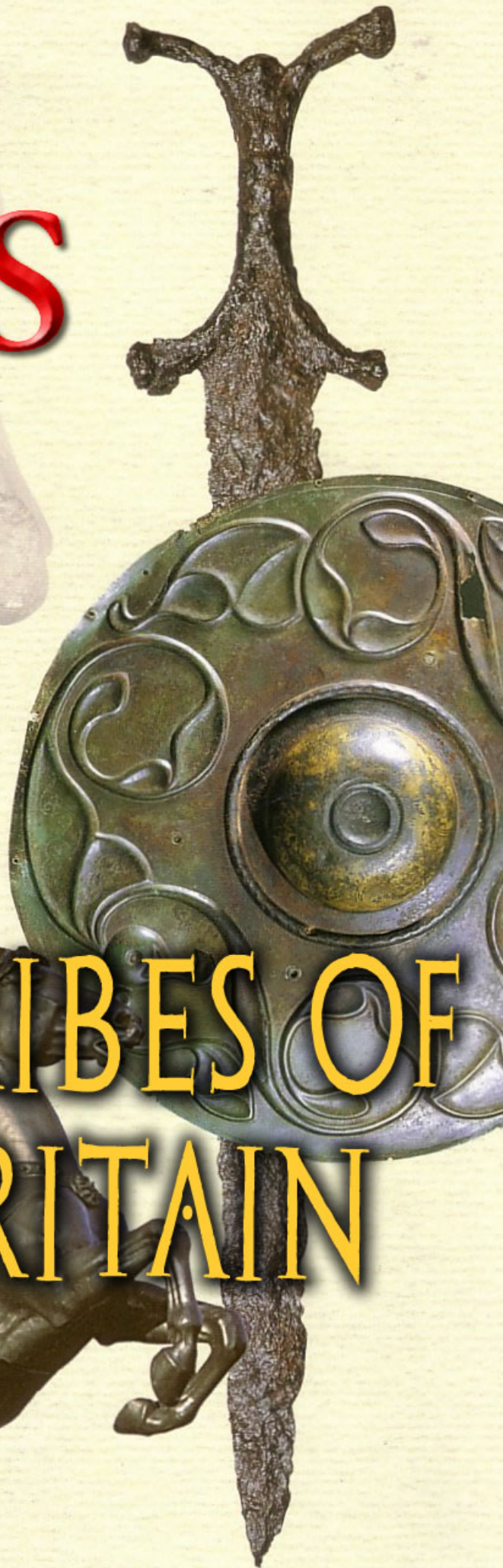


The Celts



NATIVE TRIBES OF
CELTIC BRITAIN





This map shows the approximate location of the major tribes who lived in Britain at the time of the Roman Conquest of Britain in the First Century AD. The sole source for the existence and location of these tribes are Roman writers who visited Britain.

One of the best observers of the tribes of Celtic Britain was Tacitus who wrote on historical events in Britain. Another was a Roman geographer called Ptolemy who wrote a description of Britain, listing the names of the many British tribes.

01: Caledones
02: Taexali
03: Carvetii
04: Venicones
05: Epidii
06: Damnonii
07: Novantae
08: Selgovae
09: Votadini
10: Brigantes
11: Parisi
12: Cornovii
13: Deceangli
14: Ordovices

15: Corieltauvi
16: Iceni
17: Demetae
18: Catuvellauni
19: Silures
20: Dubunni
21: Dumnonii
22: Durotriges
23: Belgae
24: Atrebates
25: Regni
26: Cantiaci
27: Trinovantes

Native Tribes of Celtic Britain

Caledones (Caledonii)

These peoples lived in the Scottish Highlands and Islands. The Roman word **Caledones** described both a single tribe who lived in the Great Glen between the modern towns of Inverness and Fort William. They also called all the tribes living in the north Caledonians. We know the names of some of these other tribes. They include the **Cornovii** and Smertae who probably lived in Caithness, the **Caereni** who lived in the far west of the Highlands, the **Carnonacae** and the Creones in the Western Highlands.

