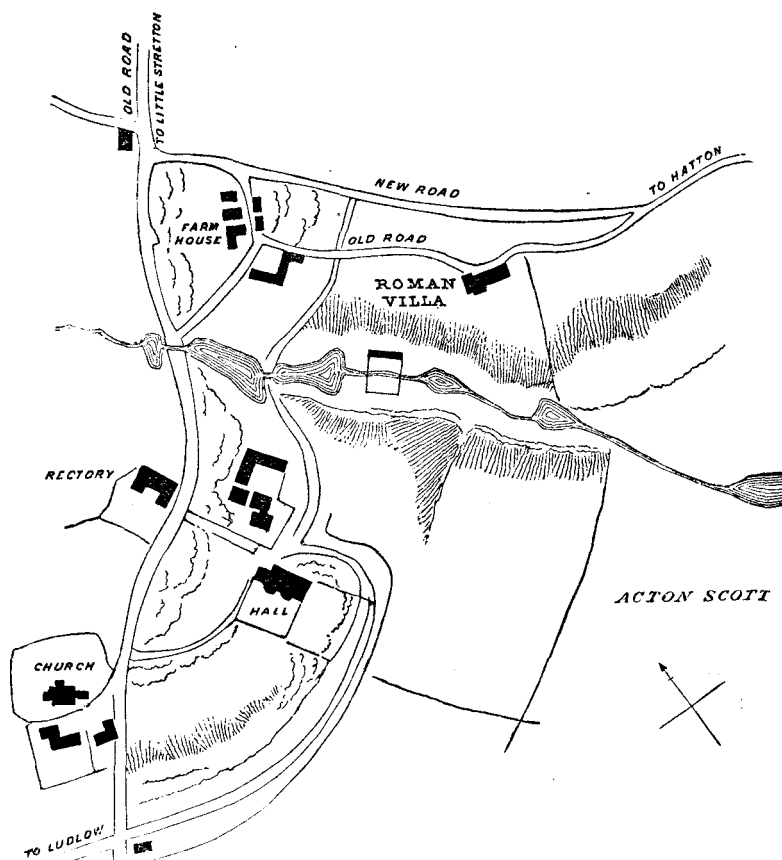


XXII. *Description of a Roman Villa discovered at Acton Scott, near Church Stretton, in Shropshire, in 1817; with an account of further researches made in July, 1844: communicated in a Letter from Mrs. FRANCES STACKHOUSE ACTON to the Very Reverend the DEAN OF HEREFORD.*

Read 13th February 1845.



DEAR MR. DEAN,

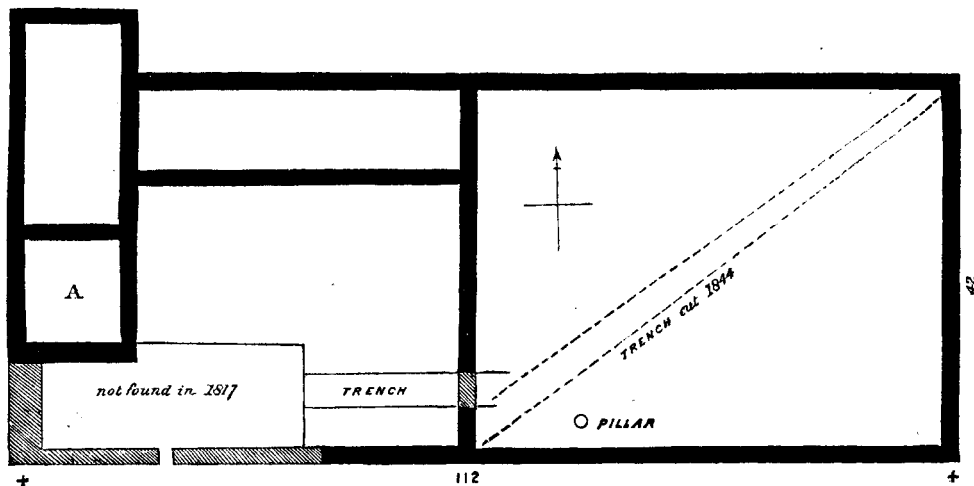
Acton Scott, Jan. 1, 1845.

