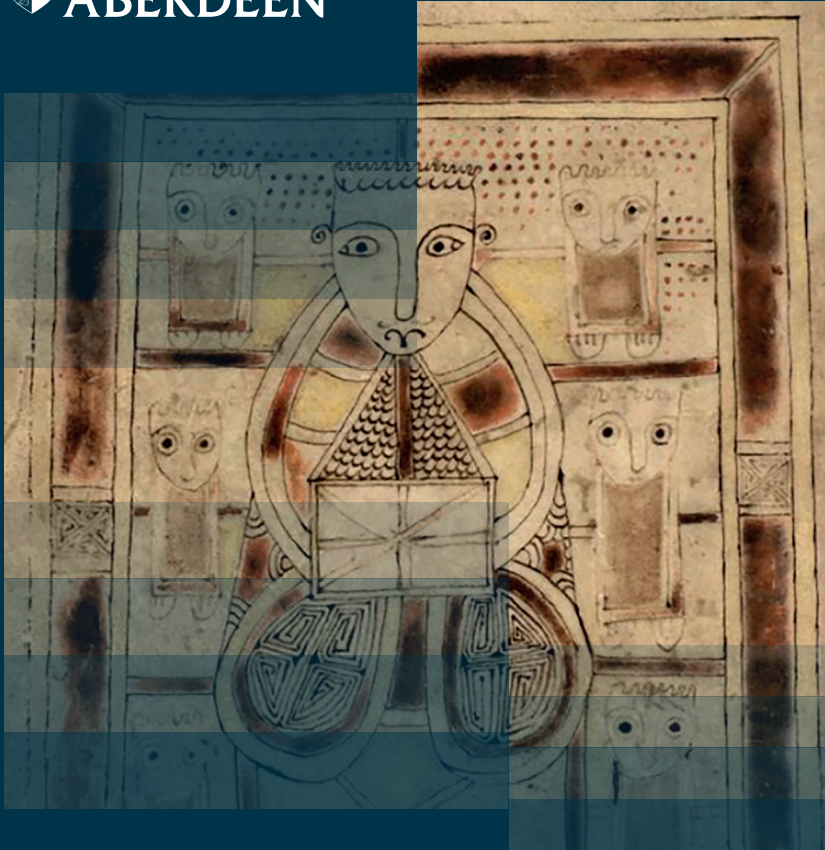




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# Celtic & Anglo-Saxon Studies

UNDERGRADUATE GUIDE



# Introduction

Celtic & Anglo-Saxon Studies (CAX) is an innovative interdisciplinary programme available as a single-honours M.A. or as part of a joint-M.A. degree with another subject, e.g. History, Archaeology, English, Linguistics, Scottish Gaelic or another modern language.

Aberdeen is one of the very few universities in Europe where it is possible for a student to study the Celts, Anglo-Saxons and Vikings in comparison. Our modules cover literature, culture, history and languages. The emphasis is on the Dark Ages and Middle Ages, but looking back to ancient times and forward to the modern period as well. No prior knowledge is expected. Students can choose their own pathway based on a wide range of available modules, depending on their particular areas of interest. Aberdeen has been a centre for Celtic studies for more than a century, and our library resources are outstanding. The surrounding countryside is rich in archaeological and historic remains of Scotland's Celtic and Nordic past.

This document lists all the modules we offer at levels 1 to 4. They are not available at the same time, and teaching and assessment details may vary during the pandemic.

To see which module are available in the current academic year, please consult the Catalogue of Courses [www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/courses/undergraduate](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/registry/courses/undergraduate) and click on 'Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Studies'. This is updated each summer.

For further information please contact the Undergraduate Programme Coordinator, Professor Ralph O'Connor  
[r.oconnor@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:r.oconnor@abdn.ac.uk)

## Level 1 Modules

At level 1, all students registered for Celtic & Anglo-Saxon Studies (single and joint honours) are required to take the introductory module 'Songs, Myths and Hero-Tales of the Old North' and 30 credit points from modules considered to be part of the Celtic & Anglo-Saxon curriculum, plus 75 credit points from other available modules.

