

A ROMANO-BRITISH VILLA AT HIGH WYCOMBE

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THE excavations recorded here were done by the Ancient Monuments Branch of the Ministry of Works in the autumn of 1954 in advance of building operations by the Borough of High Wycombe. The work was directed at first by Mr. R. R. Inskeep and later by the writer.¹ Reasonably complete examination of the available area ensured a record of the main buildings of the villa; but it is certain that there were some Roman structures outside these limits, and it now seems unlikely that they will ever be excavated. All the material from the excavations is in the Borough Library and Museum at High Wycombe.

THE SITE AND THE PREVIOUS EXCAVATIONS

The villa was close to the W. Bank of the River Wye, half a mile S. of the centre of the modern town (National Grid TQ/873923; O.S. 25 in. Sheet Bucks. XLVII.2), in the midst of public playing-fields now known as the Rye. Formerly this area was divided into a number of separate pastures including Great Penn Mead, in which the greater part of the villa lay, and Holywell or Halliwell Mead, which was between the villa and the river.²

At High Wycombe the valley of the Wye is narrow, relatively flat, and bounded by steep chalk hills. The valley floor is formed of geologically-recent deposits of alluvium, chiefly gravels with thin layers of peat. At the site of the villa, however, the gravels are capped by a pervious deposit, best described as a chalk marl, which rises slightly above the general level to form a tongue of well-drained land projecting towards the river from the S. side of the valley.

Although the existence of buildings on the site was well known in the Middle Ages, when they were used as quarries for building material, the first record of them dates only from the eighteenth century. In 1722-4 a mosaic floor was discovered by workmen of the Abbey estate.³ Although it excited much curiosity at the time, no extended excavation was done and the site of the discoveries was soon forgotten. Rediscovery came only in 1863, when the villa was partly explored by E. J. Payne. An account of his work was published with somewhat idealised plans vitiated by failure to appreciate the nature of robber-trenches.⁴ The plan of the house was later republished by the local historian, J. Parker, who embellished it with additions to suit his own theories of the position of the eighteenth-century discoveries.⁵ The account in the Victoria County History adds nothing of value, while further excavations under Mr. Francis Colmer in 1932 and later were confined to areas already dug by Payne. No account of the

pre-war work was published and the present location of the finds from these excavations and from the earlier ones is unknown.

SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS OF THE 1954 WORK

Four structures belonging to the Roman villa complex were examined (Fig. 1). These were: (i) a medium-sized house of double-corridor type; (ii) a detached bath-house; (iii) a boundary wall on the S.E. of the site with a gate and gatehouse; and (iv) an outbuilding of uncertain purpose. All were apparently built at the time of the first Roman occupation of the site in the second half of the second century A.D. The baths were extensively modified in the early fourth century, but the other buildings suffered little change. The economic basis of the villa is obscure, and so is its ultimate fate. No evidence of destruction was found, and the latest securely datable object was a worn coin of A.D.320-4.

During the Middle Ages the Roman buildings were extensively plundered of their flints and tiles. Some of this material undoubtedly went into the large post-Roman building which occupied part of the site, while some appears to have been used in the nearby Norman Hospital of St. John the Baptist, which has Roman tile in its walls. Apart from surface traces connected with recent use of the land for allotments, the latest features of the site were ditches containing pottery of the eighteenth century. Finally, though first in point of time, traces of Neolithic use of the site were found. An account of these will be published later.

THE VILLA HOUSE (Fig. 2)

The house faced E.S.E., but to simplify description it is here regarded as facing E. and having its long axis N.-S.

The ground plan of the house was completely recovered. It was an unusually symmetrical and well-planned version of the double-corridor type.⁶ As originally laid out, it had a central range of rooms (I-VI) between two corridors or verandahs (VII and VIII), with two symmetrical wings, each containing three large rooms (IX-XI and XII-XIV). It will be clear from Fig. 2 that the house must have had a central ridge roof ending at the wings, which would have independent ridges of their own, no doubt with gables. To allow for the lighting of the central range, clerestory windows must be postulated above lean-to roofs over the corridors.⁷ The precise treatment of the roofs over the returns of the front corridor is uncertain, but here and everywhere the nature of the roofing is made clear by the large quantities of *tegulae* and *imbrices* in the building debris.

The house was 104 ft. wide, with wings 70 ft. deep overall. All the walls were of unknapped flints set in hard brown mortar. The normal thickness at footings level was 32 in., with a foundation trench 24 in. deep; but it will be seen from the plan that some of the internal walls, and the outer wall of the front corridor, were slightly thinner. Most of the walls had suffered badly from robbing, and frequently even the foundations had been completely removed; but there was, nevertheless, no difficulty in tracing them (Pl. I). It is uncertain whether the walls were carried up to the eaves in flint. There would be no insuperable difficulty about this, and it is noteworthy that some existing buildings in High Wycombe have flint walls only 18 in. thick standing 15 ft. or more



FIG. 1. Site plan showing all trenches.

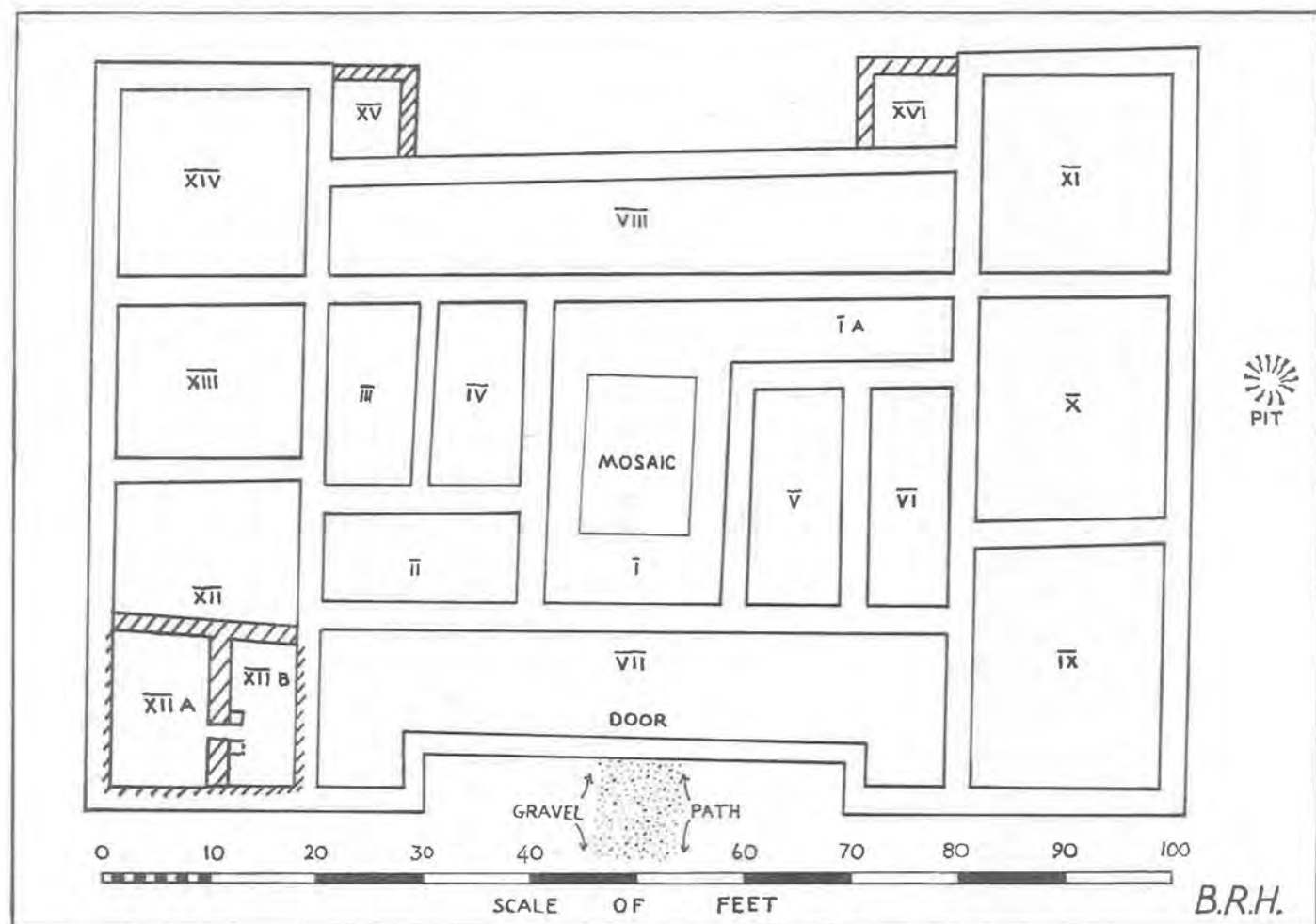


FIG. 2.. The house (additional and rebuilt walls shaded).

high. Certainly no daub of the kind usual in half-timbered walls was found, nor was there any clay which could be interpreted as disintegrated daub or clay walling.

Except in I and the rooms of the N. wing, coarse red tile *tesserae* were used for the floors. They were laid on fine white mortar over a sub-flooring of flints set in brown mortar. Curiously enough, the builders had not stripped the old topsoil before they laid the floors. This was carefully examined over large areas, but only a handful of Romano-British sherds from, at the most, three vessels was found. It is therefore virtually certain that there was no occupation of the site before the building of the house.

Room I, clearly the focus of the house, was graced with a mosaic panel (see p. 251 and Pl. IX) surrounded by a border of tile cubes like those used in the other rooms. A central position is normal for the main room in villas of this class, while the mosaic would be appropriate in a *triclinium*.⁸ Less usual, however, is the corridor-like return in the N.W. corner of the room. This looks very much like an internal service passage designed to facilitate swift arrival of food at table. It should be noted that the flooring of I and Ia was continuous, with no trace of a threshold setting. No doubt a curtain divided them.

There is no direct evidence of the purpose of the five small rooms of the central range (II–VI), though it is tempting to see in them the bedrooms of the house. No other rooms appear to be appropriate in size.

The three large rooms of the N. wing appear to have been given over to domestic quarters. They alone had no permanent, solid floors, and no doubt the planks or rushes used instead would be thought sufficient for servants' rooms. Siting on the N. side of the house is also appropriate. Perhaps a further hint is also afforded by the presence outside this wing of the only pit found. This was filled with domestic refuse, though it may well have been dug as a latrine, of course. If Room X was the kitchen, as the passage to Room I suggests, the other rooms would be adequate as communal living and sleeping accommodation for the servants.

The S. wing originally had three large rooms, all with floors of tile cubes. (There was no mosaic in XII, as earlier excavators thought.) It is likely that the floors in XII and XIII had been renovated, as the individual cubes were larger than in the other rooms and often had exposed box-tile scoring, elsewhere carefully concealed. In the filling of the robber-trench between XIII and XIV was a length of quarter-round moulding of the kind used as a fillet at the junction of floors and walls. Nowhere, however, was there any trace of mortar on the edges of the cube floors. It is true that it could have come from Room XIIa, where the upper floor had entirely vanished, but the possibility of the use of such a moulding at the junction of wall and ceiling is worth considering. The S. wing would naturally have been chosen for the living-rooms of the house: that this was so is confirmed by the subsequent insertion of a heated room at the E. end of the wing. Before this was provided the rooms must have been heated by braziers.⁹

Finally, a few general points about the house may be noted. Wall-plaster was used extensively in the central range and the S. wing; none was in position, but the robber-trenches yielded many tiny fragments. No doors were traced,

though one may be inferred in the middle of the front corridor where a gravel path led up to the house. As usual with Romano-British villas, internal and external drainage systems were conspicuously absent.

ALTERATIONS TO THE HOUSE

Two small rooms (XV and XVI) were added at the back of the house in such a manner as to balance the returns of the front corridor. The walls of XVI were standing and they met the original walls in butt joints. They were narrower and more roughly built than the older walls. The room was floored with small, poorly-set tile cubes. Although the walls of XVI had been entirely removed by robbers, there can be no doubt that it was also an addition, as its foundation trenches were shallower than those of the original house and were separated from them by ridges of undisturbed subsoil. Presumably the two additions were contemporary.

The only other alteration traced was the insertion of a hypocaust, stoked from a small room to the N. (XIIb), in the E. end of XII. That part of XII chosen for the hypocaust and stoke-hole had been excavated to the bottom of the wall foundations and then, as the foundations were loose, they had been faced internally with broken tiles set in hard *opus signinum* (Pl. VII). The other walls of XIIa and b were then built and butted against the original walls. Only the flue was left to show that the inserted room was a hypocaust, though *pilæ* were apparently still in position in the nineteenth century.¹⁰ The hypocaust was modified soon after it was added, perhaps because the lack of a good through draught from the internal stoke-hole led to difficulty in firing. A new *opus signinum* floor was put down in the basement on a layer of flints, raising the floor level by 8 in. This operation must have involved the complete removal of the suspended floor and the *pilæ*, and it is also clear that the wall-flues were modified at the same time, since many of the roller-stamped box-tiles used in the first version were incorporated in the second basement floor or strewn around the stoke-hole.¹¹ At the same time the level of the stoke-hole had also to be raised, and a rough mortar floor was laid at the new level. Fortunately, the ash and rubbish lying on the old floor was not removed when the new one was made. The pottery in this deposit (Group A, p. 246) suggests a date late in the second century, or early in the third century for the alterations. It is possible that the new suspended floor was decorated with a mosaic. Both the nineteenth-century excavations and the recent ones yielded many small *tesserae* from this general area, and it may well be that the mosaic found in the eighteenth-century was in this room. It is relevant to note that a few small cubes suitable for a mosaic, though never used, were found immediately below the second floor in the stoke-hole. A few of these were cut from late Antonine samian dishes.

