

Relics of the Roman Occupation, Little Chester, Derby.

BY JOHN WARD.



SEVERAL times within the last few years, broken pottery, coins, fragments of querns, &c., belonging to the above era have been found at Little Chester, the Roman Derventio, and have been duly recorded in the *Derbyshire Natural History and Archaeological Society's Journal*; but it will be observed in the sequel that much has been found that has not been recorded at all. Every year, with little doubt, many objects as above described are turned up in the gardens, or when digging to lay foundations, and most of these receive no notice whatever: an occasional coin finds its way into the box of odds and ends upon the cottage shelf, a worked stone ornaments a rockery, and the larger potsherds are broken up or thrown amongst the rubbish.

Such might have been the fate of a considerable quantity of broken pottery that some labourers turned up last August when digging at the Manor House farm (Mr. Dickens'), had not Mr. Keys, whose antiquarian interest in the locality is well known, heard, and with characteristic promptitude repaired to the spot, and recovered the "find." Subsequently he and the writer made a visit which led to the discovery that Mr. Dickens' neighbour, Mr. Mottram, had in his possession sundry coins, fragments of querns, various worked stones (one in particular most interesting), and a little broken pottery—all found at various times in his garden. He directed them to his uncle, Mr. Williams,

Duffield Road, who has quite a large collection of similar objects, mostly found when the foundations of the Great Northern Railway Company's bridge at Little Chester were laid. A recent visit of Mr. Keys to Little Chester, has led to the probable discovery of the Roman cemetery, across which he intends cutting a trench next Spring.

The POTTERY must first claim our attention. The beautiful Continental Samian ware, held in the highest repute by the Romans and the most widely diffused of their pottery, is represented in these "finds" by about twenty or thirty fragments. Several of these fragments have the usual "festoon and tassel" ornament, one has a draped female figure, another a winged Cupid—all, as usual, in relief. But the majority are quite plain, and obviously formed part of bowls and saucer-shaped vessels of graceful form and smooth sealing-wax-like surface.

A similar number of fragments, apparently of one make, are thin, porous, light in weight, sonorous when struck, dirty white in paste, and with semi-lustrous or waxy-looking surfaces, ranging in colour from a light ruddy chocolate to black, the tint often varying upon the same piece. Some are quite plain, others "engine-turned," or perhaps better expressed as hatched or milled, several have scroll patterns in relief, not moulded, however, like those of the Samian, but trailed on in slip, and one has a simple "frill" ornamentation. Many of these fragments belong to covered vessels, or rather boxes, elaborately "engine-turned." Mr. Williams has a large piece of one of the lids; it is slightly conical, about 8 inches in diameter, and was probably surmounted with a knob. No illustration of this class of vessel is given in Jewitt's *Ceramic Art of Great Britain*, but there is one in his *Grave Mounds and their Contents* (fig. 268). The rest seem to have belonged to tall vase-like vessels, one at least being "indented"—that is, with its sides *pushed in* when still plastic, to form undulations or flutings round the body of the vessel. "There is nothing new under the sun"—the writer is informed that a firm of potters not many miles from this town have a patent for this very process!

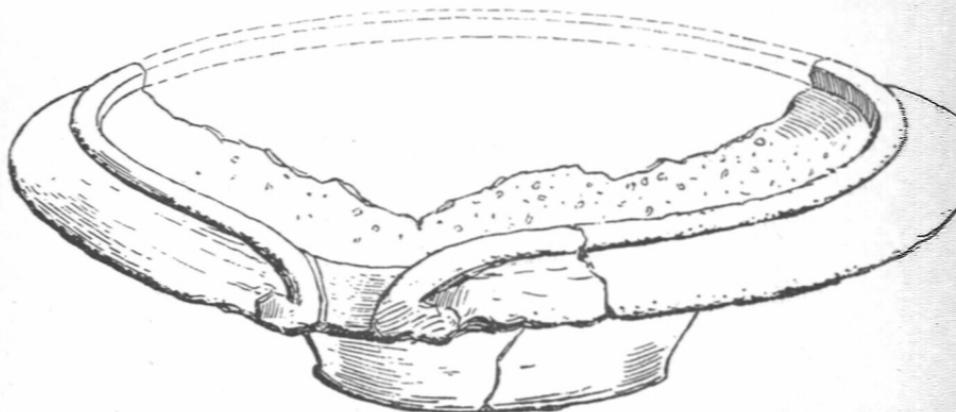
Several fragments of beautifully finished, thin and highly lustrous ware were found at the farm. Two belonged to an indented vessel (similar to fig. 172 *Ceramic Art*) of close red paste with horizontal lines of "hatched" work. Two others, one scarcely $\frac{1}{16}$ inch in thickness and delicately "hatched," belonging to a small globular vessel, and the other thicker and belonging to a narrow-necked one, are of close blackish paste and with a highly lustrous dark grey surface.

