

THE EXCAVATIONS AT SILCHESTER.

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preliminary to the visit of the Institute.

SILCHESTER was visited by the Archæological Institute twenty-two years ago, at which time none of the recent excavations had been attempted. A valuable paper upon the general topography of the site was then contributed by Mr. Maclauchlan, accompanied by an excellent map, and by some remarks upon the Roman relics which had then been discovered, from the able pen of Mr. Albert Way. These were published by the Institute in the volume of *Memoirs* which appeared in 1854; and consequently some points which have reference to the position of Silchester and to its more remote history which are there touched upon, have not been repeated here.

At present it may be enough to state that there is ground for assuming that the prehistoric name of Silchester was *Caer Segeint* (or *Segont*), and that it was originally a stronghold of the *Sægontiaci*, a native British race, who were driven westward before a wave of invasion, when a tribe of Belgic Gauls called *Atrebates* overflowed out of their own territories into Britain, and securely established themselves in this country, still retaining their ancient settlements in Gaul. During the *Atrebatian* period, Silchester, according to a concurrence of opinion among our own best archaeologists, bore the name of *Calleva*, a name retained by the Romans, and by which it continued to be known up to the date when the *Itineraries* were compiled. Its present appellation, as the word itself indicates, is of a later age.

Occupying as it does an extensive table-land of considerable elevation, which commands the surrounding country on every side for many miles, it was peculiarly adapted for Roman use. Roman military roads are still traceable without difficulty, which issued from its eastern gate to

London, and from its southern to Winchester, with a bifurcation to Old Sarum. The Roman road which made its exit from its western gate, and that from its northern, are not capable of being so clearly traced.

The town is to this day still encompassed by its Roman wall, which, after braving seventeen centuries, demonstrates the amazing durability of Roman masonry when of good character ; for where a few great fragments have fallen from it, they have not crumbled or parted, but remain like pieces of some homogeneous rock. The *enceinte* is slightly incomplete in places, but saving these few gaps, the circuit continues entire, and its profile is nowhere obliterated. The outline of the wall is not rectangular, nor in fact regular, but consists of a figure enclosed by nine sides, no two of which are of precisely the same length. The extent of its circuit may be set down as 2,670 yards. With regard to the structure of this wall, which is venerable even to weirdness, and in itself is an object of the most extreme interest, its upper courses have been wanting for ages, and its lower in many parts appear to have been used as a quarry, always accessible, containing an inexhaustible supply of building material for Saxon, Norman, or Englishman. Nearly a century and a half ago (in 1744), a little to westward of the south gate, the height, as then measured, was about 18 ft. from the sward, showing six courses of flint wall bonded together by seven courses of flat stones.¹ At the present time, not far from the same gate, there are now five courses of flint, bonded together by six of flat stones. A course of flint, measured so as to include along with it the bonding course above, is generally 3 ft. in height ; but there is some variation, not only in this particular, but in the method of laying the materials previous to grouting. In some portions of the wall the materials (not always of flints) which form the course are laid herring-bone fashion, whilst in many other parts there is no indication of such a purpose. The general thickness appears to have been 9 ft., and it presents, in certain places, a rather unusual feature, in having supports to strengthen it inside at regular intervals. These supports are strong buttresses with perpendicular faces, which appear to be integral portions of its original construction.

The wall was surrounded by a wide fosse, which is still

¹ Dr. Ward's paper. Philosophical Transactions, 1744.

perfectly visible round a great portion of it. The width of the fosse, as estimated by the surveyors of Her Majesty's Ordnance Office, was 100 ft. ; its actual depth at present, measured from the level of its summit to its deepest part, is about 12 ft., but there is every reason to think that it was considerably deeper.

Outside the walls, at the north-east corner, is the amphitheatre. This is still unopened, and remains nearly as it has been for centuries. The following is an extract from an ancient description of it, supplying particulars, some of which are not now to be traced :—"There are five ranges of seats above one another at the distance of about 6 ft. on the slope. It has two passages into it, one towards the town and the other opposite to it."² The diameter of the area of the amphitheatre is, according to the Ordnance survey, 150 ft. in its longer, by 120 ft. in its shorter dimensions.

The great gates, by which the town was entered through this circuit of wall, were four in number, answering to the cardinal points. The north and south gates are directly over against each other upon the straight line of the great *via* which entered from Winchester, and passed northward without the least deflection, traversing close by the Forum, and going out at the opposite side. The east and west gates are not difficult to identify as regards position, and bear a relation to each other nearly similar though not perfectly the same. The exact site of the great east gate has been recently ascertained, and the foundations of the gateway, showing very distinctly its form and dimensions, are at present open for inspection. As this gate offers a very complete example of such a Roman work, some short description in detail may be interesting, even though the masonry which remains is little higher than the footings.

