

# The Romans

## Unit 3



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# About this Unit

Unit 3: What difference did the Romans make in Wales?

## Unit theme

What difference did the Romans make in Wales?

## Learning Objectives

This Unit focuses on the Roman Occupation of Wales. It takes a closer look at Cultural diversity and domestic and military life as well as metal resources / food / religion / unrest etc.

The learners are guided to consider a range of areas where cultural differences would have been apparent and to immerse them in how the day-to-day lives of co-existing Celts and Romans might have been.

## 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 a critical understanding of how societies are and have been organised, structured and led, in the learners' own locality and in Wales, as well as in the wider world.

### In detail

Societies are characterised by a range of cultural, linguistic, economic, legal and political norms and values. They are also dynamic, both driving and reacting to changes on a local, national and global scale. Learners can explore the connections and interdependence between such societies in the past and present, in the context of a globalised world.

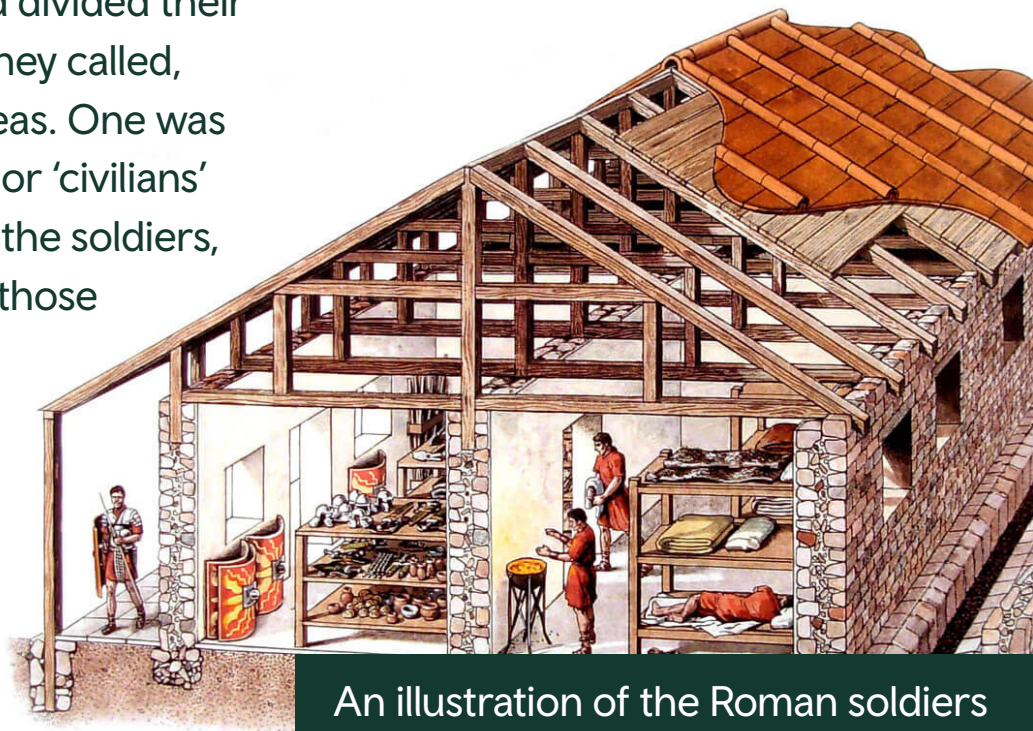
Appropriate disciplinary approaches, including digital humanities will help learners gather, justify, present, analyse, and evaluate a range of evidence. Interpreting and synthesising information will help learners build upon what they have already learned and further inform their understanding of the world.



# Introduction

Now they'd conquered a sizeable chunk of Britain, the Romans got on with transforming it.

By about AD 80 they'd divided their new province which they called, 'Britannia' into two areas. One was for the general public or 'civilians' and the other was for the soldiers, to protect them from those troublesome Celts.



An illustration of the Roman soldiers in their barracks in Caerleon

© J Banbury



Caerleon Roman site © Visit Wales



They built three major fortresses for the soldiers to defend the border at York, Chester and in Wales, Isca or Caerleon, as we know it today.



# New towns, a new way of life

The new Roman roads, towns, forts and amphitheatres that appeared in Britain transformed the landscape. But we must remember that they also changed the way of life for the people who lived there.

Wales was part of the Roman Empire for over 300 years. The British tribes were exposed to Roman art, culture, lifestyle and more. The Romans were also influenced by the Britons. So how did this all affect Britain and Wales in particular?

By the 2nd century there were about forty towns established by the Romans like London and York in England and Isca or Caerleon and Caerwent in Wales.

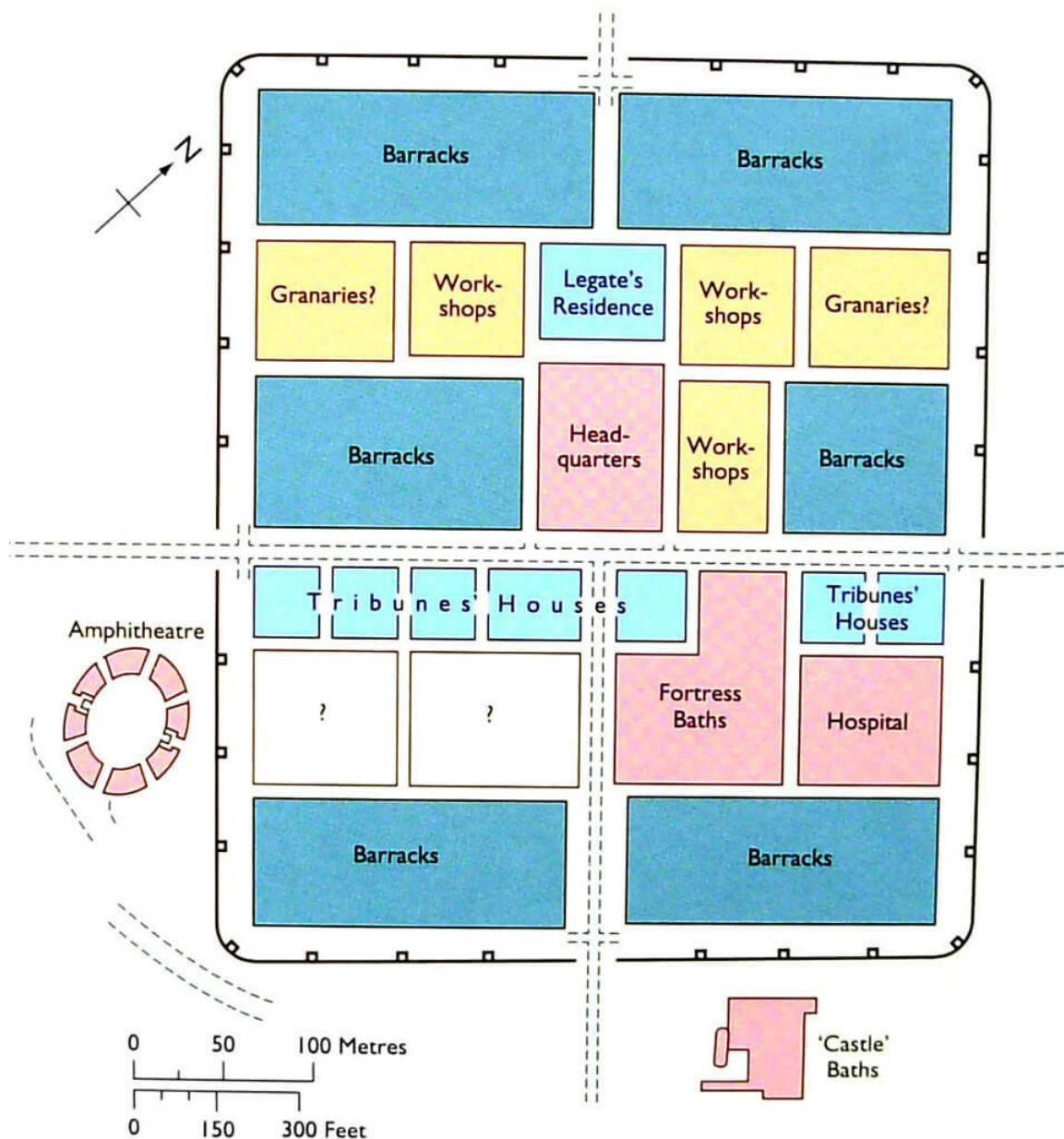
Isca was part of a network of forts and fortlets stretching from Carmarthen in the West to the north in Caernarfon and Anglesey. It seemed that the native tribes were starting to see the benefits brought by Rome and didn't want to fight as much.

## Find out!

Find out how many forts and fortlets you could find in Wales and create a simple map of the locations. Remember the clues about place names that you were given in Unit 2. The [Cadw website](#) can help you too.



# Caerleon - a unique Roman town in Wales



Caerleon Ground plan



Now these Roman towns were very snazzy with a lot of 'mod cons' the locals had never seen before.

We know the Romans liked everything to be neat and tidy. So they made sure their towns were well designed too. Their towns were often laid out in a 'grid' which looked a bit like a chessboard. This then formed blocks which were called 'insulae'.

In the middle you'd find the 'forum' which was very like our town market places today. This is where people would sell things. They had shops and offices on three sides and the government offices, or the 'Basilica' on the other side.

On a trip into a Roman town, you could shop on the high street, worship at a temple and even have a snack at a takeaway or some delicious street food!



## Awesome Activity

Design your own town grid for your ideal Roman town. You can add in anything you like, shops, offices, baths etc as long as they existed in a Roman town!



### Statements of What Matters

Responding and reflecting, both as artist and audience, is a fundamental part of learning in the expressive arts. Creating combines skills and knowledge, drawing on the senses, inspiration and imagination.



