

BRAMDEAN ROMAN VILLA: A NOTE ON PLANS OF ITS BUILDINGS

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ABSTRACT

A plan of Bramdean Roman villa, dating to the 1820s, has given new data on the layout of the buildings and the villa courtyard. John Lickman (1774–1844), a schoolmaster based near Andover, made the plan and associated paintings of the mosaics, copies of which are now held at Stourhead and Lydney Park. This paper discusses the plan, reconciles it with other plans made of the site, and proposes that Bramdean was a typical winged-corridor house within a rectangular courtyard, with an aisled building at right-angles to it at the other end of the courtyard.

INTRODUCTION

During the extensive research for the corpus of Romano-British mosaics much interesting and unpublished material was found, which, although important, was not relevant to the subject in hand. One such was an annotated plan of Bramdean Roman villa from the 1820s, which came to light in 2003. This not only shows a plan of the building with the famous mosaics, more detailed than was hitherto known, but also includes parts of a large structure lying at right angles to it (Fig. 1). The accompanying plan to the mosaic entries in the Romano-British corpus was based on this, but, because of the nature of the work and the fact that there was no evidence for mosaics in this second building, little more than fleeting reference could be given there (Neal & Cosh 2009, 165, fig. 114). This will be rectified in this short paper. Conversely, it is not intended to discuss the two mosaics here as they have been considered in great detail in the corpus and elsewhere (Ibid. Mosaics 308.1 & 308.2).

The plan and paintings of the mosaics at Bramdean were by John Lickman (1774–1844), a schoolmaster at Hatherden near Andover, who was also a Methodist preacher and a skilled artist (Cosh 2004; Coldicott 2012). In 1823 he painted a detailed picture of the newly unearthed Thruxton mosaic for the landowner who was an acquaintance of his; the illustration came to the notice of the great antiquary, Sir Richard Colt Hoare (Henig & Soffe 1993). This was the same year as the discovery of the Bramdean mosaics, which were drawn by Lickman shortly after a protective structure had been erected over them. This contribution was unknown until two paintings of the mosaics emerged in 1992 in the library of Stourhead, the former home of Sir Richard Colt Hoare, Lickman's patron. This discovery, the paintings' significance and interpretation have been discussed in great detail in several articles by Dr Patricia Witts (1993, 2002, 2006 and 2007). At some stage in the 1820s Lickman was requested to make copies of his mosaic paintings for Rt Hon Charles Bragge Bathurst (1754–1831). He was also a keen antiquary and had investigated the famous Roman temple complex on the Lydney estate in Gloucestershire which he had inherited in 1804; he also collected engravings and this interest led to his commissioning Lickman to make these copies. These, including the Bramdean plan, currently form part of the private collection of his descendant, Viscount Bledisloe of Lydney Park.

It is not known precisely when John Lickman made his plan and paintings of the Bramdean mosaics, presumably having visited the site. His circumstances, as a schoolmaster and widower with a young family, made it difficult for him to travel. He certainly visited the