The great east gate of Silchester, as approached from outside the walls, presented to view, when perfect, a curtain wall 46 ft. wide, recessed from the line of the main wall so as to fall back about 9 ft., that is to say, about one thickness of the wall itself. Where the curtain wall was thus recessed it was flanked at either side by cheeks rounded off, so that the main wall where it turned inward offered no quoin or projecting angle. In this curtain wall was a very massive gateway, the opening of which measures 28 ft. 6 in. in

² Dr. Ward, *ibid.*

width ; its depth inwardly, from the extreme outside to the extreme inside, is about the same—viz., 28 ft. 3 in. The depth inwardly represents, of course, the side of one of the great piers which enclosed the gateway. These great piers were not exactly the same in their dimensions, though both were 28 ft. 3 in. deep ; the one was 13 ft. 2 in. wide, and the other 12 ft. 2 in. Within the thickness of each pier were a pair of guard-rooms, one behind the other ; the two guard-rooms within the south pier being smaller than those in the north. The smallest of these four chambers measures 5 ft. 8 in. by 5 ft. 3 in., and the largest 8 ft. 4 in. by 6 ft. 3 in. The walls of these guard-rooms are 4 ft. to 4 ft. 7 in. thick at the back of the pier, and 3 ft. to 3 ft. 4 in. thick on the face next the passage through the gateway. We did not succeed in discovering what one might have reasonably hoped to find in its place, the socket-stone for the gate-post, on either side.

In connection with this great east gate, so recently exposed, there is a somewhat curious fact to be mentioned. Every care was taken, when the present excavations were commenced, to trace out, and as far as possible lay down correctly, the lines of street as shown from time to time in the crops, and which were already known to run at right angles to each other. Now the great *via* from west to east across the town, which was, in fact, the road to London, was very distinctly traceable along a considerable part of its length, and notably so about the point where it intersects the other great *via* from north to south, close by the north-west angle of the Forum. But upon following its traces, it is plainly impossible that it could have traversed the town without a bend in its direction, if it issued out through the great east gate. It appears to bear nearly direct for another opening in the wall, which is, in truth, as examination has proved, a gate leading to the Amphitheatre. Its course can be followed, with a very near approach to certainty, till it arrives much closer to the small east gate than to the large one, although it does not pass straight out by either. The opening of the great east gate leaves no doubt that the approach from London must have been by that, and, unlikely though it may appear, we are left to the conclusion that the great London road soon after it entered must have deflected to the right, to strike the straight line of the

principal *via* from the west, still so plainly visible. There appears also to have been a second and an important street parallel in direction to this last, and about 150 yards from it, which led direct from the east gate to the middle of the Forum. It has been already explained that the existing features of the ground show plainly enough, at this present time, where the great *via* passed in a straight line, without any bend, along the northern face of the Forum at a short distance from it.³

Passing from walls and gates to buildings within the town, it may be desirable first to advert, in a very few words, to the circumstances under which the recent extensive excavations were begun.

Archæology is deeply indebted to the munificence of the present Duke of Wellington, the owner of the estate, for the very important contributions which Silchester is now yielding to our knowledge of the Roman period in Britain. As far back as 1833, portion of a Roman residence, within the walls, was discovered accidentally on the southern slope of the town, by some workmen employed in laying a drain. This circumstance re-awakened public interest, which had flagged considerably, after having been very warm about the middle of last century. Four, or at the utmost five, rooms only of this residence were then opened, and they remained uncovered merely long enough to admit of their being seen by a few persons and accurately planned. The then occupier of the land, the late Mr. Barton, subsequently to this event, made a collection of such Roman relics or coins as were brought to him by his workpeople, and this collection ultimately became by purchase the property of the Duke of Wellington, upon Mr. Barton's decease, in 1863. In the course of the year following, his Grace was induced to give consent to excavations being commenced upon a systematic plan, not far from the centre of the town (upon the northern side of it), as it was ascertained that the plough had very recently encountered there a smooth hard pavement of considerable length, over which the share had glinted. The

³ Before the great east gate was discovered, I was led to suppose, from the direction of the main *via*, that the gate nearer the Amphitheatre might be the actual east gate itself. It appears now clear that it was not so, but was, in fact, the gate to the Amphitheatre, and

to the beautiful spring of water which was close by it. Mr. Maclauchlan considered that the bend in direction occurred at the Forum, but this does not appear to have been the case, as the *via* passes straight along the northern face of that building.

result of this commencement proved immediately that numerous and important remains of buried edifices were lying quite near the surface, and the discoveries were possessed of so much interest that by the generous liberality of the Duke the excavations have been carried on ever since without intermission, beyond such as is unavoidable during the more inclement portions of our English winters.

