



Scale 0 $\frac{1}{2}$ 1 2 3 4 5 Feet.

H.M. Gimson. Mens. et Del.

THE LIPPEN WOOD ROMAN VILLA, WEST MEON, HANTS.
EXCAVATED 1905-6.

By A. MORAY WILLIAMS, B.A.

The following report is a completed record of the excavations carried out in 1905-6 on the site of the Roman Villa in Lippen Wood, West Meon, Hants, a preliminary account of which appeared in the *Archaeological Journal* last year (Vol. lxii, No. 248, pp. 262-264).

The plan of the house is now determined as fully as the nature of the site will permit. The surrounding ground has been trenched and examined, showing in all directions natural undisturbed soil, and I am satisfied that the house extends no further than the area represented in our plan. This will be seen to be of a somewhat unusual nature. In the first place, it is small, covering a space of no more than 140 by 60 feet; and in the second place, it conforms to neither of the two usual types (courtyard or corridor) of Romano-British dwelling-houses. In spite of its small extent, it contains indications of luxury, sufficient to leave no doubt of its having been a substantial and important habitation. The walls were well built, the entrance gateway was elaborate, while out of sixteen determined chambers three had patterned mosaic floors and at least three others were paved with *tesserae*. Three were fitted with *hypocausts*, of which two were probably connected with bath-rooms. The peculiarity of the plan consists in the complete absence of corridors, though in other respects it may be said to resemble that of an ordinary courtyard house. That is to say, the main arrangement is a system of dwelling rooms surrounding on three sides an open court.

But the area thus covered comprises quite a small rectangle, and the actual living-rooms are confined to one end of this, the southern half being divided between

bath-rooms and servants' quarters (or outhouses) built on two distinct levels.

Of the scores of Romano-British houses that have been excavated, those in the towns conform—practically without exception—to the two above-mentioned types, while the isolated country-houses, which belong to the Villas, do so so frequently that the few exceptions, such as the present one, which do occur are especially interesting. In the Hampshire region itself I believe that only two other such exceptions have been found—at Carisbrook and at Clanville. (*Vict. Co. Hist. Hants*, i, pp. 296 and 316.) They occur in other counties, but until more of them have been uncovered it is probably premature to label them as a third and distinctive type.

When one gets into the country districts, it is, after all, only to be expected that the architects should have departed occasionally from the stereotyped plan. These houses may have been adaptations of earlier buildings, or the owner may have been his own architect and built solely in accordance with his own requirements. Or, again, his plan may have had to adapt itself to the peculiarities of a specially attractive site. Such may well have been the case with this West Meon house. It stands on ground which rises gently for about three-quarters of a mile from the village of West Meon, but falls away somewhat irregularly towards the west; and it is on the crest of this slope, with a glorious south-west view towards the hills, that the house is placed. There was hardly room for a larger house. As it is, the varying depths of chalk and flint foundations show the extent to which the summit was adapted to receive it. On the south side the fall is rather more abrupt, and the building here, in consequence, is terraced, a sloping bank surmounted by a thick retaining wall dividing the outhouses above from the baths below. This slope is hardened with a mortar face, and doubtless steps at one time gave access from the lower to the upper level.

The walls as a rule are from 2 to 3 feet thick, but a glance at the plan will show that along the west front of the house, which comes right up to the edge of the slope, an additional thickness and, at one point, a buttress were deemed necessary.

The material for building this house was derived mainly from local sources. It is situated in the Chalk-down country, half-way between Winchester and Petersfield. Consequently the main features of its construction are chalk-and-flint foundations and flint-and-mortar walls. Brick was used sparingly, only for essentials, such as the floors, and for especially important points, such as the buttress. For quoins much use was made of the green sandstone, which could be obtained from the country round Petersfield. A course of this material occurs in the bricked buttress, and it was also used for the supports of door-jambs and of the pillars which probably fronted the entrance gateway.

In a few cases dwarf-walls supported lighter construction of the lath-and-plaster description, but in the case of the majority the flints were probably continued to the wall's full height. For the tessellated and mosaic floors the builder, as usual, depended for his colours upon nature or the oven. The red and black *tesserae* are due to firing, the grey is lias, the white a hard chalk, the yellow an oolite. The roofing slabs are of the two usual types, hexagonal slabs of limestone or of the local "shell" stone, and the rectangular flanged brick *tegulae* and *imbrices*. The former are far more frequent in this house, though possibly only because they have not proved such attractive spoil. Mortar was used lavishly, but the finer *opus signinum* is less in evidence. The pottery and other domestic features of the house will be dealt with later.