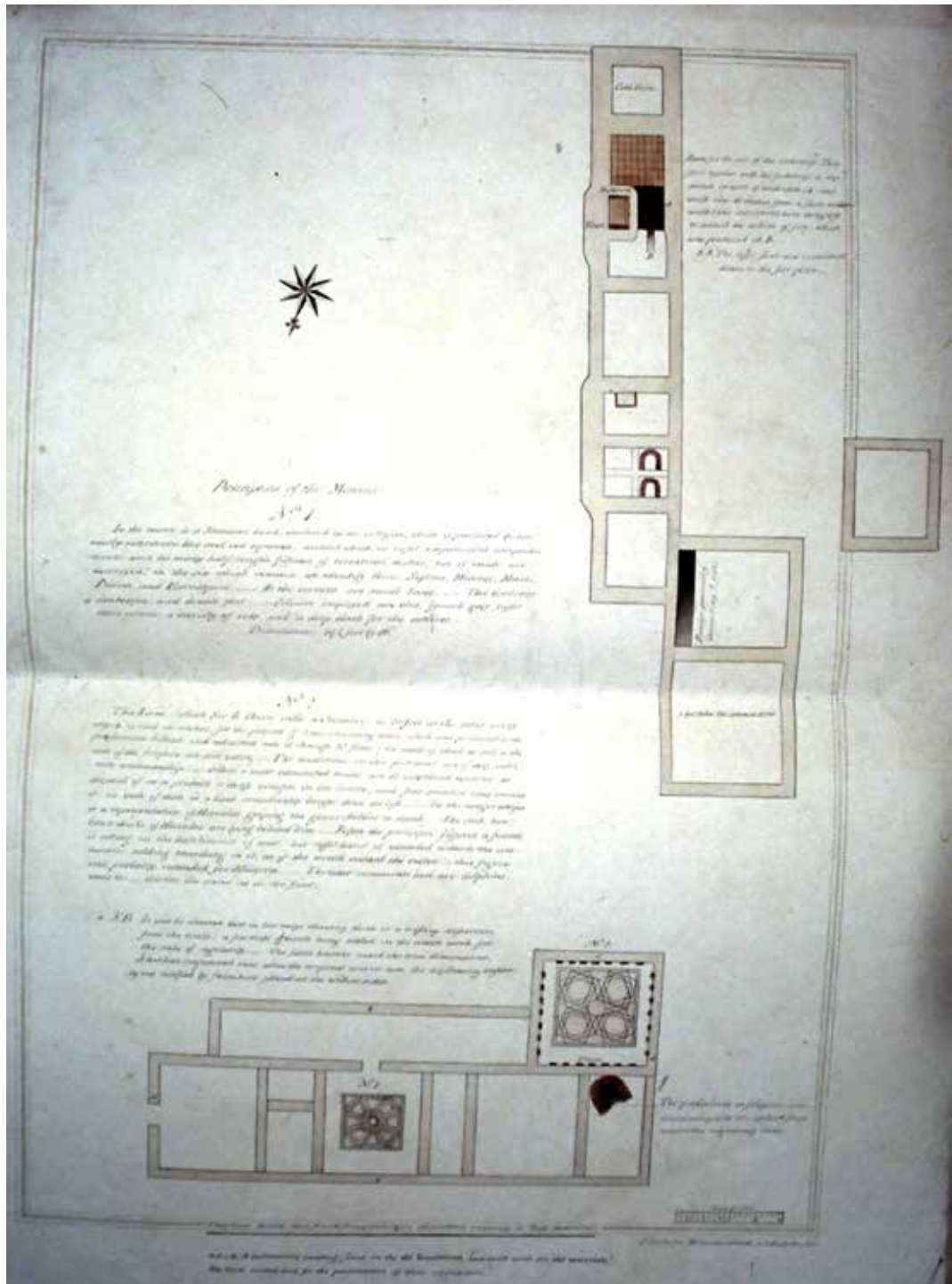


Fig. 1 Annotated plan of Bramdean Roman villa from the 1820s

nearby excavations at Thruxton and Abbots Ann, and, because pavements from both sites were lifted and are currently displayed in the British Museum, the accuracy of his paintings can be appreciated. Bramdean is not too far distant, and we can assume that he visited the site personally and took the same care, although it is clear from his painting of the mosaic from Crondall that he had not seen *that* particular pavement despite Colt Hoare's praise of it (Colt Hoare 1829, 54; Neal & Cosh 2009, 170–1, fig. 118a). The Bramdean plan could be no later than 1828, the date given on the drawing, and was executed after the erection of the cover building, which was in place by 1824. Although 1828 is the date on the copy, the original plan, which was presumably executed for Sir Richard Colt Hoare but no longer appears to form part of his collection at Stourhead, may well have been drawn nearer the time of discovery. Nevertheless, it was some years before John Duthy – previously our earliest principal source – was writing, by which time, although the rooms with mosaics and tessellated pavements lay within a cover building, the other Roman remains no longer survived. This is clear from Duthy's small published plan, which shows only the main house and merely marks the position of a 'sudatory' (Duthy 1839, no. 1).

Thereafter only the mosaics drew attention. In the *Builder* 13, 100–1 dated 3 March 1855, a correspondent, Edward J Lance, stated that the mosaics could be viewed 'by permission of the owner, Colonel Greenwood, of Brookwood'. Their subsequent sad destruction has been documented in detail elsewhere (Shore 1899, 147; Witts 2006).

