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### Angles, Saxons, and Jutes: A Common Language and a Shared History

Most people know of Britain as a place with a long and varied history from the original Celtic settlers of the region to the invasion of the Danes in 856 AD. Few know of the culture and languages of the original Celts that inhabited the area before its colonization by the Romans and the large-scale migration of the Anglo-Saxons. When these Germanic tribes migrated to the island that had been recently abandoned by the Romans who left to deal with trouble in the Empire's heartland, they started a transformation that would bring Britain from a backwater island to a united nation. The diverse history of England allowed the English language to evolve from a backwater Germanic language into a standardized language of literary worth (Middle English). That diverse history includes both a subtle influence of the Celtic British natives and the more obvious influence of Viking invasions such as their take-over of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Mercia and Northumbria and the establishment of the Danelaw, all of which caused English to go from 5 small dialects to a single linguistic standard.

After we explore the rich history of Anglo-Saxon England, we will discover the Germanic and Celtic language families. Then, we will plunge into the influence that the language of the Vikings, Old Norse, had on Old English and get a short introduction to loanwords (words from other languages that were adopted into another). Finally, we'll explore the evolution of dialects in Old English and the creation of the two interesting alphabets.

A large part of English’s development into a language that is spoken throughout the world was the influence of the Romance language family member French on the island nation after William the Conqueror invaded England and established French as the language of the upper classes while relegating English to the lower class. The enormous amount of impact that the Norman Conquest had on English will not be discussed here as we will be exploring the vast world of Anglo-Saxon England. However, Latin will be discussed as the literary standard of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms before Alfred the Great’s initiative to impose the West Saxon dialect of English as the new literary standard. Now, off we go on our exploration of how English started its ascension from the tongue of a backwater island to one of the most linguistically interesting languages.

## Part I: History

### The History of Anglo-Saxon England



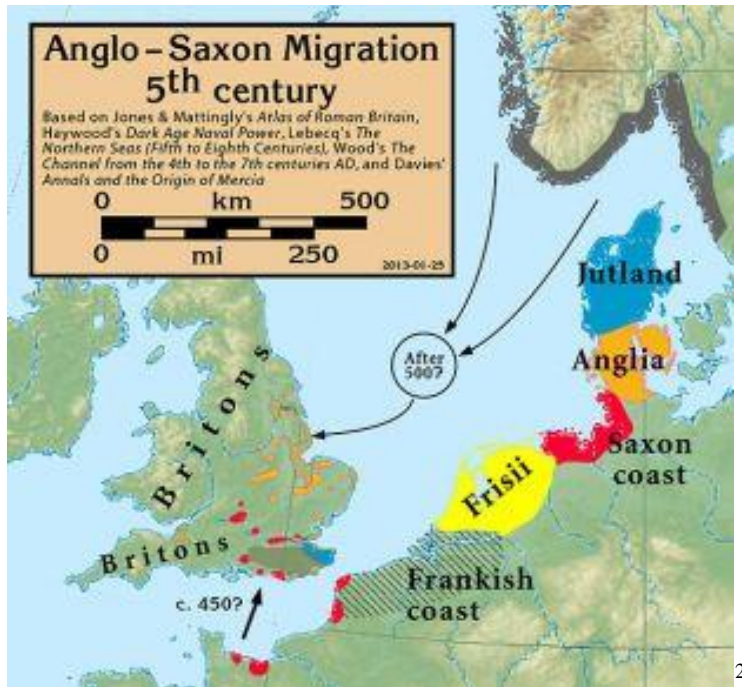
<sup>1</sup> Nacu, Andrei. 2012. "Map of Roman Britain, 150 AD." *Ancient History Encyclopedia*. April 26, 2012. <https://www.ancient.eu/image/575/map-of-roman-britain-150-ad/>.

## Map of Roman Britain

After the Romans drew back from their colonies in Britain in order to focus on the barbarian invasion of their Italian heartland, the Germanic tribes known as the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes migrated to the politically fragmented island in the 500's AD. The Angles originated from the region of Anglia, where the modern German province of Schleswig-Holstein is, while the Saxons came from the West German coast in a region that roughly corresponds to the modern German provinces of Lower Saxony and Saxony-Anhalt, and the Jutes originated in the region of Jutland which is known as the country of Denmark today. The migration of these tribes was not the first experience that the island had with Germanic tribes as they were members of the invasion force in 43 AD as mercenaries and are commonly found in Roman cemeteries in the region today as the remains of those with Germanic ancestry have been discovered.

In order to understand how English became such a diverse language, we must first understand how the Anglo-Saxons came to and colonized England. Prior to the Anglo-Saxon migration, post-Roman Britain was an island of war-torn Celtic tribes who were ruled by chiefs and attempting to recover from the tyranny of Roman colonization. When the Anglo-Saxons arrived and battled the native tribes, this caused the Celtic tribes to band together to fight off another group of colonizers. The conquest of Britain by the Anglo-Saxons took centuries as territory that consisted of modern-day England was exchanged between the two groups. The Anglo-Saxons established regional kingdoms such as Mercia, Northumbria, and Wessex while fighting against the invading Danes from the Jutes' homeland of Denmark in 793 AD. The treaty between the Anglo-Saxons and the Danes allowed for one kingdom, Wessex, to become prominent and absorb the other kingdoms as the Celts had been marginalized and were considered second-class citizens which allowed for the various dialects to merge into one standardized whole.

The migration of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes who were tribes living in what is now Germany and Denmark that spoken a Germanic language is a small but important part of what is known as the Migration Period that consisted of barbarian tribes throughout Europe moving from place to place. This part of the Migration Period lasted from 315 AD to 538 AD with the entire Period lasting from 410 AD to 1066 AD.



Map of Anglo-Saxon Migrations to Britain

In the same period as the Anglo-Saxon migration to Britain, there were migrations of Britons to the Armorican peninsula (Brittany and Normandy in modern-day France): initially around 383 AD during Roman rule, but also 460 AD and in the 540s AD and 550s AD. Many historians think that the migration in the 460s AD was a reaction to the fighting during the Anglo-

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<sup>2</sup> Emery, Katy Meyers. 2013. "Continuity or Colonization: Debating Anglo-Saxon Migration." *Spartan Ideas*. Michigan State University. September 12, 2013.

