**The Roman Invasion(s)**

**The First Invasion (55 BC):**

* On the 26th of August 55BC Julius Caesar set off from Gaul (modern day France) with two legions (Legion VII and Legion X) and 500 cavalry.
* It’s possible that his journey to Britain was intended as a warning or punishment for the Britons who had been aiding the Gauls in their fight against the Romans.
* At this time, there was continual interactions between the Gauls and Britons. Because of this, the Britons knew he was coming.
* In response, some Britons sent ambassadors to Caesar, offering hostages and allegiance to Rome.
* Commius, a chief of the Atrebates tribe from Gaul, travelled to Britain with the ambassadors as a negotiator. He had previously capitulated to Rome. However, he was later imprisoned by the Britons.
* In 52 BC Commius joined the Gaulish resistance and in 50 BC was forced to flee from Roman occupied Gaul to Britain. There he founded a dynasty at Calleva (Silchester).
* Initially, Caesar tried to land at Dubris (Dover). It had a natural harbour, and so had presumably been identified as a suitable landing place.
* However, as he approached he saw the Briton forces gathered on the overlooking hills and cliffs. The cliffs were so close to the shore that javelins could be thrown down onto anyone landing in this spot.
* Caesar later wrote about this in his work, *The Gallic Wars:*

***The Gallic Wars* 4.23:**

These matters being arranged, finding the weather favourable for his voyage, he set sail about the third watch, and ordered the horse to march forward to the further port, and there embark and follow him. As this was performed rather tardily by them, he himself reached Britain with the first squadron of ships, about the fourth hour of the day, and there saw the forces of the enemy drawn up in arms on all the hills. The nature of the place was this: the sea was confined by mountains so close to it that a dart could be thrown from their summit upon the shore. Considering this by no means a fit place for disembarking, he remained at anchor till the ninth hour, for the other ships to arrive there. Having in the mean time assembled the legates and military tribunes, he told them both what he had learned from Volusenus, and what he wished to be done; and enjoined them (as the principle of military matters, and especially as maritime affairs, which have a precipitate and uncertain action, required) that all things should be performed by them at a nod and at the instant. Having dismissed them, meeting both with wind and tide favourable at the same time, the signal being given and the anchor weighed, he advanced about seven miles from that place, and stationed his fleet over against an open and level shore.

* Unable to land at Dover, the Romans continued to sail up the coast.
* Previously, it was thought that they had landed at Walmer.
* However, evidence now suggests that they may have actually sailed to modern Pegwell Bay.
* At the time, the bay was part of the Wantsum Channel, which split the Isle of Thanet off from the mainland.
* In 2017 [archaeologists from the University of Leicester](https://archaeology.co.uk/articles/features/ebbsfleet-54-bc-searching-for-the-launch-site-of-caesars-british-invasions.htm) found a Roman spearhead at Ebbsfleet in Thanet. This may may be evidence of the Roman landing.
* This site is across from [Richborough](https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/richborough-roman-fort-and-amphitheatre/history/), which would later become the ceremonial point of arrival and the principal entry point from mainland Europe.
* Over time, Richborough would develop from a military supply base into a thriving port town and later into a massive fort.

**The Second Invasion (54 BC):**

* In July 54BC, Caesar launched his second invasion, utilising five legions and 2,000 cavalry – 27,000 men in 800 vessels.
* Another difference was that this time the landing was unopposed. Presumably this was the result of political negotiations between the British tribes and the Romans.
* One of these British negotiators was Mandubracius of the Trinovantes, and enemy of Cassivellaunus of the Catuvellauni.
* Cassivellaunus was a warlord from north of the Thames, and had previously been at war with most of the British tribes. He had recently overthrown the king of the Trinovantes and forced the king's son, Mandubracius, into exile.
* Mandubracius fled to the Romans and asked for their help.
* The Trinovantes sent an embassy agreeing to surrender to Caesar if Mandubracias was reinstated, providing grain and sending 40 hostages.
* Following their example, the Cenimagni, Segontiaci, Ancalites, Bibroci and Cassi tribes also joined the Romans.
* The Britons appointed Cassivellaunus to lead their forces.
* However, when Cassivellaunus realised he could not defeat Caesar in a pitched battle, he disbanded the majority of his force.
* Instead, he utilised guerrilla tactics to slow the Roman advance, relying on the mobility of his 4,000 chariots and their superior knowledge of the terrain.
* By the time Caesar reached the Thames, it had been fortified with sharpened stakes on both the shore and under the water, and the far bank was defended.
* Nevertheless, the Romans emerged victorious.
* After crossing the Thames, Caesar made for Cassivelaunus’ *oppidum* (the name for the major British settlements, especially fortified towns) and defeated them.
* Hostages and an annual tribute were handed over, and Cassivellaunus agreed to leave the Trinovantes in peace, under their new King Mandubracius.

