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A DETACHED ROMANO-BRITISH BATH-HOUSE AT BRAISHFIELD, NEAR ROMSEY, HAMPSHIRE

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with contributions from S M Davies, R Foot, S J Langford, D F Mackreth, J M Maltby and J R Timby

SUMMARY

The excavation of a detached bath-house building revealed occupation dating between 50 BC and AD 100, which included a masonry grain-drying oven or kiln. A flint masonry bath-house was built in the late third or very early fourth century AD. Although enlarged and modified it was demolished within 50 years. Research work in the area shows that this bath-house was part of a major villa, and this complex is discussed in relation to other rural settlements of the period in the locality.

INTRODUCTION

Excavation commenced on this site in 1975 following the discovery of a scatter of Roman objects brought up by the plough. The site, which was unploughed until the 1950s, lies approximately 1700m to the north of Pucknall Farm, Braishfield at SU 382265 some 90m OD on the gentle westward slope of the Broom Hill plateau (Fig 1). The topsoil of the site varied between 100mm and 150mm, and overlaid a dense yellow clay 400mm–1m deep which capped a solution-eroded deposit of Upper Chalk. Excavation was carried out manually by local volunteers over three seasons, and general advice and guidance was provided by Kevin Stubbs, then Field Director of the Test Valley Archaeological Committee. The site was back-filled with the excavated material. The site records were made by J Rogers, the final site plan by S M Davies, and this report written by J S F Walker on the basis of those records and with the desire to publish the results as far as they were understood.

Aims

The main aim of the excavation was to elucidate the history of this part of a larger villa complex. Excavation was limited to those layers threatened with destruction by ploughing or essential to an understanding of the basic stratigraphy of the site.

SITE DESCRIPTION

Phase IA

The earliest features consisted of two pits (F138 and F41) mainly filled with brown loam and U-shaped in section, and three other features F136, F137 and F150. The bottom of F41 was filled with burnt flint capped by a fine silty loam, whilst F136, F137 and F150 were loam-filled postholes, all overlain by burnt flints.

Phase IB

A layer (30) of rounded flint cobbles overran F136, F137 and F150, and was in turn partially overlain by a deep layer of compressed loam (14). These layers were capped by a spread of white mortar (15) which contained the pseudomorph of a timber (F16), 100mm x 400mm. This layer was cut through by the wall of the later building F17).

Belonging within this phase was F50, a possible grain-drying oven, with walls of random-coursed, knapped flint rubble lined with heat-discoloured chalk blocks set in a white mortar. At the end of the flue (F53) was a limestone block, shaped for use as a springer for an arch. The floor of the structure consisted

