

# What traces of Anglo-Saxon England can be found in Suffolk?

When two tribes went to this county... and what they have left behind for us

**C**enturies ago the Angles and the Saxons made their way to Suffolk. And while they since have long gone, they certainly left their mark on the region by way of a number of interesting reminders.

They were just two of the Germanic tribes that originated from northern Europe, making their way, along with the Frisians and Jutes, to the British Isles following the collapse of Roman Britain in the 5th century.

A force to be reckoned with, Britain was under the rule of the Anglo-Saxons for a number of years - producing memorable monarchs including Alfred the Great, King Canute, and Harold II. And during those years, they left behind a massive legacy.

For starters, we get our nation's name, England, from the Angles - 'land of Ængle'. And the name Suffolk has its roots in Anglo-Saxon England - Sudfole/Suthfolc, which means 'southern folk'.

And we also owe a lot of our modern-day language to these tribes. "Suffolk is where the Angles first settled in the 5th century. When the Angles arrived, the first place they settled was

**RIGHT:**  
A replica of the Sutton Hoo helmet at Sutton Hoo National Trust

Picture: PHIL MORLEY

**BELOW:**  
An antique map of Britain under the Anglo-Saxons

Picture:  
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present-day Ipswich. Their kings then settled in what is now Woodbridge and Rendlesham, and when the kings died, they were buried at Sutton Hoo," explains Suffolk historian and dialect coach Charlie Haylock.

"In 2009, there was a programme on the BBC called *Raiders of the Lost Past* with Dr. Janina Ramirez. And on it, she explored three archaeological digs that she felt were the most important in the history of the world - and one of those three was Sutton Hoo.

"She said where the Angles settled in Suffolk was not only the first page of English history, it was also the first page of the English people, and therefore the first page of the English language. That's how important Suffolk was, and still is, to the history of spoken English."

Going back to Sutton Hoo, as previously mentioned, this has been heralded as one of the most important and historically significant archaeological discoveries in modern history.

In 1938, local archaeologist Basil Brown unearthed the remains of an undisturbed ship burial on Edith Pretty's property near Woodbridge. The discovery ended up being key in helping us uncover more about this time period, and get a better understanding of Anglo-Saxon traditions and customs, as well as the Kingdom of East Anglia.

Due to lack of written records from the time, it's hard to be certain who was buried on the ship - but many historians believe it's the grave of Rædwald, King of East Anglia, who died in 624.

Some key discoveries Basil and his team dug up during the excavation include the 'ghost' imprint of the wooden ship, gold jewellery, a shield, a sword, silverware from the Byzantine Empire, and the world-famous Sutton Hoo helmet.

While the iconic helmet is no longer in Suffolk (it was donated to the British Museum by Edith Pretty following its discovery), a replica can be seen at Sutton Hoo.

Elsewhere in Suffolk, Anglo-Saxon remains and influences can be seen at the West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village. This archaeological site and open-air museum was once the site of an early Anglo-Saxon village, and was occupied between 420 and 650 AD (four centuries before the Norman invasion).

Historians began excavating



West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village  
Picture: CITIZENSIDE.COM



there in 1849, after a neighbouring Anglo-Saxon cemetery was found. Following this, pottery kilns from Roman Britain were discovered before an Anglo-Saxon settlement was uncovered.

The settlement was once home to 69 sunken-featured buildings, as well as seven post-hold buildings, two large hollows/animal pens, pits, and 7th century boundary ditches.

When the latter was uncovered, archaeologists found a number of fragments of Ipswich ware (among other artefacts). A type of Anglo-Saxon pottery, as the name suggests, Ipswich ware was produced in the town of the same name and is considered to be the first mass-produced wheel-turned pottery in Britain. Grey and simple with little to no decoration, it was used to make jars, pitchers, and cooking pots during the 8th and 9th centuries. While it was primarily used in the East, it made its way in small numbers to Kent, York and

Oxfordshire.

Today, the reconstructed Anglo-Saxon village is home to a number of buildings including a craft building, a farmers house, a weaving house, and workshop. The site is such an accurate portrayal of Anglo-Saxon England that it has been used as a filming location for productions such as the 2009 fan-made *Lord of the Rings*-inspired film *Born of Hope*, and 1999 ITV sitcom *Dark Ages*.

Another fascinating slice of Anglo-Saxon life left behind in Suffolk is the Snape Anglo-Saxon Cemetery - a 6th century burial site comprised of both inhumation and cremations, as well as a ship burial which was uncovered in the 19th century by Septimus Davidson.

During its excavation, historians found fragments of metal - which are believed to have been a chain plate that held shrouds of a mast. Other artefacts found in Snape include a ring (dubbed the Snape ring), and a 6th century claw beaker.



**TOP RIGHT:**  
Sutton Hoo  
Picture: PAUL GEATER

**CENTRE RIGHT:**  
Basil Brown in the  
Sutton Hoo ship  
burial  
Picture:  
ARCHANT ARCHIVES

**BOTTOM RIGHT:**  
A replica of the Snape  
ring on display at  
Aldeburgh Museum  
Picture:  
CHARLOTTE BOND

