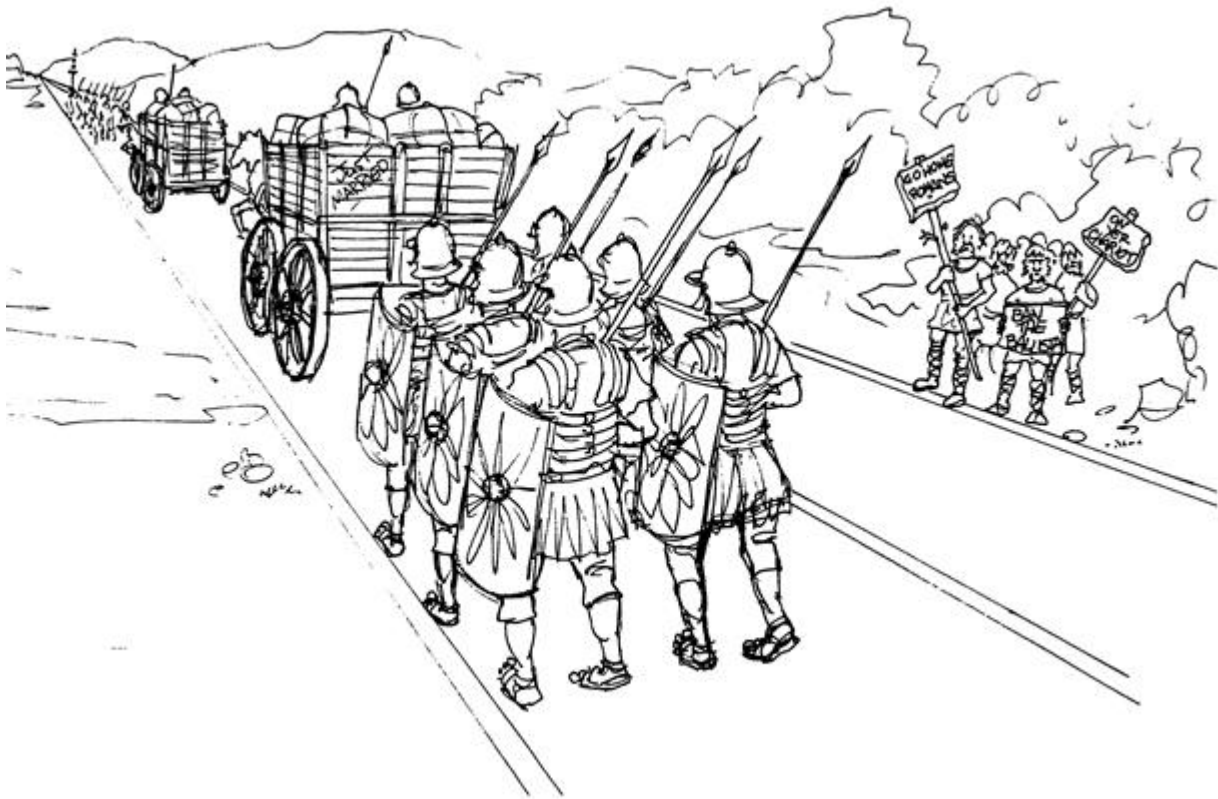


LIFE IN ROMAN BEDFORDSHIRE A RESOURCE PACK



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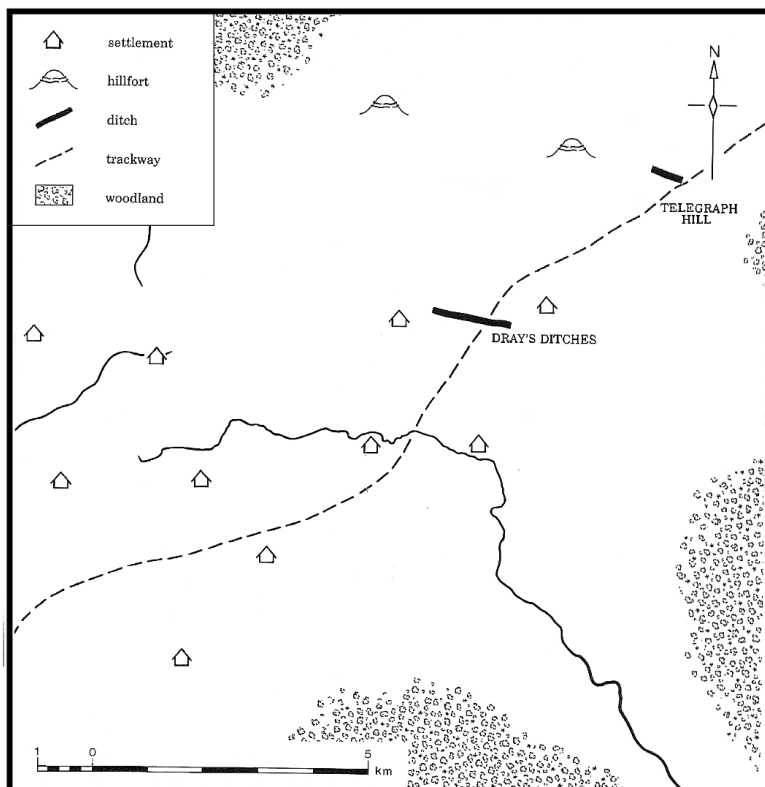
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ROMAN BEDFORDSHIRE - AN OVERVIEW

Before The Romans

Before the Roman invasion, much of Britain was settled by farming communities and what is now Bedfordshire was no exception. Each community had skilled craftspeople; blacksmiths, carpenters, potters and weavers. The Britons traded with the Roman Empire. Strabo, a Roman geographer, noted that Britain exported cattle, hides, corn, hunting dogs, textiles, gold, silver, iron and slaves; and imported ivory necklaces, bracelets, amber, glassware and other luxury goods. We also know from archaeological evidence that they imported wine, olive oil and pottery. This indicates that Britain, and particularly the South East, was well within the orbit of Roman trade prior to the invasion and its imposition of Roman government.

Britain was divided by a dozen or so well organised tribes, each with their own leaders. Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire were the home of the Catuvellauni, who conquered the Essex tribe, the Trinovantes, under their leader Cunobelinus; Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*. He established his capital at Camulodunum, Colchester, which would later become the Roman capital. Evidence found in the region suggest that it had strong trade links with the Roman Empire and was already assimilating the Roman lifestyle before the invasion and, in diplomatic relations with the Romans, Cunobelinus was considered as the King of the Britons.



Much of Luton and Dunstable was farmland before the Roman invasion. The small communities that worked the land lived in farmsteads; clusters of a few roundhouses sometimes enclosed by a defensive bank or ditch. A settlement of this kind was excavated at Puddlehill, north of Houghton Regis. There are no known farmsteads of this kind within Luton itself; the closest are those at Sundon and south-east of Galley Hill. All the known sites are within reach of the Icknield Way, an ancient and important route linking East Anglia with central southern England.

