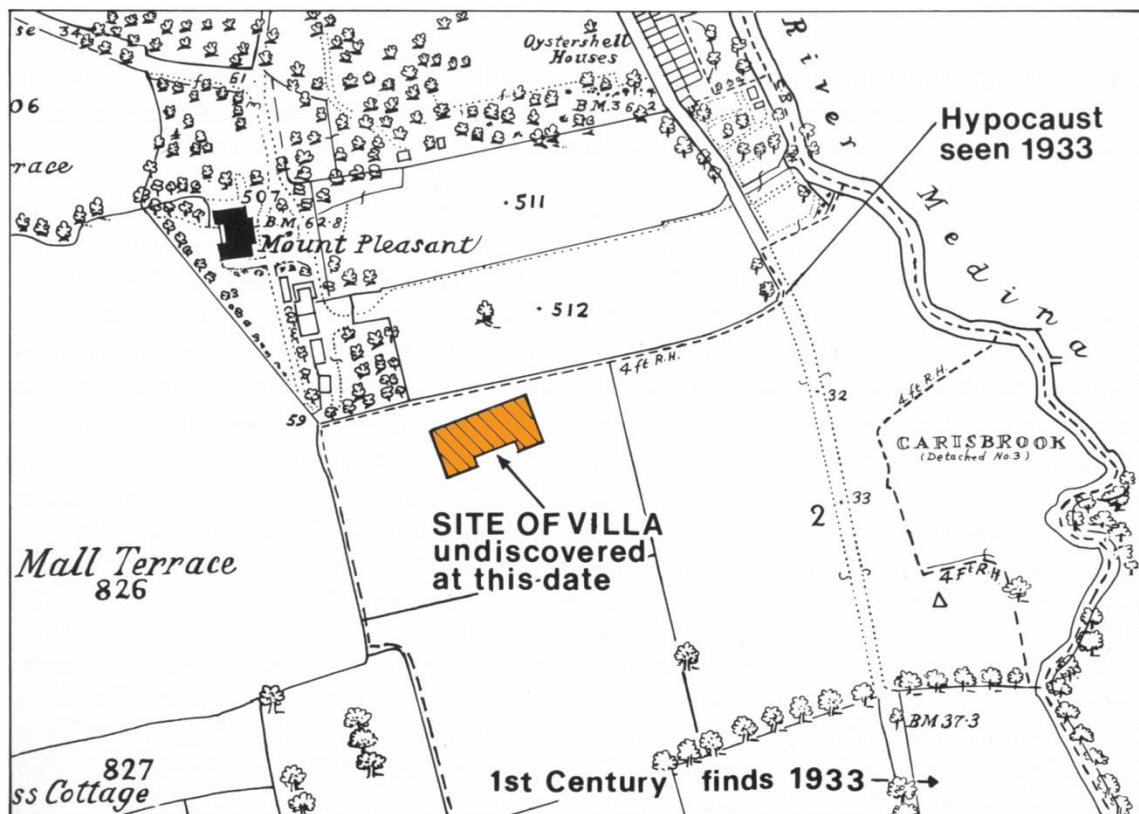




Newport Roman Villa was discovered in March 1926.

Workmen uncovered Roman tiles while digging foundations for a garage as part of a new housing development.

The site was excavated and the ground plan of the villa house uncovered.



The setting of Newport Villa as illustrated by the 1864 O.S. map

Thanks to public interest and the generosity of a local resident (*Mr. J. C. Millgate*), the site was preserved and protected by a cover building.

House building continued around the site and it lies rather unexpectedly in a residential part of the town.

Unfortunately the excavators were preoccupied with the villa house and lost a valuable opportunity to investigate and record the other buildings and features which must have existed as part of the villa complex.

