

Roman towns



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Before the Roman invasion

At the end of the Iron Age, Britons were living in hillforts and small settlements. Families lived in roundhouses. Walls and ditches defended hillforts against attack. There were no towns and little organisation.



After the Roman invasion

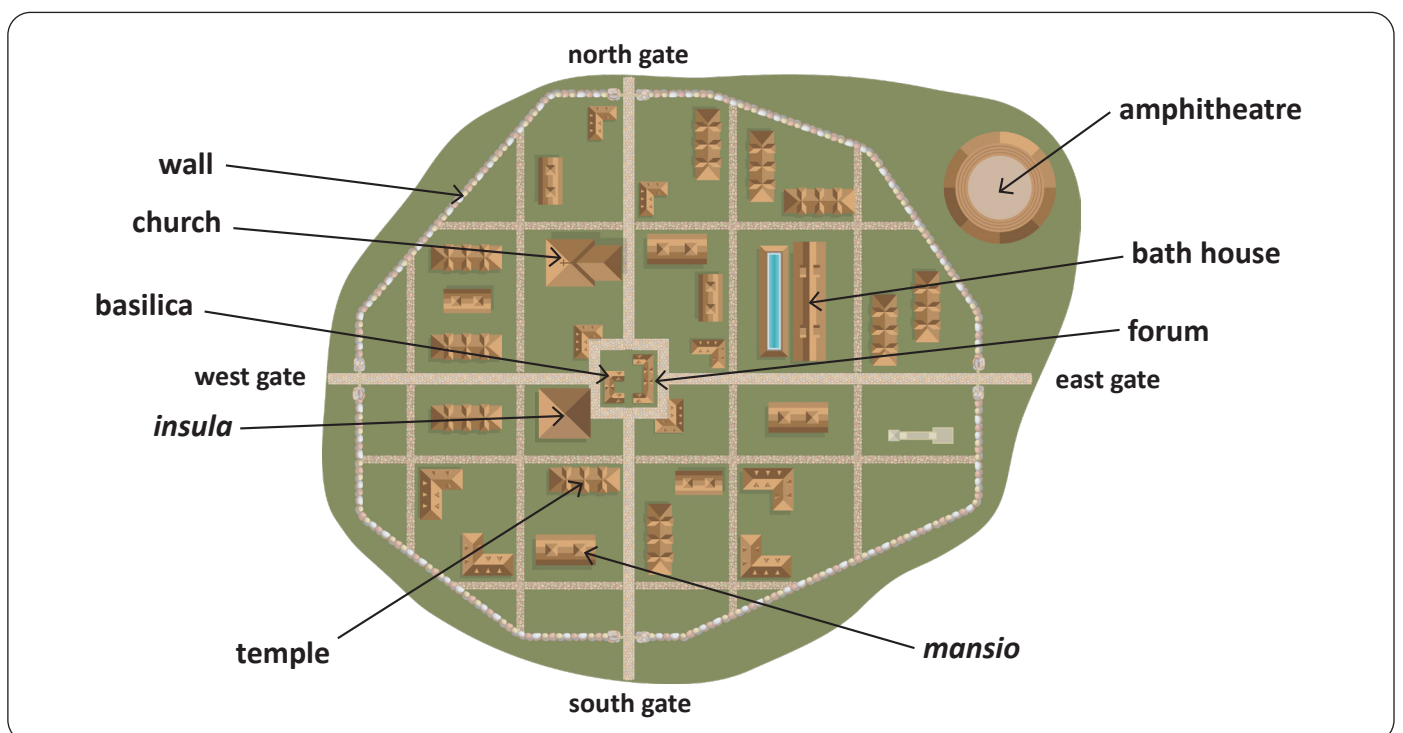
After the invasion of Britain in AD 43, the Romans started to build towns. There were 22 major Roman towns in Britain. These towns were planned and designed in the same way as towns across the Roman Empire. The Romans used towns to administer the local area and as centres for meetings and trade.



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Layout of Roman towns

All Roman towns were built in the same grid pattern, like a chessboard. The roads ran either from north to south or from east to west. Each town had a central square, called a forum and a town hall called a basilica. Shops, houses and apartment buildings lined the streets.



Features of Roman towns

Defensive walls and gates

Roman towns were surrounded by defensive walls, which provided protection from attack. There were gates in the walls, which allowed visitors and residents to enter and leave the town.



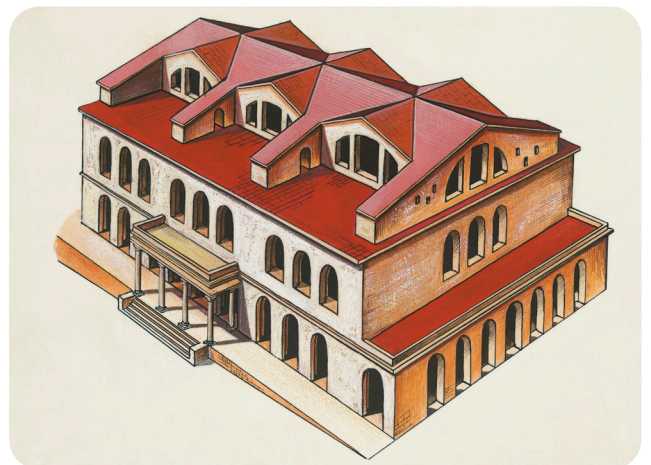
Forum

The forum was the marketplace in the centre of a town. There were shops and market stalls selling food and goods from across the Roman Empire. It was also used as a general meeting place, where people could spend time with friends and listen to speeches and debates.



Basilica

Next to the forum was the basilica. This was usually a long, rectangular building. Roman officials held court cases and dealt with legal matters here.



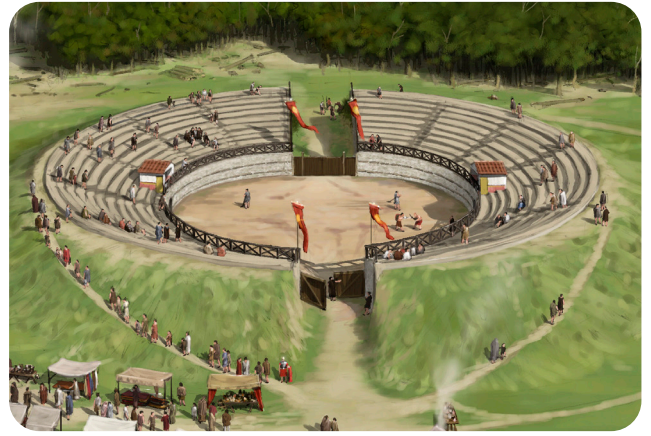
Houses

Houses lined the streets in Roman towns. Wealthy Romans lived in large brick and stone houses called *domūs*, on the edge of the town. The poorer townspeople lived in small, wooden houses or brick built apartment blocks called *insulae*.



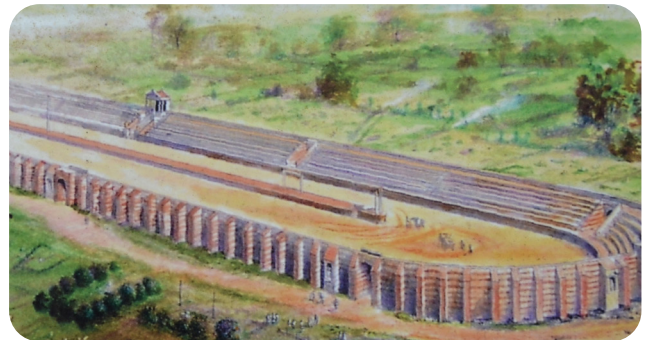
Amphitheatre

Roman amphitheatres were a place for Romans to watch shows for entertainment, including gladiator fights, wild animal fights and horse events. They were round or oval in shape with raised seating and could hold thousands of spectators. The roads leading to the amphitheatre were lined with stalls selling food and souvenirs.



Circus

The Roman circus was a large open air venue with raised seating where public events, such as chariot racing, took place.



Temples and churches

The Romans built large stone temples to worship their gods and host public celebrations and ceremonies. Churches were also built in some towns after Christianity became accepted by the Romans in AD 313.



Bath houses

Roman baths were places where people could swim, relax, wash, exercise and chat to friends. Public baths had an exercise yard, an undressing room and three different temperature rooms. The warm and hot rooms were heated with an underfloor heating system called a hypocaust. Water for the baths was carried into town through a brick built channel called an aqueduct.



Public toilets

The Romans built public toilets around the towns because many homes didn't have a toilet. They were connected to underground sewers and many used water from the bath houses to flush waste away.



Romanisation of Britain

Towns helped to Romanise the lives of the Britons who lived in or near them. For the first time, Britons lived in well-planned, urban environments. They followed Roman laws and paid taxes. They bought food and goods from shops and enjoyed bath houses and public entertainments. Roman ingenuity also made life safer, cleaner and more comfortable than before.

How do we know about Roman towns in Britain?

Historians and archaeologists have studied Roman sites and artefacts to help them learn more about life in Roman towns.



Roman aqueduct in Wales



Roman Baths in Bath, Somerset



Ruins of Corbridge Roman town in Northumberland



Mosaic floors at Fishbourne Roman Palace in Chichester

