

THE CAMBRIDGE
ENCYCLOPEDIA OF
THE ENGLISH
LANGUAGE
THIRD EDITION DAVID CRYSTAL



THE CAMBRIDGE
ENCYCLOPEDIA OF
**THE ENGLISH
LANGUAGE**



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CONTENTS

1 Modelling English	2	6 Modern English	80	Unusual Structures	140	Knowing vs Knowing	
PART I The History of English	4	Transition	80	Lexical Creation	142	About	203
2 The Origins of English	6	Grammatical Trends	81	Literary Neologism	144	Traditional Grammar	204
3 Old English	8	Prescriptivism	82	10 Etymology	146	Prescriptive Grammar	206
Early Borrowings	8	American English	84	Lexical History	146	The 21st-Century Legacy	208
Runes	9	Breaking the Rules	88	Semantic Change	148	The Main Branches of Grammar	209
The Old English Corpus	10	Variety Awareness	90	Folk Etymology	149	14 The Structure of Words	210
Literary Texts	12	Scientific Language	91	Place Names	150	Morphology	210
The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle	14	Literary Voices	92	Surnames	158	Suffixation	210
Spelling	16	Dickens	93	First Names	160	Adjectives	211
Sounds	18	Recent Trends	94	Nicknames	162	Nouns	212
Grammar	20	Current Trends	96	Object Names	164	The Apostrophe	215
Vocabulary	22	Linguistic Memes	97	Eponyms	165	Pronouns	215
Late Borrowings	24	7 World English	98	11 The Structure of the Lexicon	166	Verbs	216
Dialects	28	The New World	98	Semantic Structure	166	15 Word Classes	218
4 Middle English	30	American Dialects	99	Semantic Fields	167	Parts of Speech	218
French and English	30	Canada	101	Dictionary and Thesaurus	168	Traditional Definitions	218
The Transition From Old English	32	Black English Vernacular	102	Collocations	172	New Classes	219
The Middle English Corpus	34	Australia	104	Lexical Predictability	174	Nouns	220
Literary Texts	36	New Zealand	105	Idioms	175	Pronouns	222
Chaucer	38	South Africa	106	Synonyms	176	Adjectives	223
Spelling	40	South Asia	107	Antonyms	177	Adverbs	223
Sounds	42	West Africa	108	Hyponyms	178	Verbs	224
Grammar	44	East Africa	108	Incompatibility	179	Prepositions	225
Vocabulary	46	South-East Asia and the South Pacific	110	Other Sense Relations	180	Conjunctions	225
Latin borrowings	48	A World Language	112	12 Lexical Dimensions	182	Interjections	225
Dialects	50	Numbers of Speakers	114	Loaded Vocabulary	182	16 The Structure of Sentences	226
Middle Scots	52	Standard English	118	Taboo	184	Spoken and Written Syntax	226
The Origins of Standard English	54	The Future of English	120	Swearing	185	Types of Sentence	228
5 Early Modern English	56	English Threatened and as Threat	122	Jargon	186	Sentence Structure	229
Caxton	56	Euro-Englishes	124	Doublespeak	188	Sentence Functions	230
Transitional Texts	58	PART II English Vocabulary	126	Political Correctness	189	Clause Elements	232
Renaissance English	60	8 The Nature of the Lexicon	128	Catch Phrases	190	Clause Types	233
The Inkhorn Controversy	61	Lexemes	128	Vogue Words	191	Phrases	234
Shakespeare	62	The Size of the English Lexicon	129	Slogans	192	Noun Phrases	234
The King James Bible	66	Abbreviations	130	Graffiti	193	Verb Phrases	236
Spelling and Regularization	68	Proper Names	132	Slang	194	Multiple Sentences	238
Punctuation	70	The Size of a Person's Lexicon	133	Quotations	196	Multiple Structures	239
Sounds	71	9 The Sources of the Lexicon	134	Proverbs	196	Abbreviation	240
Original Pronunciation	72	Native Vocabulary	134	Archaisms	197	Disjuncts and Comment Clauses	241
Grammar	74	Foreign Borrowings	136	Clichés	198	Reporting Speech	242
Vocabulary	76	Lexical Structure	138	Last Words	199	Sentence Information	243
The Academy Issue	77	PART III English Grammar	200	13 Grammatical Mythology	202	Beyond the Sentence	244
Johnson	78			The Nature of Grammar	202		

PART IV Spoken and Written English 246
17 The Sound system 248

Phonetics and	
Phonology	248
Vocal organs	248
Vowels	249
Consonants	254
Syllables	258
Connected Speech	259
Prosody	260
Sound Symbolism	262
Pronunciation in Practice	266

18 The Writing System 268

Graphetics and Graphology	269
Typography	269
The Alphabet	270
Properties of Letters	277
Letter Frequency	277
Letter Distribution	278
Letter Symbolism	280
Analysing Handwriting	281
Graphetic Variety	282
Spelling	284
Sources of Irregularity	286
Spelling Reform	288
Punctuation	290
The Development	
of the Writing System	292
Punctuation Marks	294
The Punctuation Problem	296

PART V Using English 298
19 Varieties of Discourse 300

Structure vs Use	300
Pragmatic Issues	300
Constructing a Discourse	301

Microlinguistic Studies	302
Pragmatics	304
Cognitive Approaches	306
Texts and Varieties	308
Speech and Writing	309
Mixed Medium	310
Monologue and Dialogue	312
Panchronicity	317

20 Regional Variation 318

Accent and Dialect	318
International and	
Intranational	319
A Day in the Life of the	
Language	320
American and British	
English	326
American Dialects	332
British Dialects	338
Scotland	348
Wales	354
Ireland	356
Canada	360
Caribbean	364
Pidgins and Creoles	366
Australia	370
New Zealand	374
South Africa	376
New Englishes	378
Culture Talking	383

21 Social Variation 386

Sociolinguistic	
Perspective	386
Received Pronunciation	387
Prescriptive Attitudes	388
Gender	390
Occupation	394
Religion	395
Science	396
Law	398

Plain English	401
Politics	402
News Media	406
Journalism	408
Broadcasting	410
Weather Forecasting	411
Sports Commentary	412
Advertising	414
Restricted Varieties	416
New Fashions	418
New Technologies	419