Because the floors of the house had all been uncovered before by previous excavators, no significant deposits were found on them. It should, however, be stressed that there were no traces on the floors or surviving walls of the burning that would be expected if the house had been destroyed in a barbarian raid.

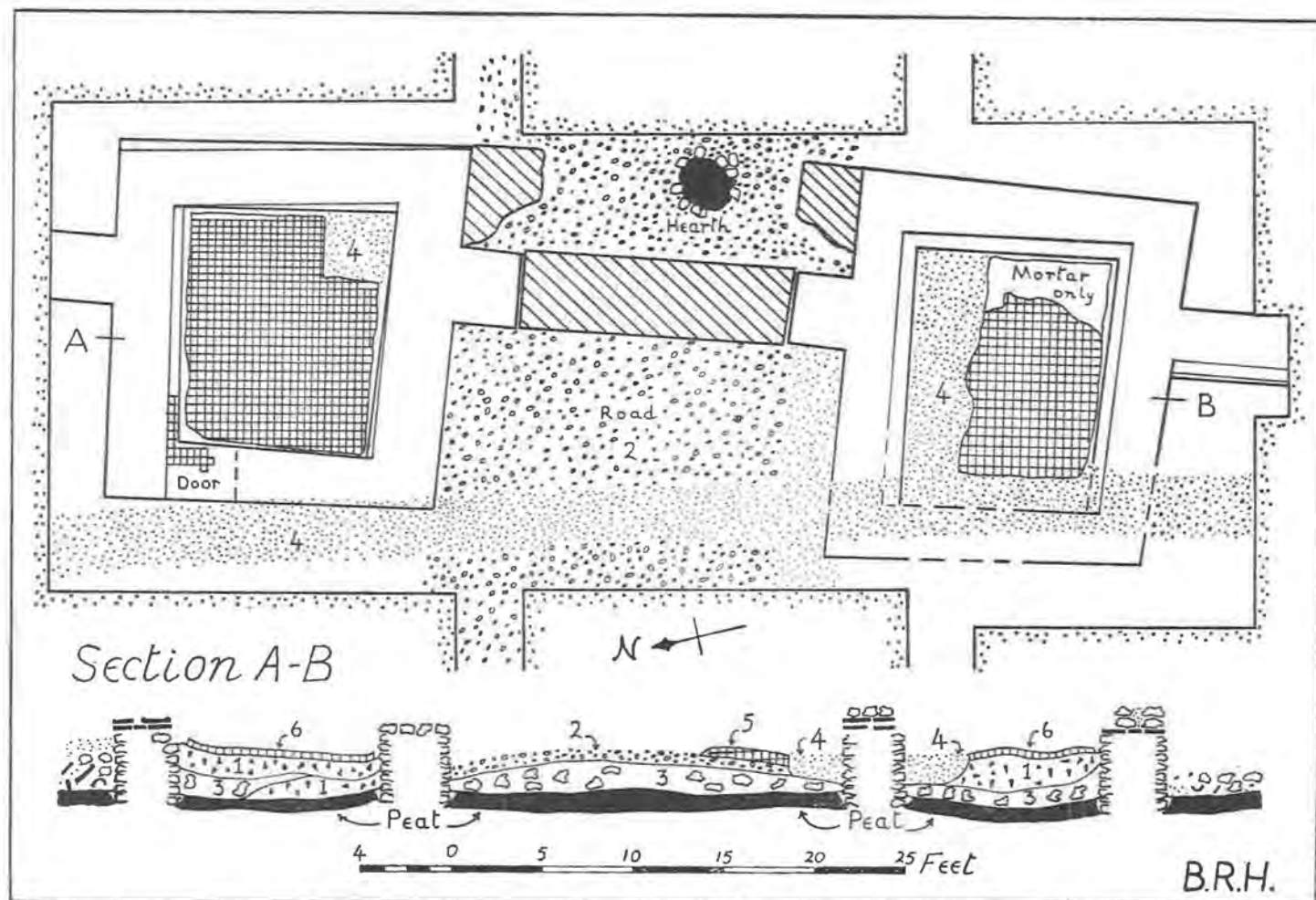


FIG. 3. Plan and section of the gate. Key to symbols: 1. Crushed tile. 2. Gravel and mortar. 3. Chalk marl with flints. 4. Post-Roman interferences. 5. Sandy mortar. 6. Tile cubes.

THE BOUNDARY WALL AND GATE (Fig. 3)

On the E. side of the villa parallel to the long axis of the house and 160 ft. from it was a boundary wall. It was flint-built, but apparently had no tile bonding, since tiles were only associated with it in the immediate vicinity of the gate. The wall was 3 ft. wide at the footings, but was reduced to 27 in. by two internal offsets. There was no evidence of the nature of the coping. As originally planned, the wall was continuous for at least 106 ft. S. of the gate, into which it was bonded. To the N. it was found 70 ft. from the gate when a water main was laid in the autumn of 1954. On this side it may perhaps have continued as far as the river, since no sign of a return was found in a N.-S. stretch of the water-main trench. The position of the river in the Roman period is not known, and it could have been nearer the villa than it is at present.

A gateway flanked by two small rooms, clearly intended as a porter's lodge, was set in the wall immediately opposite to the centre of the house. It coincided roughly with the edge of the natural chalk marl platform and partly overlapped on to a peat layer itself resting on alluvial gravel. The foundation trenches had been dug through the peat into the underlying gravel, but nevertheless the walls eventually proved unstable. Inside the rooms the floors were laid well above the level of the subsoil on packings of crushed tile and other debris (Fig. 3). The floors were like those of the house—tile cubes set in fine mortar—but the flint sub-flooring was omitted. In the N. room, under which the peat was thickest, the floor had sunk unevenly and at one point was 22 in. below the door threshold, which was marked by *tesserae* still in position on the top of the W. wall. It was presumably the existence of this tessellation and of other cubes resting on the offset of the N. wall that led Payne to state enigmatically that the room was "... paved with common red *tesserae* and had seats of the same". It will be clear that the floors had formerly rested on internal offsets in the walls that reduced them from a width of 36 in. at the footings to 28 in. at the highest surviving level. At the offset were two tile courses, including complete *tegulae* with flanges intact (Pl. IV). The S. room had a lining of tufa-like plaster above the offset, but the N. one had a thick mortar rendering instead. There was no sign of steps in either room, and there is no reason to believe that the structures were gate-towers, as previous writers have thought.¹²

Perhaps the most interesting feature of the gate was the presence of two square responds, bonded into the main structure, one on each side of the entrance and set back 5 ft. from the front of the passage. As no voussours were found in the debris of the gate, the responds presumably carried a wooden lintel as a stop for the top of the gate, which would have had two leaves. Unfortunately, a later wall had removed the hinge pivot-stones and the gate-stop. Allowing for the thickness of the leaves when the gates were open, the passage would have been 10 ft. wide and could, therefore, have admitted a cart without difficulty.

During the use of the gate serious cracks developed in the walls of the flanking rooms because of subsidence of the foundations in the soft subsoil. An attempt to counter this led to the addition of two buttresses at the outer corners of the passage: these were not bonded into the main walls and had a totally different mortar. Finally, a wall was inserted between the responds,

with foundations cut through the latest road surface. A small hearth in the mouth of the gate (Pl. VI) rested directly on the last surface and, as it cannot have been used when the road carried traffic, it would appear that the inserted wall must have blocked access to the gate and was not merely a sleeper wall acting as an additional buttress. At first sight it seems curious that what was obviously the main gate of the villa was blocked in this way, but other evidence makes it clear that the boundary wall was at least partly demolished when the baths were extended in the fourth century (p. 240). The hearth had fourth-century pottery embedded in it (Group C, p. 247).

The road itself consisted of a layer of flints set in compact grey marl, with a cambered top surface and maximum thickness of 16 in. In the passage two later surfaces, of pebbles set in mortary material, were traced, though both had been partly removed in previous excavations. Outside the gate the road continued for at least 20 ft. It would no doubt join a major road down the valley of the Wye, though this and the other parts of the road network that must have existed N. of the Thames have yet to be traced, as a glance at the Ordnance Survey map of Roman Britain will show. Inside the villa enclosure the road was traced for 50 ft., after which it petered out.

Dating evidence for the gate-house, which was of one build with the boundary wall, consists of a few sherds of pottery from below the floors (Group D, p. 247). These belong to the Antonine period, and their presence suggests that the gate and wall were built after the site had been occupied for sufficient time for broken pottery to be lying about in some quantity. It is, of course, impossible to say whether this implies an interval of weeks, months or years after the building of the house. But the pottery from the Roman surface nearby, which was presumably refuse from the occupation of the gate-house, included relatively early Antonine samian, so there is no need to postulate a long interval.

THE BATH-HOUSE (Fig. 4)

There can be no doubt that the most interesting feature of the villa was the unusually large and elaborate bath-house set close to the boundary wall immediately S. of the gate. Structurally, the building appears to have had a relatively simple history, which may conveniently be divided into (a) an initial phase including most of the features to be found in much larger baths (Fig. 6); and (b) modification in detail and the addition of some new rooms (Fig. 7). There is no strict proof that all the alterations were made at one time, but it appears likely that this was so, with the exception of the addition of Room VII. For convenience, the final version of the building will be called Period II, but it must be remembered that the building was heavily robbed in post-Roman times, primarily for the sake of the tiles used in the hypocaust pillars, so that any trace of alterations in the details of the heating system would have been removed. Apart from Room VI, the whole area of the building was stripped.

