

Ralegh Radford and the Roman Villa at Ditchley: a Review

By PAUL BOOTH

SUMMARY

The excavation of the Roman villa at Ditchley in 1935 by Ralegh Radford was the first such work in the county to consider aspects beyond the architecture of the villa house itself. In this respect, and as a type-site for winged corridor houses in Roman Britain, the results of the excavation, while open to reinterpretation at several points, have had a lasting effect on Romano-British studies.

The death of C.A. Ralegh Radford, on 27 December 1998 at the age of 98, has significance for the archaeology of Oxfordshire as well as for that of the country as a whole. While best known for his work on the post-Roman period, perhaps particularly at Tintagel, Radford was both one of the longest surviving members of the Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society, having joined at least as early as 1939 (before which date there are no surviving membership records), and the excavator of one of the county's best known Roman sites, the villa at Watts Wells, Ditchley. This work, carried out in 1935, was published with commendable speed in the first volume of *Oxoniensia* in 1936¹ and rapidly established Ditchley as an important example of a 'modern' villa excavation. Since this turned out to be his only significant contribution to the archaeology of Oxfordshire it seemed appropriate to offer a review of the site in appreciation of Radford's overall achievement in British archaeology.²

THE SITE AND THE 1935 EXCAVATIONS

The existence of the site had been known for some considerable time prior to its excavation, but attention was focused on it after its 'rediscovery' from the air in 1934, initially by a Mr. E.W. Walford of Coventry.³ The site was revealed with exceptional clarity in photographs taken by Major Allen in that year, which showed not only the main house but also ancillary buildings, the walled and ditched enclosure within which all of these were set, and elements of further enclosures or part of a field system on the same axis. Such was the clarity of the photographs that recovery of the plan was not in itself the primary objective of excavation, since this was already considered to be substantially complete. Radford's stated intention in carrying out the excavation was simply to recover accurate measurements and to establish

¹ C.A.R. Radford, 'The Roman Villa at Ditchley, Oxon.', *Oxoniensia*, i (1936), 24-69 (hereafter 'Radford'), preceded by an interim report, C.A.R. Radford, 'A Roman Villa at Ditchley', *Antiquity*, ix (1935), 472-6.

² I am grateful to Adrienne Rosen for the invitation to write this piece, to Elizabeth Leggatt who provided information, to Professor W.H.C. Frend who worked at Ditchley and kindly responded to queries about the excavation, to Alison Roberts who located archive material in the Ashmolean Museum and in particular to Martin Henig and various colleagues who have discussed Ditchley with me, none of whom are responsible for the defects in what follows. This article does not pretend to be a comprehensive review either of Ditchley or of Radford's work there.

³ Radford, 25.

and date the various phases of the site sequence.⁴ The more general objective of the work was to examine 'some of the many problems connected with the Roman villa-system' (i.e. in Britain as a whole),⁵ though the specific nature of these problems and specific strategies for their solution were not elaborated. We may assume that questions of development and sequence were amongst the most important, since it was precisely this kind of information that was lacking in many earlier villa excavations, concerned as they were largely with the recovery of plans and mosaic pavements.

This supposition is confirmed by examination of the surviving papers of the Watts Wells Excavation Committee, formed at the beginning of 1935 to raise finance for the excavation, which reveals an interesting story. The potential of the site had been realised very rapidly. It was agreed that it would be designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument as early as September 1934, but correspondence shows that this had not yet been formalised (though it was pending) by April 1935, when the Office of Works (as it then was) raised no objection to the proposed excavation. Meanwhile the possibility of excavating the site had been discussed almost as soon as it had been photographed. The Excavation Committee was chaired by no less a scholar than R.G. Collingwood. The joint secretaries, Miss M.V. Taylor and Donald Harden, shouldered the initial administrative burden and, reading between the lines, did much 'tidying up' at the end of the project. Collingwood was soon to become Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy and at that time was presumably still working on the Roman Britain volume for the *Oxford History of England*.

What arguably formed the research agenda for the excavation, hinted at in Radford's report, was set out in a letter from Collingwood to Miss Taylor dated 6 January 1935. Collingwood was concerned that needless excavation should be avoided. It may be noted in parenthesis, that the proposal for excavation had not been universally approved – it was opposed by O.G.S. Crawford at the Ordnance Survey, at least partly on the basis that the plan of the site was well understood from the aerial photographs ('I cannot see what else you want') and that on research grounds a better case could be made for examination of a villa more directly associated with the North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch complex (however, Crawford generously refrained from airing his views publicly). Collingwood's concise research aims were: to establish if there was a 'pre-Roman farm site' and if so, to characterise it; to define and date the process of Romanisation of the site; to establish its architectural and other development, with particular attention to its end; and to consider the nature of the agriculture practised on the site. This clearly considered list of objectives, which would do credit to many a contemporary project design, was typical of Collingwood's approach, which has been recently characterised as favouring 'projects that were small in scale and precisely focused'.⁶ It is likely that it formed the basis of Radford's (unstated) programme, though it must also be presumed that Radford had his own view of the aims of the excavation.

