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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Anglo-Saxons: Myth and History

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Abstract

'Anglo-Saxon' is a term with a long and nuanced history. This study assesses where the word itself comes from, why it has been felt appropriate to separate the pre-Conquest epoch from later English history and why the Anglo-Saxons have taken on so many different meanings in subsequent times. Beginning with the deployment of 'Anglo-Saxon' in the eighth to tenth centuries, the focus then turns to how the period before 1066 was constructed as a formative time for English national and institutional identity. This process began in the later Middle Ages, but the term 'Anglo-Saxon' itself only began to be used again in the sixteenth century. It later took on powerful political and cultural resonance, which eventually gave rise to a racial understanding of 'Anglo-Saxon'. The difficult legacy of these many layers of later usage, including developments since the Victorian peak of Anglo-Saxonism, is also assessed.

Keywords: Anglo-Saxons; medieval; Medievalism; historiography; early modern

'Anglo-Saxon' is a term with a long and complicated history that begins in the eighth century.[1] However, its basic meaning in modern times is as a designation for the earliest phase of English history that runs from the fifth century to the Norman Conquest that began in 1066; it also refers to the inhabitants and cultures of England in that period, and by extension to other ideas, practices and people that claim association with or descent from them, sometimes distantly and with heavy layers of reinterpretation.

This broadly historical valence of 'Anglo-Saxon' started to develop only in the sixteenth century, but arose from an already long tradition of regarding the

[1] In what follows, Anglo-Saxon will be used for more-or-less direct references to the people, language and culture of early medieval England; 'Anglo-Saxon' will denote deployment of that term in more distant senses, or when the word itself is under discussion. This is in many cases a difficult distinction, but is attempted for the sake of clarity.

Conquest as a suppression of ancient English liberty, which led to 1066 being cast as an historical watershed and the time before as the source of much that was thought to constitute the deepest strata of English national and political identity. The Anglo-Saxons changed as the English themselves did in subsequent times, suiting each new age's requirements and tastes. In the sixteenth century they were forerunners to the inchoate Church of England. Claims to 'Anglo-Saxon' freedom and institutional heritage became an important part of political culture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This casting of the Anglo-Saxons as the wellspring of English identity reached its apogee in the nineteenth century, when such claims became much wider in appeal, as well as very forthright in articulation. A more explicitly racialised, and racist, understanding of 'Anglo-Saxon' arose; one that cast not only ancient peoples but modern ones as Anglo-Saxons, and that was used to celebrate and justify the global extension of British and American influence.[2] Where once the Anglo-Saxons had been cherished because of their great institutions, the institutions were now cherished because they were thought to have been made by racially superior Anglo-Saxons. There is no getting around the fact that 'Anglo-Saxon' used in this way has been enthusiastically and prominently used in exclusionary rhetoric across the globe. Such language is no longer part of the acceptable mainstream regarding ethnicity or race anywhere, but it is the handling of this legacy that creates the most contention in the twenty-first century.

Dissatisfaction with the term 'Anglo-Saxon' has been expressed since the mid-nineteenth century, on diverse grounds. The vernacular of early medieval England had already started to be called 'Old English' rather than 'Anglo-Saxon' in the 1860s and 1870s, emphasising its place in the *longue durée* of English language and literature,[3] and this designation grew to predominate in the twentieth century.[4] Historians in the nineteenth century such as E. A. Freeman (1823–92) and Thomas Kerslake (1812–91) also argued in favour of moving away from 'Anglo-Saxon' in historical contexts because it was not a term widely used in the period itself.[5] For Freeman, the label's main value was as a designation for

[2] The point is developed in more depth below, but recent studies that foreground this issue, and its relevance in current times, include A. Miyashiro, 'Our Deeper Past: Race, Settler Colonialism, and Medieval Heritage Politics', *Lit. Compass* 16 (2019), 1–11; M. Rambaran-Olm, 'A Wrinkle in Medieval Time: Ironing Out Issues Regarding Race, Temporality, and the Early English', *New Lit. Hist.* 52 (2021), 385–406; and M. Rambaran-Olm and E. Wade, 'What's in a Name? The Past and Present Racism in "Anglo-Saxon" Studies', *YES* 52 (2022), 135–53.

[3] A. Frantzen, *Desire for Origins: New Language, Old English, and Teaching the Tradition* (New Brunswick, 1990), p. 72; H. Momma, *From Philology to English Studies: Language and Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 128–9; and A. Curzan, 'Interdisciplinarity and Historiography: Periodization in the History of the English Language', *English Historical Linguistics: an International Handbook*, ed. A. Bergs and L. J. Brinton (Berlin, 2012), pp. 1233–56, at 1237–44. There was a strand of resistance to this move, which emphasised the distance of the Anglo-Saxons from later English literary tradition: F. A. March, 'Is there an Anglo-Saxon Language?', *Trans. of the Amer. Philol. Assoc.* 3 (1872), 97–110.

[4] A perusal of occurrences of 'Old English' and 'Anglo-Saxon' in the titles of journal articles and other publications stored in the 'Language and Literature' and 'Linguistics' sections of www.jstor.org (in December 2023) found that 'Old English' gained rapidly in relative popularity from about 1890 and especially after about 1920.

[5] For Freeman, see below. See also T. Kerslake, 'Vestiges of the Supremacy of Mercia in the South of England, during the Eighth Century', *Trans. of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeol. Soc.* 3 (1878–9), 106–67, at 110–11.

the modern population because 'the "Anglo-Saxon period", so far as there ever was one, is going on still'.[6] This racialised modern heritage of the term 'Anglo-Saxon' has been recognised in scholarship since the 1980s,[7] but was brought to wider attention in a series of disputes that arose in 2017 within the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists; in 2019, these controversies led the society to change its name to the International Society for the Study of Early Medieval England.[8]

No single alternative term exists that will satisfy all constituencies, which in turn raises the question of whether and why there *should* be a single designation for this period.[9] There is no consensus on what to do with the Anglo-Saxons and their afterlife, and this survey makes no attempt to settle that debate. What it offers is in part an account of the development of the word itself, but also an historiographical exploration of what lies behind it. Very often this study deals with caricatures that bear only a distant and selective relationship to material from before 1066, for the *idea* of the Anglo-Saxons – what might be called the myth of them – was harnessed again and again to serve contemporary needs. Limits must inevitably be set for this expansive subject. The focus will be on developments in Britain and later also the USA; 'Anglo-Saxon' mythology in Australia, Canada and non-Anglophone countries is also deeply interesting, but space precludes a full treatment of all areas.[10] The remit includes scholarly assessment of the Anglo-Saxon past, meaning study of the actual history, language and literature of early medieval England, but also looks to other deployments of that past. Indeed, there was not a firm distinction between popular and scholarly writing before the twentieth century.[11] The last section of this article does, however, turn to how approaches to the Anglo-

[6] E. A. Freeman, *The History of the Norman Conquest of England, its Causes and its Results*, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1867–79) I, 608.

[7] Key overviews include R. Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: the Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, 1981); H. A. MacDougall, *Racial Myth in English History: Trojans, Teutons, and Anglo-Saxons* (Hanover, 1982); C. A. Simmons, *Reversing the Conquest: History and Myth in Nineteenth-Century British Literature* (New Brunswick, 1990); and M. X. Vernon, *The Black Middle Ages: Race and the Construction of the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke, 2018) See also M. Dockray-Miller, *Public Medievalists, Racism, and Suffrage in the American Women's College* (Basingstoke, 2017); and D. Wilton, 'What Do We Mean by Anglo-Saxon? Pre-Conquest to the Present', *JEGP* 119 (2020), 425–56.

[8] Selected overviews of the society's experience (with reference to the numerous treatments of it on the internet) include E. Louviot, 'Divided by a Common Language: Controversy over the Use of the Word "Anglo-Saxon"', *Études médiévales anglaises* 95 (2020), 107–47, at 107–11; and J. Hines, '"Anglo-Saxonists", "Anglo-Saxonism" and "Anglo-Saxon": Trying to Make Some Sense of Things', *New Narratives for the First Millennium AD? Alte und neue Perspektiven der archäologischen Forschung zum 1. Jahrtausend n. Chr.*, ed. B. Ludowici and H. Pöppelmann (Brunswick, 2022), pp. 299–311.

[9] S. Oosthuizen, *The Emergence of the English* (Amsterdam, 2018), esp. pp. 3–6 addresses this problem and suggests some possible alternative divisions of the period.

[10] For selected works on these traditions, see E. P. Kohn, *This Kindred People: Canadian-American Relations and the Anglo-Saxon Ideal, 1895–1903* (Montréal, 2004); E. Winter, 'Rethinking Multiculturalism after its "Retreat": Lessons from Canada', *Amer. Behavioral Scientist* 59 (2015), 637–57; M. Lake, 'British World or New World? Anglo-Saxonism and Australian Engagement with America', *Hist. Australia* 10 (2013), 36–50; and E. Chabal, 'The Rise of the Anglo-Saxon: French Perceptions of the Anglo-American World in the Long Twentieth Century', *French Politics, Culture and Soc.* 31 (2013), 24–46.

[11] See below.

Saxons in historical scholarship have changed since that time. Philological research – the study of Old English, understood broadly – has likewise been closely bound up with interest in all aspects of the Anglo-Saxon past since the sixteenth century, but because this side of the subject has been extensively covered elsewhere it will be touched on here only in relation to historical themes.[12]

It should also be stressed that even at the height of their popularity the Anglo-Saxons were by no means the only or uncontested foundation of English national or ethnic identity. They competed at various times with the Britons or Celts (especially in the form of King Arthur), the Romans, the Normans and others.[13] Eventually, as will be seen, the Anglo-Saxon past did win out as the preferred English (and to some extent British) origin story, although there was no single, agreed way of understanding it.

The 'English Saxons' before 1066

'Anglo-Saxon' did not originate in England. It first emerged as an exonym: a name used by outsiders. Specifically, it arose in Latin in continental European sources of the late eighth and ninth centuries as a way of differentiating the 'English Saxons' from their counterparts in 'old' Saxony.[14] Around 760 St Willibald (d. *c.* 787), an Englishman long resident in mainland Europe, set Angles and Saxons side by side when giving the 'old name of the Angles and Saxons' for London (*antiquo Anglorum Saxonumque vocabulo*),[15] and two decades or so later Paul the

[12] The story of how interest revived in the language and literature of the Anglo-Saxons has been told very effectively: major studies include Frantzen, *Desire for Origins*; J. Niles, *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England, 1066–1901: Remembering, Forgetting, Deciphering, and Renewing the Past* (Chichester, 2015); T. Graham, *The Recovery of Old English: Anglo-Saxon Studies in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Kalamazoo, 2000); and K. Dekkers, *Recovering Old English* (Cambridge, 2024). Frantzen's work has been a formative influence in this area, and as such is cited here, though, in contrast to his nuanced take on this subject, the problematic nature of his views regarding masculinity and women is now widely acknowledged. For on-going influence of the historical framing of Old English in modern pedagogical works, see J. Blanquer, D. B. Ellard, E. Hitchcock and E. E. Sweany, 'Mitchell & Robinson's Medievalism: Echoes of Empire in the History of Old English Pedagogy', *Old English Medievalism: Reception and Recreation in the 20th and 21st Centuries*, ed. R. A. Fletcher, T. Porck and O. M. Traxel (Cambridge, 2022), pp. 225–41.

[13] Geoffrey of Monmouth's *De gestis Brittonum* appeared at much the same time as interest revived in pre-Conquest English history, and presented a direct challenge to the emergent picture of an English-dominated past that endured and competed with it for centuries: see T. D. Kendrick, *British Antiquity* (London, 1950); R. W. Leckie, *The Passage of Dominion: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Periodization of Insular History in the Twelfth Century* (Toronto, 1981); G. Henley and J. B. Smith (eds), *A Companion to Geoffrey of Monmouth* (Leiden, 2020); and L. Brady, *The Origin Legends of Early Medieval Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2022), pp. 188–97.

[14] W. Levison, *England and the Continent in the Eighth Century* (Oxford, 1946), p. 92, n. 1; S. Reynolds, 'What Do We Mean by "Anglo-Saxon" and "Anglo-Saxons"?', *Jnl of Brit. Stud.* 24 (1985), 395–414, esp. 397–400; Wilton, 'What Do We Mean', pp. 435–9; and F. Tinti, *Europe and the Anglo-Saxons* (Cambridge, 2021), pp. 3–4.

[15] Willibald, *Vita Bonifatii*, ch. 4 (*Vitae sancti Bonifatii archiepiscopi Moguntini*, ed. W. Levison, MGH SS rer. Germ. 57 (Hanover, 1905), 16). This text was written before 768, as it describes Pippin III (751–68) as still ruling.

Deacon (d. 799),[16] in his *History of the Lombards* (*Historia Langobardorum*), referred to the loose, linen garments seen in a painting at Monza as like those associated with the *Anglisaxones*, and called Cædwalla, ruler of the West Saxons (686–8), king of the *Anglorum Saxonum.*[17] Two other very early references come in the *Vita Bertuini* (probably written in the late eighth century), which refers to its subject as having been born in 'the Anglo-Saxon land' (*provintia Anglisaxonis*),[18] and in a document conveying the decisions of a papal legation of 786 that described a synod as being held in *Anglorum Saxonia.*[19] Several more occurrences of 'Anglo-Saxon' come from the ninth century: among others, a biography of the Northumbrian expatriate scholar Alcuin (d. 804), written probably at Tours in the 820s, describes one English visitor to him as an *Aengelsaxo*,[20] and a papal privilege from ninth-century Saint-Denis refers to lands held *apud Anglos Saxones.*[21]

None of the longer texts among these used 'Anglo-Saxon' exclusively, or even predominantly: they also leaned heavily on *Angli* and *Saxones*, which were the standard terms in England during the eighth and ninth centuries to refer to the English as a whole.[22] Both were well-established ethnonyms long before the era of 'Anglo-Saxon' settlement.[23] According to the famous origin story recounted by the Venerable Bede (d. 735), both the Angles and Saxons were among three continental European peoples who settled in Britain from mainland northern Europe in the fifth century: the Angles supposedly made the lands north of the Thames their own, with the exception of the kingdom of the East Saxons, while other realms founded by Saxons could be found south of the Thames, along with some

[16] The exact date of this work is difficult to pin down: it stops in 744, and was probably written in or after the mid-780s. See W. Pohl, 'Paolo Diacono e la costruzione dell'identità longobarda', *Paolo Diacono*, ed. P. Chiesa (Udine, 2001), pp. 413–26; W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 500–800): Jordanes, Gregory of Tours, Bede, and Paul the Deacon* (Princeton, 1988), esp. pp. 331–44; and R. McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 66–71.

[17] Paul the Deacon, *Historia Langobardorum* iv.22 and vi.15 (*Pauli Historia Langobardorum*, ed. G. Waitz, MGH SS rer. Germ. 48 (Hanover, 1878), 155 and 217; *Paul the Deacon: History of the Langobards*, trans. W. D. Foulke (Philadelphia, 1907), pp. 166 and 261).

[18] *Vita Bertuini*, ch. 1 (*Passiones vitaeque sanctorum aevi*, ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, MGH SS rer. Mer. 7 (Hanover, 1920), 177). For date and context, see A. Dierkens, *Abbayes et chapitres entre Sambre et Meuse (VIIe–XIe siècles): contribution à l'histoire religieuse des campagnes du Haut Moyen Age* (Sigmaringen, 1985), pp. 137–42.

[19] *Epistolae Karolini aevi: tomus II*, ed. E. Dümmler, MGH Epp. 4 (Berlin, 1895), 20 (no. 3); *English Historical Documents c. 500–1042*, ed. D. Whitelock, Eng. Hist. Documents 1, 2nd ed. (London, 1979), 836. This letter was written to Pope Hadrian I (772–95), ostensibly by George, bishop of Ostia, though it should probably be seen as the work of Alcuin: C. Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils c. 650–c. 850* (London, 1995), pp. 153–90.

[20] *Vita Alcuini*, ch. 18 (*La Vita beati Alcuini (IXe s.): les inflexions d'un discours de sainteté*, ed. C. Veyrard-Cosme (Paris, 2017), pp. 288–9).

[21] Discussed in B. Savill, *England and the Papacy in the Early Middle Ages: Papal Privileges in European Perspective, c. 680–1073* (Oxford, 2023), pp. 82–3.

[22] A clear summation of early ethnic terminology for the English is J. Hines, 'Who Did the Anglo-Saxons Think They Were?', *CA* 366 (2020), 52–5.

[23] For the earlier *Saxones*, see R. Flierman, *Saxon Identities, AD 150–900* (London, 2017), esp. pp. 23–51; and J. M. Harland, 'Imagining the Saxons in Late Antique Gaul', *Sächsische Leute und Länder Benennung und Lokalisierung von Gruppenidentitäten im ersted Jahrtausend*, ed. M. Augstein and M. Hardt (Brunswick, 2019), pp. 45–56. The earlier footprint left by the *Angli* is much smaller: a succinct summary is S. Ghosh, *Writing the Barbarian Past: Studies in Early Medieval Historical Narrative* (Leiden, 2016), p. 185, n. 5.

established by Jutes.[24] Bede's narrative had enormous influence in subsequent times, even though he was almost certainly simplifying a more complex picture and back-projecting the political and ethnic landscape of his own day.[25] His own *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* neatly labelled all the English peoples *Saxones* prior to their conversion (following the usage of very early sources), and all *Angli* thereafter, united by the famous pun of Pope Gregory I (590–604) who likened some enslaved *Angli* he saw on sale in Rome to *angeli* (angels).[26] In the tenth and eleventh centuries this undoubtedly gave impetus to Anglian (or, as it would become, English) nomenclature,[27] but a wider view shows considerable diversity in earlier centuries, including in Bede's own time. Charters from Worcester (supposedly in an 'Anglian' area) referred to speaking *Saxonice*,[28] the West Saxon St Boniface (d. 754) preferred *Angli*,[29] and the Northumbrian Stephen of

[24] Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* i.15 (*Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), pp. 48–53).

[25] There is much discussion to this effect: insightful treatments include J. Hines, 'The Becoming of the English: Identity, Material Culture and Language in Early Anglo-Saxon England', *ASSAH* 7 (1994), 49–59; I. Wood, 'Before and After the Migration to Britain', *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century: an Ethnographic Perspective*, ed. J. Hines, Studies in Hist. Archaeoethnology 2 (-Woodbridge, 1997), 41–64; B. Yorke, 'Political and Ethnic Identity: a Case Study of Anglo-Saxon Practice', *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain*, ed. W. O. Frazer and A. Tyrell (London, 2000), pp. 69–89; B. Yorke, 'Anglo-Saxon *gentes* and *regna*', *Regna and Gentes: the Relationship between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World*, ed. H.-W. Goetz, J. Jarnut and W. Pohl, The Transformation of the Roman World 13 (Leiden, 2003), 381–407; S. Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, Stud. in Med. Hist. and Culture 24 (New York, 2003), 45–82; see also below.