Saxon mutiny between about 450 AD to 500 AD, as was the migration to Britonia (modern day Galicia, in northwest Spain) at about the same time.<sup>3</sup>

The historian Peter Hunter-Blair expounded upon what is now regarded as the traditional view of the Anglo-Saxon arrival in Britain. He suggested a mass immigration, fighting and driving the native Britons off their land and into the western extremities of the islands, and into the Breton and Iberian peninsulas.<sup>4</sup> This view was probably influenced by sources such as Bede, a Northumbrian monk and historian, who talks about the Britons being slaughtered or going into "perpetual servitude". According to Heinrich Härke, an expert in the archaeology and history of post-Roman Britain, the modern view is of co-existence between the British and the Anglo-Saxons. He suggests that several modern archaeologists and historians have now re-assessed the invasion model, and have developed a co-existence model largely based on the Laws of Ine. The laws include several clauses that provide six different *wergild* or class levels for the Britons, of which four are below that of freeman. Although it was possible for the Britons to be rich freemen in Anglo-Saxon society, generally it seems that they had a lower status than that of the Anglo-Saxons as most landowners and nobles were Anglo-Saxons. Discussions and analysis still continue on the size of the migration, and whether it was a small elite band of Anglo-Saxons who came in and took over the running of the country, or a mass migration of peoples who overwhelmed the Britons.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> James Ingram and J.A. Giles, translators. 2009. *The Anglo Saxon Chronicle: A History of England from Roman Times to the Norman Conquest*. St. Petersburg, FL: Red and Black Publishers.

<sup>4</sup> Hunter-Blair, Peter. 2006. *An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.

<sup>5</sup> Harke, Heinrich. 2004. *War and Violence in the Anglo-Saxon World*. Stroud: Sutton.

According to Gildas<sup>6</sup>, a 6<sup>th</sup> century monk, the initial British resistance was led by a man called Ambrosius Aurelianus, and victory fluctuated between the two peoples. Gildas records a "final" victory of the Britons at the Battle of Mount Badon in 500 AD, and this might mark a point at which Anglo-Saxon migration was temporarily stemmed. Gildas said that this battle was "forty-four years and one month" after the arrival of the Saxons in the year 456 AD, and was also the year of his birth. He said that a time of great prosperity followed. But, despite the lull, the Anglo-Saxons took control of Sussex, Kent, East Anglia and part of Yorkshire; while the West Saxons founded a kingdom in Hampshire under the leadership of Cerdic, around 520 AD. However, it was to be 50 years before the Anglo-Saxons began further major advances.

In the intervening years the Britons exhausted themselves with civil war, internal disputes, and general unrest, which was the inspiration behind Gildas's book *De Excidio Britanniae (The Ruin of Britain)*. At the end of the 6th century the most powerful ruler in England was Æthelberht of Kent, whose lands extended north to the River Humber. In the early years of the 7th century, Kent and East Anglia were the leading English kingdoms. After the death of Æthelberht in 616, Rædwald of East Anglia became the most powerful leader south of the River Humber. Following the death of Æthelfrith of Northumbria, Rædwald provided military assistance to the Deiran king Edwin in his struggle to take over the two kingdoms of Deira and Bernicia and create the unified kingdom of Northumbria. Upon the death of Rædwald, Edwin was able to pursue a grand plan to expand Northumbrian power. The growing strength of Edwin of Northumbria forced the Anglo-Saxon Mercians under Penda into an alliance with the Welsh King Cadwallon ap Cadfan of Gwynedd, and together they invaded Edwin's lands and defeated him at the Battle of Hatfield Chase in 633 AD.

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<sup>6</sup> Gildas. 1978. *The Ruin of Britain*. London: Phillimore.



Map of the kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England

However, their success was short-lived, as Oswald (one of the sons of the late King of Northumbria, Æthelfrith) defeated and killed Cadwallon at Heavenfield near Hexham. Less than a decade later Penda once again waged war against Northumbria, and killed Oswald in the Battle of Maserfield in 642 AD. His brother Oswiu was chased to the northern extremes of his kingdom. However, Oswiu killed Penda shortly after, and Mercia spent the rest of the 7th and all of the 8th century fighting the kingdom of Powys. The war reached its climax during the reign of Offa of Mercia, who is remembered for the construction of a 150-mile-long dyke which formed the Wales/England border. It is not clear whether this was a boundary line or a defensive position. The ascendancy of the Mercians came to an end in 825 AD, when they were soundly beaten under Beornwulf at the Battle of Ellendun by Egbert of Wessex.

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<sup>7</sup> Lawson, Rich. 2004. "Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms in England." *Medieval History Resources*. Shadowed Realm. October 9, 2004. [https://www.shadowedrealm.com/medieval-maps/political/view/anglo\\_saxon\\_kingdoms\\_in\\_england](https://www.shadowedrealm.com/medieval-maps/political/view/anglo_saxon_kingdoms_in_england).

Finally, we come to the arrival of the Vikings in Britain whose language of Old Norse had a significant effect on the development of English by providing it with much of its grammar and vocabulary. Between the 8th and 11th centuries, raiders and colonists from Scandinavia, mainly Danish and Norwegian, plundered Western Europe, including the British Isles. These raiders came to be known as the Vikings; the name is believed to derive from Scandinavia, where the Vikings originated. The first raids in the British Isles were in the late 8th century AD, mainly on churches and monasteries (which were seen as centres of wealth). The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, a collection of manuscripts in Old English that was compiled in the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD during the reign of Alfred the Great, reports that the holy island of Lindisfarne was sacked in 793 AD. The raiding then virtually stopped for around 40 years; but in about 835 AD, it started becoming more regular.

