



ENGLISH HERITAGE  
EDUCATION

# SOURCES

PEEK INTO THE PAST

A historical source is something that tells us about life in the past, such as a document, a picture or an object. It may be a primary source, from the time, or a secondary source, created later. Experts at English Heritage have chosen these sources to help you learn about Wroxeter Roman City.

## IRON AGE POT

This late Iron Age pot was found at Wroxeter. The Cornovii tribe lived in the Wroxeter area during the Iron Age, working mainly as farmers. When the Roman army invaded, the Cornovii were forced to surrender. This pot dates from the time of the early fortress which the Romans built soon after they took control of the land.



© Roger H White



## TOMBSTONE OF A CORNOVIAN WOMAN

This tombstone shows a young woman, aged 30, sitting in a high-backed chair. She originally came from the native Cornovii tribe and married a Roman soldier from Ilkley Fort. The quality of this tombstone suggests she was of high status by the time she died. The inscription identifies her as a 'citizen of the Cornovii', making this an important example of a British native who worked her way up the social ladder in Roman Britain.

© Paul White Photography



## BRONZE DIANA SHRINE

The Romans worshipped many Gods (this is called 'polytheism'). They believed that different gods were in charge of different things, such as Diana, the god of hunting and the moon, and Mercury, the god of trade and money. They mainly worshipped in temples but there is evidence that some people also made small, portable shrines, like this bronze figure of Diana.



## BOX FLUE TILE

It wasn't just under-floor heating that heated the rooms at Wroxeter's baths. Hot air produced by the furnace could also flow up the walls, behind the plaster, through hollow box flue tiles like this one. Marks were scratched into one side of the tile to help the wall plaster bind to it.



IMP CAES DIVI TRAIANI PARTHICI FIL DIVI NERVAE NEPOTI TRAIANO HADRIANO  
AVG PONTIFICI MAXIMO TRIB POT XIII COS III PP CIVITAS CORNOVIORVM

“To Emperor Caesar Trajanus Hadrianus Augustus, the son of the divine Trajanus Parthicus, the grandson of the divine Nerva, Chief Priest, holding tribunician power for the fourteenth time, consul three times, Father of the Fatherland, the community of the Cornovii [(erected this)].”

These words were carved into a stone slab which was originally placed above the entrance of the forum at Wroxeter. The stone dedicates the forum to the emperor Hadrian (r.117–138), who famously built Hadrian's Wall across the north of England. The mention of Emperor Hadrian holding power for the 'fourteenth time' narrows the date the forum was completed to AD 129–130. The dedication stone was found by archaeologists in 1920 and confirmed the name of the Roman town. A replica of the stone can be seen on display in the museum at Wroxeter Roman City. The original is kept at Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery.





A reconstruction drawing by Ivan Lapper of one of the furnaces used to heat the rooms in the baths. The wood for the fire came from trees in the surrounding area and the fire was stoked by slaves – it would have been incredibly hot and tiring work.



A reconstruction drawing by Ivan Lapper of the 'basilica' (exercise hall) at Wroxeter, where people would go to work up a sweat and open their pores before entering the main bath suite.



A reconstruction drawing by Ivan Lapper of the 'natatio' (outdoor plunge pool) at Wroxeter, where people would go after visiting the hot rooms to take a refreshing dip in the water.



A reconstruction drawing by Ivan Lapper of the 'cauldarium' (hot, steamy room) at Wroxeter, showing the highly decorated floor, walls and ceiling. Bathers wore wooden shoes to protect their feet from the underfloor heating. They could get an oil massage from a hot room attendant then have the oil and dirt scraped off their skin with a metal 'strigil'.



A reconstruction drawing by Ivan Lapper of the baths (centre) and the market hall (top left) as they may have looked in the 2nd century AD. Beyond the market hall, the front of the forum can be seen.



An aerial reconstruction drawing by Ivan Lapper showing Wroxeter Roman City as it may have looked at the end of the 2nd century AD, when it was in its prime. It was the fourth largest city in Roman Britain at the time.

## PAINTED WALL PLASTER

This section of plaster is from the entrance to the hot room at Wroxeter's baths. When the Romans invaded Britain, they brought with them new types of interior design, introducing a more detailed and highly-decorated style than people were used to. Beautiful patterns like this were painted directly onto the plastered walls and ceilings at the baths.



### 23. Seneca Letter 56.1-2

'My dear Lucilius,

If you want to study, quiet is not nearly as necessary as you might think. Here I am, surrounded by all kinds of noise (my lodgings overlook a bath house). Conjure up in your imagination all the sounds that make one hate one's ears. I hear the grunts of musclemen exercising and jerking those heavy weights around; they are working hard, or pretending to. I hear their sharp hissing when they release their pent breath. If there happens to be a lazy fellow content with a simple massage I hear the slap of hand on shoulder; you can tell whether it's hitting a flat or a hollow. If a ball-player comes up and starts calling out his score, I'm done for. Add to this the racket of [...] a thief caught in the act, and a fellow who likes the sound of his own voice in the bath, plus those who plunge into the pool with a huge splash of water. Besides those who just have loud voices, imagine the skinny armpit-hair plucker whose cries are shrill so as to draw people's attention and never stop except when he's doing his job and making someone else shriek for him. Now add the mingled cries of the drink peddler and the sellers of sausages, pastries, and hot fare, each hawking his own wares with his own particular peal...'

This extract is from a letter written by Seneca, a famous Roman philosopher, playwright, tutor and later advisor to Emperor Nero (r.AD 54–68). It is from one of his many 'moral letters' to his friend Lucilius, an important Roman knight and writer. In this dramatic account, Seneca describes the hustle and bustle of a nearby bath house, which he can hear as he tries to study.

There is a bright spring morning overhead, the old wall standing close by looks blank at us; here and there a stray antiquary clammers among the rubbish, careless of dirt stains; an attentive gentleman on the crest of a dirt heap explains Roman antiquities to some young ladies in pink and blue, who have made Wroxeter the business of a morning drive. An intelligent labourer, who seems to be a sort of foreman of the works, waits to disclose to the honorary secretary the contents of a box in which it is his business to deposit each day's findings of small odds and ends...'

This extract is from an account by Charles Dickens, the famous author, which he wrote after visiting Wroxeter on 14 May 1859. He describes an excavation taking place at Wroxeter in Victorian times.