The **Vacomagi** lived in and around the Cairngorns. Other unknown tribes lived in Orkney, Shetland and the Hebrides. Warriors from many of these tribes came together to resist the Romans under a leader called Calgacus at battle of Mons Graupius in AD 84. Although the Romans won this battle, they never successfully conquered the Highlands. The Romans admired the **Caledonii** for their ability to endure cold, hunger and hardship. Tacitus described them as red-haired and large-limbed.

All these tribes lived very different lifestyles than neighbouring peoples in other parts of Scotland. In many areas they lived in tall stone towers, called Brochs, or other fortified sites, called Duns. Unlike the **Taexali** and **Venicones**, the **Caledones** rarely made religious offerings of fine metal objects.

Taexali

Little is known of those who lived in what is today Grampian except that they lived in small undefended farms and hamlets. They shared much with their neighbours the **Venicones** to the south. These low lying and fertile parts of eastern Scotland provide archaeological evidence for different types of settlement and rituals compared to those of the Highlands and Islands to the west and north.

Although defeated by Romans in AD 84, they were never permanently occupied. Like the **Venicones** and **Caledones**, they lived beyond the northern most frontier of the Roman Empire; the Antonine Wall.

Carvetii

This tribe lived in what is today Cumbria. They are a poorly known group which were made into their own civitas (an administrative units or 'county') in the Roman Province. There is very little archaeological evidence for the people who lived in this area before the Roman Conquest.

Like their neighbours, the **Novantae**, they likely lived in small farms and did not use coins or hillforts. The **Carvetii** might have been a smaller tribe within the large kingdom or federation of the **Brigantes**.

Venicones

This tribe lived in what is today Tayside. The Roman army campaigned several times in their territory, but they were never permanently conquered and occupied. The archaeological evidence shows that this people and their northern neighbours, the **Taexali**, had much in common.

The **Venicones** were one of the few groups in northern Britain at this time that buried their dead in stone lined graves, such graves and cremation burials are very rare in other parts of Britain before the Roman period. Archaeologists suspect many Iron Age peoples often practised complex funeral rituals in which bodies were naturally allowed to decompose.

The **Venicones** and **Taexali** also made offerings of prestigious decorated locally made metal objects in bogs and lakes, including massive bronze armlets. Only the **Venicones** and **Taexali** wore these unusual ornaments, which could weigh over 1.5 kg each and were worn one on each arm.

Native Tribes of Celtic Britain

Epidii

Little is known about this mysterious tribe except that they lived in the modern region of Kintyre and probably the islands of Arran, Jura and Islay.

Damnonii

These people lived in the central part of Scotland around what is today Glasgow and Strathclyde. The name of this tribe could be spelt either as **Damnonii** or as **Dumnonii** although the **Dumnonii** is also the name of the people who lived in Devon and Cornwall at this time. Many tribes in Britain and France at the time of the Roman Conquest shared similar names which may have been as a result of inter-tribal contact. It could, however, be coincidence, as people used similar types of names for themselves such as 'the people of the mountains', 'people of the horn' or 'the brave people' etc. The **Damnonii** were conquered by the Romans and for many years their territory was occupied by the Roman army before they retreated further south to the line of Hadrians Wall.

Novantae

The **Novantae** were a little known tribe or people who lived in what is today south-west Scotland. People living in this area did not build massive forts on the tops of mountains, as did the **Votadini**, nor did they make many offerings of fine metal objects. Like their neighbours to the south, the **Carvetii**, archaeologists have found little evidence for the lives of these peoples before the Roman Conquest. They were clearly farmers and herders, but few of their farms and other settlements have been excavated by archaeologists so far.

