



BOUDICCA - THE WARRIOR QUEEN AND HER FIGHT AGAINST ROME

by Michele Breeze



Michele Breeze as Boudicca

Walking around multi-cultural London, whether you live here or are just visiting, you will undoubtedly notice how naturally people take each other for granted, affording not so much as a second glance to anything or anybody, no matter how odd, alien or culturally different other people are from themselves. A magnificent achievement for a City whose history is littered with thousands of years of cultural battles involving Religion, Race and continuous power struggles down through the ages. Finally resulting in the peace and freedom that London now enjoys and whose rights to such, this Nation defends.

But the history of this great city has not always been one to be proud of, yet each extreme act has brought about a cultural change to the eventual enrichment of the daily lives of 'Londoners' today. As the pendulum of life swings to and fro, an equilibrium has evolved and London has absorbed all it's past troubles embracing and assimilating all who visit

her and succumb to her charms. Of the many great monuments, churches, museums and buildings spread across the city, Big Ben has to be the focal point that has grabbed the world's attention as the image of London Town. On the corner of Westminster

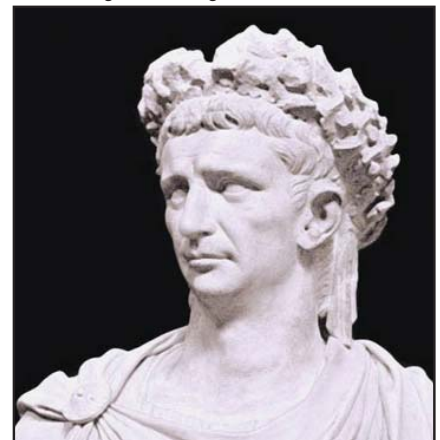
Bridge and Victoria Embankment, you may also notice the statue of the Celtic Queen Boadicea or Boudicca (her Celtic name), fearless and defiant in her horse drawn chariot with her two daughters beside her. (see above)

She is portrayed throughout British History as the Warrior Queen, primarily because of her battle against Roman rule and oppression. This stunning statue in bronze, is the work of Thomas Thornecroft and was commissioned by Queen Victoria, who was a great admirer of Boadicea's achievements and bravery. These days she is often derided by the PC brigade who in general, tend to rubbish British History without the slightest knowledge of that which they berate. How can we as a Nation, avoid troubles in the future if we do not learn the lessons from the past? It is vitally important for any country, especially one as old as ours, to retain its history in full and pass it down through the generations. It's who we were and who we are and who we will be, despite the best efforts of many in academia, who constantly berate that which went before. They are lucky that Hitler's Nazi Germany didn't win the Second World War as their right to freedom to teach in an unfettered way would not exist under that heinous regime and neither I suspect, would they.

If I put Boadicea's story into modern day terms it would read like this. Mother beaten and forced to watch her two daughters raped by a bunch of foreign squaddies. Their home is re-

possessed along with many of her friend's homes. Their possessions are confiscated and the whole area in which she grew up and lived, was taxed out of existence, all ordered by an un-elected foreign government in occupation, who created the problem in the first place. Of course if we are to believe the Roman scribe Tacitus, (who incidentally never left Rome, deriving his information by hearsay from those returning to Rome) the circumstances leading up to Boudicca's revolt were even more scurrilous.

Boudicca's husband Prasutagus, was the King of the Iceni tribe, based around the Thetford area in Norfolk. He had what was termed a 'Client Kingdom' arrangement with the Roman



Emperor Claudius.

Basically this was a deal whereby Prasutagus guaranteed the Iceni wouldn't attack Roman interests in return he received from Claudius, Roman gold. This worked out well for all parties.



Nero



However, after Claudius and Prasutagus died, Nero took over as Emperor and things changed

! Prasutagus had left a will leaving half his kingdom to his two daughters under the stewardship of Boudicca and the other half to Rome. Nero however, was not best pleased with this arrangement



Boudicca coin

and worked out a way to get the lot. His advisor, Seneca, much like the Chancellor these days, came up with a scheme that turned the gold that Prasutagus had received over the years from Rome into a 'loan'.. And this loan was demanded by Nero, to be repaid immediately in full. Unable to pay, Boudicca and the Iceni lost everything they owned. To rub salt into the wounds and prevent any uprisings among the tribes, they flogged Queen Boudicca and publicly raped her virgin daughters. Unfortunately for the Romans, the whole thing backfired and served only to unite the tribes against Rome.

All the Celts fought in battles, women alongside men, painted in their blue woad, fearless and proud. Boudicca was able to unite the Celtic Tribes under her leadership, which in itself was an incredible feat of political skill, as they usually fought each other. But faced with this latest Roman outrage, they marched, first to Colchester (then known as Camulodunum) around AD 60/61, which they completely destroyed and burned the temple of



destruction of the Temple of Claudius

Claudius to the ground, along with many Romans sheltering inside. The charred remains of Boudicca's visit are still visible today in places like Lion Walk for example, where more tangible evidence of this destruction has survived. From there, she marched her army to London. "Londinium" was in fact the Roman adaptation of its native Celtic name Llyn Din, which means "the City, or Fortress, of the Lake". At that time, the Roman Military Governor, Gaius Suetonius Paulinus was away with his legions, fighting and finally destroying the Druids on Anglesey in North Wales. London itself, was undefended and Boudicca had a score to settle with Catus Decianus, the Pro-curator, for ordering his troops to flog Boudicca and her daughters.

