

IRON WEAPONS FOUND NEAR ASTWICK.

E. Weller, lith.

BRITISH AND ROMAN REMAINS FOUND IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF HITCHIN.

In the spring of 1879 my attention was drawn to a slightlyraised circular plot of ground on Pegsdon Common, at the foot of the Chalk downs, about four miles from Hitchin. I had it opened in company with a friend, Mr. F. Latchmore. Trenches were dug across it, and at a depth of about a foot from the surface we came upon a considerable number of broken urns of brown pottery of the usual type found in Roman burying-places, some of them being in a fair state of preservation, and containing cremated human There were also several pieces of red ware, formerly called Samian, but now supposed to have been made at Arezzo in Italy, and at other manufactories in France and Germany, while the finest quality only came from the island of Samos. Pliny tells us that Arretium, or Arezzo as it is now called, was famous for its dinner-services, and Surrentum, the present Sorrento, for its cups. In a few cases the Samian ware bore traces of having been mended with rivets of lead or other metal, in the same manner as we were accustomed to repair valuable old china until the discovery of 'diamond cement,' indicating the great value attached to this description of pottery. The brittleness of this ware is frequently referred to by classical writers.

Under these Roman remains, from 2ft. to 2ft. 6 ins. in the ground, were a large number of ruder urns of very coarse material, about $\frac{2}{3}$ of an inch in thickness, and extremely friable, so that it was impossible to remove them from the earth without their crumbling to pieces. They were probably British, of an earlier manufacture, and were hand-formed, not turned on a wheel like the Roman ware, and they were probably merely sun-dried, or very slightly baked. Like those above them they contained human ashes, mixed with pieces of wood and charcoal, and iron nails. These would be gathered up with the bones after the body had been

burned on the funeral pyre.

A few feet from this spot was a mound of greater elevation, on digging into which we came upon a perfect human skeleton in a slightly sitting posture. Judging from the unusual length of the bones, the skeleton must have been that of a man not less than 6 ft. 4 ins. in height, and the skull was of a superior type. An iron knife close by had evidently fallen from his left hand. From his weapon being buried with him, and also from the shape of the skull, I have no doubt that he was a Saxon, and a man of some note. The Romans did not usually bury their implements of warfare with the dead, whether cremation was practised or not. A special interest attaching to this discovery is, that the three races should

have chosen the same place for burial, indicating a superstitious feeling connected therewith, and it is a little strange to our ideas to find the ashes of the conquerors resting upon those of the conquered, yet suggesting the happy thought that after death all former difference is at an end. The Icknield Way is about half a mile from this site.

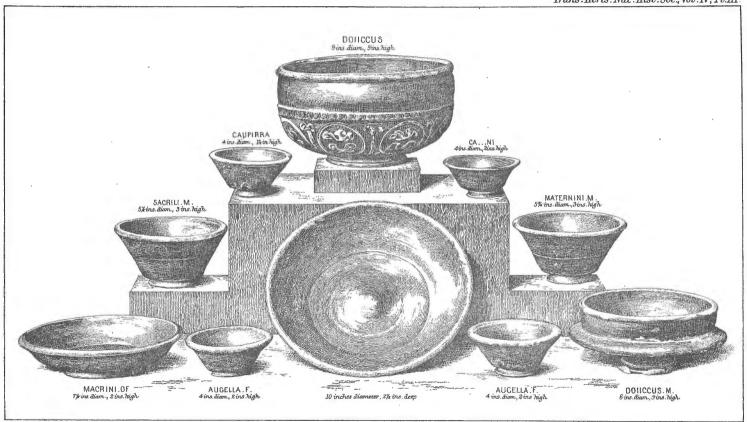
In a field near, known as Dane's field, there were found about forty-five years ago a large number of human skeletons, and also those of horses, with several fragments of iron and bronze. These were probably of more recent date than the cinerary urns found in the cemetery already described. The bodies might have been those of men killed in battle, and hurriedly buried without the usual care bestowed upon an ordinary interment. Within a short distance an almost perfect Roman amphora three feet high has been dug out, and a variety of other vessels have since been found there. It may be interesting to note by the way that the pretty purple Anemone Pulsatilla, known as Danes'-blood, grows abundantly on the hill-slopes around, covering the scanty herbage with its purple blossoms in the early spring. It is an object of attraction to our botanical friends far and near.

