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The Roman-British Temple, Chedworth

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THE ROMAN-BRITISH TEMPLE, CHEDWORTH

by St. CLAIR BADDELEY

Part I

SINCE, three years ago, writing some account of the (1925-6) exploration of this beautiful and characteristic site overlooking Edricsmead and the river Coln—here in part re-edited, with additions, from a limited and privately-printed text—the finding by Mr E. C. Sewell and Mrs Sewell, of Cirencester, of a small sketch, dated 22 October 1871, made by the late Prof. James Buckman, (though not published by him), that represents the valuable, though fragmentary, northwest angle of the sadly-missing plinth of the Temple, now renders it possible, not merely to reinforce our view of that once-important structure, but to present a slightly fuller text, which, with the friendly consent of the Hon. Samuel Vestey, the owner of the site, and the encourager of its study and investigation, the writer can now offer to these *Transactions*.

The site, of late years better known to visitors, is marked by an artificial square platform situated some 700 yards southeast of the familiar Chedworth villa in Falcombe (fallow-combe), and within fifty yards of the drive and the present bed of the stream,¹ and about 50 feet above it, among fir and oak trees. The spot, for more than a century, has been locally known as 'Old Quarry'; and, immediately beside it (w), occurs a deep pit that was enlarged in 1864-5; to which a brief cart-track gives access from the road. The trenching has consequently formed certain steep knolls upon which trees of now some sixty years' growth are flourishing.

¹ The original, or earlier, bed of the Coln has obviously been deliberately altered 200 years ago in order, doubtless, to regularize the rich pasture beside it, for cattle, by getting rid of many windings.

To the left of these, overlooking both innerward quarry and outward knoll, extends the level platform above mentioned having once commanded an inclined and stepped approach, nearly 100 ft. long, from the road and river. Until the late exploration it had been for two generations a jungle of thorn and privet and elder-bushes, affording good cover for foxes and rabbits. Among this scrub before clearing it the site proved to be still strewn with Roman-British debris: tiles, tufa-like blocks of squared calcar, also dark sandstone (FD) even hexagonal roof-tiles, with (occasionally) their iron nails; while, beyond the scrub, it was still obvious that the southwest (and also the southeast) angle of the former (rear) walls lay yet clearly recognizable; the former, indeed, preserving parts of no less than four courses of Roman-draughted *opus quadratum*, with a fragment of the chamfered 'set-off'; while many more similar great blocks (4 ft. by 2 ft.) lay displaced (? for carrying-off) and scattered along the slope to the disused modern trench below.

Additional verbal evidences given by my workers (from the Stowell estate), from their youthful memories, and confirmed presently by further exploration of the site, made it certain that long before 1864, when the late Mr James Farrer, F.S.A. SCOT., of Inglesborough, co. York, the late Lord Eldon's uncle, and the finder and excavator for him of the neighbouring villa, duly recognized the remains here as those befitting a temple. These had been victims of organized plunder on a very destructive scale; and the subjoined plan discovers readily enough to what extent these operations have completed the obliteration of the cella noticed as clearly traceable by Mr J. W. Grover as lately as 1867, though doubtless it was familiar to Capt. Bell, who, already in 1864, here picked up some excellent early 2nd century Samian ware: the best specimen of which is now in the museum at the villa—the writer having been kindly permitted to receive it (in exchange) from Cheltenham College

museum, to which it had been given and labelled by the original finder. One former quarrier related that he and his brother, as youths, had carried off (in 1871-2) over 300 loads of stones, squared and other, up to Yanworth, a mile away; wherewith to repair certain sheds, cottages, and gateways. Excavation in 1926 soon made it clear that two rather long separated dates of spoliation have occurred here; the earlier probably in the 18th century days of the Grubham-Howe family: yet we see that it is on record that both Mr Farrer and Mr Grover about 1866 separately noticed that parts of the actual inner

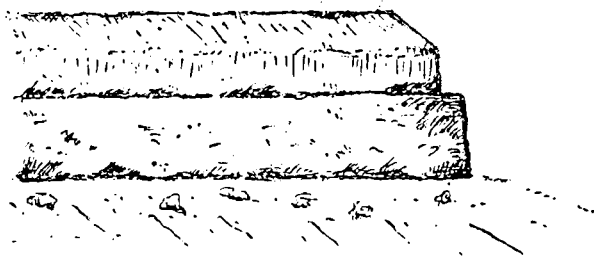


Fig. 2

dais (so called) and four or five courses of the southwest wall, next the quarry, still stood in site. At present only a portion, including the third course, survives there.

