

# Brislington Community Museum News

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Winchester Road



Looking north at the site of the Roman villa, on the plateaux.



Looking south toward the site of the Roman villa, about half way along this section of Winchester Road.

## News & events

Following from our previous newsletter which focussed on the Stone Age, we're skipping forward in this issue to the Roman Period (sadly, there isn't much evidence for the Bronze and Iron Ages amongst our exhibits).

This is the first of two newsletters devoted to Brislington Villa (the second

will focus on ceramics).

Our first Annual General Meeting (AGM) is due to take place in December. Details are available on request (please enquire early so we can make suitable arrangements).

Ken Taylor, chair

# Brislington's Roman villa

Most of the Romano-British artefacts included here are from Brislington Villa, and are a selection of those in Bristol Museum and Art Gallery. These were excavated during the rescue dig that followed the Roman villa's discovery in December 1899 when the housing development of Winchester Road was being built.

The villa faced roughly south-southwest, and its frontage was some 33m (107 feet) broad. The entrance opened into a corridor that spanned most of the width of the building, with a square room at either end that extended slightly into the approach. Then, further in and spanning the same width of the front, was a suite of rooms either side of a central courtyard: two on the western side, and two on east (these having a corridor between them). The rear of the property had a complex extension at each corner that jutted out slightly to the sides; the extension

on the western side contained the bathhouse.

Most of the rooms were of similar size and approximately square and some had mosaic floors. The structure was some 20m (65 feet) from front to back. Approximately 4.5m (15 feet) to the north-northeast of the bath complex was a well, some 11.5m (38 feet) deep.

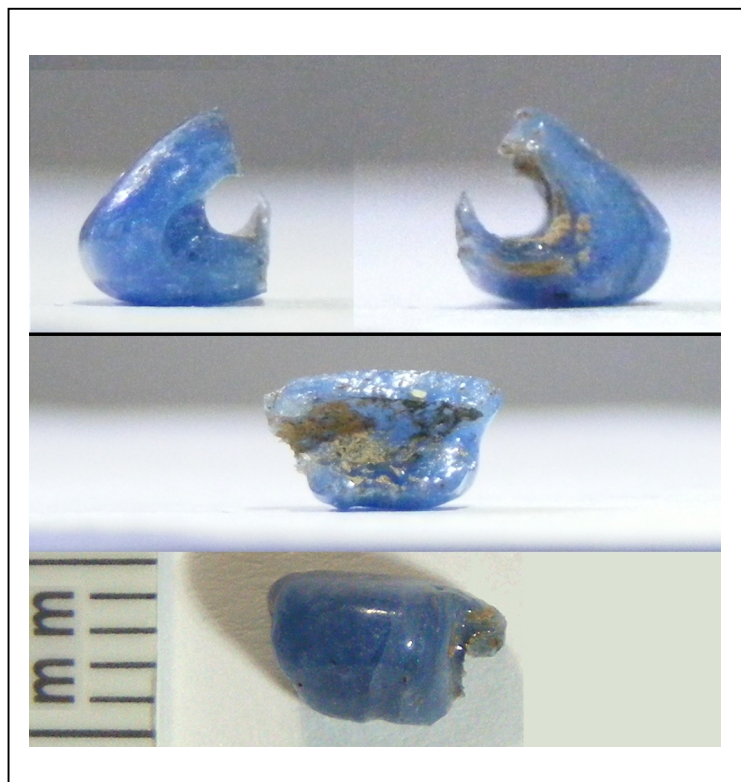
It's thought the villa was built around 270 AD and lost to fire about a century later. Its complete destruction however, occurred at the end of the Victorian era when Bristol - and its desire for new housing (which, controversially, continues to the present day) - engulfed much of the Somerset village of Brislington in the 1897 boundary change. The site lies toward the southern end of Winchester Road (ST61647097).

## Glass bead from Brislington Meadows

The villa has been in the news recently, as local TV, newspapers and websites have covered the emerging story of apparently contemporaneous Roman glassware that has been excavated from Brislington Meadows.

The illustration is of a fragment of a blue glass bead only 5mm in length that was spotted by a passer-by on the surface of backfill from Trench 7 excavated by Cotswold Archaeology in November 2021.

Their evaluation report ([https://legacy-reports.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk/content/uploads/2022/06/CR0810-Brislington-Meadows-Bristol-EVAL-report-CR0810\\_11.1.pdf](https://legacy-reports.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk/content/uploads/2022/06/CR0810-Brislington-Meadows-Bristol-EVAL-report-CR0810_11.1.pdf)) describes the 48 similar blue beads found in that trench as probably dating to the 3rd and 4th centuries CE (which matches the date of the villa some 820m to the west).



