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EXCAVATIONS AT ECCLES, 1971¹

TENTH INTERIM REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

EXCAVATIONS were undertaken, for the tenth successive season, under my direction and on behalf of the Eccles Excavation Committee, 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); this work was carried out at weekends, from early April until late October 1971, and during a fortnight in August when a training course in Romano-British archaeology, jointly sponsored by the Committee and the Kent Archaeological Society, was held at the site.

It is again with pleasure that I record my thanks to the landowners, Messrs. Associated Portland Cement Manufacturers Limited, for readily allowing our work to continue on their property, and my appreciation to their tenant farmers, Messrs. A. A. and A. C. Southwell, for their continued welcome and support.

Financial support for this work was again given by the Kent Archaeological Society, the British Academy, the Society of Antiquaries of London, the Haverfield Bequest of the University of Oxford, and private donors to all of whom I am very grateful.

Many volunteers participated in this work throughout its long season and only limitations of space prevent me from recording their names; I must, however, make an exception in the case of the following for their sustained support: first and foremost, Mr. A. C. Harrison, B.A., F.S.A.; Mrs. S. M. Frettingham, B.A.; Misses H. Baldon, B.A., and R. C. Symes, and Messrs. O. K. Hales, T. Hetherington, T. Ithell, B.Eng., W. A. Knowles, R. Lowson, B.A., C. E. J. Martin, H. Pearce, and P. Thornhill, B.A.; in their various ways, they have all been of inestimable help. I am also grateful to Mr. I. J. Bissett, for continuing to draw the pottery and the small finds; Miss D. Charlesworth, M.A., F.S.A., for reporting on the glass; Mr. R. G. Foord, for some of the

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; lxxxiv (1969), 93-106; lxxxv (1970), 55-60, and lxxxvi (1971), 25-34. I am glad to place on record, once again, my personal gratitude to Professor S. S. Frere, M.A., F.B.A., F.S.A., for his support and interest in this excavation virtually since its inception and, also, for reading this report in draft to its great benefit.

prints illustrating this report; Mrs. K. F. Hartley, B.A., F.S.A., for reporting on the mortaria; Mr. M. R. Hull, F.S.A., for reporting on the brooches; 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. Lastly, I must record my gratitude to my wife, Mrs. R. M. Emerton and Miss F. E. Emerton, for the initial processing of most of the pottery, and to Miss D. M. Rooke, for her great assistance in preparing my field drawings for publication and in the drawing of the plans of this report.

THE EXCAVATION

Work this year was concentrated on various parts of the site and aimed at completing the examination and recording of features first found last year as well as undertaking the observation and excavation of new areas as they became available.

Periods I-III, to c. A.D. 55: the Ditches

To these early periods are assigned sections of three ditches, partly explored this year and antedating the construction of the first house as *Ditch IX* was found below the foundations of the north-east wall of Room 114 which had been carried down to the bottom of the ditch; this ditch cut across the line of *Ditch X* in the area of Rooms 127 and 128. *Ditch X*, in its turn, either joins or intersects *Ditch XI*.

Ditch IX was traced for some 126 ft. (37.8 m.) and was, on average, 7 ft. 6 in. (2.25 m.) wide; it contained little datable material. *Ditch X* was traced for some 97 ft. (29.10 m.) and was, on average, 7 ft. (2.10 m.) wide; its filling contained pottery consistent with a general dating to c. A.D. 50. *Ditch XI* is so far known only by a short length in an area of much disturbance; its width has not yet been established. This ditch seems to be either earlier than or contemporary with *Ditch X*.

These three new ditches of early dating are now added to a number of others already recorded in previous years of work² which seem to have been cut for land-drainage purposes before the construction of the earliest house.

Period IV, c. A.D. 65-120: The Dwelling-House

As anticipated in 1970,³ the south-east, south-west and north-east walls of *Room 94* were discovered in a new trench immediately beyond the limit of the previous excavation; they had been almost completely robbed and survived only as foundation courses, though the north-east wall had fared even worse and was located only as a robber-trench. All

² E.g. *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxiv (1969), fig. 1, and p. 94.

³ *Ibid.*, lxxxvi (1971), 26.

