

British History Series: Episode 2 - "The Romans Return"

Presented by Chris Green

Introduction

Chris Green continued the series with the second episode, focusing on the Roman conquest of Britain and the resistance led by figures like Caratacus and Boudicca. The talk covered the period from Julius Caesar's expeditions to the eventual decline of Roman rule in Britain.

Key Themes Covered

1. Julius Caesar's Expeditions (55-54 BC)

- Caesar's invasions were more about prestige than conquest. He defeated British tribes but left without establishing lasting control.
- His expeditions introduced Britain to the Roman world, and trade connections between southern British tribes and Roman Gaul grew.

2. Claudius' Invasion (AD 43)

- Emperor Claudius launched a full-scale invasion of Britain to bolster his political standing.
- Four legions and 20,000 auxiliaries, led by General Aulus Plautius, landed in Kent.
- The Romans defeated a united British force at the **Battle of the Medway**, killing the British leader Togodumnus.
- Claudius arrived with elephants to claim victory and accepted the surrender of the Catuvellauni tribe at Colchester.

3. Roman Expansion and Resistance

- Over the next four years, the Romans expanded their control across southern Britain, defeating tribes like the Durotriges in Dorset.
- **Caratacus**, brother of Togodumnus, led resistance in Wales but was eventually captured and taken to Rome, where he famously impressed Claudius with a speech and was spared.

4. Boudicca's Rebellion (AD 60)

- The Iceni tribe, led by Queen Boudicca, rebelled after the Romans ignored their king's will, raped his daughters, and whipped Boudicca.

- Boudicca's forces destroyed Roman settlements at Colchester, London (Londinium), and St Albans (Verulamium), killing tens of thousands.
- The rebellion was crushed at the **Battle of Watling Street**, where Boudicca's army was trapped by their own families' wagons. Boudicca's fate is unknown, but she likely died shortly after.

5. Roman Rule in Britain

- By AD 83, the Romans had pushed into Scotland, defeating the Caledonians at the **Battle of Mons Graupius**.
- **Hadrian's Wall** was built in AD 122 to mark the northern boundary of Roman Britain, though trade and influence extended beyond it.
- Roman towns like Londinium (London), Colchester, and Chester were established, and Roman roads (e.g., Watling Street, the A5) still form the basis of modern British infrastructure.

6. Decline of Roman Rule

- By the 4th century, Roman Britain faced increasing raids from Picts, Scots, and Saxons.
- In AD 367, a combined attack by these groups overran the province, and Roman control weakened.
- In AD 410, Emperor Honorius told the British towns to defend themselves, effectively ending Roman rule in Britain.

Key Figures and Events

- **Caratacus:** A British resistance leader who fought the Romans in Wales and was eventually captured but spared by Claudius.
- **Boudicca:** Queen of the Iceni who led a major rebellion against Roman rule, destroying several Roman settlements.
- **Hadrian's Wall:** Built to mark the northern boundary of Roman Britain, though trade and influence extended beyond it.
- **St. Alban:** Britain's first Christian martyr, executed in Verulamium (St Albans) in AD 305.

Fun Facts

- **London's Origins:** Londinium was a Roman invention, established as a trading town and now one of the world's largest cities.
- **Roman Roads:** Many modern British roads, like the A5 (Watling Street) and A1 (Ermine Street), follow Roman routes.

- **Elephants in Britain:** Claudius brought war elephants to Britain to impress the locals and claim victory.
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Next Week: The Dark Ages

- The series continues with the fall of Roman Britain and the arrival of the Saxons, leading to the so-called "Dark Ages."
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Questions from the Audience

- **Q: What happened to the families of captured leaders like Caratacus?**
 - A: While Roman history is often written by the victors, there's no record of Caratacus' family being killed. It's likely they were spared, as Caratacus himself was allowed to live in Rome.
 - **Q: Why isn't St. Alban more widely recognized as England's patron saint?**
 - A: St. Alban is Britain's first Christian martyr, but St. George became more prominent due to later medieval traditions.
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Join us next week for more fascinating insights into British history!

Series presented by Chris Green, 2025.