Enquiry Question: Who shaped England to 1066?

New Enquiry: Who shaped England to 1066?

In this series of lessons, we will be exploring the period from the end of Roman rule in Britain (410) to the death of Edward the Confessor (1066).

We will be learning about the following:

2.1 The legacy of Roman rule in Britain
2.2 An overview from 800 to 1066
2.3 Alfred and the Vikings
2.4 Alfred and the idea of English kingship
2.5 From Alfred to Edward (the Confessor)
2.1 The Roman legacy in Britain

Britain was governed by the Roman Empire for nearly four centuries, from 43AD to 410AD. But as the Roman Empire started to collapse in the fifth century AD, the Romans abandoned Britain in a bid to salvage the empire. Their legacy, however, lived on.

The Roman Army leaves Britain

In AD410, the Roman Emperor Honorius sent a goodbye letter to the people of Britain. He wrote, “fight bravely and defend your lives...you are on your own now”. The city of Rome was under attack and the empire was falling apart, so the Romans had to leave to take care of matters back home.

After they left, the country fell into chaos. Native tribes and foreign invaders battled each other for power. Many of the Roman towns in Britain crumbled away as people went back to living in the countryside.

But even after they were gone, the Romans left their mark all over the country. They gave us new towns, plants, animals, a new religion and ways of reading and counting. Even the word ‘Britain’ came from the Romans. When the Romans arrived in AD43, they introduced new ideas and ways of living to Britain.

Roman roads

Britain had no proper roads before the Romans - there were just muddy tracks. So the Romans built new roads all across the landscape – over 16,000km (10,000 miles) in fact!

The Romans knew that the shortest distance from one place to another is a straight line. So they made all their roads as straight as possible to get around quickly.

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Key Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Emperor</strong></th>
<th><strong>Empire</strong></th>
<th><strong>Native</strong></th>
<th><strong>AD</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leader of the Roman Empire</td>
<td>A system where one nation/state rules over other, less powerful nations/states</td>
<td>A person born in a specified place</td>
<td>Anno Domini (‘The Year of Our Lord’) indicates how many years have passed since Christ’s birth</td>
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They built their roads on foundations of clay, chalk and gravel. They laid bigger flat stones on top. Roman roads bulged in the middle and had ditches either side, to help the rainwater drain off.

Some Roman roads have been converted into motorways and main roads we use today. You can still find a few places where the original Roman road is still visible, too.

**How did the Romans change religion?**

Before the Romans came, the native Britons were pagan. They believed in lots of different gods and spirits.

The Romans were pagans too, but they didn't believe in the same gods as the Britons. They let the Britons worship their own gods, as long as they were respectful of the Roman ones too.

Christianity arrived in Britain during the second century. At first only a few people became Christian. When Christianity started to get popular, the Romans banned it. Christians refused to worship the Roman emperor and anyone who was caught following the new religion could be whipped or even executed.

By the beginning of the 4th century, more and more people were following Christianity. In AD313 the Emperor Constantine declared that Christians were free to worship in peace. By 391, Christianity was the official Roman religion, but pagan beliefs were still popular in Britain.

Constantine was the first Roman emperor to allow Christians to worship. He later became a Christian himself.

**Language, writing and numbers**

Before the Romans came, most people were illiterate. Instead, information was usually

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**Key Terms**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Briton</th>
<th>Pagan</th>
<th>Official Roman religion</th>
<th>Illiterate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A British person</td>
<td>A follower of a religion other than the main world religions</td>
<td>The main religion followed throughout the empire</td>
<td>Cannot read or write</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Romans wrote down their history, their literature and their laws. Their language was called Latin, and it wasn’t long before some people in Britain started to use it too. However, it only really caught on in the new Roman towns - most people living in the countryside stuck to their old Celtic language.

We’ve still got lots of words and phrases today that come from Latin. Words like ‘exit’, which means ‘he or she goes out’, and ‘pedestrian’, which means ‘going on foot’.

Our coins are based on a Roman design and some of the lettering is in Latin. Written around the edge of some £1 coins is the phrase 'decus et tutamen' which means 'glory and protection'.

How did the Romans change towns?

The Romans introduced the idea of living in big towns and cities. Roman towns were laid out in a grid. Streets criss-crossed the town to form blocks called ‘insulae’. In the middle was the ‘forum’, a big market square where people came to trade.

After the Romans, the next group of people to settle in Britain were the Anglo-Saxons. They were farmers, not townspeople. They abandoned many of the Roman towns and set up new kingdoms, but some Roman towns continued to exist and still exist today.

If a place-name has 'chester', 'caster' or 'cester' in it, it’s almost certainly Roman (for example, Gloucester, Doncaster and Manchester). The word ‘chester’ comes from the Latin word ‘castrum’ which means ‘a fort’.

London was a Roman city too, although they called it ‘Londinium’. When the Romans invaded, they built a fort beside the River Thames. This was where traders came from all over the empire to bring their goods to Britain. It grew and grew, until it was the most important city in Roman Britain.

Key Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Celtic language</th>
<th>Forum</th>
<th>Anglo-Saxons</th>
<th>Kingdom</th>
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<tr>
<td>Language of the Celts, the main group of people who lived in Britain before the Romans arrived</td>
<td>Place where people came to trade and buy goods</td>
<td>People of Germanic origin who lived in England between the 5th century and Norman Conquest</td>
<td>An area with a king e.g. Wessex, Mercia (see map on pg. 1)</td>
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</table>
Review and Consolidation

1. Why did the Romans leave Britain and what effect did this have on the country?

2. How did the Romans change the British transport system?

3. How did religious beliefs in Britain evolve over time under the Romans? You must use the phrase ‘initially’ and ‘later, in (year)…’.

4. How was the transfer of information changed under the Romans?

5. How did Romans structure their towns and why did many of these towns not last once the Romans left?

6. Which group of people settled in Britain after the Romans?
Recall Task

How much can you remember of what you read? Our memories strengthen the more we practice recalling information.

1. Next to each image, write down any relevant facts you remember from the reading above.
2. Once you have exhausted your memory, use the reading to add in any facts you missed. Use a different colour to do so.