Settlement of the Luton district before the Roman conquest.

(Drawn by Jo Richards)

The Roman Invasions

Julius Caesar

The Roman army first came to Britain in 55 BC, and then again in 54 BC, under the command of Julius Caesar. Caesar recalls in his account that he defeated the Catuvellauni, who led the British resistance (possibly from Wheathampstead). The Romans left Britain after imposing a treaty demanding tribute, hostages and tribal harmony, with Caesar returning to Rome to become Emperor and, eventually, to be assassinated.

The Emperor Claudius

After the murder of the Emperor Caligula in AD 41 his uncle Claudius was chosen as Emperor. He ordered the invasion of Britain for several reasons:

1. He could gain the support of the army by offering them opportunities for victories and plunder.
2. He could prove himself a great leader in the tradition of previous Emperors.
3. After the death of Cunobelinus, tribal rivalries and a disputed succession weakened Britain's leadership and meant much of Britain was politically unstable.
4. Britain's mineral and agricultural wealth made the country a useful addition to the Empire.
5. Britain had long helped resistance to Roman rule in Gaul.
6. Britain was the home of the Druids, priests whose savage rites stirred up hostility against the Romans.

In AD 43 four Roman legions, with several auxiliary units, crossed the Channel. They came ashore at Richborough in Kent and marched inland initially to the River Medway and then to the River Thames. At both rivers, they fought bloody battles against the local tribes led by Cunobelinus' sons, Caratacus and Togodumnus. The Romans emerged triumphant and, after the arrival of Emperor Claudius, marched to Colchester where they received the surrender of eleven British chiefs. Colchester, known as Camulodunum, then became Britain's capital until the Boudiccan rebellion, when the centre of government moved to London.

