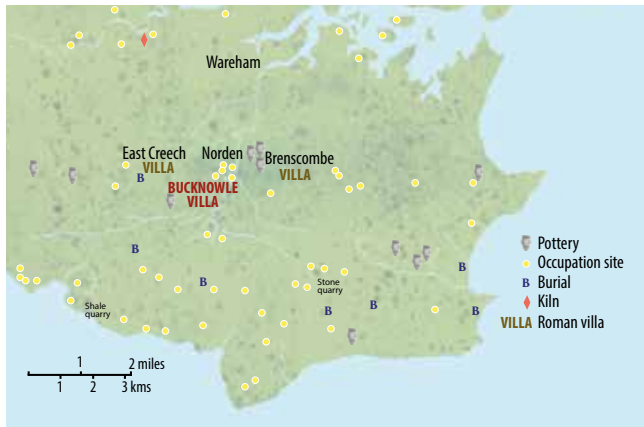


The Romans in Purbeck

The Romans invaded Britain in AD 43 and within a few years they had discovered a very useful stone, Purbeck Marble, in the hills south of Corfe Castle. This stone was used as a decorative stone in the interiors of buildings, and for stones to take inscriptions, such as tombstones. Shale from Kimmeridge, a soft black rock which could be carved like wood, was also used, for making personal ornaments and domestic items.



Iron Age & Romano-British Sites in Isle of Purbeck

The local people gradually adopted the Roman way of life. Bucknowle is the only known Romano-British villa in the southern part of Purbeck. It was a grand house but not as grand as some others in Dorset. There was a Romano-British settlement at Wareham and the nearest town was at Dorchester, named Durnovaria.

The Romanised way of life declined in Britain in the late fourth century AD and Roman control finally came to an end in about AD 410.



Enamelled headstud brooch.

Enamelled plate brooch.

Bucknowle Villa Archaeological Finds



Furniture fitting in the shape of a female's head, perhaps Medusa.



Decorated bone handle



"Cut glass" samian pot.



Ovoid glass jug



Black-burnished ware cups.

Funded by Heritage Lottery Fund and Wessex Water



Text by Ben Buxton

Source of photographs and details: Bucknowle, a Romano-British Villa and its Antecedents: Excavations 1976-1991 by Tony Light and Peter Ellis, Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society 2009

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Bucknowle Roman Villa Threshold Stones

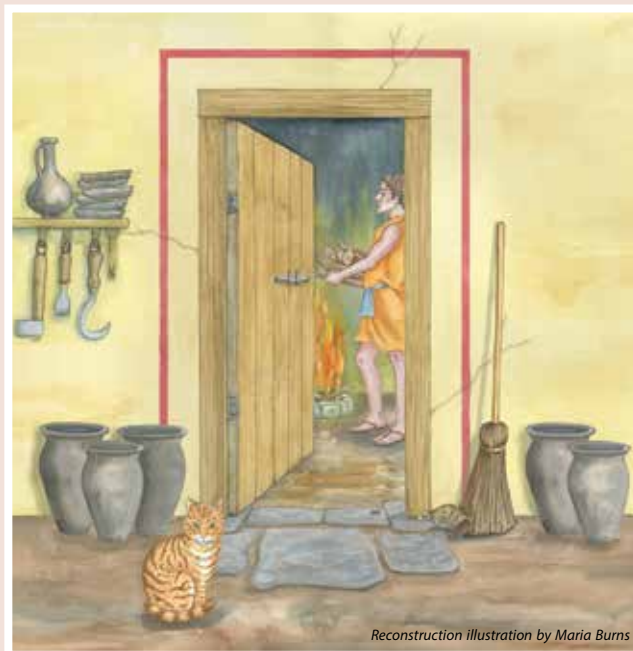


*See where the Romans walked ~
Wareham Library Gardens*

These stones are the threshold stones of a doorway between two rooms in a Romano-British villa (grand country house) at Bucknowle near Corfe Castle.



The threshold stones in situ when they were discovered in 1977.



Reconstruction illustration by Maria Burns

A reconstruction illustration showing how the threshold may have looked in Bucknowle Villa.

The two rooms were added to the villa (building 1 on the plan) in about AD 300. One of the rooms had a furnace in the floor, which supplied heat for the under-floor heating of an adjacent room in the original house. It is not known what the other room was used for, but the burials of four babies were found in the floor. It was common at this time for very young children to be buried in houses; older children and adults were buried in cemeteries.

The threshold stones were shaped to create a door-stop. This shows that the door opened into the furnace room. The hole may have been for a peg to keep the door shut. The stones on either side of the threshold stones each have two square holes to take the upright timbers of the door frame.

