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Woodchester Roman Villa

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found to bear a *graffito* (PLATE VI) on which Mr R. P. Wright, F.S.A., to whom it was submitted, reports as follows¹:—

‘Dr I. A. Richmond examined it carefully yesterday and we read SILVRF (*Silur fecit*) which accords well with its discovery in the Gloucester area. Richmond quotes an example of *Silur* as the singular form from a Spanish inscription, *C.I.L.*, ii, 5923

The *graffito* has about three secondary strokes on the 2nd, 3rd and 5th letters. The S has two tails, and has been cut after the 2nd letter was made. The 3rd letter is a cursive L, and the R and F are good. The V is ligatured to the R by the serif at the bottom.’

In the north-east corner of the room, the hypocaust piers were not of tiles but in five instances capitals and bases of stone columns and in one instance a mortar-filled box-tile had been used. The fragments of columns were cut in the local oolite and displayed careful workmanship; they are very like other fragments displayed on the site and, by their re-use, imply that Room 5 belongs to one of the later phases of reconstruction in the villa’s history which had been noted by Mrs E. M. Clifford, F.S.A., in her excavations of 1938.²

F. H. THOMPSON

WOODCHESTER ROMAN VILLA

The pavements of Rooms ten, twelve, thirteen and a portion of Corridor two, as numbered on Samuel Lysons’ plan³ of the Villa published in 1797, were uncovered for a short period in July and August, 1954.

With the permission of Mr Nelson Bower of The Old Priory,

¹ Cf. *J.R.S.*, xli, 143.

² *J.R.S.*, xxix, 217.

³ *An Account of Roman Antiquities Discovered at Woodchester in the County of Gloucester*. Samuel Lysons, F.R.S. & A.S. 1797.

on whose land this part of the Villa lies, the Rector of Woodchester, the Rev. D. H. Woolcott with the help of the Parochial Church Council uncovered these pavements for show to raise funds for the repair and decoration to the parish Church Room of the Church of St. Mary the Virgin, Woodchester.

I am indebted to Mr Nelson Bower, the Rev. D. H. Woolcott and the Ministry of Works for permission to take photographs of the pavements.

This note is to call attention to the pavement of Room X as it and the others of Rooms XII and XIII have not been seen since Lysons' day. Photography has also supplied details missed by the original artists who made the drawings.

A description of the pavement follows in Lysons' own words:

'Having obtained leave of Samuel Wathen, Esq. the proprietor of the adjoining orchard, to open any part of his ground, a hole was dug opposite the centre of the great pavement in the churchyard, at a distance of about twenty-five feet from the churchyard wall, where, at the depth of three feet below the surface of the earth, there appeared a floor of very hard cement or *terrace*; on removing some of which, a small fragment of a mosaic pavement was discovered six inches below the level of that floor. The whole of the terrace floor was then not without much difficulty removed from the extreme hardness of the cement, and the four fragments of a mosaic pavement represented in PLATE XIX were laid open.

'The fragments of this pavement which remain are sufficient to ascertain the general design of it; see PLATE XIX. They are in a good taste, and very similar to that of a large mosaic pavement discovered at Avenches in Switzerland. The design consists of five octagonal compartments, containing figures on a white ground, surrounded by a double labyrinth fret; immediately within which on the north side is a scroll of flowers, having a vase in the centre; see PLATE XX, FIG. 3. In the remains of the compartments at the north-west and south-east corners are fragments of Bacchanalian figures. The octagonal compartment at the south-west corner is entire, and contains figures of two boys holding up a basket of fruit and leaves, with the words BONVM EVENTVM inscribed under them. The compartment at the north-east corner had nothing remaining within the octagonal border, except the letters BIINIIC----- being part of the remainder of the foregoing inscription; the last word has probably been COLITE, which would exactly fill up the space which is effaced. The inscription would then be "BONVM EVENTVM BENE COLITE." It is represented of half the

original size in PLATE XX, FIG. 1 and 2, in order more distinctly to show the form of the letters. One peculiarity is to be observed in this inscription, II (no doubt intended for the Greek H) is introduced for E; a circumstance by no means uncommon in the Roman inscriptions, and equally occurring, whether the E be long or short. Unfortunately the date of few of these inscriptions is known, so that this peculiarity will not serve as a criterion towards ascertaining the age of the mosaic, which it might otherwise have done.