The Roman Army in Bedfordshire

From a military base at Colchester, three legions spread to the west, the Midlands and Lincoln to complete the Roman occupation of lowland Britain. As the legions advanced, they built a network of roads in their wake to ensure that supplies in the south-east could reach soldiers at the front line. Along the road that we know now as the A5 the legions established temporary forts at what were to become Verulamium (St. Albans), Durocobriavae (Dunstable) and Magiovinium (Fenny Stratford). They were laying out Watling Street, one of the first main roads to be constructed. No military remains have been found at Dunstable, however, its location at the junction of the Watling Street and the Icknield Way (half-way between the other two forts) and its Roman name (which translates as 'fort' and 'bridge') suggest it housed a similar station.

Queen Boudicca's Revolt

There was a major rebellion in AD 60/61 which was led by the famous Boudicca of the Iceni tribe in the Norfolk area. Her husband Prasutagus had been a 'client king', who was allowed a degree of independence in return for supporting the Roman invaders. On his death he made Boudicca queen and divided his wealth between her and the Empire. However the Roman authorities, not content with this, seized his property in such a brutal manner that it sparked off an uprising, led by Queen Boudicca, which spread across East Anglia. The new Roman town at Camulodunum (Colchester) was sacked and then burnt, followed by Londinium (London) and Verulamium. Archaeological evidence shows that the rebels almost completely destroyed these three towns before they were defeated by a Roman army they outnumbered.

For several years after the rebellion, it seems there were few Britons in the affected area that dared identify themselves too closely with the occupying power. But with changes in the personnel of the government, security was eventually restored. The towns were rebuilt, and even rural communities began to acquire whatever aspects of Roman civilisation they could afford. The sons of leading Britons were educated after the Roman manner, and it became fashionable to display all the outward trappings of a Roman way of life.

The Roman Trade Network

The desire to secure trade routes, supplies and markets was a major motivation behind the expansion of the Roman Empire. The conquest of what is now Britain was no exception. As a new territory it supplied, amongst other things; slaves, metals and hunting dogs but also a new market for goods from other parts of the Empire. Dunstable would have been a trading centre for the settlements in the countryside around it. Many of the artefacts on display, found at sites in our area, in the gallery originated in other parts of the Empire.

The Departure of the Romans

The decline of Roman Britain was a gradual process. Saxon raiders had long threatened the eastern coast, and in the 3rd-4th centuries the defences were accordingly strengthened. In AD 367 attacks from Caledonia (Scotland), Hibernia (Ireland) and the Saxons left Britain in chaos. The 4th century was a period of relative prosperity, but as raids and political instability continued to threaten Britain the security of Rome itself was tested. Troops were gradually withdrawn for the defence of Italy or to support political adventures by Roman generals in Britain, attempting to seize power in the chaos of a crumbling empire. Finally, in AD 410, Emperor Honorius advised the British leaders to look to their own defence.

With the Roman withdrawal from Britain the major pottery industries collapsed and the supply of coinage dropped off. This led some Britons to bury hoards of coins for safekeeping. Such a hoard was uncovered in a sand quarry at Tingrith. Over 2000 bronze coins had been placed in a pottery urn. The coins were minted in the 4th century and their good condition suggested that they were buried about AD 336. Coins from this hoard are on display in the Roman gallery at Stockwood Discovery Centre.

