

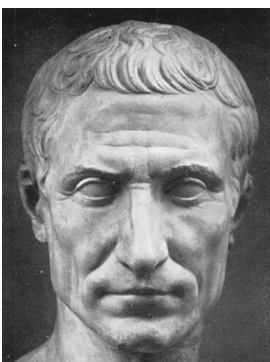


Romans

The name “Britain” comes from the word “Pretani”, the Greco-Roman word for the inhabitants of Britain. The Romans mispronounced the word and called the island “Britannia”.

The Romans had invaded because the Celts of Britain were working with the Celts of Gaul against them. The British Celts were giving them food, and allowing them to hide in Britain. There was another reason. The Celts used cattle to pull their ploughs and this meant that richer, heavier land could be farmed. Under the Celts Britain had become an important food producer because of its mild climate. It now exported corn and animals, as well as hunting dogs and slaves, to the European mainland. The Romans could make use of British food for their own army fighting the Gauls.

The Romans brought the skills of reading and writing to Britain. While the Celtic peasantry remained illiterate and only Celtic-speaking, a number of town dwellers spoke Latin and Greek with ease, and the richer landowners in the country almost certainly used Latin. But Latin completely disappeared both in its spoken and written forms when the Anglo-Saxons invaded Britain in the fifth century AD. Britain was probably more literate under the Romans than it was to be again until the fifteenth century.



Julius Caesar

Julius Caesar first came to Britain in 55 BC, but it was not until almost a century later, in AD 43, that a Roman army actually occupied Britain. The Romans were determined to conquer the whole island. They had little difficulty, apart from Boadicea’s revolt, because they had a better trained army and because the Celtic tribes fought among themselves. The Romans considered the Celts as war-mad, “high spirited and quick for battle”, a description some would still give the Scots, Irish and Welsh today.

The Romans established a Romano-British culture across the southern half of Britain, from the River Humber to the River Severn. This part of Britain was inside the empire. Beyond were the upland areas, under Roman control but not developed. These areas were watched from the towns of York, Chester and Caerleon in the western peninsula of Britain that later became known as Wales. Each of these towns was held by a Roman legion of about 7,000 men. The total Roman army in Britain was about 40,000 men.

49.
ROMAN BRITAIN
about 369 A.D.



The Romans could not conquer “Caledonia”, as they called Scotland, although they spent over a century trying to do so. At last they built a strong wall along the northern border, named after the Emperor Hadrian who planned it. At the time, Hadrian’s wall was simply intended to keep out raiders from the north. But it also marked the border between the two later countries, England and Scotland. Eventually, the border was established a few miles further north. Efforts to change it in later centuries did not succeed, mainly because on either side of the border an invading army found its supply line overstretched. A natural point of balance had been found.



Roman control of Britain came to an end as the empire began to collapse. The first signs were the attacks by Celts of Caledonia in AD 367. The Roman legions found it more and more difficult to stop the raiders from crossing Hadrian’s wall. The same was happening on the European mainland as Germanic groups, Saxons and Franks, began to raid the coast of Gaul. In AD 409 Rome pulled its last soldiers out of Britain and the Romano-British, the Romanised Celts, were left to fight alone against the Scots, the Irish and Saxon raiders from Germany. The following year Rome itself fell to raiders. When Britain called to Rome for help against the raiders from Saxon Germany in the mid-fifth century, no answer came.

The remarkable thing about the Romans is that, despite their long occupation of Britain, they left very little behind. To many other parts of Europe they bequeathed a system of law and administration which forms the basis of the modern system and a language which developed into the modern Romance family of languages. In Britain, they left neither. Moreover, most of their villas, baths and temples, their impressive network of roads, and the cities they founded, including Londinium (London), were soon destroyed or fell into disrepair. Almost the Only lasting reminder of their presence are place-names like Chester, Lancaster and Gloucester, which include variants of the Roman word castra (a military camp).

Some important dates

55 BC

The Roman general Julius Caesar lands in Britain with an expeditionary force, wins a battle and leaves. The first 'date' in popular British history.

AD 43

The Romans come to stay.

AD 61

Queen Boudicca (or Boadicea) of the Iceni tribe leads a bloody revolt against the Roman occupation. It is suppressed.

AD 410

The Romans leave Britain.

Boadicea (Boudicca)



Boudicca was queen of the Iceni people of Eastern England and led a major uprising against occupying Roman forces.

Boudicca was married to Prasutagus, ruler of the Iceni people of East Anglia. When the Romans conquered southern England in AD 43, they allowed Prasutagus to continue to rule. However, when Prasutagus died the Romans decided to rule the Iceni directly and confiscated the property of the leading tribesmen. They are also said to have stripped and

flogged Boudicca and raped her daughters. These actions exacerbated widespread resentment at Roman rule.

In 60 or 61 AD, while the Roman governor Gaius Suetonius Paullinus was leading a campaign in North Wales, the Iceni rebelled. Members of other tribes joined them. Boudicca's warriors successfully defeated the Roman Ninth Legion and destroyed the capital of Roman Britain, then at Colchester. They went on to destroy London and Verulamium (St Albans). Thousands were killed. Finally, Boudicca was defeated by a Roman army led by Paulinus. Many Britons were killed and Boudicca is thought to have poisoned herself to avoid capture. The site of the battle, and of Boudicca's death, are unknown.



There is a statue of Boadicea, made in the nineteenth century, outside the Houses of Parliament. This has helped to keep the memory of her alive.

*Sources of the text: bbc.co.uk,
Britain by James O'Driscoll,
An Illustrated History of Britain*

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