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Exploratory Excavations of Roman Buildings at Cherhill and Manningford Bruce

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The Roman Research Trust has recently undertaken excavations at two Roman sites in the county. Cherhill Manor and Church have long been thought to overlie a major Roman building, the remains of a mosaic pavement featuring a hunting dog first being found in 1913. This is now seen as a product of Durnovarian mosaicists expanding their operations northwards around the middle of the fourth century A.D.

The site at Manningford Bruce, probably a courtyard villa, is a new discovery and has produced evidence for an elegant mosaic pavement whose design originated in central Italy and spread throughout most of the Roman empire by the fourth century. Both sites have early mediaeval churches founded close to the Roman structures, a relationship that merits further research.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades there has been a growing interest in the foundation of church buildings on or within the vestiges of Roman villas, of which there are an increasing number of examples. The study gained momentum in France in the late 1960s with the aerial survey work of Agache (1972) and was taken up again by Percival (1976, 183–199) in his work on Roman villas and by the Rodwells at Rivenhall (1985). Salway (1981, 731) has suggested that many early churches on the continent developed from Roman shrines or *mausolea* of prominent Christian families. This relationship still needs to be explored more deeply, with an examination of early mediaeval society and the development of the village system with the church as the focus of a rural community. This is beyond the scope of the present paper; however, it was in order to obtain further information for this study, as well as for the dating and distribution of Romano-British mosaics, that the two exploratory excavations were mounted between July 1984 and March 1987.

Cherhill (ST 0385 7031)

HISTORY OF INVESTIGATION

The site lies on a knoll of soliflucted chalk drift overlying the Upper Greensand and adjacent to a prolific spring line which has cut a deep ravine to the north of the site. Two miles to the south ran the Roman road from *Cunetio* (Mildenhall) to *Verlucio* (Sandy Lane).

In July 1984 the narrow grass verge to the west of St James's Church (Figure 1), known to contain the remains of a Roman mosaic, was made available for excavation to the writers by the new owner of Cherhill Manor, Mrs Trudy Oatley, in advance of possible landscaping in front of her home. The following October, again ahead of a replanting programme, further trenching was permitted by Mrs Oatley in her front garden in order to identify further remains of the Roman building located during the summer.

The greater part of the grass verge was opened to identify the alignment and dimensions of any structural remains and to obtain datable material. Unfortunately this small piece of land had been badly disturbed on several occasions and no dating evidence was recovered. However, some structural details of the Roman building were revealed which permitted a conjectural outline of the mosaic-floored chamber to be drawn (Figure 2). A respond on the east side, close to the northeast corner of the Hunting Dog panel, is inferred from the truncation of the border *tesserae*, suggesting that the chamber was divided at this point by a wide archway. This unheated double chamber with a NW–SE axis had a smaller ante-chamber to the south possibly a former corridor. The foundation for a respond on the east side indicated another wide archway linking this ante-chamber to the main area; thus the entire suite should be regarded as tri-partite. The ante-chamber itself once had a fine mosaic pavement of which only *tesserae* impressions survived in the mortar bedding. Although no trace of a hypocaust was found for this chamber many stray fragments of box flue tiles were recovered indicating that such a feature had existed elsewhere in the building.

In the present garden area robber trenches were identified along the alignment of the north wall of the mosaic room, indicating that the room had probably been terraced above the natural slope of the hill. No

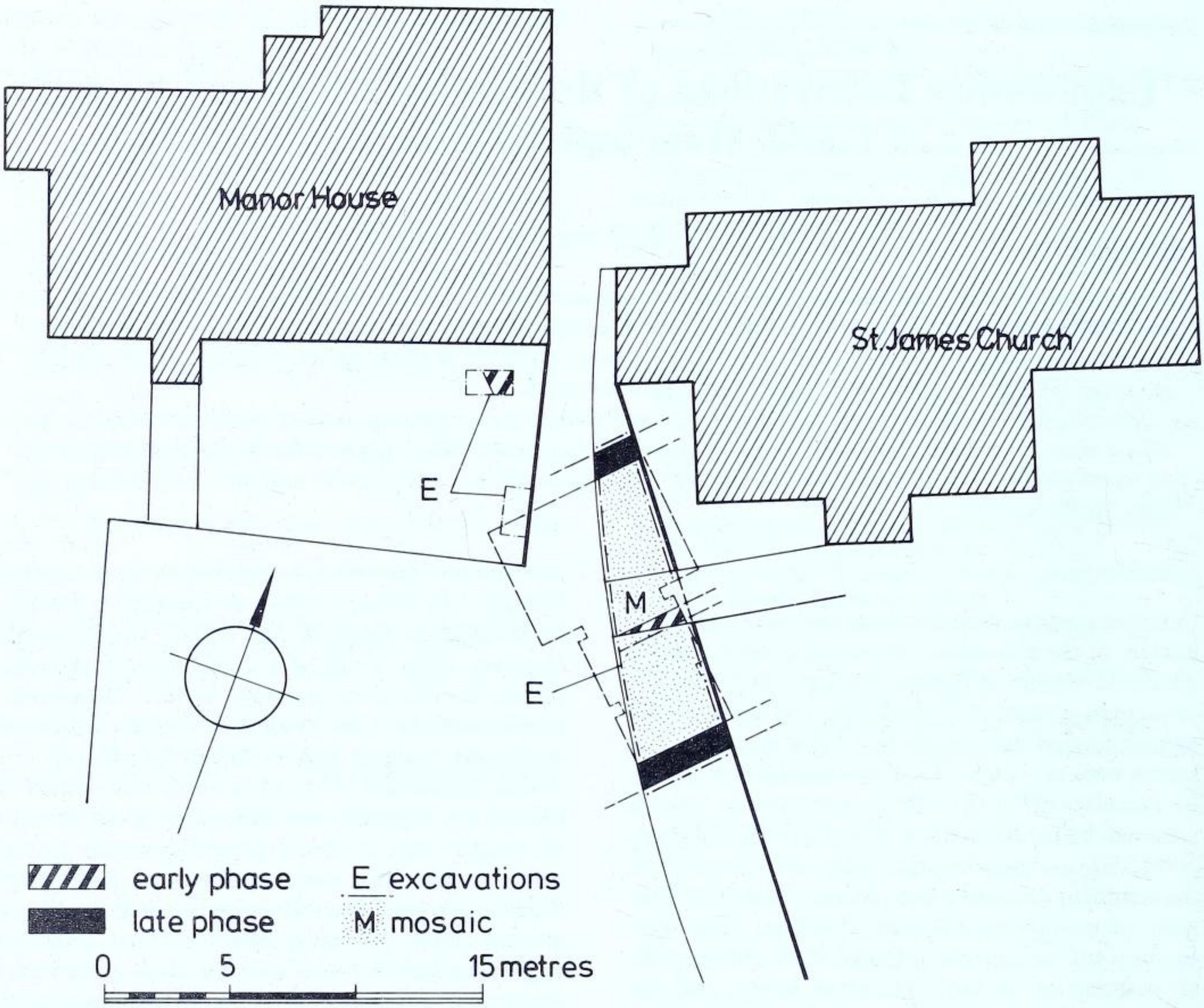

Figure 1. Cherhill: plan of mosaic chamber and its location

structural remains were located west of this area, suggesting that the mosaic room was the end chamber of a building lying beneath the south corner of the church and mostly under the churchyard. *Tesserae* have also been found in the churchyard area (information from Mr Grubb, gravedigger).

