

By W.A. Silvester, H.Sc., F.S.A.(Scot).

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Yarchester, in fact, more than some of the others, was a villa by surmise. Until 1955 there had been no surveying in detail of the site and no recorded excavation, but many visitors had found pieces of roofing tile and potsherds, and there is a literature, up to 1908 conveniently condensed in the Shropshire Victoria County History, with some later records in, e.g. the Transactions of the Caradoc and Severn Valley Field Club. One writer, impressed by the wide scatter of potsherds, etc. thought that the place might even have been a small town.

There has been some confusion as to whether the vestiges pointed to a site in Harley parish or in Much Wenlock parish, or in both. Two fields on the Wenlock side of the boundary were named by the Tithe Commissioners as "Hairchester" and "Upper Hairchester". The now accepted name is that picked up, doubtless verbally, by the Ordnance Surveyors in 1833, there being at that time a 'crofter' dwelling on what is clearly the true site. This dwelling is named, on the O.S. 1" map of 1833, "Tarchester Cot". The last pieces of timber from this cot were removed within the lifetime of the grandfather of a local resident.

Survey and exploration were, with the kindly permission of Mr. J. Griffiths, of Harley, begun in the summer of 1955. Fragments of tegulae, potsherds (no early Samian) and scraps of stone roof shingle, identical with that at Wroxeter, were found. The tooled stone in scattered lumps was found to be not the near-by limestone, but sandstone eventually identified as Kenley grit. Spring 1956 was good for moles; soon three oblong areas of closely clustered molehills, rich in fragments of roof tile or stone and even potsherds, all in a little plateau, became distinct and were mapped. At the NE corner of this plateau a walling stone was found to be part of a wall corner. The wall was at least four courses deep and 30" thick, with a typical Roman plaster floor inside.

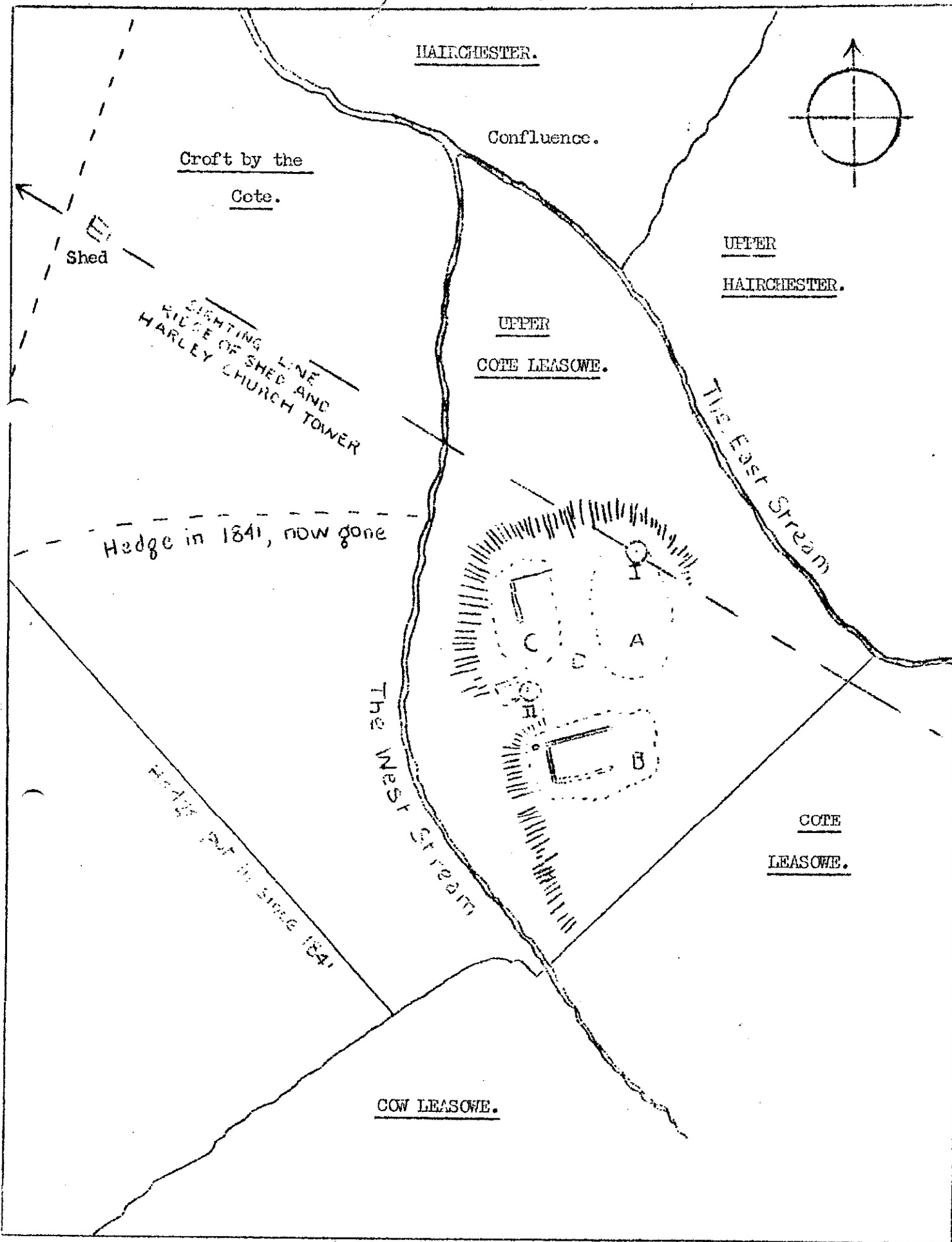
For 1957 a scheme for joint work was arranged with Mr. J.L. Edwards, of the Much Wenlock Secondary Modern school and his colleague, Mr. J. Corbett, on their initiative. Teams of staff and senior pupils have joined in two digging campaigns (Spring and Summer). The first, beginning with exploratory shallow trenching, led to the uncovering of, in all, about 150 feet of foundation or boundary walling. This was duly measured, mapped and covered up again. The site thus clearly outlined, about 60 x 30 yards, was evidently that of a medium-sized villa, with buildings round a yard, and the superior stonework of the southern block, as well as the indicated lay-out, suggested that the residential quarters were in this southern building.