The appointment of Radford is of interest. His connection with Oxford went back to the early 1920s when he read Modern History at Exeter College, but it is unclear what links were maintained thereafter. His work at Tintagel had started in 1933. Described in the inaugural committee minute of 8 January 1935 as 'late assistant inspector of Ancient Monuments, HM Office of Works' (he had been appointed Inspector of Ancient Monuments for Wales and Monmouthshire in 1929) he is noted there as having been proposed as excavation director by Collingwood (who was not present at the meeting, through illness). Collingwood's letter

⁴ Ibid. 27.

⁵ Ibid. 25.

⁶ R. Bradley, 'The Philosopher and the Field Archaeologist: Collingwood, Bersu and the excavation of King Arthur's Round Table', *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 60 (1994), 28.

of 6 January to Miss Taylor; however, merely states that 'If Mr. Radford could undertake the work I think we should be very fortunate', without making it clear whether Radford was his own candidate. There had certainly been correspondence the previous December between Miss Taylor and Radford, though again there is no indication of where the suggestion to approach Radford had originated.

In any case the excavation commenced in August 1935 and after a financial crisis in October was completed in the following month. An interim report was published almost immediately and the final report was prepared the following year, in the course of which Radford was appointed director of the British School at Rome.

Radford's interpretation of Ditchley can be summarised as follows. The site, established about AD 70, consisted of a ditched and banked enclosure within which were timber buildings, including a posthole structure which probably formed the principal domestic structure in this phase, underlying the later house. In the early 2nd century the house was rebuilt in stone with a tiled roof, consisting at that time of an east-west range of six rooms with a projecting wing room at each end of the range, these perhaps being linked by a timber corridor and apparently having a poorly defined 'kitchen' attached to the north side of the range (neither corridor nor kitchen appears on plan). In a second stone phase, also dated within the first half of the 2nd century AD, a narrow range of four (or possibly six) rooms was added to the rear (north) of the main range. A well, constructed on the central axis of the stone house, was thought to be contemporary with its first phase. Within the courtyard was a circular stone-walled threshing floor, while the entire width of the south end of the enclosure was occupied by a structure of some 85 m. x 21 m. The structure was timber framed on stone foundations, and roofed with thatch.

About AD 200 the main house was severely damaged by fire and the other structures were probably abandoned at the same time. After a substantial hiatus in occupation the house was rebuilt in the early 4th century on the same plan as previously, with the addition of a continuous outer corridor which surrounded it on all sides except the north. The main entrance to the house, perhaps also as previously, was into the east wing, where the corridor was embellished with columns set on substantial bases projecting from the corridor wall. The building, roofed in Stonesfield slate, was now of two storeys and the enclosure was surrounded by a stone wall. Within the enclosure a second threshing floor was slightly offset in relation to the 2nd-century one, while at the southern end of the site the position of the large timber framed building was partly occupied by a stone built granary *c.* 11 m. square consisting of three north-south aligned 'rooms'. Occupation of the site, particularly as indicated by coins, continued at least to the very end of the 4th century, but a reduction of standards in the late period was indicated. 'During this process people camped within the walls lighting their fires on the mortar pavement of Room 2'.⁷

The site and its published report can be viewed at a number of levels. The report is, by Radford's own admission, a work of summary and interpretation, with detailed information contained in documentation which was deposited in the Ashmolean Museum. In this sense, too, the project has a contemporary echo, though in the case of the Ditchley excavation there is not the same feeling one has with many a modern excavation that the extended summary is the only way to present a huge amount of detail. As presented the site was not complex, or rather, areas of potential complexity are rather glossed over. It is clear from the labelling of the finds, for example, that the division of the site into stratigraphic units was at a very rudimentary level, though whether as a consequence of site conditions, the expertise of the workforce or the inclination of the director is unknown. In detail, the published account

⁷ Radford, 69.

leaves a number of areas of uncertainty – clinically identified in acerbic marginal notes in one copy of *Oxoniensia* in the Ashmolean! However, the focus here is rather on the subsequent place of the site in Romano-British studies, first in the years since its publication and secondly in relation to present understanding of the archaeology of north Oxfordshire.

