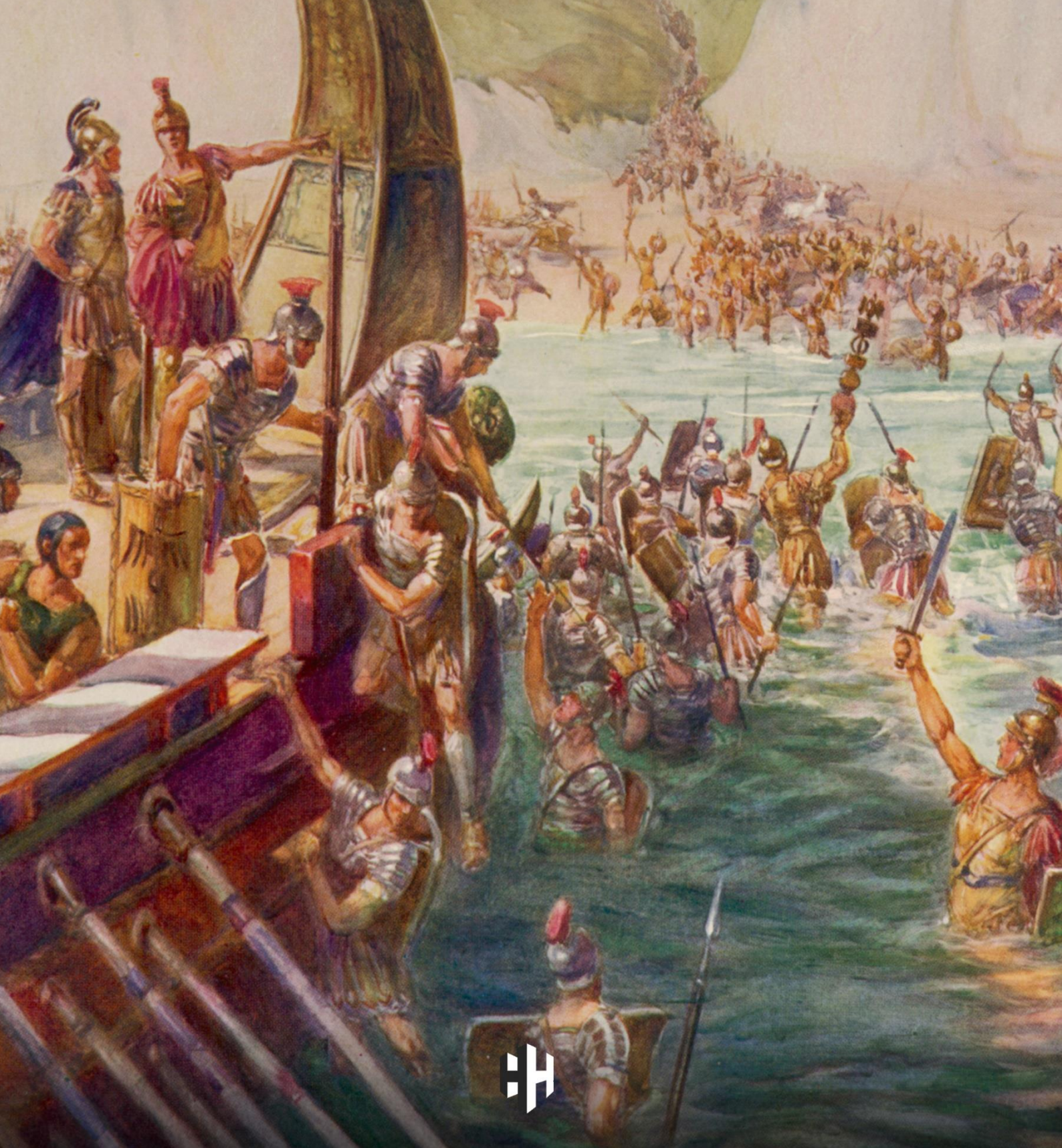


THE ROMAN INVASION OF BRITAIN



ARTICLES FROM HISTORYHIT.com

M. SKELTON

“So what have the Romans ever done for us?” Well, quite a lot. Their legacy can be seen all around us.

Stunning remains of monumental architecture can be seen across the British Isles: from excavated Roman villas like Fishbourne in southern England, to Hadrian’s Wall and its many milecastles stretching across Cumbria and Northumberland, to the well-preserved legionary fort layout at Ardoch in central Scotland. Their road networks and urban landscapes have formed the basis for many key cities and transport routes that dominate Britain today. Rome’s impact remains a fundamental part of Keystage 2 education. Hollywood films and popular historical fiction, that base their storylines around this far-flung region of the Roman Empire, are as popular as ever.

