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**The Roman Pavement at the Barton, Cirencester**

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## THE ROMAN PAVEMENT AT THE BARTON, CIRENCESTER.

BY E. C. SEWELL AND ALFRED H. POWELL.

IN the year 1825 this pavement was discovered at The Barton Farm, Cirencester, by some workmen who were removing a walnut tree, and who found their progress opposed by a hard surface, which proved to be a tessellated pavement. Earl Bathurst, the owner of the property on which it was found, immediately caused a suitable building to be erected over it, and consequently it has been preserved *in situ*. It forms a floor 21 feet square, and consists of a central circle, occupied by Orpheus, who is habited in a Phrygian cap, his body being covered with the tunic, fastened round the waist by a girdle. He is represented in a leaning position with the left knee elevated as a rest for the lyre. Around the central medallion is a circle devoted to birds, with the duck, goose, hen, peacock, and pheasant all represented, walking round the circle with stately strides. Then follows another and larger circle, which has been much injured by the roots of a walnut tree, which has broken up sections of the pavement and rendered them very uneven. Enough, however, is left to show that this larger circle was occupied by pictures of animals, in which the lion, panther, leopard, and tiger are spiritedly portrayed. The circle just described is bounded by a very beautiful double-twisted guilloche, which ornament is also used to form the square border of the room.

The subject of this pavement seems to have been a favourite for tessellated compositions. The one found at Withington, a great portion of which is in the British Museum, represents the same story; but the most elaborate specimen is the one at Woodchester, which consists of a series of

circles for the centre, around which the beasts are marching with the same stately tread as observed of those in the Barton pavement.

The evidence of art afforded by this pavement is striking, the drawings of the beasts being exceedingly fine, while those of the birds are equally admirable.

For many years past it has been noticed that the surface of the pavement has been getting more and more uneven, but no practical suggestion for restoration has been submitted until Mr. Alfred H. Powell (a member of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, who was engaged in supervising work at the parish church) expressed his opinion that with care the pavement could be saved by a process of underpinning. After carefully explaining to Earl Bathurst the method he proposed to adopt, and supplying proof that no injury would result to the pavement therefrom, but rather benefit, Mr. Powell was instructed to carry out the work of restoration.

Appended is his report compiled at my request expressly for the *Transactions* of the Society. From this it will be seen that during the work an exceedingly interesting discovery was made of a complete skeleton of a man *underneath the pavement*. Such a position would, of course, be a most unusual one for a Roman burial, and it is conjectured that the interment must have been carried out before the builders of the Roman house laid down the pavement of the room. If this is so, then the Roman workmen must have laid their bed of concrete for the pavement only 9 ins. above the remains of the man whose skeleton has just been discovered.

