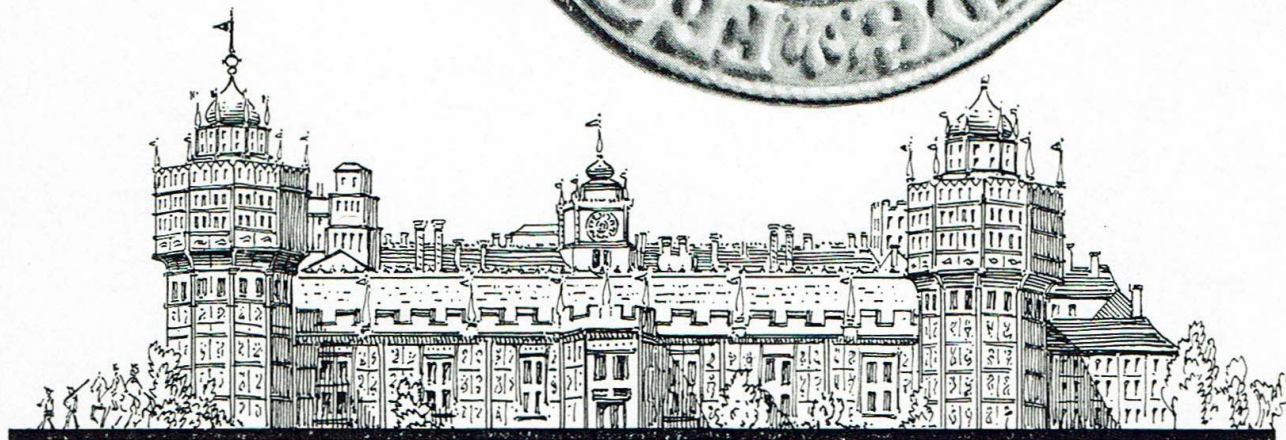

NONSUCH ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY



OCCASIONAL PAPER

10. SURFACE FINDS IN EWELL

SURFACE FINDS -

A Talk given to Members by Arthur H. Jenkins, at the Ewell Symposium in 1967 (Re-printed from the Society's 1969 Bulletin).

It is not my intention this evening to take up either your time or my own by attempting to summarise what is already known of Roman Ewell. Nor do I, at this time, wish to enumerate the many questions we would like answered or to argue the pros and cons of the many theories real or hypothetical that exist concerning it. Rather, if I may, I would try to give you some idea of the type of work I have been able to do, tell you of some of the objects I have found and where they were found. I make no claim that these objects throw any new light on the period we are considering, although they must supply some information. Only scientific excavation can give us the information we really need and, if we are perfectly honest about it, there has been very little of that which has been concerned with the Roman period in Ewell during the past forty years. It has been exceedingly difficult to make a start, or shall I put it this way, it has been exceedingly difficult to be given a start. Not so long ago this Society made repeated requests to excavate a certain site, these requests were at first ignored, then answered in an unsatisfactory manner, all this while the site was lying fallow and untouched by the

developers. When labourers, builders and bulldozers did finally move in, all that could be attempted was salvage work and observation. This is a poor alternative but better than nothing at all when one considers that a site will, in all probability, be sealed for the next century or so. Much of the work I have been privileged to do is connected with this 'poor alternative'; nevertheless, I consider it important enough for at least some to stand by, on the alert, to undertake such work.

Almost a decade ago I realised that, due to personal and professional commitments, any archaeological work I might be able to do would have to be undertaken alone. I began to wonder what might result from a deliberate and consistent searching of disturbed soil surfaces which would naturally include those eternal but necessary 'holes in the road'.

Here I feel I must interpose an apology for repeating much that I have said in previous papers read to this Society, namely, 'In Search of Plus' and 'Persfield'. However, I feel sure that some of you were not present on those occasions and would like to hear as full a summary of my doings as time will permit.

My attention was first given to Bourne Hall. The area under cultivation as garden beds and borders is not large. The main concentration of Romano-British pottery came from an area of cultivated land (now under grass) directly behind the gardeners' store house. This may or may not be the area in which inhumation burials, pottery and glass, were found as reported in Sy. A.C. Vol. 26, 1913. Some five or six years ago an oblong planting-out bed was cut in that part of the grounds known as the Paddock. In ploughing this piece several plough shares were broken when they came up against a lateral obstruction at its western end, this adjacent to the archway leading into this area. When the soil was well weathered and broken up I searched every square inch of its surface and was rewarded by

finding a very fine round scraper, a transverse arrow-head, a pair of decorated bronze tweezers, a mediaeval counter and a pipe clay wig curler. The main scatter of R.B. pottery sherds included those of both early and late date, and came from the 'Turrets' end of this plot. More R.B. pottery came to light when in the winter of 1964 some 20 ft. of earthen bank, parallel to the upper arm of Spring Street, was cleared to ground level. It is interesting to note in this connection that Mr. David Johnston also encountered Roman and Mediaeval sherds during building operations almost opposite the gardeners' store, on the other side of Spring Street. It is probable that this earthen bank was built up from upcast when the Store-house was built. To the best of my knowledge only one Roman coin has been reported as being found in Bourne Hall; this was found by a gardener and is a battered brass of Domitian.