THE 'WINGED CORRIDOR' HOUSE

On Lickman's annotated plan he states: 'a, b, c and d: A substantial building (laid on the old foundations and build with the old materials) has been erected here for the preservation of these curiosities'. The letters a–d indicate that it was the full extent of the cover building which he had planned. It would seem that both Duthy and Lickman included only the

walls of rooms enclosed or built over by this protective structure. It seems likely that the house was originally symmetrical with a second square wing room and probably an additional rectangular room on the east side, in both of which there was presumably nothing of interest. The traces of parallel walls that Duthy took to be east walls of an enclosure were perhaps part of these unplanned rooms as they are more or less where they ought to be. There are many examples of this type of building, and the *porticus* façade with two projecting corner rooms is ubiquitous, even applied to aisled buildings in the region (Stroud, North Warnborough, Fishbourne Creek, etc). Both plans of the Bramdean house are similar except that one rectangular room on Duthy's has a cross-wall on Lickman's; curiously Duthy mentions the cross-wall in his text so it was doubtless an omission on his part. Lickman's doorway at the east end was probably the entry to the cover building and not Roman. The annotations on his plan of this part of the villa chiefly concern the mosaics. Dealing with the mosaic in the heated 'wing' room, he notes: 'It will be observed that in the large drawing there is a trifling departure from the truth: a few rows of tessels being added in the coarse work for the sake of regularity. The [box] flues however mark the true dimensions. It has been conjectured that, when the original was in use, the displeasing irregularity was rectified by furniture placed on the widest sides.' His plan shows the square panel set forward in the square room. This phenomenon is often observed in unheated rooms where it is usually given as evidence for the placement of three couches for dining – perhaps summer dining rooms. Because of the rare survival of mosaics over hypocausts due to collapse and destruction during the robbing of underlying building material, notably for tiles, it is rare indeed to find the winter equivalent (see Cosh 2000). The stoke-hole for the hypocaust was in the north wall and Lickman included a drawing of it in the narrow room at the west end of the building with an accompanying note: 'The praefurnium or fire-place communicating with the arches and flues under the adjoining room'. It was

presumably a channelled hypocaust rather than the pillared type, which were largely confined to bath-suites by the fourth century.

THE AISLED BUILDING

While so much attention was given to the wonderful figured mosaics of the 'winged-corridor' building, the same cannot be said for the other and larger structure. The earliest known report is in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1823, 631–2) when 'excavations' were evidently still in progress: 'Workmen are continually removing the rubbish, and it is expected much more will be discovered. About thirty yards from what appears the main building a very large rough-bricked pavement has been found, nearly 2 feet beneath the surface, the connection of which with the above pavements is yet to be explored. ...the most singular discovery is the arrangement of small cells, about four feet beneath the surface formed by a number of red tile columns, about a foot square. This is about 80 yards from the pavements, and has hitherto been cleared only to a small extent.' No name is appended to the letter but Duthy attributed it to Sir Richard Colt Hoare.

In the following year a letter in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (1824, 100–1) by 'Viator', the pseudonym of Dr George Lipscomb (1773–1846), notes: 'The outward buildings annexed to this villa are extensive, the walls built with flint, large Roman tiles, etc, and at the extremity of the parts already discovered is a very perfect little sudatory, with its flues, in their original situation; and it is supposed that the foundations of buildings are still more extensive.'

Although Duthy's account of the villa is the fullest, he can add very little about the second building: 'A very perfect little sudatory was discovered amongst the foundations on the southern side, with hypocaust and flues, in their original position, and the remains of smoke and soot still adhering to the tiles of which they were constructed. Nothing of this now remains, except a few Roman bricks, still forming the foundation wall. The site of the sudatory is marked on the plan. Among the foundations now dug up on the western side were originally those of a large apartment, in which were

evident traces of an open fire-place, without vault or flues. It is much to be regretted that this has perished... the connection between the western and northern ranges has not been entirely traced...' (Duthy 1939, 40–1). He shows an irregular 'excavation' on his plan, roughly the shape and dimensions of Lickman's building, but the lack of coherent detail on it probably reflects the state of destruction he encountered.

