

A display of identity pots was installed at Arbeia Roman Fort, South Shields. These were created by Year 5 of Hadrian Primary School, working with artist Karen MacDougall, the Arbeia fort learning team and FV assistant Clare Forsythe. They were inspired by Roman ceramic head-pots, portraits of real Roman people who may have visited this Roman Frontier in Roman times.

Arbeia Roman Fort was known as 'Fort of the Arab troops' and was a very cosmopolitan place with evidence of people from Mesopotamia, Spain, Syria and of Moorish descent, as well as from different parts of Britain. Today, South Shields is also a multi-cultural place - so there are definite similarities, past and present. Identity today was explored, considering names, how you describe yourself, your origin and descent. The exploration also included how the fort site had changed over time and what is known about the identity of the people who were there and assessing the evidence they left behind. This evidence is both epigraphic, written on tombstones, names inscribed on artefacts and portraits of people on head-pots. There are also sheep bones, evidencing sheep in the area grazing the area beyond the fort. It is believed that sheep were selectively bred in the UK in Roman times and wool would have been processed and used for spinning, weaving and felting. This inspired Karen to suggest that we felt the vessels using needle-felting and a special wet-felting resist technique to create 3D forms.

Hadrian Primary is a Royal Shakespeare Company Associate School and 8 of the head-pots were used in a recent production of William Shakespeare's 'Much Ado About Nothing' at the Northern Stage theatre, Newcastle 1st July 2022.

When Arbeia closed for the season, the pots were relocated to Segedunum.

