

# Part 1 Raiders and invaders

## How to use the material in Part 1

This part of the book covers Module 1 of the Specification and is about the Saxons, Vikings and Normans – the people who raided, invaded and settled in the British Isles between around 400 and 1100.

You will be using a wide range of sources to investigate why raids and invasions happened, and how the Saxons, Vikings and Normans settled. Indeed, it is through the use of sources that you will build up a picture of these people. The three chapters – Saxons, Vikings and Normans – also give you enough basic information to enable you to put into context the sources you are dealing with and the inferences and conclusions you have drawn from them.

Although the approach in the book is broadly chronological, you will be expected, as you work through each chapter, to compare and contrast what happened, and the different ways in which we know, or think we know, about what happened.

Think particularly about:

- What were the reasons for the invasions?
- How were the invasions organised and why were they successful?
- How did the invaders settle?
- How effectively did the invaders establish control?
- What were the long-term legacies of the invasions?
- How do we find out about the invasions?
- How have these invasions been represented and interpreted?

There are questions and tasks as you work through each chapter, and summary tasks at the end, which expect you to reflect on what you have learned and compare and contrast what you have found out with what you learned from an earlier chapter.

After the three main chapters, you will find a ‘ragbag’ of sources. This contains a range of different sources on Saxons, Vikings and Normans for you to dip into as you work through the different chapters, to use when answering the summary questions and to refer to when you do the externally set exam question. Sometimes, it will be suggested that you look in the ragbag, but mostly it’s up to you.

An important part of your learning is the research that you do. Sometimes you will find yourself directed to a specific internet site, and in Chapter 1.3 The Normans there is a structured piece of research for you to undertake. Certainly in the externally set task you will be expected to follow through a research task, and an example of how to work through one of these is given to you after the ragbag.

It is essential, therefore, that you use this book as a starting point for your investigations – not as the finishing line!

# Timeline of Saxon, Viking and Norman raiding, invading and settling

This timeline shows you the sequence of raiding, invading and settling events. Refer to it whenever you have a concern about where something fits in.

**406**  
Roman army leaves Britain



**477-95**  
Saxons settle in  
Sussex and Wessex



**620s**  
Sutton Hoo burial



**871**  
Alfred becomes King  
of Wessex



**664**  
Synod of  
Whitby

## SAXONS

## VIKINGS



**440s**  
Saxon raids begin



**597**  
St Augustine's  
Christian mission  
arrives in Kent



**793-5**  
Vikings raid Lindisfarne,  
Jarrow and Iona

**865**  
Viking 'Great Army'  
arrives

**878**

Alfred defeats Danes (Vikings) at Edlington and Guthrum the Dane is baptised



**1016**

Cnut the Dane becomes King of all England



**1066**

William of Normandy invades England and defeats Harold of Wessex



**1070**

Resistance of Hereward the Wake



**NORMANS**



**899**

Death of Alfred



**1042**

Edward the Confessor becomes King of England



**991**

First Danegeld paid



**1069**

Harrying of the North by the Norman army

**1100**

Entire Saxon ruling class has been replaced by Normans

*Task*

Copy the dates on this timeline into your file but leave large gaps in between each date. As you work through this section and do your own research, add events, dates and people in the correct places. In this way you will gradually build up a detailed chronology of the period.

# 1.1

## *The Saxons*

Britain had, by AD 380, been part of the Roman Empire for over three hundred years. A snapshot of the Roman province of Britain at this time would find Roman soldiers patrolling Hadrian's Wall, the northernmost boundary of the Empire; the Wall, together with strong eastern coastal defences, would be keeping enemies of the Empire at bay. South of the Wall, the whole of the country was under Roman rule – a province that was just one small part of the vast and powerful empire that dominated the Mediterranean and most of Western Europe. Fifty years later this had ended for the British. Archaeological evidence points to a sudden and total collapse of the Roman way of life in Britain between, roughly, 411 and 430. At the beginning of the fifth century AD the Roman Empire was attacked by tribes massing on its borders: Franks, Vandals, Huns, Ostrogoths and Visigoths, who all wanted a share in the Empire's wealth and, more importantly, its land. In AD 410 and again in AD 455, these 'barbarians', as the Romans called them, captured Rome itself. The Roman Empire was collapsing. What, in Britain, would take its place?

### **Raiding, then invading**

#### ● SOURCE 1



Alan Sorrell's reconstruction of a Saxon raiding party landing in open boats on the Yorkshire coast near Scarborough.

What is happening here? In the background, Roman signal towers send the alarm to the nearest military garrison. This is a picture drawn from the artist's imagination but it is based on fact. We know the Saxons raided the east coast while the Romans still occupied Britain; we know that the Romans set up an elaborate system of warning beacons in the event of just such an action; and we know that the Saxons crossed the North Sea in great open rowing boats. The artist put all this together, being as true to the past as possible.

