

Let's imagine: mortarium

Each week the Museum is going to publish a 'Let's Imagine' activity sheet. This activity sheet will include a picture of an object in the Museum. It will tell you about the object and then it will be up to you to imagine a story, poem and/or picture inspired by this object. The sheet will include at least three questions or statements to help get you started and inspired.

This week's object is a Roman **mortarium** that can be found in the permanent exhibition. Read the information in blue below to find out more about this mortarium.



You have to describe this object to a friend. What do you say?

Imagine this object whole. Draw a picture of it.

Write a story or poem about being transported back to Roman Britain. Imagine you visit a villa where an important dinner is being prepared. What do you see and do?

This is a *part* or fragment of a buff ware (clay) mortarium from Roman Britain. It was found in Thatcham. A mortarium is a piece of kitchen equipment, and no Roman kitchen would be seen without one. When whole, it would have been a large round or cone-shaped pottery bowl with a thick rim, and coarse sand or grit embedded into the internal surface. This surface was used for grinding, pounding or mixing foods, and there would often be a spout in the rim to drain off excess liquid. The presence of mortarium in an area indicates the spread of Roman food preparation methods.

This particular mortarium is a simple and plain version, but fancier versions have been found elsewhere; they tend to be red and have a hole near the top for discharging liquids which is shaped to appear as the mouth of a mouse, lion or bat.

You may have a 'pestle and mortar' in your kitchen, the modern equivalent of a mortarium, which also lends the 'pestle and mortar' its name; mortar comes from the Latin 'mortarium' meaning a 'receptacle for pounding' or 'the product for grinding or pounding'.