

# Anglo-Saxons

The Middle Ages, 1996

## Anglo-Saxons

Anglo-Saxons are the people on whose language modern English is based. They began to settle in the British Isles during the 400s. For three centuries before that time, England had been part of the Roman Empire, and most of its inhabitants were [Celts\\*](#), who had converted to Christianity. Roman rule weakened in the 400s, however, and the invasion began.

Anglo-Saxons were a group of Germanic peoples living in coastal areas of Denmark and Germany. The earliest to come to England may have been troops invited by the Romans to help defend the region. The settlers came from two main tribes, the Saxons and the Angles. They were joined by the Jutes from Denmark and the Frisians from islands in the North Sea.

The Anglo-Saxon settlers formed farming communities in the eastern part of Britain. They worshiped Germanic gods, such as Woden and Thor, and their rulers were tribal kings supported by bands of fiercely loyal warriors. The arrival of these [pagan\\*](#) invaders drove the Celtic Christian population into Wales and the west of Britain.

There are almost no records of the Anglo-Saxons as they arrived. But in 597, when a monk named Augustine was sent to England by Pope GREGORY I THE GREAT, he found that much of England was no longer Christian. There were still some Celtic kingdoms in the far west and north, but the east was solidly Anglo-Saxon. St. Augustine established his church at Canterbury in the southeast and began to convert the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. (See also [England](#) .)

## Definitions

\* Celts ancient inhabitants of Europe and the British Isles

\* pagan word used by Christians to mean non-Christian and believing in several gods

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