22 Personal Variation 420

Individual Differences	420
Deviance	421
Word Games	422
Rule-Breaking Varieties	426
The Edges of Language	429
Jokes and Puns	430
Comic Alphabets	433
Variety Humour	436
Literary Freedom	438
Phonetics and Phonology	440
Graphetics and	
Graphology	442
Grammar and Lexicon	444
Discourse and Variety	446
Stylometry	449
Forensic Linguistics	450

23 Electronic Variation 452

Netspeak and its	
Properties	452
Lexical Distinctiveness	461
Graphetic Distinctiveness	462
Graphological	
Distinctiveness	463
Grammatical	
Distinctiveness	466
Discourse Distinctiveness	468

PART VI Learning About English 476
24 Learning English as a Mother Tongue 478

Child Language	
Acquisition	478
Literacy	479
Grammatical Development	480
Early Words and Sounds	482
Reading and Writing	484
Insufficient Language	486
Language Disability	486

25 New Ways of Studying English 488

Technological Revolution	488
Corpus Studies	490
National and	
International Corpora	492
Dictionaries	498
Innovations	502
Sources and Resources	506

APPENDICES 507

I	Glossary	508
II	Special Symbols and Abbreviations	526
III	References	528
IV	New Addresses	534
V	Further Reading	535
VI	Index of Linguistic Items	540
VII	Index of Authors and Personalities	544
VIII	Index of Topics	549
	Acknowledgements	569

PREFACE

A book about the English language – or about any individual language – is a daring enterprise, for it has as many perceptive critics as there are fluent readers. The language as a whole belongs to no one, yet everyone owns a part of it, has an interest in it, and has an opinion about it. Moreover, whenever people begin to talk about their own language, they all have something to offer – favourite words or sayings, dialect anecdotes and observations, usage likes and dislikes. Individual linguistic memories, experiences, and abilities enable everyone to make a personal contribution to language chat. In a sense, we are all truly equal when we participate – even though this democratic vision is disturbed by the widely-shared perception that some (notably, those who have learned the terminology of language study) are more equal than others.

The Stories of English

That is why the metaphor of ‘the story’ (as in ‘the story of English’) is somewhat misleading. There is no one ‘story’ of English. There are innumerable individual stories. And even if we look for broad narrative themes, there are several dimensions competing for our attention. For example, there is the structural story – the way the sounds, grammar, and vocabulary of the language have evolved. There is the social story – the way the language has come to serve a multiplicity of functions in society. There is the literary story – the way writers have evoked the power, range, and beauty of the language to express new orders of meaning. And there is the chronological story – apparently the most straightforward, though even here it is not possible to give a simple account, in terms of a beginning, middle, and end. There is no single beginning to the story of English, but several, with waves of Anglo-Saxon invaders arriving in various locations, and laying the foundations of later dialect difference. There is no single middle, but several, with the language diverging early on in England and Scotland, then much later taking different paths in Britain, North America, and elsewhere. And, as we observe the increasingly diverse directions in which English is currently moving around the world, there is certainly no single end.

A Traveller’s Guide

The biggest problem in compiling this book, accordingly, was what order to impose upon the mass of material which presents itself for inclusion. I have started with history, moved on to structure, and concluded with use. But it might have been otherwise, and I have written the six parts so that it is possible for readers to begin with any one of them and move in any direction. The same principle was applied to the structure of each part. While there is a certain logic of exposition in some topics (such as Part I, the history of English), there is none in others (such as Part V, the account of major regional or social varieties). In all cases, therefore, chapters, and sections within chapters, have been planned as self-contained entities, with relevant conceptual underpinning provided by the frequent use of cross-references.

The basic unit of organization in the book is the double-page spread. Sentences never cross turn-over pages, and the vast majority of topics are treated within the constraints of a single spread. I have tried to ensure that it will be possible for readers to dip into this book at any point, and find a coherent treatment of a topic in a single opening. There is too much in any language for the information to be assimilated in a continuous reading, and this is especially so in the case of English, with its lengthy history and vast range of use; and while some may wish to read this book ‘from left to right’, I suspect most will prefer to make more leisurely excursions over a period of time – more a casual stroll than a guided tour. The double-page spread approach is designed for that kind of traveller. Indeed, the metaphor of travelling is far more suitable for this book than the metaphor of story-telling.

Treatment and Coverage

I have kept several criteria in mind while writing *CEEL* (pronounced ‘seal’, as we have come to call it). I have tried to find a balance between talking about the language and letting the language speak for itself. Most spreads distinguish between an expository overview and detailed examples (largely through the typographic convention of main text vs panels). Then within each spread, I have tried to provide examples of the wonder which can be found when we begin to look carefully at the language. All languages are fascinating, beautiful, full of surprises, moving, awesome, fun. I hope I have succeeded in provoking at least one of these responses on every page. I would be disappointed if, after any opening, a reader did not feel to some extent entertained, as well as informed.

Obviously it has all been a personal selection. The hardest part, in fact, was the choosing. Once I had decided on a topic for a spread, I would collect material relating to it from as many sources as I could find. I would write the opening perspective, and then look at all the material to find textual and pictorial illustrations. Invariably I had enough material to fill several spreads, and choosing what to put in and what to leave out was always painful. The moral is plain. There are several other possible encyclopedic worlds.

Wider Horizons

In particular, there has not been space to go into the many applications of English language studies in proper detail. I touch upon some of these areas in Part VI, but the aim of that part is not to be comprehensive, but simply to illustrate the various directions that applied language studies can take. There are many other horizons which can only be approached by using systematic information about the language, but this book does not try to reach them. However, in view of its special place in the history of language study, I do try to reach out in the direction of literature as often as possible, and it is perhaps worth drawing attention to the way that literary examples are

dispersed throughout the book. I have always been strongly opposed to the great divide which traditionally separates ‘lang’ and ‘lit’. It seemed to me that it would only reinforce that divide if I were to include a separate chapter called something like ‘literary language’, so I have not done so – a position which is discussed towards the end of §22. Many pages, accordingly, display a literary presence – sometimes by way of stylistic comment, often through extensive quotation.

