English and Celtic in Contact

Markku Filppula,
Juhani Klemola,
and Heli Paulasto

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Abbreviations

AAVE	African American Vernacular English
ACC	accusative
AI	Anglo-Irish
AmE	American English
Arm.	Armorican (Breton)
B.	Breton
BrE	British English
C.	Cornish
CamE	Cameroon English
CE	Celtic English
CUD	*A Concise Ulster Dictionary*
DAT	dative
DOST	*A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*
EDD	*The English Dialect Dictionary*
EI	embedded inversion
EngE	English English
EModE	Early Modern English
FEM	feminine
FF	focus fronting
G.	German
GPC	*Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymru* [Dictionary of the Welsh Language]
HE	Hiberno-English
HebE	Hebridean English
HVE	*A Handbook of Varieties of English*
ICE	*The International Corpus of English*
INF	infinitive
Ir.	Irish
IrE	Irish English
L.	Latin
LAE	*The Linguistic Atlas of England*
LAEME	*A Linguistic Atlas of Early Middle English*

LALME	*A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*
ME	Middle English
MED	*Middle English Dictionary*
MEG	*A Modern English Grammar*
M.Ir.	Middle Irish
Mn	Manx
ModE	Modern English
MW	Middle Welsh
MxE	Manx English
NfldE	Newfoundland English
NICTS	*Northern Ireland Corpus of Transcribed Speech*
NORM	non-mobile, older, rural male
NP	noun phrase
NIrE	northern Irish English
NSR	Northern Subject Rule
O	object
OE	Old English
OED	*The Oxford English Dictionary*
OEG	*Old English Grammar*
OF	Old French
OHG	Old High German
O.Ir.	Old Irish
OSaxon	Old Saxon
OW	Old Welsh
PF	progressive form
PL	plural
PP	prepositional phrase
PRO	pronoun
PT	particle
REL	relative (pronoun/particle)
REL-COMP	relative complementiser
RP	received pronunciation
S	subject
SAWD	*The Survey of Anglo-Welsh Dialects*
ScE	Scottish English
Sc.G.	Scottish Gaelic
SED	*The Survey of English Dialects*
SIrE	southern Irish English
SND	*The Scottish National Dictionary*
SSE	Standard Scottish English
StE	Standard English
TL	target language
TMA	tense-mood-aspect
UE	Ulster English

U.Sc.	Ulster Scots
V	verb
V2	verb-second (constraint)
VP	verb phrase
W.	Welsh
WE	Welsh English

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Joensuu and Tampere, November 2007
Markku Filppula Juhani Klemola Heli Paulasto

Introduction

Throughout its recorded history, the English language has been known to have absorbed linguistic influences of all kinds from other languages, such as Latin, Scandinavian and French, in particular. Indeed, it is this permeable nature of English that has often been put forward as a major factor explaining the spread of English all over the world and its present-day status as a *lingua franca*. Against this background, it seems remarkable that there is one group of languages which—as is commonly argued—has left virtually no traces in English, despite a close coexistence in the British Isles spanning for more than one and a half millennia. This group is, of course, the Insular Celtic languages, the present-day members of which are Welsh, Irish and Scottish Gaelic. Their 'resurrected' siblings Cornish and Manx Gaelic could arguably also be included in that number, although they no longer have the same status as living community languages.

The usual explanation for the impermeability of English against Celtic influences rests not so much on any linguistic properties of English or Celtic but on sociopolitical and cultural factors surrounding the relationships between the English and the Celtic populations, starting from the Anglo-Saxon conquest of Britain in the mid-fifth century onwards and extending up to the present day. The Celts have throughout the history of their encounters with the English and their ancestors, Anglo-Saxons, been the underdogs from a political, military and also cultural point of view, and it is this hegemony of the English which is commonly believed to have blocked any significant linguistic influences from the Celtic languages upon English. The small number of Celtic loanwords in English is usually cited as definitive proof of this; the conquering nation has never, as the argument goes, had any practical need to borrow words from the language of the conquered.

