

VESTIGES OF ROMAN COLONIZATION  
DISCOVERED IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF  
SOUTHWOLD.

BY J. EUSTACE GRUBBE.

Some fifteen or twenty years ago, after a continuance of stormy weather which had brought down large masses of cliff between Southwold and Covehithe, the author was strolling along the beach under the Covehithe Cliff, and about midway between its commencement near the Benacre Road and the road which then led down to the beach at Covehithe, a strange object presented itself in the cliff, which, upon examination, appeared to be the half of a well split down vertically, one half remaining in the cliff, and the other having fallen and been washed away by the sea.

There was no brickwork visible in any part of the structure which remained, nor were there any loose bricks or fragments lying about the beach, showing that any had been used in its formation.

The upper part appeared to have been filled up with earth for several feet below the surface of the ground, and what remained at the lower part was lined with rough planks or slabs of wood, with cross pieces or ties at irregular intervals, to keep the planks in their place and prevent them from falling inwards. These cross pieces were not placed one directly over the other, but each crossed the one immediately above it at an angle, and the general appearance was very much that of a winding staircase.

The well appeared to be circular and sufficiently large to admit of a man's descending by the cross pieces, using them as steps, but not to carry a burden down with him, or continue the work of excavation at the bottom.

The use of such a singular contrivance appeared inexplicable. It could not be a draw well, for a bucket could not be let down lower than the topmost cross piece, which would have been above the top water level, and if intended as a dumb well or cesspool the cross pieces would have been in the way of cleaning it out.

About the autumn of 1888 several fragments of old pottery were found, which, at first sight, appeared to be portions of a single vessel. From the description given of the place where they were found, it was evidently a well or pit of the same description as that at Covehithe; but it was situated in the cliff at Easton Bavent, about ten yards northward of the spot where the old farmhouse formerly stood. These fragments were carefully washed, with the intention of putting them together, but it was found there were at least three different patterns, indicating three separate vessels, and that very few of the fragments would fit one another. It was obvious that they were the *débris* of many vessels.

In the Museum, at Ipswich, pottery very similar in appearance, is described as "Romano British."

Other similar pits have at different times been seen in the cliff at Covehithe, in some of which the wooden framing was in very good condition.

In April, 1890, another of these pits was discovered and another supply of broken pottery procured. This pit was situated at Covehithe, under, or very nearly under, the extremity of the road which ends there abruptly at the edge of the cliff. Very little of the woodwork of this pit was visible when seen by the author about a week after its discovery; but the quantity of pottery in it must have been very great, as the beach is said to have been strewed with it.

Now, it appears from a perusal of "The Romans of

Britain," by Henry Charles Coote, F.S.A., that these pits or wells are vestiges of Roman colonization, being, as Coote terms them, "arcæ finales" (more properly boundary shafts), or underground vaults, containing indestructible materials of some kind or other to mark the boundaries between contiguous estates as they were set out when the territory of the colony was divided and allotted amongst the colonists.

The origin and use of these arcæ, or boundary shafts, is curious; but to understand their history properly it is necessary to know something of the Roman system of colonization, which Coote describes with fulness and perspicuity.

From his description (p. 46) it appears that whenever a colony was to be established, a law ("Lex Colonica") was passed, which appears to have been very similar to a modern Railway Act. Under this Lex Colonica, Agrimensores, or Surveyors, were appointed, who were to lay out the land to be colonized according to certain fixed principles. In accordance with these the Agrimensor, on arriving at the ground, commenced proceedings by laying out a road from East to West (p. 58), generally about 40 feet wide, through the centre of the territory, and another crossing it midway at right angles from north to south, about 30 feet wide. These may be termed respectively—the East and West main road, and North and South main road. From these main roads plots of land (centuriæ) were measured in square or oblong blocks, each block so far as not bounded by the main roads, or one of them, being separated from its neighbours by what may be called occupation roads (p. 58). These were about 12 feet wide, and simply served the purpose of giving access to the centuriæ, or properties, which they bounded (p. 56.)

The Agrimensor also, in accordance with the Lex Colonica, subdivided the territory into Pagi, or Villages, and established or set up terminal signs upon the confines of the territory and its Pagi, and also upon the lines

of the various occupation roads, as definitions of the private estates of the colonists—in other words, boundary marks, or signs of the whole territory, of the different villages, and of the *centuriæ* (p. 50).

These terminal signs were of different kinds, sometimes they were natural objects, such as the sea or river, or watercourse, or a tree, but more commonly, especially in the case of the *centuriæ*, they were artificial, such as an existing road or altar, or mound of earth, or a stone, with or without an inscription. Probably natural objects were more commonly used as boundary signs of territories and villages than artificial; but when the latter were adopted, such as a mound or stone, its greater importance, as compared with an estate boundary mark, was shown by its superior size or shape. In the case of estate boundaries, the boundary marks must have been almost exclusively artificial, and generally an altar, a mound, or a stone, with or without some other object, used in connection with it.

