

The Roman Villa at Deanshanger, Northamptonshire: Excavations 2004-2005

by

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with contributions by

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SUMMARY

Excavation at Kingsbrook School, Deanshanger examined archaeological remains to the south-east of a Roman villa that was first identified in 1957. Late 1st-century to early 2nd-century ditch systems lay within the excavated area, and two rectangular enclosures, at the end of a line of similar enclosures excavated previously, are dated to the mid-2nd century. This arrangement was probably contemporary with the establishment of the villa to the west, as the walled courtyard was a later addition, dating to the late 2nd and early 3rd centuries, but followed the same alignment as the enclosures. The robbed walls of the south-east corner of the courtyard were located. Two circular stone structures of uncertain purpose were also found.

INTRODUCTION

Northamptonshire Archaeology conducted an archaeological excavation in the footprint of the all-weather football pitch at Kingsbrook School, Deanshanger, Northamptonshire between 2004 and 2005 (Fig 1: NGR SP 7684 3957). The application area lay adjacent to the present school buildings, immediately east and south-east of a Roman villa that was first identified in 1957 when the building work on the original school buildings began.

The 2004-5 excavations covered an area of 120m by 60m and revealed the south-east corner of the villa courtyard, its extensions to the east, associated ditches and two circular stone structures

(Fig 2). The site was partially obscured by remnant medieval furrows and had been severely truncated by modern levelling. On the whole the remains were poorly preserved. A smaller area, the site of a new Sixth Form Block, was excavated concurrently but revealed no Roman features (Brown 2005).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Northamptonshire Archaeology would like to thank Deanshanger Village Historical Society for voluntary involvement in the project fieldwork and for access to unpublished resources. Thanks are also owed to Kingsbrook School, Deanshanger, for involvement in creating an historical learning resource for the community.

The project was managed by Andy Mudd. Ian Fisher and Jim Brown carried out the geophysical survey. The fieldwork was supervised by Jim Brown for the evaluation and excavation, assisted by James Aaronson, Anne Foard-Colby, Rosemary Jones and Ed Taylor, who also helped supervise during the excavation. The metal detecting survey was by Steve Critchley.

BACKGROUND

PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK 1957-1996

This summary of the previous archaeological investigations on the villa site at Kingsbrook School, Deanshanger has been compiled with reference to Flitcroft (2004) and Brown (2004).

In 1957, when the school was being built, arch-



Fig 1 Site location

aeological investigations were directed by Charles Green on behalf of the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works, assisted by the County Architect's staff and members of the Wolverton & District Archaeological Society. The excavations revealed remains of the main stone-founded house and extensive ancillary structures on the north and east sides of a large walled courtyard (Fig 2: NSMR 1170/1/1; 1170/1/3). Further remains were identified in the area outside the courtyard, with evidence for Iron Age settlement to the north of the courtyard (NSMR 1170/0/1). It was considered by Green that the poor condition of the site prior to the school development was due to medieval ploughing, the earthwork evidence of which was evident at the time of the excavation. It was also reported by the architect and the Clerk of Works that soil had been removed from the site during World War II to construct runways at Silverstone Aerodrome (Monk 1982, 2). Subsequent to the 1957 excavations, the present site was bulldozed for the construction of the school playing fields. Trial trenching in 2004 showed that this had caused considerable damage to archaeological deposits in the north of the site and had buried deposits in the south of the site beneath an overburden of re-deposited natural clay and gravel (Brown 2004).

In 1972 excavations directed by Peter Woods took place immediately to the east of the villa and courtyard, exposing further contemporary ancillary buildings, enclosures and structures (Fig 2: Woods 1972; NSMR 1170/0/2; 1170/0/4; 1170/0/5). These excavations were necessitated by the enlargement of the school sports field to include land adjacent to the east that was recorded on aerial photographs held at the SMR (NSMR 7739/004-9). Specific reference was made to these excavations in the interpretation of the current work.

In 1974-5 the west end of the main villa block was exposed again during construction of a school extension, now used as the maths block, and was investigated by Paul Everson (Fig 2: NSMR 1170/1/1).

Records for the excavations in 1957, 1972 and 1974-5 have not been fully reported and less detail of the archaeological findings was available than would be hoped. A brief note of the 1957 excavation was included in the *Wolverton & District Archaeological Society newsletter* complimenting those involved, but no report was made in subsequent issues (Mynard 1958). An account of the 1957 excavation

with plans and photographs was deposited with the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works together with a brief note in the *Journal of Roman Studies* (JRS 1958). The location and general plan of the complex was recorded amongst the notes held at the Northamptonshire SMR together with the report of the 1972 excavation and the site plan (Woods 1972). A summary of the 1957 excavations appears in the *Milton Keynes Journal of Archaeology and History* as part of an interim report for the 1972 works conducted at the lower end of the sports field and was subsequently mentioned in *Britannia* (Brown 1974, 8-9; Wilson *et al* 1973, 294). A report for the 1974-5 works appears to have been produced by Paul Everson in October 1975, but this has not been published (Monk 1982, 53). Records and finds for all these excavations are held at the temporary county store in Daventry (Accession numbers 1995.330; 1995.331).

Aerial photographs of the school, taken in 1990, showed the south-eastern corner of the villa courtyard although these images were obscured by the markings on the sports field (NSMR 7639/004; 7639/005). An apparent linear cropmark, visible running eastward across the fields towards Passenham, was a sewerage main.

Archaeological evaluation was conducted by Northamptonshire Archaeology in 1996 to inform proposals for construction of a classroom extension and associated car-parking facilities directly north-west of the application area (Holmes 1996). The evaluation comprised geophysical survey and three trial trenches. It confirmed the presence of a sparse pattern of small Roman ditches, as detected by the geophysical survey in the area of the car park (Fig 2). The evaluation also demonstrated severe truncation of the features. Two of these ditches were subsequently identified and sampled during the present excavation.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORK 2004-2005

Preliminary geophysical and trial trenching surveys were undertaken in June 2004. These identified the south-east courtyard walls and a small structure, but the site was shown to be poorly preserved.

The investigations also showed that the 1950s building work had involved terracing to create a level surface whereby earth was moved from the northern end of the site and deposited in a bank up to 0.6m thick to the south.

