**Romans in Britain**

**By Howard Brenton**

**Audition Pack**

**For Everyman Production**

28/2/17-4/3/17 **Chapter Arts Centre**

**Auditions**

Main auditions are:

**Sat October 22nd**

**Slots:**

**1**. 10.30am -12.30pm

**2**. 1pm-2pm

**3**. 3pm-5pm

**Mon 24th October**

**Slots:**

**1.** 6.30pm-8.30pm

**2.** 8.30pm-10.30pm

**Fri 28th October**

**Slots:**

**1.** 6.30pm-8.30pm

**2.** 8.30pm-10.30pm

**Sat 29th October**

**Slots:**

**1**. 10.30am -12.30pm

**2**. 1pm-2pm

**3**. 3pm-5pm

Recalls on Mon 31st October and Sat 5th November.

All auditions in Chapter Arts Centre in the Everyman Clubroom unless you are notified otherwise when booking. Please book your slot as places are limited in each to 6 or 7.

Auditions will be in groups. They will take the form of workshops with readings of text only. No need to learn anything! If you would like to have a look at some text please see the transcribed speeches below. Please indicate which day and slot you would be interested in. I may ask you to change slot if a) the slot you require is full (I’m looking at only 6 per group) or if I can spot an opportunity for changing the demographic of the group to suit the scenes (eg a mixed group/an all male group etc.)

To book an audition slot please email me on RiB@ everymantheatre.co.uk

**Rehearsals**

Rehearsals will be Tue and Thurs evenings from 7 and all day (10-5.30pm) on Sunday. However you would not be called for every rehearsal and I shall try to take great pains, at the beginning, as far as possible, to stagger rehearsals so you are not kept waiting around all day. I know how frustrating that can be!

It is not envisaged to rehearse over Christmas/New Year itself but I would be hoping to rehearse quite close to Christmas if possible (I’m thinking December 22nd) and starting again on Tuesday 3rd January.

**Performance Dates**

The play will be performed in Chapter Arts Centre from Tues 28th Feb-Sat 4th March 2017. Get in and Tech dress day is Sun 26th Feb and the Dress Rehearsal is Mon 27th Feb

**Play**

The play is wonderful in its language, themes, characterisation and dramatic telling. It has breath taking breadth and depth. Its theme is invasion and its consequence and it looks at three occupations: Julius Caesar’s brief invasion of Britain in 54 BC, The Anglo-Saxon settlement in AD 515, and the British in Northern Ireland in 1980 during the period which is now referred to as ‘The Troubles.’

It caused notoriety at the time of its first performance due to its portrayal of a scene of attempted rape and resulted in a failed prosecution by Mary Whitehouse ‘for procuring an act of gross indecency.’ a law used more usually at the time to oppress and entrap homosexuals than ban theatre. The case was thrown out of court when the prosecution case collapsed, but the play was still considered controversial and the GLC cut the National Theatre’s grant as punishment. However, the same scene when performed in Sam West’s revival in 2006 at the Crucible Theatre was, according to the preface to the recent edition of the play, just accepted as ‘another atrocity of war.’ Time has moved on and we are now post-Abu Ghraib and post-Game of Thrones.

The result of the controversy, however, is that it has not been performed much in the intervening years and we are especially privileged to have been granted the performing rights.

**Plot**

The Romans in Britain is a play written in two acts or ‘parts’. Part One is subtitled Caesar’s Tooth and is an account of the disastrous impact that Julius Caesar’s second expedition to Britain in 54 BC had on the local inhabitants. The theme of the story is as much ‘culture shock’ as it is brutality and some of the most moving scenes are where the ancient Britons struggle to find the language to communicate what it is that is happening to them. It is during this section of the play that there is the attempted rape of a young trainee priest which caused so much offence. However, the theme of ‘The rape of Britain’ becomes, dramatically, the central theme of the play as we move into part Two and discover the we, the British people, have become the Romans ourselves in our oppression around the globe and on our doorstep.

Part Two tells two stories concurrently: In 1980 AD a captain in the SAS attempts an ill-fated infiltration of the IRA in the border counties of Northern Ireland. He very much struggles with this notion, however and finds himself attracted more and more to the ideals of peace. As he has his melt down he suffers visions of an earlier invasion, that of the Anglo-Saxons in AD 515. That invasion forms the basis for the second story which details the last of the Romans struggling for a meaningful existence after Rome has fallen to the barbarians, as well as the retreat of the population into nostalgia for that which never was with the creation of the myth of King Arthur. The overall subtitle for Part Two is Arthur’s Grave.

One of the great aspects of the piece is that Brenton never strays into the territory of propaganda or easy political analysis. Like Shakespeare he never tells us directly his own opinion but sets up these dramatic images and scenes which make us question ourselves .

