Cirencester Excavations VI

EXCAVATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS IN ROMAN CIRENCESTER
1998–2007

Edited by Neil Holbrook

with a review of archaeology in Cirencester 1958–2008

COTSWOLD ARCHAEOLOGY
EXCAVATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS
IN ROMAN CIRENCESTER
1998–2007

with a review of archaeology in
Cirencester 1958–2008
This volume is dedicated to Alan McWhirr in recognition of his service and commitment to the archaeology of Cirencester.

Alan McWhirr at The Beeches, 1971.
CIRENCESTER EXCAVATIONS VI
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IN ROMAN CIRENCESTER
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with a review of archaeology in
Cirencester 1958–2008

EDITED BY
NEIL HOLBROOK

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Cotswold Archaeology
Cirencester, 2008
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1. INTRODUCTORY SECTIONS

by Timothy Darvill and Neil Holbrook

Introduction

Much has changed in the nature and scale of archaeological endeavour in and around Cirencester since December 1958 when a small gathering in the rooms of the Society of Antiquaries in Burlington House on Piccadilly, London, formally constituted the Cirencester Excavation Committee as the lead body to organise and execute excavations in this small town in the heart of the Cotswolds. Few there present would have guessed that in 2008 there would be celebrations for its golden jubilee, still less that a later generation of archaeologists could have transformed the simple Committee into a not-for-profit commercial company and registered charity with a turnover of more than £3 million per annum and a workbook filled with more than two hundred investigations contributing to the education of the public each year. This brief history of Cirencester Excavation Committee (CEC) and its successors outlines the growth of a single organisation and tries to situate its development within the ever-changing social, political, economic and academic environment. Across Britain there are more than two dozen similar organisations that emerged within the same milieu, some now exceedingly healthy and others less so. A more broadly based history of this fascinating period in the history of archaeology is urgently needed, and in writing this account we are acutely aware of treading lightly into new territory (see McWhirr 1988 for an earlier treatment of this topic in Cirencester). We are also conscious of the fact that neither of us was archaeologically active in the late 1950s and 1960s and, to paraphrase Andy Warhol, anyone who says they can remember it probably wasn’t there either!

Picking up the pieces: The aftermath of the Second World War

Although no bombs fell directly on Cirencester during the Second World War, post-War reconstruction works made a major impact on the appearance and size of the town. Housing was a priority and by the end of 1947 more than a hundred new homes had been built on the newly created estates at Chesterton and Beeches (Welshford 1987a, 162). Over the following decade other developments, both privately financed and council sponsored, took shape to provide for the needs of an increasing population. Opportunities for archaeological work were seized whenever possible. The installation of a large woodworking machine at Lock’s Timber Yard on the west side of Victoria Road in June 1947 brought to light a fine mosaic floor. Work was halted and the floor was excavated by local volunteers and workmen from the Council (Cliffe 1949). Similarly, the erection of a telegraph pole on allotments at Ashcroft revealed a mosaic that was investigated on a small scale by Dr H. Catling in 1951 (Reece 1976) and at Queens Lane House Richard Reece undertook excavations in 1955–6 to reveal part of the Roman building and intramural street (Reece 1956). Such a pattern of small-scale work was of course possible because of the well-established interest in the history of the town started off in Victorian times and consolidated by Buckman and Newmarch’s Illustrations of the Remains of Roman Art in Cirencester (1856), Beecham’s History of Cirencester (1887), and Haverfield’s paper on Roman Cirencester published in volume 49 of Archaeologia (Haverfield 1920). Private collections amassed by Earl Bathurst, Thomas Bravender and the Cripps family showed the wealth of what lay below Cirencester’s streets, and were brought together in a fine new public museum of Roman antiquities housed in Abberley House in Park Street (now the Corinium Museum) which was opened by Professor George Trevelyan on 28 October 1938 to much acclaim (Austin 1938). One of the star attractions in the museum was the Orpheus pavement with the god encircled by birds and beasts; it was found at The Barton on the north-west side of the town in 1825 and was for long held as an icon of the Roman town and typical of the ‘Corinium School’ of mosaicists.

At national level discussions on the impact and opportunities of post-War reconstruction on historic towns were underway long before the War ended. A conference on the future organisation of archaeology was held at the Institute of Archaeology in the University of London from 6 to 8 August 1943 at which the need for archaeological work in towns such as Cirencester was explicitly recognised by Ian Richmond in his overview of Roman-British Archaeology (Anon 1944a, 13). One tangible indirect consequence of this meeting was the formation of the Congress of Archaeological Societies and the creation...
of the Council for British Archaeology, a move facilitated in large measure by the Society of Antiquaries of London (Anon 1944b, 173-4). Both bodies maintained a strong interest in the archaeology of historic towns and were influential in shaping public opinion, galvanizing activity at all levels, and promoting the value of Britain's archaeological heritage to government. No surprise therefore that the radical and influential Town and Country Planning Act 1947 provided sweeping new powers for local authorities, introduced the practice of spatial planning for the control of property development, and included provisions for the preservation of trees, woodland and buildings of special historic or architectural interest (Sections 28-30). Roman Corinium also enjoyed a measure of legal protection since the whole of the town had been designated a scheduled monument under the prevailing Ancient Monuments Consolidation and Protection Act 1913. Although weak by modern standards, this simple measure placed upon owners of properties in the town the duty of informing the Ministry of Works of any plans to develop their land in any way, and in turn the Ministry had certain powers to control such works by investigating and recording remains in advance of their destruction.

The need for archaeological investigation and recording in Cirencester was sporadic through the early 1950s as post-War reconstruction gathered pace. The construction of a new sewer at Watermoor, for example, necessitated cutting through the Roman defences. The Ministry of Works granted consent for the works on condition that a full archaeological excavation of the trench was undertaken and this was carried out under the direction of Miss Mary Rennie in poor weather during February and March 1952 (Rennie 1957). It was the first detailed examination of the defences and showed their complexity, scale and long duration through the 2nd, 3rd and 4th centuries AD. It also demonstrated that there was no pre-Roman occupation in this part of Cirencester, which prompted Elsie Clifton to consider whether such activity should in fact be sought at nearby Bagendon (Clifford 1961, 2).

Among those acknowledged as helping with the excavation and preparing the report were Sheppard Frere and Graham Webster, both of whom were later to play influential roles in the provision of archaeological services in the town. Indeed, five years later Graham Webster was leading investigations at Dyer Court on the south side of Dyer Street in advance of construction works for what is now the Forum car park (Webster 1959). The work was done at the behest of and with financial backing from the Ancient Monuments Branch of the Ministry of Works who treated it as an emergency excavation. Members of the then recently formed Cirencester Archaeological and Historical Society acted as volunteers, assisted by volunteers from across the county and students from the geography department at the University of Birmingham. Forty-eight separate trenches were excavated to reveal sections of a Roman street near the centre of the town and the basic structure and orientation of buildings to either side. Tensions can be seen in the final report on the Dyer Court work between the Ministry of Works who felt that excavations should only deal with deposits up to 4 feet (1.2m) deep and Graham Webster who saw the opportunity of exploring the full depth of stratigraphy in this key central area of the Roman town. Clearly a compromise was reached as the section through the main street in Trenches 2, 3, 16, 18 and 20 show the lowest surface about 20 feet (6m) below the modern ground level with no less than 24 successive re-surfacings through the full stratigraphic sequence. It was an impressive piece of excavation and to judge from available photographs carried out without the aid of shoring!

It was undoubtedly increasing intelligence about planned development elsewhere in the town, and the need to provide a consolidated and rapid response to new proposals, that led local enthusiast Mary Rennie and the London-based academic Roman archaeologist Sheppard Frere to write to the Society of Antiquaries of London in Spring 1958 inviting the Society to take the initiative in forming a Cirencester Excavation Committee. Their fears were real, and while their letter worked its way through the committees in London, archaeology was springing from the earth in Cirencester. Groundworks for the construction of the County Health Centre in Parsonage Field, Watermoor Road, revealed part of a Roman building, which caused the Ministry of Works to take over the site from the contractors and commission an archaeological excavation there over three weeks in July 1958. Four men were employed to carry out the work under the direction of Miss Rennie, assisted by local volunteers and members of the Cirencester Archaeological and Historical Society, and uncovered parts of at least four buildings, the largest with remains of a mosaic floor of geometric design (Rennie 1971). Later in the same year groundworks in advance of the construction of bungalows on the corner of King Street and Victoria Road prompted the Ministry of Works to commission Rennie to excavate this site in less than ideal conditions through November and December (CH III, 194-201).

Among the structures recorded was part of a heated octagonal room, probably an imposing winter dining room of a fine town house.

1958: Creating Cirencester Excavation Committee

The letter (Fig. 1) from Rennie and Frere was read to the Executive Committee of the Society at its meeting on 14 April 1958, and after some discussion it was agreed to consider the matter at a special meeting of the Research Committee before the November meeting of the Council, after discussion of the project by Mr Frere, the Assistant Secretary to the Society (Philip Corder), and the Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments at the Ministry of Works (P.K. Baille-Reynolds). The special meeting was duly held on 6 November 1958, and at Council on the same day it was resolved to approve the recommendation of the Research Committee that a Cirencester Excavation Committee be formed forthwith to conduct excavation within the Roman City, and that the list of names of Fellows and of institutions to be invited to form such a Committee, proposed by
It will be recalled that a rescue excavation (lasting 24 days) took place this summer under the direction of Miss M. Cook; the Council for British Archaeology by G.B. Young; the Council for Education, Research and Training by W.F. Grimes; the Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies by Miss M. Taylor; and the Haverfield Trust.

The first meeting of the Cirencester Excavation Committee (CEC) was held at Burlington House, Piccadilly, on Tuesday 16 December 1958 with an agenda that included the election of officers, the election of an Executive Committee, co-options to the Committee, the appointment of a Director for the excavations, financial arrangements, and a programme of works for 1959. Professor Ian Richmond, then a Vice-President of the Antiquaries, was elected as the first chairman of CEC. Richmond was Professor of the Archaeology of the Roman Empire in the University of Oxford and the dominant figure in Romano-British archaeology at the time. He was widely respected, admired and, indeed, the affairs of the Committee was immense until his death at the tragically early age of 63 in October 1965. Capt. Stewart Gracie RN, a diligent and energetic Gloucestershire-based amateur archaeologist well known as the founder of excavations at Frocester in 1958 was made secretary, and Miss Katherine (Kitty) Richardson was appointed Director of excavations. The Society also made a series of grants from its research fund to support the work of the Committee, and in 1959 issued an Appeal Leaflet seeking one-off donations or a seven-year covenant with the Society that enabled the recovery of income tax and directed the entire proceeds to the Cirencester Excavation Fund.

News of the establishment of CEC was widely reported and caused considerable local interest. Much emphasis was placed on its remit to focus on emergency excavations in advance of building operations (Anon 1959, 191), although the 1959 Appeal Leaflet (Fig. 2) takes a more holistic view by noting that ‘no large scale excavation has, however, been undertaken and without it our knowledge of the history and development of this important Roman centre remains virtually blank’. From 1959 onwards meetings were held in Cirencester. Colonel W.A. Chester-Master was the first patron. As well as the officers already noted (Richmond, Gracie and Richardson), Ivan Sheppard of Lloyds Bank in Cirencester was recruited as the first treasurer. The Ministry of Works was represented by its Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments P.K. Bullie-Reynolds and inspector J.R.C. Hamilton; Gloucestershire County Council was represented by Major-General F.V.B. Wints, Cirencester Urban District Council by J.F. Jefferies and J.W. Elliot; the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society and the Society of Antiquaries by Joan Evans; the Cirencester Archaeological and Historical Society by G.B. Young; the Corinium Museum by Donald Atkinson, the Honorary Curator; Bristol University by Professor J.M. Cook; the Council for British Archaeology by W.F. Grimes; the Society for Promotion of Roman Studies by Miss M.V. Taylor; and the Haverfield Trust.

The other part of the Parsonage Field, about half the total area, though in an inordinate danger, since it will probably not be built upon for at least a year, was total cleared later during the summer in order to discover to what extent excavation would also be needed there. Very few of these trenches failed to show even signs of Roman building and it is clear that excavation should be undertaken there before building takes place. The question is one upon which scale this should be attempted. The buildings lie close to the surface, so that, in spite of the size of the area, it would not be too great a task to uncover the plans of the latest buildings. There is little to hope, however, that there may be stratified Roman levels reaching to a depth of about six or seven feet from the surface, since this was so in the few places in which it was possible to excavate to any depth beneath the building already uncovered. It would seem a pity not to examine the site in detail, since so good an opportunity of throwing some light upon the history of the town about which so little is known is likely to occur again soon, if ever.

