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ROMAN REMAINS DISCOVERED IN MAKING THE PUBLIC PARK AT COLCHESTER CASTLE.

BY HENRY LAVER, F.S.A.

It may be advantageous, even after a lapse of ten years, to publish in full the paper read before the Society at a meeting held in Colchester on March 9th 1893, of which only a short summary was printed in Vol. iv., N.S., p. 298, of the Society's *Transactions*. The subject is an important one, and can now be illustrated by a contemporary plan, drawn by Major Bale, and exhibited at the meeting, but which would then have occupied space that could not very conveniently have been spared.

The subject of the paper was the find of Roman remains, discovered in making the public park for Colchester in the grounds of the castle, and the lands near by. These discoveries were of considerable importance, as probably the remains found were relics of the Roman forum of Colchester, a matter scarcely admitting of doubt. If it is conceded that here was the forum, the answer to the question, who were the builders of the castle? is considerably simplified. The Rev. Henry Jenkins, and others, held that the castle was a Roman building; but it must not be understood by this reference to the opinions these gentlemen expressed, that any great weight has ever been attached to them by any competent antiquary who has studied the subject without prejudice. These discoveries, then, have upset all ideas of the possibility of this castle having been erected in Roman times. The paper read was as follows:—

“In the course of the excavations and levellings near the castle in the autumn of 1892, in the formation of the public park for Colchester, discoveries were made, some of which were of considerable interest. On the west, north, and east sides of the castle-bailey are some large ramparts of earth, and at the north-west angle of these it became necessary to excavate a path through the lowest part of the rampart, for convenience of access to the remaining portion of the park, which lies at a lower level. Here the workmen came on to a wall of

masonry, the existence of which has been usually overlooked by visitors, although a few stones of it were apparent in the bottom of a surface drain receiving the rainfall from the bailey.¹

Tracing this wall westward, it makes a right angle, and then follows a southern course under the whole remaining portion of the western rampart. It was also traced towards the northern rampart, making first a turn directly northward, and then in a short distance turning at a right angle, which brings it under the centre of the northern rampart, through which it is known to extend, until the eastern rampart is reached; here it appears to be covered by it, as by the other ramparts. It therefore surrounds the castle on three sides. On the fourth, it was probably removed at the end of the seventeenth century, when the houses on the south side, facing the High Street, were built.

The outer facing of this wall is composed of squared stones, the body being formed of a rubble of the same kind of stone, known as septaria, largely used in Roman times for building purposes in this district. Of this stone the town walls are also formed. The inner side of this wall is roughly plastered, and the stones are not pointed, shewing clearly that it was intended for a facing to the mound of earth now overlying it.

A careful examination of this wall confirmed the idea that it was of Roman construction, a view fully borne out by further excavation, as, in baring this wall under the west rampart, it was found that there were portions plastered with the characteristic salmon-coloured cement, so constantly found in Roman buildings. A drain, sufficiently large for a man to creep up, ran from the bailey under this, the west rampart, and remains of it could be traced some distance within the area inclosed by these walls. The arch of this drain is formed of Roman brick, and the sides and bottom are plastered with the pink cement previously mentioned.

Adjoining to, and continuous with, the red plaster seen on the inside of the west wall, were found two floors formed of the red Roman concrete. On one lay five human skeletons side by side, head and feet alternately east and west; on the other, two, similarly arranged. The heads in both cases were protected by having portions of Roman brick arranged on either side, the cist being completed by another brick being laid over as a cover. As the bones of these skeletons were much decayed and very soft, they may possibly have

¹ The wall is noticed in the Rev. Henry Jenkins' "Colchester Castle," p. 10, but it is not correctly laid down in his accompanying map.

lain there since the Saxon period, but there were no ornaments or weapons found from which an approximate date might have been given for their burial. As no attention seems to have been paid to orientation, we may perhaps be justified in supposing the bodies to have been interred in pagan Saxon times.

Inside the bailey a small remnant of another wall was exposed. This is parallel to the one under the north rampart, and is composed of septaria rubble, but there are no squared facing stones now, whatever there may have been formerly.

Every care is taken of these remains, and the cloaca is now fenced round with an iron railing, and will be kept open for inspection.