In the Summer 'dig' an exploratory hole on a line of distinguishably scorched turf exposed not only the south wall of this building but a tessellated floor within, of a room eventually found to be about 19' square. The soil above this floor, about 2' deep, contained large clumps of stone roofing, some of the shingles having iron nails still in their holes. As the floor was cleared there was uncovered a guilloche-patterned mosaic within a wide border of large tesserae. Then, surprisingly, a 12' diameter semicircular alcove projecting from the south wall was opened up. A photograph of the almost undamaged mosaic in this alcove has appeared in the local press. This mosaic is of much beauty, the tesserae (cubes about $\frac{3}{8}$ " square) are of brick, marble and various kinds of limestone, giving patterns in white, red, brown, green and blue. The mosaic in the main room is much damaged by subsidence and falling roof.

Almost no charcoal has been found, nor is there other evidence of destruction of the house by accident or violence. Potsherds so far found, mostly at the NW corner of the site, in a rubbish tip (?), indicate occupation already about A.A. 200, and the one coin so far found is a small bronze of Constantius II (A.D. 353-360). Some of the pottery is also about this date.

Everything so far discovered fits into the general picture presented by Sir Mortimer Wheeler in his Norman Lockyer lecture of 1937. There is even, perhaps, a glimmer of evidence of hard times before the building was finally deserted: a human molar tooth, ground down almost to socket, was found in the out-throw above the mosaic. A "skeleton of aged female, teeth ground down to socket" was found, as a Christian (?) burial, in the villa at Ilantwit Major (Nash-Williams, Arch. Cambrensis, 1953, 102, page 105).

YARCHESTER. Plan No 1, revised June, 1957.



SCALE: 1" = 33 yards.

W.A. SILVESTER.

December 1957.

SHROPSHIRE NEWSLETTER.

Number 2.

3

Edited by J.L.Hobbs, Shrewsbury Museum, Castle Gatos, Shrewsbury. (Tel. 4554)

YARCHESTER ROMANO-BRITISH VILLA.

By W.A. Silvester, H.Sc., F.S.A.(Scot).

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July 1958.

SHROPSHIRE NEWSLETTER.

Number 4.

Edited by J.L.Hobbs, Shrewsbury Museum, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury (Tel. 4554)

YARCHESTER ROMANO-BRITISH VILLA.

A Second Report by W.A. Silvester, M.Sc., F.S.A. (Soot).,

Plan no.1, in Shropshire Newsletter no.2, showed the north and west walls of a building in an area marked 'B'. That building is now shown on a larger scale (1" = 20 ft) in the plan annexed to this Report. It will be seen that the building is almost certainly a residence of the category known as "corridor house" (cf. Haverfield, VCH Shrops., 1908, p.212, and Collingwood, ARB, 1930, Ch. VII)

As said earlier, the exploratory digging so far has mostly been a mere uncovering of foundation walling. There is evidence of deliberate removal of stone in past centuries, and not only has the site been tilled but, one is told, there has been digging for rabbits. Nevertheless, some foundations are only 8 inches from the surface. Taking the rooms as numbered on the plan, the following remarks are made:

Room I. The SW corner has 'concrete' floor with indications of hypocaust (?) duct - large square floor tiles. (Note: a few scattered fragments of box tiles have been found here and elsewhere) This room has still to be systematically explored.

Room No exploration as yet except of small area in SE corner - 'concrete' floor.

Room III. Floor completely uncovered in August 1957 and covered up again in October. Mosaic in apse almost undamaged. This, and undamaged parts of mosaic in main room systematically photographed (some colour transparencies) and measured. One trial hole in main room showed under tesserae about 4" of concrete resting on bed of cobbles. In due course to look for hypocaust in apse (cf. J. Ward, Roman Era in Britain, 2nd ed. 1920, p. 77).

Except for a few small potsherds, nails, animal bone fragments and, of course, masses of roof shingles (and the human tooth already mentioned) nothing was found in this room on its main floor, but in the alcove resting at random on the mosaic were found a red sandstone flagstone, a piece of red sandstone column (?) and the base of a grey ware pot apparently hand-chipped to make a disc 5" diameter and $\frac{1}{2}$ " thick. The residual walling round the apse is 15 inches high; at the north side of Room III it is irregularly about one course, i.e. a few inches, high, and the present soil surface slopes correspondingly to the north. The walls of the whole room were seemingly plastered, and coloured in a pattern of the usual tints, but all the coloured plaster found was in fragments; no large pieces were found in situ.

Room IV. In foundation walling on east side, as shown on plan, is a break which may represent site of a hearth. Some lumps of vesicular slaggy material were found, also nut-size lumps of charcoal.

Rooms V and VI. No exploration yet. The south wall of Room VI is slightly out of alignment with, and so far as visible, less well constructed than the rest of the south wall. Roots of nettles are very troublesome hereabouts.

There was a short school party digging campaign from 9th to 12th April last, and another similar 'dig' is planned for August. Meanwhile Mr. Corbett and the present writer continue with local surface observation filed work, and with literature hunting, etc. on constructional materials.

