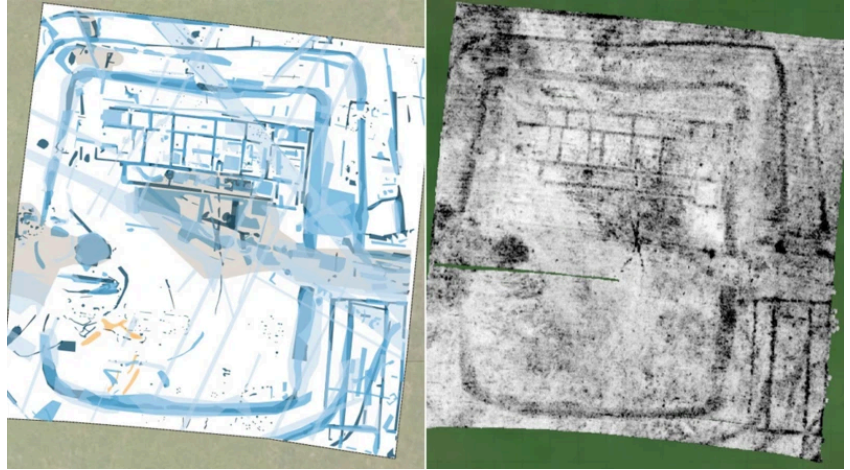


Port Talbot's Pompeii

(Layout of villa, Terredat Geophysics 2026)

In January 2026, BBC Wales published on their website an article about the "Huge Roman villa dubbed Pompeii" that resides under Margam Park in Port Talbot. This is due to the archaeological preservation of the structure. Pompeii is an ancient Roman city that was preserved due to a sudden volcanic eruption from Mount Vesuvius in 79AD that caused the city to be covered in volcanic ash (Britannica Wilhelmina Feemester Jashemski 2026). This created some



tension between archaeologists when it came to connections being made with Pompeii and other archaeological sites (Steffan Messenger 2026/ Alex Langlands). Whilst the majority of archaeological discoveries have been allowed to deteriorate over time, Pompei is described as providing a snapshot of daily life, preserved in ash. The suddenness of the event even cast the people that lived there, making Pompeii an archaeological site of importance.

The remains of the villa in Port Talbot were found less than a meter below the surface. The land had not been ploughed or built on, allowing the preservation of the remains (Steffan Messenger 2026). The BBC article highlights that specialists would be required to "rewrite the way we think about South Wales in the Romano-British period" (Alex Langlands 2026). This shows how important the find of the Villa was because it pushes new ideas of what took place in Wales during the Romano-British period.

The article claimed that the Roman residence is considered to be prestigious and is understood to have been the home of a local dignitary (Alex Langlands/ Steffan Messenger 2026). Swansea university lecturer Alex Langlands told the BBC that there is evidence the villa is decorated with mosaic flooring and statues. This was commonplace in ancient Roman homes, where the mosaics would range from simple geometrical shapes to more complex designs that often featured mythical beings, people of power or a blend of the two (Ian Lockey 2009). This Roman villa is said to have a 572 sq meter footprint, (Steffan Messenger 2026) thus making it one of the largest archaeological sites found in Wales. (Swansea university students helping to excavate the site 2026)

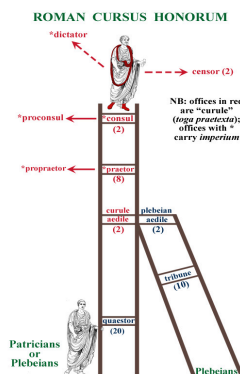


During the excavation project, many people that did not have archaeological experience were given the opportunity to provide assistance in discovering the remains of the Roman villa. This allowed for this archaeological site to have an expanded view from the people of Wales due to the fact

that they allowed others to have a chance at seeing and taking part in the excavation of one of the most important finds in Wales. It also allowed for the Roman villa to become a widespread discovery due to it being mentioned on the BBC and an event was set up to showcase the findings of the ongoing excavation. This enabled them to expand on any details that had already been released as well as revealing any new information. According to ArchaeoMargam, they were able to provide over 900 hands-on archaeological experiences. This opportunity was given to a range of people including school pupils, university students as well as archaeological clubs in Wales. Allowing the public access to such an important discovery will increase interest in archaeology and give a sense of ownership to the site, something which may prove useful in the future, particularly if funding is required.

Alongside traditional methods of archaeology discovery, the site allowed for the use of more modern technological means. The article refers to the use of radar to support understanding of the remains without having to disturb the ground. Ground penetrating radar can be used to locate archaeological features under a wide range of surfaces. This would be useful in the Margam Park exploration as the grounds are well maintained and have sites of already understood historical significance. By using radar, it enables the archaeologist to understand the depth of the remains making it easier to plan for any future digs (Archaeological surveys). This can reduce the damage and cost that a dig may cause. The advertising of the villa could lead to more interest in Margam Park and have a positive impact on its historical value.

(Cursus Honorum Roman Government)



Whilst the site has not been fully explored, it is already changing how Wales understands the part it played in Roman history. Welsh remains had previously been of military camps and forts but this villa reveals that there was a deeper degree of Roman governance than first believed (Steffan Messenger 2026). The article does not tell us who might have lived in the villa, only that it belonged to a dignitary. It remains to be seen where the occupants sat in the Cursus Honorum but they could be from the Proconsul, Consul or the Praetor. These would be a part of the highest classes of the Roman governance outside of the Emperor.

It is possible that the discovery will give a greater understanding of life in the first to fourth centuries and potentially the fifth century as well (Steffan Messenger 2026). The fact that it has been discovered in Wales will potentially increase our understanding of Roman and Welsh life. Margam Park is home to other historical buildings but the discovery of the villa has led to conversations about whether or not it has given its name to the counties of Glamorganshire (Steffan Messenger 2026). This is likely the case, depending on the inhabitants of the villa. This may move the historical place of power to Port Talbot, presumably leading to more archaeological discoveries and a better understanding of Welsh history.

Port Talbot has been through some recent negative changes due to the majority of the steelworks closing, thus resulting in many people losing their jobs (Steffan Messenger 2026). However, it is positive that archaeologists have been able to find something that members of the public can become involved in and feel positive about. The use of technology alongside an understanding of history has led to this discovery, which will hopefully reveal its secrets for years to come.

Bibliography

Steffan Messenger (2026) Huge Roman villa found under popular park dubbed town's "Pompeii" Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cgk8j1gkxelo>

ArchaeoMargam (2026) ArchaeoMargam Open Day Celebrates Landmark Discovery of Roman Villa Beneath Margam Abbey Landscape Available at: <https://www.churchinwales.org.uk/en/news-and-events/archaeomargam-open-day-celebrates-landmark-discovery-of-roman-villa-beneath-margam-abbey-landscape/>

Wilhelmina Feemester Jashemski (2026) Pompeii Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Pompeii>

Archaeological Surveys (year not mentioned) Ground penetrating radar Available at: <https://www.archaeological-surveys.co.uk/29/Ground-penetrating-radar/>

Ian Lockey (2009) Roman Housing Available at: <https://www.metmuseum.org/essays/roman-housing>