# MYTHIC BRITAIN

# Logres

## Lands of the Saxons

MYTHRAS

THE DESIGN MECHANISM

Paul Mitchener
& Friends

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## A Mythic Britain Expansion for the Saxon Lands

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# INTRODUCTION

*...Hengest and Esc fought with the Welsh, and took immense Booty. And the Welsh fled from the English like fire.*
The Anglo Saxon Chronicle

The Saxons had harried the coasts of Britain since late Roman times. Vortigern, the High King, hired them as mercenaries to aid in his conquests of the Picts and then betrayed them, cheating of them of the lands they were promised. The Saxons defeated Vortigern in battle, and then at the peace meeting betrayed him in turn at the Night of the Long Knives, slaughtering him and all of his nobles in attendance at a feast.

To most Britons, the Saxons are the sea wolves who came from across the water, remorseless in battle, endlessly greedy for land and loot. In the lands they have taken - Logres, the lost lands - their rule over the Britons is total, and many who remain are reduced to the status of slaves or servants. They are relentless when wronged, and never forgive a slight. But who are they?

*Mythic Britain: Logres* is *their* story.

### why did they come?

The Saxon homelands are low-lying areas and for centuries they have raided Britannia's shores. Such raiding became easier when the Romans ceased defending the shoreline and retreated to the capital. The Saxons began to migrate en masse when rising sea levels caused frequent salt water flooding, making their lands all but impossible to farm. Instead of raiding further inland, where lived their kin, the Frisians, they set out to settle in another fertile land they were familiar with, namely Britain.

## about this book

This book is a supplement for the Mythic Britain setting for the Mythras rules. It includes an extensive background on the world

of early Saxon Britain, including details of Saxon culture, descriptions of the Saxon lands and important people, and Saxon magic.

We round out this book with a short campaign of four linked scenarios for Saxon characters. These scenarios take place just after the scenarios in *Mythic Britain* and can be played independently.

# Saxon peoples & kingdoms

*Saxons* is a blanket term for a group of Germanic coastal tribes who once raided, and are now settling, in Britain. They share a common culture, ideals, and similar languages. The various Saxon peoples are:

### The Angles

The Angles have settled on the east coast of Britain, in the kingdom of Anglia. Under King Guercha, Anglia is the second most powerful of the Saxon kingdoms.

### The Frisians

The Frisians did not come to Britain but remained in their homeland. They still sail and raid but, more than that, they trade and maintain trade connections with their cousins in Britain.

### The Jutes

The first of the Saxon groups to come to Britain, under the leaders Hengist and Horsa, were the Jutes. They are present across much of the south coast of Britain, although the old Jute kingdoms are now absorbed into Saxon lands.

### The Saxons

The Saxons are the dominant group and give the peoples as a whole their name. The Saxon kingdom of Ceint is the most powerful of the Saxon kingdoms, although it faces challenges from both Anglia and the newcomer Cerdic. Cerdic is, for the present, expanding Ceint lands.

Besides the lands of Anglia and Ceint, Saxon expansion is also occurring in the regions of Mierce and the South Coast. The South Coast has a fringe of Saxon settlement, with further expansion being opposed by the Celtic kingdom of Dumnonia. Mierce is another border region claimed by both Ceint and Anglia, as well as the Celts. The dominant force in Mierce are the Angles.

# Saxon society: war & blood feud

The Saxons value lands, freedom and kin. The key way a Saxon advances in status and wealth is through military success. A warlord (called an ealdorman) holds his men to his banner through a supply of glory, loot and land. Saxon warriors (carls) are free men and not obliged to follow a lord who does not reward them or honour his promises. Unlanded free Saxon warriors are in a state of almost constant war.

A Saxon lord's decisions are made before an assembly of the carls who follow them, who must assent to his decisions. They do this by banging their weapons against their shields. A lord will also hold feasts, essentially celebrations involving as much drink as food. They mark victories, funerals, marriages and religious festivals.

Someone who is wronged by another brings the complaint before an assembly. The lord, if he agrees, gives them permission to right this wrong by pursuing a bloodfeud — a vendetta against the one accused of the crime.

Kin are the most important thing to a Saxon, as they are the only allies one can truly rely upon. In a bloodfeud, kin are allies, are expected to provide warriors to fight in a bloodfeud, or pursue it on behalf of a helpless victim. A bloodfeud is not just a right but an obligation. Not pursuing a bloodfeud indicates an acknowledgement that the wrong was merited.

