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EXCAVATIONS AT ECCLES, 1969¹

EIGHTH INTERIM REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

EXCAVATIONS were undertaken by the Eccles Excavation Committee for an eighth season, beginning in early April and terminating at the end of October, 1969, at the site of the large 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 Romano-British 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. I am once more greatly in the debt of their tenant farmers, Messrs. A. A. & A. C. Southwell, for their welcome on their land and for continuing to facilitate our work by their generous co-operation.

Financial assistance for this work was given by the Kent Archaeological Society, the British Academy, the Society of Antiquaries of London, the Haverfield Bequest of the University of Oxford and other private contributors.

The major burden of the work fell upon many volunteers, amongst them several members of the Lower Medway Archaeological Research Group, without whose help this excavation could not have been undertaken and whom space considerations alone prevent me from mentioning individually. I must, nevertheless, make an exception in the case of the following to whom I am particularly indebted for their continuous support throughout the season's work: Mrs. D. Cloake, Miss S. M. Emerton, Miss M. B. V. Webster, and Messrs. I. J. Bissett, R. W. Chapman, N. H. Cloake, A. C. Harrison, B.A., F.S.A., O. K. Hales, T. Hetherington, T. Ithell, B.Eng., W. A. Knowles, R. Lowson, B.A., C. E. J. Martin, and P. Thornhill, B.A. I am also grateful to Mr. I. J. Bissett, for continuing to draw the pottery and the small finds; Miss D.

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, and lxxxiv (1969), 93-106. I am once again personally indebted to Professor S. S. Frere, M.A., F.S.A., for his practical support of the work of the Eccles Excavation Committee over the years and for his kindness in reading through this report in draft and suggesting various improvements.

Charlesworth, M.A., F.S.A., for reporting on the glass; Miss S. M. Emerton, for much help with field drawing; Mr. R. G. Foord, for the monochrome site-photography and two of the prints illustrating this report; 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 also acknowledge my indebtedness to my wife for undertaking the initial processing of the pottery.

THE EXCAVATION

This season's work was intended to continue the examination of the villa's living quarters to south-east of the area reached in 1968 and to trench across the lines of the underlying ditches.

Periods I-II, to c. A.D. 55

*Ditch IV*² was sectioned to north-east and south-west of the villa's main block of rooms, and its total known length has now reached some 135 ft.; its outline and dimensions remain unchanged, and it had been filled in with a deposit of soft brown soil which is equated with the topsoil in Romano-British times. No material was found in this filling to determine the ditch's dating; on the other hand, as its alignment is not quite parallel with that of *Ditch VI*, it is clear that these two ditches are not contemporary.

*Ditch V*³ was not found at the north corner of the central of three trenches cut across the width of Room 106 where it should have passed if it were rectilinear; it must be assumed, therefore, that it has changed direction and passed under the unexcavated area to south-east of this room's north corner.

*Ditch IV*⁴ was sectioned by four trenches, and its known length is now⁵ rather more than 213 ft.; though a slight deviation in its course has been noted, it remains rectilinear and of approximately the same width (8 ft.) and depth (3 ft. 9 in.) as in the 1968 trenches. Towards the south-eastern limit of the site, this ditch is very difficult to distinguish from the subsoil through which it had been cut as its back-filling consists of practically identical material.⁶ A *terra nigra* plate, stamped ANDOR,⁷

² *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxiv (1969), 94.

³ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 94-5.

⁵ The line of this ditch is not shown on Fig. 1 to its full known extent at the extreme southern area of the site.

⁶ The same difficulty was experienced in previous years with a similar ditch (*Ditch II*) further to west of the site; cf. *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxii (1967), 164, and Fig. 1.

⁷ At Colchester dated A.D. 43/44-61; cf. C. F. C. Hawkes and M. R. Hull, *Camulodunum*, Oxford, 1947, 208.

