

REPORT ON THE PROGRESS OF THE EXCAVATIONS AT
WROXETER, THE ROMAN URIOCONIUM.¹

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SINCE I had the pleasure last year of bringing before the members of the Institute, at the meeting at Carlisle, a statement of the interesting discoveries which had been recently made at Wroxeter, the researches have been continued with much zeal and ability. The difficulties by which the undertaking then appeared to be impeded have, through the liberality of the noble owner of the property, the Duke of Cleveland, been removed, and it now remains that I should detail what has been effected during the past year. I will not enter, on the present occasion, into any lengthened recapitulation; the paper read at Carlisle appeared in this Journal, with an accurate map from the survey by Mr. Hillary Davies, showing the vestiges laid open, to September of last year.²

It seems now agreed by all who have paid attention to the portions hitherto exposed to view, that the idea which I ventured to put forth at Carlisle last year, that the eastern side of the Forum was then under excavation, is correct, and also that the large rectangular building, of which the Old Wall forms a portion, was a Basilica, the front of which looked into the Forum. Unfortunately the portions of this extensive structure which had been exposed to view, are now covered up, so that the plan is lost when we examine the ground, and can only be supplied in idea. This, however, will not in future be the case with the remains excavated, which are henceforth to remain open to inspection.

The conjecture hazarded in regard to the contiguous buildings, a very small portion of which had then been laid open, has been shown by further excavation not to be so correct.

¹ Communicated to the Section of Antiquities at the Annual Meeting of the

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² Arch. Journal, vol. xvi. p. 264.

What then appeared to have been a large mansion proves, to all present appearances, to be an extensive establishment of Baths. The northern side of this was formed by the south wall of the Basilica, the west, south, and east sides being occupied by an ambulatory or cloister, which extended eastward beyond the space at present under excavation.³

Within the area of this square, the side of which measures 180 feet (taking the outer wall of the ambulatory) are two courts, having tanks, paved with flat tiles, and five hypocausts with some chambers contiguous; the easternmost of them preserves upon the surface of the wall traces of the flue tiles, which were so closely arranged as to have brought it to a very high temperature. This, therefore, appears to have been the *caldaria*, *sudatorium*, or vapour bath, while the other hypocausts served for chambers heated at different degrees of temperature. On the western side of the first hypocaust there has been laid open a system of flues for heating. These chambers were probably kept at different degrees of heat, and served to prepare the bather for the *sudatorium*. Contiguous to this is a room, the floor of which is covered with small white tessellæ, and it appears to have been a bath.⁴

The chambers between this bath-room and the Old Wall have not been excavated for fear of endangering the stability of the wall. This may be done, however, with care at a future time, and the examination may perhaps bring to light the fact that these chambers, which from the appearances on the face of the Old Wall were certainly vaulted, were not stores, but were rooms connected with the baths, and in this part of the establishment may have been a sweating room, for the proportions and the vaulting correspond to the directions of Vitruvius.

³ It will be remembered that the baths at Pompeii had a portico or *ambulacrum* running round three sides, and that seats were attached to the walls for the slaves who attended their masters. It is hardly necessary to observe that these *ambulacra* are the origin of the cloisters of our cathedrals. In the baths of Caracalla at Rome there is also an *ambulacrum* running round three sides, in the centre of which is the *piscina* for bathing as at Uriconium. I think it may not be a rash conjecture to place the date of the baths at Uriconium at about the same period as those of Caracalla at Rome.

Caracalla was much in Britain, and he may have even directed the work at Uriconium.

⁴ At Pompeii the hot bath occupied the end of the room next to the furnace. It was 4 ft. 4 in. wide, 12 ft. long, and 1 ft. 8 in. deep, and constructed of marble, with only one pipe to introduce water, and was elevated two steps above the floor, while a single step led down into the bath itself, forming a continuous bench round it, for the convenience of the bathers. See Baths of Pompeii, vol. i. p. 167.

No buildings have been traced to the eastward of these hypocausts, and it has, therefore, been conjectured that the further space was occupied by gardens contiguous to the baths. The ambulatory, however, appears to have enclosed this space as well as the baths: its course may be traced in the adjoining field, and is very distinct while the crop of grain is ripening. It is interesting to know that in two other instances in this island the Baths and Basilica seem to have been placed contiguous to each other. There are inscriptions preserved, the one found at Lanchester (*Epiacum*) the other at Ribchester (*Coccium*), which commemorate—BALNEUM CUM BASILICA—and—BALNEUM ET BASILICAM. "Both buildings," as Mr. Wright observes, "seem to have participated in the same accidents and to have undergone decay together. We are, therefore, justified in concluding that the two great public buildings, the Baths and Basilica, usually joined each other." Some question may, however, exist, whether we may consider the uses of these buildings at Urioconium as definitively ascertained.

