**How did the Romans change Britain?**

In AD410, the Roman Emperor Honorius sent a goodbye letter to the people of Britain. He wrote, “fight bravely and defend your lives...you are on your own now”. The city of Rome was under attack and the empire was falling apart, so the Romans had to leave to take care of matters back home.

After they left, the country fell into chaos. Native tribes and foreign invaders battled each other for power. Many of the Roman towns in Britain crumbled away as people went back to living in the countryside.

But even after they were gone, the Romans left their mark all over the country. They gave us new towns, plants, animals, a new religion and ways of reading and counting. Even the word ‘Britain’ came from the Romans.

Roads.

Britain had no proper roads before the Romans - there were just muddy tracks. So the Romans built new roads all across the landscape – over 16,000km (10,000 miles) in fact!

The Romans knew that the shortest distance from one place to another is a straight line. So they made all their roads as **straight as possible** to get around quickly.

They built their roads on foundations of clay, chalk and gravel. They laid bigger flat stones on top. Roman roads bulged in the middle and had ditches either side, to help the rainwater drain off.

Some Roman roads have been converted into motorways and main roads we use today. You can still find a few places where the original Roman road is still visible, too.

## **How did the Romans change religion?**

Before the Romans came, the native Britons were **pagans**. They believed in lots of different gods and spirits.

The Romans were pagans too, but they didn't believe in the same gods as the Britons. They let the Britons worship their own gods, as long as they were respectful of the Roman ones too.

Christianity arrived in Britain during the second century. At first only a few people became Christian. When Christianity started to get popular, the Romans **banned it**. Christians refused to worship the Roman emperor and anyone who was caught following the new religion could be whipped or even executed.

By the beginning of the 4th century, more and more people were following Christianity. In AD313 the Emperor Constantine declared that Christians were free to worship in peace. By 391, Christianity was the official Roman religion, but pagan beliefs were still popular in Britain.

## Language, writing and numbers

Before the Romans came, very few people could read or write in Britain. Instead, information was usually passed from person to person by word of mouth.

The Romans wrote down their history, their literature and their laws. Their language was called **Latin**, and it wasn’t long before some people in Britain started to use it too. However, it only really caught on in the new Roman towns - most people living in the countryside stuck to their old Celtic language.

We've still got lots of words and phrases today that come from Latin. Words like ‘exit’, which means ‘he or she goes out’, and ‘pedestrian’, which means ‘going on foot’.

Our coins are based on a Roman design and some of the lettering is in Latin. Written around the edge of some £1 coins is the phrase 'decus et tutamen' which means 'glory and protection'.

## How did the Romans change towns?

The Romans introduced the idea of living in big towns and cities. Roman towns were laid out in a **grid**. Streets criss-crossed the town to form blocks called ‘insulae’. In the middle was the ‘**forum**’, a big market square where people came to trade.

After the Romans, the next group of people to settle in Britain were the Anglo-Saxons. They were farmers, not townspeople. They abandoned many of the Roman towns and set up new kingdoms, but some Roman towns continued to exist and still exist today.

If a place-name has 'chester', 'caster' or 'cester' in it, it's almost certainly Roman (for example, Gloucester, Doncaster and Manchester). The word ‘chester’ comes from the Latin word ‘castrum’ which means ‘a fort’.

London was a Roman city too, although they called it ‘Londinium’. When the Romans invaded, they built a fort beside the River Thames. This was where traders came from all over the empire to bring their goods to Britain. It grew and grew, until it was the most important city in Roman Britain.