



HISTORY MYSTERIES

Did the Romans really leave Britain?

Stone Age	Bronze Age	Iron Age	Romans	Anglo-Saxons	Medieval	Tudors	Stuarts	English Commonwealth	Stuarts (again)	Georgians	Victorians	Edwardians	World War I	Inter-War Period	World War II	Cold War	Modern
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After a couple of failed attempts, the Romans finally managed to successfully invade England in 43CE and spent the next 367 years integrating Britain into the mighty Roman **Empire**, which, at its height, spread across three continents, incorporating land in the Middle East, Northern Africa and most of Europe. The Romans brought with them their way of life: their culture, their cuisine, their technology, language and **infrastructure**. The people of Britain accepted this in some cases willingly and, in other cases, less so, but, for better or worse, the influence of the Roman occupation of Britain can still be seen today.

410CE is generally accepted as the official date that the Romans left Britain. This definitive date suggests that at some in this year, all the Romans in Britain simply packed up, got into their boats and sailed back to Rome. But did it really happen like this? How and why did the Romans leave Britain? And did they really leave at all?

Source A



Evidence for the first stone structure at Chedworth Roman Villa dates to the 2nd century AD. The relatively simple structure consisted of three detached buildings, each of a few rooms.

Over the following two centuries the villa was extended and improved, reaching its heyday in the 4th century AD, between 360-380AD. During this time Chedworth Roman Villa was a place of wealth, luxury and comfort. Imagine stunning mosaic floors, extensive bath house rooms and features made of marble so precious it was usually reserved for the imperial family.

Soon after this period of wealth and decadence in 410AD the Roman Empire officially pulled out of Britain. However, there is evidence that the wealthy owners of the villa continued to lead an opulent lifestyle well into the 5th century, laying new mosaics long after it was thought these skills had declined and the wealth had gone.

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/gloucestershire-cotswolds/chedworth-roman-villa/history-of-chedworth-roman-villa>

Source B

A loosening of control

During a period in the third century referred to as the 'Third-Century Crisis', civil and foreign wars in Europe had knock-on effects in Britain. Large elements of the Roman **military** that had been based here were **redeployed** to the continent and most did not return.

Even after the third-century crisis was long past, a looser degree of control was exerted on Britain by Roman central government and a very much smaller imperial military force was based here than previously. Administration and defence were arranged much more locally, and often private soldiers were employed to protect settlements from **barbarian** invaders coming from the continent (in south-east Britain) and from Ireland and Scotland (in the west and north).

<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/inspire-me/why-did-the-romans-leave-britain/>

Source C

Ancient invaders transformed Britain, but not its DNA

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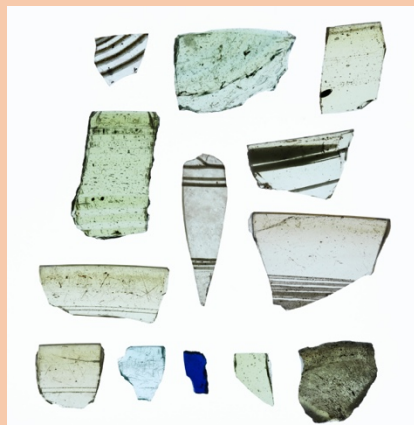
THEY came, they saw, they conquered. But while the Romans, Vikings and Normans ruled Britain for many years, none left their **genetic** calling cards behind in the **DNA** of today's mainland Caucasian **population**. That's the message from the most comprehensive analysis yet of the genetic make-up of the white British population.

Given the cultural significance of the Roman, Viking and Norman invasions, it's surprising they didn't leave greater genetic legacy. For the Romans and Normans, that may be because they were ruling **elites** who didn't intermarry with the natives.

The overall message is that despite their large cultural impact, Britain's main invaders left no genetic stamp of note. "When you study the past through history, linguistics or archaeology, you learn about successful people," says Donnelly. "History is written by the winners, so much of current historical information is from a relatively small subset of people. Genetics, by contrast, is the history of the masses."

<https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg22530134-300-ancient-invaders-transformed-britain-but-not-its-dna/>

Source D



Pieces of vessel glass excavated from Tintagel Castle. © Historic England Archive

During the fifth and sixth centuries, sites like Tintagel Castle on the north coast of Cornwall saw the arrival of Roman luxury goods such as wine, wine glasses and high status-pottery, which were used there in feasts.

<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/tintagel-castle/history-and-legend/>

Source E

c. Summer AD 409

Britons throw off their allegiance to Rome

After the usurper Constantine III crossed to the continent with part of the army to fight for supreme power, Britons may have successfully fought off a Saxon incursion on their own in 408 AD. A year later, they reputedly expelled the Roman **administration** and began to manage their own affairs.

c. Summer AD 410

Britons send a vain appeal for military assistance to the Roman emperor

By 410, troops were continually being withdrawn from Britain to help fight wars elsewhere in the empire. There was a general and persistent state of military crisis. With incursions on all fronts by Angles, Saxons, Picts and Scots, Britain appealed to **emperor** Honorius for help. Honorius wrote to them telling them to 'look to their own defences'. This act is often seen as marking the end of Roman Britain, although Roman institutions and their way of life endured.

https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/timeline/romanbritain_timeline_noflash.shtml



What do YOU think?

Glossary

empire – lots of countries ruled by one leader

emperor – the person in charge of an empire

infrastructure – the basic building blocks of a place, such as roads, bridges and water supplies

military – the armed forces

redeployed – when an army is sent somewhere else to fight

barbarian – a word the Romans used to describe anyone who was not Roman

genetics/DNA – the instructions that we carry inside our bodies determine what we look like and how we work; scientists can study these and work out what biological characteristics we have that are passed down from previous generations

population – the people living in a place

elites – the rich and powerful people in charge of a place

administration – the government of a place

010 Roman Britain

Further Reading:

The Usborne Official Roman Soldier's Handbook

Factology: Romans

Horrible Histories: Rotten Romans by Terry Deary

Time Travel Guides: Roman Britain and Londinium by Ben Hubbard

The Roman Empire and its impact on Britain by Claire Throp

BBC Bitesize pages on Roman Britain - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zqtf34j>