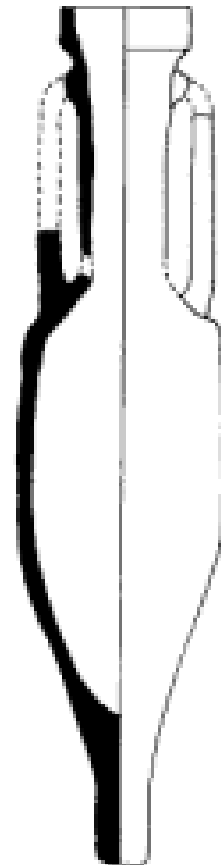


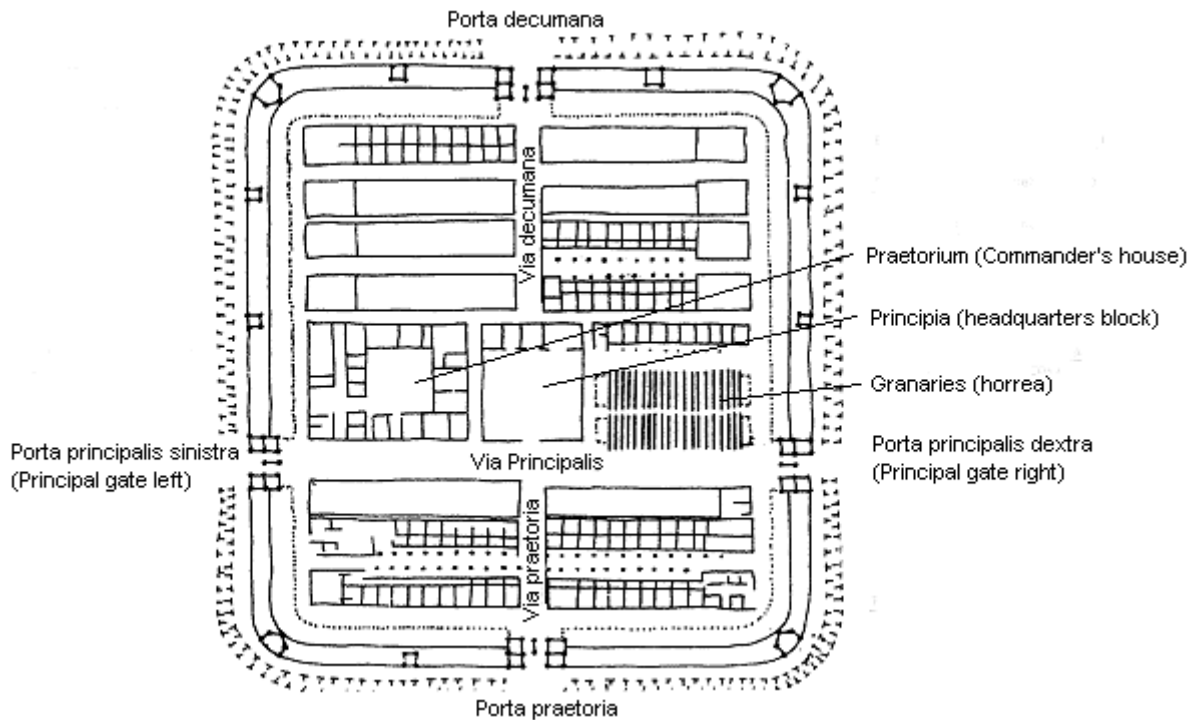
[Cymraeg](#) / English**Key Stage 2: Life in Early Wales and Britain****The Romans in Wales**

In AD 43 a Roman army under the command of Aulus Plautius landed in southern Britain. During the next seventeen years the Roman armies proceeded to conquer most of southern and western Britain (including Wales). However this was not the first contact that the Romans had had with the people of Britain. In 55 and 54 BC Julius Caesar had led an army to southern Britain, they were ill-prepared and eventually retreated to Gaul. Longer term contact between the Roman world and Celtic Britain had been maintained by merchants who brought wine, oil, fine pottery and other luxuries to tribal leaders. In return they exported slaves, minerals, hunting dogs and probably other goods such as woollen cloth.

