

Yorkshire Museum

Roman York: Meet the People of the Empire Teachers' Exhibition Pack



Image: Figurine of Mars. © York Museums Trust (Yorkshire Museum).

Chronology: The Romans

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Section One: How to use this resource

This resource will help you get the most out of a visit to our Roman galleries at the Yorkshire Museum. It contains:

- An introduction to the **Roman York: Meet the People of the Empire** exhibition.
- Information about ten **Star Objects** in the exhibition, which you **may wish** to look at with your pupils when visiting.

Each Star Object corresponds to one of the **themes** that can be found in our Roman galleries. These are:

- Gods and worship
- Fashion
- Emperors
- Death and burial
- The Roman army
- Home life
- Across the empire

You can use this resource to familiarise yourself with our Roman galleries **before your visit**. You may also find it helpful to **share** these notes with the other **adults** who will be accompanying the class on your visit to the museum.

Please be aware that this resource contains images of human remains.

Flash cards

A condensed version of these notes is available to borrow on the day of your visit in our **Roman York Discovery Box**. These come as a set of **flash cards**, which you can use to guide your pupils around the Star Objects in our Roman galleries. This resource can be reserved for free when booking a self-guided visit to the Yorkshire Museum.



Curriculum Links

A visit to our **Roman galleries** can be used to cover the following curriculum areas:

Key Stage Two

Pupils should be taught about:

- The Roman Empire and its impact on Britain

This could include:

- The Roman Empire by AD42 and the power of its army
- Successful invasion by Claudius and conquest

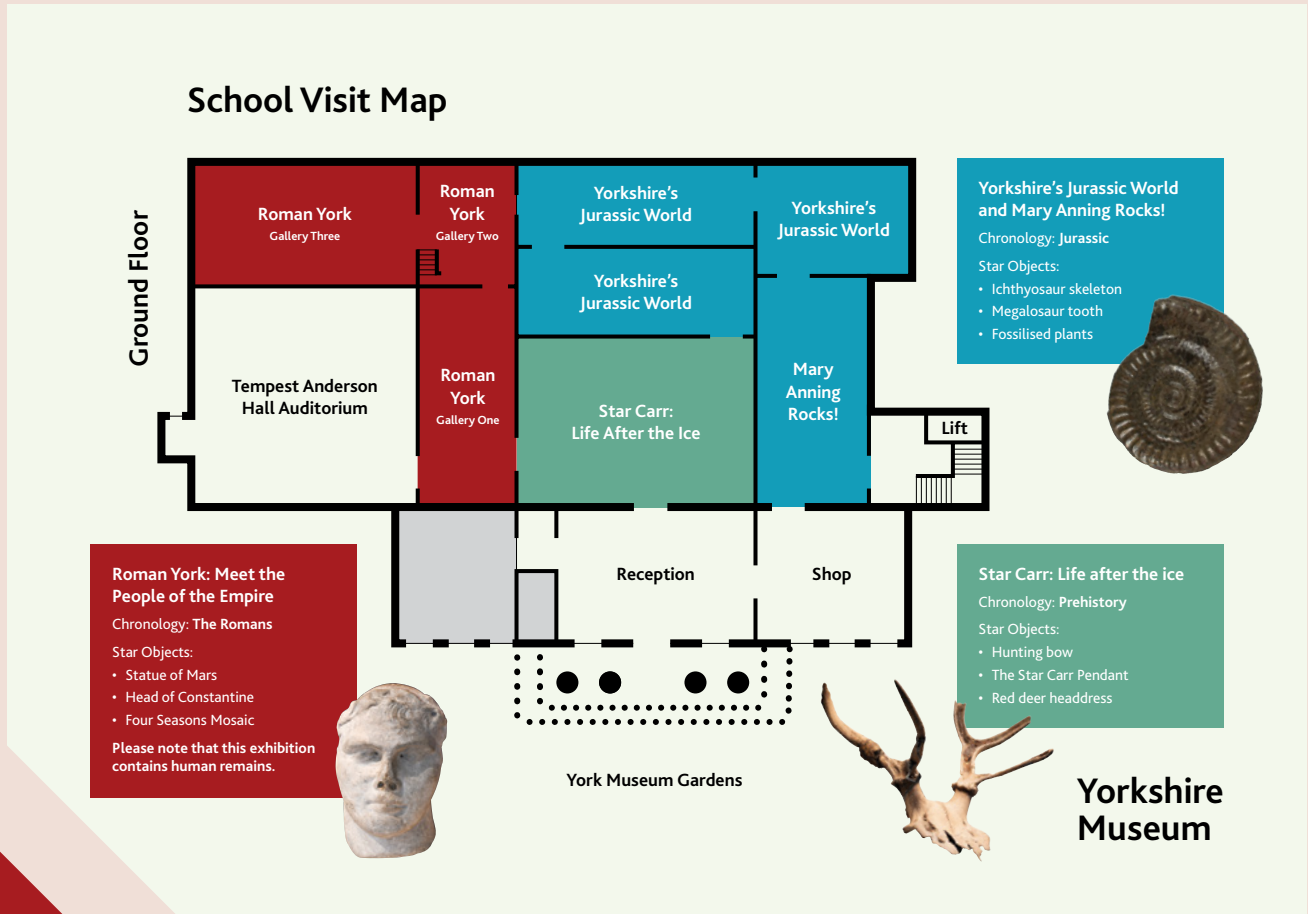
- British resistance
- 'Romanisation' of Britain: the impact of technology, culture and beliefs, including early Christianity

