

# The Romans

## Unit 2



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# About this Unit

Unit 2: What effect did the Romans have on the people of Britain?

## Unit theme

What effect did the Romans have on the people of Britain?

## Learning Objectives

This unit focuses on the effect Romans had on the people of Britain. It encourages learners to investigate the reasons behind the Romans choosing Wales as a suitable land for invasion and occupation, DESPITE the challenges they came across with regards to terrain, resistance from the locals and the comparative isolation.

It also highlights some influential historical characters on both sides and encourages learners to think about how and why the history of the period was recorded.

## Links to the Curriculum for Wales

### Curriculum Purposes

Help to develop the skills necessary to interpret and articulate the past and the present.

### Area of learning

Humanities

### Statement of what Matters

This unit will encourage enquiry and discovery, as learners are challenged to be curious and to question, to think critically and to reflect upon evidence.

### In detail

Encourages learners to critically review the ways these events and experiences are perceived, interpreted and represented.

An appreciation of identity, heritage and 'cynefin', including the history of Wales and the World, can influence learners emotionally and spiritually, and help build their sense of self and of belonging.

Enable learners to identify what makes places and spaces distinct, and to develop an awareness of the interconnections between humans and their environment in both contemporary and historical contexts.



# Introduction

When the Romans reached what we now call Britain in AD 43, they caused quite a stir. Not only did they bring a vast army with them, they introduced new ideas and ways of life that we'd never seen before.

They were very impressed with the precious metals and the abundance of tasty food supplies. They weren't as impressed with the living conditions of Britons here at the time. So they went ahead to make this new strange land more like their beloved Rome.



# Changing our... landscape

They built stone buildings with the world's first 'central heating'.  
They built amphitheatres, forts and amazing mosaic floors that can still be seen in Wales today.

**What!**  
No central heating?!



Caerleon amphitheatre ©Cadw

They also built sewage systems and 8,000 miles of straight roads that stretched across the country to link up their new Roman towns.



Roman mosaic floor - probably from a dining room floor. Found in Caerleon churchyard 1865. Dates from 1-3<sup>rd</sup> century  
© National Museum of Wales



## Awesome Activity

Make your own mosaic by cutting up little pieces of paper and sticking them onto a larger piece of paper or cardboard. You don't even need scissors as the paper can be any size or shape! You could also make your own mosaic using computer software.



## Statements of What Matters

Exploring the expressive arts is essential to developing artistic skills and knowledge and it enables learners to become curious and creative individuals.

