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A ROMANO-BRITISH BUILDING AT CHARING

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INTRODUCTION

Excavations took place, by kind permission of the farmers, Messrs. S. and J. Homewood, and at the invitation of the Charing and District Local History Society, during the last two weekends in January 1975 at a site in Charing where the existence of a small Romano-British building was established.

The site was discovered in 1974 by Mrs. P. M. Winzar, following crop-marks noticed in 1967 by the previous landowner, Mr. J. Hosking, J.P. I am grateful to Mrs. P. M. Winzar, for the information on this site and her general assistance with the arrangements and work of this excavation. I am also indebted to Messrs. J. James and B. Mantell, for carrying out a general survey of the site; to several members of the Charing Society whose labour in adverse weather made this work possible; to Mr. and Mrs. P. Ryan, for their hospitality; to Messrs. A. J. Daniels and A. C. Harrison, B.A., F.S.A., who took part throughout this excavation; and to Miss S. J. Marsh, who assisted me with the site plan.

THE SITE

The site (N.G.R. TQ 961487) lies below the 350-ft. contour in a field of arable land, south-east of the village of Charing. The only other evidence of substantial Romano-British occupation previously recorded in this area is the Romano-British bath-house, excavated in 1947 at Little Chart,¹ approximately 2 miles south-west of the present site.

THE EXCAVATION

Following some initial trenching by members of the Charing Society, which exposed some of the area of Room 4 (Fig. 1) selective excavation was undertaken with the object of recording as much of the building as possible within the time available for the examination of the site. As a result, it is now known that a small building, with subsequent additions, had been constructed at this site, though little else survived than the lowest foundation courses of its walls.

The original building consisted of a single room (*Room 2*), measuring internally 33 ft. 3 in. by 19 ft. 3 in. (9.96 by 5.76 m.); its walls were

¹*Arch. Cant.*, lxxi (1957), 130-46. There is also an inconclusive reference to 'remains of a villa', reported by Payne, 'at the foot of Yew Tree Hill', Charing (*Coll. Cant.*, (1893), 144, note; V.C.H., iii, 149.)

