

The development of Roman villas in Sussex

by David Rudling

The Roman conquest of Britain in the 1st century had a dramatic impact on this island's social and economic environments. These developments, together with others in technology, were responsible for major changes at some rural settlements in Sussex, and more minor changes at others both during and after the period of the client kingdom of Cogidubnus. In the 1st century the favourable economic and political climates of the client kingdom led to the construction of a relatively large number of elaborate early villas, at least some of which (e.g. Fishbourne and Southwick) incorporated major elements of Mediterranean architecture and decoration. By the 2nd century the owners of these early villas may have faced growing competition from a large number of other rural settlements, and at certain of these farms there are increasing signs of romanization, including the building of houses which show a significant degree of the Roman style of life: i.e. villas. During the later 3rd and 4th centuries the development of villas began to decline in certain areas, especially the coastal plain. This decline may be linked to such factors as pirate raids and the establishment of a major military presence at Pevensey. In other areas, and to the west in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, villas continued to develop, and at Bignor the relatively humble 3rd-century winged corridor villa grew into a very large and luxurious courtyard villa. Little information is available about the nature and dating of the final phases of villa life in Sussex, but at Beddingham parts of the site may have been occupied or used by Saxons during either the late 4th or early 5th century.

INTRODUCTION

The Roman conquest of Britain in the 1st century resulted in dramatic alterations to this island's social and economic environments. The results of these changes, together with equally major changes in technology, make the period of Roman occupation one of the most distinctive and dynamic episodes in the history of south-east England (Rudling in Drewett *et al.* 1988, 178–80).

In this article, which is an expanded statement of a paper presented at Dieppe in 1996 (Rudling 1998a), I consider these developments with regard to one major type of settlement in Roman Sussex: villas. In particular it concentrates upon the recent extensive investigations at two villas: Beddingham in East Sussex and Bignor in West Sussex. By the end of the 3rd century the main domestic buildings at both sites were of similar size and type (i.e. winged corridor villas). Subsequently the villa at Bignor

developed into what was, for Roman Britain, a very large and luxurious courtyard villa, with an outer stockyard or farmyard. In contrast, the villa at Beddingham appears to have declined considerably in importance, or to have gone out of use, by the mid-4th century. By the end of the 4th century or early 5th century Saxon occupation was present at Beddingham, but was apparently absent at Bignor.

In order to place the Beddingham and Bignor villas into their wider Sussex contexts this paper begins by reviewing the conquest, the client kingdom, the integration of the region into the Roman Province, and other Sussex villa and 'non-villa' farm settlements. These background sections provide both an updated bibliography to supplement those forming parts of earlier reviews of Roman rural Sussex (Cunliffe 1973; Rudling 1979; Rudling 1982a; Black 1987; Rudling 1988), and the first comprehensive presentation of Sussex villa plans all drawn to the same scale (Figs 3–5).

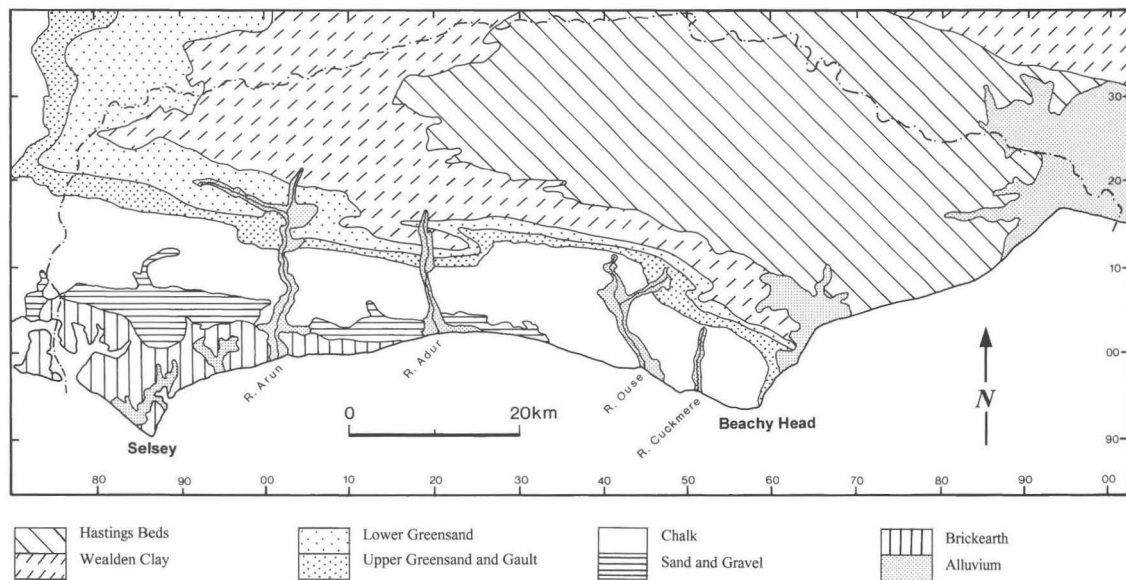


Fig. 1. Sussex geology. (Based on Sheldon 1978.)

THE CONQUEST

The flight from Britain to the protection of Rome of the pro-Roman king Verica provided the emperor Claudius with a convenient diplomatic reason for invading Britain — the restoration of Verica to his Atrebatian kingdom located in parts of the modern counties of Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire and Berkshire. Details of the landing point/s of the invasion force and the subsequent military encounters are currently the subject of review (Drewett *et al.* 1988, 182–5; Hind 1989). Hind puts forward the suggestion that Aulus Plautius' force landed not at Richborough in Kent (the traditional view), but along the south coast of Britain in either Sussex (Fig. 1) or Hampshire. Here were safe harbours (e.g. Chichester Harbour) and the Romans could expect political support from among the local inhabitants. There is as yet little archaeological evidence for this theory, but Claudian military buildings, including granaries, were found during the excavation of the Fishbourne Palace site (Cunliffe 1971). Excavations in the field to the east of the Palace have revealed traces of a pre-Flavian timber building, which was later replaced by a masonry courtyard structure (Down 1996; Manley & Rudkin 1996; 1997). The size and plan of the masonry structure have led Manley and Rudkin to suggest that it might have been a military

principia, demolished prior to the building of the Palace. If the courtyard structure is not the principia of a fort (and to date there have been no discoveries at Fishbourne of any defences or barracks), it is possible that this building, and perhaps two other masonry structures (i.e. the Period 1C 'Proto-palace' and a Period 1B or 1C building beneath the west wing of the Period 2 Palace), together with a large ditched enclosure, smaller ditched enclosure, and metalled roads (Cunliffe 1971, fig. 20) may have functioned as parts of a continuing military supply base, replacing and/or adding to the existing timber structures on the site. The extended period postulated for a military supply base at Fishbourne may have continued until the mid-70s, by which time its location was probably no longer suitable for supplying the army which was then in Wales and the north (Black 1998).

The date of construction of the Palace is the subject of debate, with *c.* AD 75 advanced by the excavator (Cunliffe 1971; 1991a), whilst Ernest Black has argued for the slightly later date of *c.* AD 90–110 (Black 1987, 84–6; 1993, 236).

Excavations at Chichester have also revealed possible evidence for a Claudian military presence or involvement (Down 1988, 7–16). Other traces of possible early military activity in Sussex are the major roads such as Stane Street, which links

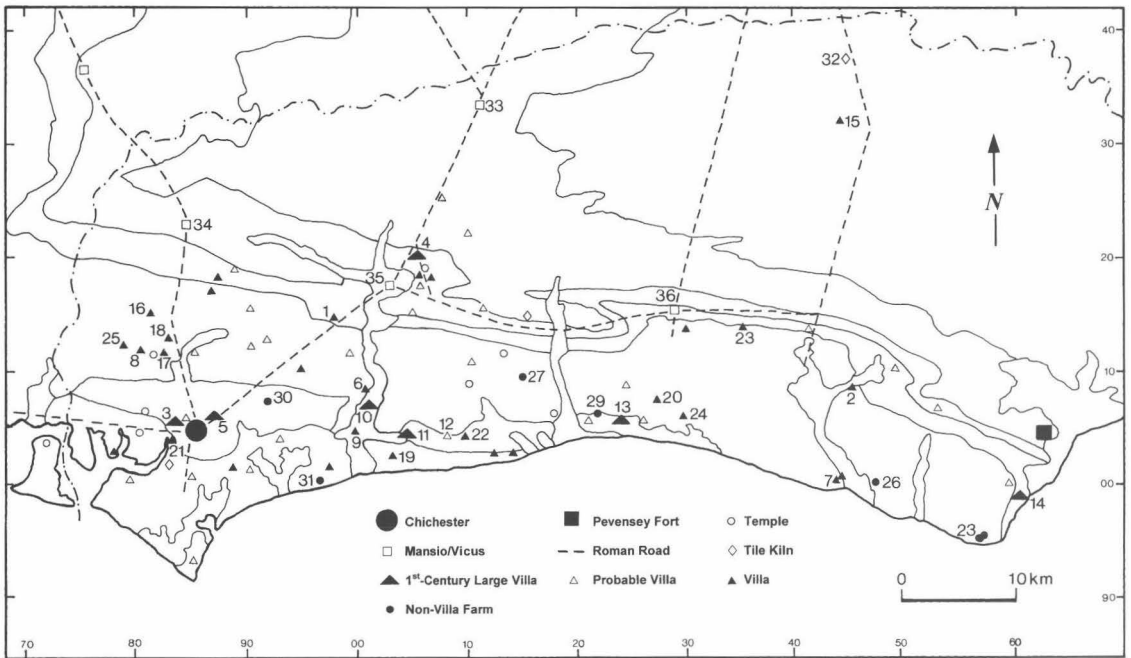


Fig. 2. Distribution map of various Roman sites, including all villas and probable villas, in West Sussex and part of East Sussex. The numbered sites are - villas: Bignor (1); Beddingham (2); Fishbourne (3); Pulborough (4); Westhampnett (5); The Shepherds Garden, Arundel (6); Newhaven (7); Up Marden (8); Tortington (9); Tarrant Street, Arundel (10); Angmering (11); High Down, Angmering (12); Southwick (13); Eastbourne (14); Garden Hill, Hartfield (15); Batten Hanger (16); Chilgrove 1 (17); Chilgrove 2 (18); Littlehampton (19); West Blatchington (20); Fishbourne Creek (21); Goring (22); Plumpton (23); Brighton (24); Watergate (25); - 'non-villas': Bishopstone (26); Park Brow (27); Bullock Down (28); Slonk Hill (29); Boxgrove (30); Middleton-on-Sea (31); - other sites: Hartfield Tile Kiln (32); Alfoldean (33); Iping (34); Hardham (35); and Hassocks (36).

Chichester with London (Fig. 2). The precise dating of these roads is uncertain, however, and some may postdate *c.* AD 50 (Drewett *et al.* 1988, 186).