GEOLOGICAL MATERIAL

The mosaic chamber formed part of a secondary rebuilding, the rubble foundations of which consisted of dolomitic limestone, which outcrops to the west of Chippenham. Earlier foundations, on a similar alignment, of Cornbrash limestone blocks were revealed below the mosaic and to the south, passing beneath the present house (Figure 1). The building appears to have been roofed in Pennant sandstone.

INTERIOR DECORATION AND FINDS

The few fragments of painted wall plaster recovered were insufficient to give an overall impression of the scheme of decoration. These, however, included red, yellow and mauve stripes on a white ground and some imitation marble stipple. Some fragments of coarser plaster might represent external rendering.

The few sherds of Romano-British pottery recovered were unfortunately in unstratified contexts, mostly from disturbed upper levels and from robber trenches, probably of late mediaeval date. The pottery consists of basic domestic wares of the second to fourth centuries, common on sites in North Wiltshire. Mediaeval and post-mediaeval material was found throughout the shallow overburden and in the robber trench backfill.

Further finds of *tesserae* have been made about 70 m east of the old tithe barn (now demolished) and pottery and a Roman coin have been recorded to the rear of Bell Farm buildings (Blackford 1941, 31). These discoveries imply further extensions to the complex lying on a S–E axis, an orientation commonly preferred for British and Gallic villas.

The Cherhill Mosaic

The pavement first came to light in 1913 when the Hunting Dog panel was discovered to the west of St James's Church, under the flagged pathway leading from the churchyard into the grounds of Cherhill Manor (Figure 1). This panel was briefly re-exposed in 1938 and in 1939 an area of geometric decoration was discovered to the south of it. These immediately pre-war discoveries were instigated by the then owner of the Manor, Mr J.H. Blackford, and published in his book of the Manor and village (Blackford 1941, 30–31, 33, plan p. 32, and plans facing pp. 32 and 33). The Hunting Dog panel was re-exposed at least once more: in 1980 for display during the village fête.

In 1983 the Manor was sold by Mr D. Blackford to Mrs Oatley who in 1984 invited the writers to re-excavate and record the mosaic and to attempt to establish its architectural context. These limited investigations were carried out in June 1984 when all the previously known areas of mosaic were re-exposed and further areas of the mosaic were discovered. All the surviving areas of tessellation were cleaned and photographed by the Trust and then drawn *in situ* by Mr David Neal whose finished painting is reproduced here (as part of Figure 2). Conservation staff from the Wiltshire Library and Museum Service prepared the Hunting Dog panel (Figure 3) for lifting and it was removed in one piece on 28 June 1984. After conservation and rebacking with Araldite epoxy resin, vermiculite and aluminium mesh, the panel was generously donated by Mrs Oatley to Devizes Museum where it is now permanently displayed. The remainder of the mosaic was reburied *in situ*. An interim study of the mosaic has recently been published (Johnson 1985).

DESCRIPTION

It is estimated that no more than 6 per cent of the mosaic survived in 1984. Much must have been destroyed in mediaeval times when the Manor or its antecedents were constructed and also, more regrettably, in recent times when the Manor forecourt was resurfaced. The northeast corner of the Hunting Dog panel had also been destroyed by a later (Roman?) hearth. Towards the north end a modern drain running NW–SE had caused a zone of destruction. The mosaic was found at a depth of about 0.3 m.

The threshold of 'giant guilloche', discussed below, had exceptionally large *tesserae* with sides of 2.8–3.8 cm and a depth of 1.7–2.5 cm. All other *tesserae* used in the mosaic were well-cut and ranged in width from 11–19 sq mm and were 8–13 mm deep. There were five colours:

cream/white. . . . . Upper Chalk
ochre brown. . . . . .possibly sandstone
light grey/blue. . . . . .Lias limestone
orange/red. . . . . terracotta brick and tile
purple.. . . . . Pennant Sandstone

The *tesserae* were set in a hard white lime mortar with a grouting of fine whitish mortar with an occasionally pinkish hue. Large areas of tessellation, particularly towards the north end, were coated with a thick calcareous scale.

The interior (NW–SE) dimensions of the tri-partite chamber, and hence the mosaic, were clearly indicated by the surviving foundations and robbing trenches. Total destruction of the east side, however, had obscured the chamber's NE–SW dimensions. These have been estimated by assuming a minimum width for the Hunting Dog panel of 2.43 m, to allow for a second animal being chased. Thus the largest chamber would have been 5 m in depth with a width of up to 6.9 m, and the middle chamber would have been 3.25 m deep with a width of up to 4.2 m. The ante-chamber was 2 m deep and up to 4.2 m wide. The threshold between the ante-chamber and the middle chamber was paved with a coarse mosaic panel of 'giant guilloche' pattern, now almost destroyed but constructed of very large *tesserae* of purple sandstone and orange terracotta. Any other materials used must have been softer as they have totally perished. It was curious that elsewhere on the mosaic, i.e. on panel 2, bands of purple sandstone had survived whereas neighbouring bands of chalk had eroded.

Similarly, the following description of the mosaic assumes the restoration (Figure 2) of the chambers and mosaic panels to be correct. The main area of mosaic consisted of a suite of five contiguous rectangular panels, six if we include the guilloche threshold. We have seen how the mosaic of the ante-chamber, panel 1, had totally perished. The middle chamber comprised two panels of similar dimensions, 2 and 3. Panel 2 was almost entirely destroyed but apparently had consisted of a rectangular frame of simple guilloche enclosing an all-over pattern of *maeander*(?). Panel 3 featured the hunting dog,

