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EXCAVATIONS AT ECCLES, 1968¹

SEVENTH INTERIM REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

EXCAVATIONS were undertaken by the Eccles Excavation Committee for a seventh season, beginning in early April and concluding at the end of October 1968, 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). A continuous fortnight's work was also carried out in August, during which period a training course in archaeology was based on the site.

Permission to continue with this work was again readily granted by the landowners, Messrs. Associated Portland Cement Manufacturers Limited and the Reed Paper Group Limited. I am greatly in the debt of the tenant farmers, Messrs. A. A. and A. C. Southwell, for welcoming us once more on their land and easing the burdens of our work by their unstinted kindness.

Financial assistance for this work was given by an anonymous donor, the Kent Archaeological Society, the Society of Antiquaries of London, the Haverfield Bequest of the University of Oxford, and other public contributors.

The major burden of the actual work fell upon many volunteers, amongst them several members of the Lower Medway Archaeological Research Group, without whose help this excavation would have been impossible and whom space considerations only preclude from individual mention. I must, however, make an exception in the case of the following to whom I am especially grateful for their sustained support throughout the season's work: Mrs. M. E. Davies, B.A.; Miss M. B. V. Webster; and Messrs. I. J. Bissett, R. W. Chapman, A. C. Harrison, B.A., F.S.A., T. Hetherington, T. Ithell, B.Eng., W. A. Knowles, R. Lawson, C. E. J. Martin and P. Thornhill, B.A. I am also particularly indebted to Mr. I. J. Bissett, for continuing to draw the pottery; Miss D. Charlesworth, M.A., F.S.A., for reporting on the glass; Mr. R. G. Foord, for the monochrome site-photography and the prints

¹ *Arch. Cant.*, lxxviii (1963), 125-41; lxxix (1964), 121-35; lxxx (1965), 69-91; lxxxi (1966), 44-52; lxxxii (1967), 162-78; lxxxiii (1968), 39-48. Professor S. S. Frere, M.A., F.S.A., has kindly read this report in draft form and has made several suggestions for its improvement and, in acknowledging my indebtedness, I should also like to place on record my personal appreciation for his practical support and interest throughout the several years of this excavation.

illustrating this report; Mr. A. C. Harrison, B.A., F.S.A., for occasionally acting in my place; Mrs. K. F. Hartley, B.A., for reporting on the mortaria; Dr. J. P. C. Kent, B.A., Ph.D., F.S.A., for identifying the coins; and Mr. R. P. Wright, M.A., F.S.A., for reading and reporting on the graffiti. Finally, I must place on record my appreciation to my wife for the initial processing of the pottery.

THE EXCAVATION

This season's work was planned to continue the examination of the villa's living quarters beyond the points reached in 1967.

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

A further trench was cut across the line of this ditch north-east of the area explored in 1967² but, apart from confirming the alignment of this ditch in this part of the site, no fresh evidence was forthcoming nor did it prove possible to carry out more extensive work in this area.

Periods II-III, to c. A.D. 65: Ditches IV-VI

To these periods are tentatively assigned for the time being three rectilinear ditches found at the very end of the season's work. As these ditches are built over by the first house, they are clearly earlier than Period IV; this is independently supported by the few sherds found in Ditch VI. On the other hand, it must be noted that no pottery was recovered in either of the other two ditches. However, as *Ditch IV* runs approximately parallel to *Ditch VI*, into which runs *Ditch V*, it is clear that Ditches IV and V cannot have been cut much later than Ditch VI, even if it can eventually be shown that all three are not strictly contemporary.

Ditch IV was approximately 2 ft. 6 in. deep and about 3 ft. wide, if its sides are projected to the top of the Romano-British plough-soil; it has been traced so far for some 74 ft. and its profile is roughly V-shaped. *Ditch V* is rather wider (3 ft.), but of the same depth and outline; so far only some 19 ft. of its course have been examined, from its junction with Ditch VI towards the eastern part of the site. *Ditch VI* is by far the largest of the three, with a width and depth of 8 ft. and 3 ft. 9 in. respectively; it is U-shaped in outline and its course has been traced for about 70 ft. What distinguishes these ditches is that Ditches IV and V are cut mainly through the Romano-British ploughsoil and barely penetrate the subsoil, hence their filling contained a very small proportion of Gault Clay, whereas Ditch VI is cut well into the subsoil and its filling consisted mainly of re-deposited clay subsoil over some silt accumulation. Clearly the subsoil upcast from this ditch must have been piled up on its western (? outer) lip and later

² *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxii (1967), fig. 1; lxxxiii (1968), 40.

used to backfill the ditch when the site was levelled for the purpose of building the earliest villa. The function of these ditches is at present uncertain though, as Ditch V runs into Ditch VI, it is safest to assume that they were intended for drainage.³

Periods III-IV, c. A.D. 55-120

Examination to the north-east of the villa's main range of rooms has shown that some sort of a building, perhaps a small outhouse, was located in this area before the building of the rear corridor; all that survived of this presumed structure is a short length of wall, built of ragstone and yellow mortar and about 1 ft. 6 in. wide, running approximately parallel with the villa and turning to south-west. The whole area to north-east of the outer wall of the rear corridor showed evidence for a compacted layer of yellow mortar, cut immediately outside the wall by the trench of the water-pipeline passing under Rooms 86 and 88, which is more likely to be the result of mixing mortar at the time of the building of the corridor rather than a floor, as it rests directly upon the Romano-British ploughsoil without any make-up layers beneath it; this mortar layer was recorded as far as the south-east limit of the length of wall mentioned above and covered some loose ragstone laid in a shallow trench which may belong to foundations extending that wall towards the south-east.

