

Feature



Coins from the Hoxne hoard, buried in the 5th century AD. Found in Hoxne, Suffolk (1992). This find contains money from the richest find of treasure from Roman Britain
Picture: BRITISH MUSEUM

What did the Romans do for us in Suffolk?

Landing in 43 AD, the Romans made modern-day Colchester in neighbouring Essex (then called 'Camulodunum') the capital of Roman Britain. Anyone who's been to Colchester will know all about the remains of the Roman walls, and the Roman circus.

But here in Suffolk, a few traces of their legacy can still be seen to this day.

In Ipswich, remains of Roman settlements have been found over the years in places such as Belstead Brook, where gold torcs dating back to the 1st century have since been uncovered by archaeologists. It is thought that this former Roman-period settlement was perhaps a religious enclosure (similar to Snettisham in Norfolk).

In the Boss Hall area of the town, evidence from Suffolk Heritage Explorer uncovered a series of enclosures, trackways, and fields dating back to the mid-1st and mid-3rd centuries in Handford Road. Some of the structures unearthed include probable timber buildings, a well, pottery production, and iron working before the Saxons invaded and settled.

The most significant site in Ipswich however has to be Castle Hill Villa – a complex which comprised of several buildings arranged around a courtyard.

While Suffolk's archaeologists don't have a complete plan, it's the county's largest known villa from

They came, they saw, they conquered. Thousands of years ago Romans invaded Britain and left their mark on the region by way of a number of interesting finds and remains as **Danielle Lett** discovers

that era, and is home to a number of Roman features including hypocausts, a bath building, mosaic floors, and plaster on the walls. Examined in the 19th and 20th centuries, archaeologists also found a plaque depicting ancient solar deity Atys, and an occultist's stamp, and it is believed the site possibly belonged to someone who had links to the administration of the late Roman military coastal defence system.

"The most enduring monument to the influence of the Romans is in our landscape - and very straight. Most of the A140 is a Roman road, part of the Roman route from Colchester to Caistor by Norwich," explains Faye Minter, senior archaeological officer at Suffolk County Council's Archaeological Service. The road would have carried thousands of Roman soldiers marching between what is now modern-day Essex and Norfolk.

In 2004 the remains of a Roman settlement were discovered in the Suffolk village of Stoke Ash. Just a stone's throw away from the A140, archaeologists John

Fairclough and Mike Hardy found pottery, brooches, coins and other items that date back to the 1st century.

Over in Ixworth near Bury St Edmunds, a Roman fort was built and used until the end of the 1st century – most likely in response to the Boudiccan revolution. Measuring roughly 193 x 215 metres, it had three ditches for defence, as well as a water tower.

According to Historic England Research Records, excavation of the fort uncovered finds, pottery, and coins which suggests that the hypothesis of a Post-Boudiccan campaign as the context of the military campaign is correct.

Other Roman ruins have also been uncovered in Stonham Aspal, Lidgate, and Icklingham.

And if you head towards the coast and make your way to Felixstowe, the remains of a former Roman shore fort can still be glimpsed at low tide.

According to Historic England Research Records, the fort, known as Walton Castle, was most likely built between 276 and 285 AD,



and stood roughly 30 metres above sea level before it was destroyed by coastal erosion in the 18th century.

Before it succumbed to the sea however, the Normans reused the fort as the bailey for one of their castles built by one of the Bigod earls.

Strengthened by Hugh Bigod, the castle was unfortunately confiscated by King Henry II and in 1175/6, it was dismantled – although the walls of the Roman fort survived. The fort was still around for most of the 17th and 18th century – but when antiquarian Francis Grose penned his 1786 book 'The Antiquities of England and Wales', he noted that it was only visible at low water. In the subsequent years, it has since been taken by the sea and is

visible on a clear day at low tide.

Impressive architecture aside, the Romans also brought with them innovation by way of pottery to Suffolk. In 1886, Henry Prigg found two pottery kilns at West Stow Heath. "There are numerous examples in the Wattisfield area, where resources included good potting clay. Most of the Roman kilns produced a grey ware for everyday kitchen ware - but some finer wares were also produced," explains Faye.

Other Roman kilns have also been uncovered across the county, including one in Homersfield, which contained pottery, a face mask mould for jugs, and coins; and another excavated in Botesdale by Basil Brown in 1946.



Inset above, a Roman piece of pottery from a late 1st century flagon, discovered at Stoke Ash in 2004

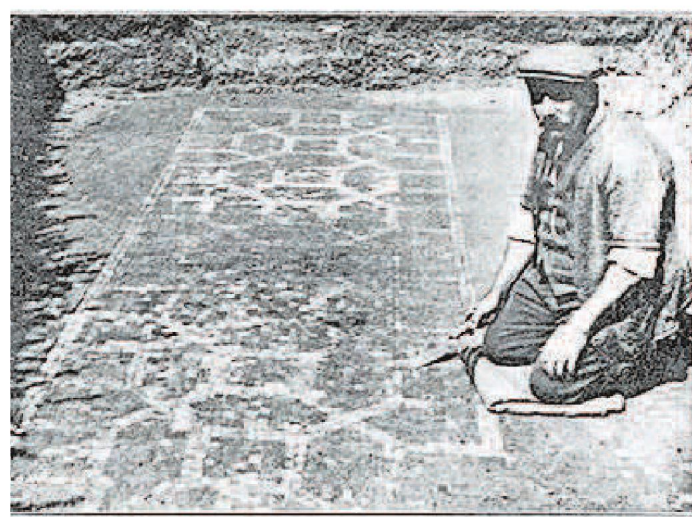
Left, excavation work on the site of a Roman villa at Stonham Aspal in 1962
 Pictures: ARCHANT

Below, excavating a mosaic at Castle Hill in Ipswich in 1930



The remains of the former Walton fort can be seen off the coast of Felixstowe at low tide

Picture: ARCHANT ARCHIVES



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