

Roman Britain

Britain's early history is really a story of invasion and the way each invader changed the country. Long before William the Conqueror or the Vikings eyed up the riches of Britain, the Roman Empire was first to invade.

1. Invasion by Caesar

On the morning of the 23rd of August 55 BC, thousands of British warriors lined Walmer Beach in Kent. Facing them were a fleet of 89 ships carrying two legions of Roman infantry. So do you know who was at the head of this army?

It was one of the most famous men to have ever lived. The Roman general and future Emperor, Julius Caesar. Behind Caesar was the totally subjugated land of Gaul but defeating Britain was another matter. The ferocity of the British defence prevented Caesar's armies from gaining a foothold and Britain's identity, independence and way of life were preserved... for a little while!

For the following year, Caesar returned and defeated the British. Caesar made the local kings swear oaths of loyalty to Rome and to ensure this loyalty, their sons were taken hostage when the Romans left. From then on, the Romans began to establish small settlements in Britain, though it

would be another hundred years before Rome enacted another full-scale invasion and truly brought Britain under control. So how did that invasion take place?

2. Invasion by Claudius

The invasion came in 43 AD under the Roman Emperor Claudius, and to get an idea of the size of the invading force, we can make a comparison with another famous invasion 1,000 years later:

You see, when William the Conqueror invaded Britain in 1066, he brought around 7,000 troops with him. That might seem like a lot until you consider that Claudius's army had between 40 and 50 thousand!

200 years earlier when the Romans had first begun to spread beyond Italy by expanding into the Mediterranean, they were able to make use of already built large towns of more ancient civilizations like the Greeks and Carthaginians. No towns of comparable size existed in Britain before their arrival so they had to build their own as well as the roads to connect them, the aqueducts to quench them and the sewers to sanitize them. This was hugely important to the development of Britain and many of the roads, towns and infrastructure still exist today, including the most famous settlement, London.

Claudius faced fierce opposition from the native Britons, most notably from Queen Boudicca who in 60 AD captured the towns of Colchester London and St. Albans, killing 70,000 Roman citizens. The rebellion was brutally crushed but internal opposition was an issue that every Roman Emperor would face in Britain to some degree.

Let's complete the chart below

	Julius Caesar	Claudius
Time of Invasion		
Number of Soldiers		
Local Resistance		
Actions Taken Before Departure		

3. The Hadrian's Wall

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So how did the Romans keep the population under control? Well, one Roman Emperor, Hadrian, employed the same tactics as China's Emperor Qin Shi Huang 400 years earlier. You see, while most of England had succumbed to Roman rule, the native Scottish people were proving to be impossible to control. Eventually, Hadrian decided that Scotland was too poor in resources and too abundant in hostile locals to be deemed worth the effort. Therefore, in 122 AD he ordered the construction of what is

now known as Hadrian's Wall which stretched 73 miles from the West Coast of England all the way to the East Coast. This became the established border between Roman Britain and ancient Scotland and was the longest protected frontier in the entire Roman Empire with 10,000 soldiers posted on the wall.

- Why was Hadrian's wall built?
- How did Hadrian describe the Scottish?