

## ROMAN SITE AT OTFORD.

BY BERTRAM W. PEARCE.

ABOUT a quarter of a mile above Otford Station to the south of the Pilgrim's Way, on a subsoil of chalk, is a small farm belonging to Mr. A. Johnson. In July, 1926, he was digging a hole for a fruit tree when the spade threw up some large tiles and flints which were apparently part of a wall. A later digging not far away showed more tiles, which were inspected early in 1927 by Dr. Gordon Ward and Major Hesketh, who identified them as Roman. During the spring months trial holes were made by various investigators, leading to the discovery of a fine wall of flint and large quantities of fallen plaster, highly decorated, and in particular of three pieces, which, put together, gave the words *BINA MANU*, the opening words of a line from the *Æneid*, Book I., 313, XII., 165, or VII., 688. Another large piece showed part of the figure of a man brandishing a spear in his right hand. The background of both figure and inscription is black, the letters white, and the figure red. On April 11th, I took charge of the operations on the site for the Sevenoaks Society, and, with the help of volunteers, a good deal of work was done during the next three weeks. At the end of this period a wall was cleared running roughly east and west, 27 feet long, 2 feet wide, and 2 feet high. On its southern face at intervals were larger or smaller patches of coloured plaster still in position, the colouring being bands of cream, pink and red, with vertical and horizontal stripes of a darker red. West of the wall is an entry, and the remains of another wall beyond that. To the north run portions of four short walls defining two rooms (?). Work was resumed on July 29th, and will be continued till the first week in September. Another wall has now been discovered parallel to, and 10 feet to the south of, the one first found, the two being perhaps the walls of a corridor. The ground between

these is being cleared, and there are signs of further rooms towards the east. Traces of coloured plaster can be seen on these also. At present it is not possible to make any pronouncement as to the buildings, for, while it is hoped that the work in hand may throw light upon the subject, there are many perplexing features. Trial trenches and holes all round have brought to light considerable heaps of flints and broken tiles, while large numbers of tessaræ have been found, no two in juxtaposition, and in some cases in pockets, as though they had been swept together. Most are red, a few yellow, about one inch square, others smaller and of several colours. There has been a good deal of filling in at various parts of the site. Under about a foot of chalk I found more earth with potsherds and charcoal; under another bed of chalk small tessaræ in a confused heap. At the south-east corner of the first wall and in three other places, beneath a wall in each case, are holes roughly circular in section, the deepest 3 feet 3 inches in depth. No obvious drains lead to the holes. In two of them there was much charcoal and indeed charcoal lies almost everywhere at ground level.

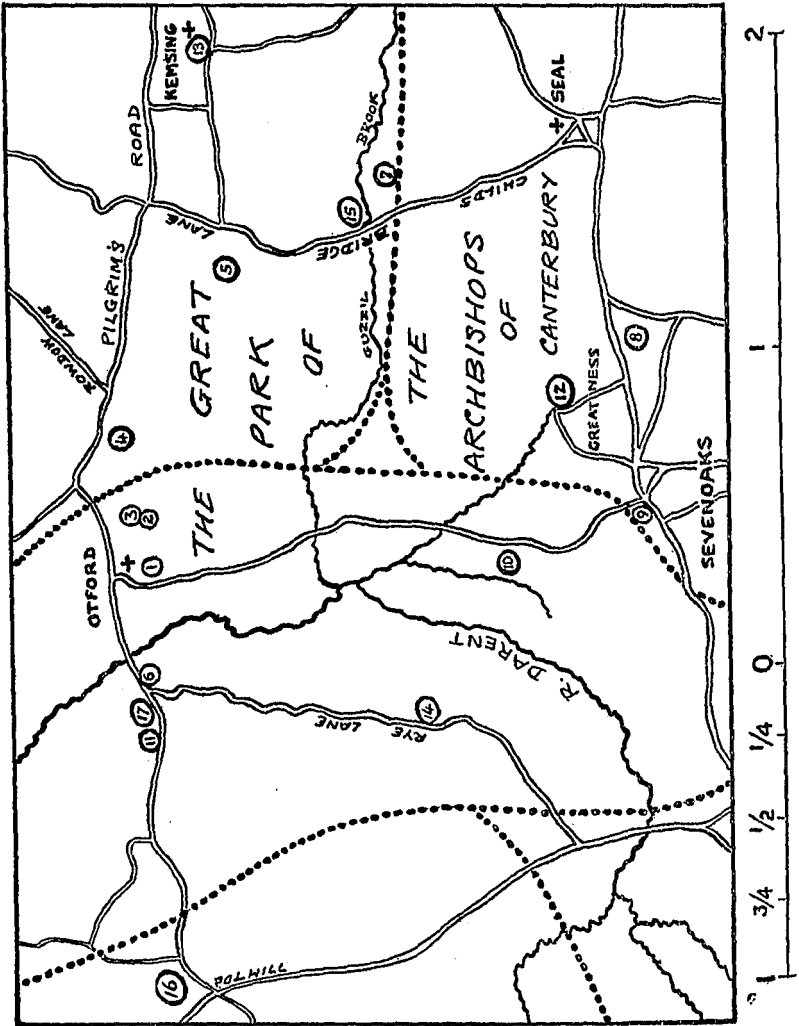
We have found many fragments of Samian ware belonging to the first and second centuries, but, a rather curious fact, not one base, although many bases of coarse ware have turned up. Other finds are a bronze coin of Antoninus Pius, 140-144 A.D.; a bronze earpick; a bronze fibula of late first century date; a bronze band, use unknown; a bone hairpin; a piece of marble lining; part of a hexagonal design; bottle and window glass; a piece of figured Samian, with a rivet hole, and other objects. There is a little castor ware. The coarse pottery includes a piece of soft ware, possibly pre-Claudian; part of a thumb pot; and of some large yellowish store vessels with two or more bands of stick-made marks for ornament.

