

Excavations on the Site of Verulam.

1913—1914.

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IN the year 1898, whilst stubbing up an old tree in the garden of St. Michael's Vicarage, traces of the existence of Roman masonry were disclosed. On investigation these proved to be the foundations of a wall. Excavations and further investigation made during the winter of 1898-99, and of 1899-1900, disclosed the plan of an oblong building three hundred and seventy-five feet in length by two hundred and twenty feet in breadth, believed to be the Roman Forum of Verulam. An account of the work then done is recorded by Mr. William Page, F.S.A., in the Transactions of the Society.¹ More recently opportunity has been afforded for making some further excavations, the results of which I will now detail.

I assume that previous excavations have proved the existence of the Forum, extending across the Vicarage glebe meadow on the south, running up on the east along the line of the hedge as far as the corner of the churchyard, returning westward from that corner along the boundary between the Vicarage garden to the churchyard (except the last thirty yards or so, where a piece has been added to the Vicarage garden), and then, on the west side, running under the coach-house, potting shed, and cow-yard to the south-west corner in the meadow.

When we opened the ground at the south-west corner, it showed a portion of the inner west wall running north and south, about fifty-six feet from the outer north side of the south wall. This portion presented part of a flint wall higher and part of it lower, extending over twelve feet, starting from fifty-six feet north of the south wall. The lower part presented quite a flat surface where possibly, as on the south wall, a large block of stone had lain. Towards the east of this inner wall was a very large amount of *débris*, bricks, tiles, white plaster, pieces of mortar, etc. There was among the *débris* one portion of a brick wall with five layers of brick—late work, judging

¹ See Transactions, St. Albans and Hertfordshire Architectural and Archæological Society, Vol. I. (N.S.), pp. 198 and 205.

by the commonness of the plaster and the distance of the bricks. This was covered, when first seen, on one side with a thick layer of plaster, painted white, which fell off when the whole was moved. Running west from this lower piece of the inner wall was a smooth wall two feet six inches wide. It presented no special feature, and was probably a dividing wall between two shops or offices; it ran westward, and we found the west end of it in the cow-yard, within a short distance of the outside wall of the Forum (about five feet).

Rather to the north, about nine feet from the centre of the last-named wall running east and west, we found a curious remnant of a flint wall, with a flue of Roman brick beneath it. This flint wall struck us all at once as not being Roman work, and Mr. Page, after examining the mortar, etc., suggested that it was a piece of a wall of early Norman date, much of the same date as the early Norman work in the Abbey, but it was impossible to say of what it was part.

We then turned our attention to a spot in the cow-yard where we expected to find the west outer wall of the Forum, and here we came across what was perhaps the most interesting, and at the same time the most puzzling, part of this excavation work. About seven feet down there was a smooth red surface two feet three inches wide, with what appeared on either side as a flint wall one foot ten inches thick, slightly raised above the smooth surface. This was, from its northern point, so far as we opened, fifty-seven feet or thereabouts from the exact south-west corner of the Forum. We opened out, going southward, seven feet of this smooth surface, and left unopened twenty-four feet. We then opened out fifteen feet and left unopened thirteen feet, and opened out seven more feet, which brought us to the exact south-west corner, and it seemed to go on southward. In various parts, from beginning to end, we found a number of bits of rounded cement, rough outside, smooth inside, as if laid over a pipe or forming part of a small conduit; in all, twenty pieces or more were of much the same size and shape. At the south-west corner we broke through the smooth surface, and found about one and a half inches of "*opus signinum*," then rather remarkably red thin bricks, one layer only, then two feet six inches of very solid cement

and flint, on the top of the chalk base. It was suggested it was some kind of water-course. It ran north and south, the way the surface water would run. It had a fall of one and a half inches in about six yards, and these rounded cement blocks point to some cause for such "arched" matter. But the solidity of the work beneath seems rather to call for some other explanation. Probably, too, a roadway ran to the west of this end of the Forum.

At that extreme south-west corner, on the inner side, when we went down over ten feet, we found a great deal of black stuff; it seemed to me to have much charred wood amongst it. A few common red tesseræ were found there, much broken pottery, and four coins (Emperor in Gaul 248—273, Constantine Cæsar 320—324, Constantius II. 331—337, and Constantine II. 337—350). In places some large bones and two bricks with marks of some dog-like feet on them, were found. Any quantity of white wall-plaster and some red wall-plaster was found in excavating the inner wall. A great depth had in most places to be opened out, from six to ten feet; this made the work longer and costlier.
