enumerated. The case of Lydney has already been mentioned, with the excavators denominating some of the material as 'Roman votive offerings', the objects consisting of representations of anthropomorphic elements, or cynomorphic material, or fragments of bronze plaques seen as having been votive (Wheeler, Wheeler, 1932, p. 89). Lydney was also remarkable for the large number of bronze bracelets from the site, 270, though these were largely recovered from the site in the 19th c. so their exact provenances are lost. Coins to the number of 'several thousands' had also been recovered from the site in the 19th c.; Pearce catalogued 6,285, of which 4,870 were of Constantine I to Arcadius and Honorius (Pearce, *in* Wheeler, Wheeler, 1932, p. 104-111). The Wheelers also recovered two hoards of bronze imitations of the *Fel Temp Reparatio* coinage of the House of Constantine, one of which consisted largely of pieces so small that the Wheelers called them '*minimissimi*' (Wheeler, Wheeler, 1932, p. 112-131). This latter hoard was found in the bath-house, so its religious vocation is equivocal.

The more recent excavations on the other side of the Bristol Channel at Uley also recovered large quantities of finds in a range of different types of object, overwhelmingly associated with the sites of now-disused ancillary buildings around the temple, though in the latest phase of the site coins which were preponderantly from the surviving elements of the temple building itself (Woodward, Leach dir., 1993). The most common objects apart from coins were: lead curse-tablets; miniature ceramic vessels; items of personal adornment including beads, bracelets and rings (Smith, 2001, p. 115), along with smaller numbers of objects such as miniature spearheads, or figurines and *caducei* associated with the patron deity of the site Mercury.

Other temple sites mentioned above have yielded assemblages of objects apparently deposited in 'ritual' or 'structured' fashion, such Brigstock, Harlow, Henley Wood, Lamyatt Beacon, Springhead, *Verulamium* (the 'Triangular Temple'). At all of these the most common class of find was coins (*cf.* King, 2008). Coins were, of course, the most common class of material deposited in the two great 'wet place' shrines of Roman Britain, Coventina's Well outside the fort of Carrawburgh on Hadrian's Wall and the Sacred Spring of the Bath complex (Cunliffe dir., 1988). Coventina's Well was the focus of deposition of coins from the time of its construction, probably in the 130s, to the later 4th c. 13,487 coins have been catalogued but there were undoubtedly more (Allason-Jones, MacKay, 1985). The 4th c. was not that strongly represented, with only just over 1,000 coins (867 legible, 193 illegible) and closing before the end of the 4th c., suggesting that this form of votive deposition in the Well had declined significantly since earlier periods. Coin deposition into the Sacred Spring at Bath also continued strongly into the 4th c., with 2,842 (22.5%) out of the total of 12,595 coins being of 4th c. date (Walker, 1988). The other major class of object deposited into the Sacred Spring, curse tablets or *defixiones*, will be considered below. Another site that has long been known for the large number of 4th c. coins is Woodeaton, where the coins have been recovered from the area around the temple itself (Milne, 1931).

The list of sites with evidence for 'ritual' could be prolonged, but not for that long. Though some sites such as those mentioned above clearly have an important element of this practice and have therefore attracted considerable attention, it is worth making the point that they are a small minority of all the temple sites known from Roman Britain. Nevertheless, because the majority of sites are less obviously informative about ritual practices, it is still worth considering the minority of sites with significant deposition. Having looked so far at individual sites, the focus will now shift to the classes of material across the range of these sites, starting with coins as the most common class of artefact, moving on to a consideration of the curse tablets, then some brief comments on bracelets, before turning to the evidence for the deposition and types of animal bones at some sites.