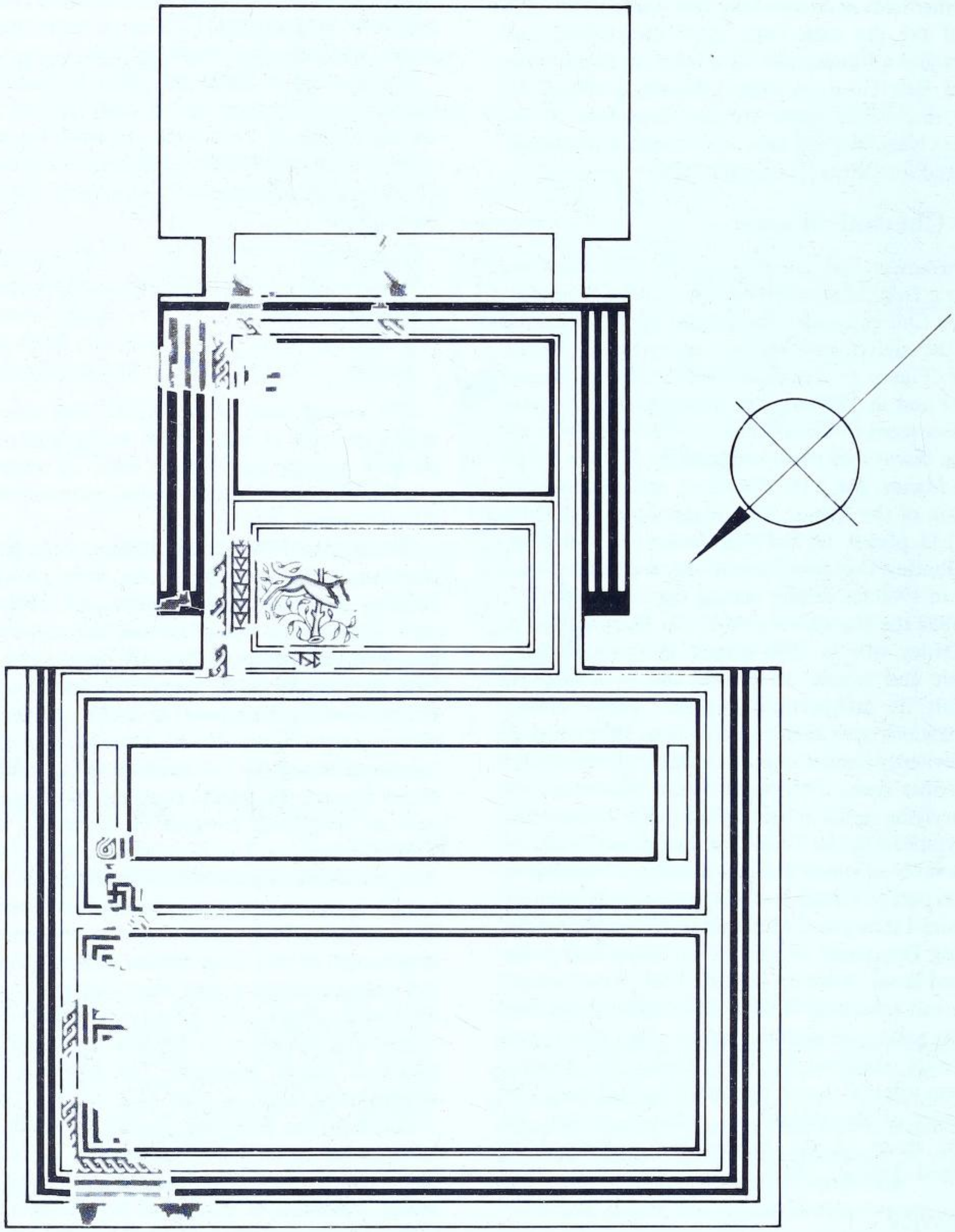

Figure 2. Cherhill: reconstruction of mosaic panels, over painting of surviving areas of mosaic reproduced by permission of David S. Neal

Figure 3. Cherhill: Hunting Dog panel *in situ*, 1984. 1 m scale

described below. Both panels were linked by simple guilloche and were flanked up to the responds by eight alternating bands of chalk and purple sandstone.

The largest chamber, to the north, also comprised two panels of similar dimensions, 4 and 5, but rather larger than those of the middle chamber. Panel 4 hardly survived at all save for its east border, which seems to have contained part of a strip of simple guilloche, of lower quality and of a different colour scheme to guilloche elsewhere on this mosaic. This strip of guilloche, if indeed it was such a thing, may have been repeated on the opposite (west) side. Part of a linear strip of swastika *maeander* also survived and may have bordered the panel along both of its long sides. The northernmost Panel, 5, was slightly better preserved and, as in Panel 2, contained an overall *maeander* pattern, but here with what appears to be part of a *pelta* in red terracotta, outlined in grey-blue. This might have been part of a strip of opposed *peltae* running parallel to the *maeander*. Both panels of the larger room were framed by simple guilloche and bordered by bands of chalk, purple sandstone, chalk, terracotta, chalk and purple sandstone, respectively.

Panel 3, part of the middle chamber, featuring the hunting dog (Figure 3) is of considerable iconographical and historical significance. A partial reconstruction (Figure 4) has been made by Luigi Thompson, based on comparisons cited below. The remains of this athletic-looking hound are finely drawn and, despite the head and most of the forelegs being missing, the animal strongly evokes the energy of the chase. The *tesserae* are grey/blue, orange, brown and white. The upper part of the right foreleg is well muscled and the rear feet have long claws. This large animal, originally over 1 m in length, is bounding past a leafy tree in pursuit of its quarry, which almost certainly would have been a stag, hind or hare. The panel is framed by a band of grey/blue and a band of

