



Chertsey Museum Education Service
Runnymede Borough Museum

All About

ROMANS



Chertsey Museum, The Cedars, 33 Windsor Street, Chertsey, KT16 8AT
Tel: 01932 565764
www.chertseymuseum.org.uk

Runnymede
BOROUGH COUNCIL



General Information

In the middle of the 1st century BC, Julius Caesar attempted to claim Britain as part of the Roman Empire. Although unsuccessful, it is likely that this initial contact established trading links which helped pave the way for invasion almost a hundred years later.

Before the Roman conquest of Britain, the area south of the river Thames was inhabited by two main tribes: the Catuvellauni and the Atrebates.

Claudius became Emperor in AD41 on the death of Gaius or Caligula as he was better known. As with all Roman Emperors, military victory was needed to consolidate his position, prove his worth as leader of the ever-growing Empire, and in Claudius' case, detract from domestic problems. The Emperor turned his sights to Britain. Armed forces of the Legio II August, under the command of the future Emperor Vespasian, invaded Britain in AD43 and began the process that would gradually transform the country into the place we know today.

Written evidence of the invasion comes from the Roman historian Cassius Dio, but his account was penned many years after the event and is lacking in details which would give precise locations for any of the battles. It is thought that the invading army landed at Richborough in Kent, and fought their way up to the area which is now London, before pushing onwards and founding Camulodunon (Colchester) in c.AD50 - the new administrative and cultural centre of Roman Britain.

The Romans came to Britain for several reasons. They wanted to exploit Britain's mineral wealth (for example tin from Cornwall, gold, lead and silver) and people (they took slaves), but also to trade for goods such as wool, leather and foodstuffs.

The Romans in Surrey

The most important town in Roman Britain was Londinium, our modern London. Londinium was founded by the Romans in AD50 as their capital after invading Britain in AD43. Locally the Romans built a town at Staines which they called Pontibus after the Latin word pontes, bridge. Here they built a bridge over the Thames as the river was naturally shallow. Before this bridge was constructed, they had crossed by horse. Pontibus would originally have been a fort. Apart from Pontibus no major Roman settlements were built in the Runnymede area, as far as we know, although there was a farmstead at Thorpe Lea and the Roman road from London to Silchester (known as 'Stane Street') passed through Staines. It followed the route of what is now the modern A30 as far as Staines where it crossed the river.

Military Presence

There is little evidence of the Roman army in Surrey, but what there is comes from the Borough of Runnymede and surrounding areas.

At Staines there is some evidence of military occupation. It is thought that the bridge which enabled the Silchester to London road to cross the Thames was built by the army. The discovery of a cheek piece from a Roman cavalry helmet further supports this theory, although no other military finds have been unearthed.

Within the modern-day Borough of Runnymede, Petters Sports Field in Egham also has limited evidence of military remains. During excavations in the 1970s when the M25 motorway was being constructed, a very straight palisade ditch was discovered with a military style entrance way. The discovery of this Roman enclosure, together with a bronze military harness mount dating from the middle of the 1st century AD, suggests that the Roman army was based there, at least for a short period of time.

Romanisation

AD43 is given as the date when Iron Age Britain ceased to exist and Roman Britain started, but in reality there would have been very little difference between the two for many years to come.

It wasn't until c.AD50 that the Roman road system started to develop, and it was a further 20 years until settlements started to grow up alongside these roads. Even then there were no large scale Roman towns founded in Surrey, only a few small roadside developments. In this area the main settlement was to be found at Staines.

In practice, little changed and it is difficult to assess exactly what impact the Roman settlers really had. At first Surrey probably continued as a client kingdom of Cogidubnus, leader of the Atrebates. The chief town of the Atrebates was Silchester; however, Staines and the area to the north of the Thames was part of the Catuvellauni civitas with its chief town being Verulamium (St. Albans). The system of government altered, but this was of little consequence to the average person. Magistrates were now elected from each tribal council to act as local administrators. They would report to the Governor, the Emperor's representative in the Province. Financial matters were overseen by a Procurator, and taxes to pay for all of this administration and for the army were collected by the local tribes. Over time there was a gradual absorption of Roman ways and customs, and the local population became Romano-British, culturally very different to the Romans who lived in Rome.

Food and drink

Excavations in Roman towns have given archaeologists an insight into the dietary habits of the Romano-British. The insides of amphorae, pots and jars can be analysed to identify the contents.

