

Roman Trail Podcast Script

STOP ONE

Military Life and Religion in the Ranks – Statue of Constantine, York Minster

The trail begins next to the south door of York Minster, in front of the statue of the Roman Emperor Constantine.

The Roman Army arrived in York around AD71 it established the fortress of *Eboracum* that was to be the home of two legions, the *Ninth Legion Hispana* and later the *Sixth Legion Victrix*. This base provided the focus for the civilian town that grew here. You are now standing in the heart of the fortress, over the site of the *principia* or headquarters building, which lies partially underneath the Minster.

The soldiers who built and lived in the fortress here came from all across the Empire. Many came from Italy, others from Spain, France and Germany, places where the legions had been based prior to coming to Britain. We can see evidence of this from tombstone inscriptions, some of which are on display in the Yorkshire Museum.

In the later Roman period, troops began to be recruited locally, and we can imagine men who grew up in and around York following their fathers into the legion. However, troops continued to arrive from around the Empire and North African troops came to Britain with Emperor Septimius Severus in the early third century. Archaeologists have found pottery and special stoves used to cook African-style dishes.

Soldiers ate food and used objects that had originated from all over the Empire, a possible reminder of home for newly-arrived troops stationed in this distant province.

Evidence from York suggests that soldiers had a mixed diet, with cereals and meat aplenty, especially beef and pork, and also a wide range of fruit and vegetables, both local and imported, together with Mediterranean olive oil and wine. Daily life was not only about soldiering however. I'll now introduce you to one of the occupants of the fortress, Legionary Titus:

"Salve to you friend. Legionary Titus, 4th Century, 2nd Cohort of the Sixth Legion Victorious, at your service. I'm not going to lie to you... it's pretty routine here in Eboracum, hope you're ready for days filled with parades, fighting practice, guard duty and the never-ending cleaning of weapons and armour. But don't worry, you can break up the monotony by learning a trade; most of us do. We have blacksmiths, carpenters, builders, potters, bakers, brewers and clerks among the garrison, and anything we don't provide ourselves, we can get from the civilians outside. Anyway, I better head off to report to my centurion or I'll get the short straw and be stuck on guard duty again..."

The traditional view of York's fortress is that only men lived here but senior officers were allowed to legally marry whilst on active service, and regular soldiers often had girlfriends and families in the town. There is evidence for these women living alongside the soldiers because lost female jewellery has been found in the sewer of the army bathhouse, now under the Roman Bath pub.

The diverse nature of the Roman army meant that the troops had a wide variety of religious practices. Throughout the whole empire, the official religion of the Roman army was the imperial cult. A building called the basilica, adjacent to the *principia*, was used for compulsory religious ceremonies pertaining to the worship of past emperors. It was here that addresses were made to the troops; and statues of Jupiter, Minerva and Juno were displayed in a small room along with the legion's standards. You can see a column from the basilica across the road from the Minster entrance. The basilica would have stood to the height of the nave of the current Minster!

Apart from the official military religion, soldiers were allowed to indulge in whatever religious practices they chose. In the third century, the popular cult of Mithras was brought to Eboracum. This exclusively male cult gave followers access to about 400 secret temples across the empire, where ceremonial feasts took place. It was particularly popular with military officers; and a Mithraic temple was built in the Micklegate area of York, from which an altar stone was recovered in the 18th century.

Roman soldiers were very pious, and had the means to make many personal offerings to both Roman and local gods. This usually involved the sacrifice of an animal or the dedication of an altar at which they would worship privately. Several of these have been found from York, including ones to Mars and Hercules, who presided over war and combat; and Victoria and Fortuna, the goddesses of victory and luck. Soldiers also worshipped deities from their homeland and countries in which they had served, as well as the local spirits, or genii. One such offering to the god Silvanus was uncovered:

"I'm so excited about the hunt tomorrow. I've got a chance to get away from my clerical duties organising supplies for the garrison, and get out into the wilderness to hunt deer and boar in the forest outside Eboracum. I've had a portable altar made to give me great fortune in the chase, so in the morning I will make an offering to the forest god Silvanus."

