Contents

Preface and Acknowledgements xi
List of Boxes xiii
List of Illustrations xv
List of Maps xvii

1 Introduction 1
  1.1 Overview 1
  1.2 Cathròe’s Journey 2
  1.3 The Land and Kingdoms of Britain 6
  1.4 Peoples and Places 9
  1.5 Rethinking ‘the Middle Ages’ 10
  1.6 Reading this Book 14
  1.7 Key Texts 14

Part I Conceiving Early Medieval Britain

2 An Island in the Ocean: The Idea of Britain 17
  2.1 Overview 17
  2.2 Introduction 18
  2.3 Britain in the Sixth Century: Un-Roman Britain 19
  2.4 Britain in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries: A Contest of Scholarship 22
  2.5 Britain in the Tenth Century: Three Visions 27
  2.6 Conclusion: Whose Britain Was it Anyway? 35
  2.7 Points for Discussion 36
  2.8 Key Texts 37

3 On the Edge of the World: Britain and Europe 38
  3.1 Overview 38
  3.2 Britain on the Edge 39
  3.3 West: Ireland and the Irish Sea 45
  3.4 East: Scandinavia 51
  3.5 South: Mainland Europe 59
## Table of Contents

3.6 Conclusion  69  
3.7 Points for Discussion  70  
3.8 Key Texts  70  

4 Legend, Myth and History  71  
4.1 Overview  71  
4.2 An Anglo-German Chronicle  72  
4.3 Forms of History  75  
4.4 Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*  80  
4.5 Geoffrey of Monmouth, *History of the Kings of Britain*  85  
4.6 *Beowulf*  89  
4.7 The Pillar of Eliseg  92  
4.8 Conclusion  94  
4.9 Points for Discussion  94  
4.10 Key Texts  95  

5 Migrations and Peoples  96  
5.1 Overview  96  
5.2 Thinking About Peoples  97  
5.3 Thinking About Migration  103  
5.4 The Roots of the English  105  
5.5 What's in a Name? The Anglo-Saxons  111  
5.6 The Origins of Scotland: Irish Migration to North Britain  117  
5.7 Viking Settlement in Britain  120  
5.8 Conclusion  124  
5.9 Points for Discussion  125  
5.10 Key Texts  125  

6 Fragments of the Past  126  
6.1 Overview  126  
6.2 Introduction  127  
6.3 Out of the Libraries  128  
6.4 Out of the Ground  135  
6.5 Out of Mouths  140  
6.6 Conclusion  142  
6.7 Points for Discussion  143  
6.8 Key Texts  143  

### Part II Making Early Medieval Britain

7 Britain c. 500  147  
7.1 Overview  147  
7.2 Timeline  148
7.3 Introduction 149
7.4 Two Britains 149
7.5 The End of Roman Britain 152
7.6 North Britain 159
7.7 Conclusion 161
7.8 Points for Discussion 162
7.9 Key Texts 162

8 ‘Fertile of Tyrants’: Britain 500–650 163
8.1 Overview 163
8.2 Timeline 164
8.3 Introduction 165
8.4 Becoming Different: New Kingdoms in the South 167
8.5 Developing Kingship in Southern and Eastern Britain 174
8.6 Continuity and Change in North Britain 175
8.7 Gildas’s Vision of Britain 178
8.8 The Date and Outlook of Gildas 180
8.9 Religions Old and New 183
8.10 Conclusion 189
8.11 Points for Discussion 189
8.12 Key Texts 190

9 ‘What the Outcome Will Be, a Future Age Will See’: Britain 650–850 191
9.1 Overview 191
9.2 Timeline 192
9.3 Introduction: Britain in the Balance? 194
9.4 Southern Britain: Mercia and Wessex 194
9.5 Middle Britain: Northumbria and its Neighbours 205
9.6 North Britain: The Triumph of the Picts 208
9.7 Towns and Trade 211
9.8 Conclusion: The Coming of the Vikings 213
9.9 Points for Discussion 214
9.10 Key Texts 214

10 ‘God Help Us!’: Britain 850–1000 216
10.1 Overview 216
10.2 Timeline 217
10.3 Introduction: Crisis and Consolidation 219
10.4 Vikings 219
10.5 The Kingdom of the English 231
10.6 The Kingdom of Alba and North Britain 239
10.7 The Welsh Kingdoms 244
## CONTENTS

10.8 Conclusion 248
10.9 Points for Discussion 249
10.10 Key Texts 250

### Part III Living in Early Medieval Britain

11 Kingship in Action 253
   11.1 Overview 253
   11.2 Introduction 254
   11.3 Doing without Kings? 254
   11.4 The Making of Kingdoms 255
   11.5 The Workings of Kingship 258
   11.6 Case Study: Alfred the Great (871–99) 262
   11.7 Points for Discussion 272
   11.8 Key Texts 272

12 Building a Christian Society 273
   12.1 Overview 273
   12.2 Introduction: An Age of Faith? 274
   12.3 The Conversion Process 275
   12.4 The Nature of Conversion 280
   12.5 The Aristocracy Converts the Church 285
   12.6 Case Study: Conversion and Burial 291
   12.7 Case Study: Pre-Christian Beliefs 295
   12.8 Points for Discussion 300
   12.9 Key Texts 300

13 Maintaining Belief: The Church as an Institution 301
   13.1 Overview 301
   13.2 Introduction: Structuring Religion 302
   13.3 The Bishops of Britain 302
   13.4 Forms of Monasticism 306
   13.5 Local Churches and Pastoral Care 315
   13.6 An Age of Saints 319
   13.7 Points for Discussion 325
   13.8 Key Texts 325

14 Family, Friend, Lord, Slave: The Basis of Society 326
   14.1 Overview 326
   14.2 Getting by in Early Medieval Britain 327
   14.3 Families and Lords 327
   14.4 Rank and Social Structure 330
   14.5 Slavery and Unfreedom 333
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Women’s Status</td>
<td>339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sex and Sexuality</td>
<td>345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Law and Order</td>
<td>348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Points for Discussion</td>
<td>351</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Key Texts</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Land, People and Settlement</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>People on the Land</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Living on the Land</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>A Tour of the Early Medieval Countryside</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>A Sense of Place: Settlements and Central Places</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Conclusion: Place and Mobility</td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Points for Discussion</td>
<td>376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Key Texts</td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Getting and Giving: Acts and Settings of Exchange</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Commerce, Tribute and Gift-Giving</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Means of Exchange: Money, Metal and Beyond</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>People and Places of Exchange</td>
<td>393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Points for Discussion</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Key Texts</td>
<td>399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Language and Communication</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Introduction: The Languages of Britain</td>
<td>401</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>The Age of Latin?</td>
<td>402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>The Age of the Vernacular?</td>
<td>406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>What’s in a Name?</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Points for Discussion</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Key Texts</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>‘As Far as the Cold Waves Reach’: Conclusion</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Overview</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Britain in the Eleventh Century</td>
<td>422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>A New Britain?</td>
<td>426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Key Texts</td>
<td>429</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Glossary 430
Further Reading 436
Index 464