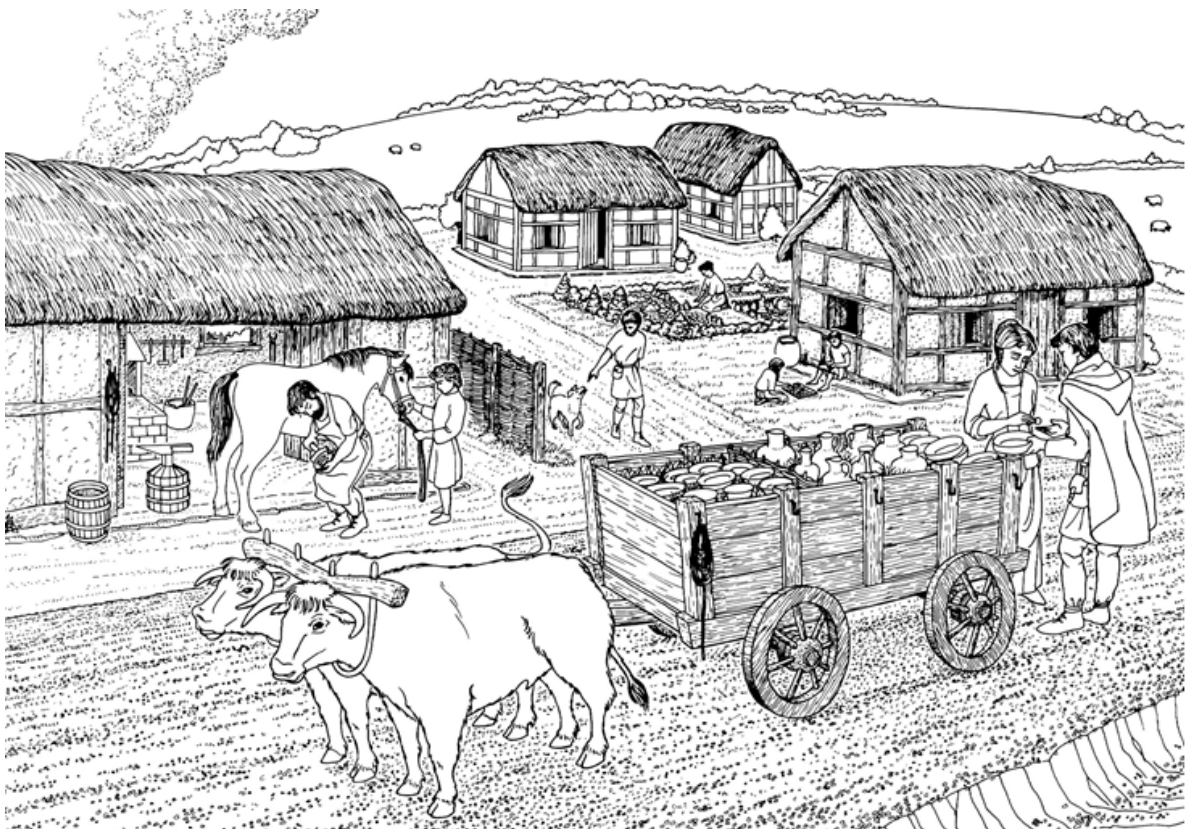
The gradual withdrawal from the western parts of the Empire and the collapse of its historical administrative centre in Rome does not, however, mark the end of the Roman Empire. The eastern parts of the Empire became Byzantium and remained until the defeat of Trebizond by the Ottoman Turks in the 15th century.

Life in Roman Bedfordshire

The Countryside

During the Romano-British period, the majority of people lived in the country in two types of settlement.

- i. Farmsteads: Celtic farmsteads continued to be occupied. At Puddlehill, north of Dunstable, a succession of prehistoric occupation continued into the Romano-British period. Post-built houses with earth floors were constructed and pits and ditches dug for farming purposes. Although the layout of the farm itself did not change significantly, the styles of pottery and other artefacts introduced to Britain by the Romans were acquired and used.
- ii. Villas: some of the rural population became 'Romanised' and villas (or large stone-built farmhouses) of the type found elsewhere in the Roman Empire developed in the Bedfordshire countryside. At Church End, Totternhoe a stone building, 65m by 75m, was constructed around three sides of a courtyard. An ornamental sandstone gateway opened onto a road approaching the house from the south. The villa incorporated a bath-block, hypocausts (under-floor heating systems), mosaic pavements and painted wall plaster. The contents of the building, e.g. pottery, metal fittings and glassware, showed a similar preference for Roman tastes. The villas, though, were still working farms, not merely country residences. Finds from the site at Totternhoe Villa can be seen in the Roman Gallery at Stockwood Discovery Centre.



An artist's impression of the Romano-British settlement at Limbury, Luton

Towns

While most lived in a rural setting, urban life was a major part of the Roman Mediterranean world and it was Imperial policy to establish towns in 'barbarian' territories. The towns were intrinsically linked to the rural populations that surrounded them and served as trade and administrative centres. The third largest town in Roman Britain was sited at Verulamium near the earlier fort, dating from about AD 50 to the late 4th century. This was set out on a regular street grid, with all the amenities required by Roman civilisation; an administrative centre, market place, public baths, theatre and temples.

