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THE ROMANS IN THE BRISTOL AREA

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INTRODUCTION

Ideally the geographical limitations of this study should be determined by the physical and political geography of the Bristol region during the period of the Roman occupation, but this would involve a far greater area than that with which the Bristol Historical Association is concerned and considerably more space than is available to the writer. Equally the present day boundaries of Bristol are unsatisfactory for our purpose since they would exclude several important sites on the outskirts of the city and impose totally artificial boundaries on our subject. The solution chosen is a reasoned compromise, which makes it possible to include within the scope of this pamphlet most of the Romano-British sites which lie within a radius of seven miles from Bristol Cathedral. (see fig. 1). On the south the area is defined by the Failand Ridge and Dundry Hills, on the east by the western edge of the Cotswolds, on the north by the modern suburbs of the city (Mangotsfield, Patchway) and on the west by the Severn.

The Pamphlet is divided into two sections, the first dealing with political and military history of the area and the second with the social and economic history. All sites are referred to by their modern names. A short bibliography lists suggestions for further reading.

The Romans in the Bristol Area is the twenty-second pamphlet published by the Bristol Branch of the Historical Association in a series dealing with local history. The author, Dr. K. Branigan, is an Assistant Lecturer in Romano-British Archaeology in the University of Bristol. He has for some time been concerned with important new discoveries in and around Bristol, and in this pamphlet he fits the evidence for the Bristol area into the wider context of the Roman conquest and occupation. The Branch wishes to express its gratitude to the Publications Fund of the University of Bristol for a grant towards the cost of publication.

The Branch hopes in due course to follow this work, which deals with a wider area than the City itself, with another pamphlet examining the pre-history of the region. This is being written by Mr. L. V. Grinsell, Curator in Archaeology in the City Museum, and it is hoped to publish it in 1969 or early in 1970.

Other pamphlets in an advanced stage of preparation include Mr. M. Q. Smith's study of the medieval churches of Bristol and Mr. Grahame Farr's examination of Bristol ship-building in the nineteenth century.

Miss K. M. D. Barker's two pamphlets on the history of The Theatre Royal, Bristol, have been extremely popular and are now out of print. Thanks to the generous response to an appeal, funds are now available for reprinting the first of these pamphlets, and its third edition will be published in the course of 1969.

The pamphlets can be obtained from most Bristol booksellers or direct from Mr. Peter Harris, 74 Bell Barn Road, Stoke Bishop, Bristol, 9, BS9 2DG. They are also on sale at the Porters' Lodge in the Wills Memorial Building and in the Senate House. The Branch hopes that readers will help its work by placing standing orders for future publications.



I. POLITICAL AND MILITARY HISTORY

At the time of the Roman invasion in AD.43 the Bristol area, along with Gloucestershire and much of Somerset, lay within the territory of the Dobunni, a tribe dominated by Belgic immigrants but largely comprised of non-Belgic peoples. From c. AD.20 the tribe issued inscribed coins which tell us the names of its ruling kings and, from their distribution, something about its history in the period c. AD.20 - 43. For most of this period the tribe appears to have prospered and to have maintained friendly commercial relations with the expanding Catuvellaunian kingdom further east and also perhaps with the Durotriges to the south-east. Not long before the Roman invasion, however, the situation seems to have changed in two respects. The coinage reveals that two kings now ruled the tribe, presumably implying a division of tribal territory which the distribution of the coins appears to confirm. Furthermore the king who held Gloucestershire, Boduocus, seems to have favoured Rome to judge by the style of his coinage, his ready submission to Claudius, and his subsequent treatment. The rest of Dobunni territory was held by Corio . . . who would appear to have been more hostile to the Romans and more closely allied to the Catuvellauni. It was the Catuvellauni who brought about the second important change in the political situation in Somerset and Gloucestershire, for on the joint succession of Caratacus and Togodumnus c. AD.41 they had expanded further to the west and, if we interpret Dio Cassius correctly, had made Boduocus's kingdom a tributary state.

With this situation in mind the events of AD.43 fall into place. Before the Romans, advancing from Richborough, had reached the Medway, a part of a tribe whom Dio calls the "Bodunni" had negotiated a settlement with them. The historical context points clearly to Boduocus's kingdom as the tribe involved, even if the geographical context is surprising. His sympathies appear to have lain with Rome and as a subject state of the Catuvellauni, one of Rome's major opponents, he had much to gain by concluding an early treaty with the Romans. It is significant that subsequently his territory retained its identity and with certain modifications became the *civitas* of the Dobunni, whereas Corio . . . 's southern possessions were absorbed in the artificially created *civitas* of the Belgae. South-western England was subjected to a rapid campaign, by the II Augusta under their legate Vespasian, (later to become Emperor) which had been brought to a successful conclusion by mid AD.44. We are told by Suetonius that Vespasian's forces were

opposed by two hostile tribes and that more than twenty of their hill-forts were reduced. The Durotriges of Dorset and Wiltshire were certainly one of the two tribes involved and most of the captured hill-forts must have lain within their territory, but the identity of the second tribe is in dispute. There is reason to think however that it may have been Corio . . . 's Dobunni. In the south of Somerset there is now evidence for the reduction of the hill-forts on South Cadbury and Worlebury, probably c. AD.43, and the hill-fort at Ham Hill was partially occupied by Roman troops about this time. Nearer to the Bristol area evidence of military activity is less decisive but recent finds suggest that the small fortlet at Charterhouse was occupied about the middle of the first century. Nearer still to Bristol, three scales from a military cuirass (very similar to examples from Ham Hill) were found with mid first century pottery in the native settlement at Butcome and imply some sort of military activity in the area. It would be tempting to draw similar conclusions from the mid-first century Samian and other pottery found inside a long, rectangular building with internal partitions inside the hill-fort at Bury Hill Camp, Winterbourne Down north of Bristol. No military metal-work has yet been discovered on the site however and despite superficial similarities between the long hut and the early timber barrack blocks the Roman forts of the first century AD, its method of construction argues strongly against its identification as such.

It is almost certain however that a small fort and naval base were established during the early years of the invasion at Sea Mills. Apart from Claudian coins and pottery, evidence is at present lacking, but it is clear from discoveries at Fishbourne (Chichester), in Poole harbour, and at Topsham (on the mouth of the Exe), that Vespasian relied a great deal on naval support for his legion. Furthermore the discovery of early Roman coins and pottery at Aust further up the mouth of the Severn are also suggestive of Roman naval interest in this area. The most likely position for the fort at Sea Mills would appear to be the small, relatively level area today occupied by the bungalows of Hadrian Close and crossed by the Portway. Here we may imagine a small fort would overlook a quay, perhaps built at the mouth of the Trym, and a group of store-houses and granaries (similar to those recently excavated at Fishbourne) to which were brought supplies for the garrisons of the forts being established in the region.

