

BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY  
FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY UNIT

BOSCOBEL HOUSE,  
SHROPSHIRE

A Report on the Recording  
and Limited Restoration  
of a Pebble Mosaic

*B.U.F.A.U.*



PROVISIONAL PROGRAMME, SHROPSHIRE

A Report on the Recording and Limited Restoration  
of a Pebble Mosaic

Introduction

This report has been produced as a consequence of a commission  
being given to the author by the Shropshire Archaeological Society  
to undertake a preliminary investigation and recording of a pebble  
mosaic which was discovered in the garden of Boscobel House,  
Shropshire, in 1987. The mosaic was discovered by the late  
Mrs. J. Boscobel, who was the daughter of the late Mr. J. Boscobel,  
the house being situated in the garden of Boscobel House, 100  
feet from the main road, and is situated in the garden of the  
house.

**BOSCOBEL HOUSE,  
SHROPSHIRE**

**A Report on the Recording  
and Limited Restoration  
of a Pebble Mosaic**

The commission was undertaken over a period of eight days in  
the beginning of February 1988, with a field team from  
Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit under the  
supervision of the author, and a number of other staff.

- 1) To record and describe the pebble mosaic in detail, including  
a plan of the mosaic and a plan of the garden showing the  
position of the mosaic.
- 2) To make a detailed record of the mosaic, including a plan  
(Fig. 2.4.1).
- 3) To make a photographic record of the mosaic, including  
a plan of the mosaic in its current condition, by means of  
aerial photography and colour slides.

## BOSCOBEL HOUSE, SHROPSHIRE

### **A Report on the Recording and Limited Restoration of a Pebble Mosaic**

#### Introduction

This report has been produced as a commentary on a commission from English Heritage to undertake recording and some remedial work upon a pebble mosaic inscription located in the gardens of Boscobel House, a monument in care of the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission (England). The mosaic was situated in the gardens immediately adjacent to the west front of the house within more extensive plain settings of pebbles. Prior to this work the setting was partly obscured by moss and plant debris, and was subject in places to some upheaval and erosion.

The commission was undertaken over a period of eight days at the beginning of February 1988, with a field team from Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit under the supervision of Jon Sterenberg, according to the following brief.

- 1) To clean and expose two surviving areas of pebble mosaic setting on either side of a path fronting the west front of Boscobel House (Fig. 1).
- 2) To make a graphic record of the freshly-cleaned areas (Figs. 2 & 3).
- 3) To make a photographic record of the mosaic settings in their current condition by means of monochrome and colour slide film.

- 4) To carry out a limited archaeological investigation of the cobble setting matrix.
- 5) To reform and re-lay damaged areas of the mosaic cobble setting.

#### Procedure

It was immediately apparent during the cleaning process that the white pebble inscription comprising the bulk of this mosaic does not correspond exactly with that recorded in previous architects plans of 1966, nor, apparently, with the full text of the inscription as recorded in the 19th century. Two lines of text were revealed in the setting to the west of the path in an area c. 14 x 1.5m, the letters defined by the white pebbles. To the east, against the west front of the house, a crown and incomplete words could be deciphered in an area c. 5 x 2m. The latter appeared to be the final letters in the third line of inscription, erroneously recorded in the earlier plan as arranged beneath those two surviving west of the path. It was apparent that three lines could never have been arranged together in this fashion without a radical re-setting of the inscription and path. There was no evidence to suggest such a circumstance had prevailed in recent years and certainly since the earlier plan was made. Examination of the badly disturbed cobbles immediately in front of the house suggested the possibility of the third line of text having been laid out here, parallel with the path. The surviving final letters and crown design would seem to confirm this suggestion.

The cleaned area of pebble-set text west of the path, and the smaller area of crown and letters to the east were planned at a scale of 1:10 (Figs. 2 & 3). A photographic record in monochrome print and colour slide, in both wet and dry conditions, was also made.

Following this, recording efforts were made to investigate the pebble mosaic setting matrix and to carry out limited restoration of the surviving portions of the inscription. A single, 1m-square portion was excavated, and subsequently restored, in a disturbed area adjacent to the garderobe steps in the house (Fig. 1). The sequence revealed here demonstrated that the pebbles were set into a matrix of mixed, sandy, humic soil above a bed of relatively clean sand. These deposits, each approximately 0.10m thick, were laid above a compressed horizon of humic, stony, garden soil, also some 0.10m thick.