THE CLIENT KINGDOM

Soon after the invasion the Romans established in southern England a client kingdom consisting of part of Sussex, and probably also other areas to the north and west. We have no evidence that Verica returned to rule this kingdom, and the only historical information about a client kingdom in this area concerns one Tiberius Claudius Cogidubnus (Barrett 1979; Bogaers 1979). Barrett's work suggests that Cogidubnus (or Togidubnus: Tomlin 1997, 129) became king between AD 43 and 52 and that he was dead or had retired before AD 78, and probably before the end of Nero's reign in AD 68. According to Tacitus the king remained loyal to the Romans for a long time, and it is clear from the archaeological evidence

from Sussex that during his reign he was fairly successful in introducing elements of Roman culture into his kingdom — the famous temple dedication-stone (*RIB 91*) found in Chichester being an impressive example. In addition to the generally widespread acceptance and distribution of products of Roman manufacture, such as coins and pottery, various other archaeological discoveries in Sussex also shed light on the processes of romanization during the period of the client kingdom, especially so in Chichester which was clearly developing as a romanized centre. The undated dedication inscription (*RIB 91*) referred to above is proof that there was a temple to the gods Neptune and Minerva erected with the permission of King Cogidubnus, and paid for by a guild of artisan craftsmen. Another dedicatory inscription (*RIB 92*) can be dated to AD 58. In the north-west quadrant of the town the Claudian military-type timber buildings (*see above*) were superseded by new timber-framed structures

and extensive areas of industrial activity (Down 1988, 18). This concentration of craft work may indicate a developing civilian market.

Romanization (i.e. the adoption by the native Britons of aspects of Roman culture) during the period of the client kingdom was also occurring in the countryside. Sussex has a relatively large number of early villas (Cunliffe 1973, 79; Black 1987) and at least some of these may date to the reign of Cogidubnus. Borough Farm (Pulborough) and Westhampnett Church, and possibly also The Shepherds Garden (Arundel) and a site at Newhaven, have all yielded half-box tiles — the earliest type of wall-jacketing found in Britain which probably predates c. AD 75–80 (Black 1987, 12).

Subsequently in the late 1st/early 2nd century new types of wall-jacketing were introduced. Finds of such tiles at over 15 sites demonstrate both a considerable expansion of villa construction (as at Compton, Fishbourne, Lavant, Bignor, Tortington, Arundel, Angmering (x2), Southwick, Beddingham and Eastbourne) and alterations to earlier buildings. Who were the owners of these establishments, and what were the economic conditions which provided the finance for such building projects? It is probable that these villas were the property of the native aristocracy, which was 'left in peace to develop in the strongly philo-Roman atmosphere created by the client kingdom of Cogidubnus' (Cunliffe 1973, 79). The wide distribution of the large early villas may be very significant, with each located on a distinct block of land which may 'represent the territory over which the land-owning aristocracy held control' (Cunliffe 1973, 79). Could this pattern be a clue to one distribution of the tribal sub-units, the *pagi*, about which so little is known (Ernest Black pers. comm.)? In most cases the major source of wealth for the aristocracy would have been the sale of agricultural surpluses from the villa estates and tenant farms. In some cases these sales may have included valuable military supply contracts (Black 1987, 17). Other sources of finances for the villa-building projects could have involved Roman moneylenders. Some of the villa developments may have been over-ambitious and later necessitated contraction, especially since the favourable economic advantages which are thought to have benefited the aristocracy of the Sussex area in the 1st century may have diminished in the course of the 2nd century (Black 1987, 34). One may question whether the motivation for early villa building in

Sussex had been a competitive desire by prominent men to display their status in a new, romanized way. If so, these villas must have been displayed to people who mattered, governors or procurators, or *legati iuridici* (Ernest Black pers. comm.).

The Palace at Fishbourne (Fig. 3) may be an example of such an over-ambitious project, but parts of it at least continued in use until the late 3rd century when it was destroyed by fire. The precise functions, dating and ownership of both the Proto-Palace and Palace at Fishbourne remain uncertain. Originally Professor Cunliffe suggested that the owner of both phases of buildings might have been King Cogidubnus (Cunliffe 1971, 75 & 153). Other possibilities, however, include foreign businessmen (*negotiatores*), other members of the local aristocracy, or high-ranking Roman administrators, perhaps after the death or retirement of Cogidubnus (Drewett *et al.* 1988, 190–93). The whole Proto-Palace complex has been reinterpreted as a bath-building (Black 1993, 236), and may have been part of a military supply base (*see above*). As to the function and ownership of the Palace, at a meeting of the Brighton and Hove Archaeological Society held on 20th February 1998, Ernest Black discussed the theory that this complex was the residence of an important member of the ruling class of the Regni. He suggested that the domestic quarters of the owner were located in the west wing immediately to the north of Room W14, the formal dining room (or audience chamber: Cunliffe 1971, 87–8), and could be identified owing to the presence there of a room (W11) that Black identifies as a *hypocauston*, which was probably designed to heat an adjacent bedroom (W8). This *hypocauston* is the only domestic room in the Period 2 Palace to have under-floor heating, and as such is likely to represent a high status feature used by the owner himself. Black further suggested that the north wing of the Period 2 Palace may have provided domestic accommodation for various important retainers and their families. This suggestion regarding the status of the domestic accommodation in the north wing differs from that put forward by the excavator, i.e. that 'these residential units' were 'perhaps for visitors' (Cunliffe 1971, 150), and also from an earlier idea by Black that both these quarters and those in the west wing may 'have been occupied by more than one family of similar status' (Black 1987, 28).

One piece of evidence which may provide some support for the theory that the owner/s of the Period

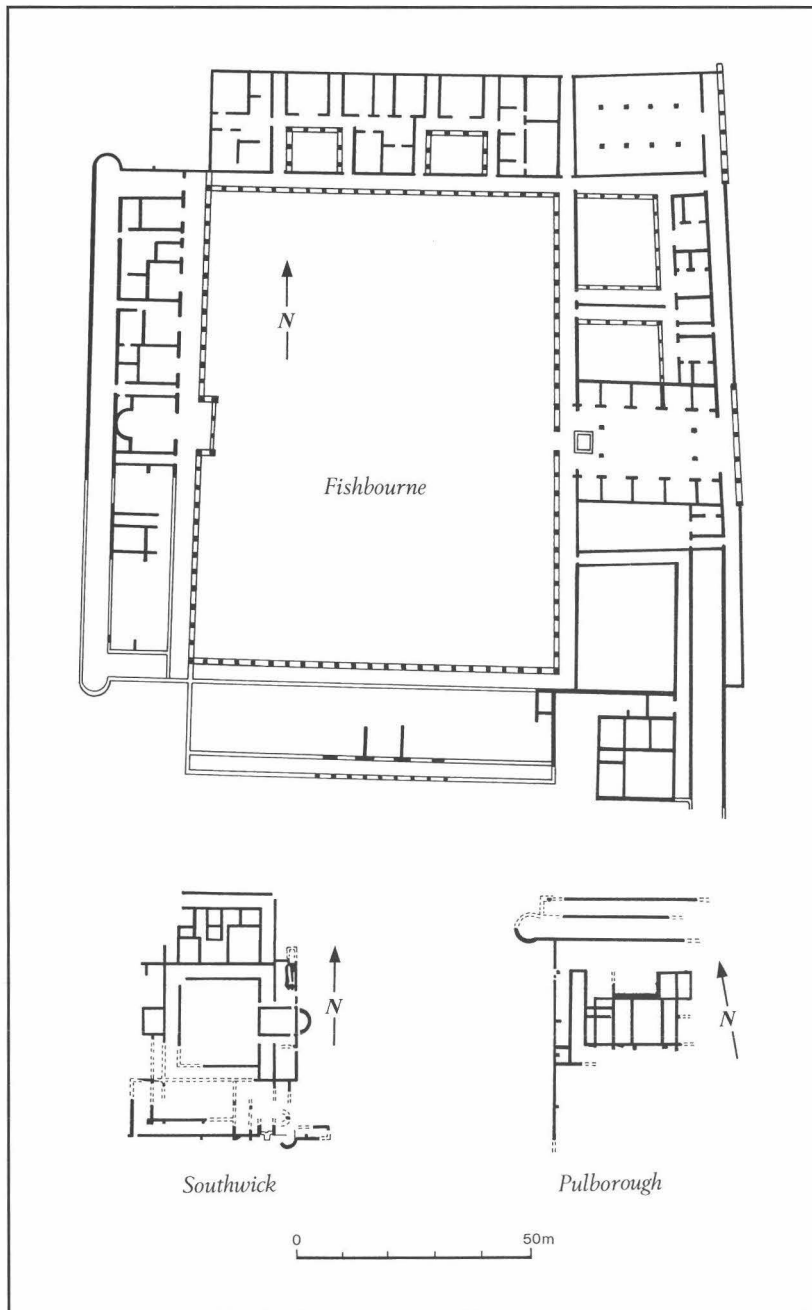


Fig. 3. Plans of the Fishbourne Palace and the 1st-century villas at Southwick and Pulborough.

2 Palace was of Celtic origin is a 1st-century gold signet ring, recently discovered some 200 metres to the east of the Palace. This ring and its inscription

have been published by Dr Roger Tomlin (1997) who identifies the owner of the ring as one Tiberius Claudius Catuarus. The name of this individual (like

that also of King Cogidubnus) indicates that he was a new Roman citizen of Celtic origin. The ring owner's probable status is further indicated by the fact that the ring is made of gold, which at this period was worn only by those of equestrian rank (i.e. the Roman upper class). Tomlin speculates that Catuarus may have been a British chieftain sympathetic to the Romans, who was given Roman citizenship either by the emperor Claudius or by Nero in recognition of his wealth and support. Tomlin further proposes that Catuarus may have been a kinsman of King Cogidubnus.

INTEGRATION INTO THE ROMAN PROVINCE

Following the death or retirement of King Cogidubnus his extensive kingdom was integrated into the Roman province of *Britannia* and probably divided into three regional tribal units or *civitates*, to which various administrative functions were delegated. Much of Sussex, especially the areas to the south of the Weald (Fig. 1) and part of south-eastern Hampshire formed the *civitas* of the *Regni*, with a capital at Chichester (Cunliffe 1973, fig. 1). Discussion of Roman Chichester (*Noviomagus Regnensium*) is outside the scope of this paper and the reader is referred to a book on this subject by the late Alec Down (1988).

Other parts of Sussex, especially large areas of the Weald where there were major 1st- and 2nd-century iron-workings, some associated with the *Classis Britannica*, may have been separately administered as an Imperial Estate (Cleere & Crossley 1985, 66–9). If this was the case, it may help to explain the apparent absence of agricultural villas to the north and east of Eastbourne.

During the 3rd century the south coast became threatened by pirate raiding. This increasing problem may have been one of the reasons for the sudden end of the eastern group of large iron-working sites in Sussex (Cleere & Crossley 1985, 84–5) and the destruction and abandonment of some of the Sussex coastal villas, including perhaps the Palace at Fishbourne. Traditionally it has been argued that in general the Roman response to such raiding along the coast of south-east England was the gradual establishment of a system of coastal fortifications: the 'Saxon Shore-forts' (Johnson 1976; Johnston 1977; Maxfield 1989). Other scholars, notably D. A. White (1961), have argued, however,

that most of the Shore-forts were constructed by the usurpers Carausius and Allectus in order to defend Britain from invasion by the central empire. In Sussex the only Shore-fort was at Pevensey and here recent excavations by Professor Fulford have provided new dating evidence (dendrochronology and coin finds) interpreted as providing a *terminus post quem* of AD 293 for the original construction of the fortress wall (Fulford & Tyres 1995, 1012). Whatever the reasons for the construction of the Pevensey fort, its presence may have had a detrimental effect upon nearby villas. Black (1987, 42) has argued that whilst the military market is beneficial for villas located at a distance from the army centres, agricultural communities in the hinterland of the forts would have been especially vulnerable to the requisition (as opposed to contract purchase) of supplies by the military.