These forts appear to be a part of a major frontier system established during the governorship of Plautius, the commander of the invasion forces. The basis of the system was probably the Fosse Way, although the date of the Fosse's construction is not

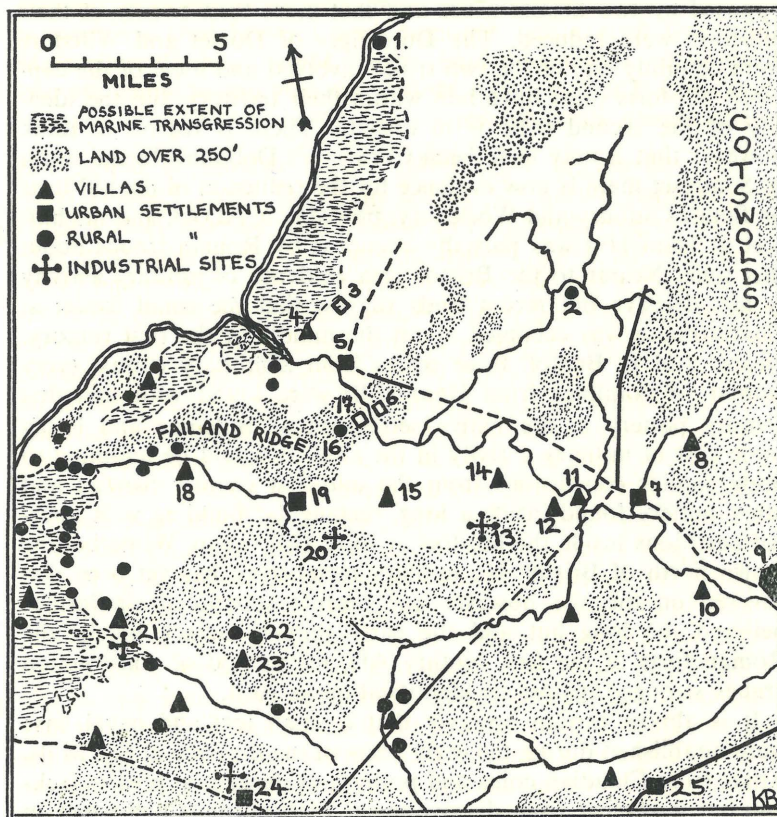


Fig. 1. The Bristol Area in the Roman Period.

Key to Sites—

1. Aust.
2. Winterbourne.
3. Blaise Castle.
4. King's Weston.
5. Sea Mills.
6. Clifton Camp.
7. Bitton.
8. Wick.
9. Bath.
10. Newton St. Loe.
11. Somerdale.
12. Keynsham.

13. Whitchurch.
14. Brislington.
15. Bedminster.
16. Ashton Park.
17. Stokeleigh Camp.
18. Wraxall.
19. Gatcombe.
20. Dundry.
21. Congresbury Kilns.
22. Butcombe.
23. Lye Hole.
24. Charterhouse.
25. Cameron.

clearly established and in its known form it may in places be somewhat later, perhaps Flavian. On the Fosse Way itself were situated a number of forts, two of which are thought to have been at Nettleton and Camerton. Forward of the Fosse however a whole chain of forts were erected, all placed about fifteen miles west of

the road, and separated from each other by distances of between thirty and forty miles. Amongst these forward forts are those at Kingsholm (Gloucestershire), Sea Mills, and Wiveliscombe (Somerset). The fort at Sea Mills is the only one of which the precise location is still unknown.

The necessity of these forts, and of defence in depth, was demonstrated during the period in AD.47 when Plautius relinquished his governorship to be succeeded by Scapula. Hostile tribes broke into the newly formed province, and it is clear from subsequent events that the tribes involved were the Silures and Ordovices of southern and central Wales. Tacitus specifically mentions the use of auxiliary troops against these invaders, and it seems likely that the VIth Cohort of Thracians stationed at Kingsholm and the Indiana cavalry (named after their founder) based on Cirencester were in the thick of the fighting. The auxiliary garrison at Sea Mills were less exposed to a land-based attack than their colleagues further north, and the presence of a naval force such as we have conjectured at Sea Mills, would no doubt have deterred a Welsh attack across the Severn at this point. Certainly there is no evidence for violent destruction of any Romano-British or Roman establishments in the Bristol area at this time. The sequel to these events was the establishment of a legionary fortress at Gloucester in AD.49, to which was transferred the XX Valeria Victrix from Colchester, and the erection of a naval reconnaissance post at Old Burrow (Devon) on the edge of the Bristol Channel. The latter may have been one of a chain of such fortlets and in itself implies the necessity for continued caution in this area. It may well be that the naval force at Sea Mills was strengthened now, and the Roman remains at Aust mentioned above might perhaps refer to this period rather than the years immediately following the invasion.

With the XX Valeria Victrix established at Gloucester, Scapula undertook between AD.50 - 52 a series of campaigns against the Silures and Ordovices which resulted in the capture of the leading British commander Caratacus. The success was short-lived, however, for whilst Scapula was enjoying his (honorary) Triumph in Rome, the Silures began a further major war. This seems to have been fought principally if not exclusively on Silurian territory and presumably had little direct effect on the Bristol area, although Sea Mills must have seen a great deal of activity again in its role as a supply base if not as a headquarters for naval operations against the Welsh. In AD.52 - 53 the situation temporarily worsened, again during the interval between governors, Scapula having died unexpectedly. The XX Valeria Victrix suffered a defeat, though where

we do not know, and the Silures looted and plundered "far and wide." This presumably indicates that they again broke into the province and that parts of Gloucestershire at least may have been subjected to violence at their hands. The situation is thought to have been restored by the new governor Gallus, and by his successor Veranius between AD.53 - 58. Apart from an ambiguous sentence in Tacitus the only evidence we have to support this hypothesis is the confidence with which Paulinus was able to withdraw a detachment of the XX Valeria Victrix from Gloucester and undertake a major campaign in north Wales in AD.59 - 60. On the other hand the failure of the II Augusta to go to the aid of Paulinus during the Boudiccan revolt of the following year could be interpreted as indicative of unrest in the south-west, for this legion was probably based on Exeter and garrisoning several outlying forts including perhaps Ham Hill and Wiveliscombe.

By AD.70 however the government felt secure enough in the south-west to transfer the II Augusta to Gloucester, although the fortlet at Old Burrow was replaced by a more permanent post at Martinhoe. This would suggest continued naval activity in the Bristol Channel for which Sea Mills must have been the base. The necessity of maintaining a watch on the Silures was confirmed by the events of AD.74 - 77, during the governorship of Frontinus. The Roman government decided that the whole of the south-west would remain under threat until the Silures had been not only conquered but effectively controlled by a network of forts. Scapula and Gallus had attempted this, at least on a limited scale, but the hostility of the Silures and events elsewhere in the province had prevented them or their successors from achieving their objectives. In three campaigns about which Tacitus tells us very little, Frontinus defeated the Silures and established the basis of a network of forts in southern Wales. Apart from a legionary fortress for II Augusta at Caerleon, forts were founded in the harbours of Cardiff, Neath and Carmarthen and this implies that Frontinus had made good use of the British fleet during his advance. If this were so then we must again see Sea Mills as acquiring a temporary importance far in excess of its normal role. A good deal of Flavian material has been found on the site and this and a stamped tile of the II Augusta, may reflect a short period of great activity during Frontinus's campaigns and shortly after whilst the forts were being completed. Flavian Samian pottery and coins from Blaise Castle hill might perhaps be associated with a signal post established on this prominent landmark north of Sea Mills and within view of the Severn during this period.

