A Five-Acre Wood in Roman Kent

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It is to be hoped that future excavations in the City, particularly along the course of the Walbrook, will produce more texts', Hugh Chapman wrote twenty years ago, in his survey of Roman writing tablets from London (Chapman 1974). But when he came to publish new discoveries, regrettably none of them carried a legible text (Chapman 1976, two or three names only; Chapman 1978 and 1986, nothing). This is true of most stilus writing tablets found in Britain, and I am particularly happy to pay tribute to Hugh's memory by publishing here a remarkable exception to the rule. It is the longest stilus tablet text to survive from Britain (compare RIB 2443), and it was found by the Museum of London while he was Deputy Director. By a further happy coincidence, since Hugh was born in Kent, this tablet, although it was found in the City of London, relates to Roman Kent.

The tablet (figs 24.1, 24.2) was found in 1986 during rescue excavation on the Garden House site at the corner of Throgmorton Avenue and Austin Friars, in what was once the Walbrook valley (Hunting 1987. 5; Frere 1987, 336). It had been dumped with other organic material in association with the 2nd-century Roman embankment of the eastern branch of the Walbrook. The tablet is of usual form, a rectangle of wood, probably silver fir (Abies alba), 3mm thick and measuring 145 by 110mm, complete except for minor damage to one edge. It is recessed on one face only, and in the lower border two holes have been pierced for the cords which hinged it to other tablets; a notch has been sawn in the upper border, through which passed the binding cord that tied the bundle of tablets together. (How this worked can be seen in Chapman 1978. fig 183.) The present tablet would have been an outer leaf, in fact the first 'page'. The recess was originally filled with a smooth coating of black wax made from beeswax and soot, on which the scribe wrote with a needle-pointed stilus. Many such stilii have been found in the bed of the Walbrook (Merrifield 1983, 101). By scratching through the wax coating to the pale wood underneath, the scribe made his writing legible against the dark surface. He could correct a mistake, or re-use the tablet, simply by first smoothing out the wax; to erase something entirely was to wipe it out ‘down to the wood' (Fronto, Ad Antoninum Imp i 2, 9). This wax has now disappeared (it hardly ever survives in the waterlogged deposits of Britain), but the pressure of the scribe's stilus bruised and scratched the wood, making his writing still legible. More or less legible, rather, since the wood also carries traces of an earlier text: at their most obvious these are the letter 'S', presumably because this was the longest letter and so was made with the greatest pressure, but also little diagonal strokes, fragments of other letters, which have to be distinguished from our text. The scribe has also imported confusion by interlineation at one point. I shall return to these problems below.

The tablet was expertly cleaned and conserved by Helen Ganiaris at the Museum of London, and I was allowed to examine it while it was still wet and the marks were at their freshest. The tablet was also photographed then, while damp, by means of a large-format camera and high-contrast film (Ganiaris 1990). This was important. Although I was able to read most of the text at the time (Tomlin 1988; RIB 2443.19), I delayed publication in the hope that computerised image processing would help with the rest, but in this country at least the technique has not been developed sufficiently, and it was the invitation to contribute to this volume that renewed my interest in the tablet. By looking at the photographs
themselves long enough, I have been able to solve some of the outstanding problems. Decipherment of Roman ‘manuscripts’ is a slow business, and often it is only feasible to work from photographs. So I would emphasise their importance, and earnestly recommend that they be taken after a tablet has been cleaned, but before it has been dried out, since the traces of the stilus are no more than shallow indentations or subtle bruising and discoloration of the fibres, which all tend to disappear when the wood is dry. Colour photographs should also be taken. If other conservators should read this, therefore, and happen to have a Roman stilus writing tablet in their care, I beg them to read what Helen Ganiaris has written (Ganiaris 1990).

