

ON ROMAN TESSELLATED PAVEMENTS.

BY C. ROACH SMITH.

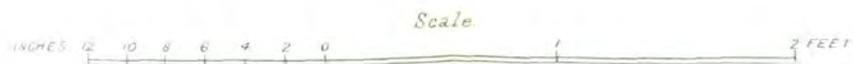
THE late Mr. John Brent, in his *Canterbury in the Olden Time*, thus writes: “ *The Gentleman’s Magazine* for January 1808, p. 17, states that a tessellated pavement was discovered, 20th June 1758, at three feet under the surface of the soil, in digging a cellar for a house, next to the ‘King’s Head.’ A drawing seems to have been taken of this relic, which was once in the possession of a Mr. Edward Jacob of Faversham; but I can get no further account of the pavement in question.”

This identical drawing, I make no doubt, I have discovered in the Canterbury Collections of Miss Dunkin, arranged by herself, and her brother the late Alfred John Dunkin; and by the kind consent of the owner and the Council of the Kent Archæological Society, it is here engraved, the lettering which serves for identification being also copied.

Mr. Brent, after referring to the Burgate Street tessellated pavements, specimens of which are preserved in the Canterbury Museum, mentions the record by Hasted of one discovered in Jewry Lane, in 1739; of one, noticed by Somner, exhumed in digging a cellar in St. Margaret’s parish; of one in St. Martin’s parish; and, not many years since, he states a pavement of white tessellæ was found opposite the “Fountain Inn” gateway. The whole of these, together with that now published, were portions only



ROMAN PAVEMENT, DISCOVERED JUNE 20TH 1758, IN HIGH ST. CANTERBURY,
BESIDE THE KING'S HEAD INN.



of floors of dwelling-houses, probably of considerable extent. That in St. Martin's parish must have belonged to a villa beyond the city wall. They cannot be said to afford a fair example of the tessellated decorations of the houses in Roman Canterbury, for they occupied but a very trifling portion of the extensive area of the city; and plans of the houses to which they belonged are unknown. It may be that the houses were large and that some of the rooms were floored with tessellated work of far higher pretensions, such as we find was customary in Roman London and elsewhere. In London, in consequence of the great depth of the accumulated earth and the contiguity of houses, many tessellated pavements of a superior kind were merely indicated, small portions only being laid open to be broken up or covered over again. Mr. H. Ecroyd Smith, who has published the pavements discovered at Aldborough in Yorkshire,* some of which are very beautiful, remarks that those found in the city of York and its immediate suburbs are few in comparison with those of Aldborough; but that the paucity of the former is to be ascribed not to their absence, but to the great depths at which they lie. Our observations on this point will apply to all large towns of Roman origin.

The comparatively few tessellated pavements recorded as discovered in Kent, may be explained partly by their destruction during the many centuries in which their historical and artistic value was not understood; and partly that it is highly probable many yet remain buried at such a depth that, as they

* *Reliquiæ Isurianæ; the Remains of the Roman Isurium* (now Aldborough, near Boroughbridge, Yorkshire). Illustrated. Folio. London and York, 1852.

do not impede agriculture, they may be hidden for centuries to come unless accidental circumstances should lead to their disclosure. They are, from time to time, discovered in unsuspected localities; and when we see what the penetration of Mr. Dowker has led to at Wingham, and that of Captain Thorp at Morton in the Isle of Wight, we may reasonably hope that, in our own time, further discoveries may be made. Mr. George Payne's practised eye detected indications of foundations of buildings, at Boxstead, so marked by the stunted growth of the corn, that he could direct excavations with precision and the certainty of success. He did not find a villa with tessellated pavements, but a building not less interesting; one that must have been devoted to the storing of agricultural produce. The Roman remains found near Maidstone, and described in *Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. X., retained only a small portion of pavements; but the excavations did not disclose the extent of the building, which seemed to be large.

The tessellated pavements in Kent, then, present no especial features of interest requiring comment. That from Canterbury, which is now produced, contains part of a design which may have been intended for something architectural; but what, in its fragmentary state, it is impossible to say. The squares containing rosettes or flowers are of common occurrence. The tessellated work upon the wall at Wingham is of great rarity. Another example, beyond that recorded by Artis as found at Caistor in Northamptonshire,* it would be difficult to point to in this country. This would seem to suggest that the more highly orna-

* *The Durobrivæ of Antoninus Identified and Illustrated*, pt. xxvi. Folio. London, 1823.

mented portions of this villa have not been laid open; probably they were destroyed in past times.