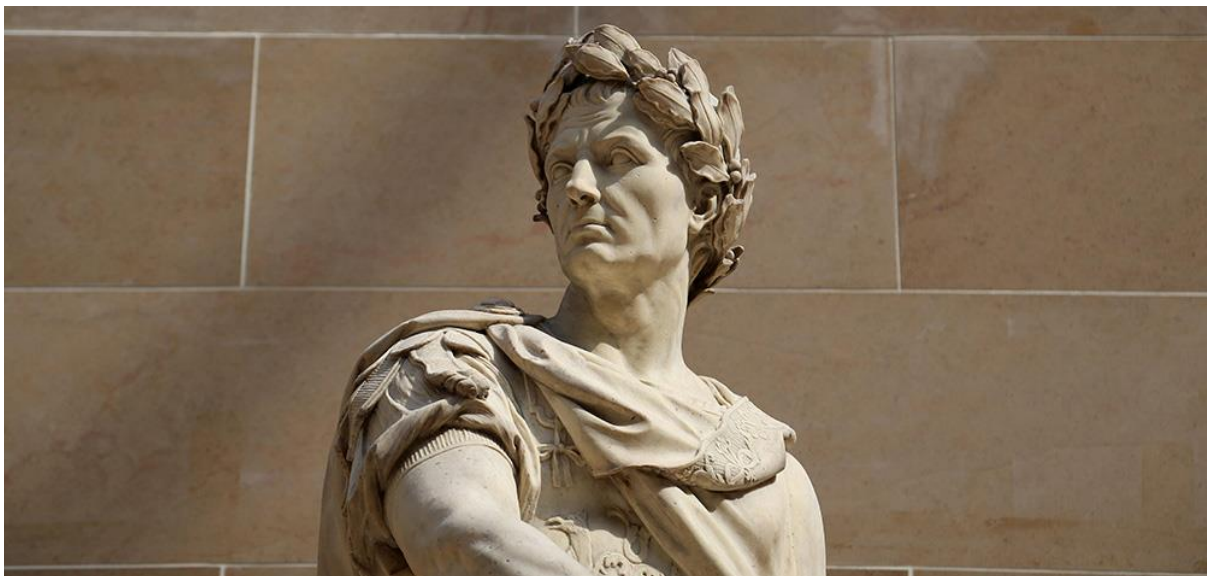
Rome’s relationship with Britain continues to fascinate historians, archaeologists and enthusiasts to this day. Mysteries remain abundant. Archaeological discoveries continue to reveal exciting new information about this period, providing a clearer picture not only about major figures and events in our island’s history, but also about everyday life and how the native Iron Age British population adapted to the Roman occupation.

From Caesar first setting eyes on this ‘unknown’ island’s shoreline to the fall of the Brigantes Queen Cartimandua this eBook tells the tale of the Roman invasion of Britain. Detailed articles explain key topics, edited from various History Hit resources. Included in this eBook are articles written for History Hit by historians specialising in Roman Britain, as well as edited transcripts of History Hit podcasts featuring archaeologist Dr Simon Elliott.

You can access all these articles on historyhit.com. *The Roman Invasion of Britain* was compiled by Tristan Hughes.

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A statue of the Roman statesman Julius Caesar, whose two expeditions to Britain firmly placed the island on the Roman map.

The Roman Arrival

Julius Caesar's Triumphs and Failures in Britain

History Hit Podcast with Simon Elliott

Julius Caesar never added Britain to his expanding Roman conquests, but he did have his eye on the island. His two expeditions laid the foundations for the final Roman invasion in 43 AD and provide us with some of the first written accounts of Britain.

Britain before Rome

The Britons had been interacting with their continental neighbours for centuries before Caesar's arrival. They had been integrated since the re-population of mainland Britain in around 9,000 BC.

From Britain's re-population at the end of the last Ice Age all the way through to the Roman period, the island maintained strong connections with cultural developments taking place on the continent.

Greek and Phoenician (a North African and Middle Eastern civilisation) explorers and sailors had visited. Tribes from Gaul and modern Belgium had made expeditions and settled in the south. Tin resources had brought traders, and as Rome expanded north, Italian wine started to appear in southern Britain.

The Britons lived by agriculture: arable farming in the south, grazing animals further north. They were a tribal society ruled by local kings. Probably a mix of Celtic peoples, their language was certainly related to modern Welsh.

A great unknown

Just prior to the arrival of the Romans, the British culture was Late Iron Age. But to the Romans, Britain remained a great unknown. They knew about Gaul because of their Mediterranean connections; but they knew very little about Britain.

