CHAPTER 3

BUILDINGS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

By Alexander Smith

INTRODUCTION

The study of rural architecture has often been at the forefront of previous accounts of the Romano-British countryside (e.g. Rivet 1969; Branigan 1977b; Morris 1979; Hingley 1989; Scott 1993; Smith 1998; Perring 2002; Martins 2005; Taylor 2011). The archaeological remains of buildings in rural settlements have been classified and used to provide frameworks through which significant insight has been gained into aspects of social and economic expression, as well as giving a deeper understanding of wider regional characteristics. With some notable exceptions (e.g. S. Clarke 1998; Taylor 2001; 2013), these studies have concentrated on one broad category of elite rural architecture – the Roman villa.

Definitions of the term ‘villa’ can vary significantly from one author to another (see Chs 1 and 2), but – in archaeological terms – it is generally taken as meaning rural buildings of the Roman period with architectural characteristics associated with high-status prominent display, such as tiled roofs, painted plaster walls, mosaic floors, under-floor heating and often with associated bathhouses (Hingley 1989, 21; King 2004a, 349; Roymans and Derks 2011b, 2). Smith, however, advocated a far wider approach (1998, 11). For him the ‘villa’ embraced almost any domestic rural architecture within a Roman province that was unlike ‘native’ forms, and thus accentuated the binary ‘Roman’ and ‘non-Roman’ division inherent in the concept of ‘Romanisation’, which has been critiqued at length within wider theoretical debates about the reproduction of social identities in the Roman period (e.g. Woolf 1998; Mattingly 2004; Van Oyen 2015). Eleanor Scott (1993), in her comprehensive gazetteer of Roman villas in Britain, was equally wide ranging in her interpretative parameters, listing over 1600 entries, based not only on excavated buildings but also on any presence of material such as roof tile, wall plaster and window glass in a rural context. However, this work failed to take into account the wider settlement context and the various possible interpretations of the surface material.

Both Smith (1998, 11) and Scott (1993, 6) did recognise that there was an architectural continuum across time and space rather than a strictly defined and easily recognised set of classifiable buildings. At either end of this continuum, from single-roomed timber or mass-walled structures to large multi-courtyard masonry complexes, there were obviously huge differences, both architecturally and socially, but between these extremes was a myriad of often more subtle variation, perhaps reflecting different individual, cultural and economic choices. With all due acknowledgement of this complex variation, there have been a number of attempts at broad classification, at least of those buildings or complexes explicitly defined as villas. Richmond’s (1969) account of villa plans has formed the basis for comparative analysis in many subsequent studies (e.g. Hingley 1989, 30; Perring 2002, 72; Martins 2005, 3), comprising ‘cottage’, ‘corridor’, ‘winged-corridor’ and ‘courtyard’ types. Smith’s (1998) subsequent critique of this system proposed a more complex typology based upon perceived social expression of the architecture, and included hall houses, row houses, courtyard houses and multiple variants thereof. Within all such classification, however, there are inherent issues with blurred boundaries between types, and with the recognition that most buildings will have complex architectural histories. In many cases such histories have not been recognised during excavation, either because of restricted areas of investigation and/or significant truncation, or else the buildings were investigated prior to the implementation of modern archaeological techniques, and at best we are left with plans depicting the final stages of active occupation.

The current study of rural settlement in Roman Britain has taken into account those excavated buildings/complexes interpreted as villas in all their different forms, generally following the broad classificatory system of Richmond (1969) just outlined (see Villa architecture p. 71). However, it is immediately apparent that these only represent a significant minority of architectural forms in the Romano-British countryside, with the vast bulk of the buildings in most areas being of much less complex form, albeit still with considerable variation. With the mass of mainly developer-funded excavations, we are now in a position to create an account of Romano-British rural architecture that is not totally dominated by villa buildings, and which demonstrates pronounced levels of regional and local diversity.
THE ARCHITECTURAL DATASET

The current study has collated information on 6175 different buildings from 1563 sites across England and Wales, ranging in date from the late Iron Age to late Roman period. As shown in Fig. 3.1 this architectural evidence is well spread across the regions, being recorded in c. 60 per cent of South, Central Belt, East and North-East region settlements and up to 80 per cent of settlements in the North, the latter due mainly to greater preservation of earthworks in upland areas.

Most of the recorded buildings come from sites interpreted as farmsteads, with approximately equal numbers from complex (628) and enclosed (674) farmsteads, followed by roadside settlements, villa complexes, villages, military vicus, hillforts and a number of ‘non-settlement’ sites (Fig. 3.2). The emphasis on non-villa farmstead buildings is important for achieving a more balanced understanding of Romano-British rural architecture across the whole country, which, as Taylor has demonstrated for parts of the East Midlands and Wroxeter hinterlands, can in turn lead to a more nuanced appreciation of local and regional community identity (Taylor 2013).

In terms of building density, this remains fairly modest at 2.4 buildings per settlement across the whole dataset, although this does vary by region, with both the North and Upland Wales and Marches exceeding four buildings per settlement for reasons outlined above (i.e. better preservation of earthworks) (Fig. 3.3a). There are also obvious and expected differences in the quantity of buildings by settlement type (Fig. 3.3b), with a
much higher average number in nucleated settlements, followed by villa complexes then farmsteads. The nature of complex farmsteads, with extensive evidence for multiple differentiated zoning, is undoubtedly behind an increased architectural presence over enclosed farmsteads, although the differences are not huge.

The overall number of buildings recorded, although considerable, would of course only represent a small fraction of the total count originally found across the late Iron Age and Roman countryside. Buildings, which are defined here as constructions with walls and roofs at a suitable scale for human entry, have only been included in the dataset if they are of a recognisable form, defined most often by specific arrangements of postholes, beam slots or masonry foundations. There are at least a further 450 settlements where potential elements of building foundations were noted but with no discernible patterns, or else there are what appear to be building platforms, but no obvious traces of sub-structure. It has been suggested in some regions (e.g. Thames Valley: Allen et al. 1984; Booth et al. 2007, 36) that mass-walled (e.g. turf) buildings may have become more common during the late Iron Age and Roman periods, with a resultant increased difficulty in archaeological recognition (though possibly indicated by penannular gullies; see below, p. 51). Perring (2002, 98–106) describes an array of such earth, cob and clay construction techniques for Romano-British buildings, though definite examples are encountered only sporadically, and then mostly in better preserved urban environments.

### Table 3.1: Recorded Characteristics of Buildings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building characteristic</th>
<th>Variables recorded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Form</td>
<td>rectangular, circular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural material</td>
<td>masonry, timber/mass-walled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation of space</td>
<td>multi-room building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronology</td>
<td>overall use of building, form and material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architectural elaboration</td>
<td>tiled roof, painted plaster, architectural stonework, window glass, tessellated floor, hypocaust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific building type</td>
<td>aisled building, cellared building, villa types</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Architectural Recording

In a large-scale project such as this it has not been possible to record detailed information on each and every building, and instead base-line characteristics have been recorded as set out in Table 3.1. It is appreciated that such relatively coarse level data will omit many more subtle developments, such as the differentiation between part- and full-masonry (although drystone and mortared masonry buildings are differentiated where possible), and circular and oval buildings, though such variables are not always possible to determine, and even then may not always be defined as such within reports. Nevertheless, the overall quantity of data is sufficient to enable a fairly robust characterisation of rural architectural type and form, on a chronological, geographical and site/landscape context basis.
BUILDING FORM AND MATERIAL

Rural architecture in Roman Britain is characterised by great complexity in physical form, from simple, single-roomed timber or mass-walled roundhouses to palatial, multi-courtyard, rectilinear, masonry villas. At the most basic level, this can be broken down into the fundamentals of morphology and building material, as outlined above: circular vs rectilinear and timber vs masonry. The functional and ideological impacts of such dichotomies have been discussed at length in various archaeological, historical and architectural studies (e.g. Steadman 2006; Pope 2008; Bradley 2012), and the broad evidence from rural settlements in late Iron Age and Roman Britain will now be outlined.