[26] Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* i.15 (ed. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 132–4). Another, slightly earlier version of the story is found in the earliest *vita* of Gregory the Great (ch. 9 (*The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave (Lawrence, 1968), pp. 90–1)). For selected discussion, see M. Richter, 'Bede's *Angli*: Angles or English?', *Peritia* 3 (1984), 99–114; S. J. Harris, 'Bede and Gregory's Allusive Angles', *Criticism* 44 (2002), 271–89; R. W. Rix, 'Northumbrian Angels in Rome: Religion and Politics in the Anecdote of St Gregory', *JMH* 38 (2012), 257–77; and Flierman, *Saxon Identities*, pp. 32–6.

[27] Major contributions on the longer-term development of English identity at this time include Reynolds, 'What Do We Mean'; S. Foot, 'The Making of *Angelcynn*: English Identity before the Norman Conquest', *TRHS*, 6th ser., 6 (1996), 25–50; and N. P. Brooks, 'English Identity from Bede to the Millennium', *Haskins Soc. Jnl* 14 (2003), 33–51. For the shift towards English/Anglian terminology in the tenth century, see F. Tinti, 'The English Presence in Rome in the Later Ango-Saxon Period: Change or Continuity?', *Cities, Saints, and Communities in Early Medieval Europe: Essays in Honour of Alan Thacker*, ed. S. DeGregorio and P. Kershaw, Stud. in the Early Middle Ages 46 (Turnhout, 2020), 345–72, at 359–60.

[28] P. H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography*, Royal Hist. Soc. Guides and Handbooks 8 (London, 1968), no. 190 (dated 836) (*Cartularium Saxonicum: a Collection of Charters Relating to Anglo-Saxon History*, ed. W. de G. Birch, 3 vols. (London, 1885–93), no. 416; *English Historical Documents*, ed. Whitelock, no. 85). For the mixed ethnic and linguistic terminology of English charters, see E. Roberts and F. Tinti, 'Signalling Language Choice in Anglo-Saxon and Frankish Charters, *c.* 700–*c.* 900', *The Languages of Early Medieval Charters: Latin, Germanic Vernaculars, and the Written Word*, ed. R. Gallagher, E. Roberts and F. Tinti, Brill's Ser. on the Early Middle Ages 27 (Leiden, 2021), 188–229, at 207–10.

[29] Brooks, 'English Identity', pp. 37–41.

Ripon referred to St Wilfrid (d. 709/10) at various points as both *de Anglorum gente* and an *episcopus Saxoniae.*[30]

The development of English identity and self-reference is too large a subject to address fully here, but it is important to establish that 'Anglo-Saxon' was always a variation on the more popular Anglian/English and Saxon terminology. For a brief period, it did enjoy wider popularity in England, when circumstances conspired to promote the political convergence of Angles and Saxons. This extended from the middle of the reign of Alfred the Great (871–99) to the early years of the reign of his grandson Æthelstan (924–39), with a limited revival in the 940s and 950s. At the outset of this period, Northumbria, East Anglia and a large part of Mercia, three of the four principal English kingdoms, had fallen under Scandinavian dominance, and Mercia was severely truncated. Alfred, king of the West Saxons, was recognised as overlord of what remained of the Mercian kingdom from some point around 880, and in time also by the rulers of the Welsh kingdoms. In effect, Alfred now ruled over all those in the southern part of Britain who were arrayed against the Scandinavian (or, as it was sometimes put, pagan) threat. This situation gave rise to the formulation of Alfred's position as found in the opening of a biography of him written by Asser (d. *c.* 909) in 893: 'ruler of all the Christians of the island of Britain, king of the Anglo-Saxons'.[31] It may be no coincidence that Asser himself was an outsider, coming from Wales; he could also have absorbed the usage of the several scholars from the Frankish kingdoms at Alfred's court. Anglo-Saxon terminology nonetheless proved useful as a way to set Alfred's polity apart. Asser called earlier West Saxon kings 'king of the (West) Saxons', reserving 'Anglo-Saxon' nomenclature for Alfred alone. Charters show that this language extended beyond Asser's work, and it seems to have gained wider currency after a ceremonial submission to Alfred at London in 886 by all the English peoples who were not under Scandinavian dominance.[32]

For two generations in late-ninth- and early-tenth-century England, a 'kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons' therefore came into being.[33] It co-opted a

[30] Stephen of Ripon, *Vita sancti Wilfrithi*, chs 6 and 30 (*The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1927), pp. 14–15 and 60–1).

[31] 'Omnium Brittanniae insulae Christianorum rectori … Anglorum Saxonum regi'. Asser, *De rebus gestis Ælfredi* (*Asser's Life of King Alfred, together with the Annals of Saint Neots, Erroneously Ascribed to Asser*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (Oxford, 1904), p. 1; *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, trans. S. Keynes and M. Lapidge (London, 1983), p. 67).

[32] *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* 886 (*The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle MS. A*, ed. J. M. Bately, AS Chronicle: a Collaborative Edition 3 (Cambridge, 1986), 53; *English Historical Documents*, ed. Whitelock, p. 199); Asser, *De rebus gestis Ælfredi*, ch. 83 (ed. Stevenson, p. 69; trans. Keynes and Lapidge, pp. 97–8). For discussion, see Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, pp. 227–8; and S. Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', *Kings, Currency and Alliances: History and Coinage of Southern England in the Ninth Century*, ed. M. A. S. Blackburn and D. N. Dumville, Stud. in AS Hist. 9 (Woodbridge, 1998), 1–47, at 22–6. It has recently been suggested that Asser may have been involved in drafting some of Alfred's charters, some of which also used 'Anglo-Saxon': R. Gallager, 'Asser and the Writing of West Saxon Charters', *EHR* 136 (2021), 773–808.

[33] S. Keynes, 'Edward, King of the Anglo-Saxons', *Edward the Elder 899–924*, ed. N. J. Higham and D. H. Hill (London, 2001), pp. 40–66; and S. Keynes, 'Anglo-Saxons, Kingdom of the', *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. M. Lapidge, J. Blair, S. Keynes and D. Scragg, 2nd ed. (Chichester, 2014), p. 40.

helpful, originally external designation, given new force by the merging of West Saxon and Mercian (Anglian) polities to create an altogether new composite entity.[34] The same configuration was maintained under Alfred's son and successor, Edward the Elder (899–924), who collaborated closely and successfully with his brother-in-law and sister, Æthelred (d. 911) and Æthelflæd (d. 918), as rulers of the Mercians within the larger 'Anglo-Saxon' polity.[35] During this period 'Anglo-Saxon' was integral to the identity of the kingdom, and featured prominently not only in charters issued by the kings but also in several versions of a royal coronation *ordo*, intended for recitation during the formal installation of new monarchs before their most important subjects.[36] Early in the reign of Edward's son and successor Æthelstan (924–39) the emphasis shifted, again in response to changing circumstances. The takeover of York in 927 – which brought together at least part of all the kingdoms considered English before the Scandinavian invasions of the late ninth century – gave grounds for the king's partisans to reformulate his domain as a unified kingdom of the English or, as one Latin poem of the period put it, 'this Saxon-land (now) made whole' (*ista perfecta Saxonia*).[37] This reference to Saxons notwithstanding, for the rest of Æthelstan's reign the emphasis fell on kingship of the English (*Angli*), combined now with overlordship of all Britain. Things were different by this stage: Æthelstan asserted a higher order of political supremacy, while within his own kingdom he ruled lands in the east and north of England as well as in Mercia and Wessex, and the combined whole was perhaps not felt to fit so comfortably with the Anglo-Saxon frame of reference. Tellingly, Anglo-Saxon terminology was resurrected briefly in the mid-tenth century by the scribes responsible for the so-called 'alliterative charters'. These documents took a view from the west midlands that was especially conscious of the patchwork nature of the kingdom and probably also of the reduced circumstances of Æthelstan's successors, who lost many of the gains made in the midlands and the north earlier in the tenth century. One charter, issued in 946 by King Eadred

[34] Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, pp. 38–9; S. Keynes, 'The West Saxon Charters of King Æthelwulf and his Sons', *EHR* 109 (1994), 1109–49, at 1147–8; Keynes, 'King Alfred and the Mercians', pp. 34–9; S. Keynes, 'England, 900–1016', *The New Cambridge Medieval History, III: c. 900–c. 1024*, ed. T. Reuter (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 456–84, at 460–4; D. Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great*, Cambridge Stud. in Med. Life and Thought, 4th ser., 67 (Cambridge, 2007), 105–7; S. Keynes, 'Alfred the Great and the Kingdom of the Anglo-Saxons', *A Companion to Alfred the Great*, ed. N. G. Discenza, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 58 (Leiden, 2015), 13–46, at 22–6.

[35] Keynes, 'Edward', pp. 48–62.

[36] D. Pratt, *English Coronation Ordines in the Ninth and Early Tenth Centuries*, HBS 125 (London, 2023), 25–7.

[37] For the poem, *Carta dirige gressus*, see M. Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature* (London, 1993), p. 77. On Æthelstan's reign more broadly, see S. Foot, *Æthelstan: the First King of England* (New Haven, 2011), pp. 25–8. For difficulties in equating the new kingdom created by Æthelstan and his successors with later England, see G. Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford, 2015), pp. 1–7.

(946–55), described him as ruler 'of the Anglo-Saxons and Northumbrians, of the pagans and the Britons'.[38]

As the kingdom of the English was reconstituted in the later tenth century, 'Anglo-Saxon' was superseded. That should not take away from its genuine significance during a formative phase of English political development. It had been adopted from external usage to suit a particular configuration of circumstances that existed between the end of the ninth century and the mid-tenth. Yet except when copying or adapting texts from this era, it was barely used for centuries thereafter. Rulers and subjects in the century before the Norman Conquest were resolutely English.

Looking Back on the Anglo-Saxons in the Later Middle Ages

Even though the Anglo-Saxons as such vanished almost completely from the scene even before 1066, at least in England,[39] the centuries that followed the Norman Conquest were pivotal in the creation of the myth of pre-Conquest England that would flourish in later times.

Such was emphatically not the message propagated in the decades immediately after the Conquest. Continuity was an integral element of what came to be the accepted Norman line on the events of 1066: that William, Edward's kinsman, had been nominated as the latter's legitimate heir, and reclaimed from a presumptuous usurper the kingdom that was his by right.[40] William's invasion only crystallised into a watershed moment in English history in several important works of history that were produced in the early twelfth century. Written by Eadmer of Canterbury, Gaimar, Henry of Huntingdon, Symeon of Durham, William of Malmesbury and others, these works offered the most dynamic syntheses of English history since that of Bede himself.[41] Several of them reflect deep interest in the pre-Conquest past, which was not at this stage set apart with a distinct term: in that sense there was as yet no 'Anglo-Saxon England'.

[38] 'Angulsaxna et Norþhymbra paganorum Brettonumque'. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. 520 (*Cartularium Saxonicum*, ed. Birch, no. 815; *English Historical Documents*, ed. Whitelock, no. 105). For further discussion of the 'alliterative charters' and a list of them, see S. Keynes, 'Church Councils, Royal Assemblies, and Anglo-Saxon Royal Diplomas', *Kingship, Legislation and Power in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. G. R. Owen-Crocker and B. W. Schneider, Publications of the Manchester Centre for AS Stud. 13 (Woodbridge, 2013), 17–184, at 93–5; and C. R. Hart, *The Danelaw* (London, 1992), pp. 431–44.

[39] 'Anglo-Saxon' was still found occasionally in mainland European texts as late as the twelfth century: *Annales Altahenses* s.a. 1036, 1066, 1071 (*Annales Altahenses maiores*, ed. W. de Giesebrecht and E. L. B. Ab Oefele, MGH SS rer. Germ. 4 (Hanover, 1891), 20, 72 and 80); *Annales Beneventani* s.a. 1066 (*Scriptorum tomus III*, ed. G. H. Pertz, MGH SS 3 (Hanover, 1839), 180); and Hugh of Flavigny, *Chronicon* s.a. 929 (*Scriptorum tomus II*, ed. G. H. Pertz, MGH SS 2 (Hanover, 1829), 359). See discussion in Wilton, 'What Do We Mean', pp. 454–6; and U. Matzke, *England und das Reich der Ottonen in der ersten Hälfte des 10. Jahrhunderts: Beziehung und Wahrnehmung von Angelsachsen und Sachsen zwischen Eigenständigkeit und Zusammengehörigkeit*, Göttinger Forschungen zur Landesgeschichte 16 (Bielefeld, 2009), 152–62.

[40] G. Garnett, *Conquered England: Kingship, Succession, and Tenure 1066–1166* (Oxford, 2007).

[41] For what follows, see G. Garnett, *The Norman Conquest in English History*, I: *a Broken Chain?* (Oxford, 2021), pp. 13–103; A. Gransden, *Historical Writing in England c. 550 to c. 1307* (London, 1974), pp. 92–185.

Nonetheless, what animated William of Malmesbury to write his monumental *History of the English Kings* (*Gesta regum Anglorum*) was a desire to 'mend the broken chain of our [meaning English] history'.[42] By this he referred to the paucity of historical writing from England between Bede and his own time: the main witnesses he knew of were several versions of vernacular annals now known collectively as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, and one tenth-century Latin adaptation of the same chronicle. Yet he was concerned about more than the simple lack of information. William immediately followed his comment on the broken chain by saying that he wished to 'give a Roman polish to the rough annals of our native speech'.[43] The information that could be found about the English past – much of it written in the English vernacular, or in Latin of idiosyncratic and outmoded style – now sat uncomfortably in a kingdom that was remaking its aristocratic and ecclesiastical culture. The king and his barons were French speakers with interests on both sides of the Channel, and most abbots and bishops were drawn from the same stock, trained to regard Latin as the proper foundation of literacy, and largely unfamiliar with English. Major churches across the land were being knocked down and rebuilt to suit new architectural tastes. The face of England was changing rapidly.[44] And yet many foundations of the kingdom – its saints, its institutions, the landholdings of lords and churches – rested on the pre-Conquest past. What William of Malmesbury and his contemporaries achieved was a rationalisation of that history, in a form more conducive to Anglo-Norman expectations. They presented the Conquest itself as a major event, as recompense for the sins and shortcomings of the English in the preceding decades, but not as the end of English history.[45]

At much the same time, and for much the same reasons, scholars of law began to play a part in consolidating and preserving the legacy of the pre-Conquest past. Interest in early laws grew around 1100, when several compilations of Anglo-Saxon law were assembled, most notably the Latin translation *Quadripartitus* and the Old English *Textus Roffensis.* The bulk of surviving Anglo-Saxon legislation comes from these compilations.[46] They put the legal heritage of England on record, on the premise that English legal traditions laid down before 1066 were still believed to inform the way the law operated in subsequent times.[47] William the Conqueror was thus supposed to have endorsed the laws of King Edward the Confessor. As is well known, Edward never issued any such

[42] '... Interruptam temporum seriem sarcire'. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, i. prologue (*William of Malmesbury: Gesta regum Anglorum; the History of the English Kings*, ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson and M. Winterbottom, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1998–9) I, 14–15).

[43] 'Exarata barbarice Romano sale condire'. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, i. prologue (ed. and trans. Mynors, Thomson and Winterbottom, I, 14–15).

[44] For the internationalisation of England at this stage, see R. Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings 1075–1225* (Oxford, 2000), esp. pp. 11–28 and 102–20. For the wider phenomenon of 'Europeanisation', see R. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change 950–1350* (London, 1993).

[45] Garnett, *Norman Conquest*, esp. pp. 13–22.

[46] P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*, I: *Legislation and its Limits* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 224–53 and 465–76.

[47] Garnett, *Norman Conquest*, pp. 104–31.

laws, and the text that circulates as the *Leges Edwardi Confessoris* was a product of the twelfth century that had only a distant connection with the saintly king.[48]

Fascination with the legal heritage of the Anglo-Saxons reflected a strengthening conviction that England after 1066 was less free and less just, which implied that the time before had been better. Already in the early twelfth century, Henry of Huntingdon and the writer of the *Gesta Herewardi* railed against Norman injustice,[49] and Orderic Vitalis and Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote, respectively, of the 'Norman arrogance' (*Normannicus fastus*) or 'yoke of unending slavery' (*iugum perpetue seruitutis*) imposed on the English – phrasing that would prove deeply influential in later times.[50] These writers were still close enough to the Conquest that they could (at least in the case of English speakers) comprehend Old English, and had reasonable familiarity with Anglo-Saxon sources and customs. That knowledge dwindled as time passed, but enthusiasm for the institutional virtues of the Anglo-Saxons persevered. For Robert Mannyng (d. *c.* 1338) and other vernacular historians of the early fourteenth century, affection for the Anglo-Saxons arose out of animosity for their conquerors: 'alle þis þraldom þat now on Inglond is, þorgh Normanȝ it cam, bondage [and] destres'.[51] Oppression by Normans could also be set against triumph over brutish Danes. The latter were frequently the antagonists of the English in romances of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries set in the pre-Conquest period, and even featured as ceremonial adversaries to be beaten by the English in pageants from at least 1416 onwards.[52]

Other writers focused on genuine historical characters of the pre-Conquest period. Alfred the Great was already seen in the early twelfth century as pre-Conquest England's pre-eminent ruler, and by the thirteenth century his status as 'the great' was well established in both English and Icelandic sources.[53]

[48] Wormald, *Making of English Law*, pp. 409–11; and B. R. O'Brien, *God's Peace and King's Peace: the Laws of Edward the Confessor* (Philadelphia, 1999).

[49] Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum* vi.38 (*Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon: Historia Anglorum, the History of the English People*, ed. and trans. D. Greenway (Oxford, 1996), pp. 402–3). For (extensive) English resistance to Norman oppression in the *Gesta Herewardi*, see H. Thomas, 'The *Gesta Herewardi*, the English and their Conquerors', *ANS* 21 (1999), 212–32.

[50] Orderic Vitalis, *Historia ecclesiastica* iv (*The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. and trans. M. Chibnall, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1969–80) II, 202–3); and Geoffrey of Monmouth, *De gestis Britonum*, 'Prophetiae Merlini', ch. 113 (*Geoffrey of Monmouth: the History of the Kings of Britain*, ed. and trans. M. D. Reeve and N. Wright (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 146–7). See discussion in R. Barber, 'The Norman Conquest and the Media', *ANS* 26 (2004), 1–20, at 3–4.

[51] Robert Mannyng, *Chronicle* ii, lines 6317–18 (*Robert Mannyng of Brunne: the Chronicle*, ed. I. Sullens, Med. and Renaissance Texts and Stud. 153 (Binghamton, 1996), 644–5). For discussion of this and related texts, see D. Moffat, 'Sin, Conquest, Servitude: English Self-Image in the Chronicles of the Early Fourteenth Century', *The Work of Work: Servitude, Slavery, and Labor in Medieval England*, ed. A. J. Frantzen and D. Moffat (Glasgow, 1994), pp. 146–68; and Barber, 'Norman Conquest and the Media', pp. 4–5.

