

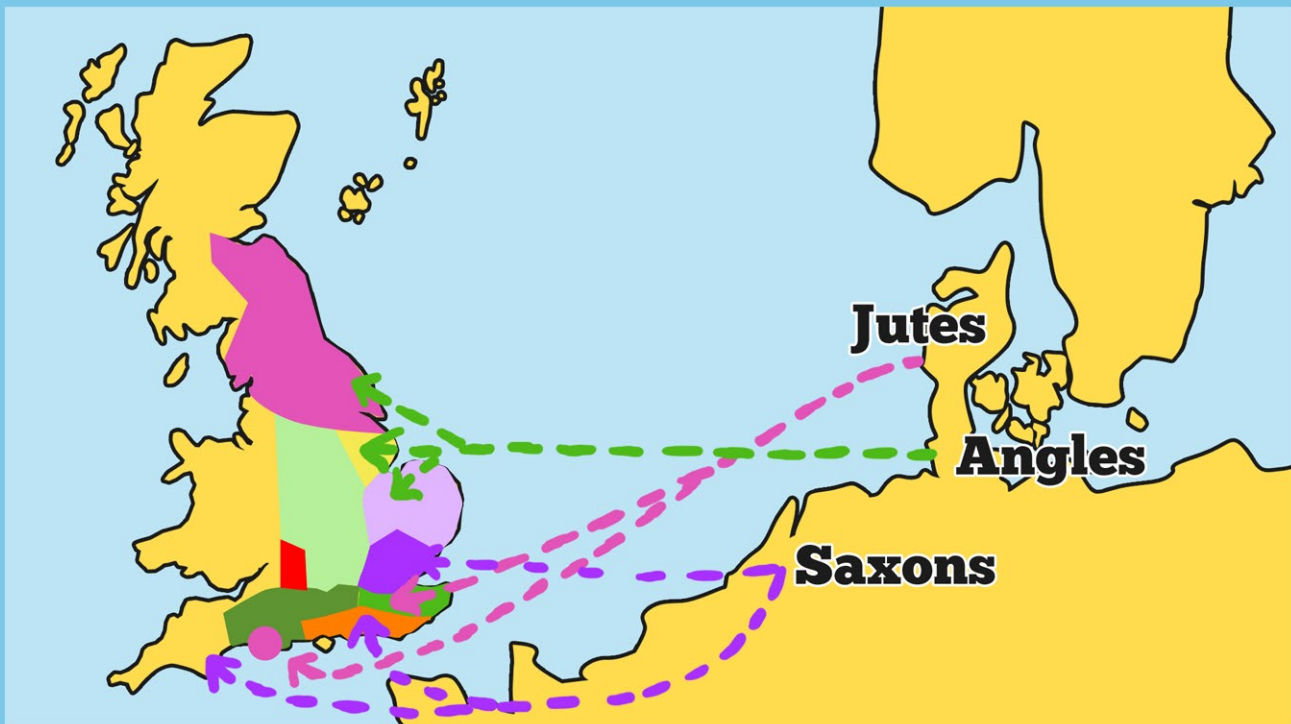
THE Anglo Saxons

Britain AD 449 - 1066



An informative book

The Anglo-Saxons



Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms of England

	Northumbria		East Saxons		Kent
	Mercia		East Angles		West Saxons
	Lindsey		Hwicca		South Saxons

Who?

The Anglo-Saxons of Britain in the fifth century were formed from the Angles, Saxons and Jutes emigrating from different parts of Europe. The map above shows the journeys taken and the places travelled from by the Anglo Saxons. Many Saxons made a living by farming and trading, as well as forming armies to protect themselves.

Many places in modern Britain have names of Saxon heriatge, such as Birmingham. 'Beornmund' means the name of a tribe leader, 'ing' means a group of people and 'ham' is an estate. 'Birmingham' together means 'the estate of Beornmund's people'.

Where did the Saxons come from?

A monk whose name was Bede, from Jarrow Abbey, Northumberland (673-735) became a very important writer for historians as it is from his writings that they confirmed exactly where the Anglo Saxons had come from. Bede also helped historians to realise just how long the names of some places in England had been used. Here is an extract from Bede's writings about the origins of the Saxons.

They came from three of the stronger peoples of Germany, the Saxons, the Angles and the Jutes. From the Jutes came the Cantuarri (the people of Kent) and the Victuarri who are the people who occupy the Isle of Wight. In the mainland is where the West Saxons live and to this day it is called the nation of Jutes. From the Saxons, came the East, South and West Saxons. From the Angles, came the East Angles, Middle Angles, Mercians and Northumbrians, that is the people who live north of the Humber as well as the Anglian tribes.

Names with Meaning

The names that the Anglo Saxons gave to places usually described a feature of the place. These included:



Name	Meaning
bury	fortified place
ley or leigh	forest
shaw	small wood
stoke or stock	religious place
ford	river crossing
wick	farm

Before the Saxons...

Before the arrival of the Saxons in Britain, it was occupied by the Romans, who had invaded in AD43. During the Roman invasion of Britain, it was the Celts who inhabited the country.

Under Roman rule, Britain grew to be a great and civilised country. Roman roads, towns and immense buildings were built and the pottery industry was set up. After the Romans left, life in Britain became rather disorganised and there is evidence that pottery production and trade had stopped.