The emperor Constantine was hailed as leader of the Roman Empire at York in AD306 - you can see a statue of him outside the Minster entrance. Constantine later made a decree for the tolerance of Christianity, which had probably already spread to Britain by the fourth century but archaeological evidence suggests that Christianity had made little impact upon the material history of Eboracum, and there are only two artefacts which suggest the presence of Christianity

in York. However, as the centre of the military fortress in York, it is no surprise that this area became the site for later Christian churches.

By the late fourth century, the decline in Roman government eroded York's influence, reducing it from the capital of northern Britain to a small town. The military had been reorganised and the troops of the remaining garrison were barely distinguishable from people living outside the fortress, as the walls slowly crumbled around them.

STOP TWO

Civilian Life in Eboracum – Roman Bath Pub

Standing in St Sampson's square, you should look for the Roman Bath pub.

The civilian settlement extended between the fort and the river on the north-east bank and across onto the south west bank of the River Ouse. Eboracum was as cosmopolitan as the city of York is today. It was home to people from all walks of life and backgrounds. Originally a military settlement, a civilian town soon sprang up around the fortress in order to meet the economic and social needs of the garrison. It would have been a busy, crowded, and smelly place to live!

The Romans divided their day into sections, the length of which varied with the seasons. Most Romans rose at dawn. The first part of the day was for meeting friends and gossiping, possibly over breakfast. The second part of the day was generally for business. This is Gaia the jeweller, she is a fictional character but everything she says is based on evidence of Roman civilian life:

"I had the commander's wife in this morning. She wanted a necklace made for her with beads in the shape of a melon like the ones being imported to Rome from Egypt. She insisted it was the latest fashion to come from Rome and said she simply had to have one. I don't really have the time for this at the minute as I have to make a set of jet bangles, a couple of coin broaches and some carved bone

clothing pins for my other customers. Oh, sorry, I have to go, my son is helping me in the shop today, he's been doing it since he was 6, but he is making a mess of that bone pin!"

After all their business had been conducted the Romans liked to have a sleep in the Mediterranean fashion of a siesta. This was the third part of the day. But before taking that siesta the Romans may have visited a temple to pray for prosperity or to put a curse on someone.

Siestas were followed by a trip to the bath house. The Roman Bath Pub in front of you stands on the remains one of Eboracum's bath houses. Everyone, no matter their social standing, went to the bath house. These places levelled society, in the sense that everyone attended and used the same rooms and pools. However they also reinforced the social hierarchy as some people had slaves to help them bathe. Although everyone attended, it was not considered acceptable for men and women to do so together. Many bath houses had either two sets of identical rooms, one for men and one for women, or set aside different hours for men and women to bathe. The native British population would have initially been cautious of attending the bath house. However, once tried it was often adopted as a regular habit. And attending bath houses was viewed as an effective way of Romanising native populations into Roman culture. This is Julia, she is a fictional character but what she says is based on what we know about bathing plasticises:

"I am having a relaxing time at the baths today. I need it after a hard morning cleaning the house and watching the children! I paid to have a massage with scented oils from one of the house slaves and I enjoyed it so much I am thinking of inviting all my friends here for my birthday in a couple of weeks. I heard from Olivia that Gaia the Jeweller's daughter is pregnant but still isn't married! The attendant has just come round warning us that our time is almost up and the men will be arriving soon. I suggest you heed the attendant's warning and leave shortly unless you want to witness the men gambling their money away, drinking and frolicking with prostitutes and messing around in the

manner of Bacchus, the God of Wine. I'm going home but maybe ill see you here tomorrow at the same time?"

The last part of the day was set aside for eating dinner. The traditional Roman diet consisted largely of meat, usually beef, supplemented by olive oil, bread and other cereal products. Much of the produce was collected from the countryside around Eboracum, however the Romans did not have a particularly good knowledge of native British plants. For example, seeds from the weed corncockle have been found mixed in with some of the grain stores. The seeds from this weed are poisonous and if some made their way into a loaf of bread they would have caused a bad case of stomach ache! A lot of the middle and upper class citizens would have eaten imported food that was stereotypically Roman, such as olives, grapes and figs. The majority of citizens would have gone to their local tavern for food, whilst the wealthy stayed at home to eat dinner often accompanied by entertainment of some form, or playing board games, or listening to music and poetry.

