

ROMANO-BRITISH OCCUPATION SITES IN THE VALE OF EVESHAM

By BENJAMIN G. COX.

THE object of this contribution is to place on record the extent of our present knowledge, which is admittedly somewhat scant, of the Romano-British occupation sites within a five-mile radius of Evesham.

For a great deal of the information I am indebted to Doctor G. L. Malkin, who practised for some years in Evesham between the wars, and the late Mr. Arthur Jones, of Stone House, Badsey. Between them these gentlemen recorded most of the known sites. These have been carefully checked, added to and confirmed by the Vale of Evesham Historical Society since its formation in 1950. I have some doubt as to the completeness of the information now given, but if one keeps on putting off the job of publishing what is known, there is a danger of it never being done and the records lost or forgotten. What I have to record then, will be basic information upon which we can add to in future years as our researches continue.

Apart from a few rather limited excavations, the information available is derived from surface finds and general observations and, although these surface finds do not give us the complete picture, they do indicate fairly conclusively the major areas of settlement.

Although recent aerial reconnaissance has clearly shown that the Avon Valley was intensively occupied from Neolithic times¹, such reconnaissance has been of little help so far as the sites referred to in the Appendix hereto are concerned since they are almost all under intensive horticultural cultivation throughout most of the year and consequently do not produce the very helpful and time-saving crop marks which have been such a boon to archaeologists elsewhere.

We have had to be content to walk the ground after the plough, follow up "finds" made by the local market gardeners, and to make such observations and deductions as are possible in the circumstances.

The Romanised Britons could be divided into two distinct categories. There were those who lived in towns and those who lived in the countryside. Although of the same social scale, and all administered by Roman officials and subject to Roman law and order, they lived quite different lives though dependant one upon the other. The peasants and small tenant farmers remained more or less tied to the land, and this became an increasing tendency in the third and fourth centuries, but those who migrated to the towns probably had more mobility and could sell their labour to the highest bidder or engage in a variety of trades on their own account.

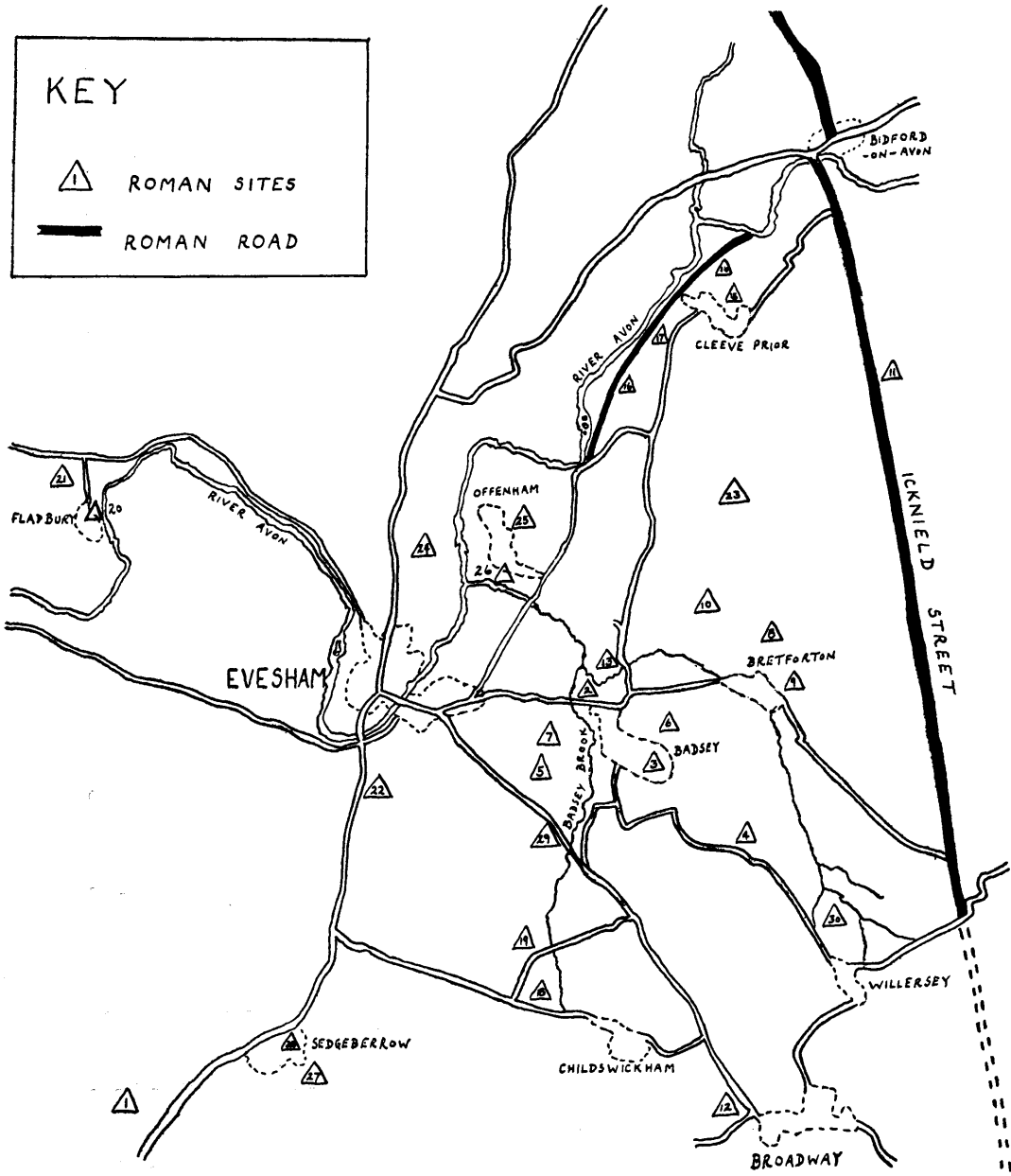
In my opinion most of the dwellers in the settlements near Evesham lived in somewhat crude wooden structures, with wattle and daub walls and thatched roofs and very little different from the type of dwelling in use in the area before the Romans came.

