Corinian Interlocking Squares and Venus Mosaic, Kingscote, Gloucestershire – see article on page 3.

Photo: © Grahame Soffe.
GRAHAM WEBSTER
OBE MA PhD DLitt FSA AMA MIFA

It is with sorrow that we announce the death of our Honorary President, Dr. Graham Webster on 21 May 2001, just before his 88th birthday. Graham was the best loved, and probably the greatest scholar in post-war Romano-British archaeology, and we are honoured that he was our first President. He leaves his wife Diana Bonakis and two sons from his first marriage. We send our condolences to her and to his family and friends. Obituaries have already been published in The Times and The Independent newspapers and will also appear in the archaeological press. We plan to dedicate our next Bulletin to him. This will contain a full obituary and articles relating to archaeological sites and themes particularly associated with his life and work.

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Of all the artistic remains of Roman Britain, the mosaics which paved the floors of houses are the best known and most spectacular. Buried by the collapse of the buildings that sheltered them, they have been protected from centuries of weathering and human interference.

The result is a far superior survival rate in comparison with the more exposed and more fragile painted plaster which decorated walls. Mosaics have fared well also in comparison with other forms of art, such as stone sculptures and bronze statuary; these were often deliberately smashed by iconoclasts or recycled by the lime-burners and smelters of subsequent centuries.

As a result, we know of well over 1,500 mosaics in the province. Some are fragmentary, some are recorded only in old drawings and photographs, but others have survived largely intact. The vast majority are decorated with simple geometric patterns in three or four colours, generally white, black, red and yellow obtained from natural stones and terracottas; but a significant minority show animals and figures, and some exploit a broader range of colours and materials, including coloured glass, which allowed rich blues, reds and greens. Among the figure mosaics the favourite subjects were the Greek myths beloved of Latin poets: Bellerophon killing the Chimæra, Orpheus charming the beasts with his music, and so forth. They are a testimony to the hold of classical culture on the educated classes in Britain – especially in the fourth century AD – and also to the desire of these classes to display their culture. Particularly eloquent of such concerns is the pavement of a dining room in the villa at Lullingstone in Kent (Fig. 1), where the diners reclining on a couch in the apse would have admired a scene of the abduction of Europa which was accompanied by a Latin verse alluding to the first book of Virgil’s epic poem, the Aeneid. This would have meant nothing to people who didn’t know their Greek myths or their Virgil.

These pavements, composed of thousands of small cubes or tesserae, would have represented a considerable investment on the part of the householder. They were designed to be durable – to last for generations. In the circumstances they would have been chosen with care, both to fit their surroundings and to reflect the patron’s interests and aspirations. They are thus important documents for the Roman lifestyle, especially in view of our comparative lack of knowledge of other forms of interior decoration, furniture and fittings.

Yet the systematic study of Britain’s Roman mosaics is a relatively recent development. Before the last World War many mosaics were known, and there were splendid publications with colour lithographs, going back to Samuel Lysons at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Fig. 2). However, little attempt had been made to achieve a broad perspective – to draw general conclusions about stylistic developments, patterns of distribution, choices of subject-matter, etc., and few mosaics were actually preserved in anything like their complete state. A handful could still be seen in position, e.g. at Chedworth (Gloucestershire), Brading (Isle of Wight) and Verulamium (St. Albans), and parts of some pavements had been lifted and taken to museums.
but the vast mass of material had been lost or destroyed, often recorded only in meagre descriptions or inadequate drawings. Moreover, some mosaics which had been left in situ, supposedly protected by cover-buildings, were fast deteriorating.

Since the war there has been a remarkable spate of new discoveries and an increased concern for adequate conservation and presentation. The pavement with scenes of the legend of Dido and Aeneas, found at Low Ham in Somerset, discovered in 1938 but excavated only in 1945, was the first major revelation. The Lullingstone mosaic surfaced in 1949. Then came the numerous discoveries in towns and cities affected by redevelopment in the 1950s, 60s and 70s – Verulamium, Colchester, Cirencester, and many others. The 1960s also saw the discovery of the largest single complex of mosaics, and the first extensive series of first-century black and white geometric pavements to have emerged in Britain: those of the luxurious villa at Fishbourne, near Chichester (Fig. 3). Even more important, the mosaic at Hinton St. Mary (Dorset), notable for the bust of Christ in its central roundel, was found in 1963. Almost all of these discoveries have been either preserved in situ in specially designed site buildings (Lullingstone, Fishbourne) or moved to the safety of established museums. Lack of museum space is, however, a problem: too many mosaics have had to be dismembered, or inappropriately

displayed upon walls, but a shining exception was the Hinton St. Mary pavement, purchased for the British Museum, and displayed complete upon the floor.

Along with new discoveries has come new understanding. Perhaps the most significant contribution has been David Smith’s identification of regional schools or workshops. Beginning in the 1950s, he drew attention to similarities of compositions, motifs and subjects which link mosaics in particular regions and argued that they indicated the work of close-knit groups of craftsmen. His first groups belonged to the fourth century: one in the East Midlands, another in Gloucestershire and neighbouring areas, a third in Dorset, and a fourth on and near Humberside. Each was assigned to, and named after, an urban centre, e.g. Cirencester (Corinium) in Gloucestershire, and Dorchester (Durnovaria) in Dorset. Later research tended to refine this picture, with some groups being subdivided (the Corinian group was divided into a branch specialising in figure work, notably scenes of

Leicester. The tendency to equate such groupings with tight-knit organizations has produced an over-rigid classification of the mosaics: the reality of itinerant craftsmen exchanging ideas and allegiances over long periods was too complex for us to hope to understand. But the attempt to analyse regional differences has produced important insights into how styles were evolved and disseminated.

Another major contribution has been in the recording of the mosaics. Here the principal player is David Neal, who began his career at Verulamium in the 1950s and has gone on to produce a portfolio of coloured drawings and paintings (at a scale of 1:10) which now extends to a large proportion of all the known pavements of Britain. Included are tours de force such as a tessera by a tessera record of the vast Orpheus pavement at Woodchester (Gloucestershire), last exposed in 1973. A full record of the material is the essential prerequisite for future study; and Neal, together with his collaborator Steve Cosh, is now preparing a four-volume corpus in which all their drawings will be published.

