A ROMAN ‘DELICATESSEN’ AT CASTLE STREET, LEICESTER

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An archaeological excavation was undertaken by University of Leicester Archaeological Services (ULAS) on land at the junction of Castle Street and St Nicholas Circle, Leicester (SK 5832 0432) between April and June 2005. The work was carried out in response to a planning application by Victoria Hall Ltd for the construction of new student accommodation. The site lies in the south-west corner of the Roman and medieval walled town close to the south gate. The excavations revealed Roman, medieval and post-medieval occupation. The most significant evidence relates to the discovery of a second-century colonnaded shop front, on a busy thoroughfare, associated with deposits of food remains and pottery in a cesspit to the rear, which suggests the establishment was a ‘delicatessen’. The food remains comprise local produce such as meat, fish and fruits, as well as more exotic items such as wines and fruits from the continent, whilst the pottery assemblage comprised amphorae, flagons and samian ware. Whilst similar assemblages of plant, animal and ceramic material have been found individually before in Leicester, this is the first time they have been found together and in close association with a potential shop front.

The archive is held by Leicester City Museums Service under Accession No. A7.2004, and the full report (Score 2006) can be consulted through the Oasis Database. (http://ads.ahds.ac.uk/catalogue/library/greylit/details.cfm?id=4112).

INTRODUCTION

The excavations were undertaken on 0.1ha of land previously occupied by the Heathcote Ball Castle Auction House buildings at 72 St Nicholas Circle (Fig. 1). The site lies at a height of 61m OD, sloping southwards with underlying geology comprising deposits of the Mercia Mudstone Group, and overlain by river sands and gravels located at a height of 58.6m OD (Ordnance Survey Geological Survey of Great Britain, Sheet 156). The site lay within Insula XXVII of the Roman town on the west side of the street, separating it from Insula XXVIII (Fig. 2). It was close to the forum, to the north, and the roads leading to Caves Inn and Godmanchester, to the south. Previous excavations in 2001, on land adjoining the site to the south, also identified the remains of Roman buildings (George 2004; Thomas 2001), and evaluation of the present site in 2004 (Priest 2004) identified three areas of significant Roman and medieval deposits, the former being protected in the east by the line of the medieval Bakehouse Lane (Fig. 3).
Fig. 1. Site location within Leicester.
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SUMMARY OF PHASING

Late Iron Age activity (Phase 1) is represented only by the presence of pottery, but deposits attributed to Phase 2 (mid- to late first century AD) included the truncated remains of a shallow circular gully similar to features often associated with Iron Age roundhouses. No dating evidence was recovered, but the feature was sealed by layers containing late first century pottery, and butchered animal bone from a series of redeposited soil layers suggested domestic occupation.

The second century (Phase 3) saw the construction of a colonnaded building fronting onto the north–south street, associated with surfaces and pits. This was
succeeded by another structure in the third century (Phase 4). Some industrial activity was present in the form of six bowl-shaped furnaces to the north (probably for copper working), similar to those found on the opposite site of the Roman street during excavations at Redcross Street (Clay and Pollard 1994, 28). Buildings appear to have occupied the frontage until at least the beginning of the fourth century (Phase 5), with indications of demolition in the northern area of the site.

The post-Roman period from the fifth to the eleventh centuries (Phase 6) is represented only by the presence of Early to Middle Saxon and Saxo-Norman pottery occurring residually in later levels. The first activity detected was the robbing of the Roman walls and the digging of pits during the late eleventh and twelfth centuries (Phase 7). At this time it appears that buildings were constructed along the frontages of Redcross Street to the north and Bakehouse Lane to the east. The pottery, animal bone and environmental evidence suggest domestic occupation with no signs of industrial or commercial activity, and this situation appears to continue after 1250 (Phase 8). By the late fourteenth century (Phase 9) the presence of cess and rubbish pits containing unabraded pottery and domestic waste indicates continued occupation, but perhaps less intensive.

The area was densely occupied during the post-medieval period (Phase 10) as shown on early maps. Apart from a number of rubbish pits and parts of at least one building, much of the post-medieval evidence from this site had been destroyed by modern cellaring (Phase 11).

THE ROMAN ‘DELICATESSEN’

The remainder of this article concentrates on the evidence for the second-century shop front and the associated deposits to the rear (Fig. 3).

