

Roman Glass Jar (Replica)

Period: Roman
Date: AD 50-250
Material: Glass
Use: Storage/Decoration
Site: Originals commonly found all over Scotland



1. When the Romans arrived in Scotland they brought with them some beautiful glass objects. Bottles were used for storing everything from medicine to wine and had decorated handles. The appearance of bubbles (as can be seen on the glass bottle) is an indicator of pure blown glass.

2. Glass bottles were very common all over the Roman Empire and were generally used as containers for transporting and storing household goods such as wine, olive oil, fish sauce and a range of medicines and healing ointments. They are found in large numbers usually on settlement and cemetery sites.

Fantastic Fact!

The bottoms of Roman glass bottles were usually decorated with a relief pattern. Many different patterns have been found but it is unsure what their exact purpose was. They could be maker's marks, owner's marks or perhaps advertise the original contents of the bottle! What do you think?

Activity Idea!

Imagine you are working in the kitchen of a Roman fort on the Antonine Wall. Today is delivery day, with lots of food arriving from all over the Empire. Can you research what kinds of food the Romans ate and then pick one type of food and write a story about its journey to Scotland?

ZY111

Mortaria Sherd

Period: Roman

Date: c. AD 100

Material: Clay and coarse grit

Use: Food preparation

Site: Wroxeter (England)



1. This pottery sherd comes from the rim of a Roman mixing bowl known as a 'mortaria'. These bowls were used for preparing food. Rough pieces of grit set inside the bowl helped to grind up food that was then poured out of the spout. You can see and feel the rough red grit on the inside of the sherd.

2. These stout mixing bowls featured thick overlapping rims for easy gripping and a pouring spout. Coarse grit from quartz or other resilient stone is embedded in the internal surface to improve its ability to shred and grind foodstuffs rubbed around it and to strengthen it against wear during pounding. Sometimes mortaria are found with hardly any grit left at all showing they were well worn and were used for a long time. This everyday object is a very common find on Roman sites and is a good example of a useful Roman invention that was also adopted by the local population.

Fantastic Fact!

Mortaria did not appear in Britain until the Romans arrived but were soon being made locally. They are the only examples of British pottery at the time with makers' marks. These stamps can be used to trace different potters showing they moved or traded designs around the country. So although this example was made in England it could easily have ended up at a Roman site in Scotland.

Activity Idea!

Imagine you are a cook in the Roman army. Prepare a menu to feed the soldiers stationed at your fort. What ingredients would you prepare in your mortaria? You could then make your meal and use a modern mortar and pestle to grind up some of the ingredients.

ZY213

Amphora Sherd

Period: Roman
Date: A.D. 50-300
Material: Unglazed Clay
Use: Storage and Trade
Site: Camelon (Falkirk)



1. This pottery sherd comes from a large container called an ‘amphora’. Amphorae were used for storage and transporting goods such as olive oil and wine. Thousands would have been transported to Scotland to supply the Roman army.

2. This sherd comes from a fat bellied amphora. This was one of the largest types with a capacity of around 80 litres. Most amphorae were long and thin so that large numbers could be stacked easily side by side. They were usually imported from other parts of the Roman Empire such as Italy, Spain and France. The pointed base of the amphora could be used to move it by rotating instead of lifting. The contents could be poured out by holding the bottom point and one of the side handles. This sherd was found at the remains of the Roman fort at Camelon next to the Antonine Wall.

Fantastic Fact!

Archaeologists have found many amphorae in shipwrecks. Analysing the inside of them in the lab can let us know what they contained. All sorts of goods were transported in amphorae such as wine, olive oil, fish paste, dates and sauce.

Once the jars were empty amphorae were often re-used as containers or toilets!

Activity Idea!

Can you use the sherd to reconstruct what the amphora would have looked like when it was whole? Think about how large it would have been and research the different shapes that amphora would have been. Can you draw the whole object?

Roman Glass Bead (Replica)

Period: Roman
Date: AD 50-250
Material: Glass
Use: Storage/Decoration
Site: Originals commonly found all over Scotland



Roman glass was not made in Britain but imported from other parts of the Empire where it was blown into moulds by skilled glassmakers to make ornate shapes. Glass beads were popular as jewellery and this bead is called a ‘melon bead’ because of its shape.

When Roman glass began to appear in Scotland the locals liked to melt it down and re-cycle it into jewellery such as bangles and beads or use it to decorate metal brooches and horse fittings.

Although it was most desirable to wear necklaces made from precious metals like silver, most people could not afford them so used cheaper materials such as glass. Glass melon beads are very common on Scottish Roman military sites and they are often associated with the decoration of horse harnesses and other forms of military equipment.

Fantastic Fact!

