



<http://kentarchaeology.org.uk/research/archaeologia-cantiana/>

Kent Archaeological Society is a registered charity number 223382

© 2017 Kent Archaeological Society

ROMAN VILLA, FOLKESTONE.

BY S. E. WINBOLT, M.A.

IN response to an invitation from the Editor, I am making a short interim statement about the excavation of a Roman villa at East Wear Bay, Folkestone, hoping that the next volume of *Arch. Cant.* will contain a considered and comprehensive report, fully illustrated.

In August 1923, acting on a hint given me in Folkestone Museum about the mouth of a drain on the cliff edge in which Roman tile had been found, I explored the site of the allotment ground behind, and soon satisfied myself that Roman buildings of considerable size lay beneath. On being informed, the Corporation of Folkestone, with rare public spirit, shouldered the responsibility of excavation, and invited me to superintend the work. This was begun in April and continued in August 1924, and completed in eight weeks of digging with an average of about twenty-four men. What was exposed was a big Roman villa and an annexe. The main villa has a continuous run of wall north to south, of 207 feet, while the annexe extends, at a distance of about 20 feet south, at right angles for 180 feet west to east down to the edge of the cliff. Though much of the cliff front has crumbled away in the last forty years, it seems probable that not much of the annexe has fallen.

In brief, the history of the site as revealed comprises three periods: a British inhabitation, which may be inferred from British coins (some early) and British burials; the building of the main villa, with two parallel long corridors and rooms between, and two wings enclosing a courtyard, the construction being of calcareous (Kentish) tufa blocks on foundations of flint and ironstone; the enlargement (perhaps at the end of the third century) of the earlier buildings

on very similar lines, and the addition of an annexe, the material this time being a local greenish sandstone, quarried and faced, on foundations of large rounded stones from the beach.

The two blocks of building together make a palatial establishment, and the ground plan of some fifty rooms was revealed; moreover, two staircase rooms indicate several rooms in a storey, over the wings at any rate, if not over the central part. Both blocks have ample arrangements of baths and hypocausts, the main building at the back of the western corridor, the annexe at the east end where now is the cliff edge. The kitchen department in each is perfectly clear.

Almost all the "finds" usual in Roman villas were to hand: "Samian" and coarse pottery of various dates, articles of silver, bronze, bone and iron, glass, and coins ranging from early British, through the first, second, and third centuries to the fourth century. On the whole, the Roman occupation seems to have begun about the time of Domitian, and to have ended about 360—370. The finding of tiles stamped by the British fleet perhaps warrants the idea that the villas were occupied by a high official of the British fleet, and that, after its suppression in 298, officials of the "Saxon Shore" defence lived here.

The Corporation of Folkestone will probably preserve the most significant remains under sheds, and the site will continue to be open to the public. An illustrated guide will be on sale at the gates. Before I begin to write my report two or three months hence, I should welcome suggestions in writing from members of the Kent Archæological Society, to be sent to me at Christ's Hospital, Horsham, Sussex.