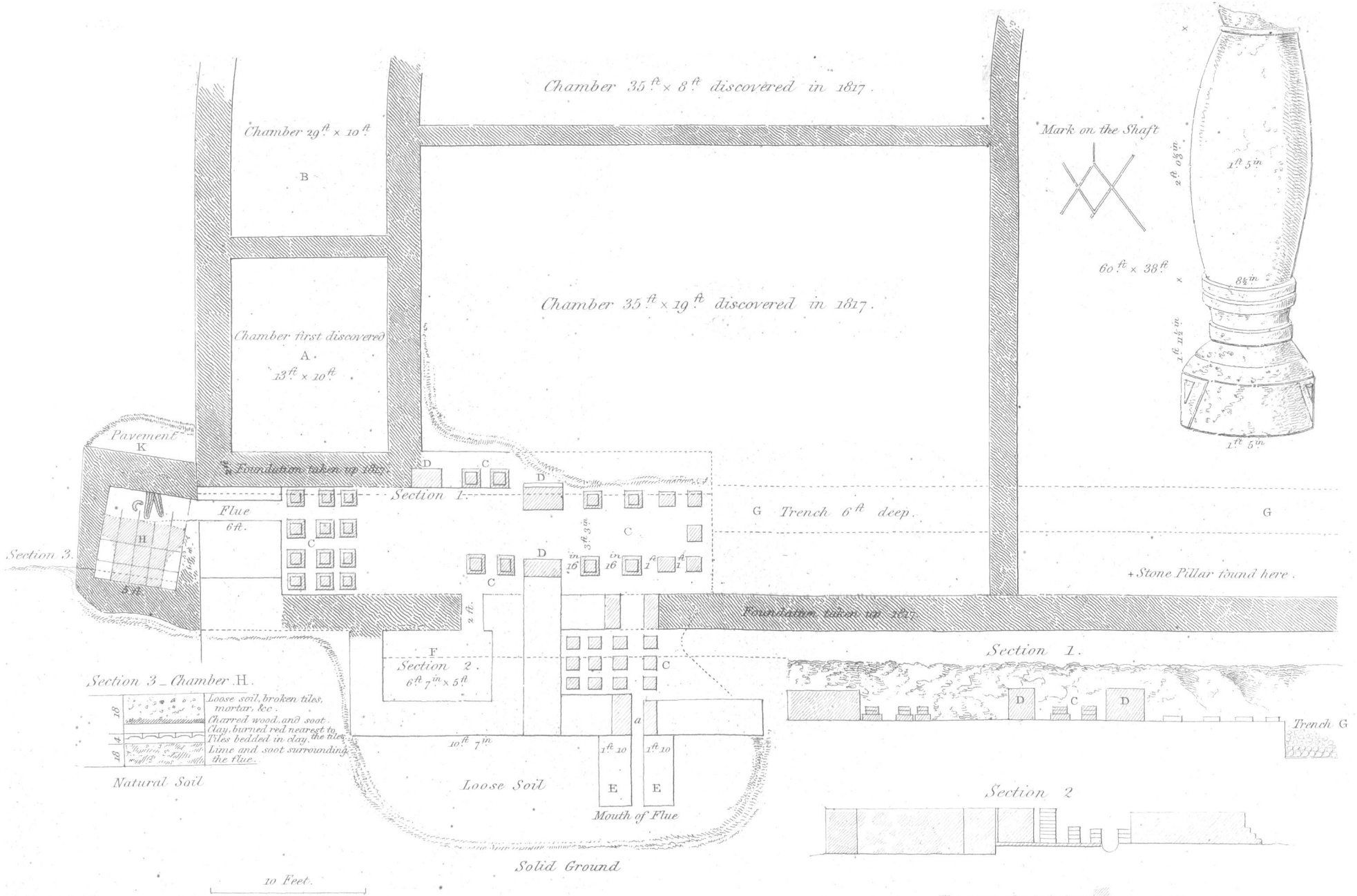
Acton Scott is situated about three quarters of a mile to the east of the Watling Street road, which leads from Wroxeter, through the Strettons;
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to Leintwardine and Brandon Camp, and from thence to Kentchester. In the "Salopia Antiqua" another line of Roman road is described by Mr. Hartshorne, as going from Nordy Bank, at the foot of the Brown Clee hill, to Wroxeter, which at Wall would pass within four miles of Acton Scott, on the other side.

The nearest known Roman station is at Norton Camp, near the Craven Arms, which is also near the Watling Street road, and is about six miles south of Acton Scott; the British station of Caercaradoc, near Church Stretton, is four miles to the northward. The first discovery of the Roman remains at Acton Scott took place in the year 1817, in diverting the course of a parish road through Acton Scott in the direction of Wall, when a floor, marked A. in the plan (Plate XII.) formed of concrete, and some foundations of stone walls, were uncovered. The latter were broken up, and employed in making the new road, and it was only on becoming aware of the unusual size of the building, that I made as correct a ground-plan as circumstances would permit. This gave an oblong square of 102 feet by 41, intersected in two directions by cross walls, as shown by the parts which are most darkly shaded in the plan.

VILLA AT ACTON SCOTT.





Plan of the Roman Villa discovered at Acton Scott.

Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London April 23rd 1846.

J. Basire sc.

A stone pillar, of which a representation is given, was also found lying down near the spot marked + on the ground-plan. ^a I did not, at the time when these discoveries were made, suspect the character of the remains; but, on showing the plan some years afterwards to the late Archdeacon Owen, he considered them to be the vestiges of a Roman Villa, and recommended that the site should be further examined.

