Carved stone cross from Cropthorne, Worcestershire, ninth century. The birds and animals have close parallels in earlier Northumbrian manuscript illumination. (2)

THE ANGLO-SAXON SETTLEMENT OF ENGLAND

MODERN BRITAIN is a mixture of races, a mixture where elements have been growing more heterogeneous for thousands of years. There have been immigrants in search of a better life, refugees from religious wars and victims of political persecution. To find a people who actually conquered the country we have to go back to the Normans. But the Normans themselves were a mixture, descendants of Scandinavians who had settled in northern France among a population that was already a blend of Germanic Franks and Gallo-Romans, and cousins of those Norsemen who had invaded the north and east of England in the ninth century. None of these folk movements – important and far-reaching as they were – has left such obvious traces on the future as that which took place during the fifth century AD, when the peoples who came to be called Anglo-Saxons crossed the North Sea. The largest part of Britain is still called England, and we speak English, a direct descendant of the Germanic language which was brought to Britain by the fifth-century settlers. These peoples are the subject of this chapter.

Tribal ancestry: Angles, Saxons and Jutes

Our knowledge of the Anglo-Saxons, both in their Continental homelands and during and after their settlement of England, depends very largely on archaeological evidence. A few documentary sources should, however, be mentioned, although there has not always been agreement as to their value or as to the significance of the information they contain. Tacitus, at the end of the first century AD, and Ptolemy, in the middle of the second, both list north German tribes and suggest geographical locations for them. Both mention the Angles, although unfortunately they do not seem to put them in quite the same place. Only Ptolemy mentions the Saxons, who, he thought, lived somewhere in the region of modern Holstein. The Angles probably lived to the north, in the Jutland peninsula. It seems to have been the Saxons who made the greatest impression on the later Roman Empire: the system of defences along both sides of the Channel was known as 'The Saxon Shore', presumably because the defences were designed to protect Britain and northern Gaul from Saxon pirates.

By the fourth century, the Saxons had probably moved and expanded south-westwards along the North Sea coast, perhaps absorbing an earlier people known as the Chauci.

One problem in interpreting early written sources is that we do not know what the authors understood by the tribal names they used, and we certainly do not know what the peoples concerned themselves meant by them. A tribal name might begin as the name of a small clan and then, with political or military success, be extended to cover various other, previously separate, groups. Alternatively, groups once affiliated might be separated and realigned with others. After the late fourth century we are dealing with a period in which there was a great deal of movement, of small war-bands and family groups as well as of whole peoples and tribes. It was a situation too fluid for us now to determine precise definitions of ethnic, social or political groupings, which probably were not clearly defined at the time. Our most important written source

◁ **The final glory** of Anglo-Saxon England was its superb manuscripts, of which only a tragic few survived the Viking attacks and the vicissitudes of a thousand years. The provenance and dating of these books, nearly all copies of the Gospels, are matters of some complexity, and the mixture of stylistic elements – Celtic, Germanic and classical – makes it difficult to classify them with exactness. We can be sure, however, that most of them were produced in the *scriptoria* of the great monasteries of Northumbria and Ireland between the seventh and the ninth centuries. The most famous of all, the *Lindisfarne Gospels*, can be dated to about 700. This 'carpet page' (*left*) incorporates a cross outlined against a background of interlace so dense that the eye can hardly decipher it. Later ages looked back incredulously to such books and said that they were the work not of men but of angels. (29)

for Anglo-Saxon history up to the eighth century is the *Ecclesiastical History* of the Venerable Bede, written at Jarrow, completed in AD 731. At the beginning of this work Bede describes the ancestry of the English as it was known to him. He says that the peoples of England were descended from the three most formidable races of Germany: the Saxons, Angles and Jutes. The Saxons came from Old Saxony, now Lower Saxony, the coastal region of northern Germany; the Angles from Angeln, probably the eastern part of Schleswig-Holstein; and the Jutes from Jutland. Parts of these regions, according to Bede, remained depopulated to his own day. The sixth-century Byzantine historian Procopius said Britain was peopled with Angles and Frisians. His contemporary, the British writer, Gildas, did not concern himself with the detailed origins of the barbarian invaders, while the other major English source, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, depends partly on Bede for its earliest sections. Much ink has been spilt over the degree to which these sources, together with other odd scraps of information from Continental writings, can be reconciled with each other and with the archaeological evidence.

Archaeology provides the excavated remains of buildings and graves. Until recently, most of our information came from cemeteries, but there are now a number of substantially excavated settlements, which have begun to balance the picture. During the fourth and fifth centuries the predominant burial rite in northern Europe outside the Roman Empire was cremation, and this was also the rite practised by the earliest settlers in eastern England. Most cremations were contained in pots, usually decorated with patterns which vary from region to region, and which change over the years so that they are very useful indicators both of chronology and of social groupings. Inhumation was not entirely unknown, and was adopted by Germans who settled in or near the Roman Empire, where it was the normal practice. During the sixth century, both in England and apparently in northern Germany, cremation began to give way to inhumation; and in England this process was accelerated once the conversion to Christianity had begun in the seventh century. Pagan inhumations provide a great deal of information about jewellery and weapons because these were often buried with the dead. Pots, 7,8,9 glass vessels, and bronze bowls or cauldrons were also put in the graves of richer individuals. Sometimes fragments of fabric, stuck to the back of brooches, allow some reconstruction of clothing, while the bones themselves give us information concerning the physique, disease and age at death of the population.

Using this evidence, it seems that at least some credence can be given to Bede's account, even if he does give a simplified picture. In the region between the Elbe and Weser river mouths, south of Hamburg in Lower Saxony, many cemeteries of the fourth and early fifth centuries are known from excavations. The best known has been the one at Westerwanna where over four 4
thousand cremations were unearthed before the First World War. More recently, near Stade at Issendorf, six thousand cremations have been excavated, while Liebenau, not far from Hanover, is an interesting site which includes the funeral pyres as well as the actual burials. Some of the most characteristic types of pottery, and the metalwork found in the pots, can be paralleled in England. For instance, one popular pattern found on pottery includes a rosette motif set within zig-zag or arched lines. Many examples of this pattern can be seen in the Elbe-Weser cemeteries and it can also be found in Norfolk, at the cemeteries of Caistor-by-Norwich and Spong Hill. One pot from 11,12,1
Caistor has a face mask which is so similar to a mask on a pot from Wehden that it has been suggested the same p.50(7)
potter made both, so that either the pot, or more probably, the potter, must have travelled from Germany to England. Similarly, a round brooch found at Spong Hill has a pattern of four masks within a border, a pattern found almost exactly repeated on three brooches from Mahndorf, near Bremen. Other types of brooch were popular on both sides of the North Sea. There are round brooches with spiral scroll patterns and 'equal-armed' brooches which also have 5,6
scroll patterns as well as animal borders.

If we consider the Angles, it is again possible to discover a distinctive culture in the region Bede suggests, or in fact in a somewhat larger region, centred on Angeln, which includes parts of Mecklenberg and perhaps the Danish island of Fyn as well as much of Schleswig-Holstein. Characteristic pots from this region have a decoration which consists of contrasting horizontal and vertical lines or grooves, horizontal around the neck of the pot, vertical grooves or bosses across the shoulder. The pots tend to be shallower, wider vessels than the Elbe-Weser pots. Grave-goods include sets of miniature shears, tweezers and razors (which also occur in the Elbe-Weser region, but less frequently), and cruciform brooches. Again, many parallels for these can be found in England. In particular at Caistor-by-Norwich there is a series of 13
pots, all of the classic Anglian type, which suggests a direct connection. Cruciform brooches became one of the most popular ornaments of the fifth and sixth centuries in England, especially north of the Thames.