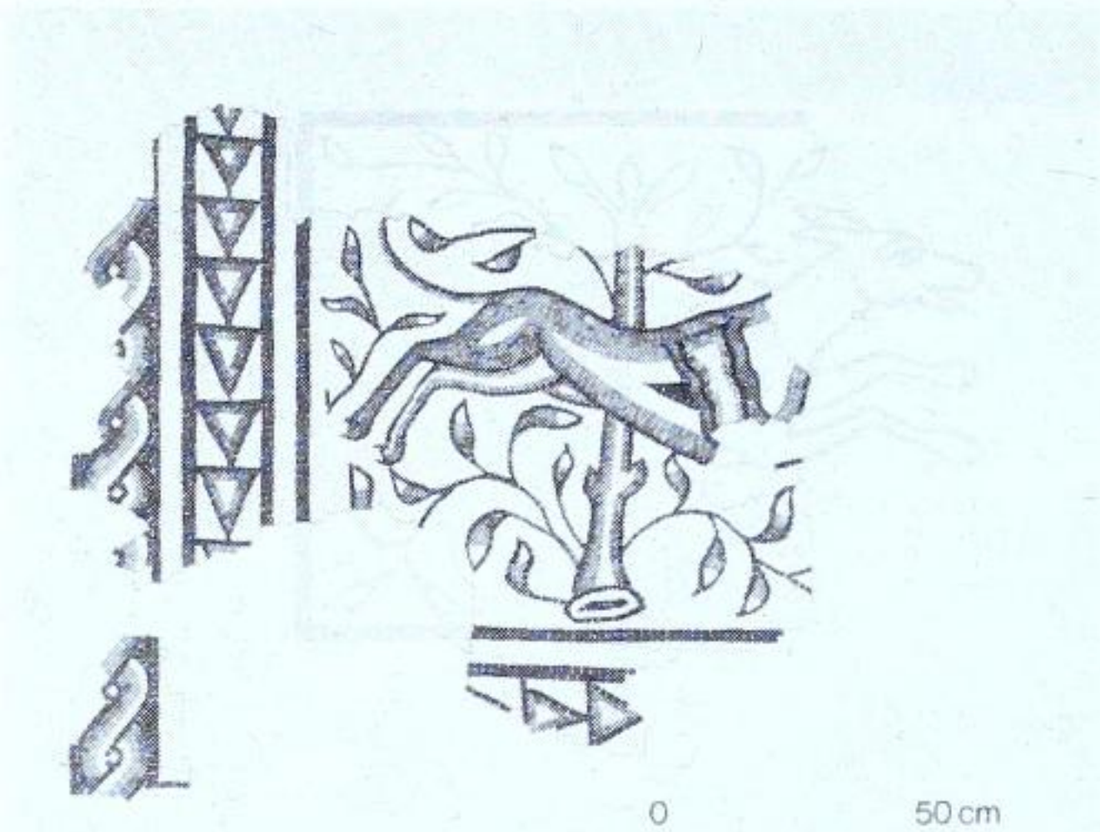

Figure 4. Cherhill: reconstruction of Hunting Dog panel

white, then a border of superposed 'hollow' triangles in grey, orange and white, running anti-clockwise, and finally by a border of simple guilloche in grey/blue, orange, brown and white.

DISCUSSION

The Cherhill mosaic is clearly to be associated with the Durnovarian 'School' (*officina*) of mosaicists, postulated by Smith as being based at *Durnovaria* (Dorchester, Dorset) during the fourth century (1969, 112–13, 116). Such an overall scheme of contiguous, rectangular panels of decoration is very similar to that of a geometric mosaic from Olga Road, Dorchester, attributed by Smith to a late 'Durno-Corinian' phase of the Durnovarian 'School' (1984, 372, Fig. 12). A similar use of multiple panels is known on the Durnovarian mosaic at Withington villa, Gloucestershire. Here Smith has demonstrated that additions were made to the Orpheus mosaic produced by mosaicists based in *Corinium* (Cirencester) in the early fourth century when the unheated chamber was extended, possibly around, or after, the middle of the fourth century (1965, 105, 107–112, Fig. II). A series of marine and hunting panels of obvious Durnovarian origin was laid down next to the Orpheus scheme, its north border being removed for the purpose. Black (1986, 155–6) has examined the iconography of the mosaic work in some detail.

More significantly, the hunting dog is very closely paralleled on three other mosaics, all of Durnovarian manufacture, at Hinton St Mary (Smith 1965, 99–105, Fig. 5) and Frampton (Lysons 1813, Pl. IV) in Dorset, and at East Coker (Smith 1969, 91, 123, Fig. 3.3) in Somerset. The Hinton mosaic is perhaps the most significant, featuring the earliest known representation of Christ on any mosaic, though combined with pagan figurative elements.

The Frampton mosaics, all now lost, had figured scenes depicting Neptune, Dionysus and various mythological themes and would appear to be entirely pagan were it not for the occurrence of a Christian monogram on the chord of the apse attached to the largest chamber (mosaic B). The East Coker pavement, also now lost, is recorded as having as its central motif a circular panel with a figured scene, interpreted by Smith (1969, 91–2) as the birth of Dionysus, bordered by a concentric zone of hounds chasing stags amongst leafy trees. The scene has more recently been re-interpreted as the rescue of Ariadne by Bacchus (Stupperich 1980, 291–2). Whichever identification is to be preferred the Dionysiac character remains undisputed.

The style of the tree on the Cherhill panel, with its base shown as a marked ellipse, is very similar to trees depicted on the Hinton St Mary and Frampton mosaics where they occur as a backdrop to the running hounds, as well as in panels by themselves at Hinton. They also occur at Withington in the Durnovarian marine panel where Black (1986, 156) views them as symbolising 'the external renewal of life', though in an absolutely pagan context. In all these examples the branches bear distinctive lanceolate leaves and grow from the entire length of the trunk, including the base. Unlike the Hinton leaves, those at Cherhill have tri-partite colouration, in red, brown and white. The leaves at Frampton (mosaic A) have greater similarity to those at Cherhill, however, having bi-partite colouration. The superposed hollow triangles bordering the dog panel are paralleled exactly at Withington where they border the marine panel. Indeed, the conjectured strip of opposed *peltae* has an exact parallel in the terminal panel at Withington and is less closely paralleled at Frampton and Hinton. They also occur at Withington in the Durnovarian marine panel where Black (1986, 156) views them as symbolising 'the external renewal of life', though in an absolutely pagan context. In all these examples the branches bear distinctive lanceolate leaves and grow from the entire length of the trunk, including the base. Unlike the Hinton leaves, those at Cherhill have tri-partite colouration, in red, brown and white. The leaves at Frampton (mosaic A) have greater similarity to those at Cherhill, however, having bi-partite colouration. The superposed hollow triangles bordering the dog panel are paralleled exactly at Withington where they border the marine panel. Indeed, the conjectured strip of opposed *peltae* has an exact parallel in the terminal panel at Withington and is less closely paralleled at Frampton and Hinton. The giant guilloche however appears to be unique in Britain and its coarseness might confirm a late date for the mosaic as a whole.

Another Durnovarian feature is stylized musculature, used on the surviving upper foreleg of the Cherhill dog and almost exactly reproduced on the animals (and human figures) at Frampton and Hinton. In short, the occurrence of athletic hounds chasing quarry in a landscape of leafy 'Durnovarian trees' at all four sites has already prompted Smith to suggest that the Cherhill mosaic was produced by the

same mosaicists (1969, 112–13, 116; Johnson 1985). The Cherhill dog is coloured and modelled much less expertly than are the animals at Hinton and Frampton however, and lacks their well-defined ribs. The Cherhill dog therefore may perhaps be seen as a slightly less accomplished (and later?) piece of work.

Toynbee suggested that such scenes are Christian allegories (1964, 14), representing the teeming life of Paradise, although Eriksen, by contrast, sees them as showing the pains of the Christian's life (1980, 43–8). Black (1986, 148) sees the deer 'as the followers of Christ, and the hounds as the dangers or perhaps the sins which lie in wait for them and pursue them through life'. However, Henig (1986, 163) does not think that the Frampton mosaics are Christian and suggests that even at Hinton St Mary the 'tree of life' and hounds chasing deer in themselves are neutral and orthodox motifs. Huskinson (1974, 77) also plays down the significance of the Chi-Rho at Frampton, suggesting it was merely the patron hedging his bets for divine protection. Similarly, Brandenburg (1969, 78) suggests that such Christian symbols, like those of pagan mystery cults, might have been used merely as 'tokens of good fortune with prophylactic value'. It is thus doubly unfortunate that no further areas of figured work survived at Cherhill to help resolve this debate.

