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Romano-British Mosaics - Dr David Smith's Archive

Patricia WITTS

Dr David Smith is one of the foremost scholars of Romano-British mosaics. His work takes its place in a distinguished tradition of research in the subject.

Since the seventeenth century, when John Aubrey devoted a chapter of his manuscript *Monumenta Britannica*¹ to mosaics, there has been a consistent appreciation of the quality and intrinsic interest of the pavements dating from the Roman period in England and Wales. In the past, scholars tended to consider mosaics as part of a wide-ranging interest in all aspects of Romano-British art². Dr Smith, on the other hand, has concentrated upon the mosaics as worthy of detailed study in their own right. As a student, he was inspired to take up the subject by an essay set by Professor Ian Richmond in 1948. Following his thesis entitled "The Development and Affinities of Mosaic Decoration in Roman Britain", for which he was awarded his doctorate by the University of Durham in 1952, he pursued his interest by the prolific production of articles, reviews, and specialist reports. A select list of his publications is given at the end of this paper.

Dr Smith was a founder member of AIEMA and participated in the early colloquia. In 1978 he founded the British branch, the Association for the Study and Preservation of Roman Mosaics (ASPROM). Between 1979 and 1984 he edited ASPROM's journal *Mosaic*.

During the course of his career, Dr Smith amassed an unrivalled amount of material on the subject. He was invariably consulted on new mosaic discoveries and his opinion was frequently sought whenever known pavements were reevaluated. Following his retirement, he generously donated his personal archive to the Roman Research Trust so that other scholars could benefit from forty years of research.

The archive is primarily concerned with Romano-British mosaics but also contains items from elsewhere. It includes books, articles, pamphlets and slides. Of particular importance are five large boxes of correspondence. This material often contains valuable details that supplement the published excavation reports as well as conveying the sense of excitement when a major mosaic discovery is made. Of especial value to researchers are 19 boxes of photographs, mostly in black and white, and many of them unpublished. In this brief account of some of the "highlights" of the archive, I shall concentrate upon some of the most interesting iconographical information contained in the photographic collection.

¹ Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Top. Gen. C25.

² See, for instance, J.M.C. TOYNBEE's two standard works on the subject, *Art in Roman Britain*, London 1962, and *Art in Britain under the Romans*, Oxford 1964.

One of the most exciting events in the last few decades has been the rediscovery of the "lost" mosaic at Littlecote, Wiltshire³, which first came to light in the early eighteenth century. Contemporaneous reports and photographs from the modern excavators are held in the archive and are particularly useful given that the excavation has yet to be published in detail. In addition, the archive contains photographs of an embroidery made by the wife of the estate steward at the time of the original discovery. While antiquarian drawings of the mosaic are famous, the embroidery is not. Along with the evidence of the drawings, it provided the basis for the subsequent substantial restoration of the pavement.

The mosaic from Roxby, North Lincolnshire⁴, was illustrated by William Fowler nearly 200 years ago and his drawing has been reproduced in many books since. However, the presence of at least two doves decorating compartments towards the centre of the mosaic escaped Fowler's attention. They were seen by Dr Smith when the pavement was briefly exposed in 1972. His archive includes photographs of them.

Some well-known mosaics can no longer be studied in their original form. For instance, the Muses mosaic at Aldborough, North Yorkshire⁵, deteriorated after discovery in the nineteenth century. The most complete Muse was lifted and has since been conserved on more than one occasion. It is therefore valuable to be able to study photographs in the archive taken of the figure while it remained *in situ*.

The "Ceres" mosaic from Winterton, North Lincolnshire⁶, suffered an unhappy fate during its "restoration". Recorded originally by Mitley in the late eighteenth century, it was subsequently illustrated by William Fowler. The mosaic was reexcavated and lifted in 1959, following which it was installed in Scunthorpe Council offices. The central panel was turned through 90 degrees and the figure is barely recognisable. Fortunately, the bust was sketched prior to lifting when a much more plausible image was recorded. Dr Smith's archive contains a photograph of the sketch.

The fragments from what must have been an impressive figured mosaic from Lion Walk in Colchester, Essex⁷, are primarily known from drawings made by R.H. Moyes and by Dr D.S. Neal. They have since been lifted and are on display in Colchester Castle Museum. It is possible to study them as they were when *in situ* from a series of photographs in the archive taken by the excavator. These are especially useful to researchers whose main interest lies in iconography as the subject of the mosaic is far from clear and the remains are so scanty.

