



Figure 2a.
The wider landscape: 4th century

Pollen evidence indicates that much of Britain was already a predominantly agricultural landscape before the Roman conquest. In southern Britain, much woodland was removed in the Bronze Age. So the landscape around the Chedworth villa may have been wooded but not so thickly as in our recent centuries. It is also quite likely that woodland clearance would have taken place on the slopes immediately around the villa to provide fuel for many purposes, including for the furnaces of the underfloor heating systems. The Romans had a well-developed industrial economy and it is likely that sheep farming and a woollen industry were established in the area. Again, this would suggest a relatively open landscape structure. There is some evidence of metal-working in the vicinity the villa (also requiring fuel), although this may have been post-Roman.

Wheat and barley may have been in cultivation locally during the Roman period. Certainly there is evidence of wheat and barley cultivation during later times. Ploughing striations are visible on some of the excavated stonework at the south-east corner of the villa.

Although many Roman villas lay at the centre of agricultural estates, there is no particular evidence to indicate that this was the case at Chedworth. However, it is possible that an estate associated with the villa may have had its functional and administrative centre elsewhere. Another smaller villa existed to the east, on the opposite hillside of the Coln valley, only about 500m from the main Chedworth villa. This may have been a lower-status or subordinate villa and not necessarily residential, possibly providing some form of estate facility, used or occupied by a bailiff.

Further to the east, along the lower southern slopes of the Coln valley, there was a temple. A small building on the hillside to the north-west of the main villa, which was destroyed when the MSWJ Railway was built, may have been a mausoleum or shrine. Roman villas, temples and mausolea often had architectural affinity. It is not known whether inter-visibility between such sites was regarded as important, but this possibility is explored in Figures 5a to 5d.

Although the Foss Way is relatively nearby (2 miles to the SE), the nearest Roman road leading to Cirencester was the White Way lying just over 1 mile to the west of the Chedworth villa. There is evidence that tracks led westward and south-westward from the villa possibly providing links with the White Way. If so, although the main approach to the villa was likely to have been from the east, quicker routes may have also been used to reach Cirencester via the White Way.