

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE DISCOVERY OF A ROMAN  
VILLA IN THE GREETWELL FIELDS NEAR LINCOLN.<sup>1</sup>

By the REV. PRECENTOR VENABLES.

Although Lincoln was one of the chief military positions during the earlier period of the Roman occupation of Britain, and doubtless had its full complement of dignified officers and wealthy magistrates, who would share in the desire universally felt when men rise in the world, of escaping from "the smoke and din" of the crowded city, and building themselves a pleasantly situated country house in its vicinity, until a short time since no trace of any Roman villa had been brought to light in the immediate neighbourhood of Lincoln itself. Till recently the only villa known near Lincoln was that discovered in 1795 at Scampton, between five and six miles distant from the city, and described by Archdeacon Illingworth. The magnificent mosaic pavements at Horkstow and Roxby, and other places bordering on the Humber are much too distant to have had any direct connection with "Lindum Colonia." It is needless to state that the fact that until the last few years no remains of Roman villas have been discovered, and that even now they are restricted to a single example, is no evidence whatever of the non-existence of such buildings. The villa, of which the present paper affords a description, was brought to light by what we may call accident, in the course of digging for ironstone, and was not the result of any purposely directed archæological investigation. Many more may be hid beneath the surface, only waiting for some happy chance to unveil their beautiful and interesting features. In the words of the late Mr. Thomas Wright, "As these discoveries have generally been the result of accident there can be no doubt that we are only acquainted with a small number of the villas which were scattered over the soil of Britain."<sup>2</sup>

The villa now under consideration was first brought to light in 1884, and the small part then laid bare was

<sup>1</sup> Read at the Monthly Meeting of the  
Institute, February 3rd, 1892.

<sup>2</sup> "The Celt, the Roman and the  
Saxon," p. 244.

described in the *Archæological Journal* (Vol. xli, p. 321). It lies in what are known as the Greetwell Fields, a tract of pasture land stretching to the east of the city towards the little village of Greetwell, on the brow of the hill steeply running down to the valley of the Witham, about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles from the Minster. A rich bed of ironstone underlies the whole tract at some distance below the surface-soil and superincumbent strata, the removal of which, for the purpose of working the ore, led to this interesting discovery. The workmen when engaged in sinking a fresh mining shaft came upon the first traces of the villa, which further investigations more fully developed. The discovery then made as described by Dr. O'Neill,<sup>1</sup> of Lincoln, included a bathroom with a dado of tesserae going round the room, containing a bath between 3 ft. and 4 ft. in depth, a very deep well in an adjoining apartment; two long walls, 30 yards apart, and between them several chambers, with tessellated pavements and red tile flooring; and fragments of painted wall plaster well designed and executed. On one piece of plaster was the figure of a swallow, well drawn and painted. Dr. O'Neill says "the house must have been that of a Roman gentleman of taste and opulence. The site was well chosen with a direct southern exposure, but in consequence of the villa being built on the brow of a hill the lower rooms were on different planes. Doubtless, if careful diggings were extended on either side of the mining trench, other Roman discoveries of a valuable character might be made."

This last remark has been abundantly verified. The ironstone works having been subsequently transferred to another Company<sup>2</sup> the mining operations were carried on with greater vigour than previously, leading to more extensive discoveries.

Two years since the extension of the excavations to the westward of the site of the first discovery, laid bare a portion of the tessellated pavement of a plain pattern formed of red and white tesserae, previously described in this *Journal*. This, with a degree of promptitude we could wish were more common in municipal dignitaries, was taken up by the directions of the late Mayor, Mr. Edwin Pratt, and preserved for the future City Museum.

<sup>1</sup> See *Journal* xli, p. 321.

<sup>2</sup> The "Mid Lincolnshire Iron Company limited."

I am indebted to Mr. Benjamin Ramsden, the resident manager of the Ironstone works for a detailed account of the remains discovered, as well as for the ground plan which renders his report clearly intelligible. Mr. Ramsden has all along taken an intelligent interest in the investigations carried on by his workmen, and we are greatly indebted to him for preserving so full and accurate a record of the discovery.