Pottery of a thicker and softer build, not sonorous when struck, and black throughout, is strongly represented among the fragments. The colour is due to the process of the smother-kiln, several of which, described and illustrated in *Ceramic Art*, have been found upon the sites of the extensive Roman potteries at and around Castor, Northamptonshire. This process consisted in an arrangement for closing the flue at a certain stage of the firing, by which means the carbonaceous fumes of the fire, and those derived from the ground rye or wheat mixed with the clay of which the pottery was made, were pent up and caused to impregnate the contents of the kiln. The surface of this pottery is frequently smooth and with a sort of dull waxy gloss—evidently produced by a burnisher when the paste was almost dry: where the surface is roughish, as left by the wheel, it is generally ornamented by burnished, but not sunk lines—hence are only seen distinctly in certain lights. Most of the vessels of which they formed parts, seem to have been of elegant urn character with brims boldly curved outwards.

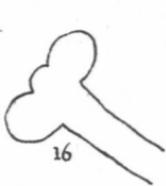
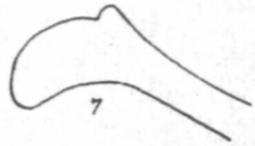
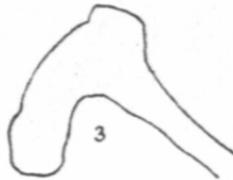
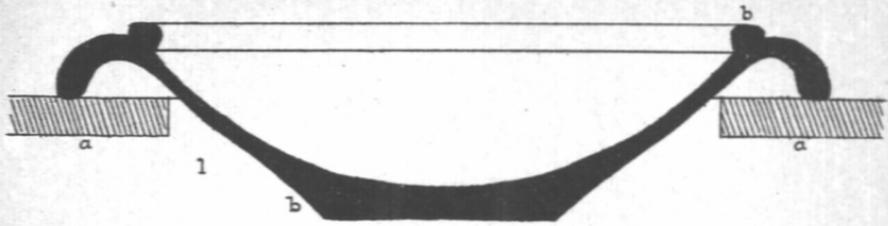
A coarser variety of this pottery is almost as plentiful. It is heavier, harder, and in colour approaching a black-grey. The surface is never smoothed as above. The vessels were larger, and apparently of similar shape, only their brims, while curving outwards, were thick and bead-like.

But the larger proportion by far are a series ranging from white to buff or light red, of varying degrees of coarseness, but never so fine as the above mentioned kinds of pottery, nor so coarse as the common red to be described. The hardness and porosity, too, vary. There can be little doubt that most of these were made at the extensive Shropshire potteries; the rest elsewhere.

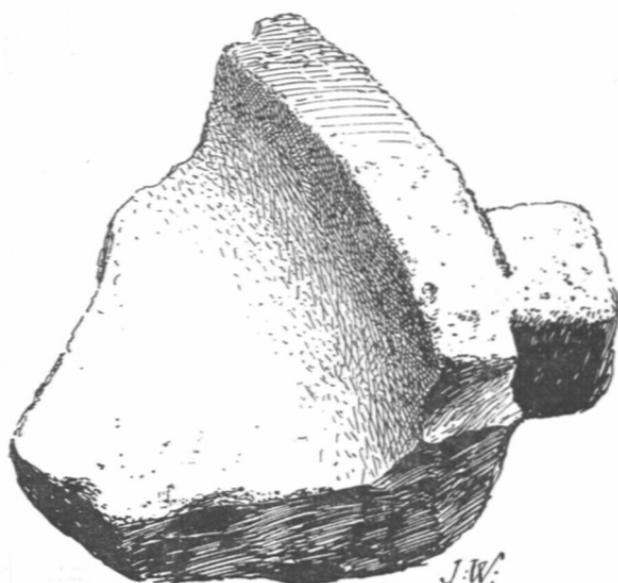
Fragments of ampullæ (the one-handed flask-shaped bottles or jugs generally found upon Roman sites) are plentiful amongst these potsherds. But most noticeable and numerous are the fragments of mortaria—the domestic mortars of the Romans, which, as the reader will see from the accompanying sketch