Some uncertainty still hangs over the use of the building which faces into the Forum, and is situated to the south-west, between the ambulatory of the Baths and the Forum, and is marked I. in the plan given in this Journal.⁵ This consists of a square court, with two entries from the west, the one for carriages and the other for foot passengers, and it is surrounded by small chambers. This has been supposed to have been a market, in consequence of the remains found in the chambers,⁶ but I am rather inclined to think it may have been a place where stores were kept for the supply of the baths, such as fuel and other necessities; it may have served also as lodgings for the persons attending on the baths.

A building, situated between this last and the Basilica, is now under excavation, and consists of a room about 30 feet square. Two openings from the Forum lead into it, which, according to Mr. Wright, appear to have had wide folding-doors, or a framework of wood in two compartments. In the centre of this is a piece of masonry. Towards the north and south corners, two small furnaces have lately been found, constructed of clay, with a cavity at the top. The surface of one of these was completely vitrified, and much charcoal strewed around; a low wall has been traced running across

⁵ Arch. Journal, vol. xvi. p. 266.

⁶ Ibid., p. 267.

the room east and west in a line with the furnaces, and also a transverse low wall ; upon this was found what Mr. Wright considers a "stone table" for the use of the workmen. A portion of the shaft of a column was found in the middle of this room. Specimens of glass, of good quality, and many fragments of metal, were scattered about the floor ; also nearly a dozen hair-pins, two of them much ornamented, and a quantity of Samian ware, of better workmanship than had previously been met with, a portion of a large bronze fibula, also a number of coins and other objects.⁷ One of the vessels of Samian ware was a fine bowl, with figures in high relief representing a stag hunt.

About sixty copper coins, which seemed to have been deposited in an earthen urn, the fragments of which lay near them, were found here.

By reference to the plan it will be seen that the block of buildings here described, including the Basilica, is situated between two streets running parallel, each conducting into the space which is considered to be the Forum. These streets have been examined in several places, and the roadway is found to be composed of small stones from the bed of the river Severn, as described in my former memoir,⁸ and to have a causeway on either side for foot passengers, terminated by a kerb-stone ; the width of the road, including the footways, being 18 feet. On crossing the street, which is the southern boundary of this block of buildings now under excavation, other constructions of smaller character have been laid bare. These project further westward, and seem to point out the southern limit of the Forum. A water-course of wrought stone, very well made, little more than a foot deep and a foot wide, has been opened, which runs in front of these houses, and probably followed the line where the Watling Street points towards the Severn and passes out of the Forum. The stones found in this water-course, and which in places block it up, have been supposed to be stepping-stones ; they have, however, doubtless fallen in during the demolition of the adjoining buildings, or before the city was wholly deserted.

This is the extent of the excavations up to the present time (July 24), and a more promising field for investigation has

⁷ Journal of Arch. Assoc., June, 1860, p. 162.

⁸ Arch. Journal, vol. xvi. p. 274.

rarely been presented in this island, or one more fraught with interest to every student of the ancient history of his country.

We trust, now that every facility is given for the examination of these remains, that the work may not be impeded through want of funds, and that the zealous antiquaries who have been so indefatigable in prosecuting the researches may be supplied with ample means to carry out the investigation.

This notice of the progress of the excavations would not be complete without an enumeration of certain relics of the ancient occupants brought to light on the site of Uriconium during the past year. Among these may be noticed a cinerary urn, figured in Mr. Wright's Guide to Uriconium (second edition, plate 13, fig. 2); a large spear-head, with a hooked projection attached to the back, like that of a boarding pike (*ibid.*, fig. 1); also the head of a pick or adze, with two prongs (fig. 4).⁹ A portion of a stone column, 1 foot 10 inches in diameter, has been found in the line of the south wall of the ambulatory at the Baths.

The discovery of the remains of a wheel, possibly of a chariot, has been regarded with considerable interest. It has been thus described by Dr. Henry Johnson:—"In the centre of the hoop, as it lay in the ground, we found two smaller rings, one 7 inches and the other 5 inches in diameter. I have no doubt that they formed the nave of the wheel; the outer ring was to give strength, the inner one lined it with iron; traces of wood were found between the two; the axle-tree had been 5 inches in diameter, and worked within the inner ring. The outer iron hoop, or tire, is 3 feet 4 inches in diameter, 1½ inch wide, and it is still so sound that it rings when struck. There are traces of wood inside it, but it cannot be ascertained whether the wheel had fellys and spokes, or merely a piece of board to fill up the circle. It might serve for a light cart or chariot, but it is less substantial than any of our cart-wheels." Similar hoops of iron have been found, which had probably likewise belonged to wheels.