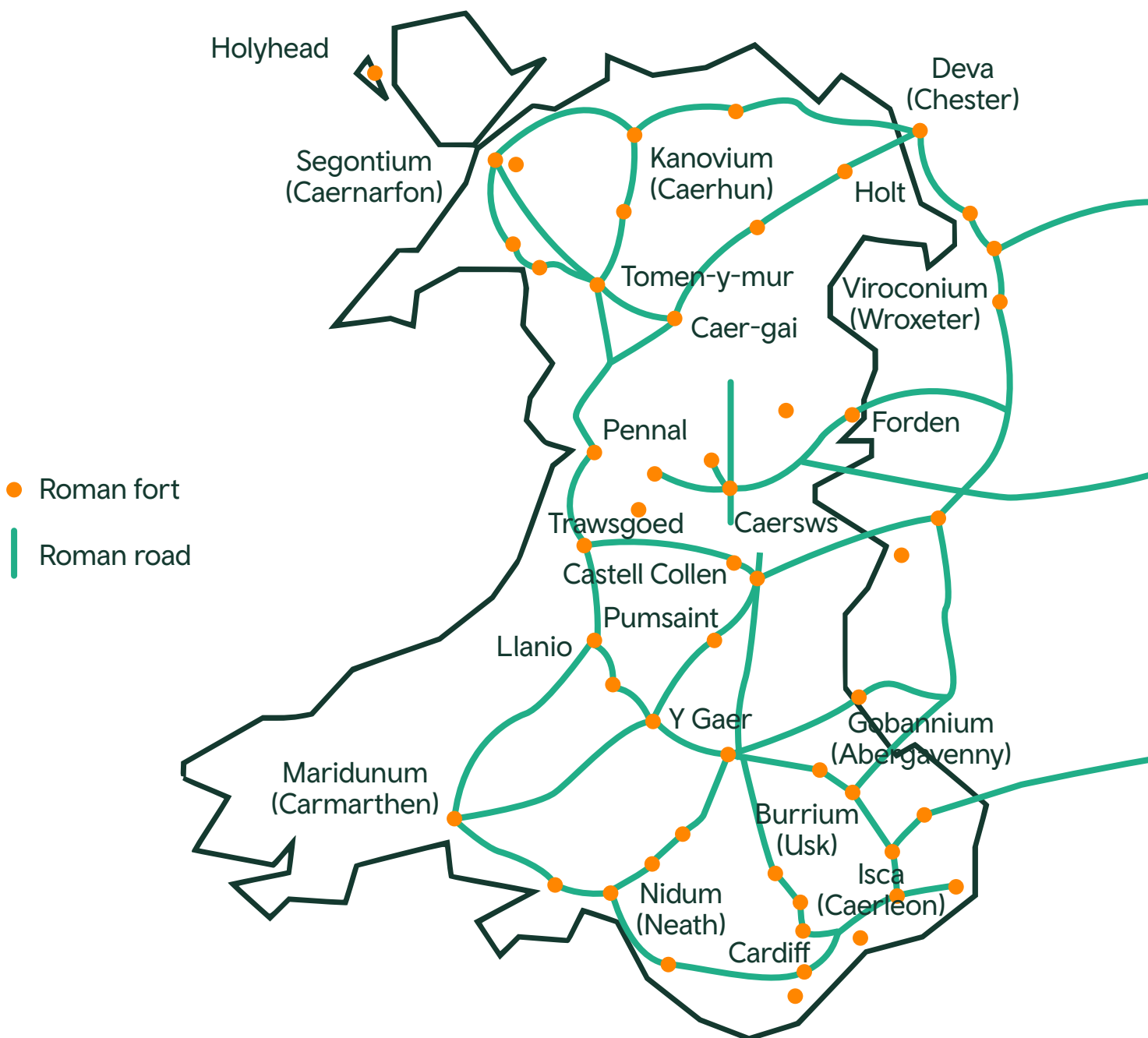


# Roman forts and roads in Wales

You can still see the traces of these Roman roads. One of the most famous is known as Sarn Helen. But you'll need an Ordnance Survey map, not sat nav, to find it.

## Find out!

You could also find out more about the Roman road near Y Pigwn, a well known site between Brecon and Llandovery.



Before long, the Romans changed the landscape so much that these parts of Britain looked a lot like Rome, but with more rain!

## Changing our... diet

They even brought animals we'd never seen before such as rabbits as a handy food supply and as exotic pets. No wonder the Britons got hopping mad!

They introduced us to many tasty fruit and vegetables, previously unknown to the Britons. Asparagus, leeks, peas, garlic, figs, cherries, plums and more. They could have left the turnips, celery and artichokes back in Rome though!





# Changing our... religion



Religion in Roman Britain was a mix of gods, usually to do with the powers of nature and Roman gods like Mars, Mercury, Jupiter and Venus. The Romans built temples so they could worship these gods. Sound familiar? They're also the names now given to the planets in our solar system.

Mudstone carving of the Roman God of War (and sometimes healing), Mars AD 60-300 from the Segontium Roman Fort, Caernarfon



Some Roman gods were like the Celtic gods. We'll find out more about this in Unit 3. The Romans then changed their main religion to Christianity and made that religion popular here too.



# Changing our... language

There wasn't a 'written' language in Britain when the Romans arrived. So they made sure the important Britons learnt to read and write and to speak the Roman language, Latin.

Even today, a lot of our words in English and Welsh, come from the Latin.

Britain has many Roman place names. If a place name has chester, caster, cester or in Wales, 'caer' in it, it's almost certainly Roman.

'Cambria' is a name for Wales, and it comes from the Latin form of the Welsh name of the country, 'Cymru.'



Caernarfon Castle © Visit Wales

## Find out!

Can you find place names in Wales which are Roman?  
Make a list!

I have an enormous lavatory!



# How far?

The Romans also thought it was a good idea to measure distances properly. Well, they were travelling a lot across the country. Thanks to them we measure distances in miles, feet and inches.



I II III IV  
V VI VII VIII  
IX X XI XII

# Clocks and Coins

Roman numerals are still used as numbers today, on clocks and on coins for example. They also made sure the same coins could be used across the Roman empire, including in Britain. They made or 'minted' these coins in their own 'mints' in London and Colchester.



EXPRESSIVE ARTS  
Y CELFYDDYDAU  
MYNEGIANWOL

## Statements of What Matters

Creating combines skills and knowledge, drawing on the senses, inspiration and imagination.

# Awesome Activity

Look up more ways the Romans have influenced our lives today. Make a short film including things with as many Roman influences that you can find around you. It could be a five pence piece, it could be a leek!

## Get out and about!

You could also make a film showing how the Romans made their mark at one of the Roman sites in Wales. This could be in Caerleon, Caernarfon, Caerwent, Carmarthen or Dolaucothi! [Cadw's 'Filming History' guide](#) can show you how to make your film.



# Why did the Romans want to invade Britain?

We know that Rome had warm weather, nice buildings and good plumbing, so why did the Romans decide to come and conquer Wales?

It wasn't easy to say the least as Wales has tricky terrain of mountains and valleys and bad weather. Wales also had its native Celtic tribes who didn't give the Romans a warm welcome. Indeed, it would take the Romans over 25 years to take over just a part of Wales. They never conquered the whole country.

## Find out!

Use [Cadw's excellent interactive map](#) to find a Roman site to visit in Wales and find out what happened there.



## Statements of What Matters

Enquiry, exploration and investigation inspire curiosity about the world, its past, present and future.


Appropriate disciplinary approaches, including digital humanities will help learners gather, justify, present, analyse, and evaluate a range of evidence.

# The first attempts to conquer Britain

## Julius Caesar

He came, he saw, he went home, he came back and then he went home again!

In 54-55 BC Julius Caesar, the famous Roman Commander, had tried and failed to conquer Britain.