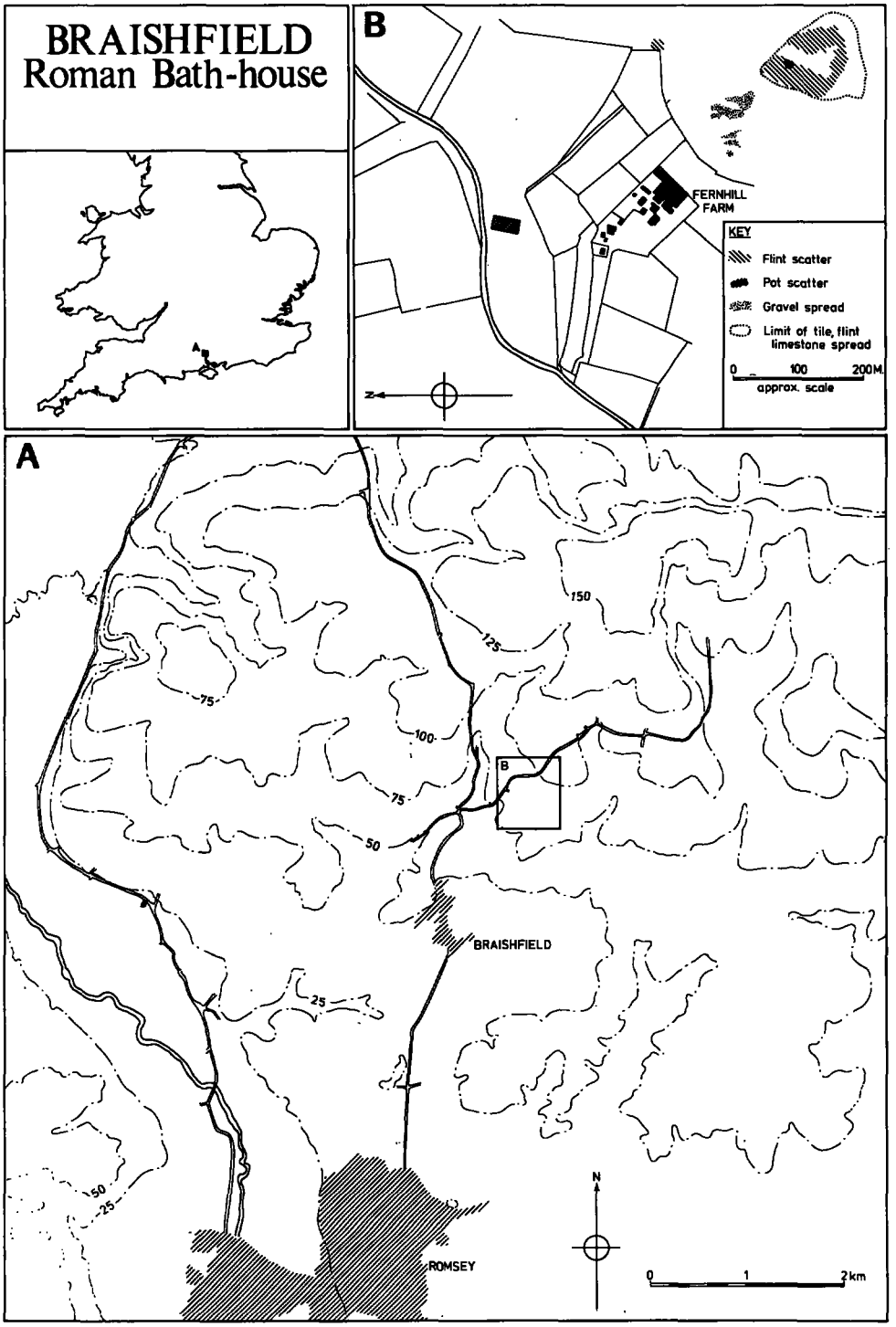

Fig 1. Braishfield Roman bath-house: location. Area X (see p77) is immediately west of the excavation (the hatched rectangle); Area Y is shown in dotted outline.

of ragged limestone flags. Immediately adjoining this structure were two layers of clay (13 and 129) which were overlain by a spread of burnt pink mortar.

Phase II

This phase opened with the construction of a simple rectangular building consisting of rooms 1 to 5. The walls were made of unknapped, coursed flint rubble with a 80mm thick tile 'damp course' as the fourth course, all the building materials being set in a yellow-white mortar. The exterior surfaces of the walls were unevenly finished, whereas the interior surfaces, which survived to a height of 700mm in places, were carefully pointed.

It was clear, from ash-free tile impressions, that rooms 1 and 2 had each originally contained 16 *pilae*, mounted on mortar floors that dished towards the centres of the rooms. These rooms were heated by a furnace (F60). Whether there was an enclosing room around this feature is not known, as the phase III walls and the semi-sunken nature of room 6 would have destroyed all evidence of any earlier walls.

Room 5 contained an apse in this phase that was possibly divided off from the rest of the room by a wall (F9).

Phase III

Room 6: the walls (F20, F24, F25) and the step-foundations in the south-east corner of this semi-sunken room were of coursed, unknapped flint set in a rough mortar. The walls butted up to the south wall of the bath-house (F10, F11). The original bedrock chalk-marl floor of this room was overlain by a spread of dark loam (123) which was in turn covered by a mortar floor (78) that was overrun by another loam spread (76).

In the south-east corner of the room was a U-profile pit (F120) filled with black silty loam and slag and overlain by layer 123. Contemporary with layer 76 was another U-profile pit (F106), again filled with black loam and slag. Also present within this final phase was a posthole (F141) and a simple hearth (F140) consisting of three horizontal tiles and two vertical tiles against the southern wall (F24). These tiles were heavily burnt and covered with a thin deposit of ash.

Rooms 1 and 2: two semi-circular apses were added to these rooms, as well as a chalk floor. At this stage walls F11 and F12 were reduced to a single course in height. The single surviving tile (Fig 2) in the southern apse indicates that these new structures contained a hypocaust. The main southern flue (F60) was also extended with flint and tile walls into room 6.

