

Further Excavations in the Roman house at Harpsden Wood, Henley-on-Thames

By COL. C. N. RIVERS-MOORE

IN the year 1909 some excavations were carried out in the garden of Harpsden Wood House, in the course of which parts of a Roman house, comprising a hypocaust and small rooms connected with it were disclosed.¹ This work came to an end at the boundary fence of Harpsden Wood House garden, but it was evident that some walls continued over this line on to the Henley Golf Course. In the spring of 1951 Mr. Stanley Day, who lives in the adjoining house known as Harpsden Wood End, together with his nephew, made a trial cutting on the edge of the Golf Course, and south of the earlier excavation and almost immediately came upon foundations associated with Roman tiles and pottery. He thereupon obtained permission of the Golf Club Committee to make further explorations and invited the writer to organize the work.²

Digging took place throughout the spring and summer, mainly during week-ends, and the results are indicated on the plan accompanying this report. Unfortunately it transpired that the first owners of Harpsden Wood House had cut a ditch on their boundary and placed a sunken fence within it, and this ditch passed right through the Roman site and completely obliterated much of the foundation. It also appeared that a considerable amount of indiscriminate excavation had occurred in the past, of which no report can be found. The actual finds made in 1909, which were originally kept in a small local museum on the site, were scattered and lost when the property changed hands.

The Site. The site of the house lies on the almost level crest of Harpsden Wood hill, with a slight fall towards the north and then an abrupt drop to the Harpsden valley. A thin layer of soil with grass overlies a layer of about 12 to 18 inches of pebble gravel which is probably the oldest of drift deposits, consisting of rounded flints and much veined quartz. This bed appears to cover the chalk, and its character is different from the 'clay with flints' found on the high ground north and west of Henley. Below the gravel is a layer of hard

¹ *Arch. Journal*, LXVIII (1911), 43 ff. See also *V.C.H. Oxon.*, I, 323 f., summarizing the 1909 work and referring to further excavations by Dr. A. E. Peake in 1921, recorded in *Journ. Rom. Studies*, XI, 214.

² I am much indebted to all those who gave voluntary help in digging, to Mr. G. C. Boon, B.A., Archaeological Assistant at the Museum, Reading, for kindly reporting on the small finds, and to Mr. R. P. Wright for his note on the inscribed tile.

