

## ROMAN VILLA AT WYCOMBE.

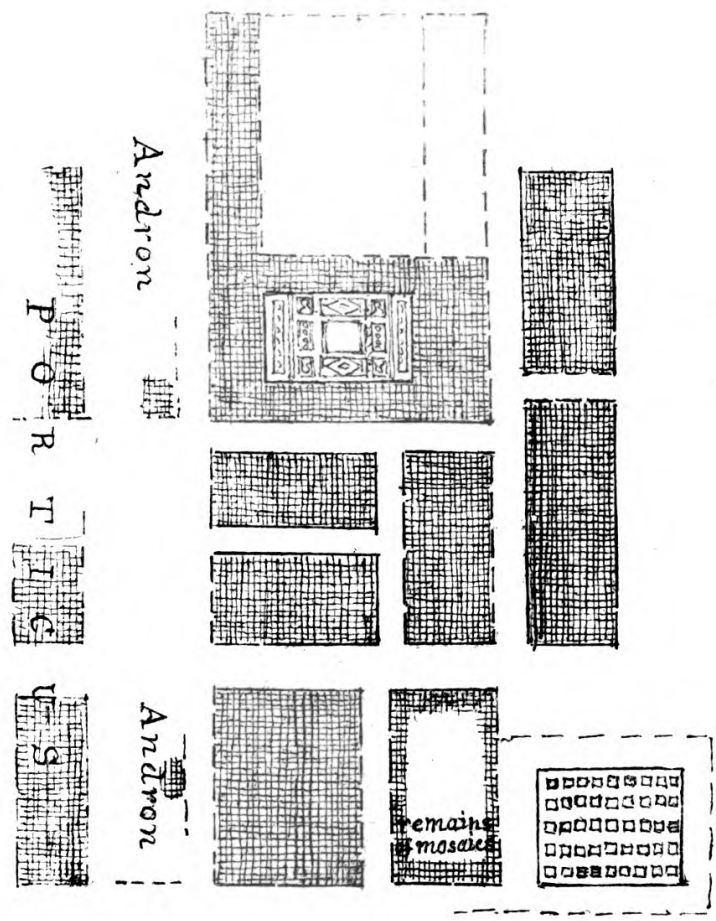
(Read at the Annual Meeting at Monks Risborough, by E. J. PAYNE.)

In the year 1724, a Roman pavement was discovered in a meadow called Penn's Mead, belonging to Lord Shelburne ; but the finders do not appear to have searched for any further remains, or to have taken any further interest in the matter than to cause the event to be recorded in the Borough Registers. The pavement, according to the Municipal Register No. 3, was set in the patterns common to Roman pavements, with an animal in the centre like a dog, standing by a tree. A Mr. John Bates, a draper in the town, employed John Rowell, the well-known painter on glass, to make a copy of it on a canvas footcloth, which he occasionally used as a carpet in his parlour. There, the Rev. Mr. Delafield says, he saw it many a time ; and his description of it corresponds, in all respects, with that taken from the pavement itself at the time of the discovery, though less minute.\*

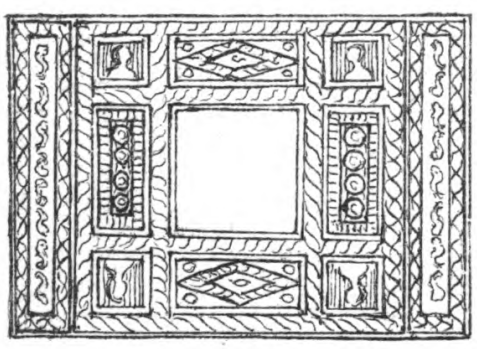
Succeeding antiquaries recorded the tradition of the discovery, but knew of no authentic records ; hence, mistakes as to the date and nature of the discovery have found their way into all the printed accounts. In the year 1862, when the Archæological Society of the county of Buckingham expressed their intention of visiting the town of Wycombe, the entry in the register fell under my notice in the collection of materials for an historical account of the borough, but for a long time I could get no clue to the locality ; the name of the meadow (Penn's Mead) had long been forgotten, and I searched, fruitlessly, two or three centuries of documents, until, in a lease of the time of Henry VIII., I found the description of a meadow whose locality I knew (Lady Mead), abutting, on the

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\* See extracts appended.