[52] D. Wollenberg, '"The Thing is Grounded on Story": the Danes and Medieval English Memory', *Northern Stud.* 46 (2015), 75–101, esp. 75–8.

[53] M. Firth, 'What's in a Name? Tracing the Origins of Alfred's "the Great"', *EHR* (early access version http://doi.org/10.1093/ehr/ceae078).

As 'England's darling' (*Englelondes deorling*), to use the description from Laȝamon's *Brut* (1185 × 1216),[54] Alfred also won a particular reputation for sagacity and lawmaking, though the utterances associated with Alfred in the *Proverbs of Alfred* (probably written in the thirteenth century) were an assemblage of moralised wisdom rather than law.[55] Similarly, King Æthelstan was, in the fourteenth-century romance *Athelston*, transplanted from the tenth century into a more-or-less contemporary fourteenth-century setting where he exemplified a virtuous, nostalgic brand of kingship.[56]

Specific liberties also depended on supposed Anglo-Saxon roots. At a local level, Thomas Walsingham (d. *c.* 1422) recounted how angry crowds assailed the abbot of St Albans during the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, demanding to be shown a specific charter with gold and azure letters that enshrined the liberties of the town, allegedly granted by Offa of Mercia but later suppressed by the abbots.[57] Some of England's key representative institutions were credited to the pre-Conquest period. One legacy put optimistically, yet falsely, at the feet of both Alfred and Edward the Confessor around 1300 was the foundation of parliament, and in legal tracts from around this time a slew of other practices such as wardship, dependent tenure and seigneurial justice were given Anglo-Saxon origins.[58]

As will be apparent, there was a good dose of wishful thinking at work, and the impact of real pre-Conquest material was limited – but neither of those impediments prevented the *idea* of Anglo-Saxon institutional inheritance from taking firm root. Domesday Book presented an exception to this rule. The volumes constituting this survey remained accessible across the Middle Ages, and were

[54] Laȝamon, *Brut*, line 3148 (*Laȝamon: Brut. Edited from British Museum Cotton Caligula A. ix and British Museum MS. Cotton Otho C. xiii*, ed. G. L. Brook and R. F. Leslie, EETS ns 250, 2 vols. (London, 1963) I, 164). For the date, see F. H. M. Le Saux, *Layamon's Brut: the Poem and its Sources*, Arthurian Stud. 33 (Cambridge, 1989), 10.

[55] C. Weinberg, 'Victor and Victim: a View of the Anglo-Saxon Past in Laȝamon's *Brut*', *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons from the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. D. G. Scragg and C. Weinberg, CSASE 29 (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 22–39; and S. Jurasinski, 'Andrew Horn, Alfredian Aprocrypha, and the Anglo-Saxon Names of the *Mirror of Justices*', *JEGP* 105 (2006), 540–63. For the date of the *Proverbs of Alfred*, see B. T. O'Camb, 'The Familiar Wisdom of Treasured Friends and the Landscape of Conquest in *The Proverbs of Alfred*', *Remembering the Medieval Present: Generative Uses of England's Pre-Conquest Past, 10th to 15th Centuries*, ed. J. P. Gates and B. T. O'Camb, Explorations in Med. Culture 11 (Leiden, 2017), 87–116, at 244, n. 3.

[56] T. Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290–1340* (Oxford, 1996); R. A. Rouse, *The Idea of Anglo-Saxon England in Middle English Romance*, Stud. in Med. Romance 3 (Woodbridge, 2005); D. Battles, 'The Middle English *Athelston* and 1381. Part I: the Politics of Anglo-Saxon Identity', *Stud in Philology* 117 (2020), 1–39.; D. Battles, 'Sir Orfeo and English Identity', *SP* 107 (2010), 179–211; and D. Battles, 'Reconquering England for the English in *Havelok the Dane*', *Chaucer Rev.* 47 (2012), 187–205.

[57] Thomas Walsingham, *Gesta abbatum* (*Gesta abbatum monasterii Sancti Albani*, ed. H. T. Riley, RS, 3 vols. (London, 1867–9) III, 308 and 365).

[58] *Modus tenendi parliamentum* (*Parliamentary Texts of the Later Middle Ages*, ed. N. Pronay and J. Taylor (Oxford, 1980), pp. 67 and 130); *Mirror of Justices* ch. 3 (*The Mirror of Justices*, ed. W. J. Whittaker, Publ. of the Selden Soc. 7 (London, 1895), 8–9). Garnett, *Norman Conquest*, pp. 216–17; see also S. Mitchell, 'Kings, Constitution and Crisis: "Robert of Gloucester" and the Anglo-Saxon Remedy', *Literary Appropriations*, ed. Scragg and Weinberg (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 39–56.

used to define (for example) the privileges of 'ancient demesne': estates that had belonged to the king in 1066, and that were entitled to numerous exemptions and privileges. In 1377, a consortium of about forty villages across the south of England asserted – and won – the right to withhold labour services on the basis that they had been ancient demesne in the time of King Edward, based on an inspection of Domesday Book.[59]

The later medieval assertion of pre-Conquest roots established a tradition that would persist into the early modern period, gathering momentum as time went on and reinforced rather than shaken by increasing acquaintance with pre-Conquest sources.[60] This on-going attachment to Anglo-Saxon England was forged as much from legal and literary texts as historical narratives, and specialists in law and government would go on to play a large part in cultivating the idea of Anglo-Saxon England in subsequent centuries.

The Rebirth of Anglo-Saxon Studies in the Sixteenth Century

The Anglo-Saxons regained a prominent place in political and historical consciousness in the sixteenth century.[61] It was at this point that the term 'Anglo-Saxon' itself emerged once again, now with effectively the meaning it still has: England and the English before 1066. But in order to seize on this archaic term, direct access to early medieval texts was needed, and this was one hallmark of the age: increased awareness of and interaction with original sources. For the pre-Conquest period, that meant dealing not just with Latin, but also with Old English, which presented a particular challenge to learn, yet which also assumed special authority precisely because of its obscurity and age.[62]

This revival of interest in early history – 'antiquity', as it was often called, and its dedicatees 'antiquaries' – quickly gathered momentum in the mid- and late sixteenth century.[63] England's experience at this time was part of a much wider renewal of interest in the past,[64] but it also owed much to specific circumstances,

[59] R. Faith, 'The "Great Rumour" of 1377 and Peasant Ideology', *The English Rising of 1381*, ed. R. H. Hilton and T. H. Aston (Cambridge, 1984), pp. 1–39.

[60] William Dugdale (1605–86), for example, treats the post-1066 period in detail in his *Antiquities of Warwickshire* (London, 1656) but declined to engage with sources for earlier times, and instead discussed the Anglo-Saxon period in terms of legends and traditions that are reminiscent of the approach discussed here: R. Brackmann, *Old English Scholarship in the Seventeenth Century: Medievalism and National Crisis*, Medievalism 23 (Cambridge, 2023), 162–88.

[61] Major recent studies of sixteenth-century antiquarianism as it pertains to Anglo-Saxon remains include Graham, *Recovery of Old English*; A. Vine, *In Defiance of Time: Antiquarian Writing in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2010); and R. Brackmann, *The Elizabethan Invention of Anglo-Saxon England: Laurence Nowell, William Lambarde and the Study of Old English*, Stud. in Renaissance Lit. 30 (Woodbridge, 2012).

[62] Frantzen, *Desire for Origins*, pp. 35–50; Graham, *Recovery of Old English*; Brackmann, *Elizabethan Invention*, pp. 29–84; L. Munro, *Archaic Style in English Literature, 1590–1674* (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 32–68; and Niles, *Idea of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 49–108.

[63] Vine, *In Defiance of Time*, esp. pp. 1–21.

[64] P. Geary, *The Myth of Nations: the Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton, 2002), esp. pp. 1–40; I. Wood, *The Modern Origins of the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2013); and P. N. Miller, 'Major Trends in European Antiquarianism, Petrarch to Peiresc', *The Oxford History of Historical Writing*, III: 1400–1800, ed. J. Rabasa, M. Sato, E. Tortarolo and D. Woolf (Oxford, 2012), pp. 244–60.

most notably the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s, which rendered the written remains of earlier times more open (though also more vulnerable) than they had been in centuries,[65] as well as other facets of the Reformation and establishment of the Church of England. Advocates of the new religious order sought to portray their Protestant ideals as a restoration of pristine Christianity, untainted by what they saw as Catholic errors. The unquestionable papal element in the Anglo-Saxon conversion story thus stood as a liability: many Protestant scholars reached for antecedents in the earliest phase of Christianity in Roman and pre-Roman Britain, and portrayed the Anglo-Saxons as the first bringers of corruption. Richard Davies, bishop of St David's (d. 1581), claimed that the Welsh resistance to dealing with St Augustine at the end of the sixth century was precisely because 'the Christianity which Augustine brought to the English/Saxons had fallen somewhat from the purity of the Gospels and the limits of the old Church, and it was mixed with much superfluity, rules for people, and meaningless ceremonies, disagreeing with the nature of Christ's kingdom'.[66] Catholic writers such as Thomas Stapleton (1535–98), who produced a new translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* in 1565, and Richard Verstegan (d. 1640) capitalised on exactly the same point but from the opposite perspective, emphasising early religious links between England and Rome as a virtue;[67] as Cardinal William Allen (1532–94) put it in a letter of 1578 or 1580, Bede's *History* served 'to show our countrymen … that our nation did not receive in the beginning any other than the catholic faith which we profess'.[68]

It was therefore an important departure when Matthew Parker, archbishop of Canterbury (1504–75), and his associates in the 1560s and 1570s started to argue that the pre-Conquest English preserved elements of pure, apostolic Christianity

[65] A. E. Coates, *English Medieval Books: the Reading Abbey Collections from Foundation to Dispersal* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 122–70; J. Carley, 'The Dispersal of the Monastic Libraries and the Salvaging of the Spoils', *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*, I: *to 1640*, ed. E. Leedham-Green and T. Webber (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 265–91; R. Sharpe, 'Dissolution and Dispersal in Sixteenth-Century England: Understanding the Remains', *How the Secularization of Religious Houses Transformed the Libraries of Europe*, ed. C. F. Dondi, D. Raines and R. Sharpe, Bibliologia 63 (Turnhout, 2022), 39–66.

[66] 'Y Chrystynogaeth a ddug Awstin ir Sayson a lithrasai beth o ddiwrth puredd yr Efengel, a' thervynay'r hen Eglwys, ac ydoedd gymyscedic a llawer o arddigonedd, gosodigaythay dynion, a ceremoniae mution, anghytun a natur teyrnas Christ'. Richard Davies, prefatory letter to *Testament Newydd ein Arglwydd Iesu Christ* (London, 1567), ff. xxi r–xlv r, at xxvi v; *A Memorandum on the Legality of the Welsh Bible and the Welsh Version of the Book of Common Prayer*, trans. A. O. Evans (Cardiff, 1925), pp. 83–124, at 91, with modifications kindly suggested by Ben Guy. For further discussion, see B. S. Robinson, 'John Foxe and the Anglo-Saxons', *John Foxe and his World*, ed. C. Highley and J. N. King (Aldershot, 2002), pp. 54–72; H. Pryce, *Writing Welsh History: from the Early Middle Ages to the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford, 2022), pp. 112–20; G. Williams, 'Some Protestant Views of Early British Church History', *History* 38 (1953), 219–33; and F. Heal, 'What can King Lucius do for you? The Reformation and the Early British Church', *EHR* 120 (2005), 593–614.

[67] C. Highley, *Catholics Writing the Nation in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 80–117. See more broadly F. Heal, 'Appropriating History: Catholic and Protestant Polemics and the National Past', *Huntington Lib. Quarterly* 68 (2005), 109–32; and E. Oates, 'Elizabethan Histories of English Christian Origins', *Sacred Histories: Uses of the Christian Past in the Renaissance World*, ed. K. Van Liere, S. Ditchfield and H. Louthan (Oxford, 2012), pp. 165–85.

[68] *The First and Second Diaries of the English College, Douay*, ed. T. F. Knox, Records of the English Catholics under the Penal Laws 1 (London, 1878), p. xlii.

that persisted down to the eleventh century and that could be harnessed as historical support for the Church of England.[69] Parker maintained a strong interest in the early British church, which featured prominently in the opening part of his *De antiquitate Britannicae ecclesiae* (1572), but the dissolution of the monastic libraries had shone a bright new light onto specific practices in Anglo-Saxon Christianity, attested in books of great antiquity. Parker used his position and its prestige to gain access to the choicest manuscripts circulating at the time. He and his collaborators put great emphasis on the books' age, attested by their archaic language and script, both of which were scrupulously reproduced in print.[70] These volumes were mined to support Parker's preferred views on the use of the vernacular in ecclesiastical contexts, priestly marriage, transubstantiation and other matters.[71]

The religious element in the revival of Anglo-Saxon studies was especially strong in the 1560s and 1570s. An important change in direction later in the Elizabethan era saw the rise of secular contributions to historical discourse and scholarship, not least on the part of members of the gentry enriched by the liquidation of monastic assets. As a result, the constituency who had the resources and skills to engage with the past grew substantially and changed in makeup.[72] Gentleman antiquaries had interests that extended far beyond religion, to language, landscape, buildings and objects, as well as the legal and institutional aspects of the Anglo-Saxon past that were already embedded in English legal tradition. Such topics were all grist to the mill of the 'College of Antiquaries' that operated in London between about 1586 and 1607, and which consisted of lawyers, heralds, archivists and wealthy collectors of manuscripts and antiquities, among them John Stow (1525–1605), William Lambarde (1536–1601), William Camden (1551–1623), Henry Spelman (1562–1641) and Robert Cotton (1571–1631). These members gathered every Friday at the College of Arms, with some idea of their weekly discussions being preserved in lists of

[69] C. Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 102–3; and Robinson, 'John Foxe', pp. 62–3.

[70] On the development of a special typeface to represent Old English, see R. W. Clement, 'The Beginnings of Printing in Anglo-Saxon, 1565–1630', *Papers of the Bibliographical Soc. of Amer.* 91 (1997), 192–244.

[71] B. S. Robinson, '"Darke Speech": Matthew Parker and the Reforming of History', *Sixteenth Century Jnl* 29 (1998), 1061–83; A. J. Kleist, 'Monks, Marriage, and Manuscripts: Matthew Parker's Manipulation (?) of Ælfric of Eynsham', *JEGP* 105 (2006), 312–27; A. J. Kleist, 'Anglo-Saxon Homiliaries in Tudor and Stuart England', *The Old English Homily: Precedent, Practice and Appropriation*, ed. A. J. Kleist, Stud. in the Early Middle Ages 17 (Turnhout, 2007), 445–92; A. J. Kleist, 'Matthew Parker, Old English, and the Defense of Priestly Marriage', *Anglo-Saxon Books and their Readers*, ed. T. Hall and D. Scragg (Kalamazoo, 2008), pp. 106–35; M. McMahon, 'Matthew Parker and the Practice of Church History', *Confessionalisation and Erudition in Early Modern Europe: an Episode in the History of the Humanities*, ed. N. Hardy and D. Levitin, PBA 225 (Oxford, 2019), pp. 116–53; and H. Spillane, '"A Matter Newly Seene": the Bishops' Bible, Matthew Parker, and Elizabethan Antiquarianism', *Reformation* 27 (2022), 107–24.

[72] J. Broadway, 'Symbolic and Self-Consciously Antiquarian: the Elizabethan and Early Stuart Gentry's Use of the Past', *Huntington Lib. Quarterly* 76 (2013), 541–58. For enrichment of the king and the gentry following the dissolution, see J. Clark, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries: a New History* (New Haven, 2021), pp. 469–529.

topics and summaries of main points ('discourses').[73] It should be stressed that although the early antiquaries had a deep, genuine curiosity regarding the past, this was not a detached or abstracted interest: generally it served to support and deepen current practices, with the potential to undermine or challenge them as well. Indeed, the College of Antiquaries is thought to have ceased to operate precisely because it enquired too closely into sensitive matters of religion and state, leading James VI and I (1603–25) to curtail its activities.[74]

The sixteenth-century resurgence of interest in the Anglo-Saxon past was in many ways a much amplified and elaborated continuation of the role that the period had served already, as a storehouse of founding precedents that were still usually quite distant from practices and concerns of the early Middle Ages, but increasingly informed by contact with genuine early material. Importantly, the Anglo-Saxon period was still often thought of as a collective whole. Members of the College of Antiquaries spoke broadly of the 'Saxon kings' and 'Saxon laws', and a few decades earlier the first edition of Anglo-Saxon laws, *Archaionomia* (1568), made much of the fact that it presented for the first time the laws of Æthelberht (d. 616/17) to Alfred and Æthelred II (978–1016).[75] 'Saxon' was widely considered the more formal and correct term of reference into the seventeenth century,[76] and it was equally common in the late sixteenth century to refer to the pre-Conquest English simply as 'English' (*Angli* in Latin). 'Anglo-Saxon' also reappeared as a shorthand for the period of English history before 1066, initially in Latin texts where its similarity to *Angli* and *Anglia* was evident. Why and by whom the hybrid term 'Anglo-Saxon' was plucked out of obscurity is not clear.

[73] The principal collection of manuscript papers relating to the College of Antiquaries is London, British Library, Cotton Faustina E.V. A wide selection of the discourses were later printed in T. Hearne, *A Collection of Curious Discourses, Written by Eminent Antiquaries upon Several Heads in Our English Antiquities* (Oxford, 1720), with an enlarged edition expanded by Sir John Ayloffe (published under the same title in two volumes in 1771). See further M. Stuckey, 'Antiquarianism and Legal History', *Making Legal History: Approaches and Methodologies*, ed. A. Musson and C. Stebbings (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 215–43, at 227–43; C. DeCoursey, 'Society of Antiquaries (act. 1586–1607)', *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, in Association with the British Academy: from the Earliest Times to the Year 2000*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and B. Harrison, 60 vols. (Oxford, 2004) LI, 522–5; Vine, *In Defiance of Time*, pp. 53–7; C. Kennedy, 'Those Who Stayed: English Chorography and the Elizabethan Society of Antiquaries', *Motion and Knowledge in the Changing Early Modern World: Orbits, Routes and Vessels*, ed. O. Gal and Y. Zheng, Stud. in Hist. and Philosophy of Science 30 (London, 2014), 47–70.

[74] DeCoursey, 'Society of Antiquaries'.

[75] W. Lambarde, *Archaionomia, siue de priscis Anglorum legibus libri* (London, 1568), prefatory letter. Lambarde went on to become one of the founding members of the College of Antiquaries. One copy of *Archaionomia* held in the Folger Library (STC 15142 copy 1) carries what has been identified as a signature of William Shakespeare. The authenticity of this signature is uncertain; for a discussion of its implications if genuine, see W. Nicholas Knight, 'Equity, *The Merchant of Venice* and William Lambarde', *Shakespeare Survey* 27 (1974), 93–104.

