

Great Archaeological Sites in the Vale of Glamorgan



3. COLD KNAP ROMAN SITE



Most of the Roman-period sites that we can visit in Wales are forts, built by the Roman army to subjugate the local population, and most of these were established in the 1st century when the army first arrived. But the Roman building at Cold Knap, Barry (ST 0993 6648), is a later civilian site. Around all four sides of a central courtyard are rooms of various sizes. The plan resembles those of residential buildings such as villas, but there is no trace of the underfloor central heating that would be expected in such an elaborate building of this date if it were a home. However, this layout was not only not only for those designed for family use – it was also used for accommodation attached to the official posting houses known as *mansiones*, where couriers of the imperial post could stay overnight before resuming their journeys the next day in a light horse-drawn chaise. And there is another argument that the building may have been a *mansio* than a villa. It stands right on the coast, next to the marine lake in Knap Gardens which was once an inlet of the sea. It is well placed to have been a small harbour in Roman times. Directly opposite on the Somerset coast is the mouth of the River Parrett from where a road leads inland. A courier could have stayed at Cold Knap to wait for a suitable tide to take ship to the opposite shore.

The building was discovered in 1980 when the surface of the abandoned tennis court that had occupied the site started to break up, revealing the walls underneath. An archaeologist who lived in Barry recognised them as being part of the same complex as a Roman building that been destroyed during development in 1960. The archive photographs shown here were taken at the end of the first season of excavation by the Trust. One very interesting discovery was that the building does not seem to have been finished. Some of the walls had collapsed directly onto the layers of

debris created by the original builders. Some of these deposits, like the stockpile of tiles found in a room on the seaward side, could possibly have been intended for removal from the site, but others, such as the mortar mixing beds, were definitely created during construction. Besides these there were a series of small hearths with piles of shells suggesting that the workmen were having oyster breaks. The pottery and coins that we found dated to the end of the 3rd century, a time of political turmoil when Britain was the heart of a small breakaway empire which lasted for only ten years. Perhaps the rise and fall of our building was related in some way to this episode.



The Roman building stands just above the Knap Car Terrace on the seafront at Barry (CF62 6FF). The nearest railway station is Barry Town, on the Vale line (Cardiff – Bridgend). Maps: OS Landranger Series sheet 171, Explorer Series sheet 151.

Timeline (the asterisks indicate the time-span)



You can learn more about this site, and other similar archaeological sites in Wales, by going to <https://www.archwilio.org.uk/arch/>. Please read and observe the Conditions of Use. The building at Cold Knap has the PRN (Primary Record Number) 00539s, and you can search for other similar sites here too. You can contact us via social media or through the methods given at the bottom of the page. See more about the Romans in South Wales at http://www.ggat.org.uk/cadw/romans_in_south_wales/index.html