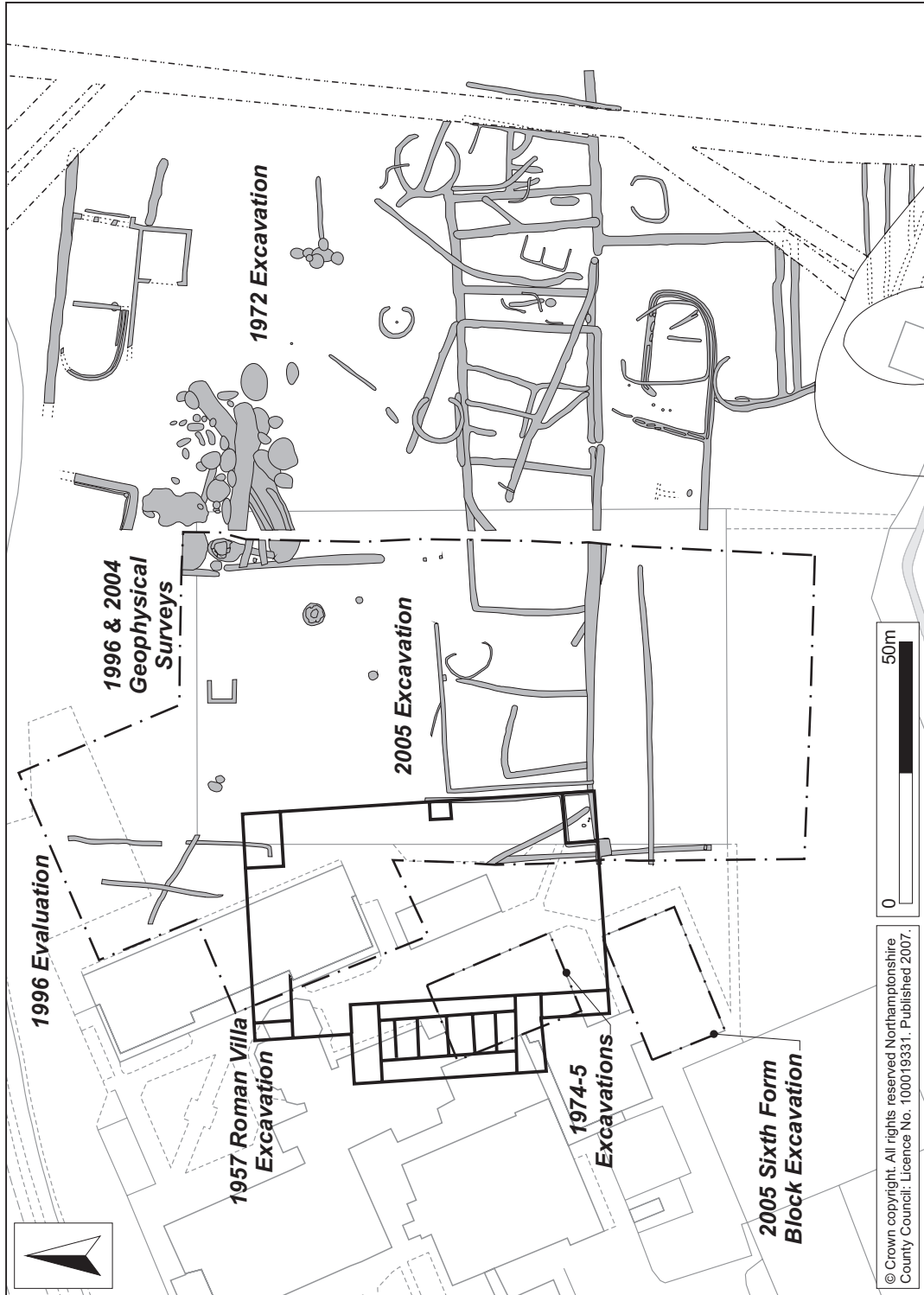


Fig 2 Areas of previous archaeological investigation

TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

The footprint of the all-weather sports pitch was approximately 0.72ha on a level grassed area. The British Geological Survey has mapped the school as lying on a localised outcrop of Boulder Clay above 1st Terrace gravels within a tributary stream valley (the “Kings Brook”) of the River Great Ouse. The stream, with adjacent surface alluvium, lies to the south of the site. Boulder Clay with glacial gravel was encountered between 69.41m OD in the north of the site and 69.21m OD in the south.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The excavations were undertaken with the knowledge that the villa remains had already been severely disturbed by the development of the school. The archaeological objectives were therefore limited to providing as complete a record as possible of the surviving remains, with specific attention directed towards planning and dating features relating to the villa complex and recovering viable environmental samples.

Removal of overburden was carried out using a 360° excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket. A scan of all spoil and machined surfaces was conducted using a metal detector.

Potential archaeological features were hand cleaned and partially excavated in order to clarify their nature. Bulk environmental samples comprising 20 litres of soil each were retrieved from secure contexts considered likely to produce ecofacts such as seeds, charcoal and bone.

Following the work undertaken by Northamptonshire Archaeology, members of the Deanshanger Village Historical Society undertook further excavations on the site with the principal aim of recovering more datable finds. The stratified pottery assemblages from these excavations are included with the current report.

EXCAVATED EVIDENCE

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Archaeological features lay directly under the recent imported soil in the northern part of the site and under clay and gravel redeposited in the 1950s across the southern part. There was no surviving stratigraphy and many of the features were very shallow. A number of archaeological features, evident on the

1957 excavation plan had clearly been lost. These included the northern corner of the villa courtyard and a stone structure beyond.

The 1972 excavation immediately to the east provided a broader picture of activity on the site and specific reference to Woods work has been made in the interpretation of the present results (Fig 2).

SUMMARY OF CHRONOLOGY

The relatively simple sequence of Roman features examined at the site may be broken down into three chronological developments, based upon the stratigraphic relationships and the dates provided by the pottery (Timby, this report):

<i>Period</i>	<i>Activity/evidence</i>
Phase 1, Roman (late 1st - early 2nd centuries AD)	Pits and ditches (Fig 3)
Phase 2, Roman (early - late 2nd century AD)	New rectilinear ditch systems and other features, probably introduced at establishment of villa to the west (Fig 3)
Phase 3, Roman (late 2nd - 3rd centuries AD)	The addition of the walled courtyard (Fig 4)

PHASE 1: ROMAN (THE LATE 1ST CENTURY TO EARLY 2ND CENTURY AD)

Features of this phase seem to have been present on the eastern part of the site, where Woods described features that he assigned to the immediate post-Boudiccan period, AD 60-90 (Woods 1972, 4-6). His evidence was based principally upon four key contexts in two major ditches spanning the width of the 1972 excavation area from east to west and forming the basis for a system of enclosures (Fig 3). One of the ditches that he referred to was ditch 173, although the precision of his dating was not supported by the current excavations. The other ditch was identified as ditch 31, but current evidence suggests that this was slightly later.

Ditch 173

Ditch 173 was orientated east to west with a western terminal. It was largely truncated by ditch 164 from Phase 2 on the same course and seems to be a precursor to the enclosure system (Fig 3).

Ditch 25

Ditch 25 was orientated north to south with a 1.5m staggered opening to the north. It was probably related to the early enclosure pattern and did not link to any of the ditch systems visible on the 1972 plans. The pottery assemblage was relatively early and also large, suggesting occupation nearby.

Ditch 14

In the north-west corner of the site, ditch 14 was aligned on two pits 10 and 12. The continuation of this ditch was observed on the 1996 geophysical survey (Holmes 1996, figs 4 & 5).

