

# The melting pot of Eboracum: exploring diversity and identity through skeletal and burial evidence in Roman York



WROCAH funded Collaborative Doctoral Award between Department of Archaeology, University of York and York Archaeological Trust (YAT)

## Lead Academic and Partner Organisation Supervisors

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## Project summary

York (Eboracum) has one of the most diverse funerary landscapes in Roman Britain. It was a bustling cosmopolitan metropolis, the provincial capital and entrepot for northern Britain, attracting people from across the Empire. This project aims to deepen our understanding and perception of diversity and inclusion in past societies by applying an innovative, multifaceted approach to burial evidence from Roman York, considering mobility, identity, health and diet and placing the results within their wider contemporary social context. The cosmopolitan character of the Roman city, together with significant skeletal populations and a renewed emphasis on Roman heritage by the York Archaeological Trust make an ideal stage to promote the understanding of cultural diversity through a bioarchaeological lens.



## PhD Project description

This PhD project will undertake a critical appraisal of the existing osteological and funerary evidence from Roman York, undertake isotope analysis of targeted individuals to gain a better understanding of diet, migration and identify and work with York Archaeological Trust to disseminate the results to the public.

Previous skeletal and initial biomolecular research revealed tantalising insights into Eboracum's relationship with the Roman world, identifying individuals of African/mixed ancestry, e.g. the Ivory Bangle Lady, as well as from other parts of Britain, Europe and the Middle East, indicating a complex relationship between identity, migration, and burial. These investigations challenge common perceptions that immigrants were male, low status, or slaves, yet there is more to be done to bring all strands of evidence together. The student will undertake analysis of recently excavated cemeteries, integrating new and existing biomolecular, osteological data and burial evidence. The project will go beyond what has already been carried out on Roman skeletal assemblages in York by consolidating our understanding from a broader section of the burial population and will use that data to strengthen the scientific research underpinning public perceptions of the people of Eboracum.

The project will make a timely contribution to promote an understanding of the multicultural and multi-ethnic nature of the Romano-British population of York, and its relevance to modern-day audiences through analysis of cemetery evidence using skeletal, burial and biomolecular approaches to understand human identity, migration and health on the northern frontier.

York Archaeological Trust's (YAT) research and public participatory projects provide an ideal platform to draw together new archaeological evidence that offers an alternative to the negative narratives of the 'hostile other' that emerged in response to migration in the modern world. This project is strategically important at a crucial moment for YAT, who are taking a new focus on the Roman heritage of York. The student will play a key role, benefitting from training in research dissemination and public communication to present new narratives from their research, taking inspiration from the recent manifesto for museum learning and engagement for people-centred research that responds to challenges in society. Through close collaboration with YAT, the student will gain practical experience of public engagement and the heritage sector for their future career.



### Research Questions

- What does the combined burial (type, orientation, position, grave goods), skeletal and biomolecular evidence tell us about identity and the cultural and ethnic composition of Eboracum?
- How do ancestry and identity in life (diet) and death (burial) map with health indicators such as childhood stress and longevity?
- To what extent are different audiences aware of diversity in Eboracum?

## Objectives and methods

- A holistic appraisal of the burial context for inhumations and cremations integrated with new bioarchaeological evidence
- Meta-analysis of skeletal data across York's Roman burial archive, representing over 300 inhumations and 30 cremations from 11 sites, including large populations from Hungate and Newington Hotel recently excavated by YAT
- Isotopic analysis of a subsection of individuals across all sites to deepen our understanding of diet (carbon, nitrogen) and mobility (oxygen) in a greater cross-section of society, integrating the results with aDNA analysis by the Francis Crick Institute
- Communication of interdisciplinary results to academic, school and public audiences, using YAT's heritage engagement initiatives. The student may emphasise their own interests in this area in particular and will be introduced to a range of evaluation methods by YAT's engagement team

## About York Archaeological Trust

YAT's mission is Building Better Lives Through Heritage, with three strands: 1. Understanding the Past, 2. Conserving our Heritage and 3. Facilitating Research and Best Practice. YAT reaches 1.2 million people/yr through its museums, educational and participatory work and is now focussing on a Roman research agenda: Dig for Eboracum will draw on academic, health, educational and cultural partnerships in an ambitious 2 year programme of excavation and public involvement leading to a dynamic new Roman museum. YAT also delivers substantial engagement working with Eboracum 360 (York) and as a partner in 'Roman York Beneath the Streets' (AHRC, Cambridge) and 'Roman Melting Pots' (DFG-AHRC, Exeter). The skeletal populations (ca 300 burials from diverse cemeteries across York) held by YAT are among the largest for Roman Britain and serve as the centrepiece of this CDA.