Roman Britain became post-Roman Britain at around AD410.

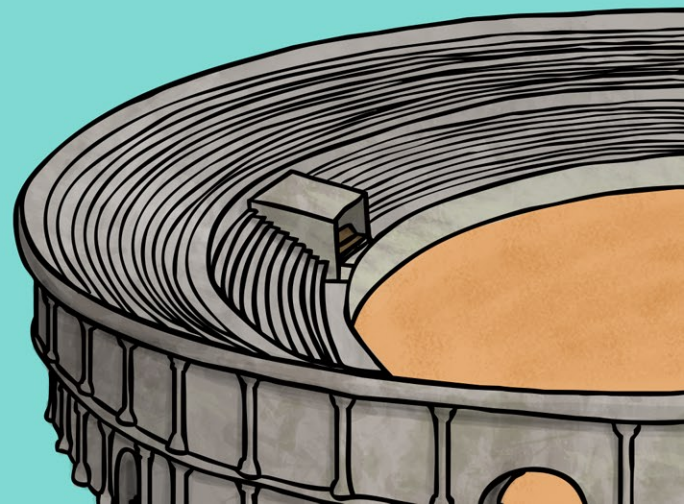


Fall of the Empire

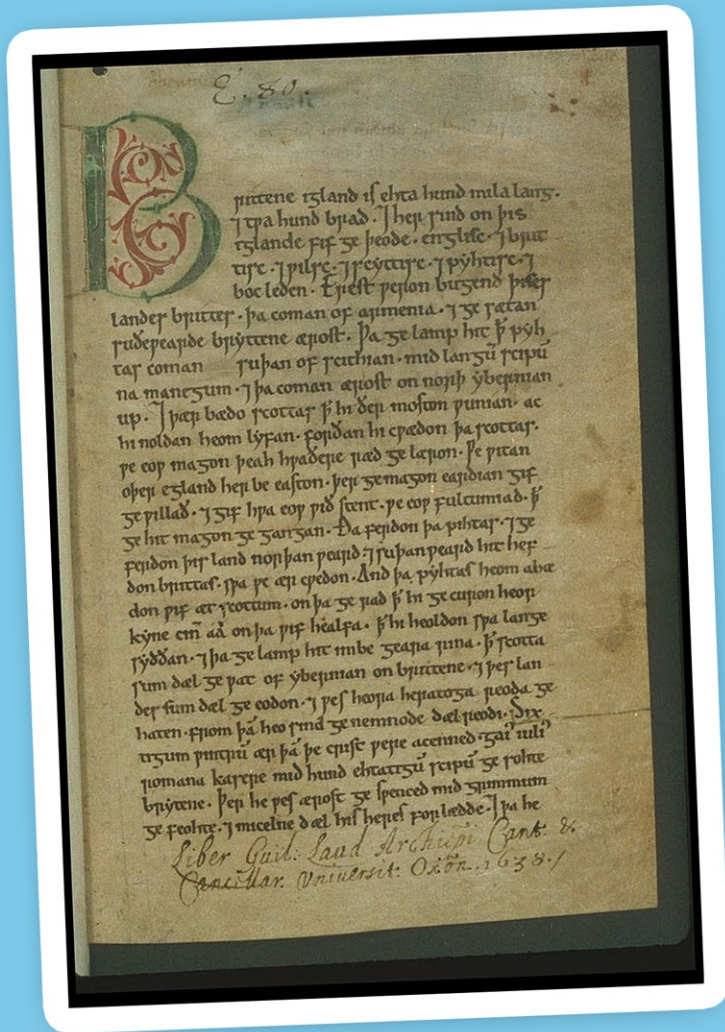
The Roman army stationed in Britain were located there to prevent invasions. Not all members of the army were Roman and sometimes they would hire mercenaries, who were skilled fighters for hire.

Historians also know that even some Anglo-Saxon men had, at some point, joined the Roman army from the uniforms that were found buried in some graves.

The Roman army had gradually become smaller and smaller as more and more troops were called out to defend other parts of the empire. By AD410, the last troops were gone from Britain.



The Saxon Arrival



One of the reasons we have managed to learn a lot about Anglo-Saxon life is because of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicles that have been found. These are a collection of written works created in the late 9th century, when Alfred the Great ruled.

Copies of the Chronicles were given out to monasteries, who kept updating the books up until 1154.

The picture on the left shows the first page of the Peterborough chronicle. Note the intricate and handpainted letter 'B'.

It is from these Chronicles that we have learnt about Vortigern, the leader of the British.

Vortigern

King Vortigern (right) was the leader of the Angles when they arrived in Britain, 449. It is said in the Chronicles, that 'the Angles were invited here by King Vortigern and they came in three longships, landing at Ebbesfleet. King Vortigern gave them territory, on the condition that they fight the Picts. They did and had victory wherever they went. They then sent to Angel, commanded more aid and they soon sent hither a greater host to help the others, their warriors were Hengest and Horsa. First of all, they killed and drove away the king's enemies, then later they turned on the king and the British, destroying through fire and sword's edge.'



Anglo-Saxon Fighting



The attacks on the British continued and in AD455 Hengest and Horsa finally fought with Vortigern's army and won. Horsa died in battle and Hengest carried on fighting the British for many years to come.

