

Roman Britain

Roman Cambridge

The Romans invaded Britain properly in AD43 (Julius Caesar having briefly visited in 55BC), but 18 years later Boudica (or Boadicea), leader of the local Iceni tribe, went on the rampage and burned half of the new wooden town of Londinium (now London). The Romans were understandably upset and crushed the rebellion. But they also decided they needed to keep an eye on her troublesome tribe, the Iceni, who lived north of the River Cam, and east of what is now Cambridge. The Cam was then 100m across (very different to the canal-like river of today), so they set up a long wooden bridge at the site of Magdalene Bridge, extending as far as Northampton Street, and built a stone fort at Castle Hill, calling the town Durolopona (or Duralipons). It was on a major Roman road, the Via Devana, which stretched all the way from Colchester, across the bridge, and eventually up to Chester (known as Deva in Roman times).



Local evidence of the Romans

St Peter's Church (in Kettle's Yard): This church dates from the 11th century – some of the stone was taken from the remains of the Roman fort.

Arbury Coffin: (Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology) 4th century Roman woman 40-55 years old with a slightly gnawed foot, shrew and mouse, found in 1952 in Arbury, in a large Roman villa (picture left). For more, see: [Roman Burials at Arbury Road on Capturing Cambridge](#) website.

Roman tumuli: 12 miles southeast of Cambridge, the village of Bartlow has three large burial mounds up to 15m high, originally part of seven made by the Romans in the 1st or 2nd century (picture left).

Roman Road: Heading southeast from Worts Causeway, the Via Devana was a major Roman route from Colchester to Chester, now a lovely path to explore (see overleaf).

Colchester: The nearest significant Roman remains, of the first Roman capital of Britain. Traces are visible of walls, a theatre and the only circus (chariot-racing arena — reconstructed on the left) in the country. It also has a decent museum detailing the town's Roman credentials.

Roman Britain timeline

- ◆ **BC55** Julius Caesar leads troops to Britain but doesn't stay.
- ◆ **AD43** Invasion of Britain by Emperor Claudius.
- ◆ **AD61** Boudica revolts against the Romans and burns much of Londinium.
- ◆ **AD84** Emperor Agricola defeats the Caledonians (of Scotland) at the Battle of Mons Graupius, arguably ending the conquest of Britain.
- ◆ **AD122** Construction of Hadrian's Wall (below) begins, marking a boundary with Scotland.



- ◆ **AD139** Construction of the more northerly Antonine Wall, but it is later abandoned.
- ◆ **AD410** Romans abandon Britain as the empire collapses. Britain enters to so-called Dark Ages, although much of 'Roman' life probably carried on as before.

Roman artefacts in museums (free)



Fitzwilliam Museum: Has some good Roman stuff (Room 21), including a Roman 'Swiss Army' knife and the Baiae mosaic niche (picture left).

Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology: Has a small display about the Romans on the ground floor (including the Arbury Coffin above).

Museum of Classical Archaeology: Has a great collection of Roman plaster casts (as well as Greek), including the giant Farnese Hercules.

Lawrence Room (Girton College): Small but good collection including Hermione (1st century AD Roman portrait mummy) and a map of their Anglo-Saxon cemetery which dates from Roman times.

Romans in fiction

Jeremy Strong: "Romans on the Rampage" has three books in the series, an easy and comical read.

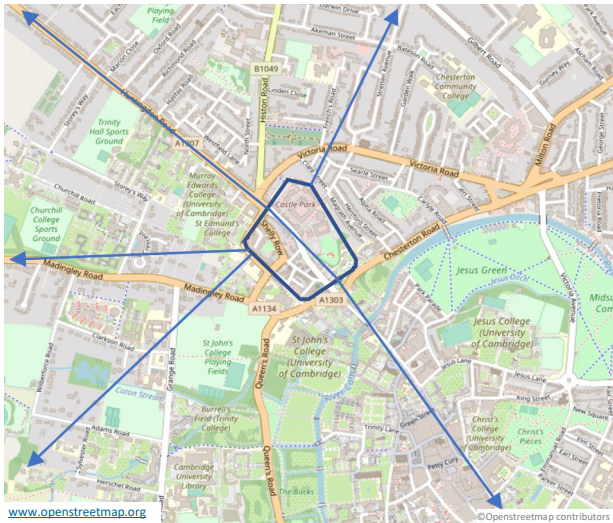
Horrible Histories also have a number of Roman offerings including "Rotten Romans".

Caroline Lawrence: Roman Mysteries Scrolls, Roman Mysteries and Roman Quests are three series in increasing order of difficulty. The Mysteries include exciting stories such as the destruction of Pompeii by Mt Vesuvius, while the Quests (perhaps for parents to read to Year 4) cover life in Roman Britain.

