

# Roman Britain



Kirkby Thore Tombstone  
From Kirkby Thore, Cumbria  
AD100-400

Visit resource for teachers  
Key Stage 2

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# Before your visit

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## Background information

### British Iron Age

Around 800 BC iron working techniques reached Britain from Europe. Whilst bronze was still used for objects such as jewellery, iron was used for tools. Iron Age Britain was essentially rural with most people living in small villages. Iron axes and iron tipped ploughs make farming more efficient and output increased. Wheat, barley, beans and greens were grown in small fields. Timber was used for fuel and for building houses, carts, furniture and tools. Cattle provided milk and leather and were used to pull the plough while sheep provided milk, meat and wool. Chickens were introduced in the first century AD. Another form of constructed community space were the hilltop settlements which began to be built in the late Bronze Age around 1100 BC. These may have been defensive or used for social and trading gatherings.

Communities had contacts with each other and Western Europe. Through these contacts La Tène art styles spread (from 450 BC) until they were used across most of the British Isles. Trade, internal and with continental Europe, flourished, based on Britain's mineral resources. From around 150 BC the use of coins developed within the elite of south-east Britain. British Iron Age people did not build temples or shrines to worship their gods and there are very few statues of these gods. Instead, gods were seen as being everywhere and religious offerings were made in the home, around farms, in the countryside and in watery places like rivers or lakes.. By the start of the first century AD, south-east Britain was controlled by powerful rulers who had contact with the Roman Empire. Rulers such as Tincomarus, Tasciovanus and Cunobelinus are known from the coinage they produced. They controlled areas of land from centres such as St Albans, Colchester, Chichester and Silchester.

### Roman Britain

Migration and trade between continental Europe and Britain was already well established by the time the Roman general Julius Caesar made two expeditions to Britain in 55 and 54 BC following his conquest of Gaul. During these expeditions, the Romans did not conquer any territory, but instead invited the British people to pay tribute in return for peace, established client rulers and brought Britain more fully into Rome's sphere of influence.

In AD 43, a Roman invasion force landed in Britain and quickly took control of the south-east before heading north and west. Then in AD 61, while the Roman army was in Wales, Boudica, ruler of the Iceni people, provoked by Roman seizure of land and the brutal treatment of her family raised an army to fight the Romans. The Iceni, joined by the Trinovantes, destroyed the Roman settlements at Camulodunum (Colchester) Verulamium (St Albans) and London (Londinium) before the Roman army finally defeated them at an unknown site in the Midlands.

In Britain, many towns began as military camps or planned settlements for former soldiers. London, Cirencester and Colchester were among the largest and most important towns in Britain. At the centre of the town was an open space (the forum) often used as a market place. Facing on to the forum were official buildings including the basilica (used for local government, tax-collecting and record-keeping). Other buildings in towns might include one or more temples, a bath house and occasionally a theatre or amphitheatre for events such as gladiatorial combats. The largest Romano-British amphitheatre known to date is at Chester and a circus (for chariot racing) was found recently at Colchester. Remains of the best preserved amphitheatre are at Caerleon in Wales where the amphitheatre formed part of a nearby fortress and was probably used for military training as well as entertainment.

The Romans built rectangular houses, with brick walls and tiled roofs, which in the countryside are commonly known as villas. People continued to live in round houses, especially in areas where Roman ways of living had less influence. Villas often formed the centre of farming estates which produced food crops, timber and animal products such as leather and wool. The main rooms in a villa might have mosaic floors and were sometimes decorated with wall paintings. As well as reception rooms and living quarters, a villa might have a library, a study, a bath house and a room used for worship. At Lullingstone Villa, Kent, there was a shrine to three water goddesses and later some of the rooms were converted into a Christian house-church.