According to Dr. D. Smith (ANL, 1955, 6, 50) there have been about 360 villa mosaics recorded in Britain, and of the few so far dated on external evidence none is earlier than the fourth century. The present writer, seeing by accident an enlarged photograph of a mosaic in an advertising display in a London bank, has obtained a photograph of that mosaic. The roundel therein is a little larger than that in the Yarchester apse, but the eight 'petal' pattern is almost identical (the nearest to an equivalent so far found). Dr. Anthony, of the Verulamium Museum, through whose kindness the photograph has been obtained, says that beneath this pavement, found last year, was a coin of Constantine II. Hence the mosaic cannot be earlier than about A.D. 360. This fits the date so far surmised for the peak of prosperity at Yarchester. As Dr. Smith has said (loc. cit.) ultimately we may discern, from study of the mosaics, something of the size and organization of the firms which laid them. It may perhaps be added that the Yarchester mosaic is the largest so far found in Shropshire outside Viroconium; in general style, especially of guilloche patterning, the much smaller Lea Cross mosaic (VCH. Shrops. p.258) was similar and perhaps laid by the same hands, whereas the specimens on exhibition in Shrewsbury Museum of early finds at Viroconium are mostly more geometrical, with larger tesserae.

WYCHERLEY, HARLEY, SHROPSHIRE.

Romano-British Villa Site - Plan no. 2a.

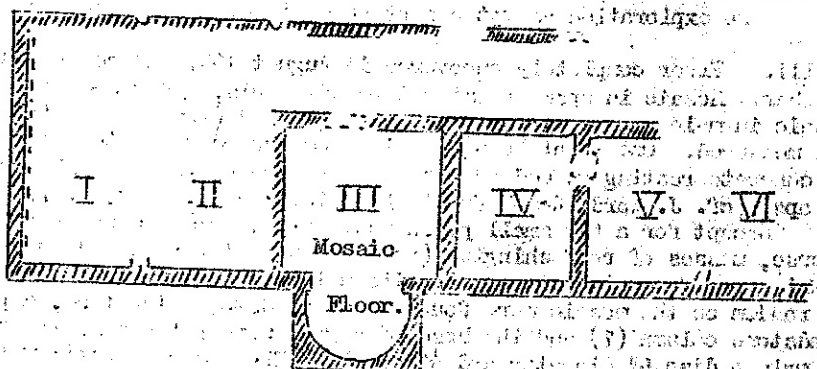
Residential Building as explored to May 1958.

Scale: 1 inch = 20 ft.



This point is shown as (II) on

Plan no.1 (Shropshire Newsletter, no.2. Dec 1957)



W.A. Silvester del.

16.5.58.

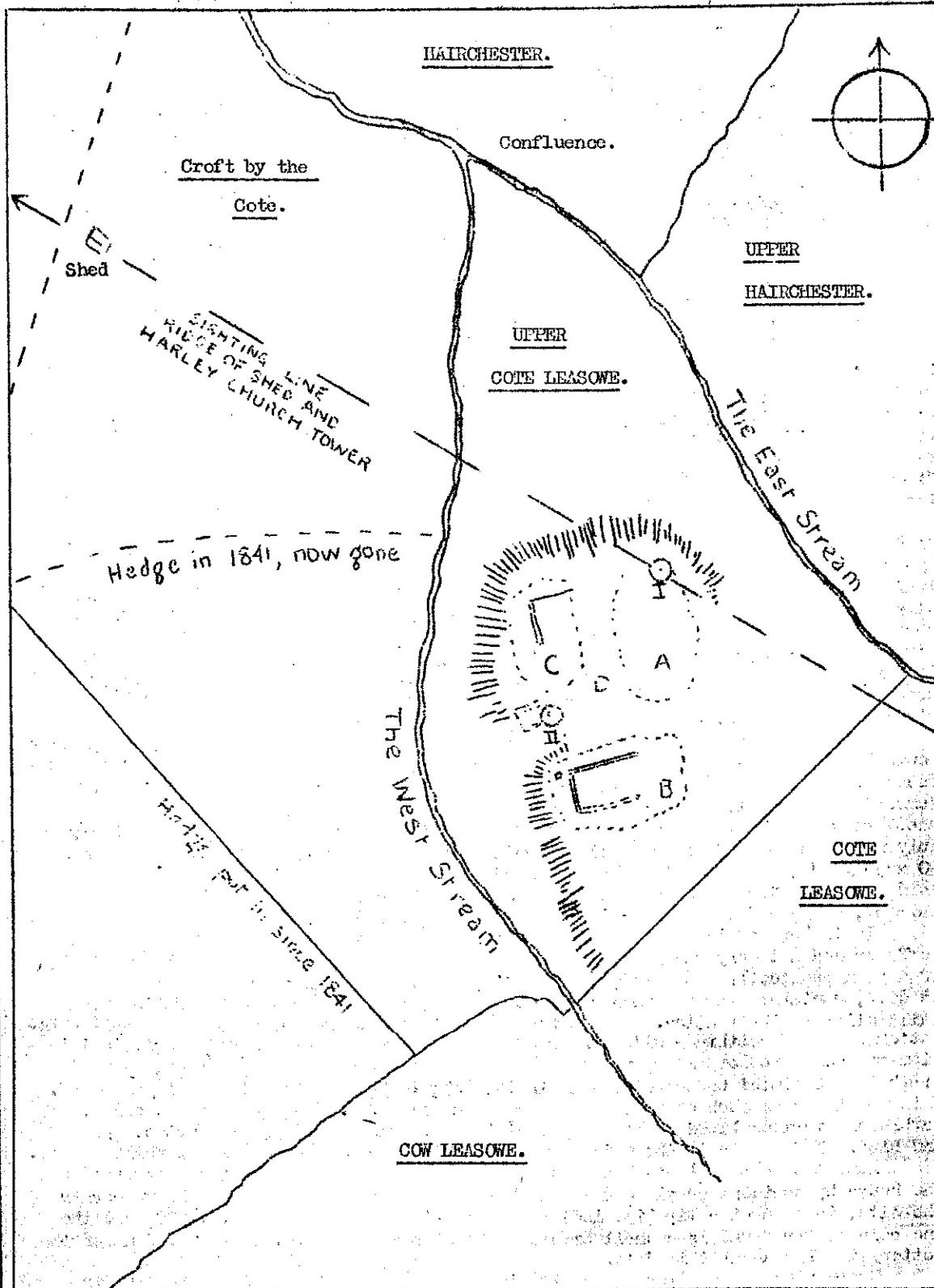
DESERTED MEDIAEVAL VILLAGES. Following the publication of the notes on possible Deserted Mediaeval Village sites in Shropshire in the second issue of this Newsletter, a visit was paid to the county on May 12th and 13th by Mr. J.G. Hurst, of the Ministry of Works, who is also Secretary of the Deserted Mediaeval Village Research Group, and Mr. Maurice Beresford, author of "The Lost Villages of England" and (in collaboration with Dr. J.K. St. Joseph) of "Medieval England". They were met by Mr. P.A. Barker, Mr. G.S. Gamble, Mr. Graham Webster and the Editor and several of the sites listed in the Newsletter were visited, commencing with the earthwork at Uppington (SJ 592086) which, it is suggested, may be the site of 'Siwardston' and also the possible site of the grange of Wycherley at SJ 591094, where the mill bank and pool site were observed and evidence of mediaeval cultivation was noticed between the Bell Brook and the old road to Uppington.