Two fresh trenches were cut in the area of *Room 94* which was partly explored in 1967.⁴ One of these established the line of the south-west wall of this feature, and the other was cut astride both walls so as to give a continuous section. As a result, it is now known that this feature was 12 ft. 9 in. wide; its full length is not yet traced, 34 ft. 3 in. only have so far been examined. As previously recorded,⁴ the whole feature had been methodically demolished: its north-east wall had been completely removed, and only the cutting of its construction trench into the sub-soil indicated where it had been built; the south-west wall had fared rather better as some loose foundation material survived *in situ* and suggested that the demolition had been carried out from a north-easterly direction. No traces whatever of the floor of this feature were preserved in these new trenches; instead demolition had penetrated 1 ft. 9 in. deeper than the level thought last year⁵ to be that of the floor, and the back-filling consisted of alternating layers of building débris and subsoil, the latter clearly deriving from construction trenches dug elsewhere on the site at the time of the demolition. The depth of this back-filling suggests that the floor of Room 94 must

³ This ditch seems to run practically parallel with a similar rectilinear ditch explored in previous years at the western limit of the site; cf. *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxii (1967), fig. 11 and pp. 163-4.

⁴ *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxiii (1968), 40-1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 40.

have been lower than 4 ft. 6 in. from the present surface; it is scarcely deep enough to indicate the presence of a cellar.

On this basis, what was thought in 1967 to be the floor-level could be tentatively re-interpreted as the top of the uppermost of a number of steps such as would be found inside a bath. Support for this suggestion can be found not only in the fact that the *débris* filling in the 1967 trench dropped below the *opus signinum* then considered as the bath-floor but also, and much more to the point, in the *opus signinum* rendering on the *inner* surface of the north-west wall, which had survived, and the painted wall-plaster *débris* present in the back-filling, which would have rendered the wall above the *opus signinum*, i.e. above the water level. The alternative possibility that the room was first robbed of its materials and then excavation continued at depth for the purpose of obtaining clay can be discounted on the grounds that clay could be had more easily elsewhere and that it formed much of the back-filling. Furthermore, the subsoil material used to back-fill this feature argues that the area occupied by it was being levelled.

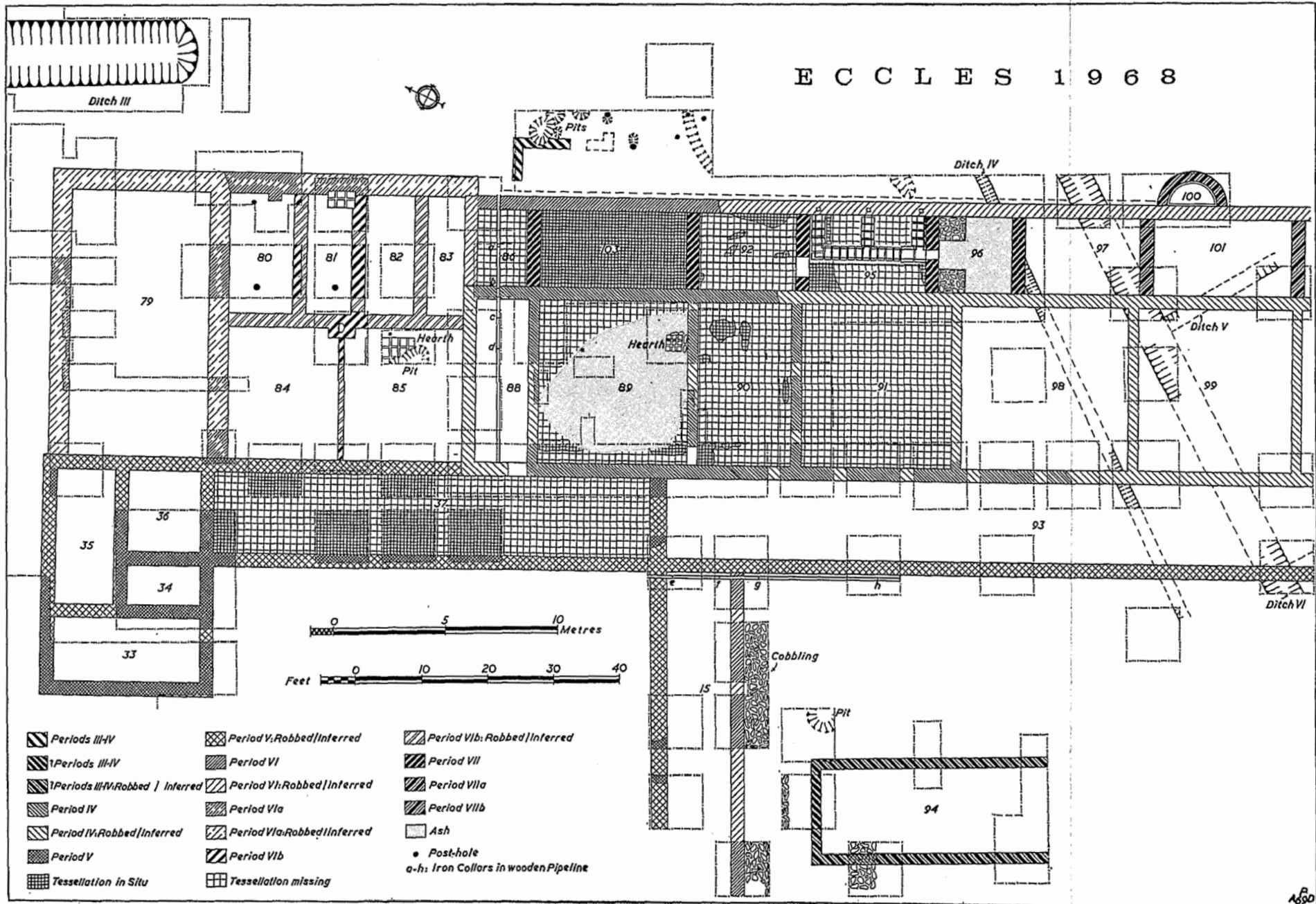
Immediately beyond the line of the north-east wall in the larger of the two new trenches was found a layer of whitish mortar deposited directly upon the subsoil; its full extent is not known but, as it did not appear in the 1967 trench further to north-west, it is unlikely that it represents anything more than mortar being mixed at the time of the construction of Room 94. A large part of a small, carinated reeded bowl, normally datable from Flavian times to the early second century A.D., was found embedded in this mortar deposit. It seems now clear that this feature was not built as early as provisionally suggested on the previous report and that the early-Flavian samian found below the level of the *opus signinum* step must be considered as rubbish-survival.