### Core modules, first semester:

#### **Songs, Myths and Hero-Tales of the Old North: An Introduction To Early Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Literature** (15 credits) (compulsory)

This module introduces students to the oldest vernacular literature of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England. We explore heroic narratives featuring, for example, the Scandinavian monster-fighter Beowulf (immortalized in England's first epic poem), the Irish warrior Cú Chulainn (hero of the Táin) and the tragic Welsh princess Branwen, caught up in a fatal power-struggle between Wales and Ireland. We examine praise-poetry and heroic elegy, meditative poetry, prophecy, and tales of Otherworldly shapeshifters.

All these texts will be studied in English translation, and no prior knowledge is expected.

- Two one-hour lectures and one one-hour tutorial per week
- Assessment: two essays (30% and 50%, 1500 and 2000 words), tutorial participation (20%)

### Optional Level 1 modules:

#### **Lost Gods and Hidden Monsters in the Celtic and Germanic Middle Ages** (15 credits)

Primordial giants, godlike 'immortals', elves, leprechauns, trolls, water-monsters and the walking dead: uncanny Otherworldly beings feature widely in the literature of the Celtic and Germanic Middle Ages, as its Christian authors reimagined their cultures' pagan pasts. Drawing primarily on Gaelic and Norse-Icelandic literature, this course will explore how these beings were conceptualized, how (if at all) they related to pre-Christian myth and religion, and why they continued to be significant to these cultures many centuries after Christianization.

- One one-hour lecture and one one-hour tutorial per week
- Assessment: two essays (30% and 50%, 1500 and 2000 words), tutorial participation (20%)

#### **Barbarians, Romans, Gods and Warriors** (15 credits)

This module gives you an exciting introduction to the ancient Celtic and Germanic worlds. In lectures and small-group tutorials, we will explore the peoples who inhabited western and central Europe in Antiquity. We will discuss their cultures and their interactions with Greece and Rome. The module also covers the fates of these cultures in the post-Roman world. Change over time will provide a major driver of the course: for instance, empire and its effect; the history and impact of the 'barbarian'; the successive impacts of Roman religion and of Christianity, and how they were represented in mediaeval 'heroic' literature.

- Two one-hour lectures and one one-hour tutorial per week
- Assessment: one two-hour written examination (60%), essay of approx. 1500-2000 words (30%), tutorial participation (10%)

#### **Modern Irish for Beginners 1** (15 credits, first semester)

This module aims to give students an introduction to the modern Irish language (not to be confused with Scottish Gaelic: see below). It covers basic conversation skills and the structures of the language through the use of songs, videos and speaking practice in class. The module is open to those with little or no knowledge of the language.

- Four classes per week
- Assessment: one two-hour examination (60%), three translation exercises (10% each), and oral assessment (10%)

#### **Modern Irish for Beginners 2** (15 credits, second semester)

This module gives students a continuation of their study of the modern Irish language. It will encourage conversations in Irish on more advanced topics, through the use of current news programmes and features, songs, literature, and speaking practice in class on fun topics of the students' choice.

- Four classes per week
- Assessment: one two-hour examination (60%), three translation exercises (10% each), and oral assessment (10%)

### **Scottish Gaelic Language Modules for Beginners and Intermediates**

(2 modules at each skill level, one in each semester, 15 credits each) (Based in Gaelic)

Scottish Gaelic (or simply 'Gaelic'), the Celtic language of modern Scotland, is the sister language of modern Irish. The 'Gaelic for Beginners 1A and 1B' modules will enable students with little or no prior experience of the language to speak, read, write and understand Gaelic at a basic level and master a large working vocabulary, while 'Gaelic Language 1A and 1B' are aimed at students who are already relatively fluent and have studied the language to at least Higher level at school (or equivalent). These modules are taught through a mixture of interactive classes, conversation classes, and a programme of homework exercises and self-directed learning. They are complemented by follow-up modules at level 2, available only for students who have already taken the level 1 modules. Students wishing to learn a Celtic language for two full years (four semesters) should sign up in the first semester of their first year; students wishing to take only one or two semesters of Gaelic can take the level 1 modules in their first or second year of study.

