**Anglo-Saxon Notes, Completed**

England is the largest of four countries that make up the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. These countries are: Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England

Names for England: England, Great Britain, United Kingdom

Very little is known about early inhabitants, but relics and monuments indicate that someone was there.

Stonehenge—means “Hanging Stone.” Ancient monument in Salisbury Plain in southern England. Radio-carbon dating places it as 3500 years old (B.C.) Most stones are a kind only found in West Wales, 200 miles away. Archeologists think it took 900 years to build. Outer circle of 30 blocks, each 28 tons; 97 feet in diameter.

Possible explanations for Stonehenge:
1. Sacrificial temple (altar)
2. Sun worship (astronomical calendar; shadows) – In 1963, a Smithsonian scholar found that seasons/eclipses could be predicted.
3. Occult explanations – space travelers, Devil project

Celts – First invaders to England – warlike people

Two tribes of Celts: Gaels, who settled in Ireland; Britons, who settled in Britain

Druids – Celtic priests – led Celts in worship to nature gods.

55 B.C. – Britain was first mentioned in writings of ancient Greeks during Julius Caesar’s day

43 A.D. – Roman emperor Claudius defeated Britannia and the Celts.

Roman influence – established a settlement; Latin became the language. For 400 years, Britain remained part of the Holy Roman Empire – big influence on language

Hadrian’s Wall— 120 A.D. – This wall was built (still stands in places) to protect from northern invaders (Scots).

About 410 A.D. – Barbarians began attacking. Romans pulled out and left! “Britons” drove out some invaders.

Angles, Saxons, and Jutes (all Germanic tribes) invaded, raided, pillaged.

450 A.D.—Angles and Saxons conquered Britain. This date marks beginning of Anglo-Saxon Period.

Four classes of Anglo-Saxon society:
1. Earls (rulers) – Thanes
2. Freemen (own land) – warriors/prestigious role
3. Churls (serfs) – workers
4. Thralls - slaves
Witan— Council of Elders

Wyrd— god of Fate

Sutton Hoo— see handout about this treasure, found in a ship buried in England

Runes— People could not read/write. They used primitive hieroglyphics instead of alphabet.

Favorite activities of these people: feast, storytelling (by scop), mead, mead-hall


Influence of Christianity— entrance of monasteries, then schools, then reading/writing. Some paganism remained, however (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday are named for Anglo-Saxon god).

Alfred the Great – 850 – King Alfred (1st of England’s great rulers) was being attacked by Vikings and resisted. He became national hero. He encouraged learning.

Anglo-Saxon Chronicle— a collection of Anglo-Saxon writings

William, Duke of Normandy – from France – had been promised the throne of England by Edward the Confessor, but the Council chose Harold II to reign instead. William invades England as a result and takes the throne.

Edward the Confessor— very religious monarch who had promised the throne to William of Normandy. He died in 1066.

1066 A.D.— On Christmas day, William the Conqueror (of Normandy) defeated England in the Battle of Hastings. This is called the Norman Conquest and marks the end of the Anglo-Saxon period in England. Feudalism evolved from Norman influence. William was a ruthless ruler; he introduced beheading in 1076. Westminster Abbey dates from this time.

Years 450 to 1066 are known as the Old English period or the Dark Ages. These years are also considered to be the early years of the Medieval period.

Anglo-Saxon Literature

Literature began with the Celtic Druids.

Three types:
Epic heroic poetry – devoid of love – warriors and victory
Elegiac poetry – laments – passing away of earthly goods, words, deeds (mutability)
Riddles – ambiguous meanings – makes the familiar unfamiliar
Bede – wrote *English History of the Church and People*. He is called Venerable Bede.

*Exeter Book*— much of Anglo-Saxon literature is in this book.

Caedmon – earliest English poetry – wrote a creation poem in 660.

*Beowulf*— written in English; Scandinavian plot – most important Anglo-Saxon work – one of the oldest epics in the world. No author; it was sung or chanted for centuries (by *scops*) before being written down. Its date is unknown, but probably composed by a monk or poet and written in the 11th century. There is no original, but a manuscript is in the British Museum (dated 1000). It contains 3,182 lines and contains both Christian and pagan elements.

Themes in *Beowulf*:
All earthly good, words, and deeds pass away – mutability – all heroic deeds also pass away.

Heroism

*Comitatus* – band of devoted comrades in arms

Influence of Boethius – A Roman senator/philosopher who wrote *Consolation of Philosophy* in early 6th century Italy. King Alfred translated it to Old English. In it, Lady Philosophy talks to a man tried for treason and awaiting execution, and she tells him he valued all the wrong things. She convinces him that religion is most important. It contains a “wheel of fortune.”

Elegy (elegiac) – deals with loss – mutability of all earthly goods

Characteristic literary devices in *Beowulf*:

Alliteration – repetition of initial consonant sounds (Peter Piper picked…)

Caesura – pause in the middle of a line of poetry


Litotes – understatement – a means of expressing the affirmative by using the negative of the contrary (“not a few”).

**Epic** – a long narrative poem, relating the heroic deed of a noble and semi-divine person.

Two types of epic:

Traditional (folk) – legends handed down orally (*Beowulf, Iliad, El Cid, Odyssey*)

Literary – formally written by one author (*Aeneid* by Virgil, *Paradise Lost* by John Milton)

Features of the epic:

1. Heroic/ superhuman central character
2. Immense scale of action and setting involving the fate of a whole people
3. God or semi-divine creatures come to the aid of one side or the other.
4. A call to a Muse to help guide the poet
5. Announcement of theme at the beginning
6. Usually begins “in medias res,” (in center of things) at a critical point in action
7. Noble/ majestic/ elevated style
8. Characters speak ceremoniously in long speeches.
Mock epic –
Features and devices of the epic became predictable eventually, so the “anti-epic” was developed. This mock epic reversed many of the epic’s characteristics such as a small setting, a common conflict, non-heroic characters.
In the 18th century, Alexander Pope wrote “Rape of the Lock,” a famous mock epic.