

# Background

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## The Anglo-Saxons' place in history

After the Roman army left Britain (around AD 410) new groups of settlers arrived from northern Europe. There were three main groups, Angles, Saxons and Jutes, and in time they came to be called Anglo-Saxons.

These tribes settled in the south and east of Britain (in what became England) while the original Celtic/Romano-British population remained predominant in the north and west.



In this early period (AD400 - 600) the Angles, Saxons and Jutes were pagans whose belief system was probably similar in character to the Norse religions (for example, the Anglo-Saxon god Woden may be equivalent to the Norse god Odin). Widespread conversion to Christianity began around AD 600.

The migration phase was a turbulent and often dangerous time, with regular feuding between rival kingdoms.

The new settlers were mainly farmers. In many ways their way of life was less sophisticated than that of the earlier Romans. Instead of stone villas with fine mosaic floors they lived in simple thatched wooden houses. The Roman towns and infrastructure fell into disrepair, were abandoned or were gradually built over.

The early Anglo-Saxons were not a literate people, being unable to read – but they loved telling stories and listening to fireside songs. Their fine craftsmanship, particularly their metal work, is still impressive. Their language formed the root of modern English.

The themes of migration and tension between different tribes are explored in *Freedom for Bron* and have resonance today. The book tells the story of a young slave who helps an old warrior to prevent a war between neighbouring tribes of Saxons and Jutes.