Thomas ‘Governor’ Pownall and the Roman Villa at Glentworth, Lincolnshire

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At some time early in 1753, or perhaps a year or more earlier, but certainly by April of that year, certain parts of what was evidently a Roman villa were revealed in building works at Glentworth, which lies ten miles (sixteen km) north of Lincoln under the scarp slope of the Jurassic limestone edge. By a special combination of circumstances, the find received no notice in contemporary antiquarian circles, and knowledge of its discovery was completely lost to archaeological literature until its recent rediscovery. Apparently the sole record takes the form of a letter among the Lumley Muniments at the Earl of Scarbrough’s residence at Sandbeck Park. The text is transcribed in full below.

Front

Lincoln, May 2 = 53

My Lord

By the desire of Mr Basset I went over last week to your Lordship’s seat at Glentworth, to see that aqueduct (as they called it) which was found in digging for foundations of your Lordship’s stables. By the account he gave of it before I went I apprehended it was no aqueduct properly so called. That I might be better prepared to judge of it I looked into Vitruvius and particularly into his chapter de Bulae as I conceived that this would turn out to be one. When I came to the Place I found your Lordship had directed that the ground under which it lies should not be removed till you came into the country; I could not therefore presume to search further into the state of these remains than as they were already opened. I saw at first that it was Roman work (at least I think so) and observing the coat of Cement that enclosed the tiles that form the conduit and having read in Vitruvius — Sin autem minore sumptu volueris aquam ducere sic et faciendum. Tubuli (fictiles) crasso corio ne minus digitorum duorum, fiant ex testa &c — I did presume (and I hope your Lordship won’t take it ill) to bare as much of the Cement as appears below observing too on the side of it the tile gutter as below, I said to the gardener, that if the thing was what I apprehended it to be, that if he was to bear away the earth a little from the side of this gutter he would find a floor paved with very little square pieces of stone, accordingly we found as appears in the sketch at the margin.

(Drawing. Plate III. 10 x 8mm, ink and watercolour; depicting the buttressed wall foundation of a standing building, evidently the stables, with a hole alongside it in which are shown a short length of square or rectangular-sectioned tile drain or duct in a cement jacket, a half-round tile gutter lying adjacent and parallel, and a small area of white tesselated floor. Each had clearly been cut through by the wall running at approximately right angles to the pipes. No scale or compass point).

The Tesellae are of a very white close-grained stone as white as the Rocch-Abby. — I saw them cover it up again.
immediately and that it might be in no danger of receiving
damage when it opened

Back

again, I made them cover it with bricks. From the
appearance as in the Draught and from what I read
in Vitruvius and Pliny, I have ventured to form a plan of what
I apprehend it will be found to be, as appears on the reverse
of this paper, which I am so bold as to trouble your
Lordship with. If I should have been too free I hope your
Lordship will impute it to any other cause but
imperfection; my intent is to be respectfull; and to
congratulate your Lordship on being possessed of what I
apprehend will prove to be not only the greatest Curiosity
in Lincolnshire but perhaps in England; most certainly so
if it turns out intire as it begins. Most likely it will not prove
to be minutely as I have laid down the plan, because
that plan is adapted to their more expensive Bagnio's.

Whereas I apprehend this to have been such a one only as
they had in private houses and country seats of less
expense. The first difference then that will most likely
occur, will be in the situation of the Laconicum and
Hypocaust, for they were economists enough to save the
expense and trouble of a fire on purpose. So generally
placed their baths next their kitchen, (Balnearia item
conjuncta sint culinae in aedificis rusticii) that the same
fire which served the kitchen might heat the water for the
bath and by its chimney communicating with the
Laconicum too. Therefore the Laconicum may turn out to
be where I have put the frigidarium. And in the Climate of
England there may possibly be no use of the frigidarium at
all — yet I cant but think that I observed close on the west
side of the Conduit some remains of the Cement and place
where the Coppers were wet, as likewise some tiles laid in
cement upon which they were alway wet. But this seemed
to have been in part destroyed in sinking for the foundations.

insomuch as the Top of the Dome with which it was coved. Under
which aperture was hung a vessel called by Vitruvius the
Clypeus Aereus, which being hung in pulleys was raised or
lett lower as was wanted for by this device says Vitruvius
perficietur sudationis temperatura.3

The Conduit D is of the nature that Vitruvius calls
Fictitil Tubulis and is covered over with a strong Coarse of
Cement as he directs and is made exactly according to the
rules laid down in his book. The Dimensions of it is what
the Romans called Didoron. That is two Palms high and
one broad. For I measured by the English Ruler and it
measured 7½ of our inches high and 3¾ broad or wide.
(Drawing. Plate IV. 40 x 20mm., as before; detail of
concrete jacketed conduit. It is annotated, 'The
course of Coemnt with which the Tubulis Fictitis
will be coved', and shows a small square hole in
the upper face of the exposed tile. No scale or compass
point.)

