

# The Romans in Devon

**2,000 BC to 400 AD**

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## 100 - World coinage

## **1 - Board game**

Around 100-400

Found at various sites in Exeter

A slate gaming board with a grid scratched onto it for playing a game similar to modern backgammon. Many gaming counters made from glass, pottery or stone have been discovered from Roman Exeter showing the popularity of board games.

## **2 - Stylus**

About 275-325

Found in Rack Street, Exeter

This stylus originally had a changeable end, with a point for writing on wax tablets and a nib for ink on wooden tablets. The flat end served as an eraser when writing on wax.

## **3 - Tumbler-lock bolt**

Around 100-400

Found in Cathedral Close, Exeter

This is part of the lock mechanism from a storage chest or a door.

#### **4-5 - Metal and bone keys**

Around 100-400

Found in Exeter

For a casket or a door latch.

#### **6 - Mouse figurine**

About 75-80

Found at Mermaid Yard, Exeter

Small metal mice and rats are found all over the Roman Empire. This may have been a child's toy or a religious votive object.

#### **7-8 - Seal box and seal box lid**

About 200-300

Found in Exeter

Seal boxes were attached to wooden writing tablets to contain the official seal of the sender. These are two different seal boxes made to a similar design.

#### **9 - Whetstone**

Around 75-350

Found in Queen Street, Exeter

Whetstones were used to sharpen metal blades.

## **10 - Knife blade**

Around 100-400

Found in Cathedral Close, Exeter

Knives were common everyday items. This knife blade was dropped by a visitor to the town's public bath-house.

## **11 - Panther knife handle**

Around 100-400

Found in Bear Street, Exeter

This knife handle is shaped like a growling panther. It is made from jet, a luxurious stone from Whitby on the Yorkshire coast.

## **12 - Dog and hare knife handle**

Around 100-300

Found at Princesshay, Exeter

This is the handle from a clasp knife, a type of knife where the blade folded up when not in use. The handle is shaped like a dog chasing a hare, which was a popular motif on Roman metalwork, glass and pottery.

## **13 - Pottery and stone spindle whorls**

Around 100-400

Found in Exeter



Made to aid the rotation of the spindle while spinning wool into yarn, these simple discs were often recycled from broken pottery, stones or roof slates.

#### **14-15 - Metal and bone needles**

Around 100-400

Found in Exeter

Needles were an essential piece of home equipment, particularly important for making and mending clothes.

#### **16 - Crucibles used in silver-working**

Around 100-300

Found in Trichay Street, Exeter

These pottery crucibles, small pots for melting metal, were used in processing gold and silver.

The fragments here are among the earliest surviving evidence of the silver industry in Exeter.

#### **17 - Wooden spade**

About 175-200

Found in Queen Street, Exeter

This spade blade is made from oak. It is missing its wooden handle. Wood was undoubtedly a common material for tools and household equipment, but it usually rots away if buried in the ground for many years. This one was preserved in a waterlogged pit.

## **18 - Cattle skull**

Around 100-400

Found in Queen Street, Exeter

Excavated animal bones sometimes have the telltale signs of butchery. This cattle skull, found with butchered animal bones, has evidence of a bolt mark between the eyes, showing how the animal was killed.

## **19-20 - Spearheads**

Around 75-200

Found at Princesshay, Exeter

These spears were found during excavations of the Roman town, but are a type used by soldiers. It seems likely that a small military presence remained in Exeter after the legion had moved on.

## **21-27 - Bone and antler offcuts**

Around 100-400

From various sites in Exeter

Animal bone was a useful material for making household fittings, tools or jewellery. These pieces of bone and antler have been cut, shaped or pierced ready to be made into objects, but never used.

## **28 - Worked bone fragment**

Around 100-400

Found in Friernhay Street, Exeter

This piece of bone has been carefully shaped and decorated, but it was thrown away unfinished.

## **29-30 - Bone objects**

Around 100-400

Found in Exeter

Small objects like this furniture hinge and amulet may have been made by craftspeople in Exeter.

## **31 - Bronze brooches**

Around 100-400

From various sites in Exeter

Brooches were an important part of everyday clothing. They were practical, for keeping clothing pinned together, as well as decorative. These brooches show over 300 years of changing fashion.

## **32 - Surgical instrument**

Around 100-400

Found in Cathedral Close, Exeter

This tool has a spatula at one end and held a scalpel blade at the other. It shows the residents of the town continued to use medical ideas first brought to the region by the army.

### **33 - Spatula**

Around 175-400

Found in Queen Street, Exeter

Similar to the type of spatula used by the army in the fortress, this tool could be used for mixing and applying medicines or cosmetics.

