

**THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST  
TRANSCRIPTS**

**EPISODE 17:  
ANCIENT CELTS AND THE  
LATIN INVASION OF GAUL**

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## **EPISODE 17: ANCIENT CELTS AND THE LATIN INVASION OF GAUL**

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 17: Ancient Celts and the Latin Invasion of Gaul.

In this episode, we're going to look at the ancient Celts – the people who once dominated much of Europe. And we'll look at the spread of Rome and Latin into many of the territories where the Romance languages are being spoken today.

But before I begin, let me give you an update on a couple of matters. First, I sometimes neglect to mention the website for the podcast so let me do that. It's [historyofenglishpodcast.com](http://historyofenglishpodcast.com).

And also, I have mentioned in past episodes that I am working on a series dedicated to the history of the alphabet from its ancient origins to Modern English. It has taken me a little longer than I anticipated to put that together because I have been trying to maintain a regular schedule for this podcast. And so in order to get an episode of the podcast ready every two weeks, I have not had as much time to dedicate to the alphabet series. But it looks like that series will be ready at the start of the new year. And it will actually consist of several parts. First, there will be an overall history of the alphabet, and then a look at the various letters and how they got to use in their current form. So it will basically be an audiobook which will be divided into several chapters. So look for that in January.

So let's turn now to this episode. Last time I explored the rise of Rome from a small village in western Italy to the dominant political and military power of the Mediterranean. And with the spread of Rome, the Roman language went with it. But the overall role of Latin was still limited at this point. In the eastern Mediterranean, Greek was still the dominant language, and it would remain the dominant language even after the Romans conquered the Macedonian and Greek territories to the east. And north of Italy – in the areas we know today as France, Germany and Britain – it was Celtic languages that dominated.

So let's look at these Celtic-speaking people of western Europe and try to figure out who they were. When we think of modern Celtic cultures, we think of places like Ireland, Scotland and Wales. And we can also include places like the Isle of Man and the French province of Brittany. In all of these places, modern Celtic languages are still spoken. But these are merely the remnants of a culture, or at least a linguistic group, that once dominated most of central and western Europe. In fact, during the time of the early Roman Republic, pretty much all of Europe between Italy in the south and Scandinavia to the north was occupied by Celtic-speaking tribes. And this included Britain and large portions of modern Spain. So who were these ancient Celts?

Well, they were the linguistic descendants of the early Celtic tribes that I have mentioned in earlier episodes. So, like the Greeks, the Romans and the Germanic tribes to the north in Scandinavia, they spoke languages that were descended from the original Indo-European language.

As you may recall, I have mentioned in prior episodes that late in the second millennium BC, there were a variety of Indo-European tribes in the region north of Greece in southeastern Europe. And I have mentioned that these tribes included the tribes that swept down into Greece and caused the disruptions which led to the period known as the 'Invasion of the Sea Peoples' in the eastern Mediterranean. And I have noted that some language historians believe that the tribes may also have included the ancestors of the Latin-speaking tribes and other Italic-speaking tribes that found their way to Italy. And I've mentioned that these tribes may also have included the ancestors of the Celtic-speaking tribes. But let's keep in mind that, as with so much of this part of ancient history, we can't be too definitive about any of this. There are still lots of competing theories about the specific treks taken by these early Indo-European tribes.

By now, if you've listened to the earlier episode of this podcast, you'll know that much of what is known about ancient history is the product of relatively recent discoveries. And by 'relatively recent,' I mean within the past couple of centuries. And that is generally true for our view of the ancient Celts as well.

In the mid-1800s, a prehistoric cemetery was discovered near Halstatt in Modern Austria. Excavations revealed that this was the site of a culture that existed from around the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC until the sixth century BC. It turns out this was one of the earliest Celtic settlements in central Europe. And about a decade after the discovery of the Halstatt cemetery, a prolonged drought in Switzerland lowered the level of several lakes and revealed the remains of another ancient settlement near the city of La Tene in Switzerland. And this was a later Celtic settlement which originated near the end of the earlier Halstatt period and indicates a general westward movement of these peoples from southeastern Europe into western Europe. And both of these sites have revealed a tremendous amount about these early tribes. These Celtic tribes also existed at a time when early Greek and Roman historians encountered them. So in addition to archaeological evidence, we also have some contemporary accounts of these Celts by these ancient historians. So if we put all of these pieces together, we can get a general sense of who these people were.

