

## The Site of the Roman Villa at Havyatt, Somerset

By  
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### SUMMARY

Dr. E. K. Tratman (1960) described his rediscovery of the Lye Hole Roman villa (discovered in 1876 and subsequently forgotten) but failed to re-locate the Havyatt Roman villa, originally discovered in 1817. Fresh documentary evidence has led to a re-examination of the original references to the Havyatt site, and its location in August 1969 at ST 48016145, on the slope of a low hill south of the R. Yeo near Havyatt Farm. The confusion that has arisen between this and a second Roman site about a mile away in Lower Langford is resolved.

On 18th June, 1817 The Rev. J. Douglas wrote to The Rev. J. Skinner about the discovery of a Roman building at Havyatt. The Rev. Preb. H. M. Scarth (1877, p. 159) first publicized this find, as having been made by labourers during road alterations to the Bristol-Bridgwater turnpike at Havyatt. His description also includes additional details of limestone walls found eighteen inches down and standing one foot high, roofing tiles and signs of destruction by fire, which suggest that he had access to other local memories of the site. He mentioned the site briefly in 1878, as "near Havyatt Green" and in 1879 and 1888 he described it as "on Havyatt Green."

Haverfield (1906) followed Scarth in assuming that the site was "at Havyatt Green." He also noted an anonymous reference in *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1856 to "Roman Remains in Somersetshire: In digging down a bank, the foundation of an old wall, in Lower Langford, some pieces of old tessellated pavement have been exhumed." Haverfield, however, confused the situation by suggesting that since Havyatt is "practically in" the village of Lower Langford, the two references of 1817 and 1856 are therefore to one and the the same site. In fact, while Havyatt Green adjoins the parish boundary of Langford, the Havyatt farms lie northeast of the Green and in Wrington parish, a full three-quarters of a mile from Lower Langford village. In 1966 Mr. J. E. Hancock reported Roman remains from foundation trenches in the grounds of the Veterinary College at the western end of Lower Langford. This site, over a mile from Havyatt, would seem the most likely candidate for the 1856 remains. There would, therefore, appear to be two distinct Roman sites: one at the western end of Lower Langford and the other in the Havyatt area. Investigations by Dr. Tratman in 1960 of a drain trench and in 1966 of a G.P.O. trench along the southern and northern sides of A.38 across Havyatt Green