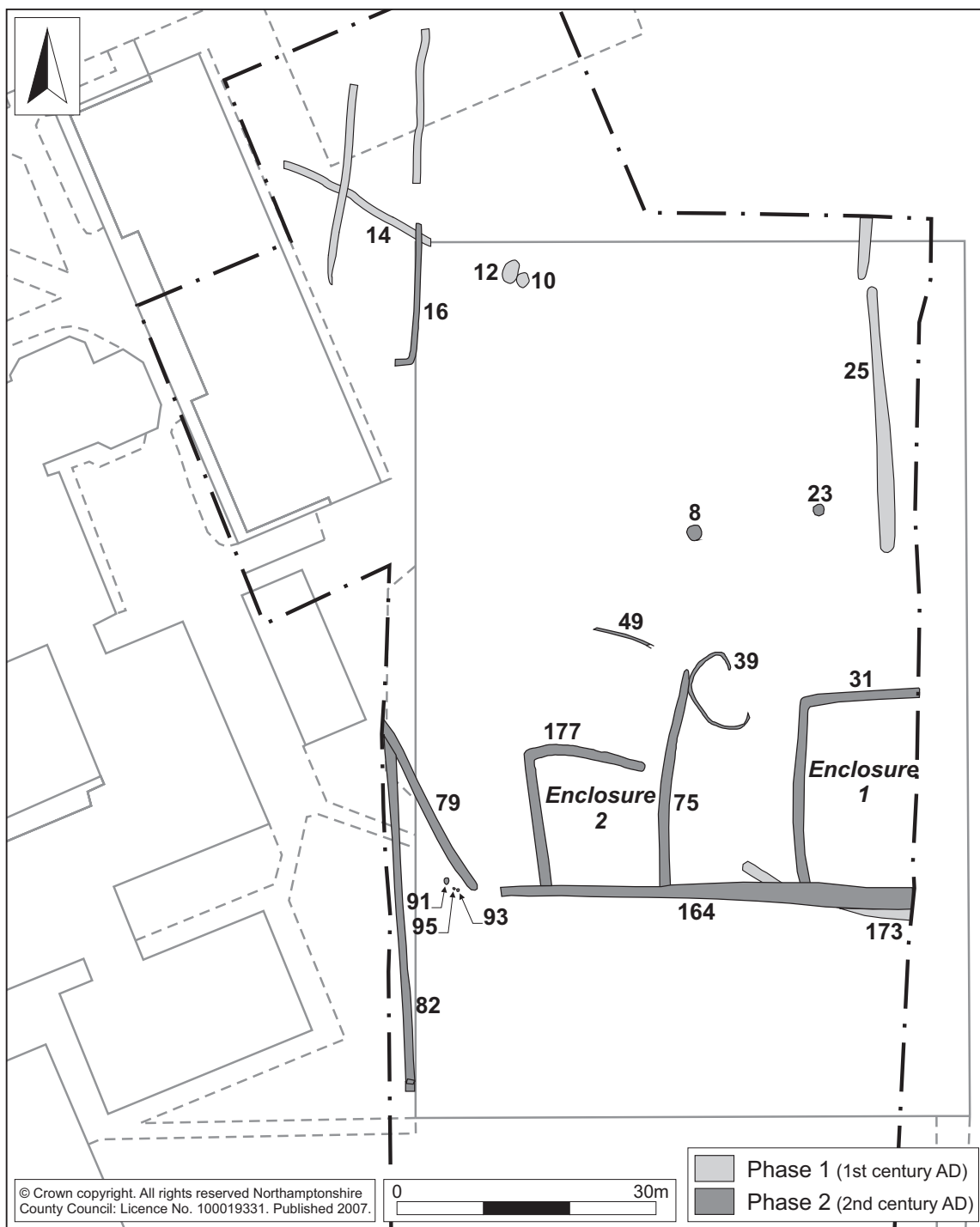


Fig 3 Archaeological features of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD

Pits 10 and 12

Two sub-circular pits, 10 and 12, which produced pottery belonging exclusively to this phase of activity, had been heavily truncated by 1950s landscaping.

PHASE 2: ROMAN (EARLY TO LATE 2ND CENTURY AD)

The majority of the dateable pottery showed that an arrangement of ditches was in continuous use from the end of the 1st century into the 2nd century AD. The ditches formed a series of small enclosures or paddocks matching those shown on the 1972 excavation plan (Fig 3). Examination of the unpublished report of the 1972 excavation and comparison with the present evidence indicated that the paddocks were probably established during the late 1st century AD, but were maintained until the mid- 2nd century AD (Woods 1972, 6). Ditch 31 contained pottery of probable late 2nd century date, which extended the chronology slightly beyond the Trajanic to Hadrianic (AD 90-140) phase suggested by Woods. The current excavation identified two enclosures with a main east - west ditch linking them.

Ditch 164

This broad linear ditch formed the southern boundary to the enclosure system and was directly comparable to Woods' principal ditch (Fig 3; Woods 1972, 6). In its latest phase it cut both enclosure ditches, suggesting the boundary was longer-lived than the enclosures abutting it. It was truncated at the western end by the villa courtyard, which followed the same line. The ditch profile was flat-based and similar in form to the other enclosure ditches, although the differences in recuts suggested the ditch to have been more heavily maintained.

Enclosure 1

Enclosure 1 was rectangular, measuring 24m by 26m, with the eastern side recorded in the 1972 excavations (Fig 2). The enclosing ditch, 31, was examined at five points and found to be generally consistent and to contain frequent fragmented limestone, probably demolition material from a stone structure.

Enclosure 2

The enclosure was rectangular, measuring 16m by 14m, with an entrance in the north-east corner. The east side, ditch 75, was 26m long and extended beyond the northern boundary of the enclosure, as defined by the western ditch, 177. The ditches surrounding Enclosure 2 were not as uniform as those forming Enclosure 1, but the greater variation in width and depth partly resulted from variations in later truncation.

Gully 39

A curvilinear gully was open to the north-east, and formed an irregular sub-rounded enclosure, 8m long by 5m wide. There was a posthole within the perimeter. The gully may have been part of a small enclosure such as a wattle-fenced animal pen.

Ditch 82

This ditch lay at the western extremity of the excavation. The primary fill comprised large unshaped limestone fragments, perhaps placed in the ditch to facilitate drainage into the brook to the south, and this deposit was overlain by firm greyish-brown silty clay. This ditch cut across the line of the southern enclosure boundary, and may have marked an early division between the enclosure system and the villa to the west. It predated ditch 79 which was associated with the enclosure system (Fig 3).

Ditch 79

This ditch ran at an oblique angle to the enclosure system, but terminated at the edge of the southern boundary ditch flanking the enclosures. Three postholes, 91, 93 and 95, close to this junction did not appear to be part of a structure.

Ditch 16

This ditch lay in the north-west corner of the site, but probably formed the eastern side of a sub-rectangular enclosure. The continuation of this ditch northward was observed on the 1996 geophysical and trenching surveys (Holmes 1996, 5).

PHASE 3: ROMAN (LATE 2ND AND 3RD CENTURIES AD)

The features of this phase comprised the south-east villa courtyard wall, 55, and corner structure with other associated walls and features, some of which had not been previously identified (Fig 4). The most prominent features had been recorded prior to the current excavation from parch-marks, the 1957 excavations, geophysical survey and trial trenching (Brown 2004, figs 2 & 7; Monk 1982). This phase was described by Woods as dating to AD 140-240 and the current excavations suggest that this was approximately correct (Woods 1972, 17-18).

Courtyard wall 55

A robbed remnant of stone wall, 55, was uncovered during the evaluation in Trench 3 (Brown 2004, 8). The wall comprised limestone blocks between 100-200mm in size bonded with loose whitish-yellow lime mortar. It was 0.7m wide, with only the bottom 0.23m of stone surviving, and formed the south-east corner of the courtyard perimeter. Within the corner of the courtyard was situated an ancillary building measuring 11m by 8m, excavated by Green in 1957. The surviving walls of the building were identical to those of the courtyard and seemed to have been contemporary. No interior features were evident and the associated rubble from the wall collapse and anticipated occupation deposits had probably been removed in 1957. The survival of the wall only in the southern part of the site indicated that truncation in the northern area had removed the archaeology to a depth exceeding 0.42m.

Pit 197

Immediately south of the southern arm of the courtyard wall was a large pit, 3m square, 197. It was bounded to the north by the courtyard wall, 55. The pit fill comprised frequent large, shaped-limestone blocks up to 350mm in diameter, suggesting that the pit formed a foundation base for a substantial square structure set against the southern courtyard wall (Fig 4). On its west side the pit was bounded by a line of faced stone, and stone that had stood along the south and east sides, had been robbed away leaving yellowish-orange gravel bedding mortar. This feature was not observed during the 1957 excavations.

