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SIXTH INTERIM REPORT

By A. P. Detsicas, M.A., F.S.A.

INTRODUCTION

THE sixth season of excavations was undertaken by the Eccles Excavation Committee, from late March to late October, 1967, including a fortnight's full-time work in August, at the site of the Romano-British villa at Rowe Place Farm, Eccles, in the parish of Aylesford (N.G.R. TQ 722605; O.S. 6-inch Sheet TQ 76 SW.).

Once again permission to carry out a further year's work was readily given by the landowners, Messrs. Associated Portland Cement Manufacturers Limited and the Reed Paper Group Limited. I am greatly in the debt of Mr. N. M. Adams, the then Regional Estates Surveyor of the former company, for his continued interest in our work, and of the tenant farmers, Messrs. A. A. and A. C. Southwell whose welcome on their land and many acts of kindness continue to lighten our burdens.

The excavation was again financially supported by generous grants from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, the Kent Archæological Society, the Society of Antiquaries of London, the Craven Fund and the Haverfield Bequest of the University of Oxford, and by public donations.

My thanks are once more due to several members of the Lower Medway Archæological Research Group and to the numerous other volunteers who made this excavation possible and whom space considerations only preclude me from individual mention. I am particularly indebted, however, to the following for their sustained support throughout a long campaign: Mrs. E. V. Jones, Misses V. Gotsell, L. Kemp and M. V. B. Webster, and Messrs. I. J. Bissett, R. W. Chapman, A. C. Harrison, B.A., T. Hetherington, T. Ithell, B.Eng., D. T. Jones, W. A. Knowles, R. Lowson, C. E. J. Martin and P. Thornhill, M.A. I am also especially grateful to Mr. I. J. Bissett for much help with field drawing and for coping with the drawing of the pottery; Mr. A. C. Harrison,

¹ Arch. Cant., lxxviii (1963), 125-41; lxxix (1964), 121-35; lxxx (1965), 69-91; lxxxi (1966), 44-52; lxxxii (1967), 162-78. Once again, it is with pleasure that I record my personal appreciation to Professor S. S. Frere, F.S.A., not only for his support and interest throughout the years of this excavation but also for kindly reading this report in draft and contributing several valuable suggestions and improvements.

B.A., for occasionally deputizing for me; Mr. R. G. Foord, for undertaking the monochrome site-photography and providing the prints illustrating this report; Mrs. K. F. Hartley, B.A., for reporting on the mortaria; Dr. J. P. C. Kent, F.S.A., for identifying the coins; Mr. E. R. Swain, for drawing the small finds; and Mr. R. P. Wright, M.A., F.S.A., for reporting on the graffiti. Finally, I must record my appreciation to my wife and eldest daughter for the initial processing of the bulk of the pottery.

THE EXCAVATION

The main aim of this season's work was to continue the examination of parts of the site begun in 1966 and to search further for the location of the original building; thus, the focus of the excavation was concerned with parts of the site north-east and south-east of areas last examined in 1962-3, with the main result being the discovery of the site of the earliest dwelling-house and the beginning of its methodical exploration.

Period I, ? to A.D. 43: Ditch I

A further trench was cut across the line of this ditch north-east of the point reached in 1966² and this confirmed its alignment in that part of the site, but no more work could be carried out there.

Period II, to c. A.D. 55: Ditch II

Because of the pressing need to concentrate on other parts of the site only one trench was cut across the line of this ditch to north of the last point reached in the previous year; it was noticed that, in this part of the site, the outline of this ditch is becoming less pronounced and is filled with clean material resembling the subsoil. It is not unlikely, therefore, that this ditch may soon come to an end as did also the much later Ditch III roughly in this same area.4

Period III, c. A.D. 55-65

To this period is tentatively assigned Room 94 whose dimensions are not yet known. This room was first exposed at some depth in a deep excavation which had removed much of the archæological evidence south-east of Room 15 and which is referred to below. Its wall was 1 ft. 6 in. wide, trench-built with ragstone and bright yellow mortar; the floor of this room was at 4 ft. 6 in. below the modern surface and consisted of opus signinum, 2 in. thick. The inner surface of the wall was also rendered with opus signinum, I in. thick, and painted a light red

² Arch. Cant., Ixxxii (1967), fig. 1.