There isn't a lot of evidence of the housing in Eboracum. However, houses in the centre of Roman cities were often not of a high quality with people living almost in their neighbour's pockets. Unlike the regimented barracks in the fortress, the civilian settlement grew up in a disorganised fashion and houses would have been small and roads between them narrow.

STOP THREE

Production and Consumption – *Overlooking the River Ouse, by the City Screen*

You should go down the alleyway off Coney Street alongside the church of St Martin's to the river.

As you have already heard, the people of Eboracum had access to exotic products from across the vast trade network of the Roman Empire, but many items were also produced closer to home.

Food staples like meat and grain were grown in the fields surrounding the town and brought into market. Not far from where you're standing now there once stood a large warehouse for storing this grain; it would have been brought into York by boat; excavations here revealed the existence of storage pits and large quantities of charred barley and rye, as well as the remains of millions of grain beetles, a hungry pest which devoured the crops.

The remains of animals butchered for their meat have also been found in Roman sites around York. Although beef appears to have been the main meat consumed by the people of Eboracum, the inhabitants of the city apparently had a varied diet and the Roman dinner table might have held pork, mutton, venison, rabbit, goose, duck, fish, and even dormouse.

Some of the best evidence for butchery taking place on a large scale in Eboracum was discovered just across the river from here. Standing on the riverbank, you might once have caught the sounds and smells of the butcher's trade drifting over the water. A large number of cattle shoulder-blades were found on the site with holes drilled through the bone. These shoulders of meat would have been hung up to smoke for a period of time before being carved up and sold to the public.

The byproducts of butchery would also have played an important role in local industry. Leather, in particular, would have had many uses. Now let us hear from Otha, who represents a shoemaker of Eboracum:

'I'll have to speak to Rufus at the tannery soon about purchasing some more leather. He always has the very best stuff. His suppliers must be skilled butchers, as the hides are always in good condition, without many cut-marks. The demand for my shoes has been high of late. Everyone needs shoes, after all. Perhaps if I agree to make some for Rufus and his family, he will give me a good deal on the leather.'

Among the Yorkshire Museum's Roman collections is a child's leather shoe. Although leather shoes were worn by the majority of people throughout the Roman Empire, the boy or girl who

wore this shoe probably came from a relatively well-to-do family, as it would have been just as expensive to keep buying new footwear for a growing child as it is today.

Industry in Eboracum extended far beyond butchery and leatherwork; the town was alive with craft activity. The streets would have been filled with the sound of clanking hammers and the air filled with smoke from craftsmen's hearths. Entrepreneurs took every opportunity to profit from markets offered by access to the Roman trading network. Excavations have revealed that there were various manufacture and craft industries in workshops that spread across the city. Some of their produce includes metalwork, leather items and Whitby jet jewellery.

Romano-British craftsmen often operated from compact strip buildings, these were simple one storey buildings, with a small room flanking the street front which was used for business and shop transactions and workshop areas and living quarters to the rear. It is likely that there were many of these humble multifunctional households all over Eboracum.

Eboracum was a specialist centre for the production of artefacts made from Whitby Jet. Examples of unfinished objects found at various locations around the city are now on display in the Yorkshire museum. Complete items include Jet Pins, bracelets, beads and figurines which became, especially fashionable in the latter half of the 2nd Century AD.

As well as producing more ornate personal items, the craftsmen of Eboracum were responsible for producing mundane, everyday items. The city had its own pottery industry, producing the famous Eboracumware, a grey pottery which was distributed widely across Yorkshire. But potters kept up with Empire-wide trends and also mimicked continental styles.

