



The
Novium
Museum

An Introduction to
Roman Chichester



www.thenovium.org

The town of Chichester was first established by the Romans as the town of *Noviomagus Reginorum*, which translates as the new market of the proud people.

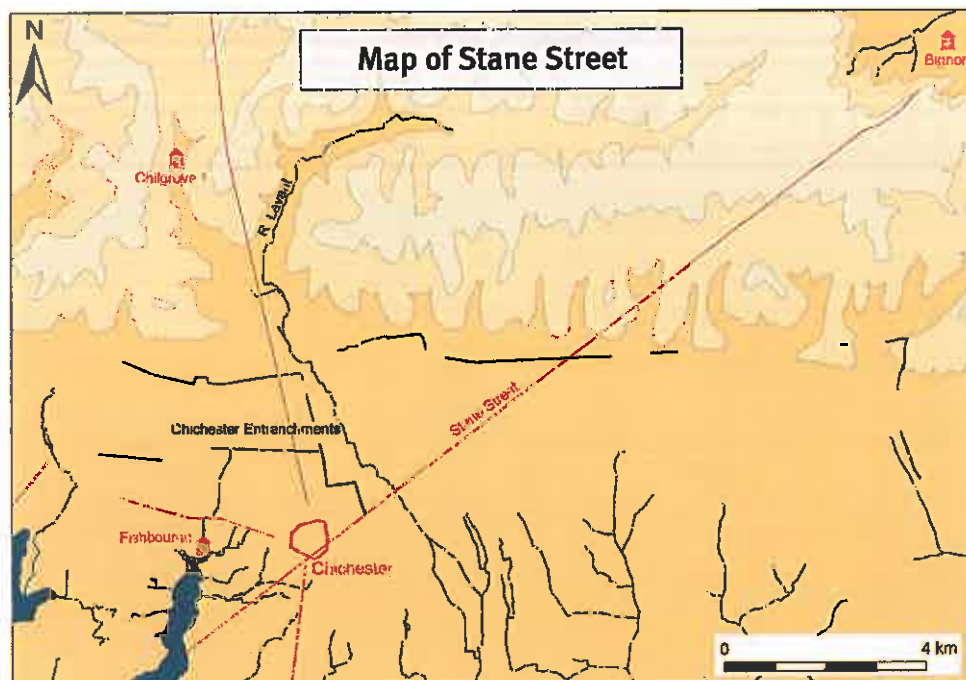
Little evidence has been found for urban development in Chichester prior to the Romans. The area of Chichester had not been an oppidum (late Iron Age enclosed settlement). There was however evidence for a nearby oppida represented by the Chichester Entrenchments, a series of linear earthworks and defensive ditches to the north.

After the invasion and conquest, the native people, known as the Regni, aligned themselves to Tiberius Claudius Cogidubnus, who became their leader. It was under Cogidubnus that the first town on the site of Chichester was laid out as the centre of the kingdom

Chichester became a major Roman centre in the South-East. The new town developed in association with a major road, now known as Stane Street, which ran between Chichester Harbour and London.

The earliest evidence for Roman settlement was in the form of timber buildings which were probably a military supply centre. Major investment between the middle and late 1st century AD witnessed the construction of stone buildings and the creation of an infrastructure associated with all the elements of Roman culture and society including public baths, the forum, basilica, temples, roads and an amphitheatre.

The city walls were constructed in the late second century AD, enclosing the centre of the town. Originally beginning as





defensive banks, these developed into solid masonry structures. By the middle of the fourth century AD, bastions were added capable of housing siege artillery. It is possible that these extra defences were in response to Barbarian raids that occurred in AD367, however they were also symbolic of the wider changes occurring within the empire, in which economic, political and social collapse became a frightening reality given the pressures of inflation, invasion and disease.

Despite this, archaeologists discovered a number of 4th century AD town houses within the city, boasting mosaic floors and large rooms, showing evidence of wealth. The Chichester District likewise shows similar investment and development, for example the grand extension and redecoration, along with lavish mosaic floors seen at Chilgrove Villa I.

It is believed that the Romans 'officially' left Britain in AD410 but it is likely that the withdrawal of Roman support was felt long before this period. There were pressures facing the empire including Saxon raids on the southern shores of Roman Britain. A lack of centralised support and protection left Britain vulnerable to barbarian attack. We know very little of what faced the people living in the town between the Roman withdrawal of AD410 and the Saxon habitation of the city.

What can we **assume** about Roman Chichester:

The **Roman forum** was possibly situated somewhere in the angle of North Street and West Street. Archaeologists found pottery there allowing them to speculate the date for the forum to be around AD70-80. Beneath the cellars of what was the Dolphin and Anchor Hotel (now retail

outlets) are the massive foundations of six foot thick flint and mortar walls, thought to have formed the colonnade on the south side of the forum.