PERIOD I

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BATH-BUILDING

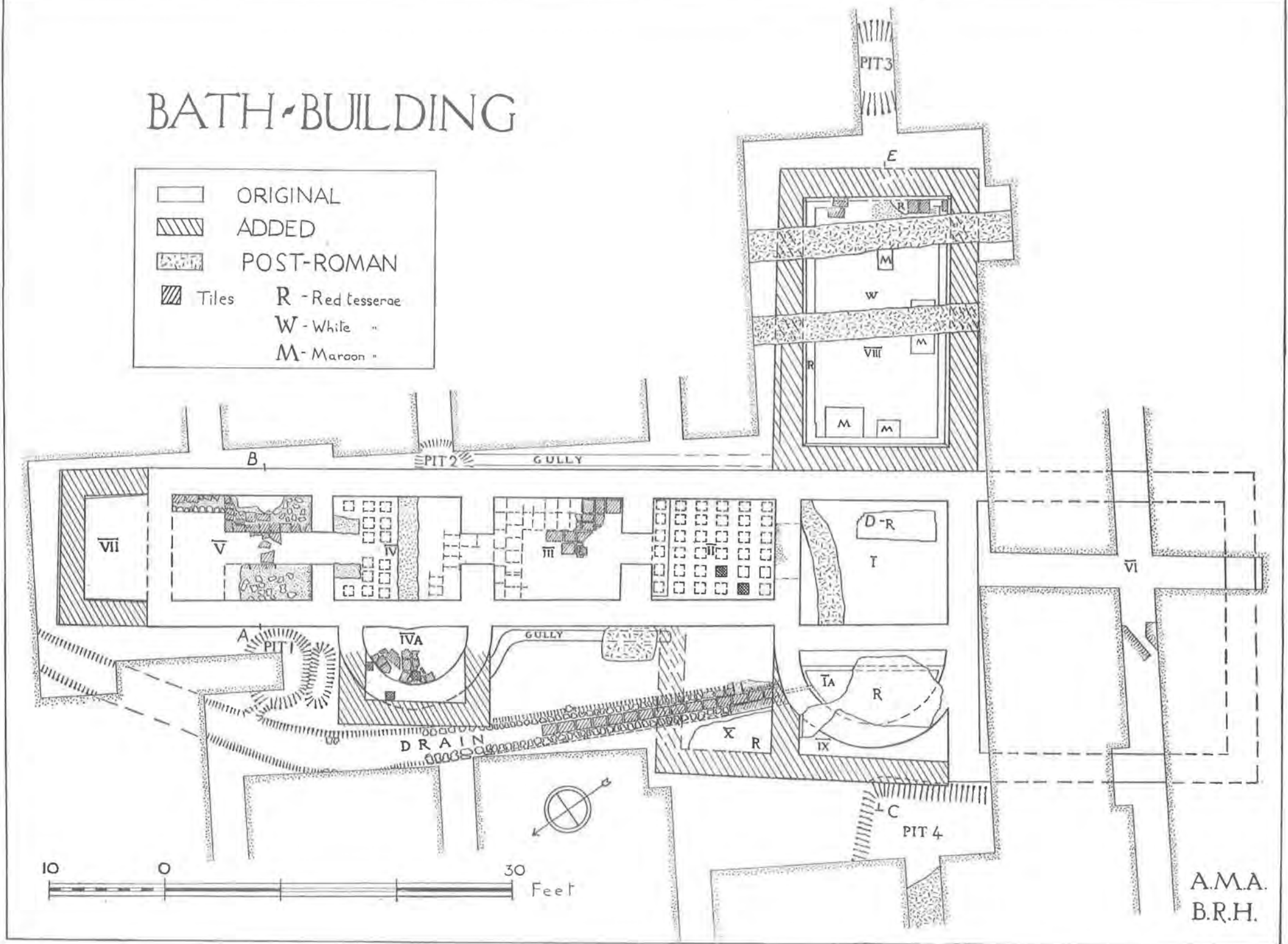


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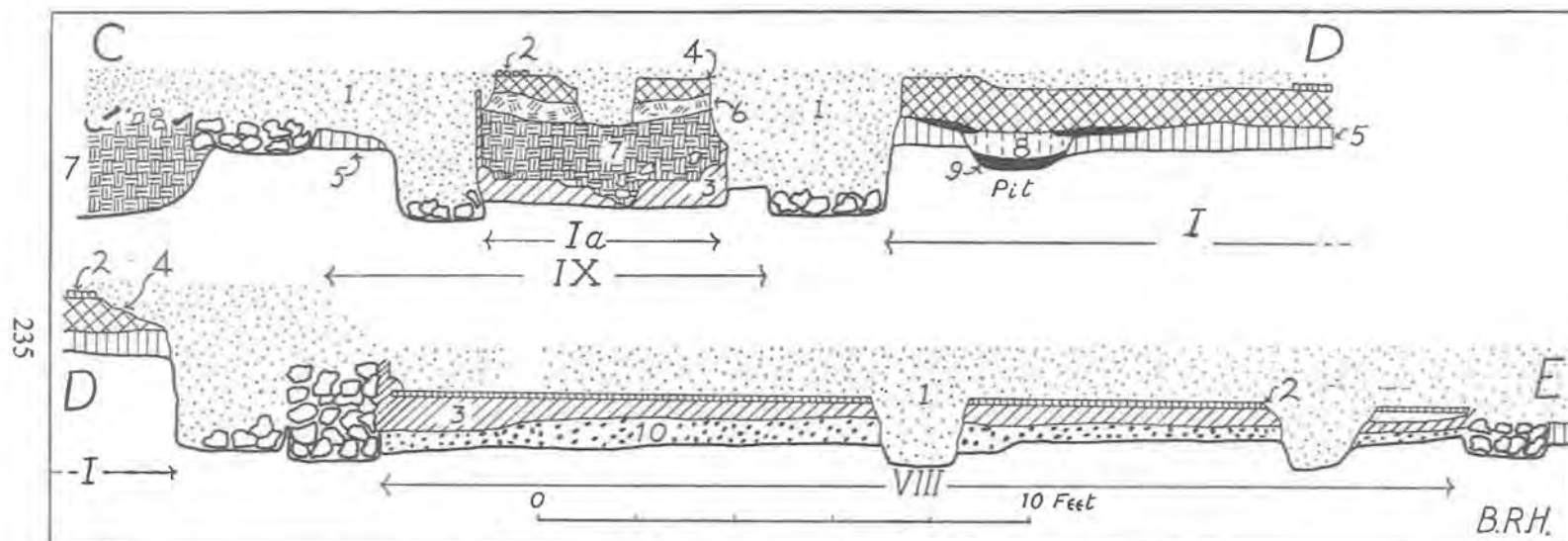


FIG. 5. A section through Rooms IX, Ia, I and VIII of the bath-house. Key to symbols: 1. Post-Roman interferences. 2. *Tesserae*. 3. *Opus signinum*. 4. Sandy mortar. 5. Brown soil. 6. Grey marl. 7. Brown earth with occupation material. 8. Brown earth with tile fragments. 9. Ash. 10. Gravel.

Roman pottery, though there was a small ash-pit, probably of Roman date, best explained as a temporary cooking place used during the construction. It seems probable, therefore, that the bath-house was built at the same time as, or immediately after, the house. The pottery strewn around it on the Roman ground surface dated from the Antonine period onwards.

The building was a straightforward example of the *Reihentyp* arrangement, with a single line of heated rooms (II–IV) served by the same furnace. The walls were of unknapped flints set in very tenacious pink mortar.

Room I was unheated and was a combined dressing room and cold room (*frigidarium*) floored with the customary red tile cubes laid on an inch of pink mortar over brown mortar 6–8 in. thick. Below the mortar was the old topsoil into which was cut the ashpit referred to above (Fig. 5). An apsidal cold-water bath (Ia) opened off the W. side of the room. Its floor, 2 ft. below that of I, was of very tough *opus signinum* 12 in. thick and was furnished with a quarter-round fillet where it met the walls. The water-proof rendering of the walls was of the same material, and was remarkably strong, as it still stood 20 in. high in places although the wall it lined had been bodily removed (Pl. II). A pipe led through the segment wall of the apse into the main drain of the building. That there was formerly a step between I and Ia is clear from the section (Fig. 5), though the sill-wall dividing the two had been removed by robbers. The top of the wall between I and II retained traces of the mortar setting for the door threshold; the E. edge was sharply defined, and, assuming that the door was symmetrical with respect to II, the entrance would have been 29 in. wide. The S. wall of I was common to it and VI, which had a hypocaust. There is, accordingly, no doubt that access to I from outside the building was through a door in the E. wall.

Rooms II–IV formed a sequence of heated rooms, cool, warm, and hot respectively, with temperature controlled primarily by distance from the single furnace at the far end (V). Their details are known only from the basement floors, more or less intact, and the foundations of the cross-walls dividing them, each of which had a central flue. No wall-flues were found in position, though they must have existed, if only to give a through draught for the hypocaust. Indirect testimony to their presence is given by the many box-tile fragments in the debris of all three rooms.

The treatment of the basement floors varied in a remarkable manner, though all were unusually solid and carefully laid. Room II had a mortar floor (of *opus signinum*, as elsewhere in the building), into which a single row of tiles had been let at the N. end. Only two *pila* bases were in position, but the patches of clay packing on which the others had rested were clearly visible on the mortar floor. The original arrangement is restored in Fig. 4, from which it will be seen that the walls of the room must have had offsets to take the edges of the hypocaust tiles spanning the *pilæ*. Only the S. wall stood sufficiently high to show this offset, which was 32 in. above basement level, allowing a thickness of 5 in. for the suspended floor if it was at the same level as the floor of I. The basement of III had been floored entirely with tiles set on mortar. Most of the tiles had been removed, but it was again possible to trace much of the arrangement, though only a single *pila* base was left in position, precariously perched on the edge of

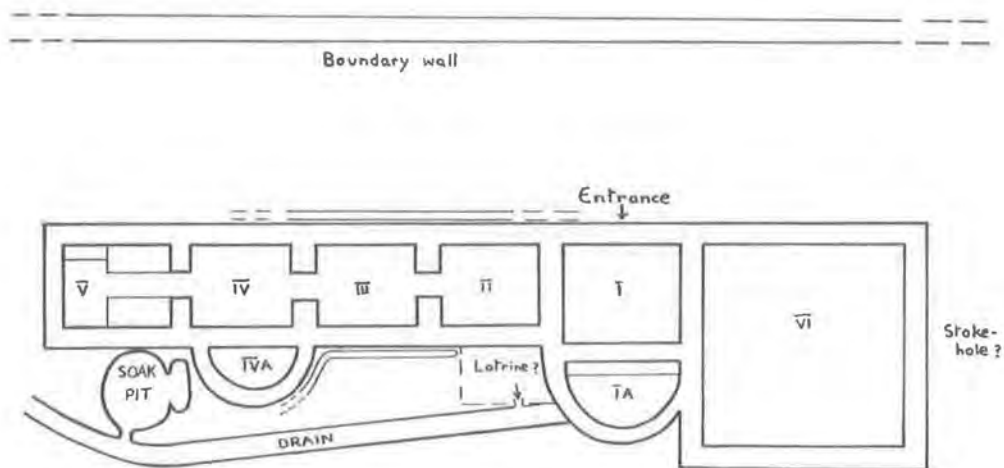


FIG. 6. Sketch-plan of the original bath-house.

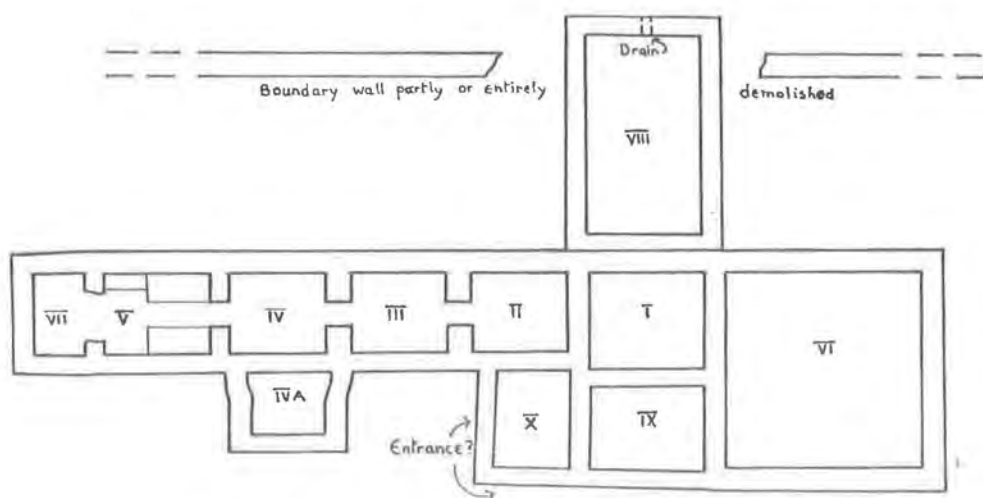


FIG. 7. Sketch-plan of the bath-house in its final state.

a floor-tile that had been partly hacked away by robbers.¹³ The floor of the hot room was treated differently in two portions divided unequally by a flat-topped ridge of mortar an inch high. S. of the ridge, tiles continued through from III; N. of it the floor was of hard mortar and bore slight impressions left by the *pilæ*, which are restored in Fig. 4. The purpose of the ridge of mortar is not clear, though it appears to be related in plan to IVa. It is not apparent how the suspended floor was carried over the ridge, unless *pilæ* stood on it, but there were no tile impressions on its surface. Two roughly rectangular tongues of tile and mortar projected into the basement of IV on each side of the flue, as in many other Roman bath-houses.¹⁴ Apart from helping to prolong the flue and give a better draught, they would also support the inner end of the hot-water tank above the flue. Damp heat was essential in the main series of heated rooms in such a bath-house, and so the tank would have had an exposed surface inside the hot room. Furthermore, a convenient supply of hot water would be necessary for the hot douche which was in IVa, as is shown by the existence of a soak-pit carefully sited to take the waste water and provided with an overflow into the main drain. Room IVa had a tiled basement in the original arrangement, though the two surviving *pilæ* belonged to Period II.

In V there was a massive platform of mortared flints faced with tile on each side of the flue. Between them there was originally a tile floor, but most of the tiles had disintegrated, and hollows had been worn in the underlying subsoil by prolonged raking and shovelling of ash. The platforms took up much of the area of the stoke-hole, leaving a very restricted space at the N. end for the stoker to manœuvre. Although the platforms were badly preserved, each had a pink mortar layer at the N. end, 2 ft. above the bottom of the flue. To the S., the E. one rose higher and here was a packing of flints in marl that probably carried the outer end of the water-tank. The mortar layer was presumably the surface on which the hypocaust attendant stood to replenish the tank. If this interpretation is correct, then a low tile platform against the E. wall, and abutting the tank platform, is explicable as an intermediate step allowing access to that platform. The corresponding area on the W. side of the room was too badly disturbed to determine whether a similar step had existed.

Room VII may suitably be dealt with here, since although it was an addition to the original building involving the demolition of the original N. wall, it is likely to have been added before Period II. The first version of the stoke-hole must have been uncomfortably cramped, and can have afforded no space for storing fuel. The walls of the addition were thinner and less well built than those of Period I, but had pink mortar differing greatly from the characteristic brown mortar of Period II. The entrance to the stoke-hole was not located, nor was there any sign of the steps that must have led into it.

Room VI was separated from the main series of heated rooms by the *frigidarium* (I). As usual, it had been heavily robbed, but fortunately a fragment of the hypocaust was left in the middle of the room. This consisted of two thin flint walls separated by a channel 10 in. wide and backed by a packing of chalk marl. In such a context, this arrangement can only be explained as part of a channelled hypocaust. The builders had dug out the subsoil to hypocaust basement level and laid a thick mortar floor over the whole area of the room

before constructing the hypocaust channels. It is probable, therefore, that the channelled type of hypocaust was chosen quite deliberately for its own sake, and not because labour could have been saved by leaving islands of unexcavated subsoil between the channels. Although time did not allow a search for the stoke-hole, the plan strongly suggests that this would have been centrally placed outside the S. wall. Among the debris left by the robbers were many *tesserae* and a few tiny fragments from a patterned mosaic, probably belonging to a cable border. The purpose of this large room opening off I and heated by its own hypocaust can scarcely be in doubt. Most large bath-houses had a sweating room (*laconicum* or *sudatorium*) in this position, to give an alternative to the more leisurely progression demanded by the series of steam-heated rooms by offering dry heat at high temperature. Other examples of the choice of a channelled hypocaust for such *laconica* are not wanting in rural civilian contexts in Britain.¹⁵ The selection was no doubt governed by the high thermal capacity of the islands between channels.

External features belonging to Period I remain to be described. The drain, leading from Ia past IVa, where it took the overflow from a soak-pit, was found to swing round the N. end of the building, as if making for the boundary wall, under which it would pass to an outfall in the marshy ground to the E. For most of its course, only a flat-bottomed channel cut in the subsoil was left. Near the cold-water bath, however, it was better preserved and still lined with large flints set in mortar. No cover-slabs were left, though the tiled bottom was intact. An inlet on its E. side near Ia must be considered in connection with two shallow gullies 1 ft. wide and 5 in. deep, parallel to the main walls of the building and close to them. These clearly took the eaves-drip in Period I, as the conformity of the W. one to the original apse of IVa demonstrates. But this gully stopped short at a finished end 9 ft. from the segment wall of Ia, implying an intervening roofed structure. The inlet to the drain strongly suggests that this would have been a latrine, the one amenity lacking which is to be expected in a well-found bath-house. Traces of structural remains of this were carefully looked for, but none was found. This means that, if it ever existed, it was a lean-to with slight foundations. Its floor would probably have had to be well above the level of the drain, as access from the bath-house would only have been possible from II. Alternatively, it could have had an external door, though this is, perhaps, unlikely in view of its remoteness from the main entrance.