Acknowledgements

If an enterprise of this kind has succeeded, it is because its author has managed to balance on the shoulders of many others, without too often falling off. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Professor Whitney Bolton, of Rutgers University, who read the whole text of the book and offered innumerable valuable comments and suggestions. I must thank Dr Andy Orchard and Professor David Burnley for their advice on several points in the Old and Middle English chapters. And a number of other scholars or organizations have helped me find the best illustration of a particular topic: these points of contact are acknowledged formally at the end of the book, but I would want to record personal thanks to Henry G. Burger, Lou Burnard, Kenneth Cameron, Jack Chambers, Vinod Dubey, Leslie Dunkling, Charles Jones, Kevin Kiernan, Edwin D. Lawson, Geoffrey Leech, Valerie Luckins, Angus McIntosh, Chrissie Maher, Chris Upward, Maggie Vance, and Lyn Wendon. Anne Rowlands helped me compile the indexes. It is perhaps unusual to thank a journal, but I have to acknowledge an enormous debt to *English Today*, and thus to its editor, Tom McArthur, for bringing together such a valuable collection of English-language material. For anyone who wishes to maintain a healthy English-language lifestyle, I prescribe the reading of *ET* three times a day after meals.

The book has been a real collaboration with in-house staff at Cambridge University Press, and involved many planning meetings both in Cambridge and Holyhead, over a period of some three years. It is therefore a real pleasure to acknowledge the roles of Geoff Staff and Clare Orchard, who managed and coordinated the project at Cambridge, Paula Granados and Anne Priestley, who carried out the picture research, and Carol-June Cassidy, who read the text from the point of view of American English. I have much enjoyed collaborating once again with Roger Walker, whose design experience will be evident on every page. I am especially grateful to Adrian du Plessis, director of Cambridge Reference, for his personal interest and encouragement from the earliest days of this project. And, in a different sense of in-house, I thank my wife, Hilary, whose editorial comments have greatly improved the clarity of the text, and whose role in relation to the book’s planning and production has been so great that it defies any attempt at conventional expression.

David Crystal
Holyhead, October 1994

Preface to the Paperback Edition

I have been delighted by the enthusiastic reception given to the appearance of *CEEL*, which has permitted the early production of a

paperback edition. For this edition I have taken the opportunity of correcting a number of typographical errors which slipped through in the first printing, and have made a number of small textual modifications in response to points made by readers and reviewers. The only major authorial change affects §7, where I have brought the table of World English statistics up to date, using 1995 population estimates; this has also involved a rewriting of the associated commentary.

Several other changes have affected later sections of that chapter, largely as a consequence of the rapidly growing position of English throughout the world. Indeed, since the text of *CEEL* was completed, in 1994, this topic has attracted greatly increased media attention, with the millennium providing the excuse for fresh discussion of ‘the future of English’. A related publication, *English as a Global Language* (Cambridge University Press, 1997, 2nd edn 2003), has enabled me to deal with this issue in proper depth, supplementing the historical story outlined in the first part of §7 with a fuller account of contemporary developments (such as the role of English on the Internet) than it has been possible to describe in the present book.

This preface gives me an opportunity to thank the many readers of the first edition who have sent in facts, comments, and anecdotes about the way English is used in various parts of the world. These are far too numerous and extensive to be easily included in a book like *CEEL*, but they have all been carefully filed, and it is my hope that before too long there will be an opportunity to use this information as part of an archive about the English language, whose absence (referred to at the end of the book) I continue to lament.

David Crystal
Holyhead, February 1997

Preface to the Second Edition

The amount of revision for the new edition has been considerable, but can be easily summarized. Time-related tables, such as the table of statistics on World English usage and country population figures, have been updated to 2001. The rapid evolution of the Internet during the 1990s has required the addition of a separate 10-page section (§23), with consequent revision of later chapter numbers. Political events of the decade, such as in Hong Kong, have been addressed, and a number of dated illustrations have been replaced. The section giving details of further reading has been updated, and websites have been added to institutional addresses. Last but not least, with the turning of the millennium all references to ‘this century’, and the like, have been faithfully revised.

David Crystal
Holyhead, September 2002

Preface to the Third Edition

A lot has happened in the 15 years since the second edition, though not all of the developments have been predictable. For instance, I was expecting to update the statistics on global English use – now including all countries, not just those where English is a first or second language – and I wasn't surprised to find it necessary to add extra pages on the growing cultural identities of 'new Englishes'. But who would ever have predicted that I would need new spreads on English in a post-Brexit Europe, or on changes in the oratorical style of American presidents?

I introduced the language of the Internet in my second edition, but the digital developments that sparked linguistic interest pre-2003 have been hugely overtaken by those that have taken place since, not least in relation to social media and online language play. Facebook, Twitter, Wikis, Second Life, WhatsApp, LOLcats, and Doggolingos name just some of the popular innovations that today need to be represented in any book that dares to call itself a language encyclopedia. They illustrate the emergence of new varieties of online discourse, often more radical than the first manifestations of electronically mediated communication, and making us rethink some of our traditional categories of linguistic description, especially in relation to text analysis. At the same time, the arrival of 'big data' has introduced a new climate into corpus linguistics, which has vastly grown since 2003, and motivated one of the largest revisions in this edition.

Other fields have grown too. This third edition has additional spreads on gender, with its new paradigms of enquiry, Internet graphology, and forensic linguistics. The first decade of the new millennium also saw the publication of the historical thesaurus of the *OED*, fresh interest in original pronunciation (especially in relation to Shakespeare), and the emergence of new forms of digital art. The field of linguistics broadened its scope, notably in cognitive linguistics and the various domains of online enquiry that provided the motivation for searchlinguistics. The ongoing revision of the *OED* necessitated a complete review of all the statistics relating to Shakespeare's vocabulary, and the new character of the *OED* and other dictionaries

Frontispiece Caption

The British Library printed a series of postcards reflecting the history of the language and its varieties, in association with its exhibition *Evolving English: One Language, Many Voices* (12 November 2010–3 April 2011) (see p. 504). In their breadth of coverage they provide an appropriate frontispiece for the encyclopedia.