Walls 45 and 57

Parallel to the east courtyard wall and offset to the east by approximately 2m was a second robbed wall, 57. The robber trench ran northward for 27m from the south-east corner of the courtyard, and then turned at 90° and continued eastward, wall 45. To the east the wall was lost, but it may once have continued further to the east, see postholes 27 and 29, below. The walls therefore formed the western and northern sides of an ancillary enclosure that seems to have been part of an extramural villa landscape, and may have directly replaced the former ditched

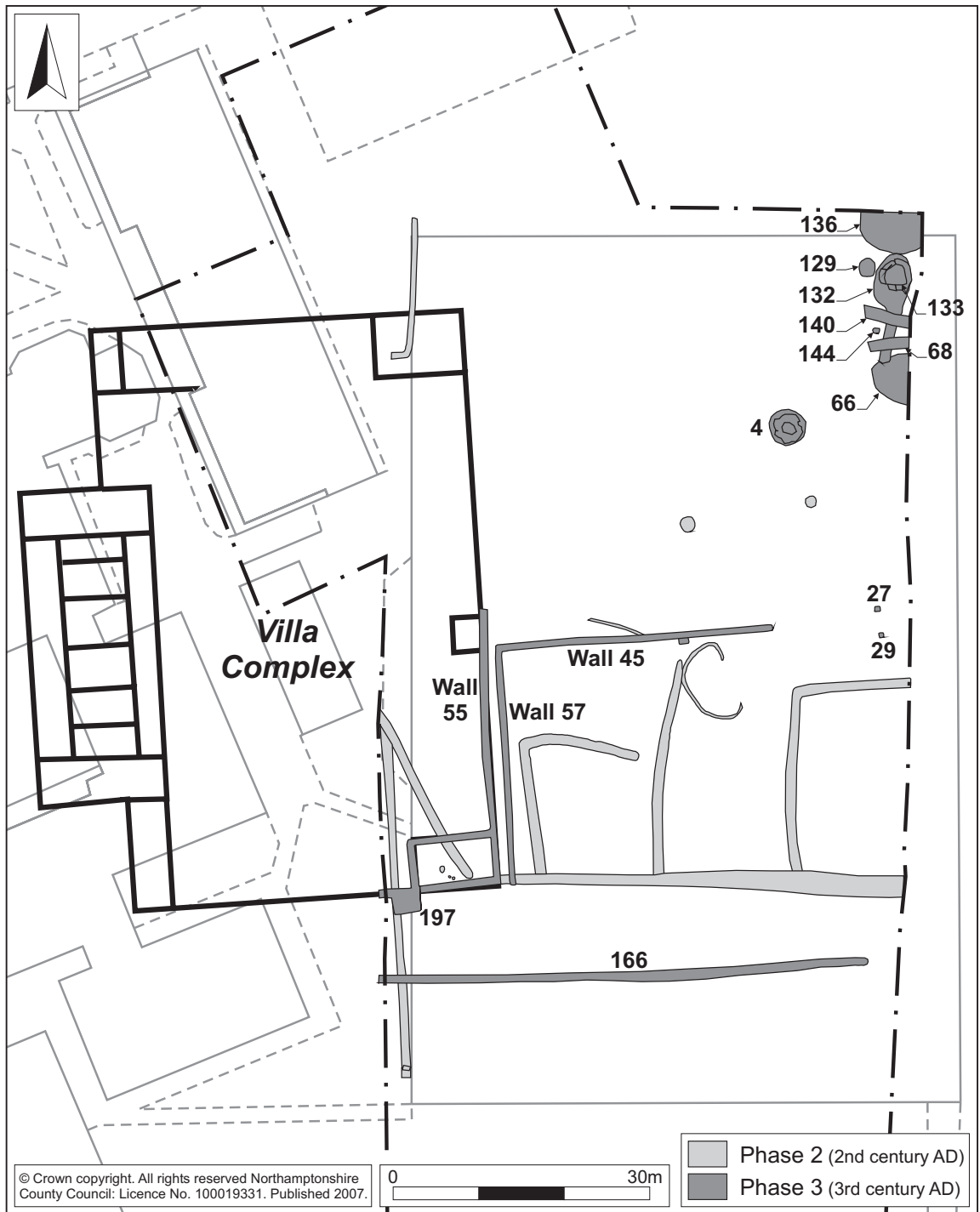


Fig 4 The Roman villa, 2nd and 3rd centuries AD

enclosures (Fig 4). Ditch 164 may have been partially retained as the southern boundary, and the upper, secondary ditch fills did contain later pottery. The space between the courtyard and enclosure walls may have formed a narrow pathway between the two.

Postholes 27 and 29

Postholes 27 and 29 were similar in form, square, approximately 0.5m across and 0.3m deep, packed with large unshaped limestone stones measuring up to 280mm; although posthole 29 was severely damaged by later activity. They straddled the eastward projected line of wall 45, and it is suggested that they may have been the footings for the gate posts or an opening through this wall.

Ditch 166

Ditch 166 ran parallel to the southern side of the enclosures. It may have been related to features further to the east investigated in 1972, including a D-shaped cattle enclosure (Fig 2; Woods 1972, 17).

Ditches 68 and 140 and the area of pits

In the north-east corner of the excavation were two ditches, 68 and 140, which continued eastward into a broad area of pits and ditches that had been observed, but not excavated, in 1957 and were interpreted in 1972 as having been dug as gravel quarries for the construction of the villa (Woods 1972, 23-24). The pottery from their fills indicated a late 2nd century date.

Structures 4 and 133

In the north-eastern area of the excavation were two substantial circular stone structures, 4 and 133. Structure 4 was investigated and recorded intensively whilst its counterpart 133 was sampled and partially excavated to confirm that they were identical.

Structure 4 was the same as the 'oven' examined in 1957. The wall was 0.9m wide by 0.3m deep, with only one course surviving, and the stonework had been laid directly onto the base of a 0.3m deep construction trench (Fig 5 and Plate 1). It was constructed

from large, roughly shaped limestone blocks, measuring up to 470mm by 260mm by 200mm, irregularly arranged with no facing and without bonding material. The lack of structural integrity suggests it was a makeshift structure, and heat reddened stones were observed throughout, even in the middle of the wall, although the natural gravel below and surrounding it showed no signs of intense heat.

Structure 133 was of the same construction with considerably more collapse around it and three to four courses survived. It was 3.58m in diameter, and the wall, 0.7m wide and 0.5m deep, was constructed at the base of a 0.6m deep construction trench. The surviving stonework had not been heat reddened.

The interior of both features was comparable, containing a thick deposit of pinkish sandy clay with occasional groups of small gravel inclusions that was largely sterile of charcoal but contained a few fragments of fired clay (Fig 5, layer 21). Only in structure 4 was this overlain by a thin lens, 0.07m thick, of firm mottled bluish-grey and pinkish-red sandy clay, 56, containing charcoal flecks and grit.

In 1957, Green identified structure 4 as a corn-drying oven, but this is a low temperature process that would not produce intense heating throughout the structure. Woods hypothesised in 1972 that this may have been a smaller version of the type of corn-dryer excavated at Great Casterton 1951-53, although it was not clear that he was referring to structure 4 since he described it as having a pitched stone floor edged with flat slabs, which structure 4 did not have (Woods 1972, 1-2). In any case, the structure lacked the sub-floor flues and stokehole of the Great Casterton oven and corn dryers of other forms (Corder 1961, 19-25). During the 1957 excavations little attention was paid to features external to the villa courtyard, no finds were retained from them and none of the building materials were kept (Monk 1982, 2). Green's daybook mentioned a long oval spill of fired clay that he felt was indicative of a flue, but lying as it did across the line of the medieval ridge and furrow he suspected the dome of the oven to have been demolished and scattered (Monk 1982, 54).



