

ON A ROMAN VILLA NEAR MAIDSTONE.

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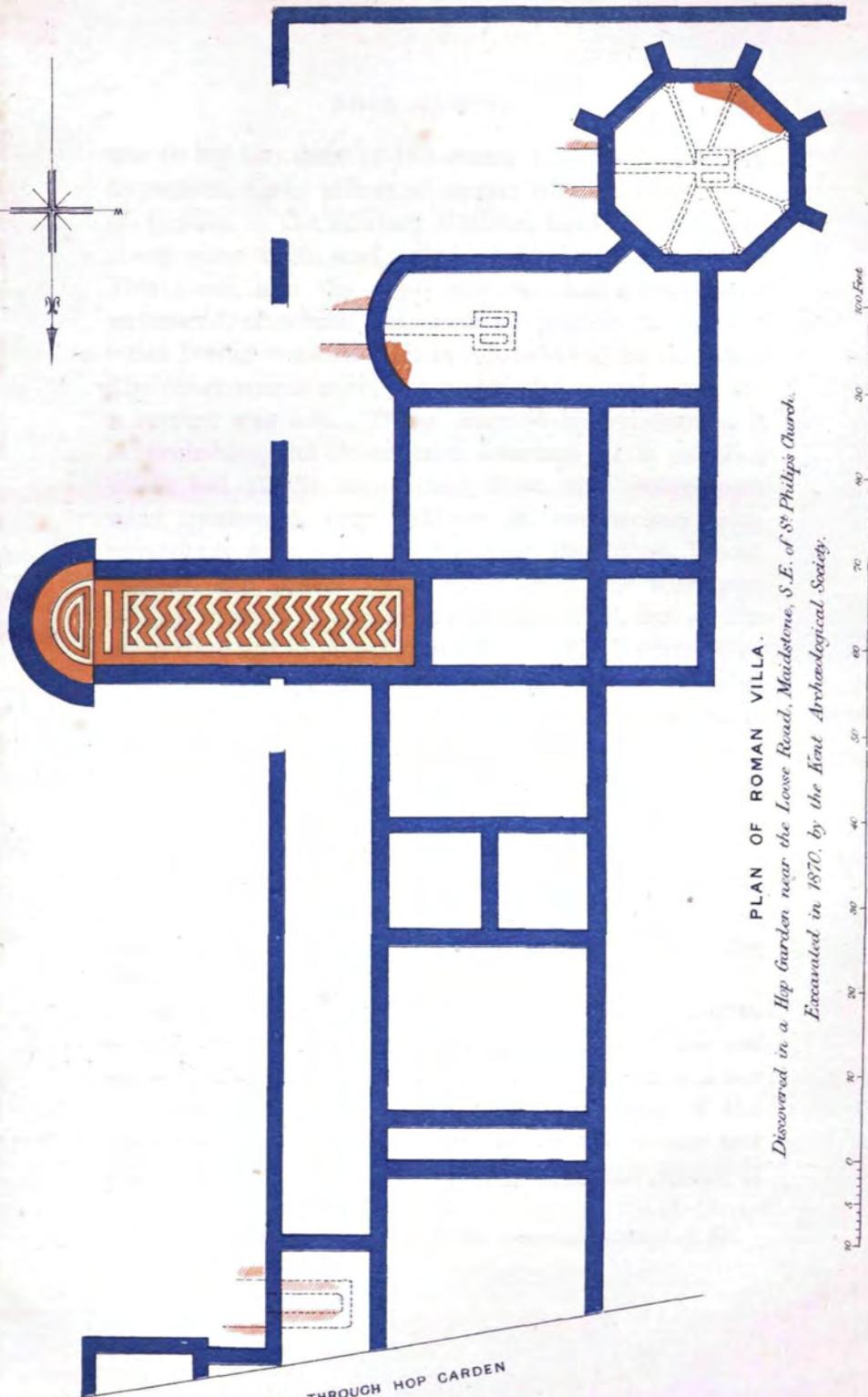
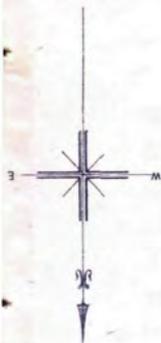
THE Kent Archæological Society is indebted to Mr. Hubert Bensted for a carefully prepared plan of the foundations of a Roman building, excavated at the cost of the Society in 1870. The site is in a hop-field near Upper Stone Street, on the left of the Loose Road, in going from Maidstone, and a little beyond the junction of the road to Tovil. The occupier of the field is Mr. Fauchon, who very obligingly permitted the excavations to be made, and took considerable interest in their progress.

