Chapter VII

The site in the landscape

The site was first occupied in the Late Neolithic, roughly contemporarily with the appearance of the Lechlade cursus. The utilisation of the 2nd gravel terrace close to junctions between the river Thames and its tributaries for ceremonial monuments is a pattern evident at Stanton Harcourt, where the Devil's Quoits, radiocarbon dated to 4010 ± 120 BP (2863–2404 cal. BC), became a focus for later henge and burial monuments, and at Dorchester, where the cursus was constructed in the later Middle Neolithic (Case in Briggs *et al* 1986, 26–32). There is similarly little evidence for earlier occupation at Stanton Harcourt, although the presence of stone and flint axes in both areas shows that some clearance was carried out earlier than this. Recent excavations of tree-throw pits at Gravelly Guy, Stanton Harcourt have shown that tree-clearance was still being carried out during the Late Neolithic, so that the landscape in which the monuments lay was only partially cleared (Lambrick in prep). Similar features were encountered at Roughground Farm containing flints but none could be more closely dated. The predominance of pig in the Grooved Ware pits, an animal usually associated with woodland and which is very helpful in clearance, would also support this.

The construction of these monuments involved considerable labour and provided a focus for numerous groups, hence perhaps the appearance of settlement sites such as Roughground Farm and The Loders (Fig. 20). The superficially dissimilar character of these two settlements may simply reflect survival of different elements of both within the pits; alternatively it may be evidence for a model of Neolithic settlement in which a number of specialised (and often seasonal) camps are utilised by transhumant groups.

In the Beaker period monuments in the Upper Thames continue in use, and are surrounded by scattered evidence of settlement, as at Roughground Farm. The few widely distributed pits are seen by Timothy Darvill as chance survivals from settlements, and thus presumably reflect a greater number of these settlements. Their more widespread distribution may also reflect a more open landscape as clearance progressed. It is also noticeable that the Late Neolithic features occur along the line of the Iron Age and Romano-British trackway (Fig. 7), and could conceivably indicate the existence of a track alongside the river Leach at this early date. If so the settlements were not randomly scattered across the landscape as it might otherwise appear.

The Neolithic cursus continued to act as a focus for burial and other monuments in the Beaker and Bronze Age periods, as is evident from the possible small henge and the ring-ditches visible as cropmarks south and south-west of the site (Fig. 110). Only one small ring-ditch has been excavated, at Butler's Field (Miles & Palmer 1986, 4); this contained a central cremation. Early Bronze Age occupation is hardly represented at Roughground Farm, but clusters of pits of the Later Bronze Age seem to indicate small encampments in an open grassland landscape, probably of semi-nomadic pastoralists. This picture is repeated elsewhere in the Upper Thames Valley, contrasting with the settled mixed farms and field systems of the Middle and Lower Thames and sites such as Fengate (Pryor 1980). It has been suggested that the Upper Thames constituted something of a cultural backwater in this period (Barrett & Bradley 1980, 249–260), and certainly at this site exploitation of the gravels was unintensive and traditional.

The Early Iron Age however sees an intensification of land use and a shift to arable agriculture, evident in the division of the landscape into fields and in the appearance of storage pits. The ring-ditch at Butler's Field was deliberately infilled, probably when this reorganisation took place; at Vicarage Field, Stanton Harcourt, where linear pit-clusters and settlements show a similar organisation into fields in the Early Iron Age, barrow-ditches were slighted and ploughed over at this time (Case 1982b, 103–117).

From the limited excavation at Roughground Farm, Butler's Field and Hambridge Lane, Lechlade and the surrounding cropmark evidence it seems that the linear pit-clusters and tightly defined settlements which accompany land-division in the Stanton Harcourt area are not present here. Pits were excavated at the Loders Field (Darvill *et al* 1986) and at Butler's Field, and a possible roundhouse associated with two four-post structures adjacent to the Lechlade Cursus (SP 212/004) (J Moore in prep). Although excavation was small-scale, neither site seemed to have a tightly organised layout. Settlement within the ditched landscape seems to have been more spread out, perhaps indicating less pressure on land. This may also be reflected in the apparent greater mobility of settlement in the Iron Age in this area; the Early Iron Age settlements so far investigated do not continue into the Middle Iron Age.

Cropmarks of small circular and oval ditched enclosures characteristic of the Middle Iron Age occur north-west (SP 217/013)and west (SP 209/006) of the Roughground Farm

site (RCHM(E), Glos., 1976, 74–5), and the expansion of settlement onto the low-lying 1st terrace at Claydon Pike suggests an increase in population and pressure on grazing similar to that elsewhere in the Upper Thames, notably in the Windrush valley.