In the 860s AD, instead of raids, the Danes mounted a full-scale invasion. In 865 AD, an army arrived that the Anglo-Saxons described as the Great Heathen Army. This was reinforced in 871 AD by the Great Summer Army. Within ten years nearly all of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms fell to the invaders: Northumbria in 867 AD, East Anglia in 869 AD, and nearly all of Mercia in 874–77 AD. Kingdoms, centres of learning, archives, and churches all fell before the onslaught from the invading Danes. Only the Kingdom of Wessex was able to survive. In March 878 AD, the Anglo-Saxon King of Wessex, Alfred, with a few men, built a fortress at Athelney, hidden deep in the marshes of Somerset. He used this as a base from which to harry the Vikings. In May 878 AD he put together an army formed from the populations of Somerset, Wiltshire, and Hampshire, which defeated the Viking army in the Battle of Edington. The Vikings retreated to their stronghold, and Alfred laid siege to it. Ultimately the Danes capitulated, and their leader Guthrum agreed to withdraw from Wessex and to be baptized as a Christian, which had supplanted the Anglo-Saxon pagan faith as the primary religion of the region. The formal ceremony was



completed a few days later at Wedmore. A peace treaty between Alfred and Guthrum followed, which had a variety of provisions, including defining the boundaries of the area to be ruled by the Danes (which became known as the Danelaw) and those of Wessex. The Kingdom of Wessex controlled part of the Midlands and the whole of the South (apart from Cornwall, which was still held by the Britons), while the Danes held East Anglia and the North.<sup>8</sup>



A map of Britain according to the terms of the peace treaty written by Alfred the Great, King of Wessex and Guthrum, the Viking leader

After the victory at Edington and resultant peace treaty, Alfred set about transforming his Kingdom of Wessex into a society on a full-time war footing. He built a navy, reorganized the army, and set up a system of fortified towns known as burhs. He mainly used old Roman cities for

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<sup>8</sup> Asser. 2004. *The Life of King Alfred*. Translated by Keynes Lapidge. Penguin Classic.

<sup>9</sup> Stroud, Kevin. 2015. "Vikings among the English and French." *The History of English Podcast*. September 17, 2015. <http://historyofenglishpodcast.com/2014/09/17/episode-49-vikings-among-the-english-and-french/>.

his burhs, as he was able to rebuild and reinforce their existing fortifications. To maintain the burhs, and the standing army, he set up a taxation system known as the Burghal Hidage. These burhs (or burghs) operated as defensive structures. The Vikings were thereafter unable to cross large sections of Wessex: the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle reports that a Danish raiding party was defeated when it tried to attack the burh of Chichester. This unification under Alfred the Great allowed for the West Saxon dialect of English to become the literary standard of the kingdom as well as changing the English language dramatically due to the large influence of the Vikings' language of Old Norse.

Although the burhs were primarily designed as defensive structures, they were also commercial centres, attracting traders and markets to a safe haven, and they provided a safe place for the king's moneys and mints. A new wave of Danish invasions commenced in the year 891 AD, beginning a war that lasted over three years. Alfred's new system of defense worked, however, and ultimately it wore the Danes down: they gave up and dispersed in the summer of 896 AD.

On Alfred's death in 899 AD, his son Edward the Elder succeeded him. Alfred's son Edward, and his grandsons Æthelstan, Edmund I, and Eadred, continued the policy of resistance against the Vikings. In Mercia, from 874–879 AD the western half was ruled by Ceowulf II, who was succeeded by Æthelred. In 886 AD Æthelred married Alfred's daughter Æthelflæd. When Æthelred died in 911 AD, his widow administered the Mercian province with the title "Lady of the Mercians". As the commander of the Mercian army, she worked with her brother, Edward the Elder, to win back the Mercian lands that were under Danish control. Edward and his successors expanded Alfred's network of fortified burhs, a key element of their strategy, which enabled them to go on the offensive. Edward recaptured Essex in 913 AD. Edward's son, Æthelstan, annexed

Northumbria and forced the kings of Wales to submit; at the Battle of Brunanburh in 937 AD, he defeated an alliance of the Scots, Danes, and Vikings to become King of all England.

Along with the Britons and the settled Danes, some of the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms disliked being ruled by Wessex. Consequently, the death of a Wessex king would be followed by rebellion, particularly in Northumbria. In 973 AD, Alfred's great-grandson, Edgar, was crowned King of England and Emperor of Britain at Bath. On his coinage he had inscribed EADGAR REX ANGLORUM ("Edgar, King of the English"). The Germanic language family that English is a part of is an important component to understanding how the British Empire came to dominate the world through the spread of its' native tongue.



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The coinage of Edgar the Peaceful, great grandson of Alfred the Great

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<sup>10</sup> Heaton, D. G. 2014. "Middle Anglo-Saxon and Viking." *AMR Coins*. Huddersfield Numismatic Society. April 16, 2014. <http://www.amrcoins.com/information-and-articles/anglosaxon-coins-a-background-pt-1/>.

## Part II: Linguistics

### History of Germanic Languages

Now that we have gone over the vast history of Anglo-Saxon England that helped make English the powerhouse of a language that it is today, we will learn about the various aspects of linguistics that have affected English over time. Examples include the Germanic language family throughout history, the influence of the Celtic language family in Britain, the Viking's language of Old Norse, loanwords (words in English that originated in other languages), and the two alphabets that were used in Anglo-Saxon England. In order to understand how English evolved to become a linguistically diverse language, we must learn how the Germanic languages have changed over time and how they diverged into three different branches; West, East, and North.