CIRCULAR AND RECTANGULAR ARCHITECTURE

The main domestic architectural form in Britain prior to the Roman invasion was the roundhouse, which had origins in the early Bronze Age, and reached maximum numbers across the country in the middle Iron Age (Pope 2008, 14). Thereafter, the numbers of circular buildings in many parts of the south and east appear to have declined significantly, or at least were built in a style that is not easily recognisable in the archaeological record. However, it is recognised that roundhouses did continue in use into at least the early Roman period, and remained very numerous in the north and west throughout the third and fourth centuries A.D. (Hingley 1989, 31; Perring 2002, 51; Taylor 2007, 31; see Chs 9–11). A recent study of roundhouses in Wales revealed an exceptionally long-lived history, from as early as the later third millennium B.C. to the later first millennium A.D., with one-third of the sites in the study having their origins in the Iron Age and most of these appearing to continue in occupation through to the Roman period (Ghey et al. 2007).

A total of 2659 circular, or at least curvilinear, buildings from 813 sites were recorded in the current dataset, representing 43 per cent of the total number of structures. Although not all of these would have been domestic roundhouses, it is likely that the greater percentage were, with a relatively small number of others having specific functions noted such as agricultural buildings, workshops and shrines (see Building function below). On a national level there is a steady reduction in the number of sites with circular architecture over time, with the most noticeable period of decline being observed across the late Iron Age to early Roman transition, when there is fall from 40 to 24 per cent of settlements containing such buildings (Fig. 3.4). As will be shown in Chapters 4 to 11, however, there are significant regional variations to this national pattern, with, for example, the major period of decline in the relative frequency of circular buildings being the second century A.D. for the East region and the third/fourth centuries for the North.

In a general discussion on architectural geometry, Steadman (2006, 128) argued that circularity in plan was often a characteristic of freestanding, widely spaced, single-room houses in pre-industrial societies. With a greater desire for physical differentiation of space came a change from single-room to multi-room houses and a resulting change from circular to rectangular plan shapes, since the latter made it easier to pack together rooms in plan and offered greater flexibility in the event of a requirement to expand the overall dimensions of the building (e.g. multi-storey) (ibid.). The gradual change from predominantly circular to predominantly rectangular architecture in most parts of Roman Britain is likely to be linked at least in part with such a need for greater architectural differentiation and flexibility, as buildings (circular and rectangular) became increasingly used as tools for

**FIG. 3.4. Use of circular and rectangular buildings over time**
FIG. 3.5. Distribution of all excavated circular and rectangular buildings, c. late Iron Age–late Roman
FIG. 3.6. Distribution of sites with different architectural forms from the late Iron Age to the 4th century A.D.
more complex expressions of cultural identity and hierarchy (see Multi-space architecture below).

The 3517 rectangular buildings from 1079 sites represent 57 per cent of the known number of structures in the current dataset. Unlike circular buildings there is far more direct evidence for a multitude of different functions other than purely domestic, partly because of the increased scope of such buildings for division into multiple rooms that could be utilised for different purposes (see Building function below). Although comparatively rare, there are many instances of rectilinear structures dating to the late Iron Age, occurring sporadically across most parts of England and Wales, and forming just under 5 per cent of all buildings in use at this time (FIG. 3.4). Traditionally many Iron Age rectangular buildings are thought to have had non-domestic functions, often interpreted as shrines (e.g. those in Danebury hillfort; Cunliffe 1995), though usually only on the basis of their incongruity among other forms of contemporary architecture. In a review of the evidence, however, Moore (2003) pointed out that these buildings may have served a multitude of functions, including domestic occupation and as animal byres. The well-known post-built rectangular buildings at Goldcliff on the Gwent Levels are mostly of middle Iron Age date (Bell et al. 2000), and further buildings of a similar nature and date have recently been found on the Sussex Downs at Peacehaven (Hart 2015, 175). In both instances the buildings have been suggested as seasonal huts, used for temporary human and animal occupation in a society based upon transhumance (Moore 2003, 53; Hart 2015, 180).

Most late Iron Age rectangular buildings recorded in the current dataset are quite insubstantial structures, and of uncertain use, such as the small posthole building from Bluntisham in the Ouse Valley (Burrow and Mudd 2010). However, larger, more defined structures of late Iron Age date do exist, as seen at Newhouse Park, Chepstow, on the margins of the Severn Levels (not too far from the buildings at Goldcliff), where major excavations revealed a substantial, multi-phase rectangular building with a metalled floor, associated with much domestic debris and dated to the early first century A.D. (Robic and Ponsford 2008; see FIG. 3.16 below).

The increased adoption of rectilinear forms over time on a national basis is clear, these eventually becoming the dominant form across most of the Roman province by the second to third centuries A.D. (FIG. 3.4). As with circular buildings, however, the situation is highly variable across the different regions, with the South for example having a dominance of rectangular buildings by the later first century A.D. and architecture in the South-West region always remaining predominantly curvilinear (including oval and ‘boat-shaped’ buildings; see Ch. 11).

The distribution of circular and rectangular architecture can be seen in FIG. 3.5. Both forms are found across the country, though clearly at differing densities with rectangular buildings dominating in much of the south and east, and circular buildings to the north and west, though there is also a highly significant cluster in and around the Fenland region. As already stated, there was a gradual, though piecemeal, shift in most areas from predominantly circular to predominantly rectangular architecture, and this is seen geographically in FIG. 3.6. Even during the late Iron Age, parts of the south-east display a much greater diversity of architectural form than those areas further west and north, and it is the south-east that sees the greatest proliferation of rectangular architecture during the later first century A.D. The major expansion of rectangular buildings across the province can be seen in the

![FIG. 3.7. Relative frequency of circular and rectangular buildings according to major settlement type (n=total number of buildings identified)](image-url)
second century A.D., and by this time it is only parts of north-east England, north-west Wales and Cornwall where circular buildings still dominate, with only the latter area remaining in this situation by the fourth century. However, even during the later Roman period, there are areas such as the Fenlands and its western periphery that persist with a relatively strong, circular, architectural signature (see Ch. 5).

The distribution of building forms across England and Wales shown in Figs 3.5 and 3.6 encompasses all forms of rural settlement, and thus the apparent proliferation of rectangular buildings from central Wales and parts of the north-west, for instance, is largely due to the presence of military vici rather than a reflection of ‘native’ rural architecture. The proportion of circular versus rectangular architecture according to the major settlement types is shown in Fig. 3.7, and in part correlates with general chronological patterns, with settlement types more resonant of the Iron Age having far greater proportions of circular buildings. However, the national disparity between farmstead types seen here is not purely chronological, as the number of rectangular buildings does not reach parity with circular buildings on enclosed farmsteads until the fourth century, whereas on complex farmsteads they surpass them by the second century and become ever more dominant thereafter. This suggests that changing architectural styles were generally concurrent with changes in settlement form across the countryside, although the picture, as ever, is very mixed and there can be substantial variation in form even within a relatively limited area, with different settlements adopting different architectural styles over time. Furthermore, within the broad classification of circular and rectangular buildings there was also little homogeneity, with a great deal of differentiation in complexity and use of space, along with building materials and architectural elaboration.

BUILDING MATERIALS AND APPEARANCE

The extensive variety of building materials and techniques used in rural Romano-British architecture has really only started to be fully appreciated since the advent of developer-funded archaeology in 1990, and the resultant huge increase in non-villa buildings being investigated. Even then, much of the discussion has still revolved around villas and townhouses (e.g. Johnson and Haynes 1996), although Perring’s work on the Roman house in Britain did provide an account of variable building materials and methods of construction (Perring 2002, 80–110). Many recent site excavation reports also enter into considerable detail on this matter, such as the 36 mostly timber-framed buildings from the major roadside settlement at Wilderspool, Warrington (Rogers and Garner 2007) and the 62 timber buildings from the inland port at Camp Ground, Colne Fen, Cambridgeshire, including platform, beam-slot buildings and post-built structures (Evans 2013b, 236–77; see Building function below).

The national scale and scope of the current project has meant that specific construction details have not been systematically recorded for all buildings in the dataset, and instead a basic division between timber/mass-walled and masonry structures has been catalogued, as displayed in Fig. 3.8.