The Roman road network, although initially constructed to supply the military front line, also produced a stimulus for other larger settlements to develop. Dunstable can be included in this category. Excavations have revealed the remains of stone wall footings and building materials, timber buildings and wells. A cemetery uncovered in Friary Field, west of High Street South, contained the remains of over 100 individuals dating from the 3rd to possibly the 5th centuries.

Several activities were centred at Durocbrivae (Dunstable):

- i. Administration: the Britons were required by the Romans to provide the '*Annona*' (levy of corn for feeding the army), the '*Tributum soli*' (land productivity tax) and the '*Tributum capitis*' (poll tax). Minor towns such as Dunstable probably served as collection points.
- ii. Trade: Durocbrivae was on an important crossroads with access to both local and foreign markets.
- iii. Agriculture: ditches, farming implements and structures within Dunstable suggest that farming was practised within and close to the town.
- iv. Religion: religious activities may have centred on the town.

Archaeological Evidence in and around Luton

1. Maiden Bower Romano-British cemetery. Found in 1907 by Worthington Smith. In total eleven pots and five Samian vessels were collected. The remains of wooden coffins and cremation urns were also uncovered. Probably dating from 100 - 200 AD.

2. Park Street in Luton. Luton Archaeological Society monitored some building work and uncovered a selection of Roman pottery and tiles, suggesting a building at this location. Probably dating from 100 - 200 AD.

3. Stockwood Park in Luton. A Roman road has long been known to run north through the grounds of Stockwood Discovery Centre. The road was excavated where it runs through the grounds of Farley Junior School in 1960 by archaeologist James Dyer. The road had a crushed flint surface and probably dated from about 250 – 350 AD.

4. Wigmore Valley Park in Luton. A possible Roman building was discovered in Wigmore Valley Park in Luton during the construction of a water main. Probably dating from about 50 - 350 AD.

5. Toddington near Luton. Old Park Farm may well be the site of a substantial Roman building. Probably dating from about 50 - 150 AD.

6. Limbury in Luton. Excavations in 1953 by W. H. Manning during housing development

uncovered a Roman settlement at a point close to where the Icknield Way crosses the River Lea. Probably dating from about 50 - 350 AD.

7. Winch Hill, Luton Field walking by Manshead Archaeological Society revealed the probable site of a Romano-British building. Date unknown.

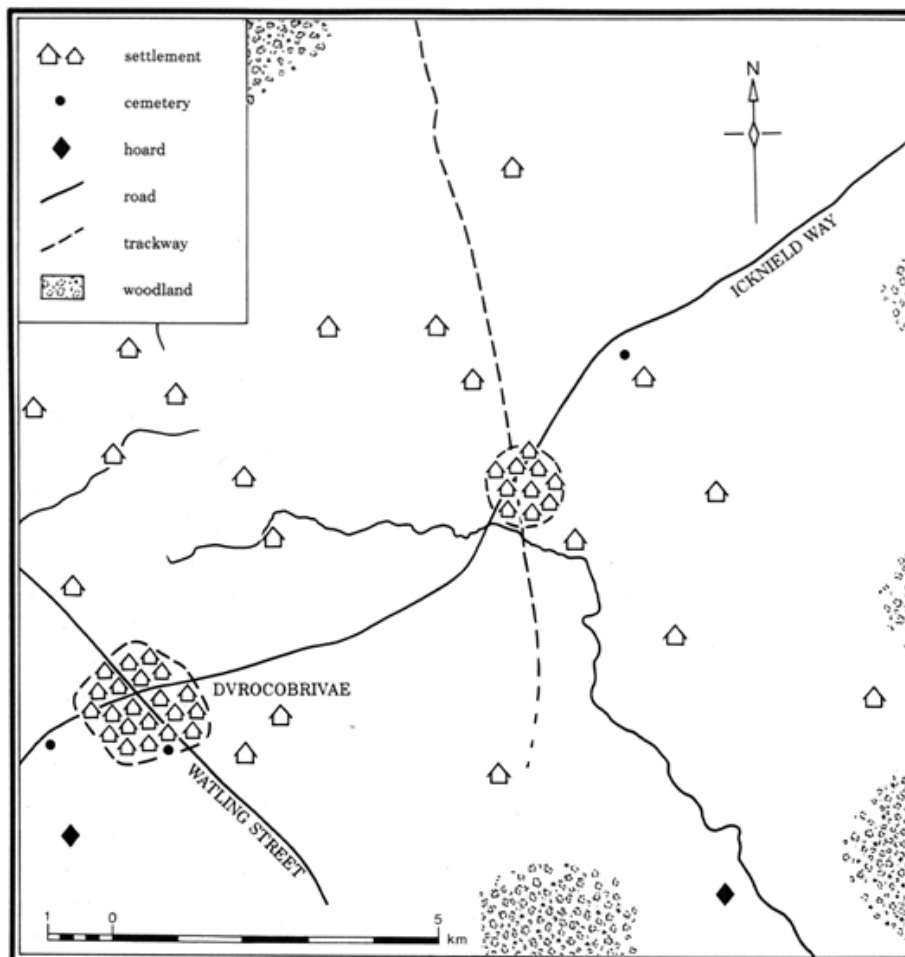
8. Richmond Hill in Luton. During the construction of Richmond Hill in 1926 a number of early Roman pottery vessels and a possible farmstead were uncovered. The finds included a number of cremation vessels. Dating from 50 to 100 AD.