A stylized illustration of Julius Caesar, showing his head and shoulders. He has short, wavy blonde hair and a serious expression. He is wearing a red Roman toga with a gold border and a gold circular brooch (fibula) on his left shoulder. The background is plain white.

In 55 BC I came to Britain with a fairly small army, however those pesky Celts were too strong and the weather was too cold so I decided to leave. I tried again the following year; this time I brought more troops and an elephant to show those Celts who was boss! However, the weather was still too cold and wet, my toes were freezing in my sandals! Those Celts were still being a pain and refusing to welcome us Romans, so ..... I went home to Italy and never came back!

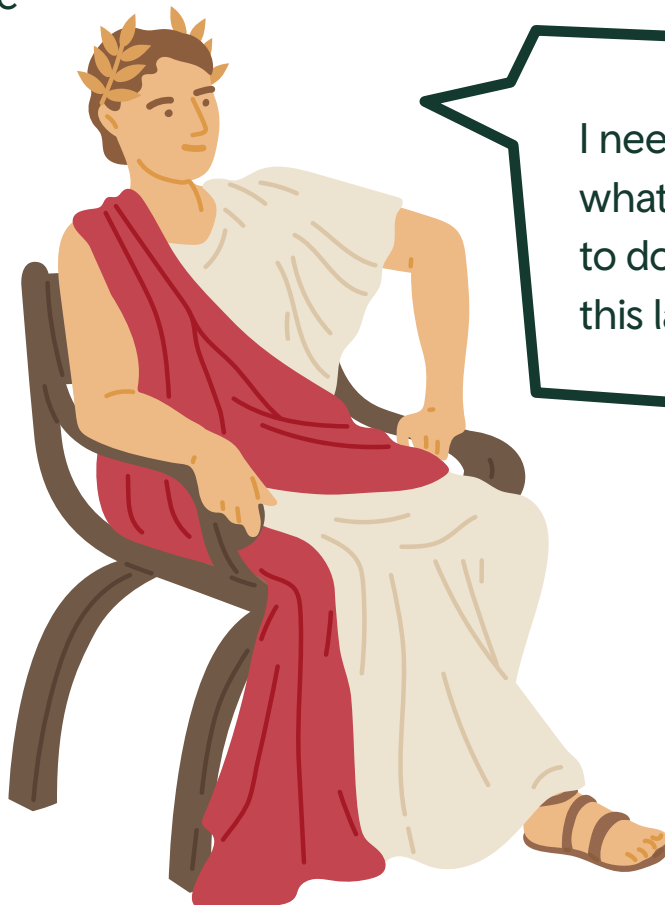


We know why Caesar was attracted to Britain as he wrote down his reasons for trying to invade in a book.

## Third time lucky for Claudius

But then 100 years later, in AD 43, the Emperor Claudius came into the picture.

Emperor Claudius had his reasons too. As a new leader, he needed to impress his people. Where the great Julius Caesar had failed, he would succeed!



“ The Britons have a huge number of cattle, they use gold coins or iron bars as their money, and produce tin and iron!

I need a quick win! I'll do what Julius Caesar failed to do and I'll conquer this land - easily!



# Going for Gold

The Romans wanted to make their empire as powerful as possible. Conquering Britain would be a feather in their caps. They also knew that Britain, and Wales in particular, was a land rich in precious metals just waiting to be mined like tin, copper and iron. It would be very useful to the Roman empire. They could extract silver from lead for example to make all kinds of things.



The great Mildenhall treasure - Roman silverware



Wales had one of the most precious metals of all - gold. Did you know that the Romans mined for gold in Dolaucothi at Pumsaint in Carmarthenshire? It's the only site in Britain where we know they did this. You can still pan for gold here today!



Roman workings at Dolaucothi mine



Gold Roman chain from 1-2C found in Dolaucothi  
© British Museum

Did the Romans copy the Celts who were well-known for their gold and precious metal work?

## Find out!

Find out what the Romans used precious metals for and what the Celts used them for by exploring the National Museum Wales website. Make a list of the differences and similarities.



SCIENCE &  
TECHNOLOGY  
— GWYDDONIAETH  
A THECHNOLEG —

### Statements of What Matters

Being curious and searching for answers is essential to understanding and predicting phenomena.