Prior to the Claudian conquest, timber or mass-walled architecture was almost exclusive across much of Britain, mostly in the form of roundhouses and, indeed, many Roman period roundhouses retained similar construction techniques (though see discussion of masonry circular buildings below). Most of these buildings were only represented by penannular gullies, usually interpreted as drainage gullies around the exterior of the superstructure. In some cases the building’s walls were defined by ring grooves for solid split timbers, or else stakeholes used in wattle and daub construction (Pope 2008, 17). However, in other cases, there was no indication as to the building’s superstructure, either through truncation of timber slots/posts or else use of a mass-walling technique such as turf. Despite this uncertainty over the construction material, the term ‘timber building’ will be used throughout the remainder of this volume in order to describe such buildings, and to differentiate them from those structures built using some form of masonry.

The 3370 timber buildings in the current dataset represent 55 per cent of the total number of structures, which is almost certainly a significant under-representation, as they are often quite insubstantial (especially box-framed and beam-slot structures; see discussion of buildings at Staines, Ch. 4) and were rarely identified prior to the middle of the twentieth century. The predominance of such buildings in the Iron Age has already been noted, and they were still very common during the Roman period, when a variety of new carpentry techniques were introduced, including timber framing, that ensured ever more substantial and sophisticated wooden buildings were capable of being built (Goodburn 1992, 197; Perring 2002, 83). The widespread distribution of timber buildings across England and Wales is shown on Fig. 3.8, dominating the excavated building record in most areas. Exceptions include places where there is a ready supply of good building stone, such as in the Cotswolds, although
Fig. 3.8  Distribution of all excavated timber/mass-walled and masonry buildings
BUILDINGS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

the apparent lack of timber buildings here may be just an artefact of the historical concentration of excavations on villas in this area. Overall, timber was undoubtedly the main construction material used within most rural buildings in Roman Britain, and the variety of techniques employed within these structures is quite evident; however, systematic analysis of these construction methods lies beyond the scope of this study.

Masonry buildings are defined as those having at least stone footings, even if the remainder of the building may well have been cob or timber framed. A total of 2713 such ‘stone’ buildings were recorded, only apparent in most areas during the Roman period, although drystone masonry structures (predominantly roundhouses) did occur in parts of Dorset, Cornwall, north-west Wales and north-east England from the late Iron Age onwards (Fig. 3.8). The first significant development of masonry buildings (including the first mortared structures) occurred in the mid- to late first century A.D. in parts of the south-east, and to a lesser extent in the Central Belt. As with rectangular buildings, it is not until the second century A.D. that masonry buildings become more widespread across the country, including the north and west, although here they generally still remained as drystone structures outside of military contexts.

Most masonry buildings in the dataset were rectangular though 570 circular masonry structures were also recorded, the distribution of which demonstrates distinct clusters (Fig. 3.9). Those to the north and west represent for the most part a continuation of late Iron Age masonry roundhouse tradition, with diameters typically somewhat smaller than those of average timber roundhouses, such as at Middle Gunnar Peak, Barrasford, Northumberland, where three excavated buildings had thick walls (1–1.5 m) of irregularly shaped blocks with a rubble and earth core and internal diameters ranging from 4 m to 7.5 m (Jobey 1981). In contrast, many of the circular masonry structures in the south and east, including the major concentration in and around the Nene and Upper Ouse Valleys, were often substantial and occasionally mortared buildings, as for example at the roadside settlement of Higham Ferrers in the Nene Valley, where four structures of second century A.D. date were revealed with tightly packed ironstone foundations and internal diameters up to 10.7 m (giving an interior area of 90 m²)

FIG. 3.9. Distribution of circular masonry buildings
floors and hypocausts are very rare (c. and glazed windows is encountered far less often religious sites. Evidence for painted plaster walls vici roadside settlements, 15 military and 33 been defined, including 109 farmsteads, 67 attested at c. circular structures) with some of these attributes incorporating buildings (including occasional timber component. Villa complexes are, unsurprisingly, associated with very high levels of masonry architecture (76 per cent of buildings in these sites), though this is in part due to a lack of excavation beyond the main villa building in many cases. Where investigation has been more extensive, for example around the periphery of the Ingleby Barwick villa in County Durham, a range of timber and masonry buildings is often encountered (Willis and Carne 2013). Within nucleated settlements, timber architecture is dominant (60 per cent) at villages, while a much more mixed range of masonry and timber buildings is encountered in roadside settlements and military vici.

Architectural elaboration

The nature of any superstructure and elaboration within rural buildings is quite poorly understood in most cases, especially outside of villa complexes, where, unsurprisingly, most of the academic attention has been focused (Johnson and Haynes 1996; Smith 1998; Perring 2002). As discussed above, such villa buildings are defined by the presence of features such as tiled roofs, painted plaster walls, tessellated floors and hypocaust systems, though there are still many settlements incorporating buildings (including occasional circular structures) with some of these attributes without necessarily being defined as villas.

The most frequently encountered evidence is for tiled-roof buildings, interpreted by the quantity of roofing material (ceramic or stone), which is attested at c. 20 per cent of sites where no villa has been defined, including 109 farmsteads, 67 roadside settlements, 15 military vici and 33 religious sites. Evidence for painted plaster walls and glazed windows is encountered far less often (c. 12 per cent of non-villa sites), while tessellated floors and hypocausts are very rare (c. 4 per cent), with most of the pavements occurring in religious sites (all Romano-Celtic temples), then roadside settlements, and only four being attributed to settlements defined as farmsteads (e.g. Towcester, Northants; Turland 1977). These settlements, along with many of the 15 ‘farmsteads’ with evidence for hypocausts, are usually regarded as ‘possible villas’, but generally lack good evidence. Some of the farmsteads included here, however, have hypocausted buildings within their complexes but no domestic villa range, such as the small two-room bathhouse/caldarium at Faverdale, Darlington (Proctor 2012), and the building interpreted as a masonry workshop with a heated room for drying at Fosters End Drove, EastWinch, Norfolk (Lally and Nicholson 2008). At Chilton Fields in Oxfordshire, a very small (1.91 × 1.62 m internally) heated building has been suggested as a hot bath (Pine and Preston 2015, 23–9), though it has more in common with the caldarium from Faverdale, and another similar structure is known at Ingleby Barwick in County Durham (Willis and Carne 2013). The Chilton Fields example lay over 25 m from what is interpreted as a very modest three-roomed ‘villa’ building (discussed in Ch. 5).

Most of the building refinements discussed above are from sites that concentrate in the same geographic regions as villa buildings, all being parts of the same suite of architectural elements that developed within parts of the province from the earliest post-conquest period onwards. Outside this southern and eastern zone such embellishments are very rare, generally only occurring in military vici, roadside settlements and the odd remote villa building.

BUILDING FUNCTION

Architectural space can be utilised in many different ways, even within a single building (e.g. see Perring 2002, chapters 8–11). Attempts to determine function, both of the building as a whole and individual components, can be extremely problematic, especially when it is noted that many buildings and rooms may have been multi-functional or at least had different uses within their lifespan. Furthermore, any thorough analysis of the use of space in buildings requires the position of doorways to be known, and this is rarely the case in Roman Britain. Functional interpretation in general relies upon the presence of certain features such as recognisable furniture/embellishments (e.g. hearths, ovens, flooring, bathing pools, etc.), environmental remains and artefactual remains, though other factors such as structural parallels and context also often come into play. Even with these strands of evidence, our understanding of the more detailed use of space within buildings is rarely above the level of vague supposition. Analysis of a Roman ailed building
at North Wanborough in Hampshire sought to produce a social reconstruction, dividing the building into male and female areas on the basis of different categories of finds (Hingley 1989, 43–5). However, the choice of artefacts to reflect different genders was entirely subjective (e.g. male = keys, knives, spears and female = combs, shuttles and spindlewhorls), and little account was taken of the taphonomic processes that led to the distribution of this ‘rubbish’ in the main part of the building.
In some cases, the levels of preservation, extent of excavation and meticulous post-excavation analysis can provide a reasonable level of confidence in attempting to determine general building function within settlements, as seen in the recently published account of a farmstead and nucleated inland port on the edge of the Cambridgeshire Fens at Colne Fen (Evans 2013b; FIG. 3.10). Within the farmstead at Langdale Hale, two timber post-built and beam-slot buildings are interpreted as being residential on the basis of associated finds, one (Structure 17) even tentatively suggested as being connected with inhabitants undertaking an administrative role (on the basis of writing/tally equipment), and the other (Structure 6) incorporating an agricultural barn (ibid., 169–70). The much larger inland port at Camp Ground had 62 identified timber buildings with a variety of building styles (noted above) and with various interpretations as residential houses, granaries, warehouses, mills, shops and a shrine (ibid., 432–4). Many of these interpretations are, as with Langdale Hale, based upon associated finds’ signatures, while one, a 12 × 28 m beam-slot structure, was suggested as a warehouse purely on the basis of its waterside location and scale (ibid., 440). Even considering the scale and comparative thoroughness of this archaeological investigation, the excavators still admit that some of the functional classification of buildings was quite arbitrary (ibid.).