A further area where much has been achieved in recent years is the field of iconography – the study of figure subjects and the ways that they are represented. The groundwork was again laid by David Smith, who in 1977 published a definitive catalogue of mythological figures and scenes in Romano-British mosaics. This provided the launch-pad for further important studies. In particular, many scenes that had perplexed earlier commentators have now been identified as items from the standard repertoire. They had eluded interpretation because of their incomplete or damaged state, or sometimes because of the incompetence or lack of understanding of the original mosaicist, who garbled the models from which he worked. Brilliant detective work by Reinhard Stupperich recognized an incomplete scene on a pavement from Keynsham (Somerset) as representing the goddess Athena seeing her reflection as she played the flutes, the prelude to the well-known myth of the musical

Fig. 3. First-century mosaic, Fishbourne, West Sussex. Photo: © Graham Soffe.
contest between Marsyas and Apollo. Stupperich was also the first to realize that a scene on a mosaic at East Coker (also in Somerset), known only from an eighteenth-century drawing, showed the god Dionysus finding Ariadne sleeping on the island of Naxos, one of the most popular of all subjects in Roman art. These and other discoveries have confirmed the overwhelming popularity of Greek myths among Romano-British patrons.

The surge in mosaic studies has not been confined to Britain. It has affected the whole Roman world. In fact, the last half century has seen a globalization of mosaic studies. Much of the credit for this must go to the French, and especially to Henri Stern, who was instrumental in organizing the first international congress on mosaic studies at Paris in 1963, an initiative that led to the founding of the Association Internationale pour l’Étude de la Mosaïque Antique (AIEMA). This body has become the chief forum for the exchange and dissemination of information about ancient mosaics, publishing a regular bibliographical bulletin and organizing international congresses every three or four years. The latest (8th) congress, held at Lausanne in 1997, attracted delegates from 25 countries; and the latest issue of the bulletin (volume 17, published in 1999) contained 2088 entries and boasted 480 pages. The Association has also spawned several national branches, of which the British branch, the Association for the Study and Preservation of Roman Mosaics (ASPRM), is one of the most vigorous.

An important aspect of the enhancement of knowledge is the publication of corpora – detailed catalogues of the primary material. If the mosaics discovered in various regions of the Roman world are not made available to researchers, the progress of mosaic studies will be stunted. Such corpora have proliferated in recent decades. The most ambitious are the multi-volume national corpora, such as the one begun by Stern for France, and those for Tunisia (begun in 1973) and Spain (from 1978). There have also been single-volume studies (Parlasca for Germany, Von Gonzenbach for Switzerland, Kiss for Hungary), and even volumes on the mosaics of single sites (e.g. Levi for Antioch, Becatti for Ostia, Bruneau for Delos, Schmid for Augst).

In the meantime, new discoveries have continued apace. These are too numerous to mention, but the highlights include the pebble mosaics of Pella in northern Greece in the 1960s, which shed important light on the pre-Roman period; the figure mosaics of Paphos in Cyprus, excavated in the 1970s and 1980s; the remarkable cosmological mosaic at Mérida in Spain; the equally remarkable mosaic showing a group of female musicians from Mariamin in Syria; and, most recently, the mosaics from Zeugma on the Euphrates.

The enlargement of our stock of mosaics and the dissemination of information via corpora have enabled researchers to produce a number of studies on general themes. Again, only a few can be mentioned. Among surveys of local styles and their influence, the work of Henri Stern and Janine Lancha on the workshops of the Rhône valley has improved our understanding of an important link in the dissemination of mosaic from Italy to the north-western provinces. Dieter Salzmann’s study of pebble mosaics has gathered evidence for the preliminary stages in the evolution of mosaic techniques. Frank Sear has collected all the available material on Roman wall and vault mosaics, the precursors of the marvellous decorations of early Christian churches in Ravenna and elsewhere. John Clarke has analysed the distinctive black and white figure mosaics of Roman Italy. There have been countless studies on aspects of iconography.

All this progress has now been summarized in the magisterial book of Katherine Dunbabin, *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*. The first major synthesis of ancient mosaics to be published in English (or indeed any language), this examines the historical development of the art-form, as well as reviewing the styles of the Roman Empire, region by region; it also goes into questions of technique; how artists operated, and the role of the clients who commissioned them. It forms a fitting climax to a highly productive period in the history of mosaic studies – a period in which Britain has played a small, but not insignificant, part.
The creation of a catalogue or corpus of all known Romano-British mosaics in a single book has had a long development ever since mosaics have been unearthed by serious scholars. The progenitor of this process was Samuel Lysons who excavated important sites at Woodchester, Frampton and Bignor at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. These villas contained some of the finest mosaics ever found in Britain and he illustrated them skilfully. He also re-drew several other mosaics which were known at that time, publishing them as tinted engravings in his three volumes of Reliquiae Britannico-Romanæ (1813–17). These volumes are really an archeological treatise – as far as the subject was understood at the time – mainly on villas, although the mosaics figure prominently. In 1886 Thomas Morgan published his Romano-British Mosaic Pavements. This he maintained, with some justification, was ‘... the first work specifically dedicated to the description of Romano-British pavements ...’ (Morgan 1886, p. xxxiv) and can be regarded as a corpus, although the work contains only sixteen illustrations of Romano-British mosaics and he frequently strays into other fields, with sections on mosaics from overseas and coins, as well as discourses on a variety of aspects of Roman life and beliefs. He said of his work that he had ‘... arranged more than a hundred and eighty examples, according to counties, without pretending that the list is complete ... and it is a beginning for a work which others may continue and perfect afterwards ...’. (Ibid xxii). The scholar who took up the challenge in earnest was Dr. David Smith whose unpublished doctoral thesis of 1951 contains a catalogue of mosaics discovered to that date. He went on to amass a huge archive of material relating to Romano-British mosaics which is housed in the Institute of Classical Studies, London. However, although he furthered our knowledge of mosaics considerably and wrote many descriptions of mosaics published in individual site reports, he never produced a corpus for publication. Pending Smith’s work, which was never to be, Ann Rainey produced a short gazetteer of some 750 Romano-British mosaics, illustrating a few of them (Rainey 1973); but this was not meant to be a work of the high academic standard which Smith had envisaged and was prepared for the ‘interested amateur’ and she asked serious students ‘... to overlook the elementary character of the information ...’ (Ibid 9).

