

From the *Transactions* of the
Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

The Corinium Museum, Cirencester, and its Curators

by E. C. Sewell
1933, Vol. 55, 317-321

© The Society and the Author(s)

THE CORINIUM MUSEUM, CIRENCESTER,
AND ITS CURATORS

by EDWARD C. SEWELL

THE building of the 'Corinium Museum' was due to the generosity of Henry George, fourth Earl Bathurst, and mainly arose from the great interest evoked by the discovery in 1849 of the two fine mosaic tessellated pavements in Dyer street, Cirencester, which are now housed in the museum. There had been previous discoveries of similar pavements recorded by historians of Cirencester and antiquaries but in 1849 there happened to be residing there James Buckman, professor of geology and botany at the Royal Agricultural College, who was an enthusiastic student of Roman remains. He immediately saw that these pavements were of unusual quality and size and deserved preservation. Buckman found ready supporters for this view in Canon Powell, vicar of Cirencester, Charles H. Newmarch, T. B. Brown, J. Brown, T. Cox and other leading residents. When representations were made that the pavements might be placed in a suitable building for exhibition Earl Bathurst most generously came forward and said he would at his own expense provide a museum for their reception and for the deposit of other Roman remains found in the town and district. With this promise in view Professor Buckman and others took the necessary steps for raising the mosaic pavements in sections and for storing them in safety until the time came to relay them in the promised museum. He was assisted by Canon Powell and Mr Thomas Cox, who accurately traced on the spot all the designs of the patterns and then coloured them for future reference.

For various reasons the erection of the museum was postponed for some time but was eventually built from designs and plans of J. Parrish, F.S.A., architect on the site of an ancient inn known as the Barley Mow. This stood adjacent to the Tetbury road and immediately opposite the entrance to the Great Western Railway station, which at that time (1856-7) had only been opened a few years. In August 1856 the museum was opened to the public. In the *Illustrated London News* of 2 August is an article descriptive of its origin and objects and an illustration of the exterior and interior. The British Association was that year holding its annual meeting at Oxford under the presidency of Dr Daubeney and the members made an excursion to be present at the opening. This indicates the interest that was being taken in the event.

Little is known generally of those who have been responsible for the care of the museum, and the following notes on the curators who have served since its opening will therefore be of interest.

JAMES BUCKMAN, F.S.A., F.L.S., F.G.S., the first curator, was born in 1814 at Cheltenham where he studied under a surgeon apothecary and where he subsequently lectured at the Philosophical Institution. In 1848 he was appointed professor of geology and botany at the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester. He was one of the first members of the Cotteswold Naturalists' Field Club, which had been formed on 7 July 1846 by T. B. Lloyd-Baker of Hardwicke Court and other county gentlemen at a meeting at the Black Horse Inn, Birdlip, when 25 foundation members were elected. In 1854 he became honorary secretary of the Club and served until 1860. He left Cirencester in 1863 to reside at Bradford Abbas in Dorsetshire, where he died in 1884.

While at Cirencester he contributed several papers to the *Journal of the Archaeological Institute* in reference

to mosaic pavements and the method of raising them, and on other subjects relating to Roman remains, upon which he became an authority.* He was joint author with Charles H. Newmarch of *Remains of Roman Art in Cirencester*, published in 1850. Buckman was a popular lecturer on many subjects and he was largely instrumental in getting various townsmen who had made collections of Roman remains in the past to deposit them in the museum as donations or on permanent loan.

CAPTAIN CHARLES COMPTON ABBOTT succeeded James Buckman. He had been a captain in the 47th regiment of Infantry, and in January 1862 was appointed adjutant of the Royal North Gloucestershire Militia whose headquarters were at Cirencester. He at once took great interest in antiquarian pursuits and on Buckman's departure in 1863 was appointed by Earl Bathurst to be curator, and continued as such till 1869 when he retired from the militia. He died at Weston super Mare on 30 May 1887.

