1. **The ethnic composition of the British population**

**IV.1. The first inhabitants of the British Isles: the Celts and Picts**

* From time immemorial, the British Isles were occupied by various tribal groups coming from the European continent
* But, generally, historians consider the Celts and the Picts to be the first communities in the British Isles. The Celts - that came from Southern Europe - arrived about 500 BC and settled in the west of the British Isles, precisely in Wales and Ireland
* Originating from South-western part of France, the Picts arrived around 200 BC and took position in the north, in Ireland specifically
* These early-established migrants in the British Isles spoke Celtic languages and are collectively known as the ancient Britons
* They were various tribes under the leadership of kings often at war with one another
* These indigenous populations will be later victim of invasions from other European tribes

**IV.2. The Roman invasion**

* From Gaul (part of the Roman Empire, Gaul is a name given to territories inhabited mostly by Celtic tribes and that correspond to present France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Switzerland, and the northern part of Italy) where he was the general of the army, Julius Caesar, invaded twice Britain, first in 55 BC then in 54BC
* His army was defeated in 54 by the British Celts, but was able to conquer many tribes before withdrawing after a short stay in 55 mainly to put down the rebellion that raised in Gaul
* About a hundred years later, that is in 43 AD, under Emperor Claudius, Romans finally settled in the South of Britain (England)
* Unable to subdue all Britain, the Romans decided, under Emperor Hadrian, to protect their conquered territories (part of the Roman Empire) against the rebellious tribes in the unconquered parts of Britain, particularly in Scotland
* Built between 122 to 127AD, this wall is known as the Hadrian’s Wall or the Roman Wall and its remaining are still visible
* Besides the Hadrian’s Wall that recalled the presence of Romans in Britain, the latter built cities and roads, which did not exist in Celtic Britain.
* They introduced Christianity not only in England, but also in Scotland and Ireland; they introduced Latin language and the tradition of writing
* Around 409 Romans were obliged to quit England and return to Italy to defend their Empire attacked by “barbarian” tribes
* Britain under the Romans knew a period of peace and security, but as the latter left, it was again exposed to invasion threats

**IV.3. The Anglo-Saxon invasion**

* On the departure of Romans and about the mid 5th century, three Germanic tribes, the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes successively invaded England
* Because the Angles and the Saxons were the two largest groups, these invaders were commonly known as the Anglo-Saxons
* The Jutes conquered Kent where they established their kingdoms, the Angles settled in East Anglia and the Saxons in different parts of the countries: Essex (East Saxons), Sussex (South Saxons), and Wessex (West Saxons)
* They did not however manage to conquer Scotland, Wales and Cornwall (the far south-west of England)
* The surviving Celts in England were assimilated to Anglo-Saxons, while those living in the unconquered territories remained Celtics (the Cornish in England claimed their cultural difference from the English)
* The Anglo-Saxons divided then England into different kingdoms the five main of which were Mercia, Northumbria, Kent, Anglia and Wessex
* Later, Alfred the Great (849-899), king of Wessex, dominated many of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and in 878 proclaimed himself “king of the Anglo-Saxons”
* The full unification of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms was, however, effective in 927 under Athelstan (894-939), grandson of Alfred Great and king of Wessex from 924 to 927
* The unified kingdom is called England
* The name “England” originally meant “Angle land” that is the Land of the Angles
* The cultural impact of the invasion of Anglo-Saxons is enormous
* They led a disastrous campaign against the local civilization inherited from Romans
* As rural people and farmers (preferring then life in the countryside), the Anglo-Saxons destroyed many of the cities built by Romans
* As Pagans, they attacked Christianity, killed a great number of priests and celebrated their pagan values among which loyalty, fame, honour, bravery…
* Pope Gregory the Great sent in 597 a mission led by the monk Augustine to christianize the Anglo-Saxons and reorganize the local Church
* Saint Augustine arrived in Kent (to the south) and converted the king, Ethelbert, and then the inhabitants of the kingdom
* Augustine was later made Bishop by Pope Gregory, and King Ethelbert allowed him to build a church in Canterbury
* From Canterbury Christianity spread over England, which made of Canterbury, up to now, a famous religious centre and pilgrimage place
* The Early English literature derived besides from the tales, legends and histories of Anglo-Saxons, which were later written down by Anglo-Saxon Christians
* The Germanic language spoken by the Anglo-Saxons is called Anglo-Saxon or Old English
* Modern English derives from Old English, even though the two languages are very different
* The names of the days of the week originate from Anglo-Saxons, as each of the days is tied to a particular God of the Pagan Anglo-Saxons (see the chart below the source of which is specified in the footnote)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| *GOD* | *GOD OF WHAT?* |
| *Balder* | *God of Immortality* |
| *Eostre* | *Goddess of Birth* |
| *Frigg* | *Goddess of Love* |
| *Hel* | *Goddess of Death* |
| *Loki* | *God of Cunning* |
| *Saxnot* | *God of the Family* |
| *Thunor* | *God of Thunder* |
| *Tiw* | *God of War* |
| *Wade* | *God of the Sea* |
| *Wayland* | *God of Metalworking* |
| *Woden* | *Chief God* |

