

NOTES

A COB DOVECOTE AT DURLEIGH

In the spring of 1967, shortly after this note was written, the roof of the dovecote was unfortunately destroyed by the wind and, as was inevitable, the already weakened walls collapsed.

Although cob is a common building material in South-West England, only two cob dovecotes are known. One reason for this may lie in the nature of the material, for most dovecotes appear to have gone out of use by about 1800, and cob, when neglected, deteriorates rapidly and is almost impossible to repair. The last dovecote to survive in Somerset is therefore worthy of our attention, especially from the point of view of its construction.

The Durleigh dovecote is at ST 265363 near the site of West Bower manor house, to which it belonged. Both the timber-work of the roof and the weathercock which formerly surmounted it are of 17th century character, and the cob walls are probably of this date as well. The dovecote is circular, 20½ feet in internal diameter, with a stone plinth and thatched roof, but has deteriorated markedly in the last 45 years¹. During this time the lantern and weathervane have collapsed, the wall has cracked, and the floor has been raised along with the level of the surrounding farm yard when the Durleigh Reservoir was built.

The sandstone footings are about 3 feet high, though only 15 inches are now visible; on them stands the cob wall, 13 feet 4 inches high and 3 feet 10 inches thick. Probably the unusual height of this plinth was intended to discourage vermin. There is a complete absence of stones in the cob, which consists of red clay with a small quantity of chopped straw, built in six courses or risers each between 18 and 30 inches high. In Devon a progressive reduction in the height of the risers has been claimed,² but the reverse is the case at Durleigh, where the courses are respectively 22, 18, 28, 30, 30 and 30 inches high. After each riser had been completed, it would have been left for a short while to compact before the next course was laid on top. When the wall had been completed and the cob had consolidated, but apparently before it had entirely dried out and become hard, the inner face was trimmed and the nesting holes were cut out. Each hole is wedge-shaped and about 6 inches high, having an opening 6 inches square and widening out to 10 or 11 inches at the back; they vary in depth from 15 to 18 inches. The sides, top and bottom of each hole are smooth, with a few lines scored by the tool used, but the ends are rough where the stiff clay has broken away. The tool used was a cob-paring iron, a small spade-like flat iron blade, in this case 5 inches wide, mounted on a long straight handle. This iron was used normally to pare away the rough surface of a newly-built cob wall. To cut the nesting-holes, it was simply driven into the wall with the handle held horizontally.³ This technique of cutting the nesting holes accounts for the absence

¹ The dovecote was visited in 1920 by Father Horne, who describes it on p. 13 of his manuscript "Dovecotes of Somerset", in the Library of the Som. Arch. Soc.

² *Trans. Devon Assn.* 52 (1920), 179 ff. The writer has not found any evidence for this in Somerset, and in Lancashire the risers are always equal in height, cf. *Trans. Historic Soc. Lancs. & Chesh.* 117 (1965), 44-5.

³ In Devon, door and window openings are said to have been cut out of the walls after completion; see C. H. Laycock in *Trans. Devon Assn.* 52 (1920), 179 ff. This is impossible to demonstrate in a house, so it is valuable to have at Durleigh clear evidence of the technique of cutting openings and recesses out of the solid wall.