### Statements of What Matters

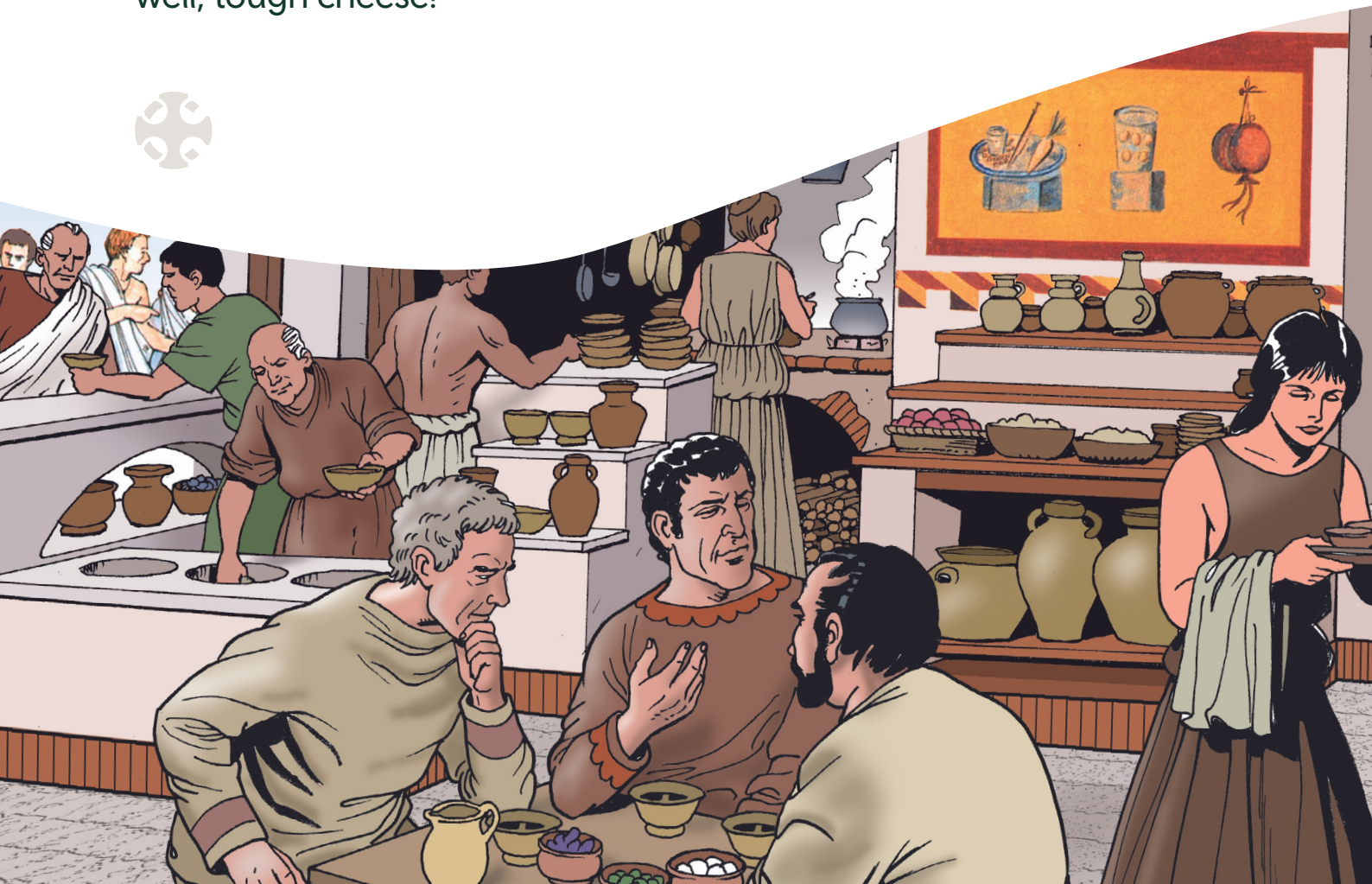
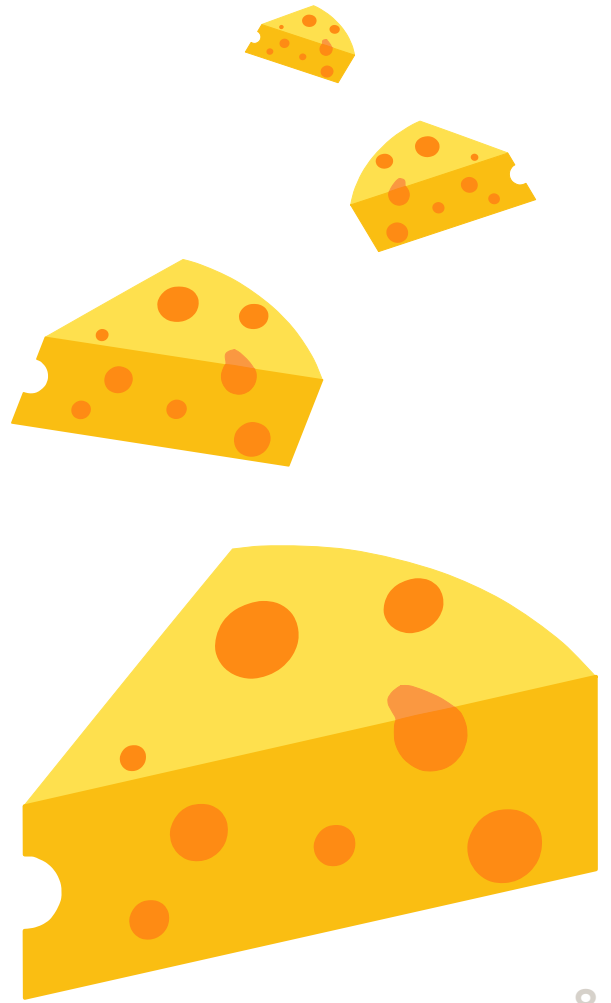
Design thinking and engineering offer technical and creative ways to meet society's needs and wants.





# Food, glorious food

We already know from Unit 2 that the Romans introduced a lot of new and tasty foods to Britain. But did you know they also loved cheese? They even worked out how to smoke cheese and make hard cheese. You could buy cheese from a street vendor. If you didn't like it, well, tough cheese!



They also loved fish and shellfish. Oysters, cockles and mussels were brought in from the coast in big barrels. Salt was really important to keep food fresh and they got it from the shores of Britain. The Celts did eat shellfish but not to the extent the Romans did.



Market gardens and orchards growing delicious fruits like pears, apples and plums became a common sight. The new diet wasn't as popular with the poor Britons in the countryside though as they couldn't get hold of it. But even their military communities could eat Roman style foods.



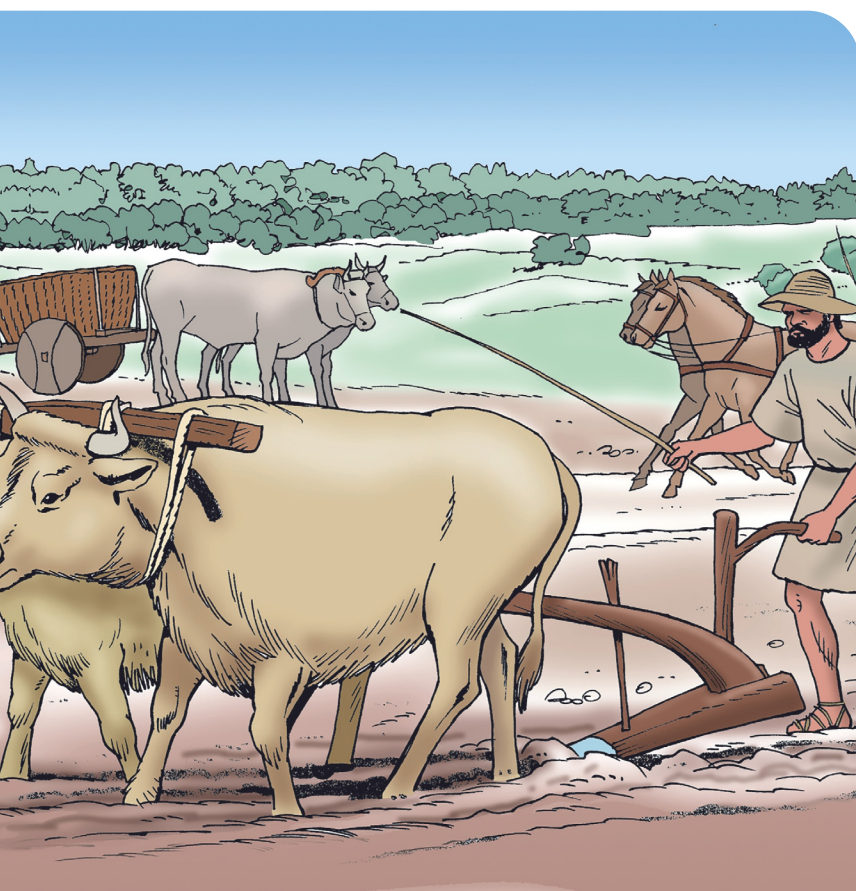


Like the Britons, the Romans still grew grain so they could make bread. One of the best areas in Wales for growing cereal crops is the Vale of Glamorgan. Did you know that charred grains from Roman times were found near Cardiff airport?

The soldiers in Caerleon also baked their own bread in communal ovens outside the barrack blocks. We know this because this bread stamp was found there in the 1920s. Bread was so important to Romans, it was given away free to the poor.



A Roman bread stamp found in Caerleon inscribed with 'Quintinius Aquilia Company' to show who owned the loaf © National Museum of Wales



Meat became more popular too. They kept more cattle; pigs and sheep were also farmed.

Honey was a favourite ingredient, so beekeeping became popular. Most farms had a man known as the *apiarus* who looked after the bees. It was a hive of activity!

The Romans also introduced us to olive oil and wine.

These vessels are very useful in telling us about trade in wine and olive oil. They were both transported in large pottery vessels called amphorae. Experts can tell just by looking at them where they came from and what they carried.

These huge pots also carried dried fruit, grape juice syrup and the fish sauce that was widely used in Roman cooking.

Wine from Italy, Greece and France and olive oil and fish sauce from Spain, all ended up in Caerleon. Some even ended up further west at Loughor and other forts and their surrounding settlements. Cheers!

