

1.5 **Rome** *Public health – the Romans' big idea!*

Your third empire! The Roman empire. The Romans' big idea was public health! They spent a lot of time and money providing clean water and public baths for the people who lived in Roman towns. On the next four pages you can see exactly what they did and why they did it. At the end you will see if you know enough to get the job advertised below.

■ **ACTIVITY 1**

You are applying for the job of a Public Health Inspector in a Roman town. Complete the questionnaire below using the information on pages 25–27 and explain the reason for each choice. The person who gives the most correct answers and the best explanations will get the job.

OFFICIAL QUESTIONNAIRE

**FOR THE POST OF STAFF INSPECTOR, REPORTING TO
CORPULENTUS GROSSUS:
SENIOR PUBLIC HEALTH ADMINISTRATOR, PLUMBRIAN REGION**

1 You have been instructed to build a new Roman settlement. Do you

- a) choose a site with plenty of fresh air and spring water
- b) choose an old settlement near marshy land – this will be much quicker and easier.

2 Your town is growing bigger – you don't have enough water. Do you

- a) pray for rain
- b) limit the townspeople to one bucket a day and insist that they pay for it
- c) build channels to bring fresh water into the town.

3 Your town has been given money for new buildings. Do you

- a) decide to build public baths, lavatories and sewers to protect the health of your citizens
- b) build a theatre to entertain local people because they need to relax after a hard day's work.

4 Roman soldiers have been injured near your town. Do you

- a) build a new hospital for wounded soldiers
- b) stop trying to defend the empire
- c) improve the training of your soldiers because they don't know how to defend themselves.

5 You have built new baths in the town. Will you

- a) make a very low entry charge so everyone can keep clean
- b) have a high entry charge so that only the wealthy can use the baths.

6 You have many poor people and slaves in your town who sometimes fall ill. Do you

- a) ignore them because they are an unimportant section of your population
- b) pay for a doctor to treat them
- c) tell them to pray to the gods more often.

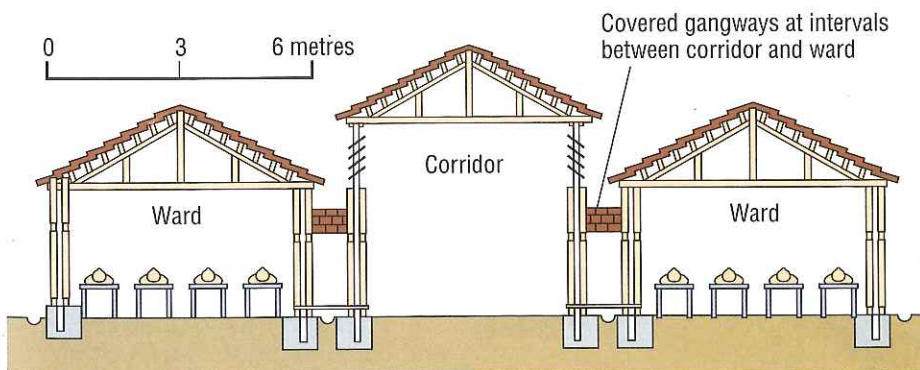
How did the Romans keep their army healthy?

The Roman empire was much bigger than the Egyptian or Greek empires. It reached from Italy into Germany, Spain and Britain and across to North Africa. The Romans built up their huge empire thanks to their very powerful and disciplined army. The Romans worked hard to improve public health because they had to keep the army healthy to defend the empire.

As the Roman army travelled across Europe and North Africa, its leaders noticed that every time the soldiers camped near to swamps and marshes they became ill with MALARIA. Although they did not know about germs, the Romans realised that there was a connection between dirty water and disease. So they built their forts and camps well away from marshes and swamps. They tried to build near fresh water. If that was not possible, their engineers designed AQUEDUCTS to bring fresh water from the rivers to the camps. Each fort had a bath house with drains and fresh water.

The Romans also built hospitals for their soldiers. This meant that the soldiers got the best treatments possible from trained SURGEONS and doctors. These treatments were very similar to those used by the Greeks. They mostly depended on herbal medicine, simple surgery, or rest, diet and exercise. Of course the soldiers, like everybody else, also used magic charms or prayed to the gods to be cured.

▼ **SOURCE 1** A plan of a Roman army hospital built in Scotland. There was room for 240 patients and there was also an operating theatre, kitchens and baths



A healthy army means a healthy empire!



▼ **SOURCE 2** One Roman soldier wrote:

Soldiers must not remain for too long near unhealthy marshes. A soldier... must not drink swamp water.