³ S. LYSONS, *Reliquiae Britannico-Romanae*, London 1813, I, Part IV, pl. IX and X; W. FOWLER, *Engravings of the Principal Mosaic Pavements*, 1804, no. 20; B. WALTERS, "The "Orpheus" Mosaic in Littlecote Park, England", in R. FARIOLI CAMPANATI (ed.), *Il Mosaico Antico: III Colloquio Internazionale sul Mosaico Antico*, II, Ravenna 1983, 433-442.

⁴ W. FOWLER, *Engravings of the Principal Mosaic Pavements*, 1804, no. 3.

⁵ H.E. SMITH, *Reliquiae Isurianae*, London 1852, p. 41-42 and pl. XVIII.

⁶ *Vetusta Monumenta*, 1789, II, pl. 9. II; W. FOWLER, *Engravings of the Principal Mosaic Pavements*, 1804, no. 1; I.M. STEAD, *Excavations at Winterton Roman Villa 1958-1967*, D.O.E. Archaeological Reports 9, 1976, p. 43, 48-49, 87 and pl. XVI, XVII and XXIII.

⁷ P. CRUMMY, *Colchester Archaeological Report 3: Excavations at Lion Walk, Balkerne Lane, and Middleborough, Colchester, Essex*, Colchester 1984, p. 52-57 and fig. 46 and 47.

Reference to the archive can also assist where mosaics are currently inaccessible. An example is the mosaic of Mars and satyrs at Fullerton Manor, Hampshire⁸, which lies under a fitted carpet. It can be studied from a set of photographs supplied to Dr Smith.

The archive is also useful for the information it contains about mosaics which are otherwise not widely known, especially outside Britain. These include a bust of an athlete from Lufton, Somerset⁹, and a hitherto enigmatic bust from Bratton Seymour, Somerset¹⁰. The archive also contains photographs of the small fragments of a figured mosaic from Eccles, Kent¹¹. The only published record of these fragments is a reconstruction drawing suggesting that the figures were gladiators, an unusual subject for their location within the bath suite of the *villa*. The photographs enable other identifications to be considered.

Much of the material, both written and photographic, sets the mosaics in their archaeological context. For instance, one of the most attractive pavements found in Britain in recent years is the Venus mosaic from Kingscote, Gloucestershire¹². This has been lifted and can be seen in the Corinium Museum, Cirencester. The photographs in the archive not only record the mosaic *in situ* but some of them show the walls of the room. Such information is one of the most direct ways in which we can appreciate the relationship between floor decoration and its surroundings.

Members of ASPROM have already made productive use of Dr Smith's archive. The purpose of this paper is to give it wider publicity within AIEMA in the hope that scholars from outside Britain will also find it of interest and delight.

Acknowledgements

This paper is presented with the kind permission of the Roman Research Trust to whom any enquiries should be directed regarding access to the archive, and with the support of Dr Smith himself to whom I am indebted for responding to factual queries.

⁸ *The Hampshire Chronicle*, 21 June 1930.

⁹ L.C. HAYWARD, "The Roman Villa at Lufton, near Yeovil", *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society* XCVII, 1952, p. 90-112.

¹⁰ M. WHITFIELD, *In Praise of Bratton St Mawr*, 1974, p. 6-9. Anthony Beeson has convincingly suggested (pers. comm.) that this bust represents the goddess Diana with her bow behind her left shoulder. The bust is paralleled at the *villa* of Bruckneudorf near Carnuntum - W. Jobst, *Antike Mosaikkunst in Osterreich*, Vienna 1984, p. 117.

¹¹ A.P. DETSICAS, "Excavations at Eccles. 1964. Third Interim Report", *Archaeologia Cantiana* LXXX, 1965, p. 69-92.

¹² B.N. EAGLES and V.G. SWAN, "The Chessalls, a Romano-British Settlement at Kingscote", *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* 91, 1972, p. 60-91.

DISCUSSION

Jean-Pierre **Darmon** : Je tiens à profiter de l'occasion offerte par votre communication pour exprimer au nom de toute l'AIEMA notre admiration pour les travaux menés dans le domaine de la mosaïque en Grande-Bretagne et la joie que nous avons tous eu d'apprendre la prochaine parution du premier tome de votre corpus des mosaïques. Que les archives du professeur David Smith soient si soigneusement conservées et exploitées nous rappelle l'importance de son œuvre et nous invitent à lui exprimer toute notre gratitude et toute notre chaleureuse amitié.