Plate 1 The circular stone structure, looking west

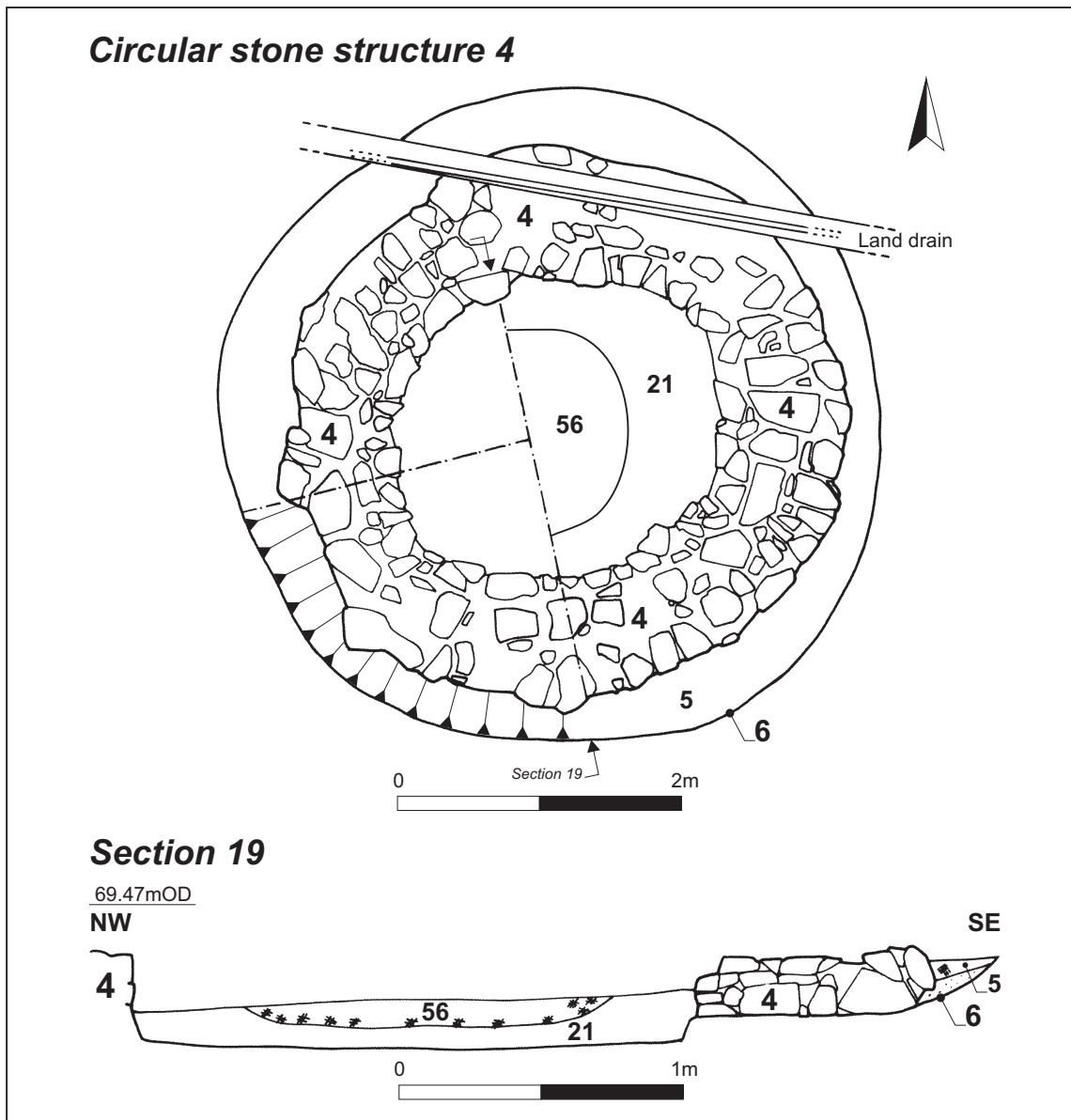


Fig 5 Plan and section of circular stone structure 4

THE ROMAN POTTERY

by Jane Timby

The excavations produced a modest assemblage of 1,071 sherds of pottery weighing c13.2kg with estimated vessel equivalence (EVE) of 8.86. With the exception of four sherds of Iron Age date and two of post-medieval date the entire group dates to the Roman period. The sherds are in relatively good condition, with an overall average sherd weight of 12g and a few instances of joining sherds from single vessels. For Roman material, which is usually quite robust, it is quite fragmented which is typical with waste material from disturbed contexts.

The sherds were sorted into broad fabric categories according to the type and density of the inclusions in the various pastes. Named or traded wares were coded following the system advocated in the National Roman fabric series (Tomber and Dore 1998); the remaining wares were coded by colour, surface finish and dominant inclusions. Rim sherds were coded according to form. The assemblage was fully quantified by sherd count, weight and estimated vessel equivalence (EVE) and the data entered onto an Excel spreadsheet, a copy of which was deposited with the site archive.

FABRICS

Romano-British imports

- 1 Samian; 46 sherds, mostly of Central Gaulish origin. With the exception of several sherds of a Dragendorff 37 decorated bowl and a Dragendorff 36 bowl with a barbotine decorated rim, most of the pieces appear to be from plain vessels that include forms Dragendorff 18/31, 31, 33 and 27.
- 2 Dorset black burnished ware (DOR BB1): Two sherds, both residual to later contexts. (Tomber and Dore 1998, 127).
- 3 Oxfordshire colour-coated ware (OXF RS): Two sherds, one from a Young (1977) type C45 bowl (Tomber and Dore 1998, 176).
- 4 Verulamium white ware (VER WH): Two sherds from ditch 25. One vessel is stamped by the potter Albinus (Fig 6, 7), one of the most prolific mortarium makers in Britain (Hartley 1972, 372). The stamp is impressed across the flange near the spout and has no border. Albinus is thought to have been active in the period AD 60-90 (Hartley 1984, 282). A mortarium fragment of a similar type was recovered with the same stamp during the 1972 excavations (Woods 1972, 4; Tomber and Dore 1998, 154).
- 5 MORT: An unknown mortaria. This sherd of mortaria is moderately soft, pale orange, fabric with pale grog clay pellets. It may have had a red colour-coated surface. The interior surface has small polished, rounded, quartz trituration grit. The fabric is probably 3rd century.