Uckington, a suspected shrunken mediaeval village, for which there 26 entries in the Lay Subsidy Roll of 1327, as compared with only 6 for Uppington, was next examined. The considerable ridge and furrow East of the site was noticed and the rather indeterminate earthworks S. of the present farm were also examined, without any positive conclusions being drawn. It is hoped that this promising site, and the others at Uppington will be given aerial cover in the near future.

Mr. Hurst and Mr. Beresford also visited Caus Castle and examined the site of the 'vill' of Caus in the outer Bailey where cultivation has obliterated the slight surface traces which wooden buildings might be expected to leave. On the following day, May 13th they intended to visit sites in the south of the county, especially the two sites of Tonnert and Goreham at Stow, on their way into Herefordshire.

(Continued at foot of page 4)

YARCHESTER Plan No 1, revised June, 195



SCALE: 1" = 33 yards.

W.A. SILVESTER

HARLEY is a parish and village, two miles north-west from Much Wenlock, and ten miles south-east from Shrewsbury, containing 1,955 acres of fertile land, the most considerable owner of which is the Duke of Cleveland, who is also lord of the manor. Sir W. W. Wynne, Bart., Samuel Moore, Esq., and Francis Oakes, Esq., are also proprietors. The soil is various, and wheat is grown here to a large extent. There are several plots of land of different dimensions in the vicinity of Harley that are in the parish of Wenlock, although surrounded by land in the parish of Harley. The parish in 1861 contained 221 inhabitants; 1831, 257; and in 1841, 210; at which time there were 47 houses. Rateable value, £1,838. 8s. 4d.; gross estimated rental, £2,070. 4s. Two churches, dedicated to St. Mary, has a handsome tower in the perpendicular style of architecture, the nave and chancel were rebuilt in 1846 by subscriptions, the greater part of which was contributed by the Duke of Cleveland, and the present incumbent. The interior has a neat and chaste appearance, and the east and west windows are beautified with stained glass, the gift of the late Rev. R. Scott, B.D. The living is a rectory in the patronage of the Duke of Cleveland, valued in the king's book at £5. 12s. 1d., now returned at £290; incumbent, Rev. John Gibbons, M.A. The pious and celebrated Benjamin Jenks held the rectory of Harley for 56 years; he was author of "Prayers and Devotions for Families," a work at one time very popular. A neat monument has been erected to his memory in the chancel, he died in 1784, aged seventy-eight years. There is a monumental stone slab with brass ornaments and an inscription in the old English character in the vestry, which was formerly placed over a vault in the church. The Rectory is a commodious residence pleasantly situated near the church, which from the east commands a picturesque view of Wenlock Edge, the beauty of which is much increased by an elegant pyramidal monument in the church yard. There are 46 acres of glebe land, 36 acres of which are situated contiguous to the rectory. Harley was the birth place of Silas Doxville, one of the parliamentary committee in the time of the great rebellion. He was a lover of antiquities, and had some curious manuscripts.

Richard Corfield, by will 1715, gave to the poor of the parish of Harley the sum of £20, the interest to be distributed on St. Andrew's day. This legacy when the charity commissioners published their report, was in the hands of Richard Woofe, who paid interest at the rate of four per cent.

Adney G., farmer & maltster
Bailey Adam, maltster
Bailey Thomas, farmer
Cartwright Mary, farmer
Cartwright Richard, farmer
Casewell William, shoemaker
Davies Richard, farmer and corn miller

Gibbons Rev. John, M.A.,
The Rectory
Gwinn William, wheelwright
Langford Richard, victualler,
Ulverton Inn
Macham William, corn miller
Maddox John, farmer

Meire Samuel, farmer, Castle hill
Partridge Mr. Thomas, Harley Tower
Roberts Robert, blacksmith
Runners Thomas, farmer, Blakeway
Worrall Wm., farmer, Cressage

HARLEY is a township, parish, and village, 2 miles north-west from Much Wenlock, 10 south-east from Shrewsbury, and 10 from Bridgnorth, in Conund division, Condover hundred and rural deanery, Atcham union, Shrewsbury county court district, South Salop, archdeaconry of Salop, and Lichfield bishopric, situated on the Much Wenlock and Shrewsbury turnpike road, and about 2 miles from the river Severn. The church of St. Mary is a new stone building; the nave and chancel were rebuilt in 1846 at an expense of nearly £1,000, which was raised by public subscriptions, the principal contributors being the Duke of Cleveland, Sir George Harnage, Bart., and the then rector; it has a handsome tower in the Perpendicular style, nave, aisle, porch, chancel, organ, 3 bells and a clock; there are also two handsome stained-glass windows of modern manufacture, presented by the late Rev. R. Scott. The register

Greenham Rev. William, B.A.
Meire Samuel, esq. Castle hill
COMMERCIAL.

