

The plan of *Venta Icenorum* (Caistor-by-Norwich): interpreting a new geophysical survey

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The site of the Roman town of *Venta Icenorum* lies two km south of the city of Norwich on the W side of the present village of Caistor St. Edmund (fig. 1). The river Tas flows past the W flank of the town, shortly before its confluence with the Yare. Like Silchester and Wroxeter, Caistor is a 'green-field' site, unencumbered by modern settlement. Its walls enclose some 14 ha, although aerial photographs suggest that the earlier street plan covered an area twice that subsequently enclosed by the walls.

The name *Venta Icenorum* (literally, 'market-place of the Iceni') is preserved in the *Antonine Itinerary* (Iter V, AI 474 6; Iter IX, AI 479 10). Ptolemy (2.3.11) refers to *Venta* as the only town within the *civitas* of the Iceni. The site of Caistor was first identified as *Venta Icenorum* by William Camden in the 16th c. (Davies 2001, 5), but archaeological interest in the site really began in the dry summer of 1928 when a series of vertical air photographs was taken over the site. The original aerial photograph was first published in the *Times* of London of March 4, 1929; a composite image then appeared in *Antiquity* in 1929 (183), accompanied by a commentary and an interpretative plan by R. E. M. Wheeler (figs. 2-3). The air photograph shows the street plan and a number of buildings clearly revealed in the barley crop. The version published in *Antiquity* does not show them with the same clarity; further, the definition of a number of features (notably the bath-house) appears to have been enhanced,¹ but a number of buildings, in particular the forum basilica and the two temples, can be clearly seen. Excavations were subsequently carried out by D. Atkinson, who investigated the forum, a bath complex, the south gate, a house, and two temples between 1929 and 1935. These excavations remained largely unpublished during Atkinson's lifetime, although a painstaking study of his records by S. S. Frere eventually resulted in partial publication (1971; 2005) of this work.

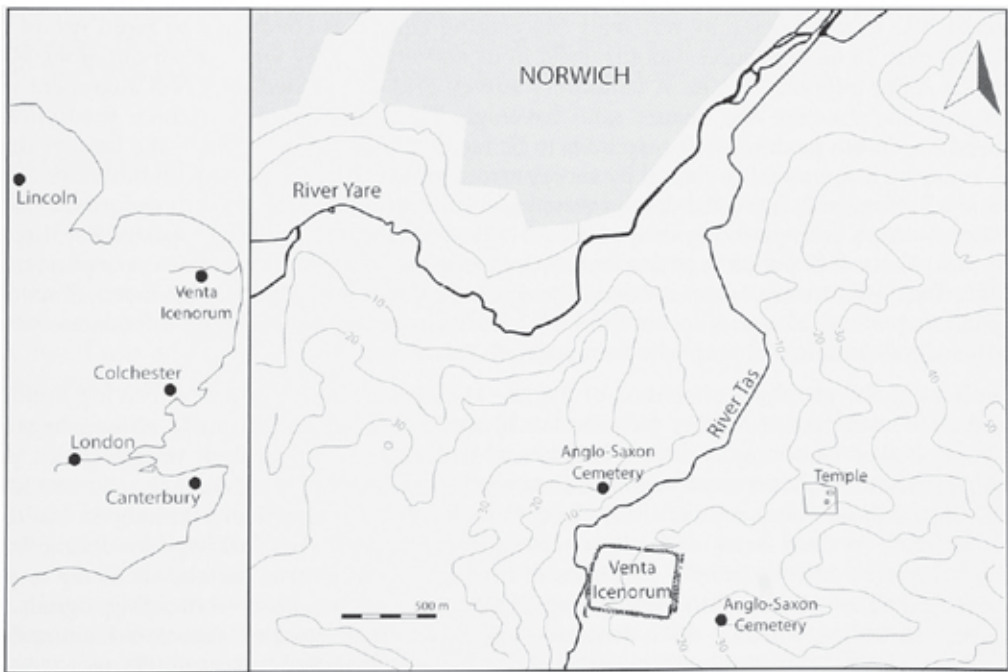


Fig. 1. The location of *Venta Icenorum* (W. Bowden after T. Ashwin 2000).

1 This early case of a newspaper altering a photograph was pointed out to me by S. S. Frere after the *Eastern Daily Press* reprinted the *Times* photo in an article about the present project.