**Cast**

The cast doubling parts One + Two total 36 actors. With extra doubling within the parts it could be reduced to around 25. Therefore there is plenty of opportunity to be cast. The cast is ensemble – there are no ‘starring’ parts as the main characters last for one or two scenes only. The exception to this is Chichester in Part Two who remains onstage throughout – however for half of it he is a mute witness to the scenes in Saxon times.

Another thing we’ll look at is the possibility that when the character is killed they remain on stage throughout the rest of the Part. This would cut the need for messy blackouts and shuffling off stage in the dark. However, it would also need the ability to stay still!

**Accent.**

I have indicated where accents may be used. In the Roman era section this is a grey area. The Slave might come from mainland Gaul but a French accent pre-Charlemagne may seem inappropriate. We’ll experiment. However the two runaway convicts from Ireland ought to have Southern Irish accents.

**Nudity.**

I have not made my mind up about male nudity in the attempted rape scene. The three brothers who are attacked by the Roman soldiers have just been swimming in the river, and two of the soldiers after the attack themselves then strip to go and swim – there would have been no bathing trunks or towels! However, the nudity may prove a distraction. And we might have to gain the permission of Chapter/local council etc. so perhaps an alternative may be found.

**Text.**

The play needs an ability to handle text which is very ‘muscular’ (ie requires the actor to stretch themselves to deliver the text). It invents cadences and language of the ancient Britons as well as mimicking some of the forms of Roman rhetoric. And there is some naturalistic dialogue from the 1980s. I can only describe the result as being akin to Shakespeare’s prose in scope and form. The auditions and recalls will explore this. I have included an example of text below.

**Hair.**

All the female characters would have had long hair. The male characters will be divided between those with long hair (Ancient Britons/Saxons etc.) and those with short (Roman soldiers/Modern army). This will be a factor in casting and working out the doubling. The long hair need not be very long but must not be cut short between now and March. I know this is a big ask but it is important it does not look out of place and we do not have the money or resources for the necessary wigs. I have indicated LH and SH and S or LH where it is not important.

**Characters**

I have indicated where they were Male (M) or Female (F) in the script.

**Part One**

M Conlag (LH) - Irish criminal on the run from his tribe. Southern Irish accent? Age 30-60

M Daui (LH)ditto

F Female slave – Possibly from Gaul. Or from the Channel Islands. Or the Isle of Wight. In her 20s. Has been abused – murders Conlag out of desperation. However, the Roman Army in its retreat find her and kill her, although in a wonderful ‘coup de theatre’ they are portrayed as British soldiers in the 1980s,

M Marban (LH)– Teenage trainee priest (Druid). Older than his years, poetic with almost an ability to see into the future.

M Brac (LH)– His foster brother also teenager.

M Viridio (LH)– ditto. Both brothers are affectionate, funny, full of energy. They are also violent although not necessarily sadistic. They both die horrible deaths.

F Matriarch – 30+ Plain speaking (and a bit foul mouthed) she has the wit and chutzpa of a Mother Courage or Peggy Mitchell.

M Her Husband – same age or older. Cynical and weak-willed.

M Two Envoys from a neighbouring village (LH) – come to warn about the Romans. They great treated badly.

M Village men (LH) x3

F Village Women x4

M/F Village children (LH) x4 (Not essential) – the villagers are at first very sceptical about the Romans (it’ll never happen here’ etc. Afterwards they are the remnants of a massacre.)

M Roman soldiers (SH) x 7 (first three only involved in the attempted rape/murder)

M Roman soldier 1 (SH)– violent, only wanted to get to the river for a swim but happy to murder two locals to do so. Also a bit of a hypochondriac.

M Roman soldier 2 (SH)– Appears to be the kinder of the two preventing Marban from choking on his own blood until he in turn abuses him – for the crime of speaking Latin.

M Roman soldier 3 (SH)– the rapist. Older than the others. A veteran of many campaigns, war weary.

The soldiers are squaddies, essentially. British army soldiers in Roman costumes. Possible cockney accents.

M Guard (SH)

M Julius Caesar (SH) – Very Roman: aloof, cold, arrogant. His treatment of the Legate as humiliating as is his treatment of Marban. He does everything for his own image and glory. He holds Britain with the same contempt that he holds his rotten tooth: something to spit out. At this point aged 46 and possibly balding. In text he speaks perfect Roman rhetoric. Very formal. All the more shocking when he lapses into profanity.

M Prefect (SH)

M Primus Pilus. (SH)

M Legate (SH) – treated very badly by Caesar and a real chip on his shoulder.

M Bugler (SH)

M Standard Bearer (SH)

M Asinus (SH) – Roman historian like an embedded journalist. Called upon to write up Julius Caesar’s biography and record his ‘moments of greatness’. Will be a journalist (briefly) in the 1980 ‘flash forward.’