- A local history study

Curriculum Links

Our **Roman York: Meet the People of the Empire** exhibition is located on the lower ground floor of the Yorkshire Museum. The exhibition is split into three galleries.

You can download a copy of our [**Yorkshire Museum: School Visit Map**](#) from our website.



Section Two: Introduction to Roman York

The origins of Roman York

- The Roman army arrived in the north of England in **AD 71**. Northern England, 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 northern Britain (*Britannia Inferior*).

People of the Empire

- People travelled from different parts of the empire to work and live in Eboracum. The objects in Roman Gallery One tell us the stories of people who travelled to York from faraway places such as **North Africa, France, Spain** and the **Baltic**.
- Though on the empire's frontier, Eboracum became the centre of the Roman world when emperors visited. For example, the **emperor Septimius Severus** visited the city between AD 208–211 and brought fashions from **North Africa (Star Object Two)** and religious beliefs from **Egypt**.

Everyday life

- The artefacts in our galleries tell stories about Eboracum's inhabitants. For example, **motto beakers (Star Object Ten)** tell us how important socialising was to the Romans, whereas the **Four Seasons Mosaic (Star Object Nine)** shows us how people in York were keen to **adopt Roman fashions**.
- Whilst goods, such as pottery and foodstuffs, were brought into Eboracum from across the empire, materials made in the city were also sold overseas. **Jet**, a black gemstone, was mined by the Romans in **Whitby**. Craftsmen in York then used jet to make decorative objects like bangles (**Star Object Five**), hair pins, rings, and brooches.

Section Three: Star Objects

The **Star Objects** listed below have been chosen because they can provide us with an intriguing insight into life in **Eboracum**.

Each Star Object comes with:

- A brief **description** of the object, the **materials** used to make it, and why we think it is **important**.
- Suggested **enquiry questions** which you can use to lead a discussion with your pupils. Some of these are designed to be shared **before** the object information.

Each Star Object corresponds to one, or more, **themes** that can be found in our Roman galleries.

These are:

- Gods and worship
- Fashion
- Emperors
- Death and burial
- The Roman Army
- Home Life
- Across the Empire

Flash cards

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Star Object One: Ninth Legion floor tile

Materials: Clay

Theme: The Roman army

Location: Roman Gallery One

What is it?

- This floor tile was made by soldiers from the **Ninth Legion**. We know this because the tiles given a stamp when it was still wet. The inscription reads '**LEG IX HISP**'.
- The word '**LEG**' is short for **legion**. A legion was a unit of approximately **5000 soldiers**, known as **legionaries**, in the Roman army. '**HISP**' is short for **Hispania**, the Roman (Latin) name for **Spain**. This title was given to the Ninth Legion for its bravery when fighting in northern Spain between 25–19 BC.
- It is possible that the Ninth Legion took part in the **Emperor Claudius' invasion of Britain in AD 43**. The legion also suffered a defeat at the hands of **Boudica** during her rebellion against the Romans in **c. AD 60–61**.

Why is it important?

- This object provides us with evidence that the Ninth Legion **built** the original **fort** at Eboracum. This also tells us that legionaries were **builders** as well as fighters.