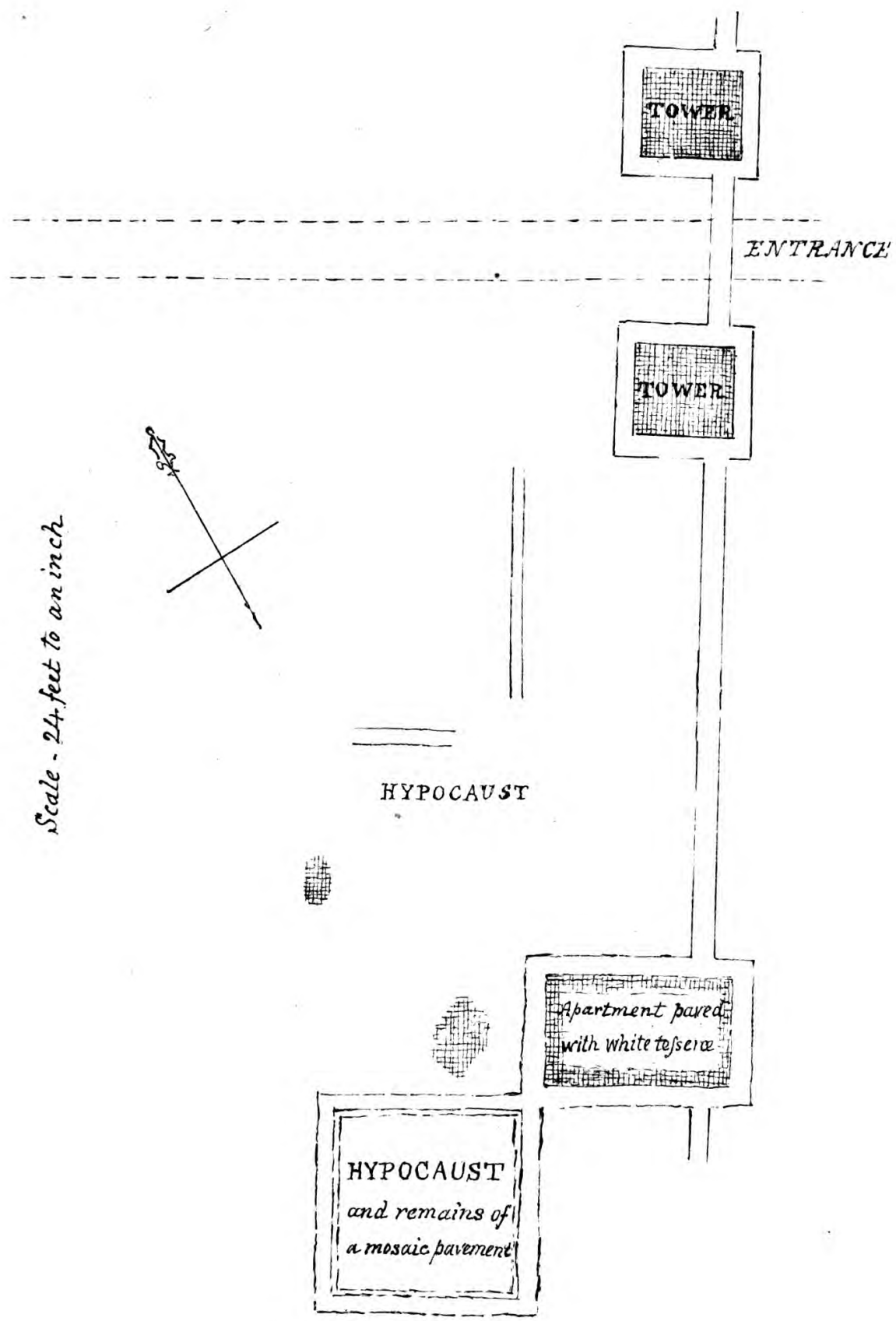


A



*Plan of Roman Villa discovered at Wycombe.*

BROOK



Scale - 24 feet to an inch

south, upon the meadow called "Penne Mead." The first trial made in this meadow proved this clue to be the right one. The meadow in question is situated about half a mile from the town of Wycombe, at the east end of the ancient common pasture known as the Rye; it is an irregular triangle in shape, and is bounded on the north by a very clear and rapid streamlet flowing from the ancient spring called Holywell, and on the south by the ancient road called Windsor Way, now filled up and converted into a piece of ornamental water, and, like the meadows, the property of Lord Carington, and forming part of the Wycombe Abbey estate. The meadow thus identified, the consent of the noble proprietor and of the tenant to excavation was readily obtained, and his lordship caused the site to be explored and surveyed at his own expense.

The excavations, so far as they have proceeded, have resulted in the discovery of the remains of which the plan is exhibited. They compose a villa, situated near the middle of the field, consisting of a portico and sundry apartments. This appears to have been partially surrounded, at a distance of about eighty yards, by a massive wall, fortified at intervals with turrets. Remains of larger apartments were found at the southern angle of the inclosure, which have not been completely excavated.

The central buildings consist chiefly of apartments paved with tesserae of red brick about one and a half inch square, set in mortar on a basis of rubble. All these are in an even and good condition, except the long division at the west end, which, from their uneven and broken state, had evidently been exposed to the weather. Between the portico and the principal apartments a space occurs enclosed between two walls, which I take to be the architectural contrivance called *andron*, used, in certain aspects, to sever the internal apartments from the variable atmosphere.\* The principal apartment is that at the north extremity of the portion excavated, and was decorated with two mosaic pavements, one of which remains, though much mutilated.

