

## The Roman House at Whitestaunton.

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WHEN the Society did me the honour of visiting Whitestaunton last year, we were so fortunate as to discover the remains of a Roman house, situate beside the stream which rises in the large fishpond and flows down into the valley of the Yarty. The existence of the ruins of a villa in the immediate neighbourhood of the stream had long been suspected, owing to the frequent occurrence on its banks of minute fragments of an ancient kind of pottery and of stone split into thin sheets and cut into the shape of roofing tiles. When the course of the high road was altered, about forty years ago, the ruins of a little room or chapel, roofed with these slabs and paved with tesserae of brick, were found standing over a clear spring in the wood, not far from the stream in question, and within a few yards of the back north-wall of the house which has now been discovered. At the time of the Society's visit we had not found much more than the sandstone pillars which had supported the flooring over a hot-air chamber, some of the square box-like flue-pipes which had let the warm air through the walls of the dwelling-rooms, a quantity of broken tiles, and the foundations and lower courses of some of the principal walls.

The house was built under a steep hillside facing to the south, though the windows looking down the valley westwards must certainly have afforded the finest view. The bath-rooms were on the western side, and the principal living rooms were arranged round the *atrium* or covered court at the eastern end. The centre of the house was occupied by a furnace-room, probably adjoining the kitchen, and here were the boilers which supplied

water to the warm bath and steam for the vapour-bath, the latter taken in a heated chamber from which the bathers must have passed into a room containing the cold plunge-bath lying further to the east. The hot-room terminates in a semi-circular recess, paved with square red tiles imbedded in concrete, several lines of thicker tiles radiating from the centre of the room towards the curve of the recess, where they reached the wall and formed a support for the *solium*, or bench, where the bathers sat. On the further side of the furnace-room flues, underground passages for hot air, lined with thick tile-work, led at the back to another semi-circular room containing a number of red sandstone blocks, intended apparently to support the fireplace, the doorway, and a seat or projection from the wall; and towards the front to another room adjoining the *atrium*, where a huge slab of much-discoloured sandstone marks the position of another large hearth or fireplace.

One is reminded at this part of the excavations, if we may compare small things with great, of that vivid description of the ruins of the City of Legions, which we find in the '*Welsh Journey*' of Giraldus, where he tells us how Caerleon "was excellently built by the Romans with their walls of brick," and how, even in his day, were to be seen the traces of its former greatness, the giant tower and the palaces "aping the Roman majesty" with their roofs of antique gold; "and the traveller," he adds, "within and without the city finds underground works and pipes and winding passages, and hypocausts contrived with wonderful skill to throw the heat from little hidden flues within the walls."

The *atrium* or inner court, which was probably roofed in against the inclement weather of the "land of clouds and rain," was surrounded by a cloister or gallery, opening at the back upon a large archway, of which the ruins lie in a mass of masonry upon the floor. On the eastern side of the arch there is an alteration of level in the floor of the little cloister, and here there are remains of a step and a doorway, and another slab of

sandstone in the corner, which seems to indicate the position of another stove or fireplace. The cloister was evidently supported on stone pillars, of which two were found lying by the wall at the corners of the court, and another had been displaced and thrown to some distance beyond the outer wall. Owing to the dampness of the soil, which necessitates a tedious course of draining, we have not yet examined much of the flooring of the *atrium* and its surrounding cloister; but enough has been uncovered to show that the passage at least was floored with fine mosaic work, bordered with the pattern called the "double key," the cubes being made of terra cotta, white lias, and the darker stone of the district, so as to afford a variety of colours in the pattern. The pavement of the large room, between the outer wall of the *atrium* and the sloping wall, appears, from the few portions left, to have been of the same fine quality, the sides of the cubes measuring about a quarter of an inch; in the other rooms and passages the pavement was of a rougher and coarser kind. On passing through the opening for the large archway, we came upon three small rooms, paved with concrete, in which a few *tesseræ*, about an inch every way in size, are still in position. Some parts of the wall retain pieces of the stucco or plaster, of a red or maroon colour striped with white lines, with which the surface was originally covered; but the dampness of the soil led to the destruction of the greater part of the plaster work, which fell off in an almost fluid condition when the stones were first exposed to the air. Mr. Wright, in his work on *The Celt, the Roman, and the Saxon*, has observed a peculiarity of the Roman houses in this country, of which the middle room of the three last mentioned affords a new illustration. "One room," he says, "has always a semi-circular recess or alcove, and there is generally at each side, where it joins the room, an advancing piece of wall or pier, as though a curtain had been drawn across to separate the recess from the room;" and he adds, it has been conjectured that this recess served as the *sacrarium* or place of domestic worship.

There are one or two other points about the building which seem to be worthy of observation. The construction of the arches appears to have been similar to that of the larger archways discovered among the Roman ruins at Bath, the masons having for the sake of lightness used "brick wedge-shaped boxes open on two sides," set in a cement of lime and pounded tiles, and roofed in with a "roll and flat tile," or thin stones cut into an hexagonal shape. The stones of the east wall of the *atrium* are scored over with "diamond-broaching," like the masonry of Hadrian's Wall. The tiles are of all sizes and shapes, some being flanged for roofing or for use in the hot-air flues, others being rounded for the ridges of the roof, which seems to have been made in part of stone flags and in part of the thick slate found at Wiveliscombe. The box-like flue tiles are pierced with square holes, and scored with lines, so as to get a firmer hold on the mortar. In one or two places where the supply of red sandstone pillars had fallen short, some of these flue-tiles were filled with cement, and set up on end to serve as supports for the floor. Several of the tiles show marks of footsteps impressed on them while the clay was wet, the mark in one case showing the nails of a man's boot, and in another the footprint of a large dog. There has not as yet been an opportunity of thoroughly examining the ground, the earth being left for some inches over the greater part of the floor; but some objects of interest have already been found, the list including several coins of the 4th century, part of a bronze brooch, part of a glass bowl, several pieces of fine red Samian ware, a vast quantity of bones, and a number of broken articles of the black, red, and grey pottery which was manufactured in Britain. Between the wall and the stream were found several large pieces of slag from the ancient iron-works carried on in the immediate neighbourhood, and a broken quern or hand-mill made of granite from Dartmoor; and lower down the stream, and hidden under its bank, lay a circular block of red sandstone, shaped like a