

FORDCROFT ROMANO-BRITISH BATHHOUSE

About the bathhouse

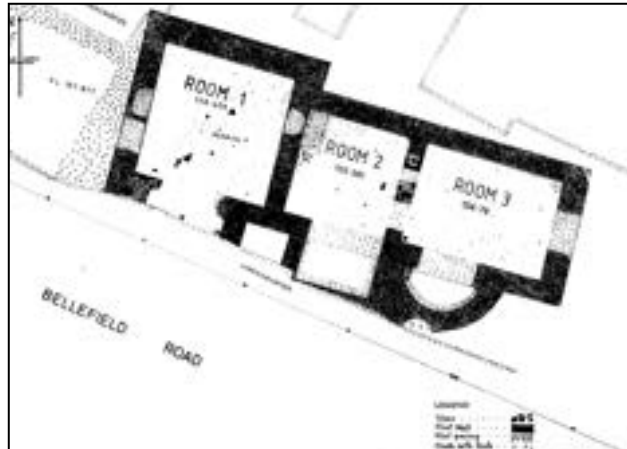
At the eastern end of Poverest Road in St Mary Cray, the remains of a building can be seen protected by a shelter. This has been interpreted as a small Romano-British bathhouse.

The Romans built communal bathhouses as social centres where people met, carried out business, gamed, chatted to friends, received massages and cleaned themselves with oil and a scraper (*strigil*). The bather went from room to room, moving gradually into more intense heat and finishing in a cold plunge pool.

Rome had several large and elaborate public baths. Bathhouses were built all over the empire, in cities and elsewhere. Baths could be attached to an inn, villa, military camp or farmstead.



Artist's impression of bathhouse
Drawn by Christina Clark



Plan of bathhouse

The Fordcroft bathhouse may have belonged to a local farmstead. A number of sites around St Mary Cray have produced evidence of Romano-British settlement. There was clearly a thriving community on both sides of the River Cray.

When was it discovered?

The structure was originally excavated between 1970 and 1975 by the curator of Orpington museum, who documented it as a bathhouse. In 1993 excavations below Room 1 indicated that the smelting of metals had taken place near the main building. This may indicate a change of use in this area. It was quite common for iron tools to be made in a smithy on Romano-British sites.

During the excavations Roman pottery including mortaria and flagons, loom-weights used in weaving cloth, querns of millstone grit for grinding corn, roof tiles, floor tiles and box flue tiles were found.

Also found were crucibles for bronze working, glass fragments, bronze and iron pins, and coins. There was a cobbled courtyard outside the north side of the building.

Dating the building

The first phase of the bathhouse was originally thought to date to around AD 100, from the pottery found on the site. However, the 1993 excavations suggest that the whole building might be later – possibly constructed around AD 270. The dating of the finds suggests that the building was abandoned around AD 400.

The rooms

The bathhouse building originally had two rooms, the *tepidarium* and *caldarium* (Rooms 2 and 3 on the plan). These would have been the warm and hot rooms, each with a small alcove on the south side which contained a plunge bath. A third room, the *frigidarium* (Room 1 on the plan) was added later as a cold room or changing room.

The bathhouse was made of flint and was roofed with clay tiles. It would have had plaster walls inside.

Part of the under floor heating system – the hypocaust – can still be seen. Wood was burned in the stokehole; the hot air passed under the floor, and up the walls through a cavity system of box flue tiles.

ANGLO-SAXON CEMETERY

After the Romans left Britain in AD 410 people from Northern Europe settled in Britain. ODAS has excavated an Anglo-Saxon hut in Kent Road, quite close to the bathhouse, but on the other side of the River Cray. The hut was part of a small settlement there. The community seems to have buried its dead next to the bathhouse, which probably still survived as a ruin.

How was the cemetery found?

In 1965-1968 the Victorian houses in Poverest Road were demolished to make way for new houses. As Roman pottery had been found in a service trench in Bellefield Road in 1946, an excavation was carried out in the back gardens. This revealed more Roman pottery and the Anglo-Saxon cemetery. In 2007 an excavation in Bellefield Road to install services revealed another grave, just outside the walls of the bathhouse.

About the graves

A total of 84 burials, both inhumation burials and cremations, were excavated on the site. Many graves contained grave goods including pots, swords, shields and jewellery such as coloured beads. The cremations were found in pottery vessels. No graves were found inside the bathhouse.

What date is the cemetery?

The artefacts found in the graves show that the cemetery dates from around AD 450-550.



Plan of cemetery and bathhouse

How can I get involved?

If you are interested in local heritage why not join ODAS? We are a group of volunteers who are currently excavating at Scadbury Moated Manor. We give training, and members can excavate, process finds and engage with the public on open days at both the bathhouse and Scadbury Moated Manor. We have a programme of talks and produce a quarterly newsletter. See the ODAS website for more information at www.odas.org.uk.

Who owns the site?

The site is owned by the London Borough of Bromley and is a Scheduled Monument. Some finds can be seen in the museum at Bromley Central Library.

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FORDCROFT ROMANO-BRITISH BATHHOUSE AND ANGLO-SAXON CEMETERY



View of the bathhouse

www.odas.org.uk