## Why did the Saxons invade Britain?

We can get other clues about the early Saxons from a British monk called Gildas. As you will see, he was hardly a fan of the Saxons! The title of his work gives you a clue, even before you read what he says:

### ● SOURCE 2

*All the councillors, together with that proud tyrant Gurthrigern, the British king, were so blinded that they sealed their country's doom by inviting in among them [like wolves into the sheepfold] the fierce and impious Saxons, a race hateful to both God and man, to repel the invasions of the northern nations. They first landed on the eastern side of the island, and there fixed their sharp talons, apparently to fight in favour of the island but alas! more truly against it. Their motherland, finding her first brood thus successful, sends forth a larger company of her wolfish offspring, which, sailing over, join themselves to their bastard-born comrades.*

Gildas wrote *The Ruin of Britain* around the 540s.  
The 'proud tyrant Gurthrigern' is probably Vortigern.

The Venerable Bede, another monk writing later on, tells us where these raiders and invaders came from:

### ● SOURCE 3

*They came from three very powerful Germanic tribes, the Saxons, Angles and Jutes. From the Saxon country, that is, the district now known as Old Saxony, came the East Saxons, the South Saxons and the West Saxons. [He goes on:] It was not long before such hordes of these alien peoples crowded into the island that the natives who had invited them began to live in terror. These heathen conquerors devastated the surrounding cities and countryside and established a stranglehold over nearly all the doomed island.*

Bede wrote his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* in 731.

Further clues about why the Saxons came to Britain can be seen in the findings of archaeologists working at Feddersen Wierde, near the mouth of the River Weiser on the European side of the North Sea. They discovered the remains of large wooden buildings that were abandoned around 450 because of rising sea levels. Add to this the invitation from Vortigern to come across and work as mercenaries and the rich fertile lowlands of southern and eastern Britain, and we probably have all the main reasons why the Saxons left their homelands. Remember, too, that Saxons had been raiding the east coast of Britain for over 200 years. They would have a pretty good idea of the rich pickings to be had there.

There are very few sources of evidence about the fifth and sixth centuries. There is some archaeological evidence, mainly objects from graves, but only fragmentary evidence from the Saxons themselves about the ways in which they lived out their lives once they arrived in Britain. So, much of what we know about their early years in Britain comes from angry, outraged British monks, from foreigners who were not directly involved and from half-remembered Saxon stories and traditions that surfaced later. It is not until the 600s that we can begin to be certain about what was going on in Saxon England.

- Sources 1–3 tell you quite a lot about the Saxons, but they all have their problems. What are they?
- Do these sources give you any firm clues about why the Saxons came to Britain?

## How did the Saxons establish themselves in Britain?

Britain was not an empty island when the Saxons arrived in force in the 440s. True, most of the Romans had gone, and Saxon raiding parties must have told people in their homelands of this. The Roman army had left in 406; four years later the Roman Emperor had ordered the cities of Britain to look after their own defences. Who remained? Some part-Roman, part-British families who had nowhere else to go and, of course, the Britons themselves, some of whom had lived on the fringe of the Roman Empire and had maybe never seen a Roman in their lives. What were these people to do, faced with a collapsed economy, disintegrating society and the withdrawal of support? Were they going to be easy prey for raiders and invaders from across the North Sea?

One of the things they could do, of course, was to ask for help. In 446 the Britons appealed to Aetius, the last effective Roman governor in Gaul. They asked him to hear ‘for the third time [the] groans of the Britons’. They told him that ‘the barbarians drive us to the sea; the sea throws us back on the barbarians. Thus two modes of death await us, we are either slain or drowned.’ The other thing they could do was to fight back. And they did that, too. Have a look in the ragbag (page 43) and see what Nennius has to say.

The Venerable Bede tells us that 449 was the year of the *Adventus Saxonum*, the coming of the Saxons. It is more than probable that the Saxons, Hengist and Horsa, invited in by Vortigern to act as mercenaries in his defence of Britain, eventually turned against him (look back to page 5 at what Gildas says) and set up their own kingdom in Kent. Wave after wave of Saxon invasions followed. For example, Aelle, in 477, began setting up the Saxon kingdom of Sussex and Cerdic and Cynric, in 495, founded the kingdom of Wessex. British resistance was easily overcome initially, although the Saxon advance was slowed down by the British victory at Mount Badon, where they were fighting under the leadership of Ambrosius Aurelianus. Around 550, the Saxons were on the move again, pushing the British further and further west and north. By 610, after the Battle of Chester, the Saxons were in control of most of what we now call England.

### Task

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Historians are generally agreed that the following dates and battles are reasonably accurate in showing the spread of Saxons throughout Britain.

|                 |                 |                     |
|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------|
| 455 Aegelsthrep | 456 Crecganford | 491 Andredesceaster |
| 500 Badon       | 552 Searoburh   | 556 Beranburh       |
| 571 Bedcanford  | 577 Deorham     | 610 Chester         |

- 1 Find out** who was involved in each battle. Try typing them into a search engine like Google, or use a good reference book in your library.
  - 2 Work out** how each was significant in the Saxon advance.
  - 3 Decide** how best to present this information, remembering you have to deal with three elements: time, place and significance.
  - 4 And then do it!**
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## How well did the Saxons settle the country?