The function of this long feature is still far from certain, though the suggestion put forward above that it may have been an open-air bath does fit all the known facts of the excavation. Its proximity (about 28 ft.) to Room 93, the fronting corridor of the villa, makes it unlikely that it would have been retained beyond Period IV; it certainly had been demolished before Period VI as the cobbling, extending to south-east from the outer wall of Room 15, the corridor leading to the baths of that period, had been carried over the line of the feature's south-west wall.

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

Examination of the central range of rooms in this period of the villa's occupation continued and two further large rooms were added to its plan.

ECCLES 1968



- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Periods III-IV | Period V: Robbed/Inferred | Period VIb: Robbed/Inferred |
| 1Periods III-IV | Period VI | Period VII |
| 1Periods III-IV Robbed / Inferred | Period VIa: Robbed/Inferred | Period VIIa |
| Period IV | Period VIa | Period VIIb |
| Period IV: Robbed/Inferred | Period VIa: Robbed/Inferred | Ash |
| Period V | Period VIIb | Post-hole |
| Tessellation in Situ | Tessellation missing | a-h: Iron Collars in wooden Pipeline |

FIG. 1.

The east corner of *Room 90* was confirmed in a trench to north-east of the area examined in 1967. The partition wall had survived as foundation materials only and its junction with the north-east wall of the villa in this period had been completely robbed.

The dimensions of *Room 91* are 24 ft. 6 in. by 22 ft. 6 in., *Room 98* measured 24 ft. 6 in. by 25 ft. 3 in., and *Room 99* 24 ft. 6 in. by 23 ft. Most of the walls of these rooms had been totally robbed, but there is no doubt that the main walls were the standard width of 2 ft. and the partition walls rather slighter at 1 ft. 6 in. *Room 91* alone was laid with a tessellated floor, though none of the tessellation survived *in situ*; the *opus signinum* bedding for it, however, was preserved and was identical in construction with beddings in the other rooms to north-west where parts of the tessellation had survived *in situ*. On the other hand, *Rooms 98* and *99* were floored with yellow mortar laid on a make-up layer of clay which was quite unlike the make-up layers below the *opus signinum* beddings.⁶ In the last stages in the villa's history both these rooms must have ceased to fulfil their original function as evidence was found for open hearths within both.

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

Two new trenches were cut across the length of the villa's fronting corridor (*Room 93*). Its south-west wall had been completely robbed and its line survives only as a robber trench; the length so far traced is 96 ft. 6 in. Its floor had been virtually ploughed out and was preserved in few places where it consisted of yellow mortar laid on a bedding of bright yellow sandy clay.⁷

No traces were found of the water-pipeline trench observed south-west of this wall in the 1967 trenches further to north-west, but the disturbance at depth in this area at the time of the robbing of the wall may account for their absence.⁸

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

(i) *The Living Quarters*. Extensive re-examination of the area immediately to north-west of the central range of rooms has brought about a reconsideration of the plan of this area.

Removal of the tessellation and its *opus signinum* bedding of *Room 103*⁹ (Plate I, A) showed that its north-west and north-east walls were not contemporary, but that the former had been abutted

⁶ *Ibid.*, fig. 2, section AA'.

⁷ It is quite possible, of course, that these mortar floors were in fact the under-floors beneath tiling since removed by the plough.

⁸ Further evidence for this water pipeline was recovered in 1969 beyond the limits of the 1968 excavation.

⁹ *Room 103* is the result of the re-numbering of *Room 87* as in the report for 1967.

on the latter; furthermore, it was established that the north-east wall of *Room 86* and its robbed north-west one were part of the original plan. No earlier wall lay beneath the south-east wall of *Room 86*, as had been earlier suspected;¹⁰ the traces of hard foundation material, immediately outside the north corner of this room and considered to belong to a robbed north-east wall of *Room 86* projecting slightly beyond the line of the later north-east wall, are now known to belong partly to the north-east wall of *Block 79-85*, abutted on the north corner of *Room 86*, and partly to a hard base below the water-pipeline trench outside of and parallel with the north-east wall of *Room 86*.

