

EARLY BRITAIN

54 B.C. TO 800 A.D.

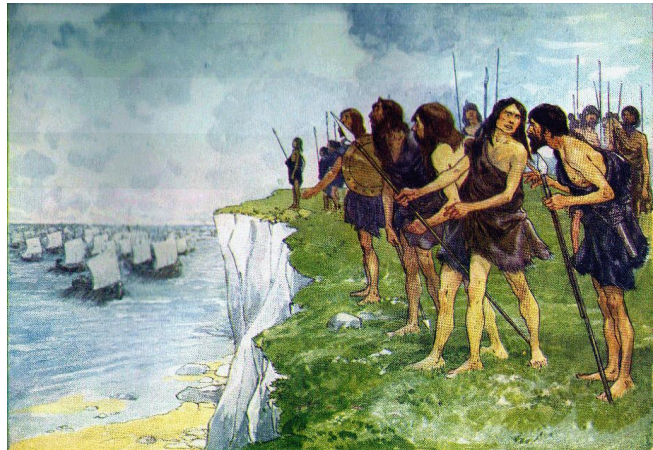
ROMAN CONQUEST OF BRITAIN TO FIRST VIKING RAID

ERA SUMMARY – EARLY BRITAIN

The British Isles were originally settled by Celtic tribes, a race of tall, fair-skinned, but non-Germanic people. They were known for their druid priests, colorful fabrics, clever metal-working, and ferocious warrior spirit. The Romans had extensive contact with the Gauls, or southern Celts, who inhabited most of Western Europe, and by the time they sought to take possession of the British Isles, they had already conquering most of Celtic Gaul (France) and Hispania (Spain). [Julius Caesar](#) was the first Roman conqueror who sent ships across the channel in order to subdue the Britons in 54 B.C. and succeeded in vanquishing a local tribe, but he did not follow up his victories by establishing permanent forts in the region.

Roman Britain

It was not until more than one hundred years later, in 51 A.D. that [Claudius](#) led a second, more permanent [invasion of Britain](#). United under [Caractacus](#), the Celtic tribes continued to resist for several years, but at last submitted to Roman rule. For the most part, the Britons submitted peacefully, especially after [Agricola](#), a prominent Roman general became governor and began building schools, roads, aqueducts, demonstrating the best aspects of civilization. The only rebellion of Britains against Romans was led by [Queen](#)



THE SHORE WAS COVERED WITH MEN READY FOR BATTLE

[Boadicea](#) just ten years after the second invasion. Although the Romans were able to subdue the Britons in the south, they were never able to permanently conquer the wild tribes of Picts in the north. Emperor [Hadrian](#) therefore built a wall from the River Tyne to the Solway Firth, which composed the northern border of civilization. This same boundary remained the border between the countries of England and Scotland for more than a thousand years following.

Britain fared well under Roman rule. Many roads were built, trade and commerce thrived, and as Christianity spread throughout the empire, many native Celts became Christian. [St. Alban](#), who was put to death shortly before [Constantine](#) legalized Christianity, is known for being the first Christian martyr in Britain. [Saint Patrick](#) was a Celtic Christian who left Britain in 433 as a missionary to Ireland, and is well known for converting most of the Irish to Christianity. The Celtic Christians in both Britain and Ireland built monasteries, which were important repositories of learning. It was mostly the great Celtic Christians, lead by saints such as [Saint](#)

[David](#), [Saint Brigid](#), [Saint Mungo](#), [Saint Cuthbert](#), and [Saint Columba](#), that kept Christianity alive in the British Isles during the years of struggle with Teutonic invaders.

Saxon Britain

In 402, Rome officially withdrew its legions from Britain, leaving the Celts to fend for themselves against the Pictish savages of the north and the Saxon pirates who raided the coastal towns. The Jutes, Angles, and Saxons were three northern German tribes and were well aware of the good roads, wealthy towns, and productive farmland that could be found in Britain. Almost as soon as the Roman legions were gone, these German tribes began their incursions. The first known Jute settlers were [Hengist and Horsa](#). [Vortigern](#), a Celtic king, sought their help in defeating his enemies and invited them in, but he soon regretted permitting them to settle in Britain, for they brought more of their tribesmen and soon threatened the Celtic kingdoms. There followed several centuries of war between the Celts and the invading Saxons, at the end of which the "Anglo-Saxon" barbarians were the uncontested rulers of the rich and prosperous southeast lowlands. The great Celtic heroes of these wars were the legendary [King Arthur](#) and his Knights of the Round Table, but we know little of this struggle between the Celts and Saxons other than that the Christian Celts had been driven to the far reaches of Wales, Ireland, and Scotland. Much of what we know about Britain in these Dark Ages was given to us by monks such as [Venerable Bede](#), who lived in monasteries in the British Isles which had been established by the 700's.