The excavations were continued as far as the cultivation of the field permitted and discoveries justified; but it is very obvious that only a portion of the foundations was laid open; probably not half. The plan shews projecting rooms at the north-eastern angle, which may have terminated the range of apartments in that direction; but that they continued towards the west and south, so as to form a large irregular square surrounding an open court, there can be but little doubt. Mr. Bensted obtained information of a wall running at an angle from those shewn on the plan, towards the west, and on this side foundations were grubbed up some years ago; so that it is impossible to say what may have been the entire extent of

the building and its outer works; but it must have been considerable; this is certain, from our knowledge of the scheme and principles on which Roman rural villas were constructed. We need not go far for numerous examples, all of which more or less accord in general features, although they differ, often very much, in details.

Mr. Bensted has in the plan done as much as could be done for the remains of this building. They were not in a good state of preservation; and they everywhere bore the marks of violence from agricultural operations, as well as from diggings for materials for building purposes. The walls were of the stone of the vicinity, the quoins being of tufa, no doubt from the bed of some neighbouring calcareous stream; they were well built and firmly laid, in thickness usually about two feet, not always constructed with mortar excepting in the three rooms heated with hypocausts (indicated on the plan by parallel dotted lines, partially tinted red), and in the long projecting apartment on the north-east. The long room running north and south on this side possibly may have been a corridor; but it is impossible to say. Such villas have usually corridors on at least two sides of the internal square.

The octangular room had been heated by means of a hypocaust (as indicated in the plan by dotted lines). The flues were channels cut in the hard native loam, and lined with tiles, a mode of construction often adopted where the ground admitted, to save labour and materials. In one of the villas excavated by the late Lord Braybrooke the flues were cut in the native chalk. There is also an analogous adaptation in one of the houses at Silchester. The usual mode



PLAN OF ROMAN VILLA.
*Discovered in a Hop Garden near the Loose Road, Maidstone, S.E. of St Philip's Church.
Excavated in 1870, by the Kent Archaeological Society.*



was to lay the floor of the room, to be heated by the hypocaust, upon pillars of square tiles. In the north of Britain, in the military stations, square columns of stone were used, and upon these large flagstones. This room, and the adjoining one, had a tessellated pavement, of which only a small portion of the red outer border remained; it is coloured red on the plan. The other rooms were, no doubt, also paved; but not a vestige was left. Those warmed by hypocausts, it is probable, had tessellated floorings of a superior kind; but at the same time, if we may judge from what remained, very inferior in comparison with pavements such as those of Bignor, Bramdean, Woodchester, and others. The example in the long projecting room is of a coarse, common kind, but at the same time not unpleasing in effect. The buttresses or piers of the octagonal room were, Mr. Bensted thinks, too slight to strengthen the wall. Similar adjuncts are often to be noticed in parts of Roman buildings. In that partially excavated by Mr. Charles,* at The Mount, near Maidstone, the buttresses are of unusual strength, and apparently out of all proportion to the walls; but as a portion of the building only was uncovered, it is impossible to explain why this was; the state of the ground may probably have been the cause.

At the upper end of the room, adjoining the octagon, near the mouth of the hypocaust, lay a heap of charred wheat, a witness certainly of the cause of the destruction of the villa, and suggestive also of the character of the apartment in which the wheat had been stored. Unlike the Hartlip villa and others, it

* 'Journal of the British Archæological Association,' vol. ii., p. 87.

afforded no remains of works of art beyond broken pieces of coarse pottery, and some decayed portions of the bronze ornaments of a small wooden coffer which had perished by fire; so thoroughly had the building been ransacked and pillaged of everything worth the removal.