In the Chronicles, the Angles suggest that the British would be easy to fight, encouraging more people from Angel to come.

Shown on the left is a photo of a part of a Pictish stone carving. The Picts were the people who lived in Scotland at the time of the Saxon battles and who had themselves fought with the Saxons too. Many Pictish stones have been found showing battle scenes.

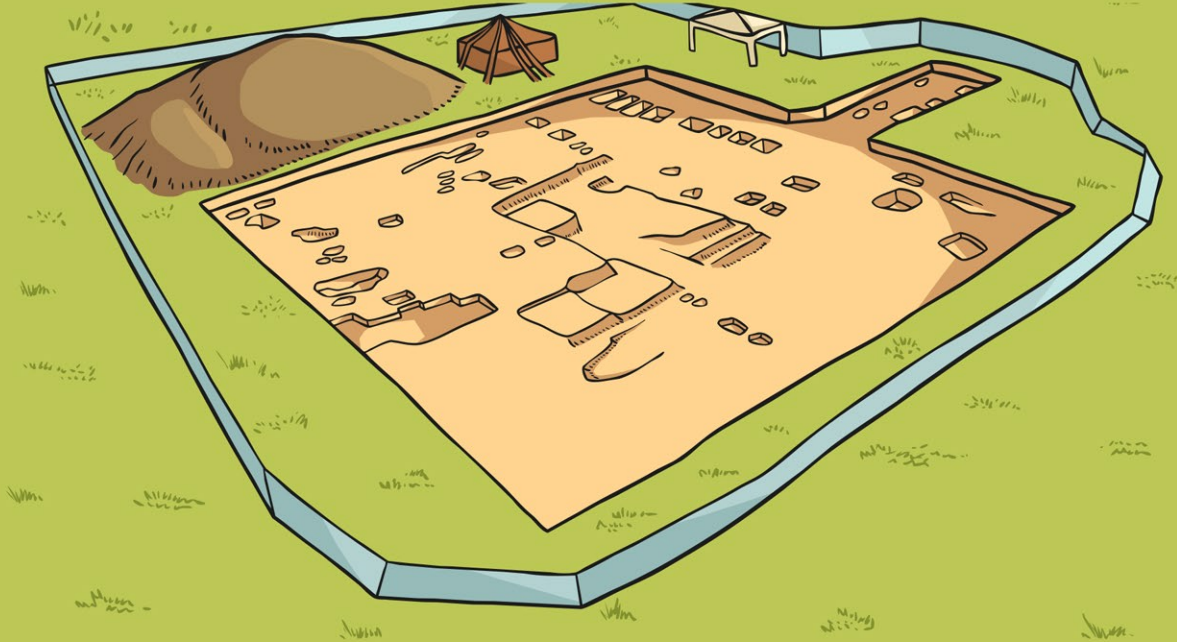
Final Conquest

After the Anglo-Saxons had finally and gradually settled in Britain at around AD600, there were four main kingdoms that were established in Britain: East Anglia, Mercia, Northumbria and Wessex.



Settlement

There are many towns and villages that date back to the Anglo-Saxon times, indicating that there should be remains of Saxon buildings in the ground. Unfortunately, archaeologists cannot reach them.



Above is a picture of an excavated site of an Anglo-Saxon house. Houses were built from oak and thatch and we know this from having made such excavations. Though the wood and reeds had rotted away, post holes could still be found in the ground. The holes tell us about the method that the Saxons used to build houses. They would place wooden posts around the outline of the house and then attach planks of wood around a framework. The roofs were then thatched with reeds.

On the right is a photo of a Saxon house built today in a Saxon Village at West Stow, where people re-enact Anglo-Saxon life.



Remains



Above is a photo of an Anglo Saxon cemetery. Note the holes where the dead were buried.