As I've said, it is likely that the linguistic ancestors of the Celts were located in southeastern Europe in the area north of Greece late in the second millennium BC. From here, they began a migration northwestward along the southern side of the Carpathian mountains into the area of modern Hungary and then further westward into modern Austria. Remember this is where the Celtic cemetery was discovered at Halstatt in Austria. This site represented one of the earliest of the ancient Celtic settlements. And so historians call this the Halstatt culture, and we can think of it as the Halstatt phase of the overall Celtic culture.

This Halstatt phase begins around 750 BC. So to put that into some perspective, that was around the time that the ancient Greeks were emerging from the Greek Dark Age having just adopted the Phoenician alphabet. And that was around the same time the first Latin speaking tribes were settling into the community that would become known as Rome. So at this early stage, these early Celts were just another group of tribes settling into western Europe and speaking an Indo-European dialect or language.

And by this point, there may have been enough of a distinction between the language of these tribes and other Indo-European tribes that we can say that we have a distinct Celtic language in place. But linguists are not in universal agreement on that point. Regardless, if the early Celtic language did not exist yet, it was quickly emerging.

And by this point, these early Celts had discovered the first organized farming in northern Europe. An archaeologists who study this part of Europe call the people who lived there before the Celts arrived the 'Urnfield Culture' because they cremated their dead and interred them in urns. And around the time that this Halstatt phase began, around 750 BC, this pre-existing Urnfield Culture began to morph into this emerging Celtic culture. So we probably have native peoples in these regions who were beginning to adopt some of the Celtic cultural characteristics, including the Celtic dialects. Remember that there is a difference between the spread of language or culture and the spread of ethnicity. This early Celtic culture was spreading throughout central Europe – perhaps by invasion, perhaps by migration, perhaps by assimilation of native cultures. But it was spreading and spreading very quickly.

These tribes continued their westward expansion so that by the time we get to the La Tene settlement in modern Switzerland, say around 450 BC, we can say with some certainty that we have a distinct Celtic language in place among these peoples. By this point, Celtic tribes occupied or were in the process of occupying much of the territory of modern Germany, Austria and Switzerland.

During the so-called La Tene period, from around 450 BC until about 200 BC, these tribes were spreading throughout western Europe, eventually occupying all of modern France, the British Isles, and larger portions of Modern Spain. So what we really have is a group of tribes spread out over a broad swath of central and western Europe.

At one time, early historians were reluctant to group all of these peoples together as part of some larger, unified cultural group. The fact is these tribes were often at war with each other. And there is no indication that these people saw themselves as part of some larger interconnected culture. But as modern scholars have examined these peoples more closely, and with the benefit of hindsight, they have begun to focus on the similarities between these peoples. And they have increasingly concluded that we do in fact have a common culture among these people that we can now call the ancient Celtic culture. There was no unified government among these peoples. Instead, it was really more like a confederation of independent tribes. But they had a common material culture, a common religion and common language or at least a common family of languages. And it is these three things – material objects, religion and language – that allows us to group these people together and call them the 'Celts.'

Let's start with material objects. Archaeologists have determined that these early Celts were the first people of Europe to master the use of iron. They have discovered amazing artwork, tools and weapons – all made from iron and all of a very similar style. Once they had mastered iron, they exported the technology throughout western Europe. Like their Indo-European ancestors, the Celts were well-equipped for mobility with horses, wagons, carts and chariots. But they were not nomadic. They were farmers who lived in settled communities.

Now farming was certainly not unique to the Celts. Most ancient people by this point were engaging in some type of farming. But again, unlike other peoples of northern Europe, these early Celts were renown for their mastery of iron and their ability to forge iron tools for farming. And this use of iron technology was widespread among these tribes, but not nearly as common among non-Celtic tribes. And as I have said, this mastery of iron extended to iron weapons, jewelry and other items. So this early use and mastery of iron is the first thing that linked these early tribes together.

The second major unifying factor was religion, and specifically, the class of religious leaders which these tribes utilized. And you've probably heard of these people religious leaders before. They were called the druids. The druids were Celtic priests and they conducted a wide variety of religious ceremonies. They officiated at the worship of gods and they regulated private and public sacrifices. They also acted as judges in disputes between both individuals and tribes. They had a very special status in Celtic society. They came from leading families, and they were exempted from paying taxes or taking part in fighting. And they were basically the teachers and the judges within Celtic society. And the key here is that you don't really find druids outside of these Celtic tribes. The later Romans noted that the Germanic tribes further north in Scandinavia and into northern Europe didn't have druid priests. So the druids were unique to the Celtic culture, and that fact provides another unifying link between them.