The Late Iron Age and Early Roman period sees another shift in settlement in the Upper Thames Valley. Many long-lived Iron Age settlements such as Gravelly Guy, Stanton Harcourt, Oxon are abandoned and new settlements formed alongside, some are abandoned and then reoccupied at the end of the 1st century AD, for instance Watkins Farm, Northmoor, Oxon (Allen 1990, 78–81) and new settlements such as Barton Court Farm, Abingdon (Miles 1986, 4–8) and Linch Hill, Stanton Harcourt, Site 8 (Grimes 1943 44, 47–59) appear. Continuity from the Middle Iron Age into the Roman period is rarely demonstrable. This pattern seems also to be evident in the Lechlade area; the settlement at Claydon Pike shifts to a new gravel platform in the Late Iron Age (Miles and Palmer in prep), and new settlements appear at Thornhill Farm (S Palmer pers. comm.), Langford Downs (Williams 1947, 44ff) and at Roughground Farm itself.

Despite the new siting of the settlement the Early Roman occupation at Roughground farm appears to represent a gradual transition from traditional Iron Age house types, agricultural practices and technology to Roman methods (see Ch. VI.1). Only part of the settlement was excavated, and there are hints that more Romanised occupation may have existed alongside, but the survival into the Roman period of some aspects of Iron Age settlement is also attested on other sites.

The settlement lay adjacent to a 'green' at the junction of at least two droveways. As at Appleford (Hinchcliffe & Thomas 1980, 62–3) and elsewhere in the region the droveways were first defined by ditches in the 2nd century, possibly as part of the villa reorganisaton, but the evidence suggests that they were in existence long before this (see Ch. III.B.8). The definition of an Iron Age trackway or droveway by ditches in the Roman period is well illustrated at Farmoor, Oxon (Lambrick & Robinson 1979, 136). The presence of only one focus of settlement adjacent to this open area at Roughground Farm suggests that it served a single community, though one which probably comprised several farming units. This is possibly in contrast to Appleford, where there was no one focus, enclosures spreading along several sides (Hinchcliffe & Thomas 1980, 13 Fig. 3).

The square-ditched cremation burial is unusually strong evidence of a continental burial tradition which appears in the 1st century AD in the East of England. Four-post structures surrounded by ditches and with ritual associations at Smithsfield, Hardwick (Allen in preparation) and Appleford (Hinchcliffe & Thomas 1980, 44–5 and Fig. 25) may be other examples of this continental influence in the Upper Thames region. This 2nd century burial occurs at the end of this burial tradition, perhaps further evidence of the conservatism of the settlement at Roughground Farm. The fact that it is a single burial however rather than part of a cemetery as is usual in Gaul suggests that it was the preferred burial rite of one individual rather than one adopted by the whole community.

Excavations at Claydon Pike, Fairford, Glos., and Somerford Keynes, Glos., have demonstrated that Late Iron Age settlements on the low-lying first terrace were swept away in the late 1st century and replaced by officially-fostered centres incorporating large barns, religious foci of Imperial worship and limited domestic accommodation of military type (Miles 1984, 208–9; Miles and Palmer pers. comm.). Another such site is suggested by large numbers of early Roman coins, brooches and other metalwork recovered by M Maillard in surface collection at Leaze Farm south-east of Lechlade (Fig. 4; Miles 1984, 208). It is possible that the floodplain grazing on this part of the Upper Thames Valley was under imperial control towards the end of the 1st century AD. This did not occur at Roughground Farm itself, but may have inhibited the growth of the site. The decline of the officially-fostered settlement at Claydon Pike in the mid-2nd century appears to coincide with the emergence of prosperity shown by building the villa at Roughground Farm.

The appearance of rectilinear field systems and trackways is however matched elsewhere on the gravels, for instance at Northmoor, Oxon. (Allen 1990, 83), where many Early Roman sites go out of use at this time, and perhaps indicates large-scale reorganisation of the gravels at this time. This development may be part of a wider response to the introduction of a regular money supply and the development of a market economy, as suggested by Fulford (1989, 182–190).