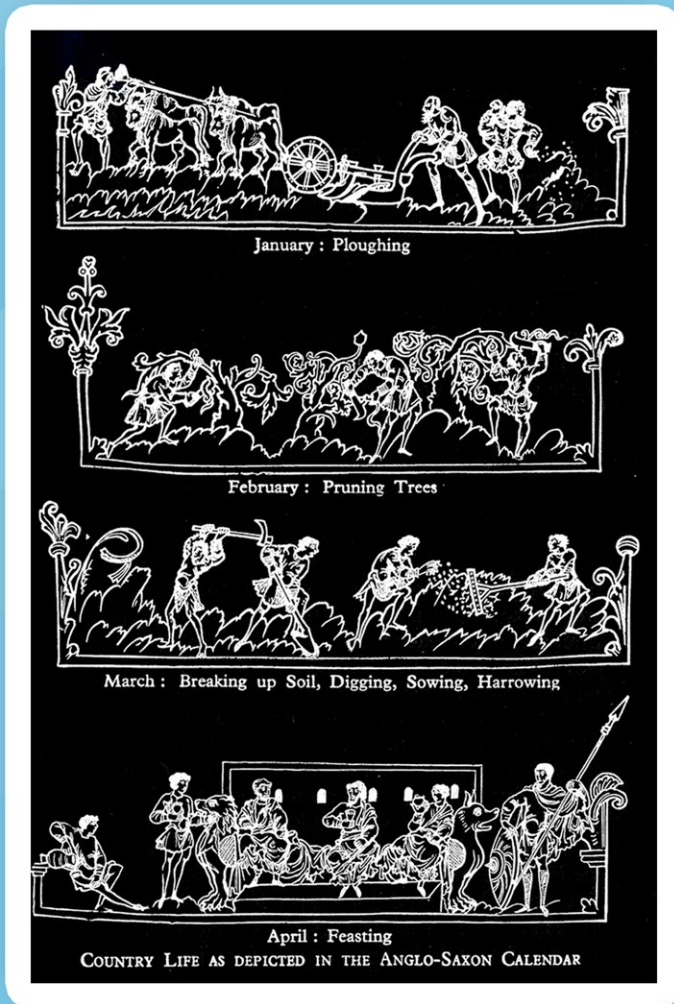
Farming

Most average Saxons were farmers. Families lived in small villages and grew produce on the land around them.

A farming year would begin with ploughing to break the soil up, ready for planting seeds. Crops grown were oats, wheat and barley. The crops grew until summer, when their grains were harvested by **threshing** them. Threshing was technique used to separate the grains from the stalks.



A Farmer's Life

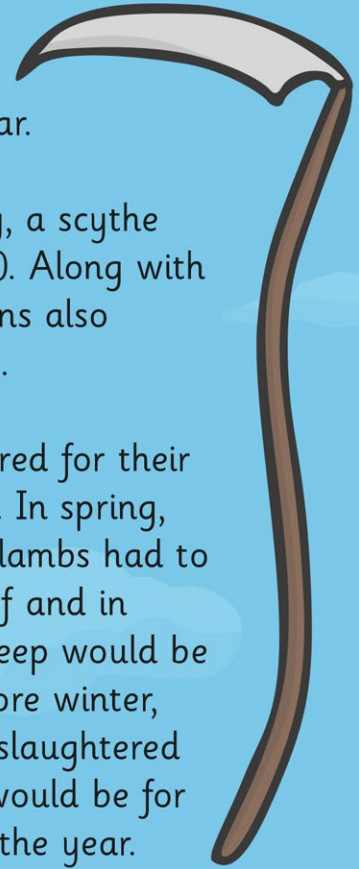


Left: An Anglo-Saxon farmer's calendar.

When threshing, a scythe was used (right). Along with crops, the Saxons also reared livestock.

Sheep were reared for their meat and wool. In spring, the birthing of lambs had to be taken care of and in summer, the sheep would be shorn. Just before winter, they would be slaughtered and the meat would be for use later on in the year.

Cows and pigs were reared for milk and meat. The farm animals were much smaller back then.



Farming

Below is a painting depicting life on a farm. Men and women both had parts to play in farming. Men would do the threshing and ploughing, whilst the women would grind the querns and cereal grains into flour to make bread and cakes. They would also spin yarn from sheep wool.

Milking cattle, making butter and cheese, feeding chickens and ducks and rearing bees for honey were other things had to be done on a farm. In order for meat to be safe to eat, it had to be preserved by rubbing salt on it for winter. Herbs were also grown for medicines and mead was made for drinking.



Anglo-Saxon Crafts

Pottery

Earlier Saxon pottery was made by piling rings of clay on top of each other and smoothing the sides of the pots afterwards. The clay used was mixed with water, sand, crushed shells and sometimes even grass to bind it together. They were then left to dry and then baked in a kiln afterwards.



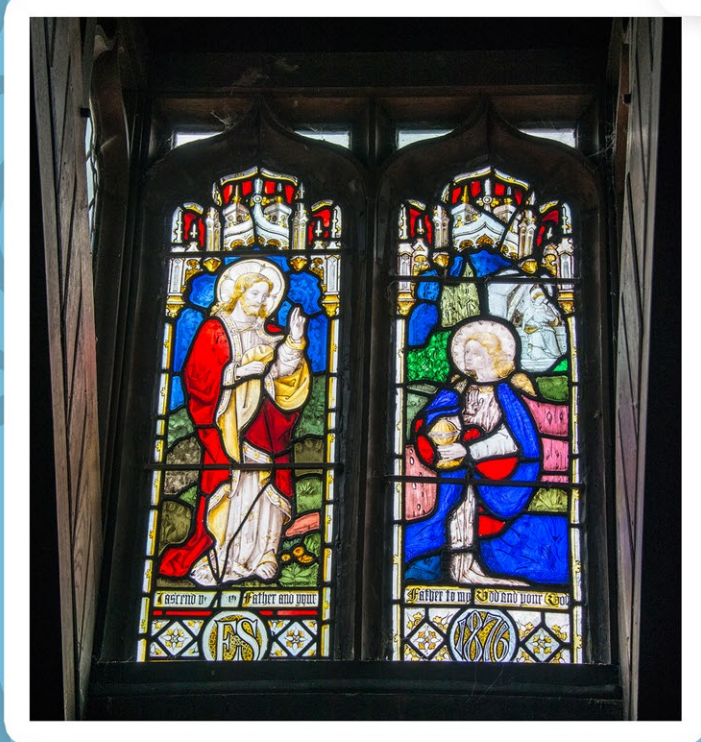
Bones

Bones and antlers were also used as a material for making buckles, spoons, needles, and many other things. Antler is tougher than bone so it was used to make combs, like the one in the picture on the right. Without plastic, bones and antlers were the best alternative for the Anglo-Saxons.