All Germanic languages are thought by the majority of scholars to be descended from a hypothetical Proto-Germanic, since it was theorized by the linguist Sigmund Feist in his 1932 paper "*The Origin of the Germanic Languages and the Europeanization of North Europe*". Proto-Germanic itself was likely spoken after c. 500 BC and common innovations that separate Proto-Germanic from Proto-Indo-European have suggested that there is a common history of pre-Proto-Germanic speakers throughout the Nordic Bronze Age. From the time of the earliest historic evidence, the Germanic varieties are divided into three groups: West, East, and North Germanic. The western group would have formed in the late Jastorf culture, that inhabited southern Denmark and northern Germany, and the eastern group may be derived from the 1st-century variety of Gotland, Sweden's largest island, leaving southern Sweden as the original location of the northern

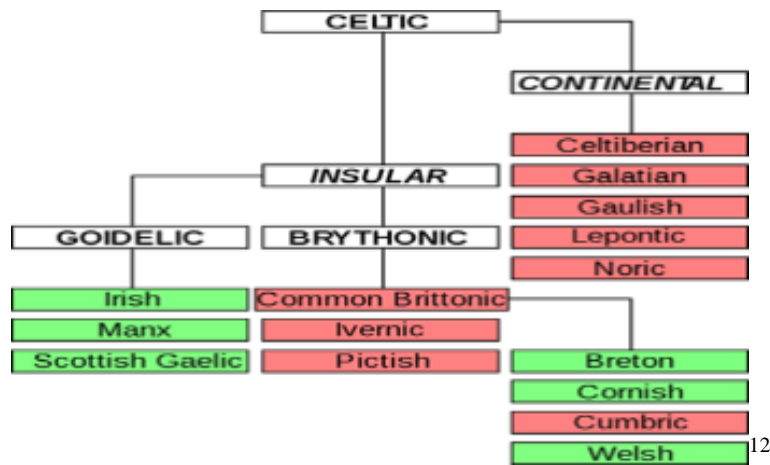
group. By about the 10th century, the varieties had diverged enough to make inter-comprehensibility difficult. The linguistic contact through raids, trade, and invasion of the Viking settlers of the Danelaw with the Anglo-Saxons left traces in the English language. The East Germanic languages were marginalized from the end of the Migration Period. The Burgundians, Goths, and Vandals became linguistically assimilated by their neighbors by about the 7th century. During the early Middle Ages, the West Germanic languages were separated by the insular development of Middle English and by the High German consonant shift on the continent which resulted in Upper German and Low Saxon, with intermediate Central German varieties.

#### A History of Celtic Languages and Their Influence on Old English

The languages of the people of England, the Celts, who resided there before the Anglo-Saxons but had in fact migrated there from mainland Europe were marginalized from the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons. The Celtic languages of the native people of Britain have had a great amount of influence on Old English, even though there are only a small number of words that are derived from the Celtic languages in English. While the culture and language of the invading Anglo-Saxons spread across east and central Britain during the 6th and 7th centuries, the corners of the island continued to speak the languages of the previously dominant culture, the Celtic peoples who are believed to have begun arriving around 600 BC. Prior to their arrival in Britain, the Celts had already spread their influence across most of central Europe and interacted with the various Germanic tribes. <sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ball, Martin J., and Nicole Mueller, eds. 2009. *The Celtic Languages*. New York City, NY: Routledge.

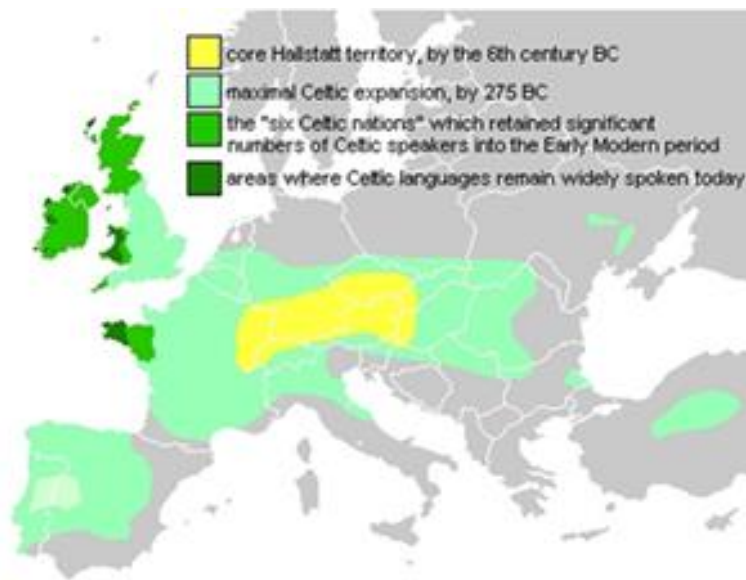


Celtic Languages Family Tree (Languages in Red are Extinct)

However, the Anglo-Saxons terrorized rather than integrated with the Celts by pushing them into the farthest corners of Britain and imposing their native languages on them, and so their languages became isolated in corners of the isle, until the efficiency of the Norman Conquest created a linguistic hierarchy with Celtic languages entrenched firmly at the bottom. The historian Peter Hunter-Blair explained the earlier way of thinking about the effects of the Anglo-Saxon invasion on the Celts. He suggested that there was a mass immigration that resulted in the Anglo-Saxons fighting and driving the Celtic tribes off their land and into the wilds of Britain. However, this view was most likely influenced by sources such as Bede who spoke of the Britons being slaughtered or going into "perpetual servitude". According to Heinrich Härke, an archaeologist whose expertise lies in Anglo-Saxon and Norman England, the modern and more likely view is one of co-existence between the British and the Anglo-Saxons. He tells us that several modern archaeologists and historians have re-assessed the invasion model, and have developed a co-existence model that is largely based on the Laws of Ine. The Laws of Ine showcase the class-based system of Anglo-Saxon England through their inclusion of several clauses that provide six

<sup>12</sup> "Celtic Languages." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation. December 23, 2016. [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Celtic\\_language\\_family\\_tree.svg](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Celtic_language_family_tree.svg).

different wergild or class levels for the Britons, of which four are below that of freeman. Celts could become rich freemen and own land but they generally had a lower status than that of the Anglo-Saxons as the majority of landowners and nobles were Anglo-Saxons. There is a continuing discussion over the nature of the Anglo-Saxon migration and whether it was a small elite band of Anglo-Saxons who came in and took over the running of the country, or a mass migration of peoples who overwhelmed the Britons. The areas of land that remained dominantly Celtic are divided linguistically into two branches – Goidelic (Gaelic) and Brythonic (British). The Goidelic languages consist of Irish, Highland Scottish and Manx. The Brythonic branch is made up of Welsh, Cornish and Breton.