Introduction to the exhibition

Summer is icumen in (c. 1225–50); BL Harley MS.978 (see p. 36)

Merchant, from the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1483) G.11586 (see p. 38)

Of Matrimonie, from the *Book of Common Prayer* (1549) BL C.25.1.14.(1.) (see p. 67)

Opening page of *A Table Alphabetical*, Robert Cawdrey (1604) Bodleian Library (see p. 76)

has caused a significant expansion to Part VI. That section also acknowledges the various ways in which popular interest in the language has been fostered in recent years by such organizations as the British Library.

All of this has added over fifty pages to the present edition. Most of the other pages have also been revised, some very much so, to take account of the various changes that have affected the language since 2003. Updating the visual context has been essential too: a new typeface has been used throughout, and about one-third of the illustrations in the book have been replaced. It never ceases to amaze me how quickly some illustrations can go out-of-date – most obviously, perhaps, in relation to technology. The mobile phones and computers of only fifteen years ago now look extremely clunky. This edition is also the first to be made available online, which has allowed me to make an audio recording of the historical illustrations and the examples of modern pronunciation, as well as adding links to additional material. Every spread has a link, either to an extra piece of writing by me or to a website.

I am grateful to Cambridge University Press for initiating a survey of second-edition users, whose feedback gave me several clear pointers about the topics most in need of revision. My thanks also to the team of people who worked on this new edition, especially my commissioning editor Rebecca Taylor, picture researcher Claire Eudall, page designer Zoe Naylor, and the other members of the in-house team: content managers Charlie Howell and Rosemary Crawley, content team lead Rachel Cox, design manager Stephanie Thelwell, Noel Robson from Creative Technical Support, and freelance copy-editor Chris Jackson. Geetha Williams and the typesetters at MPS Limited in Chennai did a grand job of turning my new-page briefs into elegant layouts. At home, Hilary Crystal managed the process of inputting revisions and, as ever, provided invaluable comments on my initial drafts. The result, I hope, is a book that will meet the needs and interests of a new generation of 21st-century English-language enthusiasts.

David Crystal
Holyhead, April 2018

Title-page of the *King James Bible* (1611) BL C.35.1.13.(1.) (see p. 66)

Hornbook, wooden 'paddle' with printed alphabet and text, 14.5 x 8.5 cm (c. 1650) BL C.45.a.14 (see p. 270)

Letters W and X from *The Paragon of Alphabets* (1815) BL Ch.800/111.(7.) (see p. 276)

The Pronouns, from *The Infant's Grammar* (1824) BL 012806.ee.33.(9.) (see p. 230)

Frontispiece of the *Modern Flash Dictionary* by George Kent (1835) 1490.d.52 (see p. 194)

H-dropping, from *Punch* (27 October 1855) C.194.b.199 (see p. 90)

The Mouse's Tale or Tail, from *Alice's Adventures under Ground*, Lewis Carroll (c. 1852–4) BL Add.MS.46700 (see p. 283)

Poster for Naylor's Travelling Show (1879) BL Evan.462 (see p. 414)

How to Write Love Letters and Romance with Your Girl Friend, Nathan O. Njoku (1965) BL X.0909/588.(161.) (see p. 108)

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AND
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BY N. O. NIOKUKU

Two lovers is the game of love.
This is the best way to romance with your lovers
if you don't know.

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"I beg your PARDON, Ma'am, but I think you dropped this!"

A MAN'S HOME
IS HIS CASTLE.
PAD. DIG. SHACK.
ROOST. GAFF.
SOCK. CRIB.
HAME. PLACE...

OF SURETH THERE WAS A TIME
That munny was as a little out of poffe
Somewhat it is for the munny
To make the munny the munny
And in the munny the munny
And in the munny the munny
And in the munny the munny
And in the munny the munny

Marchant the was the a foolery
My munny on the munny the munny
The munny the munny the munny
The munny the munny the munny
The munny the munny the munny
The munny the munny the munny
The munny the munny the munny
The munny the munny the munny

W w
Wandering Willy

That wandering far from home is silly.
Is often prov'd... now in Willy.

We live beneath the mat
Warm and cozy, and just
But one way that
Was the cat!
The cat!
The cat!
The cat!
The cat!
The cat!
The cat!
The cat!

AT THE END
OF THE DAY,
THEY'RE
MOVING THE
GOALPOSTS

Of Sparrow. **Of Sparrow.**
The munny the munny the munny
The munny the munny the munny
The munny the munny the munny
The munny the munny the munny
The munny the munny the munny
The munny the munny the munny
The munny the munny the munny
The munny the munny the munny

X x
Xenophon

We come now to the Letter X.
Which does not small our mind perplex
But yet we think that evry Son
Should read the works of Xenophon.

Prize Dogs & various Breeds
BLACK and TAN TOY TERRIERS, ITALIAN GREYHOUNDS, BLUES and
HAIRLESS TERRIERS, FUG DOGS, DALMATIANS, etc.

GREAT ENGLISH & IRISH BULL DOGS,
GREAT DOG SHOW

1. "KING," Belfast. 2. "YOUNG DUKER," Sheffield.

BRUV, MATES,
COCKERS
LEND ME YER
BRITNEYS

A Table Alphabeticall,
contayning and teaching the true
writing, and vnderstanding of hard
vsall English words. &c.

(k) standeth for a kind of.
(g. or gr.) standeth for Greeke.
The French words haue this (f) before them.

A
A Bandon, call away, a2 pained up, to
leaur, a2 forfake.
Abash, bluth.
abba, father.
abbie, abbateffe, spidris of a punne-
rie, comforters of others.
abbettors, counsellors.
aberration, a going a stray, a2 wand-
ring.
abbreviar, a2 to shorten, a2 make
abridge, a2 short.
about, to lie vnto, a2 border vpon, as one
lands end meets with another.
abecedarie, the order of the Letters, a2 hee
that dieth them.
aberration, a going astray, a2 wandering.
maintaine. B. a2 abdi-

THE PRONOUNS.
At this moment a bustle was heard at the door
From a party of PRONOUNS, who came by the score.
And what do you think? Why I vow and declare
THEY would pass for the Nouns who already were there.
And THEIR boldness was such, as I live it is true,
ONE declar'd HE was I, and ONE call'd HIMSELF YOU.

2b or not
2b. That
is the Q.