The labyrinthine fret, which composes the pavement of one of the rooms in the Wingham villa, is not uncommon; and an example occurs at Woodchester, but divided by scrolls; it is common also in borders; a variation of the labyrinth which not unfrequently occupies a more important position in the floorings of Roman villas, as, for instance, at Caerleon,* where it forms the centre of an apartment, surrounded by elegant foliage springing from two-handled vases. This, though comparatively fine, is dwarfed by the splendour of one discovered near Saltsburg, and published by the late Professor Joseph Arneth, in his *Archæologische Analecten*. It is of great beauty, and an excellent instance of the higher class of tessellated pavements of which many in this country are copies; copies, no doubt, of copies. It is meant for a representation of the celebrated labyrinth of Crete, made obvious by the introduction of the story of Jason and Ariadne and the Minotaur in a series of pictorial scenes in rich colours and well designed. The connection between the ancient labyrinths and the mediæval and modern has been admirably shewn by the Rev. Edward Trollope (now Suffragan Bishop of Nottingham).†

I hope I shall be excused in drawing attention to a few more of these interesting works which contributed to make the Roman villas so gorgeous, and which must have demanded the highest skill of the designer and of the artificers. It cannot be said that

* Published by Octavius Morgan, Esq., for the Monmouthshire and Caerleon Antiquarian Association. Newport, 1866.

† *Journal of the Archæological Institute*, No. 59, 1858.

their beauty has been sufficiently appreciated; and they are comparatively but little known. Many are now of the past and known only through the medium of works necessarily costly and almost inaccessible. No attempt has yet been made to give a general and comprehensive account even of those in our own country. While writing, I notice in the recently issued number of the *Bulletin Monumental* that M. Gerspach has just published an illustrated volume on the subject.*

The nearest to us are those discovered in London. In addition to the examples I published some years since,† Mr. John Edward Price, by the aid of the London and Middlesex Archæological Society and the Library Committee of the Guildhall, has made known one discovered in Bucklersbury in a manner leaving nothing to be desired.‡ It is engraved on a large scale in chromo-lithography; and, to the credit of the Corporation of London, the pavement itself is preserved in the Guildhall Museum. The British Museum should also be consulted for other Romano-British examples and for some of a superior class from Carthage; so that a comparison can be made which will shew that however beautiful some of these works in our own country may be, they yield, with a very few exceptions, to the magnificent productions of other Roman provinces. They are not on that account less interesting. Mr. Price properly refuses

* *La Mosaïque*, par Gerspach, 1 vol. de 272 pages et 68 gravures. Paris: A. Quantin.

† *Illustrations of Roman London*, 4to, 1859.

‡ *A Description of a Roman Tessellated Pavement discovered in Bucklersbury, with Observations on analogous Discoveries*. 4to. Westminster, 1870.

to accept the popular notion of apartments such as that to which this pavement belonged having been *baths*; and he might also have included that at Woodchester, of which he gives a cut, supposed by Lysons to have been a *laconicum* or sweating-room.

In a westerly direction the pavements of the extensive villa at Bignor, in Sussex, are the first that can be pointed to as claiming attention. Fortunately they are yet to be examined in almost unfaded beauty, having been preserved, through two generations, by the Messrs. Tupper, father and son, the proprietors. Here are representations of Cupids armed as Gladiators in combat, dancing Nymphs or Bacchantees, and a draped head of Winter with a leafless bough, very finely worked. From a similarity of treatment in some of the figures with like representations in a pavement at Avenches, in Switzerland, it has been supposed that they are contemporaneous and by the same hands; but there is nothing remarkable in this from which any important conclusion can be drawn; neither will style or workmanship indicate date, for expert artificers may have abounded in late times and inferior in earlier. Moreover, although the workers in tessellated work came originally to the northern provinces from Italy, they must have had provincial assistants, some of whom probably in time became masters. The late Mr. E. T. Artis told me that one of the rooms excavated by him at Caistor, in Northamptonshire, had been a workshop still containing heaps of small sorted tessellæ evidently manufactured upon the spot.