**Part Two**

**In 1980:**

M Thomas Chichester (L or SH) – a rogue SAS officer. His personal mission to assassinate local IRA commander O Rourke but he starts to go native and tries, unsuccessfully, to sue for peace.

M Corporal (SH)

M British soldiers x 6 (SH)

M Bob Maitland (SH)– a fellow officer

F Irish Woman – a zealot IRA member.

M O’ Rourke (L or SH) – IRA commander in his 50s. A surprisingly sympathetic ear to Chichester’s attempts but ultimately gives the command for Chichester’s execution.

M Irish Men x 2. Shadowy gunmen. They execute Chichester without compunction.

**In 515 AD:**

M Priest(LH) Tries to organise the panicky retreat of civilians in the face of the Saxon invasion.

M Cai (LH) – an old pagan and old warrior of many campaigns against Saxon invasions. Also an abuser. Is murdered by his daughter in revenge.

M/F Villagers (LH) x 3 Refugees.

M Saxon Soldier (L or SH) – wounded, delirious and speaking Saxon.

F Corda – daughter of Cai. Abused by him. Murders him then goes on the run with her sister.

F Morgana – Corda’s sister. Very religious.

F Adona – Has the haughty attitude of a Roman Matron but it soon crumbles: her situation is desperate.

M Steward (SH) – An assimilated Roman but he begins to see that he has backed the wrong horse. The Saxon invasion allows him to reinvent himself – and not for the first time. I have always assumed he was on the young side – say early 30s. Investigation shows that originally the part was played by Peter Needham then in his late forties.

M Cook 1 (L or SH) – Highly sarcastic but the leader of the two. ‘I’m meat, he’s vegetable’ Although stage direction state both cooks are young in fact he was originally played by someone in his early-40s.

M Cook 2 (L or SH) - The younger of the two – originally played (at the age of 32) by Jim Carter. Given a chance is as sarcastic as Cook 1 but is in his shadow. Has the final wonderful line of the play.

**An example of the text.**

Marban’s speech:

*‘Three years the salt will drain out of the fields. And in the fourth year? Will you dare to creep out of the hidden fields in the forests, to plant another harvest? To watch the nightmare of another raid, ripening though the year?*

*Oh, the life of the farms will go on.*

*But you’ll never dig out the fear they’ve struck in you. With their strange foreign weapons*

*Generation after generation, cataracts of terror in the eyes of your children. And in the eyes of husband for wife and wife for husband, hatred of the suffering that is bound to come again.*

*They’ve struck a spring in the ground beneath your feet, it will never stop, it will flood everything. The filthy water of Roman ways.*

*They’ll even take away death as you know it. No sweet fields, rich woods beyond the grave. You’ll go to a Roman underworld of torture, a black river, rocks of fire.*

*We must have nothing to do with them. Nothing.*

*Abandon the life we know.*

*Change ourselves into animals. The cat. No, an animal not yet heard of. Deadly watching, ready in the forest. Something not human.*

***First Village Man:*** *And live off what, priest?*

***Marban:*** *Visions.Visions. Stones.Visions.* (A silence. Then dead voiced) *The* *ghosts of our ancestors slink away. The fabulous beasts, their claws crumble. The Gods grow small as flies.*

Final scene of Part Two – the creation of the Arthur myth. In AD 515, the First Cook, having renounced his former profession, declares himself a poet. When he is challenged by Corda to tell a story he says the following:

***Cook 1****: Actually, he was a King who never was.*

*His government was the people of Britain. His peace was a common as rain or sun. His law was a natural as grass, growing in a meadow.*

*And there never was a Government, or a peace, or a law like that.*

*His sister murdered his father. His wife was unfaithful. He died by the treachery of his best friend.*

*And when he was dead, the King who never was and the Government that never was – were mourned. And remembered. Bitterly.*

*And thought of as a golden age, lost and yet to come.*

***Corda****: Very pretty.*

***Morgana****: What was his name?*

***First Cook****: Right dear, any old name. (To Second Cook) What was his name?*

***Second Cook****: Right – er, any old name.*

*Arthur?*

*Arthur?*

Simon Futty, director

October 9th 2016

Romans in Britain Audition Form

Please put a [current] photo of yourself here!

**Please print off and bring this form**

**with photograph to your audition. There**

**will be some spares for those without printers.**

Name…………………………………………………………………………………………………………….

Date of audition……………………………………………………....time…………………………………......

Address………………………………………………………………………………………………………….

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Postcode………………….email address………………………………………………………………………

Tel.no [home]……………………………………………[work/mobile]………………………………………

Playing age…………………...

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE …………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

Preferred role (if any)…………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

**PLEASE DO NOT WRITE BELOW THIS LINE**