

## Old Collections, New Questions

### Undergraduate & Masters projects based on the Yorkshire Museum's Roman Collections

The following represents a series of possible research projects based upon the collections of the Yorkshire Museum. The Museum has recently completed a project to identify the research potential of its Roman collections, and the below represent discrete projects which it might be possible to complete within the scope of an Undergraduate or MA dissertation. You can read more about the collection in general, and possible research projects at <https://www.yorkshireremuseum.org.uk/old-collections-new-questions/>.

Staff at the museum would be more than happy to discuss any of the below, as well as other possible projects based on the nationally-important archaeological collections of the Yorkshire Museum. In the first instance please contact Lucy Creighton, Curator of Archaeology via [enquiries@ymt.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ymt.org.uk).

#### **1. Petrology (Monumental sculpture)**

The Yorkshire Museum has a large and important collection of stone monuments and sculpture including funerary monuments, inscription tablets, altars, architectural fragments and statues. Although much of this collection is published and has been studied from a stylistic perspective, minimal research has been undertaken on the source of stone. A project that utilises scientific techniques to identify and provenance the stone for part of the collection has the potential to explore themes such as choice of and access to materials, trade networks and craftspersonship in Roman York.

See:

Blagg, T. F. C. 1995. 'Roman architectural and sculptured stonework', in Phillips, D. and Heywood, B., *Excavations at York Minster, Volume 1: From Roman Fortress to Norman Cathedral*. pp.223-45.

RCHME. 1962. *Eboracum: Roman York (An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of York, Volume I)*. London, HMSO.

Tufi, S. R. 1983. *Corpus Signorum Imperii Romani (Corpus of Sculpture of the Roman World) Great Britain, 1, fasc. 3, Yorkshire*.

#### **2. Marble Provenance**

Within the Yorkshire Museum there is a discrete collection of four sculptural fragments from Roman York. These include a small figurine of a youthful athlete and the twice-life sized head of a statue of Constantine the Great. The statue of Constantine is the only such depiction of an Emperor known from Roman Britain. There are opportunities to research the use and crafting of this material in York, Yorkshire, and beyond and, specifically, to establish an original source for the marble which may help us to understand *Eboracum's* trade links across Britain and the Empire.

See:

RCHME. 1962. *Eboracum: Roman York (An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of York, Volume I)*. London, HMSO. pp112.

Russell, M. 2018. 'Facing up to Constantine: Reassessing the Stonegate Monumental Head from York', *Britannia* 49.

### **3. Imperial Presence (Severans)**

Between AD 208 and AD 211 the Roman emperor Septimius Severus ruled the Roman Empire from York while carrying out military campaigns in Scotland. He lived in York with his wife, Julia Domna, and children, Caracalla and Geta, who would later also become emperors. Severus died in York in February AD 211 and was cremated here. The Yorkshire Museum's archaeological and numismatic collections offer an excellent opportunity to investigate the impact of the presence of the Severan imperial family in York and the region. A project of this kind would involve analysis of Severan coinage in the region (including individual finds and the recently acquired Overton Hoard) and Severan influences on York and Yorkshire's material culture as reflected by, for example, women's fashions, evidence of Eastern cult worship, and the use and production of head pots.

See:

Swan, V. G. and Monaghan, J. 1993. 'Head pots: a North African tradition in Roman York', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 65. pp.21-38.

Braithwaite, G. 1984. 'Romano-British face pots and head pots', *Britannia* 15. pp.99-131.

Robertson, A. S., 2000. *An Inventory of Romano-British Coin Hoards* (Royal Numismatic Society Special Publication 20). London.

### **4. Imperial Presence (Constantius and Constantine I)**

Constantius I visited York during military campaigns in the north. He died and was cremated in the city in July AD 306. His son, Constantine I, was acclaimed emperor by the Sixth Legion in York. Material evidence for the presence of these emperors in the city is almost non-existent, except for a marble head considered to depict Constantine. The Yorkshire Museum's archaeological and numismatic collections offer an excellent opportunity to investigate the impact of the presence of Constantius and Constantine I in York and the region. A project of this kind would involve analysis of Constantinian coinage in the region (including individual finds and the recently acquired Wold Newton Hoard) and archaeological evidence for this imperial presence such as the marble Head of Constantine sculpture.

See:

Cloke, H. and Toone, L. 2015. *The London Mint of Constantius and Constantine*, London.

Hartley, E., Hawkes, J., Henig, M. and Mee, F. (eds) 2006. *Constantine the Great: York's Roman Emperor*. York, York Museums and Gallery Trust.

RCHME. 1962. *Eboracum: Roman York* (An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of York, Volume I). London, HMSO.

