

Roman Britain: Imprint of Empire [B2]

I Romani hanno governato gran parte della Gran Bretagna per tre secoli e mezzo. La loro eredità è presente in tutti i contesti della società, dalle infrastrutture alla lingua.

When Claudius became Roman emperor in 41 [AD](#) he needed [to strengthen](#) his image and his [uncertain grip](#) on the Empire. The first Roman emperor to be born outside Italy, childhood illness had left him with a [limp](#) and slight [deafness](#), and he was [looked down](#) on by his family. However, Claudius was a brilliant strategist. His invasion of Britain in 43 [AD](#) consolidated his power at home, while gaining access to Britain's rich natural resources and subjugating an apparently uncivilised people.

ENGINEERS AND ARCHITECTS

Over the next forty-five years, the Roman army conquered much of present-day England and Wales and made incursions into territory now in Scotland. First-hand [accounts](#) of the invasion are virtually non-existent, with the most frequently-cited document written over a century and a half later by the Greek historian Cassius Dio. There is, however, an abundance of archaeological evidence. The Romans were fine engineers and architects who, with a [workforce](#) of slaves, built infrastructure and edifices that have stood the test of time.

A NETWORK OF [ROADS](#)

Soon after the invasion, the Romans [set about](#) constructing new roads that would allow troops to move efficiently from ports to the most important military bases. As Roman power expanded across Britain, so did the road network. As many as ten major Roman routes form the basis of modern infrastructure. Perhaps the most famous is Watling Street, a historic route that connects Dover on the southeast coast to London before continuing northwest to Wroxeter, near the Welsh border. The Romans reinforced and

paved the route and it continued to be used throughout the Middle Ages and beyond. Today, these routes are major roads, and the name Watling Street still appears at various points.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Iron Age Britons were mostly farmers and one the greatest changes the Romans brought about was the development of towns. Military bases gradually became settlements with houses, civic buildings and, crucially, markets for produce from the country. Local farmers became involved in civic life as they came to pay taxes or sell their goods in the forum and basilica complex that lay at the centre of every town. In this way they became exposed to the Roman way of life, eating Roman food in the local taverns and even visiting the public baths. The 3rd century saw a proliferation of small market towns, villages and villas. Roman-made objects became common in even the poorest rural settlements.

CHRISTIANITY

In 312 AD, Emperor Constantine the Great converted to Christianity and the new religion was widely adopted in Britain. This started a golden age of villa building, especially in the south-west, that lasted fifty years or more. Although a series of Barbarian invasions in the latter part of the 4th century signalled the end of the Roman presence in Britain, their building works and artefacts remained for centuries to come. A surprisingly large number of Roman ruins can still be visited today.

Glossary

- **uncertain grip** = incerta presa
- **workforce** = forza lavoro
- **Iron Age** = età del ferro
- **produce** = prodotti agricoli
- **AD** = dopo Cristo (anno Domini)
- **deafness** = sordità
- **accounts** = racconti
- **paved** = pavimentare
- **to strengthen** = rafforzare
- **looked down** = guardare con disprezzo
- **set about** = cominciare a
- **settlements** = insediamenti
- **latter part** = la seconda metà
- **limp** = zoppaggine
- **brought about** = introdurre, apportare
- **goods** = merci
- **lay** = trovarsi