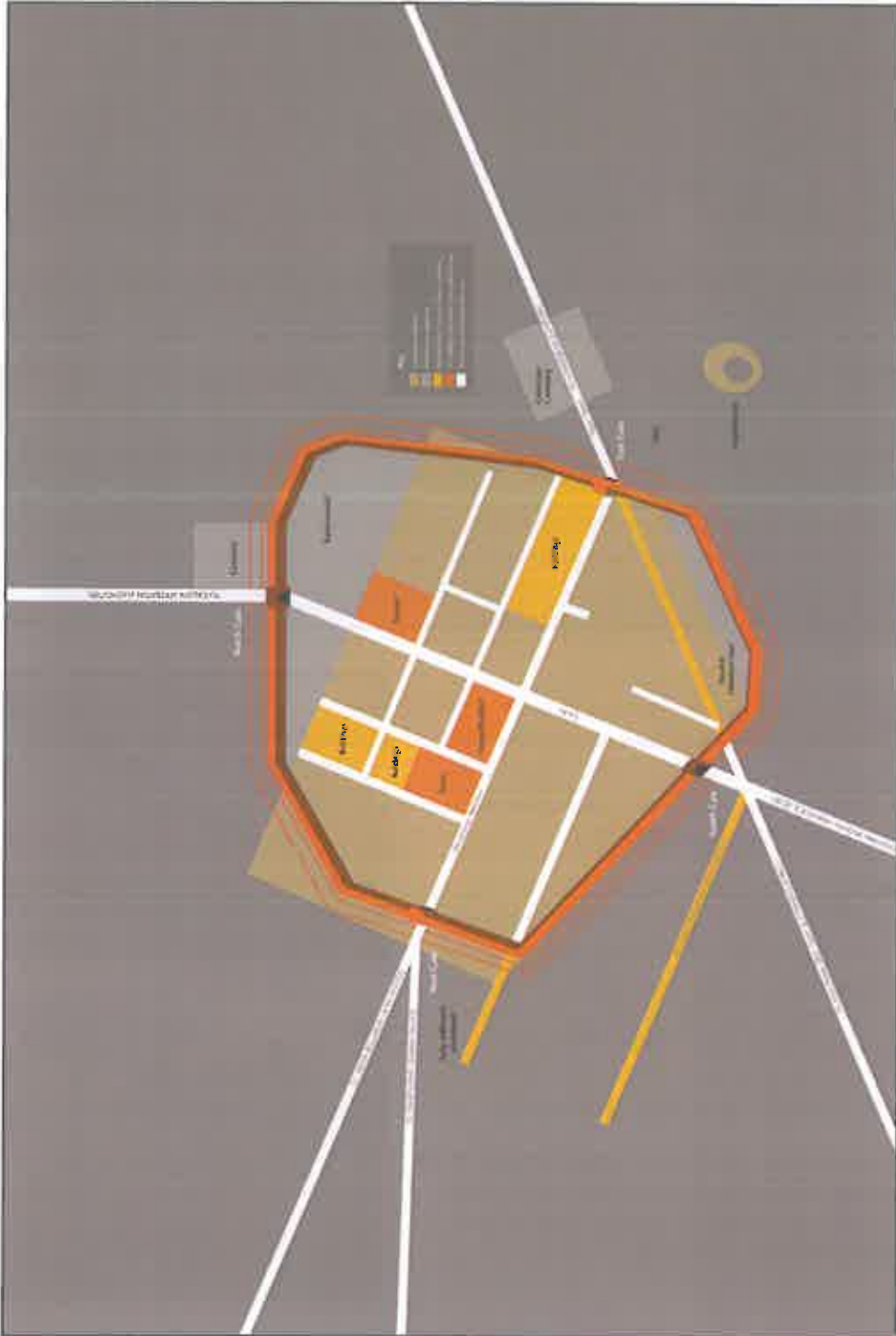
To the west lay the **public baths** thought to date from around AD70-80. At their largest, the baths are estimated to have covered an area of some 5,500 square metres. During the period in which the baths were in use, various alterations were made, perhaps reflecting changing fashions. Below ground masonry found in East and West Pallant probably represents the remains of a **very large Roman building**. Large decorative stone building fragments, thought to have been quarried from the Paris Basin have also been retrieved from All Saints, in the Pallants, supporting the idea of the **theatre** being located in this area.