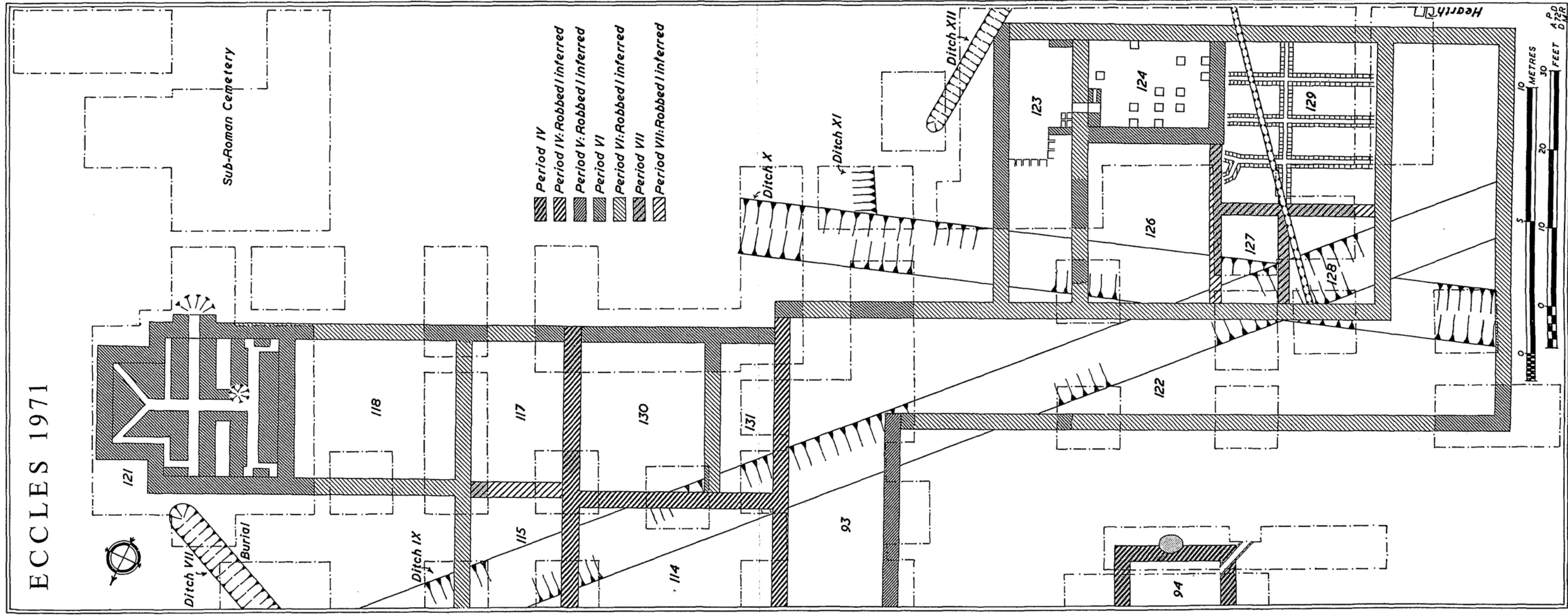


Fig. 1.

three walls of this structure had been trench-built to a width of 2 ft. (0.60 m.),⁴ with ragstone and tufa bonded in bright yellow mortar. No evidence was found for a floor, except at the extreme south corner of this feature where some decayed *opus signinum* lay directly on the subsoil as well as rendering the inner face of the wall. At this point, a channel had been let through the wall-corner for a drain which was 1 ft. 6 in. (0.45 m.) wide, with upright bonding-tiles serving to line its sides and others laid flat for its flooring; the complete length of this drain and its outfall are not yet known.

Outside the north-east and south-east walls of this structure was found a floor⁵ of white mortar, some 3 in. (0.07 m.) in thickness and laid directly on the subsoil.

With the completion of its excavation, it is now known that Room 94, in effect a separate building, measured internally 83 ft. (24.9 m.)⁶ by 11 ft. 6 in. (3.45 m.),⁷ but its purpose is still unclear; the *opus signinum* rendering⁸ and the drain at its southern corner suggest strongly that it contained water. As, clearly, this structure did not form part of a baths, it seems likely that it may have been used for the stalling of cattle or as stables the cleaning of which would necessitate the use of water; this can only be a tentative explanation as the subsequent thorough demolition of this structure has removed all evidence for partitioning which would have made such an interpretation more or less conclusive.

Following the demolition of this building when the main dwelling-house was reconstructed to face south-west,⁹ a plinth-like base of *opus signinum* was built partly into the subsoil and, definitely, partly over the line of the demolished south-east wall; it was quite solidly constructed to a depth of at least 1 ft. 6 in. (0.45 m.) and may have served as the base for some ornament in the courtyard area between the two projecting wings of the villa.¹⁰

Period VI, c. A.D. 180-290: The South-east Wing

Work in this area beyond the 1970 excavations resulted in the almost complete examination of the villa's south-east wing behind its fronting corridor.

