



# EBORACUM ROMAN FESTIVAL

## SCHOOLS PACK



Marching with the Legions in York Museum Gardens. © Photo by Gareth Buddo, courtesy of York Museums Trust.

**Image:** The head of the Emperor Constantine in the Yorkshire Museum.  
© York Museums Trust.



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**Image:** Exploring the Roman collections at the Yorkshire Museum.  
© Photo by Gareth Buddo, courtesy of York Museums Trust.



## SECTION ONE

# Eboracum Roman Festival 2025

The Eboracum Roman Festival 2025 aims to bring Roman York to life through an exciting programme of talks, living history, family activities and resources for primary schools.

This year's schools offer is being delivered by the Yorkshire Museum, in partnership with York Minster and York Archaeology.

### JOIN US IN PERSON FOR OUR TEACHERS' CPD EVENT

Where: **Yorkshire Museum**  
Date: **Thursday 15 May 2025**  
Time: **4pm–6pm**  
Cost: **Free, booking essential**

Enjoy a tour of the Yorkshire Museum's Roman galleries, handle original artefacts, and find out about the exciting Roman-themed activities and resources being offered at the Yorkshire Museum, York Minster and York Archaeology.

### BROWSE OUR DIGITAL RESOURCES!

As well as our **Eboracum Roman Festival 2025 Schools Pack**, don't miss our 'Introducing Roman York' [video](#), which is the perfect way to share the story of Roman York with your pupils.

### HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Visit our [website](#) for more information about our exciting online resources, and how to book your place at our Teachers' CPD event at the Yorkshire Museum.

Alternatively, contact the Schools Learning Team at York Museums Trust by emailing [schools@ymt.org.uk](mailto:schools@ymt.org.uk).

# SECTION TWO

## How to use this resource

The Eboracum Roman Festival Schools pack is designed to help you and your pupils engage with the story of Roman York.

It contains:

- An introduction to the history of Roman York.
- Three classroom activities which have been created by learning staff from the Yorkshire Museum, York Minster and York Archaeology. Each classroom activity focuses on objects which can tell us important stories about life in Roman York.
- Information about the Yorkshire Museum, York Minster and York Archaeology and how we can enrich your Roman history topic through our sites, resources and led activities.
- A link to an [evaluation form](#) which you can use to let us know how useful you found this Schools Pack. The first ten respondents will receive a **£10 gift voucher** as a thank you from us.

### CURRICULUM LINKS

The activities in this Schools Pack can be used to cover the following curriculum areas:

#### *Key Stage Two – History*

Pupils should be taught about:

- The Roman Empire and its impact on Britain.

This could include:

- ‘Romanisation’ of Britain: the impact of technology, culture and beliefs, including early Christianity.
- A local history study.

# SECTION THREE

## Introduction to Roman York

### THE ORIGINS OF ROMAN YORK

- The Roman Army arrived in the North of Britain in AD 71. Northern Britain, as far as the Scottish Lowlands, was inhabited by the **Brigantes**. The Brigantes were ruled by **Queen Cartimandua** who favoured good relations with Rome. Her husband **Venutius**, however, wanted to resist the Romans and launched a rebellion against his wife.
- The **Ninth Legion** was sent from Lincoln to support Cartimandua. To control the area, the legion built a **fortress** between the **Rivers Ouse and Foss**.
- A **civilian** settlement grew up around the fortress, which supplied the soldiers with food and goods. This grew into a more developed town with **baths** and, possibly, an **amphitheatre** for gladiatorial games.
- The Romans called this settlement **Eboracum**. This may have come from a British word meaning 'the place of the yew trees'.
- When the **emperor Caracalla** (AD 198–217) divided Britain into two regions, Eboracum became the **provincial capital** of the North of Britain (*Britannia Inferior*).

### ROMANISATION

- For the Romans, **Eboracum** was at the very edge of their empire – an empire that stretched from **Britain** in the northwest, down to **Egypt** in the southeast. Despite this, **people, fashions, pastimes and beliefs** from across the Roman Empire found their way to York. A good example of this is the **Four Seasons Mosaic** which can be found at the **Yorkshire Museum** ([Activity One](#)). Mosaics were artworks made by specialist artists which wealthy Romans throughout the empire used to decorate their homes.



**Image:** The gravestone of a Roman soldier at the Yorkshire Museum.  
© York Museums Trust.

## CHRISTIANITY

- Buried beneath **York Minster** are the remains of the **Principia**, the building at the heart of the Roman Empire in York. In that building, **Constantine the Great** was raised to **Emperor** by his men, going on to become one of the most important figures of his time. Hidden in the ruin of the Principia was a roof tile marked with the Chi-Rho, a symbol that represented Christianity, the rising faith of the Roman Empire. In **Activity Two** see how Constantine the Great was converted to Christianity and why his men went into battle with the Chi-Ro symbol emblazoned on their shields.

