

Roman Handling Box



National
Museum of
Scotland

Roman handling box

Teachers' notes

Introduction

Welcome to the National Museum of Scotland.

Our Roman handling box is a free resource for you to use with your class. The box will be ready for you in the *Early People* gallery on Level 0 of the Museum. There is an alun key for you to unlock and lock the box.

Our Roman handling collection contains original and replica objects based on archaeological evidence from the Roman period. All of the objects have links to Roman material on display in the *Early People* Gallery.

The objects divide into four themes:

1. Exploring evidence
2. The Roman soldier
3. Leisure and entertainment
4. Roman cooking

A Roman gallery trail and other teaching resources are also available on our website:

http://www.nms.ac.uk/learning/schools/gallery_packs_and_trails.aspx

Introduction

Two thousand years ago, around 80AD, the Roman army marched into Scotland - which they called 'Caledonia'. Archaeology has uncovered clues from the past which allow us to build up a picture of how Roman legions lived in Scotland. The army was highly organised and well supplied. The soldiers built road systems and forts and traded with local tribes. We hope you enjoy exploring the Roman handling box to find out what it might have been like as a Roman in Scotland!

Roman handling box

Ideas for using the Roman handling box with your class

1. Working in groups

To make sure that your pupils to see all of the objects, you can divide the class into four groups.

You can either:

- give each group one drawer of objects to look at and discuss
- give each group one object to look at and discuss in detail

Allow each group 5-10 minutes to talk about and/or draw the objects, and then rotate the objects around each group.

You can follow this up with a group discussion session where children can share their ideas, discoveries and thoughts about the objects.

2. Asking questions

Asking questions can help focus children's attention on the objects, especially questions that can be answered by looking at the objects (rather than requiring prior knowledge). Useful starter questions include:

What is it?

What materials is it made of?

Is it broken? Is there anything missing?

What might this object have been used for?

Do we have anything like this today?

3. Drawing and writing

You can encourage pupils to make a record of one of the objects by making a sketch or creating their own museum label, or writing a short descriptive piece.

Examples:

My favourite object was the...

I liked it because...

I thought it was interesting because...

Roman handling box

Drawer 1- Exploring evidence

Archaeology provides us with clues about what life was like when the Roman army were present in Scotland and the legacy of the Roman Empire.

Drawer 1, pupils have the chance to handle original Roman artefacts made and used by people in Roman times.

- Amphorae fragment
- Pieces of coarseware pottery
- Roman nails
- Oil lamp
- Fragments (sherds) of Samianware pottery

Roman handling box



Amphorae fragment (original)

Made of pottery, this is a fragment - or sherd- of an amphora, or storage jar. You can see the grooves left by the potter's wheel on the sherd. Many of the goods that Romans, including soldiers, used in their everyday lives, were not made in Britain. These included wine, olive oil and fish sauce. These commodities were imported by travelling merchants and middle-men, who followed the army. The goods were transported in large amphorae. Once the jars were empty they were often reused as containers or sometimes even as toilets. Due to such high demand, amphorae were mass-produced and many examples have been excavated by archaeologists across the Roman world.

See



Look out for examples of complete amphorae in display Q18 in the *Early People* gallery.

Roman handling box



Pieces of coarseware and black burnished ware (original)

These fragments are examples of everyday pottery, used by ordinary soldiers, for cooking and serving food. Pottery like this was an indispensable material for the Roman soldiers. Roman archaeological sites across Britain have produced large quantities of pottery which shows the importance pottery played in Roman industry and trade.

Roman handling box



Image of the original Inchtuthil hoard

Roman nails (original)

These nails came from the Inchtuthil Hoard. This was a hoard of almost a million iron nails, weighing a total of 10 tonnes, found at the site of a Roman fortress in Perthshire. It was a formidable fortress, the most northerly in the Roman Empire, and was intended to be as the Roman army's headquarters in Scotland.

Before the fortress was finished, the emperor had to call part of the army away to deal with problems elsewhere in the Empire, so the incomplete fort was abandoned.

Before the soldiers left, they demolished the buildings and buried all these iron nails so that they could not be used by their enemies. It was probably easier to bury them- after all, 10 tonnes of nails would have been a lot for the soldiers to carry away with them!