Local Romano-British and unknown wares

- 6 Buff sandy wares (BUFF): Medium buff sandy wares are present, probably from flagons.
- 7 Black sandy wares (BW): Various medium to fine sandy black wares with grey cores. Vessels include rolled rim necked jars, necked jars/bowls, a flanged bowl, a cordoned bowl and lids (Fig 6, 9-10). One sherd has incised 'London-style' decoration and another has comb-impressed decoration.
- 8 Blackened whitewares with sandy fabric (BWHGR): There is a single sherd of white sandy ware with a blackened exterior.
- 9 Sandy grog-tempered wares: Various sandy grog-tempered wares dominate the assemblage. These vary from oxidised wares (OXGR), pale grey wares (GYGR), black wares (BWGR), oxidised wares with a black exterior surface (BOXGR) and handmade storage jars (GRSJ). The pastes are all moderately hard with a sandy feel and contain varying quantities of sub-angular and rounded clay pellets/grog. The oxidised wares are the most common accounting for 21% of the total assemblage by sherd count. Vessels are heavily dominated by jar forms and include versions with narrow necks, everted rims, triangular rims, neckless versions, lid-seated jars and lids. A small number of bowls are also evident (Fig 6, 1-2)
- 10 'Belgic' grog-tempered wares (GROG): A soapy dark brown grog tempered ware of which there are five sherds from a single handmade lid-seated jar.
- 11 Grog and shell-tempered ware (GRSH): Similar to GROG but with sparse fossil shell fragments.
- 12 Grey or orange sandy wares (GW/ OW): Medium sandy, wheelmade grey or orange wares. Greyware vessels include jars with rilled surfaces and triangular rims, narrow necked jars (Fig 6, 8) and a bowl imitating a Dragendorff 30 form. The oxidised wares include lid-seated jars, beakers and bowls/dishes (Fig 6, 9).
- 13 Fine grey/oxidised ware (GYF/ OXIDF): A very fine grey or orange ware. Most of the greyware comes from a single vessel with barbotine dot decoration. The oxidised wares include a ring-necked flagon, a necked everted rim jar and a beaker.
- 14 Lower Nene Valley colour-coated ware (LNV CC): Some 21 sherds of colour-coated ware are present, 13 of these are from a single beaker decorated with a barbotine hunt scene along with a plain-rimmed dish (Tomber and Dore 1998, 118).
- 15 Lower Nene Valley reduced ware (LNV RE): A well-fired pale grey ware with lighter cores. Vessels include dishes with stepped profiles imitating moulded forms (Fig 6, 4), a ring-necked flagon, jars and curved rim dishes.
- 16 Oxidised colour-coated ware (OXIDCC): Three sherds of an oxidised sandy ware were recovered with traces of colour-coat.
- 17 Shelly ware (SHELL1-3): Shelly wares formed a substantial part of the assemblage, 20.5% by sherd count. These include hand-built (SHELL1) and wheelmade (SHELL2), dense shelly wares typical of the midlands, and a sandy ware with sparse fossil shell (SHELL3). Vessels are mainly limited to jars, both lid-seated and necked types, with expanded rims (Fig 6, 5-6).
- 18 White sandy ware (WW): A pimply white sandy ware, probably part of the Lower Nene Valley series.

DISCUSSION

There was probably some Iron Age occupation, and the site chronology has been divided into three Roman phases, with a possible hiatus in the late 2nd century. A small quantity of 4th century material was recovered from the villa in 1957 and from a ditch to the east in 1972, no other 4th century pottery was found in the present excavations (Monk 1982; Woods 1972). This low incidence suggests a relatively short lived occupation during the latest phase.

The earliest material came from ditches 14 and 173, and pits 10 and 12. Together with pottery found to be residual in later features these comprise a total of 158 sherds weighing 1,283g. The latest material comprises 14 sherds of LNV CC, which is unlikely to date much before the late 2nd century. These sherds came from ditch 31 and include 13 sherds from a barbotine decorated hunt cup and a plain-rimmed dish. Ditch 31 produced 123 sherds of pottery for this phase. The much smaller groups from ditches 14, 173 and pit 10 are potentially from the late 1st or early 2nd century AD comprising mainly shelly or grog-tempered wares. Pit 12 is more likely to date after the 2nd quarter of the 2nd century, containing LNV RE.

The pre-courtyard ditch systems produced the largest assemblage of pottery comprising 797 sherds weighing c10 kg. Sherds of LNV CC and LNV RE are still present but in relative terms form a smaller percentage of the assemblage, which is dominated by black sandy wares, 24.5% by sherd count, shelly wares (23.1%) and oxidised grog-tempered wares (22.2%). The overall the assemblage contains wares spanning the later 1st to mid- and later 2nd centuries with the greater emphasis on the first half of the 2nd century when the majority of the paddock enclosures were recut (Woods 1972, 6-9).

The largest single assemblage came from ditch 25 comprising 560 sherds, some 70% of the phase 1 assemblage. Of note in this group are ring-necked flagons and moulded dishes in grey sandy ware (LNV RE) and oxidised wares, black wares with London-style and comb impressed decoration, barbotine dot decorated fine greyware beaker, some samian, several lid-seated shelly jars and the stamped Verulamium mortarium (Fig 6, 7).

The foundation pit 197 and the courtyard walls produced a modest assemblage of 74 sherds, over half of which is samian. Of the samian, 38 sherds come from just two vessels; a decorated bowl, Dragendorff 37; and a dish Dragendorff 18/31-31. The latest sherds comprise a single piece of LNV CC, an unknown mortaria and one sherd of OXF RS, suggesting of a 3rd century date. Clearly much of the material is 2nd century so it is possible that this may have been an intrusive piece introduced during the backfill of the 1957 excavation or a potential demolition date associated with robbing of the walls. The high percentage of samian suggests a fairly high status establishment but this distorts the overall totals such that little else can be deduced from the overall group.

Looking at the assemblage overall, samian is quite well represented at over 4% by sherd count, suggesting that the occupants enjoyed Roman style decoration. Based on EVEs, the forms are dominated by jars at 65.4%, followed by bowls/dishes at 22.1%. The remaining 12.5% is an assortment of mortaria, cups, beakers, flagons and lids. The higher status suggested by the samian is tempered by the complete lack of other continental imports. It is a pattern further emphasised by the low incidence of regional imports and appears highly indicative of a reliance on locally produced ceramics.

CATALOGUE OF ILLUSTRATED VESSELS (FIG 6)

- 1 Wide-mouthed bowl with everted rim. Grog and shell-tempered ware
Pale orange surfaces
- 2 Wide-mouthed shallow bowl with everted rim. Sandy grog-tempered, oxidised ware
- 3 Bevelled rim jar. Sandy grog-tempered, oxidised ware
- 4 Shallow dish with internal moulding. Lower Nene Valley reduced ware
- 5 Lid-seated jar. Wheelmade shelly ware
- 6 Lid-seated jar. Sandy ware with sparse fossil shell
- 7 Verulamium stamped mortaria. Verulamium white ware
- 8 Narrow necked jar. Greyware
- 9 Oxidised sandy bowl with rouletted decoration. Oxidised ware
- 10 Wheelmade cordoned bowl with a sooted interior. Sandy grog-tempered black ware
- 11 Lid. Black sandy ware

THE CERAMIC BUILDING MATERIALS

by Pat Chapman

ROMAN ROOF TILE

The assemblage is fragmentary comprising 114 mainly abraded sherds that weigh 3,462g. Approximately 75% of the sherds came from ditch 82, at the western end of the site and therefore the nearest to the villa. Nearly half of the assemblage comprises fragments measuring no more than 30mm by 30mm by 20mm, many being smaller.

The only identifiable fragments are six *tegulae*, eight *imbrices* and a fragment of either a *pilae* or brick. A tile fragment from pit 66 has been deliberately cut into a triangle with a base of 90mm and two equal sides of 100mm. A fragment from the modern dumped levelling has been cut into a small rectangle, c35mm by 25mm, with chamfered sides, possibly for use in a mosaic.

There are two main fabrics. One is orangey-brown silty clay, sometimes with a broad medium grey core with fine crushed grog and occasional gravel inclusions up to 8mm long. The other is pinkish-brown fine sandy clay, slightly streaky, also with an occasional broad medium grey core and some fine crushed grog inclusions. The other two fabrics are of orange sandy clay and a medium to dark reddish brown sandy clay. Two *imbres* fragments from the fill of ditch 82 are in a silty brown fabric with a blackened, perhaps painted, upper surface.

As the assemblage is so fragmentary no attempt was made to compare the tile with that from neighbouring villas. A full catalogue is maintained in archive.

BRICK

The corner of one brick was found in ditch 82. It is 43mm thick and well abraded. It has orange coarse sandy fabric with inclusions of some fine crushed grog and occasional gravel up to 10mm in length.

FIRED CLAY

This small assemblage of 32 fragments weighs 1,847g and contains two distinct types of fired clay. The material from structure 133 is reddish-brown friable vesicular clay with occasional groups of small gravel inclusions or individual flint up to 30mm long.

