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# EXCAVATIONS AT ECCLES, 1976<sup>1</sup>

## FINAL INTERIM REPORT

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### INTRODUCTION

The final season of excavations, under my direction and on behalf of the Eccles Excavation Committee, at the Romano-British site located at Rowe Place Farm, Eccles, in the parish of Aylesford (N.G.R. TQ 722605; O.S. 6-in. Sheet TQ 76 SW) was carried out throughout the summer and autumn of 1976.<sup>2</sup>

Once more, I am grateful to the landowners, Messrs. Associated Portland Cement Manufacturers Limited and the Reed Paper Group, for allowing access on their properties, and to their tenants, Messrs. A. A. and A. C. Southwell and Messrs. A. and D. Tucker, for welcoming us on their land.

The excavation was again supported by generous grants from the British Academy and the Haverfield Bequest of the University of Oxford, without whose aid this work could not have been done. The actual labour was undertaken by several friends to whom I am most grateful: Mr. and Mrs. E. Gledhill, Mrs. G. Goodwin, who also worked on the pottery, and Messrs. R. J. Ansell, T. Beswick, G. Brown, W. A. Knowles and C. E. J. Martin.

### THE EXCAVATION

The general aim of this concluding season's work was to continue, as far as possible, the exploration of several features partly examined in 1975.<sup>3</sup>

#### *I. Late Iron Age/Romano-British/Anglo-Saxon*

Three more trenches were cut across the line of *Ditch X*, immediately to east of the point reached in the previous year<sup>4</sup> and the length of this

<sup>1</sup> *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; lxxxvi (1971), 25-34; lxxxvii (1972), 101-10; lxxxviii (1973), 73-80; lxxxix (1974), 119-34; xci (1975), 41-5, and xcii (1976), 157-63.

<sup>2</sup> Watch on the site was kept during 1977 in the course of back-filling.

<sup>3</sup> *Arch. Cant.*, xcii (1976), 157-63.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Fig. 1.

feature was increased by 21 ft. (6.4 m.) to a sectioned total length of 304 ft. (92.65 m.); no evidence was found for a turn to north or south. The ditch had been back-filled with débris and brown soil and its outline showed the known V-shape, with a rudimentary box-gutter-like channel at its bottom.

The north edge of Ditch X had been cut through a sector of the curvilinear gully first recorded in 1973,<sup>5</sup> which it had virtually obliterated. An inhumation burial was exposed in this area; the skeleton lay flat on its back, with its head to east and on its right side and the hands crossed over the pelvis, as in the case of several burials in the Anglo-Saxon cemetery further to west<sup>6</sup> – apart from this, the depth of this burial (27 in. = 67.5 cm.) in the subsidence occurring in the filling of the gully makes its dating to the Anglo-Saxon period certain.

## *II. Romano-British, fourth Century A.D.*

Trenching was undertaken in the area beyond the public footpath to confirm the findings of exploratory excavation in 1975<sup>7</sup> (Fig. 1). The boundary wall was cleared below the topsoil in *Trench I*; only its foundation material survived and there were no signs of any mortared courses. On either side of this wall there was very little topsoil in this area and no débris at all between the ploughsoil and the clean subsoil which was exposed about 1 ft. (30.5 cm.) below the present surface. In *Trench II*,<sup>8</sup> the boundary wall was exposed, again immediately below the topsoil; it was undisturbed along the whole length of this trench and consisted of ragstone bonded with yellow mortar built on a very solid foundation of large river boulders and blocks of ragstone<sup>9</sup> – the filling to north of this wall length contained much roofing- and bonding-tile débris, which suggests that a small room or outbuilding may have been built within the south corner of the boundary wall, though no direct evidence was found for such a structure. *Trench III* was originally excavated out of alignment with *Trench II* in order to expose both sides of the boundary wall and later extended to the dimensions shown on Fig. 1; initially, this trench failed to secure any evidence for the boundary wall, and thorough examination of all the