The addition of the rooms to the building and installation of under-floor heating show that the owners of the property, probably a local family, were becoming more wealthy. Later in the fourth century, the doorway was blocked up with stone slabs and the furnace went out of use.

The Bucknowle Villa Discovery



Tony Brown

The villa was discovered in 1975 when the late Tony Brown found Roman potsherds and tesserae in a mole hill. He dug a trial trench and found Roman walls and flooring. Archaeologists excavated the villa between 1976 and 1991. The threshold stones were found in 1977 and were donated to the new library in Wareham. The site was re-buried and it is now grassland. No remains of the villa are visible.

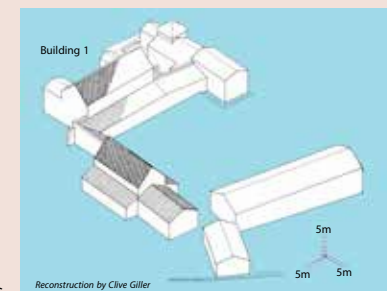


Part of the villa under excavation, with Corfe Castle behind.

About The Villa

The site at Bucknowle was probably the centre of a rural estate for many centuries in the Iron Age and Roman periods. In the late Iron Age (first century BC) there was a round house on the site, and fragments of Roman wine jars (amphorae) found there show that the inhabitants were rich enough to import wine from the Roman world.

In the late first century AD the first rectangular building in Roman style was constructed. Over the next 300 years buildings were rebuilt and new ones added. They were built of stone with tiled roofs, and some rooms had mosaic floors and under-floor heating. By the fourth century the villa itself (building 1), farm buildings and workshops were arranged around three sides of a courtyard. The site was the centre of agricultural and shale-working activities.