The seriousness of the threat of Saxon and pirate raiding along the south coast is probably also reflected in the late-3rd- or early-4th-century modifications, including the addition of D-shaped bastions, to the defences of Roman Chichester. Although there is as yet only limited evidence from Chichester for the construction at this time of masonry houses comparable to those being built as villas in the countryside, the town's strong defences may have become an increasingly desirable attraction to wealthy landowners on the coastal plain.

RURAL FARMS

The basis of the Roman economy was land and its exploitation by farming to produce sufficient surpluses to support the more sophisticated aspects of Roman life: the towns, the luxurious country and seaside houses of the rich, large-scale manufacturing industries (such as pottery and iron production) and the army. Given the importance of farming, it is therefore surprising that there has been relatively little detailed examination of this aspect of the countryside, especially land-use and settlement patterns, field systems, methods of drainage, the crops and domesticated animals, and farm buildings and tools. In contrast, much time and resources have been spent on the study of one aspect of the Roman countryside: the 'villas'.

There are many definitions of the term 'villa', but most would probably agree that it refers to a rural house which significantly reflects the Roman

style of life. In practical archaeological terms this assessment is usually determined by the finding of masonry footings; multiple rooms; tessellated or mosaic floors; clay tiles/bricks; window glass; painted wall-plaster and sometimes hypocaust heating systems and bath-suites. One or more of these criteria have been used to select the sites of Sussex villas and probable villas in Figure 2. Most of these establishments are presumed to have been the centres of farms, but other functions are occasionally possible, as at the iron-working site at Garden Hill, Hartfield, East Sussex (Money 1977).

The majority of the farming settlements in Roman Sussex, however, were the less wealthy and less sophisticated native 'peasant' farmsteads. Despite their numerical superiority, they have received remarkably little attention. This situation is very disappointing because large numbers of 'non-villa' farms span the entire period of the Roman occupation. Many such sites originated in the Late Iron Age or earlier, and some continued into the 5th century. Bishopstone (Bell 1977) is a good example of such lengthy continuity. For information about the 'non-villa' farms of Roman Sussex the reader is referred to discussions by Cunliffe (1973, 97–102) and Rudling (1988, 205–13), and to the reports on excavations at Park Brow (Wolseley *et al.* 1927); Bishopstone (Bell 1977); Bullock Down sites 16 and 44 (Rudling 1982b); Slonk Hill (Hartridge 1978); Middleton-on-Sea (Barber 1994) and Boxgrove (Bedwin & Place 1995).

Of the excavated sites listed above perhaps the most illuminating is that at Park Brow. The Romano-British settlement is the last of three distinct occupation areas of different periods dating back to the Late Bronze Age. It is possible that the three settlement areas represent continuous occupation with the occasional relocation of the habitation area. The entire complex is also closely linked by trackways and field systems, which again may have been in continuous use for a considerable period of time. Excavations during the 1920s at the Iron Age/Romano-British habitation site revealed three successive boundary ditches, various pits, and five rectangular 'house sites' (Wolseley *et al.* 1927). One of these houses was totally excavated and proved to have been constructed of timber with wattle and daub infill, the daub internally keyed to take an application of plaster which was painted red. The finding of window glass, roof tiles and a door key are other indications of the degree of the

sophistication and 'romanization' of the building. In the absence of good dating evidence the phasing of this group of rectangular buildings is difficult. Possibilities therefore include: successive single houses; a 'hamlet of cottages' (Cunliffe 1973, 98); or groupings of buildings which may have been used by one family for different purposes (Black 1987, 96–7). Black suggests that the buildings at Park Brow fall into two groups, each with a principal building which is approximately the same size in each group. He further suggests that the groups were not contemporary and that they 'look like two discrete houses'. At Bullock Down site 16 survey revealed Romano-British domestic rubbish in association with four pairs of building platforms (Rudling 1982b). Although the total excavation of one of these platforms failed to reveal sufficient evidence that can be interpreted as a domestic building, it is possible that as at Park Brow the groupings (i.e. pairs) of building platforms may represent discrete houses. This idea that at Romano-British 'native' settlements, groups of buildings many have formed a 'house' is based upon a theory put forward by Professor Rivet that on such sites individual 'huts' should be regarded as the equivalent of a single room in a villa (Rivet 1964, 108). Black's eastern group of buildings at Park Brow is shown in Figure 5 alongside various villa buildings drawn to the same scale. If Black is right and this group of three buildings functioned as a discrete house, it would have provided accommodation comparable in size with the main domestic buildings (assuming that these were single-storey) at small villas such as Goring (Rudling 1983; Fig. 5) and Up Marden (Down & Magilton 1994; Fig. 4). This factor, together with the signs of sophistication revealed at Park Brow, should warn us that the domestic accommodation at some small villas and at some 'non-villa' farm settlements may not have been significantly different. In addition, as Rivet has pointed out with regard to an analogy from East Africa, the 'architectural revolution' of replacing individual 'huts' by a single building which incorporates all the 'rooms' under one roof does not on its own imply changes to either the social organization or the system of land-tenure (Rivet 1964, 110).

A major difference frequently noted between villa and 'non-villa' rural settlements is the presence of bath-suites. Thus at both Goring and Up Marden there were detached bath-houses away from the main domestic buildings (Figs 4 & 5). The importance

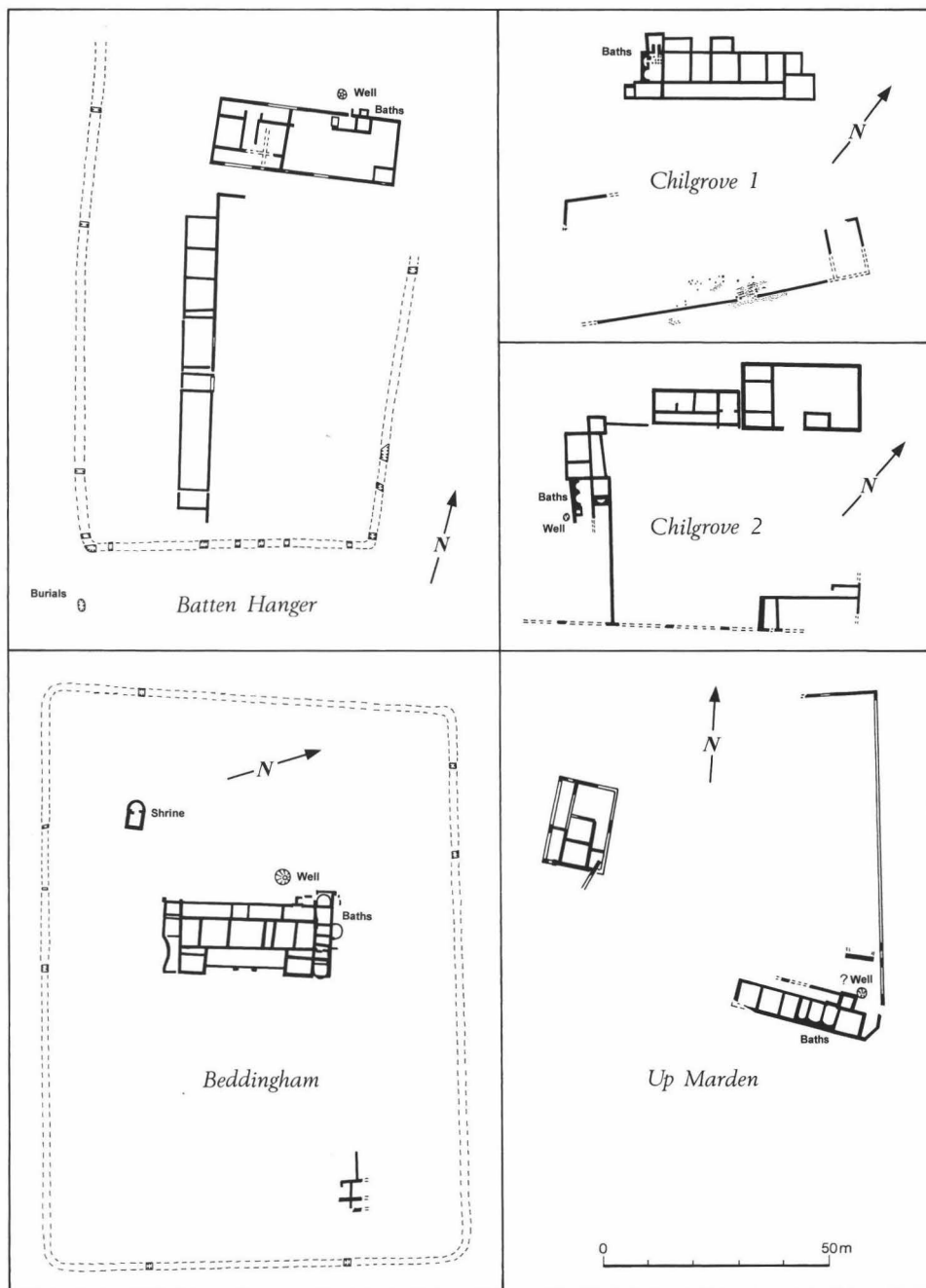


Fig. 4. Plans of various Sussex villas with ditched or walled enclosures.

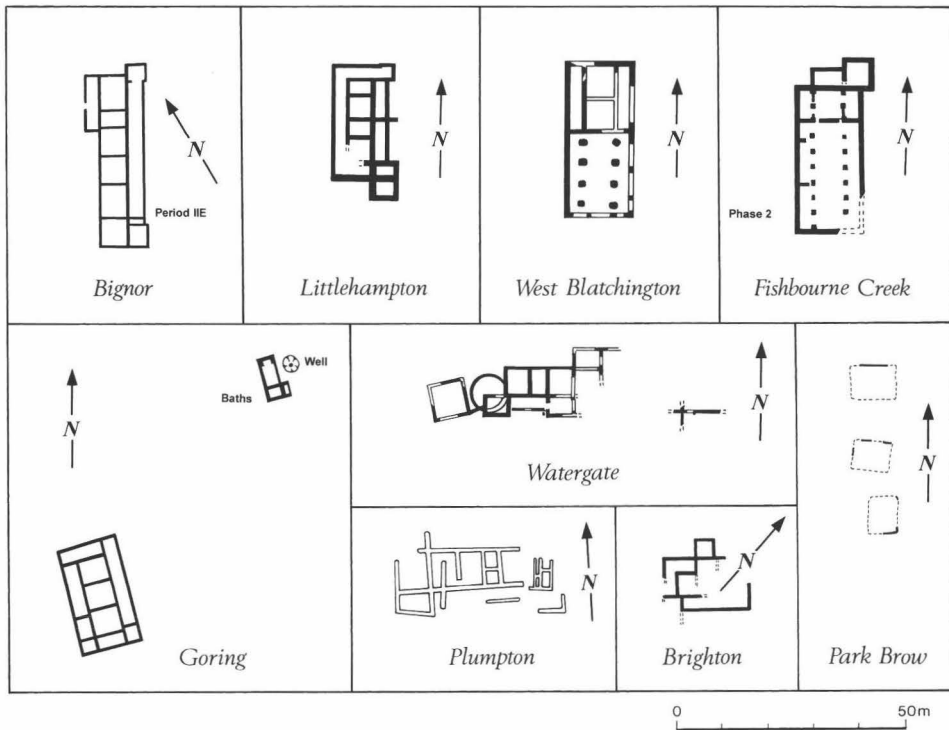


Fig. 5. Plans of various Sussex villas and a group of three buildings (a possible house) at Park Brow.

