

Artefact to Art

Competition 2019

WINNERS & HIGHLY COMMENDED

POETRY

The Laughing She-Wolf Dame

By Amrita May-Singh (first prize, under 11)

“I was inspired by the Roman mosaic from Aldborough in the Leeds City Museum. Every time I look at it, I laugh.”

Back of horse, head of cat,
Kicking babies in the back.
Sly smile, cheeky grin,
Guarding over her own kin.
Big nose, crazy eyes,
Little children – what a surprise!
Unnatural tree with orange leaves,
Towering over bending knees.
Romulus and Remus will found Rome,
Then she will be so proud of her own.
Diamonds surround them on a frame:
The happy kids and she-wolf dame.

A Poem about Roman Britain

By Charlotte Hutchinson, Woodbridge School, Suffolk (first prize, 11-14s)

“I was inspired by the remains of a Romano-British fountain. I researched the Roman invasion and how Britain fell apart – I was curious to know what that must have looked like.”

I stare at the forum, unacknowledged – unloved
The decades fly by, as swift as a dove
The people stand holding a crying child
Or run past in a hurry, their eyes flashing wild

I was put out of use almost a decade ago
Why did they keep me? I don't know.
I have seen more than I could ever say
Sitting here, my position watching over the bay.

It has been peaceful for over a decade
No one dare rebel, nor foreigner invade;
The Romans have gone now, gone back to their home.
But still I stand silent, still proud to be alone.

I was their world crumble, turn again into sand,
And the Britons are helpless, lost in their own land.
Uncertain, ungoverned, expecting the worst:
They miss the invaders who conquered them first.

Feeling Shoes

By Aitana Miranda Arilla, Roedean School, Brighton (first prize, 15-18)

“I was inspired by the shoes that were found in Vindolanda. These shoes make me think of girls and boys from that period of history. The shoes make me wonder what it was like to be a child then, and how different it would have been compared to being a child in the present.”

As the path gets longer
My shoes get smaller
Feet bare and scarred
Limp toward the edge
The steps become heavier
My skin turns into a darker soul
The shoe fits this haggard beast
Skin of leather fights against the wings
Where graves begin
Body breaking down
Spirit growing dim

Spend a day in my shoes
24 hours if you dare
If you're so sure it's easy
Step in for me on a bad day
I bet you an hour before you cry
Walk a mile or two
Take a drive
Climb the stairs

The soles of my shoes are
Nothing
We're leaving for days gone by
Fight this
For the end is near
Everything is on your mind.

Mithraeum

By Isabella Patrick (winning entry, under 11s)

“I was inspired by my visit to the London Mithraeum. I saw the replica of the head of Mithras as well as the remains of the temple. I was inspired by the experience to imagine what a Mithraeum would have been like.”

Mithras is the god I follow
I descend down and down below
This place is a secret society
His power is very might
Ringing music in my ear
A beast of oysters lays here
Ending when darkness falls
Understanding why I'm in these walls
Mithras is revealed killing a bull

The Statue

By Erin Casey, Godolphin and Latymer School, London (winning entry, 11-14)

“The gilt bronze head of the goddess Sulis Minerva, which was once part of a statue, inspired me because the statue was beside the Sacred Spring where people would pray. I thought the head was very intricately designed and I was amazed that it lasted so long.”

Standing in the temple
Tall and monumental
A flame burning right beside me
Thoughts of hope and glee

Life size gilt bronze statue
It is me that they pray to
Stood beside the sacred spring
When they need help, I'm there aiding

They give me their curses
And throw me their purses
And wait for me to accomplish
While they sit and wish.

Chiron

By Samson Fayers, Woodbridge School, Suffolk (winning entry, age 11)

“I was inspired by a statuette of the wise centaur Chiron, because I find the character of Chiron interesting, and because his father was Kronos but he was always shown as a good character.”

Chiron, Chiron from where do you come?
Not bullish and rude like the others.
Perhaps they were raised by the kin of the centaurs,
Not rejected like you by their mother.

Apollo saw fit to look after you well,
So taught music, archery and healing.
Instead of violence you understood the importance of civility, peace and feelings.

Perhaps because you look front-on human you hide your equine traits?
Your admirers are many and your skills so wide-reaching,
Heroes rush to hear your teachings.

Chiron, Chiron – it doesn't matter from where you come,
What matters is where you belong.

Vilbia

By Isabella Alcock, Burntwood School, London (winning entry, 11-14)

“I was inspired by a curse tablet, found at the Roman bath complex at Bath (Aquae Sulis). The tablet called on Sulis Minerva to curse whoever took a person called ‘Vilbia’. I thought the sense of mystery was interesting and it demonstrated how superstitious the Romans were.”

A curse on you,
A curse of them,
A curse upon
Ten women and men,

As liquid as water,
I will you to turn,
For what you’ve taken
I’ll forever yearn,

Vengeance is now
All I desire,
And so I will ask
She who is higher,

Oh Sulis Minerva,
Please answer me,
Ensure this villain
Does not walk free,

I thought, to find peace
You must pay the price,
As I etch in my wrath,
I start to think twice

However you suffer,
Whatever the cost,
It’s now that I realise
My Vilbia remains lost.

For Vilbia's Sake

By Rosalind Corderoy-Conway, Brighton and Hove High School, Brighton (winning entry, 11-14)

"The artefact I was inspired by was the Vilbia curse tablet. I like writing emotional poems and love is a strong emotion. I thought it was a good one for me to use."

I would love her 'til the end.
Row down Styx with her ever
Holding her hands tight
As day becomes night
Telling her that I care.
But now she can't hear me.
Splashing in the water pool
All I see is her reflection.
Played like a fool.
Glazing into her eyes I can't believe
One of them would take her from me:
 Velvinna,
 Exsupereus,
 Verianus,
 Severinus,
 Augustalis,
 Comitianus,
 Catus,
 Minianus,
 Germanilla,
 Jovina
One of these men is the behemoth
Ruining all my dreams of
True happiness with you.
Left with no choice, here's what I'll do:
I curse he who took her away
To never see another day
To turn to water for the rest of time
And Vilbia will once again be mine.
Now into the watery depths I throw
This prayer that will sink down below.
Sleep tight Vilbia my love,
When we die we'll still love each other up above.

Tres Servi

By Josie Head, St Edmunds' School, Canterbury (winning entry, 11-14)

“My inspiration came from the metal chains the Romans used to incarcerate slaves in Britain. Many people remember the splendour and grandeur of the Roman Empire, but the monstrosities such as this are overlooked. We are all aware of the fabulous temples, jewellery, glasswork and mosaics, but I do not feel that the appalling treatment of slaves during this period is as prominent in people's mind when they consider the Empire. I wanted to highlight this, the parallels to our modern world, and how there are two sides to every story.”

On. On. On and on.
A never-ending journey, one foot in front of the other;
Not a flicker of light at the end of the tunnel.
Nothing to see but the one in front
Each one more miserable than the last.
Suffocating, choking, tethered, bound.
A life of freedom, a life worth living
A faint-held ideal of the past.

Heart wrenching screams of those held most dear,
A conquest dictated by fire. Our village,
No more now than ashes to dust;
My home for which I long. I laced our fingers,
Pulled us tight, my love, How we ran!
We ran and ran, our love so drove us on.
Her smile is forever etched on my heart,
Her grace and beauty with me still.

My feet are numb, cut and bleeding
They sink deeper and deeper into icy mud;
Each step agony as I wrench them out.
The beauty of the landscape forgotten to my eyes,
Unable to see through the pain and horror.
I lost count of the hours, sunset after sunrise
Without a break. Dawn to dusk, day and night
We trudge onwards; despair without destination.

Cries and shouts fall upon deaf ears, the Generals
Absolute in their orders will show no mercy.
With every motion the sharp jangle of a chain
Reminding us to whom we now belong.
The unforgiving noose around my neck slits,
Its presence unfamiliar, starving me of air
As sure as it steals away my hope.
The dull weight pulls my head down,
Pulling my spirit down along with it.
A new life. Of fear, of desperation, of hate, of loathing,
Of love, and of loss, of pain.
Freedom lost and never found.

The Battle of Watling Street

By Oliver Laxton, Woodbridge School, Suffolk (winning entry, 11-14)

“I was inspired by the Roman road Watling Street, and how something so historic that was the stage of Boudicca’s last stand is still in use today, mainly without our knowing.”