The several parts excavated, though lying near together, are not actually contiguous, and have been distinguished from one another under the name of "blocks." This course has been adopted, because in carrying out the work of excavation upon an extensive scale, it is obviously impossible, when new lines of foundation are struck, to conjecture whether the still-unopened portion may include one edifice or many. The classical term "insula" properly describes a group of houses, or one house surrounded by shops, standing apart from others. This term could not in all cases be correctly applied to the distinct portions of the Silchester works, and as it is desirable, for convenience of reference, to have a specific name for each excavation from its earliest commencement, the term "block" appeared the simplest and most intelligible, with the addition of a distinctive number in every case. It should be understood, however, that the great east gate has not been considered to need any other distinctive name than its proper designation.

The blocks excavated up to the present date are in all seven. Nos. I., II., III. and IV. are dwelling-houses, or portions of them. No. V., which covers a very extensive area, is the Forum, including within its lines a basilica of most imposing dimensions, and a series of public offices. No. VI. comprises a group of small houses to the south of the Forum. No. VII. contains the foundation walls of a great circular temple,⁴ the most recent of all our discoveries as yet, and by no means the least interesting.

The blocks numbered I., III. and IV. have been covered in again recently, and the land brought back into cultivation. Fortunately for the interests of archæology a careful record of each is preserved, and the two which are most important have been described with accurate plans in the "Archæologia"

⁴ This circular temple was not open at the date of the visit of the Royal Archæo-

logical Institute, but was uncovered very soon after.

of the Society of Antiquaries: as these records are attainable to any student, it may suffice to have here called attention to the fact that all important details are accessible, though the Roman remains themselves are no longer open to view.

Block II., which is by far the most important dwelling that has yet been uncovered, has also been partially filled up again on its northern side. The greater portion of its area, however, remains still exposed, and the house contains so many points of interest as to merit some more detailed description. Its lines present us with the ground plan of a very large structure, covering an area of about 150 ft. in length by 110 ft. in breadth, and which may in general terms be spoken of as containing for its centre an open rectangular space, round three sides of which ran a suite of corridors or long narrow passages, having the various apartments on their outer side. It will be found, in the course of the remarks which follow, that important alterations were carried on in this building from time to time; and it may simplify a correct understanding with respect to these, to say here that the changes so made were consequent upon successive enlargements of the central rectangular space. This open area was increased on its north and on its west sides, the addition to it being made by taking into it the original first corridors and throwing the new ones further from the centre.

The chief interest attaching to this house, besides its great size, is the probability that it was the official residence of a Roman of some rank. The grounds on which such a supposition rests are these. It stood closer to the Forum than any other dwelling of any importance, being about 120 yards distant from the northern face of that building, and directly in front of it. In the space between ran the great east and west *Via* (the London road), whilst the north and south *Via* passed along its other side; and this house may be said to have occupied, with its attached buildings, the same position on the north of the intersection of the two great *Via* that the Forum did on the south. A second particular which gives a curious interest to this house is the series of alterations it underwent. The ground plan when first uncovered appeared to exhibit (in the northern portion) walls either running in the same direction with, or intersecting, each other in a very confused and inexplicable manner; those which ran in the same direction were not parallel, though

near together, and clearly did not enclose passages; those which crossed were not intended to form rooms with others which they intersected. Floor levels were different, but without any trace of steps or regular ascent; doorways appeared to have been filled up and disused. On more mature examination this apparent confusion was cleared up. It became obvious that the walls belonged to one mansion of great size and importance, in fact the mansion which had been for ages—certainly for three centuries—the principal dwelling next the Forum, and which, without its site or general design being much altered, had undergone important changes throughout the ages that rolled by. Each change left its traces hidden in the earth, beneath its new successor, and when we excavated to the footings of the lowest walls, we exposed these traces all at one time. The walls lowest down, though not actually eradicated, had been *razéed*, and differed not only in level but in width from the series next above, being more slender in construction. The courses of flints in the second series were laid by the builder so as to mount upward in curving lines to override these *razéed* first walls, showing most indubitably that the one had been cut away by a Roman mason to make room for the other. A third alteration, affecting all rooms on the north side, was indicated by a slight change of square in the series of walls belonging to it, the whole of the rebuilt portion being slightly canted round in the line of its direction, so as to be no longer square with the original plan. A fourth series, at a still higher level, showed wider walls and larger rooms, but very inferior work, the flints being laid only in dark mud and not in mortar.