## DAILY LIFE

- Eboracum had a growing population, and these people needed a ready supply of food, equipment and building materials. We know that several **workshops, potteries** and **docks** were serving the city and the **farms** in the surrounding countryside supplied crops and animal products.
- Great **grain warehouses** on the river ensured a good supply of flour and local butchers prepared fresh cuts of meat and more unusual delicacies for the residents. All this activity left behind a lot of archaeological evidence that can be used to learn more about Roman mealtimes in the city (**Activity Three**).

## THE EVIDENCE FOR STUDYING ROMAN YORK

- **Written sources** of information about the Romans survive in texts such as personal letters, literature, histories, philosophy and legal and

governmental records, although there are fewer surviving texts relating to events from Roman Britain than other parts of the Roman Empire.

- **Archaeological evidence** helps to fill in some of the gaps not currently covered in the written record. Occasionally, Roman **building remains** are still clearly visible above ground, but the remains of stone, brick and occasionally wooden structures have also been uncovered. Archaeologists might also find preserved objects such as **jewellery, pottery, tools, food waste, toys** and **weapons** that have been lost, buried or thrown away. York is a special place to study Roman archaeology because not only was it an important Roman settlement, but it has some fantastic conditions for preserving archaeological finds buried deep in the soil.
- **Pottery fragments** are a common find and occur in different forms, which can help to work out the **date range** of different sites producing similar pots. **Coins** can also help to date finds, as they often feature the name of a ruler and identifying details. This information can be compared with what we know from the historical record and other coins.
- **Cemetery sites** can provide a range of evidence of how people lived and died. For a settlement as large as Eboracum, there were many cemeteries, and these have been studied in detail by archaeologists. Analysis of human skeletons can give clues to living conditions and health, whilst the graves themselves give useful clues about how the Romans treated their dead.

**Image:** The Four Seasons Mosaic at the Yorkshire Museum.  
© York Museums Trust.



## SECTION FOUR

### Activity One – The Four Seasons Mosaic

**The BIG question:** How did the Romans change everyday life in Britain?

#### KEY INFORMATION

- The Romans brought new fashions and ideas to Britain. One of these was the use of **mosaics** to decorate homes and public buildings. This mosaic was discovered by archaeologists in the remains of a Roman house found in York.
- Roman mosaics commonly showed images from **history, myth** and **everyday life**. The four figures on this mosaic are gods that each represent one of the **four seasons**.

**Spring** is symbolised by a small bird (a swallow), **summer** by grapes, **autumn** by a rake, and **winter** by a bare branch. We think that the central panel once showed the head of **Medusa** – a mythical figure, with snakes instead of hair, who turned anyone who looked directly at her to stone. The Romans thought the face of Medusa provided **protection**. For example, we know that Romans wore **pendants** made from **jet** (a black gemstone made from fossilised wood) with the face of Medusa on to protect them from **evil spirits**.

- Mosaics were created by specialist **artists** who used small squares, known as **tesserae**, made of different coloured materials to create a picture or pattern. This mosaic has been made using white limestone, red brick, and black stone. Mosaic artists travelled the Roman empire looking for work. As such, it is possible that the person who created this mosaic travelled to Britain from overseas.
- Mosaics were **expensive** to make and would only be found in the homes of **wealthy** people or important **public buildings**. Two other mosaics were found in the house in which the Four Seasons Mosaic was discovered. We therefore think it must have been the home of someone important. One theory is that this was the residence of the governor of the province of **Britannia Inferior**. We know that when the **emperor Caracalla** (AD 198–217) divided Britain into two regions, Eboracum became the **provincial capital** of the North of Britain. The governor of the new province would have needed a fancy place to live!
- The Four Seasons Mosaic is now on display in the **Yorkshire Museum** – you can **even walk across** it if you take your shoes off first!

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR SCHOOLS

Below are details of some activities you may wish to complete with your pupils. These can be used to learn more about the Four Seasons Mosaic and some of the other fashions and ideas that the Romans brought to Britain.

1. **The Four Seasons Mosaic – Object Investigation.** The aim of this activity is to encourage pupils to think like archaeologists and consider how we can use objects to learn about the past. Instructions and resources for completing this activity can be found [here](#).
2. **Mosaic Makers!** The aim of this activity is for pupils to use examples of Roman mosaics in the Yorkshire Museum as inspiration for creating their own artworks. Instructions and resources for completing this activity can be found [here](#).
3. **Fashions, Beliefs and Pastimes.** The aim of this activity is to encourage pupils to think about how life in Britain changed under the Romans. Instructions and resources for completing this activity can be found [here](#).