COINS

If the pattern of coin deposition at a few individual sites is remarkable, the overall pattern of coin-loss/deposition at temple sites in Britain in fact conforms closely to the normal pattern for Britain. Moreover analysis of the pattern of coinage at certain broad functional groups of site showed that the pattern from religious sites conformed most closely to that from rural sites rather than urban ones (Reece, 1980), as might be expected from the largely rural location of temples. More recent studies have confirmed this pattern (King, 2008; Wythe, 2008). Indeed for the 4th c. temples seem to fall below the 'British mean' the norm of coin-loss across all types of sites in Britain established by Reece (1991), particularly in the period of the House of Constantine (Wythe, 2008, fig. 19.2). This serves again as a warning against taking the small number of exceptional sites described above, such as Bath, Lydney or Woodeaton as being representative of anything other than themselves. Overall, temples do not seem to have been as engaged with the coin-using parts of the economy as were urban sites, nor does coin-deposition seem to have been a widespread 'ritual' phenomenon in later Roman Britain.

BRACELETS

It was noted above that Lydney had yielded 270 bracelets by the time of the Wheelers' excavations in 1928-1929. This is an exceptional number for a temple site, but there may be a wider religious context for this. Research on the typology and distribution of bracelets in Roman Britain and in the Continent has noted that bracelets were particularly common in Britain compared with continental provinces, sometimes at temple sites such as Lydney and Uley (Swift, 2000, p. 119). But there are other circumstances which see the deposition of quantities of bracelets and which partake of a ritual nature. The most obvious of these are cemeteries, and a number of 4th c. cemeteries in Britain have bracelets as a regular component of female grave-goods. The clearest example of this is the cemetery of Lankhills, Winchester, where bracelets were particularly asso-

ciated with younger females but not with older (Clarke, 1979; Booth *et al*., 2010). This is also the case in the cemetery at Butt Road, Colchester (Crummy *et al*., 1993, p. 136-141). In this case, could the deposition of so many bracelets at Lydney argue that the temple had some particular significance for females at the transition to adulthood? Though this may be highly speculative, it does point up the fact that there has to date been very little consideration in Britain of the nature of the worshippers at temples and of associated topics such as gender, age and status.

CURSE TABLETS/*DEFIXIONES*

The excavations of 1979-1980 in the Sacred Spring at Bath brought to light one of the most remarkable testaments to religious activity from Britain, the corpus of curses, *defixiones*, inscribed onto lead plaques which were then folded up and thrown into the Spring for the attention of the goddess *Sulis*. The format, content and significance of these tablets have been considered with formidable erudition (Tomlin, 1988). This is not the place to go into this in detail, save to say that the bulk of the tablets are related to theft and implore the goddess to restore the stolen possession to its owner, for which she/he will make an offering to *Sulis*. The curses tend to be very formulaic in their wording, and interestingly one tablet which from its letter-forms looks to be later Roman names possible categories of malefactors as *seu christianus seu gentilis* (Tomlin, 1988, *Tab Sulis* 98). Such curse tablets are a particular feature of Britain, and they are now known over a wide geographical distribution in the south and east of the island and from a range of sites (Mattingly, 2011, p. 227-230). But several of these sites are temples, and the second-largest collection of these *defixiones* comes from near Bath, at Uley (Tomlin, 1993). Lydney is amongst the other temples to have yielded such items. As well as giving fascinating insights into the daily concerns of their authors, these tablets also show that the old gods were still seen as efficacious by people in the 4th c.

ANIMAL BONES

Though we have so far been considering artefact classes, in fact the largest class of material recovered from temples in Roman Britain both individually and collectively is animal bones. Uley again is a key site here. The analysis of the animal bones from the site showed a number of interesting aspects (Levitan, 1993). Like the artefacts, many of the animal bones come from the deposits over the abandoned ancillary buildings. They are remarkable for the dominance of ovicaprid bones, in some cases comprising over 90% of the assemblage. The dominance of ovicaprids in fact increases over time at the expense of bovids; the reverse of the normal chronological pattern for Britain. The ovicaprids are, furthermore, dominated by goat, at a ratio of 4:1 goat:sheep. Clearly very specific choices have been exercised, presumably for some rationale connected with the cult at the temple. The presiding deity seems to have been Mercury, to judge by fragments of a large, limestone cult statue and smaller, bronze statuettes, one with horns resembling an ovicaprid, and some *caducei*. Analysis of the tooth-wear patterns showed that the majority were killed in the autumn or winter following spring birth, suggesting a seasonal pattern to this aspect of the cult. Uley also produced a high percentage of *gallus*, including many males. This may reflect the place of the cockerel as an attribute of Mercury. Only two other temples in Britain (Brigstock and Folly Lane at *Verulamium*) have high representation of this species. Preliminary publication of large assemblages of bones in pits at the Great Chesterford temple consisted extraordinarily of over 99% sheep (this time with no goat), placed fresh into the pits (King, 2005, p. 336-337 and refs.). A high proportion of ovicaprids has been noted at other temple sites such as Henley Wood, Lamyatt Beacon and Nettleton, though not as pronounced as at Uley. Conversely there are other temple sites such as Bath or Chelmsford where it is the bovids that are most frequently represented; this raises the question of whether this is also to do with the cult association of the site or instead merely reflect wider patterning in the 'normal' incidence of the three main species in 4th c. Britain (King, 1984; Lepetz, Van Andringa dir., 2008, partie 2).

