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EXCAVATIONS AT ECCLES: A PROGRESS REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

Excavations were carried out between 1962 and 1976 at Rowe Place Farm in the village of Eccles, near Aylesford, and have been reported in *Archaeologia Cantiana* in fifteen interim reports.¹

Three sites were excavated (Fig. 1): (i) the main site at about 60 ft. A.O.D. and some 400 yards east of the original course of the Medway, occupied by a large villa estate centred on N.G.R. TQ 722605; (ii) the site of pottery manufacture,² located on a remnant of the 50ft. contour in an area badly disturbed by industrial waste pits at about 350 yards west of the villa and about 75 yards from the east bank of the river (N.G.R. TQ 718605); and (iii) a tilery (N.G.R. TQ 717604), found and excavated following the extension of a waste paper dump, at about 225 yards to south-west of the pottery site and about 125 yards south of the river-bank.³

The preparation of the definitive report on these excavations is in hand; however, as its publication is still some time in the future, the opportunity is taken to publish here a further report on some features of the main site, which have been reconsidered as a result of further study of the excavation records since the publication of the interim reports.

¹ *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxviii (1963) to xciii (1977).

² *Ibid.*, lxxxix (1974), 128-9; A. Detsicas, 'First-century Pottery Manufacture at Eccles, Kent', in (Eds.) J. Dore and K. Greene, *Roman Pottery Studies in Britain and Beyond*, BAR Supplementary Series 30, Oxford, 1977, 19-36.

³ *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxii (1967), 170-8.

I. THE BOUNDARY WALL OF THE VILLA

The eastern part of the villa's boundary wall was first cleared in 1972,⁴ further explored in 1975⁵ and in the 1976 final season of excavations⁶ was found to extend to 229 ft. (69.84 m.) beyond the villa's south wing. This perimeter wall then turned at right angles to south-west and, after a short length, ended at a regular face, suggesting a gate-way into the villa compound. In 1976, this entrance appeared blocked by a later wall of different construction and at a rather different alignment. There was no evidence to indicate the dating of this blocking length of wall, which could belong to a structure abutted onto the corner of the boundary wall at a later, possibly post-Roman, date. However, further examination of the site records shows what is clearly a construction trench found in two trenches excavated further to south-west of the boundary wall's southern corner. This construction trench is in direct alignment with the short length of the boundary wall beyond its southern corner, which clearly means that the boundary wall of the villa continued into the area to the south-west of the foot-path (Site S) leading to Rose Cottage and beyond (Fig. 1). Moreover, in 1966⁷ a similar boundary wall was exposed at the northern limit of the area occupied by the dwelling-house, with a gate-way, later blocked, at its northern corner. The alignment of this western boundary wall was not further explored but, if projected to south-west, it would intersect the construction trench on Site S at c. 115 ft. further south-west. Fig. 2 shows the area enclosed by the villa's perimeter wall to south and west of the house as restored by the projection of the excavated lengths of boundary wall.

II. THE INNER COURTYARD

It is now clear that a large ornamental pool was situated in the area fronting the villa's living accommodation and enclosed by its two wings (Fig. 2).

This ornamental pool, originally described as Room 94, was first exposed in 1967⁸ and further explored in the following years of

⁴ *Ibid.*, lxxxviii (1973), 76.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xcii (1976), 158.

⁶ *Ibid.*, xciii (1977), 56-8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, lxxxii (1967), Fig. 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*, lxxxiii (1968), 40-1.