Lickman planned the features which had been destroyed by the time Duthy wrote. Although the second structure appears to be carefully drawn, its position in relation to the main house is probably not correct and the separate building plans may well have been arranged to fit on the sheet of paper rather than giving their true locations. It would be unusual for an aisled or other building to partly obscure the house when viewed towards the front. The building also seems to be located closer to the house on Lickman's drawing (Fig. 2a) compared with the position of the 'sudatory' marked on Duthy's plan (Fig. 2b). The 1823 letter mentions that a large paved room lay about 30 yards (27.5m) from the mosaics and the 'sudatory' about 80 yards (73m), the latter agreeing closely to the position shown by Duthy. Assuming that the 'large room' equates with the large room at the north end of the second building on Lickman's plan, the approximate difference of 50 yards is close to the total length of 47 yards (43m) for the building as drawn by Lickman. By locating Lickman's buildings where they are indicated on Duthy's drawing, an overall conjectural plan can be produced (Fig. 2c). It is clear that much had been lost by the time Duthy wrote, and his direct quote from 'Viator' shows how much he was relying on this earlier material. It now seems likely that the remains of the 'sudatory' (sweating room) marked on his plan were actually those of the cold plunge bath, and 'sudatory' may merely have been a vague term for Roman baths or the remains misunderstood.

Little extra knowledge of this building can be gleaned from the excavations conducted by Brian Perry from the 1960s to 1980s; he was chiefly concerned with the Iron Age banjo enclosure close by and other enclosure ditches (Perry 1972, 1982 and 1986). One of his

