

Background to Study

Topography

The central spine of the Tithing is formed by Wickridge Hill, running from north-east to south-west and rising to over 750 feet (229 metres OD). The ground falls steeply to the Slad valley to the south-east, and more gently to the Painswick stream to the north-west, where a number of small tributary streams flow down from the spring line along Wick Street. To the south-west the ridge slopes down to the valley of the River Frome in Stroud, and to the north-east it joins Longridge Hill in Sheepscombe Tithing. Beyond the Tithing to the west and east, the land rises again to Scottsquar Hill in Pitchcombe parish and Edge Tithing, and the Cotswold plateau in Bisley parish.

Geology

The central ridge of Wickridge Hill is formed of Inferior Oolitic Limestone. This is overlain by gravelly topsoil. In the Painswick and Slad stream valleys Marlstone and Upper Lias clays are exposed (Witchell 1882, 4-5). Rainwater soaks through the porous limestone rocks and is stored at its horizons with the non-porous clay beneath. Therefore springs rise on the valley sides at the junction between the limestone and the clay layers (Tann 1965, 54).

Some beds of the limestone provide a fine-grained freestone, which can be cut easily when it is freshly quarried but hardens with weathering, and therefore makes an excellent building stone. Other limestone beds consist of thin layers of rock which can be split by frost action to produce roofing slates (Finberg 1975, 26). In the area surrounding Painswick, Fullers earth is found between the Great and Inferior Oolites, providing one of the prerequisite raw materials for the cloth-making industry which made the district famous.

Iron Age evidence

Stroudend Tithing and the surrounding landscape were probably fully settled and exploited for agriculture in the Iron Age and Romano-British periods. The land was probably more intensively farmed at this time than in any period before the 16th century.

Iron Age settlement in the area is likely to have centred around Kimsbury hill-fort on Painswick Hill. This encloses an area of eight acres and is multi-vallate for most of its circuit, with an inturned entrance near the east angle (Verey 1970, 368). Earlier antiquarians regarded this as a Roman site:

"Painswick Hill... is one of the *Castra exploratia* of the Romans, being a lofty elbow, which shoulders all the adjacent belt of hills" (Fosbrooke 1807, 352).

Roman evidence

Agricultural use of the Cotswolds area in the Romano-British period was organised around a series of villas. The emphasis of animal husbandry was on wool production

(Finberg 1975, 57). One villa was excavated in the parish of Painwick at Ifold in 1903-4, with a mosaic floor, a hypocaust and a bath suite. It was probably constructed in the late 2nd century, all in one building phase, and was subsequently burned. It included stamped bricks from the *Colonia* of Glevum (Baddeley 1904, 156-171).

The site of another villa is thought to lie within Stroudend Tithing at Brownhill Court, where traces of the structures were found during the rebuilding of the house by William Caruthers in 1796. The discoveries included several Roman inhumations and building materials, coins, tesserae and tiles (Fosbrooke 1807, 351; Little 1892, 27; Baddeley 1929, 5, 25; Burton 1929, 258; Gray 1958, 155). The find was described at the time as follows:

"Memorandum. The 29 and 31 of October 1796 on digging on the South West Side of the South West Garden Wall was found at about Three Feet under the Surface of the Earth and at about Eight Feet distance from the Garden Wall, Two entire Human Skeletons and Four more was discovered by the workmen on Digging the Ground but not so entire as the Two before mentioned as the Work Men Threw up many of the Bones before they discovered what they belonged to. Many more is supposed to be laid in the same Direction as those discovered (only Buried Deeper in the Ground) as in many places the Workmen passed over, the Ground was very hollow, the Bodeys was laid exactly in the Direction of the Garden Wall the Feet of the Skeletons about Eight Feet from the Wall. Many Roman Bricks was found and a kind of Cement used by the Romans in making of their Bricks was found at the same time" (Gray 1958, 155-6, apparently quoting Smith Papers bundle 63).

It has been suggested that Wick Street may have been a minor Roman road, running adjacent to this villa (Baddeley 1929, 25).

Another Romano-British site lay at Down Farm near Slad at SO 882 081, where there are stone foundations. A 4th-century coin, flue-tiles and roof-tiles were found here in the 1960s (*TBGAS* lxxxvii 204).

Other Roman finds have occurred at the Grange in Stroud in 1866-7, and at Custom Scrubs on the eastern side of the Slad valley, where four votive reliefs were found in a quarry in 1799 (Baddeley 1929, 26-7).

Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman finds may account for the items of treasure noted as found by tenants on the 16th-century manorial court rolls. A *leotringus* worth 10^d was found by Edward Browne in 1530 (PRO SC2/176/2); a mattock and two arrows worth 16^d were found at Pyncottes Cross in 1548 (GL RF.229.27). A silver spoon worth 5^{sh} was found in 1570/1 (Staffs RO D641/3/C/1/1/6), and Thomas Duck found pieces of gold weighing 3^{lb} in the walls of his house in 1577 (Staffs RO D641/3/D/1/64 m9d). Another silver spoon worth 16^d was found in Stroudend Tithing in 1586 (Staffs RO D641/3/D/1/65 m1d). The lords of the manor took the profit on all these items as treasure trove.

These items of treasure or the finds at Brownhill may have been the origin of the "three large gold coins in a box marked William Caruthers" which were part of the Caruthers family inheritance in 1804 (GRO D5967/8).