The site of this Villa is no isolated one. In the immediate vicinity, at Bramdean, East Meon, Corhampton, Droxford, Twyford, Bishop's Waltham, in fact all along the Meon Valley, traces of Roman occupation have been found and in some cases explored, while many still await excavation.¹ The *Villa* system evidently flourished in this district, for there was much in favour of its security. This part of the island received the benefits of an early Romanization, and the development of its Romano-British life was, owing either to the thoroughness

¹ I am undertaking during this season and next the excavation of two more villas in this district.

of its conquest or to the easy temperament of its inhabitants, free from interruption. It is possible that the Bramdean and West Meon houses represent adjoining estates, but excavation has yielded nothing datable in either case. Coins by themselves are unreliable, and, as a matter of fact, at West Meon, not a single coin was found. The name Meon itself is a relic of the Keltic tribe which history assigns to this locality. Later the valley became a Jutish settlement, but whether its Romano-British life became at an early date merged in that of its Anglo-Saxon settlers, or continued side by side with it until the final disappearance of direct Roman influence, is a problem which at present cannot be solved.

The villas in this district seldom show signs of burning or of hurried evacuation. Plundered they certainly are, but I do not think that there is much evidence to show that this was the work of conquerors. There are far more indications of the plundering of deserted houses by searchers for building material than of the looting by invaders of still inhabited abodes.

These villas were within easy reach of Roman roads. North of them Ermine Street connected Silchester (Calleva Atrebatum) with Winchester (Venta Belgarum) in one direction and with London in the other. From Winchester a good road led to Southampton (Clausentum) and thence through Bitterne and Portchester to Chichester (Regnum), from which point it continued under the name of Stane Street in a north-easterly direction to London through the Weald; and doubtless minor roads, whose traces have disappeared, were additional aids to the social and commercial development of the district.

With this brief survey of the general features and surroundings of the Lippen Wood Villa, we may pass on to a more detailed examination of its plan. The house was entered through a gateway in the middle of its eastern wall (see Plate VIII). Immediately fronting this gateway were two square blocks of green sandstone, 10 feet apart, which may have supported columns, indicating in that case an entrance of some architectural pretensions. Nothing was found in the nature of a stone sill. A large

iron nail lay in the debris near the northern block. Through this gateway was entered the courtyard, extending to the western limit of the building, and flanked north and south by the two separate divisions of the house. There was nothing in it that calls for special comment. It was covered with a two-inch layer of hard mortar on the top of chalk, while fragments of brick tiling here and there showed perhaps that part, or all, was paved. Nine small slabs of stone, $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick and varying from 4 inches to 7 inches square, turned up in different places here. There was not a trace of mortar adhering to them.

The excavations have furnished no clue as to the source from which the house obtained its water supply; nothing in the shape of tank or well could be traced either in this yard or elsewhere. The nearest running water is nearly a mile distant.

North of the courtyard was a group of ten living-rooms, some of them elaborately floored. Three of these constituted possibly a lobby and hall, on either side of which the remainder were ranged.

Room No. 1 may be termed the lobby, a small chamber measuring 11 feet square and paved with coarse red *tesserae*, with a 4-inch border strip of white ones along its south side. As however only the central part of this strip remained, it is probable that this indicated the position of the actual doorway leading to Room No. 4 immediately south of it, especially as these white *tesserae* continued the pattern of the mosaic in that room. This lobby communicated directly with what I have called the hall (Nos. 2 and 3) and with Rooms 4 and 5, south and north of it respectively. The partition on each of these three sides consisted probably of folding-doors or curtains, for the *tesserae* in each case ran on over sleeper walls. Between Rooms 1 and 2 the doorway may have been more elaborate, for on one side (see plan) the moulded oblong base of a door-post, with the red paint adhering, still remained *in situ*. Room No. 2 ($17' 0'' \times 9' 9''$) was divided from No. 3 ($11' 0'' \times 9' 9''$) by a similar partition, the *tesserae* running on as before. The floor of these two rooms was in places very much sunk, this being due to the compression of the chalk

foundations and not, as I at first supposed, to the presence of a hypocaust beneath them.