A rather different insight into the use of animal deposits is afforded by analysis of the placing of these in and around the temple complex of Chanctonbury Ring (Bedwin, 1980; Rudling, 2001). On the one hand, whereas the double-square temple on the summit of the hill had no particular association with bones, the polygonal shrine slightly lower down was associated with nearly 5,000 suid bones, almost exclusively crania, mandibles or teeth; post-cranial bones were almost entirely lacking. Suid bones were, though, virtually absent from elsewhere in the complex. The complex did, though, show other interesting evidence for the use of animal bones. Just to the west of the main temple was a large deposit of oyster-shells, and in the ditch of the Iron Age hillfort reused as the *temenos* ditch for the temple were quantities of bovid and ovicaprid crania but few other bones. Chanctonbury remains the clearest example for the zonation of the deposition of animal bones, and also clearly demonstrates election in the elements deposited. As seen above there are other temples such as Great Chesterford, Henley Wood and Lamyatt Beacon (red deer antlers) that also demonstrate deposition in specific places and selection of species and of carcass elements.

Clearly therefore the use of animals in cult practices and in relation to specific deities continued well into the later Roman period in Britain, indeed it is a form of deposition which had its roots in the later Iron Age (King, 2005). But as with the deposition of artefacts examined above, one must issue a caution that the sites concerned represent a tiny fraction of the total of temples in use in the 4th c. Such practices were far from universal; nevertheless such analyses do afford both another insight into the range of cult practices sustained and give indications of avenues for further research.

The 'ritual', 'votive' or 'structured' deposition of objects or of other classes of material such as animal bones is not, of course, confined to temple sites in later Roman Britain. The phenomenon is already well-known from the spectacular concentration of hoards of late Roman silver and jewellery from the island, particularly from East Anglia (Hobbs, 2006, p. 55-58). The large number of hoards of pewter (a lead/tin alloy), especially of later Roman date, have recently been catalogued and discussed and their association with 'wet places'

made plain (Perrin, 2012). The placing of other deposits of material, sometimes in 'wet places' such as wells (Gerrard, 2009) but also other contexts (Esmonde Cleary, 2000), is now increasingly recognised. So it may be that deposition in temples will need to be re-contextualised within a wider framework of such deposition rather than considered solely in a 'sanctuary' context.

THE REAL 'END OF THE GODS'?

As argued at the outset of this paper, there is no warrant for seeing an 'end of the gods' for Britain in the 3rd and 4th c. Instead there seems to be a continuation of a cycle of creation, use and abandonment of places of worship over the *moyenne durée*. If we are to look for an 'end of the gods', then it is to the 5th c., particularly the first half of the 5th c. that we must turn. This time period, however, brings with it major difficulties in understanding of the archaeological record generally and the evidence for religious sites specifically. These difficulties may be subsumed under three main headings: (1) the evidence from religious sites corresponds with wider trends in the archaeological evidence for Roman Britain, particularly for structures of 'Roman' type, so temples may simply being reflecting these wider trends rather than telling us anything specifically about the fate of the gods and of religious practices in 5th c. Britain; (2) often there is very little archaeological evidence pertaining to the modalities of the cessation of use and the abandonment of temples: in urban contexts this can be because of subsequent activities on the site, and in rural areas the effects of subsequent land-use, in particular ploughing; (3) the major problems in dating with the cessation of coin-supply to Britain after the issues of 388-402, the dependence for dating of pottery on the coinage, and thus the risk of pulling the end-dates back too close to the 388-402 horizon (Gerrard, 2013, ch. 3). Therefore for a great many temples the excavation reports can only note that use of the buildings and any deposition of material seems to end at the turn of the 4th and 5th c. This may or may not have been the case. Nevertheless, at these sites there do not on the whole seem to be any activities or deposits that might be read as representing formal 'closure' rather than just disuse.