Now at the height of Celtic power, it was possible to cross the entire continent of Europe from east to west without leaving Celtic territory. Remember that the Germanic tribes occupied the territory to the north in northern Europe, and the Romans were expanding throughout the Mediterranean to the south. But the vast territory in the middle was occupied by the Celts. And even though they were not a cohesive group of tribes, the druids within these various did communicate with each other over vast distances. According to the later Romans, the druids of Gaul (which is modern France) communicated with the druids of Britain. So again, we do see a type of networking between the groups, and this is even more evidence of a common culture.

Now the word *druid* comes from the Indo-European root word for 'oak tree.' And oak trees had very mystical, sacred properties to the ancient Celts, so the term *druid* reflected a connection between the priests and the sacred oaks. The rituals performed by druids often took place outside, especially in the woods. And since mistletoe often grew in trees, especially oak trees, the Celts soon came to believe that mistletoe was sacred as well. They thought that mistletoe had healing properties and could fend off evil spirits. It was thought to be a sign of good luck and blessings. It was so sacred that when enemies happened to meet and pass under mistletoe in the forest, they would lay down their weapons and agree to a truce – at least until the next day. And this was the origin of hanging mistletoe above a doorway as a sign of peace and goodwill. And of course that tradition later passed into Christianity many centuries later. By the way, the Germanic tribes also held mistletoe in high regard. And the tradition of kissing under the mistletoe comes from those tribes. So we see many similarities between the ancient Celts and the ancient Germanic tribes during this period. But I'm going to deal with the Germanic tribes in an upcoming episode.

And speaking of holiday traditions rooted in ancient Celtic culture, many of our modern Halloween traditions can be traced back to Celts, specifically the Celts of the British Isles. But that was a much later borrowing that occurred during the Middle Ages, so I am not going to go into that here.

So the use of iron and the creation of specific iron objects helps to establish a connection between these people. And certain religious practices, especially the existence of the druids, marks another cultural connection.

But one of the most important connections between these people, especially for our purposes, was the fact that they all spoke closely-related languages which we called *Celtic* today. And again, these were ancient versions of modern Celtic languages like Gaelic and Breton. But like many ancient people, the Celts were illiterate – meaning simply that they didn’t write down their language. So that obviously makes the study of the early Celtic languages very difficult. The major point here is that by the second century BC, Celtic languages were widely spoken across western and central Europe. And even though those languages were likely quite diverse and may not have been mutually intelligible, they still reflect a common linguistic ancestry.

So all of these factors allow historians and linguists to lump these various European tribes together under the general heading of the ‘Celtic tribes.’

Now by 400 BC, these tribes had already spread across much of western Europe and were also probably filtering into the British Isles at this time as well. They brought with them all the cultural factors that I just discussed, including iron-working, druids and the Celtic languages.

As I mentioned earlier, archaeologists call the earliest Celtic culture the Hallstatt culture based around what they have unearthed at Halstatt in Austria. And then there was this later Celtic culture exemplified by the site at La Tene in Switzerland. But these later artifacts discovered at La Tene have more elaborate designs, and they reflect influences from trading with the Greeks and the Etruscans. This would have been a time when ancient Greece was flourishing and the Etruscan culture was still prominent in Italy.

So let’s take a look at the early contacts between these Celtic tribes and their neighbors. I mentioned earlier that the Celtic tribes were illiterate. But the Greeks and the Etruscans and the later Romans, they were literate. They had written languages. And they also had writers and historians. And since they encountered the Celts, and since their writers sometimes wrote about the Celts, we can get a glimpse of these ancient Celtic people from these limited written accounts which do exist.

One of the problems we have is that we’re getting the perspective of outsiders who didn’t always have a positive view of the Celts. So we have to keep that in mind as we review their writings.

It was in fact the Greeks who coined the term *Celt*. The Greeks called these central European tribes the *keltoi*. And some linguists believe that the term *keltoi* may have simply been a generic term for the people who they considered to be barbarians in the north. So it may not have referred to any particular cultural or linguistic group.