But although the researches of the Society have not realized all the expectations raised, they have succeeded, perhaps, in the most essential object of archæological investigations. Materials towards a fuller knowledge of the rural condition of Roman Kent have been obtained in the comparison afforded with other remains of a similar character, discovered in past times, but hitherto only studied individually and not collectively. Such are the villa at Hartlip; and on the other side of Maidstone, at the Slade near Loose; the cemeteries at Sutton Valence, and at Lockham Wood; and the traces of populations, whether in residences or in burials, spread all over the county. A map or plan, with explanatory references, would best shew the significance of what I indicate.

Kent is remarkably destitute of Roman military establishments. The *castra* at Reculver, Richborough, and Lymne, are comparatively of a late date; and they were constructed and garrisoned to repel a foreign foe; not to coerce a dissatisfied and turbulent population. The great earthworks commonly called Roman camps belong to a far earlier period than the Roman occupation; and nowhere is to be found any of those unmistakeable proofs of military subjugation of a land in a state of siege, which are spread over the north of Britain. This absence of legions and cohorts deprives the historian of an interesting and valuable source of information in lapidary records; but, at the

same time, as these monuments represent the preservation of conquest by force, he has, in their non-existence, evidence that the inhabitants of the south of Britain enjoyed the advantages of peace and the civilizing influence of Roman laws and manners.

The mines, and the fertility of the soil, alike tempted the Romans to undertake the conquest of Britain; and then to maintain their hold by exertions and sacrifices which astonish by their magnitude and by the perseverance with which they were sustained so effectually. The first invaders were nourished by the corn of Kent, then ripe for the sickle, as Cæsar has informed us. Eumenius, in his address to Constantine, eulogises in emphatic terms the fertility of Britain, its productiveness in grain and in cattle; and when he adds wine, there is no reason to suppose he merely wrote in metaphor. But the vast resources of the province are more decisively shewn by the fact that the Emperor Julian, when the countries on the Rhine had been exhausted by war, and when famine was imminent, drew from Britain, in six hundred transports which made several voyages, corn sufficient to avert the threatened calamity.

The Gauls and Britons, long anterior to the Roman conquest, were skilled in agriculture, and in the management of flocks and herds; they well understood the nature of manures, the rotation of crops, the providing of fodder and food for the flocks and cattle in the winter; and the conquerors were as ready to avail themselves of this knowledge as the conquered were to receive the more refined and theoretical wisdom of Italian civilization. The use of marl and chalk as a renovating manure was known from remote antiquity. The latter was among the British exports,

and many old disused pits in Kent, as I have pointed out elsewhere,* illustrate perfectly the description of the manner in which they were worked, given by Pliny, the naturalist.

A consideration of the historical evidences here but briefly indicated, in connection with the state of Britain under the Romans, as shewn by existing remains, will, I submit, convince us that in the dwellings, such as this near Maidstone, that at Hartlip,† and numerous others, we can but recognize the *villæ rusticæ*, or farm-houses, from which all the operations in husbandry were directed, and in the granaries and store-rooms of which all the results were preserved. Columella, who of all the ancient writers on husbandry has written the most fully on the construction of the country villa, or farm-house, gives rather minute directions on the arrangement of the various rooms. He is very particular in directing the disposition of some apartments, so that in winter they should receive as much as possible of the solar heat; that others be sheltered from too much sun in the summer; that the bath-rooms and ambulatories be built with like reference to heat, and shade, and light. To attain all these conditions, it is clear that portions of the villa must have projected in a manner very different from the modern fashion, and that the entire villa would, in consequence, present irregularities such as are to be noticed in plans of Roman villas, whether in England or on the Continent, for all seem designed on the same principle. The numerous small rooms are partly explained by the fact that these

* 'Collectanea Antiqua,' vol. vi., p. 243.

† Idem, vol. ii., pp. 1 to 24.

villas had no upper story, and that many were required for *cubicula*, or bed chambers. The baths, as shewn at Hartlip, were of small size, and adapted both for cold and hot water. Not unfrequently the villas and their appendages covered several acres. When walls are found surrounding the buildings at a considerable distance, they must be taken to denote the limits of gardens and orchards.