THE ROLE OF THE SITE IN ROMANO-BRITISH VILLA STUDIES

Publication of the excavation was followed relatively shortly (in 1939) by the appearance of Volume I of the *Victoria History of Oxfordshire*, with its extensive survey of the Roman period by Harden and Taylor, both of whom had, of course, been intimately involved with the excavation.⁸ It was inevitable that Ditchley should loom large in this survey, as the most recently and best-excavated site of its type in the county. There was little deviation from Radford's account, though some small but significant points can be noted: the starting date of the site was given as c. AD 80 rather than 70 (the significance of this, if any, is uncertain); the possible existence of a second circular structure, not mentioned by Radford, is raised, and it is explicitly stated that tesserae were found (but whether from a mosaic or from a coarse tessellated floor is not clear), a fact also not mentioned by Radford, though he did suggest that the mosaic examined in 1867 by Colonel Lane-Fox was probably located in Room 2 of the excavated house.⁹

Meanwhile, however, Collingwood referred to the results of the excavation in *Roman Britain and the English Settlements*, first published in 1936. Here Ditchley was accepted as an early villa, and was also noted as one of the group of villas lying within the North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch (see further below). It is interesting that Collingwood's first reference to Ditchley is followed within a few lines by the statement that 'The history of the villa-system in Britain is still very obscure, owing to the fewness of the sites on which really scientific digging has been done'.¹⁰ We may assume that Ditchley was included within that group, since Collingwood was very complimentary about Radford's work in an excavation committee meeting minute of October 1935, but again the matter is not explicit, and no other documents or correspondence dating to the time of the excavation survive in the present file to demonstrate the nature of the working relationship between excavation director and committee.

By the early 1940s Ditchley was beginning to appear in general works on Roman Britain such as Winbolt's *Britain under the Romans*,¹¹ where it is mentioned briefly, immediately prior to extended descriptions of the villas at Bignor and Folkestone. While described as 'an interesting farm enclosure',¹² the emphasis of the chapter (entitled 'The countryside: villas, villages and agriculture') was essentially on architecture, and 'agriculture' received barely half a dozen lines. Ten years on, Richmond's *Roman Britain* of 1955 used Ditchley as a major type-site for smaller villas and reproduced a simplified version of the plan (which along with Bignor was the only villa to be illustrated in the volume), including the courtyard and outer buildings.¹³ The wording, however ('about the turn of the first century AD there were added a new stone-built veranda and projecting end rooms which gave to the establishment both

⁸ D.B. Harden and M.V. Taylor, 'Romano-British remains', in *V.C.H. Oxon.* i, particularly 307-8 and 311-13.

⁹ Radford, 25.

¹⁰ R.G. Collingwood and J.N.L. Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (2nd edn. 1937), 214, a close echo of wording in his 'research agenda' letter of January 1935.

¹¹ S.E. Winbolt, *Britain under the Romans* (1945).

¹² *Ibid.* 79.

¹³ I.A. Richmond, *Roman Britain* (1955), 110-12.

privacy and a new elegance')¹⁴ suggests that Richmond had either misunderstood or reinterpreted part of Radford's developmental sequence. This section was retained unchanged in the second edition of 1963. Ditchley continued to be emphasised in Richmond's later work, both in a short surviving draft for a chapter in *The Roman Villa in Britain*,¹⁵ and in the main text eventually used for that volume, which was essentially that prepared for the revised version of Collingwood's *Archaeology of Roman Britain*, also published in 1969.¹⁶ In this case, however, the emphasis was specifically on the plan of the house (though the courtyard was referred to, and illustrated in a published aerial photograph in both volumes), which was taken as being of typical winged corridor type, despite, strictly speaking, the absence of a corridor simply linking the two wings. The unity of the wings with the main block in the first stone built phase was recognised, however, while the 'elaborate colonnaded front' was assigned to the 4th century.¹⁷

Ditchley was thus firmly established in the literature of Roman Britain. In the first (1967) edition of Frere's *Britannia* it was referenced more frequently than any other villa site except Bignor, a tribute to the enduring quality of its evidence, not least with regard to the aerial photographs. A similar situation prevailed as recently as 1981, with Ditchley again second only to Bignor (but now equalled by Fishbourne and Lullingstone) in terms of the number of references in Salway's *Roman Britain*, OUP's belated successor to Collingwood's part of *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* of 45 years previously. Only since that time have other sites, with a greater quantity, quality and range of excavated evidence, come to dominate discussions of Romano-British villas, as interest has moved particularly in the direction of their study as economic units. Here Ditchley, while prompting interesting calculations on the size of its attached estate, based on the estimated capacity of the granary, had no further evidence in the form of animal bones, charred plant remains or other environmental material to offer, and the potential of the waterlogged deposits in the well had been ignored, as was typical of the time of excavation. The potential of the artefacts to illuminate aspects of life at the site was also under-exploited – the catalogued material being presented to support the dating of the site and because it was there (there is a cryptic reference in one of Radford's letters to the need to include some of the finds illustrations to show that the job had been done properly).

