Above: Late Roman bone comb from Newton Bewley

Front Cover: A Roman couple

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First Printing July 2004 (750 copies)
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1 Who were the Romans?

The Romans came from what is now Italy. They began building Rome, their capital city, in 785 BC. Rome was soon to become the greatest city in Europe and the first to have a population of 1 million.

The founding of Rome has a famous legend. The Romans told a story of how twin boys called Romulus and Remus had been taken from their mother and left by the River Tiber to starve. A mother wolf found the babies and raised them as her own until they could fend for themselves.

The story goes on to say that Mars, the Roman God of War, told the boys to build a great city at the spot where the wolf had found them. The boys built the city as instructed but quarrelled and made war with each other. Romulus won this war and so the city became known as Rome.
By the end of the first century BC Rome was very powerful. It had a large army that had conquered much of Europe including Spain, France and also parts of Northern Africa.

Map of the Roman Empire at around 100 AD

From the time of Augustus (27 BC) Rome was ruled by an Emperor. The Emperor had a senate that advised him and acted like a government. However some Emperors, including the mad Caligula, chose to ignore the senate and instead acted like dictators.
2 The Roman Invasion

The Romans ruled Britain for over 350 years. Julius Caesar had visited the island twice, once in 55 BC, then again in 54 BC. The Romans knew that Britain was ideal for the farming of both crops and livestock. Natural resources such as gold, silver, tin and iron were also in plentiful supply.

The Roman invasion began from Gaul (modern France) in AD 43. The invasion force consisted of four legions led by the commander Aulus Plautius. The Roman army were successful in taking south-east England fairly rapidly. The Emperor Claudius himself arrived to lead his troops to Camulodunum (modern Colchester) to receive the surrender of twelve British tribal leaders.
At the time of the Roman invasion Britain was divided up into a series of territories. Each territory was dominated by a local tribe. The Romans recorded the names of the local tribes and we know that Teesside, and a large part of Yorkshire, was occupied by the Brigantes.

There may have been subdivisions within each tribe and it is thought that the Tees Valley was the home of a separately named pre-Roman tribe who formed part of the Brigantes.

Queen Cartimandua was the leader of the Brigantia tribe. She was pro-Roman and was probably one of the original leaders to surrender to Claudius. In AD 51 she even refused refuge to Caratacus, a Celtic guerrilla leader fleeing from the Romans after fighting on the Welsh borders.
The location and names of the Celtic tribes
Despite making initial headway the Conquest was far from over. Once outside of the south-east the Romans started to meet fierce resistance. The Britons were well prepared. They had a long tradition of tribal warfare and well-defended settlements known as hillforts, many of which saw active service.

By AD 47 the Romans had set up a frontier that ran diagonally from Exeter at the south-west, to the Humber at the north-east. The Roman army then concentrated on pushing west into Dorset and northwards into Wales.

*The Roman army at work as depicted on Trajan's Column*

In the decades that followed, opposition against Rome was particularly marked. Boudica of the Iceni led a revolt in AD 60 which culminated in Roman London, Colchester and St. Albans being razed to the ground.

Although the Brigantes were supporters of Rome in the early years of the conquest this all changed from AD 69. Venutius, the husband of Cartimandua, led a rebellion against his wife who had divorced him for Vellocatus, his armour bearer.
Queen Cartimandua escaped with help from the Roman army leaving Venutius to assume leadership of the anti-Roman Brigantes.

The Roman North

Venutius and his forces were eventually defeated after a series of Roman campaigns between AD 71-74 spearheaded by the ninth legion which marched north from Lincoln. Some speculate that the Brigantes made their last stand at the Iron Age stronghold of Stanwick just west of Darlington.
3 Life on Roman Teesside

The Romans seem to have had the north-east and Yorkshire under control by the reign of Hadrian, which began in 117 AD. Many of the forts that they built in Yorkshire such as Cawthorn and Malton were abandoned suggesting that they did not feel a military presence was necessary.

A typical Romano-British family

The people living in the Teesside area during the Roman occupation were native Britons or ‘Celts’. Teesside probably saw no large-scale movements of population following the Roman invasion or any great influx of new immigrants. Indeed in many parts of Britain there is little evidence for the adoption of Roman culture or beliefs among the majority of the population. For this reason the time following the Roman invasion is often known as the Romano-British period.
4 Native Settlements

Most native Britons living at the time of the Roman occupation were farmers. Archaeological evidence of settlement in the Roman period suggests that Teesside was quite fruitful and densely populated with small agricultural settlements. Roman building styles and superior home comforts were not widely adopted by the native population.

The native settlement at Thorpe Thewles near Stockton

Many of these Romano-British settlements continued in use from the Iron Age. At Thorpe Thewles we have evidence that a native Iron Age site expanded after the Roman invasion. The site was originally bounded by a defensive enclosure ditch. By 100 AD this ditch was filled in as the settlement grew outside of its original boundaries.
ROUND HOUSES

The most common building on a Romano-British site was the round house.