Even as Caesar began to conquer Gaul in the 50s BC, Britain remained a forbidding land for the Romans. It was The North in 'Game of Thrones' about which they knew nothing.

This mythical place lay across fearsome *Oceanus*, as they called the English Channel and the North Sea. It was very different to the comparatively placid *Mare Nostrum*: the Mediterranean.

The first references we have to Britain were from merchants and geographers in the 5th, 4th, 3rd-centuries BC. Again, they're only passing references. One famous geographer called Pytheas circumnavigated, it seems, the main isles of Britain.

It's from him that we get the name of Britain, because he said that Britain was populated by the *Prettani*, the 'painted people'. The name *Prettani* comes down to us today as the name Britain.

Why did Caesar invade?

The Romans wanted to conquer Britain for a variety of reasons. Initially, these can be found in the context of Julius Caesar's conquest of Gaul, which began in around 60 BC and ran through to around 52 BC.

Firstly, Caesar knew it was a place of refuge for those fleeing his conquest of Gaul. It was a troublesome place to the northwest of his campaigning area which he wanted to pacify.

Secondly, Caesar knew that Britain was famous for some of its exports: mineral resources like tin, lead, iron, silver, and gold. It was also a place known for exporting slaves, hunting dogs (e.g. mastiffs), woollen goods, and produce (e.g. wheat). So there was wealth to be had in Britain, and Caesar was always interested in making money.

Finally, this was Julius Caesar, a man obsessed with glory. A man who touched the statue of Alexander the Great and wept because he hadn't, at the same age, conquered what Alexander had by that time.

Going to Britain, this mythical, far-fetched mysterious place across terrifying *Oceanus*, was a giant step and an enormous gamble which no Roman general had dared before.

So Caesar invaded for, initially, a strategic reason: it was a place of refuge for those fermenting trouble in Gaul. But it was also for wealth, and it was also for glory.

The invasions

During Caesar's conquest of Gaul he made two incursions to Britain.

They should not be seen as full invasions; they were armed reconnaissances in 55 and 54 BC, specifically in the context of Caesar's campaigns in Gaul.

Both invasions are manifestations of two key aspects of Roman society and culture.

The first is grit: that determination to always come back. Caesar came in 55 BC, he failed, so he came back again in 54 BC. The second aspect is to learn from your mistakes. In Caesar's second invasion in 54 BC, he learned from his mistakes.

Caesar had initially intended to cross to Britain in 56 BC, but troubles in Gaul and Germania caused him to delay the expedition for the following year.

The first invasion

Despite major military commitments in Gaul and across the Rhine in Germania, Julius Caesar made his first British expedition in 55 BC. Gaius Volusenus, the first Roman soldier to see Britain, allowed a single warship to scout the Kent coast for five days.

Fearing an invasion, some southern British rulers had crossed the Channel offering to submit to Rome. Caesar had sent them home, telling them to advise other tribes to adopt the same attitude.

With 80 ships carrying two legions and with further naval support, in the early hours of 23 August 55 BC Caesar set sail for Britain.

A lack of preparation

Unusually for Caesar his 55 BC invasion of Britain seems to have been poorly planned. He didn't do a very good reconnaissance and appeared rather unprepared.

For example, Caesar was advised to find a landing place on the beaches beneath the White Cliffs of Dover, which is not a very sensible place to stage a landing. All your opponents can be standing on top of the cliffs, throwing rocks, throwing javelins,

throwing spears, firing slingshots, shooting arrows down at you. It was, in short, a very poor place to mount an amphibious landing.

Secondly, Caesar's force proved to be too small; and crucially, his cavalry didn't arrive.

So his force arrives off the coast of Dover, and the Britons have been alerted by their Gallic friends that the Romans are coming. The White Cliffs of Dover are swarming with native Britons, and they're ready for the Romans. Caesar realises that his plan won't work.

He therefore heads northwards to where he should have been advised to land in the first place, where there are very long stretches of shallow beaches. His fleet arrives, but the Britons follow them mile for mile so by the time the Romans arrive off the beaches, the natives are ready for them again.

We shall fight them on the beaches

The Romans now must perform that most difficult of military operations: a contested amphibious assault. Again they almost don't succeed. This is all written by Caesar. It's worth remembering a lot of what we know about Caesar is what he wrote about himself.

Caesar tells us that the *aquilifer* of his 10th legion, the standard-bearer with a golden eagle standard, had to jump into the shallows from his galley to encourage the rest of the legionaries to follow him.

