

LASTING LATIN

The Romans had an enormous impact on the language we use today. Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Romanian all come from Latin, and even the English language, which isn't so closely related to Latin, includes thousands of words that are based on Latin.

LETTERS AND NUMBERS

Of the 26 letters in our alphabet, 22 come from the Roman alphabet. The Romans had no W or Y, the letters I and J were both written as I, while U and V were written as V. Roman letters and numbers were mainly made from straight lines so that they were easy to carve in stone.

Latin inscriptions can be found on Roman buildings, monuments and tombs. On this gravestone for 'Rinnio Novicio, mule driver', the carver wasn't able to fit the man's name onto one line.



The numbers that we use today are based on Arabic numerals which are much easier to use than Roman ones. But Roman numerals are often used on the faces of clocks and watches. (See page 363 for a guide to Roman numerals.)

A 24-hour stone clock with carved Roman numerals



The scientific names for plants are written in Latin. This is *Fuchsia fulgens*, from a 19th-century guide to plants.

WORDS AND PHRASES

Although no one speaks Latin as a first language anymore, it hasn't been forgotten. All over the world, scientists identify plants and animals by their Latin names, and some children still study Latin at school.

The English language contains several Latin phrases, such as *ad infinitum* ('to infinity') and *et cetera* ('and the rest'). It also includes many words that are based on Latin. For example, the word 'urban' comes from the Latin *urbis*, meaning 'city'.

REMEMBERING THE GODS

Our calendar is based on the Roman system (see page 362). Some of our months take their names from Roman gods, such as Mars (March) and Juno (June), while July and August are named after Julius Caesar and the Emperor Augustus. The Romans also gave the names of their gods to the planets Jupiter, Venus, Mars, Mercury and Saturn.