Room 7: this room was added during this phase, and consisted of coursed, unknapped flint walls with Upper Greensand quoins enclosing a raft of large, unknapped mortared flint. In the centre of the room was a pool of complex shape (F190). The walls of this pool were built of horizontal tiles that were plastered on their exterior face. Leading away from the pool, to the west, was a white-plastered drain capped by horizontal tiles.

Rooms 3, 4 and 5: during this phase the upper portions of walls F22 and F23 were rebuilt in flint, without a tile course. Wall F9 was reduced to one course and a hypocaust added to rooms 3 and 5. These hypocausts consisted of chalk rubble 'islands' faced with carefully dressed chalk blocks. In the centre of the room 5 system was a small, circular depression (F7) of unknown function. Re-used architectural stone fragments were found in the east wall of the north-west flue (see below). The floor between the flues was raised by 10–20mm of mortar in this phase, and a fragment of *opus signinum* survived the phase IV robbing in the north-west corner of the room. Room 3 was now connected to the main system by an opening into room 2 (F16) and room 5 was given a rough flue into room 6. Traces of ash (91) were discovered in places at the bottom of the channels in room 5.

Phase IVA

The enlarged final bath-house contained over 35m^3 of demolition rubble that consisted of fragments of flint, limestone, mortar and tile in a sandy-loam matrix. This material (33, 18, 10) filled the rooms of the building; only the top

