

Excavations at Beddington 1982

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Fig 1: Part of the main villa-house. The ranging rods are placed alongside walls, foundations and robber trenches.

EXCAVATIONS AT THE SITE of the Roman villa at Beddington Sewage Works, near Croydon, Surrey (TQ 297 658) began in March 1981 and continued until December 1981 as an exploratory investigation in advance of gravel extraction¹. On the strength of the promising results of this investigation, further finance was obtained, and a second season

of excavation took place from April 1982 to March 1983, directed by Lesley and Roy Adkins of the South West London Archaeological Unit of the Surrey Archaeological Society.

1. L. Adkins and R. Adkins 'Excavations at Beddington 1981', *London Archaeol* 4, no 3 (1982) 199-203.

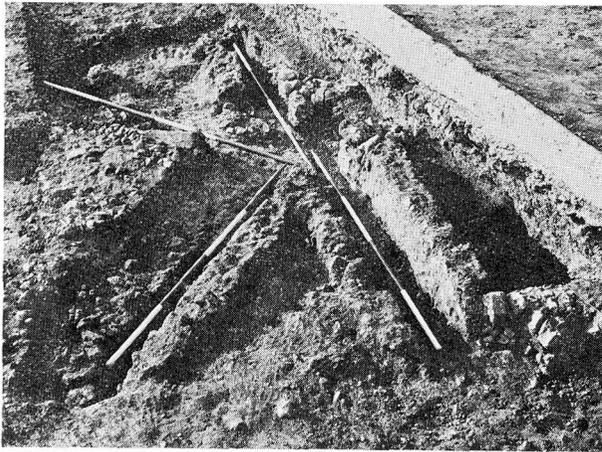


Fig. 2: The remains of the channelled hypocaust.

Further areas were stripped of modern sewage sludge by machine, with particular attention being paid to those areas more likely to have been protected by the raised trackways and embankments of the sewage works, rather than in the bottom of the sludge-drying beds which had been cleared out several times by bulldozer, and were thus less likely to have preserved archaeological remains.

The most important discovery in the 1982 season of excavation was that of the main domestic building of the villa (Fig. 1). The evidence for this building is complex, and consists of stretches of walls composed of mortared flint and tufa, numerous robber trenches, and stretches of unmortared flint foundations for the masonry footings. No floor levels of this villa-house have survived, although debris from the overlying topsoil and from the robber trenches indicates that the building once had mosaic and tessellated floors, plastered and painted walls, and a tiled roof. However, a channelled hypocaust consisting of tufa and mortar-lined channels survived in the western room of the building (Fig. 2), even though this room had been extensively robbed. The building had at least two phases of construction; the details of these phases are still being studied, but a preliminary assessment suggests that the building dates from the mid 2nd century. Unfortunately, only the southern half of this building survives; the northern half was probably destroyed without record in the 1930's, and so its full extent cannot be estimated with certainty. The building was probably a corridor villa, with two short wings added at a later date, and with at least one row of main rooms, most of which no longer survive (see Fig. 3 for plan of villa).

2. *ibid.*

3. L Adkins and R Adkins 'The use of micro-excavators on archaeological sites: a review', *London Archaeol* 4,

The main building is detached from the bath-house, which lies nine metres (30ft) to the west. The bath-house was first discovered in 1871 and was relocated and partially excavated in 1981². In 1982 Thames Water moved the line of a fence and gateway in order to give access to the rest of the bath-house. The modern overburden was removed using a micro-excavator³. Despite destruction caused by several concrete culverts (Fig. 4), preservation in this area was much better than expected, with the walls of the bath-house surviving to a maximum of just over one metre (over 3ft) in height. The bath-house walls were constructed largely of tufa, with some flint and tile. No floor levels survived, although stacks of tiles used as the floor supports of the hypocaust heating system survived in one room. These tile stacks were mainly composed of re-used roof and flue tiles, an unusual type of construction⁴. *Opus signinum* rendering survived in several places on the walls and in the bottom of the apsidal room, where it may have formed the base for *pilae* tiles or possibly the lining of a bath. A great deal of information has been added to that recorded in 1871, when the bath-house was first discovered, including evidence for timber and masonry structures adjoining the bath-house to the north and the south. A tile-lined heating flue and part of a flint wall which had not been recorded in 1871 were also found, and probably belong to an early phase of the bath-house. The bath-house consisted of a range of connected rooms and one detached room. Unfortunately the area between the main bath-house and the detached room was badly disturbed, and no evidence of a connecting structure could be found. Like the main villa building, the bath-house seems to date from the mid 2nd century.