⁴ This is a corrected width from that given in previous reports.

⁵ *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxiii (1968), fig. 1. This floor was found immediately to the north-east of the wall, though it is not mentioned in the text of the report.

⁶ Not extending 'at least 97 ft. 9 in. to south-east' as in *ibid.*, lxxxv (1970), 57.

⁷ This is the correct width of this feature; the width of 12 ft. 9 in. given in previous reports (*ibid.*, lxxxiv (1969), 95, and lxxxv (1970), 57) was based on measurements taken from the lips of robber-trenches which can now be shown to be wrong.

⁸ *Ibid.*, lxxxiii (1968), 40.

⁹ *Ibid.*, lxxxvi (1971), 33.

¹⁰ In support of this may be adduced the discovery, in 1972, at the centre of this courtyard of an ornamental basin.

This corridor (*Room 122*) continues to south-west from its junction with *Room 93* to which it had clearly been added; both the north-east and south-west walls of *Room 93* terminated, as shown on the plan (Fig. 1), as if allowance had been made for a turn to south-west when *Room 93* was originally built but, as undoubtedly shown by the fact that the south-east and north-west walls of *Rooms 122* abut on to those of *Room 93*, this intention was not carried out till the following building period. Clearly, the end of the fronting corridor, *Room 93*, facing to south-east must have been closed, probably by a timber structure, but no evidence survived and, in any case, such a structure would have been removed when the south-east wing was eventually added to the house.

Similarly, no evidence was found to show how *Room 116* had been closed in its initial phase; for, as mentioned before,¹¹ its south-eastern wall of flint is not original. The whole length of this wall was removed to the depth of its construction trench, but nothing was found to support the suggestion¹¹ of a timber construction closing this end of the house, and the logical conclusion is again that such evidence must have been swept away by the cutting of the construction trench for the flint wall which must, necessarily, have been cut deeper than any trench intended to take only sleeper-beams.

However, evidence was uncovered that this room was subdivided, when the flint wall was constructed, into two smaller units: *Room 130*, measuring 19 by 15 ft. 6 in. (5.79 by 4.20 m.), and *Room 131*, measuring 19 ft. by 6 ft. 9 in. (5.79 by 2.02 m.). No floors survived, nor any other hint to an explanation for this subdivision of the original *Room 116*.

Measured from the south-west wall of the main range of rooms, i.e. that of *Room 131*, *Room 122* has a length of 76 ft. 6 in. (22.95 m.) towards the south-west before it turns to south-east to continue for another 47 ft. 3 in. (14.13 m.) and reach the south-east wall of this wing; the south-western portion of this corridor was of the same width as the rest of the villa's fronting corridor (12 ft., 3.60 m.), but its south-western portion was wider (13 ft. 6 in., 4.05 m.). The south-east wall of the corridor, apart from a short length opposite *Room 93*, had been thoroughly robbed; the north-west wall had survived better, its western corner (Plate IA) being found intact, though reduced to off-set level. This corner showed, however, that the wall had been built of the usual ragstone and yellow mortar, was 2 ft. thick (0.60 m.) and had been rendered externally with a 2-in. (0.05 m.) thick coating of painted wall-plaster; only the lowest two inches of this survived *in situ* and nothing can be said of its decoration except that, at off-set level, it was pink. Virtually nothing, too, was present of the flooring of this corridor,

¹¹ *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxvi (1971), 27.



