

THE ROMANS

4. THE ROMAN IN BRITAIN

JULIA: I'm at Richborough Roman Fort on the south coast of England. It marks the spot where the Romans landed when they invaded Britain in 43 CE.

The people they fought and conquered here were one of many Celtic tribes that lived in Britain at the time. They wore jewellery, like this torc, which would have been the height of fashion. It's made of silver and gold, which were just two of the many natural resources from Britain the Romans wanted to trade.

Before the invasion, the Celts were already selling metals like lead, copper, tin and iron and crops like wheat to people in Europe, including other Celts in Gaul, which is now France, and to the Romans themselves. The Romans had conquered lands across Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, and had grown rich by making the people who lived there pay taxes to Rome. It's not surprising then, that Britain was on their 'invasion wish list'.

At the time, Britain was split up into lots of similar tribal kingdoms. They sometimes fought each other, and until 43 CE, they had always managed to fight off the Romans. But the Romans had learned from their failed attempts and brought an army of 40,000 men. Some tribes knew they couldn't take on the might of the Roman army and quickly surrendered. But others fought back, and it took several years and many battles for the Romans to take over most of Britain.

Most Celtic chieftains agreed to live peacefully alongside their Romans masters. And, over time, the tribes started being more Roman...by living in Roman houses called villas...by joining and fighting for the Roman army...and by paying taxes to Rome.

But things didn't always go to plan. When Prasutagus, King of the Iceni tribe in the East of England died, half his land was meant to be given to the Romans and half kept by his wife. But the Romans took it all and treated his wife and daughters very badly. Which was a mistake, because the wife of Prasutagus was none other than BOUDICA!

Rock guitar sound

Like many Celtic women, she had been trained to fight and she could drive a chariot. She united Celtic tribes that were fed up with being ruled by the Romans and built up an army which was said to be over 100,000 strong. They destroyed Colchester and wiped out the Roman 9th Legion. They burned London - or 'Londinium', as it was called then - to the ground. But even though they outnumbered the Romans by more than 10 to 1, Boudica's army was finally defeated at the Battle of Watling Street.

However, nearly two thousand years later, she is still celebrated in books, films and stories, and there's even a statue of her and her daughters near the Houses of Parliament.

The Roman conquest of Britain continued for many years, but the Picts, who lived in what is now Scotland, were never defeated. To protect the North from the Picts, Emperor Hadrian built a wall. And what a wall! 'Hadrian's Wall', as it became known, was nearly 120 kilometres long, three metres thick, and over four metres high and it stretched right across the north of England. It had over 80 towers spaced out at regular intervals and sixteen forts with soldiers that patrolled the wall night and day.

JULIA (to Roman soldier): Morning!

The Romans stayed in Britain for four hundred years after its conquest, but in the 5th Century tribes across Central Europe were fighting back and Rome withdrew its soldiers from Britain to fight elsewhere in the empire.

The Romans may have left Britain all those years ago, but you can still see their legacy today.