

# We East Anglians really are a diverse bunch of folk

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■ Walcott, which in Old English meant 'the cottage of the Welsh'.

Picture: ANTONY KELLY

We were told at school that the Germanic invaders who crossed the North Sea to Britain in the fifth century were the Angles and Saxons. The Saxons, from north-west Germany, settled in Essex, Middlesex, Sussex and Wessex. The Angles, from southern Jutland, dominated everywhere else, including Norfolk and Suffolk – East Anglia.

If anyone doubted the truth of what our teachers said, it can be demonstrated rather nicely through a little bit of linguistic detective work on our local place names. Think about the Suffolk village called Saxham, near Bury St Edmunds. This name meant “the home of the Saxons”. That might seem to contradict what we were told at school, but of course it doesn't.

The village was called that because there was something unusual, in Suffolk, about being a Saxon. Everyone else was an Angle. Because there was nothing distinctive about being an Angle in Norfolk or Suffolk, we have no placenames with Angle as an element. Where you do find such names is in Wessex. Englefield, in

Berkshire, meant the “field of the Angles” – which tells you very clearly that everybody else round there was a Saxon.

But East Anglia did have something of an ethnic mix. There weren't just Angles and Saxons here. We also had Frisians, who made it over to England from their homeland along the Dutch/Belgian coast. We can see this from the Suffolk village names Friston and Freston – “the village of the Frisians”.

There were also other Germanic tribes hanging around. Swabia today is the part of Germany around Stuttgart, but the Swabian tribe spread far and wide in those days: the name of our Norfolk town of Swaffham meant “the home of the Swabians”. Flempton in Suffolk, also near Bury, indicates the presence of Flemings,

who had come from areas inland from the Frisians.

As another part of this fascinating ethno-linguistic mix, East Anglia also had plenty of survivors from the original Celtic population. On the Norfolk coast, just across the sea from the Frisian homeland, is the village of Walcott, which in Old English meant “the cottage of the Welsh”.

So Celts, Angles, Saxons, Frisians, Flemings, Swabians, not forgetting the Danes who came along later – there was a rich mix of peoples in early East Anglia. With such a diverse gene pool in our ancestry it's no surprise that the native people of modern Norfolk and Suffolk are such a fine bunch.