



A Mosaic of Recollections

Memoirs of an Archaeologist

by David S. Neal

DESCRIPTION:

A Mosaic of Recollections is the autobiography of David S. Neal, whose name has become synonymous with the study and illustration of Roman mosaics in Britain. It tells the story of a working-class boy, born into the travails of war-torn London, and his evacuation to South Wales to live with a mining community. The return to London in time to celebrate VE-Day remains a vivid memory. After moving to Hemel Hempstead New Town he became fascinated with the museums at St Albans and spent many hours watching excavations on Roman Verulamium before being invited to help. Studying graphic design at Watford School of Art developed his talents, which he was able to combine with his activities on the excavations as he began to record the mosaic pavements then being exposed. Work as a graphic designer with the Gas Board was not compelling, and he was fortunate to secure employment as an archaeological illustrator with the government's Ancient Monuments Inspectorate, where he met a wide range of unusual personalities. Tea-breaks were an education, as were lectures he was invited to attend at the Society of Antiquaries of London. Soon Neal became the manager of the archaeological drawing office, responsible for a team of illustrators recording a wide range of artefacts from excavations sponsored by the department. His work became renowned in the profession and, increasingly, he was invited to help on excavations in England and abroad. At the age of 23 he directed his own excavations on the Roman villa in Gadebridge Park, Hemel Hempstead, which led to the publication of a monograph. With his growing interest and expertise, he was frequently invited to record Roman mosaics, often at a moment's notice, and was able to share the excitement of discovery of many of them. After 15 years he became a full-time archaeologist and excavated a variety of sites of all periods culminating on the extensive excavations of a Roman settlement at Stanwick, Northamptonshire. Early retirement allowed the time to concentrate, with a colleague, on the publication of the corpus of Roman Mosaics of Britain and, later, to record the medieval mosaics at Westminster Abbey and Canterbury.

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