



Flag Fen
Archaeology Park

Flag Fen & Roman Peterborough

Background Information for Teachers

This information is provided as a brief overview of Roman Peterborough including links with Flag Fen and our Roman themed learning programmes. Please use what information you think would be useful to the children as a way of introducing their upcoming trip.

Beginnings – 43-5AD

The history of Roman Peterborough begins shortly after Claudius' invasion in 43AD. Troops of the IX Legion (Hispania) moved northwards along the route of Ermine Street, and built a fort at Longthorpe, near the centre of the modern city of Peterborough, probably around 47AD. A small number from the legion remained, while the rest continued northwards to establish forts at Lincoln and York.

Boudicca's Revolt – 60-1AD

We also hear of the fort at Longthorpe and the IX Legion during the first major uprising by Celts against Roman rule. Boudicca, queen of the Iceni, rebelled after her lands were seized by the Romans. She drew together an army consisting of Iceni and some other tribes, and laid siege to Colchester.

The garrison at Longthorpe – reckoned to be about 2500 men of the IX Legion - were ordered to relieve the town. According to Tacitus, this was not a great success. It is believed the IX legion were ambushed on their way to Colchester. The result was that Colchester fell, followed by London and St Albans. Another Roman army eventually defeated the rebellion and Boudicca is reputed to have taken poison rather than be captured.

Pupils will be able to meet Boudicca in the Iron Age roundhouse at Flag Fen during Building A Roman Empire school visits or if you have selected Boudicca as part of your Big Roman Dig day.



Meet Boudicca in the Building a Roman Empire learning programme at Flag Fen



The Fen Causeway

Running through the Flag Fen site is a Roman road – the Fen Causeway. The construction of the Fen Causeway is thought to have started following the Boudiccan revolt in 60AD. The Fen Causeway is believed to have been constructed using layers of gravel to raise it above the marshy fenland.

The road runs for some 24 miles eastward from Peterborough across the Fens to Norfolk. It points straight towards Icen territory, bypassing the Icen camp at Stonea, which the Romans later garrisoned, as far as Denver, where it joins the network of prehistoric trackways. At Denver, however, there was a major saltworks, which could provide another reason for the road. Salt was a commodity of huge importance in the days before modern methods of preserving food, and the Romans subsequently sent salt from this site all over the Empire.



The location of the Fen Causeway running through the Flag Fen site.
Photo credit: Emma Bothamley

At Flag Fen, the Fen Causeway is underground, its route marked by the straight path between the rows of willows, which gives an idea of its width. It is not as straight as most Roman roads are reputed to be, since it had to cross an area of land which had been under water for millennia, and which was in the slow process of drying out. It runs parallel to the prehistoric causeway which is believed to have been covered with silt by the time the Fen Causeway was constructed. Could the Fen Causeway have joined onto the foundations of a previous prehistoric trackway that led to the causeway?

Durobrivae

Peterborough is an area rich in Roman history. Just on the outskirts of the modern city lies the remains of the Roman town of Durobrivae. We are not sure exactly when it was started, but by the end of the 2nd century it was fully walled, with an accompanying fort, and was obviously a place of considerable significance. The mounds that mark its outline can still be clearly seen from the southbound A1, as they can on google maps. On a hill overlooking the town, at Castor, sat the Praetorium, a huge palace, home to the Roman governor of the Fens. As well as being an administrative centre, Durobrivae was a commercial hub, lying as it did on major north-south, and east, roads. Its wealth came from salt, wool, and other products of the Fens.