### **Gaelic Scotland**

(15 credits, 1st semester) (Based in Gaelic)

Gaelic is Scotland's oldest living language. In this introductory module you will learn about the Gaels, their history and their role in the shaping of modern Scotland. You will also learn about how Gaelic language and culture became minoritized in its own country.

Students will learn about various contemporary initiatives that are aimed at saving and promoting this indigenous language and culture and this will be compared to minority languages and cultures elsewhere in the world.

### **Latin 1 & 2**

(2 modules, one in each semester, 15 credits each) (Based in Divinity)

Latin was the upper-class language of Roman Britain, the major language of the early churches in mediaeval Britain and Ireland, and the language in which some of the finest literary works produced in mediaeval Britain and Ireland were written. There are four Latin modules at levels 1 and 2. These can be taken as a complete set under the 'Sustained Study' rubric, or as individual modules depending on prior ability. The first-semester level 1 Latin module is an introductory, intensive module for those with little or no previous exposure to Latin. Students completing this module should have a Latin vocabulary of about 400 words and a basic understanding of Latin grammar and syntax. Students successfully completing this module will be adequately prepared to attend the second-semester course if they wish. Students will probably discover that their knowledge of English vocabulary and grammar/syntax is improved by their study of Latin. The etymological roots of many English words can be traced to the Latin language.

The second-semester module will provide students with a more or less comprehensive understanding of Latin syntax and grammar, a Latin vocabulary of 700-800 words, and the ability to translate simple Latin texts into idiomatic English. Those who wish can go on to take one or both Latin modules at level 2 (see below).

### **Level 2 Modules**

At level 2, all students registered for Celtic & Anglo-Saxon Studies (single and joint honours) are required to take 30 credit points from modules considered to be part of the Celtic & Anglo-Saxon curriculum, plus 90 credit points from other available modules.

### **Love, Loss and Revival: Gaelic Ireland, 1700 to the Present** (15 credits)

This module provides an introduction to Gaelic Ireland from the eighteenth century to the present, a period of historical trauma but also of unrivalled literary expression across many genres, from courtly poetry to the folk song, the autobiography and the novel. Reference will be made throughout to the political upheavals in which Gaelic Ireland was refashioned, alongside other key themes including the changing status of the Irish language, and Ireland's relationship with the rest of Europe. Though much Gaelic writing of this period closely reflect the bleakness of history, it has also been a vehicle for joyful affirmation, comedy, and tragic grandeur and resilience.

- One one-hour lecture and one one-hour tutorial per week
- Assessment: one two-hour written examination (60%), 2000-to-2500-word essay (30%), tutorial participation (10%)

### **Arthur in Mediaeval Celtic and Scandanavian Literature**

(15 credits)

The module provides a survey of literature on Arthur in the Middle Ages, focusing on early Welsh and Gaelic sources, related Scandinavian literature and French, Welsh and English romances. It includes discussion of broader themes and questions posed by the literature, e.g. whether Arthur could have been a real person, how the Arthurian legend evolved over time and in different areas of Europe, and why the character has been elevated to iconic status.

- One one-hour lecture and one one-hour tutorial per week
- Assessment: one two-hour written examination (60%), essay of approximately 2000-2500 words (30%), tutorial participation (10%)

### **Vikings: An Introduction**

(15 credits) (Based in History but taught with Celtic & Anglo- Saxon staff)

The year 793: a surprise viking attack on the peaceful monastic island of Lindisfarne. This raid is often considered to mark the beginning of the so-called Viking Age, a time of turbulence and transformation with repercussions throughout Europe and beyond. This period saw violence and warfare, cultural contact and religious conversion, political overhaul, and literary and artistic creativity. As well as critically interrogating the concepts of the 'viking' and the 'Viking Age', this course provides an introduction to key themes and topics in the study of early Scandinavia, c. 800-1200.

- 11 one-hour lectures and 6 one-hour tutorials
- Assessment: 2000-word essay (60%), 600-word source analysis (20%), tutorial participation and online discussion (20%)

### **Introduction to Scottish Gaelic Literature** (15 credits) (Based in Gaelic)

This survey module is an introduction to Scottish Gaelic literature from the seventeenth century to the present day. It is strongly recommended as a companion module to 'Love, Loss and Revival' (listed above) which surveys the literature and culture of modern Gaelic Ireland. It is taught using translated texts, alongside original sources for those whose Gaelic skills are good enough.

