

DISCOVERY OF A SUPPOSED ROMAN BRICK KILN NEAR SERPENTINE WALK, COLCHESTER.

BY HENRY LAVER, F.S.A.

DURING some double trenching last autumn in Mr. R.W. Wallace's garden, near Serpentine Walk, the workmen came upon a large quantity of burnt earth and brick rubbish, in that part of the garden nearest the road from Middle Mill, towards the north.

This burnt earth was about 2 feet under the surface and covered a large area, about 50 yards long and 25 wide. On digging through it, the same burnt rubbish was found to about a yard thick, and was formed, to a large extent, of burnt clay, in appearance somewhat like insufficiently burned ballast, and intermixed with this were numerous pieces of thin bricks, flue tiles and the ordinary roof tiles of the Roman period. On none of the bricks or tiles were there any appearances indicating previous use in building, as they were all clear of any marks of mortar or lime, in fact, the appearances seen were such as may be found on any site where bricks are burned in clamps at the present day. In burning bricks in clamps it is found necessary to plaster up some vacancies with clay to prevent an undue quantity of heat passing, thus forcing the fire in other directions and so getting the whole body of the clamp equally burned. When this is done, this luting, if I may so term the clay so used, becomes heated sufficiently to cause it to assume the red colour of brick, but not to cause it to become so hard as well burned ballast. This appears to be the origin of the red earth found with the fragments of brick discovered.

In no part of England, that I am aware of, have any remains of a brick kiln of the Roman period been discovered, but there have been a large number of pottery kilns found, and I cannot but think that, had the Roman brick maker used kilns to fire his wares, some relics somewhere must have survived as well as the small potters' kilns.

In one place, in West Mersea, not far from the church, is a quantity of strong brick earth, and at this spot, some years ago,

I saw appearances of a very similar character, and the brick rubbish bore no marks of previous use, as here.

From the well-known appearances found on bricks fired in a clamp, which are absent from bricks burned in what we understand by the term kiln, we may fairly assume that the Romans did not burn their bricks in a kiln such as we now use.

If this was the case, we need wonder no longer where the Roman bricks we see in such numbers were burned, because no building would be needed, as they could be made and burned at any spot where there was a sufficiency of suitable clay, and the only marks they would leave behind them would be just such an accumulation of burnt earth and brick rubbish as may be seen in this garden mentioned, an accumulation which may be compared with that found wherever bricks are burned in a clamp at the present time.