

The language and writing of the Anglo-Saxons

What language did they speak?

When the Angles and Saxons arrived in Britain the local people spoke either Latin or British. Welsh and Cornish are the modern versions of the old British language. The Angles and Saxons spoke Anglisc or as we call it, Old English.

Many of our modern words come from Old English, but have changed over the years.

Old English	Modern
ƷARM	Arm
hƷe	Hip
CIƷ	Chin
ƆOC	Book
SCƆLD	Shield

Runes

At first they didn't write much, but when they did they used Runes. Runes are made up of a series of straight lines so are easily cut into stone or onto metal (carving curves is hard!). Runes are sometimes named Futharks after the first letters of their alphabet.

ƿ	Ʊ	Ɗ	Ʀ	ƿ	Ɔ
F	UR	TH	O	R	C

You might notice some of the Runes make the sound of two letters - UR and TH. We need two letters to make these sounds in modern English.



Fun Fact: Modern printers didn't have the Thorn letter, so they often used a Y instead. This is why people think they said Ye instead of The in the past (Ye Olde Tavern), whereas in fact the Y was a TH sound!



That means *listen up!*
It is found at the beginning of the Old English poem Beowulf.

Letters

When the Anglo-Saxons started to write using the letters we use (Latin script), they didn't have a W, X, Y or Z. They did have some extra letters though:

ƥ This is called Eth and makes a TH sound.

ƿ This is called Thorn and makes a TH sound as well.

Anglo-Saxon Riddles

Can you answer these riddles?

The Anglo-Saxons loved riddles. J.R.R. Tolkien taught Anglo-Saxons at University and he fitted some of their riddles into his book *The Hobbit*. An early book with over 90 Anglo-Saxon riddles is called the *Book of Exeter*. None of the answers were written down so we have to guess what they were! Here are some of our favourites:

RIDDLE 1

When alive I don't speak.
anyone who wants to, takes me
PRISONER and cuts off my head.
they bite my body.
I don't harm anyone unless
they cut me first. then I will
soon make them cry.
what am I?

RIDDLE 2

I fly over men's houses
and wear a white robe.
I lurk near banks and
still waters,
from a cygnet I arose.
what am I?

RIDDLE 3

a hoard of rings am I,
but no fit gift for a bride;
I await a sword's kiss.
what am I?

RIDDLE 4

four dilly-dandies
four stick standies
two crookers
two lookers
and a wig wag
what am I?

RIDDLE 5

I am on my own,
wounded by iron weapons and
cut by swords.
I have often seen battle.
what am I?









You'll find the answers on the next page!

Perhaps you could try creating your own riddle? Describe an everyday item in an unusual way and see if anyone can guess what it is. You could share your riddles with us on social media and we will try to answer them!

Anglo-Saxon Runes

							
F	UR	TH	O	R	C/K	G	W

							
H	N	I	J/Y	EI	P	Z	S

							
T	B	E	M	L	NG	D	O

Can you translate these words?

NMTHO RIO SPARD

Try writing your own words using the runes. It may not be possible to spell some words with the same letters so try a similar sounding letter instead!

Want to know more about the Anglo-Saxons? Click on the following links:

- [What the Anglo-Saxons wore](#)
- [Anglo-Saxon Dragons](#)

Share Your Creations!

We would love to hear your riddles or see your Runes!

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