(a restoration of one from Little Chester in the possession of Mr. Williams), differed considerably from the modern ones. They were shallow; the internal surface was thickly studded with broken quartz or iron slag to aid the process of trituration; their brims were strong and peculiar, and had, or usually had, a spout. From the fact that pestles are never found it may be concluded that wooden ones were used. The character of the brims varied considerably, and as a large variety have been found at Little Chester, the writer thought it well worth the while to give a plate of sections (each being one-half the lineal measurement of the original) and notes: they may be of value to readers who make Roman pottery a special study. But first, the mortarium as a vessel in use. The small bottom and the heavy brim must have made it very unsteady and awkward when used, unless there were some additional means of supporting it. When the writer saw the fragment of a stone mortarium found at Little Chester



Roman Mortaria
 from Little Chester—
 Derby.
 Examples of Rims. J.W.



belonging to Mr. Williams, here sketched, it occurred to him that the brims of the earthenware ones may have fulfilled a similar function to that of the square projection on this fragment, which is undoubtedly Roman.* Probably it had three or four such projections when complete, and undoubtedly their function, like that of the rounded projections of the modern pharmacist's marble mortar, was to hold the utensil in place when *let into a bench or table*. In the earthenware mortaria the brims would admirably serve a similar purpose, and æsthetically were well adapted for it.

Fig. 1, plate vii., will explain the arrangement; *a, a*, represent the table top in section, and *b, b*, that of the mortarium let into it, the brim ledging upon the edge of the table top round the hole, and thus furnishing a firm and steady support to the vessel. The usefulness of such an utensil, fixed in such a manner, is so

* Fragments of similar stone mortaria have been found associated with Roman remains in the City of London.

obvious that the wonder is that some enterprising potter has not long ago re-introduced it.

The mortaria brim-sections shown on the plate fall into two classes—the curve and its derivatives, and the double flange. Of the former, Fig. 2 may be regarded as the perfect type; and of the latter, Figs. 9, 12, and 17 are the simplest forms. In the following list the inches refer to the external diameters of the vessels. Interiors of all, with two exceptions, studded with iron slag.

Fig. 2.— $10\frac{1}{2}$ in.; coarse, heavy, light buff. Other fragments similar, upon two the makers' names are slightly impressed, but now almost illegible.

Fig. 3.— $11\frac{3}{4}$ in.; heavy, light buff. This refers to the almost perfect vessel sketched above. Another fragment belonged to a larger vessel. A third, $11\frac{3}{4}$ in.; fine and light in weight, a well defined bead at lower edge.

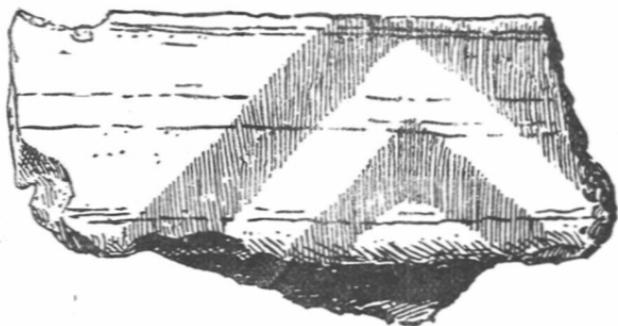
Fig. 4.—11 in.; well finished, fine, smooth surface, light in weight. Another fragment, rough, whitish. A third, moderately well-finished, light in weight, light buff.

Fig. 5.— $8\frac{2}{3}$ in.; coarse, heavy, dirty buff; peculiar in shape, and in having a name, VIVIVIS (but the final letter is doubtful—perhaps it is not a letter at all), in an irregular cartouch of some chocolate-coloured pigment. Fig. 2, plate vi., is the exact size of original. Unlike the usual method of impressing the maker's name with a die this was moulded by hand, and hence it may be concluded that it is the purchaser's name. This fragment has been submitted to Mr. Augustus Franks, of the British Museum, to the Editor of this journal, and to the Rev. Canon Raine, of York, all of whom concur that the inscription is unique.

Fig. 6.—Well-finished, whitish; studded with broken quartz. A very unusual shape.

