XX. *An Account of the Discovery of a Tessellated Pavement, 10th Feb. 1854, under the Vaults of the South-Eastern Area of the late Excise Office; by WILLIAM TITE, Esq. F.R.S., F.S.A., in a Letter to FREDERIC OUVRY, Esq. Treasurer.*

Read 15 June, 1854.

42, Lowndes Square, 17 April, 1854.

DEAR SIR,

I have the honour to forward for the consideration of the Society of Antiquaries a Drawing of the Tessellated Pavement recently found between Bishopsgate Street and Broad Street, under the vaults of the south-eastern area of the late Excise Office. A small plan which accompanies the drawing (Pl. XVIII.), will show the exact position of the pavement itself, relatively to the adjoining street and to the buildings of the Excise Office. It is a commonly received opinion, that the late Government edifice occupied the site of the house and premises of Sir Thomas Gresham *only*; and it may be therefore convenient to explain that subsequently to the purchase by the Government from the trustees of Sir Thomas Gresham of the buildings of Gresham College, in 1768,^a they bought an inn adjoining southward, called the Sun; and these two premises together constituted the area of the late Excise Office. I cannot exactly define the boundary of the two properties, but I have no doubt that the site of this pavement was under the Sun inn portion of it, and did not form any part of the land purchased of the Gresham trustees. In removing the Excise Offices we began from Threadneedle Street, and in taking up the foundations of the main buildings, nothing of any interest was found; but, as we proceeded towards Bishopsgate Street, it was evident that we were approaching foundations and remains that were of a much earlier con-

^a "On the 17th March the City Members, attended by Mr. Dance, the surveyor, waited on the Lords of the Treasury with a plan of the ground on which Gresham College stood, with a view to the converting that ancient and almost useless building into an Excise Office; the building in the Old Jewry then made use of being found too small and inconvenient for that purpose. At a Court of Common Council held on the 22nd of May, it was resolved to agree with the proposal of government for the purchase, in order to erect the Excise Office on the spot." Noorthouck's *New History of London*, 1773, pp. 439, 440. See also Stat. 8 Geo. III. c. 32.

struction. We then encountered an extensive series of arched vaults, mostly built of brickwork of about the middle of the seventeenth century ; but below these there were flat arches of chalk-rubble and foundations of the same character, that probably were as old as the fifteenth century. These foundations ceased at a depth of 12 or 13 feet from the level of Bishopsgate Street. The walls were generally founded on a bed of coarse concrete, about a foot in thickness. On removing this, however, the native soil was not reached ; and it was apparent that below this level the ground had been disturbed. In this ground first appeared traces of Roman remains, in very imperfect fragments of pottery and glass of doubtful origin, with a few coins, and fragments of Roman mortar and concrete. Particular directions were then given to the workmen to proceed cautiously, and to examine the earth and rubbish with great care. Nothing however was discovered, excepting a silver coin of Hadrian, until the morning of the 10th February, 1854, when one of the workmen, in digging a hole somewhat deeper than the other excavations for a scaffold-pole, came upon a fragment of this Tessellated Pavement. Instructions were immediately given to clear out the whole space with the greatest caution, and also to follow every trace of the pavement so far as our ground extended. The great quantity of vaults and arching, however, over this part of the building, led to considerable delay as well as to some expense in preventing damage to the very interesting remains which we were thus gradually uncovering. The Section attached to the small Plan will show the exact depth of this fragment from the present surface.

The Pavement itself (Pl. XIX.) was constructed in the following manner :—the earth having been cleared away and levelled down to the natural clay and gravel, a bed of coarse concrete was laid about six inches thick. This concrete was composed of river-ballast and lime, with occasional pieces of broken and pounded brick ; and on this coarse substratum a bed of very hard mortar or cement was laid, about an inch in thickness, and perfectly level. I should suppose that this mortar was composed of about two parts of clean sharp sand, one part of pounded bricks or tiles, and one part of lime ; the whole mass of which must have been well beaten together and consolidated. This formed the bed for the tesserae, which were generally of an uniform thickness, of the usual dimensions of about half an inch square, and set in fine mortar. It is well known to antiquaries that the Romans had two methods of constructing these floors. One was laid simply upon the native earth ; the other was placed on short piers supporting tiles and concrete, forming the floor called “ *Suspensura*,” which had an interval beneath.* It has

* Vitruvius *De Architectura*, lib. vii. c. i. lib. x. c. v.