## Glass beads from Brislington villa

These are segmented (but not separated) beads on a wire, diminishing in size towards one end. It would be easy to say these were part of a piece of jewellery, earrings perhaps, and maybe they were.

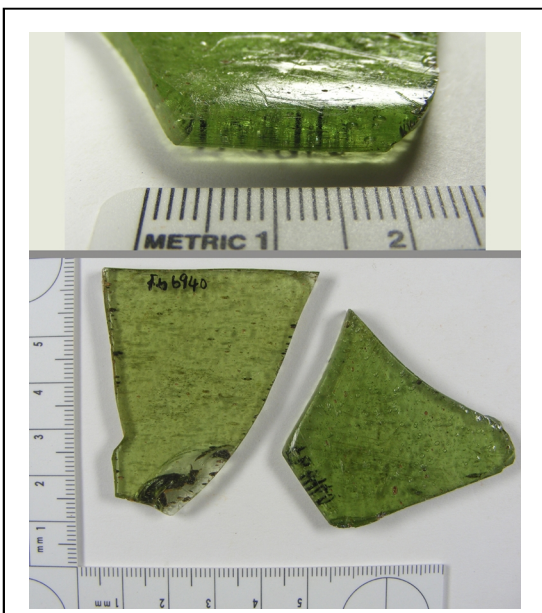
These glass segmented beads were probably produced by 'gathering' a tube of glass and introducing a bubble of air which then was drawn out to form a hollow glass rod. This rod then could be crimped at regular intervals and may be then broken into smaller segments. The molten glass was rolled or drawn into a cylinder shape then rolled across a ribbed surface to produce a segmented strip which could then be sliced into individual beads. This bead type varies from two to five or six segments and is only about 4mm in diameter.

Another possible manufacturing technique was to wind a thin glass rod around a metal wire which would be removed leaving a tapering end (as here in these examples). In this way the beads in the centre of the rod would have been



the perfect ones, leaving the tapered end beads as 'offcuts'. This type of bead became popular in Northern Europe at an early Roman date. The majority of finds are from Britain and tend to be from the late third or fourth centuries. They continued in popularity well into the Viking period in Britain.

Exhibit contributed by Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (reference numbers F941 and Fb7159).  
Text written by Dawn Witherspoon (2012)  
Acquisition number: 120316c5



## Window glass

Excavated from Brislington Roman villa in 1899.

Exhibit contributed by Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (reference number Fb6940).  
Acquisition number: 120316c8



# Metal finds from Brislington Villa

## Pewter flagons

These three rare Roman survivals were found 8.5m (28 feet) to 10m (32 feet) deep in the villa's well amongst other material. They're made from pewter and are made of lead 62.5%, tin 36%, antimony 0.8%, "earthy matter" and possible loss 0.7%. The powdery white patches on the surface are lead oxide.

Top. The jug has a narrow neck opening and small base. It has a decorated handle in the form of ridges on the outside surface and smooth on the inside. The decoration of the handles resembles bronze work of the same period.

Exhibit contributed by Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (reference: F1264).

Text written by Dawn Witherspoon, 2012.

Acquisition number: 120316a6

Middle. The jug has a narrow neck opening and small base. It has a plain handle, the top part of which continues like a loop around the neck.

Exhibit contributed by Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (reference: F1263).

Text written by Dawn Witherspoon, 2012.

Acquisition number: 120316a5

Bottom: The jug has an extremely narrow neck opening and small base. It has a decorated handle in the form of lines with chevrons and diamonds. There is a line of raised studs around the narrow neck near the top. The decoration of the handles resembles bronze work of the same period.

Exhibit contributed by Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (reference: F1259).

Text written by Dawn Witherspoon, 2012.

Acquisition number: 120316a4





## Coin of Constantius II



This is a bronze coin of Constantius II, Roman emperor from 337 to 361. The legend on the reverse (VIRTVS AVGG N N) refers to the valour (virtue) of the emperors, while the picture is of a soldier holding a spear, point down, with his other hand resting on top of his shield.

This coin was manufactured in the mint at Treveri (Trier, Germany).

Exhibit contributed by Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (reference: Barker 1900 - 303 6b).

Text written by Dawn Witherspoon.

Acquisition number: 120322b9

## Bow brooch



This bronze bow brooch was given to Bristol Museum and Art Gallery in 1935 by Miss E M Smith, and is reputed to be from Brislington's Roman villa. It features the head of a lion in the centre of the cross.

Exhibit contributed by Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (reference: F2349).

Text written by Dawn Witherspoon, 2012.