³ Ibid.
4 Ibid.

colour. The purpose of this room must remain unknown until much more of it has been exposed, but the structure of which it must have formed part was certainly thoroughly demolished as the trenches where its walls were exposed contained a large amount of mortar and painted wall-plaster débris. Its tentative inclusion in this period of the villa rests on some early-Flavian samian recovered from the débris layer below the floor level, though it must be observed that this material may have been deposited there after the destruction of the floor of this structure.

Period IV, c. A.D. 65-120

- (a) The Workshops. Examination of the extensive workshop area of the villa in Period IV5 is still progressing and a report on this complex is best postponed until it can be dealt with as a whole.
- (b) The Living Quarters. Fresh trenches were cut in order to explore the alignment of the north-east and south-west walls of Room 37 beyond the points reached in 1962-36 and to establish the junction of the north-west wall of Room 157 with Room 37. It was soon found that this wall continued beyond the junction to become the south-east wall of Room 37; further examination, however, seeking to establish the east corner of this room, clearly showed that, unexpectedly, the southeast wall of Room 37 had been abutted on, and not bonded with, the north-east wall of Room 37 at this point (Plate I). Thus, it became obvious that part at least of the line of the north-east wall of Room 37 belonged to an earlier structure. This was further demonstrated in another trench to north-west where another part of the north-east wall of Room 37 was once more abutted on an earlier structure, i.e. the west corner of Room 88. Consequently, it was established that the original living-quarters of the villa lay to east of this area; this was confirmed by further work there.

Five rooms8 of this earliest building have so far been excavated and recorded. Structurally, their walls were of identical construction, i.e. of ragstone set in the bright yellow mortar of this period; below floor level, the external walls were about 2 ft. 6 in. in width. The floors had been laid on off-sets above which the width of these walls was 2 ft. as was the case with the walls in the bath building of this period; partition walls, however, were only 1 ft. 6 in. thick. The walls had been rendered, above the level of the off-sets, with bright yellow mortar and a final coating of painted wall-plaster; little of this survived in situ and all that

⁵ Ibid.

Arch. Cant., lxxviii (1963), 140; lxxix (1964), 129.
 Arch. Cant., lxxviii (1963), 132-3.
 Work in 1968 established that Rooms 87 and 92 do not belong to the original plan of the building in Period IV.

could be recorded was a dado, mostly of yellow with splashes of other colours, rising above the off-set level and preserved by the subsequent laying of the opus signinum bedding of the tessellated pavements.

Room 88, measuring 8 ft. by 24 ft. 6 in., had been badly robbed; its north-west wall had earlier been recorded as a robber-trench.9 and only a small fragment at foundation level remained of its south-east wall. Demolition prevented establishing beyond doubt that the floor of this room had been tessellated, but remnants of opus signinum (Fig. 2, Section AA'. Laver 9) to east of the west corner strongly suggest it: furthermore, it would seem improbable that a room used as a corridor lacked the tessellation that Rooms 89-91 certainly did have. A doorway, 3 ft. in width, was recorded at the south corner of this room whose purpose is likely to have been that of a corridor leading via the corridor Rooms 87 and 92 from the main block of rooms, further to south-east, to the bath building; the nearest point of the baths lies some 52 ft. from the doorway (see Fig. 1, inset). The siting of this doorway supports the suggestion that the entrance of the baths must have been located in the south-east wall of the bath building and between Rooms 28 and 31 this wall, however, was preserved only as the lowest two foundation courses¹⁰ and no structural evidence had survived for such an entrance.

Room 86, measuring 8 ft. by 14 ft., had been just as badly robbed as Room 88; only a robber-trench remained of its north-west wall and foundation courses only of its north-east counterpart; the south-east wall of this room may lie beneath the north-west wall of the later Room 87. Not even the few traces of opus signinum found in Room 88 were present in this area, but if Room 86 lacked a tessellated floor, it was the only room in this part of the villa to do so.

All the rooms to south-east of the last two just described had been floored with tessellated pavements of contemporary construction and identical build, except for the floors of Rooms 87 and 92 which have yet to be explored in depth. Resting upon the ancient ploughsoil were alternate make-up layers consisting of ragstone, rubble and an uppermost layer of yellow gravel; the opus signinum bedding of the tessellations had been laid directly on this gravel layer and varied in thickness from 4-6 in. (Fig. 2, Section AA'). The tessellation consisted of red and buff tesserae roughly hewn from roofing-tiles and had either been removed in Romano-British times or subsequently ploughed out, except for a few patches of tesserae which remained in situ and proved that the opus signinum was the bedding of tessellations and not itself a floor.