### **34 - Boxwood comb**

About 175-200

Found in Queen Street, Exeter

Although this comb is now very misshapen, originally it looked similar to modern combs. It was probably often used to remove head lice.

### **35 - Grooming kit**

About 350-400

Found in Holloway Street, Exeter

Clearly appearance and hygiene were important to some inhabitants of the town. This set contains two pairs of tweezers and two nail cleaners.

### **36 - Nail cleaner**

Around 100-400

Found in Cathedral Close, Exeter

This decorative, but practical, item was used to clean under the nails.

### **37 - Bone and copper tweezers**

Around 100-400

Found in Exeter

### **38 - Shale bracelets**

Around 100-300

From various sites in Exeter

The different sizes of these bracelets suggest they were worn by both children and adults. They are made from a soft type of stone called Kimmeridge shale, which is found in Dorset and was probably brought to Exeter by sea.

### **39 - Metal bracelet**

Around 200-400

Found at Mermaid Yard, Exeter

Bracelets came in a variety of styles according to fashion and personal taste. This is a simple design of twisted strands of copper alloy, with a hook fastening.

## **40 - Beads**

Around 200-400

Found in Exeter

These beads are made from a range of colourful materials including glass, amber, stone and shale. Glass ones are the commonest type from the town. The amber bead is the only one known from Exeter and was probably made from amber picked up on a beach in the Baltic region.

## **41 - Ring key**

About 375-400

Found in Trichay Street, Exeter

Rings with keys could be used for locking boxes containing personal or valuable items.

## **42-43 - Rings with seals**

About 200-300

Found in Trichay Street, Exeter

These rings are made from copper with glass insets. They are British versions of a Roman ring style which features an engraved image of a god. The artists who made these were not as skilled as their Italian counterparts. The god figures are reduced to a stick men or even just three blobs.

#### **44 - Glass ring**

Around 100-400

Found in Exeter

This ring is made from trailed dark brown glass with decoration cut into it. The large size of the ring suggests it was worn by a man, or was a pendant on a necklace.

#### **45-46 - Bone and copper hairpins**

Around 100-400

From sites in Exeter

Fashionable women liked to have the latest Roman hairstyles. They were often very elaborate, needing numerous pins to keep the hair in place.

The length of the pins reflects the changing requirements of fashions. Large creations on top of the head needed long pins, and smaller styles near the neck required shorter pins.

The heads of the pins are ornamented in a range of styles, from plain to the very elaborate.

#### **47 - Pottery fragment with Christian symbol**

About 350

Found in South Street, Exeter

Scratched into this jar sherd is the Christian chi rho symbol. It is formed from 'X' and 'P', the first letters of the word Christ in the Greek alphabet. This little fragment is the only certain evidence for Christianity in Roman Devon.

## **48 - Axe-head brooch**

Around 75-300

Found in Exeter

Many people wore amulets to protect themselves from harm, or to endow themselves with physical strengths. This axe brooch may be an amulet representing power.

## **49 - Mother goddess figurine**

About 150

Found in High Street, Exeter

This ceramic figurine shows a fertility goddess called a Dea Nutrix. She is sitting in a wicker chair and nurses two babies. Small religious figurines were often found in Roman homes. This model was made in France and they are more commonly unearthed in other parts of Roman Britain, but this is the only one known from Devon. Her head is missing and it is possible she was deliberately broken before she was discarded.

## **50 - Quern stone**

Around 100-300

Found near Honiton

Querns were used for grinding cereal grains into flour. After this one was broken into halves, each piece was placed into a different pit.



## **51 - Brooch**

About 75-125

Found at Seaton villa

This brooch is very similar to those worn by the Roman townsfolk. Very few brooches have been found in the Devon countryside, suggesting people continued wearing traditional, local styles of clothing.

## **52 - Brooch fragment**

About 175-200

Found at Seaton villa

Plate brooches like this are very uncommon finds from Roman Devon. This tiny fragment retains decoration in blue, red and white enamel.

## **53 - Jet beads**

Around 200-400

Found near Honiton

These tiny beads are made from Whitby jet. They were found in a rubbish pit at a roadside settlement at Pomeroy Wood, near Honiton.

## **54 - Glass beads**

Around 200-300

Found at Seaton villa

Glass beads strung together as a necklace were probably very common in Roman Britain. Their tiny size makes them difficult to find during archaeological excavations.

## **55 - Copper finger ring**

Around 200-300

Found at Seaton Villa

## **56 - Intaglio from a finger ring**

Around 200-300

Found at Seaton villa

The image on this stone shows a Greek satyr figure holding a staff and a bunch of grapes. The image is a typical Classical Roman style. Its owner may have aspired to the Roman fashion and way of life.