Students will gain new perspectives on key areas of Scottish society such as Jacobitism, the Clearances, the Highland Land Wars, the Celtic Revival and the modern Gaelic renaissance. This module is suitable for anyone in programme year 2 with an interest in Scottish society or literature.

### **The Celts, Their Neighbours and the Classical World** (15 credits)

Greek and Roman interactions with, and perceptions of, Celtic and Germanic peoples will form the central theme of this module. It includes in-depth discussion of migrations, material cultures and pre-Christian belief-systems. We will also analyse individual Classical authors' motives and judgments in relation to Celts and Germani, and how these perceptions evolved against the background of the emerging Roman Empire. In addition the course involves discussion of broader themes and questions posed by the sources, e.g. the portrayals of Celtic and Germanic peoples in Greek and Roman visual art, and the possible uses of Classical texts in Celtic and Anglo-Saxon literatures.

- One one-hour lecture and one one-hour tutorial per week
- Assessment: one two-hour written examination (60%), an essay of approx. 2000 words, including references but excluding bibliography (30%), and tutorial participation (10%)

### **Other level 2 courses which may be of interest:**

#### **Scottish Gaelic Language Modules for Advanced Beginners and Intermediates** (2 modules at each skill level, one per semester, 15 credits each) (Based in Gaelic)

These modules continue the course of study in modern Gaelic for students who have already taken the level 1 modules in this language. See above under level 1 modules.

#### **Latin Language and Literature 1 and Intermediate Latin 2** (15 credits each) (Based in Divinity)

These two modules, running across the year, build on the level 1 Latin modules (and can be taken separately by those who already have the basic skills). It introduces students to medium- difficulty Latin texts, such as the Gospels and mediaeval saints' Lives. The aim is to consolidate and extend students' grasp of the grammar, syntax and vocabulary of classical and mediaeval Latin, covering all the chief constructions by the end of the module.

### **Modules at Levels 3 & 4**

Unless otherwise specified, level 3 and 4 (Honours) modules are worth 30 credits each and are taught in combined classes of level 3 and level 4 students.

- Programme requirement (single honours): students will need 240 credits overall. All students registered for Celtic & Anglo-Saxon Studies single honours are required to take 210 credits altogether in years 3 and 4 from modules available as part of the Celtic & Anglo-Saxon curriculum, with the option of taking 30 credit points in a different subject if they wish, or a further Celtic & Anglo- Saxon module if they prefer. They must take the level 4 dissertation module in Celtic & Anglo-Saxon Studies.
- Programme requirement (joint honours): students will need 240 credits overall. All students registered for Celtic & Anglo- Saxon Studies joint honours are required to take 120 credits from level 3 and 4 modules available as part of the Celtic & Anglo-Saxon curriculum during their third and fourth years of study.

### **Language-only modules**

NB: No previous knowledge of Celtic or Germanic languages is required.

### **Introduction to Old Gaelic** (2 30-credit modules)

These modules provide a basic introduction to Old Gaelic, the direct ancestor of modern Irish and Scottish Gaelic. Spoken in Ireland and Scotland in the early Middle Ages, Old Gaelic is the earliest Celtic language which we can reconstruct with some certainty.

#### **Or (in alternate years):**

### **Introduction to Brittonic Language** (2 30-credit modules) (mediaeval Welsh)

Brittonic languages were spoken throughout mainland Britain and in Brittany prior to the invasions of the Anglo-Saxons, vikings and Normans, giving rise to modern Welsh, Cornish and Breton. These modules provide a basic introduction to the mediaeval Welsh language, forms of which were spoken in Wales, northern England and southern Scotland during the early Middle Ages.

#### **'Language combined with literature' modules**

NB: No previous knowledge of Celtic or Germanic languages is required.

