THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 30:
THE CELTIC LEGACY

Presented by Kevin W. Stroud

EPISODE 30: THE CELTIC LEGACY

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 30: The Celtic Legacy. In this episode, we're going to explore the impact of the Celtic languages on Modern English. And we're going to look at the ultimate fate of the native Britons when they encountered the Anglo-Saxons. Now this may seem like a straight-forward topic. But actually, it's a topic that has perplexed historians for centuries. The true legacy of the Celts in Anglo-Saxons England is still the subject of much debate. So I'll try to put the pieces together for you as best I can to determine how much Modern English owe sto those original Celtic Britons.

Last time, we looked at the actual evidence from the period of the Anglo-Saxon invasion to try to determine what happened between the years 410 and 600. That two-century period marks the time during which the Anglo-Saxons conquered much of the area we know today as England. Based upon that evidence and the accounts of later writers, a very general view emerged.

That view was that an Anglo-Saxon onslaught began sometime around the year 450 – give or take a few years. Over the next few decades, the Anglo-Saxons conquered much of the region of eastern Britain. And in the process, the native Romano Britons and Celtic Britons were either killed or displaced. The result was the complete Anglo-Saxon dominance and control over eastern Britain. And then the Anglo-Saxons began to move westward expanding their territory. But sometime around the year 500, the native Britons began to piece together some significant victories in these border regions. Around that time, they won a decisive victory at a placed called Mons Badonicus in Latin, or Mount Badon or Badon Hill in later English. And that victory basically stemmed the tide of the Anglo-Saxons.

For a while, there was a period of relative peace between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons. But sometime around the year 550, another onslaught began and the Anglo-Saxons began a new campaign into western Britain. And that meant a new round of killing and displacement occurred. Most of the native Celtic-speaking Britons who survived fled to the west to Cornwall and Wales, and north in to modern Scotland, or even south across the Channel into Brittany in northern Gaul.

The net result of all of this was a large portion of central and southern Britain under the control of the Anglo-Saxons. And along the way, the native Celtic-speaking Britons were effectively 'wiped out' from these regions. So that's the traditional view of events during this period.

So why did these historians assume that the native Celts has been completely displaced from these regions? Well, it was based in part of the descriptions of people like Gildas. He described how many of the native Britons had been killed by the invaders and how most of those who survived had fled to the west or across the seas. And he noted that most of the towns and cities had been devastated and abandoned. So we have a contemporary account which was very compelling. But there is no evidence that Gildas actually traveled into the regions which had been conquered by the Anglo-Saxons. And even he noted that he was writing several decades after those initial battles had occurred. And keep in mind that he wasn't really writing a proper

1

history, he was writing a sermon about how bad the Anglo-Saxons were and how much of a mistake it had been to invite them in to begin with.

And we know that some of his early history was wrong, especially his account of the construction of Hadrian's Wall. So for much of his history, he was basing his accounts on the descriptions of others. And it's possible that these accounts were exaggerated, or that he exaggerated his account in order to emphasize his point.

Beyond the writings of Gildas, some of the best evidence that the Celts had been wiped out was the fact that there are so few Celtic words in English.

As a general rule, when two groups of people encounter each other, and they each speak different languages, there is a significant amount of borrowing between the languages. Over time, one language may die out, but the surviving language usually retains a large number of words from the other language, and it may even borrow some grammar from the other language.

So theoretically, English should have a heavy Celtic influence. The Anglo-Saxons conquered a Celtic-speaking people on a Celtic-speaking island. And Celtic languages have continued to exist next door on the island to this day. So where is all of that Celtic influence that we should expect to see? Well, the traditional view is that it's not really there.

According that view, the Anglo-Saxons only borrowed a handful of Celtic words. Depending on who you ask, maybe a dozen, maybe a couple of dozen, but very few no matter how you count them.

Now compare this to Latin as it slowly replaced the Celtic languages in Gaul. Of course, the Latin spoken in Gaul eventually evolved into French. And it's estimated that there are over 500 Celtic words in modern French. But again, the Anglo-Saxons in Britain only borrowed a dozen or so.

So let's try to identify those Celtic words in English. And let's begin by noting that the ancestors of the Anglo-Saxons – the original Germanic tribes – they encountered Celtic-speaking tribes on the continent. And back in Episode 17, we looked at some of those Celtic words which were acquired by the Germanic tribes very early on long before the Anglo-Saxons headed to Britain. That included words like *breeches* and *bin*. We also have the word *rich* from the Celtic word *rix* meaning 'king, ruler or powerful.' We've come across that word several times, and we'll see it again a little later in this episode.

So the Anglo-Saxons had a few Celtic words in their vocabulary when they first arrived in Britain. And then, once they were in Britain, they picked up a few more words. A few of those words existed in Old English, but have since disappeared. For example, the Old English word *bannuc* meant a 'bit or small piece of something.' It came from an almost identical word in the Celtic languages which meant a small cake.

2

The Old English word *brocc* meant 'badger,' and it too was borrowed from the Celts.

And the Old English word *dunn* meant a dull, grayish brown color. It was also borrowed from the Celts. But all of those words have long since disappeared from English.

Another possible borrowing from the Celtic languages was the word *bratt* as in 'Don't be a little brat.' This etymology is disputed, but the Celtic languages had a word *bratt* which meant a 'cloak.' And according to some etymologies, it later came to mean a makeshift or ragged garment, and then came to be associated with beggars, and later came to mean a 'beggar's child,' and later an 'annoying child.' So if this etymology is correct, the word 'brat' can also be traced back to the native Celtic-speaking Britons.

But most of the Celtic words which were borrowed by the original Anglo-Saxons, and which still exist in Modern English, were terms related to the geography of region. As the Anglo-Saxons settled in, they borrowed local words for certain places and geographical features.

So for example, the word *crag* meant 'rock' and can still be found in English.

The word *torr* meant 'hill or mound or rock.' That word still exists in English, mainly in certain parts of England. Interestingly, that word *torr* was probably borrowed from the Romans during the period of Roman rule. Latin had the word *turris* which meant 'high structure.' And that Latin word ultimately gave us the English word *tower*. So Celtic *tor* and English *tower* are cognate if that etymology is correct.