Several small areas of the pebble settings which comprised the main inscription were loose or displaced. Restoration of these damaged areas was achieved by minor localised excavation of the displaced pebbles and their re-setting into a reinstated bed of sandy soil. No attempt was made to restore the bed adjacent to the house except in the immediate vicinity of the crown and surviving letters.

## Conclusions

Cleaning, recording and limited restoration of the Boscobel pebble mosaic revealed the following two-line inscription (reading from S. to N.) to the west of the path (Fig. 2):

### Line 1

*Sext 10' Sept 1651 in hac domo CAROLUS secundus*

### Line 2

*tutela quinquefratrum destirpe Pendret potitus*

To the east only the disturbed letters ... NIS EVAS... set below a crown, survived within the pebbles (Fig. 3).

The inscription is defined in white quartz pebbles within a background of darker, buff-pink/grey-brown pebbles, predominantly sandstone. The crown comprises variegated pebbles of sandstone and other rock, including some white quartz. In addition to the absent third line, whose original setting is suggested above, some letters of the intact setting appear to have been obscured beneath turf at the south end of the western panel, while others were disturbed.

To restore the entire setting to its original documented state would probably require an almost total re-laying of the pebbles. The sandy base matrix does not provide a permanent rigid base for the settings and is susceptible to disturbance, erosion and the growth of vegetation, primarily moss. Periodic cleaning of the surface and heavy rolling has maintained the mosaic up until now and could well suffice for the future. More serious is the problem of erosion, which seems to arise primarily through visitor access to the area.

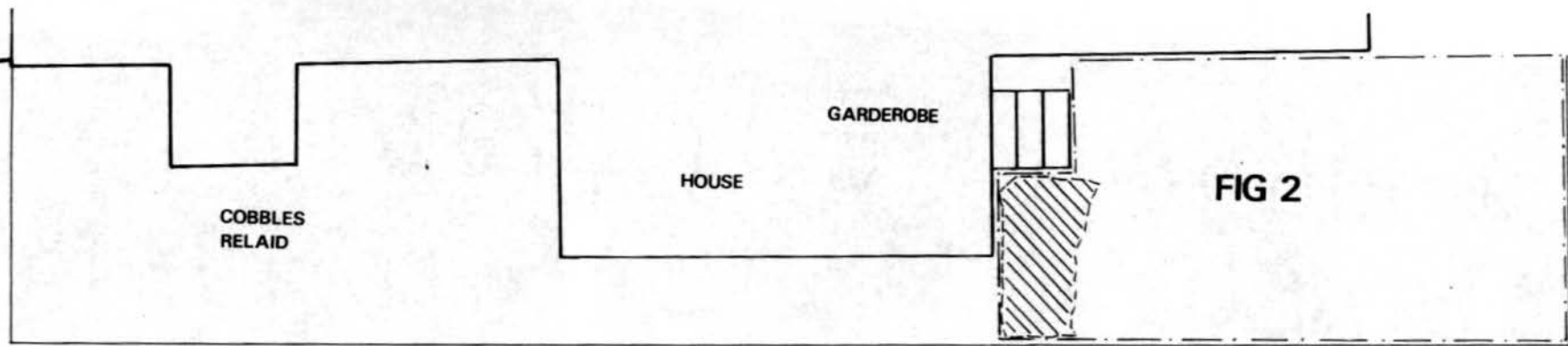
The pebbles are fairly easily dislodged, even when well set and rolled, and, once loosened, a progressive disturbance to the setting results.

Were public access to the pebble surfaces to be restricted, the mosaic could probably be restored to a complete state using available materials and a similar bedding medium, and then successfully maintained. In view of its exposed position, any such restoration would best be undertaken outside the winter months.