Why, then, investigate Celtic influences in English, when several generations of scholars have painstakingly proved that, apart from those few loanwords, the Celtic languages have not left any marks in English? First of all, fresh archaeological and historical evidence is now available about the relationships of the Celts and the Anglo-Saxons in the first few centuries following the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons which sheds new light on the relative positions of these populations, population movements, and especially on the

vexed question of the fate of the British Celtic population in the aftermath of the Anglo-Saxon settlement. Rather than being exterminated by the Anglo-Saxons, as the 'clean sweep' theory has maintained, the Celtic-speaking population continued to live side by side with their new rulers in many areas and, after a period of extensive bilingualism, were gradually absorbed into them both linguistically and culturally. This is also supported by the latest population genetic studies, which point to a significant degree of continuity of the indigenous Celtic-speaking population even in the southern parts of England. Taken together, all this evidence has repercussions on the question of the linguistic outcomes of the Celtic–English contacts.

Secondly, the standard arguments about the lack of evidence for Celtic contacts rest on grounds which cannot be sustained in the light of our present-day knowledge about language contacts and their typical outcomes globally. The nature of contact influences has been found to vary depending on the type of sociohistorical conditions in a given contact situation. Thus, in conditions of language shift, such as those which have characterised many parts of the British Isles for centuries, contact influences can be expected to be found in the domains of phonology and syntax rather than lexicon. Efforts to brush aside the Celtic substratum on the basis of lexical evidence only are therefore seriously misguided. We believe that it is time to reinterpret the available evidence by putting it in a cross-linguistic perspective and availing of the recent advances in the general theory of language contacts, language typology and areal linguistics.

Thirdly, there is also new evidence about the history and later stages of both English and the Celtic languages which can be brought to bear on this issue and which was not there when the early twentieth-century philologists formulated their views. Fourthly, it is often forgotten that the prevailing view on the paucity of Celtic influences in English has never been accepted by all of the scholars working on historical and linguistic contacts between English and Celtic. From very early on, there have been dissident voices, which have not, however, received the attention they would have deserved but which merit to be re-heard now. Indeed, there is reason to believe that the traditional views on the nature and outcomes of the English–Celtic contacts have at least partially been inspired by other than purely linguistic agendas. We are here referring to an ideological stand known as 'Anglo-Saxonism', which—as will be shown below—has informed the views of many influential scholars writing on these issues. It is true that extreme views have also been expressed on the part of those who have defended the 'Celtic hypothesis'. 'Substrato-maniacs' or 'Celto-maniacs' are the terms which have sometimes been used for representatives of this position by those who want to deny any Celtic influences in English. The existence of these kinds of extremist views is yet another factor which underlines the need for a new, open discussion on the exact nature of the English–Celtic contacts.

The book has been divided into two major parts, the first of which examines the earliest, i.e. mediaeval, contacts and their historical background.

The discussion focuses on a number of syntactic, phonological and also lexical features which can be considered to have a Celtic substratal origin or which are hard to explain without assuming at least some kind of Celtic connection. The second part is devoted to similar Celtic influences in the modern age, which means essentially the emergence of the so-called Celtic Englishes, i.e. Celtic-influenced varieties of English, in the formerly or presently Celtic-speaking areas in Wales, Scotland, Ireland and the Isle of Man. Although the sociohistorical settings of the modern contacts are different in some respects from those in the mediaeval periods, the linguistic outcomes are rather similar. Indeed, the Celtic substratal influences that we can now witness in the various 'Celtic Englishes' provide indirect support for similar effects in varieties of mediaeval English. Finally, in the Epilogue, we return to the ongoing debate on the extent of Celtic influences in English across the centuries and seek to provide answers and conclusions drawing on the discussion in the first two parts of the book.

Finally, a note on the division of labour between the authors. Each of us has contributed to this book not only on the basis of his/her areas of expertise but by reading through and commenting on the draft chapters prepared by one or the other of the co-authors. In that sense we share the responsibility for the contents of this book, including possible errors and other shortcomings.

