The Origins of the English Language

Although Britain existed at least 1500 years before the Roman Conquest, we have very little sources left.

The Celtic substratum was not destroyed by the Romans: indeed, it remained, assimilated and adapted by the new ruler.

Julius Caesar did his first expedition in 55 BC, and went back again the year after.

For a while, Rome was not interested in Britain, especially because of internal problem and the change from being a Republic to an Empire.

Augustus, the first Roman Emperor, was defeated in Germany in AD 9: it was such a disaster that expeditions to Britain were stopped. But severe consequences were to come for the Roman Empire.

The emperor Claudius went to Britain in AD 43. The invasion of south and east of England was completed four years later.

In AD 50 we had the foundation of *Londinum* as a supply port.

Emperor Hadrian visited Britain in person in 122. He ordered the construction of a wall in the north of England (Newcastle-upon-Tyne), which was considered the extreme point of expansion.

A state of mutual toleration between Rome and the Britons was pretty satisfactory: Rome did not force any population to accept their own culture. But an assimilation was always possible, especially for religion.

Roman occupation in Britain ended in 420-30. The old Roman order crumbled under pressure from the new invaders, the Saxons, a Germanic illiterate population that conquered England in 450. The original Celtic population resisted, directed by a prince who claimed imperial authority. He was later associated with the mythological fabled King Arthur. Eventually,

A monk named Bede, who lived in a Northumbrian monastery, wrote the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* in 731. After this, we do not have any surviving manuscripts of Anglo-Saxon poetry until the year 1000 (*Beowulf*, an epic poem).

The scarcity of manuscripts is mainly due to the violent raids which were made by the barbarian warriors all along the Eastern coast of England.

A major event caused a dramatic cultural change: on 14 October 1066, the English and the Norman armies met somewhere near Hastings, on the coast of the English Channel. King Harold of Wessex was killed by the Duke William of Normandy, who was later consecrated king and always remembered as William the Conqueror. From that moment, English was replaced by French. Old words were mostly distorted by French tongue and Latinate scribes.