There is reason to suppose that the Ministry of Works would be willing to arrange for excavation of the site, but that the funds which they have at their disposal might not extend to such complete excavation as these desirable, and further funds would need to be raised. Cooperation between the Ministry of Works and the Cirencester Archaeological and Historical Society was tried in the past and failed, so that the Ministry are unlikely to wish to encourage the local society with any grant they might be willing to make. We suggest, therefore, the formation of a special committee to become the recipient of any funds which can be raised and to determine how they can be used to the best advantage, so that the society may be learnt from the site. We hope that the Society of Antiquaries may take the initiative here as it has done previously elsewhere; for in this way the local difficulties may be avoided and a well balanced and active committee created.

D.M. Rennie, D.S. Frere.
The idea of an excavation committee as a community-driven means of promoting and organising archaeological work may at first sight seem rather strange, but as an organisational structure had a long history born of collegiate endeavour that in the first half of the 20th century was popularised for archaeology by Mortimer Wheeler. His enthusiasm for getting things done, his military mind, a commitment to a kind of autocratic democracy and a concern for what might nowadays be called ‘inclusiveness’ made the recruitment of a governing committee an ideal vehicle to carry forward his plans. In 1929 a Verulamium Excavation Committee was set up under the chairmanship of Sir Charles Peers to support and raise funds for Wheeler’s ambitious investigations undertaken between 1930 and 1934. Locally, the Roman Research Committee for Gloucester was established on 12 January 1931 to provide a relatively informal collective of interested parties supporting a series of selected projects around the town starting with the excavations at the Crypt School in Brunswick Road (GRRRC 1930). Wheeler, who had just completed two seasons of excavation at the Roman temple in Lydney Park at the invitation of Lord Bledisloe, was a member of the Committee (the only one not resident in the area) and his influence may be discerned in its creation. Both these organisations, and others across the country, focused on research projects, and in the main were fairly short-lived. However, after the Second World War some were reinvigorated and others newly instigated as the basic structure was sound and there was a new and clear need to involve both individuals and organisations in the common cause that was now focused on mitigating the impacts of development on the historic environment. Canterbury was the first in 1944, followed quickly by others such as Dover, Exeter, Gloucester and Lincoln. Much the same happened at St Albans in 1954 with the reconstruction of the Verulamium Excavation Committee, but the essential difference here was the independence of the organisation, a feature that soon came to define and characterise the emergent field of rescue archaeology, alongside alternative administrative solutions based in local museums or university departments (Biddle 1974, 108-9). Sheppard Frere was appointed director of excavations at Verulamium, and it was his pioneering experiences that allowed CEC to follow closely behind. Indeed, some of the barrows and buckets used in the early work of CEC were borrowed from St Albans, and one of Frere’s most enduring contributions to excavations in both towns must be the steady supply of pipe-tobacco tins (Three Nuns was preferred at Cirencester) in which valuable and fragile small finds could conveniently be stored! John Wacher’s later contributions on this score were similarly memorable.

The first excavation to be undertaken by CEC, between 4 May and 15 June 1959, was in advance of the
anticipated development of the northern part of Parsonage Field on Watermoor Road for the construction of an old people's home. Four workmen were employed, Mary Rennie acted as deputy director to Kitty Richardson, and many of those who participated in earlier seasons either helped with the excavation or assisted with post-extraction analysis and reporting, the proofs of the promptly completed report being checked by CEC's chairman Ian Richmond (Richardson 1962). The excavations themselves were innovative in combining the tightly structured trenching characteristic of the Wheeler System with a desire to provide a full ground plan of the principal building that demanded a more open-area approach. It was an experiment typical of Richardson, who came to Cirencester as one of 'Wheeler's babes' having worked with Sir Mortimer at Verulamium in 1930-3, Maiden Castle in 1935-7, the hillforts campaign in northern France in 1938-9 and Stanwick in 1951-2. She was one of the first archaeologists to use mechanical excavators to strip topsoil and empty deep features when she directed investigations at Boscombe Down West in 1949 (Richardson and Stone 1951). (Frere had pioneered the same technique in an urban environment in Canterbury that same year.) She was a lady in much demand, and after working at Cirencester in 1959 moved to London to work for the Council for British Archaeology as editor of the British Archaeological Bibliography, a role she continued until retirement in 1972.

The 1959 season had gone well and the Committee could now turn its attentions to a number of other impending threats. All the signs were that development would continue in Cirencester for a number of years to come, so it faced an enormous task. Richmond recognised the importance of replacing Kitty Richardson with someone well versed in Romano-British urban archaeology and it was envisaged that Sheppard Frere would direct the excavations. Frere had to withdraw at short notice, however, owing to other commitments, and Richmond invited John Wacher to take over. John had recently been appointed as assistant lecturer in British archaeology in the newly founded department of archaeology at the University of Leicester and had an impressive record of urban excavation. He had worked as a supervisor under Sheppard Frere at Canterbury and Verulamium and had directed his own excavations at Brough-on-Humber and Leicester in 1958 and at Catterick in 1959. His appointment established a strong link with Leicester University that continued for more than two decades. Richmond, Frere and Webster remained influential members of the Committee, and it was Frere who took up the Chairmanship upon Richmond's death in 1965. He was also instrumental in the decision to publish annual interim accounts of the work of the Committee in the *Antiquaries Journal* and to deliver an annual lecture to the Society in London, an approach that he had successfully developed in the seven interims published between 1956 and 1962 on his work at Verulamium. John Wacher's first excavation for CEC was an examination of the Verulamium Gate to the north of London Road along with a section of the Roman defences in the Abbey Grounds in advance of the construction of a housing estate (now Corinium Gate) on the east side of the town. This took place over seven weeks in March and April 1960 and began what many see as a 'Golden Age' of large-scale annual summertime excavations in the town that lasted pretty much continuously for fourteen years.

1960-1974: The Golden Years

Work at the Verulamium Gate and adjacent north-eastern defences yielded impressive results and stimulated an interest in urban defences that proved to be one of John Wacher's long-standing research interests through the rest of his career. The work also involved a notable early example of environmental archaeology, with a selection of mollusc shells collected and analysed by local cleric Canon L.W. Grensted (CEV, 46-7). The first interim account was duly published in 1961 accompanied by a plan of the Roman town which was little different from that produced by Haverfield forty years earlier (Fig. 3a; cf. Haverfield 1920, pl. XI). However, by the time of the second interim John had got his teeth into Cirencester and produced a new plan of the Roman town, complete with numbered insulae, which has formed the basis for all subsequent revisions (Fig. 3b). Richmond read and improved all the interim accounts up to his death in 1964, a process which all referred to as 'Ian-ising'. In John's second season, 1961, the programme of work had expanded to comprise three weeks at Easter and nine weeks in the summer. Excavations took place at Leatholme Gardens where traces of public buildings and an underlying military fort were discovered (Fig. 4). The discovery of the upper torso of a human skeleton in the top of the side ditch of Ermin Street proved to be especially influential as this was interpreted as evidence for the decline of town life at the end of Roman rule in Britain. As John Wacher colourfully records 'all traces of order had broken down; grass was literally growing in the streets and unburied bodies were left to rot in roadside ditches ... we might wonder whether if this event was connected with one or other severe epidemics which occurred in the fifth or sixth centuries' (Wacher 1974, 313; but cf. Reece 1988, 124-5). The committee was able to support this work due to its vigorous and successful fundraising which collected £2,200 by no means an insignificant sum in the early 1960s.

Support in kind was always vital to the Committee, however, with dig HQs being set up wherever promises could be made available, including an old slaughterhouse off Dyer street and the skatele alley of Watermoor Hospital Staff Social Club. Public access to the excavations was always considered important and from 1961 onwards the Archaeological and Historical Society organised guided tours of the trenches and assisted with the catering, as well as undertaking much of the advance planning such as finding accommodation and a suitable camp site. Throughout, the brand of archaeology promoted by CEC was a very public kind of archaeology in which people could join in with the work or at least see it happening. Col. W.A. Chester-Master assisted where he could as Patron of the
Fig. 3.  a. Plan of Roman Cirencester published in the first interim report in 1961.  b. The greatly improved plan published one year later in the second interim report.
opposed to 'rescue' excavations were undertaken in late 1962 and 1963 at the amphitheatre on the west side of the town, work that continued in 1966. In 1963 there were also excavations at King's Head Yard off the Market Place, two separate sites off Lewis Lane, Parsonage Field in Watermoor Road and in Watermoor Hospital Gardens. In 1964 trenches were dug at Lloyds Bank in Silver Street, at the Gaumont Cinema site on the corner of Victoria Road and London Road, at Ashcroft House in Querns House and in Chester Mews, while in the following two years sites such as the northern defences off Spitalgate Lane and Dollar Street were investigated. All contributed to the emerging plan of the Roman town and it is instructive to compare the maps presented in successive interim reports through the 1960s. The period between 1964 and 1966 was dominated by another site, however, because in 1964 much of the pre-planned work had to be curtailed when the implications of proposed development on the site of Cirencester Abbey became apparent. After the first season at the Abbey in 1964 the Committee was acutely aware of the potential resources that might be required to complete the excavation, and the difficult decisions which would be ahead in balancing the competing claims of the Roman and medieval archaeology of the town. John Wacher fell ill during the 1965 season, and retired from active fieldwork in Cirencester. Alan McWhirr and David Brown took over as joint directors of the excavations. Conscious of the importance of the discoveries being made at the abbey, the Committee invited David Brown, an Anglo-Saxon specialist, to direct the excavations there in 1966. David was brought up in the Cotswold village of Daglingworth and had started digging in Cirencester in 1960 during his vacations from Cambridge. He also dug with Frere at the samian ware production site at Lezoux in France. Alan McWhirr had also dug with Frere at Verulamium and with Wacher at Leicester and Caterick. His first connection with Cirencester had been as a supervisor at the Leatholme (basilica) excavations in 1961. At that time Alan was a school teacher in Leicester who dug in the holidays, a situation which continued when he became a lecturer in Environmental Studies at Leicester College of Education (latterly Leicester Polytechnic). In 1988 he joined the Department of Archaeology at Leicester University on a part-time basis and in a full-time capacity in 1995 to set up a distance-learning course in archaeology.

By 1967 the threat to the site of the Abbey had diminished, and David Brown withdrew from the Committee as he had just been appointed to a post working on the collection of Anglo-Saxon grave goods in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. Alan McWhirr therefore assumed sole charge of the excavations and through the later 1960s and early 1970s masterminded a series of high-profile projects closely tied to the rapid expansion of the town and the threats posed by major developments in its historic core. In 1967 this included work at The Station Yard beside Sheep Street, Watermoor School, and sites at Midland Road and The Sands in the south-east corner of the town. 1968 saw work at The Waterloo, 17 The Avenue and Victoria Road, all of which added yet more detail to the town plan and began to focus attention on the fact that occupation across the walled area of the town was uneven in its intensity and date.

Between 1969 and 1975 a number of small excavations were undertaken around the town, but the work of the Committee mainly focused on three classic excavations whose results still figure prominently in textbooks on Roman Britain. In 1969 plans for the construction of the Cirencester western relief road led to the start of excavations in the Bath Gate cemetery which were to carry on until 1974, while on the
opposite side of the town excavations between 1970 and 1973 at Beeches Road (Fig. 5a) uncovered two very well-preserved town houses, one of which yielded the iconic hare mosaic which was rapidly adopted as the logo of the Corinium Museum, stealing attention from the Orpheus pavement and soon installed in a prominent place for visitors to admire the detail of its design. The final site involved the excavation of a strip through St Michael’s Field between 1974 and 1976 in advance of a (thankfully never to be constructed) road link. The excavation was known as Admiral’s Walk and uncovered the substantial remains of houses, shops and a part of a large public building, plus further evidence of early military activity (Fig. 5b).

All three of these large projects involved extensive open area excavations with teams of up to a hundred volunteers and students from Leicester working mainly through the summer months and living on campsites and in digs around the town. Alan McWhirr stayed with the Burton family who owned the rambling secondhand bookshop in Dyer Street which was always well stocked with archaeological volumes and made enjoyable browsing on a wet afternoon. A favourite haunt for supervisors was a rented house on the corner of London Road and Beeches Road that hosted many parties and deep debates about the archaeology of the town. The Twelve Bells and the Black Horse were favoured watering holes through the long summer excavations, although there were always a few diggers to be found in the Wagon and Horses, the Bear and the Nelson, easily recognised by their dirty knees and dusty shoes.

