

Dennis the Investigate dragon has been finding out about the history of dragons. It turns out that people way back in Anglo-Saxon times were telling stories about dragons too!



~ Who were the Anglo-Saxons? ~

Well they were a mixture. Sometime after the end of Roman rule in Britain some groups of people who had been raiding Roman Britain turned up and settled down. They came from across the North Sea, northwest Germany, western Denmark and northern Netherlands. They were a mixture of tribes that included Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Frisians. As well as mixing together, they mixed with the locals (though there was some fighting). Later on, when Vikings settled parts of England (especially here in Lincolnshire) the two groups mixed again. In 1066 the last Anglo-Saxon king was killed at the Battle of Hastings and the Normans took over. An Anglo-Saxon church once stood where the Castle is now.



~ Anglo-Saxon Dragons ~

In the year 793 the Anglo-Saxons wrote in their Chronicle that they saw **fiery dragons in the sky**. It sounds incredible to us, but it was probably a real thing that they saw. In northern Europe you sometimes see strange red lights in the sky; we call them the Northern Lights and we know they are caused by sunspots which are more active about every 11 years. When we consult the charts, it seems 793 is very close to a peak in sunspots, so the Anglo-Saxons weren't seeing things that did not exist, just things they couldn't explain so they thought the lights were dragons! (although, of course, we aren't saying dragons don't exist!)



~ Beowulf and the Dragon ~

This story is adapted from Beowulf, a poem from the Dark Ages. The original poem is in Old English and 3,000 lines long; it is probably the earliest masterpiece of English literature, but the story is set in Sweden and Denmark. It tells how Beowulf fought three monsters, two in Denmark and one in Sweden when he was the King of the Geats (who lived in southern Sweden). The following version tells of the final fight with a fire breathing dragon. It is written in the style of the original poem (with lots of alliteration, which is having lots of words with the same first letter) but using modern English and is designed to give a taste of this epic poem. **Be warned some parts of the story are gruesome and may not be suitable for young children.**

In the dark days gone by, brave Beowulf became king
Guardian of the Geats, he ruled wise and well
Till a deadly dragon arose to terrify the troubled land
On a cliff the lizard lived, in an ancient and mighty mound
Asleep atop of treasure, a pile of gleaming gold
A slave seeking shelter entered and stole a costly cup
The creature awoke with anger and missed its treasured trinket
The dreadful dragon searched, burning barns and crushing homes
King Beowulf was soon warned of the terrible tidings
He had a magnificent iron shield made to protect him from fearsome dragon fire
He gathered his mightiest men and sought the serpent's sea-cliff home
But his men fled into the forest and would not help bold Beowulf
Beowulf armed with helm, sword and shield, walked bravely to the barrow
He reached the mouth of the mound, lair of the winged worm



Steam shot for inside, the ground burnt by the beast's fire
Beowulf roared a great roar, the dragon knew a fearsome fighter had come
The creature uncoiled itself and went to meet its final fate
The hero raised his round shield as the beast burst forth
From the ancient entrance it came with burning breath
Beowulf, armed with antique sword, struck the furious serpent
But the blade could not cut its hide and the fire-snake spouted flame
Beowulf's cowardly companions cowered, except one young warrior called Wiglaf
"Beowulf", he cried "I come to your aid" but again the dragon swiftly struck
Behind Beowulf's iron-shod shield they sheltered from fierce flames
Beowulf struck again, but his sword snapped and a third time the dragon attacked
It grabbed Beowulf's bare neck and our hero was bathed in his blood
Wiglaf then stabbed the serpent, not in its head but the beast's soft belly
His sword swiftly sank in and the monster's flames faded to nought
The king struck with a keen knife in the same spot, killing the serpent
Beowulf slumped slowly down, aware he was about to die
Wiglaf rushed into the monster's mound and grabbed armfuls of ancient treasure
He laid these at his lord's feet and cried as the king faded
Beowulf gazed at the gold and breathed his final breath
Soon the cowards crept forward and soon saw their slain king's form
Wiglaf cursed the craven fools, a warrior should stand with their lord
Over Beowulf men built a mighty mound, burying him with a trove of treasures
He was the kindest of kings, fair, fearless and bravest of men.



~ Anglo-Saxon Dragon Art ~

The Anglo-Saxons were terrific craftspeople and produced some beautiful jewellery and decoration. They loved pictures of dragons, serpents, eagles and wild boar. Inspired by their folklore, their belt buckles, shields and helmets often had pictures of these creatures on them. But they liked to mix up the creatures so their bodies were all curled round each other. As the figures and patterns look like knots, it is called knot work.



~ Make your own dragon brooch ~

- 1 Cut out a brooch shape from a cereal box. Make it as big as you like!
- 2 Cover completely in tin foil.
- 3 Use a really blunt pencil to add details. Press gently so you don't tear your foil.
- 4 Use sticky tape to attach a safety pin to the back of your creation so you can wear it on your tunic, your best cloak or your pyjamas!



You can find more fact sheets about Anglo-Saxon clothing and language on The Collection Museum website, which can be found by clicking [here](#)