Adney George, farmer, Harley tower
Bailey John, butcher

Burley John, farmer
Cartwright Edward, farmer, Rowley
Cartwright Richard, farmer
Corfield Edward, farmer, Blakeway
Gwynn Thomas, wheelwright

Horton George, farmer
Langford Richard, Unicorn, & boot & shoe maker
Maddox John, farmer & miller
Roberts Robert, blacksmith

Post Office.—Mrs. Mary Armstrong, sub-postmistress. Letters arrive from Much Wenlock at 7.30 a.m.; dispatched at 5.50 p.m. The nearest money order office is at Much Wenlock
National School, John Marshall, master

dates from about 1540. The living is a rectory, value £270 yearly, with residence and 48 acres of glebe land, in the gift of the Duke of Cleveland; the Rev. William Greenham, B.A., of Magdalen Hall, Oxford, is the rector. The Rectory is a commodious residence adjoining the church, commanding a picturesque view of Wenlock Edge. The population in 1861 was 220; the acreage is 1,955, the most considerable owner of which is the Duke of Cleveland, who is also lord of the manor. James Milnes Gaskell, Esq., M.P., and Francis Oakes, Esq., are also landowners. There are several plots of land in this vicinity belonging to the parish of Much Wenlock, although surrounded by land in this parish. The soil is light gravelly and cold clayey. There are charities of £20 yearly value. Here is a National school.
Parish Clerk, Robert Sandals.

HARLEY is a township, parish and village, 2 miles north-west from Much Wenlock, 10 south-east from Shrewsbury, and 10 from Bridgnorth, in the Southern division of the county, Conund division of Condover hundred, Atcham union, Shrewsbury county court district, rural deanery of Condover, archdeaconry of Salop, and diocese of Lichfield, situated on the Much Wenlock and Shrewsbury turnpike road, and about 2 miles from the river Severn. There are several plots of land in this vicinity belonging to the parish of Much Wenlock, although surrounded by land in this parish. The church of St. Mary is a stone building; the nave and chancel were rebuilt in 1846, at an expense of nearly £1,000, raised by public subscriptions, the principal contributors being the Duke of Cleveland, the late Sir George Harnage, Bart., and the then rector; it has a handsome tower in the Perpendicular style, nave, aisle, porch, organ, 3 bells and a clock; there are also two handsome stained-glass windows, presented by the late Rev. R. Scott, and an organ. The register dates from about

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Cartwright Edward, farmer, Rowley

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Corfield Edward, farmer, Blakeway
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Parish Clerk, Robert Sandals.

Post Office.—Mrs. Mary Armstrong, sub-postmistress. Letters arrive from Wellington through Much Wenlock at 7.30 a.m.; dispatched at 5.50 p.m. The nearest money order office is at Much Wenlock
National School, Miss Russell, mistress

Horton George, farmer
Maddox John, farmer & miller
Roberts Robert, blacksmith

Harley - Kellys Directory 1895

HARLEY is a township, parish and village on the Much Wenlock and Shrewsbury road, 2 miles north-west from Much Wenlock station and a mile from Cressage station on the Severn Valley branch of the Great Western railway, and 10 south-east from Shrewsbury, in the Western division of the county, Conund division of Condover hundred, Atcham union, petty sessional division of Condover, Shrewsbury county court district, rural deanery of Condover, archdeaconry of Salop and diocese of Lichfield. There are several plots of land in this vicinity belonging to the parish of Much Wenlock ecclesiastically, although surrounded by this parish, but under the Divided Parishes Act, were, in 1862, transferred to this parish for civil purposes. The church of St. Mary is a building of stone, consisting of chancel, nave, south porch and an embattled western tower in the Perpendicular style, containing a clock and 3 bells, re-cast in 1878; there are two stained windows presented in 1846 by the late Rev. Richard Scott, sometime vicar of Condover; the chancel and nave were rebuilt in 1846, at an expense of nearly £1,000. The register dates from 1745. The living is a rectory, gross yearly value £286, including 48 acres of glebe, with residence, in the gift

of Lord Barnard, and held since 1892 by the Rev. John Charles Storey M.A., T.C.D. The Rectory House adjoins the church and commands a picturesque view of Wenlock Edge. The charities are 11s. 6d. yearly value. Here is the supposed site of a Roman villa, and also the remains of iron forges of ancient date. Lord Barnard, who is lord of the manor, Charles George Milnes Gaskell esq. M.A. of Wenlock, Samuel Corfield Meire esq. and Mrs. Horton are the principal landowners. The soil is clayey loam; subsoil, a bastard limestone. The crops are the usual cereals. The population in 1891 was 209 in the civil, and 84 in the ecclesiastical parish; the area is 2,068 acres of land and 7 of water; rateable value, £2,042.

Parish Clerk, Thomas Bowen.

Post Office.—Mrs. Charlotte Bowen, sub-postmistress. Letters arrive from Much Wenlock (railway sub-office) at 7 a.m.; despatched at 5.50 p.m. Postal orders are issued here, but not paid. The nearest money order & telegraph office is at Cressage.

National School (mixed), built with residence for mistress in 1859, for 90 children; average attendance, 33; Charles Davenport, master.