To the south of the bath-house, what appeared to be a timber building with painted plaster was found in 1981⁵. Approximately 7 metres (23ft) further south was another timber building of a similar size. The evidence for this building was more substantial, consisting of a flint platform, with the remains of a collapsed tiled roof scattered around it. The building was constructed over an earlier cobbled surface and an earlier timber structure.

In addition to the buildings, numerous pits and ditches have been found dating from the mid first century. Most of the pits and ditches were no more than one metre (3ft) deep, but one large pit was found to contain a quantity of building debris including tile, tesserae and large amounts of painted plaster.

no 10 (1983) 271-3.

4. M J Stone, *pers comm.*

5. *op cit* fn 1.

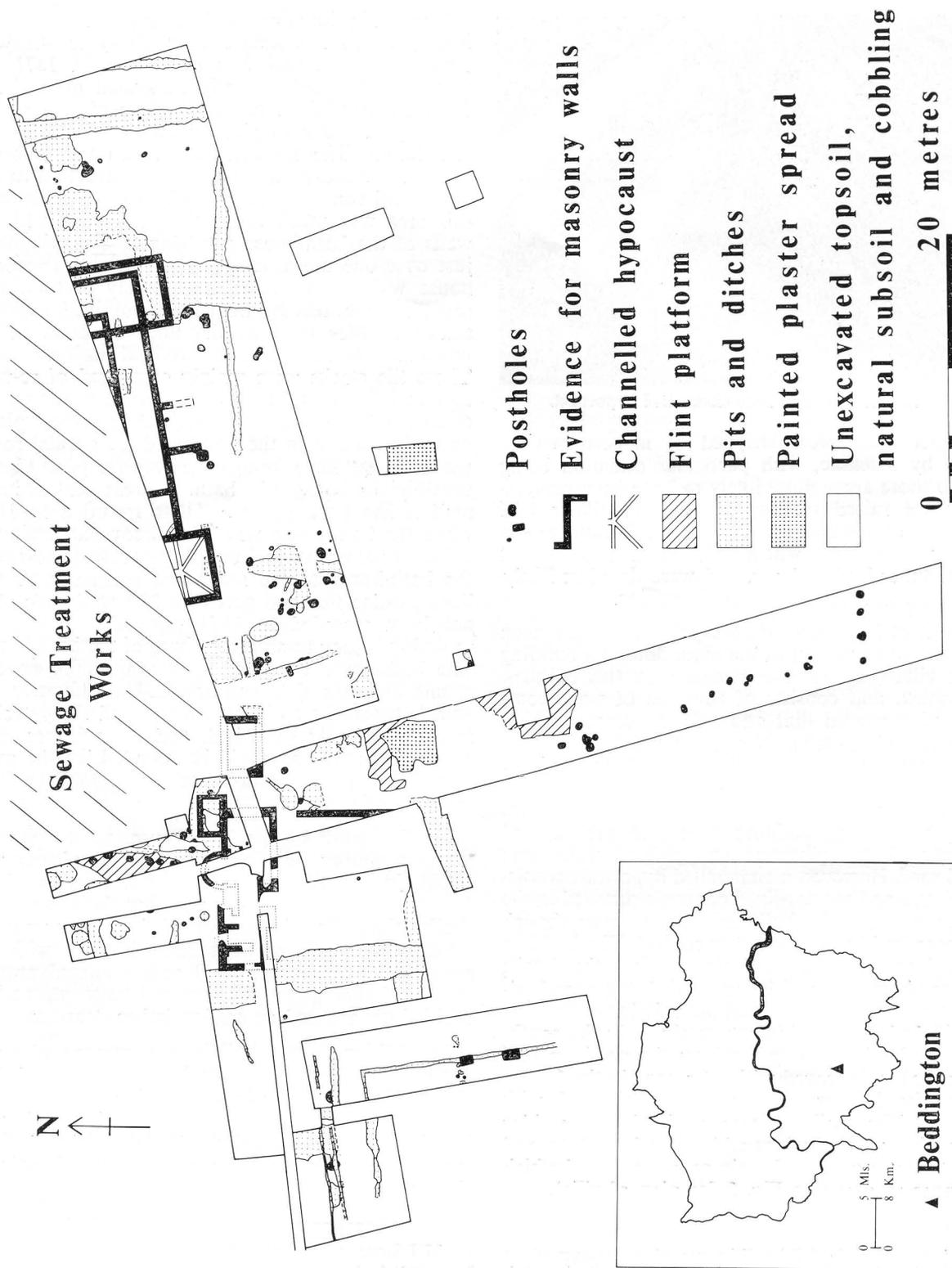


Fig. 3: Area of excavation showing major features. (drawn by Kurt Hunter-Mann)

