

A Romano-British Kiln Discovered at Radlett.*

BY WILLIAM PAGE, F.S.A.

Early in October, 1898, Sir John Evans sent me a letter he had received from Father Morris regarding a Romano-British kiln which had been found on the property of Sir Walter Phillimore at Radlett. I shortly afterwards visited the spot with Mr. R. C. Phillimore, who very kindly showed me what was left of the kiln, which lay in a sand-pit on the east side and about a quarter of a mile up Loom Lane, which leads from Radlett Church in Watling Street to Aldenham. Unfortunately the kiln had been mistaken for a disused land drain, and under such misapprehension had been almost entirely destroyed. From what remained, however, I was able to ascertain that its form was circular in plan, 3 feet in diameter.

The walls were 5 inches in thickness and of baked clay with pieces of brick irregularly inserted. The floor of the flue was about 2 feet from the Romano-British ground level, and was composed of the natural sand, which for about an inch or more had been burnt to a brilliant red colour.

Three could be seen the remains of a projection from the wall of the kiln† which came out to the middle of the flue, where it formed a pedestal. This pedestal, which was only 9 inches in height, supported the kiln or oven floor. Of what that floor was composed there was nothing to show; it may have been of wedge-shaped perforated bricks resting at the broad end upon the top of a thickening in the wall (indications of which existed) and at the point upon the pedestal above referred to, or it may have been roughly arched over in a similar manner to that described hereafter.

Thinking, from the quantity of potsherds lying about, that the pottery works probably consisted of more than

* This paper was read before the Society of Antiquaries of London, and we are indebted to that Society for the use of the blocks illustrating it.

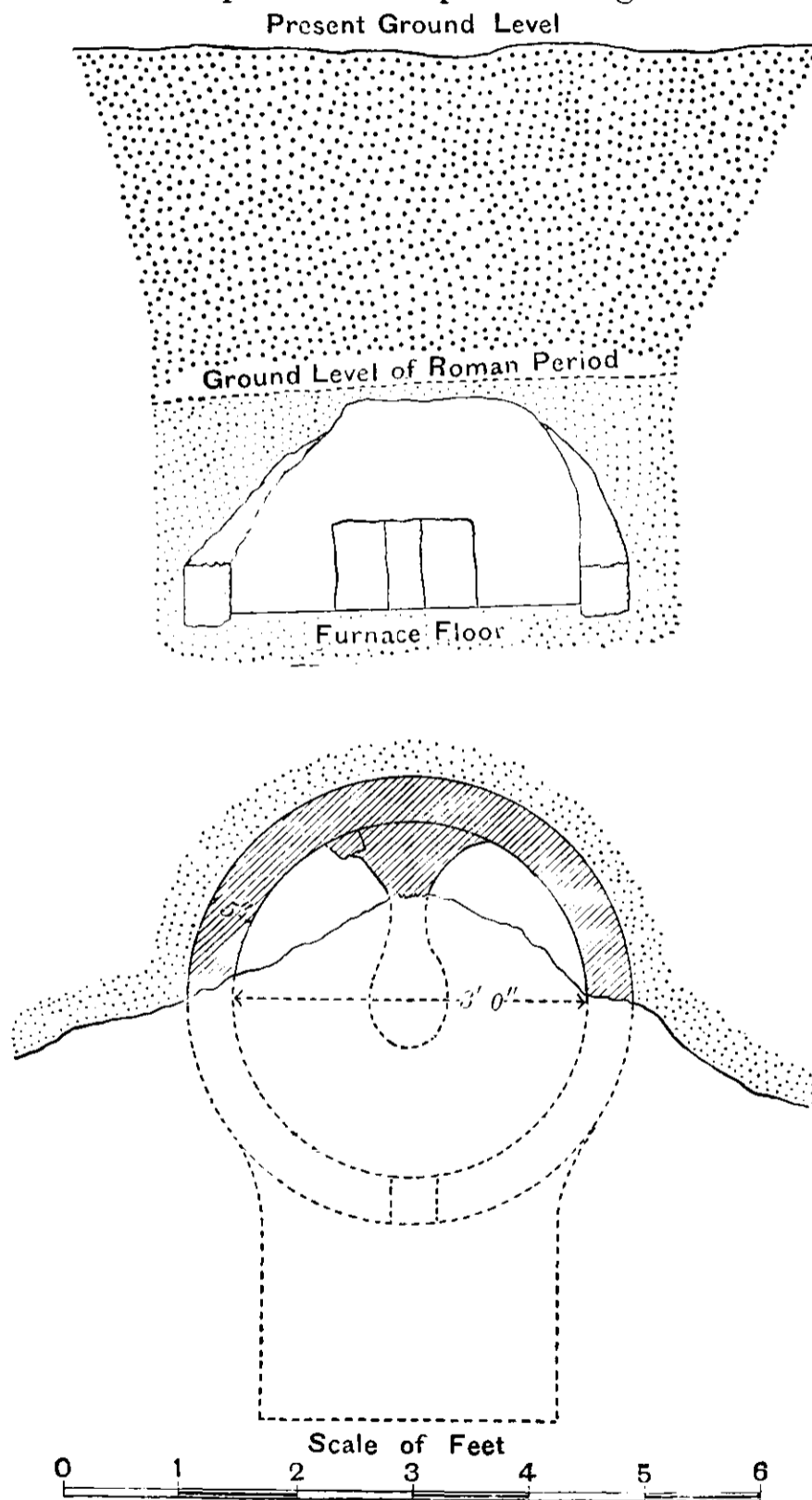
† This pedestal was apparently similar to that shown on plate xxxvii. fig. 3, in Mr. Charles Roach Smith's *Collectanea Antiqua*, vol. vi., representing a kiln found at Gibson, near Wansford, in Northamptonshire.