- The floor tile also shows us that Roman Legions often **served in different parts of the Roman Empire**. For example, as well as **Spain**, we know that the Ninth Legion also served in **Germany** before arriving in Britain.

Enquiry question

- The inscription on the tile was made using a **stamp**. Why do you think the soldiers of the Ninth Legion added a stamp to the floor tile?



Star Object Two: Head pot

Materials: Pottery

Theme: Emperors; Across the empire

Location: Roman Gallery One

What is it?

- This style of pottery was brought to Eboracum from **North Africa** by **Emperor Septimius Severus**, when he visited the city in **AD 208**. The emperor was born in the town of **Leptis Magna** in the Roman province of **Africa** (Libya).
- It is likely that potters from North Africa **travelled** with the emperor and made pots resembling his son, **Caracalla**, and his wife, **Julia Domna**.
- This pot probably shows us someone important as they are wearing a **laurel wreath**. For the Romans, laurel wreaths were symbols of **power, victory** and **authority**.
- Head pots like this were often used to store the **cremated** remains of people.

Why is it important?

- This pot provides evidence for how fashions **travelled** to Eboracum from different parts of the Roman Empire.

Enquiry question

- What do you think this pot might have been **used** for?



Star Object Three: Tombstone of Julia Velva

Materials: Stone

Theme: Death and burial; Home life

Location: Roman Gallery One

What is it?

- This is the tombstone of a woman who lived in Eboracum called **Julia Velva**. She died when she was **50 years old**. This was a long life in Roman York.
- Julia's heir, **Aurelius Mercurialis**, and his family would **gather** at the tombstone each year on the **anniversary** of her death to **celebrate** her life. They would have believed that Julia took part in these celebrations.

Why is it important?

- This tombstone provides evidence for how the Romans thought it was important to **remember** and **respect** their **ancestors**.
- The figures on the tombstone can also tell us about **everyday life** in Roman York. They appear to show Julia – most likely the person in the centre – reclining on a **couch** whilst having a **meal** with her **family**. Julia is dressed in **fashionable clothing** and is holding a **wine jar**.
- The small boy standing next to the table might be a **servant** or **enslaved person** who has been tasked with serving the family.

Enquiry question

- Why do you think Julia's family chose to decorate her tombstone with a scene of them **eating** together?



Star Object Four: Figurine of Mars (Ryedale Hoard)

Materials: Copper alloy

Theme: Gods and worship

Location: Roman Gallery One

What is it?

- This is a figurine of **Mars**, the Roman **god of war**. He is shown riding a **horse** and is wearing a **crested helmet** and a **belted tunic**. He is missing a **spear** from his raised arm and a **shield** from his left hand.
- This object is part of the **Ryedale Hoard**, a collection of four precious objects that were **buried** in the ground. We are not sure **who** buried the hoard or **why**.

Why is it important?

- Mars was one of the most important Roman gods. He was particularly popular with **Roman soldiers** who often called on him for **protection** in battle. Perhaps the Ryedale Hoard was buried by a Roman soldier looking to gain **Mars' favour**?
- Lots of figurines of Mars have been found across the Roman Empire. Showing him **riding a horse** was a particularly popular design in **Britain**.

Enquiry question

- What other **objects** were buried as part of the Ryedale Hoard?



Star Object Five: Jet and ivory Bangles

Materials: Jet and Ivory

Theme: Fashion; Across the empire

Location: Roman Gallery One

What is it?

- This skeleton of a young woman who died in Eboracum was buried with expensive and **fashionable jewellery**. These include **bangles** made from **elephant ivory** and **jet**.
- The bangles made from elephant ivory are likely to have come from **North Africa**, whilst the jet bangles were probably made in **Eboracum**.
- Jet is a **black gemstone** which was mined by the Romans from **Whitby**. It was then brought to York where it was **made** into goods – such as jewellery – which could be sold.

Why is it important?

- These pieces of jewellery give us information about the **woman** they were **buried** with. They are valuable objects which suggests she was a **wealthy**. They also tell us about the types of jewellery fashionable Romans liked to wear.
- The ivory bangles provide evidence for how objects and materials, like jewellery, **travelled** to Eboracum from different parts of the Roman Empire.

Enquiry question

- Can you find any other objects made from **jet** in our Roman galleries?



Star Object Six: Legionary Column

Materials: Stone

Theme: The Roman army

Location: Roman Gallery Two

What is it?