Room 89, the largest of the rooms cleared so far, measured 24 ft. 6 in.

⁹ This robber-trench was in fact recorded in 1963 in an exploratory trench at the extreme eastern limit of the excavated area; Arch. Cant., lxxix (1964), fig. 1. ¹⁰ Ibid., 124-5.

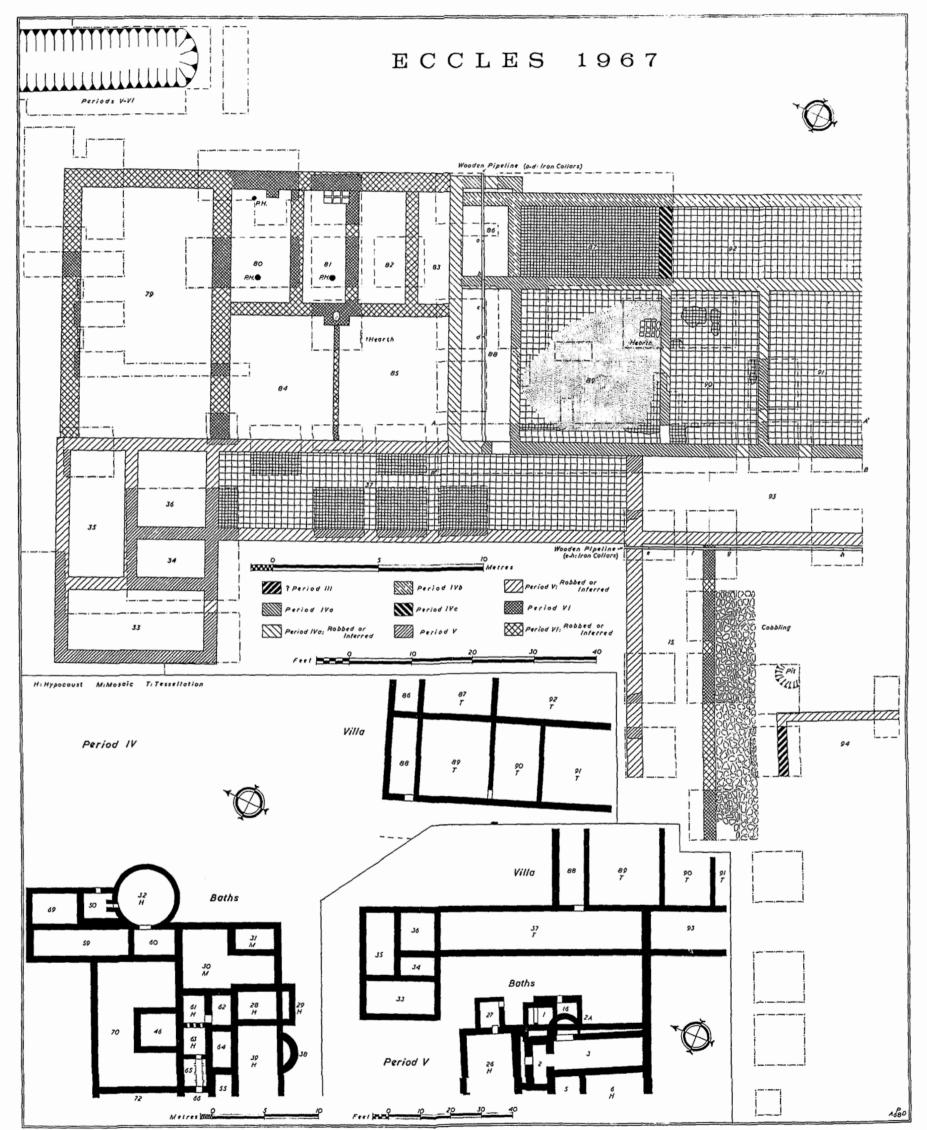


Fig. 1.

by 22 ft. 6 in.; little of its tessellation had survived in situ close to the south-west wall (Fig. 2, Section AA'), the remainder having been removed during the fourth century A.D. (see below). A doorway, 3 ft. wide, connected this with Room 90, but had been blocked in Period V with ragstone set in this period's characteristic off-white mortar (Fig. 2, Section AA').