# This means war!

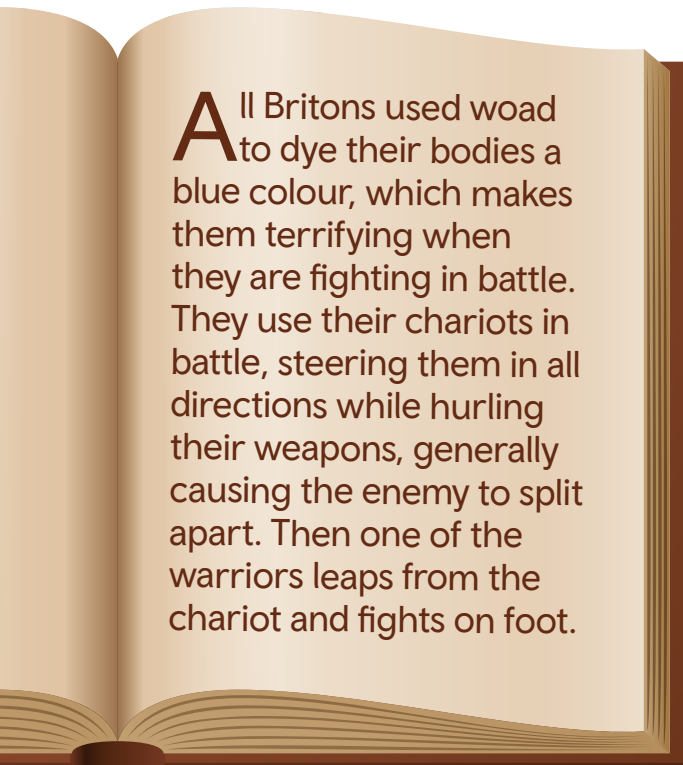
So now we can see, the Romans had a lot of reasons for trying to conquer Britain. They were prepared to take on the Celtic tribes and do whatever was necessary to take over.



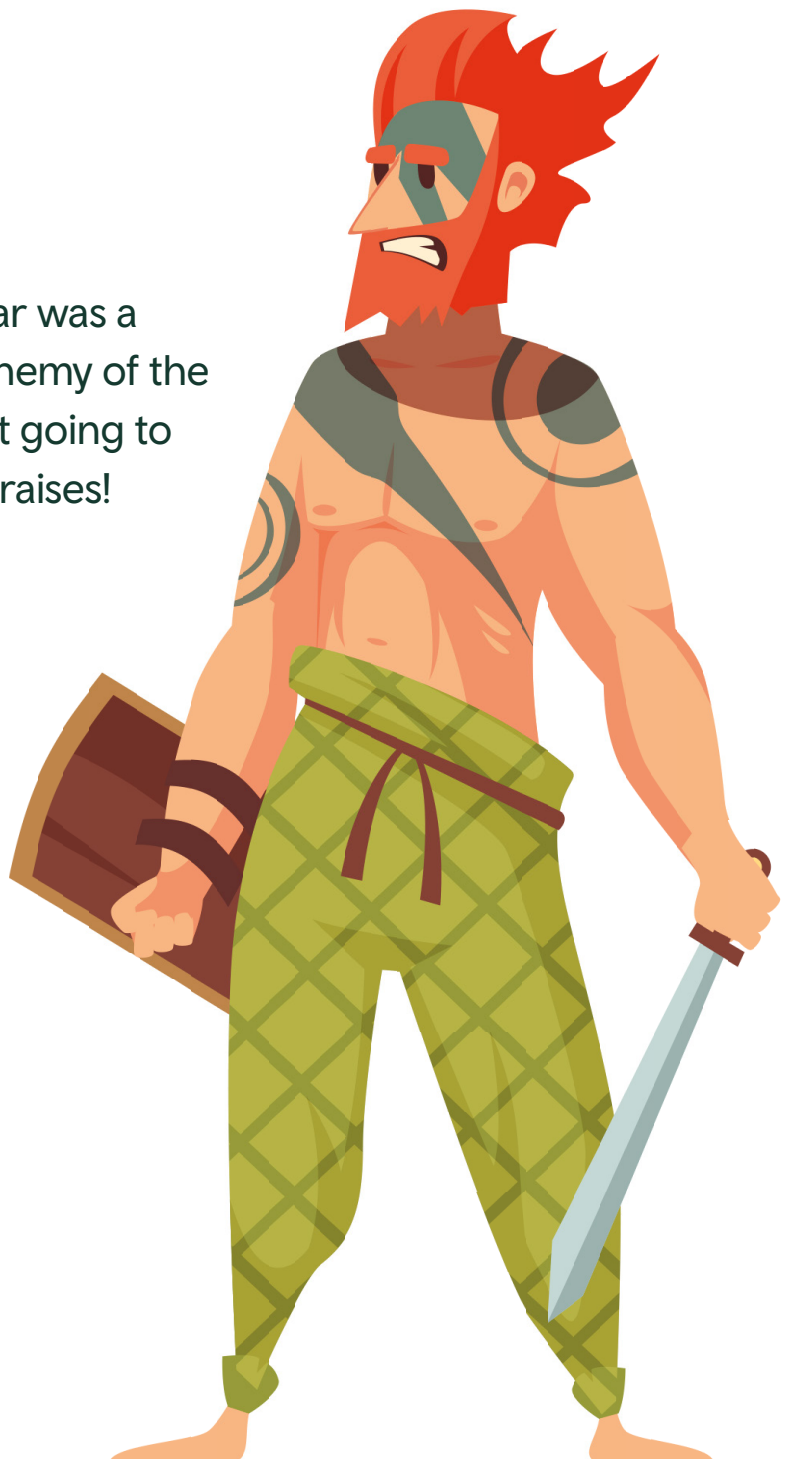
# Fighting the Celtic tribes

The Romans saw the British people as primitive and uncivilised. Julius Caesar had described them in his book as being terrifying!

Remember, Caesar was a Roman and the enemy of the Celts, so he wasn't going to be singing their praises!