Horton Mrs. Harley tower
Horton Thomas Richd. Harley tower
Meire Samuel Corfield, Castle hill
Storey Rev. John Chas. M.A. Rectory
Clay Jane (Mrs.), shopkeeper

Corfield Mary (Mrs.), farmer, Blake way
Davies Wm. Skett, frmr. & miller (water)
Patrick Zacharias, farmer, Rowley
Price John, wheelwright
Roberts Robert, blacksmith

Raywood Richard, farmer
Robinson Wm. farmer & haulier
Speed Thomas, Feathers inn
Tart Edmund, farmer
Woodcock Danl. Jn. farmer, New ho

YARCHESTER, HARLEY SHROPS

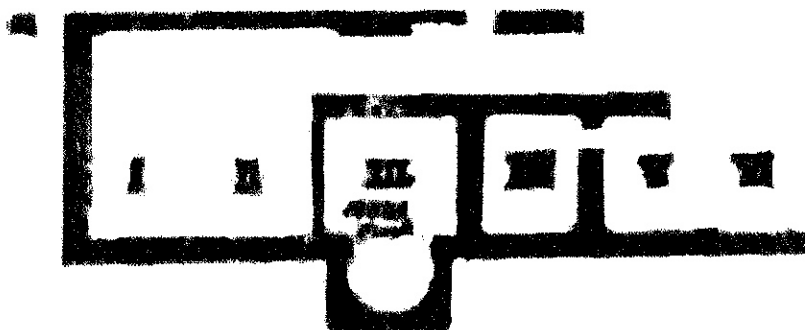
Romano-British Villa Site — Plan No 2a.

Residential bldg. as explored to May 1956

Scale 1 inch = 10 feet



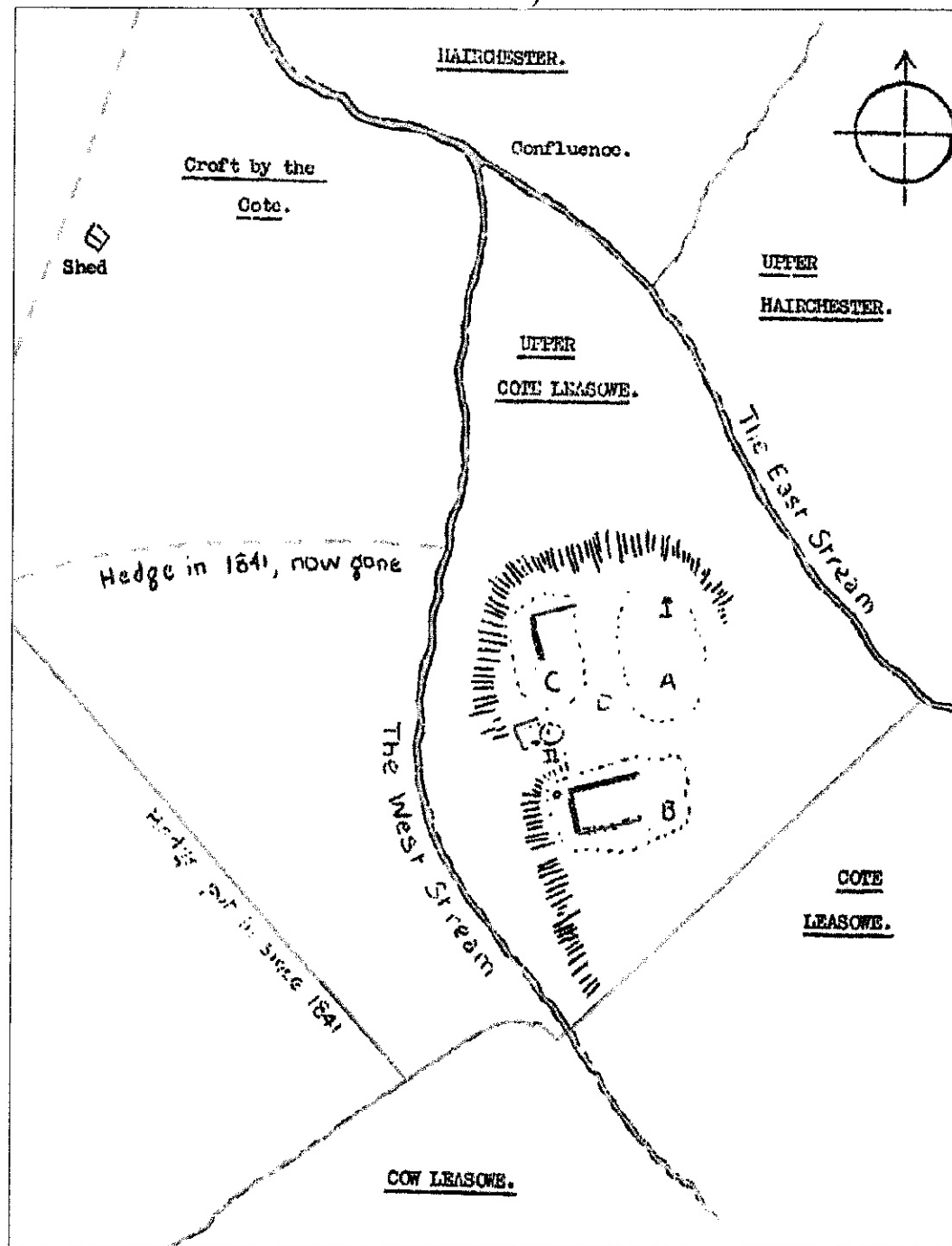
Place point as shown on
Plan No 1 (Shropshire Newsletter
No 1 Dec 1957)



