

Invaders and Settlers: The Anglo-Saxons

After the Romans

After the Romans left Britannia in AD 410, many towns fell into disrepair and the country became vulnerable to attack. This marked the beginning of a period of invasions from different groups.

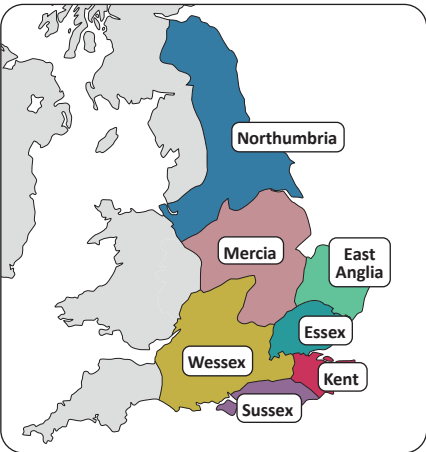
Anglo-Saxons

Invasion

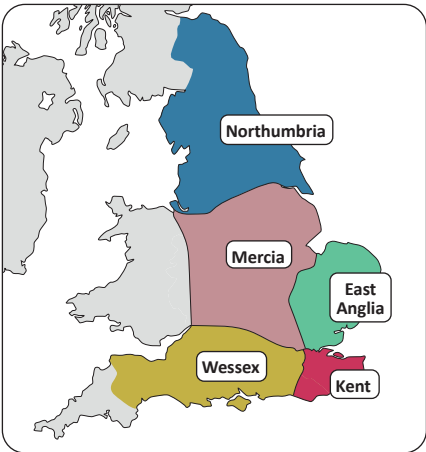
The Picts and Scots tried to invade England after AD 410, because the Britons were undefended. In AD 449, a British leader, Vortigern, asked Hengist and Horsa, two Jutes, to come to England to help the Britons. However, the Jutes realised that the land in England was good for farming, so they, along with the Angles and Saxons, invaded England.

Settlement

The Anglo-Saxons invaded the east and south coasts of England and pushed the Celtic Britons west. They split England into seven kingdoms, which became known as the heptarchy. The rulers of these kingdoms fought each other for land and power. By AD 800, there were five main kingdoms: East Anglia, Kent, Mercia, Northumbria and Wessex. Celtic Britons still lived in Wales, Cornwall, Scotland and Ireland.



The heptarchy



The five English kingdoms cAD 800

Christianity

Christianity declined in England after the Romans left, so Irish and Roman Christians were sent to Britain to reestablish Christianity. Monks like St Columba, St Aidan and St Augustine converted the Anglo-Saxon kings, and then their people, to Christianity. They also established churches and monasteries.

Evidence of Anglo-Saxon Christianity include the writings of Bede, books such as the Lindesfarne Gospels, the ruins of St Augustine’s Abbey and the Bewcastle Cross.

Monasteries

Monasteries helped to spread Christianity in Britain. They were home to monks who devoted themselves to prayer, promoted reading and writing and provided help for the poor. Monasteries were usually built in isolated places and were rich with money and precious objects.



Image from: Getty Images/Heritage Images



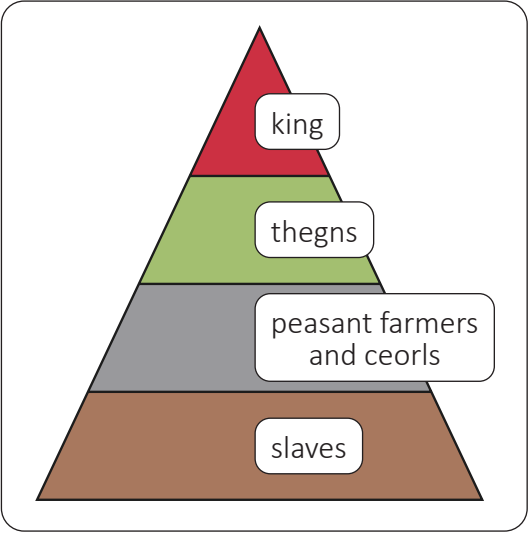
Augustine preaching to King Aethelberht



Lindisfarne Gospels

Everyday life

Anglo-Saxon society had a hierarchy, with a king at the top. Landowners, called thegns, were below the king and peasant farmers worked on the thegn’s land. Slaves were at the bottom of the hierarchy. Most Anglo-Saxons were farmers or craftspeople. They lived in homes made from wood or wattle and daub, with a single room and central fireplace. Settlements were surrounded by high fences to protect animals and villagers from thieves and attack.



Anglo-Saxon kingdom hierarchy

Sutton Hoo

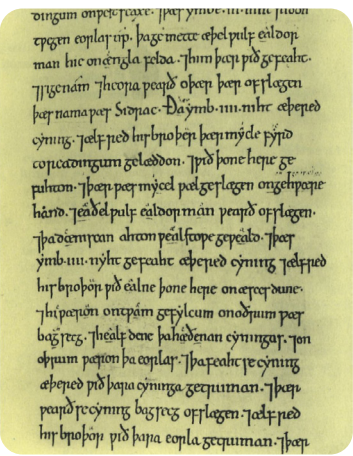
Sutton Hoo is a 1,300-year-old Anglo-Saxon royal burial ground in Suffolk, England. It is famous for the Great Ship Burial and the amazing objects found there including a highly decorated iron helmet.



Image from: Getty Images/Universal History Archive

Legacy

There are still aspects of life in modern England that date back to the Anglo-Saxons, including the English language, the rule of law, place names, Christianity and even the layout of England itself.



old english

