

# THE ROMAN VILLA AT LATIMER, BUCKS.

BY THE REV. BRYANT BURGESS.

The present road from Chesham to Chenies and London passes through the south-western part of a slightly-elevated mound near Dell Farm, at Latimer, but within the boundary of the parish of Chenies. In the year 1834, the road which originally ran between the farm-house and the river was diverted to its present course, and the workmen who were employed in making it, found the tesserae of a Roman pavement in the mound, and a few yards to the north-west, four human skeletons, with earthen vessels and coins deposited near the skulls; the urns or vessels, which were broken, were taken away by a passer-by.

In 1863, numerous tesserae, of various sizes, pieces of Roman tile and mortar, with the peculiar pink tinge which marks it of Roman manufacture, were found lying by the side of the road, where it was cut through the mound, and at three inches below the level of the road a tessellated pavement of coarse red ware.

In July, 1864, some workmen, by direction of Lord Chesham, who owns the property, began to dig for the foundations of three new cottages, and soon laid bare parts of the floors of the rooms marked 1 and 2 in the plan, together with the wall between them, which was standing to a height of about eighteen inches, and the investigation of that part of the mound was proceeded with by myself.

Room 1 is rectangular, measuring 19 ft. 6 in. by 22 ft. The tessellated pavement was partially destroyed; but where that was the case, there remained a smooth floor

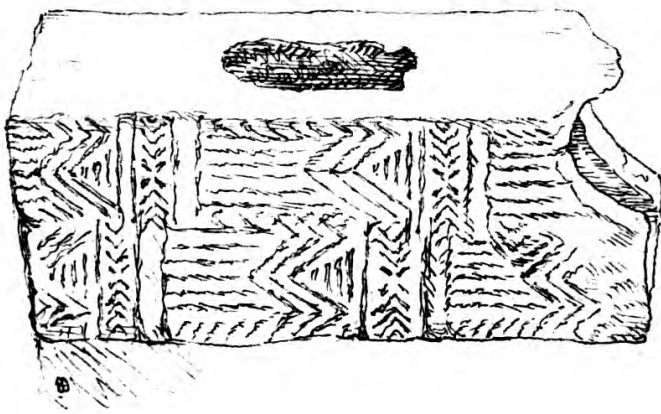
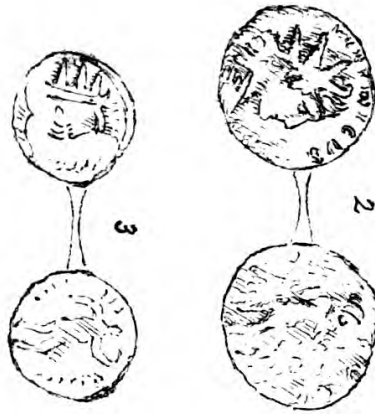
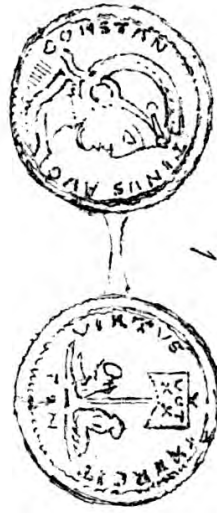
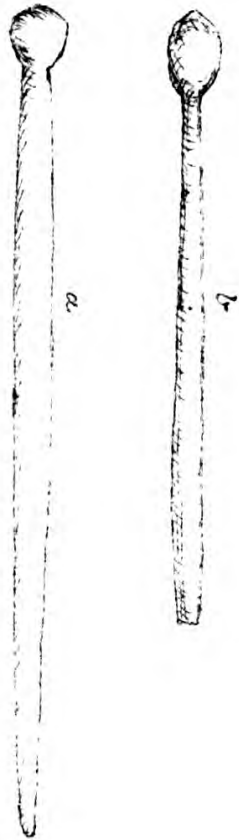
on which the pavement had been laid, formed of concrete upon a bed of large flints. In this chamber, as also in Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 9, there is a very considerable dip in the floor, which rises as it approaches a wall; and this rise in the floor was of assistance in tracing the dimensions of a room, by showing where the wall was to be expected before it was discovered.