If this took place, then it worked, because the legions ultimately land, fight the Britons and make their way to shore. The Britons flee.

But Caesar has no cavalry, so he can't pursue them. He builds a marching camp and stays close to it for the rest of the 55 BC invasion. Mainly because without cavalry he can't reconnoitre the way forward.

Meanwhile the stormy English Channel was playing havoc with Caesar's ships. Sensing weakness, the British attacked again but were unable to defeat the encamped Romans. Unable to make further progress Caesar returned to Gaul with hostages from two British tribes, but without making any lasting gains.

Julius Caesar's opposed landing during his first venture to Britain in 55 BC is the only time in history, bar the much smaller Battle of Deal in 1495, that an 'English' army has fought an invader on the beaches.

The second invasion

In 54 BC, when Caesar comes back, he's learned from his mistakes. His force is much bigger: it's 5 legions, 25,000 men. He's brought cavalry with him this time. He's also using ships which are now built with a view to operation in northern waters. The force is big enough to deter any Britons from opposing the landing. Caesar marches inland.

Meanwhile a large force of Britons unites under the leadership of the Celtic chieftain Cassivellaunus. He realises that his chariots (which the Romans are not used to) and local knowledge can be used to harass the invaders. Nonetheless, Caesar manages to cross the Thames.

Ultimately Caesar fights his foe to a standstill near their capital. Cassivellaunus' tribal enemies, including his own son, come over to Caesar's side and direct him to the warlord's camp. A diversionary attack on the Roman beach-head by Cassivellaunus' allies fails and a negotiated surrender is agreed.

This time, Caesar can return to Gaul victorious. He doesn't overstay; he had rebellions in Gaul to deal with and took his entire force back over the Channel. Both incursions into Britain were more like reconnaissances. He can go back to Gaul with tribute, the promise of more tribute in the future, and with hostages. From Caesar's perspective, it's job done.

From that point, Britain is on the Roman map.

A first account

Caesar's two visits were an important window into British life, largely unrecorded before then. Most of what he wrote was second hand information, as he himself never travelled far into Britain.

He recorded a temperate climate on a 'triangular' island. He described the tribes as similar to the barbarian Gauls, with *Belgae* settlements on the south coast. It was illegal to eat hare, cock and goose, he said, but fine to breed them for pleasure.

The interior was less civilised than the coast, according to Caesar. Warriors painted themselves blue with woad, growing their hair long and shaving their bodies, but wearing moustaches. Wives were shared. Britain was described as the home of the Druidic religion. The skills of their charioteers were praised, allowing warriors to hit and run in battle.

His accounts of agricultural prosperity may have been slanted to justify returning for a valuable prize.

Facts About Caesar in Britain

1. He introduced Britain to the world and to history

Caesar never achieved a full invasion of Britain, but his two expeditions to the islands mark an important turning point. His writings on Britain and the Britons are among the very first and provide a wide-ranging view of the islands.

Recorded British history is reckoned to start with the successful Roman takeover in 43 AD, something Caesar set the grounds for.

2. A later source claims he used an exotic beast to cross the Thames

The later Macedonian strategist Polyaeus claimed that Caesar was able to cross the Thames by using an elephant to devastating effect: scaring away the local tribes (who had never set eyes on an elephant before).

This, however, almost certainly appears a mix up with the elephants that accompanied the Emperor Claudius on his invasion nearly 100 years later.

3. We know very little about Cassivellaunus

Despite leading the defence against Caesar during his second invasion, the story of Cassivellaunus is shrouded in mystery. He later became part of British legend, appearing in Geoffrey Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain as 'Cassibelanus'

After Caesar

Once the Romans arrived in Britain there was to be no turning back. Alliances had been struck and client kingdoms established. Trade with the Roman-occupied continent soon increased.

Caesar's successor Augustus intended three times (34, 27 and 25 BC) to complete the job, but the invasions never got off the ground. Britain continued to supply tribute and raw materials to the Empire while Roman luxuries headed the other way.

Caligula's planned invasion of 40 AD also failed. He probably built 900 ships on the northwest coast of Gaul. He also stocked warehouses with all the materials needed to invade Britain. But the invasion failed to come to fruition. Accounts of its farcical end may have been coloured by the 'mad' emperor's unpopularity.

Caligula reputedly set his legionaries to collecting seashells when he called off the invasion.

Emperor Claudius in 43 AD had no such problems, though some of his troops balked at the idea of travelling beyond the limits of the known world.