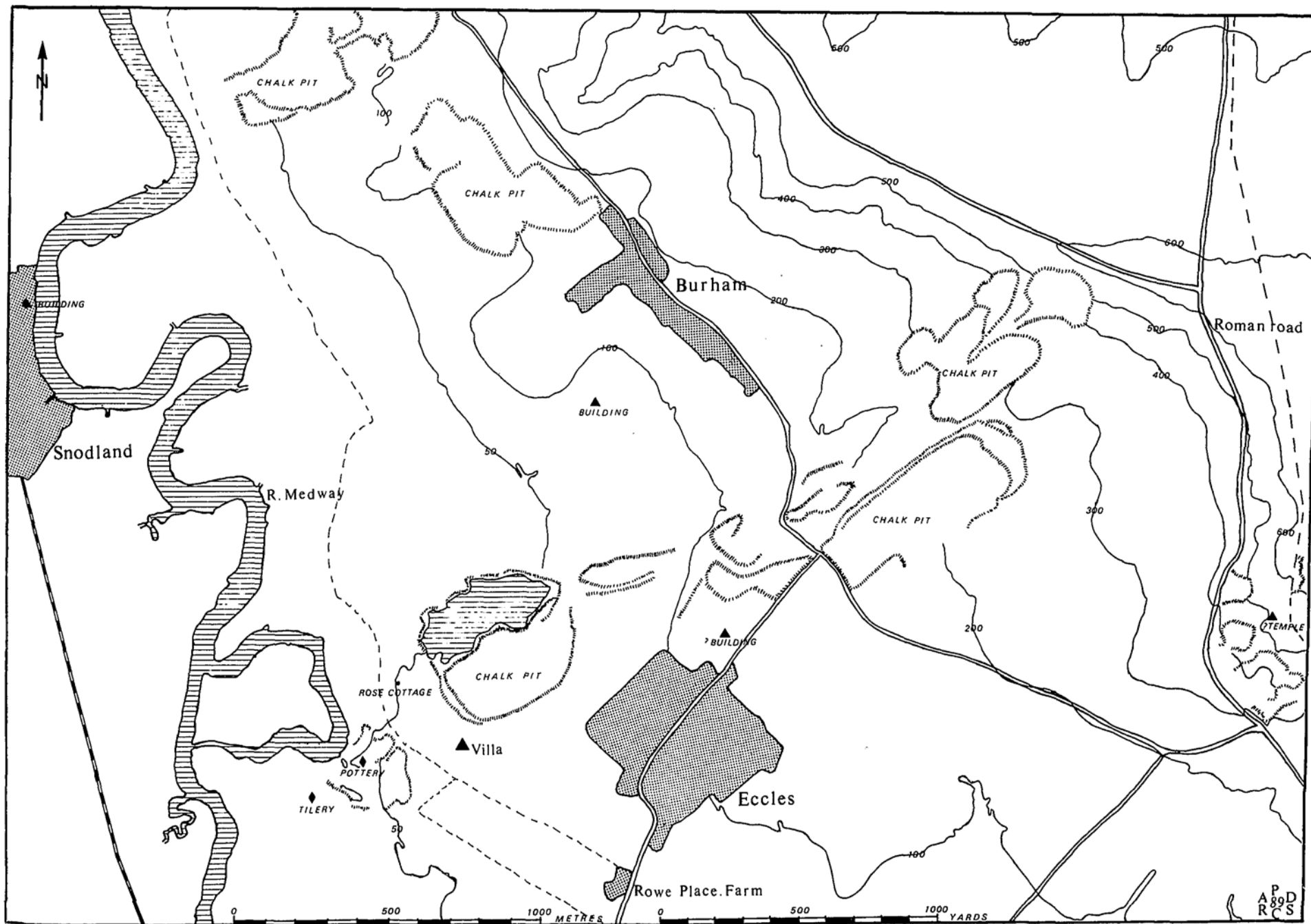


Fig. 1. Location map (Based on the Ordnance Survey map and reproduced with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery).

excavation;⁹ its total dimensions were established as 83 × 11 ft. 6 in. (24.90 × 3.45 m.), internally. However, the tentative suggestions as to the purpose of this structure previously put forward¹⁰ must be abandoned. For there is no doubt, as Walthew and Smith have already pointed out,¹¹ that this structure was an ornamental pool at the centre of the house's inner courtyard and further to north-east of the small basin excavated in 1973.¹²

There are several sites, both in this country and on the Continent, generally in the northern part of the Empire, with such ornamental pools. In Roman Britain the closest parallel to the Eccles pool is at Darenth where such a feature, albeit at right angles to the main block and not parallel with it as at Eccles and other sites, measured 22.65 × 3.36 m., internally.¹³ Of several sites in Roman Gaul,¹⁴ the villa at

⁹ *Ibid.*, lxxxiv (1969), 95–9, Fig. 1; lxxxv (1970), 57, Fig. 1; lxxxvi (1971), 26, Fig. 1; and lxxxvii (1972), 103, Fig. 1.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, lxxxv (1970), 57; lxxxvii (1972), 103.