The colonnaded building

At the south-eastern end of the excavated area, adjacent to the line of the Roman street, a series of surfaces were recorded. The first, dating to the early second century, was of mortar, and the presence of a number of loose tesserae above it suggests it may have been tesselated. The overlying surfaces, often quite worn, comprised small rounded pebbles, although the latest surface was rougher with larger cobbles. These surfaces, which are interpreted as a covered walkway, were associated with a line of three, regularly-spaced rectangular pits, measuring 0.8m × 1.2m and set approximately 2m apart. The pits were packed with red clay and fragments of stone, and are interpreted as footings for a colonnade, probably constructed soon after AD 120 and standing for the rest of the century (Fig. 3). The major part of the building probably lay immediately to the west and was therefore largely destroyed by modern truncation. However, the presence of painted wall plaster, fire-affected window glass and roofing tile suggest a substantial structure. A wood-lined drain, which appears to have been inserted through one of the later surfaces, ran north–south down the centre of the surviving walkway, immediately inside the line of the colonnade.
Fig. 3. Excavation plan showing principal Roman features from Phase 3.
**Pit 1067**

In the northern part of the excavated area, which is interpreted as a yard lying to the rear of the colonnaded shop frontage, were a series of crudely metalled surfaces and pits, also dating to the second century. Pit 1067 was a large rectangular cesspit (identified by the presence of mineralised fly puparia), measuring 1.6m × 1.8m and cutting through the Phase 2 make-up deposits into the natural sand beneath (Fig. 3). This cesspit contained evidence for a variety of domestic food waste and pottery dating to the middle of the second century, although an earlier fill contained late first- and early second-century pottery. This waste, which forms an atypical assemblage, is thought to relate to a specific kind of retail outlet selling local and imported produce, and is discussed in detail below.

**The pottery from Pit 1067 (Elizabeth Johnson)**

The pit produced 549 sherds with an average sherd weight of 38g (23g discounting amphorae), deposited in the middle of the second century (Fig. 4). The most striking aspect of the collection is the quantity of amphorae and flagons, which account for half the assemblage (Fig. 5); forms which would normally

![Fig. 4. Examples of the pottery from Pit 1067, including samian bowls and dishes (left), amphorae (centre) and flagons (right).](image-url)
account for only 8 per cent and 1 per cent respectively in deposits elsewhere in the town at this time – for example, Causeway Lane (Connor and Buckley 1999; Clark 1999, Table 15, 121). The amphora types comprise Dressel 20, Gauloise 4, Dressel 2–4, Cam 186 and Fishbourne 148.3, representing at least six vessels. Baetican Dressel 20 olive oil and Gaulish Gauloise 4 wine amphorae are the most common types found in Leicester. A Dressel 2–4 wine amphora is most likely to have come from Italy, and the Cam 186 (Cadiz fabric) is thought to be used for transporting fish sauces (Peacock and Williams 1986, Class 17). The source of Fishbourne 148.3 amphorae is unknown, although it may be related to the Cam 189 ‘carrot’ amphora, which has been associated with the transport of fruit such as dates (Peacock and Williams 1986, Class 12). At least 17 flagons, including devolved ring-necked and two-handled collared forms, are represented from sources such as Mancetter-Hartshill, Northamptonshire and Verulamium. In addition, 77 per cent of the bowls, dishes, plates and platters are imported samian table wares from Southern and Central Gaul, representing at least 26 vessels. The forms present include Dragendorff 15/17, 18, 18/31, 18/31R, 79, 30, 37 and Curle 11, ranging in date from the late first century through to the middle of the second century. Significantly, however, there is a complete absence of samian cup forms Dr. 27 and 33, or, indeed, cups or drinking beakers in any other ware, which would normally be expected in a typical rubbish assemblage.

The plant remains from Pit 1067 (Angela Monckton)

Seeds and small bones are only recovered by wet-sieving soil samples, which is routine practice for archaeological excavations in Leicestershire. Although a few cess pits are known from Roman Leicester and have produced a range of fruit remains, Pit 1067 is unusually rich (Fig. 6). One sample from the lower fill differed from others in being rich in preserved mineralised remains; seeds can become mineralised by impregnation with calcium phosphate minerals from the sewage.