Amphorae were most often used for wine and olive oil which was imported for use in cooking, lighting and medicine. They were also used to store a rather pungent fish sauce called garum, which was made from fish, fish intestines and salt mixed together and allowed to ferment. The discovery of mortaria shows that the Romans liked to grind their food, a new technique introduced to Britain.

It is also clear that the diet of town and village dwellers and those in the countryside differed. Rural areas still ate predominantly mutton which had been a staple food since the Iron Age. Whereas in the town inhabitants ate beef and pork, as they did in Rome. Despite this taste for meat, there is very little sign that the Romano-British in Surrey hunted for their food, choosing instead to rear it at their farmsteads.

In Southwark, a major Roman site on the south bank of the Thames in London, the diet of the inhabitants was very varied. Evidence of fig, walnut, grape, olive, raspberry, blackberry, mulberry, plum, peach, cherry, damson, apple, pear, lentils, peas, cabbage, coriander, mustard, dill and cucumber have been found. Nearer to here in Ewell, evidence shows that the Romano-British living there enjoyed a diet of goose, chicken, domestic doves, mallard, deer, hare, beef, mutton and pork.

The Romans introduced a number of new foodstuffs into Britain. Some they grew here. Others, like olive oil, almonds, ginger and wine, had to be imported. Wine merchant shops have been found at Verulamium, York and Lincoln.

The Romans introduced the sweet chestnut tree, walnut and mulberry trees, grape vines, and many herbs such as parsley, mint, garlic, rosemary and sage. In addition they brought new vegetables into production - cabbage, lettuce, and turnips and introduced game such as pheasants, peacocks, guinea fowl and fallow deer.

Rich Romans ate fantastic banquets, served by slaves. In Britain most Romans ate a variety of foods including fish, game, snails, beef, pork, milk, butter, cheese and vegetables. They probably also ate horse meat. Cereals were used to make gruels and bread. Corn was stored in special granaries with raised roofs to keep the contents dry. Corn-drying kilns have been found next to Roman villas.

Roman clothing and decoration

The toga remained the main garment of the upper classes throughout the history of the Empire, but only Roman citizens and men were allowed to wear the toga. It was made of a semi-circular piece of cloth over 5.5 metres long.

In Britain, the Romans would have worn similar clothes to the people they found here. They would have worn a linen tunic with a top coat (known as a Gallic cape) made of wool. The colours were produced from natural dyes. They probably also wore undergarments to keep themselves warm.

Jewellery was made in various metals — copper, silver, gold — and was worn by both men and women. Soldiers would be awarded torcs for bravery in battle.

Roman Villas

Romano-British villas were not the sumptuous palaces found in Rome itself. Instead they were farmsteads, rectangular rural buildings with stone foundations and tiled roofs.

There were more than 20 such rural villas in Surrey; but alas none of them are within the Borough of Runnymede. All the Surrey villas are built on gently sloping ground, mostly facing east or south, and with appealing vistas over the Surrey countryside.

Unlike the Roman villas in Italy, most of the Surrey villas were modest in size and did not have wings leading off the main building. They were single buildings but were normally surrounded by outbuildings which were used as storage areas and barns. Roman villas normally contained a bath house, complete with hypocaust heating systems, and this was also true in Surrey. A few mosaic floors have been found locally, which is a sign that the inhabitants were increasingly prosperous and able to afford a little luxury.

At Thorpe Lea Nurseries, where Roman farmsteads have been found, excavations show two distinct phases of occupation during the Roman period. The first occurred just after the invasion in the mid 1st Century, and then when the site was occupied again from the mid 3rd Century. Amongst the finds were a number of personal items such as fragments of bracelets and rings, as well as shears and a reaping hook, items associated with running a farmstead.

Unfortunately little is known about the Romano-British people who inhabited these villas although it is normally accepted that they were local families who had prospered under the Romans, rather than immigrants from the Empire.

Industry

The Romans were highly skilled in civil engineering, metalworking and pottery manufacturing. These skills and new techniques were introduced to Roman Britain.