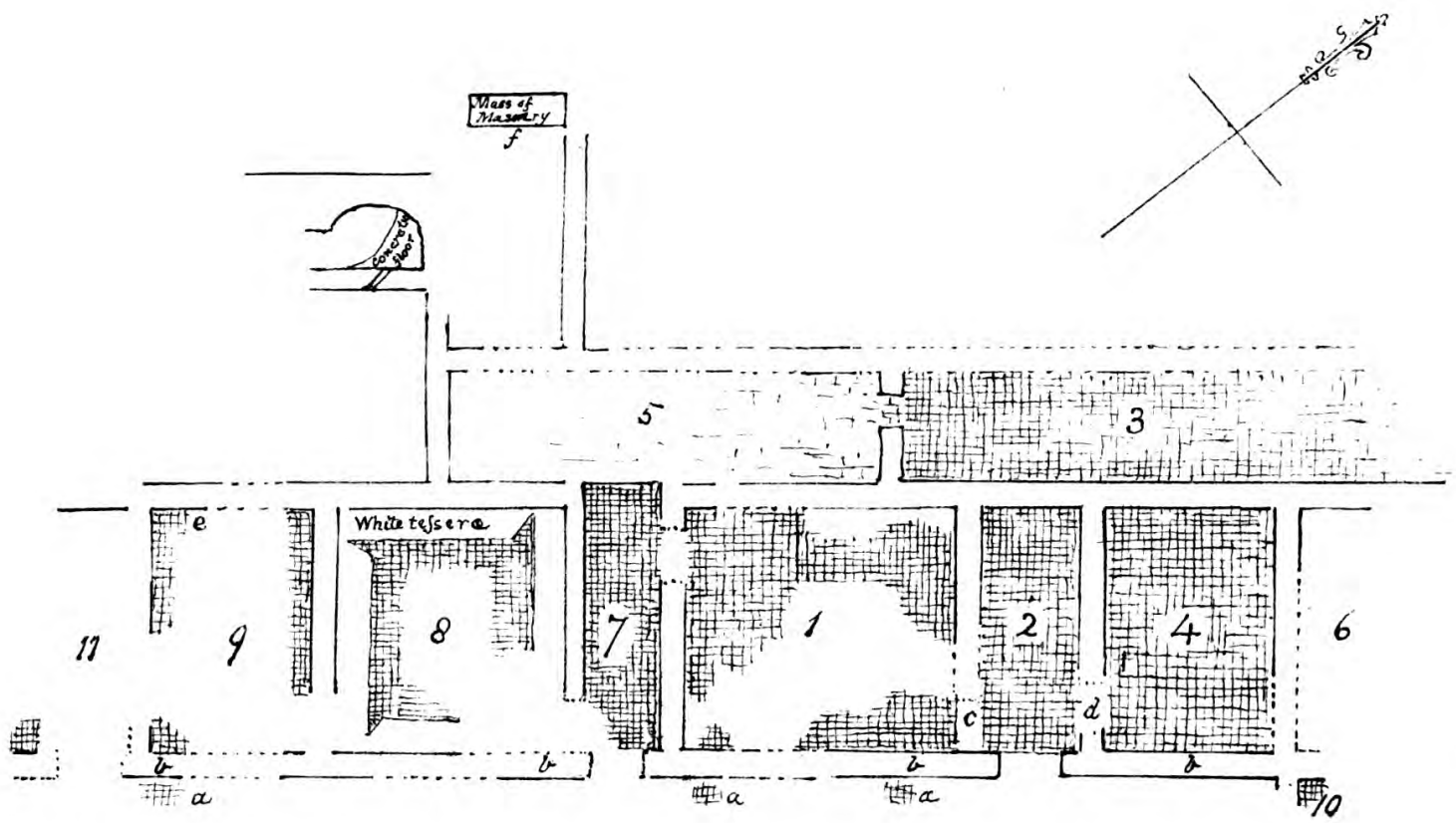
In No. 3 the dip is very considerable, the tesserae turning up to meet the wall; the upper ones being covered with a sill or ledge of Roman mortar, which was very perfect in Rooms 3 and 8. In Room 1 the tesserae were one and a quarter inch square, but of somewhat uneven shapes; the walls were neatly plastered, and the part remaining was coloured of a dull red, but pieces of the plaster of the rooms were found white, with a red, and others with a green stripe, and some of three different colours. The floors in this and the other rooms were covered with a black powder, formed of decayed wood, in which were a considerable number of iron nails, from one and a half to five inches in length, many of which were bent at right angles, as if they had been driven through wood and clenched; above this was a mass of broken ridge and flanged tiles (of which doubtless the roof was formed as figured in Wright's "Celt, Roman, and Saxon," p. 171), together with large flints and mortar and the plaster of rooms, evidently the *débris* of the upper part of the building.

Room 2 communicated with 1 by a doorway, full 5 ft. wide at *c*; the wooden threshold, though much decayed, still remaining. This room, also  $19\frac{1}{2}$  ft. in length, is only  $9\frac{1}{4}$  ft. in breadth, and appears to have been a kind of entrance hall, having a doorway through the main wall, *b, b, b*, 6 ft. wide, with a concrete floor. The pavement in this room is more perfect than in 1. The entrance to Room 4 was by a doorway at *d*.

