

Anglo-Saxon Society: England before 1066

This topic focusses on the arrival of the Normans but you need to know about Change and Continuity and so you need to know about Anglo-Saxon society before.

- What do I need to know:
- What England was like before 1066..
 - The importance of the Godwin Family.



Where did the Anglo-Saxons come from?

- The Anglo-Saxons came from Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands.
- These fearsome warriors rowed across the North Sea in wooden boats to England and forced the tribes in Britain to flee their homes.
- Within a few centuries, the land they had invaded was known as England, after the Angles.



Who were the Anglo-Saxons?

- Believe it or not, the Anglo-Saxons were **warrior-farmers**. They began to invade Britain while the Romans were still in control.
- They wanted control and land.
- The Anglo-Saxons were tall, fair-haired men, armed with swords and spears and round shields.
- Their other skills consisted of hunting, farming, textile (cloth) production and leather working.

There were three groups of people who settled in Britain which together, are called the Anglo-Saxons. These three groups are called:

- Jutes
- Angles
- Saxons

The Angles and the Saxon tribes were the largest of the three attacking tribes and so we often know them as Anglo-Saxons.

For about 150 years the Britons fought the Anglo-Saxons, but by the year 600 the Britons had either been forced to flee to Wales or the West Country and had become slaves.

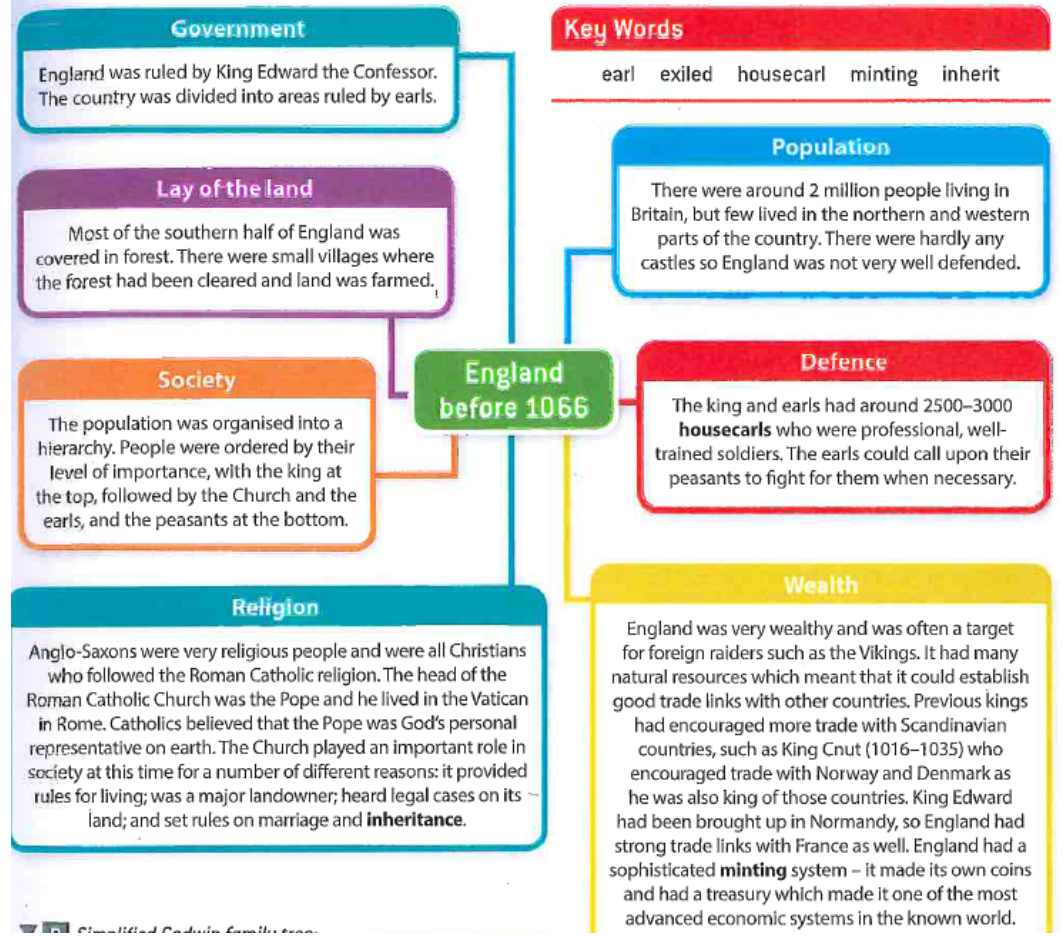
By the year 600 Britain had been divided into 7 main Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms:

Northumbria, Mercia, Essex, East Anglia, Wessex, Kent and Sussex.