Attempts to determine function within many of the rural buildings in this dataset are hampered by such coarse subjectivity and, indeed, many do not have any particular use assigned to them at all. Nevertheless, there are broad categories of function allocated to some buildings, and these will be examined briefly now.

DOMESTIC

Assessing the number of buildings used for domestic occupation is problematic for reasons discussed above, though it is likely that a high proportion of the 5772 buildings on 1480 settlements with evidence for domestic occupation would at least partly fall into this category. Dominic Perring’s ‘The Roman House in Britain’ (2002) is probably the most comprehensive account of different forms of domestic architecture, yet aside from fairly limited discussion of roundhouses, is very much orientated towards the houses of the upper echelons of Romano-British society (urban town houses and rural villas), mainly in the south and east of the country. Identifying domestic dwellings further down the social scale is in some ways more problematic, in part due to their more insubstantial nature. Yet these often single-roomed structures, whether circular or rectangular, have been recorded with increasing frequency within recent developer-funded archaeology, and are discussed below and in the regional analyses of Chapters 4 to 11. Determining a domestic function for such buildings is usually by default, with an assumption that ‘household’ debris in the vicinity is associated, though of course it is highly likely that they were multi-functional spaces for the most part, incorporating a range of craftworking and agricultural aspects (see Taylor 2001, 51–2).

Specific evidence for a domestic function within buildings may come through occasional preservation of features like hearths or even painted plaster walls. There are over one hundred explicitly recorded examples of settlements with single-room buildings containing in situ hearths, such as a group of late Roman rectangular stone-founded buildings in the roadside settlement at Navenby, Lincolnshire, which each had hearths, floor surfaces and drains (Palmer-Brown and Rylatt 2011). In general, a higher proportion of circular buildings have been noted to contain internal hearths (e.g. at Higham Ferrers, Northants; Lawrence and Smith 2009, 52–7), but this does not appear to have been due to better overall levels of preservation and instead may result from different arrangements for cooking and/or heating. In rural settlements throughout the late Iron Age and Roman periods, it is more common to find evidence for hearths that were not contained within recognised buildings, potentially because of the truncation of mass-walling or more ephemeral structural features that might have stood around them, but perhaps also because some cooking took place outside the main domestic buildings. At the upper end of the scale, a series of hearths were noted to the west of the north range at Fishbourne Palace, believed to have been part of a kitchen garden and possibly for outdoor dining (Cunliffe 1998; M. Jones 2007). Within more modest contexts, there were at least two late Roman stone-built domestic ovens set into the top of earlier midden deposits in a farmstead at Castle Farm, South Cadbury, Somerset, associated with a cobbled surface, but away from a number of post-built buildings (Leach and Tabor 1996, 11).

In addition to the simple, single-room buildings just discussed, there are of course many more complex structures that seem certain to have included domestic components. These buildings, which include those defined as villas, are discussed in more detail below, but here it is worth just reiterating the multi-functional nature of such architecture. A recently excavated and well-preserved late Roman masonry building at Nesley Farm, Tetbury, Gloucestershire, originally comprised a single-roomed rectangular structure (15 × 7 m), with the later addition of two smaller
AGRICULTURE

Agricultural production lies at the heart of Romano-British rural settlement, both economically and undoubtedly socially. In terms of its architectural signature, it has just been remarked upon that many buildings would have had both domestic and agricultural functions, although there is also a range of structures that appear to be specifically designed for agrarian and/or pastoral needs, including animal shelters, arable processing facilities and storage facilities. The only detailed national study of such buildings remains Morris’s *Agricultural Buildings in Roman Britain* (1979), which assessed the available evidence, including a gazetteer of known structures. Since then many more rural agricultural buildings have been excavated, and a summary of these now follows.

Livestock shelters

There are only 27 settlements (mostly farmsteads, but including five villas) where structures have been positively interpreted in excavation reports as livestock shelters, sometimes specifically stated as cattle byres or horse stables. In most ways such interpretation is entirely subjective (e.g. ‘stables’ at Babraham, Cambs.; Armour 2007), since many are designated as potential stock shelters within the parameters of what appear to be agricultural building/enclosure complexes, though some do have more positive evidence to support identifications. At Cefn Graenog, a small mid-to late Roman enclosed farmstead in Gwynedd, phosphate analysis has suggested that some buildings may have been used as livestock shelters (Fasham et al. 1998), while a fourth century A.D. masonry building at Bradley Hill, Somerton, Somerset, was interpreted as a byre on the basis of potential stall divisions along with a drain running along the west side of the building (Leech 1981, 189). Notwithstanding the many rural structures that could possibly have functioned as livestock shelters (including the general agricultural buildings discussed below), the striking paucity of positively identified stock buildings may suggest that the normal arrangement was to over-winter stock in open hay yards rather than dedicated structures.

General agricultural buildings and crop processing

Large numbers of buildings have been assigned a general ‘agricultural’ function, mainly because they have minimal numbers of associated domestic objects, although this argument is less convincing in regions further to the north and west where the general levels of material culture decrease significantly (see Chs 9–11). Some of these buildings do have greater evidence for agrarian facilities, usually in the form of internal corndryers or occasionally other features such as threshing floors (e.g. Dalton Parlours and Wattle Syke in West Yorkshire, where buildings contained both; Wrathmell and Nicholson 1990; Martin et al. 2013), although these are rarely observed (see vol. 2 for more details). Out of 357 rural settlements across the country with evidence for corndryers, just 66 (18.5 per cent) had at least one such structure located within a building (e.g. Yewden villa, Bucks: Eyers 2011; Stanwick, Northants: Crosby and Muldowney 2011) (fig. 3.11). Although at some other settlements, such as the farmstead at Pineham North, Northamptonshire (Carlyle 2007), and the villa at Minster in Thanet, Kent (Moody 2010), there are suggestions that ovens had possible shelters built over them, it seems that in most areas, and in most periods, the norm was for corndryers to be freestanding, albeit sometimes explicitly associated with adjacent storage or threshing structures (e.g. Frost Hill (Site 44), Bullock Down, East Sussex: Rudling 1982).

Of those settlements where there is evidence for corndryers within buildings, 60 per cent were located within villa complexes (often in aisled buildings; see below, p. 66), and most of these date to the later Roman period (e.g. Yewden), with a concentration in the Central Belt region, particularly to the south-west (fig. 3.11). Not all of these could be classified as ‘dedicated agricultural buildings’, as in half the cases the corndryers were inserted directly into the main villa building or associated bathhouse, often cutting through mosaic floors, such as at Butleigh and Ilchester Mead, in Somerset (Martin and Driscoll 2010; Hayward 1982). This well-observed phenomenon is often taken – quite reasonably – as suggesting a fundamental change in the social and economic trajectories of such villas, though quite why the inhabitants felt the need to insert a structure more often sited externally within the main domestic building remains more of a puzzle.
Storage
Perhaps the most commonly stated use for agricultural buildings within excavation reports is storage, both of arable produce and other elements such as tools and carts. Granaries of some sort must have existed at many rural farmsteads though they are very hard to define, being specifically noted at only 41 settlements, including 13 farmsteads, 17 villas, 7 roadside settlements, 3 military vici and 1 village. In many cases such interpretation is again somewhat arbitrary, though others are more securely based, with evidence such as quantities of carbonised grain found in a fourth-century masonry barn in a villa complex at Great Weldon, Northamptonshire, which was destroyed by fire (Smith et al. 1990). A recent

FIG. 3.11. Distribution of excavated sites with corndryers (those contained within buildings highlighted in red) and plan of Yewden villa, Bucks (Eyers 2011)
Excavation at Bredon’s Norton in the Worcestershire Avon Valley revealed part of what appeared to be a bathhouse, which was later used as granary. This was suggested by a high concentration of spelt wheat grain preserved on the floor of one room, under a dense layer of wood charcoal, seemingly when the building burnt down in the later fourth/early fifth century A.D. (grain radiocarbon dated 345–430 cal AD, 95% confidence) (T. Allen et al. 2015). The evidence of carbonised grain preserved in conflagrations in both of these examples highlights the difficulties in interpreting agricultural storage, which may have occurred, even as a secondary function, in any number of buildings, but in most cases would leave no archaeological trace.