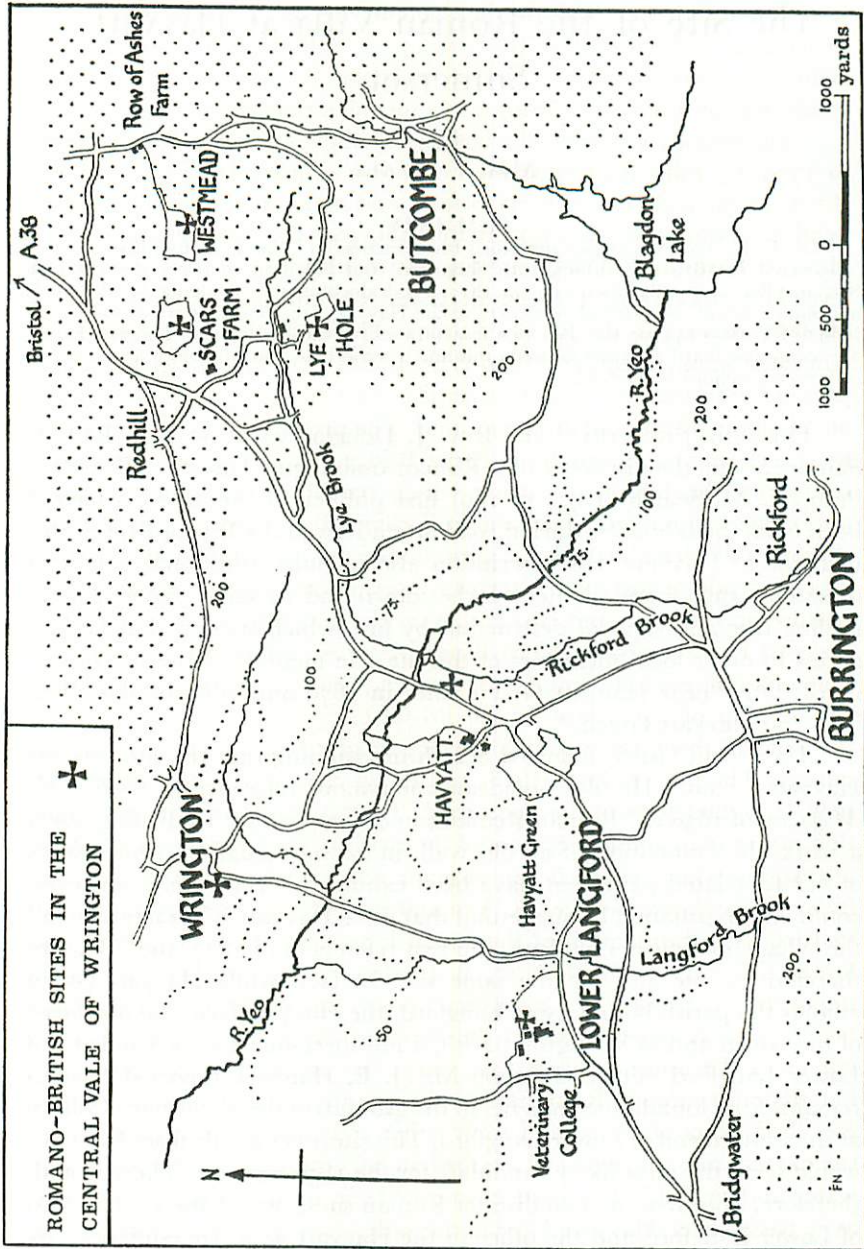


Fig. 31.

revealed no trace of any Roman building. It is noteworthy how the conviction that the site should be on the Green itself only developed with time and the passage of information from writer to writer. One constant factor, however, is the association of the site with roadworks on the Bristol-Bridgwater turnpike road, now A.38.

The discovery in 1965 of a large-scale map of the Manor of Wrington in 1739, by John Rocque showed the 18th century turnpike road from Bristol crossing R. Yeo at Perry Bridge, and making a pronounced double bend as it wound its way up the low hill, past the roads leading west to Havyatt Farm and Wrington, and east to Blagdon, on to the open and level Havyatt Green. Two hundred yards south of R. Yeo, a lane ran off eastwards across the Rickford Brook. The entire area was divided into a maze of small, irregularly shaped fields. Many of these field boundaries, part of the former curve of the turnpike road, and the lane can be traced on air-photographs and on the ground. The present-day A.38 trunk road, however, running south from Perry Bridge, follows an almost straight course up the hill in a cutting which reaches a maximum depth of approximately ten feet. The lane to Rickford Brook (which has also been considerably straightened) has gone out of use completely; and the land on either side of the road is thrown together into three large fields: one pasture on the west, and two arable on the east side. Only a track from Havyatt Farm across Rickford Brook preserves, for part of its route, the lines of a fragment of turnpike road and a path marked on the 1739 map.

A map of alterations to the Bristol-Bridgwater turnpike pinpoints the change from the winding surface road to the straight road in a cutting. The plan is dated 1818, and shows clearly both the old and the new, straighter lines of the main road. Taking 1818 as a date of completion rather than commencement of the roadworks, it is suggested that the alterations which exposed the Roman remains described in 1817 are in fact those shown between R. Yeo and the Havyatt Farm road-junction in 1818. An examination of the actual letter from Douglas (1817) reinforces this suggestion; further, it renders a site on Havyatt Green impossible: it "concerns a discovery my son has made in his neighbourhood . . . it is called *Haviot* in the Parish of *Wrington*. In making a new cut for a Turnpike road at this place, the labourers have broke into foundations evidently Roman, from the quantity of pottery, *Samian* ware, &c., fragments of Urns, and some other sepulchral *escuviae*, which my son has sent me, who lives at Langford, in [*sic*] the great road from Bridgewater and Bristol." The road has never been in an artificial "new cut" as it passes over Havyatt Green; the only cutting is that made on the hillslope south of R. Yeo and shown as part of the new alterations on the map of 1818.