With South Wales pacified and under Roman control, the whole of the south west, including Somerset and Gloucestershire was freed from the fear of further hostile invasion from the west. Nevertheless there is some evidence to suggest that disturbances continued sporadically in Wales and these presumably had their effect on the economic development of the south-west. Most of the evidence however comes from the territory of the Ordovices further north, where forts are known to have been destroyed c. AD.90 and c. AD.169. In the latter instance Wroxeter and Worcester may have been subjected to attack and a number of forts in Silurian territory were rebuilt and/or re-occupied suggesting that the disturbances were more widespread than previously. On the other hand there is no evidence to suggest a Silurian revolt during AD.196 when much of northern Britain was overrun and several forts in central and northern Wales reveal evidence of destruction and/or rebuilding. Thus, by and large, the two centuries from c. AD.70 to c. AD.270 were, for the people of the Bristol area, peaceful and undisturbed.

The situation seems to have changed drastically in the late 260's. In AD.255 legionaries and auxiliaries had been withdrawn for operations in Germany, and amongst these detachments would have been part of the II Augusta from Caerleon and possibly some auxiliary units from the Welsh forts. Whether or not as a direct consequence of this weakening of the garrisons of the west, Somerset and the other areas around the Bristol Channel appear now to have come under attack by sea-borne raiders coming, one assumes, from Ireland. There are no references to these raids amongst the works of the Roman historians, neither can we point to any evidence of violent destruction in the region at this time, but the implication of a considerable number of coin hoards from the area, dating between c. AD.270 - 296, is clear. The counterfeiting of coins at Whitchurch and Clevedon during the 270's is presumably, in part, a response to this situation, as is the subsequent establishment of short forts at Cardiff, Caernarvon, Holyhead and elsewhere on the western coast.

The shore forts and the measures taken first by the British usurper, Carausius, and then by the central government brought peace to the Bristol Channel again and restored confidence amongst the local population. The villas at Keynsham, Brislington and King's Weston appear to have been founded at the close of the third century and presumably point to a restoration of both confidence and prosperity. This was no doubt encouraged by the formation of a more localised government, resulting from a subdivision of the existing province, one part forming *Britannia Prima*, with its

capital almost certainly at Cirencester, and also by the presence in Britain of Constantius Caesar for a short time in 297 and 306.

Half a century passed with, as far as we know, no further threats to the security of the Bristol region manifesting themselves. The usurpation of Magnentius in AD.350 however must have resulted in a large scale withdrawal of troops from the island to support his claim in AD.351 when he met Constantius II in battle (in Pannonia) and was defeated. The ability of the garrison in Britain to resist pressure from beyond the frontiers was considerably weakened by this episode, and through the 350's the pressure increased. In AD.360 four regiments of the mobile field army were sent to Britain to settle disorders in the north, and five years later there were major raids which involved both Scots and Attacotti, sea-borne raiders who may well have appeared in the Bristol Channel at this time. If the Bristol area was fortunate on this occasion however, it was but a short respite. In AD.367 came the concerted attack on the province by Picts, Scots, Attacotti and Saxons. Few of the coastal regions of Britain escaped their attention and there is evidence, both literary and archaeological, of their presence far inland. In the Bristol area the evidence for the raiders comes from the villas at King's Weston and Brislington. Marine transgression in the late 3rd-4th century meant that these villas, and other Romano-British settlements and farms in the area, were more easily reached by boat than they would be today. At King's Weston the western wing of the villa and the bath suite showed signs of having been burnt down, and hostile action rather than misfortune is suggested by the collapse (destruction?) of the well-constructed *portico* on the south side of the house. Brislington villa produced evidence of a more spectacular nature. Here the well was deliberately filled with masonry from the building at a time subsequent to AD.337 (a coin of Constantius II, AD.337-361, being found in the debris in the well) and amongst the debris were four human skulls and a quantity of human bones. The evidence reported from the villa at Keynsham is not clear enough to enable us to say whether or not it was affected by the raids but either now or shortly after much of the building fell into disuse. The town of Gatcombe on the other hand was defended by a massive wall and appears to have been unmolested by the barbarians. Equally there is nothing at Sea Mills to suggest a violent destruction here in AD.367, and we may conjecture that it too was defended by a town wall, as yet undiscovered.

The central government dispatched Theodosius to restore the situation and within two years he had accomplished this task. Probably as a result of his recommendations many of the towns in the

province, including Cirencester and Caerwent, were given a series of bastions projecting forwards from their walls, on which were placed *ballistae* — a type of catapult which had long since proved its effectiveness with the Roman army. Gatcombe however appears not to have been defended with these weapons, and we do not know the situation at Sea Mills. One aspect of Theodosius's restoration which probably affected Sea Mills was the reorganisation of the naval defences, which the raid of 367 clearly demanded. About this time the temple at Lydney, just across the Bristol Channel, was constructed and a fine mosaic floor there was dedicated by Flavius Senilis, who is described as PR REL, probably to be expanded to *praepositus reliquationi classis* — or officer commanding the naval depot. That this depot stood at Sea Mills is most probable, and certainly the fourth century at Sea Mills would appear to have been an active and relatively prosperous time to judge from the remains excavated there. In eastern England Theodosius introduced small armed garrisons, often of Germanic troops, to the walled towns, and similar garrisons, but of British rather than Germanic origin, may be recognised by their characteristic buckles in the west country. These distinctive buckles have been found at Cirencester and Caerwent and a single example has also come to light at Sea Mills. Nothing of this sort has yet been discovered at Gatcombe, but iron spearheads from here and from the villa sites at Keynsham and King's Weston may be compared to an example from a late deposit at Sea Mills and are perhaps indicative of a local militia force operating not only in the towns but in the countryside too during the late fourth century.

All of the excavated villas, including Brislington, appear to have been re-occupied subsequent to the raid of 367 and the evidence of the coins found in the re-occupation material suggests that they were inhabited at least into the last quarter of the fourth century. Indeed the coins from the villa at Newton St. Loe (between Bath and Keynsham villa) point to occupation into the fifth century and further afield we may refer to several villas in Gloucestershire where occupation into the fifth century seems certain (Hucclecote, Frocester, and Barnsley Park). Equally, the coin lists for Gatcombe and Sea Mills point to continued activity in these towns at the very end of the fourth century. Recent excavations at Gatcombe have revealed remains of this late occupation *in situ*, and have thus confirmed the evidence of the coin list. For how long these sites remained inhabited is difficult to determine, since coinage of the period A.D.402 - 410 is very scarce in Britain and all coinage seems to have gone out of circulation by c. AD.430. Although a series of

usurpers had withdrawn troops from the province between AD.383 - 407 there is no reason to suppose that local militia forces were not still operative and from other parts of southern England (e.g. Dorchester, Oxfordshire) there is positive evidence for the existence of small military garrisons well into the fifth century. Raids along the coast of the Bristol Channel no doubt became frequent, but disconcerting and disruptive as these may have been they were rather different from the Saxon raids in eastern and southern England which soon were undertaken with a view to permanent occupation. Thus, whilst life may have been much less secure than previously there was no reason why it should not have continued both in town and country. The maintenance of the forum at Cirencester well into the fifth century suggests that the towns in the west country still functioned as market centres for the farms, though the latter had in most cases long ceased to be "villas."

