

A Villa on the Common

ROMAN FINDS IN BERKHAMSTED

By 'BEORCHAM'

THE LIKELIHOOD of an archaeological group being formed in Berkhamsted in the near future makes this an appropriate time to go over some not very familiar ground. I refer to ancient sites which have previously engaged the attention of archaeologists. Unfortunately, they were usually called in after the eleventh hour.

As G. H. Whybrow tells us in his *History of Berkhamsted Common* (1935), 'Grims Dyke is not the only object of archaeological interest on the Common. The pavement of a Roman villa was discovered not long ago on the golf course, on the east side of Frithsden Beeches, and unfortunately received very bad treatment. Close by this villa, although actually not on the Common but in the adjoining copse, funerary urns of Roman date (in one of which was a spindle whorl) have been dug up'.

Despite the bad treatment, it seems that the site on the Common could still be of great interest, and the possibility of a full-scale 'dig' need not be ruled out.

TESSELATED PAVEMENT

In 1927, the foundations of ancient walls and a plain tessellated pavement were found when a new green was being made by the Golf Club. Ten years later, the *Journal of Roman Studies* reported that 'the substructure of a considerable building with dressed flint walls and tessellated pavements was found . . . close by the site of the discoveries made in 1927'.

In April 1954, Mr. Tony Burch and Mr. John Sayer, to whom I am indebted for many of my facts, sought more detailed information. They had no intention of excavating, but merely wished to make a preliminary survey to find the approximate extent of the site and to see if there were sufficient remains

in situ to warrant further investigation.

Although the site was much overgrown, they immediately located three sections of wall constructed with dressed flints laid in regular courses in soft mortar containing small, sharp gravel. Numerous potsherds (fragments of earthenware pots) and pieces of tile and broken brick were incorporated in the walls.

TRACING THE WALLS

One small section seemed to be about 2 ft. thick, and just by this wall, below the surface of the ground, were found many fragments of coarse red unglazed ware. Two pieces had a concentric ring pattern and may have formed the bottom of a shallow dish. A nail with mortar adhering to its shaft was found, and on the surface a few feet away were more potsherds, about half a dozen tesserae (one red, the others buff), and a pile of large flints.

The second section of wall examined was about 30 ft. away and of similar construction. The third visible section, a continuous line of large flints, extended for about 20 ft., with traces of mortar and pieces of brick. Two more nails were found, as well as small fragments of pottery and brick beside the wall.

In October 1954, further finds were made about 70 ft. due east from the sites already mentioned. Among the objects were pieces of brick, potsherds of differing types, two pieces of what may be iron slag, and one small piece of clear green glass containing numerous bubbles and moulded on one edge, perhaps part

of an ornament or of a square glass bottle.

Mr. Gurnow, of the Verulamium Museum, pronounced the objects undoubtedly genuine and comparable with exhibits at the museum. Some small lumps of red clay were daub, and these, together with the nails, suggested the possibility of wattle-and-daub buildings on the same site as the flint and brick structures.

BELGIC AND ROMAN

Certain of the potsherds, of a light buff colour, resembled in colour, texture and rim-shape certain Belgic (pre-Roman) pottery, of local origin, found during excavations at Verulamium and Prae Wood. It is therefore conceivable that the site near Frithsden Beeches had two stages of occupation, the first Belgic, with wattle-and-daub buildings and pale-coloured pottery, and the second Romano-British, with flint and brick walls and coarse red pottery.

The discoveries showed that the site was an extremely large one, and from evidence at present available it is thought that the villa belonged to the second century A.D.

DOWN IN THE VALLEY

Several interesting discoveries have been made in the Bulbourne valley. In 1955, the late Mr. J. A. Patrick inspected land which was being cleared for a house in Castle Hill Avenue and found many oyster shells (the Romans loved oysters), pottery and other Roman remains.

In 1933, on the gasworks site, five Samian bowls were found; two were preserved and identified as first and second century A.D. work. As this narrow strip of land was almost certainly raised when soil from the canal and railway was tipped there in 1830 and 1837, it must not be assumed that the bowls were in their original position.

East of this site, on the field between the railway and the canal opposite St. John's Well Lane, the discovery of many pieces of Roman tile and brick on the surface encouraged Mr. A. Burch, Mr. J. Sayer and Mr. T. Gee to make excava-

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questions. It is hoped to stimulate discussion and to apply our minds to current issues of general concern. There are likely to be two meetings later this year and two in the Spring of 1972. No dates have yet been fixed but the subjects to be tackled are Censorship, the Welfare State, Violence and Environmental Pollution. Look out for the details, and do your best to support.