During the period of the Roman conquest of southern Britain (between AD 34 and AD60) the Roman armies first moved rapidly westward subduing most of the south and east. Between AD 47 and AD 49, under the governor Ostorius Scapula, the Roman armies pushed into western Britain. The tribes of this area were now led by Caratacus (Caradog), a son of a southern British leader, Cunobelinus. One by one the tribes were defeated in battle, one of the battles between the Romans and the Ordovices led to the defeat and capture of Caratacus. The site of this battle is unclear but appears to have been in western Shropshire. Campaigns against the western tribes continued up to AD 60 when a revolt, led by Boudica, broke out in eastern Britain. After the defeat of Boudica and her armies the Romans spent the next seven years consolidating their position and establishing military forts to subdue southern and western Britain. It was not until AD 71 that the Roman army under Julius Agricola was able to move northwards to campaign against the Brigantes and other northern tribes. The pacification of the western tribes continued through the 70s and beyond.

During the period of conquest and pacification the Roman army built camps and forts in which to house the soldiers and military craftsmen. The camps were usually temporary structures built of turf and wood to protect the army overnight as they rested between marches. Many of these camps lie in the Marches and on the route into central Wales followed by the conquering army. Forts were however more permanent structures built to house troops stationed for a lengthy period of time. They are found in most areas of modern Wales with those of earliest date being grouped along the eastern and southern edge. The largest of these forts were bases for a legion. Some of the best preserved and investigated legionary forts in Wales and the Borders include Wroxeter, Caerleon and Chester. Other forts which are well known in this area include Forden Gaer (near Montgomery), Caersws and Brecon Gaer.