Throughout its Golden Years Cirencester was part of what became known as the digging circuit, and between 1960 and 1976 a number of up and coming archaeologists cut their teeth working in the town. In the early years some came here for what Alan McWhirr describes as ‘an annual dose of archaeological mania’ because the excavations at Verulamium were now starting to wind down. All were eager for the opportunities and training afforded by a high-profile programme of excavation under the direction of the country’s leading practitioners. Among the many people who worked on the digs during this period some went on to forge successful careers in academia, although there were always a few diggers to be found in the Wagon and Horses, the Bear and the Nelson, easily recognised by their dirty knees and dusty shoes.

Across Britain rescue archaeology was gradually changing as the 1970s unfolded. The early 1970s saw the creation of a number of new full-time professional archaeological units, at places such as Canterbury, Exeter, Lincoln, London and York, and some innovative approaches to recording. Enthused by the experiences of Tim O’Leary and Steve Roskams at the multinational excavations at Carthage and encouraged by innovative publications on stratigraphic sequences by Ed Harris, the 1974 supervisors working at Admiral’s Walk — Rick Middleton, Tim O’Leary, Giovanna Vitelli, Chris Gooday and Timothy Darvill — experimented with the emerging idea of single context recording. Despite using miles of permatrace and reams of paper it proved to be largely unsuccessful, with many of the records proving unintelligible in post-excavation analysis. But it was through such experiments that the principles of modern urban archaeology were established and a revised and much improved version of the system has now become standard practice.

Public interest in archaeology in Cirencester remained high through the early 1970s. The summer excavations, especially those at The Beeches and Admiral’s Walk, attracted thousands of visitors, both local residents and tourists from further afield, with August Bank Holidays being particularly popular and rather hectic. The AA provided signage to direct drivers into appropriate car parks. Queues formed to file around the excavation trenches. Members of the Cirencester Archaeological and Historical Society acted as guides, and prepared refreshments, galvanised and lolled by Miss D.M. Radway, Miss Joyce Barker and Mr
Kenneth Povah, Mr Povah was a retired school teacher and excellent artist who frequently used to sketch or paint reconstructions of what could be seen in the trenches in order to illuminate the tours he led. Collecting tins were always ready at hand to receive a few coins by way of a donation to excavation funds, and some bright supervisor invented the caption The rattle of the tin says 'thank you'. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s there were close reciprocal links with the Corinium Museum and, courtesy of successive custodians and curators Donald Atkinson, John Real and David Viner, a long-standing tradition of free entry for those working on the excavations on their days off or when rain stopped play.

Through the 1970s government support for archaeology in England was channelled through the Department of the Environment and focused on providing block grants to cover the core costs of established nationally based organisations. Some of the new archaeological units deemed necessary to cope with the rising tide of rescue archaeology were based within local authorities; others were set up as autonomous trusts. Cirencester was not deemed by the Department of the Environment to be a sufficiently large place to justify a full-time unit in its own right, and in 1972 the Committee for Rescue Archaeology in Avon Gloucestershire and Somerset (CRAAGS) was created to administer funds from the Department in the three counties. CRAAGS was responsible for excavations in Cirencester in 1976 at the Bath Gate cemetery west of Sheep Street and St John's Hospital in Spitalgate Lane, both directed by Roger Leech. The introduction of a second organisation into Cirencester might have made difficulties, but in fact a good working relationship was maintained between the two bodies, and both sites were subsequently published in collaboration with CEC.

The last major excavation in the Centre of Cirencester was at Admiral’s Walk in 1975, with small trenches at 26 Dollar Street and beside the amphitheatre running in parallel. The following year involved some small-scale clearing up work supervised by Timothy Darvill and a small team of local diggers drawn from the pool of skill by this time well established in the town: among them Jason Townsend, Andrea Morley, Ann Chapel and Helen d’Carle. Bob Zeepvat, who had worked at The School building in Gloucester Street. Alan Povah, was responsible for excavations in 1976 at 30 Gloucester as guest of honour. The tenth and last interim report of Cirencester excavations, covering work between 1973 and 1976, was published in the Antiquaries Journal for 1978. But although large-scale excavations came to an end in the mid 1970s the period remained a vibrant one for archaeology in the town. With David Viner as its first full-time curator, the Corinium Museum was extended and completely refurbished in 1973 and opened visitors on 26 November 1974 with the Duke of Gloucester as guest of honour. One of the early archaeological events held in the refurbished rooms was a research seminar organised by CEC in November 1975 on the archaeology and history of Cirencester, which dealt not only with the Roman period but actually devoted more space to the Saxon, medieval and later archaeology of the town. The papers, edited by Alan McWhirr, were published as British Archaeological Report no. 30 in 1976 (McWhirr 1976).

CEC’s headquarters were variously (indeed tenuously) located in sundry offices, in Park Street from 1978, in Silver Street (above one of Cirencester’s well-remembered greengrocers) from 1985 and latterly upstairs in Abberley House adjacent to the Corinium Museum. Post-excavation analysis and reporting were in full swing and an ambitious programme of publication was planned with financial support from the Department of the Environment and others. Initially it was hoped to produce a series of thematic monographs issued as reports of the Research Committee of the Society of Antiquaries, but the nature and character of publication was changing and as the first volume took form the decision was taken for the Committee to self-publish the reports by taking advantage of the emergent new computer-based technology. This latter era evolvement: volume II had microfiche but volume III reverted in part to small print to negate the use of fiche. The first volume covered the early Roman occupation at Cirencester and was launched at the Corinium Museum on 31 March 1982, at Cotswold District Council’s invitation and with Sheppard Feree in fine form as Chairman of CEC and most of the then committee in attendance, including Joyce Barker, John Jeffries and David Viner, who acted as the committee’s Honorary Secretary for twenty years from 1978 to 1997. It was around this time that CEC installed its first computer in the Park Street office, an Apple JIE acquired at educational discount through Alan McWhirr’s Leicester contacts, which made its way to Cirencester when Alan McWhirr and Timothy Darvill met in a lay-by on the Fosse Way somewhere near Stretton-on-Fosse to transfer the bulky cardboard cartons containing the computer and its peripherals from one car to the other in a manner that seemed slightly shady at the time and which today would probably have led to the arrest of both innocent parties.

Changing times: 1976–1989

Post-excavation work and small-scale excavations characterised Cirencester excavations through the late
1970s and 1980s. Cirencester Excavations volume II on the cemeteries was published in late 1982 and volume III on the town houses in Cirencester in 1986. Both sold well and have joined the ranks of key volumes on Britain’s Roman towns. But maintaining the momentum was difficult and in 1979 government funding for archaeology shifted from core-funding of established organisations to project funding for specific initiatives. CRAAGS and its later incarnation Western Archaeological Trust failed to keep in step with the changing pattern of archaeological endeavour and went into voluntary liquidation in March 1985. Gloucestershire in company with other parts of south-western England was left without a professional archaeological presence.

The new Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 established more robust approaches to the protection and conservation of scheduled monuments and in Cirencester the definition of the scheduled area shifted from blanket coverage of the whole town to precisely defined and mapped areas of mainly open ground occupied by car parks and parkland. The Roman amphitheatre was a Guardianship monument, but Cirencester was not included in the list of historic towns defined as Areas of Archaeological Importance in the 1979 Act. Responsibility for spatial planning and development control was focused in the hands of district councils as defined local planning authorities under the radical and controversial local government reorganisation in 1974 that saw the establishment of a new form of two-tier jurisdiction. Cotswold District Council became the district authority for Cirencester and eastern Gloucestershire. Some strategic planning responsibilities remained at county level and while many county councils established archaeological offices and Sites and Monuments Records (SMR) during the early 1970s, Gloucestershire was one of the last into the field with the creation of an SMR in Shire Hall in Gloucester as late as 1982.

Meanwhile, in Cirencester, CEC working closely with the staff of the Corinium Museum and Cotswold District Council were trying to maintain some archaeological presence. Timothy Darvill directed small-scale excavations in the kitchen garden of the Querns, in advance of the construction of a new ambulance station behind the hospital, in June and July 1978 revealing evidence of extensive Roman quarreying, and in 1980 excavated a small trench at the south end of Tower Street (2-8 Chester Street) which provided valuable new evidence from the military phases of the Leafield fort as well as another view of the large public building at the north end of insula VI. This work also included the first use of a systematic programme of environmental sampling that provided a rare insight into the palaeobotanical materials from the Roman town. Around the same period David Wilkinson was employed by CEC via the Corinium Museum to undertake post-excavation work and to carry out watching briefs and small-scale recording excavations across the town, for example at Querns Hospital in 1981 and at the site of the town’s first Tesco store, in Brewery Yard and at Watermoor Hospital. David also compiled the beginnings of a listed buildings recording archive for the museum, and did a substantial amount of work on the Cirencester Abbey volume preparation. In the mid 1980s Nick Turner and Chris Guy undertook other site observations, usually linked to Scheduled Monument Consent applications. David Viner clearly remembers all this as being essentially a holding operation, with much archaeological potential unrealised and indeed unrealisable given the funding and organisation structures then prevailing; ‘it is something of an abiding memory that so much was achieved on a succession of unconnected grants, chased with a certain amount of nervousness in advance of each season’ (Viner 2000, 31).

The Committee met annually with a gradually rotating membership. One of the items that cropped up on the agenda year after year was the need for a professional archaeological unit to cover the Cirencester area, but despite numerous threats of impending large-scale development in the Waterloo area, Forum car park, and Brewery car park and old Railway Station none seemed to get beyond the creation of outline schemes and the commissioning of desk-based assessments that gathered together existing information and established the case for further work. A breakthrough came when Cotswold District Council appointed Debenham Tewson and Chinnocks as advisors for the promotion of a large-scale town-centre development over the Brewery car park between Sheep Street, Castle Street and Cire Green. The scheme, generally known as the Corinium Development, was masterminded by Gerald Allison and was bold and ambitious. A development brief was established and a design competition took place between November 1988 and January 1989. Numerous presentations were made by prospective developers and an exhibition of proposals in the Corn Hall attracted much public attention. After much debate MEPC was invited to work up more detailed plans and co-operate with Cotswold District Council to draw up a formal agreement, apply for planning permission and gain Scheduled Monument Consent for the works. Archaeological evaluations were required as part of the initial works, and CEC were identified as the body to undertake the work.

CEC to CAT 1989–1991

At a meeting of CEC in April 1989 it was agreed to reconstitute the Committee as a company limited by guarantee, a management structure based on a small Board of Directors, and seek charitable status in such a way that the Directors were also the Trustees of the charity. As part of the reshuffle Sheppard Freer retired from the chair after nearly twenty-five years, passing the baton to Professor Mike Fulford from the University of Reading who was already an established member of the Committee. CEC’s legal advisor, Meryl Atkins, found a series of useful precedents and in discussion with Committee members drew up the documents that would establish Cotswold Archaeological Trust (CAT) and secure its charitable status. The Trust came into existence on 17 March 1989. The first meeting of the Board of Directors was held in the Corinium Museum on 14 April 1989 when Mike Fulford was elected chairman and Derek Waring appointed company
secretary. The other directors named on the founding articles of association were Timothy Darvill, Carolyn Heighway, Alan McWhirr and David Viner.

Particularly important at this early stage in the life of the Trust was the help and advice given by Glenne Mitchell, a special projects officer at Cotswold District Council whose responsibilities included both the Corinium Development and the encouragement of new small businesses and community initiatives. He quickly recognised the potential of having a viable archaeological capability in Cotswold District and campaigned tirelessly to secure resources and support. CAT started trading just a few weeks after its first board meeting appointing Chris Gerrard as Field Officer and Director of Excavations, together with Graeme Walker, Casper Johnson and Alastair Barber as field officers and site assistants to undertake a programme of field evaluation for the Corinium Development (Fig. 6).

CEC provided a small sum of money to pay the first wage bill, and Cotswold District Council agreed to an annual payment for retained archaeological services to cover inquiries that came through the Corinium Museum and the Council’s planning department. Setting up the Trust involved a degree of risk, and all the initial Trustees gave generously of their time to help ensure its success. Glenne Mitchell was also able to provide office accommodation on the upper floors of the Old Railway Station in Sheep Street at a peppercorn rent. A selection of desks, filing cabinets and office equipment established an operational base for the team and a home for the Trust which served through several cold winters and hot summers down to 1996 with CAT eventually occupying the whole building. (A Grade II* Listed Building, the station opened in 1841 and was briefly the boardroom ‘at the end of the line’ during Brunel’s design and construction of the Great Western Railway westwards.)

