



This section gives an introduction to archaeological work carried out in the area around Junction 18 of the M1, on land sanctioned for development into Phase I and Phase II of the Daventry Industrial Rail Freight Terminal (DIRFT).

The area of land concerned in these archaeological investigations is indicated on the first map. It extends about 2 miles from west to east and roughly 1.5 miles from north to south, and is approximately centred on a point on the Roman Watling Street (which is shown as a straight double-dotted line on the map on right) just west of Junction 18 of the M1.

The archaeological work described here was carried out in 1994-98 (Phase I) and 2005-08 (Phase II), by separate archaeological companies working under the overall direction of Northamptonshire Archaeology.

Tribal Background

Pre-Roman tribes in the Leics/Warks/Northants area



Dobunni

The Dobunni (sometimes known as Dubunni) were amongst the largest tribes of Britannia, with a territory that covered large extents of the Severn Valley and the Cotswolds. They were a tribe that issued pre-Roman coinage and from these coins it can be determined that the Dobunni were divided into northern and southern sub-groupings. The Dobunni were a wealthy agrarian peoples who were already fairly Romanized by the time the Romans invaded. As a result they did not resist the invasion and may well have been amongst the first to submit to Roman rule. After the conquest the Dobunnic settlement of Bagendon in Gloucester (the largest in their territory) was supplanted by the Roman city of Corinium Dobunnorum (Cirencester). Many of the Dobunni did very well from the Roman conquest, as can be attested by the large number of wealthy villas in the region.

As an agrarian peoples the Dobunni seemed to have revered deities of agriculture and fertility

above all, which may perhaps explain the large number of dedications to the Genii Cucullati in their territory.

There was a long-term Dobunni settlement and camp on a hilltop about 4 miles south west of the M1/M6 junction, at what is now the centre of the town of Rugby.

Coritani

The Coritani (or Corieltauvi) seem to have been a loose confederation of mainly agrarian tribes whose economy seems to have been based predominantly on cattle. Their area of influence stretched from modern Leicestershire up through Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire and into South Yorkshire. Like most of the other agrarian tribes the Coritani seem to have readily embraced Roman rule. Prior to this point, the Coritani had their own capital at Lindum (Lincoln) and minted their own coinage. After the conquest, the Coritani civitas was governed from Ratae Corieltauorum (Leicester). One reason the Coritani acquiesced to Roman rule so readily was that the Romans aided in their defence against their more warlike western neighbours, the Brigantes. That the Coritani are a conglomeration of peoples is made more likely by their name which is derived from the reconstructed proto-Celtic *koryo- (troop, tribe) and tank-(j)e/o- (join) thus they are 'the joined tribes'.

Catuvellauni

Even before the time of Julius Caesar the Catuvellauni were a large and powerful tribe, their territories covering most of modern Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and southern Cambridgeshire. Allied tribes also probably gave them a foothold in Buckinghamshire and north-western Oxfordshire. The Catuvellauni began minting coins quite early and from these we know that around 10 CE a leader arose, known as Tasciovanus who founded a large royal and ritual centre ad Verulamium (St Albans). Through conquest and alliance he began the process that linked the Catuvellauni, Trinovantes and Cantiaci into a single grouping. This tightening of links between the three tribes (who already shared similar lifestyles and beliefs) culminated in the rule of Cunobelinus. However, after this leader's death (somewhere around the late 30s CE) the kingdom was riven by the rivalries of his successors. This internal strife was used as one of the excuses by Claudius to invade Britain in 43 CE, as the Catuvellauni were one of the most pro-Roman of the British peoples. This probably explains why Verulamium became one of the very first civitae of the new province of Britannia.

Etymologically the name of this tribe can be derived from the reconstructed proto-Celtic elements: *katu- (battle) and *welo- (good) thus the Catuvellauni are those who are 'good in battle'; perhaps with the sense of 'Foremost in Battle'.

Inter-tribal communications

From the above introduction, it seems possible to the author of these pages that the area around the junction of the 3 present-day shires (along the line of the Watling Street [A5], close to the M1/M6 junction) may have had potential significance prior to the Roman invasion as a possible inter-tribal trading area. It seems reasonable to suggest that the Dobunni, with a substantial permanent settlement at the nearby site of modern Rugby a mere 4 miles away, may have exercised influence over the site.