## **57 - Gold snake ring**

Around 50-400

Found at Spreyton, mid Devon

Snakes were a popular emblem throughout the Roman Empire, but very few rings in this form are known from Roman Britain, and even fewer are made of gold. This was found by A. Gerrard.

## **58 - Pottery feeding cup**

Around 200-400

Found near Honiton

The spout on this cup shows it was used for feeding young children or the sick. Even though it is undamaged, it had been thrown into a rubbish pit.

## **59 - Shale dish**

Around 200-350

Found at Holcombe villa, Uplyme

These fragments are part of a handled bowl used for serving food. It is made from shale, a soft black stone that is easy to carve and polish.

## **60 - Achilles and Cheiron**

About 100-200

Found on Sidmouth beach, 1840

This figure depicts the Greek war hero Achilles, riding on the back of Cheiron the centaur. They are being attacked by a wild animal. This was the top of an expensive piece of Roman bronze furniture used for displaying trays or bowls of food. Figures like these are very unusual finds from Roman Britain. Its find spot in Sidmouth suggests a local resident had adopted Classical Greek and Roman tastes and way of life.

## **61 - Coin hoard**

Buried around 388

Found near Honiton

This coin hoard is unusual as the container is made from a nodule of ironstone. The stonelike appearance may have made it an ingenious hiding place for the 18 silver coins inside.

## **62 - Blacksmith's tongs**

Around 300-400

From Holcombe villa, Uplyme

Tongs were used to hold hot metal while it was worked on the anvil. Many such ironworking tools were revealed at Holcombe villa. The estate workshops had to make and mend tools needed in farming.

## **63 - Hammer head**

Around 300-400

From Holcombe villa, Uplyme

This is part of a hammer head, probably used for ironworking.

## **64 - Blacksmith's punch**

About 300-350

From Holcombe villa, Uplyme

This tool was used to punch rectangular holes into sheet metal. The top has become misshapen through hammering.

## **65 - Carpentry axe-head**

Around 300-400

From Holcombe villa, Uplyme

## **66-67 - Iron knife blades**

About 400

From Holcombe and Seaton villas

These blades originally had handles made from wood or bone. One knife (top) was found by archaeologists near the kitchen hearth in Holcombe villa, where it had probably been used for preparing meals.

## **68-69 - Tumbler lock keys**

About 300-350

From Holcombe villa, Uplyme

These keys are similar to those from the fortress and town in Exeter.

## **70 - Iron horseshoe**

Around 300-400

From Holcombe villa, Uplyme

This is a type of Roman horseshoe called a hipposandal. These were tied onto horses' hooves when working on metalled roads or hard surfaces. Clearly there were working animals on the villa estate at Holcombe.

## **71 - Concrete**

Around 100-400

From Holcombe villa, Uplyme

Concrete, called opus signinum, was used throughout the villa buildings at Seaton and Holcombe. It was made from local materials including flint and crushed tile.

## **72 - Mosaic fragments**

Around 300-400

From Holcombe villa, Uplyme

These plain fragments of mosaic probably formed the border for an ornate central panel. The stone tesserae are set into a thick bed of mortar which includes small pieces of broken tile.

## **73 - Floor tile**

About 300-350

From Holcombe villa, Uplyme

The small lumps projecting from the tile surface show it was originally made for a cavity wall. Instead it was utilised for flooring, with the lumps buried in the mortar bedding. Tiled floors were often used in private rooms of villas, as they were less expensive than mosaic floors.

## **74 - Roman central heating**

About 300-400

From Holcombe villa, Uplyme

These hollow box-shaped tiles come from a hypocaust system, which channelled hot air up the walls of a private bath-house at Holcombe villa. The marks scratched into the surface of the wet clay were intended to help wall plaster stick to the tiles.

## **75 - Window glass**

Around 200-400

From Seaton villa

Fragments of window glass were found during the excavations of the bath-houses at both Seaton and Holcombe villas. Glazed windows were essential in a bath-house for keeping heat in, especially with the British climate.

However, other parts of the villa buildings were left open to the air.

## **76 - Painted wall plaster**

About 250-325

From Holcombe villa, Uplyme

Several rooms at Holcombe villa were decorated with brightly-coloured walls. Some of the decorative schemes employed were intended to imitate more expensive finishes like marble.

## **77 - Stone roof tiles**

About 300-350

From Holcombe villa, Uplyme

Holcombe villa was redesigned and extended as fashions and fortunes changed. Stone roof tiles like these were used when the villa's occupants were at their wealthiest.