Now the later Romans also encountered the same Celtic tribes as they ventured north across the Alps into the heart of Europe. But the Romans coined their own term for these people. The Romans called them the *galli*. And, unlike the term used by the Greeks which was probably more of a generic term, many linguists believe that the Roman term *Galli* initially referred to a specific tribe, but eventually came to be used to describe the entire region which they called *Gallia* – and which we would come to know as *Gaul*. And the area of Gaul roughly corresponds to modern France. So the term *Gauls* can be a little confusing. The Romans used it to refer to the people who inhabited the region of Gaul, and these people were Celts. But for the early Romans, they generally just called them *Gauls*. But Julius Caesar did note that some of the Celts living in Gaul called themselves *Celtae*. So there does appear to be a connection between this word *Celtae* and the Greek term *keltoi*. It is possible that the early Greeks and Romans had each encountered the same tribe or group of tribes which used this term to refer to themselves.

But the major point here is that these terms – *Celts* and *Gauls* – often get used interchangeably by historians. But, technically speaking, the Gauls represented only a portion of the overall Celtic people of Europe.

In 324 BC, the Greek explorer Pytheas traveled all the way to the British Isles. He referred to Ireland and Britain as the Pretanic Islands, with the Celtic inhabitants referred to as the Pritani. The Pretanic Islands became known as Pretania, and eventually in the hands of the Romans, it was called Britannia. According to Pytheas, the Celtic residents of Britannia mined tin and iron, made pottery, wove cloth, and raised large herds of cattle and sheep. So this was an ancient culture that still resembled the original Indo-European culture in many respects.

And speaking of the connection between the early Indo-Europeans and the ancient Celts, they both revered horses and they placed them in very high regard. The ancient Celts held annual parades and chariot races. And in times of war, they fought on horseback and were especially skilled at using horses in their cavalry. In fact, the Celtic cavalry was capable of intimidating the Roman infantry. And it wasn't until the Romans finally developed a disciplined, professional army that they were able to routinely defeat the Celts in battle. But more on that later. And by the way, some historians believe that these ancient Celts invented horseshoes. Remember the Celts were some of the first people of Europe to master the use of iron.

So what else did the Greeks and Romans have to say about the Celts. Well, they described the physical appearance of the Celts. Supposedly, they were tall people and they were “fair-haired,” so that means that had light-colored hair. Archeologists have unearthed graves with Celtic warriors and chiefs who were in excess of 6 feet tall, which was very tall for that period of time. They were also said to bear large mustaches with neck rings made of gold, silver or bronze. They wore colorful clothing and loved to fight in battle. The colorful clothing attributed to these

ancient Celts also provides a cultural and historical link to modern tartan and plaid fabrics associated with Celtic societies.

And speaking of Celtic clothing, the Romans were amused by the fact that the Celts wore pants instead of tunics. And, in fact, the word *breeches* – or as we say in the American South *britches* – may be one of the oldest Celtic words in the English language. That word actually pre-dates Old English – it goes all the way back to the original Germanic language spoken in northern Europe. But the ancient Celtic language had a very similar word. The original Germanic word was something like *\*brokiz*. And the Celtic word used in Gaul was *\*bracca*. So it is believed that one of the tribes borrowed the word from the other. And remember that by this point the Celts and the Germanic tribes were neighbors and sometimes rivals fighting for the same territory. So words would have likely passed between them, both figuratively and literally. If the Germanic tribes borrowed it from the Celtic Gauls, then that would make it one of the first Celtic words to arrive within English, or actually in this case, the ancestor of English.

By the way, that Celtic term *\*bracca* passed into Latin after the Romans conquered Gaul and eventually passed into French as *braguette* which meant codpiece armor to protect the crotch area. And this word *braguette* eventually gave use the word *bracket* due to some resemblance in shape between early *brackets* and the French *braguette*. It doesn't sound very comfortable, but think of the *braguette* as the connecting point between the two legs. So in that sense the term *bracket* makes a little more sense. So there you go.

According to these early Greek and Roman writers, women held many positions of equality with men in Celtic culture. They fought alongside men in battle and they retained control of their personal possessions after marriage. They also wore make-up and placed their hair in braids.