Selgovae

A British tribe of Scotland, the name is thought to mean 'hunters'. Roman geographer Ptolemy places them in the Southern uplands of Scotland, although it is not clear from the little evidence we have as to exactly where this people lived. Some scholars place their location as the upper Tweed Basin, and it is unclear if they were part of the **Votadini**. The **Selgovae** might have used Eildon Seat as their principal settlement, but this might have been a **Votadinian** site. Like the **Votadini**, they were conquered in AD 79-80 by the Roman army.

Votadini

The **Votadini** were a very large tribe or people that lived in the south east of Scotland. In the north, their territory started at Edinburgh and the Firth of Forth and stretched as far south as Northumberland in northern England. It is not clear where the boundary between the **Votadini** and the other large tribe, the **Brigantes**, was, although it probably frequently shifted as a result of wars and as smaller tribes and communities changed allegiances.

The **Votadini**, like the **Brigantes**, were a group made up of smaller tribes, unfortunately the names of these smaller tribes and communities remain unknown. Archaeologically, the territory of the **Votadini** was very different to that of either the **Venicones** or the **Novantae**. Large walls, banks and ditches surrounded most of their farms and the people made offerings of fine metal objects, but never wore massive armlets. There are also at least three very large hillforts in their territory (Yeavinger Bell, Eildon Seat and Traprain Law), each was located on the top of a prominent hill or mountain. The hillforts may have been used for over a thousand years by this time as places of refuge and as places for meetings for political and religious ceremonies.

Native Tribes of Celtic Britain

Brigantes

This large tribe was, like the **Votadini**, a federation of smaller communities. The name means 'upland people' or 'hill dwellers'. This name is appropriate as the Pennines formed the heart of their territory.

After the Roman Conquest, the **Brigantes** were formed into a very large civitates, or administrative unit that covered most of Yorkshire, Cleveland, Durham and Lancashire. It stretched from the North Sea to the Irish Sea. We know the names of some of the smaller tribes they made up the **Brigantes** at the time of the Roman Conquest. They include the **Setanti** in Lancashire, the **Lopocares**, the **Corionototae** and the **Tectoverdi** around the Tyne valley. This huge area was very varied. As well as people living in the Dales and hills, many people farmed the fertile land in Durham, Tyneside and Teeside. At the time of the Roman Conquest people in this region wore swords carried in distinctive local metal scabbards that were highly decorated.

An important centre for the **Brigantes** was built at Stanwick in North Yorkshire in the first century AD. This was probably the capital of Queen Cartimandua who ruled the **Brigantes**. Cartimandua was friendly towards the Romans, but her husband was anti-Roman. The Romans invaded and occupied the territory in AD79.

Parisi

The **Parisi** lived in East Yorkshire. They were a small, but distinctive group of people who farmed the chalk hills of the Yorkshire Wolds. The **Parisi** share their name with the people who lived in France around what is today Paris although whether both tribes shared strong links is hotly debated. The British **Parisi** are known for their unusual 'chariot-burials' and cemeteries.

Unlike other people living in Britain between about 300 and 100 BC, the people in East Yorkshire buried their dead in large cemeteries. This was much like the way many peoples in France and Germany buried their dead at the same time. However, in other respects, the East Yorkshire **Parisi** lived in British style houses, wore British style ornaments and used British style pottery. At the time of the Romans, the Parisi had stopped burying their dead in this unusual way. However, they carried on other distinctive styles of life and remained separate from their large, powerful neighbours, the **Brigantes**. After the Roman Conquest they were made into their own small civitas with their capital at Petuaria (modern Brough on Humber).

Cornovii

The **Cornovii** are a surprisingly obscure tribe, given that they lay well within the boundaries of the Roman province and their civitas capital, Wroxeter, was one of the largest in Britain. They share their name with a Caledonian tribe who lived in the far north of Scotland. The name probably means 'people of the horn'. There is no reason to think that this group shared any common ancestry with the group in Caithness.