**An amphora**



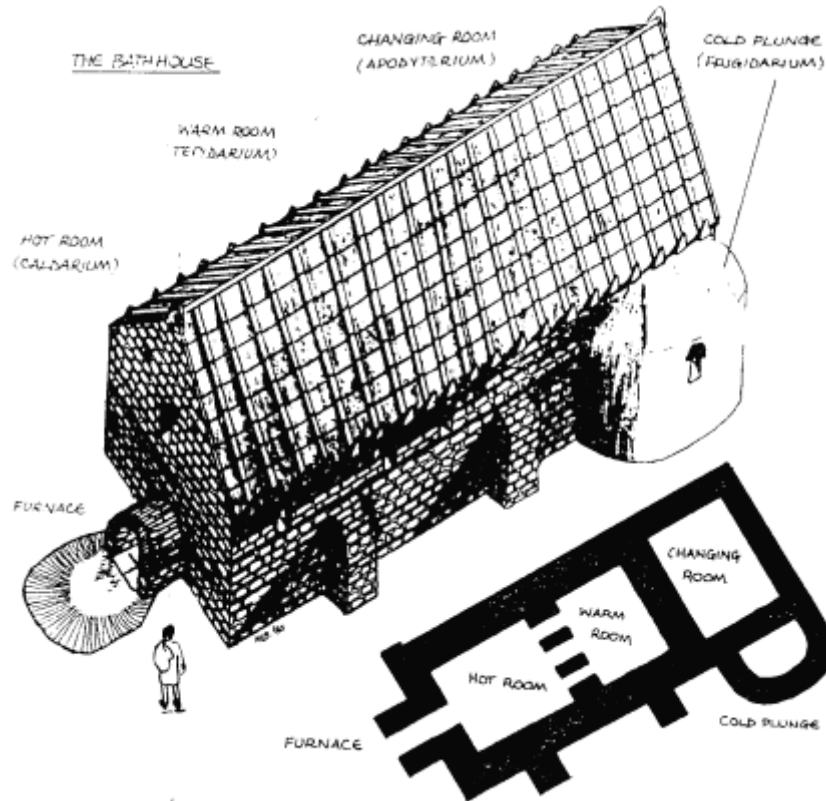
**Plan of a typical Roman fort**

During the period of Roman occupation some forts fell out of use, some were built in new locations and others were rebuilt on existing sites. A good example of a Roman fort in mid Wales is that at Forden Gaer near the present day town of Montgomery. The fort was first built in the early second century AD and was rebuilt several times, the largest fort built in the late second century AD. Most Roman forts were rectangular in shape with ramparts built of clay with a timber framework. The rampart was surmounted by a timber palisade and protected by one or more deep ditches cut around the outside. A fort usually had four gates, one in each side, with the main road (*via praetoria*) running direct from the north to the south gate. The main buildings in the fort were the headquarters (*principia*), the commander's house (*praetorium*), the granaries (*horrea*), the workshops (*fabrica*) and the barracks for the soldiers. The valuables were stored in the headquarters building which contained a shrine. Many forts were built entirely of wood with earth or turf banks but some were rebuilt with stone walls and stone buildings.

By the middle of the second century AD Britannia was an established Roman province ruled by a governor appointed by the Roman emperor. The provincial capital was in London. The Romans not only sought to conquer but aimed to civilise the people of Britain. They forcibly removed them from their old hilltop settlements and built towns and cities as centres of crafts, trade and administration. The old Celtic nobility were encouraged to become romanised, to live in the urban centres and to adopt a Roman way of life. Warfare was forbidden. As times became less troubled the size of the Roman army in Britain was reduced. However a military presence was kept in Wales which was one of the least romanised parts of the province. Fast communication between the forts, towns and cities was ensured by the building of straight, well-made roads. The former position of forts and roads can often be seen in differing pattern of cropmarks when viewed from the air.

In the romanised parts of Britain each former tribal area had one main city (*civitas*) which was the centre of administration. Parts of western Britain, including much of modern Wales fell within military zones and had no towns but in south Wales and along the Borders the area was more romanised. The new *civitates* were sometimes on the site of former military forts. In modern Wales and in the Borders the *civitates* were at Caerwent, Carmarthen, Wroxeter and possibly Kentchester. In the new towns and cities public buildings were constructed to serve the needs of the administrators and towns people. These included the forum, public baths, the theatre,

amphitheatre and temple. The forum usually consisted of a market-place with covered walkways on three sides and a basilica or hall on the fourth. The public baths varied considerably in size but included hot dry (*laconica*) and cold rooms (*frigidarium*), the latter with cold plunge pools, as well as the baths themselves and an exercise area or hall. The baths were heated and water was supplied to them and to other buildings in the city from public aqueducts often fed by springs outside the city.

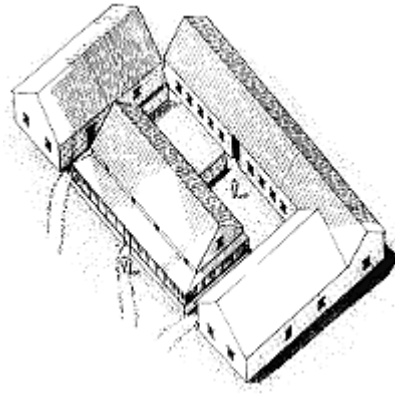


**Bathhouse at Prestatyn**

The inhabitants of the towns and cities were administrators, craftsmen and merchants. The administrators were Roman citizens, the more important of them posted from other provinces. Craftsmen made and sold their wares on their own premises supplying people from the town and surrounding area. The principal crafts were pottery making, the making of bricks and tiles for building, metalworking, leatherworking, glassmaking, woodworking and the manufacture of textiles and leather goods.

