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PAPERS, ETC.

The Roman Villa at Wemberham in Yatton; and discovery
of Roman Coins near Kingston Seymour.

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“IN the Parish of Yatton is a Manor called Ham and Wemberham, the property of John Pigott, of Brockley, Esq.” This is all the mention made of Wemberham by Col-linson, the historian of Somerset, whose work was published in 1791.

Rutter, who published his *Delineations of the N.W. Division of Somerset* in 1829, in giving an account of the parish of Yatton, tells us that “an ancient sepulchre was discovered in 1828, on the property of J. H. Pigott, Esq., in a field called Great Wemberham, within the parish of Yatton, and about a mile and a half N.E. of the church, towards Kingston Sey-mour. About a foot below the surface was a freestone coffin, with a lid, shaped to the body, and fractured; it was of un-

common thickness, and had been excavated out of a solid block. It contained, besides the principal bones of a skeleton of middle stature, some parts of a lead coffin. The local situation of this interment is extraordinary, having in former times been a wild lonely spot, far distant from human habitation, and over which the waters of the Channel frequently flowed, previously to the modern embankments. The head of the coffin pointed to the north-west, a proof of its great antiquity, and it is conjectured that it was originally covered by a tumulus, which was levelled for agricultural purposes; this will account for its lying so near the surface, and for the absence of large portions of the lead coffin."

So thought and so wrote Rutter, who has happily recorded this discovery; but the still more recent discovery of the site of a Roman villa, with remains of six tessellated floors and two hypocausts, close upon the bank of the river, and the still more recent discovery of a large hoard of coins, serves to show that this district was early brought under cultivation, and that Roman civilization had planted itself firmly in this part of Britain, and had carried out important works in the neighbourhood.

Roman remains have been found both at Clevedon and Yatton, and not long ago a Roman interment was discovered on Cadbury, which is recorded in the *Proceedings of the Somerset Archæological and Natural History Society*.

The villa at Wemberham, now under notice, discovered in 1884, contains not fewer than ten rooms, which have been cleared, and more may yet be discovered. Much care has been taken in opening out these chambers; they have been protected from damage, and all the fragments of wall painting or of bone or metal, and all coins have been carefully collected by the present owner, who has exhibited a laudable zeal in their preservation.

Unfortunately very little of the masonry remains, as the walls have been destroyed to below the surface, but what does

remain is of good workmanship, and thoroughly Roman in character.

There are the remains of a considerable hypocaust, and traces of a bath adjoining. The rooms are of the ordinary dimensions found in Roman villas, and the tessellated floors are not inferior in workmanship to those found elsewhere in Britain. The tesserae are of white, blue, and red; the materials being obtained near at hand. Unhappily, by reason of their proximity to the river, the pavements have suffered from inundations when the embankment has been neglected.

The great interest of this villa is its situation on a level tract of land, through which the river Yeo flows. This position shows clearly that the villa could not have been built in Roman times unless the river had been previously confined to its natural channel; and thus we are brought to the conclusion that the embankments which are now so carefully attended to, must be Roman in their origin.

Happily, we have complete confirmation of this fact, not confined to Somerset. Embankments are proved to have been constructed in Roman times on the opposite side of the Bristol Channel in Monmouthshire, also in Lincolnshire, in Cambridgeshire, in Sussex, and in Kent; so that the work of recovering land by means of draining and embanking has been well established.

In the autumn of 1878, at Goldcliff, near Newport, on the Bristol Channel, a stone was washed out of an embankment by the action of the tide. This was found to be inscribed, and had upon it the letters—

COH. I
 STATORI
 M. M. I.

II.

The slab was 21 inches long by 14 inches at the top, and 11 at the bottom. It is described in the *Proceedings of the Monmouth and Caerleon Antiquarian Association*, 1882.

“There is on the shore of the Channel, on both sides of the river Usk, an extent of flat land, which has been reclaimed from the sea by a raised embankment, called the sea wall, which continues for a distance of 20 miles, reaching from the mouth of the river Rumney nearly to the Wye at Chepstow.