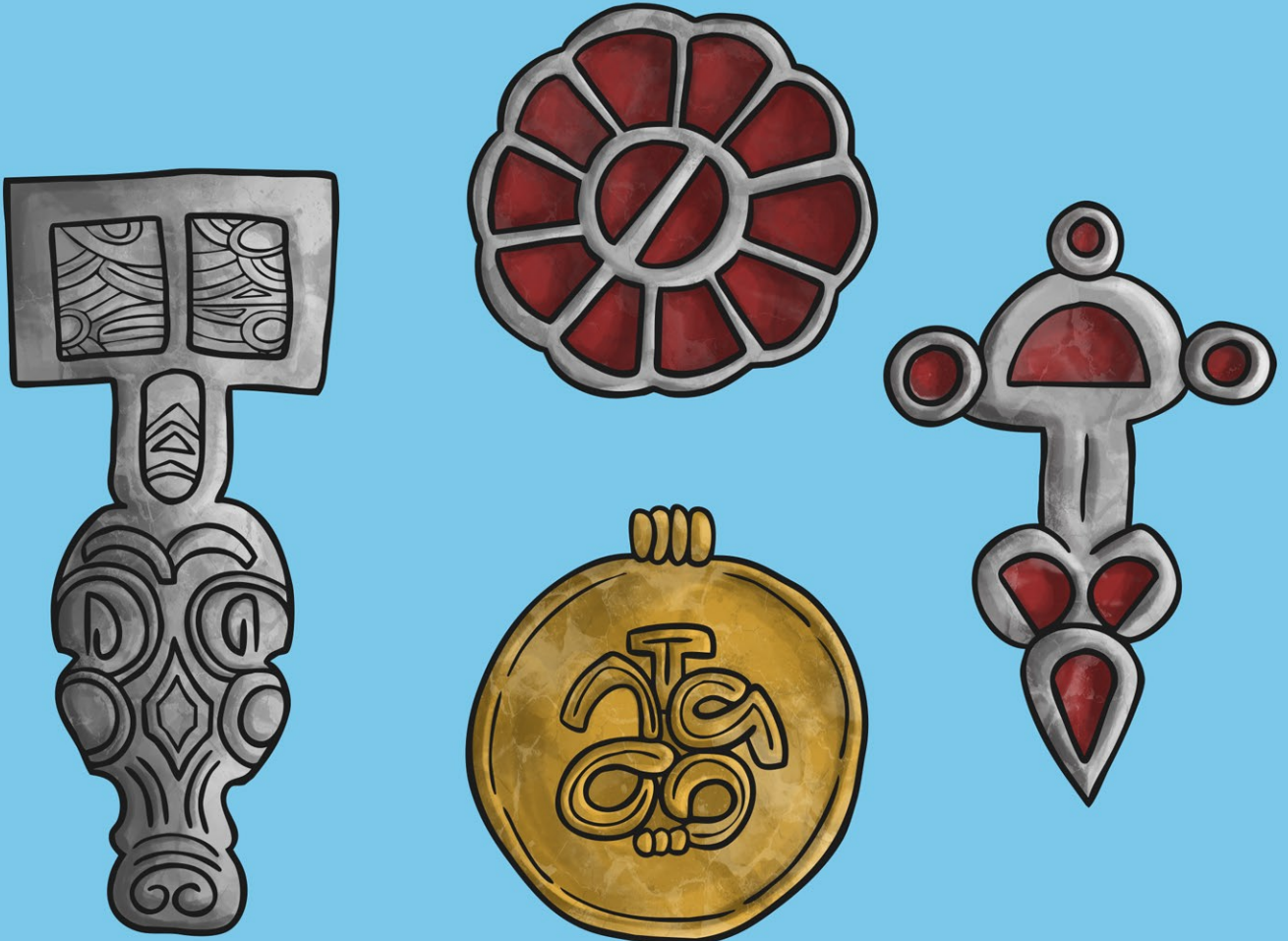
Glass

Glass was made from a mixture of sand, potash and natron. This was heated in an oven, which was stirred by the glassmaker to get rid of any bubbles. The glass made was slightly green but was coloured with different copper minerals. On the left is a beautiful stained glass window of a church and items like glass beakers have also been found.



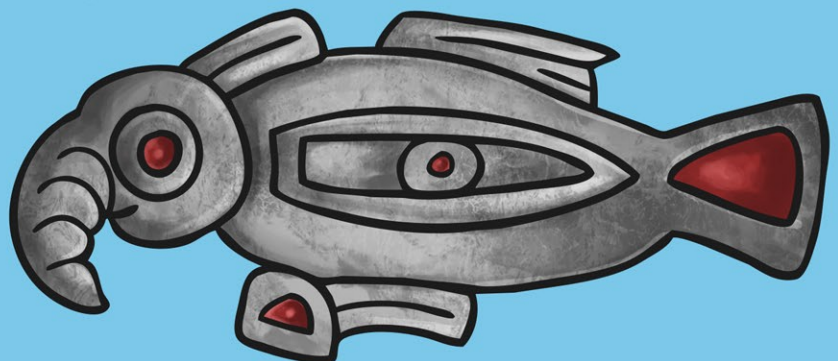
Jewellery

Below are a selection of Anglo Saxon pendants and brooches found by archaeologists. Metalwork and jewellery are the only forms of early Anglo-Saxon art that have survived to this day.