Supidia who represents a potter from the city, will give you an idea of what it might have been like to work in this trade:

'My father was a potter, he taught me all I know about the craft. I take pride in my work and am proud of the range of items I can make. I sell plates, bowls, jugs, jars, drinking cups, you name any kitchen or tableware, I can make it. Some of my more ambitious products have included mortaria, which are large basins used for grinding down herbs and spices, I sold a batch to the fish sauce man. I've also recently tried my hand at candlesticks. It's a competitive market you see, I've got to compete with all of the stylish fancy pottery, Samian from Gaul and colour coated ware from the south of Britain. The soldiers prefer these types as it gives them a taste of home. I know my customers though, I mainly cater for British locals, who want functional items but like to keep up with the latest Roman Styles at a fair price'

Not all production activity was as honest as pottery. It seems that Activities could go under the radar of the authorities. Counterfeit roman coins were produced in Eboracum, as suggested by the discovery of a mould designed for this purpose. Perhaps some of the local inhabitants were resentful of the burden of Roman tax so resorted to more devious methods of profiteering.

STOP FOUR

Trade and Exchange – Foss Bridge, Fossgate

Stand near the small stone bridge that carries the road over the River Foss.

You may think that before the development of fast motorised transport and refrigeration, most people ate only what they grew themselves, or could obtain near where they lived.

But residents of Eboracum, an integral part of a trading network extending throughout Europe, Asia and Africa, had access to many kinds of goods from all over the world. Popular Samian pottery, found in great quantities in excavations of Roman York, was shipped to this area from

France, known in Roman times as Gaul. People in Eboracum ate both local grains, meat and dairy products and many kinds of food not grown in Britain. Three important items of most people's everyday diet--wine, olive oil, and fish sauce--were shipped to Eboracum from their places of origin thousands of miles away. Vineyards were planted in England as far north as Lincoln in Roman times, but most of the wine people drank was made in the Rhône valley in Gaul. Olive oil was produced in southern Spain, known in Roman times as Hispania, and fish sauce, or *garum*, was made in large factories along the Mediterranean coast. An excavation in York found the bones of doormice native to Gaul—possibly not the same species as the doormice wealthy Romans dined on, but tastier than native rodents.

These foods arrived in Eboracum in clay pots up to six feet tall, called amphorae, in the hulls of ships sailing across the North Sea, up the English coast and then up the river Ouse and the river Foss, which you are standing over now. Up the river from this point, across from the Red Tower, is Hungate, where excavations in the 1950s revealed an extensive harbour with channels for ships and stone bases that supported the cranes that loaded and unloaded the ships. Today the Foss is no longer used for shipping, but in Roman times the harbour at Hungate was alive with boat traffic connecting the interior of Britannia to the rest of the Empire.

Wholesale merchants transported the amphorae to their shops, and emptied the contents into smaller clay jars for people to purchase. Many of the large amphorae couldn't be reused, as the food residue in them would become rancid so when empty they were broken and disposed of. Pieces of amphorae are often found in excavations in and around York as well as all over the Roman world, and some can be seen in the Yorkshire Museum.

Salve! Welcome to the harbour—it looks like chaos, but everything is in its proper place. We're filling that warehouse with amphorae of wine and Samian ware just arrived from Colonia Claudia and Augusta Treverorum, and that ship there is being loaded with grain, beef and jewellery destined

for traders in Gaul. Things don't always go as smoothly as they're going today—both this river and the Ouse flood regularly, and we have to stop our work to try to protect our property from the rising waters. I am Lucius Viducius Placidus, of the Velio casses of Gaul, Negotiator Britannicianus; I arrange trade across the Oceanus Germanicus between Britannia and the rest of the Empire. Twenty years ago I was only Placidus son of Viduci, but now I am a full Roman citizen with three names, rich enough to dedicate an archway in Eboracum to Neptune and the genius of this place. May the goddess Fortuna look as kindly on you as she has on me!

That fictional account of the harbor is inspired by Lucius's dedication slab which can be seen in the Yorkshire Museum.

STOP FIVE

Slavery – Micklegate Bar

After climbing up Micklegate stop when you reach the Bar, the old Medieval stone gate into the city

Micklegate Bar, the main *medieval* gateway to the city, probably stands on top of an older, Roman, gate into Eboracum. Through this gate came a diverse range of visitors to the Roman town. But the crucial invisible props that kept the Roman Empire functioning were the slaves who would have been brought here and put to work. It's impossible to estimate the size of York's slave population because given their low social status their existence was rarely documented.

