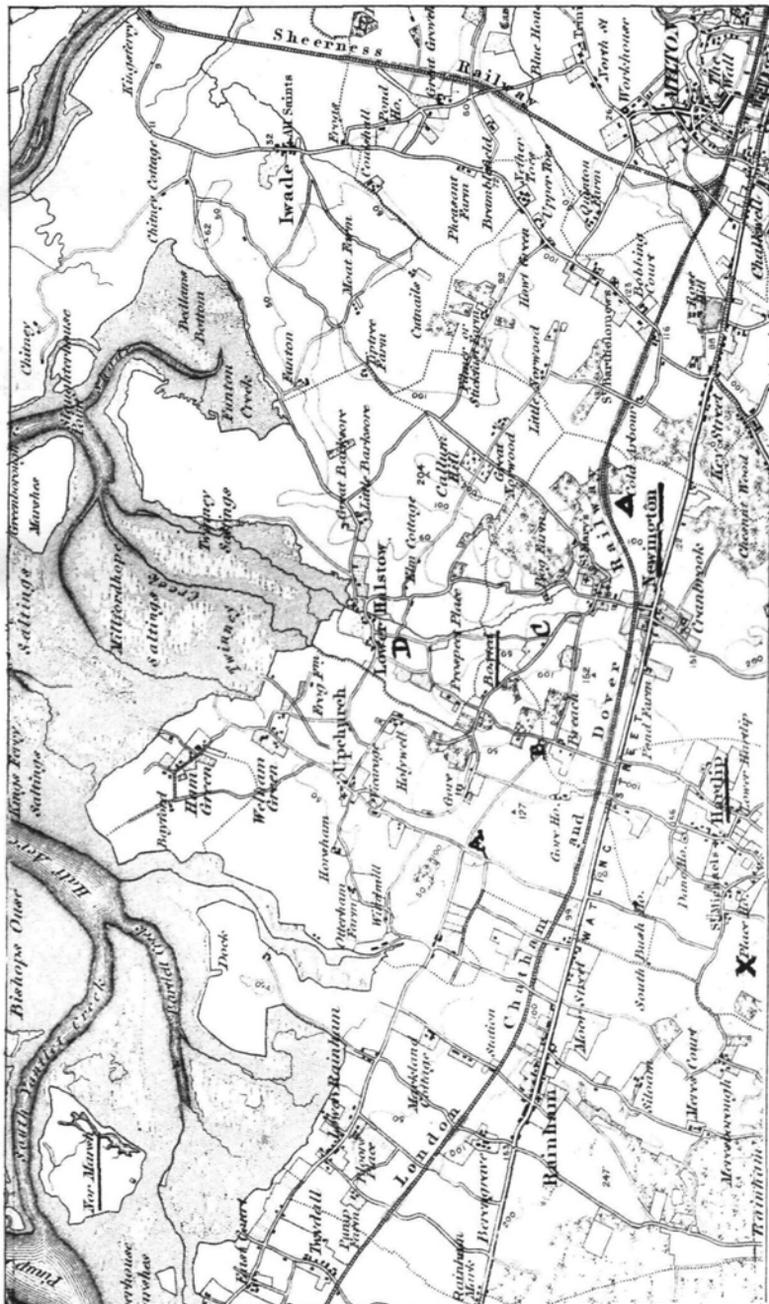


DISCOVERY OF FOUNDATIONS OF ROMAN
BUILDINGS AND OTHER REMAINS
NEAR LOWER HALSTOW, KENT.

BY GEORGE PAYNE, F.S.A.

