

Roman 4: Roman Home



Life in Roman Britain

The Romans set up administrative centres to run the province and involved the local tribal elite in the decision process. They encouraged them to build dwellings in the new towns and to fund civic buildings.



[Venta Icenorum](#) (Caistor St Edmund)

Towns were laid out with grid pattern streets, at the centre was the *Forum*, which served as a marketplace and meeting centre and the *Basilica*, a form of town hall. The streets had shops and also temples dedicated to Roman gods. Many towns had running water and sewers.

Public bath houses were built in most Roman towns like the one at [Aquae Sulis](#) (Bath, on right).



Theatre ruins at [Camulodunum](#) (Colchester)

Public entertainment was also catered for with larger towns having open air theatres, *amphitheatres* or even chariot racing in the *Circus* at Colchester!



Most people though still lived in the countryside and the impact of Roman culture was slow to change the way of life. Farms grew crops, especially spelt wheat for bread and kept cows, sheep, goats, pigs and hens. Peasant farmers would still live in thatched houses as in the Iron Age.

Wealthy land owners built *villas*, generally quite close to the towns. These homes could have mosaic floors, an underfloor heating system and painted wall plaster. Pictured right is a reconstructed villa in [Wroxeter](#).



As much depended on the harvest, changes of the seasons were marked by religious festivals. In February, the arrival of Spring was marked by *Lupercalia*, for the onset of Summer in May was *Floralia*, *Cerialia* in October to mark the harvest and December the Winter festival of *Saturnalia*.

Religion was important in every day life, religious festivals took place across the year and other local gods were also worshipped such as *Sulis* (right).



Some of the most important gods were *Jupiter*, *Mars*, *Mercury*, *Saturn*, *Venus*, *Minerva*, *Apollo* and *Bacchus*. Gifts offered to the gods and animal sacrifices were at the centre of religious ceremonies. The Roman Empire under [Constantine](#) began to tolerate Christianity and became the official state church in AD 380 with the [Edict of Thessalonica](#).



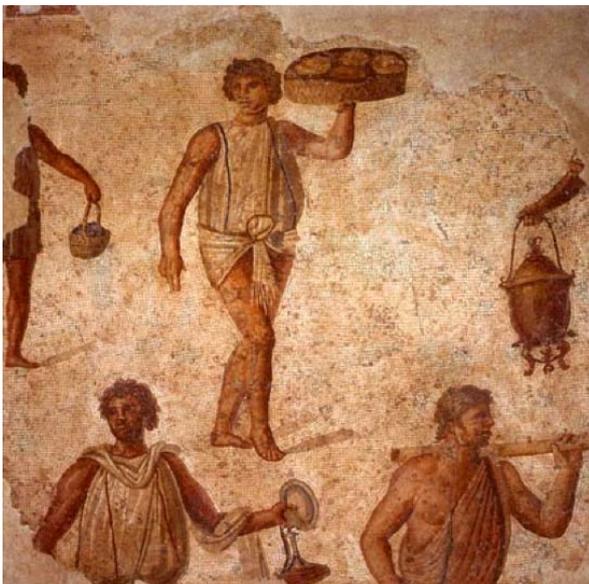
Roman Family

The head of the Roman family was the husband and father, wives were expected to obey their husbands and had little independence. The husband had considerable power over those in the household. The main role of the wife was to manage the home.



Wealthy women did not work but poorer women would have to work in the fields or workshops with their husbands.

Children did not receive much education unless they came from wealthy families. Family pets were popular especially dogs (right), birds and hares. Children would play board games, boys would play as soldiers with wooden swords and girls would have dolls to play with.



Slaves played an important role in society and the economy. Besides manual labour, slaves could also be highly skilled, working as accountants or physicians. They were considered property under Roman law but some could buy their freedom.



Further study

Some examples to provide a more in-depth look at Roman Britain



Aquae Sulis (Bath)

Natural hot spring in well preserved public baths.

<https://www.romanbaths.co.uk/>

Wroxeter reconstructed house

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/wroxeter-roman-city/things-to-do/#Section4>



Pompeii

Eruption of Mt Vesuvius buried Pompeii in AD 79.

<http://www.pompeiiisites.org/Sezione.jsp?titolo=History+of+the+excavation+of+Pompeii&idSezione=2682>



Activities

Roman themed activities to try out in the classroom or at home.



Design your own mosaic

On a thick piece of A4 card divide the page into 1cm squares, (21x30 = 630 squares). Plan your design and mark each square with the colour you intend using (use B for black, G for green etc). Cut out the appropriate number of each colour 1cm tiles from card and stick onto your gridded card to complete your mosaic.

Honey cake

Whisk 3 eggs in a bowl until stiff then slowly add 200g of runny honey and then gently fold in 50g of sifted spelt flour. Pour mixture into a greased baking tin(s) and bake in a preheated oven at 170C or 330F for 40-50 minutes . Turn out onto a wire tray to cool.



Io Saturnalia!

Celebrate the festival of Saturn on December 17th with a feast. Decorate tables with candles and leaves, prepare breads, cheeses, olives, chicken, eggs, grapes, honey cake and cheesecake with grape juice to drink. Slaves and children would be in charge of the feast so serve the children at the festival!