Room 90 measured 24 ft. 6 in. by 14 ft. 6 in. and, except for a few patches, had its tessellation removed by modern ploughing; otherwise, the opus signinum bedding was well preserved (Fig. 2, Section AA'), except for some worn areas obviously due to frost action.

Room 91 is so far incompletely cleared, but was obviously larger than Room 90; the opus signinum bedding of its floor is well preserved in its west corner (Fig. 2, Section AA'), but the tessellation is completely ploughed out.

Room 87, dealt with here in its location rather than its structural sequence, was originally clearly part of a long corridor at the rear of the villa and formed one unit with Room 92 as the partition wall dividing them was 2 ft. wide, unlike the other partition walls, and was abutted on to the north-east and south-west walls of these rooms; it was not part of the original plan of the building. In its final phase, Room 87 measured 11 ft. 6 in. by 22 ft. 3 in. and had been floored with a tessellated pavement of red and buff tesserae cut from roofing- and/or box-tiles. An attempt at some decoration had been aimed at in flooring this room as the tesserae had been laid in five alternating strips, each between 27 and 29 in. wide, three of buff and two of red tesserae, along the length of the room; the strips of buff tesserae formed the outer and central portions of this elementary decoration (Plate II). This floor has yet to be sectioned and little more can be said about its construction other than to note its remarkable state of preservation when contrasted with the almost total destruction by the plough of other tessellations further to south-west.

The dimensions of *Room 92* are not yet established; it had clearly been provided with a tessellated floor as was Room 87 as some *tesserae* were recorded *in situ* just to north-west of the excavated trench.

Period V, c. A.D. 120-180: The Living Quarters

It is now clear that the four rooms (Rooms 33–36) and the tessellated corridor (Room 37), previously recorded, ¹² were extensions and additions to the original plan of the villa.

The full dimensions of Room 37 (12 ft. by 66 ft.) are now established;

Work in 1968 established that Rooms 87 and 92 do not belong to the original plan of the building in Period IV.
 Arch. Cant., lxxix (1964), 129-30.

its tessellation, however, had fared worse to south-east than to northwest, though enough traces of opus signinum remained (Fig. 2, Section BB') to prove the existence of a tessellated pavement up to the southeast wall of this room. Further support for the earlier suggestion¹³ that the tessellated floor may have been a later addition than part of the original construction was found in the shape of a mortar floor, bearing unmistakable impressions of planking across the width of the corridor and present below the level of the tessellation (Fig. 2, Section BB', Layer 61); clearly, this corridor had had so much wear that re-flooring with a more durable material became imperative.

Room 93 continues the alignment of the corridor Room 37 further to south-east; its north-east wall, part of the original house, is well preserved but the south-west one has been completely robbed out and survives only as a robber-trench. The length of this room is not yet known but, presumably, it will continue in this direction as a corridor fronting the main block of rooms until it reaches the south-east wing of the villa (cf. the provisional site plan based on aerial and ground survev).14

A water pipeline, first recorded in 1963,15 was found running approximately north-east to south-west through the earlier Rooms 86 and 88 and under the floor of the corridor (Room 37), with four of its iron collars (a-d) still in situ; its purpose was obviously to supply water for Room 2A, and possibly also Room 16, of the second bath building.16

Periods V-VI, c. A.D. 120-290: Ditch III

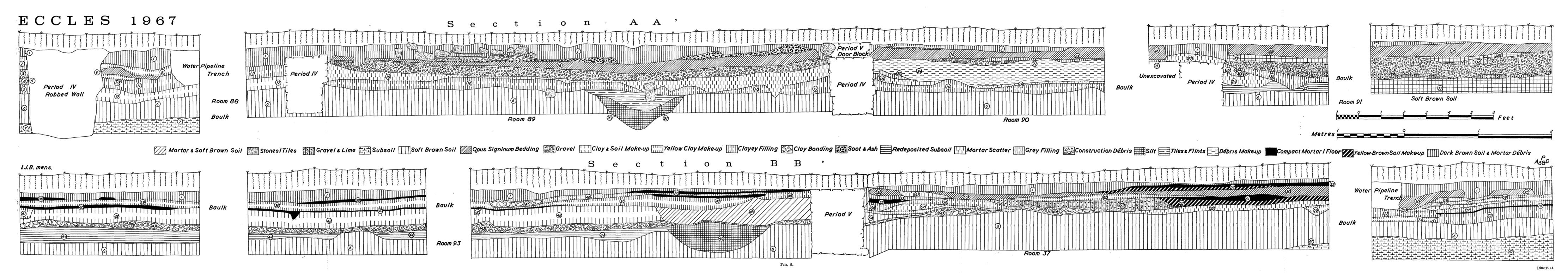
Excavation of this ditch was completed with the discovery of its south-east end which presented a rounded outline. A trench cut beyond this failed to find any more signs of this ditch further to south-east, though it is not impossible that it will resume after a wider gap than so far explored.