Photo: R. G. Foord

A. Room 122: West Corner.

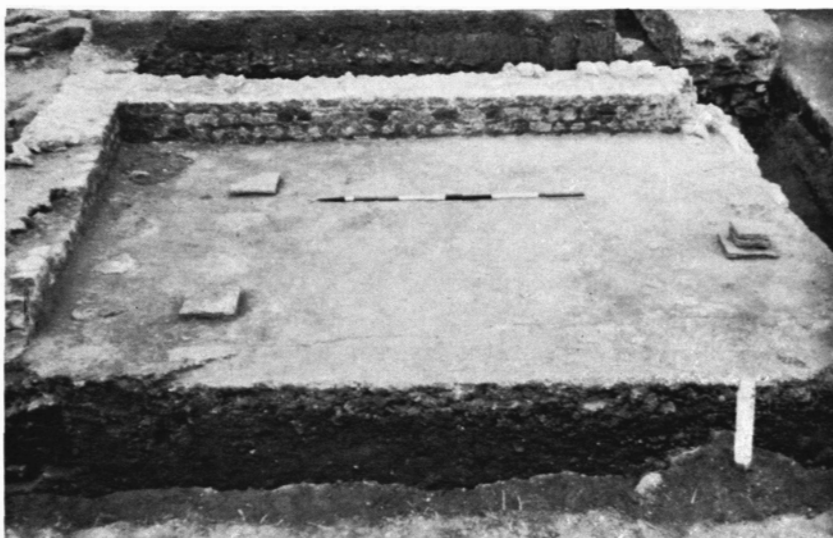


Photo: A. P. Detsikas

B. Room 124: General View from South-east.



Photo: R. G. Foord

A. Room 124: showing Section through Hypocaust Underfloor.



Photo: A. P. Detsikas

B. Rooms 124 and 129: General View from South-west.

except for an area of compacted yellow mortar, immediately to south-west of Room 129, which had some small gravel adhering to it; this suggests that the whole of the corridor, at least along this frontage, may have been likewise floored. If so, it may be concluded that the outer wall of the corridor was only a low one and supported a colonnade with penthouse roof, open to the weather, to explain this more durable flooring in preference to planking or mortar.

The south-east wing originally consisted of three rooms behind the fronting corridor, *Rooms 123-125*; undoubtedly, the most important of these rooms was Room 124 (Plate IB) which measured 11 by 12 ft. 9 in. (3.20 by 3.82 m.) and was provided with a hypocaust. The underfloor of this hypocaust consisted of *opus signinum* (2 in., 0.05 m. thick) laid on a foundation of wall-plaster debris and ragstone chippings, clearly from the construction of the south-east wing, deposited on the subsoil (Plate IIA and IIB). A few of the *pila*-tiles (of standard dimensions, 1 ft., 0.30 m., square, but lacking the more usual larger base tile) survived on the underfloor, but none of the suspended floor; the rubble filling this area did not contain any of the usual lumps of *opus signinum* from a destroyed suspension which must mean that tiles alone may have been used for flooring. This hypocaust was heated from the furnace-room (*Room 123*) through a flue (1 ft. 6 in., 0.45 m., wide) eccentrically placed at the northern corner of the room and with its cheeks slightly projecting into it.

The furnace-room (*Room 123*) was immediately to the north-east of the hypocaust. If it was one single room, it would have occupied a total area of 33 ft. 3 in. (9.16 m.) by 8 ft. (2.40 m.), but it is more likely that this area was divided into two parts; one of these would have been the furnace proper, the remainder probably a fuel store. The whole area here was very badly disturbed by demolition and robbing and much of the evidence was lost; however, much heavy burning on tiling and the subsoil to the north-west of the tiled edge shown on the plan (Fig. 1) suggest that the fire was not confined within the ragstone cheeks of the furnace. Within these cheeks, some of the floor-tiling had remained *in situ*; elsewhere the subsoil was fire-reddened and covered with a fairly thick deposit of soot and ash.

The rest of the south-east wing had initially been one L-shaped area (*Room 125*) measuring, at its widest, 33 ft. 3 in. (9.16 m.) and 36 ft. 9 in. (11.02 m.) at its longest; again, nothing at all survived of the flooring, if it had had one. It seems as though the whole of this irregularly-shaped area was used for the storage of the grain dried in the hypocausted room; however, reconstruction of the whole area was undertaken after a fire which appears to have engulfed it and was shown by a thick deposit of black soot and ashes which was found, lying directly upon the subsoil, in the general area of the later Rooms 126-128.

To this period also belongs *Ditch VIII* (Fig. 2), located to the north-east of the villa and first sectioned in 1971;¹² this year, it was further traced to south-east for some 25 ft. (7.50 m.). Its average width was 4 ft. 6 in. (1.35 m.); it had been filled with building débris and domestic rubbish. As previously suggested,¹² this ditch may have originally served as a boundary and was later used for the deposition of domestic rubbish.

Period VII, c. A.D. 290–400: The South-east Wing

Following the fire in the area of Room 125, the south-east wing was internally reconstructed and the affected area partitioned into four separate rooms; the partition walls, which were 1 ft. 6 in. (0.45 m.) thick, of ragstone and yellow mortar, were all of the same build and had been bedded into shallow trenches cutting through the soot and ashes of the fire. Room 126 measured 20 ft. 3 in. (6.07 m.) by 15 ft. 6 in. (4.65 m.), Room 127 was 11 ft. (3.30 m.) by 7 ft. 3 in. (2.17 m.), Room 128 measured 11 ft. (3.30 m.) square, and the largest Room 129 occupied an area of 20 ft. 6 in. (6.15 m.) by 19 ft. 6 in. (5.85 m.).