One naturally longs to light upon some clue to the periods when such alterations were effected. The only possible guide is to be found in the dates of the coins discovered at the several levels, and as coins (especially of the earlier Emperors) continued in use after the time of the Imperial person whose head they bore, they can give but an approximate indication. In the deepest portion a coin was found as ancient as the reign of the first Claudius; it was much worn and had been long in circulation, but was capable of being identified as that struck by him in honour of his mother Antonia, the date being about A.D. 50.⁵ Among the

⁵ Cohen. Descr. Hist. des Monnaies. Antonia 6.

walls of the second series, coins of Antoninus Pius and of Commodus occurred. In the third series many pieces were met with of the period of Gallienus, Victorinus, and Claudius II. In the uppermost of all lay a numerous crop of "*folles*," and of small bronze, of the reigns of Diocletian, Maximianus, Carausius, Constantine, and his successors, and in fact most of the succeeding Emperors down to the withdrawal of the Roman power from Britain. Whilst, however, these alterations affected the northern side, some portions of the oldest walls remained throughout unchanged on the southern. It does not appear unreasonable to consider that a mansion of such magnitude, built on such a site, close to the Basilica and council-chambers, and continuing evidently to be of a growing importance throughout three centuries, was not unlikely to have been an official residence, and in all probability was the actual home of one of the "*Duumviri*" of Silchester.

This house was enriched with mosaic pavements,⁶ and contains two hypocausts. One of these hypocausts, which is extremely curious, belonged to the earliest state of the residence as originally built. Its construction suggests rather the uses of a vapour bath than of an ordinary Roman room warmed by artificial heat. At some very remote date (perhaps when the other hypocaust was introduced into the plan, for it was not in the original house) its floor had been broken up, its sunk chamber filled with rubbish, its furnace walled up, and it so continued lying as it would appear under the new floor of some other apartment. When opened by us, five tiles of extraordinary size and thickness, which had been a portion of its original floor, lay amongst the rubbish which filled up the sunk chamber. These tiles are nearly 2 ft. square and 4 in. thick, and have been burnt with such great perfection that they are to all intents absolutely imperishable. The bottom and sides of the sunk chamber were lined with a facing of pink concrete, intensely hard, and such as would have been used to contain water.⁷ Round the

⁶ The concrete in which these mosaics were laid was entirely rotten, and their faces uneven, owing to the irregular subsidence of the gravel below them. They were, therefore, removed from a position where exposure must have speedily

destroyed them. They are now placed in the floor of the hall at Strathfieldsaye House.

⁷ A round hole, apparently for a plug, was formed in the concrete, but no pipe was within it.

walls are flues for ascending heat, or rather the elbows (formed by flanged tiles, laid inclining upwards, at an angle of 45°), where the heat entered the flues. In this room, only 13 ft. 4 in. by 6 ft. 7 in., there were five such flues ascending on one side, three on the opposite (the entrance occupying the place of two more), and at each end (apparently) three others, fourteen in all. It is impossible now to ascertain how heat was applied; the brickwork of an arch was traceable in the exterior wall, *at each end*, below the level of the bottom of the sunk chamber, but the arches had been removed, and the wall built up, the ground being made quite solid with rammed gravel at the date of the alteration, to prevent subsequent subsidence.

The other hypocaust is very perfect, and furnishes an excellent example of one method used by the Roman builders for warming a *triclinium* or dining-room. In the case of this hypocaust, the floor of the room did not rest, as is so frequently found, upon a number of short pillars, but was principally supported by banks of earth faced with masonry, the floor being about 20 ft. square. The construction was effected in this manner. Outside the room on the south was a small sunk chamber, in which was the door of the furnace. The heat, being created here, entered beneath the floor of the *triclinium*. It passed first through a middle channel cut into the centre, and diverged from thence, or rather radiated, by other heat-ducts in every direction (following in design the pattern of a union-jack), till it reached the walls of the apartment. Having done duty underneath the floor, the heat then ascended in flues let into the thickness of the walls, each of the heat-ducts having the mouth of an up-cast flue below the floor level, corresponding to its termination. The banks of earth which were left, between the divergent channels under the floor, were also pierced through their narrow ends horizontally, to admit of a better circulation of the heat. One pillar only stood at the exact centre, so as to support the *suspensura*.