The R.B. pottery from the grounds of Glyn House was more concentrated than at Bourne Hall. Roughly speaking it came from those areas nearest the line of Stane Street. At this juncture, I should like to say that I have never observed any surface indications that Stane Street passes through Glyn. The main concentrations of pottery occur in a flower bed that runs parallel to the No. 3 Graveyard, and to the East of the Spring Pool in the kitchen garden close to the spot where the Society carried out an exploratory dig some two years ago. It is on this site that extensive building operations will commence early next year. During the first two years of my examination of the soil surfaces at Glyn House some 200+ R.B. rims were collected. From a tentative dating of these it would appear that an equal number belong to the first and second, but these exceed about an equal number which can be dated 3rd and 4th century. Two Roman coins were found during this period, one of MAGNENTIUS (mid fourth) the other of ARCADIUS (late fourth), the first was found adjacent to the kitchen garden, the second on a flower bed parallel to the old Church Tower. A third has been found only last week in a rose bed to the

rear of the House. It is very worn on the surface making identification difficult, and has been sent to the Guildhall Museum, to Mr. Ralph Merrifield, for positive identification.

Very near the find place of the Arcadius came the bronze mask of Pan or Faunus. It has been suggested that this formed the decorative motif of a hemispherical bowl. Mr. Norman Cook has dated this piece to the late first or early second century. It has, however, been pointed out by Professor Tomlinson of Birmingham, that the craftsman has tried to indicate the pupils of the eyes; therefore the Professor would think the mask is likely to be of second century workmanship. Dr. Ann Ross of Glasgow University differs from both these experts and says she believes the mask is much earlier. So much for experts.

Another interesting surface find from this same area is part of the handle of a pewter jug decorated with the phallus symbol in relief.

Two physical features at Glyn need thorough scientific examination when the opportunity permits. One is the grass covered conical-shaped knoll which stands approximately mid-site. I can say little about this feature except that R.B. sherds have been found at its base, where the feature slopes down to a path, which runs in front of it. May I also add that some few feet away, to the West of the knoll, one of the gardeners recently uncovered some 12 to 15 feet of metalling while digging a flower bed. This might be Austynes Lane.

The second feature is the Spring Pool. R.B. sherds, with later pottery, flint cores, flakes and blades together with some half dozen fossil sea urchins have been found in flower beds immediately behind the Pool. I have examined a sample of silt from the pond and it seems largely composed of sand, chalk or limestone. When wet the mixture strongly resembles mortar made with sharp sand, and when allowed to dry it sets as hard

as concrete. The sample I examined also contained almost the whole of a clay pipe marked VINING-KINGSTON, and a much worn grey R.B. rim.

From this type of surface observation I seemed to graduate quite naturally to salvage work on building sites. My first site was "Persfield". The Roman road reported by Capt. Lowther at Purberry Shot seems to me to be aimed at this area, although from the limited amount of Lowther's road uncovered it could just by-pass the Persfield area. Unfortunately, a careful examination of foundation and drainage trenches, that is, all but those associated with the first four houses, where building had already commenced, showed no sign of such a road or any building structures. Bourne Hall produced no building material, Glyn a small amount, but a considerable quantity was observed in the upcast soil at Persfield. This material consisted of fragments of roofing tile, ridge tile, hand-combed decorated flue tiles, and, literally, dozens of brickettes still encrusted with pink opus signinum. Two of these brickettes were found still bonded together in such a manner as to suggest they had been used as flooring, herringbone pattern wise, or, "testacea spicata" as seed spikelets in an ear of corn. The floor of the L-Shaped No. 7 room at the Ashted Villa was similarly constructed. Some 100 pottery rims were recovered, 10% of these were from different bead rim jars; there were also many Romanized examples of the Belgic derived cordoned vessels. A very small proportion of the pottery was of Samian ware. This seems to be a common factor on all the Ewell sites. Among the few pieces of decorated Samian was a sherd of Form 30, a cylindrical bowl; the decoration, which consists of rosettes, tendrils, leaves and squatting hares, is very delicate and pleasing. It is one of the best early examples of craftsmanship I have seen, before mass production led to deterioration and cruder design; this deterioration in workmanship can be clearly seen in an example from Persfield of 2nd century design, possibly Hadrianic, portraying a dolphin and ivy like leaves. Amongst other material