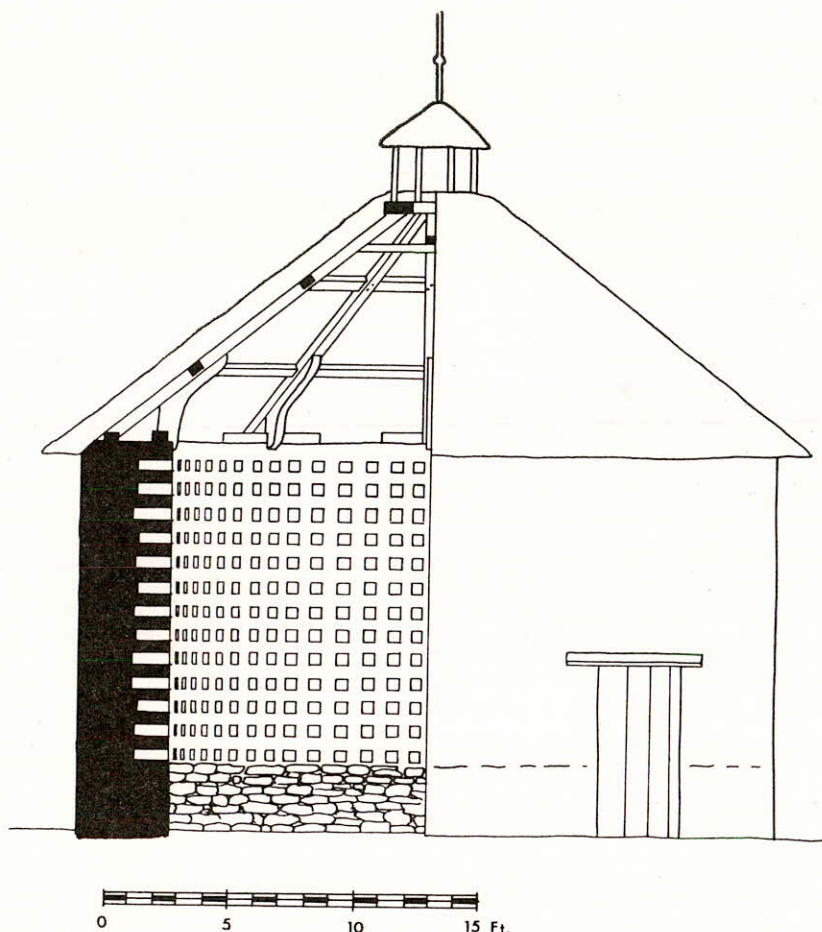


FIG. 1 DOVECOTE AT WEST BOWER FARM, DURLEIGH

of stones in the cob, for in walls of this height it was normal to include a proportion of stone as ballast to improve the load-bearing properties of the wall.

Originally there were about 730 nesting holes arranged in 13 rows or tiers, each complete tier containing 60 holes. Each hole is placed exactly over the one below, at 12 inch centres, the vertical intervals being very regular. On the other hand, the horizontal intervals between the columns vary considerably, with a norm of 6 to 7 inches, reducing to barely 5 inches in the south-east sector of the dovecote. From this it can be inferred that the holes were cut, not tier by tier but column by column with the help of some form of vertical guide, and that the work of cutting the holes probably began and ended in the south-east sector, where the spacing of the holes is suggestive of confusion.

A quarter-inch thick slab of Devonian slate, probably from the Rooks Castle quarries, was placed on the floor of each nesting hole, projecting about an inch to give a small alighting ledge and also to protect the threshold. Finally the whole inner face of the

dovecote was given a half-inch thick coating of soft lime plaster, which also extended into the nesting holes for about 3 inches. The outer face of the wall was keyed for a plaster rendering by a series of near-vertical closely-spaced grooves, apparently made with the cob-parer when the wall was trimmed.⁴ Subsequently the lower parts of the wall were refaced in stone, and about 1900 the cob was cut back in places and given a brick skin.

The door is on the north-west, and has been greatly enlarged at the expense of the nesting-holes, probably in connection with a secondary use of the building. The curved lintel with its slightly hollow unstopped chamfer may be the original one re-used. Almost opposite the door is a window for ventilation, placed at the top of the wall. Though mutilated, the splayed jambs and steeply sloping sill remain and suggest an opening $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet square.

Conical roofs have received scant attention in the past, so that a discussion of the present roof must await further work in this field. There are 8 principal rafters which support the circular wooden frame which forms the exit-hole at the apex of the roof. They are linked by two sets of curved purlins which are canted to the pitch of the roof and mortised and pegged into the sides of the principals. The weight of the roof is spread over the top of the cob wall by a wall-plate at the base of the principals; and by curved brackets which are mortised into the principals and rest on baulks of timber on the inner face of the wall. These brackets convey some of the thrust of the roof downwards in an effort to reduce the horizontal stress on a cob wall already weakened by the cutting of the nesting holes. Between the upper purlins and the apex are four ties which link opposing principals. Immediately below the upper purlins are four similar ties, but these are secondary and have been omitted from the drawing. The Glover has now collapsed, but consisted of 6 posts standing on the framework of the exit-hole, supporting a conical thatched roof surmounted by a weathervane.

