Roman Scotland: Life on the Edge of Empire - Teacher & Adult Helper Notes

We hope that you enjoy the Roman Scotland exhibition. Here are a few hints and tips for you as you take your class around.

Preparing for your visit

The exhibition is displayed in Exhibition Gallery 1, which is located on Level 3 of the museum.

There are no toilets within the exhibition. The nearest toilets are on Level 3 between the ‘Making and Creating’, and ‘Technology by Design’ galleries. You will need to leave the exhibition to access these.

You are welcome to take notes so feel free to bring in pencils and paper.

Please do not bring any food or drink into the exhibition.

For more information see our Roman Scotland web page for schools.

Important information for inside the exhibition:

- The exhibition may be busy, please consider splitting your class or group into smaller groups during your visit
- Parts of the exhibition are quite dimly lit
- Please remind your pupils to take their time when moving around the space
- You will enter and exit the exhibition through separate doors
- Limited seating is available as you move around the exhibition
- Photography is permitted.

Exhibition overview

The exhibition is split into seven sections:

1. Conquering Caledonia
2. Making a Frontier
3. Supplying the Frontier
4. People of the Frontier
5. Life on the Frontier
6. Endgame
7. Rediscovery and Legacy

During your visit

We recommend showing the highlights of section 1, 2, 3, and then allowing your pupils time to explore before moving on to sections 4, 5 and 6. Finally, you can allow your pupils time to investigate further if you wish.

Sections

1. Conquering Caledonia

This section explores the land of Caledonia, its people, cultures and identities from the time of the Roman arrival. It shows the diversity of people living here, their spread and how the Romans sought to bring Caledonia into line.

Look out for:

- The larger-than-life bronze leg. Found near Hawick on what was once a busy network of Roman roads
- The ballista balls from Burnswark Hill. These are missiles that Roman siege weapons called ballistae fired. They were similar to catapults
- Ptolemy's map. This map was made in the 2nd century AD in Alexandria, Egypt. It captures the shape of Scotland, but with one notable exception. What is different?

Try to find your school on the map and spot which tribe was nearest.

2. Making a Frontier

This section tells us about the Roman plans to stay in Scotland by building forts and establishing the infrastructure to allow them to travel quickly across the country. In time, settlements grew up around these forts, with Inveresk becoming the centre of Roman Scotland.

Look out for:

- The decorated building stones. These architectural flourishes are evidence that the Romans believed they were here to stay.

Watch the Inveresk video.

3. Supplying the Frontier

This section is all about how the fort was built, what skills it required and where material came from.

Look out for:

- The giant pile of nails. Archaeologists found around 800,000 of them at the Roman fort of Inchtuthil in Perthshire. Imagine making every nail by hand. It would have taken a single blacksmith 37 years!

What does this tell us about the effort involved in building a Roman fort?

Look out for:

- The Amphora. Ask pupils what they think these were used for. They were used to transport goods such as wine and fish sauce.

Ask pupils if they think many people who lived and worked here had been to Rome before? The Roman Empire was huge, and many Romans had lived in places like modern day Germany and Austria before arriving in Scotland.

4. People of the Frontier

This section tells us about who was living at Roman Inveresk, across both the town and military fort. It explores the diverse communities who lived and worked there.

Ask pupils to find as many different groups of people living at Inveresk as they can.

Look out for:

- The pottery that has graffiti on it. Why do you think they scratched their names into their pots? Why do you write your name on your belongings?

Watch the video reconstructing what someone living at Inveresk might have looked like. How does it feel to come face to face with someone from the past?

Feasting was very important for both the Romans and the locals.

Those who had befriended the Romans liked to show off the fancy Roman dining equipment they had acquired. Think about what this can tell us about the relationship between the Romans and the local Iron Age communities who were already living in Scotland.

5. Life on the Frontier

This section focuses on what everyday life looked like in Roman Inveresk.

Look out for:

- A strigil, flask and tweezers. These were used in the bathhouse, which was a vital part of Roman life. Would you like to bathe like a Roman?
- An object that the Romans used that we still use today. Discuss any similarities or differences.
- The altars to Mithras and Sol.

The cult of Mithras was a secretive, male-only religion practised by some Romans, especially those serving in the army. Mithraism celebrated the victory of light over darkness and good over evil. Sol, the Roman sun god, played an important role in Mithraic beliefs. The cult of Mithras was not open to local communities. How might that have affected relationships between the locals and the Romans?

These altars once stood in an underground temple. The altar to Sol was illuminated from behind, causing the face of the sun god to glow. Imagine stepping into the dark shrine and seeing this dramatic effect for the first time.

6. End of the Frontier

This section is about the abandonment of Inveresk and the frontier. Remember that Scotland was invaded and abandoned three times.

Look out for:

- The coins. Find the picture of the goddess Victory on one of them.

The Romans did not like failure, so even though they did not successfully conquer and Romanise Scotland, they still printed victory symbols to give an impression of having won.

Look out for:

- The Pictish symbol stone. Remember that the local communities were living here long before the Romans came. As we saw in the exhibit, some local communities embraced the Roman way of life and some would have protested against them.

Think about how you would have reacted if you had been living in Scotland when the Romans arrived.

7. Rediscovery and Legacy

This section explores how archaeologists uncovered evidence of the Romans in Scotland and what these discoveries can tell us about life at Roman Inveresk.

Archaeologists are often described as detectives of the past. They use clues from objects, buildings and landscapes to work out what happened long ago. Sometimes there are no written records to explain a discovery. This was the case with the altars to Mithras. As Mithraism was a secretive religion, archaeologists had to piece together the evidence to identify the altars and understand their purpose.

Ask:

- If you had discovered these altars, what would you think they were?
- What clues would help you investigate their meaning?
- How could you test your ideas?

Look out for:

- The medieval vessel that 19th century antiquaries (early amateur archaeologists) mistakenly believed was Roman. Discuss why people can sometimes reach the wrong conclusions about objects and how new evidence can change our understanding of the past.

This section provides a great opportunity to explore how archaeological interpretations are formed, challenged and sometimes revised as new discoveries are made.

Curriculum links

Literacy

Primary & Secondary:

Through developing my knowledge of context clues, punctuation, grammar, and layout, I can read unfamiliar texts with increasing fluency, understanding and expression. **ENG 2-12a / ENG 3-12a**

Social Studies

Primary:

I understand that evidence varies in the extent to which it can be trusted and can use this in learning about the past. **SOC 1-01a**

I can use primary and secondary sources selectively to research events in the past. **SOC 2-01a**

By exploring places, investigating artefacts and locating them in time, I have developed an awareness of the ways we remember and preserve Scotland's history. **SOC 1-02a**

I can interpret historical evidence from a range of periods to help to build a picture of Scotland's heritage and my sense of chronology. **SOC 2-02a**

I can compare aspects of people's daily lives in the past with my own by using historical evidence or the experience of recreating an historical setting. **SOC 1-04a**

I can compare and contrast a society in the past with my own and contribute to a discussion of the similarities and differences. **SOC 2-04a**

Secondary:

I can use my knowledge of a historical period to interpret the evidence and present an informed view. **SOC 3-01a**

I can make links between my current and previous studies, and show my understanding of how people and events have contributed to the development of the Scottish nation. **SOC 3-02a**

Questions or feedback?

If you have any questions, comments, or feedback, please contact us. We would also love to see any work your class produce after visiting the exhibition:

- E-mail: schools@nms.ac.uk

Alternatively, complete our teacher feedback form.