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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.

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.

F		\triangle	14	R	<
F	UR	TH	0	R	U

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.

Old English	Modern
earm	Arm
hype	Hip
cinn	Chin
BōC	Book
scelð	Shield



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:

ð This is called Eth and makes a TH sound.

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

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!

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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:

RIDOLE 1

when alive I don't speak.

anyone who wants to, takes me
anyoner and cuts off my head.

prisoner and cuts off my head.

they bite my body.

they bite my body.

they anyone unless

they cut me first. then I will

they cut me first. them cry.

what am I?

RISSLE 3

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

R188L€ 5

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

RIDOLE 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?

RISSLE 4

four dilly-dandies four stick standies two crookers two lookers and a wig wag what am 1?

You'll find the answers on the next page!

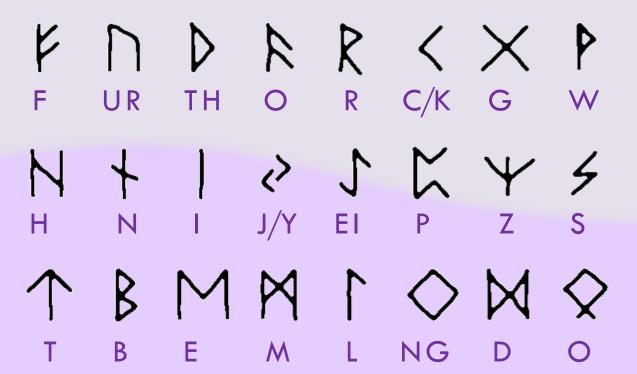
Perhaps you could try creating your own riddle?

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!

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Anglo-Saxon Runes



Can you translate these words?







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

Try our Kahoot! quiz!
Use this code to find it: 05488538

Share Your Creations!
We would love to hear your riddles or see your Runes!



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