

Roman Trail App Script

STOP ONE

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

Welcome to "Walking with the Romans: Daily Life in Eboracum" I'm Jonathan Cowap and I'll be your guide. The trail begins next to the south door of the York Minster in front of the statue of the Roman Emperor Constantine.

Stop One.

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

The Roman army arrived in York in AD71. It established a fortress here named Eboracum, built to be the home of an army legion, which was made up of soldiers drawn from provinces across the Roman Empire. This fortress became the focus of the town that grew up here, and you are now standing right at its very heart: the headquarters building, the principia, lies right beneath your feet and spreads out underneath the Minster.

Recruited from Spain, from France, from Africa and beyond the soldiers who came to live and work in York ate food and used objects produced throughout the Roman world, perhaps reminding them of faraway homes. Besides their training and guard duties, many soldiers would have practised trades such as carpentry and blacksmithing to make the garrison more self-sufficient and perhaps to break the monotony of army life. Although only more senior officers were officially allowed to marry whilst on active service, many regular soldiers would have had families or girlfriends in the adjacent town. As the army was made up of a great mix of people from different places and cultures, its religious practices could be quite diverse but the army's official religion was the Imperial cult, the worship of the Emperors.

Compulsory religious ceremonies would have taken place to honour previous Imperial rulers in a building known as the Basilica.

The Basilica was part of the headquarters complex. Where you're now standing is where the basilica stood; one of its columns was found in excavations and re-erected opposite the statue of Constantine. If you look at the screen on your device you can see just a few of the many excavated objects held in the Yorkshire Museum. These belonged to the soldiers who served here and range from their tombstones to the pottery they used.

STOP TWO

Civilian Life in Eboracum – Roman Bath Pub

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

Outside the walls of the fortress, the civilian settlement that grew up stretched down towards the river, and then across to the bank beyond. Eboracum was a cosmopolitan place, home to people from all walks of life; the settlement was established to meet the needs of the soldiers who lived in their fortress, supplying them with food, goods, and a place to socialise. It would have been a busy, noisy, smelly and crowded place to live.

Romans generally divided their day into sections, rising at dawn and spending the first part of the morning meeting friends, after which they began work. Those engaged in trade and small-scale industry usually lived above or behind their shop, so the streets of Roman York would have hummed and buzzed with people making, buying and selling their goods. Later in the day people might pay a visit to a temple, to pray for their own health or prosperity, or to put a curse on someone else. Then they might have taken a siesta or visited the bath house.

The Roman Bath Pub right in front of you stands on the remains of the legionary bath-house, just one of Eboracum's many bath houses. Everyone, no matter what their social standing, visited a place of communal bathing, but the baths were as much about socialising, meeting people and gossiping, as they were about keeping clean.

The last part of the day was given over to food. The Roman diet consisted largely of meat, supplemented by olive oil, bread, and other cereals. The majority of citizens would have visited their local tavern for dinner, but the very rich stayed at home and entertained their guests, frequently eating food such as figs and grapes imported from abroad. The buildings in which regular people lived were often subdivided and cramped. 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 Martins to the river

Some of the wealthier inhabitants of Eboracum had access to exotic products from across the empire, but many of the things people ate, drank, and used were produced much closer to home. Food staples like meat and grain were grown in the fields surrounding the town and brought in to 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. Just across the river archaeologists also found the remains of an animal butchers, preparing meat for people's tables. The by-products of butchery also played an important role in the local economy: York would have had a tannery, and amongst the Roman collections in the Yorkshire Museum is a well-preserved child's leather shoe.

Eboracum would have been a town alive with craft activity: the streets filled with sounds of clanking hammers and the air thick with the smoke of craftsman's hearths. Networks of transportation meant that a careful and clever entrepreneur might profit from manufacture and trade. Some of the craft products fashioned in

York included metalwork, pottery, and jewellery made from famous Whitby jet. Many beautiful objects crafted from this smooth black gemstone have been found in the town, a selection is displayed at the Yorkshire Museum and you can find some pictures of them on your screen.

