

ASTOUNDING ANGLO SAXONS!

Anglo-Saxons raided the coast of Britain from the 4th c AD and started settling after the end of Christian Roman rule in 410AD. A lot of what we know about the early Saxons was recorded by a monk named the Venerable Bede; who is sometimes called the "Father of English History". He wrote his history several hundred years after the settlers came though, so we don't know how accurate his writings are! The rest of what we know is through Archaeology which only gives us some answers, so there is much we don't know about the Anglo-Saxons.



They were a mix of tribes from modern day Germany, Denmark, France and the Netherlands. The three biggest groups to arrive were the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes. The land they settled in became 'Angle-land', or England and our language today is still based on theirs.

England was split into kingdoms – Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Wessex and Kent, until Athelstan united them as one and he became the first king of England.

Saxon lands were divided into Shires which were further divided into "hundreds". A peace officer of a Shire was called the Shire Reeve. This later became known as the "sheriff". Loughborough and Charnwood Forest were in West Goscote Hundred of Lægreastrescir, the 11th century Anglo-Saxon name for the County.

In 800AD Vikings raided Lindisfarne, an island monastery in Northumbria. In the following years, just like the Anglo-Saxons before them, they raided and then settled in England. The Anglo-Saxons would spend many years fighting the Vikings, finally capturing the last Viking-held Kingdom, Northumbria, in 954AD, by which time many Scandinavians had settled and married with the AngloSaxons. During the 9th century Leicestershire was in the part of England subject to Danish rule – the Danelaw. What we call the Anglo-Scandinavian period came to an end with the Norman Invasion of 1066. But as the Normans were actually once Norsemen themselves, it can be argued that the Vikings finally won!

Crime and Punishment

The laws of the Saxons were very primitive. For example, if you stole something you may have your hand chopped off. Murder or injury to another person was punished by a fine called the wergild. The wergild varied depending on the rank of the person. For example, if you killed an important person like a thane you would owe 1,200 shillings. If you killed a lower-class person, like a churl, you may owe only 200 shillings. If you injured someone, different parts of the body were worth different amounts of money.

What early beliefs did they have?

Anglo-Saxons believed in many gods and had many superstitions. The king of the Anglo-Saxon gods was Woden, also known as Odin by the Vikings, who had two pet wolves and a horse with eight legs. Other gods were Thunor, god of thunder - known as Thor by the Vikings; Frige, goddess of love; and Tiw, god of war. They named the days of the week after their Anglo-Saxon gods; Tiw became Tuesday, Woden - Wednesday, Thunor - Thursday and Frige - Friday.

The Anglo-Saxons slowly converted to Christianity from 597AD, when St Augustine arrived in the country, and kept a mixture of customs. In the late 9th and 10th centuries some of the Vikings also converted to Christianity while others continued to worship the old Norse gods.

On display at the museum we have a silver Thor's Hammer pendant from Thurcaston, Leicestershire dating from AD 850-925. This silver amulet would have been worn by a devotee of Thor, one of the main Viking gods alongside Odin and Frey. Thor was the god of thunder and this was only the fourth example of this type of pendant ever found at the time of its discovery by a metal detectorist in 1993.



Life as an Anglo Saxon

Anglo-Saxon children had to grow up very quickly. By the time they were ten, they were seen as an adult. They had to work as hard as any adult and would be punished as adults if they stole or broke the law.

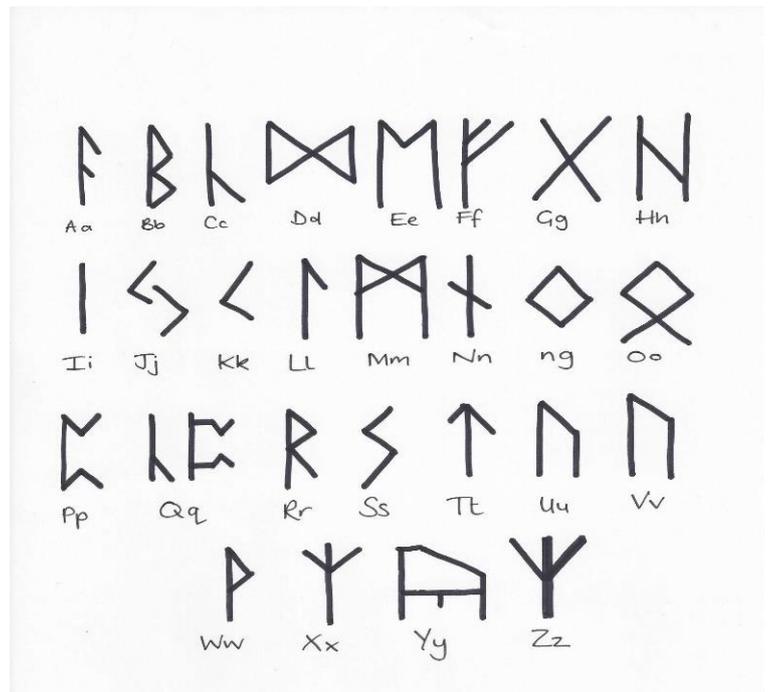


The Anglo-Saxons were great craft workers. They made intricate jewellery, musical instruments and homemade toys and games. This is a 7th Century Gold and Garnet Pendant, found in Shepshed

Girls worked in the home. They were in charge of housekeeping, spinning thread and weaving cloth, cooking meals, making cheese and brewing ale. Boys learned the skills of their fathers. They learned to chop down trees with an axe, plough a field, build a timber and thatched house and use a spear in battle. They also fished and went hunting with other men from the village.

Learning

A form of the alphabet used by early Anglo-Saxons were runes; the characters were known collectively as the futhorc. Early Anglo-Saxons left very little writing behind, perhaps because much of it was carved into wooden objects that don't survive, but is it likely that very few people know how to write and read at all. The great Anglo-Saxon poems, like Beowulf, were learned from memory.



As Christian missionaries arrived, they introduced the Old English Latin alphabet, which replaced the runes. Even then only a few girls and boys learned to read and write. The sons of kings or wealthy families might be taught at home by a private teacher, often a church cleric. The only schools were run by the Christian church, in monasteries. Some children lived there to train as monks and nuns.

Sources and places to find out more!

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/zxsbcdm/articles/zs3gcdm>

https://www.ducksters.com/history/middle_ages/anglo_saxons.php

https://www.bl.uk/anglo-saxons?gclid=EALalQobChMIx6bS-7iN6gIVQ7tChlQUgPuEAAYASAAEgLQYPD_BwE

<https://www.history.org.uk/primary/resource/3865/anglo-saxons-a-brief-history>

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NOW ITS TIME TO HAVE A GO AT OUR
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