![Fig. 5. Proportions of different pottery forms from Pit 1067.](image-url)
found in cesspits. These included grape pips, but whether these come from fresh grapes, imported raisins, or were perhaps included with wine, is unknown. The existence of vineyards in Roman Britain – for example, at Woollaston, Northamptonshire (Brown and Meadows 2000) – might support the possibility that they were fresh or that not all the wine was imported. Other remains included mineralised fruit stones of small plum or bullace, and densely mineralised seeds including wild strawberry and figs. A single seed of opium poppy was also found. This plant was used as a medicine as well as for food flavouring, and has also been found in several Roman contexts (Greig 1991) including Causeway Lane, Leicester (Monckton 1999) and in second-century cesspits on two sites on Newark Street, Leicester (Monckton 1996; Derrick 2009, 70). Other remains included unidentified mineralised grasses and organic fragments similar to examples found in other cesspits in Leicester. The sample also contained a few charred cereal grains with spelt glumes and a few weed seeds probably representing food preparation waste; spelt chaff is common in Roman features, but is only found in small amounts within the town. A few other weed seeds were also mineralised including nettle, goosefoots and docks, and may represent nearby vegetation.

Fig. 6. Some of the seeds from Pit 1067.
The animal bone from Pit 1067 (Jennifer Browning)

A particularly interesting bone assemblage was recovered from the cess pit. Although butchered sheep and pig bones were also recorded, 61 per cent of the 198 fragments were cattle or cattle-sized. This included the remains of 16 fragmented cattle scapulae, all butchered in a similar manner. The scapulae were fused and well-grown, indicating that they belonged to adult animals (Fig. 7). The manner of butchery exhibited was distinct from that seen in other early Roman deposits at the same site, where scapulae were simply chopped through the ‘neck’ of the bone. In contrast, these were chopped at the distal end, sometimes partially transecting the glenoid cavity. The blade of each scapula frequently had a hole cut into it, roughly rectangular in shape. This is presumed to be a hook mark, from which to suspend the shoulder during the drying or smoking process (Cool 2006, 89). In some cases, the spine was cut off and fine parallel knife cuts were noted on the neck and blade, often obliquely angled and probably produced during the slicing of meat from the bone. The concentration of scapulae in Pit 1067 is not typical of household waste and strongly suggests that the beef was being sold off the bone from nearby premises.

In addition to the scapulae, the pit also contained a number of cattle and cattle-sized skull and horncore fragments, representing a minimum of two individuals. The remainder of the cattle bones consisted of an assortment of anatomical parts and do not appear to represent distinctive groups of waste. Nine of the 15 pig

Fig. 7. Scapula from Pit 1067.
bones were skull and mandible fragments representing at least two animals. A sheep skull had been chopped longitudinally down the centre, presumably to facilitate removal of the brain and meat from the head. The other sheep bones from the deposit were mainly from the meaty parts of the body, such as the femur, humerus and tibia. The environmental samples produced a small number of fish bones and scales among which eel was identified, as well as a few bones which may belong to herring (Fig. 8).

There were also 27 dog bones from at least three individuals, recovered from a single context within the pit. None of the dogs appeared to be represented by a complete skeleton, and it is possible that three bones (skull, mandible and scapula) from a different context within the same feature may represent further disturbed elements of the same skeletons. All the bones present had fused epiphyses, indicating that they were adult. Stature estimated from longbones, using factors proposed by Harcourt (1974), suggested heights of 490mm and 570mm. However, a radius and possibly two of the pelvices represent a much smaller animal. A calculated height suggests this dog stood only 240mm high at the shoulder. These small dogs do not generally appear in the archaeological record before the Roman period. Examples have previously been noted at several Leicester sites including Causeway Lane, which had an animal with an estimated height of 220mm (Gidney 1999, 317).

**DISCUSSION**

Table 1 summarises the food types represented in the cess pit and their likely place of origin. The pottery indicates the presence of imported olive oil, wine and preserves, transported in amphorae but probably decanted into the flagons for sale, whilst the presence of samian dishes and bowls but not cups, would suggest the presentation of items for sale, rather than the consumption of food and beverages on the premises. The botanical evidence demonstrates the importation

![Fish bones and scales from Pit 1067.](image)

Fig. 8. Fish bones and scales from Pit 1067.
and introduction of a range of fruit and seeds which may also have been sold on the premises, whilst the faunal remains indicates the selling of smoked or cured beef carved off the bone, and fish, both freshwater and marine, perhaps preserved in salt or prepared as a sauce.

The significance of this assemblage is placed in stark relief when it is considered that despite the examination of over a thousand samples from Iron Age and Roman sites across the county, remains of imported fruits and sea fish have not been found on any of the Iron Age sites; indeed, even evidence for wild fruits and any fish is very sparse (Monckton 2004). Roman rural sites within the county tend to show more similarities to the Iron Age sites than they do to their urban centre. The remains from this cesspit and others in Leicester therefore represent a departure from the local Iron Age economy, and show the Roman influence on food available in the town.