Pottery production was highly developed in the Roman period and standardised shapes were produced quickly and in large numbers. Most ordinary household pots were multi-purpose containers used for storing, preparing and cooking food, made locally wherever suitable clay was available. Finer decorative pottery, such as Samian ware, was used as tableware. Made principally in Gaul (modern France) and traded over wide areas including

Britain, it was copied by British potters, although it was of usually inferior quality. Wine, sauces and dried fruit were imported in large pottery amphorae while cooking ingredients and sauces were processed in gritted bowls (mortaria) to produce blends of flavours.

In Britain the Roman army played an important role in maintaining peace, and around AD 100 as many as 50,000 troops were stationed in the province. As well as military training, the army constructed buildings and roads. Military documents and letters from Vindolanda, a fort south of Hadrian's Wall, reveal fascinating details of the administrative and social activities of a Roman fort. Control of particular regions was strengthened by forts ranging from great fortresses to temporary camps. These were mostly in Wales, northern England and Scotland. A typical fort was rectangular in shape, surrounded by ditches and a wall and divided into blocks by a grid of streets. The headquarters building lay at the centre of the fort. Other buildings included officers' houses, a bath-house, storage facilities and barracks. A civilian settlement (vicus) often developed around forts and trading and socialising took place with the local people. Although Latin was the official language in the western Roman Empire many of the British and many in the Roman army, for example, the barbarian auxiliary troops, would have continued to use their native languages. Contact with the Roman administrative and legal systems would probably have given many people a basic spoken understanding of Latin even if they could not read or write.

During the Roman period in Britain local gods and goddesses were included in Roman religious beliefs. At Bath, the local god Sul was combined with the Roman goddess Minerva and worshipped at a temple near a hot water spring, sacred long before Roman times. Roman temples were a place for people to pray to the gods, make offerings and take part in religious festivals. Roman houses would often have a small shrine used for worshipping protective household gods, known as the lares, and honouring family ancestors.

During the reign of the emperor Tiberius (AD 14-37), the Christian faith spread across the empire. Early Christians were often persecuted for their beliefs because they refused to worship the emperor as a god. Then, in AD 313, the emperor Constantine ordered complete freedom of worship for all religions, including Christianity. However, it was not until AD 392, under the emperor Theodosius, that Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire and all the temples to the Roman gods and goddesses were closed. Evidence for Christianity in Britain dates to the 4th century AD.

The disintegration of Roman Britain proper began with the revolt of Magnus Maximus in AD 383, although the province had been troubled for at least a century before this. After 12 years as a military commander in Britain, Maximus was proclaimed Emperor by his troops and took a large part of the British Roman garrison to the Continent where he dethroned the emperor Gratian, before being killed himself by the next emperor, Theodosius, in AD 388. The remaining Roman soldiers began to withdraw from Britain at the end of the 4th century as the need to protect Rome itself from invading forces grew. In Britain, defence of the east coast was commanded by the Count of the Saxon Shore, and a fleet was organized to control the Channel and the North Sea. However, around AD 410, the Roman army and administration having left the province, British towns were instructed to organize their own defences.

## **Anglo-Saxons**

British history from AD 410 -1066 is usually referred to as the Anglo-Saxon period. Germanic auxiliary troops had been used by Rome and their presence in Roman Britain would have facilitated any migration. Graves and settlements suggest that the British population was not killed or displaced, but rather came to adopt Anglo-Saxon culture. The extent of Anglo-Saxon migration seems to have differed considerably across England. Over time the different Germanic peoples formed unified cultural and political groups and a number of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms developed, finally unifying into the kingdom of England in the 10th century.

## Resources

### British Museum websites

#### Explore

Explore is an online database of over 5000 objects from the Museum's collection. To investigate Roman objects use the Explore option on the homepage:

[www.britishmuseum.org](http://www.britishmuseum.org)

#### Ancient Civilizations [www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk](http://www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk)

This is an interactive learning and information website with text, images and maps relating to a range of civilizations across the world and through time. The site includes information about Roman Britain.