Three or four miles eastward, near Astwick, in digging for coprolites, a large number of human skeletons were disinterred, and near these were ten Samian vessels, all quite perfect, with the potters' names distinctly legible on most of them. Three of the names had not previously been recorded. The large bowl exhibited, with a raised pattern of fishes, etc., running round it, is an unusually fine specimen of its kind. These vessels are additionally interesting from having the impression of the tips of the maker's fingers, made after he had applied the glaze, distinctly visible underneath each, thus indicating the exact position in which they were held on placing them in the oven to harden. A sword and a number of spear-heads, with divided haft, indicative of Saxon workmanship as distinguished from the usually welded haft of the Roman weapons, were also found. One of these is of a very unusual type. There was also a boss of a shield, which was in fragments, but, when cleaned, the pieces were easily put together.

In 1878 a number of bronze celts were found about two feet below the surface in a field near Cumberlow Green, and with them a quantity of rough metal for casting into implements. They are of similar character to those which are distributed almost all over Europe. They are almost as hard as steel, and they would, with their sharp edge, prove formidable weapons. These are pre-Roman, belonging to a period antecedent to the use of iron in England.

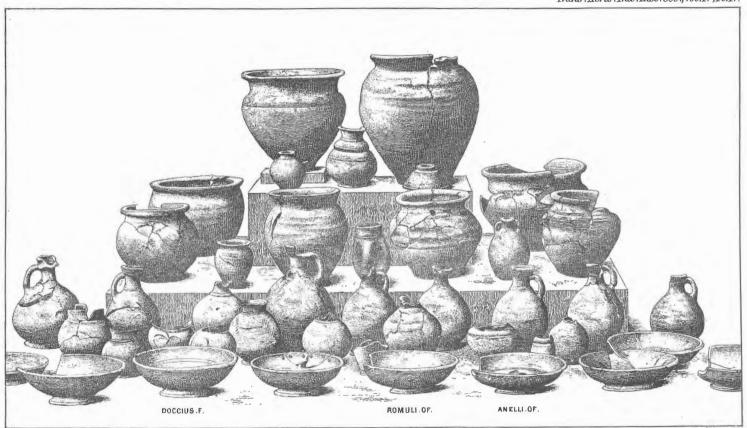
On the 6th of March, 1882, a workman, whilst engaged in draining land near Great Wymondley, a mile and a half east of Hitchin, turned up an earthen vessel of Roman ware. This induced me to make further search, and we soon discovered the first distinct trace that is known of a Roman settlement in that immediate neighbourhood. Within a space of five yards by seven yards were disinterred forty-three cinerary urns of various sizes, shapes, and colours, from

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SAMIAN WARE FOUND NEAR ASTWICK.

E.Wellet lith



ROMAN POTTERY FOUND AT GREAT WYMONDLEY.

Edwa Weller lich.