It is now clear, therefore, that the villa in this period had originally been provided with a rear corridor, divided into at least two parts (*Rooms 87 and 104*; Fig. 2) and extending from the north corner of the villa towards the south-east; this corridor was 11 ft. 6 in. wide, but its total length is not yet known though it extends at least 126 ft., i.e. the total length of the living quarters examined so far. The tessellated portion of this corridor (*Room 87*; Fig. 2) measures 68 ft. and includes the area of the later *Room 86*; as it is now known that the south-east wall of this room is not part of the original plan, there is no reason to suppose that the tessellation would not have extended to the north corner of the rear corridor. The remainder of the corridor (*Room 104*) was floored with yellow mortar¹¹ and extended at least 56 ft. to the south-east; later, it was partitioned into smaller rooms.

(ii) *Block 79-85*. The north-east area of *Room 85* was partly re-examined, and a new trench was cut here in order to establish the dimensions of the hearth whose north-west edge was first exposed in 1967.¹² The hearth was found to measure 7 ft. 6 in. by not much more than 4 ft. as some undercutting through the south-west face of the trench showed conclusively that the tiles of the hearth did not extend further than shown on the plan (Fig. 1). The hearth (Plate I, B) had been constructed of bonding-tiles laid directly upon yellow clay which had been burnt a brilliant brick-red.¹³ The area between the north-east edge of this hearth and the north-east wall of the room had been filled with ragstone, bearing traces of mortaring and continuing round the east corner of the hearth for part of its south-east edge; this indicates the possibility of a ragstone surround to the hearth which would also serve to protect the north-east wall of the room from direct contact with fire. Ashes and charcoal filled the whole area of the hearth, and it was observed that this deposit became thicker towards the south-east and beyond the edge of the trench which clearly

¹⁰ *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxiii (1968), 42.

¹¹ See note 7, above.

¹² *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxiii (1968), 47.

¹³ This was also the case in the 1967 trench immediately to north-west; *ibid.*, 47.



Photo: R. G. Foord

A. Period VII. General View of the rear Corridor, looking south-east. *Foreground:* Room 103, with a temporary Baulk across its Width, fully excavated. *Middle Distance:* Room 95, showing make-up Layers below Floor. *Background:* Room 96, Channelled Hypocaust.



Photo: R. G. Foord

B. Period VI. Room 85, looking north-east: Hearth.

PLATE II



Photo: R. G. Foord

A. Period VI. Courtyard Cobbling.



Photo: R. G. Foord

B. Period VII. Room 96: Channelled Hypocaust, looking south-west, with south-eastern subsidiary Channel (extreme left) uncleared of its Filling.

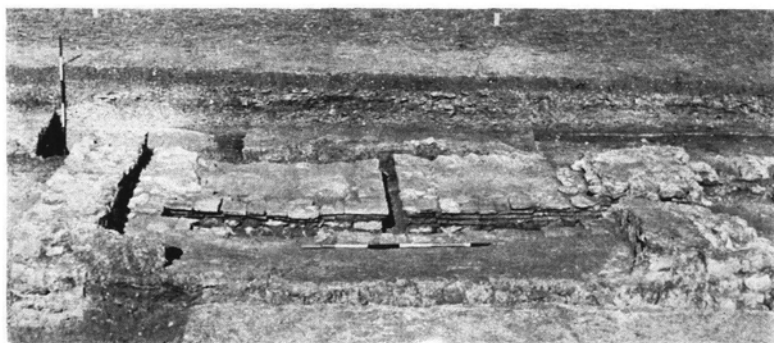


Photo: R. G. Foord

A. Period VII. Room 96: Channelled Hypocaust, looking north-east.

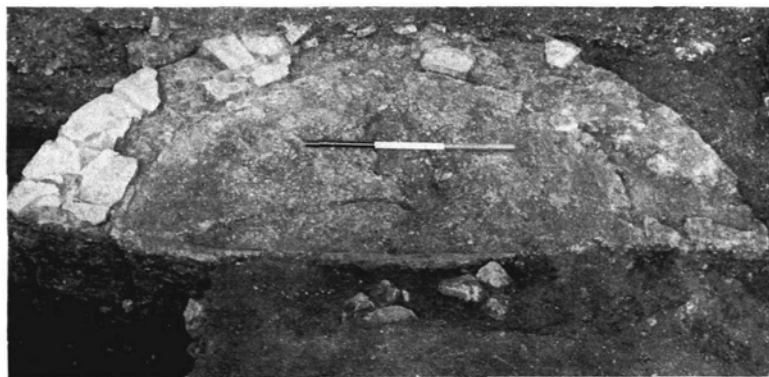


Photo: R. G. Foord

B. Period VII. Room 100, looking north-east.

points to servicing from that direction. The existence of this hearth in Room 85 confirms its function as a kitchen.

(iii) *The Courtyard*. The area of cobbling exposed in 1967¹⁴ was again found in the north-western part of one of the new trenches cut in this area (Plate II, A), and it would seem that this cobbling had extended for at least 20 ft. south-east of Room 15; it proved impossible to establish whether it had been laid still further south-east as the whole area here has been disturbed at great depth, probably in post-Roman times—however, there was no evidence either to show that its existing edge was its original limit, and it is likely that it formerly extended over the whole courtyard.

Period VII, c. A.D. 290–400: The Living Quarters

Examination at depth of the area to south-east of the tessellated portion of the rear corridor has resulted in considerable additions to the plan of the villa.

