

Roman Remains found at Barrington.

BY H. ST. GEORGE GRAY.

BARRINGTON has been added to the already long list of places in Somerset which have revealed Roman remains¹; but the extent of the area and its significance can only be determined by future exploration.

The nearest point at which Roman remains have been discovered (in 1909-10) is a field adjoining the churchyard at Puckington where road-metal was being quarried; remains of the period had not previously been recorded from this parish.² The nearest Roman town was Ilchester (*Ischalis*). Roman remains have also been found at Ile Brewers, Seavington St. Michael, South Petherton, Curry Rivel, Drayton, Langport, and Huish Episcopi.

On May 18th, 1912, the Rev. Prebendary Hamlet, Vicar of Barrington, kindly sent me the following information in the form of a letter :—

“There is a field on the southern boundary of the parish of Barrington and towards its eastern end, called ‘Aller Grove,’ and numbered on the Tithe Map 553, on the Ordnance Map 176. It has often attracted attention by its peculiarities. The general surface of the field is cocoa-coloured, but about the middle there is an irregular patch, say half-an-acre in extent, which is darker in colour and when newly ploughed in


1. *Vict. Co. Hist., Somerset*, Vol. I, Roman Remains, by F. Haverfield, LL.D.

2. “Roman Remains found at Puckington,” by H. St. George Gray, *Proc. Som. Arch. Soc.*, LVII, ii, 91-97.

conspicuous contrast with the rest. A closer examination shows that this soil is different not only in colour but in texture and contents. It is more friable, lighter, and of a peaty appearance. It is perhaps the outcrop of a small and thin bed of the Middle Lias. The field lies a little above the clay levels and is a water-bearing area, three of its four sides being bounded by water-courses. The blackish patch is wetter than the rest of the field, and long ago may have been covered by a grove of alder bushes and trees.³ The nature of the soil shows itself to-day in bearing dead nettle very abundantly, the rest of the field being comparatively free of it. The field has had a good deal of draining to improve it for agriculture and is now very fruitful, yielding from time to time splendid crops of wheat and roots. The men who dig the trenches to receive the drain pipes have turned up large quantities of animal bones—as one said ‘a putt load of hosses heads and bones.’ Some five and thirty years ago whilst draining the men uncovered, near the south-western corner of the field, two human skeletons which I am told were lying face downward. The villagers say, ‘There must have been a battle there some time,’ and the children account for the black patch by saying, ‘It’s the blood of those who were killed in the war.’ The old sexton (died 1902, aged 78) said, ‘I have heard tell that there was a church there once on a time.’ Whether these sayings embody any genuine tradition I do not know ; more probably they are attempts at accounting for the colour and the bones.

“In March last two men were opening a clogged drain in the blackish patch and found at a depth of 2ft. a skull and some bones which they brought to me. A few days ago the field having been newly ploughed I walked over nearly its whole extent and found several objects which I send to you, together with the bones, for examination. Putting aside a

3. The old English form of alder was “*alor*,” and is still common in dialect use. The name is written “*Aller-grove*,” but the pronunciation is rather “*Ollor-grove*.”

few fragments of recent earthenware and many pieces of the tile and 'half-rounds'  which until about 1850 were in use for field drains, they were :—

1, 2. Small flints. I need hardly say that flint gravels are not found within several miles of the field.

3. A small flat blue water-rolled pebble. This and numbers 1 and 2 were found on the eastern edge of the field, not on the blackish patch.

4. The rim of a vessel of dark earthenware.

5. A small piece of red pottery, quite distinct from the drainage earthenware.

6. (a) A skull ; (b) a lower jaw ; (c) a flat bone ; (d)—(g) four long thin bones.

“The site of the field should be noted. It is well above the moor-level and would always be secure from flooding. It contains one of the principal springs in the parish, called ‘*Sulva Well*’ (written ‘*Silver*’); it is bounded on the north by our chief brook on which is a small waterfall which may have been utilized to turn a little water-wheel. There is but one field between *Aller-grove* and *Barrington Court* which stands on the ancient demesne of the lord of the manor, and which may have been a distinct parcel of the manor from *Domesday* and beyond. *Aller-grove* may therefore prove to have been the place of very early habitations and would probably repay careful examination by excavation. When you have made up your mind with regard to the articles I send, perhaps you could find time to come over and make a trial exploration.”

The writer examined the remains mentioned in *Preb. Hamlet's letter* and reported, briefly, as follows :—

1. Flint scraper of poor workmanship.
2. Flint core from which flakes had been struck.
3. Pebble which may have been used as a whetstone.
4. Part of a rim of a mortarium, studded with quartz, etc., on the inner surface; Roman, and similar to the fragment mentioned on p. 84.

5. Fragment of imitation red Samian ware ; Romano-British.

6. (a) Part of a human skull ; (b) lower jaw having teeth much ground down by gritty food ; (c) scapula, or shoulder-blade ; (d) humeri (right and left), ulna (right) and radius. The ulna was probably fractured during life-time and rejoined. The remains appeared to be those of a woman of about thirty years of age ; none of the long-bones were sufficiently perfect for accurate measurement, but her stature was probably from 4ft. 10ins. to 5ft. 1in.