The brooch on the left has been shaped into a horse.

The brooch on the right has been shaped into a fish.



Sutton Hoo?

Sutton Hoo is an Anglo-Saxon burial site that was found in the English county of Suffolk. It is one of the most significant and richest finds for medieval archaeologists because of the sheer size of the site, the highly intricate and precious goods it contained and nearly everything was found in perfect condition. It is especially famous for its ship burial that was discovered there.

The land of Sutton Hoo is made up of mounds of earth called barrows. Some of the barrows contain hollows to indicate that people have dug into them in the past. In 1938, the landowner of the barrows, called Mrs. Edith Pretty hired an archaeologist to find out what they contained.



Sadly, when archaeologist Basil Brown began digging, he found that many of the barrows had been plundered and robbed. He had only managed to find a few nails of a boat and some cremation pots in the first three barrows. Finally, he came to the largest barrow on the site and slowly uncovered hundreds of nails of the boat that they were once part of. The wood had all rotted away but the nails had stayed in place and Basil could make out the size and shape of the boat from these.

A wooden hut was soon uncovered in the centre of the boat and inside it was the largest amount of buried treasure that was ever found in Britain...

Left: A barrow.

Why Bury a Ship?

The huge ship buried at Sutton Hill was known to be special as it had been pulled up a hill especially to be buried. Some Viking ships have been found buried in peat bogs but not in this way.

No skeletons or bones had been found in the hut of the barrow so it was first thought to be a monument to an important person. In 1966, however, archaeologists decided to test the soil under the ship for traces of phosphate, which skeletons contain a lot of. They did indeed find high amounts of phosphate, which is evidence of there once having been a body in the hut but had rotted away. It has now been decided that the barrow was the grave of a very wealthy pagan, who had been buried with his possessions.



Above are photos of some of the grave goods found in Sutton Hoo. The sword was kept inside a wooden scabbard lined with sheep's wool. The handle was also intricately detailed. High traces of phosphate were also found on this sword, telling us that it was probably laid beside a body when buried.

Before the treasures were removed, archaeologists would mark where they had been found for records. Some gold coins were found alongside the treasures and their style of decoration indicated that they were made in around AD620.

The Treasures



One of the most prized finds of Sutton Hoo was this beautiful helmet. It was originally found broken into hundreds of fragments and has been painstakingly pieced back together by archaeologists.

It is mostly made from iron with bronze pieces. It is thought that this was a ceremonial crown due to its intricate patterns and there are no dents in it that could suggest it was used in battle.

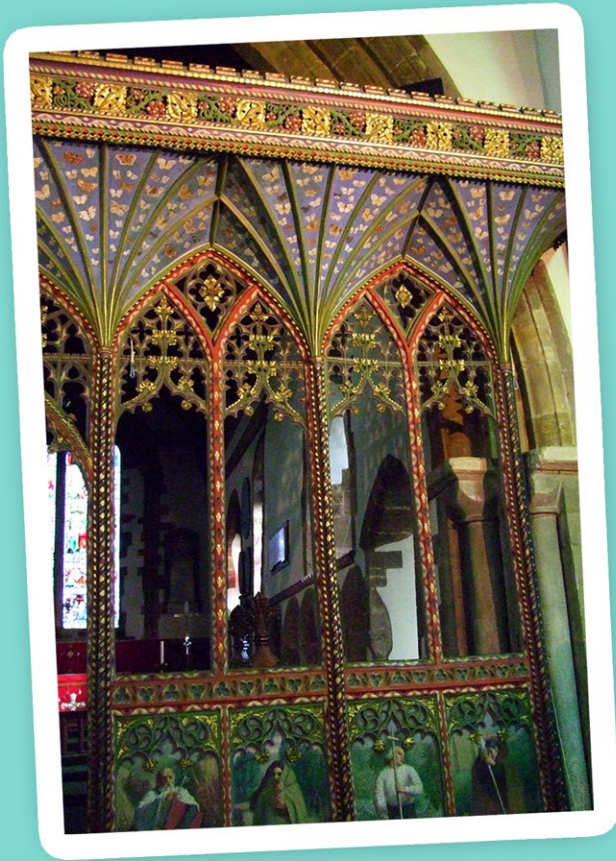
Birds were a significant symbol for the Saxons, as it symbolised strength and courage.

Note the eyebrows of the helmet are actually made up of the spread wings of a bird.

The shield found in Sutton Hoo on the right, was completely rotted away and reconstructed. There is also a bird in the design, can you spot it?



Christianisation of Britain



Above: a look at some ornate screens in Anglo-Saxon church, Earls Barton.

Other ways of converting Britain were restoring pagan buildings of worship into a more Christian style and by blending Christian celebrations and festivals with the Pagan one. Christmas, for example, has Pagan origins.

On the right is a photo of St. Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury of Kent, England. It was built for Augustine and his monks to live in.

Before the baptism of the first Anglo-Saxon Christian king, Æthelberht of Kent, previous kings were all pagans. Æthelberht's wife Bertha, was a Christian too. Paganism was the main religion of Britain before it was Christianised.

