

Woolstone Roman Villa

By ANN HAMILTON

Earlier Bibliography

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2. Morgan, *Romano-British Pavements* (1880), 149.
3. Davey, *Wantage Past and Present* (1901), 12.
4. *Antiquary* x (1884), 36, 181 and 133.
5. V.C.H. Berks i (1906), 222 and 247-8; *ibid.*, iv (1924), 544.
6. Smith, *Proc. Soc. Ants.* xxi (2nd ser., 1907), 215.
7. Peake, *Arch. of Berks.* (1931), 119 and 249.
8. Grinsell, *Berks. Arch. Journ.* xliii (1939), 137 and Pl. I, p. 138.

THE Roman Villa at Woolstone, Berkshire (41/292877), was discovered in 1884 by Mr. R. Walker of Uffington.⁽¹⁾ He uncovered part of the baths buildings, 'oyster-tanks', an east-west corridor traced for some 100 feet, and two mosaic pavements, both of geometric design. According to Morgan,⁽²⁾ one of the pavements was taken to the Ashmolean Museum, but there is no record of its having been lifted and taken there. It was seen *in situ* by the then Keeper of the Museum who considered it but part of a larger pavement which had been destroyed. It had a series of compartments divided by a coil pattern, with conventional rose ornament, but no figures. The other pavement had a 'key-pattern'.

During the excavation of the corridor a skeleton was found at the western end, and two more at the eastern end. Several other skeletons, believed to be Saxon, were found close by. Peake⁽⁷⁾ thought that these skeletons showed that there had been enacted here one of those tragedies that must have occurred at the end of the Roman occupation of the country. He records coins from the area which were then in the West Collection, either at The Knowle, Abingdon or in the Abingdon Museum. A photograph of one of the pavements is in the Reading Public Library.⁽⁸⁾

In 1955, Lady Craven, the owner of the land on which this site is, kindly gave permission for an exploratory excavation. Work was undertaken for a week in September 1955.¹ The walls found are now reduced by agriculture to one course only or to footings.²

The structures found (fig. 1) consisted of north, south and west corridors; a cobbled or flagstoned courtyard; and a room with a mosaic pavement. The S. corridor was paved with red tesserae or

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²*J.R.S.* xlvi (1956), 143-144.

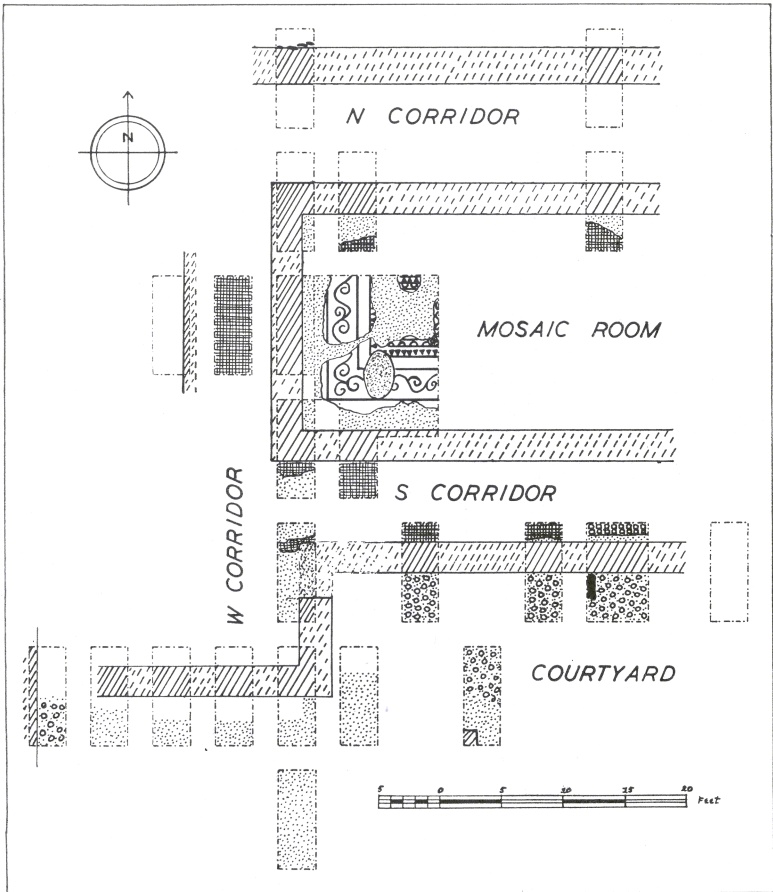


Fig 1—Ground plan

red tiles, the W. corridor with white with occasional red tesserae; whilst the N. corridor appeared to mark the northern boundary of the building.

In the room with the mosaic floor (pl. I), the third mosaic to be found at the site, that part of it uncovered measured $10' \times 14'$, but it probably extended eastward for at least another $15'$, making the dimensions of the room $25' \times 14'$. Unfortunately the central portion of the mosaic pattern at the western end is missing. The outer border was a surround of plain white tesserae. The patterned area was outlined in yellowish buff tesserae. Between this and another buff band, inset in white tesserae was a scroll pattern in red.

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A dark plum-coloured line supported red (occasionally orange) semi-circles. The innermost square consisted of a narrow line of buff tesserae with buff outline semi-circles. The geometric design conforms to that of the two earlier pavements. The room had no hypocaust, but two burnt patches suggested the use of braziers. The mosaic was laid on a hard chalk make-up which overlay the natural Gault clay.

Most of the pottery scraps found were of coarse ware types assignable to the second and fourth centuries, but a few small fragments of Samian ware occurred. Two coins were found: one a *denarius* of Julia Domna (A.D. 196–211, Rome mint-mark), from the courtyard; and the other of Quintillius, an unstratified surface find. A small stone foot from a statuette or toy was found in the plough-soil; and there were many fragments of painted wall-plaster.

The pottery suggests that the villa was occupied over a long period. Patching on the floors and mosaic also suggest long use, but the building does not seem to have ended by a destructive fire. More information about the plan and different periods of this building would be an interesting addition to the knowledge of the Romano-British occupation of the area.