R. F. TAYLOR

A DOBUNNIC SILVER COIN FROM BATH¹

Amongst a collection of miscellaneous coins in the Victoria Art Gallery, Bath, recently examined by the writer, was an envelope containing a silver coin which had been found by F. Russ on 28th September, 1932, while working an allotment at the back of Dunsford Place, Bathwick Hill, Bath. The National Grid Reference for the approximate site is ST 759649.

The coin had been identified as a Northumbrian sceat of Aelfwald I, but it was clearly not of this type and when shown to Mr. Derek Allen, it was positively identified as a Dobunnic coin of Mack type 389.² The type has an obverse with a crude head facing to the right and a reverse with the letters EISV above and below a triple tailed horse to left with several pellets in the field. This coin is much worn and shows only some of these features. The weight is 0.60 grams and it has been photographed by the Institute of

⁴ Similar marks have been observed elsewhere, for example in an 18th century cottage at Hardhorn, Lancs. The amount of cob removed was sometimes considerable, up to 3 inches from one face—*Trans. Devon Assn.* 51 (1919), 69 ff.

¹ The writer is grateful to Mr. Peter Pagan, B.A., F.L.A., and his assistant, Miss J. Knight, of the Victoria Art Gallery, Bath, for access to the collection, and to Mr. Derek Allen, F.S.A. for identifying the coin.

² Mack, R. P., *The Coinage of Ancient Britain* (London, 1953), 111; Clifford, E. M., *Bagendon, A Belgic Oppidum* (Cambridge, 1961), 109, No. 19, Class H.

Archaeology, London (negative numbers 352/353) for their index of Iron Age coins.

Coins of this type are comparatively common and several have been found in the Bath area: single pieces at Kingsdown Camp near Mells, and at Camerton, and there were 27 specimens in the Nunney Hoard.

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EXCAVATION AT NEWTON ST. LOE ROMAN VILLA

INTRODUCTION

This excavation, undertaken on behalf of the Bath Excavation Committee and the Ministry of Public Building and Works, was necessitated by the widening of the A.4, Bath to Bristol road from the former Newbridge Toll-house to the Globe Inn, Newton St. Loe, about 3½ miles WNW. of Bath (Fig. 1).¹

The site was originally discovered in November 1837 when the London to Bristol railway line was constructed, and plans were published shortly afterwards.² Only one of the mosaics recorded, the Orpheus pavement, survives today; it is at the City Museum, Bristol.

The failure to locate the site precisely has led to subsequent confusion.

THE EXCAVATION

Time being at a premium, a trench three feet wide and over thirty feet long was laid out across the probable site (Fig. 2) and at right angles to the railway.

This trench showed conclusively that the 1837 excavation for the railway had removed everything including floors, only leaving the walls behind. The site had afterwards been refilled with the debris, the greater quantity of stone and mortary material being deposited at the northern, rather deeper, end.

Two extensions added to east and west of the trench confirmed these facts. The western trench remained unfinished owing to the vagaries of winter weather.

INTERPRETATION

This excavation, with the aid of the nineteenth century plans, made it possible to plot the position of the Villa (Fig. 3).

It showed also how much of the entire site had been destroyed by the construction of the railway in 1837. It is to be regretted that only one of the mosaics has survived.

The nineteenth century investigators apparently failed to recognise any distinct periods, but as can be seen (Figs. 2 and 4) the story is rather more complicated than they suggested.

¹ The writer is indebted to the Duchy of Cornwall, through their land steward, and to the tenant Mr. Denning for permission to excavate prior to the arrival of the contractors.

² J. M. C. Toynbee — *Art in Britain under the Romans*, 247; G. R. Stanton — "The Newton St. Loe Pavement" *Journ. Rom. Studies* 26 (1936), 43; Rev. W. L. Nichols — *Horae Romanae; or A Visit to a Roman Villa* (Bath 1838); Anon. — *A Description of the Roman Villa, with tessellated Pavements: Discovered at Newton St. Loe, Twerton, Near Bath* (Bath 1839).

NEWTON ST. LOE ROMAN VILLA

FIG. 1: Sketch Map of Area
(Excavation at NGR ST713655)
Based on Ordnance Survey Map of 1903.

