

BRITISH ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION.

1860 Report: pages, 312-315. Carisbrooke Roman Villa (1859)

The following paper, by the rev. Edmund Kell, giving an account of a recent discovery at the Roman villa at Carisbrooke, Isle of Wight, revised from descriptive notes submitted to the Association at the Newbury Congress, was laid before the meeting. "Until within a few years it had been the opinion of antiquaries generally, that the Romans resided very little in the Isle of Wight. Sir R. Worsley, sir H. Engelfield, the rev. R. Warner, and others, historians of the Isle, either ignored any traces of their residence, or limited those simply to half a dozen Roman coins found at Carisbrooke.

The successive discoveries of Roman coins since the date of their publications amounting at Shanklin to six hundred in an ampulla; in Barton Wood, near Osborne, to a gallon measure of them ; to one hundred and fifty others from various parts of the Isle, now deposited in the Museum at Newport ; with others in private collections, have tended to shew, that probably few parts of England of equal extent are more prolific of Roman coins than the Isle of Wight. Independently of these coins and of various Roman relics found in the Isle of Wight, the discovery of a Romano-British pottery at Brixton, and of the sites of the scattered relics of two Roman villas at Clatterford and Brixton, recorded in the Journal of this Association, 1856, vol. xii, p. 141, have led to the conviction of a much larger Roman occupation than had previously prevailed. Newport, itself, the ancient Medina, was probably of Roman origin. Several Roman roads have been pointed out, and it is certain from the sculptured Roman stones in the ancient Roman station of Clausentum near Southampton, that the Romans quarried both on the north and south of the Isle of Wight. But though these evidences of Roman occupation have crowded upon us of late years, there was still wanting more of that decidedly ocular proof which should satisfy the still doubting antiquary. That proof has been lately afforded by the discovery of a Roman villa, in good preservation at Carisbrooke, and it is to a brief sketch of this discovery that I now call the attention of the Members of the Association.

"This Roman Villa was discovered by William Spickernell, esq., on the 28th of April, 1859, at the bottom of the vicarage field, about a quarter of a mile east of the scattered relics of the Roman villa at Clatterford.

Whilst observing the operations of some workmen excavating the ground for the foundation of the vicarage stables, he perceived some Roman tiles among the upturned earth, and having obtained the permission of the vicar, the rev. E. B. James, to make any investigation he desired, he cut trenches in various directions, until he had arrived at the outer walls of the villa, and ascertained its dimensions. On the day following the discovery, Mr. Spickernell, knowing the interest I had taken in the Roman antiquities of the Isle of Wight, kindly acquainted me with the discovery, and I have had frequent opportunities since that period by personal inspection of verifying the information which I now offer of the villa, for the particulars of which I am mainly indebted to William Spickernell, esq.,¹ and to Dr. Wilkins, a well known and able antiquary in the Isle of Wight.² " The villa is from one hundred and ten to a hundred and twenty feet long, its northern side being forty- eight feet broad, and its southern side sixty-four feet broad. Its floors at the north were six feet below the level of the turf, gradually diminishing with the slope of the ground to three ¹ Vide letter to the Hants Advertiser, on the Roman villa at Carisbrooke, August 27, 1859. ² As Dr. Wilkins and Mr. Brion are about to publish An Exposition of the Geology, Antiquities, and

