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Traders and Raiders

Anglo-Saxons invade

During the Roman rule of Britain, tribes from Denmark and Germany attempted to invade Britain. The Romans built shore forts on the east and south coasts of England to protect themselves from invasion. After the Romans left in AD 410, three tribes called the Angles, Saxons and Jutes invaded England. They attacked and killed Britons or caused them to flee to Cornwall, Wales or Scotland. By AD 600 the invaders had claimed England as their own country and divided it into seven kingdoms. Each kingdom was ruled by an Anglo-Saxon king.

Map showing the different invasions of Britain and the Anglo-Saxon seven kingdom divide

Anglo-Saxon way of life

After the invasion, people in the south and east of England settled into the Anglo-Saxon way of life. The Anglo-Saxons lived in small villages of huts and farmed the land. They were great craftspeople who used metal, wood, clay and precious stones to make weapons, tools, pottery, furniture and jewellery. When the Anglo-Saxons arrived in Britain, they were pagans, which means they believed in different gods. Over time, most Anglo-Saxons converted to Christianity. They spoke Old English, which developed from the language spoken by the Angles, Saxons and Jutes. Few people could read and write.

Recreation of an Anglo-Saxon house in Suffolk

Vikings invade

The Vikings came from Denmark, Sweden and Norway. The word 'Viking' comes from the Old Norse language and means 'a pirate raid'. They first raided monasteries on the north coast of England in AD 793. Monasteries were easy targets for the Vikings, as the monks had no weapons but lots of riches. At first, the Vikings carried out violent raids, stealing precious items and burning down buildings, before returning home. However, they eventually conquered the land and took over many of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

Viking way of life

The Vikings lived in large homes, called longhouses, which they shared with their animals. Longhouses were built from wood or stone with a thatched or turf roof. Many Vikings worked as farmers, growing crops and keeping animals. The Vikings were skilled craftsmen. They made strong weapons, fast ships and beautiful metalwork and wooden carvings. They also made jewellery from metal, wood and glass. Viking women were skilled at spinning wool to weave into cloth and dying fabrics. The Vikings were pagans, unlike most people living in Britain at the time, who were Christians. Gradually, the Vikings became Christians to allow them to live and trade more easily with their neighbours.

End of Anglo-Saxon rule

By AD 870, the only Anglo-Saxon kingdom left was Wessex, which was ruled from AD 871 by a wise and popular king called Alfred. The Vikings tried to invade Wessex in AD 876 and at first seemed to be succeeding but Alfred fought back. He defeated the Viking leader, Guthrum, in battle. Alfred made a deal with Guthrum to share Britain between them. However, the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings continued to fight so Alfred created an army and navy to defend Wessex from Viking troops. Other Anglo-Saxon leaders followed Alfred and their separate kingdoms started to unite. The end of Anglo-Saxon rule came in 1066 with the invasion of the Normans.

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Timeline

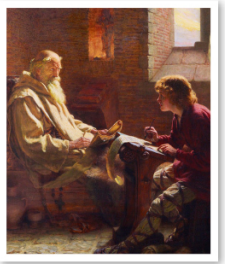
AD 410	The Romans leave Britain.
cAD 450	Angles, Saxons and Jutes invade England and settle on the south and east coast.
cAD 450–600	The invaders claim England as their own and divide the country into seven kingdoms.
AD 685	King Ecgfrith of Northumbria loses a fierce battle to the Scottish Picts, ending Anglo-Saxon rule in Scotland.
AD 731	Bede writes about the Anglo-Saxon invasion in the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.
AD 785	King Offa, the Anglo-Saxon king of Mercia, builds an earth wall to protect the border between his kingdom and the Welsh kingdom of Powys.
AD 793	Vikings attack the monastery of Lindisfarne.
AD 866	Vikings capture the city of York.
AD 870	Wessex is the only remaining Anglo-Saxon kingdom.
AD 871	Alfred of Wessex becomes king of the Anglo-Saxons.
AD 886	King Alfred agrees to share Britain with the Vikings.
AD 899	King Alfred dies in Winchester.
1066	The Normans, under William, Duke of Normandy, invade from France and defeat the Anglo-Saxon King Harold II at the Battle of Hastings. This ends the Anglo-Saxon era.

Famous people

There were several notable people during this period. Much of what we know about the Anglo-Saxons comes from Bede's writing and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which was ordered by King Alfred and distributed around monasteries.

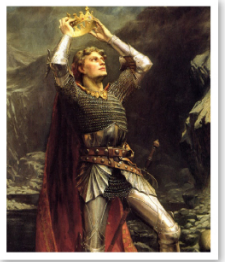
Bede

Bede was a Christian priest who lived in a monastery in Jarrow, Northumberland. He was a great scholar and wrote many books including the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*.



King Arthur

King Arthur was a popular king of England. He worked with his Knights of the Round Table to fight the Anglo-Saxon invaders. Historians are not sure whether King Arthur existed or not.



Alfred the Great

King Alfred is considered to be one of the greatest Englishmen of all time. He was born in AD 849. He defended his kingdom of Wessex against the Vikings, agreed to share England with the Viking leader, Guthrum, and united Anglo-Saxon leaders.

Glossary

Angle	A member of a Germanic tribe who invaded and settled in Britain in the 5th century.
Anglo-Saxon	The people who invaded and settled in Britain from the 5th century up to the Norman conquest.
conquer	To take control or possession of a place or people, by force.
Germanic	Relating to people who speak Germanic, a group of languages that include German, Swedish and English.
invade	To enter a country by force.
Jute	A member of a Germanic tribe who invaded and settled in Britain in the 5th century.
longhouse	A long, single-room building made from wood, stone, mud and turf where many Viking people lived together.
monastery	A building in which monks live and worship.
Offa's Dyke	A wall made from earth that King Offa ordered to be built to divide his kingdom of Mercia from Wales.
pagan	Belonging to a religion that worships many gods.
Saxon	A member of a Germanic tribe who invaded and settled in Britain in the 5th century.
Viking	A member of a Scandinavian tribe who invaded and settled in Britain between the 8th and 11th centuries.

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