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[Welcome](#) [Our Village](#) [Community Features](#) [Diary](#) [News](#) [Clubs](#) [Businesses](#)

## Features

[History](#)

[Local Writers](#)

..Graham Palmer

..Howard Gibbs

[Aelda](#)

[Last Battle](#)

• [Roman Remains](#)

[Cancer Project](#)

[Phishing by J R Hartley](#)

[Beating the Bounds](#)

[login](#)

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## Roman Remains within the civil parish of Aldbourne

By Howard Gibbs



The distribution of Romano British pottery sherds and coins spanning the first four Centuries AD show a wide scatter over the whole area of what became the civil parish of Aldbourne. It is doubtful if there was a village here, as we understand the word today, but it is likely that there was a scatter of low status wood or cob dwellings though sadly such buildings leave little or no trace. This type of building goes with subsistence farming, not the larger commercial farming associated with the villa farms.

The fact that so much evidence can be found by field walking is due in part to the relatively recent conversion of long established pasture to arable during the two world wars when food production was maximised.

On the site of Aldbourne itself evidence of occupation was found in a small excavation to the north side of West Street that was conducted by Mr Andrew Sewell on the vegetable gardens that belong to a group of thatched cottages set back from the road.

Romano British pottery sherds have been found in the gardens of Pudley Cottage in Castle street and in the garden of Manor farm. Skeletons have been found in Marlborough road and were identified as 4th Century Christians by Mr Bryn Waters who was the archaeologist in charge of the excavations at Littlecote near Hungerford. Some time further back other skeletons were found on this site and were thought to be civil war but it is more likely they were part of the same small Romano British cemetery.

We all think of Roman Villas as the epitome of things Roman, but Villa is a generic term for the farms of that period, they can be any size from two or three rooms with a connecting corridor to the high status house with painted walls, mosaics, under-floor heating and bath suites. There are four, possibly five Romano British farms in the parish and none have been excavated. Passmore identified these between the wars and Mr Walters post-war. A coin hoard of some 5,000 in number was found near one site by a local field walker and a local metal-detectorist assisted in finding the remainder, which had been scattered by the plough. It is likely these coins came from a high status establishment and was the result of a robbery, buried in haste around 274AD, which was a period of unrest in Britain at this time. The coin of Gallienus pictured above is typical of the hoard's contents and picture below is the hoard as lifted and prior to any examination or cleaning.





*Pic 1 The Aldbourne hoard found by a sharp-eyed field walker*

Ermin Street runs on the northern border of the parish. It ran from Cirencester (Corinium) though to Speen (Spinis) then on to Silchester (Caleva Atribatum). A minor road run from Bishopstone through to Ramsbury, it's route through the village is by way of Peaks track along the back of Lottage Road council houses, across the Green and the Square, through Butts and Southward Lane and across the common. Another may have left the Square where the entrance to Barnes coach yard is now, avoiding the twists and turns of the present Castle Street and emerges as a bank which runs parallel for a few hundred yards to the present tarmac road in front of the nineteenth century cottages. See pic 2. It continued on the line of the modern road on leaving the village. See pic 3.



*Pic 2 Castle Street Bank*





*Pic 3 The Road to Marlborough*

On leaving the tarmac road it continues into the fields as a terrace that can be seen running diagonally down the hill. See pic 4.



*Pic 4*

It is then lost either to erosion or plough, as there was little or no metaling it is difficult to know where this road went, or indeed if it was ever finished. Some years ago when a trench for a new water main was being dug quite close to the public conveniences which were constructed in the same pattern as the stonework of the Littlecote Roman villa. Whether this means that a more substantial Roman building awaits discovery is open to conjecture.



*Pic 5 Looking down a Roman well situated on the Northern edge of the Parish*

I am indebted to other local historians for valuable information, which has helped with this article.

HOWARD GIBBS

*Howard Gibbs*

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[\[ Home \]](#) [\[ Village \]](#) [\[ Community \]](#) [\[ Diary \]](#) [\[ News \]](#) [\[ Features \]](#) [\[ Clubs \]](#) [\[ Businesses \]](#) [\[ Links \]](#)

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