Room No. 4 (Plate I) measured 11 feet in width, but its length could not be determined accurately owing to the entire disappearance of its south wall. It was floored with fairly small red *tesserae* ($\frac{1}{2}$ inch square) with a central panel of mosaic, which is very perfect still. This consisted of a system of contained geometrical figures in white on a red ground, centring in a knotwork pattern in red, black, white, and greyish blue (Plate VI). The margin of red at the south end was wider than at the north, the object being probably to keep the furniture clear of the mosaic design. This pavement also had sunk considerably, but there was no hypocaust beneath it.

On the other side of the lobby, Room No. 5 (measuring 21' 0" \times 10' 9") was floored with the usual coarse *tesserae*, and a central panel of finer mosaic, 13' 6" \times 7' 6" in red, black, white, and greyish blue. This panel was divided by braidwork bordering into three compartments (Plate VII), of which the central one was a 5-foot square, and the two outer ones rectangles measuring 5' 0" \times 2' 0". In the central square were inscribed two interlacing squares of narrower braidwork enclosing an octagon which may have contained a figure but was wholly destroyed. The corner interstices of this compartment were filled with floral ornament. The rectangles which flanked it on either side each contained sixty small squares divided into black and white triangles and were bordered with an indented pattern of similar colouring. The whole floor was in a very damaged condition, only just enough being left to show the original design. This room, although situated in the north-east corner of the house, was not warmed by any hypocaust. A slight discolouring of the *tesserae* across the middle of the western band of outer braidwork may be due to a brazier, but from its position it is more likely, if it represents burning at all, to be the result of a casual fire at a later period. All the wall-plaster found in this chamber was painted red. A feature of the coarse tessellation bordering the mosaic was the number of *tesserae* made roughly of stone and interspersed with the red, regardless



ROOM NO. 4.



ROOM NO. 7. WITH HYPOCAUST BENEATH.

of appearances. As this is confined to the south end of the room it may mean that a large piece of furniture covered the untidiness of the repairs.

The room immediately west of this (No. 6) was the largest in the house, measuring 20' 0" \times 18' 6"; its floor, which has entirely vanished, may have been paved, but nothing in the shape of tile or *tesserae* was found to warrant this assumption. Its size, however, points to it having been a room of some importance. Adjacent to its west wall at 10 feet from the south end was a square block of sandstone *in situ*, and the presence in the south-west corner of a loose fragment of similar stone suggests the possibility of these having supported the jambs of a doorway leading into Room No. 7. A few fragments of wall-plaster were found in this chamber, coloured red and yellow.

Next to it, in the north-west corner of the house, was situated the Winter Room of the establishment (No. 7), measuring 20' 0" \times 10' 9" (Plate II). Its pavement had been destroyed by searchers for building material from the hypocaust which lay beneath it. This hypocaust was of the composite type, viz., a central square pit, with passages of the same depth diverging from it to the wall-flues. The dimensions of this pit were 5 feet 9 inches in each direction, and it contained originally twelve *pilae* formed of small brick tiles 8 inches square and 1 inch thick, with mortar joints of an equal thickness. These *pilae*, of which three only remained *in situ*, stood 9 inches apart upon a mortar floor, the base tile in each case being a larger one measuring 11' 0" \times 10 $\frac{1}{2}$ ".¹ The width of the diverging passages varied from 7 inches to a foot, leaving solid blocks, formed of chalk and mortar, to complete the support of the floor above. In two of these channels fragments of box-tiles were found, but along the walls not a vestige of these remained. The height of the *pilae* was probably 18 inches.

The stoke-hole which fed this hypocaust was situated probably north of it, but I have no evidence for this beyond the direction of what appears to be the main channel.

¹ This measurement was uniform, and occurs again in the base tiles of the hypocausts in Rooms 11 and 12.

An examination of the debris fallen into the pit and channels showed that a section of the *suspensura* (i.e., the actual floor of the dwelling-room supported by the *pilae*, etc.) consisted of a stratum of rather rough *opus signinum* and then a layer of fine mortar in which the *tesserae* were set, forming altogether a thickness of some $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches. This suspended floor was paved with a mosaic, sufficient fragments of which were found, fallen into the hypocaust below, to show the main features of its design, which was a conventional one of the geometrical type in black, white, and yellow, enclosed by the ordinary four-coloured braidwork, and the whole bordered by coarse red *tesserae*. This design must have been somewhat similar to that of Room No. 5, and the dimensions of these two rooms are the same. The wall-plaster of this chamber was ornamented with thin red lines on a white ground.