All Britons used woad to dye their bodies a blue colour, which makes them terrifying when they are fighting in battle. They use their chariots in battle, steering them in all directions while hurling their weapons, generally causing the enemy to split apart. Then one of the warriors leaps from the chariot and fights on foot.



# The Divided Celts

Yes, the Celts could be terrifying but they were also highly skilled in many crafts and traded across Northern Europe.

They were however a divided people, made up of many clans and tribes who kept falling out. At least five tribes lived in what we now know as Wales.

## Find out!

Which tribe lived in your part of Wales? What were they like?



# The Roman soldiers



We must cut off the tribes of Britain from each other! We'll set up forts with our soldiers and take over their land! Divide and conquer!



## Where did the Roman soldiers come from?

The soldiers or 'Legionnaires' as they were known didn't only come from Rome, they came from all over the Roman empire to fight the Celts. They came initially mainly from Italy (81%) but by the end of the first century, they were mainly from North Africa, the Alpine provinces and modern Austria Slovenia.

Later on, they also had troops from the modern Netherlands, Belgium and Bulgaria. So the army had a mix of people and was very diverse. This of course had an effect on the country they conquered. We'll learn more about this in Unit 3.

Unlike the Celts, the Romans were very organised and even had categories for the squads in their armies. They meant business! At its largest, the Roman army had 450,000 soldiers.



### Find out!

Go online and find out the names of the Romans' squads and how many men were in each one.



# Fit for battle

A Roman soldier needed to be very fit and healthy. He was expected to march about 36km (24 miles) in 5 hours. He had to serve for 25 years and was recruited when in his late teens to early 20s.

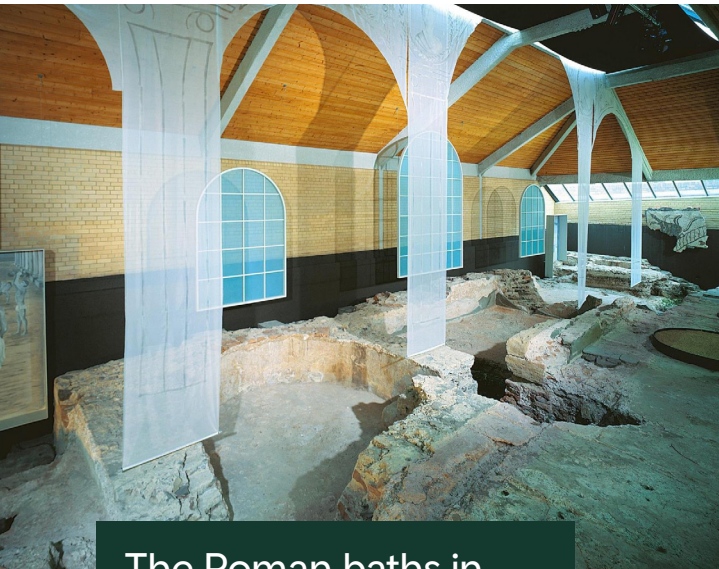
He was usually someone strong who came from a background of manual labour, like a blacksmith or butcher. Soldiers had to do daily military drills and practice.

The soldier's diet amounted to 3,000 calories a day. That's about 10 cheeseburgers! But they had to eat a diet rich in wheat so they were strong and fit enough to fight.

## Find out!

Take a look at the most sophisticated Roman baths in the country and read all about Isca on the [Cadw website](#). We'll find out more about how the Romans used to relax and unwind in Unit 3.





The Roman baths in Caerleon © Visit Wales

The soldiers had to train as well every day. Running, jumping, sword fighting and javelin throwing. So life was hard for the Roman soldier.

When he wasn't cooped up in his barracks, he was out fighting the frightening Celts!

They did have some time though for relaxation as the amazing Roman baths in Isca (or Caerleon as it's known today) show. The swimming pool in Caerleon, the massive 'natatio' held more than 80,000 gallons of water!



The amphitheatre in Caerleon © Visit Wales

## Awesome Activity

You are a Roman soldier, settling into your new life in Wales. Film a vlog with a friend describing your impressions so far and what you do with your time.



### Statements of What Matters

Exploring the expressive arts is essential to developing artistic skills and knowledge and it enables learners to become curious and creative individuals.



# War or peace?

So as we can see, the Romans and Celts were very different. It wasn't surprising this would lead to some huge battles between them.

In AD 43, ordered by Emperor Claudius, a big Roman army landed on the beaches of what we know now as Kent in England.

Over the next year they battled inland, storming through hillforts and conquering anyone who stood in their way.

Some Celts made peace with the Romans. They agreed to obey Roman laws and pay taxes. In return, they could keep their kingdoms. However, some Celtic leaders chose to fight.



# Choose your player

## Caratacus (Caradog)



Lived during the first century AD.



Son of the king of the Catuvellauni of Essex.



Escaped battle of Medway against the Romans.



Came to Wales to persuade the Silures tribe to fight the Romans.



Defeated by the Romans at the Battle of Caer Caradog in AD 50.

Why do you Romans, with all these grand possessions, still want our poor huts?

Caradog put up a brave fight against the Romans. He was a big hero in the eyes of the Britons. But the queen of the Brigantes tribe, Cartamandua, betrayed him to the Romans. This proud Celtic warrior was then taken in chains to Rome.