of suitable sources of water for such Roman 'necessities' is demonstrated at Goring, Batten Hanger, Chilgrove 2, Beddingham and perhaps Up Marden (Figs 4–6), by the discovery of wells only a short distance from the baths. In contrast, as one might expect, villa and 'non-villa' complexes reveal many similarities in other aspects of settlement and farming practices. Thus many examples of both types of settlement are located within ditched enclosures, as are the villas at Beddingham and Batten Hanger (Magilton 1991), and the Downland farms at Bishopstone, Park Brow and Bullock Down site 44. Similarly 'corn-drying ovens' occur at both types of site: Bishopstone and Bullock Down site 44 being examples of Downland farms with such ovens, whilst West Blatchington was a small villa (Fig. 5) with at least eleven 'corn-drying' ovens (Norris & Burstow 1950). (For an alternative interpretation of the function of 'corn-drying ovens' as 'malting floors': see Reynolds 1979.) It is worth noting that many Sussex villas, such as Goring, West

Blatchington and Beddingham, probably originated as 'non-villa' farms. It is thus of importance to consider the reasons why some farms developed into villas, while others did not. The range of possible factors includes the ownership and the fertility of the land; access to markets; alternative sources of income; and suitable supplies of water. Most of the excavated and other known 'non-villa' farms are located on the chalk Downs, and many other sites exist on the coastal plain. Only the locations of those farmsteads mentioned in this text have been shown in Figure 2, and for an impression of the density and distribution of the other Sussex 'native' sites the reader is referred to figure 6.2 in *The South-East to AD 1000* (Drewett *et al.* 1988, 181).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF VILLAS IN SUSSEX

The villa buildings of Sussex have been reviewed in several surveys (Cunliffe 1973; Down 1979; Rudling

1982a; Black 1987; Rudling 1988; Scott 1993). Given the volume of such coverage, and the limitation in length of this article, it would be both impossible and unwarranted to undertake a detailed examination of all the Sussex villas. I therefore recommend the reader to consult the publications listed above, especially that by Ernest Black which considers in detail such regional (south-east England) topics as 'The Development of Villas'; 'Rooms and their Functions'; and 'Estates', and also provides a gazetteer of villas. I shall thus confine myself here to providing a few general observations and plans of most of the excavated villas drawn to the same scale (Figs 3–5).

Many of the Sussex villas grew 'organically' out of native farms, a pattern which is normal for many areas of Britain (Applebaum 1966, 99). Such growth usually involved a gradual development, often with a change from a house built of timber to one built of stone (or with masonry foundations) of much the same size, to which luxuries such as simple mosaics, baths and perhaps underfloor heating were occasionally added. The late 2nd- to 3rd-century villa at Bignor (Frere 1982; Fig. 5) and the two phases (late 1st–4th centuries) of aisled buildings at Fishbourne Creek (Rudkin 1986; Fig. 5) are good examples.

The Bignor Period II villa and the Fishbourne Creek villa are examples of two of the main types of villa buildings found in Sussex and elsewhere in Britain: the 'winged corridor villa' and the 'aisled villa' respectively. Relatively recent work on such sites in Sussex includes the publication of a winged corridor villa discovered at Littlehampton in 1949 (Gilkes 1993; Fig. 5). This site, which is dated to the 2nd century, has also yielded evidence of occupation during the Iron Age. At Plumpton new survey work by the Field Archaeology Unit is currently taking place on and around the site of an unexcavated winged corridor villa which was first fieldwalked between 1973 and 1977 (Allen 1984; Fig. 5). At Batten Hanger excavations between 1988 and 1991 revealed extensive remains of a villa within a ditched enclosure (Magilton 1991). The north range was found to consist of at least three successive buildings with stone foundations. The second building, which was of aisled construction and 40 m long, subsequently had its western end subdivided into a number of rooms and a small bath-suite inserted towards the north-east corner (Fig. 4). Later a rectangular building (not shown on Fig. 4)

measuring approximately 32 m long and about 11 m wide was laid over most of the earlier aisled house. Although the lateral walls had been predominantly timber-framed, the eastern gable appears to have been built entirely of masonry. This gable, which had collapsed outwards, was fortunately fairly undisturbed and it was possible for the excavators to record a square-headed doorway and a possible window above. This important building, with its exceptionally rare surviving eastern gable (Magilton 1991, fig. 14 & pl. VIII) has been dated on coin evidence to the late 4th century. Finally, excavations in 1992 and 1993 at Pitlands Farm, Up Marden, were designed to increase our knowledge of a villa first investigated between 1966 and 1969 (Down 1979, 101–7). The excavations revealed parts of an aisled building consisting of at least six rooms (Down & Magilton 1994; Fig. 4). This building, at least part of which is thought to have had domestic functions, is similar in size and form to the villa at Goring (Fig. 5). Also as at Goring, a separate bath-suite (probably a precaution against the risk of fire) was located elsewhere in the farmyard. Both the aisled house and baths at Up Marden appear to have continued in use in the 4th century.

In contrast to the sites discussed above, at other sites it is possible to recognize that very major and rapid developments occurred, as in the case of the large rich early villas discussed in the section on the client kingdom. These villas include Fishbourne (Cunliffe 1971; Cunliffe *et al.* 1996); Pulborough (Praetorius 1911); Arundel (Rudling 1984); Angmering (Scott 1938; 1939; Wilson 1947); Southwick (Winbolt 1932; Rudling 1985); and Eastbourne (Sutton 1952; Stevens & Gilbert 1973), and possibly other sites at such locations as Newhaven (Bell 1976) and near Westhampnett Church. Some of these villas, such as Fishbourne, Southwick and Pulborough, are exceptional (Fig. 3) and are clearly derived from Mediterranean rather than North Gallic-type villas. These buildings exhibit similarities in elements of design, construction and decoration, and some probably involved the same architects and craftsmen. Given the general absence of evidence from these sites for any significant pre-conquest occupation, the villas appear to have been 'imposed' on the Late Iron Age settlement pattern, and are presumably a reflection of the favourable political and economic climate of the client kingdom of the *Regni*. Unfortunately, only the site at Fishbourne has

been investigated on any scale under modern conditions. The immense size of the 'palace' at this site can be appreciated from Figure 3 where its plan is compared with those from Southwick and Pulborough.

Other major villa developments, as at Bignor during the 4th century (Fig. 12: Period III), may have been caused by major changes in economic possibilities (for example the development of new markets), by the merger of two or more previously separate farms (perhaps in order to benefit from economies of scale) or by immigration into the area (including landowners and farmers from both elsewhere in Britain and overseas, and retired soldiers). Any attempt to explain major changes at particular villas will therefore require a detailed understanding of the locations, chronology and fortunes of other sites — rural, urban and military — in the area (Fig. 2).

The distribution of villas (Fig. 2) is very important. In Sussex they concentrate in three main areas: the very fertile coastal plain, the chalk Downs, and on or near the Greensand to the north of the Downs (Fig. 1). In all areas the river valleys or sites with easy access to the major roads (examples include Bignor and Chilgrove 2) were particularly popular locations. Communications by road or water (as at Arundel and Newhaven), and access to suitable markets (for example Chichester), were clearly major considerations and may have been more important than the quality of the land on which the villas were built. Much of the Weald appears to be devoid of villas (Figs 1 & 2). This absence may be due to the lack of archaeological fieldwork, but may have been determined by poor soils, dense woodland, and perhaps the existence of an Imperial Estate designed to control the valuable iron-works (*see above*).

The economic basis of most of the villas (and also the 'non-villa' farms) was mixed farming and many (for example Bignor) were situated at places chosen for the exploitation of several environments, including good arable and grazing lands. In addition to the 'corn-drying ovens' mentioned above, other evidence for farming at villas includes ancillary farm buildings, tools, bones of domesticated animals and carbonized seeds. Occasionally evidence also survives of the associated field systems, as at Chilgrove 1 (Down 1979, figs 2 & 5). Although hunting appears generally to have provided only a small proportion of the meat diet, most villas have

yielded evidence (often considerable) for the consumption of shellfish, especially oysters.

Finally the fate of villas in Sussex must be considered. I have already mentioned that some of the large early 'imposed' villas may have been over-ambitious projects. Several of them, including Fishbourne Palace (Cunliffe 1971, 186), may have contracted during the 2nd century, perhaps as a result of changes in both the social and economic environments. At about the same time, however, there was a considerable increase in the building of new villas and it has been suggested that the profits of agriculture were now being 'shared amongst a larger number of landowners' (Black 1987, 34). It is possible that this expansion of villa construction in Sussex may have been linked to a decline in the power of King Cogidubnus' heirs and nobles, especially if villa construction had formerly been restricted to the élite. Thus with the demise of the client kingdom more farmers may have aspired to live in villas, however humble in comparison with the large and luxurious 1st-century examples. In the 3rd and 4th centuries increasing inflation, pirate attacks along the south coast, and the establishment of a substantial military presence, may all have been factors which led to a large number of coastal villas being either deserted as was Fishbourne, or subject to contraction as possibly at Beddingham. During this period, however, various villas located inland and away from both coastal raiding and military garrisons as at Bignor and to the north of Chichester (and also to the west of Sussex in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight), were continuing to expand and develop. Perhaps the large 4th-century villas such as Bignor indicate that society had possibly then come full circle: the large 1st-century villas occupied by rich tribal notables and their retinues had been followed by the big expansion of villa-ownership by 'middle-rank' farmers during the 2nd and 3rd centuries and then by a 4th-century reversion to a smaller number of villa-owners, some of whom were very rich and had larger households (Ernest Black pers. comm.). Finally, in the late 4th or early 5th centuries these villas too show signs of decay or abandonment. In contrast, some of the downland farmsteads, including even those located near to the coast as at Bishopstone and Bullock Down Site 44, show signs of continued occupation throughout the 4th century, and perhaps into the 5th century. At Bishopstone there may even have been continuity of settlement into the Saxon period (Bell 1977).

CASE-STUDY ONE: THE BEDDINGHAM VILLA

During 1986 aerial reconnaissance by the author and Dr Andrew Woodcock, County Archaeologist for East Sussex, revealed a previously unrecorded Roman villa near the foot of the north scarp of the South Downs at Beddingham, East Sussex (NGR TQ 45850740). Subsequently both a systematic surface artefact-collecting survey and a geophysical soil resistivity survey were undertaken (*Britannia* 18, 353 & pl. XXVIA). Between 1987 and 1992 excavations each summer fully exposed the main villa building and sampled adjacent buildings and the villa farmyard/ditched enclosure (Fig. 4; *Britannia* 19, 481; *Britannia* 20, 319 & pl. XX; *Britannia* 21, 358–9 & pl. XXXIA; *Britannia* 22, 289 & pl. XXXB; *Britannia* 23, 306 & pl. XVIII; *Britannia* 24, 307, fig. 21 & pls XIVA & XIVB).

The discovery of a villa at Beddingham was very interesting since the site is over 50 miles from a major Roman market centre and is located in an area between the rivers Ouse and Cuckmere (Fig. 1) which had previously been thought to contain no villas (Welch 1971, 232). Martin Welch suggested that the area between the rivers Ouse and Cuckmere, being 'blank on the Romano-British map', may have been given by 'some sort of treaty-arrangement' to Saxon settlers. Professor Cunliffe developed this approach further and proposed various 'Saxon and British enclaves in the territory of the Regni during the 5th century' (Cunliffe 1973, fig. 45), with the old nucleated settlements (e.g. Chichester and Pevensey) continuing to defend themselves and adjacent territory, while intervening territories may have been put under the control of mercenary bands (Cunliffe 1973, 137). The discovery of the Beddingham villa in a possible Saxon 'enclave' thus provided a rare opportunity to examine some of the implications of the enclave theory.