The plague of AD.443 may have brought town life to an unexpectedly rapid end in the Bristol region. A number of unburied bodies lying by the side of the street in Cirencester may be identified as victims of this catastrophe, and two inhumations recently found at Sea Mills apparently belonged to the very end of the occupation of the site or later. Whether or not one might also ascribe to the period of the plague some of the large sub-Roman cemeteries in Somerset (Henley Wood, Brean Down, Camerton, Cannington and Winthill — the last amongst the ruins of a villa) is debatable but worth consideration. In this connection we should note the several graves dug around and into the ? Romano-British temple on Blaise Castle Hill.

Whatever the truth concerning the plague in AD.443, it would appear that life of some sort continued in the towns of Gloucester and Somerset for in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle the entry for AD.557 records:

"In this year Cuthwine and Ceawlin fought against the Britons . . . ; and they captured three cities, Gloucester, Cirencester and Bath."

It could be however, that the Saxons captured nothing more than deserted ruins. Recent excavations at South Cadbury and Cadbury Camp (Congresbury) have shown that by the late sixth century, at least some of the people in the Bristol region had re-occupied the hill-forts out of which their ancestors had moved in the years between AD.43 - 47.

II. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY

The Dobunnic tribesmen who occupied the Bristol area at the time of the Roman conquest may still have been living within the ramparts of the hill-forts on Blaise Castle Hill, Tickenham Hill, Bury Hill (Winterbourne), Stokeleigh, Clifton Down and elsewhere, if we are to judge from the violent end to the occupation of the hill-forts at South Cadbury and Worlebury probably assignable to Roman actions c. AD.43. Unfortunately the nature of the evidence from those forts which have been excavated does not allow us to say with confidence the time at which they were abandoned. Whether or not some or all of these hill-forts were still occupied in AD.43, evidence is now accumulating to suggest that several farming communities based on undefended settlements were established about this time. Unexcavated examples are situated in Ashton Park, near Failand Lodge, at Naish House and elsewhere on the Failand Ridge. The finds from these sites are poorly recorded but include pottery which appears to be of second century date.

That communities of this sort were in existence during the mid first century AD is shown by the present excavations at Butcombe (fig. 2) where pits and structural remains of this period have been

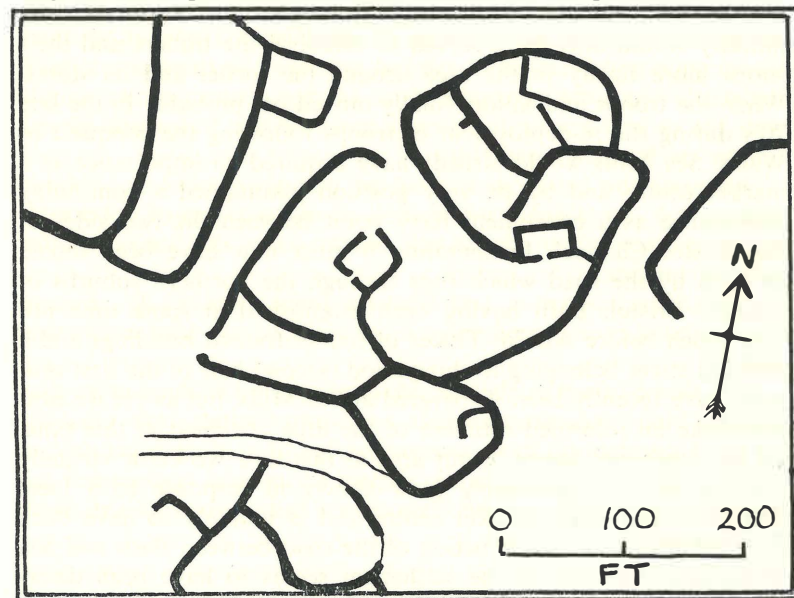


Fig. 2. Native Settlement at Butcombe in the Fourth Century AD. (Interpretation of Earthworks by P. J. Fowler)

discovered. In this respect the three scales of a military cuirass mentioned earlier might be significant and on the evidence at present available it is possible to postulate the implementation of a policy by the conquerors, whereby the southern Dobunni were systematically removed from their hill-forts into open settlements where they could more easily be controlled and intimidated. The evidence from Wiltshire and Dorset, Durotrigian territory, points more clearly to the same conclusion, and we may recall that the southern Dobunni and the Durotriges are probably to be identified with the two tribes which Suetonius records as giving the Roman forces most trouble in the drive to the south-west.

At the same time as these settlements may have been established, a small town must have been growing up around the military base at Sea Mills. The early forts at Exeter and Cirencester gave birth to towns which flourished long after the troops had moved on, and the same pattern can be recognised elsewhere in the province. In particular we might compare Sea Mills to Fishbourne. Here too a military base had been established by Vespasian in AD.43, and when the base was dismantled a decade later an apparently thriving harbour town came into being. Sea Mills, as we have seen, was probably used as a naval base for rather longer, into the mid 70's in fact, but this prolonged association with the military would only have served to establish the traders and their shops more firmly in the area around the fortlet and its stores. When the troops and sailors finally moved on, probably in the late 70's during the re-deployment of troops following the conquest of Wales, Sea Mills would already have acquired an importance as a market centre and by its very position maintained a continuing importance as a convenient ferry point between the two sides of the Bristol Channel. Furthermore it must now have been linked to Bath by the road which runs through the northern suburbs of modern Bristol, Bath having been established at some time not very much before AD.76. Traces of timber-framed buildings and a cobbled street belonging to this period (second half of the first century) have recently been discovered at Sea Mills, but as yet we cannot make an informed estimate of the area occupied at this time. Of the other two towns in our area at this time we know virtually nothing. Bitton presumably grew slowly in response to a local demand for a small market centre and is unlikely to have been founded before the construction of the road between Bath and Sea Mills, since the site of the settlement seems to have been determined by the course of the road rather than *vice versa*. At Gatcombe, pottery and a few associated post holes suggest some sort

of occupation on the site by the mid first century AD but there is nothing indicative of a town here at this period. Scattered first century finds in the countryside (e.g. Somerdale, Whitchurch, Newton St. Loe) may, in some cases, represent the sites of small farmsteads but there is no evidence at all for the erection of even the most simple Romanised farm house or "villa." This is to be expected for Romanised farms only appear where Romanised urban populations exist and provide the appropriate economic and social focus for the rural settlements. As we have seen, Sea Mills was the only urban centre in our area during the first century and there were few signs of Romanisation even here until at least the Hadrianic period. Bath, founded c. AD.70, must have been similarly ill-equipped initially to provide the necessary stimulus for the foundation of Romanised farms. In addition economic conditions in the south-west during the first century AD were unfavourable to the development of a villa system in the countryside, as was the military situation.

