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## THE ROMANO-BRITISH SETTLEMENT AT SPRINGHEAD

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THE existence of a Romano-British settlement at Springhead, Southfleet, near Gravesend, has been known for many years, and One Tree Field at Springhead is marked on the Ordnance Survey Map as the site of Vagniacæ,<sup>1</sup> mentioned in the *Itinerary of Antonine, Iter II*. In spite of this, no systematic investigation of the site seems to have been conducted, although there must have been sporadic excavations (mainly unrecorded) at intervals over the past fifty years.<sup>2</sup> A full discussion of the contention that the site is Vagniacæ (and the evidence is not conclusive<sup>3</sup>) and of other finds in the district does not belong to this summarizing report, but will be considered in the detailed report of the recent excavations to be published later.

The Excavations Committee of the Gravesend Historical Society decided to conduct a series of investigations on the site and several trial pits were dug in One Tree Field during the autumn of 1950. Coins, pottery and other finds, including flint footings, indicated a fairly intensive fourth-century occupation so that it was decided to carry out as systematic an investigation as possible, considering the limited time available on agricultural land. After much work of this nature it became possible to excavate fully during the 1952 season, through the courtesy of the Tenant, Mr. Bartholomew.

The relatively limited amount of work so far completed has indicated several well-defined features of the occupation, but it should be stressed that any conclusions are only tentative since a vast area requires to be excavated. Briefly, the site was first occupied during the first century (coarse ware and Samian ware) an extensive flood occurring soon afterwards (c. A.D. 100) this probably having been caused by the creek near which the settlement is reputed to have been situated. The second century site was built over the first-century site from about A.D. 110-200 and was intensively occupied during this period (pottery and coins, etc.). There was an apparent period of inactivity during the third century, but during the fourth century there is evidence of extensive occupation. The settlement was occupied until the end of the fourth century and perhaps for a little time afterwards, but there is no evidence of a violent destruction of the site at the end of this time.

<sup>1</sup> Nat. Grid. Ref. 617725. The site stands about 40 feet above N.O.D.

<sup>2</sup> A. J. Philip, *History of Gravesend*, Vol. I, Stanley Paul, 1914.

<sup>3</sup> G. M. Hughes, *Roman Roads in South East Britain*, George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1936.

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The structural remains, although not yet extensive, show considerable promise for the future. At the first-century level a large rectangular building has been found (although its exact purpose has not yet been ascertained) with an estimated size of 74 ft. by 22 ft., the walls being 22 in. thick and 40 in. thick at the buttresses, of which two have so far been found 22 ft. apart and each one 40 in. long. The walls are built in trenches on concrete foundations, being 2-3 ft. high above the foundations (on average) with a 3 in. offset about 12 in. above the foundations. The building is apparently divided into two rooms by a similar wall, the one room being about 35 ft. by 22 ft. The remains of a small chalk apse were found near one wall in the first century level, associated with three large tiles set in mortar at the end of a baked clay floor. This seems to have been a hearth of some type. All the walls are flint, set in mortar and well faced, the long axis of the building being orientated almost east-west.

The structural remains belonging to the second-century level are very few. Traces of a poor chalk wall were found and one of the walls of the first-century building was over built with heavy chalk and flint blocks, covered with a floor of gravel set in mortar. These heavy blocks may have been to support the floor over the clay layer (this was deposited over the first-century building by the flood) but at the moment this is only conjecture. A fine second-century road or trackway was also found in the area (orientated north-south), 12 ft. wide, 9 in. thick, with a pronounced camber and composed of a gravel surface cemented with clay and laid on chalk blocks. This may be a branch of the Watling Street or simply a track in the settlement, and crop marks have indicated the position of other roads in the vicinity. Floors of concrete, rammed chalk and flint, the first with a few tesserae have also been found.

A few trial pits established the existence of a larger number of flint footings in the fourth-century area. The evidence at the moment indicates that this is by the side of the earlier sites and that the latter were robbed to provide building materials for the fourth-century buildings. The fact that the fields have been under cultivation has so far prevented closer study of these footings.

As far as smaller finds are concerned, these have been numerous. First-century finds included much coarse ware, a little Samian ware (Drag. 18, 27, 29 and 42) and a Dupondius of Antonia. Second-century finds included large amounts of coarse ware and Samian ware (Drag. 18, 18/31, 24/25, 30, 31, 33, 35 or 36, 37 and 38, Walters Form 79 and Ludowici Type T<sub>n</sub>1), although no complete pots have been found, levels also being considerably mixed, probably through ploughing. There have been many bone pins and needles, several bronze pins, four fibulae, two keys (one a padlock type) an iron spoon and several coins (Trajan,

Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius and Septimius Severus) and a few fragments of glass, including part of a burial urn with a leaf design. Large numbers of oyster shells and bones have also been found, illustrating the intensive occupation of the site.

Very little was found to represent a third-century occupation, but during the fourth century the finds included coins (Constantine the Great, Valens, Valentinian I and II and Arcadius) a bronze spoon, a double toothed comb, many nails, fragments of roofing tiles and many sherds of coarse ware.

It is not possible in this summarizing report to comment on the finds or to list them all in detail, but a few of the more interesting ones may be mentioned. The initials of four individuals were scratched on sherds of pottery (three Samian and one coarse) these being NVA, PA, VA and DMR, and several potters' marks have been found namely Atiliani. M, Elvillus, Pavli. M., O Frontinus, Cracuna. F., Micciomi. M. and Masculus. In one section of the room of the building, painted wall plaster was found, the main body of the plaster being buff-coloured or cream, with simple line designs in signal red, Vandyke brown and orange. A large cluster of carbonized seeds was also found at the second-century level, these having been identified as *Atriplex patula*, or the common orache. This is a member of the spinach family and may have been grown for fodder or even human consumption. It may also be noted that it normally grows on sea shores or salty marshes which is interesting in view of the theory that the settlement was situated by the side of a creek. Evidence of smelting on the site has also been found in fragments of furnace wall with flux still adhering to it, parts of the brick furnace base with slag adhering to it and the presence of considerable amounts of iron slag and ore.

There have been many other miscellaneous finds, all of which indicate an extensive occupation, particularly during the Antonine period and the fourth century. Much work remains to be done, however, to establish the extent of the site, to determine its history and whether or not it is Vagniacæ. It is hoped to make considerable progress during the course of the next few years.

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