FORMAT

The tablet carries a text, thirteen lines long, which is the first ‘page’ of a longer document. It was laid out carefully by an experienced scribe, even if he did not use punctuation in the modern sense of the word, not even the medial point or ‘interpunct’ used in earlier, 1st-century, texts to separate words. Nor did he use the interpunct to mark abbreviations, which were in any case familiar suspensions, like L for Lucius. As usual in texts of this date there is no word-separation, but occasionally the scribe left a small gap between words; these can be seen after VERLVCIONIVM (line 4), QVINQVE (5), MINVS (5), VICINALE (9), and they coincide with pauses in the sense, so I have taken them to be deliberate (compare Parkes 1992, 10) and I have indicated them with a comma in my transcript. Another such pause coincides with the end of a line (3). If necessary, the scribe divided words between lines, breaking them by syllables (see the ends of 4, 5 and 11), but once (in 7) he interlineated the final syllable, by cramming it below the line. He also inserted half a line (7a) between 7 and 8. The most obvious feature of his layout, one that is found in official documents on stone, bronze, papyrus and wood (compare Bowman & Thomas 1983, 80; and see Gordon & Gordon 1957, 154; Parkes 1992, 10), is the way in which the scribe marked each sentence or ‘paragraph’. He started it on a new line, hence the uninscribed space in 12, and he started somewhat to the left of his regular margin, enlarging both the first letter and the last.

SCRIPT

The scribe wrote the standard cursive script without ligatures used in contemporary stilus tablets. Except in the heading (1-2), his handwriting is firm and regular, but after this lapse of time it presents problems. I will discuss these in detail below, but briefly, they are due to our text being what underlay the wax, rather than what was originally visible on the surface. As I have said, there are confusing traces of an earlier text, and in particular the half-line (7a) inserted between 7 and 8. Moreover, letters are not always completely preserved in the wood and, since they were made from a limited repertoire of strokes, one letter is liable to be confused with another, for instance the pairs A and M, CI and G, B and D, L and I. Incomplete letters are also easily confused with E and V, a pair of letters which presents a special problem in stilus tablet texts. Here the distinction is that, though both letters are made with two short parallel strokes, E consists essentially of two diagonals, V of two uprights; and that even if the first stroke of V tends to slope, it nonetheless curves to meet the second stroke, which is upright. Both strokes of E, by contrast, are diagonals, and the first does not meet the second. This important distinction can best be seen in the last line of the text (13).

TRANSCRIPTION

I now transcribe the text, retaining the original format, but otherwise modernizing it; that is, I have added punctuation, I have separated words and capitalized the initial letter where appropriate, and have resolved abbreviations and symbols in round brackets ( ). Square brackets [ ] letters now lost whose existence can be deduced. Interlineated letters are indicated thus”. Dots under a letter indicate a reading doubtful in itself, even if it is guaranteed by the context. Dots by themselves below the line (thus ...) indicate traces of approximately the same number of undeciphered letters. Capitals, other than initial letters, mean that the word as a whole is unexplained. I discuss particular readings below, but my line drawing (fig 24.2) is intended to be a visual transcription and should be compared with the photograph (fig 24.1); in it I have excluded what I take to be traces of a previous text, without however ‘restoring’ anything which is not there.

Imp(erator) Traiano [Had]ri[ano] Caesare Aug(usto) (iterum), Gn(aeo)
Fusco Salinatore co(n)s(ulibus) pr(idie) idus Martias.

Cum ventum essec in rem praesentem,
silvam Verlucionium, arepennia de-
cem quinque, plus minus, quod est in ci-
vitate Cantiacorum pago DIBVSSV...
....RABI....A..Sadfinibus heredi'bus'
interlineated, traces of half a line
et heredibus Caesenni Vitalis et via
vicinale, quod se emisse diceret L(ucius)
Iulius Bellicus de T(ito) Valerio Silvino
(denariis) quadraginta sicut emptione con-
tinetur.