There are some sites where there is activity later than the arrival of the latest datable artefacts (coins and pottery). Sometimes this takes the form of new structures or other activities on or near the site of the temple; sometimes it takes the form of a developing stratigraphic sequence betokening continuing frequentation of the site (whether or not for religious purposes). Yet again it is the region in the south-west, to either side of the Bristol Channel, particularly its southern side, that provides much of the best evidence (Rahtz, Watts, 1979). The evidence takes various different forms rather than a uniform phase of development. At Uley, by the turn of the 4th and 5th c. most of the stone-built structures of the century before had been abandoned and largely demolished. The latest phase of occupation on the site was in timber, represented by a major, post-built structure and some related activity (Woodward, Leach dir., 1993, 63-79). The excavators proposed that this was a timber Christian church of basilican plan, but this is by no means certain and it could simply represent the ultimate phase of worship of the traditional gods at the site. This was in its turn succeeded by a small, rectangular stone structure, probably of 6th to 7th c. date, partly overlying the site of the temple and similar in plan to the late structures at the next two sites to be discussed. These are further south and west, the sites at Brean Down (ApSimon, 1965) and Lamyatt Beacon exhibit a similar development (fig. 204). At both sites there is a small, rectangular structure that appears to have succeeded the stone-built *fanum*. One theory is that these represented the Christianisation of the site, by some form of oratory or cell, but again as at Uley these structures could equally well represent an ultimate use of the sites by the traditional religions (Rahtz, Watts, 1979, p. 189). Rather different was the sequence at Henley Wood, not far from Brean Down, where burial succeeded the use of the site for a temple (Watts, Leach, 1996). The burials seem to have started in a major ditch, possibly a *temenos* ditch, from where they spread towards the temple, with five within the site of the temple itself. There was also a small, undated inhumation cemetery to the north-east of the Lamyatt Beacon temple. In the Roman period the presence of burials would have polluted a temple precinct, but in the post-Roman period it could represent a change in the ritual significance of the hilltop. Further south at Maiden Castle the two shrines within the hillfort seem also to have continued in use after the introduction of the latest coins, to judge by the stratigraphic sequence, and there were some late inhumations in this part of the hillfort (Wheeler, 1943; Rahtz, Watts, 1979, p. 191-194). North of Bath and not far from Uley the elaborate, octagonal temple at Nettleton Scrubb seems to have been abandoned around the end of the 4th c., but the excavator argued that ritual activity was transferred to another structure nearby (Wedlake, 1982).

But the most substantial evidence for continuity of use well after the turn of the 4th and 5th c. comes, perhaps not surprisingly, from Bath. The excavations in the southern part of the temple precinct between the main altar and the building enclosing the Sacred Spring brought to light a long stratigraphic sequence (Cunliffe, Davenport, 1985, p. 66-75). To summarise, the precinct received a new paving of limestone slabs in the mid 4th c., after that there was a sequence whereby mud and other material accumulated and was then surfaced by cobbling. Six phases could be identified, with some of the cobbling being eroded by wear. This clearly extended beyond the arrival of the latest pottery and coin types, but till when could not be determined. More recently, a sequence of ^{14}C determinations on animal bones from the sequence suggests use down to at least the end of the 5th c. (Gerrard, 2007).