Room 103 is the old Room 87 re-numbered and now placed in its correct building sequence; its dimensions and flooring have already been described.¹⁵ However, sectioning of its floor has shown that the *opus signinum* bedding of the tessellation varied in thickness from 4–6 in. and had been laid on a foundation of loose ragstone, with mortar débris and painted wall-plaster fragments filling the gaps between the ragstone, followed by a layer of gravel and several deposits of building débris. To south-west the *opus signinum* bedding had been carried on to the external offset of the existing outer wall of the central range of rooms (Plate I, A), which had been rendered with white-washed *opus signinum*; no offset at all, however, had been allowed for in the north-east wall of Room 103. The north-west wall of this room had clearly been abutted on to the north-east wall at the north corner, just as this was observed in the south corner;¹⁵ it had been constructed of ragstone and yellow mortar on a loose foundation deposit of painted wall-plaster and mosaic fragments¹⁶ laid in a fairly shallow construction trench cut into the Romano-British ploughsoil.

Room 92 (Plate I, A) was divided from Room 103 by a partition wall, 2 ft. wide, and measured 11 ft. 6 in. by 14 ft. 6 in. Both the north-east and south-west walls of this room had been partly robbed, but its floor-bedding of *opus signinum* had survived intact; though most

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁶ The provenance of these painted wall-plaster and mosaic fragments is not yet known; they obviously came from a demolished structure which has not yet been identified. However, as lumps probably of *opus vermiculatum* were also present, this material must have come from a first-century building (for the dating of *opus vermiculatum*, see D. J. Smith, 'The Mosaic Pavements', in A. L. F. Rivet (Ed.), *The Roman Villa in Britain*, London, 1969, 75).

of its tessellation had been dispersed by ploughing, enough *tesserae* were preserved *in situ* to show that the tessellation had been identical, in its alternating strips of red and buff *tesserae*, with that in Room 103.¹⁵ The *opus signinum* bedding averaged 4 in. in thickness and consisted of two applications of concrete over two make-up layers of painted wall-plaster fragments with loose yellow mortar and ragstone chippings. Both partition walls of this room were of the same thickness as the north-west wall of Room 103 and similarly contained painted wall-plaster and mosaic fragments in the bottom of their shallow construction trenches.¹⁶

Room 95 (Plate I, A) measured 11 ft. 6 in. by 17 ft. 6 in. and was divided from Room 92 by a partition wall, 2 ft. in width; access between these two rooms was afforded by a doorway, near the south corner of Room 95 and measuring 3 ft. in width—this is not, however, likely to be the true width of the door as no evidence survived for the jambs that would have obviously narrowed the opening allowed for the door in the partition wall. This room, too, had been laid with a tessellated pavement, of which a few pockets of *tesserae* remained *in situ*; its *opus signinum* bedding was again about 4 in. thick, consisted of two clearly distinct applications of concrete and had been carried through the doorway. A thin layer of dirt was observed below the upper surface of this bedding and the thin screed of *opus signinum* used for the setting of the *tesserae*; this clearly indicates that some time had elapsed between the construction of the bedding and the laying of the tessellation.

The most likely explanation for this must be that the surviving tessellation is not the original floor of this room and that the original pavement had been removed in order to allow for the insertion of the channelled hypocaust below the floor of this room. In this case, dust and dirt from the building operations would accumulate on the bedding and become sealed underneath the tessellation when it was re-laid. Further support for this suggestion can be found in the recorded change made in the re-laying of the *tesserae* still in five alternating stripes as before but with red *tesserae* forming the outer and central stripes instead of buff-coloured ones as in Rooms 103 and 92 and, in effect, reversing the colour-scheme of the tessellation. Below the *opus signinum* bedding was a deposit of yellow mortar and numerous fragments of painted wall-plaster laid on a make-up of loose ragstone and tile débris, except over the hypocaust channels where tile débris alone formed the make-up layer.

The channelled hypocaust (Plates II, B and III, A) inserted in this room consisted of one main flue and three subsidiary channels ending in outlets possibly built into the north-east wall of the room or, more likely as it would avoid the necessary extensive demolition, box flue-

tiles rose abutting the wall-face;¹⁷ no direct evidence for either was found, however, as the wall had been completely robbed.

The main flue channel and its subsidiaries had been cut into the Romano-British topsoil, parallel with the inner and outer walls of the room and extending for the full length of the room. Three subsidiary channels opened towards the north-east wall from the main flue: two of these were built adjacent to the partition walls and the central one very nearly half-way between them; there were no channels at all opening to south-west of the main flue. All the construction trenches for these channels had been lined internally with two courses of clay-bonded ragstone to form a stable foundation for the superstructure; this consisted of six layers of superimposed bonding-tiles, each one projecting further inward than the layer below, in the manner of corbel-vaulting, until the space separating the opposite sides had been reduced to a mere 6 in. A capping layer of bonding-tiles spanned this gap, except for the area close to the mouth of the flue and underneath the partition wall from the furnace (Room 96) where the larger bridging-tiles had been used instead. The uppermost layer of capping tiles had survived intact *in situ* and in good condition, except for cracking through heating; none of the channels was floored, and heat alone had baked the underlying soil to a brick-red consistency and colour. Clay had been used throughout the construction of this hypocaust for bonding, except for the bridging tiles which had been mortared. The main channel was 1 ft. 6 in. wide and the subsidiary ones 1 ft.; the height of all the channels was about 2 ft.

There was an accumulation of soot and ashes in the main channel close to the mouth of the flue into Room 96; likewise, soot had collected at the ends of the subsidiary channels and at the points where they would have risen vertically inside or against the north-east wall. The soot and ashes close to the mouth of the flue and for some way towards the north-west contained many sherds and food bones, their volume decreasing away from the flue-mouth; this deposit, which also contained a coin of Carausius, had obviously been pushed into the hypocaust channel by those tending the furnace,¹⁸ and its date is mainly of the fourth century A.D. A second, and very worn, coin of Tetricus was found embedded in the yellow mortar bonding of the south-east partition wall in the flue cut through this wall when the channelled hypocaust was inserted; its actual find-spot was the seating of one of the bridging-tiles spanning the flue, and its discovery confirms the dating of this reconstruction.