As will be seen from the Appendix hereto, roofing tiles and flue tiles have been found on some of our sites, and this suggests that here and there were dwellings of a somewhat superior type. Doctor Graham Webster, who has kindly "vetted" these notes for me, is of the opinion that we could quite reasonably expect to find buildings of a villa type in the Vale of Evesham, and I am hopeful that one day we shall find something as exciting as the Roman Villa which I discovered at Ebrington, near Chipping Campden, in 1957, when digging a trial

KEY

▲ ROMAN SITES

— ROMAN ROAD



trench there and which was subsequently excavated in 1958 and 1959 under the direction of Mrs. H. E. O'Neil, F.S.A.

In my opinion the people of the Vale of Evesham did not, on the whole, become subject to any very startling changes in their way of life at any time during the 400 years or so of the Roman occupation. The main advantage accruing to them was that they always had a ready market for their corn and livestock, and were presented with opportunities for trade. Although they took advantage of the many luxury goods brought in by the Romans, including pottery, bronze and glass objects, examples of which are constantly being brought up by the plough, their general way of life and tribal customs were retained.

The quantity of coins found indicates that a considerable amount of trade was carried on. The finding at Cleeve Prior in 1811 of an extra-ordinary coin hoard consisting of 400 gold and 2,000 silver coins², buried by someone in the fourth century, might give some indication of the prosperity of at least one of the local residents.

There is no evidence of the people of the Vale putting up any resistance to the Roman invader. I have no doubt that they received assurances, possibly before the invasion, that provided they continued as a food producing community, they would suffer very little interference in their general way of life and were promised a good market for their produce. The Romans could always offer attractive terms when it suited them to do so and a good supply of food for the invading forces was important.

The finding of Iron Age pottery, and here and there early British coins, all mixed up with Roman pottery and Roman coins indicates a very gradual Romanisation.

As will be seen from the map which I have prepared, the principal areas of settlement were along the banks of the River Avon on either side and, more intensively, along the banks of what we call the Badsey Brook. This brook comes into our area at Childswickham and runs through Murcot, Wickhamford, Badsey, Aldington and into the Avon at Offenham. Another extensive area of occupation was along the whole length of the high ground above the River Avon from Cleeve Prior to the Littletons. This area was served by a minor Roman road which was excavated in section by me in 1958³.