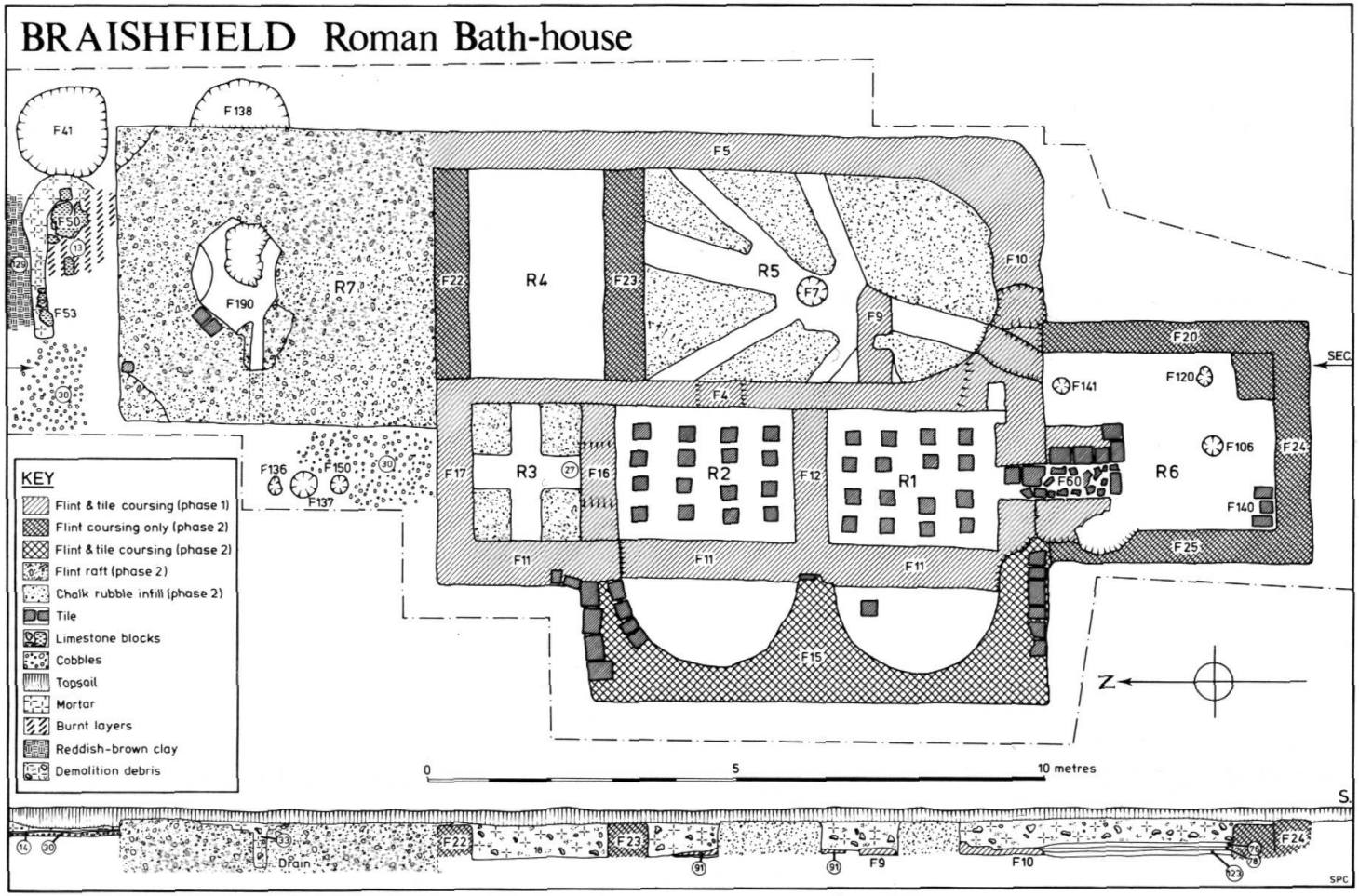

Fig 2. Braishfield Roman bath-house: excavation plan and section.

filling of the hypocaust channels, which contained lenses of dark soil in room 5, was different.

Phase IVB

Traces of robbing trenches were discovered, filled with redeposited debris, in the two northern corners of room 7. These trenches had evidently been dug to remove the greensand quoins, only one of which survived.

THE FINDS

Most of the finds were randomly distributed among demolition debris of the bath-house, and are summarised briefly below. More detailed archive reports are available for the metalwork, ceramics, building materials and animal bone.

METALWORK

Copper Alloy

The Brooches by D F Mackreth
(Fig 3.1 and 2)

Made from a copper alloy, both brooches belong to the Nauheim Derivative type, and are from F41 and F138 (phase I) respectively.

1. The spring is of the usual four-coiled, internal chord form. The bow has a flat section and on the front are to be seen, on the right, the poorly executed traces of a double row of rectangular punch-marks; on the left are the distinct remains of a single row of the same kind of punch-mark with, perhaps, faint signs of a second row. The lower bow with the catch-plate is missing.
2. The spring is the same as in the last, and the section of the bow is narrower, plain, and bevelled on either side both on the front and back. The lower bow with the catch-plate is missing.

Neither brooch shows any evidence of having been made before the Roman Conquest.

The second brooch is plain whilst the first with its punched decoration belongs to the author's 'Lowbury Hill' group. Though the dating is problematical, it is perhaps best to consider that its *floruit* of manufacture ran from *c* 45 to *c* 60 AD. The second brooch is not closely datable, but the general type dates to the last decade of the first century AD in Central Southern England (Cunliffe 1971, Down 1974, 1978)

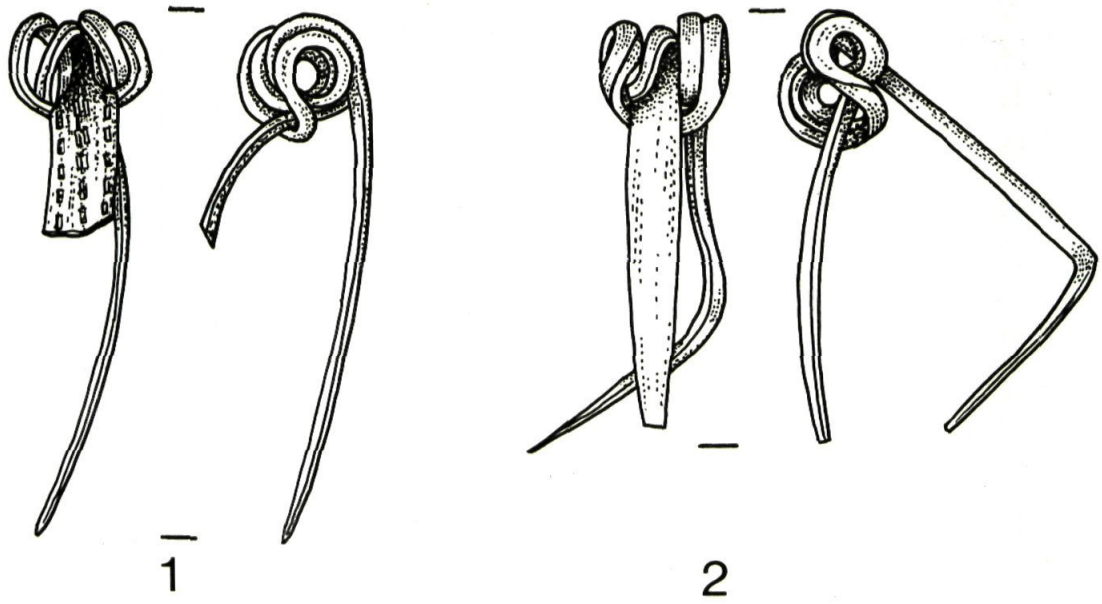

Fig 3. Braishfield Roman bath-house: Nauheim brooches, scale 2:1.

