

# Anglo-Saxons



Plated disc brooch  
Kent, England  
Late 6th or early 7th century AD

Visit resource for teachers  
Key Stage 2

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## **Background information**

### **The end of Roman Britain**

The Roman legions began to be withdrawn from Britain to protect other areas of the empire from invasion by peoples living on the edge of the empire at the end of the fourth century AD. Around AD 407 Constantine III, a claimant for the imperial throne based in Britain, led the troops from Britain to Gaul in an attempt to secure control of the Western Roman Empire. He failed and was killed in Gaul in AD 411. This left the Saxon Shore forts, which had been built by the Romans to protect the coast from attacks by raiding Saxons, virtually empty and the coast of Britain open to attack. In AD 410 there was a devastating raid on the undefended coasts of Britain and Gaul by Saxons raiders. Imperial governance in Britain collapsed and although aspects of Roman Britain continued after AD 410, Britain was no longer part of the Roman empire and saw increased settlement by Germanic people, particularly in the northern and eastern regions of England. This period of history is sometimes referred to as sub-Roman Britain or the early Anglo-Saxon period.

### **Germanic people in Britain**

During the Roman period, Germanic auxiliary troops had formed part of the imperial army and their presence in Roman Britain would have facilitated the migration of peoples from the Germanic areas of mainland Europe into Britain. After the end of Roman rule, more people from the Germanic areas of Europe came to settle in England. Graves and settlements suggest that the British population was not killed or displaced, but instead came to adopt Anglo-Saxon culture. The extent of Anglo-Saxon migration seems to have differed considerably across England. Gradually, the different Germanic peoples formed unified cultural and political groups and a number of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms developed, finally unifying into the kingdom of England in the 10th century.

### **Anglo-Saxon language**

Old English was the language spoken until the Norman Conquest of AD 1066 when, influenced by the Anglo-Norman language spoken by the ruling class, it gradually changed into Middle English. Before literacy in Old English or Latin became widespread, runes were used for inscriptions. Anglo-Saxon literature included epic poetry, sermons, Bible translations, legal works, chronicles and riddles. Famous works include the poem Beowulf and The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle – a collection of writing important for early English history.

## Anglo-Saxon religion

Early Anglo-Saxon religion was a pagan belief system based on Germanic mythology. Remnants of these gods remain in the English names for the days of the week: Tuesday - Tiw (god of war), Wednesday - Woden (god of the dead), Thursday – Thor (god of thunder) and Friday - Fréo (goddess of love). In AD 597, St. Augustine was sent to England by Pope Gregory (the head of the Roman Christian church) to convert the Saxons to Christianity. Augustine landed in Kent and converted King Aethelbert of Kent and his court to Christianity and founded a monastery at Canterbury. Christianity gradually spread across England replacing the Anglo-Saxon pagan religion.

## The Vikings

The term Viking covers the pagan peoples of Scandinavia who spoke Old Norse, a Germanic language spoken until about AD 1300. The Vikings were mainly farmers, fishers, hunters and skilled craft workers. Many Vikings traded with Europe, Russia and Asia, exchanging furs, walrus ivory, amber and slaves for silver, gold and luxury goods including wine, fine textiles, pottery and glassware. In AD 793 Vikings raid the monastery on Lindisfarne. This marked the beginning of a period of raids on the British Isles. Later, restricted by a lack of natural resources and land, some Vikings migrated overseas to Britain in search of better land to farm.

## Vikings in Britain

During the ninth century, Danish Vikings settled in eastern England. From AD 870 they moved west and invaded Wessex in AD 878. King Alfred of Wessex defeated them in battle and established a frontier dividing England in two. The north and east came under Danish control (Danelaw) while Alfred controlled West Mercia, Kent and Wessex.

## The end of Anglo-Saxon England

When King Edward died in January 1066, he was succeeded by the last Anglo-Saxon king, Harold II. William, Duke of Normandy, (a distant cousin of Harold) said that Edward had promised him the throne and crossed the Channel with an army to claim it. William's army defeated Harold at the Battle of Senlac (near Hastings) on 14 October 1066 and was crowned king in Westminster Abbey on Christmas Day. To help rule his new kingdom he built over 80 stone castles, redistributed land among his Norman supporters and in AD 1085 ordered a survey of land ownership which was recorded in the Domesday Book