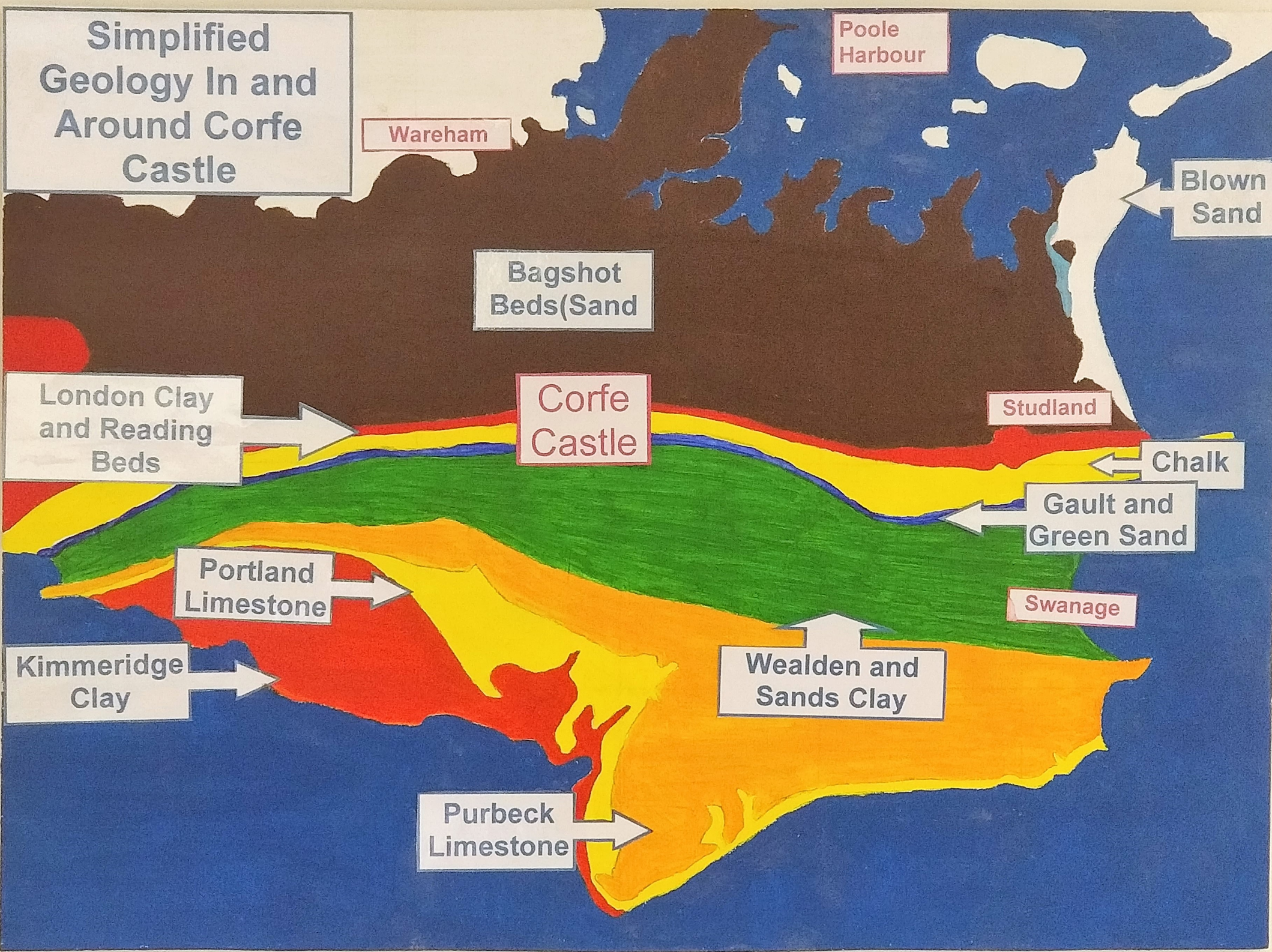
Reconstruction by Clive Giller

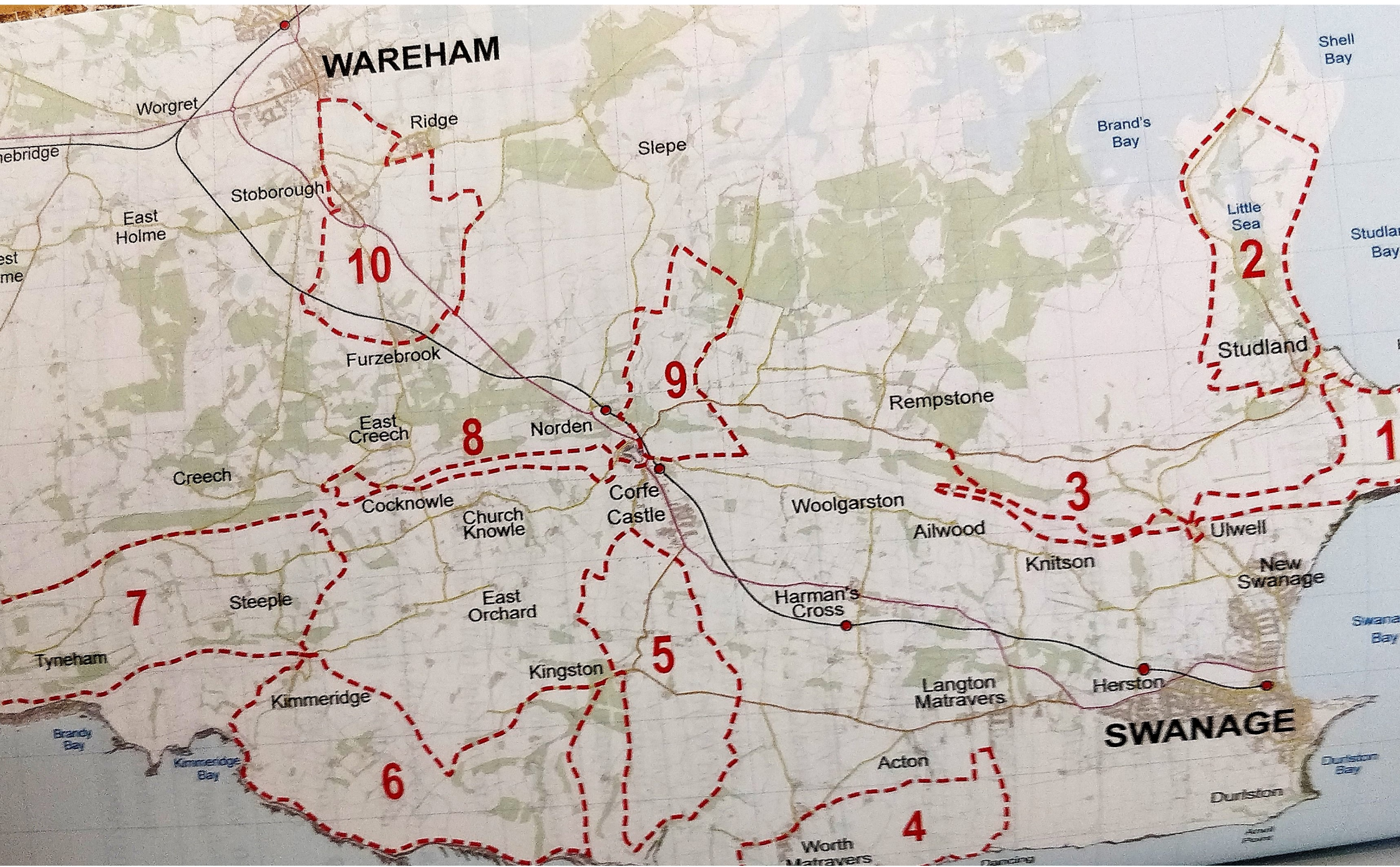


The villa declined in the late fourth century and was eventually abandoned. Subsequently, stones from the ruined building were taken away to be used elsewhere and the site became farmland.