One of the last communications made to me by the late Abbé Cochet was that of the discovery at Lillebonne (Juliabona) of a particularly interesting

tessellated pavement, of which I have seen no engraving or account beyond a brief notice in the local papers of the day. The chief subject of this pavement is a forest and stag hunt. But in another compartment, above and below the figure of a nymph, is the rare feature of an inscription shewing that the maker was one T. Senuis (or Sentius) Felix, a native of Puteoli (now Pozzuoli), and a pupil of Amor.

T SEN FILIX CPV
TEOLANVS FEC
ET AMORIS
DISCIPVLVS.

This is the only instance I know in which the parentage of the artist is introduced. There are examples of the name alone, but they are extremely rare. In the well-known pavement at Thruxton, in Hampshire, two names occur, which have given rise, needlessly I think, to various theories quite incompatible with the general character of such inscriptions. They are QVINTVS NATALIVS NATALINVS ET BODENI . . , and on the other side of the pavement is FECERVNT, and indications of other letters. In the second name we may, I submit, recognize that of a British artist.

The pavements of the villa at Bramdean, near Alresford, Hants, are the next nearest to Kent. They have not had the advantage of being engraved on the magnitude of the scale of those published by Lysons; and, though of the highest interest, they have now shared the fate of so many of our most precious national antiquities, and even their place, I fear, is not to be easily found. However, a portion has been transferred to the Winchester Museum. One of them

is a square enclosing an octagon, in the centre of which is the head of Medusa; and in the compartments busts and attributes of the deities presiding over the days of the week. The octagonal centre of the other pavement contains a well-designed representation of the combat of Hercules and Antæus; on one side are the bow and quiver of Hercules; on the other a seated helmeted female with spear and shield, extending the right hand towards the combatants as if adjudging the prize of victory. The entire square is filled with four intersecting squares, containing smaller intersecting squares, each enclosing a bust; and on the sides are dolphins and vases.*

The discovery of an extensive Roman villa at Morton, near Brading, in the Isle of Wight, is another encouraging instance of what may be expected from pursuing archæological researches scientifically. When only agricultural produce was looked for, Captain Thorp's divining rod served to bring forth the works of ancient art which have been made known extensively by the Guide and Reports of the excavators, the Messrs. Price, F.F.S.A., and by the descriptive account of Mr. Cornelius Nicholson, F.S.A. As these works, I presume, are in the hands of most of the members of the Kent Archæological Society, I shall restrict my remarks to a couple of the more obscure designs, in the interpretation of which I somewhat differ from my friends and colleagues.

One of them is that of the figure of a man in a tunic, with the head and feet of a cock; and a little above him is a small temple approached by a flight of steps, which indicates a religious or *quasi* religious character in the composition. The nearest approach

* *Collectanea Antiqua*, vol. ii., with Plates.

to a deity with an animal's head, in the mythology of Roman Gaul and Britain, is Anubis with a dog's head. Serapis, Isis, and Anubis had long taken permanent places in the Roman mythology; their worship had become popular and had extended to and taken root in Gaul and Britain. But Anubis was tolerated only by the vulgar, who tolerate everything absurd; he was despised by the reflective, and lashed by the satirist. If popular credulity could countenance a god with the head of a dog, why not one with the head and feet of a cock? Such may have been the sportive idea of the artist who designed this figure, in which it is difficult to see anything beyond caricature. The bearded figure seated by a column surmounted by a globe, and pointing with a wand to a terrestrial sphere, is called by Mr. Nicholson, and with reason, Hipparchus; but I think it is more likely intended for Pythagoras; as such he is represented on coins. The subject of Orpheus taming the beasts and birds with his lyre is treated in a very inferior manner both as regards design and workmanship, and it is perhaps one of the most meagre representations of the numerous examples in tessellated work. The only animals are a fox, a peacock, a coote, and an ape. In the last of these may possibly lurk something of the humour indicated in the figure with a cock's head and feet. The subject was a favourite with the ancient pictorial artists, and some of the representations are of superior workmanship. There are many, and variously treated, in this country, some of especial beauty. At Laon is one of extraordinary interest and but little known, to which I direct attention. Orpheus (a little under life-size) is seated between two trees playing on his lyre; which rests upon a table covered with a

