

EXCAVATIONS NEAR WEST MARDEN, SUSSEX.¹

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Watergate Hanger, the site of the Roman villa described in this paper, is a wood forming part of the Stansted Park estate in Sussex, about a mile from West Marden and west of the road from that village to Emsworth. Old House Lane² passes near the northern side of the villa and, crossing the high road, is continued eastward in a fairly straight line up the hill, with a width no greater than that of most Roman roads.

Northwards from Old House Lane runs a footpath over the lower part of the down, here called "the Nore." A neighbouring farmer told me he had heard from an old woman that in former times "a carriage drive with shrubs and flowers" passed over this portion of the Nore. The present footpath before reaching West Marden turns to the right and joins the high road, which soon skirts the eastern extremity of the village on the way to Compton. If this carriage drive really represented a Roman way it probably crossed the line of this high road and passed on over the opposite hill northwards where I found apparent indications of a Roman road.

Some twenty years ago a tree was uprooted in Watergate Hanger and a pavement of red cubes was revealed. In 1907, in anticipation of my coming, the excavation was extended, and disclosed a mosaic in which white and a few black tesserae combined with the red to form a key pattern in a square.

On my arrival I dug on to the north wall and found it still covered with dark red stucco. This wall continued along a chamber (II in fig. 1) to the east. The foundations of the south and west walls of chamber I do not quite

¹ Read before the Institute, 17th April, 1912.

² As there is no other house so near the lane the name no doubt refers to our villa, which is only about sixty feet from it.

meet. In the soft earth between them, probably a drain, were the bones of a bird.

To the south I discovered another apartment with a tessellated pavement (vi). A few alternately red and white squares of 7 inches remained in situ; for the most part, however, the tesserae were scattered, though in places the white cement which had formed their bed was still

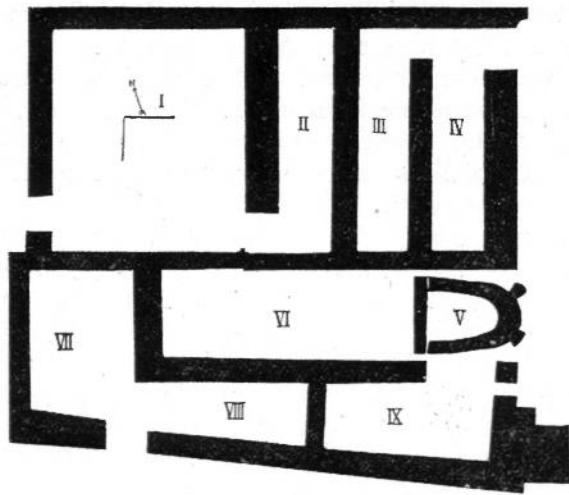


FIG. I. PLAN OF ROMAN VILLA, WATERGATE HANGER.

Scale 16 feet = 1 inch.

to be seen. From the roof there were several fragments of tiles and *imbrices*.

Returning to chamber i I discovered a gap of 3 feet in the western wall, apparently an entrance, with threshold 15 inches wide. Here were found a nail, scraps of pottery, and a small piece of charred wood. West of this I dug a trench, at the northern end of which was black earth full of periwinkle shells.

On my second visit (July, 1908) several squares of red and white tesserae were found in situ in chamber vi, especially on the east and the west. In some places the border of red stucco still marks the junction of wall and floor.

In 1909 was begun the excavation of chamber VIII, which seemed to have been paved with chalk. In it was found a knife.

Chambers VII, VIII and IX may have been a later addition. This might account for some irregularity of plan, and less elaborate paving. Mr. W. H. St. John Hope has suggested that they were not rooms but yards, as otherwise it is difficult to understand how chamber VI was lighted. In support of this theory it may be mentioned that in excavating chamber VII roof-stones were found, with two fragments of glass apparently from a window; and in no. IX pieces of *imbrex* and roof-tile, and also shells and bones, all which objects were likely to be outside the house rather than within it.

Working eastward along the north wall I found at its base a plinth of red cement, and on the extreme east red tesserae in position.

The east wall lay on the edge of a sudden drop in the ground. Near this wall there is a cavity about 18 feet broad from north to south and 12 feet from east to west which looks artificial, being much below the level of the surrounding ground on all sides. It may have been a reservoir to supply the adjacent nymphaeum, referred to below, fed by rainwater coming down hill from the west, as Busto pond is now. It may also have served as a fishpond.