The creation of CAT could not have come at a better moment. Not only was the Corinium Development fuelling a sense of hope and opportunity in the town but on a political front the appearance in November 1990 of Planning Policy Guidance 16 (PPG16) on Archaeology and Planning (DoE 1990) formalised the need to integrate archaeological matters in both strategic planning and development control. Local planning authorities were not only obliged to have regard to the preservation of archaeological deposits as a material consideration when determining planning permission, but they were given powerful tools in the form of powers to request desk-based assessment and field evaluations to fully inform the decision-making process, and specimen clauses for providing developer-funded mitigation programmes where in situ preservation was not possible. In the background there was also the emergence of stronger European Legislation promoting Environmental Impact Assessment that appeared as an EU Directive in 1985, implemented in July 1988 in the UK by Statutory Instrument 1199. Cotswold District Council quickly embraced the new order and tenders for work started to arrive through the CAT letterbox. As well as work for the Corinium Development, nearly a dozen projects were undertaken in the first year, including evaluations and watching briefs in Cricklade Street, Watermoor Nursery, St Michael’s Field, Victoria Road, Churnside and Corinium Gate. By 1990 CAT was working on projects across southern England.

English Heritage, since 1983 the government agency for archaeological and heritage matters, was supportive of CAT’s development and in 1989 commissioned an urban assessment of Cirencester, one of the first batch to be undertaken alongside work at York, Durham and Canterbury, published as Cirencester: Town and Landscape in 1994. This was a long and substantial job that developed a range of innovative thinking that did much to pioneer what has become known as the Event-Monument model of archaeological resource management and formalise the staged management cycle linking archaeological inputs to the decision-making process embedded in the English town and county planning system. Balancing the imperatives of commercial archaeology with opportunities for trying new approaches and large-scale research has been a characteristic of CAT’s work throughout its existence. Cirencester: Town and Landscape also contains one of the best reference bibliographies for Cirencester’s archaeology yet produced.

Through 1990 and 1991 CAT expanded its workbook and its footprint in the region and, while the undelivered and eventually abandoned Corinium Development gradually faded into the background, the idea of improving the line of the A417/419 from Stratton north of Swindon though to Birdlip high on the Cotswolds swept onto the agenda with CAT engaged to carry out the desk-based work and field evaluations starting in 1990. It was a large job and stretched resources to the full. It also involved taking on additional staff not only for fieldwork but also for administration. The administrator was Michael Hobday who worked for CAT part-time while also continuing a passion for commentating on polo matches, a skill that earned him an acknowledgement in Jilly Cooper’s 1991 ‘bonk-buster’ novel Polo, and eventually took him away to pastures new. One of the big changes prompted by the work connected with the A417/419 improvements
was a recognition that archaeology was deeply embedded in the wider field of environmental consultancy. It was not long before CAT was drawn into this world, engaged variously as contractor or subcontractor within multi-disciplinary teams often headed by companies such as Countryside Planning and Management, based nearby at Quenington, or Barton Wilmore in Reading or Frank Graham in Worcester. Other clients during these early years included the National Trust, Thames Water and Cotswold District Council, connections that served to reinforce the way in which contract archaeology was already moving outwards from the traditional heartlands of prehistoric, Roman and medieval remains into the realms of a broader historic environment that was as likely to involve remains from the 20th century AD as from the 20th century BC. It was the excitement of working in a wider environmental context that gave Chris Gerrard the opportunity to move to Countryside Planning and Management in early 1991.

CAT and commercial archaeology 1991–2008

In 1991 Neil Holbrook was appointed as the full-time Archaeological Manager to take responsibility for the day-to-day activities of the Trust. Neil was an on-and-off Romanist who had previously worked on Hadrian’s Wall and in Ixeter. The financial viability of CAT was on a knife edge throughout his first year in charge, a product of the immaturity of the new market for archaeological services and the prevailing harsh economic conditions which led to a slowdown in construction activity. With the collapse of plans for the Corinium Development, construction in Cirencester was on a small scale and CAT had to compete for the contracts to undertake associated archaeological fieldwork. It was obvious that if CAT was to survive it increasingly had to look for work elsewhere in Gloucestershire and beyond, and its major fieldwork for the next couple of years was away from the town at places such as Kemble, Tewkesbury, Wantage and Witney.

The early 1990s were a struggle as the provisions of PPG16 began to find widespread acceptance and developers came to understand that archaeological costs had to be worked into overall development costs. But by 1994 the recession had eased, archaeological evaluations and development conditions were commonplace, and CAT was developing a client base which gave it a sounder financial footing. The publication that year of Cirencester: Town and Landscape also provided a stimulus for a new assessment of the outstanding work on the most important unpublished excavations undertaken by CEC. In December 1994 English Heritage approved a grant which culminated in the publication in 1998 of Cirencester Excavations volume IV, covering the Anglo-Saxon church and medieval abbey, and volume V, dealing with the Roman town defences, public buildings and shops.

By now CAT was developing something of a reputation for reviving stalled post-exavation projects, having published earlier in 1998 its second monograph on excavations undertaken at Kingscote between 1973 and 1980 in a volume concerned with Roman small towns in the Cotswolds (Timby 1998). Work was also ongoing which would lead to publication of the 1969 excavations at Bishop’s Cleeve Anglo-Saxon cemetery and the work in 1971 on a Bronze Age burnt mound at Charlton Kings. The number of staff employed by CAT was steadily increasing and by 1996 the company was on the verge of outgrowing its offices in the Old Railway Station. When Cotswold District Council requested that CAT vacate that building a search was begun for new premises which culminated in a move to the Headquarters Building of the former RAF base at Kemble, six miles outside Cirencester, in the autumn of 1996.

The remainder of the 1990s was a period of steady growth for the Trust. CEC was formally dissolved on 28 February 1997 as with the publication programme substantially completed its work was effectively done. Later the same day a professional seminar was held in the King’s Head in the Market Place to discuss and define new research themes that would give added purpose to explorations of the archaeology of Cirencester. Matters such as the prehistoric antecedents, the local road patterns, the emergence of public buildings in the town and the role of the defences were all reviewed and remain important, and partly unresolved, research questions.

By 2000 the hard work which had been put in during the first ten years of CAT’s life was starting to pay off as it established itself as one of the top ten archaeological contractors working in the UK, with a publication record that put a number of its competitors to shame. It was taking on larger and larger projects and working over an increasing geographical area, including important work in the Bristol region and South Wales. Its expertise in urban archaeology was increasingly being deployed in Bristol where a building boom was taking place and land values were sufficient to finance extensive excavations in advance of development. The company changed its trading name to the shorter, snappier, Cotswold Archaeology on 1 September 2001 and in 2003 its annual income passed £1 million for the first time.

Through the 1990s and beyond there have been gradual changes to the structure of the Trust and the composition of its board. Timothy Darvill took over as chairman from Mike Fulford in May 1992, and Richard Drew became company secretary in 1999. Glenna Mitchell was elected a Director of the Trust in 1992, but his untimely death in 1999 robbed the Trust of one of its most loyal supporters. Of the original Trustees, Mike Fulford and Alan McWhirr stepped down in 1993 and 1998 respectively; the rest remain alongside others: David Newton (1990–); Mick Aston (1990–2004), Trevor Rowley (1993–2001), Desmond Godman (1994–), the late Michael Oakshott (1995–2004), Tom Hassall (1999–2002), Sue Hendin (1999–2005), John Rhodes (2004–), Richard Courtney-Lord (2004–), Chris Caining (2004–) and Leslie Jones (2004–). Over the years a number of senior staff have been recruited to build the archaeological and management experience of the Trust, among them Mark Collard, Martin Watts and Simon Cox. A handful of the field staff recruited in the first year or two are still with the company, notably Abigail
Barber, Cliff Bateman and Richard Morton. The initial offices at Kemble soon proved too small and in 2003 CA moved to larger and more comfortable accommodation in Building 11 in the same Business Park, the new offices being formally opened by Henry Elwes, Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire on 17 March 2004.

Work in Cirencester over the last decade has been consistent, if small-scale, as is described further in the Introduction to this volume, although as we write excavations are ongoing in the Corn Hall which are the largest to have taken place in the town for thirty years (Fig. 7). As we approach the fiftieth anniversary of the formation of CEC in December 2008 it is a source of pride that Cirencester remains the home of one of the leading archaeological fieldwork companies in the country, with a staff of over seventy and income in excess of £3 million. It has also succeeded in publishing over a hundred site reports in a variety of regional and national journals, and sponsors an annual public lecture held in Cirencester which regularly attracts an audience in excess of two hundred.

Despite all that has changed, we like to think that we have remained true to the original ideals of CEC and continue to be a centre of knowledge and expertise about the archaeology of Cirencester. In the Appeal Leaflet issued in 1959 (see Fig. 2) the new Committee anticipated the benefits of its proposed programme of fieldwork: ‘the information gained would certainly throw much new light upon the way of life in Roman Britain and upon the history of Roman occupation, which covers virtually a fifth of the long history of a town that has ever since remained a notable centre of Cotswold life. Too much of this period is at present dark...’. Fifty years on one hopes that Sir Ian Richmond and his fellow committee members would have been pleased about what has been learnt about Roman Cirencester, and also that the wanton destruction of archaeological remains by development has been brought to an end. We have also made some advances in our understanding of the history and archaeology of the other four fifths of the town’s history, although as always much more needs to be done. Outside of the minster church and abbey we still know precious little about the post-Roman and high medieval archaeology of the town. Cirencester also retains a fine stock of historic vernacular buildings but, as David Viner outlines later in this volume, there has been comparatively little research which builds on the results of the pioneering survey of Richard Reece and Christopher Catling published in 1974. Certainly much remains to be learned, but on balance we can be pretty pleased with what has been achieved in the last half century and look forward to new opportunities and fresh approaches that will take us towards our first century.
Cirencester Excavation Committee

Chairmen
Sir Ian Richmond 1958–1965
Sheppard Frece 1965–1989
Michael Fulford 1989–1992

Patrons
Earl Bathurst 1963–1989

Directors of Excavations
Katherine Richardson 1959
John Wacher 1960–1965
David Brown 1965–1967
Alan McWhirr 1965–1989

Cotswold Archaeological Trust

Chairmen
Michael Fulford 1989–1992
Timothy Darvill 1992–present

Archaeological Manager/Chief Executive
Christopher Gerrard 1989–1991
Neil Holbrook 1991 present

Cirencester Excavations 1958–2007

Introduction
The purpose of this study is to offer a brief assessment of achievements made and, it is also argued, opportunities overlooked in the study and interpretation of the upstanding architectural heritage of Cirencester since 1958. It is hoped that it may also serve as a stimulus for future action to continue the long tradition of archaeological endeavour in the town, as enshrined in the Cirencester Excavations series of five volumes published between 1958 and 1968, moving forward to incorporate study of the upstanding building fabric as integral to the overall archaeological record. It is salutary to note that no such study of any individual building has featured in any detail in the five preceding volumes in this series, which accurately reflects the nature of archaeological research in Cirencester and indeed elsewhere for much of the second half of the 20th century.

The town has a rich stock of buildings. In terms of listed building status, the total in 1971 was nearly 350.

Other site reports

Interim Reports

Other publications
Darvill, T. and Gerrard, C. 1994 Cirencester: Town and landscape. An urban archaeological assessment Cirencester, Cotswold Archaeological Trust

A RICH RESOURCE: STUDYING CIRENCESTER'S HISTORIC BUILDINGS
by David Viner

Introduction
The purpose of this study is to offer a brief assessment of achievements made and, it is also argued, opportunities overlooked in the study and interpretation of the upstanding architectural heritage of Cirencester since 1958. It is hoped that it may also serve as a stimulus for future action to continue the long tradition of archaeological endeavour in the town, as enshrined in the Cirencester Excavations series of five volumes published between 1958 and 1968, moving forward to incorporate study of the upstanding building fabric as integral to the overall archaeological record. It is salutary to note that no such study of any individual building has featured in any detail in the five preceding volumes in this series, which accurately reflects the nature of archaeological research in Cirencester and indeed elsewhere for much of the second half of the 20th century.

