

By the time they invaded Britain in 43 AD, the Romans already had a vast empire. The land they occupied included countries as far apart as Spain, Turkey, France and Egypt, and they were extremely rich. So why did they bother invading the small, rainy island that lay across the Channel?

The answer is that the new Roman Emperor, Claudius, was already an old man by the time he came to power. Because of his age, he was worried that his subjects would think he was weak. By conquering Britain, Claudius would be able to show everyone that he was a great leader – worthy of ruling the vast Roman Empire.

There were other good reasons to invade Britain, too. The Romans had already been trading with the Britons for many years, and so they were well aware that British mines were rich in metals such as gold, silver, tin and iron. By adding Britain to their empire, the Romans would be increasing their wealth.

In preparation for the invasion, Claudius assembled an army of more than 40,000 soldiers. Led by the commander Aulus Plautius, they sailed across the Channel and landed in Kent before travelling across the Thames and the Medway.

Although the British Celts were fierce warriors, they could not defeat the highly organised and skilful Roman army. Within just a few months, the Romans had defeated the Catuvellaunian tribe, capturing their capital city of Colchester. Eleven other British tribes quickly surrendered to the Romans.

By 47 AD, most of southern Britain was under Roman rule. Britain had become a part of the Roman Empire!