

Dr Andrew R Glover



**The Music and ‘Scopic’
Elements of our Anglo-
Saxon Ancestors.**

An Essay

Jaguar Press

**The Music and
'Scopic'
(Bardic/Skaldic)
Elements of our
Anglo-Saxon
Ancestors.**

An Essay

by Dr Andrew R Glover

© Copyright ARGlover 2013

Jaguar Press, Birmingham, UK

First published 2014

The Music and ‘Scopic’ (Bardic/Skaldic) Elements of our Anglo-Saxon Ancestors.

By Dr A.R.Glover

© Copyright ARGlover 2013

As dawn breaks over yet another cold December morning two days before the great Winter Solstice and the beginning day of the 12 days of Yuletide it has made me wonder how our ancestors used to cope with the long dark terrifying nights of silence, storms and snow in a time when the world was viewed very differently to the way it is today. A world of Norse Gods, giants, dwarves, trolls, elves, and dark forces lurking in a world they could not control or even try to comprehend and guard against. Today science has explained many of the mysteries of nature and the world around us, as well as much of space, and has given us the capabilities to close off the natural harsh world outside and feel a part of a civilisation that is not just national but now global through the world of technological medias. We are able to shut a front door made in Germany and lock it with a key and lock made in China with steel supplied from India and watch a TV series made in America on a TV system made in Japan while eating a Thai take-away meal, and see people living and dying in Africa from famine or war from guns made in Russia that were diverted there instead of the death fields Afghanistan that were brokered by arms dealers in France to fight the invading armies of Britain and America soldiers..... and so on and so on. You get the idea!

Think of a world without instant communication, of no electricity or running water, of a world that lived in tiny villages with your food in the local fields and the livestock for your dinner either sharing your home or out in the yard or fields. A world where if you had been to the local sizeable town ten miles away you were considered travelled. A world of superstition and communal politics, a place of a simple but hard life to survive and live. A place where your entertainment was made by you or the 'scop' in your community, or by a travelling storyteller and musician. So step back 13 hundred years and try to think of what our ancestors, who spoke the founding basis of our language, did for entertainment in a world where most never left their surrounds of more than a few short miles. Only the Housecarls and the Thegns knew the country outside their local environs and that for the reason of taxation gathering or levies and war. Our perception is that of the wild formidable hairy and warlike Vikingar. Stuffed with meats and drunk to the point of passing out on strong honeyed mead, listening to their skalds/scops tell tales of glorious fights that some of them never returned from against the next tribe who they have always hated, usually for no apparent reason, and will never trust. Well, to a point this is the truth, the warriors did do all this, and probably more besides, but not all the time or every night. They were also caring, loyal, religious, artisans and skilled craftsmen who loved trading and fine arts. Anglo-Saxon society of which we are/were the predominant race in Britain from the late 5th century had a social set up that was different to the one we now have and each tribe or community did have its social strata's that had hierarchies with the peasant at the bottom rising to the local earl or king under which the Housecarls (*professional fighting men*) played an important role followed by the freemen and farmers of the area. They in turn had slaves captured in battle to help them work the land but each man was free to a lesser or greater degree owing fealty to the local lord. A farmer farmed his own land and paid a small levy to his local lord, earl or thegn. They were independently minded and were contracted to the local land owner/earl for a few weeks of the year to fight as part of their lords' army (fyrd) when required to. So where did the "scop" (pro' shop) bard/skald, who acted not just as story teller and song smith but also as the societies' history keeper in a time of little literacy amongst the common folk, where did they fit in to the warrior farmer society? They were not seen as outcasts, scroungers, weirdo's or nuisances and freeloaders as much of society sees musicians today, but were exalted as an integral part of the society, as story telling entertainers, comedians, singers of songs, makers of songs, keepers of the societies histories, laws, ways and lore of the people amongst whom they had grown up and lived. They played a central role within the world around them. Some were seen as witches who through their arts were in communion with the other world, the world of spirits and dark forces for good and bad. The Anglo-Saxon perception of a witch was very different to that cultivated by the Norman French church and successive eras after. They along with the spiritual wandering men made up the world of the Anglo-Saxons pre and post Christian eras.

Their role could be seen not only to entertain but also to connect and act as a bridge between the physical world and sometimes the spiritual through their music and through

the skill of telling the great epic tales and poems of their world and society as well as the Norse legends, until Christianity banned them from being heard for being heretical.

Music was seen by our early Anglo-Saxon forefather settlers as something from another world or realm, and could be 'magic' in itself or imbued with magical properties. In this era magic was not seen as something that was evil as it was from the time of the Norman Conquest onwards, but could be good or malevolent due to nature and the world around it. The Angles and Saxons were much more attuned to the natural world around them than we have ever been, enclosed in our brick shells and metal vehicles. Theirs was a world of the full forces of nature be they beautiful, ugly, calm or destructive. Music had the power to alter mental states, to create moods in sound and to calm or cajole or to bolster warriors and people at important points in the individuals and societies times. It could be invoked and be full of special magic in the very existence of the sound. The sound-world was a magical place to dwell and reside, it was like smoke, something physical and yet intangibly unobtainable in its physical presence, and as Shakespeare was to write in the tempest many centuries later:

"Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises, sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not. Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments will hum about mine ears, and sometimes voices that if I then had waked after long sleep will make me sleep again:"

It was believed that music could heal the spiritual problems and physically alter the world and the people around it. In a book written by Charles W. Whistler in 1895; *"King Olaf's Kinsman: A Story of the Last Saxon Struggle against the Danes in the Days of Ironside and Cnut"* the main hero Redwald and his Norwegian kinsman King Olaf (later to become in reality 'Saint Olaf of Norway') are saved from being murdered by a group of Danes after a battle by the Kings bard Ottar who boards a boat on a lake and appears in a white ghostly cloak singing a strange almost incantational song in a strange unknown language. The power of the strange song and the image scatter the Danes into the forest. He later in the story; the book is based on the factual happenings and characters of the 1014-16 Danish wars; is unable to ever create that same sound or song again, even though asked, and puts it down to the power of a friendly spirit of Redwald's people who spoke through the magic of music. The power of music was something the Anglo-Saxons admired and wholeheartedly accepted and expected to have in their lives. To a lesser extent we can perceive how they must have felt when a piece of music stirs us to the point of bringing goosebumps to our skin, transports us away from the physical world and leaves us in a different mood than we were in at the beginning of the music. The "magic" still exists if we were to open ourselves to it and accept its inherent powers.