So I have discussed what the Greeks and the Romans wrote about the Celts. But let's explore the relationship between them a little further. First, I mentioned in the last episode that Celtic tribes from Gaul crossed the Alps and traveled down into northern Italy where they sacked the early city of Rome around 391 BC. And I noted that it had a tremendous psychological impact on the Romans. It shaped the way they viewed the Celts – or the Gauls – going forward. The Romans basically viewed them as savage barbarians and as a lingering threat to the north.

And following the conflicts with the Romans, some Celts moved to the East into the Balkans and eventually to Macedonia and Thrace into modern-day Greece. About twenty-five years after Rome was sacked, there are reports that Celts were fighting as mercenaries in the wars between Sparta and Thebes in Greece. A few years later, in 335 BC, Alexander the Great fought a brief skirmish against a Celtic tribe in the Danube Valley region to shore up the northern territory before he moved onto Anatolia and the Middle East and eventually India. So even Alexander had to deal with Celts on his northern border. And, in fact, about a century later, well after the death of Alexander and with Greek power waning, another group of Celtic tribes invaded Greece and sacked the city of Delphi.



This was around the time the Romans were fighting the Punic Wars with Carthage to gain control of the Mediterranean. And I mentioned Hannibal's famous trek from Spain through southern Gaul and across the Alps on his way into northern Italy. This trek took Hannibal through Celtic territory in northern Spain and southern Gaul (remember that's modern France). So along the way, Hannibal actually retained the Celts as mercenaries in his army. And large numbers of them fought as part of Hannibal's army against the Romans in Italy. It is estimated that he had about 10,000 Celtic mercenaries from Spain alone.

So you can probably see why the Greeks and the Romans had a generally negative view of the Celts. And you can see why the Romans really wanted to eliminate this northern threat. But this was barbarian territory to the Romans. They mainly wanted security from the Celtic threat in Gaul, but that could only be accomplished by actually conquering Gaul. And up to this point, Rome had been occupied by its quest to conquer Italy and the Mediterranean.

Now at this point in history, in the second century BC, western Europe can be roughly divided into three distinct territories. Around the Mediterranean was the Roman Republic where Latin was spreading and becoming a lingua franca, except in the east where Greek held on.

And far to the north were the Germanic tribes, which included the ancient ancestors of the Anglo-Saxons. And this is where the early Germanic languages were being spoken. But the vast territory in the middle was occupied by Celtic-speaking tribes.

And a series of events were about to transpire which would mark the beginning of the end of the Celts as a distinct culture in continental Europe, and it would pave the way for the Romans and the Germanic tribes to take over these Celtic areas.

Shortly after Rome began to establish trading posts up the Rhone River in Gaul, a situation developed in northern Europe which caused a great deal of concern in Rome. This was around 120 BC. And at this point, a group of tribes from Jutland and the North Sea coast began to migrate southward possibly as a result of a flash flood in their Jutland homeland. Now you may remember from way back in Episode 3 that Jutland means 'Home of the Jutes.' And the Jutes were part of the Anglo-Saxon tribes who brought Old English to Britain. But since there were a lot more Angles and Saxons than there were Jutes, the Jutes didn't get their name in the label. But there were enough Jutes to establish their own territory which eventually became Kent in England.

So a group of tribes from this region around Jutland in modern-day Denmark began to move southward into southeastern Europe. And this confederation of tribes was led by two specific tribes – the Teutones and the Cimbri.

Now remember Jutland is in modern-day Denmark. And it is the same region that produced the Jutes – a Germanic-speaking tribe. So this is Germanic territory, not Celtic territory. And, in fact, the Teutones were a Germanic tribe. But there is debate about the other tribe – the Cimbri. Based upon the location of their homeland, some historians think they were also a Germanic tribes. But their name – Cimbri – is definitely Celtic, not Germanic. And many of the tribal

leaders also had Celtic names. So most modern historians consider them to have been a Celtic tribe. But it shows you how the distinction between Celtic and Germanic was sometimes blurred in many of these areas.

And to emphasize that point, the name of that Germanic tribe – the Teutones – is the origin of the modern term **Teutonic** which is usually used as a term for things associated with Germany. But even though the Teutones were a Germanic tribe, their name actually comes from the Celtic word for ‘people’ which was **teuto**. And initially it was applied to this unnamed Germanic tribe. Over time, the term was applied by the Romans collectively to all of the Germanic tribes.