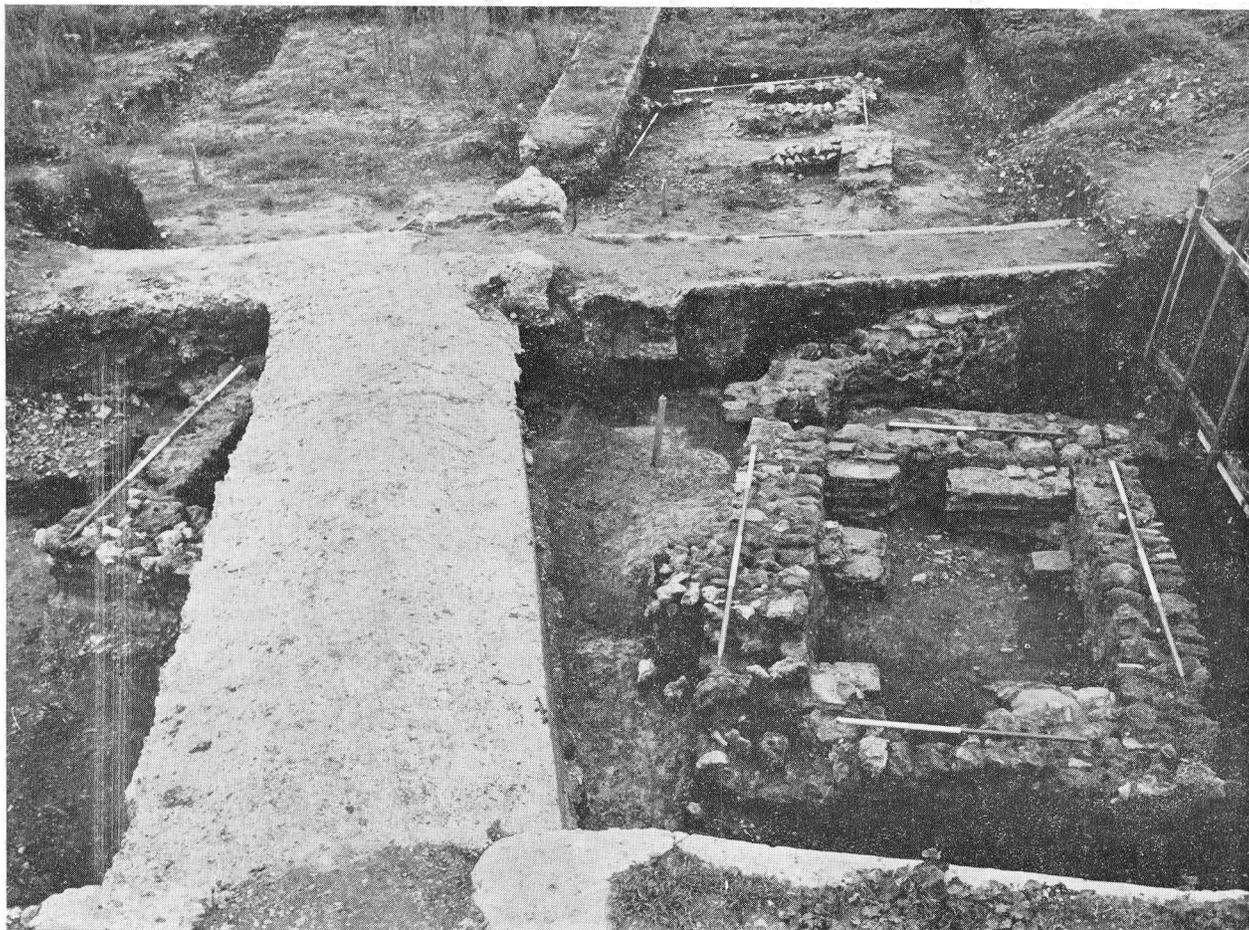


Fig 4: The main rooms of the bath-house dissected by concrete sewage carriers and culverts.

There are also good indications of prehistoric activity on the site, mostly of Later Bronze Age date. Some of the pits and ditches appear to be prehistoric in date, but there is also much residual material including flint-tempered pottery, clay slab fragments, waste flint flakes and bone artifacts, that has been recovered from the Roman features.

A 20-year programme of gravel extraction on the 120 acre area (of which this site forms part) is expected to start soon. It is hoped that this area can be fully examined for further archaeological features, in particular for further evidence of Roman and Later Bronze Age settlement, when the topsoil stripping commences, and that sufficient finance will be forthcoming for this work. This is one of the largest areas in South West London where relatively undisturbed archaeological remains, and especially prehistoric remains, can be expected to survive.

Meanwhile, the campaign to raise funds for the

post-excavation work on the material from Beddington has proved successful, and the preparation of the final report has begun. It is hoped that this will be published in the near future.

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