Other Objects
A fragment of a twisted wire bracelet was found in room 7. It consisted of three twisted wires, each *c* 1mm to 1.5mm in diameter.

The Ironwork by S Langford

The majority of the ironwork from the site, all of which is badly corroded, consisted of 134 nails which were found in the phase IV demolition debris. Virtually all are square-sectioned, and vary in length from 10mm to 95mm. Several show signs of having been extracted for re-use. Other iron objects include a number of small flat fragments of iron plate, a large angle-iron, and three bent iron strips, probably fragments of timber- or door-fittings, as well as half a dozen fragmentary remains of boot cleats. Half a pair of plain iron shears was found in room 5.

THE POTTERY by Susan M Davies and Jane R Timby

A small quantity of pottery was recovered from the excavation of the bath-house, dividing broadly into a small group of early material probably mid to late first century, or slightly later, associated with pre-bath-house activity on the site; and a large group of late third and fourth century types, associated with the building itself.

The early material was found mainly in layers 17, 30, 33, 51, 62, 79, 129 and 133, but also occurred in the fill of the bath-house itself along with the later pottery. Where identifiable, the material conforms to standard early types such as beadrim jars and necked jars, but is generally so fragmentary that it cannot be illustrated. One mid-first century samian sherd bearing a stamp was found, dated AD 40–50 (see archive catalogue). Because of the small amount of the early pottery and its poor condition, little can be said about it other than it was present.

By far the largest part of the assemblage was formed by the late third/fourth century material, which again contains types standard to the area, including products of the New Forest and Oxfordshire kilns, and possibly some from the Alice Holt potteries, as well as the ubiquitous grey coarsewares. Among the New Forest types are shallow colourcoat bowl forms, indented beakers and mortaria, various jar forms, and a bag-bodied beaker. The Oxfordshire products are generally more fragmentary and abraded than the New Forest wares, and include colourcoat mortaria, straight-sided or flanged bowls, and shallow bowls with footrings.

The material cannot be dated more closely than late third to fourth century, though some of the New Forest wares appear to be fourth rather than third. Only one example, a small bag-shaped jar reminiscent of Fulford's greyware type 26 (Fulford 1975a), can definitely be said to be post-350. The large flange-rim pie-dishes could also go on well into the fourth century. Thus the dating is certainly not precise enough to give more than a general late third/fourth century date to the bath-house, and individual phases are difficult to distinguish.

The fabrics of the pottery are common in the area, and are predominantly sandy. Rare examples of flint-tempering occur in the early period, notably on fragments of beadrim jars, and there are also several body sherds with grog-temper. This latter fabric occurs both with the early material and more commonly with the late third and fourth century groups. The fabric is common in south Hampshire, and a number of production centres, possibly the work of itinerant potters, have been postulated (Fulford 1975b, 286, 293 for a full discussion of this type of hand-made pottery and its origin).

STONEWORK by J S F Walker

Dr D P S Peacock kindly advised on the source of the stone fragments from the site.

Phase I
A small fragment of rotary Upper Greensand quernstone from the Hythe Beds, Sussex.

Phase III
A roof finial of Jurassic oolitic limestone possibly from the Bath area (Fig 4).

