

# Early Britons in Cosgrove

## The Catuvellauni

When the Romans first came to Britain under Julius Caesar in 55 BC there were already tribes living there who had divided territories and recognised areas which could be mapped out.



The Catuvellauni were probably a Belgic tribe from the North Sea or Baltics, part of the third wave of Celtic settlers in Britain in the second century BC. They may have been related to the Catalauni, a Belgic tribe of Gaul.

The Catuvellauni lived in the modern counties of Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire and southern Cambridgeshire. Their territory also probably included tribes in what is today Buckinghamshire and parts of Oxfordshire. The tribal name possibly means 'good in battle'.

Cassivellaunus, British war leader in 55 BC, is the first British individual known to history. He appears in Julius Caesar's *Commentarii de Bello Gallico*, as commander of British warriors opposing Caesar's second invasion of Britain. Caesar does not mention Cassivellaunus's tribe, but his territory, north of the River Thames, corresponds with that of the Catuvellauni at the time of the later

invasion under Claudius.

Cassivellaunus had been at constant war with other British tribes, and had overthrown the king of the Trinovantes, the most powerful tribe in Britain at the time. Despite Cassivellaunus's harrying tactics, designed to prevent Caesar's army from foraging and plundering for food, Caesar advanced to the Thames. The only fordable point was defended and fortified with sharp stakes, but the Romans managed to cross it. Cassivellaunus dismissed most of his army and resorted to guerilla tactics, relying on his knowledge of the territory and the speed of his chariots.

Five British tribes, the Cenimagni, the Segontiaci, the Ancalites, the Bibroci and the Cassi, surrendered to Caesar and revealed the location of Cassivellaunus's stronghold, thought to be at Wheathampstead, which Caesar put under siege.<sup>[2]</sup> Cassivellaunus managed to get a message to the four kings of Kent, Cingetorix, Carvilius, Taximagulus and Segovax, to gather their forces and attack the Roman camp on the coast, but the Romans defended themselves successfully. On hearing of the defeat and the devastation of his territories, Cassivellaunus surrendered. Terms were mediated, hostages were given and a tribute agreed. Cassivellaunus undertook not to wage war against him. All this achieved, Caesar returned to Gaul and Roman legions did not return to Britain for another 97 years.

Around 30 BC, most of what later became Northamptonshire became part of the territory of the Catuvellauni, the Northamptonshire area forming their most northerly possession. Their first known

king was Tasciovanus, who is known from the coins he minted with his name on them at around 20 BC. He founded a royal and ritual centre at Verulamium, modern St Albans in about 10 AD.

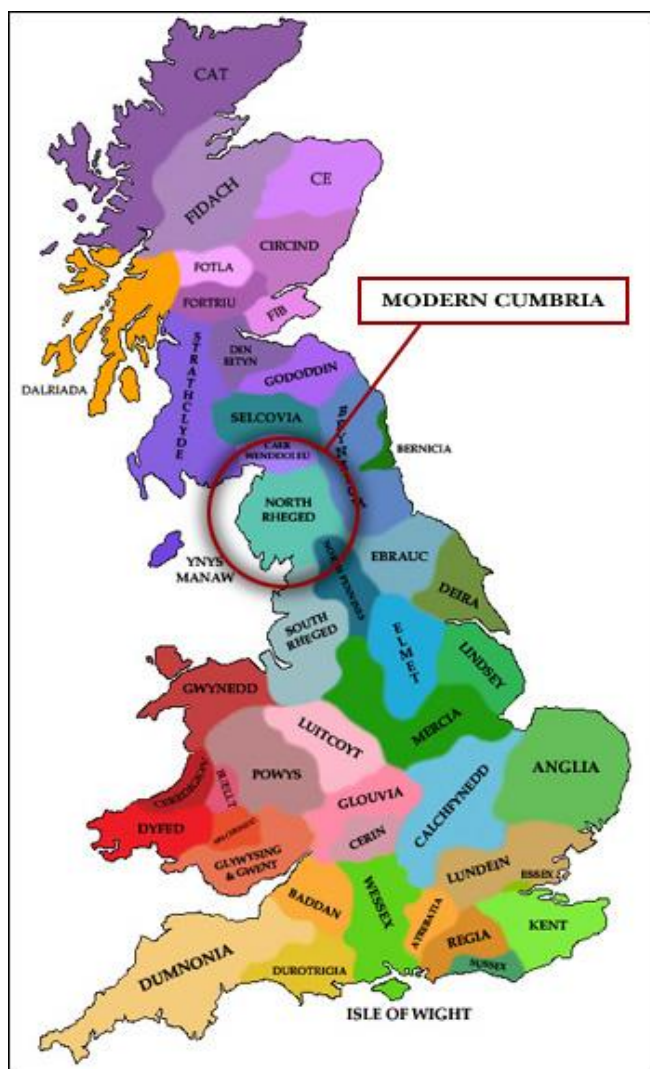
They had been using coins for at least a century, adopted the same way of burying the dead as was practised in northern France, and ate and dressed in ways more common in France than other parts of Britain. Tasciovanus' son, who succeeded him, was the famous Cymbeline, followed around 35 AD by his equally well known son Caratacus, who was one of the tribal kings most active in the resistance to the Romans invading in 43 AD.