Attached to this *triclinium* was a small *exhedra*, or withdrawing-room. It formed almost a part of the larger apartment, being separated from it only by piers, and, when the house was inhabited, by a curtain. In its floor there had been a mosaic of excellent workmanship, but unfortunately so very near the surface (only 5 in. beneath it), that it long

since perished under the plough, with the exception of the border at one end.⁸

A great number of coins were found during the excavation of this important house, those of the later Emperors being much the most frequent. A small hoard of forty-two lay together upon the still existing floor of coarse tesserae, in a room next to the *triclinium*, upon the west; they were chiefly of the reign of Carausius, and several among them were curious from the unusual circumstance that they are palimpsest impressions, being, in truth, the coins of Gallienus, Postumus, and some other Emperor, passed through the mint of Carausius, and re-struck; retaining, however, quite enough of their original impressions to be easily identified. Among other articles of minor interest, there was found here a fragment of a glass quarry, which had been in use as window glass,⁹ and had been cast as a quarry. In the dirt which choked the heat-channels of the larger hypocaust, there was buried an interesting ring. It is not of very uncommon character, but is extremely perfect as a specimen. It is one of those which combines with an ornamental purpose the more useful one of being also a key. The attached key is particularly well cut and clean in workmanship, and singularly resembles in pattern those which are now made by the celebrated locksmith, Mr. Chubb; it implies, in fact, a high amount of skill in the locksmiths of an age when such a key and the lock it opened were in ordinary use. The material of this ring is fine bronze.

The most amusing relic, perhaps, of man's ordinary life which was met with in this mansion, was a broken fragment of a flanged roof tile. The tile-maker, like many a potter since, was in love, and was thinking of the maid he worshipped whilst his hands were thick with clay. He scribbled, with a bit of stick, on the face of a moist tile before it was fired, some snatch of poetry in hexameters about her, and in the fragment found by us there is left the last syllable of the last dactyl and the final spondee, to tell the potter's tale. The line which the potter had scribbled, in cursive uncials, ended upon the lowest corner with "PVELLAM."

Directly over against this large mansion, on the opposite

⁸ It has been already stated that this was removed to Strathfieldsaye House to preserve it.

⁹ Skilled archaeologists may consider that this implies the house to have had an upper story.

side of the principal *Via*, and at about 120 yards distant, stretched the northern face of the Forum. It presented a straight line of unbroken wall, without a projection, having one entrance at some hundred feet from its western termination. Between the entrance and that western end rose the basilica, towering over all other buildings, and over the Forum itself. Against this wall of the basilica, close to the intersection of the two great *Via*æ, was an inscription affixed (*more Romanorum*) in honour of the enchorial god, the Sæ-gontiac Hercules.¹

The Forum proper was, therefore, on the left hand at entering by this northern doorway, and the basilica and council-chambers on the right. Confining ourselves first to the Forum properly so called, and excluding for the present any other buildings which lie within its plan, the visitor, immediately upon passing through the entrance, would have found himself standing in an ambulatory, which stretched away to his left hand, and might be followed, without a break, completely round three sides of the entire edifice, making the circuit until it arrived on the southern side, at an exit corresponding to the doorway on the north; any one walking along it, however, must pass by the great entrance, which was at the centre of the eastern side. The range of shops extended the whole way along the inner part of this ambulatory, forming a sort of bazaar, except on the south side, where the rooms were larger, and had other uses. Within the range of shops, again, was a second line of ambulatories, enclosing on three sides the great central court or quadrangle of the Forum. The general plan may, therefore, be described as a rectangular court, open to the sky, encompassed round three of its sides by symmetrical ranges of not very lofty buildings, which contained a double row of ambulatories, having between their lines a series of chambers, used for shops or for public business. The fourth side of the central court was formed by the side wall of the basilica, which extended its whole length. The range of

Dr. Ward's paper, Philos. Trans., 1744.