Part I

Early Celtic Influences in English

1 The Historical Background to the Early Contacts

1.1 THE ARRIVAL OF THE ANGLO-SAXONS AND THE CONQUEST OF BRITAIN

The mid-fifth century AD has come to be cited as the crucial date which marks the beginning of a new era in the relationship between the Insular Celts and the Anglo-Saxons. The last Roman legions had left Britain in the early part of the fifth century, leaving behind a country which was characterised by confusion and lack of a strong administrative centre. Although there is evidence for some amount of contacts between the Celts (i.e. Britons) and the Anglo-Saxons even before the mid-fifth century (see, e.g. Jackson 1953: 197; Higham 1994: 118–145), historical tradition has it that it was in 449 that the first major Anglo-Saxon force, led by Hengest and Horsa, set foot in Britain. Though first invited by the Britons as allies against foreign raiders such as the 'Picts' of Scotland and the 'Scots' (i.e. the Irish), they soon embarked on a series of rebellions against their hosts, which eventually led to an almost wholesale conquest of Britain within the next couple of centuries. As Jackson (1953: 199) writes, our main source of information here is the historical account by the British monk Gildas, who according to Jackson wrote his *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae* sometime in the first half of the sixth century. Sims-Williams (1983: 3–5) points out some caveats in this dating, including the doubtful authority of the *Annales Cambriae*, on which it mainly rests. He is himself content to settle for a fairly broad dating in the sixth century, at a period earlier than the first reference to Gildas by Columbanus ca 600, and later than the fifth century "because of Gildas's vagueness about the known history of the early part of that century" (*op. cit.*, 5). However, a somewhat earlier date is proposed by Higham (1994: 141), who places the composition of *De excidio* within the late fifth century, that is, around fifty years after the *adventus Saxonum*. Although little is known about Gildas's person or even where he wrote his work, there is evidence which suggests that he was based somewhere in central southern England (Higham 1994: 111–113; see, however, Sims-Williams 1983 for a more sceptical view). Other important near-contemporary sources are the two Gallic Chronicles of 452 and 511 (see Higham 1992: 69). Well-known,

though significantly later, sources are the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* from the early eighth century, written by the Anglo-Saxon monk Beda Venerabilis (the Venerable Bede), and somewhat later still, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which was compiled by several authors working in different places at different times, with the earliest versions dating from the ninth century.

While the first hostilities between the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons were relatively widespread and extended even to the western parts of Britain, they did not lead to permanent settlements by the latter except in some eastern parts of the country. Furthermore, after their initial setbacks, the Britons were able to fight back the invading Anglo-Saxon armies and even secure peace for some decades during the latter half of the fifth century. Gildas names Ambrosius Aurelianus, a British aristocrat probably of Roman extraction, as the person who was alone able to rally the Britons behind him to battle off the Saxon armies:

> After a time, when the cruel plunderers had gone home, God gave strength to the survivors. Wretched people fled to them from all directions, as eagerly as bees to the beehive when a storm threatens, and begged whole-heartedly, 'burdening heaven with unnumbered prayers', that they should not be altogether destroyed. Their leader was Ambrosius Aurelianus, a gentleman who, perhaps alone of the Romans, had survived the shock of this notable storm: certainly his parents, who had worn the purple, were slain in it. His descendants in our day have become greatly inferior to their grandfather's excellence. Under him our people regained their strength, and challenged the victors to battle. The Lord assented, and the battle went their way.
>
> From then on victory went now to our countrymen, now to their enemies: so that in this people the Lord could make trial (as he tends to) of his latter-day Israel to see whether it loves him or not. This lasted right up till the year of the siege of Badon Hill, pretty well the last defeat of the villains, and certainly not the least. That was the year of my birth; as I know, one month of the forty-fourth year since then has already passed.
>
> (Winterbottom 1978: 28)

After a short-lived truce, the situation changed rapidly along with new invasions by the Saxons along the Thames valley and from the southern coast, starting already at the beginning of the sixth century. As Jackson (1953: 203–206) writes, relying here on the evidence from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the second half of the sixth century witnessed great expansion of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex, formed in the first half of the sixth century by the Saxon chiefs Cerdic and Cynric. By around 600, Wessex reached as far west as the River Severn, and further south, to the forest

of Selwood on the borders of Wiltshire and Somerset. This meant that the Britons of Wales were cut off from the Britons of the south-west of Britain, leading eventually to the separation and division of the (Late) British dialects into Welsh and Cornish, respectively. After a brief respite of some fifty years, the kingdom of Wessex pushed further west, first conquering the remaining parts of Somerset, Devon and possibly parts of Dorset (although, as Jackson points out, the Chronicle has nothing to say about Dorset at this period), with the conquest of Devon being completed in the early decades of the eighth century. Cornwall remained in British hands for another hundred years, and according to Jackson (1953: 206) retained some form of independence, though probably sharing the power with the Anglo-Saxons in the final stages, up until the time of Athelstan, who was king of England from 925 to 939. Wakelin (1975: 67) provides a more detailed account of the Saxon settlements in Cornwall in 1086 on the basis of the Domesday Book. From this survey of tenure and population as well as the place-names recorded in it, Wakelin concludes that the north-east and south-east of Cornwall were firmly Anglo-Saxon by this time, with its nomenclature being mostly English; to the south and west of these areas, by contrast, the majority of the place-names and settlements were still Cornish (Wakelin 1975: 65f.). Yet, combining the evidence from Domesday Book and other sources, such as the Bodmin Gospels, written in the early tenth century, leads Wakelin to conclude that by 1086 the whole of Cornwall had already been brought under the rule of an Anglo-Saxon minority (Wakelin 1975: 67).