The roofing system of the building is not as clear as might be wished. A ridge and gable must have been used for II-IV, and its eaves cannot have overhung the walls by more than a few inches, to judge from the position of the eaves-drip gullies. Room I may well have been treated separately, as the position of its W. wall introduces complications. Unfortunately, it was impossible to trace the eaves-drip gullies at the S. end of the building in the time available, so the roofing arrangement of VI remains in doubt. Room VII would probably have had a lean-to roof below the level of the main gable, as there would be ample headroom in the stoke-hole without going to the expense of building high. The two apses would presumably have semi-conical roofs demanding the use of special tiles. None was found, but the roofs would have

been removed in the alterations of Period II. No vaulting voussoirs were present in the debris, and it is clear that there was an external roof of *tegulae* and *imbrices*. The only floor which may be assigned with certainty to Period I was the coarse tessellation of I. Although small red, white and blue-grey *tesserae* abounded in the fillings of III, IV, IVa and VI, these may have come from floors laid in Period II, when they were in any event in use. Externally the walls were rendered with tough *opus signinum*, while painted plaster was used inside in both periods. Replastering and repainting were in evidence (p. 255).

PERIOD II

The main alterations to the building may be dated to the early fourth century on the evidence of a large stratified group of pottery (Group F, p. 247).

The original apse (Ia) was demolished and two unheated rooms (IX and X) added on the W. side of the building, one of them with the new entrance to the baths. Both had floors of tile cubes with quarter-round fillets of *opus signinum* at the junctions with the walls. The foundations were very shallow, and those of the N. wall of X had entirely gone, though the N.W. corner was clear. The walls had soft brown mortar, contrasting sharply with that used in Period I. The addition of VIII must have taken place at the same time, as it was a replacement for the old cold-plunge on a much more lavish scale. The floor, 2 ft. below that of I, was of mortar with a tessellated surface (Fig. 5 and Pl. VIII), red cubes in the border surrounding a rectangle of white. The room had no door, as the walls everywhere stood above floor-level and there was a continuous quarter-round fillet. The walls were rendered with fine mortar, which had been painted with frescoes showing fish, if earlier accounts are to be trusted.¹⁶ No trace of paint was left. The floor had been heavily worn and patched with red *tesserae* and tiles in a very chaotic fashion. External offsets reduced the wall thickness from 30 in. at the footings to 21 in. at the highest surviving point. This implies that there was no heavy superstructure, and it would be easy to employ half-timbering for an unheated room of this kind. The floor sloped slightly to the E. to allow drainage through the E. wall into a large soak-pit. While VIII undoubtedly replaced the old apsidal plunge, its ample size raises the possibility that it was a swimming-bath. If so, the wall between it and I must have stood above the floor of the latter in order to give an adequate depth of water.

Demolition of the boundary wall was necessary when VIII was built and, as the foundations were found to have ragged ends not in contact with the walls of VIII, it appears that the wall went out of commission as an effective barrier. It may even have been demolished completely, leaving the gate-house as an isolated unit (cf. p. 234).

The only other alteration traced was the replacement of the apse of the hot room by a rectangular recess. This still had a hypocaust basement with tile *pilae*. Little additional space was gained by the change and the reason for it is not apparent. A fragment of the upper floor survived in the S.W. corner of the recess. This had ten white *tesserae* embedded in it 27 in. above the basement floor, i.e., about 10 in. below the probable floor-level in II-IV (p. 236). This would be reasonable as a precaution preventing water from the hot douche flowing



PLATE I. Intersection of robber-trench and post-Roman ditch in the N. wing of the house (p. 228).



PLATE II. *Opus signinum* lining of Ia and later tessellation in the baths (p. 240).



PLATE III. Rooms XIIa and b, showing two floor levels and flue (p. 231).



PLATE IV. N. gate-room from the W. (p. 233).



PLATE V. N.W. corner of N. gate-room, showing threshold *tessera* (p. 233).



PLATE VI. Hearth in the gateway (p. 234).



PLATE VII. S. wall of Room XIIa,
showing tile re-facing (p. 231).



PLATE VIII. Room VIII of the baths from the W. (p. 240).

out on to the floor of the hot room. The alteration could not certainly be equated in date with the changes further S, but it was noticed that the mortar used agreed well with that in the walls of IX and X.

WATER SUPPLY

In both periods, and especially in the later one when VIII was in use, considerable quantities of water would be needed to maintain the baths. It is certain that a piped supply was provided, as iron collars from wooden water-pipes were found in the building debris.¹⁷ If the water came from the river, lifting apparatus would have been needed. It is easier to suppose that it was piped from one of the springs which now feed the artificial waterway at the foot of the hill to the S. of the site.

AN OUTBUILDING

The only other villa building with which we came into contact lay to the S. of the baths and projected beyond the boundary wall. It measured 34 ft. by at least 22 ft. 6 in. over the walls, but it was not possible to decide which was the long axis. The mortar was of the same character as that of the boundary wall, so they were probably contemporary, but their junction had been too badly robbed to clinch the matter. No floor was left and there was no hint of the function of the building. Even if it had been aligned N.-S., it would have been too narrow to be an aisled barn.

THE POST-ROMAN FEATURES

On a slightly different alignment from the Roman structures at the S. edge of the site was a large building with walls of knapped flints set in clay. The structural differences suggested that this was not Roman, and satisfactory proof was forthcoming when a tiny scrap of medieval green-glazed pottery and thin tiles with nailholes were found below a pebble floor inside the building. The tiles appear to be similar to those made at the well-known Penn tileries. This might well have been an outbuilding of the Abbey, or perhaps a predecessor of Bassetbury Manor. There was almost no stratified pottery associated with it.

The only other post-Roman features were three parallel ditches crossing the site on approximately the same alignment as the Roman buildings. One of these cut through the rear corridor of the house, another through Room VIII of the baths and the back of the gate-house. All contained pottery ranging from the Roman period to the eighteenth-century. They were presumably boundary or drainage ditches, connected perhaps with the old watercress beds between the villa and the river, or perhaps with the work done in 1722-4 which led to the discovery of the mosaic floor.

DISCUSSION

Enough is now known about the High Wycombe villa from the 1954 excavations to justify some general discussion.

The villa was laid out in the second half of the second century, probably about A.D. 150-170 (p. 246). It appears to have been planned as a self-contained unit at that time and, in contrast with villas like Lockleys¹⁸ or Park Street,¹⁹

and surely Hambleden with its pre-Flavian pottery,³⁰ it did not replace a native farm on the same site.³¹ It will be apparent from the details already given that the owner could afford to build soundly, though not luxuriously, even if he is to be credited with the earliest mosaic floor yet known in a Romano-British villa (p. 253). The whole impression of the site is one of orderliness, solidity and utility.

The provision of the boundary wall on the E., recalling the recommendations of Cato and Varro,³² implies enclosure of the whole villa, after the fashion of Ditchley,³³ though here probably on a much larger scale, since the minimum dimensions possible are 360 ft. by 280 ft. One of the most remarkable things about the site is the apparently complete absence from the vicinity of the house of functional farm structures like drying ovens, threshing floors or manure pits, not to mention barns or stables. There could be no more complete contrast to the squalid surroundings of the villa at Hambleden.³⁴ Presumably, then, the house was surrounded by a garden, or orchards. There would, of course, still be plenty of room inside the boundary wall for the farm buildings, always assuming that there were some, and it is possible that the building S. of the baths was one of them. There also appears to have been a building between the house and the river in Halliwell Mead, though this may not have been a farm building, as it is said to have had a floor of tile *tesserae*.³⁵ It is not clear whether a flint floor found in this general region a decade or so ago belonged to the same structure.³⁶ Unfortunately our ignorance of the workaday buildings of the villa makes discussion of its economic basis impossible. Indeed, the only object found which could have any bearing on this was a pruning hook (Fig. 10, 6).

Nevertheless, it is possible to deduce something of the life of the villa from the large and well-provided bath-house. This was far too large to be intended solely for the use of those living in the house.³⁷ And, indeed, its independence from it could scarcely be more marked, even to the extent of an entrance on the side away from the house in Period I. It was surely intended as an estate bath-house, provided for the use of farm workers, if only on holidays,³⁸ as well as for the household. It is tempting to wonder whether this means that the occupier of the house was a bailiff. The owner must surely have been a man of means who might well have been expected to provide a bath-suite for the use of his family in the house itself.³⁹ However that may be, it is at least clear that the size of the baths implies a considerable population on the estate, which must have been a working farm, whether agricultural, pastoral or of mixed economy.

The late history of the villa remains obscure. There is a curious contrast between the fourth-century elaboration of the baths and the final simple state of the house, though there are obviously several possible interpretations of the fact. The refurbished bath-house was clearly used for a considerable time, as the several patchings of the floor of Room VIII demonstrate, but it is also clear that characteristic late fourth-century pottery is not present on the site, while it is relevant to recall that the latest coin recorded is one of Constantine I. Unfortunately, palaeomagnetic samples from the hypocausts proved of no value for dating the last firings.³⁰

Finally, it must be stressed that there was no sign of a violent end to the occupation of the villa. It is at least feasible that the final abandonment was a result of economic changes.

¹ Thanks are due to all who helped in the work, especially to our two assistants, Mr. A. M. Apsimon and Mr. M. J. Needham. Our foreman, Mr. A. B. Snowling, and his colleague, Mr. R. Mallett, were splendidly helpful throughout, and so were the many volunteers who worked on the site. Finally, the kindly co-operation of many Borough officials must be acknowledged, especially that of Mr. Andrews, Superintendent of Parks, and of Mr. F. L. Mayes, Borough Librarian. The writer is indebted to Miss J. Liversidge, Dr. D. J. Smith and Mr. G. C. Boon for their valuable contributions to the report.

² *Records of Bucks.*, III, p. 164.

³ *Ibid.* and *V.C.H., Bucks.*, II, p. 18.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ J. Parker, *The Early History and Antiquities of Wycombe* (1878), p. 3.

⁶ See Collingwood, *Archæology of Roman Britain*, pp. 119–23, for a discussion of the type.

⁷ The reconstruction drawing of the Park Street villa in the late second century (*Arch. J.*, CII, p. 58) gives a good general idea of the appearance of the High Wycombe house.

⁸ For a large central room with mosaic, cf., for instance, Gayton Thorpe (*Norfolk Arch.*, XXIII, part ii).

⁹ As in many town and country houses in Roman Britain. The Ditchley villa, for example (*Oxoniensia*, I, p. 24ff.), was never provided with a heated room at all. Hearths are not normally found in living rooms, and fireplaces in the modern sense are excessively rare.

¹⁰ *Records of Bucks.*, III, p. 162.

¹¹ These were Lowther Group 5 (A. W. G. Lowther, *A study of the patterns on Roman flue-tiles*, Fig. 12, no. 12).

¹² *V.C.H., Bucks.*, II, p. 17.

¹³ Implying that the basement was already partly filled with debris when the robbing was done.

¹⁴ As at Caerwent (J. Ward, *Romano-British Buildings and Earthworks*, p. 197).

¹⁵ The *laconicum* of the bath-suite in the Llantwit Major villa, for instance, is a good example (*Arch. Cambr.*, CII, p. 109).

¹⁶ *V.C.H., Bucks.*, II, p. 17, for a fish "resembling a roach".

¹⁷ These were of the type normal in Romano-British towns and less commonly found on rural sites, as at Bignor. The diameter of the collars was slightly under 4 in.

¹⁸ *Ant. J.*, XVIII, p. 339ff.

¹⁹ *Arch. J.*, CII, p. 21ff.

²⁰ *Arch.*, 71, p. 141ff.

²¹ Though the presumed Iron Age earthwork on the hill S. of the villa (*V.C.H. Bucks.*, II, p. 18) may have been its predecessor, if it was a farmstead.

²² Cato, *De agri cultura*, XV; Varro, *Rerum rusticarum*, XIV, 1.

²³ *Oxoniensia*, I, p. 24ff.

²⁴ *Op. cit.*

²⁵ *V.C.H., Bucks.*, II, p. 18.

²⁶ Verbal information from Mr. Andrews.

²⁷ The area of the heated rooms was approximately 730 sq. ft., comparing with 420 sq. ft., 370 sq. ft. and 310 sq. ft. respectively for the bath-suites of the villas at Llantwit Major, Spoonley Wood and Chedworth.

²⁸ Columella, *De re rustica*, I, vi, 19.

²⁹ Most large villas have bath-suites in the main house, sometimes there is a detached bath-house as well, as at Folkestone or Castledykes, near Ripon. The whole subject of villa baths is one of immense interest, and a complete reappraisal of the evidence is being carried out by Mr. J. M. Younge of Leeds University.

³⁰ *Antiquity*, XXXII, p. 176.

THE FINDS

A. POTTERY (Figs. 8 and 9)

Very little stratified pottery was found. The house and the bath-house each yielded one major group. These and a few smaller groups are described below. In contrast, there was a large quantity of unstratified material, mostly very fragmentary. As this does not add to the dating evidence, it will not be described in detail, except for a few sherds of intrinsic interest.