PLAN OF THE ROMAN PAVEMENT
discovered near
BROAD STREET,
February 1854.

SCALE OF FEET.
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

been sometimes supposed that the latter mode of flooring was used in floors and rooms of the higher class only; but from my own experience I am disposed to think that the Roman builders were usually guided by the character of the soil, and if, as in this case, it was gravel or well-drained earth, they altogether avoided the additional expense of a floor constructed on *pilæ*. The Pavement thus discovered constituted the floor of a room 28 feet square. On the side, at the point marked A, there were some traces of wall-plastering; but, though we searched with the greatest care, there was not any trace *in situ*, nor near it, of any walls, flues, or Roman bricks. Every fragment had disappeared; and even this trace of wall-plastering had nothing behind it but loamy earth. The only additional fact requiring to be noticed connected with the construction of the Pavement itself, is one which is of equal interest and rarity: namely, that in some places it had evidently been mended in the Roman times, but by an inferior hand, and the tesserae introduced in those places were whiter and in general colour did not quite coincide with the older work. The pattern, however, had been carefully preserved and restored. I think it probable that we shall find further traces of pavements as we proceed northwards: for there is a tradition in the neighbourhood that in digging a well under a house in Bishopsgate Street in that direction, at about 13 feet from the surface, some remains of a pavement were found.^a

In reflecting on this discovery and its connection with Roman London, a few remarks collaterally illustrative of the subject will perhaps be allowed me. A work so finished as this pavement, evidently points out a period of security and comparative wealth in the inhabitants; and such a period may doubtless be found in the reign of Hadrian, to which the silver coin found on this floor also belongs. Hadrian began to reign in A. D. 117, about one hundred and seventy years after Cæsar's landing in Britain, and died in A. D. 138.^b For thirty years previously to his accession there is no notice whatever in the Roman historians of any important transactions in Britain: but in A. D. 120 Hadrian visited this island, settled its affairs, and caused the great wall to be built, to divide, as Spartianus says, the barbarians from the Romans.^c This interval of tranquillity appears also to have continued for many years afterwards, certainly until the middle of the

^a This expectation has been partly realised, because northwards of this pavement we have found the floor of a room paved with dark red tesserae. The pavement was about 12 feet square; the tesserae uniform in size, being about 17 inches square. I still expect to find further remains to the north-east; but the old buildings cannot be at present removed.—March, 1855.

^b Horsley's "Britannia Romana," book i. chap. 4. pp. 49, 50.

^c Vit. Hadriani in Script. Hist. Ang.

reign of Marcus Aurelius, about A. D. 170 ; and it was doubtless during this period that the mansion or merchant's house was erected which stood on the site now under consideration.

I should here remind you that the nature of that site is very peculiar. It may be in your recollection that in passing from Bishopsgate Street to Broad Street, through the late Excise Office, there was a descent of twenty steps, giving a difference of level of about ten feet between the two streets. This difference of level was no doubt always greatest at this particular point ; but the same general features may still be traced in the continuing high level of Bishopsgate Street, and the comparatively low level of Old and New Broad Street, Throgmorton Street, and Lothbury, down to the line of the Wall Brook, which at that point was 30 feet below the present level of the ground.^a This Roman house, therefore, in my opinion stood on a gravelly bank ; and the pavement was itself level with the ground at the back. In the front of the house the ground was probably considerably higher, and was the Roman Causeway that passed through the City Wall about 330 yards to the north, and then through the Roman cemetery which we know to have existed in Spitalfields. The road was then continued in a direct line to the fords over the Lea between Stratford and Ilford, and about the spot which is regarded as the Roman Station "*Durolitum*," five miles from London. This road, as in the Appian Way at Rome, and the Street of the Tombs at Pompeii, was probably lined with the tombs of the Roman and British residents of London.