Some other Celtic words for locations or geological features can still be found buried within other words. The Celtic word *lynn* or *lindo* meant 'lake.' And the Romans combined that word *lindo* with the Latin word *colonia* meaning 'colony.' The result was the name *Lincoln* – the name of a town which is the ultimate origin of the surname Lincoln.

The Celtic word *cumb* meant a 'valley.' And that word still exists in a handful of place names that end in *combe* (either C-O-M-B or C-O-M-B-E).

The Celtic word for 'river' was *avon*. And that word appears in a variety of river names in Britain.

And a lot of other modern place names derive from Celtic names, names like *London*, *Devon*, *Dover*, *Kent*, *York*, *Carlisle*, *Lancaster*, *Cornwall*, *Cumberland*, the *River Thames* (which meant 'dark river' in Celtic)

So the fact that we have a lot of place names borrowed into English isn't really surprising. The Anglo-Saxons tended to use existing words for place names. When Europeans settled in North America, they did basically the same thing. That is why is so many place names in the United States are derived from Native American names.

But while English borrowed Celtic words for certain place names, it didn't borrow Celtic words into the basic vocabulary of English. And except for a few more place names, there don't appear to be any other Celtic words in the original vocabulary of Old English during the first few centuries after the Anglo-Saxons arrived in Britain. And that's why the traditional view has been that the native Celtic-speaking populations were generally wiped out by the Anglo-Saxons. The Germanic tribes arrived, they picked up a few Celtic words for the names of places around them, and that was about it. The Celts were then killed or driven out, and no more Celtic words entered the vocabulary of Old English.

Well, that traditional view has been challenged in recent years. The modern view is a bit more complicated. And there are still as many questions as there are answers.

As scholars have poured over the evidence from this period – the fifth and sixth centuries – they increasingly believe that the relationship between the native Celtic-speaking Britons and the Anglo-Saxon invaders was for more complicated. And what happened varied from one region to the next.

So let's examine the evidence, and then let's try to piece together what happened to the native Celtic-speaking Britons.

Let's begin with some of the archaeological research. Through the years, archaeologists have uncovered many Anglo-Saxon settlements. They have also uncovered a lot of cemeteries. And this research is important for two reasons. It provides obvious archaeological evidence. But with respect to the bones that have been studied within some of those graves, it also reveals some genetic evidence.

The archaeological evidence provides mixed results depending on the region where the settlements were located. Within those settlements, researchers have found pottery, and jewelry and other items which are distinct from those associated with Roman Britain before the Anglo-Saxon invasion. And those newer artifacts tend to match the types used in the North Sea region of the continent. But what's interesting is that researchers don't generally find a sharp contrast between earlier Roman and Celtic objects and the later Anglo-Saxon objects. In other words, we don't go from Roman and Celtic objects one day, and then all of a sudden there is a clean break, and we just have Anglo-Saxon objects the next day. But we would expect to see that type of clean break if the Romano-Britons were wiped out. But instead, the evidence tends to show a gradual introduction of Anglo-Saxons objects mixed in with older objects.

But what about those cemeteries? Well, we would expect to see mass graves of dead Romano-Britons if something akin to a genocide had occurred, but those have never been discovered.

And within the graves that have been discovered, the bones that have been analyzed also reveal a much more complex result. Within many of the supposedly 'Anglo-Saxon' cemeteries, the bone evidence isn't always Anglo-Saxon. Isotope analysis of teeth found in those cemeteries has revealed that some of those corpses were indeed immigrants from northern Europe, but others were local people – not Germanic invaders.

4

Now many researchers thought that modern DNA evidence would finally provide us with some definitive answers to these questions. If the native Britons had been wiped out by Anglo-Saxon invaders from northern Germany and Denmark, then DNA evidence on these ancient bones should confirm that. And in fact, since people didn't tend to move around very much during the Middle Ages, many researchers believed that there should still be noticeable differences in the DNA of people in England and the DNA of people in other parts of Britain. But the DNA research has also yielded mixed results.

One of the first DNA studies was conducted back in 2002. And it actually appeared to confirm some of these traditional assumptions. This 2002 study used y-chromosome DNA samples from men living in central England, Wales, Norway and modern Frisia or Friesland. And this study concluded that DNA evidence was consistent between the various English towns, and also consistent between the English towns and the Frisian towns. But there were very distinct differences between the English/Frisian groups and the Welsh groups, and the Norwegian groups were different as well. So this particular study concluded that there had been a substantial migration of people from the Germanic regions of northern Europe to southern and central Britain, enough to affect well over half of the gene pool of England. Now again, this was what a lot people expected to find.

But several more studies have been conducted in the years since 2002, and none of them really confirm the results of that first study.

A 2003 study used a lot more samples and a much larger sampling area. It concluded that there were some genetic differences noticeable between the populations of England and Wales, but the differences were minor. And while there was some evidence of Germanic invasions in England, the evidence suggested a much smaller invasion. It also suggested that Viking influence on the overall DNA was just as great, if not greater, that the Anglo-Saxon influence. The bottom line is that this study didn't match the traditional view of the Anglo-Saxon conquest at all.

A 2005 study used mitochondrial DNA as well as Y-chromosome DNA, so that meant that it included females as well as males. It also used modern DNA as well as the DNA from bones found in ancient burial sites. And this study also failed to establish connections between the English DNA samples and the samples from northern Germany.

In 2006, an Oxford genetics professor named Bryan Sykes published a book called "Blood of the Isles." He also looked at both mitochondrial DNA as well as Y-chromosome DNA. He found that the overall genetic makeup of the entire British Isles was basically the same – that there were no significant differences between the populations of England and Wales, nor was there any significant differences between those people and the people of Scotland and Ireland. He even concluded that the genetic evidence suggests a massive migration shortly after the last Ice Age ended around 10,000 BC, and that most of that original DNA came from the modern Basque region in northern Spain. Remember that the Basque language is one of the few non-Indo-European languages in Europe.