On Oct. 15th, 1913, the writer visited Barrington for the purpose of superintending a day's excavating,⁴ while the field was still fallow. The "marked" plot is quarter of a mile south of Barrington Court and $2\frac{1}{2}$ furlongs S.E. of the School. The part examined is about 115ft. and the nearest part of the road to Shepton Beauchamp 140ft. above mean sea-level, whilst the bench-mark at the Court is 74.3ft. (See 6in. Ordn. Map, Som. Sheet LXXXI. S.E.).

The part selected for digging was roughly 115 feet from the hedge on the E.S.E. which divides the parishes of Barrington and Shepton Beauchamp.

In this trial-digging we cut a trench about 25 feet long, E. and W., and $2\frac{1}{4}$ ft. wide—with an extension on the south side 14ft. long and $5\frac{1}{2}$ ft. wide. A dark brown surface mould extended to a depth of 11 or 12 inches below the surface, and this was followed by a black peaty-looking mould streaked more or less considerably by a dirty whitish granular deposit, upon which Mr. Clement Reid, F.R.S., has made the following report : "The Barrington material with white specks is mingled vegetable matter, white amorphous marl, with a few land-shells (*Helix* and *Cochliocopa*). I do not see any freshwater shells in it. The dark earth was probably of the same com-

4. Permission to dig was kindly given by Mr. E. J. Jacobs, tenant of Barrington Court Farm.

position originally, but the lime has been dissolved out by percolating water."

A large amount of Romano-British pottery was revealed considering the small area dug ; for the most part it was found at one level, i.e. about 1·2ft. below the surface, and consequently below the reach of the plough (which penetrates the ground only to the extent of 7 or 8 inches). The black earth was found to extend to a good depth, and in one place, at 1·8ft. below the surface, a trunk of a tree was uncovered lying horizontal. A sample of this was subsequently examined at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and pronounced to be Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*).

The 123 fragments of pottery collected during the day consisted of 64 pieces of the sides of vessels, 44 rim pieces, 14 fragments of bottom, and one handle. With few exceptions the ware was the ordinary black Romano-British pottery ; but a dark grey Roman earthenware was also met with, and a few shards of buff-coloured and light brown ware, some of which showed traces of having been painted.

Judging from the variety in thickness of the wares and the difference in the depth of the curve of the fragments, it was evident that the shards represented parts of vessels of many sizes. One piece of heavy thick rim, part of a very large vessel, with the characteristic thumb-mark ornament, is of a type which has been found in various parts of the county including Ham Hill, Charterhouse-on-Mendip, Norton Fitzwarren, Curry Rivel, Bridgwater and Preston Plucknett.

The collection includes nine fragments of flanged rims, called by General Pitt-Rivers "rims of basin-shaped vessels," and found commonly in the Romano-British Villages excavated by him,⁵ and indeed on most Roman sites. One of the Barrington fragments is ornamented by interlocking semi-circles in burnished lines.

Part of a buff-coloured tazza has an overhanging flange. A

5. "Excavations in Cranborne Chase," Vol. II, Plate cxvi, A to X.

rim piece of light brown pottery (which originally may have been painted) is interesting from the fact that it is ornamented with a semi-circular punched design of radiating lines, similar to a fragment found in the "Fore Drain" in the Romano-British Settlement at Woodyates,⁶ and other pieces found at Silchester, Caerwent and elsewhere. The same kind of pattern is seen on a rim piece of buff ware (painted red) found in Drayton Field, Curry Rivel (Taunton Museum).

The other rim pieces call for no particular comment. Of straight rims, without moulded tops, about nine pieces were collected.

One of the fragments of base is ornamented, externally, by a curved asymmetrical design of a series of burnished loops. A similar base was found at Dymboro, Midsomer Norton, with other Roman pottery; also at Puckington, etc. Romano-British pottery is rarely ornamented on the bottom; but several Late-Celtic pots from the Lake Villages have designs on the base. Another base obtained from Barrington consists of cream-coloured New Forest ware, painted dark grey on the outer surface.

The flat handle has a single longitudinal groove. Three of the fragments of buff ware are studded on the inner surface with grains of quartz, etc.; they probably formed part of vessels used for the trituration of vegetables. Four of the pieces of the sides of pots were ornamented with the burnished lattice pattern.

No coins or metals were discovered; nor any bone or antler objects. With the pottery part of a whetstone and a seashore pebble were found.

A few pieces of quartz, flint and chert were collected, including part of a hammerstone, one or two cores, and three flakes. These materials are of course not indigenous.

Of animal remains the most interesting was an antler of roe-deer; and a few bones of horse, ox, sheep and pig were noted.

6. *Op. cit.*, Vol. III, Plate CLXXXVII, fig. 7.