Not all urban centres were ordinary towns or cities. Some were settlements based on the exploitation of minerals such as gold, copper or lead such as those at Llanymynech or Dolaucothi. Wales was an important area for the extraction of minerals with concentrations in the north and east notably at Halkyn Mountain. At Prestatyn the excavations of a civilian settlement reveal that the people were engaged in metalworking. A bronzesmith's workshop, including the remains of hearths and furnaces was found, together with large quantities of slag, bronze scrap and parts of casting moulds. Evidence of lead mining and working has also been found at Prestatyn where the settlement lay close to a Roman fort housing the Twentieth Legion. Tiles of the legion were found in a small bath-house adjacent to the fort. At Pentre Farm, Flint the administrative centre of the local lead-mining industry has been excavated.

**Reconstruction of the early timber complex at Pentre Farm, probably built about AD 120 as the residence and administrative center of an official overseeing the local lead-mining industry.**



In much of mid and north Wales, apart from the building of forts and settlements associated with mining communities, settlement in the countryside continued much as it had been before the Roman conquest. For the most part the hillforts were abandoned but Iron Age style farmsteads continued to be occupied. Elsewhere in lowland Britain type of buildings changed from round houses to rectangular but in the mid and north Wales there is little indication that Roman style houses were built in the countryside.

During the late fourth century AD the Roman province of Britannia came under increasing threat from raiders from outside the Empire. These included the Picts to the north, the Irish to the west and the Saxons to the east. Forts were constructed around the coasts to counter these attacks. The quality and number of Roman troops in Britain diminished as the borders of the Roman Empire were threatened elsewhere. On certain occasions the army was strengthened to combat attacks such as that in AD 367 at the time of the so called "barbarian conspiracy" when Roman Britain was attacked by combined groups of raiders. During the late fourth and early fifth centuries a number of usurpers attempted to break away from the Empire. One of these, Magnus Maximus (Macsen Wledig), who was eventually defeated by the Emperor Theodosius in AD 388, is remembered in the *Mabinogion* as the founder of a number of Welsh royal lineages.

In the early years of the fifth century AD the Roman army was withdrawn from Britain and in AD 410 the Emperor Honorius formally gave up control of the province advising the people of Britain to look to their own defences. The period which followed did not see the immediate collapse of a romanised way of life but a gradual decline in centralised administration with the growth of new kingdoms. In Wales these included, among others, the kingdoms of Gwynedd, Powys, Dyfed and Glywysing. Towns and cities were gradually abandoned and the centres of power and administration became established in local courts, often defended sites sometimes located in former hillforts.

#### **Suggested sites to visit:-**

**Roman town of Wroxeter** (south-east of Shrewsbury, off A5), Shropshire (English Heritage Guardianship site). Open daily. Tel: 01743 761330

**Roman fort** (SN 858107) and **camp** (SN 963104) near **Coelbren**, Mid Glamorgan plus **Sarn Helen Roman road** running from east and north (Ordnance Survey Pathfinder Map 1084).

**Brecon Gaer Roman fort**, near Brecon (SO 00332966): finds in Brecknock Museum, Brecon. Ordnance Survey Pathfinder map 160

**Prestatyn Roman bathhouse**, Melyd Avenue (SJ062818).

(Leaflets prepared by the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust are available for some of these sites. Details of other sites in your area can be obtained by contacting the SMR officer.)

#### **Further reading:-**

**Howell, R** (ed) *Archaeology and the National Curriculum in Wales*. CBA/National Museum of

Wales/Cadw.

**English Heritage.** *Resources 1994* (practical materials for teachers to use the historic environment for any subject).

**English Heritage.** *The Archaeology Resource Book 1992.*

**McWhirr, A.** *Roman Crafts and Industries.* Shire Archaeology, Aylesbury.

**Todd, M.** 1980. *Roman Britain (55BC-AD 400).* Harvester Press, Brighton.

**Atelier Productions** 1995 *The Romans in Breconshire & Radnorshire, a field guide,* Borth.

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