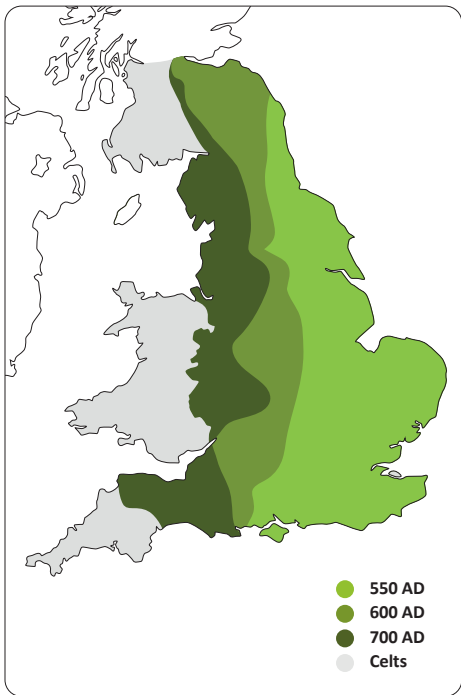# Anglo-Saxons settle

When the Anglo-Saxons settled in Britain, they changed both the physical and cultural landscape of the country.

East and west divide

When the Anglo-Saxons settled in the east of England, many Britons moved to the west. This split the country into two distinct parts. The Anglo-Saxons practised their culture and customs in the east, while the Britons continued to practise Celtic traditions in the west.

550 AD
600 AD
700 AD
Celts

Anglo-Saxon migration
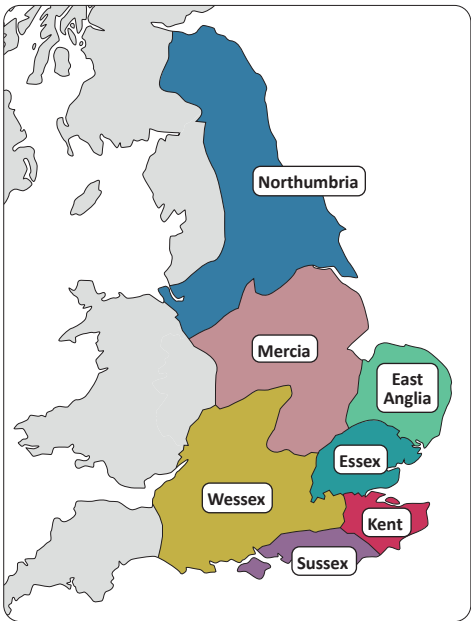
Communication problems

Crossing from east to west was like travelling to a different country. The Anglo-Saxons spoke their Germanic language, while the Britons spoke a mixture of Celtic languages. As the Britons became separated from each other, the Celtic languages developed regional variations, depending on whether they were spoken in England, Wales or Scotland. This made communication between the kingdoms increasingly difficult.

Culture clash

The east and west divide also meant that people lived in different ways. They had their own styles of clothing and houses and their own sets of beliefs, with Christianity existing side by side with Celtic and Anglo-Saxon mythologies.

Shifting borders

After the Anglo-Saxon invasion, England was split into seven kingdoms, collectively known as the heptarchy. However, Anglo-Saxon rulers regularly led their kingdoms into battle against each other to gain more land, wealth and political power. When they succeeded, the borders of the kingdoms changed to reflect this.

Fighting for power

When a king died, anyone could put themselves forward to be the new king. These were times of great bloodshed, as competitors fought amongst themselves for supremacy and neighbouring kings saw an opportunity to attack each other.
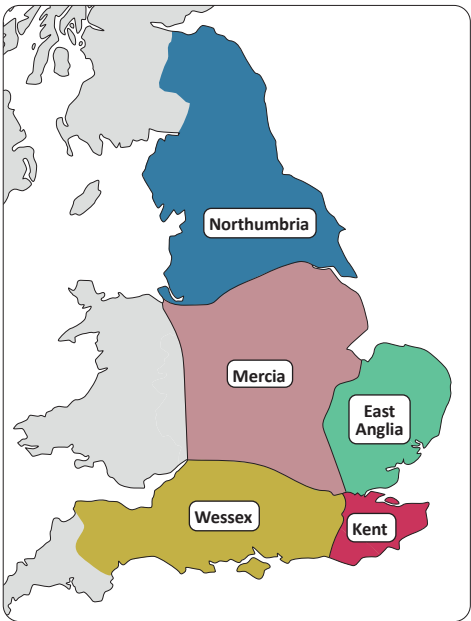
Bretwaldas

Sometimes, a king ousted a rival king and ruled more than one kingdom. These kings were known as *bretwaldas*. One of the first kings to become a *bretwalda* was King Aethelfrith who united the kingdoms of Bernicia and Deira, to make the kingdom of Northumbria.

King Offa

King Offa, the king of Mercia, was a *bretwalda*. He expanded his territory far and wide. He tried to expand into Wales, but crossing the mountains proved too difficult. Instead, he built an earth wall called Offa's Dyke between Mercia and Wales to protect his kingdom from invasion by the Celts. Parts of this structure can still be seen today.

Merging kingdoms

Over time, the seven kingdoms merged into the five main kingdoms of East Anglia, Kent, Mercia, Northumbria and Wessex. It would remain this way until the country was divided after the Viking invasion.

Anglo-Saxon place names

When the Anglo-Saxons established settlements, they named them after features in their surroundings. Many of these place names, such as Bamburgh and Oxford, still exist today.

Place name ending	Meaning
bourne/burn	stream
burgh/bury	fort
ford	river crossing
ham	village
hurst	wooded hill
ley	forest clearing
stow	meeting place
ton	fenced area
wick	farm