An essential early step in the study of a language is to model it. A ‘model’, in this context, is not a three-dimensional miniature replica: this book does not devote its space to techniques of moulding the English language in Play-Doh®, Meccano®, or Lego®. To model the English language is, rather, to provide an abstract representation of its central characteristics, so that it becomes easier to see how it is structured and used.

Two models provide this first perspective. The first, shown below, breaks the structure of English down into a series of components; and these will be used to organize the exposition throughout Parts II to IV. On the facing page, there is a model of the uses of English; and this will be used as a perspective for Parts I and V. The omniscient eye of the English linguist surveys the whole scene, in ways which are examined in Part VI.

Text
A coherent, self-contained unit of discourse. Texts, which may be spoken, written, computer-mediated or signed, vary greatly in size, from such tiny units as posters, captions, e-mails, and bus tickets, to such large units as novels, sermons, web pages and conversations. They provide the frame of reference within which grammatical, lexical, and other features of English can be identified and interpreted. (See Part V, §19.)

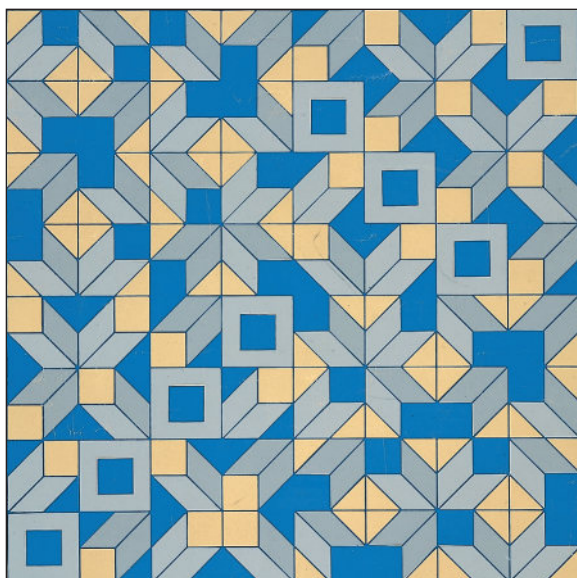
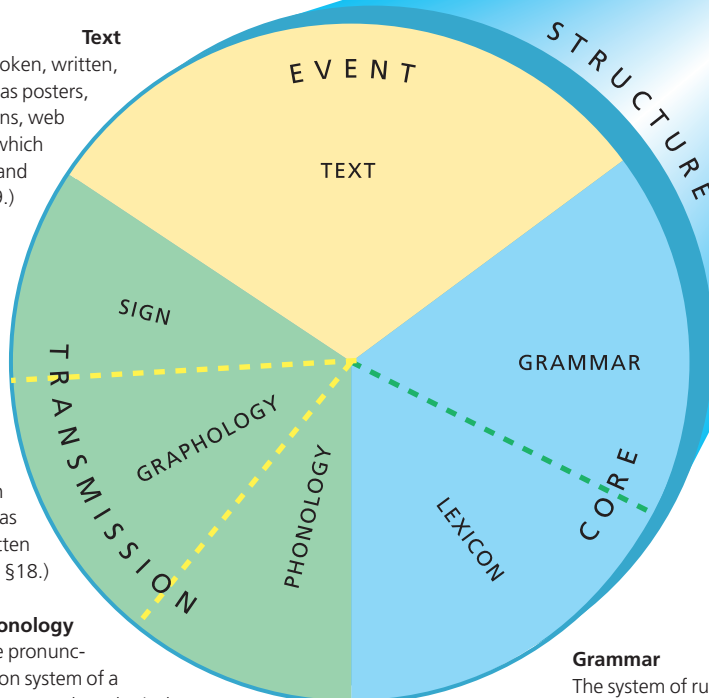
Sign
A visual language used chiefly by people who are deaf. This book refers only to those signing systems which have been devised to represent aspects of English structure, such as its spelling, grammar, or vocabulary. (See §23.)

Graphology
The writing system of a language. Graphological (or orthographic) study has two main aspects: the visual segments of the written language, which take the form of vowels, consonants, punctuation marks, and certain typographical features; and the various patterns of graphic design, such as spacing and layout, which add structure and meaning to stretches of written text. (See Part IV, §18.)

Phonology
The pronunciation system of a language. Phonological study has two main aspects: the sound segments of the spoken language, which take the form of vowels and consonants; and the various patterns of intonation, rhythm, and tone of voice, which add structure and meaning to stretches of speech. (See Part IV, §17.)

Lexicon
The vocabulary of a language. Lexical study is a wide-ranging domain, involving such diverse areas as the sense relationships between words, the use of abbreviations, puns, and euphemisms, and the compilation of dictionaries. (See Part II.)

Grammar
The system of rules governing the construction of sentences. Grammatical study is usually divided into two main aspects: *syntax*, dealing with the structure and connection of sentences; and *morphology*, dealing with the structure and formation of words. (See Part III.)



BUT IS IT ART?

Just occasionally, someone tries to visualize language in a way which goes beyond the purely diagrammatic. This print was made by art students as part of their degree. They were asked to attend lectures from different university courses,

and then present an abstract design which reflected their perception of the topic. As may perhaps be immediately obvious, this design is the result of their attending a lecture on the structure of the English language, given by the present

author. The design's asymmetries well represent the irregularities and erratic research paths which are so much a part of English language study. (Equally, of course, they could represent the structural disorganization of the lecturer.)



WHY JANUS?

The Roman god, Janus, here seen on a Roman coin in his usual representation with a double-headed head. A spirit associated with doorways and archways, looking backwards as well as forwards, he is also often regarded as the god

of beginnings. The month of January is named after him.

