

Life in Roman Britannia

Before the Romans arrived, Celtic Britons lived in tribal communities on hillforts. They farmed the land to provide food for themselves and to trade with others, and they had their own Celtic culture. After the invasion of AD 43, the Romans brought their way of life to their new province, Britannia. Over time, many Britons who lived in or near Roman towns, took on Roman culture, religion and lifestyle and became Romanised.



Artist's impression of a street scene from the lost Roman town of Letocetum, Staffordshire

Town life

Before the invasion, there were no towns in Britain. After the invasion, the Romans built towns that were similar to towns found across the Roman Empire. Each town had temples, a bath house and a forum. Houses were made from brick and tiles and there was running water. People travelled on well made roads and worked in a variety of different jobs.



Artist's impression of Silchester Roman town, Hampshire

Government

The Roman emperor appointed a governor to rule Britannia. Britannia was split into different regions and each had a main town, a group of leaders, a taxation system and a road structure. Many of the leaders were Britons who were willing to work with the Romans. These Romanised leaders made sure that their tribespeople didn't rebel against Roman rule.



Statue of the Roman governor of Britannia, Agricola, in Bath, Somerset

Country life

Large farms developed outside towns. They were run by wealthy landowners who lived in large country houses called villas. Slaves and farmworkers used new, more efficient farming techniques to grow large quantities of food, which was sold in the markets and shops in town.



Artist's impression of Great Witcombe Roman villa, Gloucester

Engineering

The Romans brought their knowledge of engineering to Britannia, which made life safer, cleaner and more comfortable. Roman towns had running water, which was piped into public drinking fountains, bath houses and toilets. Some buildings had an underfloor heating system called a hypocaust. Walls and bridges were made from concrete and clay bricks, and roads linked towns and cities together.



Roman baths in Bath, Somerset

Londinium

Before the Romans arrived, London didn't exist. There were only a handful of small farms around the River Thames. After AD 43, the Romans built a port and a town on the River Thames and named it Londinium. Londinium thrived and became the capital of Britannia. The governor of Britannia ruled from Londinium and it had a huge forum and basilica.



Artist's impression of the Roman governor's house in Londinium

Religion

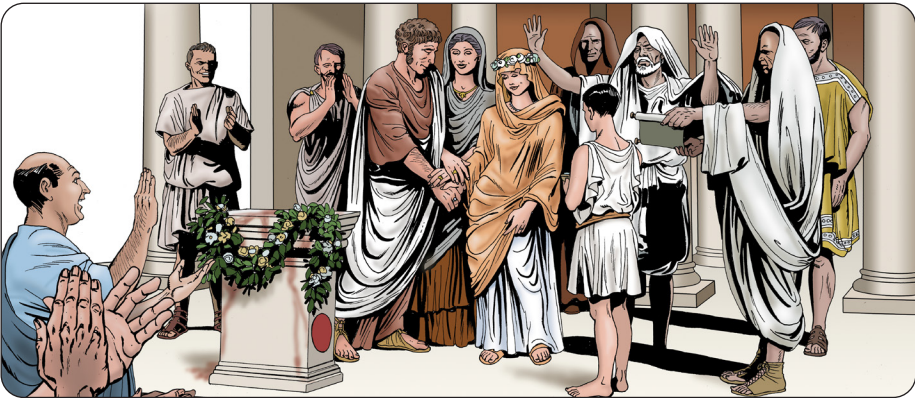
The Romans expected everybody in Britannia to worship Roman gods and goddesses, but the Britons also worshipped their own Celtic gods. However, the Romans did not want Celtic priests, known as druids, to have power and influence in Britannia, so they attacked and killed most of them on the Welsh island of Anglesey in AD 60.



Ruins of a temple dedicated to the Roman god, Mithras, near Hadrian's Wall, Northumberland

Family life

Before the Romans came, Britons lived in tribal communities where some women were powerful leaders and warriors. After the invasion, some Britons adopted Roman ideas about family life and the roles of men and women. In Roman families, girls married in their teens and women were expected to care for the home and children. The oldest man, the *paterfamilias*, was the head of the family and ruled over his wife, children and extended family.



Artist's impression of a Roman wedding

Culture

In Britannia, free plays, gladiator fights and chariot races were popular forms of public entertainment. People bathed, exercised, and socialised in the public baths. Wealthier citizens held feasts at home during the afternoons and evenings and their homes were filled with beautiful mosaics, sculptures, pottery and glassware from across the Empire. Romanised men cut their hair and beards short and some wore togas. Women wore make up and had elaborate hairstyles.



Artist's impression of a Roman feast

Trade

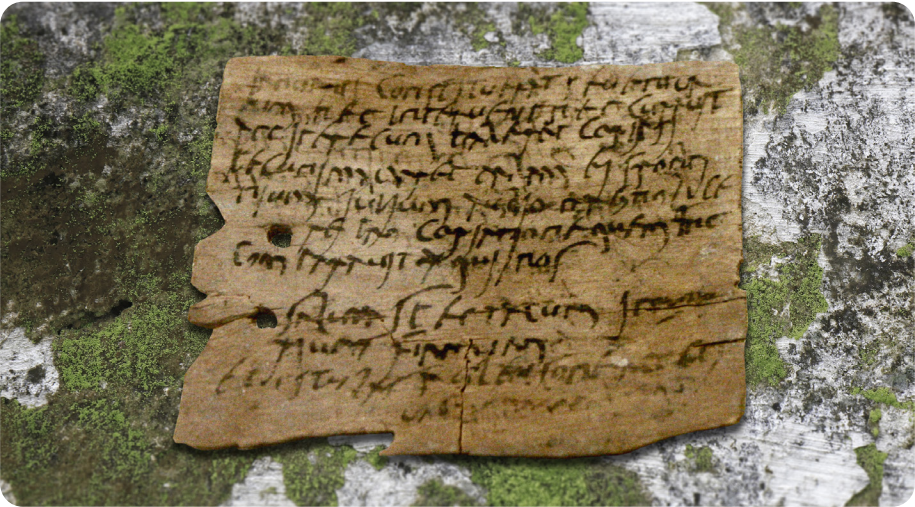
After the invasion, trade boomed in Britannia. It was easy to move goods across the Roman Empire by road and sea, so people in Britannia exported metal, pottery, wool and slaves to other parts of the Roman Empire. They also imported olive oil, wine and glass from the Mediterranean. The Romans used gold, silver and bronze coins as payment and they weighed and measured goods carefully to make sure that everybody was paid a fair price.



Hoard of Roman coins, found in Lincolnshire

Writing

Before the Romans, there was no written language in Britain. Latin was used by the Roman government and army so, after the invasion, wealthier Britons who lived in towns began to use Latin themselves. However, people who lived away from Roman towns, especially in the north of England, continued to speak their own Celtic language.



The Vindolanda tablets were written in Latin and found near Hadrian's Wall

Glossary

basilica	A large public building.
Britannia	The area of Britain that was a part of the Roman Empire, including England, Wales and parts of southern Scotland.
culture	The customs, beliefs, artwork and ways of life of a particular group of people.
Romanise	To make Roman.
taxation	A system for taking money from people to pay to the government, based on their earnings or on the goods that they have bought.