## USEFUL RESOURCES

- A 3D scan of the Four Seasons Mosaic, which you can show your pupils using your classroom whiteboard, can be found [here](#).
- For hi-res images of the Four Seasons Mosaic, and some of the other objects which are mentioned in the three activities, please download our [Four Seasons Mosaic Slide Deck](#).



# SECTION FIVE

## Activity Two – The Chi Rho Symbol

**The BIG question:** How did the Chi-Rho symbol change the course of history?

### KEY INFORMATION

When the Roman army came to the North of Britain, they settled in what would later become York and built a fortress there in AD 71. Their Principia, or headquarters was built on the site of the present-day York Minster. We know this because during the late 1960s, the foundations of the Minster were excavated and strengthened when it was structurally in danger, and this became known as the 'Great Dig'. Exciting Roman artefacts were discovered at this time, some of which can now be seen in York Minster's Undercroft Museum. They include among other things, a Roman column, wall paintings, a drain, coins and the Chi-Rho tile.

### THE CHI-RHO

The Chi-Rho is made from the first two Greek letters for the word Christ. It became an early Christian symbol and was adopted by the Emperor Constantine after his conversion to Christianity in AD 312.

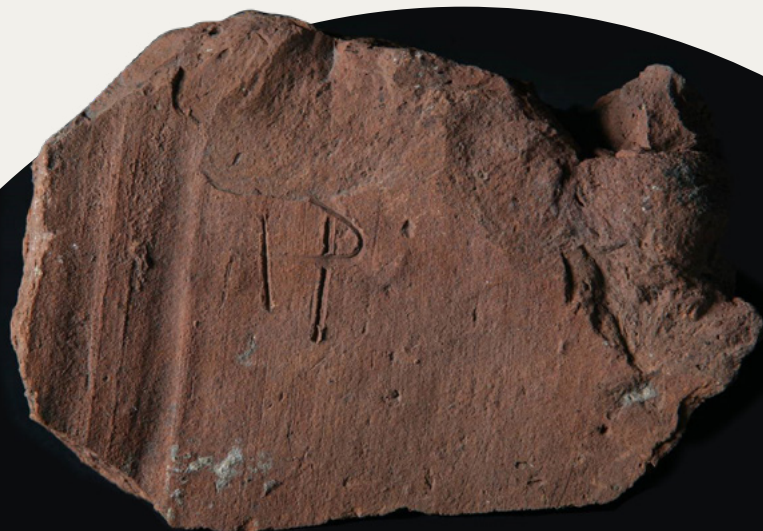
### LATIN VERSUS GREEK

Although Latin was the official language of the Roman Empire, Greek was also spoken by many people. It is likely that Constantine would have known some Greek and his mother Helena came from a Greek speaking part of the Roman Empire.

### THE CHI-RHO TILE

The Chi-Rho symbol was found scratched onto a piece of Roman roof tile that was discovered below York Minster in the 'Great Dig'. The York Minster tile is possibly a very simple, early example of the symbol being used before Christianity was accepted in the Roman Empire. It was marked in the tile from right to left with just three strokes, probably before being fired. The mark on the tile is called a graffito (the singular of graffiti).

**Image:** The Chi-Rho symbol at York Minster.  
© Chapter of York.



## THE CHI-RHO AND CONSTANTINE

The Emperor Constantine is connected to both York and to the Chi-Rho symbol. He was declared Emperor when he was in York following the death of his father in AD 306. He later became a Christian after seeing a vision of the Chi-Rho symbol and this eventually changed the face of religion in the Roman Empire.

### CONSTANTINE'S VISION

In the story of Constantine's conversion, he saw a light shining in the sky with the symbol of the Chi-Rho. That night he saw the symbol again in a dream and heard the words 'By this conquer'. Consequently, he had the symbol painted on the shields of his soldiers and created a Standard (Labarum) of the Chi-Rho to be carried into battle. He used this before the important battle of Milvian Bridge in AD 312 where he was fighting his brother-in-law Maxentius for control of the empire. Constantine's army won the battle, and he credited Christ with the victory.

Following this experience, Constantine became a Christian and in AD 313 issued the Edict of Milan, granting toleration to all religions. This was important for Christians because prior to this they had at times been persecuted by previous emperors. By AD 380, the Roman Empire adopted Christianity as the official religion and it was the minor religions and cults that then faced persecution.