His location on this opening spread has, however, a further significance. The two facets of language study represented on these pages – of structure and use – have traditionally been

studied independently of each other (§14). A major theme of the present book is to assert their inter-dependence. What are English structures for, if not to be used? And how can we understand the uses of English, without investigating

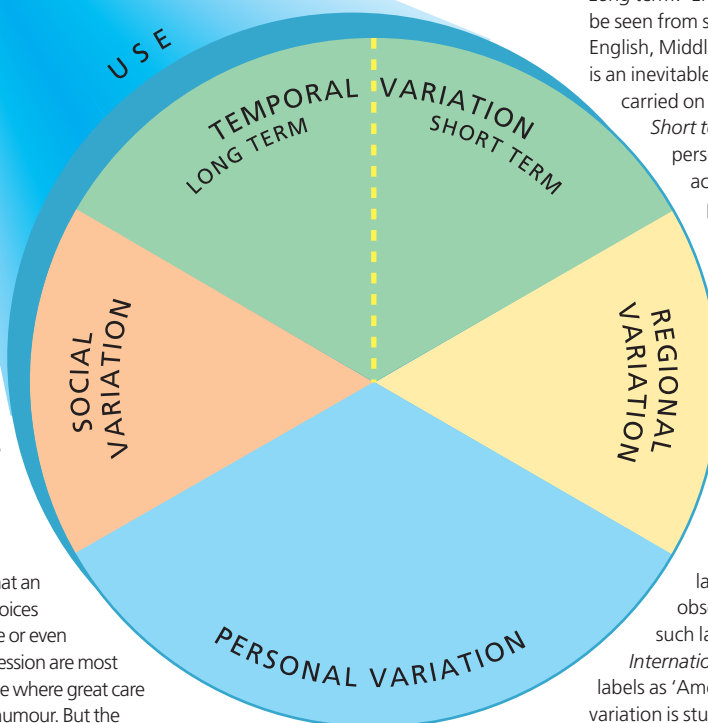
their structure? Structure and use are two sides of the same coin, Roman or otherwise, and this principle is reflected in the organization of the present book (see Preface).

Social variation

Society affects a language, in the sense that any important aspect of social structure and function is likely to have a distinctive linguistic counterpart. People belong to different social classes, perform different social roles, use different technologies, and carry on different occupations. Their use of language is affected by their sex, age, ethnic group, and educational background. English is being increasingly affected by all these factors, because its developing role as a world language is bringing it more and more into contact with new cultures and social systems. (See Part V, §21.)

Personal variation

People affect a language, in the sense that an individual's conscious or unconscious choices and preferences can result in a distinctive or even unique style. Such variations in self-expression are most noticeable in those areas of language use where great care is being taken, such as in literature and humour. But the uniqueness of individuals, arising out of differences in their memory, personality, intelligence, social background, and personal experience, makes distinctiveness of style inevitable in everyone. (See Part V, §22.)



Temporal variation

Time affects a language, both in the long term and short term, giving rise to several highly distinctive processes and varieties.

Long term: English has changed throughout the centuries, as can be seen from such clearly distinguishable linguistic periods as Old English, Middle English, and Elizabethan English. Language change is an inevitable and continuing process, whose study is chiefly carried on by philologists and historical linguists. (See Part I.)

Short term: English changes within the history of a single person. This is most noticeable while children are acquiring their mother tongue, but it is also seen when people learn a foreign language, develop their style as adult speakers or writers, and, sometimes, find that their linguistic abilities are lost or seriously impaired through injury or disease. Psycholinguists study language learning and loss, as do several other professionals, notably speech therapists and language teachers. (See Part VI, §24.)

Regional variation

Geography affects language, both within a country and between countries, giving rise to regional accents and dialects, and to the pidgins and creoles which emerged around the world whenever English first came into contact with other languages. *Intranational* regional varieties have been observed within English from its earliest days, as seen in such labels as 'Northern', 'London', and 'Scottish'.

International varieties are more recent in origin, as seen in such labels as 'American', 'Australian', and 'Indian'. Regional language variation is studied by sociolinguists, geographical linguists, dialectologists, and others, the actual designation depending on the focus and emphasis of the study. (See §7 and Part V, §20.)

WHY STUDY THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE?

Because it's fascinating

It is remarkable how often the language turns up as a topic of interest in daily conversation – whether it is a question about accents and dialects, a comment about usage and standards, or simply curiosity about a word's origins and history.

Because it's important

The dominant role of English as a world language forces it upon our attention in a way that no language has ever done before. As English becomes the chief means of communication between nations, it is crucial to ensure that it is taught accurately and efficiently, and to study changes in its structure and use.

Because it's fun

One of the most popular leisure pursuits is to play with the English language – with its words, sounds,

spellings, and structures. Crosswords, Scrabble®, media word shows, and many other quizzes and guessing games keep millions happily occupied every day, teasing their linguistic brain centres and sending them running to their dictionaries.

Because it's beautiful

Each language has its unique beauty and power, as seen to best effect in the works of its great orators and writers. We can see the 1,000-year-old history of English writing only through the glass of language, and anything we learn about English as a language can serve to increase our appreciation of its oratory and literature.

Because it's useful

Getting the language right is a major issue in almost every corner of society. No one wants to be accused

of ambiguity and obscurity, or find themselves talking or writing at cross-purposes. The more we know about the language the more chance we shall have of success, whether we are advertisers, priests, politicians, journalists, doctors, lawyers – or just ordinary people at home, trying to understand and be understood.

Because it's there

English, more than any other language, has attracted the interest of professional linguists. It has been analysed in dozens of different ways, as part of the linguist's aim of devising a theory about the nature of language in general. The study of the English language, in this way, becomes a branch of linguistics – English linguistics.



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Explicatio Notarum et Literarum
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PART I

The History of English

The history of English is a fascinating field of study in its own right, but it also provides a valuable perspective for the contemporary study of the language, and thus makes an appropriate opening section for this book. The historical account promotes a sense of identity and continuity, and enables us to find coherence in many of the fluctuations and conflicts of present-day English language use. Above all, it satisfies the deep-rooted sense of curiosity we have about our linguistic heritage. People like to be aware of their linguistic roots.

We begin as close to the beginning as we can get, using the summary accounts of early chronicles to determine the language's continental origins (§2). The Anglo-Saxon corpus of poetry and prose, dating from around the 7th century, provides the first opportunity to examine the linguistic evidence. §3 outlines the characteristics of Old English texts, and gives a brief account of the sounds, spellings, grammar, and vocabulary which they display. A similar account is given of the Middle English period (§4), beginning with the effects on the language of the French invasion and concluding with a discussion of the origins of Standard English. At all points, special attention is paid to the historical and cultural setting to which texts relate, and to the character of the leading literary works, such as *Beowulf* and *The Canterbury Tales*.

