

# ANGLO-SAXON EXPERIENCE DAY WITH WOOD FARM SCHOOL

The move to the new National Curriculum where children must learn prehistory up to 1066 means that there will be an increased interest in the Anglo-Saxon period. Furthermore there is a strong emphasis on schools focusing on a local study of one of more periods of investigation. As a result of this transition we decided to develop an Anglo-Saxon experience day, again in conjunction with the Hurst Water Meadow, following on from the success we had last year with our Tudor Experience day.

The day began in the Abbey Guest House with our table laden with materials to reflect the Anglo-Saxon period (e.g. bread, leather goods, helmet and shield, various foods and herbs, etc – see in photo below left). Rosie, from the Hurst Water Meadow, was dressed to represent a poor Anglo-Saxon farmer woman called Roseburga and Margaret was dressed as the wealthy Merwenna (for the purposes of this she is said to be King Cynegils' sister, seen to the right).



Roseburga and Merwenna described their daily routine, the types of food and diet they had, demonstrating how the poor had a slightly different less varied diet in comparison to the wealthy (e.g. the poor had 'fresh' cheese as opposed to mature cheese and much less meat in their diet, they drank ale all the time with mead only for special occasions). Both explained what types of things they wore, demonstrated how wool was made into yarn and how this would have been woven on a large wooden upright loom.

But, how did we know all this? How can the children know we weren't just making it up? We needed to explain the role of archaeology in providing evidence for us to base our knowledge on, thus we engaged the children in an archaeology exercise (see photo below).

In our mini-archaeological activity they were given a tray with various items they had to construct a 'story' from. The tray contained items such as bones, a shell, some cloth/leather fragments, some burnt wood fragments, pottery sherd, etc. They all enjoyed looking at this and trying to work it all out. They learned that it could have been part of a burial site or it could just be part of a midden (rubbish heap). But they understood these were some of the types of things that were found by archaeologists in particular locations that provided the evidence for them to work out the use of the location and the objects. We explained about other local sites that had been found and some of the stories connected with them (e.g. locally Dorchester's post-hole *grubenhous* and the Berinsfield burials; further afield the impressive find at Sutton Hoo linked to the East Anglian King Raedwald).





At the end of our introduction to the Anglo-Saxon period the children were able to go to the Hurst Water Meadow to re-enact some Anglo-Saxon activities, including decorating a pagan shrine, hurdle making, wool spinning, preparation of a pagan burial site, and collecting herbs and grasses.

These activities were all very popular, giving the children an interactive experience of a range of Anglo-Saxon beliefs and practices.



Above you see a group photo with their decorated pagan shrine on the oak tree and the hurdle they made.

To the right you see some students engaging in preparing the wool with teasels and spinning the wool with the spindle.

To the left is an image of the funerary urn with its decoration and grave goods, prepared for an Anglo-Saxon burial.



Below, Roseburga at the decorated pagan shrine .



After their morning on the Hurst we returned to the Abbey for lunch and a spot of Anglo-Saxon baptism! They got to see Bishop Birinus as he arrived in Dorchester in 635 to spread the word of God to the pagan Anglo-Saxons. The children were dressed as King Cynegils, his daughter Cyneburga, and their entourage and they are seen being 'baptised' in the Physic Garden, near the Thame (as seen in the photo above to the right), with the Christian Northumbrian King Oswald as god father just behind King Cynegils.

We moved into the Abbey following the baptism re-enactment and children were first able to fully experience the awe and wonder of the amazing Abbey building, giving their feedback in a 'sensory report'. They then engaged in two tasks, a worksheet and a brooch making activity. The worksheet explored the shift from Anglo-Saxon times to the Norman period, demonstrating how Christianity had changed earlier pagan Anglo-Saxon practices. In the brooch making workshop they were able to make an Anglo-Saxon copper metal disc brooch to take home with them. A very popular activity, despite the look on these girls' faces! We ended with the lighting of a candle for them to say thanks to family, friends and staff. It was a hugely successful (and exhausting!) day for all! But, how did we know this? How do *you* know we aren't just making it up? All the evidence you need is in the wonderful comments from the children (and members of the public!) below!



The evidence of a successful visit: measuring the impact of the event on the staff, pupils and others.....

**Feedback from the children of Wood Farm School.**

- ❖ My favourite bit was everything! – Samuel
- ❖ I really liked making the shrine. – Sadia
- ❖ It was a perfect trip! It was fascinating and I loved being in the meadow and the leaders were dressed for the part. – Lila
- ❖ I enjoyed making the brooches because it was a lot of fun. – Masum
- ❖ I liked everything, but the best thing was making the fence. – Nabila
- ❖ My favourite thing about it was trying the Anglo-Saxon bread.
- ❖ My favourite part was doing the activities, particularly the brooches.
- ❖ I liked the people in costume, but I wish more of us had got to wear them!
- ❖ The leaders had lots of experience and they taught us lots. I liked it when the lights flickered off! – Kaleem. [NB In the Cloister Gallery the lights went out as they were trying out the coffin for size!]
- ❖ I really enjoyed looking round the church and finding things. –Luka
- ❖ I liked finding things for the shrine and making it look amazing. It was really fun! – Alan
- ❖ I really liked learning to make wool into threads. – Levi
- ❖ We all learnt how they dress and what life is like in Anglo Saxon times. –Lila

- ❖ We learnt about stuff about how children lived and what happened when they died. – Kaleem
- ❖ We found out about what plants people ate in Anglo Saxon times (like nettles!). – Alan

**And finally their teachers said:**

- ❖ ‘They all wanted to say a big thank you for the trip - everyone really enjoyed it!’
- ❖ ‘Thank you so much, it was a really great day and both leaders were really good with the children! Wish we had more time!’
- ❖ ‘Great explanation to support the children’s understanding as well as high level vocabulary (and ‘Anglo-Saxon speak’!) to challenge them.’
- ❖ ‘[The children were] very engaged and positive while doing each activity and keen to achieve!’
- ❖ ‘The expert knowledge provided was invaluable.’

In addition, at the end of their visit a member of the public came up to me to report that one of the children had approached her and asked if she would like to learn about the Anglo-Saxons, when she agreed he proceeded to tell her all about what he had learned and how excited he was by the whole visit! She in turn was very engaged by his enthusiasm and knowledge and wanted to let me know how much she enjoyed hearing about it. Therefore not only a successful day for the students, teachers and staff, but even the general public too!

Further to this, when the teacher heard of the above account this was her reply: 'And thank you for letting me know about this. It is always nice to hear positive feedback about our children, but it is even more lovely to hear that they have impressed people! I will give them a copy of the email you sent to take home and show mum!'