The Claudian Invasion of Britain

History Hit Podcast with Simon Elliott

So we come to AD 43, and the ill-favoured Claudius. He only became emperor because the Praetorian Guard wanted somebody they could use as a puppet after Caligula had been assassinated. But Claudius turns out to be far greater an emperor than they were expecting.

He looks around and thinks, what can he do to make his name as a great Roman emperor? His answer: the conquest of Britain. He has the means already; he's got Caligula's ships and stocked warehouses.

Britain gave Claudius a shot at an easy military victory and when Verica, a British ally of the Romans, was deposed he had an excuse. He ordered Aulus Plautius north with around 40,000 men. 20,000 of those were legionaries, who were Roman citizens and the best troops.

They probably sailed from what is now Boulogne, landing at Richborough in eastern Kent in late summer AD 43.

900 ships were constructed to carry Emperor Claudius' huge invasion force of 40,000 legionaries and auxilia from northwestern Gaul to Britain in 43 AD.

The British had retained decent relations with the Empire, but an invasion was another matter entirely. A concerted resistance emerged led by Togodumnus and Caratacus, both of the Catuvellauni tribe. Gathering an army, they prepared to fight the invaders.

Clash at the Medway

The key engagement of the Claudian invasion of Britain in AD 43 under Plautius was what is now known as the Battle of the Medway.

The primary sources tell us this was a river crossing battle, which we think today was probably on the River Medway, near Aylesford to the south of Rochester. You can imagine the Roman legionary spearhead marching east to west along the slopes of the North Downs until they reach the River Medway.

It's there, on the western bank, that the native Britons are waiting for them in force. There takes place a dramatic battle, a battle the Romans nearly lose. It takes them two days to win.

On the first day the Romans try and force the river, but they fail. They therefore have to retreat to their marching camp to lick their wounds, pursued by the Britons who are throwing javelins and firing slings at them.

But Plautius is an experienced general. He determines what he's going to do: he's going to flank the Britons overnight.

So he gathers an auxiliary unit of Batavians from the Rhine Delta who are used to swimming, and who allegedly are famous for being able to swim in armour. He sends them to the north, just immediately below Rochester.

They cross the River Medway to the north of the British camp, and in the early hours of the following day, circle around behind the native Britons. They attack the British horses (that pull their chariots) in their corrals by hamstringing them. This causes panic in the British forces.

As dawn breaks, Plautius orders his troops to fight their way over the river, but it's still a hard fight. Ultimately they succeed at the point of the *gladius* (sword), and the Britons break and flee. The Romans pursue, chasing the fleeing Britons north to the Thames.

There they fight another battle, succeed in crossing the River, and then fight all the way up to the capital of the Catuvellauni at *Camulodunum* (modern Colchester).

Somewhere between the Thames crossing and their arrival at *Camulodunum*, Claudius joins Plautius. Together they reach *Camulodunum* and the native Britons, led by the Catuvellauni, submit. With all the tribes fighting the Romans surrendering at that time, the province of Britannia is declared.

Interestingly, Claudius brings elephants and camels with him to shock the native Britons. It succeeds.

The Roman Pharos (lighthouse) in Dover is the oldest building in Britain still standing. It is 24 metres tall and was constructed soon after Claudius' successful invasion (43).

The legacy of the Claudian invasion

Claudius' invasion is very important in Britain's history. Some of the events in the conquest period set in stone aspects of Britain which still impact the country that we live in today.

For example, the conquest of Britain took far longer than the conquest of Gaul (about eight years). Gaul, given that Caesar had probably killed a million Gauls and enslaved a million more, proved far easier to integrate into the Roman Empire than Britain did.

The campaigns of conquest from when Plautius landed in the Claudian invasion took far longer: AD 43 to the mid to later AD 80s, over 40 years. So it's a far more difficult undertaking and, therefore, aspects of it resonate.

Unconquered lands

The far north of Scotland, for example, was never conquered in these campaigns, even though there were two major attempts to do so in the history of Roman Britain. So we still have the 'dividing line' between Scotland and England existing today because of this differing experience of Roman Britain.

Ireland was never invaded by the Romans, even though there was a plan to invade. So again the 'political settlements' of the British Isles, with Ireland and England and Scotland being separate in some way, shape, or form, can be linked all the way back to that period.

More importantly, because the campaigns of conquest took so long and were so difficult, Britain became the wild west of the Roman Empire.

Expanding the province

In AD 43, the province is probably only the southeast of Britain. However, the Romans knew they would have to conquer far more of Britain to make the invasion of this new province worth its huge monetary expense.

So, very quickly, the breakout campaigns begin. Vespasian, for example, conquers the southwest of Britain through to the late AD 40s, founding Exeter, Gloucester, and Cirencester on the way.