L(ucius) Iulius Bellicus testatus est se

'In the consulship of the Emperor Trajan Hadrian Caesar Augustus for the second time, and Gnaeus Fuscus Salinator, on the day before the Ides of March [14 March 118]. Whereas, on arriving at the property in question, the wood Verlucionium, fifteen arepennia more or less, which is in the canton of the Cantiaci in Dibussu[ ] parish, [ ], neighboured by the heirs [of...] and the heirs of Caesennius Vitalis and the vicinal road, Lucius Julius Bellicus said that he had bought it from Titus Valerius Silvinus for forty denarii, as is contained in the deed of purchase. Lucius Julius Bellicus attested that he ['']

NOTES ON THE READING

1-2 This heading (the date) stands apart from the rest of the 'page' (3-13). Its alignment is slightly different; moreover 1

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is further to the left than 3, and 2 than 4ff. The script is noticeably less firm and regular than that of 3—13; in particular the G of AVG is a rapid zig-zag compared with the upright two-stroke G of PAGO (6) and QVADRAGINTA (11). This need not mean the date is by another hand, but it does seem to have been written rapidly and carelessly, no doubt because it was formulaic.

There is a long vertical stroke after the second A of MARTIAS, which I take to belong to an earlier text; compare that under V in CANTIACORVM (6). In MARTIAS the scribe seems to have lengthened the second A to fill the space, and then to have marked the sentence-ending with an exaggerated S.

3 The scribe sometimes writes M with four strokes (as in CVM), sometimes with three (as in VENTVM), the second stroke turning down at right-angles; the latter is the more common form and may be reduced virtually to an 'arrow head' of three strokes as in -CEM (5).

4 SILVAM: S and L have coalesced, making SIL- look like SV-.

VERLVCIONIVM: I disregard what I take to be traces of an earlier text, the short horizontals or diagonals above certain letters; a ghost letter from this text is also visible between E and R. Verlucionium is a plausible place-name: see Commentary below.
5 P of PLVS seems to be written with a short horizontal (not diagonal) stroke.

6 The reading -VITATE is inevitable, but the T is a good example of the scribe's tendency to slope the cross-bar down to the right, rather like an A or P.

V of CANTIACORVM overlies a vertical stroke from an earlier text; compare MARTIAS (2).

After PAGO must be the name of the pagus ('parish', see Commentary), expressed as an adjective in the ablative case. It clearly begins with DIBV (to see that it begins with D not B, compare HEREDIBVS in 8), then continues with SS over trace of an earlier text, and with another V, that is DIBVSSV. But after this the letters are incomplete and there is trace of an earlier text. I read them tentatively as TI (though N is equally possible), L and I. There is also a long horizontal stroke which might be terminal O (compare that in SILVINO at the end of 10), but it seems to be on a lower alignment and thus part of an earlier text. I can find no convincing analogy or etymology for the name (though note Rivet & Smith 1979 s.v. *DVABISSVM), so the whole reading must remain doubtful. The coincidence with the ending of HEREDIBVS (8) is also odd, but seems to be only a coincidence.

7-8 This line also presents unsolved problems. The scribe has added half a line (7a) below the first half of the line, and it is not always possible to separate the two. In fact I can only read the last word of 7 with certainty, HEREDIBVS, which itself is partly interlineated as if the scribe did not have room to carry it over. Yet it is strangely repeated in 8 (ET HEREDIBVS): see further,below.

The context requires that the wood is being located more precisely: see Commentary. But one would expect either the name(s) of neighbouring proprietor(s) preceded by ADFINIBVS (ablative plural, as required by HEREDIBVS), or possibly the name of the nearest 'village' (vicus) preceded by VICO (compare CIL XI, 1147, p 2.56 fund(um) Castricianum pag(o) s(upra) s(cripto) vico Flania). ADFINIBVS however cannot be read, and in any case is probably to be read immediately before HEREDIBVS. On the other hand VICO is just possible, assuming a V like that in FVSCO (2) and some traces of a previous text. What follows would then be an unknown place-name. It looks like RAB (the B is certain), IA (but IN and IR are also possible), possibly VR, then three illegible letters, A, and finally some fainter traces (perhaps from an earlier text) which resemble EOS.

ADFINIBVS: this reading is required by the context and what follows. What actually survives looks like ..NNI.VS, with sufficient trace of AD and B to read them dotted; so the apparent (first) ' N' must be taken as an incomplete F running into I.