A rough division between north and south, Angle and Saxon, can be made in England on the basis of inhumation grave-goods: women of the 'Saxon' south of England and the Thames valley preferred round brooches, while in East Anglia and the Midlands cruciform and other types of bow brooch (as well as simple annular brooches) were more common. 'Anglian' women fastened their sleeves with metal

clasps and had cloaks pinned with large bow brooches. Unfortunately this distinction belongs to the sixth century, not to the fifth. Archaeology cannot yet distinguish clearly between the various peoples who came to England in the very early stages of the migrations.

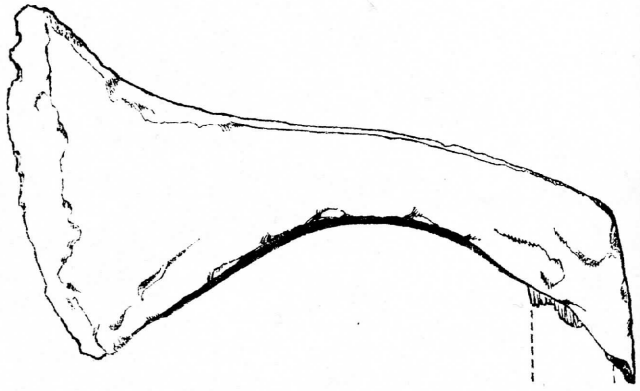
In some places it seems as if there may have been settlers who were already of mixed origins when they
11,12 arrived. At Spong Hill, a cemetery in central Norfolk, the fifth-century material displays a mixture of pottery and metalwork traditions which derive from various parts of northern Europe including southern Scandinavia. A similar mixture is observable in Germany, at Issendorf. It may well be that in some regions movement had already by the beginning of the fifth century produced a mixed culture on the Continent, so that, when some of the people from those areas moved to England, they brought the same mixed pattern with them. There must be some reason for the later dichotomy between Angle and Saxon: perhaps it lies in the ancestry of the eventual ruling clan rather than in any actual original ethnic difference between the

mass of settlers in different parts of England (although one would not expect this to affect general patterns of female dress).

In the fifth century, if not later, there are traces of several other peoples and traditions. The most important group is the Jutes, said by Bede to have occupied Kent and the Isle of Wight, together with part of Hampshire. These areas did have a common and distinctive culture, distinguished by very rich jewellery and weapons, with close affinities to contemporary material from the Rhineland. Because of this, it was for some time thought that the 'Jutes' were in fact Franks. However, this rich culture belongs to the later sixth and seventh centuries and so must have developed after the initial phase of settlement. It is now clear that there are similarities between pottery and metalwork from Kent and from Jutland, although so little has been published from Jutland that it is unwise to be dogmatic. There seems no reason to doubt that early settlers in Kent could have had southern Scandinavian ancestry. There are also fashions in brooch types and in ornament which seem to develop first in Denmark during the fifth century and then to spread to eastern England. This suggests continuing contact. In fact, the quantity of material which can be closely paralleled between England and northern Germany and Denmark now suggests that the period of the migration must have lasted for some time, during which there was communication across the North Sea. Only later, during the sixth century, did England develop separate regional identities and traditions although, as we have seen, their German origins were still remembered in the eighth century.

Other peoples of whom there is some evidence are the Frisians, Alemanni, Swabians and Franks. The Frisians occupied the coastal regions of the Low Countries and Germany as far as the Weser, as well as some of the islands. They may themselves have been partly absorbed into the 'Saxon' culture sphere during the fifth century, and some settlers who eventually arrived in England may have used Frisia as a temporary or more long-lasting base. The fragments of records which relate to a Jutish chief named Hengist suggest just such a sequence. This man came first to Frisia, and then, if he is the same person, to Kent, where his treachery to his British employer Vortigern is well known from Gildas and Bede.

Alemannic leaders from southern Germany, presumably leading units of their own men, were recorded in Britain during the fourth century as part of the Roman army. The presence of Swabians, also from central or southern Germany, is thought to be indicated by the place-name Swaffham, found in Norfolk and in Cambridgeshire. Neither group has left any other traces. It is possible to detect other traditions as well. Both in England and in the Elbe-Weser region there is a



A 'francisca', or throwing axe, from Howletts, Kent; it would have had a short wooden handle on the right. The name seems to indicate that it was associated with the Franks. (3)

characteristic late fourth- early fifth-century type of pottery, which includes vessels with sharp faceted carinations and pedestals. This appears to derive from third-century west German fashions. The tendency towards wider, shallower bowls apparent at Issendorf may owe something to the central and eastern German 'bowl urn' tradition.

The presence of the Franks, once they are no longer identified with Bede's Jutes, is more controversial. Their origin seems to be as obscure as those of other Germanic tribes and it is not clear whether, before they became partially assimilated to late Roman culture, they were culturally distinct from other tribes, for instance from the Saxons. They settled first in the Low Countries and then moved south into the Rhineland during the fourth century, still under the aegis of Roman power. Some were probably employed in the Roman army as federates (*foederati*). These were barbarians who were not simply recruited into the regular Roman army and incorporated into its normal structure. Instead, large groups, perhaps whole tribes, agreed to fight for the Empire in return for subsidies in food and money, and for land. They fought under their own leaders and probably retained their own social and political organization, bringing their own women to settle with them in the lands granted to them. They adopted the Roman rite of inhumation but were buried with equipment and jewellery, which was not the practice of the local Christian native population. Most of the objects found in Frankish graves are, however, of Roman manufacture, apart from a few brooches which are of types known otherwise from the Elbe-Weser region. It is therefore difficult to identify a Frankish grave as such when it is found outside the areas known to have been Frankish, since such a burial might have been that of any barbarian using and being buried with the available Roman objects. Furthermore, although it is possible to find in southern England material which has been imported from the Rhineland, there is seldom

reason to suppose that this could not have happened in the normal course of trade or exchange; in other words, the movement of the objects does not imply a large-scale movement of people. Yet there are a few English graves whose equipment can perhaps be described as typically 'Frankish': a certain type of throwing axe, for example, is called a *fransisca* precisely because of its Frankish associations. Some English graves contain swords of a type probably made in the Meuse valley. In the sixth and seventh centuries there was clearly very close contact between south-eastern England and the Frankish Rhineland and there is no reason why there should not have been such contact in the fifth century, which might well have involved participation in invasion or migration by Franks. 3

Migration and settlement

Having discussed who the settlers were, we should attempt to say why they came. Several reasons can be suggested. The Roman Empire and its wealth was an inevitable attraction to the barbarians, while pressure from movements of peoples further east gave added impetus to the westwards surge of those nearest the Empire. In the North Sea coastal regions it seems that the reasons for the migrations may have been economic. During the second to fourth centuries AD many coastal settlements had been built up into mounds (*terps*) in order to avoid the increasingly wet and flooded lower-lying ground level. This process of isolating the settlements on mounds was eventually uneconomic. Neither arable nor cattle farming could profitably continue in the marshy coastlands, and those terps which have been excavated show decline and eventual abandonment during the fifth century. Even sites further inland, such as Wijster in Holland and Flögeln in the Elbe-Weser region suffered the same fate. In the case of Flögeln the archaeological evidence has been supplemented by analysis of pollen found in the soil, which shows that previously cultivated land was allowed to revert to woodland and heath. Some of the population may have moved south, and in a few cases we may simply be seeing part of a process of constantly shifting settlement within a limited area. The abandonment of so many cemeteries and settlements in the coastal regions must, however, surely be partly the result of emigration. Eastern England is not far from the other side of the North Sea even in primitive boats, and the attraction of an agriculturally rich land with an apparently dissolving political and administrative system would have been hard for the coastal people to resist.

