

### Excavations on the Site of Verulam.\*

REPORT FOR 1899-1900.

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Assisted by a grant from the Research Fund of the Society of Antiquaries, a donation from this Society, and by other subscriptions, I recommenced excavations in October, 1899, being obliged to carry on the work during the winter months, the land being required for pasture and hay at other times of the year. The result of the excavation during the past winter shows a portion of the inner or southern wall of the main ambulatory, the outer wall of which, was, as will be remembered, uncovered last year. The clear width of the south alley is 26 feet, the floor of which, as mentioned in my last report, was raised about a foot, when the outer wall was re-built. The lower or older pavement is of *opus signinum*, and the upper of white cement, upon neither of which so far as could be seen was there any appearance of a tessellated floor.

At the east end of the ambulatory we traced the eastern boundary wall running southwards for a distance of about 70 feet, when we were compelled to desist from continuing our trench on account of the nearness of some large trees. On the west side of this wall was a pavement of coarse red *tesserae* in a good state of preservation, 21ft. in width and extending the whole length of our building from north to south which is 83 feet. Running under the middle of the pavement is a short sleeper wall 2ft. 6in. in width. The pavement is bounded on its western side by a wall (which was apparently a sleeper wall)

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\* This paper was prepared for the Excursion of this Society to the site of the Excavations on 27 June, 1900, but is printed for convenience after the previous report.

2ft. 8in. in width and running north and south the full length of the building. For the reason above stated we were unable to trace this wall its full length, but we uncovered a considerable portion of it and both its ends. I noticed that its upper surface was quite smooth and level, looking as though it had formed a bed for a layer of stones. Westward of this last wall was another coarse red tessellated pavement about 8in. lower in level than the pavement just referred to, and 6ft. 6in. in width being bounded on its western side by a roughly built wall, 2ft. 6in. in thickness at the footing and 1ft. 6in. above, and which ran the whole length of the building. On the western side of this wall was what appeared to be a narrow passage 3ft. 2in. in width, at the bottom of which, about 6ft. or 7ft. down, was a deposit of black mud, but as each end of the passage was blocked by a very solid wall it is difficult to understand how it can have been a drain or water way. Beyond this passage is a large rectangular chamber 63ft. 9in. in length, and 34ft. 6in. in width, internal measurements. At the southern end of this chamber was an apse 17ft. across externally and 26ft. in width, which formed a sort of platform about 4ft. 8in. above the floor level of the room, and to which there was apparently no approach from the chamber by steps or otherwise. There are now no remains of the superstructure of the apse, and the upper surface of the platform, which is broken away, may have been slightly higher than it now is. The side walls of the chamber are of excellent construction, being as much as 8ft. 6in. in thickness and terminate with pilasters, the foundations of which are 5ft. by 4ft., and are opposite to the similar foundations in the wall uncovered in the previous winter. These walls and that at the south end, all of which remain to a height of 2ft. and more above the floor level, were covered with plaster with the usual roll at the junction of the wall and floor. So far as the plaster remained in position it was coloured a dark olive green, but detached pieces of it were found of various colours and with fragments of designs upon them. Mr. G. E. Fox, F.S.A., suggests that having regard to the thickness of the walls, the chamber was vaulted and probably with a barrel vault. Of this there was every appearance, for firstly, I found three pieces of coloured

wall plaster, the surfaces of which were very slightly concave, and which had possibly formed portions of the internal decoration of the vault; secondly, while on the floor of the ambulatory, and at the sides of the apse there was a layer of charcoal indicating the remains of a burnt wooden roof, in the chamber itself we found scarcely any charcoal, and thirdly, the floor of the middle part of the chamber was mostly destroyed by bricks and flints which had evidently fallen from some height and had become embedded in the pavement in their fall.

There can have been no entrance to the chamber from the east, south, or west side, as there is apparently no opening in the walls, which, as before stated, remain some height above the floor level. On the north side, however, the wall has been destroyed down to a foot below this level, and from the smoothness of its upper surface I am inclined to think it formed a bed for a continuous course of blocks of stone, and was merely a sleeper wall to carry columns. This is corroborated to a certain extent by the fact that the eastern side wall passes quite over it, and by the finding of a considerable number of the triangular tiles with one side curved, used as we found in last year's excavations, in building columns. On the other hand, however, there was a slight projection of four inches on the west side at the end of the east wall, eight feet westward of which there was a small block of masonry, with a slight indication of a face on its eastern side, the space between these points may have formed a doorway, but the remains were so slight that it is impossible to make any definite statement, beyond pointing out that for the reasons before stated the entrance to the chamber must have been at the northern end.