The CDA partnership will:

- Enhance knowledge of York's Roman burials
- Improve YAT's skeletal collection catalogues
- Help deliver YAT's research agenda 1 & 3
- Connect with YAT's inclusion, equity and diversity dialogues
- Promote understanding of Roman populations, human osteology and scientific applications within YAT's fieldwork, research, curation and public facing staff
- Connect with the broader scientific research agenda for Dig for Eboracum

Sit at the heart of the new museum itself, adding crucial data to allow us to speak with integrity about the lived experience in Eboracum

### **Engagement, outreach, dissemination and impact initiatives**

Results of this studentship will be disseminated through multiple channels, including presentations delivered as part of events organised by YAT and the York Festival of Ideas, YAT's online engagement programme and seminars at the Department of Archaeology.

The student will make a positive contribution to YAT's Roman-focused visitor experience and engagement activities. Through training in the digital and physical presentation of heritage and public engagement at YAT and their attractions, the student will:

- Make a key contribution to a series of current initiatives, including online engagement programmes reaching international audiences
  - Improve in-house displays, in particular the current 'Life and Death in Eboracum' at DIG and the touring Gladiators exhibition, with fresh evidence from multiple lines of investigation including burial data, engaging with narratives on diversity and inclusion. This will involve new visual exhibits about the people of Eboracum aimed at developing and promoting audience diversity and developing a "sense of place" for York citizens and visitors alike
  - Support the Trust's formal learning and training programmes by contributing to the development of multi-disciplinary school resources, linking science, social studies and history thereby championing the understanding of science, inspiring all audiences but in particular the younger generation through learning programmes.
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### **Financial support**

Studentships for doctoral research are 40 months in duration for full-time study. Awards are subject to satisfactory academic progress. Awards must be taken up in October 2022; no deferrals are possible. Awards will comprise fees at Research Council rates and a maintenance grant (£15,609 in 2021/22). The grant pays the fees at the Home/UK rate; international students are, however, eligible to apply for this Studentship and the difference between the Home/UK and International fee will be met by the University of York for a successful international applicant. Awards may be taken up on a part-time basis if a student is eligible to undertake part-time study; international applicants may be required to study full-time by the terms of their visa.

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### **Qualifications**

Applications are invited from students with a good first degree in an appropriate subject (archaeology, osteology, bioarchaeology, funerary archaeology) as well as a Master's degree appropriate to the topic (or be working towards one). We particularly welcome applicants who self-identify as being from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME/Global Majority) background.

## Requirements of the Studentship

WROCAH students are required to undertake a bespoke training package and to complete a Researcher Employability Project of at least a month, a Knowledge Exchange Project, and to engage with Internationalisation.

All WROCAH students must submit their thesis for examination with the funded period. This is a requirement of the Arts & Humanities Research Council, which provides the funding for WROCAH, and is a condition of accepting a Studentship.

**Before applying for any WROCAH Studentship, please first ensure that you have read the WROCAH webpages about the WROCAH training programme and requirements, as well as other funding opportunities**

**<http://wrocah.ac.uk/>**

## How to apply

By 5pm Wednesday 9 March 2022, applicants are required to submit to WRoCAH an Expression of Interest, which should include:

1. A CV with details of academic qualifications
2. A covering letter comprising a two-page statement to convey your motivation and enthusiasm for the project, and to demonstrate your suitability for your intended PhD studies with the University and Project Partner.

*The covering letter should specifically highlight the following:*

- Your interest in the project and details on why you have chosen that University and Project Partner.
  - How you will apply your current skills, knowledge and experience to undertake a PhD and the approach you would take to develop the project.
  - How the project fits into your career plans and ambitions.
- **16 March 2022: decision on short-listing**  
The short-list of candidates to be invited for an interview will be announced on Wednesday 16 March 2022. *Short-listed candidates must complete a PhD programme application before interview.* If you are short-listed for an interview you will be sent details of how to apply for a place at the University of York. At that point you will need to submit the names and contact details of two referees, copies of transcripts of your academic qualifications and (if applicable) an IELTS certificate.
  - **w/c 11 April 2022: interviews**

Interviews will involve the academic supervisor, Project Partner supervisor and a member of the WRoCAH Studentships Committee. They will be conducted online.

## For more information about this project contact

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