There was in any case a tradition of communication between England and the barbarians. Saxon sea pirates had been attacking the coast since the third century (or even earlier) and barbarians had for some years been employed in the Roman army. There had been plenty of opportunity to acquire familiarity with England and to estimate its potential. To begin with, this might not have been such a danger to Rome because troops, even if foreign, were recruited into the regular Roman army and probably rapidly became Romanized, marrying wives in the provinces in which they were stationed or where they were eventually pensioned off. In the fourth century, however, as we have seen, it became more usual for whole units to be employed as federates, who retained a semi-independent status. These units, however loyal some of them may have been to the Empire, were bound to lead to a blurring of the distinction between Roman and barbarian. Barbarians also rose to very high positions within the regular army; Stilicho, who ruled the Empire for some years in the fifth century, was a Vandal, a member of a tribe whose name has become a byword for wanton destruction.

It has been suggested that the existence and distribution of these Germanic soldiers, whose presence is certainly historically recorded, can be traced in the archaeological record. Particularly important in this respect are certain types of belt equipment. During the fifth century – perhaps under eastern influence, perhaps as result of barbarian taste – large and elaborate bronze buckles and other fittings for belts became popular. 2 Most of these have been found in towns, forts or graves along the Rhine-Danube frontier or in frontier provinces such as Britain and North Africa. This distribution suggests a military context since these were the places where the army was stationed. The belts are also so elaborate in appearance that an official function seems very likely. However, we do know that in the late Empire civil servants were entitled to military rank, which would presumably have carried with it the right to the insignia of that rank. It is also not clear that all the belts which have been brought into the argument are military. One small type of buckle, found only in Britain and probably made in the province, has a fragile, delicate plate sometimes decorated with Christian symbols. This kind of buckle has never been found in a male grave and was probably worn by women. Not enough is known about fourth-century civilian dress to be certain of this, but there is at least one third-century sculpture which shows a female figure wearing a belt with a buckle. The larger belts may well have been originally military in function, but when only broken fragments are excavated from an occupation site it is not always possible to say who the last owner was nor why it was lost in that particular place. Pieces of Roman metalwork may have survived in the barbarian world for centuries after the end of the Empire. There are a very few graves in England which do justify the suggestion that they are those of Germanic soldiers. These are the burials containing belt fittings – and sometimes weapons – which occur in cemeteries where

they stand out as a distinctive group like the Frankish graves in the Rhineland. A grave at Dorchester on Thames may have belonged to this category, but unfortunately the rest of the cemetery, if it exists, has never been excavated. A cemetery outside Winchester, Lankhills, has produced a group of apparently Germanic settlers who belong to a phase before the breakdown of Roman authority, the mid-fourth century. There are also graves within Anglo-Saxon cemeteries which appear to belong to the earliest stages of the settlement. Several such graves have been found at Mucking in Essex. In this case it is not clear whether we are dealing with the first independent settlers or with an initial group deliberately planted by still-existing Romano-British authorities.

The nature of the migration itself is still in question. It used to be thought that hordes of Saxons overran the country, pillaging and murdering as they went, and that the Britons who were not killed, either emigrated or became slaves. It is true that the word for Briton and for slave, *wealh*, is the same in West Saxon dialect, and some Britons did emigrate to Brittany, Wales and the south-west. However, the size of the population of Roman Britain has recently been reconsidered on the basis of extensive fieldwork, and it seems likely that it was very much larger than had previously been supposed. Natural disasters, plagues and war may have killed many people, but they are unlikely to have left an empty land to be occupied by the Anglo-Saxons. It has also been doubted whether the numbers of the settlers were as large as Gildas's picture of hordes of invading barbarians would suggest. The numbers of a victorious enemy are prone to exaggeration, and if they all had to come, as they did, across the North Sea in small ships, the movement of large numbers of peoples would have been a long-drawn-out and gradual process.

Nonetheless, there are some indications that very large numbers of immigrants did arrive. The number of those buried in the cemeteries, which has in the past been estimated in hundreds, should, in some cases (perhaps in many) be counted in thousands, up to half of which may belong to the first century of the Anglo-Saxon period. We speak today a language which is descended from Old English and not from Welsh. Very few words in modern English can be traced back to a Roman or Celtic root and Celtic elements in place-names are very infrequent in the south and east of Britain. If large numbers of the native population did survive, they were entirely swamped by the culture of the invaders, at least so far as archaeologically detectable aspects of it go. There may have been Britons who continued to live in their farms and villas, maintaining as near as possible a Roman way of life long after much of the country had been settled by barbarians. Such people would have had pottery and equipment which, if excavated now, would appear to be 'late Roman' in date, if somewhat worn. They would have been buried as Christians without grave-goods so that if their cemeteries were ever found they would also be indistinguishable from late Roman graves.

Careful examination of the location of early Anglo-Saxon settlement and place-names suggests that the course of events varied from region to region. In Sussex it looks as if there may have been a division of the land by treaty, since all very early Anglo-Saxon sites lie in a group between the rivers Ouse and Cuckmere, as if the immigrants had been granted that particular area to settle. Elsewhere it has been suggested that the settlers were not allowed to occupy the best farming land, which would mean they were not in a sufficiently dominant position to do as they pleased. However, the settlement sites which have been quoted as examples of settlement on marginal land are not entirely convincing. Mucking, in Essex, may be on a rather barren gravel terrace, but it has a strategically strong position from which the Thames could be observed and perhaps controlled. Chalton in Hampshire is on top of a hill, again a strong position, whether for offence or defence. Whoever settled there was taking a position of some strength, which does not support a picture of refugee peasants allowed to occupy land no one else wanted. The known settlement sites of this period are still so few that no generalization can yet be made.

The Anglo-Saxons did not come into an empty country and the most difficult problem of all is the question of the degree to which they took over existing buildings and property boundaries. Some modern estate boundaries can plausibly be traced back through late Anglo-Saxon land charters to earlier times, although it is a very tentative study. It may be that some properties retained their Roman limits and were taken over as going concerns by incoming Saxons. Buildings may have been reused and patched up for some time. There are place-names which contain elements that appear to incorporate references to surviving Roman buildings or villages. The distribution of some early place-names shows a relationship to the Roman road system which should mean that the roads were still to some extent used and usable, although in general river valleys are a far more dominant feature of any Anglo-Saxon settlement pattern.