Lasting Influence

They came, they saw, they conquered, but in the immortal words of Monty Python, “what did the Romans ever do for us”? Here are just some of the things the Romans introduced to Britain.

administration
advertisements
apples
apricots
arches
asparagus
benefits for the poor
bricks
bikinis
calendar (days of the month and 365 days in year)
carrots
catapult
cats
cement
chain mail
Christianity
coriander
currency
firemen
flushing lavatories
glass
irrigation systems
laws
measurement - feet and inches
parks

pavements
pears
plumbing (the word plumbing comes from the Latin word plumbum, meaning lead.)
policemen
prefabricated buildings (e.g. Lunt Fort near Coventry)
public libraries
public order
rabbits
roads
Semaphore (soldiers stationed on Hadrian's Wall used flags to signal to each other)
shops
stinging nettles
street cleaners
tenement blocks (high-rise living)
three-course meal
towns
turnips
waterwheel
wine

Pottery

Surrey became a centre for tile manufacturing during the Roman period. Tile kilns have been excavated in Ashted, Cranleigh and Reigate. These sites manufactured many different types of tiles – tegula or flat roof tiles, imbrex or curved roof tiles, as well as tiles for under floor hypocaust heating systems and box flue tiles which allowed the hot air from the hypocaust to rise within the walls to heat the rooms above. The making of these tiles was a new industry for the inhabitants of the area and originally specialist craftsmen were brought in from the Empire to teach the locals the skills needed.

In the Alice Holt area of Farnham, pottery kilns have been discovered. The pottery made here was everyday cooking and storage ware in a vast range of different sizes and shapes. Samian ware, the decorative, red glossy pottery most associated with the Romans, was only used on special occasions since it was expensive and had to be imported. Oxfordshire ware became the British replacement for Samian ware, but was still too expensive for most people.

At Thorpe Lea Nurseries there is evidence that during the 3rd and 4th Centuries the Romano-British inhabitants ran an iron working business. Remains of a furnace lining and slag, the waste product left behind when metal is separated from its ore, have been uncovered indicating an industrial use of the site.

Decline

In the same way as the increasing influence of the Roman Empire on Britain was a gradual process, so was the decline. There was no sudden pulling out of the military, but a gradual retreat of forces back to Rome.

By the middle of the 3rd Century the Roman Empire had extended as far as it could. There were thousands of miles of frontier to defend and over a quarter of a million soldiers employed to do it. Without the continuous addition of land and the war booty that accompanied it, the Emperor found it difficult to pay the soldiers and fund the administration of the provinces. Taxes had to increase. As such the financial burden on the Romano-British was enormous. Meanwhile elsewhere in Europe, Rome's enemies were getting stronger and starting to challenge the Emperor's authority, in particular the Germans and the Goths of central Europe. As a result the Empire needed to construct defensive walls and fortresses, all of which were expensive and put yet another burden on the provinces.

Britain was repeatedly raided by Anglo-Saxons, the Irish and Picts. New coastal forts were built as a response to this threat, but the army was already stretched too thin to defend Britain for long. During this time there was a gradual move of people from the countryside to the fortified cities and towns, and so began the slow decline of Roman Britain. When Italy itself was attacked, troops were withdrawn from Britain altogether to defend the homeland.

By 425 AD Britain had ceased to be in any sense 'Roman'. Over the period of a generation all Roman influence had gradually withdrawn leaving towns and villas abandoned, and leaving Britain in a state of turmoil and uncertainty.

Pottery

Samian ware was a mass-produced tableware with a distinctive glossy red surface and was often decorated with relief images. It dates from the 1st and 2nd centuries A.D. and was mostly produced in France (then known as Gaul) and imported into Britain. A range of cups, bowls, jars, mortaria (a general purpose mixing-bowl) and ink-wells were made in Samian ware.



Flagons or jugs were common and were used for wine or oil. This is the neck of a flagon or jug. During 1st –2nd century AD this pale coloured clay was widely used to make flagons.



Grey ware was the common kitchen ware of the Roman world. It was made throughout the period of the Empire and was produced locally throughout Britain. We know that there were potteries at Farnham, Surrey. It was almost always wheel-thrown and used to produce kitchen pots, storage jars, beakers and other containers.



Mortaria: This general purpose grinding or mixing bowl was a Roman innovation in ceramics. Previous ceramic bowls that had been used in this country were crude and clumsy by comparison and tended to be at best very dark, or at worst black. The Roman mortaria was however a hygienic looking white or cream colour. In addition the mortaria was much harder and tougher than predecessors and the heavily formed rim would have made them very useful in the kitchen. Another advantage was the introduction of hard wearing grits impressed into the interior surface of the bowl. This texture helped the abrasive quality of the mortaria when it was used for grinding purposes.



