

Roman History at Robin Hill

What can you discover about the Romans and their life at Combley Villa?

Student Introduction

- ▶ This resource will help you to practise your reading and understanding skills.
- ▶ You will find out about the history of the Romans at this particular site on the Island.

Did you know there are archaeological remains of a Roman Villa beneath Robin Hill's grounds?

TASK

- ✓ Read and understand the information in the text below.
- ✓ Answer the questions on page 2 & 3, using full sentences and quotations where relevant.
- ✓ Your teacher will tell you if you are to answer on the sheet or in your book/on paper .

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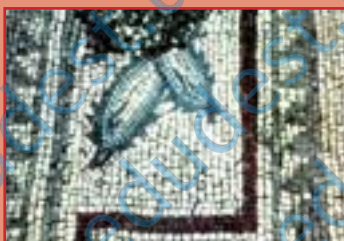
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The Isle of Wight was occupied by the Romans from approximately 43 A.D. The site probably had access to clean spring water which may have been one reason to settle here. In the early years, Combley Villa was probably the home of a wealthy family who would have prospered from the Roman trade. One of the two rooms shows evidence of a Roman-styled feature - a hypocaust floor - which allowed hot air to circulate beneath the floor, an advanced form of central heating!



By 200 A.D. the cottage villa became a full size farmhouse, likely over 30 metres long, highlighting the wealth of the owners. It is the remains of this impressive structure that is buried today and shown on the excavation model and drawings in the exhibition on-site at Robin Hill.



During the 3rd Century A.D. it looks as if several kilns were added. It is very likely that Combley villa was the centre of the local pottery industry at this time, producing rustic brown pottery called 'Vectis Ware'. Broken remains of pots, jars and drinking vessels have been found at other villa sites on the Island as well as in large quantity here. It wasn't of very good quality, but was recognisable and traceable because of its rich red colour. Samples of 'Vectis Ware' have been found as far as Normandy in France.



The final stage of the villa's development came with the installation of a bath house with a finely mosaiced floor featuring a dolphin. The villa had fine mosaics in the main living and entrance rooms as well as the bath house. In the 4th Century, Combley Villa would have been well furnished with couches for entertaining guests and for sleeping on. Open fire places would have provided a focal point to the main living rooms and walls would have been brightly painted and decorated with murals. Doors would have been fitted with iron locks for the first time.

At its end, Combley Villa might have just been abandoned and left for other poorer locals to farm, crumbling away with no money to maintain its structure or perhaps it was raided and pulled to the ground; no one really knows, but the villa probably didn't stand for very long into the 5th Century A.D. However, the remains of Combley Villa buried here at Robin Hill are testament to that very significant period of British history, where the way in which Britain lived changed forever.

Questions

1. For approximately how many years was the Isle of Wight occupied or ruled by the Romans?
2. What was the area called Combley originally used for, and who was settled here?
3. What was a 'hypocaust-floor'?

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4. How can we tell that the villa owners are wealthy?

5. Was was 'Vectis Ware' and where has it been found?

6. Describe Combley Villa in the 4th Century:

7. Why did Combley Villa decay?

Combley Villa: The Excavations



Robin Hill was once part of Combley Farm, sited about a mile southeast from the villa site. The villa was first officially discovered in 1910 by the Fleming's estate steward, Arthur Arnold. However, the living relatives of the Willis-Fleming family suggest the villa was discovered many years before. An old family story states, "once in every generation, the reigning Fleming had unearthed the villa ruins, had a look and buried it up again". There may be evidence of this in 1867, when Roman remains at Combley were mentioned in a magazine called *The Gentleman*, but this has not been proved as fact. There is no record of what was found during these early excavations.

Between 1968 and 1970, local archaeologist L.R Fennerly conducted several extensive excavations of the area to try and reveal the actual size of the villa. Much of the hard work was done by enthusiastic senior pupils from Sandown Grammar School during the summer holidays.

Fennerly revealed that the villa was much more extensive than first

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Despite all the digging, still no significant finds were reported apart from a large quantity of clay roof tiles, a square glass bottle, nails and some coarse 'Vectis Ware' pottery.

Three coins also were uncovered (shown left):

- 1) Dated from A.D.305-309, with the head of Emperor Maximinus II
- 2) Dated from A.D. 117-138, with the head of Emperor Hadrian
- 3) Dated from A.D. 259-268, from the reign of Emperor Gallieus

These three coins are the only ones found directly within the villa walls. Other finds of Roman coins have been found on local farmland, one in 1996 found over 1150 coins.

Further minor excavations took place through the summers of the 1970s until 1979, but Combley Villa was then completely re-covered and is now protected by a government monument order. This means that the site is protected for national interest and does not allow it to be disturbed again unless with direct permission of *English Heritage*.



Extension Task

Using the information on pages 1 and 3 (and any information gained during your visit), produce a timeline containing all the key moments in the history of Combley Villa, from its earliest years up to the most recent excavations and re-burying.

If you can, link your findings to Roman activity and life throughout the rest of Roman Britain at the same time.