At some time either in Period V or VI, a short length of drain or gutter was constructed on the floor of Room 89 and close to its southwest wall (this feature has been omitted from the general plan for clarity's sake, but cf. Fig. 2, Section AA'); it was constructed with ragstone sides and a tiled bottom, bonded with vellow clay. As most of this feature has been ploughed out, its purpose must remain at present unknown.

Period VI, c. A.D. 180-290

- (a) The Bath Building. Further work was carried out in order to establish the dimensions of Room 15 (8 ft. by 69 ft.), which is now known
 - 13 Ibid., 130.

 - Arch. Cant., lxxviii (1963), 127.
 Arch. Cant., lxxix (1964), fig. 1.
 Arch. Cant., lxxviii (1963), 135-6.



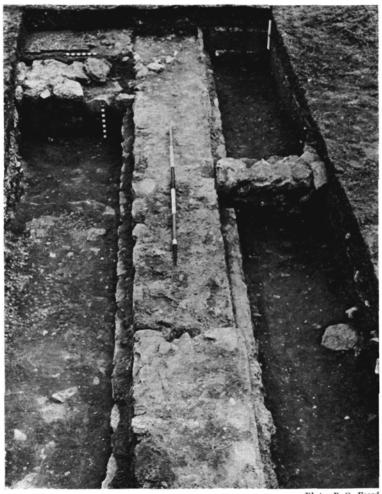


Photo: R. G. Foord Period IV, Rooms 89 and 90; Period V, Rooms 37 and 93.



Photo: R. G. Foord

Period IV: Tessellated Pavement in Room 87.



Photo: R. G. Foord

Period VI: Room 15.



 ${\it Photo: R. G. Foord}$ Period VI: Room 15, Detail of painted Wall-plaster in~situ.



 ${\it Photo: R. G. Foord} \\ {\it Fragment of Bath-stone Pillar.}$

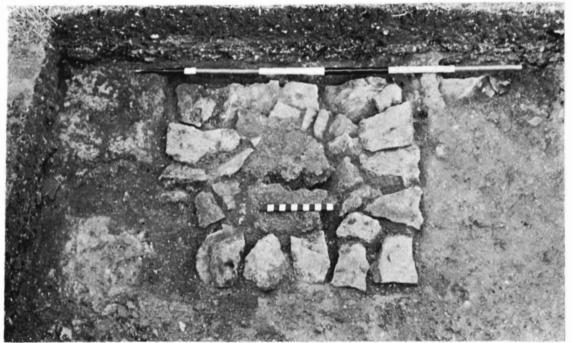


Photo: R. G. Foord

Period VI: Rooms 84 and 85, Stepping for Timber Roof-Support.

Photo: R. G. Foord

Period VI: Room 81, East Corner, Ledge.



Photo: R. G. Foord Foreground: Period VII: Hearth in Room 90; Background: Period IV: Room 91, Remnants of Tessellation.

to have been a corridor leading to the third bath building. Excavation in this area showed that (a) the north-east wall of the second baths and the north-west one of Room 15 formed the boundary of the bath-house, and (b) that Rooms 14 and 15 were not part of this bath building. In effect, though the south-west wall of Room 93 has been robbed out, it was quite clear that the south-east wall of Room 15 had been abutted on to the former; not only was the butt joint clearly visible but it could also be seen that the painted wall-plaster on the outer surface of the south-east wall of Room 15 had been carried on to the south-west wall of Room 93 (Plate III).