In the rubbish thrown out in the draining and other excavations, a considerable number of small bricks, about $5\frac{1}{2}$ by $2\frac{1}{2}$ by $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches, appeared, especially near to, and in the interval between these two parallel walls. The bricks appear to have been used in Roman times for pavements. In one fragment, now in the castle Museum, they are arranged herring-bone fashion, and these lately found bear marks favouring the idea that they may have been used in a similar manner. There is no building stone to be found in Essex, and in consequence of its absence might not the Romans have done here, as they did at Lincoln, formed columns of half round bricks? It would almost appear that they did so, for in these excavations more half circular bricks were found than had been discovered in Colchester before. These bricks would have been very suitable for this purpose, and if the columns were formed of them, it is easy to understand why so many appeared in this part of the excavation.

In the field below the castle a tessellated pavement, about eighteen feet square, was unearthed. It was composed of red tesserae, about an inch square, set in concrete. The borders of the figured pavements occasionally found, have generally a margin of red, similarly formed, and this may well have been only a portion of such a border, as at the edge of it, at one point, the tesserae are arranged as the segment of a circle. If it was the border of a pavement, the remaining part had quite disappeared; but there were evidences of the existence of a considerable building in the immediate vicinity. A cover has been placed over the best portion of this pavement for protection, and to enable it to be inspected at any time.

Further down the park, excavations just inside the town wall have brought to light a squared mass of masonry, $19\frac{1}{2}$ feet long by $6\frac{1}{2}$ feet broad, attached to, and forming part of the wall. It may probably be the remains of one of the towers, found in other parts of the wall. This example, like the others mentioned, does not project beyond the outer face of the wall.

The question naturally suggests itself, what is the meaning of this large area, doubly walled, surrounding the present castle? Is it a portion of the defence of the fortress? as asserted by the late Rev. Henry Jenkins and Mr. Buckler, who believed the keep to be of Roman origin. This idea must be dismissed at once, as these walls are so distinctly Roman that they could not have been erected as a part of the castle, although they afterwards formed part of its defences; for, if the theory be accepted that here was the forum of Roman Camulodunum, no such building as the present castle would have been erected in the centre of so important a part of the city.

Other questions arise: are the small bricks which have been mentioned a portion of the pavement of the covered part under the colonnade, and is the inner wall the foundation on which were erected the columns supporting the roof, and are the half-circular bricks portions of the columns standing on this dwarf wall?"