**Fig. 3.12.** Distribution of excavated sites with four-post structures and buildings interpreted as granaries and plans of selected ‘granaries’ (Evans 2013b; Philp and Mills 1991; Smith et al. 1990)
In structural terms, the buildings that have been specifically suggested as granaries are quite varied, including both timber beam-slot and posthole-defined structures and substantial masonry barns, with most of the latter being associated with villas (FIG. 3.12). A more defined form, which ultimately stems from a military context (Gentry 1976), comprises parallel rows of beam slots or masonry sleeper walls (or piers in the case of some such as Lullingstone in Kent; Meates 1979) which raised the floor up, as seen at settlements like Camp Ground, Colne Fen in Cambridgeshire, Westminster Sports Field, Horton Kirby in Kent and Cleevelands, Bishop’s Cleeve in Gloucestershire (Evans 2013b; Philp and Mills 1991; Joyce 2010a). The distribution of buildings interpreted as granaries, as shown in FIG. 3.12, is largely concentrated in the Central Belt region, with another group around London and a broad spread to the north-west, with most of the latter being associated with military vici and roadside settlements. Assuming that such buildings were genuinely utilised for large scale storage of grain, this perhaps points to a general increase and centralisation of arable production in this central region, at least from the second century A.D. onwards, from when most of the buildings are dated, a proposition that will be discussed at length in volume 2.

A far more widespread form of structure that is traditionally interpreted as being used for grain storage is the ubiquitous four-post structure, a feature more commonly discussed in Iron Age studies (Reynolds 1974; Cunliffe 2005, 394; Van der Veen 2007, 116). There is generally much less discussion of four-post structures within the Roman period, largely owing to the perception that they rarely occur on Roman sites, though they were noted by Morris, who saw them as representing a delay in the adoption of Roman farming methods (1979, 31). Furthermore, when they are encountered in Romano-British contexts an alternative functional explanation is sometimes sought, such as at Langdale Hale in Cambridgeshire where they are suggested as mills (Evans 2013b, 69). Although strictly outside the architectural remit of this chapter (i.e. they are not included in the general count as ‘buildings’), it is worth noting that they have been recorded on 114 settlements in the current database, of which 80 (70 per cent) potentially were in use into the Roman period, and 36 (32 per cent) definitely so, with some certainly utilised during the third and fourth centuries A.D., such as at Sedgeford in Norfolk and Amesbury in Wiltshire (SHARP 2014; Seager Smith and Fitzpatrick 2000). The continued use of such structures is probably indicative of grain storage (if indeed this was their main function) at a household level, as opposed to the larger scale, perhaps more ‘commercial’ granaries discussed above.

**Other agricultural buildings**

There are of course other types of rural agricultural building, including those defined as mills, smokehouses, threshing sheds etc. In general the archaeological evidence for such buildings is quite meagre, though our evidence for mills is starting to increase to the point where it is now believed that they were a common feature in the Romano-British landscape, at least during the later Roman period (Shaffrey 2015). Most of this evidence comes from the millstones themselves (ibid); there are still relatively few positively identified mill buildings. These are recorded in just seventeen rural sites in the current database, nearly all of which are villages and roadside settlements, the majority suggested as watermills, such as at the villa complex at Woolaston in the Forest of Dean, which had a building with millstones built into the floor and evidence for a double aqueduct or leat traced as an earthwork running up the valley slope (Fulford and Allen 1992, 201). Perhaps the most spectacular example, comprising 3–4 watermills, is from what is thought to be a roadside settlement at Ickham in Kent, probably dating to the later Roman period (Bennett et al. 2010). Typically, the evidence is more subtle, as at the roadside settlement at Scole on the Norfolk/Suffolk border, where a watermill was postulated on the basis of a leat and faint structural remnants (Ashwin and Tester 2014, 195–6). Overall it is believed that watermills were comparatively rare (Peacock 2013, 113; Shaffrey 2015), and on the basis of the incidence of millstones it is likely that many more non-water-powered mill buildings are yet to be identified; indeed, many of the ‘general agricultural buildings’ referred to above could have filled such a role. One probable example of an animal-powered mill was revealed in the roadside settlement at Stanwick, Northamptonshire, where a large (11.5 m diameter) circular masonry building contained the remains of two tread-mills with wear marks caused by hooves (Crosby and Muldowney 2011, 126).

**INDUSTRIAL WORKSHOPS**

In addition to agricultural buildings, there is a whole range of structures that have been interpreted as representing workshops associated with craftworking or industrial activities. These have been recorded on 134 settlements across most of the regions, with the majority, unsurprisingly, being found in roadside settlements and specialised industrial sites, where there is also the greatest diversity of associated industry (TABLE 3.2; FIG. 3.13).
### Table 3.2: Buildings Interpreted as Workshops: Associated Site Types and Industries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Site type</th>
<th>Metalworking production</th>
<th>Pottery production</th>
<th>Tile production</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Not specific</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farmstead</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villa</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roadside settlement</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicus</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (religious, village, hillfort)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>68</strong></td>
<td><strong>19</strong></td>
<td><strong>5</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>134</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 3.13.** Distribution of excavated sites with buildings interpreted as workshops and plan of late Roman pottery workshop at Stibbington, Cambs (Upex et al. 2008)
By far the most common associated industry is metalworking (probably because other crafts such as wood and leather working do not generally leave an archaeological trace), with 38 per cent of these buildings specified as being connected with iron production and/or smithing. Those structures interpreted as smithies (or at least having some evidence for smithing) are quite varied, ranging from a circular building defined by gullies with an internal hearth at the nucleated ‘village’ settlement of Gill Mill, Oxfordshire (Booth and Simmonds 2012) to a more substantial rectangular masonry building with furnaces, slag, hammerscale, a quenching tank and smithing tools found at the roadside settlement at Ashton, Northamptonshire (Hadman and Upex 1975). About all these structures have in common is the presence of hearths/ovens/furnaces and distinct concentrations of smithing slag, occasionally with hammerscale also recorded.

Pottery workshops, where noted, generally seem to have been fairly insubstantial timber structures (cf. Swan 1984, 46–8), such as the sub-rectangular hollow and posthole-defined building lying 5 m

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FIG. 3.14. Distribution of excavated sites with structures interpreted as religious in nature (shrines and Romano-Celtic temples) and plan of shrine at Rutland Water, Rutland (Carlyle 2011a)
north of the kilns at Meole Brace in Shropshire (Evans et al. 1999). However, more substantial buildings did exist, as for example at Stibbington in Cambridgeshire, where a rectangular masonry building of fourth-century date was associated with two external kilns and contained possible emplacements for potters’ wheels (Upex et al. 2008; fig. 3.13), and at Fosters End Drove in Norfolk where there was a masonry building interpreted as a workshop with a heated room for drying (Lally and Nicholson 2008). Another more substantial building was revealed at Alice Holt in Hampshire, where a large timber-framed structure covered a number of early Roman kilns, with additional drying sheds and other related buildings in the vicinity (Lyne 2012). This covering structure was used to suggest that pottery production had been a full-time occupation at that time, as indoor kilns and heated drying sheds prevented problems of ‘winter potting’ (ibid., 136).

On the basis of associated finds, context and features, other possible workshops have been associated with tile manufacture, saltworking, boneworking, shale production, brewing, tanning and fulling, and all, as may be expected, vary significantly in form. A large number of buildings have also been provided with a general ‘workshop’ tag without any specific reasoning, this being particularly common on villa complexes. Although there almost certainly were buildings functioning in an industrial or workshop capacity on villa estates, as seen by the number of structures or rooms associated with metalworking, without specific evidence the ‘workshop’ label attached to many of those listed here should perhaps be viewed with some caution.

