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ROMAN REMAINS AT HOO ST. WERBURGH.

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Before the introduction of railways, population and trade usually followed the rivers prior to the construction of roads.

There is little doubt that ancient Hoo stood on the banks of the river Medway on Hoo Creek, or between there and Cookham Woods. In confirmation of this opinion it should be noted that the ancient entrance of Hoo Church is on the south side facing the river, the present entrance porch on the north side having been built at a more recent period after the present village had been built on the main roads, the ancient porch being then converted into a vestry.

It is evident that the parish of Hoo St. Werburgh was the most important in the Rochester district in Saxon times, inasmuch as it was the largest contributory parish to the maintenance of Rochester Bridge (Chatham being the smallest).

From the earliest times the position of Hoo on the river Medway has been one of strategic value: it is therefore not surprising that the Romans after having fortified the city of Rochester, and built a bridge across the Medway, should establish a camp or outpost at this point.

The top soil of the fields marked Nos. 451 and 184 on the Ordnance Survey contains much broken pottery of Roman origin, viz., broken roof tiles, pottery, etc. In some instances the roof tiles have been dug out in perfect condition, whilst much of the pottery had been beautifully glazed, but none had figures or ornamental enrichment.

In one case a Roman roof tile had the perfect impress of a dog's foot, which must have been made when the clay was soft prior to drying and burning, and which doubtless provoked some strong language from the Roman brickmaker (in Latin of course).

The Roman cemetery was situated in field No. 451 on the Ordnance Survey, about 100 yards south of the roadway on the north side, and the same distance from the hedge on the west side.

The cinerary urns were found in the bottom of a straight trench running north and south about 3 ft. 6 in. deep from the surface, which had been filled with top-soil. In most cases the urns were very underburnt and fell to pieces on exposure to the atmosphere, whilst others were in a better condition, but were promptly broken by the workmen to see what they contained. In one urn it was rumoured they had found a snake bracelet which looked like gold, so they tested it by breaking it into pieces, which they threw away. This statement may be received with caution; in all probability they sold it.

All the urns contained calcined bones and ashes which the men scattered abroad; the urns were of various sizes, some being quite small as though for children, and in one or two cases very large.

The author endeavoured to stop their destruction, but only partially succeeded. One very large urn was preserved intact, and presented to the late Mr. G. M. Arnold for his collection at Milton Hall, this being prior to the establishment of the Rochester Museum.

The discovery of these remains took place in 1894, when the brick earth was being excavated for brickmaking in the Hoo Lodge brickfield.

All these Roman urns had been turned on a potter's "wheel," but a more interesting discovery was that of a small burnt clay box, about 12 in. by 10 in., covered with a flat tile, containing calcined bones, which was found at a lower level than the urns in the same trench, denoting an earlier origin. This was preserved by the writer for many years, but ultimately lost.

In the winter of 1895, whilst digging drains to carry off rain-water from the villa-grounds on the west side of the tramway, foundations of permanent buildings were discovered at a few feet below the surface, but owing to the presence of a large quantity of water the operations were stopped. Their position would be about 60 yards west of the tramway shewn on the Ordnance Survey, and 30 yards from the footpath on the bank of the river.

In the opinion of the writer, this is about the site of the ancient Roman villa or settlement.

In the year 1903 a silver coin was found in the brickfield, which had doubtless been excavated with the soil overlying the brick earth. It is in excellent preservation, and has been pronounced by experts to be a "drachma" of Philip of Macedon,

B.C. 359 (father of Alexander the Great). This coin has had very little wear, and must have been practically new when brought to this country and lost. It has been presented by the writer to the Rochester Museum. We may certainly accept this incident as corroborative proof of the Roman occupation, but why not go back a little further and conclude that the Phœnicians traded here before the Roman occupation.

Indeed, may not the Romans have heard of Britain from the Phœnicians, whose trade they coveted, but lacking their knowledge of navigation, were compelled to wait until their conquest of Gaul placed them within sight of this country.