

Remains at Fishbourne Roman Palace

In addition to the mosaics, significant masonry remains have survived and many are visible to the visitor. They can be divided into two groups: those in the north wing and thus inside the modern cover building and those outside.

North wing.

Despite plough damage and extensive stone robbing a significant amount of masonry and tile survives. The most impressive piece of free-standing wall, approximately 0.62m. wide and 0.55m. high, separates rooms N3 and N4. It shows the typical construction of squared limestone facing blocks with a core of stone rubble and mortar. A small amount of wall plaster survives on the west face with a quarter-round mortar moulding in front of it. The latter is the Roman equivalent to a skirting board, which both protected the bottom of the wall plaster and hid the edge of the mosaic. There was a doorway through the wall originally, linking the two rooms, but this was later blocked. Traces of a straight joint between wall and blocking can be seen on the western face.

Generally, wall foundations have survived better at the eastern end of the north wing. That is because the east end was demolished in the mid-second century, so the foundations were no longer visible when the major robbing took place, after the fire, in the late third century.

The north wing of the palace contained two internal courtyards or gardens, which were surrounded by a colonnade on their west, north and east sides. Some of the large limestone stylobate blocks which supported columns still survive in-situ on the western side of the western courtyard. The columns and their bases have gone, but a small part of what may have been a blocking wall that replaced them still survives. Close to this wall are the bases of two clay bread-ovens. Their domed tops would have been destroyed when the roof collapsed on them during the fire. Towards the middle of this courtyard is a square foundation with an upper surface of roof tiles. This must have been designed for something fairly heavy, such as a press or corn mill.

In room N1, in the north west corner of the wing, are the remains of an impressive hypocaust, or under-floor heating system. This was never completed owing to the disastrous fire. However sufficient survives to see how it would have operated. The hot flue gasses would have been drawn along the straight flue between the furnace and the central chamber, where they would have circulated around the tile pillars supporting the overlying floor. From there they would have passed along the diagonal flues and up hollow box tiles set into the walls before escaping through a vent or chimney at eaves or roof level.

In the early second century a bath suite was installed in the corridor between the end of the north wing and the now modified aisled hall. It consisted of three rooms: a caldarium or hot room to the north, where the bases of the tile columns can still be seen, a

tepidarium or warm room adjacent to it with a warm plunge bath on its western side and a frigidarium or cold room to the south, where part of a central drain survives.

Gardens.

A significant amount of masonry has survived to the north and west of the formal garden. This includes much of the revetment wall that supported the front of the terrace on which the west wing stood. In front of it lies part of the line of gully blocks which carried rainwater from the colonnade roof. In the extreme north-west corner two column bases survive in-situ. This lucky survival makes it possible to calculate both the height of the columns and the number that must have surrounded the garden.

Car park.

Between the car park and the outer wall of the museum lies the foundation of what was probably a large oven, divided into four by two channels. The latter are not flues as there is no trace of scorching, but they may have been ash pits. Too little survives to be sure of what the superstructure was like.