

Selfless Sacrifice: Anglo-Saxon History



THE DARK AGES

The Anglo-Saxons: 449–1066

300s BC

Celts in Britain

55 BC – AD 409

Roman Occupation

AD 449

Anglo-Saxon
Invasion

AD 878

King Alfred
against the
Danes

AD 1066

Norman
Invasion

300
BC

AD
1

AD
300

AD
600

AD
900

AD
1200

AD 400–699

Spread of Christianity

The Celts in Britain

Before and during the 4th century BC

- Britain is named after the *Brythons*, tall blond warriors who made up one of the Celtic tribes.
- Celtic religion was a form of *animism*, Latin word for spirits. They saw spirits everywhere and in everything.
- Druids, Celtic priests, performed religious rituals.



Stonehenge, built 3100-1100 BC...some of the stones weigh as much as four tons and were transported some 240 miles

The Roman Occupation

Hadrian's Wall

55 BC Julius Caesar leads an invasion

43 BC Celts defeated and driven out by Emperor Claudius

- Over the course of their rule, the Romans build walls, villas, baths, and roads (some still in use)

AD 409 Romans evacuate their troops, leaving physical structures, but no central government

- Britain is left a country of separate clans, making them vulnerable to attack



Roman ruins

Germanic Tribes Invade



AD 449 The invading tribes, Jutes, Angles, and Saxons, push the native Celts into the far west of the country, known as Wales, where they were led by a Welsh chieftain known as Arthur, the "once and future king."

The Anglo-Saxon Society

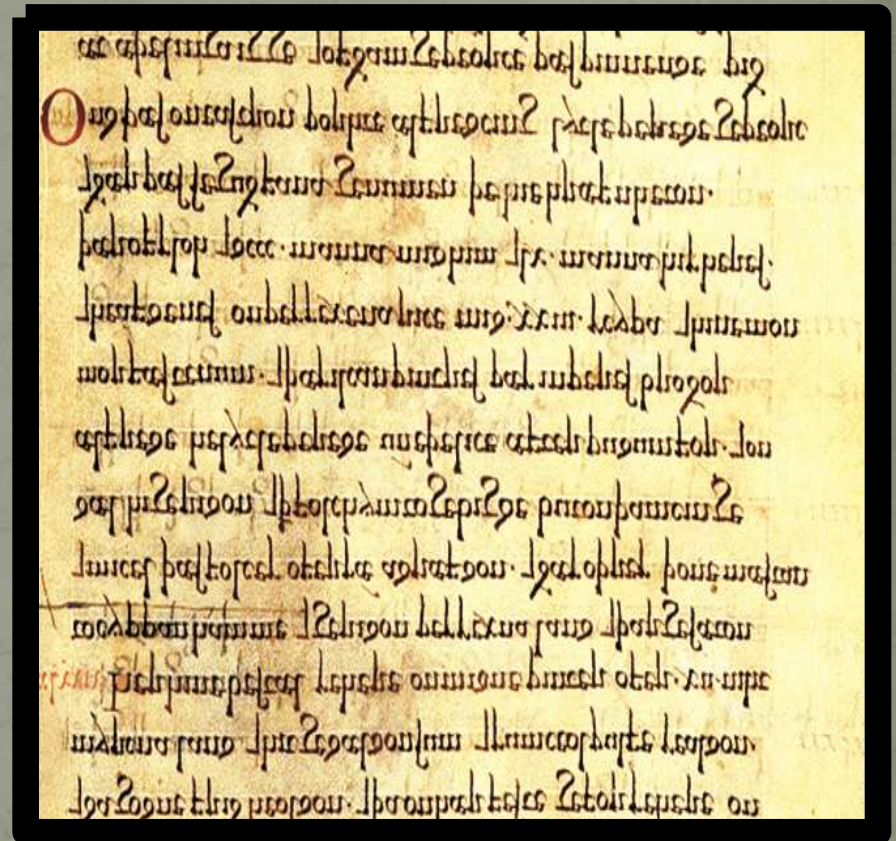
- Germanic tribes that came to Britain in the 5th century are known as the Anglo-Saxons.
- They were the first to bring iron tools and weapons to Britain.
- Families lived in small villages or hamlets.
- They were farmers and raised sheep and cattle.
- They lived in simple wooden houses with thatched roofs.
- They lived in a society of lords and peasants.
- People farmed, fished, and produced fine craftwork.