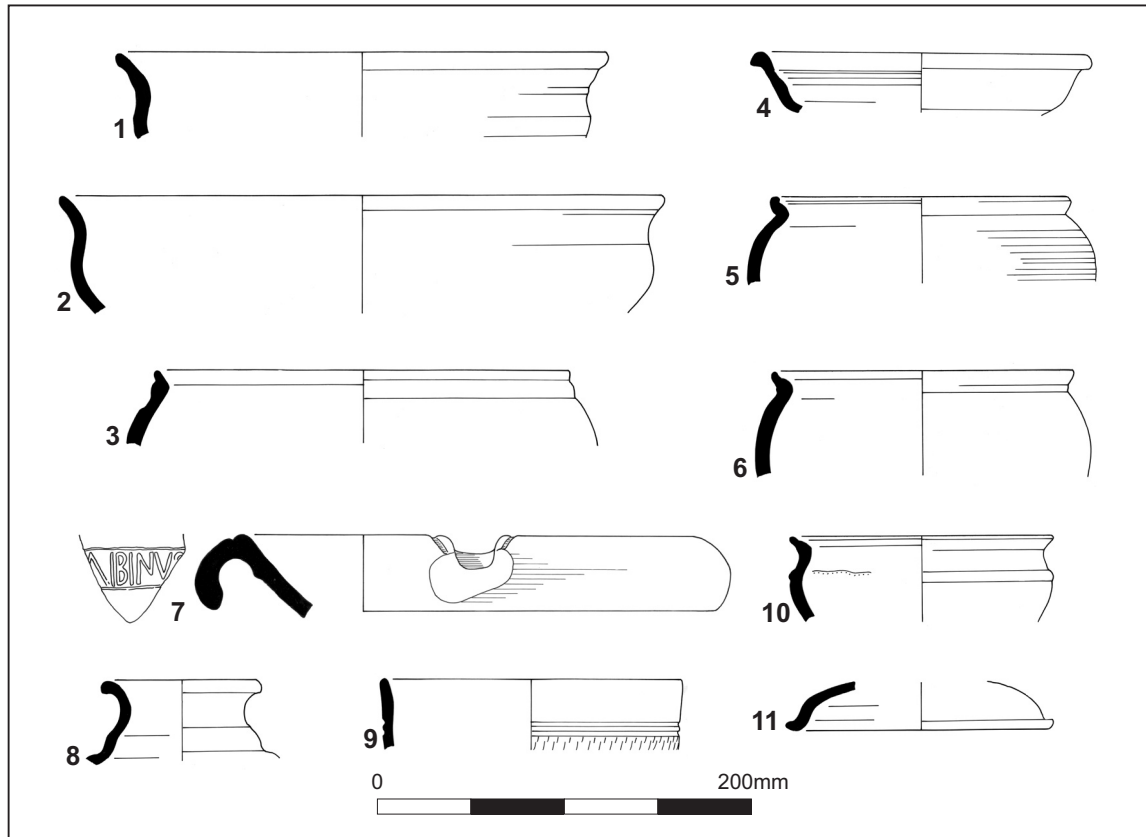


Fig 6 The Roman pottery

This group comprises four large amorphous lumps, the largest measuring 100mm by 130mm by 40mm, with the rest being considerably smaller pieces. These are the only finds discovered within the feature.

The remaining fired clay from ditches 25 and 79 is typically hard fired to a reduced grey with a dull red surface and some flint inclusions up to 5mm long. The red surface is fairly smooth and the edges are defined. The material contains small impressions left by organic constituents and is most likely from a structure.

THE COINS

by Ian Meadows

All four of the coins that were found were residual in later contexts except for one that was found in pit 66. They are all common examples of 3rd century issues. The number of barbarous copies is typical of the period when the need to maintain money supply allowed the mass production of irregular issue for circulation. The individual coins were in their day of little value and their loss a frequent occurrence. A catalogue is included with the archive.

OTHER FINDS

by Tora Hylton

The excavation produced 16 Roman finds, in four material types; copper alloy, iron, lead and glass. Each object has been described and measured, and a descriptive catalogue is retained in the site archive. Twelve of the objects were recovered from stratified Roman deposits. Those of specific interest include a copper alloy brooch and two iron knives. In addition there are six nails, two fragments of undiagnostic vessel glass and a lead pot repair.

The brooch, recovered from ditch 25, is a “dragonesque” fibula with one terminal missing (Plate 2). It comprises a plain plate with two arms forming a zoomorphic S-shape. The pin, now missing, would have been attached to the neck, and the presence of a small scar on the chest indicates that there would have been a link between the chin and chest, helping to secure the pin in place. The brooch is decorated with a circular motif flanked by two recessed panels which would originally have been inlaid with enamel. Stylistically dragonesque brooches display Celtic traits and they were in use cAD 50-150. They are predominantly found in northern Britain and are thought to have been manufactured



Plate 2 The “dragonesque” fibula brooch (36mm long)

in England, although they have been recorded as far away as Hungary, France and Germany (Hattatt 1982, 153).

The iron knives were recovered from ditches 16 and 68. One is complete, it has a short wide symmetrical blade which widens slightly along its length and then curves inwards towards the tip. It resembles Mannings’ Type 21 (Manning 1985, fig 29, 21). A similar example was recovered from Bancroft Villa, Milton Keynes (Skinner 1994, fig 164, 219). The other knife is incomplete, the back of the blade is horizontal and the cutting edge is damaged and displays similarities to Mannings’ Type 11 (Manning 1985, fig 28, 11a, b).

THE FAUNAL REMAINS

by Karen Deighton

A total of 45 identifiable fragments of animal bone were recovered from 18 contexts by hand and included material from sieved soil samples. The assemblage is dominated by cattle, followed by smaller numbers of sheep/goat, horse and chicken. Unusually no pig is present. The assemblage is too small for statistical analyses or any hypotheses to be made regarding body part representation. The material represents a small assemblage of common Roman domesticates.

A high level of canid gnawing is present on 26% of bones which could suggest that smaller bones were under-represented in the assemblage. Only one instance of butchery is present. The assemblage is subject to fairly high fragmentation and only

eight complete bones survive. Two fresh breaks were observed indicating fragmentation during or after excavation. No evidence of burning is present. Two neonatal elements are present, both from cattle; a distal metatarsal and a proximal tibia, and both from ditch 25. Three cattle mandibles were recovered, but only one can be assigned to a single age group (30-36 months).

The dominance of cattle is typical for the Roman period and is thought to be linked to an intensification of cereal production (Grant 1989). Other Roman sites at Bicester Park, Oxfordshire and Wootton Fields School, Northampton also showed a dominance of cattle (Deighton 2004; 2005). Bicester Park had no pig, whilst Wootton had only 1.8% of the species. Comparisons are tentative due to the small sizes of the assemblages involved but the pattern at Deanshanger is reminiscent of these other contemporary sites. The lack of wild species suggests no reliance on wild resources and is not unusual for the Roman period.

DISCUSSION

THE DATING EVIDENCE

Four sherds of Iron Age pottery were recovered as residual material in Roman features and no Iron Age occupation features were identified. There was no confirmed record of Iron Age occupation under the later villa building and it was not known whether

the circle of postholes mentioned by Green in his daybook of the 1957 excavation were of 1st century or earlier date, but the presence of 'Belgic'-type hand-built calcite-gritted pottery would seem to indicate early domestic type structures in this area pre-dating the recorded stone buildings (Woods 1972, 12; Monk 1982, 3). On present evidence the villa therefore appears to have been created adjacent to an area of at least late Iron Age settlement.