HEREDIBVS: this reading is fairly clear, if one assumes that the apparent descender (not drawn) of H is a survival from an earlier text; compare MARTIAS and CANTIACORVM. However, the succeeding ET HEREDIBVS creates a problem. There seems to be no instance of heredes et heredes in the sense of (say) 'heirs male and female'. Professor Jim Adams has suggested to me that it may be a 'distributive gemination' in the sense of 'heirs in this place and that', comparing Peregrinatio Aetheriae 6.2, locis et locis ('in this place and that'): see Hofmann & Szantyr 1965,197. But this usage is rare and 'late', and it is easier to suppose that the scribe made a transcription error. Properties were usually identified by two neighbouring properties (see Commentary to 7, below), so I conjecture that both the neighbouring properties here were owned by 'heirs', ie ADFINIBVS HEREDIBVS [of John Doe] ET HEREDIBVS CAESENNI VITALIS, and that the scribe's eye slipped from one HEREDIBVS to the next. Later he realised his mistake, and inserted 7a, which would be the name of the first original owner. (It is now illegible.) Two heirs may seem a coincidence, but it only means that the records were not being kept up to date. Egyptian property lists often identify owners, not by name, but as the anonymous 'heir' of an owner deceased: see for example Sijpesteijn & Worp 1978, 166, a reference I owe to Dr John Rea.

Below ET VIA are diagonals left by an earlier text.

9 VICINALE: syntactically the ablative (vicinali) is required, as Professor Harry Jocelyn has pointed out to me, but the E is certain, so VICINALE must be a grammatical solecism.

SE EMISSE: I owe this reading to Professor David Thomas.

10-12 BELLICVS: I originally read Betucus (thus Tomlin 1988; RIB 2443.19), but on the second appearance of the
name in 13, - L L - now looks certain. Bellicus is also a more common name than Betucus (of which Betucus is a variant).

T(ITO): there is damage here from an earlier text (compare the diagonal strokes above R and E in VALERIO), which I take to be the remains of SS or SC. It has obscured what must have been the abbreviated praenomen of Valerius Silvinus, and I take the downward-sloping diagonal to be part of a bold T; compare T in QUADRAGINTA (11). Titus is uncommon as a praenomen with Valerius; G(aius), L(ucius) or M(arcus) are usual, but there is no sign of any of them.

13 S of BELLICVS coincides with an earlier S, or (less likely)was written twice. TESTATVS overlies three Ss of an earlier text.

COMMENTARY

3 Cum ventum esset in rem praesentem is a well-attested technical legal phrase (see TLL s.v. praesens i.3) used when the boundaries of land or its ownership were in dispute, and refers to the arrival of the judge and parties concerned at the property in question. See for instance CIL VI, 266, which records a series of official verdicts about a place claimed to be sacred:

Florianus ... qui, cum in rem praesentem venisset, locum inspexit... sententiam de eo loco ...protulit (‘Florianus who, when he had come to the property in question, inspected the place, and pronounced judgement on the place’).

For the impersonal construction compare AE 1973.159, cum ad vadimonium ventum esset (a stilus writing tablet from Pompeii which records an appearance under recognizance) and Cicero, Pro Caecina 20, placuit Caecinae constituere quo die in rem praesentem veniretur (‘Caecina agreed a day on which to come to the property in question’). Unfortunately this leaves unstated who actually did come. Julius Bellicus must have been there, of course, and his opponent, whoever he was; and to decide between them the arbiter, whether he had been chosen by mutual consent (ex compromiso) or imposed by judicial authority, perhaps even that of the governor of Britain or the iuridicus, compare CIL III, 9938, where judges appointed by the legate of Dalmatia (iudices dati a M(arco) Pompeio Silvano leg(ato) Aug(usti)) determine the boundary between two communities on the ground (in re praesenti). For the nature of the dispute, see next note.