black to pale yellow, containing burnt human bones, charcoal, and iron nails. Accompanying each urn was a Samian dish and a winebottle, some of these being full of liquid, but possessing none of the flavour of the famous Falernian wine. By the side of one of the urns there was a baby's feeding-bottle, thus touchingly indicating that the ashes of a mother and infant rested in the larger vessel, and illustrating the care that was then taken in providing even for the anticipated need of the spirit of the little babe whilst being ferried over the river Styx under Charon's charge. Some of the Samian dishes retained the metallic rivets with which the fractured pieces had been joined, still holding them together. I do not know of any other description of Roman ware that had the same care bestowed in mending it. Of the whole number of vessels, many were so hopelessly crushed that it was useless to attempt to restore them. No two vessels were exactly alike. Several other small vessels—some of elegant shape—which had probably belonged to the departed, were also buried with the urns. Whether the relatives of the deceased were prompted in this by the thought that they might again be used in the spirit-world, or by a superstitious idea in regard to the property of the departed, can only be matter for conjecture. It is easy to recognize much of the pottery, of which we picked out no fewer than forty-five varieties distinct in colour and texture. Several ancient kilns having been found in various parts of England, with the ware still standing on the shelves in the ovens, we are enabled to determine where the different varieties were made. One of the most famous of these was discovered about sixty years since at Castor, in Northamptonshire, the ancient Durobrivæ.* A specimen of this ware was found near Hitchin, with its device in high relief, and similar pieces are constantly found in many parts of England. Huntingscenes formed a favourite pattern on the better class of the Castor vessels. In connection with pottery I may mention that at Sandy, the ancient Salinæ, an iron implement with serrated edge was dug up, the teeth being alternately set in opposite directions. I was puzzled to understand its use, until, turning out a piece of pottery near, and comparing the indentations upon it. I found that they corresponded exactly with the marks which would be made with the teeth of the implement.

A line of black earth in another part of the field at Wymondley, extending from north to south across it, was perceptible. This was carefully excavated, and it seems to have been a ditch into which all sorts of broken or rejected articles of domestic use were thrown. There were heaps of Samian ware, several pieces of Castor, some of Upchurch, made on the banks of the Medway, and also pieces of New Forest pottery, strainers and parts of six mortaria, lined with sharp pieces of flint or small pebbles, to facilitate the work of trituration. A strigil, a bent metal implement with which the attendant slaves scraped their masters after leaving the bath,

^{*} The name Durobrivæ is also known as that of a town of the Cantii, the present Rochester.—ED.

was also found; and there were many nails and spikes, a key, knives, horse-shoes, some pieces of bronze, and Colchester or probably Richboro' oyster-shells, the contents of which formed a favourite dish with the Romans. In reference to their appreciation of mollusks and crustaceans, Juvenal, in his Fourth Satire, writes of Montanus, a court sycophant, much addicted to the pleasures of the table, that he knew how to discern at the first bite whether an oyster had its birthplace at Circeii or on the Lucrine rocks, or whether it was a native of the Bay of Richborough, and at

sight of a crab could tell at once what shore it came from. We also came upon fragments of Roman glass, pieces of querns or millstones, and volcanic lava. This last I believe to have been used along with the ordinary clay of the district in making common earthen vessels. Analyses of pottery from Pompeii and Rome show it to contain volcanic earth, and favour this suggestion. Hones for sharpening knives, etc., stone weights, and cores from the horns of oxen, believed to be those of the extinct Bos longifrons, of which the black Welsh cattle are supposed to be descendants, bones of horses, sheep, and hogs, a large number of knuckle-bones which were used as dice, a quantity of Roman bricks and roofingtiles of the usual red colour, and some Roman coins, were dug out; these were much defaced by the action of the soil, and their inscriptions rendered illegible. Many coins have been picked up at various times in this field, dating from Vespasian, A.D. 69, to Julianus, A.D. 360, almost continuously. The following is a list of these coins :-

			A.D.			A.D.
	Vespasian	*****	69-79	Tetricus	*****	267
	Nerva	*****	96-98	Tetricus, Jun	*****	267-272
2	Antoninus Pius		138-161	Allectus	*****	293 - 296
	Marcus Aurelius	*****	161-180	2 Constantine	*****	306 - 337
	Postumus	*****	258	Crispus	****	317 - 326
2	Gallienus	*****	253 - 268	Constantinus II	*****	337 - 340
	Salonina, wife of Gallienus.			Julianus	*****	360-363

We next dug in a pasture separated from the other field by a lane. In the south-west corner is a double mound; this we opened, but found nothing more than broken dark pottery and a quantity of burnt earth on a surface which had been beaten down hard. Possibly some sacrifice had been offered there, and the mound four feet in height raised over it. In various parts of this field were lines of stone, about 2 ft. deep, running at right angles to one another, probably the foundations of a house, or other buildings, but no mortar was present; this may have perished by the dissolving away of the lime constituent. Fragments of pottery and Samian ware were turned up in almost every part of the quadrangular enclosure, which can be distinctly traced from the raised ground and trenches encircling it, measuring about 20 acres.