■ ACTIVITY 2

The Romans wanted to keep their soldiers healthy and fighting-fit. If they did not have a fit army they would lose their empire. Using the information on this page, make a list of all the methods they used to keep their soldiers healthy.

How did the Romans keep their towns healthy?

These practical methods and ideas helped the Roman army to stay fit and healthy. People soon realised that they could use the same ideas in their homes in Roman cities or when they were building new towns or villas. As soon as the Romans realised how important it was to have fresh water, baths, hospitals and sewers to keep people healthy, they made sure that *all* their new towns followed the same pattern.

We have lots of slaves to do the building but it still takes a lot of money and careful organisation.



It's not just the army that need to be healthy! We Romans are the first government to care about improving the people's health.

▼ SOURCE 3 How the Romans improved public health

A Roman engineer always ...

... makes sure that all buildings are well away from marshland.

... tests the water supply. Mosquitoes and flies gather if there is foul sludge in the water.

... builds aqueducts and brick-lined channels called conduits to supply fresh water to towns.

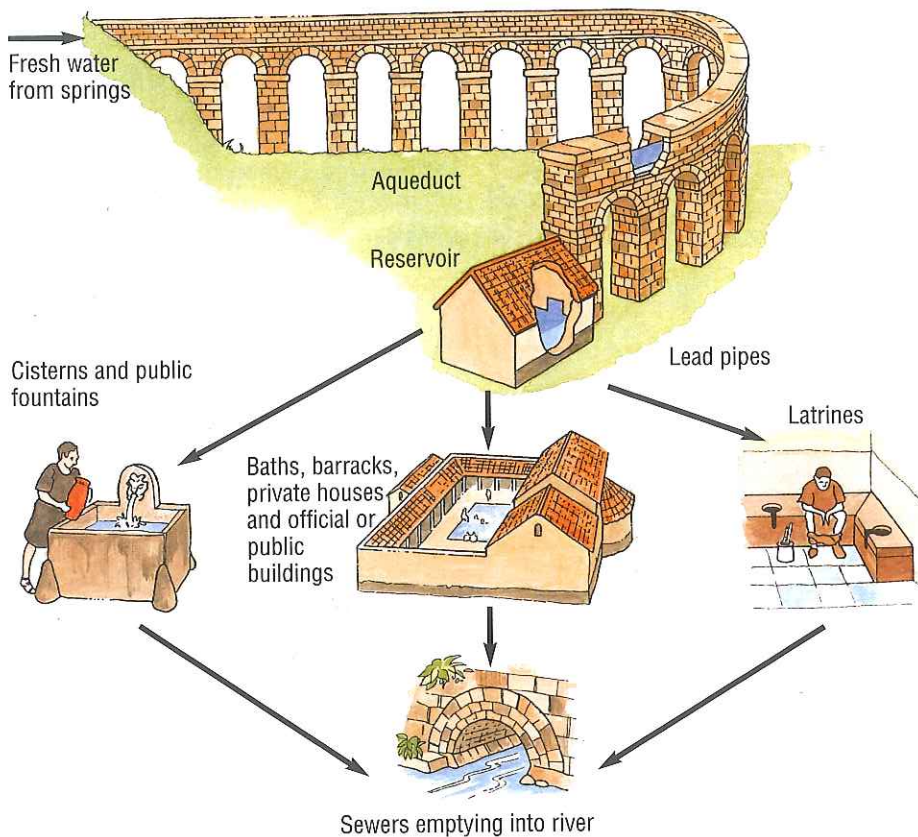
... builds sewers underground to take away sewage from private houses and public toilets.

... builds public baths in every town, and makes them so cheap that everyone can afford to use them.

... builds public toilets in towns – so people can clean up, clear out and catch up on the latest gossip!



▼ **SOURCE 4** A Roman aqueduct and how it worked



▼ **SOURCE 5** The Roman baths at Bath in Somerset. The baths have been preserved and you can visit them today to walk where the Romans walked



▼ **SOURCE 6** A Roman author, Marcus Varro

When building a house or farm, especial care should be taken to place it at the foot of a wooded hill where it is exposed to health-giving winds. Care should be taken when there are swamps in the neighbourhood because certain tiny creatures which cannot be seen by the eyes breed there. These float through the air and enter the body through the mouth and nose and cause serious diseases.

■ **DISCUSS**

Study Source 6.

- 1 What do you think the tiny creatures would be called nowadays?
- 2 Do you think the Roman reasoning was sensible?