### **5. Railway Excavations**

The construction of York's railway station in the later 19<sup>th</sup> century resulted in what is probably the largest excavation of a Roman site in York, covering a huge cemetery area to the south and south west of the modern city. Hundreds of graves are known from the site, including some of the best evidence for high status burials in huge stone sarcophagi. Despite the clear importance of this site, our modern understanding of it is somewhat limited. There are opportunities within the archaeological and numismatic collections of the Yorkshire Museum, enhanced by the documentary archive, to holistically analyse all or part of this large material collection. Specific research projects may involve: investigating the nature of the burials in this area; reconstructing and reinterpreting grave groups that may have become dispersed; comparing this cemetery site to the others in York and beyond; undertaking modern scientific analyses of the skeletal remains

(e.g. stable isotopes, aDNA); to better understand individual biographies within this large assemblage.

See:

RCHME. 1962. *Eboracum: Roman York (An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of York, Volume I)*. London, HMSO. pp.77-92.

Philpot, R. 1991. *Burial Practices in Roman Britain: A Survey of Grave Treatment and Furnishing AD 43-410* (BAR British Series 219). Oxford, British Archaeological Reports.

## **6. Blake Street Animal Remains**

The collections of the Yorkshire Museum contain large quantities of animal bone excavated from Roman, or probable, Roman contexts within York. Animal bone from Roman York has not been extensively studied, the only large groups published being those from the Minster excavations in the fortress and from the civilian settlement south-west of the Ouse at 24-30 Tanner Row with a smaller group from the Roman well at Skeldergate.

The largest and best recorded assemblages in the museum's collection are those from 9 Blake Street (YORYM : 1975.6) and 59 Skeldergate (YORYM : 1975.14) both excavated by York Archaeological Trust. These assemblages warrant further research, although at present it is not clear how much well-stratified material of Roman date there is. A project could involve a systematic review of the fieldwork records and the published site reports to assess the research potential of the remains, followed by the quantification and identification of the relevant remains.

The study of this material by a student interested in zooarchaeology has the potential to make a useful contribution to our understanding of such themes as animal husbandry, diet and butchery in Roman York.

See:

O'Connor, T. P. 1984. *Selected Groups of Bone from Skeldergate and Walmgate* (Archaeology of York 15/1). York, Council for British Archaeology.

O'Connor, T. P. 1988. *Bones from the General Accident Site, Tanner Row* (Archaeology of York 15/2). York, Council for British Archaeology.

Rackham, D. J. 1995. 'Animal bone from post-Roman contexts', in Phillips, D. and Heywood, B., *Excavations at York Minster, Volume 1: From Roman Fortress to Norman Cathedral*. pp.533-58.

O'Connor, T. P. 2003. *The Analysis of Urban Animal Bone Assemblages: a handbook for archaeologists* (Archaeology of York 19/2). York, Council for British Archaeology.

## **7. Investigating Ebor Ware through Ceramic Petrology**

It is well known that a Roman earthenware known generically as 'Ebor ware' was produced locally at York, whether immediately outside the fortress in the Peaseholm Green area or at Appletree Farm, Heworth. However, many aspects of its production and distribution are uncertain. Through a research project utilising scientific methods such as ceramic petrology and chemical analysis of Ebor ware vessel and wasters, the following questions could be addressed:

- How controlled was the firing process? What sort of temperatures were achieved and what extent of variability existed in the kiln atmosphere?
- Are all so-called Ebor wares in fact from York? Can Peaseholm Green and Heworth wares be reliably distinguished from each?

- How far from York was Ebor ware distributed?

One way of approaching such questions would be by selective thin sectioning, petrography and chemical analysis of Ebor Ware vessels and wasters; there are a number of the latter from the Borthwick Institute excavations of 1970 (King 1975). In addition, clay could be recovered from the kiln sites for investigation.

See:

Monaghan, J. 1997. *Roman Pottery from York* (Archaeology of York 16/8). York, Council for British Archaeology.

Historic England. 2015. *Archaeological and Historical Pottery Production Sites: Guidelines for Best Practice*. Available: <https://content.historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/archaeological-and-historic-pottery-production-sites/heag019-pottery-production-sites.pdf/>

## **8. Knaresborough Vessel Hoard**

A group of 27 copper alloy vessels in the collections of the Yorkshire Museum, discovered near Knaresborough in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and known as the Knaresborough Hoard (YORYM : H144), is available for research purposes. This largely unpublished hoard presents an interesting opportunity to investigate topics such as craftsmanship in Roman metalworking, the use and structured deposition of metal vessels in Roman Britain, or how metallurgical analysis can improve our understanding of the hoard. There is also potential to attempt to trace missing parts of the hoard, which might have been acquired by other museums.

See:

Eggers, H. 1966. 'Römische Bronzegefäße in Britannien', *Jahrbuch des Römisch-Germanischen Zentral Museums, Mainz 13, Jahrgang 1966*. pp.67-164.