Acquisition number: 120322a5

## Finger ring key



This bronze ring key could have been worn either on the finger or on a cord around the neck. The key part sits neatly against the finger and it would have been possible to open a rotary lock while wearing it. It might have been used to open a strongbox or casket.

Although this type of key was used throughout the Roman period, the simple and functional

style of this one probably means it is an early type.

Exhibit contributed by Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (reference: F1230).

Text written by Dawn Witherspoon, 2012.

Acquisition number: 120316a7Text

## Roman spoon

This fragile object is a bronze spoon, with a thin yet ornate handle.

Exhibit contributed by Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (reference: F2269).

Text written by Dawn Witherspoon

Acquisition number: 120322a1



# Organic finds from Brislington Villa

## Bone pins

Exhibit contributed by Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (reference numbers 2263, 2264, 2266).  
Acquisition number: 120316d3



## Horse teeth

Exhibit contributed by Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (reference number Fb6939).  
Acquisition number: 120316c7



## Boars' tusks

The diet of the villa's occupants was varied; bones from wild and domesticated animals were found here. Hunting for sport and food was popular in Roman Britain and the open land and forests in the area would have had red deer, roe deer, fallow deer and wild boar.

Only adult male boars develop tusks, continuously growing their upper and lower canine teeth, usually somewhere between 6 and 12cm in length. Wild boar were not easy prey and their tusks were formidable weapons; the upper tusks are bent upwards and grind against the lower tusks, becoming sharp. In Rome, a boar was the feast offering to the god Saturn. They probably became extinct in Great Britain

in the 13th century.

Exhibit contributed by Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (reference number Fb6919).  
Text written by Dawn Witherspoon (2012).  
Acquisition number: 120316c6



# Stone finds from Brislington Villa

## Moulds

The purpose of the rectangular mould (probably only the mould has survived) is unknown. Both moulds are thought to be of white lias limestone (dating to the early Jurassic Period, some 195 million years ago, the closest source of which is at Knowle)

The triangular stone is part of a larger composite reusable mould which, appears to be for making a circular ring. The large holes are where the separate elements of the mould were joined together with pegs (material unknown). The casting process includes the use of a crucible, with the molten metal being poured into the mould via the sprue (conical shaped groove) and hand finished. It is not known what the cluster of five small depressions (which resemble a dice side) were for.

Exhibits contributed by Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (reference numbers: upper F888 lower F887).

Text written by Dawn Witherspoon (2012)

Acquisition numbers: upper 120316a3  
lower 120316a2



## Fossils

Upper: bivalve

Lower left: gastropod

Lower right: ammonite

These are probably from Dundry (associated with the middle Jurassic inferior oolitic limestone, which dates to some 170 million years ago). Whether these fossils were curiosities, toys, or not regarded at all, is unknown.

Exhibit contributed by Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (reference number Fb6974).

Text written by Dawn Witherspoon (2012)

Acquisition number: 120316a8

# Tesserae

These tesserae are from the floors of Brislington villa, and would have been part of a pattern in a mosaic picture or tessellation.

Substantial portions of the floors of Brislington's villa were carefully removed during the 1899 excavation and have since been put on public display at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery. Larger portions are stored at Kings Weston Roman Villa, where they can be viewed on open days or by arrangement.

The six tesserae at the top of this illustration were cut from white lias limestone (dating to the early Jurassic Period, some 195 million years ago, the closest source of which is at Knowle).

The four in the middle are of blue lias limestone, which is similar age and source as the white lias.

The six at the bottom were cut from the type of pennant sandstone that underlies much of Brislington (dating to the Carboniferous Period, some 310 million years ago).

Exhibits contributed by Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (reference numbers: top Fb7139  
middle Fb7135  
bottom Fb7133).

Acquisition numbers: top 120316d2  
middle 120316d1  
bottom 120316c9





## Painted wall plaster

Recovered, like most of these exhibits, during the 1899 excavation of Brislington Roman villa. The walls would not only have stripes such as those shown here, which would mark panels, containing pictures of gods or goddesses and other images drawn from their rich mythology.

Exhibit contributed by Bristol Museum and Art Gallery (reference number Fb6955).

Acquisition number: 120316d4



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## Credits

Page 1 - Winchester Road photos by Kai Taylor, September 2022.

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## Contact us

Email us - [secretary@brislington.org](mailto:secretary@brislington.org) - to enquire about any of our community museum's exhibits, or to suggest ideas to add to or improve them. Please use the same email address to contribute feedback or items for inclusion in this publication.

We aim to produce this quarterly, but our schedule is flexible so we can react quickly to inform our members of changes or important events. It also means during quiet times we can focus our attention on other matters such as out-reach activities and sourcing and researching new exhibits.