A range of cooking and eating vessels found at Caerleon

© National Museum of Wales



# A Roman takeaway

What would you choose from the Roman takeaway menu?

## *Menu*

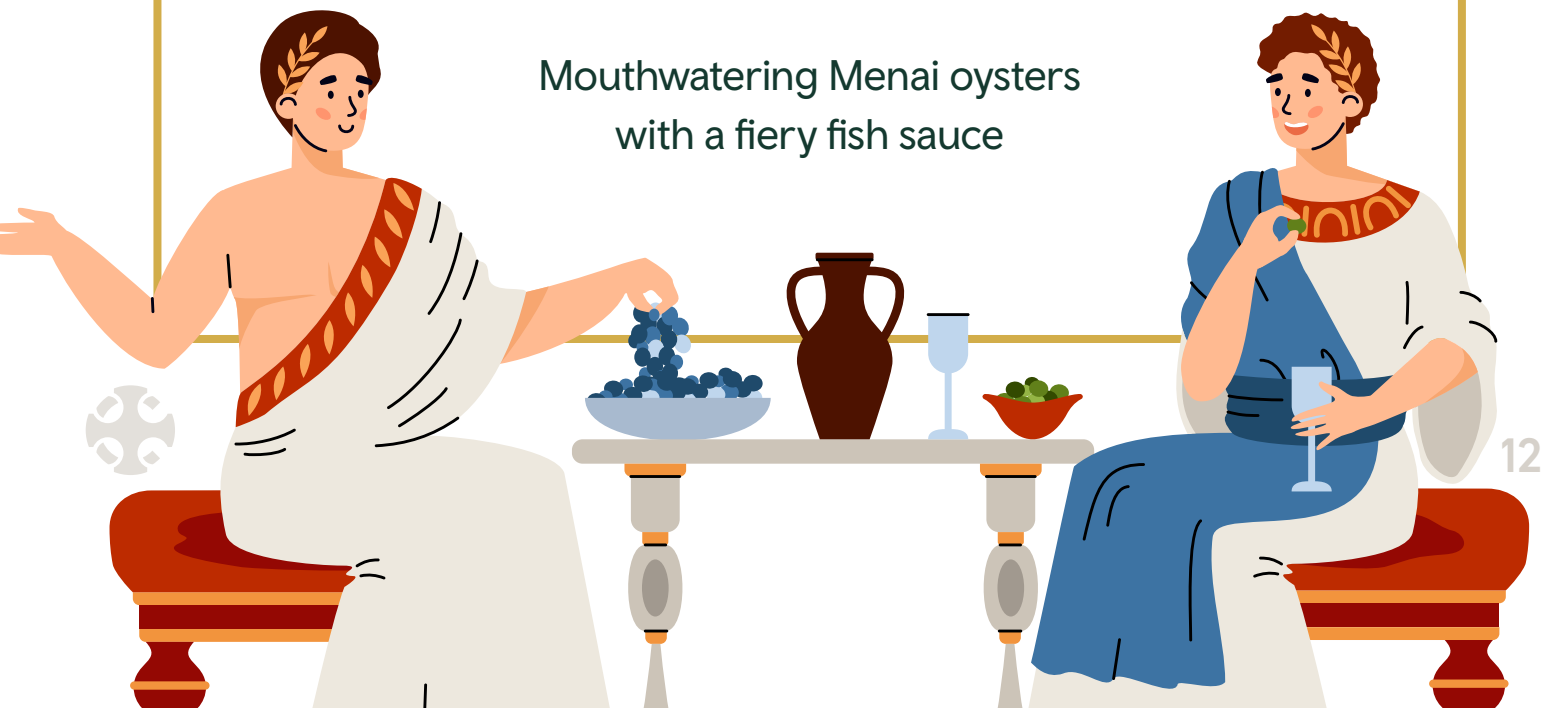
The Pigwn Plum, fig and honey surprise

The Segontium steak bun drizzled  
with olive oil

The big Brecon Gaer breakfast  
(ientaculum) – Ham, olives and Caerleon  
cheese

Caerwent cherries  
with a red wine drizzle

Mouthwatering Menai oysters  
with a fiery fish sauce



# So what did the Celts eat?

The Celts had some tasty foods too. They would eat wild foods like berries, nettles, mushrooms and blackberries. They would also hunt deer, foxes, beavers, wild boars and bears! They'd eat eggs from hens and wild birds. They'd fish for trout, salmon or mackerel. So you'd have a good meal if you called round for tea in a Celtic home as well.

## Find out!

What other foods did the Romans bring to Wales?  
How did they get these foods into the country?

## Awesome Activity

Prepare a Roman menu in cookery class. Find some mouthwatering ingredients and cook up a dish fit for a Roman feast! Do a step by step video of how you prepared your meal. You could even dress up as Romans!



## Statements of What Matters

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



# Rest and relaxation

After a good meal, you could then go for a wash and a good gossip at the heated baths. Of course the local Britons, who were a bit scruffy, had never seen a heated bath before. Isca or Caerleon must have been an eye-opening place, with its heated water systems, hospital and Wales' first leisure centre!

