

## ROMAN LONDON.

It has been suggested that notices of some of the features of Roman London, together with the various works of ancient art which, within its limits, during the last few years have been brought to light, might prove interesting and perhaps useful to such of our correspondents as may be engaged in researches on the early antiquities of our country, especially if the publications, in which from time to time, detailed accounts of the discoveries appeared, should not have fallen under their observation, or be conveniently accessible.

It must be obvious to all who consider the present condition of the metropolis of England, that great difficulties would beset any attempt to carry on a systematic exploration of the wreck and ruins of the ancient town, buried beneath the accumulated soil of centuries and the crowded masses of modern buildings. Under the most favourable circumstances such a project would encounter objections almost insurmountable; but when undertaken by individual zeal on a partial and confined scale, at uncertain times and places, whenever the earth may be excavated for public works, without assistance or countenance from the directors, and usually in contention with obstructions and annoyances of all kinds, it is fortunate, in such a state of things, should any discoveries be rendered available to the topographer and antiquary.

In the course of the last fifteen or twenty years, excavations, ordered by the Court of Common Council, and placed under the management of Committees elected from their own body, have been made throughout the city, for sewerage, for approaches to the New London Bridge, for foundations of houses in the new streets and in those which have been widened, as well as on the sites of churches destroyed, and on that of the Royal Exchange. These excavations penetrated to depths varying from twelve to thirty feet and more, and it is from opportunities thus accidentally afforded that some faint glimmerings have been obtained of rich stores of subterranean antiquities. Had the work been conducted in an intelligent as well as mechanical spirit, important antiquarian results would have been effected. Thus when a rich tessellated pave-

ment was discovered, the workmen should have been prohibited from breaking it up until at least drawings had been made. In many instances, at a trifling expense, the various rooms of a Roman building might have been opened, and plans and drawings made; the direction, width, and peculiarities of buildings recorded; and moreover and chiefly, as it is not to be expected that people, whose habits and pursuits do not qualify them to appreciate the use and value of works of ancient art, should of themselves promote antiquarian research, it is desirable that competent persons, willing to devote their time to investigations having a public and general object in view, should be at least permitted to do their best, free from hindrance and annoyance.

It would appear that the first settlement of the Romans was made on the banks of the Thames, about the centre of the present city. Whether they fixed on the spot from its natural advantages, or because the Britons had already established there a town as a medium of continental traffic, it is impossible to say; we have met with no remains indicative of a British town, nor works of art anterior to the Roman epoch.

The line of the Roman wall is well known, stretching from the Tower through the Minories to Aldgate, Houndsditch, Bishopsgate, along London Wall to Fore-street, through Cripplegate church-yard, thence between Monkwell-street and Castle-street to Aldersgate, through Christ's Hospital to Newgate and Ludgate towards the Thames. The erection of this wall was probably a work of the latter days of the Romano-British period. We refer to other evidence to shew that originally the bounds of the Roman town must have been confined within narrow compass on the rising ground bordering the river.

It is well known that respect for decency and regard for human health restrained the Romans from mixing up together the living and the dead. The offensive and pernicious modern practice of interring the dead within towns, contiguous to the abodes of the living, was never tolerated by the Romans, who made its prohibition effectual by legislative enactment. We find this custom adhered to in the provinces, and the burial-places belonging to most of their stations and towns in Britain have been discovered at a considerable distance from the habitations.

In various central parts of the city, imbedded in the

natural gravel, Roman skeletons have been found, accompanied with urns, coins, and other remains, which leave no doubt of the sepulchral character of the deposits. As late as within the last month several skeletons were discovered in King William-street, at the corner of St. Swithin's-lane, and with them fragments of pottery, and coins, in second brass of Antonia, Claudius, Nero, and Vespasian. As all the coins found under similar circumstances in the centre of the city are invariably of the Higher Empire, these interments we infer were made in early times, and probably soon after the time of the last named emperor, when no buildings stood near, and when the district was resorted to for the burial of the dead, as being remote from the town.

During the excavations made for the foundations of the New Royal Exchange, an ancient gravel-pit was opened. This pit was filled with rubbish, chiefly such as at the present day is thrown on waste places in the precincts of towns; dross from smithies, bones and horns of cows, sheep, and goats; ordure, broken pottery, old sandals, and fragments of leathern harness, oyster shells, and nearly a dozen coins, in second brass, of Vespasian and Domitian. Over the mouth of the pit had been spread a layer of gravel, upon which were the foundations of buildings, and a mass of masonry six feet square, two sides of which still retained portions of fresco-paintings with which they had been ornamented. Remains of buildings covered also the whole site of the present Exchange.

