

Groundwell Ridge Villa Analysis Project – Update I, April 2007

In March, following a period of nearly 18 months in which we assessed our discoveries, detailed work on the data from the Groundwell Ridge Roman Villa Project was re-started at Fort Cumberland, Portsmouth. In the intervening period two vital reports have been produced in line with current Post-Excavation methodologies: an Assessment Report and an Updated Project Design (UPD). These documents take all the evidence from the fieldwork and examine it for its potential to reveal data that will aid our understanding of the site; then using that, the UPD is written to illustrate the direction of future research. This future work is scheduled to take up to a further 18 months, hopefully leading to an article in the *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* in 2009.

At this point in time in accordance with these above documents, a research assistant with prior knowledge of the site was taken on to analyse fully the site records. Due to time constraints, weather problems, and sometimes, (but rarely) human error, the records that come off site are slightly imperfect, so the first job is to take the records, recheck them and try to fill in the gaps and cross-reference them all with each other and also with the dates provided by the pottery, which is a vital part of the process which makes sure that all the records are telling the same story. After this, all the building phases, from the very early Roman to the probable post-Roman building, were re-visited in the same way to make sure they all agreed with each other. This is routine work, but it still has the ability to throw up some surprises. Even 18 months after digging has finished, an analysis of the walls of the villa has shown some irregularities which although noticed at the time, required all the data to be considered together to suggest an explanation. These irregularities appear to show the possible remains of an apsidal structure at the far south end of the bath block. This appears to have stood alone, but cannot have lasted very long as the conjectured construction date for the Building 2 is somewhere in the early to mid 2nd century AD.

Once this was done, the next job is to decide exactly what else can be done to assist in the dating of the site. Some preserved organic material found in soil samples allow the possibility for Carbon 14 dating, which would compliment the results from archaeomagnetic dating samples taken from the latest elements of the two hypocaust furnaces found on site. Both of these are expensive techniques, so they must be used judiciously only where they are likely to reveal the most information, and even then success cannot be guaranteed!

Hopefully all these techniques combined, will enable us to extract a clearer understanding of this site.

West Wall of Room I



West wall of Room I incorporating an earlier post-pad (stones to support and upright post), showing as a curved expansion of the wall towards the camera in the left foreground. This post-pad is associated with the early apsidal building recognised in post-excitation.

Record Checking



Record checking in progress