The south-east wall of Room 15 was built of ragstone set in vellow mortar to a width of 2 ft. above floor level, although off-sets below this depth made this wall rather more than 2 ft. 6 in, thick. Room 15 had been floored with vellow mortar, varying in thickness from 2-4 in. Externally, the south-east wall had been faced above floor level (this had been raised at least once before the laving of the cobbling referred to below) with painted wall-plaster; all that survived of this was a plain band of yellow liberally splashed with red, green, brown and black to give an impression of marbling, with slight traces of dark brown pigment above this yellow dado outlining the decorated panels at a higher level than preserved by the later cobbling (Plate IV). The presence of painted wall-plaster on the outer face of an external wall strongly suggests that a covered verandah or peristyle, with a lean-to roof supported by pillars placed on a stylobate in the manner of other sites.¹⁷ may well have been built here: no evidence, however, could be found to establish this. On the other hand, the whole area to south-east of this wall had been disturbed at great depth in later times and structural evidence for a peristyle could have been then removed; in this connection, it is worth noting that, in the filling of a robber-trench elsewhere on the site, about two-thirds of a short, Bath-stone pillar was found (Plate V), and this is precisely the kind of short column required for supporting the presumed sloping roof (it is quite possible, of course, that this broken pillar belonged to an entirely different architectural feature).

Provision had been made, about 1 ft. from the junction of this south-east wall of Room 15 with the south-west one of Room 93, for the passage through it of a wooden water pipeline, four of whose iron collars (e-h) were recorded in situ; the channel of this pipeline could be traced and, as it clearly must have run through the robbed north-west wall of Room 15 as well, it probably supplied water to the second baths, perhaps in the interim period before the third bath building was completed and fully commissioned.

At a later stage (it is not yet known whether this should be within Period VI or Period VII), however, the presumed peristyle must have

¹⁷ e.g. at Fishbourne.

been removed; the whole area for some 7 ft. 6 in. beyond the south-east wall of Room 15 was then laid with cobbling, consisting of suitable lumps of undressed ragstone, laid more or less flat and set in yellow mortar which suggests an open courtyard. The north corner of this area was badly disturbed and it could not be established that the cobbling continued to this point, though it is likely that it did; likewise, the deep excavation in this area, which cut through the cobbling and accounted also for the lack of evidence for a stylobate, precludes certainty about the limits of this cobbled area to south-east; 18 nor is it certain that the absence of cobbling in the trenches cut beyond its known south-west limit signifies that it was never laid this far to south-west.

(b) Block 79-85. This block consists of Rooms 79-85 and has now been completely cleared; it filled the area north of the villa in Periods IV and V and made use of existing walls for its construction. In its original plan, it seems that the area occupied by Rooms 80-85 composed one single unit, larger than Room 79; this is shown by the southeast walls of Rooms 80 and 81 which are abutted on to the north-east wall of the block and also by the south-east wall of Room 80 which is bonded with the wall dividing Rooms 80-83 from Rooms 84-85. In this first lay-out, this block must have been used for storage purposes only.

Room 79 (21 ft. by 41 ft. 6 in.) was established in 1966¹⁹ and fresh trenching in appropriate places this year showed that it was not partitioned; the whole area of this room as one unit was probably used as a small barn or for storage purposes.

The area to south-east of Room 79 was occupied by another six rooms during the secondary phase of this block, and here their walls survived, mainly as foundations but occasionally as one or two upper courses as well. These walls were trench-built on foundations of loose ragstone, which material was used, set in yellow mortar, for the construction of the upper courses; the outer walls, which were abutted on to earlier ones belonging to the villa, and the south-east wall of Room 79 were 3 ft. thick (exactly the width of outer walls in the third bath building), but the partition walls were only 2 ft. in width. The wall dividing Rooms 80-83 from Rooms 84-85 showed a projection about the middle of its course and a hollow space, filled with lumps of tufa bonded with yellow mortar, occupied the centre of this projection; this is likely to have been the stepping for a central timber supporting the roof structure (Plate VI).

Room 80 measures 18 ft. by 9 ft. 6 in., Room 81 18 ft. by 6 ft. 9 in., Room 82 18 ft. by 7 ft. 6 in. and Room 83, the narrowest of all, 18 ft. by 5 ft. 3 in.; all these rooms were floored with yellow mortar, from 1-4 in.

19 Arch. Cant., lxxxii (1967), 168.

 $^{^{18}}$ Examination in 1968 clearly showed that the cobbled area continued much further to south-east.

thick, and surviving in varying degrees of preservation. It is not improbable that these rooms were used as servants' quarters and working areas. The east corner of Room 81 was occupied by a ledge, 4 ft. by 8 ft. in size, built of roofing-tiles based upon ragstone and partly set into the wall-corner; this was clearly done when the area to north-east of Rooms 84 and 85 was partitioned. The ledge in this room could be the sub-structure of a copper or boiling-vat²⁰ (Plate VII).