The earliest identifiable occupation involved the laying out of the pattern of enclosures. Woods identified a 'post-Boudiccan' phase around AD 60-90. This specific evidence was not encountered in the present excavations since most of the ditches investigated had been maintained well into the mid-2nd century AD. It was not clear whether a villa building was present at this time but it was worth noting that roof tile was found in Phase 1 which suggests that a Roman-style structure was present somewhere on the site.

The earliest recorded dwelling appeared to have been the large roundhouse excavated by Woods and dated AD 90-140. It was the largest and earliest of three such dwellings, with evidence for two hearths and substantial domestic materials. Structures of this type were commonly found on villa estates until well into the 2nd century AD and there was no reason to suppose it was a direct precursor to the villa building. It was more likely to have been a dwelling for agricultural labourers.

There can be little doubt that a villa-style building was present in the 2nd century AD, before the courtyard wall and associated structures, since there was abundant roof tile and also limestone rubble from features of this phase. Most of the enclosure ditches in the current excavation belonged with this phase. The stone foundation of the villa courtyard and associated features were ascribed to the late 2nd century AD onwards. Some of these foundations cut the earlier enclosure ditches, and it seemed likely that they had been directly replaced by a partially walled enclosure.

It would seem from dated finds in the robber trenches that the courtyard wall and ancillary walls had been dismantled by the end of the 3rd century and possibly earlier than that. The marked change may indicate the demise of the farming economy of the villa since there was no evidence that any of the enclosures or ancillary structures were in use. It was not clear why this happened, but it would seem that the change was quite sudden and distinct. The evidence for robbing

of stone gave the impression that stone was needed for works elsewhere and was taken from redundant structures implying decay. No 4th-century pottery was recovered during the current excavations and a mere handful of sherds were recovered from a single ditch in the 1972 excavations. Yet the pottery from the main villa building, excavated in 1957, included a significant assemblage of what was identified as late colour-coated wares showing that the villa was still occupied (Monk 1982, 54). The nature of the occupation appeared to have been rather different than before but the evidence on which to base any further speculation was lacking.

It was unclear whether a hiatus in the 3rd century AD was part of a wider pattern. At Bancroft villa in Milton Keynes, a discontinuity in occupation was identified at this time, although the villa was rebuilt in the 4th century AD (Williams & Zeepvat 1994). Not far away at Hill Farm, Haversham, much smaller excavations indicated a cessation of occupation at a probable villa in the late 2nd or 3rd century AD (Mudd 2005).

THE NATURE AND LAYOUT OF THE FEATURES

At its height, in the mid- to late 2nd century AD, the layout of the villa, courtyard and associated enclosures had many typical features of design which were intended to show off the principal façade of the residence and demarcate space for domestic and non-domestic living. The east-facing villa and courtyard were arranged quite symmetrically, and the pattern of enclosures, which were the principal features of interest further east, clearly respected both the alignment and symmetry of the principal dwelling. Since the enclosures were demonstrably earlier than the villa courtyard, it was likely that they were laid out with respect to an earlier version of the villa complex.

The occupants of the villa would have enjoyed a prospect from the top of the hill viewing the land to the east. A clear division of space would have been evident to anyone walking from the villa to the lower fields as they passed first from the villa building into the immediate courtyard. It was unclear what the courtyard space was used for, it may have contained a formal garden or alternatively more practical features related to the activities of the household. There may have been a kitchen garden, a water source and ground for keeping small stock such as chickens or geese.

Beyond this was an ancillary yard space associated with the management of the land surrounding the villa. This linear progression appears to reflect the concept of inner and outer enclosures found, for instance, at Gorhambury villa (Neal *et al* 1990). Here, from the late 1st century AD onwards, the outer enclosure contained paddocks flanking an axial trackway which stretched over a 150 m from the villa itself. The outer enclosure also contained buildings of circular and rectangular form (Neal *et al*, op. cit. figs 47, 56, 73 & 96).

Outside the villa courtyard at Deanshanger, on the lower ground to the east, lay numerous enclosures with means to shelter and water livestock, a pond liable to flooding, land suitable for pasture, at least one rectangular building with an apsidal end and three circular houses incorporating elements of both timber and stone in their structures (Fig 2; Woods 1972, 13-14, 17-22). It was probable that the houses were the homes of people in the service of, or kinsmen of, the villa owners and possible that they were mainly involved in the care of the livestock. The largest of the roundhouses was of a type similar to those excavated at Williams Way, Wollaston, a site identified as a small Romano-British farmstead of low standing (BNFAS 1972, 37-38).

There was little doubt that the enclosures were for agricultural tasks connected with the economic basis of the villa, but there was no direct evidence for their functions, and comparable instances of this ladder-like pattern connected to a villa are uncommon. It was possible that the enclosures were horticultural or other specialist agricultural plots. Walled kitchen gardens were identified from archaeobotanical remains at Bancroft villa near Milton Keynes, lying some distance from the main villa residence (Williams & Zeepvat 1994, fig. 66 Enclosure 1208; fig. 86 Enclosure 990). By their position and size these seemed to have been economic ventures rather than providing produce for immediate domestic consumption. At Deanshanger, it was alternatively possible that the enclosures were for livestock or they may have served a mixed farming economy.

Agricultural features on the 1972 site included a T-shaped corn-drying oven to the south and a large stone-founded building interpreted as a barn with an annexe, to the north (Woods 1972, 22-23, 25-27). The walls of the 'barn' were uniformly 0.7m thick with two courses of stone and completely without a tumble of stone, suggesting that they were dwarf walls acting as sills in support of a timber upper

structure (Woods 1972, 25). This structure should have lain within the northern part of the 2005 excavation area, but had presumably been lost to the terracing.

THE MATERIAL GOODS AND CONTACTS

The finds from the site provide the most information with regard to the status of the villa and the contacts that it had. Of these the pottery is the most ubiquitous. Assemblages were collected from the excavations in 1957, 1972, 1974-5, 1996, and 2004-5 but comparisons of the data by quantification were made problematic by the different excavation strategies employed and removal of a large proportion of material prior to the more recent archaeological surveys.

The overall impression from the current excavations reiterates the conclusion reached by Monk that the villa was not a luxurious establishment (Monk 1982). With the exception of the samian, which was surprisingly common, no continental imported pottery came from the current work and only three sherds were recovered in 1957 from the villa itself; one piece of Spanish amphora, a piece of North Gaulish fabric and a piece of Cologne fabric (Monk 1982, 54; Timby, this report). The samian was all of common vessel types, generally undecorated and lacking unique character. The sherds recovered in 1957 numbered 52, estimated at 23 vessels, of which three were decorated. This represented 5.9% of the 877 sherds from the excavation, a not dissimilar proportion to the 2005 assemblage (Monk 1982, table 2). Monk also noted the dominance of the local pottery fabrics amongst the assemblage, as was confirmed in the current excavations (Monk 1982, 55-56; Timby, this report). This may be largely attributed to the widespread availability of local ceramic goods since the region had one of the densest distributions of early Roman pottery kilns in the country. The regional imports were for the most part Oxfordshire and Nene Valley wares.

Non-pottery finds were scarce. There were small quantities of roof tile but no box flue tile or tesserae, and only one fragment of a possible *pila* or brick. There was a general lack of vessel glass, or personal possessions such as brooches, pins and beads, and very few coins. The finds from the earlier excavations have not been systematically quantified and an appraisal of them was not possible. Woods, however, noted the presence of several additional items such as a few pieces of box-flue tile, a dolphin

brooch, two iron fire-dogs, an iron tyre, a quern and several oyster shells. Green also recorded oysters and a fragment of a glass bowl. None of these objects were remarkable and do not alter the picture of a relatively mundane villa establishment.

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