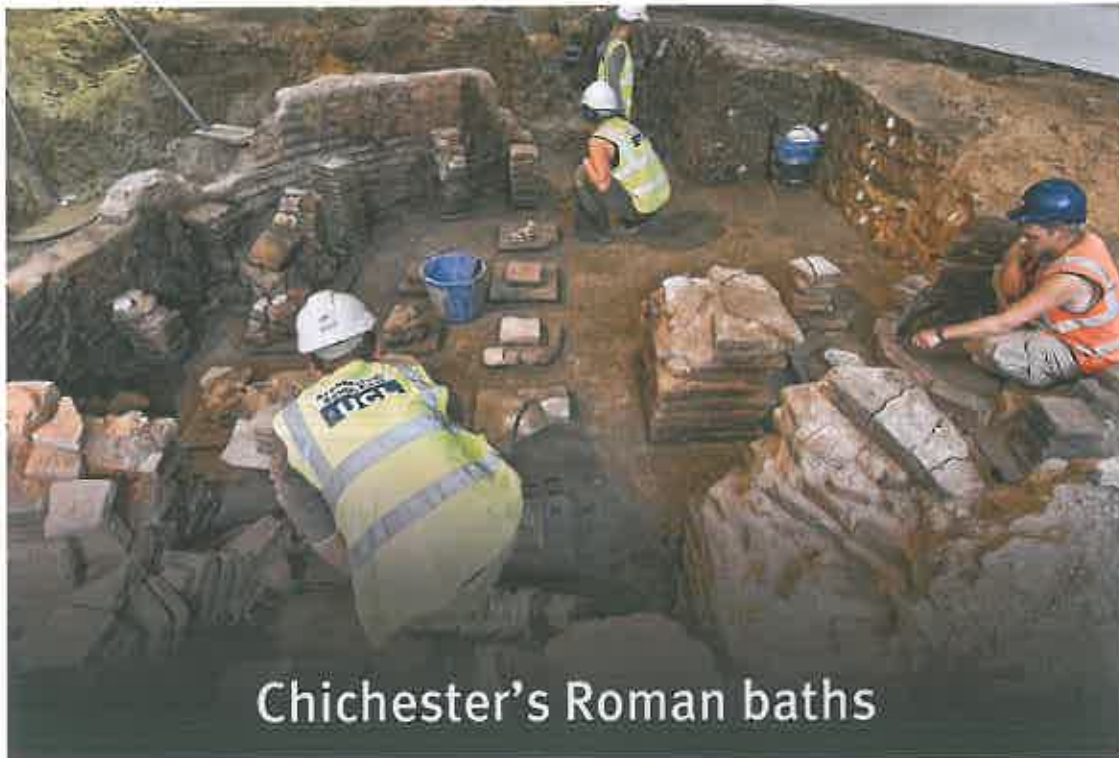
Only one probable site **temple site** has been found in Chichester, on North Street, on the corner of Lion Street. A Roman altar stone discovered in 1723 can now be seen set into the walls of the Assembly Rooms in North Street.

Chichester's **amphitheatre** lay outside the south-east walls of the city. It had an oval arena, sunk four feet below ground level. Around this were raised banks of gravel supporting tiers of seats. The arena walls were stone faced with timber which was probably plastered in bright colours of red, yellow, green and purple. Chichester's amphitheatre was 185 feet long and 150 feet wide.

Every year new investigations reveal more about Chichester in the Roman period, from the remains **of houses**, to sections of Roman streets, helping us to get a more complete picture of the layout and plan of the town.







Chichester's Roman baths

The remains of the *thermae* – a large public bath house – were discovered during archaeological excavations in 1974 and 1975. The excavation totalled approximately 1,300 square metres, all open at the same time, and went on for 440 days non-stop.

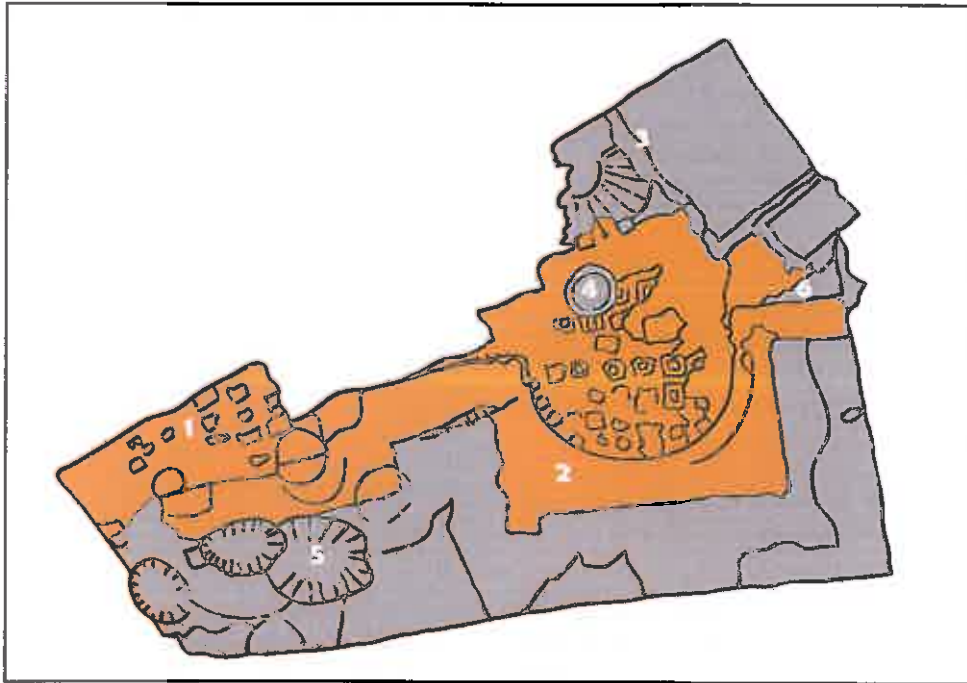
The remains were initially excavated because the site was to be developed as a multi-storey car park, but as a result of the discovery, the site remained undeveloped and the remains of the bath house were preserved under a temporary car park. The bathhouse was re-excavated in 1990 to assess its suitability for display in a proposed heritage site.

In April 2010, the Novium began construction. In order to protect the archaeology, the bath house was re-excavated after the museum had been built around it



What can you see?

The archaeological remains are predominantly Roman and were probably built sometime after about AD69 and were in use until sometime in the AD300s. These are marked in orange on the diagram below.