At the south-west corner of the Winter Room the outer wall was supported by a well-built buttress (Plate III) $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet square at its base, and cased in large brick tiles (14 inches by 11 inches) with a sandstone course 9 inches from the ground. The core of this buttress was formed of rough cement. As the lower plinth alone remains, it is hard to say whether the brick casing was continued above the sandstone course or not.

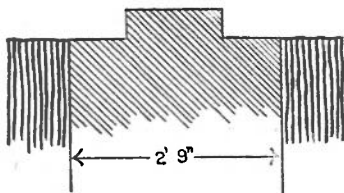


FIG. 1.—SECTION OF WALL AND DOOR SILL BETWEEN ROOMS 2 AND 8.
(FROM A TO B ON PLATE VIII.)



PLATE III.—BUTTRESS SUPPORTING WEST WALL.



PLATE IV.—DOOR SILL BETWEEN ROOMS 2 AND 8.

Of the three remaining rooms on this side of the courtyard, No. 8 probably corresponded in dimensions to No. 6. All traces of its flooring had gone, with the exception of two patches of coarse *opus signinum*, which may indicate either the original floor or the undersetting of the *tesserae*. This room was approached from No. 2, and the sill of the doorway, 6 feet in length, is still well preserved (Plate IV and Fig. 1). The wall at the south end had entirely vanished, as in Room 4. No traces even of its foundations remained. Along the north and west walls coloured plaster (red, blue, and white) lay in profusion, though in a very fragmentary condition. And it is unlikely that a room so decorated should have been exposed on its south-west side. The idea of a verandah may therefore be dismissed.

The east wall, to which some of the painted stucco was still adhering, was only 1 foot 9 inches in breadth, for a reason which a subsequent discovery made obvious. Close to it, on the floor level, was found a small and isolated deposit of a rich and somewhat peculiar clay about 6 inches thick. At first its significance was not clear to me, but later, in reading the 1901 Silchester Report on Insula xxvii (*Archaeologia*, Vol. lviii) I came across some facts which showed the discovery to be an important one. In the excavation of House No. 1 of this Insula, Mr. St. John Hope found similar deposits of clay, about 18 inches thick, over many of the rooms, for the presence of which he was at first unable to account. The solution of the problem came from a chance visit which he made to a deserted seventeenth-century cottage. "The lowest courses of the walls," he says, "were of brick. On them rested a timber framework, pinned together, filled in in the lower storey with lathing covered with clay, and in the upper storey with wattlework covered with clay. . . . When the timber framing has been removed for spoil, all that will remain of the cottage will be its brick floor buried beneath a layer of broken bricks and lumps of clay and rotting thatch; and a few years of rain and frost will reproduce almost exactly what we have found in our Silchester house." I concluded, therefore, that this clay deposit in Room No. 8 was due to the same cause. The wall beneath which it lay was a low

dwarf wall, narrow and of lighter masonry. It must have supported a timber framework filled in with clay-covered laths. Rooms Nos. 9 and 10 were small, and their flooring had entirely disappeared.

From the buttress the west wall of the house, along the edge of the slope, was $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet thick. It was well-built for a distance of some 50 feet, at which point it somewhat abruptly ended. It is probable, however, that it once joined up with Rooms 11 and 12.

These two chambers, together with the small one next to them, No. 13, seem to have been the baths of the establishment (Plate V.) They form a group, in the south-west corner, which is isolated from the rest of the house on the north side by the end of the courtyard, on the east by a bank surmounted by a thick wall. Nos. 11 and 12 were parallel chambers of equal size, each of which had an apsidal termination and was fitted with a hypocaust of brick *pilae* on a floor paved with large tiles measuring 16 inches by 11 inches. In Room No. 12 the floor and *pilae* were fairly well preserved, but in No. 11 both had been almost entirely removed. The bricks of the *pilae* measured 8 inches square, the lowest one, however, as was the case in Room No. 7, measuring 11 inches by $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches. One of these, in the south apse, was scored with a workman's comb in the same manner as the flue-tiles.