one kiln, a trench was cut a little to the south-east, and at a distance of about 10 feet we came upon a second kiln, which was considerably larger than that first discovered. The ground, however, being so exceedingly dry and hard, making it impossible to get out any pottery without breaking it, we determined to wait for rain.

In December following, with the assistance of Mr. Mill Stephenson and Mr. St. John Hope, the second kiln was cleared out, and found to be somewhat in the shape of a horseshoe, 6 feet at its greatest length inside and 5 feet 1 inch at its greatest width. It has a batter on the inside varying from 6 to 10 inches. The uppermost part existing is 3 feet 6 inches from the present ground level and about 1 foot 6 inches from the ground level of the Romano-British period. The kiln had evidently been constructed by cutting a hole in the sand about 4 feet in depth, of the shape which it was to take, and against the sand there was built the wall of the kiln, consisting of small pieces of Roman bricks, varying in size, and set in clay, which was afterwards baked, making one solid piece of wall about 6 inches in thickness.

The kiln was heated by means of a furnace 3 feet 9 inches in length and 1 foot 7 inches in width. The roof of the furnace is formed by a very flat arch 1 foot 9 inches above the level of the hearth. We found that the furnace had been damped down by covering the mouth with puddled clay, and within it was a quantity of charcoal. The flames passed from the furnace into a flue formed by a block or pedestal composed of brick and burnt clay, 2 feet 6 inches by 1 foot 5 inches. This flue varied in width, being 1 foot 8 inches at the entrance, 1 foot at the sides, and 1 foot 4 inches at the end. It was covered by a flat arch about 1 foot 9 inches from the floor, and was apparently roughly built with pieces of brick, some of which seem to have been placed lengthwise of the kiln and others crosswise, so as to leave apertures to allow the draught and heat to pass upwards. The heat in the kiln must have been very considerable, as we found that many of the pieces of bricks which formed the voussoirs of the arch were quite vitrified, and the sand around the outside of the walls for nearly a foot was burnt red. The floor of the kiln, which was 2 feet 4 inches from the floor of the flue, was composed of clinkers and burnt clay laid loosely, over which was

placed a thin layer of sand, one or two openings being probably left in the floor at the end distant from the furnace in order to maintain a draught. Upon the sand the pots to be baked were placed. Above the kiln floor the sides of the walls are plastered with clay, which still bears the impress of the potter's fingers.



PLAN AND SECTION OF A ROMAN POTTER'S KILN FOUND AT RADLETT, HERTS.

The mode of covering the kiln seems to have been the same as that described by Mr. Artis in his *Durobrivæ of Antoninus Identified and Illustrated*. According to this description the pots were loosely packed in the kiln, the



POTTER'S STAMPS OF CASTUS FOUND IN A KILN AT RADLETT.

packer being followed by an attendant who covered each layer of pots with coarse hay or grass, and when the layers of pots had arrived at a level above the wall of the kiln, a coating of clay was plastered round each layer, the layers diminishing in diameter so as to form a dome, while the grass or hay overlapped the coating of clay, so that the roof could be easily removed and the pots got at when baked. Against the coating of clay some sand or earth was thrown, a small aperture being

left at the top of the dome to maintain a draught. It appears evident that much the same system was adopted at the kilns at Radlett, for we found that the larger kiln was almost full of pieces of burnt clay, which had in all probability formed the dome above alluded to. This had apparently fallen in and broken the pots beneath it. Considering that we found so large a quantity of potsherds inside the kiln, and, as before stated, that we