Many tribes or peoples in Europe at the time of the Roman Conquest shared similar names. This might be because these tribes had contacts with each other. But it is just as likely to be a coincidence, as people used similar types of names for themselves such as 'the people of the mountains' or 'the brave people' etc. The **Cornovii** never issued coinage and before the Roman Conquest left little evidence to recognise them. They probably lived in what are today the modern counties of Staffordshire, Shropshire and Cheshire.

Native Tribes of Celtic Britain

Deceangli

The **Deceangli**, the **Ordovices** and the **Silures** were the three main tribe groups who lived in the mountains of what is today called Wales. However, in prehistory Wales, England and Scotland did not exist in anyway as distinctive entities in the ways they have done so for the last 1000 years.

The Deceangli were the peoples of what is today north Wales and probably included the peoples who lived on the Isle of Anglesey. The Romans considered Anglesey, or Mona, as a stronghold of the Druids. Because the Druids played an important role in encouraging the recently conquered Britons to resist the Roman Conquerors, the Roman army specifically targeted Anglesey for destruction. On the eve of Boudicca's revolt in what is today East Anglia, the Roman Army has only just completed the long and difficult task of conquering the tribes living in the Welsh Mountains. The final episode of that conquest was the invasion of Anglesey and the slaughter of the Druids there.

Corieltauvi

This large tribe appears to have been created only shortly before the Roman Conquest of Britain. It offered no resistance to the Romans and was quickly turned into a civitas (an administrative district equivalent to a modern county) with its capital at the city of Leicester.

The **Corieltauvi** combined groups of people living in what is today most of the East Midlands (Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Northamptonshire). Before about 50 to 1 BC, archaeological evidence suggests two different groups or tribes lived in this region. One lived in what is today Lincolnshire, the other in what is today Northamptonshire. Both areas were different to each other and were important centres of population and economy in the period c. 400 and 100 BC. The **Corieltauvi** are known from their coins that are found throughout the East Midlands. This group appears to have been a new federation that united earlier different groups. This was a region where people lived in villages, and some times larger settlements. Leicester was certainly an important large settlement before the Roman Conquest, as were a number of large settlements in Lincolnshire, such as Dragonby and Old Sleaford.

Iceni

They also issued coins before the Conquest. Their coins and other archaeological evidence shows that the tribe's territory was in the modern counties of Norfolk and parts of Suffolk and Cambridgeshire. They appear to have been a wealthy and powerful group of tribes between 200 and 50 BC. From their territory come the finest hoards of gold treasure found in Iron Age Britain; the Snettisham torcs. Other hoards of elaborately decorated bronze chariot fittings point to a love of conspicuous display by the nobles of the **Iceni**. This tribe also shunned contacts with the Roman world and the changes they brought with them that characterised the life styles of **Catuvellauni** and **Trinovantes** at this time.

The **Iceni** had important religious centres at Snettisham and at Thetford. But when they were made into Roman Civitas, the Romans did not choose either of these centres, but the settlement at Caistor, near what is today Norwich. Was this because the **Iceni** led the most successful revolt against Roman rule in the history of Roman Britain? When the Romans invade southern Britain in AD 43 the **Iceni** were friendly towards the new rulers. Their king Prasutagus became a client-king of Rome. But on his death the kingdom was incorporated into the Roman province and together with other abuses led to the **Iceni** revolt led by Prasutagus' widow, Queen Boudicca.

Native Tribes of Celtic Britain

Ordovices

This group covered much of the mountains and valleys of what is today mid-Wales. They were the northern neighbours of the **Silures** and the Southern neighbours of the **Degeangli**.

Like the **Silures** and **Degeangli**, these peoples lived in small farms, often defended against attack. After the emperor Claudius invaded southern England in AD 43, one of the main leaders of the Britons, called Caratacus escaped to the **Ordovices** and the **Silures**. They were stirred into rebellion by Caratacus and for a long time successfully resisted the Romans. The Roman general Agricola only finally defeated the **Ordovices** in 77-8. The tribe was incorporated into Britannia and became a civitas.

