

THE LIPPEN WOOD ROMAN VILLA, WEST MEON,
HANTS.

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Little Lippen Wood stands on a hillside which slopes sharply to the west, about a mile from West Meon. It has long been thought to conceal a Roman building. Bricks and other Roman *debris* have been noticed freely in its eastern part: some diggings made once by Dr. Earl, of Winchester, yielded Roman potsherds, and Mr. Haverfield, who visited the site and saw the remains, admitted it among the villas and rural dwellings of Hampshire in the *Victoria County History*.

In 1904, I determined to attempt excavation, and this year, by the kindness and generous help of the owner of the wood—Mr. D. Meinertzhagen of Brockwood Park—I was able to uncover some part of a substantial house. The general area examined extends about 150 feet from north to south, and 50 feet from east to west; but parts of this are still untrenched. At the north end of this area I found a block of six rooms, of which four had tessellated floors. This block is, I think, completely excavated on the north and west, but it may extend further east and south. Of the individual rooms in it, No. 1. (10 × 33 feet) paved plainly with red-brick tesserae, is perhaps too broad to form a passage. As a sleeper wall underlies the tesserae at 10 feet from its west end, it may have been divided up by folding doors or other partition. A base of a moulded column *in situ* (13 inches diameter), with red paint adhering and traces of a similar column opposite (see plan) indicate a doorway leading to Room 2.

Room 2. (11 × 10 feet) approached by this door, is paved like Room 1, but the red tesserae are bordered by

a 4-inch strip of white ones. Its three inner partitions are sleeper walls, indicating that, as in Room 1, folding-doors, or perhaps curtains, may have separated it from the three rooms, 1, 3, and 4, leading out of it.

Room 3. ($11 \times 21\frac{1}{2}$ feet) running north from 2 was floored with a somewhat elaborate mosaic of geometrical pattern of red, black, white and blue, centering in an octagon panel which may have contained a figure, but is wholly destroyed.

On the other side of Room 2. is another, Room 4. (11×19 feet) also floored with mosaic, in this case wholly geometrical, in red, white and black. The pavement, which is very perfect, has sunk considerably, and perhaps lies over a hypocaust. As it will probably be taken up, I left the examination of this detail till that occurs. In both 3 and 4, the red and black tesserae are due to firing, the blue is lias, the white a hard chalk. Of the other two rooms, 5 and 6, there is little to say. Even their dimensions are not all certain, but the evidence of flooring and roof-tiles seems to prove that they were rooms.

At the other (south) end of the excavated area was found another block of continuous building, a hypocaust consisting of two chambers, each fitted with an apse on its west side, and floored with brick tiles (11×16 inches). The *pilae* of the hypocaust are fairly well preserved and are constructed of bricks (8 inches square). The east wall of the southern room is furnished by the slope of the hill smoothed and hardened, and this has been somewhat curiously used as a substitute for the lower parts of the *pilae* near it. (Fig. 1.)

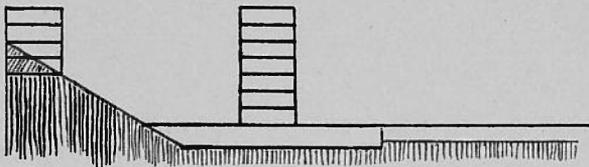


FIG. 1.—SECTION OF PILAE.

A thick transverse wall, which cuts across the two apses obliquely, seems to be a later insertion.

The relation between these two sets of building at the

north and south ends of our excavation has not yet been made clear. The west wall of the north rooms, which is backed at the end of Room 1. by a bricked buttress ($4\frac{1}{2}$ feet square, see plan), is certainly the outer wall of its part of the house. But it cannot be traced southwards so far as the hypocaust. The east wall is equally obscure. Two square blocks of sandstone, 10 feet apart (see plan) might represent the doorposts of a gateway into some courtyard, but this has not yet been excavated, and no wall can be traced on either side of the two stones. Nor is it possible as yet to bring into any coherence the traceable fragments of walling which I found on the east side of the hypocaust.

I do not think that the house extends much further than the area already touched. But further exploration is desirable to ascertain its proper plan. It may prove to be a small corridor house, or perhaps it may resemble the buildings at Clanville and Carisbrooke, both in the Hampshire region (*Victoria County History, Hants*, i, 296 and 316).

Finds of smaller objects were comparatively few, and do not include coins or other datable or important objects. But mention may be made of a deposit of charcoal, black earth, slag and rude potsherds found some hundred yards south-east of the house. The slag, examined by Dr. H. B. Baker, F.R.S., is iron slag, containing rather more iron than would be usual in modern slag. It may indicate some smithy, connected perhaps with the needs of the house, or of the neighbourhood. The iron worked in it may have been obtained from the Weald clay, which comes to within ten miles east of West Meon.