The earliest datable pottery is samian of Hadrianic-Antonine type. There is relatively little of this, however, and it is probable that the vessels concerned are ones

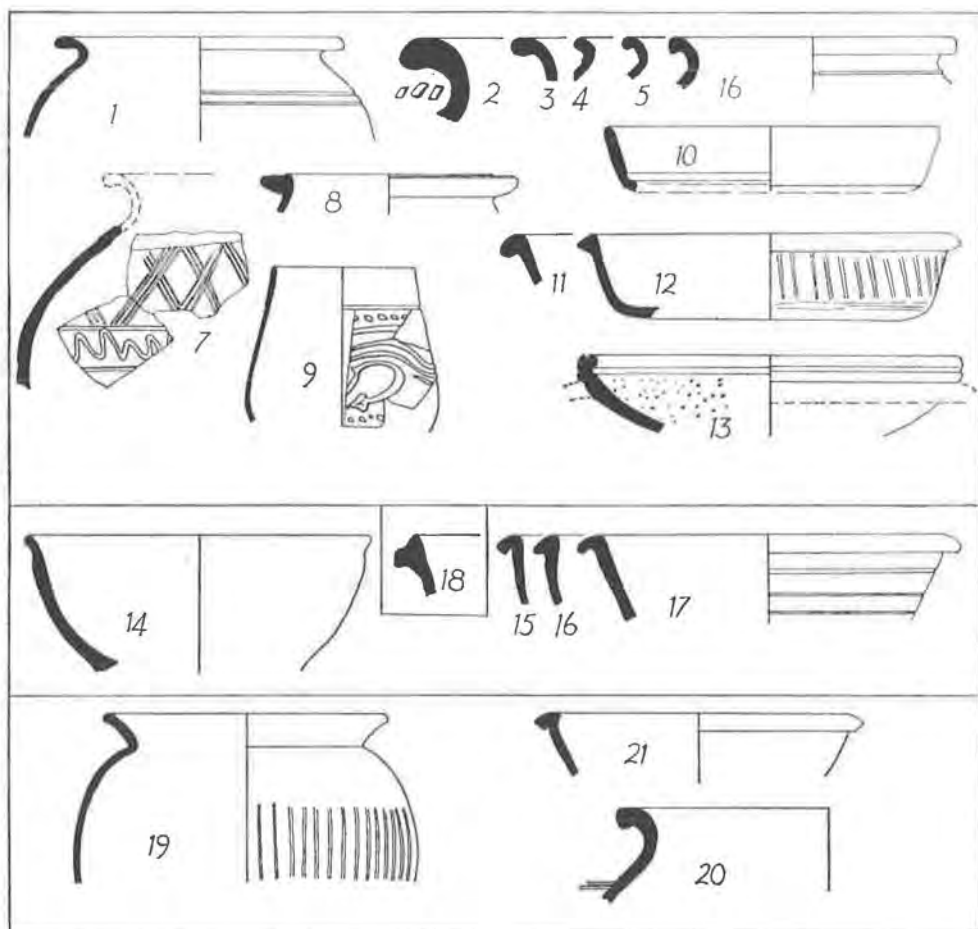


FIG. 8. Course pottery ($\frac{1}{4}$).

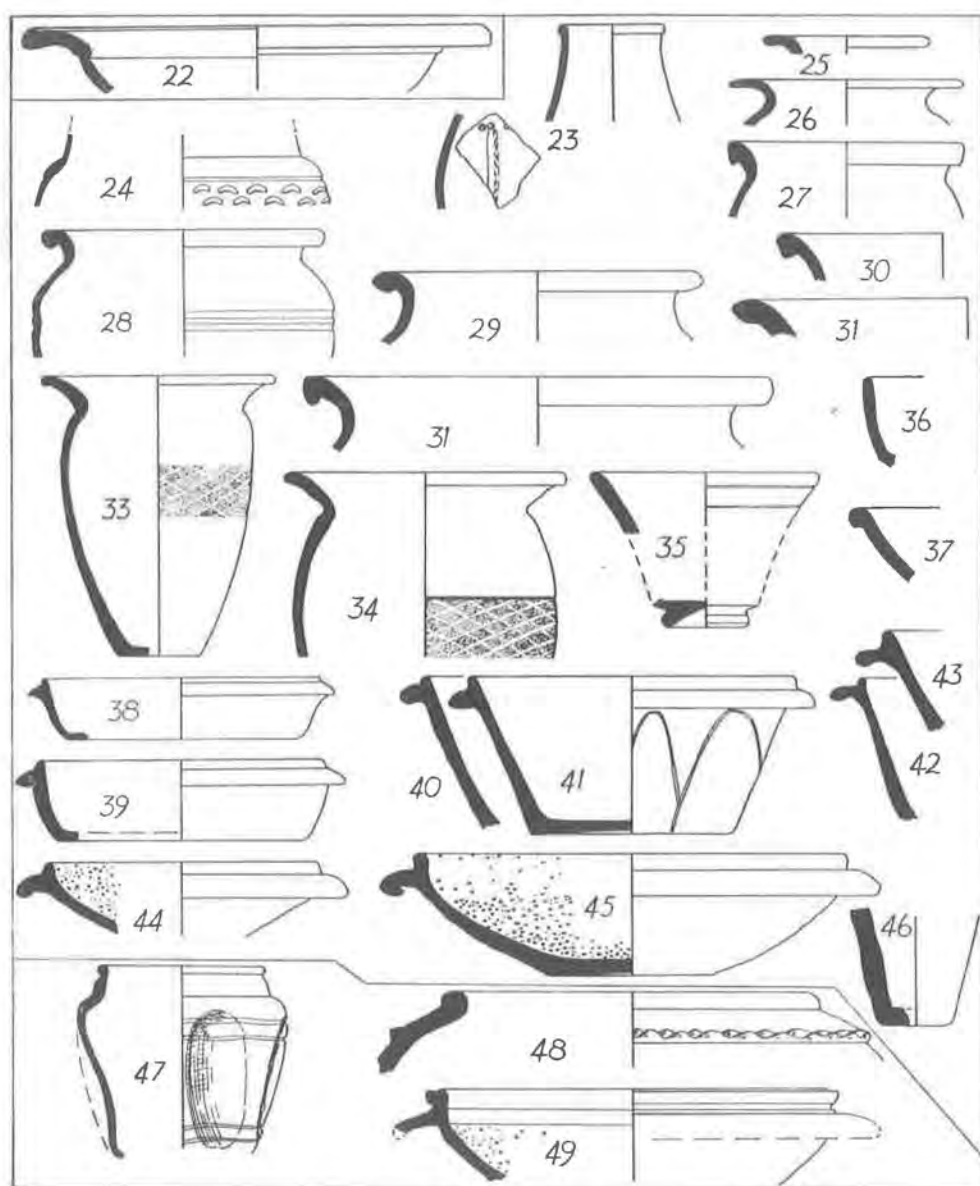


FIG. 9. Course pottery ($\frac{1}{4}$).

which had been in use for some years before being brought to the villa. An initial date c. A.D. 150-170 would best fit the evidence. At the other end of the range there is nothing among the unstratified pottery necessarily later than Group F from the bath-house, though some red colour-coated ware imitating samian forms 38 and 45 could perhaps be later.

None of the colour-coated ware certainly comes from the Nene Valley or Colchester kilns. Instead, there is much red or brown coated ware generally similar to some New Forest products but more closely related to the types made at Sandford (*Archæologia*, LXXII, pp. 225ff.) and Dorchester (*Oxoniensia*, I, p. 81ff.) and other Oxfordshire sites. None of this ware was found in Group A (late second to early third century), but it is well represented in Group F (late third to early fourth century).

Almost all the mortaria are of Bushe-Fox type 142/6 and are in hard buff fabric with white, pink and light brown translucent grits, always well rounded. This is a distinctively southern form which is especially common in the vicinity of the Thames. It was certainly made at Sandford (loc. cit.) and apparently also at Headington (*Oxoniensia*, XVII/XVIII, p. 224). The type clearly had a long life, as it was present in both Groups A and F, but it is not yet known how significant the variations in precise forms are chronologically. Even the second-century ones never seem to have a potter's stamp.

The jars and cooking-pots are almost all in hard grey fabrics, though a few black-burnished pieces appear in the late groups. The second-century cooking-pots in the latter fabric, which are so common in the Midlands and north, are not present. Amphora fragments were only found in the early groups.

The Oxfordshire kilns already mentioned clearly account for much of the pottery, but it seems probable that some of the coarse ware in the early groups came from Fulmer (see nos. 3, 4, etc.), while two vessels in hard white ware are akin to the products of the Verulamium "Pit 6" kilns. The centres that mass-produced the late black-burnished ware account for a dozen vessels (cf. nos. 33, 34).

STRATIFIED GROUPS

Descriptions of form are not given for vessels that are illustrated.

GROUP A. *From the primary floor of the stoke-hole in Room XIIb of the house.*

1. Hard grey with slight surface burnish. *Hambleton* 162. 2. Hard purplish grey. Stabbed decoration on the neck. Diam. c. 12 in. 3. Grey-brown sandy fabric with light grey core. Diam. 8 in. Cf. *Fulmer* 8d. 4-6. All hard sandy grey with black surface. Diams. 4½, 5 and 6 in. respectively. Cf. *Fulmer* 91 as a parallel for no. 4. 7. Red-brown fabric with thick grey core. A broad, flat cordon on the shoulder. *Fulmer* 12. 8. Hard granular whitish buff. Fabric and form are reminiscent of *Verulamium* PIT 6, type 6. 9. White fabric with slightly metallic-looking colour-coat, brown outside, greenish blue inside. Fragments of another similar. Cf. *Gillam* 80 and the remarks below. 10. Orange-brown fabric with black, burnished surface. The internal groove is reminiscent of the ancestral Gallo-Belgic forms. Two more similar, but without grooves. 11 and 12. Brown fabric, grey core and black, burnished surface. Five others in similar ware, but mostly with latticed decoration. The form is a very common second-century one, made at Hedgerley, Fulmer and no doubt at other kilns in the area. 13. Hard, buff. Translucent pink and light brown grit. The flange would be like *Hambleton* 122. This is no doubt a Thames Valley product, though rather more elaborate than the other mortaria of this class from the site.

Samian forms 31 (nine), 33 (two), 36 (one) and 38 (one), all Central Gaulish ware of the Antonine period.

Most of the pottery in the group, including all the samian, is Antonine. But the

typologically latest piece (no. 9) has good third-century parallels in the north. However, the northern dated series is primarily based on the Nene Valley colour-coated types, and it is not impossible that this piece, with fabric which does not quite match known Nene Valley products, is from a southern centre not exporting to the north. If this is so, the chronology of the form may not be precisely the same as in the north. Nevertheless, it is difficult to believe that this beaker could be earlier than A.D. 190, and a *terminus post quem* of A.D. 190–200 may be suggested for the group. This means that most of the pottery must be residual. However, none of it is likely to be pre-Antonine, and it may well be that Dr. Corder's date for the Fulmer kilns (*Records of Bucks.*, XIV, part 3, p. 156) needs slight modification. It is, however, noteworthy that the Fulmer type of reeded rim carinated bowl is entirely absent from the site.

GROUP B. *From the rubbish pit outside the N. wing of the house.* 14. Coarse sandy buff; hand-made. An instance of the survival of the Iron Age A tradition into the Roman period. Such hand-made vessels occur sporadically in the lowland zone throughout the Roman period (cf. *Proc. Camb. Ant. Soc.*, XLIX, p. 47, 5). 15. Grey, sandy. Diam. 7 in. 16. Buff-brown, sandy. Diam. $7\frac{1}{2}$ in. 17. Red-brown with thick black core; burnished horizontal grooves. These three vessels belong to the same general class as nos. 11 and 12, though they are perhaps later typologically. They probably belong to the late second or early third century, so no. 14 is likely to have been made at the same date.

GROUP C. *From the hearth outside the villa gateway.* 18. Sandy brown with grey core and black surface wash. Diam. 7 in. *Hambleton* 146. Not closely datable, but clearly of the late third or fourth century. A fragment from a colour-coated bulbous beaker with white paint from the same place.

GROUP D. *From the packing below the floor of the N. gate-room.* 19. Sandy buff-grey with thick brown core. A southern version of the familiar black-burnished cooking-pot of the Midlands and north. This jar does not seem to have been made at any of the known local kilns, though a vessel of the same general form was found at *Hambleton* (161). Without dated parallels it is difficult to be sure of the date of this piece, though the general shape would be more at home in the early or mid-Antonine period. 20. Hard grey, thick orange-brown core. 21. Grey sandy fabric with grey-brown core. The incurved rim and triangular section recall *Fulmer* 3.

The samian from this group (form 37—in the style of Stanfield's X-5, and form 31) is as early as anything from the site. Nos. 19 and 21 have an early "feel", while no. 20 is too featureless to be helpful. Nothing in the group need necessarily be later than the earliest material from the house.

GROUP E. *From the soak-pit near the hot apse of the bath-house.* 22. Orange-brown, with surface coat including mica. *Sandford* 11 is close in form, though without the up-turned lip. This is a variant of the general class of third- and fourth-century dishes based ultimately on samian form 36, but here with the rim of *Curle* 15.