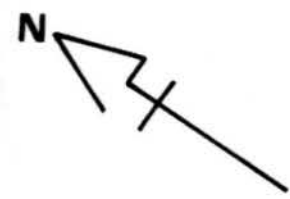
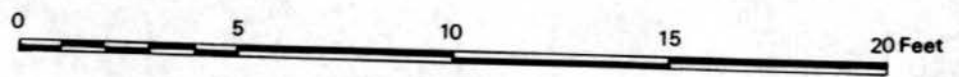
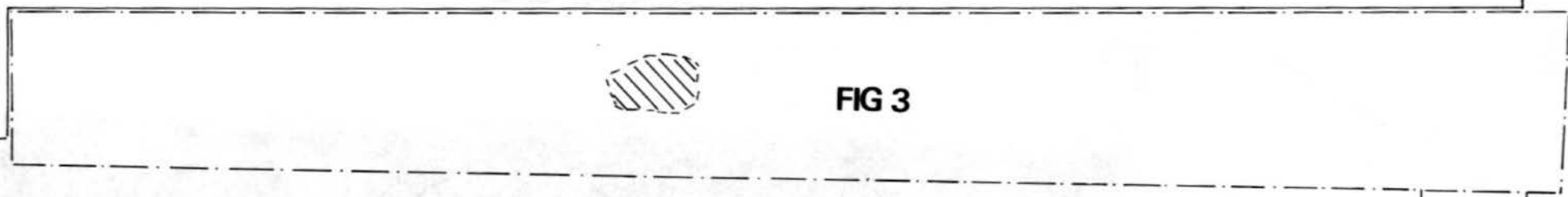
Jon Sterenberg