The Early Modern English period (§5) begins with the English of Caxton and the Renaissance, continues with that of Shakespeare and the

King James Bible, and ends with the landmark publication of Johnson's *Dictionary*. A recurring theme is the extent and variety of language change during this period. The next section, on Modern English (§6), follows the course of further language change, examines the nature of early grammars, traces the development of new varieties and attitudes in America, and finds in literature, especially in the novel, an invaluable linguistic mirror. Several present-day usage controversies turn out to have their origins during this period. By the end of §6, we are within living memory.

The final section (§7) looks at what has happened to the English language in the 20th and 21st centuries, and in particular at its increasing presence worldwide. The approach is again historical, tracing the way English has travelled to the United States, Canada, Africa, Australia, South and South-East Asia, and several other parts of the globe. The section reviews the concept of World English, examines the statistics of usage, and discusses the problems of intelligibility and identity which arise when a language achieves such widespread use. The notion of Standard English, seen from both national and international perspectives, turns out to be of special importance. Part I then concludes with some thoughts about the future of the language, especially in Europe in a post-Brexit world, and about the relationships which have grown up (sometimes amicable, sometimes antagonistic) between English and other languages.

◀ A map of Anglo-Saxon England taken from Edmund Gibson's 1692 edition of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The Latin caption (top left) explains that the map shows the places mentioned in the Chronicle and in Old English literature.

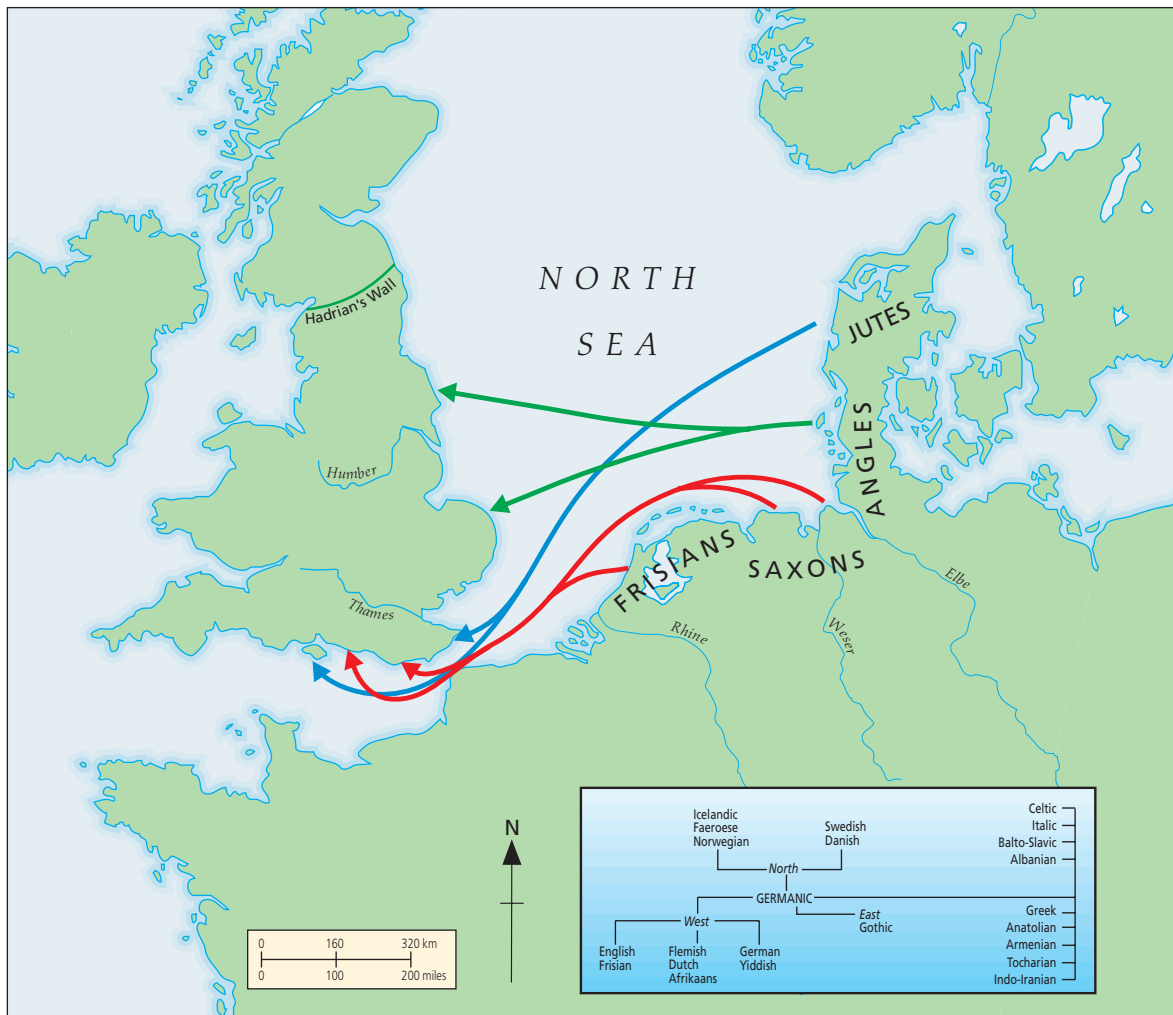
‘To Aëtius, thrice consul, the groans of the Britons.’ Thus, according to the Anglo-Saxon historian, the Venerable Bede, began the letter written to the Roman consul by some of the Celtic people who had survived the ferocious invasions of the Scots and Picts in the early decades of the 5th century. ‘The barbarians drive us to the sea. The sea drives us back towards the barbarians. Between them we are exposed to two sorts of death: we are either slain or drowned.’

The plea fell on deaf ears. Although the Romans had sent assistance in the past, they were now fully occupied by their own wars with Bledla and Attila, kings of the Huns. The attacks from the north continued, and the British were forced to look elsewhere for help. Bede gives a succinct and sober account of what then took place.

They consulted what was to be done, and where they should seek assistance to prevent or repel the cruel and frequent incursions of the northern nations; and they all agreed with their King Vortigern to call over to their aid, from parts beyond the sea, the Saxon nation...