Rooms 126–128 had been laid with yellow mortar floors, averaging 2–3 in. in thickness, on a foundation layer of yellow clay laid directly on and sealing the soot and ashes of the fire. Room 129 (Plates IIB and IIIA) clearly served as a granary: it had been provided with dwarf walls, constructed of bonding-tiles set in clay, which would have supported a floor, probably of planking. A continuous air-flow below the floor was ensured by channels allowed in the thickness of these dwarf walls, and it is likely that lateral vents may also have been present at a level higher than surviving. In the northern corner of this room, the air channel branches out into two arms, the one adjacent to the eastern corner of Room 126 being immediately opposite a small hearth which was located immediately beyond the partition wall which, at this point, was not as high as elsewhere along its line; this suggests that the hearth was used to provide hot air beneath the floor in Room 126. It seems clear that, in this period, the south-east wing provided for the drying of corn in Room 124 and its dry-storage in Room 129.

A hearth was also partly exposed outside the south-east wall of the wing; it was built of bonding-tiles set directly on the subsoil, but no datable material was found in association with it, though its location would suggest connection with this building period rather than an earlier one.

Ditch XII, a fairly narrow channel of an average width of 2 ft. 6 in. (0.75 m.) and traced so far for 18 ft. (5.40 m.), is a very late feature, as it cuts through the extreme east corner of Room 123, and may be of comparatively recent date.

¹² *Ibid.*, 31.