## Anglo-Saxon England time line

2nd century AD		Ptolemy's <i>Geographia</i> , written in the 2nd century, possibly contains the first mention of the Saxons. Some copies of this text mention a Germanic tribe called Saxones.
3rd century AD	270s - 280s	Germanic raiders, known as 'Saxones', attack the shores of Roman Britain and Roman Gaul. Saxon Shore forts built to defend the southern coastline
4th century AD	350-353	Saxons are settled in Gaul where they support the usurper emperor Magnentius.
5th century AD	407-11	Roman Emperor Constantine III takes the field army of Britain to the Continent to fight continental peoples and to support his claim on the Empire. This leaves Britain unprotected. Saxons are employed as troops by British leaders.
6th century AD	500 597	Battle of Mount Badon, the Britons inflicted a severe defeat on the Anglo-Saxons St Augustine converts King Ethelbert of Kent to Christianity
7th century AD	600 635 c595-640	The Anglo-Saxons control most of central and western England Aidan founds the monastery on Lindisfarne Island Ship Burial at Sutton Hoo, probably a burial for a member of local nobility
8th century AD	760 793	Offa organises the building of a dyke between England and Wales Vikings raid the monastery on Lindisfarne, beginning of a period of raids on the British Isles
9th century AD	850 867 878	Vikings make permanent settlements in Britain Vikings establish the kingdom of York The Danes agree to leave Wessex after Alfred defeats them at the Battle of Eddington
10th century AD	991 994	Battle of Maldon takes place on the coast of Essex. Vikings defeat the Anglo-Saxons Danish raids led by King Sweyn
11th century AD	1016 1066	Canute the Dane becomes King of England William of Normandy becomes King of England

## Resources

### British Museum websites

#### Teaching History in 100 Objects

Look for Anglo-Saxon objects among the 100 objects from museums across the UK chosen to support history teaching. All objects are supported with resources, information and teaching ideas.

<http://teachinghistory100.org/>

#### Portable Antiquities Scheme [www.finds.org.uk](http://www.finds.org.uk)

Find out about Anglo-Saxon finds from your local area using the PAS database or explore a virtual Anglo-Saxon village at [www.pastexplorers.org.uk/village](http://www.pastexplorers.org.uk/village)

#### Books for adults

Blair, J., *The Anglo-Saxon Age*, Oxford Paperbacks, 2000

Hindley G., *A Brief History of the Anglo-Saxons*, Constable and Robinson, 2006

Lapidge, M., Blair, J., Keynes, S., Scragg, D. (eds). *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, Blackwell, 2000

#### Books for children

Sharman, M., *Anglo-Saxons: Britain through the Ages*, Evans Brothers, 2003

## Gallery Information

Room 41 displays material from the early medieval period in Europe (AD 300-1100). It contains objects from the end of Roman Britain (c. AD 411) into the early and later Anglo-Saxon periods. There is a small amount of Viking material on display. It should be noted that the gallery also displays objects from the same period from other areas of Europe including material from the Byzantine Empire (the continuation of the Roman Empire in the east). Objects are displayed in themed cases such as personal adornment and early Christian art. Many of the objects are from burial contexts (one of the richest recovered sources of Anglo-Saxon material).

## What is it like to visit this gallery?

Room 41 is a medium-sized gallery which contains a large number of wall cases, small freestanding cases and one large central freestanding case. The gallery has doorways on three sides giving access to the Roman Britain gallery (Room 49), the medieval gallery (Room 40) and the later European galleries (Rooms 47, 48 and 46). This means that there can be quite a high level of through traffic in the gallery. The material from the Sutton Hoo ship burial is displayed in the centre of the gallery whilst other material from Anglo-Saxon England is dispersed across the rest of the gallery in individual cases and a number of large wall cases. The following cases contain Anglo-Saxon material: Case 2: Franks casket; Case 3: Anglo-Saxon England and the continent; Case 6: Anglo-Saxon England; central freestanding case: The Sutton Hoo ship burial. Students and adult helpers will need to have clear direction concerning the cases to be used for their study

## Case Numbers

Please note that case numbers are usually small, white and high up on the glass.

## Preliminary activities

You may find some of the following classroom activities useful in helping to prepare the students for their visit to the Anglo-Saxon gallery.

