

ROMAN VILLA CISTERN FOR BATH

ROMAN VILLA DISCOVERED NEAR OXFORD.

The last published Number of the *Archaeological Journal* (8) contains a very interesting Notice of the discovery of a Roman Villa, at Wheatley, near Oxford, a short time since. We are aware that the circumstance has already been recorded in the newspapers; but, we believe the present to be the first accredited professional, or rather antiquarian account, of this valuable illustration of the Roman colonization of Britain.

The *Archaeological Journal*, it may be as well to state, is published quarterly, under the direction of the Central Committee of the Archaeological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, for the encouragement and prosecution of Researches into the Arts and Monuments of the Early and Middle Ages; and, if proof were wanting of the well-directed energies of the Association, we might find it, generally, in the excellent Number (8) of the Society's Journal; but especially in this discovery of the Roman Villa near Oxford; corrective of the first account, copious in its details, and most satisfactorily illustrated with clever engravings.

We rejoice at this valuable contribution to our Anglo-Roman history; and we trust that this and similar illustrations of our early civilisation will not fail to impress upon the Directors of what is somewhat anomalously termed the *British Museum* the necessity of providing a department for the reception of *British Antiquities*; in which, by the way, our great national Museum is singularly deficient. Rich, almost beyond comparison, in the art-treasures of Egypt, Greece, and Rome, we in vain seek in its saloons such an assemblage of objects as shall educate the public eye in the artistical progression of this great country, or shall allow its advancement in art – from the rude Celtic heap of stones to the classical combinations of the exhaustless genius of Sir Christopher Wren. 'The architecture of a people' says a popular writer 'is an

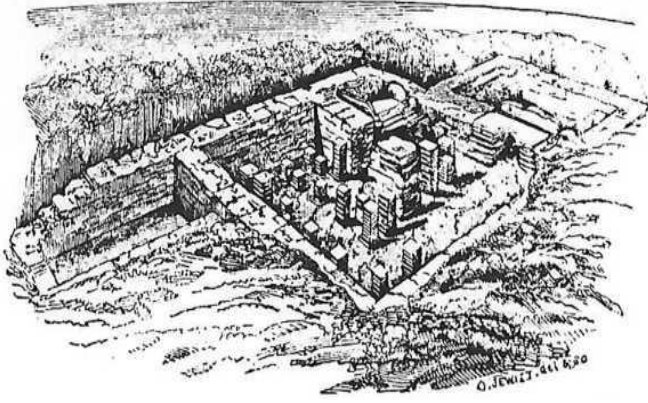
important part of their history. It is the external and enduring form of their public life; it is an index of the state of knowledge and social progress.'

If the above augmentation of the *British Museum* be carried out, it will be one of the good results of the formation of the Archaeological Institute, and similar Associations, which, by encouraging antiquarian pursuits amongst those accustomed to a life of leisure, has caused them better to appreciate the good policy of extending to the people these scenes of recreative intellectuality.

Returning to the *Journal*, we find that the first indications of a Roman Villa having been discovered in a field called Castle Hill, between Wheatley and Cuddesden, near Oxford, Dr Bromet proceeded thither on the 31st of October last, accompanied by Mr. J. Barker, of Oxford; with a draughtsman, to investigate the remains. We quote a portion of the results