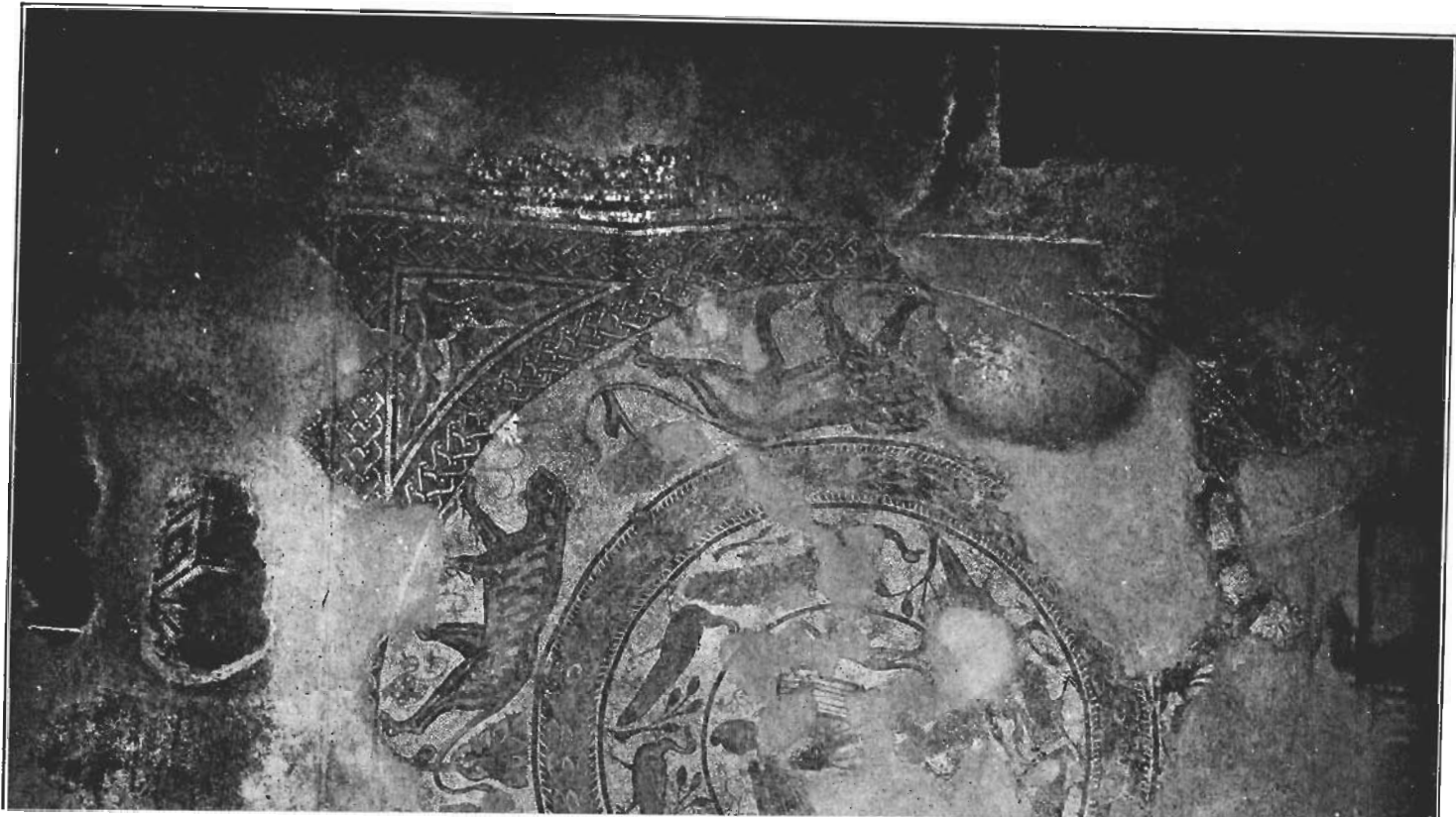
I venture to think that so interesting a discovery deserves to be recorded in our *Transactions*.