Subsequently, environmental aspects, in particular, continued to receive somewhat inconsistent treatment in excavation reports from the region such as those on the 1960s and 70s excavations of the villa at Shakenoak, very close to Ditchley. The attempt to understand the economy of Ditchley had important repercussions, however, prompting further analysis of Radford's evidence, and of that from nearby Callow Hill, in Applebaum's survey of Roman Britain in *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*.¹⁸ A similar approach was adopted in the reconstruction of the economy of the Shakenoak villa,¹⁹ still based very largely on 'traditional' data relating to the estimated extent of estate boundaries, the capabilities of different soil types, potential populations and a liberal helping of Varro, Columella and even the life of St Germanus of Auxerre. Some animal bone data and a

¹⁴ Ibid. 111.

¹⁵ I.A. Richmond, 'The Plans of Roman Villas in Britain', in A.L.F. Rivet (ed.), *The Roman Villa in Britain* (1969), 49-70, especially 49-51.

¹⁶ 'Villas', Chapter VII in R.G. Collingwood and I.A. Richmond, *The Archaeology of Roman Britain* (1969), 133-53.

¹⁷ Ibid. 137.

¹⁸ S. Applebaum, 'Roman Britain', in H.P.R. Finberg (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, vol. 1 ii (1972), 267.

¹⁹ S. Applebaum, 'The Agriculture of Shakenoak Villa', in A.C.C. Brodrick, A.R. Hands and D.R. Walker, *Excavations at Shakenoak Farm, near Wilcote, Oxfordshire, Part V: Sites K and E* (1978), 186-200.

limited range of other environmental evidence was enlisted to shed direct light on the economy of Shakenoak, but the piecemeal nature of this evidence was typical of the time. Nevertheless, the tradition of study of these issues instituted by Radford and continued at Shakenoak was an important one, and culminated in 1986 in the first fully integrated analysis of structural, topographical and environmental evidence from an Oxfordshire villa site – the work of Miles and his collaborators at Barton Court Farm.²⁰ Since then, however, there has been no further examination of any villa site within the county on a significant scale – largely an accident of the vagaries of rescue archaeology.

One consequence of the work at Shakenoak, however, was that it prompted a re-examination of both the published report and the archive material with regard to dating, particularly of the main house.²¹ The principal conclusion of this exercise was that very little 4th-century material could be associated with confidence with this building, rather than with other parts of the site. From this it was concluded that the house itself was essentially of 1st- to 2nd-century date and that Radford's final (4th-century) house phase could also be assigned to the later 2nd century. The purpose of this re-assessment was to show that Ditchley fitted a similar pattern of development to that seen at Shakenoak, with the inference that the two sites had perhaps been subsumed into the North Leigh estate in the middle of the Roman period. This new analysis has interesting implications for aspects of the wider interpretation of the rural settlement pattern of the area.

REASSESSMENT

To what extent does Radford's interpretation of Ditchley remain valid, and how far has the site retained its importance? In terms of the site narrative, while a number of aspects of the original account can be questioned, the relative developmental sequence of the main house appears still to stand, though the absolute chronology may be questioned. First, the foundation date remains slightly uncertain and is likely to remain so since the primary timber phase was not sufficiently revealed to be clearly understood. In general terms the scale of excavation and the technique employed were inadequate to define timber structures fully, particularly in the southern part of the site, which was only trenched. There are a few pointers amongst the finds, such as a Claudian copy coin and early brooches, which might suggest at least some pre-Flavian activity, though the character of such activity is unknown. Examination of the surviving pottery, however, shows little to contradict a date of *c.* AD 70, despite the presence of occasional pieces probably of pre-Flavian date. In particular, the total absence of 'Belgic type' grog-tempered material, characteristic of the decades either side of the Roman conquest, strongly suggests that there was no significant activity much before *c.* AD 70. Secondly, the reconsideration of the dating by the Shakenoak team considerably alters Radford's overall view of the site. Their point that the original foundations are unlikely to have been precisely reused after a break of over 100 years seems reasonable. Moreover, Radford himself had pointed out that there was no dating material beneath the late floors which need have been later than the end of the 2nd century.²² In the house, therefore, significant late Roman activity can probably be largely discounted.