Emperor Constantine used the Chi-Rho symbol on his shields and coinage after his conversion and it was used as a Christian symbol for many centuries to come, on tomb stones, mosaics, cups, tiles and manuscripts for example.

## OTHER EARLY CHRISTIAN SYMBOLS

Another example of an early Christian symbol was the ICTHUS (ΙΧΘΥΣ) which was often written within the shape of a fish. Ichthus means fish in Greek, and it is also an acrostic with the Greek letters representing the words 'Jesus Christ God's Son Saviour'. It is thought Christians would use this secret symbol to identify themselves to other believers at times of persecution.

### SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR SCHOOLS

1. Act out the story of Constantine's conversion in a role play.
2. Decode a secret message using the Greek alphabet and then create your own coded message for a friend.
3. Design a Roman shield and illustrate it with the Chi-Rho symbol.
4. Hold a philosophical debate – how would life be different if Constantine had not converted to Christianity?
5. Research further information on the York Minster 'Great Dig' of 1967. Find out what Christianity was like in Roman times. Why were early Christians often secretive about their religion?
6. Visit York Minster to see the Undercroft Museum and find out more about the Roman Principia that existed on this site.

More information and a pupil's activity sheet can be downloaded [here](#).

**Image:** The remains of Roman pottery in a newly dug archaeological trench.  
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## SECTION SIX

### Activity Three – Reconstructing Diet through Archaeology

**The BIG question:** What was on the menu in Roman York?

#### KEY INFORMATION

- There are lots of ways to learn more about what happened in the Roman past, including **archaeology**. Archaeology is the study of people from the past, and is based on finding, interpreting and studying the materials these people left behind. This **evidence** can be anything, including the remains of buildings, belongings, rubbish and even toilets!
- Archaeology is a useful tool for studying food sources and cooking methods in Roman York. We can reconstruct ideas about people's diets from lots of different types of evidence, such as **environmental remains, cooking tools and pottery** from the period. Even the tiniest particles of preserved food debris can be very useful to **archaeological scientists** wanting to learn more about Roman diets.

- **Written sources** can also be helpful when learning about the Roman diet. Roman writers produced recipes, reference guides, inventories and even poems that mention farming, cooking and eating. From these, we learn the Roman words for foods, meals and even some of their cooking utensils! Most of these texts were written elsewhere in the Empire though, so if we want to learn more about diets in Roman Britain, we are more reliant on archaeological finds.

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR SCHOOLS

Below are details of some activities you may wish to complete with your students in the classroom. These can be used to learn more about the archaeological evidence for food preparation in Roman York and can help them to develop their own interpretations.

1. **What's on the Menu? – Examining Evidence:** The aim of this activity is to encourage students to think like archaeologists and consider what kinds of evidence from Roman mealtimes might be discovered in an excavation. Instructions and resources for completing this activity can be found [here](#).
2. **What's on the Menu? – Potty for Pots:** The aim of this activity is to encourage students to consider how Roman pottery gives us clues about cooking and eating in Roman times. Instructions and resources for completing this activity can be found [here](#).
3. **What's on the Menu? – Secrets of the Soil:** The aim of this activity is to introduce students to the

interpretation of soil sampling to find further archaeological evidence that we can use to learn about Roman mealtimes. Instructions and resources for completing this activity can be found [here](#).

For hi-res images of the different types of archaeological evidence, and other prompts for completing the three activities, please download our [What's on the Menu? Slide Deck](#).

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

After completing the three activities and considering the big question, you may wish to encourage your students to apply their knowledge to the following extension activities:

- Reconstruct a pot – Some of the pots shown on the Pottery Sorting Cards are only parts of a larger pot. You may want to ask your students to choose one and draw what they thought the pot might have looked like when it was whole.
- Design a Roman table setting – using what you have learned about Roman food sources and tableware, draw or collage a Roman dinner plate featuring foods fit for a banquet!
- Make a Roman recipe – why not try making your own version of a Roman recipe? Many historical sources give a recipe for moretum, a herby cheese paste, a little like modern pesto. The basic ingredients are a soft cheese pounded together with garlic and fresh herbs, but sometimes olive oil and vinegar were mixed in for extra flavour. This could then be used as a filling for flatbreads – perfect for a hungry Roman worker!

**Image:** Uncovering York's Roman history at the Yorkshire Museum.  
© Photo by Gareth Buddo, courtesy of York Museums Trust.



## SECTION SEVEN

### Uncover York's Roman Past

A visit to the Yorkshire Museum, York Minster and DIG can help schools bring a study of the Romans to life.

