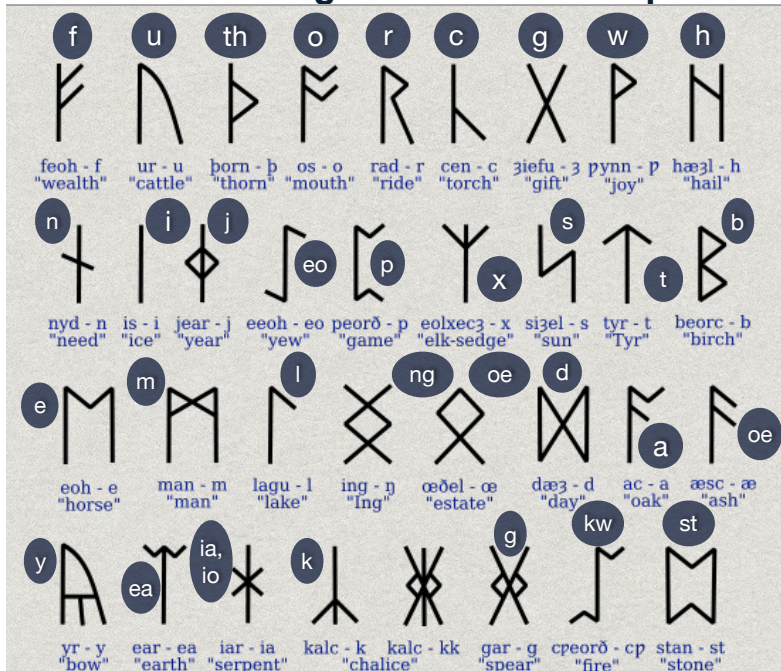


The Anglo-Saxons and the English Language

Futhorc – The Anglo-Saxon Rune Alphabet



The Anglo-Saxon Runes, known as Futhorc (from the first six runes) – Notice how angular the runes are. This made it possible to cut them into wood or stone.

Some General Details about the Anglo-Saxons

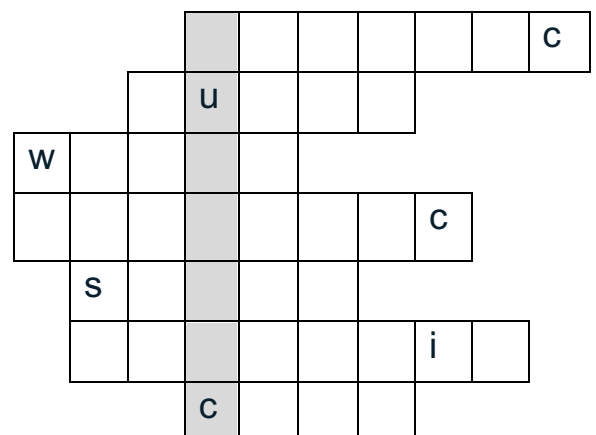
Our verb “to write” originally meant to tear, cut or rip. It comes from the Old Saxon word meaning “to cut” or “to score”. Actually, the word “write” is related to the modern German word for rip or tear, “reißen”. The Angles, Saxons and Jutes were Germanic tribes who used a knife or another sharp tool to cut **runes**, not Latin letters.

Generally, they didn’t write all that much. Our modern written alphabet derives from the Catholic missionaries who brought Latin and Christianity to England, but our word for the act of writing goes back to the Germanic tribes who cut or **ripped** words into wood or stone.

1 Write a message in runes on the gravestone above. It could be a tribute to you or a friend. (Use a pen or pencil, not a knife!)

2 Fill in the words below for each part of the puzzle. The shaded part (shown vertically) spells out the name of the Anglo-Saxon runic alphabet.

- a The name of the Anglo-Saxon alphabet was...
- b The Anglo-Saxons’ angular letters were called...
- c Our word for _____ is related to “reißen”.
- d _____ missionaries introduced the Latin alphabet.
- e The old Saxon word for “write” meant “to cut” or...
- f The Angles, Saxons and Jutes were _____ tribes.
- g The word “derive” means “to _____ from”.

