

ANGLO-SAXONS

ROMAN TO RUINS

Roman Britain had been crumbling for decades before the imperial army left for good in about 410. But from that point, the culture and politics of Roman Britain quickly fell apart. Villas were abandoned, people left the towns and the economy collapsed.

New ways of living were improvised amid the chaos and it's likely that warlords emerged. In the west, communities moved into old Iron Age hill forts, and **Tintagel** became a centre of power and international trade. In the north, **Birdoswald Fort** on Hadrian's Wall was occupied for decades after the Romans left.

RIGHT ANGLES, WRONG ARTHUR



Within about a decade of 420, new settlers started to arrive on the shores of Britain. Groups of Angles, Saxons and Jutes began to farm in East Anglia and Kent. Irish immigrants landed on the west coast, and Picts came from the north.

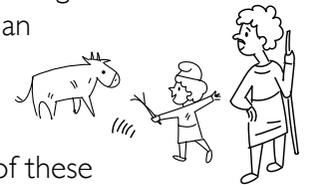
We're not sure what the Britons made of these newcomers, but it seems likely that the process was a bit more peaceful than previously thought – at least to begin with. Some later writers record that the Saxons were beaten back by the British, perhaps under a strong leader. Whoever he was, he wasn't the King Arthur we know from later myths and legends.



By 650 AD almost all of lowland Britain was under the control of new Anglo-Saxon kingdoms like Wessex, Northumbria and Mercia. The Anglo-Saxons, or 'English', were pagans at first, but they were converted to Christianity from about 600 AD.

NORSE NIGHTMARES

Groups of raiders from Scandinavia began to raid the English coast from the 790s. The priory at **Lindisfarne** was an early victim of their hit-and-run raids. Men, women and children were slaughtered or sold into slavery.



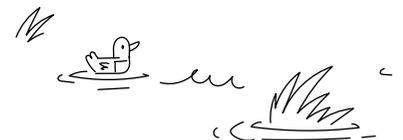
Things only got worse from there. More and more of these Norsemen, or Vikings, took to the seas to pillage, rape, enslave and extort the English. A massive army arrived in 865 and conquered the English kingdoms one by one, before nearly defeating the last kingdom, Wessex, in a surprise attack early in 878.

ALFRED AND THE ÆWESOME ÆS

Alfred, the King of Wessex, narrowly escaped the Vikings and hid in the marshes of Somerset. He eventually fought back, winning a decisive victory at Edington, and over the next fifty years his son Edward, daughter Æthelflaed and grandson Æthelstan drove the Vikings out. They eventually ruled over the whole of England. (That 'Æ' is from the Anglo Saxon alphabet, by the way – no one's quite sure how to say it, but one option is to pronounce it like the 'a' in 'cat'.)

VIKINGS AND THE KING CNUT COMEBACK

The Vikings came back from the 980s, raiding and extorting vast amounts of silver before taking over England completely under the kingship of Cnut. The old Wessex dynasty was revived by Edward the Confessor in 1042, but he died in 1066 without an heir. England was plunged into uncertainty.



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