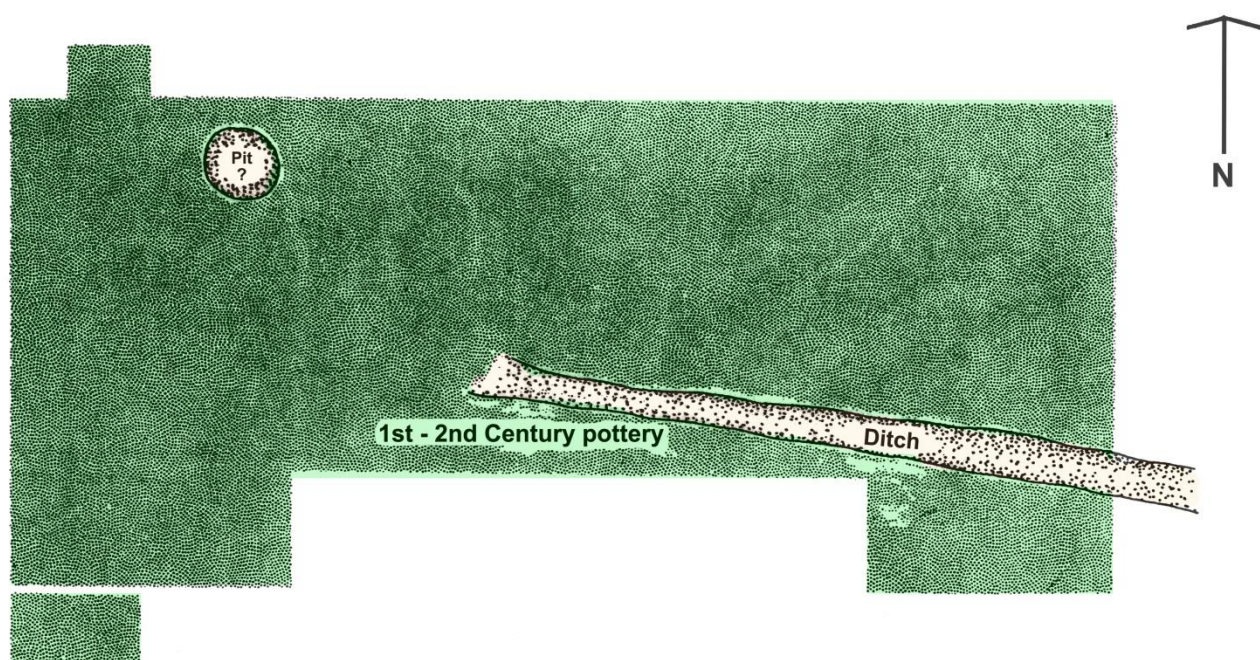
The villa was a farm, the home of someone who worked the land and could afford to build a farmhouse in the Roman style - probably a local landowner or chieftain who made the most of opportunities given by connections with Rome.

Nearby would have been the barns, granaries, stabling and accommodation for the workforce. Most of the evidence for these disappeared under the new development.

Excavation and archaeological finds have shown that people lived near the site before the villa was built.

Fragments of Iron Age pottery sometimes turn up in neighbouring gardens.

Buried beneath the villa building lies a ditch in which broken pottery and other household waste accumulated, discarded by the inhabitants of an earlier building which stood near the villa site.



The pre Villa features

pottery & daub

100ft.

The Isle of Wight County Press of Saturday 27 March 1926 reported that "*A discovery of considerable archaeological interest was made on Wednesday [24 March] on ground bordering on Cypress-road, Newport, belonging to Mr. S. Cooper, of Braeside, Cypress-road. Workmen employed by Mr E. W. Barton, builder, were excavating for footings for a garage extension when they unearthed a quantity of old tiles*".

The County Highways surveyor Mr. E. B. Wray was shown the tiles and recognising them as Roman advised that further work should be done with care.

Mr. F. J. Jackson, Miss Morey and others from the Isle of Wight Natural History Society, (with the consent of the landowner Mr. Cooper) supervised the workmen's excavations. On Thursday (25 March) a patch of red, white and grey tessellated paving was discovered, "*as well as a number of tile piles or pillars on which the floor rested and remains of a hypocaust (heating chamber) and what appears to be a bath, in almost perfect preservation*" (County Press 27 March 1926).



These discoveries established that a Roman villa had been found. On Friday (26 March) traces of the Villa's outer stone walls were unearthed and it appeared that the ruins extended under a neighbouring cultivated garden.

