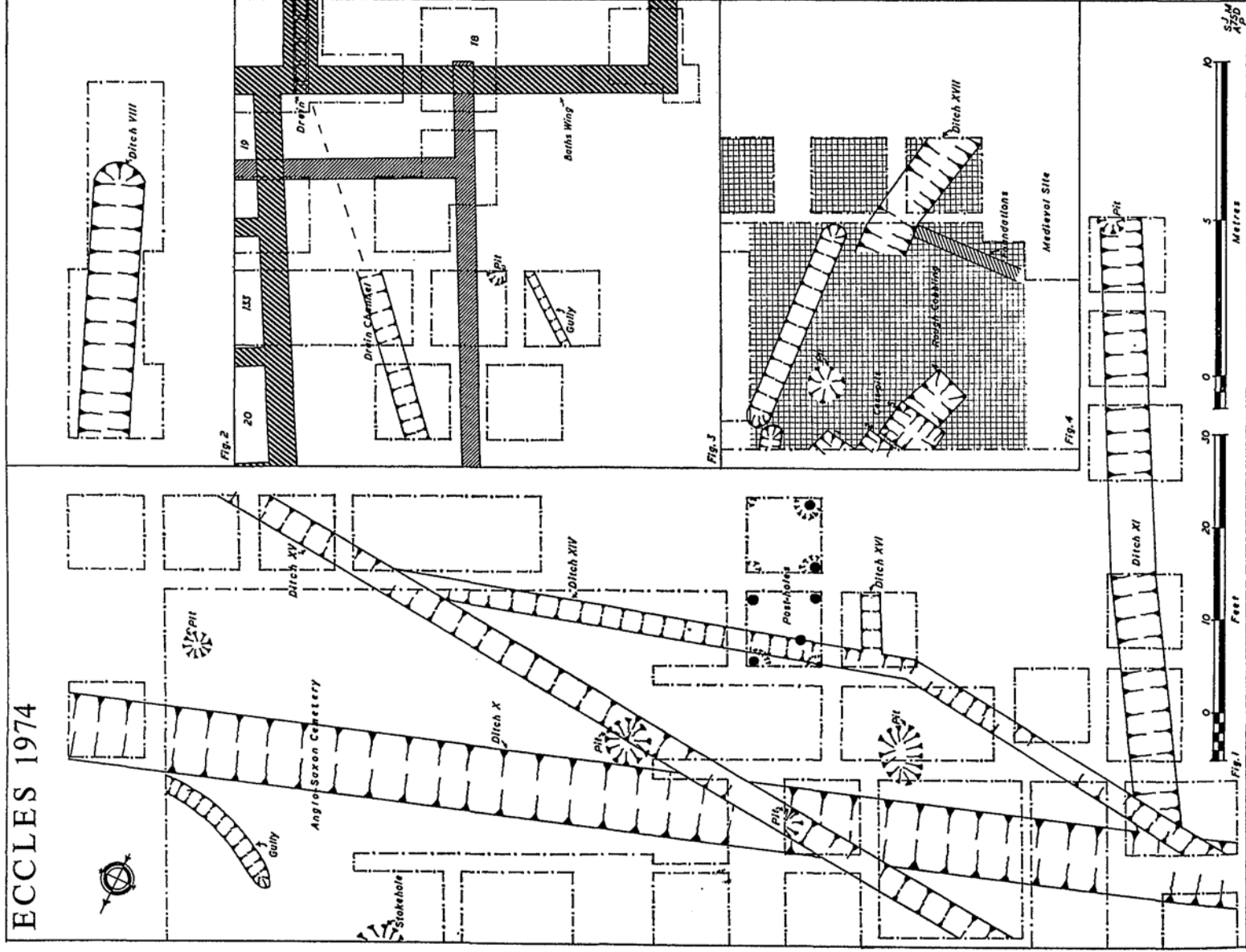




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FIGS. 1-4

EXCAVATIONS AT ECCLES, 1974¹

THIRTEENTH INTERIM REPORT

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

INTRODUCTION

EXCAVATIONS were continued, for the thirteenth successive season, under my direction and on behalf of the Eccles Excavation Committee, at the site of the large Romano-British villa situated at Rowe Place Farm, Eccles, in the parish of Aylesford (N.G.R. TQ 722605; O.S. 6-in. Sheet TQ 76 SW); this work was undertaken at weekends, from April until the end of October 1974, and during a fortnight in the summer when a training course, jointly sponsored by the Kent Archaeological Society and the Eccles Excavation Committee, in Romano-British archaeology and excavation techniques was based on the site.

Once again, I am indebted to the landowners, Messrs. Associated Portland Cement Manufacturers Limited, for their kindness in allowing me to resume work on their property. I am also grateful to their tenants, Messrs. A. A. and A. C. Southwell, for many acts of generosity.