**Important Buildings**  
the forum

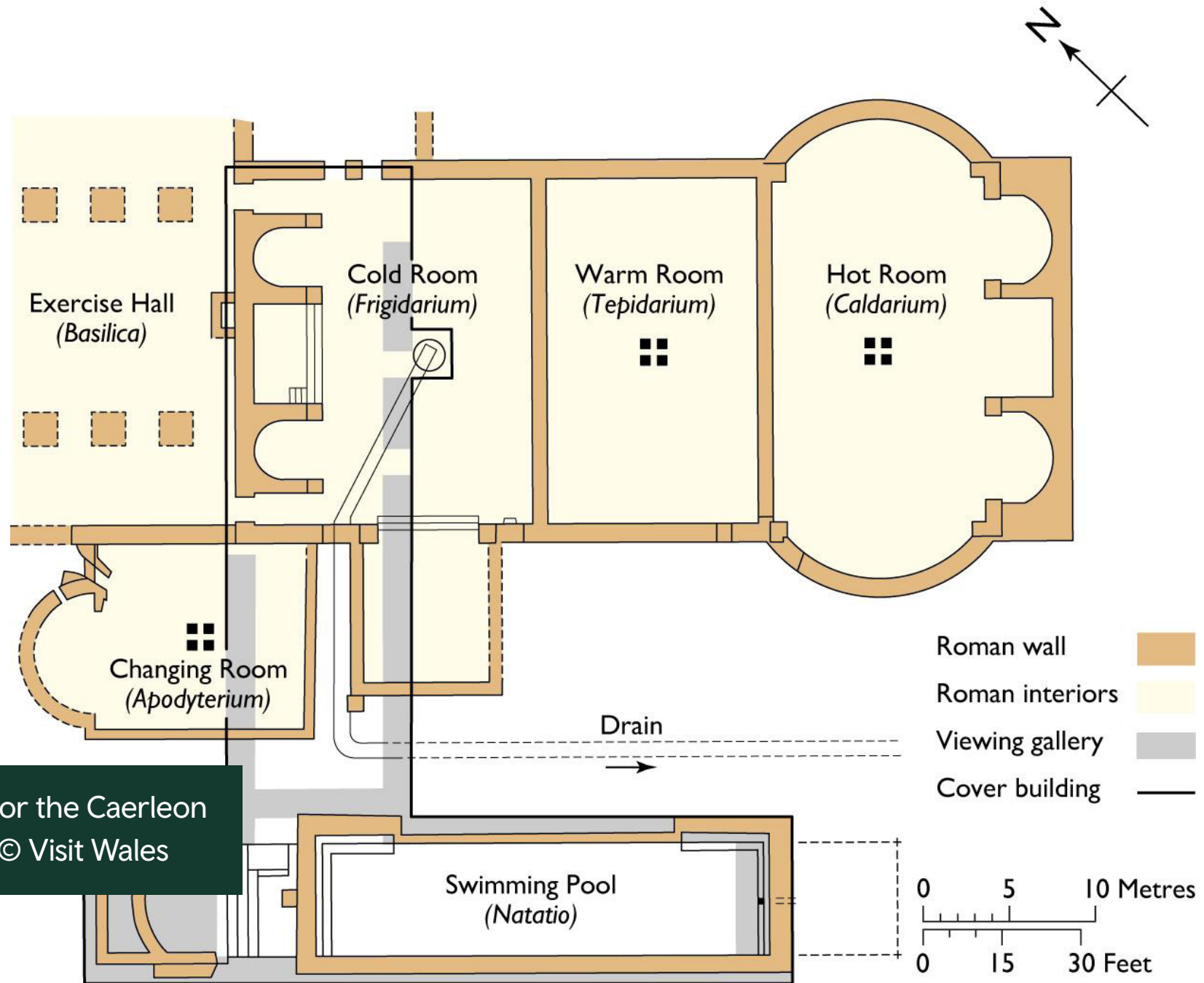
the baths

the latrines

**Used for**  
meeting place and markets  
public place to wash  
public toilets







Ground plan for the Caerleon Roman baths © Visit Wales

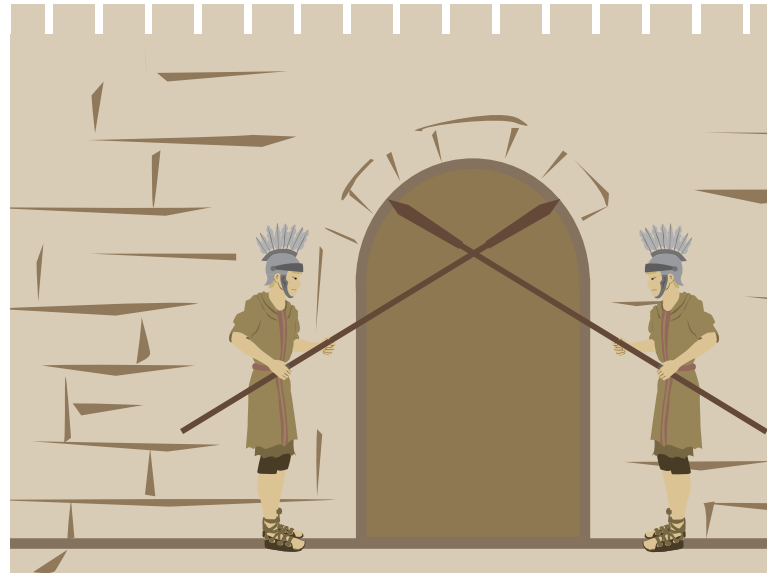


# A stroll through Caerleon

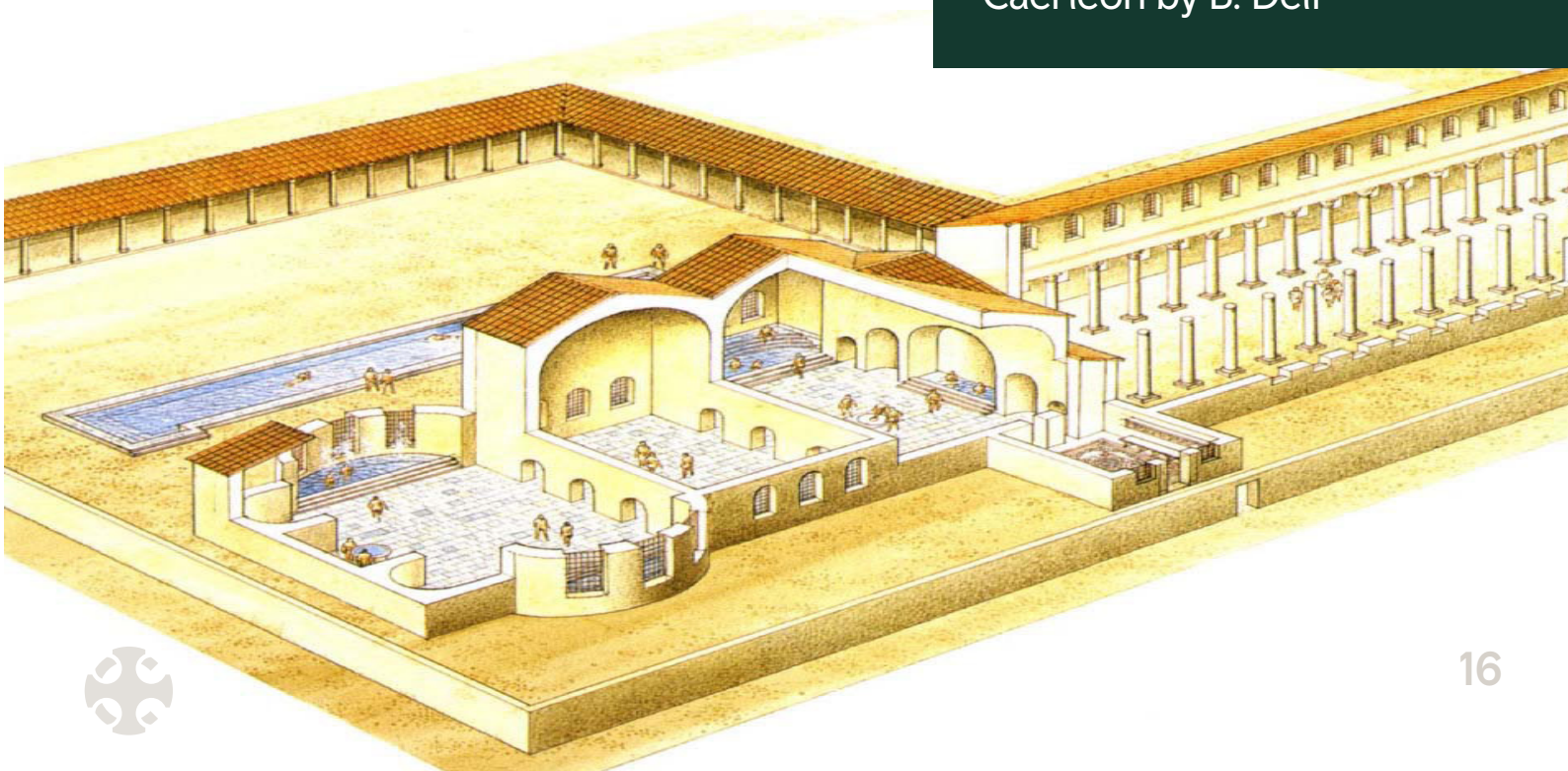
Let's take a stroll through Roman Caerleon and find out more about the people's way of life there.

Roman soldiers were stationed at Caerleon for almost 200 years between AD 75 and AD 287. Around 5,000 soldiers lived in the barracks at Caerleon.

We know they used the baths in Caerleon to swim, relax and soak after a battle. When you visit the baths, thanks to some special effects, you can even see a glimpse of a Roman soldier diving the depths today!



Artist's reconstruction of the Roman baths interiors in Caerleon by B. Delf



Playing dice have also been found in the baths which shows that people liked to play games there too as well as keeping clean. Many interesting objects have been found in the baths that were lost there by the Romans 2,000 years ago.



Gaming pieces found in Caerleon Baths

## Find out!

Which Roman objects have been found in Caerleon?

What do they show about the way of life of the people who lived there?

Caerleon Roman baths today  
© Cadw



## Statements of What Matters

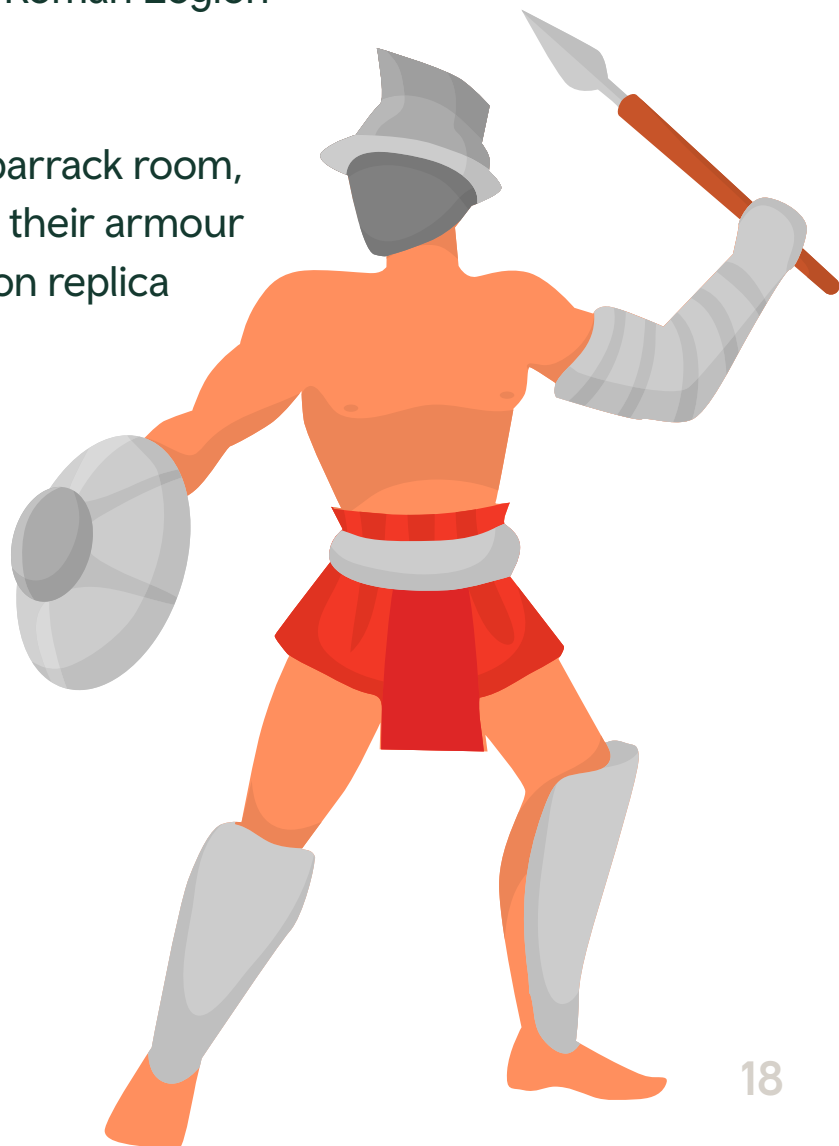
Enquiry, exploration and investigation inspire curiosity about the world, its past, present and future.

# A Soldier's Life

You can also see the cramped rooms where the soldiers slept and stored their weapons. Caerleon is very special as it's the only Roman legionary barracks still on view in Europe. Find out how you can visit the site on the [Cadw website](#).

We can learn a lot about a soldier's life in Roman Caerleon in the National Roman Legion Museum too.

You can visit a replica full-sized barrack room, which is where the soldiers kept their armour and weapons. You can even try on replica armour!





# Survival of the fittest

A Roman soldier had to be very fit. The armour was very heavy! Their weapons were also heavy and deadly. You can see the 'caltrops' - a weapon that was used to pierce the feet of enemies and their horses - in the Museum. Ouch!

Excellent weapons and armour were very important to the Roman army. Without them they wouldn't have been so successful in battle and in creating their empire.

- Only Roman citizens could sign up for the army.
- They had to be fit.
- They were not allowed to marry.
- A centurion was in charge of eighty of these men.





I have a special spear that I use in battle, my pilum! I draw my sword and stab my enemies! I have a curved shield. It's very useful as I can punch the enemy with the metal circle in the centre. I follow orders and I never answer back!

They could march twenty miles a day carrying heavy equipment - and then build a camp for the night! Could you handle that?



# Segontium's soldiers

Did you know that the Segontium, which was established in AD 77, was the largest Roman fort in North Wales?