Hardly any sites are known in the general area of the Lenches, but this does not necessarily mean that there was no occupation of that area⁴. My experience is that the majority of sites recorded are in areas where at some time or other there has been a keen and observant archaeologist. No evidence at all has been found of any occupation in the town of Evesham in Roman times or, indeed, at any earlier period.

I have prepared and appended hereto a list of the principal sites in the Evesham area known to me. To qualify for inclusion the sites have had to produce a good deal more evidence than the mere isolated finding of a coin or a pottery sherd or two.

As I have already mentioned, the majority of dwellings were of simple construction and were no doubt frequently abandoned for fresh pastures. There was a continual moving about in the same general area, and I must make it quite clear that not all the sites listed in the appendix hereto were occupied simultaneously.

I should also mention that a great many of the better "finds" referred to in the appendix were presented by the late Mr. Arthur Jones to various Museums up and down the country during his lifetime without, unfortunately, any record having been kept by him of such gifts.

In conclusion I should report that at the time of going to press an excavation is taking place under the supervision of Mr. P. J. Reynolds, M.A., and myself, at Wickhamford (Site 29) and I hope the result of this season's work on the site will be made the subject of a report to appear in the next issue of the Evesham Historical Society's Research Papers.

NOTES

- 1.—See Dr. Graham Webster's paper "Aerial Reconnaissance over the Warwickshire Avon," *Arch. Journal* 121 (1965), pp. 1-22.
- 2.—*Archaeologia* xvii, p. 329. *Gentlemans Magazine* 1811 (2, p. 505) and 1814 (1, p. 87).
- 3.—*Trans. Worcs. Arch Society* 1959, vol. xxxvi, p. 65.
- 4.—One site at Church Lench reported by Miss C. W. S. Smith. *Trans. Worcs. Arch Society* 1953, vol. xxx, p. 81.

ROMANO-BRITISH OCCUPATION SITES IN THE VALE OF EVESHAM.

Site No.	Map ref.	Local Name	Parish	Principal Finds	Remarks
1	003376	Groatsens	Ashton under Hill	Coins — Trajan to Magnentius. Black, grey and red pottery, including Samian. Early British coins also found.	In Holland-Martin Museum, Overbury Court.
2	068445	Black Banks (Also known as Pax)	Aldington (Badsey)	Coins — Claudius to Gratianus. Black, grey, red and Samian pottery. Stone quern. Spindle whorls. Bronze clasp. Bronze handle of key. Glass lacrymatory. Also British coin of Antedrigus.	The pottery and some of the coins in Almonry Museum, Evesham.
3	078428	Glebe Farm	Badsey	Grey and black pottery. Pot boilers. Coin of Constans. Spindle whorl. Bone spoon. Also late iron-age pottery.	Finds in Cheltenham Museum.
4	088423	Black Ground (Bowers Hill)	Badsey	Coins — Hadrian to Gratianus. Pottery including Samian. Fibulae. Whetstones (square and round). Querns (saddle and round). Bone pin. A ring.	Ring in Worcester Museum. Pottery in Almonry Museum, Evesham.
5	068432	Fox Hills	Badsey	Eleven skeletons. Pottery, including Samian. Fibulae. Quern fragments. Flue tiles. Bone pin. Pot boilers. Roofing tiles. Walls just below surface. Coins — Commodus to Manentius. Some iron age pottery.	Whereabouts of finds not known.
6	084435	Badsey Fields	Badsey	Skeleton. Pottery including Samian. Handle of large amphora. Buckles. Pot boilers. Whetstones. Fragments of querns. Flue tiles. Oculists stamp. Fibulae—trumpet, snake and others. Coins — Nerva to Allectus. Early British coin (Evans F.4).	Skeleton at Worcester Museum. Pottery in Almonry Museum, Evesham. Whereabouts of other finds not known.
7	066428	Briar Croft	Badsey	Pottery—red and grey. Silver coin of Vespasian.	In Almonry Museum, Evesham.
8	093448	Land near Railway known as Cuckoo	Bretforton	Pottery, including Samian. Coins—Crispina to Arcadius.	Pottery in Almonry Museum, Evesham.
9	095439	Womans Piece (near Vicarage)	Bretforton	Skeleton. Pottery, red, black and grey. Dressed stone.	Whereabouts of finds not known.
10	092452	Field Barn	Bretforton	Pottery, black, red and grey. Coins — Constantine I and Crispus.	Finds in Almonry Museum, Evesham
11	106499	Bickmarsh (adjoining Buckle Street)	Pebworth	Pottery, grey, red and Samian. Circular lead disc. Coin of Licenius.	Finds in Almonry Museum, Evesham
12	088379	Broadway Gravel Pits (now coach park)	Broadway	Pottery, fibulae. Iron age pottery.	Site excavated by the late Miss C. N. S. Smith. Trans. Worcs. Arch. Socy. 1946. Whereabouts of finds not known.