RELIGIOUS ARCHITECTURE

Constructed sacred space appears to have been very rare in the pre-Roman Iron Age, being interpreted on only about ten sites across the country (Smith 2001, 67). Furthermore, with the exception of outstanding examples such as the circular timber shrine at Hayling Island, Hampshire (King and Soffe 1998), many of these interpretations are highly subjective and the structures are not all that well dated. Overall, this suggests that religious observance at this time was not spatially segregated to any great degree, or at least was not defined in architectural terms, as seen perhaps reflected in the proliferation of evidence for structured or placed deposits within and around settlement contexts (Chadwick 2012; Smith 2014).

This situation changes quite markedly in many areas of the south and east during the early to mid-Roman period when there is a relative proliferation of religious structures, identified at 155 rural sites within the current dataset, 44 per cent located away from any obvious associated settlement (fig. 3.14). Detailed analysis of such constructed sacred space will be presented in volume 3 of this series, but such structures can be broadly divided into the architecturally defined ‘Romano-Celtic’ temple, characterised by an inner central space (cella) surrounded by an ambulatory, and a far more heterogeneous group of buildings/structures with broad interpretations of a religious nature, defined here as ‘shrines’. These range from small ‘household’ shrines within villa complexes to substantial masonry buildings, though most are quite modest structures, characterised by circular or polygonal architecture in over 50 per cent of cases, such as the circular building from Rutland Water Habitat Creation, Lagoon B, which was associated with articulated animal burials and many finds including a lead curse tablet and a fragment of a figurine of Minerva (Carlyle 2011a; fig. 3.14). There are also many examples of ‘shrines’ that contain minimal or no architectural elements, but are interpreted as religious on the basis of ‘unusual’ characteristics in the finds assemblages, such as at Rothwell Haigh, Leeds, where a well within an enclosure contained complete pottery vessels, a yew bucket, ash drinking vessels, querns, shoes, articulated animal remains, and a human adult skull (Cool and Richardson 2013). Sacred sites defined by enclosures but with no internal shrine/temple building are relatively common, forming over 20 per cent of all 132 religious sites identified from

![FIG. 3.15. Plan of religious enclosure with monumental entrance at Higham Ferrers, Northants (Lawrence and Smith 2009)](image-url)
southern England. However, in some cases there may well still be an architectural element to the site, as at Higham Ferrers in Northamptonshire, where a roadside shrine was defined by drystone wall, but with a monumental mortared stone foundation for an entrance facing across the Nene Valley (Lawrence and Smith 2009; fig. 3.15).

Most previous studies of Romano-British religious sites have been almost wholly concerned with temples of Romano-Celtic type (e.g. Lewis 1966; Woodward 1992; Smith 2001), much in the same way that previous analyses of rural settlement have largely concentrated on villa buildings, and indeed to some extent the two share quite similar distributions across the country. However, as with domestic buildings, the mass of mainly developer-funded excavation since 1990 has revealed that Romano-British religious architecture, notwithstanding the huge problems with interpretation, is far more complex and varied than previously supposed.

AN ARCHITECTURAL CONTINUUM: BUILDING TYPES

Most previous studies of Romano-British rural architecture have focused upon building typology, usually concentrating on villa types, with ‘non-villa’ buildings often restricted to roundhouses and aisled buildings (e.g. Rivet 1969; Smith 1998; Perring 2002). Hingley (1989, 30–6) took a slightly more wide-ranging approach, including single room and 2–3 room structures while other, recent, studies have emphasised the often complex and blurred boundaries between building types (e.g. King 2004a, 349–50). The current overview of rural architecture has so far concentrated on basic form, material and function, and will now conclude with a broad assessment of this continuum of building types, from the simplest of structures to major courtyard complexes.

SINGLE-SPACE ARCHITECTURE

The majority of sites in the database (992; 63 per cent) with evidence for architecture contain what appear to be single-roomed buildings only, which account for 3195 structures (fig. 3.16). These are particularly prevalent on farmsteads (85 per cent of farmsteads with architecture), with only slightly higher levels noted on enclosed rather than complex farmstead types. The prevalence of simple undifferentiated structures on farmsteads is partly explained by the fact that over 67 per cent of all buildings on such sites were circular in form, which as stated above, were far less likely to contain identifiable room division than rectangular buildings (although there are notable exceptions). However, even of the 278 farmsteads with only evidence for rectangular buildings, 77 per cent contained solely single-room structures. This may
in part be attributable to a lack of evidence for building partition, which need leave very little or no trace in the archaeological record, but the high representation probably also genuinely reflects typical vernacular rural architectural traditions across all regions of late Iron Age and Roman Britain.

The apparent lack of more complex structures on c. 40 per cent of roadside settlements with architectural evidence is almost certainly in part due to the limited scale of excavation of these settlements: Rust (2006) has demonstrated the complexity and chronological variability of building forms within ‘small towns’, which he attributes to economic and social factors. Nevertheless, it remains likely that simple, single-space buildings (masonry and timber) were very common on such sites, though often interspersed with slightly more elaborate structures, such as at Scole in Suffolk (Ashwin and Tester 2014, 219). The settlement at Shepton Mallet, lying astride the Fosse Way, contained a reasonably wide variety of building types, including an apsidal-ended, rectangular, masonry-footed building (X) with no apparent sub-division, but interpreted as both a barn and domestic dwelling on the basis of associated finds and a large deposit of charred spelt wheat at one end (Leach with Evans 2001, 309).

**Cellared buildings**

Most (76 per cent) single-room buildings were of timber, usually either post-built or of beam-slot construction, excepting the unknown number of possible mass-walled structures that may have been defined by gullies (see above, p. 51). On 40 sites, however, there was evidence for a particular type of (mostly) single-spaced structure, with floor levels below the ground surface. A total of 105 such ‘cellared buildings’ have been recorded, though they are far from a homogeneous group, and are generally distinct from the Anglo-Saxon *Grubenhauser*, where evidence points to a suspended floor above the sunken cavity. The Roman cellared buildings are found sporadically over parts of south, central and north-east England, with particular concentrations of building numbers in north-west Kent, west Yorkshire and around Dorchester in Dorset (FIG. 3.17; see Chs 4 and 7). Where such structures have been attributed a function, it is usually agricultural or occasionally

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**FIG. 3.17.** Distribution of excavated sites with Roman cellared buildings
industrial in nature, as for example in the ‘village’ settlement at Wattle Syke in West Yorkshire, where the fifteen late Roman cellared buildings were suggested as being used predominantly for crop processing, along with animal skinning, drying grain, cooking, antler working, and smithing (Martin et al. 2013). However, a number of the Kent examples did appear to be domestic structures (e.g. at Monkton; Bennett et al. 2008).

AISLED BUILDINGS
An architectural tradition that spread across large parts of Roman Britain, and which has been the focus for much academic attention (e.g. Taylor 2001; 2013; Cunliffe 2013b), is the aisled building or hall. These are essentially timber-framed buildings (often with masonry footings) with a series of regularly spaced posts (usually earthfast

![Diagram of Shiptonthorpe, Yorks and Dunkirt Barn, Hants](image.png)

**Fig. 3.18.** Distribution of excavated sites with aisled buildings and selected aisled building plans (Cunliffe and Poole 2008f; Millett 2006)
or on post-pads) along the main axis to support the roof, though there is still some debate about elements of their reconstruction (e.g. King 1987; Mackreth 1996). They are generally considered to have been multi-functional buildings, incorporating agricultural, industrial and domestic aspects, with most starting off as a single, open space (e.g. at Shiptonthorpe, Yorks; Millett 2006), and later being partially sub-divided into what are usually termed ‘developed’ or ‘modified’ aisled halls (Cunliffe 2013b, 98; e.g. Dunkirt Barn, Abbots Ann, Hants; Cunliffe and Poole 2008f) (FIG. 3.18). Taylor’s study of the internal space of aisled buildings in the East Midlands indicated evidence for cooking and eating located centrally within one end of the mid-Roman open hall, while agricultural/craft activities were practised in another part (Taylor 2001, 51–2). The addition of well-furnished domestic rooms and general architectural elaboration in the later Roman period (the ‘developed’ hall) produced what is argued as a hybrid form of architecture expressing a plurality of identity (Taylor 2013, 179).