A reconstruction of a round house

Round houses were made from locally available building materials. The walls were made from ‘wattle and daub’ panels fastened between upright posts. ‘Wattle’ consists of upright hazel or willow stakes interwoven with horizontal withies. These woven wooden panels were then weather proofed with a
mixture of clay, vegetable matter and animal hair known as ‘daub’. This provided excellent insulation and was easy to repair.

A ring of inner posts supported the roof. This would have been conical with wooden rafters covered with thatch.

Ring ditches at Kilton Thorpe

A drainage ditch was cut around the houses to catch water dripping from the roof eaves to prevent the house from flooding. Even when many of the smaller internal features such as post-holes and hearths have been damaged this distinctive circular ditch often survives for archaeologists to excavate.
5 Catcote Village

The remains of Catcote Village were discovered in 1963 during development work to the playing fields behind English Martyrs School in Hartlepool.

The site has both native roundhouses and Roman style rectangular buildings. It seems that this local site was one of many villages founded in the Iron Age which prospered with the Roman presence in the north. It was probably the headquarters of a local chief.

Reconstruction of a typical Romano-British village

Farming was important on this Romano-British site. Crops were grown in enclosures next to the settlement and livestock
such as pigs, sheep and cattle would have been kept for food, milk and clothing.

At Catcote there is little evidence of contact with the Romans before they conquered the north of England. However the range and quantity of imports increased significantly as the Roman presence in the north strengthened and Catcote became a more important site.

The Romans imported a wide range of pottery and glass vessels. Sherds of broken Samian ware are common finds on Roman and native sites. This high-quality tableware was manufactured in Gaul and is easily recognisable by its distinctive glossy red glaze. It came in a range of shapes and sizes including cups, dishes and bowls.

As well as farming there is evidence that the people of Catcote were involved with extensive trade along the east coast. The site was perfect for controlling access to the beach at Seaton Carew where many Roman finds have been made. With this in mind it seems that Catcote may have served as a regional trading centre utilising shipping along the coast.
6 Roman Villas

The Latin word ‘Villa’ literally means ‘Farm’. The villa was the Romanised equivalent of the Romano-British farmstead.

A reconstruction of a Roman Villa

Although the villa had the same function as a native farmstead it provided a much higher standard of living. The main house was the living quarters of the head of the villa estate. It was usually very well decorated with wall paintings and mosaic floors. It would also have had good sanitation, heated rooms and a bath suite.

The main house would have been surrounded by agricultural buildings. These would include barns, corn driers, granaries, stables and workers’ accommodation. The surrounding land would consist of the fields and orchards of the estate and could cover many acres.
Roman baths and heating

The habit of bathing was adopted by the Romans from the Greek World. A bath house was seen as an essential element of the villa.

The Roman bath house consisted of a series of rooms that had raised floors supported by a hypocaust. Hypocausts were pillars that allowed heated air to circulate beneath the floor.

The bath house usually had at least three rooms. These were:

I  The Frigidarium
This was a cold room that was not usually heated. It may have contained a plunge pool filled with cold water.

II  The Tepidarium
This was a moderately heated room to bridge the gap between the hot and cold rooms.

III  The Caldarium
This was the hot room and was designed to produce a heavy sweat on the bathers. There was also a hot plunge for washing.
1 Caldaria (Hot Rooms)
2 Tepidarium (Warm Room)
3 Frigidarium (Cold Room)
4 Apodyterium (Changing Room)
5 Heating furnace
6 Aqueduct outflow

A reconstructed Roman bath house
Using the Baths

The Roman bathing routine involved a number of stages:

I  A visitor to the baths would first visit the changing room where they would undress and leave their clothes in a locker. Wooden bath slippers were usually provided to protect the feet from the hot floors of the Caldarium.

II  The bather would then carry out some light exercise in the Tepidarium (warm room) before visiting the Frigidarium (cold room) for a plunge in the cold pool. The warm room would then be revisited to allow the body to adjust to the change in temperature.

III  The Caldarium (hot room) was the next port of call. The bather would sit on a bench until their skin broke into a heavy sweat. The body was rubbed with oil to lubricate the skin. The dirt, oil and sweat were then scraped from the body with a metal implement with a curved blade known as a strigil. The hot plunge was then used to completely clean the body.

IV  Before leaving the baths the warm room would be visited again to allow the body to cool down.

V  Finally a last visit to the cold plunge would close the pores of the skin to avoid catching a chill before the bather dressed for the outside world.
7 QUARRY FARM ROMAN VILLA, INGLEBY BARWICK

The remains of what is thought to be the most northerly surviving Roman villa in the Empire have been partly excavated at Ingleby Barwick.