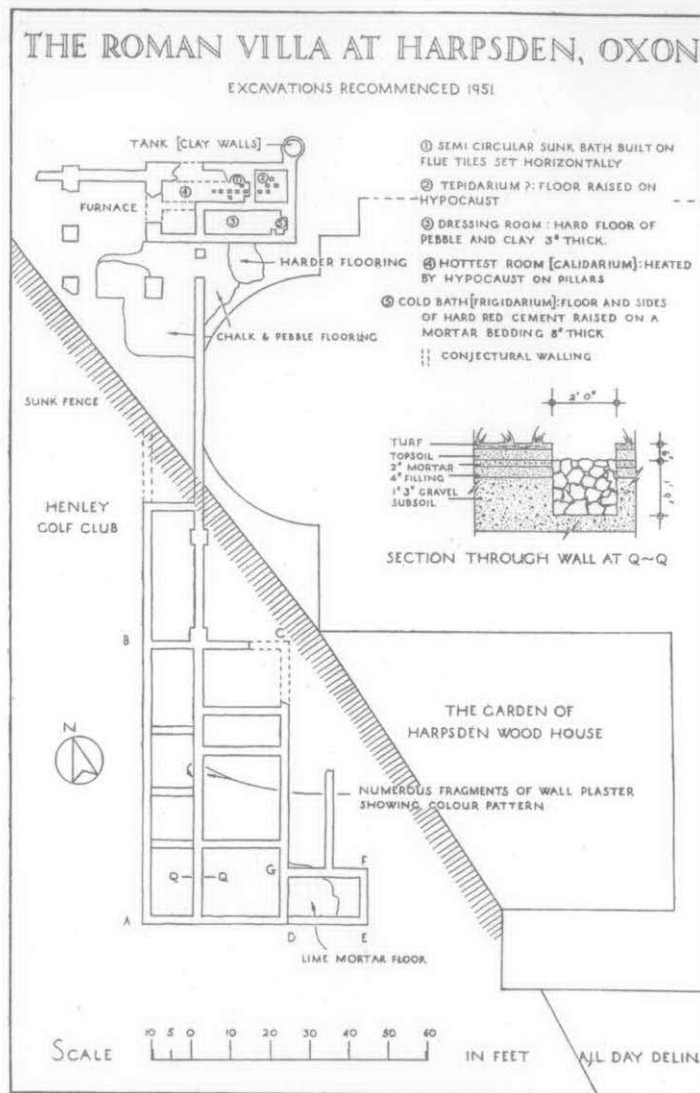


FIG. 11.
HARPSDEN WOOD, HENLEY, OXON.
Plan of Roman House (p. 25).

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clay and the subsoil is chalk. There is no water nearby, but a spring breaks out of the hill about a quarter of a mile to the east, near Harpsden Court.

The Structure. The walls are constructed of rough flints, laid in regular courses, set in a mortar of lime and sand. The principal outside angles are bonded with thick flat red tiles, 16 inches by 11 inches by $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches thick. The footings are laid on the gravel and only extend to a depth of about 12 inches below the floor levels. In a few places, possibly because the ground was soft, the footings are about 6 inches wider than the walls, which are about 18 inches thick in all cases. The walls have nowhere survived more than about two courses above the floors. The inner surfaces of the walls appear to have been plastered and coloured. Some are a plain magenta colour and others decorated with a variety of colours—red, mauve, pink and yellow. In places there was a black line on the yellow.

No trace was found of any kind of tessellated paving. All floors which have so far been cleared consist of sand and lime mortar and some, when first disclosed, appeared to have been coloured red. This colour rapidly disappeared after exposure to the sunlight. In places where the floors had sunk, it would seem that rough patches were made by bedding in odd tiles here and there. In one place a series of roofing tiles were laid edge to edge on the floor, with the rims turned upwards; this could hardly have been intended for walking upon, but may have served to carry away waste water.

The Plan (FIG. 11). The evidence suggests that in the first instance there was a rectangular block, ABCD on plan, with a corridor on the west side about 10 feet wide, which had a series of rooms opening from it. At some later date this corridor was divided by the addition of four cross walls, making separate rooms. Another room, DEFG, was also added later against the south-east corner of the building, as evidenced by the existence of a tile-bonded corner to the first block at the point marked D on plan. It is possible that there was another room, corresponding to this room at the north-east corner (C).

The corridor extended northwards to link up with the bath-house and hypocaust, but here the lay-out is lost owing to the ditch already referred to.

The writer believes that another wing of this villa must have existed, since the hypocaust is so far from the rooms now disclosed. A search has been made on the Golf Course to the north-west, but except for a small heap of roof tiles about 100 yards away, nothing was found. It is still possible that another set of rooms existed under the orchard of Harpsden Wood House to the east of the bath-block.

The plan of the block ABCD, or with two wings like DEFG connected by a corridor, is a common one in Romano-British houses. For examples see Ditchley, Oxon. (*Oxoniensia*, 1, 24 ff., fig. 9); Church Farm, Saunderton (in a

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very similar high position), *Rec. Bucks.*, XIII, 398; Terrick, Ellesborough, *Ibid.*, II (1858), 53; Lockleys, Welwyn, *Antiq. Journ.*, XVIII (1938), 339 ff.; Chenies, *R.C.H.M. Bucks.*, I, 9.