[76] Louviot, 'Divided', pp. 117–18. A glossary to an edition of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in 1692 noted that 'Anglo-Saxon' was the 'common' (*vulgo*) name, used mainly to emphasise distinction from the Saxons of Saxony: *Chronicon Saxonicum*, ed. and trans. E. Gibson (Oxford, 1692), p. 43 (of 'Regulae ad investigandas nominum locorum origines'). However, Gibson frequently used 'Anglo-Saxon' as a synonym for *Saxones* in his (Latin) prose, and the *Chronicle* had first been published as 'Chronologia Anglo-Saxonica' (as an appendix to *Historiae ecclesiasticae gentis Anglorum libri V, a Venerabili Beda presbytero scripti*, ed. A. Wheelocke (Cambridge, 1643)).

John Leland (d. 1552), the first of the main line of antiquaries at this time, used it very occasionally in the 1540s as a synonym for *Angli* and *Saxones*,[77] and it was used, apparently as a one-off, in *Archaionomia* to refer to the 'ferocious peoples of Germany' (*feroces Germaniae populos*) invited into Britain by Vortigern in the fifth century, as part of a brief historical overview written to accompany a map of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.[78]

A possible source for Leland and the writer of *Archaionomia*, William Lambarde, may have been Asser's *Life of Alfred*, the one surviving manuscript of which was owned by Leland and later by Matthew Parker, Lambarde's patron.[79] As noted above, this work prominently entitled Alfred 'king of the Anglo-Saxons' (*Anglorum Saxonum regi*) in its opening address, and several times thereafter. An edition of Asser's *Life* was eventually published (in 1574) as part of the wave of works on early history and texts undertaken through Parker's initiative, and contributed to rising awareness of Alfred as a figurehead for Anglo-Saxon achievements.[80] More prominent, and still more influential, use of the term 'Anglo-Saxon' came in the historical introduction to William Camden's monumental *Britannia*, first published in Latin in 1586.[81] Camden headed his discussion of the English between the end of Rome and the Norman Conquest *Anglosaxones*, and freely mixed this designation with *Angli* and *Saxones* in his prose. What appears to be the first vernacular usage of 'Anglo-Saxon' came in 1589,[82] very soon after the appearance of *Britannia*, and Camden himself carried over all these terms into the first English edition of his great work (1607), with *Anglosaxones* becoming 'English Saxons'. For the period after 1066, having crossed the Rubicon of the Norman Conquest, Camden exclusively used *Angli*, or 'English'. Anglo-Saxon England had been created (or re-created) by a series of antiquaries in the late sixteenth century.[83]

The Free Anglo-Saxons in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

Assigning a name to the earliest phase in English history did not in itself transform how the period was thought of and used, but it did reflect the intellectual head of steam that was gathering around Anglo-Saxon England.

[77] J. Leland, *De viris illustribus* chs. 59, 62, 87, 96 and 117 (ed. and trans. J. P. Carley and C. Brett (Toronto, 2010), pp. 140–1, 146–7, 192–3, 212–13 and 252–3); *Antiphilarchia* (Cambridge, University Library, MS Ee.5.14, f. 60r); and *Genethliacon illustrissimi Eaduerdi principis Cambriae* (London, 1543), f. ch. 3 (in separate pagination of the 'Syllabus antiquarum dictionum'). I am very grateful to James Carley for help in identifying these references.

[78] For the map, see S. Keynes, 'Mapping the Anglo-Saxon Past', *Towns and Topography: Essays in Memory of David H. Hill*, ed. G. R. Owen-Crocker and S. B. Thompson (Oxford, 2014), pp. 147–69.

[79] Stevenson, *Asser's Life*, pp. xxxiii–ix.

[80] S. Keynes, 'The Cult of King Alfred the Great', *ASE* 28 (1999), 225–356, at, 239–46.

[81] F. J. Levy, 'The Making of Camden's *Britannia*', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 26 (1964), 70–97; and Vine, *In Defiance of Time*, pp. 80–108. For Camden's influence in popularising 'Anglo-Saxon', see Wilton, 'What Do We Mean', pp. 440–1.

[82] F. Whigham and W. A. Rebhorn (eds), *The Art of English Poesy by George Puttenham: a Critical Edition* (Ithaca, 2007), p. 228.

[83] Brackmann, *Elizabethan Invention*, pp. 1–2.

Claims to 'Anglo-Saxon' origins, and political rhetoric founded in various ways on them, reached their zenith in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and became the dominant frame of reference for early English history.

Two initial caveats must be registered. First, appeals to the Anglo-Saxons did not at this stage have a consistent ethnic dimension. They meant different things when viewed through various lenses, many of which had no significant ethnic component.[84] The dominant associations of the Anglo-Saxons were cultural and institutional,[85] and these themes tended to drive ethnic thinking, not the other way around. John Hare in 1647 issued a pamphlet under the evocative title *St. Edward's Ghost or Anti-Normanisme*, which dwelt on the 'Teutonick' character of the English as a way to distance them from the Normans, whom he portrayed as invaders and corrupters of English customs, and quite different racially.[86] The supposed ethnic character of the Anglo-Saxons served to draw connections as well as build barriers: Hare not only disavowed the Normans but embraced the Saxons' 'Gothic' roots. On these grounds the English could be seen as related not only to the Germans but also the Danes and the Normans; a claim first made by Richard Verstegan using linguistic parallels, which was subsequently used both for and against Anglo-Saxonism. Verstegan's argument of necessity posited that the Britons had been wiped out and replaced entirely by the incoming Anglo-Saxons, which was presented by him as a point of pride: 'cometh it to passe, that wee not only fynde Englishmen (and those no idiots neither) that cannot directly tel from whence Englishmen are descended, and chanceing to speak of the Saxons, do rather seem to understand them for a kynd of foreyn people, then as their own true and meer anceters … for Englishmen cannot but from Saxon originall derive their descent and offspring, and can lack no honor to be descended from so honorable a race'.[87] In Scotland in the late eighteenth century, pursuit of the idea that the Picts and Lowland Saxons had been part of a larger Teutonic kindred (with the English), set apart from the 'Celtic' highlanders, served to repress and redirect Scottish nationalism.[88] Scottish

[84] Brackmann, *Old English Scholarship*, p. 4.

[85] Kidd, *British Identities*, pp. 75–7.

[86] J. Hare, *St. Edwards Ghost, or, Anti-Normanisme* (London, 1647), discussed in Kidd, *British Identities*, p. 63. For the use made of the *Leges Edwardi Confessoris* in this text, see J. Greenberg, '"St. Edward's Ghost": the Cult of St. Edward and his Laws in English History', *English Law before Magna Carta: Felix Liebermann and Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ed. S. Jurasinski, L. Oliver and A. Rabin, Med. Law and its Practice 8 (Leiden, 2010), 273–300.

[87] R. Verstegan, *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence in Antiquities Concerning the Most Noble and Renowned English Nation* (Antwerp, 1605), unpaginated opening letter [pp. 4–5]. S. Kliger, *The Goths in England: a Study in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Thought* (Cambridge, MA, 1952); Horsman, *Race*, pp. 10–13; R. W. Clement, 'Richard Verstegan's Reinvention of Anglo-Saxon England: a Contribution from the Continent', *Reinventing the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. W. F. Gentrup, Arizona Stud. in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance 1 (Turnhout, 1998), 19–36; D. B. Hamilton, 'Richard Verstegan's *A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence* (1605): a Catholic Antiquarian Replies to John Foxe, Thomas Cooper, and Jean Bodin', *Prose Studies: History, Theory, Criticism* 22 (1999), 1–38; Kidd, *British Identities*, pp. 61–4, 75–98 and 211–49; D. M. Frazier Wood, *Anglo-Saxonism and the Idea of Englishness in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Medievalism 18 (Woodbridge, 2020), pp. 157–60.

[88] C. Kidd, 'Teutonist Ethnology and Scottish Nationalist Inhibition, 1780–1880', *Scottish Hist. Rev.* 74 (1995), 45–68.

Enlightenment thought also contributed significantly to the elision of cultural and physical characteristics among humans, which would in time give rise to more solidly racial thinking,[89] but when appeals to 'Anglo-Saxon' blood were made in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they did not have the same resonance as in later times. Some presciently rejected ethnically-based divisions and lampooned the idea of racial purity, most bitingly exemplified in Daniel Defoe's (*c.* 1660–1731) satire *The True-Born Englishman.* Published in 1701, it took aim at Englishmen who criticised King William III (1689–1702) for his Dutch origins and lack of 'pure' English heritage:

> Thus from a Mixture of all Kinds began,
> That Het'rogeneous Thing, An Englishman:
> In eager Rapes, and furious Lust begot,
> Betwixt a Painted Britain and a Scot.
> Whose gend'ring Off-spring quickly learn'd to Bow,
> And yoke their Heifers to the Roman Plough:
> From whence a Mongrel half-Bred Race there came,
> With neither Name, nor Nation, Speech or Fame.
> In whose hot Veins new Mixtures quickly ran,
> Infus'd betwixt a Saxon and a Dane.[90]

Mingled origins brought strength, but at the same time the potential for division.[91] Tellingly, Defoe went on to argue that what would bind all together was England's strong legal and constitutional glue. He stopped short of saying that this had first been set down in the Anglo-Saxon period; others had no such qualms, although there was considerable variation in how much continuity was emphasised.

The second preliminary point is that the image of liberty-loving, quasi-democratic Anglo-Saxons was in very large part a myth. It is true that Anglo-Saxon law presupposed the cooperation of freemen and, at least in theory, cast the king as a protector for the rights of those freemen.[92] Aspects of this tradition had a powerful influence, especially after David Wilkins (1685–1745) produced the first full Latin translation of Anglo-Saxon law in 1721.[93] Another legacy drawn from Wilkins, and from William Somner's (1598–1669) earlier *Dictionarium Saxonico-Latino-Anglicum* – the first Old English dictionary – was that of the *witan* or

[89] S. Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress*, trans. J. Carden (New York, 2013), esp. pp. 13–14.

[90] [D. Defoe], *A True Collection of the Writings of the Author of the True Born English-man* (London, 1703), pp. 10–11.

[91] A. L. Johnson, 'True-Born Nationality and Other Patriarchal Fictions in Henry Neville's *The Isle of Pines* (1668) and Daniel Defoe's *The True-Born Englishman* (1700/1)', *Restoration: Stud in Eng Lit Culture, 1660–1700* 43 (2019), 3–28.

[92] T. Lambert, *Law and Order in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 349–63.

[93] D. Wilkins, *Leges anglo-saxonicæ ecclesiasticæ & civiles; accedunt leges Edvardi latinae, Guilelmi Conquestoris gallo-normannicæ, et Henrici I. latinae* (London, 1721), discussed in Frazier Wood, *Anglo-Saxonism*, pp. 163–4.

witenagemot.[94] By the end of the seventeenth century the *witan* was seen as a formal body of royal councillors and a precursor to parliament, and would continue to be regarded in that light until the twentieth century.[95] It is plausible to identify the grand assemblies that produced certain tenth-century charters as forerunners to later royal gatherings,[96] and hence to parliament, though that distant link was made to seem much more concrete and representative in the eyes of patriotic antiquaries of the seventeenth century and after. Three lawyers, Sir Edward Coke (1552–1634), Sir Henry Spelman (1562–1641) and John Selden (1584–1654), made particularly learned and persuasive claims to the pre-Conquest roots of parliament, shires, juries and more.[97] In general, England in the early Middle Ages is no longer seen as significantly more free or just, or more democratic in its rule, than any other contemporary European polity.[98] But early modern claims to Anglo-Saxon institutional heritage, including those of Coke, Spelman and Selden, did not stem solely from close study of actual Anglo-Saxon sources. Their immediate inspiration for key claims came from later medieval constitutional texts such as the *Mirror of Justices* and *Modus tenendi parliamentum* that asserted 'Anglo-Saxon' roots for parliament and for powers to limit royal action.[99] Although packaged in a new way to speak to new concerns, these texts had been known and read for a long time: radical claims regarding the ancient constitution in the seventeenth century rode on a train of thought that had been moving since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[100]

There is no indication that insincerity or doubt dogged those who made claims to 'Anglo-Saxon' origins, despite what are now recognised as unstable foundations.[101] As the formative first chapter of English history, the Anglo-Saxons by proxy became part of the political language of the day. The past underpinned the present in a very direct way in early modern political thought,

[94] For Somner and his dictionary, see Niles, *Idea of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 121–2; and Brackmann, *Old English Scholarship*, pp. 127–61.

[95] Frazier Wood, *Anglo-Saxonism*, pp. 163–4; for the decline of the *witan*/*witenagemot*, see L. Roach, *Kingship and Consent in Anglo-Saxon England, 871–978*, Cambridge Stud. in Med. Life and Thought, 4th ser., 92 (Cambridge, 2013), 1–6. See also below.

[96] C. Insley, 'Assemblies and Charters in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *Political Assemblies in the Earlier Middle Ages*, ed. P. S. Barnwell and M. Mostert, Stud. in the Early Middle Ages 7 (Turnhout, 2003), 47–59; and J. R. Maddicott, *The Origins of the English Parliament 924–1327* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 1–56.

[97] Keynes, 'Cult of Alfred', pp. 249–50; and Frazier Wood, *Anglo-Saxonism*, pp. 162–73.

[98] S. Brownlie, *Memory and Myths of the Norman Conquest*, Medievalism 3 (Woodbridge, 2013), 112–18.

[99] See above, and J. Greenberg, 'The Confessor's Law and the Radical Face of the Ancient Constitution', *EHR* 104 (1989), 611–37; J. Greenberg and L. Martin, 'Politics and Memory: Sharnborn's Case and the Role of the Norman Conquest in Stuart Political Thought', *Politics and the Political Imagination in Later Stuart Britain: Essays Presented to Lois Green Schwoerer*, ed. H. Nenner (Rochester, 1997), pp. 121–42; and J. Peacey, '"That Memorable Parliament": Medieval History in Parliamentarian Polemic, 1641–2', *Writing the History of Parliament in Tudor and Early Stuart England*, ed. P. Cavill and A. Gajda (Manchester, 2018), pp. 194–210.

[100] J. Greenberg, *The Radical Face of the Ancient Constitution: St. Edward's 'Laws' in Early Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2001), esp. pp. 36–78. Note that Moffat ('Sin, Conquest, Servitude', p. 153) quite reasonably challenges direct continuity of specific aspects of the 'ancient constitution' from medieval antecedents, but a basis of more general ideas of curtailed Anglo-Saxon liberty can be traced.

[101] Greenberg, '"St. Edward's Ghost"', pp. 299–300.

such that arguments for England's future were often built from views of its history, including relatively distant epochs like the pre-Conquest centuries. In the words of J. G. A. Pocock, 'to write history [at this time] was to write polemics. England was a legal, not a geographical expression; to write her history was to interpret her law, or the relation of that law to the Crown, and so to take sides in the battle of parties'.[102] As Pocock went on to stress, some saw the Anglo-Saxons as just one link in an even longer chain of continuous institutional development: Sir Edward Coke situated the Anglo-Saxons in a story of precursors to the common law that went back to Brutus and Troy.[103] Another supposed source for the earliest layers of English freedom was the Roman writer Tacitus (d. *c.* 120), whose account of the history and customs of ancient Germany (known as *De origine et situ Germanorum*, or more commonly in later times simply as *Germania*) had become highly influential in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, first in Germany and then in England. Being conscious of the Anglo-Saxons' origins in early Germany, English scholars took Tacitus' account of first-century liberty among the *Germani* as applicable to the first English settlers as well.[104] Neither of these claims holds much credence in modern scholarship, though they were profoundly influential.

But discontinuity offered as potent an argument as continuity, and the most durable origin-story of English freedom was that of the 'Norman Yoke'. This was a conceit used occasionally since the twelfth century, which imagined the Normans placing a yoke about the necks of the beleaguered English after 1066, and thereby suppressing English freedom.[105] It had been revived in a modest way in the sixteenth century, influenced by a later medieval narrative about how William the Conqueror had allowed the men of Kent (and only Kent) to retain their ancient liberties, while others fell under 'the perpetuall seruyle yoke of the Normannes', in the words of the printer and chronicler Richard Grafton (d. 1573).[106] It was the conflicts between king and parliament, and between factions within parliament, during the seventeenth century that brought the 'Norman Yoke' to its apogee. The idea of a rupture brought about by the Conquest offered the useful possibility of historicizing institutional virtues and vices: anything that was good – such as the common law, representative government, trial by jury, shires and restraint of royal and aristocratic power – could be traced back to the Anglo-Saxons and thus implanted in the deepest layers of English identity, whereas anything that was bad – such as royal tyranny and the

[102] J. G. A. Pocock, 'Robert Brady, 1627–1700. A Cambridge Historian of the Restoration', *Hist. Jnl* 10 (1951), 186–204, at 186. See further Brackmann, *Old English Scholarship.*

[103] J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law: a Study of English Historical Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1957), pp. 42–4 and 56–7.

[104] Horsman, *Race*, esp. pp. 10–17 and 26–9; and Kliger, *Goths in England*, esp. ch. 2. See more generally D. R. Kelley, '*Tacitus noster*: the *Germania* in the Renaissance and Reformation', *Tacitus and the Tacitean Tradition*, ed. T. J. Luce and A. J. Woodman (Princeton, 1993), pp. 152–67; and M. J. Toswell, '*Quid Tacitus* … ? The *Germania* and the Study of Anglo-Saxon England', *Florilegium* 27 (2010), 27–62.

[105] See above.

[106] Barber, 'Norman Conquest and the Media', pp. 8–9. The same story also appeared in William Lambarde's *A Perambulation of Kent* (published 1576 but finished a number of years earlier).

perceived abuses of feudalism – could be presented as an imposition by the Normans.[107]

Early modern incarnations of this myth imaginatively rooted out elements of continuity from behind a façade of discontinuity. The English, it was widely held, had always retained a memory of their underlying freedom that simmered away through centuries of repression, and this freedom could be restored by stripping away accretions of misgovernment and exploitation. Versions of the Norman Yoke argument therefore tended to be weaponised by those opposed to the current regime, creating a 'whiggish' or 'radical' brand of Anglo-Saxonism marked by appeals to usurped liberties that might yet be restored.[108] In the decades around the Wars of the Three Kingdoms (1639–53) many commentators looked to this so-called 'ancient constitution' for support in present disputes on whether king or community represented the source of liberty (and which should guarantee it in future). Different claims were justified by looking as far back as possible into England's constitutional past. The point here was antiquity rather than Anglo-Saxonness as such, but inevitably versions of the Norman Yoke myth came to the fore. A group known as the Levellers emphasised the need to return to Saxon precedents of representative government, while another dissenting group, the Diggers, went a step further and framed the Norman Conquest almost as a second Fall of Man.[109] The Restoration of 1660 and the Glorious Revolution of 1688 gave rise to further bursts of interest in 'Anglo-Saxon' precedents, in the former case for kings as benign yet supreme leaders of the estates, in the latter case for resistance to tyranny.[110]

[107] Frazier Wood, *Anglo-Saxonism*, pp. 162–73. For legal dimensions as part of the 'feudal revolution in English historiography', see Pocock, *Ancient Constitution*, esp. p. 119. On the idea of trial by jury as a supposed Anglo-Saxon custom, see E. G. Stanley, *Imagining Anglo-Saxon England: the Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism and Anglo-Saxon Trial by Jury* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 113–48.