In 1994 David S. Neal and Stephen R. Cosh formally agreed to collaborate on a corpus of Romano-British mosaics. Previous to this, Neal had studied mosaics for over thirty years and was well-known for his tenth-scale coloured illustrations of mosaics; a catalogue of his paintings was published in 1981 (Neal 1981). Cosh, inspired by Smith’s scholarship and Neal’s illustrations, had also studied British mosaics for some years and had also painted mosaics employing Neal’s technique. It was agreed that the corpus should comprise four volumes: Vol. 1 covering Northern Britain and the Midlands; Vol. 2 South-West Britain; Vol. 3 South-East Britain; and Vol. 4 Western Britain. These areas were chosen not only to achieve roughly the same number of pavements per volume but also to take account of regional styles and the groups or ‘schools’ of mosaics which had been identified by Smith (1965, 1969, 1984). Work has progressed and the first two volumes are complete and the series is to be published by the...
Society of Antiquaries of London (Vol. 1 is currently being prepared for publication, and should be available later this year). The volumes are divided into chapters by county, the sites arranged alphabetically and each mosaic given a discrete number. The definition of 'mosaic' is any pavement where the tesserae form a pattern, however simple, or picture, and some 2,000 examples in Britain qualify for inclusion. Where known, a plan of the building(s) from which the mosaics came is included to show their location and context. In fact, the volumes will contain more building plans of Romano-British villas, townhouses and other structures (several previously unpublished) than any other work. After a general introduction to the site, the building(s) and discovery, each mosaic entry has a detailed description and discussion, including the citation of close parallels, and a full list of references.

Romano-British mosaics form an interesting collection. The earliest ones, dating to the first century, were influenced, and probably created, by craftsmen from the continent, as there was no tradition for mosaics in Britain before the Roman invasion of AD 43. This is particularly evident in the series of black and white pavements found during the excavation of the palatial building at Fishbourne, West Sussex (Cunliffe 1971). In the mid-to late second century many townhouses and a few villas were adorned with fine polychrome mosaics which, although related in scheme and motifs to continental examples, are distinctly Romano-British in style. Smith (1975) demonstrated a western and eastern tradition for these second century mosaics using the preponderance of schemes based on grids of octagons and tangent circles in the west, and nine-compartment schemes in the east; it is, however, difficult to associate these with workshops (officinae) in any particular towns as has been suggested (Johnson 1993, 147-165). Very few mosaics are datable to the third century (Smith 1981), but in the fourth century, especially in the villas of south-west Britain, the Midlands and the North, they proliferated. Smith was able to identify six groups or 'schools', naming them (perhaps deceptively) after Roman towns roughly central to their range of distribution. Other scholars have postulated further groups (Johnston 1977, Johnson 1982, 45-49 and Cosh 1988). However, as research has continued, such rigid distinctions between groups have become blurred, and the idea of discrete groups is being questioned as links between them are increasingly being recognised. The majority of the mosaics are geometric in nature but there are also many examples of figural work, particularly in the south-west and in the north of England. Despite being at the edge of the Roman Empire, the figured scenes depicted on Romano-British mosaics are classically Roman, albeit often more simply or naïvely drawn than their continental counterparts, and often with mythological scenes abbreviated, so that fewer characters appear than on similar examples elsewhere. In the compartment of a mosaic from Keynsham, for instance, Fig. 1, featuring the story of Achilles disguised as a woman at the court of King Lycomedes at Skyros, only Achilles rising from his seat, his female attire falling away, a daughter of the king fleeing in alarm and the head of the king are shown; whereas other examples from continental Europe, e.g. Vienne (Lancha 1990, 113-4, pl. 53), usually contain additional daughters, a trumpeter calling Achilles to arms and various female accoutrements strewn around.

Although many of the illustrations of the mosaics in the corpus are old engravings (such as those executed by Samuel Lysons [Lysons 1813]) and photographs of the actual mosaics, a considerable number of illustrations (over 400 to date) are the careful tessera-by-tessera paintings by the authors. This is because every mosaic is to be illustrated in plan form, mostly in colour; which is seldom possible to do photographically, and many mosaics found before 1960 are only known from oblique monochrome photographs of variable quality which rarely show the whole pavement. It is unfortunate that frequently mosaics lifted in the nineteenth century have undergone restoration (in some cases extensively), alteration, or suffered loss, so they are no longer in the condition in which they were found, often necessitating new recordings by the authors. Nevertheless many photographs, particularly of interesting details and all figured work, are included, and every effort has been made to find good colour images of the mosaic in situ wherever possible. With excavations since
1960, and where mosaics have been lifted or lie exposed in situ, the authors have been able to draw the mosaics from the original in the normal way employing a metre square grid; but with older excavations the drawing is based on photographs, excavators’ drawings and plans, tracings, and whatever other evidence is available. The drawing is then traced onto artpaper, the tessellated area covered with a background wash and the individual tesserae painted in gouache. It is a time-consuming process, and only possible because Romano-British mosaics are executed in relatively coarse tesserae compared with many from other provinces in the Roman Empire.

Only a few examples of the various techniques employed to produce illustrations can be included here. A large palatial villa at Keynsham, near Bath, was excavated in the 1920s (Bulleid and Horne 1926). Room W was hexagonal in plan and quite spectacular. Approximately half of its mosaic survived including three rectangular compartments containing mythological scenes as mentioned above. Oblique monochrome photographs were taken at the time of its discovery and parts of the mosaic were lifted and are currently stored beneath Keynsham Town Hall. Fig. 1 shows one of these pieces depicting Achilles on Skyros. These sections were drawn by Luigi Thompson from the originals as lifted and, with the aid of photographs, were transposed to Cosh’s master drawing, along with the remainder of the floor based on the photographic evidence and the excavators’ plan. The painting (Fig. 2) by Cosh is the first illustration of the surviving pieces in their correct relative positions.

The removal of the Venus mosaic from Hemsworth, Dorset, from a stair-well to the new Weston Gallery in the British Museum allowed their staff to re-back it and remove some of the ‘restored’ parts; it also gave the authors the opportunity to record each of over sixty sections in which the mosaic was originally lifted. Unfortunately the mosaic appears to have been lifted with the aid of a pick-axe so that the mosaic now has a series of ‘scars’ between the sections. Using these drawings and an old photograph of the mosaic as found, Neal was able to produce a painting of it in the condition in which it was found (Fig. 3). However, some mosaics do not survive or were reburied, but it has often been possible for the authors to re-create them in colour from various evidence. The apodyterium mosaic from Lufton, Somerset (Fig. 4) is a case in point. Cosh painted this mosaic from oblique monochrome photographs, a colour slide of the bust and the surrounding area, the excavator’s plan and coloured sketches in notebooks, and a coloured tracing of one detail.