© Mandy Barrow, Woodlands Junior School

Anglo-Saxon Language

- Their language, *Anglish*, now known as Old English, emerged as a written language, though most couldn't read or write.
- About half of our modern English words are formed from Old English.



Old English

Old English

- Eald = old
- Brodor =brother
- Hus =house
- Nett=net
- Riht =right
- Wyrð=weird; to the Anglo-Saxons, the word meant fate. Shakespeare calls the witches in *Macbeth* the weird sisters; they inform Macbeth of his fate.

Days of the Week

- **Sunday** =Sunnandæg
- **Monday** =Mōnandæg
- **Tuesday** =Tīwesdæg
- **Wednesday**=Wōdnesdæg
- **Thursday**=Þūnresdæg
- **Friday** =Frīgedæg
- **Saturday**=Sætarnesdæg

Anglo-Saxon Religion

- Offered no hope of an afterlife—dark and fatalistic
- Valued ethics over mysticism, focusing on earthly virtues of bravery, loyalty, generosity, and friendship
- Anglo-Saxon hero was someone courageous enough to control response to fate—rather than accept it, they would face it and fight it
- Beliefs are similar to Norse mythology

Norse god	Anglo-Saxon god	Day of week
Odin	Woden	Woden's Day
Thor	Thunor	Thor's Day

Anglo-Saxon Literature

Anglo-Saxon bards (storytellers)

- also called scop
- strummed a harp as they sang songs about heroic deeds
- were as respected as warriors because they provided an element of hope
- Anglo-Saxons did not believe in an afterlife, but warriors could gain immortality through songs. If a bard sang about them, they lived forever in the collective memory



Anglo-Saxon harp

The Spread of Christianity

Around AD 400

- Christian monks settle in Britain
- Christianity and Anglo-Saxon culture co-exist

By AD 699

- Christianity is widespread
- Britain is culturally linked to the rest of Europe



Monasteries and Anglo-Saxon Literature

- Christianity replaced the dark, pagan religion and provided hope, as well as a link to continental Europe
- The monasteries served as a stronghold and developed into centers of learning and faith
- Monks spent almost all of their daylight hours copying manuscripts by hand, preserving not only the Latin and Greek classics, but also great works of popular literature, such as *Beowulf*