found at the site was several pieces of painted wall plaster and a small fragment of window glass, having one side clear, the other opaque. A bronze nail cleaner was also discovered and a barbarous radiate of Tetricus. From an examination of the pottery it would seem that the earliest fragment is from a large bead rim jar, in native ware; here there is a pronounced internal projection at the rim, this is indicative of a date in the 3rd quarter of the 1st century. Claudian examples are of a less exaggerated form. The Persfield bead rim is paralleled by an example from Merle Common, Limpsfield, associated with pottery of about A.D. 50 - 75. It also occurs in a late 1st century deposit at Southwark, but in a much finer ware. A date of perhaps 60 A.D. would not be unreasonable for this piece. There were several examples of the flanged dish or bowl which has a range of 3rd to 4th century and some of the 4th century cavetto rimmed jars. It is dangerous, I know, to argue ex absentia, especially on a site such as Persfield, but it did seem somewhat unusual that no examples of the 4th century jar with undercut rim and rilled body, were found there. This type became very common in the South in the second half of the 4th century, and is fairly common elsewhere in Ewell.

My time is running out and I shall be unable to give you a summary of all the remaining sites. I shall not say much about the Lord Nelson here and now. It is hoped before long that we shall be able to assemble all the evidence and co-ordinate all the observations that were made there. As I see it the site needs must include 56 and 58 High Street and also the site of the modern Supermarket to the South, and take in what is already known of the Council School Site, now the Primary School for Girls. We shall then be able to have some kind of idea about the whole of the Epsom Road - High Street sector which stretches from Purberry Shot to the centre of the village, and will also include some fresh evidence from the gardens of 'Cedar Keys' and 'Lurghy Vale' on Kingsway, together with some evidence from gardens between Persfield and Mongers Lane.

Pottery from the Lord Nelson contains both early and late wares with a considerable accent on Hadrianic to Antonine material. From upcast from foundation and drainage trenches in the extreme South of the site came the dolphin-type bronze brooch, which some of you saw some three weeks ago. Also from this point came a considerable amount of wattle and daub, a rim of plain Samian ware with a leaden rivet still firmly adhering to it, and a sherd of Gaulish ware depicting the complete head of the God Silenus in relief. I must admit that when I found this piece, I did not realise that it was decorated as it was completely daubed with mud. I think the moral from this is obvious. As far as I could discern (paying visits as often as I could manage but not spending the time I would have liked) there would appear to have been at least two rubbish pits of Roman date on the site. The first was cut by drainage trenching, a little north of mid-site, but some 15 feet or so from the school boundary fence, and the second by trenching parallel to the driveway connecting the High Street with the School playground; in fact, as far as I can judge, the position of the pit is synonymous with the North Eastern corner of the block of present buildings. I am told that the only coin found prior to my first visit to the site, was a coin of Hadrian in good condition. I have no knowledge of the present whereabouts of this coin. Subsequently, I found one coin from the same mound of upcast mentioned above, but it is so corroded as to be completely unidentifiable.

A copy of the report on work done by Mr. Len Buckingham, members of this Society and myself on the building site in Church Street during 1965 should reach the Society before the end of the year. The amount of pottery collected was not large and most of it could be dated to the latter decades of the 1st century and the early decades of the 2nd. The importance of this site probably centres around a piece of ancient road encountered on digging out one of the Soakaways (G).

Subsequently a cutting a few feet from this soakaway produced a full section of the road which appears to be on the alignment of Stane Street. Pottery sherds found in association with the road can be dated late 1st century. Amongst these sherds was a decorated piece of Samian ware depicting the head of a Satyr playing on his reed pipe (Oswald, Figure Type No. 609, Late 1st century). One rather unusual feature of the site was the considerable depth of top soil which was from 4 to 6 feet in most places except over the road where it was only 2 ft. The greatest proportion of pottery sherds came from Soakaway F and consisted of the rims of 14 different vessels. One of the sherds formed part of a bowl with an over-hanging rim in creamy white ware. This type is probably an import from the Rhineland and is dealt with in Gose, Erich - "Gefäßstypen der Römischer Keramik in Rhineland".

An unusual find from the site was a bronze roundel, closely resembling a draughtsman in size and decoration. The roundel is 0.9 inches in diameter and 0.2 inches thick and contains two apertures about 0.5 of an inch long on either side. Mr. Norman Cook suggests that it is a harness mount of probable Roman date. One coin of Constantius Chlorus was found by a workman on the site.

This then must complete my brief summary. Much has been omitted. Perhaps, in the not too distant future I might be given the opportunity to rectify this. Thank you for allowing me to contribute to this Symposium, and please forgive my unavoidable absence.