Demetae

These were the people who lived in the fertile lands of Pembrokeshire and much of Carmarthenshire in southwest Wales. They lived in small farms scattered across the countryside and shared many features of their lives with their neighbours across the Bristol Channel in Devon and Cornwall. They were friendly towards the Romans and quickly adapted to Roman rule, unlike their more warlike and scattered neighbours in the mountains of Wales; the **Silures** and the **Ordovices**.

Because of this the **Demetae** did not need to be intensively garrisoned by the Roman army, except along their eastern border, which may have been to protect them from their hostile neighbours, the **Silures**. The tribe was incorporated into the province of Britannia and became a civitas (an administrative unit, or county, within the Roman province). The capital of the Roman civitas was at Carmarthen (Moridundum Demetarum).

Catuvellauni

The **Catuvellauni** were the tribe that lived in the modern counties of Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and southern Cambridgeshire. Their territory also probably included tribes in what is today Buckinghamshire and parts of Oxfordshire. The tribal name possibly means 'good in battle'.

The **Catuvellauni** existed as a tribe at the time of Julius Caesar, but in the following years became an extremely powerful group. Their first known king was Tasciovanus, who is known from the coins he minted with his name on them. He founded a royal and ritual centre at Verulamium, modern St Albans in about AD10. There were several other large settlements or clusters of villages in their territory, such as at Baldock and Welwyn.

Before this time, the **Catuvellauni**, **Trinovantes** and **Cantiaci** were very different from other British tribes. They had been using coins for at least a century, adopted the same way of burying the dead as was practised in northern France, and eat and dressed in ways more common in France than other parts of Briton. Tasciovanus successors created a large kingdom through conquest and alliance that included the **Trinovantes** and **Cantiaci**.

The most successful king was Cunobelinus (Cymbeline), but after his death in the late 30's AD, his kingdom was beset by rivalries between his successors. This was the excuse used by the Roman Emperor Claudius to conquer southern Britain in 43 AD. The **Catuvellauni** were one of the most pro-Roman of British peoples who very quickly and peacefully adopted Roman lifestyles and Roman rule.

A very rich grave of a pro-Roman **Catuvellaunian** ruler who lived at the time of the Roman Conquest has been excavated at Folly Lane, St Albans. They became one of the first civitas in the new province, Verulamium becoming one of the first and most successful cities in Roman Britain.

Native Tribes of Celtic Britain

Silures

Several Roman authors including Pliny, Ptolemy and Tacitus mention this tribe and later *civitas* (administrative unit in a Roman province). Their territory was south east Wales - the Brecon Beacons and south Welsh valleys. A people of the mountains and valleys, we know relatively little about how they lived. Like the other tribes of the Welsh Mountains, they were difficult for the Romans to conquer and control. For a time in the period around AD 45-57, they led the British opposition to the Roman advance westwards.

Tacitus describes them as a strong and warlike nation, and for ten years or more the Romans fought to contain, rather than conquer them. Although defeated and occupied by the early 60's, their bitter resistance may explain the late grant of self governing *civitas* status to them only in the early 2nd century. The capital was established at a previously unoccupied site at Caerwent and was given the name *Venta Silrum*. Tacitus described them as swarthy and curly-haired, and suggested their ancestors might be from Spain because of the similarities in appearance with some peoples in Spain. However, there is no evidence to suggest any genetic links between south Wales and parts of Spain.

Dubunni

This large tribe lived in the southern part of the Severn Valley and the Cotswolds and were one of the few groups to issue coins before the Roman Conquest. The main distribution of these coins shows that the **Dubunni** occupied or ruled an area as far south as the Mendips, and the coins also hint that the group was divided into northern and southern subgroups.