Various circumstances occurred to prevent this being done at the time, and the precise spot could not afterwards be ascertained, as the old road had become pasture land; until, in July 1844, the scantiness of the herbage enabled me to trace hollow lines where the foundations had been removed, and, on setting some labourers to work, they soon uncovered the floor which we had before seen. It consisted of three layers of very hard concrete, varying slightly in composition, the lower one consisting chiefly of lime, while the upper one contained pebbles and a good deal of pounded brick. Upon this was a floor of very thin flags; the dimensions were 13 feet by 10, and it was nearly two feet in thickness. Several small apartments were discovered shortly after, containing piers formed of tiles C.C.C., varying from a foot to seven inches in diameter; in some instances there was a base tile of large dimensions, as is shewn in the plan. Only one pier was found of the height of the stone walls (20 inches), and that was formed of nine tiles. The larger piers, D.D.D., were made of tiles, many of which had been broken into fragments before they had been placed in their present position; their broken edges had been rudely fitted; some were plain, others had ribs at the edge, and others had patterns on them. The floors on which the pillars rested were formed of a thin layer of fine grained concrete.

At E.E. there was a good deal of soot and charred wood, and the former was found in small quantities all along the course of the flue, *a*.

In the apartment F, the foundations of the walls were nearly a foot deeper than in those of the adjoining hypocaust, and attached to them were some

^a It was formed of sand-stone grit, such as is found at Hoar Edge, to the north-east of Acton Scott, and measured in height 3 feet 1 inch; diameter of widest part of the shaft 1 foot 5 inches; diameter of top and base of the shaft $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches. On the shaft was a mason's mark, resembling xx. Similar marks occur on several stones in the Norman work at Hereford cathedral.

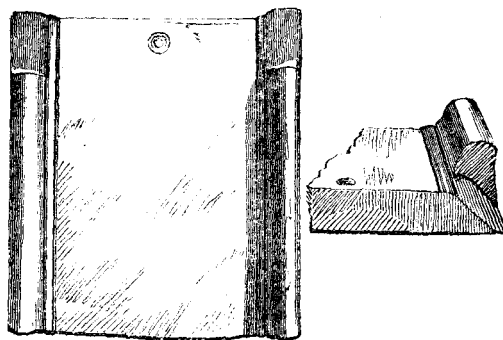
fragments of striped and spotted stucco, while portions of red stucco were principally found near to the thick concrete floor.^b

Another flue passed under the floor, H, the termination of which could not be traced, owing to the surrounding walls having been removed at some previous period, and the whole mass being in so decayed a state that it soon fell to pieces. It appeared to consist of a bed of yellow clay, which was level with the tops of the other foundation walls. The clay was four inches thick, and was much altered by the action of heat. In it were embedded two semi-cylindrical pipes like draining tiles, on each of which rested, as a cover, a flat tile nearly three inches thick. The inside of these pipes was perfectly clean, while above them the clay was covered by an accumulation of charred wood and soot. The latter had entirely lost its smell, but it was spread by the tenant on a neighbouring turnip field, and its efficacy in checking the ravages of the fly appeared quite equal to that of soot as commonly applied. On removing the bed of clay, it was found to rest on a floor formed of tiles and flags as shown at H in the plan; the tiles had ridges at each edge and a hole at one end, and had evidently been intended for a different purpose. Underneath these tiles was another deposit of lime and soot, which probably filled the space originally occupied by the flue.

Some remains of a pavement formed of small angular pebbles, covered with soot, was found at K, but no tesserae, or indications of any other sort of floor than those already described could be discovered in any part of the building. At G there was a trench four feet wide, and two feet deeper than the floor of the hypocausts. The bottom was laid with large pieces of half-burnt limestone, and above, it was filled with large pebbles to the level of the other floors. No fragments of lime, or broken tiles, which abounded every where else, were found in this trench; only one bit of thick greenish glass. It was cleared out to the extent of eight yards, but its termination was not ascertained. The floors which the brick pillars originally supported were all

^b The fragments of decorative painting shewed that the ground had been of a white or very light colour; upon this panels appeared to have been marked out by lines of dingy purple and red; the ornaments being round spots arranged by fours and fives, pyramidically. On one fragment was painted the head of a bird, with a branch in the beak, indicating that ornamental designs had been painted on some of the panels.

gone, but some of the large covering tiles were found, and there were also two tiles with ribs at the edges,^c and perforated at one end, resembling some



described by General Roy as having been found at Netherby in Cumberland, which were fastened by iron clamps to the walls, and passing through the floors afforded a passage for the heated air into the apartments above. Some of the iron clamps were also found, as also an iron key and spur much decomposed.

