



This reconstruction model of the Sparsholt Roman villa shows how the villa must have looked in its hey-day. The house (above) is a long narrow building with a verandah running along in front. The main farm building (opposite) had accommodation for farm workers at the top end, a set of baths at the bottom end, while the centre formed an open area for farm animals and equipment.

# SPARSHOLT

*by David Johnston*

UNLIKE many celebrated villas in this country, the Sparsholt villa was never 'discovered'; we think that the overgrown mounds have been remembered, and it is certainly believed locally that the Parish Church was built from its plundered remains. In 1895 the Hampshire Field Club voted three guineas for a trial excavation, but the diggers encountered such 'very massive walls' that they decided to leave the full excavation to someone else.

The site was recorded, marked on the Ordnance Survey Maps (SU415301) and, for a time, fenced off. It has since been acquired by the Forestry Commission and is being replanted. And it was partly local concern over clandestine

digging and the immediate need to bulldoze a new ride through the site that persuaded the Ministry of Public Building and Works to allocate funds, first for a trial excavation, and then for a full excavation.

In four seasons we have explored the main buildings of the villa. There had been very little disturbance of the site, in fact, and we have obtained enough information to reconstruct the buildings fairly reliably on paper, and in model form. The villa was built on a slight spur of chalk, with a light capping of clay with flints, which may have carried woodland in Roman times. To the west were open fields, that can still be traced on air photographs; to the east a deep valley, which local tradition

says was terraced by the Romans for vines. Here, to our surprise, one of this year's trial trenches did encounter a large earthwork beyond the villa, on the crest of the valley.

The villa itself consisted of three, or possibly four, buildings around a farmyard. Soon after the first buildings were finished, a well-built wall of flint was added to keep farm animals in and wild animals out. There is no sign that it enclosed a garden or orchard, and our excavations of 1965 suggested that it had been a farmyard. A pot-hole, for instance, had been roughly filled with a broken quern, and there was other farmyard debris about. We have not yet found a well, but a huge crater in the north-east corner, some 35 ft. in diameter