The prolonged occupation of some of the forts and fortlets in the south-west are indicative of a degree of continued hostility to the invaders on the part of the Dumnonii, Durotriges and Dobunni. This factor, allied with the military government that went with the forts, was in itself an obstacle to the immediate growth of a Romanised element in the local population. Equally the insecurity of the Bristol area during the first forty years of the Roman occupation, resulting largely from the persistence of the Silures, did not encourage the establishment of isolated villas which by the display of wealth which their erection involved would have formed conspicuous targets for raiders from Wales. Furthermore neither the countryside nor the town at this time was fostering the desire for Romanised farms. The native inhabitants of the settlement at Sea Mills were able to live off the trade with the troops until the late 70's and most were probably either craftsmen or innkeepers. The farming villages established on the Failand Ridge and elsewhere, whether by Roman dictate or not, were no doubt expected to provide corn for the local garrisons and probably contribute towards the corn supply for the Welsh forts as well. As in Wessex, these settlements and their surrounding field systems (which themselves indicate the importance of agriculture in the village economy) appear to persist throughout the period of the Roman occupation and it may well be that this was determined not by choice but by the wishes of the imperial government. A well known inscription from the villa at Combe Down, Bath, confirms that estates controlled by the emperor's representatives existed in the Somerset area. If the villages near Failand and else-

where in the Bristol region were deliberately maintained by the government then it is little wonder that villas only appear in the Bristol area at the end of the third century. Again we might emphasise the similarity between this situation and that in Wessex, and recall that the two areas were occupied by the two tribes in the south of England who appear to have offered the Romans the greatest resistance during their conquest of lowland Britain. The social and economic development of these two regions is by no means identical but the several similarities may have their significance.

If urban and rural development was somewhat retarded in the Bristol area as a result, direct or otherwise, of government policy, industrial development was not. Within a few years of Vespaian's conquest of the south-west, the lead mines on Charterhouse were in production, under the control of the II Augusta. Two pigs have been found dated to AD.49. Traces of lead mining on Clifton Down may also belong to the early years of the Roman invasion, for Charterhouse appears to have been the centre of a more widespread mining area. Direct military control of the mines appears to have ended about the time of the Boudiccan revolt (AD.60) since the name of a civilian prospector, Nipius Ascanius, appears on a pig of that year. Ascanius was a freeman (we think) and therefore probably working as an agent for a wealthy Roman. This probability is increased by the appearance of a pig stamped with Ascanius's name coming from the lead mines of Flintshire. Further evidence of private individuals and companies at work in the Mendip mines is provided by the pigs stamped with the name of Tiberius Trif (erna) who also mined in Derbyshire, and by a pig from Bitterne inscribed *soc Novaec* — referring to the company (*societas*) who had produced the pig. Government interest in Mendip lead (and the silver extracted from it) may have slackened in the late second century, since the latest stamped pigs are dated to AD.164 - 169. Two of these late pigs were found in the Frome at Wade Street (Bristol) and imply that during the Antonine period at least, some of the pigs were shipped through Sea Mills.

By this time Sea Mills had seen several changes. At least part of the town may have been burnt down in the Hadrianic period, although recent excavations have not revealed further deposits of the destruction debris found in the early 1940's. Timber frame buildings continued to line the streets until the late second century when the first buildings with stone foundations were erected. Of those excavated some were typical Romano-British shops, long

and narrow with a workshop-cum-showroom fronting onto the pavement. Sea Mills however was still a backwater of urban development and compares poorly with the Dobunnic capital at Cirencester where stone foundations appeared early in the second century. The economic situation in the countryside had changed little since the first century and by its nature was unlikely to stimulate the growth of a flourishing market town. Sea Mills' greatest source of income may still have come from its use as a ferry station between Somerset and Wales and in particular from visitors to Bath, who often included troops if we are to judge from the many inscriptions found in the spa town.

The settlements on the Failand Ridge continued in occupation throughout the second and third centuries, and intermittent occupation can be traced at Gatcombe, where slender stone footings of second century date have been found together with small amounts of second century pottery and coins. But as at Sea Mills there is a very clear picture of retarded development, if not stagnation, the possible causes of which we have discussed earlier. A marked change in the situation was required if the Bristol area was ever to see the growth of a Romanised society and a prosperous urban and rural population.

Strangely, when the change came it was neither sudden nor deliberate. Recent discoveries at Highbridge and on the other side of the Bristol Channel at Uskmouth, Goldcliffe and Redwick have revealed that a major inundation of the low lying coastal areas around the Bristol Channel had begun by the end of the second century AD. (fig. 1). No doubt the extent of the flooding fluctuated, but in general the water level seems to have continued to rise throughout the third century until a large part of the Somerset Levels were inundated and the people living there had been forced to abandon their homes and move further inland and on to higher ground. As we mentioned earlier, this would have facilitated sea-borne raids on Somerset and the several late third century coin hoards, some from sites now far inland, would appear to confirm that this was so. The hoarding of coins, and the loss of property, no doubt led to a scarcity of coinage in this period which local counterfeiters attempted to overcome. The hundreds of moulds from Whitchurch all appear to have been produced in the period AD.270 - 274, and this is probably the period when the mould for a coin of Tetricus (AD.270 - 273) from Clevedon was in use.

Apart from this local catastrophe, the Bristol region had suf-

ferred, along with the rest of the province, from the economic difficulties which had accompanied monetary reforms and the establishment of the Gallic empire in AD.259. For a short time the Bristol region must have gone through an economic crisis, faced with a sudden rise in the density of population, a marked drop in the amount of agricultural land available, a series of coastal raids, and a total lack of confidence in both the government and the currency. The usurpation of Carausius, admiral of the British fleet, in AD.286 surprisingly brought a marked amelioration of conditions. Both his government and his currency appear to have gained the confidence of the British population, and it was he who began the construction of the shore forts designed to defend the coasts from barbarian attack. Short-lived as this British empire was (AD.286 - 296) it saw the beginnings of a period of considerable prosperity throughout the province which the restoration of legal Roman government in AD.296 did much to foster.

Nowhere is the change in circumstances more clearly demonstrated than in the Bristol area. Increased confidence and wealth, and a ready supply of labour not attached to any of the existing farming villages, created an ideal climate for the establishment of large farming estates centred on a villa. Few of the people living in the Bristol area previously would have been able to acquire either the wealth or the taste to build a villa, and it may well be that the men who erected the several new villas along the Bristol Avon at the end of the third century were tribal dignitaries and officials from Bath or from Winchester, the capital of the *civitas* of the Belgae to which the Bristol area belonged under the Roman administration.