It was also during these campaigns that the Romans establish Lincoln as a legionary fortress; later they establish York. The province of Britannia starts expanding, and each governor comes over with a brief from the emperor to expand it further.

Celtic Queens

Expansion proved an arduous process. Britain was a tribal country and each tribe had to be defeated, usually by siege of their hill fort last redoubts. Slowly Roman military power headed west and north and by about 47 AD a line from the Severn to the Humber marked the boundary of Roman control.

Caratacus, Claudius' initial foe, had fled to Wales and helped inspire fierce resistance there, finally being handed over to his enemies by the British Brigantes tribe. Emperor Nero ordered further action in 54 AD and the invasion of Wales continued.

The massacre of the druids on Mona (Anglesey) in 60 AD was an important landmark, but Boudicca's rebellion sent the legions scurrying back to the southeast, and Wales was not fully subdued until 76 AD.

Boudicca's Bloody Revolt

In 60 / 61 AD Britain's most famous Celtic Queen led a bloody revolt against Rome, determined to evict the occupiers from Britain by the spear. Her name was Boudicca, a name that now sits among the most recognised in the whole of British history.

It was her revolt that almost brought the Roman province of Britannia to its knees.

Boudicca was the wife of Prasutagus, the Iceni king and an ally of Rome. During Prasutagus' reign the Iceni had been a client state of the Romans, centred in northern East Anglia (north Norfolk). The Romans had never bothered to conquer this part of Britain because the Iceni were considered friends of Rome.

This all changed, however, in 60 / 61 AD.

*Boudicca has been known by several other names through history:
Bunduca, Boadicea, Bodicca, Boudica and Boudiga for instance.*

Death of the King

In his will Prasutagus had set out that his daughters would inherit his kingdom, co-ruling alongside the Emperor Nero. But the Romans ignored this. They wanted to seize Iceni wealth.

When Prasutagus died in 60 / 61, the Romans wrapped the Iceni Kingdom into the province of Roman Britain. Throughout Iceni territory, they committed mass ill-treatment of both the native nobility and the common folk. Lands were pillaged and homes were plundered, sparking great resentment among all levels of the tribal hierarchy towards the Roman soldiers.

Iceni royalty did not avoid the Roman scourge. Prasutagus' two daughters, supposedly meant for joint rule with Rome, were raped. Boudicca, the widowed Iceni queen, was flogged.

According to Tacitus:

The whole country was considered as a legacy bequeathed to the plunderers. The relations of the deceased king were reduced to slavery.

The injustice Boudicca, her daughters and the rest of her tribe suffered at Roman hands sparked rebellion. She became a figurehead for revolt against Roman rule.

Citing her family's mistreatment she harangued her subjects and neighbouring tribes, encouraging them to rise up and join her in forcing the Romans out of Britain by the spear.

Past Roman oppression against these tribes ensured that Boudicca's rallying cry met with much approval; very quickly the ranks of her rebellion swelled, becoming this enormous conflagration across the entirety of the southeast, down to the line of the Thames.

Interestingly, the Cantiaci in Kent didn't join in. But certainly, the Iceni, the Catuvellauni, and the Trinovantes in the southeast above the line of the Thames rallied behind Boudicca and her revolt became a cataclysmic rebellion going from north to south through East Anglia.

What did the revolt achieve?

The first stop for these 100,000 warriors (within a body of 250,000 individuals) was Colchester, which the Emperor Claudius had set up as the province’s capital after the AD 43 invasion.

Known for its large population of Roman veterans and epitomising Roman overlordship, Boudicca’s soldiers vented their full fury at the largely-unprotected colony. No-one was spared. They murdered everyone who had taken refuge within the Temple of Claudius.

This was a terror campaign with a deadly message to all Romans in Britain: get out or die.

After also sacking London, Boudicca and her horde followed the line of Watling Street up to St. Albans (*Verulamium*), torching that too.



Watling Street (highlighted above) was the great military trunk road of Roman Britain. It went through Richborough, Rochester, London and St Albans, to the Welsh Marches, and then north to Chester or south to Caerleon in southeast Wales.

Why Was the Battle of Watling Street So Significant?

History Hit Podcast with Simon Elliott

The key battle of the Boudiccan Revolt takes place somewhere to the northwest of St Albans, along Watling Street. Boudicca has already marched all the way from East Anglia, leaving a trail of destruction in her wake.

She's seeking an engagement because she knows if she wins, it's the end of Roman Britain. The province will fall.