An Iron Age grave that pre dates the Roman villa.

Simplified Geology In and Around Corfe Castle





There is no clear division between the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age, with some metal working occurring at the end of the Neolithic and stone axes sometimes copied from bronze prototypes from the Continent. The 'Beaker' people first appear in the Late Neolithic, named after their distinctive and often highly decorated drinking vessels frequently placed in graves. The Early Beaker phase (2800–2000 BCE) saw the building of huge henge enclosures at Avebury, Stonehenge and Durrington Walls. Rempstone Stone Circle (Walk 3) may date to this period. Early Beaker burials were often of individuals placed in a crouched position under a round barrow, sometimes accompanied by grave goods. The Ulwell barrow (Walk 1) and primary inhumation probably date to this period, as well as the oak log burial found in King's Barrow at Stoborough (Walk 10). Later in the Bronze Age, cremation became more common and barrows often appear in clusters to form cemeteries (Walk 3, Ailwood Down).



Barrows on Ailwood Down.

There are different types of round barrow, with the commonest being bowl shaped surrounded by a ditch. Purbeck also has examples of bell barrows (Walk 2) and one pond barrow (Walk 1). While many Purbeck barrows are located on downland, quite a number are found on the heaths. It should be noted that some contain later inhumations and cremations as well as the original 'primary' burial. By 1400 BCE cremation was the dominant rite, no doubt reflecting a change in belief, and barrow construction declined, with cremated remains being placed in urns, some of which were inserted in barrows.

In the Early–Middle Bronze Age there was extensive clearance of woodland on the heaths, as shown by acidification of the soil, and by the end of the period heathland flora was well established. From the Middle Bronze Age the landscape became more planned, with large field systems and long linear boundaries. Bronze Age field systems have been discovered at the East of Corfe River site and New Mills Heath, showing intensive agricultural use, and it is thought there was a move into this area around 1500 BCE following overexploitation

of the chalk downland. However, the field system was soon abandoned due to deterioration of the soil.

There is evidence from the Late Bronze Age of several occupation sites in south Purbeck. The settlement at Eldon's Seat (Walk 5) consisted of several round houses, with a developing field system and manufacture of Kimmeridge shale armlets; occupation lasted well into the Iron Age. Another at Rope Lake Hole dates from a similar period, with even more emphasis on industrial activities. There were also workshops at Kimmeridge itself. A Late Bronze Age round house was found at Worth, and dating from the Late Bronze/Early Iron Age a large cobbled area used as a meeting place (Walk 4). Clay was clearly being exploited throughout the Bronze Age, as a huge range of pots were produced at Bestwall, where settlements spanned seven to eight centuries. Finally, the largest ever Bronze Age axe-head hoard in Britain was found near Langton Matravers in 2007 (Walk 4), and dated to about 800 BCE, with a probable settlement nearby.



Bronze Age axe heads found in a field south of Langton village. (Courtesy of Langton Matravers and Purbeck Stone Museum.)

The Iron Age saw a transition from bronze to iron and the construction of hill forts. Purbeck's only hill fort is Flower's Barrow (Walk 8), part of which has fallen into the sea.

Away from the hill forts, the typical rural settlement consisted of a small farmstead supporting a family, or sometimes an extended one; the farm would be surrounded by an earthwork and usually near an ancient field system. The term 'Celtic fields' is used for all fields laid out before the Saxon conquest, consisting of small rectilinear paddocks joined together resembling a chequerboard.

The Eldon Seat settlement continued well into the Iron Age, with the size of the house increasing; sheep became more important than cattle (small Celtic short-horns) by the 6th century, reflecting a trend throughout Wessex. The Kimmeridge shale industry became more developed with the introduction of lathe-turning in the 1st century, and salt production was taking place at Kimmeridge, Hobarrow Bay and Rope Lake Hole in the Early Iron Age.

Purbeck has the greatest concentration of Iron Age and Romano-British sites in Dorset and there have been pottery finds from a number of locations.

at Gallows Gore 14 storage pits were also found. Towards the end of the Middle Iron Age, Furzey Island (not then an island), Shipstal Point and Fitzworth all had settlements probably linked to salt production; an Iron Age log boat found in Poole Harbour has been dated to 295 BCE and can be seen in Poole Museum.