Music was also seen as a form of shamanistic ritual medicine full of healing and goodness. Very much in the way it was seen, and still is, amongst the North American Indians or certain parts of Africa and particular African tribes to this day. A truly great scop was believed to be able to control, through the skills of the music, the spirits that could heal and

harm. More often than not they were believed to be able to drive away evil wights and spirits that had entered people and were making them do evil or just making them feel ill. The power of the music and the sounds created by the instruments could draw out the poison and infection that had been placed in the body by the evil doing entities of the Anglo-Saxon's world, and belief in the spirit worlds that co-existed around them to do the body of a person harm. The music then once it had done its work could begin to heal the ills left by the maladies of the wights or malevolent elves. This belief of the power of music as healer existed well into the Christian era, whence the hierarchies of the church frowned upon it as being paganist but did not convincingly try and stop it as it was understood very well to be partly a religious truth and something that was beyond the physical control of the church, and thus music was allowed the freedom to do its medicinal work at whatever level of society it was required. To a certain extent this was with church approval and in later medieval times with active church encouragement as a gift from God to man as a healing source to be celebrated and encouraged. To this day we still believe, and there is quite a bit of evidence backing this up, of the healing power of music and sound. We are very happy to have quiet calming music when feeling anxious, or when we go to the dentist have the radio or CD on in the background with soothing music. If we are feeling on edge and angry, or in a joyous buoyant mood, we are happy to have loud pulsating aggressive or happy music enhancing our emotions as a foil or focus for the emotions to be physically channelled, felt or seen. We have music therapists who use the music they perform as healing processes for ill or mentally ill clients. In this method of usage we are following our Anglo-Saxon ancestors and a long line of other races in believing in the restorative powers of music as a healing force. Australian Aboriginals, African 'Witch' doctors and American Indian 'Shamans' all use music as part of their healing rituals for the very power of the music and its resonating sounds. For the Angles and Saxons this would have been seen as a type of 'good' magic, or 'white' magic, that only certain people in the society they lived in could perform or control. It was channelled from another layer of existence; pre Christian, from the god Woden's love and thirst for knowledge, and its gathering and usage to benefit mankind, and after Paganism, in Christianity from God as a gift to mankind, and then used for the good of the community by that one person, the 'scop', who became a healer as well as his normal roles in the society as retainer and teller of the arts and history.

There is little evidence to point to the fact that 'scops' were anything other than male. Why this is the case is hard to say or understood as in the Britannic and Celtic areas of Britain this was not always the case. There are instances such as in Beowulf when Wealhpeow, King Hroðgar's wife, takes the lyre and sings a lay, but this was a normal thing among the Scandinavian races of which the Anglo Saxons were counted, the lyre was passed around so that everyone sang or played a piece immaterial of sex or age. Even in the life story of Cædmon, the Venerable Bede gives a tale that is anecdotal of Cædmon taking his leave of the hall of the monastery refectory before the harp arrived with him as he said he could not sing or play. That night a dream sent to him by God of him singing a certain melody and words

about the Creation haunted his sleep. He then performed the song the following day to Abbess Hild who was so impressed she had him educated and asked him for more of the same ideas. Cædmon's Hymn has become well known from the words amongst Anglo-Saxon literature although the music is now long lost. For the harp or lyre to be passed amongst the personages of a hall was a standard thing to happen up to and after the Conquest to but was soon stopped by the Bishops as being un-pious and by the 1250's had been wiped out of the monasteries completely. The reason was that many of the old pre Christian epic tales and poems were being told in the manner of the old mead halls with scopic performances for purely entertainment reasons instead of the gospels, and as most of the Bishops and clergy after 1066 were Norman French it was stated that it was un-pious and blasphemous, but was yet another way of subjugating the Anglo Saxon peoples and their culture to the new land lords ways. Thankfully many of the tales, poems and words from the songs were written down, but without the music. Unfortunately many of these were lost over time and destroyed in the Reformation of the 16th century, the worst tragedy of all was when the large collection of Anglo-Saxon literature gathered by Robert Bruce Cotton was burnt in a fire at the Cotton Library at Ashburnham House in 1731. Only a fraction of the then extant collection survived and so the scripts got even smaller in number until we know and possess so little of the once vast language and literative world of these ancestors, and even less of their music and performance styles. The one thing we can be certain about is that the role of 'scop' always appears to have fallen to that of a man, whether spiritual, as in Bede's time or earlier with Cædmon's case, or temporal as was the norm pre the Norman Conquest. Women were after 1066 seen as too delicate and 'inferior' to partake in songs and instrumental playing unlike in the time of the Anglo Saxon Kings and lords where there was more equality of the sexes for the betterment of their society. The Norman French attitudes were alien to the Anglo-Saxons who were more liberal and egalitarian in their social ways. The Normans were so socially class ridden and sexually oppressive of females that the Angles and Saxons must have felt strangers in their own lands with such oppression and subjugation of basic freedoms and thoughts towards each other.

