

Britons are still Angles, Saxons and Celts

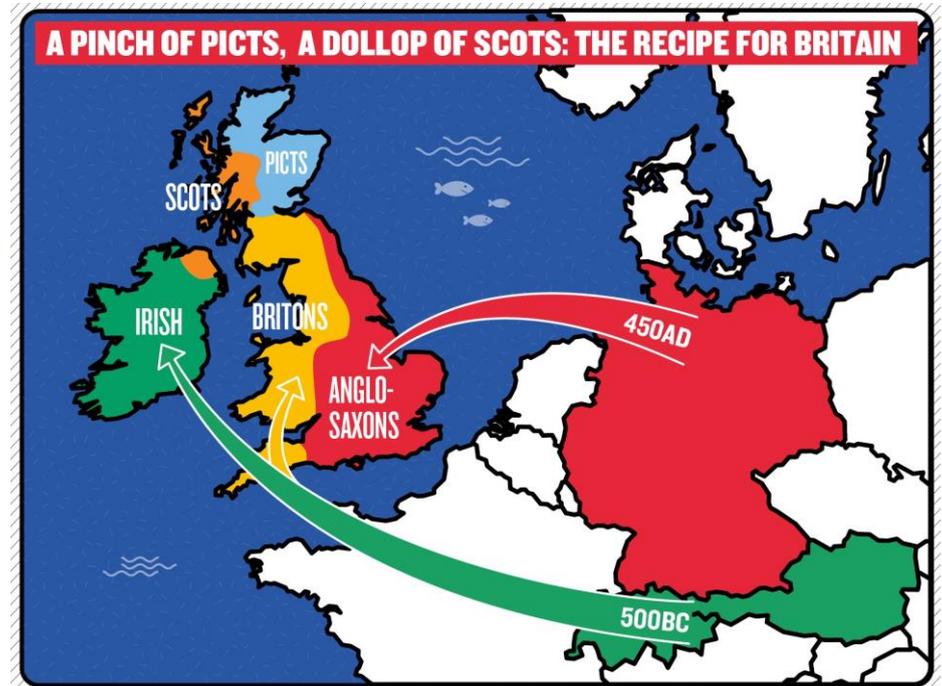
A genetic study has found that British people still live in the same tribal kingdoms they did 1400 years ago. Is Britain merely a mixture of distinct regions, or is it one complete country?



We are used to thinking of Britons as one homogeneous people, but an astonishing study has found that genetic differences between different regions of the UK are far greater than originally thought. The Oxford University research declared that we are still living in the same 'tribes' as we were in 600AD.

The study surveyed the DNA of 2,039 people from rural areas of the UK whose four grandparents were all born within 80km of each other. As a quarter of our genome comes from each of our grandparents, this was essentially a study into people in the late 19th century, before the mass internal migration caused by the industrial revolution. The results showed that the British population has remained largely the same for centuries.

In AD600 Britain had just experienced the change that largely shapes the country today: the Anglo-Saxon invasion. The Anglo-Saxons colonised vast areas



of central and southern England, and were dominant in coastal areas right up to Edinburgh. So the genetic make-up of people from counties like Norfolk, Lincolnshire and Sussex has remained Saxon. In contrast, neither the Romans nor the Vikings left a significant genetic impact on Britain.

Further west, people have Celtic DNA. People from Devon and Cornwall are genetically Celtic, as are those from Wales, the north-west and Scotland. The study also showed significant genetic differences between people from the two ancient Welsh kingdoms, Dyfed (in the south-west) and Gwynedd (in the north-west). There was also a striking correlation between the inhabitants of Elmet, a Briton stronghold in West Yorkshire in the Dark Ages, and genetic characteristics in that area.

What the results emphasise is just how varied different regions of Britain are. Instead of being 'one nation', we are a

patchwork of different tribes and communities who, until recently, very rarely mixed.

Who do you think you are?

This is a fascinating lesson for humanity. It shows that, far from humans being divided by country, the real divisions are much more local. Until it became easier to travel across Britain, north and south, east and west, Saxon and Celt had very little to do with each other. Genetically, this remains largely the case. Perhaps we should stop thinking of Brits as being one people and see that we have always been a multiethnic nation.

Yet interesting as genetics are, some say, they do not make a nation. What unites us is far more important than the genetic differences that divide us. We share a common language and a universal legal system. We tend to share cultural values. What these findings teach us is how great an achievement it was to combine such different people into one country.

Q & A

Q Does this mean that people look different in various parts of Britain?

A Very slightly, yes. While the 20th century has seen a lot of internal and external migration in England, there are still physical characteristics that are particular to certain regions. For example, northerners are more

likely to have blond hair than southerners, while Scotland has a higher proportion of redheads than anywhere else in the world.

Q What is DNA, and why is it important?

A DNA stands for deoxyribonucleic acid and is a molecule that contains the genetic instructions used in the development of all living creatures. We inherit DNA from our parents. Its discovery was a huge moment

for science. For example, some strands of DNA contain genes that trigger certain diseases.



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READING HOMEWORK

1. What were the main findings of the research carried out by Oxford University?

2. Which country in the world do you think is most similar to the United Kingdom? Why?
