

Frocester

I WAS MOST interested to read the piece on Frocester in CA169. Mr. Price is to be congratulated on recovering a fascinating archaeological sequence. Two points relating to the late villa complex were particularly striking.

Firstly, the upstairs, downstairs, arrangement of elegant rooms on the first floor and semi-working rooms below should not strike us as unusual. What we may be observing is the evolution of a typical medieval building form, the two storied hall with living quarters above and work spaces underneath. Excavations in the Mediterranean have now shown that this is a classic and common development of 'villas' in the late Roman countryside. The great 5th and 6th century site of San Giovanni di Ruoti, for example, has as its focus a great two storied hall with an elegant reception room upstairs. This architectural form develops further later on, as can be seen by the 9th century 'guests hall' at the monastery of San Vincenzo al Volturno (CA 139), the dining room of Pope Leo III at San Giovanni in Laterano in Rome and of course the mighty reception hall of the Emperor Charlemagne himself which still stands in Aachen.

The second point is how Frocester fits so well into the model of the late antique villa described by Palladio, the late Roman agricultural writer. He speaks of the centre of a villa estate being the *Praetorium*, a complex that could include living quarters, and productive facilities, especially, mills, kilns and other paraphernalia that were used by the burgeoning tenantry who formed the bulk of the rural population of the time. Surely at Frocester we have a British *Praetorium*, explaining the workaday nature of the ground floor with the padrone or his agent living above?

Frocester merely emphasises to what degree certain elements of economy and society in later Roman Britain were integrated into the Empire

as a whole. Developments in townscapes, rural settlement, trade and society mirrored those on the continent. If these developments are empire wide in their most general form, then it is time we started to refer to this period by the name by which it is known elsewhere in the empire; that is late antiquity, rather than the overly negative sub Roman? ■

OLIVER GILKES, *Institute of World Archaeology, University of East Anglia, Norwich, NR4 7TJ*

CONGRATULATIONS TO Eddie Price on being able to re-visit his site and develop interesting new ideas about it. And nice drawings too.

Those deep foundations are intriguing. Here in North London we are used to the underpinning of Victorian houses to a depth of three metres to avoid the seasonal swelling and shrinkage of the upper clay layers; a dimension, however, that is unrelated to the height of the building. But would all builders of the Roman period have had the same expertise?

I am also worried about the idea of having mosaics on the upper floors. A suspended timber floor, such as the one from Southwark illustrated in CA 124, would have needed a bedding layer (*opus signinum*?) 5-10 cm thick to minimise differential movement between the planks - and this would have been heavy. While by no means discounting his explanation for the loose *tesserae*, I do wonder whether the evidence rules out the existence of mosaics in the inner rooms of the ground floor, which might surely have been more heavily used by the squatters and their domestic animals? ■

Clive Giller, *18 Ospringe Road, London NW5 2JE*

Clava

FURTHER TO THE Clava (Winter Solstice) article (CA165), the same event

occurs also at Maes Howe in Orkney. I saw it in 1979 on a fine evening unhindered by cloud. As the sun sets, its light enters the long tunnel to the tomb's inner chamber, lighting the east wall's stones a glowing golden yellow; The finale sees this light rise slowly a few feet up the wall, not downwards as one might expect. Doubtless this upward rise had symbolism then as well as now. Very possibly Clava has this finale also, on fine winter solstice evenings.

Another ancient tomb facing the westward sea is the Dwarfie Stone in Hoy, another ancient wonder, a two-compartment tomb hollowed from a single oblong large rock lying in the valley floor

Incidentally, Maes Howe's winter solstice sunset can now be viewed on the Internet. ■

Jeremy Godwin, *15 Drovers Lane, Penrith, Cumbria, CA11 9EP*

County SMR

AS I AM a frequent contributor to the Northamptonshire Sites and Monuments Record, I recently requested a printout of all my entries. This came out at 337 pages long, but in fact about two-thirds of the pages are of no relevance and many of my entries are missing. The reason I requested the printout was a procedure I have only just found out about, after seven years. I can ask for a printout to check what goes into the SMR every time I submit information, so that I can query how it is worded. Until August last year it was apparently mandatory for them to send these, without my making a request, but they have never done so.

I wondered whether other Northants SMR users had had similar experiences. I have written to several organisations asking their advice. There are a number of different problems encountered. One problem is repetition of 'feature type' records, in one case 13 repeats of the same six feature types over 17 pages of printout, for only three lines of