Enclosures showing as marks in ripening cereal crops were first identified here from aerial photographs taken in 1970. However it was not until 2000 when Archaeological Services, University of Durham, undertook a geophysical survey that at least three stone founded buildings were discovered.
This site was then partly excavated by the Durham team in 2003. Evidence was found for both circular and rectangular buildings. The rectangular buildings probably represented the homes and farmstead of a wealthy family of ‘Romanised Britons’.

The excavation revealed details of a number of the rectangular stone buildings. One of these had an underfloor heating system. A furnace was lit in a pit at one end of the structure and the warm air it produced was circulated, via a flue, beneath the floor, which was supported by a series of stone pillars.

Adjacent to the villa there was evidence of an extensive field system and further buildings including a circular horse mill for grinding the corn grown on the estate, a well built barn/workshop and numerous corn driers. The local aristocrats who owned the site probably had close links with the Roman military and may have acted as their local representatives. The site was probably valued for its position on the River Tees where traffic and trade could easily be controlled.
The Roman Military

The Roman Empire was famous for its organised and effective army. At its peak some 55,000 troops were needed to keep the peace in Britain. Not all soldiers came from Rome; the majority of soldiers in Britain were auxiliaries who came from all over the Roman Empire.

The organisation of a Roman legion

The Roman Army was divided up into legions. A Roman Legion comprised up to 6,000 men and was led by a Roman senator. Each legion was divided into fighting units of 10 cohorts, and each cohort was further sub-divided into 6 units called centuries. A century was made up of 80 men and was led by a centurion. The fighting units were supported by non-combatants including clerks, cooks, surveyors and stone-masons.

Life as a Roman soldier was tough and discipline was severe. The soldiers had to be physically fit and carry heavy equipment whilst on the march. Each Roman soldier or *legionary* was
Roman Teesside

armed with three weapons. First of all the javelin or *pilum* would have been thrown towards approaching enemies. The main sword known as a *gladius* was used for slashing and stabbing. The *pugio* was a short dagger.

Rectangular shields made of wood and covered with leather were used for protection from missiles or in hand to hand combat. A metal boss in the middle gave extra protection to the hand and could be used to hit an enemy who got too close.

Chain mail shirts, or segmented armour, worn over a short thick tunic gave further protection at both the front and back.

Helmets, made of bronze and iron, were designed to protect the sides of the head and the neck.

A Roman Soldier
9 The Guisborough Helmet

In August 1864, workmen making a road at Barnaby, near Guisborough, came across a piece of crushed bronze. At first it was thought to be worthless and was described as ‘a curious piece of metal’.

Fortunately it was sent to the British Museum where it was identified as a Roman parade helmet from the 3rd century AD. It is still displayed there to this day as a national treasure.

Museum experts managed to unfold and reconstruct the helmet. It was decorated with serpents and with the figures of three Roman Gods: Mars, Minerva and Victory.

A helmet of this type would only have been worn on special occasions by cavalrymen. It is a remarkable find as very few survive from the entire Roman Empire. Its discovery in complete isolation has proved puzzling.
The Romans worshipped a number of Gods. In Roman Britain the most popular included Jupiter, Minerva, Mars and Mercury.

Each God had a certain area of influence or responsibility. For example Mars was the God of War and Roman soldiers would pray to him for strength in battle. Together the Gods formed what was called a Pantheon and covered all aspects of everyday life and death.
Roman worship consisted of making a compact, or agreement, with the Gods. A worshiper would ask for something from a particular God in return for offerings, sacrifices or the setting up of a shrine to the particular deity.

Amongst the most popular Roman Gods were: -

- **JUPITER** – King of the Gods and ruler of the sky.
- **JUNO** – The wife of Jupiter and Queen of the Gods. She was the Goddess of women and marriage.
- **MINERVA** – The daughter of Jupiter and the Goddess of Wisdom. She was responsible for arts and crafts.
- **MERCURY** – Messenger of the Gods and God of travel.
- **PLUTO** – The God of the dead and brother of Jupiter.
- **APOLLO** – God of the Sun. He was the son of Jupiter and drove his chariot across the sky to light it each day.
- **DIANA** – Goddess of the Moon and twin sister of Apollo. She was also the Goddess of hunting.
- **MARS** – The God of War and very powerful. Held in high esteem by the Romans.
- **VENUS AND CUPID** – The Goddess and God of love. Venus was the mother of Cupid.
- **BACCHUS** – The God of wine and theatre.
- **VULCAN** – The Smith God. Legend says that when Jupiter had a headache Vulcan clove it in two and out popped Minerva.