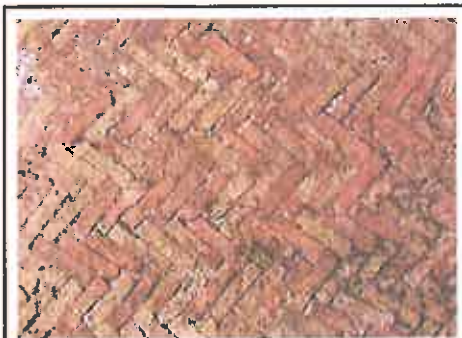


1. Stacks of square tiles that formed part of the *hypocaust* underfloor heating system indicate these rooms were heated.
2. The large semi-circular wall would have supported an apsidal room with a half-domed roof – a hot room of the bath house.
3. Remains of a cellar, cess pit and back yard from a domestic home in the 1800s.
4. Remains of a circular brick-lined soak-away – a type of drainage system for unwanted water dates to the 1900s.
5. Undated rubbish pits which are possibly from the 1600s.
6. Chalk and flint building foundations, possibly part of a medieval building.

What did the baths look like?

It is quite difficult to determine the appearance of the bath house because of the lack of building material found during excavation. Substantial amounts of stone and other building materials were robbed from the site to be reused in the construction of new buildings in the city in the middle ages. Major structures such as the Cathedral would have benefitted from a handy supply of dressed Roman stonework.

However, we know it was an impressive building and was lavishly decorated. Parian and Pentelic marble from Greece and Carrara marble from the quarries at Luna, in northern Italy, provided sources of fine-grained, translucent marble to create luxury finishes, whilst the foundations inner parts of the walls were made from locally available flint, sandstone, brick and tile.



An example of Roman *opus spicatum* flooring, from Trajan's House of the Nymphaeum, Room D).

Some floors were tessellated using tiny blocks of hard chalk and limestone, and a damaged fragment of mosaic was discovered during initial investigations carried out in 1960. Evidence suggested that some floors were decorated with *opus sectile* - inlaid polished and coloured stones to create images or patterns.

There was also evidence for flooring known as *opus spicatum*, in which brick or tile was laid to form a herringbone pattern. **See if you can spot an example in the display!**



An example of Roman *opus sectile* flooring, discovered in the room of a house in Ostia (Regio III, Insula VI, House of the Nymphaeum, Room D).

Roof Archaeologists also recovered fragments of Roman roof tile, tegula (a type of flat roof tile) and imbrex (a curved tile to cover the joins). Each tegula slightly overlapped the one below it, while its raised sides were covered by the semi-circular imbrex. **Have a look yourself for examples of tegulae and imbrices!**



An example of how tegulae and imbrices created a typical Roman roof (© Fishbourne Roman Palace)

We know from the architectural remains that Chichester's bath house had at least one room with an apse feature (a semi-circular space with vaulted half-domed ceiling). Apses are often associated with hot rooms (*caldaria*).

Walls - like many high-quality Roman buildings, Chichester's baths would have been decorated with colourfully painted and moulded stucco (a fine plaster used for coating wall surfaces), sculpture and friezes, and finished with decorative fixtures and fittings.

The large quantity of Roman glass recovered during excavations indicates plenty of **windows**. At the time of the excavations in the 1970s, a fragment of what had been a circular window pane was also discovered. At the time this was the first example of this type of glass and manufacturing technique to have been discovered in Roman Britain.

Heating the baths

Baths were heated using furnaces. Burning wood and charcoal would generate hot air, which was fed via a flue system through the hypocaust. This was a simple and effective method of heating. The furnace may have also supplied water to boilers, which would store and supply water of varying temperatures to the different parts of the baths house. Some of the hot room floors angled slightly to aid the drainage of condensation. Some bath houses may have had additional braziers (portable heaters consisting of a pan or stand) burning wood and charcoal to heat rooms during particularly cold months, or as a back-up to the hypocaust system.

Construction and materials varied, but in general the hypocaust consisted of stacks of tiles known as pilae. Locally dug clay had been applied around pilae stacks, as well as flues, to insulate them from the damage caused by high temperatures. This was not entirely successful, however, as there is evidence

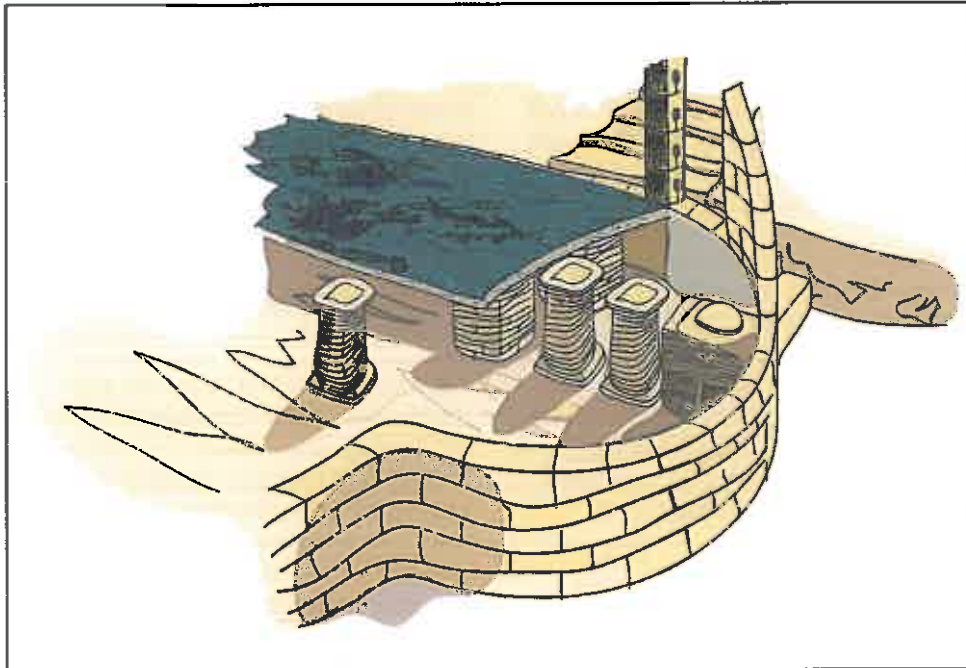
of damage to the tiles as well as some localised repairs to the flooring. The pilae supported a suspended floor, allowing hot air to circulate in the space beneath. Flue channels were created in the walls by using hollow rectangular tiles stacked one above the other. Hot air from the hypocaust would circulate up these channels, warming the walls, and then be released through chimneys in the roof.