DEO HER * * * *
 SÆGON * * * *
 T. TAMMON * * * *
 SÆN. TAMMON * * * *
 VITALIS * * * *
 OB. HONO * * * *

rooms lying between the double line of ambulatories, on the south side, was not used for shops, but for the offices of the public departments, to which there would be perpetual resort out of the Forum. These rooms are more stately in size, and were probably loftier than the shops; they also are only five in number, and are distinguished, by their arrangement, as a group constructed for an especial purpose. The central and the two end rooms (all alike in size) are rectangular, but those on each side of the central room have semicircular ends, implying that they were built for the reception of boards or committees, with a President and assessors. In this group of public offices the business of the *ædile*, the *quæstor*, and the revenue (*vectigalia*) was carried on.

The inner ambulatories at each side opened into the basilica, and there was most likely also an entrance to it from the central court. Passing now, therefore, out of the Forum proper into the basilica, the first particular which at once arrests the attention is its magnitude. Including the two tribunals, which face each other at the extreme ends, this basilica extended entirely across the Forum. Its total length consequently, measuring from the outside of its north end to the outside of its south end, was not less than 276 feet; or, omitting the tribunals altogether, the central space is about 230 feet long by 60 feet wide. This, however, by no means fills up the plan between the wide party wall next the Forum and the west exterior wall. Along the whole west side of the basilica were spacious chambers (to certain of which uses have been assigned from the articles found within them); that at the centre being unequivocally the curia, or principal hall of council. This latter was quite open to the basilica along its entire front, was always a lofty room,² and at Silchester was ascended by two steps; the back of it was formed by a wide shallow semicircle, so as to accommodate a large council board, and it was lined with a dado of white Italian marble³ sawn in thin slabs, and secured by small iron clamps. The largest room, however, along this range was a great apartment 60 feet long, which occupies the

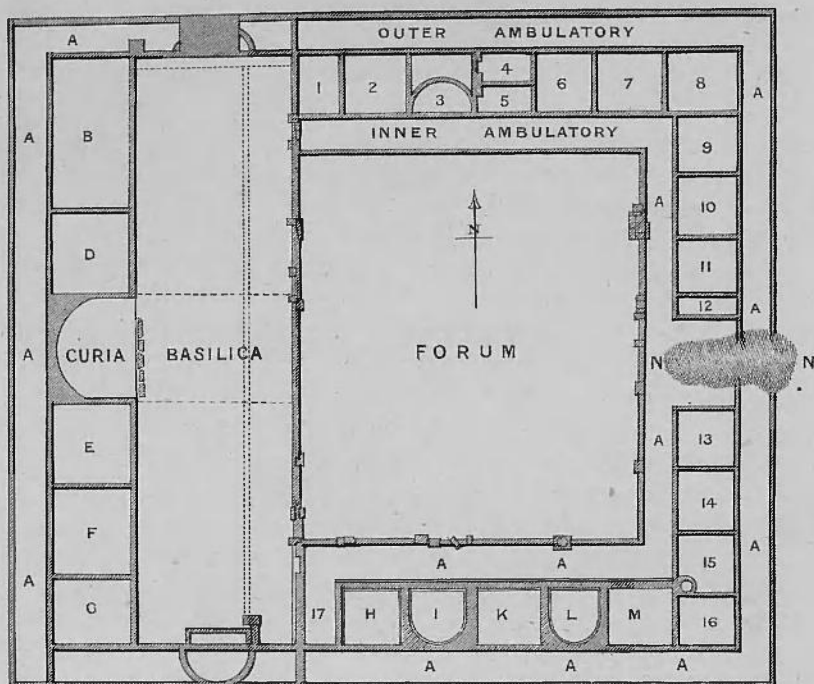
² The length and greatest width are nearly the same (about 32 feet), by Vitruvius's rule it should have been 48 feet high: "Si quadrata erit quantum habuerit latitudinis, dimidia addita constituatur altitudo." Vitruvius,

on the Curia of a Basilica. Lib. v. cap. 2.

³ "Saccharine Marble, Foreign." Report of Sir Roderick Murchison, forwarded from the Geological Survey, 22d December, 1866.

SILCHESTER

PLAN OF THE BASILICA & FORUM.



Scale, $\frac{1}{8}$ th Inch to 10 Feet.

REFERENCES.

A.A.A. Ambulatories, surrounding the entire edifice, externally & internally.

B to G. Range of large halls attached to the Basilica, of which the Curia or Great Council Room at the centre is the chief. B. The Hall of Merchants.

D.E. Committee Rooms. F. Tabularium or Record Office. G. Ærarium.

Basilica. Two Courts with their Tribunals, for the Duumviri. Between the two Courts & in front of the steps of the Curia was a space for Assemblies, about 60 ft. by 45 ft.