By around 50 AD St Albans was established as Verulamium, a Roman town. The ancient trackway alongside it was developed and paved by the Romans and became Watling Street, running up beside Cosgrove towards Holyhead.

At around 60 AD Boudicca was famously defeated by the Romans at the battle of Watling Street, the site of which is claimed by some to be at Cuttle Mill, Paulerspury, just a few miles northwest of Cosgrove.

In the late fourth century or early fifth century, following the decline of Roman administration in Britain the heartland of the Catuvellauni territory re-emerged as the British kingdom of Cynwidiion.

## Calchfynedd (Cynwidiion)



Calchfynedd is a British kingdom mentioned in old Welsh poems. Historians don't know much about it. There is a faint tradition that Dunstable & Northampton were its most important towns and it is thought that it roughly covered Northamptonshire, Huntingdonshire, Bedfordshire, North Buckinghamshire and South Oxfordshire.

The name is pronounced 'Calk-vineth'. It means 'Chalk Mountains' which refers to the Chiltern Hills. There was a cathedral at Norton (in Northamptonshire), 20 miles from Cosgrove, where the great Welsh saint, Cadog, was bishop and which was called Bannaventa. It may have been where St Patrick was born.

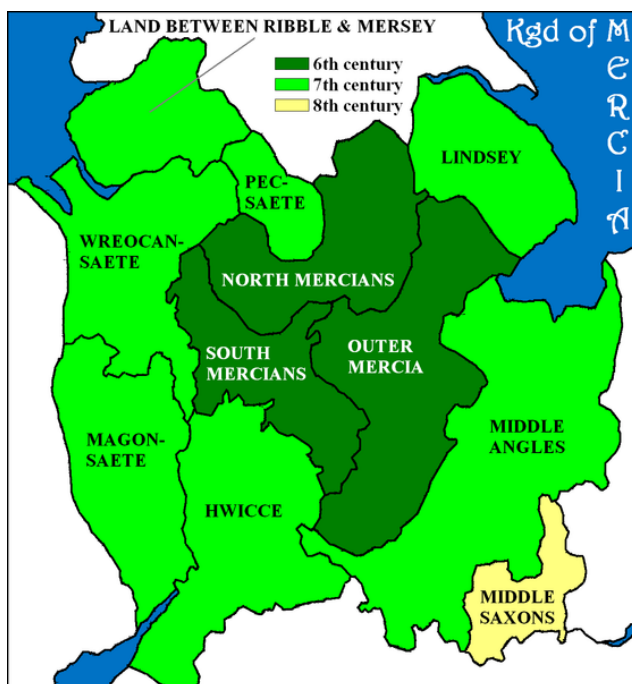
In the early 6th century, the region was probably taken over by a prince named Cynwyd (hence Cynwidiion) and his band of warriors. His cousins had thrown him out of his homeland in the Pennine Hills.