9. Puddlehill in Houghton Regis. Excavated by the Manshead Archaeological Society under Les Matthews, they uncovered a number of Roman buildings before quarrying on Puddlehill. The site dates from between 50 – 200 AD

10. Dunstable, called Durocbrivae by the Romans. During the 1960s and 1970s Manshead Archaeological Society excavated in Dunstable town centre. They uncovered a settlement dating from 50 to 350 AD on the crossroads of Roman Watling Street and the Icknield Way. The settlement was in use for most of the Roman period. Finds included a Roman cemetery and a well 28 metres deep (about 90 feet).

11. Totternhoe Roman villa. Roman finds were first recorded here by Worthington Smith in 1904. The villa was excavated in 1954 and 1956 by Manshead Archaeological Society. It dates from at least 250 – 350 AD.

12. Kensworth, south of Luton. Roman pottery found by Worthington Smith in the early 1900s. It probably dates from between 100 - 200 AD.



Luton and district during the Roman Period

(Drawn by Jo Richards)

Pottery

Everyday cooking, storing and serving pots were made locally and were probably sold at Dunstable market. Kilns in Bedfordshire have been discovered at Harrold and at Mile Road, Bedford.

Amphorae containing wine, olive oil, dried fruit and fish paste were imported from Mediterranean countries. Pottery was also imported from the Continent, for example the glossy red pottery, known as Samian ware, from France. Samian ware conferred a degree of status on its owners, not only through its craftsmanship but also through its price. It was the 'best china' of the Roman Empire and because of this many pieces have been found showing signs of repair. Potters in Britain, including those in the Nene Valley, began imitating these fine wares in the 3rd and 4th centuries. Examples of both imported and Romano-British pottery, found at local sites, can be seen in the Museum.

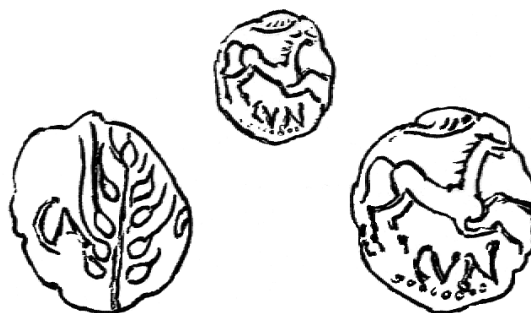
Some Roman glass has also been found in the area. By its very nature it survives less well than less fragile materials. Glass vessels have been found in graves, and examples can be seen in the Roman gallery at Stockwood Discovery Centre.

Coinage

Coins were first used in Britain in the Late Iron Age. The first coins minted by the Catuvellauni were associated with Tasciovanus, the King of the tribe in 30BC-AD5. Coin moulds of this date have been found in St. Albans. His successor, Cunobelinus, also minted coins. Coins at this stage became a means of propaganda when few successions were uncontested. Coins minted established leadership and also demonstrated allegiances, through their artwork and inscriptions.

Coin of Cunobelinus (10-40 AD) found in Leagrave. It is inscribed CVN for Cunobelinus and CA for Camulodunum (Colchester) his capital.

During the Roman occupation the use of coins became much more widespread and so the amount of coins in circulation increased. Coins enabled trade and commerce to take place with ease. The majority of coins were 'struck' in bronze, but they were also produced in gold and silver. A large number of coins of different types used and minted during the period of occupation can be seen in the gallery. Coins also offer archaeologists a means of dating sites and as such finds are always important.