The volumes are to be illustrated in full colour with the plates integrated into the text for ease of use. However, this is a costly process, and with so many illustrations, a large sum of money is required to ensure the publication of the four volumes (£96,000 for the first two). So far £60,000 has been raised, much of it by numerous small donations.

If you feel you are able to help, please send your donation to:
Dr. John Leveson Gower, The Square, Winscombe, North Somerset, BS25 1BS (cheques payable to ASPROM Corpus a/c).
Gifts of over £100 will be acknowledged in the text. We thank the readers who have already contributed.

References:
S. Lyons, Reliques Britannicae-Romanae, 1813.
D. S. Neal, Roman Mosaics in Britain: an introduction to their schemes and catalogue of paintings, 1981.
D. J. Smith, ‘Third-fourth-century Schools of Mosaic in Roman Britain’in La Mosaico Greco-Romanae 1965.
As predicted by Christopher Sparey-Green in *ARA* 9, pages 16-18, more Roman finds have turned up in Dorchester.

The latest is a ‘stunning’ mosaic floor, found on the Somerleigh Court development at the site of the former Dorset County Hospital. The discovery was made when archaeologists from Wessex Archaeology came down on an ancient room, initially thought to have had an industrial purpose. They then found a mosaic floor in an excellent state of preservation and of unusual patterns.

The floor, measuring some 6.5 x 4 metres (21 x 13 feet), has been recorded by Steve Cosh and will be published in the forthcoming Corpus of Romano-British mosaics. The geometric centre of the mosaic is edged on two of the remaining sides by a boldly designed but elegant border. It is the latter which makes the mosaic so attractive. Two opposing rows of black stepped triangles on white ground are edged by a simple swastika meander border enlivened on both sides of the mosaic with knots on black panels. The areas of coarse tessellation for furniture, beyond these borders, themselves bear simple red lines to tie them in with the finer central panel.

Steve Cosh has attributed this mosaic to the Corinian group of mosaicists thought to have been based in the Cirencester area. Their work appears at Halstock villa, fourteen miles north-west of Dorchester. However, elements of the Dorchester design look worryingly atypical of their work to this author. The boldness of the border and the use of knots (albeit double ones) with a swastika meander occurs already in the town on the mosaic from Durrigate Street, which is attributed to local mosaicists. It may therefore be too soon to attribute this to a ‘foreign’ firm. Parts of the central area have now been retrieved from a collapsed section. It will be most interesting to see the completed design and to be able to make a final decision as to its attribution.

The mosaic has been lifted by Virginia Neal and after conservation will go on display in the new development. The developer, Ranyard Care Limited, is building 68 apartments with ‘close-care’ facilities and the current plan is to display the mosaic, together with some earlier finds, under glass in a courtyard within the new complex. This would be accessible to the public.

Additionally, a 16 metre long (52 feet) section of a simple red and white striped corridor mosaic, together with the corner of another rich floor, have also been located.

The site was open to the public for one day in July and about 6,000 visitors turned up. It was reported that the queues were ‘long and hot’.

One of the most important discoveries to have been made in South Wales for many years has been made by metal detectorists at Langstone, near Newport, Gwent. A Roman villa of considerable quality has been located, with at least two rooms paved with fourth-century Corinian-style mosaics, of which only the borders adjacent to a wall were exposed. It is suspected that the building will exceed 30 metres (100 feet) in length. The site is of such importance to this area that the National Assembly for Wales and CADW (Welsh Historic Monuments) have scheduled the site.

The main section exposed shows a typical Corinian meander border with an inset guilloche panel, which would be repeated on all sides of the room. A blue limestone striped corner is just visible at middle left on the above photograph where it would have edged the inner panel and main design of the mosaic. The outer plain border is constructed in purple Forest of Dean sandstone, the white stripes are in chalk, possibly from the downs of Wiltshire or Dorset, and the blue stripes are lias limestone from Somerset.

The discoverers are to be congratulated for reporting their find so promptly, as richly endowed villas are exceptionally rare in South Wales.

We are withholding the exact location of the site for security reasons.
Among the finds made during archaeological excavations, the discovery of a Roman mosaic floor, without question, generates its own unique element of excitement.

The gradual exposure of intricate patterns, or occasionally a figured design, is not unlike creating a work of art; for that is what these large decorative antiquities are, created as two-dimensional expressions of the wealth of the patrons who commissioned them.

As with all archaeological material, the exposure of these frequently fragile treasures brings a responsibility to ensure their recording and preservation for posterity. However, mosaics pose a special difficulty for the excavation director: being so large and composed of hundreds of thousands of small tesserae, they are not portable like other archaeological material, and in Britain especially, once the protective cover of centuries of compressed debris and soil has been removed, they will begin to disintegrate. The ancient bedding mortars will often have lost their adhesive quality through centuries of percolating rain and deep frost penetration, and exposure to the elements inevitably hastens the process of decay.

Other finds such as pottery, coins or brooches are immediately subject to an established regime of recording and packaging as part of a site archive. Mosaics, on the other hand, form a special part of the constructional elements of a building and require a very different approach to incorporate them into the archive. A detailed and intricate record has to be made, both as a coloured drawing and photographically. In the past, antiquaries of the 18th and 19th centuries, made water-colour paintings and/or copper plate engravings which would later be hand coloured for sale or for binding into folios, such as the monumental works of Samuel Lysons on his discoveries at the sites of Bignor, West Sussex, and Woodchester and Withington in Gloucestershire.

Other artists made similar contributions to antiquarian records, but the quality and accuracy of some of these works vary considerably. They are nonetheless valuable today as often being the only record of a mosaic now long lost or destroyed. Currently, the principal British exponents of this work, Dr. David Neal and Steve Cosh, are known throughout the archaeological profession, both in Britain and abroad. The illustrative skills of Luigi Thompson have been used to record fragile but significant remains, skilfully restoring them in outline to reveal the former splendour of several important British mosaics (Figs. 1, 3, 4).