EDWARD C. SEWELL,

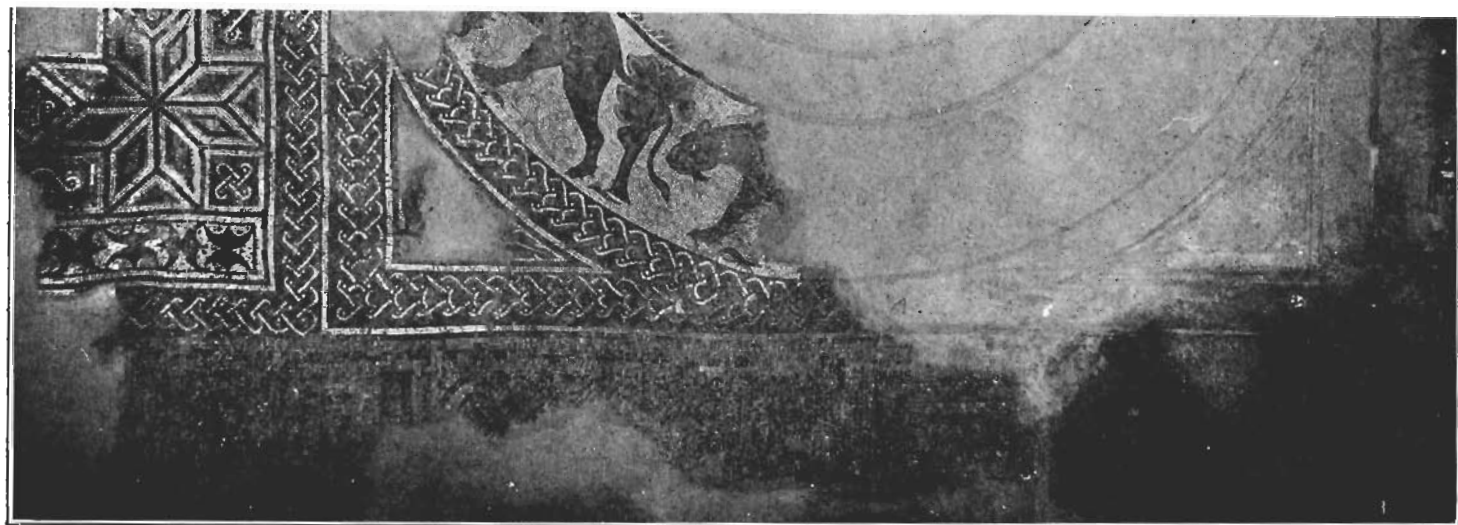
Cirencester,

*Hon. Local Secretary.*

October 1st, 1910.



The Barment at Cirencester, 1910.



The Barment

PHOTOGRAPH BY W. DENNIS MOSS.

*The centre of this illustration is arranged to avoid a crease through the principal part of the Pavement.*

REPAIR OF ROMAN TESSELLATED PAVEMENT AT THE BARTON,  
CIRENCESTER.

This work was begun in August, 1909, and completed by the end of the year, under my personal supervision. The suggestion of saving this valuable mosaic originated with a member of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, and in accordance with the usual practice of that Society, it was proposed to do this without disturbing the existing work. The scheme, which was roughly to support the entire tessellated floor on stone slabs, these in turn resting upon narrow walls of brickwork built up from the gravel at intervals of 2 or 3 ft., and which will be described in detail below, was submitted to Earl Bathurst, the owner, who generously assented to the work being undertaken at once, and defrayed the entire cost.

The pavement is protected by a chamber erected over it in the year of its discovery by Henry Earl Bathurst (1826). It seems that of this chamber two of the walls may have been already standing, viz. the north and west walls, these being built of "rubble walling" and 20 ins. thick, while the south and east walls are of wrought ashlar, 8 ins. thick. The chamber is plastered inside, and has a roof of local timber not uninteresting in its construction.

The south and east walls have windows of a uniform pattern; the north and west walls have no openings; the entrance door is in the centre of the east wall.

The measurement of the chamber inside the walls is 20 ft. by 21 ft. 6 in. The surface of the pavement is bent and broken, and nowhere is it smooth or level, the ground upon which it rested having sunk irregularly throughout into hollows, which in some cases are small pockets, and at all of these bends and irregularities the stones were loose and the joints open.

To lift the pavement in sections, in order to make good

the foundations, seemed a hazardous process, especially as some of the worst "pockets" occurred where the work was finest, and an accident would have been most deplorable; also in the lifting process it is inevitable that some stones fall from the canvas with small chance of going back into the same spaces that they came from. So it was decided to avoid all lifting of the tesserae by undermining and repairing from below the faulty foundations.