Large slabs were laid above the pilae stacks. This created the foundation for the flooring. Often above these slabs was a rubble and concrete or clay layer, over which could be laid tiles or a mosaic floor. This thick flooring ensured potentially toxic combustion gases did not escape into populated areas of the building. It also ensured the floor was solid and therefore not likely to be easily damaged by the heat.

We can guess that the floors of bath houses could get quite hot. A mosaic from Libya, with the motto 'Salvom Lavisse' ('a bath is good for you') highlights that sandals, among other items, were deemed an essential when visiting the baths.



Mosaic from the Roman baths at Sabratha, Libya



Drawing depicting how the suspended flooring created space in which hot air could circulate, before travelling through flue channels in the walls.

The water supply to the baths

Baths often utilised local rivers or streams for their water supply. Rain water could also be collected and used for washing. It is likely that here in Chichester the water was piped from springs to the west and north of the city.

A foundation was discovered during the excavations in the 1970s that proved to be the base of a massive stone-built (and probably rectangular) water cistern.

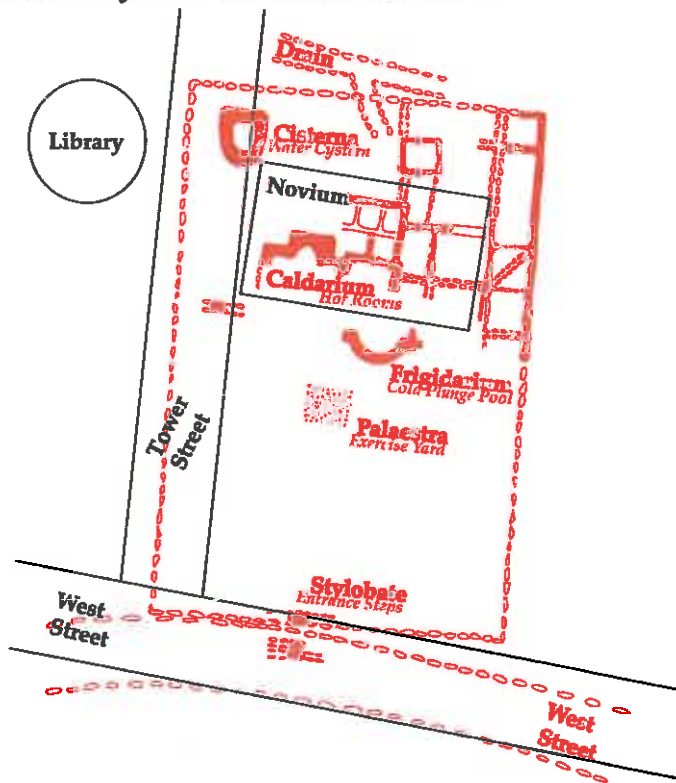
This cistern would have provided the public baths with its essential water supply. Two very large oak beams were recovered from it that may have been part of a water tower that supported the cistern. The tower would have been high

enough to create enough pressure to feed the water pipes.

The baths probably used lead pipes to feed water into the pools from the cistern and the boilers, although the high value of the lead means that none have survived as they were probably salvaged and reuse elsewhere.

Water would also have been transported around the building via a series of drains and ditches. The biggest source of waste water would have been the cold plunge pool, but waste water from across the site would have had to be carefully managed and diverted away into ditches feeding into sewer systems.

What rooms would you find in a Roman bath house?



Plan of Chichester's roman baths marked out in orange. The black outlines show the modern buildings as they are today.

- A **tepidarium** or warm room, where moderate heat would encourage more sweating, which was believed to open the body's pores in preparation for cleansing with olive oil (soap hadn't been invented!).
 - A **caldarium** or hot room, where the bather would be scraped by strigils – a type of blade made from metal - to remove the oil and dirt from their skin.
 - A **frigidarium** or cold room, where there would have been a plunge pool used to close the skin's pores.
- Some Roman baths also included:
- A changing room, called the **apodyterium**, where the bather would undress.
 - A steam room, known as either a **sudatorium** or a **laconicum**.
 - A **palaestra** or exercise yard.

Bathing and baths in the Roman world

Baths were centres of recreation, but also would have fulfilled a deeper social and cultural role. Imperial and local elite could meet, propaganda could be displayed through sculpture and painting, and the vast size of the empire could be celebrated through the use of imported materials from across the Roman world.