[108] For whig thought in this period, see J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History: Essays on Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth Century*, Ideas in Context 2 (Cambridge, 1985), 215–310; and A. Wilson, 'Whig History and Present-Centred History', *Hist. Jnl* 31 (1988), 1–16; for radicalism, C. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (London, 1972); A. Hessayon and D. Finnegan (eds.), *Varieties of Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century English Radicalism in Context* (Farnham, 2011); and G. Burgess and M. Festenstein (eds.), *English Radicalism, 1550–1850* (Cambridge, 2007).

[109] D. Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution* (London, 1958), pp. 58–125; Q. Skinner, 'History and Ideology in the English Revolution', *Hist. Jnl* 8 (1965), 151–78; R. B. Seaberg, 'The Norman Conquest and the Common Law: the Levellers and the Argument from Continuity', *Hist. Jnl* 24 (1981), 791–806; J. P. Sommerville, 'History and Theory: the Norman Conquest in Early Stuart Political Thought', *Political Stud.* 34 (1986), 249–61; C. C. Weston, 'England: Ancient Constitution and Common Law', *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450–1700*, ed. J. H. Burns and M. Goldie (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 374–411; D. Hill, *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution – Revisited* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 361–5; H. Jenkins, 'Shrugging off the Norman Yoke: Milton's History of Britain and the Levellers', *Eng. Lit. Renaissance* 29 (1999), 306–25; Kidd, *British Identities*, pp. 83–98; M. Dzelzainis, 'History and Ideology: Milton, the Levellers, and the Council of State in 1649', *The Uses of History in Early Modern England*, ed. P. Kewes (San Marino, 2006), pp. 265–84.

[110] Greenberg, *Radical Face*, pp. 243–96; Pocock, 'Robert Brady'; and D. J. A. Matthew, 'The English Cultivation of Norman History', *England and Normandy in the Middle Ages*, ed. D. Bates and A. Curry (London, 1994), pp. 1–18, at 9–10.

By the end of the seventeenth century, specific claims to Anglo-Saxon origins for parliament had been subjected to harder scholarly scrutiny by Robert Brady (1627–1700) and others, and become untenable; what remained was a more generalised 'whiggish' sense of the earliest Englishmen as founders of liberty and virtue.[111] Appeals to the Anglo-Saxons on this basis exercised broad appeal, cutting across partisan divisions and extending from essays to art and literature.[112] Sharon Turner (1768–1847) and others writing around the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries started to transform the Anglo-Saxons into standard-bearers of 'civilisation' and, as Kathleen Wilson put it, 'to reinvent the ancient Angles, Jutes and Saxons as Britain's noblest savages'.[113] They were still sometimes seen as primitive and uncouth. Language, which was seen as a proxy for the cultural credibility and historical worth of its speakers, proved a particular battleground.[114] One of the great scholarly enterprises of the age, the *Thesaurus linguarum septentrionalium* (1703–5) by George Hickes (1642–1715) and his Oxford colleagues, actually diminished the standing of the Anglo-Saxons by identifying for the first time dialects of Old English: a grave shortcoming in an age that valued linguistic purity and refinement.[115] Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) viewed English as 'overstocked with Monosyllables' relative to romance languages, and laid the blame on 'the Barbarity of those Northern Nations from whom we are descended, and whose Languages labour all under the same Defect'.[116] Others rose to the defence of the English language, and with it the Anglo-Saxons: Elizabeth Elstob (1683–1756) wrote about Old English in part 'to shew the polite Men of our Age, that the Language of their Forefathers is neither so barren nor barbarous as they affirm, with equal Ignorance and Boldness', and directly targeted Swift in asserting that 'the charge of Barbarity would rather fall upon those who, while they fancy themselves adorn'd with the Embellishments of foreign Learning, are ignorant, even to barbarity, of the Faith, Religion, the Laws and Customs, and Language of their Ancestors'.[117] The Anglo-Saxons were being embraced with enthusiasm as symbols of national pride. The

[111] Pocock, 'Robert Brady'; and Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution*, pp. 94–7.

[112] Frazier Wood, *Anglo-Saxonism*, esp. pp. 156–7.

[113] K. Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2003), pp. 85–6; and Sweet, 'Recovery'.

[114] For the early history of this debate, see I. Simon, 'Saxonism Old and New', *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire* 39 (1961), 687–735.

[115] C. M. Cain, 'George Hickes and the "Invention" of the Old English Dialects', *RES*, ns, 61 (2010), 729–48. For the highly original and important work contained in the *Thesaurus*, see Niles, *Idea of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 147–58; for its context in Oxford at this time, see below.

[116] J. Swift, *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* (London, 1712), p. 26. There was a political dimension to Swift's resistance to language change: he was charged with believing that a turn from the Hanoverian dynasty back to the Stewarts would guarantee 'no new Addition of Saxon Words' (*The Medley* 19–23 May 1712). For discussion, see I. Higgins, 'Language and Style', *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Swift*, ed. C. Fox (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 146–60, at 154–5; and Fairer, 'Anglo-Saxon Studies', p. 821.

[117] E. Elstob, *The Rudiments of Grammar for the English-Saxon Tongue* (London, 1715), p. iii; and E. Elstob (ed.), *An English-Saxon Homily on the Birth-Day of St. Gregory Anciently Used in the English-Saxon Church* (London, 1709), p. vi. For discussion, see J. Way, '"Our Mother Tongue": the Politics of Elizabeth Elstob's Antiquarian Scholarship', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 78 (2015), 417–40.

Northumberland antiquary William Hutchinson (1732–1814) had nothing but scorn, expressed in bold capitals, for 'authors [who] neglect the considerations of the advantages we derived from the Saxons no less than THE MAXIMS OF OUR COMMON LAW, AND THE ORIGINAL PRINCIPLES OF OUR INESTIMABLE CONSTITUTION'.[118] Alfred the Great surged to a new level of popular affection in the hearts of patriotic Britons, with appeal as both a model of traditional virtue for the Hanoverian establishment, and, for those of more radical bent, as the architect of enlightened, representative government.[119]

Alfred was chosen in late 1775 as a new name for the first ship acquired by the Continental Navy, as it began its struggle against Britain in the War of American Independence (1775–83).[120] Consciousness of Anglo-Saxon precedents was as pervasive in the American colonies as it was in England:[121] even though a great many people who were not of 'Anglo-Saxon' (i.e. English) ancestry already inhabited the colonies, the Anglo-Saxons stood for more than narrowly geographical and ethnic aspects of quintessential Englishness or even Britishness. Strengthened economic and cultural ties with Britain in the eighteenth century had powerfully reinforced American associations with the motherland on many levels.[122] American colonists had good cause to see themselves as part of a British Atlantic world, meaning that American grievances about tyrannical and unrepresentative government carried much the same weight as those of their British contemporaries, and could be couched in terms of lost 'Anglo-Saxon' liberty. Such claims were made widely in polemical pamphlets and essays of the 1760s and after, not least in the work of several leading figures in the intellectual formation of the new republic such as John Adams (1735–1826)[123] and above all Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826). Jefferson's interest in the Anglo-Saxons reached well beyond the familiar tropes of 'Anglo-Saxon' freedom: he actively studied (and encouraged others to study) Old English; he sought to reorganise his home state, Virginia, as a sort of neo-Anglo-Saxon farmer republic; and he proposed Hengest and Horsa, the supposed leaders of

[118] W. Hutchinson, *A View of Northumberland, with an Excursion to the Abbey of Mailross in Scotland*, 2 vols. (Newcastle, 1776–8) I, vi–vii (quoted in R. Sweet, *Antiquaries: the Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London, 2004), p. 191).

[119] Keynes, 'Cult of Alfred', pp. 269–90.

[120] J. J. McCusker, *Alfred: the First Continental Flagship, 1775–1778* (Washington DC, 1973); and J. J. McCusker, 'The Continental Ship *Alfred*', *Nautical Research Jnl* 13 (1965), 37–68. As McCusker notes, an extract from John Entick's *New Naval History* (London, 1757) about Alfred's reform of the English navy and the virtues of the king (who 'represented to [the Saxons] the iniquity of those councils in former reigns') was printed in the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* of Philadelphia on 18 November 1775, the day after the ship's new name was announced.

[121] An important overview of early American literary deployments of 'Anglo-Saxon' ideology is M. Modarelli, *The Transatlantic Genealogy of American Anglo-Saxonism* (London, 2019).

[122] Horsman, *Race*, pp. 15–24; and Kidd, *British Identities*, pp. 261–75. For economic dimensions, see T. H. Breen, 'An Empire of Goods: the Anglicization of Colonial America, 1690–1776', *Jnl of Brit. Stud.* 25 (1986), 467–99; and T. H. Breen, '"Baubles of Britain": the American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present* 119 (1988), 73–104.

[123] J. Muldoon, *John Adams and the Constitutional History of the Medieval British Empire* (London, 2017), esp. pp. 43–118.

the fifth-century settlement of Kent, as ornaments for the first great seal of the United States.[124]

The antiquarian impulse underlying seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Anglo-Saxonism depended on informal networks of scholars and patrons, and as such rested on unstable foundations largely found outside the universities: apart from important and productive bursts of interest at Cambridge in the sixteenth century and at Oxford in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the impetus for Anglo-Saxon studies lay elsewhere.[125] Passion for past times diversified geographically and socially in the eighteenth century. Gentlemen-scholars of broad historical interest amassed coins and other artefacts, and undertook proto-archaeological excavations of barrows across England.[126] Interest in Old English (on the part of 'Anglo-Saxonists', a label that first appeared in 1773) and other pre-Conquest sources persisted, at varying levels of intensity, across the period, and had a symbiotic relationship with polemical uses of the Anglo-Saxons.[127] One historical study of the Anglo-Saxons by Sharon Turner, published in 1799–1805, rested on the principle that 'a large part of what we most love and venerate in our customs, laws and institutions, originated among our Anglo-Saxon ancestors'.[128] By the time Turner's study reached its third edition, in 1820, he could write that 'his favourite desire has been fulfilled – a taste for the history and remains of our Great Ancestors has been revived, and is visibly increasing'.[129] That revival would lead the Anglo-Saxons in a new and troubling direction over the course of the coming century.

[124] S. R. Hauer, 'Thomas Jefferson and the Anglo-Saxon Language', *PMLA* 98 (1983), 879–98; R. A. Williams Jr, 'Jefferson, the Norman Yoke, and American Indian Lands', *Arizona Law Rev.* 29 (1987), 165–94; Frantzen, *Desire for Origins*, pp. 15–19 and 203–7; D. N. Mayer, *The Constitutional Thought of Thomas Jefferson* (Charlottesville, 1994), pp. 12–20; P. Thompson, '"Judicious Neology": the Imperative of Paternalism in Thomas Jefferson's Linguistic Studies', *Early Amer. Stud.* 1 (2003), 187–224; and Niles, *Idea of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 267–72 and 292–7.

[125] Sweet, *Antiquaries*, pp. 200–3. For research in Oxford *c.* 1650–1720, see D. Fairer, 'Anglo-Saxon Studies', *The History of the University of Oxford*, V: *the Eighteenth Century*, ed. L. S. Sutherland and L. G. Mitchell (Oxford, 1984), pp. 807–29; Keynes, 'Cult of Alfred', pp. 258–74; and Niles, *Idea of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 116–65.

[126] See Frazier Wood, *Anglo-Saxonism*; and Sweet, *Antiquaries*, pp. 189–230 on eighteenth-century Anglo-Saxon antiquarianism more generally.

[127] Niles, *Idea of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 109–85. The first recorded use of 'Anglo-Saxonist' (meaning a reader of Old English) was identified in Frazier Wood, *Anglo-Saxonism*, p. 3, and occurs in D. Barrington, *The Anglo-Saxon Version, from the Historian Orosius, by Ælfred the Great, together with an English Translation from the Anglo-Saxon* (London, 1773), p. xxi. 'Anglo-Saxonism', meaning the study and promotion of what was perceived to be Anglo-Saxon culture, is a more recent invention (first used in the 1960s) but a useful one: A. Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Keywords* (Malden, 2012), pp. 11–15; S. Keynes, 'Anglo-Saxonism', *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Lapidge *et al.* (Chichester, 2014), pp. 39–40.

[128] S. Turner, *The History of the Anglo-Saxons, from their First Appearance above the Elbe, to the Death of Egbert*, 4 vols. (London, 1799–1805) I, v. For discussion see Sweet, *Antiquaries*, pp. 217–19; and R. Sweet, 'The Recovery of the Anglo-Saxon Past, *c.* 1770–1850', *EHR* 136 (2021), 304–31, at 312–14.

[129] S. Turner, *The History of the Anglo-Saxons, Comprising the History of England from the Earliest Period to the Norman Conquest*, 3 vols. (London, 1820) I, vi.

Racial Anglo-Saxonism in the Nineteenth Century

From about the turn of the nineteenth century, 'Anglo-Saxon' rhetoric took on a more explicitly ethnic, racial hue. One reason for this was a rise in scientific research on race among humans that began in the latter part of the eighteenth century, which divided humanity into broad categories based on perceived differences in skin colour, skull shape and other physical features.[130] More granular divisions followed in later decades. The Anglo-Saxons, as the earliest progenitors of the English and their cultural offshoots, presented a natural point of reference for those who sought to demarcate their modern counterparts in racial terms. By 1839, Samuel George Morton (1799–1851), a Philadelphia physician, claimed there were in fact twenty-two distinct races, and among these 'the English or Anglo-Saxon … is inferior to no one of the Caucasian families'.[131] The growth of race science converged with developments in whiggish Anglo-Saxonism in the mid-nineteenth century, in the work of William Stubbs (1825–1901), Edward Augustus Freeman and John Richard Green (1837–83). They did not adhere to a constitutional genealogy that stretched from parliament back to the *witenagemot*, but they did venerate the accumulation of laws and customs that had piled up over time like sediment to form the bedrock of English society and prosperity.[132] Adopting higher standards of source criticism imported from Germany, these Victorian historians simultaneously magnified and broadened interest in the English past. They looked to continuities in local government and infrastructure, especially in the countryside, and to heroes who had supposedly personified a deep love for freedom and tradition.[133] Language constituted a key inheritance from the Anglo-Saxons, and so did 'blood' or race, which could serve as shorthand for the totality of English culture, but also as a tool to demarcate and compare the English to others.

Importantly, none of this precluded identification of 'Anglo-Saxons' on cultural and institutional grounds. The notion of racial Anglo-Saxonism always allowed some latitude. In both Britain and the USA it was possible for incomers (as long as they were White and Protestant) to enter the 'Anglo-Saxon' fold. Dutch, German, Scottish and Welsh identities were subsumed into the dominant

[130] Horsman, *Race*, pp. 43–61 and 116–57; M. Banton, *Racial Theories*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 17–43; N. I. Painter, *The History of White People* (New York, 2010), pp. 59–90; N. Bancel, T. David and D. Thomas (eds.), *The Invention of Race: Scientific and Popular Representations*, Routledge Stud. in Cultural Hist. 28 (London, 2014); R. M. Hendershot, 'Reformulating Anglo-Saxon Identity: Intersections of Racism, National Identities, and Transatlantic Stereotypes in the Nineteenth Century', *Anglo-American Relations and the Transmission of Ideas: a Shared Political Tradition?*, ed. A. P. Dobson and S. Marsh, Transatlantic Perspectives 6 (New York, 2022), 241–66, at 247.

[131] S. G. Morton, *Crania Americana, or a Comparative View of the Skulls of Various Aboriginal Nations of North and South America* (Philadelphia, 1839), p. 17. Morton's work had significant impact on both sides of the Atlantic in the 1840s: J. Poskett, 'National Types: the Transatlantic Publication and Reception of *Crania Americana* (1839)', *Hist. of Science* 53 (2015), 264–95.

[132] J. W. Burrow, *A Liberal Descent: Victorian Historians and the English Past* (Cambridge, 1981), pp. 102–8.

[133] *Ibid.* pp. 138–9, noting that there were important differences between the historians on which continuities to emphasise.

Anglo-American majority in Revolutionary America and the early republic,[134] while Freeman and others noted that the English had happily absorbed several waves of incomers who had entered after 1066.[135] It also followed (at least for Freeman) that the runaway success of the Anglo-Saxons might be observed and replicated by other peoples.[136] There were points of contact with scientific racism – Freeman observed in 1877 that 'ethnological and philological researches … have opened the way for new national sympathies'[137] – but the espousal of deep cultural legacies that grew out of devotion to English antiquity created a second, distinct path to racial Anglo-Saxonism.

Fed from these two streams, 'Anglo-Saxon' gained very considerable popular traction as a synonym for the English 'race' in the course of the nineteenth century.[138] Forthright proclamations of 'Anglo-Saxon' superiority proliferated from about the 1830s onward.[139] Just one example will suffice: an extract from a poem composed by the writer and moralist Martin Tupper (1810–89) that appeared in the short-lived British periodical *The Anglo-Saxon* (1849–50):

> 'Stretch forth! Stretch forth! From the south to the north,
> From the east to the west, – stretch forth! Stretch forth!
> Strengthen thy stakes and lengthen thy cords, –
> The world is a tent for the world's true lords!
> Break forth and spread over every place,
> The world is a world for the Saxon Race!'[140]

The Anglo-Saxons became most closely tied to race-based identity when their self-proclaimed heirs achieved their furthest reach. Sharon Turner, in the fourth edition of his *History of the Anglo-Saxons* (1823), remarked on the deep-seated proclivity of certain peoples towards outward settlement, 'as the migratory settlers on the Ohio and the Missouri in our days are the effusions of other states, more advanced and improved'.[141] The myth of inherent racial superiority

[134] E. P. Kaufmann, *The Rise and Fall of Anglo-America* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), pp. 19–20.

[135] Freeman, *History of the Norman Conquest* I, 604: 'we are a mixed race in the sense of being a people whose predominant blood and speech has incorporated and assimilated with itself more than one foreign infusion'. For Freeman's historical thinking, see Burrow, *Liberal Descent*, pp. 155–228; and for his views on race, C. J. W. Parker, 'The Failure of Liberal Racialism: the Racial Ideas of E. A. Freeman', *Hist. Jnl* 24 (1981), 825–46; and T. Koditschek, 'A Liberal Descent? E. A. Freeman's Invention of Racial Traditions', *Making History: Edward Augustus Freeman and Victorian Cultural Politics*, ed. G. A. Bremmer and J. Conlin, PBA 202 (Oxford, 2016), pp. 199–216.