On this side there was an apse (v) in which one might have expected to find a hypocaust, but no trace of furnace or fire was visible. Here were a piece of bronze, probably the handle of a cup, and a fragment of "Samian" ware, the only one, so far as I know, found on this site. North of the apse lies the eastern corridor (iv) paved with red tesserae to a width of 3 feet 9 inches; to the west of this a chamber (iii) where, Mr. Hope has suggested, there may have been a staircase to an upper story.

In 1910 I cut out the south-west corner of the villa, a mass of flints now clamped together by huge roots, and discovered the southern entrance. I then settled the position of the south-east angle, and 7 feet 6 inches northwards found in the east wall an entrance with a central block of flints and cement. The work in this quarter was especially severe, as one had to cut one's way through

a tangled mass of flints and knotted roots some half a foot thick.

The south wall was now at last dug out from end to end, its length being 43 feet. The west wall measured only 37 feet, while the east and the north were 41 feet, a divergence accounting for the peculiar shape of the villa.

The north-west angle is faced with dressed sandstone. The other angles are too much ruined to show any such provision.

Of the northern extremity of the east wall only the foundation is left, like a threshold, so there may have been an entrance at this point. On this wall I found an iron spear-head.

In no part of the building was there discovered a flue-tile or a stokehole. There were, however, indications that the walls of chamber 1 had been continued to the top in flint, as was usually done in the case of a hypocaust, for portions of the wall were still standing to a height of about 3 feet, and were surrounded by masses of flints which had apparently fallen from above. No signs of sinking were to be seen in the mosaic floor.

The north-east angle is close to a ride, across which lies a course of large stones. These may have formed part of a Roman road, as they are in a line with the path over the Nore: the width of the layer, about 8 feet, suggests such a road. In the same direction at a greater distance I have examined a green road, 8 feet wide, which may well have been Roman, as it is quite hard under the scanty grass, so hard indeed that there are no wheel-ruts, and in a short distance along it seventeen large roots, without counting more than one of a group, cross it above the surface. The layer of stones may, however, represent some connexion between the villa and another building on the other side of the ride. Of this building I explored one room which had been roofed with stone slabs, though roof-tiles also occurred in it (fig. 2). Here were found the two blades of a pair of clippers and other implements of iron. The shape of the building suggested that it was a bath, but in the absence of the usual pink cement lining I supposed it might have been the cottage of some person employed

at the villa to whom the implements found would be appropriate. Mr. Hope, however, suggests that it was a nymphaeum with latrine, and this is probably right. A large squared stone, apparently the base of a gatepost or pillar, now lies in the building.

In the following year this chamber was further excavated. At its southern extremity were found a stout bronze reel, possibly connected with the working of the doors, and some charred wood. The outside of the chamber was not completely examined on the west, and it may have been connected with additional rooms, as mortar and firmly packed flints were found in that direction.

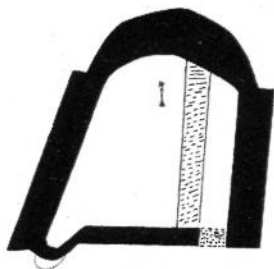


FIG. 2. PLAN OF NYMPHAEUM.

Scale 16 feet = 1 inch

In a meadow within a stone's-throw of the Roman villa stands a house called "Great Busto," to distinguish it from a smaller "Little Busto" close at hand. On first hearing this somewhat remarkable name, I was struck with its Roman sound; *bustum* (stem *busto*) being an ordinary Latin word denoting first a spot where a corpse was burnt, and then a burial-place,¹ might well indicate the last home of those who had lived in the adjacent villa. This conjecture was greatly strengthened by a communication made to me by a labourer who said that there was formerly a mound with a tree on it in Busto meadows, between the pond and the plantation. The

¹ So "*ad busta Gallica*, a place in Rome where the Gauls were buried." See Key's *Latin Dictionary*, under *bustum*.

earth of the mound was some time ago spread over the field and "the foundation" of flints, i.e. the platform on which the earthen mound stood, was sold to make roads. He said the men "were afraid," and explained that they were afraid of this platform falling in, there being a hollow sound beneath. This certainly suggests a burial-place. The meadow adjoins Old House Lane, and the Romans were accustomed to bury their dead beside their roads.¹

¹ My thanks are due to Mr. George Wilder for permission to excavate in Watergate Hanger.