#### Portable Antiquities Scheme [www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk)

## Books

### For children

Corbishley, Mike, *The British Museum Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Ancient Rome*, British Museum Press, 2003

Roberts, Paul, *Pocket Dictionary of Roman Emperors*, British Museum Press, 2006

Wiltshire, Katharine, *Pocket Timeline of Ancient Rome*, British Museum Press, 2005

Wiltshire, Katharine, *Timeline of the Ancient World*, British Museum Press, 2004

Woff, Richard, *Pocket Dictionary of Greek and Roman Gods and Goddesses*, British Museum Press, 2003

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## Gallery information

Room 49 contains material from Roman Britain. Many of the objects are the result of excavations in the British Isles on known Roman sites. The cases are broadly themed and look at areas of Roman life such as religion, pottery, the army, hoards and buildings. There is a wide range of object types ranging from tools to finely worked imperial statues. There are a number of mosaics on display on the walls of the gallery (additional examples of Roman mosaic flooring from other parts of the empire can be found on the east stairs) including the central roundel of the Hinton St Mary mosaic. The gallery contains a large number of gold and silver objects recovered as hoards. Pottery is also well represented together with more vulnerable organic remains such as the wooden writing tablets from Vindolanda.

## What is it like to visit this gallery?

Room 49 is on the upper floor of the Museum and forms part of the through route which takes visitors round the upper floor. The doorway at the south end of the gallery leads into Room 41 (Anglo-Saxon and early medieval gallery) whilst the north end opens directly into Room 50 which houses the European Iron Age collection. The gallery contains a large number of wall and free standing cases with a number of open display objects (principally grave stones and temple altars). As the main Roman Britain gallery the room can get very busy with school groups working on this period of history. The central aisle of the gallery is a through route for Museum visitors viewing the upper floor though it is usually quieter at the sides of the gallery and there are two corners where it is possible to gather a class sized group away from visitor through routes.

## Case Numbers

Please note that case numbers are usually small, white and high up on the glass in the corner.

## Preliminary activities

### General introductory activities

- Identify the territory controlled by the Roman empire on a modern world map. Which areas did it cover? Where was Britain relative to the rest of the empire?
- Look at Roman objects on Explore.
- Investigate the Roman Britain section of the British Museum Ancient Civilizations website. [www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk](http://www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk) and then follow either the writing theme or select Roman Britain from the A-Z of world cultures.

### Activities to support gallery activities

- Talk about building materials which we use nowadays to construct buildings in Britain. Discuss the names and properties of different building materials.
- Talk about the different food stuffs which we eat nowadays – sort foods into generic categories of food e.g. vegetables, fruit, animal, wheat product, etc.
- Look at some examples of food recipes with the students. What information is included? How do the instructions help you to prepare the food? What utensils do we use to help us prepare food?
- Why do we have tombstones? What information might you find on a tombstone?
- Talk about different crafts/jobs and the tools/equipment that are used. Choose a job and then draw a diagram with lines leading away from the job to drawings or labels indicating the different tools and equipment used when performing that job.

## **During your visit**

## Gallery activities: introduction for teachers

The gallery activities are a set of activity sheets which can be used by students working in Room 49. The sheets can be used as stand-alone activities or you may wish to develop work around particular sheets as suggested in the before and after sections of this resource.

- Where case numbers are indicated on a sheet, these are usually to be found marked in white numbers high up on the glass of that particular case.
- You are welcome to select the activities which are most appropriate for the focus of your visit and adapt sheets to meet the needs of your students.
- Each activity is designed to support the students in looking at, and thinking about, objects on display in the gallery.
- Individual activity sheets may be undertaken by single students, in pairs or as a small group.
- Where space is provided for recording this may be undertaken by the student or an adult helper as is most appropriate for the students involved.
- Familiarise the students and accompanying adults with the chosen activity sheets at school before the day of the visit. Make sure students and adults know what they are to do and are familiar with the vocabulary used on the sheets or which they may encounter in the gallery.

## Gallery activities: briefings for adult helpers

### Gallery activity: Roman buildings

- The Romans introduced new building materials and styles to Britain. The Meonstoke wall was probably part of a barn on a villa estate in Hampshire.
- This activity asks students to identify different building materials in the wall.