Room 4. This room,  $19\frac{1}{2}$  ft. by 12 ft., was paved with similar red tesserae to those in 1 and 2. A considerable quantity of broken pottery, and wood, apparently charred, was found in this room. The south-west wall (as also some others) had been plastered and coloured, and had afterwards received a second facing of plaster and colour.

Room 6 was traceable on the south-west side, and a





*Plan of Roman Villa discovered at Latimer*

Scale 1/4" = 1 foot

few white tesserae *in situ* were found in the south corner; but the ground had been lowered at a previous date, so that nothing more could be traced in the north-east. The same remark applies to Room 10, the corner of which, as marked in the plan, only remains. It has a tessellated pavement of the same character as in the other rooms, but the tesserae are more varied in colour, some white and dark ones being interspersed with the usual red kind, but without any traceable pattern.

Rooms 3 and 5, at the back of those already mentioned, are only  $8\frac{1}{2}$  ft. wide. No. 3 was traced for a length of 39 ft.: it is paved with red tesserae, a very considerable dip running longitudinally, and a mortar sill or ledge running along the base of the south-east wall. Two coins of Constantine I. were found near the north-east extremity of this room.

No. 5 appeared to be 34 ft. in length, and seemed to communicate with 3 by a doorway, the threshold of which was 6 in. above the floor, and the mortar retained the impression of the grain of the wood, which, no doubt, had been laid upon it. The floor of this room, where it remained, was formed of flat tiles, measuring 16 in. by 12 in., with a dip in the middle quite as great as in Room 3.

No. 7 was an entrance hall or passage, with openings through the two main walls, and side entrances to Rooms 1 and 8. This chamber is paved with red tesserae, as before, but the floor is level. It is only 5 ft. 5 in. wide. The entrance to No. 5 was by a step. In the doorway between this room and No. 1 there were marks of fire, and lumps of whitish lead were found.

Room 8 measures 19 ft. 6 in. by 18 ft. 9 in. The main wall on the south-east was scarcely traceable in places, and the floor at the eastern corner and in the centre of the room was destroyed. The other walls were very perfect to the height of about 18 inches. The pavement is of white tesserae for a width of 27 inches from the walls; the interior, as far as it remained, was of the usual red pavement, but in the three corners it was continued for some inches into the border.

No. 9 measures 19 ft. 6 in. by 12 ft. 9 in. The pavement, wherever it was reached, was of the red kind, but at the spot marked *e* a number of small tesserae, red,

white, yellow, and black, were found; in some cases three or four were found still adhering together as they had been laid in an ornamented pattern.

Room 11 appears to have been another passage, having an entrance through the front wall, but no pavement has been found in it. The excavation, however, in this chamber and in No. 9 was very imperfect. Outside the front wall parts of a pavement, mostly of white tesserae, were found at *a, a, a*.

The mass of wall, formed of large flints imbedded in mortar, with courses of tiles at *f*, was flat on the top just below the surface of the ground, and was traced perpendicularly to a depth of 4 feet. A number of small bones, as of a cat or rabbit, were found.

#### ARTICLES FOUND IN THE ROMAN VILLA AT LATIMER.

Two brass coins of Constantine the Great, almost exactly alike. On the obverse, CONSTANTINVS AVG round the helmeted head of the Emperor. On the reverse, VIRTUS EXERCIT, with two mourning captives seated under a Roman standard, inscribed VOT XX.

A brazen or copper coin of Tetricus, the name TETRICVS being decypherable above a crowned head. On the reverse, which is much defaced, apparently a human figure erect, with some letters illegible.

A small British coin, of brass, of the age of Tetricus, evidently a rude imitation on both sides of the Roman coin last described.

A lady's hair-pin, of ivory or very hard bone, carved, in perfect preservation, except the point, measuring  $3\frac{2}{10}$  inches.

A ditto, of darker colour, of finer workmanship, imperfect.

A great deal of broken pottery, with a few pieces of Caistor and Samian ware.

A piece of stag's horn.

Oyster shells and whelks, the former in considerable quantities.

Pointed pieces of iron,  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches and  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length.

Pieces of lead, and a large quantity of iron nails.

A small piece of a glass vessel and fragments of window glass.



Flue tiles, mostly broken, measuring  $15\frac{1}{2}$  in. by  $16\frac{1}{2}$  in. by  $4\frac{1}{2}$  in. One nearly perfect, ornamented on two sides with a stamped pattern; the rest merely scored on the wider sides with a comb.

Flanged tiles, measuring 16 in. by 12 in. at the broader, and  $10\frac{1}{2}$  at the narrower end: but the measurements vary considerably in different tiles. These, together with ridge tiles, measuring about 15 in. by  $7\frac{1}{2}$  by  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in., were found, mostly in a broken state, overlying the pavements in all parts of the building.