And what about the term **Germanic**? Well, it too comes from the name of a Celtic tribe which lived east of the Rhine known as the ‘Germani.’ The Romans applied this term to all of the people who lived north and east of the Rhine. However, many of those people were Germanic, not Celtic, because they spoke Germanic languages. To the Romans, the distinction was largely irrelevant because the Romans considered them all to be barbarians. But over time the name **Germania** stuck with regard to the people who inhabited this region beyond the Rhine. So the non-Celtic peoples in this region simply became known as the ‘Germanic’ peoples. And of course that is also the root of the modern word **Germany**. So the great irony is that all of these terms which mean Germanic today – words like **Teutonic** and **Germanic** and **Germany** – they are all of Celtic origin. So you can see how these distinctions between Celtic and Germanic were often blurred. Especially from the perspective of the Romans who were often unconcerned about those distinctions.

So we have the two tribes – the Teutones and the Cimbri – both Germanic or both Celtic or perhaps one of each – you take your pick, but they were moving southeastward to the region around modern Hungary and in the middle Danube region. But then, all of a sudden, around 113 BC, they turned westward, and they soon approached Italy. As they came closer to Italy, a Roman army intervened but the Roman army was defeated by those migrating tribes. And then, many of the citizens of Rome began to panic as they began to think back to Rome being sacked by the Celts from Gaul a couple of centuries earlier. But these migrating tribes didn’t move south into Italy. Instead, they continued to move westward into Gaul. And the Romans could actually breathe a sigh of relief for a while as they were apparently spared by those ‘barbarian’ tribes. And the Romans actually continued to engage those tribes in Gaul for the next few years, but they didn’t really have any success against them.

Eventually, for some reason, the Teutones and the Cimbri decided to divide their armies, and the old ‘divide and conquer’ strategy finally came to the Roman’s rescue. The Roman legions finally defeated the Teutons in southern Gaul in 102 BC, and they defeated the Cimbri tribe in northern Italy in 101 BC.

But the Celtic threat didn’t end there. By this point, the Germanic tribes in northern Europe were expanding southward into Celtic territory. And in the east, the new kingdom of Dacia formed in the Balkans was expanding as well. And a Celtic tribe in Switzerland called the Helvetii outgrew its homeland, and it began to spread westward as well. And all of this expansion on the northern and eastern sides of the Celtic lands was having a domino effect, and it was pushing more and

more Celtic tribes westward and southward into the fringes of the Roman territory. And skirmishes were starting to break out between Celtic tribes on the northern border of Rome.

All of this uncertainty and instability caused more and more concern within Rome itself. The Romans already had a deep fear of the Celtic tribes since the initial sacking of Rome. Now the fear of invasion was a frightening reality. The stage was set for someone who could take advantage of the situation by leading a Roman expedition against the Celtic tribes and delivering peace and security to Rome. And Rome had such a person. His name was Julius Caesar.

Julius Caesar was an aspiring politician looking for a great propaganda victory to match the exploits of his rival Pompey who had acquired territory for Rome in the east. And Gaul was an obvious target. Caesar also needed to keep his professional army employed. So in 59 BC, Caesar steered a special law through the Roman Senate which gave him a five-year command over Gaul. He argued that the Germanic tribes to the far north were beginning to threaten the states allied with Rome in the region of Gaul. And he said that Gaul would either become Roman or it would be overrun by those Germanic tribes. The next year, he began his conquest of Gaul. He began by attacking that Helvetii tribe which I mentioned earlier and which had been expanding into Gaul from its homeland in modern-day Switzerland. He defeated the Helvetii, and then he focused his efforts in northern Gaul, and he finally subdued the tribes there. Caesar completed his conquest of Gaul, at least temporarily, in 55 BC. Estimates – some based on Caesar's own accounts – are that hundreds of thousands of Celts (perhaps more than a million) were killed as a result of Caesar's conquest. It was nasty and brutal business.

But everything didn't go well for Caesar. In that same year, 55 BC, Caesar attempted to invade Britain for the first time with two legions. But the conquest of Britain turned out to be a lot more difficult. Britain was considered the very edge of the Roman world. And you had to get there by boat, which was never really the forte of the Romans. This first 'invasion' was really more of an expedition. The Romans didn't intend to establish a permanent settlement there. It was partly a show of force to discourage the British Celts from supporting their fellow Celts in Gaul who they routinely traded with and aided. Except for a few skirmishes with some southern Celts, the expedition didn't really have any military consequences.