Even though the Anglo-Saxon world was destroyed and replaced by a tyrannical society of despots as leaders, the Normans themselves were artistically very advanced and during their tenure at the top of the social scale in England their counterparts back in the Dukedom of Normandy were developing much of the foundations of music that we today take for granted. Normandy was the site of several important developments in the history of music in the 11th century. Fécamp Abbey and Saint-Evroul Abbey were very important centres of musical education and production. At Fécamp, under two Italian abbots, William of Volpiano and John of Ravenna, the system of denoting notes by letters (A,B,C,D,E,F,G) was developed and taught. It is still the most common form of pitch representation in English, German and Scandinavian speaking countries today. As most Latin countries use the solfage system to denote the pitches the Normans developed the A,B,C,D,E,F,G note name system that we use to this day. Also at Fécamp, the musical staff, around which neumes were oriented, was first

developed and taught in the 11th century. The earliest neumes were inflective marks which indicated the general shape, but not necessarily the exact pitch notes or rhythms to be sung or played. This appears to have been developed from the music found in the musical scores of the Byzantine Empires middle period:

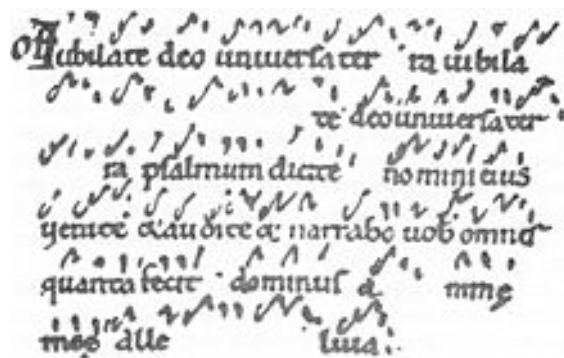
<http://www.unicode.org/charts/PDF/U1D000.pdf>

Byzantine musical neumes link.

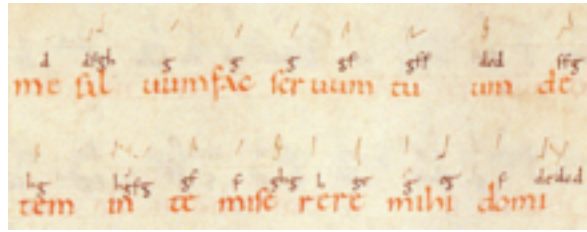


A piece of Byzantine musical script with the use of neumes above the text

Later developments included the use of heightened neumes which showed the relative pitches between neumes:



Un-heightened Neumes, circa 10th century



Digraphic neumes in an 11th-century manuscript from Dijon.

Letter names for individual notes in the neume are provided

Later still the creation of a four-line musical staff that identified particular pitches begun to be used. Neumes do not generally indicate the rhythm to be used, but additional symbols were sometimes juxtaposed with neumes to indicate changes in articulation, duration, or tempo. Neumatic notation was later used in medieval music to indicate certain patterns of rhythm called rhythmic modes, and this eventually evolved into modern musical notation:



A sample of Kyrie Eléison XI (Orbis Factor) from

the Liber Usualis. circa 11th century

Another fine example in full manuscript:



"Gaudeamus omnes," from the Graduale Aboense, was scripted

using square notation. This is an example of heightened neumes where pitch and rhythm can be read

Neumatic notation remains standard in modern editions of plainchant used in some churches.

If Anglo-Saxon music had any form of musical notation before the Norman Invasion then it was unfortunately destroyed or abandoned extremely quickly, but there is no evidence of such a system in existence and so was yet another reason for the loss of the music from this period outside of the ecclesiastical centres.

The Instruments

The instruments were limited in scope and number compared with today, or even the last 600 years, but what we do know of them comes mainly from grave burials of high lords or kings such as King Redwald's at Sutton Hoo, in Suffolk. Some things may be gleaned by studying the few written texts that have survived such as the epic tale that is known as 'Beowulf', it is a tale of our ancestors in the old lands, and also by studying the illuminated manuscripts of this period; especially the borders and headings.



The Vespasian Psalter, David playing his Lyre with other musicians

playing horns and bells or finger cymbals.

AD 725-750 formerly from the Cotton Library, now The British Library

These particularly are a wealth of information on instruments and playing positions and performance characters of the time. We do however have to be careful in this matter as the illuminations can exaggerate rather than enlighten. We can divide the grouping of instruments into the known and most common and those that were known and little used and the speculative instruments that were known in the Viking world but not necessarily used in England of the time. We know of four main instruments that would have been used in the great halls or occasionally in battle or the festivities and religious rites pre and post Christian eras of these ancestors. There are others but these are much less relevant or are in some cases speculative as to whether they were known in England at this time. The four are:

1. The Anglo-Saxon Lyre (Old English: *lyre, hearpe*)
2. The Bone Flute (Old English: *hwistle, pipe, sangpipe*)
3. Bullroarer
4. Horn (Old English: *blaedhorn, blaeshorn, bleme, horn, sarga*)

The Anglo-Saxon Lyre:



Replica of an Anglo-Saxon Lyre

The Lyre is an ancient instrument that came Westwards and Northwards with the migrating nomads of the proto Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Frisians many years before their landings in Britain in the mid 5th century. There are many images of similar instruments in ancient scrolls and texts from the Middle East and Greece as well as the former Roman Empire and Byzantium.

This particular version that has become known as the Anglo-Saxon, or Norse Lyre, is an instrument of great beauty and delicacy. Usually made of a hardwood such as maple, ash, yew or oak, its sound was created by hollowing out the centre of a piece of wood and then placing a thin soundboard over it with the bridge placed on the board so that any sound produced by the struck strings would resonate and then be amplified.



The remains of the famous Sutton Hoo Lyre

It usually had six gut strings, but it has been known to hold up to nine strings, all tuned to a different pitch. It can be played through plucking the strings or by strumming with a wooden pick known as a '*harp-flael*', and also to create different sound textures the strings can be stopped by the left hand to create different pitches textures and harmonics.



The playing position for a Lyre

There seems to have been a peculiarly English convention of reinforcing the top tenon joints with a decorative plaque, usually of bronze, riveted through the joint. This served not only to strengthen the joint but also to decorate the lyre. These decorative plaques are missing from all Scandinavian and European lyres.



Reproductions off The Sutton Hoo Lyre decorative plaques

It is a delicate sound and was usually used to accompany singing or sometimes to create effect and could be quite brusque when needed. The tuning of the gut strings could be anything that you desired, but we are nowadays guessing simply from what little written evidence remains and what Norse instruments remain that are from the same family. It is pure conjecture but going by the little vocal church music from the early 11th century that exists we can suppose that the scales would have been approximately the same as our modern tempered tuning, or as has been proposed and seems even more likely, a version of a pentatonic scale would have been used so that even if an incorrect string was plucked or the strumming needed to sound then it would never actually sound out of key or jarring on the ear. This is where the work of experimental historians and musical archaeologists comes into its own.