The town has a rich stock of buildings. In terms of listed building status, the total in 1971 was nearly 350.
including 2 Grade I and 19 Grade II* (Leech 1981, 22). Following the re-listing survey undertaken in 1989-90 this total has risen to 366 listing entries (but many more buildings of course), a rich legacy indeed for future researchers, residents and visitors to inherit and seek to understand. Additional legislative protection is afforded by Conservation Areas, which in Cirencester have a distinguished pedigree, the original designation for the central town area dating from 1968, within a year of the Act introducing the concept. Watermoor followed in 1984 and two more in 1991. At the time of writing this assessment Cotswold District Council, as the local planning authority, was consulting on the future of such arrangements locally, in tune with the overall changes forthcoming nationally in the whole approach to protection of ancient monuments and historic buildings.3

However, many (including some of the finest) of Cirencester’s buildings remain relatively little examined or understood. Private as well as public ownership imposes its own constraints, and much of the fabric is almost permanently hidden from view. Nevertheless, this collective resource forms one of the town’s primary attractions for visitors, and there is a long-standing and well-established literature harnessed to the attractiveness of stone buildings, and to the role which Cirencester plays in its Cotswold hinterland, all of which is often offered with an appeal to a nostalgic charm underpinning much of heritage presentation in the Cotswold district. The town and district is not alone in that regard, as has been noted recently in an almost exactly parallel set of comments for historic Gloucester (Heighway 2006, 213), and arguably both have been much less successful in exploiting such tourism interest to develop detailed building study programmes than some other historic towns and cities elsewhere, such as Ludlow or Lincoln.2

History of studying buildings

In reviewing a period of some fifty years a number of very clear milestones are immediately identifiable, and these form the core of this study. A sense of the general state of the building fabric in the years following the Second World War is discernible without much difficulty in the pages of a photographic study published in 1951, Festival of Britain year (Jowitt & Needham 1951). In some thirty images, which now forms a specific archive in its own right, the town’s principal historic buildings are featured, ecclesiastical and secular. They mirror something of the timeless quality captured three decades or more before by three photographers in a town history of 1924 (Bulley 1924); their work remains admired in local archives today.

Subsequent visiting or resident architectural historians have contributed their own assessments, generally finding the town and its long history attractive to explore. David Verey, a Gloucestershire man and author of the original two county volumes in the Pevsner Buildings of England series in 1970, needed no encouragement to extol the virtues of a largely stone-built town, with much of its architectural heritage of 17th and 18th-century date (Verey 1970; Verey and Brooks 1999). He also maintained a particular interest in the work of individual Victorian architects, including Samuel Whitfield Daubys, who won the architectural competition for the Royal Agricultural College (1845–6), a significant building on the western edge of the town, and William Jay, architect of Watermoor House in 1825–7 (Verey 1973, 1976).

In admiring mode, Alec Clifton-Taylor probably did as much as any commentator since the 1950s to popularise traditional Cotswold architecture, both in the vernacular style and the classically polite, the region in his view offering ‘English traditional architecture at its most succulent’ (Clifton-Taylor 1988, 7). His essay on Cirencester, wisely republished as a separate volume by the town’s Civic Society to celebrate its own twenty-first birthday in 1988, provides a good summary not only of the principal buildings with their architectural detailing described, but also the development pressures the town then faced.

Clifton-Taylor found the town coping well, ‘on the whole planning here has been skilful’ (ibid., 39), although a report undertaken by the Georgian Group shortly afterwards was far less sanguine, declaring the primary threat to the Georgian Group area being ‘the erosion of the architectural detailing of the older buildings, and the poor standard of design and workmanship in the new work’ (Frank 1990, 1). The combination of pressures large and small on the town’s fabric was a particular concern of the late 1980s; a proposed large-scale development extending westwards from the Brewery car park across and beyond Sheep Street ultimately proved to be abortive, leaving a planning blight over several stand-alone historic buildings which still continues, not least to the town’s former railway station of 1841 and to a lesser extent its former Memorial (originally Cottage) Hospital of 1873, a proposed Lidstone and the former Independ­ent Chapel of 1833 (later Apsley Hall) opposite. Such projects generate their own literature, not all of which is gathered together as the archive it should represent, but two small studies make the point that development pressures can and indeed should trigger published historical assessment (Cleve 1968, Viner 1988).

The Georgian Group report also served to highlight other factors which were impacting upon any wider appreciation of the town’s built heritage. Although the core of the medieval and post-medieval town has enjoyed Conservation Area status since 1968, the report noted that ‘while the more prominent buildings are well maintained, it is the Grade II and the Conservation Area buildings that are under threat. Obviously it is the group impact of all of Cirencester’s buildings, both the grand and the more modest, which contribute to its unique character’ (Frank 1990, 1). Minor alterations to doors and windows as well as the removal of interior fittings all erode character, reducing the diagnostic features which are essential to dating and interpreting any building’s unique history. The accompanying, if brief, photographic survey listed some sixteen or so
examples of such steady degradation and loss of historic character. Interestingly the need to compile a more detailed archival record of such activity was not mentioned, although some fifteen years previously the then chief executive of Cotswold District Council had expressed the hope that a thorough survey of Cirencester's historic buildings would be undertaken in due course as an essential ingredient in raising overall levels of appreciation (Waring 1976). Other than the welcome re-listing survey in 1989-90, no such comprehensive overview has been attempted.

Town histories and photographic records

Over-arching town histories are few and far between, not least because of the effort involved as the range of documentation available continues to expand, and also as a reflection of fashion in historical study. Town historians still respect and defer to the standard detailed history published by K. J. Beecham as long ago as 1887, a thorough study of its own time, helpfully including articles between 1874 and 1933, the great majority in the latest published edition in 1978 (Beecham 1887). An equally substantial contribution, unfortunately not brought together into a single study, was the range of researches with a strong historical base undertaken by Revd. E.A. Fuller and published in some seventeen articles between 1874 and 1933, the great majority in the late 1880s and 1890s in the Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society. Fuller came to Cirencester as curate in 1854, before moving after two years to Cirencester for eight years and thereafter back to Cirencester for a further six years. This was far from a moribund period in the life of the town's principal church as Bob Jennings' essay has shown (Jennings 1976), and Fuller's work, despite its often heavy style, contributes greatly to our appreciation of the town's more significant buildings, both ecclesiastical and secular. Like Beecham, Fuller provides a platform upon which all subsequent work can be assessed.

The publications of St Clair Baddeley and in the period under review Jean Welsford, Bob Jennings and others has enhanced the corpus, Jean Welsford's substantial contribution also including a presentation of historic photographs which reveal much about town houses and buildings now long gone (Baddeley 1924; Welsford 1963a; 1963b); 4th Photographic archives of streets and buildings have been built up from a number of sources and Cirencester is well served in this respect, not only in the Corinium Museum's extensive holdings but also in the local studies collection largely owned by the Trustees of the Bingham Library and lodged in that building until transferred, as a consequence of refurbishment and reallocation of space, to Gloucestershire Archives in 2007. The Trustees' holdings also include a substantial collection of local topographical art, containing a range of illustrations recording town streets and buildings at various dates. One outcome of the complete re-cataloguing programme which the Trustees have sponsored has been a photographic volume linked to celebrating the philanthropic work of Cirencester-born Daniel George Bingham in the town (Viner and Viner 2004). The photographs used in this study also reveal the state of the town's buildings and amenities in the early years of the 20th century (captured with considerable clarity in the work of J.H. Thomas and W.D. Moss) and act as a strong record of those buildings with which Bingham was closely associated, the Bingham Library (opened 1905); the Bingham Hall (opened 1908) and extensions to the Memorial Hospital, completed in 1913.

Such visual evidence also serves as a reminder of how much the central area of Cirencester was rebuilt, or at least given new facades, during the fifty or so years before the First World War. Photographs by Thomas, Moss and by P. Mortimer Savory capture much of this, including public and commercial buildings such as the new Corn Hall of 1862-3 in the Market Place, the refronting of the adjoining King's Head Hotel (1863-4) and the large new Wilts. and Dorset bank building of 1897. Another feature was the replacement of a number of medieval or late medieval timber-framed properties by rows of stone housing, often in a rather severe Cotswold Tudor-Revival style and at the behest and expense of the Bathurst family of Cirencester Park, the principal property owner in the town. Silver Street, Black Jack Street and considerable sections of Castle Street and Cricklade Street all provide good examples. Earl Bathurst engaged the London architect John Bird for much of this work, particularly in Castle Street (1896-7). Bingham's preferred choice was V.A. Lawson, whose original training as an engineer is reflected in much of his architectural work. Lawson's impact on Cirencester as a whole, including Watermoor, was considerable and deserves a specific study. 6

Methodologies

It is important to draw distinctions between the various methodologies by which buildings are studied, in order not to imply that little has been achieved overall in Cirencester. Detailed measured surveys of individual properties remain in very short supply, and this represents perhaps the greatest missed opportunity of the last few decades. The reasons for this are many, but a planning culture which does not appear to make full use of planning policy guidance, such as Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 introduced in 1994 (see below), inevitably sets the trend, and there are still relatively few detailed historical and architectural assessments compiled as part of the planning process. Increasingly, however, owner or occupier interest in individual properties is growing, often as part of the rapid expansion in family history research, and this at least bodes well for the future. Planning requirements to undertake even a photographic record (in the absence of anything more detailed) does not of itself place such material in the public domain, especially if it is not deposited in an appropriate archive.

While respecting the wider roles of Gloucestershire Archives and the National Monuments Record of English Heritage, the overall conclusion must be that the town still badly needs some form of archival focus around which this mass of disparate material can be gathered and promoted. Interestingly, such a project
was developed at the Corinium Museum as part of a Manpower Services Commission job creation project during the mid 1980s, with a respectable list of small projects in a relatively short time, but this has not been subsequently advanced (Wilkinson 1985-6). It has a parallel, both in concept and in timing, with a similar project to register and create an archive of Gloucester’s historic buildings, also housed in one of that city’s museums. That too has value but no subsequent growth (Leighway 2006, 213).

This is not to say that the study of the history (as distinct from the detailed physical/structural recording) of Cirencester’s buildings has been neglected, although such research is inevitably disparate, not always in published form and requires considerable effort to bring together into any cohesive record. The approach is far from systematic. The town also still awaits a volume in the Victoria County History series, sadly not envisaged for many years yet.

Key projects

However, two projects stand out, published in consecutive years but independently prepared, which moved the published data on Cirencester’s buildings forward substantially, and they remain important sources of reference. *Cirencester: the Development and Buildings of a Cotswold Town* (Reece and Catling 1975) resulted from a five-week survey in the summer of 1974, examining all buildings of pre-1922 date, using map regression analysis and providing a rough approximation of the date of their facades based on stylistic features.

A series of some ten styles was identified, based on a variety of details and materials, providing a framework around which any more detailed study of the town’s buildings could be advanced. The growth of the town was assessed and some pertinent comments added on the whole issue of loss and retention and the criteria against which both are measured in the modern planning system. Interestingly only three of the 84 illustrated buildings have disappeared since 1974, although reference is made to the loss during the study period of another significant 18th/early 19th-century town house. One particularly telling point concerns the town’s earliest dated house, 10 Coxwell Street, which has an entrance arch of 1648 but has otherwise been subjected to such modernisation (externally at least, and one might suspect also internally) that “has hidden or destroyed a building which could help us understand part of our surroundings” (Reece and Catling 1975, 61). Simply gathering together a list of dated buildings in the town, especially in and around Coxwell Street and concentrating on them would provide one particular focus.

A symposium in the Corinium Museum in November 1975 brought together a number of specialists pursuing the post-Roman development of Cirencester, and the resulting volume of essays (McWhirr 1976) exemplifies the eclectic nature of contemporary research co-ordinated to advantage. Joyce Barker’s essay on the George/Powell family and Gloucester House in Dyer Street remains one of the few studies bringing inventory information to bear upon a particular Cirencester building (Barker 1976). Rebecca Powell was (and in name remains) a substantial benefactor to Cirencester in the first half of the 18th century. Gloucester House was largely rebuilt including a new frontage, 1780–90 for a subsequent owner and is still a significant building, associated in turn with several well-known Cirencester families, Cripps, Rudder, Plummer and Ovens.

Previous house studies, in each case by the property owner, had been the modest commentary on 33 Dyer Street, just across the road (Klitz 1969–70), and a more detailed examination of Langley’s Mill in Watermoor, a mill site from at least the 16th century and surviving today as two cottages, nos 12 and 14 City Bank Road (Walls 1985 6). David Verey’s interest in individual architects of the 19th century has already been mentioned; his study of William Jay clarified who was responsible for the design and execution of Watermoor House in 1825 (Verey 1976). Jay may well also have been responsible for Arkenside in Lewis Lane, demolished in 2006 (Fig. 15).