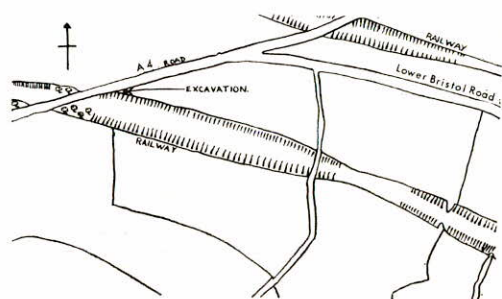


FIG. 2: Plan of Excavation.

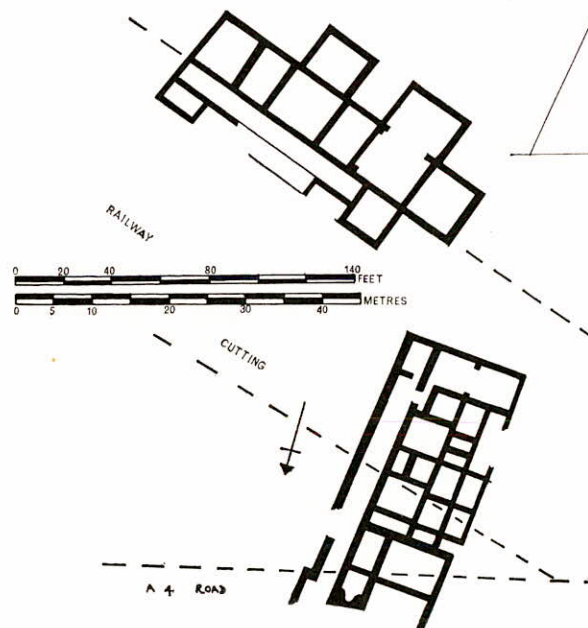
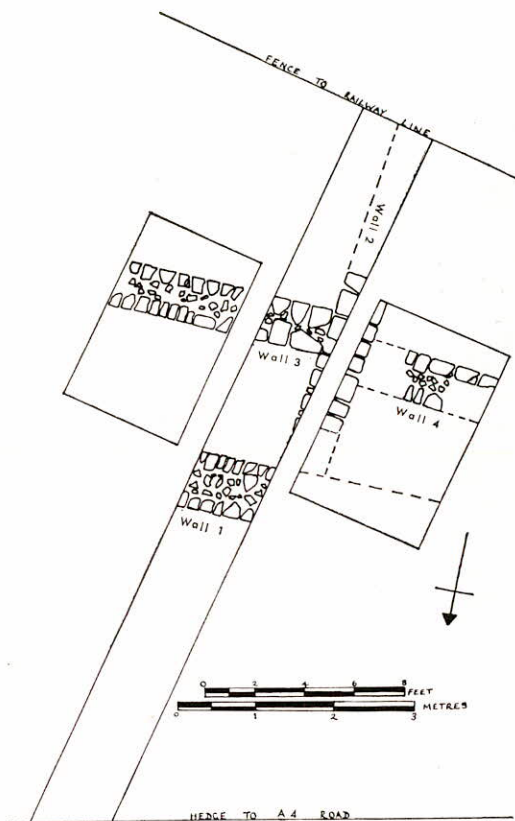


FIG. 3: Reconstructed Plan of the Site
Based on *Journal of Roman Studies*, 26, 43,
Fig. 4, by permission of the Editor.

The earliest wall on the site must be wall 1 which was far deeper than any of the others. Then followed wall 2 at right angles to wall 1. Because of the lack of evidence, it is impossible to say whether there was a bonded or a butt joint at the point of intersection. There is, however, no question that both walls 3 and 4 butted on to, and are therefore later than, wall 2; but how much later they are, or whether 3 and 4 are contemporary with each other, it is impossible to say.

The large room, which is much deeper than the remainder of the site and which is enclosed by the deep wall 1, is probably a room of the baths suite, as is indeed suggested by the nineteenth century plans. This room probably had a hypocaust, but no evidence remained.