Roman handling box



Replica oil lamp



Original oil lamp

Oil lamp (original)

This lamp is made of pottery. Lamps like this were fuelled by olive oil or fish oil, which was poured into the central hole. A wick or string was placed in the spout and lit. You can see the burn marks around the spout of the lamp. As you can imagine, burning fish oils would have been pretty smelly!

Lamps were vital to the Roman army and allowed officers and legionaries to continue working into the night. Simple candles and wooden torches would also have been used for light, which may explain why lamps like this are rarely found on Roman archaeological sites in Scotland.

Roman handling box



Samian sherds (original)

Samianware was a high quality pottery with a red gloss. It was very popular, produced in huge quantities and distributed all over the Empire. Designs and stamps on Samian pottery can help work out the date of individual pieces. Stamps often included a date and designs can be dated to particular periods when the designs were fashionable.

This example is from a piece of good quality tableware which would have been imported from France. This type would not have been available to everyone because it was expensive, so it was probably mainly used by officers.

See



Look out for a selection of Samian fragments from bowls and beads in cases S8 & S9 in the *Early People* gallery.

Roman handling box

Drawer 2- The Roman soldier

Only men could join the Roman Army. The elite legionary soldiers were all Roman citizens, but people from conquered lands could join up as auxiliary soldiers. Therefore, soldiers fighting in Scotland would have come from many different parts of the Roman world - Africa, France, Germany, the Balkans, Spain and the Middle East. Being a soldier was a tough life, and you had to serve for at least 25 years! The official language of the army was Latin, but soldiers also spoke their native language.

- Roman coins
- Section of Maille
- Roman sandals
- Jupiter figurine
- Wax tablet and styli



Roman handling box



Roman coins (replica)

The Romans used coins for trading but they were also useful as propaganda. As coins were distributed right across the Empire and would pass through many hands, they were used to spread news of the emperor's victories. Small collections of coins like this were often paid by Romans as bribes to native people, to ensure their cooperation with Rome. Bigger diplomatic gifts include the Traprain Law treasure- a large Roman silver hoard discovered in East Lothian.

- **Denarius of Julius Caesar.** On one side of the coin you can see the bust of Julius Caesar. On the reverse of the coin, you can see two captives sitting at the foot of a trophy. The trophy is made up of a pile of their weapons including a Carnyx- a long, curved war trumpet. It is also possible to make out a worn inscription which reads: 'AESA' (Caesar).
- **Aureus of Domitian:** Domitian was the younger son of the Emperor Vespasian. Vespasian wanted to conquer the whole of Britain. Agricola, Roman Governor of Britain at the time, led the Roman army at least as far north as Inverness. The coin, a gold *aureus*, shows a horn of plenty reflecting the prosperity of the time.
- **Emperor Septimus Severus** on one side. He led an army into Scotland c208–211 AD, but gained no conclusive victory. He died at York. The other side shows the emperor conducting a sacrifice upon an altar.
- **Denarius of Hadrian:** This coin refers to Hadrian's travels by sea on one of his tours of the Empire. On one side you can see the bust of Hadrian and on the reverse a Gallery with rowers and oars. Hadrian is seated to the right above the rowers.

See



Look out for coins from the three military occupations (Agricolan AD79-87, Antonine AD139-165 and Severan AD200-212) of Scotland case S1 in the *Early People* gallery.

Roman handling box



Section of Maille (replica)

Maille was a type of armoured shirt worn by soldiers to protect their bodies in battle. Each shirt was made from thousands of tiny iron rings connected together. It is woven with alternate rows of round, riveted rings with domed rivet heads and flat, punched rings - this made a complete shirt very heavy. Some soldiers were even trained to swim in it!

See



Look out for a variety of maille in case R14 in the *Early People* gallery.

Touch



Feel how flexible the Maille is - this made it much easier for Roman soldiers to move around whilst they were wearing it.

Roman handling box



Roman Sandals (replica)

Roman soldiers usually wore shoes like this- called caligae. They look like leather sandals, with strips of leather laced along the top and a sole with lots of iron studs. The openness of the caligae meant that the soldiers' feet stayed cool in hot weather and dried quickly in wet weather. The studs underneath gave extra grip, just like modern football boots. But the soldiers' toes were left open, so in cold weather they seem to have used woollen socks to keep them warm! An army needed lots of shoes as the soldiers marched long distances and had to be comfortable, so there was a constant need for shoe-makers.

