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Ingenious Roman Britain

Toilets that flush in the rain, a hoard of armour, and a fake denarius.

English Heritage's ingenuity page gathers inventions and ideas the Romans brought to Britain. A few of the most surprising sit on this sheet.

The idea	The official story
Toilets	The latrines at Housesteads are some of the best preserved Roman toilets in the country. They were flushed by a channel running anti-clockwise, using rainwater and draining surface water. You can sometimes see how this worked on a rainy day.
Armour	Until the mid-1960s, archaeologists only had descriptions of lorica segmentata. The Corbridge Hoard of 1964, in an iron-bound, leather-covered chest, finally gave them pieces to study. The segments could flex, and could be stored very compactly.
A global coin	A denarius minted in Rome could be spent in Britain, North Africa or Turkey — "such a global currency has not been seen since."
A fake	Counterfeiters made a coin with a copper core and plated it in silver. The official example came from the settlement outside the fort at Housesteads.
Roads	Watling Street still underlies the A2 and A5. Dere Street still underlies the A59 and A1 from York.
A name in a bowl	A Samian bowl made in South Gaul, c. AD 70–85, is stamped OF CEN. OF stands for Officina, a workshop. CEN may be Censorinus.

Three questions

1. In which direction did the Housesteads flush channel run?
2. In which year was the Corbridge Hoard found?
3. Where did the official copper-cored fake denarius come from?

Answers: Anti-clockwise. 1964. The settlement outside the fort at Housesteads.

Source: English Heritage, 7 ingenious things the Romans brought to Britain. Checked 17 November 2026. roman.ages.im is independent of English Heritage. No photographs are included on this sheet.

ReallyByte — Fun. Educational. Useless.