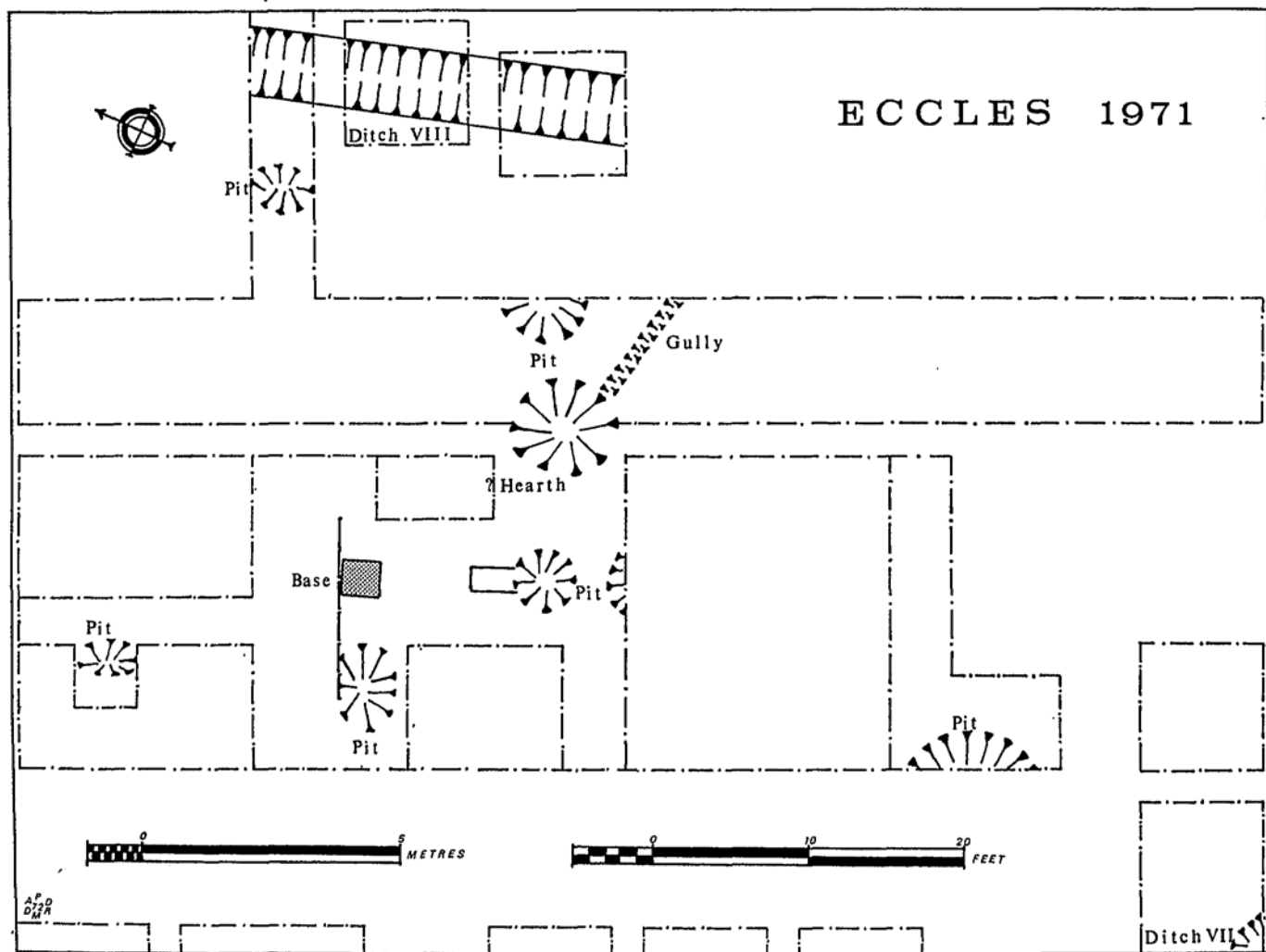


FIG. 2.

Other Features

(i) Further work was carried out to the rear of the villa in its latest periods where a fairly large area had been mechanically stripped in 1970,¹³ with particular attention paid to the centre of this area (Fig. 2). Apart from two more pits, one of which at the north-west limit of the excavation may have been fairly recently dug for the burial of stones, the main result was the examination of two plinth-like bases. One of these measured 2 ft. 6 in. (0.75 m.) square and consisted of a bottom layer of bonding-tiles upon which roofing-tiles had been stood upright to form a casing filled with *opus signinum* to a depth of some 10 in.; the flanges of these roofing-tiles faced outwards and the spaces between them had been filled with white mortar to give the whole construction a smooth external appearance—its solidity suggests that it was intended to carry some weight. Immediately to the north-west of this base and extending for some 11 ft. (3.30 m.) was a line of upright roofing-tiles, embedded in the subsoil, whose purpose seems to be to delimit this area.

Some 6 ft. (1.80 m.) to the south-east of this first base was found another similar construction of upright roofing-tiles; it was narrower (1 ft. 6 in., 0.45 m.) and longer (3 ft., 0.90 m.) than the first one and lacked both its filling of *opus signinum* and white mortar rendering, with its south-east end cut by a modern pit. The interpretation of these features is difficult. Their apparently identical construction must mean that they formed part of the same scheme, though the second base seems not completed. It is not impossible that a third base had once existed to the south-east of the second one, 6 ft. (1.80 m.) away from it and coinciding with the lip of another modern pit by which all evidence will have been removed. If the postulation of a third base can be accepted, then all three could be interpreted as forming a double, 6 ft.-wide gateway located in front of the villa's front wall, some 26 feet (7.80 m.) to the north-east and approximately at the centre of the main range of rooms. Pottery found beneath the first base indicates that it could not have been constructed much before c. A.D. 150, i.e. half-way through the span of Period V (c. A.D. 120–180), or even towards the very end of this period when it was decided to re-orientate the house to face to south-west;¹⁴ if so the construction was abandoned before it was completed.

In the following periods, various pits were cut into this area, with a hearth consisting of several layers of fire-cracked bonding-tiles adjacent to one of them; these pits emphasize that the whole of this area was converted to a kitchen midden at the rear of the villa.

(ii) *Site B.* Excavation was undertaken in advance of the laying

¹³ *Ibid.*, 30–1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

of a water-pipeline in the field immediately to the west of the main site and beyond the public footpath¹⁵ where surface indications suggest the presence of a structure. The only evidence found in the few trenches which were practicable was for a ditch, which contained at its lowest level much iron slag, and a probable trackway; nothing further can be said about this site until detailed examination becomes possible.

(iii) *Site C.* This is an area cleared, by mechanical means, for the construction of a junction-box for the water-pipeline further to west of Site B. Observation of the pipeline trench as well as some excavation have shown that a wall of ragstone 2 ft. (0.60 m.) wide traverses this area, in an approximately north-south direction, probably the boundary wall of the villa; on either side of this wall various patches of packed stones, hard standings and a gully were partly examined and recorded to await methodical excavation. It seems clear, however, that much activity has taken place on this site, probably from the earliest years of the occupation of the whole area; this is suggested by some of the pottery recovered which is datable to the second half of the first century A.D.