DATING

No absolute archaeological dating evidence was recovered from below the Cherhill mosaic after it was lifted, although the earlier wall foundation sealed below the pavement (Figure 1) indicates that the mosaic belongs to a later phase of the building. It would seem that the only dating possible is that based on stylistic criteria. Reece (1980) has tentatively suggested a date for the Hinton St Mary mosaic of A.D. 335–355, based on the hairstyle of Christ. The only firm external dating evidence for an undisputed Durnovarian mosaic is that for an inferior (and possibly later?) mosaic from Dewlish villa in Dorset dated to A.D. 353–356 (Putnam and Rainey 1975). The Virgilian mosaic from Low Ham villa, Somerset, dated from A.D. 330–350 has been attributed by Smith to the Durnovarian *officina* (1984, 370) although more recently this has been linked with the *Lindinis officina* (Johnson 1987, 47). Regardless of the attribution of the Low Ham mosaic, the *floruit* of the Durnovarian *officina* appears to have been from the second to third quarters of the fourth century, with its finest work being done earlier rather than later.

It would appear that Durnovarian mosaicists, having already produced, *inter alia*, the highly distinctive mosaics at Hinton, Frampton and East Coker during the second quarter of the fourth century, began to move northwards during the third quarter in search of fresh commissions in an ever dwindling market. At Littlecote, Wiltshire, the Orpheus mosaic of the private *temenos* (Walters 1984), firmly dated to around A.D. 360, has echoes of both the Corinian and Durnovarian repertories in its design and decoration, prompting Smith to speculate that this, like the Dorchester, Olga Road mosaic, was a product of a late 'Durno-Corinian' phase of the Durnovarian *officina* (Smith in Walters and Phillips 1981, 12). For an elaboration of this phase see Smith 1984, 370–72. It is not easy to separate this hybrid phase from the late northern expansion of the mainstream Durnovarian *officina*; indeed the two developments may have been contemporary.

The Cherhill mosaic therefore is a convincing and invaluable addition to the evidence for this late northern expansion of Durnovarian mosaicists. The architectural contexts of the three key mosaics also appear to have something in common as the mosaics at Hinton and Frampton (mosaic B) were in decorated double unheated chambers in rural locations (see also Black 1986, 149). Hinton is possibly a villa although the complex at Frampton is much more problematic (Lysons 1813, l. II and Painter 1967, 15–31). Whereas Salway maintains the latter to be a villa (1981, 342) Farrar (1956, 83) and Walters (1982, 15) have remarked on the unsuitability of the site for residential use. This extraordinary complex, sited in a water meadow, consists of a curious L-shaped platform hugged by buildings containing nothing but elaborate mosaics. Furthermore local tradition refers to the site as the 'Nunnery Meadow'. Thomas (1981, 183) considers Frampton to be an 'estate church' as does Black (1986, 150) but Lysons may have been correct in the first instance when he interpreted the complex as a pagan temple (1813, 1,5.); the interpretation is still open, however. Cherhill also has an unheated double room which is paved with an elaborate Durnovarian mosaic and it is not yet certain whether this building formed part of a conventional villa. Webster (1983) has raised doubts over a number of 'villas' in the South and South West, questioning their function.

Salway (1981, 725) suggests that as Christian motifs were used on the mosaics of the reception rooms in fine 'villas' such as Frampton and Hinton, and there was such a large Christian cemetery just outside *Durnovaria*, Christian communities may have existed at this time in pockets, especially in Dorset. However, the question of whether the Cherhill mosaic, and thus the site, has either a Christian or pagan character cannot be answered on the available evidence.

Manningford Bruce (ST 141581)

This site overlies the chalk alluvium of the Pewsey Vale, almost 2 miles southwest of the town of Pewsey and 700 m east of a tributary of the River Avon as it flows to the north of the village of Manningford Bohune.

Storm damage in June 1985 caused the collapse of a section of the dividing wall between the garden of the Old Rectory (Manningford Bruce House) and the northeast extension to the graveyard of St Peter's Church (Figure 5). The Churchwarden and owner of the house and garden, Major Robert Ferguson, contracted local builders to rebuild the wall and re-buttress it where necessary. Whilst digging the foundation for a buttress along the east side of the wall a small area of mosaic pavement was exposed. The writers were notified and suggested that the trench be extended in order to locate a stone foundation of the original Roman structure onto which the new buttress was bedded, avoiding damage to the mosaic. Permission was granted by the Church authorities to examine the narrow strip of land between the wall and the first line of graves. The investigation was planned also to facilitate the positioning of future burials and to avoid unnecessary damage to the Roman remains.

This trench (No. I) revealed a badly damaged corner of an elaborate geometric mosaic in an unheated room, with a wall foundation of chalk rubble 75 cm in width (Figure 6). The mosaic was cleaned, gridded and recorded by overlapping vertical photographs, taken by Luigi Thompson and used by him to produce the scale painting reproduced in Figure 7. The broken edges and *lacunae* were consolidated with remix plasticene and the pavement and foundations were covered over with sand and roofing slates and reburied.

When Trench II was cut on the other side of the wall, in the garden of the Old Rectory, during October and November 1985, more of the mosaic was discovered, together with a continuation of the wall foundation seen in Trench I. This foundation, as in Trench I, was made of chalk rubble, but here faced on the outside with small sandstone blocks, indicating that at this point it was an outside wall (see Figure 5).

Finally, Trench III, cut in the graveyard in March 1987, located all the other surviving areas of this mosaic. A broad ditch of early post-mediaeval date had completely cut away the rear of the main Roman structure on its north side and a single alignment of graves had also penetrated the building east of the mosaic room. A plain tessellated pavement was located southeast of the mosaic and appears to have been the floor of a forward corridor. There was virtually no Roman debris overlying the mosaic which was buried by a deposit of gritty, alluvial soil containing post-mediaeval detritus. The poor condition of the mosaic suggests that it had been exposed to frosts, implying that it had been uncovered previously, though not recorded.

During March 1987 an examination was made of Major Ferguson's field immediately to the northeast of the graveyard extension. Trenches were cut across the suspected alignment of the main Roman wing to ascertain its length (Figure 5). Footings for the front *porticus* were located in the central and eastern trenches, indicating a building at least 50 m in length, with a possible winged extension, or a second building, at a right angle to it along the east side of the field. This incorporated a tile-lined outlet for a drain which, with fragments of water-proof plaster, suggested the remains of a nearby bath-suite.

In October 1985 exploration took place underneath the central flower beds of the Old Rectory garden. Two test holes located collapsed building debris, including chalk blocks, mortar, wall plaster and tile fragments, suggesting a probable west wing of a courtyard villa complex. The Roman pottery recovered came from the upper levels of overburden and the collapsed building debris and consisted mostly of third to fourth century sherds, including black burnished bowls and some Oxford wares.

The tenth century Church of St. Peter lies only 20 m from the suggested west wing of the villa. The fields west of the church, belonging to Manningford Bruce Manor, show surface features suggesting a deserted mediaeval village. The soils and disturbed features above and within the Roman foundations contained quantities of mediaeval sherds, indicating an occupation on, or close to, the Roman site during the twelfth to fourteenth centuries.