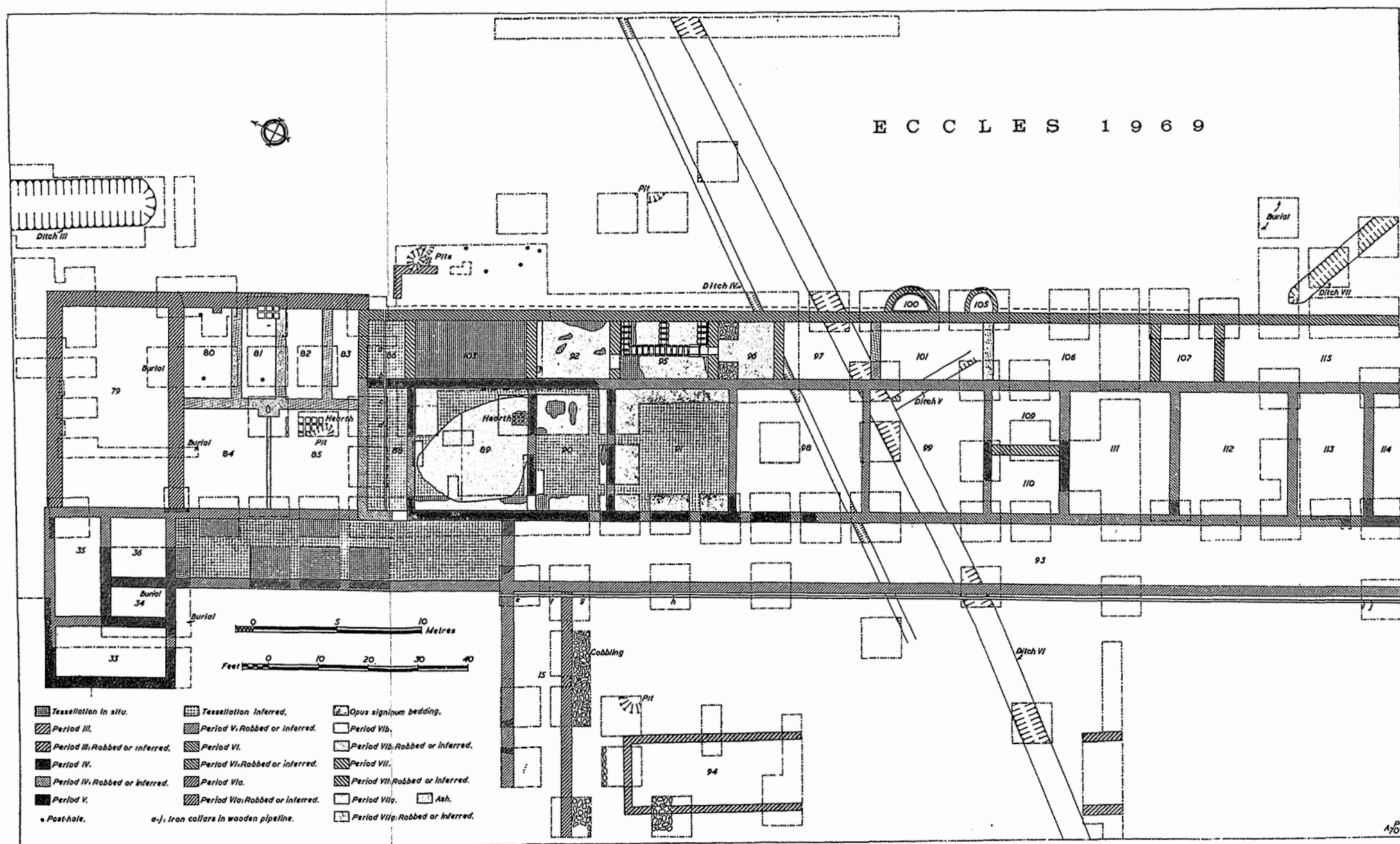


FIG. 1.