* *Certain days of the week are named after early Saxon Gods.*
* *Monandæg ( Moon's day - the day of the moon ),
Tiwesdæg ( Tiw's-day - the day of the Scandinavian sky god Tiw,Tiu or Tig),
Wodnesdæg ( Woden's day - the day of the god Woden (Othin) ),
Ðunresdæg ( Thor's Day - the day of the god Ðunor or Thunor ),
Frigedæg ( Freyja's day - the day of the goddess Freyja or Frigg, wife to Woden),
Sæternesdæg ( Saturn's day - the day of the Roman god Saturn, whose festival "Saturnalia," with its exchange of gifts, has been incorporated into our celebration of Christmas.),
Sunnandæg ( Sun's day - the day of the sun* )[[1]](#footnote-2)

**IV.4. The Scandinavian invasion**

* In the 9th century, that is about 3 centuries after their arrival in England, the Anglo-Saxons were invaded by other tribes of Germanic origin called the Scandinavian (Sweden, Norway, Denmark)
* Essentially composed of Danes (hence the term Danish invasion), they were also referred to as the Vikings (a name given to Scandinavian warriors, hence the term Viking invasion)
* They managed to conquer almost all Anglo-Saxon kingdoms with the exception of Wessex led by Alfred the Great
* After Alfred the Great defeated the Danes at the Battle of Edington in 878; a treaty called the Treaty of Wedmore was signed between the two sides to divide England
* The Danes occupied the Northern and Eastern part of England which became known as the Danelaw, while king Alfred controlled Wessex
* In the 11th the Scandinavian king Cnut (995-1035) managed to unify again England over which he ruled from 1016 to his death in 1035
* Under Cnut also called Cnut the Great or Canute, England was integrated in the empire made up of Denmark and Norway
* This great empire (England, Denmark and Norway) led by king Cnut was also referred to as the Anglo-Scandinavian Empire or [North Sea Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Sea_Empire)
* Cnut died in 1035 and his son Harold Harefoot or Harold I reigned till his death in 1040
* Harthacnut or Canute III, son of Cnut the Great and Emma of Normandy, ascended the throne after the death of his half-brother in 1040
* Harthacnut is the last Scandinavian king of England
* On his death in 1042, England fell again under the domination of Anglo-Saxons and was led by Edward the Confessor from the Wessex royal family (from 1042 to 1066)
* Edward the Confessor died childless in 1066, which engendered a succession crisis
* The richest and most powerful lord in England, Harold Godwinson (or Harold II), besides the Earl of Wessex and Edward the Confessor’s brother-in-law and friend, was chosen by the Witan or Witenaġemot (an Anglo-Saxon Council composed of greater nobles and bishops with great responsibilities including choosing and advising the king) to succeed Edward
* However, Harald III of Norway commonly called Harald Hardradra, and William the Bastard (he was the illegitimate son of Robert I Duke of Normandy and his concubine Herleva or Arlette) later called William the Conqueror or William II of Normandy or William I of England, a much powerful French lord and duke of Normandy (where Edward spent much of his life under the protection of Dukes before being crowned) claimed to be the legitimate successors of Edward
* Harold Godwinson king of England defeated and killed Harald, the invading king of Norway, at the Battle of Stamford Bridge
* Less than three weeks later, William of Normandy invaded England and defeated the already weakened troops of the last Anglo-Saxon king, Harold II, at the Battle of Hastings on 14 October 1066, becoming then the King of England
* This political event was a turning point in the social and political history of England

