

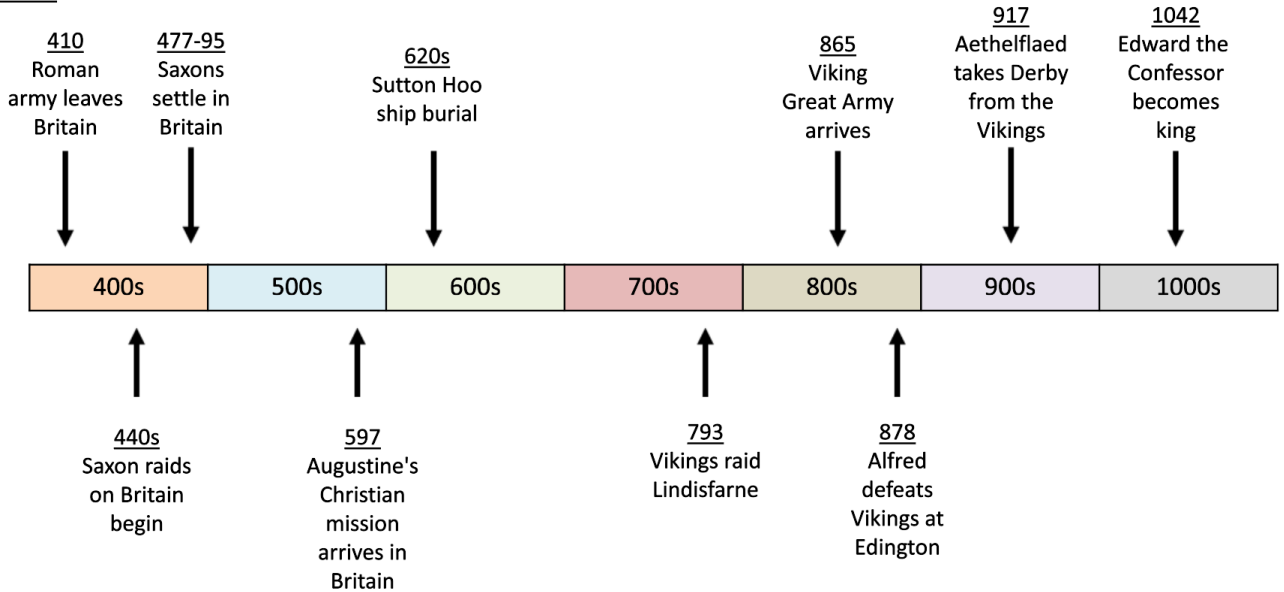
# Knowledge organiser: How sophisticated were the Anglo-Saxons?



## Topic Summary:

The Anglo-Saxons first raided Britain in the 440s. They settled and ruled over the different kingdoms in Britain until these were unified under one ruler in the 900s. Viking attacks on Britain were common during this period and many Vikings also settled in Britain, especially in the north and east. Anglo-Saxon beliefs changed over time and included pagan, Viking and Christian ideas. Evidence about the Anglo-Saxons now challenges old ideas that this period of history was a 'dark age.'











## Key Dates:



## Key People:

	<p><b>Aethelflaed</b></p> <p>Known as the 'Lady of the Mercians' she ruled the kingdom of Mercia from 911. She extended defensive burhs to protect against Viking attack and won a key victory against the Vikings, taking Derby in 917.</p>
	<p><b>Alfred the Great</b></p> <p>King of the West Saxons from 871 to 886, and King of the Anglo-Saxons from 886. He defended his kingdom against the Viking attempts at conquest, becoming the dominant ruler in England.</p>
	<p><b>St Bede</b></p> <p>English monk, author and scholar. He was one of the most known writers during the Early Middle Ages, and his most famous work, <i>Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i>, gained him the title "The Father of English History".</p>
	<p><b>Edward the Confessor</b></p> <p>King of England from 1042 until his death in 1066. He was the last reigning monarch of the House of Wessex.</p>