The pit itself is an interesting example of the gradual progress of Londinium. From this locality was gravel obtained for the flooring of buildings and various other purposes of the infant colony; but as the town increased in extent, it was abandoned, filled in, and subsequently, by an artificial stratum of gravel, adapted for buildings. Here coins are again useful as evidence. The only one obtained from this pit, besides those above mentioned, was a plated denarius of Severus, but the agents and servants of the *United Gresham and City Improvement Committees*, prevented my making those close and uninterrupted observations which otherwise would have enabled me to authenticate the exact position of the last coin. The fact of there not being found any coin of the century between the time of Domitian and that of Severus, would raise a doubt as to whether the specimen of the latter emperor may not have been in the vicinity of, rather than in the pit

itself. In antiquarian investigations much depends upon minute and careful observation : important conclusions result frequently from a connection of facts trivial in themselves but of importance when combined, and the record and registration of these facts can only be satisfactorily carried on under auspicious circumstances. Taking the coins of Vespasian and Domitian into consideration, we may infer that Londinium had considerably extended its bounds not long subsequently to the reign of the latter emperor ; but the presence of the coin of Severus suggests a later date, did not the absence of coins from Domitian to Severus, favour the supposition that this isolated specimen may have been found on some other part of the area excavated.

Roman London thus enlarged itself by degrees from the banks of the Thames towards Moorfields, and the line of the wall east and south. The sepulchral deposits alluded to confirm its growth ; others, at more remote distances, indicate posterior enlargements ; while interments discovered at Holborn, Finsbury, Whitechapel, and the extensive burial-places in Spitalfields and Goodman's Fields, denote that those localities were fixed on when Londinium, in process of time, had spread over the extensive space enclosed by the wall.

The vast moor and marsh lands on the north side of Londinium were unquestionably, by draining and embanking, rendered in part suitable for buildings, particularly the enclosed portion ; that beyond the wall, probably, retained until the last century much of its original character. Opposite Finsbury Circus, at the depth of nineteen feet, a well-turned Roman arch was discovered, at the entrance of which, on the Finsbury side, were iron bars placed apparently to restrain the sedge and weeds from choking the passage. In Prince's-street, on the west side of the Bank, in Lothbury, Token-house Yard, and the adjoining parts, the natural boggy soil descends to a great depth, but the superficial strata contain the remains of houses and their pavements. In many parts of this district wooden piles were driven through the unstable foundations into the natural gravel to form a solid substructure.

The mode of obtaining a sure foundation by means of piling, was as general on the bank of the river as in the marshy district above noticed. It was observed throughout Thames-street and Tower-street, and also on the Southwark side of the river. In the last-mentioned locality, when excavations

were made for the south wing of St. Thomas's Hospital, the foundations, walls, and pavements of a Roman house were discovered, which had been laid upon piles driven into the sand. On this side of the river there was evidence in the remains of buildings reaching almost close to its banks, that much ground had been reclaimed from subjection to periodical overflows of the river when its banks were low, straggling, and undefined.

These remarks involve the question whether Londinium was confined to the north side of the river. Discoveries of tessellated pavements on and about the site of St. Saviour's church, and other remains of buildings, pottery, lamps, glass vessels, and various domestic utensils and implements throughout the line of High-street, nearly as far as St. George's church, demonstrate the claims of a portion of the Southwark side of the Thames to be comprised within the bounds of Roman London; and these claims are further supported by an ancient extensive burial-ground discovered on the site of that now attached to the dissenters' chapel in Deverill-street, New Kent Road. When the approaches to the new bridge were being cut, an excellent opportunity was afforded for ascertaining at what point the Roman road from Kent did, or did not, reach the river; but the persons in authority over the works made no provision either for the preservation of the antiquities brought to light, or for instituting or even countenancing investigations, which, without impeding the progress of the excavations, might have furnished additional facts to clear up disputed points.

It may, for the present, be sufficient to adduce some arguments in support of the belief that the two divisions of Londinium had a connecting medium somewhere about the site of Old London Bridge. The uninterrupted possession of this locality by a succession of bridges up to the time of the Anglo-Saxons is well authenticated, and is of itself presumptive evidence of a prior erection. Dion Cassius<sup>a</sup>, who lived in the early part of the third century, when recording the invasion of Britain by Claudius, incidentally mentions a bridge over the Thames, and this notice, however indefinite as to locality, seems to determine the early existence of a bridge which the context may incline us to fix at or near London. Other considerations in favour of this opinion, are the extent, population,

<sup>a</sup> Lib. lx. sec. 20.

and commerce which Londinium then possessed. It was also the focus, to which converged the military roads, and the thoroughfare for troops from Gaul and Italy to the various stations in the northern parts of Britain. In such a town, situated as has been shewn, on both sides of the river, and to a people like the Romans, accustomed to facilitate communication with all parts of their provinces, as well as to adorn their towns with public works, a bridge would be much more indispensable than at such places as *Pontes, ad Pontem, Pons Ælii, Tripontium, Durolipons, &c.*, the etymology of which names shews that bridges were not uncommon in Britain.

