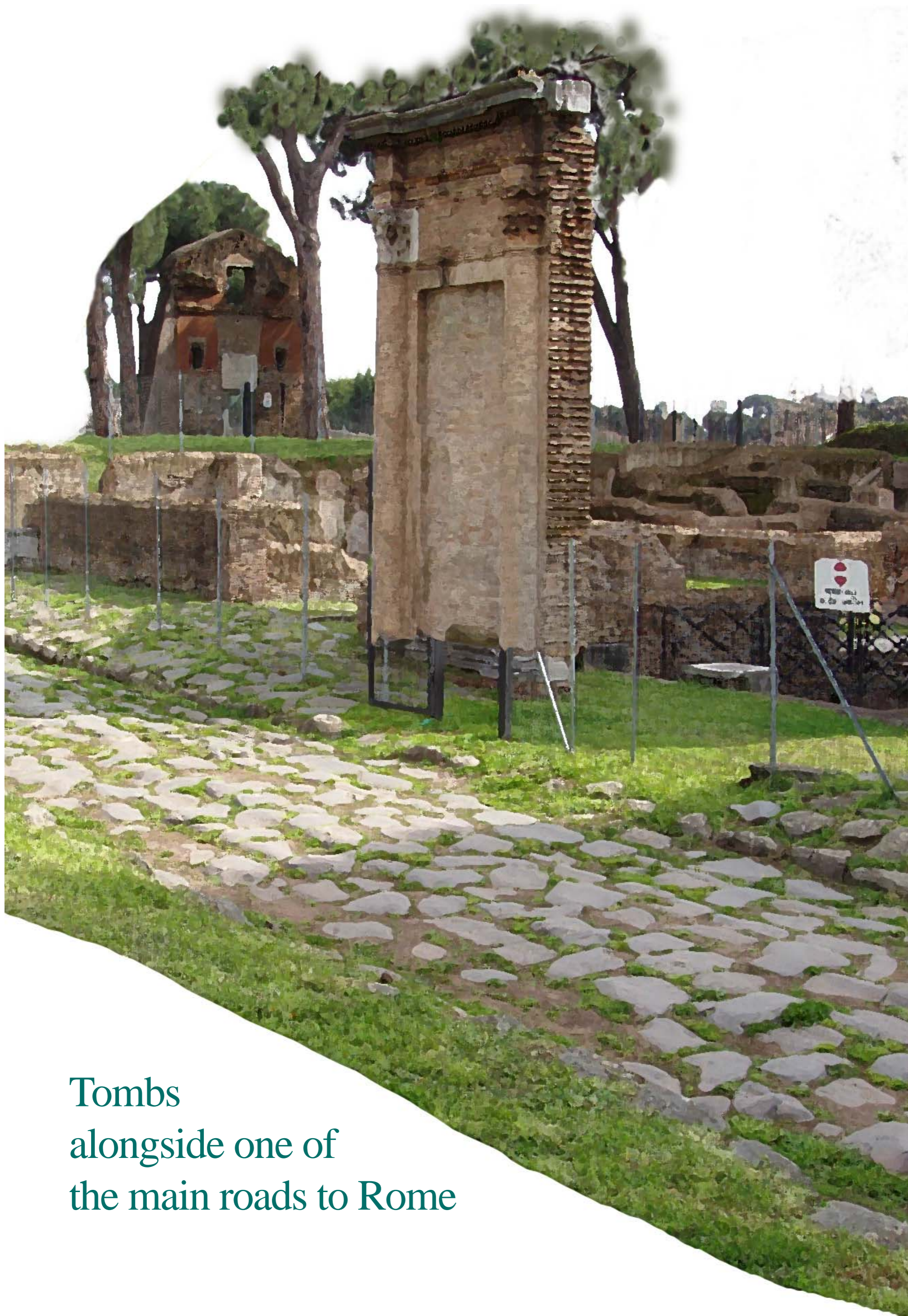


The Roman Way of Death - The Road to Calcaria

It was forbidden to bury people inside urban areas during the Roman period. Instead cemeteries grew up along the roads approaching towns and cities and created neocropolises, cities of the dead.

The place of burial was usually marked though the form of the marker varied considerably. Poor burials may have had no more than a wooden post or stone whereas the rich would erect temples. These were often highly ornate. Unfortunately in York the evidence for the above ground structures has gone, broken up and reused.



Tombs
alongside one of
the main roads to Rome

Though we cannot be sure how large the population was in York at any time in the Roman period we can estimate that many more than a hundred thousand would have died during the three and a half centuries that the city flourished. The roads which approached the city were therefore lined with burials, thousands of them.

Every approach road leading into York has revealed some evidence of Roman cemeteries.

Blossom Street and the Mount lie on, or very close, to the line of a main road which left the city on its south west side. This road ran towards Tadcaster, Roman Calcaria, and was one of the vital links with the road system which bound the country and the empire together.

Over the centuries evidence for this cemetery has come to light when roads were being widened, new houses built, and services laid. This shows that the cemetery was very extensive. It ran for over a mile alongside the road and stretched back nearly half a mile from it in some places.

It was also complicated and may have been made up of different zones. The wealthiest tombs are close to the road and on the high ground, emphasising their status. The less wealthy, though not necessarily the poor, are buried away from the road.

There are divisions within the cemetery, usually ditches, which may demarcate burial plots. Some would have been family plots and others run by burial clubs.

The burial rites used in the area range from simple cremations through to complex inhumations such as the gypsum burial recently found at Mill Mount and modern developer funded archaeological excavation provides an unequalled opportunity to look in far more depth and detail than has ever been possible before.



Gypsum burial
being excavated
at Mill Mount