FIG. 2.

was recovered almost intact from the filling of this ditch near its present southern limit and confirms its dating to earlier than c. A.D. 65.⁸

The purpose of these ditches remains, at present, uncertain, and they can best be considered as cut for drainage rather than to enclose an area.⁹

Periods IV-V, c. A.D. 65-180: Room 94

A fresh section was cut across the line of the feature provisionally known as Room 94,¹⁰ and vestigial traces of the very loose foundation deposits for its walls were again recorded. Though these were present about 2 ft. further to south-east than their alignment in the 1968 trenches, they remain 12 ft. 9 in. apart as before and extend at least 97 ft. 9 in. to south-east; the change in alignment could mean a corner in the unexcavated area between the last two seasons' trenches.

The whole area where this feature is sited had been badly disturbed by an extensive and deep excavation which had removed most of the Romano-British layers; in the back-filling of this deep excavation were found fragments of tile and a few sherds which appear to be of post-Roman date. A consideration of the few undisturbed layers suggests that a building¹¹ may have been sited here and survived only long enough to fulfil the purpose for which it was originally erected;¹² it was later removed as it could not be allowed to obstruct the view from the main range of rooms to its north-east and the area back-filled with various débris layers. However, the pottery recovered from these layers is mainly of late-Antonine date which indicates that Room 94 must have survived till well after the middle of the second century A.D.; if so, this could mean that the main block faced originally to north-east and not to south-west, as would be more normal and has hitherto been assumed, and that this area was in the rear of the villa until at least c. A.D. 180. In its turn, this would also mean that it was only at the time of one of the villa's reconstructions (Period VII, c. A.D. 180-290) that this area became an internal courtyard with a south-west aspect uninterrupted by Room 94. Much further work is necessary in this area in order to elucidate the purpose of this long feature.

⁸ *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxiv (1969), 94-5.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 95-6.

¹¹ This is suggested by the very flimsy construction of the foundations for these walls which were filled with a loose deposit of building débris and wall-plaster fragments and were perhaps not intended to support anything much heavier than a wooden superstructure.

¹² This could be housing for the workmen engaged on the construction of the main house, as Professor D. E. Strong, M.A., D.Phil., F.S.A., has suggested to me. On the other hand, it is unlikely that such temporary housing would have been internally rendered with *opus signinum* and painted; cf. *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxiii (1968), 40-1.

Period VI, c. A.D. 65-120: The Living Quarters

Examination of the earliest house was continued and a further five rooms were added to the plan of the villa.

Room 108 measures 24 ft. by 13 ft. 6 in., *Room 111* 24 ft. 6 in. by 20 ft., *Room 112* 24 ft. 6 in. by 21 ft. 6 in. and *Room 113* 24 ft. 6 in. by 13 ft. 3 in.; the length of *Room 114* is not yet established. The floors of these rooms did not survive as they were immediately below the modern ploughsoil; in all cases, however, they are likely to have consisted of yellow mortar, possibly as a base for tiling, laid on a thick make-up layer of re-deposited yellowish clay which was preserved below the topsoil and heavily scored by the plough. The walls of all these rooms had been mostly robbed but, where surviving, consisted of the standard construction for this period, i.e. of bright yellow mortar and ragstone. It was observed, too, that the partition walls between Rooms 108 and 111-115 were 6 in. thicker than such walls further to north-west. As wholesale robbing has removed the evidence, it cannot be shown whether the extra thickness denotes additions to an original range of rooms, ending perhaps with Room 108, or whether Rooms 111-114 are of one construction with the rest; but, as the mortar used for the building of the walls of these rooms, where preserved (Plate I), is the same as for those further to north-west, it is safer to assume some other reason, at present not certainly known,¹³ for the thickening of these partition walls.

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

Two further trenches were cut across the fronting corridor of the villa, extending its known length to 176 ft. 6 in.; as was found in 1968, the wall of the corridor had been completely robbed, though traces remained *in situ* of its external rendering in painted wall-plaster.¹⁴ All that survived of the corridor's flooring was its make-up of bright yellow sandy clay, with a few disturbed patches of yellow mortar upon it which indicate a tiled floor.