The fieldwalking and excavations at Beddingham have produced evidence for multi-period occupation/usage of the site from the Mesolithic to the post-medieval period. The oldest definite settlement evidence dates to the Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age and includes finds of pottery, spindle-whorls and pits, one of which contained several conjoining flint flakes. A lack of finds, particularly pottery, suggests that settlement at the site may have then been abandoned until the Late Iron Age or early Roman period.

There is very little evidence for Late Iron Age occupation at Beddingham. Two coins (a bronze issue of Cunobeline and a silver issue of Epatticus) and a very abraded sherd from an Augustan Pascual amphora (Malcolm Lyne pers. comm.) are the only finds which can definitely be dated to the Late Iron Age. Although the other pottery finds include several imported 1st-century Gallo-Belgic butt-beakers, most of these are likely to be post-conquest. Similarly in the 1st century the Samian is mainly Flavian in date. In addition, the local 1st-century grog-tempered coarse ware pottery is unfortunately difficult to attribute to either the pre- or post-conquest period.

The one feature which may possibly date to the Late Iron Age is a two-phase timber round 'house' with a possible entrance to the south-east (Fig. 6). Unfortunately, the small pieces of pottery recovered from the second-phase post-holes of this structure do not confirm such dating, and tend to suggest a pre-Flavian but post-Conquest date (Malcolm Lyne pers. comm.). The lack of pottery recovered from the first-phase post-holes indicates that the earliest round 'house' was constructed on an unoccupied site. Thus if the ring-post structure had a domestic function it could represent the original farmhouse at the very end of the Iron Age or during the first decades of the Roman period. Whatever its date, the interpretation of this circle of upright timbers is uncertain (Rudling 1997). It is similar in form and size to plans of Iron Age single ring-post houses (Cunliffe 1991b, 242–4). Other possible interpretations could include an estate office (Black 1997, 61) or a shrine. The suggestion of a shrine, for which there is no firm evidence (e.g. offerings), is based upon various factors which include the lack of any associated domestic features (e.g. a fireplace), and the fact that the location of this structure, which *defines a circular space*, was respected long after it went out of use and was only unintentionally encroached upon during the final building phase of the adjacent farmhouse (*see below*). Circular shrines and temples, as at Hayling Island, have been documented for both the Iron Age and Roman periods (Cunliffe 1991b, 510–18; Woodward 1992, 17–50; Lewis 1966, 78–86). In addition, at Westhampnett in West Sussex the excavation of a Late Iron Age cemetery revealed the religious importance of a circular space (perhaps a 'symbolic house'), around which the cemetery was organized (Fitzpatrick 1997, 239). Other dating evidence for the ring-post

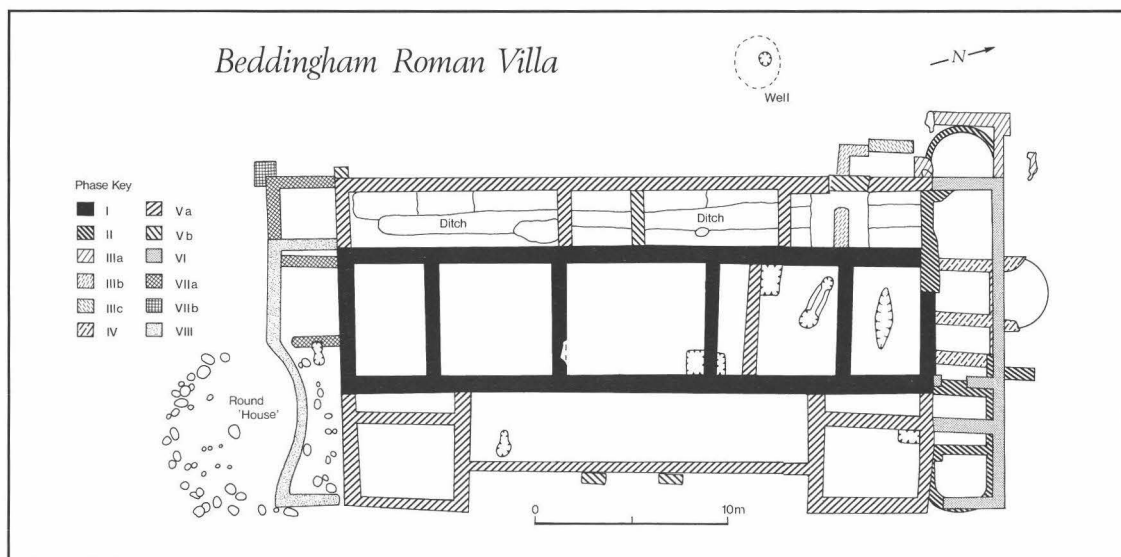


Fig. 6. Multiphase plan of the timber round 'house' and the masonry villa at Beddingham.

structure at Beddingham includes the construction of Phase I of the main villa building (Figs 6 & 7). This phase of building does not encroach upon the circle of posts, and may therefore have been constructed alongside it. Phase I is dated (see below) to the Flavian period, and therefore indicates that the round 'house' is either also of this period, or earlier.

The main period of occupation at Beddingham villa dates from the late 1st to the mid-4th centuries, and included a large domestic building with masonry foundations, a well, a shrine, a detached bath-house, a building made of timber, and two phases of enclosure ditch.

The farmhouse is situated immediately to the north of the timber round 'house' (Figs 6 & 7). Phase I consisted of five adjoining rooms aligned north-east/south-west. Although evidence was lacking, it is possible that this rectangular range of rooms, which had mortared flint foundations, may have replaced a building made of timber. Unfortunately, the precise functions of the excavated rooms is unclear since in all cases plough-damage had destroyed the floor levels. Finds of small tesserae, especially from the large central room, indicate the former presence of at least one mosaic. The central room, which lies opposite the later entrance into the Phase Va front corridor, was presumably the principal reception room. The two rooms to the

north contained an oven and a ?forging furnace respectively. An archaeomagnetic date (AJC-52) for the tile oven indicates that this feature was last fired c. AD 100–180 (95 per cent confidence level). Unfortunately, it was not possible to obtain an archaeomagnetic date for the ?forging furnace, but an adjacent pit containing iron-forging slag is evidence that at some stage this room was used for non-domestic purposes. These iron-working activities may belong to a phase of villa construction, to a period of decline, or to subsequent 'squatter' occupation. Up-slope and immediately to the west of the Phase I cottage (or row-type) villa was a drainage ditch containing Flavian pottery.

Later modifications and enlargements to the Phase I house included the adding of at least three phases (II–IV) of baths at the northern end of the cottage villa. The intended addition (Phase IIIb) of a heated room at the western end of the baths was never completed. Although there is little direct dating evidence for the various phases of baths, one of these episodes probably utilized relief-patterned flue tiles of Die 5A (Lowther 1948) which were found at a tiler's at Hartfield and dated by archaeomagnetic dating to c. AD 100–130 at the 68 per cent confidence level (Rudling 1986, 198). The discovery also of a few examples of relief-patterned flue tiles of Dies 19 and 20, which have been dated by Ernest Black to c. AD 90–110, may either belong to a different

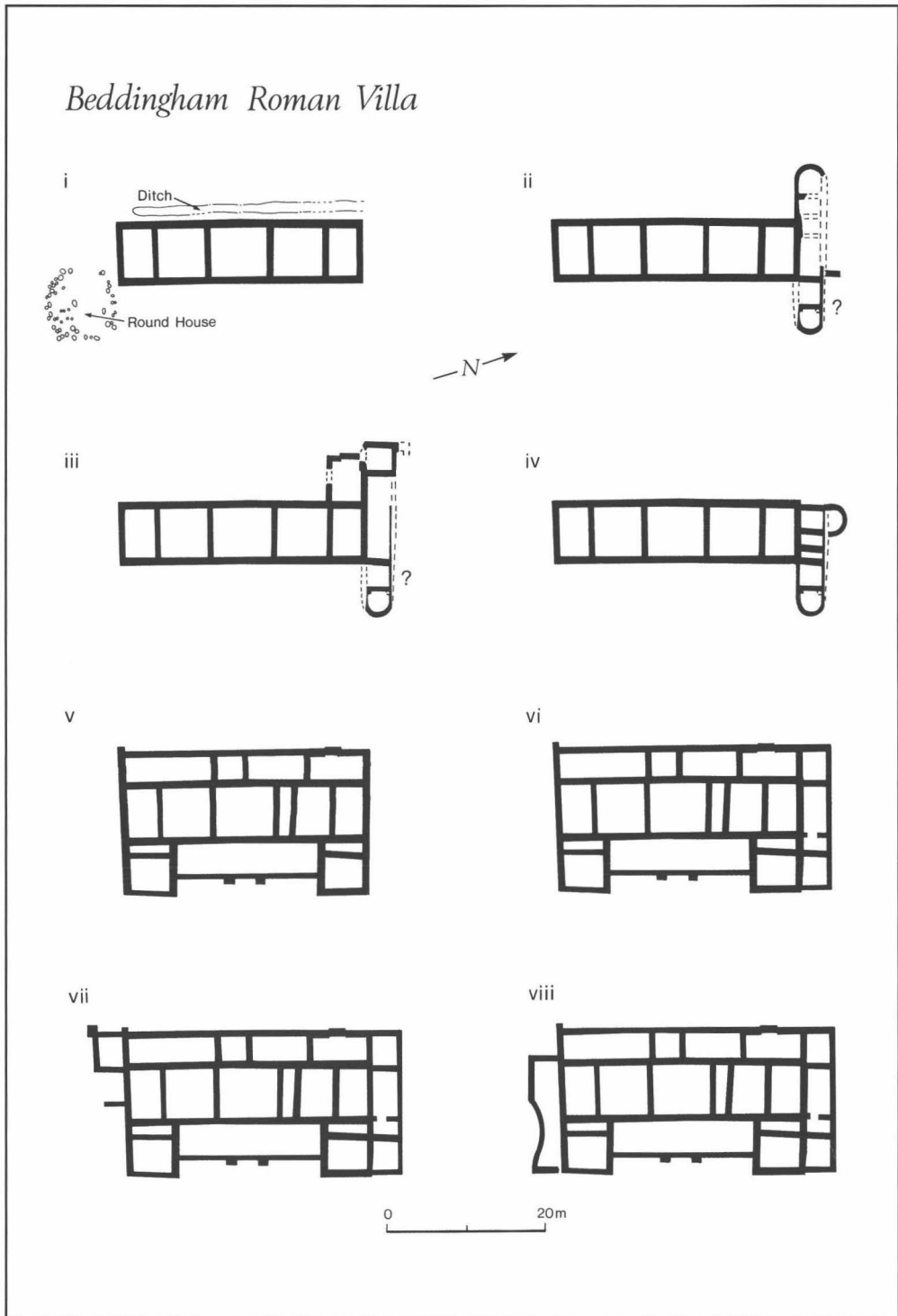


Fig. 7. Phase plans of the Beddingham villa.

phase of the baths or represent the retaining in stock of old voussoirs (Ernest Black pers. comm.). The eastern plunge-bath of the Phase II baths and the hypocaust of the Phase IV baths had gone out of use by the early 3rd century. The disused eastern plunge-bath continued to be a place for the depositing of rubbish until *c.* AD 270, when it was overlain by masonry of Phases Va and VI. It is possible that the dismantling of the Phase IV baths coincided with the construction of a detached bath-house to the north-east of the farmhouse. Unfortunately, this bath-house has been only partly exposed by trial trenching (Fig. 4) and remains undated.