Mr. Seebohm, in his book, 'The English Village Community,' thus describes this little Roman holding:—"It consists now of several fields, forming a rough square, with its sides to the four points of the compass, and contains, filling in the corners of the

square, about 25 Roman jugera—or the 8th of a centuria of 200 jugera—the extent of land often allotted to a retired veteran with a single yoke of oxen. The proof that it was a Roman holding is as follows:—In the corner next to the church are two square fields, still distinctly surrounded by a moat, nearly parallel to which, on the east side, was found a line of black earth full of broken Roman pottery and tiles. Near the church, at the south-west corner of the property, is a double tumulus, which being close to the church field, may have been an ancient 'toot hill,' or terminal mound. In the extreme opposite corner of the holding was found a Roman cemetery," etc.

Before taking leave of the Wymondley cemetery, these beautiful and touching lines of Horace to his friend Septimius when he points to the spot where he wished his own ashes to be laid, may be

appropriately quoted (Odes, ii, 6):-

"Ille te mecum locus et beatæ
Postulant arces; ibi tu calentem
Debita sparges lacrima favillam
Vatis amici."

The words "cum lacrymis posuit" are frequently found on ancient epitaphs, and it is recorded that a glass bottle supposed to be filled

with tears has occasionally been found in an urn.

Some time after desecrating the ancient burying-place, which had for so many centuries been undisturbed except by ordinary agricultural operations on the soil above it, and which was held so sacred under the Roman law that anyone disturbing graves was liable to instant death if discovered, my attention was called by the tenant of the neighbouring farm to the number of pieces of brick lying on the surface of the ground in a field some three furlongs distant, near Purwell Mill. On walking over it, I picked up numerous fragments of pottery, small tesseræ, and large pieces of bricks and tiles, evidently of Roman make, possessing the close texture and bright red colour peculiar to the period. Wherever these are found in the ruins of buildings or walls, whether at St. Albans, Brading, Silchester, Circucester, Wroxeter, Bignor, Colchester, or on the Continent, as near Ems, Trèves, Nismes, etc., they are usually of the same hue, bright red. Scattered about with the above were chipped flints and flakes, with pieces much resembling those set in wood for making the tribulum or threshingsledge for rubbing out the grain, and from which our word 'tribulation' is derived. There is an excellent specimen of this implement in the museum at Salisbury.

On seeing these fragments, I came to the conclusion that the remains of a villa and perhaps its farm-buildings might be found buried beneath the soil. On mentioning this circumstance to Mr. William Hill, a member of our Society, he coincided with me in this view, but it was not until November, 1884, that we set to work in earnest to search for foundations. We were rewarded by pitching upon the right place at the first trial. Only some 15 inches beneath the surface we found quantities of bricks, rubbish, and faced flints,

