

Roman Britain

15 June 1993



Four stamps commemorating the 1950th anniversary of the Roman occupation of Britain go on sale at post offices, the British Philatelic Bureau, Collections, philatelic counters and selected post shops on 15 June. The stamps feature spectacular items of Roman Britain discovered at sites in Kent, London, Wales and Dorset.

The values cover the inland 1st class and EC basic rates (24p); Europe, non-EC basic rate (28p); Worldwide postcard rate (33p); and basic airmail letter rate (39p).

The 33p stamp shows the goddess Roma shown on a second century gemstone discovered at the legionary fortress of Caerleon (*Ista*) in Wales.

The 39p value depicts a 4th Century mosaic of Christ from a Roman villa at Hinton St Mary in Dorset. It is probably the earliest known representation of Christ.

The Designer

The stamps were designed by John Gibbs, FCSD who trained at the London College of Printing.



The 24p stamp shows the head of the Emperor Claudius (ruled AD41-54) on a gold coin found at Bredgar, Kent. Claudius, well-known today through of the works of Robert Graves and a television series, created new provinces of the Roman Empire. He inaugurated the conquest of Britain, taking part in the opening campaign (43 AD).

The 28p stamp features the head of the Emperor Hadrian (AD 117-138). Hadrian's wall, constructed during his rule, was one of the strongest and most complete of all the imperial frontiers of Rome. Hadrian was a noted patron of the arts, and founder of the Athenaeum in Rome. The head shown on the stamp is a bronze of the 2nd century found in the River Thames in London in 1834. It is now in the British Museum.



Before becoming a freelance designer Mr Gibbs worked in London first for a printer, then for a design group (Unit Five Design, 1966-77) where he was the partner responsible for all graphics, and finally for a publishing company. As a freelance graphic designer his main areas of work are typography, symbol design, books and book covers and illustration.

He has worked with the Royal Mail for 15 years, during which time he has designed several sets of stamps, including the 1981 International Year of the Disabled set and the 1986 Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference stamp. He now lives and works in Bath, Avon.

Of his Roman Britain stamp designs, Mr Gibbs writes:

"These designs are the outcome of extensive

ROMAN BRITAIN

ROYAL MAIL MINT STAMPS

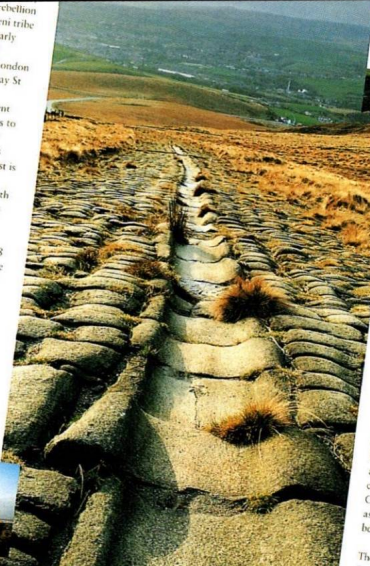


THORNHURST CASTLE, NEAR BAVERINGE, WILTSHIRE

...and the rebellion of Boudicca, Queen of the Iceni tribe (of Norfolk), in AD 60-1, nearly succeeded. The newly created Roman towns at Colchester, London and Verulamium (by present-day St Albans) were sacked, and only discipline and superior equipment finally enabled the Roman forces to crush the Iceni. Drastic reprisals followed, but soon attention was switched to the north. Its conquest is particularly associated with Gnaeus Julius Agricola, governor between AD 78 and 84. In these years, Roman control was extended from the Pennines to the Scottish lowlands. Agricola also fostered the development of towns, where Britons began enthusiastically to adopt the dress and language of the conquerors. Cirencester, Leicester and Dorchester (Dorset) were among the places that appear to have benefited from his encouragement.

POWDERMILL CASTLE, (English Heritage)

Lowland Scotland was not held for long, and the Roman army pulled back to a line between the River Solway and the River Tyne. When the emperor Hadrian visited the province in AD 122, he ordered that a wall 80 Roman miles (128 statute miles) long be built from the Roman sea to the Scottish coast. Within the 'provincia' proceeded among the Britons south and east.



ports, of which London soon became pre-eminent. Even so, the architecture and art would often have appeared somewhat hybrid to Roman eyes, and the term 'Romano-British' aptly describes this blend of indigenous Celtic and imported Roman traditions. It is nowhere better exemplified than in the world of religion. The Romans tolerated native divinities, and Celtic and Roman gods and goddesses often became syncretised.