In the north of Britain, the Anglo-Saxon conquest proceeded similarly along major waterways such as the Trent and the Humber. Settlements in the north and the Midlands led to the establishment of the Anglian kingdoms of Lindsey and Mercia, respectively. The latter was rather weak at first, as Jackson (1953: 207) writes, and did not become a powerful kingdom until the second quarter of the seventh century. Under their king Penda (d. 655 AD), Mercia conquered large areas both from their West Saxon cousins in the south and the Welsh in the west. Jackson refers here to the often-expressed view according to which the Mercians also managed to reach the sea in the north and thus break the land connection between the Welsh and the Britons of the North. He does not, however, find any solid evidence to substantiate this claim; even the victory at the battle of Chester in 613 or 616 was won by the Northumbrians, not by the Mercians (Jackson 1953: 210–211). In any case, the Anglo-Saxon advances to the north proved to have significant consequences for the later development of the Celtic languages, as it meant an areal separation of the Welsh and Cumbric dialects of Late British.

The western expansion of Mercia under Penda and his followers also led to the establishment of the borderline between Wales and England around such landmarks as the River Wye in the south and the boundary earthwork known as Wat's Dyke, running from the River Dee to near the town of Oswestry. This, as Jackson remarks, probably marked the western border of Mercia about the middle of the seventh century (1953: 211). Somewhat

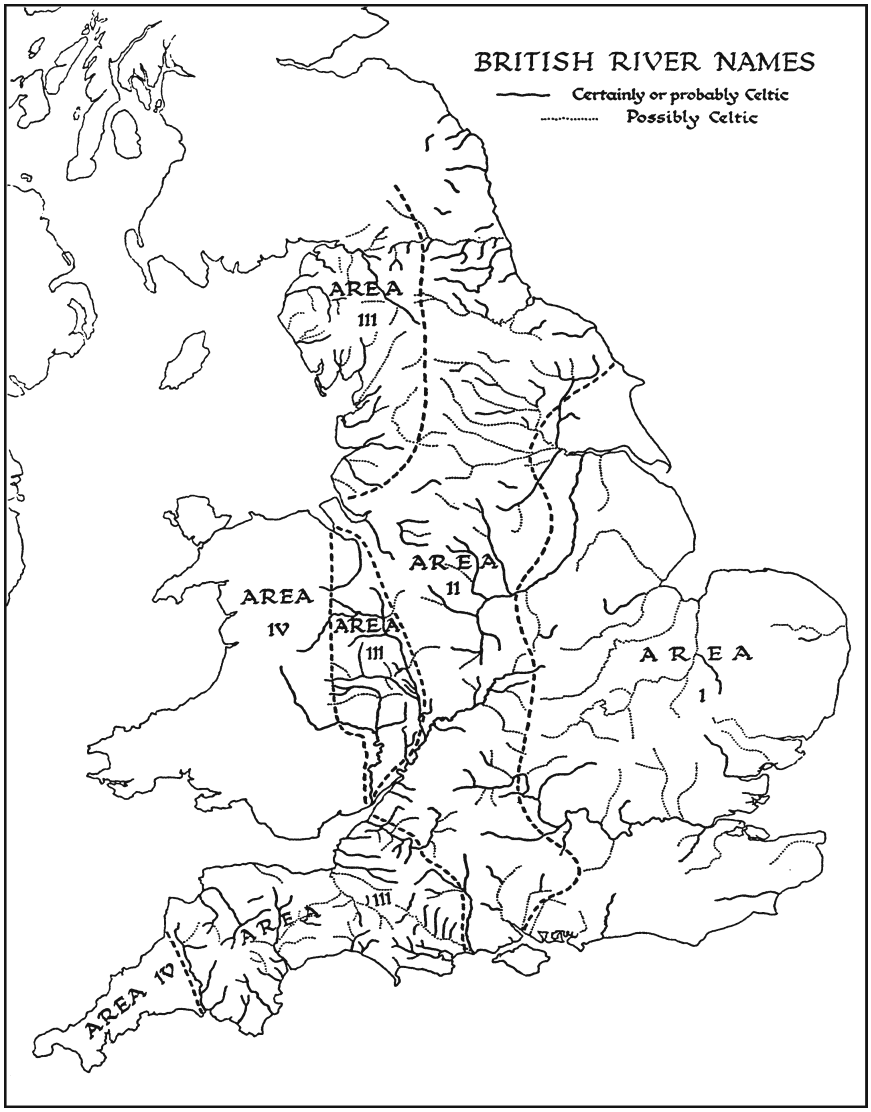
later, Wat's Dyke was followed by another earthwork called Offa's Dyke, raised by king Offa of Mercia in the late eight century. Its southern end was at the mouth of the River Wye, from which it ran via Hereford and Shrewsbury northwards, finishing near Wrexham. According to Jackson (1953: 211), Offa's Dyke consolidated the borderline situation which had already been established for more than a hundred years earlier.