ARTHUR HERBERT CHURCH, K.C.V.O., M.A., F.R.S., F.S.A., was the third curator of the museum. He came to Cirencester in 1863, when he was appointed professor of chemistry at the Royal Agricultural College on the retirement of Professor A. Voelcher. Mr Church held this professorship nearly 16 years, during which time he became noted for his research work in various directions. He was appointed curator in 1869, and held office till 1879 when, on his marriage, he resigned his professorship at the College and went to reside in London. From the outset of his residence at the College Professor Church took a leading part in the work of archaeological research in Cirencester and district, and assisted Capt. Abbott in

* See Gomme's *Index of Archaeological Papers*, 1890, pp. 110-12, and *Royal Society's catalogues of Scientific Papers*; *Catalogue Gloucestershire Collection, Gloucester Public Library*, index, p. 1107.

securing for the museum many objects that would otherwise have gone elsewhere. In 1868 he brought out the first printed guide to the contents of the museum. This was followed by other editions issued under his editorship up to the year 1910. During his curatorship he succeeded in acquiring at the sale of the Bateman heirlooms in 1893 an extremely good example of a Roman cinerary urn of glass. It was found wrapped in lead and enclosed in a hollow stone in Kings Mead, Cirencester about the year 1765. In 1872 he secured the valuable statuette of Diana and other interesting objects of bronze and bone. All these he generously deposited in the museum. He also acquired during his residence at Cirencester five gold coins of Valentinian, Gratian and Honorius (364-95) in mint condition. In 1917 they were presented by Lady Church to the museum in memory of her husband, who died at Kew on 31 May 1915.

CHRISTOPHER BOWLY, fourth curator, succeeded Sir Arthur H. Church in 1879 and held the curatorship for the long period of 33 years,

He was the younger son of William Crotch Bowly of Cecily Hill, Cirencester, who was the eldest brother of Edward, David, and Samuel Bowly, all well remembered by name and repute. He resided at Siddington House, which he purchased after the death of his uncle Edward Bowly. He devoted himself to public work and antiquarian and other pursuits. Mr Bowly was one of the last survivors of the Cirencester Society of Friends, with which his family had always been identified. He died at the ripe age of 85 years. He was instrumental in obtaining for the museum in 1910 the interesting inscribed stone found in the garden of The Firs, Victoria road, with its dedication to Septimius. In May 1880 he rescued an inscribed Roman altar that had been uncovered during drainage alterations in Sheep street and had been broken

in many pieces. These were put together with infinite trouble by Mr and Mrs Bowly.

EDWARD CLARE SEWELL, the fifth curator, was appointed by Earl Bathurst in 1912. The museum was then in a very neglected condition as Mr Bowly's health during his latter years had precluded his visiting the museum except at rare intervals. During the summer of 1925 a serious settlement occurred in the roof at the southwest corner which involved extensive repairs. These were carried out at very considerable expense by Earl Bathurst's estate workmen. The work of repair and the colouring of the walls lasted until November 1925. Between 1926-8 an extensive rearrangement of the objects in the cases was carried out by Mr and Mrs Sewell, who introduced the system of placing the bronze objects in glass topped boxes and raising them on inclined plane close to the glass of the cases. The Church collection of coins presented by Lady Church was also placed in a glazed frame and labelled. Various iron objects were sent to the Ashmolean museum for restorative treatment and replaced in case A. The notable exhibit of the iron chain for a pot-hanger is almost identical to one found by the Hon. R. C. Neville at Great Chesterford, Essex. The large amphora found at the waterworks in 1925 in a broken condition was restored at the British Museum and is placed in an iron cradle constructed by a local craftsman.

In 1932 Mr Sewell decided to take up residence in Dorset and on his leaving Cirencester Earl Bathurst appointed Mr W. C. Priestley, formerly of Bath, as his successor.

Mr Priestley has a very wide knowledge of Romano-British Antiquities and is keenly alive to the interest which the Corinium Museum has for Cirencester.