Architect and antiquarian Percy G. Stone paid several visits to the site and the remains were excavated under his experienced advice. In the County Press of Saturday 3 April 1926, Stone reported "*... In the garden above we have, I hope, discovered the site of the furnace heating the hypocausts and probably the hot bath. The two fragments of tessellated pavement in the corridor and bath room show the usual guilloche border, the latter being the finer of the two, where the tesserae are smaller and more carefully set*".

Stone called for a fund to be set up to pay for the successful conclusion of the excavation in the autumn. The County Press were pleased to set up a subscription list for donors and hoped for the possible preservation of some of the most interesting features.

The discovery proved very popular. "*The find has been the object of considerable interest during the last few days and parties of scholars from most of the schools in the town have inspected it*" (County Press 27 March 1926). "*The discovery was the object of much interest, especially during the weekend, people coming from all parts of the Island to see it. Boy Scouts did good work on Sunday mounting guard at the spot. The interest aroused amongst school-children may be gauged by the fact that on Thursday morning three boys walked from Cowes to view it*" (County Press 27 March 1926).

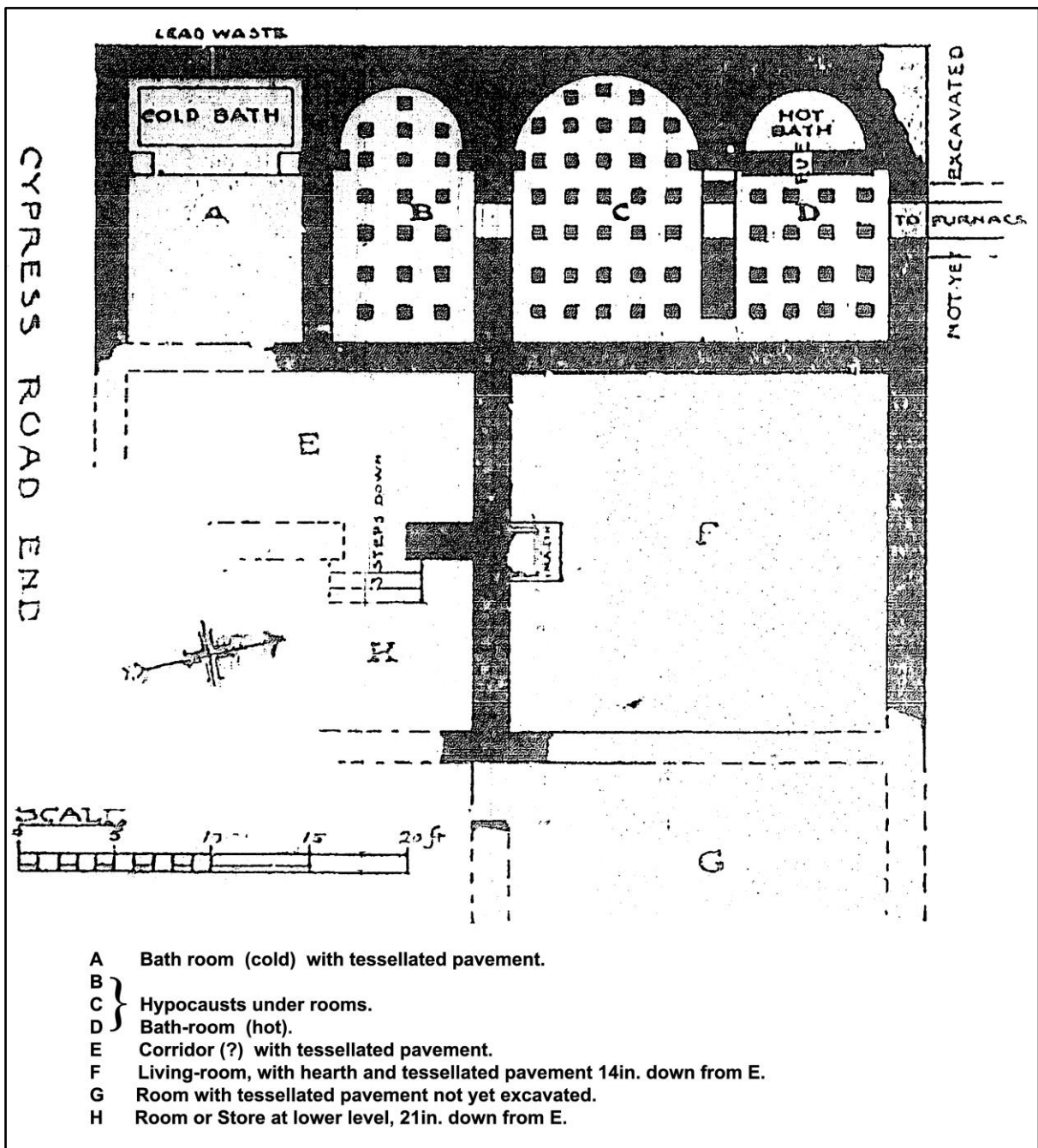