cloth. The figure is well drawn, the drapery gracefully arranged, and the shading of the folds so well contrived that at a distance the mosaic work looks like a fine painting. Upon one tree sit a partridge, a peacock, and a bird like a rook; upon the other, an owl and a woodpecker: on one side stand a boar, a bear, and a leopard; on the other, a horse, a stag, and an elephant, all well characterised. The borders are filled with fish and various designs. Coloured glass has been used, with excellent effect, in the plumage of the birds and in other portions. In a pavement discovered at Aix (Bouches du Rhône) Orpheus is represented in graceful motion, clothed in elegant transparent feminine drapery, and crowned with flowers. On one side from a rock are attracted a fox, a magpie, and some other bird. This is a picture of very superior art, and rare, if not unique in tessellated work.* Symbolically the myth of Orpheus was adopted by the early Christians in the pictorial embellishments of the catacombs and churches,† and in the latter it continued to retain a place for centuries. The tolerant Emperor Alexander Severus, Lampridius states, associated in his *lararium* the figure of Orpheus with those of Christ and Abraham.‡

In Lydney Park, Gloucestershire, were discovered, early in the present century, the remains of a very extensive establishment of a civil character, including the substructure of a temple, in the tessellated pave-

* *Rapport sur les fouilles d'antiquités faites à Aix en 1843 et 1844.* Par M. Rouard. Aix, 1844.

† Aringhi, *Roma Subterranea*, p. 316.

‡ Christum, Abraham, et Orpheum, et hujuscemodi deos habebat, ac majorum effegies rem divinam faciebat. *Hist. August. Script.*, vi., p. 540.

ment of which is a dedicatory inscription recording that either the cost of the temple itself or the ornamental pavement had been defrayed by voluntary offerings, under Flavius Senilis, chief controller of sacred worship (*PRÆSES RELIGIONIS*), and under the direction of Victorinus, whose office is rendered somewhat obscure by two defective words, the first of which begins INTER, which Mr. C. W. King reads as *Interprete Latine*, interpreter for the Latin tongue; and it is difficult to suggest a better reading either of this portion or of the entire inscription than this gentleman has given.*

In one of the rooms of the spacious villa at Woodchester, in the same county, a richly ornamented pavement, among other figures of various kinds, has two Cupids holding a basket of fruit, and, beneath, is inscribed *BONVM EVENTUM*, and in another compartment *BENE colite*, an invocation to the worship of Bonus Eventus, a deity well known in inscriptions; and in general favour; who especially presided over agriculture,† in which capacity, at Woodchester, this address has a special significance. There is a somewhat similar inscription in a pavement at Vienna. At Frampton, in Dorsetshire, a large and fine pavement, among other mythological subjects, has a bearded head of Neptune with dolphins. To this is attached an inscription, which, however, only relates to the picture; and there was also another, much mutilated, which referred to Cupid. The artists had evidently great latitude allowed them in the selection of sub-

* *Roman Antiquities at Lydney Park, Gloucestershire*; being a posthumous work of the Rev. William Hiley Bathurst, M.A., with Notes by C. W. King, M.A. London: Longman & Co., 1879.

† Varro, *De Re Rustica*, lib. i.

jects from the obviously incongruous character of many; which much depended upon the taste and wealth of those for whom they were executed. It is probable that the art was not so liable as some to decadence from the lapse of time. In the Romulus and Remus pavement at Aldborough, published by Mr. Ecroyd Smith, there is an example of the very lowest skill, both in design and in workmanship; yet Aldborough has furnished examples of great beauty. It is therefore probable that it was executed by an inferior workman from an inferior design,

On the site of Italica (now Old Seville), in Spain, was discovered, at the close of the last century, a pavement of extraordinary importance. It contained, within a large oblong square, six and thirty circular compartments surrounded alternately with wreaths and the egg-and-tongue pattern. Within these were enclosed figures of animals, etc., and busts of the nine Muses with their attributes, and the name to each. The centre of the pavement was devoted to the sports of the circus, the *carceres*, or stalls, of which were, like the chariots, horses, and drivers, well represented.* The same subject is treated in a similar way in the pavement at Horkstow in Lincolnshire. In this example the busts of the Muses are drawn with power, but with a certain severity of style, which is absent from the busts of the Seasons in the pavement discovered a few years since at Cirencester. For richly ornate and free style these are, perhaps, the finest tessellated specimens preserved in this country; and they have been well engraved and described by Messrs.

* An illustrated description, in folio, was published by De Laborde, Paris, 1806, which Mr. Ford states is all that remains of the pavement, as the soldiers of Sout destroyed it.