See



Look for a variety of Roman shoes and boots from between AD80-160 in case R14 in the *Early People* gallery.

Did you know ?

Women also wore sandals but they were of softer, finer leather. Winter shoes were usually cork-soled.

Roman handling box



Jupiter figurine (replica)

The Romans brought their own religion to Britain and they believed in many gods and goddesses. Jupiter is usually thought to have originated as a sky god and was one of the most important gods. He often holds a thunderbolt, and his sacred animal is the eagle- which was one of the most common symbols of the Roman army.

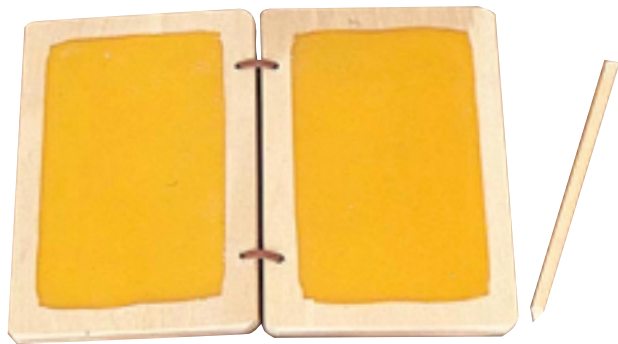
The Romans believed the gods could affect every aspect of your day and so offerings were made to the gods to keep them pleased. A votive or offering would be given to a god to encourage them to answer a prayer, or as thanks for help. What you gave as an offering depended on what you could afford and how much help you needed - an offering could be anything from a costly animal sacrifice, to small inexpensive tokens.

See



Look for two original votive offerings (a model bull and a boar) in case Y3 in the *Early People* gallery.

Roman handling box



Wax tablet with Stylus (replica)

Most Roman soldiers wrote on wooden tablets covered in wax. The wood of the tablet had the surface hollowed out and hot wax poured over it. When the wax dried, the Romans used a stylus (like a metal or wooden pen) to scratch their letters into the soft wax. A stylus often had a flat end for rubbing out mistakes! And when the writing was no longer needed, the wax could be melted to start again. Tablets were important because parchment paper was very expensive.

See



Look for an original wax tablet discovered in Newstead in case T1 in the *Early People* gallery.

Did you know ?

One wax tablet discovered on Hadrian's Wall said:

I have sent you...

Pair of socks

From Sattua

Two pairs of sandals

And two pairs of underpants.

Roman handling box

Drawer 3- Leisure and Entertainment

The Romans are famous for their impressive and elaborate baths and they brought their bathing habits to Scotland. Archaeological digs have revealed impressive Roman bathhouses such as that found in Bearsden in Glasgow. Their baths were much like the leisure centres of the day, a place to clean and get fit! Each fort built on the Roman frontier would have had a bath house. After exercise, Romans would swim and sit in heated rooms like saunas.

- Chatelaine set
- Oil flask and strigil
- Knucklebones
- Ludus Latrunculorum board game

Roman handling box



Chatelaine Set (replica)

Hygiene was very important to the Romans and this set would have been made from bronze and attached to a belt. This version consists of an ear cleaner, a pair of tweezers and a nail cleaner/toothpick on a wire ring.

See



What do you think these tools would be used for?

What are they made from?

See



Look for examples of tweezers and nail cleaners in case S5 in the *Early People* gallery.

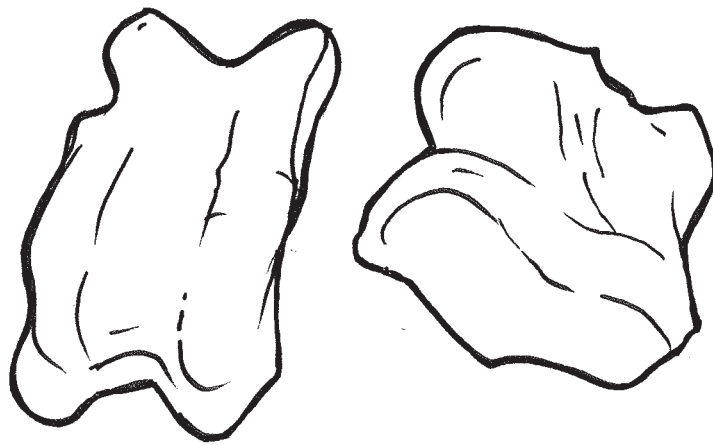
Roman handling box



Oil flask and strigil (replica)

Most Romans did not have their own baths at home; they went to public bath-houses. The glass oil flask would have held oil for use in bath-houses- a bit like a modern soap dispenser. There would have been a small plug made of cork or wood to keep the oil secure. The strigil was used for keeping clean. To clean their skin, they rubbed oil onto their skin as a softener, and then used the strigil to scrape it off the skin – along with any dead skin, sweat, and dirt! Sand and pumice stone would also be used for scouring the skin. Roman baths were not just for keeping clean it was a great way to socialise and gossip too!