4 silvam Verluchionium: the names of woods and forests (silva or saltus) are usually adjectival in form, eg Calidonia silva, but here the name is apparently a neuter proper noun in apposition to silvam and is the antecedent of quod (9). I have not found an exact parallel for this usage, but compare Pomponius Mela, Chorographia iii, 4, in proximo sinu portus est quem Gaditanum, et lucus quem Oleastrum adpeliant (‘... the grove called Oleastrum’, a name confirmed by Ptolemy ii, 4.10); Pliny, Natural History xvi, 37, among the ‘woods’ (silvarum) of ancient Rome is the Aesceleutum; Tacitus, Annals iii, 61, esse apud se... lucum Ortygiam (‘they had a grove (called) Ortygia’). Verluchionium is a variant of the place-name Verlucio, which is attested as Verluchione (ablative) in the Antonine Itinerary on the road from Bath to Mildenhall, probably Sandy Lane, near Calne. The word is of Celtic etymology, containing the intensive prefix ver and the adjective leuco, ‘bright, shining, white’, cognate with Latin lux (‘light’) and lucus (a small wood, especially in the sense of a ‘sacred grove’). (See Rivet & Smith 1979, s.v. Leuca and Verlucio) In British Celtic the diphthongs au, ou and eu fell together as (long) o in the late 1st century, and this probably developed into (long) u ‘by the end of the 3rd century’ (Jackson 1953, 313), a terminus ante quem inferred from the occurrence of the form Verlucione in the Antonine Itinerary. This chronology however may need to be revised, now that the form Verluchionium is already attested in the early 2nd century.

It may be significant that the wood has a name, indeed the name itself may be significant. The Roman land-surveyors explain how the ownership of woodland might be disputed. According to Frontinus (De controversiis agrorum = Thulin 1913, 6), when land was centuriated in Campania, woodland in the hills was often allotted to farms which did not adjoin it (the point being that a vineyard would need a source of timber for stakes, etc). But if that were the case here, it would be odd for the wood to have a Celtic name, which implies it already existed as a distinct entity rather than being an arbitrary allotment. A more attractive possibility is raised by Agennius Urbicus in his commentary on Frontinus (De controversiis agrorum = Thulin 1913,48): sacred places were legally the property of the Roman People, and governors of imperial provinces were expressly told by the Emperor to see that they remained so (nihil enim magis in mandatis etiam legati provinciarum accipere solent, quam ut haece loca quae sacra sunt custodiantur). Supervision was easier in the provinces than in Italy, Urbicus comments, since in Italy the density of landowners meant that sacred groves (lucos sacros) often passed illicitly into private hands despite being the property of the Roman People. Major disputes often arose on this point between the State (rem publicam) and private persons.

The question of ‘public land’ in the provinces is a vexed one (Jones 1941; Millar 1977,621-3), but the natural interpretation of Urbicus is that in the provinces, as in Italy, sacred groves notoriously fell into private hands; and that there were legal actions (quaestio non exigua is the phrase) to regain them. He notes that sacred groves in Italy ‘undoubtedly belong to
the Roman People. This qualification may imply that in the provinces the question was more complicated, in that land could not technically be 'sacred' (Gaius, Institutes ii, 7a; Trajan in Pliny, Letters x, 50) and its ownership was allegedly vested in the Emperor rather than the Roman People (Gaius, Institutes ii, 21; and compare Wiegels 1989, especially 73).

What then was going on? It can only be a hypothesis, but suppose the wood of Verlucionium, as its name suggests, was a pre-Roman Celtic sacred grove. With the Roman conquest and the surrender of the Cantiaci, it would technically have become Roman public property. Suppose it passed in fact into private ownership. (How this happened was no doubt disputed: whether by usurpation, land distribution, or whatever.) It was acquired by Valerius Silvinus or his predecessor in title, and later bought in good faith by Julius Bellicus, whose title

was now challenged. The action might have been brought by the Procurator asserting the Emperor’s rights, or by a private person hoping to lease the wood if it were adjudged public property, or even by the vicus or civitas asserting a claim to land within its boundaries.