Shoulder to shoulder,
We stand; fearless, unmoving.
The Roman army.

Hugely outnumbered,
Twenty-three of their soldiers
To but one of ours.

But we can still win,
Suetonius knows this,
Britain will be ours.

They lead their attack,
All funnelled into the gorge,
Right into our trap.

The sign is given
And javelins fill the air,
Their front lines fall down.

But more surge forwards,
They discard their broken shields.
Thirsty for our blood.

Now’s the time to charge,
A tight-packed wedge, crashing through
The rebel army.

We show no mercy,
And just like that, it’s over,
Victory is ours.

Just a Coin

By Annika Tang, Godolphin and Latymer School, London (winning entry, 11-14)

“The ancient artefacts that inspired me were coins from the museum in Bath. The carvings on the coins were extremely detailed. This also made me think of how one coin may not have been valuable to the masters of the household, but the slaves would not even have had something small like a coin to give as an offering to the gods in return for something they might want.”

Yes, we were poor
but we were still human.
Yes, we were slaves,
but we still had feelings.
We could sit through the pain
and keep our anger,
but we also had dreams and wishes.
We might not have many rights
but can we not even have hope.
Just one coin,
not even special.
But enough for me
to keep her by my side for a lifetime.

Just one object,
I stole from my master.
Just one coin,
I took from him
He then beat me and took
that hope from my life
And he left her there to die.
Unable to move let alone walk
To the sacred spring.
To throw that tiny piece of my dream
In and set me free
Of all the pain and torture
That I will ever have.

Dear Sulis Minerva,
I know it's just a coin
And I know I have not thrown in yet
The object I desire.
But please wait for me,
because one day I promise,
The coin will be the first of many things I give.
As long as you help me
and keep her well and healthy.
Anything you want,
I will give without hesitation.
If you must and decide,
You want a life for a life.
Then please take away, the coin, her sickness and my life.

Ad Britanniam

By Bella Armstrong, Isabelle Conley and Holly Ward, Nottingham Girls High School (winning entry, 11-14)

“We based this poem on the Fosse Way, which is one of the important things the Romans brought us. It is a road located near to where we all live.”

Caecilius died in Pompeii
While Quintus ran away.
The Romans got bored
So they decided to explore.
They came across an island
Britain was its name
And all it ever did was rain and rain
All day long.

The Romans were mean
And annoyed the queen.
That would be their fall
'Cause she killed them all.
But the Romans weren't bad
And some people were glad
That they came.

They gave us baths, roads,
Fancy clothes and different ways of travel.
Taught us how to tell the time,
And they gave us lots of wine.
But we are glad you came.
'Cause without you we'd be stuck
In rain.

VISUAL ART

Roman Coins

By Hiro McLinden, Summer Fields School, Oxford (first prize, under 11)

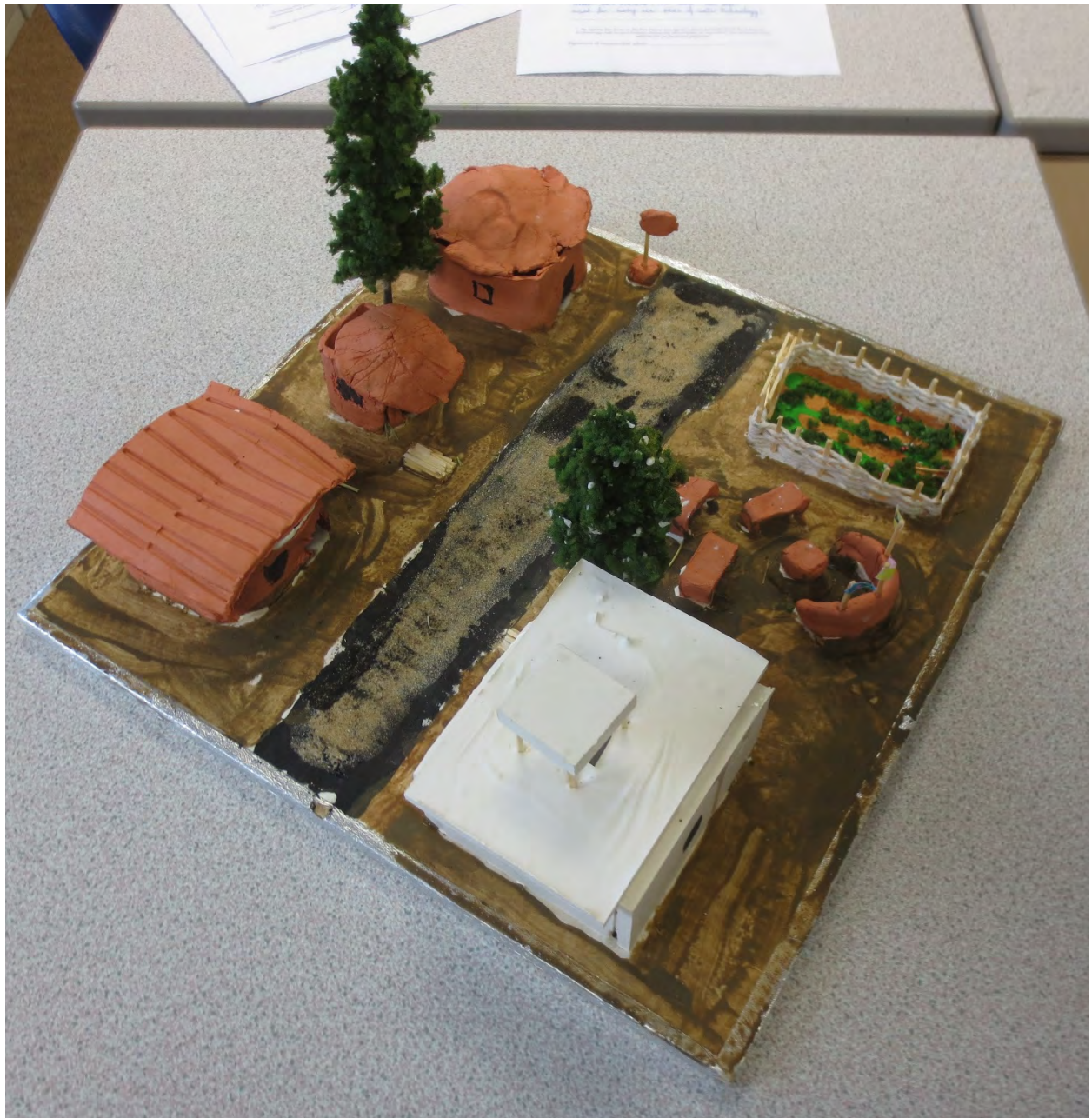
“Roman coins were always so detailed and interesting as they can tell you so much about history. Brian Malin from Oxford found a lot of coins with a metal detector. A coin like this has also been found in France but they did not know if it was fake.”



Roman Village with Proper Roman Tiles

By Charlotte Price, Woodbridge School (first prize, 11-14)

“I got this inspiration from some Roman tiles I had found in a field in Colchester. It came to me that I could have just done a house/villa but I wanted to do something special. So I did a village.”



Samian Pendants

By Miriam Mitchell, Royal Grammar School, Newcastle (first prize, 15-18)

“I was inspired by Roman Samian pottery that has been discovered all over England, with a beautiful collection found at Vindolanda. I used the stamps to create the effect of elevation in the designs of the pottery and transformed them into hanging ornaments, adding colour to fit the vibrancy of modern day society.”



Coins, Coins, and More Coins

By Ivy Bullivant, Leicester Grammar School, Leicester (winning entry, under 11)

“A Roman British coin has inspired me because there are lots of ways I can switch it up and make it my own. I have also chosen to do the coin because the man looks very detailed and hard to draw (which he was).”



Hannibal and his Elephants

By Verity MacLeod-Iredale (winning entry, age 6)

“Verity loves elephants and wanted to draw them so I told her about Hannibal crossing the Alps.”



Roman Officer's Helmet

By William Barrow, Summer Fields School, Oxford (winning entry, 11-14)

"I went to many ancient museums when I travelled to Rome, and I aspired to create some of this great work. I created an officer-styled helmet with a plume. I saw it and thought it needed more, so I added Nordic style signs."