On some of the tiles were impressions of the nailed caligæ of the soldiers, which must have been made previously to the tiles having been baked; and also of the feet of a dog and other animals. A few fragments of black, red, and light-brown pottery, together with bones and oyster shells, were also discovered.

The building fronted the south, and stood on a bank at the foot of which runs a small stream. The walls were formed of the sandstone of the country, laid in soil, except at the angles and terminations, where mortar was used. They were twenty inches in height, and were not sunk below the floors of the hypocausts: they varied in thickness from 2 feet 3 in. to 18 inches, and were level at top. There was no indication of the superstructure, except that

^c These tiles measured 1 foot 4 inches by 1 foot 1 inch, and one inch in thickness; at one end there was a hole in the centre; the sides were recurved, forming an edge raised about one inch above the face of the tile, and about one inch wide. A portion of this ridge, about two inches in length, was cut away on each side, probably to allow one tile to overlap that which adjoined to it. The tiles which were found under the floor of the chamber H, were likewise ridged at the edges, no part of the ridge being cut away.

a large quantity of travertine with mortar attached, and many fragments of tiles, with patterns rudely scored upon their surface, were found in the soil : and I have since seen that the Roman lighthouse within Dover Castle, which is said to have been the work of Ostorius, is built of travertine, flint, with a great deal of mortar, and courses of tiles at intervals, bearing patterns on them very similar to those found here. As Ostorius, according to the relation of history, erected a line of forts on the Severn, and spent some time in conquering the inhabitants of Shropshire and Herefordshire, the coincidence is not without interest.

In the soil were found six Greek coins ; one of Neapolis, two of Smyrna, a rare one of Andros, one Egyptian, and one of Parium in Mysia.

No well authenticated discovery of Greek coins has been recorded as having occurred in England, and some doubt of the fact which I have stated, has been expressed. The labourers employed had, however, all worked for me for more than twenty years ; they had nothing to gain by imposition, and from the long established custom of bringing all curiosities to me, I am sure, if one of them had possessed such coins, I should have had them before. I have no suspicion that they could have been placed where they were found by any other person.

We have evidence of the presence of Roman soldiers during the erection of the Villa, and it is related that before Claudius visited Britain, he had employed troops to subdue some insurrections of the Lycians and Rhodians, and had restored some Princes of Asia Minor to their kingdoms, who had been unjustly dispossessed by his predecessors ; and may we not therefore account for the discovery of these coins by supposing that they may have been brought to England by soldiers who had previously been in the East ? I believe their date will justify this supposition. I am indebted to the kindness of Mr. Birch of the British Museum for a description of these coins.

I am afraid I may have given you a more detailed account than you may think requisite, but I was anxious not to omit anything that might appear to possess interest.

I remain, dear Mr. Dean,

Yours truly,

FRANCES STACKHOUSE ACTON.

P.S.—I omitted to say that holes were dug at several spots within the area of the chambers, without finding anything but the usual fragments of tile and other remains of ancient constructions.

DESCRIPTION OF THE COINS FOUND AT ACTON SCOTT.

Brass coin of Neapolis. Obverse, head of Apollo, wreathed. Reverse, a demi-bull, with a human head; emblem of a river. Struck 300—250 B.C.

Brass coin of Andros, an island in the Ægean Sea. Obverse, head of the bearded Bacchus, wreathed with ivy. Reverse, head of Jupiter. Rare. Struck 250—200 B.C.

Brass coin of Smyrna. Obverse, head of Apollo with a laurel wreath; the hair arranged like a female head. Reverse, (Σ)MYRNA (ΙΩΝ) two armed hands of a gladiator, or athleta, and a palm branch. There had been also the name of a magistrate, not visible. Struck about 150—100 B.C.

Brass coin of Egypt. Antiochus VIII. and his mother Cleopatra. Obverse, head of Antiochus with a radiated crown. Reverse, an Egyptian symbol, known as the lotus ornament, placed on a crescent, and two ears of corn. (BA)ΣΙΑΙΣΣΗ(Σ) (ΚΑ)ΕΟΠΑΤΡΑ(Σ ΘΕΑΣ) ΚΑΙ (BA)ΣΙΑΕΩΣ (ANTI-OXΟΥ). Struck about 70 B.C.

Brass coin of Smyrna. Obverse, bust of Britannicus, when a boy; under the neck had been inscribed ΣMYR, now not visible. Reverse, a winged figure of Victory, holding a palm branch across her shoulders. ΕΠΙ ΦΙΑΙΣ-ΤΟΥ ΕΙΚΑΔΙΟΣ. Struck during the reign of Claudius, about A.D. 45.

Brass coin of Parium in Mysia. Obverse, A. I. C. V. P. a lustral vase. Reverse, Q. PAQVI. RVF. LEG. C. D., occupying all the field of the coin.