

THE ROMAN SITE NEAR THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST. GILES AT ASHTEAD.

BY

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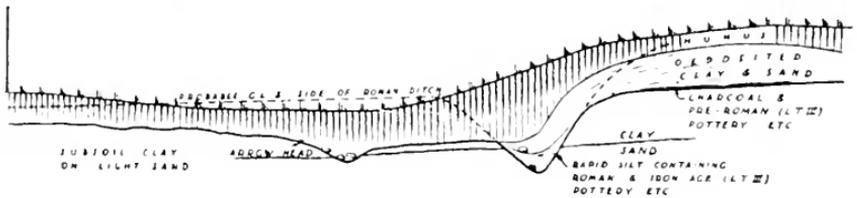
THERE are still many earthworks in different parts of the country which await scientific investigation, and whose date and purpose have only been guessed at from surface indications. Three of them are to be found within a few miles of each other in this the Copthorne Hundred of Surrey. Two are at Ashtead and one at Patchesham near Leatherhead, and all three are shown on the Ordnance Survey maps of this district and have been scheduled for preservation. The one on Ashtead Common (a triangular enclosure with an entrance at one corner, probably pre-Roman) like the one at Patchesham (rectangular and possibly medieval from its appearance) are merely termed "Camp," but the one beside the Parish Church at Ashtead is styled "Roman Camp" on the map though it is modified by the words "remains of" following it in brackets. It probably gained its title from the fact that Stane Street is known to have passed not more than half a mile to the south, possibly closer, according to what point it left the high ground on the Downs on its way towards Ewell. The presence of much Roman building material in the structure of the Church may have been partly responsible since there is nothing to be seen on the ground suggestive of a Roman Camp.

To the north-west of the church (plan, Fig. 1) is a broad and shallow ditch which follows a rather winding course for some distance in a north-easterly direction and then curves to the east, until it reaches the far side of the hill where it broadens out and comes to an end. This was evidently assumed to be the fosse limiting the "camp" in this direc-

EARTHWORK NEAR ASHTEAD PARISH CHURCH.



DATUM LEVEL, 2' ABOVE TOP OF PLINTH OF CHURCH



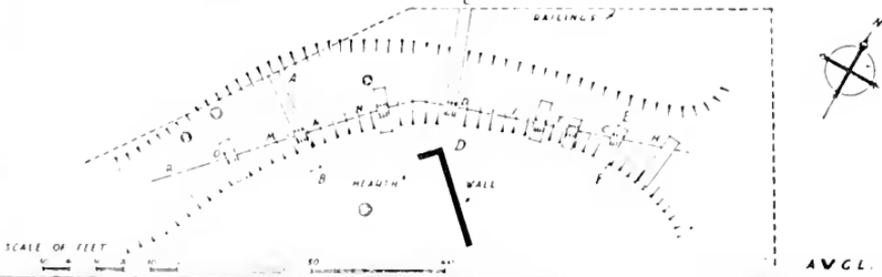
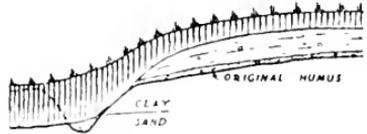
DATUM LEVEL



SITE PLAN.
FROM OS SHEET 2718
SCALE OF FEET 1:1000

NOTES
THE PROBABLE LINE OF STANE STREET IS HALF A MILE S.E. OF THE DITCH.
THE ROMAN BUILDINGS ON ASHTEAD COMMON ARE 1/4 MILE N.W. OF THE DITCH.
ROMAN POTTERY IS FOUND 150 FEET S. OF THIS POINT (24.12.1927)

DATUM LEVEL



The Site Plan (inset) is based on the Ordnance Survey Map with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office.

FIG. 1.

tion, while certain low banks beside the approach road to the church and round the original churchyard on its south side (evidently formed since the church was built) appear to have been taken as representing its south and south-west defences.

The Site.