Bloody death is not the only way a crime can be resolved; the one accused can also pay compensation to the victim in the form of wergeld, which usually takes the form of treasure. But one is not expected to pay wergeld unless forced to do so.

# Structure of Saxon Society

Saxon society is hierarchical, although free men have considerable freedoms and can rise higher in society. At the top are the kings, and their relatives and potential heirs, the *athelings*. The kings hold that they are descended from the gods themselves, although in reality, in the new lands of Britain, one who takes enough power and land and has sufficient following can become a king.

Below the athelings are the Saxon war leaders, the *ealdormen*. Then come those with lands, the *thanes*. The highest status thanes are *King's Thanes*, who receive their lands directly from a king rather than an ealdorman. Then come the *carls*, the free folk of the Saxons. The ealdormen (and even kings), can only rule with the assent of carls in assemblies.

Then come those who are not free and have fewer rights. *Geburs* are peasants, bound to their lands and not permitted to attend assembly. Then there are *thralls*, who are slaves. Both fellow Saxons and conquered Celts can be thralls.

The *laece* (pronounced *leech*) are outside of this heirarchy. They are shamans, who both serve and master the spirits. Although they present themselves as healers, the laece mastery of magic and command of the spirits makes them powerful and dangerous indeed. Although they often serve Saxon kings and ealdorman, laeces are free to serve whichever lord they choose or, for that matter, none. They are feared and respected in equal measure.

### Saxons & Britons

Recent archaeological evidence points heavily towards a high degree of assimilation between Saxons and Britons. It is likely the Saxons were resisted and, if sources like the Anglo Saxon Chronicle and Nennius are to be believed, battles were bloody. However, it makes sense for conquered Britons to have integrated with Saxon conquerors, whether willingly or otherwise, and to have adopted their ways, customs and language. Few invasions are successful without such assimilation, and while the Britons (known as welsh to the Saxons) were no doubt displaced to a large degree, many more became Saxons.

It is therefore highly likely that Britons who have chosen to live with their conquerors are found amongst the carls and, possibly, even the ealdermen. Saxons recognise loyalty and reward it, although such Britons would no doubt need to work doubly hard to gain trust and establish loyalty from born Saxons. An advantageous way of achieving that trust and loyalty is to marry into a Saxon family and produce children that will be raised as Saxons and worship the Saxon gods.

# Names

Most Saxon names are made up of two elements with different meanings. These meanings are often associated with battle or weapons. You can create new Saxon names by combining elements in different ways.

Here are some examples from historic sources. These names are not those of major non-player characters in the setting or famous people from history, so you should feel free to pillage (or recombine) for your own use.

## Female Names

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Aelfgifu | - | "aelf"=elf, "gifu"=gift |
| Aethelflaed | - | "aethel"=noble, "flaed"=beauty |
| Aethellind | - | "aethel"=noble, "lind"=serpent |
| Cyneburg | - | "cyne"=royal, "burg"=fortress |
| Dungifu | - | "dun"=dark, "gifu"=gift |
| Eadgyth | - | "ead"=wealth, "gyth"=battle |
| Ealdgyth | - | "eald"=old, "gyth"=battle |
| Eoforhild | - | "eofor"=boar, "hild"=fight |
| Frithuswith | - | "frith"=peace, "swith"=strong |
| Glaedburg | - | "glaed"=bright, "burg"=fortress |
| Hildraed | - | "hild"=battle, "raed"=counsel |
| Hildeleoma | - | "hilde"=battle, "leoma"=light. |
| | | *Figuratively, this means "sword'* |
| Leofflaed | - | "leof"=beloved, "flaed"=beauty |
| Mildburg | - | "mild"=gentle, "burg"=fortress |
| Mildgyth | - | "mild"=gentle, "gyth"=battle |
| Sunngifu | - | "sunn"=sun, "gifu"=gift |