### General introductory activities

- Locate key geographical places associated with this period such as Germany, Denmark, East Anglia, Sussex, and Kent on a map. Research the kingdoms that made up Anglo-Saxon England. Compare the location of modern counties with the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Wessex, Merca and Northumbria respectively.
- Discuss sources of evidence for Anglo-Saxon England. What evidence do we have from the archaeological record? What types of objects might survive and what types of things might not survive burial in the ground? What written sources are there for Anglo-Saxon England, for example the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English Peoples*? What problems are there with interpreting these since they were not written in the manner of a modern history but to illustrate particular points such as the glory of Wessex or the power of God? Discuss how place names can provide us with evidence for Anglo-Saxon influence.

### Activities to support gallery activities

- Discuss the role of personal adornment – functional, decorative, display of wealth/status. Confirm vocabulary used to describe different types of jewellery – e.g. necklace, pendant, brooch, ring. Look at examples (real and in catalogues) of modern jewellery. What are they made from and what decorative motifs (images, writing, patterns) are used to decorate them?
- Look at examples of how stories can be told in pictures.
- Make a collection of different everyday materials. Where do the materials come from (earth, plant or animal origin), what are their properties and what are they used for?

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**During your visit**

## Gallery activities: introduction for teachers

The gallery activities are a set of activity sheets which can be used by students working in Room 41. The sheets can be used as stand-alone activities or you may wish to develop work around particular sheets as suggested in the before and after sections of this resource.

- Where case numbers are indicated on a sheet, these are usually to be found marked in white numbers high up on the glass of that particular case.
- You are welcome to select the activities which are most appropriate for the focus of your visit and adapt sheets to meet the needs of your students.
- Each activity is designed to support the students in looking at, and thinking about, objects on display in the gallery.
- Individual activity sheets may be undertaken by single students, in pairs or as a small group.
- Where space is provided for recording this may be undertaken by the student or an adult helper as is most appropriate for the students involved.
- Familiarise the students and accompanying adults with the chosen activity sheets at school before the day of the visit. Make sure students and adults know what they are to do and are familiar with the vocabulary used on the sheets or which they may encounter in the gallery.

## **Gallery activities: briefings for adult helpers**

### **Gallery activity: The Franks Casket (Case 2)**

- The Franks Casket is named after the person who gave it to the Museum. It was made in Northumbria from whale bone. It is decorated on the lid and all four sides with pictures from mythical, biblical and historical stories.
- This activity encourages the students to look at a single object in detail.

### **Gallery activity: Personal adornment (Case 6)**

- The Anglo-Saxons fastened their clothes with brooches made from bronze, silver or gilded silver, usually circular and decorated with patterns and precious stones.
- This activity explores the different types of jewellery on display in the gallery.

### **Gallery activity: Design and decoration (Case 3)**

- Anglo-Saxon jewellery was decorated with different designs and patterns. Case 38 contains a number of necklace pendants made in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD and found in Kent.
- This activity asks students to look for and record different patterns and designs.

### **Gallery activity: Anglo-Saxon jobs**

- Anglo-Saxon objects provide evidence of various specialist crafts being followed by people during this period of history.
- This activity encourages the students to make links between objects and crafts.

### **Gallery activity: Material matters**

- The Anglo-Saxons used a wide range of natural materials – sometimes sourced from the local environment and sometimes traded from overseas. There were no artificial materials such as plastics or nylons.
- This activity looks at different materials and encourages the students to think about the materials available to the Anglo-Saxons and why certain materials may have survived better than others in the archaeological record.

# The Franks Casket

- Go to case 2 and find the object shown below. It is a casket (decorated box) made from whale bone.
- Find the side of the casket box shown below and draw lines to show where the different labels can be seen on the box. The first one has been done for you.

soldier with a spear

an arch

runes (Anglo-Saxon writing)



somebody climbing

a fierce beast

Latin letters (these look like English letters)

- Now look at the other three sides of the casket and tick the box as you find each of the items listed below.

<input type="checkbox"/>	a horse
<input type="checkbox"/>	a swan
<input type="checkbox"/>	3 people standing in a group facing each other
<input type="checkbox"/>	an archer with a bow and arrow
<input type="checkbox"/>	a woman sitting in an arch holding a baby
<input type="checkbox"/>	a mythical creature sitting on a low mound
<input type="checkbox"/>	a bird flying near the ground

- When you have finished, chose one side of the casket and discuss what you think is happening in the picture with the rest of your group.

## Personal Adornment

Brooches were used by the Anglo-Saxons both as decorative jewellery and as a way to fasten clothing (no buttons or zips in Anglo-Saxon times!)

- Look at the jewellery in case 6 and see if you can find an example of each of these types of jewellery. Tick the box as you find them.