Fresh evidence was found for the wooden pipeline running immediately to the south-west of the corridor's wall, and two more iron collars (Fig. 1, i-j) of this pipeline were recorded *in situ* within the trench cut for the insertion of the pipeline.

Period VI, c. A.D. 180-190: The Living Quarters

Several trenches were cut across the length of *Room 104*, part of the villa's rear corridor (Fig. 2). The known length of this room is some

¹³ The extra thickness may indicate a higher, more stately range of rooms, in the middle of the block, as suggested to me by Professor S. S. Frere, M.A., F.S.A.; against this, however, it must be noted that the floors of these rooms were not even tessellated.

¹⁴ *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxiii (1968), 45.

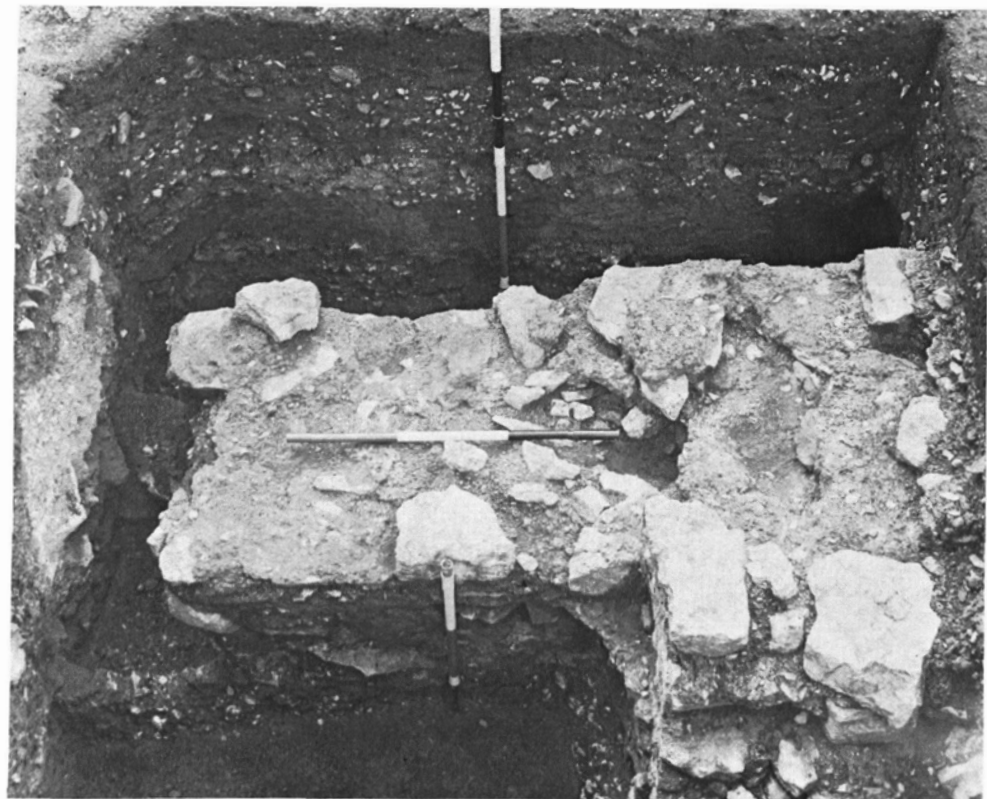


Photo: R. G. Foord

West Corner of Room 114.

PLATE II



A. Remnants of tiled Flooring in rear Corridor.

Photo: R. G. Foord



B. Room 105.

Photo: A. P. Detsikas

134 ft. 6 in. Robbing here was not quite so extensive as in other parts of the building, and a length of its north-east wall survived to show its standard construction of ragstone and yellow mortar. Evidence also survived for the flooring of this rear corridor; the floor consisted of standard hypocaust *pila*-tiles (9 by 9 by 1½ in.) laid on a foundation of yellow mortar of an average thickness of 3 in. and deposited directly on débris layers serving as make-up (Plate II, A); on this evidence, it must now be almost certain that this tiled floor had been laid on the remainder of this part of the corridor's length where only the mortar underlay has survived.