The next important event in British history was the conversion of [Ethelbert](#), a Saxon king, to Christianity by the Roman missionary [Saint Augustine of Kent](#). The Saxons were too proud to be converted by the despised Celts, but they were impressed by the embassy from Rome, and gradually Saxon England became Christian. The Celtic and Saxon churches continued to be governed independently and were not officially joined for many years after Saxon Britain became Christian.

CHARACTERS – EARLY BRITAIN

ROMAN BRITAIN

- Caswallon** ~ 54 BC Celtic chieftain in Britain who resisted the invasion of Julius Caesar.
Boadicea d. 61 Queen of the Iceni. Led the largest revolt of Celtic Britons against the Romans.

DARK AGES

- Vortigern** ~ 488 King of the Britons. Usurped the throne from rightful heir. Invited Hengist and Horsa to settle Britain.
Sir Galahad ~ 500 Knight of the Round Table. Considered the noblest and worthiest of knights.
Sir Gawain ~ 500 Knight of the Round Table. Famous for his encounter with the Green Giant.
King Arthur 460–510 Legendary king of the Britons.
Sir Perceval ~ 500 Knight of the Round table. Raised in the woods by mother who didn't want him to be a knight.
Hengist and Horsa d. 488 Two Jute princes were invited to Britain in order to help fight the Picts.

BRITISH SAINTS

- Saint Alban** d. 304 First martyr of England. Killed for hiding a priest in his home.
Saint Patrick 389–461 Kidnapped as a child and brought to Ireland, returned later to spread Christianity.
Saint Brigid 451–525 Patron saint of Ireland (with Patrick). Founded a monastery at Kildare in Ireland.
Saint Augustine of Kent d. 604 Sent by St. Gregory to Britain to preach to the Saxons. Converted Ethelbert.
Bertha 539–612 Christian princess who married the Saxon king, Ethelbert. Helped convert him to Christianity.
Ethelbert 552–616 First Christian Saxon King. Invited St. Augustine to Kent to preach in Britain.
Saint Cuthbert 634–687 Bishop at Lindisfarne. Helped to unify the Celtic and Roman Churches.
Venerable Bede 672–735 Monk at Jarrow. Scholar and author of *The Ecclesiastical History of English People*.
Saint Mungo ~ 540 Early Christian missionary to Scotland.
Saint Columba 521–597 Missionary who helped to Christianize Scotland. Founded a monastery on Iona in Scotland.
Saint George 275–303 Patron saint of England. Soldier who killed a dragon and died a martyr's death.

TIMELINE - EARLY BRITAIN

- 54 BC [Julius Caesar](#) [invades Britain](#) and demands tribute.
- 51 Emperor [Claudius](#) [reconquers Britain](#).
- 61 Rebellion of [Boadicea](#) is severely put down by the Romans.
- 77-84 [Agricola](#) Romanizes Britain; builds schools, roads, aqueducts.
- 122 [Hadrian's](#) wall is built to protect Roman Britain from the Picts of Scotland.
- 304 Death of [Saint Alban](#), the first Christian martyr in Britain.
- 402 Roman legions leave Britain.
- 433 [Saint Patrick](#) converts the Irish Celts to Christianity.
- 460 [Hengist and Horsa](#), German princes from Juteland, arrive in Britain.
- 460-685 [Saxon Conquest of Britain](#)—Saxons drive British Celts to Wales and Scotland.
- 540 [Saint Mungo](#) helps convert the Celtic Scots to Christianity.
- 542 Death of [King Arthur](#).
- 596 [Saint Augustine of Kent](#) sent from Rome to convert Saxon kingdoms of Britain.
- 660 Celtic Christian, and Roman Christian churches are united.
- 700 [Venerable Bede](#) publishes an ***Ecclesiastic History of the English People***.
- 757-96 Reign of King [Offa of Mercia](#), most influential of the Saxon kings.

RECOMMENDED READING - EARLY BRITAIN


CORE READING ASSIGNMENTS

- Guerber - [The Story of the English](#) [Early Times](#) to [Three Great Men](#) (12)
- Marshall - [Our Island Story](#) [Albion and Brutus](#) to [Gregory and the Children](#) (14)

SUPPLEMENTAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Harding - [The Story of England](#) [Introduction](#) to [The English Accept Christianity](#) (6)
- Church - [Stories from English History](#) [Caius and His Grandfather](#) to [How England Became Christian](#) (7)
- Warren - [King Arthur and His Knights](#) *entire book*
- Morris - [Historical Tales - King Arther I](#) *entire book*
- Marshall - [English Literature for Boys and Girls](#) [In the Listening Time](#) to ["The Passing of Arthur"](#) (10)

EASY READING SELECTIONS

- Cambridge Press - [Cambridge Historical Reader](#)  [Primary](#) [The Story of Queen Boadicea](#) to [The Story of Aiden](#) (4)
- Skae - [Stories from English History](#) [Hero of Ancient Britain](#) to [The Boy Captives](#) (2)
- Macgregor - [Stories of King Arthur's Knights](#) *entire book*
- Steedman - [Our Island Saints](#) [Saint Alban](#) to [Saint Columba](#) (9)