Sykes also concluded that as Britain was invaded by various peoples over the centuries speaking many new languages – like the original Celts, the Romans, the Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings – none of them had a significant impact on the overall DNA of the British Isles. The languages may have changed, and the power may have shifted among the different groups, but the overall genetic makeup remained basically the same. And this implied that the overall number of invaders was always very small. And specifically, with respect to the Anglo-Saxons, Sykes concluded that their contribution to the overall genetic pool was less than 20% – even in the heart of the original Anglo-Saxon regions of eastern Britain.

Sykes' study was basically confirmed by a separate book released by the British doctor and geneticist Stephen Oppenheimer. He released his book, "The Origins of the British," the same year as Sykes' book and he basically took the same view as Sykes.

And just to show you how all of this research leads to conflicting results, in 2011, a study suggested that British DNA was the primary result of an even earlier migration by early hunter-gatherers from the Middle East. But then the very next year – 2012 – another study refuted those findings.

So, the bottom line is that the DNA research has yet to reveal a definitive answer as to whether the native Britons were wiped out by the Anglo-Saxons. But the vast majority of the DNA studies suggest that the overall DNA of the British Isles is much more alike than it is different. And it doesn't provide any clear evidence of a geographical divide between the Celtic regions and the English regions. So all of that research has tended to chip away at that traditional view of the Anglo-Saxon conquest.

So we've looked at the archaeological evidence and the DNA evidence, but what about the linguistic evidence. As we've already seen, the Anglo-Saxons adopted very few words from the native Celtic-speaking Britons. But that doesn't mean that the native Britons were vanquished. They could have still been there, just in the background, relegated to second-class or lower status and pushed to the fringes of Anglo-Saxon society. The Anglo-Saxons could have rejected Celtic words and Celtic culture, except where they needed it to survive. They might have borrowed words for towns and rivers and other locations. Those where basic landmarks. But when it came to the actual language itself, Celtic influences were rejected.

So let's try to put all of the pieces together, and see of we can make some sense out of this linguistic mystery. And as we do that, a more complex picture starts to emerge.

It appears that the Anglo-Saxon invasion – or uprising – began in the eastern part of Britain. We know that from both the written accounts and the archaeological record. By the year 500, the Anglo-Saxons had conquered and occupied most of the eastern one-third of Britain. The western one-third was still occupied by native Celtic-speaking Britons. And the middle one-third was a transitional region.

Another piece of evidence which confirms this settlement pattern is the names of the various towns and cities throughout Britain. One of the ways in which the Anglo-Saxons identified a particular place was with the ending '-ing.'

The suffix '-ing' and its related suffix '-ling' meant 'of' or 'from,' and it was used to indicate that someone or something originated from a particular place. If you enjoy science-fiction movies, you're probably familiar with the term *earthling*. It refers to the people from planet Earth. What you might not know though is that the word *earthling* is an Anglo-Saxon word from Old English. It's context has changed through the years. It originally meant a 'plowman' or 'someone who lived on the land and worked the earth or the soil.' The modern use of the term as 'an inhabitant of planet Earth' originated in the 16th Century, but it is one of the few words which still exists in Modern English with that original Anglo-Saxon suffix to indicate the place where someone was from.

By the way, certain people in Scandinavia sailed up and down rivers and creeks and small bays, and those waterways were called *viks*. Well these people sometimes robbed and plundered. And since they were from the *viks*, they were called *vikings* (/vee-kings/) or, thanks to the later English vowel shift, the *vikings* (/vy-kings/). But again, we see that same Germanic '-ing' ending to indicate where they originated.

Well, the Anglo-Saxons used the same suffixes for place names. For example, *Hastings* meant 'the people of Haesta' or 'the home of Haesta's people.' Haesta may have been an early leader or founder of the settlement.   *Reading* meant 'the people of Reada' or 'the home of Reada's people.' Again, Reada may have been an early leader who founded the settlement.

Sometimes the suffix was combined with *ton* – 'T-O-N' – which meant a 'fenced off estate or enclosure,' and it's an early version of the modern English word *town*. So '-ing - ton' meant 'the people from the town of or estate of someone.' And this gives us town names like *Wellington*, *Donnington*, and *Washington*. In fact, the small town of *Washington* in northern England meant 'the estate of the descendants of Hwæsa.' We don't know who Hwæsa was, but we do know that the name of the town is the ultimate origin of the surname of George Washington, and that means that it is the origin of Washington, DC, Washington state, and the many other towns and cities named after George Washington in the United States.

Sometimes, the Anglo-Saxons combined the '-ing' ending with '-ham' – H-A-M. *Ham* is an early version of the word *home* or *homestead*. So 'ing - ham' meant 'the people from the home of' someone.' So *Birmingham* meant 'the home of Beorma's people.' And that same ending gives us town names like *Buckingham* and *Nottingham* in the same manner.

Well, all of those towns with that Anglo-Saxon suffix '-ing' – whether it be '-ing' or '-ington' or '-ingham' – they tend to be heavily concentrated in the eastern one-third of the Britain, especially in the southeast. There are certainly exceptions, but the fact that those endings are so concentrated in the east indicates very early settlements in those regions by Anglo-Saxons.   And it also indicates that they didn't use existing Celtic place names. In fact, they often didn't even

use existing Celtic towns at all. They established new settlement with their own Anglo-Saxon names. In other words, they lived in their own separate enclaves.

It is very likely that the Saxons largely displaced the native Celts in the southeast of Britain. The earliest invasions occurred there and the total number of Anglo-Saxons was probably at its greatest in that region. The concentration of town names with the '-ing' ending in that region also suggests that this is where the early Anglo-Saxons settled in the greatest numbers early on. But as you move westward, the likelihood of a complete displacement of Celts is much lower.

Some of the native Romano-Celtic-Britons fled westward to escape the Anglo-Saxons in the east. And as they moved west, they helped the western Britons fortify their defenses. So that when the Anglo-Saxons began to move westward later on, they likely encountered more resistence.

We have some evidence of this process in the writing so Gildas. He had described the devastation by the Anglo-Saxons early on, but then he mentioned a series of British victories under a leader named Ambrosius Aurelianus. And he mentioned that victory at Mount Badon which halted the Anglo-Saxon advance for several decades. Later Britons in the west thought that the leader who defeated the Saxons at Mount Badon was named Arthur, but we'll explore this connection a little later.

