

The Amphitheatre at Caerleon

Emperor Claudius decided an invasion, and the following occupation of parts of Britain, was necessary due to the political turmoil and lawlessness on the Island, and, in part, the Island's mineral deposits (see map). The fear being that this disruption would spread across the channel into Gaul.¹ This being the same reason Gaius Julius Caesar had decided to invade Britain for the first time in 55-54 B.C., protection of Gaul (now under Roman occupation) and worry of British influence in Gaul². Gaius Julius Caesar turned back, having subdued those inhabiting the east coast of England, in 55/54 B.C. due to the civil war according to Tacitus, although, Tacitus elsewhere, suggests it was too big an undertaking, and that conquering the tribes of Britain was a tougher prospect than Caesar had first thought, and resupply was difficult³. The Emperor Claudius sanctioned his invasion of Britain in 43 A.D., and ordered troops across the channel from Gaul⁴.



The shape of Britain and its position according to Roman geographical knowledge at the time, was that the island was 'shoulder-blade-like' in shape, and that Britain's Eastern

¹ Hutton, Peterson, Ogilvie, Warmington, Winterbottom, 1970, pp. 4-5

² Salway, 2001, pp. 23-26

³ Tac. Agr. 11-13; Hutton, Peterson, Ogilvie, Warmington, Winterbottom, 1970, p. 50

⁴ Hutton, Peterson, Ogilvie, Warmington, Winterbottom, 1970, p. 52

⁵ Todd, 2006, Brill's New Pauly online, (map)

shores faced Germany, its Western shores faced Spain, and Gaul, lay to the South of the Island⁶.

Tacitus speaks of Britain being worthy of conquest, because of its deposits of metals (see map). Also mentioned, is the usefulness of the Island's soil, for crops, and its pastures for rearing cattle⁷.

At Caerleon there stands the remains of a Roman fort, built during the Roman occupation of Britain, Caerleon is within the County of Monmouthshire, South Wales. The fort at Caerleon is situated near the river Usk, North-East of Newport. The site consists of; barracks, baths, and an amphitheatre⁸. The positioning of a legionary fort at Caerleon, and many other sites in Wales, being built, and manned, was due to the fierce resistance the Romans met from Welsh tribes (see map)⁹. Caerleon became a secure base for the *legio II Augusta* in the mid 70's A. D.¹⁰.



⁶ Tac. Agr. 10. 2-3

⁷ Tac. Agr. 12. 5-6

⁸ Hahn & Robins, 2008, online; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018, online

⁹ Todd, 1981, p. 148

¹⁰ Cannon & Crowcroft, 2015, online



The amphitheatre was a Roman invention, as opposed to an architectural design adaptation commonly made by the Romans, to buildings built by the Greeks during the Classical/Hellenistic periods, that were used regularly in make-up of Roman cities¹¹. The design and the type of events held in a Roman amphitheatre are not to be confused with the design and events held in an Ancient Greek theatre¹².

The Roman amphitheatre was a 'sporting' arena, gruesome, bloody, and spectacular, and a vital part of Roman life. The events held in amphitheatres were held by the Emperor, governors, and the elite, across the Roman Empire, and were a way of giving back to the multitude¹³. Putting on an event was a key way gaining popularity, and, as a way of gaining a political position, or, of remaining popular and retaining that position¹⁴. Amphitheatres in large cities, such as within Rome itself, held animal hunts, involving an array of exotic animals (lions, elephants, rhinoceros), gladiatorial bouts, criminal executions, and religious rites/celebrations/sacrifices¹⁵.

¹¹ Wilmott, 2008, p. 10

¹² Wilmott, 2008, p. 10

¹³ Wilmott, 2008, pp. 11-20

¹⁴ Wilmott, 2008, p 11-13

¹⁵ Mar. Spec. 2; Mar. Spec. 4; Mar. Spec. 11



The amphitheatre at Caerleon is circular/elliptical in design and made from earth and stone, and is thought to have been constructed c. 80 A.D.¹⁶. The amphitheatre was dug into the ground, with the excavated earth being used for the foundations of the seating, which was then contained, and kept in place, by stone walling (see photos), typical of constructions built by Roman legions¹⁷. There is evidence to suggest that timber seating would have sat on these contained sections at Caerleon¹⁸. It is difficult to ascertain what the Amphitheatre at Caerleon was used for, and with what frequency these acts took place. With the geographical location of Caerleon being at the edge of the Roman Empire, it is unlikely that anything as spectacular as that which took place in Rome, for example, was on display, more likely, it would have been used for religious purposes and public executions in the main.



¹⁶ Wilmott, 2008, pp. 66-74; Wilmott, 2008, p.84

¹⁷ Wilmott, 2008, p.84

¹⁸ Wilmott, 2008, p. 87



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