Between Avonmouth and Bath six villa sites are known, if we include the building only partially revealed and scarcely recorded at Bedminster. Newton St. Loe, a little over two miles west of Roman Bath, stood on a gentle slope about four hundred yards south of the Avon. Five miles downstream was the Keynsham villa in a similar situation, whilst only three quarters of a mile away from this, and within two hundred yards of the Avon, was the unusual "villa" at Somerdale. Brislington villa, two miles north-west of Keynsham, was a full three quarters of a mile from the Avon but stood close to a small tributary stream. The building at Bedminster appears to have stood in a similar situation, close to a tributary of the Avon but, in this case, separated from the main river by a distance of two miles. Brislington villa was three miles to the north-east. Between Bedminster and King's Weston, a distance

of six miles, no villa sites are known and none may be expected, at least on the south bank of the Avon where the village in Ashton Park appears to have continued in occupation. Beyond the Avon gorge and Sea Mills was situated the last of the villas, at King's Weston, a mile from the Avon, but at the time of its erection probably within a hundred yards or so of the edge of the inundation. As expected, all of the villas appear to stand within easy reach of running water, and either on the Avon or a tributary, perhaps so that boats could be used for taking produce to a market at Sea Mills. Apart from King's Weston no villas are known immediately north of the Avon but for a solitary example a little over two miles north of Bitton at Wick, close to the R. Boyd, a tributary of the Avon. (The several Romano-British buildings north of the Avon on Lansdown are disregarded since they fall within a different and distinct geographical region, the Cotswolds). The reason for the scarcity of villas on the north side of the Avon is perhaps to be explained by the generally steeper slope of the north bank and by the proximity of the road to Sea Mills. Whilst the later was useful for transporting produce to market in either Bath or Sea Mills, it is an observed fact that villas were normally situated a mile or so from a main road, perhaps for the sake of security in the event of barbarian raids. Nevertheless villas may yet be found to the north of the Avon, particularly alongside the Frome.

The disparate distances between the villas are suggestive of estates of widely differing acreage, and the differing quality of the accommodation offered at the villas is equally suggestive of marked differences in the wealth and status of the owners. The villas at King's Weston, Brislington, and Newton St. Loe, would appear to represent establishments of approximately equal size and status.

The details of the Bedminster building are unknown, but the excavated buildings at the other three sites are all between 100ft. and 120ft. in length and a little over half as wide. Brislington had eight living rooms, King's Weston *apparently* the same number (excavations were not completed), and the description of the villa at Newton St. Loe suggests a similar number of rooms here. In each case the rooms were connected by a corridor, and Brislington and King's Weston had slightly projecting wings at either end (fig. 3). Mosaic floors of average quality were found in all three villas. Whether or not Newton St. Loe possessed a suite of baths we do not know, but a second building mentioned but not described in the existing records might well have been one. The baths at

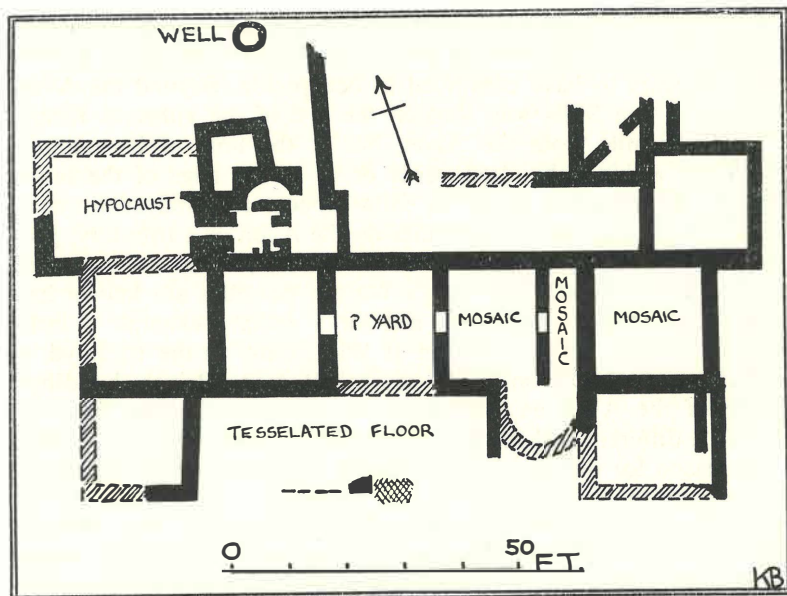


Fig. 3. Brislington Villa in the Fourth Century AD.

King's Weston were small but included a full range of facilities in the four rooms available, and this is true also of the baths at Brislington.

In spite of these similarities each of the villas displays the individual tastes and concepts of the "Roman way of living" of its owner, and each has a differing architectural history. Brislington seems to have begun as a suite of five rooms, possibly with no interconnecting corridor, and to have acquired, perhaps in the following sequence, its projecting wing rooms and a front corridor, a rear corridor and two rooms projecting rearwards, a small bath suite and finally an extended suite of baths. A very similar history has been demonstrated for the villa at Frocester Court (Gloucestershire), founded at about the same time as the Brislington villa. Three rooms and a corridor at the east end of the villa featured mosaic floors, one of which illustrated a large two-handed cup. This presumably indicates that the room in which it was found was the *triclinium*. In the greatest villas in Britain, it was not uncommon for the *triclinium* to have one apsidal end around which ran a bench. The owner of Brislington appears to have copied this, to the best of his financial ability and within the limitations of the

existing architecture, by erecting an apse between the *triclinium* and its antechamber (Fig. 3). Traces of what may have been a low bench were in position against the wall of the apse at one point. The owner of the King's Weston villa seems to have had different ideas as to the best way to introduce refinements into his home. A larger *triclinium* than that at Brislington was floored with a mosaic again depicting a two handled cup, and entered from a large antechamber with a second mosaic floor. The entrance to the villa was through an impressive portico (with six columns of Bath Stone and a columned porchway), an architectural element very rarely found in Romano-British villas and clearly reflecting the tastes of a Romanised Briton. At Newton St. Loe acquired tastes are represented not so much in the design of the building as in the choice of the motif for the mosaic in the *triclinium* — Orpheus, surrounded by animals. This motif is particularly common in late third and fourth century mosaics in the south-west, other examples occurring at Caerwent, Cirencester, Woodchester, Withington, Barton Farm and Whatley, and this concentration might well represent the work of a single school or workshop of mosaicists. Two local schools have recently been identified in this area, and it looks as if some of the mosaics at Keynsham may even have been laid by the same craftsman who laid the mosaic in the *triclinium* at Brislington. In each case not only is the two handled cup flanked by dolphins, but many details of the cup are represented in identical ways.