²⁰ D. Miles (ed.), *Archaeology at Barton Court Farm, Abingdon, Oxon: an investigation of late Neolithic, Iron Age, Romano-British and Saxon settlements* (CBA Res. Rep. 50, 1986).

²¹ A.C.C. Brodribb, A.R. Hands and D.R. Walker, *Excavations at Shakenoak Farm, near Wilcote, Oxfordshire, Part III: Site F* (1972), 140-2.

²² Radford, 43-4.

Some detailed aspects of the interpretation of the house may also be questioned. One of these is the assertion that rooms in the northern range were used as baths, these being located towards the east end of the range in the 2nd century, and at the west end in the later phase (dated by Radford to the 4th century). The only evidence adduced relates in the first instance to proximity to the kitchen, and in the second to the quality of the mortar (but not *opus signinum*) floors of the rooms in question. In the absence of more compelling evidence the case for baths in this range can probably be rejected. A modest bath suite might perhaps be expected somewhere within the complex, but it did not form part of the main house. Barton Court Farm, a not greatly dissimilar site, definitely did not have a bath suite in any phase, though it did, like Ditchley, have tessellated floors, painted plaster and glazed windows.

A second problematic aspect of the house relates to its principal entrance. In both major stone phases this was thought to lie in the east wing. While non-axial entrances are characteristic of so-called 'unit system' villas, where dual domestic units occupied by different branches of a family are postulated, there is no indication from the plan of Ditchley that the house was occupied by anything other than a single family unit, whatever its status. Nevertheless Radford's suggestion that the 'late' villa, at least, was entered through the east wing has been accepted by Smith²³ and used to support an interpretation of Ditchley as consisting of 'a central room flanked by what appear to be two distinct unitary houses',²⁴ that is to say, two separate domestic units. This interpretation ignores the developmental sequence of the site, which started from a central core of six rooms (plus wings) of a pattern which recurs regularly in Romano-British villas,²⁵ being exactly repeated, for example, in the main buildings at Barton Court Farm and at Little Milton, also in Oxfordshire, in the core of the villa at Boxmoor, Hertfordshire and in the first phase of Thurnham in Kent.²⁶ A slightly different view of this repeated arrangement is taken by Drury²⁷ who sees the four central rooms of these ranges (i.e. a square central room flanked by a narrow 'corridor' on one side and by two small rooms on the other) as a repeating 'room set' found not only in many villas but also in public buildings such as *mansiones*. A modification of this important analysis may be suggested, adding the six room block (which only seems to occur in villas) to the series of room sets defined by Drury.²⁸ Given the strongly symmetrical character of the layout of Ditchley it would be odd indeed if the entrance had not been on the central axis between the wings, a point also emphasised by Drury.²⁹

The architectural elaboration of the east wing can perhaps be seen in other ways. The three 'steps' running along the outer walls of the wing may well have served more as an extra foundation than as an access to the building here, given that this was its lowest part – the villa site sloping down both to east and south. The greatest build-up of floor levels would

²³ J.T. Smith, 'Villas as a Key to Social Structure', in M. Todd (ed.), *Studies in the Romano-British Villa* (1978), 157.

²⁴ Ibid. 165. This interpretation was accepted (somewhat tentatively) by R. Hingley, *Rural Settlement in Roman Britain* (1989), 50-1.

²⁵ Cf. T.F.C. Blagg, 'First-century Roman Houses in Gaul and Britain', in T. Blagg and M. Millett (eds.), *The Early Roman Empire in the West* (1990), 202-3.

²⁶ Barton Court Farm – Miles, op. cit. note 20, p. 11; Little Milton – Collingwood and Richmond, op. cit. note 16, p. 136; Boxmoor – D.S. Neal, 'Northchurch, Boxmoor, and Hemel Hempstead Station: the excavation of three Roman buildings in the Bulbourne Valley', *Hertfordshire Archaeol.* 4 (1974-6), 59-60; Thurnham is currently under excavation by the Oxford Archaeological Unit.

²⁷ P.J. Drury, 'Form, Function, and the Interpretation of the Excavated Plans of some Large Secular Romano-British Buildings', in P.J. Drury (ed.), *Structural Reconstruction: Approaches to the interpretation of the excavated remains of buildings* (BAR Brit. Ser. 110, 1982), 289-308.

²⁸ Ibid. 296.