In the far north, the earliest Germanic settlements recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle were those under king Ælle, who reigned over the kingdom of Deira in the late sixth century. However, on the basis of some archaeological evidence Jackson dates the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon settlements to a period about a hundred years earlier, in areas of Yorkshire and in the city of York itself, which has one of the earliest Anglo-Saxon cemeteries in the whole country (Jackson 1953: 211–212). Jackson also refers to Hunter Blair (1947), who has sought to prove that the earliest Saxon settlements go back to the late Roman period and were in fact the result of a conscious Roman policy aimed at building an efficient defence against the continual raids of the Picts and Scots from the north. Whether Hunter Blair's account fully matches the archaeological evidence remains open to question, as Jackson notes (*op.cit.*, 212, fn.).[1] In any case, there seems to be little doubt about the early presence of the Anglo-Saxons in the northern parts of the country.

Further north from Deira the Anglian invaders formed the kingdom of Bernicia, with Bamburgh as its centre. This seems to have taken place a little later than the founding of Deira. At the end of the sixth century, these two northern kingdoms were joined together by king Æthelfrith (593–617), giving rise to the powerful kingdom of Northumbria. Under Æthelfrith and his successor Edwin (617–633) Northumbria was able to greatly expand its area and eventually held the overlordship over the whole of England except Kent. During this period, the south-eastern parts of Scotland were also brought under Anglian rule, and by the middle of the seventh century, as Jackson writes, "the whole of south-east Scotland from the Forth to the Cheviots east of the watershed between Clyde and Tweed, Liddel and Tyne, was in English possession" (1953: 214). By contrast, it is less certain when the areas west of the Pennines were conquered by the Anglo-Saxons. Jackson treats with some scepticism views expressed by Ekwall and Stenton, according to which the occupation of large parts of Lancashire, Westmorland and Cumberland happened as early as the time of Æthelfrith, some parts of Lancashire even earlier, as Ekwall had suggested on the basis of a number of English place-names. Basing his own account on evidence discussed by Myres and Hunter Blair, among others, Jackson concludes that the process of occupation must have started about the middle of the seventh century but that the areas in question were not in English hands until the last quarter of that century (Jackson 1953: 217). He goes on to note that this was not by any means a final arrangement, as the British kingdom of Strathclyde continued to have a strong presence in the south-west of Scotland and was

early in the tenth century able to recapture Cumberland, which was not won back by the English until 1092.

Summing up the advance of the Anglo-Saxon occupation, Jackson (1953) shows on the basis of river-name and other evidence how the Anglo-Saxon invasions proceeded in a wave-like process from the south and east towards the west and north (see Map 1.1 from Jackson 1953: 220).



Map 1.1 Four stages of the Anglo-Saxon occupation of England, based on evidence from Brittonic river-names (from Jackson 1953: 220). Reproduced by permission of The Four Courts Press, Dublin.