I have often attempted to connect these Roman pavements with some restoration of the main lines of thoroughfare of Roman London, but I have never hitherto succeeded to my own satisfaction. If I should be right in my present conjecture, I can now nearly associate this pavement with those tessellated remains which were found on the site of the French Church in Threadneedle Street, in 1839. I think, also, that I may offer a reasonable conjecture as to the course of one of the streets which led to the way described in the ninth Iter of Antonine.^b The uniform tradition, and also the suggestion of Stukeley,^c is that the site of the present Mansion House, formerly Stocks Market, was also the situation of the Roman Forum. A line drawn from that spot as a centre would pass the site of the buildings containing these tessellated pavements, and ultimately point to the "burial-place" in Spitalfields, and the great road to the eastern counties by Stratford and Chelmsford. After I had plotted this line on

^a This is shewn in a Section of the Wall Brook in my possession, made by Mr. Richard Kelsey, the late Surveyor of Sewers of the City of London.

^b Horsley, *Brit. Rom.*, p. 447.

^c *Itinerarium Curiosum*, vol. i. plate 57 ; vol. ii. p. 12.

PLAN OF LONDON and its Vicinity to the South East, shewing the Lines of the ROMAN ROADS, and their probable continuation in ROMAN LONDON.

Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London. 23rd April. 1855.

the map, I was agreeably surprised to find, on a reference to Dr. Woodward's Letter to Sir Christopher Wren,^a that some considerable remains had been also found exactly on that line, in the present Camomile Street; and further, that in Stukeley's map "the Romans' burying-place" is shown, outside the city wall, at that very point. These coincidences were curious and striking; but they become more so, when it is found that this same line prolonged is exactly consistent with that straight road to Chelmsford, which, beginning about five miles from London, continues in a direct course to that town. I am aware that in offering these conjectures I must disturb the plan of the present Bishop's Gate, and remove it further south; but Dr. Woodward proves that all the Roman work had been levelled with the ground in that quarter before the mediæval walls had been constructed. I am now, however, about to add another more extraordinary coincidence. If a line be drawn from Botolph Wharf, the oldest site of London Bridge, it will pass through the India House exactly at the spot where the finest tessellated pavement in London was found, in 1803, and will intersect the site of the wall exactly at the point to which the line leads that I have been now suggesting. In an Essay written by me in the year 1845, and prefixed to the Catalogue of Antiquities found in the excavations at the New Royal Exchange, I suggested the probable existence of such a highway, though I was still perplexed with Bishopsgate Street, which I then supposed to be an ancient road. I now feel satisfied, however, that none of the present street existed in Roman London; and that the great Ermin Way, which extended from the coast of Sussex to Lincoln, crossed the city east of the present line of thoroughfare, and probably in the route I am now suggesting. I feel it may be objected, that in these new lines of street I am entirely abandoning the ancient or existing thoroughfares; and that it would be reasonable to suppose, that notwithstanding the lapse of seventeen or eighteen centuries, and the constant destruction by fire, they might be fairly expected in the main to coincide with the present. To this all that I can answer is, that even in Rome itself, except the Forum and the "*Via Triumphalis*," no modern street is consistent with the ancient lines; and that even the Appian Way was given up at about six miles from Rome, ceasing in the Campagna, and a new road to Albano has been in use for centuries, notwithstanding the recent researches of Signor Canina having shown that the Appian Way not only existed, but that it required very little repair to constitute it again a "*Strada rotabile*."

^a "A Letter occasioned by some Antiquities lately discovered near Bishop's Gate, London," in Hearne's *Leland's Itinerary*, vol. viii., at the end, sects. 8—10.