As the property of their owners, slaves could be beaten, raped, and killed by their masters with impunity but it seems these extremes of treatment were not representative of their daily lives.

Young male slaves often worked in the bathhouses, such as the one we have already seen under the 'Roman Bath' pub. They would have washed their masters, scraped their skin and carried oil and perfume, the sort of bottles and tools used by these boys can still be seen today in the Yorkshire Museum. Women, on the other hand, might be sold to produce children (who then

became the property of the master) or to care for the children of the rich acting as housekeepers, nursemaids and teachers.

Tacita is a fictional slave from a wealthy household in Eboracum:

"I was brought into this family to look after their two children and serve my master and mistress. Daily, I dress my mistress; some days standing for hours plaiting her hair, every now and then the hot curlers burn my hands, just so she can look presentable for her guests. I also mend the family's clothing, when I'm not busy watching the children or cleaning up their mess. I am quite lucky for a slave, I am welcomed as part of the family, but I can never forget my position. I will never be an equal and could easily be replaced."

Some luckier slaves were employed in professions, in areas such as teaching, medicine and architecture, or encouraged by their masters to become specialists in a trade. A rare local example of such a slave is a goldsmith from Norton near Malton about 20 miles north of York. This man is referred to in an inscription; stating *"Good luck to the genius of this place! Good luck to you young slave in running this goldsmith's shop!"* Such a skilled man would have been well placed to eventually buy his freedom from his master as in some cases slaves were actually paid a wage for specialist work.

It was law that freeborn Roman men and women were distinguished from slaves, who were regarded as property. However a slave could buy or earn their freedom, meaning that they became the equal of any free citizen. Once a slave became free they were able to rise to a high rank in civilian posts or qualify for service in the military. In Eboracum there are two notable freedmen on record. Publius Nikomedes, who was freed by the Emperor, dedicated a statue to the goddess Britannia in York. Another man Caecilius Musicus, was a musician freed by his master Caecilius Rufus, who was a member of Eboracum's city council, the most powerful political body in the local area.

Standing close to Micklegate Bar we are reminded that slaves could also gain their freedom in the arena. Beyond the walls following the line of Blossom Street as it comes through Micklegate Bar, roughly half a mile down the road lies a Roman cemetery in Driffield Terrace which may have contained gladiators. Between 2004 and 2005 eighty-four were excavated at Driffield Terrace by the York Archaeological Trust. Those interred are all male and most died relatively young, they are marked by frequent and in some cases unusual injuries, with over half of the bodies discovered show signs of decapitation. Many of the bodies have an overly developed right arm, which is characteristic of training in weaponry from a young age. Some of the bodies show signs of having eaten a maize based diet in infancy suggesting north African origins. One man sustained perhaps the most curious injury, a bite, which could only have come from a large carnivorous animal such as a lion or bear.

Spurius is a fictional gladiator competing in the arena at Eboracum, here he describes his role as a 'privileged' slave:

"I was born into slavery, and as a child I was sold into a gladiator school for training. Since then I have travelled far, and yet seen little of the world. We gladiators are some of the most privileged and highly trained slaves, our food and treatment is good, better than some freedmen even. But we are still slaves bound to live and die at the whim of our masters.

Many of us hope to win our freedom someday. They call me a Bestiarius, my specialty is fighting animals in the arena. Now the path of my life has led me to the northernmost reaches of the empire to entertain the people of Eboracum, and this is perhaps as far as it will lead..."

One possible location of the amphitheatre is thought to be near to where we are standing today. Those successful in the arena could win freedom and fame. A good luck charm in the form of a bone plaque was found beneath York Railway Station; it is inscribed with the words "Lord Victor may you have a lucky win" and is thought to have belonged to a gladiator, though its owner was probably not successful in gaining his freedom. The lives of slaves were often short and hard, but

their participation in the history of Eboracum should not be overlooked; their presence is a vital part of the society that flourished in York's Roman past.