In *Area I*, as Jackson explains, Brittonic river-names are rare, and they are mainly those of large or medium-sized rivers, e.g. the Trent, the Thames, the Thame, and the Darent.[2] Combining this evidence with other types of historical evidence leads Jackson to conclude that this area corresponds more or less with the extent of the first English settlements down to about the first half of the sixth century (*op.cit.*, 221–222). In *Area II*, by contrast, Brittonic river-names are much more common, and the number of those with a certain Celtic origin is greater than in *Area I*. In settlement terms, this area reflects the advancement of the Anglo-Saxon occupation by the second half of the sixth century in the south and the first half of the seventh in the north (*op.cit.*, 222). *Area III*, then, covers in the north those areas of present-day Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire which lie west of the dotted line; in the Welsh border areas parts of Shropshire, Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Gloucestershire; and finally, in the south, all areas in the south-west of England between the line and the River Tamar. As can be expected, the proportions of Brittonic river-names are at their largest in these areas, and they also include names of minor rivers, even streams. *Area III* represents the third and final stage of the Anglo-Saxon conquest, as Jackson points out; in the north this means the middle and third quarter of the seventh century, the middle and second half of the seventh century on the Welsh Marches, and the middle of the seventh to the earlier part of the eighth century in the south-west of England (*op.cit.*, 222–223). Finally, *Area IV* is left blank on the map, as it consists of much of present-day Wales (including Monmouthshire and parts of Herefordshire) and Cornwall, which remained Celtic-speaking until at least the Norman Conquest and was therefore overwhelmingly Brittonic in its nomenclature, too (*op.cit.*, 223). The same applies to Strathclyde in the north-west of England and south-west of Scotland, and the western and northern parts of Scotland.

Widely accepted as Jackson's account of the advancement of the Anglo-Saxon conquest is, more recent scholarship has pointed out the need to supplement the evidence obtainable from river-names with other types of linguistic and other evidence. Thus, Coates (2000a: 10) stresses the need to consider names of inhabited places and other geographical features as a useful source of evidence for the survival of Brittonic speech in different parts of England in the post-Conquest centuries. This is a topic to which we turn next. Place-name and toponymic evidence will be further discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.4, which also deals with other lexical influences from Celtic.

1.2 WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CELTS?

The question of the survival of Britons in the areas conquered by the Anglo-Saxon invaders has preoccupied the minds of several generations of scholars, be they historians, archaeologists, or historical linguists. The traditional

view on the nature and impact of the Anglo-Saxon settlement, first formulated by nineteenth-century historians, holds that the Anglo-Saxon intruders drove out or exterminated the native British and Romano-British population and usurped all their lands and property. As a consequence of this massive 'ethnic cleansing', it was believed, the English people are of virtually pure Germanic extraction, with no admixture of native British elements. This view, which could be called 'Germanist' (see, e.g. Higham 1992: 1–16), was canonised in such influential textbooks as Freeman (1870) and reasserted in the following century in Stenton (1943) and Myres (1986), for example. In fact, it remained a practically unquestioned doctrine among historians and archaeologists at least until the second half of the twentieth century.

The Germanist view of the English settlement, like so much of other scholarly work in nineteenth-century Victorian England, was inspired by an ideological myth known as 'Anglo-Saxonism'; other terms used for the phenomenon are 'Teutonism' and 'Gothicism'.[3] In Frantzen and Niles's (1997: 1) words, Anglo-Saxonism can be defined as "the process through which a self-conscious national and racial identity first came into being among the early peoples of the region that we now call England and how, over time, through both scholarly and popular promptings, that identity was transformed into an originary myth available to a wide variety of political and social interests". As an example of the Anglo-Saxonist approach to the nature of the Anglo-Saxon conquest, we may quote the following extract from the *Select Charters* by William Stubbs, an influential nineteenth-century historian:

> [the] . . . inhabitants [of Britain] were enervated and demoralized by long dependence, wasted by successive pestilences, worn out by the attacks of half-savage neighbours and by their own suicidal wars; whose vast forests and unreclaimed marsh-lands afforded to the newcomers a comparatively easy conquest, and the means of reproducing at liberty on new ground the institutions under which they had lived at home.
>
> This new race was the main stock of our forefathers: sharing the primaeval German pride of purity of extraction . . . and strictly careful of the distinction between themselves and the tolerated remnant of their predecessors . . .
>
> Our whole internal history testifies unmistakably to our inheritance of Teutonic institutions from the first immigrant.
>
> (Stubbs 1870: 1–3, quoted in Higham 1992: 3)

Influential though the Germanist view on the Anglo-Saxon conquest and the fate of the Celtic population is even today, it has by no means gone unchallenged in historical or archaeological scholarship. Indeed, there is