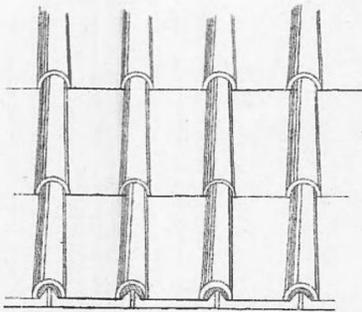
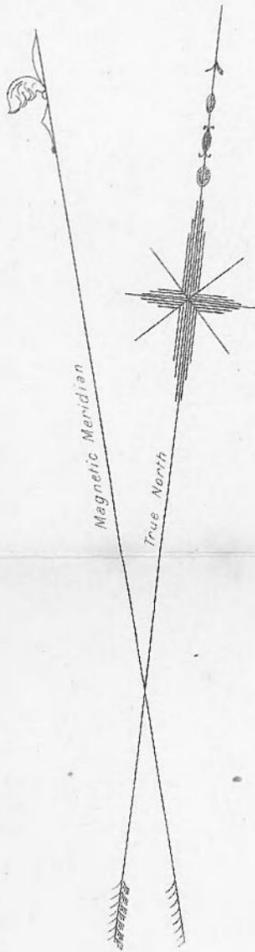
Mr. Ramsden says, that as already mentioned, the first portion of the Roman villa that was laid bare was the bath-room near to the well shewn on the plan (*A*). The floor of this room was of a salmon coloured concrete, its dimensions being about 28 feet by 10 feet. The bath itself had a small patch of tesserae remaining inside. The well was contiguous to the bath, and was about 18 feet deep, its inner diameter being about 3 ft. 6 in.

The next floor that the workmen came upon was that of a room (*B*) measuring 19 ft. by  $10\frac{1}{2}$  ft. It was paved with red tiles, each about a foot square, several of which have been carefully preserved.

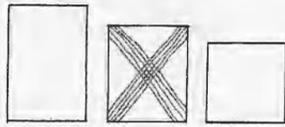
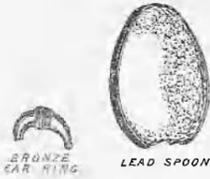
The men next discovered a long narrow corridor (*C*) running north and south, 30 ft. in length by 10 ft. in breadth. This was laid down in concrete with a perfectly smooth hard surface, without any tesserae. There was evidence of a fire having been kindled on this floor, and a considerable quantity of charcoal was found in the corridor.

Parallel with this corridor ran another (*D*) 33 ft. long by 8 ft. broad, at an elevation of about 18 in. above the corridor (*C*), with which it was connected by two concrete steps. This corridor had a tessellated pavement, with a border of red tiles  $11\frac{1}{2}$  in. square across the north end. The tesserae were formed of white limestone and red tile from 1 in. to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in. square. The red tesserae were arranged so as to form a hollow parallelogram or (heraldically speaking) an *orle* and a stripe running up the centre, each 9 in. wide, the stripe not reaching the *orle* by about a foot.

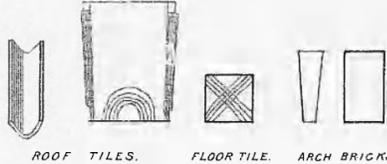
The next chamber brought to light (*E*) ran at right angles to the corridor (*D*) nearly due east of it, the breadth of the intervening wall, which had quite disappeared, being about 2 ft. The dimensions of this apartment were 27 ft. long by 10 ft. wide. The levels of (*D*) and (*E*) were



ROOFING TILES.

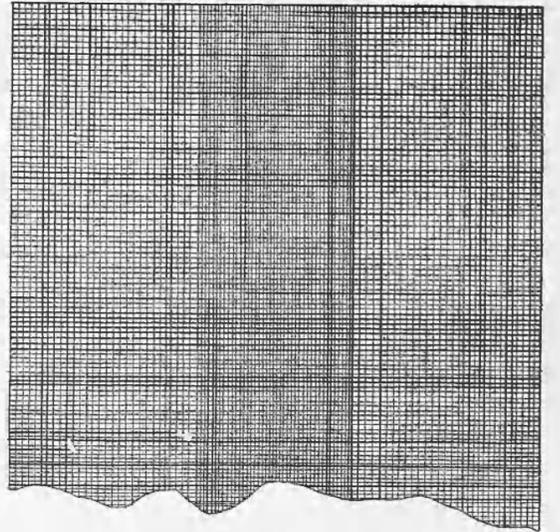


FLOOR TILES.



ROOF TILES. FLOOR TILE. ARCH BRICKS.

Scale Half an Inch to One Foot.

