THE STROUD ROMAN VILLA, PETERSFIELD, HANTS.

Showing, with temporary notation, parts excavated June - August 1907.

R. M. Gurney, misc. art. del. 1907.
The Stroud is a tract of some two hundred acres which formerly comprised a common, lying a mile west of Petersfield, at one end of the long valley which stretches eastwards into Sussex as far as Midhurst and Petworth. Here, one field south from the Winchester road, lie the foundations of a large Romano-British villa of the Constantine period. East of it, in the valley, stretched the forest; north, south, and west above it rose the downs: an isolated little community, and in its position typical of the security of late-empire villa-life. South of it, at Rowland’s Castle, and just above it on the downs at Froxfield, similar foundations have been noticed; but here in the valley, where the forest ruled, the fact of their existence comes with some surprise.

The site is divided from the high-road by a field where eight years ago were found a lead coffin and a skeleton, said to be “Roman.” In the spring of last year I trenches the field behind and found the house, a large one of the courtyard type. One season’s work has partially laid bare two wings.

Situated on the Folkestone beds of clay and sand, brick and the local green sandstone are the main features of its masonry. There is no flint, and the walls are laid directly on pugged clay. The year’s excavations already show that we are dealing with more than one period of occupation, though it is not as yet possible to bring into any coherence the details of each structural change. As this is a preliminary report only, I will not enter into details of dimension, and the notation on the accompanying plan is not intended to be permanent.

To deal first with the north wing, Rooms 1–4, seem at one period to have formed the culinary department of the
house. No. 1 was paved with square tiles, No. 2 with red brick *tesserae*, on the top of which in the centre of the room was laid a tiled area cracked through and through with fire. Nos. 3 and 4 were evidently once a corridor dividing the eastern half of this wing from the living-rooms beyond, but a later cross-wall had cut off one end, forming, it seems, an extra small kitchen, for here a whole box-tile and much burnt matter, including three small cooking-vessels, were found. One of the vessels contained bones. Rooms 5, 6, and 7 were paved with red *tesserae*, those in No. 7 being very coarse. Part of a large quern had fallen and made a fracture in the floor of No. 6.

No. 8 was a very interesting room. It had once contained a hypocaust, but this had been put out of use. The flue-passage was blocked up, and the box-tiles used to reface its walls. No less than five of these were found intact, all placed *horizontally* along the wall.

This group of rooms was flanked on the south side by a wide corridor, paved with a patterned mosaic, so broken, however, that its design could not well be traced. It opened west into a large chamber (No. 10) which seems to have been the vestibule of this northern wing. Three hot-air ducts ran along the floor from the same fire which once heated the hypocaust in No. 8. But here, again, some added masonry had blocked the passage. This vestibule probably represented at one time the main entrance to the wing, and vestiges of an elaborate doorway can still be noticed in the shape of a wide sill, roughly levelled, with roofing-tiles, perhaps for carrying a stone slab, and flanked by two wide piers of masonry, foundations, doubtless, of a columned porch.

Starting from the southernmost pier, a wall led west for 35 feet, at which point it turned abruptly south; and 10 feet from the turn was the well-preserved sill of a narrow doorway, a postern gate, as it were, leading from the courtyard to the back premises, where already three pits have been discovered.

At fifty feet from the turn, another block of continuous masonry was found, which proved to be an elaborate group of bath-chambers, of which some half-dozen at present have been excavated: and the group shows no
signs of giving out. Here, again, alterations and additions are sufficiently evident as to prevent in this report any description of the group as a coherent whole. It is a labyrinth of many periods, whose mysteries another season's work will help to solve.

To take the rooms in detail, No. 11 was an arched passage and praefurnium, which fed the channelled hypocaust in No. 12, a chamber distinguished from the rest by the solidity and finish of its masonry. Its walls, as well as floor, were heated. A flight of steps at one time led out of it in its south-west corner and down again into the adjoining bath, No. 15.

Nos. 13 and 14 comprised a T-shaped praefurnium and bricked passage heating the chambers Nos. 15 and 16; of these, the former was an oblong bath, or possibly two baths, approached by steps, and lined with large brick tiles over a thick layer of opus signinum. It had a small oblong basin in its floor. No. 16 was a small semi-circular bath, heated by a hypocaust, of which some of the pilae are still in position. It seemed at first to be a separate block and added to the rest, but a comparison with other plans of Roman and Romano-British bath groups shows the arrangement to be not unusual. In fact, I am inclined to look upon it as the development of a standard plan. For the present, however, we may compare the plans of baths in the Chedworth Villa, Gloucester, and in the Brislington Villa, Somerset.

The side walls of this little bath projected in a somewhat curious manner. As buttresses, these projections seem superfluous, and I venture to suggest that they served as supports for a large tank of water to supply the bath below. No. 17 was a sunk tank paved with tiles, which were well laid on a thick bed of opus signinum. Its walls were of brick throughout and were coated with opus signinum and layers of red wall-plaster to a thickness of several inches. If this were a bath, as its floor and tank-like appearance seem to indicate, then the red paint was water-proof, for it continued to the floor. As a matter

1 The springs of this arch were of large flanged roofing-tiles, divided by mortar.
2 Archaeologia, lix, pl. ivii.
3 Vict. Co. Hist., Somerset, i, 304. See also plans of Roman villa at Colerne, Wilts (excavated 1854), Arch. Journ., xiii, 328, and at Apethorpe, Northants, Vict. Co. Hist., Northants, i, 191, though here there is no protruding apse.
of fact, during the heavy rains of last autumn, this plastering was submerged for many days and the colours took no harm. No. 18 in this group is not yet sufficiently excavated. It seems to have had an opus signinum floor. And No. 19 appears to be the beginning of another corridor.

Finds of smaller objects were frequent, and included more than twenty bronze coins, ranging in date from A.D. 270 to 350. Iron objects included a good door-key and some instruments found at the bottom of one of the baths; the latter have a slight curve in them and seem to be a rough kind of strigil.\(^1\) Pottery of the usual types were well represented, and included a fine New Forest vase, which has been completely restored. Samian sherds were rather rare. One small piece of Caistor was inscribed AE, the finals of a word. A piece of tile had the impress of a man's hand, and showed the mark of what seemed to be a heavy ring on one of the fingers. Glass fragments were numerous, mainly from the windows of the house, while animal bones and oyster shells were found in profusion. In addition to the two usual types of roofing-tile, this excavation has yielded a third kind, namely, a pentagonal slab of brick. These are made of an exceptionally good clay,\(^2\) and, from the fact that practically all of them were found built into walls, seem to have belonged to an early period of the occupation of the villa. In fact, all the evidence (though I speak with all reserve at this early stage of the excavation) points to a decadence rather than to an improvement in the successive stages in the architectural history of this house. The Stroud Villa, then, is a large one of the courtyard, and perhaps of the Brading type, and it is important that further exploration be made to ascertain its proper plan. This, if funds permit, will be carried out this year.

\(^1\) This suggestion is not supported by others who have seen them.  
\(^2\) None of them, however, are stamped.