Nevertheless Keynsham must be recognised as a villa of quite different status to Brislington (fig. 4). Much of the villa was inaccessible to the excavators, but it is clear from the parts which were investigated that this was one of the largest villas in Britain. It comprised three, possibly four, long wings built around a courtyard 200ft. square. There must have been dozens of rooms though less than twenty were excavated, and most of them (to judge from excavated examples) were paved with mosaic floors. They were connected by a covered verandah supported by a colonnade which ran around three sides of the courtyard. No doubt the centre of the courtyard was given over to ornamental gardens and gravel pathways, somewhat resembling those of the first century palace at Fishbourne. At each end of the west wing stood an unusual suite of rooms. At the south end was a polygonal room with both rectangular and apsidal alcoves. A fine polychrome mosaic featuring birds and foliage and illustrating a number of figures, including Europa and the helmeted head of a Roman legionary, covered the floor. The rooms at the north end of the wing were grouped around

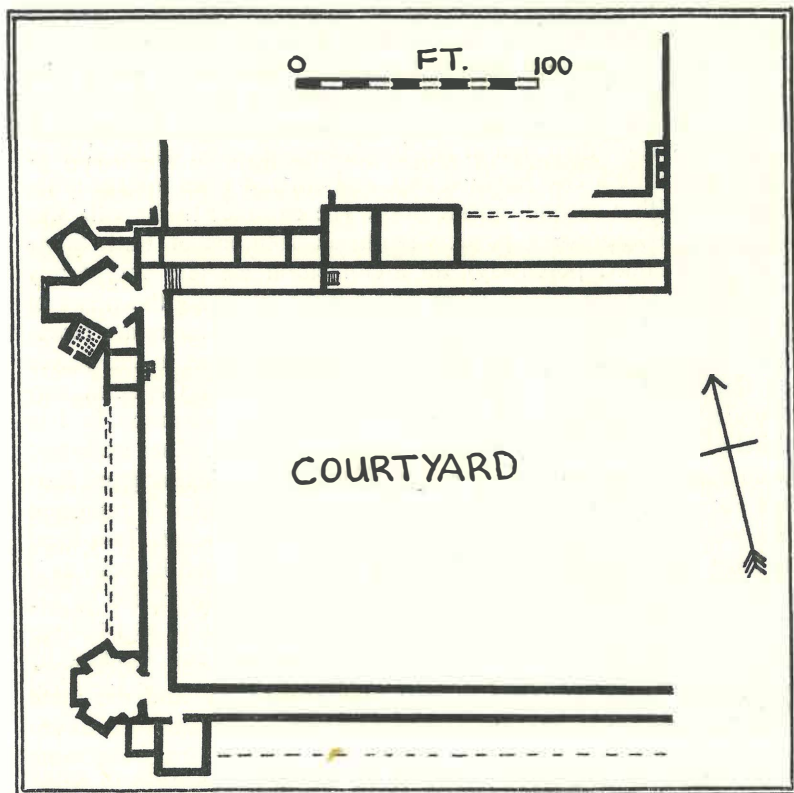


Fig. 4. Keynsham Villa in the Fourth Century AD.

a six sided room. This was flanked by four side chambers, one of which was heated, and a square recess on its west side. The polychrome mosaic on the floor was of geometric design, but no less fine than that previously described. We do not know who lived in the villa at Keynsham but the legionary's head on the mosaic is perhaps suggestive. Inscriptions from Bath show that veterans retired to this part of the country when their service was completed, but the man who built and maintained Keynsham can have been no mere legionary; he could have been an officer of high rank.

Unfortunately we have little information from which to deduce the economy operated at Keynsham and the other villas in the area. The evidence from Pitney and several other sites further south in Somerset suggests that cattle and pigs may have formed a major element of the farming economy in this period with grain

production a subsidiary activity. Cattle and pig bones were amongst the animal bones found at King's Weston but are not mentioned in a relatively lengthy list of bones found at Brislington. Sheep and goats are the only stock animals represented at Brislington. Horse bones from these two villas may represent animals kept to pull carts, and the presence of horses on the farm is confirmed at Brislington by the discovery of horseshoes and a bit. There is no direct evidence for grain growing, and the fragments of quernstones from King's Weston and Brislington need not imply that grain was grown on the farm, although it seems likely that some must have been if only to provide winter feed for stock. There was still some reliance on hunting and fishing to vary and supplement the usual supplies of food. Deer, wild boar, rabbit and fowl were all hunted for meat and fish, oysters and mussels caught or purchased at the coast.

All of the villas for which reasonably adequate reports are available have revealed traces of industrial activity, albeit on a small scale in most cases. Spindle whorls have been found at King's Weston, Brislington, Keynsham and Somerdale attesting to spinning at these villas, whilst a bobbin from King's Weston suggests that weaving may also have been undertaken. Iron and glass slag from Brislington may be indicative only of domestic workshops producing items required in and around the villa, and the same may be said of the crucible, and copper and lead slag from Keynsham, although a mould for casting a ? pendant from the same villa might suggest metalworking on a small commercial basis. Paradoxically, although the villas have produced little evidence of the economy on which their existence depended, they have yielded several clues as to those industries practised in the countryside which to a considerable extent depended upon the villas and their owners for their success.

Building stone for example was widely used in these late villas, which were probably built in stone to a considerable height, as well as in the towns during the fourth century. Much of the stone used in the Bristol area was Bath stone and this had been utilised from the first century onwards over a wide area in southern England. In the Bristol area however small quarries were opened, probably in the late third century, at Dundry. Stone from here was used not only in the immediate neighbourhood at Gatcombe and Brislington but also across the Bristol Channel at Caerwent and Cardiff. Similarly the distribution of Somerset coal in Romano-British settlements covers most of Somerset and Gloucester and

coal is mentioned by Solinus (3rd century) as being used in the Temple of Sulis Minerva at Bath. Much of this coal may well have come from outcrops at Keynsham and Bitton.

The seven pewter vessels found in the well at Brislington and the fragmentary pewter tray from King's Weston serve to remind us that the Mendip lead mines were again in operation. The lead they produced was alloyed with Cornish tin and the pewter thus produced made into a variety of jugs, bowls and dishes which found a market throughout the south of England. Known pewter working centres include Camerton, Nettleton and Lansdown — all just beyond the limits of our areas.

Much of the pottery used in the villas and towns was produced locally, and there may well have been extensive potteries on the Somerset Levels during the mid second century before the inundations drove the potters inland. From the late third century onwards kilns which have been traced to the area west of Glastonbury were producing vast quantities of black slipped and burnished cooking pots which were exported throughout the length and breadth of the province. Salt extraction may also have been undertaken on the Levels, but it must have formed a subsidiary activity to the flourishing pottery industry. Kilns producing different fabrics and finding a market in the villages on the Failand Ridge, at Gatcombe, Butcombe, and elsewhere in the area were situated at Congresbury.

It may be that the rapid expansion of the pottery industry on the levels in the late third century was largely responsible for the establishment of a large fortified settlement at Gatcombe at about the same time. Sea Mills or Bath would have been more easily accessible to the villas on the Avon, and the only villa situated close to Gatcombe is that at Wraxall. Little is known about Lye Hole villa but other farms to the south of Gatcombe (in the Chew Valley and at Wemberham near Yatton) appear to have been abandoned as such by the end of the third century. Thus it is difficult to explain the foundation of Gatcombe in terms of a market centre for surrounding farms. It may be that the occupants of the villages on the Failand Ridge were now moved into a fortified town and continued to farm the land from there, but much of the material which has been discovered on these sites belongs to the late third and fourth century (notably Congresbury ware) and suggests that the villages themselves continued to be occupied. It is difficult therefore to find the economic basis on which Gatcombe existed, unless one relates it to the contemporary

pottery industries to the south. It could have operated as a distributing or an administrative centre for the Levels potteries, which operated on such a scale that some such centre must have existed somewhere in the region.

