



Littlecote Roman Villa & Mosaic

Littlecote Roman villa and mosaic is situated in Littlecote Park, west of Chilton Foliat. If driving, the best approach is from the B1492 running between Hungerford and Chilton Foliat. Just south of Chilton Foliat take the side road signed Littlecote House Hotel at the apex of a right-angle bend in the main road. After approximately one mile enter the park through the entrance signed Littlecote House Hotel.

Littlecote House is a Grade 1 Tudor manor with its earlier parts built in the 16th and 17th centuries. It has historical connections with Henry VIII when he was courting Jane Seymour and later with the Civil War. Originally owned by the Popham family, it is now an hotel and open only to residents. The Roman villa and mosaic are sited to the west of Littlecote House and are signed; parking is available.

The Roman villa was initially built in about 60AD near the site of a Roman guard post covering a crossing of the River Kennet. Successively rebuilt and enlarged over the next two centuries, in its heyday it boasted 60 rooms, two thermal baths and a number of mosaic floors and hypocausts. The magnificent surviving mosaic floor was built in the mid 4th century. Its central feature depicts Orpheus, god of the underworld and musician to Apollo. It is thought that this was a homage to a religious cult associated with Apollo and Bacchus which flourished at that time. The quality of the mosaic design and the rarity of its overall configuration, with what would have been three semi-circular apses at one end, make it one of the outstanding Roman mosaics in Britain. It is now protected by a roof and there is a raised viewing platform.

The villa fell into decay around 400, shortly before the Roman evacuation of Britain. The mosaic floor was discovered in 1726 but was then reburied before being rediscovered in 1976. Little remains of the rest of the villa which flanks the Orpheus mosaic and is spread out over a hectare of land, but the pattern of its exterior and internal walls, now marked out by modern low walls, gives a vivid impression of its size. Storyboards provide information on how the villa with its imposingly tall gatehouse would have looked. When the villa was being excavated traces of a medieval village were found, but it appears that the village was later deliberately dismantled prior to the creation of the manor and its demesne in the 16th century.

The villa and its mosaic are open all year round; there is no entry fee. Footpaths in the park surrounding the villa offer attractive walks, especially when the wild flowers are out. There is a wild flower meadow opposite the front of Littlecote House.

From the car park the Orpheus mosaic is reached over about 200 yards of footpaths. The paths are not metalled and are rough in places which may cause difficulties for some wheelchair users. There is a ramp leading up to the viewing platform surrounding the mosaic.