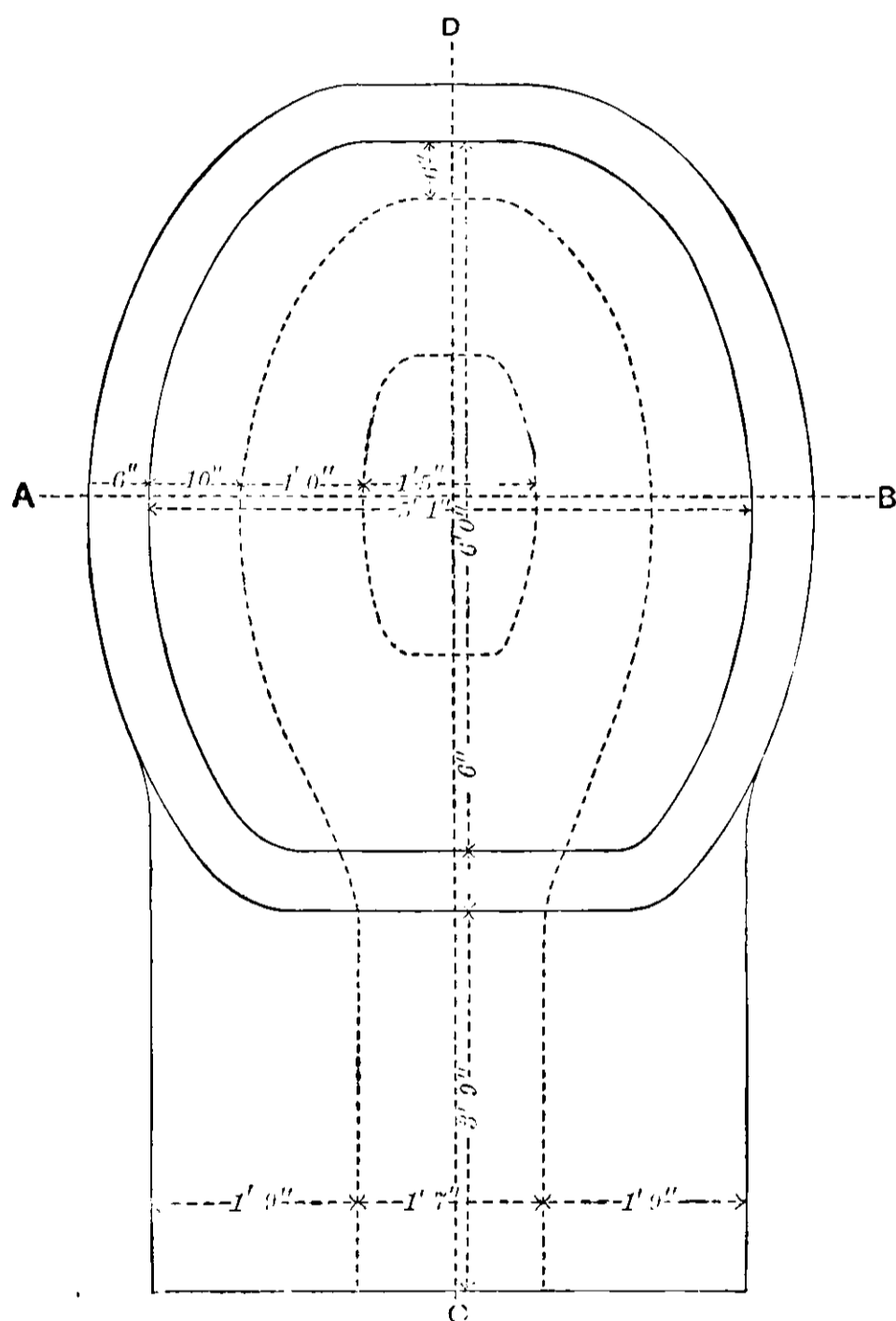


POTTER'S MARKS FOUND IN A KILN AT RADLETT.

found the kiln damped down and the charcoal remaining in the furnace, I think we may assume that the kiln had been hurriedly deserted before it was cool enough to be emptied.