Urban sites present a great problem since they have in most cases been occupied for centuries, leaving little of their earliest phases for the archaeologist to discover. Most Roman towns are now, and were in the late Anglo-Saxon period, towns again. It was once thought that the pagan Anglo-Saxons shunned the towns and feared them as the homes of ghosts: an early poem, 'The Ruin', describes the fallen remnants of a city, perhaps Bath, as 'the work of giants of old', a wonder which had lain in ruins already for generations when the poet saw it:

Wondrous is this wall-stone; broken by fate, the castles have decayed; the work of giants is crumbling. Roofs are fallen, ruinous are the towers, despoiled are the towers with their gates; frost is on their cement, broken are the roofs, cut away, fallen, undermined by age. The grasp of the earth, stout grip of the ground, holds its mighty builders, who have perished and gone; till now a hundred generations of men have died. Often this wall, grey with lichen and stained with red, unmoved under storms, has survived kingdom after kingdom; its lofty gate has fallen . . . the bold in spirit bound the foundation of the wall wondrously together with wires. Bright were the castle-dwellings, many the bath-houses, lofty the host of pinnacles, great the tumult of men, many a mead hall full of the joys of men, till Fate the mighty overturned that. The wide walls fell; days of pestilence came; death swept away all the bravery of men; their fortresses became waste places; the city fell to ruin. The multitudes who might have built it anew lay dead on the earth. Wherefore these courts are in decay and these lofty gates; the woodwork of the roof is stripped of tiles; the place has sunk into ruin, levelled to the hills, where in times past many a man light of heart and bright with gold, adorned with splendours, proud and flushed with wine, shone in war trappings, gazed on treasure, on silver, on precious stones, on riches, on possessions, on costly gems, on this bright castle of the broad kingdom. Stone courts stood here; the stream with its great gush sprang forth hotly; the wall enclosed all within its bright bosom; there the baths were hot in its centre; that was spacious . . .

Bede tells the story of St Cuthbert's visit to Carlisle where he was shown the Roman fountain as a marvel rather than as a useful means of distributing water. Although it is clear that buildings were not reconstructed or properly maintained, nevertheless it may not be true that all Roman cities were in fact totally deserted during the early Anglo-Saxon period.

Buildings and pottery of early Anglo-Saxon types have been excavated at Dorchester on Thames and at Canterbury, as well as in London. Some Roman buildings stayed in use well into the Saxon period: when the roof of the headquarters of the Roman fort at York finally collapsed it fell on top of late Anglo-Saxon pottery; this implies that the building may have been standing as late as the ninth century. In the fifth and sixth centuries it does not seem that conditions were settled enough for trade or industry in any real sense and without these urban life cannot really exist. Yet some Roman walled towns may have been occupied by descendants of their original inhabitants well into the fifth century: at Verulamium the construction of a water pipe some time long after the end of the fourth century indicates continuing urban organization. Anglo-Saxon leaders may have taken over the more substantial surviving town buildings as royal residence.

Excavation in Canterbury has produced Anglo-Saxon huts of both fifth- and seventh- or eighth-century date. It has been suggested that this represents a break in the sixth century, and that in fact it was only the stimulus of the Augustinian Christian mission after AD 597 which reawakened interest in the site. However, one might equally well explain the archaeological evidence as showing a site which was sparsely occupied, so that areas within the walls were sometimes occupied, sometimes open spaces, gardens or even fields. Bede describes Canterbury as a *metropolis* in the days of Æthelbert (late sixth early seventh century). By this he must surely have meant a place with some urban characteristics. It is difficult to see why the Frankish princess Bertha, who married Æthelbert, and her chaplain Liudhard should have chosen a church in Canterbury as a place to pray unless there was a royal residence there. Augustine need not have chosen Canterbury as the centre of his mission: he had intended to start from London, the old capital of the Roman province and, when he found that was not possible, he might have chosen one of several other towns in Kent if there had not already been a good reason for its choice as the chief residence of the king. Certainly in the later Anglo-Saxon period this town rapidly became so overpopulated that in the ninth century it was necessary to specify in a land grant that houses built on the plot should have about a metre of eavesdrip between them. Bede, writing in the eighth century, could refer to London and to York in terms which indicate some use of these places as trading centres. At Hamwih, near Southampton, excavation has produced clear evidence of trade and industry beginning probably as early as the seventh century. At Winchester there is some evidence for seventh-century occupation and it has been suggested that this was a royal and administrative centre, related to the port and market at Hamwih.

Some Anglo-Saxon genealogies and king-lists are preserved, chiefly in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. These seem to show that most of the recorded dynasties began in the later sixth century, that is, long after the original migration. It is clear that there was, throughout the fifth century, a very confused and complex political situation in England. Peoples from various parts of northern Europe settled in most of eastern and south-eastern England in groups of varying sizes. In some areas they were for a time subordinate to the local population, and in others they may have been deliberately invited. It is only during the sixth century that England takes the form in which it was known to Bede, with several large and medium sized English kingdoms.

The Anglo-Saxon village

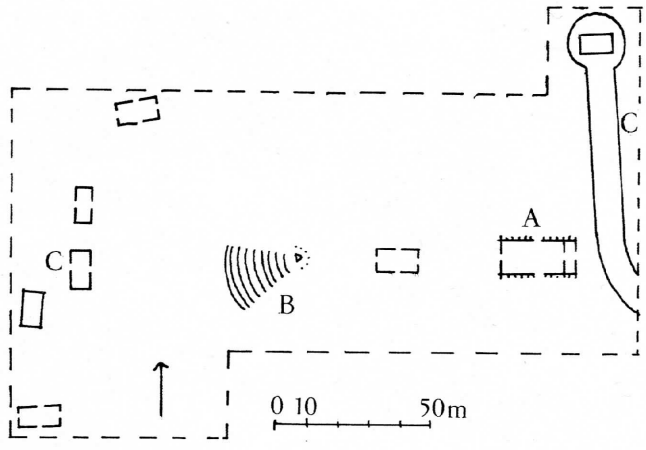
The settlements of the Anglo-Saxons in England used to be contrasted unfavourably with those of their ancestors on the Continent. During the first four centuries AD, there were, in the Continental homelands

of the Anglo-Saxons, villages of some size, consisting of substantial houses with associated outhouses, granaries and workshops. Most settlements seem to have included a number of separate farmsteads whose buildings often lay within a fenced enclosure, and the whole layout of a settlement usually appears to follow some pattern. The main buildings were 'long-houses', that is, long, aisled timber structures with space for animals at one end, and for humans at the other.

For many years it was thought that the typical Anglo-Saxon dwelling (particularly of the early period) was a hut, the floor of which was sunk into the ground – a sort of pit dwelling. (This kind of building appears on Continental sites where it is usually interpreted as a workshop or other ancillary building.) It was thought that people lived within the pit and, since these were often not very large (only 2–3 metres in length), a picture of the Anglo-Saxon village as a collection of squalid hovels could easily be presented.

However, recent excavations have begun to change
27 this idea. At West Stow, the excavator observed in some huts that there were hearths at ground level, not at the bottom of the pit, and also that in one hut which had burnt down, there were loomweights lying on top of what appeared to have been a floor overlying the pit. From this it does seem that, at least on this site, the pit functioned as a cellar rather than as a living space. The hovels are therefore not necessarily so primitive as has been thought. In fact, other kinds of building have now been found. At West Stow again, for example, there are several rectangular ground-level houses, each with its associated group of ancillary huts. At Mucking, perhaps the largest settlement so far excavated, it was thought for some years that the only buildings were the huts, but it is now clear that these were associated with a
28 variety of rectangular structures. At Chalton in Hampshire only three huts have so far been found, as opposed to the large number of substantial rectangular buildings. All these rectangular houses have a family resemblance: they tend to be a double square in shape or slightly shorter and to have opposed doors in the middle of each long side. At one end there is sometimes a partition. The same type of building, only much
4 larger, has been found at Yeavering in Northumbria.
22 This site has been identified as the royal palace of the kings of Northumbria, the *Ad Gefrin* mentioned by Bede as the place where Paulinus once stayed for thirty-six days with King Edwin, preaching and baptizing. A series of large rectangular buildings here was rebuilt on more than one occasion and was associated with a curious structure in the form of a segment of an amphitheatre. This may have had some ceremonial or religious function. One building was interpreted as a pagan temple.