Morning Routine

By Isobel Buchan, Redmaids' High School, Bristol (winning entry, 11-14)

“The artefact that inspired this painting was a wooden comb that was excavated at the fort of Vindolanda. This artefact inspired me because it is so simple and an everyday item people don't often think about, yet it still holds so much history and would've been used every day as part of someone's routine.”



Mosaic

By Hannah Duncan, Roedean School, Brighton (winning entry, 11-14)

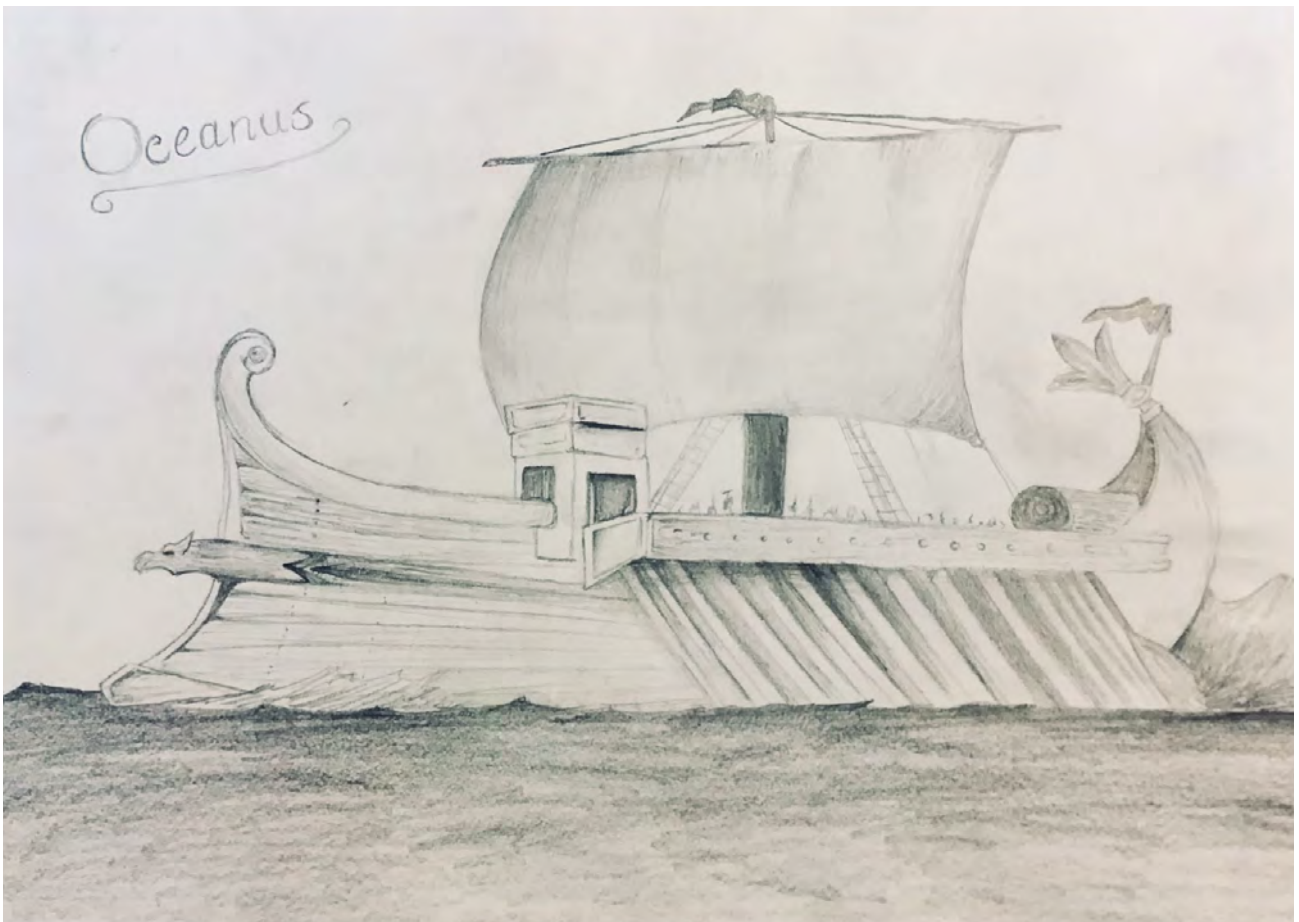
“I was inspired by Fishbourne, and when I went to it in Year Three, I saw how amazing the mosaics were. When I came across this competition, I knew I had to do a mosaic, because they were so intricate and detailed, and I wanted to challenge myself to see if I could do it.”



Oceanus

By Zara Hepworth, Nottingham Girls High School, Nottingham (winning entry, 11-14)

“I based my drawing on a Roman ship. I have reflected on how the Romans travelled to Britain. I know they must have used boats; I subsequently found out about a Roman ship dug up in the Thames at Blackfriars in 1962. From this I produced ‘Oceanus’.”



Aquae Sulis

By Jemima Tandavanitj, Surbiton High School, London (winning entry, 11-14)

“I was inspired by the head of Sulis Minerva as she has a rich history and is extremely important to Roman Britain. She is also very beautiful and mysterious, so I was inspired to draw her in the style of Japanese oil paintings.”



Roman Conquest

By Dominic Tse, Stonyhurst College, Lancashire (winning entry, 11-14)

“I was inspired by artefacts of the ancient Roman weaponry and military, including weapons like swords and spears, armour and chariots. With the topic theme of ‘Roman Britain’, I chose to draw a scene where Boudicca, infamous woman leader of the Celtic tribes, was facing off against the united face of the ever expanding Roman Empire, in a scene to show the two leading forces fighting for control of the British Isles.”



The Mouth of a River

By Gabriel Huxley, Leicester Grammar School, Leicester (winning entry, 11-14)

“I was inspired by the Sulis Minerva head because it looks quite old and has one plain colour, but I imagine it more colourful and vibrant.”



Artemis' Pot

By Oliver Jennings, Woodbridge School, Suffolk (winning entry, 11-14)

“The Greek pots in the British museum inspired me, along with my love of pottery. Artemis' stories of bravery and cunning also inspired my choice of decoration.”



Slightly Odd Pots Collage

By Isla Morris, Leicester Grammar School, Leicester (highly commended, under 11)

“I was inspired by two pots from the California and Icknield Way East cemeteries in Bedfordshire as I thought that they would be great to collage. They also had really interesting shading which I thought that I would try and replicate.”



A Reflection of the Past

By Kiren Odedra, Leicester Grammar School, Leicester (highly commended, under 11)

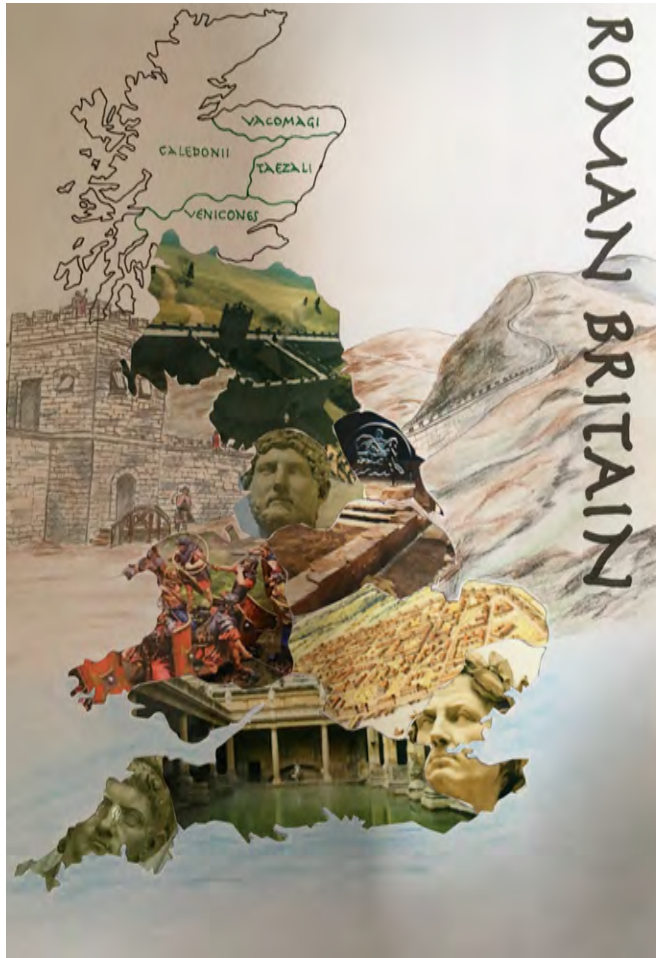
“I chose a Roman bread stamp found in Chester. It inspired me because I like how it is old and rustic and also just the little details on it makes it so interesting.”



