

A ROMAN WELL AT KEYNSHAM

A small Roman building, incorporating a bath suite, was excavated at Keynsham in 1922 by Dr Arthur Bulleid, and lay a short distance north-east of the elaborate Roman villa at Durley Hill. The foundations of this small building were removed to make way for the factory of Messrs Fry and Sons of Bristol, and it was assumed that a Roman well, discovered next to the building at the time of the original excavation, had subsequently been destroyed or filled in. Recent enquiries established, however, that the well still exists, and in April 1988, through the courtesy of Messrs Cadbury, successors to Fry's, the well was investigated by Mr Michael Hutchings, Mr Raymond Gyles, and the author.

The well, possibly of 3rd century date, lies beneath a man-hole cover in a large delivery yard on the south side of Cadbury's factory. It is 2.2 m deep, and has a diameter at the well-mouth of 0.6 m. A further 0.5 m was added to the height of the well in 1922 to bring it to the present ground level. More modern local wells are generally 9–15 m in depth, and the far shallower Roman well indicates a considerable fall in the water-table since the Roman period. The well contained 1.4 m of black, foul-smelling water, although the dampness of the exposed well walls suggested that the level had recently been higher.

In order to allow closer inspection, the well was pumped dry and entered using a ladder. It was found to be built throughout of coursed limestone rubble, the upper courses having turned a rich ochre colour. These upper courses, comprising the top 0.45 m of the well, appeared to be constructed essentially of narrow stones, about 50 mm high and 120 mm long. The lower courses revealed extensive use of even narrower stones, the generally small size of the stones, by comparison with later local wells, evidently being dictated by the well's small diameter. A few courses were built of larger stones of up to 230 mm in height.

About 0.60 m from the bottom of the well, a layer of stones was found which formed a slight inward-facing shelf. Below that, the walls curved outwards and down, forming a crude ball-shaped bottom. A few other Keynsham wells also have such a ball-shaped bottom, one being some 1.5 m in diameter; but no other local

well has a stone shelf. Throughout the well, any trace of mortar packing had disappeared. But apart from a slight bulging on one side of the well, the whole structure appeared sound, and the stones remained firmly keyed to one another. No finds from the well are known from an earlier excavation, and nothing was found during the present brief examination.

On 22 January 1991, at the instigation of the author, the well was listed grade II by the Department of the Environment.

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