[136] Mandler, *English National Character*, esp. pp. 86–105.

[137] E. A. Freeman, *Historical Essays: Third Series* (London, 1879), p. 176.

[138] Horsman, *Race*, pp. 43–77; and P. Mandler, *The English National Character: the History of an Idea from Edmund Burke to Tony Blair* (New Haven, 2006), pp. 72–86.

[139] A wide selection can be found in Rambaran-Olm and Wade, 'What's in a Name', pp. 137–43.

[140] *The Anglo Saxon* 5–9 (London, 1850), p. 467.

[141] S. Turner, *The History of the Anglo-Saxons*, 3 vols., 4th ed. (London, 1823) I, 19. In subsequent editions he added more rivers (including the Mississippi and Orinoco).

helped explain and justify the global success of the British Empire, as well as the advance of American dominance westwards to the Pacific.[142]

Tupper's doggerel verse captures the jingoistic and pseudo-scientific character of much of this rhetoric, but racial Anglo-Saxonism was more than a populist fable: it went hand in hand with renewed, and increasingly scientific, research into early medieval archaeology, history and language. John Mitchell Kemble (1807–57) reflects this duality. Trained in Germany by leading philologists of the day such as Johann Andreas Schmeller (1785–1852) and particularly inspired by the work of Jakob Grimm (1785–1863),[143] Kemble was a polymath of formidable erudition and talent who left his mark on the study of Old English and Anglo-Saxon archaeology. Among other distinctions, Kemble was the first to observe parallels in material culture on either side of the North Sea. He put this archaeological expertise to good use when he came to examine the received account of the Anglo-Saxon settlement: 'I confess that the more I examine this question, the more completely I am convinced that the received accounts of our migrations, our subsequent fortunes, and ultimate settlement, are devoid of historical truth in every detail.'[144] Kemble's repeated use of 'our' here is telling, and his research into the Anglo-Saxons was shot through with a robust sense of their superiority: 'to [Gregory the Great] it was not unknown that the Britannic islands were occupied by two populations different alike in their descent and in their fortunes; the elder and the weaker, of Keltic blood; the younger and the conquering race, an offshoot of that great Teutonic stock, whose branches had overspread all the fairest provinces of the [Roman] empire'.[145]

In nineteenth-century Britain (and above all England),[146] Anglo-Saxonism or 'Teutomania', as it was sarcastically labelled in later years by the poet

[142] J. Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: the Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783–1939* (Oxford, 2009), esp. pp. 5–6; E. Beasley, *Empire as the Triumph of Theory: Imperialism, Information and the Colonial Society of 1868* (London, 2004), pp. 95–114; D. Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860–1900* (Princeton, 2007), esp. pp. 5–7 and 181–8; M. Lake and H. Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men's Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 50–7, 88–92, 106–13 and 195–9; P. Edmonds, '"I Followed England Round the World": the Rise of Trans-Imperial Anglo-Saxon Exceptionalism, and the Spatial Narratives of Nineteenth-Century British Settler Colonies of the Pacific Rim', *Re-Orienting Whiteness*, ed. L. Boucher, J. Carey and K. Ellinghaus (London, 2009), pp. 99–115; D. Bell, *Reordering the World: Essays on Liberalism and Empire* (Princeton, 2016), esp. pp. 132–47; and Miyashiro, 'Our Deeper Past', pp. 6–7.

[143] For Kemble's German training and influence, see R. A. Wiley, *John Mitchell Kemble and Jacob Grimm: a Correspondence, 1832–1852* (Leiden, 1971), esp. pp. 5–18. M. Oergel, 'Germania and Great(er) Britain: German Scholarship and the Legitimization of the British Empire', *Angermion* 5 (2012), 91–118 examines German support for Anglo-Saxonism. For the legal dimensions of this connection, see D. Fruscione, 'Liebermann's Intellectual Milieu', *English Law before Magna Carta*, ed. Jurasinski, Oliver and Rabin (Leiden, 2010), pp. 15–26. On the nexus between race and philology, see MacDougall, *Racial Myth*, pp. 119–24.

[144] J. M. Kemble, *History of the Saxons in England*, 2 vols. (London, 1849) I, 16.

[145] *Ibid.* II, 354. See further H. Williams, 'Heathen Graves and Victorian Anglo-Saxonism: Assessing the Archaeology of John Mitchell Kemble', *ASSAH* 13 (2006), 1–18.

[146] For these quasi-historical, ethnic purposes the Scottish and Welsh were often subsumed into the English or Anglo-Saxon story: Mandler, *English National Character*, pp. 67 and 99. In Scotland this had a long prehistory: C. Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689–c. 1830* (Cambridge, 1993).

Matthew Arnold (1822–88),[147] served as a pillar in the construction of an expanded, democratised national identity that stretched across classes.[148] It was propelled furthest, and with most verve, not by scholars like Kemble and Freeman, but by novelists and other writers with mass appeal such as Sir Walter Scott (*Ivanhoe* (1819)), Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton (*Harold, the Last of the Saxon Kings* (1848)) and Charles Kingsley (*Hereward the Wake* (1866)), along with the essays of Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), and (in America) the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–82) and Walt Whitman (1819–92). All elaborated the myth of the Norman Yoke and of Anglo-Saxon ethnic roots.[149] In early science fiction, the nineteenth-century image of 'Anglo-Saxon' global dominance could also be imagined as shaping the distant future. One novel published in 1900 envisaged an 'Anglo-Saxon Empire' of 2236 that looked for new victories beyond the stars, 'the Anglo-Saxon race [having] long ago absorbed the whole of the globe'.[150]

As will be apparent, Anglo-Saxonism took many forms in nineteenth-century Britain, and was not the only frame of reference for British identity or imperialism. Other explorations of British origins and history looked elsewhere for their explanatory power: to the general uplift generated by 'civilisation' or Protestant fervour, for example, while historians such as James Anthony Froude (1818–94), J. H. Round (1854–1928) and Sir John Seeley (1834–95) emphasised the enervating effects of the adversaries of the Anglo-Saxons, the Scandinavians and the Normans, or the glories of the Reformation and seafaring in the sixteenth century.[151] These different readings of collective history and identity coexisted with the Anglo-Saxons in a rich marketplace of ideas, favoured by different constituencies as they complemented other cultural or political viewpoints.[152]

'Anglo-Saxon' identity continued to play an important role in dialogue between the British and the Americans. It rose in prominence at certain times, such as when the end of American slavery and the expansion of British voting

[147] On Arnold's place in these debates, see J. Leerssen, 'Englishness, Ethnicity and Matthew Arnold', *European Jnl of Eng. Stud.* 10 (2006), 63–79.

[148] Mandler, *English National Character*, pp. 59–72; E. Beasley, *The Victorian Reinvention of Race: New Racisms and the Problem of Grouping in the Human Sciences*, Routledge Stud. in Modern Brit. Hist. 4 (London, 2010), 16.

[149] Barber, 'Norman Conquest and the Media', pp. 15–19; L. D'Arcens and C. Jones, 'Excavating the Borders of Literary Anglo-Saxonism in Nineteenth-Century Britain and Australia', *Representations* 121 (2013), 85–106; Horsman, *Race*, pp. 38–41 and 160–2; P. S. Field, 'The Strange Career of Emerson and Race', *Amer. Nineteenth Century Hist.* 2 (2001), 1–32; Painter, *History of White People*, pp. 151–89; and H. Kim, 'From Language to Empire: Walt Whitman in the Context of Popular Nineteenth-Century Anglo-Saxonism', *Walt Whitman Quarterly Rev.* 24 (2006), 1–19.

[150] R. Cole, *The Struggle for Empire: a Story of the Year 2236* (London, 1900), p. 136. For discussion of this and many other examples, see D. Bell, *Dreamworlds of Race: Empire and the Utopian Destiny of Anglo-America* (Princeton, 2020).

[151] Mandler, *English National Character*, pp. 113–15.

[152] *Ibid.* pp. 104–5; and R. Cosgrove, 'A Usable Past: History and Politics of National Identity in Late Victorian England', *Parliamentary Hist.* 27 (2008), 30–42. For the romanticised turn towards the vikings and Scandinavian roots, see A. Wawn, *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge, 2000).

rights in the 1860s made the two more similar,[153] or during diplomatic rapprochement in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, and retreated in times of distance or tension.[154] Yet American Anglo-Saxonism had subtle distinctions of its own. It was entirely possible to be simultaneously 'an Anglo-maniac, and an Anglo-phobist', as William H. Russell (1820–1907) wrote of the Confederate Secretary of State Robert Toombs (1810–85) in 1861, who was strongly opposed to the British government but cherished an idea of shared 'Anglo-Saxon' heritage with the English.[155] Some rejected Anglo-Saxon identity altogether, or argued for restraint of its worst excesses. In 1845 the Ohio lawyer (and later governor) Charles Anderson (1814–95) furiously attacked any claim that might be made for Anglo-Saxon civilisation, let alone racial superiority, while an anonymous and highly subtle 1851 essay probably by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–82) acknowledged the principle of Anglo-Saxon identity yet repudiated its military and racist pretensions.[156]

Anderson and Longfellow certainly would have seen many examples of Anglo-Saxonism being invoked to help justify exclusion and aggressive expansion. 'Anglo-Saxon' served as shorthand for the historically dominant White Protestant population, with roots (real or imagined) in England, who saw themselves as competing for resources in the Americas against other groups. Recollections of Anglo-Saxon settlers claiming fifth-century Britain informed American claims to dominance in the nineteenth century; as one journalist put it at the onset of war with Mexico in 1846, 'Mexico was poor, distracted, in anarchy, and almost in ruins – what could she do to stay the hand of our power, to impede the march of our greatness? We were Anglo-Saxon Americans; it was our "destiny" to possess and rule this continent – we were *bound* to do it! We were a chosen people, and this was our allotted inheritance, and we must drive out all other nations before us!'[157] Divisions among the White population within America also proved highly fertile ground for new variants of Anglo-Saxonism, as happened when the growing, industrialising cities of the northeast and the Midwest received larger waves of immigration from the 1840s.[158] Celebrations in New York to mark the

[153] Hendershot, 'Reformulating Anglo-Saxon Identity', pp. 249–53.

[154] S. Anderson, *Race and Rapprochement: Anglo-Saxonism and Anglo-American Relations, 1895–1904* (Rutherford, 1981); P. A. Kramer, 'Empires, Exceptions, and Anglo-Saxons: Race and Rule between the British and United States Empires, 1880–1910', *Jnl of Amer. Hist.* 88 (2002), 1315–53; S. Vucetic, 'A Racialized Peace? How Britain and the US Made their Relationship Special', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7 (2011), 403–21; Mandler, *English National Character*, pp. 133–4.

[155] W. H. Russell, *My Diary North and South*, 2 vols. (London, 1863) I, 262.

[156] J. R. Hall, 'Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Anglo-Saxonism: the Question of Language', *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity*, ed. A. J. Frantzen and J. D. Niles (Gainesville, 1997), pp. 133–56; Niles, *Idea of Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 278–86; and J. D. Niles, 'Who Wrote the Non-Racist Essay "The Anglo-Saxon Race"? Longfellow and Nineteenth-Century American Anglo-Saxonism', *Old English Tradition: Essays in Honor of J. R. Hall*, ed. L. Brady, Med. and Renaissance Texts and Stud. 578 (Tempe, 2021), 293–301.

[157] *The American Review, a Whig Journal*, July 1846, p. 14. For context, see Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny*, pp. 208–28.

[158] D. King, *Making Americans: Immigration, Race, and the Origins of the Diverse Democracy* (Cambridge, MA, 2000); M. F. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 40–4.

completion of the first trans-Atlantic telegraph cable in 1858 (notwithstanding the fact that it failed within three weeks) prominently invoked the idea of an Anglo-Saxon bond spanning two continents – one banner read 'Anglo-Saxon twins', another 'There is no such word as fail for Saxon Blood' – and served as an opportunity to denigrate Irish migrants.[159]

The White population of the southern states used the Anglo-Saxons to frame themselves in opposition to both the White northerners and to the Black population. Tensions over slavery in the run-up to the American Civil War (1861–5) prompted some in the south to tout themselves as the descendants of chivalrous Norman knights opposed to a puritanical north full of Anglo-Saxons, on the model of *Ivanhoe*.[160] Not surprisingly, this attitude changed after the Civil War, and the defeated Anglo-Saxons became a new parallel for the south, as the supposed bearers of democratic tradition arrayed against Norman tyranny.[161] That analogy was layered upon Lost Cause ideology and racial confrontation in the work of Thomas Dixon Jr (1864–1946). Unapologetic racism couched in terms of the 'Anglo-Saxon race' figured prominently in his popular 1902 novel *The Leopard's Spots: a Romance of the White Man's Burden 1865–1900.* Members of the Ku Klux Klan, the protagonists of the story and, as Dixon put it, an 'Invisible Empire of White Robed Anglo-Saxon Knights', at one point hung a placard from the corpse of a lynched African American man that read 'The answer of the Anglo-Saxon race'.[162] Building in part on Dixon's best-selling novels and plays (one of which provided the basis for D. W. Griffith's even more popular 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation*), the Ku Klux Klan and similar societies devoted to racial segregation and 'Anglo-Saxon' supremacy surged in popularity in the 1910s and 1920s, when Klan membership ran to millions and stretched across the nation.[163]

American Anglo-Saxonism was not solely the preserve of White claims to racial superiority. In the hands of some imaginative writers, it also provided a frame of reference for subverting inequality, especially in the slaveholding states. African American observers constructed a view of 'Anglo-Saxon' identity that centred on brutality and rapaciousness, shaped by their supposed

[159] M. P. Ryan, *Civil Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City* (Berkeley, 1997), p. 228.

[160] R. D. Watson, Jr, *Normans and Saxons: Southern Race Mythology and the Intellectual History of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge, 2008); and more broadly W. R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: the Old South and American National Character* (New York, 1961).

[161] G. E. Hale, *Making Whiteness: the Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890–1940* (New York, 1998), ch. 2; and G. A. VanHoosier-Carey, 'Byrhtnoth in Dixie: the Emergence of Anglo-Saxon Studies in the Postbellum South', *Anglo-Saxonism*, ed. Frantzen and Niles (Gainesville, 1997), pp. 157–72.

[162] T. Dixon Jr, *The Leopard's Spots: a Romance of the White Man's Burden 1865–1900* (New York, 1902), p. 150. For discussion, see the papers in M. K. Gillespie and R. L. Hall (eds.), *Thomas Dixon Jr. and the Birth of Modern America* (Baton Rouge, 2006).

[163] W. C. Wade, *The Fiery Cross: the Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York, 1987), esp. pp. 167–85; and L. Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition* (New York, 2017), pp. 25–36. These societies included some in Virginia known explicitly as the 'Anglo-Saxon Clubs of America': see J. D. Smith, *Managing White Supremacy: Race, Politics, and Citizenship in Jim Crow Virginia* (Chapel Hill, 2002), pp. 76–89. Dixon himself in fact saw the revived Klan's aggression as distasteful, and a threat to democratic institutions: A. Slide, *American Racist: the Life and Films of Thomas Dixon* (Lexington, 2004), pp. 16–17.

origins as invaders of post-Roman Britain: an early proponent of this view, Hosea Easton (1798–1837), a Methodist minister from Massachusetts, wrote that 'it is not a little remarkable that in the nineteenth century a remnant of this same barbarous people should boast of their national superiority … [and yet] practiced the same crime their barbarous ancestry had done in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries'.[164] Another reworking of the Anglo-Saxon myth looked to a later stage in their history, when the Anglo-Saxons themselves were subjected to servitude by their Norman conquerors. The present masters could therefore be portrayed as the descendants of slaves, undermining their position and historicising the plight of the enslaved population. A Massachusetts abolitionist, Lydia Maria Child (1802–80), published a short story in 1841 entitled 'The Black Saxons', which first laid that thought in the mind of a fictional slaveholder, and a Black student at Oberlin College in 1846 read a poem based on the story to a literary society.[165] The same essential idea was built on by Frederick Douglass (1817/18–95) in several speeches and essays of the 1840s. It enabled him to puncture the arrogance of White enslavers who saw themselves as Anglo-Saxons, reminding them that their supposed forebears were slaves to the Normans. As he put it in one speech delivered at Canandaigua, New York, on 2 August 1847, 'the proud Anglo-Saxons, overpowered in war, had their property confiscated by their haughty Norman superiors, and were enslaved upon their own sacred soil … who were the fathers of our present haughty oppressors in this land? They were, until within the last four centuries, the miserable slaves, the degraded serfs, of Norman nobles … [the Anglo-Saxons] were regarded as an inferior race – unfit to be trusted with their own rights'. But Douglass went on to add that 'a profitable comparison might be drawn between the condition of the coloured slaves of our land, and the ancient Anglo-Saxon slaves of England'.[166] This reversal of roles placed the enslaved Black population in the position of the Anglo-Saxons, implicitly claiming for them what Douglass saw as the more desirable cultural and progressive legacy of America's English heritage.[167] Later, Sutton E. Griggs (1872–1933) in his 1899 novel *Imperium in Imperio* subtly evoked this trope by alluding to the Norman yoke, but set it in a more firmly American context by contrasting the supposed 'Anglo-Saxon' love of freedom with the enslavement inflicted concurrently on

[164] M. Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas about White People, 1830–1925* (New York, 2000), pp. 49–50 (with more general discussion of the development of this theme on pp. 38–74, 91–8 and 107–11).

[165] Vernon, *Black Middle Ages*, pp. 49–95.

[166] F. Douglass, *The Frederick Douglass Papers. Series One: Speeches, Debates, Interviews*, ed. J. W. Blassingame and J. R. McKivigan, 5 vols. (New Haven, 1979–92) II, 73.