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### Historical Spread of Celtic Languages

The social stigma that has been attached to the worth of Celtic languages in British society throughout the last thousand years seems responsible for the lack of Celtic loan words in the English language, a language that is well-known for its borrowing of words from many other

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<sup>13</sup> “Before English (Prehistory- 500 AD).” *The History of English*. August 8, 2011. [https://www.thehistoryofenglish.com/history\\_before.html](https://www.thehistoryofenglish.com/history_before.html).

languages. Celtic languages were viewed as inferior as the Anglo-Saxons made up the majority of the nobles, merchants, and landowners. The few words that have survived are usually words with geographical significance and place names. Unfortunately, the various branches became geographically isolated, preventing any opportunity at standardization as an alternative to the centralized English social and political structure.

There are two hypotheses for the grouping of Celtic languages. One hypothesis is geographic in nature and distinguishes Continental Celtic and Insular Celtic, arguing that the differences between the Goidelic and Brittonic languages arose after these split off from the Continental Celtic languages. The second hypothesis is linguistic in nature and distinguishes between P-Celtic and Q-Celtic, putting most of the Gaulish and Brittonic languages in the former group and the Goidelic and Celtiberian languages in the latter, while arguing that the linguistic similarities between the Goidelic and Celtiberian branches and the Gaulish and Brittonic branches arose due to their common origin as the Continental languages gave rise to the Insular languages as the Celts migrated into Britain.

Now we come to the curious case of Celtic loanwords in Old English which typically originate from three identifiable sources – from the continent (usually words associated with conflict and battle as the Celts were often used as mercenaries, and loans from after the settlement of the Anglo-Saxons which are usually place names. Some names that survive are the names of rivers such as the Thames and the Yare, and important Roman towns such as London, York and Lincoln. The name Cornwall is an Anglicized form of the original name for the people who inhabited the far south-west of Britain with “kern” being a tribal name or a word meaning “rock”, and "wall" coming from Old English weahlas meaning "foreigners". Parallel names are common in the south-west as well – for example St. Ives is also known by its Cornish name of Porthia.



While the contribution of Celtic languages to the English language seems quite disproportionate to the importance and longevity of Celtic culture within British society over time, it is important to remember that the place names that have been created are still a useful reminder of the ways in which past society viewed their surroundings, and the names they chose feature the characteristics of the land as it was observed by those who lived during that time. At the same time, the lack of apparent word sharing apart from place names is indicative of how effective a social and political tool that language can be by creating a class system through language usage. However, the very social stigma that suppressed the use of Celtic languages as they were classified as the languages of the lower class is the same stigma that prevents us from learning the full extent of the influence those languages have had on English. The nature of the Anglo-Saxon migrations indicates that isolated pockets of Celtic peoples would have been scattered all over the country and existed side by side in separate communities, eventually inter-marrying and becoming absorbed into Anglo-Saxon culture. The apparent lack of Celtic words in Old English may be because we do not yet understand how the languages of these people merged together and developed until these groups came to share a common language. Another language that had immense influence on English is Old Norse, which the invading Vikings spoke and spread throughout the land with their conquests and their inhabitation of the Danelaw.

### The History of Old Norse and its Influence on Old English

Now we will delve into the considerable reach that the Vikings had on the development of Old English, as the raids and occupation of Britain by the Vikings were a considerable influence on Old English through their tongue of Old Norse. Vikings from what is now Norway and

Denmark began to raid parts of Britain beginning in the late 700's. In 865, however, a major invasion of England was launched by what the Anglo-Saxons called the Great Heathen Army, which brought large parts of northern and eastern England under Scandinavian control that became known as the Danelaw. Most of these areas were retaken by the English under Edward the Elder in the early 900's, although the regions of York and Northumbria were not regained by the English until the death of Eric Bloodaxe in 954.

The Anglo-Saxons who called Britain home and the invading Scandinavians spoke related languages from different branches of the Germanic language family. English was a member of the Western branch of the Germanic language family while the language known as Old Norse was a member of the Northern branch of the Germanic language family

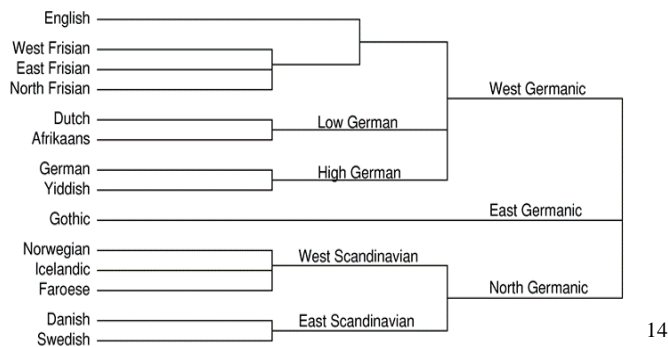


Chart clarifying the branches of the Germanic language family and their descendants

Significant numbers of Old Norse speakers settled in the area known as the Danelaw which consisted of northern and western England. The extensive contact that existed between Old English and Old Norse speakers, including the possibility of intermarriage that resulted from the

<sup>14</sup> Gooskens, Charlotte, and Wilbert Heringa. 2012. The Genetic Tree of Germanic Languages. . *ResearchGate*. [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-genetic-tree-of-Germanic-languages\\_fig1\\_237534065](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-genetic-tree-of-Germanic-languages_fig1_237534065).