'The room to which this pavement belonged, appears to have been a square of twenty-two feet ten inches; the walls, which are two feet thick, and formed of stone roughly hewn, remain to the height of about three feet on every side. Several fragments of stucco, painted in fresco were found among the rubbish, and some adhering to the walls; the colours of which were very fresh when wetted.

'Several flues were discovered under the last-mentioned pavement, crossing each other at right angles; they were four feet in depth, and one foot eleven inches in width. At the end of several of them were funnels of brick tile, placed upright in the wall, similar to those before mentioned. Some accident seems to have happened to these flues, which destroyed the greater part of the mosaic pavement over them; for it seems to have been forced up and demolished every where in the direction of the flues, and the edges of that which remains appear cracked. The floor of cement was probably laid over to supply the place of that which had been so destroyed.'

It is a remarkable fact that the pavement when uncovered in 1954 had not deteriorated since its exposure and reburial by Lysons 150 years ago, but remained as he described it even to the letter 'C' of the debatable word 'COLITE' of the inscription. It should be of interest that a covering of two feet of garden loam appears to be an excellent covering for mosaic pavements.

PLATE VII shows the south-west compartment of the pavement of Room X, with the figures of two boys holding up a basket of fruit and the inscription BONVM EVENTVM below. The boys appear to have their heads tied up in scarves which flow out behind them, while the right hand figure wears a tunic and has boots on his feet. It is not clear what the left hand figure wears beyond a decorative covering on his right shoulder.

Nothing remains of the north-east compartment but the fragment of the remaining part of the inscription BIINIIC.

The north-west and south-east compartments have only the



PLATE VII. Bonvm Eventvm Pavement, Room X, Woodchester

facing p. 175

lower parts of figures showing, the north-west those of a man and woman dancing and the south-east a man wearing boots standing in front of what might be the base of an urn. Too little remains of the central compartment to be certain of its design but there is a suggestion that it might be also of a figure subject.

That Room X is of two periods was proved by Lysons' excavation, since he there found a hard cement floor six inches thick covering the ruined mosaic pavement. He states that no date can be deduced for the pavement from its inscription, but at least it shows that the villa, in part at any rate, was of more than one period.

Brief mention is made of the other pavements uncovered in 1954. In Room XII only a fragment of a mosaic border remained. This consisted of part of the Vitruvian scroll similar to the one in the Great Pavement in Room I. The workmanship of the mosaic in Room XII was of the finest quality and seemed to excel even that in Room I. In Room XIII the pavement is complete and consists of a geometric pattern of interlacing circles of blue on a white ground with touches of red. Very little remained of the pavement at the west end of Corridor II which consists of the straight lines of a border and fragments of gullōche pattern. The material of the tesserae is similar to that found in other Cotswold Roman villas, consisting of various shades of blue lias, white and khaki coloured oolites, red tile and purple shades from the old red sandstone.

To end this note on a charming reflection is to recall the interest in the Woodchester pavements shown by the Royal Family at the end of the 18th century when Horace Walpole wrote to a correspondent¹ in 1796: 'Sir Joseph Banks [who in 1772 succeeded Aiton as adviser at the gardens at Kew] has carried Lysons to Kew with drawings of all his discoveries at Woodchester. They made great impression, and he is to send patterns of the mosaics for the Queen and Princesses to work.'

HELEN E. O'NEIL, F.S.A.

¹ *Walpole Correspondence*. I am indebted to Mr John Charlton of the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments, Ministry of Works, for drawing my attention to this reference.