

ON THE ROMAN OCCUPATION OF BRITAIN.

By G. ESDAILE.

I should like to draw attention to a few facts respecting the Roman occupation of Britain, which have hitherto escaped notice, or been slightly passed over. In looking back some 2100 years no one will doubt but that this island of ours was occupied by a people called Britons; it is also universally admitted that they occupied the high ground of the country, and that they had to some extent fortified such inhabited centres.

It is also as certain that this country was invaded and ultimately conquered by the Romans. It will be fair to assume that the latter had some trouble in subduing the Britons, and that, as the Roman tactics involved the making of a camp for the housing and protection of the invading force, so we ought as fairly to assume that, for every British fastness we ought to find remains of the camp that took it, even if such were afterwards abandoned.

In many instances we know that the British town or city was occupied by the conquerors, who would then according to fixed rule rearrange the place to suit their own plans. This may be called a somewhat fanciful idea, but when we remember the Roman art of war, and take into account the number of towns or cities in Britain, ending with or compounded with *chester*, in some form, which number amounts in Domesday Book to no fewer than 119 (not including the Scottish *chesters*), we should admit the argument to the careful consideration which it thereby deserves. To this number of 119, many places will recur to us, such as York, undoubtedly Roman, but not included in the preceding category.

Having therefore shewn that 800 years ago there were at least 120 areas—in England alone—assumed to be Roman because of the coincidence of the name—I will proceed to shew from good authorities—Horsley, Scarth, Wright, Ecroyd Smith, Thompson of Leicester, Drake, and others, that in some of these places there were, or are still existing evidences of areas of Roman enclosure of great extent, for example, as—

at London,	Scarth's "Rom. Brit." p. 13.	3 miles round = 301 acres.
" Wroxeter,	" " Wright concurs	" "
" Cirencester,	" " p. 141.	2 miles in circuit = 140 acres.
" Silchester,	" " p. 144.	$1\frac{1}{2}$ miles " = 80 "
" Aldborough,	Horsley, p. 402.	$1\frac{1}{2}$ " = 80 "
" " Drake. the Walls	$1\frac{1}{2}$	" = 80 "
" " H. E. Smith, p. 13.	25,000 yds	" = 74 "
" Leicester,	Thompson, p. 3, gives the area as	120 "

If to all these measurements of net areas *within* the walls, be added 21 acres for the contents of the walls, the scarp, the fosse, and the counter-scarp, the gross area will be materially increased and it would also be necessary to bear in mind that the cincture of wall, scarp, fosse and counterscarp are integral parts of a camp.

Seeing, then, that we have these areas of undoubted Roman origin, and that some of them are of the sizes quoted, notably in excess of 86 acres, it is incumbent upon me to account for the origin of such inclosures.

In 43, A.D., *Claudius Caesar* directed *Aulus Plautius* to invade Britain, which he did, accompanied by four legions. The camp at this time was an oblong 2,320ft. long by 1,620ft. wide, with the angles slightly rounded. This we know from the works of *Frontinus* and *Hyginus* (Antwerp 1607, 1621, and Amsterdam 1660), where a description is given—and see also Smith's *Archæological Dictionary*, where the subject is fully entered into. Seeing that both *Hyginus* and *Frontinus* were military Engineers living in the earlier half of the first century, their statements must be accounted better evidence, both of what they planned and saw executed in Britain than *Polybius*, who flourished 206-124 B.C., or *Vegetius*, who lived in the fourth century.

Having named the authors or expounders of a new theory for the increased size of the camp, I will give some account of it in detail.

The area of the camp, as laid down by *Hyginus*, was of about 86 acres, and was a parallelogram of 2320 feet by 1620 feet—over all—*i.e.*, including the counterscarp, the fosse, the scarp, and the walls on the four sides. There were three gates—the *Praetorian*, the *Dexterior*, and *sinisterior Principalis*, each at a distance of about 765 feet from a central point (*groma*) in the *Via Principalis*; and a fourth gate—the *Decuman*, situate about 1465 feet from the *groma*.

At a point in the *Via Praetoria*, almost mid-way between the *groma* and the *Praetorian Gate* (advancing towards the latter) was situated the *Valetudinarium* on the left, and the *Veterinarium* on the right; and as the hygienic and curative methods of the Romans, to a great extent, consisted of bathing in its various forms, there should be found remains of buildings of the character of baths and hypocausts within the space allotted to the *Valetudinarium*.

On reference to the square camp of *Caesar*, the *Valetudinarium*, and the *Veterinarium* are both conspicuous by their absence.

