

which were to become famous throughout Romano-Britain and over the entire Roman empire.

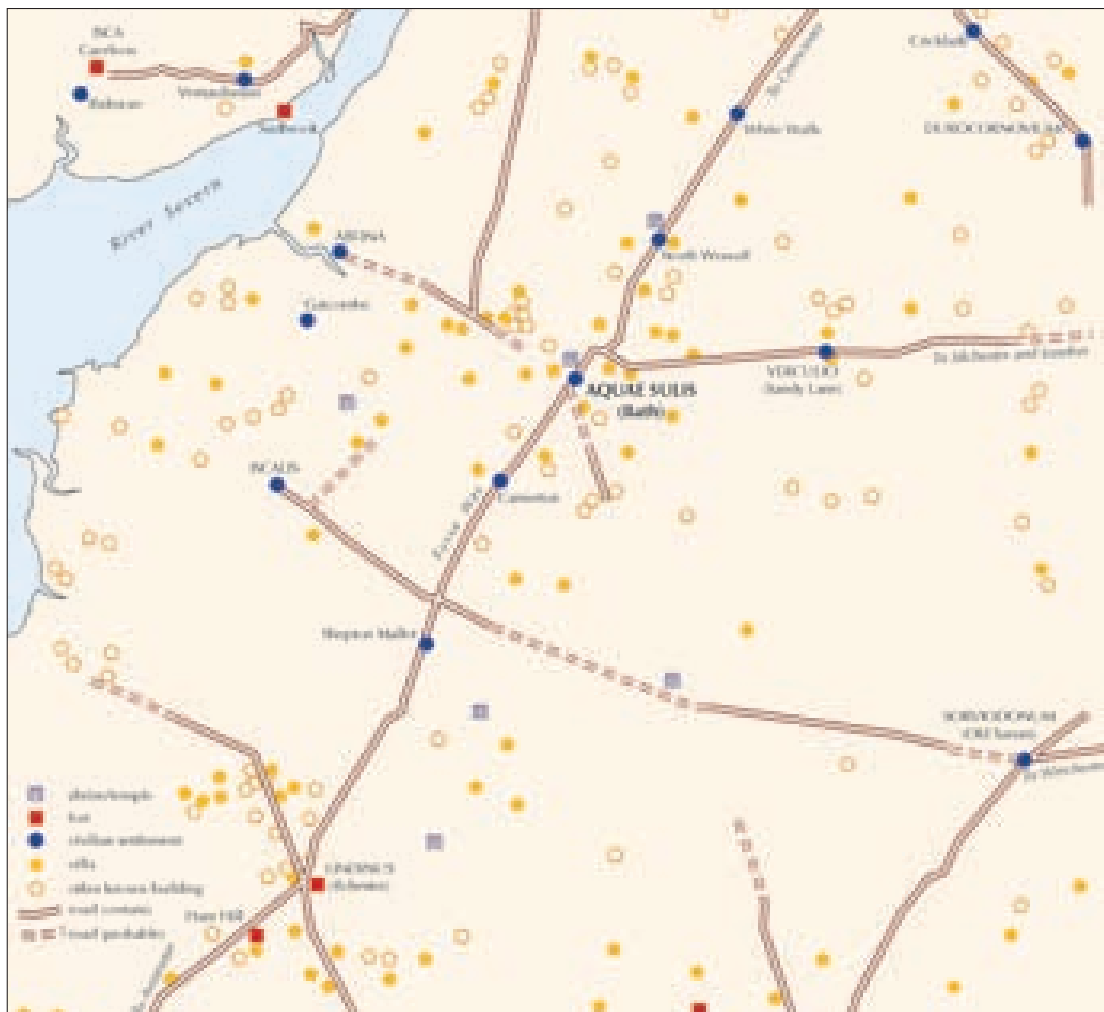
*Aquae Sulis: the Roman spa*

A simplified map of the area around Aquae Sulis shows that Roman Bath was clearly of great importance, in part because of its unique hot springs. The area around Bath boasted the highest concentration of villa sites in Roman Britain.

DRAWN BY ADAM GREGORY, CARNEGIE

The Roman invasion of AD 43 advanced rapidly to occupy southern England as far west as the Bristol Channel and the river Severn. By the late autumn of that year, the Roman army had reached the Bath area, and was soon engaged in laying out the first Roman frontier in Britain. This military road, later to become known as the Fosse Way, ran diagonally across the country from the garrison fortress at Exeter to Lincoln. In the Bath region the Fosse follows the ancient north-south route along the Jurassic ridgeway.

The Fosse Way crossed the Avon at Bath, where several other major Roman roads converged: the road from London to the port of Sea Mills near Avonmouth and the Severn crossing; the road north to Gloucester; and the south-east road



This life-size gilded bronze head of Minerva was once crowned with a Corinthian helmet. The head was found when a sewer trench as being dug in Stall Street in 1727, the first of many archaeological discoveries unearthed as the Georgian town was being built. The helmeted figure was probably the cult statue in the temple dedicated to Sulis Minerva, who was a conflation of Celtic and classical deities, with Sulis apparently sharing Minerva's attributes of wisdom, curative powers and martial prowess. Incorporating local gods into Roman worship made fine political sense.

BY COURTESY OF BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL, ROMAN BATHS MUSEUM

across Wessex to the southern port of Hamworthy on Poole Harbour. The ford to the south of the present-day Cleveland Bridge was the principal river crossing at Bath, which expert opinion agrees would have been guarded by the military. A military presence in the vicinity is suggested by archaeological evidence from the earliest Roman period, but there is continuing speculation as to the likely site of a Roman fort. The Queen Square area has been proposed by some authorities but there is also strong support for a probable site east of the river at Bathwick.<sup>15</sup>

The coming of the Romans heralded the development of the hot springs into the principal settlement of its kind in Roman Britain.<sup>16</sup> The marshy ground around the springs was drained in successive phases of activity, and within an

'IN BRITAIN [THERE] ARE HOT SPRINGS ADORNED WITH SUMPTUOUS SPLENDOUR FOR THE USE OF MORTALS ... MINERVA IS PATRON GODDESS OF THESE.'

SOLINUS, 3RD CENTURY AD