# male names

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Aelfnoth | - | "aelf"=elf, "noth"=bold |
| Aelfgar | - | "aelf"=elf, "gar"=spear |
| Aesc | - | "ash tree" |
| Aethelwine | - | "aedel"=noble, "wine"=friend |
| Aethelmaer | - | "aedel"=noble, "maer"=famed |
| Beorhtric | - | "beorht"=bright, "ric"=power |
| Cenric | - | "cene"=bold, "ric"=power |
| Ceolmund | - | "coel"=keel, "mund"=protection |
| Cola | - | "charcoal" |
| Cuthbeohrt | - | "cuth"=famed, "beohrt"=bright |
| Cynebeald | - | "cyne"=royal, "beald"=bold |
| Cynefrith | - | "cyne"=royal, "frith"=peace |
| Deorwine | - | "deor"=beloved, "wine"=friend |
| Dunstan | - | "dun"=dark, "stan"=stone |
| Eadgar | | "ead"=wealth, "gar"=spear |
| Eadweard | - | "ead"=wealth, "weard"=guard |
| Eadwig | - | "ead"=wealth, "wig"=war |
| Ealhstan | - | "ealh"=temple, "stan"=stone |
| Eardwulf | - | "eard"=land, "wulf"=wulf |
| Ecgbeohrt | - | "ecg"=edge of a sword, "behrt"=bright |
| Eoforgar | - | "eofor"=boar, "gar"=spear |
| Garheard | - | "gar"=spear, "heard"=brave |
| Heard | | "brave" |
| Hildraed | - | "hild"=fight, "read"=advice |
| Hrothgar | - | "hroth"=famous, "gar"=spear |
| Loefdaeg | - | "leof"=beloved, "daeg"=day |
| Naegling | - | "nail" |
| Osbeorn | - | "os"=god, "beorn"=bear |
| Paega | - | "peak" |
| Saewine | - | "sae"=sea, "wine"=friend |
| Sigeweard | - | "sige"=victory, "weard"=guard |
| Swithwulf | - | "swith"=strong, "wulf"=wolf |
| Wigstan | - | "wig"=war, "stan"=stone |
| Wilfrith | - | "wil"=will, "frith"=peace |
| Wulfric | - | "wulf"=wolf, "ric"=power |

Saxons have no surnames but often carry titles and nicknames besides their main name. There is an element of family naming in that children often have the same or similar sounding first element in their names as their father and almost always the same first letter.

# PRONOUNCING SAXON NAMES

Most consonants in the names in this book are pronounced in the same way as in modern English. The letter "h" is never silent and is sometimes placed before other consonants.

The letter "c" can be pronounced in two ways — either hard, as the letter "k", or softly, similarly to "ch" in modern English. So the word "laece" is pronounced "leech" or "leech-a'. The hard "k" is more common.

The letter "g" usually resembles the modern letter "g" but at the start of a word before an "e" vowel is pronounced similarly to the letter "y'.

Vowels and dipthongs (vowel combinations) are slightly more complex. Modern German is a fair approximation for most of them. The letter "y" is a vowel, and sounds either as the letter "i', or the sound "oo'.

# a note from the author

I grew up on the south coast of England, in a village called Netley Abbey. It is named after the ruins of the abbey there and these ruins were familiar to me as a child. I also grew up with stories of the Saxons and with Cerdic, and was excited by them before I grew excited by Arthurian myth and other parts of history and fantasy.

According to the late medieval historian William Camden, Netley Abbey was the site of Cerdic's battle with the British king Natanleod, where the Saxons defeated the latter's armies and founded the kingdom of Wessex in 508. I always thought it odd that local people - even my school teachers - made little of this profound historical connection. It was only later on that I learned that another Hampshire village, Netley Marsh, was conventionally identified with the site of the battle. It was too late for me; my fascination with the Saxons and with "Dark Ages" history had already formed.

Recently I returned to one of my first historical loves, the Saxons, and pondered in public the possibility of writing a Saxons RPG. The Saxons in most stories are presented as the barbaric enemy in Arthurian literature, or the unfortunate victims of the Vikings or Normans in stories of later times, but there is much more to them than that. The roots of major portions of British culture, and the English language, go back to them. They wrote the epic hero poem *Beowulf*, as good as anything out there in classical literature.

Lawrence Whitaker saw my musings and got in touch to ask if I would consider writing a Saxons book for *Mythic Britain*. I admire *Mythic Britian*, both for its gritty historical feel to Arthurian myth,

and its subtle but mystical view of the British magical landscape — in some ways barely supernatural but in other ways with the magic of it all being pervasive. I jumped at the chance.

This book is the result. I hope you like it.