People would have visited the baths daily, as it was a place to exchange gossip, meet friends or business associates, relax, and engage in recreational activities. Using the baths reflected the Roman idea of *'cultus'* – caring for the body as a sign of

civilisation and culture. Bathing was also seen as a part of the process of *'Romanisation'*, whereby populations joining the empire adopted a Roman way of life.

What happened to the baths after the Roman period?

The baths seem to have gone into decline from the AD300s. This decline may have initially been quite slow, and is indicated by poor care and maintenance of the building. Eventually it was abandoned and robbed of its masonry and fixtures – providing a source of high-quality building materials for the construction of the medieval town.



*Excavated timbers from the cistern of the Roman bath house, Tower Street.
The dig director, Alec Down, is on the left.*



Discovery

In 1963 a farmer was ploughing a field in the Chilgrove valley. His plough struck a stone object, which on inspection turned out to be the remains of a small Roman column or pedestal. With the kind permission of the owners, West Dean Estate, archaeological excavations - which were to span nearly fourteen years - revealed substantial remains of a Roman villa, which was named Chilgrove 1. During the project another Roman villa ('Chilgrove 2) was found within a mile of the site, and a third at nearby Upmarden.

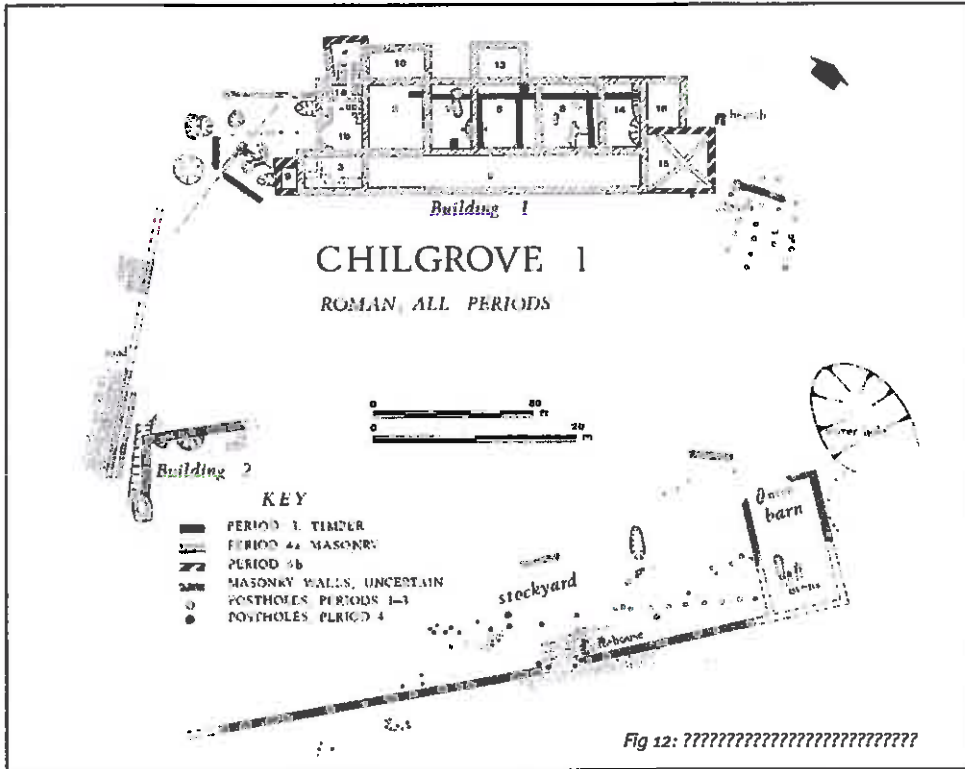
In the AD100s, Chilgrove 1 appears to have comprised five rooms. It had associated granaries or store buildings, and a stockyard for animals. Its earliest incarnation was as a relatively humble timber structure, but as more money was invested in the villa, this would have been replaced by part or full masonry walls. In the early AD300s the villa was

rebuilt on a large and luxurious scale, with the addition of a bath house and an improved stockyard with barns. Subsequent changes to the villa - which included improvements to the bath house, the installation of mosaic floors, and the addition of an extra room - all point to the growing prosperity of the family that lived there.

The mosaic

The mosaic discovered in Room 6 of Chilgrove 1 dates from after the early AD300s. It was made from different materials to create the range of colours and tones that compliment such a sophisticated design:

- tile (red),
- chalk (white),
- baked chalk (yellow),
- limestone (grey/blue)
- ironstone (brown).



The pattern is symmetrical, and features knot, bud and petal designs between plaited geometric bands (known as *guilloche*), all surrounded by a border of red tesserae.

The central design is unfortunately lost. Known as the *emblema*, this would have been the main feature of the mosaic, and is likely to have been of higher-quality workmanship than the designs surrounding it.