Roman Britain

By Manon Agbalé, Roedean School, Brighton (highly commended, 11-14)

“I have recently visited the London Mithraeum and this site inspired me a lot and gave me the idea of looking for other sites left by the Romans. You can see the Roman Baths, Roman Londinium, and Hadrian's Wall. I was really impressed by this last one. This is why the Hadrian's Wall is widely represented on my poster.”



Roman Water Mill

By Finlay Clench, Woodbridge School, Suffolk (highly commended, 11-14)

“The ancient Roman water mill inspired me because of the mechanics. This also inspired me because of how the water wheel has evolved. The idea has been used for many new pieces of water technology.”



Britannia Conquered

By Dylan Cory, Woodbridge School, Suffolk (highly commended, 11-14)

“I loved the Romans’ ideas for defence and their shields were a masterpiece. I also wanted to challenge myself by building this model by myself. I love history and since moving to high school, love Latin!”

Miniature Sculpture of Minerva

By Matylda de Laurans, Brighton and Hove High School, Brighton (highly commended, 11-14)

“The artefact that inspired me was the head of Minerva found in the Roman baths at Bath. When I saw it I couldn’t help but imagine the rest of the body and although what I made probably isn’t accurate to what the sculpture really looked like, I think it’s a pretty good guess.”



Miniature Roman Feast

By Edie Forrester, Roedean School, Brighton (highly commended, 11-14)

“I was inspired by the types of foods and meals that were introduced to Britain by the Romans. It inspired me because I think that it is really interesting how food culture in modern Britain was so influenced by the Romans, so I hand-sculpted a tiny feast from polymer clay to represent it.”



Living in Britain

By Noah Jarrad, Churcher's College, Hampshire (highly commended, 11-4)

“I was inspired by Roman attitudes towards the British about clothing, as well as Butser Ancient Farm and Fishbourne.”



Recreating the Past?

By Hugh Macaulay, Woodbridge School, Suffolk (highly commended, 11-14)

“I was inspired by the traditional Roman bowls. It plays with the idea of the TV show, *Time Team*, where they have all the right pieces but not the right finished product. Here I have the finished product but not the right pieces. The tile is all Roman and found on a field we farm near Colchester.”



Box of Wisdom

By Caitlin Oh, Brighton and Hove High School, Brighton (highly commended 11-14)

“My visual art piece was inspired by a votive plaque of the goddess Minerva. I chose this because I’ve always been fascinated by Roman mythology, in particular Minerva. On the sides of my artefact I have included two symbols commonly associated with Minerva, an owl and her shield aegis.”



Castle Hill Mosaic

By Ellie Parsons, Woodbridge School, Suffolk (highly commended, 11-14)

“I was in Ipswich Museum and I saw the mosaic from Castle Hill in Suffolk. The patterns and colours inspired me to create my artwork.”



Roman Helmet

By Joshua Turner, Woodbridge School, Suffolk (highly commended, 11-14)

“The artefact that inspired me was a Roman helmet because of the shape and the style of it, particularly the plume on top of it.”

Metal Centurion Helmet

By Lily Yallop, Woodbridge School, Suffolk (highly commended, 11-14)

“The Roman centurion helmet inspired me because it is very well known in England. I wanted to make it as realistic as possible so I made it out of scrap materials. I chose that specific type of helmet as it is the most known.”



SHORT STORIES

Vitus and the Silver Snake Ring

By Amber Shergill, Leicester Grammar School (First Prize, Under 11s)

"I found a ring in the shape of a snake online, and I thought of a really good idea of a man telling the story of a ring."

Once upon a time, a man was telling his grandchildren a story. A story about the greatest thief in Rome. Well that is what he told his grandchildren. He had made the thief up. He made the whole story up.

"Once upon a time in Italy. There was a man, his name was Vitus. His one and only desire was to be in the Roman army. To fight for Rome..."

He got interrupted by his youngest grandchild, Hannah. "Why does he want to fight in the army? Why does he want to kill people?" Hannah asked looking up at him.

"Because in the time of the ancient Romans, almost all the men fought. Any way back to the story. Where was I? Oh yes, the king said he was too small to be in the army. So, he was not allowed to join. Vitus was furious. So furious that over the years, he became dedicated to a life of crime. He stole from poor families and the rich. He had stolen from almost everybody in Rome. A thief would be happy with that, but not Vitus. He just didn't feel satisfied. Then he remembered all those years ago, when he became a thief. He thought back to when the king said he couldn't fight for the army. So, he had an idea. He was going to steal from the king.

He planned it for months. He figured out where all the guards stood, the times when the guards were there and where all the jewels were kept. He found this out from one of his friends, named Julius, who used to work in the palace, but was fired after he tried to steal the king's crown. Then one night he snuck in"

Hannah and Tom (his grandchildren) gasped. Their grandfather laughed. "That is so naughty" Tom said.

"I know. Back to the story. So, Vitus snuck into the palace without being caught. He made his way to the jewel room. He planned it out. He would go every night and every night he would take one thing. The sparkle of a silver ring caught his attention. It was in the shape of a snake. He picked it up and opened the door. Then, he was face to face with 7 guards. He tried to make a run for it, but he was caught by the guards. He was sent to jail. He lived there for the rest of his life. The End." He finished, looking down at the children.

"Grandad..." Hannah said.

"Yes," he replied.

"That story was a bit boring" she said bluntly. Their grandad just laughed.

The End

Sulpicia Lepidina

By Ilse Orson-Jones, Brighton and Hove High School (First Prize, 11-14)

“I was inspired by the Vindolanda tablets, particularly those involving Lepidina (291, 292, 293, 294), because they manage to give us a snapshot of people’s lives from back then – as complicated, detailed and interesting as our own. With my story I tried to imagine the lives beyond the letters and how the tablets reference and hint to what could have really been happening. I was also inspired by the Samian Ware found at Vindolanda.”

Sulpicia Lepidina lay awake, watching the shaft of moonlight move across the floor. Soon it would be time.

Once she was certain that every last slave had taken to their quarters, she slowly rose. Creeping across the cold floor, she paused every few seconds to assure herself with the silence. She moved carefully through the corridors, lingering before darting across patches of moonlight. Her heart hammered in her chest and her breathing seemed like sandpaper against the smooth air. She stopped, swallowed, and continued.

On approaching the kitchen, her feet were suddenly reluctant. Did she really want to do this? Need to do this? Her eyes darted about in the darkness, before resting on the doorway. Yes, she thought, I have made my decision and will stick to it. Giddy with the confidence of recklessness, she strode swiftly into the room, barely checking to ensure its emptiness.

The darkness here was more pronounced; the shadows were thicker and the corners seemed blurrier. Her eyes were heavy with the tiredness of being up at this unusual hour, but it was her conscience that weighed her down. Lepidina quickly muttered a prayer to the gods under her breath. It was no way enough to absolve what she was about to do, but perhaps it would give her enough luck to do it.

Her fingers traced the bowls and pots that were neatly in formation on the countertop, finally resting on what she was looking for. The bowl’s familiar red had a hint of garishness in the darkness. It was filled with dates ready for the next day. Lepidina thought she could see her eyes looking back at her in the gloss. She was startled at how calm they looked — expressionless, collected, unbothered. Her pulse told another story, racing for her to complete the task. A beam of moonlight reflected in the bowl reminded her of her mission. She had to be quick.

She reached around her neck for the glass vial. She slipped it off and raised it towards her eyes. Tilting it slightly, she saw the clear liquid swirl and shimmer. Subconsciously, she took a deep breath and allowed her eyelids to flutter shut for a moment. But a moment was all she could spare. At last, she unsealed the vial and tipped the contents into the bowl. Using her fingers, she spread the liquid onto the dates the best she could. She was careful to wipe her hand afterwards, just to be safe. Her greatest task was done, now all she had to do was wait.