Peter Leach

B.U.F.A.U. March 1988



TILE PATH



**FIG 1 BOSCOBEL HOUSE 1988**

Location of recorded areas

 Repaired area

 Extent of recorded area



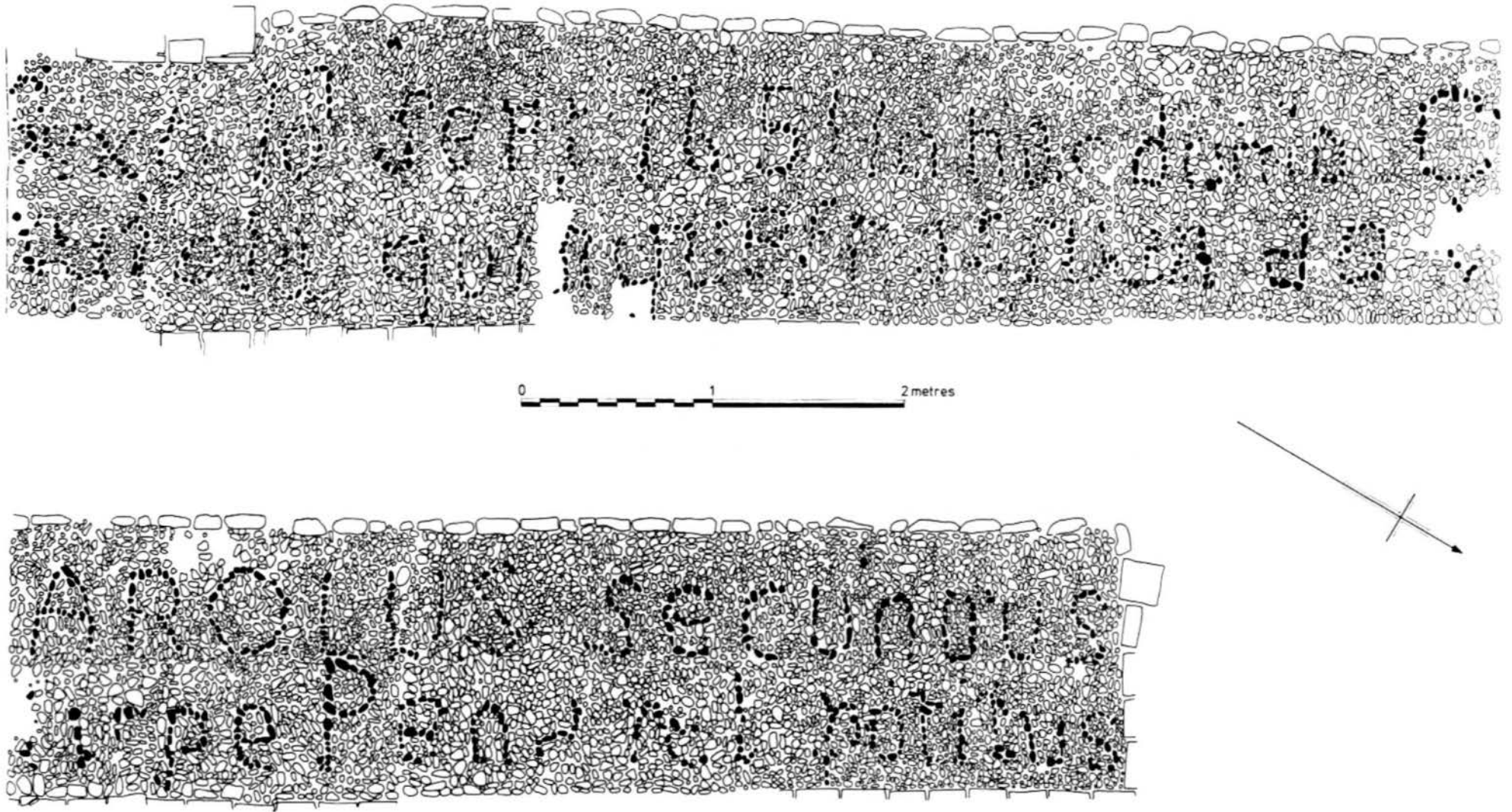


Figure 2

BOSCOBEL HOUSE 1988

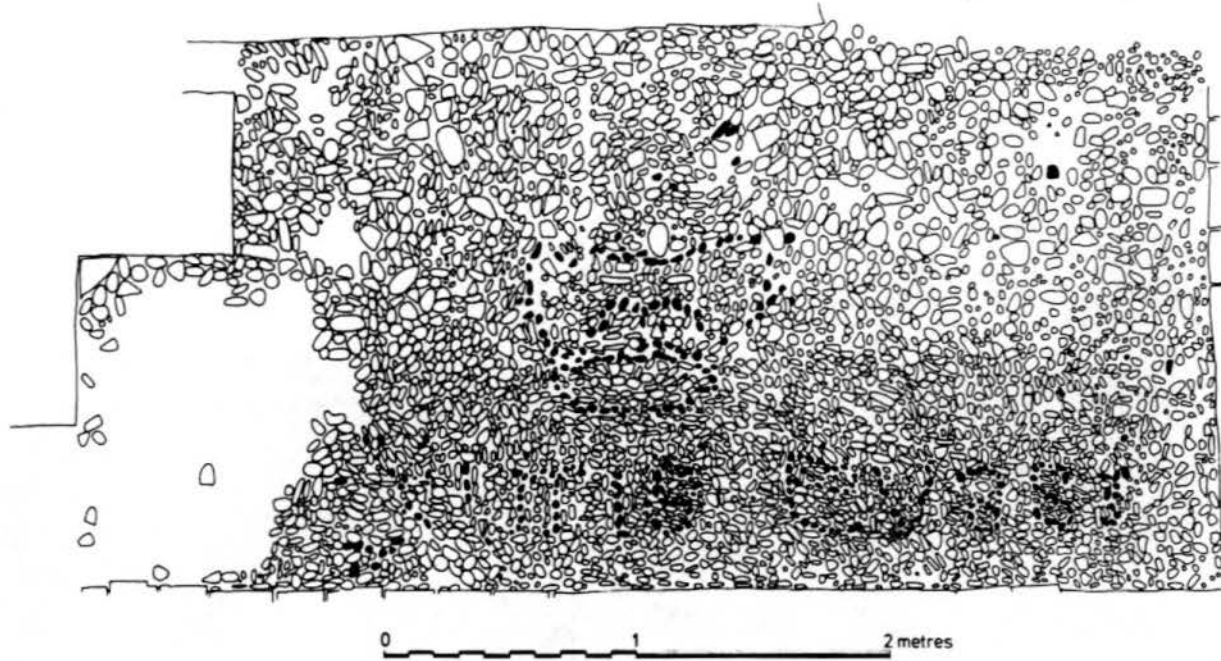


Figure 3