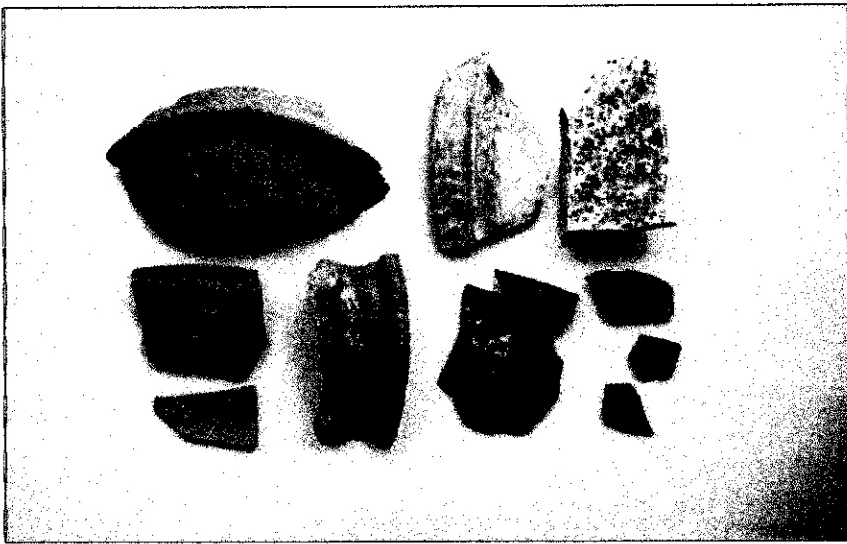
The plan of the Yarchester
excavation by W A Sylvester.

Arch Window S M Shropshire drawing portion

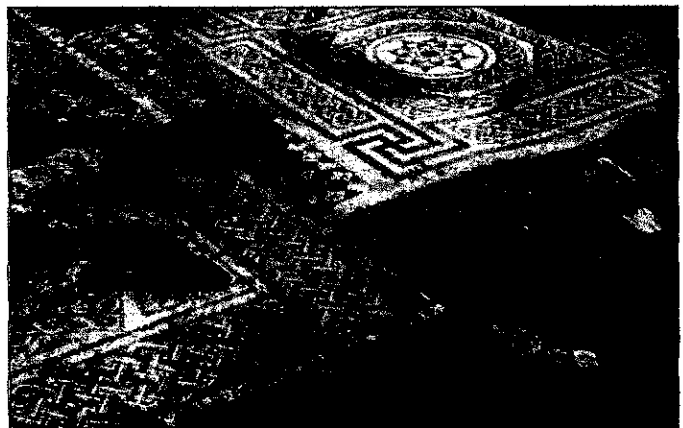
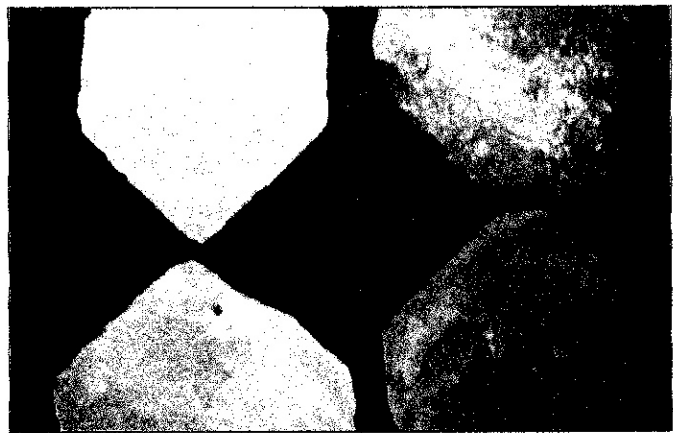
W A Sylvester
1956