Now with respect to those battles mentioned by Gildas, we don't know where they were fought, but many historians think those battles occurred in and around this transitional region in the middle of Britain. And in this transitional region between the Anglo-Saxon east and the Celtic-speaking west, we should expect to see evidence of blended communities in which both groups lived in close proximity to each other. And if we look closely, we can see some evidence of that.

Once again, the town names provide some clues. In his book, The Etymologicon, Mark Forsyth notes than there are several towns in this region – the West Midlands and central Britain – where the town names are a blend of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon names. And that suggests that Celtic-speaking Britons were living with or at least in close proximity to the Anglo-Saxons. So let's look at some of those blended names.

A Celtic word for 'hill' was *pen*. The word appears in the name of the town of *Pensax* in this particular region. As I said, *pen* meant 'hill,' and *sax* was a references to the Saxons, and it was used to indicate a Saxon settlement. So this town name combined the Saxon suffix with the Celtic prefix. Some linguists and historians believe that this type of combined name indicates that Saxon settlers were living in close proximity to the native Celtic-speaking people. And in the process, the Saxons took a Celtic word for 'hill' which they heard and knew, and they added it to their own Saxon name. And the result was *Pensax*.

By the way, these same two words also form part of the name of a town in southern England called Sixpenny Handley. The *Sixpenny* part comes from the same two root words as *Pensax*, they're just reversed to create *Sax-Penn*, and then they were further Anglicized to *Sixpenny*.

Very near the town of Pensax is a village called Menith Wood. *Menith* was another Celtic word for 'hill or mountain.' And *wood* is obviously an English word. So once again, we see in the name *Menith Wood* a blending a Celtic word and an Anglo-Saxon word.

Another example of this type of blending is the name of a large hill in northern England called Pendle Hill. Once again, we have that same Celtic word *pen* meaning 'hill.' But the Angles – who were the dominant Germanic tribe in this region – they apparently interpreted *pen* as the actual name of the hill, so they called it *Pen hill*, which eventually became *Pendle*. By the late Middle Ages, this original meaning was once again lost, and the people started calling it *Pendle Hill* – apparently unaware that 'hill' was already part of the name *Pendle*. So today, Pendle Hill literally means 'hill hill hill.' But once again, we see Celtic terms blending in with English terms.

As we can see by now, the Celts had a lot of words for hills. They also had the word *bre* which also meant 'hill.' And they had another word *din* which meant the same thing.

That word *din* was part of the original name of *London*, which was 'Lon-<u>din</u>-ium.' Well, that Celtic word was a very old Celtic word, and it was also used by the early Celtic-speaking tribes back on the continent. And the early Germanic tribes had picked it up along the way as well. So this was another word which passed from the continental Celts to the early Germanic tribes. And that word actually passed into Old English as *dun* with the same original meaning – hill or mountain. So the Anglo-Saxons brought the word *dun* with them when they arrived in Britain.

When the Anglo-Saxons encountered a large hill in the West Midlands of England, they called it *Bredon*. Once again, they combined the Celtic word *bre* meaning 'hill' with the Old English word *dun* meaning 'hill.' And the result was *Bredon*. And just as with Pendle Hill, the original meaning was lost through the years, and eventually people starting calling it *Bredon Hill*. So again, the literal meaning of the hill's name is 'hill hill hill.' And once again, we see Celtic words mixing with Old English words implying some degree of contact between the two groups.

By the way, the Old English pronunciation of *dun* changed through the years. It eventually became *down* in Modern English. As a noun, it still has its original meaning. In its plural form – as *hills* – we see it in place names like *Berkshire Downs*, *Dorset Downs*, and the Kentucky horse-racing track – *Churchill Downs*.

The Anglo-Saxons used the term *of dune* to mean the process of traveling from the top of a hill to the bottom. *Of dune* was eventually shorted to just *dune*. And that is also the origin of the preposition *down*, as in 'down the hole' or 'down the hatch.'

And you may be wondering if there is a connection to the modern English word *dune* as in sand dune. And the answer is yes, there is a connection in a round-about-way. The early French borrowed that same word from the Germanic tribes back on the continent, and that French version of the word came into English after the Norman Conquest as *dune* – D-U-N-E – and that is the version which is typically used in the context of a 'sand dune.'

So all of that means that words like *down*, *downs* and *dune* all come from the same root as the *don* in *London*. They all come from a Celtic word meaning 'hill.'

So as we see this type of blending of Celtic and Old English terms, we may have evidence of Celtic-speaking Britons living in close proximity to the Anglo-Saxons. In the east, Anglo-Saxon names dominate, like those ending in '-ing.' And in far west, Celtic names dominate. But we find these blended names in the central regions in between. So this was likely a transitional region with Celtic speakers and Germanic speakers living side by side.

And we may have additional evidence of this in the words which the Anglo-Saxons used to refer to the Celtic-Britons. As we know by now, the Anglo-Saxons were a mixture of West Germanic tribes. But despite whatever tribal differences may have existed between them back on the continent, when they arrived in Britain, they found themselves surrounded by people who were very different from themselves.

From the Anglo-Saxon perspective, the native Celts spoke an odd language, they worshiped strange Gods, they had unusual religious practices, and they had different legal traditions and political structures. So it appears that an 'us versus them' attitude developed very quickly among the Anglo-Saxons. They viewed the native Britons as different and perhaps even a little strange. And they soon developed a word for those native Celtic-speaking Britons with their strange Gods, and languages and customs. Ironically, the Anglo-Saxons called them 'foreigners.'

And this is significant for two reasons. It illustrates how the subtle differences between the various Anglo-Saxon groups began to disappear very quickly once they were on the ground in Britain and they were mixing together. But is also illustrates how they perceived the native people who they encountered. For the Anglo-Saxons, Britain was now 'Anglo-Saxon' land, and those other people who were already there with their strange culture, well 'they' were now the foreigners. The tables had basically been turned.