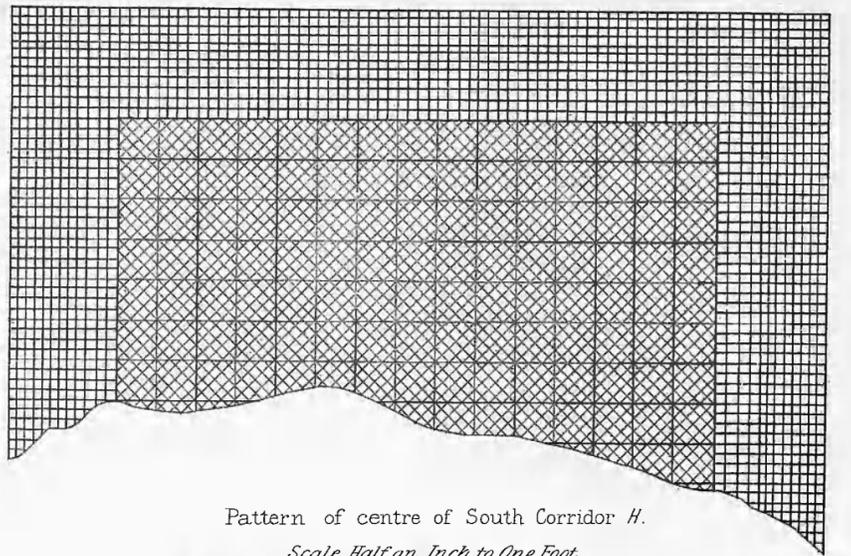


Pattern of Floor of North Corridor G

Scale Quarter of an Inch to One Foot.

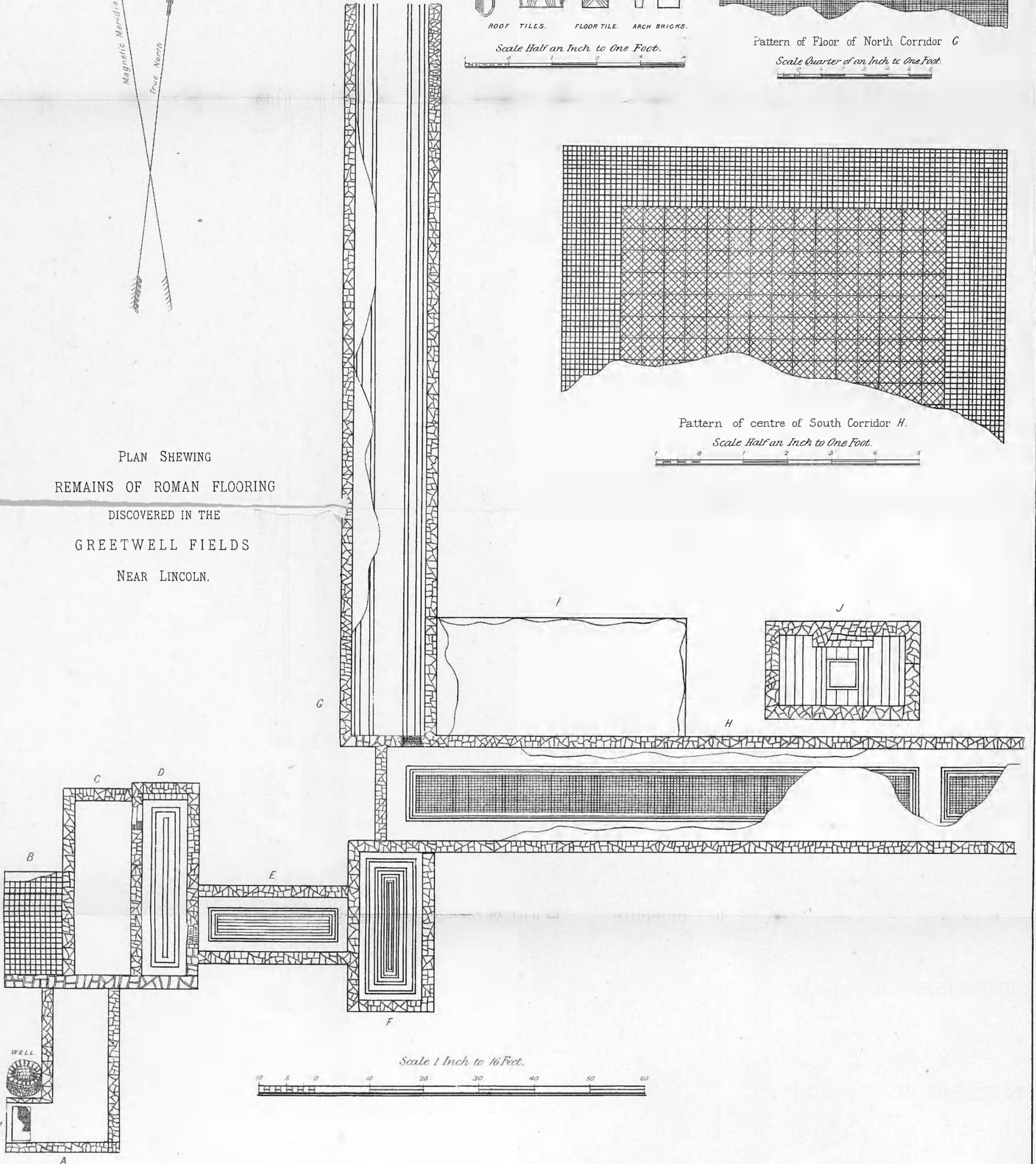
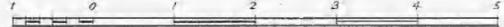


PLAN SHEWING  
REMAINS OF ROMAN FLOORING  
DISCOVERED IN THE  
GREETWELL FIELDS  
NEAR LINCOLN.