The position of the site is shown on Fig. 1. Its relation to Roman sites in the neighbourhood is not shown here since it will appear on the revised Ordnance sheets for this district, which, I understand, will soon be available and will show the Roman buildings on Ashtead Common and the section of road leading to them, discovered in 1927. A prolongation of the line of this road beyond the farthest point to which it was traced (the Rye brook) suggests that it joined Stane Street at a point not far from the site under discussion. Evidence in favour of the road having continued along this line towards Stane Street is furnished by an estate map of 1638. On it is shown a strip of land bearing the name "Stony Croft" and lying on the line the road is believed to have followed, so that it is possible that the name of this plot is due to road metalling being encountered whenever it was ploughed.

The church is situated on a low ridge or hill spur running out from the Downs in a north-west direction and ending in a small wooded area (mainly oak) just outside the area being investigated. This latter area is on the crest of the ridge, and the ground falls away from it fairly rapidly on three sides. There is also a slight fall in the ground on the side towards the church, but excavation has shown that this is due to an artificial lowering of the ground level since the Roman period.

As regards subsoil, for the area being investigated and the whole of the north half of the churchyard, this consists of Tertiary clays and sand (Woolwich and Reading mottled clay and Thanet sand) overlying the chalk, the latter coming to the surface on a line with the church, close to which is a disused chalk quarry. Thus the beds of clay and sand thin out towards the south-east, but in the area of the excavations there is a depth of about 2 feet of yellow, red and green mottled clay overlying a considerable depth (10 feet or more) of sand.

Excavations.

The recent inclusion of the irregular ditch mentioned above, together with the land south of it, in an extension of the churchyard, made it advisable that excavations should be undertaken while it was still possible. With the consent of the Rector, the Rev. E. J. Austin, M.A., and with the permission of the Office of Works, and with a grant from this Society, excavations were carried out over a period of four weeks, partly during last and partly during the present year.

The part selected as most likely to furnish the required evidence was the north end of the shallow ditch (see plan) and the ground on its south side. Three cuts, A-B, C-D and E-F, formed the extent of the first part of the work and with the following results :—

Cut A-B (Fig. 1).

This, like the succeeding cuts, showed that the shallow ditch, visible on the surface, was dug subsequently to a small V-shaped ditch and had removed most of its outer lip and some of the silted material in it. The earlier ditch must have been, originally, about 4 feet deep and 7 feet wide, and the material thrown up to the south when it was dug overlay a thin black occupation layer consisting of charcoal containing small particles of calcined bone (? human) and pieces of La Tène pottery (Fig. 2, Nos. 1 and 2). Other pieces of similar ware, calcined flints and a piece of quern of coarse sandstone (Fig. 2, No. 9) were in the silt in this ditch, but with them, and in the "rapid silt" at the bottom of the ditch, were a few small pieces of Roman pottery (Fig. 2, Nos. 4, 5 and 6) including a small chip of Samian ware (a plain form, probably Dr. 18/31) all Ist-IIInd-c. types. The rapid silt also contained pieces of millstone of the imported volcanic (Andernach or Niedermendig) stone.

The later, shallow ditch produced evidence showing that it was in existence by the XVth-c., the iron arrowhead (Fig. 2, No. 10) and two iron hob-nails (?) (Fig. 2, Nos. 7 and 8) being found at the extreme bottom of it. (The arrowhead was lying horizontally and not directed at an angle, suggesting that it had not penetrated to the spot where it was found as the result of being fired into the air.) A slight depression in