The following extract from Camden's "Britannia" (Vol. I., p. 148, revised by Dr. Gibson), shows the importance with which the Romans regarded these boundary marks:—

"The fields that lay near the Colonies were determined by several sorts of bounds; in the limits there were placed for marks sometimes one thing, sometimes another. In some a little statue of Mercury, in others a wine vessel, in others a spatula, in others a rhombus, or figure in shape like a lozenge, and in some a flagon or jar. . . . In ordering or disposing these bounds, first they brought the stones, and set them on the firm ground, nigh the place where they designed to dig the holes to fix them in. Then they adorned them with ointments, coverings, and garlands. Having killed and sacrificed a spotless victim on the hole where they were to set them, they dropped down the blood on burning torches that were placed in the earth, and scattered incense and fruit upon them. They added to these wine, honeycombs, and whatever else was customary in sacrifices of this kind, and when the fire had consumed all the provision they placed the stone that was for the boundary on the burning coals, and so fastened it with all imaginable care, treading in small fragments of stones round about it to make it the more firm."

The above extract deals only with the surface part of the work; but the following extracts from Coote (p. 69)

speak of underground appliances, and reveal to us, clearly enough the origin and purpose of the wells, or pits, at Easton Bavent and Covehithe.

After mentioning the altars, stones, etc., he proceeds: "These signs were above ground, but the Agrimensores were not content to leave all the evidences of their craft upon the surface merely. They established a system of underground signs also, to supply the place of those which should be removed from the surface, or which, from a scarcity of material, it would have been impracticable to place there. Some of these underground monuments were walled structures made to support mounds or hillocks of earth artificially heaped over them. The simple mound also answered a purpose in the Agrimensura, and under the name of *botontinus* was a true terminus (p. 70). It is obvious that these mounds would have failed to answer an agrimensorial purpose if there had not been something else to identify them for that purpose, in a manner which should be significant to an Agrimensor, if to no one else. Accordingly means were adopted to make them clearly significant. On the ground which should form the base upon which these mounds and hillocks would be subsequently heaped the Agrimensores deposited charcoal, broken pottery, gravel, pebbles (brought from a distance), lime ashes, pitched oaken stakes, all things which, upon a subsequent excavation of the mound, would demonstrate that the hand of man had placed them there to serve, with their surroundings, as a token of something more abstruse."

For this mound, covering objects which had agrimensorial significance, there was a substitute much in favour with the craft (p. 71). Instead of heaping up the mound over the selected objects, the Agrimensores dug a well, or pit, constructing its walls of stones, or tiles, when the nature of the soil required such support, and rendering it practicable for descent whenever that necessity should arise at a future epoch. Within its depths were deposited objects which thus preserved and protected should testify

their own abstruse meaning as significantly as the more easily disturbed contents of a mound. It marked a "trifinium," or "quadrifinium"—in other words, the spot where the confines of three estates, or four, as the case may be, met together.

The walls of the pit were not always framed of stones, or tiles. Timber seems to have been used not unfrequently. Coote describes (p. 106), a very elaborate one discovered at Bekesbourne Hill, near Canterbury, in the construction of which oak timber was largely used, and in which the timber was so arranged as to give "the entire structure the appearance of having a flight of steps within."

He also mentions three others found close together at Ashill, in Norfolk (p. 108). (Norf. Archæology, VIII., 226, where an illustration of the well is given.) One of these was lined with oak, and contained a great variety of objects, amongst which, at different depths, were found a small bronze fibula of the late Roman type, Samian ware, broken pottery, charcoal, the bones of oxen, deer, pigs, goats, and birds, oyster and mussel shells, drinking cups, part of the wall plaster of a Roman house, having a well-known pattern on it, a knife blade, with part of the wooden handle, parts of four well-worn sandals, a broken bottle, about 100 ollæ, many of them perfect, broken neck of an amphora, a bucket, pieces of leather, and all the bones of a haunch of venison. At the depth of 40 feet was a floor of flint, and underneath it the solid clay. The other pits were only partially investigated, but one of them was lined with oak planking, and contained two elegant vases.

As to the exact time when this part of the country was colonized we appear to have no certain data to guide us. The Iceni, who were its inhabitants, seem to have submitted to the Romans at a comparatively early period, about the year 50; but they continued, nevertheless, to be governed by their own Sovereigns till the time of the great rising under their Queen, Boadicea, in the

year 62. This rising was not confined to the Iceni, though it commenced with them, but spread quickly over the whole country; and though its immediate cause was the cruelty and indignities offered to Boadicea and her family personally, it acquired strength, and extended itself owing to the tyranny of the colonists generally.