The east wall of these two chambers was furnished by the natural slope of the bank, smoothed and hardened, and this had been somewhat curiously used as a substitute for the lower parts of the *pilae* near it. (Fig. 2.)

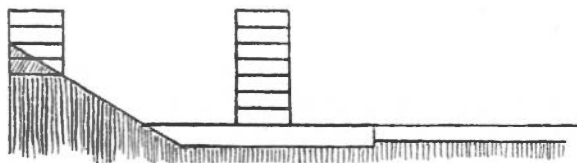
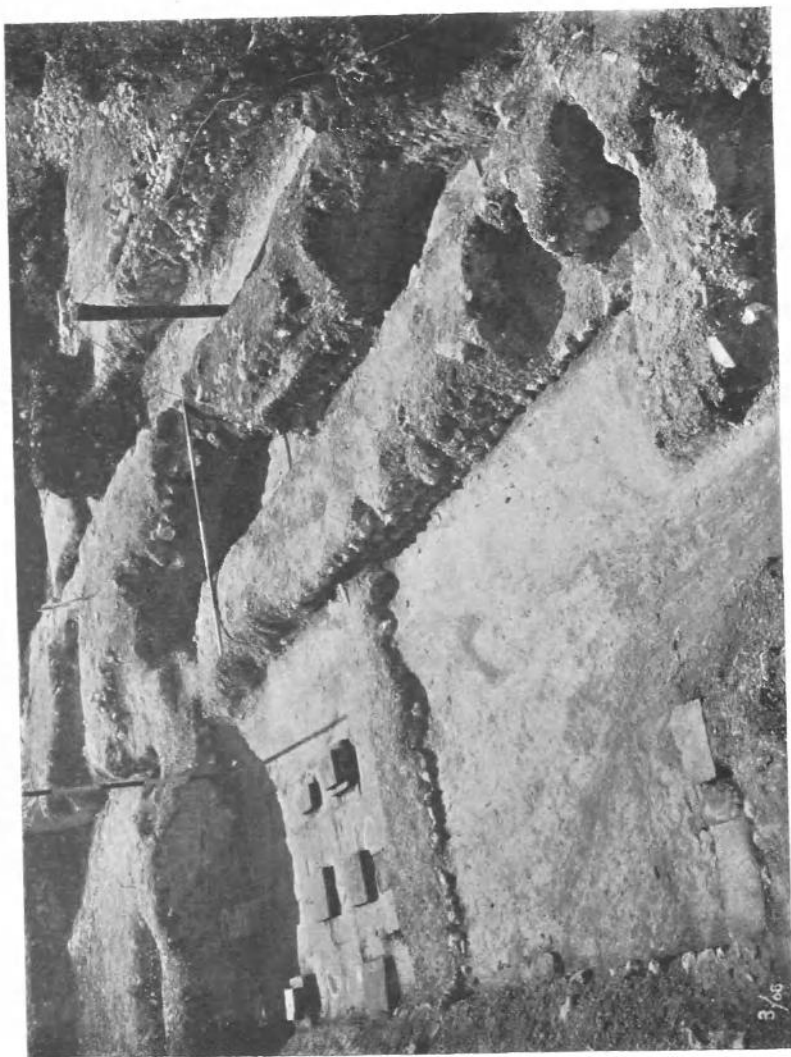


FIG. 2.—SECTION OF PILAE.



THE BATHS.

A thick transverse wall (see plan), cutting across the two apses obliquely and still standing 14 inches high, was probably a later insertion. It is hard to account for its presence. It passed over the brick tiles of the floor, and though these in Room 11 had been mostly removed, yet inside the segment which this wall made with the northern apse they were still remaining *in situ*. It is not wide enough to be the base of a system of steps leading down into the bath. We can only suggest that these apses would certainly weaken the main outer wall of the building very considerably at this point, and that this later wall was built, sacrificing the apses, owing to a threatened failure of the foundations.

In excavating these chambers no *tesserae* were found. Mortar debris to a depth of quite three feet was removed, but there was no *opus signinum*. Painted wall-plaster turned up frequently, coloured green on a white ground. On one large piece something in the nature of a floral pattern could be faintly traced. A drain-passage ran west from the northern apse, and in it was found a curved fragment, some 6 inches in diameter, painted red, which seemed to belong to a small plaster column. A similar arrangement of two apsidal chambers side by side was met with in the excavation of the Box Villa in Wiltshire by Mr. Harold Brakspear in 1903.¹ In this case, too, each was fitted with a hypocaust, and an adjoining chamber at any rate was proved to be a bath. There, again, the group was apart from the main living-rooms of the house.

