**The Nordic Invasions**

**I/ The Anglo-Saxons:**

The Roman army left Britain in AD 410. When they had gone, there was no strong army to defend Britain, and tribes called Angles, Saxons and Jutes invaded. They came from Denmark, northern Germany and northern Holland, and are called the Anglo-Saxons. Over the next 600 or so years their society grew and flourished, lasting until AD1066 when Britain was once again invaded, this time by the Normans. The Angle and Saxon armies destroyed everything in their path, and the Roman way of life disappeared from Britain. Many Britons moved west to escape the invaders. By the 7th century, groups of Britons were in control of present-day Scotland, Wales and Cornwall, but Angles and Saxons ruled the rest of Britain.

At home their land was poor and often flooded, so they were probably looking for new places to live and farm. The Anglo-Saxons rowed across the North Sea in wooden boats, and each boatload of people formed a small settlement of just a few large families. Some of the names of places in Britain ending in -don, like Swindon, or -ham, like Birmingham, are usually Saxon.

Eventually, the Anglo-Saxons ruled most of Britain, though they never conquered Cornwall and Wales in the West, or Scotland in the north. They divided the country into kingdoms, and the five main Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms were Kent, Angelia, Wessex, Mercia and Northumbria. King Alferd from the kingdom of Wessex, who was Called Alfred the Great, became the first king to rule most of England.

The Anglo-Saxon society was divided into several social classes with the king at the top. In the 10th century there were two levels of freemen: the thegns (pronounced ‘thane’) who were land-holding noblemen, and the ceorls (pronounced ‘churl’) who may have worked on the thegn’s land, or who may have held a small amount of their own land. At the bottom of society were the thraels (pronounced ‘thrall’), or slaves.

When they first came to Britain, the Anglo-Saxons worshipped several gods, some of whom gave their names to our days of the week. Tiw (Tuesday’s god) was the god of war, Woden (Wednesday’s god) was the most important god, and Thor (Thursday’s god) was the god of thunder. Many gods had animal companions, with ravens, eagles, horses, wolves and dragons found in myths and in Anglo-Saxon art. Prayers and chants were used to heal illness and to encourage a successful harvest or victory in battle. Most Anglo-Saxons were buried with grave goods, but otherwise we have no evidence that they believed in an afterlife. From the 7th century onwards, the Anglo-Saxons gradually converted to Christianity. From c.1000 the country began to be called Angle-land “land of the Angles.” Later its name became England. The reasons why the name of the Angles was ultimately given the language, country and the nation remain obscure.

**II/ The Vikings:**

The Vikings sailed in their boats, called longships, from the three countries of Scandinavia: Denmark, Norway, Sweden. Some were craftsmen or traders, but they were mostly farmers with large families. When a farmer died, the farm was passed to the eldest son in the family, so many of their brothers (with no farms) went overseas in search of fame, fortune or new land.

Many Vikings were great travelers and sailed all around Europe and the north Atlantic Ocean in their longships. They may even have reached America. Some were fierce pirate raiders, stealing goods and animals and killing or enslaving local people. But most Vikings who sailed overseas were just searching for better land to farm.

In AD 793 Viking pirate raiders sailed across the North Sea to a Christian Monastery at Lindisfarne in northeast England. They stole its treasures, murdered the monks and terrified everyone. This was followed by other violent Viking raids all over Britain.

In AD 865, a great army of Danish Vikings invaded England. There were fierce battles for several years. In the end, the Vikings conquered all of northern, central and eastern England, and seized much of the land for their own farms. From the 860s, they controlled a large area of northern and eastern England (they named it Danelaw). The Saxon kings fought against them. Alfred the Great defeated the Vikings and sent them away from Britain. But they returned, and in the early 11th century there was a Viking king of England, King Canute.