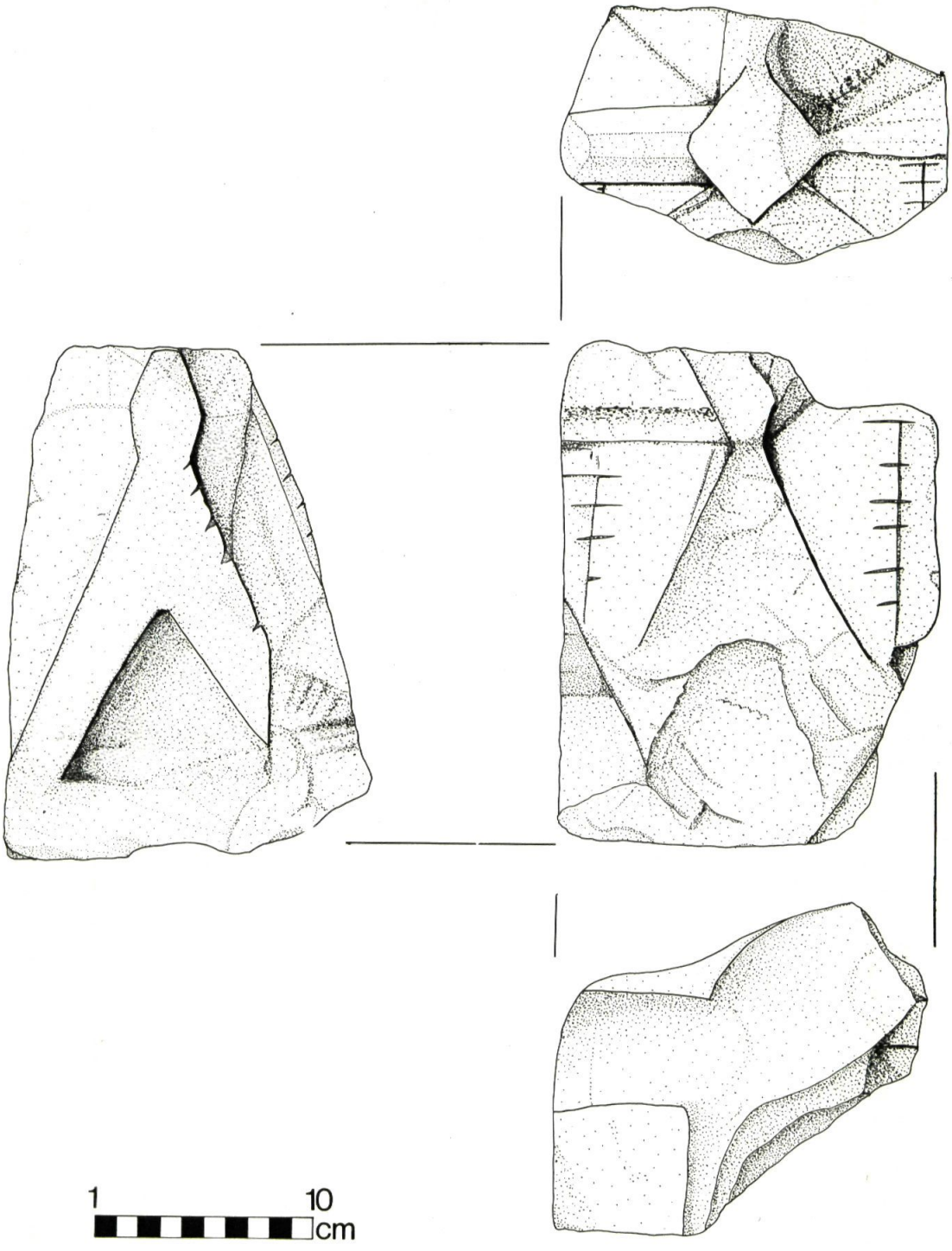

Fig 4. Braishfield Roman bath-house: stone roof finial, scale 1:2.

Phase IV

Small rotary quern fragment of Pennant sandstone from the Bristol area. A small fragment from a gutter stone (*cf* Cunliffe 1971) of Greensand. Fragments of roof slabs (*cf* Cunliffe 1971) of sandy limestone. Fragment of Greensand quoin.

Apart from the ubiquitous knapped flint nodules from these layers, there were also fragments of stones from the Tertiary Beds of Hampshire (Heathstone) and the Old Red Sandstone.

THE PAINTED PLASTER by J S F Walker

The painted plaster from the site was all found in demolition debris, and probably only between 5% and 7% of the original plaster was recovered.

It seems to have been of one phase as there is only one piece of over-painting. Otherwise three basic decorative motifs are present: one consisting of white walls with white 'panels' demarked by green or yellow stripes, one of continuous pink and red bands in a straight and swagged pattern, and finally, one of plain red walls.