That this presumptive evidence is supported by recent discoveries, I proceed to shew. Throughout the entire line of the old bridge, the bed of the river was found to contain ancient wooden piles; and when these piles, subsequently to the erection of the new bridge, were pulled up to deepen the channel of the river, many thousands of Roman coins, with abundance of broken Roman tiles and pottery, were discovered; and immediately beneath some of the central piles, brass medallions of Aurelius, Faustina, and Commodus. All these remains are indicative of a bridge. The enormous quantities of Roman coins may be accounted for by consideration of the well-known practice of the Romans to make these imperishable monuments subservient towards perpetuating the memory, not only of their conquests, but also of those public works which were the natural result of their successes in remote parts of the world. They may have been deposited either upon the building or repairs of the bridge, as well as upon the accession of a new emperor. The great rarity of medallions is corroborative of this opinion, for medallions were struck only for particular purposes. The beautiful works of art which were discovered alongside of the foundations of the old bridge,—the colossal bronze head of Hadrian, the bronze images of Apollo, Mercury, Atys, and other divinities, an extraordinary instrument ornamented with the heads of deities and animals<sup>b</sup>,—and other relics bearing direct reference to pagan mythology, were possibly thrown into the river by the early Christians in their zeal for obliterating all allusions to the old supplanted religion.

Some excavations made for sewers in Thames-street led to discoveries which confirm the truth of Fitz-Stephens' assertion

<sup>b</sup> It has been engraved, and published by the Society of Antiquaries, Archæologia,

vol. xxx. Engravings of the bronze images will be found in vol. xxviii.

that London was formerly walled on the water-side, and although in his time the wall was no longer standing, at least in an entire state, there was probably enough left to trace its course by. The cause of its destruction, this writer tells us, was the water; but it is difficult to conceive how the overthrow of a work of such solidity and strength could have been thus accomplished. This wall was first noticed at the foot of Lambeth hill, forming an angle with Thames-street, and extending, with occasional breaks, to Queenhithe; and some walling of similar character, probably a part of the above, has been noticed in Thames-street, opposite Queen-street. It was from eight to ten feet thick, and about eight deep, reckoning the top at nine feet from the present street level, and composed of rag-stone and flint, with alternate layers of red and yellow, plain and curve-edged tiles, cemented by mortar as firm and hard as the tiles, from which it could not be separated. For the foundation strong oaken piles were used, upon which was laid a stratum of chalk and stones, and then a course of hewn sand-stones from three to four feet long, by two and a-half in width.

Some of the materials of this wall had evidently been used in an earlier public building, the destruction of which may have been accomplished during some insurrection of the Britons, such as that under Boadicea. Many of the foundation-stones above-mentioned were ornamented with mouldings and sculpture, and had been cut for adaptation into a frieze or entablature of an edifice, the dimensions of which may be conceived from the fact of many of these stones weighing half a ton. Fragments of sculptured marble, among which was a portion of a decorated stone, which appears to have formed part of an altar, had also been worked into the wall.

At what period Londinium was first fortified with walls, there is no evidence to certify. It is probable that this did not take place until after the recovery of the province by Constantius, or even later, when Theodosius restored and garrisoned the towns, and fortified the stations and camps<sup>c</sup> against the northern pirates.

Foundations of other walls of great thickness have been discovered in Bush-lane, in Five-Foot Alley, in Cornhill, and other localities, but the circumstances under which they were observed, forbid our hazarding any satisfactory conjecture as to their

<sup>c</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, lib. xxviii. c. 3.



original uses. The plan of modern London gives us little or no assistance in forming a notion of that of the Roman town; for in many instances streets, which during centuries have retained their present course, cover the foundations of dwelling-houses, and thus prove the non-existence of Roman roads or streets in such sites.

Recent discoveries, however, while they leave us in doubt of the sites of public edifices, and of the arrangements of streets, reveal, by an abundance of scattered facts, the populousness of the place, and the comforts and luxuries of its inhabitants. At depths varying from ten to twenty feet, we notice throughout the city the remains of houses, and of a variety of domestic utensils. Some of the houses, as may be expected, exhibit evidences of the superior rank or wealth of their owners in the rich tessellated pavements of their apartments. The more remarkable of these were found in Bartholomew-lane, connected probably with that discovered on the site of the Bank of England, in Paternoster-row, in Crosby-square, in Bush-lane, in Lad-lane and Wood-street, and on the site of the Hall of Commerce in Threadneedle-street, but all were cut to pieces and destroyed, with the exception of the last, which having become private property, met a more worthy fate, and is deposited in the British Museum, as an example of one of the most useful and elegant of the ancient arts, by the good taste and public spirit of its conservator<sup>d</sup>.