The apparently rapid development of the villa may imply a change of ownership towards the middle of the 2nd century, but alternatively Romanisation may already have been proceeding before this, centred upon the area destroyed without record (Chapter VI.1). The villa was clearly fitted into the existing landscape, occupying almost exactly the same area as the preceding settlement, redefining the droveways and open area and with its field system oriented on the same alignment as the ditches of the former compounds. Topographical factors cannot be invoked to explain this; part of the open area due east of the villa was thickly dotted with clay patches, and may thus have been poorly-drained, partly explaining why it was not built upon, but no such constraints existed north or west of the villa.

It is possible that the villa might have exploited most or all of the 2nd and 1st gravel terrace around it, together with the floodplains of the rivers Leach and Thames, an area of 600–800 hectares. Apart from the natural boundaries suggested by the rivers and bands of poorly-drained Oxford Clay, there is another probable villa near to Great Lemhill Farm 1.7 km upstream (Fig. 4; RCHM(E) Glos. 1976, 75).

This was dug into in 1937; the results are not published, but there were stone buildings and apparently occupation of 2nd to 4th century date (information from F Innocent). Its relationship with the villa at Roughground Farm is unknown, but the level of Romanisation perhaps implies an independent establishment, which would make the edge of the 2nd terrace a likely boundary line between them.

South of the villa there are a number of Roman sites known from fieldwalking, chance discoveries and cropmarks (for details see Miles & Palmer in prep.). Most of these are not of a size or level of sophistication comparable with Roughground Farm, and were probably subsidiary to it; good dating evidence is lacking, but it is probable that some of these were only 1st to 2nd century, and were subsumed in the villa estate in the Later Roman period when groups of enclosures grew up around the 'green' next to the villa.

At Claydon Pike itself a modest farmhouse was built in the late 3rd century, and there was another stone building salvaged *c* 1 km to the east at Green Farm on the 1st terrace, apparently in use from the later 2nd to the later 4th century (Miles and Palmer in prep). The building at Green Farm may have been well-appointed, as the finds included fragments of box-flue and column tiles. The Romanised occupation here could indicate that the surrounding 1st terrace and the area of second terrace west of Roughground Farm and separated from it by a band of alluvium constituted a separate holding.

The Roughground Farm villa and its neighbours form a small group at some distance from the main cluster of Cotswold villas in Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire. Although locally trackways can be traced from aerial photographs for long distances along the valley bottom, there are no major Roman roads close by; Akeman Street lies over 5 km to the north and Ermin Street 10 km to the west. Nevertheless a string of villas has now been identified S of the Thames stretching along the Corallian Ridge from Bowling Green Farm at Stanford-in-the-Vale to Barton Court Farm at Abingdon (Chambers 1989, 54–5; Miles 1982). These sites can be interpreted as estate-centres controlling the gravel terraces along the rivers Thames and Ock, and Roughground Farm can be seen as a western continuation of these.

Water-transport and water power may have been important in the development of these sites; it may have been water-transport which in part stimulated the official settlements such as Claydon Pike, with its store-building down by the river and large numbers of imported amphorae (Miles 1984, 199–202). It is not certain that the river Thames was navigable as far up as this in the Roman period, but in the Late Saxon period river transport certainly went as far upstream as Bampton (J Blair pers. comm.), and David Miles has suggested (Miles pers. comm.) that the exceptionally rich grave-goods from the 7th century Butler's Field cemetery, which are of a type commonly associated with rich burials in Kent, imply good communications between the two areas, probably by river.

In analysing the distribution of late Oxford wares Hodder (1974, 340–59) noted a wide distribution west of Oxford which was apparently unrelated to the road system, but unfortunately did not consider the possibility of river transport. Thomson (in Ralegh Radford 1972, 90) suggests that a Roman settlement further upstream at Cricklade, where Ermin Street crosses the Thames, acted as a river-port for London-Cirencester trade, but his evidence is largely circumstantial, and alternatively David Miles has argued (pers. comm.) that possibly the extreme wealth of the Butler's Field cemetery indicates that this was the furthest upstream that was navigable, and hence the controlling point for offloading and further distribution, which might also help explain the presence of villas in the valley bottom at this point.

The buildings at Roughground Farm and Great Lemhill lie close to the river, and water may have been important both for crop-processing and for transport. Most of the stone used on the former site probably came from between 3 and 10 km to the north, and would most easily have been transported down the river Leach. In the Darent valley in Kent villas are strung out all along the river, and granaries and mill-stones demonstrate the importance of water for grinding and transporting grain. The low-lying areas adjacent to the Leach alongside the villa have not been investigated for similar evidence of water-powered mills or of crop-storage, though Miles has suggested (1984, 196) that the site at Great Lemhill might have been a mill rather than a villa.