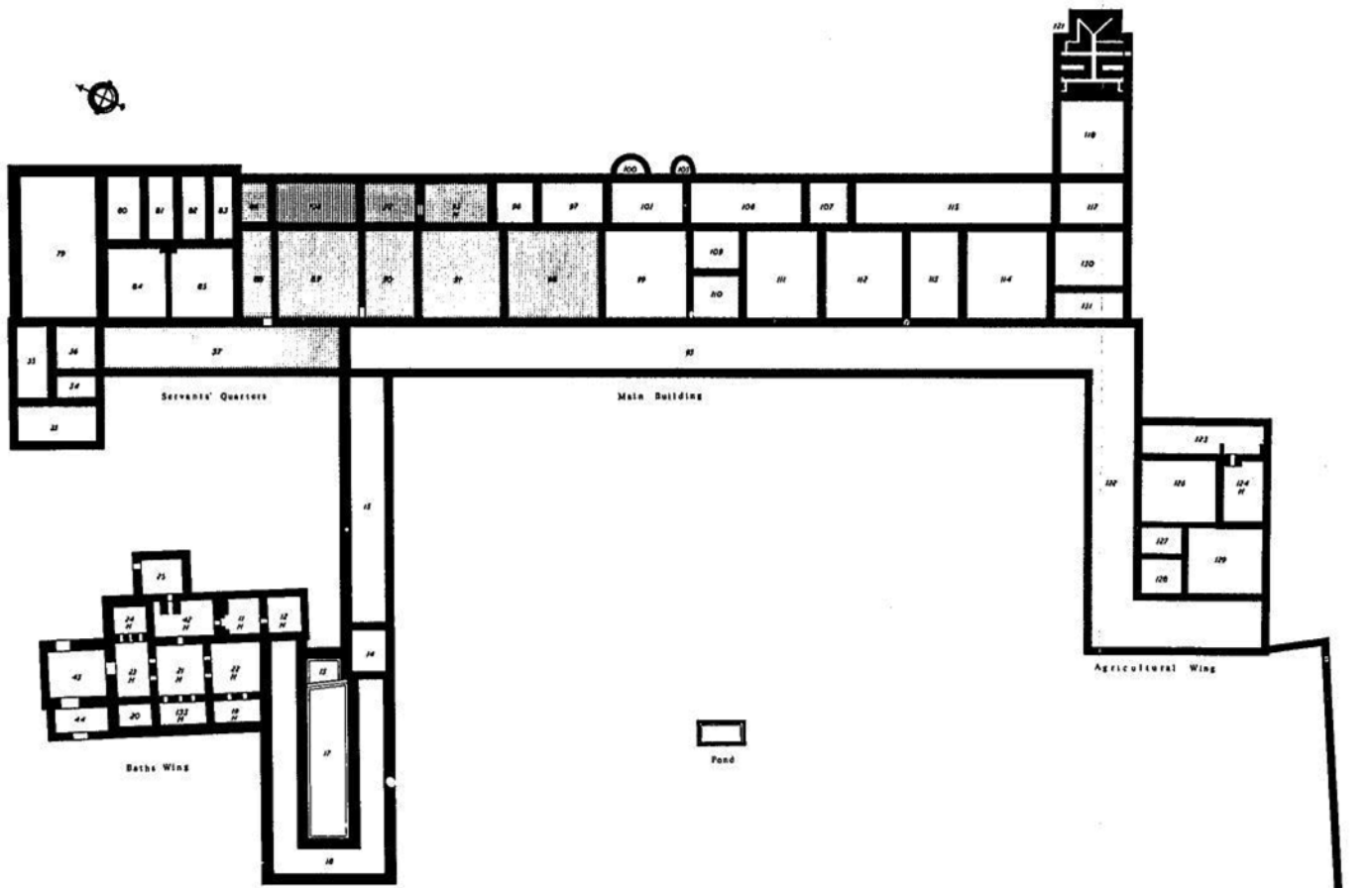
<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, lxxxix (1974), Fig. 1 and pp. 120–21.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, lxxxvi (1971), 31; lxxxvii (1972), 108; lxxxviii (1973), 78; and lxxxix (1974), 129–30.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, xcii (1976), 158–9.

<sup>8</sup> No excavation was undertaken in the wide area between Trenches I and II, but several trial trenches in 1975 had already established the line of the boundary wall.

<sup>9</sup> The greater depth and solidity of the foundations for the boundary wall in this area, as contrasted with the evidence in *Trench I* and further to north-east, may have been necessary because of the marshy condition of the ground; there is a large area of marshy ground at present very close to the excavation.



ECCLES ROMAN VILLA

FOURTH CENTURY A.D.