²⁹ Ibid. 298.

have been required here if these were to be kept anything like consistent across the building.³⁰ The apparent focus of this wing for architectural elaboration in the later period – since it was here that pier bases were concentrated, rather than being evenly distributed along the verandah wall – may be linked with Radford's suggestion that the *triclinium* was located at this end of the building. The façade of the east wing, with its view over the adjacent valley, might have been enhanced with columns on a grander scale than seen elsewhere in the verandah in order to improve the quality of the vista. This need not mean that the entrance to the villa lay at this point. Apropos the columns, the reference to a complete drum c. 0.45 m. in diameter³¹ places Ditchley with a group of 'larger villas and rural temples, such as Chedworth, Fishbourne and Nettleton, but most [columns of this diameter] are from major towns or fortresses'.³² Columns of this size were usually found in porticos, and Radford's estimate of the total height ('twelve feet', presumably including base and capital) may not have been too far wide of the mark. A feature of this kind indicates a degree of grandeur at Ditchley which is not immediately apparent from the other evidence, and is emphasised if it is accepted that this phase of the building belongs to the late 2nd century rather than later.

South of the west wing of the house stood successive round structures respectively some 9 m. and 7.5 m. in diameter. Their interpretation by Radford as threshing floors was influenced both by Mediterranean archaeology and by a relative lack of comparanda from British sites at the time of the excavation. The interpretation was tentatively accepted in Morris's survey of agricultural buildings in Roman Britain,³³ and cannot be completely discounted here (principally for want of detailed evidence), but generally there can be no doubt that these were roofed buildings of a type now commonly seen on villa and other sites both in the region and beyond. Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire examples have been discussed recently.³⁴ The nearest is found at Shakenoak, but a particularly close parallel for the Ditchley layout occurs at Islip, where circular structures can be identified (from the air) in front of both wings of the villa there.³⁵ Indeed given the overall symmetry of the Ditchley plan, it might be suggested that a similar structure should be sought in front of the east wing, and the *Victoria County History*'s summary of the site hints at just such an occurrence, though the aerial photographic evidence is not completely conclusive.³⁶ The recent study indicates a variety of functions for circular buildings in the context of villa sites, but while on one reading they may be seen as of lower status than the principal Romanised houses there is plenty of evidence that many of these buildings had a domestic function, as was clearly the case at Shakenoak. There the excavators interpreted the apparent 'replacement' of the main part of the principal house (Building B) by a circular building (K) as indicating 'a basic change in the social structure of the villa'.³⁷ There is little evidence for the function of the Ditchley buildings, but they could equally have been in domestic or agricultural use.

³⁰ Cf. Radford, 'Roman villa at Ditchley', *Antiquity*, ix, 473.

³¹ Radford, 42.

³² T.E.C. Blagg, 'Reconstructions of Roman Decorated Architecture: proportions, prescriptions and practices', in P.J. Drury (ed.), *op. cit.* note 27, p. 144.

³³ P. Morris, *Agricultural Buildings in Roman Britain* (BAR Brit. Ser. 70, 1979), 26-8.

³⁴ G. Keevill and P. Booth, 'Settlement, Sequence and Structure: Romano-British stone-built roundhouses at Redlands Farm, Stanwick (Northants) and Alchester (Oxon)', in R.M. and D.E. Friendship-Taylor (eds.), *From Round House to Villa* (Upper Nene Archaeol. Soc. 1997), 19-45.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 36; for the photograph see e.g. S.S. Frere and J.K.S. St. Joseph, *Roman Britain from the Air* (1983), 196.

³⁶ *V.C.H. Oxon.* i, 313 n. 3.

³⁷ Brodribb, Hands and Walker, *op. cit.* note 21, p. 23.