The morning came bright and clear, a perfect spring day. Lepidina tried to act as if all was normal, as if all was right. When entering the dining room, a slave handed her a letter. From Severa. She glanced at it quickly — Severa would be visiting, to discuss it. The matter that they could not talk about in letters. She clung on to this thought as she sat down to eat. She could already feel her hands becoming clammy and her breathing quickening. She locked eyes with her husband.

“Dates?” she offered.

Cupid on Dolphin Mosaic

By Danielle Appiah, Burntwood School, London (winning entry, 11-14)

“The mosaic of Cupid on a dolphin inspired me, as when my class went to Fishbourne last year, we saw it in the palace. I started imagining what it would be like if the Roman gods had evolved and become modern, and how they’d interact with mortals.”

I stood at the wooden banister, looking down at the ancient mosaic. The sounds of my Latin class messing around echoed throughout the empty building, but I ignored them, unable to tear my gaze away from the Roman floor art. They had never truly learned to appreciate the history like I had, and anyway, rowdy boys were not fun to be with, especially when they were hungry.

“Shouldn’t you be with your friends?” a voice said beside me. I looked up to see a boy, about my age, with messy dyed hair and a carefree smile. From under his loosely buttoned shirt, I could see tattoos, reading, “I love my mum,” and a leaping dolphin. He clearly didn’t go to our boys’ academy, or his multitude of piercings would have got him detentions.

“Number one...” My mouth was suddenly dry, as he was staring at me intensely, with eyes the colour of the sky. “They, they aren’t my friends, I, uh, don’t really like anyone in this school,” The boy looked at me quizzically, then continued looking at the mosaic.

“Alright. I don’t think that Cupid actually looks like that, you know? He’d be more... tall, I guess. Handsome. A daredevil. I think that you’d like him,”

“Well, we don’t know how he would look like, because he isn’t real,” I said quietly, but the boy stooped to my eye level, grinning like he could hear a joke I couldn’t.

“You sure about that?” He said, inches from my face. My heart raced, and I could see his eyes, wider than ever. Curiously, his pupils were shaped like dark hearts, I realised. After I stayed silent for a moment, he stood up again. “Thought so. Listen, I think you’re cute. Give me a call sometime, yeah?” He handed me a slip of paper, and walked away, as swiftly as he’d arrived. As he went, I noticed something pale pink protruding from his back. Wings. A quiver was slung over his shoulder, and he clutched golden arrows in his free arm.

I hastily scanned the paper he gave me, then looked up in shock. I’d just been hit on.

By Cupid.

The Pot

By Sean Marsh, The Cedars Academy, Leicestershire (winning entry, 11-14)

“A pot inspired me, because I began wondering what its history would have been and what it could have seen.”

Cries of anguish and pain echoed through the hall. The god of war; Mars, showed no mercy on our troops as we plundered through the village. Normally we were successful. Today we were not. I retreated hurtling back into the horse drawn carriage. The energy and buzz of the battle faded knocking me out into a deep sleep.

When I awoke I was surrounded by women waiting to finally reunite with their husbands, I knew many of them would be disappointed. I looked around and my housewife was nowhere to be seen. I cursed under my breath, knowing I told her to meet me here.

I went home, and when I reached it I sensed that something was wrong. The grass was not freshly cut and door not cleaned. Pushing open the door, I stumbled into a dusty unkempt room. Worrying now, I stumbled into the bedroom where a pot lay. It was then the truth hit me – she had gone.

I picked up the pot it was light, with only a small piece of paper inside. It read: “sorry” in messy writing. I picked up the pot and went outside to wonder what I should do. As I was walking, the wind picked up but I took no notice, figuring it was just a normal winter’s day. Suddenly, a branch snapped, knocking me back into a strange hooded man. He moved to the side and I heard him stamp.

The ground beneath me opened up and I fell. I was in a strange dark place. I called out: “Where am I?” but to no avail. I shouted again, and this time an answer in a dark gloomy voice said:

“Erebus... the world where only darkness and gloom exists. I, Pluto can help.” From nowhere a shadow came off the wall to face me. “All you have to do is get me a pot. I hid it in the deepest forest in the deepest ocean in the deepest land, Do this... I can make her love you again you will be together forever.”

“Where do I go?” I asked.

“Visit the land of the Stix they can help you.”

“Where is...” I began to ask, but he had gone. “Hello, can I have some help on where to find the pot?” I called, but no one could hear me.

I walked into the cavern hastily, ignoring the waring in my head and heart whilst I gripped the pot. As I stomped the walls crumbled and the pillars broke around me. I ran fearing the worst! The land cracked and an echoing laugh pounded my head.

“Give me the pot!”

He chucked me into the water and I felt my life falling away...

The Bracelet and the Swords

By Joseph Dawes, Sy Edmund’s School, Canterbury (winning entry, 11-14)

“I chose this artefact for its unusual design. It seems as if it has a fascinating history. So when I read about the two murdered Roman soldiers found eight years before the jewellery was discovered in 1978 under the Marlowe car park, I decided to combine the two.”

I was born in Rome, created by a master craftsman for a girl from Durovernum Cantiacorum (Canterbury). A Roman cavalry soldier, Marcus, who was stationed in the garrison there sent him the commission for his girlfriend. He never returned to pay for it, but his mourning family later settled the account.

My journey across the trade route was long, uncomfortable and boring. But I will never forget the moment that Julia first saw me. Marcus had wrapped me in soft cloth, and he met her in the meadows by the London Gate. Julia could not believe that he had ordered her a present all the way from Rome. He planned it so that she would understand that he was going to stay with her instead of returning to Rome with the garrison. I was a perfect fit for her slender arm, and from the moment I snaked around her arm, I never left her.

The night before the garrison left, there was feasting and fire. Marcus planned to slip away before the dawn march. Then he and Julia would head in the opposite direction, to the garrison, towards Londinium, where they would be swallowed up in the big city to start their life together.

Dawn came and went. Julia waited. The sun rose high in the sky and she could hear the garrison marching towards Dubris. There was no sign of Marcus, but he would never have returned with the garrison. His officer hated him, and Marcus had planned his new life with Julia.

Centuries passed slowly until Marcus was found in 1970. His friend Sabinus was buried with him, their long swords still in their scabbards. Sabinus was ten years older than Marcus but they became firm friends after being bullied by their officer. Just 30 years old, Sabinus was helping his young friend out of the garrison whilst the noise of the feasting was at its height. The officer, Septimus, saw them leave the feast and followed them. He swiftly cut their throats and hurriedly dug a shallow grave inside the city walls. In order not to raise suspicion for his double murder, he hastily threw their swords into the grave instead of returning them to the armoury. They would be disgraced as the deserters that they were, and Septimus’ crime would never be discovered.

As the long day of the departure passed for Julia, I stayed warm on her arm until the cold night air froze us both. She could not return to her home, and the drink she obtained from the apothecary made her colder than I had ever known. I stayed with her until the end. She lay under a tree in the orchard where we waited for Marcus and just got colder and colder. Through the century, we were covered in layers of earth, wood and stone.

Eight years after Marcus was found, I heard Julia’s voice again. There had been rumbling sounds like horses and carts, directly above where we lay for fifteen centuries. She spoke a different language and gently moved the earth around me. I heard the words “treasure” and “archaeological dig”, then I saw her face!

Not her face exactly, but as like it as a kitten to a cat. Her eyes widened when she recognised me. She raised me slowly from where we lay and stared at me again for what seemed like forever. “Mark! I feel as if I recognise this piece” she said, wonderingly, to her fellow archaeologist. Furtively, she held me against her left arm. It felt like coming home.

The Margarine Tub

By Ellen Hall (Runner-up)

“I recently read a real life story in a magazine about someone finding a Roman statue of Minerva in a margarine tub. This inspired me to write a story because it was so completely random and it really inspired me.”

It was around 3,500 years ago when I was carefully carved out of stone. Each gentle touch gave me life as I began to take shape. At last I was Minerva, goddess of wisdom, war, art, and schools.

My creator took me with him wherever he went – a good luck charm, he called me. I was polished until I shone like the sun and in his home, even worshipped. It was a glorious life for a small statue living in Roman Britain. As the years went on, battles raged, gradually tearing my perfect world apart. New challenges brought new people, who didn’t understand what I symbolized.