A year later, in 54 BC, Caesar tried again. And this second invasion of Britain was a proper invasion with intentions of establishing a permanent Roman settlement there. But the native Celts were prepared this time. Caesar fought the Celts in Britain, but he could never secure a decisive victory after three months of fighting. And at this time, there was a revolt of Celtic tribes back in Gaul, so Caesar withdrew from Britain to deal with the uprising in Gaul. He never returned to Britain, and Britain would remain outside of the Roman Empire for almost another century until the Emperor Claudius finally returned to conquer Britain for Rome.

Now this revolt that was happening back in Gaul was a very big deal. Remember that the various Celtic tribes shared some common cultural characteristics, but there was no political cohesion there. They were more likely to fight against each other than unify as a common military force. This gets back to the 'divide and conquer' approach which the Romans used to great effect

against the Celts. But now, in 53 BC, they had finally started to unite under a single leader named Vercingetorix.

Vercingetorix was the chieftain of a tribe of Central Gaul. He had encouraged the various Celtic tribes to unify against the Romans. He soon emerged as the supreme military commander of the Celts. As the leader, he actually burned Celtic towns and crops to prevent the Romans from accessing to the food. And he adopted guerrilla tactics to interrupt and cut off Roman supplies. His rebellion was initially successful against the Roman army and their Germanic mercenaries. But the Romans eventually got the upper hand due to their superior discipline and organization. The Romans were finally able to surround Vercingetorix and force him to surrender. And this effectively marked the end of any real Celtic threat to Roman power in Gaul.

Caesar's conquest of Gaul had taken eight years. And that is an incredibly short period of time to conquer such a large territory. And needless to say, it was a huge political victory for Caesar. But politics is a messy business. Caesar's political rival back in Rome was Pompey. And Pompey recognized what Caesar's victory meant for Caesar, and therefore meant for Pompey himself.

Technically, Caesar's term as the Governor of Gaul had expired. So Pompey was able to get the Roman Senate to order Caesar to disband his army and return to Rome. But Caesar was having none of it. Pompey had accused Caesar of insubordination and treason, and Caesar suspected that he would be prosecuted if he returned to Rome as a civilian. So he took his army and headed for Rome with his army in tow. In 49 BC, Caesar crossed the Rubicon River which was the northern boundary of Roman territory at the time. By crossing this river, Caesar was entering Rome with his own army in violation of the Senate's order. For Caesar, crossing the river was basically a point of no return. He knew that it would mean civil war. And this is where the get the modern English phrase 'crossing the rubicon' to mean 'going beyond the point of no return.'

Civil war in Rome did ensue, and Caesar emerged victorious. He also emerged as dictator of Rome by 48 BC. And we can also now start to speak of the 'Roman Empire' as opposed to the earlier Roman Republic. I am going to talk a lot more about Caesar and the Roman Empire in the next episode, but let's turn our attention back to Gaul because that is the focus of this episode.

After the Romans finally subdued the Celts in Gaul, the Celts there were largely assimilated into the Roman Empire. Rome began an extended period of Romanization which I described a little bit in the last episode. Rome promoted trade, farming and industry within Gaul. But the most important part of this story for our purposes is that the native Celtic languages began to disappear in Gaul. And Latin gradually began to replace those languages. The Latin dialects spoken in this region would eventually evolve into an early form of French. And as I have noted throughout this podcast series, this was the avenue by which English inherited a very large portion of its modern vocabulary. The Latin words evolved into French, and then passed into English with the Norman invasion of England in 1066. So the Roman conquest of Gaul was a crucial event in the overall story of English.

But what about those Celtic languages that were now being replaced by Latin? What was the long-term impact of those languages on English? The answer is not very much. I have already mentioned a few Celtic words that have found their way into English. But the fact is that most of the Celtic tribes were eventually conquered by the Romans in the west and by the Germanic tribes in the north and east. They were basically caught between a rock and a hard place. And after the Celts were conquered in continental Europe, their languages largely disappeared. Of course, the Celts held on in the British Isles – at least for a while until the Romans returned there under Claudius. And I will look at that part of the story next time. So there was some Celtic influence on English from the lingering Celtic languages that were still being spoken when the Anglo-Saxons arrived in Britain. And of course, some of those languages have held on to this very day in places like Ireland, Scotland and Wales. So there was some limited Celtic influence on English when the Anglo-Saxons encountered these Celts in Britain. But I will address those influences when we get to the Anglo-Saxon invasion.