E The Channel called Ficlit Incile thro' which I am of
the opinion that the Cold Water was issued is open
apprehend this will be found much broken and destroyed as being entirely unguarded.

(Drawing. Plate II. 135 x 35mm, as before; matching...
section through bath suite of Inside 1, shows details of hypocaust construction. Labelled, 'A Section of the Same but most likely the Hypocaust will be found to be under one room not all three as below'.

K The Tessellated Pavement
L The Cement in which it is set
M The Hypocaust or Hypocaust
N Fistulae Vaporariae or Flues for the smoke
P The Fornix and Praefurnium
Q The Windows, which were always facing the Sou-West (lumen habeat ab occidente hiberno) as this will be found to be.

The vessels for holding the Water were placed according to Vitruvius as in ABC. But I am of opinion that here the Cold Water was conveyed in the Fictile Incile E directly from the Well which was found in sinking for the foundations of the stables.

This Gutter of Tile E will be found to run along the side of the rooms G and H into the bath F.

R The Brick Pillars that will be found to support the floor of the Bagnio.

Wish I could be so happy as to be present when your Lordship has it opened but am afraid I shall be gone from the Country before your Lordship's return hither. Many other things occur to me which the compass of this paper will not permit me to insert. I must alway leave room to subscribe myself your Lordship's most obedient and humble servant to command.

T. Pownall

The interest of this letter is twofold, and lies both in its factual archaeological content and in its author.

Archaeology

The precise detail of what was unearthed at Glentworth in the early 1750's is interwoven in the letter in a complex fashion with the imaginative interpretation and reconstruction based upon it. Yet the latter is an important aid in understanding what was seen. Extracted from the text, the actual remains appear to have comprised:

1. The edge of a plain tesselated floor made of fine white limestone tesserae. Along one side of it ran an open tile drain or gutter, and immediately parallel to that a closed tile pipe of rectangular section, 7½ x 3¾ inches (190 x 95mm), encased in a concrete jacket. A small square hole in the upper surface of the exposed end of this pipe may have been original.

2. Some traces of tiles set in concrete, seen on the side of the closed pipe away from the pavement, which were taken to be a setting for water containers.

3. A well found also in digging foundations for the stables, but to the north.

It is assumed in the description that there was a hypocaust, but there is no direct reference to specific evidence of one here.

The exact location of the discovery can be fixed with some certainty as against the outside of the south wall of the stables (Fig. 2). To fit the reconstruction drawing of the hypothetical ground plan (Inside 1), which bears compass points, the channels would need to run north-west to south-east, with the closed one on the west of the gutter and the tesselated floor to the east. The disruptive foundations are then on the north. It is without doubt implicit in the author's archaeological method that the theoretical reconstruction would fit the actual remains to that extent. The orientation is confirmed by the reference to the supposed setting for water-containers 'on the west side of the Conduit'. The pilaster buttress shown on the drawing

(Front) will presumably be one or other projecting corner at the southern end of the single completed stable range, probably the south-west corner. The well lay to the north, presumably atop the slight rise on which the stables stand. The arrangement, perhaps surprising in view of the close proximity of the natural spring line, was presumably designed to achieve gravity feeding of the water system.

The letter's interpretation of these modest remains as part of the bath house of a rural villa seems reasonable. The concrete encased pipe finds a parallel among the fragmentary evidence for a villa at Burton near Lincoln. That example is circular in section, as is the similarly reinforced piping of the Lincoln aqueduct. The shape and size of the Glentworth pipe, and particularly the small square hole in it, suggest that flue tile was being reused for convenience and cheapness, just as imbrices were apparently used for the open gutter. The inherent weakness of the shape would cause no difficulty so long as water was gravity fed and not under pressure. There are several lengths of unusual square sectioned pipe (approximately 8 x 8 inches, 200 x 200mm) from the Lincoln, Greetwell Fields villa in the City and County Museum, Lincoln, one of them with a small square hole in one face, and these too may be flue pipes used in a water system. The location of the site, too, is a convincing one for a Roman villa. For it fits into a pattern of sites of possible or certain villas along the scarp edge of the limestone ridge north of Lincoln (Fig. 1). They are sited both at the top of the scarp, like Scampton, and below it, sometimes up to a mile (1.5 km) from the scarp, and even in the case of the one at Sturton by Stow five miles (8 km) away.