I now propose to apply this fixed gauge of *Hyginus* to the following places, in which—to say the least—if the comparison is wrong, the coincidences are great almost to conviction:—

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| 1. Chester. | 7. Manchester. |
| 2. Bath. | 8. Devizes. |
| 3. Leicester. | 9. Easton Grey. |
| 4. Lincoln. | 10. Caerleon. |
| 5. Aldborough. | 11. York. |
| 6. Malmesbury. | 12. Alchester. |
| 13. The <i>Castra Praetoria</i> at Rome and the possible areas of the <i>Castra Penegrina</i> , and of a camp in " <i>Regio</i> " VI. | |

Commencing with **CHESTER**, which, being at the same time the most perfect of the walled cities of Britain, and having been the depôt of the

twentieth legion, may be assumed to be the best adapted for the experiment, it will be seen that the length of 2320 feet, and the breadth of 1620 feet are found in the distances from Newgate (Nova Porta) to the Phoenix Tower, and from the Phoenix Tower to Morgan's Mount, the parallelogram being completed by the erection of two perpendiculars on the given base lines respectively.

The East "gate" (modern) and the North "gate" (modern) are in the correct relative positions which the Roman gates should occupy. The city having been extended on the south and west, the "gates" on those sides do not now exist, but at the south, on the imaginary line from Newgate westward there have been discovered (in the Garden of the Probate Court, Whitefriars) the foundations of a wall 15 feet thick, confirming the supposition as to the line of wall at that end. The foundation of the north wall from Phoenix Tower to Morgan's Mount is acknowledged by all to be Roman work *in situ*. On the site of the *Valetudinarium* at the corner of Feather's Lane and Bridge Street (*Via Praetoria*) there has been discovered a hypocaust the remains of which are now deposited in the Water Tower Garden. This has been so often described that any enlargement upon it is needless.

At Bath.—The sites of the City gates (north, south, and east) occupy the same relative positions as the *Porta Praetoria*, the *Porta Dexterior*, *Porta Sinisterior Principialis* do in the scheme of *Hyginus*. So also on the same relative site is found the range of baths, the Hypocaust (No. 1) at the corner of York Street and Stall Street (*via Praetoria*) and the Hypocaust (No. 2) at the end of the range furthest from Stall Street. The earlier finds in connection with these Baths are noted by Drs. Spry and Sutherland in their respective works, and the latest in the pages of the Reports and Papers of the Local and County Antiquarian and Archæological Societies.

In Leicester, the remains of the Walls and the Hypocaust (Nichol's "Leic." vol. i, p. 11) found 1667-8, are also relatively placed with regard to the plan of *Hyginus*. The Hypocaust was found at the corner of Blackfriars Lane and High Cross Street (*via praetoria*).

At Lincoln, the remains of the walls on the east and south are also relatively situated with the Hypocaust found at the corner of Bail-gate (*Via Praetoria*), and the Exchequer Gate (Gough's Camden, ii, p. 257 (1739)). The sites of the South and East Gates are in the positions assumed by *Hyginus*. The "Newport" arch (*nova porta*) indicates a later Roman erection.

In Aldborough (*Isurium*) we find a space enclosed more than a mile and a half in compass (Horsley 402, Gough's Camden iii, 59). Drake (p. 24) gives an account of a find of the foundation Walls of a considerable building and the remains of flues &c.; we should be correct in assuming this to be a range of Baths with Hypocaust &c., as the site—Borough Hill—is in the correct relative position as regards distance, from the three points where the three gates should be—those gates being the *Porta Praetoria*, and the *dexterior* and *sinisterior principalis*—

In Malmesbury (the assumed *Bladonia* of Canon Jackson) the foundations of the mediæval walls of the town follow the presumed lines—and with the wall beneath the "Culver House"—enclose an area equal to that contained within the lines (2320 ft. × 1620 ft.) and situated approximately correctly, with the site of a Hypocaust recently removed

from the abbey grounds by the present owner. The erection of the Norman Castle, and its subsequent demolition, and the building on its site of the famous Abbey of Malmesbury, and the razing of that edifice, have effectually obliterated all traces of Roman occupation with the exception of the buried Hypocaust.

In Manchester where, from existing remains of walls and from evidence of the removal of others, in recent times, a similar area is shewn to have been enclosed. A Hypocaust, alluded to by Whitaker, and noted by Dr. John Haygarth as such, was found on the same relative site as that (No. 2) in Bath; its position also in accord with the distances from the assumed sites of the gates, at either extremity of the camp on the—*via principalis*.

In Devizes, an area equal in size to the camp of *Hyginus* can be found, and according to Stukeley the fosse had been filled up, and to use his own words, "I found they had made a road of the ditch in most parts round the town; but in several places both that and the vallum are visible enough and it took in the Castle, &c." In the local museum there is a drawing of a Tessellated Pavement, found recently in the cellars of the old Town Hall and still "*in situ*," this pavement is in the correct relative position with the Hypocaust in the *Valetudinarium* and of which it appears to be an integral part.