This excavation was financed by grants from the Kent Archaeological Society, the British Academy, the Haverfield Bequest of the University of Oxford, the Society of Antiquaries of London and private donors; I am in their debt for their generosity without which our work would have been impossible.

As in previous years, this work was carried out entirely by many friends, who volunteered their labour and to whom I am most grateful though, considerations of space, preclude individual mention; however, I am glad to make an exception in the case of the following, for their sustained support throughout the long season: Mr. A. C. Harrison, B.A., F.S.A., for supervising much of our work; Mesdames G. Goodwin, H. Lowson, B.A., and P. M. Winzar; Miss A. S. Fetterlein; and Messrs. R. J. Ansell, T. Beswick, G. Brown, T. Hetherington, T. Ithell, B.Eng., W. A. Knowles, R. Lowson, B.A., C. E. J. Martin, L. Thomsen, and P. Thornhill, B.A. I am also grateful to Mrs. K. F. Hartley, B.A., F.S.A., for reporting on the mortaria; Mr. M. W. C. Hassall, B.A., F.S.A., for reading and reporting on the graffiti; Mrs. S. C. Hawkes, M.A., F.S.A., for arranging for the conservation of the Anglo-Saxon objects at the

¹ *Arch. Cant.*, lxxviii (1963), 125-41; lxxix (1964), 121-35; lxxx (1965), 69-91; lxxxii (1966), 44-52; lxxxiii (1967), 162-78; lxxxiiii (1968), 39-48; lxxxv (1969), 93-106; lxxxvi (1970), 55-60; lxxxvii (1971), 25-34; lxxxviii (1972), 101-10; lxxxviiii (1973), 73-80, and lxxxix (1974), 119-34.

Institute of Archaeology, University of Oxford; and Dr. J. P. C. Kent, B.A., Ph.D., F.S.A., for identifying the coins. I also owe a great debt to Miss S. J. Marsh, for her assistance with the records of this excavation and much help with the compilation of this report.

THE EXCAVATION

This year's work was concentrated in areas to south, south-east and south-west of the villa and to south-west of its baths wing; the results of this excavation (Figs. 1-4) are reported below within the chronological period to which each feature is assigned.

I. LATE IRON AGE/ROMANO-BRITISH

Periods I-II, to c. A.D. 65

Ditch X. Several new trenches² were cut across the line of this feature and its known length increased to some 234 ft. (70.20 m.); as in 1973,³ the V-shaped outline of this ditch showed unmistakable traces of a shallow cleaning channel at its bottom, rather like the box-gutter of military ditches, and its back-filling contained some sherds of early samian ware as well as coarse pottery, some of which had been manufactured at Site D.⁴ From the amount of silt present at the bottom of this ditch, it is clear that it had not remained open for very long; its present length indicates an enclosure of some size, though no evidence has been found so far, at either end of the excavated trenches, for a change in direction.

Ditch XI. As a result of new trenches across the line of this ditch, it is now known that its alignment changes slightly to east; the excavated length of this ditch has reached 58 ft. 6 in. (17.20 m.). Its shape is as recorded in 1972;⁵ it was noted that the filling of Ditch XI consisted mostly of clean subsoil and that there was virtually no silt at its bottom.

The purpose of either of these two ditches is not yet established.

Periods IV-V, c. A.D. 120-290

Ditch VIII (Fig. 2) was again sectioned and found to come to a rounded end 30 ft. (9.00 m.) to north-east of the point reached in previous years of work⁶; trenching beyond this end showed that this ditch did not continue, after a gap, beyond it. Ditch VIII had been back-filled with demolition débris and domestic refuse, and its purpose is almost certainly that of a rubbish pit.

² For reasons of economy, this feature is not shown on Fig. 1 to west of the villa's south-east ring, but cf. *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxix (1974), Fig. 1.

³ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 128-9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, lxxxviii (1973), Fig. 1, 74-5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, lxxxvii (1972), Fig. 2, 106.

To these periods also belongs a large rubbish deposit, which was found spread immediately below the topsoil in the area to north-east of Ditch XI (Fig. 1); it contained great quantities of demolition débris, resulting from the re-building activity known to have been undertaken about that time, and domestic refuse, which contained an ivory knife-handle carved to represent Hercules.⁷

South-west (Baths) Wing. The main reason for the excavation in this area (Fig. 3) was to investigate the possibility that the sleeper-beams of the small granary, found last year below the hypocaust underfloors of Rooms 20 and 133,⁸ had extended to south-west beyond the baths' outer wall.

The whole area immediately to south-west of the baths was found to be occupied with much débris, mostly of roofing-tiles, clearly resulting from the collapse of the building's roof; however, excavation at depth showed that the granary's sleeper-beams did not project beyond the baths' south-west wall. Though it is not impossible that this granary had sleeper-beams at right angles to those already recorded, it is more likely that it was built on the four open-ended sleeper-beams.