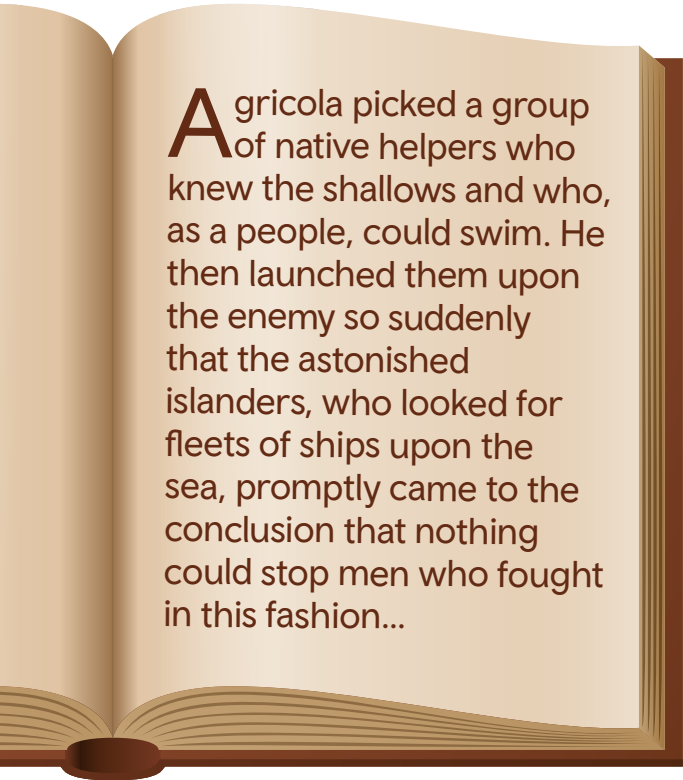
This fort, on the outskirts of Caernarfon, was also home to a thousand Roman soldiers. The Roman General Agricola decided to build it after the Romans had fought a brutal battle against the native Ordovices tribe. He also thought it would be a good base if they decided to attack another Celtic island...

This fort will keep those odious Ordovices away for good! We will rule in the North! It will also be very useful if we decide to invade Ireland too!

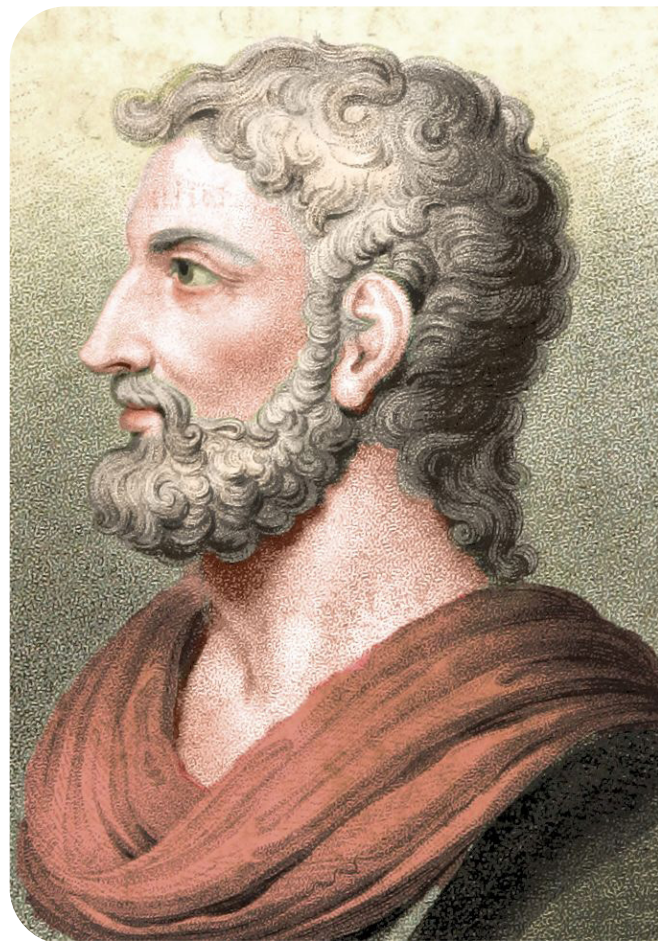


# Tacitus tells the tale

Our old friend, Tacitus the historian, had this to say about this battle in Anglesey. It suggests strongly that some of the local people helped the Romans fight the Ordovices!



**A**gricola picked a group of native helpers who knew the shallows and who, as a people, could swim. He then launched them upon the enemy so suddenly that the astonished islanders, who looked for fleets of ships upon the sea, promptly came to the conclusion that nothing could stop men who fought in this fashion...



The Ordovices were the last tribe to be conquered and Anglesey their last stronghold to be taken by the Romans. So this was a great victory for Agricola.





# Mining and multi-tasking

Remember that Segontium wasn't only a fort, it also organised mining of precious metals and collected taxes. Yes, the Romans did like collecting taxes, which added to their wealth of course.



Aerial view of Segontium  
© Visit Wales



Segontium ruins today

If you go for a stroll in Segontium today, you can still see the remains of the barracks, the buildings with underfloor heating, the storehouses, a bathhouse and the 'praetorium' or the Commander's house.

A settlement or a town grew outside the fort. There's a smaller fort nearby which was for boats to bring supplies, which is called 'Henwalia' in Welsh (old walls).



# Battling Irish pirates

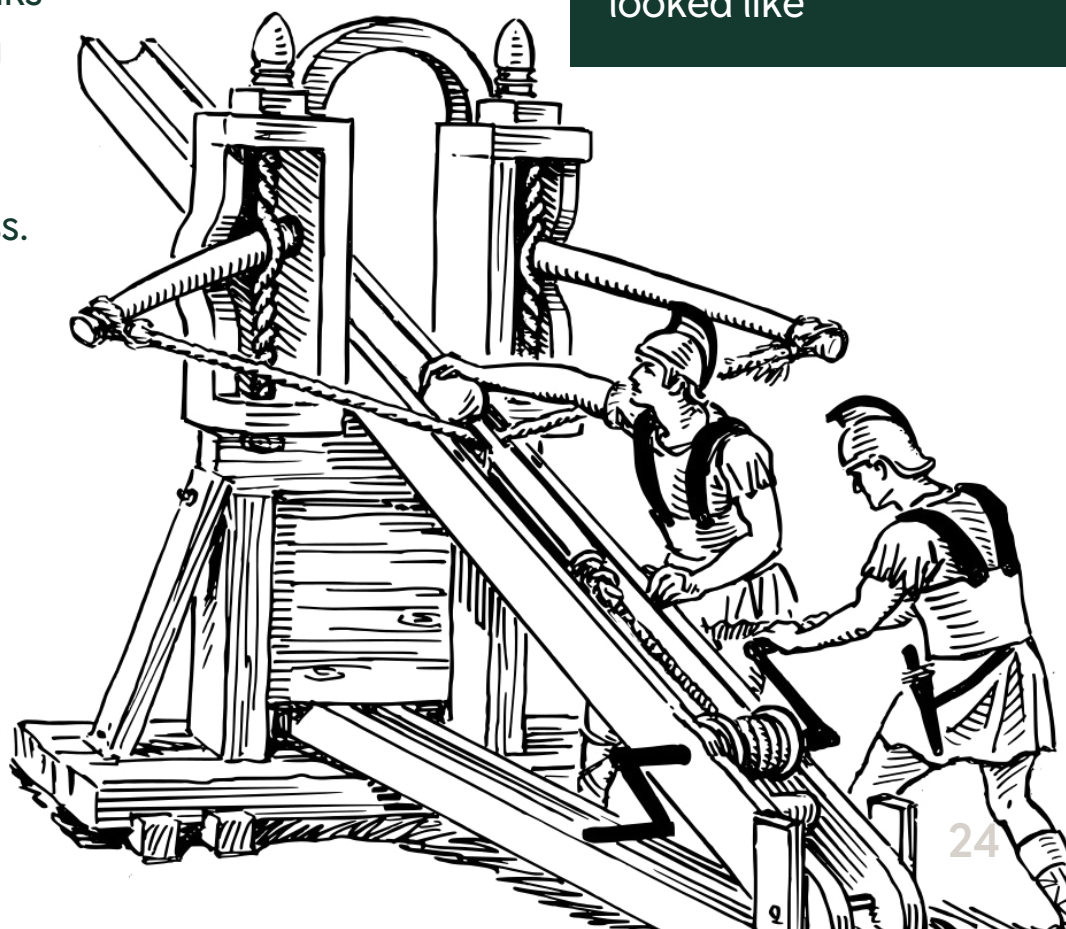
Segontium was also very useful in defending the locals from the feisty Irish pirates who attempted an attack.

The soldiers in Segontium had some impressive weapons against the pirates. They used huge catapults which were called 'Ballista' which were capable of throwing flaming missiles up to 2000 feet!

They could also adapt these to shoot rocks, chunks of metal or anything else handy to show those pirates or any enemy who was boss.

But as Roman power waned, the Irish raiders grew bolder. They would steal animals and clothes and even kidnapped people from their homes. It's said that St Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, was kidnapped from Wales and taken to Ireland as a slave by Irish pirates! They truly were a fearsome lot.

An artist's drawing of what a Roman 'Ballista' would have looked like





## Find out!

Find out more about the Roman soldiers in Segontium on the [Cadw website](#). Which Roman artefacts or objects were found there? What did they reveal about Roman life at the time?