The current project dataset has recorded evidence for 219 aisled buildings on 168 sites, spread across much of the country, though they are fairly sparse in the north and west (FIG. 3.18). The huge range in scale of such buildings is immediately apparent, from as small as 50–60 m² at places like Yaxley, Peterborough (Phillips 2014) to huge masonry-footed buildings such as at Rivenhall in Essex, which covered over 800 m² (Rodwell and Rodwell 1993). While some of these variations in scale may be due to functional differences (see analysis in Ch. 4), Cunliffe has argued that size is more likely to be a reflection of social status (2013b, 98), which is also suggested by the notable differences between the size of such buildings on villa and non-villa sites (see below, p. 69).

The pre-Roman origin of aisled buildings in Britain has been commented upon previously (Hingley 1989, 39; Perring 2002, 53), yet despite the mass of developer-funded work over the past 25 years, the building at Gorhambury, Herts, remains the only well-dated example (notwithstanding those dating to the early Iron Age: Moore 2003, 49–53), although two timber aisled buildings at Furfield Quarry in Kent could potentially pre-date the conquest (Howell 2014). An increasing number of aisled buildings can now be dated to the later first century A.D., especially around the Thames estuary and in parts of the East Midlands, though the greatest expansion in their numbers took place in the second century (FIG. 3.19), albeit with a geographic bias towards the east of the country. The growth continues into the third century when they reach their numerical and geographic maximum, and then there is an overall sharp decline in the fourth century, though with a greater concentration of surviving examples in certain central and western areas.

Context of aisled buildings

The association of aisled buildings with villa complexes has been well noted, with suggestions that they represented the homes of estate workers (Richmond 1969, 65) or extended families of higher status (Smith 1963, 12; cf. Hingley 1989, 41–5). Just over half of the excavated examples from the current dataset are from villas (87 sites), many suggested to have been used for domestic purposes, often alongside other activities. The relationship of aisled buildings to villas is quite varied, as shown in FIG. 3.20. Fourteen sites show clear evidence for one or more aisled buildings being in use prior to the construction of the main villa building, which was typically of corridor or winged corridor form (see below, p. 71. The aisled hall usually formed the main residential house up to this time, and often continued in some form after the main villa building had been constructed (e.g. Brading on the Isle of Wight: Cunliffe 2013a). That there was not always a transition from aisled

![FIG. 3.19. Number of aisled buildings in use over time](image-url)
hall to villa, however, is shown by the site at Shakenoak Farm in Oxfordshire, where the aisled building actually supplanted an existing winged corridor house that had fallen into decline (Brodribb et al. 2005).

More commonly, the aisled hall itself is seen to develop into a building with ‘villa’ attributes, usually by insertion of quite lavish ‘private’ suites of rooms at one end, with mosaic floors, hypocausts and associated bathhouses, which lay in contrast to the ‘public’ open hall of the remainder of the building. Sometimes external facades were even added to make them appear more like corridor houses (Taylor 2013, 179). It is usually in the late Roman period that such architectural transformations of aisled halls occurred, with a particular concentration in the downlands of central southern England, seen at sites such as Meonstoke and Stroud in Hampshire (King 1987; Williams 1909; FIG. 3.20). The distinction between such elaborate ‘developed’ aisled halls and those buildings classified as ‘cottage’ or ‘corridor’ villas

![distribution and relationship of excavated aisled buildings associated with villas](image_url)
with similar architectural components, is probably not significant in an economic sense, but instead reflects different individual and wider cultural choices in certain parts of the country (see villa architecture below).

In most cases, aisled buildings were seen to be a component of the villa complex rather than the main residential unit (often positioned at right-angles to one side of the main villa house; see below, p.73), and here they are more often argued to have had an agricultural or industrial function, though a mixed use is still quite likely. In some of the major courtyard and ‘palatial’ villas (e.g. Woodchester, Glos) they are actually incorporated into a single architectural whole, though usually sited well away from the primary high-status domestic core.

Away from villas, a range of aisled buildings has been revealed at farmsteads (51 sites), roadside settlements (17 sites), villages (5 sites) and military vici (3 sites). Most of these other settlements lay outside of the South region, which had a much higher proportion of its aisled buildings associated with villas (77 per cent, compared with 45 per cent in the Central Belt and 36 per cent elsewhere; see Chs 4 and 5). In general the size of aisled buildings on these ‘non-villa’ sites tends to be much more modest (average of 230 m² rather than 380 m² at villas), corroborating the suggestion by Cunliffe (2013a) noted above that social status was the most important contributory factor to the scale of such structures. Furthermore, at most (82 per cent) of the non-villa sites the aisled buildings were ‘open’ rather than ‘developed’ halls, and relatively few of these had any function specified. However, there are eleven sites with open halls where a residential or mixed use function has been proposed, including Claydon Pike in Gloucestershire, where one of the two aisled buildings contained embellishments in the form of a tiled roof and painted plaster walls (Miles et al. 2007).

**MULTI-SPACE ARCHITECTURE**

A greater level of architectural division within buildings is, as discussed above, intrinsically linked with the adoption of rectilinear structures, which allows more flexibility in building size and form (Steadman 2006, 128). Such flexibility is important as architecture became fully incorporated into packages of cultural and individual expression and hierarchy within many parts of Roman Britain, particularly within the upper echelons of society. Such association of multi-space architecture with what may be regarded as higher status rural sites (notably those buildings termed villas) is shown by their comparative rarity on farmsteads, which account for just 96 of the 571 sites where such buildings are recorded. Notwithstanding the inherent problems in identifying room divisions noted above, the apparent lack of such differentiation within most buildings on farmsteads, circular or rectangular, is striking, and is perhaps indicative of a continuation of pre-existing ways of dwelling, as Taylor has suggested when comparing use of space within Iron Age roundhouses and open aisled buildings (Taylor 2001, 51–2). Such intra-building spatial analysis lies beyond the scope of this study, and in many cases the levels of truncation and/or recording preclude any detailed comments on building use.

The developmental history of most multi-roomed buildings in the current dataset has not been recorded in detail, though it is known that many developed from single-space buildings, as for example with the developed aisled halls discussed above. Some may have remained as quite simple structures, with only 2–3 rooms, while others grew more complex, on occasion developing into elaborate villa houses. Such is the constant state of architectural flux in many regions that classification of building ‘types’ within this range is quite problematic, with often at best only the final ‘type’ being recognised. Nevertheless, it is possible within existing frameworks of building classification (e.g. Richmond 1969; Hingley 1989; Smith 1998) to provide a brief outline of such architectural variation on a provincial basis, while more detailed regional accounts are provided in Chapters 4 to 11.

**Multi-room farmstead buildings**

There are 96 farmsteads that contain one or more multi-room buildings, in both timber and masonry, but which do not appear to have developed sufficient levels of architectural embellishment (mosaic floors, hypocausts etc.) to ever be classified as ‘villas’. As can be seen from Fig. 3.21, the majority (62 per cent) lie within a single region – the Central Belt – and they will be discussed more fully in Chapter 4. Their comparative rarity outside this region is noteworthy, especially their paucity throughout most of the South region (especially the southeast), and it is clear that they do not merely follow the same distribution patterns as the more elaborate multi-room buildings defined as villas. The proliferation of such buildings in the Central Belt appears to be consistent with a trend towards greater architectural variety and dynamism in rural settlement form here, perhaps reflecting in some ways the existence of more complex hierarchies of social status in at least parts of this region.

The five farmsteads with multi-roomed buildings from the North region are quite different from most of those further south, and include two where circular stone buildings of second-fourth century A.D. date were internally divided by
Fig. 3.21. Distribution of excavated farmsteads with multi-roomed buildings and plans of buildings in Gloucestershire at Charlton Kings (Rawes 1991), Claydon Pike (Miles et al. 2007) and Nesley Farm, Tetbury (Roberts 2013).
Villa architecture

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, with some notable exceptions (e.g. S. Clarke 1998; Taylor 2013), most of the previous work on Romano-British rural architecture has concentrated almost entirely on the analysis of villa buildings. This overview has attempted to shift the focus back towards the architecture of the masses, however insubstantial that may sometimes have been, and within this to emphasise the variety and complexity of building forms across the country. However, although they may only have made up a very small proportion of the total of rural buildings, villa buildings do remain of fundamental importance to our understanding of social and economic life within Roman Britain, themes that will be explored more fully in later chapters and in subsequent volumes.