GROUP F. *From Pit 4, partly sealed by the extension of the bath-house.* 23. Rim and body fragment from a bulbous beaker in orange-brown with chocolate colour-coat. Long, narrow indentations and small circular stamps on the body. 24. Orange-brown fabric with matt red colour-coat. Barbotine crescents on the body. 25. Grey, burnished surface. 26. Sandy buff with black (bituminous?) coat. Another in grey sandy fabric. 27. Sandy buff. 28. Dark grey with thick red-brown core. 29. Red-brown, grey core, black surface. 30. Black, calcite-gritted fabric. 31. Red-brown, calcite-gritted fabric with thick grey-brown core. 32. Grey with burnished surface. 33. Standard black-burnished fabric. 34. As last. 35. Orange-brown with matt surface. 36. Black-burnished fabric. Diam. 7 in. 37. Orange fabric with patchy red surface. Diam. 10 in. 38. Grey with grey-brown core. 39. Grey with black, lightly burnished surface. 40. Black with

grey-brown core. 41. Black-burnished fabric. 42. Grey-brown with a thick orange-brown core. Diam. $7\frac{1}{2}$ in. 43. Grey with sandwich of red-brown enclosing a grey core; black surface wash. 44. Grey-brown with red coat internally and buff exterior. 45. Hard buff; brown and white translucent grit. 46. Coarse, sandy buff-brown.

Parallels have not been offered for individual pieces in this important group, as the date depends on the presence of the flanged bowls and dishes (nos. 38–43) and the black-burnished cooking-pots (33 and 34). These make it certain that the deposit belongs to the late third or the fourth century, especially as there were several more examples of each type. The late black-burnished cooking-pots had a wider distribution than the second-century ones in the same fabric, and they have frequently been found on sites in the south. The northern dating evidence is relevant. The types are *Gillam* 147 and 148, which are dated A.D. 290–370. The flanged bowls are the developed type which would best fit a fourth-century date. On the other hand, there are no characteristic late fourth-century types, and a few vessels, such as nos. 44 and 45, could scarcely be much later than the beginning of the century. A general date of c. A.D. 300–325 is likely. The presence of local types of colour-coated ware, such as 24, 35 and 37, is interesting, though it is noticeable that the proportion of such vessels is rather low and that the bulk of the pottery is self-coloured ware from local kilns. The complete form of no. 46 is uncertain.

UNSTRATIFIED POTTERY

47. Light brown fabric with grey core. (From the bath-building.) There were several other examples of the type, which is presumably from a local kiln working in the second century. 48. Sandy grey-brown fabric. No parallels have been noted for this interesting vessel. The fabric seems to be typical of the second-century groups at the site. (From the house.) 49. Rather soft buff fabric; translucent grit. This is likely to be a Thames Valley product in view of the grit, but the form is more elaborate than usual.

B. COINS

All the eight coins found were unstratified. Mr. G. C. Boon, F.S.A., contributes the following report:

1. Septimius Severus (*denarius*), A.D. 200–201. Rev. **RESTITVTOR VRBIS**. Mint of Rome. Mattingley and Sydenham, *R.I.C.* 167a. Unworn.
 2. Gallienus (*antoninianus*), A.D. 260–268. Rev. **PROVID AVG**. Mint of Milan, $\frac{1}{2}$ *R.I.C.* 508a. Worn.
 3. Claudius II (*antoninianus*), A.D. 268–270. Rev. **VICTORIA AVG**. Mint of Rome $\frac{1}{2}$ *R.I.C.* 107. Much worn.
 4. Tetricus (*antoninianus*), A.D. 270–273. Rev. **PAX AVG**. *R.I.C.* Worn, defaced.
 5. *antoninianus* with uncertain reverse. Worn.
 6. Probus (*antoninianus*), A.D. 276–282. Rev. **PAX AVG**. Mint of Lyons, $\frac{1}{11}$ *R.I.C.* 91. Worn.
 7. Carausius (*antoninianus*), A.D. 287–293. Rev. **PAX AVG**, vert. sc. Mint of London, $\frac{81}{100}$ *R.I.C.* 118. Worn.
 8. Constantine I, A.D. 320–324. Rev. **VIRTVS EXERCIT**. Mint of Trier, $\frac{79}{178}$ (Maurice, *Numismatique Constantienne*, 6th issue of Trier, reverse 8, obverse 1.)
- For other coins from the site, ranging from Nerva, cf. *Records of Bucks.*, III.

C. SMALL OBJECTS. (Fig. 10).

All the small objects were unstratified. None was of exceptional interest, and only a small number has been selected for illustration. Miss June Perry has kindly made the drawings.

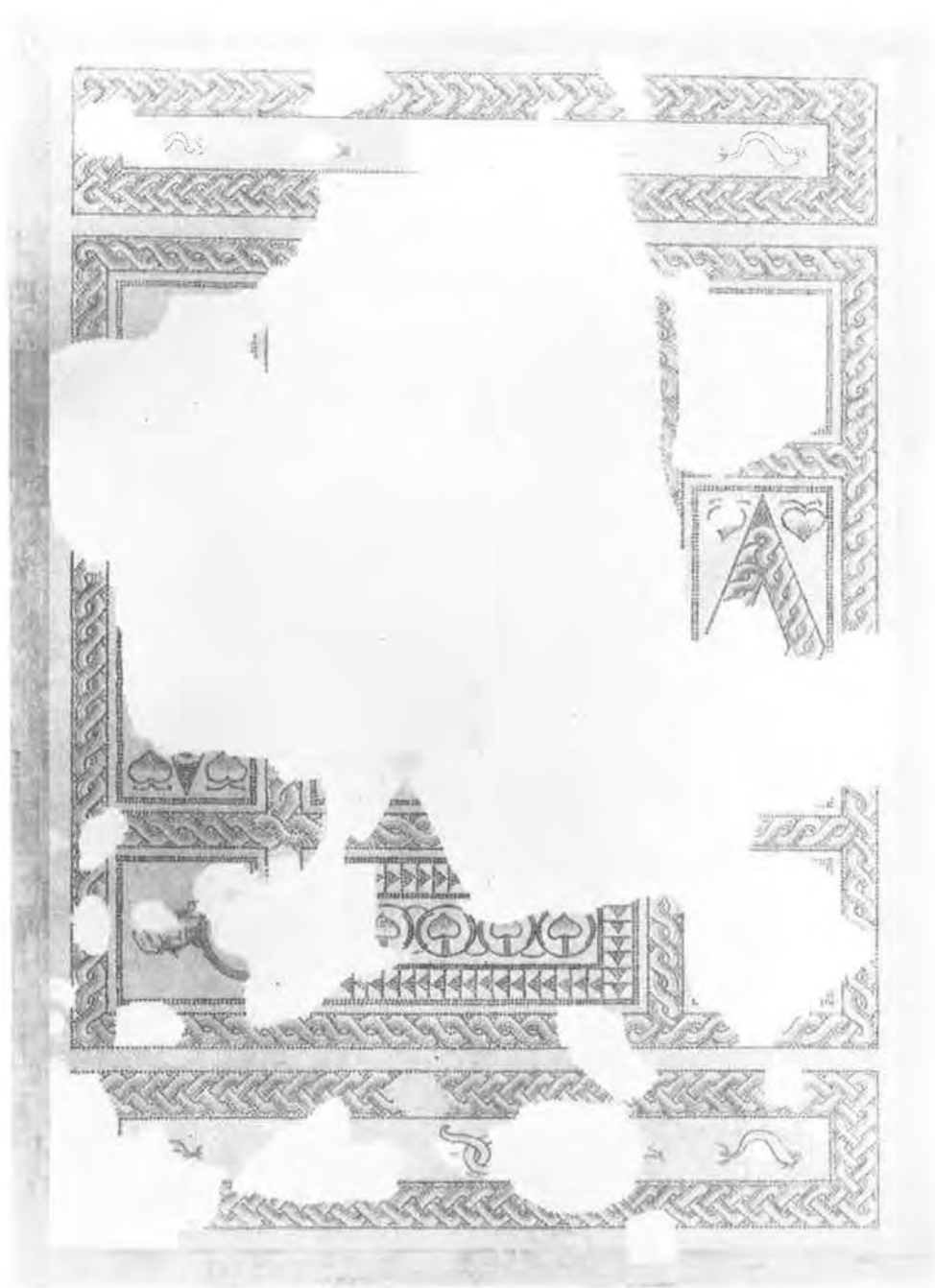


PLATE IX. The mosaic in Room I of the house (p. 230 and p. 251ff).

1. Bronze pastry-cutter. 2. Bronze belt-plate. 3. Hollow-headed, ornamental, bronze stud with two rivets. 4. Iron plate, probably part of a spade-iron (cf. *Arch. J.*, C, p. 228, fig. 3). 5. Iron key. 6. A small, iron, pruning knife.

APPENDIX I THE MOSAICS¹

BY DAVID SMITH

DISCOVERY

On 1st July, 1724, an entry was made in the Borough Register of Wycombe, recording the discovery in a meadow called Great Penn's Mead, about a quarter of a mile from the town, of "an old Roman pavement set in curious figures, as circles, squares, diamond squares, eight squares, hearts, and many other curious figures, with a beast in the centre, in a circle, like a dog standing sideways by a tree, all set with stones in red, black, yellow and white, about a quarter of an inch square"; the pavement was altogether about 14 ft. square, "the fine work in the middle" being 10 ft. by 8 ft., with a plain surround of red (tile) *tesserae* averaging 1½ in. square.²

Prompted by this old record, a local antiquary, Mr. E. J. Payne, conducted a partial excavation of the site in 1862, in the course of which he brought to light one largely complete mosaic, fragments of another, with a guilloche pattern, and coloured *tesserae* indicating the position of a third mosaic which had been completely destroyed.³

Payne describes the surviving mosaic as "a square flanked by two oblongs, the whole being enclosed by bands of double and single guilloche ornament. The oblong compartments contain a series of sea-monsters with twisted tails. The square is again resolved into a smaller central square, the design of which is lost, with four still smaller squares at the angles, which are occupied by female busts, representing the Horae, or goddesses of the seasons. The one that remains perfect appears to represent Spring. . . ."

This description has nothing in common with the report in the Borough Register, and Payne believed that the mosaic that he uncovered and sketched was not the pavement found in 1724. In particular, the entry in the Register makes no mention of female busts or sea-monsters, and it is hardly conceivable that there would not have been a reference to them if they had had a place in the decoration of that mosaic: the subject of the central panel and even the main geometric figures and motifs are noted—why not features at least as interesting, if not more so? The present writer is inclined, therefore, to share Payne's belief, and to assume that the mosaic found in 1724 either lay in a part of the site that has not been explored since then, or had gone to pieces, perhaps through over-exposure and neglect in 1724, before Payne commenced his excavations in 1862. The discoveries of 1724 and 1862 are accordingly treated as separate mosaics in this report.

I. THE MOSAIC DISCOVERED IN 1724

The contemporary description of the mosaic discovered in 1724, quoted above, is merely a list of the most notable elements in the design, and the reference to a circular figured panel in the centre is not sufficient to enable the design to be reconstructed in detail.

The most interesting feature of the mosaic was the "beast in the centre . . . like a dog standing sideways by a tree". There is a hint of uncertainty in the description, suggesting that the beast's resemblance to a dog was not so close as to be beyond

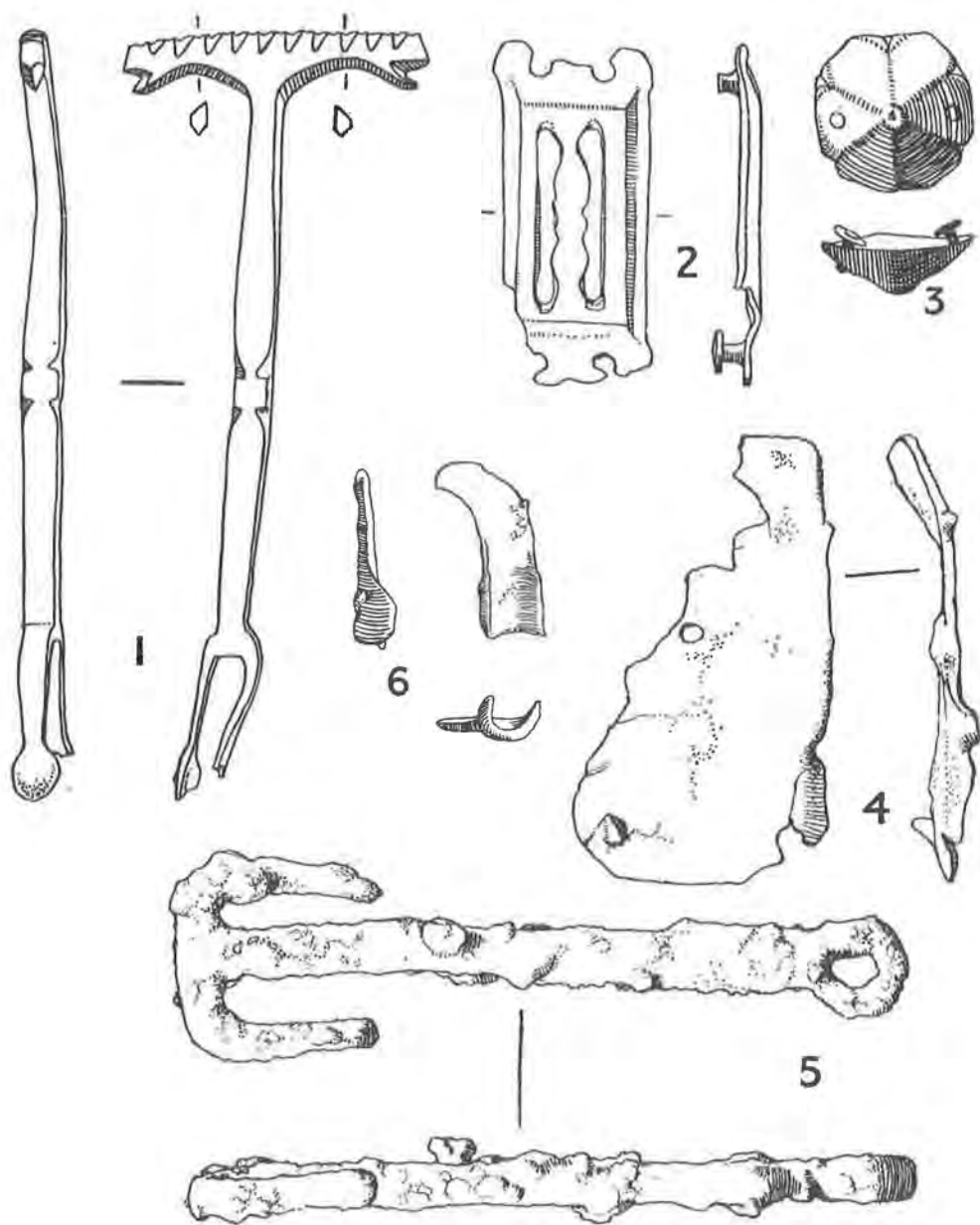


FIG. 10. Small objects. Nos. 1-3 ($\frac{1}{7}$); nos. 4-6 ($\frac{1}{2}$).

question. It may, therefore, have been intended to represent some other animal; for example, a bear.