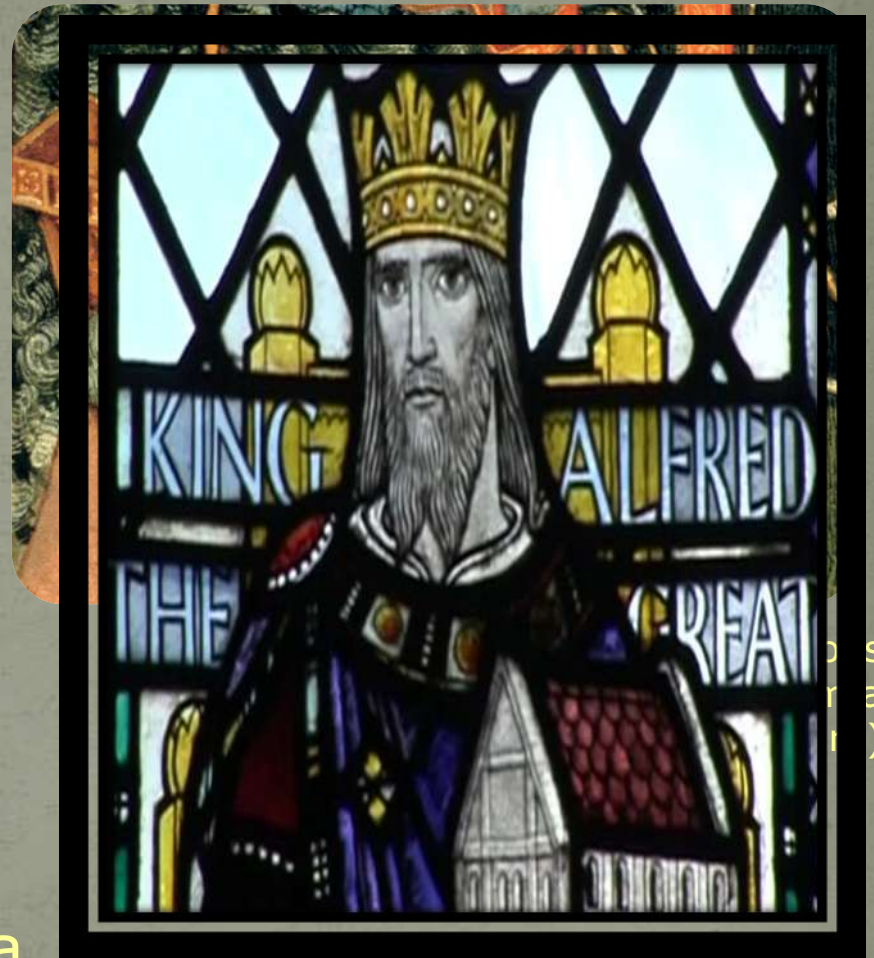
King Alfred the Great against the Danes

8th–9th centuries

Danes, one of the fierce Viking people who crossed the sea in dragon-prowed boats, invade Britain.

871 Alfred of Wessex is king of England

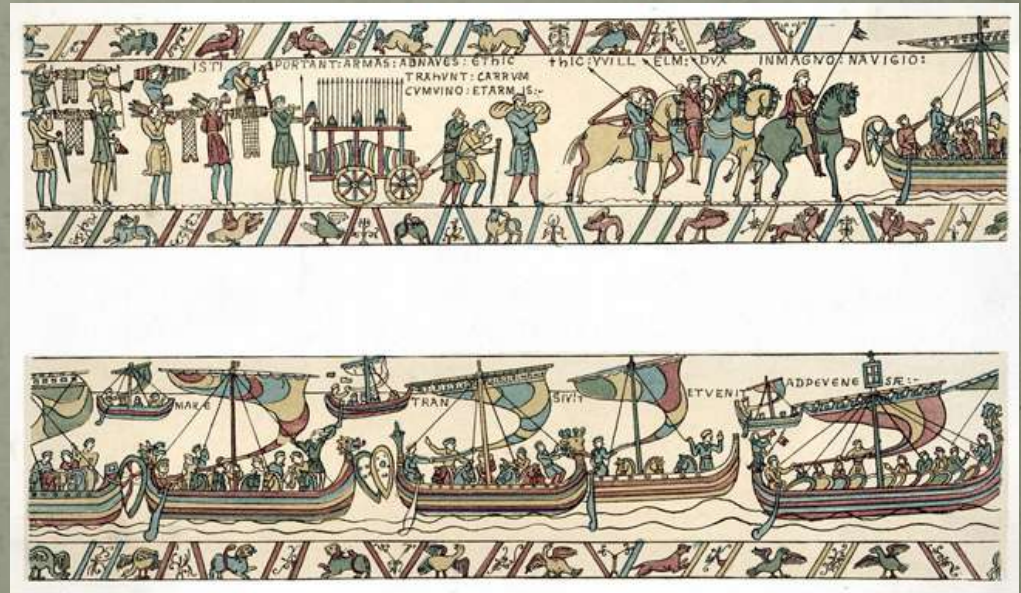
878 Known as King Alfred the Great, he unifies the Anglo-Saxons against the Danes; England becomes a unified nation.



The Norman Invasion

1066

- William of Normandy, or William the Conqueror, crosses the English Channel
- William defeats Harold and Anglo-Saxon army
- French replaces English as the language of the ruling class, and a strict class system is enforced.



The Norman Invasion,
Bayeux Tapestry