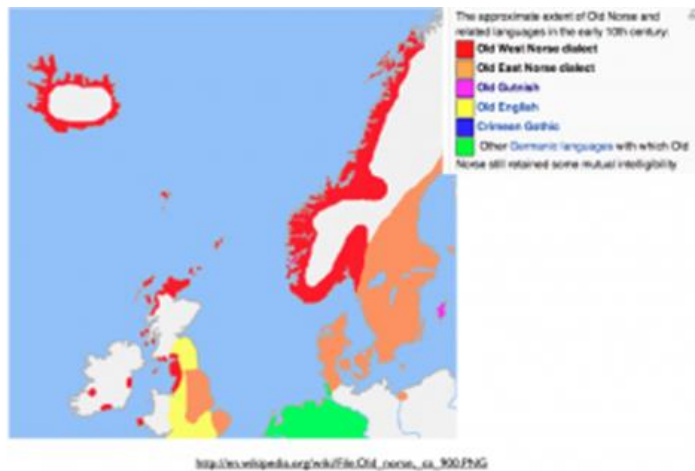
acceptance and eventual mass conversion of the Danes to Christianity, definitely influenced the varieties of those languages spoken in the areas of contact. Some scholars even theorize that Old English and Old Norse mixed together creating a creole that became Middle English and eventually the Modern English language. Two dialects were commonly used as the West Saxon dialect that was spoken in Wessex became the literary standard in which most Old English poetry and prose is found written in while the Midland dialect that was spoken in Mercia might have served as a spoken lingua franca.<sup>15</sup>

Old Norse was a Northern Germanic language that was spoken by inhabitants of Scandinavia and inhabitants of their overseas settlements from about the 800's to the 1200's. The Proto-Norse language developed into Old Norse by the 700's. Old Norse was divided into three branches: Old West Norse, Old East Norse, and Old Gutnish. Old West and East Norse had almost no geographical boundaries as Old East Norse traits were found in Norway and Old West Norse traits could be found in Sweden. Old West Norse was primarily spoken in what is now Iceland and Norway. Old East Norse was primarily spoken in what is now Denmark and Sweden. Old Gutnish, the most obscure dialect, is sometimes included in the Old East Norse dialectal branch due to geographical associations as it was spoken in an island off of the coast of Sweden known as Gotland but it is generally considered to be the sole member of a separate branch of Old Norse. Old West Norse was also spoken in Scandinavian settlements in Ireland, Scotland, northern England, and settlements in Normandy. Old East Norse was also spoken in what is now Russia, eastern England, and other settlements in Normandy. In the 1000's, Old Norse was the most widely

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<sup>15</sup> Comrie, Bernard, and John A. Hawkins. 2009. "Germanic Languages" *The World's Major Languages*. London: Routledge.

spoken European language, ranging from the colony of Vinland in the West to the Volga River in what is now Russia in the East.



16

#### Map of Old Norse Dialects and Related Languages

Only about 150 Old Norse words, all of which are related to government and administration, are found in Old English writing. The borrowing of words of this type was influenced by Scandinavian rule in the region known as the Danelaw. However, most surviving Old English texts such as *Beowulf* are written in the West Saxon dialect that largely developed in Wessex which was outside of the area of Norse influence; so it is not entirely clear to what extent Old Norse influenced the dialects that were spoken in eastern and northern England that were under Scandinavian rule at the time. Texts in Middle English such as Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* which was based on the eastern Midland dialect that originated in Mercia, one of the kingdoms that had been conquered by the Vikings, show how extensive the impact that Old Norse had on the written language.

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<sup>16</sup> “Old Norse Language Map.” 2012. *GeoCurrents*. October 10, 2012. <http://www.geocurrents.info/cultural-geography/linguistic-geography/103-errors-in-mapping-indo-european-languages-in-bouckaert-et-al-part-iv-central-europe/attachment/old-norse-language-map>.

Arguably, Old Norse had one of the largest impacts on the English language as it gave us numerous loanwords and simplified the language's grammar. During the rule of the Vikings in the region known as the Danelaw from the early 700's to the late 800's when it was reconquered by the English under the rule of King Alfred the Great of Wessex, the interactions between Vikings and the Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of England allowed for significant changes to Old English such as the loss of inflectional word endings and the loss of gendered nouns like those that still occur today in Romance languages such as French. The path of changes to Old English can be confirmed by written examples that changes such as the simplification of case endings and the loss of gendered nouns occurred the earliest in northern England which had experienced the earliest Viking raids starting in approximately 762 and occurred the latest in southwestern England which was the region that underwent the least Old Norse influence. Old Norse and Old English have a close resemblance to each other as they both belonged to the Germanic language family with Old Norse belonging to the Northern branch and Old English belonging to the Western branch. Old English and Old Norse slowly became mutually intelligible as traits from Old Norse were adopted by speakers of Old English. Old Norse may have arguably been the largest influence on Old English but other languages also had a tremendous impact on Old English such as the Celtic languages of the natives of Great Britain. Loanwords are words from other languages such as Latin that have been adopted into the vocabulary of other languages like English. There are numerous examples of loanwords that are regularly used by English speakers from languages such as the Celtic languages of the native tribes as well as the language of the Vikings, Old Norse.

Loanwords: A Definition and History

Loanwords are words adopted by the speakers of one language from a different language (the source language). A loanword can also be called a borrowing. This refers to the process of speakers adopting words from a source language into their native language. It is a consequence of cultural contact between two language communities. The borrowing of words can go in both directions between the two languages in contact, but often there is an asymmetry, in that more words are borrowed from one language than the other. In a case of asymmetry, the source language community often has some advantage of power, prestige and/or wealth that makes the objects and ideas it brings desirable and useful to the borrowing language community. For example, the Germanic tribes in the first few centuries A.D. adopted numerous loanwords from Latin as they adopted new products via trade with the Romans. Few Germanic words, on the other hand, passed into Latin.<sup>17</sup>

Those who first use the new word might use it at first only with speakers of the source language who know the word, but at some point they come to use the word with those to whom the word was not previously known. To these speakers the word may sound 'foreign'. At this stage, when most speakers do not know the word and if they hear it they think it is from another language, the word can be called a foreign word. There are many foreign words and phrases used in English such as *bon vivant* (French), *mutatis mutandis* (Latin), and *Schadenfreude* (German). However, in time more speakers can become familiar with a new foreign word. The speakers of the borrowing language that use this new word can grow to the point where even people who know little or nothing of the source language understand, and even use the new word themselves. The new word becomes a part of the borrowing language, or a loanword, such as *cuisine* or *expertise*. Not all

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<sup>17</sup> Durkin, Philip. *Borrowed Words: A History of Loanwords in English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

foreign words do become loanwords; if they fall out of use before they become widespread, they do not reach the loanword stage. As part of its assimilation into the vocabulary of the borrowing language, a newly borrowed word gradually adopts the sound and other characteristics of the borrowing language. In time, speakers of the borrowing language do not perceive the word as a loanword at all. In general, the longer a borrowed word has been in the language, and the more frequently it is used, the more it resembles the native words of the language.