The absence of inscribed stones is remarkable, and only to be accounted for upon the supposition of their having been broken up in past times for building materials. Two only have been discovered, both sepulchral; the one, inscribed to a *speculator* of the second legion<sup>e</sup>, was found imbedded in a wall of the Old Blackfriars' Monastery; the other, in memory of Grata, the daughter of Dagobitus, was discovered at London Wall, Moorfields. Some stamped tiles are interesting as affording perhaps the earliest instances of an abbreviation of the word *Londinium*. They read [PBR LON] and [P-BR-LON], and may mean *Probatum Londinii*, proved (of the proper quality) at London; or *Prima* (cohors) BRitonus LONDinii, the first (cohort) of the Britons at London.

The fictile urns and vessels, in an endless variety of shape and pattern, contribute evidence of domestic comfort, and of

<sup>d</sup> Mr. Edward Moxhay, of Threadneedle-street.

<sup>e</sup> It is in the possession of Mr. W. Chaffers, jun., of Watling-street.



that combination of elegance and utility which characterizes these works of ancient art. Some of these are proved to have been manufactured in Britain from specimens procured from the Roman potteries, discovered by Mr. Artis at Castor<sup>f</sup>, and from the *debris* of others on the banks of the Medway<sup>g</sup>. The handles of amphoræ, and the rims of a peculiar kind of shallow pans, have frequently the names of the makers. A superior kind of pottery, of a bright red colour, usually termed "Samian," has been found in great abundance throughout London. It has been supposed with reason to be of that kind so termed by the younger Pliny, who mentions its being made at various continental towns, and exported to all parts of the empire; and its identity seems confirmed from being met with wherever the Romans had established themselves. This pottery is not more remarkable for its fine texture and rich coralline colour, than for the great diversity of its ornaments. The shallow dishes or pateræ of this ware, if not plain, are usually adorned with a simple ivy-leaf pattern, but the bowls are covered with embossed designs, comprising mythological, bacchanalian, and hunting subjects, gladiatorial combats, games, and architectural and fanciful compositions. Some exhibit figures which are probably copies from sculptures whose excellence made them universally popular; for instance, that of a Venus in attitude and character much resembling the well-known statue of the *Medicean Venus*. These vases have been usually cast in moulds, but fragments of others have been discovered, the ornaments and figures on which have been separately moulded. The names of potters are usually stamped on the bottom of the interior of these vases. Of these, such as BONOXVS, DIVIXTVLVVS, DAGODVBNVS, &c., have a harsh and outlandish sound, bespeaking a Gaulish origin, or perhaps a Spanish, as Saguntum is one of the manufacturing places specified by Pliny. Many of the names as well as patterns accord with specimens preserved in museums in France and Germany. A familiarity with the frequent arrangements of the letters of the potters' names in monograms and ligatures, will tend to assist the reading of sculptured inscriptions.

The use of glass must have been common throughout Britain; fragments of beautifully-worked vessels in this material having been collected in abundance, and some in rich

<sup>f</sup> Durobrivæ of Antoninus illustrated.

<sup>g</sup> Archæologia, vol. xxix. p. 223.

striped blue, green, and yellow colours, which formed parts of ribbed bowls, shew the perfection to which the Romans had attained in the art of colouring and annealing glass.

Many of the articles which individual exertion has preserved strongly illustrate their arts, manners, and customs; and any artist engaged in attempts to revive the art of fresco-painting may derive useful hints from a close examination of the paintings from the walls of the houses of Roman London, which retain a freshness of colour as if executed only a few years ago. Many of the objects in steel, such as knives, styli, and implements, apparently modelling tools, are in an admirable fine state of preservation, to which the wet boggy soil they were taken from has materially contributed; and to the same cause we owe the conservation of leathern reticulated sandals, and other antiquities, among which may be mentioned some little wooden implements, such as are still used in the west of England for yarn-spinning, and which carry us back to the infancy of one of the greatest staple manufactures of this kingdom<sup>b</sup>.

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<sup>b</sup> For detailed accounts of discoveries made during the last few years in London see the papers in the *Archæologia*, by the writer of these notes, and by A. J. Kempe,

Esq.; and various communications to the *Gentleman's Magazine*, made chiefly by the latter gentleman.