13	073445	Blackminster Bridge	Badsey	Pottery sherds near brook. Paved ford. Coins. Also gold coin of Cnut.	Pottery in Almonry Museum, Evesham. Gold coin in Worcester Museum.
14	082498	Near Brades House	Cleeve Prior	Skeletons and pottery.	Report of Dr. Graham Webster. Trans. Worcs. Arch. Socy., vol. 36, page 67. Pottery in Evesham Museum.
15	083245	roglands	Cleeve Prior	Coins — Victorinus to Gratian. Pottery. Spindle whorls. Fibulae.	All in Almonry Museum, Evesham.
16	075485/ 6/7/8	Land adjoining terraced roadway	Cleeve Prior	Coins — M. Aurelius to Heiena. Fibulae.	Whereabouts of finds not known. See report by B. G. Cox, p. 65, Trans. Worcs. Arch. Socy., v. 36.
17	074485	In Quarry between present main road and terraced roadway.	Cleeve Prior	The famous Sheppey Hoard of gold and silver coins found in 1811.	Numismatic Chron. XVI, 1937. pp. 314-16.
18	058395	Hinton Road	Childswickham	Fibulae. Pottery, red, grey and Samian. Roofing tiles.	Finds in Almonry Museum, Evesham
19	061403	Murcot	Childswickham	Pottery, Samian and grey. Flue tile. Spindle whorl. Pot boilers. Small area of paved floor, 9 x 4 ft.	Pottery in Almonry Museum, Evesham.
20	996465	Vicarage Garden	Fladbury	Skeleton. Pottery (2nd century).	Report by B. G. Cox, Worcs. Arch. Socy. Trans., vol. XXXII, p. 36, 1955.
21	986467	Spring Hill Farm	Fladbury	Coins found "within the curve of the private railway siding" — Antoninus Pius to Theodosius I.	Whereabouts of finds not known.
22	036425	Gypsies Corner	Hinton on the Green	Pottery, including Samian. Roofing tiles. Flue tiles.	Pottery in Almonry Museum, Evesham.
23	091471	Blakes Hill	North Littleton	Pottery, including Samian. Roofing tiles, tegulae and imbrex. Stone roof tile. Fragments of quern Stone mortarium. Foundations of wall and flooring.	Partly excavated by Dr. G. R. Malkin, but abandoned. Pottery in Almonry Museum, Evesham.
24	044458	Electricity Sub-Station, Blayneys Lane	Norton & Lenchwick	Pottery, red, black and grey. New Forest ware (rare in this district). Coins of Crispus. Seal box with enamel work.	Finds in Almonry Museum, Evesham, except the seal box.
25	055464	Kings Bank	Offenham	Large iron key. Coins—Tiberius to Allectus. Pottery, red and grey.	Key in Almonry Museum, Evesham.
26	057455	Debden	Offenham	Two complete pots. Sherds, including Samian. Quern fragment. Flue tiles. Coin of Trajan and two of Constans.	Whereabouts of finds not known.
27	028376	Near Mill	Sedgeberrow	Bronze spearheads. Pieces of Roman defensive armour.	See May—History of Evesham, 1845.
28	017384	Behind Schools	Sedgeberrow	Pottery sherds. Bronze pins.	Finds in Almonry Museum, Evesham
29	062413	Near Brook (Evesham side)	Wickhamford	Pottery, red, black, grey and Samian. Flue tiles. Roofing tiles. Wall plaster. Fibulae.	Finds in Almonry Museum, Evesham
30	096405	Willersey Barn	Willersey	Samian ware. Red and grey ware. 2nd century fibulae. Coins of Victorinus, Maximus and Gratian. Also early British coin of Bodvok.	All in Worcester Museum.