The makers

The Chilgrove mosaic may represent the work of a particular 'school' of mosaicists, identifiable by particular designs and patterns that a group of craftsmen specialised in. The 'Central Southern School' is so named because their work has been identified in this small part of Britain, with examples at

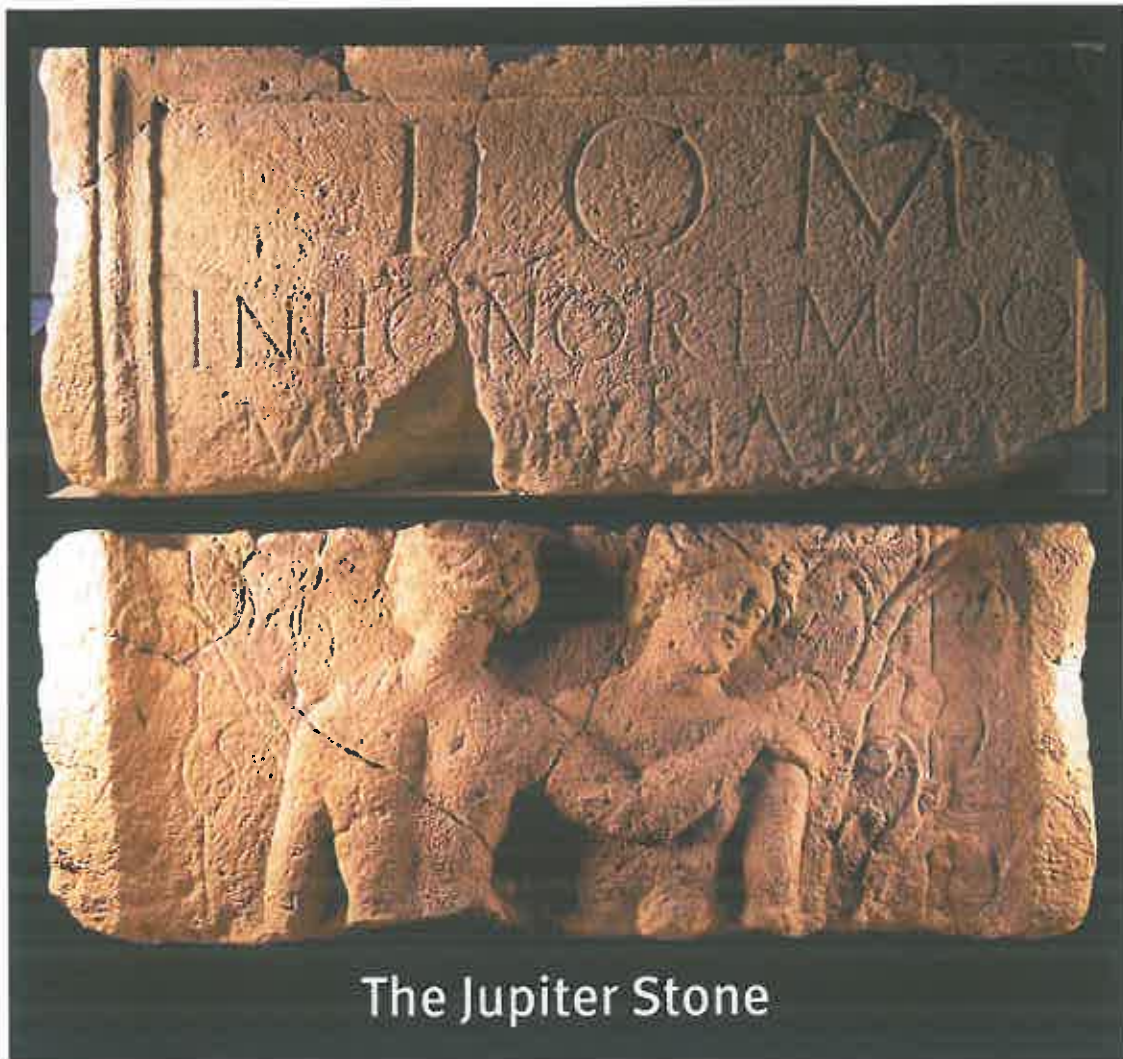
Bignor Roman Villa, Sparsholt, Hants, and Bramdean, Hants. As the empire suffered economically and politically in the late AD300s, many skilled craftsmen would have struggled to find work.

Although the Chilgrove mosaic was well designed, it was poorly laid, having been discovered on only a few inches of dirty mortar.

Damage and decline

Sometime in the late AD300s the mosaic was damaged by a post-hole, which was sunk straight through it, and a child aged less than two years old was buried underneath one corner. The continuing agricultural use of land in the Chilgrove valley for generations has also meant that the mosaic suffered as a result of plough damage, losing the central design.





The Jupiter Stone

Discovery

The Jupiter Stone was discovered during excavations on West Street in 1934. It was found in what had been identified as a midden (a rubbish dump), and had probably originally stood close to its find spot, in what may have been the forum – the Roman town market place and administration hub.

Date

There have been a number of dates suggested for the stone, ranging from the late first century AD, to the late second to early third century AD.

What is it?

The Jupiter Stone is carved from local sandstone. It would have formed a pedestal base on top of which would have been a statue of the Roman god Jupiter, perhaps on top of a column. The

What does the inscription mean?