A scale such as this:



With either the lower (1st string) note taking a G or the highest 6th string taking an A, which was more likely. If the tuning was A Pentatonic minor then the low string (1st) could if desired act as a drone note.

The octave harmonics are possible on all the strings and on certain examples found in Germany, such as the Trossingen Lyre, even the 5th harmonics were just possible on the Trossingen Lyre, thus expanding the range and sonority capabilities even further.

Have a look at some of the internet videos below and you will see some very interesting ways of playing this most beautiful and beguiling of all ancient instruments of our forefathers.

The following internet links show how the instrument can be used, and one of the extracts (No.1, the Bagley) is an adaptation in the original Anglo-Saxon of part of the "Beowulf" epic.

- 1, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ooj25_j3k1E
- 2, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1f29rtaRYk>
- 3, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-nwqu76hQY>

The link below is to Paul Butlers website that shows how to build and string etc a replica of the Sutton Hoo Lyre.

1, <http://crab.rutgers.edu/~pbutler/aslyre.html>

The Bone Flute (Old English: *hwistle, pipe, sangpipe*)

This is one of the oldest instruments, next to stones being banged together and the sound of our own vocal chords resonating, this is one of the oldest types of instruments known to man. The oldest one that has been found is a three finger holed animal bone discovered in a cave in Germany and is thought to be over forty thousand years old. By the time our ancestors were playing in the mead halls and cottages of the Anglo-Saxon period the instrument had changed little other than to occasionally add a few more finger holes and longer bone, usually of sheep or cattle, sometimes of deer or even swan. There have even been instruments found made of dog bone.

Many of these small instruments have been found in Anglo-Saxon burials not just of royal or high born people but also in the graves of the common people and shows that it was an instrument of popular usage. They were also used when hunting as a form of communication and there is one hint in an old Norse manuscript about one being used in the Ghostly Hunt of Woden and the spectres hunt on the nights of Yule. It was also probably used on the battlefield as the high pitch could be heard through the sounds of warfare and this would have been a much more useful form of communicating ideas, planned manoeuvres strategies and any danger problems that arise or even to sound a localised alarm instead of the voice or via a horn-blower. The horn could be heard by all the army and would probably have been used as a general call to arms and signalling device. The bone flute would have been used as a more localised form of the signalling system for close quarters control and communication. The instrument being so portable and easy to play it could be played by most people to a higher or lesser degree. Most were three holed so that they could be played in one hand and either another instrument, possibly a drum, or your sword could be held in the other hand.



An original and a replica of a bone flute. Left a 40,000 year old mammoth bone instrument.

The sound of these little instruments is shrill and ear piercing if miss-blown. The sound was very often used in the fields and hills by shepherds just as they are in parts of the Mediterranean and the middle-east today. They were sometimes used in the mead hall as a diversion while the feasting was taking place. We know from being able to replicate the instruments the approximate scalic ranges and forms that were used. They are not our own westernised standard of tempered scale but varied bone to bone in an almost untenable way due to the thickness of the bone wall, the bore size, the length of bone used and the position of the finger holes as well as the bone used. Each was unique and thus was purely performed on as a solo instrument for dancing, feasting, or rituals in pre Christian Anglo-Saxon times or as previously stated , in battle. These simple flutes were not used solely by our ancestors but can be found around the globe in one form or another.

1, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMy40pYdP4c>

Bullroarer

This simple and yet haunting instrument is found on all the continents of the world, and some ethnologists point to it, like they do pyramids, as being evidence of some type of original common ancestor. This is of course pure speculation, and remains so.



A beautiful hand made version.

In Britain the bullroarer was known amongst the Romano Briton's of the Celtic tribes and when the Angles and Saxons arrived here, they would undoubtedly have taken this instrument into their arsenal of instruments and probably used them in rituals of the pre-Christian period. It is a ghostly and spectral sound that haunts our psyches and thus must surely have a common root in our subliminal memories as a race. It is a simple piece of flattened and shaped wood with a long string to swing it by. One or more of these played together can be almost mentally disturbing and so was seen probably as an instrument that connected the people to the gods of the people and as an ominous and threatening sound to any poor unsuspecting captive of the tribe as it may have meant the end of their life in some form of ritual sacrifice, or just murderous execution.

It may, in pre-Christian times, have represented the sound of Surtur's fire sword flaying the air that lays waste the earth and the heavens and all known things at the end of the Gods, the time known as "*Ragnarök*", and thus was a portent of doom and inevitability in all things, used in rituals or in storytelling to impress the ideas and tale on the listener's mind, it could have been a potent symbolic totem of the other worlds; a gateway or portal in sound to the time of the Gods and the societies spirits. This would have been more at the time of Yule when the 'Draugar' (The tribe or families dead ancestors) were closest to them. This as much as any instrument could have been the ritualistic instrument for this connecting and communing with the spirits.

In post heathen society it was less important as a ritual instrument and became an instrument for the land workers and of course eventually the toy of children that it remained for many centuries.

1, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vscBpbao7Os>

Horn (Old English: *blaedhorn, blaeshorn, bleme, horn, sarga*)

The horn was always made from the hardened and treated horn of cattle or oxen, and smaller ones from sheep. The English Longhorn cow that was so beloved of the British and particularly our Anglo-Saxon forefathers was the usual provider of this instrument if an oxen was not available. With the rebirth of interest in old breeds of farm animals the provision of horn has again increased and experimentation with the different types of horn has increased. It originated from the famous drinking horns of the Norse and Scandinavian people and sometime in the forgotten past had the end cut off and turned into a blown instrument for battle and ritual. One of the symbols of Odin (*Woden in Anglo-Saxon*) was the three drinking horns interlaced.



The Odin (Woden) symbols.