¹¹ C.V. Walthew, 'The Town House and Villa House in Roman Britain', *Britannia*, vi (1975), 189–205; D.J. Smith, 'Regional Aspects of the Winged Corridor Villa in Britain', in (Ed.) M. Todd, *Studies in the Romano-British Villa*, Leicester, 1978, 121–2.

¹² *Arch. Cant.*, lxxxviii (1973), 77.

¹³ G.E. Fox, 'Notes on some probable Traces of Roman Fulling in Britain', *Archaeologia*, lix (1905), 207–32; VCH (Kent), iii (1932), 111–13; B.J. Philp, *Excavations in west Kent*, 1973, 135; B.J. Philp, 'The Darent Valley Operation', *Current Archaeology*, 38 (1973), 89–91; A. Detsicas, *The Cantiaci*, Gloucester, 1983 and 1987, 103–7. The fishponds at Shakenoak (A.C.C. Brodrib, A.R. hands and D.R. Walker, *Excavations at Shakenoak Farm, near Wilcote, Oxfordshire*, v, Oxford, 1977), are not in the same category.

¹⁴ [Belgium] Anthée:

E. del Marmol, 'Villa d'Anthée', *Annales de la Société archéologique de Namur*, xiv (1879), 169–96; *ibid.*, xv (1881), 1–40.

R. Agache, *Détection aérienne de Vestiges protohistoriques, gallo-romains et médiévaux*, Amiens, 1971; R. Agache, 'La Campagne à l'Epoque gallo-romaine dans les grandes Plaines du Nord de la France d'après les Photographies aériennes', in (Eds.) H. Temporini and W. Haase, *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II, vi, Berlin, 1975; R. Agache and B. Breart, *Atlas d'Archéologie aérienne de Picardie*, Amiens, 1976.

Agache 1971, *op. cit.*, Fig. 407.

M.A. de Caumont, *Abécédaire ou Rudiment d'Archéologie*, 1870; A. Grenier and J. Déchelette, *Manuel d'Archéologie gallo-romaine*, Paris, 1934, Fig. 277.

Grenier and Déchelette 1934, *op. cit.*, Fig. 307.

Gallia, xviii (1960), 354–6, Fig. 31.

[France] Biarre:

Estrées-sur-Noye:

Lébissey:

Mienne:

Noyers-sur-Serein:

Haccourt (Belgium)¹⁵ had such an ornamental pool (53.50 × 7 m.) very close to the house and enclosed by its two wings, and at Echternach (Luxembourg)¹⁶ an ornamental pool (59 × 14.50 m.) was located in front of the house like the Eccles pool.

III. FIRST BUILDING PERIOD

A reconsideration of the evidence in the area below the hypocausted rooms of the last baths building has resulted in the re-examination of the early structures known to lie below these rooms (Fig. 3).

In 1962, a remnant of wall was found under the south-west wall of the corridor (Room 18) surrounding on three sides the baths' *piscina* (Room 17).¹⁷ A trench cut immediately outside Room 18 showed that this wall had extended to south-west and also had a partition wall to north-east towards the hypocausted Room 19. Also in 1962, a length of wall of similar construction and width was exposed below Rooms 3, 6 and 9 of the second bath-house; this wall had been removed first in the area of Room 13 and later by the construction of the *piscina* (Room 17). Further excavation in 1964 and 1965¹⁸ in the area of the first baths and trenching in 1966 outside the hypocausted Rooms 19–22 established parts of an early building consisting of Rooms 53, 54 and 76–78, within a boundary wall continuing to south-west beyond the first bath-house.¹⁹ The hypocaust underfloors in Rooms 19–22 were removed in 1973 and the structures lying below them were cleared and recorded.²⁰

Romegoux-La Vergnée:	P. Burgand, 'La Villa gallo-romaine de La Vergnée à Romegoux (Charente Inférieure)', <i>Revue archéologique</i> , xvi (1940), 46–61.
Villemurt:	Caumont 1870, <i>op. cit.</i> , 391.
[Germany] Horath:	H. Cüppers, 'Ein gallo-römischer Bauernhof bei Horath, Kr. Bernkastel', <i>Trierer Zeitschrift</i> , xxx (1967), 114–43.
Welschbillig:	H. Wrede, <i>Die spätantike Hermengalerie von Welschbillig</i> , Berlin, 1972.
[Luxembourg] Mersch:	G. Thill, 'Nouvelles Découvertes autour d'une Villa romaine à Mersch', <i>Hémécht</i> , xix (1967), 477–84.