MARRIAGES

7th August—Richard Stewart Eldred and Janice Moore.

28th August—Roger Alan Hume and Angela Christine Miller.

TAILPIECE

On learning (?) a new word, a child asked: 'Do they call it turnibus because that's where they turn the buses?'

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tions in 1953. They dug a series of 6 ft. square pits and found, some 2 ft. below the surface of one square, an oyster shell, a few pieces of tile and three small nails. At the bottom of this level was what seemed to be a thin stamped chalk floor. Eventually it was decided that a full-scale investigation was not likely to yield sufficiently interesting results.

NORTHCHURCH SITES

During or just after the first World War, a field behind the Old Grey Mare at Northchurch was ploughed for the first time. A large quantity of Roman bricks, potsherds and flints was turned up; among the first discoveries was a coin of A.D. 270. With the exception of the coin, these relics were used to make up the road to Norcott Court! In more recent times a number of interesting finds have been made on this site. Further investigation might yet prove rewarding, though it is feared that ploughing has destroyed definite structures.

G. H. Whybrow mentions another site that was discovered during the first World War. Fragments of Roman pottery were unearthed when the Inns of Court O.T.C. dug trenches at the Northchurch end of the Common. It was thought that these fragments came from the refuse heap of a villa situated outside the boundary of the Common, and there could be a connection between this wartime find and some further discoveries made when alterations were being carried out at Norcott Hill Farm and House in the 1920s.

A POTTER'S KILN

Two miles away, Moneybury Hill, above Aldbury, takes its name from a hoard of coins that was found there many years ago. The coins were of various dates from A.D. 50 to 270. At the entrance to Duncombe Terrace, the remains of a Roman building, possibly a temple, were found in the 1930s. Excavations uncovered walls, a floor, tiles, tesserae, and six coins dating from A.D. 120 to 296.

Mr. C. H. Quennell, the historian, excavated a potter's kiln at Nettleden in 1933. Among the objects found was a complete jug in hard grey ware, yellowish within. The kiln was thought to have been operated between the years A.D. 1156-67.

What next? Will excavations for the by-pass uncover Roman remains on the scale of those which aroused enormous interest in Gadebridge Park, Hemel Hempstead, a few years ago?

WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

The July meeting of the Berkhamsted W.I. was opened by our guest speaker, Miss Helen Crerar, from Elizabeth Arden Cosmetics, who gave us a very interesting talk on skin types, and the various cosmetics to use for each one, finishing up with a demonstration on one of our members, Mrs. R. Sims. This, of course, was very intently watched by all members present, and we expect the tips received will quickly be put into practice.

The general meeting then followed at which we were told that our flag day in aid of the N.S.P.C.C., made £97, a very good effort, with thanks to all helpers. Our jumble sale earlier in the month had raised £28.77 for our funds, also a very pleasing result.

The group outing is on 8th September to Ascot House. As this is only a short journey, it was decided to try and arrange car transport instead of a coach, as this would be quicker. Members are asked to assemble at Ascot House by 2 p.m. The September meeting and October one have had to be exchanged. Mr. Cook will now speak in September, and Mrs. H. M. Smedley in October.

MUSIC SUCCESSSES

In the 1970-71 Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music Examinations the following were successful:

Pianoforte (Grade 3): Paul Goode (Pass with Merit), David Hill (Pass), Charles Hutchinson (Pass), Francis Newman (Pass). (Grade 4): Robert Breakwell (Pass). (Grade 5): Beverley Jones (Pass), Jacqueline Hall (Pass). (Grade 2): Gordon Bateson (Pass with Merit), Sandra Taylor (Pass with Merit). (Grade 6): Rosemary Hall (Pass).

Theory (Grade 4): Paul Goode (95 marks out of possible 99). (Grade V): Rosemary Hall (78), Ruth Hiron (90), Frances Quinn (94).

Chiltern Music Festival (Amersham): Piano solo for 7 and under 9 age group: Gordon Bateson, 1st place. Piano Solo, 16 and over: Ruth Hiron, 2nd place. Piano Duet, 16 and over: Rosemary Hall and Ruth Hiron, 2nd place.

Watford Music Festival: Piano Solo 7 and under: Lorna Bateson, Merit Certificate. Piano Solo: 8 and under: Gordon Bateson, Merit Certificate.