

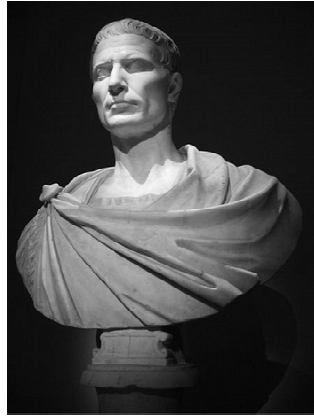
When Togas and Latin Came to Britannia

Chapter 1

Veni, Vidi, Vici.

“I came, I saw, I conquered.”

Julius Caesar



Caesar Conquers Gaul and Britannia

In 55 BC Julius Caesar landed in what we know as England today. He called it Britannia, the land of a people known as the Britons. He had just finished his conquest of Gaul, the old Roman name for France. Both the Gauls and the Britons were part of a much larger group known as the Celts (pronounced *Kelts* or *Selts*, either way).

There are some very definite characteristics that make historians lump these people together into one group. The first is their languages. From studying the grammar and vocabulary used by these Britons and Gauls, linguists can tell their languages were close kin and from a common base. They also had the same religion for the most part, that is, the Druidic religion. Druids were a special class of men among the Celtic people. They were the rulers, the leaders in warfare, and also the priests. They led the people in the worship of many gods and a strong belief in the afterlife. They thought oak trees and mistletoe were sacred and held most of their religious rites and sacrifices in oak forests. Our custom of kissing under the mistletoe at Christmas time is a cute twist on some old Druid beliefs.

Other areas around Britain besides Gaul were also Celtic at this time. Look at the map just inside the cover of this book. Find Wales. It is part of the same island as Britain but is separated from the rest of Britain by mountains. Now look at Ireland, which is

separated, obviously, by the Irish Sea. Then there's Scotland, the top part of Britain. Like Wales, Scotland is separated from the rest of the island by rough, mountainous terrain. Last of all, in the south is little Cornwall. By now you can guess: there's another mountain range separating Cornwall from the rest of Britain. Whenever you see distinct differences in culture between areas that are close together on a map, you can bet there is some geographical feature that separates the two, something hard to cross like a wide desert or a rugged mountain range. In 55 BC, Celtic people inhabited all of these places—that is, Gaul (France), Britain, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, and Cornwall. (Notice that *England* did not yet exist.) All these areas had their own dialects, tribes, and chiefs, but all were Celts. There was another group of Celts who had settled in Asia Minor, our present-day Turkey. Their Celtic language was Gallic for they were related to the Celts in Gaul. The apostle Paul wrote them a letter and it is part of our New Testament: the book of Galatians (*Gaul*-atians).

After conquering Gaul, Julius Caesar sailed across the English Channel to conquer Britannia just to say he could. Caesar didn't like thinking that anyone was above Roman rule. Britain was of no real use to the Romans at that time, and the Romans didn't really intend to settle there. They hated the climate. It was rainy and chilly, and though it was never terribly cold, it was never terribly warm there either. So Caesar built some temporary fortifications and left a few troops there, but only for a short while.

Then, around a hundred years later in 43 AD, Emperor Claudius I decided that Rome should go back to Britain, re-conquer it, and this time establish some permanent forts and buildings and convince a few Romans to actually settle there.

Fighting Druids

The Celtic people in Britain were fierce fighters, but they didn't stand much of a chance against the Roman Empire's advanced weapons and war tactics. The Romans had catapults and a cavalry, and, to top it off, the Romans even had their own version of a tank—elephants. You can imagine what the average Briton thought of these huge, strange beasts. He'd never even heard of an elephant, let alone seen one. The Romans floated them over the rough waters of the English Channel and terrorized the Britons with them. But more importantly, the Roman army was a highly organized and trained war-machine, unlike the Britons who were only temporarily banded together to fight a common enemy. Britons, as a matter of fact, usually spent a great deal of time fighting each other.



However, the Romans had to fight much longer and harder than they had anticipated because these Celtic Britons did have two distinct factors on their side. First, they were absolutely fearless warriors. They fought at times with such total abandon that

they sent waves of terror through the ranks of even the battle-hardened soldiers of Rome. They sometimes dyed their faces blue, as did the Celtic Scots in the movie *Braveheart*, and gave out fearsome, bloodcurdling battle cries as they charged. (Some historians think their battle cry may have been the forerunner to the famous rebel yell of the Southern soldier during the American Civil War). Along with the blue faces and the hollering came loud blasts from a multitude of blaring war-trumpets made of rams' horns. The whole effect was pretty overwhelming.