Coin hoards

Sometimes coins are found in large groups with contextual clues to suggest that they have been deliberately buried. These are known as 'hoards'. The most remarkable hoard to be found in Bedfordshire is the Shillington hoard.

In October 1998 two separate coins hoards, one consisting entirely of gold coins and one of silver coins, were found close to springs at Shillington by metal detectorists Shane Pyper and Simon Leete. That these two hoards were buried so close together and at the same time, suggests that they were buried as offerings to the gods rather than valuables buried for safekeeping. An Iron Age mirror was also found close by and this suggests the continuity

of a native religious sanctuary in this area.

The Shillington Hoard is the largest gold coin hoard found in Britain to date and was probably buried somewhere between 81 and 96 AD. The hoard consists of 127 gold coins dating from the reign of the Emperor Tiberius, who reigned from 14 - 37 AD, through to the reign of Vespasian, who reigned from 69 to 79 AD.

The silver coin hoard was buried at the same time. The coins were in use from about 100 BC, during the time of the Roman Republic until the reign of the Emperor Vespasian (69 – 79 AD). This explains their worn appearance.

However this is not the only possible explanation for hoards. The Tingrith Hoard, also on display, was discovered in at Tingrith sand quarry, near Flitwick, in 1961. Over 2,000 bronze coins had been placed in a pottery urn. A stone slab found nearby may have marked the position of the hoard. This suggests the hoard was buried for safekeeping, but the owners never returned.

With no banks, people often buried their valuables for safekeeping. Sometimes they never returned to retrieve them, leaving them for people to discover hundreds of years later.

Religion

During the Romano-British period, there was a fusion of native Celtic religious beliefs with the imported Roman beliefs. This was common throughout the Empire; and is often used to explain the Roman Empire's adaptability and longevity. Often, Roman gods were identified with native deities. Superstition was an important aspect of life in the Romano-British period.

Our understanding of late Celtic religion is incomplete but deities associated with nature seem to be significant. Archaeological evidence suggests springs were often considered sacred sites where ritual offerings were made. Shirrell Spring near Totternhoe and a spring between Chalgrave and Toddington may have had such associations.

At Shillington the coin hoards and bronze mirror suggest another religious site. These deposits were of great value and would have been very significant offerings. Other similar finds from across the country, for example at Snettisham in Norfolk, indicate that there was a custom in the late Iron Age of depositing groups of gold and silver items as votive offerings. So it is likely that the site where the hoards were buried was a religious or 'cult' site.

Central to Roman religion was the 'Imperial Cult', whereby deceased emperors and their descendants were deified and worshipped. Other classical deities were associated with specific activities: e.g. Mars, the god of war, and Venus, the goddess of love. Roman-type temples have been identified at Verulamium. The Roman army also brought with it religions from the East. An inscribed pot from Dunstable indicates the existence of a cult of Cybele of Syria in the region.

Christianity had probably found its way into Britain by the 3rd century. It was officially disapproved because it discouraged the worship of emperors. It was this that led to its suppression when so many other religions were tolerated. However, the Emperor Constantine was converted in AD 312 and Christian worship was then permitted.

Burial

The early Romano-British burial customs were very much a continuation of late prehistoric practises. For the first 100 years of Roman occupation, cremation was dominant. Belief in the after-life was common to Celtic and Roman religions, and therefore grave goods continued to be buried along with the dead. A 1st century cremation cemetery was discovered at Richmond Hill, Luton.

From the mid 2nd century, inhumation (burial of the whole body) began to replace cremation as the dominant custom, although grave goods remained common. The Romano-British inhumation cemetery at Friary Field, Dunstable produced over 100 burials, many with coffins and grave goods. Some of the grave goods from this site are now in the collection of Luton Museums and examples can be seen in the Roman displays. Overall, the burials probably reflect a community of 20-30 people. The infant mortality rate was high, as was that of young female adults, which suggests a high risk of death as a result of childbirth.

With the spread of Christianity in the latter part of the Romano-British period, inhumations were more consistently aligned east to west and grave goods were no longer deposited. At Friary Field, Dunstable many of the burials to the north of the enclosed area displayed possible Christian characteristics.