Topography of the Isle of Wight, to be illustrated by plates of the tessellated pavement and other antiquities discovered at Carisbrooke, it has not been thought necessary to illustrate Mr. Roll's paper; but in justice to Dr. Wilkins and Mr. Brion, to refer our readers to their publication. feet at the south. The walls were about two feet thick and were built of chalk, the outer ones being faced with flint. Painted plaster on their first discovery was found on many of the walls, and cement moulding may still be seen skirting several rooms. "The villa fronted the south, and was opposite Carisbrooke castle, which no doubt then existed, as it is of ancient British origin, and Roman bricks have been found in the interior ; there appears to have been about twelve rooms, arranged with considerable regard to convenience ; three on the south, the atrium —two on each side, one on the north of the atrium, and three at the northern side of the villa. The three on the south side of the villa cannot now be made out, in consequence of the vicarage stables being built on them. They had a kind of cement floor. The westward one appears to have been the sudatorium, having a hypocaust under it, and contiguous ; outside the stabling and at the south-western extremity of the atrium was the bath, having also a hypocaust beneath it, visible through a small hole made accidentally by the workmen. The bath is in good preservation ; it is semicircular; its height is about sixteen inches, and its greatest length seven and a half feet. Three stone steps near it descend to a part which has various indications of having been the site of the furnace. Beyond the three rooms on which the stable stands is the atrium, the floor of which was formed of roughly formed red brick tesserae, without any plan. It is not quite clear what the exact dimensions of the atrium were, but Dr. Wilkins, who enjoyed the best means of examination during the excavation, considers that it occupied two rectangular shaped spaces, which were nearly of the same width from north to south. The upper rectangular space was only about twenty-four feet from east to west, whilst the lower rectangular space was forty-six feet from east to west, occupying very nearly the whole breadth of the villa.

The length of the atrium in its greatest extent was thirty-eight feet. Supposing, then, the whole of this space to have been the atrium, at the upper end of its western side was an entrance into a small room, paved with eight inch red tiles, which conducted to long narrow apartments north and south of it, which were probably dormitories. The atrium opened on its north side into a large square apartment twenty-two feet by twenty-one feet, paved with one inch tessellae, which may have been the dining room. There is some appearance of accommodation for a stove at the west of its entrance. On its north side is an opening into a smaller room with a cement floor, probably another dormitory.

The dormitories varying in length from fourteen to thirty one feet, were from nine to ten feet wide. The entrance from the atrium to the eastern side of the villa was into an apartment twenty-four feet long and nine feet in width, which had a room of similar width on its south, and an apartment of fourteen feet square on its northern side; in this apartment there is a projection four feet square from what I have considered as the dining room. That apartment formed the gem of the villa, having in it a beautiful tessellated pavement. The fine tesserae of which this pavement is composed are of white, black, blue, and red colours, and are worked into parallelograms and other figures with scrolled or chain-like borders, enclosing the lotus flower and leaves. In the centre of the pavement are a beautiful vase and flowers. The borders are wide, and are composed of coarse white and red tesserae. On one side of the room portions of the plastering, which was painted in panels, remain; among the fragments on the ground, pieces were found, having flowers, leaves, and other figures in various colours of a bright hue. I have not seen

any tessellated pavement of this pattern, but the chain-like bordering resembles a part of the pavement at Bramdean in Hants, and portions of the pavements found at Aldborough. ¹ From the hollow sound proceeding from the floor of this apartment, it is not improbable that flues are extended beneath it." There are no marks of doors on the north side of the villa.

A lonsr wall of about sixty feet extends on the western side from the vicinity of the bath, which probably inclosed outer offices of some kind. The villa was covered with stone roofing tiles, many of which were found with the nails sticking in them. They were cut in angular ornamental shapes, and, composed of a similar stone to Portland, and must have formed a handsome roof. There were six large square stones found in the villa, four of them connected with the atrium, which have been supposed to have formed the foundation of the pillars which supported a roof." The articles discovered in the villa have not proved of great value. Among them were three Roman coins, a Constantinus, a Claudius, a Posthumus, and a few of later times, as a silver penny of Edward. So many Roman coins have been found at Carisbrooke, that it was expected more would have been turned up.

Besides the coins were found iron and bronze rings, hinges, knife-blade, ladies' bone hair pins, some nails eight or nine inches long, portions of querns and mortaria, window and other glass, many pieces of pottery, consisting of fragments of urns, paterae, etc. Wood ashes in various parts. There were besides, as is usual in Roman villas, abundance of oyster shells, with deer horns and the bones of other animals, as sheep, etc." The tessellated pavement at the principal room and the bath have fortunately been protected from the weather by sheds, and it is hoped that the intention originally entertained of roofing over the Villa, may still be effected."

¹ See Woodward's Hampshire, p. 128. Smith's Rdiqice Isauriana; plates 12 and 14.