

## THE BEDALES EXCAVATION OF THE STROUD ROMAN VILLA

Some of us recently spent an enjoyable sunny Sunday afternoon in 2014 walking the site of the Roman villa at Stroud with the archaeologist Peter Price. The site is now a green field with one or two gentle undulations and slopes, which Peter pointed out as evidence of the outline of the villa. Later, I was prompted to look at accounts from 1906 – 8, when pupils from Bedales carried out excavations there, under their teacher Mr A. Moray Williams. During the previous year, Bedales pupils had been occupied at a Roman excavation at West Meon. It had taken precious time to cycle there and back. Now they were pleased to be engaged at Stroud:

“Mr Williams discovered the site at the end of summer 1906, when we were finishing up at West Meon. The site is near Stroud, and, being about ten minutes, ride from the School does not involve the unnecessary waste of time and energy....in a ten mile ride before or after work each day.”

The dig obviously required a lot of initial spade work to uncover the remains of the Roman Villa, but they were pleased to report:

“The work was carried out for the first half of term entirely by members of the School, but during the last five or six weeks two workmen have been employed, and the additional time given to it has made the progress much faster. The expense thus incurred, in addition to the rent of the land, has been met by charging sixpence admission to all visitors.”

After discovering the outline of a courtyard style villa with baths to the west, as well as finding numerous pieces of pottery and other fragments, it was reported:

“The whole villa will be covered over with straw for the winter ....and will afford employment for the whole of next summer, if not more.”

Of the 1907 – 8 excavations, it was recorded:

“Last year's work has suffered a good deal from frost, but the new excavations are so extensive, and in parts are in such excellent condition, that the damage done by frost is overshadowed.” Somewhat worryingly, the report goes on to state: “Franklin, Pease, Fothergill, Mackenzie, Devonshire and Lanyard, volunteered to excavate and ‘hack the walls about’ wherever they struck upon them.” Finds from the site were taken back to the School and displayed in a ‘museum’ there: “The museum is now well stocked with various iron things – nails, split pins, Dutch hoes etc – glass, pottery, bone pins, tiles, box tiles, shells and one or two pieces of mosaic.” The above reports are by H.M.G. and R.G.L and appear in the ‘Bedales Record’. Moray Williams later gave a lecture, reported in the Bedales Chronicle, in which he stated: “In what way shall the ‘villa’ be preserved? Are we to fill it in again and leave it to resume for perhaps another sixteen hundred years its broken sleep.”

Opinion in the neighbourhood had been expressed that the villa should not be hidden away again and it was hoped to find funding for the erection of buildings to cover it... Sufficient donations do not appear to have been forthcoming and later, the site was covered again.

With thanks to Jane Kirby, Bedales librarian and archivist, for sending articles from the Bedales archives. Readers are reminded that the Stroud Roman villa

is a protected site on private land and not open to the public. We are most grateful to the landowners for allowing us to view it recently.

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