'Having first laid bare some rough walling, 2 feet thick, which enclosed a quadrangular space, measuring internally 14 feet by 12, they, by careful digging, exposed the inner face of the western wall, where, at a depth of 2 feet from the surface, they arrived at an ovolo base moulding, and a plaster floor 2½ to 3 inches thick, composed of lime, sand, and broken brick. It was situated over the entrance to a furnace from the prefurnium described hereafter. On clearing away the earth in the north-east angle, they found that this floor had been laid on solid flat tiles 2 ft. square by 2½ in. thick, the whole being supported by uniform and regularly disposed pillars, about 1 foot 10 inches high, built up of flat tiles 7 inches square by 1¼ thick, set in beds of mortar ¾ of an inch thick — the lowest, or plinth tiles, being about 11 inches square, and laid on a natural bed of yellow sand. These pillars were distant from each other about 16 or 18 inches, but the upper portions of the intervals were filled with earth, and the lower part with a stratum, about 6 inches thick, of soot and ashes, lying on the sand-bed before mentioned, under which they feared to dig, lest they might injure the stability of the pillars. Here and there, among the earth between these pillars (earth which had probably been laid there soon after the demolition of the villa), were found fragments of coarse pottery, and pieces of stucco, painted red, yellow, green, and black, but not sufficiently large to show their patterns. The greater number of the lines on the stucco are straight, the others are curved and waved.

'The fire-place which was used for heating this hypocaust is an opening from the prefurnium through the western wall, about 3 feet high, built of brick, and covered with large 2 feet square tiles like those before noticed, placed on different levels, the highest being outermost. Under this cover, were found coarse ashes and many bits of charred wood.



REMAINS OF A ROMAN VILLA NEAR OXFORD

‘Adjoining to the south-eastern part of the calidarium (the chamber above hypocaust), but lower than its floor, is a rectangular enclosure, 8 feet by 4, which was, no doubt, a bath, its waste-water gutter still remaining in the eastern wall. This gutter was formed of two concave tiles, one within rite other, set firmly in cement, so as to render it efficient.

‘About 116 feet further north, they uncovered the south-western angle of another portion of the villa; but nothing was found there except a few fragments of fine pottery, and the foundations of other walls. Several tiles of various forms were likewise found. Remains of instruments and nails of iron, and several bones of oxen, deer, sheep, and hogs, were also found, with the shells of common garden-snails, *helix aspersa*, which were probably eaten, like the *helix pomatia*; and oyster-shells, like those found at many Roman stations in the centre of England, e.g., in a Roman camp near Northampton, and a Roman station at Aldworth, near Wallingford.

‘In the space between the hypocaust and another room, since discovered, 29 feet north of it, another stratum of ‘sooty matter’ was found, at the same depth, as in the hypocaust, resting upon the ‘natural sand bed,’ whence we infer that the villa was destroyed by fire.

‘The excavations were continued by the Bishop of Oxford, with Dr Buckland and Mr. Parker, on a subsequent day, when a cistern or boiler (measuring 4½ feet by 2½) was found over the south-west angle of the hypocaust. This boiler *or cistern* had the lower part of its floor mid some height of the sides perfect, with the same moulding at the tingle as the one first discovered. It was lined inside with fine stucco or plaster, 1½ inch thick, and outside this were 2 inches of mortar. It rested on large tiles, like those before mentioned, supported by pillars of smaller tiles, similar to those before described, but not at such regular intervals. Further heat from the furnace was communicated to this boiler by rows of vertical flue-tiles or pipes, behind the stucco of its sides; these are quadrangular, and measure 8 inches by 3½: they are smooth and blackened with soot in the inside, but scored on the outside to make them adhere to the mortar. Many of these are entire, and remain *in situ*. On

the south side a leaden pipe, quite perfect, passes from the bottom of this cistern, through the outer wall. This pipe probably conducted the hot water to the bath at the east end of the calidarium. The boiler had its stucco lining more perfect than the bath at the south-east end of the hypocaust.”

We are happy to learn that the remains have been protected by a building.

The site of the Villa is about 10 furlongs from the Roman road between Aelia Castra (Bicester) and Dorocina (Dorchester). The bath and hypocaust show it to have been a luxurious mansion, which was, probably, burnt on the retreat of the Romans. Among the fragments of pottery and tiles, Dr Buckland recognised several pieces of black cellular lava, containing, in some of its cells, small crystals of the blue mineral *Hauine* : these must have come from the mill-stone quarries near Andernach, from which large mill-stones are now sent to England and all parts of the world; and from whence, also, the Romans might have brought their mill-stones (probably hand-mills) to the villa at Wheatley.