3,499 years later I lay, caked in mud on farmland in Oxfordshire. I noticed movement in the nearby vegetation. Suddenly, I got sprayed by a shower of... dog slobber! The white, curly-haired beast sniffed me intently and slowly clamped its jaws around me. If statues could scream, all of Oxfordshire would have heard me then. The owner of this disgusting mongrel had just eaten his lunch out of an empty margarine tub. Lazily, he threw it in the bushes. The dog raced after it and eventually dropped me in the tub. It carried the tub, with my bouncing playfully inside, and dropped it at its owner’s feet, wanting to play fetch.

Now this owner looked inside the tub and saw me. He turned me round, peering at me intently. This was the most attention anyone had given me in 3,000 years! It was an amazing feeling. “It must be Roman,” he murmured. I was then inserted into a pocket for the rest of the man’s walk.

I was taken out of this rather comfortable pocket at someone’s house, a friend of the dog owner’s, whose name is Len Jackman. The friend, a local farmer, exclaimed, “It is Roman, a bit broken and shabby, but definitely Roman. Where did you find it?”

Len replied: ‘In a margarine tub.’

At last I was polished and cleaned, and was sent to a museum to be valued, so I could be put up for auction. Soon someone would buy me and I would be loved and respected like I once was all those years ago.

The true story: Len Jackman, 66, is a metal detectorist who was at a farmer friend’s house, soon to be going get some of his own finds valued. The statue had been in a margarine tub unnoticed with some other artefacts. Len could tell it was Roman by the weight. He decided to take it to be valued.

Murders of the Invasion

By Isaac Lucraft, Churcher’s College, Hampshire (Runner-up)

“I was inspired by Roman Military arrowheads – I like bows and writing stories about war.”

43 AD, a small English settlement in Britain:

Lexus was never one for war. He despised it. However, that was what the Roman Empire was best at. Creating mayhem and bloodshed, methodically and efficiently. Lexus also despised the idea of methodical and efficient bloodshed. Bloodshed was not supposed to be methodical. It wasn’t supposed to be considered at all. You were ending a person’s life, rather than pushing people out of the way like the Romans saw it. The thought of the piercing screams and the memory of fear always sent a shiver down his spine. Lexus was a man of peace and ease. He used to be a soldier, fighting in the chaos that the Romans created.

But war changes people. War changed him. So now he liked to lounge around his British villa, knocking back the dark red in his cup. But war was bound to spread when Emperor Claudius came to power. Lexus had

heard what the Emperor was planning, and he did not like the plan one bit. Emperor Claudius was to invade Britain rather soon. Which meant more bloodshed and mayhem. So Lexus made contact with Emperor Claudius, despite that it would give away his place of hiding. Claudius had always despised Lexus ever since he snuck out of the Legion. Lexus was a slippery man, who was extremely skilled at running from the authorities.

He sent a message to him that the Britons were peaceful, and that he did not need to wage war upon them. The Emperor did not take the message well. Lexus, a criminal on the run, was telling him that he shouldn't wage war on a people he was living with? Claudius thought that Lexus was scheming against the Roman Empire with the Britons, so that as soon as the Romans landed in Britain, Lexus would be there to welcome them with an army of the British people. So the Emperor, several days later, invaded Britain. And Lexus was there to meet him. He was not thinking. He did not care. He did not want the Emperor to kill the people that he had grown fond of over the years. The Emperor landed with one third of the Roman force. He strolled forward and boomed to Lexus: "Lexus Viridius Lucullus, you are under arrest!"

"Don't do this, Claudius."

"I want to so that is what I will do! Galerius, Cassius, arrest him."

"I'll give you all my belongings, Claudius. All of my slaves, all of my luxuries, all of my money. Think about how many resources I must have had to sustain myself and the run from your guards. All of that could be yours! Just don't do this. You have everything you need anyway. Why would you kill thousands of people just to get that little bit more?"

"I am not doing this for me. I am doing this for the Empire..."

"You and I know that's a lie."

"...and the Gods. Mars has given us his blessing. Also... since you have caused my men no end of trouble, and murdered so many people who I sent after you... I think you shall watch."

"What do you mean all those people you sent after me?"

"The men. All the young men with hopes and dreams."

"I haven't murdered anyone apart from the people I was forced to while serving in the Legion."

"Well that's what you're being arrested for. And I think I'll take all of your belongings as well."

"You can't do this. How many people in your life do you care for!?"

"I care for the Gods and the Empire. Have him bound."

"What about Claudia. I have her held hostage. You care about your sweet sister, don't you?"

"I will have my men go and find her. I am not scared of you." Claudius said, doubting that he actually did.

With that, he was bound. Several days later, when the Romans went to crush a rebellion who would not submit to the Romans' way, Lexus was put on a horse, to hear and see all the bloodshed that he hated. All the time spent capturing Claudius' sister, all the belongings and riches he possessed had not swayed the Emperor one bit. Lexus closed his eyes, but the darkness could not block out the roars of people charging and the screams of people dying. No one would ever be able to forget it. No one would be able to forget that war is not a thing to be nonchalant about. It is a thing to be feared, a force of rage and hatred, capable of breaking people and making them lose their minds. It gives people visions and memories never to be forgotten. It marks people. A mark of horror and madness, that turns them into warmongers and murderers themselves.

43 AD, a few weeks after the first rebellion is put down, a slave was cleaning his master's house. After Lexus' execution, Claudius had claimed the house and the slaves for his own. The slave brushed the mantelpiece and found something on the top. Claudius must not have seen it, as he had only visited the house to claim it, and he hadn't even gone in yet. The slave unrolled the piece of parchment. It read:

Hello Temenos.

I understand that you are in Claudius' hands now. I hope he treats you as well or better than I did, but doubt that he will. Underneath the floorboard of the cellar, you shall find a dagger. I would like you to use this to kill the girl bound in the cellar. Do this for me, and do it for the revenge you will want after the years of abuse Claudius will give to you. You know how well I treated you, how much I enjoyed your company. Think of it as a favour for your old master, would you? This will help my spirit be satisfied down in the Underworld.

Your old master, Lexus

Claudius, had he been visiting the villa, may have heard the faint scream emanating from the depths of the villa.

The Tear Jar

By Sydney Hart, Redmaids' High School, Bristol (winning entry, 11-14)

"My artefact was a tear bottle. Around the time of Christ, Romans would fill the bottles with tears when mourning to put on dead relatives' tombs as a sign of respect. I found this a really good idea but wanted to make a happy mythical story of one."

A long time ago in ancient Rome, a young girl was walking the markets. She was rich and pretty looking at jewellery to go with her new robes. She came across an old man sitting on a stall; he was wrinkled and pale but shouting at the top of his hoarse voice. He said:

"Tear jar, tear jar, I have ONE to sell!" So the young lady walked to his stall and looked at the tall thin jar.

"What does it do?" she asked. The old man looked at her, astonished.

"You don't know about the legend of the tear jar?!" he exclaimed, looking at her wide-eyed with wonder.

"Grab that stool and I'll tell you the tale." The old man had a slight excitement in his tone as he took the red jar in his hands....

"Well, this very jar was held by the Gods above, every god decided that they should all drop one of their magic tears into the jar, so as every year one of the bravest, kindest people on the planet, would get the jar tipped just enough for one drip to go on the head of that person in their sleep so when they wake up, they have a random power from one of the gods who cried in to it. But one time they made a mistake and decided to drop a tear on a kind-hearted tradesman.

But that year the gods gave the jar dripping duty to Hera, (the wife of Zeus) who is vengeful and jealous so didn't agree with this. She rushed the event and accidentally dropped the whole jar all together! It was such a disaster she called out to the tradesman; she tried to wake him up but failed as when she dropped the jar it had knocked him flat out!

So she looked over the towns people and found a pottery maker and a painter, she woke them both up easily. She got them together and, imitating her husband's bold booming tone she told them that if they didn't remake the tall red jar (that was currently in pieces on some guy's head!), then she would force the world into war with the elements.

Soon after, the two townsmen had recreated the jar with Hera guiding them telling them of every little detail. Hera then promised the good people happy marriage with rich beautiful wives! After saying her thanks she used the force to take the jar. She only had one problem, THE JAR HAD NO TEARS IN!

She began to cry thinking of all her worries and fears and what her husband may think of her. All the tears fell nearly into the jar giving it a slight blue glow. "Yes!" she exclaimed, so happy that she wouldn't be found out. No one knew but her of the incident that had occurred.