***The Gallic Wars* 5.21:**

The Trinobantes (sic) being protected and secured from any violence of the soldiers, the Cenimagni, the Segontiaci, the Ancalites, the Bibroci, and the Cassi, sending embassies, surrendered themselves to Caesar. From them he learns that the capital town of Cassivellaunus was not far from that place, and was defended by woods and morasses, and a very large number of men and of cattle had been collected in it. (Now the Britons, when they have fortified the intricate woods, in which they are wont to assemble for the purpose of avoiding the incursion of an enemy, with an intrenchment and a rampart, call them a town.) Thither he proceeds with his legions: he finds the place admirably fortified by nature and art; he, however, undertakes to attack it in two directions. The enemy, having remained only a short time, did not sustain the attack of our soldiers, and hurried away on the other side of the town. A great amount of cattle was found there, and many of the enemy were taken and slain in their flight.

**Between the Second and Third Invasions:**

* There was a gap of almost a century between the second (54 BC) and third (AD 43) Roman invasions.
* Nevertheless, it can be seen as a time of continued development of the ties and links with Rome, a period in which there was a spread of awareness of the Roman empire, its culture and the potential benefits that links with Rome could bring.
* During this time period many British tribes in the southeast were sending the Romans tribute (although we don’t know how long such tribute paying lasted). There were therefore strong links being forged between the elites of southeast Britain and Rome.
* Unsurprisingly, this was the area in which the strongest Roman influence was seen.
* Some of the hostages given to Rome (children of the Briton elites) were raised in Rome. When they returned to Britain they brought with them Roman culture and habits.
* For tribal leaders, links with Rome were increasingly seen as prestigious, bringing the benefits of trade and real or imagined cultural superiority.
* There is evidence of amphorae of wine, fine imported table ware, bronze and silver wine serving vessels all over the southeast.
* In contrast, it is likely that the north and west of Britain were still free from Roman influence, and were considered good places to acquire slaves.
* The ancient Greek geographer, Strabo, describes the inhabitants of Britain he saw in Rome, and may have been referring to some of these slaves. However, he also would have seen the hostages of the wealthy, who then acquired a level of Romanisation.

**Strabo, *Geography* 4.5.2.**

The men of Britain are taller than the Celti, and not so yellow-haired, although their bodies are of looser build. The following is an indication of their size: I myself, in Rome, saw mere lads towering as much as half a foot above the tallest people in the city, although they were bandy-legged and presented no fair lines anywhere else in their figure. Their habits are in part like those of the Celti, but in part more simple and barbaric​ — so much so that, on account of their inexperience, some of them, although well supplied with milk, make no cheese; and they have no experience in gardening or other agricultural pursuits. And they have powerful chieftains in their country.​ For the purposes of war they use chariots for the most part, just as some of the Celti do. The forests are their cities; for they fence in a spacious circular enclosure with trees which they have felled,​ and in that enclosure make huts for themselves and also pen up their cattle — not, however, with the purpose of staying a long time.​ Their weather is more rainy than snowy; and on the days of clear sky fog prevails so long a time that throughout a whole day the sun is to be seen for only three or four hours round about midday. And this is the case also among the Morini and the Menapii and all the neighbours of the latter.

**The Third Invasion (AD 43):**

* In AD 39 the Briton Adminius, son of Cunobelin, had a disagreement with his father and fled to seek the emperors help.
* Cunobelin controlled a large portion of south-eastern Britain, including the territories of the Catuvellauni and the Trinovantes, and was called "King of the Britons" (*Britannorum rex*) by the Roman historian Suetonius.
* Caligula responded by preparing an invasion of Britain.
* He abandoned it, however, by ordering his soldiers to attack the waves and gather seashells as the spoils of victor.

**Suetonius *Twelve Caesars - Caligula* 46.1**

Finally, as if he intended to bring the war to an end, he drew up a line of battle on the shore of the Ocean, arranging his ballistas and other artillery; and when no one knew or could imagine what he was going to do, he suddenly bade them gather shells and fill their helmets and the folds of their gowns, calling them "spoils from the Ocean, due to the Capitol and Palatine." As a monument of his victory he erected a lofty tower, from which lights were to shine at night to guide the course of ships, as from the Pharos.​Then promising the soldiers a gratuity of a hundred denarii each, as if he had shown unprecedented liberality, he said, "Go your way happy; go your way rich."

* Three years later, the new emperor Claudius began the third invasion of Britain.
* His decision may have been linked to the actions of Caratacus of the Catuvellauni.
* Caratacus had expanded into other tribal areas and held an anti-Roman stance
* Other Britons such as Verica, who had been exiled by Caractacus, sought help from the Romans.
* In AD 43 40,000 men were assembled at Gesoriacum (Boulogne), and by the end of AD 43 the native capital of Camulodonum (Colchester) had been captured, along with the core of the southeast.