STOP SIX

Death and Burial – Museum Gardens, by the Sarcophagi in St. Mary's Ruins

Descend from the city walls, cross the bridge and enter the museum gardens on your left. Walk past the museum in the direction of the abbey ruins and look away to your right where you'll find two rows of Roman stone coffins

Roman cemeteries were usually found outside the areas inhabited by the living. They were arranged along the main roads approaching forts, towns and other settlements, allowing passers-by to pay tribute to the deceased. The stone coffins, also called sarcophagi, which you can see in front of you here in the museum gardens were all excavated from other sites in York, most coming from the cemeteries beneath the current railway station.

Archaeological evidence from here in York suggests bodies were burned either in a dedicated area or at the graveside. Graveside cremations are evidenced by areas of charred wood debris, fragments of burnt bone and coal ash. Pots, in the shape of human heads, were sometimes used to hold the ashes of the deceased, some are on display in the Yorkshire Museum. These often depict Julia Domna, the wife of the Emperor Septimius Severus and demonstrate a trend within funerary rites.

Cremation was gradually replaced by burial in the third century AD, although even in the fourth century the remains of cremated infants are found buried with their parents. Unusual forms of burial have been found, such as individuals in a crouched position, believed to have been a rite of the native population. At York's railway station site poorer people were buried together in large pits. Cemeteries were often reused, with graves overlapping, perhaps due to space constraints. While this seems to indicate a lack of respect for those long dead, concern for the wellbeing of the

recently deceased in the afterlife is evidenced by practices such as the inclusion of a coin in the mouth of the departed - thought to pay the ferryman in the underworld.

In contrast these sarcophagi, some of which are elaborately carved, would have been used for the privileged burial expected by the very rich. Occasionally lead coffins have been found but wooden coffins being the most common form of burial from the end of 2nd century onwards.

One of the most interesting ways of housing the dead was the tile tomb, a reconstruction of which you can see the reconstruction in the Yorkshire Museum. Usually, this type of tomb was built of several plain tiles tilted against one another. Many Romans were also buried coated with gypsum, a type of plaster that is still used on walls today. The gypsum has a preservative effect, leading to the survival of material and even hair, such as the auburn hair displayed in the Yorkshire Museum.

The sarcophagi here are arranged in two rows above ground with a passage running through the centre, which was the way the Romans also arranged them. The distinctive tiny coffin in front of you belongs to a child. Although infant mortality in Eboracum was astonishingly high and life expectancy extremely short, with an average life span of 40 years, exceptions did exist - a tombstone in the Yorkshire Museum dedicated to Julia Velva records she lived to 50 years. The woman in the centre is Julia herself, while the man with the beard is her heir, Aurelius Mercurialis. He commissioned this tombstone while he was alive not only to commemorate his family but also himself.

If you take a look around at the sarcophagi in front of you, you may notice the letters "D" "M" on them. Many inscriptions in Eboracum begin with these two letters, which stand for 'Dis Manibus' and mean "to the spirits of the departed", because Romans believed that the dead were taken care of by the divine in the next world. In these inscriptions on tombstones and sarcophagi, we can feel the sadness suffered by the living. Here is a grieving father, Quintus, who really did live in Eboracum, reading the inscription on his daughter's tomb:

“To the spirits of the departed. Corellia Optata. I, the grieving father of an innocent daughter, caught by cheating hope, lament her final end.”

Grave goods have been found in cremations, burials and sarcophagi. In burials, they are often found adorning the body in the form of earrings, necklaces, brooches and hairpins. Other objects included vials of perfume, as well as food and drink. Some of these may have been possessions of the deceased, while others were gifts from friends and family. Let’s hear from Antonia, who we imagine has recently attended the burial of her friend Flavia.

“It gives me some comfort you know, to remember that she was buried with everything most precious to her in life - the rings that she always wore, her favourite perfume and her fan. Of course we provided some food and drink for her to have in the afterlife as well. Death is a horrible business, so we might as well try to do all we can to reassure her spirit, and ourselves.”

One of the most lavishly adorned of York’s burials, the so-called ‘Ivory Bangle Lady’, is of a young woman from North Africa who was buried with bangles of white ivory and of black Whitby jet. She is an evocative symbol of Eboracum itself, a cosmopolitan city where local and global met and she is best experienced in the flesh at The Yorkshire Museum.