But with the worry of no one finding out she completely forgot that that man had all the tears spilled on him PLUS pieces of a magical jar! When he woke up, the man looked at the pieces confused so he picked them all up and decided to try to put them all together, remaking the tear jar with a few added things like two handles and a wider open top as he now had the powers of every god and the help of his builder friends. This man, remember, is a tradesman so one day he decided a jar touched by the gods could sell for a lot of money. So he sat down on his stool and hoped someone would take interest in its history."

The old man looked at the young girl for the last time and winked pure joy in his one open eye.

"How much?" The girl looks at him, taking out her purse.

"How much is a miracle?" The man said mysteriously, as the girl handed over most of the money she had and took the jar feeling it over with her fingers. Just for a second she thought she saw a slight blue glow around the jar.

A Night in Bath

By Juliet Hill, Surbiton High School, London (winning entry, 11-14)

"I was inspired by the cursed tabled because they are so shocking and some of the motives are crazy (and sometimes a little pathetic). I have tried to understand what might have gone on in their heads as they as were then and what backstory they would have had."

He looked away, unable stand the sight of the object. Fighting the tears that threatened to spill from his eyes, he stood up sharply and stared around at the looming shadows of the bath walls. He knew there was no one there; knew that he'd made doubly sure that the haruspex was fast asleep; knew that he was utterly alone but yet he was still wary. The curse tablet clanged against the hewn stone floor, abandoned with as much love as it had been written. Bubbles trickled up from the boiling depths of the sacred spring, a swirling, storming mass, furious to escape from their lead-lined cage.

For a moment, Plotius surveyed the scene, considering the possibility of jumping into the water's clawing embrace. A brief moment of pain, more heat than he could possibly imagine, and then it would all be over. The words etched into the soft pewter still echoed in his head. "Hand him over to fevers—quartan, tertian, and daily—so that they wrestle and struggle with him."

How could things have gone so wrong between a husband and wife that one was filled with a hatred so strong that she was driven to curse him to death, whilst the other was left, staring at the water's edge, close enough to death to reach out to its loving call?

He walked away. Plotius didn't know what it was that made him do it but something deep inside him recoiled at the idea of just giving up to his wife's will. He wanted her to pay for what she'd done. Of course, he'd been incredibly lucky, finding the tablet before she'd actually used it, but still, the fact that she'd even considered... It didn't bear thinking about.

Plotius froze. He'd been so caught up in his own thoughts that he hadn't noticed the light on in the temple. It had only been the door swinging open, just seconds before he passed into its line of sight, that had alerted him. Diving out of the way, he tried to lose himself in the shadows of the garden. It was a very different sight to the one he had relaxed in this morning. The smiling, colourful faces of the flowers and trees dancing to the light, gentle music of the birds above had been replaced with leering shadows and the almost tangible smell of danger.

"Plotius." The lilting tone reached out to him in a voice he recognised immediately. His wife. Holding his breath, he tensed his body, preparing himself for what he knew he had to do. Her footsteps were getting ever closer but still he forced himself to wait for the right moment; his fists clenched as he pictured her pale features, softly illuminated in the moonlight. Maybe she would be smiling, in that amused, slightly guilty smirk that he detested so much. Not for long. It was time to fight back. He stood up.

"There you are, Plotius! Where did you go? I, I..." She trailed off, seeing the violence in his eyes. "What is it?"

"You know full well what," he snarled. For a second, a flicker of unease crossed her face, but then she smoothed it over with a look of infuriating superiority.

"I think you've made a mistake, Plotius. You're the one who forgot to buy me a dress for my party."

"Well why should I have to do everything for you? At least I don't go about cursing people who don't always treat me like I'm the empress!"

"I only did that because you wouldn't apologise!"

"Well, you didn't deserve an apology!"

She opened her mouth to retort angrily but suddenly closed it again, as a strange look crossed her face. It took a second for him to realise that she was smiling. And not in that awful way either; it was a sweet, gentle thing, happiness lighting up her eyes.

"What, what is it?" Plotius was still blinking furiously, trying to catch up with events.

"Can't you see, Plotius?" She was laughing now. "Don't you realise how silly we've been? To argue over a silly old dress, whilst there are other couples out there who genuinely have something to fight about. We've been such idiots!"

His frown soon faded as a slightly dazed look overcame him. His wife saw the realisation dawn in his eyes and she ran to him, hugging him tightly. They stood there saying nothing, enveloped in each other's arms, peaceful and grateful at last

Fabius Dubitatus' Golden Necklace

By Allerga Westwood-Dunkley, Brighton and Hove High School (winning entry)

"I chose the golden necklace belonging to Fabius Dubitatus, as I thought that it had an interesting story behind it: it was a gift to the 'mother goddesses' along with many other valuable objects. On some of the items was engraved Fabius' name and 'mother goddesses'. It is thought that Fabius Dubitatus was a wealthy soldier/centurion at Hadrian's Wall."

My head dropped lazily onto my hand, which was propped up on the small wooden table in front of me, and my tired eyes fell on the small window in the corner of the room. Through the smeared panels I could make out the familiar sight of Hadrian's wall, and the officers small huts near it. It was a beautiful day and the sun was shining brightly so I could clearly make out the many soldiers standing at their posts along the wall. The hills were windswept and dreamlike, glistening with the morning's fresh dew. All too soon, my eyes automatically fixed on the north east of the wall. I sighed, as I reluctantly stared at Fabius' old-post: I thought back for the hundredth time to Centurion Fabius Dubitatus, with his strange laugh, lopsided smile, and sparkling eyes.

I shook myself, awoke from my daydream and proceeded to continue my previous task of wrapping carefully. Once my brown paper parcel was complete, I stood up, smoothed down my creased dress, gathered my cloak and 'the package, and swiftly walked out the door.

As I ventured through the moorland and weaved between hill after hill, I made precise care to not trip or fail; I was making my best effort to stay clean and presentable so as to impress the mother-goddesses, and I was especially careful to keep a firm grip on my brown paper parcel held tightly to my chest. After a while I came to a small wood which I knew well.

I bent my head backwards and soaked in the warm rays of sunlight being projected my way. Even though I was completely alone the light gave me a feeling of warmth and protection deep down in my chest: The gentle breeze rippled through the trees like a small wave travelling across a calm lake.

As I came across a small clearing, with perfectly cut grass, and groomed flowerbeds, I stopped and gazed. Although I had seen this sight more times than I could remember, each time it seemed to get more and more fantastical. In front of me was the magnificent temple of the mother goddesses: The white pillars, detailed with a ribbed pattern and small roses painted on the base of each one, rose majestically above my head. The grand entrance way welcomed me to the raised marble platform, in the centre of the structure, surrounded by similar white pillars and open sides, the high, tiled roof enclosed me as I walked hesitantly up the steps.

I bent down slowly and placed the package gently on the marble slab in front of me. I then sat down on my heels as I looked forwards determinedly. There before me lay the collection of items my husband, Fabius and I had been collecting and gifting to the Gods for over 15 years. I noticed the skillet with his name beautifully inscribed into it, and the many gold rings we had placed there, I spotted our three silver spoons and our precious silver plate.

I felt my face grow hot and my vision start to go blurry, quickly I looked down-and fumbled with the string tying the paper together on the parcel. As I worked at the knot, droplets fell on to the paper which gradually started to disintegrate it more and more. I tasted the saltiness of my tears on the tip of my tongue as I finally prized from the ruins of paper what I wanted.

Holding them out before me I looked down at my hands and analysed the heavy gold necklace weighing them down. The intricate detail-on the round penny like shape of the middle of the necklace glowed mystically. I remembered exactly when Fabius had given it to me and had fastened it around my neck for me. I closed my eyes and could almost feel the weight of it there now, my hands tightly closed around it. I did not want to go over, with my necklace, to the pile of valuables, however my legs were already carrying me there and my hands were subconsciously placing the beautiful necklace on top of the cluster of expensive items. Quietly I whispered into the suffocating silence:

"It has been one year without you, Fabius, and I will never forget you, but this is for you, to never forget me."

Turning my head, I walked shakily down the steps and out into the clearing. Breathing in a deep breath I walked steadily through the trees and back to Hadrian's wall.

