

Anglo-Saxon Weaponry



Introduction

After the collapse of the Roman Empire in the 5th century the peoples of northern Europe - Angles, Saxons and Jutes - quickly moved to fill the power void left in Britain, settling, taking control, and introducing their culture to the Britons.

1500 years later we still owe a great deal to these peoples, in our language, culture, and genetic inheritance. Two of the essential aspects of Anglo-Saxon life were weapons and warfare, and jewellery. The many stunning works in gold and silver left by the craftsmen reveal that this period is unfairly known as a Dark Age.

The legacy of the Anglo-Saxons left behind a whole host of amazing art works in the form of helmets, shields, swords, and jewellery.

The Anglo Saxon Shield

The shield was an extremely important piece of war equipment: in fact for most Anglo Saxon warriors, shields were the only piece of defensive equipment they had, and as combat was mostly face to face, a robust means of protecting the body was vital.

Anglo Saxon shields were generally a circular piece of wood made from planks which were glued together. In the middle of the shield, something called a 'boss' was attached. A shield boss was a round, conical or convex piece of material, such as iron or wood, which was welded to the shield using iron or bronze rivets, that was designed to deflect blows and provide a place to mount the shield's grip. As shields evolved in shape and sophistication, the boss was retained but became purely ornamental

What Were Anglo Saxon Shields Made of?

Willow, poplar and alder were the most common types of wood used for shields, but shields made from oak, ash, birch and maple have also been found. Old English poetry talks about shields made from lime (linden-wood), but few examples have been discovered.

Shields were often covered in leather, to help hold the glued planks together, and the leather was either dyed or painted. Although no painted Anglo Saxon shields have been found in England, painted shields from the same period have been found in Denmark and the epic poem *Beowulf* describes shields as being "bright" and "yellow." There is also evidence that other colours were used, like red, green, black and white, as well as different patterns, which may have signified which kingdom a warrior belonged to, like a coat of arms.

Shield designs



