

Fig. 1. Map of Roman Sites (Merlin, n.d.)



The Site

Caerleon is the location of where there was once a Roman Legionary Fortress set up around 74 AD (Todd, 2006), the place being known as 'Isca' at the time Britain (Gardner and Guest, 2008, p.47). It was occupied by Roman Legionaries, with the fortress being one of the three permanent ones in Britain (Gardner and Guest, 2008, p.47). The Baths' purpose was to be not only for cleanliness, but also as a form of relaxation for the people and an area for socialization (DeLaine, 2012).



Fig. 2. Aerial view of Caerleon (Caerleon Net, n.d.)

Context

This Roman Military Fortress held the Second Augustan Legion- with the location chosen strategically due to the surrounding hills and good position of the river (Maynard, n.d.). The baths were included and were well-built due to the high importance placed upon them in culture. It reached the point where any substantial community, whether it be civil or military, would see public baths as essential and would have at least one set (DeLaine, 2012).

Fig. 3. A reconstruction (© Charlotte Watson, 2020)

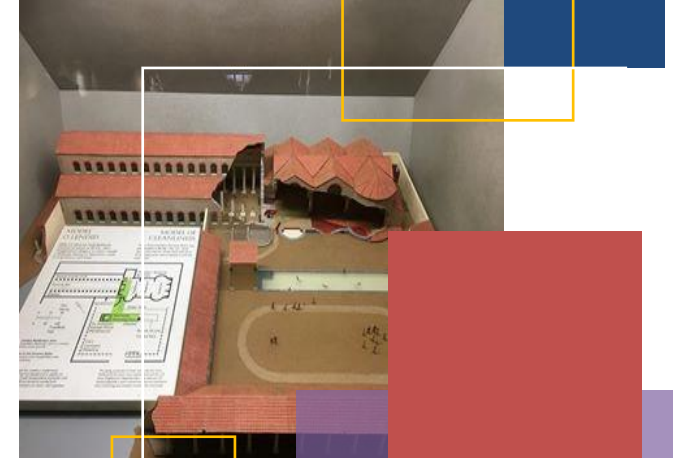
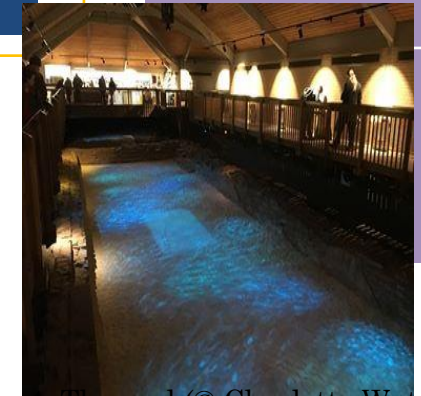


Fig. 4. The pool (© Charlotte Watson, 2020)



Roman Baths: Caerleon

Charlotte Watson

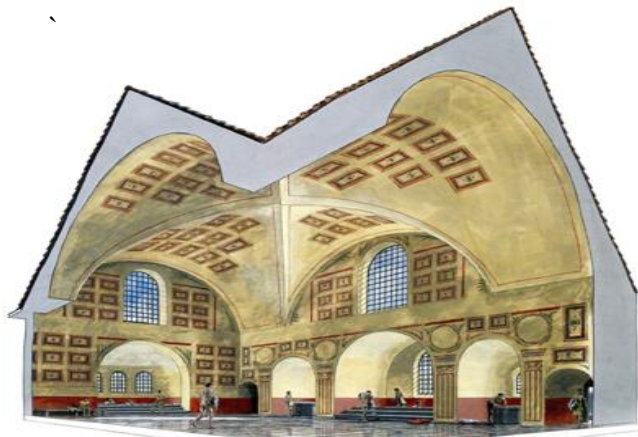


Fig. 5. Reconstruction of frigidarium (North, 2010)

What were they?

The bath building was built as three large arched halls with a long open-air swimming pool to the side. This was called 'natatio' and had a fountain house included on one end. (Cadw, 2019)

There were lockers provided to secure valuables whilst the consumers bathed, but they were in no way secure (Cadw, 2019).

In fact, due to an attempt to keep belongings safe from thieves, many artifacts have been excavated from the drains of the baths. This is because if the person did not have a slave available to look after their objects, they often took them in with them and sometimes subsequently lost them in the act (Cadw, 2019).

In fact, 88 engraved gemstones were found in the drain, demonstrating a high property loss rate (Pillely, 1995, p.22).

Features

Apodyterium- Changing Rooms

Frigidarium- Cool water basin in unheated room

Tepidarium- Warm room with tepid pool

Caldarium- Hot room

Labrum- A separate basin within the Caldarium

Sudatoria- Sweating rooms- both wet and dry

Natatio- Open-air swimming pool

Palaestrae- Exercise rooms

(DeLaine, 2012)

**“We stayed till we ran with sweat, and then at once passed through into the cold water.”
(Petr. 28)**

How did they work?

The baths were a collection of stages and had various temperatures at different points.