Mr. St. Clair Baddeley, too, found the same thing in a villa at Painswick in Gloucestershire. It is quite conceivable that the baths even of the country houses of Roman Britain should have sometimes imitated on a humbler scale their luxurious models of Italy.

Room 13 (11' 0" × 7' 0") was divided from Room 12 by a flint wall (2 feet wide) faced on each side with a thin coating of mortar. Its west wall was no less than 7 feet in width, and was faced on the inside with mortar. The floor of this room was on the same level as that of

¹ See *Archaeological Journal*, Vol. lxi, No. 241, p. 22. Plan of Roman Villa at Box. Chedworth too, I believe, has a similar feature.

the hypocaust of Rooms 11 and 12. It was a mortar floor, and there were no traces of a hypocaust. The smallness of this chamber, the depth of its floor, and its proximity to the two rooms just mentioned, would seem to point to its having also contained a bath. It may have been entered by a doorway in its south-east corner, the actual bath being approached by steps. The great foundation of masonry along the west side was doubtless meant to strengthen this corner of the building.

In the outer side of this wall, 6 feet from its south end, was a good quoin made of four courses of green sandstone and two of tile. I do not think that this was an original corner. It seemed to be merely an additional strengthening of the wall at an important point.

These three chambers, 11, 12, and 13, were about six feet lower than the rest of the building south of the courtyard. A hardened bank, immediately east of them, had a wall 32 feet long and 5 feet thick along its edge. Its position seemed to account for its thickness. It must have risen to some considerable height, for its debris lay for several feet from its eastern side, along its whole length. At 4 feet from its north end it narrowed down somewhat curiously to $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet.

Beyond this wall, in the south-east corner of the house, the plan of the building was very incoherent. A large oak tree, situated in the middle of it, interfered with the excavation to no small extent, and the masonry immediately round it was badly broken up by its roots. The walls that could be followed were very wide and of a rough construction. It is possible that outhouses or stables covered this area. No. 14 had a tiled floor, but little of it remained and its north wall could not be traced. No. 15 may have been a yard—an extension of the central court. The presence, in the middle of it, of some large tiles (16 by 11 inches) *in situ* (see plan) might represent the original flooring of the whole, but they were laid at a decided angle with the outer wall. They showed traces of burning, as did the earth round them. Room 16, with its different orientation, was possibly a later addition. It could not be traced to its full extent. Its north wall was faced on the inside with a white stucco ornamented with thin red lines, but such ornamentation in a Romano-

British house need not necessarily denote a living room. In the excavation of this house very few smaller "finds" turned up. Of these the most interesting was a bronze bracelet, a small antler of the roebuck, which may have been used as an ornament for the hair, and a fragment of tile with the impress of a small hoof. Other finds comprised the usual painted stucco in profusion, roofing-slabs and tiles, nails, oyster and other shells, animal bones, etc. The bones were of the horse, ox, goat, hare, domestic pig, and roebuck. I was informed that there was nothing at all remarkable in these, except that those of the ox were very small and probably belonged to the small Keltic breed whose nearest present-day relative is the Kerry cow.

