

Unit 2: Roman Britain

← Stone, Bronze & Iron Ages

43CE – 410CE

Anglo-Saxons & Scots →

Period Overview

Roman Britain was a province of the Roman Empire from 43 to 409. Before the invasions the tribes of Britain had already established cultural and economic links with continental Europe, but the Roman invaders introduced new developments in agriculture, urbanisation, industry, and architecture. After the initial rebellions of Caratacus and Boudicca, the Romans controlled the lands south of Hadrian's wall in relative peace & a distinctively Romano-British culture developed. From 400 Britain suffered repeated attacks from barbarian invasions and in c. 409 Roman officials departed. Over the next 150 years most of the Roman cities fell into ruins, nevertheless, the legacy of Roman rule was felt for many centuries.

Roman invasions & revolt

After Julius Caesar's failed invasions of 55 & 54 BC, a successful Roman invasion, led by Aulus Plautius landed in 43. Ordered by Claudius, Plautius' forces quickly took control of the country, building alliances with local tribes. During the early years after the invasions the tribes of Wales (initially led by Caratacus) proved difficult to defeat & occupied much of the Roman army. In 60, while Governor Gaius Suetonius Paulinus was campaigning in Wales, a rebellion started in the SE of England, led by Queen Boudicca, widow of Prasutagus, king of the Iceni. The Iceni, who felt betrayed by the new emperor, Nero, attacked first Colchester, then London, and then St Albans, leaving between seventy & eighty thousand people dead. Paulinus on hearing the news led his army back to England and met Boudicca's Iceni forces at the Battle of Watling Street. Despite being massively outnumbered the superior battle discipline of the Roman army won the day and the Iceni forces were scattered. Gradually the Roman administration took firm control of the south of the British Isles, although they never defeated the tribes of Scotland.

"Romanisation" of Britain

Trade: During the Roman period Britain's continental trade was principally directed across the Southern North Sea and Eastern Channel. Imports included: coin, pottery, olive oil, wine, olives, salt fish, & glass. Exports (more difficult to prove archeologically): metals (silver, gold, lead, iron & copper), salt & agricultural products.

Economy: Mining very important & agriculture. By the 3rd century, Britain's economy was diverse and well established.

Government: Country run by Governor, whose role was primarily military, but also maintaining diplomatic relations with local client kings, building roads, ensuring the public courier system functioned, supervising the civitates & acting as a judge in important cases.

Settlements: Romans established a number of important settlements, many of which still survive. They introduced the idea of a town as a centre of power and administration.

Religion: Druids outlawed by Claudius, however, Britain's continued to worship Celtic deities. Christianity introduced to Britain in c. 200.

Possible Enquiry Questions

- **Social:** *How did the Roman invasions change the way people lived, traded and socialised?*
- **Cultural:** *How did the Roman invasions affect the cultural development of Britain?*
- **Political:** *What were the political issues surrounding the invasion?*
- **Historical:** *What effects did the Roman invasions have?*
- **Environmental:** *How did the Roman invasions change the British landscape?*

Key Individuals

- **Aulus Plautius** – General who led Roman invasion army in 43
- **Claudius** – Emperor who ordered the invasion
- **Gaius Suetonius Paulinus** – 1st Governor
- **Prasutagus** – King of the Iceni
- **Boudicca** – Queen of the Iceni
- **Hadrian** – Emperor who orders the building of the wall between Scotland & Roman Britain
- **Tacitus** – Roman historian who writes an account of the Iceni revolt.



Statue of Boudicca in Westminster²

National Curriculum:

Roman Empire and its impact on Britain: Could include:- Julius Caesar's attempted invasion in 55-54 BC- the Roman Empire by AD 42 and the power of its army- successful invasion by Claudius and conquest, including Hadrian's Wall- British resistance, e.g. Boudicca- "Romanisation" of Britain: sites such as Caerwent and the impact of technology, culture and beliefs, including early Christianity.

Themes:

- **Roman army** – legions, training, weapons, armour, tactics, discipline
- **Roman worship** – gods, temples, rituals
- **Architecture**, cities, villas, embellishments (jewellery, art etc).
- **Technology** – roads, machines, heating, aqueducts, buildings
- **Entertainment** – Gladiators, chariots, plays
- **Iceni** – Settlements, tribes, religion, weapons, jewellery, buried treasure

Ref. for a mind map & further planning visit: imaginative-inquiry.co.uk

Places to Visit:

There are [many sites, famous & otherwise](#) scattered around the Britain, these a just a few:

- [Hadrian's Wall](#) - The North
- [Bath](#), South West
- [Colchester](#), East Anglia
- [British Museum](#), London
- [Senhouse Roman Museum](#), North West
- [Chester](#) – Welsh borders

Timeline of Key Events:

- 54BC** Julius Caesar's invasion attempt
 - 43** Successful invasion ordered by Claudius
 - 51** Defeat of Caratacus
 - 61** Iceni revolt led by Boudicca
 - 122** Construction of Hadrian's wall
 - 200** Introduction of Christianity
 - 306** Constantine proclaimed emperor in York
 - 406** Suevi, Alans, Vandals and Burgundians attack Gaul, and break contact between Rome and Britain: Remaining Roman army in Britain mutinies
 - 408** Devastating attacks by the Picts, Scots and Saxons
 - 409** Britons expel Roman officials and fight for themselves
 - 410** Britain is independent
 - 440-500** Civil war and famine in Britain; Pictish invasions: Many towns and cities are in ruins.
 - c. 480 – 550** Arrival of Anglo-Saxons
- Ref: [Ancient History.com](http://AncientHistory.com) & Wikipedia

Further Information:

General background:

[Encyclopaedia Britannica – eb.com](#)

[BBC – Historical Figures](#)

[Encyclo – Online Encyclopedea](#)

[BBC Primary History: Romans](#)

[BBC History: Romans](#)

[Timeline – Romans in Britain](#)

Celts & Iceni:

[British Celtic Nobles of the early Roman Era](#)

Romans:

[History of Ancient Rome – History Learning Site](#)

Media:

[BBC - Battlefield Britain: Boudicca Revolt 61AD](#) –

Caution, please watch this first to judge if it is suitable for your students, as it does contain some graphic descriptions of violence.

[BBC - Horrible histories: Boudicca](#)

[Decisive Battles: Boudicca Revolt](#) – Computer animation retelling of the defeat of the Iceni army.

Again please use with caution, some descriptions of violence.

[BBC Learning Zone - Boudicca's Attack on Colchester](#)

[BBC - In our time Podcast](#)

²Boudicca statue image [<http://bit.do/boudicca>] by BableStone is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License. The licence can be viewed at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>