



Areas of Roman occupation

An intensive series of archaeological investigations, culminating in large scale excavations, was carried out before the construction of Great Western Park - to ensure that all of the archaeological evidence in the area was recorded and preserved. This is one of eight information boards which summarise the results of these investigations.

THE ROMAN VILLA

In some respects the Roman Conquest of Britain in AD 43 marks a sharp break in the history of the country. As a result of trade and other connections with the Continent, the impact of the expansion of the Roman Empire had, however, been felt long before the conquest - and is marked by the appearance of the first towns in Britain, the use of coins and new styles of pottery. In other respects, however, life for many of the inhabitants of Britain may have continued with little change.

Romans and Britains: from roundhouse to villa

This may have been true at Great Western Park. Although the extensive Iron Age settlement described on Board 2b had been abandoned, the earliest evidence from the Roman period includes the remains of roundhouses, just like those which had been built in the Iron Age. It



was only later, around AD 240, that a villa - a building unmistakably Roman in character - was built on the site.

A late Iron Age roundhouses (defined by a circular gully)

The Roman villa

Most of the Great Western Park villa has been preserved below Boundary Park, and only one corner was revealed during the excavations. Our knowledge of the building is, therefore, limited (and the reconstruction on this board is based upon a villa at Claydon Pike, Glos). Even these limited investigations, however, provide some interesting details of the building.

The villa probably measured about 21m long by 13m wide - a size comparable to that of other villas in Oxfordshire - and probably consisted of a row of rooms with corridors or aisles on one or both sides. The building was probably constructed of timber-framed walls standing on rubble footings, and was roofed with both ceramic and stone tiles.

There are also signs that the building was of some status. The excavated area includes the remains of a hypocaust and traces of painted plaster. A hypocaust is a system of underfloor heating in which hot air from a furnace is circulated below a floor raised up on columns made of stacked tiles. The painted plaster includes fragments in Pompeii red, cream and yellow, as well as a fragment with a splash of Pompeii red which might have been part of an image.



Reconstruction of a Roman villa at Claydon Pike

A permanent residence?

The villa was probably occupied for around 150 years. Unlike the Iron Age roundhouses which preceded it (which may have been occupied for only one generation), it must have been passed from generation to generation - the first permanent residence in Didcot.



Roman trackways and enclosures at Great Western Park

Ordering the landscape

The stable occupation represented by the villa, is also reflected in the organisation of the wider landscape. The landscape had already begun to be ordered by the construction of ditched enclosures - used as stock pens and to enclose houses - at the end of the Iron Age. And in the Roman period, much more extensive systems of rectangular fields and trackways - defined by ditches - were laid out. At the time that the villa was constructed, however, a major reorganisation of the landscape took place, consolidating the fields, stock pens and trackways into a coherent plan.



MESOLITHIC

NEOLITHIC

BRONZE AGE

IRON AGE

ROMAN
CONQUEST OF
BRITAIN

ANGLO-SAXON
OCCUPATION

NORMAN
CONQUEST

MEDIEVAL
PERIOD

INDUSTRIAL
REVOLUTION

4000BC

2500BC

900BC

43AD

450AD

1066AD

1800AD