



Fig. 1: An area at the western end of the site during the initial stages of excavation.

Excavations at Beddington, 1981

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THE SITE (TQ 297 658) was discovered in 1871 during the construction of an extension to the sewage works at Beddington, near Croydon, Surrey¹. Two separate adjacent buildings were uncovered, which were interpreted as a bath-house, and Roman debris was found some distance to the north and to

the south-east. One Saxon coin was also found². The present whereabouts of the finds from this excavation are unknown. Excavation of 'two small trenches' from 26-28 August 1959, and from 6-12 April 1960 recovered some Roman pottery, but the excavator concluded that the bath-house had been destroyed³.

1. E P L Brock, 'Roman Remains at Beddington, Surrey', *Journal Brit Archaeol Assoc* 27 (1871) 514-9, and J Addy, 'Account of a Roman villa lately discovered at Beddington, Surrey', *Surrey Archaeol Collect* 6 (1874) 118-21.

2. Addy, *op. cit.* fn. 1.

3. M Keulemans, 'New light on the Roman bath building and villa at Beddington', *Surrey Archaeol Collect* 60 (1963) 37-44.



Fig. 2: Part of the western end of the bath-house during excavation.

Some of the finds from these excavations are now held by the Archaeology Section of the Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society. Some of these finds are marked '3rd season' implying that further excavations were undertaken. The whereabouts of the other finds and the excavator are unknown.

During sludge clearance in 1972 an area to the south of the bath-house was examined by H. Sheldon to ascertain the extent of damage done to the site by such sludge clearance operations. After the submission of the results of this investigation to the Department of Environment, the area to the west, south and south-east (approximately 46 acres) was scheduled as an Ancient Monument.

The importance of the site lies in the fact that it is one of only three villa sites known south of the Thames within Greater London. The site now falls within the Beddington-Mitcham Area of Opportunity and its destruction by gravel extraction is threatened in the near future. Because of this threat, an exploratory excavation took place from March to December 1981 directed by Lesley Adkins and Roy A. Adkins, Field Officers of the South West London Archaeological Unit of the Surrey Archaeological Society.

Prior to the start of the investigation it was agreed with representatives of the funding authorities that the investigation would start by re-locating and uncovering the bath-house (if it still existed), and that adjacent areas should be examined for evidence of associated structures; areas requiring further excavation or consolidation should also be determined.

Because of the continued use of part of the area of the Ancient Monument by the present sewage treatment plant, the area available for excavation was limited. In the first few weeks of the excavation six areas totalling 570 sq m (6100 sq ft) were dug by hand (see Fig. 1). This approach was adopted because, due to re-landscaping of the site when it was in full use as sewage drying beds, there were no indications of the height of the original ground surface, or of the extent of modern disturbance. Once the varying depths of the archaeological levels over the site had been established, a further area of 620 sq m (6700 sq ft) was stripped by machine, bringing the total area under excavation to 1,190 sq m (12,800 sq ft).

About one third of the bath-house (the north-west end) was located and uncovered in 1981 (see



Fig. 3: The last vestiges of a clay-walled oven, set on a cobbled surface to the south of the bath-house.



Fig. 4: Part of the spread of wall plaster being uncovered.

Fig. 2); the remainder of the bath-house is being excavated in 1982. The surviving walls of the bath-house were built of tufa, tile, flint and chalk, and represent at least two phases of building.

To the south of the bath-house extends a series of cobbled yards, and much rougher yard surfaces. There were at least two phases in the history of the site when good cobbled yard surfaces were laid down south of the bath-house; in other areas it appears that rubble was dumped in holes and mud patches to form a much rougher surface akin to a farm yard. On one area of cobbling, the remains of a domed clay oven were found (Fig. 3). One posthole was found nearby, contemporary with the cobbling on which the oven was set; the modern disturbance of the area immediately adjacent to the oven may well have removed other postholes. Immediately to the west of the bath-house was a large ditch, at least

one metre (3ft) deep, that had been re-cut at least four times. It is possible that this ditch was a drainage ditch for the bath-house, but it is more likely that it is a boundary ditch. It has been tentatively dated to the late second century AD on the evidence of the pottery from primary silting. A beam slot, associated with large rectangular postholes, which runs parallel to the ditch a little farther to the west, is evidence of a large timber structure in this area. To the north of the bath-house a series of postholes with post-packing consisting of massive flints is evidence for at least one further timber building.