David Neal prefers to draw in situ remains directly, on site, using a string grid fixed across the mosaic, complemented with a reduced-scale grid on a hand-held drawing board, adding finer details and colour later. Other recorders have made full-scale colour tracings, reducing these to a more manageable scale later, off-site. Luigi Thompson’s preferred method is to create a vertical photo-mosaic. He first marks out a regular fine string grid which is attached to the undulating surface with small nails tapped in between the tesserae. A camera is then set on a tripod arm extension, and moved across the floor at a set height (Fig. 2). The resulting photographic images are
subsequently joined using the grid lines as a guide, and from this a scaled illustration is created. Fine details are photographed separately in colour to assist restoration on the drafting table. Sample tesserae are retained by the artists to colour-match the final painting. Prior to laying down the string grid, it is often desirable to pack any broken edges or damaged parts of a floor with plasticine or clay to prevent further damage when moving over the surface (Fig. 2).

After full recording, the mosaics then often face an uncertain future, because preservation is extremely expensive, and usually beyond the resources of an excavation.

Occasionally a mosaic will be lifted for display in a museum, if funds are made available, which is often the preferred option when the discovery has been made on a development site. Frequently however, a mosaic is reburied, a procedure which, all too often, has not been carried out satisfactorily for the continued preservation of the floor. In the recent past, and unfortunately still in certain cases today, an impermeable sheet of plastic or polythene has been placed on the mosaic's surface before backfilling. This is disastrous, because the formidable earthworm, the agent by which ancient remains where often buried in the first place, is unable to pass freely through the interstices between the tesserae. Being restricted by the plastic, worms are thus forced back and forth around the tesserae, so that in time the tesserae are dislodged and overturned, and once delicate patterns are reduced to amorphous jumble.

It is better by far, to cover the surface of a mosaic with similar material to that which had originally covered it, such as a mixture of decayed mortar and soil to a depth of at least 150 mm (6 inches). This should then be firmly compressed and overlaid with stone slabs, both as added weight, and as a marker for any future uncovering. This method allows the earthworm to pass freely through the ground and the spaces between the tesserae without dislodging them.

In conclusion, the discovery and excavation of a fine mosaic can be an exciting and spectacular event. The consequent responsibilities, however, are enormously time-consuming and expensive, although worthwhile, because the end result provides an insight into an often splendid domestic interior of one of our ancient forebears.
Many mosaics found in Britain, as in other provinces, show deities or scenes from Greek and Roman mythology. There is general agreement that these relate on the whole to the culture of the educated elite (or at least to those who aspired to be educated). Some, mainly 4th-century, mosaics have been interpreted as indicating that their owners had powerful religious beliefs, though this is more controversial. I believe (with our Director and others) that the Littlecote mosaic floored an Orphic/Bacchic cult room; by the same token it seems to me that the floors of the complex at Brading are shot through with esoteric, pagan imagery as are those at Frampton where a Christian element seems to be present as well. Christianity is self-evidently present at Hinton St. Mary whose centrepiece is a bust of Christ with the Christian chi-rho behind. At Thruxton the British owner, Quintus Natalius Natalinus seems to have dedicated a Bacchic floor ‘ex voto’ to the god, while at Lullingstone, if Professor Charles Thomas and I are right, the owner Avitus encoded his name in a poetic couplet alluding to the Aeneid in an Ovidian metre, at the same time expressing his allegiance to Christ. Elite culture permeates the Low Ham mosaic (in Taunton Museum), showing Venus presiding over human fate in the heart rending tale of love and duty encapsulated in the passions of Dido and Aeneas in books 2 and 4 of the Aeneid.

Native cult is much harder to find and in many instances its traces will be even more uncertain than those of the Upper Class beliefs of Late Pagan intellectuals or heterodox Christians. One need not be surprised by this because mosaic production, like gem-cutting and the fashioning of silver plate, belonged to a polite, classical milieu. There are no intaglions from Britain which unequivocally allude to the Matres, the Genii Cucullati, Mars Alator or Meporus although of course it is possible that such gods and goddesses were in people’s minds when they wore rings showing Roman deities like Ceres, Bonus Eventus, Mars or Apollo. With mosaics at least we have a starting-point in the cella mosaic from the temple at Lydney Park, found in 1805 and now lost but illustrated by Bathurst and King in 1879 (Fig. 1). It bears a text which reads, in expanded form: D(eo) M(artis) N(odenti) T(itus) Flavius Senilis pr(aepositus) Rel(gionis) ex stipibus posuit o(pitum) lante Victorino interp(r)(e) tante. In other words a priest called Titus Flavius Senilis paid for the mosaic out of the fees paid by worshippers, the dream-interpreter Victorinus being left in charge of the work. The mosaic, which included a sunken receptacle for further offerings, is figured with sea creatures, which suggests that Mars Nodens had connections with water, not surprising in a cult where the local water was endowed with healing properties and moreover where the sanctuary overlooked the Severn Sea. If Mars was originally shown on the mosaic his image did not survive. It is very likely he was not shown, for the sea-monsters (ketoi) and fish shown are conventional elements in marine mosaic repertoires even though, as here, executed in local style. Temples, like other important buildings, were no doubt sometimes embellished with mosaics, though little remains; there are Flavian-period tesseræ at Hayling Island and later geometric mosaics at Great Chesterford, Essex and Springhead, Kent, but none of these bear any obvious relationship to the cults practised there.

A more promising approach is to look at domestic mosaics and try to connect them with prevalent local cults. Gloucestershire with its wealth of religious sculpture and of villa mosaics provides a reasonable hunting ground for such an exercise.
opinion the canine companion of Orpheus is in fact a dog and the god is a transformed Apollo Cunomagus, Apollo the 'hound prince' as an inscription from the temple at Nettleton Shrub would have it. The Cotswold huntsman was a power of nature, possibly already conflated with Attis, before he took a new form in the palaces and villas of the ruling class as Orpheus.