Fieldwalking at Glentworth in spring 1977, independently of the discovery of the letter, identified a
major Roman site to the east of Glentworth Hall on either side of the ornamental ‘Fish Pond’ (Fig. 2). Finds consisted of large quantities of pottery of third and fourth century date and building stone, roof tile and combed flue tile. This supports the eighteenth century discoveries and gives a more realistic picture of the area of the site. It seems that the construction of the fish pond in landscaping the eastern prospect of Glentworth Hall may have disturbed part of the residential area of the villa.

The letter speaks, perhaps more hopefully than in certainty, of further excavations proposed in the near future. It would not be surprising if these never took place. Quite apart from the absence of later reference to the remains, one obvious effect of the letter’s archaeological method of interpretation and conjecture is to produce an account ready made to stand in lieu of further investigation. It might easily have satisfied the inquisitiveness of the 4th Earl, who, having inherited the title only a year previously on the death of his father, was soon to curtail his projected grand building operations at Glentworth and to follow his wife’s preference by developing Sandbeck on the Yorkshire/Nottinghamshire border as his principal family seat in the north Midlands.11

Biography

The letter is signed by T. Pownall, that is Thomas ‘Governor’ Pownall.14 Pownall was born and educated at Lincoln before going to Cambridge, and his well-to-do family lived at the house that is now 5 Pottergate. The diplomatic and political career which ensured his fame has been fully recounted in a number of studies. His antiquarian interests have likewise received frequent, if somewhat generalised, notice in print, in which they are commonly assumed to have begun after his American experiences.15 He was in America from 1753 to 1760, and while there managed to combine an opportunistic and successful political career with an active interest in the country, its native cultures and the impact on them of colonial activity. This in particular brought him, like others of his contemporaries, to a conception of the social and economic development of mankind from hunter/gatherer to colonialist. He was proposed for election to the Society of Antiquaries of London in June 1769, ‘as a Person duly qualified by his knowledge and well inclined to promote the Study of Antiquities, and likely to become an useful and valuable Member’, without reference to any specific earlier work.16 It is only recently that Bryony Orme has produced an excellent study of Pownall’s philosophy of archaeology and antiquarianism which has allowed a clearer assessment of his contribution to the subject.17 That distinctive contribution was not in the recording of the minuatie of new finds, though he both was capable of accurate observation and fine draughtsmanship, and considered them an essential prerequisite to archaeological philosophising.18 The concern and ability is seen in the Glentworth drawings, and, along with the accuracy of quotations from ancient sources, encourages reliance on the factual content in this case. But one sees also here the will to go beyond the mere cataloguing of a discovery in ‘a more adventurous and speculative approach to the study of antiquities’, which finds clear philosophical expression in his mature view that ‘To make cumbrous collections of numberless particulars, merely because they are fragments; and to admire them merely as they are antique; is not the spirit of ancient learning, but the mere doting of superannuation’.19

Not the least interest of the Glentworth letter, therefore, is the way it shows Thomas Pownall’s antiquarian interest, skills and attitudes well developed on the eve of his departure to America and some time before he came into wider prominence as an antiquary. This is hardly surprising, for such interests were deeply established in his family. His father, Captain William Pownall, concerned himself with ancient finds in and around Lincoln before his death in 1734/5, corresponded with Stukeley and with

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**Fig. 2** Glentworth: site of villa and Roman surface finds
Roger Gale of the Spalding Gentlemen’s Society, and was later said to have left materials for the study of Lincoln, and his brother John, too, was known as ‘an Eminent Antiquary’ and became a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, contributing several items for publication. The contrast between John Pownall’s prosaic reports of Roman finds at Reculver and Lincoln and his brother’s work illustrates well the distinctive place of Thomas Pownall, in his own time and in the development of the subject of archaeology.