Trenching in this area exposed a length of wall, constructed of ragstone and yellow mortar and 2 ft. (0.60 m.) wide, continuing to north-west the alignment of a similar wall first recorded in 1962;⁹ this wall clearly belongs to the early building in this area, which was demolished in subsequent reconstructions.⁸ No evidence survived to show how this building was floored.

A very narrow and shallow gully was also recorded to south-west of this early wall, but not enough of this feature is so far known to attempt even a tentative interpretation.

Immediately to south-west of the baths' wall, a wide channel was recorded in two trenches; it had been filled with the demolition débris occupying this area. Though no evidence at all survived for the tiling necessary for its sides and bottom, it is clear that this channel represents the surviving remains of the outflow drain used for the disposal of water from the baths' *piscina* (Room 17); this drain was located in 1962¹⁰ at the west angle of the baths, though in the narrow space of the excavation trench it was not possible to establish how this drain continued beyond the north-west wall of the baths. However, it is clear now that water was drained away from the baths in a westerly direction by means of this channel.

⁷ I am grateful to Professor J. M. C. Toynbee, M.A., D.Phil., F.B.A., F.S.A., for her comments on this object; cf. *Antiq. Journ.*, lv (1975), 406-7.

⁸ *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxix (1974), Fig. 3, 123.

⁹ *Ibid.*, lxxxviii (1973), Fig. 2, 128.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 138.

II. POST-ROMAN, c. A.D. 400-650

Ditch XV (Fig. 1) was further sectioned and its known length increased to some 87 ft. (26.10 m.); nothing further can at present be added about the purpose of this ditch. It was in use in the period following the abandonment of the villa, as the ditch had been cut through the débris layer spread in this area, but before this part of the site became an Anglo-Saxon burial ground after c. A.D. 650, as some burials were found interred in the line of this ditch wherever this was convenient.

III. ANGLO-SAXON, LATER THAN c. A.D. 650

Several new burials were found, mostly in the unexcavated area to south-east of the Romano-British villa; they were all aligned approximately east-to-west and clearly Christian, which is underlined by the total absence of grave goods with these burials.

Trenching to east of the furthest 1973 trench (Fig. 1) has brought to light no additional burials, and this suggests that the Anglo-Saxon cemetery may not have extended into this area.¹¹

A number of post-holes were recorded in two trenches adjacent to the cemetery; the timbers they had contained must have been quite substantial and, in some cases, large post-pits had been dug for the insertion of the posts, which were packed with rubble into their holes driven into the subsoil at much greater depth than the post-pits. Not enough of these post-holes have been so far recorded to attempt a reconstruction of the building to which they belonged, but it is clear that a wooden structure had been erected adjacent to the Anglo-Saxon cemetery and, possibly, at the time when the burial ground was in use.

IV. MEDIEVAL, THIRTEENTH CENTURY

Trenching in the area of the medieval site¹² showed that the rough cobbling extended to south-east beyond the limits of the 1973 excavation; it survived as loose rubble of stone and tiles embedded in the subsoil.

Ditch XVII (Fig. 4) was further traced turning to south; it retained the same U-shaped outline, vertical sides and width as recorded last year, but its function is not yet known.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The main problems of interpretation of the site and the outstanding questions are as follows:

¹¹ However, work in 1975 has recovered, in a trench sectioning *Ditch X* beyond its 1974 limit to north-east, a fresh burial belonging to the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon period; this burial may represent the beginning of another section of the cemetery after a gap of some 30 ft. or prove to be an outlier.

¹² *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxix (1974), Fig. 1, 132-3.

(i) The various ditches, cut both before and after the erection of the villa, remain to be explained. Of these, Ditch X poses the question of some sort of probable military occupation of the site as its shape indicates military practices; however, until turnings are found to east and west of the points so far excavated, it is not possible to suggest what this military presence may have been. It is hoped, nevertheless, that this may become apparent in 1976 as, if the area enclosed by Ditch X lies to its south-east, no building activity seems to have taken place there; (ii) the area in front of the villa requires further investigation;¹³ (iii) the form and function of the wooden structure close to the Anglo-Saxon cemetery remain to be established and interpreted; (iv) the Romano-British cemetery still has to be located;¹⁴ (v) building débris is present on the ploughsoil at Site S to west of the main site and investigation is needed in that area; and (vi) the extent of the medieval site and the reason for its occupation remain also to be further investigated, though this area is severely restricted by a modern pond.

¹³ In 1975, the boundary wall of the villa, starting from its south-east wing (*Arch. Cant.*, lxxxviii (1973), Fig. 1, 76), was traced for some 148 ft. beyond its limit recorded in 1972 and this indicates the probable existence of outbuildings in front of the dwelling-house.

¹⁴ Mechanical trenching in November 1974 to north-east of the villa proved inconclusive, except for producing evidence for rubbish pits; however, the area in question is so large that it is quite possible that this trenching may have missed any Romano-British burials, if they had been interred to the rear of the villa.