Roman handling box



Knucklebones

Roman soldiers played a variety of different games to keep them entertained. Knucklebones, which were usually sheep or goat ankle bones, were very much like the game of jacks. You throw up one of the knucklebones and try to scoop up some of the other knucklebones and then catch the first one before it hits the ground.

Roman handling box



Roman board game

Ludus Latruncolorum (the game of little soldiers or mercenaries), was one of many popular of Roman board games, as it was considered to be a game of skill and strategy.

RULES: Ludus Latruncolorum is a game for two players, each using between ten and sixteen counters.

1. Each player (in turn) begins by laying out their counters, two at a time, one per square, until all counters are laid. They can be placed anywhere - you don't have to keep to your 'half' of the board.
2. Players then move their counters in turns one square at a time, either horizontally or vertically, never diagonally. Each player must make a move whenever it is their turn, even though it may mean certain capture - you cannot 'pass'!
The object of the game is to trap an opponent's counter between two of your own. The captive piece is then removed from the board.
3. The game is over when the losing player has been reduced to their last counter or a 'stalemate' has been reached, in which case the player with the most pieces wins.

Roman handling box

Drawer 4- cooking

It was vital to keep the soldiers of the Roman army properly fed- a hungry army wouldn't have been much use! Common supplies to the army would be wine and olive oil. Roman grain ships arriving at Cramond on the Firth of Forth would also have been a regular sight. Wax tablets discovered at Roman sites in England shows that armies used meat from farmed and wild animals, cereals, fruit and vegetables and spices. The use of amphorae (large pottery containers) meant that foodstuffs could be transported across the Empire so that the soldiers could have the foods they liked to eat and to cook with every day. Evidence of animals from Roman sites show that the army used both cows and sheep for food.

- Mortarium
- Roman Recipe
- Scent bags

Roman handling box



Mortarium

A mortarium was a bowl used for grinding and mixing food. It is made of pottery with small gritty stones set into the base. These would help to tear up herbs and break down ingredients as they were stirred. There is a small spout at one side of the mortarium to pour out the herbs or sauces. Many of the herbs Romans liked to use, such as coriander, mint and thyme, did not grow in Britain at the time, so the Romans brought plants with them. Soldiers would carry their own mortarium bowls with them, although local potters were soon set up to make them at Roman sites in Scotland, such as Newstead in the Scottish Borders.

See



Look out for a variety of Roman cooking utensils in case Q16 in the *Early People* gallery.

Did you know ?

The Romans introduced new kinds of vegetables to Britain, including garlic, onions, shallots, leeks, cabbages and peas.

Roman handling box



Scent Bags

Many herbs were introduced by the Romans into Scotland and some we still even use today! The main purpose of these herbs was to add flavour to the soldier's food in Roman Britain. They would be ground in a mortarium and then added to meat during cooking.

In the scent bags you will find:

- Mint
- Coriander
- Thyme

Did you know ?

At Bearsden on the Antonine Wall, occupied AD 142-58, contents of the latrine (or toilet!) revealed quantities of emmer and spelt flour together with coriander, celery, figs, lentils and beans!

Roman handling box

We hope that you have enjoyed exploring the Roman handling collection.

Please help us by

- 1 making sure that all items are returned to the box and signing this form
- 2 telling us how you think we could improve our handling collections

Thank you!

Exploring evidence

- Amphora fragments
- Samain fragments
- Inchtuthil nails
- Oil lamp

The Roman soldier

- Maille
- Roman shoes/caligae
- Wax tablet
- Coins

Leisure and entertainment

- Strigil
- Oil flask
- Chatelaine Set
- Knucklebones
- Ludus Latrunculorum game

Roman cooking

- Pottery bowl
- Mortarium
- Roman recipe
- Sensory scent bags