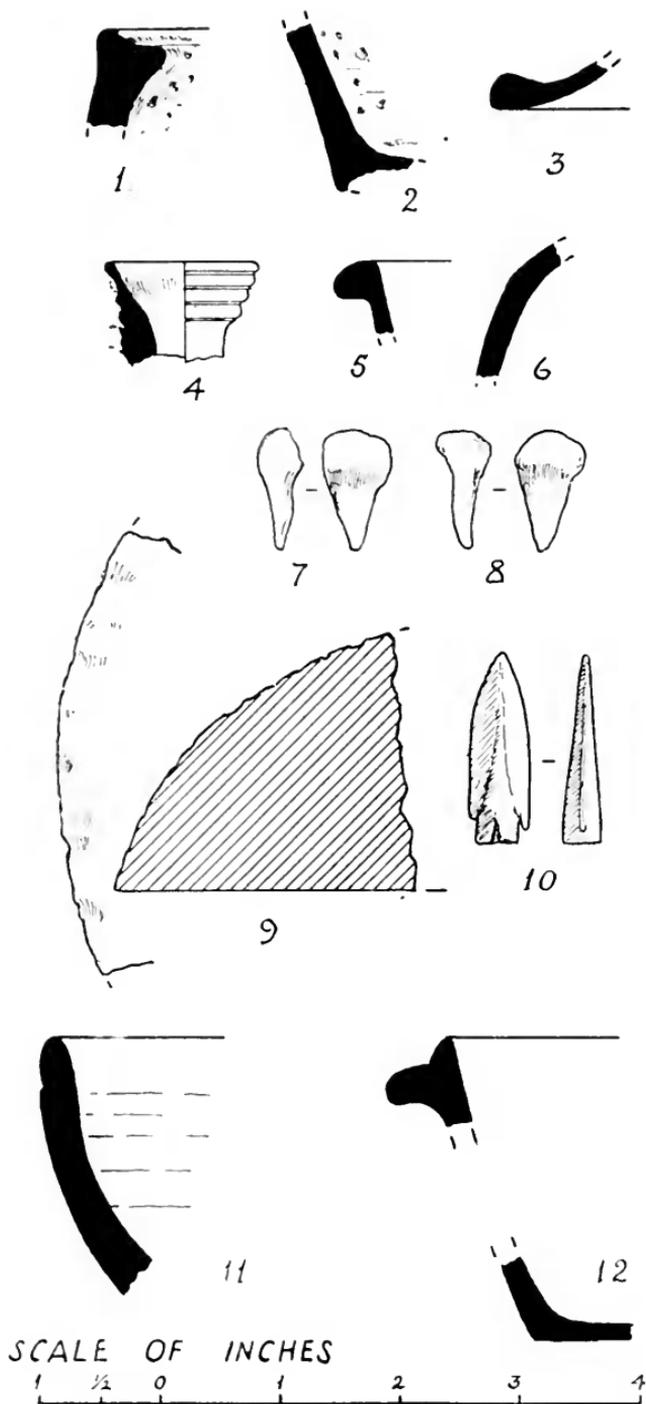


FIG. 2.

the bottom of the ditch had several large flints in it, and, judging from the results of the other sections, these were probably part of the material put in to form a rough metalled surface.

Cut C-D.

This cut repeated and amplified the results obtained from the last. The rough metalling at the bottom of the shallow ditch consisted of a layer of flints mixed with pieces of Roman tile and some small pieces of glazed medieval ware and an iron horse-shoe among it. On the old land surface below the heap-up from the Roman ditch were found a few pieces of heavily gritted (Iron Age A) ware, as well as a thin layer of charcoal, as found in the preceding cut. The ditch silt contained only two pieces of pottery, one a piece of L.T. III ware, the other, from the "rapid silt," a piece of Roman coarse ware (Fig. 2, No. 3, the rim of a pot-lid).

A few pieces of Roman tile were in the material heaped up when this ditch was formed.

Cut E-F.

At this point the later, shallow ditch had been carried right across the Roman ditch and cut into its south side.

The fortnight's work during the present year was divided into two parts, *viz.* (a) the making of further cuts to trace out the course of the V-shaped ditch, and (b) investigation of the area on its south (inner) side.

The results of (a) are best shown by the plan on Fig. 1. The ditch was found to angle obliquely in the centre of the remaining length (less than 200 feet) and to have been obliterated by the later ditch at either end. The silt (a very compact mixture of clay and sand) produced a few more pieces of Roman pottery and pieces of a bowl (Fig. 2, No. 11) came from the two adjoining cuts between C-D and E-F.