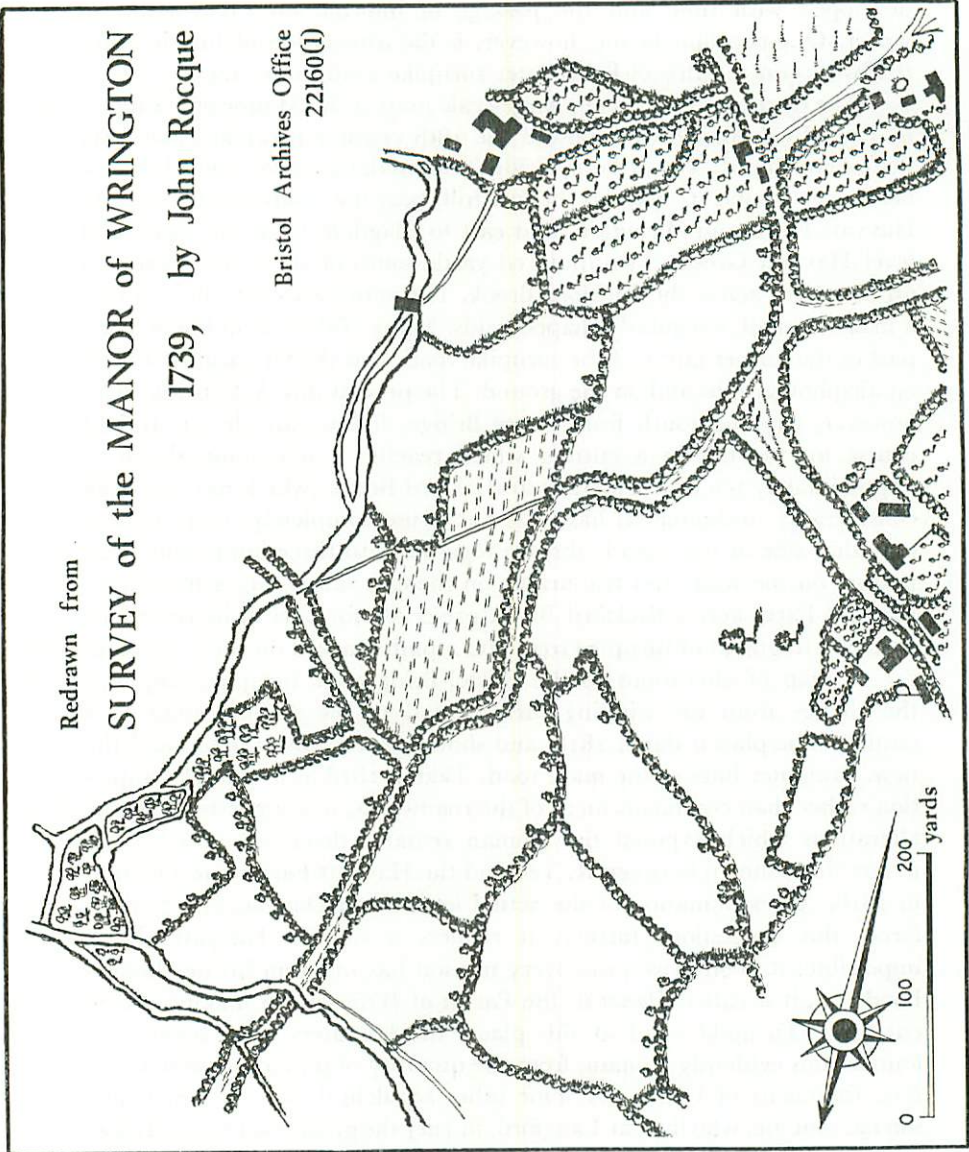


Fig. 32.

The Rev. J. Douglas' description at secondhand from his son, together with Scarth's additional details, suggest that the principal structural remains of the building were thoroughly cut through by the new line of road. The road, and its cutting, were widened still further in the 1920's, Perry Bridge being reconstructed in 1927. The sides of the cutting are now faced with a zig-zag stone revetment on the west, and a low stone wall on part of the east side so that no section is exposed to view. This road-widening must have destroyed still more of the Roman building, although the County Surveyor's records contain no reference to further finds. In addition, soil from the cutting was spread over the adjacent fields, with the doubtful benefit of both obscuring and protecting anything that remained.

Examination of the area in August 1969, however, located the probable site of the building. It lies in the arable field to the east of A.38, bounded on the north side by R. Yeo. The former lane running from the main road eastwards through this field can be traced as a pronounced gully on the crest of the hill, dwindling down to a terrace-way towards Rickford Brook. Halfway down the hillslope between the gully and the R. Yeo, c.340 ft. south of Perry Bridge and hard against the hedge bordering A.38, is a small level area. This platform yielded a quantity of surface finds of Roman pottery. These Roman sherds occurred only on the platform and in its immediate vicinity; none were found anywhere else in the three fields under examination. Shallow ploughing revealed that a concentration of loose stones and larger potsherds occurred at the uphill side of the platform. The sherds included three fragments of Samian, together with rims, bases and body-sherds of grey wares and other coarse fabrics comparable with the type-fabric series for the nearby site at Row of Ashes Farm, Butcombe (T.F.'s VII, VIII, X, XII, XVI, XXII, and XXIX). There was no trace of masonry on the surface.

This site, ST 48016145, is at the northern commencement of the cutting in which the main road now runs. The shape of the platform, still widening at the point at which it is cut by A.38, suggests that half or more of the building area has been completely destroyed. On the opposite or western side of the road, slightly nearer the R. Yeo, an area of broken ground centres around a marked depression, at present with a tree growing in it. In part, the broken appearance of the ground can be traced to field boundaries shown on the 1739 map; but it might also in part be associated with a western extremity of this Roman site, although not completely aligned with it. Building- and flag-stones are exposed in the depression, but may well be post-medieval material imported to serve for a cattle-trough stand or similar purpose.