However, Caradog soon made friends in high places there. He had the gift of the gab and made an impressive speech and was pardoned by the Emperor Claudius himself!

### Statements of What Matters

Enquiry, exploration and investigation inspire curiosity about the world, its past, present and future.

### Find out!

Find out more about the battle of Caer Caradog. Do you think Caradog did the right thing fighting the Romans? Would you have given in to the Romans for a quiet life?





# Boudicca's battles

After years of heavy taxes and the Romans taking their land, some Celtic tribes were desperate for revenge.

## Choose your player

Queen Boudicca (Buddug)



Lived during the first century AD.



Queen of the Iceni tribe.



Fought the Romans in AD 60.



Raised a huge army and burned the Roman towns of Colchester and London.

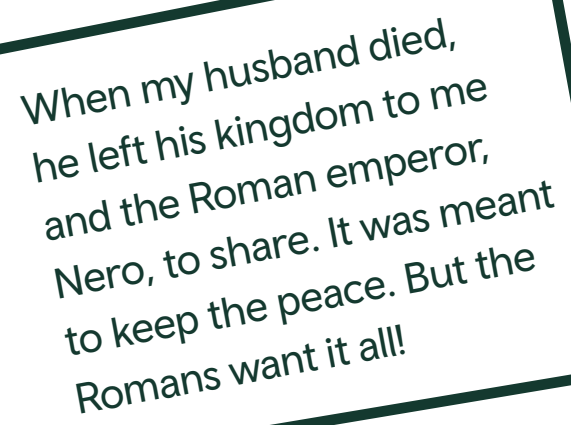


When the Roman army heard about this, they turned back from Wales to face her.




# Choose your battle

In AD 60, one leader who chose to fight was Queen Boudicca, or 'Buddug' in Welsh, of the Iceni tribe in what we know now as Norfolk. She decided to lead her tribe against the Romans.



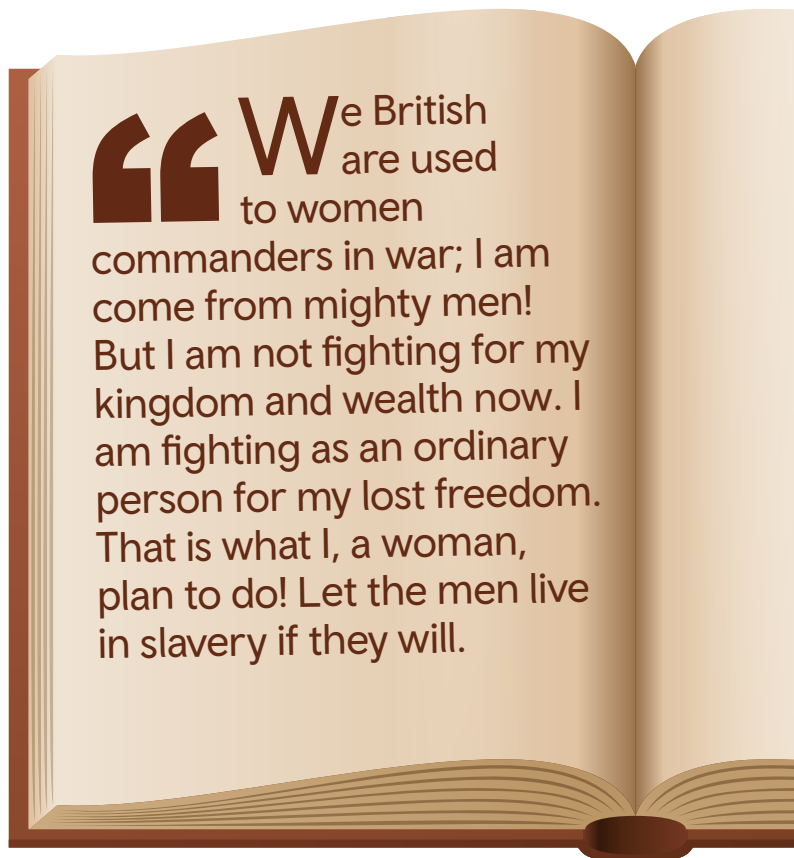
When my husband died, he left his kingdom to me and the Roman emperor, Nero, to share. It was meant to keep the peace. But the Romans want it all!



Boudicca had cause to complain. Emperor Nero even had her whipped in front of her people. He demanded that they paid taxes on land that belonged to the Celts. She was ready for battle and had the strong personality needed to lead her people too.

# Tacitus tells his tale

The famous Roman Historian, Tacitus, described Boudicca's rousing speech to her army:



“We British are used to women commanders in war; I am come from mighty men! But I am not fighting for my kingdom and wealth now. I am fighting as an ordinary person for my lost freedom. That is what I, a woman, plan to do! Let the men live in slavery if they will.”

## What happened next?

Boudicca raised a huge army of 200,000 warriors, which included men and women. They destroyed the capital of Roman Britain, then at Colchester, and defeated the Roman Ninth Legion. They then did the same in London and thousands were killed on both sides.