The **Dubunni** lived in very fertile farmland in farms and small villages. They did not resist the Roman Conquest, unlike their neighbours, the **Silures**. Indeed, they may have been one of the first tribes to submit to the Romans, even before the Romans reached their territory. The **Dubunni** had a central or important settlement at Bagendon in Gloucester, on the eastern edge of their territory. This centre was replaced by the important Roman city of Cirencester, which became the capital of the **Dubunnic** *civitas*.

Dumnonii

The **Dumnonii** occupied the whole of the South West peninsula and parts of Southern Somerset. They did not use coins, nor did they have large settlements to act of political centres for the tribe, and there is no evidence for a dynasty of **Dumnonian** kings.

The **Dumnonii** were probably a group of smaller tribes that lived across the large area of Cornwall, Devon and Somerset. The people lived in small farmsteads, usually surrounded by large walls: however, there were also local differences in the types of settlements and other aspects of life between different parts of Devon and Cornwall. There is also evidence for contacts and trade with Brittany with whom they shared similar styles of highly decorated pottery. Cornwall was one of the few parts of Britain where the dead were buried at this time.

The **Dumnonii** appear to have accepted the Roman conquest without resistance and as a result few garrison forts were placed in their territory, although this area never fully adopted Roman ways of life. Life styles and types of settlements remained little changed from the Iron Age through the Roman period. The Romans granted *civitas* status to the town of Exeter (*Isca Dumnoniorum*).

Native Tribes of Celtic Britain

Durotriges

Centred in Dorset, this people were also found in southern parts of Wiltshire and Somerset and western Dorset. This was a people that minted and used coins before the Roman Conquest, but there is no evidence from the coins or burials for a strong dynasty of kings. Rather the **Durotriges** seem to have been a loosely knit confederation of smaller tribal groups at the time of the Roman conquest. One of these smaller tribal groups that lived around Dorchester, buried their dead in inhumation cemeteries.

A unique feature of the **Durotriges** at this time was that they still occupied hillforts. Although hillforts are one of the most well-known features of the Iron Age, most were no longer occupied at turn of the first millennium. Best known of these **Durotrigean** hillforts is that of Maiden Castle near Dorchester, others include South Cadbury Castle and Hod Hill.

A major trading centre existed at Hengistbury Head from which cross-channel trade with Gaul was controlled. This may be the settlement called Dunium by Ptolemy which was located on the border between the **Durotriges** and **Atrebates**. Cross channel trade was not an important source of goods for the **Durotriges**, who preferred local products.

A particular type of pottery made at Poole Harbour was traded through out the territory of the **Durotriges**. At the time of the Roman invasion the **Durotriges** put up a spirited, if unsuccessful opposition and they are almost certainly one of the two tribes that Suetonius records fighting against Vespasian and the 2nd legion. After the conquest they were made into a civitas with their capital was at Durnovaria (Dorchester) in the mid-70's. Later a second **Durotrigean** civitas was created, administered from Lindinis (Ilchester).

Belgae

The **Belgae** were probably not a British tribe. The Romans applied the name **Belgae** to a whole group of tribes in northwest Gaul, but the appearance of a civitas of this name in Britain is something of a mystery. According to the Roman geographer Ptolemy the territory of the **Belgae** included not only Winchester but also Bath nearby and an as yet unidentified settlement called Ischalis.

It seems likely that Ptolemy has made an error here since the resulting shape of the territory of the **Belgae** would bear little resemblance to pre-Roman tribal geography and would be something of an administrative nightmare. If the civitas was actually focussed around Winchester (called by the Romans Venta Belgarum - 'town of the **Belgae**') there is still a problem, since this area seems to have been part of the old kingdom of the **Atrebates**.

The civitas of the **Belgae** was therefore most probably an artificial creation of the Roman administration, like the neighbouring civitas of the **Regni**, and was created at about the same time in c. AD 80 following the death of King Cogidubnus. Its administrative capital at Winchester was known as Venta Belgarum, which was an important settlement before the Roman Conquest.