The English buildings do not, however, resemble the Continental structures. There are no English long-houses from this period. One possible explanation is that it was no longer necessary to house animals in the milder English climate and that the richer soil put less of a premium on the collection of manure from the animal stalls. Alternatively, the difference in form might be explained in terms of another building tradition, in which case the tradition could only derive from Romano-British buildings and might in some way represent a translation into timber of Romano-British stone. It may be that archaeological concentration on the more glamorous elements of the material culture of the period – towns, forts, villas and roads – has left large parts of Roman Britain untouched. Ordinary rural houses may have been fairly simple stone or even timber rectangular buildings much like the later Anglo-Saxon ones, which may continue an earlier tradition.



Yeavering, the royal palace of the kings of Northumbria, in the early seventh century. The king's hall (A) has been fairly certainly identified, but the strange structure like part of an amphitheatre (B) is still mysterious, and another rectangular building (C) could have been either a church or a pagan temple. (4)

Too few settlements have been excavated to allow any generalization concerning their layout and organization. Catholme in Nottinghamshire and Chalton, however, have plans which show them as clusters of several separate units or farmsteads within ditched or fenced enclosures. West Stow also appears to have been a group of small farms. Elsewhere, for instance in Oxfordshire at Eynsham, there may have been a more scattered pattern of buildings strung out over a wide area. So far early Anglo-Saxon villages have not been discovered directly underneath excavated sites of deserted medieval villages, nor have those excavated so far shown continuity from the early to the later Anglo-Saxon period. This suggests a shift in settlement during the Anglo-Saxon period which might be partly explained by the later concentration into nucleated villages of an earlier random, non-nucleated pattern of scattered hamlets and farmsteads.

Provision for death: the cemeteries

The life of the Anglo-Saxons in England has until recently been illustrated mostly by cemeteries, and these are still important sources of information. They have occasionally been found near settlements, as at Mucking, Essex, West Stow in Suffolk and possibly Spong Hill in central Norfolk, but more often cemeteries seem to have been placed at some distance away from their contemporary settlements. This may have been because there was a wish to keep the dead as far as possible from the living, or it may have been that more than one community used the same cemetery. If burial sites were put near the boundaries of the lands of two communities which shared them this would have been convenient for both, and may explain the fact that many cemeteries are on what are now parish boundaries and which might have already been boundaries in the early Anglo-Saxon period. They also often occur on hilltops or on rising ground which is a landmark in the area: Loveden Hill in Lincolnshire is a good example of this.

As has been noted, the size of cemeteries has in the past been greatly underestimated. It used not to be thought necessary to excavate more than a part of a site, so that total numbers and area covered were seldom established. At Loveden Hill over two thousand cremations were excavated and at Spong Hill 1,200 cremations, from what may be between a half and two-thirds of the whole cemetery, have so far been
11,12 excavated. Many of the cremation urns at Spong Hill contain the remains of more than one individual, so that the total population figures will be even higher than would be suggested by the number of pots. Since the cemetery was in use from the middle or possibly near the beginning of the fifth century and does not so far appear to have continued in use long into the seventh century, it covers two hundred years, six or seven generations. This gives us a minimum of three hundred in each generation, allowing for further excavation, but not allowing for the presence of multiple burials. The actual total is likely to have been somewhat higher. There is no reason why some of the other partially
5 excavated cemeteries, such as Lackford, Suffolk, or Sancton, Yorkshire, should not have been of equivalent size or even larger. We are thus dealing with a fairly substantial population.

One obvious source of information supplied by cemeteries is provided by the skeletal remains of the bones themselves. From these bare bones it is possible to learn something about the health and diet of the Anglo-Saxons and to say something about their way of life. Unfortunately many soils are too acid to preserve bone so that some cemeteries provide little or no skeletal material. Cremated bones can never be as informative as a complete and well-preserved inhumed skeleton, but even so a surprising amount of detail can be recovered from a few fragments of burnt bone. As yet there is no published statistical survey of the ages of death or of the incidence of types of disease in Anglo-Saxon England, so that most comments consist of informed guesswork rather than accurate analysis. It is clear that many Anglo-Saxons died before reaching adulthood and it is probable that average life expectancy was far lower than it is today, but as yet there is no definite evidence to show this. Determining the age of a skeleton after 'maturity' is not easy and it may be that there were more very old people than one might expect. The most obvious disease shown by the bones is arthritis, but odd features such as trephination of the skull indicate a fairly sophisticated approach to medicine. At least some of the men were six foot or over, but again there are no overall figures to show how representative that is.

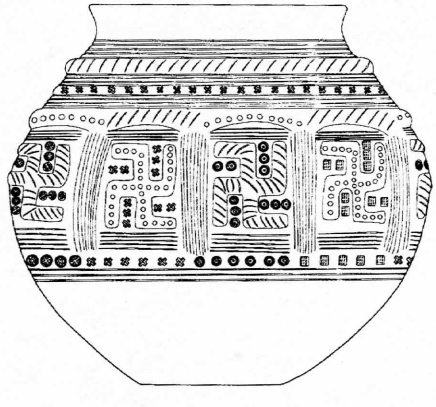
Pagan Anglo-Saxons were buried with their clothes, jewellery and weapons, as well as sometimes with glass or pottery vessels, buckets, or bronze bowls. This is true of cremations as well as inhumations, except that there are very few weapons in cremations. Even if the objects have been burnt or distorted in the funeral pyre, it is often still possible to identify them. The chief drawback to cremation grave-groups is that we do not know what form the funeral ritual took and so we cannot be sure that care was taken to collect all the grave-goods and put them with the bones in the pot. It is clear that not all the bones themselves were collected: most of the skull was usually placed in the pot, otherwise widely varying proportions of the body are found, so that some of the bones must have been left on the pyre or buried elsewhere. At Liebenau, in Germany, where pyres have been discovered, it was found that many of the grave-goods had been left behind although much of the bone had been collected into the pots.

The pots in which the cremations were contained were, in England as on the Continent, highly decorated hand-made vessels, not usually very well fired. This represents a complete break with the Roman tradition in England. In the Rhineland, on the contrary, Roman techniques of pottery manufacture continued unbroken, and wheel-thrown, hard-fired pots were still made. It was probably from the Rhineland that these more sophisticated techniques were reintroduced to England during the later Anglo-Saxon period, but throughout the pagan period it is only in Kent that a few imported wheel-thrown vessels can be found.

