

Transcript of fly-through video of Binchester baths

[The is no audio on the video.]

The tour commences with a plan of the bathhouse showing that it consisted of a large combined exercise-hall and changing-room along with three bathing rooms served by two furnace chambers.

The camera swoops down into the semi-basement containing the underfloor heating system or hypocaust in one of the chambers showing the grid-pattern of brick-stack pillars that supported the upper floor. It then proceeds through one of the archways in the wall separating two chambers rising to show the reddish-coloured concrete floor of the room and the rows of hollow bricks that lined the walls of the room forming a cavity that was heated like the floor.

The camera swoops up above the building showing the full extent of the hypocaust system and the two furnaces that provided the heating. The main furnace chamber is shown in close-up with its tunnel-like furnace equipped with an iron door used to control the amount of oxygen entering it and thus regulating the temperature of the adjoining room. Above the furnace is a large copper boiler that supplied hot water to the plunge-baths and beside it a lead tank supplying water to the boiler. A stack of logs used as fuel for the furnace is also shown

Swooping back up, the scene shows the bathhouse with its superstructure restored. A tour of the interior begins by entering the building via a doorway opening from the main street through the middle of the fort. The viewer sees the exercise hall interior with its distinctive floor of heavy stone flags. An arcade formed by a line of square pillars supporting arches gives access to the changing area beyond while, to the right, is a pair of cold plunge-baths.

Moving through a doorway in the back wall of the changing area brings the viewer into the first of the three bathing rooms each of increasing temperature and humidity and all decorated with wall paintings in bright colours. This is the *tepidarium* or room of moderate heat. Next is the *sudatorium*, a room of high temperature and moderate humidity equipped with a free-standing basin or *labrum*. The third and hottest room is the *caldarium* equipped with two hot plunge-baths giving it a very steamy atmosphere. By the time the bather reached this room they would have been perspiring very freely. After applying oil to their body, they would use a curved bronze scraper known as a *strigil* to remove the oil, perspiration and dirt from their body. Following a dip in one of the hot plunge-baths to cleanse themselves they would return to the changing room/exercise hall where they could take a dip in a cold plunge-bath to close the pores of the skin and thus reduce the chances of them catching a chill.

The camera returns to the exterior once more to show details of the roof construction. Each of the bathing chambers is covered by its own semi-circular vault which is covered in turn by a conventional double pitch timber roof clad with terracotta tiles.