To do this it was necessary to suspend the pavement, a section at a time, in advance of the excavation work. For this two pieces of hoop iron, 3 in. long crossed, with a wire 3 in. long, rising from the crossing and ending in a loop, formed the necessary attachment. A sufficient number of these (about thirty to a square yard) were laid on the pavement to be underpinned, and two thicknesses of very coarse-mesh canvas passed over them and glued with very hot glue from above, the glue readily soaking through the coarse canvas to the surface of the tesserae. Thus the hoop-iron crosses were below the canvas and the wire loops projecting above. Two timber trusses of the whole span of the chamber were laid upon ledges bolted to the north and south walls, with a space of some 2 ft. between the trusses and the pavement. These trusses were so arranged as to be slid along the ledges as the work proceeded from east to west. Next, between the two trusses (3 ft. apart), a number of pieces of wood—little joists, as it were—3 ft. long were laid, and from these depended wires hooked at their lower ends, and into each attaching loop on the pavement as above described passed a hook from these little joists. When the glue was hard this arrangement proved an entirely satisfactory way of hanging the tesserae without in any way disturbing them.

Having thus made fast the tesserae with the glue hard and the wires taut, excavation was started in the north-east corner, where no tesserae remained. Here a pit was sunk about 4 ft. square and the same deep, from which to begin

tunnelling southwards, in a line immediately below the two trusses and the 3-ft. width of suspended pavement.

The section of the soil revealed by this first digging was as follows :—

(a) The tesserae, in this spot represented by the cement mending.

(b) Three inches of fine concrete, or mortar, in places still hard.

(c) Three inches of soil, mixed with sand, or grains of mortar and roots (fibrous).

(d) Twelve inches of lime concrete made with local gravel.

(e) Twenty inches of rough flat stones laid sloping against each other (herringbonewise, but only one rank of them).

NOTE.—Fuller, in his "Account of the Parish Church," notices that there was a herring bone foundation of this kind to the west of the archway leading into the Lady Chapel and St. Catherine's Chapel.

From the opening thus made a tunnel was driven southwards, as above said, until the opposite or south wall was reached.

As the tunnel was cut, the earth, etc., was passed back on a trolley to the opening, and there emptied and sifted. The plan adopted by Mr. William Whiting, of Frampton Mansell, the mason who carried the work through, was to get his portion of tunnel clear by some time in the afternoon, and then lay his concrete bottom in before leaving off work, so that he could begin building upon it in the morning ; then building up on either side of the tunnel the half-brick walls in cement mortar on cement concrete to the requisite height (8 in. or so beneath the tesserae), stone slabs about 3 in. thick by 15 in. wide and 2 ft. 6 in. long were laid across from wall to wall, and the space between these stone slabs and the tesserae filled in with stone and tiles and cement mortar, pushing it close and tight up to the underside of the tesserae. The work proceeded in this way without any hitch, except for an interval (when the water, never far below, rose to such a height as to make the work

impossible), until the end. As the first or easternmost tunnel was being cut, it was found that the rough stone foundation (*e*) above mentioned stopped at about 18 in. from the east wall, having been removed when that wall was built. At the doorway in the centre of the east wall the rough stones had not been interfered with. The foundation of this east wall also had been cut through the 12-in. bed of Roman concrete, above mentioned (*d*), suggesting that this earlier pavement, if we may so speak of it, continued eastwards beyond the present chamber.

A piece of a Roman column was also come upon in the first tunnel. It measured about 12 in. diameter, and 18 in. long, and is now in the museum. It was found 11 ft. from the north wall, and 4 ft. from the east wall of chamber, not far below the tesserae.

A considerable number of tesserae of various sizes and colour were continually found amongst the excavated soil.

Outside the chamber on the east 2 ft. 2 in. from the wall, and 22 in. below the surface of the pathway, a bed of black (?) cinders about an inch thick was come upon, amongst the (?) cinders a piece of iron and a piece of bone, and a fragment of brick, also a red or white and a black tessera. The blackness measured about 3 ft. 9 in. by 1 ft. 7 in.

The south jamb of the chamber door is built upon what seems to be the foundations of a 4-ft. wall, running across it, viz. east and west; the north face of this foundation was 10 ft. from the north wall of chamber. This foundation continues eastwards outside the chamber, and measures 3 ft. in thickness. Up to this wall foundation, *i.e.* on the north side of it, the rough stones (*e*) leant north to south, and on the south side of it they leant south to north.