In 571 AD The Britons in the area of Biedcanford (possibly Bedford, near Luton) were defeated by Cuthwulf of the West Seaxe. The Saxons had come from Northern Germany and had begun to settle in Britain around 441 AD, having made raids along the coast since the collapse of Roman rule.

Meanwhile the Angles broke into the Midlands from East Anglia and the Wash early in the 6th century, from the Baltic coast of Germany. Their territory was centred in modern Leicestershire and East Staffordshire, but probably extended as far as the Cambridgeshire uplands and the Chilterns, including Calchfynedd and the Cosgrove area.

## Mercia

The Mercians moved south to take over Calchfynedd late in the 6th century. They called the southern part of the kingdom 'Chilternset'.



Over the next two centuries the Mercians extended their power over what was to be the Midlands.

The ruling family was that of Penda, "a most warlike man of the royal race of the Mercians" and his descendants, including Aethelbald and Offa. The Mercians fought off challenges from all neighbouring territories until the 8th century.

The Middle Anglian territory remained the political and ecclesiastical centre of wider Mercia throughout its existence.

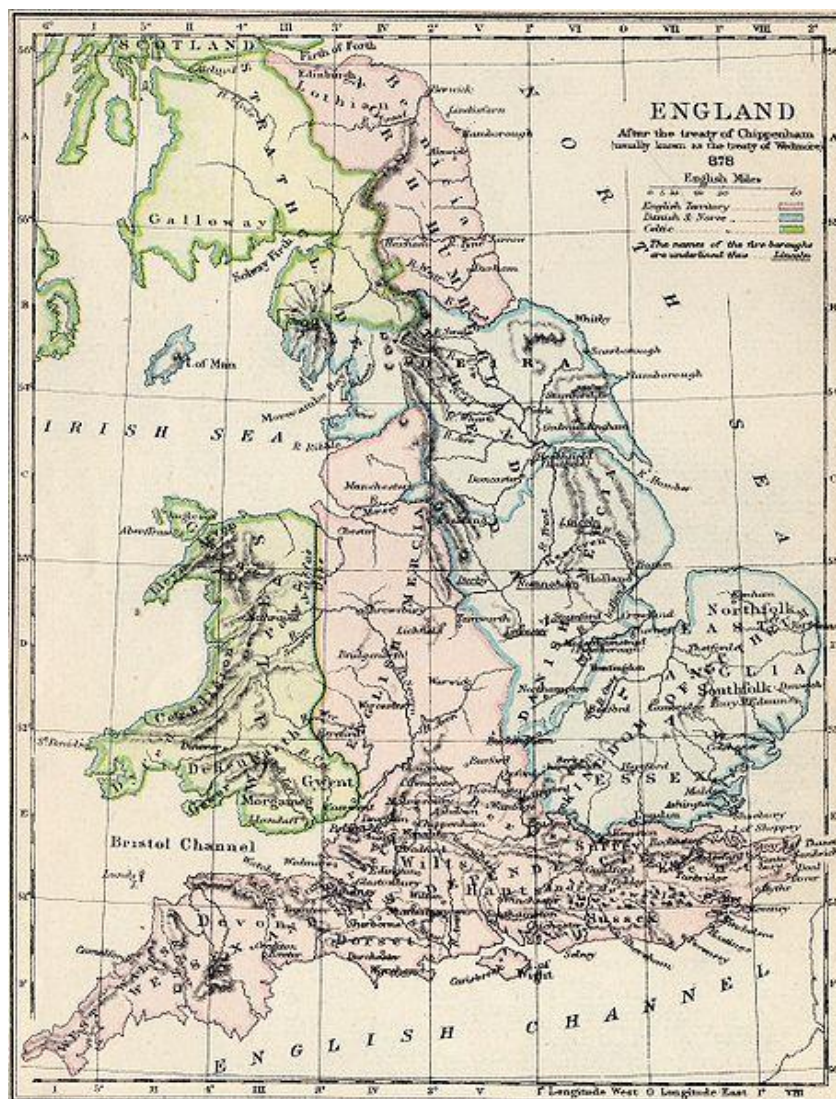


## Anglo Saxons

Early in the ninth century the West Saxons from Wessex began to battle for control of the area which included Cosgrove. By 830 AD Mercia was still fairly independent but Wessex was clearly the dominant power in what was becoming England.

