



ROMAN KILN, SHEPTON MALLEY.

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Roman Potters' Kiln,

DISCOVERED AT SHEPTON MALLET, NOVEMBER, 1864,
ON THE SITE OF A LARGE BREWERY, BELONGING TO
MESSRS. MORRIS, COX AND CLARKE.

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ON the line of the Foss road between Bath (Aquæ Solis) and Ilchester (Ischalis), and about two miles south of the point called Beacon Hill on the ordnance map, where the Foss road is crossed by the line of Roman road leading from Old Sarum to the port on the Severn, (ad Axium), and about a mile to the west of the Foss road lies the town of Shepton Mallet. Here a large brewery, in the occupation of Messrs. Morris, Cox, and Clarke, has recently been built. It is situated on the south side of the road leading to Croscombe and Wells, a little way out

of the town of Shepton Mallet, and in the process of excavating a spot for the large boiler of the brewery, the workmen came upon an ancient Roman Potters' Kiln in good preservation. The kiln is excavated in the hill side, with an approach to it and a space in front, protected by a slight wall which is still to be traced. On descending to the level of the floor of the kiln it is found to be about six feet below the surface. The sides of the kiln are protected by stone jambs. The form is circular, the shelf for the pottery remaining perfect, except a portion of the front which has been broken away, and the dome above the shelf remaining entire to the height of about two feet at the back of the kiln. The shelf is supported at the back by five pillars of clay, about eighteen inches high, and is seven inches thick ; the width of the shelf is forty-nine inches, and depth from front to back forty-five inches. It is pierced with nine holes, varying in diameter from nine to three inches, not quite circular in form. There are traces of two more perforations in the part broken away. The back and sides of the kiln are coated with clay. When first discovered several cups were found placed in the holes or on the shelf, as they had been left by the hand of the Roman potter.

The pottery found in and around the kiln is of a coarse red kind, in texture very similar to our modern flower pots. Some fragments of black ware have also been found, and a very perfect mortarium or vessel for triturating, made of white clay. These are now in the possession of Mr. William Clarke, through whose courtesy I have been enabled to make the sketch from which the accompanying drawing is taken. Fragments of charcoal and burnt wood are said to have been found under the kiln when it was first opened.

This kiln, although it appears to have been used only for the manufacture of a very coarse kind of ware, is interesting as the first Roman pottery kiln recorded to have been found in the west of England. Its discovery, however, has been succeeded by the finding of four more of similar construction in the same locality, though not in as good preservation. These have all been found on the brewery premises and within the space of a quarter of an acre, but their decayed condition, owing to the damp to which they had been subjected, caused them to fall to pieces when first uncovered. A bed of clay has been found close at hand.

Much pottery was discovered in and around the first kiln that was opened. Most of it broken, but some perfect, and other specimens nearly so. Two of these cups are in the possession of Mr. William Clarke, and many mutilated vessels which sufficiently show the nature of the ware manufactured. The larger of the two cups is five inches high, three and an half wide at the base, and five at the top, and has two circular bands, one above and the other below the handle, and is scored on the sides. The handle is two inches wide, and fixed to the side of the cup.

The second cup is similar in shape, and is four inches high, and four and five-eighths wide at the top, narrowing to the base. The bottoms of these cups are torn away, as if the clay when moist had adhered to the shelf of the oven in the baking.

A shallow bowl of red ware of finer quality was also found, and a mortarium of white clay, and of the usual form, the bottom being covered with small particles of flint for tritulating or pulverizing.

No fragments of Samian or Durobrivian ware have been found around the kilns, but two portions of a quern or

Roman handmill, fitting one into the other, and composed of a coarse conglomerate. The diameter of the quern is fifteen inches, and the thickness from two and an half to three inches.

In the adjoining field the workmen in quarrying stone last summer cut through a pit containing animal bones and other refuse, among which Roman coins were found of the Constantine family. Human skeletons have also been found in the vicinity of these kilns.

In the *Gentleman's Magazine* for December, 1864, will be found a detailed account of the first discovery, but the particulars here given are from personal inspection. I am, however, indebted to Mr. Serel of Wells, and to Mr. Freeman of Somerleaze House, for first calling my attention to these interesting remains. It ought to be recorded that the owners of the brewery, in consequence of the interest taken in the kiln, have taken measures to preserve it from destruction, by causing an arch to be thrown over the spot where it stands; it can therefore be seen by any one interested in Roman remains. Such care is most commendable, and manifests the greater value now set upon these records of the condition of our island under the Roman dominion.

The Roman potteries which have as yet been discovered in Britain are situated on the banks of the river Nene, and on the Medway. Kilns have also been discovered in the New Forest and in London.

The beautiful work of Mr. Artis* contains a full account of those found at Durobrivæ, now Castor, in Northamptonshire, and extending about twenty miles on the banks of the Nene. Mr. Wright in his *Celt, Roman, and Saxon*

* Durobrivæ of Antoninus, by Artis.

chapter vii., has also described these and other indications of Roman fictile manufacture.

In the *Collectanea* of Mr. Roach Smith will be found very interesting details of the potteries on the Medway, and of the kiln found in London. Volume VI. contains drawings and descriptions of different kinds of Roman kilns, one of which, viz., that found in London (see plate xxxvii., no. 4) very much resembles the kiln described in this paper.

The British Museum possesses a large assortment of Roman fictile ware, much of which has been obtained from the banks of the Medway and its tributaries. Those who would pursue the subject of ancient pottery, will be well repaid by the study of Mr. Birch's interesting volumes. The discovery of the kilns at Shepton Mallet adds one more to the list of Roman potteries already found in this island, and leads us to believe that they must have been more numerous than has been supposed, and that if care were taken to examine the sites of Roman occupation near to which beds of clay exist, many more would be brought to light, for it is most probable that the more common vessels, like those discovered at Shepton Mallet kiln, were manufactured in every part of our land while under the Roman dominion.