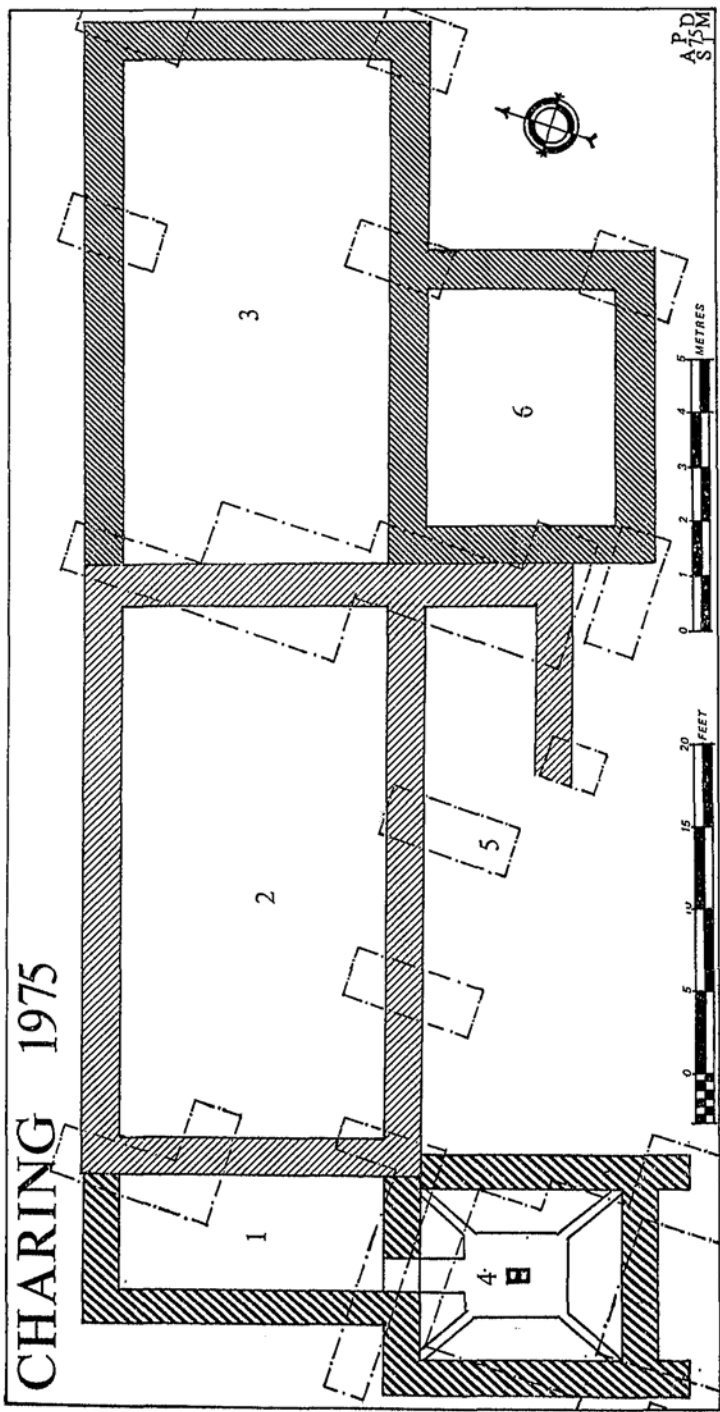


FIG. 1

built of ragstone set in yellow mortar to a general width of 2 ft. 6 in. (0.75 m.). A general spread of yellow mortar within the excavation trenches suggests that this room had been laid with a thin floor of mortar. The east wall of Room 2 projected beyond its south corner and continued to west to form what may have been either a small projecting room (*Room 5*) 6 ft. 9 in. (1.82 m.) wide or a fronting corridor to Room 2. Some loose masonry in the area north of this wall indicates a returning wall to north beyond the limits of the excavation, but this could not be established beyond doubt; on the other hand, it is quite possible that the south wall of Room 5 may have continued further to west—it is clear, however, that it cannot have continued for the full length of the south wall of Room 2 as, in that case, the east wall of Room 4 would not have been abutted on to the west corner of Room 2, which is beyond question.

At a later stage, two rooms were added to west of the original building. *Room 4* was built on an area spread with a deposit of soot, ash, burnt bones and much débris from bronze working, sealed beneath a thin layer of mortar forming the underfloor of this room; it measured 10 ft. 6 in. by 12 ft. 3 in. (3.15 by 3.66 m.) and its walls were built of ragstone and yellow mortar, though rather slighter than those of the original building at 1 ft. 6 in. (0.45 m.) A channelled hypocaust provided heating for this room, and it was of the usual St. Andrew's Cross shape, with four channels (7 in., 0.175 m. wide) reaching each corner of the room; the suspended floor, which did not survive, was supported by a central pillar composed of two box-tiles mortared to each other and inserted into the subsoil. This room was externally buttressed to south and serviced by a stokehole (*Room 1*), measuring 7 by 19 ft. 3 in. (2.10 by 5.76 m.); a flue, 2 ft. (0.60 m.) wide, was recorded at the west corner of this room, through the wall dividing it from Room 4; it is not impossible that Room 1 may have been partitioned into two smaller units, but this was not established. However, the southern area of this room, close to the entrance of the flue, had been laid with bonding-tiles, which were not present at its northern end, and this lends support to the suggestion of a partition wall. Both Rooms 1 and 4 were later than the original building as they were abutted against the west wall of Room 2.

A further suite of two rooms had been added on to the east wall of Room 2; this extension to the original building is clearly later than Rooms 1 and 4 as its walls had been built of flint and yellow mortar unlike any other walls. *Room 3* measured 30 ft. 6 in. by 19 ft. 3 in. (9.13 by 5.76 m.) and *Room 6* 14 ft. 3 in. by 11 ft. 6 in. (4.26 by 3.42 m.); no substantial remains survived to show how both these rooms were floored.

No other structures were located beyond Rooms 3 and 6, though

this does not preclude the possibility of another building unattached to the present structure. Likewise, trenching to south of Room 4 showed no evidence for any other building in that area.

THE FINDS

The finds consisted of relatively small amounts of coarse pottery, mostly unstratified, except for a few sherds in the débris of Room 4; apart from this pottery, there were also found a few food bones and several lumps of bronze below the underfloor of the channelled hypocaust, which suggests either bronze-working or a considerable conflagration in this area before the construction of Rooms 1 and 4.

Also found unstratified was a silver *denarius* of Elagabalus: Obv. Head laureate to right, IMP ANTONINVS PIVS AVG; rev. Elagabalus standing to left, sacrificing over an altar and holding a club, INVICTVS SACERDOS AVG, no mint mark. R.I.C. 88. A.D. 218-222.²

DATING AND CONCLUSIONS

With so little evidence secured in the time available for this excavation, only tentative conclusions can be reached. However, it seems clear that a small building, perhaps a workshop for the manufacture of bronze objects, was first located at the site and that this building was subsequently converted to agricultural use, perhaps as barns for corn storage, as the hypocaust Room 4 can only be interpreted as a corn-drier. All the evidence recovered points to occupation later than c. A.D. 225. As, clearly, this building was not a dwelling-house, a larger house is to be sought in its vicinity.

²I am indebted to Mr. A. C. Harrison, B.A., F.S.A., for his comments on this coin.