- First, the person would visit the changing rooms (Apodyterium)
- They would then enter the Tepidarium as a transitional room
- Next would be the Sudatoria,
- Before reaching the Caldarium
- They would then work back through the building before reaching the Frigidarium

Despite this being the general rule, people could bathe as they wished. They also used oil to anoint themselves with, which was then scraped off with a strigil before they bathed in the Frigidarium.

(Nielson, 2006)

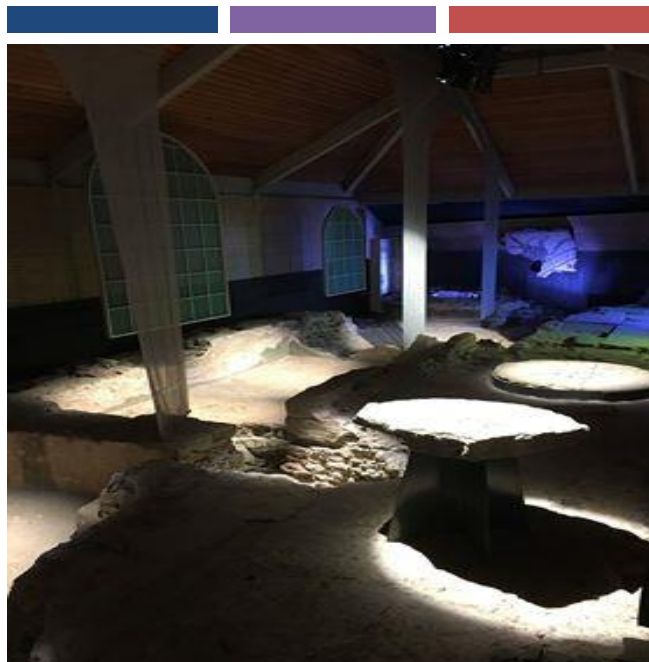


Fig. 6. The bathing rooms (© Charlotte Watson, 2020)



Fig. 7. Model of the baths (North, 2010)

Construction

Usually, the bathing rooms were large and vaulted with a clear plan to the system (Nielsen, 2006). The location of the building mattered also; the warmer rooms would be built so that they were “lighted from the southwest” (Vitr. 5.10.1). The bath sizes were based on the population of the community in which they were to serve and everything was planned so exactly that even the washbowl had a prime position with it “placed under a window” (Vitr. 5.10.4)

Due to being social centers, the baths were also always decorated well and when there was an assured water supply, there was also often large swimming pools to accompany the baths. (DeLaine, 2012).

**“The vaulted ceilings will be more serviceable if built of masonry; but if they are of framework, they should have tile work on the under side, to be constructed as follows..”
(Vitr. 5.10.3)**

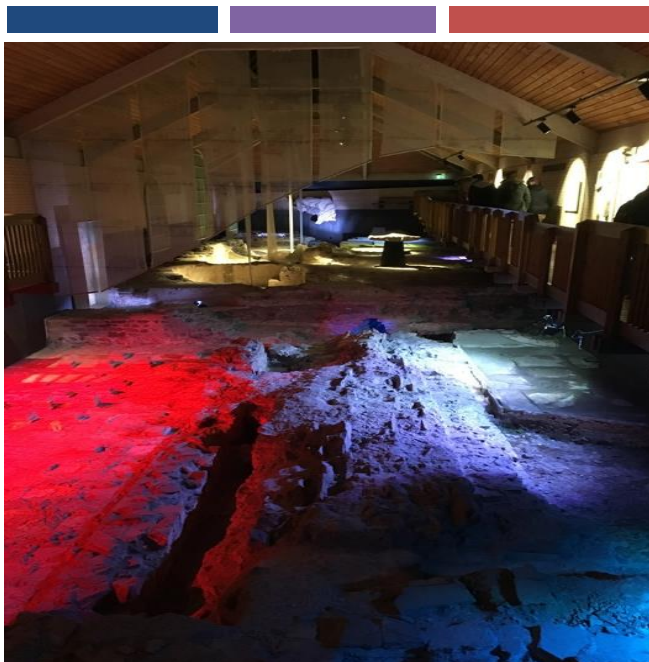


Fig. 8. The bathing stages (© Charlotte Watson, 2020)

Strigil

This was a tool used to scrape away the oil, and thusly any dirt and perspiration which had accumulated on the person. It was used within the baths to help achieve the desired level of cleanliness.

(Wright and Vickers, 2012)



Fig. 9. Roman Strigils (MatthiasKabel, 2006)

The Consumers

Baths were a normal part of Roman communities and had existed in Rome for a great deal of time. As the Roman empire expanded, their bathing houses came with them.

(DeLaine, 2012)

Furthermore, the baths were not just reserved for male consumption, women and children also used the baths- though mixed bathing was officially frowned upon.

(Cadw, 2019)



Fig. 10. Caerleon Bath House (© Charlotte Watson, 2020)

Hygiene

Due to the high amount of traffic and the public nature of the baths, risk of infection would have been high. If someone entered the water with an open wound, infection was likely to happen due to the diseases carried by others alongside the general dirtying of the water (Aur. 8.24).

**“What bathing is when thou
thinkest of it—oil, sweat, filth,
greasy water, everything
revolting—such is every part of
life and every object we meet
with..”**

(Aur. 8.24)

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