While the physical remains are therefore slight, and the greater part

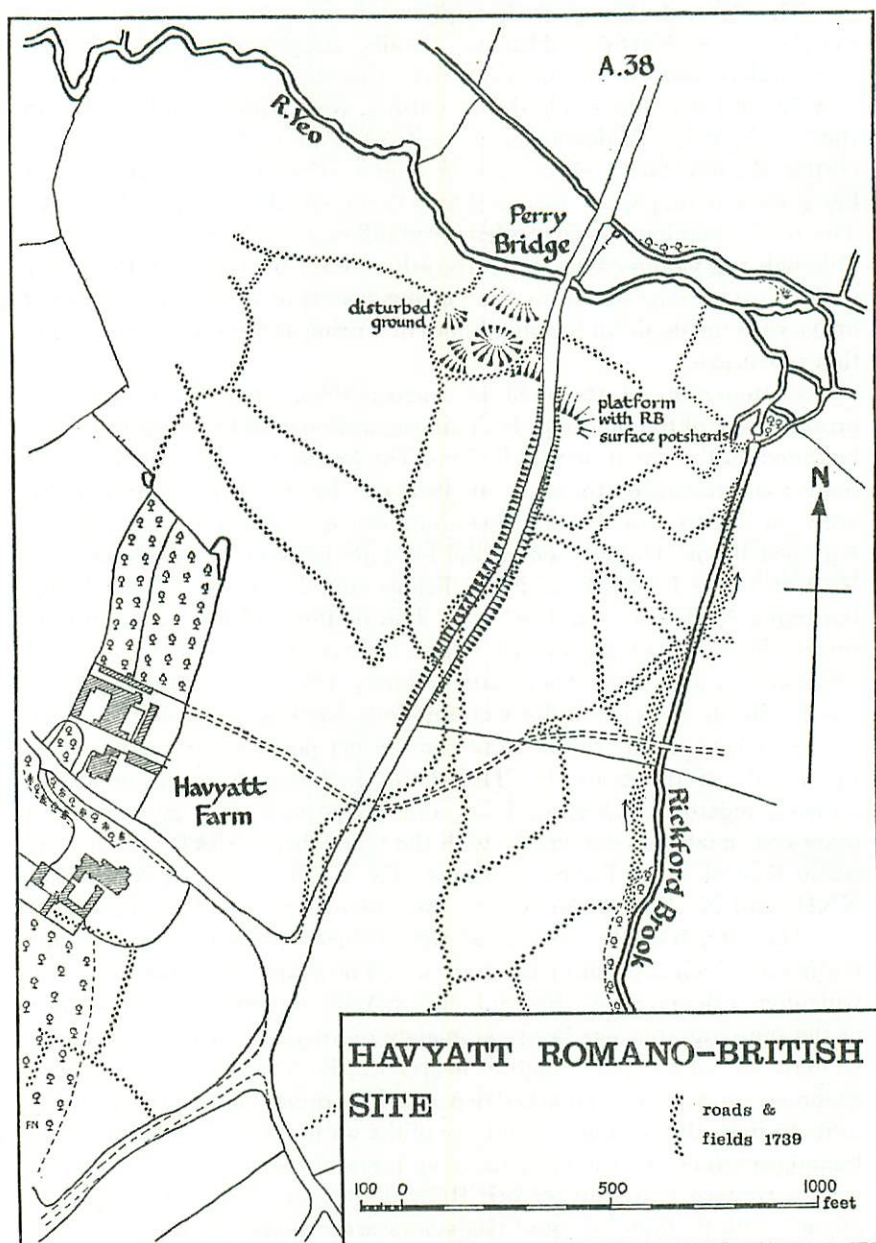


Fig. 33.

of this Roman building has apparently been destroyed, the material and documentary evidence together seem sufficient to re-locate this lost site with reasonable certainty. The Havvatt site, now insignificant in itself, gains importance in the context of the increasing number of Roman sites now known in the Wrington valley, and their implications for the settlement and exploitation of the valley in Roman times.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer is grateful to Sir John Wills of Langford Court and Mr. J. Alvis of Havvatt Farm, for permission to examine the relevant fields; and to Mr. Alvis and Mr. J. E. Hancock for information which contributed to this investigation. The pottery was examined by Mr. P. J. Fowler, Extra-Mural Department, University of Bristol, to whom the writer is also indebted for comment and encouragement.

### DISPOSAL

The few items of pottery found on the site have been deposited in the U.B.S.S. Museum.

### APPENDIX

NGR's of sites shown on Fig. 31.

Wrington	ST468628	Lye Hole	ST502622
Lower Langford	ST458608	Scars Farm	ST502629
Havvatt	ST480614	Westmead	ST508629

The Scars Farm and Westmead sites have been described by Fowler (1968). The Wrington site was located by the North Somerset Archaeological Research Group, corroborating earlier coin finds. The placing of the other sites has been described above.

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