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## Archaeology InSites



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Roman bathhouses at Bothwellhaugh,  
Bar Hill and Bearsden; Latrines at  
Bearsden and Castlecary





## Bathhouses

*Roman forts were provided with bathhouses (balnea) for the soldiers. These are often located just outside a fort, in an annexe (enclosed area attached to a fort), or inside but close to the edge. They were away from the main buildings because of the fire risk that they posed. This was because bathhouses had hot rooms heated by a hypocaust system - underfloor heating provided by a furnace.*

*Bathhouses contained several rooms (Bearsden had eight, Bothwellhaugh seven, Bar Hill around six), which were usually entered in a sequence, the bather returning the same way. Not all rooms were present in every bathhouse, but could include:*

*\* Changing room, where a soldier would remove his clothes (but keep footwear on – the floors could get very hot!)*

*\* Cold room (Frigidarium)*

*\* Cold plunge bath*

*\* Warm rooms (Tepidaria)*

*\* Hot room (Caldarium)*

*\* Hot bath*

*The furnace room (praefurnium) sat beyond the hot rooms.*

*Turkish baths are the closest modern-day parallel to Roman bathhouses. We don't know how often men bathed nor how frequently water was changed in the baths - they were probably used by around 500 men! They used a curved metal blade, known as a strigil, to scrape oil and dirt from the skin in a hot room or after exercise (<http://collections.gla.ac.uk/#details=ecatalogue.123109>). It is possible that they relaxed and played games in the bathhouses – a gaming board was found in the granary at Bearsden. Excavations in the bathhouse there also found a sandstone head of a goddess (<https://vimeo.com/129135972>) and a fountainhead with a gaping mouth – all are now on display in the Hunterian Museum.*

*Excavations in the cold room at Bothwellhaugh revealed an attractive floral drain cover, with the water draining away between the petals. This is now in the Hunterian Museum (<http://collections.gla.ac.uk/#details=ecatalogue.125932>).*





## Latrines

*And of course, soldiers need to go to the toilet! But this was a communal activity, with toilet blocks seating several soldiers together. A number of latrines have been found in Scotland. At Castlecary, excavations in 1902 revealed the toilet block separate from the bathhouse, but flushed by drains from the fort. These took the sewage through the wall of the fort and outside into the ditches.*

*At Bearsden, the toilet had nine seats – stone seats with holes have been found, but excavations on Hadrian's Wall have found wooden seats so they presumably had wooden seats on top – rather warmer to sit on than stone in the winter months! Underneath the seats, the sewage channel was flushed by water from the bathhouse, showing careful and sensible design. Moss was found in the sewage, suggesting that soldiers used this to clean themselves in the toilet. The sewage from the latrine at Bearsden drained through the rampart and into the ditches, where it could still be smelt whilst being excavated almost 2,000 years later.*

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<https://canmore.org.uk/site/45665/bothwellhaugh>  
<https://canmore.org.uk/site/45920/antonine-wall-bar-hill-roman-fort>  
<https://canmore.org.uk/site/44532/bearsden>



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