The monk, Augustine of the Saint Andrew Monastery in Rome, was sent with a troop of monks on a mission to convert people to Christianity. They settled in the town of Canterbury to do this. Augustine and his monks succeeded in converting thousands of Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. This all began in AD597.



Laws and Justice



The Anglo-Saxons, like many civilisations of the past, had some rather grisly and brutal punishments for people who disobeyed the law. There were no clear law enforcement groups like the police so sometimes, justice had to be claimed by the families of the victims of crimes.

A common oath to obey the king's law and be a good person was sworn by all men from the age of 12. If disobeyed, it would be seen as a betrayal of the king and if serious enough, whole families were also punished!

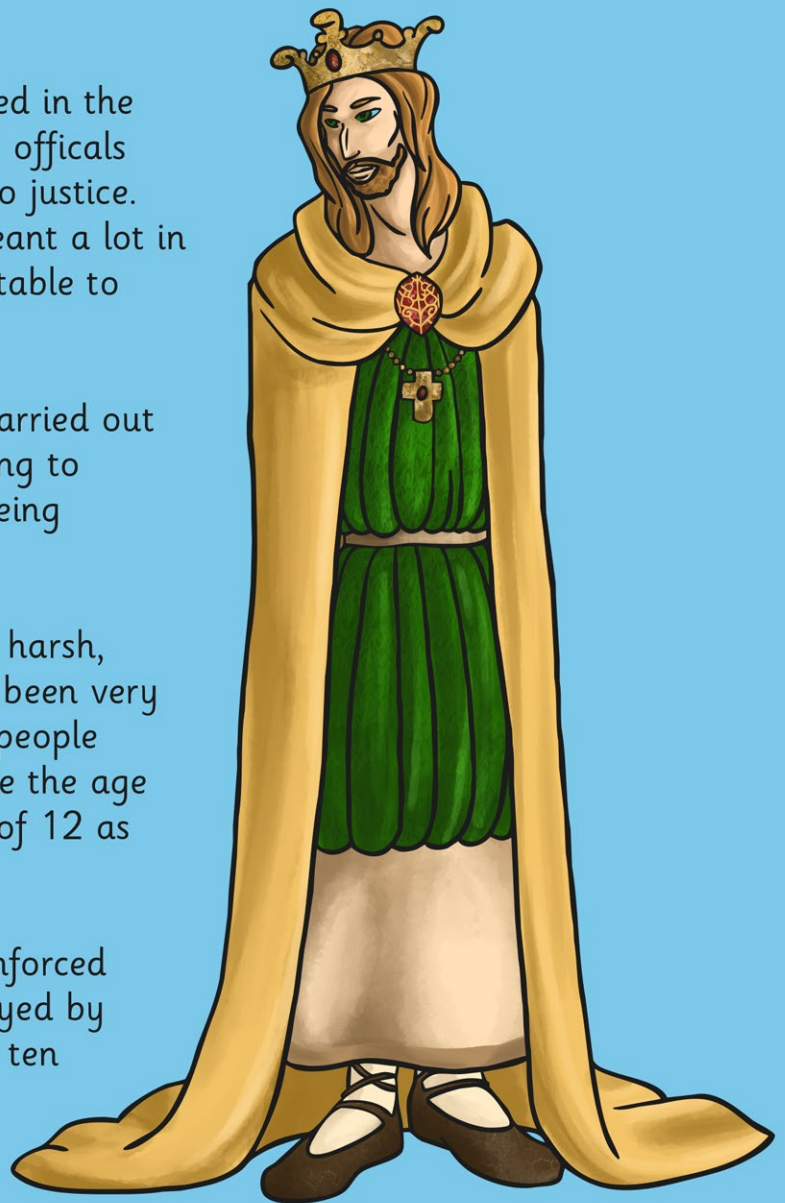
Punishments

A criminal would be tried by the hundred in the courts. The hundred were the king's law officials and it was their job to bring criminals to justice. Back then, a person's sworn promise meant a lot in the eyes of the law and it was unacceptable to break it.

Some of the most brutal punishments carried out were cutting off limbs, whipping, chaining to stocks, being stretched on a rack and being burned alive.