(iv) *Site D.* This is located (approximate N.G.R. TQ 718615) in the area of a large pit used by Messrs. Reid International Ltd. for the disposal of paper-waste and consists of an exposed section cut through the slope above the Medway in which were observed many potsherds, mostly of light-coloured vessels; it is likely that pottery manufacture is carried out here¹⁶

(v) *The Cemetery.* Work continued in the area of the cemetery found in the previous year's work¹⁷ and though the area under excavation was much larger than in 1970, the south-eastern limits of this burial ground have not yet been reached. Again the same conditions of three layers of interments were recorded (Plate IIIB), each new layer causing considerable disturbance to the one below it and adding to the difficulty of recording. No individual graves were observed, nor any grave goods; the few Romano-British sherds present in the soil with the burials are of no diagnostic value as they are clearly rubbish survivals. The majority of these burials, certainly all those not subsequently disturbed, were laid with their heads approximately to west and many of these had their hands crossed over their pelvic regions. Again, apart from the suggestion of Christian practice shown in the alignment of the bodies, it has not been possible to date this cemetery more precisely than to the sub-Roman period.¹⁸

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, lxxviii (1963), fig. 1.

¹⁶ This was confirmed in 1972 by the partial examination of a pottery kiln.

¹⁷ *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxvi (1971), 31.

¹⁸ In 1972, the discovery of grave goods associated with the earliest burials showed that the cemetery was first used towards the end of the pagan Anglo-Saxon period.