Here were found two pieces of the melanogaster fungus, with its strong smell of assafœtida.

A piece of sandstone 1 in. thick, and about 10 in. by 6 in., was found lying immediately under the 3 in. of concrete

(b) so curiously soft as to be easily rubbed to sand by the finger.

During the excavation of the second tunnel a complete skeleton, except for a bone or two of one foot, was discovered 9 in. below the pavement—the head about half under the tesserae, the rest of it had been under the cement mending that at previous successive times had replaced the loosened tesserae.

The position of the skeleton was as follows:—

The head 7 ft. 4 in. from east wall, 10 ft. from north wall.

The feet 5 ft. 5 in. from east wall, and 4 ft. from north wall.

Thus it will be seen that it lay in a south-west to north-east direction. The head, crushed forward on to breast, looked north-west. The right hand lay along by the side, the left hand across over the pelvis, on which rested the iron cup-shaped object now in the museum. Close to the pelvis was a piece of iron band, thin and about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in. wide, and by the skull another skull and small bones as of a child.

Here also, besides the skeleton, was found the small Romano-British pot now in the museum, mended by Mr. St. Clair Baddeley, of Painswick. Photographs of the skeleton were taken by Mr. Dennis Moss, of Cirencester. The skeleton was left in position for two days, and then carefully removed on to a door packed with sawdust, in as far as possible the same position as that in which it lay on the earth, and then placed in the museum opposite the Great Western Railway, where also are the other objects found during the work. The following is a list of these:—

Romano-British pot.

Two fibulae.

One embossed knobbed nail-head—bronze.

Two coins of fourth and fifth centuries.

Fragments of coloured plaster.

Fragments of metal.

One small piece of crystal.

A covered drain was discovered formed of large thin stones, and running obliquely north-east and south-west across the corner of the present chamber, about 3 ft. below the surface. It was covered over with large rough slabs of local stone.

Passage was left for the water in the dividing walls of the tunnels, and a sealed manhole covered with a large stone against the north wall of the chamber.

Finally, when all was finished underground, and the whole of the pavement had been packed up tight from below, the whole of the floor was gone over, and all tesserae that could be found that were not secure were grouted with liquid cement. This was done as follows, so as to avoid getting any cement on to the surface of the stones, so fatal to the appearance of many pavements that have been removed and remounted. A few, that is three, six, ten or twenty stones, as the occasion might demand are traced, taken up and placed beside the hole they come from in their proper order ready to go back. The space they occupied is then given a sufficient bed of cement mortar, on to which the stones are then relaid projecting above the surface of the other neighbouring stones about  $\frac{1}{8}$  in. to  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. according to their size. These projecting stones are then gently patted down very leisurely until they are level with the others, and it will be found then that the cement bed has welled up between them to the surface, but not over it. They are then left to set.

This plan answered so well, that apart from its general interest, it is due to Mr. Whiting to describe it as one of many ways devised by him for dealing with such little problems as arose from day to day.

Parts of the guilloche borders were also made good where gaps had occurred, and the patterning was unmistakable, removing thus the unsightly cement patches; for this work tesserae discovered in the excavation were used. All such restoration work is marked by a

thin cement line to show where the new work begins and ends.<sup>1</sup>

Below is a description of the pavement as it now is after repair.

#### IN THE CENTRE ORPHEUS.

He is sitting, his body slightly bent, the right knee stiff, the left knee bent to support a stringed instrument like an Irish harp, upon which he is playing with his right hand. Note in his bonnet the white crosses and compare the pavement found at Lydney, where crosses occur in the patterning. These crosses are actual crosses and not stars.

Helmet and head perfect down to and including upper lip; chin gone.

A stalk with foliation occupies space on each side of head.

A broad cloak on his right of red striped with white, swung away from his right arm which is brought forward, the hand upon the strings. The right shoulder and lower parts of the upper and forearm with four fingers remain, the rest gone. The left arm and hand not visible, the waist girdled. Right knee and shin down to the ankle; the left knee, shin and foot remain.