Timber-framed buildings

A short but significant essay by David Smith on a surviving fragment of timber building at 49 Castle Street, recorded in 1975, is a reminder of the timber building tradition which at least perhaps to the public eye is otherwise rather lost behind, beneath or replaced by the ubiquitous stone building traditions of the Cotswold region in general, and its market towns in particular (Fig. 8). He noted that “periodically entire timber-framed buildings were constructed in the [Cotswold] towns as well as other buildings where a stone ground floor wall carried timber-framed walling at first floor level.” (Smith 1976, 109). Both forms can be found in Cirencester, the Bear Inn in Dyer Street and the Fleece Hotel in Market Place (albeit the latter rather obscured by pseudo-framing), being good examples with jetted floors of the entire frame type. Neither building, as far as is known, has been subjected to any detailed structural analysis or recording.

No 49 Castle Street, albeit largely rebuilt post-recording, exemplifies the frame on a ground-floor-wall type of structure, and stands in a probably subdivided haggare plot. Smith noted that a study of haggare plots in Cirencester had yet to take place, and would be of considerable potential value in understanding the growth of the medieval town. Such systematic documentary research still remains largely unattempted for Cirencester.

That said, the work of historical geographer Terry Slater, also during the 1970s, does provide a firm basis for understanding both the medieval town and the processes of growth in the 19th-century town, particularly in the relationship between estate ownership and suburban development (Slater 1976a; 1976b; 1978). Clifton-Taylor also noted how the historic town was “wedged between two large estates, the former Abbey lands to the north-east and the Park to the west”, together acting “as a straightjacket” (Clifton-Taylor 1988, 37). Expansion to the south-east was one inevitable result, and Slater shows how the area of...
Fig. 8 Timber-framed buildings. a. 33–35 Gloucester Street b. 17–19 Gosditch Street. c. 6–8 Dollar Street. (photos 1970)

former nursery lands south of Lewis Lane was systematically developed from 1850 onwards, providing incidentally a rich resource of well-dated mid and later Victorian streets and houses extant today.

19th-century Cirencester

Slater's further study was the associated development of Watermoor on a scale and intensity which effectively gave it a status as almost an industrial railway suburb. He shows how the efforts of an improved dwellings company, an associated form of building society, could respond to the housing needs of the time (Slater 1976c). With one notable exception (Loveridge 1977), it is regrettable that oral history recording opportunities came too late to capture much of the richness of oral record which was undoubtedly contained within Watermoor during the lifetime of the railway works (opened 1895, enlarged three times, closed 1925) and of the railway itself (closed 1961). A flavour can certainly be found in the best of the Midland and South Western Junction Railway studies (Bartholomew 1982) but more could still be done on the housing stock and its occupants.

The 19th-century town, which Slater noted had bequeathed a wealth of historical records (Slater 1976b, 145), not surprisingly has been better studied in relative terms. Its building stock is considerable, its rate of survival better, while at the same time subsequent development pressures, particularly during the period under review, have threatened a number of buildings regarded as significant to town life, even if redundant to their original purpose(s). Recording driven by such development pressure has included various specific-purpose buildings; two brief studies have already been noted, for the town railway station and the Memorial Hospital; both survive, if only in partial use (Clews 1988; Viner 1988). Other stand-alone buildings where in situ measured survey has been undertaken include the former agent's house/warehouse at the Thames and Severn Canal wharf off Querns Lane, recorded prior to demolition in 1975 (Viner 1976), and the former town lock-up, surveyed as part of its presentation by the district's museum service (Viner and Powell 1991; Price and Viner 1994).

Planning process

A summary statement in 1981 examined the relationship between archaeology and planning in Cirencester as part of a countywide survey (Leech 1981, 17–25) and the following quarter-century has brought a number of changes to that relationship, specifically the introduction of long-awaited Planning Policy Guidance Notes, no. 16 Archaeology and Planning in 1990 (PPG 16), and
more significantly for this study no. 15 Planning and the Historic Environment in 1994 (PPG 15). Together, these provided local planning authorities with a clear steer on archaeology and the built historic environment as a threatened and finite resource and a material consideration in the planning process. The result as noted by Jan Wills, Gloucestershire’s county archaeologist, has been ‘an unprecedented amount of archaeological excavation both in Gloucestershire and elsewhere’, with the majority of archaeological work being triggered by this planning advice mechanism (Wills 2006, 233). The imposition of PPG 15, however, has proved less effective.

While PPG 16 may provide adequate funding for specific projects and tasks, it does not of itself allow for wider synthesis. However, in 1994 as part of a programme of work on urban areas of national archaeological importance initiated by English Heritage, a detailed urban archaeological assessment volume was published for Cirencester, containing extremely valuable essays on the growth and development of the town from Roman to post-medieval times (Darvill and Gerrard 1994). This also contains by far the most useful and comprehensive bibliography to this whole period under review. Now out of print, this volume is well worth consideration for an updated edition, in part at least.

**Archaeological organisation**

When Cirencester Excavation Committee’s work was absorbed into the newly created Cotswold Archaeological Trust in 1989, it might have been hoped that the study of standing buildings would also benefit from increased opportunities, helped by the subsequent funding changes for archaeology. Given that the greater part of the new trust’s work has inevitably been directly dependent upon development pressures arising from PPG 16, and the inevitable funding constraints which accompany them, there has been relatively little achieved on the town’s upstanding building heritage by this or any other archaeological unit or organisation, a number of which have worked on a commercial basis in Cirencester since the 1980s. Such comments apply equally to voluntary groups and societies. Rather, the range of projects reported elsewhere in this volume is an indication of the nature of development-driven, PPG 16-determined archaeological work in an historic town such as Cirencester over the past decade or more.

An early opportunity for CAT came with the proposed rebuilding of a block of properties at 32–38 Cricklade Street, which although only of late Victorian date (these properties were entirely rebuilt in 1893) nevertheless provided an opportunity for study in the town’s commercial heart (Gerard and Johnson 1989). The architectural survey element was integrated with an archaeological watching brief, and became even more valuable when these replacement buildings themselves suffered a major fire on 10 January 2004, requiring another substantial rebuilding.\(^9\) Plot development for this site also formed part of the subsequent urban archaeological assessment, and remains one of the few published examples of its type for Cirencester (Darvill and Gerard 1994, 125). However, the site report clearly shows how little time was allocated for any form of recording, access being via a watching brief condition, resulting in little more than a salvage opportunity.

One of the few Cirencester buildings to be subjected to structural analysis in any depth prior to and during rehabilitation for new use has been 44 Black Jack Street (Turner 1995). This property was in a very run-down condition when acquired by the local authority as a linked development with the Corinium Museum next door. It proved to be a much-altered building with only fragmentary surviving evidence of 17th-century date, viz. a floor beam and a section of oak panelling (not in situ) dated to c. 1620. Although documentary research was unrewarding, enough was achieved to show structural evolution on the site, suggesting the property to be once part of a larger footprint and with a distinctive plan of a frontage building with a rear wing set at an angle behind, a recognisable feature in Cirencester streets.\(^10\)

Surviving architectural features and fittings have long been subjected to attrition, especially in town centre properties where ground floor areas, once adapted for shops, have continued to be enlarged and modernised. This process seems only to accelerate in the main shopping streets, especially the Market Place and Cricklade Street, where little of pre-20th-century date must now survive at ground floor level. The fate of 32–38 Cricklade Street, twice comprehensively rebuilt in a little over a century, is perhaps an extreme example (Fig. 9). Upper floors, however, may offer better hope of survival, and building conversion some years ago brought the late 17th-century moulded plaster ceiling and contemporary upper staircase on the first floor of 7 Cricklade Street to notice; it remains otherwise unrecorded in detail (Verey and Brooks 1999, 274). Roof spaces are generally speaking a little explored and even less recorded area anywhere in Cirencester.

**Cirencester’s principal medieval and later buildings**

Until recently it could still be argued that little if any detailed structural research had been undertaken on any of the major surviving medieval buildings in the town,
ecclesiastical and secular. Several recent initiatives suggest an improvement. The town’s most outstanding building, the parish church of St John Baptist with its adjoining Town Hall in the south porch, is currently subject to a detailed and phased improvement programme which has been some years in preparation. This has spawned some detailed research, principally by Warwick Rodwell with an appraisal of the church fabric and fittings (Rodwell 1997), to which can now be added a detailed study by Malcolm James of the south porch and Town Hall, in advance of necessary structural repairs (James 2006). This latter also serves as a record of the previous programmes of repairs to the porch especially in 1908-9. Without doubt there is enough material gathered here and elsewhere to merit a monograph on this fine building, linked perhaps to the programme of planned works. There is also a reminder in scale and significance of the previous major restoration programme to the church of 1865-7 (Jennings 1976).

The two surviving buildings most closely associated with the Abbey of St Mary, Cirencester have also been the focus of recent investigation. St John’s Hospital in Spitalgate Lane, founded by Henry I in about 1133, survives as an arcade of the infirmary ‘nave’, its refurbishment and landscaping during the 1970s allowed a limited amount of archaeological recording (Leech and McWhirr 1982). Roof repairs including tile and timber replacement in 2006 provided an awaited opportunity to commission some dendrochronology, and the results now available are believed to provide the very first dendro-dating successfully achieved for any building in Cirencester (Arnold and Howard 2007) which is both an achievement and a salutary reminder of how much has been missed in the town since, such techniques became more widely available. Previously it was believed (or assumed) that the roof was largely of one phase, early medieval in date, but with some later inserted timber repairs. What is now known is that the principal surviving roof structure dates to the second quarter of the 15th century (the majority of the timbers being felled in AD 1436), but that it incorporates a number of early 12th-century timbers, presumably re-used.11

Nearby Spital Gate is the only surviving gatehouse of the Abbey of St Mary, and dates from c. 1180-90 (Fig. 10). It has been variously known as the Saxon Arch or (currently) Norman Arch, not least to avoid any confusion with the nearby street named Spitalgate Lane and with St John’s Hospital a short distance away. Its relationship with and contribution to the life of Cirencester Abbey was recognised in the various detailed archaeological studies of the Abbey of St Mary, but these did not include any opportunity throughout that extensive programme to undertake any detailed investigative work on the arch itself or its adjoining (now linked) cottage. It does however grace the cover of the published archaeological report (CE IV).12

In January 2005 the town council’s quieter management of this Grade I building changed dramatically with its proposal to sell off this historic asset into the private sector. The resulting storm of protest merits publication as an episode of community interest in its own right, and various alternative solutions were offered. One preferred route, to convert the cottage attached to the gatehouse into a specialised holiday let by one of the nationally recognised agencies in this field, is (at the time of writing) in the final stages of feasibility assessment and presentation. It is to be hoped that the useful brief assessments so far prepared may be expanded into a fuller archaeological recording programme, including dendro-dating of the gatehouse roof and substantial pair of doors, surely one of the most significant opportunities in any standing building in Cirencester (Townsend 2006).

The Weavers Hall or St Thomas’s Hospital in Thomas Street is recognised as ‘probably the oldest secular building still in use’ in the town (Verey and Brooks 1999, 268) dating from the will of Sir William Nottingham of 1483 to endow ‘a certain house lately built by me in Cirencester’ for the ‘use profit and maintenance of 4 pore men’ (Fig. 11). Its austere facade to the street, through-passage plan and mix of small window openings are indicative of a building of considerable archaeological interest, well worthy of detailed survey when possible. Documentation has been assessed but remains unpublished in any summary form.13 Of similar or later date and also in Thomas Street is Monmouth House, on an L-shaped plan and with many diagnostic features of the 15th and 16th centuries. Modernised for office use c. 1989, this building nevertheless must be another prime candidate for detailed survey and dating in due course (Verey and Brooks 1999, 268). Dollar Street has at least two further examples. Not all medieval diagnostic features may be above ground, of course, and the admittedly tentative identification of as yet undated undercroft(s) forming cellars beneath 82 Cricklade Street in 1997 should be noted. Other than cellar vaults known to form part of the King’s Head Hotel in the town centre, this discovery is believed to be the only one of its kind in a domestic property fronting one of the town’s principal streets.14

Cirencester Park
Home of the Bathurst family, Cirencester Park is celebrated as a pre-eminent historic parkland, listed

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**Fig. 10** Spital Gate, variously Saxon Arch and Norman Arch, c. 1180-90 (photo 2006)
Grade I, and the glories of its landscaping often overshadow any study of the mansion house itself. That is a topic largely outwith the framework of this study except that, in terms of property ownership and close physical relationship with the town itself, Cirencester Park has long exercised a dominant and stimulating influence on a considerable part of the town’s built heritage. A visit to Cecily Hill alone makes this point. More pertinent in terms of specific buildings and structures are the follies which adorn the parkland and have a significance of their own. Much research remains unpublished and the Park as a whole certainly deserves a thorough published landscape assessment; meanwhile James Lees-Milne’s much-admired essay in 1962 (Lees-Milne 1962, eh.1; see also Mowl 2002, 67ff). The Park also includes Cirencester’s only ‘building at risk’ on the English Heritage register (and one of only seven listed for Cotswold district), a state of affairs which has continued far too long. It is recognised that Alfred’s Hall of c. 1721–3 (completed by 1732) ‘may well have been the first of all castellated follies’ (Verey and Brooks 1999, 282).