Some of the greatest difficulties with Radford's view of the site, however, are encountered at the southern end of the enclosure; first in our lack of understanding of the timber structures, probably of 1st-century date, which undoubtedly stood here, though this is more a function of the scale of excavation than a failure of interpretation. Secondly and more importantly, Radford's huge 2nd-century timber framed structure must be misconceived – indeed it is so implausible that it has rarely featured in discussions of the site, suggesting that the problem was recognised early on, though the interpretation does seem to have been accepted by Richmond.³⁸ The stone walls of this 'structure' appear to be fully integrated with the enclosure wall and presumably represent a smaller courtyard within the overall walled compound, eventually containing the 'granary' in the eastern part and, to the west, north-south dividing walls, thought to be secondary by Radford, perhaps defining a further building which would have provided an architectural counterbalance to the granary in an overall layout which is generally marked in its symmetry. While the argument for a 4th-century date for the enclosure wall is not compelling such a date is still possible, and so by implication the southern walled enclosure could also be of this date. This is consistent with the dating of the 'granary'. Alternatively, however, the stone enclosure wall, if closely associated with the late stone phase of the main house could, if the re-dating of that structure is accepted, have been of late 2nd-century date. Either way, earlier material associated with the southern enclosure walls is presumably residual from the first phase of occupation of the site, and the direct association of 2nd-century fills in the enclosure ditch with the 'timber framed structure' is based on the misconception that a particular dark ditch fill horizon was formed of thatch which had slipped into the ditch from the roof of the building. The validity of such an interpretation is hard to assess on the basis of the published evidence, but it is unlikely that the enclosure ditch would have contained waterlogged deposits (even though these may have been encountered elsewhere) and the one photograph of a ditch section containing the 'thatch horizon' appears to show a fairly typical dark loamy deposit between lighter fills, presumably with a higher clay or silt content. In summary therefore, the walls at the southern end of the enclosure may have contained buildings, but for the most part did not themselves constitute structures, and certainly nothing on the scale of the 'barracks for the slaves cultivating the estate' briefly envisaged in the 1935 interim report.³⁹

THE PLACE OF DITCHLEY IN THE REGIONAL SETTLEMENT PATTERN

Even before excavation commenced Ditchley was recognised as one of a notable group of Roman villas lying within the extensive earthworks of the North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch. Understanding of the dating of Grim's Ditch was being transformed by Harden at the same time as Radford was working at Ditchley. Having hitherto been considered a late or post-Roman feature, Grim's Ditch was revealed as dating to the late Iron Age,⁴⁰ a conclusion now generally accepted.⁴¹ What has become apparent since is the unusually early date of a number of the villa sites concentrated within the Grim's Ditch. Not only Ditchley but also Shakenoak apparently originated in the late 1st century.⁴² Early origins are additionally

³⁸ Richmond, op. cit. note 13. The building is labelled 'barn for staff, stock and tools' on the plan on p. 111.

³⁹ Radford, 'Roman Villa at Ditchley', *Antiquity*, ix, 476.

⁴⁰ D.B. Harden, 'Excavations on Grim's Dyke, North Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, ii (1937), 74-92; cf. Collingwood and Myres, op. cit. note 10, p. 220.

⁴¹ E.g. T. Copeland, 'The North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch: a fieldwork survey', *Oxoniensia*, liii (1988), 287.

⁴² A.C.C. Brodrick, A.R. Hands and D.R. Walker, *Excavations at Shakenoak Farm, near Wilcote, Oxfordshire, Part II: Sites B and H* (1971), 14.

claimed for North Leigh⁴³ and Bury Close, Fawler, where the first phase building was assigned a late 1st- to early 2nd-century date⁴⁴ and the earliest activity (of uncertain character) may have been of about the mid 1st century. Pottery evidence suggests that Callow Hill, too, may be no later than late 1st- to early 2nd-century at the latest.⁴⁵ In the Thames Valley the early timber phase at Barton Court Farm was probably contemporary with these sites, but the majority of villa development in Oxfordshire is assignable to the mid to late 2nd century and later. Other aspects of the relationship of the Roman settlement pattern to Grim's Ditch have been discussed elsewhere.⁴⁶ It is arguable, however that the association of early villas with a probable late pre-conquest focus of power was not coincidental, and that the precocious development of villas here reflected the interest of at least some parts of the Dobunnic tribal elite in the conscious adoption of new means of expression of status, though there seems not to have been any direct continuity of occupation on any of the sites just mentioned. Ditchley presumably fell within this pattern of development.

There is one further unusual characteristic about some of these early villa sites. The occurrence of fragments of 'carrot amphorae' at Shakenoak and Fawler as well as from the roadside settlement at Wilcote has already been noted.⁴⁷ This distinctive early amphora type, most commonly found on military sites, also occurred at Ditchley, the relatively small surviving pottery assemblage including two sherds from a 4th-century fill of the well. For this material to be found at three early villas in the area is remarkable, and suggests a particularly close connection between these sites and patterns of military supply, if not a more direct association with the military itself. In turn this hints at the close relationship which may have existed, albeit perhaps only briefly, between certain members of the local elite and the occupying (or possibly, in this case, allied) power.⁴⁸

The villas within Grim's Ditch of course varied in size and grandeur, with sites such as North Leigh and Stonesfield ultimately at the top of the scale. Varying fortunes, economic and possibly also political, may be seen in the probable evidence at Shakenoak and Ditchley for some reduction in the scale of domestic accommodation. This has been suggested as indicating changes in ownership of both sites as they perhaps became subsumed into the North Leigh estate. Clearly, however, occupation continued at both sites – labourers and perhaps managers or agents would have been needed to maintain the agricultural units. No distinction between these groups can be drawn on the basis of archaeological evidence at Ditchley, and at Shakenoak it has been inferred from presumed differences between the

⁴³ D.R. Wilson and D.A. Sherlock, *North Leigh Roman Villa* (Eng. Heritage, 1980), 7-9.

