

# Ancient Britain

Historians call *Anglo-Saxons* the peoples who lived in the south and east of Great Britain, since the early 5<sup>th</sup> century AD to the Norman conquest of 1066.

They spoke Germanic dialects, and were the descendants of three powerful Germanic tribes: the *Angles*, the *Saxons* (from today's northern Germany) and the *Jutes* (from Denmark).



**Figura 1 Stonehenge, the Circle of Stones**

## Britain in AD 500 and the Roman Invasion

Various myths and legends surround the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons.

The *Celts*, one of the most mysterious people of all times, lived in Britain since 1500 BC to 400 BC during the *Bronze* or the *Iron Age*. One of their most famous constructions, Stonehenge, can still be seen today in Salisbury Plain, not far from London.

Julius Caesar led the first Roman invasion of the British Isles around 54 BC, and started the settlement. By then Rome had already paved roads, public thermal baths and a complex political system, while the Britons still lived in caves and were animists. But although technically by far more advanced, the Romans could not completely tame the Northern tribes. So in AD 122 the Emperor built the famous Hadrian's Wall to keep the Scottish tribes at bay; it still can be seen today.

During 350 years of Roman occupation of Britain, there was constant contact with Rome because of trading, and the Britons had to adopt Roman language and customs.

## The Vikings and the Normans

When the Roman legions abandoned Britain in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century, the number of Germanic immigrants to Britain increased, and in 789 it was the *Vikings'* turn to raid Britain.

The Vikings brought along a big change in culture and traditions from the Anglo-Saxon society, but the biggest event was the conquest was by the *Normans* in 1066, with the invasion by *William the Conqueror Duke of Normandy*, and his success at the Battle of Hastings.

This was the final event in English history for several reasons: first because it created one of the most powerful monarchies in Europe, and finally because it was... the last successful foreign conquest of England!

Last but not least, the Norman Invasion started the birth of Modern English.

Now answer to the following questions:

1. Who were the Anglo-Saxons?
2. Which were their origins?
3. How long was Roman occupation of Britain? What happened during it?
4. Were there many differences between Roman and British societies in 54 BC? Give examples.
5. What can you admire in Salisbury Plain? What's its history?
6. What happened in the British Isles during the *Bronze Age*?
7. Who was Julius Caesar and what did he do in 54 BC?
8. Who was William the Conqueror? Why is he crucial in British history?
9. Why did Emperor Hadrian decide to build the Wall?
10. Every country in the world has monuments and famous places to visit. Choose one in your city/area/region and speak about it, its history, why you like it, etc.