English has gone through many periods in which large numbers of words from a particular language were borrowed. These periods coincide with times of major cultural contact between English speakers and those speaking other languages. The waves of borrowing during periods of especially strong cultural contacts are not sharply delineated, and can overlap. For example, the Norse influence on English began in the 8th century A.D. and continued strongly well after the Norman Conquest brought a large influx of Norman French to the language. It is part of the cultural history of English speakers that they have always adopted loanwords from the languages of whatever cultures they have come in contact with such as the Celtic languages of the British natives or the North Germanic language of Old Norse spoken by the Vikings.

Loanwords from Celtic Languages:

Bard “traveling musician” ←Old Celtic bardos ←Welsh bardd ←Cornish bardh

Bin←binn “basket, bin” ←British Celtic bennā “wicker wagon-bed “←Welsh benn

Bog “wetland area” ←Scottish Gaelic bog←Old Irish bocc.

Cairn ←carr “(large) rock” ←British Celtic karr- ←Welsh carreg

Loch ←luh (Northumbrian) “sea” ←Welsh llwch

Hog← hogg “young pig” ← Welsh hwch← Old Cornish hoch<sup>18</sup>

Loanwords from Old Norse

Berserk← berserkr ← “bear-shirt.”

Bylaw← bylög ← “village-law”

Club← klubba← “a heavy, blunt weapon”

Heathen← heiðinn← one who inhabits the heath or open country

Hell← Hel ← Norse mythology: Loki’s daughter and ruler of the underworld

Loan← lán ← “to lend”

Ransack← rannsaka “to search a house”

Scathe← skaða “to injure”

Slaughter← slatra “to butcher”

Skill← skil← distinction

Steak← steik ← to fry

Thrall← þræll← “slave”

Thrift← þrift ← “prosperity”

Tidings← tíðindi ← “news of events”

Yule← jol ← “a pagan winter solstice feast”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Wheeler, L. Kip. 2018. “Celtic Influence on English.” *The History of Languages*. Carson-Newman University. April 24, 2018. [https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/hist\\_celts.html](https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/hist_celts.html).

<sup>19</sup> Jordan, John-Erik. 2015. “139 Old Norse Words That Invaded the English Language.” *Babbel*. February 9, 2015. <https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/139-norse-words/>.



The tribes of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes all colonized England but they settled different parts of the island. This geographical separation allowed for dialects that were mutually intelligible to settlers of another area but were still different enough to not be considered one and the same.

### The Emergence of Dialects

Old English should not be regarded as a single entity. It emerged over time out of the many languages of the colonizing Angles, Saxons, and Jutes.



A map of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes' migration to England

Even as the many languages of the colonists became one, Old English continued to exhibit much local and regional variation, the four main dialects were Mercian, Northumbrian, Kentish, and West Saxon. Geography-wise, the Northumbrian region lay north of the River Humber; the Mercian region lay north of the River Thames and south of the River Humber; West Saxon lay

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<sup>20</sup> Rodgers, Clive. 2015. "Anglo-Saxon Swanbourne 600-1066 AD" *Swanbourne History*. The National Lottery. June 16, 2015. <http://www.swanbournehistory.co.uk/anglo-saxon-swanbourne-ad600-1066/>.

south and southwest of the River Thames; and the smallest, Kentish region lay southeast of the River Thames, in a small corner of England.<sup>21</sup>



22

A map of Old English dialects and their corresponding kingdoms

Each of these four dialects was associated with an independent kingdom on the island. Of these, the kingdoms of Northumbria and Mercia, were invaded and overrun by the Vikings in the 800's. The small portion of Mercia that was successfully defended, and all of Kent, were then integrated into the Kingdom of Wessex under Alfred the Great. From then on, the West Saxon dialect became standardized as the language of government, and as the basis for the many works of literature and religious materials that were produced or translated from Latin in that period. Due to the centralization of power in Wessex and the Viking invasions, there is relatively little written record of the non-Wessex dialects after Alfred's unification. However, there are more records of the Mercian dialects as the region was one of two that had been integrated into Wessex. Other dialects continued to be spoken, as is evidenced by the continued variation between their

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<sup>21</sup> Fontane, Theodore. 2018. "The Dialects of Old English." *A History of English*. University of Duisburg-Eisen. April 4, 2018. [https://www.uni-due.de/SHE/SHE\\_Old\\_English.htm](https://www.uni-due.de/SHE/SHE_Old_English.htm).

<sup>22</sup> Prinsky, Norman. 2004. "Notes and Questions on the Canterbury Tales and Old English." *World Humanities*. Augusta University. May, 2004. <http://spots.gru.edu/nprinsky/Humn2001/CHAUGP-NQ-htm.htm>.

successors in Middle and Modern English. In fact, Middle English is descended from Mercian rather than West Saxon. Related to the development of dialects is the development of written alphabets. There were two alphabets used to write Old English, the Anglo-Saxon Runes and the Latin alphabet.

### Old English Alphabets: Runic and Latin

Anglo-Saxon runes are runes used by the early Anglo-Saxons as an alphabet in their writing. The characters are known collectively as the futhorc (or fuþorc), from the Old English sound values of the first six runes. The futhorc was a development from the 24-character Elder Futhark. Since the futhorc runes are thought to have first been used in Frisia before the Anglo-Saxon settlement of Britain, they have also been called Anglo-Frisian runes. They were likely used from the 5th century onward, recording Old English and Old Frisian. They were gradually supplanted in Anglo-Saxon England by the Old English Latin alphabet that was introduced by Irish missionaries. Futhorc runes were no longer in common use by the eleventh century, though manuscripts show that a fairly accurate understanding of them persisted into at least the twelfth century.

