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## **Stamped Roman Tile in Berkeley Church**

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## STAMPED ROMAN TILE IN BERKELEY CHURCH

Whilst investigations were being made as to what Roman objects had been found in Berkeley and the neighbourhood, our attention was drawn to the stamped brick or tile, measuring 11 inches by 11 inches, preserved in the wall of the church on the south side of the chancel arch. This tile or brick, along with an exact duplicate, was found about 4 feet below the chancel floor during restorations carried out in 1866 by Gilbert Scott. It is stamped in Roman characters which read,  $\text{D}$  CLVI. These have been interpreted<sup>2</sup> as standing for Decurio Legionis Sextae (Decurion of the 6th Legion). Another interpretation is given in the Berkeley Church Guide. This reading is: 'The century of  $\text{D}$  CL(audius) VI(talis) or VI(ctoris)', or some such name beginning VI.

Now it is generally assumed and Professor I. A. Richmond has stressed that it is highly improbable that the 6th Legion ever operated in the Berkeley area. Nor is a decurio a legionary officer, but one attached to cavalry. Further, legion is usually represented by Leg., not by L. So, after thorough examination and investigation, Mr R. P. Wright has made what is undoubtedly the correct reading, viz. the number 656, made up of the symbols D(500), C(100), L(50), VI(6).

What this number means or indicates is at present unknown. An A.D. date 656 is a significant one in Saxon history. A year earlier the great King Penda of Mercia was slain, as was his son Paeda in 656. In that year another son, Wulfhere, became king and he went on with the building of the great monastery of Medeshamstede (Peterborough) which his brother began. Berkeley in Hwiccean territory was under the influence of Mercia since Penda defeated Cynegils of Wessex at Corinum in 628. An early Saxon church preceded the present one in Berkeley, but we have no record of its foundation. As, however, the use of A.D. dates did not become general in England until about the close of the 8th century, dates before that being expressed in the cycle of indiction, a cycle of 15 years instituted by Constantine the Great from the year A.D. 313, it is unlikely that this figure stamp represents a Saxon date copied from the Roman style. Mr Wright is quite convinced that the stamped brick is truly Roman, having the ansate (handle-like) decoration typical of many Roman inscriptions around it (PLATE XII).

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<sup>1</sup> Haverfield, *VCH Somerset*, p. 1285.

<sup>2</sup> *Trans. BGAS*, xiv, p. 3; xxviii, p. 3; *Proc. CNFC*, vi (1872) p. 61.



PLATE XII. A Berkeley Tile

*facing* p. 302