The only exception to these three motifs is in the plaster recovered from the 'pool' (F190) which consists of small splashes of red, green, yellow and mauve. These, unfortunately, are too few and fragmentary to make it possible to recover the design.

Otherwise the use of colours is restricted as follows:

Red – striped/swagged decoration, and plain areas (occasionally convex or curved moulded);

Yellow – demarking panels on a white background or marking the junction between red and white (occasionally convex moulded at these junctions);

Green – demarking panels, sometimes in two tones, on a white background (occasionally convex or concave moulded);

White – as a background 'colour' (occasionally convex or concave moulded).

The moulding recovered was usually straight pieces of convex or concave moulding with rare (less than 5%) pieces of convex curved moulding. The inner surfaces of some of these pieces have traces of wood impressions, perhaps indicating that this technique was used to cover wood jambs *etc.* The curved pieces had probably been at the junctions between vaults in the apsed rooms and vertical end-walls.

The emphasis on large empanelled areas of white walls is a common third and fourth century feature (Neal 1974, 29, 30, 88–93). The quality of the painting is fair in terms of accuracy, but it has a rough surface with frequent brush marks.

An analysis of the distribution of the plaster in the phase 4 demolition debris suggests the following design layout:

Rooms 1 and 2:	Plain and striped swagged red, white panels. Moulded decoration.
Apses:	Predominantly red striped. Moulded decoration.
Pool:	Complex multi-coloured.
Room 3:	None.
Room 4:	Plain red.
Room 5:	Predominantly white-panelled.
Room 6:	None.

CERAMIC BUILDING MATERIAL

A standard variety of tiles was collected, including whole or partial *pilae*, box-tiles, *tegulae* and *imbrices*. A few fragments of possible pipes were also found, a feature not uncommon elsewhere in southern England. Details of context and measurement are available in archive.

BONE OBJECT

A single 'buttonblank' was recovered.

THE ANIMAL BONE by J M Maltby and R Foot

Fragmentation and Preservation. Only 10% of the recorded fragments listed in Table 1 could be identified. In addition the bone from the site is poorly preserved, 738 fragments displaying evidence of erosion, some having been severely

affected. Bones of low density and unfused epiphyses are particularly vulnerable and the identifiable fragments do not, therefore, necessarily reflect an accurate impression of the original deposit. Close examination reveals evidence of butchery knife cuts on only three bones, a cattle humerus, a sheep femur and a sheep/goat pelvis.

Other Comments. A disarticulated partial cattle skeleton was recovered from context 31. Most bones of the lower hind limbs are present, belonging to a large animal from the Roman period. Conversion of the length of the metatarsus into withers height using the formula of Foch (1966, 73) produces an estimated height of 118cm, comparable to the large specimen discovered at Little Somborne (Walker, Davies and Maltby 1984).

Only two bones belonging to wild species were identified: a humerus of an immature badger (*Meles meles*) from context 71, and a metacarpus of a red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) from context 10. The predominance of domestic animals is typical of most sites of Roman date as yet investigated in southern England. Conclusions about the exploitation and the quality of the domestic stock, however, are not possible from this Braishfield sample alone. The faunal data from the site will be part of the archival record being established for Wessex and will, therefore, be useful in future regional assessments of Roman farming.

DISCUSSION

Lay-out of Bath-Setting

The bath-house forms part of a larger villa complex (Fig 1). Area X has produced first to fourth century pottery, tesserae, Purbeck marble, painted plaster and coins of the third and fourth century. Area Y has also produced tesserae, Purbeck marble and pottery. Aerial photographic evidence indicates that Area X consists of a rectangular range divided into two unequal portions, and Y appears to consist of a collection of ranges in a trapezoidal arrangement.

Given the close proximity of the bath-house to this large complex, it is more than likely that this bath-house belonged to this establishment.

Dating

On the evidence of the brooches and the pottery the first phase of occupation would appear to date from post-Conquest to the end of the first century.

The dating of the major phases presents some problems; all of the pottery from these phases is late third or fourth century. It would appear that the first bath-house (phase II) was built somewhere between *c* 300 and 400. The bath-house was then probably re-modelled (phase III) in the fourth century prior to *c* 370 on the evidence of the pottery. The demolition material probably dates to the last half of the

Table 1. Animal bone fragments recovered, by number.