It is necessary therefore to place this assemblage and its associated shop frontage into the social and economic context of the recently-appointed and rapidly-growing civitas capital of Ratae Corieltavorum, and seek parallels with other urban centres in Britain. The time that the shop frontage was built and the cess pit filled (the middle decades of the second century) was the fastest period of growth for Ratae, with a massive public building programme in progress at the forum and baths in the insula immediately to the north (Wacher 1995; Cooper and Buckley 2003), with a workforce no doubt hungry for the kind of snacks being provided just down the street. The town was not yet enclosed by defences and so the street on which the frontage lay led straight onto the road south to Caves Inn (Tripontium), at its junction with Watling Street, and the road south-east to Godmanchester (Durovigutum) at its junction with Ermine Street. These roads therefore brought not only rural Corieltavians into their new cosmopolitan centre, but also long-distance travellers from London, Colchester and beyond,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food Type</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Olive oil</td>
<td>Amphora</td>
<td>Mediterranean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wine</td>
<td>Amphora</td>
<td>Italy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish sauce</td>
<td>Amphora</td>
<td>Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruit (Dates?)</td>
<td>Amphora</td>
<td>Mediterranean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grapes</td>
<td>Pips</td>
<td>Mediterranean/introduced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figs</td>
<td>Seeds</td>
<td>Mediterranean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple</td>
<td>Pips</td>
<td>Orchard/introduced?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plum</td>
<td>Stones</td>
<td>Orchard/introduced?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strawberry</td>
<td>Pips</td>
<td>Local, gathered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opium poppy</td>
<td>Seeds</td>
<td>Import/introduced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelt wheat</td>
<td>Grains (charred)</td>
<td>Local agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish, freshwater and eels</td>
<td>Bones, scales</td>
<td>Local, supplied to town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish, marine, herring</td>
<td>Bones</td>
<td>Trade with coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beef, cured/smoked</td>
<td>Cattle bones</td>
<td>Local, supplied to town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutton</td>
<td>Sheep bones (few)</td>
<td>Local, supplied to town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pork</td>
<td>Pig bones (few)</td>
<td>Local, supplied to town</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Summary of food types and their origins located in Cesspit 1067.
who might have been surprised to find the same delicacies awaiting them in Ratae as they had grown accustomed to in the south.

**Meat and fish**

Analysis of the faunal remains has shed light on the types of animals consumed and, to a certain extent, how meat was prepared. Although products such as sausages or blood pudding leave no archaeological trace, it is reasonable to assume that use was made of most parts of slaughtered animals, and at Castle Street, bones were chopped both to portion the carcass and to access the nutritious marrow. Literary Roman sources, such as Apicius, emphasise the importance of pork in this period, and there is some evidence to suggest that a taste for pork was developing where the native elite were adopting new culinary habits (Cool 2006, 83–4). However, the faunal remains recovered from most Roman period sites in Britain indicate that beef was the most widely consumed meat, as pig bones very rarely exceed those of cattle. Most Leicester sites of the period conform to this pattern, including Castle Street, where the relative proportion of the three main species in the Roman phases was 56 per cent cattle, 27 per cent sheep/goat and 17 per cent pig. Although wild mammal bones were rare judging by butchery marks, both red deer and hare were consumed, and poultry, represented by domestic fowl and goose, seems to have formed only a small proportion of the diet.

Evidence for the preparation of dried, smoked cuts of meat, as seen at Castle Street, has been noted elsewhere in Leicester. Scapulae from mid and late Roman phases at Vine Street, Leicester, exhibited similar patterns of butchery. A late Roman pit produced a number of bones butchered around the glenoid cavity; in these cases, however, the hook hole was either absent or fragmented (Browning 2009). The hook hole in the scapula blade indicates drying or smoking rather than salting, which would provide longer term preservation; suggesting that the smoking was undertaken as a matter of taste rather than stemming from a need for preservation (Cool 2006, 91). Similar groups of cattle scapulae, representing preserved shoulders of beef, have been found all over the Roman Empire. In Britain, examples are common at military sites, but they also occur in urban centres, including Lincoln (Dobney et al. 1996, 26) and the General Accident site in York (O’Connor 1988, 84). This style of butchery seems to be a predominantly Roman phenomenon; the Lincoln examples are from Roman deposits (Dobney et al. 1996, 26), the York scapulae are from mid-second and early third century deposits (O’Connor 1988, 84), while the Castle Street assemblage lies firmly in the second century. O’Connor’s observations concerning the York examples are equally true here; if the cured meat had been sold on the bone then it is likely that the scapulae would have been distributed in deposits all over the town (O’Connor 1988, 84) rather than being recovered from a single feature.

