

The Anglo Saxon Settlement of Lighthorne

by Peter Hinman (1999)

1. After the collapse of the Roman rule in Britain little is recorded of Warwickshire.
2. Germanic invaders seem to have reached the area late in the 6th century, where they found an area inhabited by Romano-Celtic peoples, probably the eastern part of the Kingdom of Powys, (which extended to Leicester).
3. The Anglo-Saxons first settled the valleys of the Avon and the Alne, probably occupying and controlling this area following a decisive battle in 584AD at a place called "Fethanleag" (which means Battle Wood). The precise location of this battle is not known but it is believed to be in the Cherwell river valley.
4. Spreading out along the trackways and either destroying or assimilating Romano British settlements, they eventually pushed the Romano British control back to the current Welsh borders. The further west the Germanic invaders advanced across the area, they tended to assimilate rather than destroy the settlements, leaving evidence in Celtic place names such as Chadshunt and Ingon in Warwickshire. Such names increase in frequency towards the west. (See "Field and Forest", the place name volumes for Worcestershire & Warwickshire, by Margaret Gelling.)
5. The south of Warwickshire, together with most of Worcestershire & Gloucestershire, was occupied by the tribe of Hwicca, meaning "the people of the ark", in the sense of a kind of chest. How they obtained this name and its significance are not known. Archaeological evidence shows that these people were from the sub group known as the Mid Angles. The "ark" reference may be to people from a variety of tribal backgrounds who resisted the conversion to Christianity and gained the "ark" reference because of their varied origins. The area was certainly the last in England to adopt Christianity.
6. During work to the north of the church, in 1849, some bones were found along with parts of a cauldron of Germanic design, currently in Warwick Museum. These consisted of three beautifully worked enamelled escutcheons and a base escutcheon from the bowl. These are typical of early styles and date from the pre Christian age.



7. The tribal name of Hwicce survives as a place name in the Cotswolds and elsewhere as “Wychwood” (Hwiccaswudu) and at “Whichford” (Hwiccasford) and “Wiggerland Wood” north of Newbold Pacey.
8. They formed a semi-independent state until about 628, when the Hwiccan Kingdom became a subsidiary to Penda of Mercia. Known Hwiccan Kings include Eanhere (688-700), Ethelbert (700-710), Ethelweard (710-720), Ethelric (720-728), Osred (728-742), Eanberht (742-760), Uhtred (760-772) and Ealdred (772-777). The Kingdom remained as a subject kingdom to Mercia until 777, when it was fully absorbed into Mercia by King Offa. Alfred of Wessex incorporated Mercia into one state with Wessex in 871.
9. The Hwicca were the last Germanic tribe to accept Christianity, an event which possibly corresponds with the incorporation of South Warwickshire into the Worcester Diocese in 688. Prior to this there does not seem to have been any Episcopal responsibility for the area. In the early years, the Bishop of Worcester was known as the Bishop of the Hwicca. The remains of what may have been the original “Preaching Cross” is still visible in Lighthorne churchyard. Early “churches” were often churches only in the sense of community and did not have a physical structure, the services being held in the open air by such preaching crosses.



Remains of Lighthorne's preaching cross.

The Anglo-Saxon administration divided the country into largely self sufficient areas called “Hundreds”, with Lighthorne forming part of the hundred of Tremelau, which survived as an administrative unit until the 12th century, when it was merged with Kineton Hundred.