Building Phase Va (probably Antonine) saw the addition of new rooms to both the eastern and western faces of the cottage villa. On the eastern side these changes consisted of a corridor and two wing rooms. Also at this time, one of the main rooms was subdivided in order to create a passage between the new front corridor and the new western range of rooms. Subsequently *c.* AD 270 (Phase VI) the long disused Phase IV baths were replaced by a rectangular range of rooms. Phase VIII (undated) consisted of the construction of a room and an entrance or lean-to at the south-western corner of the building. These additions were later replaced by a verandah (Phase VIII) which is unusual in having foundations made of chalk and involving an irregular curved section along the eastern half of its south wall. Both this irregular section of wall and the east wall overlie the northern part of the timber round 'house', and it is assumed that the shape of the irregular section was designed to respect the location of the former ring-post structure. If this theory is correct, since part of the round 'house' lies under the chalk wall foundations, it can be assumed that the exact position of the ring of posts was no longer visible or remembered. Memory of, and respect for, the location of such a structure is an extremely important indication of continuity of ownership through most of the Roman occupation of Britain.

To the west of the revered round 'house' are the remains of a masonry structure which in its 3rd phase had an apsidal western end (Figs 4 & 8). Originally (Phase A — probably 3rd century) this building had been approximately square, with external sides measuring 3.6–3.7 metres long. In Phase B (undated) the foundations of this building were widened on the northern and southern sides,

and the west wall moved slightly to the west of its original position. Ultimately in Phase C an apsidal end was added to the west wall. Although the finds (which include a coin issued *c.* AD 322–323) recovered from this building provide no clues with regard to its function, it is thought to have served as a shrine. If so, and if the earlier timber round 'house' actually served a religious rather than a domestic function, we may have at Beddingham evidence of continuity of religious structures. Such a scenario may also have occurred at the Watergate villa in West Sussex where a fairly substantial masonry circular structure predates the construction of the first masonry cottage villa and was subsequently demolished and replaced by a new square building (Rudling 1997; Fig. 5).

Of the other evidence for Romano-British occupation at Beddingham villa it is important to draw attention to one very important development: the settlement's two phases of enclosure ditches. The smaller of the enclosures is the earlier, and the lower fills of its ditch include pre-Flavian to Hadrianic pottery. This ditch may therefore be a primary feature of the villa, and have been in existence at the time of the round 'house'. Probably during the mid-2nd century the original enclosure was replaced by a considerably larger version (Fig. 4), the ditch of which has produced pottery dating to the 2nd to 4th centuries. Other Sussex examples of villas where there is evidence for the expansion of the settlement's boundaries include Bignor (*see below*) and Batten Hanger (Magilton 1991, 30). Such developments indicate an increase in prosperity at these sites.

One of the most important discoveries at the Beddingham villa site concerns the final use of the masonry 'shrine' during the early Saxon period. At this time a large area was hollowed out at the western end of the Roman building (Fig. 8), and finds from its fill (Context 648) include sherds of Saxon pottery dated to the late 4th or 5th century (Lyne forthcoming). The Saxon vessels (Fig. 9) are in two fabrics, a coarse black sandy ware (Fig. 9:2, 3 & 6) and a fine-sanded polished black ware (Fig. 9:4, 5 & 7). They include the base from a pedestalled bowl (Fig. 9:2); a body sherd from a rusticated vessel with random stabbing (Fig. 9:3); the base from a jar with twin vertical grooves flanked by vertical rows of dimples (Fig. 9:6); three body sherds decorated by pairs of vertical grooves separated by rows of dimples (Fig. 9:5); a pedestal-based necked bowl with a

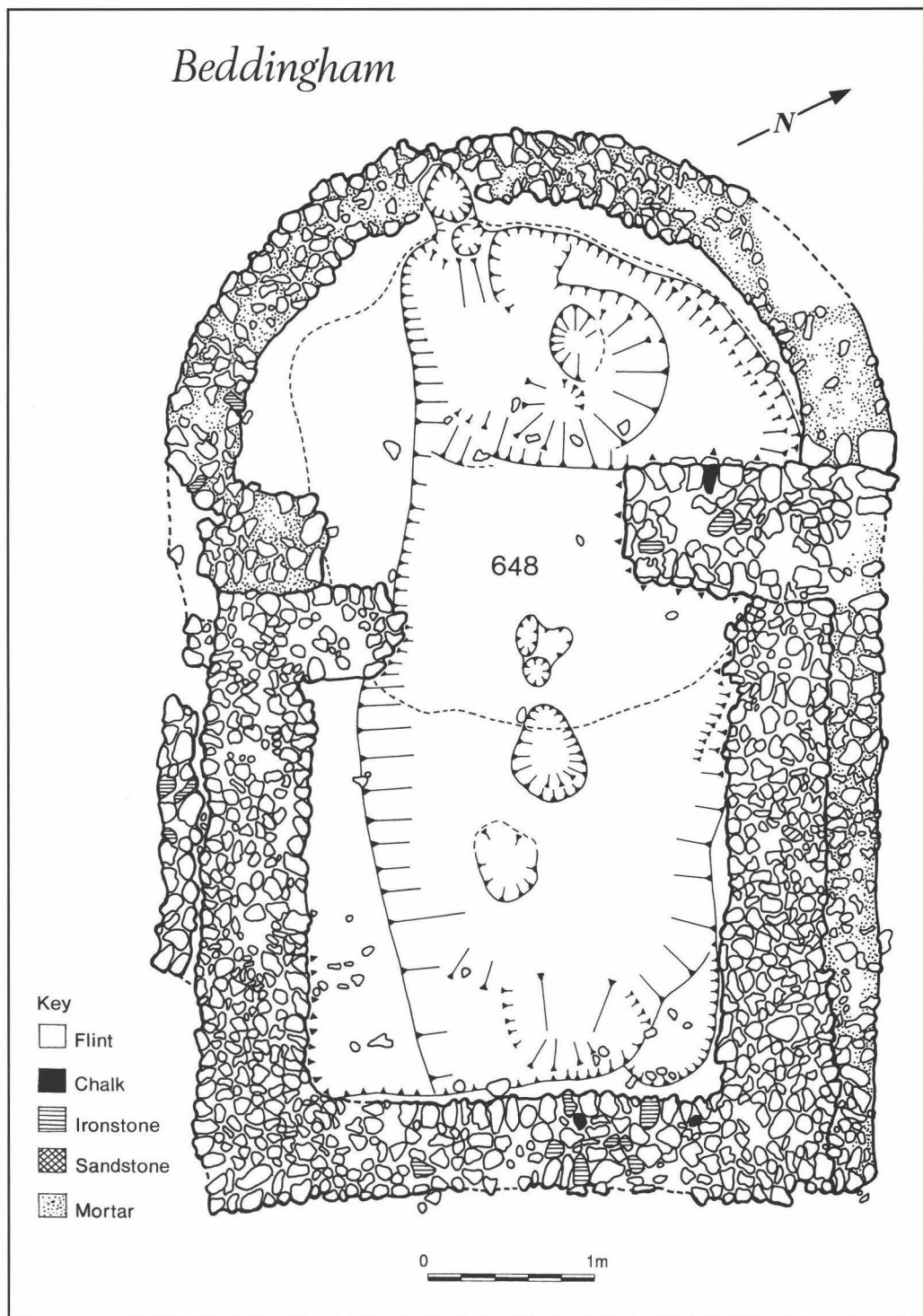


Fig. 8. Multiphase plan of the masonry shrine at Beddingham. Context 648 contained Saxon pottery.

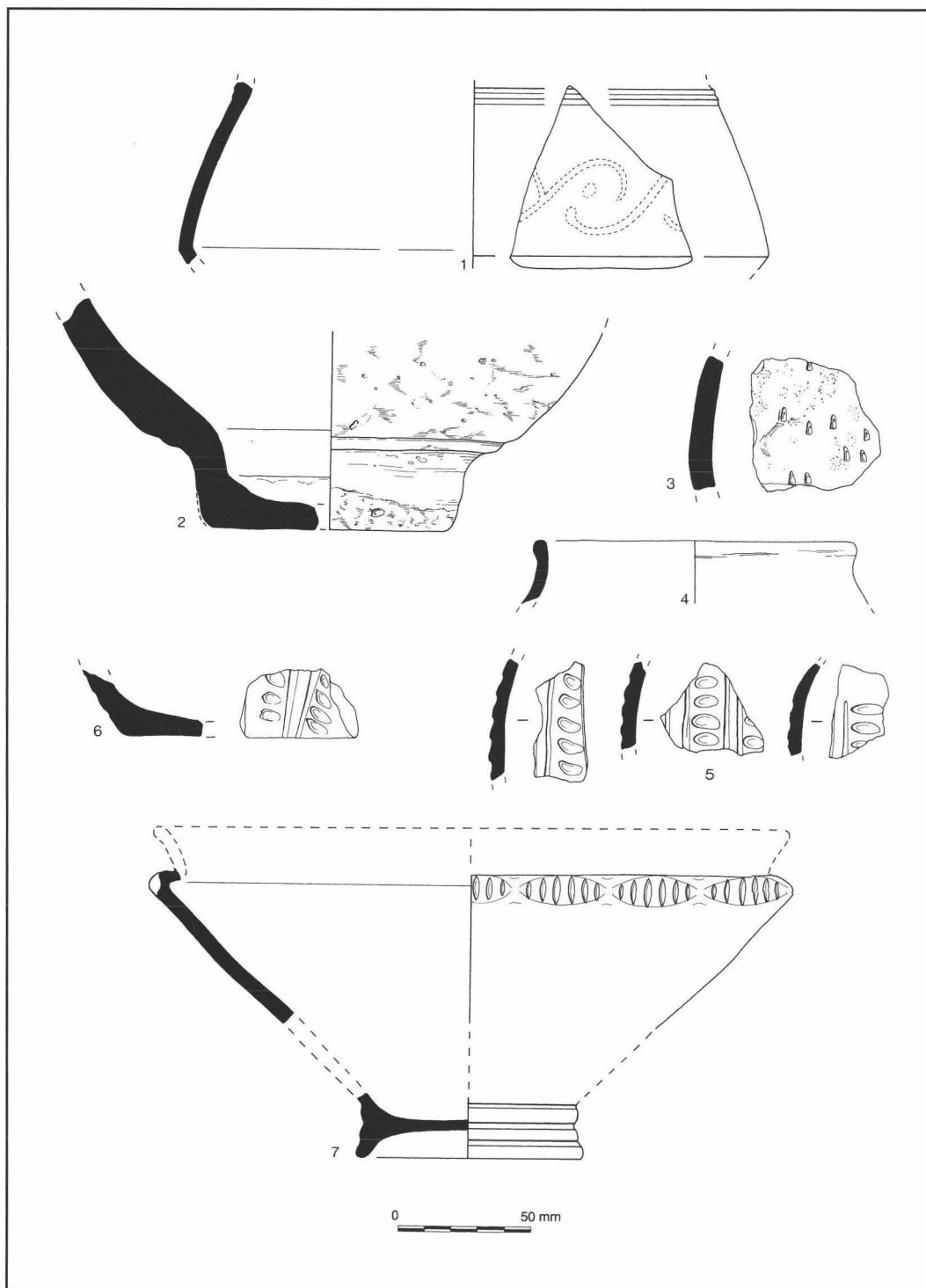


Fig. 9. One late Roman (No. 1) and Saxon pottery sherds from Context 648 in the shrine at Beddingham.

