



The Anglo Saxons

Who were the Anglo-Saxons?

The Anglo-Saxons were people who lived in Britain from around 400AD to 1066. They were descended from three main tribes who came from modern-day Germany, Netherlands and Denmark. The tribes were called the Angles, Saxons and Jutes.

What brought the Anglo-Saxons to Britain?

When the Romans withdrew from Britain in around 409, the country was left vulnerable. The Picts and Scotti from Scotland began attacking. The Saxons may originally have been invited by the Britons to help. However, they did not leave once the Picts and Scotti had been pushed back into Scotland. They were tempted by Britain's rich soil. They needed farmland since their own lands had been suffering due to flooding. More and more Angles, Saxons and Jutes arrived. Eventually, these new incomers settled.

How was Anglo-Saxon Britain organised?

The different tribes settled into different kingdoms. Each had their own leader and they often fought each other. By 800AD, there were seven kingdoms: Northumbria, East Anglia, Mercia, Wessex, Essex, Kent and Sussex. As well as fighting each other, the Anglo-Saxons also faced threats from the sea. The Vikings raided and then finally established their own kingdom in Britain.

How did Anglo-Saxon people live?

The Anglo-Saxons built homes and villages. Families lived in wooden, one-roomed huts. They were farmers, who lived off parsnips, onions, cabbage and meat. They washed it down with beer made from the barley they grew. Anglo-Saxons were also craftspeople. They made intricate jewellery, weapons and instruments. Children did not go to school. Instead they helped at home, learning the skills of their parents. Though most could not read or write, Anglo-Saxons were keen story-tellers. Great epics such as Beowulf are still told today.

What did Anglo-Saxons believe?

The Anglo-Saxons originally had their own Gods and beliefs. However, they were converted to Christianity by missionaries. Churches and monasteries were built



and these became places of learning as well as of prayer. Beautiful manuscripts and holy books with hand-painted lettering and designs were produced. The Lindisfarne Gospels is one of the most famous examples. It is a copy of the four gospels made at a monastery on Lindisfarne (also called Holy Island) which is off the coast of Northumbria.

What did the Anglo-Saxons do for us?

Although they were originally invaders, the Anglo-Saxons helped shape Britain. The name England even comes from one of these invaders! Angle Land (or land of the Angles) became 'England'. Many other place names come from Anglo-Saxon times. If you know anywhere with the suffix 'ham'. 'ford', 'stead', bury or 'ton' in its name, these may well be places that started as Anglo-Saxon villages. However, they did not only give us names. The language we speak today comes from the language the Anglo-Saxons brought with them.

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. Where did the Anglo-Saxons come from?
2. When did the Romans leave Britain?
3. How many Anglo-Saxons kingdoms were there in 800AD?
4. What is another name for Lindisfarne?
5. Where does the name England come from?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

E Why does the use of the word 'modern-day' tell us?

E Look in the section 'What brought the Anglo-Saxons to Britain?'. How can we tell that we don't know the exact details of when and why the Anglo-Saxons came to Britain?

V Look in the section 'What brought the Anglo-Saxons to Britain?'. Which word suggests that Britain was at risk of attack?

S Put these events in order:

The Anglo-Saxons were attacked by the Vikings.

The Saxons fought the Picts and Scotti.

The Romans ruled Britain.

The Angles, Saxons and Jutes settled in Britain.

I How can we tell that the Anglo-Saxons were skilled craftspeople?