Two thousand years ago, the Celts lived in Britain. Then in AD 43, the Romans invaded their land. Britain became part of the Roman Empire. The Romans built new roads and cities, but when they left in AD 410, most people in Britain still spoke Celtic languages, not Latin.

In AD 400 – 500, the Angles, the Saxons and other tribes came to Britain from Germany and Denmark. At first, they spoke different languages, but later they joined together, and a new language was born – Anglo-Saxon (or ‘Old English’) – with words like father and mother. The word English comes from the word Angles.

By AD 700, the Anglo-Saxons controlled most of England and part of Scotland. The Celts lived in Scotland, Ireland, Wales and Cornwall. Today, some people in these places still speak Celtic languages.
In AD 597, Pope Gregory sent a mission with the monk Augustine to convert the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity. The monks used Latin and Greek words in the mass. Some words became part of Old English.

In AD 793, Viking ships from Norway attacked a monastery in Lindisfarne, England. The Vikings killed all the monks, and took gold and farm animals. For years, they attacked churches and villages. Then around AD 900, they began to build towns like York and Norwich. Today, there are about 500 Viking words in English, like window and egg.

In 1066, the Normans invaded Britain. They came from Normandy in France, and French became the official language. Most books were in Latin or French, but the local people spoke English. The Normans married local people, and they began to speak English too. In about 1386, Chaucer became the first important writer to write in English, and by the 1500s, English was the official language.

From 1600 to the 1950s, the British Empire controlled lots of countries around the world. People in these countries learnt English because it was the language of the government. But the Empire changed English too – new words came into the language, like shampoo (India), tea (China) and safari (Kenya). In the 1950s, the British government encouraged people from the Empire to come and live in Britain. Millions of immigrants came from places like the Caribbean, India and Pakistan.

In the last ten years, a lot of immigrants have come from European countries like Poland and Romania. Polish is now the second most important language in England, with half a million speakers!