



The Silures



Before the arrival of the Romans, the tribe that dominated the area around Gelligaer was the Silures.

They were mentioned by Pliny, Ptolemy and Tacitus, mainly in relation to their warlike natures.

Their territory probably covered what later became Glamorgan, Gwent and southern Powys. They were described as having curly hair and either dark or ruddy complexions.

They were one of the strongest forces of resistance met by the Roman army. Even after the defeat of Caradoc (Caractacus), the Catuvellaunian chieftain who had become their war leader, they continued guerilla warfare against the Romans until about AD 78.

Tacitus called them *"a naturally fierce people"*.

"Neither terror nor mercy had the least effect; they persisted in war and could be quelled only by legions encamped in their country."

Even years after the defeat of Caradoc it was written *"...the Roman were repeatedly conquered and put to the rout by the single stat of the Silures alone."*

As well as being formidable fighters, they were merchants and were famous for their horsemanship. After the conquest, it seems that many young Silure men became auxiliary cavalymen. They were not just good riders – there is also evidence of them using horse drawn vehicles. This suggests that there may well have been some sort of road network in the area even before the Romans. The finds also show that they were fond of decoration with, apparently, red seeming to be the favoured colour.

In all the Celtic tribes the most important people in a village were the Druid, the chieftain, craftsmen (especially metal workers) and warriors. Most of the tribe were primarily farmers – providing the food for the villages by looking after the fields and the stock. They also provided the vital wool for clothing. Below them came the unfree people. These were slaves. Some of them would have been born to that position and others would have been captured from other tribes.