### Gallery activity: Food in Roman Britain

- Archaeologist can use a wide range of sources to find out about food and drink. This may be the food itself, a list of foods, a model of an animal (e.g. a cow = meat, milk, butter, cheese) or a painted picture.
- This activity encourages students to use objects to work out what foods were eaten in Roman Britain.

### Gallery activity: Kirkby Thore tombstone

- This broken tombstone commemorates the daughter of a Roman soldier. It shows her at a funerary banquet, lying on a couch, with a table in front, holding a two-handled wine cup. On the left a servant passes her food.
- This activity encourages students to collect information from a single object.

### Gallery activity: Roman tombstones

- Tombstones usually contain lots of information for archaeologists through the pictures carved on them and especially the writing (inscriptions). The students will probably need help in using the labels.
- This activity encourages students to look at the different parts of the tombstones and to collect information from different sources.

## **Gallery activities: briefings for adult helpers**

### **Gallery activity: Roman recipe**

- The Romans published cook books full of recipes.
- This activity uses an authentic Roman recipe to think about the utensils used to prepare food.

### **Gallery activity: Roman pottery**

- Pottery production was highly developed in Roman Britain and standardised shapes were produced quickly and in very large numbers.
- This activity encourages students to use technical words used by archaeologists when they are talking about Roman pottery that they have dug up.

### **Gallery activity: Tools of the trade**

- Archaeologists have found many tools which tell us about the crafts and skills of people in Roman Britain.
- This activity asks students to make links between tools and specific activities.

## Roman buildings

Find the wall section from Meonstoke, Hampshire (the corner next to case 16).

- Match the labels below to the correct part of the wall in the picture. The clues will help you work out which material is which.

Clues

**Flint** is a whitish stone which when broken is shiny black inside. **Clay tiles** are red and were sometimes piled one on top of another in a wall. **Mortar** is a type of pale cement which is used to join things together. **Greenstone** could be cut into different shapes and used as decoration in a wall. **Plaster** was a white mixture used to make a smooth surface on a wall.



flint

clay tile

mortar

greenstone

plaster

- See what different shapes you can spot in the design of the wall.
- Describe or draw them here.

## Food in Roman Britain

Objects in the gallery provide evidence of food in Roman Britain.

- Look at letters 19, 20 and 21 in case 2 written at Vindolanda Roman fort.

- What different foods are mentioned in these letters?

- Look in case 7 at the objects excavated at the Roman settlement of Stonea. What food remains were found?

- Look in case 7 at the tiles in the middle section of the case. What evidence is there on one of the tiles that the Romans kept sheep?

- Look at the silver spoons in case 23. How are these spoons different from the spoons we use?

- Look at the picture on the information board in case 13. What sort of food is shown in the picture?

- Look in case 20 at the bones left behind by people visiting Uley Roman Temple. What animals do the bones come from?

- Look in at the animal statuettes in case 15. Which animals might have provided food?

- When you have finished, discuss which of the foods are still eaten in Britain today. Does everybody eat them?

## Kirkby Thore Tombstone



- Find this tombstone on the side wall. The broken tombstone was made in memory of the daughter of a Roman soldier stationed at a fort in Cumbria.

- The woman is shown at a banquet. What is her position? *Circle the answer.*

sitting on a chair

standing up

lying down on a couch

- What is the furniture the woman has in front of her. *Circle the answer*

a cupboard

a bed

a small table

What is she holding in her left hand? *Circle the answer.*

a spoon

a two-handled cup

a flat plate of food

- The tombstone shows part of another person standing by the woman's side. Who are they and what are they doing? Write your ideas below.



- Now have a look for this tombstone of Volusia Faustina (shown on the left of the tombstone).
- What can you see on the tombstone?
- Who do you think the other woman might be?

## Roman tombstones

- Look at the tombstones on display and collect some information about them.

Copy some Roman style writing here.