arepennia: see TLL and, in more detail, Holder 1896 s.v. arepennis. There are minor variations in spelling, but a neuter form (whether in -e or -ium) is otherwise unattested. The word is of Celtic etymology and was current in Gaul and Spain as a unit of area-measurement, but it was nonetheless a unit of Roman measurement, since it was one actus (120 Roman feet) square, that is half of one iugerum. One arepennis is thus equivalent to 1,495 square yards, and fifteen to 4.6 acres. The use of this technical term and that of via vicinalis (see below) might imply that the civitas Cantiacorum had been professionally surveyed; this would be required for the Census in any case, and traces of Roman centuriation in Kent have been plausibly detected north of Rochester (Nightingale 1952, Dilke 1971, 191-3) and by aerial survey elsewhere (Graham Soffe, pers comm). Centuriation would of course not extend from arable land to woodland, but it is interesting that the approximate area was known.

6 in civitate Cantiacorum: Rivet & Smith (1979, s.v. Cantiaci) have already argued that the Ravenna Cosmography’s Cantiaci, not Ptolemy’s Cantii (var Cantici), is the correct form. The present text proves them right. Note also that CANT in RIB 192 should be resolved as Cant(iacus), not Cant(ius).

pago Dibussu[ ]: pagus is used here in the technical sense of a geographical sub-division of a civitas (or other large unit of local government); the term ‘parish’ is the nearest modern equivalent, though it is of course anachronistic. There are many examples in the Italian alimentary tables (CIL IX, 1455 and XI, 1147, and compare ILS Index X, 660—2), but this is the first British pagus to be named explicitly. It is unfortunate that the reading (see above) is uncertain.

7 For the reading, see above. Ulpian in the Digest (50.15.4) says that land is to be registered for the Census in the following way: the name of the farm (fundus), the civitas and pagus in which it lies, and the names of two neighbours. This is the pattern followed in the Italian alimentary tables; compare the conveyance of a house in Dacia (FIRA iii, no 90 = Bonner Jahrbücher, 177 (1977), 395): domus... qu(a)e est Alb(urno) maiori vico Pirusta[rum in]t[er] ad [fines Platorem Acep]tianum et Ingenu(u)m Callisti filium et si qui al(i)i adfines sunt et viam publicam (denariis) trecentis de Vetur[o Valente].

8—9 via vicinalis: a ‘vicinal’ road is defined by Siculus Flaccus, De condicionibus agrorum (Thulin 1913, 109) as a minor road relative to a major road (via publica), whose upkeep was the responsibility of local landowners under the supervision of the ‘parish’ authorities (magistri pagi). It led from a major road into the hinterland, and often served as a land boundary, being mentioned in conveyances (in emptionibus agrorum). Compare the reference to the via publica in the Dacian conveyance quoted above (7).

8—11 Caesennius Vitalis, Julius Bellicus, Valerius Silvinus. These three landowners of Roman Kent, the first ever recorded, are otherwise unknown. All three were Roman citizens. The name Caesennius suggests an Italian, perhaps Etruscan, origin; a connection with Caesennius Silvanus, military tribune in Britain in c AD 103 (Pliny, Letters iii, 8), is possible, but seems unlikely. Iulius and Valerius suggest provincial origins, particularly Cisalpine or Transalpine Gaul, or Spain, the descendants of provincials enfranchised in the late Republic; both nomina are very common among legionaries. The cognomen Bellicus is of Celtic etymology and is well attested in Gaul and Britain. None of these persons, to judge by his name, was of British origin. An attractive hypothesis is that land was confiscated from the tribes which resisted the Roman conquest, and was acquired by immigrants, army veterans perhaps, or businessmen with money to invest (compare Tacitus, Annals xiv, 31 and 33).
11 (denariis) quadraginta. The numeral is written out in full, as usual in legal documents, to avoid any error. Roman land-prices are discussed by Duncan-Jones (1982,48—52), and since Egypt is 'the one part of the empire where numbers of actual land prices are known', this would seem to be the first explicit landprice elsewhere. It is equivalent to 21 sesterces (HS) per iugerum, one-fiftieth of the price estimated by Columella per iugerum of unimproved land (iii, 3.8.1000 HS; compare iii,3.3, where 100 HS is said to be a good return for one iugerum of pasture or woodland). Duncan-Jones is surely correct in doubting Columella's figures, contrasting them with average prices for cornland in Egypt: 141 HS per iugerum in the 1st century, 183 HS in the 2nd century. This was highly productive land, not woodland in Rome's most northern province, and the difference in land-price seems reasonable.