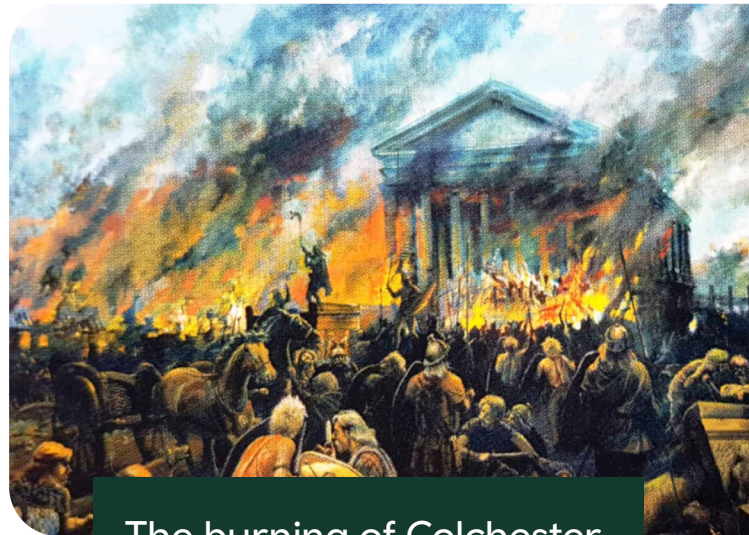


Boudicca Statue, Westminster bridge, London

Both sides fought a fierce battle but the Romans won. No-one knows what really happened to Boudicca after that. Many Britons were killed and she is thought to have poisoned herself to avoid capture. The site of the battle and her death are unknown. But she remains a Celtic hero to this day.

Then they travelled North to Verulamium, now known as St Albans in England.

When the Roman army heard about this, they turned back from their campaign in North Wales to face her. And even though they were outnumbered they were better trained and had better armour.



The burning of Colchester



### Statements of What Matters

Human societies are complex and diverse, and shaped by human actions and beliefs. Consequently, learners will come to realise that the choices we all make, individually and collectively, can have major impacts on society.



## Awesome Activity 1

Imagine your class is a Celtic tribe living in Wales during the reign of Emperor Claudius. Now it's time to decide what to do when the Romans invade - make peace or war?

Mark out a line on the floor.

Everyone in the class must stand on one side or other of the line.

On one side will be everyone who thinks fighting against the Romans is a good idea.

On the other side will be everyone who thinks that your tribe should learn to live with the Romans.

You must give some reasons for your decision and use evidence from what you have learned about the Romans and the Celts. You can also change your mind at any point.

What did your tribe decide to do in the end?



## Awesome Activity 2

Find different images of Boudicca. Discuss if she was a hero or a villain. How is she shown in these various images?

Draw up a timeline of the events of her rebellion. You could produce a poster showing your opinion of Boudicca.



# The legendary battle of Anglesey

By AD 50 most of what we now know as Southern England had been captured by the Romans. But the Romans, with all their excellent fighting skills, didn't have it their own way as Caradog and Boudicca's battles show. The Silures, Ordovices and Demetae tribes also fought to keep them at bay.

So around AD 60-61, the Roman general, Suetonius Paulinus, decided that enough was enough. He decided to target the island

of Anglesey, or 'Mona' as it was then known. This was an important centre for Celtic Druids.

This was the first of two invasions -the first, under Paulinus, was successful. But as he started to garrison the island, this had to be abandoned as he had to lead the legions to deal with Boudicca's uprising. General Agricola lead the second Roman invasion on the island in AD 77. He finished the job Paulinus had started.



# Why Anglesey?

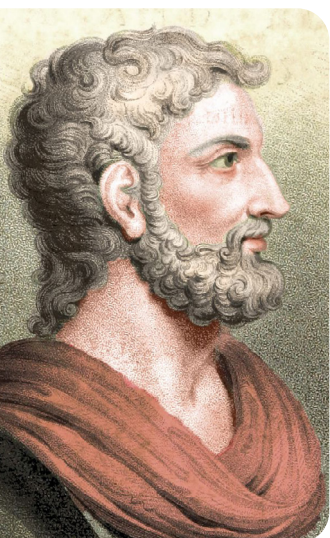
The island of Anglesey with its mild weather and good soil was called 'the bread basket of Wales', because it produced a lot of food for its people. There was also a rich source of copper at nearby Parys Mountain, (near Amlwch), which was very attractive to the Romans.

According to the Roman historian Tacitus, the Roman soldiers or legionnaires took the Druids by surprise by swimming across the Menai Strait. They also used small, flat bottomed boats to reach the island.

The Celts and their priests gathered on the opposite shore of the island, ready for battle.



Menai Straits © Visit Wales



**O**n the beach stood a huge crowd of Britons - men and women. They had black and untidy hair and waved their torches of fire in the air. Their Druids lifted their hands to the sky, chanting as they did so.

The Roman troops were so shocked at this sight, that at first they couldn't move! They froze like statues. This made them an easy target for the Britons who attacked them and drew blood.

The Romans pulled themselves together and fought back. They had better weapons and a bigger army and managed to win the battle. Then they destroyed the Druids' altars where they worshipped their gods.