The Manningford Bruce Mosaic

The initial test hole of June 1985 was eventually expanded to become Trench I, the pavement lying 1 m below the ground level of the churchyard extension (Figure 6). Some neatly defined damage had been caused to the mosaic in the 1950s by a number of graves very close by, but most of the damage must have been caused by the construction of the garden wall in the late eighteenth century. Its foundation trench had sliced very neatly through the mosaic and its bedding of pink *opus signinum*. However, it is suspected that exposure to frosts in the eighteenth or early nineteenth century had caused most of the

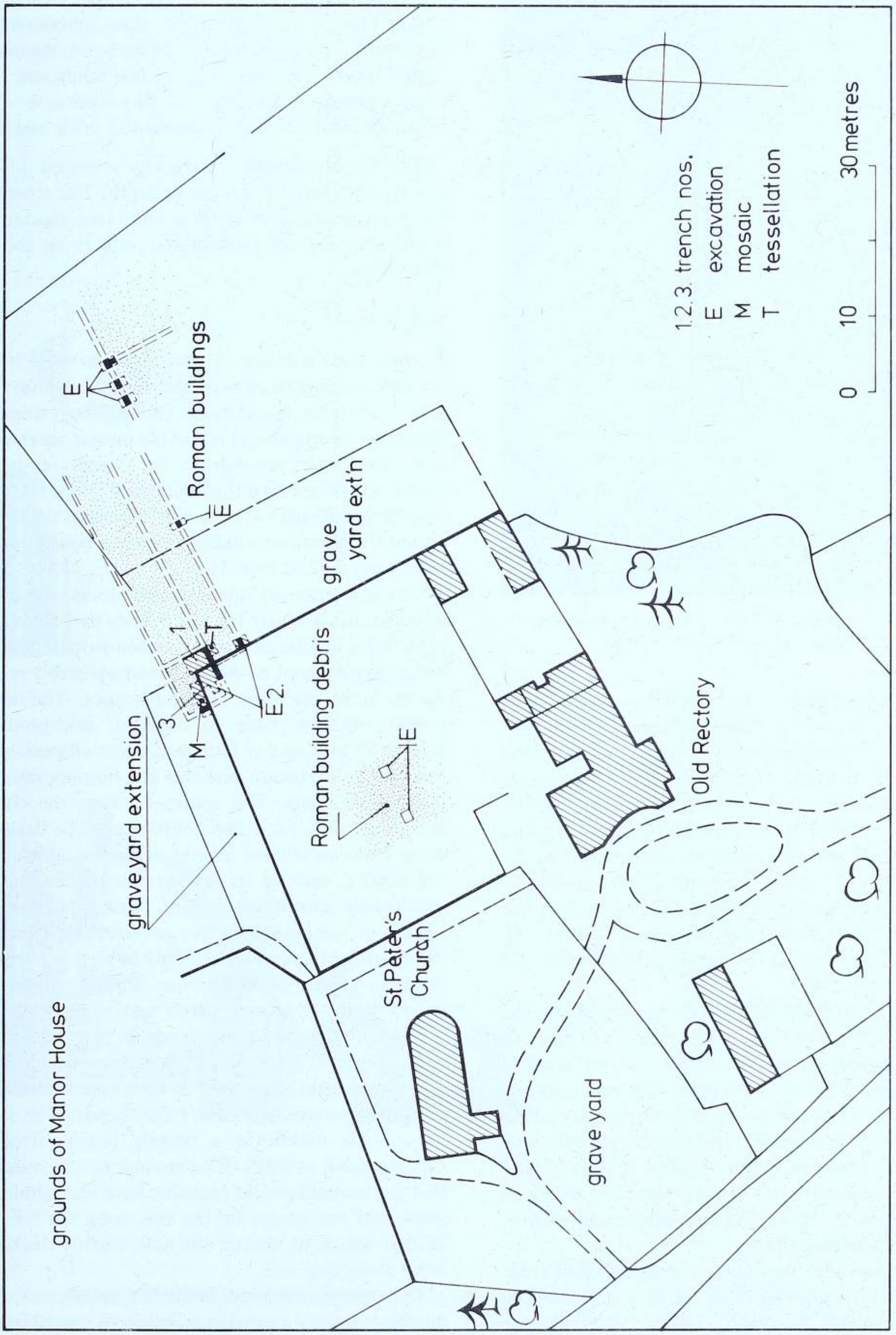

Figure 5. Manningford Bruce: plan of villa in relation to church and Old Rectory.