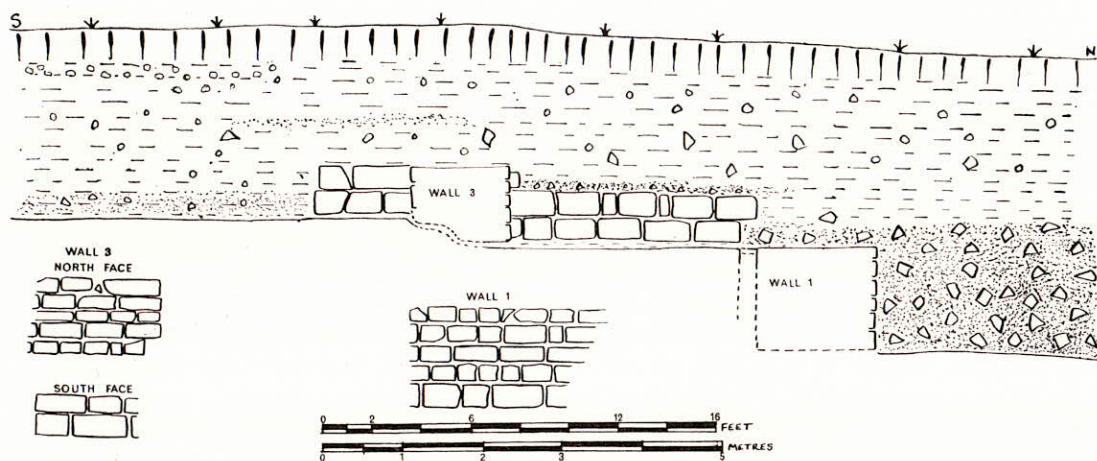


FIG. 4: Section of Main Cutting.

Finds were very few, but the discovery of Pennant sandstone roofing slabs, two voussoir stones and several pieces of moulded white lias limestone add at least something to the picture of a villa about which little, in either a historical or an architectural sense, is known.

M. B. OWEN.

EXCAVATIONS AT TAUNTON TOWN MILLS SITE, TAUNTON, 1967

In 1967 it was decided that the Society should undertake an excavation on the site of the Old Town Mills, prior to its development as a park, in the hope of finding the Saxon or medieval mills that were supposed to have occupied a site close to the Castle. The excavations were carried out in early August and proved that the only structures on the site were those associated with the mills of the 19th and 20th centuries. These had stood on made-up land consisting mainly of industrial rubbish.

None of the numerous and detailed references in medieval documents to the Town Mills — there were two mills, one for corn and one for malt, in the same building — give a precise description of the site. In the earliest Pipe Rolls the mills are referred to as

de Burgo or *sub Castello*. The Survey of the Manor of 1566 refers to *lez Taunton Mylles* as *prope Castrum*. It was therefore assumed that there had been continuity of occupation of the ancient site with periodic reconstruction of the buildings. This has now been proved to be incorrect.

THE EXCAVATION

Digging started on July 31st and continued for two weeks. The site lay in the area between the mill stream and the modern turbine sluice. Five square trenches were excavated along a line parallel with the bank of the mill stream; later, three rectangular trenches were opened near the river. In each of these trenches the upper levels were composed of the demolition rubbish left on the site after the destruction of the Town Mill in 1956 — large blocks of masonry with loose bricks and other rubble. In the trenches nearest the modern turbine sluice were found the lower parts of the wall of the turbine house. No floors were associated with these walls and Mr. Small, one of the former owners, told us that there had been no floors at ground level; the work had been carried out on wooden platforms raised to a height convenient for the loading of vehicles. In the trench furthest from the modern sluice a circular brick-lined pit was found. It may have been related to a brick arch visible in the wall of the mill stream at about this point, and was perhaps a millstone emplacement. After the circular pit had gone out of use, two brick-built square bases were erected on its site, but their significance could not be determined. No other structures were found, but one trench revealed a large shallow irregular pit, full of ash, charcoal and soot. This was probably the result of burning rubbish during the demolition in 1956. The trenches nearer the river all produced layers of metalling immediately below the present surface. These represented the paving of the mill yard, and may have been laid down as late as 1950. Beneath the layers containing these modern features, all trenches contained layers of mixed ash, clay, rubble and refuse, including plenty of 19th century pottery lying directly on the river mud. The area had evidently been water-logged and subject to flooding before the land was reclaimed in the second half of the 19th century. The small quantities of material included in this made-up land clearly derived from earlier rubbish tips.