In the Essay which I have now referred to, prefixed to the Catalogue of Antiquities found at the Royal Exchange, and placed in the Library of the Corporation of London, I have given my reasons why, in my judgment, Roman London was not so important a place as its present greatness leads us to imagine, and there is nothing in the present pavement which induces me to alter that opinion. It is doubtless an elegant and an interesting work, but it is not better than those usually found in provincial towns, and very inferior in material as well as in style to the great remains of Roman magnificence of this kind which exist at Rome, and perhaps even to some found in England.^a It is also a very remarkable fact, that no architectural remains of Roman London of any importance have ever been discovered. I use the word *ever* advisedly, because it is not difficult to show that for nearly 200 years the various excavations made within the walls have been under the inspection of competent and anxious inquirers, and yet nothing of any importance has occurred. Beginning with the great excavations of St. Paul's, Sir Christopher Wren was evidently desirous to discover and to care for Roman remains, but nothing was found. Again, he built fifty churches in the metropolis, and repaired many others; but in the course of all the excavations for these buildings we do not hear of any discovery, though Woodward was at hand making his collection and storing it with all the best remains of Roman antiquities disclosed amidst the clays and gravels of Spitalfields, where most of the bricks required for the rebuilding the city were made. It is quite true that Woodward urges Sir Christopher, in his letter, to publish his notes of what he had found; but the report itself, in the "*Parentalia*," literally describes nothing but the foundations of a causeway, and some Roman remains at Bow Church.^b Sir Christopher Wren died Feb. 25, 1723, and Dr. Woodward, April 25, 1728.

The Society of Antiquaries was established in 1718, and in 1747 began to publish the *Vetusta Monumenta*; but in vain do we turn to those volumes, or to the memoirs of the *Archæologia*, commenced in 1779, for any notice of important Roman remains of edifices. In the meanwhile, the architectural remains at Bath and elsewhere show what has been found in other Roman cities,—doubtless then of far greater importance than London, though we have been taught to infer from our present metropolitan importance our former pre-eminent greatness. My own opportunities have accidentally been extremely great in this department of archæology; for in very early life I witnessed and watched the enormous

^a Several very fine specimens of tessellated pavements found in England have been engraved by Messrs. W. Fowler and Samuel Lysons, in their well known and interesting publications.

^b Sects. 5, 6, in Hearne's *Leland's Itinerary*, vol. viii. Wren's *Parentalia*, part ii. sect. i. p. 264.

excavations for the Custom House, and from that period down to almost the present time, scarcely a year has passed in which in the space between the Tower to London Bridge I have not had the foundations of large warehouses and other buildings under my personal inspection.

That the Romans built and occupied in this neighbourhood, is apparent from the discovery of the Roman hypocaust under the New Coal Exchange; but in the whole line thus referred to, occupying a length to the river of 1000 feet, and a mean width of 120 feet, the only Roman remains which occurred were a few coins and some fragments of pottery, rude embankments of timber without number, but no trace of Roman architecture. The ancient foundations rooted up in this immense space furnished evidence of Roman bricks mixed with chalk and ragstone, and occasional architectural fragments of mediæval dates; but, excepting Roman bricks and tiles, I have never seen, neither here nor at the Exchange, nor anywhere in the City, any fragment of stone having the impress of a Roman character.

In the summer of 1853, the excavations on the north side of the Tower on Tower Hill showed *in situ* distinct remains of Roman work in part of the inclosure wall of Roman London on that side. Here the wall was composed of square tiles, with that very thick joint and accurate bend for which Roman builders were remarkable; and this piece of work might have been executed within the compass of "The Seven Hills;" but, excepting this brickwork, the Roman hypocaust in Thames Street, and the pavements uncovered in various places, I have never seen any Roman work which I felt sure of. It may be answered, that London was often sacked and burned; but still Roman edifices of stone are not so easily disposed of. In all ages such fragments have been made use of as building materials, and have in the course of time been gradually brought to light. Bath, Gloucester, Cirencester, and other places can witness; yet their entire absence in London convinces me that Roman London was a brick city, and, in the words of Tacitus, "a place not dignified with the name of colony, but the chief residence of merchants."^a As a further confirmation of this opinion, the great difficulty of procuring good workable stone at that time must not be forgotten. At Bath the oolite was at hand, and also generally northwards there were equally abundant materials; but for London the same deficiency existed then as now. I know of no stone available for building purposes nearer than the oolites of Wiltshire; and

^a Cognomento quidem coloniae non insigne, sed copia negotiatorum et commeatuum maximè celebre.—
Annalium, lib. xiv. sect. 33.

in the Roman walls no stone is found but the Kentish rag-stone. The expression of this opinion may I fear give offence, and expose me to reproach from those who are disposed to attribute (unjustly as I think) the absence of Roman remains in our London museums to recklessness or carelessness on the part of architects and City authorities; but an experience of nearly forty years in London has satisfied me that they are not to be found in any great abundance, and their absence has induced me therefore to support the hypothesis that they never had any existence.