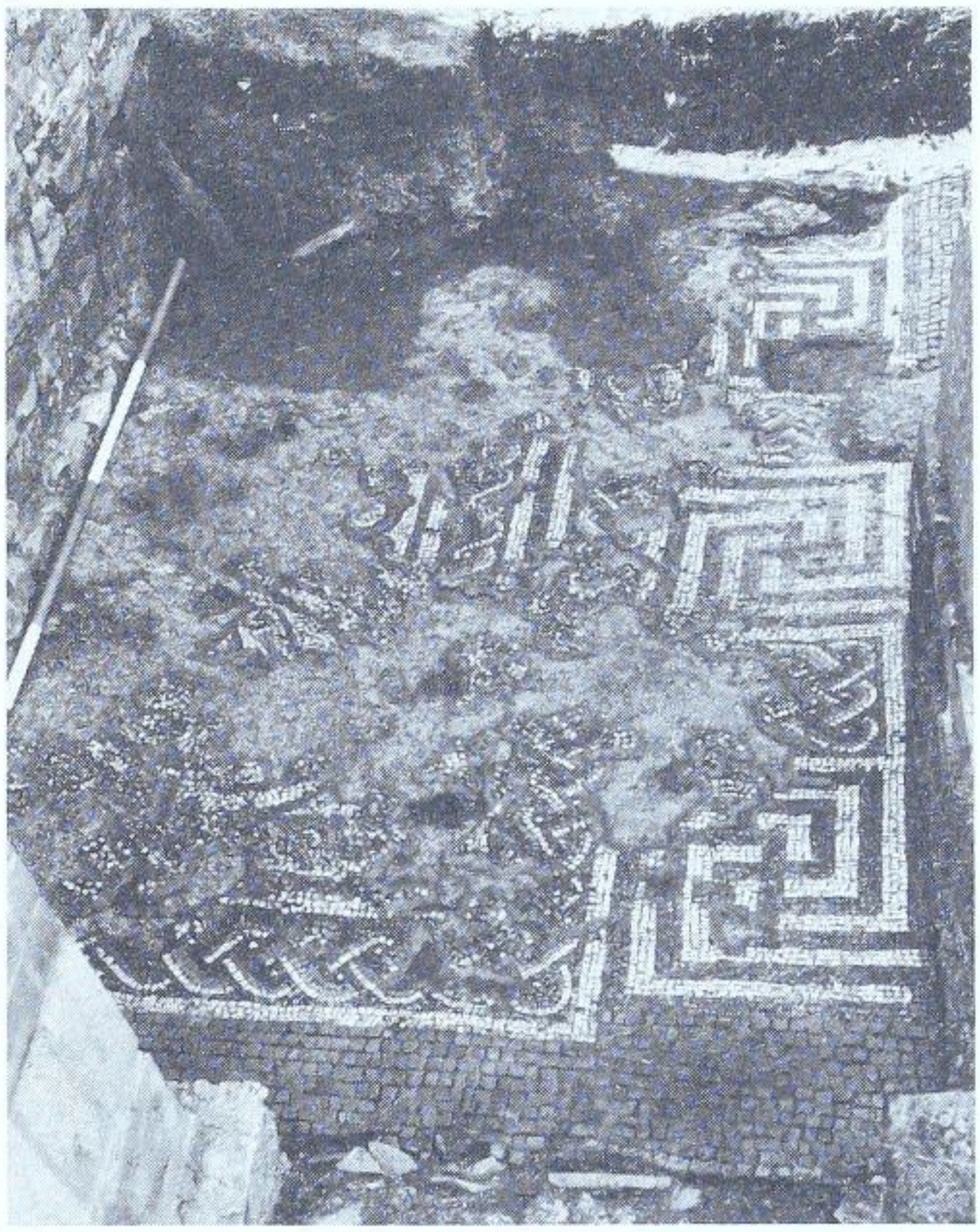

Figure 6. Manningford Bruce: Trench I with mosaic (1985), facing NW; 2 m scale

observed destruction of the tessellated surface, leaving much of the *opus signinum* bedding exposed. The surface of this bedding clearly showed a linear butting mark where a length of guilloche would have been continued, evidently the result of the laying of part of the design by the Roman mosaicist after and against an area already set. This could be interpreted either as evidence for the laying of prefabricated panels of mosaic or, alternatively, as a 'day joint', indicating the positioning of a fresh band of mosaic laid by the 'direct method', next to the previous day's work (see Johnston 1984, 528).

Trench II, cut in October to November 1985 on the opposite side of the wall in the garden of the Old Rectory, encountered the mosaic at the slightly greater depth of 1.3 m. An even smaller percentage of mosaic survived, much having been destroyed when a summer house was constructed in the north corner of the garden in the nineteenth century. In March 1987 Trench III revealed more of the mosaic at a depth of only 50–70 cm as the ground level was much lower in this part of the graveyard.

The *tesserae* were well cut, ranging in width from 9–14 mm with an average depth of 10 mm. The chalk *tesserae* tended to be slightly larger. The following materials and colours were used:

cream/white. . . . . Upper Chalk
grey/blue . . . . . .Lias limestone
purple . . . . . Pennant Sandstone
pale brown . . . . . fine sandstone
olive green . . . . . .fine sandstone
orange/red . . . . . terracotta brick and tile

The border *tesserae* of terracotta averaged 2.0–2.6 cm in width and 1.7–2.4 cm in depth. The *tesserae* of the main design were set in a white lime mortar and grouted with a fine pink mortar with brick and tile inclusions.

THE DESIGN

Despite total robbing of the northeast wall it was possible roughly to estimate the size of the room from other surviving foundations and robbing trenches. Moreover, although so little of the mosaic survived, it was possible to reconstruct the design on paper, which served to refine this estimation (Figure 7). The room was originally 6.15 m by 6.94 m and the overall size of the mosaic, excluding the outer border, would have been 5.52 m by 6.51 m.

The main part of this elaborate design, as reconstructed, has a square format, 5.34 m by 5.52 m, and is virtually unique amongst Romano-British mosaics, although certain of its elements and a possibly related design occur elsewhere in the province. The design appears to have been an outlined, grid-produced scheme of four sets of four recumbent ellipses, separated by four adjacent cushions and forming irregular concave octagons. The spaces between the ellipses along each side form two bell-shapes. The design is made from curvilinear lengths of simple guilloche in six colours, each of its two strands maintaining its own colour scheme throughout. This is framed by a square of simple guilloche, enclosed by bands of white, grey/blue and white. This in turn is bordered by three-strand guilloche, also in six colours, one strand being of brown, green and white, edged in grey/blue, the other two strands in red, brown and white, edged in grey/blue. This scheme of colouration is not consistent, however, as each strand alternates its colour pattern after every two bends. The space left in the middle is a slightly larger, irregular concave-sided octagon. The reconstruction indicates that the cushions would probably have been similar in shape and size except for the two along the NE–SW midline which are shorter and have slightly thickened lobes along that axis.

This principal scheme is flanked along most of its northeast side by a panel of *maeander* of spaced double returned swastikas, in purple on white, with a guill-

Figure 7. Manningford Bruce: reconstruction of the mosaic

oche mat or knot alternating in each space. The one surviving knot has two pointed lobes and is constructed against a white ground. At the south end of the room this panel of *maeander* would have been repeated in order to adapt the square design to the rectangular format of the room.

The destruction of so much of the mosaic causes the filling motifs to remain largely conjectural but the ellipse of the northeast corner did remain substantially intact and contained part of an elegant *cantharus*. The partially surviving ellipse of the southwest side contained a dark triangular shape, possibly the foot of another *cantharus*. The bell-shape near the northeast corner contained the remains of a floral motif with a central, pointed lobe similar to the two projecting from the smallest guilloche mat. The only other partly surviving bell-shape, along the east side, had the remains of another floral or vegetal motif, although this was rather constricted in its bell as the mosaic design seems to have been distorted at this point, possibly by later subsidence.

The whole design was bordered by coarse red tessellation and the quarter-round filet of plaster, painted red, survived intact in parts, particularly in Trench I. This would have been the finishing touch to the interior decoration of the chamber and indicates that, as was usual, first the mosaic had been laid, then the walls plastered and painted and finally the junction sealed with a filet of plaster.

DISCUSSION

Although this graceful design based on ellipses is without a direct parallel in Roman Britain some of its elements occur elsewhere and merit comment. The cushion shapes are particularly striking and immediately recall those on a late third to fourth century mosaic from Brislington villa, Avon where four, spaced cushions in simple guilloche are placed around a central square containing a *cantharus* (Barker 1900, Pls. V and VI; Branigan 1972, 78–85). A single, large cushion also occurs on the Bellerophon mosaic at Lullingstone, Kent, dated between AD 330–360 (Meates 1979, 75–83, Pl. facing p. 78, Pl. XVIa). There it is the main design feature, flanked by four circular roundels, basically the same scheme as is repeated in all-over form at Manningford. The irregular concave octagons formed between sets of ellipses recall similar shapes on the mosaic from King's Weston villa, Avon, only a few miles from Brislington and also dated to after AD 270 (Boon 1950, Pls. IVb, V and VI).

Elliptical panels are rare in Britain but the Manningford ellipses are very similar to those placed in the corners of the sophisticated mosaic in room 26 at Bignor villa, Sussex, dated on style to *c.* AD 300 (Johnson 1984, 410).