Forum. H to M. Offices of the Departments connected with the Forum, as H. *Fecigalia*, or Public Revenue. 1. *Quæstor*, or *Pro-quæstor*, Military pay, & Allowances. L. *Aedile*, Weights & Measures, also Streets & Buildings. Shops. 4. 5. 6. *Tabernæ argentariæ*: Money changers & jewellers. 9. 10. 11. Butchers. 14. Dealer in Poultry & Game. 15. Fishmonger. 1 & 17. Entrances. (N, S)

N.N. Walls injured. A deep cutting existed here before recent excavations. Here was probably the principal Entrance from the E.

northern end, and to which, from the connection Vitruvius mentions between merchants and basilicæ, the name of the Hall of Merchants has been assigned.⁴ It must not be forgotten that of these spacious chambers nothing remains but the outline of their several floors.

To revert to the great basilica itself, it might with propriety be described as consisting really of two courts placed end to end. No *septum* or division, nor any indication whatever of one, has been discovered, but the dimensions (that is to say, the length as compared with the breadth) almost indicate that such was the purpose of its original designer. A Roman basilica was built upon such a plan that its nave or central area (which was very lofty) had on either hand an aisle in two stories. The lower story of the aisle was formed by a colonnade of large pillars, and the upper by a gallery behind a parapet, having along its front a range of smaller pillars, which stood symmetrically over the large ones. The colonnade below had thus to support an enormous weight, and it was usual to give strength and firmness to the bases of the columns by placing them upon a massive substructural wall, which wall, built beneath the floor of the basilica, kept all the columns true to the level, and greatly aided them to bear the superincumbent pressure without sinking. At Silchester nave and aisles are obliterated; the splendid colonnade is represented by a few blocks of weather-worn shafts, and by some fragments of well-wrought capitals; but the massive substructural wall on one side of the basilica, which supported its long range of pillars, remains embedded still in the ground, and is no less than five feet wide. Of the corresponding wall, upon the opposite side of the centre, not the slightest vestige has been recovered, though carefully sought for. Portions of shafts of two sizes (as might be expected) lay about among the *debris* in the centre. The diameter of the largest was 3 ft., that of the smaller 1 ft. 10 in. Parts of two bases also have been met with, one of them having the torus mouldings fairly marked still, but both being more or less defaced. Fragments of capitals of a very enriched style, and excellent workmanship, have also been discovered, and,

⁴ Merchants (*i.e.*, wholesale dealers in contradistinction to the tradesmen of the Forum) appear to have used the basilicæ

as our merchants do the Exchange. Vitruv. de Foro. Lib. v. cap. 1.

judging from the character of the execution, they might well be assigned to as early a date as the reign of Hadrian. They are such as could not have been produced in the time of Diocletian or of Constantine the Great. These few fragments of broken capitals, whilst they eloquently bespeak the perished splendour of the building, serve only to make us regret the more bitterly, alas ! that not one pillar, nor even a base, has been found standing where the Roman workman originally placed it. Everything here has not alone sustained the shock of time, but has also passed through an ordeal of violence and fire.

The plan of the whole is completed by an ambulatory running outside the range of chambers on the west side, which was parallel to the great north and south *via*, and stood almost upon it.⁵

Intensely interesting to us as the uncovering of this very perfect Roman Forum and basilica is, it is disappointing in one particular. It might have been reasonably expected that statues, or at any rate their bases, that altars to the gods, and inscriptions of some kind, would have rewarded our search. But in these respects the ground has proved almost barren. Close to the steps forming the ascent to the curia, or principal council-chamber, one mutilated lump of carving was disinterred. At first sight it was difficult to identify what remained with any intelligible purpose, but subsequently this twice-destroyed lump (for it had been evidently mended once) resolved itself into a portion of a colossal head of some Emperor ; it is but just the line of forehead above the eye-brow, with a few locks of thick and curling hair, ably carved. Not a morsel of sculpture besides has ever come to light. And so also with inscriptions ; a few letters, of the best shape generally, carved in thin slabs of Purbeck marble, have been dug up. On one fragment are five perfect letters and some portions of others, on another four letters, on a third some half letters, on two others a very small part of a single line—nowhere any record that could be laid hold of, except by the most vague conjecture.