We do not really know as yet very much about the organization of pagan Anglo-Saxon pottery manufacture. It used to be stated categorically that it was a domestic product, made by the women of each household for their family needs, but there is as yet little evidence to prove it, and some which contradicts it. Most pots come from cemeteries and it is not yet clear how far they can be regarded as products of a

specialized funerary industry. Until more careful analysis of pottery from settlements is available it is impossible to say whether ordinary cooking-pots were simply taken off the shelf when grandfather died, or whether only special pots were used for burials. If the latter were true, then one could be far more confident in interpreting some of the decorative motifs on the pots as having religious meaning.

The clay from which the pots were made usually had various substances mixed in, such as crushed potsherds, sand or organic materials which may have been incorporated together with animal dung. All these substances made the clay easier to work and less likely to break during firing. One study of inclusions of crushed limestone shows that pottery found near Peterborough had been made using stone from Charnwood forest in Leicestershire, and other pottery made with the same material has been found elsewhere. Such evidence hardly supports the idea that this was a very localized, domestic industry. Examination of the pots has often concentrated on their decoration and some of the results of this study also contradict interpretation of pottery manufacture as a purely domestic occupation. The impressions of the same stamp tool used in decoration can be traced from one pot to another, thus identifying the products of the same potter. Distribution patterns for such stamp-linked groups of pots sometimes extend over large areas. Numerous small groups, found at perhaps two or three neighbouring cemeteries, could still be thought of as the results of contacts between a few villages (perhaps as the result of intermarriage), but other groups cannot be explained save as the result of specialization in the production of pots. In East Anglia
5 hundreds of pots from one group, the Lackford-Illington pots, have now been found at several cemeteries and at one settlement site. Another group includes pots from Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Norfolk. It is not yet clear whether the potter or his products moved: the difference in clay between some of the Lackford-Illington pots suggests that it was the potter who travelled, finding local deposits of clay wherever he was working.

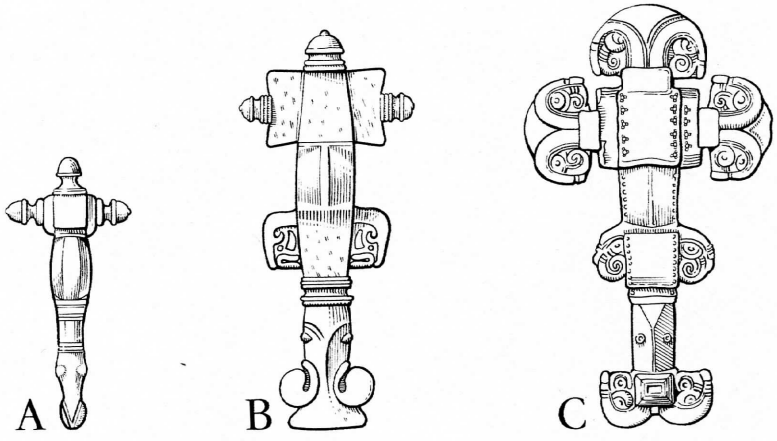


Pottery of a high order was made for cremation burials, some of it sufficiently individual to be attributed to a single potter. This example comes from Lackford, Suffolk. (5)

The jewellery and weapons which have been found mostly in inhumations form the basis for consideration of regional and chronological variation during the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries in England. It is possible to arrange many types of objects according to art-historical principles in an evolutionary series. Fig. 6 shows this sequence worked out for the kind of brooch known as 'cruciform' from its shape. The early versions of this brooch developed from Iron Age 'safety pin' brooches under the influence of more massive Roman crossbow brooches. The spring of the brooch is behind a rectangular plate from which three knobs extend. The two lateral knobs are cast separately and are fastened to a bar which passes through the spring. The catch plate is behind an elongated terminal which takes the form of a horse's head. In later varieties the side knobs are cast in one with the head and become larger and flatter. Excrescences of all kinds appear at both extremities of the brooch and sometimes there are panels of decoration on the end plate. It should be noted that all carefully excavated graves show the brooches worn with the catch plate uppermost.

Similarly, it is possible to trace the development of other brooch types, usually from small simple varieties with elements in their design clearly derived from classical models, to larger ornate and sometimes clumsy creations. As well as cruciform brooches, there are other large bow brooches with rectangular or square head plates ('square-headed' brooches) and there are 7
also smaller brooches which seem to be simple versions of either cruciform or square-headed brooches. The other main form is circular. There are simple ring or annular, flat disc, dished or 'saucer' brooches and others 4
which have separate discs of decorated bronze applied to a plain metal disc. The distinction between 'Anglian' and 'Saxon' women has been mentioned, but even more noticeable is the difference between the jewellery of women from Kent and the Isle of Wight and from the rest of England. Kentish women wore round jewelled brooches made of gold or silver as well as bronze. Coloured glass and garnet inlays combined with various techniques such as niello, filigree and chip-carving to produce rich and varied patterns. The most famous of these brooches is the exquisite Kingston 14
brooch. From Kent there are also gold buckles, clasps and pendants as well as wheel-thrown pots and a great variety of glass vessels.

It is less easy to set weapons into an evolutionary sequence, partly no doubt because they would not change unless methods of fighting changed, and partly



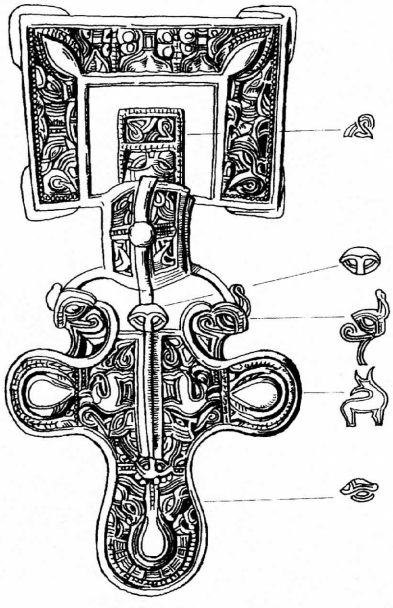
Three examples of cruciform brooches, showing the sequence of development: A, from East Shefford, Berkshire; B, from Barton Seagrave, Northamptonshire; C, from Sleaford, Lincolnshire. (6)

because they were made of iron, which has not always survived in such good condition that we can now say very much about its original form. The iron bosses which strengthened the centre of Saxon shields did develop, becoming taller during the seventh century, and there are perhaps a few distinctive types of spearhead which can be given a rough regional and chronological distribution, while the ornamental fittings of sword scabbards can be related to styles of ornament found on other types of metalwork.

The styles of decoration are as important as the form of the objects in classification. Germanic craftsmen were fascinated by animals, but they seldom represented them realistically. At first they may have copied the stylized but still recognizable lions and hippocamps found on the borders of late Roman belt fittings. Very 5,6 similar animals appear on the borders of Saxon equal-armed brooches and it may be that craftsmen went from Roman workshops to work instead for Saxons in north Germany. Barbarian craftsmen may have been trained in Roman workshops and then returned home to use the Roman techniques they had learned in the production of Germanic brooches. In England there is a small group of metalwork which is decorated with a very distinctive type of animal ornament. All the items in the group are either parts of belt fittings or large quoit-shaped brooches. They appear to have been made in southern England during the early years of the fifth century by craftsmen who had been trained in techniques in use in the workshops of the Rhineland or northern Gaul. It is not clear for whom they were made, whether for soldiers of British or Germanic ancestry fighting for the Romano-British authorities, or for barbarian invaders.