“Before this embankment was formed this extensive tract of country must have been a great marsh, a considerable portion of it being many feet below the level of the tide, and, were it not for the embankment, it would be flooded at the present time. The sea wall prevents the tide from overflowing the land, and the marshy swamp has been drained by means of deep ditches, which have sluices at their outlet. Before the finding of this inscribed stone, it was uncertain by whom this embankment was made or the ditches formed.”

Neither Saxons nor Danes “had sufficient hold of the country to attempt so great a work, and the Normans, when they came, found it a district embanked, drained, inhabited, and cultivated ready to their hands, and divided into manors and parishes.”

The finding of this stone shows it to have been the work of the Romans. The lettering proves that a detachment from the first Cohort, under a Centurion named Statorius, executed a certain portion of the work, which was probably about two miles or more—for the lettering is not quite clear. “The great interest of the inscription lies in the fact that the military were employed, and it is clear that the Cohort mentioned was one of those composing the Second Legion, stationed at Isca Silurum, now Caerleon.”

We know that the Car dyke, reaching from the river Nen, near Peterborough, and ending in the parish of Washingborough, near Lincoln, a distance of 56 miles, was the work of the Romans.¹

(1). See Archdeacon Trollope's *Sleaford and the Wapentakes of Flaxwell and Ashwardburn, in the county of Lincoln*; see also, *Archæological Journal*, vol. xviii. pp. 394-5; and *Journal of Archæological Association*, vol. xl. p. 185.

The Rhee Wall, also near Lymne, in Kent, is a work of the Romans, by which 24,000 acres were recovered from the sea. This was done by throwing up a high bank or earth wall, and cutting a deep channel parallel with the earth wall.¹

If such works were carried on in the south and east of Britain by the Romans, we may well believe that they were equally active in the west, where they had undisputed possession for full three hundred years, and where the country appears to have been more settled, if we may judge from the remains of villas which have been found. It is almost a certainty, therefore, that many of the embankments which keep out the high tides and overflow of the Severn estuary in Somerset, are the work of the Romans, and that the deep rhynes or ditches were first cut by them. These were, no doubt, left uncared for in the ages which succeeded the Roman period. They were probably kept up for a time, but as the country became convulsed by invasion, and men were drawn away for its defence, they fell into neglect, and the land became again subject to inundation.

The banks of the Yeo, by which the water was restrained to its proper channel no doubt shared the same fate, and the site of the villa at Wemberham became overflowed at certain times, and uninhabitable. It then became a quarry for material and a harbour for wild animals, until all outward vestiges were removed. When the country became settled, after the Norman conquest, these banks and ditches were again repaired and strengthened, and the land held by the Abbeyes and large landed proprietors was well protected against floods, and considerable portions also reclaimed; but the first lessons in restricting the channels of rivers and reclaiming land from the sea is due to the Roman power. From the Roman the art was learned which now is so productive of good to our country, and as the Roman taught the art of gardening and an im-

(1). See Roach Smith's *Report of Excavations made on the site of the Roman Castrum, at Lymne.*

proved system of agriculture, so did he teach the art of draining and reclaiming the land, and confining the courses of the rivers to their proper channels.

Twenty-one coins were found in the course of excavating the villa, the earliest being that of the reign of Gallienus, A.D. 253—268; the latest, that of Constantius, A.D. 305—or later, if the coin belonged to Constantius II, A.D. 337—361. We may therefore assign the date of the villa to the third or the fourth century.

The hoard of coins found at Kingston Seymour, two miles from the villa, in November, 1884, numbers 800, among which are those of the Emperor Gallienus, A.D. 253—268; Postumus, A.D. 258; the Tetrici, A.D. 267—272, and A.D. 276—282; Claudius Gothicus, 269—270; Victorinus the elder, 265—267; Salonina, A.D. 268.

These coins, therefore, so far as they have been examined, are of the latter portion of the 3rd century of the Christian era. It is probable, therefore, that the land in the vicinity of the villa was reclaimed and brought into cultivation in the second half of the 3rd and the beginning of the 4th century; at all events, it had then been made fit for permanent occupation.

The latest coin would indicate the period at which the peaceable occupation was interrupted.