An objection to the use of the river Thames as a busy trade route is the absence of highly Romanised settlements downriver on the N bank of the Thames until below Oxford. The absence of villas between Lechlade and Oxford has been attributed to a pre-existing dense and socially complex settlement pattern (Hingley 1984, 83–6) which was not affected by official reorganisation as was settlement further upstream. The lack of gradient of the lower reaches of the rivers Windrush and Evenlode may also have hindered the development of mills along their banks. On the south side of the river however the villas along the Corallian Ridge could have exploited the river for transport.

The layout of the villa and its adjoining enclosures and trackways, though sadly incomplete, nevertheless represents an unusually clear picture of the operation of a villa as farm, and Fig. 115 is a suggested interpretation of this in its fully developed (4th century) form. Excavations at Winterton (Goodburn 1978, 93–103) and recently at Stanwick, Northants (Neal 1989) have uncovered numerous buildings of an agricultural nature in the enclosures and fields around their villas, and more probably existed in the uninvestigated areas at Roughground Farm, perhaps spread over a radius of as much as 0.3 km from its centre.

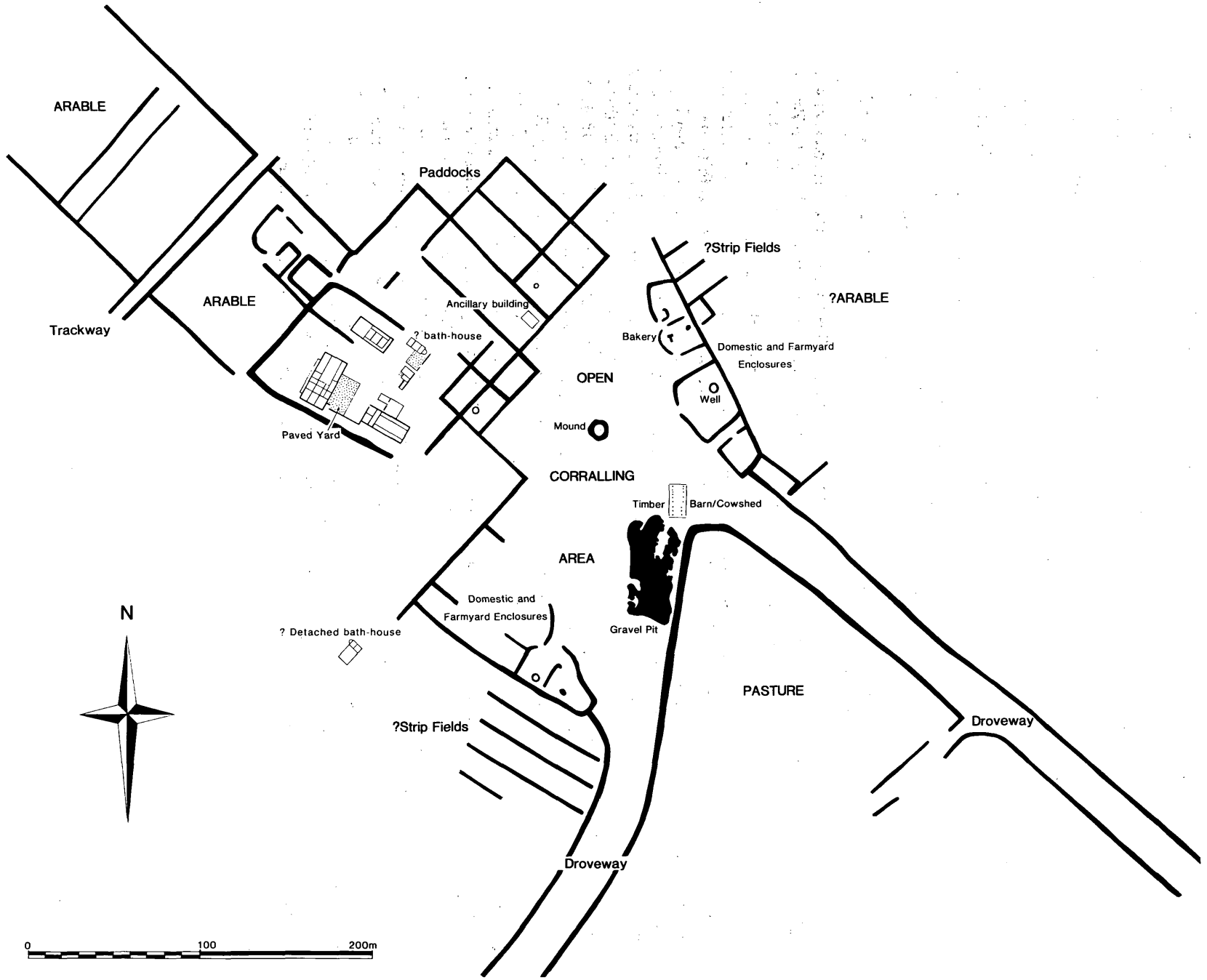

Figure 115 Interpretation of the organisation of the Late Roman villa

This was not however a planned development supplanting the pre-existing settlement. The basic elements, droveways and an open 'green' area with occupation enclosures on the north-west side, were already present in the early Roman period, and the subsequent development of the enclosure groups around the 'green' and of the gravel-pit area was gradual; the only major reorganisation undertaken all at once seems to have been the regular field system, and possibly a trackway from the south end of the 'green' northwest to the villa buildings (see Figs. 113 and 114; this is an alternative interpretation to that outlined on Fig. 74). The addition of strip-fields of standard width to the northern enclosure group in the 4th century should warn against assuming that all of the small paddocks of this width, which are only known from cropmarks, were necessarily laid out at once. Even the orientation of the field system would appear to be following that of the early Roman enclosures. The continuing use of the early Roman layout also implies, as might have been expected, that the agricultural economy was only refined, not substantially altered, with the arrival of the villa.

Although the growth of the northern and southern enclosure groups was gradual, and their origins were probably not contemporary (see Figs. 113 and 114), the periodic redefinition of a common back boundary for several enclosures in each group suggests some overall control of each enclosure group, not simply piecemeal squatting around the 'green'. The fact that the boundaries to individual enclosures, with one or two exceptions such as the 'bakery', shift back and forth, also perhaps implies common ownership of the whole, though the length of use of the enclosure groups could mean that these shifts only occurred every 15 years or so. The gradual enlargement of the enclosure groups and their encroachment upon the adjacent fields is likely to mean that ownership of both fields and enclosures was in the same hands, those of the villa owners, throughout.