Mysteries of Isis

By Ananya Miletic, Burntwood School, London (first prize, 15-18)

“I was inspired by a visit to the London Mithraeum and the bust of a Boy Priest of Isis, of about 7 or 8 years old, displayed at the British Museum. I thought it would be interesting to explore the life of a young boy in Roman London, especially in connection to the intriguing mystery cult of Isis, as we still don’t have much knowledge about it today.”

It was the first hour. Weak sunlight seeped through the glassless window and glowed behind Felix’s eyelids. He hesitantly opened his eyes and looked out at the pale sky. As soon as it had come, though, the feeble ray of sun disappeared behind an ominous grey cloud. He shivered. Not because it had grown colder, but because it had brought back dark memories of the monstrous black mass of ash and smoke he had escaped from in Pompeii.

Pompeii. It didn’t exist anymore. Suddenly the cawing of seagulls in the distance turned to the screams of helpless people. He shut his eyes again, but the image blotted his mind’s eye like an ink stain. The sound of his mother’s voice pulled him back into the cool Britannic morning. He took a deep breath. He was in Londinium. He was safe. He was being yelled at by his mother for being late to breakfast. Felix sprung up off the ground and hastily made his way to the triclinium.

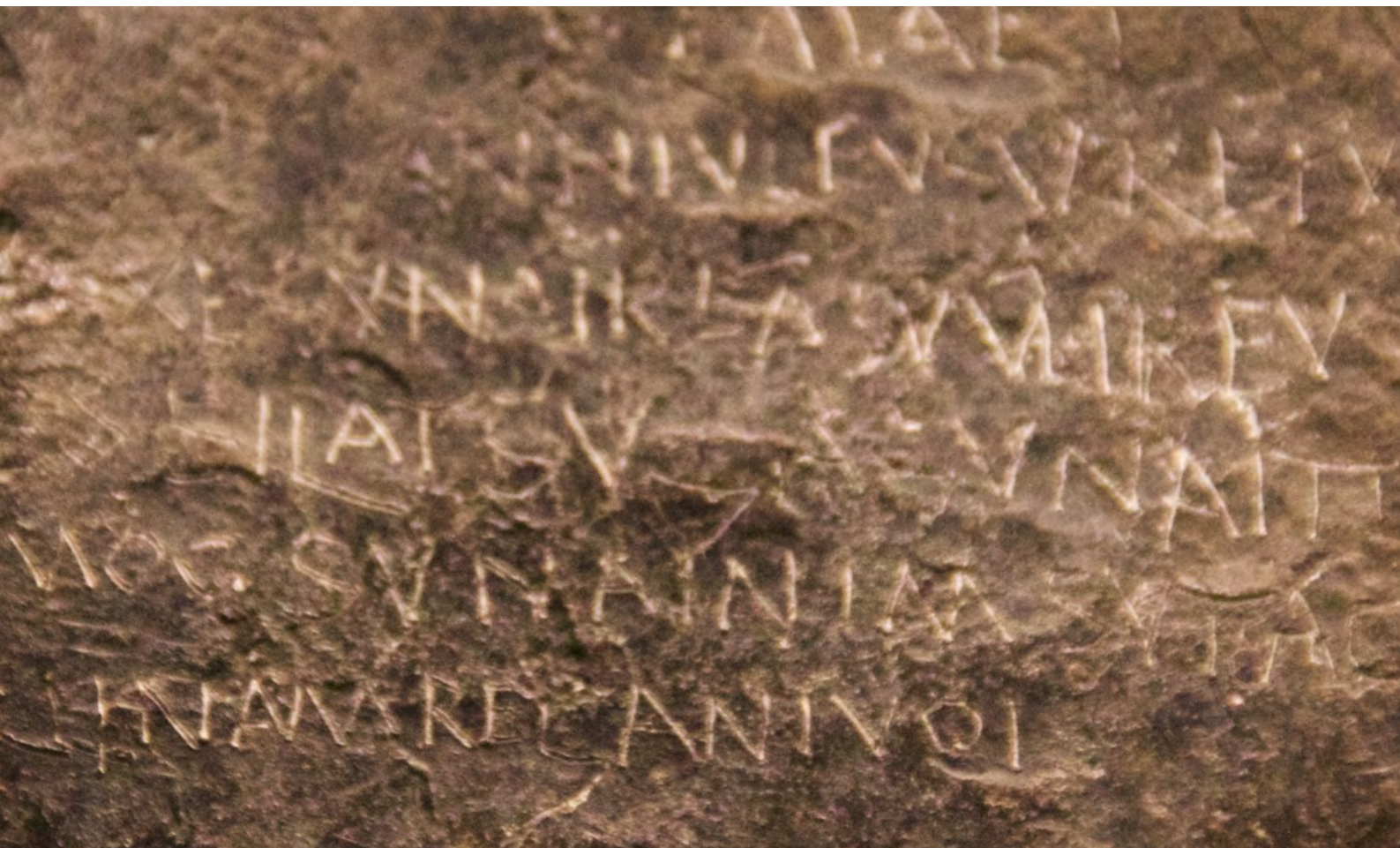
It was the second hour, and his mother held his hand tightly as they carved their way through the densely packed forum. His other hand was clamped around a small marble he’d found on the way. A friendly woman called out “salve!” to them, but his mother returned the greeting with only a brief nod of the head. There was no time to stop and chat. It was an important day, she had told Felix. He was going to enter priesthood at the Temple of Isis.

His eight-year-old mind didn’t fully understand what that meant, however. Her solemn words kept rolling around in his head like marbles, spinning and knocking into each other. He had been fasting for the last ten days, and his hair had been cut short except for two locks over his right ear, like the God Horus, in preparation of the initiation ceremony. Although what that entailed was a mystery even to his mother. The persistent chattering of market-goers moving from stall to stall like restless birds flying from tree to tree pounded in his head. Latin and that strange Britannic language were interwoven in a chorus of merchants’ shouts, boasting about everything from olive oil imported from Roma to carefully crafted Celtic jewellery. Children were playing with marbles in the dusty ground a short way away, and Felix was tempted to break his mother’s grip and join them; her stern expression held him back. The outline of the white stony temple was growing. His small fingers gripped the smooth surface of his marble even tighter.

It must be the third hour, thought Felix, gazing out at the position of the sun through a gap in one of the four towering stone walls. It was difficult to tell however, as his eyes had already become accustomed to the darkness of the temple. Whispers echoed coolly about the vast space, an unsettling contrast to the clamouring market outside. His marble had long since been taken away by his mother, who had left him with the priests. They solemnly led him into a separate room, almost completely dark. He stood waiting, his heart beating loudly into the quiet of the room. The ceremony was beginning. Suddenly a bright light flared in front of him, so quick he couldn’t tell what its source was. Then another bright light, this time from behind. He felt his neck warm — it must have been fire. He tightened his fist out of habit, startled for a moment at the absence of the marble. Eyes now shut he felt the flashes of light continue behind his eyelids. Fire was frightening.

Mount Vesuvius had erupted in fire, he had been told. Fear fuelled his imagination and conjured up horrible images of people being swallowed up by flames. If his mother had not listened to the advice of a soothsayer, they would now be buried under a pile of ash along with them. He opened his eyes. Darkness had resumed. The priests were reading from a ritual book, decorated with symbols which he recognised as hieroglyphs. Strange music joined their murmurs, filling the silence of the room. To his left, Felix heard the slow pounding of a drum quicken until it almost reached the speed of his throbbing heart. The noise abruptly stopped, leaving the room reverberating with sound. It was time for the Mysteries of Isis.

It was the fourth hour. Daylight pierced Felix’s eyes and he raised a hand to shield himself. His other hand was held by his mother. She hadn’t asked any questions after the ceremony had finished and they were now making their way home in silence. He would never be able to tell her about the ritual. The Cult of Isis was a mystery cult to which he was now sworn to secrecy. The people in the market were carrying on their daily business, unchanged, but Felix felt like he would never be the same again. He kept an eye out for a new marble, but there was nothing but the litter on the ground.



The Artefact to Art competition is organised by the School of Archaeology and Ancient History, University of Leicester. It aims to encourage and stimulate creative responses to the ancient world.

This year in the 2019 competition, judges received almost 300 entries this year on the theme of 'Roman Britain', in age categories for poetry, short stories, and visual art. The forty-nine entries printed here have been judged outstanding for their creativity and imagination.



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