Measurements of the three cleared angles (inner) of the remaining foundation-courses gave the internal width and length of the original square structure as 41 ft. by 39 ft. 6 ins. The fourth (or northwest), angle, had been deleted entirely by emptying the loads of stone over it for the carters below to handle. It may be conjectured that this was the valuable point that forms the subject of Prof. Buckman's drawing now reproduced. To this let us now subjoin what Mr J. W. Grover actually wrote in his paper on the Chedworth villa.² 'About half a mile from the Villa in the wood, and immediately

² *Journ. Brit. Arch. Assoc.*, 1868, xxiv, 134.

adjoining the present road [then re-made] and the rushing waters of the Coln, can be seen the massive foundations of an extensive temple, about 16 yards wide, the length uncertain. At its southern extremity [can be traced] the raised stone dais, with the dwarf walls which probably supported the steps to the altar [*i.e.* the walls of the cella]. Who was the god to whom it was consecrated? Could he have been the divinity of the Thames'?

We were fortunate enough to find a 'drum' of one of the frontal columns (diam. 1 ft. 6 ins., length 2 ft. 7 ins.) and part of another:³ of which there may have been either four, or six; and, with these, were several bricks formed of *opus signinum* (12 ins. by 7 ins. by 4 ins. deep). In addition, while examining a circular pit centring the front section, we were lucky enough to pick out a fragment of a tile bearing a (perhaps) unique impress of a wolf's foot (letter from Sir Arthur Keith) together with a portion of the frontal bone of a young man and a bone of a red-deer, a bronze pin, and also one of bone (spilla). Close in front of this pit was laid bare two-thirds the length of the north, or front, wall, including the sharp angle of the eastern end thereof. One was then in possession of three of the four angles of the structure, giving a diagonal from northeast to southwest (interior) of 55 ft. Nevertheless, most of the east wall had long been dug-up and carted away.

It is now useful to subjoin that the other, and more important explorer, Mr James Farrer, before the villa hard-by became uncovered properly by him, in 1865 wrote the following words⁴—'In one place, discovered in opening out a quarry, a large platform of stones of four courses, rising one above the other, and of quite Cyclopean character, has been laid bare. Hypocaust tiles, several of them having the impression of the feet

³ One of the workmen quite distinctly remembered a still larger fragment being found.

⁴ *Procs. of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 1868, vi, 282-3.

of animals—deer, sheep, dog, etc., and one with human finger-marks; also remains of pillars, and very large worked stones. A human jaw-bone, in which were two teeth, was found here’.

These are the tiles which, together with fragments of a late mosaic, Mr Farrer set aside for the future museum which he designed with the keeper’s house (really intended for a shooting lodge) within the villa, and they can all be viewed therein today, (central case w). There is reason to decide that the small anaglyph of Sylvanus—formerly credited to the dove-cote and terrace north of the villa (as by Canon H. M. Scarth)—was really brought from here, as a former caretaker informed the writer a generation or more ago; ‘from another Villa’ (as he termed it) ‘down in the wood towards the mill’. Scarth merely knew that there was a second site nearby, showing remains; but he knew not of the third and fourth. Writing of Chedworth villa, and referring to the terrace, he merely says: ‘Here I believe, was found the piece of sculpture which . . . contains the figure of a hunter dressed in a tunic with his pallium fastened to his right shoulder, and twisted over the left arm, holding a rabbit [? hare] in the right hand’.⁵

The small late altarlets (fig. 9) graven with war-gods, here figured, probably came from the temple site, and remained undescribed (till now) in the museum.

The piece of sculpture that *was* found upon the (N) terrace was the graceful little stone carven niche now in the villa museum, together with some coins and tesserae of glass (blue and white). Others of the tesserae, since then, have been found there.⁶

⁵ *Journ. Brit. Arch. Assoc.*, 1869, xxv, 222.

⁶ By some writers this terrace-site has fancifully been named Temple of Diana, Vesta or Tomb-House. Our own investigation has satisfied us that it was carefully levelled and laid out of old as a water-garden adorned by an octagonal wheel design of 8 cisterns, centred by a dove-cote, or columbarium: and this was, moreover, the chief water-supply of the Villa.

Part II

The digging at this site, therefore, had a three-fold objective: first, the examination of such parts of the side and rear-walls as might be found to survive either above or below the present surface. Next, the examining of a large depression situated in the front denuded floor of the platform and surrounded by well-set heavy rubble-stones, and lastly, the saving of any objects to be met with in or near it, and the search for the vanished front or north wall-foundation if remains of that still anywhere lay hidden, and, lastly, the path mounting from the river-side.