(b) Fifteen feet from the Roman ditch where exposed in cut C-D, was found the corner of a Roman building. It was represented by the robber trenches (sometimes referred to as "ghost walls," *e.g.* Verulamium) where the material that originally formed these walls had been quarried out along their line, and only mortar, broken tiles and loose flints had been

left to show the course that the wall had followed. (The mortar was typical Roman sand-lime mortar containing numerous chalk particles, and the impress of small pieces of chopped straw.) One wall line was traced for 38 feet without having any walls returning off it, the other for only 10 feet. In both cases subsequent lowering of the ground level prevented their being traced any further. They appear to have been 2 feet thick and represented only the foundation courses of the walls, being only 1 foot deep at the corner.

No flooring or floor basis had survived.

Just inside the line of the shorter of these walls, and hence presumably inside the building, was a small circular, bowl-shaped depression, about 6 inches deep at the centre and 2 feet in diameter. It had a heavily burnt clay lining and contained charcoal and calcined flints; filling the upper 3 inches was a layer of gravel. This is apparently part of a pre-Roman hearth or oven, probably contemporary with the L.T. III pottery referred to, and filled with gravel when the Roman building was erected over it.

Fig. 2, No. 12, shows part of a bowl of a late IIIrd-c. type (having the distinctive raised angular ridge along the top of the rim) found with the debris in one of the wall trenches.

Among the pieces of tile from these walls were many pieces of broken flue-tile which, from the mortar adhering to both faces, had been built into the walls and not employed here as flue-tiles. They had the same stamped designs on them as on the flue-tiles found *in situ* in the buildings on Ashtead Common (*S.A.C.*, XXXVII, p. 150, Pl. III, and, not figured, a design of wavy lines covering the whole face of the tile).

The few pieces of wall plaster which retain traces of colour show a thin green line (c. $\frac{3}{16}$ inch) on a plain white ground.

Conclusions.

The sequence of events is apparently as follows:—

There appears to have been a certain amount of pre-Roman occupation on this site, followed in the Roman period, by the digging of a V-section boundary or enclosure ditch, probably enclosing a polygonal area of unknown extent and having a low bank on its inner side. The few finds suggest a IIInd-c. date for this ditch though it may be later.

A Roman flint and tile built structure, possibly of late IIIrd-c. date and built of materials taken from the buildings on Ashtead Common about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the north-west (occupation there did not extend beyond A.D. 250). Only very slight evidence was found in support of the suggested dating for this building.

The cutting of a sunk trackway across the hill, in the XVth-c. or earlier, and consequent obliteration of most of the Roman ditch, though, in part, the scarp of the hill due to the Roman ditch seems to have influenced the direction taken by this trackway.

The point that is most certain is that, whatever the nature of the Roman building, it was quarried to the bottom of its foundations to provide materials for the building of the church. (Saxon windows, formed with Roman tiles, like those in the church at Fetcham, are recorded as being found when the N. wall of the Nave was demolished to form the North Transept during the last century. Roman tiles can be seen built into the walls in several places.) In the whole length of wall line explored, only at one point was any of it still in position, *viz.* just by the corner, where some three or four large flints were still *in situ* at the bottom of the foundation trench.

The position of these walls has been permanently marked out on the surface, some of the materials found having been used for this purpose.

DESCRIPTION OF THE POTTERY ON FIG. 2.

- Nos. 1 and 2.—Rim and base fragments of soft, red-brown "soapy-surfaced" ware, full of small cavities. La Tène III type.
- No. 3.—Rim of pot-lid of dark grey ware.
- No. 4.—Neck of a "screw-top" flagon. Red ware with cream-coloured slip surfacing. 1st-IIInd-c.
- No. 5.—Rim of bowl; dark grey ware. 1st-IIInd-c.
- No. 6.—Shoulder fragment of a vessel of gritty grey ware.
- No. 11.—Wall of a bowl of light grey ware with black surfacing. 1st-IIInd-c.
- No. 12.—Dish of smooth brownish-black ware. A late IIIrd-c form.