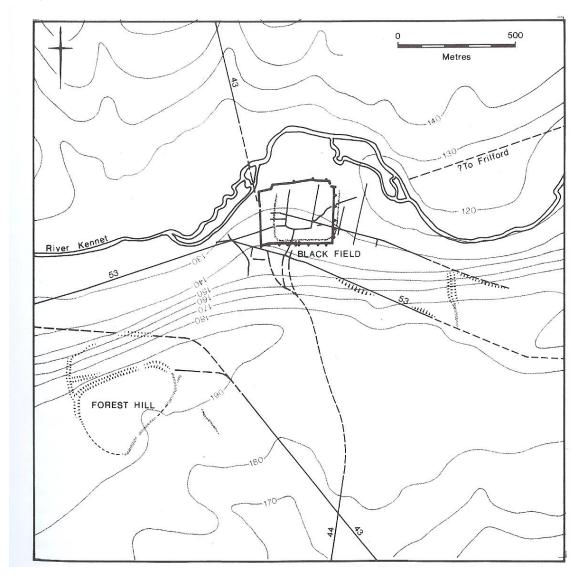***Cunetio*, Wiltshire: archaeology and history** (notes for visitors, prepared by the Royal Archaeological Institute, 2017)

The Kennet valley provided a route for the Bath-Silchester Roman road, and subsequently the A4. The Roman road met north-south roads at Forest Hill, south-east of Marlborough, which seems to have started in the late Iron Age, and could be classified as an 'oppidum'; it has also been claimed as a short-lived early Roman fort; inside, air photographs indicate a masonry, villa-like complex. *Cunetio* (known as Black Field because of the organic deposits in it) might also have been an early Roman fort, possibly replacing Forest Hill, being nearer the river, but no trace of one has been found.

Cunetio is one of the most invisible walled towns in Britain; it makes no impression even on modern field boundaries (plan by Mark Corney: Corney 2001, 13). Excavation, air photography and geophysics, most recently by 'Time Team' (Seager Smith and Wakeham 2015), have shown that it stretched across 44 acres (18 ha). It had a regular grid of streets and stone buildings on its eastern side, and less regular and less substantial structures on the west. A late third-century hoard of over 55,000 coins was the largest known in Britain when discovered by metal-detectorists in 1982. Originally defended by an earth bank with two

ditches, the site may have been the location of a *mansio*. In the late fourth century, the defences were considerably strengthened with stone walls and at least seventeen bastions and a monumental gateway. This must have involved great expenditure, and is very rare in inland Britain; the change may have been because *Cunetio* was to be a principal army base for the southern province, but an alternative theory has recently been advanced, that the work owed at least as much to the ambition of a local British governor, the sort of man who in another generation or so would be setting himself up as a war-lord or regional chieftain (Gerrard 2013, 52-3). Interpretation therefore swings between the Empire re-establishing its authority after various rebellions and uprisings, and that authority breaking down.

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References and further reading

CORNEY, M. C. 2001. The Roman nucleated settlements of Wiltshire, in Ellis, P. (ed.) *Roman Wiltshire and After: Papers in Honour of Ken Annable*, Devizes: Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society
GERRARD, J. 2013. *The Ruin of Roman Britain*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
SEAGER SMITH, R. AND WAKEHAM, G. 2015. Further investigation of the Roman small town of *Cunetio*: a *Time Team* evaluation, *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, 108, 79-88

These notes were originally prepared for the annual summer meeting of the Royal Archaeological institute held in July 2016; see www.royalarchinst.org for further information. RAI members have access to the printed Report which contains syntheses of the significance of recent research to archaeological understanding of the county. The notes were prepared by David A. Hinton. Other on-line entries can be accessed through the RAI web-site (including Littlecote, Marlborough, Ramsbury and Savernake, which are all near *Cunetio*) .