Identifiable Bone Fragments		Unidentifiable Bone Fragments		%
Cattle	57*	Large mammal	277	34.6
Horse	4	Large artiodactyl (cattle or red deer)	17	2.1
Sheep/goat	30	Small artiodactyl (sheep/goat/pig/ roe deer)	153	19.1
Sheep	16	Unknown mammal	354	44.2
Pig	3			
Dog	1			
Domestic fowl	3			
Red deer (*Cervus elaphus*)	1			
Badger (*Meles meles*)	1			
TOTALS	116		801	100%

*Includes 26 fragments from one animal.

fourth century with the final stone robbing dating to the end of that century or later.

The first, phase I, evidence is consistent with simple agricultural activity, and the yard-like layer 30 and the existence of a grain-dryer suggest settlement nearby. Walker (nd) has suggested that practically all grain-dryers of this period were within buildings; and it is possible that the cobble layer (30) represents the floor of a structure enclosing the probable corn-dryer (F50). The pits (F41, F138) are common agricultural features of this period and area (Walker, nd).

The phase II structure, the original bath-house, seems to have been a simple square structure provided with a tile 'damp course'. Only two rooms (1 and 2) seem to have been provided with a hypocaust, whereas room 5 contained an apse. It is probable that room 4 served as an entrance vestibule, with perhaps room 3 being a changing room. From there the visitor could make his or her way to a warm room (2) and on to a hot room (1). It is possible that room 5 was primarily intended to serve as a rest area with, perhaps, a cold plunge in the apsidal end.

The phase III structure was a quite different affair. New rooms were added (7 and 6) and extensive hypocaust systems created. Both rooms 5 and 3 were now heated, the stoke area (room 6) enclosed and a small wing (room 7) built containing an elaborate pool, similar in plan to a sixth century pool from a baptistry at Clupea, Tunisia. It was probably at this point in the fourth century that the entire building was replastered and painted.

Collingwood and Richmond (1971) have outlined the normal order of use of a bath-house: the user proceeds from an *apodyterium* (changing room) to either a *laconium* (hot sauna) or to the *frigidarium* (cold room) and then on to the *tepidarium* (warm room) and *caldarium* (hot room), and then proceeds back through the rooms in the reverse order, the whole building serving as a sort of Turkish bath. The function of the phase III building rooms is difficult to analyse, but it is suggested that room 4 was the entrance, room 5 the *tepidarium*, rooms 1 and 2 the *caldarium*, and the enigmatic room 3 was either an ineffective *laconium* (very hot dry room), or an *apodyterium* (changing room). Room 7 was probably a type of *frigidarium*. The whole layout and furnishings of this structure show that it was designed to the level of contemporary fashion, with apses, painted plaster and *opus signinum* floors. Room 6 is slightly unusual in that it seems to have been used at times as a smithy: F106 and F120 contained within it were probably smithing pits, and a small subsidiary hearth was also provided. The hearth can easily be parallelled (Johnston 1978), and the layout, phase II rooms 1 and 2, is very similar to those discovered at nearby Sparsholt (Johnston 1978).

The quality of the pottery assemblage, with its Oxford and New Forest wares, indicates the typical type of contacts on such rural sites, and the 'smithy' in room 6 is in keeping with rural economic adaptability. The final demolition in phase IV also indicates the parsimony of rural life, with the careful salvaging of stone and ironwork – an activity at variance with the luxury of the baths.

The date of the final abandonment of the whole villa is unknown.

Sporadic work over the last few years has resulted in the discovery of more sites on the clays and sands of the Hampshire Basin, between the Test and the Itchen (Westwood, nd, Walker, nd). The general density in that area is now one site per 11 square kilometres, as against one site per 7.2 square kilometres on similarly studied areas of the Test Valley chalklands, one per 2.3 square kilometres on the Nene Valley gravels (Taylor 1975), and one per 1.5 square kilometres on the better soils of Ager Cosanus, Italy (Dyson 1978). If the general trend of these figures is correct, it is clear that deep, light soils were favoured by a factor of 5 over heavy clays. Given that the clays were predominantly pastoral areas and the light soils arable, as today, the commercial advantage of arable production in the Roman period can be clearly seen.

However, this does not mean that relative poverty was endemic to the clay areas, as the bath-house excavation reveals a high level of intrinsic wealth in a chalk/clay area. The

implication of the density figures and the excavation is, therefore, that the clay lands were less well preferred, but the landowners' living status may have been maintained by having larger estates.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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