**IV.5. The Norman invasion**

* William is officially crowned king of England on 25 December 1066 (on Christmas Day)
* In his attempt to gain more control over England, William introduced castle building into England (to better mark their presence) and, mainly, confiscated the estates (lands) of English lords and granted them to his Norman followers who were very small in number compared to the English population
* In return, the latter should be loyal to William who had ultimate and full possession of the lands (they had to swear loyalty to the king)
* They are not only soldiers entirely at the disposal of William, but also are responsible for collecting taxes in their different areas for the king
* These noblemen including barons, dukes and earls were also free to grant a portion of their lands to other Norman knights who are also expected to be loyal to them
* These lords - who are indirectly answerable to king William and directly to the noblemen that grant them lands - should work to maintain order in the different territories given to them
* The knights could also give land to peasants who worked for them
* This system of governance based on the tenure of land and introduced by William the Conqueror to better control England is known as the feudal system or feudalism; it is described in the chart below (source: http://spartacus-educational.com/NORfeudal.htm)
* 
* this feudal system led to the elimination of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy
* Anglo-Norman (also called Norman French), a northern dialect of Old French became the language of the new ruling class, the court (judicial system) and the administration, replacing Old English which was the language of the lower people (the illiterate English peasants and serfs that represented about 95% of the population)
* Latin was the official language and that of the Church which was then under the full control of Normans
* For about 300 years Anglo-Norman remained the language of the kings and the elite
* The Norman French heavily influenced Old English that became an almost new English known as Middle English
* Later, the Normans became anglicized (they decided to live in England forever and regarded themselves as English and not as French or Normans) specifically as they lost Normandy in 1204 under King John
* In 1362 the English Parliament, for practical reason, decided to make again of English - spoken by the great majority of people - the official language of the country
* This Act of Parliament is known as the Pleading in English Act 1362 or Statute of Pleading
* The Norman conquest is the last of the series of invasion that England underwent
* But many people coming from the various nations in the world, specially from the Commonwealth of Nations had been migrating to England and the UK as a whole
* The British population today is then the cultural product of the different ethnic groups that arrived in the UK either as a result of the series of invasion or the vast migratory movement from the Commonwealth nations
* The UK is then a true melting pot and multicultural society, as testified by the following illustrative poem by the British Jamaican Rastafarian writer, Benjamin Zephaniah

Take some Picts, Celts and Silures
And let them settle,
Then overrun them with Roman conquerors.

Remove the Romans after approximately 400 years
Add lots of Norman French to some
Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Vikings, then stir vigorously.

Mix some hot Chileans, cool Jamaicans, Dominicans,
Trinidadians and Bajans with some Ethiopians, Chinese,
Vietnamese and Sudanese.

Then take a blend of Somalians, Sri Lankans, Nigerians
And Pakistanis,
Combine with some Guyanese
And turn up the heat.

Sprinkle some fresh Indians, Malaysians, Bosnians,
Iraqis and Bangladeshis together with some
Afghans, Spanish, Turkish, Kurdish, Japanese
And Palestinians
Then add to the melting pot.

Leave the ingredients to simmer.

As they mix and blend allow their languages to flourish
Binding them together with English.

Allow time to be cool.

Add some unity, understanding, and respect for the future,
Serve with justice
And enjoy.

Note: All the ingredients are equally important. Treating one ingredient better than another will leave a bitter unpleasant taste.

Warning: An unequal spread of justice will damage the people and cause pain. Give justice and equality to all.

1. Source: http://primaryhomeworkhelp.co.uk/saxons/religion.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-2)