The British governor, Paulinus, has been fighting in Anglesey in Wales. He also knows, as soon as he hears word of the revolt, that the province is in danger. So he hotfoots it down Watling Street. Paulinus has probably got about 10,000 men with him: one legion (the 14th), bits of other legions (the 20th) + auxiliaries.

He gets to High Cross in Leicestershire where the Fosseway meets Watling Street. He sends word down to *Legio II Augusta* who are based in Exeter and he says, "Come and join us". But the third in command of the legions is in charge there, and he refuses. He later commits suicide as he's so ashamed of his actions.

So Paulinus has only these 10,000 men to face Boudicca. He's marching down Watling Street and Boudicca is marching northwest up Watling Street, and they meet in a big engagement.

Think of the numbers. Boudicca has got 100,000 warriors and Paulinus has only got 10,000 troops. The odds are hugely against the Romans. But Paulinus fights the perfect battle.

Quantity vs quality

He chooses the ground spectacularly well in a bowl-shaped valley. Paulinus deploys his troops with the legionaries in the middle and the auxiliaries on the flank at the head of the valley. He has woods on his flanks to protect his sides, and he puts the marching camp at his rear. This helps to negate his foe's numerical advantage: any attacking force would be funnelled in by the terrain.

Boudicca comes into the bowl-shaped valley. She can't control her troops and they attack. They get forced into a compressed mass; they can't use their weapons. The ill-

equipped warriors become sitting targets for their enemy. Roman *pila* (javelins) rain down on their ranks, inflicting terrible casualties. Paulinus seizes the momentum. His foes disabled, he forms his legionaries into wedges and they launch a savage assault.

They get their *gladii* (short swords) out and their *scutum* shields ready. The *pila* are thrown at point-blank range. The native Britons fall in rank after rank. They're compressed, they can't fight.

The *gladius* starts doing its murderous job. It creates hideous wounds and soon it becomes a slaughter. A cavalry charge puts to flight the last remnants of organised resistance.

According to Tacitus:

...some reports put the British dead at not much below eighty thousand, with roughly four hundred Roman soldiers killed.

Ultimately, the Romans are fabulously successful. The revolt ends; Boudicca commits suicide along with her daughters. The Roman province of Britain is saved; Paulinus is the hero of the day.

In the 1850s Prince Albert commissioned Thomas Thornycroft to create a new bronze sculptural group depicting Boudicca and her daughters. The statue can still be viewed today at Westminster.

Facts About Boudicca's Revolt

1. Boudicca's forces massacred the famous Ninth Legion

Though the Ninth Legion is best remembered for its later disappearance, in 61 AD it played an active role opposing Boudicca's revolt.

Upon hearing of the sacking of *Camulodonum*, a contingent of the Ninth Legion – stationed at *Lindum Colonia* (modern day Lincoln) – marched south to come to the aid. It was not to be.

The legion was annihilated. En-route Boudicca and her large army overwhelmed and destroyed almost the entire relief force. No infantrymen were spared: only the Roman commander and his cavalry managed to escape the slaughter.

2. History has provided her a fiery pre-battle speech

Tacitus provides her a glorious – if not certainly fictitious – speech before the decisive battle:

"This is not the first time that the Britons have been led to battle by a woman. But now I do not come to boast the pride of a long line of ancestry, nor even to recover my kingdom and the plundered wealth of my family. I take the field, like the meanest among you, to assert the cause of public liberty, and to seek revenge for my body seamed with ignominious stripes, and my two daughters infamously raped.

From the pride and arrogance of the Romans nothing is sacred; all are subject to violation; the old endure the scourge, and the virgins are deflowered. But the vindictive gods are now at hand.

A Roman legion dared to face us warlike Britons: with their lives they paid for their rashness; those who survived the carnage of that day, lie poorly hid behind their entrenchments, meditating nothing but how to save themselves by an ignominious flight.

From the din of preparation, and the shouts of our army, the Romans, even now, shrink back with terror. What will be their case when the assault begins?

Look round, and view your numbers. Behold the proud display of warlike spirits, and consider the motives for which we draw the avenging sword! On this spot we must either conquer, or die with glory. There is no alternative. Though a woman, my resolution is fixed: the men, if they please, may survive with infamy, and live in bondage."

3. We are still unsure of the battlefield's exact location

Multiple theories abound to this day about the battle's exact location. Hopefully time will reveal the truth.

Cartimandua - Why Does History Overlook Her?

By Jill Armitage

Mention the name Cartimandua and people look blank, yet Cartimandua is the first documented Queen to have ruled part of Britain in her own right.