⁴⁴ T.G. Allen, 'Excavations at Bury Close, Fawler, Oxon', *Oxoniensia*, liii (1988), 312.

⁴⁵ N. Thomas, 'Excavations at Callow Hill, Glympton and Stonesfield, Oxon', *Oxoniensia*, xxii (1957), 37-8.

⁴⁶ P. Booth, 'The Regional Archaeological Setting of the Roman Roadside Settlement at Wilcote – a Summary', in A.R. Hands, *The Romano-British roadside settlement at Wilcote, Oxfordshire II. Excavations 1993-96* (BAR Brit. Ser. 265, 1998), 14-15.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 15. For Shakenoak – A.C.C. Brodribb, A.R. Hands and D.R. Walker, *Excavations at Shakenoak Farm, near Wilcote, Oxfordshire, Part I: Sites A and D* (1968), 66; for Wilcote – A.R. Hands, *The Romano-British roadside settlement at Wilcote, Oxfordshire I. Excavations 1990-92* (BAR Brit. Ser. 232, 1993), 156-7; the Fawler sherds are unpublished.

⁴⁸ Cassius Dio (lx, 20) records that a part of the Bodunni (sic) surrendered (?allied) themselves to Rome at the time of the conquest. While coin distributions have long been suggested as indicating the existence of distinct groupings within the Dobunni (e.g. L. Sellwood, 'Tribal Boundaries viewed from the Perspective of Numismatic Evidence' in B. Cunliffe and D. Miles (eds.), *Aspects of the Iron Age in Central Southern Britain* (Oxf. Univ. Comm. for Archaeol. Monograph No. 2, 1984), especially 200-2) it is not known for certain which of these groupings might have been meant by Dio, though the 'northern' one, which probably included the Grim's Ditch area, may be the more likely.

structures rather than on other grounds. In any case, neither Shakenoak nor Ditchley developed in the way that North Leigh and other rich, late villas did.

Despite the relative preponderance of villas in the area, and the suggestion that additional (including seasonal?) labour might have been found at sites such as the roadside settlement at Wilcote, there is no reason to suppose that the rural settlement pattern consisted solely of sites of these types. The challenge remains, however, to identify and characterise the whole range of settlement types in the area and to establish the ways in which they were integrated. The presence of important sites like North Leigh and Stonesfield in the 4th century suggests that this area retained a special significance for parts of the Dobunnic elite throughout the Roman period, but the settlement pattern cannot have remained static for all this time, as the changes at Shakenoak and Ditchley indicate. The imbalance in the geographical distribution of excavation between the Cotswold area and the Thames Valley to the south means that we still have very little information on these issues.

Meanwhile, for Ditchley itself, some of the questions raised in Collingwood's research agenda still remain unresolved. Of these the most important relates to the agricultural economy of the site, which was addressed only in the loosest sense, and arguably misunderstood at enough points for the final interpretation to bear only a passing resemblance to the likely realities, largely for want of appropriate evidence. The whole question, which has a bearing on social and political as well as economic issues, remains fundamental to the area and potentially provides a starting point for future work. At the simplest level, one of the main attractions of Ditchley was and is its neat, more or less symmetrical plan, a characteristic which undoubtedly helped to establish the main domestic building, at least, as a type site for winged corridor houses and also ensured an enduring place for the overall plan within the corpus of Romano-British villa sites. The political, social and economic structures which produced, inhabited and gave meaning to the plan were much more complex, however. Radford's excavation, which was no more than of its time, was inadequate to address these issues and it remains to be seen if the present generation of archaeologists can overcome the challenge which they offer. Nevertheless, the fact that Ditchley attracted the interest of many of the finest scholars of Roman Britain in the generation after its excavation, and continues to provoke re-assessment and new questions, is a tribute to the quality of Radford's work and perhaps in particular to the clarity of the interpretation which he offered of the site. The fact that the interpretation can be challenged in parts, and new approaches to the site suggested, rather emphasises than detracts from his achievement.