Patricia **Witts** : I am sure Dr Smith would wish me to thank Mr Darmon for his kind words and to reciprocate his warm expression of friendship. I hope our colleagues from all countries, not only Britain, will be able to profit from the material made available by Dr Smith's generous donation of his archive.

Appendix - A Select List of the Publications of Dr D.J. Smith

Note : This list covers the major articles and notes Dr Smith has written about mosaics ; it excludes papers on non-mosaic subjects, review articles, and items which appear in volumes of *Bulletin de l'AIEMA* and in *Mosaic*.

- "Report on the mosaics of the villa at Great Casterton, Rutland", in P. CORDER (ed.), *The Roman Town and Villa at Great Casterton, Rutland*, Second Interim Report, 1954, p. 35-39.
- "Romano-British Mosaics : some problems and possibilities", *The Archaeological News Letter* VI, 2, 1955, p. 50-51.
- "Report on the mosaics of the villa at High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire", in B.R. HARTLEY, "A Romano-British Villa at High Wycombe", *Records of Bucks* XVI, 1959, p. 249-254.
- "The Labyrinth Mosaic at Caerleon", *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* XVIII, 1959, p. 304-310.
- "Report on the mosaic of the villa at Downton, Wiltshire", in P.A. RAHTZ, "A Roman Villa at Downton", *Wiltshire Archaeological Magazine* LVIII, 1963, p. 334-336.
- "Three Fourth-Century Schools of Mosaic in Roman Britain", in H. STERN (ed.), *La Mosaique Gréco-Romaine*, Paris 1965, p. 95-116.
- "Report on the mosaics of the villa at Southwell, Nottinghamshire", *Transactions of the Thoroton Society of Nottinghamshire* LXX, 1966, p. 33-40.
- "Report on the mosaics discovered at North Hill, Colchester, in 1965", *The Archaeological Journal* CXIII, 1967, p. 40-43.
- "The Mosaic Pavements", in A.L.F. RIVET (ed.), *The Roman Villa in Britain*, London 1969, p. 71-125.
- "New Light on the Corinthian School : the mosaics of Cirencester, 1968", *The Antiquaries Journal* XLIX, 1969, p. 235-243.
- "The Fragments of Mosaic from the Frocester Court Villa", *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucester Archaeological Society* LXXXIX, 1970, p. 73-76.
- "Mosaics", in K. BRANIGAN, *Latimer : Belgic, Roman, Dark Age and Early Modern Farm*, 1971, p. 137-138.
- "The Mosaics from the Villa" [Denton, Lincolnshire], *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology* I, 6, 1971, p. 53-55.
- "The Mosaics of the Villa at Tixover Grange, Rutland", *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society* XLVI, 1971, p. 7.
- "The Mosaics of Lufton", in L.C. HAYWARD, "The Roman Villa at Lufton, near Yeovil", *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society* CXVI, 1972, p. 71-77.
- *The Great Pavement and Roman Villa at Woodchester*, Gloucestershire 1973.