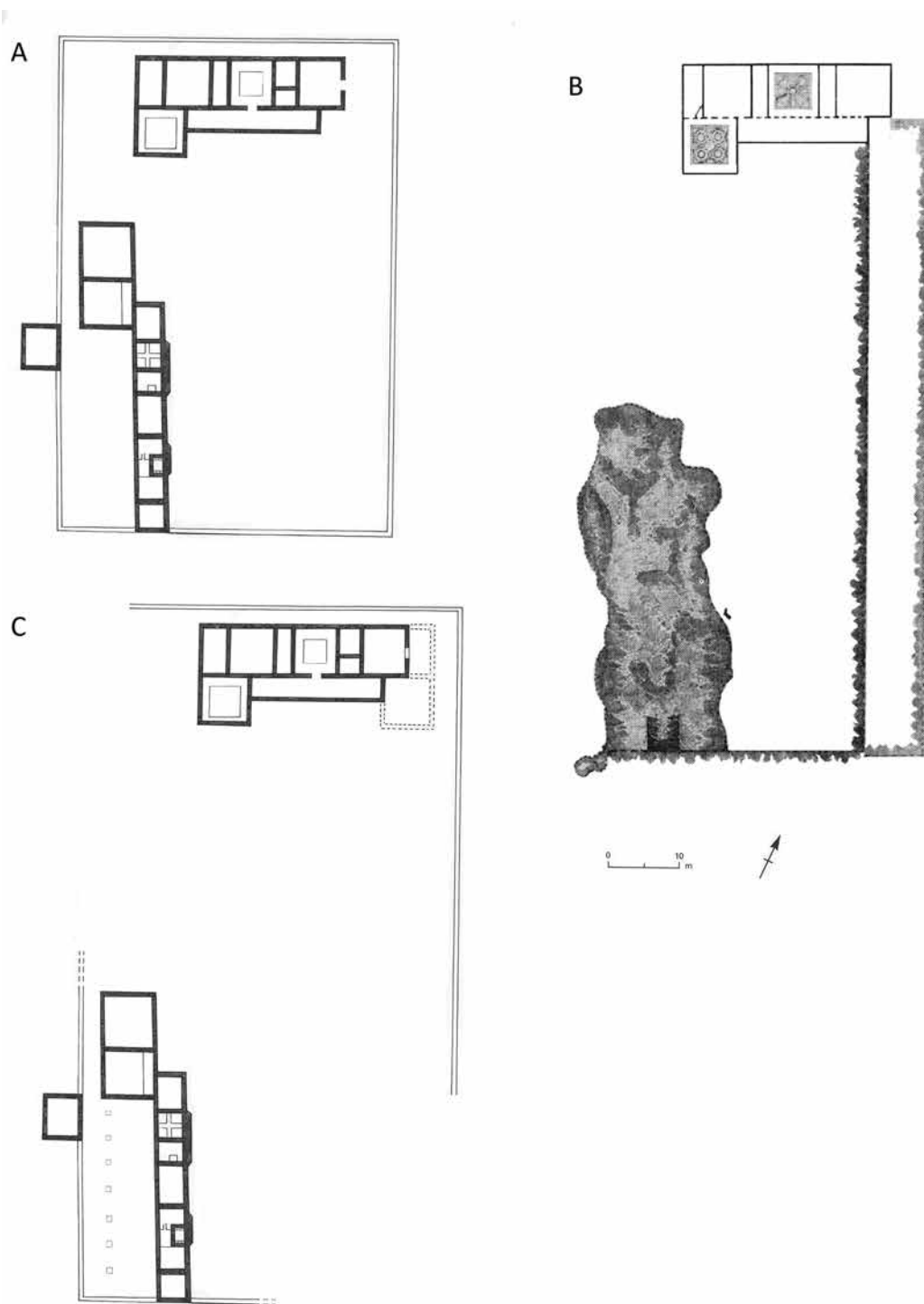


Fig. 2 a) simplified version of Lickman's plan; b) plan after Duthy 1839, no 1; c) conjectural composite plan

cuttings (H) was where the western part of the second building would have been, and he states that there was: 'an amorphous layer with very mixed variegated fill which was interpreted as backfill (or refuse) from the nineteenth century excavations on the villa site' (Perry 1986, 37). The rather ambiguous phrase of Duthy (1839, 40): 'Among the foundations now dug up on the western side were originally those of a large apartment...' perhaps suggests deliberate destruction of the remains in this area. Duthy (1839, 41) also writes that rooms 'taken in conjunction with those now destroyed on the western and southern sides of the quadrangle, ... must have been numerous, and their range extensive.'

There can be little doubt that, even though no post-pads are shown on Lickman's plan, this structure was a large aisled building, a basilican construction with two internal rows of posts forming a nave twice the width of each of the flanking aisles (in this case probably 20 and 10 Roman feet); more than thirty such structures are known from Hampshire alone. Its position in relation to the house is so typical of many villa complexes from Ingleby Barwick, North Yorkshire, to Brading on the Isle of Wight. Within Hampshire, the villas re-excavated by Sir Barry Cunliffe as part of the Danebury project at Houghton Down (Longstock), two phases at Dunkirt Barn (Abbotts Ann), Grateley and possibly Fullerton all have this arrangement of the main house set at right angles to an aisled building (Cunliffe & Poole 2008). The dimensions and design of the aisled building and plan of the house closely match the Period 6–7 villa at Dunkirt Barn (Ibid. vol 2, part 7, fig 7.91). Closer to Bramdean, the villa at Sparsholt, just to the west of Winchester has the same arrangement (Johnston & Dicks 2014). Furthermore the fine mosaics which adorned the central room and the heated room at both villas have been identified as the work of the same Group of mosaicists (Johnston 1977, 206–7). Other certain or possible examples of this arrangement of corridor villas and aisled buildings in Hampshire occur to the north of Bramdean at Monk Sherborne (Teague 2005); Glade Farm, Bentley where aerial photographs revealed two rectangular buildings, one with a series of rooms (one known from a small-scale

excavation by A J Wade to have had painted wall-plaster), the other larger and at right angles to the first (*Journal Roman Studies* 18, 1928, 207); and probably the little known villa in Micheldever Wood (Fasham 1983).

The internal arrangement of the second Bramdean building conforms to that at several large developed aisled buildings throughout Britain but more prevalent in Central Southern England. These typically have baths set in a row in the aisle next to the courtyard, with residential rooms at the end nearest the house at the opposite end to the bath-suite, as at Bramdean. One room within the eastern aisle was evidently a channelled hypocaust; often such rooms, admittedly with a more complex arrangement than the simple cruciform channels at Bramdean (for example Lippenwood and Clanville), were inserted in the same aisle as the baths. There are normally one or two square rooms within the nave similar to those shown by Lickman. One may have had the 'very large rough-bricked pavement...nearly 2 feet beneath the surface'. Lickman provides no information about the northernmost of these rooms other than the note that it was '3 feet below common level'. He shows no indication of flooring, but neither does he indicate the plain red tessellated pavements in the main house. The open fireplace in this room referred to by Duthy (1839, 41) was compared to one found a few years earlier by Samuel Lysons at Bignor villa, West Sussex. Such a fire-place, presumably with associated chimney originally, would not be out of place in this context; fireplaces against walls in similar rooms have been found within aisled buildings in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight at Clanville, North Warnborough, Combley and Carisbrooke (Johnston 1978, figs. 28 and 29). Lickman, however, does not show it on his plan but includes a rectangular feature against the southern wall of one of the aisle rooms and it is possible that Duthy conflated two pieces of information. It is difficult to ascertain where the basic aisled structure ends at the north, and several other aisled buildings have additional rooms extending beyond it, often in line with the aisle-posts.

