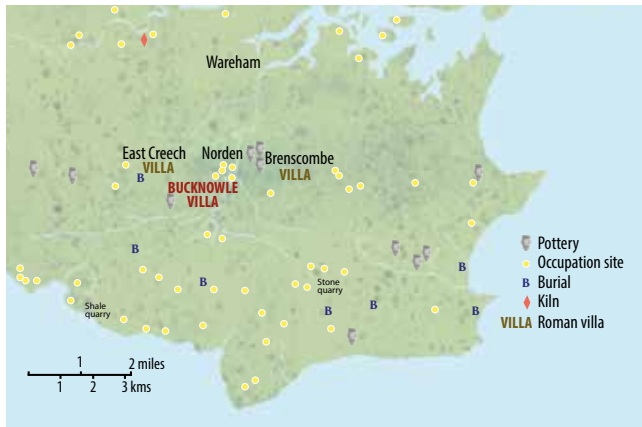


The Romans in Purbeck

The Romans invaded Britain in AD 43 and within a few years they had discovered a very useful stone, Purbeck Marble, in the hills south of Corfe Castle. This stone was used as a decorative stone in the interiors of buildings, and for stones to take inscriptions, such as tombstones. Shale from Kimmeridge, a soft black rock which could be carved like wood, was also used, for making personal ornaments and domestic items.



Iron Age & Romano-British Sites in Isle of Purbeck

The local people gradually adopted the Roman way of life. Bucknowle is the only known Romano-British villa in the southern part of Purbeck. It was a grand house but not as grand as some others in Dorset. There was a Romano-British settlement at Wareham and the nearest town was at Dorchester, named Durnovaria.

The Romanised way of life declined in Britain in the late fourth century AD and Roman control finally came to an end in about AD 410.



Enamelled headstud brooch.

Enamelled plate brooch.

Bucknowle Villa Archaeological Finds



Furniture fitting in the shape of a female's head, perhaps Medusa.



Decorated bone handle



"Cut glass" samian pot.



Ovoid glass jug



Black-burnished ware cups.

Funded by Heritage Lottery Fund and Wessex Water



Text by Ben Buxton

Source of photographs and details: Bucknowle, a Romano-British Villa and its Antecedents: Excavations 1976-1991 by Tony Light and Peter Ellis, Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society 2009

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Bucknowle Roman Villa Threshold Stones

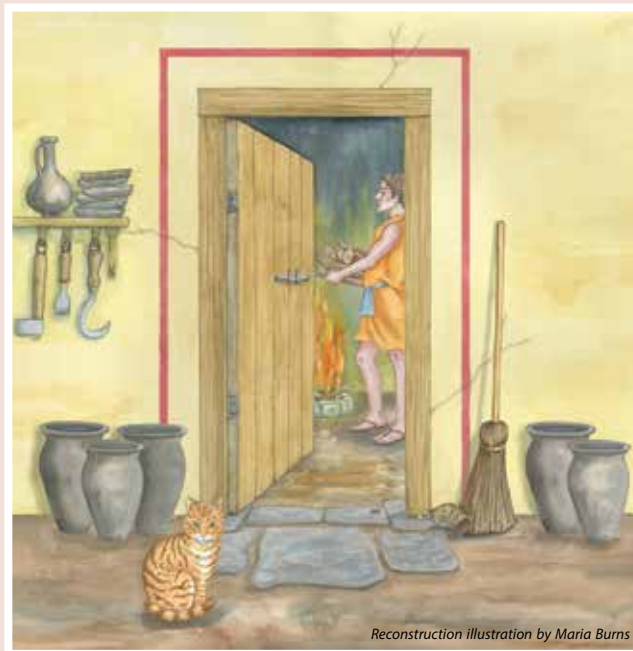


See where the Romans walked ~ Wareham Library Gardens

These stones are the threshold stones of a doorway between two rooms in a Romano-British villa (grand country house) at Bucknowle near Corfe Castle.



The threshold stones in situ when they were discovered in 1977.



Reconstruction illustration by Maria Burns

A reconstruction illustration showing how the threshold may have looked in Bucknowle Villa.

The two rooms were added to the villa (building 1 on the plan) in about AD 300. One of the rooms had a furnace in the floor, which supplied heat for the under-floor heating of an adjacent room in the original house. It is not known what the other room was used for, but the burials of four babies were found in the floor. It was common at this time for very young children to be buried in houses; older children and adults were buried in cemeteries.

The threshold stones were shaped to create a door-stop. This shows that the door opened into the furnace room. The hole may have been for a peg to keep the door shut. The stones on either side of the threshold stones each have two square holes to take the upright timbers of the door frame.

The addition of the rooms to the building and installation of under-floor heating show that the owners of the property, probably a local family, were becoming more wealthy. Later in the fourth century, the doorway was blocked up with stone slabs and the furnace went out of use.

The Bucknowle Villa Discovery



Tony Brown

The villa was discovered in 1975 when the late Tony Brown found Roman potsherds and tesserae in a mole hill. He dug a trial trench and found Roman walls and flooring. Archaeologists excavated the villa between 1976 and 1991. The threshold stones were found in 1977 and were donated to the new library in Wareham. The site was re-buried and it is now grassland. No remains of the villa are visible.

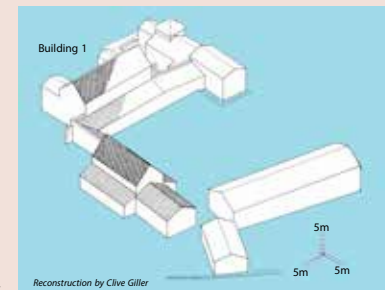


Part of the villa under excavation, with Corfe Castle behind.

About The Villa

The site at Bucknowle was probably the centre of a rural estate for many centuries in the Iron Age and Roman periods. In the late Iron Age (first century BC) there was a round house on the site, and fragments of Roman wine jars (amphorae) found there show that the inhabitants were rich enough to import wine from the Roman world.

In the late first century AD the first rectangular building in Roman style was constructed. Over the next 300 years buildings were rebuilt and new ones added. They were built of stone with tiled roofs, and some rooms had mosaic floors and under-floor heating. By the fourth century the villa itself (building 1), farm buildings and workshops were arranged around three sides of a courtyard. The site was the centre of agricultural and shale-working activities.



Reconstruction by Clive Giller



The villa declined in the late fourth century and was eventually abandoned. Subsequently, stones from the ruined building were taken away to be used elsewhere and the site became farmland.

An Iron Age grave that pre dates the Roman villa.