- Key Words:**
- Earl
 - Exiled
 - Housecarl
 - Inherit
 - minting

- So what was life like in Anglo-Saxon England?**
- Around two million inhabitants
 - Life was hard
 - Life expectancy low
 - Most people farmed the land
 - At the top of Anglo – Saxon society were the aristocracy (people who had wealth and power), in the middle the peasant farmers and at the bottom the slaves
 - Religion was an important feature of society
 - King Edward the Confessor had ruled since 1042



Anglo-Saxon Society: Edward the Confessor and the Godwin family



King Edward the Confessor's Rule:

- ▶ Ruled since 1042
- ▶ Before 1042, England had been ruled by Edward's half brother, Harthacnut
- ▶ His reign had been stable and largely peaceful, there was a growing threat from Normandy and Norway / Denmark
- ▶ The earls were the most important aristocrats, the relationship with the king was based on loyalty
- ▶ King Edward was not a warrior king he relied on his earls being a powerful military force, especially Earl Godwin
- ▶ During his time he brought many of his Norman friends to England as advisors
- ▶ This angered the Anglo – Saxons and caused some disagreement with Earl Godwin
- ▶ King Edward was a respected law – maker and he was very religious
- ▶ King Edward was married to Edith of Wessex, Earl Godwin's daughter

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Who were the Godwins and why were they important?

- ▶ The Godwins were a powerful ruling family in England
- ▶ Earl Godwin (1001 – 53) was born in Wessex
- ▶ Anglo - Saxons
- ▶ Godwin and King Edward had a major dispute when Godwin refused to follow the king's orders, Godwin was exiled by the King
- ▶ Godwin returned with his army BUT King Edward was unable to raise an army, Godwin was stronger
- ▶ The king reinstated Godwin, the earls, their lands and their power = the power of the Godwins increased
- ▶ Earl Godwin died 1053 and his son Harold Godwinson becomes Earl of Wessex
- ▶ By the mid 1060s the Godwins had control of most of England and advised the king

An Uneasy King!

Sometimes a King named his own successor, But English and Norman ideas about this were different. This was quite important in the story of 1066.

▶ **English Customs:** The English regarded the dying King's 'last words' as more important than any promises made before that moment. The only way an earlier promise was stronger was if that promise had been made 'kept'. This means that the current king had crowned their successor and shared the throne with them from that point on.

▶ **Norman Customs:** Things were slightly different in Normandy where earlier promises of the throne were seen as final and they could not be undone later, even on the King's deathbed.

An uneasy King!

Edward the Confessor died on 5 January, with Harold at his side, and the very next day on the 6 January 1066, witnessed by prominent nobles Harold was crowned king. He was popular with the English lords. He was soon to be married to Ealdgyth, sister of the powerful Earls Edwin and Morcar, to strengthen his position. He was experienced having practically run England for some time as he was the 'Sub-regulus, a deputy king who represented Edward in battle.



What do I need to know:

- Who the Godwin's are
- How successful Edward the Confessor rule was.

The rules of inheritance

1. The son of a King would inherit the title (it does not have to be the eldest). If the king had no sons, then a male relative of a previous king could be chosen instead.



2. Post obitum = which means after death, this was a nomination for the next king



OR

Novissima Verba = where the king would name an heir of his choice



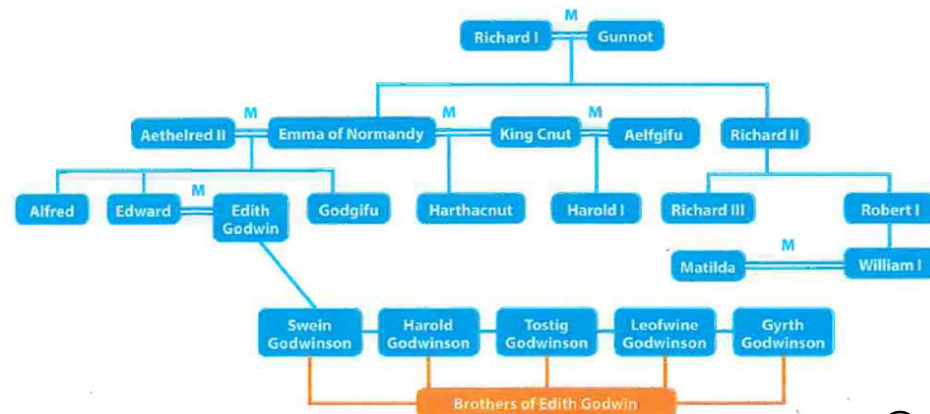
OR

The Witan = a council made up of a group of nobles and leading churchmen could suggest an heir or support the king's choice



3. The claimants could challenge each other for the throne and then the successful man was then crowned.

▼ A This family tree shows the ties between some of the claimants and their families



When Edward the Confessor died on the 5th January 1066 he had no children. As a result, it was unclear who was to become King. After Edward's death there were many powerful men who put forward their claim to the throne, four of whom presented the strongest claims. However, the claimants came from different countries and had differing levels of support.