

# Rock Roman villa

## A Scheduled Monument in Brighstone, Isle of Wight

Rock Roman villa situated on a south east facing slope c.140m east of a spring which lies in the valley bottom. The building is of a corridor house type on a terrace cut into the hillside, but this is not visible at ground level.

Partial excavation in 1975 has confirmed that the building includes a corridor lying north west-south east fronting a range of at least five rooms which lay to the north east of the corridor. The north wall of the building remained standing to 1.4m high. The interior walls had been decorated with painted plaster and the building roofed with limestone tiles. At the south east corner of the corridor an extension wing was butted onto the original structure, and the north, west and east sides of the main structure were surrounded by a U-shaped ditch. Coins and pottery dated the original structure to A.D.275-300.

During the excavation two infant burials were located, and it was found that a corn dryer had been inserted into the villa in c.375-400 when the original building was in a dilapidated state. In c.1831 remains of a hypocaust were found at the site, while during agricultural work in the 19th century, mortared stone was often encountered in the field. Burnt material including human bones was also found and a stone lined grave was discovered. An air photograph of 1924 provides no evidence for other substantial masonry buildings on the site. The post and wire fence which marks the boundary line of the monument on its south side is excluded from the scheduling, although the ground beneath is included.

**Source: Historic England**

### Reasons for Scheduling

Romano-British villas were extensive rural estates at the focus of which were groups of domestic, agricultural, and occasionally industrial buildings. The term "villa" is now commonly used to describe either the estate or the buildings themselves. The buildings usually include a well-appointed dwelling house, the design of which varies considerably according to the needs, taste and prosperity of the occupier. Most of the houses were partly or wholly stone-built, many with a timber-framed superstructure on masonry footings. Roofs were generally tiled, and the house could feature tiled or mosaic floors, underfloor heating, wall plaster, glazed windows, and cellars. Many had integral or separate suites of heated baths.

The house was usually accompanied by a range of buildings providing accommodation for farm labourers, workshops and storage for agricultural produce. These were arranged around or alongside a courtyard and were surrounded by a complex of paddocks, pens, yards and features such as vegetable plots, granaries, threshing floors, wells and hearths, all approached by tracks leading from the surrounding fields. Villa buildings were constructed throughout the period of Roman occupation, from the first to the fourth centuries AD.

They are usually complex structures occupied over several hundred years and continually remodelled to fit changing circumstances. They could serve a wide variety of uses alongside agricultural activities, including administrative, recreational and craft functions, and this is reflected in the considerable diversity in their plan. The least elaborate villas served as simple farmhouses whilst, for the most complex, the term "palace" is not inappropriate. Villa owners tended to be drawn from a limited elite section of Romano-British society. Although some villas belonged to immigrant Roman officials or entrepreneurs, the majority seem to have been in the hands of wealthy natives with a more-or-less Romanised lifestyle, and some were built directly on the sites of Iron Age farmsteads. Roman villa buildings are widespread, with between 400 and 1000 examples recorded nationally. The majority of these are classified as 'minor' villas to distinguish them from 'major' villas. The latter were a very small group of extremely substantial and opulent villas built by the very wealthiest members of Romano-British society. Minor villas are found throughout lowland Britain and occasionally beyond. Roman villas provide a valuable index of the rate, extent and degree to which native British society became Romanised, as well as indicating the sources of

inspiration behind changes of taste and custom. In addition, they serve to illustrate the agrarian and economic history of the Roman province, allowing comparisons over wide areas both within and beyond Britain. As a very diverse and often long-lived type of monument, a significant proportion of the known population are identified as nationally important. Partial excavation has demonstrated that Rock Roman villa will contain archaeological remains and vironmental evidence relating to the villa and the landscape in which it was constructed. This villa is one of only seven to have been identified on the island, and thus is essential to an understanding of the Romano-British period on the Isle of Wight.

***Source: Historic England***

## **Sources**

### **Books and journals**

'Britannia' in *Britannia*, , Vol. 7, (1976), 337-8

'Journal of the British Archaeological Association' in *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, , Vol. 12, (1856), 159-60

### **Other**

Noted on OS card SZ 48 SW 27,

*Source: Historic England*

## **Coordinates**

Latitude: 50.6553 / 50°39'19"N = Longitude: -1.4012 / 1°24'4"W

OS Eastings: 442425.825004 = OS Northings: 84131.71909 = OS Grid: SZ424841

Mapcode National: GBR 8BS.SNY = Mapcode Global: FRA 77YB.PYG

**Entry Name:** Rock Roman villa

**Scheduled Date:** 7 March 1994

**Source:** Historic England

**Source ID:** 1008304

**English Heritage Legacy ID:** 22002

**County:** Isle of Wight

**Civil Parish:** Brighstone

**Traditional County:** Hampshire

**Lieutenancy Area (Ceremonial County):** Isle of Wight

**Church of England Parish:** Brighstone

**Church of England Diocese:** Portsmouth