My second suggestion has no need of such complex syncretism. Many mosaics from the Cotswolds show saltire crosses, the best known, perhaps, being the surviving pavement at North Leigh in Oxfordshire (Fig. 4), though it is also to be seen in room 10 in one of the bath-suites at Chedworth, traditionally a 'villa'; though both Graham Webster and Bryn Walters have offered cogent suggestions that the complex may have been a guest-house associated with a major sanctuary. The device is common enough, and indeed, also occurs on 4th century painted plaster at Nettleton, where it was suggested it was the Christian chi, standing for Christos. A more likely explanation, if one is needed, is that it should be equated with the similar saltire upon a little portable altar found recently in a Time Team sondage at Whittington, Gloucestershire, as on another, even smaller, altar at nearby Chedworth. Moreover at Chedworth, two other little altars show a standing male figure, in one case clearly a warrior with a quincunx of five dots arranged in a similar saltire on his breast. Could therefore the saltire stand for this protective deity, Mars perhaps, or the self-same deity as the Cotswold huntsman?

Surveying the repertoire of central figures on mosaics which match those most frequently invoked at shrines, there are remarkably few. The figure of Mars portrayed on the mosaic at Fullerton, Hampshire (Fig. 5), was doubtless that of the same deity who protected the fields in Britain as in Italy. The villa owner could have passed from enjoying his fine mosaic to worshipping Mars at a shrine such as those at Kings Stanley, Gloucestershire, and Woodeaton, Oxfordshire, dedicated to his worship. But Apollo and Minerva are simply adjuncts to Graeco-Roman myth (note especially Minerva as guardian of Hercules at Bramdean, Hampshire; Apollo and Marsyas at Lenthay Green, Dorset); and where is Mercury, the most venerated of all deities in local shrines?

A religious component is to be glimpsed in the local 'gods of place', the *genii loci*. The female figure holding a branch at Thenford (Fig. 6), is surely Venus – who is above all guardian of gardens – and of whom many bronze images have been found, often no doubt lost from *lararia*. From Whatley, Somerset, is a bust of Fortuna and at Winterton, Lincolnshire, of a Genius, both common in sculpture from rural settings. The admonition in another inscribed mosaic, this time from Woodchester, *Bonum Eventum bene colite*, 'Worship Bonus Eventus duly' (Fig. 7), reminds us of the many intaglios set in signet rings found in rural Britain, for instance in the Snellsham cache, showing
As we enjoy the exhibits in a museum, how often do we wonder what further treasures might be stowed away in the museum’s store? We could be forgiven for assuming that the best and most representative items in the collection will be on permanent display and that the storeroom is the preserve of second-rate artefacts or duplicates.

In the case of the British Museum’s collection of Roman-British mosaics, however, some of the most lively and accomplished figured mosaics are to be found in store. These are the surviving animals that once surrounded Orpheus on a mosaic found at Witton, not far from the well-known villa of Chedworth, in Gloucestershire.

The first traces of the Witton villa were discovered in 1811 when ploughing brought tesserae to light. The landowner invited the antiquary Samuel Lysons to excavate the site and Lysons read a paper to the Society of Antiquaries in 1813 in which he outlined his discoveries. His written account included a plan of the rooms he had uncovered and drawings by Richard Smirke of the Orpheus mosaic and the adjoining panels. One of these – the bust of Neptune with dolphins and sea-creatures – can usually be found on display in the Weston Gallery at the British Museum. Lysons also published colour plates by himself and Smirke of the whole mosaic, and of ‘not inelegant’ geometric designs made with ‘coarse tesserae’, in his magisterial work Reliquiae Britannico-Romanae.

Unlike some other Orpheus mosaics, the Witton example was sufficiently well preserved to enable all the animals to be identified. Bounding in an anti-clockwise direction around the seated figure of Orpheus were a bear with large

Fig. 1. The hound, boar and birds.

Photo: © P. A. W. Witts, by kind permission of the British Museum.

Fig. 7. Mosaic from the Woodchester (after Lysons).

Photo: © Institute of Archaeology, Oxford.

Benefits Eventus . . . but takes us back to the polite culture of ‘High Art’ which so often excludes the Romano-Celtic religion of the overwhelming majority of Britons.

NOTES ON FURTHER READING


For native cult in the Cotswolds see M. Henig, *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani I.7. Roman Sculpture from the Cotswold Region* (British Academy 1993); for inscriptions on mosaics see S. S. Freere and R. S. O. Tomlin in R. G. Collingwood and R. P. Wright, *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain II.4* (1992), 83-93 especially p. 84 no. 24483, the Lydney mosaic.
claws, a stag, a leopard with huge yellow spots, a wild ass, a lion, a lively bull, a hound, and a boar with carefully delineated bristles. Interspersed between the animals were trees with lotus-shaped leaves.

On either side of the mosaic was a narrow rectangular panel. One was decorated with a rosette flanked on either side by doves and cocks in naturalistic poses. The other had a large canthus with the remains of a peacock, probably one of a pair, on one side.

Fig. 3. The leopard. Photo: © P.A. Wiggs, by kind permission of the British Museum.

Fig. 4. The stag. Photo: © P.A. Wiggs, by kind permission of the British Museum.

Does this mean that Durnovarian craftsmen were drafted in to add or replace mosaic panels at a later date, or might artisans from two different workshops have operated side by side? Lysons considered that the Orpheus panel was "infinitely better executed" than the Neptune panel and the rectangular panels adjoining it, which he regarded as "inferior work", "probably the work of a much later age". The recorded archaeological evidence does not give a clear answer, but what is certain is that this pavement is of considerable interest to art-historians and to those studying the organisation of mosaic workshops.

Dr. Ilona Jesnick comments that in medieval and Renaissance art it was usual for two or more artists or craftsmen to collaborate and doubts that Roman methods of work would have been different. As aquatic imagery is the most widespread theme found with Orpheus, it would not be surprising if the person commissioning the mosaic envisaged the marine panel from the outset and approached the Durnovarian workshop because marine subjects were one of its specialities.

The bounding beasts on the Withington Orpheus mosaic are among the most charming and animated depictions to have come down to us from antiquity. Is it possible for the British Museum to find the space and resources to enable them to be appreciated by a wider public?

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Samuel Lysons, 'Discoveries at Withington' in 'An Account of the Remains of several Roman Buildings and other Roman Antiquities discovered in the County of Gloucester', Archaeologia 18 (1817), 118-121.


A rare treat was afforded to lovers of Romano-British art in May 2000, when for one week the surviving fourth-century mosaics from the sumptuous lost villa at Keynsham in Somerset were taken out of storage and shown to the public.

