

The Early Middle Ages

The Early Middle Ages began after Rome collapsed in 476 AD. The decline began in 376 AD when many people fled to Rome for safety but were too powerful for the Romans to control. Then in 395AD, the empire was divided into two. The final blow fell when the emperor of the Western Empire died.

After the collapse of Rome groups of Anglo-Saxons and Vikings moved into new parts of Europe. These groups displaced local cultures and mixed pagan beliefs with Christianity. Languages changed as people settled in new areas. These changes localized people's outlooks. Without the protection of the powerful Roman government it was more dangerous to travel. Trade routes, social ties, and literacy gradually broke down. Many people died in epidemics, and populations declined.

In Britain, missionaries landed in the kingdom of Kent in 597 AD where Bertha, a Christian woman, had married King Ethelbert, a pagan, on the condition that she could practice her religion. A former Roman church was restored so Bertha could worship. St. Martin's church is the oldest Christian church in the English-

speaking world. Through Bertha, Christianity slowly returned to Britain. Bertha's husband was the first English king to convert to Christianity. Soon, churches sprang up across the land. Ethelbert provided land for a church in Canterbury. Today, it is known as Canterbury Cathedral. It is the headquarters of the Church of England.

This statue shows Bertha wearing clothing typical of the early Middle Ages. Note the beautiful woven design on her dress. Similar designs were used to decorate books, stonework, and graves, such as the one above.

Create a Design

Use a blank sheet of paper to create a design that could be worn on an article of clothing, carved into a cross or building, or used as a decorative border for a book. While neither of the examples shown are colored, you can use bright colors to highlight your work.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertha_of_Kent#/media/File:Stephen_Melton's_Queen_Bertha_statue,_Lady_Wootton's_Green,_Canterbury_-_geograph.org.uk_-_5055992.jpg [Accessed 6 June 2025]



Beeley Cross, Bakewell



Queen Bertha