The fully-exposed southwest angle of the building sufficiently declares the style of the outer structure to have been in that known to Roman archaeology as *opus quadratum*, or, of long squared stones, and with its heavy axe-work (dressing) still showing characteristically upon them (fig. 3). Many other stones of similar size belonging to former walls are seen lying displaced just west of it upon the slope to the modern quarry, having been abandoned by the latest spoilers as being not easy to handle. Fortunately they had left in site the great chamfered outer-course at the extreme south end of the wall (cf. fig. 4). Several other courses duly appear there below that. Trees covered almost everything until 1925. But the special interest of this once fine southwest angle and its resistance to the spoiler is that it bears sure proof of original structural thickening—there due to certain definite purpose and not to repairs. That makes this angle-wall 7 ft. 6 ins. through instead of 5 ft.—like the rest of the walls—and upon the flat upper surface of the large chamfered stone is noticed what resembles a sinking, perhaps related to a door-bolt. But opinions may differ as to its origin, other than accidental. A stairway may have risen here. The numerous hypocaust tiles found next adjoining it in 1864-5

PLATE I



Fig. 3. Southwest angle above quarry—fallen block



Fig. 4. Southwest angle from west side

PLATE II

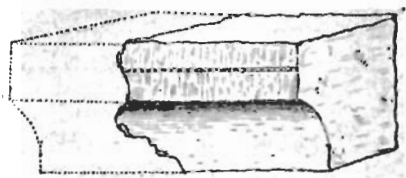


Fig. 5. South wall course



Fig. 6. Platform and northeast angle

PLATE III



Fragment of freestone

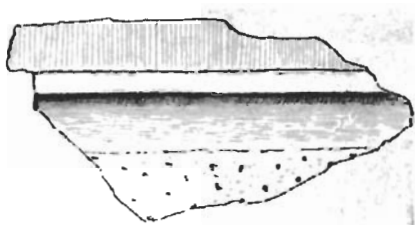


Fig. 7. Fragment of freestone pricked for plaster

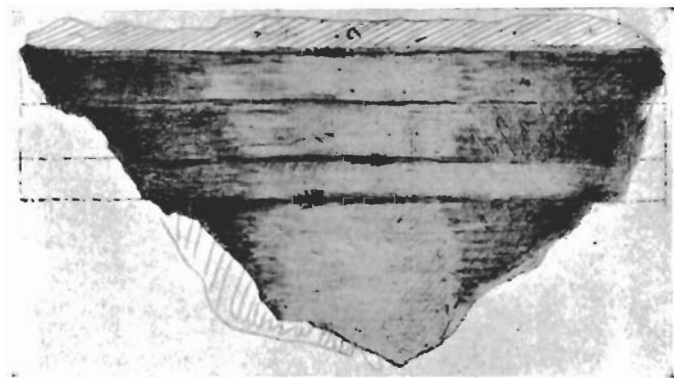


Fig. 8. Fragment of oolite cap



A GOD OF WAR
holding battle axe in left hand
and spear in right (4th cent.)

Fig. 9



A WAR DIVINITY
spear and shield incised on
both sides

as well as others more recently found scattered there, suggest that some small abode, possibly a priest's or Ædile's house—may have been here attached to the building. Similar wall-thickenings in like position have been noted in other temple-walls.

The upper courses of masonry that may have carried the latest floor and dais (*that* recognized in part by Mr Grover in 1867) have all but vanished. Only a few rough slabs project internally from the south wall (cf. plan fig. 1), and a number of beautifully dressed small free-stone blocks found loose there may possibly represent the start of the former cella-walls. The rest of the much-pillaged south wall, saving a few displaced blocks, entirely gives out along the shelf-line until the south-east angle brings one to a single large stone, and several smaller stones ;—the former slightly out of position—but the latter in site. Together these form the commencement of the east wall, the northeast or other end of which has since been disclosed, at least in its foundation-courses. This wall is represented by a bank of moved earth containing smaller stones, some few of them only in site, together with much cement and clay.

In March 1926, near the north end of this bank a noticeable circular hollow (or pit) was dealt with and found to lie upon the median line of the temple-enclosure. It was framed round with several courses of non-squared stones, and proved to have a depth of about 5 feet. Of whatsoever it may have once been lined no trace survived. Muddy discolouration was non-existent at 2 ft. 6 ins. down, where, however, were met with two stones stained green with oxide of copper and pierced by two small clean holes as though for some apparatus. The position of this pit, *tholos*, or whatever it may have been, will be noticed upon the plan as occurring just within the front wall (and door) of the building. A diminutive mantled male figurine of bronze, wreathed and extending with his right hand a *patera* (6.05 cm.), was picked up near

the northeast angle. The road and river Coln lie below in front of the site ; so we may infer that this track connective (though reformed by the late owner) with the Foss-way is of ancient origin. Some dense thickets of elder, privet, and nettles being removed, digging commenced at the extreme north edge of the drop of an apparent terrace to the road by making a west-east exploration trench.