The owner on the neighbouring cultivated garden gave permission for further exploration on his land (April 1926) and the excavations were carried on for a short while longer. This allowed the full extent of the bath house wing to be established.

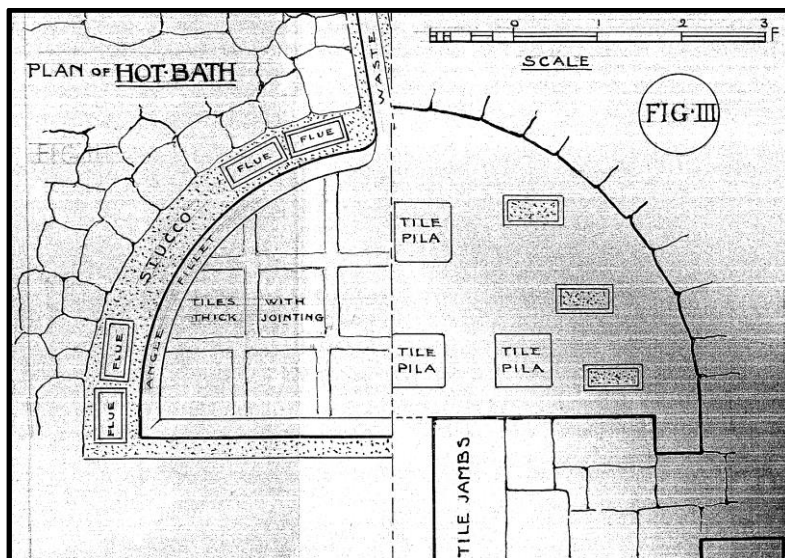


Stone gave a site report in the County Press (24 April 1926) and submitted a plan of what had been excavated to that date (see below). He was pleased with the progress "So far our dig has borne satisfactory results, all but the "finds," which are remarkable by their absence"(County Press 24 April 1926).





Percy G. Stone's plan of Newport Roman Villa – April 1926.
 (Original text replaced)



Stone's plan of the hot bath



Stone was to report the resumption of excavations in the County Press (Saturday 11 September 1926). *"Owing to the good office of Mr. G. F. Quinton the spoil heap of our former digging has now been cleared away, and the excavations have begun again with good results. Chiefly owing to the exertions of Mr Jackson some 60ft of wall running eastwards has been brought to light"*. He made a further appeal for help, financial and personal, requesting amateur diggers who could wield pick and shovel to assist with the digging.

Writing in the County Press (Saturday 30 October 1926) Stone revealed the discovery of four coins *"A second brass of Antoninus Pius, AD138-61; a third brass of Claudius Gothicus, AD268-70; a third brass of Tetricus, AD268-73; and a coin of rough workmanship which Mr Sherwin considers a local imitation or forgery of Postumus, 258-267AD."*