with the wall of a Roman building in situ, and at a depth of 2 ft. 6 ins. we came upon the concrete floor of a room. The præfurnium, or furnace, was next disclosed, and then the flues leading to the hypocausts, used for heating the floors, these being supported on pilæ or columns of eight square bricks or tiles, about 13 ins. in height and 14 ins. apart. On these were laid square flooring tiles, which were then covered with a thick layer of concrete containing a large amount of broken brick or burnt clay. We cleared out three rooms of this description: No. 1, measuring 9ft. 3 ins. by 6ft. 6 ins.; No. 2, 9 ft. 3 ins. by 14 ft.; and No. 3, 8 ft. 9 ins. by 8 ft. 6 ins. These, I am disposed to think, were used as baths, or possibly might have been the winter quarters of the family. If the former conjecture were correct, No. 1, being nearest the furnace, would probably be the sudatorium, or Turkish bath; No. 2, the laconicum, or vapour bath; and No. 3, the tepidarium, or warm bath. A narrow passage led to the other part of the house, the first room (No. 5 on plan) having an elliptical alcove at the end. This might be the basilica or room used either for worship, or for conducting the business of the establishment. On either side of the alcove, outside the building, was a stone or paved floor, which may have been the remains of the porticus or covered walk, and immediately opposite to which would be the principal garden. The floor of this room was 14 ins. thick, of fine concrete, and so hard that in ascertaining its thickness we had almost to drill through it, and on striking it with a hammer the implement rebounded with great force, the concrete being as hard as, or harder than, our strongest cement. The adjoining room (No. 6) was covered with a nearly perfect tessellated floor of an unusual but simple pattern, red, with parallel white lines, and gridironed in the centre. No. 7 was a rectangular room 19ft. 3ins. long by 14ft. 3ins. broad, and beyond this, parts of two others were distinctly defined, until the floors cropped out to the surface of the land, and we were unable to trace more, although I believe the villa extended some considerable distance beyond in a northerly direction. My opinion that we only laid bare a small part is confirmed by archæologists who have had much experience in this direction.

It was interesting to notice that considerable alterations had been carried out in the building since its original erection, as at the point A, where a new præfurnium had been added, the entrance to which was floored with large roofing tiles, perhaps from some outbuilding which had been taken down. In room No. 2 a division-wall had been built across, apparently to reduce its size. The inferiority of the later building-material was very marked, the mortar not being nearly so hard as that originally used, and without the admixture of powdered clay or brick, indicating a decadence in the art of building, which we are told commenced in Italy about

the time of Augustus.

The herring-bone walling in No. 3 chamber, with the radiating bricks visible in the west face of the divisional wall, is a good specimen of Roman work. This system of walling prevails in most

Roman constructions, and is illustrated to a great extent in the walls of Silchester, a few miles from Reading. All the walls were strengthened at the angles with courses of tiles, and in other parts similar courses and sometimes single tiles were laid in for bonding and levelling-up purposes. Structural alterations were noticed in several other parts of the building. One remarkable feature was the presence of charcoal and ashes in the centre of most of the rooms, even that in which was the tessellated pavement being in this way blackened and injured. Around were scattered bones of oxen, sheep, red deer, swine, goats, and birds, with quantities of oyster-shells; also a few bones of the fox, but none of the hare or rabbit. Probably the antipathy to hares, which Cæsar mentions in his description of Britain, held good then in the same way as it exists still among some of our population in certain parts of the country. From the untidy state of the floor, we may be justified in concluding that after the original occupants had been driven from their abode by another set of invaders, some semi-barbarous tribe took possession and dwelt there, that they kindled fires on the elaborately-designed tessellated floors in the centre of the rooms, to warm themselves and cook their food, and, gnawing the flesh off the bones, threw these aside, after extracting the marrow, as the marrow-bones were cracked longitudinally.

Considering the alterations which had been made from time to time in the villa, and the gradual decadence in the quality of the material used at each change, it must doubtless have been occupied for a long period, and this view is further confirmed by the wide range in the dates of the coins found in and around the ruins, commencing with Severus, A.D. 195, and almost continuous up to Valens, A.D. 375, probably the time of its occupation by its last Roman owner. Upwards of 40 coins came into my hands, and there were others besides which did not reach me. The following is a list of the coins which I know to have been found in and

around the villa :--

COINS FOUND IN THE VILLA.