Perhaps the most interesting point with regard to these kilns is the fact that we are able to identify the name of the potter who worked there. This we can do from the large quantity of the impressions of his stamps bearing the name *CASTUS* which we found upon pieces of the rims of *mortaria*. I have myself seen twenty-two of these, and I understand that others were found and

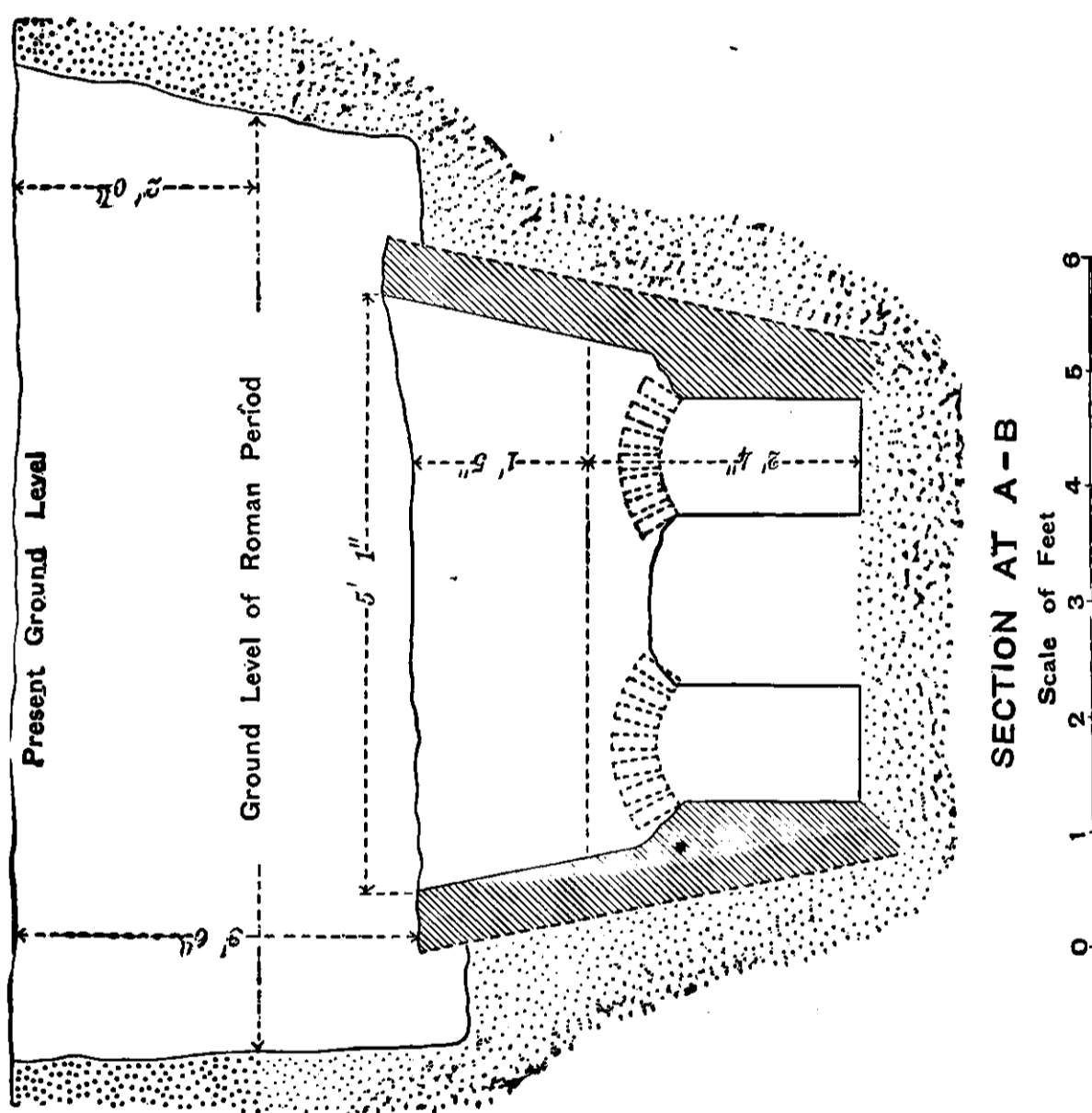
carried away before I visited the kiln first discovered. Three pieces bearing this stamp were taken out of the larger of the two kilns. We have the impressions from three stamps bearing the name *CASTUS*, one having



PLAN OF A ROMAN POTTER'S KILN FOUND AT RADLETT, HERTS.

simply the name in an elaborate border, another with the words *CASTUS FECIT*, and the third with the words *FECIT CASTUS*, reproductions of which will be seen in the accompanying illustrations. This is, I believe, the