This price for woodland of 40 denarii for 15 arepennia (equivalent to 160 HS for 7 1/2 iugera) is difficult to place in context. A legionary discharged after 25 or 26 years' service received 3,000 denarii (Cassius Dio 55.23.1), by implication the price of a small farm. Most of the Italian farms listed in the alimentary tables are worth more than this (Smallwood 1966, 141 -2,144,147-51), but few of them are anything like the 25,000 denarii claimed by Pliny (Letters vi, 3) for the farm he gave his old nurse. On the other hand, a serving legionary was paid only 300 denarii a year, and much of this was retained by the authorities for his food and other expenses. Compare the savings in cash lost by two of the legionaries building Hadrian's Wall: 135 denarii and 28 denarii (Bruce & Daniels 1978,155, 202). A five-acre wood for 40 denarii sounds quite a bargain, but what percentage of the population would have had the cash to buy it? It was evidently thought to be worth the trouble and expense of formal legal proceedings professionally recorded.

11-12 sicut emptione continentur. it is not an exact parallel, but compare Digest 21.2.72, multi fundi una emptione continentur ('several farms sold in one conveyance').

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13 L(ucius) Julius Bellicus testatus est se []: the phrasing is legal; compare AE 1973.149, Sulpici[us] Faustus testatus est se (etc), and AE 1973.161. The text unfortunately breaks off at this point.

IN CONCLUSION

When I told a papyrologist about this, he replied in a jolly way (it was that sort of party) that his papyri always failed him at the crucial moment. Still, as I have said already, it is the longest stilus tablet text yet found in Britain. Whereas Hugh Chapman's other texts belong to the commercial and financial life of Roman London, this is a legal document which implies a judicial authority and a secretariat to record its deliberations and decisions. It is another indication that by the early 2nd century London, not Colchester, was the formal capital of Britain. It may be added that this text was written less than eight months after Hadrian's accession, 'when the Britons could not be kept under Roman control' (Augustan History, Hadrian, v, 2), in Hadrian's second consulship, the date on the enigmatic Jarrow fragment (RIB 1051.a) from Hadrian's Wall. But there is no sign of the contemporary military crisis as Julius Bellicus prepares to do battle for his 40-denarii parcel of woodland.

The tablet is a disconcerting survival, disconcerting because it implies what does not survive: records of the ownership of land, farm by farm, throughout the Roman province. It gives us that rarity, a Roman land-price, even if its context is elusive. There is the intriguing possibility that the property in question was once a Celtic sacred grove; nonetheless it is labelled like a piece of Roman real estate. This marks a break with tradition, a change in values, like the sale of a City church for demolition and redevelopment. But the Church Commissioners would at least be free agents, whereas the tablet is in its way a document of the Roman conquest, 75 years before. (I write this on 11 November 1993, after the same interval of time which now separates us from the end of the First World War, an event which lingers at the very edge of living memory.) There is a hint perhaps, in that stilted legal language, of the old injustice, when tribal land was confiscated, and its farms and sacred places were surveyed and sold to strangers.

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Abbreviations

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CIL Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, 1863- (cited by vol and item)
FIRA  Fontes Iuris Romani Antejustiniani, 1941—69

ILS  H Dessau, Inscriptiones Latiae Selectae, 1892—1916

RIB  R G Collingwood & R P Wright, The Roman Inscriptions of Britain vols 1 (1965), 2.1-8 (1990-5) (cited by item)

TLL  Thesaurus Linguae Latinae, 1900-

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