Poole Harbour was becoming an important centre for trade by the 1st century, judging by the finds of imported goods, though the main port at this time was Hengistbury. There was a considerable increase in activity and density of occupation at the East of Corfe River site and Ower Peninsula in the Late Iron Age; at the former there was an extensive settlement, with evidence of agriculture, salt working and possibly pottery production, while there was intensive shale working at Ower, which may have been a production centre. On the west bank of Corfe River a possible pottery production site with a firing structure was found; high-quality ball clay occurs nearby. In addition to these sites, considerable amounts of salt, pottery and shale items were produced at Cleaval Point, Green Island, Fitzworth, Middlebere and Shipstal Point. An apparent causeway (dated to *c* 250–200 BCE) between Cleaval Point and Green Island is now believed to have been a breakwater, acting as shelter for boats and enabling them to unload cargoes.

The Durotriges occupied most of what is now modern Dorset and south Somerset at the time of the Roman Conquest. As a tribe they are loosely connected by three elements: distinctive pottery known as black burnished ware, with simple decoration, centred around Poole Harbour (an important site has been found at Worgret, west of Wareham); their own coinage from about 50 BCE; and crouched burials on the right side, usually with the head orientated to the east, and grave goods. Pig bones often accompanied female burials, cattle with male, and sheep with both.

In 2004, 142 base-metal Durotrigan staters (based on ancient coins used in Greece) were discovered at Norden and dated from 1 to 50 CE; many have small test marks on their surface, suggesting they were deposited as an offering. In 2006 a Late Iron Age stone temple 4 m² was also located at Norden and its construction trench contained Durotrigan pottery, coins, two spearheads and other ironwork, indicating some kind of dedication.

In 43 CE the Romans invaded Britain. In Purbeck it would seem local communities may have been willing to work with them from the beginning. Norden became a major



*Durotrigan coins and patena from Norden.
(Courtesy of Dorset County Museum.)*

manufacturing centre between the 1st and 4th centuries, specialising in high-quality goods such as chalk tesserae, elaborate shale items and Purbeck Marble mortaria (small bowls used for mixing or grinding food). A magnetometer survey has shown there was a major Romano-British road connecting the site. It is possible the industrial complex at Norden may have developed from the temple mentioned above.

Black burnished ware was being produced in huge quantities by the early 2nd century, with the Worgret site, which appears to have developed from a Durotrigan settlement, perhaps manufacturing this pottery to the exclusion of all else; the site was close to the River Frome with access to Dorchester, not far



Durotrigan black burnished ware. (Courtesy of Dorset County Museum.)

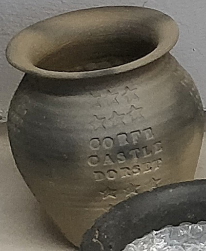
from Poole Harbour, and it may have been linked to Norden by the Roman road. The pottery consisted of plain kitchen ware made by hand and finished by burnishing the surface with a bone polisher. In Dorset it was used far more than any other kitchen ware and was favoured by the Roman army, with large amounts being exported to the north, including Hadrian's Wall where half the pottery found is Durotrigan. By the Late Roman period large-scale iron smelting was taking place by the Frome not far from Worgret.

At the same time as the rise in importance of sites at Norden and Worgret, industrial settlements at Ower Peninsula and East of Corfe River reduced in size by the late 1st century and reverted to agriculture. Three Roman villas have been found within a few miles of Norden: East Creech (Walk 8), Bucknowle (Walk 5) and Brenscombe (Walk 9); all may have developed from Late Iron Age sites and were probably based on agriculture, though shale furniture was produced at Bucknowle and a ritual site from the Middle Iron Age was also identified here. Many rural settlements, in fact, show continuity between the Late Iron Age and Roman periods, while some new ones would have been established. The Romano-British settlement at Woodhouse, Studland (Walk 1), showed evidence of occupation for much of the Roman period.

Soon after the Roman invasion, Purbeck Marble began to be quarried at Wilkswood for inscriptions, wall inlays and mouldings; large amounts were used in the palace of Fishbourne, Hampshire, and in a number of Roman towns. Kimmeridge shale bracelets were being produced in great numbers on lathes at rural sites such as Rope Lake Hole. The Iron Age and Romano-British settlement at Quarry Field, Worth, also showed evidence of shale use.



Fragments of Roman Flue
Tiles
From the Roman Villa
Bucknowle



Roman Pottery made from
local clay found at Bucknowle
Villa