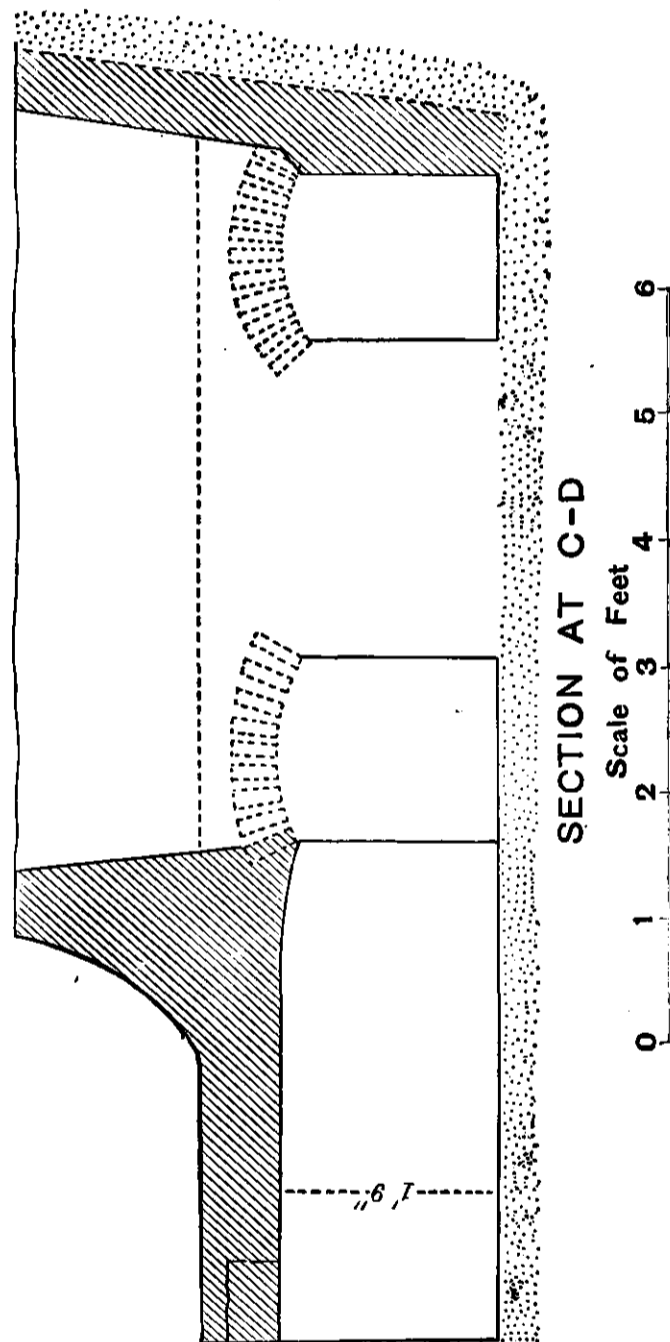
first kiln discovered in England to which the name of the potter can be assigned. Besides the name *CASTUS*, we found one piece of a *mortarium* bearing the name *ALBINUS*, two with the word *FECIT* spelt backwards, and four which are undecipherable, and are probably not intended for words.



ROMAN POTTER'S KILN FOUND AT BADLETT, HERTS.

With regard to the pottery made in these kilns, it would seem that the largest proportion was *mortaria*, judging from the fragments which we found in the rubbish heaps and in the kilns. Of these, the clay is somewhat coarse and the bits of flint which are always to be found at the bottom of them are fewer than is customary. An interesting point with regard to the

baking of *mortaria* at this pottery was noticed by Mr. Hope. It appears that these vessels were placed on the kiln floor with their rims downwards, one over another, the rim of each one being separated from the rim above



ROMAN POTTER'S KILN FOUND AT RADLETT, HERTS.

it by a lump of clay considerably mixed with sand to prevent its adhering to the pots while being baked. We found in the rubbish heap beside the kiln portions of large *mortaria* packed five deep in this manner and at other places in less numbers.

Of the more brittle kind of pottery we have the jug-shaped *amphora*, the urn-shaped pots, with what may be covers to them, and various forms of *patera*. In this class of pottery there is a considerable admixture of sand with the clay, giving a smooth and sometimes a sparkling appearance to its surface, otherwise it is of the usual whitish-red colour of the commoner Romano-British pottery. Specimens of the different kinds of pottery found at the kiln may now be seen at the Hertfordshire County Museum, St. Albans.

In conclusion I should like to express my sincere thanks to Mr. and Mrs. R. C. Phillimore, whose keen interest and hearty assistance in the excavations facilitated our researches in every possible way.