### **Introduction to Old English Language**

This module will provide an introduction to the language of the Anglo-Saxons. It will focus on grammatical study of the language, and translating basic Anglo-Saxon passages into modern English. It will be based on a new version of the Old English course designed by Dr Duncan Macrae-Gibson, an eminent Anglo-Saxonist and inspirational lecturer at

Aberdeen. This 21st-century version of the course (published by Aberdeen University Press) will include traditional and online elements. The course will give students the opportunity to begin learning the language in which 'Beowulf' and many other fascinating poems and prose texts were composed.

- Teaching and assessment: for information please contact the course coordinator, Dr Aileen O'Leary (a.oleary@abdn.ac.uk)
- In 2021-22 there will be an option to study Old English under the 'Independent Study' course title: contact Dr Aileen O'Leary for details

### **Early Modern Gaelic Language and Texts** (Based in Gaelic)

This module is available to students with some experience of studying a Gaelic language, normally one semester or more studying modern Irish, modern Gaelic or Old Gaelic. It introduces students to the Gaelic language and society of the early modern period, c. 1200 to c.1700. Students will learn to read short historical and fictional texts in the original language (with help); students will also read translated texts and scholarly materials about historical and cultural topics of that period. The course will involve morphological, syntactic and lexical study, with an emphasis on translation into English or modern Gaelic, and consideration of the socio-historical and literary background needed to reach a full appreciation of the texts.

Directed self-learning will include preparation of translations for discussion and analysis in class and substantial reading on historical and cultural topics related to the texts and their authors.

- Assessment: two language exercises (40% each), seminar participation (20%)

### **Literature and history modules** (Texts taught in translation)

#### **Tales of Vengeance and Enchantment: The Heroic Age in Irish and Icelandic Saga Literature**

This module explores and compares the legendary saga-narratives written in mediaeval Ireland and Iceland which dramatize the great deeds and even greater misdeeds of Celtic and Scandinavian 'heroes'. Characters studied range from the frenzied Ulster warrior Cu Chulainn to the tragic and troll-like Icelander Grettir the Strong and the mythic dragon-slayer Sigurðr the Volsung, made famous by Wagner but much wilder in the original. Stories studied will include cattle-raids, bloodfeuds, Otherworld quests and fights with zombies. By the end of the course, students will know how to go berserk in an informed and critically aware manner.

- Three hours of seminars per week, some including lecture-material
- Assessment: one 3000-word essay (level 3) or 4000-word essay (level 4) (60%), primary-source exercise (30%), seminar participation (10%)

#### **Dangerous Liaisons: Love, Sex and Romance in the Celtic West and the Old North**

The literature of the Celtic and Germanic Middle Ages is famous for its tragic tales of ill-starred romance and forbidden love, as well as for the frankness and freshness with which its poetry explores the subject of sexual attraction. This module will explore how the interwoven themes of love, sex and romance were dramatized in Celtic, Norse and Anglo-Saxon stories and poetry. Topics covered will include some or all of the following: love-triangles, maiden-kings and cross-dressing, amorous trolls and femmes fatales, undead and fairy lovers, elopements and abductions, courtly love, and lyrics of requited and unrequited passion.

- One one-hour lecture and one two-hour seminar per week
- Assessment: one 3000-word essay (level 3) or 4000-word essay (level 4) (60%), primary-source exercise (30%), seminar participation (10%)

### **Celtic Encounters: The Gaelic World in Modern Irish and Scottish Literature**

Celtic Encounters looks at the ways in which Irish and Scottish writers have reimagined texts of Celtic origin in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, from the Irish Literary Revival through the Scottish Literary Renaissance, to the present day. Writers have adapted Old Gaelic sagas and hero tales for modern consumption, reinvented themselves as latter-day bardic poets, and been inspired by the Celtic and Gaelic past to produce daringly modernist and experimental new work.

- 3 contact hours per week (lectures and seminars)
- Assessment: 1500-word essay (30%), 3000 or 4000-word essay (50%), presentation (10%), seminar participation (10%)

### **Gaelic Learning Through The Ages** (15 credits based in Gaelic)

This course examines education in Gaelic society from earliest times to the eighteenth century, and what learning represented in a world that cherished its own traditional culture but also valued and absorbed the learning beyond it. It explores the role and work of the professional classes (the guardians and promoters of culture), and that of other members of society who had access to education; and it studies the exchange between both groups. It observes the impact on native culture of external influences, such as Christianity, the Classics, various continental traditions, and Lowland

contact, and it highlights the role and contribution of women. It closes with an overview of the developments that led to the extinction of traditional Gaelic society, their bearing on native culture and society, and the centrality of the ceilidh to Gaelic culture for the two following centuries.