The discovery of this extensive villa is of considerable interest in relation to the state of the country around the site of Maidstone in the time of the Romans; and on this subject I draw attention to a paper by my friend the late Rev. Beale Poste, in the first volume of the 'Archæologia Cantiana.' As regards the terms "Stone Street" and "Wyke" (*Vicus*), I think his opinions are obviously good, if not conclusive. He also speaks of the remains of villas on the north-western side of Maidstone; one at the Mount, one at Little Buckland, one towards Allington; others near Barming Church and at West Town, in East Farleigh; but, he adds, "the other side of Maidstone by no means supplies the same results, where there are none;" and he suggests that the cause might be found in the wooded state of the country. It is hardly possible to judge of the mutations of the face of a country during fourteen or fifteen hundred years. Copses and woods are of speedy growth if unchecked; and many instances could be cited of villas and entire towns now covered with wood; ruins, if unmolested, are extremely favourable to the growth of trees. There is no reason to suppose there may not be many more remains of buildings on this side of Maidstone. The large space of ground occupied by the villa under consideration alone suggests

a wide extent of neighbouring cultivated land. It is probable that after the destruction of the villa, the ruins may have tended to convert the place into woodland, which, at some remote period, was again turned into arable. In the direction of Loose and Langley, from the remains discovered, the country must have been generally cultivated. The villa at the Slade, near Loose; excavated by the late Mr. Clement Taylor Smythe, and the walled cemetery in Lockham Wood, laid open by him and Mr. Charles, indicate a populated district depending on agricultural industry. The latter especially denotes opulence in the owners; but no traces of the foundations of their residence have yet been found; it was probably at no great distance.

This important addition to the evidences of Roman buildings in the vicinity of Maidstone naturally re-opens the question of the claims of the locality to the site of the *Vagniacæ* of the second *Iter* of the Itinerary of Antoninus. Thomas Gale, in his Commentaries on this Itinerary,* was the first after Camden, I think, who placed this station at Maidstone; and he did so on the ground of the etymology† of the word, and on the distance from Woodcote Warren, which he assigned to *Noviomagus*, the station intervening between London and *Vagniacæ*, at ten miles from the former, and eighteen from the latter. Horsley, after examining Gale's arguments, inclines for Northfleet or near it, where Stukeley supposed a station had been. It is in place here to reconsider this question.

The third *Iter*, and the fourth also, make the distance from *Londinium* to *Durobrovis*, Rochester, twenty-seven miles. This must have been by the

* London, 1709.

† In this he is supported by Baxter in his Glossary, London, 1733.

direct military road, commonly called the Watling Street, traces of which are yet to be seen in Cobham Park and in Swanscombe Wood, just beyond Springhead. It ran in a straight line from London to Dover. In these two *Itinera* the two intervening stations of the second *Iter* are not named. In the second they stand thus: from *Londinium* to *Noviomagus* ten miles; from *Noviomagus* to *Vagniacæ* eighteen miles; from *Vagniacæ* to *Durobrovis* nine miles; making an increase in the distance of ten miles. *Noviomagus*, therefore, it may be inferred, was not situated upon the nearer and direct road to *Durobrovis*. It must, then, be placed at some spot southwards, where a road going to it, and then proceeding to *Vagniacæ*, would give an additional ten miles. If we try to adopt the opinion of Gale and others, we have a difficulty in the distance, which would much exceed the required eighteen miles; and then the retrogression to Rochester, to regain the direct route. If we place *Vagniacæ* at Springhead, we are supported by all the requirements for such a station, in extensive foundations of buildings, and in antiquities of a general character;* and also the distance on the direct military road to Rochester. As regards *Noviomagus* being located, as proposed by Mr. Kempe, at Keston, there is the same objection as to distance. It is probable the place has yet to be discovered so as to answer this requirement.

But, although it appears to me that we are more justified in placing *Vagniacæ* near Springhead, yet I have no doubt a Roman road ran near or through the site of Maidstone, probably direct from London to the *Portus Lemanis*; that it branched off in one

* See 'Collectanea Antiqua,' vol. i., p. 110, *et seq.*

direction to Rochester; in another towards Loose and Sutton Valence; and that it had vicinal ways, as, indeed, all the main roads must have had. There are yet to be traced, here and there, throughout the country, numerous roads intersecting sometimes, and often running parallel with the main lines in the Itinerary, and upon these roads were *vici* and *castra*, the names of which are unrecorded; and the same with the large villas.