The Old English word for foreigner was *wealh*. And this was what the Anglo-Saxons called the native Celtic-speaking Britons. They called them *wealhs*. And the term later evolved from *wealhs* to *Welsh*. Early on, that term was applied to the Celtic Britons throughout the island – no matter where they lived. But over the centuries, as the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms grew, and the Celtic regions shrank, the only places where the native Britons held on was in the west and in the far north. And that's why today this western region of Britain is known as Wales and its inhabitants are the Welsh. But early on, the term *Welsh* wasn't associated with any particular region of Britain. It could refer to the natives regardless of where they lived.

Now if you're familiar British history and Celtic history, you may be saying, "What about Cornwall?" Many Celtic-speaking Britons held on there as well, and a Celtic language continued to be spoken there until very recently. So why wasn't this place also called *Wales*. Well, it kinda was.

The *wall* in Cornwall comes from that same Old English word *wealh* which gives us *Welsh* and *Wales*. The original Celtic tribe that inhabited the region of Cornwall was called the *Cornowii*.

That was their native Celtic tribal name. Now the *corn* part meant *horn*, and in fact that root word *corn* was cognate with the Latin word *cornu* which also meant 'horn.' And if we go all the way back to Grimm's Law, Latin *cornu* and English *horn* are cognate thanks to that sound shift where the 'k' sound became an 'h' sound in the Germanic languages. So obviously we're looking at a word with very deep Indo-European roots. And so the *corn* in the name of the *Cornowii* tribe meant 'horn,' and the tribal name meant 'the people of the horn.' Now if that sounds kinda weird, look at Cornwall on a map. It's a peninsula that sticks out into the ocean and it resembles a horn. So just like the name of the Angles came from the fact that their homeland looked like a fishhook, the name of the Cornowii came from the fact that their homeland looked like a horn.

When the Anglo-Saxons encountered these people, they called the Cornowii the *Corn-wealhs* – literally the 'Corn Welsh' or 'Corn foreigners.' Over time, the name evolved into *Cornwall*.

So within the modern names *Wales* and *Cornwall*, we can still see how the original Anglo-Saxons viewed the native Celts as foreigners.

By the way, as a quick digression, the hazel nut was a very common and popular nut back in Germania, but the Romans had introduced a new nut there which was grown in Italy and Gaul. The Germanic tribes back in Germania called this new imported nut a 'foreign nut' using this same word *wealh*. They combined *wealh* meaning 'foreign' and *hnutu* meaning 'nut,' and this produced the word *walnut*.

So *Welsh*, *Wales*, *Cornwall* and *walnut* all have the same Germanic root meaning 'foreign' or 'foreigner.' And if you're a fan of the movie Braveheart, you'll know that the Scottish leader who fought the English was William Wallace. Well, there really was a William Wallace, and ironically, even though the surname *Wallace* is a Scottish surname, it originates from the same Germanic root word meaning 'foreigner.'

Now you might be inclined to believe that Anglo-Saxons applied this word meaning 'foreigner' to the native Britons after several centuries – after the Anglo-Saxons had established their own kingdoms, and they began to concern themselves with outside threats. But that doesn't appear to be the case. In fact, it appears that the Anglo-Saxons used this term for the Britons very early on. In fact, we see evidence of this early use in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle – the historical record maintained by the later Anglo-Saxons. Now even though the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was written many years later, its account of this period provides clear shift in terminology from *Britons* to *Welsh*. The native people are initially referred to as the *Britons* in the entries up through the year 456. But after that date, the terminology shifts to *Welsh*, and that term is used from that point on. So if the later chroniclers were relying upon old records, and if they were maintaining the original terminology, then this term *Welsh* meaning 'foreigner' was adopted very early on. In fact, based on that evidence, the term *Welsh* appeared shortly after the initial Anglo-Saxon invasion or uprising around the year 450.

So the Anglo-Saxons called the native Britons *Wealhas* or *Welsh* to mean 'foreigners,' but over time, the meaning expanded, and it eventually was used to mean 'slave,' especially in southwestern Britain. And that shift in meaning is picked up from later Old English texts.

And the fact that the term *Welsh* was being used by Anglo-Saxons to mean a 'slave or a serf' is very important because it implies that the Anglo-Saxons were the masters and the native Britons were the slaves, and that means the Britons were still living 'among' the Anglo-Saxons. And if we go back to the last episode, one of the passages from Gildas stated that some of the most unfortunate Britons had been taken into slavery by the Saxons rather than being killed on the spot. So we have strong evidence that some native Britons remained in the Anglo-Saxon regions as forced servants.

And we have even more confirmation of this in a set of laws which were issued by the Anglo-Saxon King of Wessex in southwestern Britain in the late 600s. The king was Ine. And his laws were some of the first laws issued in the English language, and those laws made specific provisions for the "Welsh" who were living there. The Welsh were divided into different categories depending on whether they were free or unfree, and depending on whether they owned land, and how much land they owned. So we know that Celtic Britons were living under Anglo-Saxon rule in Wessex, but we don't know how many were there.

The later historian Bede also made reference to the fact that native Britons were living under the rule of the Anglo-Saxons. He noted that around the time of Ine's laws, many of the Britons who were the subjects of the West Saxons began to celebrate the Catholic Easter. So by referring to these 'British subjects,' we have further confirmation that the native Britons were living among the West Saxons in Wessex.

Another piece of evidence is that fact Welsh names were common among the political and religious leaders of Wessex – names like Ceadwalla, Mul, Cadda, Conbran, Catwal. And the existence of those names among people in prominent positions in Wessex implies some degree of intermarriage between Celts and Saxons, and family names were thereby passed on. Interestingly, those names began to disappear after the eighth century implying that the power of Celts faded over time. A few Celtic names also appear in other areas, even in Kent in the east and Northumbria in the north. And there may have been Celtic names in the other regions as well, but early written records are more lacking in those other areas.

By the tenth century, the laws of London sentenced a runaway slave to be stoned "like a Welsh thief." And in eleventh century Cambridge, the compensation for slaying a Welshman was set at half of the compensation required for killing an Englishman. So all of these Anglo-Saxon laws imply that Celts were still living among the Anglo-Saxons.