In Easton Grey, Wilts, we doubtless see the remains of the camp which formed the base of the operations against the British Fortress on the site of Malmesbury. It is bisected by the fosse road and by another road at right angles to the latter, and at the distances from the groma where we should look for the four gates we find a depression which outlines the position of the camp fosse. There are the remains of the later "barrack," which according to Sir R. Colt-Hoare measures 200 yards square. Approximately about the site of the *Valetudinarium* have been found portions of pavements and flues and pillars, leading to the supposition of the correct position of that building. But as there are three feet of rich black soil (said to be of burnt "material") overlying the area, the farmers are loth to have the surface disturbed.

In Caerleon—taking the unintentional testimony in favour of the scheme of *Hyginus*, I find in plan 2 of J. E. Lees' "Caerleon," London 1850—a block plan of the site of *Isea Silurum*; within the walls of which, an area is enclosed—*by the side walls of the breadth*—and such walls themselves are the correct distance apart to form the parallellogramic plan of *Hyginus*.

If part of the Castle mound be taken in to allow of a length of 2320ft. from the counterscarp of the ditch, furthest from the medieval castle, we find the remains of Hypocausts, marked *q*, *t*, *u*, and *w*, in the detail plan (Lee), amongst which remains and over, between, and amongst them, later Roman buildings have been erected, and such hypocaustal arrangement occupies the correct relative distance from the three sides mentioned, and it is of corresponding size to that given in the scheme of *Hyginus*.

In York, from Bootham Bar to the old course of the Fosse Dyke, we find the length of the camp of *Hyginus*; and from the city wall, adjoining Lord Mayor's Walk, to the city wall parallel with the Lendal, we have the width of the camp. In Stanegate and Groves Lane we find the line of the *Via Principalis*. Unfortunately Duncombe Street occupies the site of the *Valetudinarium*, and so precludes any search, except when the ground is broken to inspect or repair sewers, &c.

In Alcester there are inequalities in the ground—literally in heaps and hollows—following the lines of the walls and fosse, and the over-all circuit is about one mile-and-a-half.

The roads impinge on the sides of the camp at the right points, and on the site of the *Valitudinarium* have been found the remains of hypocaustal pillars.

Turning for a moment to Rome, the metropolis of the Roman world, and therefore best calculated to furnish evidence in support of the statement of *Hyginus* as to the size and shape of the camp called “*tertiata*.”

At Rome we find the agger of *Servius Tullius* enclosing the area of the city of that period. Outside that agger was afterwards placed the *Castra Praetoria*, which remained outside until A.D. 271, when *Aurelian* enclosed a large area beyond the fortifications of *Servius* and built his new wall up to the north and south sides of the *Praetorian* camp, leaving, however, about 400 yards of the camp extending beyond the walls, and which portion so projecting still exists. This obtruding part is nearly 1620 feet from north to south, and would be so entirely if the breadth of the counterscarp, fosse, and scarp were added, and from the east and stretching almost to the agger of *Servius*, we find the length about 2320 feet, the approximate length and breadth of the camp as laid down by *Hyginus*. *Constantine* (306-337) cleared away the *Praetorian* camp and removed those parts of the north and south walls, which are wanting to complete the sides; in so doing he would also remove the two gates, the *Porta Principalis dexterior* and the *Porta Principalis sinisterior*. In addition to the necessity of the abolition of these Janissaries of Rome, the demolition of the wall at the west end, and of the parts of the walls on the north and south sides of the *Praetorian* camp, would open up the new baths of *Diocletian*, erected some twenty years before, and so improve the appearance of the city.

As the design in originally placing the camp close to the city was to enable the Emperors to overawe the capital, so the point of danger would be at the west end, where we ought to expect to find the *Porta Praetoria*, but as all above-ground was cleared away by *Constantine*, we do not find any trace of it.

The *Via Principalis* would pass from north to south, across the camp, from the *Via Nomentana* to the *Via Tiburtina* of Bunsen.

In the thirteen instances I have cited, I have been enabled to give the position of the Hypocaust from printed or living testimony in eleven cases; in the remaining two I have but the coincidence that the walls are the identical distance apart to agree with the plan of the military Engineer of the first century, at which period they were all made.

Whilst, in the case of the *Castra Peregrina*, tradition and various writers name *Caeliomontana* as the quarter in which it was situated; on reference to any plan of Rome, but particularly to that of *Piranesi*, we find that the width of the “*Regio XII.*” is exactly the width laid down by *Hyginus*.

There is also in “*Regio VI.*” a length of the camp shown in the boundary of such “*Regio*” possibly pointing out the site of another camp.

I feel that attention has only to be directed to the subject to bring about a correction in one point, at least, of the education of our youth in the idea that Roman Legionary camps in Britain—were perfect squares—from and after A.D. 43.