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## Anglo Saxons

I recently visited my local museum to view a one-day exhibition of life in Saxon times, over a thousand years ago. I was surprised to see not only the expected glass cases of archaeological finds, but also the people themselves with all their goods, clothing, food, weapons and other items. These friendly villagers were members of the Anglo-Saxon Living History Group called Centingas, which means People of Kent. I am glad to say that the warrior with the axe was on our side, and I think the ancient Centingas would be pleased to have such robust protection, seeing as any attackers or raiders on their villages would be similarly armed. One wonders if the villagers would be quite so happy if they had displeased their overlord and had to meet the warrior as enforcer rather than protector.

All the props displayed are exact authentic reproductions to enable the Group to hold educational sessions at schools and re-enactment events. The audiences and children will certainly have no trouble in remembering the history and lives of previous inhabitants of the land, especially as there is the opportunity to dress up and take part. The helmets, swords and shields would delight those who like "boys' toys" to occupy their imaginations, all the better for being bright, shiny and complete, rather than a rusty relic needing a drawing to illustrate how it would have looked. All the brightly coloured wools awoke my fingers' knitting instincts, although this would have been woven or braided, as knitting did not arrive until much later. If I were in that Saxon village, I would be very busy at home making all the clothes for everyone, and let others feed the chickens, till the soil and find the firewood. But somehow I don't think I would get away with that easy option!

The display of writing implements, quills, styluses (or styli), inkpots and inkstands, drew my eye instantly, as I enjoy playing about with pens and paints. I did once attempt to make some dip pens from thin pieces of bamboo grown in my own garden, successful enough for drawing but unable to hold enough ink for much continuous writing. The wax tablet was used for quick temporary notes, and was the reporter's pad of its day, when paper, parchment and vellum were rare and expensive commodities. Quill pens were made from the moulted flight feathers of large birds such as geese and occasionally swans, the Latin for feather being "penna". They were used until the early eighteen hundreds, when they were replaced by the mass-produced metal dip-pen nib.

I like to learn about how people lived in times past in my country. It is easy to pick out the pleasant parts and gloss over the less comfortable aspects of their lives. I prefer to have a home that keeps the weather out, and the convenience of the local supermarket, although gathering pesticide-free apples from my garden trees is much more appealing than buying them. I appreciate not having to worry about Viking raiders sneaking up the River Thames in their longboats and attacking in the dark. I am sure the Saxons would have a similar comparison list if they could view us, and be glad that they did not have to live with our noise, pollution and crowded existence in the cities, and lack of skill or opportunity to provide for ourselves from our immediate surroundings. Maybe they looked back on earlier times and saw themselves as enjoying the ultimate in modern comfortable living. Perhaps someone in the future will join a re-enactment event to recreate our "ancient" lives, although now that we have the ability to record our world in minute detail, they will probably not have to work so hard to find out how we lived. (630 words)

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