But unfortunately, there's no evidence of the language spoken by those native Britons. But it's unlikely that their Celtic language would have died out overnight. So we can conclude that, at least for a while, Celtic languages were being spoken in the vicinity of Old English, especially in these western regions.

But that leaves us with that original mystery. If the Anglo-Saxons were exposed to the Celtic languages, why aren't there more Celtic influences in English? Well, maybe there are. Maybe we're just looking in the wrong places.

In the book Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue, John McWhorter argues that the Celtic influence is there. Maybe not in the vocabulary, but in the grammar. He points to two aspects of Modern English grammar which can only be found elsewhere in the Celtic languages.

The first example is the way Modern English uses the word *do* and its variations, *did* and *does*. Of course, we can use *do* to express emphasis as in "I DO like it – I really DO." And that isn't necessarily unique to English, but what is unique is the way we use it in so many other contexts. It really permeates the English language in a way that's very unusual compared to other languages.

 Whenever we ask questions, there's often a *do* in there somewhere. "How do you do that?" "Where did you go?" "Why did he say?" "What do you like to eat?" "When does she get here?" "Did you go outside?" "Does it surprise you?" "Do you like it?" So there always seems to be a *do* hanging around.

And when we make negative statements, we routinely stick a *do* or *did* in there somewhere. "I do not like it." "He does not have any." "You do not look well." "It does not work." "She did not see him."

Again, English has this persistent use of *do*. But if you really think about, that *do* doesn't really do anything in those examples. In fact, it wasn't there in Old English, at least not in the many ways that we tend to use it today. And in fact, no other language uses *do* like English does today, except, you guessed it, Celtic languages like Welsh and Cornish. Those Celtic languages in Britain had this same type of grammatical feature when the Anglo-Saxons arrived, and after several centuries, by the period of Middle English, this piece of Celtic grammar may have spread to English. And today, it's a very prominent feature of English.

And John McWhorter also points to another aspect of English grammar to show the Celtic influence. This other aspect has to do with our basic present tense verbs. If you were asked to conjugate a basic verb like *listen* in present tense, you would probably say "I listen," "you listen," "he/she/it listens." That is technically the way to conjugate that verb in English. But if I asked you what you're doing right now. You wouldn't say, "I listen." You would say, "I am listening." And I wouldn't say, "I speak." I would say "I am speaking."

That basic verb form – like "I speak," "I listen," "I read," "I sleep" – that was the basic verb form of present tense in Old English, and it is the basic verb form of present tense in other languages, including other Indo-European languages.   But in Modern English, we rarely use it. We almost always use that verb phrase 'am speaking' or 'am listening.'

Now we do sometimes use that basic form of the verb, if you want to indicate that you do something on a regular basis. So if I asked what you do whenever you find out that there is a new

episode of the podcast, you might say "I listen." And if you ask Paul McCartney what he does for a living, he might say "I sing," or "I play guitar," or "I write songs." So we do use that basic form of the verb in present tense, but it's been relegated to this limited situation where we are indicating that something happens on a regular basis.   Otherwise, the default form in Modern English is that longer more complicated verb phrase 'am singing,' 'am playing' or 'am writing.'

Again, this '-ing' verb phrase wasn't used in that way, as the default form, in Old English. And it's not used that way in other Indo-European languages with one exception. Of course, it's the Celtic languages. The Celtic languages in Britain had this same type of present tense conjugation. So McWorter argues that this feature of Modern English occurred when the Anglo-Saxons encountered the Celtic-speaking Britons. That in fact, they did live together, at least in parts of Britain, and that some of the aspects of the Celtic languages changed English during the period of late Old English and Middle English. So that by the time we get into the Middle English period, this feature of English had emerged.

Again, if you're interested in exploring this research further, check out John McWhorter's book, Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue. It's available as an ebook and as an audiobook.

Now all of this research – the genetic research, the archaeological research, and the linguistic research – it all suggests that the traditional view of the Celtic legacy was wrong. The Celtic Britons were not completely wiped out in England. And Old English was not immune from Celtic influences.

Instead, at least in parts of England, there was a blending of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon peoples, and languages and cultures. But make no mistake, the Anglo-Saxon influences dominated. There might be a bit more Celtic influence on English than was once thought, but it still pales in comparison to the influences of Old Norse and Norman French. And that suggests that the Celts were not fully integrated into the Anglo-Saxon society. They likely lived at the margins as slaves and serfs. And even when they were free, they held a far inferior status in Anglo-Saxon society.

But their influences still came through, and if we look close enough we can see those influences. And those influences sometimes found their way into English culture in strange and round-about ways. In fact, when we think of Medieval England after the Norman Conquest, many of us instinctively think of the legendary figure of King Arthur and the knights of the round table. Those legendary stories have become synonymous with Medieval Britain. Yet these stories didn't originate with the Anglo-Saxons. They originated with the Celts. And in fact, they originated as stories of resistance against the Anglo-Saxons during this early period in the fifth and sixth centuries.

So I want to conclude this episode about the Celtic Legacy by exploring how the early Celtic resistance movement gave rise to the legendary figure of King Arthur – a King of ALL of Britain.

In the aftermath of the Anglo-Saxon invasions, many Celtic Britons had apparently been relegated to slaves within the new Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and the only places where they maintained their independence were on the western fringes of the island, and in the far north, and

across the sea in Brittany. But many of these Celtic Britons saw this as a temporary condition. They imagined that the tide would one day turn, and the Britons would once again rise up and reclaim their island. But in order for this to happen, the Celtic Britons needed a hero – a hero that would one day return to fight the Saxons. And this appears to be the origin of the early legends in Wales and Cornwall and Brittany about a military leader named Arthur – a leader who had supposedly fought the Saxons, and a leader who would one day return to fight them again.

As we saw in the last episode, the actual written accounts from this period are very limited. And none of the sources from this period actually mention a king or military leader named Arthur. But shortly after this period, written references to Arthur start to pop up throughout the Celtic regions. And at least early on, the references suggest that Arthur was an actual person – a real life historical figure. So was there really a Celtic leader named Arthur who fought the Saxons? Well there have been numerous books written about this subject , and I'm certainly not going to provide a definitive answer here, but let's look at the evidence to see how this mysterious figure emerged.