It is not probable that the country of the Iceni was colonized at the time of this rising, as the Roman system of colonization appears incompatible with the government of the country by a native Prince, however subordinate to the power of Rome. We must, therefore, look to a later period, and this would be probably when the commotion occasioned by that great rising, and the wars which followed it, had subsided, and the country was reduced to more complete subjection. This would be some time after the year 62, probably about 64, or even as late as the time of Agricola—between 78 and 84. This, however, is entirely conjecture.

Another question arises. How far the particular colony extended which included Covehithe within its boundary?

No map is at hand giving any assistance upon that point. On those consulted the whole country between Yarmouth or Burgh Castle (Garianonum), and the Orwell is entirely devoid of Roman names, save, in the opinion of many, Sitomagus. Eastonness appears to be indicated by Exoche or Extensio, but that is evidently a description of the place as a promontory or ness, and not its name.

As regards the northern boundary, we can offer no conjecture; but it seems probable that southward it may have extended to the River Blythe, which is the nearest good natural boundary in that direction. The territory of another colony, of which Dunwich was the capital, may have commenced on the other side of that river.

If the exact position of the Easton and Covehithe boundary shafts had been taken and recorded, as each became exposed to view, enough might have been learned to settle this point, so far, at least, as regards the Covehithe

colony. It might, for instance, have been ascertained with tolerable certainty whether the shafts at Easton Bavent formed one of the same system as those at Covehithe. The Romans, according to Coote, were very exact in their measurements in laying out the territory of a colony, and if the boundary shaft at Easton Bavent was found to be at the exact spot where one would have occurred if the territory of the Covehithe colony had extended so far south, it would have afforded strong ground for supposing that the land about there was comprised within the territory.

Possibly, also, some experienced Archæologist might have gathered further proofs from the contents of the pits if they had been thoroughly examined. Nothing came to hand which certainly came out of them except the broken pottery, a few spikes, or nails, which may have been used in the framework, and some bones of a small animal: but judging from the great depth to which these shafts generally appear to have been sunk, it is doubtful whether any but the upper parts of those at Covehithe and Easton have ever been uncovered.

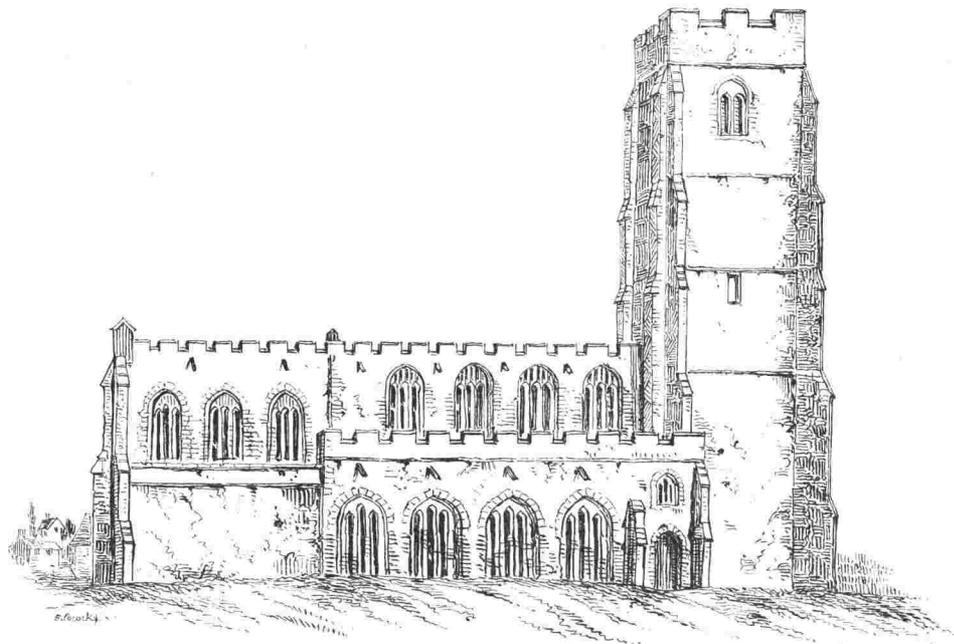
A similar discovery was made some years ago on the cliff at Felixstowe, in which a Roman drinking cup was found. Height,  $7\frac{5}{8}$  in.

[That the term "arca finalis" is not rightly applied by Mr. Coote to these shafts may be seen by a reference to Goesius, *Rei agrariae auctores legesque variae*, Amsterdam, 1674. This work, of which there is a copy in Gray's Inn Library, contains the agrimensorial notes of Simlus Flaccus, Julius Frontinus, Aggenus Urbicus, Hyginus, &c. From extracts, kindly made for me by G. O. Edwards, Esq., it is clear that the "arca finalis" was a box of some shape, hollowed from a stone, or made of marble, or earthenware, buried in the earth to mark a boundary. This recondite work of Goesius deserves to be re-edited.

J. J. R.]



GRAMMAR SCHOOL, SUDBURY, 1700.



S. GREGORY'S CHURCH, SUDBURY.

NORTH VIEW FROM THE STOUR, 1840.