Having probed this terrace along about 14 feet to a depth of 6 feet entirely composed of debris, the natural reddish sub-soil was reached—all that lay above it being composed of mixed tile, soil, shards and cement, with some few small bits of coarse brown R.-B. pottery shot in here and there. From a central point of that sufficiently-completed trench we now turned at right-angles (due south) with another trench to make directly for the aforesaid pit-centre, then still about 45 feet away, just within the front of the temple. Two good fragments (fig. 7) of a hollow-moulded square freestone (impost) were soon met with and some hypo-tiles and more hexagonal roof-tiles. Presently, at a few feet onward only, traces were encountered of some poor dry-walling of modern period. Soon after passing through this a piece of well-moulded freestone (column-cap) turned-up (cf. fig. 8), and a thick animal (red-deer) bone cut at one end, but showing no sign of use. At 25 feet the hard natural soil rose decisively about 3 feet in the trench, and continued thence-forward at a gradually shallowing level. The trench was therefore travelling slowly shallower and uphill. At 8 feet further on it rose nearly 2 feet more. These sudden liftings may indicate former steps, the stones of which, however, have been long removed. Pieces of cut stone wedge-shaped, and quantities of tiles were now met with. The shallowness soon thinned to within a foot of the surface. The men were disappointed. Then, suddenly, at but 6 feet north of the pit opening, the spade came against a distinct solid wall-footing of fine cement with a clean hard upper surface, measuring

5 feet in width like all the other wall-foundations. This was the front-wall foundation-course. Having cleared this we opened the ground to left (or at 7 feet east), to see if this wall-course continued. This proved to be the case and with it we had, therefore, obtained the exact areal inner dimensions of the enclosure, namely : length 39 ft. 6 ins. by breadth of 41 feet ; otherwise, the measure of an almost square building that had once owned these massive stone walls.

A second portion of a smooth column with a diameter 1 ft. 6 ins. had already been found lying near the pit. This enables us to imagine, (but only *imagine*) a tetra-style (or hexastyle) finely-built temple, rising within a solid enclosure, and placed designedly upon a shelf cut into this selected hill-slope, at some 50 feet above the waters of the ancient *Cuneglan*, or modern Coln, and its green valley of pasture (*Edrichsmede*). Some portion of it rose, therefore, once to a heavy pent roof neatly covered with red-sandstone hexagonal tiles ;⁷ and it was approached from a Roman-British riverside trackway below it by a gentle *rampa* leading to two or three broad-stepped shallow platforms of yellowish stone. At the southwest angle once stood a small, attached, building heated by a hypocaust and similarly tiled. On the other hand the small fragment or two of mosaic is very rough and late and no other tesserae have been met with here by the writer.

The neighbourhood of a long barrow (Woodbarrow), since fruitless operations in 1921 entirely hidden by the arable soil, and of a second one refound during the war westwards in Withington Wood, as well as two ditched Iron Age barrows—all of them overlooking this Coln valley at different altitudes and distances from the river—seem to point to its marked veneration in times long pre-Roman ; while Holy Well, at the foot of Holiwell

⁷ Of quite another design and material from the slats of the villa close-by, which are from the upper oolite.

Wood, lies actually on the ancient parish boundary-line of Withington and close to the road and river north beyond Chedworth villa. Not a little traditional folklore (respecting Elderwood, Hutnage close-by, and the little people), likewise preserves something of Celtic atmosphere in this beautiful secluded spot, that we may duly be thankful for.⁸

If, then, as we hold, these remains are those of a Roman-British *sacrarium* or temple-enclosure of the 2nd century A.D., thus placed overlooking this head-water of the Thames, we may assure ourselves that the site was chosen for religious reasons, and conclude that the temple was probably but a glorified successor of some earlier, more primitive, tribal structure.

Whatever was the nature of the cult established here, or whatever river-god may have been here revered, we are at liberty to suggest that in all probability this *sacrarium* and a former grove may well have been the magnet that gradually drew out of Corinium official and other landowners, like Censorinus, to build their houses and develop their estates near an auspicious and long renowned spot; and, thus, in time these created the unusual group of rich villas which we only now recognize—no longer as of sporadic occurrence, but as having consisted of several State-encouraged and State-protected properties, the nearest of which were Listercombe, Chedworth, Compton Abdale and Withington, a group of lasting importance to the trade of Corinium.*

⁸ The operations due to transferring this water to Stowell have made the well unrecognizable save from the overflowing close to the road, and just east of Turpin's Green (or Hreodcumbe = reed-combe).

⁹ 1628 IPM, called Leycester, showing OE ceaster for Latin *castrum*.

* A list of the coins found on the Temple-site and also of those found on the site of Chedworth Villa—all now in the museum—is printed in the Chedworth Roman Villa guide, (ed. 1931), pp. 33-6.