

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

**Trial Excavations at Sea Mills, 1954**

by K. R. Nightingale  
1954, Vol. 73, 70-72

© The Society and the Author(s)

## TRIAL EXCAVATION AT SEA MILLS, 1954

by K. R. NIGHTINGALE

THE need of a trial excavation was indicated when tesserae were discovered on the surface of a portion of the garden at 31, Hadrian Close, Sea Mills, within the area of the well-known Roman settlement. With the kind consent of the occupant, Mr J. Bryan, a trial trench  $23\frac{1}{2}$  by 3 feet was dug in the hope that remains of a tessellated pavement might be exposed. Few more tesserae were found, however, but it is interesting to note that the tesserae originally found lay within 25 feet of the area marked *opus signinum* on the 1945 plan of the site.<sup>1</sup> It is thought that the tesserae represent a mosaic broken up and scattered in 1945-6—the *opus signinum* being merely the brick-mortar bed of such a floor. But whatever its origin, it is more than evident that the original mosaic must have been a very fine one, indicating the existence of a building of some pretensions.

The stratification observed consisted of a recently-laid top spit of 9 inches, followed by a 1-inch layer of coal and builder's rubble. Immediately below the coal layer was a 12-inch layer of disturbed, pre-1946, plough-soil lying upon a rough stone pavement some 15 to 18 inches deep. A square Bristol farthing, of later 16th century date, was found just above the paving. The pavement may be compared with a similar extent of rough cobbling exposed in 1945 only about 40 feet away<sup>2</sup>; and indeed both exposures may be of parts of the same pavement. Numerous fragments of undatable Roman pottery, nails, bones, etc., were found in the disturbed layers.

Below the pavement was a 12 to 15 inch early occupation layer passing gradually into virgin marl, and sealed by the pavement above. Approximately 15 square feet of paving were taken up and the early occupation level excavated down to the

<sup>1</sup> *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, LXVI, p. 261, at 'x'.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p. 269.

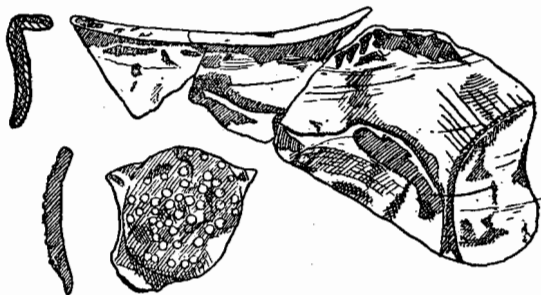


Fig. 1. Scale  $\frac{1}{4}$

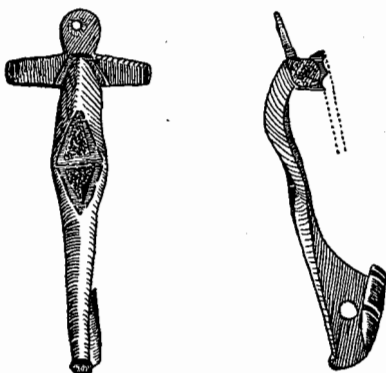


Fig. 2. Scale  $\frac{1}{4}$

marl. To one side of the trench, evidence of the edge of a pit, 9 inches deep but of unknown extent, was apparent. The more important finds from the early occupation level include:

1. Five fr. of a small decorated beaker (see FIG. 1) of cream-coloured fabric bearing traces of a brownish slip or glaze. Pre-Flavian beakers of this shape, though lacking the decoration of slipped crescents and applied 'raspberry' roundels, are common enough on early Roman sites in Britain and were a continental import. Decoration combining crescents and roundels appears on small bowls of similar fabric at *Hofheim* (Taf. xxxii, 22 Ac.) and in this country, e.g. at *Exeter*, (Fox. *Roman Exeter*, 1952, p. 77, Fig. 9, 12 and pl. x, c) but the occurrence of both motifs on a beaker seems unparalleled. Yet the five shards were found in such close proximity, and were the only ones of their kind found, that one is compelled to regard them as being all of one vessel despite the fact that the roundel will not join the other pieces.

This is an important find, as it helps to substantiate Mr Boon's belief in a Claudian origin for Sea Mills.<sup>1</sup>

2. One fr. S. Gaulish plain Samian, later 1st century. Form uncertain.
3. Two fr. poppy-head beaker, 1st-2nd century.
4. Two fr. amphorae.
5. Two fr. coarse, hand-made bead-rimmed cooking jar. These may go as late as the later 1st century.
6. Fr. metal (speculum-metal) mirror.

For content, this occupation level may be compared with that excavated below the stretch of pavement exposed in 1945. The occupation there ran as late as Trajan, as evidenced by a *semis* of that emperor (RIC 689)<sup>2</sup>.

A test-hole about 8 feet west of the trench and opposite its middle ascertained the continuation of the paving at least so far. In the disturbed level above the paving at this point a small bronze brooch was discovered (see FIG. 2) of Collingwood's Type N, dated to the later 2nd century. A similar brooch was found in the 1945-6 operations.<sup>3</sup>

All the finds have been deposited at the City Museum, Bristol, together with plans of the excavation. I am indebted to Mr George C. Boon for help in the work and for contributing a note on the finds.

<sup>1</sup> *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, LXVIII, 184 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Trans. B.G.A.S.*, LXVI, p. 270.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 263, no. 1, and p. 287.