The Romanization of England

by Kevin Mike Collins

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Although there was increasing contact between England and the classical world from the late Iron-Age onward, it wasn't until A.D. 43-410 that it became part of the Roman Province of Britannia.

Julius Caesar was the first official Roman presence from 55-54 B.C. but it was the Emperor Claudius who was responsible for invading Britain - on the pretext of quieting troublesome tribal princes and druids. However, once his army had arrived they proceeded to take advantage of the island's rich minerals and agricultural wealth.

And so the 'romanization' of the region we now know as England began, and within just a single generation, the landscape had altered tremendously. The Roman army constructed legionary fortresses, camps and roads. They built forts close to existing tribal centres (known as oppida), which became the nucleus of major Romano-British towns, such as Colchester, York, Chester, St Albans, Lincoln and Gloucester.

Archaeologists have since discovered that the initial phases of such communities date back to the mid-1st century, and digs have revealed timber strip buildings that were Roman temples and administrative centres. The Romans also introduced their own unique style of architecture in the form of villas. Some of the largest and earliest examples of such residences being built in Eccles, Kent and Fishbourne, Sussex.

Today, there are no comparable remains anywhere in Britain to match the famous spa town of Bath, which was dedicated to the worship of Sulis Minerva - a curious mixture of both local and Roman deities. Built around a natural hot spring, the area became a popular Roman resort which flourished for centuries. The main feature both then and now is the Great Bath itself, which was originally roofed and surrounded by dressing rooms.

Although the Romans never quite succeeded in subduing the unruly Britons, their complete cultural domination is unquestionable. Roman fashions were evident in the temples, ampitheatres and sculptures of native gods. New burial practices were introduced, as were exotic spices, trinkets and glassware from other parts of the empire. Roman manners were also adopted by the aristocracy to impress their acquaintances and superiors - although life was as harsh as ever for peasant communities.

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