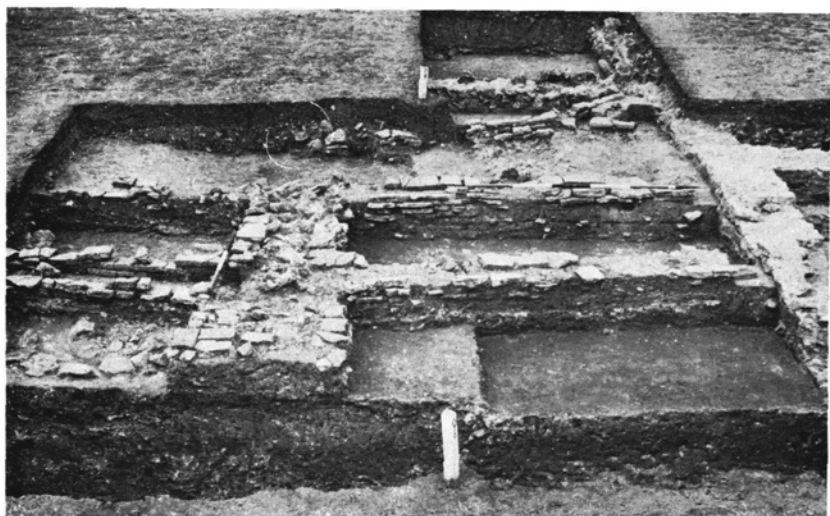


Photo: R. G. Foord

A. Room 129: Details of Dwarf Walls.



Photo: A. P. Detsikas

B. The Cemetery.

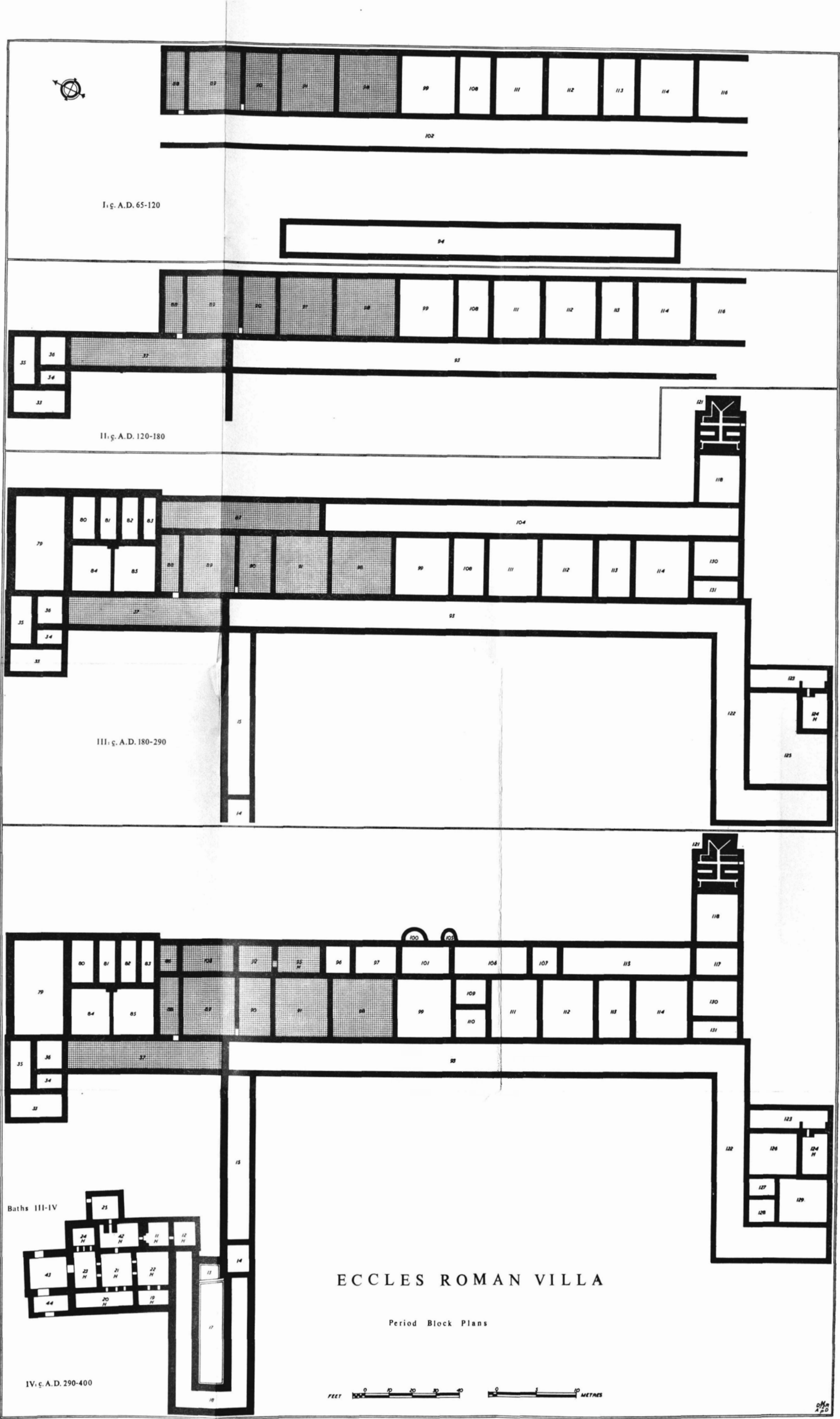


FIG. 3.

DATING

As in 1970, all the evidence recovered this year supports the dating sequence proposed in earlier reports which remains unaltered for the time being.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The excavation of the south-east wing, which is now virtually finished, brings about the complete recovery of the ground plan of the main house, and the following additions may now be made to the general summary in the 1970 report (Fig. 3).¹⁹

In spite of methodical search, no evidence was found for a south-east wall in the original building phase (Period IV), and the conclusion is inescapable that both this room and the corridor to its south-west (Room 102) were closed by a timber construction which later rebuilding has removed without trace. It is not certainly established that the south-west wall of the corridor terminated as shown on Fig. 3, but there seems to be no reason why it should not have done so.

In the following reconstruction of the house (Period V), the south-west wall of the corridor (Room 93), built now of ragstone, replaced the earlier wall, and it seems clear that it was intended to build the south-east wing at that time or, at any rate, provision was made for a turn of the corridor to south-west.

Period VI can now be seen as the final major reconstruction of the house as well as its re-orientation to face to south-west. Two wings were added, a north-eastern one, to the rear of the house and consisting of two rooms,²⁰ and a south-eastern wing behind the fronting corridor which was turned to south-west. As each of these two new wings contained hypocausted rooms, which were not intended for the heating of living rooms, it is clear that they were designed for corn-drying and that the whole south-eastern area of the villa housed rooms concerned with agriculture; the main rooms of the house were concentrated at the opposite end of the building. It is in this period that the house assumed the shape of a building consisting of a main range of rooms and two projecting wings enclosing an inner courtyard which was first established by air photography and ground observation in 1962.²¹

Period VII was one only of internal modifications to this ground plan which remained unchanged in its main details for the rest of the villa's occupation.

The outstanding tasks of this long campaign are now the search for any further structures beyond the south-east wing as well as to south-

¹⁹ *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxvi (1971), 32-4.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 28-30.

²¹ *Ibid.*, lxxviii (1963), 127, fig. 1, with modifications.

west and west of the villa, the examination of the inner courtyard, the sectioning of ditches underlying the house and the search for a roadway connecting the estate with the main Roman road from Rochester to Hastings on Blue Bell Hill and for the cemetery belonging to the Romano-British occupation of the site. Moreover, as already indicated by the discovery of a tilery in 1966,²² more work will be needed at some short distance from the house, in areas surviving modern industrial excavations to south-west and west, as it is now quite certain that the economic background of the estate was industrial as well as agricultural.

²² *Ibid.*, lxxxii (1967), 170-4.