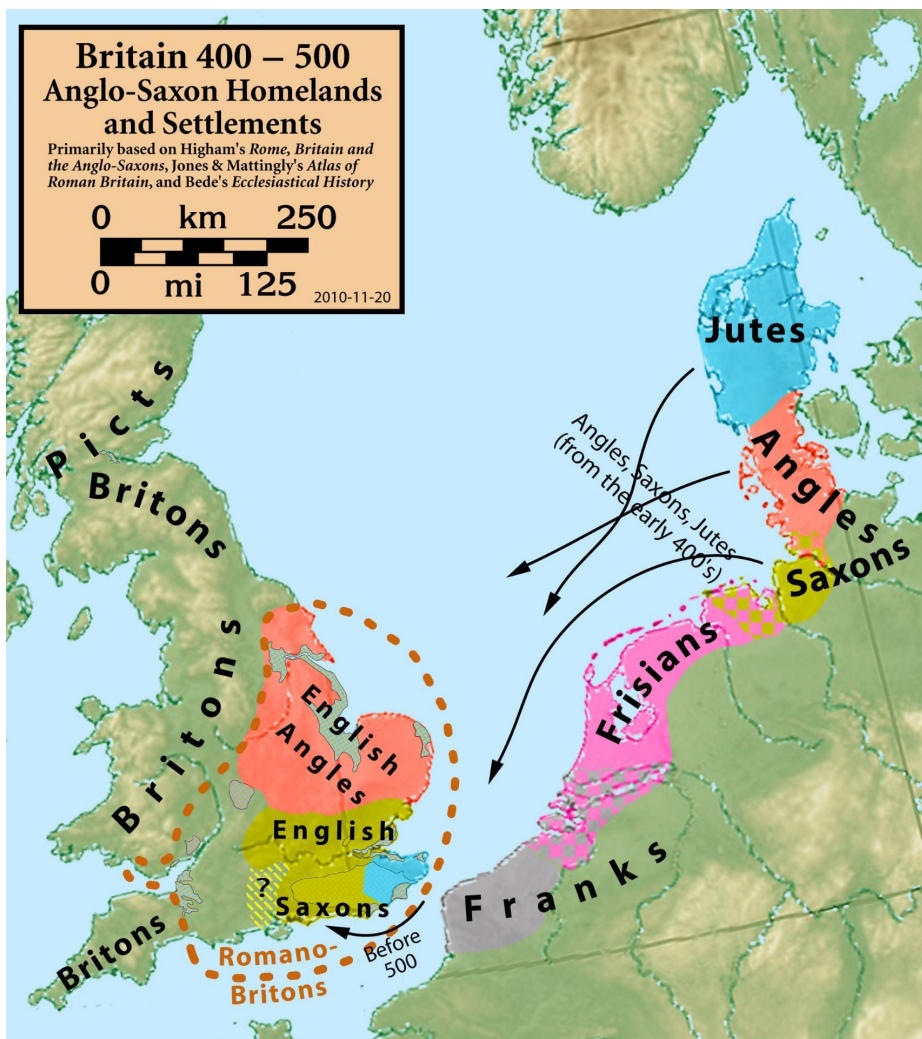


When the Roman **legions** began to pull out of Britain in AD 410, the native Britons were placed in a **precarious** position. For hundreds of years, they had had the most **powerful military force in the world** to protect them. Quite suddenly, that force was gone.

The **Britons** hoped that the Angles, Saxons and Jutes, Germanic tribes, would protect them from the Picts and Scots in the north who were disturbingly eager to overrun them. At first, it seemed like a good notion to let the Germanic tribes visit and become their protectors.

3 Match the sentence beginnings and endings by colour-coding or drawing branches.

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|
| <u>a A legion...</u> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <u>...lived in present-day England, then called Britain.</u> |
| <u>b The Britons...</u> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <u>...were one of three Germanic tribes.</u> |
| <u>c The Angles...</u> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <u>...was a division of 3,000-6,000 soldiers in the Roman army.</u> |
| <u>d The Romans...</u> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <u>...the Roman legions withdrew from Britain.</u> |
| <u>e In AD 410,...</u> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <u>...insecure, uncertain and possibly unsafe.</u> |
| <u>f 'Precarious' means...</u> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <u>...had been the most powerful military force in the world.</u> |



4 Fill in the names of the **modern countries** below. Back then, they had different names.

Belgium • Denmark • France • Germany • Scotland

a The Jutes, Angles and Saxons came from

□ □ □ m □ □ □

and northern

□ □ □ □ □ n □ .

b The Picts lived in the area that we now call

□ □ □ □ □ l □ □ □ .

c The Franks lived in

northern □ □ a □ □ □

and □ □ □ g □ □ □ .