Whatever the creature's identity, the description strongly recalls the pavement found in 1832 in the garden behind the Aldborough Arms (then the Black Swan Inn) at Aldborough, Yorks.⁴ There, in a panel about 3 ft. square, was depicted a lion lying or crouching under a tree. It is noteworthy that, as in the High Wycombe pavement, the dimensions of the *tesserae*— $\frac{3}{8}$ to $\frac{7}{16}$ in.—are smaller than is usual in Romano-British mosaics; the technical standard of the pavement is good and it may perhaps be assigned to a period as early as c. A.D. 200. These considerations, together with the evidence for the date of the mosaic discovered by Payne (see below, Sec. II, para. 3), suggest that the lost High Wycombe pavement may also have been an early villa-mosaic. Its loss is therefore the more regrettable.

II. THE MOSAIC DISCOVERED IN 1862

1. DESCRIPTION

In 1933, the mosaic discovered by Payne was again uncovered and its surviving parts were recorded with care and accuracy, to the generous scale of 1:4, in a pen-and-water-colour drawing.⁵ It was then re-buried, but, the site being given over to allotments, had been still further damaged by gardeners before its final re-excavation in 1954-55. All that remained by then was destroyed during the subsequent building operations on the site. The following description is based upon the drawing made in 1933 (Pl. IX), which has every appearance of being reliable.

The mosaic had a plain surround of large red (tile) *tesserae* averaging $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. square, such as were used to pave the floors in all the other rooms of the villa. It measured 14 ft. 8 in. by 10 ft. 1 in., including a narrow plain surround of small white (chalk) *tesserae* separating the red surround from the decorated area. The decoration consisted of a large square panel flanked by two narrow frieze-like panels.

The latter can be quickly described. Though slightly different in width, they would seem to have been identical in their decoration, which was simple and conventional. At the centre of each was, apparently, a pair of sea-monsters with bodies or tails entwined, and on either side of these a fish swimming towards them and a dolphin swimming away from them. The frame of both panels was a triple-braided guilloche.

The main panel is much more interesting. Its design was a rectangular grid of simple guilloche forming nine compartments, of which the compartment at the centre was the largest. Much of the panel, including the central compartment, had already disappeared by 1933, but sufficient remained to suggest that the design was symmetrical, opposite side—and corner—panels balancing each other.

The oblong panels on the N. and S. sides of the pavement contained, within a double line of dark *tesserae*, a lozenge of simple guilloche. These doubtless framed a geometric motif of some sort, but in neither case is it possible, owing to damage, to say what that motif was. In each angle of the double-line frame was a heart-shaped leaf—a common filling-motif and a regular standby with Romano-British mosaicists.

The E. and, it may be assumed, the W. side-panels contained a strip of what the writer calls a "miniature" scroll of heart-shaped leaves, in a frame of triangles set apex-to-base between double lines of dark *tesserae*.

Of the square corner-panels, that at the S.E. corner was the only one of which anything remained in 1933. It showed a human head surmounting a semi-circle. The semi-circle is difficult to explain, unless it be merely a summary representation of the upper part of the body to which the head belongs. The head itself is crowned by what looks like a cap. The expression of the face is solemn. On the left side, the hair appears to fall well below the ear, with wisps escaping here (though the copyist may have been

misled by displaced *tesserae*) and on the right side by the cheek. Here, though it is impossible to see any certain resemblance to one of the seasons in the drawing of 1933, it must be admitted that Payne's opinion has probability to commend it. Excluding the High Wycombe pavement and doubtful examples, there are no fewer than thirteen representations of the four Seasons in Romano-British mosaics, and in nine cases out of the thirteen they occupy corner positions.

2. THE DESIGN AND MOTIFS

The design of the main panel—a rectangular grid forming nine panels with a large square panel at the centre—is one of the commonest in Romano-British mosaic. The writer has listed twelve other examples: (i, ii) Brading (Isle of Wight; Rooms III and XII);⁶ (iii) Castor (Northants., in 1821);⁷ (iv) Cirencester (Ashcroft site, 1950);⁸ (v, vi, vii) Colchester (Barnard's Garden, 1763;⁹ "Berryfield", 1923;¹⁰ No. 9, North Hill, 1922);¹¹ (viii) West Mersea (Essex);¹² (ix) Silchester (Insula XIX);¹³ (x, xi) Verulamium (Mosaic No. 7,¹⁴ and a mosaic discovered in 1958);¹⁵ and Witcombe (Glos., Mosaic No. 3).¹⁶ Of these, no. (x) has been dated to the late second century¹⁷ and is thus approximately contemporary with the High Wycombe pavement. On the other hand, no. (xii) is probably to be assigned to the fourth century, on the evidence of the coin-list from the villa in which it was found.¹⁸

Eight of the twelve mosaics listed above have a design or framework of simple guilloche, like the High Wycombe pavement, and one (no. x) a design of triple-braided guilloche; two (nos. iii, xii) are simply linear designs, and one (no. i) has a design of alternating red and blue squares—these three are undoubtedly of the fourth century. The High Wycombe mosaic is, therefore, a typical example of this particular design.

The large square centre panel may have contained a floral motif, either as in no. (x) and (?) no. (xii) above, or set in a roundel as in nos. (iii) and (vi); alternative possibilities are a cantharus, as in no. (xi), a cantharus in a roundel, as in nos. (iv) and (x), or a bust in a roundel, as in no. (i). On the whole, a floral motif seems the most likely for a mosaic of this period. The roundel, if roundel there was, would perhaps have been framed by a simple guilloche, as in nos. (iv) and (vi), but a frame of some other type, such as crow'sfoot pattern (cf., no. ii), plain line (cf., no. iii), or chevron or wave pattern would also be quite possible.

Only two of the mosaics listed above have busts in the corner-panels, like the High Wycombe pavement. In one (no. ii) the busts personify the four Seasons; in the other (no. i), the figures bear wands with small cross-pieces near the top, but what they personify or represent is not clear. Much more frequently the corner-panels in mosaics of this particular design are filled with floral motifs of one type or another (nos. iv, v, vi, viii, x), occasionally enclosed in a frame (no. iii, a lozenge; no. xii, a roundel).

For the oblong side-panels, the pavement found in 1922 at No. 9, North Hill, Colchester, offers the closest parallels; it too, had lozenges of simple guilloche and lengths of "miniature" scroll balancing each other on opposite sides of the design. These are, in fact, the only two mosaics of this design in which the very formal type of "miniature" scroll is employed, though no. (xi), approximately contemporary with the High Wycombe pavement, has a freer but similar example of it. Four pavements have lozenges of simple guilloche in side-panels (nos. iii, iv, v, xi), and one (no. xii) has lozenges in plain line. Sometimes other motifs occur, such as a guilloche of several strands (nos. iv, viii), while the four larger mosaics of this design display mythological or conventional figured scenes in the side-panels (nos. i, ii, vi, ix).

It remains only to mention the two panels, one at either side of the main design. These may be regarded, in a sense, as condensed versions of the compositions of sea-creatures which decorate many Roman mosaics. Here, they are, however, subsidiary

to the main design. In Britain, compositions of sea-creatures are found particularly in the West Country, and one of them offers the closest parallel in Britain to the most interesting feature of the High Wycombe friezes: the entwined creatures at the centre of each panel. This is the well-known inscribed pavement at Lydney Park in Gloucestershire, which is not earlier than A.D. 367.¹⁹ There is, however, no hint at High Wycombe of the strikingly Celtic animal heads, unique in Romano-British mosaic, which terminate the tails of the creatures at Lydney and clearly betray the hand of a native mosaicist.

Nonetheless, the High Wycombe mosaic is in its own way as characteristically Romano-British as the pavements at Lydney. As a mosaic it is a work of no particular merit, but as a mosaic dated to the second half of the second century (see below, Para. 3), and displaying in combination a number of motifs typical of Romano-British mosaics, it may be regarded as of some importance in the present state of knowledge. It would have been impossible to estimate its date with confidence on the evidence of the design and motifs alone. And finally, it is worth recalling that this mosaic belonged to a villa, and to the best of the writer's knowledge it is the only villa-mosaic at present assignable on such good evidence to so early a period.

3. DATE

The most important aspect of this mosaic is that it is dated, with reasonable certainty, to the second half of the second century. This is the period in which the villa was built (see above, p. 246), and the mosaic had every appearance of being an original floor. Moreover, many of its red *tesserae* were actually fragments of samian ware of Dragendorff Forms 31 and 33, of Hadrianic-Antonine or Antonine date. Although the upper surface of these fragments was heavily worn, all glaze having disappeared, the lower surface was fresh and undamaged, and it is clear that the mosaicists had selected relatively new sherds, the glossier the better.

On such evidence one may perhaps assign this mosaic even more precisely to the third quarter of the second century, though if opinion had had to depend only upon a study of the design and its motifs, a date not earlier than c. A.D. 200 would have been proposed.

4. MATERIALS AND CONSTRUCTION

The pavement was laid on a foundation of flints in brownish mortar, and the *tesserae* were set in a thin layer of hard white mortar spread on this foundation.

The *tesserae* themselves comprised four colours: red (tile and fragments of samian ware); white (chalk); blue (limestone); yellowish cream (limestone). All were produced on the site from materials at hand or obtainable within a short distance of the villa.

NOTES

¹ I am indebted to Mr. B. R. Hartley for the opportunity to report on these mosaics, and for information upon which Section II, paras. 3 and 4, are partly or wholly based.

² Borough Register No. 3, quoted by E. J. Payne, *Records of Buckinghamshire*, III (1863), p. 164. Hence *V.C.H., Bucks.*, II, p. 17.

³ Payne, loc. cit., pp. 160-163, with a plan of the villa and a sketch of the surviving mosaic.

⁴ Smith, H. E., *Reliquiae Isurianae* (1852), Pl. XVI. Preserved *in situ* under a permanent shelter, but the centre panel is now largely destroyed.

⁵ The original drawing is in the Borough Library. Mr. Mayes, Borough Librarian, kindly allowed it to be photographed for inclusion here (Pl. IX).

⁶ J. E. and F. G. H. Price, *Remains of Roman Buildings at Morton, near Brading, I.W.* (1881), Pl. 10 (Room III), plate facing p. 8 (Room XII).

⁷ Artis, E. T., *Durobrivæ* (1828), Pl. XII.

⁸ *Illustrated London News*, 2nd December, 1950.

⁹ Two drawings, one of them coloured, are preserved in the Colchester and Essex Museum.

¹⁰ R.C.H.M. *Report on Essex, IV: South-East*, plate facing p. 185. Preserved in the Colchester and Essex Museum.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 188. Preserved in the Colchester and Essex Museum.

¹² An original pen and water-colour drawing is preserved in the Topographical Collections, Essex volume, of the Society of Antiquaries of London; cf. Salmon, *Hist. of Essex* (1743), plate facing p. 434.

¹³ *Archæologia*, LVI (1899), Pl. XIV, Fragments preserved in Reading Museum.

¹⁴ R. E. M. and T. V. Wheeler, *Verulamium* (Soc. of Ants. of London, Research Report No. XI, 1936), Pl. XLIV, B.

¹⁵ I am indebted to Mr. S. S. Frere for permission to anticipate here his forthcoming report, and to Miss M. Brennand for kindly sending me a photograph of this mosaic.

¹⁶ An original pen and water-colour sketch is preserved in the Topographical Collections Gloucestershire volume, of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

¹⁷ Wheeler, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

¹⁸ *Archæologia*, XIX (1821), p. 183.

¹⁹ R. E. M. and T. V. Wheeler, *Report on the Excavations . . . in Lydney Park, Gloucestershire*, (Soc. of Ants. of London, Research Report No. IX, 1932), p. 65, Pl. XIX, A.