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

Further work in the area of the rear corridor of the villa exposed two new partition walls, sub-dividing Room 104 into smaller units; these partitions were 2 ft. wide, built of ragstone and yellow mortar and clearly abutted on the north-east walls of the main block and its rear corridor.¹⁵ Room 106 measures 31 ft. 6 in. by 11 ft. 6 in., Room 107 10 ft. 9 in. by 11 ft. 6 in.; the complete length of Room 115 is still to be determined.

Another new partition wall, built during this period of the same materials and to the same width, sub-divided the earlier Room 108 into two smaller ones (Figs. 1 and 2), Room 109 measuring 13 ft. 6 in. by 10 ft. 9 in., and Room 110 measuring 13 ft. 6 in. by 11 ft. 9 in.

A second apsidal recess (Room 105) was constructed during this period outside the east corner of Room 101. Its wall was built on a foundation layer of loose ragstone chippings; over this had been spread a layer of consolidating yellow mortar, followed by two courses of mortared ragstone. Above these latter were at least two courses of mortared bonding-tiles. A deep pit had been cut into the Gault Clay subsoil within the apse and was filled with débris and some silt at the very bottom; this suggests that this room was used as a latrine (Plate II, B). It seems now clear that the adjacent Room 100, with its quarter-round moulding of *opus signinum*,¹⁶ must have been used as a wash-room.

A length of ditch (*Ditch VII*) or, rather more precisely, a series of contiguous rubbish-pits, had been cut outside the outer wall of the rear corridor and beyond the north corner of Room 115. This ditch was about 3 ft. 9 in. wide, with an irregular V-shaped profile and an average depth of some 3 ft.; the total length of this feature is not yet known. It had been filled in with much building débris and pottery which is

¹⁵ The dividing walls of Rooms 97 and 101 may be contemporary with those of Rooms 106 and 107 but, as the foundation trenches of the former are shallower than the latter's, these walls have provisionally been assigned to separate phases.

¹⁶ *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxiv (1969), 99.

consistently of late-third to fourth-century A.D. date; this dating is further supported by several worn coins found in this filling which range from Gallienus to Diocletian.

Two infant burials were found to north of this ditch, but it could not be certainly established whether they were inserted during the occupation of the villa as no grave goods were found in unmistakable association with them.

DATING

The eighth season's work at the site has not brought to light any fresh evidence requiring a revision of the provisional dating sequence proposed in earlier reports;¹⁷ on the other hand, the pottery and coins recovered in sealed deposits amply confirm it.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Fig. 2 summarizes the development of the villa's living quarters throughout the occupation of the site so far as it is known after eight seasons' examination of the surviving structures, and little more can be added to what has already been discussed in the previous interim report¹⁸ beyond noting that, even with the addition of five new rooms to the plan of the villa, the south-east end of the house is still to be reached.

Apart from establishing eventually the function of each one of these rooms, the main question that still remains to be answered was posed at the very outset of this excavation when it was realized that the Eccles villa was built much earlier than is normal elsewhere and to such a scale as to proclaim wealth and social prominence. However, no certain evidence has yet been obtained to throw light on the question of ownership. It has already been suggested, in previous reports,¹⁹ that the original builder of the villa may have been a rich philo-Roman Briton who adopted Roman patterns of living within a generation of the conquest; recently, the suggestion has been made that the owner may have been a government official.²⁰ It is to be hoped that these alternatives may be resolved when the excavation of the villa is complete.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 104-6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, lxxix (1964), 135; lxxx (1965), 89, and lxxxiv (1969), 105.

²⁰ *Current Archaeology*, July, 1970, 286.