

What did the Romans do for us?

Roman administration brought stability, peace and wealth but they were pragmatists and adapted whatever existed already when they could. To help the army move quickly in case trouble broke out, they improved existing roads like the Icknield Way and constructed new ones. One of these, Watling St, passed ten miles to the southwest of Shillington and crossed the ancient Icknield Way at Dunstable.

Another new road nine miles to the east connected Roman towns at Sandy and Baldock, which was also on the Icknield Way. People in pre-Roman Britain had typically worshipped a wide range of gods and goddesses. The Romans allowed this to continue but added the names of their deities to the British ones. At holy sites such as springs, they constructed temples.

Pottering around

While some may have resented the Roman presence, their control brought innovations and benefits for all. Peace and stability led to a population increase and farmers improved production by manuring the soil, rotating crops and clearing more of the remaining natural woodland. More efficient ploughs with asymmetric iron shares appeared. Demand for wool seems to have increased. The quality of pottery improved too and it has survived much better in the soil than any that preceded it.

In 2013, Shillington History Society began to organise small-scale archaeological excavations or test pits.

Since then, small amounts of Roman era pottery have appeared in about one in four of the locations investigated.

They may mark the scattered sites of small farms but if manure was spread in the area, they could have come with it from elsewhere.



A test pit in a garden near the top of Church St (photographed while work was underway) produced the greatest amount of Roman pottery found so far suggesting that people were living there nearly 2,000 years ago.

A Roman villa

Few Roman villa sites are known in Bedfordshire. In 1978, an underground pipeline was installed across the parish and part of a previously unknown Roman villa was disturbed. It was located deep beneath a field east of Upton End near a long-gone spring called Ashton's Well. The owner must

have been wealthy and probably had influence over the local people to ensure that they produced surplus food for export. He prospered as the subsequent archaeological excavation found that the villa was extended later.

However, by this time, the Roman empire had expanded so much that its soldiers could no longer defend it all. When trouble broke out on its borders elsewhere in Europe, part of the army was redeployed to quell it. Taking advantage of this, Germanic tribes began raiding the east coast of England from the 280s onwards. As the 4th century progressed, the Romans faced further uprisings and more troops were removed from Britain.

In 410 AD, they abandoned the British Isles completely. The population of around 5 million people began a new chapter in their lives.



[End.of.Roman.rule.in.Britain.383.410 - End of Roman rule in Britain - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/End_of_Roman_rule_in_Britain)