The horns were so connected with the pre-Christian religion of our ancestors who would have seen the horn as a connection to the 'all-father' (Woden/Odin) and the gods in general. Some horns were so large that they were used as warning horns for the villages or communities in case of attack, or to herald the arrival of shipping for trade. There are also accounts of the horn being used to summon peoples of the tribe to the great feasts of the year in the mead halls. The instrument was thus multi-purposeful in the running of and the ways of the society. As time progressed finger holes were added and complex tunes were eventually able to be played and thus used in the mead hall too.



A replica of the Horn found in the Sutton Hoo burial

The horn was the only instrument to survive the suppression of Anglo-Saxon culture by the Norman overlords and remained an instrument of all levels of society. In the Saxon world it became an instrument of hunting and communication, which the Normans allowed and also took as their own, in the hunting field especially. The Normans liked pomp and ceremony and the horn was used to announce points in the day such as meals or religious observances such as Matins etc. and so the Saxon horn was accepted without any disturbance to the line of development. There must have been some recognition by the subjugated Anglo-Saxons of the Saxon horn as a statement of individuality and defiance against their overlords, but again this is conjecture as there is little or no evidence in the extant post Norman Saxon literature or the French Norman to back this up.

Have a look at the video links below and in the last one you will hear just how versatile an instrument the horn could become in the hands of a master player.

- 1, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uh1dYVloUqc>
- 2, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjilc9MIqNs&list=PL560E2BDF986F82A9>
- 3, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJv6H_w9C9w&list=PL560E2BDF986F82A9

Other Instruments

There were a good many other instruments of lesser importance, such as the 'Pibgorn' which was a remnant of the Roman times in these Islands and seems to have been played particularly by the Welsh tribes, but was only a rare instrument in Anglo-Saxon England, along with certain types of skin drum that could be easily made and played. There were prototype harps stemming from the Romano-Britons and Rome itself but these remained more in Celtic hands and did not appear to make the transition very often to the Angles and Saxons who came into contact with or assimilated the native populations as traders or by conquest. The true harp as these were known (old English: *hearpe*, *gamenwudu* (*gleewood*)) seems to have started to appear in England in the late ninth or early tenth century, although it had been known earlier in Scotland and the northern part of the Kingdom of Northumbria which covered the land up to the Firth of Forth where Edinburgh now stands (*It was held for three centuries by the Angles of Northumbria until in the 950's when it fell into the hands of the Scots forever*), Wales and Ireland. These were predominantly 12 string instruments and gave a much wider range to perform with than the six stringed Lyres. It is reputed that the sound box of some of these harps were used for carrying other items around but there has not been any real evidence of this found either in England or anywhere in the British Isles.



A 12 string early English/Celtic Harp 'hearpe'

Although there are no surviving harps from the period, other than in Ireland with the Brian Boru Harp found in the Dublin Museum, there are numerous pictorial representations of them. None of these instruments have survived in England but we do know that they existed in certain mentions of early Medieval manuscripts and illustrations. Also the odd church relief or embossed corbels of finer churches show the occasional musician playing instruments, the harp being just one of them. These are very often mistaken for post Norman invasion, as many are, but just occasionally they are of an older period pre Conquest.

In York some unusual panpipes have been excavated and are known as Viking pipes. They are box-wood (Old English: *pipe*, *sangpipe*), and these may well have been a fairly common type of instrument, as yet, no further examples have been found in England but this may be because they were made of wood and quite disposable and rotted easily. They do, however, appear in some manuscript illustrations of the Anglo-Saxon period so we can assume with some surety they were well dispersed and known.

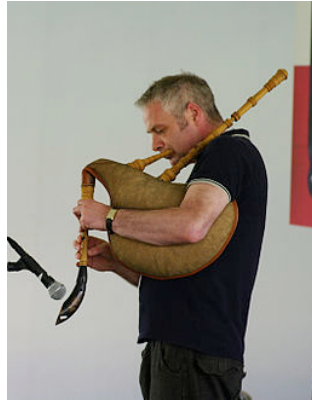


Viking panpipes found at York (Jorvik)

Bagpipes (pibgorn) are known from literary sources only and although there have been no finds of them they were probably fairly common. In appearance they were probably more akin to the likeness of the modern Northumbrian smallpipes, or Irish bagpipes, rather than the modern Scottish variety. There are two components other than the bag which set the bagpipes from other instruments, the reed chanter which was probably enclosed or encased in a sheath with a hole at the top as a mouth piece, and the drone pipes. The appearance of the reed which gives the pipes their high 'squawking' sound is a matter as yet of conjecture due to the lack of any physical finds evidence, and the number, if any, of drones, has also yet to be qualified. As no archaeological finds have proven the actual existence of bagpipes in Anglo-Saxon England or how they may have been played then it remains speculation as to size and style of performance.



A set of modern Northumbrian Pipes



A Welsh bag Hornpipe or Pibe Cyn that is a cross between bagpipe and pibgorn

Organs (Old English: *organa*) were also known, both in a fixed form for large churches and Cathedrals, as well as a portative form, which may have been used for secular as well as clerical music. The portative organ was very popular in the castles and court after the Norman invasion. This portative type of organ could have been as small as an old typewriter or small suitcase, and just as easy to carry. It is reputed that Winchester Cathedral had the largest fixed type of organ in Northern Europe, and there are references to organs that required a team of sixteen men, or boys, on the bellows to keep it running.



From a much later manuscript of the 13th Century. To the right a boy pumping the bellows of the organ and to the left a Hurdy Gurdy player. Note in the centre the organist playing the stops not keys.

The “Harley” psalter shows a number of people pumping the bellows of just such an organ. These organs were played only with sliding stops, not a modern style keyboard like the organs we are used to seeing today. Surprisingly for the age both hydraulic and pneumatic organs were known and used. There has been one find of a fragmentary piece of organ that has been identified as a Water Organ from the Padaborn region of Northern Germany dating from this period showing that across the Scandinavian and Germanic world this instrument was quite well known. The water in this case is not part of the musical process, but a method of controlling the consistent and steady flow of air to the organ pipes and was originally developed from the Roman types of an earlier period.

It is possible that a form of *shawm* (a type of medieval oboe) arrived in England in the fifth century (the same time as the early Anglo-Saxon settlers) and so may have been a Saxon 'import' from the continent, although this is fairly speculative, and there has been no archaeological evidence to back this up. There have been the odd manuscript images and that is all there is to give us a clue.