Some stones have a carving. Do a rough sketch of one here.

Draw some Roman tombstone symbols. *Stars represent wealth. Dolphins represent the journey to the afterlife. Pine cones represent life after death*

Can you find out how old people were when they died?

What jobs or occupations can you find?

What homelands for people in Roman Britain can you find? (People in Britain came from across the empire.)

- Who might have put up the tombstones?
- Now decide which of the tombstones you have looked at is the most impressive in your opinion. Tell the other people in your group what you think.

## Roman recipe

- This is a Roman recipe for honeyed bread from a cookbook written by Marcus Apicius during the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD.
- Look around the gallery for objects used to prepare, cook and serve food.
- Draw suitable Roman utensils in each box to help with each step of the recipe.

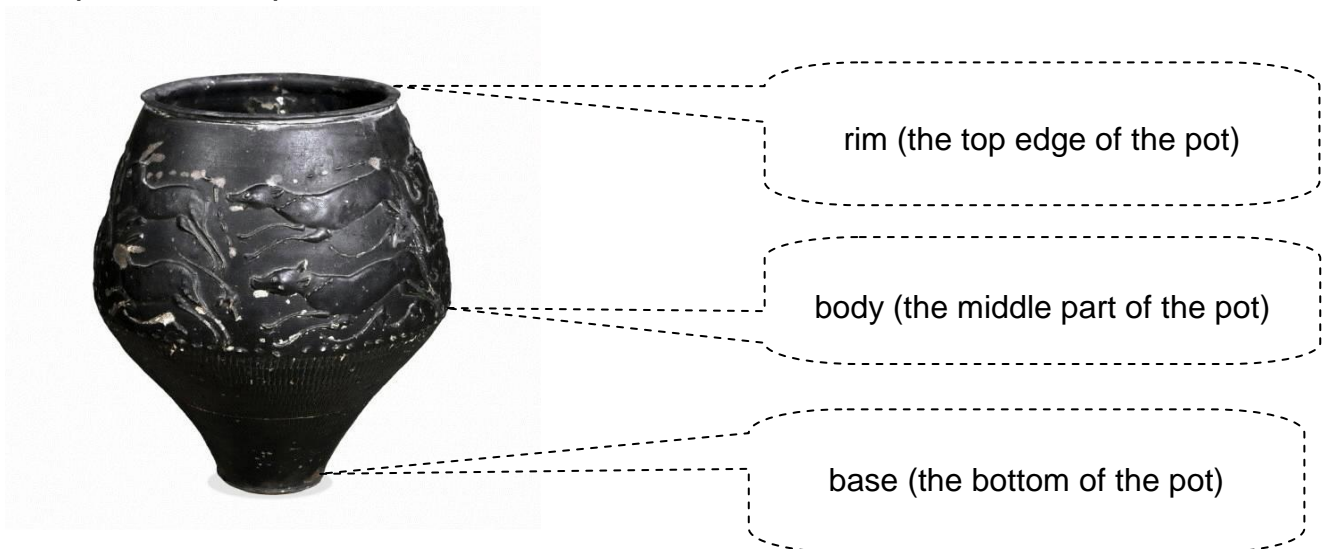
1. Remove the crust from a loaf of bread.	2. Break the bread into large pieces.
3. Soak the bread in a bowl of milk.	4. Fry the pieces of bread in oil.
5. Put the fried bread on a plate to cool.	6. Pour honey over the fried bread.

- Now find a suitable dish to serve your fried bread on. What shape will you choose, what is the dish made from, does it have a pattern or picture on it? Will it impress your guests? Show the others which dish you choose.

## Roman pottery

Archaeologists dig up lots of Roman pots (often broken into small pieces). They use different words to describe the different parts of a pot.

- Look at the diagram below to see which words are used to describe different parts of the pot.



- Go to case 21 and look at the different pots on display. Can you point to the rim, body and base on some of the pots?
- Choose 3 different pot shapes in the gallery and draw them in the boxes below.