I O M
IN HONOREM DO MVS DIVINA

To Jupiter Best and Greatest
In Honour of the Divine House

Interpreting the images

The significance of this piece lies in the images carved on its sides. They possibly represent:

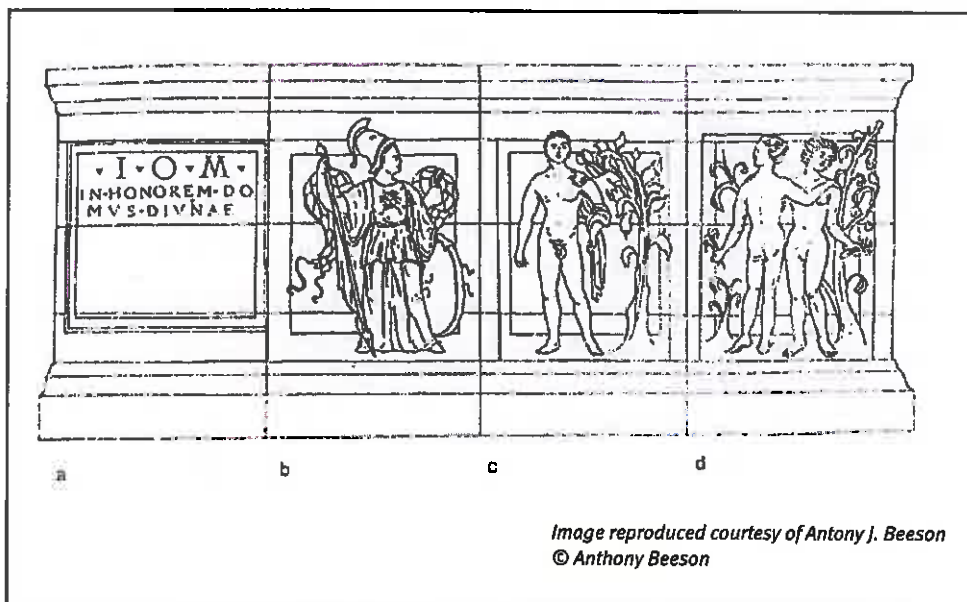
- a) Inscription dedicated to IVPITER OPTIMUS MAXIMUS (I.O.M) 'Jupiter Best and Greatest'
- b) A female figure holding a spear (only the arm and hand holding a portion of the spear survives) – possibly the goddess Minerva

c) A male figure standing next to a tree (only the shoulder, showing the remains of a Greek chlamys (a type of cloak, sometimes associated with soldiers), survives).

d) Two embracing, nude females, possibly local goddesses or nymphs.

Can you work out which side is which?

The images are of particular interest as they show a sophisticated fusion of Classical art forms with native British traditions. This fusion of realism with the abstract has created a significant example of Romano-British art, which would have originally formed part of an impressive and imposing monument dedicated to Jupiter in the centre of Roman Chichester.





The Bosham Head

The Bosham head remains a mystery. It is uncertain when exactly it was discovered, but it certainly once stood in the vicarage garden at Bosham – in an engraving dating from 1824, the head can clearly be seen in the garden. It was later moved to the grounds of the Bishop's Palace at Chichester, where one of the clergymen suggested that it might have been a head of the Roman emperor, Vespasian.

The head was lent to the British Museum by Bishop Bell in 1949, but was transferred to Chichester Museum in 1966.

The identification of the piece has been a cause of debate since the early AD1800's. A. Hay in his *The History of Chichester* (1804) speculated that it may have been an image of the god Thor. Richard Dally, in his 1831 *The Chichester Guide*, also referred to the:

"...colossal head of stone, said to be of the god Thor, and to have been brought over by German adventurers [i.e. Saxons] for worship, was many years ago dug up in the church yard, and is now placed in the vicarage garden, formally the sextonry; but it has suffered much from weather, and the features are nearly destroyed."

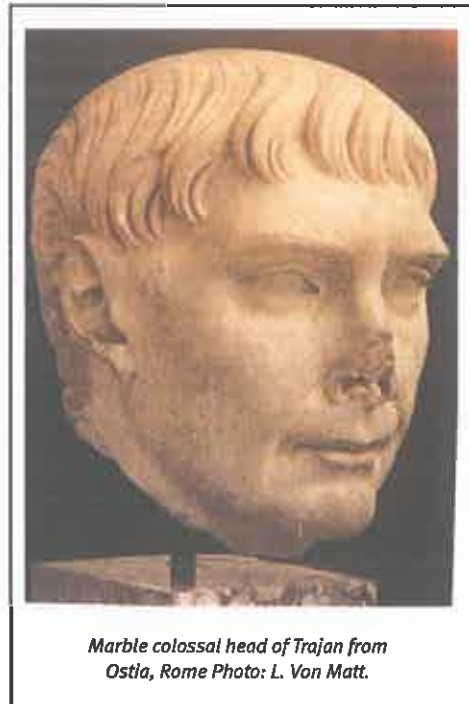


Photo courtesy of
Richard Rogers Conservation Ltd.

In 1902 there was still a strong tradition that believed the head was a portrait of Vespasian. However, by the late 1960s, suggestions had widened to propose Woden, Trajan or St. Christopher.

A colossal remnant of ancient art, the piece is certainly all that remains of a monumental statue of the Roman period. Badly damaged by burial and a considerable amount of time subject to the elements, the main features of the portrait have all but been obliterated. The most likely proposition is that the piece represents either the emperor Vespasian or the emperor Trajan, judging by the few facial features that remain, however this is always open to reassessment.

What do you think: does this head of Trajan look like our Bosham head?



Marble colossal head of Trajan from
Ostia, Rome Photo: L. Von Matt.

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