[167] E. Tamarkin, *Anglophilia: Deference, Devotion, and Antebellum America* (Chicago, 2007), pp. 231–46; and A. Abrams, '"The Miserable Slaves, the Degraded Serfs": Frederick Douglass, Anglo-Saxonism, and the Mexican War', *Postmedieval: a Jnl of Med. Cultural Stud.* 10 (2019), 151–61. Arguments for the benefits in language, culture and religion that the Black American population had derived from contact with the 'Anglo-Saxons' were also made frequently by the influential scholar and minister Alexander Crummell (1819–98): see discussion in A. Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York, 1992), esp. pp. 3–27; and T. Adeleke, *UnAfrican Americans: Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalists and the Civilizing Mission* (Lexington, 1998), esp. pp. 70–91.

the Black population: 'That same hammer and anvil that forged the steel sword of the Anglo-Saxon, with which he fought for freedom from England's yoke, also forged the chain that the Anglo-Saxon used to bind the negro more securely in the thralldom of slavery'.[168]

The Anglo-Saxons in Popular Usage in the Twentieth Century and Beyond

In general, popular embrace of the Anglo-Saxons, and of an identity that foregrounded Anglo-Saxon biological, institutional and cultural roots, lost a significant amount of ground in the course of the twentieth century.[169] Discourse around race has transformed in the United States, driven by demographic and political upheaval. The 'White Anglo-Saxon Protestant' (WASP) element of the population, once so numerically and culturally overbearing, lost its hegemonic position in the course of the mid-twentieth century.[170] Reasons for this are many and debatable: migration into and within the country, with the raising and then lowering of federal barriers to immigration on a national or ethnic basis; the logical conclusion of progressive ideals espoused by the Anglo-American elite; the anti-subversive campaigns of the 1950s, which regarded the Anglo-American elite with particular disdain and suspicion; two bouts of mass mobilisation for war that helped break down differences within the White population, along with desegregation of military units after the Second World War; reaction against the assumed superiority of Anglo-American identity and the embrace of more diverse hyphenated identities; and, for European immigrants on the economic margins of American society, a desire to identify with the dominant ethnic group through discrimination on the basis of skin colour.[171] The end result was to flatten ethnic and religious distinctions with an enlarged definition of whiteness, leaving behind the colour-based dichotomy that has always lurked behind other racial divisions.[172] 'Anglo-Saxon' occurs occasionally as a synonym for White,[173]

[168] Sutton E. Griggs, *Imperium in Imperio* (Cincinnati, 1899), p. 90.

[169] MacDougall, *Racial Myth*, pp. 127–9.

[170] On WASP, see I. L. Allen, 'WASP – from Sociological Concept to Epithet', *Ethnicity* 2 (1975), 153–62; J. D. Davidson, R. E. Pyle and D. V. Reyes, 'Persistence and Change in the Protestant Establishment, 1930–1992', *Social Forces* 74 (1995), 157–75; M. Zhang, 'WASPs', *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism* (Chichester, 2015). The term first appeared in the mid-twentieth century.

[171] N. Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York, 1995); Jacobson, *Whiteness*, pp. 246–80; King, *Making Americans*, pp. 199–253; S. Fenton, *Ethnicity*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 25–36; G. Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, 2017); Kaufmann, *Rise and Fall*, esp. pp. 177–282; A. Jardina, *White Identity Politics* (Cambridge, 2019); M. Omi and H. Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3rd ed. (London, 2015), pp. 161–244; and Painter, *History of White People*, pp. 301–96.

[172] King, *Making Americans*, pp. 257–92. For the earlier erection of free White identity in opposition to Black servitude, see T. W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York, 1994–2012); and for the history of definitions of blackness, F. J. Davis, *Who is Black? One Nation's Definition* (University Park, 2001).

[173] See, for example, the description of Christopher Columbus as 'an Anglo-Saxon from Spain' in a speech before Congress by Hank Johnson, a Congressman from Georgia, on 25 September 2017: *Congressional Record* 163 (September 2017), H7480.

but has largely been superseded and is simply no longer used by most Americans. When it is invoked, 'Anglo-Saxon' most often represents one of many bygone and distasteful layers of exclusionary, hierarchical thinking, as demonstrated in a speech before Congress in April 2021 by Hakeen Jeffries, a Congressman from New York: 'The foundational model of this country is *e pluribus unum*, out of many, one. It doesn't say out of many Europeans, one. It doesn't say out of many Anglo-Saxons, one. It doesn't say out of many Confederate sympathizers, one. It doesn't say out of many Christians, one. It certainly doesn't say out of many nations, except Muslim countries, one.'[174]

Usage in Britain has ended up in a similar place, with 'Anglo-Saxon' no longer favoured as a central component of Englishness or Britishness, though the route taken to this destination was quite different, with both internal and external factors in play. Two world wars against Germany inevitably compromised the appeal of deep Teutonic roots, though support for Germany on a cultural level persisted even during the First World War and into the 1930s (sometimes citing shared ancestry).[175] National identity reoriented towards local, cultural characteristics in the 1920s and 1930s, sharpened by debate about Irish home rule that changed the position of Britain and its constituent nations.[176] There was, at the same time, a strand of thinking that positioned the British as part of a worldwide White brethren with their cousins in the Dominions of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa.[177] These ways of framing race and identity progressed in later decades. Legislation on citizenship in the 1960s and after, and rhetoric from the same period directed against non-White immigrants, favoured Britishness and whiteness much more than 'Anglo-Saxon' descent.[178]

This was not, however, simply a matter of the Anglo-Saxons losing their spot at the beginning of a clear trail of English (or British) historical identity: that trail itself became overgrown in the late twentieth century as the idea that there was, or should be, a single national historical narrative lost momentum. Social changes in Britain during and after the 1960s produced a more fragmented sense of national identity, with the emphasis by the end of the century on

[174] *Congressional Record* 167 (April 2021), H2010.

[175] R. Boyce, 'The Persistence of Anglo-Saxonism in Britain and the Origins of Britain's Appeasement Policy', *Histoire@Politique. Politique, culture, société* 15 (2011), 1–19.

[176] Mandler, *English National Character*, pp. 143–95. There is much scholarship on the subsequent interplay between Britishness and Englishness, especially in the wake of devolution for Scotland and Wales at the end of the twentieth century (and, in 2014 and 2016, the referenda on Scottish independence and on membership of the EU): for a selection of important recent analyses, see T. Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, 3rd ed. (London, 2021); A. Henderson and R. Wyn Jones, *Englishness: the Political Force Transforming Britain* (Oxford, 2021); A. Gamble and A. Wright (eds.), *Britishness: Perspectives on the Britishness Question* (Chichester, 2009); A. Aughey and C. Berberich (eds.), *These Englands: a Conversation on National Identity* (Manchester, 2012); and, for the earlier stages of the process, R. J. C. Young, *The Idea of English Ethnicity* (Oxford, 2008), esp. chs. 4 and 5.

[177] Mandler, *English National Character*, pp. 133–4; and Young, *English Ethnicity*, pp. 179–80.

[178] D. Cesarani, 'The Changing Character of Citizenship and Nationality in Britain', *Citizenship, Nationality and Migration in Europe*, ed. D. Cesarani and M. Fulbrook (London, 1996), pp. 57–73. See also O. Esteves, *Inside the Black Box of 'White Backlash': Letters of Support to Enoch Powell (1968–1969)* (London, 2022), pp. 11–30.

individualism and cultural diversity and less on a long shared past.[179] The historical dimensions of Britishness narrowed significantly, with the Second World War becoming a crucible of national identity, both in right-wing nationalist discourse that fastened on a narrative of Britain triumphing against European neighbours,[180] and more liberal accounts that emphasise the 'Blitz spirit' and the establishment of the NHS and the Welfare State immediately after the war, as part of a catalogue of progressive achievements from the abolition of slavery to the arrival of the SS *Empire Windrush.*[181]

History of both the recent and distant British past gained considerably in popular interest even as it lost political centrality, becoming something that individual people had and used as a storehouse of personally fulfilling education and entertainment rather than a narrative that defined a people.[182] The Anglo-Saxons were caught up in this wave, profiting rather than suffering from their reputation as distant and mysterious. They maintained a place in popular historical consciousness on an increasingly emotional basis: while reportage on the discovery of the Sutton Hoo ship-burial in summer 1939 still mentioned the 'blood' that linked Rædwald with the contemporary English (frequently elided with British), the emphasis now fell on broad cultural affinities that supposedly reached across thirteen centuries.[183] Sutton Hoo remains a touchstone. *The Dig*, a 2021 film based on a 2007 novel by John Preston, told the story of the site's excavation as a metonym for recent changes in British society, including the looming impact of the Second World War and tensions between metropolitan elites and the earthy, working-class regional population. The Anglo-Saxons precipitate the film's plot, yet are surprisingly distant from its human action. In discovering an Anglo-Saxon treasure, the film suggests, the English discover something about themselves.[184] The baseline assumption is that the Anglo-Saxons represent an enigma, with occasional new discoveries – especially archaeological ones – offering a flash of relatability: as Ashok Kumar (1956–2010), MP for

[179] Mandler, *English National Character*, pp. 215–42; and G. Bhattacharyya et al., *Empire's Endgame: Racism and the British State*, FireWorks 4 (London, 2021), 65–7.

[180] Louviot, 'Divided', pp. 133–6. See further Bhattacharyya *et al.*, *Empire's Endgame*, pp. 59–60 and 65–70 on the pruning of the national past more generally; and, for the Second World War, T. Williams, 'Mobilizing the Past: Germany and the Second World War in Debates on Brexit', *Revue LISA* 19 (2021), https://doi.org/10.4000/lisa.13019; and J. Stratton, 'The Language of Leaving: Brexit, the Second World War and Cultural Trauma', *Jnl for Cultural Research* 23 (2019), 225–51.

[181] Bhattacharyya *et al.*, *Empire's Endgame*, p. 71, using the example of the opening ceremony of the London Olympics in 2012.

[182] Brownlie, *Memory and Myths*, pp. 121–30; Louviot, 'Divided', p. 133; S. Condor, '"Having History": a Social Psychological Exploration of Anglo-British Autostereotypes', *Beyond Pug's Tour: National and Ethnic Stereotyping in Theory and Literary Practice*, ed. C. C. Barfoot, DQR Stud. in Lit. 20 (Amsterdam, 1997), 213–53; and P. Mandler, *History and National Life* (London, 2002), pp. 93–163.

[183] F. Allfrey, 'Ethnonationalism and Medievalism: Reading Affective "Anglo-Saxonism" Today with the Discovery of Sutton Hoo', *Postmedieval: a Jnl of Med. Cultural Stud.* 12 (2021), 75–99, at 83–9.

[184] L. D'Arcens, 'The Dig's Romanticisation of an Anglo-Saxon Past Reveals it is a Film for Post-Brexit UK', *The Conversation* 15 February 2021 (https://theconversation.com/the-digs-romanticisation-of-an-anglo-saxon-past-reveals-it-is-a-film-for-post-brexit-uk-154827, accessed 3 August 2024); K. Carella, 'The Dig, Dir. Simon Stone', *Medievally Speaking* 29 July 2021 (http://medievallyspeaking.blogspot.com/2021/07/the-dig-dir-simon-stone.html, accessed 3 August 2024).

Middlesborough and Cleveland, put it before parliament in January 2008 when discussing important new Anglo-Saxon archaeological finds from Loftus, North Yorkshire, '[these treasures] provide us with a link to our history and tell us about the order of society in the dark ages. They also show us that those people, far from being remote from us, felt some of the same emotions that we do and had the same sense of curiosity about the world around them and their place in it'.[185] In particular, the Anglo-Saxons offer a vision of the past that is strongly English in character and yet distant from the metropolitan, London-centred form of the modern nation; as such, the Anglo-Saxons are often claimed as an historical proxy for regional identities within England. Wessex and Mercia both have a political party advocating for regional interests within the bounds of a former Anglo-Saxon kingdom,[186] and there has been a campaign since the 1990s for the return of the Lindisfarne Gospels to a location in the north.[187] Regional identity was a particular leitmotif in reporting on the Staffordshire hoard in 2009, which rooted the dazzling new find in the 'mysteries of Mercia',[188] while a government minister proudly observed that the eventual acquisition of the hoard for museums in Birmingham and Stoke-on-Trent would mean that the 'superb finds will be able to stay – and be enjoyed – where they belong: in the midlands where they were discovered'.[189] As one of the curators who eventually took on the hoard put it, 'we're all Mercians now'.[190]

The Anglo-Saxons largely survive as a historical designation, and in this form are deeply embedded in British public understanding of the past. They feature in the national curriculum of (English) schools and in the labels of national heritage organisations,[191] and attachment to them is framed in affective, emotional terms: those who are accustomed to using 'Anglo-Saxon' defend themselves in defending the term.[192] The Anglo-Saxons' ethnic, racial role has not evaporated completely. Displays in the museum operated by English Heritage at Sutton Hoo embraced a continuum of Anglo-Saxon and English, even British, identity in displays and videos as recently as the 2000s and 2010s.[193] But on the whole, calling attention to the 'Anglo-Saxon' identity

[185] 'Loftus Saxon Treasures', *Hansard* 470 (22 January 2008), cols. 419–26, at 420.

[186] https://www.wessexregionalists.info/; https://www.independentmercia.org/ (both accessed 14 April 2024).

[187] See 'Let Gospels Come Home', *Sunderland Echo* 22 September 2006, reporting on local arguments for a temporary exhibition. A claim for permanent relocation was made and discussed in the House of Lords, with the opening case made by Michael Turnbull, bishop of Durham: 'The Lindisfarne Gospels', *Hansard* 558 (2 April 1998), cols. 451–64.

[188] *The Guardian* 24 September 2009.

[189] Margaret Hodge, then Minister of State for Culture and Tourism, quoted in *The Guardian* 23 March 2010.

[190] Martin Ellis, Curator of Applied Arts at Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, quoted in *A History of the World*, Radio 4, first broadcast 12 March 2010 (transcript available at https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/ahistoryoftheworld/2010/03/staffordshire-hoard-draws-the.shtml, accessed 11 April 2024).

[191] M. Pitts (ed.), 'Should *British Archaeology* Stop Using "Anglo-Saxon"?', *British Archaeology* 170 (2019), 24–9.

[192] Allfrey, 'Ethnonationalism and Medievalism', pp. 77–80.

[193] F. Allfrey, 'Old English Poetry and Sutton Hoo on Display: Creating "the Anglo-Saxon" in Museums', *Old English Medievalism*, ed. Fletcher et al. (Cambridge 2022), pp. 71–92, at 84.

of the modern English population sits uncomfortably in public settings. England's second national rugby union team was known from 2006 until 2021 as 'England Saxons', but the name was withdrawn because (as the Rugby Football Union chairman put it) the organisation needed 'to step up its efforts to improve diversity and inclusion across our game'.[194] This move reflects not only consciousness of the problems posed by '[Anglo-]Saxon', but also broader shifts in how race is (or is not) addressed publicly in late twentieth- and twenty-first-century Britain. Self-identified ethnicity has been promoted instead of race in censuses and other governmental contexts, with 'White British' emerging by 2001 as the preferred designation for the established bulk of the White population in such contexts.[195] This is emphatically not to deny or downplay the existence of racism in British society, but the ways in which this is articulated in modern times are often indirect, and the Anglo-Saxons have little part to play in them.[196]

Explicitly racist usage of the term is increasingly associated with the political far right, as part of a vision of degeneracy and existential threats to western, White or national identities. These ideas are buttressed with highly selective and tendentious readings of historiography, and magnified by reverberation in racist echo chambers, now largely found on the internet.[197] In such quarters, 'Anglo-Saxon' sits alongside antisemitic and skin colour-based racist discourse, and functions as a 'White monolith' and a dog-whistle for the alt-right.[198] When statements using 'Anglo-Saxon' in such ways do surface in more public settings they tend to be treated with a mixture of revulsion and ridicule in both the UK and the USA, as when a widely reported speech by a Conservative Member of Parliament in 2001 lamented that 'commonwealth immigration' had undermined 'our homogenous Anglo-

[194] *The Times*, 11 May 2021.

[195] For the evolution of the 'White British' label in successive censuses, see D. Thompson, 'The Ethnic Question: Census Politics in Great Britain', *Social Statistics and Ethnic Diversity: Cross-National Perspectives in Classifications and Identity Politics*, ed. P. Simon, V. Piché and A. A. Gagnon (Cham, 2015), pp. 111–39, at 123–31.

[196] Bhattacharyya *et al.*, *Empire's Endgame*, chs. 4–6; Fenton, *Ethnicity*, pp. 36–8; P. Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: the Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, 2nd ed. (London, 2002), esp. pp. xxx–xxxv; and M. Song, 'Why We Still Need to Talk about Race', *Ethnic and Racial Stud.* 41 (2018), 1131–45, esp. at 1135. See more broadly the classic D. Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, 1985), esp. pp. 36–8.

[197] For general guidance, see L. D. Valencia-García, 'Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History', *Far-Right Revisionism and the End of History: Alt/Histories*, ed. L. D. Valencia-García, Routledge Approaches to Hist. 37 (London, 2020), 3–26, along with other contributions in the same volume. For the specifically British dimension, see S. Woodbridge, 'History and Cultural Heritage: the Far Right and the "Battle for Britain"', *Cultures of Post-War British Fascism*, ed. N. Copsey and J. E. Richardson (London, 2014), pp. 27–48. For evolving views on race in the British far right, see R. Thurlow, 'The Developing British Fascist Interpretation of Race, Culture and Evolution', *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain*, ed. J. V. Gottlieb and T. P. Linehan (London, 2004), pp. 66–79.

[198] Rambaran-Olm and Wade, 'What's in a Name', pp. 137 and 143–58. For the difficulties associated with attempts by the racially dominant to define the terms of racism, see A. Lentin, 'Beyond Denial: "Not Racism" as Racist Violence', *Continuum: Jnl of Media and Cultural Stud.* 32 (2018), 400–14; and, more broadly, A. Lentin, *Why Race Still Matters* (Oxford, 2020).

Saxon society',[199] or when a spokesperson for Mitt Romney's Republican presidential campaign in 2012 referred to the 'unique Anglo-Saxon heritage' that Britain shared with the USA, which the incumbent President Barack Obama 'didn't fully appreciate'.[200]

Changing Scholarly Views on the Anglo-Saxons

The historicisation of the Anglo-Saxons in Britain took place in all contexts and registers, and has so far been viewed in relation to popular and political historical consciousness, but something similar took place in historical and archaeological scholarship, for related yet distinct reasons. Academic usage came to favour a deconstructed view of the Anglo-Saxons, which kept the designation but left most of their ethnic and nationalistic baggage behind, and in effect turned them back into a people of the past rather than the present. Aspects of this more qualified view began to emerge in earnest at the beginning of the twentieth century. Treasured Anglo-Saxon cultural and political inheritances of an earlier age started to be demolished with two tools honed in the nineteenth century: philology and highly targeted source criticism. Both were ultimately German imports,[201] used by (among others) Kemble and Freeman to great effect, but where they had wielded these techniques to craft their own visions of national origins, twentieth-century practitioners turned them back on the central tenets of Anglo-Saxon origin stories. Anglo-Saxon history thus became more academically rigorous but less embedded in the English grand narrative. H. M Chadwick (1870–1947) outright denied the supposedly democratic nature of early Anglo-Saxon social organisation.[202] F. W. Maitland (1850–1906) cut the *witan* down to size and downplayed the significance of the Anglo-Saxon contribution in the long-term development of English law,[203] while Felix Liebermann (1851–1925) put knowledge of what Anglo-Saxon laws actually said on a much firmer footing.[204] Probably the most influential historical

[199] O. Blackman, 'Enoch Was Right', *The Daily Mirror* 28 March 2001. One might compare the examples presented in A. Medhurst, *A National Joke: Popular Comedy and English Cultural Identities* (London, 2007), pp. 55–6, which draw on the extremist views presented in T. Linsell (ed.), *Our Englishness* (Hockwold-cum-Wilton, 2000) and in an episode of the BBC documentary *Counterblast* (20 April 1999) on English nationalism.