She was queen of the great Brigante tribe whose land, according to the geographer Ptolemy writing in the 2nd century AD, extended to both seas – east to west, and reached as far north as Birren in Dumfriesshire and as far south as the River Trent in south Derbyshire.

Cartimandua's Brigante tribe was the single largest Celtic kingdom in Britain.

The Romans arrive

Cartimandua is largely unknown, yet she was a central player in the drama of the Roman annexation of Britain in the 1st century AD. At that time Britain was made up of 33 tribal groupings – each with its own individual kingdom. This, however, was a time of immense change, the merging of the old and new worlds, the new millennium.

In 43 AD the Emperor Claudius' general, Aulus Plautius, invaded Britain and called the natives Celts or Celtae coming from the Greek – *Keltoi*, meaning 'barbarian'.

The Celts were not necessarily barbarians; they were inestimably brave and had a reputation as ferocious warriors, painting themselves with a blue dye called woad and hurling themselves without fear into the conflict.

What they lacked in military skill they made up for with bloodthirsty ferocity, but sadly the Celts were no match for the well-disciplined Roman army.

Cartimandua and her elders watched and waited as the Roman legions invaded the south. She called together other tribal leaders and they debated whether to unite and go south to fight or wait.

If the Roman legions defeated the Cantiaci and the Catuvellauni, would they be content with the richer land and the wealth of the more compliant southern kingdoms, or would they turn their attention further north?

The Roman authorities believed in their 'right by might' – that lesser people should be subject to them or exterminated, and the tribal lands of defiant tribes who resisted the Romans were scorched, making them unfit for habitation.

The Roman leader Agricola was praised for the almost total slaughter of the Ordovician people in Wales and news of his thoroughness travelled before him.

Averting bloodshed

Queen Cartimandua looked for signs from the gods, but the gods did not stop the Roman armies advancing north. The sheer number of troops and the splendour of their arms and armour as thousands of men marching across the countryside in orderly columns would have been an impressive, though terrifying sight to their enemies.

By 47 AD Agricola and his vast armies were on the very edge of Brigante territory. They had fought their way north and a new Roman province lay south of the Trent-Severn line, its boundary marked by the Fosse Way.

Agricola was ready to bring the weight of the Roman armies into Brigantia, but Queen Cartimandua was a strong, practical leader. Rather than fighting the invading forces, she negotiated to preserve her people's tribal independence without bloodshed.

The Brigantian tribes of Derbyshire, Lancashire, Cumberland and Yorkshire united to become a client kingdom of Rome which meant that they were controlled by diplomacy not war. Cartimandua's collaboration would have allowed her to administer her own area as long as tributes were paid to Rome, recruits were provided for the army and slaves were always available.

Unlike Boudicca, wife of King Prasutagus, Cartimandua was regent of the Brigante tribe in her own right.

Enemies of Rome

It became a practical Claudian policy to have pro-Roman kingdoms flanking its boundaries, but sadly not everyone agreed with Cartimandua's compromise and the greatest anti-Roman hostility for Cartimandua came from her husband Venutius.

In 48 AD Roman troops from Cheshire had to be sent into Brigantia to shore up Cartimandua's position. Her loyalty to Rome was tested to the full when in 51 AD Caratacus, the former leader of the Catuvellauni tribe, fled into Brigantia seeking political asylum after military defeat by the Romans.

Unlike Cartimandua, Caratacus had chosen to fight the Romans right from the start but fearing for the safety of her people, Cartimandua handed him over to the Romans. Her enemies considered this an act of treachery, but the Roman authorities rewarded Cartimandua with great wealth and favours.

Venutius, Cartimandua's husband organised a palace coup and again Roman troops were sent to restore Cartimandua to the throne. According to the Roman writer Tacitus,

Cartimandua lost a husband but preserved her kingdom.

Venutius takes the kingdom

Throughout the 50s and 60's the Roman legions were hovering on the borders of Brigantia poised for intervention in support of Cartimandua, then in 69 AD another Brigantian crisis broke. Queen Cartimandua fell for the charms of Vellocatus, her husband's armour bearer. The Roman writers had a field day and her reputation suffered.

A furious Venutius organised another coup as revenge against his erstwhile wife who fled to the protection of Rome. The anti-Roman party triumphed and Venutius was now undisputed leader of the Brigante tribe and bitterly anti-Roman. It was only then that the Romans made the decision to invade, conquer and absorb Brigantia.

Despite all Cartimandua's efforts, Brigantia became part of the vast Roman empire and the armies went on to conquer the north as far as the Scottish Highlands.

Sadly, the courageous Queen of the Brigantes who had faced the Roman invasion with such determination has not found her rightful place in our history books.