

ROYAL ARMOURIES

Witness | Guardian | Expert | Leader

Roman Britain

Learning Resource

Teacher Notes

KS2



Overview

A great topic for **local history** and **the Roman Empire and its impact on Britain**, the achievements and impact of the Roman military on Britain is excellent inspiration for cross-curricular learning as well as **chronological understanding, source knowledge and understanding** and **development of historically valid questions**.

The Royal Armouries collection houses a Roman gladius, a simple but impactful object that thousands of Roman soldiers owned and used in their military service across the Empire. This object and the National Curriculum have inspired our resources. Below are notes intended to help you use our online resources and collection to bring this topic to life for your pupils.

Roman Britain

The Roman Emperor Julius Caesar invaded Britain twice in 55BC and 54BC, but did not settle. Emperor Claudius ordered the third Roman invasion in 43AD, after which the Romans stayed and began their colonisation of Britain.

The Celtic tribes already living in Britain resisted the Roman invaders for the most part. Some were defeated quickly, some became allies, and some continued to fight fiercely. The Iceni tribe is one of the most famous because it rebelled against the Romans in 60-61AD, led by Queen Boudica. When her husband King Prasutagus died, the Romans took Iceni lands and committed other war crimes which led to the retaliative rebellion. Boudica led her warriors to burn down the Roman cities of Camulodunum (Colchester), Londinium (London) and Verulamium (St. Albans). When the tribes finally came to face a Roman army, they outnumbered the Romans 20-1 on the battlefield. But their military tactics were their undoing. Lack of armour meant that massive casualties were inevitable. And they struggled to use their long swords in the close press of battle. The Romans defeated the tribe and Queen Boudica either poisoned herself to escape becoming a captive (according to the Roman historian Tacitus) or died of illness (according to Roman historian Cassius Dio).

The Romans stayed in Britain until 410AD. They brought with them many innovations, including roads, underfloor heating and military tactics. They also brought people to the British Isles from all over the Empire, which stretched across Europe to North Africa and the Middle East. We can still see the impact of the Romans on Britain today, not least thanks to archaeological structures such as Hadrian's Wall.

A Roman in Britain

Video

This fictional account is designed to inspire your pupils to imagine themselves as a Roman soldier, great for a **creative writing** or **drama** based task. The video gives an account of the training, weaponry and armour of a foot soldier. The Roman army travelled widely to achieve the Empire's aims, which is why this soldier has been moved from Rome to Britannia (Britain).

When confronting the tribes already living in Britain, the Roman army came up against an enemy that fought very differently to themselves. Firstly, most native warriors did not wear armour. There is evidence that mail (thousands of small metal rings interlinked to make a garment) may have been used but this was very rare, if available at all. Instead of physical armour, warriors painted their bodies with woad made from the seeds of a yellow flower. Believed to have magical properties to protect against wounds, it was intended to make warriors look terrifying in battle. Some warriors even chose to fight entirely naked. It is also believed that women fought in the armies of Celtic tribes.

Weaponry was also slightly different. Celtic swords were typically longer than the Roman gladius. This allowed a greater reach, but could also cause problems such as hitting fellow warriors if not wielded correctly. Shields were still used by the tribes, as were spears and javelins, just like the Romans. The tribe's battle tactics are not believed to have been as formalised as the Roman military, but there is little evidence of this so we cannot be completely sure.

Below are the Latin names for weaponry, military tactics and orders that you may find useful for tasks and activities.

Weapons and tactics

Lorica segmentata – Body armour made with lames of metal

Lorica hamata- Body armour made with mail (thousands of small metal rings linked together)

Galea – Helmet

Gladius – Short Roman sword

Scutum – Roman shield

'Testudo' formation– A shield formation that is reminiscent of a tortoise shell. Usually formed in a square/rectangle shape with the soldiers holding shields to create a hard outer shell, protecting themselves and fellow soldiers

'Wedge' formation– A shield formation in the shape of a wedge, with the point towards the enemy

Orders in Latin

Mandata Captate – An order to stand to attention, respect and await the orders from the captain/ superior. ***feet together, arms locked in by your side and chest puffed up***

Sin (sinister) – Left

Dex (dexter) – Right

Silentium – Silence!

Accelerate or **acceleratus** – Accelerate/quicken your pace

Time travel radio: Hadrian's Wall

Audio recording

This fictional recording of an interview with a soldier is designed to inspire pupils to imagine what it might have been like to live and work in Britain as a soldier and as a civilian, and to impart historical knowledge.

Built in 122AD, the wall was designed to assist with border control with the Caledonian tribes and also assisted with the control of trade. Stretching from the east to the west coast of what is now England, the wall is as impressive today as it must have been 1900 years ago. Along the wall were barracks, forts and settlements that housed people from all over the Empire, making the wall a cosmopolitan area of Roman life. The wall was briefly abandoned soon after completion but resumed use and continued to be used until 410AD when Roman troops were withdrawn from Britain.

Photo bank

The photo bank has been compiled to assist your lessons in any way that you see fit. They are all original photographs or images of items in our collection. Please download them for educational use only. They would be great for increasing historical knowledge, building evidentially supported enquiries and historical source work.

Images will be added and updated on a regular basis.

We have added notes to each image; collections items are hyperlinked in the descriptions to our Collections Online, where you can get more images and technical information; and the asset numbers for our Image Library are given where relevant. If you would like any more information about any image, please contact educate.leeds@armouries.org.uk and we would be happy to assist.