## Statements of What Matters

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



**HUMANITIES**  
— Y DYNIAETHAU —

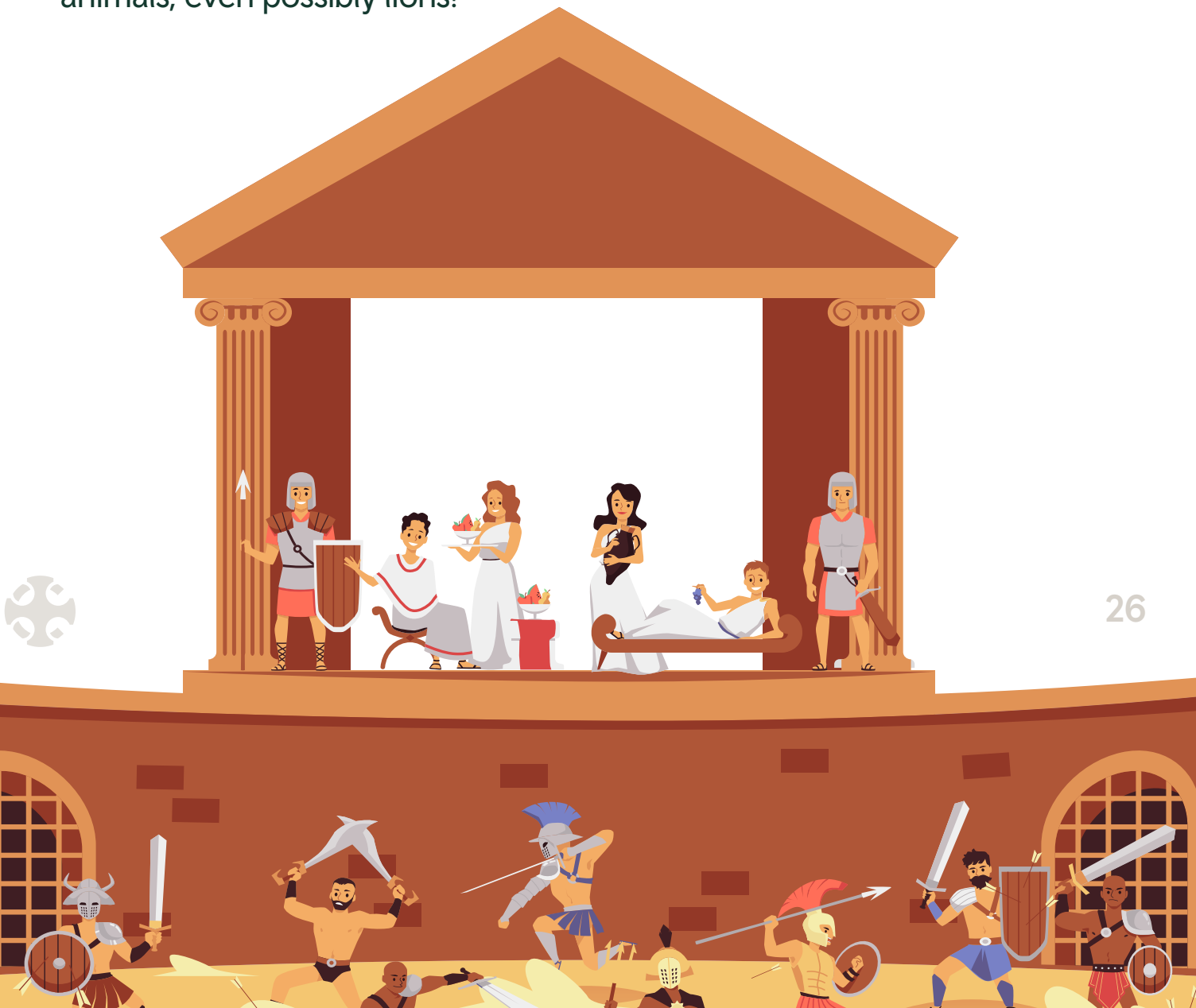


# Thumbs up or Thumbs down?

## Welsh amphitheatres

Outside Caerleon's walls the Romans built a stone amphitheatre. You could go there to watch the gladiators do battle and see ferocious wild animals, even possibly lions!

An amphitheatre was an important venue for the Romans and had its own culture. It was very like today's multiplex cinema.



Wooden benches could seat up to 6,000 people. They would come in their droves to watch the gladiators fight and to see exotic wild animals too. Gladiators – including women gladiators – became as famous as modern footballers. Imagine the crowds as they roared and cheered for blood!

Remember, if the Roman leaders made a thumbs down sign, the gladiator would be killed by his opponent! This is how the amphitheatre could have looked.

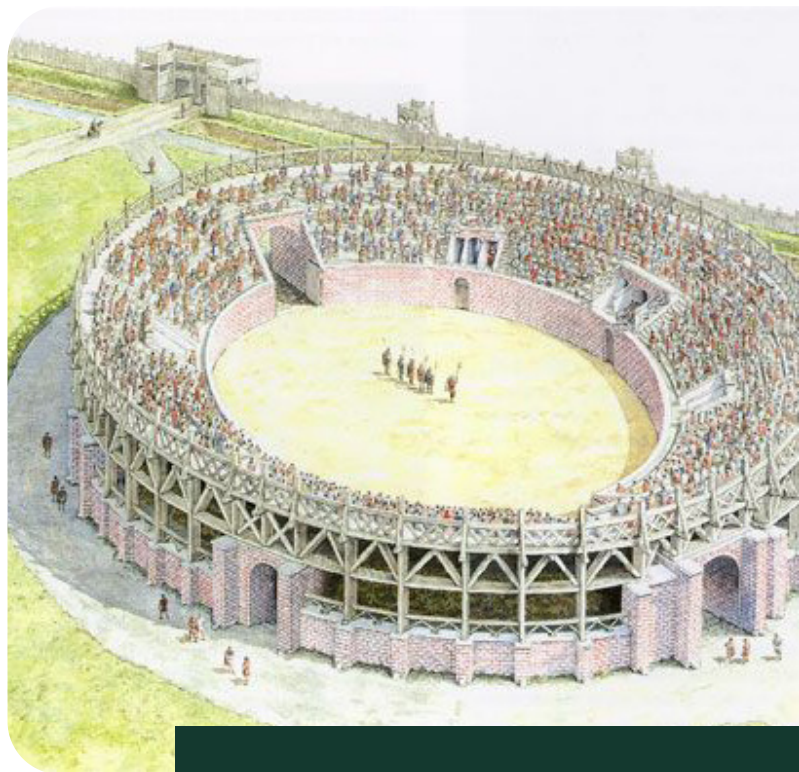


Illustration Dale Evans  
© Cadw



Caerleon amphitheatre  
© Cadw

And this is how it looks today.



Did you know you can also see the remains of an amazing amphitheatre in Carmarthen, West Wales too? It's in a very unexpected place near a very ordinary street! This was when Carmarthen was known by its Roman name, Moridunum.

## Find out!

Find out who the gladiators were and how they fought. What happened in the amphitheatres in Caerleon and Carmarthen?



Remains of the Carmarthen amphitheatre

## Awesome Activity

In a group make a short film describing a gladiator battle in Caerleon. You could visit the site or you could use online images. Take a look at [Cadw's Filming History guide](#) to learn how to make a film.



### 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 villas for the rich

Life for the rich in Roman Britain had never been better. Wealthy Roman Britons built grand houses in towns and Roman style villas. These were very grand houses that had mosaic flooring and formal gardens. The villas were often the centre of a Roman farm, known as a 'villa rustica'.

29



A Roman villa and garden  
© National Museum of Wales



They even had underfloor heating called a 'hypocaust'. Well, remember, Britain was very cold compared to Rome and they did wear those sandals!

You can see the remains of a Roman villa in Llantwit Major in the Vale of Glamorgan which had a beautiful mosaic floor.

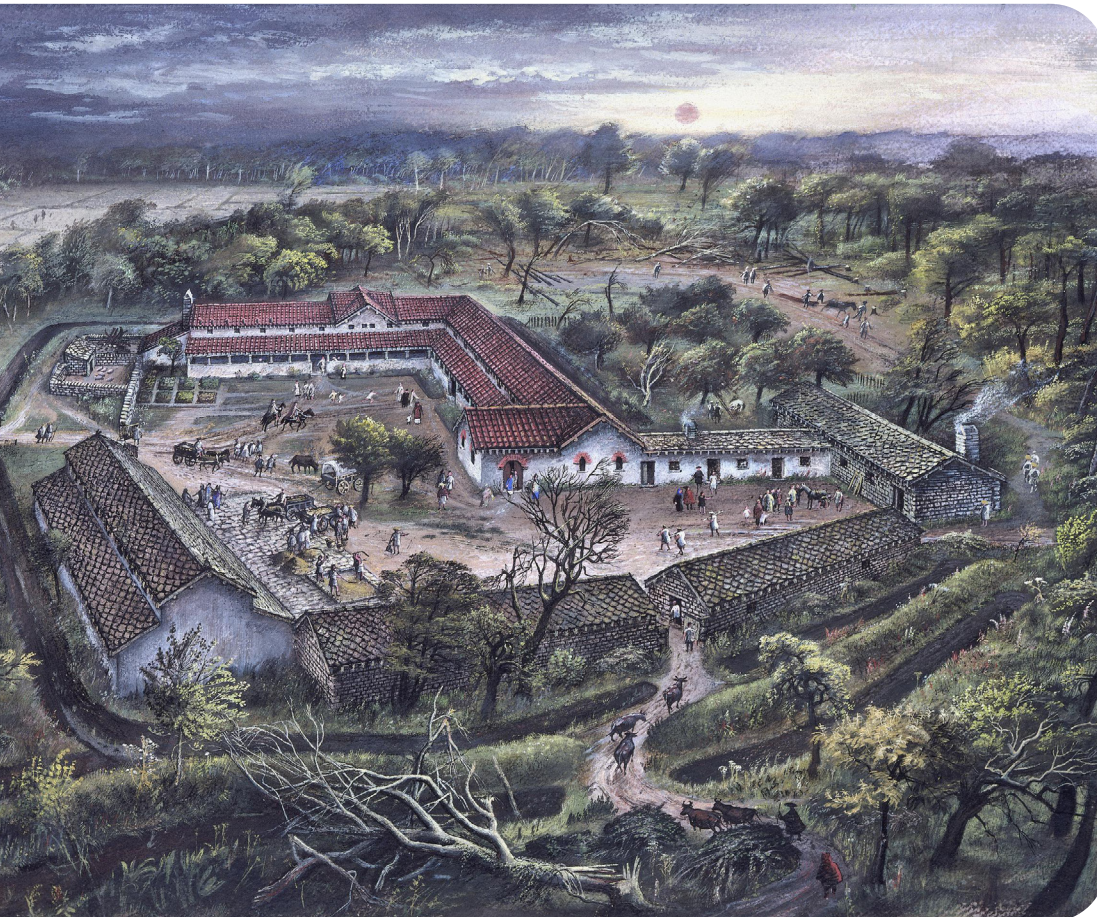


An example of a Roman mosaic floor found in Britain in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century





In its heyday the villa in Llantwit Major could have looked something like this.