				A.D.				A.D.
	Gallienus	*****	*****	253 - 268	Allectus	****	*****	293-296
2	Victorinus	****	****	265 - 267	Constantine	*****	*****	306 - 337
	Tetricus	****	*****	267	2 Valentinianus	II		375 - 392
	Tetricus, Jun.	*****	*****	267 - 272	Three barbarous imitations of Roma			
	Carausius	****	*****	287 - 293	coins.			

Coins found in the field in which the Villa stood.

			A.D.			A.D.
Severus	****	4000	193-211	2 Constantinus II	****	335 - 340
Gallienus	*****	****	253-268	Crispus	*****	317 - 326
Salonina (wife of Gallienus)				2 Constans	*****	335-350
Victorinus	*****	****	265-267	Constantius II	****	335-361
Tetricus	*****	****	267	Magnentius	40000	350-353
Tetricus, Jun		****	267 - 272	Gratianus	*****	378-383
Claudius Goth	nicus		269 - 270	Valentinianus II	****	375 - 392
Carausius	*****	44510	287 - 293	Valens		364-378
Allectus	*****	*****	293-296	Several barbarous imita	tions	of Roman
Constantine	****	****	306-337	coins.		

Many cart-loads of broken roofing, flooring, and flue-tiles, together with faced flints, were thrown out in the rubbish from the excavation.

The paint or fresco on the walls retained in places the colour as brightly as when first put on, and, while most of the ornamentation was in straight lines, there were some rude indescribable devices. In one case the wall, with the plaster uninjured, was within seven inches of the surface, which is still more remarkable, and proof of the excellent quality of the building-material, as the soil is wet,

and the land has been tilled by the plough for ages.

In addition to the articles already mentioned there were found in the débris, bone pins, a band for ladies' hair, pieces of glass, vessels of fine quality, window-glass and thick bottle-glass, iron nails, an iron gouge, a style for writing on wax, rubstones for sharpening knives, with oxide of iron still adhering, oyster-shells from the best natives (?), a key, pieces of bronze, and a pretty little bronze steel-yard for weighing small articles, perhaps the precious metals or medicines, similar to those now in use at marketstalls; also Upchurch ware from Kent, mortaria of white Lyons ware, and a curious perforated lid, which was probably the top of a scent-jar. Amongst the bones were also found, at the depth of three or more feet, a number of the pretty little spiral shells of Achatina acicula, which are frequently turned out where animals have been buried. This molluse has a peculiar perception as to where its food lies, for its shells are occasionally found at a depth of 7 or 8 feet in human graves.

From the extent of this villa and the substantial way in which it was built, there can be no doubt but that it was once the residence of a person of some distinction, and was chosen for its salubrious position. It is interesting to note its proximity to remarkably fine springs of water, welling up from the chalk. Good and clear water was a first consideration in choosing a site for a residence, and Vitruvius tells us that the ancients used to "examine the livers of beasts which fed where they designed to build, which, if they found vitiated, they attributed it to bad water or pasturage, and concluded it would not fare better with themselves if they should settle there, as their own diet must be of those beasts, and

they would be obliged to partake of the same water."

In addition to pure water, other luxuries attached to Roman villas were fishponds and places set apart for the breeding of snails and dormice, both of which are often mentioned in connection with Roman cookery. The places in which they were kept, called Cochlearia and Gliraria by Varro, are thus described by him: "A proper place in the open air is to be provided to preserve snails, which you must compass all round with water, that you may find those you put there to breed, as well as their young ones. I say they are to be encompassed by water, that they may have no opportunity of escaping. The place may be made dewy by bringing in a pipe and fitting small cocks to it, which may eject the water so as to make it fall upon some stone and diffuse itself widely." "The

Glirarium is managed in a different manner, being surrounded by walls, not water. The whole is covered with stone or plaster within, to prevent the dormice from creeping out. There ought to be trees in it, that may bear acorns, but when they do not bear fruit, you must throw within the walls acorns and chestnuts for them to feed upon. You must make large holes for them to breed in." Helix Pomatia, which still abounds on our Chalk, is said to have been introduced by the Romans.