Second, their women often fought alongside the men and were even scarier! The wives of the Druid priests reportedly fought with a vicious frenzy unlike anything the Romans had ever seen. Tacitus, a Roman historian, described an attack by Druid warriors: "On the shore stood the opposing army with its dense array of armed warriors, while between the ranks dashed women in black attire like the Furies, with hair disheveled, waving brands." Another Roman author, Marcellinus, described a Celtic woman fighting "with flashing eyes, she...begins to rain blows mingled with kicks like shots discharged by the twisted cords of a catapult." There was a Celtic queen of this era named Boudicca. When her husband was killed by Roman soldiers, she led her people in several amazingly successful battles against the Roman army, but was then finally defeated. Our word *bodacious*, meaning outlandishly bold, comes from her name. Bodacious sounds like a good adjective for Celtic women in general.

In the end, the ferocity of the Celtic warriors could not defeat the immense and efficient army of the Roman Empire. Claudius eventually won, and Britain came under Roman rule. After victory was more or less secured, the Romans began setting up a few forts that eventually became towns. The most important of these was Londinium Fort. It, of course, turned into London, the capital city of present-day England. London is located on the Thames River (not pronounced as it is spelled—say *Těmz*). The Thames became a kind of liquid highway for travel and trade in England.

Some of the Celts in the northern regions, especially the Picts and Scots, were harder to subdue. They kept on attacking Roman outposts until Rome gave up on trying to control these rowdy hordes. Finally, after a century or so of fighting off these early Scottish highlanders, the Roman Emperor Hadrian built a rock wall to mark the northern boundary of Roman rule. The wall was eight feet thick, 20 feet high, and 80 miles long. It kept the un-subdued Celts separate from the subdued Celts. Most of the wall still stands there today. It is known as Hadrian's Wall (see map).

The Romans founded several towns: Bath, Canterbury, Caerphilly (in present-day Wales), as well as London, to name a few. With buildings as high as four and five stories, tiled roofs, beautiful mosaic tile floors, plumbing, and even central heat in the nicer homes, these towns flourished. Picture a bustling town brim full of educated nobility, servants, slaves, and a solid middle class all speaking Latin and wearing togas...in England! And it lasted almost 400 years.

Many Roman ruins can still be seen in England today. The city of Bath, known for having the only hot springs in England, has some of the best-preserved Roman buildings and baths. Roman roads can still be seen in many places as well. In fact, Rome was famous for her roads. There was nothing like them anywhere else in the world. Paved with stones,

extending miles and miles crisscrossing a vast empire, they made the traveling easier for certain evangelistic apostles of the first century AD to take the good news of a Savior to all parts of the world. The Roman Empire persecuted Christians off and on for nearly three centuries, but despite being fed to lions in the Coliseum and other Roman cruelties, the Christians endured, and their faith spread like a brush fire. Throughout history, the winds of persecution have always made the fire of the gospel burn brighter, and those wonderful Roman roads literally paved the way for the sparks to spread.

Constantine

In the fourth century AD, a man named Constantine was fighting in a civil war over the throne of the Roman Empire. One day he had a vision. There are several variations to the story, but basically he claimed that he saw the “sign of the Christ” in the sky and a voice telling him he would win if he fought under that sign. With renewed hope, he had the first two letters of the word Christ in Greek, *chi* (X) and *roe* (P), put on the standards of his army. He won the battle and converted to Christianity. Constantine became Rome’s first Christian emperor and he made Christianity legal all over the empire. Finally, the persecution of Christians by the Roman Empire was ended.

The Chi-Rho symbol for Christ is always depicted with the *Chi* placed over the *Rho* as Constantine presumably saw in his vision. The symbol has been used by the church throughout history and is still popular today in religious artwork from stained glass windows to altar cloths. Occasionally at Christmas time, you might see someone use the abbreviation *Xmas* for Christmas. This shorthand for Christmas is not sacrilegious as some people think. It is not x-ing out Christ, but rather using the traditional Greek initial *Chi* to stand for the first letter of Christ in Greek, just the way Constantine did.