There were also villas in Ely near Cardiff and at least three in Caerwent.

## Find out!

Find out more about the Roman villas in Wales.

What can we learn about the Roman way of life from these sites?





# How did the Britons react to this new way of life?

During the 300 years that Wales was part of the Roman Empire, some of the native Britons did accept this way of life.

There is one Roman town in Wales that's a well kept secret, Caerwent or Venta Silurum to the Romans. Not many people know about its Roman roots.

It was established in about AD 75-80 by the Silures, a native tribe. We learnt about them in Unit 2. Now they are very interesting as they're an example of a tribe who became 'Romanised' or lived like the Romans after the conquest of Britain.

Caerwent Roman ruins  
© Visit Wales





Caerwent was a bustling town with public baths. It also followed the well-ordered Roman grid pattern, which means the town was laid out in neat, straight lines.



An artist's impression of Caerwent in Roman times © J Banbury

You can still see the Roman walls, the excavated houses, market-place and Romano-British temple there. Find out more about visiting Caerwent on the [Cadw website](#).





# How the other half lived

Of course not everyone lived in a posh villa or in a town. In Wales we didn't have lots of Roman towns. Britain in general was still a farming country and dependent on small farms. The lives of these Celtic farmers changed very little.

They still lived in their round Celtic huts, or 'roundhouses'. They worked their fields the same way so their standard of living changed very little.

They also still spoke their Celtic languages, which helps explain why Welsh, a Celtic language, is still spoken today.



A typical Celtic Roundhouse dwelling © Atebol





# Din Lligwy

There's a fascinating ancient Welsh village, Din Lligwy in Anglesey that can tell us a lot about the way of life of the Celtic people at the time. You can still see clearly the remains of two round huts and many rectangular buildings with a big 5ft stone wall around them. It was 15m thick! But this was to keep their animals in rather than keeping the Romans out.

We know that people in this village did adapt a lot of the Roman lifestyle because of what was found there dating back to the third and fourth centuries.



## Find out!

Go on the Cadw website and [learn more about Din Lligwy](#). What items were discovered there? What do they tell us about the villagers' way of life?



## Statements of What Matters

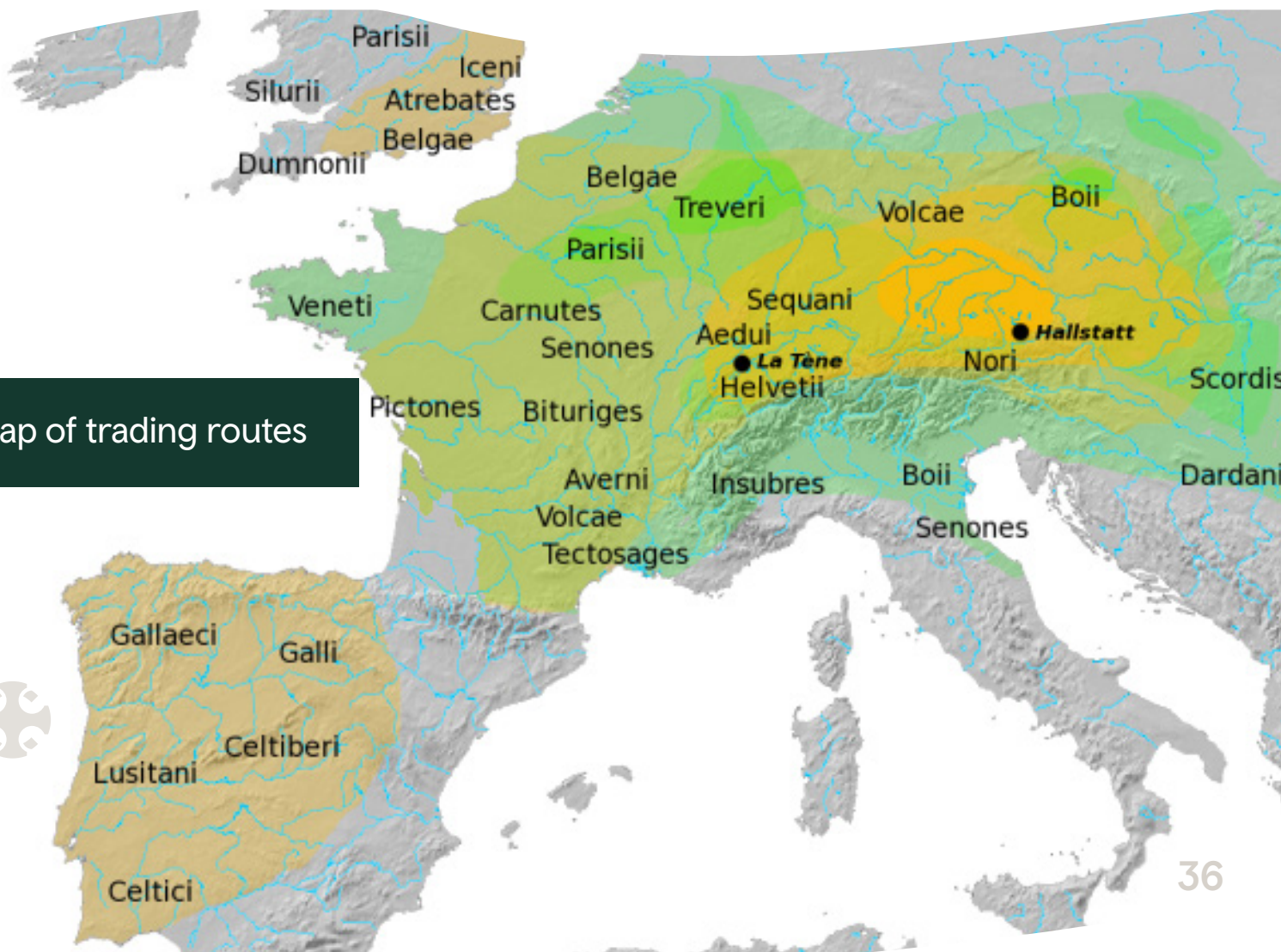
Enquiry, exploration and investigation inspire curiosity about the world, its past, present and future.



# What did the Romans learn from the Celts?


We've seen how the Romans influenced the Celts in Britain, but how about the other way around? The Romans actually liked quite a lot of things about the Celts.

It's surprising to us today but ancient Europe was a hub of activity with some very well-established trade routes with Celts and Romans selling their wares to each other.




Map of trading routes





I'll have two woven baskets, three hunting dogs, a box of salt and, oh a fur coat please!



That'll cost you two of your finest pots, a bag of figs and throw in some of that good wine too!

The Romans in turn traded wine, ivory, raw glass, silver, food and fine pottery with the Celts. Before coins were used as payment, they would just swap goods which was known as 'bartering'. The Celts of course liked to get as much as they could from the Romans!

Trade meant that the Romans and the Celts swapped ideas and could copy from each other in technology, weapons, art and religious practices.



# Chariots and Swords

The Romans learnt a lot about how to make chariots from the Celts. These were very useful in battle.

Boudicca and her chariot in battle





The Celts were skilled with horses in battle too and the Romans picked up some useful tips here as some of them served as Roman soldiers later on.

The Celts were also very skilled in metal working. They forged tools and weapons from iron and made beautiful gold jewellery. The Romans were certainly influenced by this and came to Britain because of the wealth of precious metals available here. The Romans even adopted the Celtic cavalry sword, the 'spatha' for battle.



The Mold gold cape (Clogyn Aur yr Wyddgrug) dating from 1900-1600 BC found near Mold, Flintshire





A 'spatha' sword - used by the Romans, inspired by the Celts



Cerrig y Drudion celtic crown - early example of Celtic art in Wales © National Museum of Wales

Celtic designs did not disappear with the Roman conquest, they still continued to influence art. A bronze saucepan found in Carmarthenshire, in Coygan, for example, was repaired in the 3rd century. But it wasn't decorated with a typical Roman design, but with a Celtic one.

Roman art, like Celtic art used animal heads - a lot!



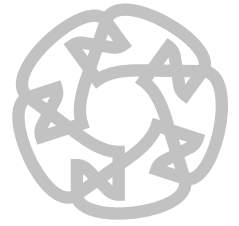
A Roman lion's head, possibly a furniture ornament found in Caerleon © People's Collection Wales



A celtic animal head of a horse or a bull found in Newport © People's Collection Wales







## Awesome Activity

Are you a Celtic fan or a Romans fan? In your groups, draw your own Roman or Celtic design that could represent your 'tribe'. You could use a suitable computer programme or freestyle by hand. Then share your designs and explain what your tribe is all about!

### *Expressive Arts:*

1. Responding and reflecting, both as artist and audience, is a fundamental part of learning in the expressive arts.
2. Creating combines skills and knowledge, drawing on the senses, inspiration and imagination

### *Science and Technology:*

Design thinking and engineering offer technical and creative ways to meet society's needs and wants.