### **Independent Study in Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Studies** (15 credits, level 3 or 4, depending on staff availability)

This module will provide the opportunity for students with appropriate experience in Celtic & Anglo-Saxon Studies to pursue in-depth exploration of a specific topic in Celtic and/or Anglo-Saxon Studies. It gives students an opportunity for intensive engagement in a specific area within the research field of an individual staff member, and at level 3 it can be arranged as preparatory work towards a dissertation.

#### **Level 3 Only:**

### **Scottish Archaeology** (15 credits) (Based in Archaeology)

Here in Scotland we have a world-class record of past human society. From the spectacularly preserved Neolithic settlement of Skara Brae to 19th-century clearance villages, this course explores the broad sweep of Scottish prehistoric and historic archaeology, with a chronological focus on the period from the earliest settlers to the major social and political changes of the Middle Ages. In lectures and a day-long study trip, students will gain an in-depth

insight into the archaeology of Scotland and will explore some of the major issues in human history: the origins of agriculture and monumentality, worldview and belief in the north, settlement and social structure, urbanism and the emergence of the modern world.

- 2 lectures per week, 1 week taken up by a field trip
- 100% continuous assessment

#### **Level 4 Only:**

### **Myths of the North** (30 credits, based in History)

This course explores (in translation) the main primary sources for Old Norse myth and legend, enabling students to better understand Viking and medieval Scandinavian myths, beliefs, gods and heroes, in their original historical contexts. Once an understanding of the medieval sources (mainly textual, including poetry and prose, but also material and artistic evidence) has been established, the course considers the ongoing impact and significance of these myths and tales in various historical contexts up to today. We will critically evaluate representations of the Old Norse world in contexts from national socialism to Hollywood, and consider the political and cultural implications of post-medieval uses (and abuses) of North myth and legend.

- 2 seminars per week
- Assessment: 2000-word written exercise (40%), exam (60%)

### **Viking Archaeology** (15 credits, based in Archaeology)

In their brief 300-year heyday, the peoples of Viking-Age Scandinavia transformed the northern world, and themselves. This course explores the Vikings at home, abroad, and in their new homes overseas in the developing colonies of the diaspora that stretched from the coasts of North America to the Asian steppe. In lectures and seminars, with hands-on classes looking at the finds, students will consider themes such as settlement and social structure, urbanism and commerce, pagan and Christian religion, and the political process that created the modern nation-states of Norway, Sweden and Denmark. As an introduction to the archaeology of the Viking Age, this course will provide students with an insight into the nature of Viking Age Scandinavian society and culture; an understanding of political developments in the Viking Age and the transformation from tribal- to state-based societies in Norway, Sweden and Denmark; detailed knowledge of the geographical scope of the Viking world; and an understanding of how archaeologists combine a range of sources (material, textual and environmental) to achieve a synthetic understanding of a discrete period of history.

- 2 one-hour lectures per week, plus tutorials or seminars in some weeks
- Assessment: 3000-word essay (50%), museum-display-style poster project (50%)

**Dissertation in Celtic & Anglo-Saxon Studies**  
(2nd semester)

This dissertation is the culmination of a humanities student's programme of study: an 8000-word research essay written on a topic which they devise in consultation with a supervisor, who will meet them in a series of one-to-one supervision sessions to help them plan their work. It is compulsory for single-honours students in their fourth year. Joint-honours students choose between writing their dissertation in Celtic & Anglo-Saxon Studies or in their other discipline.

For further information please contact the Undergraduate Programme Coordinator, Professor Ralph O'Connor  
[r.oconnor@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:r.oconnor@abdn.ac.uk)

**Cover image:**  
*St John from the 'Book of Deer', a Gospel-book with connections to the North-East of Scotland, generally dated to the tenth century: Cambridge University Library, MS li.6.32, fol. 41v (copyright Cambridge University Library)*







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