A small metal box has also been discovered, containing some object which could not be extracted without destroying the box itself. Dr. Henry Johnson, whose exertions in directing the excavations, and also in arranging objects dis-

⁹ See also the plate of Roman implements of iron found at Wroxeter. Archæo-

logia Cambrensis, third series, vol. vi. p. 312.

covered and now preserved in the Museum at Shrewsbury have been indefatigable, has succeeded in reuniting the fragments of two fictile vessels which were much broken. One of them is of coarse red earthenware, bearing some resemblance to the ordinary garden-pot, but formed with one small ear or handle; height, $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches; width, at top, $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches, at the bottom $2\frac{7}{8}$ inches. The other is a vessel of very peculiar construction. Some *fictilia* of like form, though not precisely similar, occurred, as I have been informed, at Pompeii. There is no example of any vessel of this type in the British Museum, and I have sought in vain for information on the subject from antiquaries most conversant with ancient *fictilia*.

The height is 8 inches, the width about 4 inches: it is closed at the top. The only aperture is a hole about 2 inches from the bottom, and it has had two ears or handles, only one of which remains; when filled with water the liquid would escape very slowly, as in the vessels of beehive shape used at the present time for giving water to poultry, and to which this curious Roman relic bears considerable resemblance. It has been conjectured that it may have been a filtering vessel, or possibly some kind of *clepsydra*.

The fragments of a fine Samian bowl, 10 inches wide by 5 inches deep, have also been reunited; this vessel had apparently been broken and repaired in many places, in Roman times, and it had suffered much from long use, the inner surface being rubbed and injured.

Two painters' palettes (as they are supposed to be) are among the most curious relics hitherto discovered.¹ These are in the Museum at Shrewsbury, and they have been figured in Mr. Wright's second memoir on the discoveries at Wroxeter, in the Journal of the Archæological Association, accompanied by the following description. They are rectangular tablets of whitish stone, apparently steatite or soap-stone, carefully smoothed, one side being perfectly even, the other beveled off at the edges. One tablet is $2\frac{5}{8}$ inches long by $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches broad, and $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick. The other has been broken, and only a part is preserved. The upper surface of the broken one is much rubbed in the middle, so as to have

¹ Mr. Roach Smith has given some examples of objects of similar character,

preserved in the Museum at Boulogne, Collect. Ant., vol. i. p. 173.

become concave, and the remains of colour rubbed upon it may be traced. At the back of the perfect specimen is an inscription within a label, minutely written, which has been read thus—DICINIV MA—supposed to signify *Dicinivi manu*, which may be the name of the maker, as on pottery, or the name of the artist to whom the palette belonged. I may here also mention that a stilyard in good preservation was lately dug up, and a finger-ring, set with an intaglio of a goat issuing from a nautilus shell.

Having now given an account of recent investigations on the site of the ancient Urioconium, I may not improperly here place on record a discovery made Feb. 8, 1798, but which I believe has never been stated in any published account of Wroxeter. The following notice of the particulars has been preserved in Mr. Parkes' MSS. in the British Museum, which contain drawings of the churches and monasteries of Shropshire :—²

"Between Tern Bridge and the Severn, at Attingham, in a ploughed field, at a little more than plough depth, an enclosure of large stones was come upon, within which were ranged three large glass urns of very elegant workmanship, one large earthen urn, and two small ones of fine red earth. Each of the urns had one handle, and the handles of the glass urns were elegantly ribbed. The glass urns were 12 inches high, by 10 inches in diameter. The large earthen urn was so much broken that its size could not be ascertained. On the handle were the letters—SPAII. The small urns were about 9 inches high. Within the glass urns were burnt bones and fine mould, and in each a fine glass lachry-matory ; these had a most beautiful light green tint. Near one of them was part of a jaw-bone, an earthen lamp, and a few Roman coins of the lower empire, of little value. The whole was covered with large flat stones, covered with a quantity of coarse rock-stone." This, as noticed in the MS., was probably the burial-place of some family of Urioconium, or the remains of a villa might possibly be found in the vicinity. The relics are stated to have been preserved at Attingham Hall. The writer, unfortunately, does not state on which side of the River Tern these remains lay, whether on the east or Wroxeter side, or on the west towards Shrews-

² Add. MS., No. 21,011, p. 37.

bury. But they would probably be by the side of the Roman road which led to *Deva* (Chester), and near the point where it crossed the Tern. This is the direction in which the road has been traced, as laid down in maps of Roman Britain; and as we have sepulchral remains marking the line of the other two well-ascertained roads which led through Urioconium, so have we here sepulchral remains marking a line of road, the course of which has hitherto been doubtful, and it is interesting to have found a record of interments along its supposed line. If indeed the spot was on the side towards Shrewsbury, the same side on which Attingham Hall stands, it is not improbable that a villa may have existed near the site of that house; and we may remark how constantly we find the sites of Roman villas represented by modern mansions erected not far distant; Roman bridges also, as well as Roman roads, preceded and determined the position of those now existing. The present bridge over the Tern probably occupies the site of the old Roman bridge.