Room 84 (20 ft. by 16 ft. 6 in.) and Room 85 (20 ft. by 17 ft. 6 in.) were divided by a wooden partition built on a sleeper beam laid into a trench 1 ft. wide. Some traces of yellow mortar were observed at floor level and, at the north corner of Room 85 immediately below the section, the edges of bonding-tiles and much burnt clay and ashes to their north-west to suggest a fire-place or hearth beyond the excavated area. The function of these two rooms is uncertain, but the probable hearth in Room 85 points to the likelihood of its being a kitchen, Room 84 probably being a store-room. Robbing and demolition accounted for the lack of any evidence for doorways into this block, but it is more likely that access would have been obtained through a doorway, possibly more, located in the south-west wall of the block.

Period VII, later than c. A.D. 290

No structural remains of this period have yet come to light, except for the late hearth in Room 89. This hearth had been constructed entirely of pila-tiles (Plate VIII), measured 2 ft. 6 in. square and may have had a ragstone surround—certainly ragstone was found between the tiles of the hearth and the south-east wall of Room 89 as well as close to the north-east edge of the hearth. This is no doubt a late feature constructed after Room 89 had ceased to be used as originally intended; almost all its tessellation had been removed, its opus signinum bedding had been cut through for the accommodation of a large deposit of soot and ashes spreading over nearly the whole area of the room (Fig. 1, and Fig. 2, Section AA', Layer 15). This deposit contained many food bones and some fourth-century pottery.

DATING

All the evidence found in this sixth season of work has supported the dating provisionally adopted in earlier reports and no modifications are called for.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

With the location of the earliest dwelling-house and leaving aside all the recorded evidence for earlier occupation at the site, the history

 20 I owe this suggestion to Professor S. S. Frere, F.S.A., who also refers me to a parallel at Gadebridge Farm, Hemel Hempstead, Herts.

and development of this large villa is now becoming much easier to summarize.

The original foundation in Period IV (c. A.D. 65–120) consisted of a house with a bath building close to the living accommodation. Although the full shape and size of this first dwelling-house remains to be established, it seems certain that it was composed of a central range of rooms laid with tessellated pavements (no mosaics have so far been found in situ) and facing approximately north-east and south-west;²¹ whether this building had originally a verandah outside its south-west façade as would be expected is not possible to say with certainty, though it is quite likely that the walls of the later corridor (Rooms 37 and 93) were constructed on the line of a verandah of timbered construction.²² The size and furnishing of the excavated rooms suggest a house of some pretence and quite in keeping with its extensive and well-provided bath building. The earliest baths were built to west of the house (Fig. 1, inset) and at a short distance from it to minimize the risk of fire spreading from there to the villa itself.

Following the destruction by fire of at least parts of the first baths, the opportunity seems to have been taken not only to build a new bath-house but also to provide the villa with a corridor along its south-west frontage²³ and a few additional rooms for the use of servants (Period V, c. A.D. 120–180). The new baths, now a true bath wing, were built closer to the villa and the space between them may have been either open or roofed over; it certainly was floored with opus signinum.²⁴

Finally, with the new bath wing constructed in Period VI (c. A.D. 180–290) and the addition of the corridor leading to it from the villa (Room 15) as well as other extensions yet to be explored, the plan of the villa is beginning to assume the outline suggested by ground and air observation²⁵ of a central range of rooms flanked by two wings. Whatever the subsequent development of the villa in Period VII (post c. A.D. 290), at least one more baths suite is to be expected to continue in use into the early fifth century A.D.

²² The earlier flooring beneath the tessellation of Room 37 must be borne in mind.

²¹ Work in 1968 suggests that a verandah may have existed facing to the north-east of Rooms 87 and 92 as there is evidence in that area for a construction trench; it is more likely, however, that this trench contained either a water-pipeline or a gutter outside Rooms 87 and 92.

²³ Professor S. S. Frere, F.S.A., reminds me of the point he has already made (*Britannia*, 269) on the custom of disguising the real frontage of a villa by constructing in front of it a corridor much longer than the villa's true length.

²⁴ Arch. Cant., lxxviii (1963), fig. 2, and p. 141.