Much curious iron work has from time to time been found in the Forum. Amongst other things, the keys of the

⁵ There is great reason to think that all the west side of the basilica, and the chambers along it, were destroyed and

rebuilt long before the final destruction of the edifice ; the masonry is of inferior character to the rest.

shops in the ambulatories, the styli with which the tradesmen kept their accounts, door-hinges (one especially, which appears to be made to keep a door closed by a spring at the back), snap-lock bolts, rings in pairs for the handles of double doors, nails of every size and sort, some of them fully earning the name of "*clavi trabales*." A small iron axe,⁶ knife-blades of various sizes, the hooks of the butchers' steel-yards found in the shops of the butchers, and the blade of an oyster-knife⁷ in the fishmonger's.

The bronze articles consist principally of fibulæ of various patterns—small armlets, piece of a chain bracelet with a snap, some playthings, such as a toy anchor, a tiny game cock, a quaint little long-legged horse, meant apparently to rock by balancing on a small sphere of metal (no metal sphere now remaining), a *securicula*, or diminutive axe (probably one of a set of pendent ornaments), a *simpulum* for libating, a scale bottom, some very small hand-bells, toilette implements, studs of curiously modern shape in some instances, and some few other matters of which the uses are not very apparent.

The great prize, however, of all that has been recovered within the Forum is the bronze eagle of the basilica. This most valuable bird was disinterred in October, 1866, in the chamber next to the tribunal upon the south (which is supposed to have been the *ærarium*), and, after his long entombment, he re-entered the upper air from beneath 10 in. deep of burnt timber, not much the worse for his sojourn there. Previous to his having left the hands of his last custodian, the eagle appears to have been torn by sheer violence from the stand or staff on which he had been borne,⁸ and his wings to have been wrenched away, doubtless in order that he might be the more easily secreted in the timbers of the ceiling, beneath which he ultimately found a safe resting-place, and a grave. Upon a careful comparison of the relative size, modelling, and posture of this bronze with the legionary eagles sculptured on Trajan's

⁶ This iron axe was lying on the floor of the Council Chamber: some daring speculator may hint that it might once have been tied up in the fasces of a lictor.

⁷ An extraordinary quantity of oyster-shells having been found in the floor of one shop, and under the floor of the ambulatory outside it for several yards

in length, and about a foot in depth, this shop has received the designation of the "Fishmonger's." It contained in one corner a large shallow pan set in masonry.

⁸ If this was a legionary eagle, the talons grasped a thunderbolt. The talons were left attached to what they held on the summit of the staff.

Pillar, there is good reason to consider that to it belongs the unique interest of having once been the principal standard of a Roman legion.

So large is the number and so various the attributions of the coins found within the Forum and basilica, that it can only be here said that the series commences with Caligula in A.D. 37, and ends with Arcadius about A.D. 405, offering an almost unbroken line of succession throughout, and representing upon the obverses the coinage of not less than sixty-four Emperors or Empresses. The coins of the earliest Emperors (as Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, and Nero) were found frequently either close to the walls, or amongst the mortar; some of these are so crusted with mortar that it is extremely difficult to remove it. The most copious supply is yielded by the period of Constantine the Great, a considerable variety of whose reverses has been obtained. By far the larger proportion, in all instances, has been bronze, and no example of a gold coin has occurred.⁹ Many of the coins were in a fine state of preservation, and some of the impressions so sharp that the piece of money must have been nearly new when lost.¹ It is a most important fact to notice that not one British coin, nor the faintest trace of British occupation, has been anywhere recognised.

Such is a description in outline of the Forum and basilica of Silchester, and of some of the results attained in uncovering them. Though the tide of Roman life was not here arrested in a moment, yet it bears in one particular a curious similarity to Pompeii, and one in which scarcely any other Roman remains can be said to participate to the same extent. Silchester has never been lived upon, or built over, by any subsequent civilization. It remains at this hour exactly as it was when the hand of destruction first overtook it. Hence almost every detail of plan and dimension is complete. It is needless to add that so unique a relic possesses almost more than a national value, for it has a peculiar charm for every educated man, whatever be the language he may use to express his thoughts.

POSTSCRIPT.—Since the visit of the Archæological Insti-

⁹ A fine gold Trajan, and a very beautiful gold Valens, had been found before the recent excavation; these are now in the collection.

¹ This was singularly the case with

regard to a silver coin of Julian the Apostate. It was so clear and sharp that it looked as if it had not been ten years struck when it was found.

tute in 1872, a group of small private houses has been exposed, south of the Forum (Block VI.). The circular temple has likewise been opened ; it consists of two rings of good masonry, one within the other, the larger having a diameter of 66 ft. These rings are not round, but represent a figure which is a regular polygon, having sixteen sides (Block VII.).