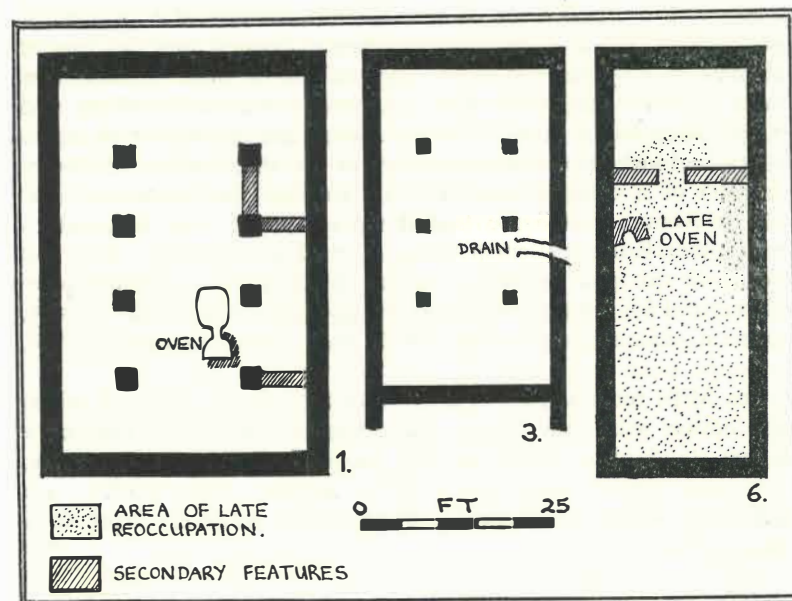


Fig. 5. The three buildings excavated at Gatcombe.

The nature of the town at Gatcombe confirms that it probably fulfilled a function of this sort. A massive wall encloses an area of between 15 and 20 acres, in which at present there is no trace of a grid system of streets though probable road surfaces have been found in at least two places. Remains of perhaps eight buildings have so far been examined, but only two of these are known in their entirety. Two of the buildings are of "basilican" plan (the interior divided into three parts by two rows of columns or posts, fig. 5, 1 and 3), an architectural form normally associated in Roman Britain with workshops or stores in the towns and with labourers quarters in the countryside. The larger of these two buildings, the excavator suggested, might be a bakery for in it were found quernstones and ovens. If this were the case then the size of the building and its storage space suggests that the building must have met a substantial part of the town's requirements. A third building began as a single large room, about 50ft x 18ft, although it was later subdivided, (fig 5, 6) whilst a fourth building only partially ex-

cavated appears to have had one room at least 40ft long. None of these buildings resemble normal town houses, nor do they assume the form of shops. Furthermore their simple floors (mortar, paving slabs, or in one case *opus signinum*—a pinkish mortar made with crushed brick or tile) and the almost total absence of wall plaster (found in only one building excavated, and this plaster painted in only two colours) suggests that if these houses were lived in, their occupants were not even moderately well-off and barely Romanised at all. The nineteenth century report of traces of a colonnade in the southern part of the site, and the discovery in 1965 of a column base, do little to alter the impression that life in Roman Gatcombe lacked the quality of that attained in most other Romano-British towns in the fourth century. That the town was occupied by those engaged in an industry operated elsewhere, and for which there is no direct evidence in the town itself, seems a reasonable conclusion with these considerations in mind.

Sea Mills remained a minor town of little merit, although shops and houses with *opus* floors suggest that its inhabitants enjoyed a higher standard of living than the people of Gatcombe. Crucibles, iron and copper slag, chisels, drills, knives and querns are indicative of the usual light industries and services offered in a small town.

The barbarian raids of AD.367 seem to have had no immediate effect on Gatcombe and Sea Mills, but King's Weston villa was partially destroyed by fire perhaps at this time, and the skeletons found in the well at Brislington together with a mass of building are almost certainly to be related to this raid. A deposit found covering the floor of the hexagonal room at Keynsham may have been burnt roofing, and human bones found in the overlying wall debris are also suggestive perhaps of a partial destruction at this time. What happened in the other villas we do not know, but if Keynsham was raided then Bedminster and Somerdale could scarcely have avoided a similar fate. The villages on the Failand Ridge would have been less attractive targets for the Irish but even if they were not raided they must have been abandoned for the safety of Gatcombe. When the raids had passed and Theodosius had restored the situation the villas were apparently re-occupied. At King's Weston the east wing, which had apparently been unaffected by the fire which consumed the west wing, was occupied into the late fourth century although the only new structural feature was a platform of Bath Stone laid at the east end of the portico. A tile platform, used as a hearth, was found standing

on destruction debris in the west corridor at Keynsham, and here too the coins point to occupation into the late fourth century. The latest coins from Brislington are of Constantius II (AD.337-61), yet even here the records suggest a re-occupation. The mass of building debris emptied with the skeletal remains into the well, is itself suggestive of re-occupation since there is no reason why the raiders, having looted the villa, should have demolished it and then hauled the debris to the well. It is more likely that a group of people re-occupying the villa several years later would have cleared out the debris from the rooms they intended to occupy and thrown it into the well. The sequence of deposits in the well suggests this, and the discovery of a human jaw bone on the ground near the well may indicate that the skeletal remains were just gathered up — as bones rather than corpses — and thrown down the well. This would suggest a considerable period of time went by before people came to live at Brislington villa again. The occupation of the villas was by this time of little more than squatter status, yet it persisted for a generation or more. The latest coins from Newton St. Loe suggest occupation into the early fifth century at least.

Coins found on the surface or in unstratified deposits at Sea Mills and Gatcombe have for many years indicated that here too people remained in occupation into the early fifth century. There is a little evidence, mentioned above, to suggest that Sea Mills may have had a small garrison of locally recruited troops to assist in its defence. Recent excavations have suggested that some buildings in the town may have been occupied when they were in a partly ruinous state, and at Sea Mills too we might therefore postulate that the last phases of occupation were of a squatter nature. The latest excavations at Gatcombe have more clearly revealed a similar situation. Here one of the long buildings was occupied after its floor had been broken up—presumably by exposure to the weather — and the longer of its two rooms was cleared of debris and re-occupied (fig 5, 6). A clay oven on a stone base was built by the new occupiers. Half a dozen badly worn coins of the period c. 350-400 were recovered from the occupation debris of these people and clearly point to occupation into the fifth century. Growing insecurity at this time is probably represented by the skeleton of a man found in the east wing at King's Weston, his skull exhibiting the marks of two sword strokes, and perhaps by three late burials at Sea Mills. The scanty evidence for the history of the Bristol area in the succeeding fifty years has already been discussed above and needs no repetition; suffice it

to say that for the people of the Bristol area, events had turned almost full circle, and they may once again have turned to the hill-forts to provide them with protection.

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