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- Now have a look for containers made from other materials. For example, can you find any glass or metal pots, jugs, bowls or dishes?

## Tools of the trade

- Look round the gallery and record any objects you find which show that these jobs were done in Roman Britain.

metal worker	carpenter
builder	farmer
cook	shoe maker

- Now decide which of the jobs listed above you would have chosen to have done in Roman Britain. Do you think it would be harder or easier to do in Roman times than the same job nowadays?

## **After your visit**

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## Follow-up classroom activities: introduction

These activities aim to encourage students to reflect on the work undertaken in the Roman Britain gallery during their Museum visit.

- Some of the activities draw directly on the information gathered at the Museum while others encourage the students to draw on personal experience or undertake additional research in the classroom.
- Each activity includes a suggestion for classroom work and also an outcome which may be in the form of a written piece, drama presentation or artwork.
- You may also wish to look at some of the activities available on the Ancient Civilizations learning website ([www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk](http://www.ancientcivilizations.co.uk)) which relate to your visit.

## Follow-up activity: Roman buildings

Curriculum links: history

- Make a list of modern building materials the students know of.
- Make a list of materials used in Roman buildings (you may like to encourage further research on Roman buildings).
- Which materials are the same, which are different?
- Do the students think that archaeologists are able to find evidence of all the different building materials used in Roman Britain? If not, why not?

## Follow-up activity: Food in Roman Britain

Curriculum links: history, citizenship

- Revise with the students the different food stuffs which they found evidence for in the Roman gallery. Do you think that archaeologists are able to find evidence of all the different food stuffs eaten in Roman Britain? Why not?
- Talk about the types of food eaten in Britain nowadays. Are any of them the same as those eaten in Roman times? Discuss the country of origin for particular modern food stuffs not only in terms of where they are grown but also where different ways of preparing foods have come from (e.g. curry, pizza, stir-fry).
- Collect food labels or pictures of finished dishes and link them to their place of origin on a map.

## Follow-up activity: Kirkby Thore tombstone

Curriculum links: history, maths, art and design

- Discuss with the students how archaeologists can gather information from both groups of objects (as with the foods of Roman Britain activity) and a single object (as with this activity).
- Prepare a sheet with an image of the Kirkby Thore stone in the centre and ask students to annotate the picture either individually or in pairs.

## Follow-up activity: Roman tombstones

Curriculum links: history, RE

- Gather the different sorts of information and messages communicated by the tombstones in the Museum. How did the tombstones communicate- by writing, symbols or pictures?
- Undertake a survey of your local place of public burial and compare modern tombstones with those seen in the Roman gallery at the Museum.

## Follow-up activity: Roman recipe

Curriculum links: history, food technology, drama/literacy

- Revise the different stages of the recipe and discuss the utensils which the students found in the gallery which would help you to prepare the recipe in Roman times. Do we still use these utensils today? Do we have any modern utensils which would make the preparation and cooking easier and quicker?
- Present the information gathered in the gallery either as a dramatic presentation of the recipe being made (Roman Ready-Steady-Cook) or as an illustrated recipe card

## Follow-up activity: Roman pottery

Curriculum links: history, art and design

- With the support of the gallery sheets and further research on Explore, create a chart showing different Roman pottery shapes.
- Ask pupils to make a clay pot in the style of a Roman vessel using either red clay to be fired or modern self-drying clay. What decorative would be appropriate for the vessel? What would each vessel have been used for?
- Make a display of the vessels either in the style of a Museum display or as if laid out in a Roman potter's shop.

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## Follow-up activity: Tools of the trade

Curriculum links: history, technology

- Revise the different trades and tools identified in the Roman gallery. Which tools were the same? Which modern tools would you not find in a Roman tool display?
- Provide students with an outline drawing of a sack or box and ask them to choose a trade and then draw in the tools that would be used for that trade in Roman times. They may want to add other pieces of equipment needed to complete the craft alongside the tool container (e.g. a fire for a blacksmith)

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