From 858 AD four brothers from Wessex ruled most of England. The oldest three were Æthelbald, Æthelbert and Æthelred, who each have their own stories. However, an army of Danes - the "Great Heathen Army" landed in East Anglia in 865 AD. In 868, the youngest brother, Alfred, (The Great) is recorded as fighting beside Æthelred in an unsuccessful attempt to keep the Great Heathen Army out of Mercia.<sup>[5]</sup> 871 AD has been called "Alfred's year of battles", and in April, when Æthelred died, Alfred became King of Wessex and controlled Mercia and the Cosgrove locality.

## The Danes



Alfred was beset by attacks from the Danes and was forced to pay them off and make agreements with them to maintain peace. Under a new leader, Guthrum, the Danes gained land and power until in 878 AD an agreement was made at Wedmore in Somerset, when Guthrum was baptised and informally became Alfred's "spiritual son". Later, in 879 or 880 AD this treaty was formalised, Guthrum took control of East Mercia to the north of the River Ouse, and the Danelaw came into existence, including the village of Cosgrove.

This led to a period of relative peace between Guthrum's Danes and Alfred's Anglo Saxons, until 888 AD when

Guthrum died. The Danes began renewed attacks at different parts of the English coast, and Alfred and his son Edward The Elder constantly moved around the country warding them off.

Despite continual need for battles, Alfred developed laws and systems for religion, defence and education that still remain a part of England's heritage.

When Alfred died in 899 AD his son, Edward the Elder, became King of Wessex despite other challengers. In the next twenty years he and his sister Aethelflaed, the Lady of Mercia, waged war on the Danes and Edward is said to have held Stony Stratford against the Danes in 917 AD. However, the following year, when Aethelflaed died, Edward took control of Mercia absolutely. Later in 921 AD he was able to seize Towcester back from the Danes and constructed a fort there to defend it.



Edward's descendants continued to rule the Anglo Saxon sector of England in the face of continual pressure from the Danes. At times, hostages and Danegeld were used to buy peace. Cosgrove, right on the edge of Danelaw, must have seen turbulent times in the succession of Anglo Saxon rulers.



Northamptonshire was conquered again in 940, this time by the Vikings of York, who devastated the area, only for the county to be retaken by the English in 942. Consequently, it is one of the few counties in England to have both Saxon and Danish town-names and settlements.

In 1016 AD Cnut, a king of Denmark, Norway, and parts of Sweden, gained control of a unified kingdom of England. Cnut ruled England for almost twenty years. The protection he lent against Viking raiders – many of them under his command – restored prosperity. Cnut was generally remembered as a wise and successful king of England, although this

view may in part be attributable to his good treatment of the Church, keeper of the historic record.

The house of Wessex reigned again in 1042 AD as Edward the Confessor was brought out of exile in Normandy and made a treaty with Harthacnut, his half-brother, Cnut's son. The succession continued to be disputed in the following years and Northampton was the centre of a meeting in October 10165 AD between Edward and Tostig and Harold Godwinson who each had differing claims. In the midst of this uncertainty Edward died in January 1066.

Harold Godwinson succeeded to the throne of England. However, Harald Hardrada, King of Norway, continued to attack and on September 28<sup>th</sup> William of Normandy landed on the south coast in preparation for battle, which eventually came about on October 14<sup>th</sup> 1066.

During the next twenty years Northamptonshire, including Cosgrove, entered the medieval age.