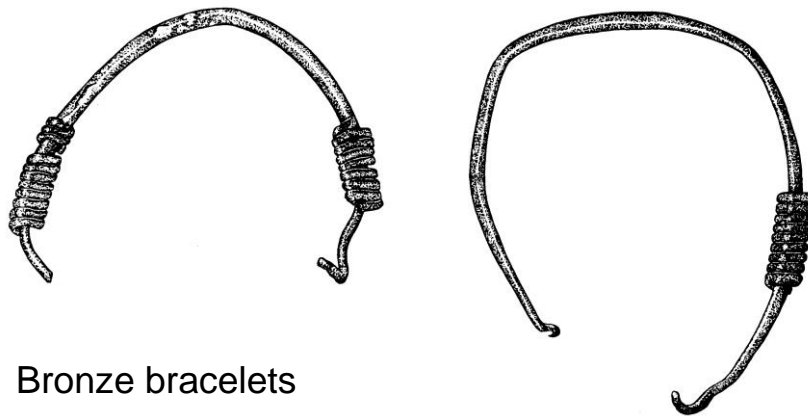


Antoninus Pius, AD138-161



Postumus, 260-268AD

He also reported on the metal finds including bronze bracelets and spiral rings.



Bronze bracelets

The iron finds consisted of "mighty" nails that held the timbers of the building together, corroded objects that may have been door hinges and fittings and two fragments that may have been the cutting edge of a wooden spade.



Two iron nails

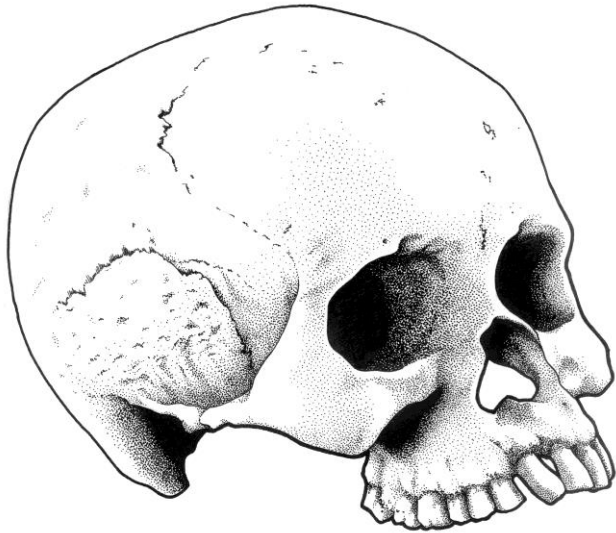
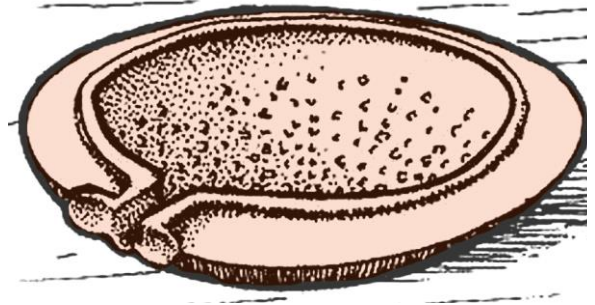


This iron blade would have fitted on the bottom of a wooden spade.



Four marbles, used to play games, were also found.

Stone wrote that "*From the east end of the corridor, at a rather high level, came part of a pink-coloured mortarium, a shallow bowl used in the kitchen for pounding food stuff with the aid of a pestle, and this has, as is usual, coarse grit embodied in the surface to help in the operation.*"



Excavators found the skull of a woman in her early thirties in a corner of one of the rooms. It has been suggested that she met her death at the hands of raiders in an abandoned building. This is just speculation of course and the decline and abandonment of Island villas by the middle of the fourth century may have been due to economic hardship rather than the threat of attacks by Anglo-Saxon raiders.

Excavations had revealed the complete ground plan of the building leaving the excavators faced with the dilemma of re-burying a Roman villa which was remarkably well preserved. At this point Mr. J. C. Millgate generously purchased the site and constructed the cover building for the villa. After the death of Mr. Millgate in 1960 the site was offered to the ministry of Public Building and Works, but the gift was declined. To safeguard the future of the site the Isle of Wight County Council accepted responsibility for the villa in 1961. Due to the foresight of Mr. Millgate we are today able to view a Romano-British farmhouse which was abandoned more than sixteen centuries ago.