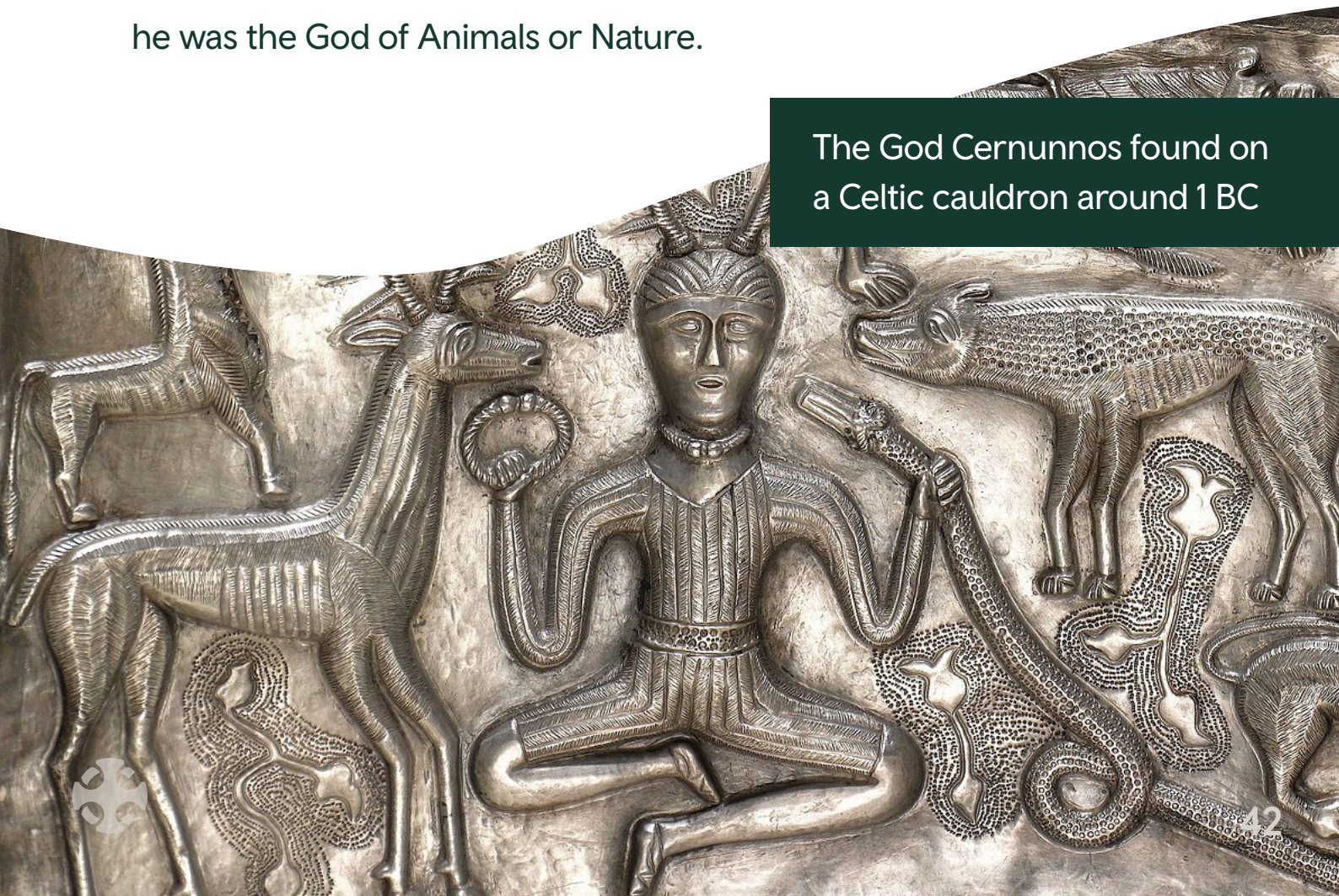
# Choose your Gods

Before the Romans came, the native Britons were pagans. This means that they believed in lots of different gods and spirits.

The Romans were pagans too, but they didn't believe in the same gods as the Britons, although sometimes there were similarities.

In ancient Celtic and Roman religions the god Cernunnos for example is shown with antlers like a deer. He was often found on ancient boats and some historians believe he was the God of Animals or Nature.

The God Cernunnos found on  
a Celtic cauldron around 1 BC





The Roman Goddess, Minerva was very similar to the Celtic goddess, Sulis. Minvera was the Roman goddess of war, wisdom and the crafts. Sulis was the goddess of healing. A shrine to Sulis Minerva at Bath shows this. The fact that Sulis is named first shows that she was the older god.



Image of Minerva,  
Roman goddess



Roman Minerva  
Head (Bath)

This is one of 88 engraved gemstones which were discovered in a large drain beneath the cold hall of the fortress baths in Caerleon in 1979. Experts think that it shows the goddess Minerva. The gemstone would have originally been set in a finger-ring.



# Making an offering

At first the Romans let the Britons worship their own gods, as long as they were respectful of the Roman ones too.

The Romans would make offerings to the God of War, Mars, for example to help them in battle. They would usually choose something valuable to offer to a statue of the God, like wine.

In Caerwent an altar was found in a house within the Roman town to 'Mars Ocleus' which is a mix of both Roman and British gods. It's very likely the owner had been a soldier. He would have put the altar in the house to 'pay back' a vow granted by the god.



The Caerwent altar

To the God Mars Ocleus. Aelius Augustinus Optio paid his vow.





He may have made a vow to have success in battle or recovery after an illness.

In Caerleon an altar was also found near the fort headquarters. They were also often found in temples. Incense was burnt in the top. It was believed that the smoke carried the message to heaven - in this case



to the god Jupiter, the Roman King of all gods - the god of the sky and thunder. There's a Celtic god, called 'Taranis', (remember taran means 'thunder' in Welsh), who was very similar to Jupiter.



A reproduction of the Caerleon altar

## Christianity takes over

Christianity arrived in Britain during the second century. At first only a few people became Christian. When Christianity started to get popular, the Romans banned it and punished people harshly. Indeed, the first Christian 'martyrs' in Wales, Julius and Aaron, were probably killed at Caerleon in about AD 304.

But by the beginning of the 4th century, more and more people were following Christianity including the Romans. By about AD 391, Christianity was the official Roman religion, but pagan beliefs were still popular in Britain.



# Where women ruled the roost

The Celts were more advanced than the Romans in some ways. In Rome the men were the bosses, whilst women weren't allowed to be leaders. But as we know from Celts like Boudicca in Unit 2, both women and men were able to rule tribes in their own right.

In fact, at all levels of Celtic society women appear to have greater freedom than in Rome when it came to marriage, business, owning land and in the home. The only exceptions were the Roman Empresses, the wives of the Emperors, who were very powerful.



# Awesome Activity

You are a Celt or a Roman. Film a vlog of yourself using a green screen app telling people about a typical day in your life. You could mention if your Mother or sister ruled the roost at home, or what you had to eat that day. You could share your opinion about your neighbours from the other group!

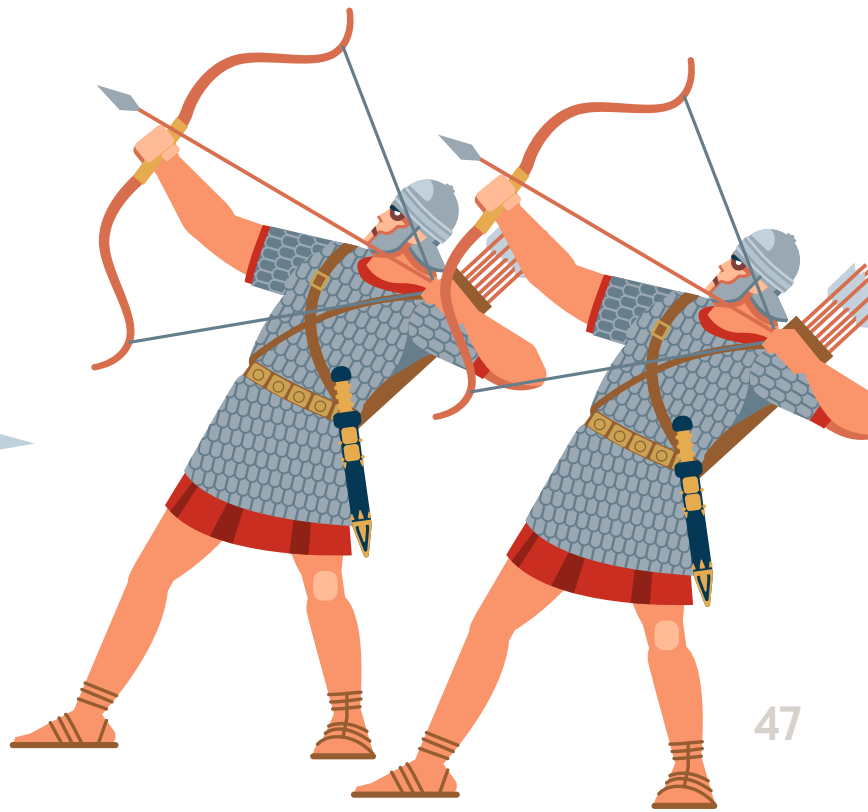


LANGUAGES, LITERACY  
& COMMUNICATION

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## Statements of What Matters

Expressing ourselves through languages is  
key to communication.





# Romans and Celts mix it up

We know that the Celts started using Latin words and within a few generations the Celtic and Roman ways of life became mixed. The Celts and Romans married each other, Roman soldiers retired from the army and became farmers and shopkeepers. The sons and grandsons of those who fought against the Romans even joined the Roman army.

## Awesome Activity

Your class is a Celtic tribe living in Wales. You have received news that a Roman Legion is soon scheduled to pass through your village. You need to impress the Romans by showing that you are not wild, stupid and primitive but proud, artistic and cultured people.

Prepare a presentation or an 'ad' for the Romans so that they will see what a great tribe you are, treat you well and co-operate with you. You could show them your fine foods, your great textiles or challenge them to a chariot race perhaps?



### Statements of What Matters

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



# Find out more

Here's some information to help you learn more about the Romans and Celts in Wales. Please note that Cadw is not responsible for the context of external websites.

- Watch this [CGI animation](#) by Cardiff University showing how archaeologists from the School of History found the remains of a port found in Caerleon. It's a very rare find in Roman Britain.
- Take a look at [these videos and resources](#) on the Hwb website which look at the daily life of the Celts in Wales.
- Look at these [Welsh language resources and videos](#) on the BBC Bitesize website about the lives of Iron Age Celts.
- Read [this ebook](#) by the National Museum of Wales on the Hwb website which describes some weird and wonderful feasts in Roman times.
- Learn more about the Romans in Powys by [watching these videos](#) on the Hwb website.