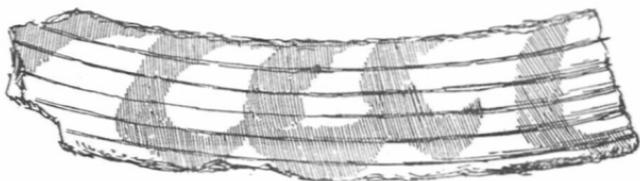
Fig. 7.—11 in.; well-finished, whitish, sandy. Mr. Williams has many fragments of this section, apparently all of one vessel, which possibly was not a mortarium, as its inner surface is not studded.

Fig. 8.—Fine, whitish, light in weight; on the face a double



zig-zag pattern in red pigment.*

Fig. 9.— $1\frac{3}{4}$ in.; coarse, rough, whitish; the face ribbed longitudinally and having a rude pattern of curved bands in



similar colour as above. A similar fragment, $7\frac{1}{2}$ in.; light in weight, porous, and well-finished; ribs indistinct; no pattern.

Fig. 10.— $10\frac{1}{4}$ in.; coarse, heavy, yellow, vertically striped with red bands.

Fig. 11.—9 in. compact, dirty buff; obliquely striped as above.

Fig. 12.—9 in. rather coarse, light buff, beaded along upper edge. Another fragment, similar, $7\frac{1}{2}$ in., slightly ribbed.

Figs. 13, 15, 16, and other fragments, all belonging to vessels ranging from 9 in. to $10\frac{1}{2}$ in.; faces ribbed, sometimes strongly so, as in Fig. 15; coarse, heavy and yellow.

Fig. 17.—Well-finished, light in weight, whitish.

In general character, the pastes of the second class, with the

* This illustration, and all the following ones except the next, are somewhat larger than the objects to which they refer. It was the writer's intention that the sketches should be reduced for the press.

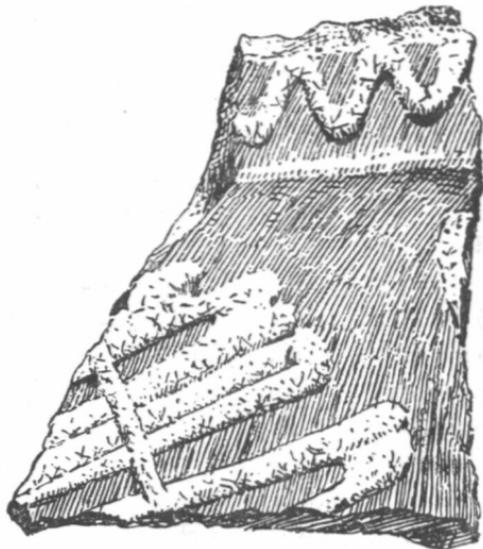
exception of Figs. 8 and 17, are heavy and yellow when compared with those of the first class.

Of a coarse sandy variety of this light coloured ware are a considerable number of fragments of amphoræ, the large, round or pointed-bottomed, two-handled vases used by the Romans for wine, oil, or honey. Upon the handles of several are impressed the makers' names, fig. 3, plate vi. being the most distinct.

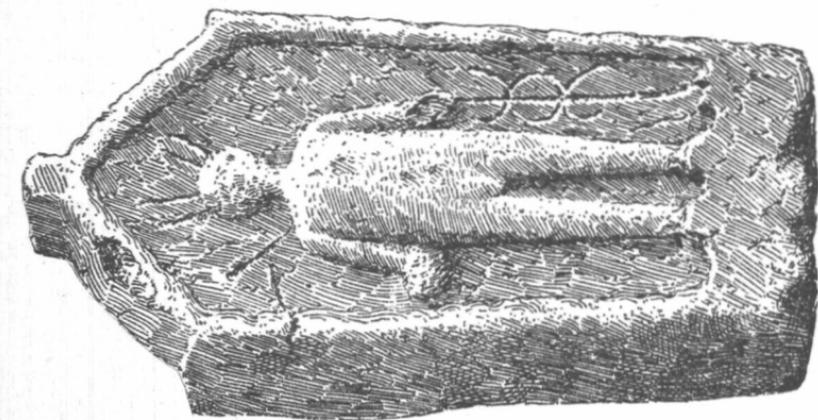
Several fragments of pottery are roughly glazed—the glaze being in each case of a greenish colour. Several pieces of glass of similar colour are probably Roman.

There are abundant fragments of the common red pottery. They need no further remark beyond that they represent a variety of vessels—all large.

