



ENGLISH HERITAGE
EDUCATION

KS2–KS3

HANDLING COLLECTION

Birdoswald Roman Fort

This pack will help teachers use the Roman handling collection at Birdoswald Roman Fort, which offers fascinating insight into life in a Roman fort and the building of Hadrian's Wall.

To book to use the handling collection in the education room, please contact our Education Bookings Team.



Get in touch with our Education Bookings Team:

- ☎ 0370 333 0606
- ✉ bookeducation@english-heritage.org.uk
- 🖱 <https://bookings.english-heritage.org.uk/education>

Don't forget to download our **Hazard Information Sheets** to help with planning.

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Step into England's story



TEACHERS' GUIDE

LEARNING OVERVIEW

Recommended For

- KS2 and KS3 (History)

Learning Objectives

- Discover through investigating objects how people lived in a Roman fort on Hadrian's Wall.
- Understand how artefacts give us clues about history and apply knowledge to objects to draw conclusions.
- Explore methods of conserving artefacts.

BEFORE YOU VISIT

SUMMARY

This handling collection has been categorised into three separate topics:

- Life in a Roman Fort
- Roman Pottery
- Roman Coins

Each box has information cards about key objects and some suggested activities. We suggest an adult helper uses the information cards to help KS2 students explore the objects. KS3 students may like to work independently.

Most of the handling collection items are replicas. Please advise your students, however, to handle each object very carefully to preserve this collection for future education groups.

The objects have been packaged and stored in a way that demonstrates how an archaeological conservator stores real finds. For example, some objects have an 'SF' (small finds) number and each coin has its own coin identification number. Each coin is stored in chronological order. Inside each box is an indicator strip to monitor humidity levels, a silica bag to absorb moisture, and each plastic coin bag is ventilated with small holes.

CONTACT DETAILS

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BOX 1: LIFE IN A ROMAN FORT

This box contains replica Roman objects that were discovered on Hadrian's Wall. There were 16 forts built along the Wall. Soldiers were based at these forts to guard the Roman frontier line in Britain.

ANGELA MIDDLETON – ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSERVATOR

'I investigate archaeological artefacts to study their use and how they decay. I conserve artefacts to stabilise them for future generations. After conservation, artefacts can add to our understanding of the past.'



“”

Q Which objects are similar to ones we use today?

What is each object made from?

Did the Romans use the **same** materials that we do today?



A die found at Birdoswald Roman Fort made from bone and hand-carved with circular patterns numbering from 1 to 6.

Q Why do you think these objects survived for so many hundreds of years? What type of objects may not have survived?

CONSERVATOR'S TIP

'Inside each box is a silica bag. These contain silica beads (chemicals) which soak up the moisture in the air. You often get tiny ones of these in shoeboxes.'

DID YOU KNOW?

After their training and marching practice, soldiers liked to play games and gamble. A popular game was betting on dice.

KEY OBJECTS



BUILDING and ARCHITECTURE

This piece of tile is from the roof ridge of a building. It has an imprint of the VI Roman legion that made the tile and built the roof.

Look out for iron nails and a measuring device.



COOKING and FOOD

This is a mortarium for grinding food (like a pestle and mortar).

Look out for a wooden bowl, oyster shells, spoons and some cow's teeth!



JEWELLERY

This is a trumpet brooch. Romans used brooches to hold their clothes together because they did not have the technology like Velcro, zips or even buttons.

Look out for rings, bracelets and a hair pin.



CULTURE and RELIGION

This is a wax tablet and stylus and a wooden roller. The Romans did not have paper like we use today. They used the stylus as a pen to make an impression on the wax.

Look out for a bone die and a deity statue.



TECHNOLOGY

These are spindle whorls. A spindle was a rod used to wind or twist sheep's wool into thread. The whorl is a weight that helped the spindle to spin.

Look out for a pin beater made from bone. This was used to push down each woollen thread to make a tight weave of cloth.