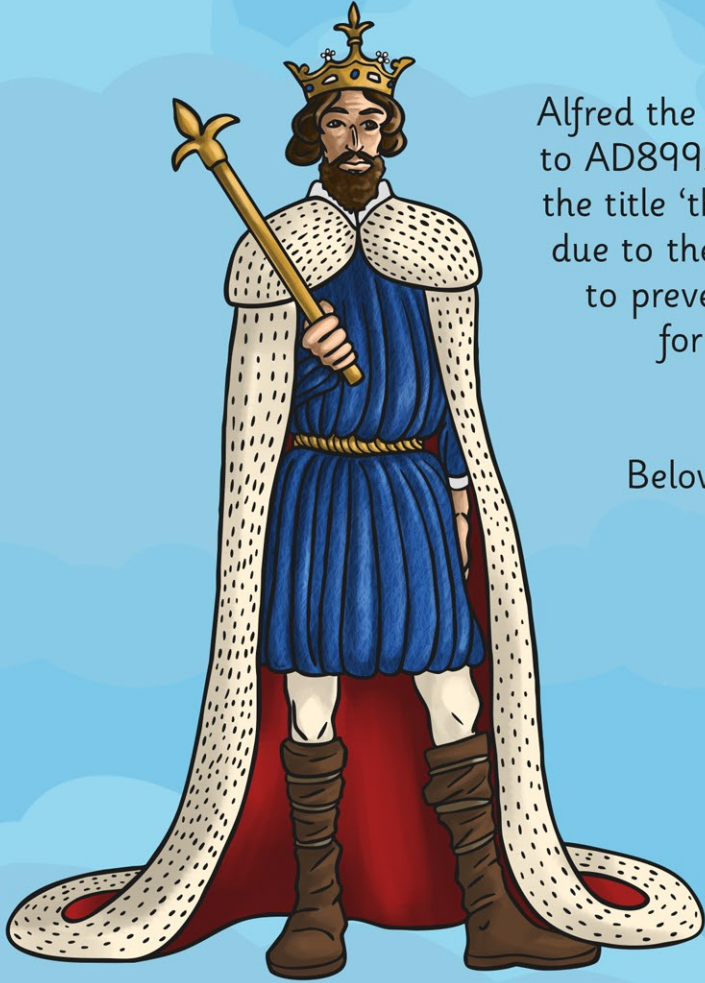
Though punishments were known to be harsh, King Athelstan (right) was said to have been very concerned about the number of young people being executed. He then decided to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 16 instead of 12 as he thought it was too cruel.

It was around AD930 when this was enforced but we know that this law was not obeyed by all as there is clear evidence of eight to ten year old children being executed for thieving at a much later date!



Anglo-Saxon Kings

Alfred the Great AD 871



Alfred the Great was the King of Wessex from AD871 to AD899. Alfred is the only English monarch to have the title 'the Great' after his name. This was probably due to the fact that under his reign, Britain managed to prevent Viking invasion and he had a reputation for being a clever and merciful king who really wanted to improve his people's lives.

Below: both sides of a silver coin with Alfred the Great's head on it.



King Athelstan AD 924

Athelstan was the grandson of Alfred the Great. He became the King of the Anglo-Saxons in AD924 and then King of the English from AD927 to AD939.

In AD927, he finally conquered the Viking city of York and became the first Anglo-Saxon to rule all of England.

He is regarded as the first King of England and never married so was succeeded by his half brother Edmund. His coronation took place at Kingston upon Thames and he was crowned by the Archbishop of Canterbury. This was the first time that a king had a crown instead of a helmet placed upon his head in the service.



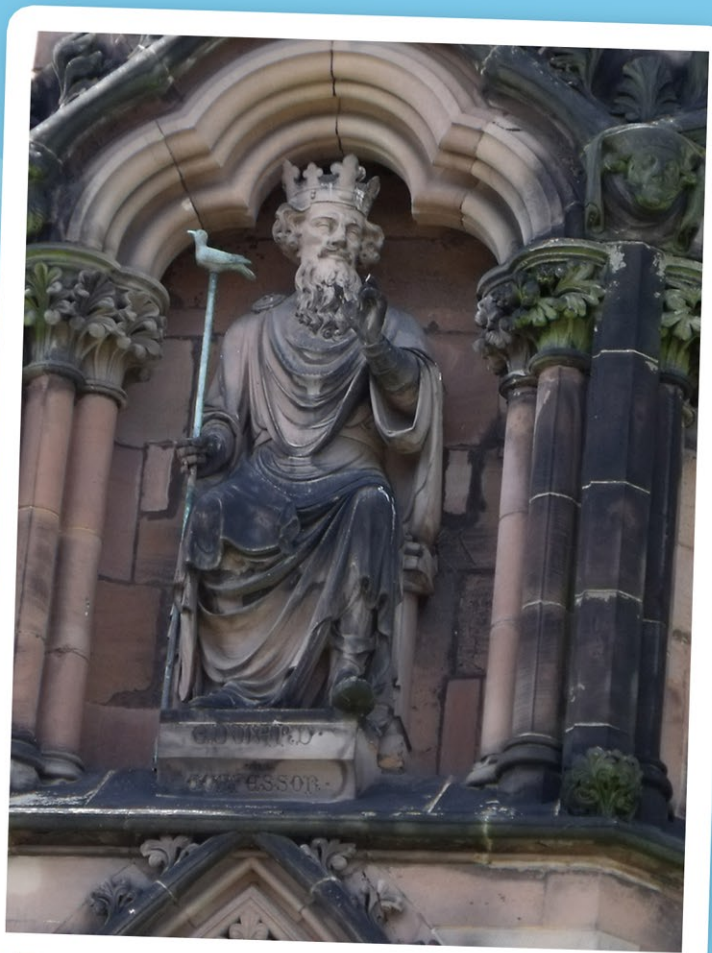
Edward the Confessor AD 1042

Edward is regarded as the last Anglo-Saxon King of England. He was named 'the Confessor' due to the saintly life that he led. It is said that the power of the English monarchy had started to lessen under his reign, leading to the Norman conquest after his death.

It is noted that towards the later years of his reign, he took part in less and less kingly activities. He also had the loom of the powerful Godwin family returning from exile and usurping him.

After his death in 1066, the throne was succeeded by Harold Godwinson who was defeated in that same year by William the Conqueror of the Normans in the Battle of Hastings.

Below: a statue of Edward the Confessor at Lichfield Cathedral.





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