

ANGLO-SAXON FARMING – EXTRACT

Anglo-Saxon farming was a way of life for most Anglo-Saxons, who lived on small farms and raised crops and animals. All Anglo-Saxon farming systems were integrated. Livestock and arable farming were indispensable to one another; arable crops depended on the manure and labour of animals which in turn fed on the products of arable land as well as that lying fallow.

During the Anglo-Saxon period the landscape and food production of lowland Britain was in large measure transformed. By the end of the period something recognisable as “traditional English farming” had started.

Crops

They mostly grew einkorn (a type of wheat), rye, barley, oats, peas, turnips, carrots, leeks, onions and beans. They used lots of different wooden tools, like hoes, rakes, spades, billhooks and forks, peas, turnips, carrots, leeks, onions

What did the Anglo-Saxons have for food?

What did the Anglo-Saxons eat? They had bread baked in the oven and meat which they roasted or boiled. The vegetables they ate were mainly peas and beans. There were no potatoes because these didn't come to Britain until hundreds of years later when they were brought back from America.

Farm implements

Saxons used a simple form of plough called an 'Ard' or 'scratch plough'. This dug a furrow, but did not turn over the soil and do all the good things to it. In the 10th century, the plough was invented.

Mouldboard plough: A plough that turned over the soil, burying weeds and breaking up clods.

Heavy plough: A plough that created deep furrows, allowing the cultivation of heavier soils

Anglo-Saxons used heavy ploughs pulled by teams of oxen to cultivate heavier soils. The heavy plough enabled the cultivation of heavier soils, especially in areas of poor drainage. The heavy plough was essential for cutting deep furrows to expose as much plow soil as possible to the elements.

Ploughing rituals

Ploughing was incorporated into performative rituals grounded in concepts of fertility and reproduction "Plough Monday" was a major seasonal festival of the Christian calendar that was suffused with plough symbolism and ritual performances.

The role of seasons.

Because we can import food from all over the world and grow food in controlled settings, we can eat the same foods all year round. However, the Anglo-Saxons were only able to eat food when it was ready to harvest.

Anglo-Saxon's diet varied depending upon how much money they had. Meat would have only been consumed by the rich. Although poorer people would have had access to meat on their farms, they would have been more likely to sell it for money.

How did the Anglo-Saxons use their land?

Most Anglo-Saxons were farmers and lived off the land. They were able to make equipment such as ploughs and tools to help them in their work. They would grind wheat to make flour so they could make bread. The tools they had available included wooden tools like hoes, rakes, spades, billhooks, and forks.

How they used Animals.

The Sheep for wool including making woolen coats and bedding, milk, and meat. The Goat and Cow for milk and meat. The Pig for meat. Horses for riding, pulling carts, and ploughing as well as Oxen for ploughing. Chickens, ducks, and geese for eggs, feathers, and meat. Saxon animals were small: cows about 1.0-1.3m high and sheep about 50-70cm high. Pigs were dark and hairy with pointed ears.

Farming practices

Manure and labour from animals helped arable crops and crops fed animals, which in turn fed on arable land. Every part of the animal was used, including fat for candles, wool for weaving, and leather for clothing. They used animal fat to make candles. They used pots for cooking, storing food, and holding water.

End.