

SEPTEMBER SELF-STUDY PROGRAMME

ROMAN TIMES AND ARCHAEOLOGY

We hope that Guy de la Bedoyère will be able to give his lecture, '*Villas in Roman Britain - The Architecture and Art of a remote Roman province*', originally scheduled for September 2020, in September 2021.

In the meantime, you are invited to view the first of his talks on YouTube '**Women in Roman Britain**': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHbCQHEF-Vo>

If you wish to skip the host's introduction, fast-forward to 5.40 - the start of the lecture.

Simple epitaphs on tombstones, written by their husbands, provide Guy with the earliest evidence for the status of women in Roman Britain, and much more comes from the army records of the forts on Hadrian's Wall, as the women were the wives of serving soldiers. Though some were well-educated, they had limited legal status, unlike women in the indigenous Celtic population, who could exercise real political power (Tacitus speaks admiringly of the Celtic women's 'manly and Roman virtues'). However, by the 4th century AD, evidence indicates that some women could occupy important social roles. The discovery of a lead coffin in Spitalfields, containing finely worked grave goods and fabric sewn with gold thread, marks a woman of considerable prominence.

Should you be interested to seek out the Roman artefacts in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, it will now be open three days a week - Thursday to Saturday. Admission is free, but you will need a pre-booked, timed ticket to enter. Go to the Museum's Home Page (<https://maa.cam.ac.uk>) and click Book Here.

On the ground floor of the Museum, you will find a stone sarcophagus of Barnack Rag (Oolitic limestone), its lid broken, containing the skeleton of a woman, about 5ft 2ins tall. A few pieces of her woollen shroud survived. The sarcophagus (c. 4th century AD), with its inner lead coffin, was one of a group of high-status burials discovered during an excavation by the Museum at Arbury Road Building Estate, Cambridge, in 1952. But she was not alone. The remains of a shrew and a mouse were also found in the coffin - and the woman's left tibia, near the foot, had been gnawed. - For further information, see <https://collections.maa.cam.ac.uk/>

If you're curious to read further, there are several related publications in the Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society:

[https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archives/view/cambridge_antiq/proceedings.cfm]

Fell, Clare. 1956. 'Roman Burials found at Arbury Road, Cambridge, 1952'. vol XLIX. pp. 13 -23.

[https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-1895-1/dissemination/pdf/PCAS/1956_XLIX/PCAS_XLIX_1956_013-024_Fell.pdf]

Frend, W.H.C. 1955. 'A Romano-British Settlement at Arbury Road, Cambridge'. vol XLVIII. pp. 10 - 43.

[\[https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-1895-1/dissemination/pdf/PCAS/1955_XLVIII/PCAS_XLVIII_1955_010-043_Frend.pdf\]](https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-1895-1/dissemination/pdf/PCAS/1955_XLVIII/PCAS_XLVIII_1955_010-043_Frend.pdf)

Liversidge, Joan. 1977. 'Roman Burials in the Cambridge Area'. vol LXVII. pp. 11 - 38.
[\[https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-1895-1/dissemination/pdf/PCAS/1977_LXVII/PCAS_LXVII_1977_011-038_Liversidge.pdf\]](https://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/archiveDS/archiveDownload?t=arch-1895-1/dissemination/pdf/PCAS/1977_LXVII/PCAS_LXVII_1977_011-038_Liversidge.pdf)

But the skeletons have inspired more than academic papers. The American poet, Sylvia Plath, saw the sarcophagus and its contents soon after it was excavated, when she was a student at Newnham College in the 50s, and 'this antique museum-cased lady' - and her companion rodents - gave rise to her poem 'All the dead dears'. [\[https://allpoetry.com/All-The-Dead-Dears\]](https://allpoetry.com/All-The-Dead-Dears).