Suggestive though such sequences may be of a range of possible developments at temple sites, they are of course a minority of sites, even in their region. If we look at other regions, then there is even less to work with. The county of Essex affords a small number of sites where there is evidence for late activity. The large temple complex at Great Chesterford, mentioned above and cited for its important deposits of animal bones, has yielded a pit with probable votive objects set against the wall of the *temenos* and traces of late, simple, post-built structures (Miller, 1995, p. 33). At Chelmsford, evidence for late activity is furnished by a number of objects datable to the later 4th c. and the fact that the relatively high figure of 13% of the coins were of the issue of 388-402. Late in the life of the

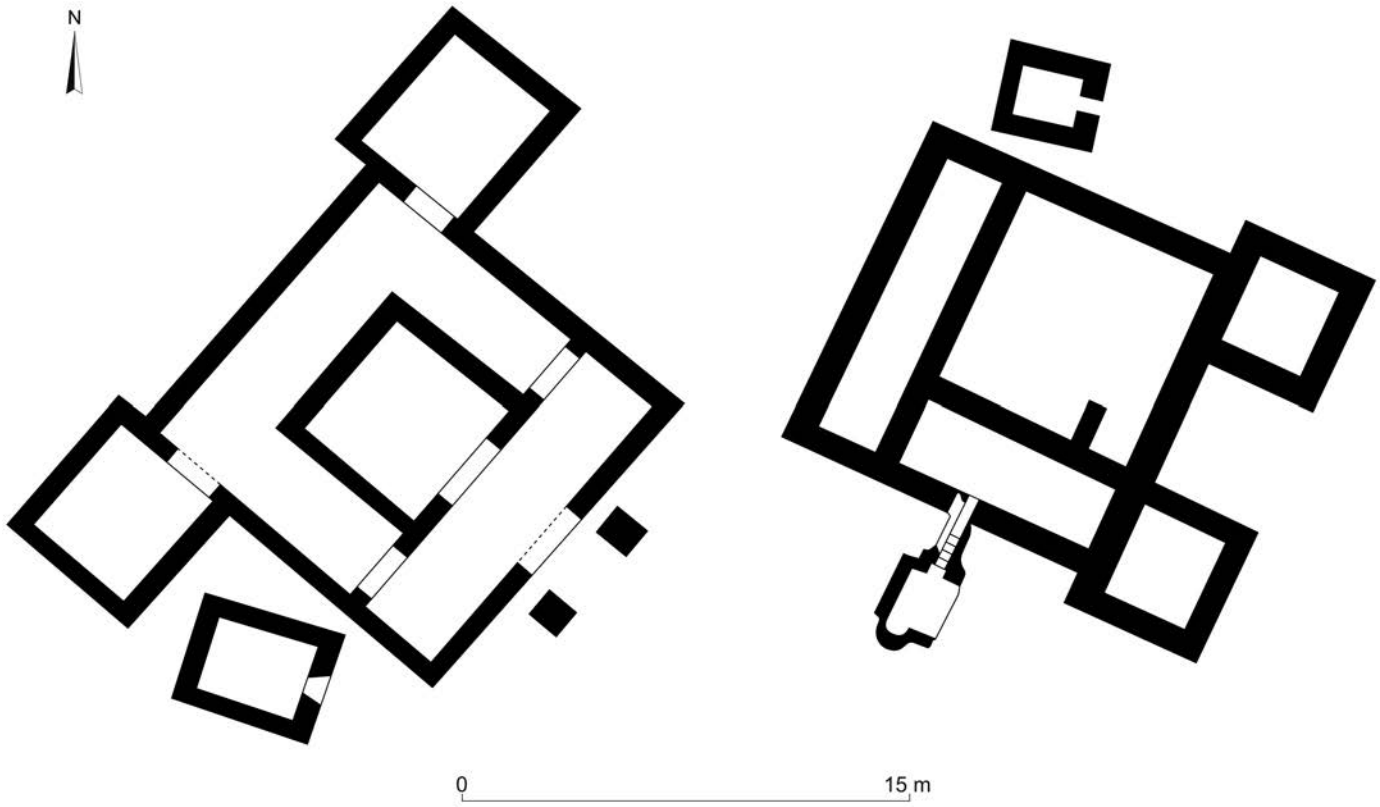

Fig. 204 – *Brean Down and Lamyatt Beacon, the 4th c. temples with later associated structures (DAO : H. Buglass).*