Replicas of early Medieval Shawms

The wooden rimmed drum in the form that we would all recognise it has never been found in Europe from this period, which does beg the question as to what they used as bass percussion. A form of drum that is known by name and some rare vague literative description only is the *hylsung*, but what it looked like and how it was played we cannot be certain of. It is possible that it was similar to the large Irish ‘bodhrán’ since this is a very ancient form of drum common to the Britons of the period and later, or it could have been stave built similar to a medieval long drum. The only clue we have is a Spanish illustration showing the devil playing what seems to be a double ended drum, on its side in the Arab fashion. More likely though it would have been made of goat or cattle skin stretched over a circular frame and either tacked in place or like the North American shaman drums tied at the back. Whether they were hand struck or a beater of some form was used is unknown

but going by the Irish bodhrán probably a beater of some type was used. Whether like the Irish instrument it was an instrument of the battlefield is hard to know. There are no references to them being used at all in battle situations as the warriors would bounce or bang the pommel of their swords off the back of their linden wood shields to create a war beat before the commencement of fighting.



This is an Irish Bodhrán with cipin but the Anglo-Saxon drums were probably quite similar.

Bells (Old English: *belle, clucge, handbelle*) are known and were probably used for mead hall music performance as well as for churches and animals collars as well as ritualistic ceremonies pre and post Christianisation of the tribes. A magnificent example of a church bell was excavated at *Hedeby* in Northern Germany dating from this period of time. A section of a wooden hanger (*the hinge on which it would have swung*) was located as well. The replicated example is now hung and erected in its own bell 'booth' just outside the museum buildings.

A trio of bell ringers (although they only have a pair of bells between them) can be seen on the *Skog* tapestry from Sweden from the same period as is under investigation here, and so it is highly likely that our Anglo-Saxon ancestors too would have had instruments like these. It seems that church bells were on the whole installed either in a completely separate 'tower' (such as in the *Skog* tapestry) or in one of the simple booths, rather than hung directly in the church. Quite why this is, is unclear and will probably remain so. There is no evidence in England of this being the case but without excavation of church land and property, which is not forth coming due to the land being consecrated and sanctified, from this period it is hard to be sure.



The bell found at Hedeby, Northern Germany in 1981



The two bells and three ringers from the Skog Tapestry

Even in the case of animal bells there are modern European traditions of deliberate pitch selection on the part of herdsman and often for shepherds not only to tune the bells of their flock to a distinct scale, but to adjust their own pipes accordingly, providing a rough but tuneful accompaniment to their own playing. There is no reason to suspect otherwise with our own ancestors while tending sheep or cattle to help the day pass more quickly and with some distraction by playing the bone flute to the accompaniment of their flocks bells.

Bells were made either from folding a sheet of iron or bronze into a square or round beehive shape and fixing it with rivets, or by casting a similar shape in bronze.



Small ancient bronze bell that may have been from an animal collar or from a robe and hung from a string.

Small cast bells that had a clapper fitted inside were possibly worn to help to 'announce' the presence of the wearer. This was done as a courtesy to other travellers and villagers - as it would alert others of their innocent approach, whereas, it is implied, only criminals would wish to be silent and sneak unawares upon the weary traveller.

The find at Mastermyr in Denmark yielded a pair of folded iron bells including their clappers, either true hand bells or for strapping around cattle necks.



A small iron bell from southern Scotland 650-900 AD

Replicated versions of these bells suggests that they were less than tuneful and were indeed intended for livestock only. Stray finds from other sites include crude but effective miniature folded copper alloy or iron bells. Sets of bells suspended from a bar are illustrated in some manuscripts, which were in all likelihood struck with a wooden hammer.



Hand bell ringers at Edward the Confessors funeral from the Bayeux Tapestry

In the Bayeux tapestry there is an image of two men dressed in Anglo-Saxon clothing and wearing Saxon hair and moustache styles holding a pair of hand bells each, it comes from the section of Edward the Confessor's funeral. The figures are much smaller than the pallbearers around the coffin. This image was made just after the Norman Invasion and so is a very useful one to have and analyse for the knowledge it yields of these hand bells. Campanologists would easily recognise the stances and the shapes and it is surprising that centuries later England still produces some of the finest bell ringers, whether church or secular, in the world. Is it a trait that has remained with us since this era?

Other percussion instruments probably included bones (played like spoons). The Irish 'bones' nowadays use wood more than bone and although the bones have fallen out of favour in England as an instrument the idea still remains in parts when a pair of desert spoons are reversed and used in a similar way. Finger cymbals and tong cymbals (Old English, *cimbal*) or small simple improvised instruments were also probably used such as stones or blocks of shaped hard wood; a bit like the Aboriginal 'Rainsticks'. Clapping would certainly have been used for percussion as it still is to this day.

We also have written references to 'rattle-sticks' (Old English: *cladersticca*), although it is not clear whether these are percussion instruments, or whether they are perhaps just a baby's style rattle. Some Morris Dance troupes use a stick with small bells or even beer bottle tops attached to create a stick that when shook or struck on the ground (*if long enough*) creates a rattled sound. This is used instead of a drum and is probably the modern version of this bygone instrument.

It is thought that the Morris men's bells attached to legs, arms, dibbing and rattle sticks are to keep evil wights, elves, dwarves and all manner of other nasty fantastical Anglo-Saxon creatures and monsters away from the wearer and to bring good luck. Again the true meaning of this is lost in time, but possibly stems from this period of great superstition and belief in such creatures.

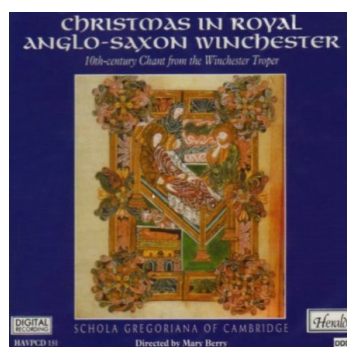
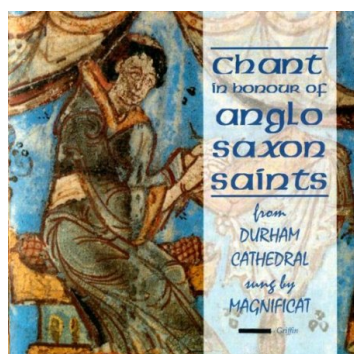


A modern Morris Men's rattle stick with bells and ribbons attached.