An apiary was absolutely necessary, as honey was much in request, and was used for much the same purposes as we now use sugar. Virgil, in his fourth Georgic, describes the wonderful qualities of the bee, and gives the following description of an apiary:

"First for your bees a quiet station find,
Avoid access of the all-insulting wind,
Their haunts secure from sporting kids and sheep,
Which morning dew from flowers and blossoms sweep.
Muskins and other birds infest the hive,
Far from your bees enamelled lizards drive,
The swallows catch them flying, then convey
To their expecting young the luscious prey."

Then, describing stones which he recommends should be placed in water to enable the bees to drink, he says:

"The bees will on these frequent bridges stand, And to the sun their glittering wings expand, The verdant lavender must there abound, There savory shed its pleasant sweets around, There beds of purple violets should bloom, And fragrant thyme the ambient air perfume."

An osier-bed was also thought very desirable, probably to provide

baskets in which to pack presents for sending to friends.

All these might easily have been provided on this site, with a terrace round the house, a sloping lawn, at the side of which the box-tree was cut into the forms of various animals, a place for practising chariot-exercises, a farm-house, a park, a kitchen-garden,

and many other surroundings of a Roman country house.

Besides the places already mentioned I should refer to Wilbury Hill, a commanding position on the Icknield Way, about 2½ miles N.E. of Hitchin, where traces of an ancient camp are distinctly visible, with a rampart formerly surrounded by a ditch. Many relics have been found here from time to time, including a few coins. There is also a large tumulus very near. On the site of the residence of Mr. W. T. Lucas, at Foxholes, half a mile west of the town, several Roman antiquities were recently dug out, consisting of bronze armlets and ornaments, fibulæ, Samian dishes, knives, and several cinerary urns; also skeletons, one being of gigantic size, and supposed to be that of a man nearly seven feet in height.

On Bury Mead, close to Hitchin, whilst it was being prepared for sewage-disposal, several Roman bottles and pots and a few coins were found. On the chalk hills, about 4½ miles to the west, is an unusually perfect entrenchment, named Ravensburgh Castle,

enclosing some twelve acres of land, and rising abruptly from a deep ravine; this is probably an early British camp, though commonly attributed to the Danes. I have not heard of Roman or Saxon remains having been found on the site, which surely would have been the case had the camp been used by either as a post for defence, but possibly further explorations might expose some to view. Small worked flint implements are frequently picked up in and around the enclosure. I have also found around my own residence at Fairfield, Hitchin, many pieces of ancient British pottery, and urns containing cremated bones.

I believe the whole of the higher ground in this district was at one time thickly populated with its ancient inhabitants, and then by the Romans, whose coins are universally distributed throughout

the district.

EXPLANATION OF THE PLATES.

PLATE II.

Iron Weapons found near Astwick. Scale one-fourth natural size. Fig. 1. Sword. Figs. 2-6. Spear- and lance-heads (fig. 4 of unusual shape). Fig. 7. Dart. Fig. 8. Knife. Fig. 9. Bent rod, use unknown. Fig. 10. Boss of a shield. Fig. 11. Probably tip of boss. Fig. 12. Pin passing through boss at base and forming the handle of the wooden shield. (See p. 40.)

PLATE III.

Samian Ware found near Astwick. From a photograph. Scale about one-fourth natural size. The names given are the potters' marks, as far as they can be made out. (See p. 40.)

PLATE IV.

Roman Pottery found at Great Wymondley. From a photograph. Scale about one-eighth natural size. The potters' marks can only be made out on three of the dishes, as indicated. (See pp. 40-41.)

PLATE V.

Foundations, floors, and parts of walls of Roman Villa discovered on land belonging to C. W. Wilshere, Esq., near Purwell Mill, between Hitchin and Great Wymondley. From a plan drawn by Mr. Henry Hodge, Architect. Scale one-twelfth of an inch to a foot. (See pp. 43-47.)

