

History

Enquiry: How “dark” were the Dark Ages?

The Arrival of the Anglo-Saxons

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Migration to Britain

When the Romans abandoned Britain, it didn't take long for the country to fall apart. Towns became empty, buildings collapsed and people moved to small communities in the countryside. It was at this point that small groups of people known as Anglo-Saxons started to **migrate** to Britain, mainly from Northern Germany. They travelled across the North Sea in boats and were able to settle without worrying about Roman soldiers attacking them. As time passed, more and more people followed them. Eventually so many people had moved across the North Sea that they were able to take control of most of southern and eastern Britain.



Grave goods

Almost nothing was written down during the fifth century because people forgot how to read and write. So historians have very little to read to find out what happened. Instead they use **archaeological remains** to get an idea of what life was like at this time. We can learn a lot about who lived where and what kind of people they were by looking at graves.



Fifth century graves

If you study graves from the fifth century you can see what a person was buried with and the way a person was buried. From this we can identify what kind of person this was and where that person came from. After the Romans left, people were buried with precious things like weapons and jewelry. This shows that a new group of people had arrived with different ideas about how to bury a person. It also shows that some people were richer than others.



New neighbours

At the end of the fifth century, groups started to migrate from Northern Germany to Britain. They are often described as Angles, Saxons and Jutes, or sometimes just as the 'Anglo-Saxons'. We know where they came from and where they settled because the jewelry, weapons and clothes they were buried with are very similar to those found in Northern Germany and Scandinavia.



Coexistence

Many historians used to say that the Angles, Saxons and Jutes killed the local British population, forcing the survivors to Cornwall, Wales and Scotland.

However the remains found in graves suggest that the two peoples **co-existed** and married into each other's families. Styles and fashions often combined both British and northern German styles. Over time, the styles changed but this happened slowly over many years, not suddenly.



Glossary

Archaeological remains: Something dug up from the ground.

To migrate: To move from one place to another.

To be isolated: To be far away from everyone.

To co-exist: To live peacefully together.



Comprehension Questions

1. Where did the Anglo-Saxons come from?
2. What were important Anglo-Saxons buried with?
3. What did historians used to think happened to the local British population when the Anglo-Saxons arrived?
4. Why do historians now think that the British and the Anglo-Saxons married each other?
5. How do we know that the Anglo-Saxons came from Northern Germany?