temple the ambulatory seems to have been suppressed and an ephemeral timber structure was built against the still-extant *cella* (Wickenden, 1992, p. 39-43). Another Essex site where there had been a temple complex since the earlier Roman period was the 'small town' of Heybridge. A circular temple structure within a walled *temenos* continued in use into the 4th c., but late in that century the precinct wall collapsed and a rectangular structure was built on its line. Nevertheless, the temple seems to have continued in use until the end of the Roman period (Atkinson, Preston, 1998, p. 100-102).

Two other sites in Essex merit some discussion here, both for the light that they shed on this late period and for the insights they offer into possible types of religious site in Roman Britain other than the familiar *fanum* type of temple. One is the site of Ivy Chimneys, Witham (Turner, 1999). There is considerable evidence for religious activity through the 4th c., particularly related to a pond. In the earlier part of the 4th c. there was a square, post-built structure to the west of the pond, which may or may not have been a single-cell *fanum*. Later there was a rectangular timber structure to the north-east of the pond, which again may have been religious, but there is no definitive evidence. Deposition of objects in and around the pond continued until at least the turn of the 4th and 5th c. Clearly this was a site with religious importance, but one which did not possess the usual sort of temple building. The other site was that at Great Dunmow (Wickenden, 1988). In the mid 4th c. a small, square, timber-and-turf building was constructed, which was associated with pits containing 'votive deposits'. This was reconstructed right at the end of the 4th c., after which activity continued for some time. These two sites indicate that other forms of archaeological evidence for religious or cult practice other than the temple should be envisaged.

One other direction from which we might approach the question of whether religious sites survived into the post-Roman period is to try to examine whether they retained any significance into the post-Roman period. On the one hand there are hardly any temple sites where the latest phases of activity contain 'Anglo-Saxon' pottery. This would principally be expected in the eastern parts of the country where such material can date to at least the middle of the 5th c., and on occasion earlier. In the western half of the island, including the areas around the Bristol Channel, such material is not found. But even in regions such as East Anglia where the earliest 'Anglo-Saxon' material is to be found in some quantity, the number of occasions on which it is found on Roman-period religious sites is as we have seen vanishingly small.

Increasing appreciation of the nature of pre-Christian 'pagan' Anglo-Saxon religion is making it clear that Roman sites could be important *foci* for pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon ritual activity such as places of worship or cemeteries (Semple, 2011), equally there were shrines and sanctuaries in this period as well as other religious markers in the landscape; however they do not seem to have perpetuated places and structures that had already been sacred in the Roman period. The religious landscape, like so much else, shifted after the end of the Roman period and took on new conformations. A related approach is to try to ascertain whether there is any evidence of structural continuity through to Christian Anglo-Saxon structures, in particular stone-built structures such as churches. A recent survey on this

topic has shown that of the limited number of Romano-British structures later incorporated into Anglo-Saxon buildings, in only two cases may there have been Roman temples underlying medieval churches (Ancaster and Silchester) and at neither site is the evidence for a Roman temple there definite (Bell, 2005, p. 77-79). There is therefore no warrant for suggesting that the sanctity of a Roman cult place influenced the siting of a church after the start of the Augustinian mission of conversion in 597: their former sanctity had been forgotten.

It seems clear that during the 5th c., and at most sites most probably in the first half of the century, the gods and the places and forms of worship that had obtained through the Roman period ceased to be venerated. In part what we may be looking at is temples as part of a wider phenomenon of the abandonment of Roman-style traditions of construction in stone, as happened at villas and cities also (Faulkner, 2000a, p. 138 fig. 57; 2000b, p. 30 fig. 2.1). But if that were all there was to it then one could have expected to find evidence of continuing use of the site, perhaps in the form of timber buildings and other activity, as for instance at Uley or the burials at Henley Wood. But these sites are the exception; the overwhelming majority of religious sites show no such 'afterlife'. It would seem that a religious and ritual system that had its origins in later prehistory and had developed through the Roman period came to an end. Whatever god or gods were now worshipped she/he/they were one/s different to the gods of Roman Britain, who it seems had come to an end.