The remains of the Roman bridge at Urioconium are said to be discernible in the bed of the Severn, when it is low, below the ford a short distance down the stream, and connected with the city wall by a road, which is often come upon in ploughing. This road seems to have passed out of the city on the east, above the spot where a castle was built in mediæval times to protect the ford. By a little excavation the abutments of the bridge might still be traced, and the remains exposed to view, as has recently been done so successfully near Chesters (*Cilurnum*), on the line of the Roman Wall in Northumberland, by the owner of that station, John Clayton, Esq., to whose intelligent and indefatigable researches *per lineam valli* the antiquary has been so largely indebted.

Here we may draw to a conclusion the account of the last year's excavations at Urioconium, a city which probably owed its foundation to the campaigns of Ostorius, about the year A.D. 50, and the overthrow of which may be assigned, according to the opinion of a learned member of the Institute lately expressed at the Gloucester meeting, to A.D. 584. The result of the excavations has not, I think, as far as they have been carried, disappointed expectation, but the portions hitherto brought to light should only be regarded as an earnest of what remains to be disinterred.

A very interesting group of Roman buildings has, during the last year, been uncovered at North Wraxhall, Wilts, about a mile from the Fosse Way, the Roman road between Bath and Cirencester. It is a mile distant from Castle Combe, near which Roman vestiges, consisting of part of a sepulchral monument, and some coins, had been found. The owner of Castle Combe, G. Poulett Scrope, Esq., M.P., has taken much interest in the examination of the remains recently brought to light at North Wraxhall, through the permission of Lord Methuen, on whose property they are situated. An account of them has been given by Mr. Poulett Scrope in the *Journal of the Wiltshire Archæological Society*,³ and I would only allude to this discovery in reference to the remains of Uriconium now under consideration, my object in noticing them being to point out the similarity in the arrangement of the hypocaust in respect to the bath, in both cases. At North Wraxhall the bath remains in its original position and is quite perfect, except that a piece is broken on one of the sides. It seems, as at Wroxeter, to be placed contiguous to the vapour-bath chamber or *laconicum*. I will, however, briefly describe the disposition of the chambers which have been laid bare. They consist of the furnace, with a room adjoining it; a heated apartment opening by a door into that last named; the bath-room, with a stone bath at one extremity; the *tepidarium*, constructed like the rest over an hypocaust, but more remote from the furnace; the *frigidarium*, only one quarter of the area of which was warmed by means of flues; and the *exedra*, or long corridor leading from it.

It will be seen that this arrangement is similar to that at Wroxeter, but the building is on a smaller scale. The number of chambers is the same. A kiln or furnace has been laid open by Mr. Scrope at North Wraxhall, with the foundations of a range of buildings adjoining. The Roman well is perfect, the stone-work being as good masonry as any at the present day. The area, enclosed by a boundary wall, is between two and three acres, and within this boundary have been found a well-wrought stone sarcophagus, with a lid or cover, and also some other sepulchral remains. No pavement has been uncovered, but many small tesserae have been turned

³ *Wiltshire Archæological Magazine*, vol. vii. p. 59.

up in the progress of the work. Four of the rooms have circular apses, and in one of these the bath is placed.

In reviewing the results of the spirited undertaking, originated by Mr. Botfield, for the investigation of the most extensive settlement in Roman times on the borders of Wales, the chief city probably of the *Cornavii*, in whose country, as we learn from Ptolemy, Urioconium—*Οὐριοκόνιον*—was situated, it may be remarked that the amount of civilisation in this distant province of the Roman empire appears by no means to have been over-rated. We seem hardly to have formed a fitting estimate of the advance made at an early period. The evidence of the progress of art and civilisation in so remote a part of Roman Britain, at the end of the sixth century, may still remain to be developed under the ruins of Urioconium.

NOTE.

Mr. Thomas Wright has announced for publication an illustrated volume, in which a History of the Roman Occupation of the part of Britain in which Wroxeter is situated will be given, with a complete account of the discoveries which may have been made on the site of Urioconium, and an endeavour to illustrate, by means of these, the condition, life, and manners, of the Roman inhabitants of this island. This work will be published (by subscription) by Mr. Sandford, Shrewsbury, as soon as the area allotted by the Duke of Cleveland to the Excavation Committee has been sufficiently explored.