Meats such as beef, pork and mutton would probably have been locally-produced and butchered before being prepared for sale by the shops. In some cases this would suggest proximity to a convenient source of meat, such as a meat market, as is suggested for shops in Insula II at Cirencester where sawn bones,
from pits in Shop 5, indicated 200 years of continuous operation (Holbrook 1998, 187). In Leicester, bones recovered from Great Holme Street (Gouldwell 1991), sited to the west of the town walls, might indicate an abbatoir. Horsemeat seems to have been eaten rarely and although butchers’ shops in Verulamium appear to have been producing and selling horseflesh, possibly as sausages (Alcock 1996, 78), very few butchered horse bones have been found in Leicester, and the single butchered metatarsal recovered from Castle Street is unlikely to indicate the consumption of horsemeat.

Fish remains were few, but included eel and possibly herring. Other sites in Leicester, such as Causeway Lane, suggest that the fish consumed in the Roman period were often freshwater species such as perch or the euryhaline eel, presumably fished locally, and that saltwater species including herring, imported from the coast, were also consumed, but were less common than in later times (Nicholson 1999, 334).

**Fruits, cereals, pulses and herbs**

The evidence for the produce of plants, both local and exotic, from Castle Street is paralleled both within Leicester and across many of the major towns of Roman Britain. It suggests that as well as a range of locally-grown fruits and cereals, some new plants were being introduced into cultivation, whilst other exotics were being imported. Remains of wild fruits and hazel nutshell are found on most Leicester sites, whilst charred cereals, mainly spelt and barley, as well as legumes such as peas and field bean, are also common (Monckton 2004). The charred remains of coriander and lentil came from Causeway Lane (Monckton 1999), with grape pips and olive stone fragments recovered from Freeschool Lane (Radini 2009), whilst mineralised remains from cesspits, dating throughout the Roman period – for example, at Newarke Street, Causeway Lane and Vine Street (Monckton 1996; 1999; 2009) – have produced a range of fruit including grapes, figs, plums and apples, as well as flavourings such as opium poppy, mint and possibly mustards. This compares well with such towns as Silchester (Fulford et al. 2006), although only London has produced remains of spices such as pepper (van der Veen et al. 2008). Evidence from a shop in *Insula XXVIII* at Colchester included barley, coriander, figs, lentils, horsebean, spelt and stone-pine (MacMahon and Price 2005, 65), while at No. 1 Poultry, London a variety of herbs and spices for cooking, as indicated by the carbonised remains of black mustard, coriander, dill, mustard and fennel, appears to have been available (MacMahon 2003, 67).

**Pottery**

Whilst a number of retailers specifically selling pottery have been identified across Roman Britain and the north-western provinces, including the forum gutter deposit from Wroxeter where stalls selling mortaria and samian were destroyed in a fire (Rhodes 1989, 54; Evans 2005, 147), the combination of vessel types represented at Castle Street, where pottery is playing a subsidiary role, is less
obviously paralleled. The herbs and spices from No. 1 Poultry, mentioned above, were accompanied by South Gaulish samian ware bowls and Central Gaulish glazed wares (MacMahon 2003, 67), which may also have functioned as vessels for the display of foods, but without the evidence for other food and drink indicated by the amphora and flagons at Castle Street. However, one significant assemblage from elsewhere in Leicester itself bears a very close resemblance. Ten times as many sherds, over 5,600 weighing 163kg, were retrieved from the back fill of a remarkably-preserved timber-lined cellar on Little Lane (Lucas and Buckley 2007, 29, fig. 19 Ph.5.6/6.3 F186; Sawday 1989, 32–5), again dating to the middle or later decades of the second century. The assemblage contained a very high proportion of white ware flagons (over 30 per cent) and at least five Dressel 20 olive oil amphorae, together with single examples of the other amphora represented at Castle Street (Pollard 2007, 213–20). However, a number of differences are apparent which indicate that the assemblage did not derive from a retail establishment exactly like that proposed for Castle Street: firstly, large numbers of drinking vessels including samian cup forms Dr. 27 and 33 and colour-coated ware beakers were present; and secondly, large numbers of discarded oyster shells were also retrieved (Monckton 2007, 481). The assemblage from the cellar, which seems to have been deposited in a single event, would more closely resemble a tavern, perhaps, where food and drink was consumed on the premises, as paralleled by the Room 4 frontage in Insula XIV at Verulamium, where a large deposit of oyster shells was found (Frere 1972, 12).

