

## Ham or Hamdon Hill, South Somerset.

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DISCOVERY OF A ROMAN VILLA WITHIN THE LINE OF  
ENTRENCHMENTS, AND OTHER FINDS OF INTEREST  
DURING 1907.

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THE fascination of probing into the story of the past, when history was but at its dawn, has ample scope on the Camp of Hamdon Hill. Year by year a careful observer may see unfolded scattered leaflets which, pieced together, form the outlines of a local history, throwing light on the manners, customs, and mode of life of the early dwellers on this well-known hill-fort.

If one may judge by their relics, the prehistoric inhabitants were of a comparatively peaceable disposition, engaged in tending their flocks and herds on the adjoining plains, or in the chase in the neighbouring forests, while their women-folk at home were spinning, weaving, or making garments of skins, when not ministering to the wants of the inner man.

Of a later date, one may recognise the sites of Roman or Romano-British dwellings, whose occupants were apparently of more warlike tendencies, having left behind them various weapons and the means of their manufacture, as well as numerous articles of personal use and adornment, many of which bear the impress of Late-Celtic workmanship with no small degree of artistic sense, tending to show that in all

probability Late-Celtic and Roman (or Romanized) peoples existed contemporaneously on Ham Hill.

Possibly of still more recent origin, may also be found the remains of a villa, maybe the residence of an official of the Roman administration, essentially Roman in character, into the relics from which there appears to enter but little leaven of British or Late-Celtic influence.

Truly a wonderful storehouse of antiquarian interest !

Hitherto some doubt has been expressed as to the permanency of any occupation of Ham Hill. Recent discoveries tend to dissipate this uncertainty, it being the writer's good fortune to realise, what in last year's *Proceedings*<sup>1</sup> he outlined in theory, the fact of the existence of a Roman villa within the line of entrenchments.

Permission was obtained at the end of May, 1907, to excavate in a field known as "The Warren" at the s.e. portion of the Hill, for a brief period, limited to six working days, owing to the supervision of farming operations. Within a few minutes of commencing work, foundations of a definite character were discovered, the upper surface of which was on an average not more than from six inches to a foot below the surface of the soil. Although the field has been ploughed for generations, it is strange that no record or suggestion of foundations has hitherto been made. In the course of two or three days, the outlines of a villa of considerable extent were traced, the walls having an average thickness of about two feet, substantially built of faced Ham stone and well laid on a set-off course. The area of the buildings was about 160 by 40 feet, and included at least 12 rooms ; the floors of two of the smaller rooms were partially uncovered, disclosing sound concrete flooring on which were innumerable tesserae which had previously been disturbed. A few relics,<sup>2</sup> among which were coins of the 3rd and 4th centuries, A.D., were found during the progress of the work.

1. Vol. LII, pt. ii, pp. 160-1.

2. See Additions to the "Walter Collection," pt. i, pp. 86-7.



The writer's best thanks are due to Mr. G. R. Norman of the Abbey Farm, Montacute, for his courtesy in affording the opportunity which led to the discovery, and also to Messrs. A. V. Cornish and W. P. O'Connor for their assistance in tracing the foundations and preparing a plan of the same.

At the time of the above discovery, excavations were being carried on by the writer (by special permission from the Duchy of Cornwall,) on the east side of the northern spur of Ham Hill, in what may be termed the "East Valley," running due south from the "Frying Pan" to the Inn. After trenching a portion of the floor of the reputed amphitheatre, which yielded nothing, attention was directed to a spot about 150 yards to the south—Site A '07—near where a large Roman steel-yard had been found by a casual observer some time previously, when the site of a Romano-British dwelling and workshop with many interesting "finds"<sup>1</sup> dating from the first three centuries A.D. was unearthed.

In September a working-lad came across another site of a Romano-British dwelling in the "East Valley," about 130 yards north of the Inn (adjacent to Chislett's Quarry, where the fragments of the *lorica*<sup>2</sup> were found)—Site B '07—where several objects<sup>3</sup> of interest (2nd and 3rd century A.D.) were obtained.

During September and November some relics,<sup>4</sup> which appear to form a link between the Prehistoric or Late-Celtic and Romano-British periods, were found by workmen while 'rubbling' towards the middle of the "Central Plateau" of the northern spur of Ham Hill—Site C '07.

Since 1904 ample evidence has been culled by the writer to indicate the existence of a prehistoric settlement at "Ham Turn" on the western brow of Ham Hill, peopled by a race

1. See Additions to the "Walter Collection," pt. i, pp. 87-8.
2. *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Lond.*, 2nd Ser., vol. xxi, p. 135 and plate.
3. See Additions to the "Walter Collection," pt. i, p. 89.
4. See Additions to the "Walter Collection," pt. i, pp. 89-90.

presumably akin to that which dwelt at the Glastonbury Lake Village, owing to the great similarity of their implements and decorated pottery. The situation of this settlement was probably influenced by the proximity of Ham Stone or "Ham Hill Great Stone," which was described by the late Mr. Richard Walter as "a large mass of stone which stood on this spot from time immemorial, measuring 30 by 18 feet by about 20 feet in height, whence an extensive and uninterrupted view of the surrounding country could be obtained." (It was cut up for building purposes in 1824, and all that now remains to mark the spot is a large heap of chippings and rubble known as "Rubble Knap.")

Doubtless on account of its commanding position this stone was used as a look-out, and perhaps at times as a beacon. In troublous times this watch-tower would be of the greatest value to dwellers at "Ham Turn," evidence of whose residence there has been gathered from the existence of hut-circles with definite hearths, around which have been found various implements of flint, bone, antler, and bronze, decorated Late-Celtic pottery and fragments of loom-weights, near which one of the only three recorded Roman coins from this site was found in the spring of 1907—a "second brass" of Caligula—a "first brass" having been obtained there in 1905,<sup>1</sup> and one in 1902,<sup>2</sup> both of Claudius I.

An old lady, still living at Stoke-under-Ham, well remembers as a girl being taken to the top of "Ham Stone," the upper surface of which, she says, was hollowed out in the centre and burnt as if by fire. Among the village children in the early part of the XIX Century, the following couplet was current, and greatly appealed to the juvenile mind—

"When Ham Stone hears the Norton chimes at midnight clack,  
It rolls down hill to drink at Jack o' Beard's and back."

1. *Proceedings*, vol. LI, pt. i, p. 88.

2. See Additions to the "Walter Collection," pt. i, p. 86.