From Wikipedia – in the Public Domain. The origins and destination of the three Germanic tribes: Angles, Saxons and Jutes

Inviting the Angles, Saxons and Jutes to come over turned out to be a critical error, for these three Germanic tribes came in waves from AD 449 onwards and decided to stay. As a result, many Britons withdrew to Cornwall and Wales to protect themselves from these aggressive and overbearing newcomers.

The words “England” and “English” come from the name of one of these tribes, the Angles. They gave us our language. With the passing of time, of course, the English language was to borrow many words from other peoples. For instance, the Christian missionaries brought Latin, the Vikings contributed about 1800 words, referred to in quality dictionaries as Old Norse, and the Normans gave us thousands of French words.

Despite all these contributors to English vocabulary, the soul of the language, the building blocks, the words that are learned by English-speaking children at their mother’s or father’s knee and used in most English sentences, come from the Anglo-Saxons.

5 Find these words in the text above (in order):

- Another word for **mistake**:
- Another word for **moved out of**:
- A synonym for **hostile** or **warlike**:
- Origin of the words English and England:
- The alphabet brought by the Christian missionaries:
- The name for Viking words in a dictionary:
- The language that gave English thousands of words:



Fig. 18.—Ploughmen.—Fac-simile of a Miniature in a very ancient Anglo-Saxon Manuscript published by Shaw, with legend “God Spede ye Plow, and send us Korne onow.”

6 Discussion: What does this picture (in the Public Domain) suggest about the way of life of the Anglo-Saxons?

Once you discover all these details about the origins of English, it becomes easier to understand why the language has so many idiosyncrasies. Here are some questions to which this history provides the answer:

◆ Why is English spelling so unpredictable?

English has a strange concoction of many spelling rules from a range of languages, including Latin, Old Norse (from the Vikings), Norman French and of course modern languages. Furthermore, in the formative years of modern English, the spelling was unpredictable because of variations in pronunciation from place to place and the lack of a central authority that could eliminate inconsistent and illogical spelling.

◆ Why are English and German so similar in many ways?

The language of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes was of Germanic origin. As a result, many of our most common words are similar to modern German words: mother (Mutter), brother (Bruder), father (Vater), house (Haus), sheep (Schaf), hound (Hund), etc.

◆ Why are Christmas and Easter celebrated on the dates of pagan festivals?

This was a cunning idea of the early Catholic Church and Christian missionaries. December 25 was already a pagan feast day known as Yule, so turning it into Christmas Day was likely to be well received by pagans who were converting to Christianity. Some historians also believe that Easter is connected to a goddess called Eostre, though this has been questioned by some scholars.

7 Vocabulary relating to the Anglo-Saxons:

Eostre • Germanic • pagan • Tuesday • Vikings • Wednesday • Yule

a _____ was originally a pagan festival that lasted for twelve days. It was a celebration of the Winter solstice, the shortest day of the year.

b The word _____ refers to religious beliefs other than those of the main world religions. It is sometimes used in a derogatory way.

c Old English, the language spoken by the Anglo-Saxons, is a _____ language.

d Some historians believe that the name Easter derives from _____, a pagan goddess associated with spring.

e The Anglo-Saxons gave us the names of several of our weekdays. For instance, our name for _____ comes from the word Wōdnesdæg, which meant “Woden’s Day” and referred to a pre-Christian god.

f Similarly, the name for _____ is based on Tiwesdæg or Tiw’s Day, which comes from the god of war in ancient German mythology.

g The words from Old Norse in the English language, including *dregs*, *slaughter*, *sky*, *they* and *them*, come from the _____.

8 Write a paragraph in which you describe the Anglo-Saxons, referring to topics such as their origins, their lifestyle, their skills, their social hierarchy, their alphabet and their contributions to modern English.

9 Online presentation and quiz: <https://h5p.org/node/278545>