

Britannia

** When people hear 'Britannia', they may think of the patriotic anthem Rule Britannia or even the Cool Britannia movement of the 1990s. But how many will picture the Roman goddess, despite the fact that anyone who has spent a 50 pence piece will almost certainly have seen an image of her?*



- **Britannia** was the Roman and Greek term for the geographical region of Great Britain and is the name given to the female personification of the island.
- It is a term still used to refer to the island today.
- The name is Latin, and derives from the Greek form *Prettanike* or *Brettaniai* (a collection of islands with individual names)
- The native Celtic inhabitants of the province are known as the Britons . In the 2nd century, Roman Britannia came to be personified as a goddess, armed with a trident and shield and wearing a Corinthian helmet.



Who is Britannia?

Britannia, the female personification of the British Isles, has been a popular figure since the 1st century, when she was first depicted as a goddess. She was depicted on coins from this point onwards, appearing on the pennies.

While most Brits will have had a coin featuring Britannia in their purse/wallet at some point, her image has also been used in numerous other ways. She is the symbol of the Bank of England, and a number of other companies have also adopted her as part of their company identity, including Britannia Building Society and Britannia Airways, while her link to the sea has also made Britannia a popular name for boats over the years.



A symbol of British unity

- *The symbol of Britannia has been used for thousands of years, but what is behind her endurance?*
- The answer could lie in the fact that she is seen as a symbol of British unity and strength.
- Her appearance in the 17th century came not long after James I brought together England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland under one rule. Especially following the Acts of Union in 1707, which joined the Kingdoms of England and Scotland, the personification of the martial Britannia was used as an emblem of British imperial power.

Renaissance and British Empire

- It was during the reign of Elizabeth I that "Britannia" came to be viewed as a personification of Britain. In 1576 John Dee used a depicted figure of Britannia kneeling by the shore beseeching Elizabeth I, to protect her empire by strengthening her navy

Modern associations

- During the 1990s the term Cool Britannia (drawn from a humorous version by the Bonzo Dog Band of the song "Rule Britannia", with words by James Thomson [1700–1748], which is often used as an unofficial national anthem), was used to describe the contemporary United Kingdom. The phrase referred to the fashionable scenes of the era, with a new generation of pop groups and style magazines, successful young fashion designers, and a surge of new restaurants and hotels. Cool Britannia represented late-1990s Britain as a fashionable place to be.
- In the song "Waiting for the Worms" Pink Floyd makes reference to Britannia in the lyric "Would you like to see Britannia rule again? My friend."



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