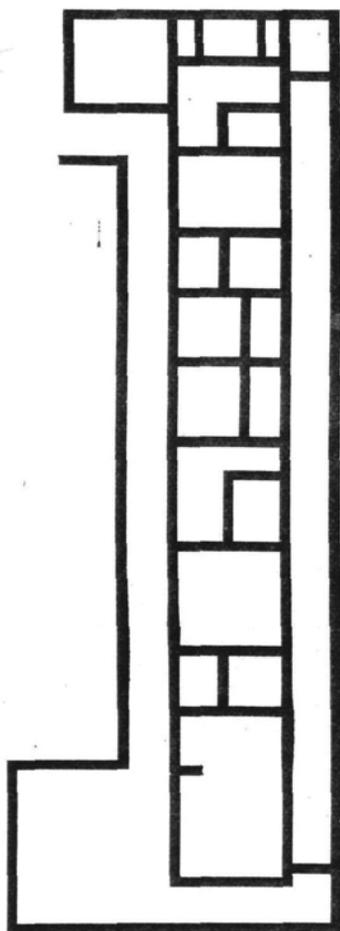
ON the 3rd of August 1880 intelligence was received of the discovery of fragments of Roman pottery, tiles, and other evidences of occupation, in a field known locally as "The Earth Pit," lying between Newington Church and the village of Lower Halstow. This field, which has been worked for brickearth for some years past by Mr. John Wood of Singlewell, is a continuation of Boxted Farm, but does not belong to it. Reference to the accompanying map will render description of the situation of the field unnecessary. On the "lower road" to Lower Rainham and Gillingham, that part which I have marked A B, has long been disused as a permanent way. The site of the discoveries lies beneath the letter "o," in the name of *Boxted*, on the map. The writer during his frequent visits to the locality noticed several patches of ground thickly strewn over the surface with broken tiles and mortar rubbish, and consequently cautioned the brickmakers to exercise great care in the event of their coming upon traces of walls or pavements. The caution was given none too soon, for within a few days (9th February 1882) the wall of a room was exposed, and a small portion of a tessellated floor remained *in situ*, paved with sandstone cubes. The tesserae were fixed by means of a white cement, and firmly set in a three-quarter inch bedding of concrete made of lime, sand, and pounded tile; the whole being laid upon a base levelled with fine gravel. The original size of the apartment could not be ascertained, as it had been torn up by the plough. Two or three gallons of sandstone and hard chalk tesserae were found upon the spot, together with fragments of pottery, a spindle whorl of bone, and a "middle



C.F. Keil. Photo Latho London E.C.

MAP SHEWING SITES OF ROMAN REMAINS DISCOVERED AT
 RAINHAM, HARTLIP, BOXTED, UPCHURCH, AND THE SOUTHERN CREEKS OF THE MEDWAY.
 Scale one inch to a mile

— PLAN OF —
— ROMAN FOUNDATIONS discovered at —
— BOXSTED near NEWINGTON KENT —
— September 22^d 1882. —



— SCALE OF 0 10 20 30 40 50 FEET —

brass" coin of Vespasian. About thirty yards to the south-west a well was met with, filled up with Roman materials; some of the debris was cleared out, among which we found a bronze finger-ring and a hair-pin. Within a hundred yards of the well coins of Domitian, Antoninus Pius, M. Aurelius, and Lucilla were exhumed. These interesting discoveries led to a careful examination of the ground about sixty yards distant, towards the west, on Boxted Farm, where, two years previously, the writer had detected pieces of tile and mortar scattered over a large area, leading him to suppose that a Roman building had once occupied the site. Mr. Stevens, the tenant of the farm, confirmed this supposition by stating that for several years the plough had struck upon foundations, and that when the corn was up about two feet high the walls could be distinctly traced. Mr. Stevens subsequently gave the writer an opportunity of seeing this, and assisted in marking the boundary, so that excavations might be commenced after the harvest. On 22nd September 1882 the ground was opened, and a wall immediately discovered at a depth of fourteen inches. The work progressed so rapidly that by the end of November the extensive foundations figured upon the plan were laid bare. The suite of compartments occupying the centre of the plan made a total length of 193 feet 3 inches, and a uniform width of 23 feet, the whole being unpaved. The walls averaged 22 inches in thickness, and where tested gave a foundation of 3 feet. They were chiefly constructed of flint, sandstone, or rag, and tufa roughly set in mortar; the outer or eastern wall being almost entirely built of tufa. The exterior chamber, towards the north-east, appeared to have been the only one used as a habitation. From the suspicious nature of the soil it was deemed necessary to dig out the area of this room to a depth of 3 feet; a quantity of broken tiles were met with, also fragments of various kinds of pottery, including some fine examples of figured Samian ware. It was evident that the walls had been adorned with fresco painting, as several pieces of plaster were found coloured in red, yellow, white, black, brown, and blue. Outside the north wall of this apartment a wide and deep trench was dug, disclosing