CONCLUSIONS

The excavation proved conclusively that this site had not been used for milling or any other purpose before the middle of the 19th century. It is likely that the whole area between the present mill stream and the river bed was reclaimed at the same time. The site of the Saxon Mills still remains to be found.

Thanks are due to the Taunton Borough Council for allowing the Society to excavate on its land and for help in many ways, particularly from the Borough Engineer and his staff; also to members of the Society (especially Mr. J. W. Haldane) for their assistance during the dig, and to Mr. A. D. Hallam and Mr. T. J. Hunt for advice and suggestions.

P. A. LANGMAID

NORTON CAMP EXCAVATIONS 1968

An excavation was undertaken at Norton Fitzwarren Camp, Somerset, by the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society in collaboration with the County Museum, during the first two weeks of September. This site is a hillfort of 13 acres surrounded by

a rampart and ditch and approached by three long "covered ways", or sunken roads, with banks on each side. An excavation in 1908 (*Proc. S.A.S.*, 54, 131-43) had shown that the ditch contained Romano-British pottery in its upper levels and Bronze Age pottery from the lowest level. The 1968 excavation was intended to show the nature of any internal occupation. Two areas were opened: one immediately inside the western rampart, and another on the crest of the hill. The trenches near the rampart revealed an earlier ditch, clearly covered by the later rampart, with a sequence similar to that found in 1908 — Romano-British pottery in the upper levels and a dark occupation layer in the lower part, containing pieces of a Bronze Age collared urn. The depth of the ditch was not determined, as it extended outside the excavated area; but the profile suggested that it might be large. The remains of a bank were traced on the inner lip of the ditch. It is hoped to explore further the size and contents of this ditch.

The site on the crest of the hill was selected after a proton-magnetometer survey and stripped by a mechanical digger. It revealed two curving gullies, which may have surrounded circular huts, and a trench-like hearth, which may have had an industrial origin. The pottery from this area was Romano-British in character, but no coins or metalwork were found. Another curious feature was the almost total absence of animal bones from the site, although the soil conditions were not adverse to their preservation. A full report will appear in a later volume.

P.A.L.

INQUEST ON GOLD BAR

The following letter from Dr. Raleigh Radford appeared in the *Western Gazette* on 17 November 1967. It is reprinted here (by courtesy of the Editor of that newspaper) because of the importance of the information it contains on the subject of "finds" from archaeological excavations.¹

Sir,— Your issue of 29th September included a report on the Coroner's Inquest on a gold bar found in the course of the excavations in Cadbury Castle, near Yeovil. The bar was unearthed in a rubbish pit dating from the pre-Roman Iron Age, and is, therefore, rather more than 2,000 years old. The Coroner's verdict, on evidence which was not in dispute, was that the object was not Treasure Trove.

The Coroner purported to award the gold bar to Mr. R. C. Townsend, who while working on the excavation, actually found it. The purported award was, however, merely an *obiter dictum*, since it is no part of a Coroner's duty to decide questions of the ownership of property which he has decided not to be Treasure Trove. In law, articles found in the ground belong to the owner of the land, and not to the finder.

Mr. Townsend, recognizing this to be the legal position, has returned the bar to the Camelot Research Committee, and is anxious that it should form part of the collection of other objects from the site, and be treated similarly.

For the time being the bar, like the other objects found during the excavations, is

¹ Reference should also be made to *Antiquity*, 42, No. 165 (March 1968), p. 45, and No. 168 (December 1968), p. 307, where Mr. Geoffrey de C. Parmiter gives a very full explanation of the law of treasure trove.

retained by the Committee on behalf of the landowner, pending the preparation of a scientific report on the project. A full report will appear in due course.

Although the Director of Excavations notified the police of the discovery in order that the Coroner might hold an inquest, it is unfortunate that neither the Director of Excavations nor any officer of the Committee was informed when the inquest was to take place, or invited to give evidence.

It is also unfortunate that for the purposes of the inquest, the gold bar was exposed to damage during analysis. Any such analysis would appear to have been unnecessary, since there was no dispute that the object was of gold.

It is most desirable that ancient, valuable and delicate objects of this kind destined to become museum exhibits should have the most careful treatment, and, preferably, only be handled by qualified technicians.— C. A. RALEGH RADFORD, Chairman, Camelot Research Committee, Culmcott, Uffculme, Devon.