No complete vessel has yet been unearthed. A few more letters of the BINA MANU inscription have been recovered, and a hint of one or possibly two others, while many boxes of fragments of plaster from the walls have been collected for

examination. These show parts of two male figures and a large variety of coloured patterns, which it may be possible to describe later. Major Bushe-Fox, who inspected the site on August 9th, is of opinion that there is nothing yet to show that it was in occupation after the end of the second century. The area is now part of an orchard, but it is said that some years ago it was under corn, which fact is confirmed by our discovery of two broken (steam) plough-shares. I have a couple of paid men at work, and have had the assistance of some keen volunteers in Messrs. Hovenden and Godwin, and of Mr. C. G. Rich and several boys of Sevenoaks School, who have proved themselves capable excavators and made themselves generally useful, while Dr. Gordon Ward and other members of the sub-committee of the Sevenoaks Society have done their utmost to smooth away difficulties and to expedite the work. Thanks must also be given to Mr. Johnson for allowing the excavations to be carried out on his farm.

The most recent discoveries have supplied evidence of the occupation of the site in the third and fourth centuries, including a bronze coin of the latter century.

Other remains supposed to be Roman have been found in or near Otford. The principal have been these : (1) In a hop-garden which adjoins the north side of St. Thomas à Becket's Well (Ordnance Survey, 6 in., xxix., S.W.) and about half a mile west of the Roman " Villa," many fragments of ridged and other tiles have been found ; (2) in the 100 acre field in which the " Villa " is being excavated, but half a mile to the east of it, fragments of tiles were found this year by a " spring and watercress bed," also marked on the O.S. map ; (3) on the north bank of the railway cutting, south east of Child's Bridge (marked on the same O.S. map), and about a mile south east of the " Villa," Miss Styan, formerly of Sevenoaks, found, about thirty years ago, a piece of tile pronounced by the British Museum to be Roman. This tile is not pottery, but is of a coarse vitreous fracture, ultramarine in colour, well worn on the surface and edges, in shape right-angled triangular, the two short sides being



## TABLE OF REFERENCES.

1. Ruins of Archbishop's Manor.
2. Thomas à Becket's Well.
3. Hop-garden in which many Roman tiles have been found.
4. Roman Villa (1927).
5. Roman tiles by a Spring.
6. Mediæval Water-pipes.
7. Blue Roman Tile found here.
8. Tumulus opened by Mr. Lewis Abbott.
9. Several Skeletons dug up (specimen in Maidstone Museum).
10. Many worked flakes: probably a factory of Neolithic date.
11. Alleged Roman Road surface.
12. Site of Old Silk Mills (*circa* 1750).
13. Site of Kensing Castle.
14. Site of Manor House of Le Rye.
15. Site of Old Mill, Earthworks thrown up to make a pond above the mill and to give a head of water.
16. Site of Battle, A.D. 1016.
17. Site of Battle, A.D. 775.

$2\frac{1}{10}$  inches in length, and the long side 3 inches, and nearly  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch thick. (4) Near Twitton, west of Otford, under the roadway of the Pilgrim's Way, sewage contractors found in the spring of 1927 a very hard surface alleged to be remains of a Roman road. This discovery has not yet been tested.

It may be useful to recall that two other Roman "Villas" have been found in the Darent valley, one at Darenth (Arch. Cant., XXII., 49), and the other at Lullingstone at the north-eastern boundary of the Park (Gent. Mag., 1823, Pt. I., pp. 577-580; Arch. Cant., XXII., p. 83).