¹⁷ I owe this suggestion to Professor S. S. Frere, M.A., F.S.A.

¹⁸ It is interesting to note that this practice of disposing of rubbish under a hypocaust was also observed in the *laconicum* of the earliest baths; *Arch. Cant.*, lxxix (1964), 123.

Room 96 (Plate I, A), measuring 11 ft. by 11 ft. 6 in., provided the heat for the channelled hypocaust under Room 95 through a flue, 1 ft. 6 in. in width, in its north-west wall; both partition walls of the furnace-room were 2 ft. wide and built of ragstone set in yellow mortar. Examination of their construction trenches, however, confirmed the observed fact that these two walls were not of contemporary construction; for not only did the north-west wall of the room look far more solidly built than the south-east one but also its ragstone and mortar construction had continued to the very bottom of its bedding trench, whereas the south-east wall had been founded on a deposit of loose ragstone and débris containing painted wall-plaster and mosaic fragments, as already noted for the partition walls of Rooms 95, 92, and 103.

Originally, the furnace-room was not floored but the fire had been laid directly on the subsoil, except for the area directly in front of the mouth of the flue where amongst the débris filling were found three fragments of sandstone which have not originated in the Wealden area; they could have come from the Millstone Grit of South Wales or the Midlands or, perhaps, even from abroad.¹⁹ All these fragments are slightly altered by heat, and it would thus seem that steps had been taken to ensure that at least the mouth of the flue was floored with durable materials: Kentish ragstone has a calcareous cement which, turning to calcium oxide on heating, would cause the stone to crumble, whereas these pieces of sandstone have a siliceous matrix which would not decay in the heat of the furnace. Two very worn coins, both of Tetricus I and Tetricus II, were found embedded in the subsoil within this furnace.

At a later stage during the life of Room 96 a reconstruction apparently became imperative because excessive heating of the north-west wall was beginning to affect it, and a pair of cheeks was constructed in order to reduce the area of direct contact; that these cheeks were not part of the original plan is clearly shown by the thin deposit of soot and ash found below them on top of the subsoil and extending to the face of the north-west wall. Both cheeks measured 4 ft. by 3 ft. 6 in. and were built of ragstone bonded with clay which had hardened to a brick consistency as a result of firing in the furnace; at the same time, tiles were laid on the subsoil, again sealing some soot and ash below them, to serve as a floor, though they were very badly cracked and disturbed in the course of later robbing. The entire area of the furnace-room was filled with the usual demolition débris and, above the remains of the tiled floor, a fairly thick layer of ashes and charcoal; this deposit

¹⁹ I am indebted to Mr. I. F. Mercer, of the Institute of Geological Sciences, and to Dr. R. P. S. Jefferies, B.A., Ph.D., F.G.S., for the identification of these fragments and useful comments.

yielded a scatter of 65 coins, mainly of fourth-century A.D. date,²⁰ clearly dropped in the course of tending the fire. No direct evidence survived for an entrance into this room, but it is virtually certain that this would have been sited through the north-west wall and at about the east corner of the furnace.

Rooms 96, 97 and 101 occupy the area, as far as examined, of the earlier Room 104, i.e. the north-eastern section of the villa's corridor beyond the south-east wall of Room 95 where the tessellated pavements stopped and yellow mortar was used as flooring material. Though once again no direct evidence could be secured, owing to the complete demolition in this area and the robbing of the walls, it is clear that the partitioning of this corridor here into smaller rooms is not contemporary with the partitioning of the north-western area of the corridor as the construction trenches cut for both partition walls of Room 101 are much shallower than those of the partition walls beyond the furnace-room.

Room 97 measures 11 ft. 6 in. by 17 ft. 3 in. and Room 101 11 ft. 6 in. by 20 ft. 6 in.; both these rooms were floored with yellow mortar, about 2-4 in thick, laid on a make-up layer of re-deposited subsoil.²¹

Room 100, a small apsidal recess opening off the north corner of Room 101 (Plate III, B), is shown on the plan (Fig. 1) as belonging to an earlier phase than Rooms 97 and 101; in fact, because robbing has again removed the evidence, this distinction may not be valid, and it is more likely that all these three rooms belong to the same reconstruction of this part of the rear corridor. The apse measured 7 ft. 6 in. in length and had a maximum width of 3 ft. 9 in.; its floor consisted of *opus signinum*, about 4 in. thick and laid on successive make-up layers of loose mortar rubble and building débris over a foundation course of unmortared ragstone resting on the subsoil. The junction of the floor and the wall of the apse had been sealed with a strip of *opus signinum* quarter-round moulding, which indicates that the apse probably contained water. The wall of this room had been built on a foundation of loose ragstone laid on the subsoil below a layer of yellow mortar rubble and tile débris; immediately above this deposit were two courses of mortared ragstone and then the wall of the apse which consisted of coursed bonding-tiles set in yellow mortar—five of these courses of bonding-tiles survived below the ploughsoil. The apse had clearly been abutted on the north-east wall of the corridor and, though the latter had been completely removed, the apse's wall

²⁰ Included in this scatter were coins of Gratian (1), Constantius II (3), *Urbs Roma* (1), Theodora (1), Magnentius (3), Constans (4), an *antoninianus* of Otacilia Severa, House of Constantine (1), Decentius (1), 'Constantinopolis' (1), Valens (1), nine illegible coins, probably of late-Roman date, and 37 barbarous FEL TEMP REPARATIO types.