- Strong **columns** like this were created to support the roofs of the large stone buildings that were constructed in the Roman **fortress** at Eboracum.
- The **Ninth Legion** began the work of building the **fortress** when they arrived in the area that became York in **AD 71**.
- The fortress was originally constructed from **wood**, though it was re-built in stone at a later date.
- It is estimated that 60,000 tonnes of **limestone** was used to build the walls of the fortress alone.

Why is it important?

- The large stone buildings and walls of the fortress would have sent a clear message to local people about the **power** of Rome and its army.
- Within the army, soldiers had specialist skills, for example **stonemasonry** or **carpentry**. A column this size was probably built by a professional builder attached to the army.

Enquiry question

- Can you find any other objects that were **made** by Roman soldiers?



Star Object Seven: Roof tile grave cover

Materials: Ceramic tiles

Theme: Death and burial

Location: Roman Gallery Two

What is it?

- These roof tiles have been assembled together to make a **tomb**. This would have covered the **cremated remains** of a person's body. Burnt **skeletal** remains, along with several **iron nails**, were discovered beneath the tiles. The nails came from the **shoes** of the person who was cremated.
- Most of the tiles are stamped with the phrase '**LEG VI V**'. This tells us that the tiles were made by soldiers from the **Sixth Legion Victrix (Victorious)**. The Sixth Legion were stationed in Eboracum between **AD 120** and **AD 410**.
- It is possible that this was the burial place of a **Roman soldier**.

Why is it important?

- This object provides us with information about how the Romans treated their dead. Whilst some people chose to **bury** their loved ones in the ground, others preferred to **cremate** their remains.

Enquiry question

- Can you spot any **footprints** on the tiles? **Who**, or **what**, do you think made them?



Star Object Eight: Head of Constantine

Materials: Marble

Theme: Emperors

Location: Roman Gallery Three

What is it?

- Constantine was proclaimed **emperor** in Eboracum in **AD 306** following the death of his father Constantius Chlorus. The city celebrated by adapting a statue of **Hercules** – a mythical **hero** famed for his strength and **power** – to look like him.
- We know this is a statue of Constantine due to the **oak-leaf crown** on his head and because he has **no beard**. By studying coins (which often show the faces of emperors) we know that Constantine was the first emperor since Trajan (AD 98–117) not to wear a beard.
- We think that Constantine was proclaimed emperor in the **Principia** (headquarters) of the fortress in Eboracum. The remains of the Principia lie beneath **York Minster**.

Why is it important?

- Constantine was one of the most important Roman emperors. He founded the city of **Constantinople** (now Istanbul, Turkey) and played an important role in converting the Roman Empire to **Christianity**.

Enquiry question

- Can you find another object in this room which shows the **face** of a Roman emperor?



Star Object Nine: Four Seasons Mosaic

Materials: White limestone, red brick, black stone

Theme: Home life; Fashion

Location: Roman Gallery Three

What is it?

- This mosaic was discovered in the remains of a **Roman house**. Mosaics were made by specialist **artists** who used small squares, known as **tesserae**, of different colours to make a **picture**. Mosaics were very **expensive** to make.
- The four figures on this mosaic represent 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**.
- The use of mosaics to decorate **homes** and important **public buildings** was a fashion that the Romans introduced to Britain.

Why is it important?

- The mosaic shows us how **wealthy** Romans decorated their homes. Two other mosaics were found in the house in which the Four Seasons Mosaic was discovered. This suggests that someone important lived there.
- One theory is that the house was home to 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!

Enquiry question

- What do you **think** would have been **shown** in the mosaic's central panel?



Star Object Ten: Motto Beakers

Materials: Pottery

Theme: Home life

Location: Roman Gallery Three

What is it?

- These **Motto Beakers** were a popular **drinking vessel** that were commonly used at **dinner parties** or **gatherings**.
- They are made from a type of pottery known as **Black-Slipped Ware**, which was produced in **Germany**.
- The beakers have been decorated with **Latin phrases**. The larger vessel reads '**NOLITE SITIRE**' ('don't thirst'), whilst the smaller one says '**DAMI**' ('drink me').
- It is likely that the beakers were used to serve **wine**.

Why is it important?

- This beaker shows us that the people of Eboracum were able to **import** objects they wanted from different parts of the Roman Empire. It also shows us that **social gatherings** and **drinking wine together** were very important to the Romans.

Enquiry question

- Can you find another object in this room that the Romans might have **used** at a dinner party?