In terms of other country seats and major houses in and around the town, the country of Gloucestershire has been extremely well served in the long-term research project by Nicholas Kingsley which produced three substantial volumes (Kingsley 1989, 1992 and 2001, the latter in co-operation with Michael Hill), and these discuss not only Cirencester Park but five smaller town and suburban houses.15 In terms of detailed archaeological investigations of standing buildings of this quality, the work of Warwick Rodwell at Daneway and at Lodge Park, each for their respective owners, provides a model study (Rodwell 2000).

Coxwell Street

For visitors a key focal point for the domestic architecture of the town has to be Coxwell Street, which together with neighbouring streets forms the core of the ‘historic quarter’ north and north-west of the parish church. Here is a stunning visual impression of a range of buildings, both vernacular and polite, which appear from external evidence alone to be of 17th and 18th-century date. Any research project on Cotswold stone town houses would and should have this street as a principal focus, not least because ‘one sees that this part of the town has hardly been altered for three hundred years. There is more genuine survival here than in any other town in the Cotswolds’. Although this assertion by David Verey in 1970 was subsequently modified in the revised Pevsner edition, it still holds good.16 Just one modest study can be added (Turner 1996) but perhaps more telling have been the co-ordinated efforts of the street’s residents to produce some permanent record of their shared heritage, in this case as a Millennium 2000 project. Individual houses are noted, details sketched, an excellent set of photographs by Bryan Berkeley provided, and there is a list of present-day residents (Turner 2000). This study provides another springboard and the obvious location for more detailed work, perhaps on the Ludlow model.

There are good parallels of detailed record not so far away, including the buildings of Burford, another Cotswold stone town with a long history and a fine surviving and accessible architectural heritage (Laithwaite 1973). More recently the fruits of several decades of determined research on the vernacular building traditions in and around Stroud and nearby Chalford have been published in considerable detail (Paterson 2006). Both provide much food for thought in both approach and presentational form. No one looking at the vernacular architecture of the wider region would omit Linda Hall’s excellent study of the rural houses of south Gloucestershire, which contains considerable parallel material to the construction of buildings in the urban context at Cirencester and other Cotswold towns (Hall 1983).

Demolition and townscape

Loss by complete demolition, although episodic over this assessment period, is a concern, as the removal of any historic building, especially without record, must be regretted. Two particular periods of change stand out, the first being the comprehensive redevelopment of much of the south side of Dyer Street between the Bear Inn and Gloucester House during the early 1960s. A sweep of contiguous buildings dating from external evidence to the 18th and 19th centuries was demolished,
one noteworthy for its columned facade, still remembered as a local secondhand bookshop. The replacement large-scale block of shops and upper floor housing, c. 1964–5, partly arranged around the small Catalpa Square, has attracted much criticism for its overall dominant effect on the street scene and more recently for the state of survival of its material detailing.

A decade later the long-awaited construction of the Cirencester ring road, in two phases in the early to mid-1970s, substantially changed the character of Cirencester's outer ring and directly involved some demolition, although the associated redevelopment projects resulted in a greater loss, especially in Watermoor where the new road scheme had its most dramatic effect on the old layout. What remained of Cirencester Watermoor railway station, goods yards and former works disappeared, as did most of the town gas works. The long-used Swindon road route (on a Roman alignment) out of town across Kingsmeadow was truncated and re-routed, and so too the old line of Siddington Road. Victorian red brick and stone terrace housing in School Lane and Midland Road was almost completely cleared away and replaced, 'demolished without any record' (Reece and Catling 1975, 73, 75) (Figs 12–13).

Equally dramatic was the almost complete redevelopment of the former GWR railway yards, goods sheds and sidings off Sheep Street to the west of the town, as the new road was driven between town and amphitheatre. The creation of the Phoenix Way office development has been expanded subsequently by additional housing and a large-scale supermarket development, with the result that only the station building itself remains, isolated in a public car park. The history of the Cirencester branch line from Kemble offers a detailed pre-clearance record (Bray 1998). Querns Hill was realigned, and at its junction with Querns Road the council depot (formerly the Thames and Severn Canal wharf) redeveloped, resulting in the demolition of its final legacy, the former agents house and warehouse, one of the few buildings at this time recorded by measured survey (Viner 1976). A further cycle of the most recent redevelopment on this western side of the town is beyond the scope of this study.

Town houses, Streets, Courts and Places

Other losses are worthy of note. Two substantial town houses fell victim to the road schemes. At the London Road junction with Grove Lane, the stone villa known as Beech Grove was demolished c. 1974 to allow the Eastern Relief Road to take off to the south; its name is remembered in a housing development nearby. Across the town at the foot of Querns Hill on its original alignment was no. 2, a substantial Victorian property, utilised as Chesterville private school between the Wars and later requisitioned for various wartime uses. The considerable programme of archaeological excavation which accompanied the entire ring road development is fully reported in the Cirencester Excavations volumes. Rivercourt, a house dated pre-1897 at 29 Beeches Road, was replaced by another housing block around the same time.

Fig. 12 Midland Road, demolished soon after this photograph was taken. The shop was on the corner with Chesterton Lane (photo August 1970)

Fig. 13 School Lane awaiting demolition with replacement housing already underway (photo August 1970)

For terraces of more modest housing in the town, two points need to be made, first the approach adopted and encouraged by Cirencester Urban District Council during the 1960s and the early 1970s to rehabilitate various groups of housing, usually as sheltered housing schemes, and especially in and around Gloucester Street. Elizabeth Place and Barton Court are good examples, both to the street frontage and in the backlands behind. However, some considerable demolition did take place, as a small example in widening the corner of Gloucester Street with Gooseacre Lane (a pre-1825 route from the town), and very little of the structures subjected to modernisation were recorded in any meaningful way, not untypical for that time. Off-street terraces came under particular pressure for modernisation or clearance, Price's Row off Watermoor Road (demolished in 1973) being a good example of such clearance, as was Gordon Place in Dollar Street. The loss of such yards, courts, alleys, places and rows, and the character and social history which went with them—"cleared away in extremely
determined fashion in the last thirty years” was particularly noted (Reece and Catling 1975, 26).

Significant domestic buildings lost within the core of the town include Ashton House, standing on the corner of its own small estate, demolished in 1964 to enable housing development; in retrospect the terraced housing which replaced it seems today particularly mean in scale and quality by comparison. The Abbey House of c. 1774–6, second of the significant houses in parkland created on the site of the former Abbey of St Mary, was replaced by the present day block in 1986. Amongst demolished non-domestic buildings might be mentioned the former Primitive Methodist Chapel tucked away off Lewis Lane, a simple brick structure of 1851, noted as ‘perhaps the earliest whole building [in the town] to stand in clear unashamed brick’ (Reece and Catling 1975, 58). Its single-unit interior was used as a store prior to demolition in 1998 and the space is now car parking (Fig. 14). The large Congregational Church of 1887 gave way in 1971 to a supermarket development, very much of its time and place, opposite the earlier and larger Dyer Street scheme. These losses apart, the town still boasts a good stock of chapel buildings as indeed it does of school buildings and almshouses, the range and interest of each group meriting special study.

What to keep?

More recent pressures upon development land have brought other changes nearby in Lewis Lane. Not without protest, the former Regal cinema, which first opened its doors in 1937, was demolished in July 2004 to allow one of the town’s first examples of new-style, higher-scale courtyard housing development, designated as Bingham Close in honour of one of Cirencester’s well-remembered benefactors. Its interior was digitally recorded for Cirencester Archaeological and Historical Society prior to final closure in autumn 2003. The same development pressures affected the adjoining property, Arkenside (nos 44-46 Lewis Lane), variously a private school evacuated from Leigh-on-Sea, Essex during the Second World War and latterly a guest house, but originally a pair of houses of 1859, rare in Cirencester, and believed associated with the work of William Jay (Fig. 15). Outside the Conservation Area, and following an English Heritage decision not to list, the building was demolished in the summer of 2006, with an understanding that its materials would be reused elsewhere. Such a decision inevitably raises a number of questions about the integrity and protection of the building stock in an historic town such as Cirencester, about what should be retained and what let go subject only to record, all points raised with feeling years before (Reece and Catling 1975, 28).

Many more buildings, especially of Victorian date, have of course been rehabilitated by conversion and as such have been subject to desk-based analysis, producing a potentially large amount of material of archival value. Examples include the conversion of the former town workhouse of 1836–7 into offices for Cotswold District Council (summary in Viner 1994), the success-
as Fulljames and Waller built the Royal North Glos. Militia armoury in Cecily Hill in 1854–6 (Carne 1995), described as a theatrical mock castle but designed with conviction (Verey and Brooks 1999, 259). One might also add George Gilbert Scott’s Holy Trinity church for Watermoor, a ‘fine, thoroughly characteristic building’ of 1847–51 (ibid., 256; Glack 2001).

Such examples, although undoubtedly popular in the public mind, often Victorian in date and mostly buildings constructed for community use, are nevertheless not necessarily central to the core need to understand the mass of private, domestic architecture in the town, which potentially also offers a longer date span for study. Much of Cirencester’s building stock, at least in the historic core of the town, is either of 17th or 18th-century date or has antecedents of that date. More detailed research would undoubtedly extend this date range earlier. In that regard it is a typical Cotswold market town, presenting a series of diagnostic architectural features which have been much commented upon and no less admired. Indeed Cirencester can and should be studied in its Cotswold context, as numerous writers seek to do. An excellent reprise of this, as well as of the appropriateness of materials, are also one of the few Cotswold studies to contain any specific building plans (Hill and Birch 1994). Another model volume is the detailed study of the stone buildings of the neighbouring Barbury region (Wood-Jones 1986) and it is to be regretted that the companion study for the Cotswolds in this admired Manchester series was never published (Worsley 1996). It might well have spawned more directed local work.

Research potential

It has to be said that it is in this core area of studying, recording and thereby better understanding the domestic architecture of the stone buildings of Cirencester where the greatest opportunity has been missed, and arguably continues to be missed. There are a number of factors at work here. First, the continuing economic vibrancy of the town effectively ensures that very little property is left to be proposed for recording and analysis, it must be hoped that the records made of this central site in the town centre will be available in a format which allows inclusion within an established archive.

At the time of writing major refurbishment works are in progress on the combined and adjoining sites of the King’s Head Hotel and the Corn Hall in the very heart of Cirencester, a project which represents a significant upgrading of town centre community facilities by a private development company. Associated archaeological excavations are underway, especially within the Corn Hall building itself, which represents the first major opportunity in such scale and depth in the town centre for more than a decade (see Fig. 7). The standing buildings do of course represent more than development of Victorian date. While facades to the Market Place of both the King’s Head and Corn Hall are clearly of their time, the hotel certainly has medieval antecedents, especially set back from the street frontage, and also includes the former town Assembly Rooms of the late 18th century, externally austere as that structure might seem today (Fig. 16). While it is too early to anticipate the results from the programme of building recording and analysis, it must be hoped that the records made of this central site in the town centre will be available in a format which allows inclusion within an established archive.

