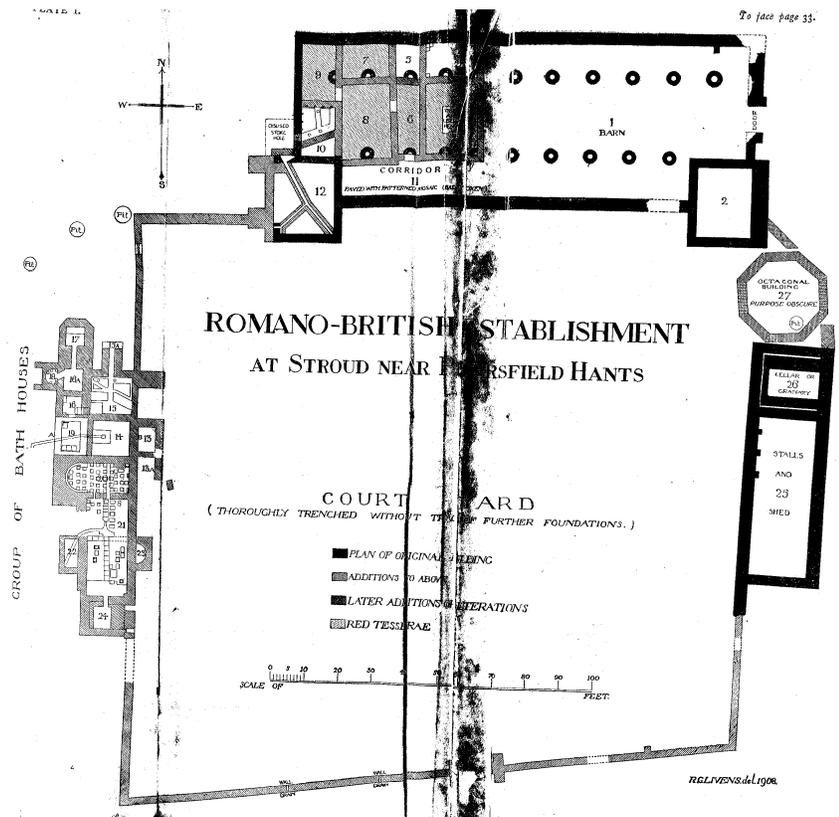
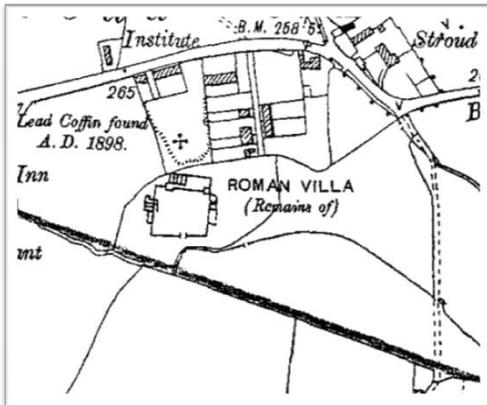


The Stroud Roman Villa

The Romans were officially here in Britain from 43AD to 410 AD and in terms of local archaeology there are a number of Roman settlements nearby, many of which have either never been explored or have only had partial or cursory investigation. Such a site is our Roman villa in Stroud which was excavated just over a century ago, between 1907-1908, by Moray Williams and students from Bedales. It is recorded as follows:

“South of Finchmead Lane, Stroud (SU 725 235) A large villa with baths excavated 1907-8. Basilican house measuring 140 ft. x 52 ft. of rectangular plan with projecting wings. At first divided by two rows of wooden columns, later divided into rooms with front corridor.”



A hundred years ago it was shown to be one among a number of Roman villas or farm houses that dotted the countryside of Roman Britain of the aisled type with in its first phase an interior rather like that of a Christian church and later divided up into rooms.

However, has the original theory of its layout and function survived to the modern day - or have recent new and exciting theories changed our perception of what this complex

might be? Can modern archaeology and reappraisal of the site suggest a much different function? Indeed can we go further and re-examine the original excavation report in which the excavator put forward a theory for part of the site which has been virtually ignored until recently - the mysterious octagonal structure that he found in the North-West corner of the site. –

"The Octagonal Structure

The last building to be examined in this house is the strange octagonal structure (27) wedged in between these two earlier blocks. Its walls, of which unfortunately the footings alone remained, leaving no clue other than logical inference as to the means of entrance, were three feet thick, and it measured 21+ feet across."

Octagonal Romano - Celtic shrine structures are also known from elsewhere in Roman Britain for example from Nettleton, Caerwent and Weycock Hill and Chelmsford – and in particular at Lydney where there is a large 'courtyarded' villa, similar to Stroud, with a definite Romano-Celtic temple dedicated to a little known God – Nodens.

These later ideas support the suspicions that Moray Williams had a century ago, that maybe what he was excavating was not a standard villa at all, but perhaps a building with a religious and ritual significance. Also, he suggested there could be possible further buildings to the west of the Villa in the field next to the Seven Stars.

Of course to prove the point much work remains to be done, which would have to include further detailed research and a ground survey of the nearby springs to see if they can shed any light on a religious reason for the site. Is it, for example as Chedworth is known to be, close to a spring dedicated to a water deity? Further field research in the area, may one day provide an answer.

Whilst work on any privately owned land can only be carried out with the owners permission, there is another option for personal involvement in a project to see if there is a larger Roman settlement outwith the known boundaries of the Villa. This would initially involve the organisation of a "big dig" in the back gardens of the village – each garden being subject to a 'mini dig' (supervised by an archaeologist) of 1 metre square, with the results hopefully giving us an idea of the extent of the settlement, if there is one. What do you think? If you are interested please contact Jeremy Mitchell in the first instant.

Notes- Information above came from an article by Peter Price in the October 2010 Petersfield Area Historical Society bulletin – itself based on an article in Current Archaeology 230 entitled 'Roman Villas in Britain –Farms, temples or tax-depots?' by Bryn Walters.

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