The other Celtic influence on English comes in the form of a few words used by those continental Celts in Gaul which were adopted by the Romans and the Germanic tribes. And a few of those words have found their way into modern English through Latin or through the Germanic languages.

I have already mentioned a few words like *breeches*, *bracket*, *Teutonic*, and *Germanic* – all of which have roots in the ancient Celtic languages of Gaul.

We also get lots of place names from the original Celts. For example, the names of London and Paris are both rooted in Celtic names, as is the River Thames which runs through London and the River Seine which runs through Paris. And since Gaul eventually evolved into the territory we know today as France, it is not surprising that we can find a fair amount of Celtic words in modern French. It is estimated that there are about 500 Celtic words in modern French, and there may actually be quite a bit more than that.

But what about English? Well, the Latin word *bulga* meaning ‘a leather bag or knapsack’ came from a Celtic term used in Gaul. The word came into English from French as *bowgette*, and later becoming *budget*. It originally retained its meaning as a small bag, then a leather purse or wallet, then it came to mean the collection of papers in the wallet. And much later in the eighteenth century it came to be used in its sense as a financial record or document today. So *budget* comes from Celtic origins.

And the Old English word *rīce*, which is the original version of our modern word *rich*, also came from Celtic origins. I mentioned this word back in the episode I did on the letter C.

Well this word *rich* was almost certainly borrowed from the Celts by the early Germanic tribes on the continent before they migrated to Britain. The word meant ‘kingdom’ in Old English, and it’s directly connected to the German word *Reich* as in ‘Third Reich.’ It eventually came to also serve as an adjective meaning ‘rich or powerful.’ And that is the sense that we have it today. So the word *rich* comes to us indirectly from these ancient Celts.

Another very common English word which comes from these Celts is the word *car*. And this word comes from early Roman contact with the Celts. The Celts in Gauls had used the term for their war chariots, and Julius Caesar borrowed the term during his wars there. The term passed through Latin and French before finally making it into English.

And the English word *bin* – B-I-N as in ‘trash bin’ – may have come from a word used by the Celts in Gaul. The word was *benn*, and it was a type of cart which usually carried a woven wicker form which was made to look like a person. These forms may have been used to contain bodies that were sacrificed by burning. And the term was adopted into Middle English to mean ‘crib or manger.’ It eventually came to mean a type of storage container. And of course, that is the sense that we have it today as in ‘trash bin.’

Beyond those words, we get a few words from the Celts in Britain after the Anglo-Saxons arrived there. A word like *ass*, for example, was probably adopted from a Celtic word by the Anglo-Saxons.

But it is estimated that no more than a dozen or so Celtic words (other than place names) were adopted by the Anglo-Saxons prior to the Norman invasion. So in terms of vocabulary, Celtic influence on English is very limited. There may be some Celtic influences on English grammar, but again, I will deal with that topic when we get to Old English and the Anglo-Saxons.

Now I should re-emphasize the fact Celtic languages are still being spoken in parts of the British Isles and northern France. And a few of these words have passed into English mainly during the late Middle Ages and thereafter. This includes words like *bard, bog, glen, banshee, flannel, clan, whiskey, plaid, loch, galore, brogue, shamrock* and *leprechaun*.

There was also a Gaelic term which combined the Gaelic words for ‘war’ and ‘cry.’ It was something like *slaugh-ghairm*. I don’t speak Gaelic, so sorry for butchering that. But it literally meant ‘war cry or shout of the troops.’ And it was the rallying cry of a Celtic chieftain in battle, and it was used in the middle of a battle to rally the troops and bring them together. And it came into Modern English as *slogan* around the 1700s.

But again, that’s about it for Celtic influences on English vocabulary. But as I said earlier, the biggest impact of this episode on the overall story of English is the fact that much of western Europe was now under Roman control and that meant the spread of Latin.

So next time, I’m going to look at this later period of Roman history and the large number of Latin words from this period which found their way into Modern English. This is also the story of the Roman conquest of Britain and the rise of the Germanic tribes in the north. So I’ll be setting the stage for the fall of Rome and the Germanic invasions of Europe.

So, until next time, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.