There are competing theories about the origins of the Anglo-Saxon futhorc. One theory proposes that it was developed in Frisia and from there spread to England. Another holds that the runes were first introduced to England from Scandinavia where the futhorc was modified and then exported to Frisia. The early futhorc was identical to the Elder Futhark, except for the split of *f* into three variants *F āc*, *F æsc* and *F ōs*, resulting in 26 runes.<sup>23</sup> In England the futhorc expanded.

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<sup>23</sup> Page, Raymond Ian. 2006. *An Introduction to English Runes*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell.

The futhorc started to be replaced by the Latin alphabet around the 7th century, but it was still in use sometimes until the 10th or 11th century. In some cases, texts would be written in the Latin alphabet, and þorn and wynn came to be used as extensions of the Latin alphabet. By the Norman Conquest of 1066, it was very rare and disappeared altogether shortly thereafter. From at least five centuries of use, fewer than 200 artefacts bearing futhorc inscriptions have survived.



24

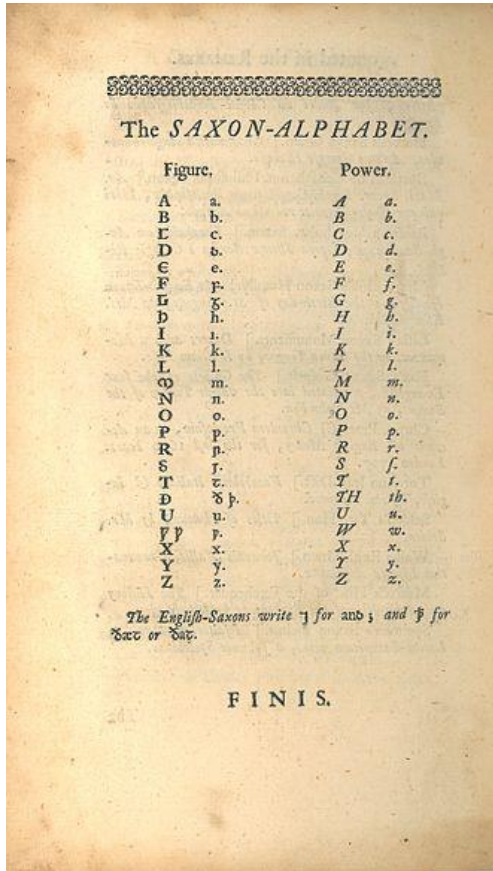
List of the twenty-six Anglo-Saxon Runes including four variations on existing runes

The Old English Latin alphabet—though it had no standard orthography—generally consisted of 24 letters, and was used for writing Old English from the 9th to the 12th centuries. The Latin alphabet had been used by Roman settlers but never caught on with the Celtic natives who continued to use their tribal alphabets. When the Romans abandoned Britain, they took the Latin alphabet with them which allowed for the Anglo-Saxon runic alphabet to be adopted with the migration of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. Of these letters, 20 were directly adopted from the Latin alphabet, two were modified Latin letters (Æ, Ð), and two developed from the runic alphabet (ƿ, Þ). The letters K, Q and Z were not used in the spelling of native English words. In the year 1011, a writer named Byrhtferð ordered the Old English alphabet for numerological purposes. He

<sup>24</sup> “Anglo-Saxon Runes (Futhorc).” 2009. Omniglot: The Online Encyclopedia of Writing Systems and Languages. Simon Ager. June 13, 2009. <https://www.omniglot.com/writing/futhorc.htm>.

listed the 23 letters of the Latin alphabet first, then the 4 additional English letters, resulting in a list of 27 symbols:

A B C D E F G H I K L M N O P Q R S T V X Y Z þ ð Æ



25

A table entitled "The Saxon-Alphabet" on the last page of John Fortescue's *The Difference between an Absolute and Limited Monarchy* that shows the letters of the Old English Latin alphabet, and their modern equivalents

Old English was first written in runes (futhorc) but shifted to a script of the Latin alphabet around the 9th century. The letter ðæt (ð) was an alteration of Latin ⟨d⟩, whereas Æ was a little used combination of the Latin letters ⟨a⟩ and ⟨e⟩ that was also a transliterated rune, and the runic

<sup>25</sup> Fortescue, John. 1724. *The Difference between an Absolute and Limited Monarchy: as It More Particularly Regards the English Constitution*. London: William Bowyer.

letters thorn ⟨þ⟩ and wynn ⟨ƿ⟩ were borrowings from futhorc. A number of changes are traditionally made in published modern editions of the original Old English manuscripts. The /w/ phoneme was occasionally spelled ⟨uu⟩ in Old English manuscripts, but ƿ was more common. The consistent use of w developed in the early Middle English period, during the 12th to 13th centuries. The wynn symbol ⟨ƿ⟩ is usually replaced by ⟨w⟩.

In conclusion, the ascension of the English language from the native language of a backwater island to an incredibly diverse language with influences from two language families. Germanic and Celtic, goes back to the very beginning of the language's history with the migration of the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes from the Germanic coasts to the island of Britain. The history of the Anglo-Saxons is a complex one with many levels as the various kingdoms formed and united under Alfred the Great of Wessex in order to defend themselves against the Vikings. The origin of the Germanic languages is important to note as it allows us to see where English came from. The invasion of the Vikings led to their language of Old Norse having immense influence on what is known as Old English and the Celtic languages of the natives also deeply impacted the fledgling language. Old English developed dialects as the three separate tribes settled different areas of the island, then there are the two alphabets, Anglo-Saxon Runic and Latin, which showcase the evolution of the English language as various runes and letters developed and died out. The period of Anglo-Saxon England is important to the history of the English language as it tells us how the language originated and began to evolve with the settlement of the island, the colonizers encounters with the Celtic natives, and the invasion of the Vikings.

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