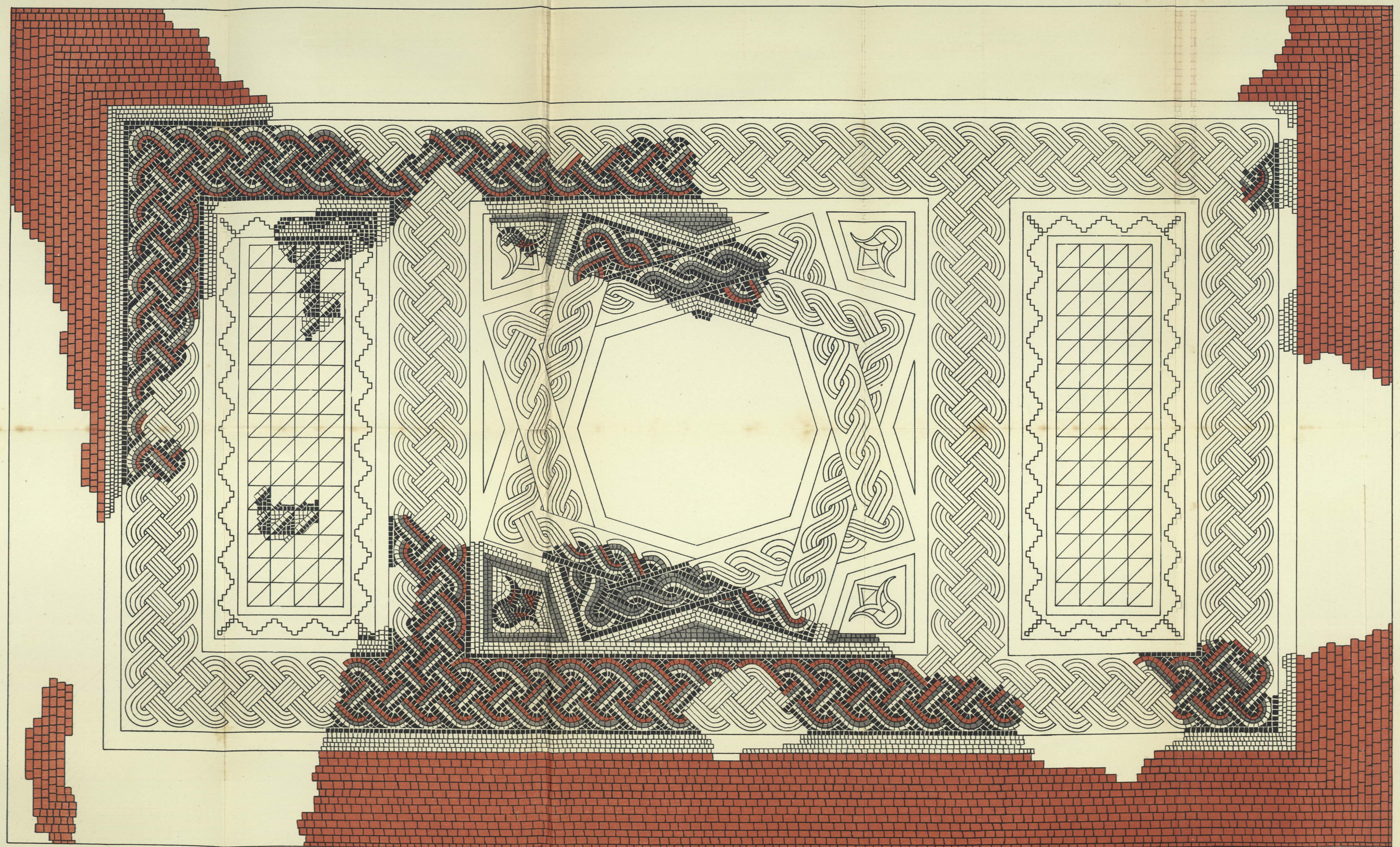
Pottery fragments were found in abundance, but in no instance was it possible to reconstruct a whole vessel. The commonest was the coarse black ware, but many pieces of Upchurch, New Forest, and Caistor pottery were found; a few also of Samian, and its British imitation.

Not a single coin turned up during our excavation, or anything datable, and none of the tiles or sherds were stamped.

There is but one more thing to be mentioned. About a hundred yards south of the Villa we came across a deep deposit of black earth containing rude potsherds and iron-slag. The latter, examined by Dr. H. B. Baker, F.R.S., was found to contain rather more iron than would be usual in modern slag. This deposit may indicate some smithy which may or may not have been connected with the house. The iron worked in it may have been obtained from the Weald clay, distant some ten or twelve miles east of West Meon, or from locally quarried pyrites, though the chalk would hardly yield the latter in sufficient quantities.

In conclusion, I would state that this excavation was conducted by members of Bedales School, Petersfield, and that the plans which accompany this Report are the work of one of the boys. From the beginning of the undertaking until its close we were helped by D. Meinertzhagen, Esq., of Brockwood Hall, the owner of the wood, who, by providing us with two labourers and by generously placing

other facilities at our disposal, enabled us to overcome the difficulties of a somewhat inconvenient site. We have to record our very great indebtedness to him for this assistance, without which the excavation could never have been carried out.



Scale 0 1/2 1 2 3 4 5 Feet.

H M Gimson, Mens. et Del.