In a purely architectural sense, the variety of buildings that fall under the term ‘villa’ is considerable, both in terms of the building plan itself and in the levels of embellishment and furnishing. Traditionally this heterogeneity has often been explained as representing varied levels of ‘Romanization’ (Richmond 1969), though more recently it is cultural, social and economic factors that are more often advanced (e.g. Smith 1998; Perring 2002, 50–1). In a study of the variability of villa architecture in the east of England, Martins (2005) argued that any explanation of diversity should go beyond broad economic and social reasons, and a ‘consumer’ model is proposed, highlighting individualistic choices made by people within elite society, albeit recognising that there would have been tensions between the values of individuals and the collective traditions of prevailing groups.

Taking into consideration the individual variation just outlined, most (68 per cent) of the 326 settlements recorded with villa architecture in the current dataset can be placed within one of the broad categories first outlined by Richmond (1969) (Figs 3.22 and 3.23). At one end of this spectrum are those developed aisled hall houses discussed above that have evidence for mosaic flooring, heated rooms and bathhouses, along with what have been termed ‘cottage houses’ (Richmond 1969, 52–3; Hingley 1989, 37), where the emphasis is on a range or block of rooms, sometimes with a transverse internal corridor. As with the aisled halls, what elevates such buildings to most archaeological definitions of ‘villa’ status are the associated embellishments (heated rooms, mosaics, bath suites etc), and therefore the distinction here between some masonry ‘multi-room farmstead buildings’ (or even certain ‘undeveloped’ aisled halls) and ‘cottage villas’ is somewhat arbitrary, dependent as it is upon these additional refinements, many of which may just have been a matter of personal preference. Nonetheless, although many of those buildings classified as hall or cottage villas may be relatively modest in size when considered on an empire-wide scale (over 60 per cent having less than ten rooms), they are still comparatively exceptional within the countryside of Roman Britain in terms of the investment of wealth in the design and layout, acquisition of building materials, and skilled construction techniques required in their erection. As stated above, there is a blurred architectural continuum, and it must be remembered that even multi-room masonry buildings without any additional refinements would have been distinct from the vast majority of buildings within Romano-British rural settlements.

FIG. 3.22. Types of villa within the dataset by total number and by final form
FIG. 3.23. Plans of selected villa types (Cunliffe and Poole 2008f; Ling et al. 1990; Lawrence 2006; Nash-Williams 1953; O’Neil 1955)
As discussed in Chapter 2, at least half of all villas developed from pre-existing settlements, with about 40 per cent of later first-century villas having late Iron Age origins. It has sometimes been stated that such early villas were built on a large scale and generally became smaller through time (e.g. Millett 2014, 4), though, with the exception of the early villas in Sussex (notably the huge complex at Fishbourne) and a few in north Kent (e.g. Eccles), the vast majority of these first-century buildings were of the relatively modest ‘cottage’ type (fig. 3.24). Moreover, a substantial proportion of these went on to develop into larger, more elaborate buildings over time, mostly corridor and winged corridor houses, which form the most distinctive, most numerous and most widespread types of villa across Britain (fig. 3.25). Such buildings are defined by a range of rooms opening on to a corridor, typically with one or more of them containing mosaic floors and underfloor heating, with either an attached or a separate bathhouse, and some could be remarkably similar in plan. The addition of wings at either end added symmetry to the frontal aspect of the villa, and such winged corridor buildings became the most common form of elite rural housing from the late second century onwards, contemporary with similar developments in northern Gaul (Taylor 2011, 181). Most of these types of villa have between 10 and 20 rooms, though as ever there is huge variety, with, for example, one small villa at Yarford, Kingston St Mary in Somerset initially comprising just four rooms linked by a corridor (King 2004b), while another villa at The Mount, Maidstone, Kent contained over 28 rooms, most set between two opposing corridors (Houlston 1999).

At the upper end of the scale of villa architecture were those defined by ranges of rooms set around a defined courtyard, often with a gated entrance. Such courtyard villas generally developed from earlier corridor villas, with new ranges and outbuildings added piecemeal over time, including the quite persistent inclusion of aised buildings arranged at right-angles to one side of the main villa house (e.g. Bignor, Sussex; see Ch. 4, FIG. 4.44a). In some cases there were more distinct episodes of major reconstruction, such as at Bucknowle in Dorset, where significant modifications were made to create a more unified building complex at the start of the fourth century A.D. (Light and Ellis 2009). Courtyard villas reached full development during the later third and fourth centuries A.D. and have a very distinctive distribution, for the most part being concentrated in parts of Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Somerset and Dorset (fig. 3.25). The scale of architectural investment in such settlements was considerable, and although, as Millett states, ‘the buildings themselves provide little or no information about how the wealth deployed to construct them was created’ (2014, 4), it is likely, based upon the relatively high levels of ancillary buildings, corndryers and agrarian tools (see regional chapters and vol. 2), that at least part of the wealth used to maintain these complexes was generated by agricultural production.

The uppermost end of the villa architectural scale is represented by huge, usually multi-courtyard building complexes with at least 40 rooms (over 70 in the case of Darenth in Kent) that must surely have served as properties of the highest levels of elite society, in Britain or other parts of the empire. With the exception of Fishbourne, which is a complete architectural anomaly in its British chronological context, all of these ‘palatial’ type villas date to the later Roman period, most belonging to the fourth century A.D., and all developed from earlier more modest complexes. They tend to cluster in the same areas as courtyard villas, particularly in the Cotswolds area (e.g. Woodchester and Turkdean), and in the Lower Nene Valley around the walled town of Durobrivae (Cotterstock and Castor; see Ch. 5). Sarah Scott’s analysis of such ‘super-elite’ villas indicated that the British examples were part of a wider phenomenon across many parts of the Roman Empire, most dating to the period c. A.D. 320–380, a time of containment and stability along the empire’s frontiers (Scott 2004, 40).
Specific historical evidence indirectly suggests ownership of British villas by the super-rich from other parts of the empire, yet the growth of such elaborate complexes does not appear to have been initiated by developments on the continent, as many Roman villas in Britain began their expansion somewhat earlier (late third/early fourth century; *ibid.*, 42, 47).

The ultimate fate of most of these and other villa buildings in the fifth century is still rather ill understood, but by the later fourth century many had clearly started to shift in function away from an emphasis purely on elite social display towards more utilitarian aspects, as demonstrated by the twenty examples of corndryers inserted into the main villa buildings, often through mosaic flooring (see *Agricultural buildings* above). Of the 214 villas thought to have been in active use of some kind in the late fourth century, only 46 (21 per cent) are explicitly stated as having some form of continued use into the fifth century (assessed in the relevant regional chapters), although this is partly due to inevitable problems of dating in this period. Most buildings probably gradually decayed, sometimes over considerable periods of time, as the effects of rural economic deterioration, or as Gerrard argues (2013, 13), the agricultural ‘re-alignment’, took full effect.

**FROM NATIONAL OVERVIEWS TO REGIONAL SYNTHESES**

Chapters 2 and 3 have provided broad overviews using data derived from England and Wales for two of the major elements of the Romano-British countryside to be discussed in this volume – the settlements themselves and the buildings contained therein. Throughout both the aim has been to attempt to redress the balance of study away from the elite villas and back towards the experiences of the greater mass of population, a redress which has only been made possible through utilisation of the wealth of modern archaeological excavation reports, both published and ‘grey’ literature. It has been appreciated that there is considerable diversity in settlement type and form as well as in architectural expression within different parts of the Roman province, and this is analogous with variations in the wider landscape infrastructure along with farming practices and in the use of material culture. The following Chapters 4 to 11 will explore this regional diversity, looking at chronological developments within all of these elements of rural life, and examining more subtle patterns within different intra-regional landscape zones.