The first Saxons were rural people. There is very little evidence that they took over the abandoned Roman towns, some of which, of course, had been abandoned for the second time by the Romano-British as the invading Saxons pushed them further west and north. It seems that most early Saxons probably looked on the crumbling Roman towns and paved roads with awe, seeing them as the ‘cunning work of giants’ and not as the work of human beings. Even so, the Saxons had a word for town, *ceaster*, and often showed that they knew its Roman name. The Roman *Mamucion* became the Saxon *Mameceaster* (modern Manchester), for example. And it must have been tempting, many cities having walls and most being at road junctions, for war lords to use them temporarily as good defensible positions when they were desperately trying to hold on to the land they had won.

## Kings and kingdoms

The 600s saw the gradual coming together of groups of invaders to form larger kingdoms – roughly a dozen by the end of the century. The process wasn’t simple: small kingdoms emerged and vanished without much trace, larger kingdoms fought to extend their power base or absorbed others when a ruler died and there was no clear internal support for a successor.

### ● SOURCE 4

*King Oswine was tall and handsome, pleasant of speech, courteous in manner, and generous to nobles and commons alike; so it came about that noblemen from almost every kingdom flocked to serve him as retainers.*

The Venerable Bede,  
.....seventh century.

- Read what Bede says about King Oswine of Deira. What sort of problems would a society have that contained a number of kingdoms like this one?

In the early Saxon years, a king’s followers or ‘thegns’ were more tied to their king than they were to their land. They were expected to live with him in his great hall, follow him, work for him, fight for him and, if necessary, die for him. Look in the ragbag (page 43) and you’ll find a source by Bede. It’s part of a story he is telling about King Eadwine but, without doing so deliberately, Bede also paints a marvellous picture of life in a great hall. Unwitting testimony like this is sometimes the best evidence of all. Why?

## Sutton Hoo: a king’s ship burial

The evidence we can gather from the ship burial of Sutton Hoo near Woodbridge in Suffolk is of a quite different sort. It seems to date from the 620s and is probably (although historians and archaeologists are still arguing about it) the burial place of King Raedwald, King of the East Anglians.

### ● SOURCE 5



Some of the objects found in the Sutton Hoo burial. The picture on the right shows a reconstruction .....of the burial.

# *The externally set task*

## How to succeed with the task

At the end of your course of study of raiders and invaders you will have to complete what the exam board calls an externally set task. You will be given a question and you will have four hours to research, plan and write an answer. These four hours will probably be spread across several of your normal history lessons.

**Below is an example of the type of question you will be given.**

‘Saxons, Vikings and Normans all invaded the British Isles, but only the Saxons were peaceful and civilised; the Vikings and Normans were violent and barbaric.’

How far do the sources you have researched convince you that this statement is correct?

### Before you start

From the very start, there are four important things to remember:

- 1 There is no right answer. What will impress the examiners is how well you support your arguments.
- 2 The examiner is interested in how well you have answered the question, not in how much you have found out or how much you can write.
- 3 The question says ‘how far do the sources you have researched convince you that this statement is correct?’. This means you need to comment on the sources you have used – have they been useful, do you trust them, do they differ from each other, are there things they do not tell you about? Make sure you have used a wide range of different types of sources: from the medieval period and from later; written sources and illustrations.
- 4 You must manage your time properly. There is no point in having lots of notes if you don’t have time to write your final answer. It would seem sensible to spend roughly two hours on your research, half an hour on sorting everything out and an hour and a half writing up your findings. But this is just a rough guide. A lot depends on how quickly you work and how easy you find the question. But don’t worry: a short, well-argued answer that keeps to the question will score more highly than a long, rambling one that contains lots of material but doesn’t get to the point.

# How to tackle the task

## 1 Think about what you know already

- How could you decide whether or not people were ‘peaceful and civilised’ and ‘violent and barbaric’? What would you look for? Draw up a checklist.
- Use your notes and other information you have already to see how the Saxons, Vikings and Normans measure up to this checklist.
- Remember that Saxons, Vikings and Normans may have behaved differently at different times.

## 2 Begin your research

- The task asks you to research sources. You will need to use evidence from a wide range of sources to back up what you are going to say. You could be looking for archaeological evidence, for reconstructions, for what people at the time believed and for what historians think.
- Start with the sources you already have from your work on Part 1 of this book. What does the evidence suggest so far about who comes out best on your checklist?
- Remember to think about the reliability and usefulness of these sources.

## 3 Wider research

- You can use any resources normally available in your school or college. This means you can use your own books and notes as well as the library and the internet.
- Look for a range of sources that will help you decide what the Saxons, Vikings and Normans were really like. Remember to think about the reliability and usefulness of these sources.
- Keep a note of all the sources you use. You will need to include a list at the end of your answer.
- Look for different opinions about what the Saxons, Vikings and Normans were like. Are these different opinions supported by the evidence you have found?

## 4 Write up your findings

- Make sure you explain **how far** you agree with the statement given in the question. Do not just write down everything you have found out about the Saxons, Vikings and Normans.
- Try to compare the three groups. If you think one was overall more peaceful and civilised than the others, explain why by comparing them.
- Back up what you say by referring to the sources you have researched.
- Do your best to communicate your findings clearly, and use correct grammar and spelling.