APPENDIX II

THE PAINTED WALL-PLASTER

BY JOAN LIVERSIDGE

The fragments of wall-painting found at High Wycombe belong to at least two or three periods, distinguishable from each other by the differences in colour and texture of the plaster backing. The earlier material was found in a stratified deposit in the baths and can be safely dated to the second half of the second century. Most of the designs are painted on a ground of fine white plaster applied in two or more coats on a hard pinkish-coloured backing containing crushed tile. Stripes and lines of varying widths predominate, some of them obviously outlining plain white panels which may have had some motif in the centre. They include:

(a) A yellow band *c.* 2 in. broad edged with deep red lines originally about 0.25 in. wide (Fig. 11e).

(b) Traces of a yellow border of unknown width edged with the same red line on one side.

(c) A lighter red outline 0.5–0.6 in. wide, perhaps defining a panel.

(d) Pieces with a black line 0.2 in. wide.

(e) Fragments of a darker red which may come from a doorway as one piece from a corner (Fig. 11c) shows the plain colour on one side and the same colour defining a white panel on the other.

(f) One piece (Fig. 11a), with olive green lines varying 0.8–0.1 in. in width meeting at an angle. This may be connected with:

(g) Two lines of dark green and buff yellow separated by a white line, the yellow line being 0.6 in. wide.

(h) The same green appears outlined by a black line *c.* 0.2 in. wide on other pieces (Fig. 11b). One fragment depicting a corner shows that it may belong to the edge of a green panel, indicated for the Romano-British artist by a rather wavering guide line. Another piece painted the same green shows a design of parallel lines with traces of an oval or semi-circle, (Fig. 11d).

A number of maroon or brick red fragments also belong to this period as well as two pieces painted blue, and blue and red, respectively. The backing on which this plaster is painted is so distinctive with its sprinkling of red tile that it is also possible

to distinguish more of this design among the unstratified material from the upper levels of the site. Some of it bears traces of a pattern in shades of red, blue and grey, but not enough has survived for the design to be identified, and the same applies to a fragment with curved black lines on a white ground. Pieces of plain black also occur, one with a raised edge apparently from the corner of a room, while another fragment painted red and white may come from the edge of a window splay.

More exciting perhaps is a large piece (Fig. 12f) also probably of this early date, decorated with a broad band of bright blue outlined on either side with lines of lighter blue. Above this come two narrow lines of black or brown 0.2 in. in width, and below it a horizontal black line and a series of diagonals in black and pale brown; all on a white ground. Another line in dark red wanders in and out of the diagonal border.

The remaining plaster recovered from the topsoil is painted either on a coarse white backing or on a sandier yellow one, both showing no traces of crushed tile. These were found unstratified and they are probably later in date than the second-century group described above. The coarse white mix may be earlier than the yellow, as one large fragment of it shows part of a dark red and white stripe with the yellowish backing plastered on top and painted with a design of green lines (?leaves) and part of a circle. Another piece of coarse white apparently came from the corner of a room as the dark red stripe c. 1.9 in. wide which decorates it is slightly rolled back along one edge. A white line 0.4 in. wide separates the red from a band of greenish blue. Other fragments must have framed a window, with the splay painted the same red and the wall immediately beneath it white, or bright red with a white line. Elsewhere a brighter red, sometimes striped with white, was used. In one case it occurs next to bright yellow; on another fragment it is divided from a blue band by a thin white line; and a third piece is decorated with a red stripe, white and black lines, and a green band of unknown breadth.

Plaster painted on the sandy yellow backing includes a small fragment of black from a window splay, three larger pieces striped in red and white; yellow, white and light green; and red and white separated from the same green by a black line. Five fragments were found with stripes of black, dark and light grey, c. 0.5–0.7 in. wide, side by side on a white ground. A red line 0.2 in. wide was painted 0.4 in. away from the black, and a smudge of red paint visible 0.7 in. beyond this on the largest piece (Fig. 13h) may indicate another red line. One fragment bore traces of a pattern of curved lines in purple and dark red on a greyish-blue ground (Fig. 13g).

The most interesting feature of this collection of fragments of wall-paintings is the existence of material of three different periods, each painted on a characteristic and easily recognisable backing, with one of them securely dated to the second century. This discovery is particularly noteworthy, because so little British painted wall-plaster has been found in stratified deposits. Fragments from each period give us some clue as to the decorative treatment of windows, admittedly here not a very enterprising one, and a doorway and the corners of a room are also represented. While the usual scheme of lines and stripes predominates, we have several indications of more ambitious designs both in the second-century material and among the fragments with the yellow backing which probably belong to the latest period of the occupation of the site.

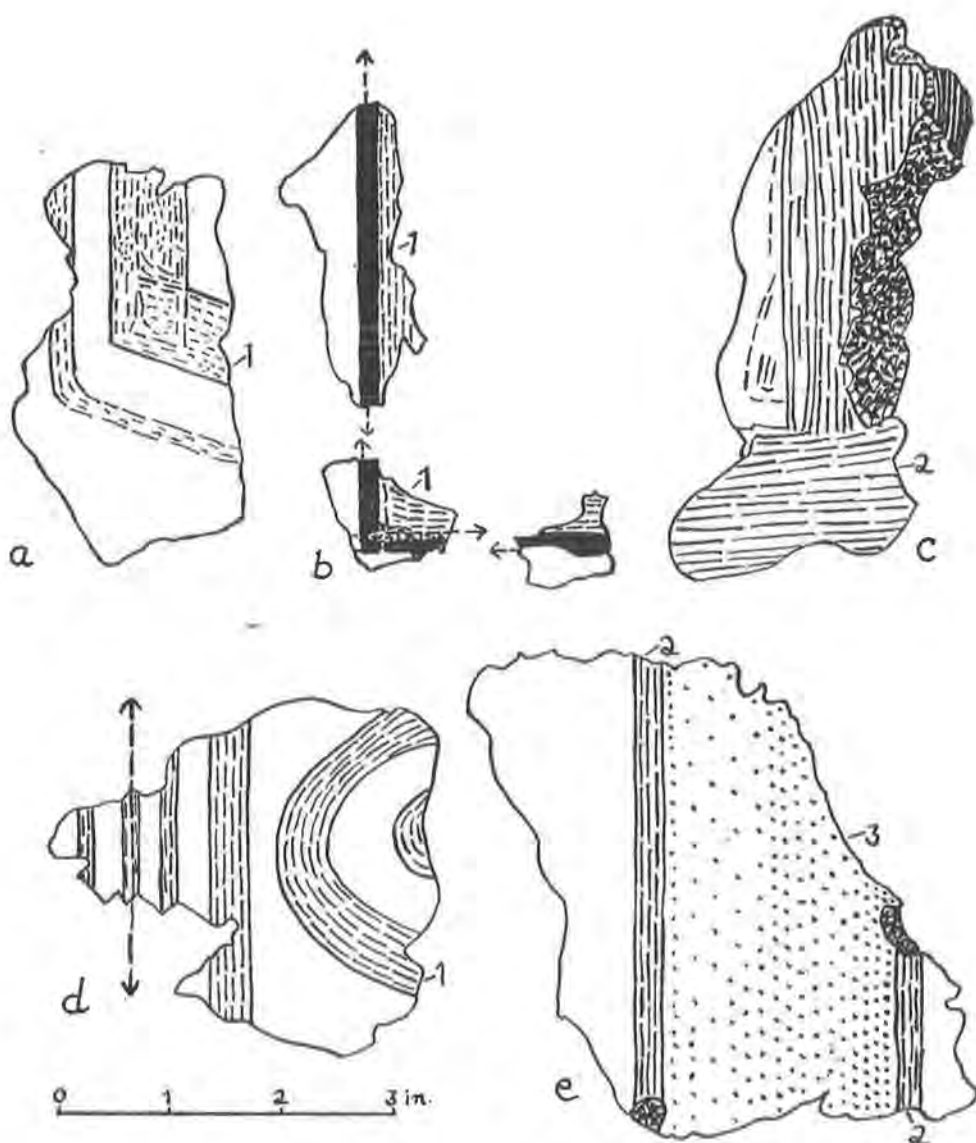


FIG. 11 (a-e). The colours are indicated by numbers as follows: 1. Dark green (or possible grey in the case of *b*). 2. Dark red. 3. Yellow. Dotted lines and arrows mark the guide lines of the Romano-British artist.

FIG. 12 (*f*). The colours are indicated as follows: 2. Dark red. 3. Yellow. 4. Blue, fading to light blue. 5. Pale brown. The colouring of some of the design is difficult to distinguish, especially the brown diagonals, and the background of the black ones. Traces of black and blue near one end of the red line are also very blurred.

FIG. 13 (*g-h*). The colours are indicated as follows: 2. Dark red. 4. Greyish blue. 6. Purple with dark and light shades intermingled. 7. Maroon. 8. Dark and light grey stripes, the dark grey printed next to the black.

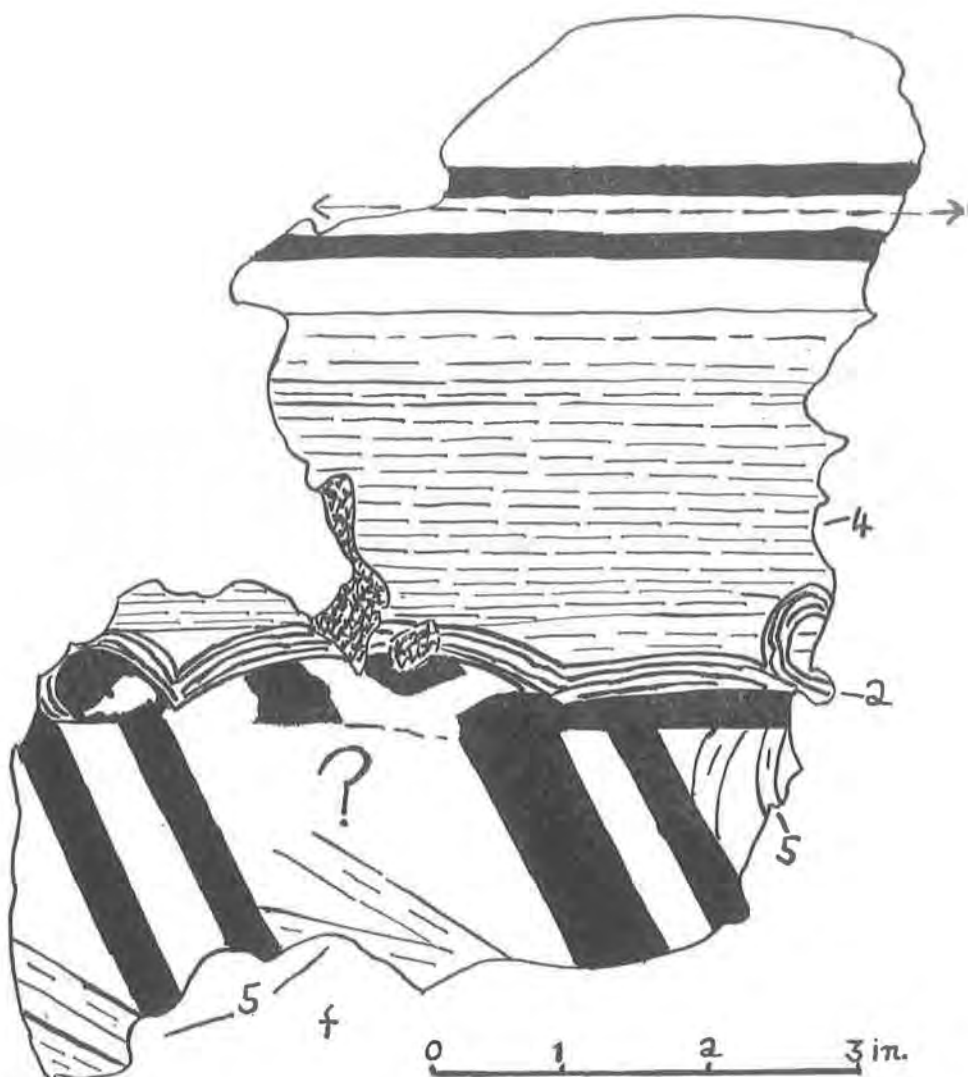


FIG. 12. (f).

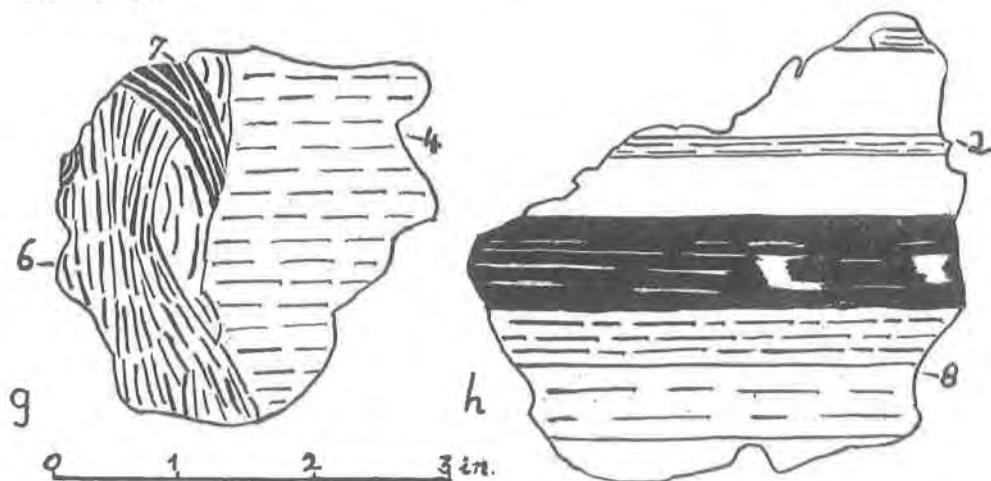


FIG. 13 (g-h).