Romans who desired good fortune would ask for the help of as many Gods as possible. It was not unusual for people to worship up to a dozen Gods at a small shrine set up in the home.
Native Gods

The Roman attitude to religion was fairly relaxed. They allowed conquered nations to continue to worship their own Gods. In fact the Romans often adopted native Gods as their Empire expanded. The Gods of the native Britons were largely connected to natural elements or places, especially those linked with water.

(Right) - A Celtic Head from Saltburn. This curious figure probably represents a native God.

Emperor Worship

Alongside traditional Gods it was believed that the Emperor had spiritual power. On his death the Emperor would be deified, meaning made into a God. The mad Emperor Caligula even declared himself to be a God during his reign.

Christianity

The first Christian Emperor was Constantine who converted on his deathbed in 337 AD. Before this the Romans persecuted the Christians who refused to worship the Emperor or any Roman Gods.
11 Roman Burials

Romano-British burials are often found in small groups of twos or threes. On Teesside they have been unearthed in old boundary ditches or sometimes within abandoned buildings. So far Romano-British burials in the area have not been found in organised cemeteries.

In 1985, archaeologists investigated human remains found at Lancaster Road in Hartlepool. Two skeletons were discovered, one male and one female. The man was lying flat on his back with his head resting on the thighs of the woman. The woman was wearing a necklace made from glass and jet beads.

The Lancaster Road skeletons

Both individuals were healthy young adults who must have died within a very short time of each other. Perhaps they were killed deliberately in a ritual murder or they may have been lovers who had taken their own lives in a suicide pact.
One of the greatest effects of the Roman invasion in the Tees Valley was the increase in trade. Luxury items such as pottery, glassware, olive oil and wine would have been imported from France, Germany and Spain on large ships. Exports from Roman Britain included grain, jet, lead and cloth.

Transportation by sea was much quicker than by land, and Seaton Carew was a prime trading spot between Hadrian’s Wall and the south of the country. Imported items found at Seaton Beach suggest that it was once a thriving trading settlement.
13 Signal Stations

By the end of the 4th century, Britain’s eastern coast was under attack from the Scottish Picts and the Anglo-Saxons.

The Romans erected defences against these raiders. They built signal stations along the south and east coasts to warn against attacks.

There was a signal station at Saltburn. It was one of a line of five on the Yorkshire coast with others at Goldsborough, Ravenscar, Scarborough and Filey.

Unfortunately the signal station at Saltburn has disappeared as the cliff on which it stood has eroded away. Luckily part of the site was excavated between 1911 and 1912 before it completely vanished.
Roman Teesside

The signal station would have been square and about 50 metres across. It would have contained a central tower up to 15 metres square. The tower was surrounded by a courtyard which was enclosed by a wall. The wall would have had bastions or small towers at each corner. The entire site was then surrounded by a deep defensive ditch.

A Signal Station as depicted on Trajan’s Column, Rome

Despite its chain of defences the station at Saltburn met a violent end. Amongst the most interesting finds were the bones of fourteen men, women and children that had been thrown into a well inside the fort. They were the remains of the garrison and the local inhabitants who had taken refuge inside the station during a raid. The fort was obviously captured, the defenders slain and their bodies flung into the well which made a convenient grave.
14 The end of the Empire

By the start of the 5th century, invaders from Germany were attacking France (then known as Gaul). As a result Britain became cut off from Rome and the rest of the Roman Empire.

In 1998 an interesting archaeological discovery was made at Newton Bewley. The skeletons of two Romano-British murder victims were discovered as excavations were carried out along a new pipeline trench.

The two males had been buried together in a pit. One had not only received a blow to the head but he had been stabbed in the back. His neck had also been severed. These are the sorts of wounds that forensic scientists see regularly on victims fleeing from their attackers.

It is thought that these two men had been killed whilst running away from invading Anglo-Saxons.
Between 401 and 410 AD, Roman troops were withdrawn from Britain as Germanic tribes crossed the River Rhine and overran Gaul. In 410 AD Rome itself was sacked by the northern tribe known as the Goths. The situation was hopeless and within 30 years the entire Western Roman Empire had come to an end.

Late Roman Trumpet Brooch from Seaton Carew
(top and side views)

After the breakdown of the Roman Empire the villas, towns and trade it supported gradually fell into ruin. The native British living on Teesside probably returned to a self-sufficient agricultural way of life without the benefits of Roman trade, much as they had in the Iron Age.

The lack of luxury imports and the loss of the high standard of living experienced in Roman towns and villas has led to the period following the end of the Roman Empire being referred to as the Dark Ages.
Further Reading

If you have enjoyed this booklet the following sources of information are also available: -

Archaeological Booklet No. 1. Anglo-Saxon Teesside.

Archaeological Booklet No. 2. Iron Age Teesside.


These booklets are available to borrow from local libraries or can be downloaded free of charge from our website (see below).

To buy copies of our booklets please contact us for current prices and availability.

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