## Vocabulary:

<b>Anglo-Saxon</b>		Germanic peoples who migrated to and settled in Britain.
<b>Viking</b>		Scandinavian seafaring pirates and traders who raided and settled in Britain.
<b>Sutton Hoo</b>		The site of an Anglo-Saxon burial ground.
<b>Lindisfarne</b>		Also known as Holy Island, home to a Christian community.
<b>Chronicle</b>		A record of things that happened in chronological order.
<b>Pagan</b>		Someone who follows an ancient religion with many gods.
<b>Burh</b>		An Anglo-Saxon fortified settlement.
<b>Danelaw</b>		The region of northern England where many Vikings settled.
<b>Beowulf</b>		A poem in Old English about a warrior who fights a monster.
<b>Sophisticated</b>		Something developed and complex.

**Core Knowledge:**

<p><b>Lesson 1: What can we learn about the Anglo-Saxons from Sutton Hoo?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Before the discovery of the Anglo-Saxon ship burial at Sutton Hoo, historians believed this period of history was a 'dark age' with limited trade and a basic way of life.</li><li>• The evidence found at Sutton Hoo proved Anglo-Saxon society was actually complex and sophisticated, with international trading connections.</li></ul>
<p><b>Lesson 2: What can we learn about the Anglo-Saxons from Lindisfarne?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Also known as Holy Island, Lindisfarne was home to a Christian monastery founded in 634 which was an important religious centre.</li><li>• It was raided by the Vikings in 793, a destructive raid which spread terror throughout Britain.</li></ul>
<p><b>Lesson 3: What can we learn about the Anglo-Saxons from the life of Aethelflaed?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Aethelflaed was the daughter of Alfred the Great and married to the Lord of the Mercians. She became known as 'the Lady of the Mercians' and was a powerful Anglo-Saxon ruler.</li><li>• Aethelflaed played a key role in fighting off Viking attacks. She extended many important burhs and defeated the Vikings in battle in 917.</li></ul>



**Lesson 4: What can we learn about the Anglo-Saxons from the Bayeux Tapestry?**

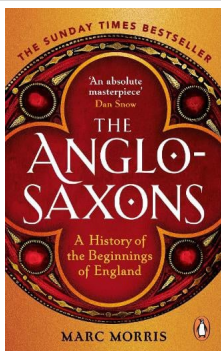
- The Bayeux Tapestry is an embroidered cloth nearly 70 metres long which tells the story of the last Anglo-Saxon kings to rule England before the Norman Conquest of 1066.
- It was made by a team of English women in the 1070s and includes many dramatic events and key examples of Anglo-Saxon beliefs.

**Lesson 5: Summary: How Sophisticated were the Anglo-Saxons?**

- Looking at the evidence, it is clear that the Anglo-Saxon period was far from a 'dark age' as historians used to believe.
- Discoveries such as the Sutton Hoo burial reveal that the Anglo-Saxons had an organised society and an international network of trade. They produced intricate works of art and had a sophisticated system of beliefs.



**What do historians say?**



*"Our understanding of the Anglo-Saxons must ultimately rest on the historical sources, but for most of the period these are extremely meagre (lacking.) The less evidence, the more contention (disagreement.) The fact that so much is debatable means that academic arguments are endless. Engaging with them is like navigating a huge, fast flowing river."*

**Marc Morris, The Anglo-Saxons**

*"The fashioning of a united kingdom of 'Englalande' was not inevitable. The challenges that confronted Aethelflaed and her father – Alfred 'the Great' - were formidable. Fearsome enemies had to be defeated, and the fragments of ancient realms soldered (joined) together. People with distinct and proud traditions had to be brought to share a common identity. A nation had to be forged. The story of Aethelflaed is the story of how it came to be achieved."*

**Tom Holland, Aethelflaed – England's Forgotten Founder**

**Aethelflaed**  
England's Forgotten Founder

Tom Holland



A Legend Expert Book

**How can I find out more?**



Anglo-Saxons: a brief history – the Historical Association



Sutton Hoo and Europe – The British Museum

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