The main types of Germanic animal ornament were defined at the beginning of the century by a Swede, Bernhard Salin, who gave them the numbers by which they have been known ever since. His Style I is usually carried out in chip-carving. This is a high-relief technique, where the pattern, although cast, looks as if it has been chiselled out like wood-carving. This accentuates the disjointed character of the beasts portrayed, who often have a head, a hand or claw and a hip as their only obvious attributes, together with various schematic parts of the body which are not shown in any normal anatomical articulation. Sometimes there are anthropomorphic masks or heads, including the curious type of head in profile which led one scholar to rename the style 'helmet style'. Hands with out-turned thumbs derive ultimately from representations of the Roman imperial *gestus*. Salin's Style II is characterized by its flowing rhythmic p.68(7) appearance, produced by the intertwining of sinuous snake or ribbon-like animal bodies. Again there is no attempt at anatomical accuracy. Most animals have elongated jaws, eyes and a head indicated by a rounded or angular ribbon, and one or two limbs. Style II beasts are seldom chip-carved, but instead are carried out in techniques such as filigree wire which is suited to the production of flowing ribbon forms, although Style II beasts in gold and garnet cloisonné occur elsewhere.

For a long time it was thought that Styles I and II were strictly consecutive and they have often been used in chronological discussion. Style I was equated approximately with the sixth century, Style II with the seventh. While there is still perhaps some truth in such a view there are also problems. The evolution of Style I from late Roman border animals seems to have taken place during the fifth century and to have become popular in England at the same time as the arrival of the square-headed brooches, originally a Scandinavian type. This may have been around the end of the fifth century but there is no very firm date for it. Style II was believed to have developed under the influence of Byzantine interlace patterns which it was thought were transmitted to northern Europe only after the Lombards' arrival in Italy in AD 569. However, in graves north of the Alps attributed to the Lombards before they moved to Italy, and dated to the sixth century, there was metalwork decorated in a style not unlike Style II. Rich Frankish graves found in Cologne p.53–55 Cathedral and the abbey of Saint-Denis, near Paris,



Square-headed brooch from Ragley, Warwickshire, illustrating the animal style that has been called Style I. Some of the animal motifs used are picked out for clarity at the side. (7)

contained objects decorated with interlace. One of these graves, at Saint-Denis, contained a ring inscribed with the name Arnegunde. This may identify the grave as that of a Frankish queen who died in 569. Some of her ornaments were decorated with curious intertwined animals which again look more like Style II than I. It has already been pointed out above that some techniques of metalworking are more suitable for the production of one style than the other. There is a regional bias, in that in England more Style II ornaments have been found in Kent than anywhere else, save for the royal burial of Sutton Hoo in Suffolk. In much of the rest of England it may be that craftsmen continued to produce Style I long after the Kentish goldsmiths had turned to Style II. This is a fundamental drawback to reliance on typology as equivalent to chronology. There is no real reason to suppose that fashions changed universally and suddenly in early Anglo-Saxon England. No one could afford to change their brooches every year: they probably lasted a lifetime or more. Some parts of England were much more exposed to foreign ideas and stimulation than others, and some regions were richer than others. It is also perhaps unwise to see a typological evolution as even and gradual. There might have been sudden rapid change at some periods and stagnation at others. A great many of the minor variations are more likely to reflect the imagination or taste of individuals than differences in date of manufacture. Some differences in ornament might have been related to the status of the woman with whom they were buried. It might have been the custom for married and unmarried, rich and poor women to wear distinctive types of jewellery, so that contemporary burials of women of different status might contain brooches which appear typologically different.

Status certainly is reflected in male equipment. Many male graves may not be immediately recognizable as such because they contain no weapons, except perhaps a knife. Probably only some classes of men were allowed to bear weapons and perhaps not all of these could afford to bury their fathers' weapons in their graves. In the later Anglo-Saxon period we hear of a sword which was an heirloom. It had originally belonged to King Offa of Mercia in the eighth century and two hundred years later Prince Athelstan left it in his will to his brother Edmund.

The spear was the weapon in widest use, accompanied often, but by no means always, by a shield. Axes are seldom found and there is little evidence for bows and arrows although it is assumed that these were in use. Swords are rare and in general their presence in a grave is taken to mean that the person buried was a man of some standing in the community. Sometimes status can be inferred from the position and arrangement of the grave within the cemetery. Some cemeteries in Kent and in East Anglia contained graves which had been surrounded by a circular ditch, either the foundation for a palisade or the limit of a mound. In some cases, even if the grave does not appear very rich in absolute terms, if it is compared with other graves from the same cemetery it can be seen that it was relatively distinctive within its own cemetery. A grave with a sword might not have belonged to the most important person in a Kentish community where there were several nobles, but in East Anglia it stands out as so unusual that any such grave can be seen as that of the local chieftain.

Imported bronze and glass vessels are signs of individual prosperity whether they arrived in the course of trade or as gifts from one king or chief to another. It is not likely that there was any very organized trade between England and the Continent during the fifth and sixth centuries, but the presence of a few imports, such as wheel-thrown vessels and glass in Kent, and ivory in East Anglia, suggests that the lines of communication had not been entirely broken. It used to be thought that the Rhineland was the most important source of foreign ideas and goods, but now the part played by France is becoming more apparent. In the later seventh and eighth centuries much of the trade of the port of Hamwih seems to have been with France. By this time there was also direct communication with the Mediterranean, inspired by the Christian mission.

The clearest demonstration of the hierarchical nature of early Anglo-Saxon society is given by the rich ship burial found at Sutton Hoo, on the Suffolk coast near Woodbridge, in 1939. The wealth of this grave is such

1,17

that it can only have been that of a royal personage – it is the richest such grave found in Europe – and it has been most often identified as commemorating King Rædwald of East Anglia, who died in or around AD 627. The material included a Byzantine bowl, spoons inscribed with the names 'Saulos' and 'Paulos' (which were perhaps connected with Christian baptism), coins from Gaul, and a helmet and shield which may have come from Sweden, as well as gold and garnet jewellery made by English craftsmen. It has been variously suggested that this was a cenotaph, the body having been lost in battle or given Christian burial elsewhere; a cremation, perhaps represented by a few possible bone fragments found on top of the Byzantine bowl; or that it was a normal inhumation, but the bone had completely dissolved in the acid soil conditions.

We know very little of the ritual connected with any of the pagan burials discussed above. Our only description of a funeral comes from the epic poem *Beowulf*, which was probably first written down in the last years of the seventh century or during the eighth century, but which describes events which belong to a much earlier period. At the beginning of the poem we are told of a hero, Scyld Scefing, whose body was laid in his ship and sent out to sea. The Sutton Hoo ship burial, although on dry land and not at sea, might represent a version of this ceremony:

> *His own close companions carried him*
> *down to the sea, as he, Lord of the Danes,*
> *had asked while he could still speak.*
> *That well-loved man had ruled his land for many years.*
> *There in the harbour stood the ring-prowed ship,*
> *the prince's vessel, shrouded in ice and eager to sail;*
> *and then they laid their dear lord,*
> *the giver of rings, deep within the ship*
> *by the mast in majesty; many treasures*
> *and adornments from far and wide were gathered there.*
> *I have never heard of a ship equipped*
> *more handsomely with weapons and war-gear,*
> *swords and corslets; on his breast*
> *lay countless treasures that were to travel far*
> *with him into the waves' domain.*
> *They gave him great ornaments, gifts*
> *no less magnificent than those men had given him*
> *long before, when they sent him alone,*
> *child as he was, across the stretch of the seas.*
> *Then high above his head they placed*
> *a golden banner and let the waves bear him,*
> *bequeathed him to the sea; their hearts were grieving,*
> *their minds mourning. Mighty men*
> *beneath the heavens, rulers in the hall,*
> *cannot say who received that cargo.*

Otherwise, we know virtually nothing of pagan religion. Because literacy arrived with Christianity and was for long the province of the clergy, our records of paganism are very few and probably biased. The names of a few gods and their festivals are mentioned by Bede, and Augustine in letters to Pope Gregory mentioned with some horror practices of the heathen English such as eating horseflesh and marrying their stepmothers. The new religion destroyed almost all trace of the old.