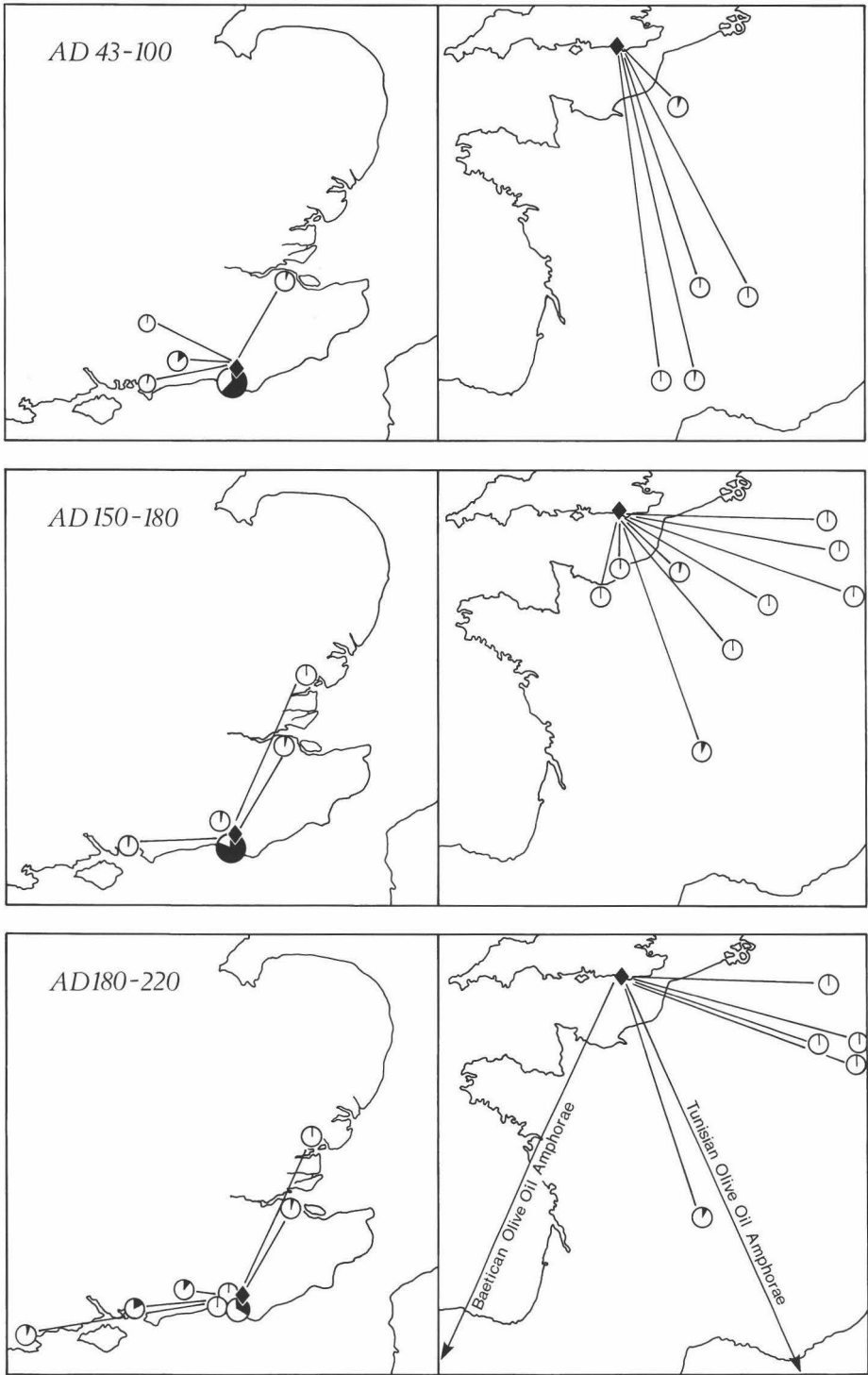


Fig. 10. Changes in the supply of Roman pottery to the Beddingham villa during the period c. AD 43-220.

carinated girth decorated with vertically slashed facetting (Fig. 9:7); and an everted rim (Fig. 9:4). The fill (Context 648) also yielded a quantity of Roman sherds including a large and unabraded piece (Fig. 9:1) from a Pevensey ware bowl dated to *c.* AD 350/70–400+. There is thus the possibility that at least some of the late-4th-century Roman pottery, which is later than the main villa building occupation, could be contemporary with some of the Saxon pottery. In addition, the two Saxon bowls with pedestal feet (*Standfussgefassen*) are of types which disappeared from the Saxon pottery repertoire during the mid-5th century. Other sherds of late Roman and early Saxon pottery were retrieved from several features in the vicinity of the Roman shrine and to the west of the main villa building. To conclude, it is suggested that part (i.e. Context 648) of the fill of the 'shrine' and its associated finds represents late Romano-British or early Saxon occupation/activity at the Beddingham villa site. Such activity may have been associated with the nearby 'Drayton Field' Saxon inhumation cemetery (Welch 1983, 396–7).

The post-excavation analysis phase of the Beddingham villa project is in progress, and the various specialist reports are shedding light on a wide range of topics. To take just one — contacts with other sites — the pottery and tile reports have been particularly rewarding. Thus in his study of the Roman and later pottery finds, Malcolm Lyne has been able to examine the changing patterns of Roman pottery supply to the villa. Examples of some of these patterns are shown in Figure 10. The study of the tile finds has also been revealing, and some of the Beddingham tiles, including some, but not all, of the Die 5A relief-patterned flue tiles discussed above, have been provenanced to the Hartfield tilerly (Middleton *et al.* 1992). This discovery appears to contradict my original conclusion that the Hartfield tilerly may have been operated by itinerant tile-makers who located themselves near sources of demand (Rudling 1986, 227). It would now appear that the products of the tilerly were required at villas as far south as Beddingham, and as far north (*c.* 20 miles) as Beddington.

To conclude, at Beddingham villa there is evidence to indicate continuity of building development from a 1st-century ring-post structure to a number of increasingly complex buildings with masonry foundations. After the 3rd century the villa may have been in decline, and at the end of the 4th

century or early in the 5th century part of the site, but apparently not the former main house, was occupied or used by people using Saxon pottery.

CASE STUDY TWO: BIGNOR ROMAN VILLA

The villa at Bignor is one of the largest in Britain. It is situated on the southern slope of the Upper Greensand, just north of the chalk Downs in West Sussex (NGR SU 987146). In addition to being located on very fertile arable land, the villa was well placed to utilize grazing lands on the nearby Downs, and perhaps also the woodlands of the Wealden clays to the north. It is very close to Stane Street, and was thus advantageously located for good communications with the markets at Chichester, the minor urban settlement in the Hardham–Pulborough area (Cunliffe 1973, 69–71) and London.

The site was discovered in 1811 and was extensively excavated until 1819 (Lysons 1817; 1819; 1821). (A revised version of Lysons' plan is the basis for Fig. 11.) Thereafter much of the site, including all of the farmyard, was returned to arable cultivation. Cover-buildings were erected over the principal mosaics and the site became a tourist attraction.

The first of the modern research excavations were undertaken by Professor Shepherd Frere between 1956 and 1962. These works investigated parts of the west, north and south wings (Frere 1982), establishing for the first time a chronology for the constructional phases of the west wing. In 1975–76 excavations were undertaken in the north corridor (Room 10) prior to the re-laying of the mosaic and the erection of a cover-building (Aldsworth 1983).

In 1985 a programme of assessment and research excavations were commenced by Fred Aldsworth, the County Archaeologist of West Sussex, and the author. These excavations were designed to locate and assess the condition of parts of the villa (especially the area of the large baths and also the boundaries of the 4th-century villa) which had previously been excavated during the 19th century and subsequently re-buried. As well as achieving their primary aims, the excavations undertaken between 1985 and 1990 added considerably to our knowledge of the development of the site (Aldsworth & Rudling 1995). The 1985 excavations also revealed evidence in support of a theory that Lysons' Rooms

BIGNOR ROMAN VILLA

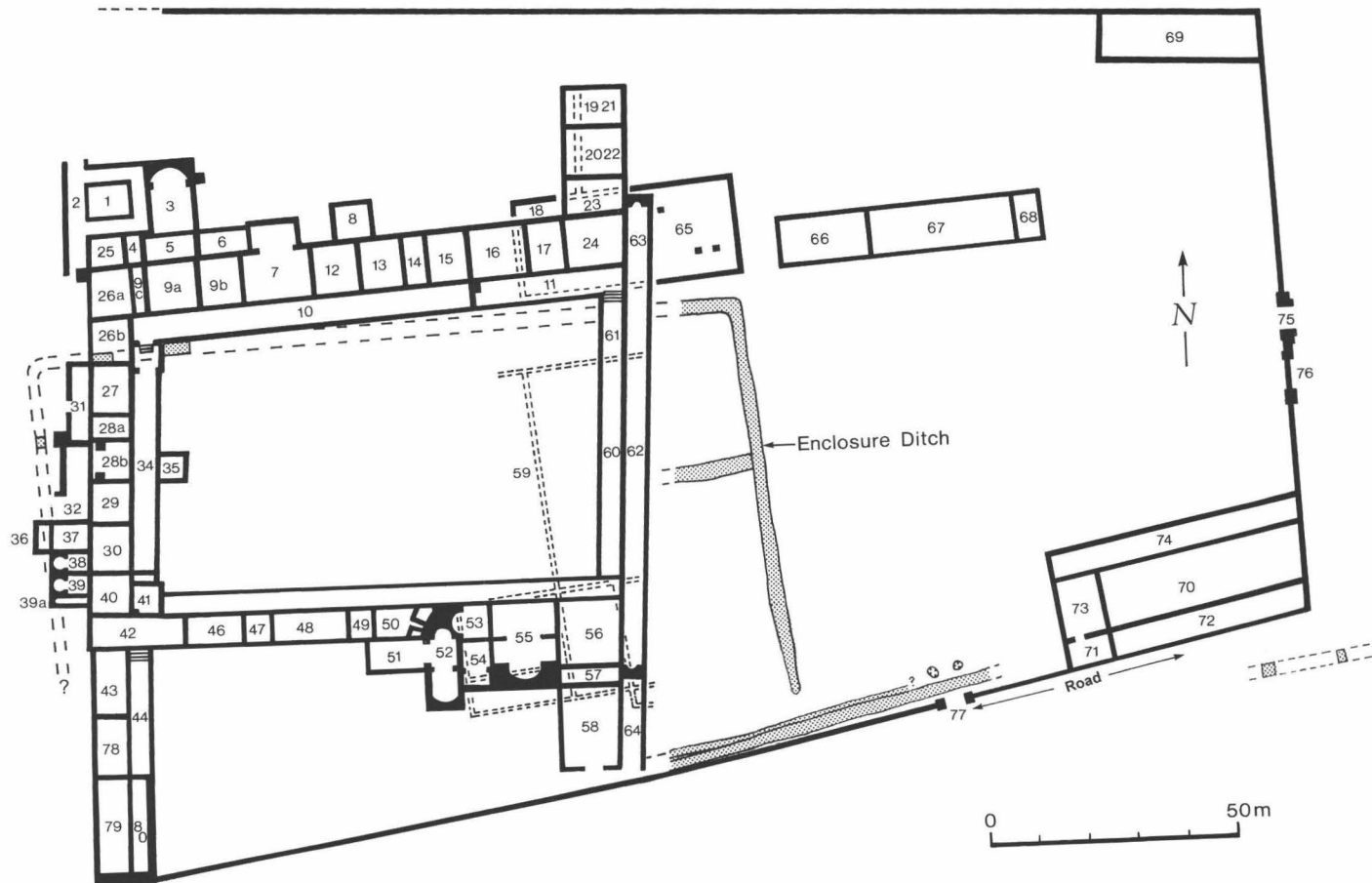


Fig. 11. Revised multiphase plan of Bignor Roman Villa. Room numbers 1-77 are based on Lysons (1819) and Frere (1982), numbers 78-80 have been added by F. Aldsworth.

