

Roman roads and buildings

By Michael Coleman

- NARRATOR:** The Roman forts were connected by a network of roads. Before the invasion there had only been rough tracks; but good, well-made roads were necessary to enable soldiers and equipment to move around quickly...
- SATNAV:** Good day. I am your new satnav complete with the latest guidance features. What type of roads do you wish to use?
- DRIVER:** Roman roads.
- SATNAV:** Very well. Route calculated. Drive straight ahead.
- DRIVER:** Right. How about turnings?
- SATNAV:** Searching map data. Turnings information absent.
- DRIVER:** What? Corners, then! Bends!
- SATNAV:** Searching map data. Corners and bends information absent.
- DRIVER:** Curves! Zig-zags! Wiggly bits!
- SATNAV:** Searching map data. Curves and zig-zags information absent. Same goes for wiggly-bits.
- DRIVER:** Call yourself a satnav! What sort of road is so straight it doesn't have turnings or corners or bends?
- SATNAV:** A Roman road. Powering down.



- NARRATOR:** Straight roads meant the quickest journey. They were made from gravel and stones, so they didn't wear out. And they sloped from the middle to the sides so that they didn't get flooded. And when a road had to cross boggy ground, the Romans stopped it sinking by building it on a foundation of sticks and sheepskins – taking the sheep out first, of course!
- As towns grew larger, so did the houses. Wealthy Romans built big homes to show off their wealth. The largest of them were called villas, which had buildings arranged around an open courtyard or garden. After a while, rich Britons began to build villas as well. It must have been a big change from the small places they'd grown up in...
- AGENT:** Well, what do you think of your new Roman villa? All these rooms! How many did you have in your previous house?
- OWNER:** One. A big one – but one.
- AGENT:** And here you have solid walls of stone and a tiled roof, instead of...
- OWNER:** Wooden walls, plugged with dung to keep the rain out. And a roof of straw.
- AGENT:** Oh, and look outside. A garden, full of beautiful flowers.
- OWNER:** Makes a change from our patch of cabbages.
- AGENT:** And finally, our top-of-the range feature: a hypocaust. You see that furnace against the wall? Hot air from the fire travels through spaces under the floor and warms up the whole of the house! We call it central heating.
- OWNER:** Oh, we had central heating. Our fire was in the middle of the floor!



- NARRATOR:** Inventions to do with water...The Romans designed wonderful systems for bringing water into towns from far away rivers. They used pipes, tunnels and even bridges – called aqueducts. Water was needed for drinking, of course, and washing – both of which produce water that needs taking away again...
- HEADMASTER:** Ladies and Gentlemen – please welcome our guest speaker for graduation day: Julius Bung, from the drainage department!
- BUNG:** Young people, as you go out into the big, wide world, you'll be wondering what job to get. Become a soldier perhaps? Or a government official? Why not do what I did – aim low, and get into drains! Drains are a wonderful Roman invention. We all produce waste water – whether it's from washing or going to the loo – and it's definitely better for it all to go down a drain than in to your sandals! So if you don't mind being up to your waist in waste water go for a life in drainage! It's work that's definitely pleasing to the gods – because at the end of the day you often smell to high heaven!
- NARRATOR:** Towns and roads, houses of stone, central heating and drains. Nowadays we take them all for granted. But Britons had none of them before the Romans came. Clothes and food and pastimes were different, of course. Britons had all those. But soon they were to become more Roman too...

