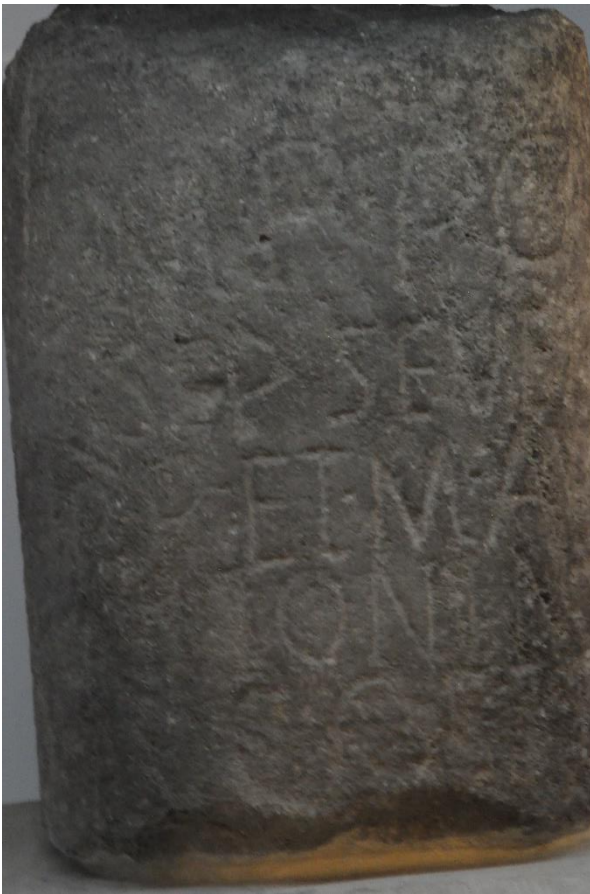# THE ROMANS

The Roman army arrived in the south of Britain in AD 43. It took several decades of fighting the Celtic tribes to gain control of Britain. The newcomers were shrewd. They set up certain areas where the tribes controlled territory for the Romans. By AD77, Governor Agricola's troops had succeeded in taking control of the Isle of Anglesey and north Wales and they set up forts in strategic locations, some by rivers or on the coast. The forts were constructed according to a uniform structure. They played a vital role in trade and communications networks, and each Roman base was connected by newly constructed roads.

The most important historical source for the Roman invasion of Wales is Tacitus who was a senator and historian of the Roman Empire. He wrote about the attack on Anglesey in AD 60.

Along the shore stood the enemy in a close-packed array of armed men interspersed with women dressed like Furies in funeral black, with streaming hair and brandishing torches. Round about were the Druids, their hands raised to heaven, pouring out dire curses. The Roman troops were so struck with dismay at this weird sight that they became rooted to the spot as though their limbs were paralysed and laid themselves open to wounds. Then, bolstered by the encouragements of their commander and urging one another not to be afraid of this mass of fanatical women, they advanced with their standards, cut down all they met, and enveloped them in the flames of their own torches.

(Tacitus Annals XIV, 29-30)

The Romans even set up their own industries to provide for their needs. Evidence of their tile kilns have been discovered, as well as remains of copper mining and their use of slate.

Fewer soldiers were stationed in Wales by AD 120, as they were needed to defend the border in the north of England. With the Roman Empire on the decline, troops were withdrawn from Wales and the north. Roman rule in Britain finally ended by AD 410. Their legacy is still visible in our towns and countryside, such as Segontium in Caernarfon and Tomen y Mur, Trawsfynydd.
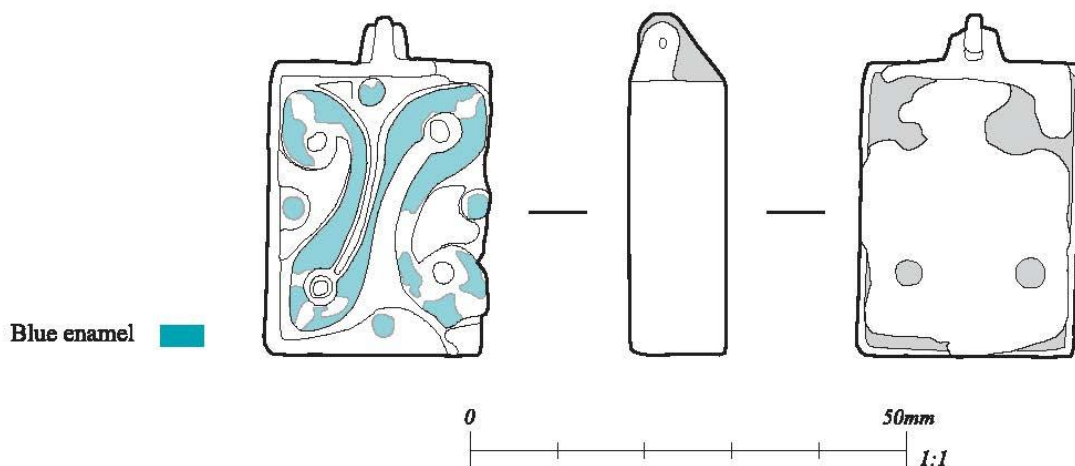
Roman seal box

During an archaeological excavation at Llandygai, near Bangor traces of a round building were excavated. This was a house built towards the end of the Iron Age but people still lived in it after the Romans arrived. In many ways their lives did not change with the Roman conquest; they still farmed their fields and lived in the same round house.

The people living in the roundhouse could not ignore the Romans as they lived close to an important Roman road. They must have met Romans and bought things from them as a few pieces of Roman pot were found during the excavation. The archaeologists also found a special object in a drain inside the roundhouse. This was a tiny bronze box. When it was found it was covered in dirt and it was only after it was cleaned in the conservation laboratory that the lid was seen to have been decorated in enamels. It would have had bright blue, yellow and red patterns when it was new. There was also some reddish stuff inside the box. This was analysed and proved to be bees wax.

A specialist identified it as a seal box used by the Roman army. An official document was rolled up and tied with string, the string was knotted inside the box, and wax put on the knot so that no one could open the document and read it without breaking the seal. Iron Age people did not have writing or documents so the box was only used by Roman officials, but the design on the box is a typical Celtic design, and the box may have been made by a Celtic craftsman. Why was it in the drain of a Celtic roundhouse? Had someone living in the roundhouse bought it from a Roman soldier or perhaps had seen it when they were visiting a Roman camp and stole it? Was it dropped by accident down the drain or was it deliberately put it into the earth as an offering to the gods?

SF615. From roundhouse A gully 3549

Blue enamel

0   50mm
1:1

Archaeological drawing of Roman seal box

Segontium Roman Sword

This 1st or early 2nd century AD Iron sword with an elephant ivory handle was found at the Roman fort of Segontium, Caernarfon, in March 1879. The auxiliary fort of Segontium was the main military and administrative centre in north Wales. It was founded byAgricola in AD 77 and a garrison was maintained there almost throughout the period of Roman rule in Britain. The sword is one of the most intact Roman swords found in the British Isles.

The Roman Hoard

These coins were found at Coed Cyrnol, Menai Bridge, and are all silver or silver alloy. The hoard includes coins from the reign of Emperors Elagabalus (218-222AD) and Postumus (259-269AD). Their burial is perhaps a hint of troubled times in the late 3rd century AD as Rome's power waned and pirates circled the Irish Sea.

THE ROMANS

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