Buckman and Newmarch.* Of these there can be no doubt that the bust crowned with ears of corn, with the same in the left hand, and a reaping-hook in the right, denotes Autumn or Ceres. That crowned with full-blown flowers and a swallow upon the left shoulder, assigned to Spring, may possibly have been intended for Summer; the third, crowned with leaves and fruit, and holding in the right hand a hatchet-shaped implement, is assigned to Pomona. If the fruit be intended for grapes, then this implement is not such as is usually figured in connection with the vintage; but it would be more appropriate for cutting down and pruning useless wood in the spring; but, in other respects, the accessories denote autumn; and thus there seems to be two indicative of this season. On the left of this bust there has been a figure, if we may judge from what remains, something like a grasshopper, which could only be an emblem of summer or autumn. In the Carthage mosaics, previously referred to, the figure of Autumn carries a bowl of fruits, which are shewn to be mulberries from the long stylus with which she is extracting them from the bowl to avoid staining the fingers.

While mythology supplied by far the greater portion of subjects in tessellated work, pastoral and hunting scenes are comparatively rare. At East Coker in Somersetshire an account has been preserved of the discovery and destruction of a Roman villa, which contained a large pavement with the recumbent figure of a female holding a cornucopia, the usual personification of abundance; other female figures; a hare

* *Illustrations of the Remains of Roman Art in Cirencester*, by Professor Buckman and C. H. Newmarch, Esq. London, 4to, 1850.

on the point of being caught by a greyhound ; and a doe pursued by a dog described as a bloodhound. The late Mr. John Moore fortunately was able to make a faithful coloured drawing of what there seems no doubt was a further portion of the same pavement respited by accident for over half a century ; but only to follow the fate of the other remains. This fragment represents two men returning from hunting, and carrying a doe or fawn, strung to a pole, between them, to which a dog is looking up. Each carries a hunting spear, and both are completely clothed from the feet to the head which is naked. The costume is interesting, as it may be accepted as an example of the ordinary dress of a countryman in the south of Roman Britain. Upon the shoulder of one of the figures hangs something probably intended for a net.*

The extent and splendour of tessellated pavements often afford the strongest evidence of the importance of the buildings they decorated although scarcely any traces of those buildings remain, the very foundations not unfrequently having been removed for building materials. The city of Autun (Augustodunum) we know, from historical evidence, was rich in public buildings of all kinds ; and remains of walls, decorated gateways, and temples yet extant confirm the praise of the historians as merited ; but the interior of the city does not shew to us remains corresponding in importance : as in London and other large towns they are doubtless still deeply buried. Some years ago, however, there was exhibited in our metropolis, from Autun, what must have been the central compartment of a flooring of great extent and of most magnificent design and execution. The subject was Bellerophon

* *Collectanea Antiqua*, vol. ii., pl. xx.

mounted upon Pegasus, killing the Chimera; and, I think, life-size, or three-quarters. At a short distance it looked like a painting by some great master; a closer inspection increased our admiration of the skill of the designer, and the consummate ability of the workman who executed the mosaic. What became of this valuable gem of art I could never learn; neither have I seen any account of the circumstances under which it was discovered.

Historical subjects in tessellated work are extremely rare. The only one extant which I can point to is that in the Naples Museum, discovered over a half-century ago at Pompeii. It represents the battle of Issus, executed with minute coloured tesserae in a style perhaps never seen out of Italy; and if not the work of Greek artists* must have been designed and worked by Romans of the best Greek school. The figures of Alexander and Darius, prominent in the picture, are most characteristic, the costumes and arms being attended to with heraldic precision; and the same fidelity is preserved in all the combatants.

Pollio has given us an interesting record of tessellated work at Rome in the time of the Emperor Aurelian. It was in the house of the Tetrici; and represented Aurelian himself in imperial robes receiving from the deposed governors of Gaul and Britain the sceptre and crown, while, on his part, he confers upon them the senatorial dignity. Pollio terms it most beautiful and *picturatum de museo*.†

* My friend, Mr. W. M. Wylie, remarks that in the same hall, that of the Flora, are some more exquisite mosaics inscribed with the name of Dioscorides of Samos, in Greek letters.

† De Tetrico Juniore, in *Hist. Aug. Script.*, vi., p. 783.