It could even be, due to the vagueness of information about the instrument, something resembling a 'rain-stick' where small dried seeds are placed inside a hollow, or hollowed out, stick and both ends are sealed thus when the stick is turned upside down or shook the seeds sound like rain, or a form of rattle. It is purely speculative and is probably closer to the former of these two ideas.

What happened to Anglo-Saxon Music

There is little left of the music of the Anglo-Saxon world in sound or in written form. No extant musical scores other than the odd scrap of Church music from the mid-10th and 11th centuries exist. There are two extant books to be found in Durham and Winchester (the old Anglo-Saxon capital) dating from this period. These are based solely on the Roman chant of continental Europe and there is little in them to show their 'Englisc' origins.



Recordings of the extant Anglo-Saxon Music.

Musical and 'scopic' skills were passed down aurally from scop to trainee from an early age and as such nearly all of it has been lost to us. We can only hazard guesses and speculate. As most of our knowledge of this early medieval period stems from written documentary evidence gathered in monasteries a number of years or decades after the Norman Conquest, we have lost much of the pure flavour of the Anglo-Saxon thought and sense. As far as music is concerned little is mentioned as to the ways of performance and the types of music that were heard. Unlike the Celtic lands where the music was seen as a weapon against the encroachment of the English dominance, years later in the 13 and 14th centuries, the Anglo-Saxons lost nearly all of their music on one fateful day in October 1066. On that day a new land lord took over breaking, destroying and obliterating everything that had stood firm and solid for over 600 years. This was again attempted by the ancestors of Duke William's invaders against the Celtic lands but was only partially successful as the Celtic areas had learnt from the dire Saxon experience. In England the music like the language was subjugated and crushed out of near existence in favour of a foreign music and foreign languages, French, and the language of state, Latin. The music that replaced it was that of the landowners who were French Normans now. Nearly all the high aristocracy as well as the earls and thegns of England were either killed at Hastings or were now vassals of the belligerent Normans and had to adopt the new ways or perish. The same went for the music of the mead halls and the villages.

The English language that had grown to the status of an International language through the work of King Ælfred and successive 'Englisc' monarchs nearly died out but somehow survived among the common people as an underground illiterate tongue, only to rise and take over the French language in the 14th century due to the Norman English crown losing

its domains in its home territories of Northern France. The Norman French aristocracy now had to accept the 'Englisc' and the 'Englisc' ways to remain in the positions of power that they held, and to above all, survive. The music though did not fare so well. It died out through the lack of skills required to develop or physically record it in musical script by the few people who could play instruments and sing well in the old scopie ways. History of the people was lost and so were the songs that recorded it. The Normans wiped it out where ever they found it and supplanted it with French instruments such as the Troubadour Harp, Recorders and Lutes etc. Songs were in Norman French and sang of things that were only known by the rulers and their entourages, courtly love, chivalry and things spiritual. 10,000 Normans ruled over 1.5 Million Anglo-Saxons who were little more than the Normans' slaves and were not allowed into the hierarchy of the New Society but had the new styles and music thrust upon them ousting the old scopie styles of their Saxon ancestors. Language because of the very necessity of communication can change and assimilate and survive as static musical art forms cannot, and so the music and tales of the 'scop' were lost forever.

In the 1340's the Black Plague arrived on English shores wiping out a third of the population thus making the Normans position impossible to maintain in the hierarchical dogmatic French way it had existed up until this event. This meant altering their attitudes towards their native serfs and underlings. Instead of the state collapsing the two separate lines of existence, one Norman French, one Anglo-Saxon Englisc, merged and became a unified stronger English nation. The language of the peasant became the everyday common tongue of all, and the music of the lower commoners also rose through the classes of society adapting and assimilating as well as adopting the new forms; but the language of these songs was very much that of the Englisc people. A variegated and much altered form of the old music of the Anglo-Saxons of three hundred years prior. The musical forms of the French and continental Europe collided with the dance, song and language of the common people, and what remained of the thegnic classes, to produce a uniquely "English" style that was enjoyed by all, and by all classes of the mid medieval period.

The English language survived as did the "Englisc" (Anglo-Saxons), and with the assimilation of the Norman French culture, re-emerged in its then new guise and to a later extent a new music also developed from the grass roots of the real English speaking people of the land and not the towns, which were predominantly Norman French in subjects and control. One of the oldest surviving songs in English, and not Norman French, from the beginnings of the new 'English' culture (circa 1250 A.D) is still sung today and very often in its original early Middle English tongue. The song is "Sumer Is Icumen In":

1, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMCA9nYnLWo>

This is one of the first extant songs in the English tongue and is a direct connection to that of the Anglo-Saxon era in its language structures and alphabetical calligraphy, and to an extant its melody. There are others but few are so loved and sung to this day as this happiest of songs that welcomes spring with a skip and a joyful air in its simple melody. It is obviously inflected with French influences in its use of the round, which is a French musical form from Medieval French music, but underneath it all it is English that we can understand as a language and music that spells itself out to us in a musical language that is direct, beautiful, and above all of our land and its people.

“Sumer is Icumen In”

Early Middle English

Sumer is icumen in,
 Lhude sing cuccu!
 Groweþ sed and bloweþ med
 And springþ þe wde nu,
 Sing cuccu!
 Awe bleteþ after lomb,
 Lhouþ after calue cu.
 Bulluc sterteþ, bucke uerteþ,
 Murie sing cuccu!
 Cuccu, cuccu, wel þu singes cuccu;
 Ne swik þu nauer nu.
 Sing cuccu nu. Sing cuccu.
 Sing cuccu. Sing cuccu nu!

Modern English translation.