The design of this pavement will be readily understood on reference to the drawing A. It consists of a square flanked by two oblongs, the whole being enclosed

\* μεσοτόλιον. See Pliny, Lib. II., Ep. 17; Vitruvius, Lib. VI., cap. 10. Also Etienne's "Thesaurus," Tom. I.

by bands of double and single guilloche ornament. The oblong compartments contain a series of sea-monsters with twisted tails. The square is again resolved into a smaller central square, the design of which is lost, with four still smaller squares at the angles, which are occupied by female busts, representing the Horæ, or goddesses of the seasons. The one that remains perfect appears to represent Spring, and answers to the poetical description,

"Positæ spatiis æqualibus Horæ;  
*Verque novum stabat cinctum florente corona;*  
 Stabat nuda Æstas, et spicea sarta gerebat;  
 Stabat et Autumnus calcatis sordidus uvis;  
 Et glacialis Hyems, canos hirsuta capillos."

*Ovid Metam., Lib. ii. 26.*

All the mosaics are executed with very fine tesserae of black, blue, red, yellow and white pottery on a solid basis of flints and rubble.\*

The compartment marked A on the plan contained another mosaic pavement, with a margin of common red tesserae. This pavement is totally destroyed, but the tesserae found show it to have been of singularly fine and minute workmanship, many being no larger than peas. The pavement on the right of this was destroyed, showing the hypocaust. Three of the pilæ remained perfect, and the bases of the others were traceable in mortar on the floor. The whole of the central building was rapidly and easily uncovered, as it lay only from twelve to eighteen inches below the surface.

Leaving the central building, we proceed through the court of the villa to the eastern fortification wall. At the north end, near the brook, are two turrets eighteen feet apart, between which was an entrance to the villa, traces of wheels still remaining in the wall. The turrets project five feet from the wall, and are paved with common red tesserae. Southwards from these towers are the most remarkable remains brought to light, composing a distinct set of apartments of much larger dimensions than those in the central building. Owing to the depth of the soil and the lateness of the season, this part of the work has only

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\* Vitruvius (Lib. VII., cap. 1) lays down that all the angles of the *pavimentum sectile* should be kept equal (*i.e.*, right angles). I regret to say that by the culpable negligence of the tessellarius, some were obtuse, and others slightly acute.



partially been explored. The largest apartment had a hypocaust, and the ruins of the pilæ were found mixed with pieces of guilloche pavement, of superior workmanship, and rubbed to a fine surface. A single trial near the wall D yielded similar results. The floor of the neighbouring apartment was found entire, and is of a different character to any of the others, being composed of *white* tesserae about an inch square, the margins and other places being laid in red, apparently in the course of repairs. This apartment projects from the wall to correspond with the turret.

Large quantities of broken plastering decorated in fresco were found, but none that were reproducible on paper. The rough coat on which the fresco was applied was made with pounded brick; so was a great part of the mortar, which was less durable than I have seen it in other places. The bricks were of the usual shape, long, thin, and excessively hard. The only coins discovered were mediæval English and German.

The arrowhead and the statera, or miniature steelyard, were found near the central building. The statera much resembles one found at Cirencester, engraved in the excellent work descriptive of the Roman remains in that town. The few pieces of pottery picked up showed no peculiar design nor potter's mark.

This, I think, has now embraced everything worthy of note in our excavation of 1863. The site is far from being exhausted; and as an evidence of what is to come, I would point to the description of the pavement found in 1724, which corresponds in dimension or description with nothing hitherto discovered. It is sufficiently clear that this remarkable pavement still remains to be found; and I believe it is to be looked for in the vicinity of the excavations last described, near the park wall. It is remarkable that none of the remains discovered by us were known to the antiquaries of 1724, which leads me to think that the old discovery must have taken place during some operation nearer the southern boundary of the field, where the park wall now stands.

The excavations were superintended by myself, with the occasional supervision of Mr. William Burges, of 15, Buckingham Street, Strand.

Extract from "Borough Register," No. 3:—

"BURGUS DE CHEPPING, WYCOMBE, IN COM. BUCKS.

"Primo die Julii, Anno Dni, 1724°.

"Memorand' that then was found in a Mead called great Penns mead, belonging to the Right Honourable the Earle of Shelburne, about a quarter of a mile from the said burrough, an old Roman pavement set in curious figures, as circles, squares, diamond squares, eight squares, hearts, and many other curious figures, with a beast in the center, in a circle, like a dog standing sideways by a tree, all set with stones in red, black, yellow, and white, about a quarter of an inch square; the whole pavement was about fourteene foot square, the fine work in the middle was ten foot long and eight foot broad, the rest was filled up with Roman brick about an inch and an halfe square."

Extract from "Delafield's MSS. Gough Collection, Bib. Bodl. Oxon." Small vol. of miscellaneous memoranda:—

"Mr. John Bates, draper, of this place (a gentleman of a good understanding and of a publick spirit), ordered a copy of it after the original to be taken, which he had painted on a canvas footcloth, and served for many years as an occasional carpet for his parlour. I have seen it many a time, and as far as I can remember, it was diversified into a great variety of work in small squares, and the middle set off with the form of a perfect wild beast."

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