- "The Mosaics", in J. LIVERSIDGE, D.J. SMITH and I.M. STEAD, "Brantingham Roman Villa : Discoveries in 1962", *Britannia* IV, 1973, p. 90-99.
- "Mosaics 1971-1972", in A.D. MCWHIRR, "Cirencester, 1969-1972 : Ninth Interim Report", *The Antiquaries Journal* LIII, 1973, p. 214-218.
- "The Dolphin Mosaic", in L.C. HAYWARD, "Ilchester Mead Roman Villa", *Somerset and Dorset Notes and Queries* XXX, 1974, p. 6-7.
- "Appendix, The Pavement, (b) Date and Discussion", in A.H.A. HOGG, "The Llantwit Major Villa : a Reconsideration of the Evidence", *Britannia* V, 1974, p. 248-250.
- "Note on the mosaic", in S. POLLARD, "A Late Iron Age Settlement and a Romano-British Villa at Holcombe near Uplyme, Devon", *Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society* XXXII, 1974, p. 93.
- "Roman Mosaics in Britain before the Fourth Century", in H. STERN and M. LE GLAY (eds), *La Mosaïque Gréco-Romaine* II, Paris 1975, p. 269-290.
- *Roman Mosaics : the Roman Mosaics from Rudston, Brantingham and Horkstow*, Kingston upon Hull 1976.
- "The Mosaics of Winterton", in I.M. STEAD, *Excavations at Winterton Roman Villa 1958-1967*, DOE Archaeological Reports 9, 1976, p. 251-272.
- "The Mosaics" [of Boxmoor], in D.S. NEAL, *Three Roman Buildings in the Bulbourne Valley*, 1977, p. 105-106.
- "Mythological Figures and Scenes in Romano-British Mosaics", in J. MUNBY and M. HENIG (eds), *Roman Life and Art in Britain*, BAR 41(i), 1977, p. 105-194.
- "The Mosaics of Kingscote", in E.J. SWAIN (ed.), *Excavations : The Chessalls, Kingscote*, 1978, p. 22-23.
- "Fragments of Mosaic from the Legionary Baths", in P.T. BIDWELL, *The Legionary Bath-House and Basilica and Forum at Exeter*, Exeter Archaeological Reports I, 1979, p. 132-134.
- "The Mosaics of Chilgrove", in A. DOWN, *Chichester Excavations 4 : The Roman Villas at Chilgrove and Upmarden*, 1979, p. 109-112.
- "Les Décors en Mosaïque", *Dossiers de l'Archéologie* 37, Sept. 1979, p. 36-43.
- "Mosaics", in I.M. STEAD, *Rudston Roman Villa*, Leeds 1980, p. 131-138.
- "Romano-British Mosaics in the Third Century", in A. KING and M. HENIG (eds), *The Roman West in the Third Century*, BAR IntSer 109, 1981, p. 159-165.
- "The Third International Colloquium on Ancient Mosaic, Ravenna, 6-10 September 1980", *Chronique du Comité International pour la Conservation des Mosaïques* 4, 1981, p. 4.
- "The Dolphin Mosaic", in L.C. HAYWARD, *Ilchester Mead Roman Villa*, St Peter Port Guernsey 1982, p. 52-53.
- "Mosaics", in M. HENIG (ed.), *A Handbook of Roman Art*, Oxford 1983, p. 116-138, 260-266, and 276-277.

- "Orpheus Mosaics in Britain", in R. GINOUVÈS *et al.* (eds), *Mosaïque : Recueil d'Homages à Henri Stern*, Paris 1983, p. 315-328.
- "Roman Mosaics in Britain : a Synthesis", in R. FARIOLI CAMPANATI (ed.), *Il Mosaico Antico : III Colloquio Internazionale sul Mosaico Antico*, II, Ravenna 1983, p. 357-380.
- "The Mosaic in Room 11/15", "The Mosaic of the Lion in Room 19", "The Mosaic of the Wrestling Cupids in Room 7", and "The Mosaic in Room 3 b", in P. CRUMMY, *Colchester Archaeological Report 3 : Excavations at Lion Walk, Balkerne Lane, and Middleborough, Colchester, Essex*, Colchester 1984, p. 57-62, 168-174, and 179-180.
- "The Blackfriars Mosaic", in P. CLAY and J. MELLOR, *Excavations in Bat Lane, Leicester*, Leicester 1985, p. 38-40.
- English contribution to illustrated quinquelingual text of C. BALMELLE *et al.*, *Le décor géométrique de la mosaïque romaine*, Paris 1985.
- "The Mosaics" [of Ashcroft Road], "The Mosaic from the Bingham Hall", and "The Mosaics" [of Ashcroft House], in A.D. MCWHIRR, *Houses in Roman Cirencester*, Cirencester Excavations III 1986, p. 79-91, 202, and 209-220.
- "Reports on mosaics" in D. BRINKLOW *et al.*, *Coney Street, Aldwark and Clementhorpe, Minor Sites, and Roman Roads*, York 1986, p. 41 and 59-60.
- "The Mosaics of the Bancroft Villa", in R.J. ZEEPVAT *et al.*, *Roman Milton Keynes*, Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society Monograph Series 1, 1987, p. 107-114.
- *Roman Mosaics at Hull*, Kingston upon Hull 1989 [dated 1987].
- "Note on a mosaic", in C. WOODFIELD and C. JOHNSON, "A Roman Site at Stanton Low... Buckinghamshire", *Archaeological Journal* 146, 1989, p. 242-243.
- "The Mosaic in Building 113, Room 2", "The Mosaic in Room 6" [Building 120], and "The Mosaics in Building 123" [Rooms 2, 8, 12, and 13], in P. CRUMMY, *Colchester Archaeological Report 6 : Excavations at Culver Street, the Gilbert School, and other sites in Colchester (1971-85)*, Colchester 1992, p. 80-82, 94, and 106-107.



Dr David Smith (on right) with Peter Johnson. Photograph: Marcia de Rosa.