This truly worthwhile millennium event was mounted by the energetic Keynsham Heritage Trust, and for the first time since their discovery in the excavations of 1922-4, the panels from the great hexagonal mosaic in room W, and portions of the elaborate geometric floor in room J at the other end of the villa’s main range were shown to the public, laid out in their proper context. The exhibition took place in St. John’s Parish Church, and the author was fortunate enough to be present when the large and exceedingly heavy panels were delivered, and was able to assist in their positioning. Because of the great size of the pavements, one isolated panel from the hexagonal floor and another from room J could not be fitted into their exact positions in the space provided in the aisle of the church, but in every other respect the well lighted situation was ideal.

Architecturally, this great courtyard villa was one of the most exciting in Roman Britain but, most unfortunately, had a late Victorian cemetery laid out above it. In addition to this, the centre part of the main wing and all the presumed southern wing lie entombed beneath the embankment of the Bristol road, safe, but out of reach. At the site, only part of the monolithic flight of steps from the north corridor, a watertank, aqueduct block and other architectural stonework survive in a small sounding to the west of the cemetery chapel. The worn nature of the steps is a testament to the longevity of the villa and to Roman hobnails!

The great hexagonal mosaic from room W once had six figured panels displaying scenes from the stories of the gods and from classical literature.
These were linked by bands of guilloche, with lunettes and angles peopled with birds, fruit, plants and emblems. Exceptionally fine tessellation was employed in the faces of the figures, and an unusually pastel palette of local stone in grey, blue and pink was employed. Twenty-six minute glass tesserae in green, white, blue, purple and pink were found in the adjoining chamber and suggest that either that room, or room W, once glittered with areas of ceiling or wall mosaic. For many years the panels were on display, but not placed in context, in the small museum built at the Fry’s factory and in the factory itself. On closure of the museum, however, they went into storage, and have not been seen since. The surviving three square panels show Achilles discovered dressed as a girl on Skyros (where his mother, Thetis, had sent him to avoid his going to the Trojan war); The Rape of Europa, with the heroine seated on the back of the white bull that was Jupiter in disguise, moments before he abducts her; and finally, Minerva inventing the double pipes or tibiae. The goddess’s reflection may be seen in the pool at her feet, and it is likely that the water nymph accompanying her once pointed to her own lips to inform the goddess that in playing them she was doing nothing to enhance her own beauty, after which Minerva cast them away!

The geometric mosaic from floor J had at its centre the most accomplished and lovely centrepiece surviving from Roman Britain. The subtle use of beautiful pastel colours employed by the master mosaicist who designed this stylised flower is breathtaking, with the gentle gradations of colour lending a three-dimensional appearance to elements of the rosette.

The mosaics, wonderful as they were, comprised only a section of this excellent exhibition. Apart from the villa, Keynsham had a prosperous settlement in Roman times, and other exhibits hint at its wealth. Unusual fragments of sculpture include a naturalistic eagle’s claw in Bath stone, whilst a bronze pair of tweezers must be the largest and yet most elegant ever found in Britannia. Some larger items such as the fascinating statue base dedicated to Sylvanus were too heavy to convey to the exhibition and had to remain in store.

Not only Roman material was on display. Keynsham was also the site of a great abbey, and much superb quality Romanesque and medieval sculpture survives. Examples of this, together with Wessex style encaustic tiles, made a fine display.

Keynsham has always been eclipsed by her neighbours, Bristol and Bath. It has been her tragedy that having had, within her bounds, two great archaeological monuments which would have put her firmly on the cultural and tourist map, she has lost both within the last seventy years, one to a cemetery and the abbey to a bypass. With archaeological collections which many a large city museum would envy, it is to be hoped that before too long the local authority will find the funds and enthusiasm to found a museum where residents and tourists can appreciate, on a permanent basis, the glories of her past.

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Roman Oxfordshire
by Martin Henig and
Paul Booth, with Tim Allen
xi + 244 pp, 100 b&w illustrations.

Review by Grahame Saife

Three leading scholars involved in the cut and thrust of the latest fieldwork and research have provided here what is likely to be the most important recent offering in the great British tradition of 'county archaeologies'. Oxfordshire has a great wealth and variety of Roman remains, and interest in the county's Roman past stretches back at least to the late 16th century. However, since the last full-length survey in the Victoria County History of 1939, the quantity of evidence for the Roman period has increased enormously. Here, then, we have the most up-to-date interpretation of the archaeology and history, recreating the county's past more accurately than ever before and placing the evidence in a wider national context. Indeed, this book covers a larger area than earlier surveys, including the acquired territory of western Berkshire. Oxfordshire as an entity did not come into being until late Anglo-Saxon times and in the Roman period it fell within the territories or administrative regions of the Atrebates, Catuvellaunii and Dobunni, who had their civitas capitals outside the county's limits. Because of this, it provides a valuable sample of Roman life in central southern Britain, including more than one regional culture within its scope. Here is Roman Britain in microcosm, with kinship and diversity, friction and co-operation, continuity and change.

Roman Oxfordshire is placed in context by Tim Allen's masterly examination of Iron Age settlement in chapter 1. Here we read of the latest results from familiar hillforts such as Alfred's Castle, Uffington Castle and Madmarston Camp; the oppida at Abingdon and Dyke Hills and the linear dyke systems such as Grim's Ditch and Aves Ditch. To this is now added the mass of new evidence of settlement pattern, particularly from the river gravel terraces, excavated in advance of commercial extraction, by the Oxford Archaeological Unit. Martin Henig in chapter 2 sets the region under the Roman Protectorate, and although the administrative centres were focused outside the county, the area had a wealth of smaller towns, villages and religious centres. The pattern of the major settlement is thus discussed in chapter 3. The most exciting developments here must be the recent work on Alchester, the largest walled town. This started with the RCHME air photographic evidence of streets, buildings and the rectilinear layout of land divisions along the principal Roman roads leading out of the town. Added to this is Eberhard Sauer's work on the Claudian vexillation fort, the parade ground (perhaps the earliest known in the empire) and the temporary camp. Dorchester-on-Thames could well have had a similar history. Air photography and fieldwork have also provided new evidence of major roadside settlements such as Sansom's Platt on Akeman Street.

Rural settlement and the environment are examined in chapter 4. Here we range from the rich villas of the eastern Cotswolds such as North Leigh and Stonesfield, down to the more typical establishments at Wychwood and Shakenoak, and the smaller villas of the Stonesfield mosaic depicting Bacchus (supplemented by the
rediscovery of the 18th-century embroidery of the same mosaic), and Hakewill’s engravings of five mosaics at the North Leigh villa, are particularly significant.