So imagine.....there you are, out with some



friends, dining in a nice restaurant on hog and ale, when all of a sudden, in bursts a mass of painted Celts, all heavily armed. They kill you all, cut off your heads (as the Celts believed in this), burn the place down and then get drunk and celebrate. That's also what the Celts did and in fact, that race still enjoys it's celebrations today, especially after winning a Rugby match against the English!

Having trashed and burned London to the ground and killing most of its inhabitants, with the taste of victory still fresh, Boudicca headed North in search of Suetonius and his Legions. She never caught Catus however, he'd already slipped away and back to Rome.

At this point, I must admit more than a writers interest in Boudicca. I wrote, costumed and performed for Theatre, a One Woman Musical Drama based upon her life, with music composed by Paul Brett and stage production by Jenny Zobel, daughter of the famous French writer, Joseph Zobel. I did extensive research on Boudicca and all things Celtic and it was during this research that I had doubts as to Boudicca's actual demise. According to Tacitus,



Michele Breezeas Boudicca

she lost a battle with Suetonius in Mancetter, took poison with her daughters and committed suicide rather than face the Romans again. The 230,000 or so of her warriors just gave up and went home ? The whole doctrine of the Celts encompassed the 'dying in battle' wish; there-

fore the poison chalice theory offered by Tacitus made me doubt his account. As the Celts never wrote anything down, (their history was kept by the Druids and spread by word of mouth) we only have the Roman account of what happened to Boudicca and they never found her body. It is often the case in early history that the victor writes the history he wants portrayed, not necessarily what actually happened. Here's what Tacitus writes :

'Suetonius Paulinus had the XIVth Legion with the veterans of the XXth and auxiliaries from the neighbourhood, to the number of about 10,000 armed men. He prepared to break off delay and fight a battle. He chose a position approached by a narrow defile, closed at the rear by a forest, having first ascertained that there was not a soldier of the enemy except in his front, where an open plain extended without any danger from ambushes. His legions were in close array; round them, the light-armed troops, and the cavalry in dense array on the wings. On the other side, the army of the Britons, with its masses of infantry and cavalry, was confidently exulting, a vaster host than ever had assembled, and so fierce in spirit that they actually brought with them, to witness the victory, their wives riding in wagons, which they had placed on the extreme of the plain. At first the legion kept its position, clinging to the narrow defile as a defence; when they had exhausted their missiles, which they discharged with unerring aim on the closely approaching foe, they rushed out in a wedge-like column. Similar was the onset if the auxiliaries, while the cavalry with extended lances broke through all who offered a strong resistance. The rest turned their back in flight, and flight proved difficult, because the surrounding wagons had blocked retreat. Our soldiers spared not to slay even the women, while the very beasts of burden, transfixed by the missiles, swelled the piles of bodies. Great glory, equal to that of our old victories, was won on that day. Some indeed say that there fell little less than 80,000 of the Britons, with a loss to our soldiers of about four hundred, and only as many wounded. Boudicca put an end to her life by poison.'

I found an old book in a library written by the



Welsh Scholar **Owen Morien Morgan**, who offers a different and frankly more believable scenario to Boudicca's end. He writes that there



was a great battle on Rhuddlan Plain, between a Celtic Army led by Boudicca and Suetonius and his Legions. This is plausible because Suetonius had just disembarked Anglesey, after destroying the Druids at Mona. That would have indeed been a long process, as crossing the Menai Strait at the best of times is treacherous and in those days, he would have had to wait for the tides to be favourable to get that many men across, probably in flat bottom boats. Boudicca could have marched her army to Chester and down the coast road to Rhuddlan, fighting her last battle there as Morien writes. He says that the battle was fought in much confusion all over the plain. Boudicca's army vastly outnumbered the Roman Legions and Boudicca was mortally wounded in a fight near the village of Newmarket, where he says she was laid to rest.

Owen Morien Morgan also refers to the finding of a gold torc in the vicinity, on a hill known as Bryn Sion (Hillside of Zion) near Caerwys. The dating is correct, as the torc has survived and is indeed, of iron age date. He states *'Boudicca's horses were slain or fell on the slippery declivity, and she and her two daughters received mortal sabre cuts on their heads, and the three fell, and the gold torque and coronet fell off and were trodden in the quagmire out of sight'*.

Whatever the truth regarding Boudicca's demise, we shall actually never know and I'm sure that more theories will emerge and the puzzle of what happened to one of the Great British Queen's will still be steeped in mystery a thousand years from now. There is another more local tale, that Boudicca's body was taken from the field along the coast into Gwynedd, where she was laid to rest in a place the locals call "**Tit Mountain**" just outside the



small village of Liithfaen. I must admit that the ending of my musical is based upon Morien's theory of Boudicca and her daughters being killed in battle, as opposed to the more widely written and accepted account of her taking poison. It's just not CELTIC !