FOOTNOTES
1 The remains were found in construction of the stables, which are assigned by M. Girouard to the 3rd Earl of Scarborough, who died in 1752 (Country Life, 7 October 1963, p. 881), and are accepted as earlier than James Paine’s main scheme of 1753 (ibid., 9; N. Pevsner and J. Harris, Lincolnshire, The Buildings of England, Harmondsworth, 1964, p. 249). The close architectural similarity of the stables to the main house, since they have in common elevations with central and side projections and windows arranged 1:3:3:1, together with details such as their ashlar impost band and ashlar and brick corbelled cornice, may raise some doubts about any chronologically distinct pattern. Paine’s plans show the stables consisting of four ranges set in a square around a courtyard. As with the main house, each range is in this case the western one, seems ever to have been built (cf. map dated 1813 attached to Gwentworth Tithe Award 1842, Lincolnshire Archives Office (subsequently L.A.O.), F253).
2 Mr. A. J. White reminds me that a reference to the villa’s discovery appears in the Cragg MSS (microfilm in L.A.O.), but with no date or details (cf. Archæologia, 1934, p. 167).
3 Lumley Monuments FHC/3, Historical Manuscripts Commission/National Register of Archives, Lumley Manuscripts (1955, typescript only), No. 3847. I am grateful to the present Earl of Scarborough for permission both to examine the document and to publish its transcription. The letter consists of a single sheet, 14½ x 8 inches (364 x 225mm), folded once to produce a front and back and a double page inside spread. It is in an eighteenth century hand, and is stored in a black edged envelope annotated ‘Roman remains, Grimston’, in the nineteenth century, and ‘FHC/3’ and on the window it is preserved by the H. M. Pownall.
4 Vitruvius, De Architectura, Book VIII ch. VI. The text as edited by F. Granger (Loeb Classical Library, 1934) gives voluerimur and esse voluerit and esse erit, and omits ex testa. The edition most likely to be available to Pownall was that edited by de Laet, Vitruvius, De Architectura libri decem, Amsterdam, 1649. This gives the readings voluerimus and erit, and includes ex testa, op. cit., Book VIII ch. VII, p. 170.
5 There had already been four Roman villas discovered in Lincolnshire prior to 1733, namely Roxby 1699, Denton 1727, South Stoke 1740, and Navenby 1747; information from Mr. A. J. White, City and County Museum, Lincoln.
6 Vitruvius, ed. Granger, Book VI ch. VI; ed. de Laet, Book VI, ch. IX.
7 Ibid., Book V, ch. X.
8 Ibid.
9 Pownall sailed from Portsmouth for America on 22 August 1753.
10 An average size for a section of flue tile would be 16½ x 5½ x 4 inches, approximately 405 x 165 x 100mm, with an opening in the centre of each narrow side which is usually square, sometimes round.
11 N. Davis, A History of Building Materials, London, 1961, p. 198. Davis illustrated in his Fig. 109 the use of flue tiles and imbrices embedded horizontally in a concrete floor as part of a heating system. But Pownall’s record that the channels lay above floor level may preclude that use.
13 One sherd of gritty pottery of early Saxon type was found with the Roman, but so in part of the area was much later medieval and post-medieval pottery and metalwork. Presumably the medieval village extended a little further north than at present, and was affected by the development of the great house and its landscaped setting. The parish church of St. Michael has a late Saxon west tower, in which an earlier but still probably late Saxon grave marker was built as part of a Saxon window. The place-name element -worth may be an indication that substantial Roman remains were recognized in this earlier Saxon period; see A. H. Smith, English Place-Name Elements, London, 1956, Part 2, pp. 273-5.
15 The signature is identical to that on other Pownall’s correspondence; see, for example, facsimiles reproduced in C. A. W. Pownall, Thomas Pownall, London, 1908.
17 He was bullied and elected in November 1769 and entered Fellow in June 1770, Society of Antiquaries Minute Book, XI, 1769-70, pp. 121, 159, 340.

Book Review


This collection of essays is a welcome addition to the comparatively small number of general text books on historical geography at present available. The editors rightly suggest that there is room on the shelves for a volume which not only seeks to incorporate the results of recent work, but attempts also the more difficult task of presenting these in ways that are likely to stimulate interest and provoke thought. On both counts An Historical Geography of England and Wales must be considered a success.

Fourteen contributions span the centuries. Two chapters present ‘Perspectives on Prehistory’ and an interpretation of the human geography of Roman Britain respectively, while a third is organised around the theme of Celts, Saxons and Scandinavians. Two further chapters discuss the historical geography of the Middle Ages and carry the chronological sequence of essays down to the year 1500, after which there follow essays on agriculture, on industry and towns and on population during the period 1500-1730. The second half of the book, containing six chapters and some 200 pages, is devoted to the years between 1730 and 1900 and is organised similarly around a number of themes. These follow closely the pattern adopted for the years 1500-1730, but are extended by additional material on industrial change and transport. About half the book is thus concerned with the historical geography of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Individual contributors (all of whom are academics) have been allowed a fairly free hand, with the happy result in this case that we are treated to a variety of approaches and interpretations.

There are many good things in this book. Its up-to-date treatment of such topics as place-name elements, the geography of population and innovation in agriculture will probably be of interest to local historians wherever they happen to live. Lincolnshire historians may well be disappointed, however, that so few of the book’s many examples relate directly to their own part of the country. Even so they could hardly fail to be stimulated by its wealth of ideas and information.

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HULL