

The Roman legacy - I

By Michael Coleman

NARRATOR: By 410 AD Romans and Britons had been living together for a long time. They'd married, had children and grandchildren. If you could trace your family tree back far enough, you'd probably find a Roman ancestor! Britain was still ruled by the Romans and protected by the Roman Army – but that was about to end. In 410 AD, the Romans stopped ruling Britain and their army left for good. The Roman Empire was crumbling. It was being attacked on all sides. That included Britain, which was being threatened by warlike peoples coming from countries like Holland and Germany.

SHOUT#1: Help! We're being attacked over here! Send some Roman soldiers!

SHOUT#2: What about us? We're being attacked here as well!

SHOUT#3: Hold on, hold on! The Roman army can't help you all!

NARRATOR: So the Roman emperors of the time had to make a choice – who should we help and who should we leave to fight their own battles? For a while they defended Britain...but finally withdrew their army in 410 AD.

So what evidence is there in modern Britain to show that the Romans were once here? The short answer to that question is: loads!

Every British place name that ends in 'chester' or 'cester' or 'castor', or in the case of Welsh places starts with 'caer', is a sure sign that the Romans were there – because they all come from the Latin word 'castra' which means camp or fort. And as you can tell from the number of them those Romans did a lot of 'roman about'! The biggest place they roamed to is London – or, as it was then, 'Londinium'...



NARRATOR:

It's had an up and down history. In about 50 AD, not long after the invasion, the Romans began the settlement of Londinium. On the river Thames, it was the perfect spot for trading ships to travel to. In 60 AD, Queen Boudicca's revolt reduced Londinium to ashes. By 70 AD Londinium had been rebuilt, and by 100 AD it had replaced the town we now call Colchester – as the capital of Roman Britain. Around 150 AD another big fire burnt it down again. By 200 AD Londinium had been rebuilt once more.

There are plenty of other remains of Roman Britain that you can still see – from Hadrian's Wall in the north of England to the Roman Palace at Fishbourne near the south coast. And if you ever travel by car from London to Dover, you'll be following the route of Watling Street, the oldest Roman road. In that case, watch out for ghosts. The Romans would bury their dead alongside roads out of town – in the hope that their spirits would keep moving and not go back to their old homes to haunt them!