Summer has come in,
 Loudly sing, Cuckoo!
 The seed grows and the meadow blooms
 And the wood springs anew,
 Sing, Cuckoo!
 The ewe bleats after the lamb
 The cow lows after the calf.
 The bullock stirs, the stag farts,
 Merrily sing, Cuckoo!
 Cuckoo, cuckoo, well you sing, cuckoo;
 Don't you ever stop now,
 Sing cuckoo now. Sing, Cuckoo.
 Sing Cuckoo. Sing cuckoo now!



This is the original manuscript from the British Library Harley 978 folio 11v. The language is in the Middle English Wessex dialect.

Sumer Is Icumen In

Sum-er is i-cum-en in lhu-de sing cu-cu. Grow-eth sed and blow-eth med and

springth the wo-de nu. Sing cu-cu. Aw-e ble-teth af-ter lomb, lhouth

af-ter cal-ve cu. Bul-loc ster-teth buck-e vert-eth Mu-rie sing cu-cu. Cu-cu

Cu-cu Wel sing-es thu cu-cu, ne swik thu nav-er nu. Sing cu-cu nu

Sing cu-cu.

A Modern notation version of "Sumer Is Icumen In"

In the search for insight.

To gain an insight into the styles and form of much of our lost Anglo-Saxon come early English music and performance styles we need to look north, and I mean far north, into the North Atlantic ocean and to the rocky and volcanic islands of the Faroes and Iceland to gain some insight into the sound world of our pre-Norman England. It is here on these far flung Viking islands that we hear the genuine voice of our Anglo-Saxon-Danish Viking ancestors. There are certain dances and songs that single these islands out as unique. In the Faroes it is the chain dance, a form of follow the leader in a circle. A most interesting dance of simplicity and complexity combined in its moves and foot work. Its real meaning appears to be lost. The songs are very often verse and chorus refrains, in question and answer forms with one singer taking the lead and then answered by the community. These are working songs and reflect the world that the islanders know and understand. Even in the islands of the Hebrides, Orkney's and Shetlands we see similar songs being performed for various reasons or jobs, such as weaving or shearing the sheep. So is it not to be expected that there were such songs and such styles and forms present long before the coming of the Norman French as well as the scopic/skaldic forms that were crushed out of existence by the conquest. In Iceland there are still to be found the great tales of the Edda (*The Norse tales and Pagan guide to their original pre-Christian faith*) sung and chanted as they probably would have been over a thousand years ago. This style of performance and music was not destroyed by the coming of Christianity but adapted and changed to meet the needs of the new faith while keeping the old ways alive and developing. There is nothing to say that the same thing did not happen in England 500 years before, that is before Christianity took hold, and through this adaption, adaptation and assimilation the old Anglo-Saxon musical forms did exactly the same thing until the snuffing out of the flame by the Norman French subjugation of the late 11th century. There would have been some continental European influences and not a purely Viking Scandinavian view and so some of the forms would have shown or borne these influences. Until 1066, England and the fledgling British Isles would have looked towards Scandinavia much more than to continental Europe. Our then language, our blood, our culture was that of the Scandinavian rather than the main European plethora. Therefore it is a safe assumption to accept that their musical styles and forms would have followed more the Scandinavian models with a vague hint of europeanness present due to England's proximity to North West mainland Europe.

Today's music that is described as Celtic in all styles, forms and sounds actually are more alike to Scandinavian Viking than we would readily accept or think of them. In Ireland the Vikings built Dublin, a city built on slavery, and so their music's were assimilated into the existing styles and became part of the music of the Irish style as we know it today. There is a unique vocal style called "*Sean Nos*" which bears some Scandinavian influences in ornamentation styles and vowel sounds when in performance. In the Isle of Man the culture is purely that of the Viking ancestors and contains various dance and musical forms. There is a chain dance that is very reminiscent of the Faroes chain dance. To a lesser extent in Wales

the Celts did hold out and that is why genuinely old Welsh music (usually vocal music only) is very different in form and sound to their near neighbours. Think of the musical style called “*Penillion*”. It nowadays does use a Concert Triple Harp but originally it would have been solo voice, or a voice and a small Welsh knee harp. In Scotland the clash of Scots, Pictish, Angle and Viking cultures produced a very variegated form and style of music that has distinct regional differences to this day. In Northumbria there is a unique and unusual music that is reminiscent of Celtic music to our ears, but is more than likely the remnants of the original Anglo-Saxon Danish music of a thousand years ago in its sound and styles. Due to the distance and inaccessibility of the land and people in Northumbria a few remnants survived subjugation and have produced an original sound world in the Northumbrian smallpipes as well as the actual musical language and styles; that, along with the Celtic lands, has seen something of a resurgence of interest of late. The “*Harrowing of the North*” by William “*The Bastard*’s” forces only partly succeeded in destroying the individuality and originality of the region which is why the people, the culture and the music of this region is so unique and more closely akin in linguistic terms to Frisian than to the English of the modern era. It may also be the reason for the Northerners belligerence and hardness of character. The music of these regions and areas gives us a window, even if a little grimy and misted, into a past that we lost on the 14th of October 1066.

The life of the Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings was probably filled with tunes and music wherever they worked and lived - from the more formal pieces of courtly music to the everyday, when men could be found just singing tunes to the cattle as they milked, or kept rhythm to songs as they sowed the seed in the ploughed fields. The sheep, goats and cattle themselves probably carried folded sheet bells at their necks, so that not even the fields would have been silent but full of sound just as Shakespeare said.

So although we do not have any direct Anglo-Saxon music we do have the first piece of purely English music from the ‘English’ people, “*Sumer is Icumen In*”, who lived and worked the land as the ancestors of the Angles and Saxons and not as Norman French English who were to, and, to an extent, do still control the country of England and its hierarchical society. Here was a piece of music that was purely English and the foundation of the music that was to find its flowering in the songs of the Tudors and the Elizabethans in general and beyond into the different ages of this countries musical history. From subjugation and oppression, to a thin chink of musical light, flowered some of the world’s great music from these lands centuries later.

Andrew Glover 2013

10,045 words