The southern part of the eastern aisle was occupied by baths. Lickman's annotation reads: 'Room for the use of the sudatory. This floor

together with the sudatory is supported on tiers of brick-work (A), and which rise 18 inches from the floor underneath: the interstices here being left to admit the action of fire, which was produced at B. NB The upper floor was continued down to the fire-place.'

What he marks as B is the *praefurnium* at the northern end of the baths with a *testudo* (hot-water tank supports) extending into the room. The adjacent *caldarium* (hot room) with its hypocaust of tile *pilae* is fairly modest at about 1.50m by 1.80m, and has a hot-water bath on its east side. This was evidently floored with tiles and appears to have had steps or seats at either end. There was no *tepidarium* (warm room). The *frigidarium* (cold room) to the south measured about 3.05m by 2.75m and was also floored with tiles; the cold plunge bath at the end was about 3.05m by 2.30m. The heated facilities are smaller than the norm, which typically comprise two heated rooms (*caldarium* and *tepidarium*) with a hot water bath in the former, although the *frigidarium* is larger than average for those within aisled buildings.

ENCLOSURE WALL

Duthy (1839, 41) states that: 'The foundations of buildings and walls, already discovered, inclose a space amounting to nearly three quarters of an acre; and on its northern and western sides, it appears to have been covered by habitable apartments.' Three-quarters of an acre (equivalent to about 3,035 square metres) equates fairly well to Lickman's enclosure as shown on his plan of approximately 150 by 220 feet or 3,066 square metres. However, Duthy's plan shows a greater area than this, and as already mentioned, Lickman may not have correctly located the aisled building in relation to the house, perhaps constrained by the size of his paper. He shows a rectangular yard in the form of parallel dotted lines merely stating that: 'These lines denote that foundations have been discovered running in these directions.' This suggests that they do not represent a completely exposed circuit. The effect is almost to create frame for his picture and cannot be entirely relied upon. The westernmost wall is probably the west wall of the aisled building and may or

may not have extended beyond it. The room protruding to the west can be paralleled for such a building, for example at West Dean, on the Hampshire-Wiltshire border (Master 1885). The northernmost wall runs parallel with the northern wall of the winged-corridor house as defined by the cover building. As the gap between them is the same width as the *porticus* or front corridor, it is conceivably a rear corridor as found at several such buildings, including Grateley and Fullerton. Again it is uncertain if the wall extended beyond the house. The south enclosure wall, level with the end of the aisled building is also indicated on Duthy's plan. The eastern wall also roughly equates to the outermost of Duthy's walls, but its positioning by Lickman may be arbitrary, being close to the edge of his paper. In Hampshire, where an enclosure wall exists or is known, the buildings tend to be linked by walls but lie outside of it (for example Sparsholt). It is quite possible that rear walls of both buildings and the east wall of the house form the basis for Lickman's framing walls. As the east wall of the aisled building is in line with the west wall of the house on Duthy's plan, a fence or wall probably linked them originally, but only the south wall of the enclosure can be considered as perhaps correct.

The villa at Bramdean is therefore another typical villa in Hampshire featuring a winged-corridor house and, at right angles to it, a large aisled building with apartments at one end and baths at the other. It also seems to have a similar dating to others. Perry (1982, 61) concluded that there was very little activity at the site between AD 100 and AD 250 'followed by renewed prosperity', the first masonry structures, and the list of coins of the later third to the mid-fourth century given by Duthy (1839, 42 note) certainly suggests that this was the *floruit* of the villa. The mosaics may well be by the same craftsmen who laid those at nearby Itchen Abbas and Sparsholt, and were therefore roughly contemporary, those at Sparsholt dated to *circa* AD 300–325. The mosaics at Bramdean, with their sophisticated figured panels, are quite exceptional within Hampshire – of such villas of this type in the general area, only the mosaics at Brading are superior, but they may well be connected with later refurbishment.

However, it is dangerous to read too much into this regarding the wealth of the owner of Bramdean, for priorities can differ and the villa buildings themselves are unexceptional.

Nevertheless he was certainly proclaiming his *Romanitas* and knowledge of the tales from classical literature.

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