Roman remains to a depth of seven feet, two Roman coins, small brass of Domitian, numerous fragments of glass vessels, a piece of ground window-glass, specimens of Upchurch and Durobrivian ware, broken tiles, two pieces of white marble, two fibulæ, the handle of a ligula, two hair-pins, the head of one skilfully ornamented, a pair of nail-cleaners, a pair of tweezers, and a pair of ear-picks, all of bronze. The three latter are châtelaine appendages. Many good pieces of embossed Samian were discovered, decorated with floral devices, arabesques, figures of men, dogs, etc.; likewise portions of pateræ, with the following potters' names: SECVNDINI, OPPARO, OFSECVN, OFCEN. At the spot marked with an arrow on the plan a trial hole was dug, revealing much broken pottery and tiles, also a bronze ligula and a stylus. It is somewhat remarkable, considering the extent of the excavations and foundations, that so little (about two tons) was discovered of the material which once formed the upper structure of the building. This may perhaps be accounted for in two or three ways. The present tenant states that for twenty years he has been ploughing up and removing the wreck of the fallen building; it is therefore reasonable to suppose that his predecessors did the same. Such evidence might be considered conclusive; but the fact must not be lost sight of that the very early church of Lower Halstow, which is close by, is built almost entirely of Roman materials. Tufa, oolite, rag, blocks of Roman mortar, and innumerable tiles with *mortar attached*, are everywhere to be seen in its walls, and were without doubt taken from some neighbouring ruin. It is possible that the Boxted foundations supported a partial superstructure of wood; if so, very little would be left after the decay of the timbers. My friend Mr. Roach Smith, F.S.A., who was present on two or three occasions during the excavations, is of opinion that we have discovered the remains of an agricultural store or granary, and that the north-east corner may be the site of the dwelling of the owner or bailiff. As that end of the building was doubtless connected with the tessellated floor and wall described in the earlier portion of this paper, we may infer that it was a residence of large dimensions. Holes were

dug between the points above mentioned, and the continuation of the walls proved, but they were too much dilapidated to have repaid further exploration. It will be seen on referring to the map that the district around Newington was of considerable importance in Roman times, and doubtless thickly populated. The field marked **A** (close to *Cold Arbour*) is the site of a cemetery, and derived the name of "Crockfield" from the immense number of urns found there, as mentioned by Hasted in his *History of Kent*.^{*} Hartlip also furnished a Roman villa, not far from the *Place House*, marked on the map as **X**, particulars of which may be found in Mr. Roach Smith's *Collectanea Antiqua*, vol. ii. The road marked C D was used as a bye-road to Halstow within the memory of persons now living. It was probably done away with in consequence of the boggy nature of the land, caused by the water-course which runs almost parallel with it. The low-lying tract of land on each side of a stream (the Libbet) between Newington and Halstow Churches is a "peat-bog," and has been used as an "osier-bed" for many years. The marshes intersected by endless creeks of the Medway, to the north and east of Upchurch, are the site of the far-famed Roman potteries,† now periodically submerged, from which every important collection throughout England has been enriched. It will be as gratifying to all archæologists to learn, as it is to the writer to record, that the Right Hon. Lord Harris, the owner of Boxted, not only permitted the excavations to be carried on there, but with great liberality requested to be allowed to share the expense. The tenant, Mr. Stevens, also very generously placed the field at the disposal of the writer from September until March, and evinced the keenest interest in the progress of the work. The plan was kindly prepared by Mr. G. Gates Warren.

* Folio edition, vol. ii., p. 561.

† *Coll. Ant.*, vol. vi.