Of course, Tacitus was a Roman so he wouldn't be writing nice things about the Britons! The Britons didn't write at this time, so we don't know their side of the story.

### Statements of What Matters

Humanities encourages learners to critically review the ways these events and experiences are perceived, interpreted and represented. As they form their own informed viewpoints and recognise those of others, learners can also develop self-awareness.



## What do you think?

Should we believe everything the Romans tell us about the Celts?

Why do you think this?

## The Druids

### Find out!

Who were the Druids? Why did they frighten the Romans so much? Why did the Romans destroy their altars?

## Awesome Activity

Why not create your own storytelling scene using the Puppet Pals app to recreate the Anglesey battle? Your scene could show both sides of the story. A Roman soldier describing how they felt when they first saw the Britons for the first time and a Briton describing the Romans at the battle.





# The Story of Segontium

The Romans then built a very important fort, Segontium, in what is now known as Caernarfon. They controlled Anglesey from there for 300 years. It's built on the top of a broad rounded hill overlooking the Menai Strait and the Isle of Anglesey. This location helped the Romans have a good view of any enemies approaching.

Segontium's name comes from the river nearby: 'sego', which means 'vigorous' or full of strength, which you can still see in its modern form, 'Seiont.'

## Statements of What Matters

Enquiry, exploration and investigation inspire curiosity about the world, its past, present and future.



## Find out!

Find out more about Segontium and its importance. Who were the people who lived there for 300 years?

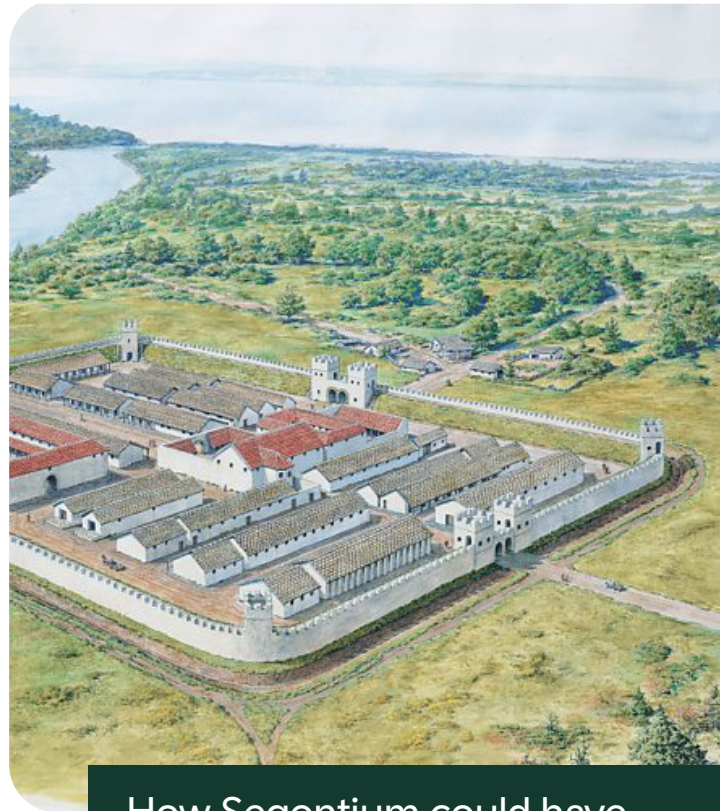
Aerial view of Segontium  
© Cadw



Thanks to excavated coins found there we know the Romans stayed until about AD 394. Indeed, no other fort in Wales was held so long.

It not only controlled access to the rich lands of Anglesey, it also helped defend the Welsh coast against Irish pirates! We'll find out more about the thrilling tale of the Irish Pirates and Segontium in Units 3 and 4.

You can visit the Segontium site today. Read more about it on the [Cadw website](#).



How Segontium could have looked in Roman times  
© J Banbury

## Additional activities

The Romans also made an appearance in the famous old Welsh legends or stories, The Mabinogion too. Find out about the tale of Magnus Maximus or Macsen Wledig as he's known in Welsh. Compare what is known as fact about Magnus and what becomes myth or legend in the Mabinogion.

### Statements of What Matters

Increasing breadth and depth of knowledge by encountering ideas in language and literature.



LANGUAGES, LITERACY  
& COMMUNICATION  
—  
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CHYFATHREBU



# Find out more

Here are some additional resources you can use to learn more about the Romans in Wales. Please note that Cadw is not responsible for the content on external websites.

- Take a look at the National Roman Legion Museum's [website](#) for some more information about the Roman artefacts (historical objects) found in Caerleon.
- Watch this great [video](#) by Cadw showing the Segontium Roman Fort rising from the ruins thanks to CGI.
- Watch this [video](#) on Welsh government's Hwb website. It shows how the Roman conquest changed life in Wales.
- The National Museum of Wales's [video animation](#), 'Roman Remains' tells the story of how the Romans influenced Wales.
- BBC Bitesize explores how the Romans changed Britain which includes an [animated video](#).
- BBC Bitesize explores the [Romans in Wales](#) in Welsh.
- BBC Bitesize introduces the story of Boudicca with an [animation](#) of her battle against the Romans.
- English Heritage explores how the Romans changed Britain in a nutshell in this [animated video](#).