Pattern of centre of South Corridor H.

Scale Half an Inch to One Foot.



Scale 1 Inch to 16 Feet.



different, but the steps connecting the two were wanting. The floor of this room or corridor was also tessellated in red and white, the white tesserae being arranged in rectangular bands, one inside the other, of about 9 in. in breadth, and two longitudinal bands running up the centre.

At the east end of the apartment (*E*), and at right angles to it, the space of the wall of separation being about 18 inches, was the chamber (*F*), 27 ft. long by 11 ft. wide. The pavement exhibited four rectangular bands or orles, of red tesserae running all around the room, one inside the other, the remainder of the tesserae being of white limestone. This was succeeded by a very long corridor (*G*) of 132 ft. in length and 13 ft. in breadth, running north and south, bearing about 6° west from the true north. The floor had a gradual rise from south to north of about 6 ft. to suit the inclination of the ground. This corridor also had a tessellated pavement, the pattern of which was intricately worked. The centre of blue and white tesserae shewed the well known "key pattern," with red and white stripes running down the whole length on each side. It may be observed that the blue tesserae were of smaller size than the others, averaging not more than  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch square. It deserves notice that beneath this floor the workmen came upon another floor of concrete, about 8 inches below the former, extending for about three-fourths of the entire length of the corridor. This double plane of flooring, shewing evidence of alterations carried on in Roman times, while the villa was still inhabited, occurs at other places as at Woodchester.<sup>1</sup> In the present case it is plain that when the lower floor was laid down the villa was of smaller dimensions than it subsequently attained to.

The extremity of what may be termed the east corridor (*H*) was next reached, bearing 84° south of the true meridian. The tessellated pavement was laid bare for more than 100 ft. in length, with a breadth of 16 ft. 9 in. The full length of this corridor has not yet been reached in the excavations. The tessellated pavement differed widely from those of any other part of the villa as will be seen from the enlarged drawing. The floor of this corridor like that of the one previously mentioned was laid on an incline,

<sup>1</sup> Wright, *ut sup.* pp. 231, 232.

with a dip of 1 ft. 4 in. from west and east. The south end of the north corridor (*G*) abutted on the west end of the east corridor (*F*), but at an elevation above it of about 18 inches.

The floor marked (*I*) was next found, adjoining to that marked (*H*), and running parallel with it. Its original length was about 45 ft. and its breadth about 21 ft. It was floored with concrete which was considerably decayed. About 14 ft. east of (*I*) that marked (*J*) was discovered, and like the last running parallel with the corridor (*H*). Its dimensions were about 27 ft. long by 13 ft. broad. The tessellated floor had seven stripes of red tesserae, and eight stripes of white running north and south, varying in breadth from 9 in. to 2 ft. 6 in. There was also a square of white tesserae in the centre of the floor 4 ft. 6 in. across, bordered with a band of blue tesserae four inches wide.

A large quantity of roofing and flooring tiles were discovered dispersed over the site, exhibiting different kinds of marking. There were also found a lead spoon, a bronze earring, portions of a human skull, human and animal bones, and a large quantity of oyster shells, besides fragments of glass and black pottery, iron nails and other objects.

There were evidences of fires having been kindled on the floors in nearly all the rooms, and charcoal was plentiful.

There was a key brick found  $1\frac{7}{8}$  inches thick at one end by  $2\frac{7}{8}$  in. at the other end, 11 in. long by  $5\frac{1}{4}$  in. wide.

In nearly all the rooms fragments of wall-plaster were turned up painted in fresco of various colours.

It is a cause of much regret to me that in consequence of my absence from Lincoln last summer, I missed the opportunity of inspecting these interesting remains myself. That their destruction was unhappily rendered necessary by the progress of the Ironstone works, makes it a subject of congratulation that there was such a gentleman as Mr. Ramsden on the spot, able to give continuous attention to the progress of the discovery, and well qualified to record its features, and to lay down its plan with far greater clearness and accuracy than would have been possible for any non-professional person.