²¹ See note 7, above.

and *opus signinum* quarter-round moulding were preserved intact along the whole course of their abutment on the north-east wall. Obviously, a doorway and, perhaps, a step into the apse must have existed through the wall at the north corner of Room 101, but robbing has removed all direct evidence.

DATING

Once more all the evidence recovered in this season of work has confirmed the provisional dating sequence proposed in earlier reports. On the other hand, the recovery in sealed deposits in Rooms 95 and 96 of coins and pottery enables the closing date of Period VII to be established at about the beginning of the fifth century A.D., rather than the previous suggestion of merely post A.D. 290.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

After seven years' work at this large site, it is now possible to attempt a tentative summary and evaluation of the history of the villa (Fig. 2).²²

The original house (Villa I, Period IV, c. A.D. 65-120) consists, at present, of at least six rooms, three of which were certainly laid with tessellated floors, ranged behind a fronting corridor; clearly, this is still only part of the villa's earliest plan, but it now looks probable that it did not possess any wings and recalls in its essentials town strip-houses and other villas,²³ though it is likely to have been larger and was certainly built earlier than most other villas. The bath-house belonging to this first dwelling-house has already been fully examined and described;²⁴ both its size and furnishings require a comparable degree of Romanization in the house itself which should be established when the whole villa is fully excavated. Villa I and its baths form a substantial establishment, showing that 'exceptional Romanization was active in this area',²⁵ within a generation of the Roman conquest; the influence of military baths on the architecture of the Eccles first baths has already been referred to.²⁶ Apart from the implications that this raises, the size of the baths is inordinately large for the occupants of the villa and their attendants alone; certainly these baths could act as 'some sort of social focus'²⁷ for the estate workers and, probably, others in the neighbourhood. This, however, implies organized large-scale farming, i.e. a large farming community, bailiffs, slaves (a length of

²² The pre-Roman occupation of the site is still incompletely explored.

²³ E.g. Lockleys, Park Street, Frocester Court, etc.

²⁴ *Arch. Cant.*, lxxx (1965), 71-85; for its relationship to the villa, *ibid.*, lxxxiii (1968), fig. 1.

²⁵ S. S. Frere, *Britannia*, 1967, 269-70.

²⁶ *Arch. Cant.*, lxxix (1964), lxxx (1965), 89.

²⁷ S. S. Frere, *op. cit.*, 270.