The first mortaria were introduced in small quantities into the South-East of England even before the Romans had arrived. However, larger quantities only arrived after the Roman invasion was under way and came mainly from the Rhineland.

Their usage quickly spread and soon they were being made in this country, often by large potteries which had sprung up in the new Roman towns such as St. Albans (Verlamium) or London (Londinium). By the mid-3rd centuries, the continental imports had virtually stopped and Britain was essentially self-sufficient in mortaria. The use of mortaria declined after a peak in the mid-2nd century and they disappeared completely after the Romans left.

Roman mortaria were designed to be a white or cream colour. If a firing clay was unavailable to a local pottery wishing to make mortaria, the potters resorted to coating a red or brown mortaria with a white coating of clay. The potters used a number of different grits in the manufacture of mortaria. These different grit are of great use to the archaeology as they can now date and identify the area of manufacture by the grit used. The mortaria was made on a potters wheel, sometime the name of the potter was stamped on the rim, just like a modern day trademark.

Roman oil lamp: This replica Roman oil lamp is an example of the type of lighting the Romans used in their houses both in Italy and in Britain. Lamps like this one would have used fish, nut or olive oil and had a wick made of linen or plant fibres. A teaspoon of oil would have lasted only about two hours, and the wicks needed to be pulled forward as they burned away in the spout. Many households would not have been able to afford lamps and people went to bed as soon as it became dark.



The lamps varied in size, with some much smaller than this. Small lamps had limited efficiency in the light they gave out and the time required to service them. Several lamps were usually grouped together to light part of a house or room, and were moved around as required. The Romans also used tallow candles.

Lamps like this were made in two parts, using moulds. A sheet of wet, thin clay was pressed into each half of the mould and the edges trimmed to just above the rim of the mould. When the clay was dry enough it was removed from the mould, then left to dry until it could be handled. At this stage the filling hole, the wick hole and the hole in the handle were cut. The lamp was then coated in 'slip' (liquefied clay) and fired to a high temperature, giving the lamp its shiny, brown appearance.

Roman Buildings

Roman buildings were the first buildings of any real size to survive in Britain because they were made of stone, brick and tile. Previously the Celts had used wood for their buildings. Wood rots and leaves little trace. The Romans built temples and villas in Britain. Many materials were produced locally. In Surrey a Roman brick-works was found at Cranleigh and tiles were made at Ashstead. Roman villas have also been discovered in the south of the county at Titsey, Bletchingley, Walton Heath, Walton on the Hill, Ashted Common, Chatley Farm near Cobham, Abinger, Broad Street, Compton, Farnham, Chiddingfold and Rapsley near Ewhurst. Roman farmsteads are known to have existed at Thorpe Lea nurseries near Egham and at Brooklands near Weybridge.

Roof Tiles: The roof of the villa would have been fitted with tiles locked together. These were flat tiles with flanges, and curved cover tiles, which fitted over the gaps and were fixed in place with cement. The average weight of each imbrice is 0.56kg. Before the 6th century BC roofs had been made of straw and wood but this changed because of the fire risk. The diagram shows how the tiles fit together.



Imbrice Roof Tile



Tegulae Roof Tile

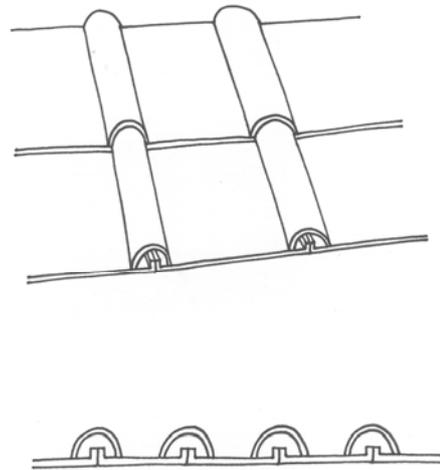
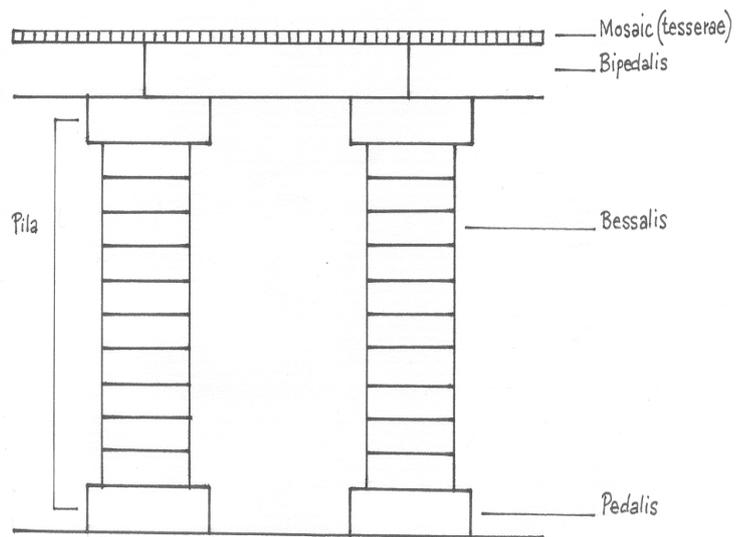