¹⁵ G. de Boe, 'Une Villa romaine à Haccourt (Liège)', *Archaeologia Belgica*, cxxxii (1971), 5–32; *ibid.*, clxxiv (1975), 5–48.

¹⁶ J. Metzler, J. Zimmer and L. Bakker, *Ausgrabungen in Echternach*, Luxembourg, 1981.

¹⁷ *Arch. Cant.*, lxxviii (1963), 128, Fig. 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, lxxx (1965), 71; Fig. 1; *ibid.*, lxxxi (1966), 46, Fig. 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, lxxxii (1967), 164–5, Fig. 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, lxxxix (1974), 112–3, Fig. 3.

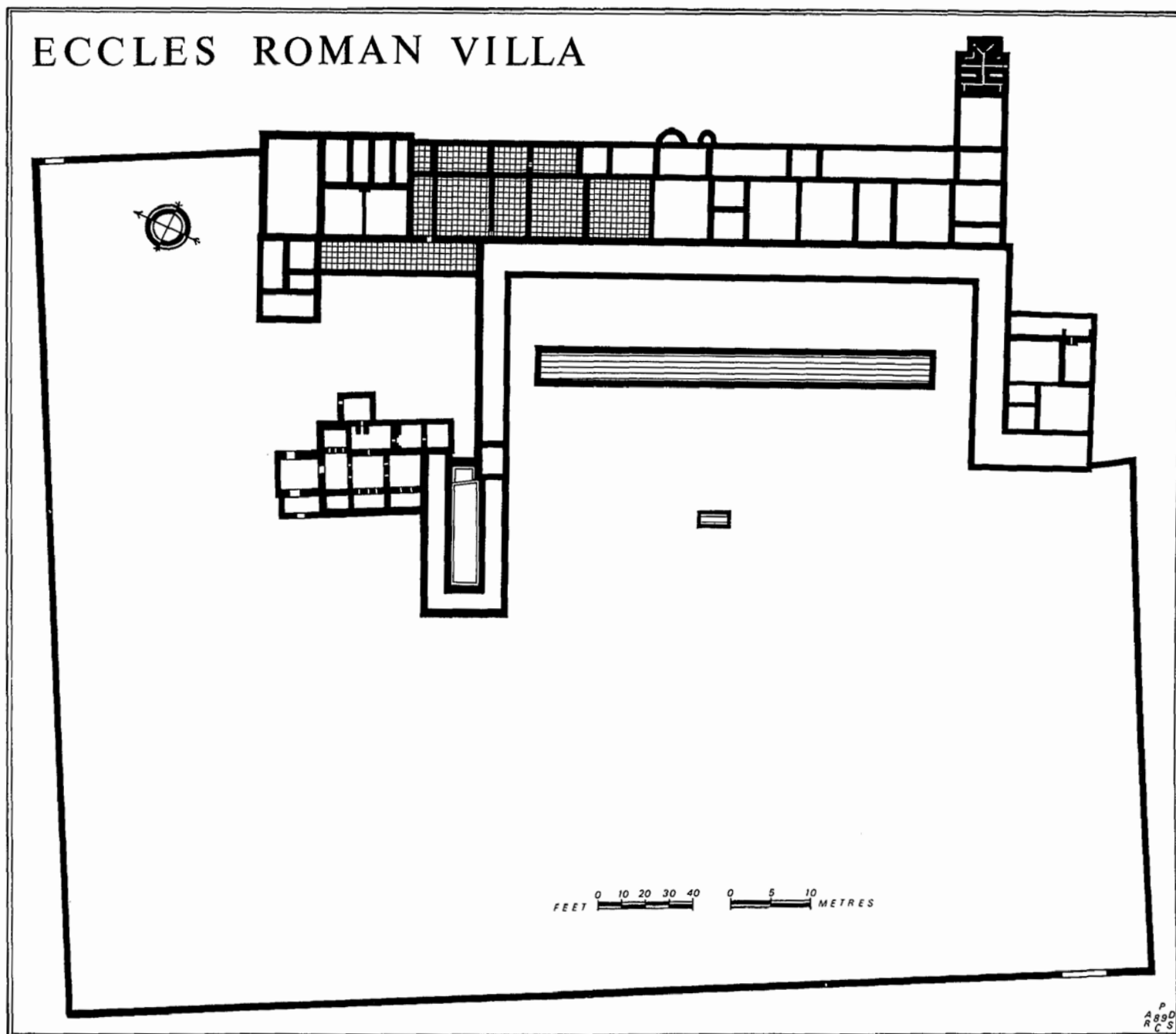


Fig. 2. General plan of the villa, fourth century A.D.

ECCLES EXCAVATIONS



Granary

First Baths Area

First Building Period
Third Baths

Feet 0 10 20 30 40

Metres 0 5 10

Fig. 3. The early structures, first century A.D.

It is now clear that, before the construction of the first baths building, the area occupied by the earliest structures was much smaller and enclosed by a boundary wall (Fig. 3). The eastern limit of this enclosure is not known because the boundary wall in this area was either destroyed by or lay beneath later features which were not removed; on the other hand, the other alignments of the boundary wall have been excavated and recorded. Within this enclosed area at least two features survived demolition and were recorded below later structures: (i) a small granary, just inside the south-western alignment of the boundary wall, excavated in 1964;²¹ and (ii) a building, probably the dwelling-house of this period of occupation, within the southern corner of the enclosure.

Of this early building, most of which was destroyed by later structures, only a few rooms could be recorded. Room 53b, which measured 9×12 ft. 6 in. (2.74×3.81 m.) was the largest of these three rooms. It was flanked by two narrow compartments, Room 53a (3 ft. 9 in. \times 12 ft. 6 in. = 1.14×3.81 m.) and Room 54 (2 ft. 9 in. \times 13 ft. = 0.85×3.96 m.) Room 54 had a doorway at its southern corner into the corridor, Room 77. Whether the north-east wall of Room 53a had originally extended beyond the room's north corner, which is not unlikely in view of the fact that the south-east wall of Room 54 continued beyond it to south-east, it was impossible to establish because of the later construction of Room 39 of the first baths, which was constructed above and beyond the northern corner of Room 53a.