BOX 2: ROMAN POTTERY

This box contains Roman pottery that was discovered on Hadrian's Wall. Some pieces are whole, some are single fragments and some are lots of fragments that can be pieced together.



Part of an amphora vessel discovered on Hadrian's Wall, showing handles and a spout.

DID YOU KNOW?

An amphora had two long handles and a narrow neck for pouring. Amphoras were brought to Britain as a storage method (like plastic crates carrying food today). This is different to Samian and other fineware pottery, which was brought as pottery to display at the table.

Q **Explore** the shape of the amphora fragment. Which part of the whole vessel do you think it is?

Q Archaeological conservators often need to piece together broken pottery sherds. **Work together** in your group to piece the sherds of pottery back together to make a whole pot.

CONSERVATOR'S TIP

'When handling artefacts, it is important to be gentle and careful as artefacts can be fragile. We wear gloves, as dirt, sweat and salts on our hands can leave permanent marks or cause damage.'



KEY OBJECTS



SAMIAN WARE

This pot was probably used as a fruit bowl to be displayed on a table. Samian ware is a type of reddish-orange pottery that had a shiny surface called a slip. The decorated pieces were made in a mould. The designs are inspired by Greek pottery.



RUSTICATED WARE

The decoration on this type of pot was made by adding clay to the surface of the pot and working it up with the fingers into rough patterns and shapes. The design is a classic Roman style that was used widely in the Roman Army in the 1st and 2nd centuries.



AMPHORA FRAGMENT

An amphora is a type of container used to transport and store wine and olive oil. It had handles around its neck for carrying. This fragment was made in Spain. It has burn marks on it.



MINATURE DISH

This dish may have been used for holding a small amount of water for washing fingers before a meal. Or it may have been a children's toy.

Look out for the miniature jug.



SHERDS

When pottery broke it was difficult to fix and, as it was so cheap, would just be thrown away. Pottery does not degrade in the ground like metal or organic materials so archaeologists find a lot of pottery on excavation.

BOX 3: ROMAN COINS

This box contains replicas of the types of coins found all over Roman Britain. Roman coins were first made in the Roman Republic in the 3rd century BC. They were used all over the Roman Empire.

Q **Look** for the coins showing the names or faces of these famous emperors:

Julius Caesar

Hadrian

Antoninus Pius

Q **Find** the symbols on the reverse of each coin. **Why** do you think these symbols were used?
What do they say about the Roman Empire and its emperors?

Q **Imagine** a coin was being made to represent you. **Talk** to your partner – what symbols would you use and why?

CONSERVATOR'S TIP

'Each plastic coin bag is ventilated with small holes. The holes let the air circulate. The dry air (the moisture is absorbed by the silica gel) gets into the bags so the coins won't degrade.'

DID YOU KNOW?

Carausius (r.AD 286–93) was a military commander of the Roman Empire in the 3rd century. He took power by force in 286, during the Carausian Revolt, declaring himself emperor in Britain. He held power for seven years before being assassinated.



KEY SYMBOLS



MILITARY MIGHT

The eagle was a Roman symbol of military strength and power.

Look for Julius Caesar's coin with an elephant on the reverse. Caesar used war elephants, riding into battle on their backs to frighten his enemies.



GODS and GODDESSES

(Top coin) Mars, god of war, holding a shield and spear. (Bottom) Salus, goddess of health and well-being, holding a patera (shallow bowl) and sceptre.

Look out for coins with other gods such as Pax (peace), Aeternitas (eternity) and Roma (personification of Rome).



LOYALTY TO THE ARMY

This coin shows a group of soldiers with a commander. The Latin words underneath, FID EXERCIT, mean fidelity (loyalty) of the soldiers to the Roman Army, and of the Army to them.



MACELLUM MAGNUM

This coin shows the Macellum Magnum, a market building in Rome, built and dedicated by Emperor Nero in AD 59.



BRITANNIA

'Britannia' was the name given to the islands of (what we now call) Great Britain by the Romans. Britannia's symbol was a goddess armed with a shield and trident (she defends the seas around the islands) and wearing a Corinthian helmet.