It now only remains for me to add, that the design or pattern of this pavement is elegant, and differs in detail from others; but in principle and in material it resembles most of the Romano-British pavements. The nearest resemblance to it which has occurred to me is an example published by Hearne, found at Stunsfield, two miles from Woodstock,^a in which there is a group in the centre, somewhat resembling the figures in the middle compartment of that at the Excise Office. It is represented in a very careful and elaborate engraving executed in 1712 by Michael Burghers; but I am inclined to think that the descriptive text by Hearne mistakes the central figure in supposing it to be Apollo, since it should certainly rather be regarded as "the young Bacchus" (the Egyptian, or beardless Bacchus), crowned with vine-leaves, and holding horizontally in his right hand an empty cyathus, and in his left the thyrsus upright.^b The animal in the background is there indisputably "a tiger, as," Hearne says, "some have conjectured; taking the hint, I suppose, partly from Baron Spanheim." Hearne himself, however, was inclined to think that it was intended for "the gryffin, as he is represented on some pieces of antiquity; only the wings are designedly left out, to signify that the artist did not intend that animal, which was looked upon as real, as I have lately observed."^c

But without any regard as to the possibility of this figure being a griffin destitute of wings, not only the human effigy represented with the animal and all its accessories seem to prove it to be Bacchus (*Dionysus*) and his tiger, but the very pavement now found at the Excise Office, with the effigy of Ariadne and her panther, seems to corroborate the truth of the interpretation. Dionysus was attached to others; but his best beloved, whose bridal-wreath he placed in the

^a The tessellated pavement here referred to was found at Stunsfield (Stonesfield), co. Oxford, Jan. 25th, 1711-12. Hearne's *Leland's Itinerary*, vol. viii., at the commencement.

^b It is worthy of observation that this subject almost precisely agrees with the figure forming the centre of the fine tessellated pavement found near the eastern extremity of the India House, in December, 1803, published and described by the late Thomas Fisher.

^c "A Discourse concerning the Stunsfield Pavement." Hearne's *Leland's Itinerary*, vol. viii. sect. v. p. 17.

skies as a constellation,^a was Ariadne. Each of these figures, then, became the emblems of conviviality, and were well adapted for the central ornament of the mosaic floor of a British *tablinum*, or rather *triclinium*, taking that term as generically expressive of a dining-room.^b As the figure of Ariadne in the Excise Office pavement was upright when seen from the north-east, the couches of the *triclinium*, and the table inclosed by them, probably looked towards the west, and the garden of the edifice would perhaps thus be situated behind towards Bishopsgate, or nearer to the extremity of Roman London.

The pavement was taken up with great care by Mr. Minton, under the direction of Owen Jones, Esq. and has been removed to the Crystal Palace at Sydenham, where he intends to restore it completely, and place it in the centre of the nave.^c By the judicious means taken by Mr. Clifton, the resident architect, and Mr. Jones, I believe that not a single fragment of it has been lost.

Before I conclude this short and I fear imperfect account of this interesting remain, I beg to add my thanks to Mr. Clifton for the care and skill with which he followed out every indication I have alluded to, and for his kindness and attention in adopting every suggestion I made to him.

I am, my dear Sir,

Very sincerely yours,

WILLIAM TITE.

POSTSCRIPT.

In the discussion that followed the reading of the preceding paper, some exceptions appeared to be taken to the opinion given by me, that London was not so important a city in the time of the Romans as its present greatness induces us to imagine; and that it was then far inferior to York. Tacitus distinctly states, in

^a Bacchus amat Flores : Baccho placuisse coronam

Ex Ariadnæo sidere nosse potes.

Ovid. Fast. v. 345.

^b The festive character of the apartment to which the tessellated pavement found in Leadenhall Street originally belonged, was further indicated by the figures of drinking-cups being introduced in the ornamental border.