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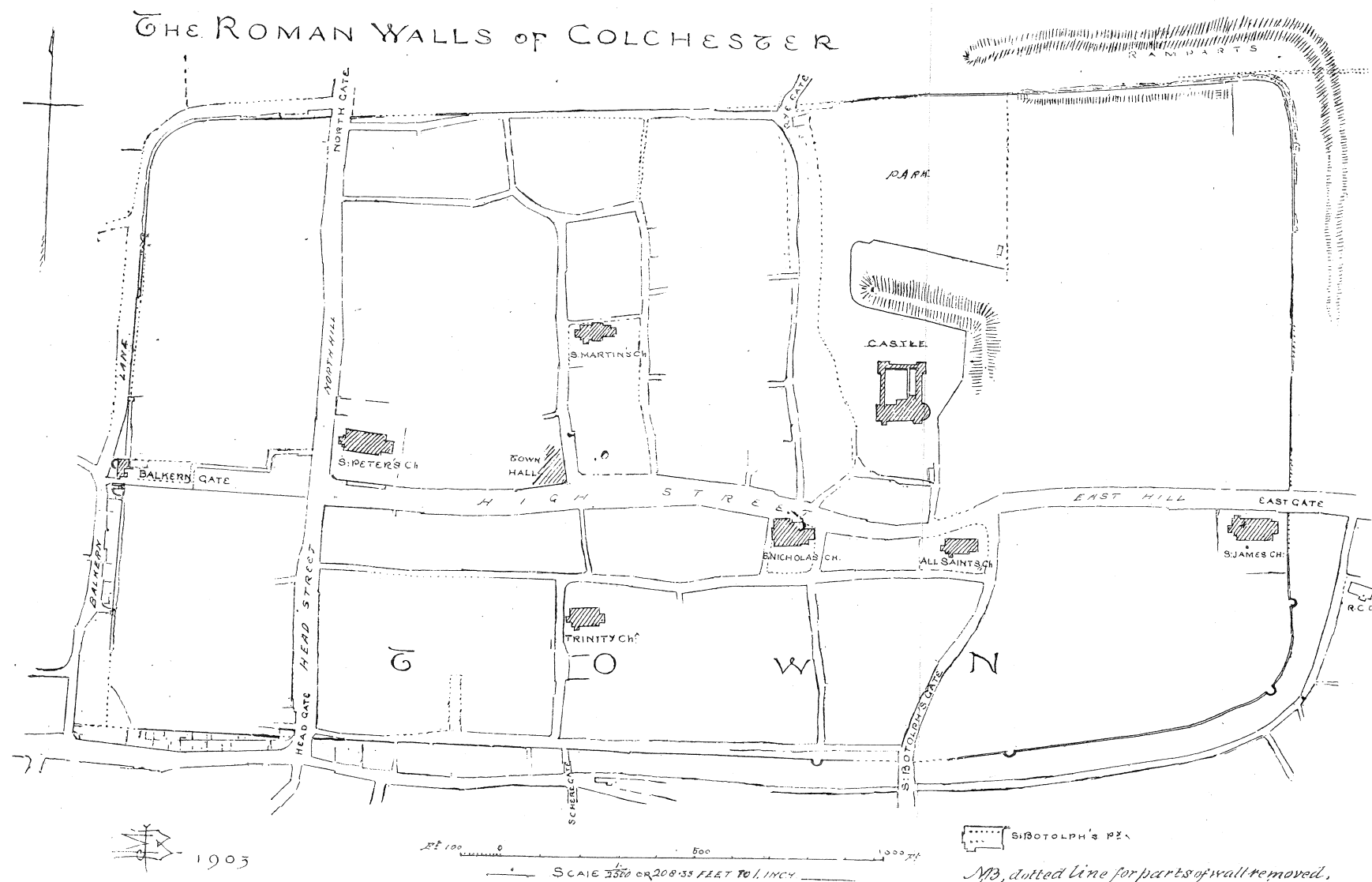
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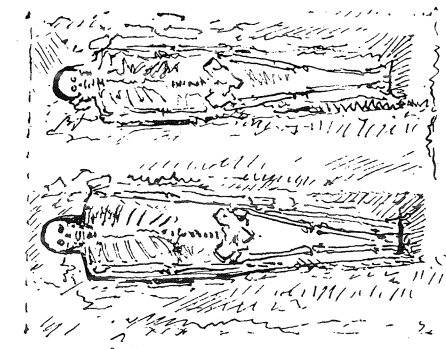
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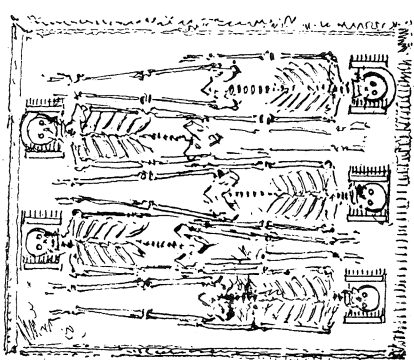
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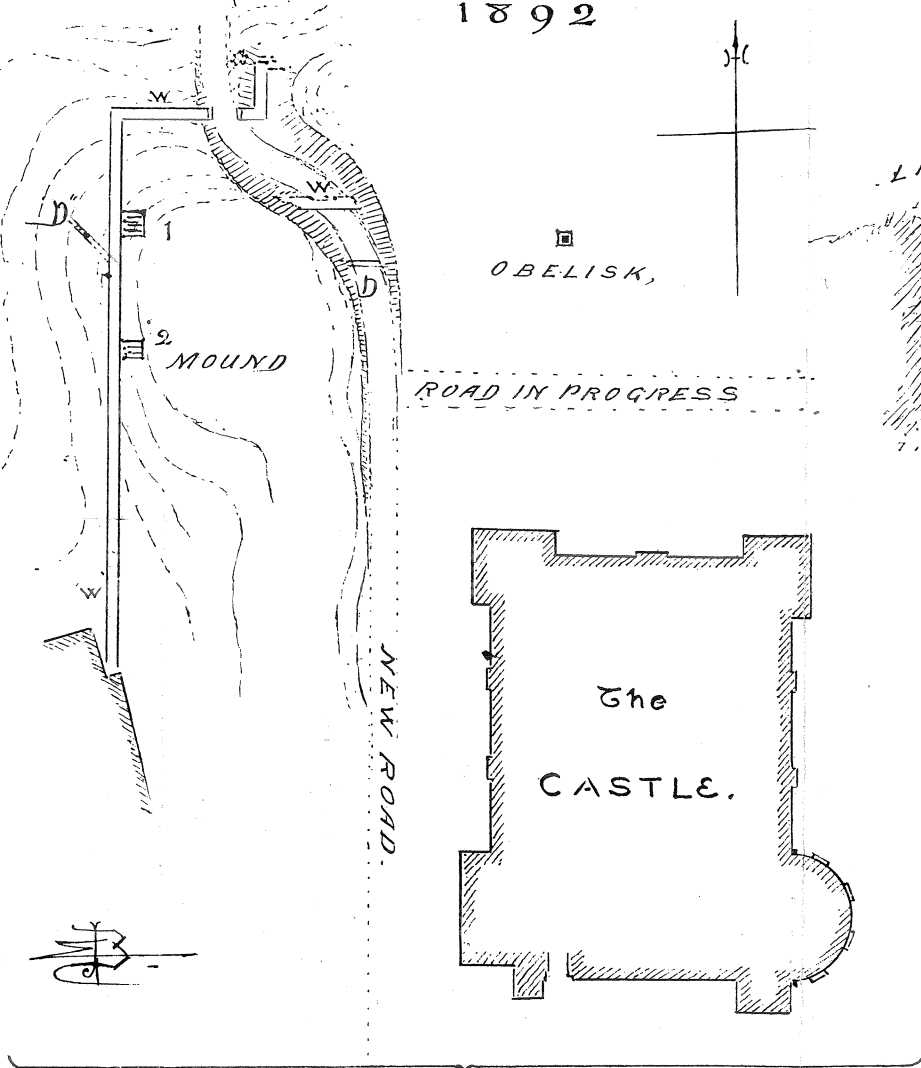
C O L C H E S T E R . 1892