#### YORKSHIRE MUSEUM

Set inside York Museum Gardens, which contain the remains of Eboracum's Roman fortress, the galleries at the Yorkshire Museum cover the origins of Roman York, the Roman Army, the ideas, fashions and pastimes the Romans brought to Britain, and what everyday life in Eboracum was like.

A visit to the Yorkshire Museum can also be used to cover the Jurassic Period, Mary Anning, the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages, and the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings.

#### DISCOVER: ROMAN YORK – KS2 WORKSHOP

Uncover the stories of citizens, soldiers and emperors in our **Discover: Roman York** workshop. Explore the museum and handle real Roman objects to get an insight into everyday life in Roman York, and the beliefs and fashions that the Romans brought to Britain. Afterwards, try your hand at some Roman board games or grab your *gladius* and *scutum* and re-enact some legionary battle tactics.

We also offer pupils the opportunity to cover 100,000,000 years of history in our [Discover: Prehistoric Yorkshire](#) workshop, or to go on an exciting time travel adventure through the museum with our [Time Odyssey](#) experience.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more details about our galleries, collections, self-guided resources and led workshops, please visit our [website](#) or contact [schools@ymt.org.uk](mailto:schools@ymt.org.uk).

### YORK MINSTER

A visit to York Minster allows your group to discover 2,000 years of York's history. With a trove of artefacts from the 1960's 'Big Dig', a self-guided trip to our Undercroft Museum will reveal the foundations of the Roman Principia – right at the heart of Eboracum. Guided workshops allow pupils to focus in on areas of history and faith in the places that they happened.

Keep an eye on our website later this year for a new Romans workshop to supplement our existing offer.

In our Creative Creation workshop, pupils are encouraged to look at the creation story through some of the most spectacular medieval glass in the country. *Pilgrimage in an Hour* lets students discover a world of Saints and relics and *Magnificent Minter Marvels* learns about key characters from York Minster's history to decide who should come out on top! In *Traitor on Trial* pupils act as judge and jury to one of the Minster's most infamous criminals and in *Poetry on Fire* we look at the tragic fires that have beset the Minster and create something beautiful in response.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more details about our schools' visits and what we can offer please see our [website](#), email our bookings team on [bookings@yorkminster.org](mailto:bookings@yorkminster.org) or contact us on 01904 557200.



**Image:** Hands on with Roman artefacts at the Yorkshire Museum.  
© Photo by Gareth Buddo, courtesy of York Museums Trust.

Image: Become an archaeologist at DIG.  
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## YORK ARCHAEOLOGY

As an educational charity, York Archaeology offers learning programmes for all ages and abilities, from school visits to online workshops. We offer school trip packages to our three attractions in York – **JORVIK Viking Centre**, **DIG: An Archaeological Adventure** and **Barley Hall**.

At DIG, you can engage with archaeology in a hands-on way. By becoming trainee archaeologists, students will learn how we use our discoveries to learn more about life in the past. Our DIG tours feature a range of exciting Roman finds from across our excavations in York and there's the chance to dig in our reconstructed dig pit, featuring an area of the Roman fortress. You can also visit us to cover the Viking, Medieval and Victorian periods too.

## LIFE IN A ROMAN TOWN – KS2 AND KS3 WORKSHOP

We run a range of hands-on activities in our archaeology-themed workshops at DIG, including **Life in a Roman Town**. York started life as the Roman fortress of Eboracum in 71 AD and archaeology gives us an exciting glimpse into what life might have been like back then. Using evidence from the fortress, plus the houses and workshops of Roman York, dig in and piece together an idea of how people lived in this bustling town.

## ROMAN LEARNING IN THE CLASSROOM

If you can't come to York and visit us, invite us into your classroom to learn more about the Romans in York. Our virtual outreach session, **DIG! The Romans**, is delivered via videoconferencing platforms and you can join us for an interactive online workshop, piecing together evidence from the fort, houses and workshops of the empire's northernmost military city.

Alternatively, hire one of our Roman-themed loan boxes. Each box is filled with artefacts, replicas and a full set of teachers' notes, giving you a range of resources to bring the Roman past to life.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more details about a visit to DIG or our other attractions, virtual outreach, loan boxes and other learning resources, please visit our [website](#) and start your enquiry online.



**Image:** DIG Virtual workshops in action.  
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# SECTION EIGHT

## Resource Evaluation

Help us to prepare an exciting schools offer for Eboracum Roman Festival 2026 by [completing our teacher questionnaire](#).

The questionnaire will take up to 10 minutes to complete.

The first ten respondents will receive a **£10 gift voucher** as a thank you from us.



**Image:** The Four Seasons Mosaic at the Yorkshire Museum.  
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