18 and 65 (Figs 11 & 12) were parts of a free-standing aisled building, the foundations of which were later overlain by extensions (Rooms 16–17; 19–24) to the Period IIIA villa (Fig. 12). This theory was an important element in a major review of the evidence for Bignor during the 4th century (Black 1983). In this and other aspects, Black's interpretation of Bignor during the 4th century contrasts with that put forward by Professor Frere (1982). Thus, for instance, Frere argues against an earlier theory (Smith 1978) that Bignor was a 'unit-system villa'. Instead he suggests that it 'remained a unity revolving round a single great household'. In contrast Black follows up Smith's unit-system approach and proposes that in his Phase III:1 the villa may have been occupied by three families, one in the west wing and two in the new north wing. It is further suggested that the large, elaborate bath-suite in the south wing would have been used by all the households living in the villa. Black goes on to explain later constructional developments at the villa and also suggests the social emergence, linked to economic factors, of one family above the others. Thus in contrast to earlier theories (such as a change of ownership or a substantial economic improvement) Black provides an alternative explanation, based on economic and social evolution, for the exceptional developments that occurred at Bignor during the 4th century. For further discussion of these and other issues the reader is referred to Rudling (1988, 221–7), Aldsworth and Rudling (1995) and Rudling (1998b).

Since 1991 annual summer research and training excavations at Bignor have been directed by the author on behalf of the Institute of Archaeology, University College London. Between 1991 and 1993 these excavations investigated parts of the South Corridor, the Porticus, the Ambulatory, the south-eastern area of the Courtyard, and two early phase 'oblique' walls (Fig. 11:59) recorded in the 19th century. Since 1994 the excavations have been located in the outer enclosure (the so-called 'Stockyard' or 'Farmyard'), especially along its western edge where it was hoped it would be possible to gain further information about the early phase walls referred to above and others of this date which were recorded by Fred Aldsworth between 1985 and 1988 (Fig. 12). Annual interim reports on the excavations undertaken between 1991 and 1997 have appeared in *The Archaeology of Chichester and District*.

The main discoveries between 1994 and 1997

included various ditches which, together with similar ditches discovered in 1986 and 1958 respectively to the west and north of the Period II villa, formed the boundaries of an enclosure of at least two phases (Figs 11 & 12). The southern boundary of this enclosure is also apparently of two phases and the excavations revealed two ditches just to the north of, and roughly parallel with, the masonry southern wall of the 4th-century 'Stockyard'. The larger of these ditches, which cuts the smaller version, is partly overlain by the masonry wall. Pottery dating for the earlier ditch is Late Neronian–Flavian, perhaps extending into the early 2nd century (Malcolm Lyne pers. comm.). The ditch's fill also yielded seven sherds of flint-tempered prehistoric pottery. The larger ditch produced early/mid-2nd-century pottery from its basal fill and Antonine pottery from its upper fill. In comparison, the north-east corner of the ditched enclosure has yielded late 1st- to 2nd-century pottery from its lower fills and large quantities of Antonine and Severan pottery from the upper fills. At some stage the northern boundary of the enclosure was to the south of its final position (Figs 11 & 12). The most recent excavations (in 1997) were designed to investigate both the south-east corner of the early Roman ditched enclosure and the southern gateway into the 4th-century masonry enclosure.

The south-east corner of the ditched enclosure proved different from the north-east corner excavated in 1994. Thus instead of the north–south and east–west ditches joining at the south-east corner, the eastern enclosure ditch ended in a terminal some three metres to the north of both phases of ditch bordering the southern boundary of the Stockyard (see Figs 11 & 12). Perhaps this gap represents an entrance. Alternatively the southern ditches, which both continue eastwards, may be earlier than the eastern enclosure ditch. If this is correct the 'gap' may have been the location of part of a bank created from the upcast of the adjacent southern ditch/es.

The re-exposure of the southern entrance into the Stockyard demonstrated that the masonry gateway and flanking walls overlie part of the flint metalled road or track which lies just outside the southern boundary of this enclosure (Aldsworth & Rudling 1995, 151). A surprise discovery in the vicinity of the entrance was a pair of large post-holes (Contexts 395 & 402) approximately three metres to the north of the gateway. These post-holes may

BIGNOR ROMAN VILLA

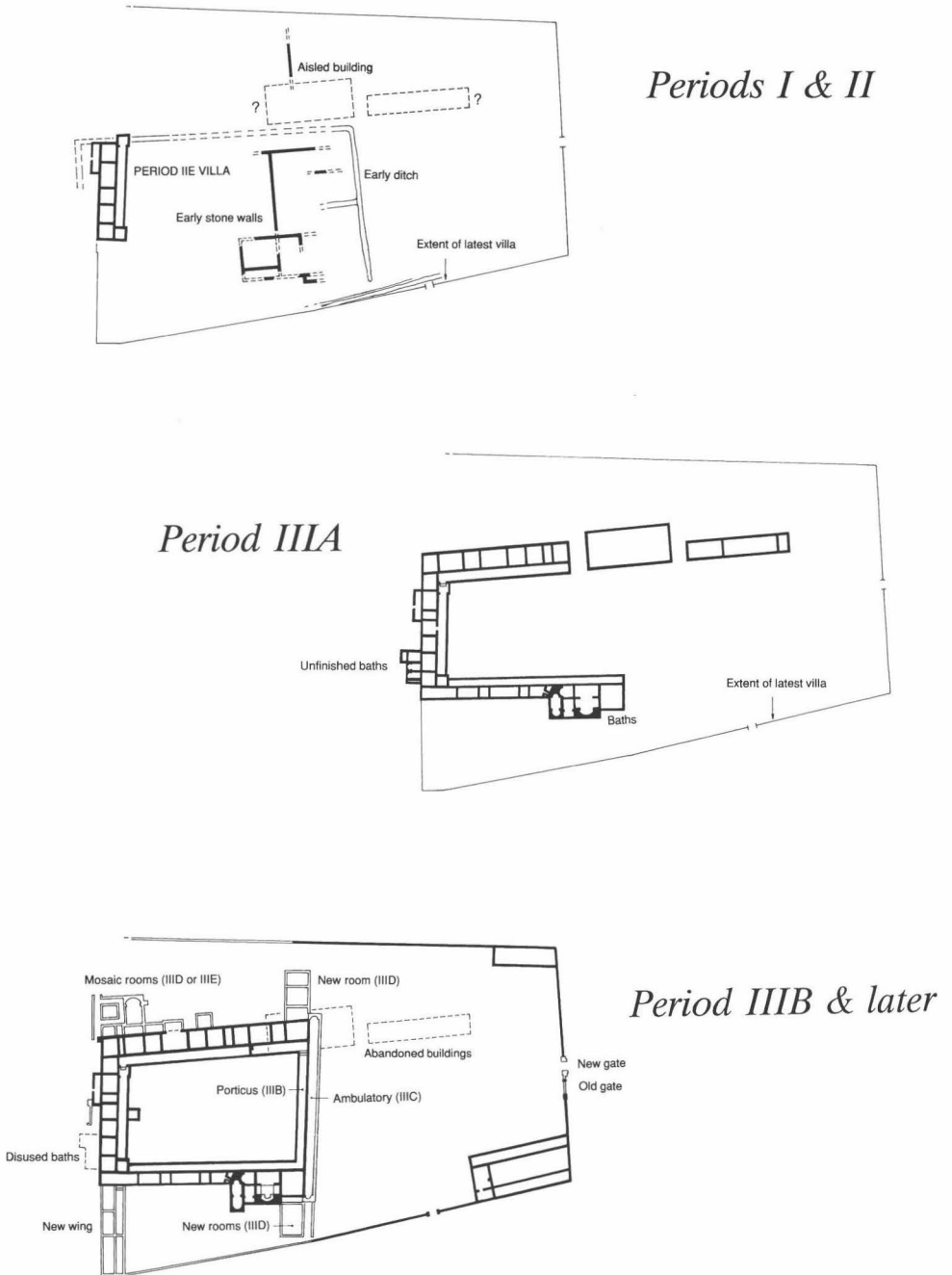


Fig. 12. Phased plans of Bignor Roman Villa based on Aldsworth and Rudling (1995).

represent an earlier phase of entrance, perhaps associated with the first of the two southern boundary ditches.

Another important discovery in 1997 was an Iron Age coin — the first to be discovered at Bignor. The uninscribed bronze coin is of the Chichester Cock type (Hobbs 1996, 81:657–9). This Southern issue, which is found in Sussex and Hampshire, is thought to date to the mid- to late 1st century BC (Hobbs 1996, 15–16). The significance of this find, however, is uncertain since the various excavations at Bignor have failed to yield much pottery which can be dated to the Late Iron Age. Thus, as at Beddingham, it is difficult to identify with certainty an immediately pre-conquest occupation at Bignor.

Generally the recent excavations and the earlier discoveries are helping to document the early stages of occupation at a site which in the 4th century developed from a fairly ordinary winged corridor villa (Fig. 5) into a very large courtyard villa (Fig. 12). The boundaries of the ditched enclosure are very important for several reasons. First, the late-2nd-century timber and the 3rd-century masonry winged corridor villa buildings are positioned in one corner of the enclosure and partly overlie it. Second, if the northern boundary of the enclosure was originally further to the south this would locate the early phase oblique masonry walls found beneath the 4th-century baths in a central position within the

enclosure. Finally, assuming one or both of the ditches found adjacent to the southern stockyard wall to be part of the enclosure, this would indicate that the boundary alignment at this location was probably in use throughout the occupation of the site. Unfortunately, our understanding of the early phases of the villa is very limited. What, for instance, was the function and date (?2nd/3rd century) of the early masonry buildings? Why was the ditched enclosure extended, and why was the late 2nd-century timber villa built where it was?

Thus although the main sequence of, but not the reasons for, the dramatic development of Bignor villa in the 4th century is now fairly well understood, the initial history of occupation at the site is very incomplete. Perhaps even more uncertain is the fate of the villa. Did it suffer a period of decline, and when, why and how was it abandoned or destroyed?

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Jane Russell who prepared all the illustrations. Thanks are also due to John Mills of West Sussex County Council and to Andrew Woodcock of East Sussex County Council for supplying information from their respective County Sites and Monuments Records, to Malcolm Lyne for providing information about pottery recovered at the Beddingham and Bignor villas, and to Ernest Black for generously sharing his thoughts about Sussex villas.

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