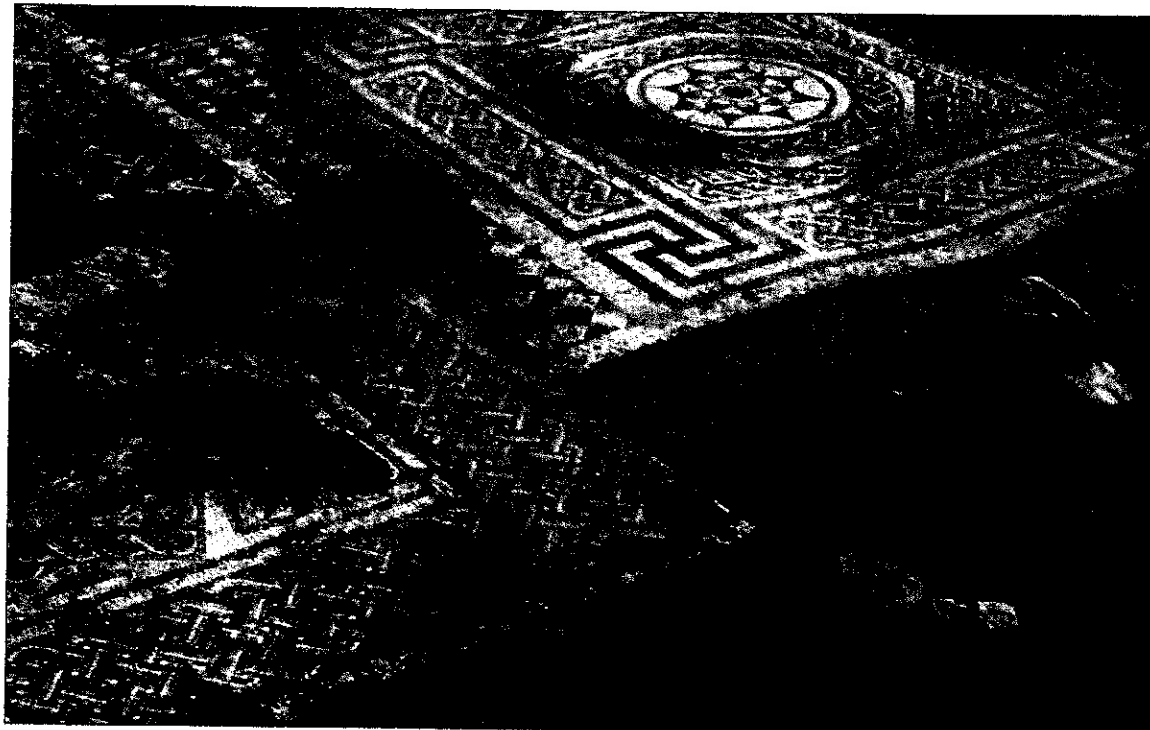


Sylvester's plan of the
Yarchester Site



**Yarchester Roman Villa
Excavations 1950's
Pottery finds,
Roof Tiles and the
Tesselated Pavement**





Yarchester Tessellated
pavement



Eerie legend guards relics

Report by
Toby Neal

tneal@shropshirestar.co.uk

ACCORDING to local folklore, Yarchester, in the shadow of the Wenlock Edge, is a "fritting" place. There is an ancient legend that a pot of gold is buried there, guarded by a black raven, and that anyone who approaches could expect to suffer misfortune. Locals gave the spot a wide berth.

And it was believed that there was an underground passage from the site to Buildwas Abbey.

But in the late 1950s youngsters at a Shropshire school, led by renowned local archaeologist Mr W. A. Silvester, overcame their "frit" and carried out an excavation which was to reveal one of the county's hidden treasures.

This was the site of a Roman villa, and they discovered spectacular mosaic flooring and a Roman central heating system called a hypocaust.

It was not of course on the scale of Uriconium up the road, but nevertheless the staff and pupils at Much Wenlock Secondary Modern School had taken part in one of Britain's exciting historic discoveries.

Roman

Then, when the digging work was over, the hidden treasure was hidden again, being covered over.

Yarchester had long been known as the site of a Roman villa, or possibly a Roman station.

Fields had appeared on old tithe maps as Hairchester and Upper Hairchester, themselves strong clues to Roman origins as "chester" or "caster" in a place name is suggestive of a Roman site — as in Colchester, Silchester, or Chesterton, near Bridgnorth.

When investigators started asking around in the Harley area in 1925, they had no joy at first. But then they came across somebody who recognised the name as a field near Wigwig called "Airchester".

Here, within the previous 50 years, there was said to have stood a farm building with Roman stones in it.

It had been pulled down and when the experts saw the site in 1925, Yarchester was a field lying fallow with a few sheep grazing.

A few Roman fragments had been worked to the surface by moles.

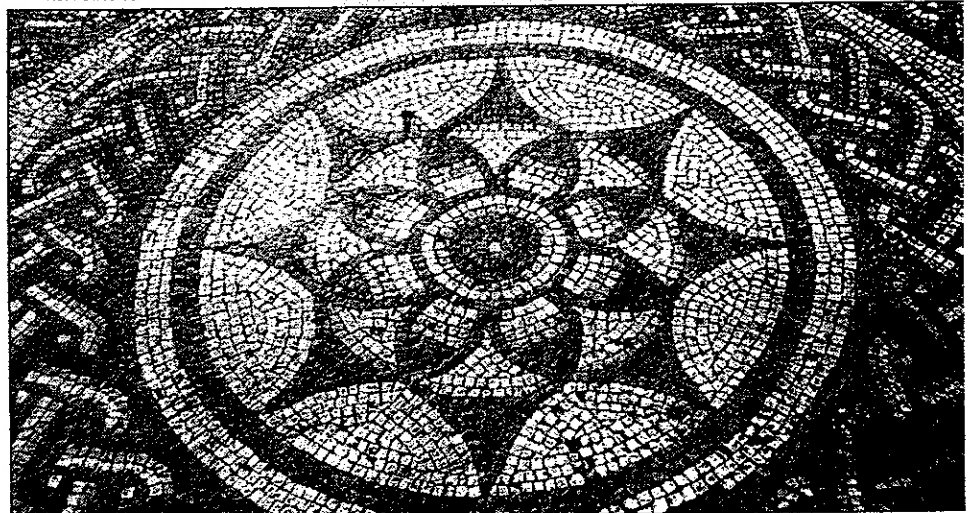
Miss H.M. Auden, a Shropshire archaeologist, had long taken an interest in Yarchester and was anxious for it to be excavated, but sadly was to die shortly before the work began in 1956 or 1957.

Mr Silvester gained permission from landowner Mr J. Griffiths of Harley Grange, and began surveying and spot digging on the site.

Mr J.L. Edwards, the head of Much Wenlock school, helped out by providing a team of boys who worked in their spare time during the Easter term under Mr J. Corbett, the history master.



Youngsters from Much Wenlock Secondary Modern School join in the excavations at the Yarchester Roman Villa in 1957. Picture: Shropshire Records and Research Centre.



Magnificent mosaic: This Roman gem was covered over again after the excavations

They were able to plot the shape and size of the villa, and found a coin of the Emperor Constantine, dating from the third or fourth century A.D. which, with other relics from Yarchester, went to the school museum.

Underfloor

In 1960 the hypocaust was found by the schoolboy team, providing underfloor ducting through which hot air from a furnace circulated.

By a quirk, the pattern of the channels was in the shape of a Union Jack.

The youngsters found a complete floor slab, seventeen-and-a-half inches square, and the

inside of the room was seventeen-and-a-half square, so a dozen slabs would lay one complete side.

They puzzled over the sizes, but when it did a bit of homework on Roman measurement all became clear.

Seventeen-and-a-half inches is one-and-half Roman feet — a cubit.

So the room was 12 cubits along each side: it needed 144 slabs, each a cubit square, to cover it.

Our picture of the mosaic floor comes from Stan Turner of Shrewsbury.

"It was taken in 1958 before the mosaic: other excavated remains were covered over again, for their protection," he says.