There seems to be a general agreement among historians that 'something' happened in the late fifth century and early sixth century which led to the creation of these later stories and legends.

As we know by now, the only contemporary account of events from within Britain during this period was the sermon of Gildas. And Gildas mentioned that the Britons had fought back against the Saxons, and that they had won a great victory at a place called Mons Badonicus in Latin – or Mount Badon in English. But he didn't say where that battle occurred, and he didn't say who the military leader was who won that battle. Perhaps he didn't mention the name because he was writing to the people of his day, and they all knew who the leader was. But based on later writings, it becomes apparent that the Celtic Britons considered this a monumental victory. It became legendary in the minds of many Britons because it proved that the Saxons could be turned back. And those later sources gave credit for the victory to a leader named Arthur.

In the years after Gildas, the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms began to rise again. As the Celtic kingdoms squabbled amongst themselves, they were unable to mount an effective defense. They soon lost the remainder of western Britain to the Saxons, except for Cornwall and Wales. And it was in these regions and in Brittany that the legend of Mount Badon and Arthur really started to grow.

Just as the Anglo-Saxons completed their conquest in the seventh century, the first historical references to Arthur appear. A Welsh poem from the early seventh century called Y Gododdin makes reference to shadowy figure named Arthur. In praising a soldier who had fought bravely against the Saxons, it conditions the praise by noting that "he was no Arthur."

A later chronicle of events compiled from a variety of Welsh sources also makes reference to Arthur. The Chronicle called the Welsh Annals probably began in the ninth century, but the first entries date back to the fifth century. So they were written down at a later date, and we don't know what the original sources were, so we don't know how reliable those early entries are. But for the year 518, the Welsh Annals specifically state that a military leader named Arthur won the Battle of Badon against the Saxons. If this entry is accurate, it is the first reference to Arthur

15

being the victor as Badon. The Annals also state that Arthur and Medraut were killed at a separate battle in the year 539. Now many historians believe that Medraut was an early verison of Mordred – the traitor who challenged Arthur's power and who was the primary villain in the later legends.

Again, we can't say with certainty how accurate these references are, but it seems clear that the legend of Arthur was in place and growing quickly.

And then we get the BIG reference to Arthur, the source that is often cited as the first real reference to the figure that we would come to know in the later accounts. And that reference comes to us via a Welsh monk named Nennius. In the year 828, he published a history which he called The History of the Britons.

It's a fascinating book, but it's a bit of stretch to call it a 'history.' It actually mixed folklore with history. But despite the fact that Nennius takes a lot of liberties, he does appear to mix in some actual history with his stories. So it's difficult to determine what's history and what's legend. The reason why the book is important to the history of Arthur is because it provides a specific list of Arthur's battles.

The list of battles probably came from a long-lost battle song which commemorated certain British victories. Nennius says that Arthur fought "with the kings of Britain," but he doesn't identify Arthur himself as a King. Nennius then lists each battle, and of the last one, he writes, "The twelfth battle was on Mount Badon in which there fell in one day 960 men from one charge by Arthur; and no one struck them down except Arthur himself, and in all the wars he emerged as victor."

So by this point, in the ninth century, Arthur had clearly become associated with that legendary victory at Mount Badon. Tales of Arthur and his victory at Badon thrived not only in western Britain, but also in Brittany in northern Gaul. In fact, the legend of Arthur may have been greater in Brittany than in Britain itself.

In the eleventh century, a monk in Brittany named William wrote about the life of a Breton bishop and later saint who was one of the many who migrated from southern Britain in the wake of Anglo-Saxon invasions. In his history, William wrote that the Saxons' pride was "limited for a while through the great Arthur, king of the Britons." He then writes that this same Arthur won many glorious victories "in Britain and in Gaul."

William's history is notable because it's the first source to describe Arthur as a 'king' and it says he won victories in Britain and in Gaul. Now this has led some historians to conclude that William was actually referring to British king who was hanging out in Gaul named 'Riothamus' (/Ry-o-tha-mus/) – or 'Riothamus' (/Ree-o-tha-mus/) using the Latin pronunciation at the time.

I mentioned Riothamus in the last episode because a bishop in Gaul named Sidonius wrote a letter to him which referenced the Bretons in northern Gaul. And I noted that the later Frankish historian Jordanes called Riothamus the 'King of the Britons' even though he was fighting in

Gaul. So is there a possible link between this guy Riothamus and the later figure of Arthur. Well, there is an interesting linguistic connection. And to understand this connection we have to consider the name *Arthur*.

First, where did the name Arthur come from? Well, no one knows for sure. It could be a personal name or a family name. There is a Celtic name *Artur* which means 'bear.' Maybe that was the source of the name. And there is also a Roman family name – *Artorius*. So maybe that was the source.

But is also possible that the name *Arthur* wasn't initially a personal name at all. It may have been a title. In fact, many prominent people of this period were named after their title, and later generations often mistakenly assumed that the title was a personal name. According to later writers, the British king who invited the Saxons into Britain in the first place was named Vortigern.   And some later linguists have concluded that the name *Vortigern* was really a title which meant 'overlord.'

Well, some historians believe that *Arthur* was also initially a Celtic title.   In the Celtic languages, the word *ardu* (/arthu/) meant 'high or supreme,' and *rix* meant 'king. ' In fact, we've come across *rix* a lot in this podcast. It's cognate with *rex* meaning 'king' in Latin, where it produced later words like *royal* and *regal*. And it's cognate with the English word *rich*. And you might also remember form our look at the Goths that it ultimately produced the 'ric-' in *Puerto Rico* and even the '-ri-' in *America*. Well, here it is again. The Celts used their version of the word *rix* to mean 'king' as well.

And again the 'supreme king' in the Celtic languages was a combination of the word *arthu* and *rix*. And that produced the new word *Ardd Ri* (/Arth-ri/). *Arth-ri* meant the 'supreme king,' and it may have been the original title of a prominent figure who was considered a king of the Britons – either a real person or a legendary figure. *Arth-ri* may have become *Arthur*.