Diagram shows how the flat tegulae roof tiles and the curved imbrice roof tiles fit together.

Floors:

In parts of the house, simple terracotta tiles, such as the one pictured, would have been laid.

Most Roman villas also had a hypocaust under floor heating system. This was built by placing the floor on brick pilae (pillars) standing on pedestals (pedalis). The floor was fitted on top of the pillars and then covered with tiles or mosaic tesserae. The air, which circulated underneath, was heated by a fire.



Floor Tile

Mosaic Tesserae pieces:

Roman villas were well made and comfortable. Villas had hot baths and were decorated inside with mosaic floors. Roman mosaics were made of small cubes called tesserae shaped from stones of different colours - black, white, blue, yellow and brown. Tesserae were laid in fine mortar, which was spread a little at a time as the mosaicist was setting the tesserae in place. Then the spaces between them were filled in and the mosaic was polished with a smooth stone. In Britain the Romans usually used locally available stone or fired clay. Some mosaics included Christian designs, other designs used mythological scenes, animals and birds.



A square metre of mosaic pavement could require the cutting and laying by hand of 10,000 tesserae! The artist who laid the tesserae was a highly skilled craftsman working to an outline design scored or painted onto the base mortar. He needed a support team of labourers cutting the stones and mixing the mortar.

Roman Coins

Roman coins are, like most coins, linked with how rulers wanted their people to think of them. Everything on the coin is there for a reason but as a coin is very small the information has to be condensed. Roman coinage found in the British Isles covers a period of more than 400 years and there were a number of changes during that time. Each Emperor tried to replace the coins already in circulation with new issues bearing his own image. The pictures and words on a coin were carefully chosen for their maximum propaganda value.

All Roman coins were struck by hand. A blank disc of hot metal was placed between two dies and then a hammer blow imprinted the design. This was a relatively slow process and the original mint in Rome was unable to produce enough coins for the whole empire. In Britain mints were set up in London and Colchester, the first Roman capital.

Obverse side (head side):

Virtually all coins bear the Emperor's head. He is often shown wearing the laurels of victory or a crown representing the divine rays of the Sol, the sun god, implying that he, too, was a god. Some rulers chose to be represented in armour, stressing their military power, whilst others preferred to be bare-headed to show their reliance on peace and law.

Reverse side:

The reverse side of the coin carried a message in the form of a picture - for example, 'Justice, Victory, Health, Money' or 'the glory of Rome'. Sometimes coins reflected current political events.

Denarius of Caesar:

Julius Caesar, never an Emperor, was a dictator of Rome. He made two military expeditions to Britain, but withdrew each time. In 55 BC he landed with two legions in Kent, but quickly returned to Gaul (France). In 54 BC he landed again, this time with five legions and 2000 cavalry, and succeeded in crossing the Thames before withdrawing. The front of the coin, a silver denarius, depicted an elephant and a serpent, representing Caesar's achievement – "The conquest of Gaul". The reverse illustrates sacrificial implements, publicising his office as Chief Priest (pontifex maximus).



Gold Coin of Catuvellauni BC 45-20:

At the time of Caesar's foray into Britain in 55 BC, the country was split into areas ruled by various Celtic tribes, such as Catuvellauni. Some of these tribes put up strong resistance to Roman forces. The gold coin bears a horse on the reverse and a decayed wreath from a bust on the on the obverse.