Gerrard, J. 2009. 'The Draper's Garden hoard: a preliminary account', *Britannia* 40. pp.163-83.

## **9. Fremington Hagg Hoard**

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century a donation of a group of first-century Roman horse fittings from Fremington Hagg, near Reeth in North Yorkshire was donated to the Yorkshire Museum. This group, of which other parts are in the British Museum, has been catalogued and interpreted in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Recent investigations have identified non-Roman objects associated with this group and the Museum's understanding of the assemblage may be improved through a reanalysis of the objects. This analysis, which could incorporate modern scientific techniques, would help answer key questions regarding its provenance, the circumstances of its discovery and donation, and its subsequent treatment within the museum collections and the academic community.

See:

Webster, G. 1971. 'A hoard of Roman military equipment from Fremington Hagg', in Butler, R. M. *Soldier and Civilian in Roman Yorkshire*. Leicester. pp.107-26.

Craddock, P. T., Lang, J., and Painter, K. S. 1973. 'Roman Horse-trapping from Fremington Hagg, Reeth, Yorkshire, N. R.', *British Museum Quarterly* 37 (1/2). pp.9-17.

## **10. Binnington Carr Hoard**

The Binnington Carr hoard is composed of 12 silver *denarii*, placed within a bronze bell. It was found in 1875 near Scarborough, in close proximity to the route between York and the Coast. The latest coin in the hoard dates to AD 76, making it one of the earliest coin hoards found in Yorkshire. The hoard has never been fully published despite its very early date and the unique circumstances of its discovery within a bell. Research could focus on the nature of deposition within the bell, its landscape context and possible connections to the first phase of the military in Yorkshire. There might also be questions in terms of connections between Roman military and indigenous populations.

See:

Robertson, A.S., 2000. *An Inventory of Romano-British Coin Hoards*. London, Royal Numismatic Society. no. 74.

## **11. Blake Street Hoard**

The Blake Street hoard of 35 silver *denarii* was found during the course of archaeological investigations within the fortress of York in the 1970s. Its numismatic dating would suggest a deposit in the first generation of Roman activity in York, with the latest coin dating to AD 74. However, this is difficult to reconcile with its stratigraphic dating which suggests a date much later. The hoard has never been fully published. Reconciling the deposition context with the contents of the hoard could allow analysis of the nature of hoarding within a fortress. The hoard might be seen to represent a foundational deposited, conceivably hidden and then reburied. Beyond the micro contextual analysis it also offers potential to investigate coinage in the first phase of military occupation of the North.

See:

Hall, R. A. 1997. *Excavations in the Praetentura: 9 Blake Street* (Archaeology of York 3/4). York, Council for British Archaeology.

Robertson, A. S. 2000. *An Inventory of Romano-British Coin Hoards*. London, Royal Numismatic Society. no. 57.

## **12. Heslington Hoard**

The Heslington Hoard is a mid-4<sup>th</sup> century AD hoard of 2,795 copper alloy *nummi*. It was found in 1966 during the construction of the University of York's Alcuin College. Over half of the hoard is made up of contemporary copies of official Roman coinage, which have not been studied in detail, and there are 279 overstruck coins. Research into this hoard could shed light on the production, distribution, and use of contemporary copies on the mid-4<sup>th</sup> century AD. Die-linked coinage among the copies suggests possible local production and small scale metallurgical analysis has been undertaken to investigate this question further. Larger scale scientific analysis could be of significant interest.

See:

Carson, R. A. G. and Kent, J. P. C. 1971. 'A Hoard of Roman Fourth-Century Bronze Coins from Heslington, Yorkshire', *Numismatic Chronicle*. pp.207-225.

Boon, G. 1988. 'Counterfeit coins in Roman Britain' in Casey, J. and Reece, R. (eds) *Coins and the Archaeologist*. London, Seaby.

## **13. Siliquae Hoards**

There are a number of very late Roman coin hoards within the collection, containing a mix of silver, gold and possibly bronze. Hoards from Cattal, Wetherby and Thirsk were deposited late in

the fourth century and, possibly, in the early part of the fifth century. The hoards are not all fully published nor is the chronology of their deposition understood. Their place within broader patterns of coin circulation at the end of the Roman Empire, where clear concentrations of coinage can be seen around York, are not understood. Projects could focus on the nature of coin use at the end of empire in a regional perspective and/or potential continuity into the fifth century.

See:

Barclay, C. 1997. 'Cattal, North Yorkshire' in *Coin Hoards from Roman Britain X*, (London, 1997), pp.424-425.

Bland, R. and Loriot, X. 2010. *Roman and Early Byzantine Gold Coins found in Britain and Ireland*. London. p.273.

Portable Antiquities Scheme. SWYOR-3COEF4. Available:  
<https://finds.org.uk/database/artefacts/record/id/501560>