The chamber had a tessellated floor, so far as we could ascertain, of an elaborate design. The pavement has an outer border of coarse drab *tesserae*, each *tessera* being about 1 in. by  $1\frac{1}{4}$  in., which extends from the side walls about 5 ft. 6 in., and rather more from the end walls. Within this was a border of a scale pattern in black and white, within which again was a very pretty wide braid-work design in black, red, drab, and white, then lines in black and white. The great depth of soil above the floor level about 5 ft. to 6 ft., prevented us from uncovering very much of the pavement, but

from our excavations it appeared that it was very fragmentary, by reason of the upper part of the building having fallen and become imbedded in its surface. From what we found, however, the design appeared to be geometric, made up of a series of bands of a scroll pattern in red, white, yellow, and black. The foundations for the tessellated pavements were composed, firstly of about a foot of rammed gravel, upon which were about two inches of rough concrete or rammed gravel mixed with lime, then came about an inch of *opus signinum*, upon which again was a thin layer of white cement forming a bed for the *tesseræ*.

We had the same difficulties to contend with regarding the great depth of the foundation as we had in the previous winter, which caused the work to be costly and prevented the progress we should like to have made. It is hoped that next winter an advance may be made as there is an appearance of an open space westward of the large chamber just described, the southern wall ends in the foundation of a pilaster, and the ground, so far as could be seen, was of black earth with no stratum of Roman brick rubbish such as we found elsewhere.

Until further excavations have been made it seems futile to speculate as to what the building was. That it was one of the most important in the city there can be no doubt from its size, but whether the forum, baths, or other building, it is impossible at present to say. The whole of the masonry uncovered this winter corresponded with the work of the second, or the best of the three periods which were distinguishable in the wall uncovered in the previous winter, and there are no signs of any re-building.

Nothing of any particular interest was found during the excavations beyond the usual fragments of Samian and other pottery. We found, however, a good deal more Purbeck marble having similar mouldings to that found in our previous excavations. We found also a fragment of white marble, the first piece discovered in these excavations. There was a considerable quantity of charcoal which was evidently from the burnt rafters of the roof of the ambulatory. I am told that some of the wood from which this charcoal came was Scotch fir. Mr. Clement Reid, F.R.S., of the Geological Survey, has been good enough to examine a few of the pieces, and writes to say some are undoubtedly oak, while others, he thinks, are apple.

To Mr. H. A. Grueber, F.S.A., of the British Museum, I am indebted for a description of the coins found, which is as follows:—

- 1 Cladius II. (A.D. 268-270), Denarius commemorating his death. CONSECRATIO and eagle.
- 1 Uncertain 3rd Century (A.D. 265-270).
- 1 Carausius (circa A.D. 290) Denarius of London.
- 1 Helene, mother of Constantine (A.D. 330 circa), Denarius.
- 6 Constantine II. as Cæsar (A.D. 330 circa) Denarii.
- 3 Constantine the Great (circa 330) Denarii, struck at Treves.
- 6 Constantine the Great (circa 330) Denarii.
- 1 Constantine II. as Cæsar (circa 336) Denarius.
- 2 Constantine II. as Augustus (after 337) Denarii.
- 1 Valens (A.D. 364-378) Denarius, struck at Treves.
- 1 " " " " Constantinople.
- 6 Uncertain.
- 8 British imitations of Roman Denarii, probably early 4th Century
- 3 " " " " probably 5th Century.
- 2 " " " " probably 5th Century or even later.

There is a particular interest in these late imitations of Roman coins, as their discovery on the site of the Roman city indicates an occupation of the town for a considerable period after the Roman legions had been withdrawn from Britain. The evidence of the visit of St. Germain to Verulamium in 429 to refute the Pelagian heresy seems strong, for we have almost contemporary notice of it by Constantius in his *Vita Sancti Germani* and by Prosper in his chronicle. From this it would seem that the town continued to be of considerable importance, and being selected as a place for the discussion of religious doctrines, one would imagine it must have contained a colony of Christians. The later information about the city is obtained from that most unreliable of English chroniclers, Geoffrey of Monmouth, whose chronicle is copied by all the later chroniclers. From this it would appear that at the beginning of the sixth century Verulamium was in the hands of the Saxons who were defeated by Uther Pendragon, the father of the celebrated King Arthur, in A.D. 512. Uther Pendragon seems to have taken up his residence at Verulamium and died there in A.D. 516. Every scrap of authentic information which can be obtained to throw light upon the period covering about two hundred years after the Roman occupation—an age of myths and romances fabricated by later mediæval writers—is most valuable, and it would be gratifying if these excavations were to throw any light upon this obscure period.