²² The corridor, Room 77 (43×7 ft. 3 in. = 13.11×2.21 m., narrowing to 5 ft. 5 in. = 1.67 m. beyond the south corner of Room 54), ran alongside the north-east side of Room 53b towards the boundary wall. The original Room 78, as in earlier interim reports, is now clearly an open space between this early building and the boundary wall. Room 76, likewise, appears to be an open area beyond the corridor, no partition walls, or their robber trenches, were recorded in the excavations to south-west of the corridor. On the other hand, the south-east wall of Room 54 continues beyond the excavated area and slightly into the area occupied by the later Room 57²³ where it was removed by the construction of the first baths. This remnant of wall clearly indicates that other rooms, belonging to this early building, must have been located to south-east of Rooms 53a, 53b and 54 and were demolished to make room for the first baths buildings.

²¹ *Ibid.*, lxxx (1965), 70-1, Fig. 1.

²² *Ibid.*, Fig. 1.

²³ *Ibid.*, Fig. 1.

As a consequence of this re-interpretation, it can now be seen that an early building of unknown dimensions and an associated granary to its north occupied an enclosed area, which was later enlarged by the demolition of these structures and the construction of the first baths. The dating of this period of occupation depends on the dating of the finds in the filling of Ditch II, which passed beneath the granary,²⁴ and the dating of the first bath-house built in this area.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to Mrs. R.C. Shaw (*née* Symes), M.A., for much help with the initial survey and recording of the early building below the third bath-house.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, lxxxi (1966), 45, Fig. 1. The misalignment reported in *ibid.*, lxxxii (1967), 164, Fig. 1, is due to an error in surveying; the boundary wall is, in fact, straight.