Many hoards of Roman coins have been found around Bristol. Barrett mentions those discovered prior to the date of his history. Seyer gives those which came under his own observation.¹ They have been found on Clifton Down, on the site of a Roman villa, and extend from the date of Nero to that of Trajan. They have been found at Portbury, Shirehampton, Seamills, Henbury, Blaize Hill, Leigh Down, Wraxall Hill, Tickenham, Cadbury Camp, near Clevedon; and Cadbury Camp, near Yatton; at Nailsea and Kenmoor, and on Leigh Down, in the parish of Ashton. Many of the hoards were lost or dispersed.

(1). See vol. i. c. ii. pp. 154—174.

In 1875 a hoard was found in the suburb of Easton, on the line of the Roman road leading to Bath. This hoard amounted to many thousands; only 732 were saved and examined. Six hundred are of the reign of Constantius Clorus and Constantine the Great: 70 belonging to Constantius, and 530 to Constantine. There are also coins of Crispus, Licinius, Dioclesian, Maximian, Maximin Daza, Maxentius, Probus, Carausius, Carinus, Claudius II, and Gallienus.

They seem to have been hidden away about the middle of the 4th century. Another hoard was discovered in 1874, by the side of an ancient footpath leading from Bristol to Maesknoll. These ranged from Claudius to Maximianus, and as no coins of Constantine were found, the coins are supposed to have been deposited previous to his reign.

A large hoard was found in 1880, at a spot between Netherways and Filton. The coins had been buried in an earthen jar of common half-baked clay, in the bank of an old water-course. The hoard consisted of upwards of 3,000 third brasses of Licinius, Constantine the Great, and his son, and had been coined chiefly at Lyons¹ and at Treves. A great number of the smaller coins were lost, but between 4,000 and 5,000 were recovered.²

These hoards, hid away in these localities, and at different periods, and the continued fresh discoveries of coin, like that recently made at Kingston Seymour, must surely indicate a neighbourhood active, commercial, and prosperous; and the discoveries are not confined to one part of Britain alone, but extend to places wherever the Romans obtained a settlement. Roman money was largely circulated, and must have been actively employed in payment of labour, and for cultivation of produce.

(1). Mr. Nichols states them to have been coined in *London*, because they bear the stamp P.L.N.; but this stands for *Lugdunum* (Lyons). The coins struck in London have the mint mark P. LON., and are of a different fabric from those of Lyons. I am indebted for this correction to Mr. Roach Smith, F.S.A.

(2). See *Bristol—Past and Present*, vol. i. p. 25.

Mr. Roach Smith, in a paper published in the *Sussex Archaeological Collections*,¹ has noted, classified, and arranged some of these discoveries of hoards of Roman coins in different parts of Britain. He has noted the places, the dates and relative numbers of the coins found in Yorkshire and Northumberland, as well as in the South of England. "A few years since nearly 30,000 coins were found at Blackmore, in Hampshire: of these, 545 were of Carausius, 90 of Allectus, but none of Constantius;" and from the date of these coins he infers that they must have been hidden away on the invasion of Britain by Asclepiodotus in command under Constantius. "This important deposit very fortunately fell into the hands of Lord Selborne, who has published an excellent report of it in the *Numismatic Chronicle*, 1877.

Mr. T. Watkin, in his *Roman Lancashire*, has carefully brought together the recorded discoveries of Roman coins in that county, some of which were in considerable numbers, and dated from the earliest to the latest possession of Britain by the Romans, and he observes, "Had these hoards been examined when entire, and reported upon, they would have yielded more information regarding the state of the country in the Roman period. . . . The coins of the latest date in each hoard may be considered as approximately marking the time when they were deposited in the ground." Two lots which he records appear to have been hidden about the period of the insurrection in the reign of Commodus.

Four lots about the time of Gallus and Volusianus (A.D. 252), or a little later, in the disturbed reign of Gallienus.

Four lots indicate the unsettled state of Britain in the usurpation under Carausius, and the invasion and re-union of the Empire under Constantius Chlorus. Hoards of a similar kind, composed of coins of a like date, are found in all parts of Britain, and seem to denote the ebb and flow of Roman power in the island.

(1). Vol. xxxi.

It would be well that in every future discovery of Roman coins, they should be carefully examined, classified, and recorded, as additional light would thus be thrown upon the Roman history of Britain, and our local Archæological Societies should use every effort to have this effectually carried out.

