

Iron Age Britain

Around 2,000 years ago, during the Iron Age, Britain was ruled by tribes of people called the Celts. The Iron Age is the name given to the time period (from approximately 500 BC to 43 AD in Britain) where iron became the preferred choice of metal for making tools. In Britain the end of the Iron Age is linked to the spread of Roman culture following the Roman invasion of 43 AD. They lived in hill forts like this one at Maiden Castle in the South of England.



Community was really important to the Celts because they needed each other to survive. They lived in hill forts because they had to be on guard from attack from neighbouring tribes. They helped each other build roundhouses. The roofs and walls were very good at keeping the wind out. They collected water from a well and firewood from a nearby woodland. They had their own local language. We don't know what it sounded like, no-one ever wrote it down. They used huts for storing corn for winter. They had enough corn thanks to their farmland. They made their own clothes and tools. They traded with other countries for jewels. Growing food was their main activity. Everyone helped, including the children. They all belonged to a tribe called the Durotriges. They were ruled by a king.



This was about to change. In AD43, the full might of the Roman army (who came from what we know now as Italy) landed on the beaches in Kent. Over the next year it battled inland, storming through hillforts and chopping down anyone who stood in their way. The Romans wanted Britain's precious metals. However, they weren't just a destructive force - they built new forts, new settlements and roads. They spread their culture, language and laws.

Even though some historians think the Romans marched as far north as Cawdor, near Inverness, the Romans never really settled in the north. Their main concern was to protect Roman Britain from attack.

Attacks increased in the 4th century and the Roman army finally packed up and left in AD410. Barbarian tribes were attacking the city of Rome and the Emperor Honorius decided, who lived there, that the Roman legions in Britain were needed elsewhere. The Romans were good at building roads and bridges, but not so keen on machines. They had slaves to do the heavy work and nasty jobs. Romans used aqueducts to supply towns with water from springs, rivers or lakes. Aqueducts were like a bridge with a stone channel to carry water on top.

The Romans liked to keep clean. Towns and forts had underground drains to take away dirty water and sewage. The drain pipes were flushed with water from the baths, so they didn't get too smelly. Fresh water and sewers are important. Without them, people risk catching diseases. The Romans were most famous for their roads. To make sure soldiers and supplies could move from town to town quickly, the Romans made their roads as straight as possible. This allowed the Roman Army to move around more easily and from Roman towns to trade with each other. Romans in Britain lived in towns like Canterbury, pictured below.



The last Roman soldiers left Britain in 410. New people came in ships across the **North Sea** – the Anglo-Saxons. The Anglo-Saxon age in Britain was from around AD410 to 1066. They were a mix of tribes from **Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands**. The three biggest were the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes. The land they settled in was 'Angle-land', or England.

If we use the modern names for the countries they came from, the Saxons were German-Dutch, the Angles were southern Danish, and the Jutes were northern Danish.

As well as settling the land, the Anglo-Saxons also replaced the Celtic gods with their own pagan gods. Although virtually no one believes in these gods any more, we still use their names frequently, centuries later, as some of our days of the week are named after them! E.g Thor – Thor's day – Thursday.

Why did the Anglo-Saxons come to Britain?

To fight - Some Anglo-Saxons were warriors who enjoyed fighting. They thought the Britons were weak and easy to beat without the Romans around.

To farm - Many Anglo-Saxons came peacefully, to find land to farm. Their homelands in Scandinavia often flooded so it was tough to grow enough food back there.

To make new homes - Whole families set sail across the sea to live in Britain. They brought tools, weapons and farm animals with them and built villages with new homes.

They were invited - With Picts and Scots attacking from the north, the Britons invited some Anglo-Saxons to help defend them. But they didn't leave! They took over.

In AD 597, **the pope sent a monk named Augustine to introduce England to Christianity**. He converted the Anglo-Saxon king, Ethelbert, to the new religion and founded some of the first Christian churches in England. Within a few generations, the old gods had been largely forgotten and replaced by the one Christian God. Christianity was to become one of the most powerful forces in English people's lives for the next thousand years and more.



In AD 793, monks working peacefully at their monastery in Lindisfarne, Northumbria, were surprised by the appearance of sails on the horizon. The ships drew closer and hordes of warriors came ashore. They ransacked the monastery, stole its gold and jewels, and killed its inhabitants. The monks, who carried no weapons, were defenceless.

Some at the time described the invaders as 'pagans', or people without religion. Others called them 'Danes' or the 'Northmen' (they came from Denmark, Norway and Sweden). It wasn't until the 11th century that they received the name 'Vikings', which means 'pirate raiders'. The raid on Lindisfarne was only the first of many; soon, the Vikings attacked other targets, and in larger numbers. For the next 250 years, Britain faced repeated attacks from the Vikings.

However, Alfred proved to be an impressive military leader and defeated the Viking army, forcing their leader to convert to Christianity. Because of his victory, Alfred gained the title by which he is commonly known 'Alfred 'the Great'. However, he was unable to drive the Vikings completely from Britain. Instead, he divided the land into two kingdoms. The Anglo-Saxon kingdom covered most of southern England, while the Viking kingdom included much of northern England and East Anglia. This became known as the 'Danelaw'*. Many Vikings settled there and, over time, became part of the general population, until it would have been difficult to tell who was a Viking and who was 'English'.

In Britain, the Vikings have had a lasting impact. The Viking city of Jorvik (modern-day York) had 10,000 inhabitants at its peak and was a major trading centre. You can still see the impact of the Vikings on place names today. Places with the suffixes '-by' or '-thorpe' (e.g. **Whitby, Derby, Scunthorpe**) were probably founded by the Vikings.

Septimius Severus – Septimius was born in Lepsis Magna in North Africa in AD145 and became Roman Emperor in AD193. There were three Roman legions in Britain for most of the period, each consisting of 6,000 men. The legions were made up of different ethnic groups from Spain, Africa, Italy and Germany. Severus's army fought hard in the North of England. Hadrian's wall – the wall protecting England from the Scots - had been destroyed by the Scots and he set out to put that right. So in AD 197, he ordered it to be rebuilt! He was the last Roman Emperor to invade Caledonia (what we know as Scotland now). He died in AD211.