The main ingredient in glass is sand! This is mixed with other chemicals and heated up to a very high temperature as a liquid. It is then blown into a mould, to make it into a certain shape and put into an oven to cool it down, as it is so hot! Even when it is cold, glass is never fully solid. If you see old glass windows, they are sometimes thicker at the bottom than at the top, because the glass is slowly settling to the bottom of the window.

Activity Idea!

This is just one bead, where there would have been many to make a necklace or the decoration on a horse’s harness. Can you design a Roman necklace or bracelet with different beads? What other materials do you think the Romans might have used to make their jewellery?

ZY238

Samian Sherd

Period: Roman
Date: c. AD 100
Material: Red fired clay
Use: Dining/Storage
Site: Newstead (Scottish Borders)



1. This pottery sherd comes from a Roman bowl. 'Samian' was the name of the best Roman pottery that had a distinctive shiny red colour. Only the most important Romans in Scotland would have had this type of pottery on their table, as it was the best available.
2. Samian ware, or '*terra sigillata*' in Latin, was mass produced at specialist pottery centres, most famously in Southern Gaul, and shipped all over the Roman Empire.
3. The demand for Samian ware was extremely high, even in areas outside the Empire. For example, Samian sherds have been found on sites in the Western Isles of Scotland. This sherd was found at the site of the Roman fort of Trimontium near Melrose in the Scottish Borders.

Fantastic Fact!

Mass produced pottery such as Samian ware was stamped or inscribed by the manufacturers to show who had made the pot; what was contained in the pot; or who owned the pot. This is something we still see today on our cups, plates and bowls. Keep an eye out for them!

Activity Idea!

Have a go at making your own clay bowl, either by making a coil pot or using a potter's wheel. Can you paint your bowl to look like Samian ware? What decoration will you put on it to make it look special?

ZY288

Oil Lamp Sherd

Period: Roman

Date: c. AD 100

Material: Red slip clay

Use: Lighting

Site: Caerlon Mon
(Wales)



This sherd is part of the top of a Roman oil lamp. It is decorated with a picture of a wild pig. The piece which you can see here is the top part of the lamp. Look at the reconstruction picture and see if you can match up which part of the lamp the sherd has come from.

The Romans used olive oil to burn their lamps and would have poured the oil in through a hole in the top of the lamp. The wick would have been placed in the second hole, which is the one you can see on this sherd. The wick would have been made of linen or flax or papyrus. Lamps are not often found in Scotland or Britain, as they would have been imported from other parts of the Roman Empire. Olive oil was expensive and also had to be imported.

Fantastic Fact!

Romans didn't just use oil lamps as lights. They also used candles, flares or wooden torches. These forms of lighting don't survive very well as they are made of organic materials. The oil lamps are made of pottery, so survive much better.

Activity Idea!

Have a look at the design of the wild pig. You can see that it stands out from the background. This is a technique called "relief" which gives the picture a feeling of depth and perspective. Try making your own picture in relief using clay.

ZY245

Carbonised Grain

Period: Roman
Date: AD 80 - 100
Material: Burnt grain
Use: Food
Site: Castlecary (Falkirk)



1. This box contains some grains of wheat, a type of grain. The word carbonised means that they have been turned into carbon, after being burned. That is why they are black. Just like today, grain was used to make flour by grinding it on a special stone called a 'quern'. A lot was needed for making bread to feed the soldiers.

2. This produce is likely to have been grown by a local Scottish farmer. Because there were so many people in the Roman army it required a lot of produce, such as grain and meat, from the local farmers. In exchange, the Romans could give the farmers valuable Roman commodities such as pottery, jewellery, glass jars, olive oil and wine.

Fantastic Facts!

The Roman army got its supplies in three different ways.

- From the local people e.g. leather, meat and grain, plus stone for building.
- From other parts of Britain, e.g. pottery and iron which could be brought up by road or up the coast in ships.
- From other parts of the Roman Empire, e.g. wine and olive oil, neither of which grows in Scotland, would have been imported by boat.

Activity Idea!

Imagine you are in charge of your own Roman Fort in Scotland. Make a list of the different supplies that you would need to keep your soldiers and officers fed, clothed and equipped!

- How would you yet hold of these supplies?
- Where do you think they would come from?
- How would they get to your Fort in Scotland?

FY100

Roman Nail

Period: Roman
Date: c. AD 83 - 87
Material: Iron
Use: Construction/warfare
Site: Inchtuthill (Perthshire)



1. This iron nail was found buried with thousands of others of all shapes and sizes at the site of the Roman fort at Inchtuthill. The fort was built c. AD 83 but was abandoned 5 years later when the soldiers from the 20th legion were recalled south.

2. We can tell that the nails in the Inchtuthill 'hoard' were hand forged as they show evidence of hammering. It is quite possible that they were produced inside the fort's huge workshop where, after smelting, the iron would be hammered into shape by the legion's blacksmith who was known as a *fabrica*.

