

ROMAN ENGLAND

CAESAR'S OVERSEAS SEIZURES

The Romans first came to Britain in 55 BC and 54 BC in two invasions led by Julius Caesar. On his second attempt he forced the British tribes to surrender, but because of unrest in Gaul he took all his men back across the English Channel.

Still, for decades after that, the British sent hostages and money to Rome in return for being left alone. They also benefited from good trading links with the empire. Caesar's successor, Augustus, planned three invasions, but ended up calling them off.

THE EMPIRE COMES BACK

There were over twenty British tribes, and they generally weren't too fond of each other. By the 40s AD, the Catuvellauni tribe had started to dominate the south east. They conquered the Atrebates (whose capital was at Silchester). The Atrebates had good links with Rome, though, and their king Verica appealed for help.

Using this as an excuse, Emperor Claudius launched a massive invasion of Britain in AD 43. Over the next few decades the Romans defeated the Britons wherever they found them, despite the temporary setback Boudicca's rebellion caused them in 60 AD. They even got as far as the far north of Scotland.

WONDER WALL

Eventually Hadrian's Wall, in the north of England, became the main frontier of Britannia. Emperor Hadrian built the wall in AD 122. It was 73 miles long and was defended by 16 forts, along with 80 milecastles and 160 turrets. You can still visit the wall today – forts like Birdoswald, Housesteads and Chesters are good places to start!

TOWN AND COUNTRY

The Romans built towns, too. These had streets, forums, temples, shops, hotels, public baths and amphitheatres, where people watched brutal gladiator fights and cruel wild animal shows.

Baths were really popular. They were the perfect place to enjoy a mix of exercise, gossip and washing – although judging by the amount of eye infections the Romans caught, the water was probably pretty dirty. But most people in Roman Britain still lived in the countryside. Life revolved around farming, just like it had done in prehistoric times, although even they might have popped into town to pay taxes or shop for manufactured goods.

FINE WINE & FISH GUTS

Wealthier Roman Britons lived in luxury town houses and countryside villas, where they indulged in fine wines, expensive mosaics and one of Rome's favourite foods – fermented fish gut sauce. Yum!

It wasn't all booze and sauce, though – the Romans also introduced over 50 types of food plants to Britain. We have them to thank for apples, pears, plums, cucumbers and walnuts, to name just a few.

ROME GOES HOME

In the late 4th century the empire was crumbling, and Roman Britain was falling victim to internal revolts and raids from overseas. Roman soldiers were gradually drawn away from the province until, by 410, there were barely any left. After 350 years of Roman rule, the Britons were left to fend for themselves in a rapidly changing world.

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