THE FINDS

By GEORGE C. BOON

- A. *Coins.* Six Roman coins were found in 1951 :
1. Carausius, A.D. 287-93. Antoninianus, much worn. M. and S. 880/2.
 2. Constantine I, A.D. 306-37. Slightly worn to worn. Coh. 21 TRS.
 3. Do., slightly worn. Coh. 17, PLG.
 4. Cast copy of above type, 15-mm., slightly worn.
 5. Constans or Constantius II, A.D. 337-50 or 337-61. Worn and defaced. Cf. Coh., Constans 176.
 6. Constantius II, A.D. 337-361. Fel. Temp. Reparatio (soldier and horseman type). Imitation, 14-mm., slightly worn to worn.

Six coins previously found, making twelve in all, are recorded in *Arch. Journ.*, LXVIII, 47-8. To judge from the coins the main incidence of occupation at Harpsden was from the late 3rd to the late 4th century A.D.

B. *Metal Objects.* A small number of metal objects was found of which the following, of iron, are noteworthy :

1. Knife or shears blade, with short length of spirally-twisted tang or shank.
2. Figure-of-eight link from a horse-bit. (There is a complete example of this kind of bit in the Silchester collection in Reading Museum.)
3. Nail with a heavy cylindrical head. ? Roman.

C. *Pottery.* No pieces occurred in a stratified or sealed position. There was a little imitation Samian, but no genuine Samian and no rosette-stamped or maroon vitreous-glazed ware of the late period of activity in the New Forest potteries. A few fragments of Castor ware occurred.

Of coarse wares, the most interesting is a series of ring-necked jars, cooking jars, wide-mouthed and flanged bowls, and shallow pie-dishes occurring in a light to dark grey fabric of two main sorts :

- (a) Very hard, rather coarse, sandy paste, with or without a thin slip containing small lumps of clay producing a warty appearance. The slip is confined to the upper parts of bowls and jars, and is unevenly applied.

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(b) Similar, but the paste is more refined. The slip mentioned above does not appear.

Vessels of this fabric have been smoothed and some show polished reserved bands. Decoration is sparse, being confined to thumb-nail notching of the lower edge of rims. The shallow dishes may exhibit one or two grooves just below the rim, and they have a sharp angle at the junction of sides and base.

This pottery does not seem to occur in any quantity at the neighbouring Hambleden (Yewden) villa, and as far as I can discover is not known from other local sites. Two wasters found at Harpsden may perhaps suggest that the kiln producing this ware is to be located near the villa, though wasters commonly occur on Roman sites and do not necessarily indicate the proximity of a kiln.

Of slightly different fabric from the above is a melon-shaped flask about $8\frac{1}{4}$ inches high and 7 inches in greatest girth, bearing decoration in the form of two narrow bands of wavy and dotted comb-pattern demarcated by broad groovings at top and bottom.

There is at Harpsden an almost total absence of the common black-ware cooking-jar with markedly everted cavetto rim and trellis-patterned body; indeed black ware as a whole is uncommon and may not have been current in the district.

All the finds are preserved by Mr. S. L. Day at his house, Harpsden Wood End, adjacent to the villa.

A NOTE ON AN INSCRIBED TILE FROM THE HOUSE

By R. P. WRIGHT

A *tegula*, or roofing tile, 15 in. long by 12 in. wide, which was incorporated in one of the walls, was unfortunately removed and broken up by unauthorized finders after the work was suspended; but most of the fragments have been retrieved from the finders by Mr. D. J. Nicholls, who was a schoolboy assistant on the dig, and pieced together at Reading Museum, whence Mr. G. C. Boon kindly sent me full details and a photograph on which this note is based.

Before firing the name DATIVS was cut across the tile with a stick. Below the name occur much shallower marks, resembling IT, and cut, perhaps by a second person, with the stick used for scoring *Datius*; they seem, however, to belong to a random group of marks still lower on the tile. A dog later placed two paw-marks on the wet tile.

The *cognomen* *Datius* occurs on the tombstone (*ILS* 2864, *CIL* x 3483) of L. Fulvius *Datius*, an under-pilot from Misenum, on a tombstone at Plasencia in Spain set up (*CIL* II 830) by L. Aelius *Datius*, and on the ware of a Rheinzabern potter (see F. Oswald, *Stamps on Terra Sigillata*, p. 103).