3. The nails, of various sizes, are square tapered with large square heads. When the fort was abandoned a huge pit was dug in the corner of the workshop and over 850,00 iron nails were buried there to stop the local tribes from getting their hands on this valuable resources and melting it down to make weapons to use against the Romans. However, they were extremely well hidden and were not discovered again until excavations at the site in 1961.

Fantastic Fact!

Because the fort was deep inside enemy territory, it was deliberately dismantled by the retreating legion. All the wood was burned, the pottery smashed and the iron, which was too heavy to move was buried in a 3.6 metre deep pit!

Activity Idea!

Can you find out what Romans would have used iron nails for? What kinds of things would they have built in the fort? Can you make a detailed drawing of one of them and make sure to label where the nails were used?

ZY294

Roman Coin

Period: Roman
Date: c. AD 268
Material: Bronze
Use: Currency
Site: Alexandria (Egypt)



1. This coin shows the head of the Roman Emperor Gallienus and was made in the Egyptian city of Alexandria. The writing on the coin is ancient Greek, the language spoken by people living in this part of the Roman Empire. As it was Egyptian currency and not legal tender it would not have been used in Scotland.

2. It is a bronze 4 drachma coin from the Alexandria mint. One side features the (armoured) bust of Gallienus (son of Valerian). He was Emperor from 253 to 268 AD and the coin was minted in the fifteenth and last year of his reign. The reverse shows a depiction of his wife Salonina dressed to resemble a goddess. The coin probably arrived in Scotland as the property of a Roman Legionary posted to serve in Scotland or even more recently by a British soldier who served in Egypt during the First or Second World War and was sold the coin as a souvenir.

Fantastic Fact!

In Scotland the Roman army would have used money amongst themselves, but, when dealing with the local population they were more likely to barter or demand things. However, buried pots containing silver coins have been found in Falkirk and in Moray. These coins could have been bribes to powerful Scottish chiefs to help keep the peace on the frontier or perhaps belonged to a wealthy merchant who grew rich by trading with the Romans. What do you think?

Activity Idea!

Archaeologists can find out a lot about coins and they are very useful for providing a lot of information, such as the Emperor's image, name and the date of when the coin was minted. Modern coins also have a lot of useful information. Why not find a modern coin and write down all the information you can find just from looking at it closely. Can you find out the same information from the Roman coin?

ZY218

Hypocaust Tile

Period: Roman
Date: c.100 BC – AD 200
Material: Baked clay
Use: Construction
Site: Cramond (Edinburgh)



1. This is a fragment of a Roman building tile from the Roman fort at Cramond. Tiles like this were used to cover the floor of the bathhouse which was kept hot by underground heating. The lines on the tile are either part of the floor decoration or helped to attach them to the mortar (a type of cement) which fixed them to the floor.

2. ‘Hypocaust’ is the name given to an ingenious central heating system for buildings invented by the Romans. A low basement or chamber was built into the foundations of the building over which a fireproof floor was constructed and supported by small pillars or channels. An external furnace was connected to these chambers from which warm air could flow around the system eventually escaping through vents in the walls called ‘flues’ constructed using box tiles.

Fantastic Fact!

A large bathhouse was built within the Roman fort at Cramond. The bathhouse was heated by the hypocaust system and had a number of rooms containing hot baths, cold baths, a massage parlour, a steam room and toilets. This was a favourite way for Roman soldiers to relax in the warmth.

Activity Idea!

First research what a Roman bath house was and what it looked like. Then, design your own Roman bathhouse! What combination of relaxing areas, bath facilities and heating system would you add?

Stylus and Wax Tablet (replicas)

Period: Roman
Date: Modern Replica
Materials: Bronze (stylus), Pine/wax (tablet)
Use: Record Keeping/Communication
Site: An original stylus & tablet were found at Newstead (Scottish Borders)



1. This was one method of writing used by the Roman army in Scotland. It consisted of a small metal rod (stylus) and a wooden block filled with wax (tablet). The rod had a pointed end like a pencil for scratching letters in the wax. The other end was blunt and could be used like an eraser to wipe letters away.

2. Writing tablets were usually made of pine like the example found at Newstead. A single block of wood would be used for each half of the pair, hollowed out so that wax could be poured inside. Messages could then be inscribed on the hardened wax. Tablets were often sent as letters or orders. When ready for despatch a pair of writing tablets could be closed like a book, tied up with string and secured by a seal.

3. Writing was very important to the Roman Empire, as it was used for keeping records; ordering supplies; communicating with other parts of the Empire; labelling (or stamping) good; and for recording weights and measures.

Fantastic Fact!

Archaeological evidence suggests that most Roman soldiers who came to Scotland would have been able to read and write. Evidence from Hadrian's Wall includes invites to birthday parties and a request for more socks.

Activity Idea!

Imagine you are a Roman soldier stationed on the Antonine Wall and you are writing home to your family in another part of the Empire. Describe your experiences, e.g. weather, food and people.