Native Tribes of Celtic Britain

Atrebates

This is another British tribe that shares a name with a tribe in pre-Roman France. They were the second most powerful group in southern Britain at the time of the Roman Conquest, they issued and used coins, and had many contacts with France.

They probably consisted of a group of tribes ruled by a single dynasty, their territory originally stretched from what is today West Sussex, Hampshire and Berkshire.

After the Roman Conquest, their territory was divided into three separate civitates, one such centre was at the major settlement at Silchester, near Reading.

Another major Royal centre, comparable to those at St Albans, Colchester and Stanwick, was at Chichester. The **Atrebates** had long links of trade with France and it is likely that people from the **Atrebates** were related by married to people from French tribes. Commas, a French leader from the French tribes called the **Atrebates**, fled to Britain during Julius Caesar's conquests of Gaul. Commius then appears as the name of the **Atrebates** ruler.

From about 15 BC, the **Atrebates** seem to have established friendly relations with Rome, and it was an appeal for help from the last Atrebatian king, Verica, which provided Claudius with the pretext for the invasion on Britain in AD 43. After the Roman Conquest, the territory of the **Atrebates** was divided up, with Silchester (Calleva Atrebatum) becoming the capital of a Roman civitas that administered the area of modern Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Surrey and north Hampshire.

The name **Atrebates** means 'settlers' or 'inhabitants'.

Regni

Like the civitas of the **Belgae**, the **Regni** are not a tribe or people known at the time of the Roman Conquest, rather the Romans created this civitas (an administrative unit within a Roman province), possibly around a smaller tribal group that were part of the **Atrebates**.

Before the Roman Conquest, the whole of the territory between what is today West Sussex, Hampshire and Berkshire was the territory of the **Atrebates**, this important kingdom had two major centres at Silchester, near Reading, and Chichester.

West Sussex was an area with very strong links to France before the Roman Conquest and was one of the first areas to use coins and adopt north French styles of cremating the dead.

Between about 10 BC and AD 43, Chichester became an important Royal centre, on a par with St Albans, Stanwick or Colchester. This area was very pro-Roman and served as one of the bases for the Roman Conquest of Britain. The ruler of the area was King Cogidubnus, who started the great palace at Fishbourne, outside Chichester, after the Conquest.

Because of his help to the Romans, Chichester at least remained a client Kingdom and not part of the new Roman province until Cogidubnus' death in about 80 AD. After this time, the territory of the **Atrebates** was divided up into three civitas, with the **Regni** being the civitas centred on Chichester and administering West Sussex.

Native Tribes of Celtic Britain

Cantiaci

This tribe lived in north and east Kent. Like other peoples in southeast Britain at the time of the Roman Conquest, this group was very open to influences from France and the Mediterranean World and they eventually became part of the large kingdom of Cunobelinus.

Like the **Catuvellauni** and **Trinovantes** they buried their dead according to the north French custom of cremation.

After the Roman Conquest they became a civitas based on their principle settlement at Canterbury.

Trinovantes

The **Trinovantes** are the first British tribe to be mentioned by a Roman author, appearing in Caesar's account of his invasion of 54 BC. By this date they seem to have been already involved in a power struggle with the neighbouring tribes to the west who were to be forged into the kingdom of the **Catuvellauni** under Tasciovanus. This group shared the same ways of life and religious practices as the **Catuvellauni** and **Cantiaci**.

They used coins, cremated their dead, ate from plates and drank from cups, They became part of the large kingdom established by the rules of the **Catuvellauni**.

The king **Cunobelinus** essentially absorbed the two tribes into one larger kingdom and he or his predecessors, established Colchester as a new royal site on the same model as St Albans. It was Colchester, that became the target for the Roman Emperor Claudius' invasion in AD43.

After the Roman Conquest, the **Trinovantes** were restored as tribal entity in the form of a civitas (an administrative unit or county) within the new Roman Province. The civitas capital was the Roman city of Colchester, originally founded as colony for retired Roman soldiers.



Native Tribes of Celtic Britain