By the late Romano-British period, not all burials were carried out with great care. To the east of the Dunstable cemetery a well was found to contain the skeletons of four female and three male adults. At Galley Hill, immediately north-east of Luton, a prehistoric barrow was reused for twelve shallow inhumation burials around AD 360. The graves appear to have remained open for some time after deposition of the bodies.

One myth the study of these skeletons can dispel is that people in the past were much shorter than they are today. The bodies found in the Dunstable graves recorded average heights of men 1.68m (5ft 7ins) and women 1.60m (5ft 3ins). This is not much shorter than the modern averages of men 1.74m (5ft 8½ins) and women 1.61m (5ft 3½ins). This evidence is supported by the fact that one qualification needed to join the Roman Army was to be over 1.72m (5ft 8ins).

Sessions and Resources

The following taught sessions and resources are available at Stockwood Discovery Centre.

Roman Discoveries

The session is focused on local Roman finds from Totterhoe and Shillington. Groups are firstly given trays that each contains a selection of real and replica Roman objects and the groups are asked to decide what the objects are and construct a theory as to what was happening on the site on which their collection of objects was found. They then explain this to the rest of the class and the leader provides additional information and pointers. The children then look at the Shillington hoard of first century Roman gold coins. The circumstances of their discovery are explained and pupils are encouraged to consider why they were originally buried. Groups are given likely scenarios and asked to make a case for that version events to the rest of the class.

Learning Objectives

Pupils will have the opportunity to:

- Handle and investigate real Roman objects and artefacts
- Appreciate the significance of objects to understanding the past; specifically the Roman period, and the role of archaeologists in this
- Improve their understanding of processes of archaeology
- Interpret evidence through enquiry and discussion
- Ascertain the differences between real and replica objects
- Use technical vocabulary
- Become more aware of the Roman presence in the local area



The Shillington Hoard

Don't Let the Bedbugs Bite

The session begins with a 'beauty pageant' of bugs that irritated the Romans as much as they bother people today and a discussion of how we deal with them. The pupils then explore how the Romans coped without modern methods. In pairs or threes they 'become' Roman doctors, each given a patient with an illness or problem. They then visit our 'herb garden' and select an appropriate treatment for the patient. These are shared with the class and the leader will assess the likelihood of success, providing more information about the herb and its modern usage if any. Next pupils use Roman style equipment to make a simple herbal remedy to a Roman recipe. The second part of the session explores the role of faith in Roman health and illness and includes them using air-drying clay to make a votive offering and discussing which approach, medicine or prayer, was likely to work best.

Learning Objectives

Pupils will have the opportunity to:

- Learn about some of the pests and diseases people suffered with during the Roman period
- Compare how the Romans treated such pests with how we would treat them today
- Consider the importance of religion in the understanding of illness and medicine
- Make up a simple herbal insect repellent
- Make a votive offering to take back to school

Meet a Roman Soldier

Find out about life in the Roman army in this session led by a professional re-enactor in role as Roman legionary Genialis.

Learning Objectives

Pupils will have the opportunity to:

- Interact with a Roman legionary
- Learn about the equipment and conditions of the ordinary Roman soldier
- Handle high quality replica equipment
- Ask questions of a 'Roman'

Blanket Dig

This session is tightly focused on the 'dig', layers of cloth each representing a different time period with relevant 'features' and 'finds'. The emphasis is on questioning and discussion although children do get the opportunity to handle objects, including Stone Age hand tools. The session begins with a discussion of how they and their teachers find out about the past to introduce archaeology. The techniques and science of archaeology are discussed briefly before the 'top soil' is removed. Beneath the first layer is modern rubbish which introduces the idea that the majority of what archaeologists find is 'rubbish', but that it can tell us a lot about a society and period, but not everything. We then speed back through time stopping at key points in English history: Victorian, Tudor or Mediaeval, Anglo-Saxon, Roman, Iron Age, Bronze Age, Neolithic and Palaeolithic. The session provides a sound chronological context for Romans or Saxons and deals with the 'big numbers' of time.

Learning Objectives

Pupils will have the opportunity to:

- See the chronology of British human history illustrated in a concrete way
- Consider what the archaeologists of the future may think about what remains of our period
- Discuss our sources of knowledge about the past
- Handle real artefacts from the past 125,000 years of human history
- Think like archaeologists; looking at evidence and extrapolating theories
- Appreciate the difference between the recent past and the long past (the years before they were born are not ancient history!)