

History

Enquiry: How “dark” were the Dark Ages?

The Return of Towns

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The end of towns

After the Roman Army left Britain, people started to move away from towns. The people of Britain realised it did not make sense for them to continue living in towns. Towns were hard to defend from attackers and it was difficult to grow crops as the land had been built upon.



Return to the countryside

For a long time, therefore, the towns were left to fall into ruin, as most people moved to the countryside and the forests to live in smaller communities. It took hundreds of years for this to change and for towns to start re-appearing all over the country.



Trading centres

The reason that people started to move back into towns was because they had things to buy and sell. The new towns were usually based near rivers, because travelling by boat was much faster and easier than travelling by horse or by foot. Archaeologists have found evidence of towns growing again in four major locations: Lundenwic (London), Hamwic (Southampton), Gippeswic (Ipswich) and Eoforwic (York).



Archaeological evidence

We know this because in each place, the outlines of markets and buildings from the Anglo-Saxon period have been discovered. Archaeologists have also found a lot of rubbish showing that the people living there were eating expensive foods. They also used well-made pottery made in other countries. As well as this, Mercian kings were starting **to mint** silver coins. Creating coins is a definite sign that Anglo-Saxon Britain was developing.



Making salt

Another example of a town that started to grow was at Droitwich in the kingdom of Mercia. In Droitwich people made salt — a hugely valuable product — out of the water that bubbled up from beneath the ground. The process was very complicated and for a long time didn't happen after the Romans abandoned Britain.



The return of salt

However archaeologists have found 10 containers made out of stone taken from the ruin of a nearby Roman villa. In these containers, people would have boiled the salty water until the water had evaporated, leaving the salt behind. The existence of these containers shows that there was a complex system supporting the making of salt, and that there was demand for it around the country.



Royal power

The rise of towns as places of trade gave ideas to the Anglo-Saxon kings who were growing in strength. The kings realised that markets could help them get more money. So, the Anglo Saxons kings started charging the people going into markets to buy and sell goods. Collecting **tolls** from the markets in London was one of the main sources of wealth for the Mercian kings who dominated the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.



Glossary

To mint: To make coins.

A toll: A fee paid by someone who wanted to sell something in a market place.



Comprehension Questions

1. Where did Britons stop living after the Romans left Britain?
2. Why did people start to move back into towns?
3. What have archaeologists found that shows people were living well in towns?
4. What happened at Droitwich?
5. Why did kings want to have control over towns?