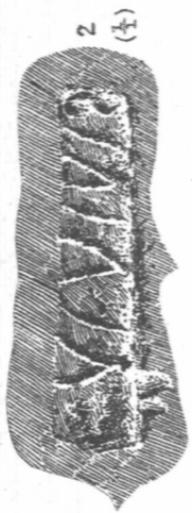
Amongst Mr. Williams' pottery are several interesting pieces of 17th or 18th century pottery, which deserve a passing notice. Their paste is reddish; surfaces highly glazed. The ornamentation was made by trailing or dropping thin slips of another colour upon the surface of the article. In the first of the accompanying



sketches the ground is chocolate, and the ornaments (which are much raised) are yellow and the glaze is much "crazed." In



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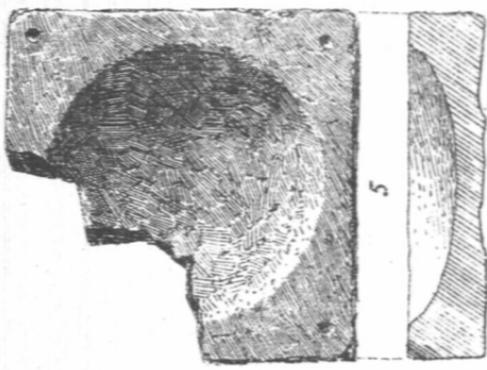


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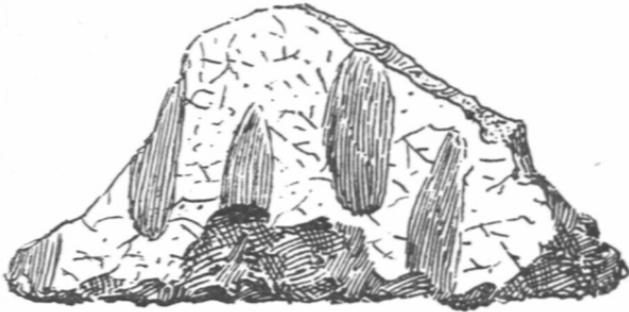
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6

Objects from
Little Chester. J.W.

the second sketch, the ornamentation was produced by drops of slip, and are dark upon a light ground. Similar pottery, made



at Tickenhall, Derbyshire, is described in *Ceramic Art*.

THE WORKED STONES. In Mr. Mottram's garden is to be seen much gritstone (its source to be entered into shortly), now thrown up into rockeries, and amongst it an occasional worked stone. The more pronounced of these are quern fragments. The upper stone given with section upon plate vi., fig. 4, is of hard gritstone, 15 inches in diameter, and from 2 to 3 inches in thickness. Its grinding surface is polished in places, and a concave as usual in querns of this period. It is clear that this stone was fitted into some mechanical arrangement for turning it, for on each side of the "eye," which is nearly 3 inches in diameter, is to be noticed the cuttings for a mill-rhine, and the excavation on the margin (seen on the plate) still further bears this out. There are other fragments of querns of very similar character, some beautifully finished, all having a general resemblance in shape to the perfect querns found upon the site of Uriconium, and now preserved at Shrewsbury. An upper-stone has the peculiar wedge-shaped slots radiating from the "eye," as noticed in the fragment from the Haddon Fields barrow, described a year ago in this Journal, the only difference being that this Little Chester stone is concave and thin. Fig. 6 is most puzzling. It is extremely nicely finished—no marks of a chisel are to be seen. It is difficult to understand how it could have been used as a mill-stone, for its diameter was only $8\frac{1}{2}$ or 9 in. Yet its lower surface is polished, and has the

concentric striations which indicate such an use. The reader will make out its peculiarities from the plate; the small holes near the edge (probably four in the perfect stone) are not deep. Fig. 5, is of very fine sandstone, about 9 in. square and of uncertain use.