Augustine's mission

In the year 597 St Augustine arrived in England to preach Christianity to the heathen English. The conversion was no more sudden and rapid a process than the migration had been, although it is similarly sometimes used as a fixed point in archaeological dating. We have an unusually detailed account of its course because the main purpose of Bede's *History* was precisely to describe how England became Christian. It was a process much bound up with politics, for the conversion of a king would determine the conversion of his followers and allies, and it would depend partly on his relations with other rulers, pagan or Christian. Some conversions followed marriage, as did Edwin of Northumbria's when he married the daughter of the by then Christian king of Kent. Northumbria's Christianity, however, perhaps owed more to the mission of Irish monks than to Augustine and his successors. King (later Saint) Oswald had been brought up in exile in Scotland where he had become a Christian. Some kingdoms, such as Essex, were converted during one reign, only to lapse with the succession of a pagan king. Rædwald of East Anglia thought it prudent to put up an altar to Christ in his pagan temple, in case he was an important god after all. If Sutton Hoo is Rædwald's burial it could be seen as displaying such mixed ideas. The Christian spoons and crosses on some of the bowls could be seen as signs of Christianity, and if the body was missing perhaps it was because it had received Christian burial elsewhere. On the other hand, the whole assemblage and the fact of burial in a ship is a purely pagan rite. Some kings remained pagan well into the seventh century: Penda of Mercia, in spite of a Christian son and an alliance with the Welsh Christian king Cadwallon, remained a stubborn pagan until his death (which was in 655 according to Bede).

The conversion brought with it an influx of new cultural stimuli from several directions. The Roman mission itself came directly from Rome and opened the way to Mediterranean culture. There were also missionaries from Gaul during the seventh century: Felix, who preached in East Anglia, and Agilbert in Wessex. These men must have brought with them books and possibly liturgical vestments and chalices which might have been copied by English craftsmen. Anglo-Saxons themselves went to the Continent in search of inspiration. One of the most famous travellers was Benedict Biscop (died 689), a Northumbrian who went to Gaul to find stonemasons and glaziers capable of building churches since those skills were unknown

to the English at that time. Evidence of the results of his work can be seen at Monkwearmouth (founded 674) and Jarrow (founded 681) where excavation of the early monastic sites has produced not only stone buildings and fragments of sculpture but also window glass, amongst much other material. The influence of classical design can be seen most clearly on the carved stone crosses (or 'roods') which are such a feature of the Early Christian period in northern England. Many of these are decorated with a pattern of vine-scrolls, often inhabited by animals or birds. This is an idea taken from
23,24 classical sources but adapted and altered by the Northumbrian sculptors. They were less successful with figural scenes, although it must be remembered that the present battered and worn condition of many of these crosses does not do justice to their original state, which may have been much more finished than now appears. It was presumably such crosses which inspired one of the most poignant of all Anglo-Saxon poems, 'The Dream of the Rood', where the cross itself speaks in most moving terms:

> As a rood was I raised up; I bore aloft the mighty King, the Lord of heaven; I durst not stoop. They pierced me with dark nails; the wounds are still plain to view in me, gaping gashes of malice; I durst not do hurt to any of them. They bemocked us both together. I was all bedewed with blood, shed from the Man's side, after He had sent forth His Spirit. I have endured many stern trials on the hill; I saw the God of hosts violently stretched out; darkness with its clouds had covered the Lord's corpse, the fair radiance; a shadow went forth, dark beneath the clouds. All creation wept, lamented the King's death; Christ was on the cross.

The best-known products of the Northumbrian renaissance, as it has some reason to be called, are the illuminated manuscripts. These owe more to the Celtic than to the Roman missionary impulse, although of course ultimately the inspiration for Celtic monasticism lies in the Mediterranean. These manuscripts used to be thought of as purely Irish in character, but they are now more commonly described as Hiberno-Saxon, in recognition of the considerable part which the English craftsmen themselves contributed. The figural scenes in these manuscripts are clearly copied from classical models, with more or less success. It is in the interlaced
29 patterns of the initials and the 'carpet page' that the Hiberno-Saxon artist really came into his own. The intricate and convoluted patterns of animals and interlace which appear on these pages are very reminiscent of the earlier pagan craftsman's delight in complexity and tortuous animal design. When direct comparison is made between panels on one of the earliest and most famous manuscripts, the *Book of Durrow*, and some of the Sutton Hoo cloisonné ornaments, they can be seen to belong to the same tradition. The skills which in the pagan period had been used for personal adornment were now being used for the glory of God instead.

The formation of the English state

When Bede wrote, England was divided into a number of petty kingdoms, sometimes known as the Heptarchy because of the seven most significant and long-lived of these: Kent, Sussex, Wessex, East Anglia, Mercia, Northumbria and Essex. These kingdoms themselves incorporated various smaller groupings, some of whose names are preserved in a document relating to Mercia known as the Tribal Hidage recently attributed to the years 670–690. This is probably an early tax register and it lists a number of peoples who had by the time of compilation been absorbed into the Mercian kingdom. Northumbria was also originally divided, into Deira and Bernicia, and 'Norfolk' and 'Suffolk' presumably preserve a division of East Anglia into north and south. Lindsey (approximately modern Lincolnshire), between Mercia and Northumbria, belonged to both the larger kingdoms in turn before being absorbed into Northumbria. First one and then another of the major kingdoms had ascendency and this may be reflected in the title 'Bretwalda' which Bede gives to various kings. These may have been in a sense overkings. The first one recorded is Ælle of Sussex, but the South Saxons do not otherwise play a very prominent role in history. Æthelbert of Kent and Rædwald of East Anglia, whose lives were partly contemporary, are both said to have been Bretwaldas, but it is not clear whether this means simultaneously or consecutively. According to Bede, the Northumbrian kings during most of the seventh century were the foremost, but Bede may have been biased in his sources, since he was writing in Northumbria, and Mercian records might well have been inclined to give more prominence to their king Penda. In the eighth century, Mercia clearly did become the leading kingdom under two strong kings, Æthelbald and Offa. Lesser kingdoms such as those of the Hwicce in the Severn valley and the Magonsaete in Herefordshire were first absorbed, and then it was the turn of major kingdoms such as Kent and East Anglia. Offa is remembered now for his creation of a visible boundary between England and Wales, Offa's Dyke. If he had had 21
successors of comparable stature, and if Mercia had not so rapidly succumbed to the Viking invasions, a unified English state might have developed with Mercia as its nucleus. As it was, it was the West Saxon kings, Alfred and his descendants, who won back England from the Danes in the east and the Norwegians in the north-west. It was Alfred who was first described as 'king over all the English'.