Denarius of Vespasian:

Vespasian served as a legate (an official representative) to the second Legion Augusta during and after the British campaign of Emperor Claudius in AD 43. Charged with the conquest of South West Britain, he pushed west, conquering the Isle of Wight and such warlike tribes as the Durotrigues of Dorset in their well fortified hill-forts of Maiden Castle and Hod Hill. By AD 51 the achievements of Vespasian had caused him to be elected Consul at Rome and won him the respect of the army. So much so that in AD 69 he was proclaimed Emperor by the troops in Egypt. It was under his rule that the Romans conquered Wales and established legionary fortresses at Caerleon, Chester and York. This coin is a Silver Denarius, the reverse showing Vespasian's sons Domitian and Titus.



Aureus of Domitian:

Domitian, younger son of Vespasian, continued his father's policy of attempting to conquer the whole of Britain. Agricola, Governor at the time, led the Roman army at least as far north as Inverness. The coin, a gold aureus, shows a cornucopia (a horn of plenty) reflecting the prosperity of the time.



Sesterius of Nero:

During Nero's reign Boudicca, Queen of the Iceni tribe in East Anglia, led her famous rebellion. Following the death of her husband, King Pratsutagas, the Romans decided to take the tribal territory for themselves in spite of the late King having willed his kingdom jointly to his daughters and the Emperor.



The Romans were extremely brutal, forcing Boudicca to lead her tribe and the neighbouring Trinovantes in revolt against Colchester and then London. Both cities were burned and the people massacred before the rebels turned north to engulf St. Albans. Suetonius Paulinus, Roman Governor, led two legions to crush the rebellion. It is said that 80,000 Britons died compared to 800 Romans. Boudicca escaped only to take poison. The rebellion was over. On the reverse of his coin Nero reinforces his military strength by picturing himself and a soldier on a horseback in “decursio” or combat.

Denarius of Titus:

Titus was a son of Emperor Vespasian. Wales and the South West of Britain were conquered during his rule. The reverse of this coin shows an eagle. This was usually associated with a dead Emperor being taken to heavens. As Titus was alive, the deification was to his father.

Aureas of Claudius:

The Romans invaded Britain in 43AD when about 40,000 troops crossed the channel under the command of Aulus Plautius. Claudius himself arrived in Britain to take command of the later stages of the campaign and earn an official triumph.

Dipondius of Hadrian:

Hadrian became Emperor in 117AD after the death of Trajan and set about implementing significant changes which marked a turning point in both Roman and European history. His new policy aimed to consolidate the frontiers and restore order. This in itself was difficult for there were many who questioned Hadrian’s succession as, during the second century, Emperors nominated their own successors. There were suspicions that Trajan had not named Hadrian, causing discontent among the late Emperor’s senior generals. An alleged conspiracy was promptly quashed by the Senate ordering the executions of those involved.

Evidence of Hadrian’s strength and consolidation can be seen from Wallsend on the River Tyne to Bowness on the Solway. Hadrian’s Wall took fifteen years to complete, spanning some 73 miles, and was approximately 10 foot wide and 15 foot high. This fortified frontier had fortresses at regular intervals. Between the forts were Mile Castles (fortified turrets). Substantial remains can still be seen including forts at Chester, Housesteads, Carvoran and Birdoswald. Whether used as a barrier intended to control the native population or as a lasting memorial to Rome’s most northerly point, Hadrian’s Wall is regarded as one of the finest examples of achievement and has provided historians with an abundance of evidence furthering our understanding of the Roman occupation.



Torcs and ring

Torcs and rings were similar items made in a similar way by bending the metal round, twisting it to make patterns. The Celts were known to wear torcs, especially large ones round their neck, but Roman soldiers were also given them as a prize for bravery.



Scribet (writing tablet) & Stylus

Boys went to school where they would learn to read, write and count. They would use an abacus to count. Most writing was done on waxed, wooden tablets using a metal pen (stylus). The pointed end of the stylus was used to cut into the wax and the flattened end was used for erasing. Sometimes the stylus would be made out of bone or wood,

Tablets were often used for accounts, especially household accounts, and messages. The point of the stylus often went through the wax and left marks on the wood. This meant that even when the wax was no longer present the marks on the tablet could often still be read. Seals were often used to close the tablets for security.

Pen and ink was also used on papyrus scrolls but none of these survive in Britain. Ink was also used on thin sheets of wood — many of these sheets have been found at Vindolanda, on Hadrian's wall, in Northumberland.

