

back towards the nets. The actual chasing was often left to slaves and dogs, while the hunter contented himself with waiting at the nets and spearing the boar or deer when it had become thoroughly entangled. Pliny, for example, in reporting a successful expedition on which he caught three boars, says that he took his stilus and writing-tablets with him to the hunt and jotted down ideas under the inspiration of the woodland scene while he waited for the boars to appear. But although Pliny's description of hunting is a very peaceful one, the sport still had its dangers: a cornered boar might turn on its pursuers, and a hunter who was slow with his spear might be gashed severely, even fatally.

Country pursuits

The hunter (bottom left) has been gored by the cornered boar.



Country pursuits

Fishing also seems to have been popular, and could easily be combined with rowing or sailing, either on the sea (in the bay of Naples, for example) or on such lakes as the Lucrine lake, famous for its fish and its oysters. A lazier method of fishing is described by Martial, who refers to a villa with a bedroom directly overlooking the sea, so that the occupant could drop a fishing-line from the window and catch a fish without even getting out of bed.



People with fishing rods (left and centre) in a Pompeian painting of a seaside villa.

Some of Pliny's letters describe his daily routine at his country villas. He spent most of his time in gentle exercise (walking, riding or occasionally hunting), working on a speech or other piece of writing, dealing with his tenant-farmers (**colōni**), entertaining friends, dining, or listening to a reading or to music. He often spent part of the afternoon reading a Greek or Latin speech aloud 'for the sake of both voice and digestion'. (Pliny often spoke in the law courts and the senate, and he was naturally anxious to keep his voice in good trim.)

The economy of the villa

A country villa of this kind, however, was not just for vacation relaxation: it was an important investment.



Often there was a farm attached to the house, and the property would usually

include an extensive area of land which the owner might farm himself or lease to tenant-farmers. In the ancient world, by far the commonest way of investing money was to buy land.



land. It is not surprising that many of Pliny's letters deal with the day-to-day problems of land management. He agonises over whether to buy a neighbouring piece of land, fertile and conveniently situated but long neglected; he asks the emperor to excuse him from Rome so that he can be on one of his estates at a time when the tenancy is changing hands; and when his tenants get into difficulties and are heavily in debt, he arranges for them to pay their rent with part of their crops rather than in cash.



He likes to



present himself as an ignorant amateur with no interest in the running of his villas, but some of his comments give the impression that he was in fact enthusiastic, practical and shrewd. One of his villas brought him an income of 400,000 sesterces a year. If you compare this with the annual pay of a centurion – about 6,000 sesterces a year – and remember that Pliny owned other villas and property, you can see that he was a very successful landowner.

Tenants paying their rent.



Tenants paying their rent.



British farms

The first picture below shows the kind of British farm that the Romans found when they came to Britain. Many such farms continued to exist during the Roman occupation, but some British farmers rebuilt their farm buildings in the Roman style. The second picture shows the same farm after it was 'Romanised'. Study the pictures and answer the questions.



- 1 You are a British farmer. Why have you rebuilt your house in the Roman style?
- 2 What changes have you made to the building?
- 3 How much has your farming changed?
- 4 What has stayed the same?
- 5 What does the farm provide for you and your family?
- 6 What would you still need to buy which you could not produce?

Home task

L.O: to identify and explain the key features of a Roman countryside villa and country pursuits available

- Using your knowledge of countryside villas in Italy and Roman Britain, sell your own Roman countryside residence!
- Good if: you include an overview of the layout of the building and the rooms
- Better if: you describe the layout and rooms in detail, including information about decoration
- Best if: you explain how the villa was suited for living a luxurious and comfortable lifestyle

Location of the plot	Location of the plot
Accommodation	Decorative and landscaping
Garden	Other