STOP FOUR

Trade and Exchange – Foss Bridge, Fossgate

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

People who lived in Eboracum were integrated into a network of trade and transportation that linked them to all parts of Europe, and even Africa and Asia. They could obtain goods from all of these places; especially popular was fashionable pottery known as Samian Ware, from Gaul (roughly the area of modern day France). If properly preserved and stored, even food and drink could be imported from far away. Although people who lived here ate much that was grown or raised in the areas surrounding Eboracum, other parts of their diet had to be brought into the city over long distances.

Three products above all others, were not native to York - wine, olive oil, and a special fish sauce known as garum. These were not extensively produced in Britain and had to be shipped here in large quantities to satisfy the appetites of the Romans. Most of the wine drunk by the people of Eboracum was grown in the Rhone Valley; olive oil was produced in southern Spain; and garum was manufactured in large quantities all along the Mediterranean coast.

Carried in the hulls of sailing ships, these foods arrived in Eboracum in pottery storage vessels known as amphorae which could be up to six feet tall. Pieces of amphorae are often found in excavations, and some are displayed in the Yorkshire Museum and on your screen. Goods were brought up the English coast and came into York along the town's two rivers, the Ouse and the Foss.

Upriver, from where you are standing now (archaeologists working in the 1950s) found an extensive harbour with channels for docking ships and stone bases for

cranes to load and unload the wares. Today the Foss is no longer used for shipping, but in Roman times the harbour would have been bustling with boat traffic that connected Roman York with the rest of the known world.

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 might work in bath houses like the legionary bath house; whilst women might be sold to take care of their masters' children as nursemaids or teachers. More fortunate slaves might have worked in craft or industry, learning a trade that might be able to support them if they got a chance to earn or buy their freedom.

On display in the Yorkshire museum is an inscription that tells of a slave goldsmith from nearby Malton, and another describes a musician slave freed by his master. Slaves could also win their freedom in the arena.

Out beyond the city gates lay a large sprawling cemetery; between 2004 and 2005 eighty-four bodies were excavated, all males who died relatively young. Many of them had suffered unusually violent injuries, including decapitation. Some believe these men were gladiators, brought to York to fight to the death for

the entertainment of the crowds at the amphitheatre. We're pretty sure that gladiators came to York in Roman times because a good luck charm in the form of a bone plaque was found beneath York's railway station, it's inscribed with the words "Lord Victor may you have a lucky win". The lives of slaves were often short and hard, but they play a crucial role in this city's Roman story.

Looking out of the city, climb the steps on the right and set off along the walls in the direction of the minster.

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

Romans buried their dead away from the places in which they lived. Cemeteries were arranged along main roads approaching towns and settlements so that those travellers passing by could pay their respects to the dead. The stone coffins, known as sarcophagi, that you see here were excavated from several different sites around York, many of them coming from the burial grounds that lie beneath the modern railway station. Early in the Roman period the dead were cremated; archaeological evidence suggests that bodies were burned either in a dedicated area or at the graveside, with the ashes collected in pots and buried in the ground. The pots that held the ashes of the deceased were sometimes in the shape of a human head: examples can be seen on display in the Yorkshire Museum. Cremation was replaced gradually by burial into the ground, and by 250AD most people were interred. Poor people seem to have been buried together in large pits, and frequently new graves cut and intercut older burials. By contrast the sarcophagi you see here were reserved for the very wealthy: with elaborate stone carving and expensive embellishment. Other unusual forms of burial have been found in York: some people had their bodies coated with

gypsum, a kind of plaster that has a preservative effect. Romans had an average lifespan of about forty years, but this average figure is low because of high levels of infant mortality, so people could and did live into an old age. Look closely at the sarcophagi in front of you: you may notice some of them have the letters D M carved onto them. This stands for 'Dis Manibus', Latin for 'To the Spirits of the Departed'. The Romans believed that the dead would be taken care of in the next world by those spirits, so they asked for them to protect their loved ones in the life beyond.

Romans often buried the dead with objects or artefacts that adorned and accompanied the body: ear-rings, necklaces, brooches, and hairpins, or bottles of perfume and food and drink. Some of these may have been the possessions of the deceased, others the final gifts of friends or family. 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. There are some pictures of her on the app but she's much better experienced in the flesh at The Yorkshire Museum.