Jim Eldridge: "Roman Invasion (My Story)" is factually good for Roman Britain.

Henry Treece (eg "Legions of the Eagle"), **Rosemary Sutcliffe** (eg "Eagle of the Ninth"), and **Elizabeth Speare** (eg "Bronze Bow") are classic children's authors, difficult at Year 4 level (try the Treece first).

Roman Roads link Cambridge into the Empire



The Roman fort at Duroliponte was a hub for several roads leading out of the city. The **Via Devana** headed off up Huntingdon Road (modern-day Godmanchester was the Roman town of Durovigutum) and on eventually to Chester, while its southern route headed along Sidney St / Hills Road, before heading off to Colchester along the now much-loved footpath called the **Roman Road** (left).



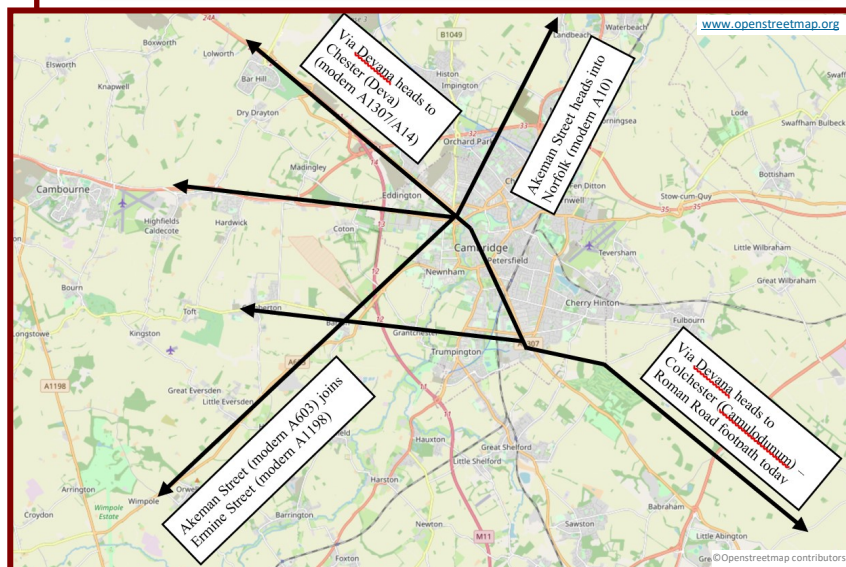
Also emanating from the fort was **Akeman Street**, heading north up what is now Mere Way and the A10 on its way to Norwich, and down the A603 to join **Ermine Street** (A1198). Other roads also linked to Ermine Street, running along what are broadly the A428 and B1046 heading west.

Digging up the past

The Museum of Cambridge's [Capturing Cambridge](#) website is a fantastic resource about the city, and a great place to learn about the discovery of a Roman burial on Long Road, found during land drainage for the playing fields of Perse Boys School; the six Romano-British burials within Girton College; and another burial at 71 Grange Road.

Cambridge is fast growing, and there are many new developments and even new towns being built in and around the city, often leading to archaeological discoveries when they are close to the old Roman road network.

Among many other finds, in 2009 two Roman villas (or possibly farmsteads) were discovered close to the M11, while a 2016 housing development in Bottisham discovered a Roman villa. Then in 2018 a Roman villa with baths was found in Eddington, and at the same time preparations for the new town of Northstowe revealed a substantial Roman settlement had once flourished here.



For more maps of the Roman road network in Britain see:

www.heritagedaily.com/2019/01/roman-britain-street-map/118249

Roman remains in Britain

Due to being a somewhat distant outpost of the Empire, combined with the later history and climate of Britain, the Roman remains cannot compare to those of Southern Europe, Middle East and North Africa, but there are still some very fine things to see.

British Museum: Fantastic collection including the Mildenhall Treasure (4th-century Roman treasure found buried in Suffolk).

Bath: Some of the best preserved Roman baths in the world, in a city with a long history, particularly noted for its Georgian times.

Hadrian's Wall: Perhaps the most appealing place to take children, with attractions across the north of the country. There are numerous forts (Housesteads (shown right), Chesters and Vindolanda being the best), as well as many sections of the wall you can walk along (the most beautiful at Crag Lough).

Fishbourne Palace: Largest Roman villa in Britain, known for its mosaics. (Near Chichester.)

Caerleon Roman Fortress: One of three garrisons set up by the Romans in Britain, with a grassy amphitheatre. (Near Cardiff.)