APPENDICES

I - BATH

The major Roman religious complex at Bath (*Aquae Sulis*) owes its existence to a series of thermal springs surfacing at this point of the floor of the Avon valley, of which the most important was the Sacred Spring yielding over 1,000,000 litres per day of water at a temperature of 46° C. It is possible that there was pre-Roman activity at the spring, but this was obliterated by the construction in the Neronian period of one of the largest religious and thermal complexes in the western provinces. The focus was the spring, captured in a polygonal masonry reservoir. To the north of this was the temple precinct with a tetrastyle classical temple, richly carved. The axis of the temple and precinct east-west, crossed by a north-south axis running through the main altar, across the reservoir and into the western part of the great, east-west-aligned thermal complex. The centrepiece of this was the Great Bath, fed directly from the reservoir, with lesser baths at its eastern and western ends. Originally covered in timber, the thermal complex was re-roofed with a barrel vault in tile and concrete at the turn of the 2nd and 3rd c., at which time also the reservoir was enclosed by walls carrying a barrel vault, though this required later buttressing. The Sacred Spring, its hot waters wreathed in steam, was the *focus* of substantial ritual deposition, including over 12,000 1rst to 4th c. coins and 130 inscribed lead curse-tablets (*defixiones*).

II - LYDNEY

Along with Bath, Lydney is the most famous temple of the Roman period in Britain thanks to the extensive excavations conducted in the 1920s by Mortimer and Tessa Wheeler (with a note in the final report on the name of the presiding deity, Nodens, by the philologist J. R. R. Tolkien). The temple complex lies within a disused Iron Age hillfort, with evidence for earlier Roman iron-mining. By the later Roman period an elaborate temple with ancillary buildings all enclosed by a precinct wall occupied the southern part of the hillfort enclosure. The temple was a hybrid of the rectangular Romano-Celtic type with a basilican form and lay in a large open area, perhaps for large gatherings of worshippers and pilgrims. West of the temple lay the 'Long Building' interpreted by the Wheelers as an 'Abaton' for incubation and oneiromancy, though it could equally be for other more mundane purposes. North of the temple stood a large courtyard structure which the Wheelers saw as a guest-house for pilgrims, though this too is not certain. West of the 'Guest House' and adjoining the northern end of the 'Long Building' was a large bath-house, with its ablutions perhaps serving ritual purposes also. The Wheelers dated the construction of the temple and other buildings to later than 364 A.D., but more recent excavation suggests a date in the later 3rd c. The site has yielded numerous objects including coins and coin-hoards, figurines and a curse-tablet, the latter mentioning the god Nodens.

III - ULEY

The Roman-period temple complex at Uley lay on the summit of a hill which had been a focus of funerary and ritual activity since the later Neolithic. The later Iron Age saw the creation of a ditched enclosure with timber structures and deep, ritual? pits, and it was here that in the early 2nd c. the first stone temple of Romano-Celtic plan was constructed. The stone temple was from the start set in an open area delimited by a series of rectangular stone ancillary structures, possibly linked with cult practices, or possibly accommodation or shops associated with the cult. The structures achieved their maximum number and elaboration around the start of the 4th c., with the later 4th c. seeing a decline in the number and complexity of the buildings. The 5th and 6th c. saw the construction of timber, post-built structure/s on the site of the temple, with a linear bank to the north. The timber structures were succeeded by a small, rectangular, stone structure. The site seems finally to have been abandoned in the 7th c. after an exceptionally long sequence of use. The Roman-period phases yielded an exceptionally diverse and rich range of finds, including parts of a life-size, limestone statue of Mercury, 140 lead tablets of which at least 86 were curse-tablets (*defixiones*), along with a range of other cultic items deposited on and around the temple site. The animal bones showed a dominance of ovicaprids, in particular of goat, an attribute of Mercury.