

The Anglo-Saxons

by Rob John

1. The Anglo-Saxons arrive

FX: *Music. Waves breaking on a shingle beach*

Narrator: **England. Sixteen hundred years ago. A beach on the East coast. A man and a girl have seen something, a boat, coming their way.**

Girl: Who are they Father?

Man: I don't know.

Girl: Are they Britons like us?

Man: I don't think so. Their boat looks strange. It's too long to be one of ours.

Girl: Look Father. There's another one. Two boats.

Man: No. Not two. Look further out; three...four...five. And see, there. More. Lots more.

Girl: Father - I'm frightened.

Narrator: **They don't know it, but the girl and her father are looking at visitors from across the sea. People who will change Britain forever. People we call The Anglo-Saxons.**

Sixteen hundred years ago the Anglo-Saxons started coming across the sea to Britain from countries we now call Denmark, the Netherlands and Germany.

At first they were just raiders; they stole valuable possessions from the Britons and then went home.

But soon the invaders became settlers. They brought their families, they built farms and villages. These Anglo-Saxons had come to stay.

FX: A horse walking, dog barking etc, as a thane returns to his village home at evening.

Narrator: Two hundred years later: The Anglo-Saxons now rule Britain. An Anglo-Saxon lord - a thane - is returning home to his wife and family.

FX: Fire in the hearth.

Wife: I was worried; you've been away for days.

Thane: It was a long way.

Wife: Sit. I'll bring you food.

Thane: Has all been well?

Wife: The children are fine, the crops are ripening. No wolves have attacked the sheep. All is well. Now...tell me of the meeting.

Thane: The witan was held two nights ago.

Wife: Tell me.

Thane: I'm tired. Tomorrow.

Wife: Were you allowed to enter the Great Hall? Were all the other thanes there?

Thane: I need to sleep.

Wife: Did you see the king?

Thane: Later.

Wife: Tell me now. I want to hear everything.

Thane: Alright...Yes, I entered the Great Hall. Yes, all the thanes of the kingdom were there.

Wife: Is the hall big?

Thane: Huge. Twenty men standing on each other's shoulders wouldn't reach the ceiling. The walls are hung with furs and tapestries – the finest. And swords and shields... The tables stretch the entire length of the hall.

Wife: And the king?

Thane: The king sat at the highest table, surrounded by his advisors. The thanes sat down the sides.

Wife: Was there a great feast?

Thane: Meat was roasting on two huge fires. The king's servants poured horns of mead. Every man ate and drank his fill.

Wife: And...the witan?

Thane: The next day the King held his witan and we found out why he wanted us there; we are to prepare ourselves for battle.

Wife: A battle?

Thane: The kingdom to the north wants to take our land. We're going to attack them before they attack us. I must leave in three days.

Wife: You? Why do you have to go?

Thane: It's my duty as a thane. If the king asks me to fight then I must fight.

Wife: No, I don't want you to go. There is work to be done here. Harvest is coming. Who'll tell the servants what to do?

Thane: You will. You'll be in charge.

Wife: They won't listen to me!

Thane: They *will* listen. Anyway, I won't be away for long. This is just a brief quarrel between kings. It'll be over in no time.

Wife: You don't know that. Please...

Thane: I have no choice. The King calls me and I must go. If I have to fight then I will fight.

Wife: But you're not a fighter.

Thane: Really?

Wife: Once perhaps, but not any more. Now we are a farmers...
...landowners.

Thane: And why are we landowners? Why do we have a farm and fields and animals? Why do we have servants and live in this place? Because the king gave it all to us! So we serve the King. And when he calls us to battle, we do not argue. We pick up our weapons and fight, to the death if we have to.

Narrator: **For the next three hundred years the five main Anglo-Saxon kingdoms - East Anglia, Mercia, Kent, Northumbria and Wessex - became stronger and richer. Sometimes they quarrelled and fought battles against each other... but they also built castles and towns and farmed the fertile soil of England.**

But then, in 873, new ships appeared sailing towards the English coast - fierce invaders from the north. The Vikings.

FX: *Waves breaking. Music.*