Tabernae
Although the structural evidence for the Castle Street ‘delicatessen’ relies entirely on our assumption that the colonnade supported a covered walkway along a shop frontage, there are a number of parallels we can drawn on to help reconstruct how it might have looked. The term taberna is used, throughout the Roman Empire, to describe commercial premises which appear to have fulfilled any combination of functions, including bar, shop, tavern, restaurant, stall or workshop (MacMahon 2003, 8), and the precise function can often only be surmised when they are associated with specific rubbish deposits as at Castle Street or with diagnostic structures such as hearths for metalworking, as here or in a number of premises at Insula XIV at Verulamium (Frere 1972, 12). For obvious reasons they are often the earliest building form recognised along the frontage of the main thoroughfares once the street grid had been established, and occupied those locations, built initially of timber and then often rebuilt in stone, throughout much of the Roman period. The typical layout, as exemplified by well-preserved examples in Ostia and Pompeii, as well as in Insula V at Cirencester (Holbrook 1998, 209) and Insula XIV at Verulamium (Frere 1972, 5–110), indicates that individual premises often comprised a pair of rooms with a shop at the front and an associated workshop to the rear, which was sometimes subdivided to provide residential accommodation or access to a first floor (Holbrook 1998, 209). In the case of Cirencester, where they occupied a corner with Ermin Street, and at Verulamium, where they fronted
on to Watling Street, between five and 10 separate premises respectively formed a single block with a shared roof, and a portico or colonnade opening onto the street.

Establishing the ownership and management of shops is of course speculative, but in the case of the purpose-built blocks such as those above and those at Gracechurch Street in London, destroyed by fire in 60 (Merrifield 1983, 48 and fig. 5), the necessary initial investment must have come from a wealthy individual who then probably rented out premises to tenants. At Gracechurch Street, it was proposed that three shops to house bronzesmiths c. AD 55 were built possibly by a private or military entrepreneur landlord (de la Bédoyère 1991, 142), whilst at Verulamium, Frere speculated that the Insula XIV shops were built by a landowner, possibly a member of the Catuvellaunian nobility or an immigrant, and tenanted by free craftsmen or labourers (Frere 1972, 12). Subsequently, tenants may have become owners and amalgamated adjoining properties, as might be the case at Insula V, Cirencester and, possibly, Insula VIII, Wroxeter (Holbrook 1998, 210). What is clear though is that, as today, shops could change function rapidly and premises providing different services could stand, side by side, along the same frontage. The Watling Street frontage at Verulamium consequently provided evidence of metalworking, of both copper and gold, bone-working, pottery selling as well as food (Niblett 2001, 78; Frere 1972, 11). This may help to explain the occurrence of the six bowl-shaped furnaces, probably for copper working, which lay to the rear of the Castle Street frontage, perhaps within the shop itself, 5m south-west of the cesspit. Dating to the late second to third century, this may indicate that the ‘delicatessen’ subsequently became a metalworkers’ towards the end of the second century, or that this was the function of another premises within the same block of shops. Bowl furnaces could be associated with several stages of production from raw materials to finished tools (Condron 1997, 5). In this case, several had been cleaned out and reused, indicating prolonged use. Similar furnaces for copper working were discovered during excavations at Redcross Street (Clay and Pollard 1994, 46) on the opposite side of the same Roman street, and the overall impression is that these keyhole excavations are capturing brief snapshots of the long and complex commercial life along this busy thoroughfare.

CONCLUSION

The excavations at Castle Street have provided a relatively rare opportunity to undertake an integrated specialist study of plant, animal and ceramic evidence from a single cesspit that provided specialised preservation conditions. Its coincidence with a colonnaded frontage has allowed the reconstruction of a story of relatively short-term commercial endeavour, which is consistent with evidence both from elsewhere within Leicester and from a number of other major urban centres across the Province of Britannia. Located on the main thoroughfare linking the main roads from the south to the administrative and commercial centre of Ratae, the civitas capital of the Corieltavi, the Castle Street ‘delicatessen’ would
have attracted townsmen, curious locals from the surrounding countryside and long-distance travellers alike, and provided an opportunity to sample not only locally-produced smoked beef straight off the bone, but also fruit, fish, wine, olive oil and other imported delicacies which would have been unknown in the area a century earlier.

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