So you may be asking what does all of that have to do with that guy 'Riothamus' who was also called a 'King of the Britons.' Well, Riothamus is also a title, not an actual personal name. And the title also means 'supreme king.' And in fact, it is composed of the same two Celtic words which make up the title *Arth-ri*.

And if you have a hard time hearing the connection between *Arth-ri* and *Riothamus*. All you have to do is reverse the two Celtic root words.

'High King' is *Arthu* plus *ri* producing *Arthri*. But when you reverse those two root words, you get *Ri* plus *Arthu*, and that gives you *Ri-arthu*, or thanks to a Latin translation – *Riothamus*.

So Arthur and Riothamus can both be derived from the same Celtic title meaning 'High King' or 'Supreme King,' with the two Celtic root words simply being reversed between the two titles.

And we can combine that linguistic connection with Jorandes who described Riothamus as 'King of the Britons' even though he was in Gaul. And we can then add in William's history who talks

about Arthur and gives Arthur the same title as Riothamus – 'King of the Britons.' And William specifically notes that Arthur won victories in both Britain and Gaul. So when we put all of those pieces together, you can see why some historians have concluded that this guy Riothamus was in fact the original Arthur. And maybe he was. But the reality is that there probably was no single Arthur. The legendary figure of Arthur was likely a combination of several prominent figures associated with the Celtic resistence during this period.   And Riothamus was likely one of those figures, especially in the versions of stories told in Brittany.

As I noted earlier, the legends surrounding this mysterious figure of Arthur were as popular in Brittany in northern France as anywhere in Britain itself. Throughout Brittany during this period, it is recorded that people sang songs about Arthur and his battles against the Saxons. And by the 11th century, the Bretons has become allied with their neighbors – the Normans. And these were same Normans who invaded England in 1066 under the leadership of William, Duke of Normandy. And here is where the story of Arthur comes full circle.

We always refer to the 'Norman Conquest' of the Anglo-Saxons in 1066. But in actuality, about one-third of William's army was actually Breton – not Norman. In fact, the entire left flank of William's army at the Battle of Hastings was Breton. They were William's allies in northern France, and they were the descendants of the Britons who had fled the Anglo-Saxons several centuries earlier. And throughout that period in exile in northern France, they had developed songs and poems and stories about the legendary figure of Arthur. Part of their support of William was based on political alliances and, perhaps, opportunism. But for the rank and file Breton soldiers, it may also have been a matter of vengeance. As the descendants of Britons who had fled the Saxon onslaught over five centuries earlier, they now had their opportunity to return to their ancestral homeland to bring the fight back to Saxons, and they did so singing the songs of Arthur. After the Norman Conquest, the songs of the Bretons blended with the poems and legends of the Cornish and the Welsh. The story of Arthur was now almost fully realized. In the figure of Arthur, the Normans didn't choose a Norman hero or a Saxon hero, they adopted a Celtic British hero. And whether it was intentional or not, it was definitely good propaganda. It helped the Normans to depict the Saxons as treacherous occupiers.

And in the wake of the Norman Conquest, the feudal system was introduced into Britain, and that included a new class of military leaders called 'knights,' and it included the Medieval concept of chivalry. And we now have the full transition of Arthur from a Dark Age Celtic warrior fighting against the Anglo-Saxons to a Medieval British king, surrounded by castles and knights, and bound by the Medieval code of chivalry.

From here, the Welsh writer Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote his <u>History of the Kings of Britain</u> in 1138. And this was the first proper telling of the myth of Arthur. His History covers the early Anglo-Saxon period from the Roman withdrawal to the Saxon uprising, and he tells the story of Arthur as he bravely fought and defeated the Saxons. In fact Arthur defeats almost everyone along the way. He defeats the Picts and the Scots. And after he marries Guenevere, he sails to Iceland and Ireland where he conquers the peoples of those regions as well. Then he invades Norway and Denmark and adds them to his empire.

He then turns his attention southward to Gaul. And, as we might expect by this point, he conquers Gaul too. Then he decides that it's time to teach Rome a lesson as well. So he fights and defeats a giant, and then he leads his soldiers into battle against the Romans, and – you guessed it – he beats the Romans too. He even decides to cross the Alps and invade Rome itself, but then he gets news that Mordred has seized power back in Britain and is living with Guenevere. Mordred has formed an alliance with the Saxons, the Picts and the Scots. So Arthur returns to Britain and fights several battles against Mordred. And Mordred is killed, but ultimately so is Arthur. And at death, Arthur's body was taken to the Isle of Avalon. And that's Geoffrey's story in a nutshell.

And Geoffey's story was expanded by later writers. But the popularity of Geoffrey's story was so great that almost all of the later version are roughly based around his original version. Of course, Geoffrey wasn't really a historian. He only used history as a backdrop – to set the scene. His main focus was on telling a good story. And perhaps we shouldn't be too surprised that Geoffrey himself was part-Welsh and part-Breton. He had grown up with the legend of Arthur on both sides of the Channel. And he fused those elements together into the first proper telling of the legend of Arthur.

The later French poet Chretien de Troyes added the characters of Lancelot, Galahad and Percival, and he introduced the quest for the Holy Grail. He also invented the name Camelot and said that Arthur's court was located there. And all of these stories ultimately culminated with Sir Thomas Malory's Le Morte D'Arthur in 1485. And Malory gives us the final version of the story – complete with Merlin, the sword Excalibur, and the affair of Guenevere and Lancelot.

So as we look back at the most legendary of British kings – the once and future King of ALL of Briton – we see part of the legacy of the Celts. They didn't really disappear from Anglo-Saxon England. They were always there. We see it the ancient legends, we see it in DNA research, we see it in the place names and old legal codes, and we even see it in the English language if we look hard enough for it.

So with that, I'm going to conclude this episode. Next time, we'll complete our look at the fifth and sixth centuries by turning our attention back to continental Europe to see what was happening to the Saxons who remained back in northern Germany.   And we'll examine the emergence of the modern High German dialects during this period. And then we'll look at the rise of the Frankish kingdom in Gaul, and with it, we'll look at the surprising number of English words which can be traced back to the Franks. So all of that will be in the next episode.

So until next time, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.