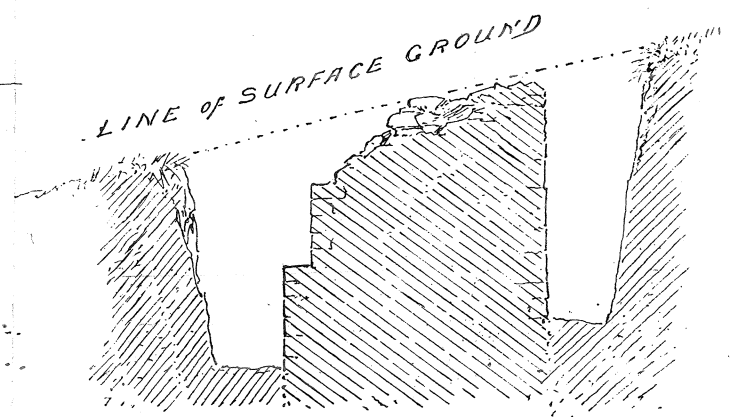
SKELETONS IN "COFFIN-SHAPED" GRAVES, AT N° 2.



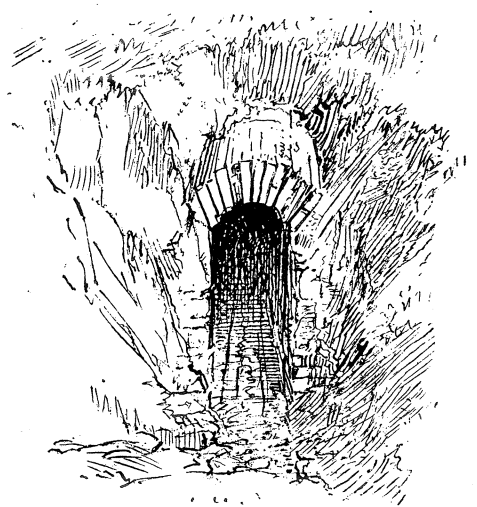
GROUP OF SKELETONS
DISCOVERED AT SITE N° 1.
SCALE 1/2" TO 1'.



BLOCK PLAN OF CASTLE AND GROUND...
SHOWING SITE OF DISCOVERED WALLS &c TO N, W,
SCALE 40' TO 1"



CROSS SECTION OF WALL.



ELEVATION, END OF DRAIN
OPENING ON N.W. SLOPE AT "D".
SCALE 1" TO 1'.