Overlying one of the cobbled areas to the south of the bath-house a quantity of Roman painted wall plaster was found, spread over an area of 20 sq m (215 sq ft) (see Fig. 4). This plaster was several layers deep and in very good condition. The painted design is a geometric pattern of squares and dia-



Fig 5: Sandra Neville and Jacqui Watson consolidating wall plaster *in situ* before it was lifted.

monds made up of red, pink, yellow and black lines and dots. Many large pieces were intact, while many other large pieces had broken into smaller pieces *in situ* so that there is a good possibility of piecing the fragments together to reconstruct larger areas of plaster. Jacqui Watson, a professional conservator from the Ancient Monuments Laboratory of the Department of Environment was called in to advise on the lifting of the plaster (see Fig. 5), and it is hoped that eventually the larger pieces will be conserved and mounted for display.

It is almost certain that the plaster arrived in the position in which it was found by collapsing from the walls of a building with timber and cob walls which, except for the plaster and some evidence for the use of cob, has decayed almost without trace.

The range of pottery from the site indicates that it was occupied from the late first century until well into the fourth century. It is not known if this occupation was continuous, but the unexpectedly large quantity of finds from the site would seem to indicate that any periods when the site was unoccupied were short and infrequent. The finds include a wide range of Romano-British pottery, including a unique form of lamp and a fragmentary cremation urn. Another complete vessel, although recovered in fragments, was found in a position which indicated that it had been buried whole. It did not contain a cremation but had an encrustation on its inner surface which is at present being analysed for traces of food remains. The metalwork finds from the site have been largely in a poor condition, probably due to the intermittent waterlogging of the site over the past

100 years, but two Roman brooches, a bronze weaving tablet, toilet instruments and a few bronze coins have been recognised, and numerous very corroded iron objects have been recovered. Large quantities of hypocaust tile, flue tile, and roof tile have also been found, and large tesserae of fired clay and smaller coloured tesserae are evidence that both tessellated and mosaic floors existed on the site.

A small amount of medieval and post-medieval pottery has also been recovered, but so far no Saxon pottery has been found to suggest a link between the Roman site and the nearby Saxon cemetery.

Most of the pre-Roman features so far excavated appear to be Late Iron Age in date, but stray finds of Later Bronze Age pottery indicate the likelihood of a Later Bronze Age settlement close-by. A quartzite pebble hammer, probably of Early Bronze Age date, and a Neolithic ground flint axe have also been found.

The 1981 season of excavation has established that the areas within the drying beds have undergone much disturbance since the first sewage works was built so that, although there is a large quantity of finds mixed in the topsoil, archaeological features have been partially removed. It is apparent, however, that even in these areas deep-cut features such

as pits, ditches and postholes are not substantially damaged. There are various areas, though, which have been well protected by raised trackways and embankments and have suffered virtually no disturbance: it is these areas which are continuing to produce the better preserved archaeological remains, and it is these areas which require further excavation before the stripping of topsoil prior to gravel extraction.

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Letters

IT WORRIES ME when the Big Brotherism of the CBA (Collective for British Archaeology) creeps into the liberal pages of *the London Archaeologist*. Of course much of what was said about the publication of conference proceedings was sound, and of course the guidance given to potential publishers was right, but in less discerning hands the call for 'selection' of papers for printing is going to result in censorship; and all censorship is bad, especially when no-one knows, or agrees, what the criteria for support or suppression should be.

Refereeing is mentioned. This noxious practice already makes sure that many interesting papers which conflict with the views of the picked referee do not get into the journals; it must not spread into the suppression of conference papers. The only selection which may properly be operated is in the choice of people to present papers at conferences, and here is the point which ought to be argued out. Dissatisfaction with conference proceedings is, to my mind, no more than dissatisfaction with conferences as they are at present constituted. However poor the proceedings, if the market will stand it, there is no basic reason against publication. So much rubbish is published that it is unfair to archaeologists to ask that they should be the only group to suppress their own rubbish rather than express it.

But Conferences! They should be divided into Teach-ins and Work-ins. The first consists of a group of people who want to know about something, who ask experts along to tell them roughly what is already known. Originality is out of place, and publication could only be utilitarian, not interesting. The Work-in should consist of a group of people who want to move a subject along, to improve it. There is no objection here to a non-participating audience so long as they realize that they are there solely to learn, and not to put forward their own half-baked ideas, or ask inconsequential questions. All papers must be prepared and circulated beforehand so that the timetable is one solely of discussion, and the organizers must take the responsibility of reading through the papers and giving more time to interesting looking papers, and less time for discussion to dull ones. And, having invited the speakers to submit papers, and then decided which papers to discuss, the editor must be no more than a technician who sees through the press the text of the papers which were discussed, in the form that they were submitted, together with the typed version of the tape of the discussion.

Until there are some guidelines as to what is Good in archaeology (a separate article in itself) the more publication the better, for amongst the present unexciting mediocre offerings the mistaken and the sparkling would at least give variety.

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