The shifts in enclosure boundaries may have been in response to the villa's changing agricultural needs, but given the burials and other evidence that the enclosures were lived in, may instead reflect periodic redistribution of property between their inhabitants, possibly in accordance with the Celtic inheritance system called *tyr gwely* (Percival 1976, 139–144). However the limited skeletal evidence gives little sign of kinship groups among the inhabitants. Only an extensive survey of settlements round about will establish whether a deliberate policy of drawing in the surrounding population was practised, but the piecemeal development of the enclosures strongly suggests that the settlement process was gradual. The settlements for which there is evidence from fieldwalking or excavation, such as Leaze Farm and Claydon Pike on the first terrace, were occupied throughout the Roman period, or like Thornhill Farm were abandoned in the Early Roman period (S. Palmer pers. comm.).

The date of the end of the villa is difficult to interpret, as the latest deposits in the villa buildings had been ploughed away. The coin list includes only one issue of the house of Valentinian, coins which are relatively common on villa sites such as Claydon Pike nearby, and only one later coin, which may have been lost during robbing (see also Ravetz 1964, 28). Only 47 Roman coins were recovered from Roughground Farm, however, and the absence of late coins may simply be due to chance. Alternatively it may imply a substantial decline after 370 or thereabouts, as was suggested at some of the villas in the valley of the Bristol Avon (Branigan 1977, 96–104). The fact that there were no later coins from the enclosures on the 'green', as well as from the villa itself, perhaps suggests that the organisation that supported a money economy ceased at this time.

The postholes cut into the floor of Building IV may imply some continued use of the site, although the burials within the villa area and the scatter of silt-filled hollows across the former 'green' show that the previous organisation of the villa had largely broken down. These silt-filled hollows crammed with very late Roman pottery are very reminiscent of some of the earliest Grubenhause at Radley, Barrow Hills (Chambers in prep.), and a few objects of Anglo-Saxon type may indicate that the site remained inhabited after the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons, whose settlement is visible from cropmarks one kilometre to the south. This community was certainly established by 500 AD, but since the earliest area of the cemetery was only partly investigated it may have begun in the 5th century, as the neighbouring cemetery at Fairford did (D Miles pers. comm.). The presence of Roman stonework in relatively fresh condition in 6th century graves would suggest that villa buildings were still standing, if only as ruins, at this time.