ECCLES ROMAN VILLA

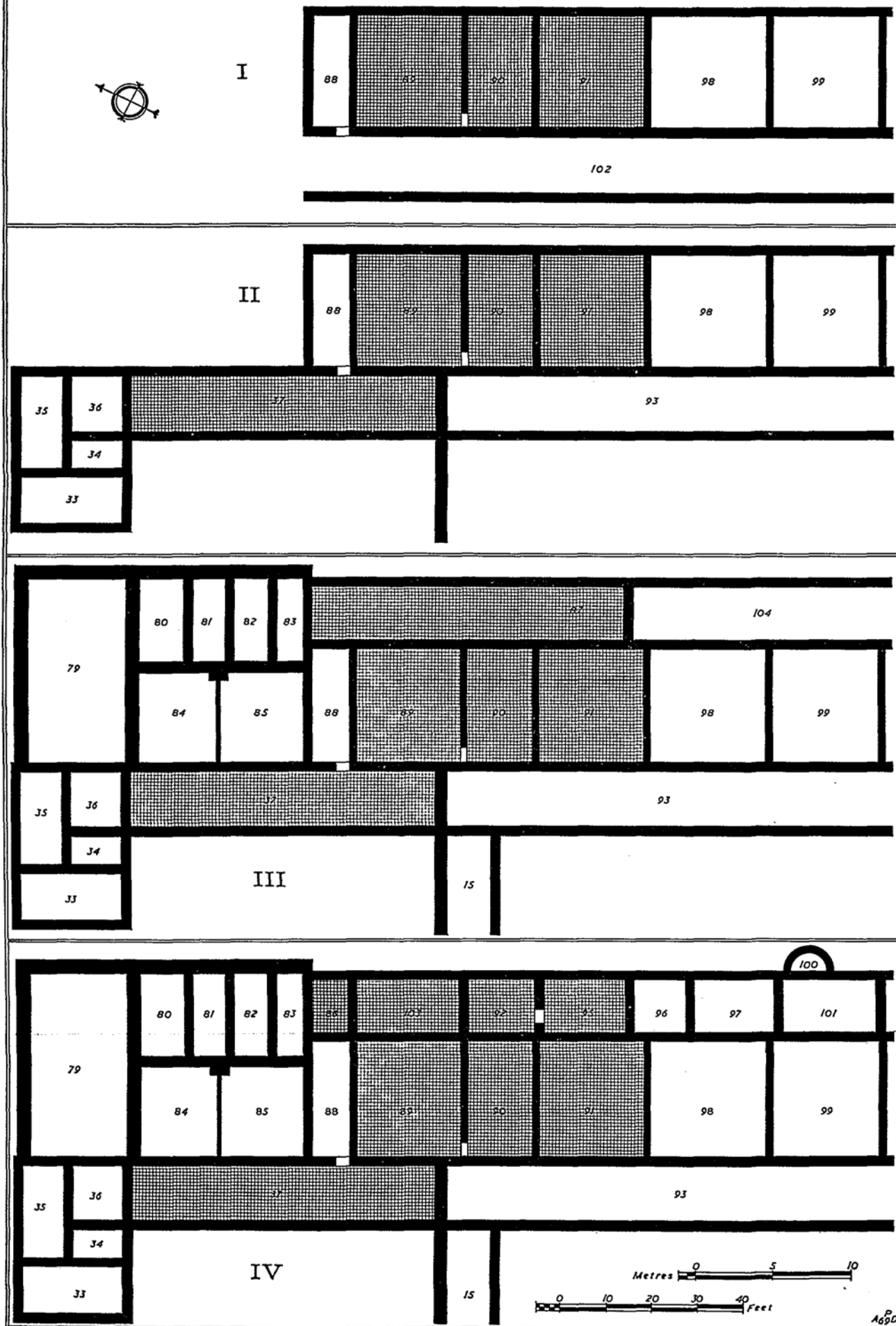


FIG. 2.

chain found in 1965 may be a pointer here), craftsmen, etc., very early in the life of the province; if so, this should mean that the owner of this estate was of considerable social importance and wealth. Only a person of this description, with obvious philo-Roman leanings, could wield sufficient influence to be cultivated by the Romans for their own purposes,²⁸ and possess the wealth needed for the construction and appointments of the earliest house and baths—there can have been very few persons fitting this description in late Iron Age Britain, but it would be idle to speculate further on this point.

The destruction by fire of the first baths²⁹ seems to have brought about not only the building of a new bath-house³⁰ but also some additions to the dwelling-house itself (Villa II, Period V, c. A.D. 120–180); these consisted of the construction of the north-west wing of the villa, a small complex of servants' quarters, and the lengthening and reconstruction of the fronting corridor of the villa.

The implication of a thriving establishment is further underlined in the next stage of reconstruction (Villa III, Period VI, c. A.D. 180–290); a rear corridor was now added to the house, new servants' rooms and kitchens were built off the north corner of the building, a new and substantially larger bath-wing was erected.³¹ Certainly, this is not 'a period of decay'³² at Eccles as might be argued for other villas;³³ and, if it can be accepted that the Lullingstone villa may have been confiscated as a result of its owner's involvement in the political upheavals of the period,³⁴ one wonders why the Eccles villa seems to have escaped unscathed.

Moreover, this continued prosperity of the estate was not affected by the troubled times of the fourth century A.D. (Villa IV, Period VII, c. A.D. 290–400). The rear corridor was now partitioned into small rooms, a channelled hypocaust was inserted, other rooms were added;³⁵ nor was the life of the villa apparently disturbed, let alone interrupted, by the upheavals of A.D. 367, if the coins in the hypocaust's furnace are taken into account. On the other hand, evidence is gradually accumulating that the centre of gravity of the villa's life may have shifted from the central range to the unexcavated south-east wing.

The size of the villa, its early foundation and continued expansion

²⁸ It is not impossible that a military engineer was responsible for the building of this bath-house; *Arch. Cant.*, lxxix (1964), 135.

²⁹ *Arch. Cant.*, lxxx (1965), 85.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, lxxx (1965), fig. 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, lxxx (1965), fig. 2 and pp. 86–7.

³² A. L. F. Rivet, *Town and Country in Roman Britain*, 1958, 108.

³³ At Lullingstone and, perhaps, at the Otford site; there is also a gap in the coin series at the Folkestone villa, but at a later date.

³⁴ S. S. Frere, *op. cit.*, 275.

³⁵ The plan now recalls the Folkestone villa and, even more closely, the building at Farningham examined in recent years (*JRS*, xxxix (1949), 110).

are testimony enough to the social prominence of the family owning the estate.³⁶ That the villa owes its inception to the proximity of Roman Rochester is likely, though it is not possible to prove as not enough is so far known of Rochester's history or social organization. Likewise, it is impossible to prove, at present, any direct links between the Eccles villa and other buildings in its immediate hinterland, e.g. the building at Snodland³⁷ and the Holborough mausoleum³⁸ immediately opposite the Eccles villa on the west bank of the Medway, the buildings³⁹ at Burham and in the village of Eccles, the latter barely half a mile from the villa; excavation alone may settle this point. In the meantime, it is difficult to believe, on purely economic grounds, that the large Eccles baths did not cater for the inhabitants of these other buildings; such a link would not only help to explain the size of the Eccles baths⁴⁰ but also stress the implied social pre-eminence of the villa and confirm it as the focal point of the area between the town of Rochester and the presumed settlement at Maidstone.

Little can be said at present about the economic background of the Eccles villa as the excavation has not progressed sufficiently far to allow for serious suggestions. On the other hand, it should be possible, within the next season or two of work at the site, to complete the north-east range of rooms and to begin the examination of the south-east wing⁴¹ where it is probable that workshops and farm outbuildings, dating from the second to the fifth centuries A.D., are to be found.

³⁶ As no break in the occupation of the villa can be detected, it is presumed that it remained in the possession of the same family.

³⁷ *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxii (1967), 192-217.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, lviii (1945), 68-72.

³⁹ None of these buildings has been methodically examined; for Burham, cf. *Arch. Cant.*, xxiii (1898), 10 and xxxiv (1920), 155.

⁴⁰ As Mr. C. E. Stevens put it 'the site at Eccles . . . seems to have more bath space than is good for a normal villa'. (C. Thomas (Ed.), *Rural Settlement in Roman Britain*, 1966, 123.)

⁴¹ Known from air photography and ground observation of crop-marks; cf. *Arch. Cant.*, lxxviii (1963), fig. 1.