

## Roman History at Robin Hill

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

### Student Introduction

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

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

### TASK

- ✓ Read and understand the information in the text below.
- ✓ Answer the questions on page 2 & 3, using full sentences. Try to use a quotation!
- ✓ Your teacher will tell you whether to answer on the sheet, in your book, or on paper.

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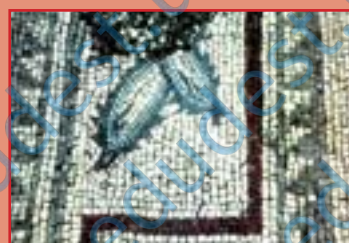
One of the two rooms shows evidence of a Roman-styled feature - a hypocaust floor - which allowed hot air to circulate beneath the floor, an advanced form of central heating!



By 200 A.D. the villa became a full size farmhouse, likely over 30 metres long; this tells us that the owners were wealthy. It is the remains of this large building that is buried today and shown on the model and drawings in the exhibition on-site at Robin Hill Country Park.

During the 3rd Century A.D. 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'.

It wasn't very good quality pottery, but was recognisable and traceable because of its rich red colour. Pieces of 'Vectis Ware' have been found as far as Normandy in France.



Later on, the owners installed 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 be a feature of the main living rooms and walls would have been brightly painted and decorated with colourful murals. Doors would have been fitted with iron locks for the first time.



In the 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.

However, the remains of Combley Villa buried at Robin Hill are evidence of a 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. What would you find inside Combley Villa in the 4th Century?
7. What happened to Combley Villa in the end?

## Combley Villa: The Excavations



Robin Hill was once part of Combley Farm, 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, some relatives of the Willis-Fleming family think 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".

Between 1968 and 1970, local archaeologist L.R Fennerly conducted several extensive excavations and revealed that the villa was much bigger than first imagined, measuring over 30metres long.

Many of the room foundations he discovered in 1970 would have been covered up during the dig of 1910 and never revealed 60 years before.

Fennerly established that the villa was an 'aisled farmhouse' with its arrangement of stone slab which supported rows of roof-supporting pillars.

Despite all the digging, still no significant finds were reported apart from a large amount of clay, roof tiles, a square glass bottle, nails and some vectis ware pottery.

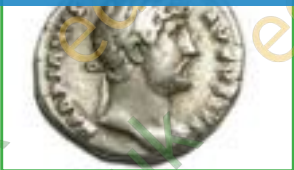
Three coins were unearthed (shown on the left):

- 1) Dates from A.D.305-309, with the head of Emperor Maximinus II
- 2) Dates from A.D. 117-138, with the head of Emperor Hadrian
- 3) Dates 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.

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 permission from *English Heritage* is given.



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### Class Project Task

Using the information these pages (and any information gained during your visit), can you put together a basic timeline for the life of Combley Villa?

Try to include 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, include other interesting things you have learned about the Romans in Britain on your timeline.

