

Who were the Romans?

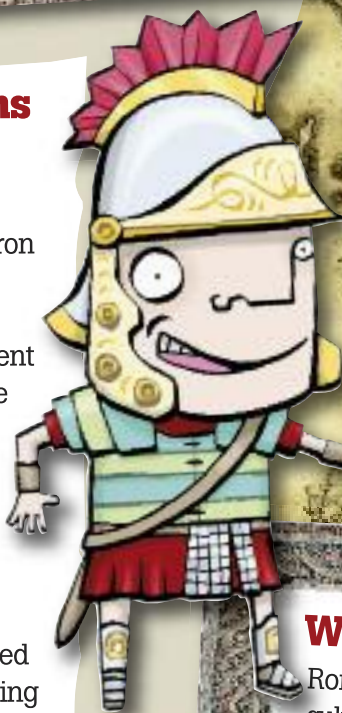
BBC

HANDS ON HISTORY THE ROMANS

Before the Romans arrived in Britain, the land was inhabited by Iron Age people. These people lived in small tribes, travelled little and lived in wooden roundhouses. The Romans would have seemed very strange to Iron Age Britons and their arrival and influence can still be felt today...

Why did the Romans come to Britain?

Conquering a land believed to be as wild and uncivilised as Iron Age Britain made Emperor Claudius look very brave and powerful. By taking over different lands, Romans could also make money by charging the local people taxes, using the land to grow food and taking useful natural minerals such as lead and silver. The Romans could also take and sell captives as slaves. Even before they invaded Britain, Romans had been visiting to trade for cattle, leather, corn and hunting dogs.



Who were the Romans?

Rome in Italy was the central governmental and cultural base of the Roman Empire. At its largest the Roman Empire stretched across Western Europe all the way to the Middle East and Northern Africa. Soldiers fighting in the Roman army could come from any part of the Empire, so few of the 'Romans' who came to Britain actually came from Rome. The troops who guarded Hadrian's Wall across the North of England, for example, included soldiers from countries such as Romania, Iraq, The Netherlands and Spain.



What did the Romans wear?

Most Roman men would wear a short linen tunic and a cloak. For special occasions those who had Roman Citizenship would wear a toga, a single piece of cloth that was wrapped around the body in folds. Roman women would wear a longer tunic with a dress called a 'stola' belted at the waist and sometimes a cloak for warmth. The Romans didn't have buttons and instead used decorative brooches to hold clothing in place. On their feet they would have worn either sandals or boots made from leather.



What did the Romans eat?

The Romans brought new types of food and ways of cooking to Iron Age Britain. New ingredients included onions, cabbages, walnuts and olive oil, which they ate with different meats such as beef, lamb, pork and fish. They also introduced the idea of eating sauces with their meals. Their favourite sauce was called 'garum', made from fermented (or rotted) fish – it was strong tasting and very smelly! These new foods would only have been available to the very rich. For the Britons living outside of the Roman towns, dinnertime would still have been a simple stew or porridge.

How did the Romans change Britain?

As part of the invasion, the Roman army built forts and settlements across much of Britain. They also built a network of roads for long-distance travel which connected different areas of the land in a new way. The Romans founded the first towns with large public buildings, temples, bath houses and the beginnings of local government. Wealthy people built rectangular Italian style villas for the first time. The most expensive villas would have included mosaics, wall paintings and even personal bath suites. However, most people outside of these new towns would have still lived as they had in the Iron Age, in basic roundhouses as part of small rural settlements.



With thanks to Dr Pete Wilson, Head of Research Policy (Roman Archaeology), English Heritage

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