It is, however, the imaginative use of curvilinear designs in guilloche that is of greatest significance. Swirling schemes of arcs and loops of simple guilloche in Britain are almost exclusive to the West Country, although occuring throughout the empire. The design of the mosaic of room K at Keynsham villa, in Avon (Bulleid and Horne 1926, 121, Fig. 4), of three intersecting, concave-sided ovals, is very closely paralleled on a mosaic from Holcombe villa in Devon, dated to the second half of the fourth century (Pollard 1974, 92–3, Pl. XXVIII). Another example of this design is the mosaic found at Littleton villa, near Somerton, in 1827, a drawing of which is preserved in Somerset County Museum, Taunton. These schemes have a graceful, swirling effect, as does the remarkable mosaic discovered at 17 Lymington Road, Ilchester (*Lindinis*), Somerset, an even more ambitious example (Neal 1983).

It is possible that a lost pavement from room F at West Dean villa, on the Wiltshire-Hampshire border, may have had a similar design to that at Manningford but with circular panels, as at Lullingstone (*Jnl. British Arch. Assoc.* 1 (1846), 62). This villa is only 20 miles south-southeast of Manningford and the illustrated, undated fragments, found in 1845 (coloured drawings in Salisbury & South Wiltshire Museum), have been used by Stephen Cosh for a suggested reconstruction of the design which has a cushion shape in simple guilloche, with flanking circular panels containing open fans (unpublished drawings in archive of ASPROM). This might have been used as an overall pattern as at Manningford but the filling motifs and borders at West Dean show no affinities with any of the mosaics mentioned.

With the exceptions of the Lullingstone and Bignor mosaics, which exhibit elements comparable to some used more extensively at Manningford, the closest British comparisons are with the above described mosaics from Avon, Somerset and Devon. The curvilinear schemes of three of them can be attributed to the *Lindinis officina*, operating during the first half of the fourth century (Johnson 1983). The design proposed for the West Dean mosaic is even more intriguing when one considers the proximity of the site to Manningford.

The panels of *maeander* inset with guilloche mats are reminiscent of the 'interrupted *maeander*' often seen in Corinian mosaics and other unattributed mosaics from Cirencester (*Corinium*). Possibly we

should interpret this as influence from the Corinian *officinae*, both of which appear to have ceased operations around the middle of the fourth century. Moreover, echoes of this aspect of the Corinian repertory might be detected in other mosaics in Wiltshire and some in Hampshire. However, despite this apparent diffusion of design elements, the Manningford mosaic should not yet be attributed directly to a particular *officina*, although contact is more readily detected with *Lindinis* than with *Corinium*. It has been suggested (Johnson 1987, 37) that the Lindinian mosaicists produced work at ten sites, mostly in Somerset with one in Avon and one in Gloucestershire, so it is perhaps not surprising that their influence can be detected in neighbouring Wiltshire.

As a specific design, however, Manningford Bruce has its closest parallels outside Britain and many examples of this '*mosaïque de coussins*' and related designs occur in other provinces. According to Kiss (1973, 59–60) the basic scheme of recumbent ellipses, or sometimes circles, forming cushion shapes has its origin in north central Italy in the early second century AD (*Enciclopedia Italiana dell'Arte Antica* I, 1958, Fig. 115), becoming more popular and more developed in the Antonine period (Blake 1936, Pl. 30.1). The scheme remained in use throughout the Severan period then was transmitted to Gaul and North Africa by the early third century (where there is a very similar design at El Djem (Alexander, Ben Abed *et al.* 1980, 98–101, Pl. XXXIX)), and is best known, albeit in modified form, on the Bacchus mosaic from Trier (Parlasca 1959, 40–1, Pl. 40). The design afterwards became very widely used and spread to *Pannonia* (Kiss 1973, 58–62, Pls. XIV, XV, XVI. I) by the early fourth century and finally to Antioch.

The closest overseas parallel for the Manningford design is, however, also the nearest geographically: a mosaic from the villa of Bazoches in *Gallia Belgica* (Stern 1979, No. 75, Pls. XXI, XXII). Here, although the dimensions were much smaller, the general scheme is exactly the same and is executed in simple guilloche, and with stylized floral motifs. This pavement has been dated archaeologically to the first half of the third century, thus it is broadly contemporary with the Bacchus mosaic from Trier, then the capital of *Gallia Belgica*. Probable links between mosaics of that province and those of Roman Britain have already been commented upon (Johnson 1984, 409–410). The mosaic craft of *Gallia Belgica*, brilliant throughout the first half of the third century, collapsed in the latter half, shortly before a dramatic revival of mosaic working in Britain where the craft seems to have broken down from AD 220 – 270. It might be that Gallic mosaicists were at least partly responsible for the British mosaic revival, seen to its most astonishing effect in the late expansion and refurbishment of Romano-British villas, particularly in the West Country (Johnson 1987, 33–55).

The Manningford mosaicist was evidently inspired by a newly imported curvilinear design, though he seems to have had some difficulty in executing it, as witnessed by the slight variation in the width of the terminals of the cushions. Nevertheless he produced a fine mosaic with commendable dexterity, incorporating some elements from the provincial repertory, particularly from the South West. The date must at present depend upon stylistic evidence but one can with reasonable confidence ascribe the mosaic to the late third century or more probably to the first half of the fourth.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The brief examination made of both sites may provide further evidence for the transition from villa to village with the church, as the focus for a rural community, replacing the earlier dominance of the Roman villa. In each case the church building is closely associated with a manor but according to Grinsell (cited in Hurst *et al.* 1987, 32), while most of the villas in Wiltshire became the foci of Domesday manors, less than a third of the known Domesday sites have Roman antecedents. Manningford Bruce Manor is mentioned in Domesday but Cherhill is not, although the latter may have then been part of the Royal Manor of Calne (Blackford 1941, 38). Hodges (in Hurst *et al.* 1987, 32) stresses the apparent break in continuity between Roman and post-Roman occupation in the county as a whole but one should not yet preclude continuity at either of the sites under discussion.

Cherhill might be seen as a satellite to the dense group of villas around *Verlucio* (Sandy Lane) which includes those at Studley, Bowood Park, Nuthills (Sandy Lane), the two extensive sites at Bromham (Mother Anthony's Well and West Park Field) and possibly another at Heddington. The newly discovered complex at Manningford provides an additional link in what might be a chain of sites along the valley of the Wiltshire Avon, starting with West Stowell (Stanchester) in the north followed by significant sites at Upavon, Rushall, Netheravon and possibly, Amesbury.

Although the Cherhill and Manningford mosaics were both extensively damaged, enough has survived to permit at least partial reconstructions of their

remarkable designs, which in turn have enabled room sizes to be estimated. We have also gained further insight into the movement of mosaicists in Britain during the late Roman period and the spread of new designs or even artisans into the province from other parts of the empire.

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