352 AD Roman coin showing the Chi Rho symbol on the back. Used with permission. www.engcoins.com

By the time of Constantine’s conversion, there were already groups of Christians in England among both the Romans and the Britons who lived there, and now that the emperor himself was a Christian, they could openly worship the Savior without fear of persecution. The new faith spread and many more people were baptized. As history testifies, this newly adopted religion of Rome would prove to be even more durable than its stone-cobbled roads.

The Gospel in a Shamrock

It was during this new Christian era of Rome’s occupation that a certain sixteen-year-old boy in Britain was kidnapped by a raiding party from Ireland. The Irish were still a

pagan people and made a habit of pirating the coastal lands nearby whenever they felt like it. The boy's name was Patrick. His captors took him back to Ireland where they sold him as a slave to a farmer. He endured long, hard months of labor under a harsh owner who didn't understand a word of Patrick's language.

Though Patrick's parents were Christians, Patrick himself had never thought too much about religion and had not committed his life to Christ. Now, he had plenty of time to think about God while he slept out in the cold watching the farmer's sheep, and, with his situation both desperate and miserable, it wasn't long before he sought to be reconciled to the only One who could help. He surrendered his life to God. As Patrick wrote later in his *Confessio*, "[God] guarded me, and comforted me, as would a Father his son." Then one night he heard a voice saying to him, "See, your ship is ready." Patrick believed it was God telling him to escape. So, he risked the harsh punishment that awaited him if he were recaptured and headed for the coast. A ship bound for France "just happened" to be docked right where Patrick ended up, and the captain was willing to take him aboard if he helped with the work. He arrived in France and made his way to a monastery. He stayed and studied under the monks for a while but eventually was able to travel back home to Britain. He would have liked nothing better than to just stay there, but God had other plans.

Patrick began to sense that the Lord was calling him to take the news of the gospel to the very folk who had so brutally enslaved him. Returning to Ireland, he spent the rest of his life in a missionary effort to win the Irish tribes to Christianity. Because of the great success of his work there, we know him today as St. Patrick, and St. Patrick's Day is celebrated each year in his honor.

Irish tradition says that Patrick used the common three-leaf clover, or shamrock, to explain the concept of the Trinity to his new converts. The shamrock remains the most recognized symbol for Ireland to this day, and in the hearts of Christians everywhere it stands for God's miraculous work in and through the man named Patrick.



Rome Gets Vandal-ized

The Roman Empire started having major problems around this time—from both inside and out. Inside, it was inflation, government corruption, and a huge government debt. Outside, it was Germans. Yes, Germans, but they weren't called that yet. "Germania," the general area we know as Germany today, was full of heathen tribes like the Ostragoths, the Visigoths, and the Vandals (from which we get our words *vandal* and *vandalism*). These tribes were uncivilized and uneducated compared to the highly advanced and educated Christian Romans, and they liked the climate of Italy and France and the loot they found when they won a city. So, they started coming down into Gaul and Italy to take over one city after another. They had no centralized government, but they had a common religion and culture, and their languages had a common base which linguists group together as being *Germanic*.

As Roman cities came increasingly under attack from these northern barbarians, Rome began to bring her troops closer to home, abandoning the more distant outposts and far-off places. Britannia fit that description. So, in 410 AD the last of the Roman troops left Britain. The towns and forts were abandoned. Latin would never again be the common tongue in that part of the world. But, hey, that left the Celts free at last after having their territory occupied by foreigners for centuries. Culturally they were still distinctly Celtic, not Roman. However, they had added Christianity to their cultural soup, along with its accompaniment of well-educated monks and priests and the language of Latin, the language used by scholars for all formal books and important records.

The End of an Empire and the Close of an Age

Now, look at the timeline at the front of this book. Officially, Rome fell as an empire in 476 AD. Historians mark the end of the Roman Empire as the official close of ancient history. The next period—with which most of this book is concerned—is the Middle Ages. If you round up the date for the fall of the Roman Empire to 500 AD, then it's really easy to memorize the dates for the Middle Ages: 500 AD to 1500 AD, an even thousand years. That means the Middle Ages went from the *middle* of the first millennium to the *middle* of the next. Get it? That's why it's the *middle* ages... That's not really the reason for the name, but it will help the dates stick in your mind. So Rome fell, ancient history closed, and the Middle Ages began.

The beginning of the Middle Ages marks the beginning of the history of our language because, with the Romans gone, Britain was now vulnerable to the *next* invasion, the invasion that brought English to the shores of England.



AD 435. This year the Goths sacked the city of Rome, and never since have the Romans reigned in Britain.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle