

Roman invention and ingenuity



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The Romans were great innovators of the ancient world. What they did not invent, they copied and adapted, creating a significant change in the lives of ordinary citizens of Britannia and beyond. Here are some significant Roman innovations that changed everyday life in Roman Britannia.



Aqueducts



Aqueducts were long channels that carried water into towns and cities. Many Roman aqueducts were built below ground. Traces of aqueducts have been found around Britain, including in St Albans, Chester, Dorchester, Leicester, York, Exeter and Ormstead, on Hadrian's Wall. Huge water pipes were also unearthed in Lincoln. The water carried by aqueducts was clean and used in drinking fountains, baths and sewers. Access to fresh water meant that people could be cleaner and healthier.

Roman aqueduct at Chesters Roman fort on Hadrian's Wall



Bridges

The Romans built long, strong bridges. Many were made of wood and have rotted away, but some stone bridges can still be seen today. The Romans used concrete as well as stone to build their bridges and used arches to make them strong.

Roman bridges allowed citizens and tradespeople to travel between cities, ports and neighboring towns easily. This allowed for better transport of materials and goods.



Roman packhorse bridge in Cheshire



Public baths



Roman baths in Bath, Somerset

All Romans bathed and socialised in public bath houses. Some baths were the size of a large swimming pool and some were very luxurious. Mosaics decorated the floors and there was a constant supply of fresh water brought in by aqueducts and heated by an underfloor hypocaust. Roman baths meant that everyone in the town could keep clean and healthy. People would also go to the baths for entertainment, healing or just to meet friends.



Toilets



Remains of Roman toilets at Housesteads Roman fort on Hadrian's Wall

The Romans built toilets in blocks, with long benches where people would sit side by side. Sewage was washed away by a continuous flow of water from beneath. Examples of Roman toilets can still be seen at the Roman fort of Vindolanda. The Romans cleaned themselves with a sea sponge on a stick called a *tersorium*. This might be shared by all of those using the latrine. Public toilets meant that towns were kept clean and waste was disposed of hygienically.



Language and writing



Before the Romans arrived, very few people could read or write in Britannia. Information was passed from person to person by word of mouth.

The Romans spoke and wrote in Latin. Over time, people in Britannia, mostly in new Roman towns, started to speak Latin too. However, people living in the countryside continued to speak their own language.

Many modern English words and phrases come from Latin.

Latin inscription on a gravestone found near Bath, Somerset



Roman roads



Soon after the invasion, the Roman army built a network of roads across Britannia. Using these roads, soldiers could march quickly and directly from fort to fort. Before the Romans built the roads, Celts used ancient tracks, which were often impassible in winter. Roman roads became important for trade and moving goods from town to town.

Roman road in Calderdale, Yorkshire

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