Methods and traditions of physical conservation of buildings form another strand to any study of
surviving architectural fabric. The Georgian Group’s report in 1990 cited some examples of poor choices of material in this regard, including several examples in Gloucester Street, an area of the town with a rich assemblage of domestic vernacular buildings and continued pressure for modernisation and improvement. Here also at 33-35 Gloucester Street is a fine timber building noted by Smith for its ‘uninterrupted line of first floor jettying between stone gables [which] suggests this was originally a single domestic unit occupying the entire façade of a burgage plot’ (Smith 1976, 109). Its external finish is also noteworthy and appropriate for this level of listed building (it is listed Grade II*) in limewash, the revival of which technique has been a long-term campaign in the town by local craftsmen and recognised specialist Rory Young (Young 1991). More recent work on a group of three houses at nos 3-7 Park Street has further enhanced public appreciation of this façade treatment.24 Earlier a detailed two-year long conservation project for Lloyds Bank of its imposing building of c. 1720/30 in one of the town’s main streets had been the subject of professional debate about materials and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings’ philosophical approach, bearing in mind the scale, quality and setting of this fine Palladian former wool merchant’s house, a bank as early as c. 1790.25 The project did take into account earlier comments about important window detailing (Clifton-Taylor 1988, 31–2).

Presentation

The physical signposting and on-site interpretation in whatever form of virtually all of the town’s principal ancient monuments, historic sites and many of its buildings is another issue, remaining capable of considerable improvement. This fact alone may be symptomatic of the general argument here, that research and dissemination of knowledge to the community at large about Cirencester’s built environment of ancient monuments and historic buildings has not always been as fully developed as possible. Schemes to erect plaques on individual buildings or at locations of historic interest have been fostered by various bodies at various times, usually to different designs, and however welcome leave a sense of a task unco-ordinated and incomplete. Cirencester Civic Society’s programme has been the most noteworthy and determined.26 It is accepted that the major excavated monuments in the town are either largely buried from view (other than the Roman amphitheatre and a section of town wall, very little of Romano-British date is visible), and/or have been so denuded historically by robbery of their reusable stone that they are marked only symbolically on the surface. The site of the basilica is one such; that of the former Abbey of St Mary also demonstrates this clearly, the outline of its principal church structure forming a feature (often overlooked) in the Abbey Grounds public park. Although the story of the creation of this park as a public amenity since the 1960s is beyond the scope of this study, it remains a remarkable achievement for a town council of the size of Cirencester. Certainly the effects of vandalism in particular have rendered site visits by interested members of the public, especially to the surviving upstanding section of the Roman town defences in the Abbey Grounds and/or the Roman amphitheatre off Coswold Avenue as inevitably disappointing experiences. Heritage presentation, in the face of considerable constraints, remains very much an issue on such open, unstaffed sites in public places.

Conclusion

In summary, sadly, it can be seen how little has been achieved in terms of recording and thereby better understanding Cirencester’s upstanding historic buildings, and at the same time how much potential has clearly been missed during the period under review. This serves as a contrast to the extensive archaeological fieldwork and excavation activities in the town since the formation of Cirencester Excavation Committee in 1958, albeit much of that was inevitably focused upon the Romano-British town. With the benefit of hindsight, and ignoring the ebbs and flows of economic climate, it is of course easy to be critical and to a degree self-satisfied with what has been achieved. However, the fact that Cirencester has only recently acquired its first dendrochronological dates from a historic building, coupled with the still relative paucity of measured survey of any kind, and the very small number of examples of any comprehensive analysis of individual buildings, groups of buildings, ownership patterns or plot layout is disappointing. This ought to be testament enough to the continuing need to achieve a better understanding and improved interpretation, presentation and enjoyment of the town’s rich legacy of historic buildings. Future opportunities, as the report of one of the first of Cirencester’s post-War archaeological projects clearly stated almost fifty years ago, ‘should be grasped more firmly’ (Webster 1959, 58).

Notes


These are most conveniently listed in Darvill and Gerrard 1994, 206-7.

For the potential of the Bear Inn, see Jowitt 1951, pl. 16. Notes and a record were made when 6-8 Dollar Street, including its yard, was restored (Wilkinson 1985-6).


For a summary see also Vernacular Architecture, 38 (2007), 109.

See also the three articles by A.K.B. Evans cited in the bibliography of CT. IV on p. 170. Stukeley’s drawing of the Spital Gate in 1721 is shown in Darvill and Gerrard 1994, 110.

Linda Viner, unpublished research for the Trustees of the Cotswold Weavers Company; typographic records in the possession of the writer.

See WiltS & Glos Standard, 16 April 1998, 13. Alternatively these cellars may be post-medieval in date.

For Cirencester Park see Kingsley 1989, 76-7 and 1992, 100-3; for Abbey House see Kingsley 1989, 44 and 1992, 44 5; for the Querne see Kingsley 1992, 201 2; for Chesterton House see Kingsley and Hill 2001, 273; for Oakley Hall see ibid., 288; and for Watermoor House see ibid., 297.

Verney 1970, 175-6; Verney and Brooks 1999, 266. See also WiltS & Glos Standard, 1 June 2000, 17.

A photographic record is in the English Heritage National Monuments Record, Swindon, which also houses other records from this period of change in Cirencester, including 1-5 Godthist Street and 26 Thomas Street.

But not without some criticism of scale and materials used; see Frank 1990, 8-10 and WiltS & Glos Standard, 21 February 2002, 15.

By the late Linda Walls for CAHS, copy held by the writer.

See Verney 1976, WiltS & Glos Standard, 20 July 2006, and correspondence file held by the writer.

Henry Cole & Co Ltd (Cotswold Mill), Lewis Lane, Cirencester, manuscript report by Linda Viner for Ivor Jones Associates, 1997.

For the visual impact of this building on Cecily Hill at the approach to Cirencester Park see Darvill and Gerrard 1994, fig. 48.

Archaeological Investigations Project, funded by English Heritage and hosted at Bournemouth University, has a website http://csweb.bournemouth.ac.uk/aiip.

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXCAVATIONS

by Neil Holbrook

The remainder of this volume is primarily concerned with the results of archaeological work done in Cirencester between 1998 and 2007 by Cotswold Archaeology. In addition it includes work on the site of the forum by Oxford Archaeology and some previously unpublished observations by Peter Grace in Victoria Road in 1960 and at Cowell Street in 1969 (Fig. 17). The latter were undertaken outside the auspices of Cirencester Excavation Committee, but produced worthwhile results deserving of wider dissemination.

While this report forms volume VI in the Cirencester Excavations series initiated in 1982, it differs from the earlier monographs in a number of important respects which reflect the changing way that archaeology is practised in England. Unlike previous reports this volume does not contain the results of any extensive excavations within the Roman town, but rather is a collection of smaller investigations. This is a product of the application of the guidance contained in Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology and Planning (1990) which states that in a development context there should be a presumption in favour of the preservation in situ of important archaeological remains. Indeed a significant aspect of the work of Cotswold Archaeology is now devoted to devising solutions which allow development to proceed while ensuring that the vast majority of archaeological remains on a site are preserved. This is most frequently achieved by engineering designs which permit structures to be founded on concrete rafts above the top of archaeological levels, or else on a small number of concrete piles. It is now possible to construct many types of building on foundations which disturb less than 2% of the area of archaeology beneath their footprint (English Heritage 2007). The indiscriminate destruction of archaeological deposits in the town in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s has thus thankfully been brought to an end. While that threat prompted a number of new small excavations, we should not forget that Cirencester, like many other historic towns in Britain, suffered a number of depressing incidents where important remains were lost with little or no record (see for instance Sheppard Freere’s Fortunately assessment of the many opportunities at Minerva Court in Tower Street; Britannia 19 (1988), 465-7).

There has therefore been considerable progress in the management of the archaeological resource in Cirencester in the last twenty years, although a number of
important issues remain to be resolved, not least whether the preservation in situ of archaeological remains by the methods outlined above does actually achieve its aim. Are archaeological deposits beneath structures built in the last ten years really being preserved for investigation by future generations of archaeologists, or is this more a case of pragmatism given that the cost of archaeological excavation in Cirencester can render many types of development uneconomic? Certainly archaeological excavation in Cirencester is not a cheap operation. Even relatively small investigations by the standards of those undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s frequently reveal complex deposits which require considerable skill in their excavation and interpretation. They also produce large quantities of artefacts that require conservation, study and reporting. The effect of archaeological costs on the economics of development in a small market.
town such as Cirencester should not be underestimated. Doubts are also beginning to be expressed about the feasibility of achieving preservation in situ of many types of archaeological deposit as the indirect effects of development are better understood, and this is now an active research topic (Nixon 1998; Davis et al. 2004; English Heritage 2007).

Inevitably the effect of this policy of preservation in situ has been to limit the number of investigations which have the potential to substantially increase our knowledge of the Roman and later town. Nevertheless, as this volume shows, there has been a steady accumulation of new information over the last decade. Another way in which the archaeology practiced in Cirencester in the last two decades differs from that previously is that Cotswold Archaeology is not the only archaeological organisation that works in the town. The market in archaeology has led to a number of other contractors working in and around Cirencester, and they will (it is to be hoped) publish their work in their own way. A search of the listings of the Archaeological Investigations Project shows that 262 fieldwork investigations of one sort and another were carried out in the parish of Cirencester between 1989 and 2005, of which 164 (63%) were by Cotswold Archaeology. Competition need not be a bad thing as long as standards are maintained, and differing approaches can be instructive. Nor is co-operation between different archaeological companies impossible, as the inclusion of a site excavated by Oxford Archaeology in this volume shows.

The demands of undertaking archaeology within the planning system necessitate that reporting is undertaken promptly, so that information is available upon which a planning application can be determined, or to permit the discharge of a condition of a consent. For pre-determination works typescript reports are produced, part of the ubiquitous ‘grey literature’. For post-determination excavations which produce significant results the approach that has been adopted by Cotswold Archaeology, and agreed with Gloucestershire County Council Archaeology Service which provides advice on planning applications to Cotswold District Council, is that a typescript report is produced in a style which will facilitate its inclusion in a future publication such as this volume. Detailed reporting of individual groups of artefacts and ecofacts from each site has the potential to be unduly repetitious. Consequently we have adopted an approach that appraises the significance of each assemblage in terms of its contribution to the current state of knowledge of a particular class of material in Cirencester, or indeed more widely. Accordingly all classes of material recovered in an excavation are assessed, and this is included as an appendix in the typescript report. Where an individual item or group of material is considered to be worthy of more detailed analysis this is undertaken and the results are published here. Readers can therefore be confident that all the material recovered from the excavations reported in this volume has been assessed, and if it is not mentioned in the site reports it is because it has not been deemed to be of sufficient importance to warrant this treatment. If readers wish to consult the assessment reports a copy can be obtained from the Gloucestershire County Council Sites and Monuments Record. There is no obligation under the planning system to disseminate the results of grey literature reports relating to evaluations and other small-scale projects more widely, but nevertheless we have taken the opportunity to include in this volume summaries of the more significant results which have derived from projects of this kind.

One final way that this report differs from the earlier volumes in the series is that it is the first to be produced without any financial support from English Heritage or its predecessors. All the investigations reported herein have been fully funded as a requirement of the planning process by bodies or individuals acting in the role of developer. A problem inherent in this system, however, is that there is no funding available for synthesis beyond that appropriate to an individual site, and yet this is manifestly necessary to create a volume such as this. The costs of drawing together the individual site reports have therefore been met by Cotswold Archaeology as part of its educational work. We also consider it appropriate to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the creation of an organised archaeological presence in Cirencester with another volume in the Cirencester Excavations series. In some cases we would have preferred to engage in a higher level of synthesis and research than has proved possible, but despite these restrictions we believe that this volume makes a valuable contribution to knowledge of the archaeology of the town.

While publication of artefacts in this volume is unashamedly selective, it remains important that the basis for the proposed chronology for each site is presented in sufficient detail to allow the reader to interrogate and evaluate the dating proposed. Each report therefore contains, where relevant, sections which outline the dating evidence which underpins the site phasing. These have been prepared by E.R. McSloy and adopt the format and approach used in Cirencester Excavations Volume V. Samian identifications are by G.B. Dannell and P.V. Webster. The coarseware pottery references derive from the Cirencester fabric series developed by V. Righly, J. Keely and N. Cooper, which has been described and discussed in previous volumes. References to this series in the dating evidence sections are prefixed by the letters TF (type fabric) and references to Ceramic Phases refer to the scheme devised by Cooper (CE V, 324–41). In the coin lists CK refers to Carson and Kent 1980 and HK to Carson et al. 1960. Contexts followed by n.i. are not illustrated on the plans or sections. References in the text to CE 1 to CE V refer to previous volumes in the Cirencester Excavations series, and Cotswold Archaeology is abbreviated as CA throughout.

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