^c Owing to the space required, this has not yet been done. but I still trust to the realisation of this expectation and promise.

A.D. 61, that it was not a colony, but an undefended British town without walls. It was also declared at the meeting, that, if the Latin authorities could be referred to, it could easily be shown that I was mistaken. I knew this to be otherwise; but, as it was impossible then to give the quotations, I have now thought it convenient to add all those which I am aware exist on the subject. For though the few contemporaneous notices now extant concerning Roman London have been repeatedly collected and printed, especially by Burton in his *Commentary on the Itinerary of Antoninus*, yet such an apparatus, for the reasons here stated, seems to be required as an indispensable part of the present paper. The following extracts are, therefore, added to supply the reader with the most convenient means of referring to such ancient records of Londinium as are still in existence :—

Taciti *Annalium* lib. xiv. c. 33.

“At Suetonius mirâ constantiâ medios inter hostes Londinium perrexit, cognomento quidem coloniæ non insigne, sed copiâ negotiatorum et commeatuum maximè celebre: ibi ambiguus, an illam sedem bello deligeret, circumspectâ infrequentiâ militis, satisque magnis documentis temeritatem Petilii cœercitam, unius oppidi damno servare universa statuit. Neque fletu et lacrymis auxilium ejus orantium flexus est, quin daret protectionis signum et comitantes in partem agminis acciperet. Si quos imbellis sexus, aut fessa ætas, vel loci dulcedo attinuerat, ab hoste oppressi sunt. Eadem clades municipio Verulamio fuit; quia barbari, omissis castellis præsidiisque militarium, quod uberrimum spoliandi, et defendentibus intutum, læti prædâ, et aliorum segnes petebant.”

Burton observes on this passage, that “here the name of London, as said, is first to be found in any antient authentick writing; and that for the calamity’s sake, which at this time it suffered most extream.”—*Commentary on Antoninus’ Itinerary*, p. 155. Londinium is not mentioned by Cæsar, probably because his line of march led him in a different direction.

Ammiani Marcellini *Rerum Gestarum* lib. xx. c. 1.

“*Lupicinus Magister armorum adversus Scotorum et Pictorum incursiones in Britannias cum exercitu mittitur.*” (A.D. 360.)

“Adulta hieme Dux antedictus Bononiam venit, quæsitisque navigiis, et omni imposito milite, observato flatu secundo ventorum, ad Rutupias sitas ex adverso defertur, petitque Lundinium: ut exinde suscepto pro rei qualitate consilio, festinaret ociùs ad procinctum.”

Idem, lib. xxvii. c. 8 (A.D. 368).

“Egressus tendensque ad Lundinium vetus oppidum, quod Augustam posteritas appellavit, divisis plurifariam globis, adortus est vagantes hostium vastatorias manus, graves onere sarcinarum; et properè fuis qui vinctos homines agebant et pecora, prædam excussit, quam tributarii perdidere miserrimi.”

Idem, lib. xxviii. c. 3 (A.D. 369).

“Theodosius verò dux nominis inclyti, animo vigore collecto ab Augusta profectus, quam veteres appellavere Lundinium, cum milite industria comparato sollerti, versis turbatisque Britannorum fortunis opem maximam tulit.”

Eumenii *Panegyricus Constantino Cæsari*, c. xvii.

“Enimvero, Cæsar invicte, tanto Deorum immortalium tibi est addicta consensu omnium quidem, quos adortus fueris, hostium, sed præcipue internecio Francorum, ut illi quoque milites vestri, qui per errorem nebulosi, ut paulo ante dixi, maris abjuncti, ad oppidum Londiniense pervenerant, quicquid ex mercenaria illa multitudine barbarorum prælio superfuerat, cum, direpta civitate, fugam capessere cogitarent, passim tota urbe confecerint; et non solam provincialibus vestris in cæde hostium dederint salutem, sed etiam in spectaculo voluptatem.”

For the passage of Ptolemy, in which the mention of Londinium occurs, see Mr. Arthur Taylor's Memoir “On the original site of Roman London,” *Archæol.* vol. xxxiii. p. 101, note, accompanied by an examination of the circumstances and of the probable Site suggested.