[200] Discussed in Vernon, *Black Middle Ages*, pp. 1–2; and Wilton, 'What Do We Mean', pp. 434–5.

[201] See in general I. Hesketh, *The Science of History in Victorian Britain*, Science and Culture in the Nineteenth Century 12 (London, 2011); and Momma, *From Philology to English Studies.*

[202] H. M. Chadwick, *The Origin of the English Nation* (Cambridge, 1907), p. 300. Chadwick would later array himself against nationalistic uses of the past more broadly in *The Nationalities of Europe and the Growth of National Ideologies* (Cambridge, 1945), discussed in Wood, *Modern Origins*, pp. 288–91.

[203] F. W. Maitland, *The Constitutional History of England* (Cambridge, 1908), p. 58; P. Wormald, 'Frederic William Maitland and the Earliest English Law', *Law and Hist. Rev.* 16 (1998), 1–25; and Roach, *Kingship and Consent*, pp. 3–4. Note that some historians of the twenty-first century are now more open to a connection (if a less coherent one) between Anglo-Saxon royal meetings and parliament: see above.

[204] F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, 3 vols. (Halle, 1903–16). For context, see Fruscione, 'Liebermann's Intellectual Milieu'; and A. Rabin, 'Felix Liebermann and *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*', *English Law*, ed. Jurasinski, Oliver and Rabin (Leiden, 2010), pp. 1–8. There was an important nationalistic component to Liebermann's research and its background, in that the Anglo-Saxons and their texts were subsumed into that of the German people more generally, though the German scholarly manifestation of this was quite different to the English tradition.

survey of the Anglo-Saxons in the twentieth century was Sir Frank Stenton's *Anglo-Saxon England*, which first appeared in 1943. Stenton's study was distinguished by close engagement with primary sources, and not only the relatively well-known territory of narratives, laws and charters, but also coins, place names and archaeological finds. In the words of Michael Bentley, Stenton successfully 'built a bridge between the new social history informed by the scientism of historical and archaeological analysis, and a view of political development that turned Anglo-Saxon England into a sophisticated and centralizing nation state'.[205] Subsequent work has followed Stenton's lead, deepening and clarifying what various categories of source material have to say about early medieval England taken on its own terms.[206] James Campbell and Patrick Wormald, in the 1970s and after, eloquently developed the case for an aggressive and sophisticated administrative system in England in the last century before 1066, forming a first chapter in England's long history of strong, centralised government;[207] crucially, though, Campbell and Wormald fastened on taxation, coinage, written instruments of government and local organs of justice, and not the more direct constitutional continuities touted in the nineteenth century and before.[208] New roles in new (or at least changing) national myths, in this case built around the evolution of an English state and its impact on people's lives, lay open to historians of the Anglo-Saxons.[209]

As in this case, scholars have always been comfortable carving up the Anglo-Saxon period into smaller chunks, including some that span the watersheds on either side: 'late antiquity' at the beginning, and 'Anglo-Norman' at the end.[210]

[205] M. Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism, 1870–1970* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 142. See further the papers in D. Matthew, A. Curry and E. Green (eds.), *Stenton's Anglo-Saxon England Fifty Years On: Papers Given at a Colloquium Held at Reading, 11–12 November 1993*, Reading Hist. Stud. 1 (Reading, 1994); and H. R. Loyn, 'Anglo-Saxon England', *A Century of British Medieval Studies*, ed. A. Deyermond (Oxford, 2007), pp. 7–26, esp. 7–9.

[206] Loyn, 'Anglo-Saxon England', pp. 11–23.

[207] J. Campbell, *The Late Anglo-Saxon State* (London, 2000), which includes the 1994 paper 'The Late Anglo-Saxon State: a Maximal View' (pp. 1–30); and P. Wormald, 'Giving God and King their Due: Conflict and its Regulation in the Early English State', and '*Engla Lond*: the Making of an Allegiance', both in his *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West: Law as Text, Image and Experience* (London, 1999), pp. 333–57 and 359–82. A major qualification to this view is G. Molyneaux, *The Formation of the English Kingdom in the Tenth Century* (Oxford, 2015), which emphasises that much of the machinery of the 'late Anglo-Saxon state' coalesced only in the late tenth century.

[208] S. Foot, 'The Historiography of the Anglo-Saxon "Nation-State"', *Power and the Nation in European History*, ed. L. Scales and O. Zimmer (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 125–42, esp. 133–6.

[209] On the role of government as an aspect of British (and English) identity, see B. Crick, 'The British State: Sovereignty and Identities', *The State: Historical and Political Dimensions*, ed. R. English and C. Townshend (London, 1999), pp. 210–34; Henderson and Wyn Jones, *Englishness*, pp. 59–68; C. Julios, *Contemporary British Identity: English Language, Migrants and Public Discourse* (Aldershot, 2008), esp. pp. 3–8; and A. Aughley, 'England and Britain in Historical Perspective', *Governing England: English Identity and Institutions in a Changing United Kingdom*, ed. M. Kenny, I. McLean and A. Paun, PBA 217 (Oxford, 2018), 27–43.

[210] For the Norman Conquest, see M. Chibnall, *The Debate on the Norman Conquest* (Manchester, 1999); and D. Bates, '1066: Does the Date Still Matter?', *Hist. Research* 78 (2005), 443–64. 'Late antiquity' has come to mean assessment of the period from about 200 to 700 with an eye to social and cultural continuity (as eloquently articulated in P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity, from Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad* (London, 1971); see also E. James, 'The Rise and Function of the Concept "Late Antiquity"', *Jnl of Late Antiquity* 1 (2008), 20–30).

But Stenton's choice of title and periodisation in his *magnum opus* was also influential, for it has continued to be common for historians to write of the Anglo-Saxons as a whole and to treat the Anglo-Saxon age as a single unit running from the fifth century to 1066.[211] *Anglo-Saxon England* ended with the death of William the Conqueror (1087) who had 'in twenty years ... transformed the immemorial Germanic kingship into a pattern of feudal sovereignty'.[212] Despite many changes in approach, historical and archaeological scholarship on the Anglo-Saxons since Stenton has preserved 'Anglo-Saxon' as a term and as a chronological infrastructure. One reason for this is the deep staying power of a centuries-old label and the division of the past that it reflects. Another is that it builds on the language and patterns of thought of the first generations of professional historians, such as Stenton, who crystallised their terms of reference in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when 'Anglo-Saxon' held sway.[213]

The legacy of these early generations has thus been to pass on the Anglo-Saxons as a framework despite its earlier premises being challenged on several fronts. Even a foundational tenet of the Anglo-Saxon myth – that the incoming English replaced the Britons as the dominant population group in what would become England – has been taken apart and reassembled in a very different form by several waves of archaeologists and historians.[214] In the culmination of a process that began with Kemble in the 1830s, the major narrative sources for the Anglo-Saxon settlement were deconstructed and mostly discredited by historians in the 1970s and 1980s.[215] Serious questions now had to be asked of the received view that derived primarily from these sources, which (in simplified terms) saw the Anglo-Saxons as coming in *en masse* as part of an orchestrated invasion, and leaping with more or less fully formed collective identities onto the beaches of eastern England. The Anglo-Saxons supposedly then became the dominant constituency by displacing or slaughtering the Romano-British population and absorbing the few survivors.[216] Gildas, Bede and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* have huge value as windows onto how the past was viewed at their various times of composition, but knowledge of developments in the fifth and

[211] Rambaran-Olm, 'Wrinkle in Time', pp. 385–7.

[212] F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1943), p. v.

[213] On the emergence of university-based professional historians, see (among many others) J. P. Kenyon, *The History Men: the Historical Profession in England since the Renaissance*, 2nd ed. (London, 1983), pp. 144–99; R. Harrison, A. Jones and P. Lambert, 'The Institutionalisation and Organisation of History', *Making History: an Introduction to the History and Practices of a Disciplines*, ed. P. Lambert and P. Schofield (London, 2004), pp. 9–25; and Bentley, *Modernizing England's Past*, pp. 119–43.

[214] N. J. Higham, *Rome, Britain and the Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1992), esp. pp. 153–236; B. Ward-Perkins, 'Why Did the Anglo-Saxons not Become More British?', *EHR* 115 (2000), 513–33, at 519–23.

[215] D. N. Dumville, 'Sub-Roman Britain: History and Legend', *History* 62 (1977), 173–92; P. Sims-Williams, 'Gildas and the Anglo-Saxons', *CMCS* 6 (1983), 1–30; and P. Sims-Williams, 'The Settlement of England in Bede and the Chronicle', *ASE* 12 (1983), 1–42.

[216] An excellent critical overview is E. James, *Britain in the First Millennium* (London, 2001), pp. 86–115.

sixth centuries is now recognised as depending in large part on interpretation of material evidence by archaeologists.[217]

Reaction against the historically-based model picked up momentum in the 1980s, as a group of archaeologists influenced by a wider turn against migration-based explanations of change argued that in fact there had been no (or virtually no) Anglo-Saxon migration at all, and that the substantial changes in material culture were instead a result of internal factors.[218] That position never achieved complete acceptance, and since the 2000s refinement of the study of ancient DNA and isotopic data has pointed strongly towards a significant amount of demographic movement in the post-Roman period, both across the North Sea and within Britain.[219] Interest has shifted away from whether there *was* a migration and instead to the *nature* of that migration, which may have been based on smaller groups of varied character who only coalesced into the familiar peoples and kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England after settling in Britain.[220] English political formations were thus the result, not the cause of post-Roman demographic changes. This fits well with the linguistic evidence. The apparent erasure of Brittonic language and place names in lowland Britain and the scarcity of Brittonic loan-words in Old English are significant, but less so if a version of Latin was the dominant vernacular in this region; moreover, it has been argued that Brittonic did exert structural and phonological influences on English, in

[217] For historiographical surveys, see H. Hamerow, 'Migration Theory and the Migration Period', *Building on the Past: Papers Celebrating 150 Years of the Royal Archaeological Institute*, ed. B. E. Vyner (London, 1994), pp. 164–77; S. Lucy, *The Anglo-Saxon Way of Death: Burial Rites in Early England* (Stroud, 2000), pp. 163–73; and *eadem*, 'Anglo-Saxon Narratives: Contesting the Past in Britain 1800–2020', *Neue Studien zur Sachsenforschung* 11 (2022), 87–98.

[218] C. J. Arnold, *From Roman Britain to Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1984); C. J. Arnold, *An Archaeology of the Early English Kingdoms* (London, 1988); R. Hodges, *The Anglo-Saxon Achievement: Archaeology and the Beginnings of English Society* (London, 1989), pp. 10–42; and Higham, *Rome, Britain and the Anglo-Saxons.*

[219] J. Kay, 'Moving from Wales and the West in the Fifth Century: Isotope Evidence for Eastward Migration in Britain', *The Welsh and the Medieval World: Travel, Migration and Exile*, ed. P. Skinner (Cardiff, 2018), pp. 17–47; M. Jobling and A. Millard, 'Isotopic and Genetic Evidence for Migration in Medieval England', *Migrants in Medieval England c. 500–c. 1500*, ed. W. M. Ormrod, J. Story and E. M. Tyler (Oxford, 2020), pp. 19–61; R. Fleming, *The Material Fall of Roman Britain, 300–525 CE* (Princeton, 2021), pp. 157–75; and J. Gretzinger et al., 'The Anglo-Saxon Migration and the Formation of the Early English Gene Pool', *Nature* 610 (2022), 112–19. There is on-going debate about the risk of paleogenetic data reinforcing a resurgence of biologically based views of race: J. Hartigan Jr, 'Is Race Still Socially Constructed? The Recent Controversy over Race and Medical Genetics', *Science as Culture* 17 (2008), 163–93; and N. Sykes, M. Spriggs and A. Evin, 'Beyond Curse or Blessing: the Opportunities and Challenges of aDNA Analysis', *World Archaeol.* 51 (2019), 503–16, with other contributions in the same special issue.

[220] S. Esmonde Cleary, 'The Roman to Medieval Transition', *Britons and Romans: Advancing an Archaeological Agenda*, ed. S. James and M. Millett, CBA Research Report 125 (York, 2001), 90–7; G. Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376–568* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 417–98; G. Halsall, *Worlds of Arthur* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 184–299; C. Hills, 'The Anglo-Saxon Migration to Britain: an Archaeological Perspective', *Migration und Integration von der Urgeschichte bis zum Mittelalter. 9. Mitteldeutscher Archäologentag vom 20. bis 22. Oktober 2016 in Halle (Saale)*, ed. H. Meller, R. Risch, F. Daim and J. Krause, Tagungen des Landesmuseums für Vorgeschichte Halle 17 (Halle, 2017), 239–53; J. Harland, *Ethnic Identity and the Archaeology of the aduentus Saxonum: a Modern Framework and its Problems* (Amsterdam, 2021).

common with some other examples of language contact that resulted in only a few lexical borrowings.[221] None of this is to deny what adds up to a 'cultural genocide' directed against the Britons,[222] but the point is that few would now argue that the Anglo-Saxons were all 'Anglo-Saxon' in descent, or that they had anything approaching a coherent 'Anglo-Saxon' identity in the fifth and sixth centuries.

The Anglo-Saxons, in dominant British popular and academic usage, have come to hold a meaning equivalent to 'the Victorians' or 'the Romans': the people who lived in England during a particular chronological window. It has certainly helped that several other European historiographical traditions also assign key phases of transition to the fifth and eleventh centuries, fitting more-or-less comfortably with what English-speakers call the Anglo-Saxon period.[223] To excise the term 'Anglo-Saxon' at this point would thus have only a limited impact on how the corresponding period is delineated: its principal effect might be to lighten the weight put on the political events of *c.* 410 and 1066 and thereby encourage interest in continuity and change across these watersheds, reinforcing a trend on-going since the later twentieth century.[224] Even if much of what made the Anglo-Saxons special has gone, there has seemed to be no need to get rid of them, at least in the context of historical periodisation.

Conclusion

Since about 1100 the pre-Conquest era has occupied a grey area between myth and history. Distant in language and custom, and yet valued as the first layer of the English past, Anglo-Saxon England took on a special meaning in the later Middle Ages that it has never lost since. Often matters have turned on what were effectively ghosts of Anglo-Saxon England, conjured in support of present concerns and founded on wishful thinking, recycling of accepted wisdom and

[221] Some forceful recent statements are M. Findell and P. A. Shaw, 'Language Contact in Early Medieval Britain: Settlement, Interaction, and Acculturation', *Migrants in Medieval England*, ed. Ormrod, Story and Tyler (Oxford, 2020), pp. 62–89, at 64–8; and D. Parsons, 'The Romance of Early Britain: Latin, British, and English, c. 400–600', *Languages and Communities in the Late and Post-Roman Western Provinces*, ed. A. Mullen and G. Woudhuysen (Oxford, 2023), pp. 236–67, at 251–61.

[222] D. N. Dumville, 'Origins of the Kingdom of the English', *Writing, Kingship and Power in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. R. Naismith and D. Woodman (Cambridge, 2018), pp. 71–121, at 73–80.

[223] C. Wickham, 'The Early Middle Ages and National Identity', *Die Deutung der mittelalterlichen Gesellschaft in der Moderne*, ed. N. M. Fryde, P. Monnet, O. G. Oexle and L. Zygner, Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte 217 (Göttingen, 2006), 107–22; C. Wickham, *The Inheritance of Rome: a History of Europe from 400 to 1000* (London, 2009), pp. 3–10; F. Mazel, 'Un, deux, trois Moyen Âge … Enjeux et critères des périodisations internes de l'époque médiévale', *ATALA Cultures et sciences humaines* 17 (2014), 101–13; C. West, *Reframing the Feudal Revolution: Political and Social Transformation between the Marne and Moselle, c. 800–1100*, Cambridge Stud. in Med. Life and Thought, 4th ser., 90 (Cambridge, 2013); and R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950–1250*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 2007).

[224] Bates, '1066', esp. pp. 452–4; and Chibnall, *Debate on the Norman Conquest*, pp. 79–154. For continuity across the late Roman to early Anglo-Saxon period, see (*inter alia*) K. Dark, *Civitas to Kingdom: British Political Continuity 300–800* (Leicester, 1994); and R. Collins and J. Gerrard (eds.), *Debating Late Antiquity in Britain AD 300–700*, BAR Brit. ser. 365 (Oxford, 2004).

uncritical acceptance of problematic sources. Yet closer acquaintance with the pre-Conquest past from the sixteenth century onwards often fanned rather than extinguished the myths that blossomed around the Anglo-Saxons. Antiquarian enterprise and the cultural, political and (ultimately) racial ideology built around the Anglo-Saxons reinforced one another. That co-ordinated march was to some extent broken, paradoxically, as a consequence of the racial and nationalistic heights that popular Anglo-Saxonism reached in the nineteenth century: it became so tightly bound to concepts of White British and American identity that when the zeitgeist moved on, as it inevitably did, the Anglo-Saxons were left behind. Their subsequent fate in twentieth-century popular usage went in several different directions. No single interpretation holds complete sway in any individual region, but in Britain historical understanding prevails, while in other Anglophone countries (including the USA) ethno-racial meanings predominate and the rest of the world typically attaches politico-cultural connotations to 'Anglo-Saxon'.[225] The heated disputes that arose among scholars about the term 'Anglo-Saxon' in the late 2010s illustrate what happens when the mass, instant communication of the internet age forces these different usages into immediate contact with each other.[226]

It is not for this piece to prescribe what ought to be done in future about the Anglo-Saxons. That is one of three final points. The second is that, whatever one's own personal view of the best way forwards, the matter should be treated with compassion, flexibility and dialogue – and with awareness that, throughout its history, 'Anglo-Saxon' has been about more than the people and culture of early medieval England. It has always been embroiled in other discourses about how the past relates to the present, and who should claim or speak for that past. This leads to the third and last point, which is that the history of 'Anglo-Saxon' and of the concept of the Anglo-Saxons is instructive precisely because of its contentious nature. It throws light on the nexus of nationalism, history, language and political ideology, and on how that nexus was remade to suit the changing needs of each new age and constituency. The Anglo-Saxons have never been frozen in time.

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[225] Louviot, 'Divided', pp. 125–9; and Wilton, 'What Do We Mean', pp. 445–51.

[226] H.-J. Schmid, Q. Würschinger, M. Keller and U. Lenker, 'Battling for Semantic Territory across Social Networks: the Case of Anglo-Saxon on Twitter', *Yearbook of the German Cognitive Ling. Assoc.* 8 (2020), 3–26.

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