<input type="checkbox"/>	bracelet
<input type="checkbox"/>	belt buckle
<input type="checkbox"/>	hair/dress pin
<input type="checkbox"/>	brooch
<input type="checkbox"/>	finger ring
<input type="checkbox"/>	necklace

- Now, look around at the other jewellery in the gallery and find a piece which you would like to wear. Draw it in the box below.

I have drawn a .....

- When you have finished, ask the other people in the group what piece of jewellery they chose and why.

## Design and decoration

- Look at the jewellery in case 3 and find examples of different types of design used to decorate the jewellery. Draw them below in the correct box.

dots	
straight lines	
circles	
swirls	
animals	



- When you have finished, look for the Fuller brooch in case 3.
- The five people in the middle represent the five senses – sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell. Can you work out which is which?

## Anglo-Saxon jobs

Objects can be used to help us find out about different trades in the past.

- Look around the gallery and find objects which provide evidence for each of the trades shown below. Record the evidence in writing or as a drawing in the appropriate box.

potter	blacksmith
glass maker	woodworker
weaver	goldsmith

- When you have finished, see if your group can think of any other jobs or trades for which the gallery provides evidence. For example, the lute in the Sutton Hoo case could have been used by a musician or story-teller.

## Material matters

Below are some of the materials used by the Anglo-Saxons. There are objects made from all these materials on display in the gallery.

- How many objects can you record for each material on the table below?

glass	gold/silver	stone
bronze	fabric	pottery
wood	horn	iron

- When you have finished, as a group discuss these questions
  - Which materials did you find the most examples of?
  - Why do you think that these materials survived so well?
  - Which materials were there less of? Why do you think this is?
  - Did you find any other materials?

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**After your visit**

## Follow up activities: introduction

These activities aim to encourage students to reflect on the work undertaken in Room 41 during their Museum visit.

- Some of the activities draw directly on the information gathered at the Museum while others encourage the students to draw on personal experience or undertake additional research in the classroom.
- Each activity includes a suggestion for classroom work and also an outcome which may be in the form of a written piece, drama presentation or artwork.

## Follow up activity: The Franks Casket

Curriculum links: history, literacy, drama

- The runes carved on the front panel of Franks Casket are a riddle. It reads 'The fish swam up the seas on to the mountainous cliffs. The king of terror became sad when he swam on to the shingle'. Can the students work out what the riddle refers to? The answer to the riddle is a beached whale. This suggests that the box was made from the bones of a beached whale
- Ask the students to make up their own riddles about everyday objects. For example, I am crunchy to eat and I grow on a tree. What am I? Answer: An apple.
- Students could try their riddles out on the rest of the class or during a class assembly. Record the riddles in a class riddle book.

## **Follow up activity: Anglo-Saxon jobs**

Curriculum links: history, technology

- Choose an object which would have been used in Anglo-Saxon times and discuss what skills and processes might have been used in its manufacture. For example a piece of clothing might need sheep's wool to be gathered, cleaned, dyed, spun and woven to make the cloth and then cutting and sewing to fashion the garment from the cloth.
- Create a flow diagram to chart the processes and stages in the manufacture of particular objects seen in the Museum.
- This notion could be extended to larger projects such as building an Anglo-Saxon hut which might involve different specialist skills and a wider range of raw materials to be processed. You might like to begin by thinking about the process nowadays so that the students can draw on their experience of local building or observation of modern construction work to help establish a working model before they research the process as it might have occurred in the past.

## **Follow up activity: Personal adornment**

Curriculum links: history, art and design

- Use the drawings to make a class Anglo-Saxon jewellery catalogue.
- Compare with examples of modern jewellery – what is the same and what is different?

## Follow up activity: Designs and decoration

Curriculum links: history, art and design

- Ask the students to use the different designs they recorded in the gallery as inspiration for their own brooch design.
- Begin by creating a drawn design on paper. This design can then be transferred to another medium such as foil over soft, thick card (the design can then be pressed into the surface of the foil using a blunt pencil) or a circle of dark-coloured card (the design can then be drawn onto the card using a gold or silver pen).

## Follow up activity: Material matters

Curriculum links: history, science

- Consider the original source of the different materials found in the gallery. Research further examples.
- Make a chart of materials used by the Anglo-Saxons detailing their source – animal, vegetable or mineral – and known uses. A similar chart for modern materials could be made for comparison. Has there been a change in the main source of materials? What sorts of objects are made from which material in each of the periods – are any the same, are any different?