'Romanisation' is also symbolised by the gradual spread of classical-style country estates, known as villas. However, these, like the towns, were mainly confined to the south and east. In the north and west, the bulk of the population lived largely as they had done before the Roman conquest, kept in check by a standing army based in forts, like those of Chester and Lancaster.

The third century was a troubled time for the Roman empire, but Britain seems to have remained, but something of a backwater. The first half of the fourth century was, however, Roman Britain's golden age, both economically and culturally. In AD 313, the emperor Constantine embraced Christianity as the official state religion and its beliefs gained ground in Britain.

But Britain also had its troubles. There were raids by Saxons.

Officials like the curator (finance) were appointed by the emperor. Roman British leaders in their own regions, administered towns, and justice was done in public baths, temples, and many other buildings of civilised life.

THORNHURST CASTLE, (English Heritage)

POWDERMILL CASTLE, (English Heritage)

ROMAN BRITAIN

ROYAL MAIL FIRST DAY COVER



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research which took me to museums and sites in England, Scotland and Wales. The brief was to depict a range of typical Roman items (such as mosaics, pottery, sculpture, jewellery, coins, etc) that reflect life in Roman Britain.

“Consultation with various experts led to the conclusion that the set should definitely include depictions of the Emperors Claudius and Hadrian and this stipulation led to the final selection of the Claudian coin and the bronze head of Hadrian. This choice in turn suggested that the rest of the set should also feature heads, so further research concentrated on mosaics and artefacts that incorporated heads within their designs. The objects chosen were the tiny gemstone of the Goddess Roma and the mosaic of Christ. The fifth (and eventually not required) item was a terracotta ‘head pot’ from the Yorkshire Museum.

“The next problem was to make the four heads work together as a set. I decided to focus in on



the heads themselves rather than the whole objects. This was a practical solution ensuring that details (particularly the fine lines in the mosaic), would not have to be reduced in size unnecessarily.

“Another question I had to address was whether to use photography or illustration as the medium. I decided on the former and the photographs were taken by the individual museum photographers. Details were enhanced and backgrounds unified on a Quantel Paintbox.”

Technical Details

<i>Printers:</i>	Harrison & Sons Ltd
<i>Process:</i>	Photogravure
<i>Size:</i>	35 x 37 mm, “almost square”
<i>Sheets:</i>	100
<i>Perforation:</i>	14½ x 14
<i>Phosphor:</i>	Phosphor Coated Paper, overprinted with 2 phosphor bars
<i>Gum:</i>	PVA Dextrin
<i>Presentation Pack:</i>	No. 238, price £1.55
<i>Stamp Cards:</i>	Nos 153 A-D, price 21p each

First Day Facilities

Unstamped Royal Mail first day cover envelopes will be available from main post offices, the Bureau, Collections, and philatelic counters around a week before 15 June, price 21p.

The Bureau will provide a first day cover service – collectors may order the Royal Mail cover bearing the stamps cancelled with pictorial “First Day of Issue” postmark of the Bureau or Caerleon. Orders for first day covers must be received at the Bureau by 15 June.

Collectors may send their own stamped covers, on the day of issue, for the Bureau or Caerleon cancels to: British Philatelic Bureau, 20 Brandon Street, EDINBURGH EH3 5TT or Special Handstamp Centre, Royal Mail, Penarth Road, CARDIFF CF1 1AA. The outer envelope should be endorsed “Pictorial First Day of Issue postmark”.

First Day Posting Boxes will be provided at most main post offices for collectors who wish to post covers to receive the standard, non-pictorial “First Day of Issue” handstamps.

Details of other special handstamps, sponsored by Royal Mail, stamp dealers and others, will be found in the *British Postmark Bulletin* – the Royal Mail’s magazine for postmark collectors. It is available on subscription from the British Philatelic Bureau: £10 UK and Europe, £21.75 Rest of World (Airmail).