On Orpheus's left, going up the circle, *i.e.* southwards, is a fox of which the head, tip of tail, and centre of body have gone. Outside the central ring, immediately under Orpheus, going eastwards, are, in the second ring of what may be called domestic animals, two geese. The right-hand one long-necked, crested, with striding legs and divided claws and spurs.

The left-hand one has lost head, neck, and part of tail, has striding legs and spurs.

A plant with two leaves remaining stands between the two birds.

[Here is a gap mended with cement].

<sup>1</sup> None of the tesserae forming the pavement were lost during the work above described, and all parts of the Patterned border made good were done with old tesserae discovered beneath the floor. The grey lines in the cement where the tessellated floor has been lost were put in to show roughly the main lines of the setting-out of the floor pattern.

A leaf. Below it, *i.e.* to south-east, remains of a wing or (?) peacock's tail, the strutting breast and one striding foot (the front one) and part of leg remains.

A plant with five leaves.

A duck with up-curved bill, striding, with wing barred.

A plant with four leaves.

A pheasant with striding legs, the hinder toes just touching the ring that represents the ground. Long-tailed. The barred wing and head except beak remain, a white line over the eye.

A peacock with tail lifted off the ground, and crested head carried low with hollow neck crouched over the fore foot.

A plant with three leaves and the stalk of a fourth.

A (?) peahen with striding legs. Head, shoulders and part of body gone. This completes the circle.

Outside this is a broad band or wreath of leaves.

Beginning in the next wider band of the wild animals at the same point, *i.e.* below Orpheus's feet.

Fragment of a tree of full leafage.

[Here is the gap of cement mending above mentioned.]

Due east of Orpheus appears all that is left of a tiger, the head, back of neck, shoulder and leg alone remaining. The head hangs down, some kind of whisker or beard beneath the jaw, the eye solemn and heavy.

A tree full of leafage with a pruned branch, crossed by the swinging tail of the next beast.

A leopard, complete saving the neck, foreleg, back of head and all but a fragment of the ears. The head carried higher than the tiger's, eye less heavy. A filagree of pale tesserae beneath the belly and between the hinder legs representing grass.

A tree full of leafage with a pruned branch, crossed by the tail of the next beast.

A tiger, striped and banded, complete, except the near fore-paw and the far hinder one, meeting as he walks, and a piece from the middle of the thigh.

The filagree patterning continues between the legs and under the belly of the tiger and in front of him.

Then comes again a tree with serrated leafage and one pruned branch, crossed by the tail of the next beast.

A lion. The front part of head and forepaw lost, part of the off hind leg, and a small piece of the near shoulder, otherwise complete and very noble.

Then a gap, and then a griffin with long, forward ears, beak and beard. The head, breast and parts of the legs only remaining. The uplifted right foreleg almost entirely gone,

This completes the outer circle.

Outside the ring of wild animals of the forest is a band of guilloche ornament, circular, woven cleverly at the points of attachment into a square of similar ornament that enclosed the whole of the Orpheus design, with four spandrels filled with leaf patterns. Three spandrels remain in whole or in part, the north-east one has quite disappeared.

On the east a broad band of various geometrical patterning is divided from the guilloche square by a double line of white tesserae, and on the south a more important geometrical pattern the width of the Orpheus square, set out symmetrically with that, suggests the continuation of the pavement southwards.

Among the examples of Roman mosaic left to us, none will be found to excel, and very few to equal, this of the Barton at Cirencester in power of animal drawing. For ever pacing around their master, these creatures of the field and forest have been set out here in these tiny scraps of coloured stone with an ease and mastery that we must feel is very remarkable. There is a grace and nobleness in their movement and gesture that has been seldom reached, even in the highest period of the life of any nation.

ALFRED H. POWELL,

*Member of the Society for the  
Protection of Ancient Buildings.*

OAKRIDGE, STROUD.