But the most interesting relic of Roman Derventio is a carved stone (fig. 1, plate vi.) 20 in. high, square in transverse section—each face being $8\frac{1}{2}$ in. broad. The top is roof-like and keeled at the ridge, the front and back of the stone terminating upwards in a gable in consequence. On the front, which is surrounded by a bead-shaped rim, is depicted in relief a nude male figure, much worn like the rim, of rude workmanship but decidedly Roman spirit. This stone was found years ago near the river, and removed to a dark embowered rockery or fernery in Mr. Mottram's garden, where the writer first saw it. When it was brought into open daylight certain incised lines were visible upon its front, which when followed up proved to be the insignia of the god Mercury. His left hand rests upon the Caduceus—the winged wand entwined by serpents given him by Apollo. The wings cannot be traced: the serpents are conventionally represented by two semi-circles and intervening circle, intersected, of course, by the wand. Starting upwards from the head are two pairs of lines—the wings of the god's travelling hat. Over the right shoulder is an indistinct line, which may represent his magical sword. The right arm terminates in a lump, too large for the hand—evidently the purse, his attribute as god of traffic. All these, with the exception of the purse, are inconsistently rendered in grooves instead of raised work. In fact, the execution of the whole is such as to preclude its being the work of a mason. For this reason we must dismiss the idea that it may have adorned a public building. Rather, as representing the god in his capacity of patron of merchants, it may have presided over a Roman officina, or taberna or shop; if indeed it did not fulfil a less honourable duty, for this convenient god was also patron of thieves and pickpockets. And what better patron could these have had? Mercury, to use an expressive term, "bested" his superiors—he robbed Neptune of his trident, Venus of her

girdle, Mars of his sword, Vulcan of his tools, and almighty Jupiter himself of his sceptre ! He could make himself invisible, take any form he wished, outstrip the gods in speed ! Invested with his power, the thief must succeed in his operations against frail *men* ; privileged with his favour, the merchant need have no longer a conscience as to short weights and broken contracts ! This stone is indeed a striking testimony of the superiority of Christianity over the Paganism it supplanted ; *now*, if men do these things, it is in spite of the ideal of their religion.

Besides the above worked stones, there is one, apparently a detail of a plinth, of decidedly Roman character, now used as the corner-stone of a wall in Mr. Dicken's yard. The writer has great pleasure in announcing that Mr. Keys has purchased the Mercury, and has offered it to the Derby Museum.

The COINS are, as might be expected, for the most part much defaced. Some, however, retain their original sharpness. A few of the latter have been decyphered from time to time for their present owners, and the writer not having made a study of Roman coins, will confine himself to these statements of others hoping that by the time a further article upon Little Chester appears in this journal, the whole will have been re-examined by a competent person.

A silver coin, bearing the name "Constantinopolis," has on the reverse a figure of Victory standing on the prow of a ship, holding in one hand a spear and in the other a shield or wreath. Of small copper coins, one bears the inscription : "Antonin. Pius. Aug.;" another has on its reverse, "Urbs Romæ," with the figures of a wolf suckling Romulus and Remus ; another, a figure of Victory, with wreath and spear ; another, "Imp. Maximinus. Aug.," reverse, "Genio Pop. Rom.," with a draped figure holding a cornucopia and paten : another, "Constantinus Chlorus," reverse, two soldiers, and between them a standard. Another coin of a Constantine has on its reverse two standards and a wreath between two soldiers ; a brass one has a beautiful winged Victory with shield and spear, the head with helmet on the obverse, being of decided Greek type.

Several pieces of BRONZE must be noticed. One is an irregular piece of sheet bronze, hammered into a convex shape: it has been suggested that it formed the boss or umbo of a shield. Another, found by Mr. Williams with some of his pottery, is a curved thin strip, ranging from $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ in. broad, and about $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. long. It has been a handle attached to some vessel after the manner of that of a modern bucket. The ornamentation is simple, consisting of two borders of punched crescents and a bead, as sketch given.



In conclusion, it may be remarked that the pottery found on the Manor House Farm was associated with bones (chiefly of oxen), charcoal and blackish earth, forming a stratum several feet below the surface, and above it was a thin layer of gravel (a former path). The former may have been the contents of some Roman rubbish heap, laid down to

form a foundation for the gravel.

Since the above went to the press, it has been suggested more than once that the stone bearing the image of Mercury was a boundary stone, and that the keel-like ridge marked the boundary line. Hermes, the Greek equivalent of Mercury, was certainly their god of boundaries, but he was replaced in this respect by Terminus amongst the Romans. Boundary stones dedicated to the latter god seem to have been common. Perhaps some readers of this journal can throw light upon the matter.

Reference has been made to the rockeries in Mr. Mottram's garden. The stone of which they are constructed is from the foundations of a very thick wall running down the side of the garden. The well-constructed lower courses of the masonry of this wall are exposed in a neighbouring cellar. Mr. Keys thinks it is a portion of the Roman wall of Derventio.