## **78 - Ceramic roof tiles**

Around 100-300

From Holcombe villa, Uplyme

Tiled roofs were constructed from two basic types of tile: the flat, flanged tegula overlapped by the curved imbrex tile. This form of construction is still widely used in Mediterranean countries today. Although quite efficient as a form of roofing, it is extremely heavy.

## **79-80 - Stone roof finials**

Around 300-400

From Holcombe villa, Uplyme

Ornate roof finials were used only on the most expensive and luxurious of buildings. These ones are carved out of Beer stone which was available just down the Devon coast at Beer. These semi-circles may represent shells.



## **81 - Seaton Down hoard**

Coins minted between 260 and 348

Buried near Seaton around 350

Found in 2013 by Laurence Egerton on land belonging to Clinton Devon Estates. Archaeologists from Devon County Council and the Portable Antiquities Scheme excavated the hoard. The coins are all nummi, which means each had a spending power roughly equivalent to a modern euro. Most of the coins relate to Constantine I, his family, rebels and rivals to the emperor.

## **82 - Iron ingot**

Three of these were buried with the coins. Blacksmiths would have turned these into tools.

## **83 - Coin with organic remains**

A leather bag that contained coins has rotted away, leaving minute traces of it preserved in the iron and copper corrosion.

## **84 - Oldest coin**

Made around 260 at the time of Claudius II, 50 years earlier than most of the coins in the hoard.

## **85 - Newest coin**

Made around 348 at the time of Constans – Constantine I's son. It is the newest coin, suggesting the hoard was probably buried around 350, soon after it was minted.

## **Messages on coins**

In Roman times, coins were used to circulate news and make political statements. They were an effective way of reaching a mass audience in an era before television, the internet or newspapers. The Seaton Down coins have a number of propaganda messages, here are four common ones:

### **86 - The army will protect you**

Two soldiers are shown either side of military standards with a message 'to the glory of the army'.

At a time of so many civil wars and rebellions, this may have had a hollow ring and could be seen as an example of Roman propaganda.

### **87 - Constantinople**

The winged figure of Victory commemorates the naval success that brought Constantine control of the old colony of Byzantium.

Constantine named his new capital, Constantinople, after himself. It is modern Istanbul in Turkey.

### **88 - Respect ancient Rome**

This coin shows a wolf suckling the twins Romulus and Remus, referring to the story of the founding of Rome.

Although the capital of the Roman world had moved to Constantinople, this coin emphasises that Rome remained an important city.

## **89 - Christianity**

Constantine I was the first emperor to accept Christianity, but Christian symbols on coins are rare. The tiny chi-rho symbol on this one derives from the first two Greek letters in 'Christ'.

## **Who's who in the Seaton Down hoard**

Modern coins follow the same format as Roman ones – the head of a ruler on one side, and a design, often with a message, on the other. Here are some of the people depicted on the Seaton Down hoard coins:

### **90 - Constantine I**

Crowned emperor in Britain. He was the first Roman emperor to tolerate Christianity and moved the capital of the Roman world to Constantinople.

### **91 - Crispus**

Eldest son of Constantine I and his first wife Minerva. He was a superb general but was executed when Constantine I became jealous of his success.

### **92 - Constantine II**

Constantine I's second son. He was made joint emperor with his brothers on Constantine I's death, and ruled over Spain, Gaul and Britain. He died trying to invade Italy to attack his brother Constans.

### **93 - Constantius II**

Constantine I's third son. He was made joint emperor with his brothers on Constantine I's death and ruled over the eastern Mediterranean area. He died of fever in 361 while fighting in Turkey.

#### **94 - Constans**

Constantine I's youngest son. He was made joint emperor with his brothers on Constantine I's death and ruled over Italy, Africa and the Balkans. He was murdered in the Pyrenees.

#### **95 - Licinius**

Initially joint emperor with Constantine I, but after fighting two civil wars was demoted and then executed.

#### **96 - Licinius II**

Licinius' son and Constantine I's nephew. He was made subemperor but was executed along with his father.

#### **97 - Delmatius**

Nephew of Constantine I, later sub-emperor but was executed following Constantine I's death.

#### **98 - Helena**

Constantine I's mother. A very powerful woman and a power behind the throne. She was made a Christian saint.

#### **99 - Theodora**

Constantine I's step-mother. Also a very powerful woman who tried to promote her son Delmatius.

## **100 - World coinage**

The coins in the Seaton Down hoard were made all over the Roman world. This coin made in Syria ended up buried in East Devon.

RAMM acquired the coins with help from Clinton Devon Estates, Thomson Reuters, Devon County Council and many members of the public. A generous donation by Patrick Long will ensure that the coins are preserved for inspiration and wonder of children.