*Paul Mitchener, September 2016*

# saxon characters

Character creation for Saxon heroes follows the *Mythras* rules, along with the guidelines in the *Mythic Britain* Characters chapter, except as noted here.

## culture and community

For a Saxon character, their culture will be either Saxon, Angle, or Jute, depending on their tribe. These cultures are similar, as described in the first chapter of this book, but there are small differences in customs noted elsewhere.

### homeland/tribe

This can be chosen by the players, chosen by the Game Master, or randomly rolled on the tables provided.

## Religion

Saxons nearly all follow the Saxon Pagan religion. Christian Saxons are very rare, although Christianity is a small possibility for Celts who have come to otherwise embrace the Saxon culture.

Saxons following Celtic paganism are unlikely to still be a part of Saxon culture, as the religion opposes the Saxons on principle.

## cultural skills

These are as described on pages 121 to 122 of *Mythic Britain*. A Fyrdman is a typical Carl warrior.

As well as the combat styles described in *Mythic Britain*, a Saxon character can also learn two other combat styles:
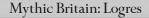
Saxon Noble (Seax, Sword and Shield, Trait: Mounted Combat)

Saxon Hunter (Seax, Spear, Bow, Trait: Skirmishing)

## regions of logres

There are four regions of Logres, as the Celts name the Saxon lands of Britain. All are described in the *Saxon Lands* chapter of

this book. The detail in that chapter may also provide some useful background ideas when considering Passions and a character's Background Event.

It is recommended that all characters start in the same place and are part of the same community. In the adventures later in this book, the characters are initially fighting for Cerdic on the South Coast, although later events take them further afield.

The random element of the Region table is there for those who prefer a more random approach to character creation.

## Random Region

| D100 Roll | Region | Land | Tribe |
|---|---|---|---|
| 01-25 | Ceint | Ceint | Jute |
| 26-35 | The South Coast | The South Shore | Saxon |
| 36-50 | | The Island of Wiht | Jute |
| 51-75 | Anglia | Anglia | Angle |
| 76-88 | Mierce | South Mierce | Saxon or Jute |
| 89-00 | | North Mierce | Angle |

## Social Class

| D100 roll | Class | Wergeld | Money Modifier |
|---|---|---|---|
| 01-10 | Gebur | 50 | 0.5 |
| 11-75 | Carl | 600 | 1 |
| 76-85 | Thane | 1,200 | 2 |
| 86-90 | King's Thane | 3,000 | 4 |
| 91-95 | Ealdorman | 5,000 | 6 |
| 96-00 | Atheling | 10,000 or more | 8 |

Although percentages are provided in the above tables, these do not reflect class proportions in society but rather frequencies in an adventuring band. Certainly fewer than one in 20 Saxons in general are athelings, and geburs are at least as common as carls.

The social classes in Saxon society are detailed in the culture chapter. For convenience, here is a quick summary:

### Thralls

Thralls are slaves. Their lack of freedom makes them unplayable as starting characters in a typical game. Thralldom need not be forever: one can become a thrall when captured in war, or to pay off wergeld, effectively paying for a crime through slavery.

### Geburs

Geburs are the peasants of Saxon society, bound to an area of land, unless special dispensation deems otherwise. They are not warriors and obey slightly different character generation rules to Saxons of higher classes.

A gebur with a talent for magic might be taken in by a laece for training and thus transcend their birth. Otherwise, they are only likely to be a part of an adventuring party by the orders of a Thane or Ealdorman, when they have particular skills to add.

### Carls

Carls are free Saxons; the free warriors, also called fyrdmen, have a say in decisions made by their ealdorman. They are the standard Saxon player characters in *Mythic Britian*.

### Thanes

Thanes are Saxon landowners in charge of an area of land and an extended family including dependents and servants, as well as a few carls. The thane's lands usually host a single hall and eight to ten houses. The carls under a thane's rule are free to leave his service and seek employment elsewhere or can become thanes in their own right as a reward.

### King's Thanes

A king's thane receives rights as a thane directly from a king, rather than a greater thane or an ealdorman. A king's thane has jurisdiction over several lesser thanes. An ordinary thane may also be raised to a king's thane for loyalty and distinguished services.

### Ealdormen

An ealdorman is a leader of a warband, a Saxon noble, second only to kings and more powerful ealdormen. This is generally the highest rank a Saxon warrior can aspire to.