A<sub>10</sub>



Fig. 2

sections of the original trench clearly showed that the wall had not continued either on its known line or turning to south-east or north-west. The whole area of the trench had been badly disturbed and filled with a heterogeneous mass of débris and dark grey soil; it was only when the original trench had been extended to south-east that it became clear that the boundary wall had continued into this trench and cornered about its centre, and that this wall-corner had been entirely robbed in fairly modern times when a trench was cut, slightly to south-east of the wall-corner, for the laying of a deep pipeline. There was also an area of compacted gravel under heavy ragstone débris immediately beyond the pipeline trench, but this is very likely to be part of its back-filling.

The wall-corner was confirmed with the extension of the original Trench III to north-west; here, a length of wall was exposed, terminating in a rough face at the limit of the robbing. This wall was identical, both in its construction materials, dimensions (2 ft. = 0.6 m.) and in the depth and filling of its construction trench, with that found in Trench II, and there can be no doubt that both lengths of wall belong to the same building period. The length of the boundary wall measured 229 ft. (69.84 m.).

The line of the wall ended, on a regular face, in *Trench IV*. It is virtually certain that a gateway must have existed here, and the presence of building débris in Trenches II, III and VI, within the wall-corner, supports the suggestion of a structure, probably a gate-house. No evidence was found for a corresponding wall further to south-west in Trench IV; however, another length of wall was exposed, though on a different alignment. This wall consisted of flint and ragstone foundations, without any mortar, and was clearly built at a later date, possibly to narrow the gateway into the villa's courtyard; if so, the corresponding original wall must be sought beyond the north-west section of Trench IV – this would make for a gateway at least 18 ft. (5.49 m.) wide, which may have had a double portal, rather oddly located at the south corner of the enclosed area than nearer to its centre.

An exploratory trench at the south-east edge of *Site S*<sup>10</sup> and across the line of this later wall failed to find any evidence for it, which supports the view that a wide gateway had been reduced by this later wall; if the original boundary wall did extend into this area, as it must have done in order to enclose the villa compound, its alignment would have passed further to north-west of the exploratory trench.

*Trenches V, VI and VII* proved abortive in that they contained neither any structural evidence nor building débris. No further work could be done in this area owing to restrictions of time and resources,

<sup>10</sup> *Arch. Cant.*, xcii (1976), 159.

but the absence of significant amounts of surface débris and the shallowness of the topsoil almost certainly preclude the existence of any structures; in any case, it is more likely that the villa's fronting courtyard (Fig. 2) may have been landscaped and laid with flowerbeds, shrubs, trees and pathways, evidence for which is very unlikely to have survived modern deep ploughing.

No further sectioning of Ditches IX and X, probably passing under this area,<sup>11</sup> could be carried out, and a few exploratory trenches in Site S confirmed, with their total lack of structural evidence, last year's conclusions.<sup>10</sup>

#### SUMMARY

At the close of this excavation, some of the questions posed from the very beginning remain unresolved. The various ditches, reported on in earlier years, belonging to the pre-villa occupation of the site, have not been fully traced; the cemetery of the Romano-British period seems unlikely to be located for the reason stated in the previous report<sup>12</sup> and, likewise, it has proved impractical to carry out any investigation towards the location of the Anglo-Saxon settlement which cannot be too far away from its cemetery. No further work was possible in the area of the medieval occupation of the site.

On the other hand, it has been possible to establish and partly delimit the area enclosed by the villa estate to the front of the dwelling house, though its lay-out again must remain unclear, for the reasons given above.

#### POST-SCRIPT

After fifteen years' arduous work at this large site, it only remains for me to pay tribute to the many who, in their various ways, made this excavation not only possible, but also a pleasant labour of love. It is with a deep feeling of gratitude that I record my debt to those institutions which financed our work, the Kent Archaeological Society, the Carnegie U.K. Trust, the Society of Antiquaries of London, the British Academy, the Craven Fund and the Haverfield Bequest of the University of Oxford; to the anonymous generosity of the late Messrs. I. D. Margary and J. H. Evans; to the advice, encouragement and continuous support I was privileged to receive from the late Professor Sir Ian Richmond and Professor S. S. Frere; to the hundreds of students participating in the eight successive training courses based on the site and the visiting lecturers acknowledged in

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, lxxxviii (1973), Fig. 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, xcii (1976), 163.

earlier volumes; and, lastly, to the very many volunteers, of casual or sustained support, and to colleagues and friends who shared so liberally both knowledge and leisure.