This book is an essay in synthesis and collaboration. The authors draw on an extensive knowledge of Romano-British archaeology and the work of many other scholars to place the evidence of this region in its proper context. With its full references and bibliography and numerous illustrations it offers a unique and fascinating insight into the heart of Roman Britain.

**Art and Society in Fourth-Century Britain, Villa Mosaics in Context**

by Sarah Scott

Oxford Univ. School of Archaeology.


**Review by Grahame Soffe**

At first sight this book seems an expensive purchase for a paperback but the reader will soon realise that it is a well-researched and up-to-date contribution to the study of Romano-British mosaics. To all those directly concerned with this subject, this book is an essential reference work.

As the title indicates, the author brings us closer to how mosaics not only related to Roman art but to ‘the contexts for which such objects were originally created’. How did they relate ‘as integral features of houses, palaces, temples and public buildings . . . rather than as isolated works of art’. She also reminds us that as ancient statements of ‘art’, scholars have often ‘read and understood’ Roman mosaic pavements as if they were created and interpreted in the modern sense of the fine arts. This does not do justice to the original intention of the patrons and mosaicists.

This study, therefore, concentrates on those fourth-century mosaics, many famous and familiar, occurring within or seen in terms of the architectural and social context of Romano-British villas. In this sense it advances such studies as David Smith’s contribution to *The Roman Villa in Britain* (ed. A. L. F. Rivet, 1969) and more specific and recent works as J. T. Smith’s *Roman Villas: A Study in Social Structure* (1998).

The book is divided into nine chapters. The introductory one discusses the subject in the context of provincial art and the regional significance of artistic choices. But in chapter 2 the author gets to grips with problems of external dating, analyses of style and how the mosaic industry actually worked, with tantalising fragments of evidence for mosaicists from the continent and North Africa. Chapter 3 is a major review of the now well-known hypotheses of ‘regional schools’ of mosaicists, with the author concluding that ‘on current evidence it is debatable whether the terms school or workshop are really appropriate to describe the organisation of the mosaic industry within these regions’.

In some ways this reviewer has found chapter 4’s study of the architectural contexts slightly disappointing, particularly as this was clearly meant to be the most important subject in the book. Villas are described individually within regional groups starting with the Cotswolds and the South-West. But here we come up against the familiar problems of dating and phasing – the legacy of inadequate excavation, and at Chedworth, for instance, the reinterpretation of the site as a religious complex is skated over (p. 83). This is also apparent in the redrawn plans, which are sometimes over-simplified or leave off important detail, such as the ‘impressive monumental gateway’ at Littlecote, described in the caption of figure 55.

The reader can use chapter 4 as a reference when embarking on the detailed discussion of ‘mythological subjects’ or iconography of individual mosaics, in chapter 5. The discussion of the two major iconographic mosaics at Brading is a very useful summary of the two current schools of interpretation by scholars who all, in fact, agree that the ‘pavements reflect classical learning on the part of the villa owner and the desire to display such knowledge to others’. In one category are the interpretations of Martin Henig and Ernest Black, who propose fascinating allegorical significance for the various compositions. On the other hand, Roger Ling and Patricia Witts propose that many themes are ill-understood excerpts ‘from the iconography of the more popular themes of fourth-century art’. The recent work of the present writer and Martin Henig on the Thruxton villa and mosaic is summarised, together with Bryn Walters’ at Littlecote, and other researchers at Low Ham and Stonesfield, although to refer to some of these villas as ‘modest’ on the available evidence is incautious.

Chapter 6 on Orpheus mosaics, chapter 7 on the Seasons, and 8 on Christianity, are all good summaries of the evidence from the archaeological literature and the book closes with a discussion of élite power and social transition in fourth-century Britain.

One of the most useful aspects of this book is its full and constant (Harvard) references to the existing literature, from which, of course, most of its data is derived. It also has a good index. The maps and plans are well drawn and reproduced but unfortunately the maps have no scales and the scales of plans vary annoyingly. Another disappointment is that although the original photographs and engravings of many mosaics were clearly of a high quality, they have been very poorly printed in muddy dark monotone. Here author and readers alike have been let down by the publisher and printer. Fortunately most can be found in other publications referred to in this important and essential book.
BUILDING A ROMAN LEGIONARY FORTRESS. The Romans are renowned for the effectiveness of their building technology. However, as Dr. Shirley’s pioneering work shows, the foundation of their military structures was the availability and use of the military manpower at their disposal. The construction of a legionary fortress would have needed many millions of man-hours, so that a single fortress took 2-3 years to build. Drawing in particular on her work at Inchtuthil in Scotland the author outlines the general sequence of construction work – for both timber and stone buildings – and explains what a fortress looked like and how it functioned. The materials used, the structural design and building techniques are all described together with the logistics for the transport and supply of required materials, food and animal fodder.

VERULAMIIUM – The Roman City of St. Albans. The last twenty years have seen an unprecedented amount of archaeological research on Roman St. Albans. The results of much of this research are not readily accessible to the non-specialist, although they have led to the formation of radical new ideas about the history of the town and surrounding area. This book provides an up-to-date authoritative account of Verulamium from the first century BC, when it was the administrative centre of the Catuvellauni, to its rise as a Saxon town in the early eighth century. In particular the author, Rosalind Niblett, looks at the evidence for the early Christian focus and of a surviving Romano-British enclave. A book for students of Roman Britain and the local residents.

ROMAN CHESTER – City of the Eagles. Roman Chester was essentially a military fortress, home for more than 300 years to an imperial legion, one of thirty such elite units of the Roman army which, led by their eagle standards, won and held Rome’s great empire. Chester, or Roman Deva, lay at the extreme north-western limit of the empire and thus, in Roman imagination, stood at the edge of the world! Commerce played an important part in the life of the community. A garrison town grew up beside the fortress, there were other substantial settlements around and economic activity was enhanced by Chester’s possession of a natural harbour. The author reconstructs the Roman fortress and town, explains the reasons for its strategic importance and describes the history as well as the day-to-day lives of the inhabitants. Many of the interpretations are new – the result is an authoritative book on Roman Chester that breaks new ground.

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