In the year of our Lord 449 ... the nation of the Angles, or Saxons, being invited by the aforesaid king, arrived in Britain with three long ships, and had a place assigned them to reside in by the same king, in the eastern part of the island, that they might thus appear to be fighting for their country, whilst their real intentions were to enslave it. Accordingly they engaged with the enemy, who were come from the north to give battle, and obtained the victory; which, being known at home in their own country, as also the fertility of the country, and the cowardice of the Britons, a more considerable fleet was quickly sent over, bringing a still greater number of men, which, being added to the former, made up an invincible army.

Bede describes the invaders as belonging to the three most powerful nations of Germany – the Saxons, the Angles, and the Jutes. The first group to arrive came from Jutland, in the northern part of modern Denmark, and were led, according to the chroniclers, by two Jutish brothers,



The homelands of the Germanic invaders, according to Bede, and the direction of their invasions. Little is known about the exact locations of the tribes. The Jutes may have had settlements further south, and links with the Frisians to the west. The Angles may have lived further into Germany. The linguistic differences between these groups, likewise, are matters for speculation. The various dialects of Old English (p. 28) plainly relate to the areas in which the invaders settled, but there are too few texts to make serious comparison possible.

English is a member of the western branch of the Germanic family of languages. It is closest in structure to Frisian – though hardly anything is known about the ancient Frisians and their role in the invasions of Britain. Germanic is a branch of the Indo-European language family.

Hengist and Horsa. They landed at Ebbsfleet in the Isle of Thanet, and settled in the areas now known as Kent, the Isle of Wight, and parts of Hampshire. The Angles came from the south of the Danish peninsula, and entered Britain much later, along the eastern coast, settling in parts of Mercia, Northumbria (the land to the north of the Humber, where in 547 they established a kingdom), and what is now East Anglia. The Saxons came from an area further south and west, along the coast of the North Sea, and from 477 settled in various parts of southern and south-eastern Britain. The chroniclers talk about groups of East, West, and South Saxons – distinctions which are reflected in the later names of Essex, Wessex, and Sussex. The name Middlesex suggests that there were Middle Saxons too. Bede's account takes up the story:

In a short time, swarms of the aforesaid nations came over the island, and they began to increase so much that they became terrible to the natives themselves who had invited them. Then, having on a sudden entered into league with the Picts, whom they had by this time expelled by the force of their arms, they began to turn their weapons against their confederates.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (see p. 14), compiled over a century later than Bede under Alfred the Great, gives a grim catalogue of disasters for the Britons.

457 · In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Britons at a place which is called Crecganford [Crayford,



Kent] and there slew four thousand men; and the Britons then forsook Kent and fled to London in great terror.

465 · In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Welsh near Wippedesfleot and there slew twelve Welsh nobles; and one of the thanes, whose name was Wipped, was slain there.

473 · In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Welsh and captured innumerable spoils, and the Welsh fled from the English as one flies from fire.

The fighting went on for several decades, but the imposition of Anglo-Saxon power was never in doubt. Over a period of about a hundred years, further bands of immigrants continued to arrive, and Anglo-Saxon settlements spread to all areas apart from the highlands of the west and north. By the end of the 5th century, the foundation was established for the emergence of the English language.

THE NAME OF THE LANGUAGE

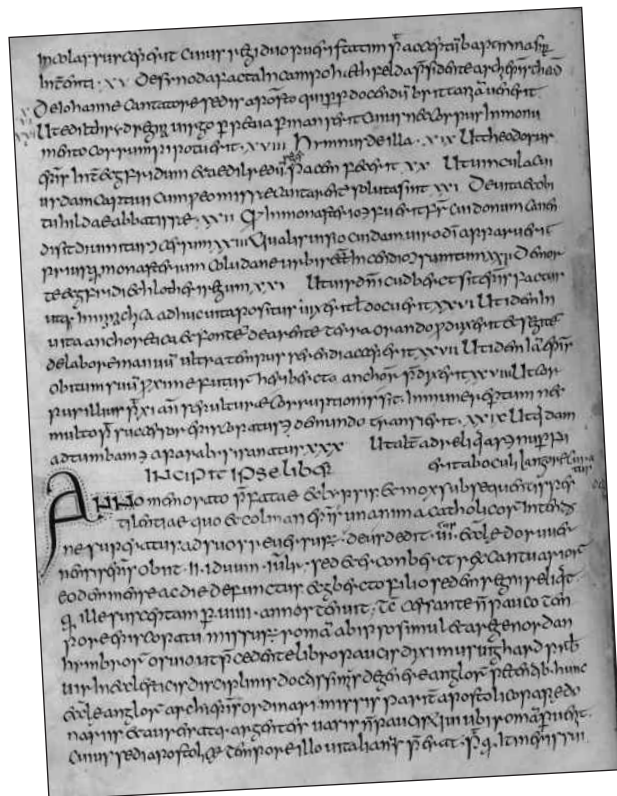
With scant respect for priorities, the Germanic invaders called the native Celts *wealas* ('foreigners'), from which the name Welsh is derived. The Celts called the invaders 'Saxons', regardless of their tribe, and this practice was followed by the early Latin writers. By the end of the 6th century, however, the term *Angli* ('Angles') was in use – as early as 601, a king of Kent, Æthelbert, is called *rex Anglorum* ('King of the Angles') – and during the 7th century *Angli* or *Anglia* (for the country) became the usual Latin names. Old English *Engle* derives from this usage, and the name of the language found in Old English texts is from the outset referred to as *Englisc* (the *sc* spelling representing the sound *sh*, /ʃ/). References to the name of the country as *Englaland* ('land of the Angles'), from which came *England*, do not appear until c. 1000.

The remarkably preserved body of a man, found in a peat bog in Denmark. Over 500 such remains have been found throughout northern Europe, many in the area formerly occupied by the Germanic tribes. The person has been murdered, possibly as a sacrificial victim to the Earth goddess. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote of the tribes in his *Germania*, and at one point mentions a group of tribes including the Eudoses and the Anglii: 'These tribes are protected by forests and rivers, nor is there anything noteworthy about them individually, except that they worship in common Nerthus, or Mother Earth, and conceive her as intervening in human affairs, and riding in procession through the cities of men.' (Trans. M. Hutton, 1914.)



The Northumbrian monk, Bede, or Bæda, known as the Venerable Bede. Born at Monkton on Tyne in c. 673, he was taken at the age of 7 to the new monastery at Wearmouth, moving in 682 to the sister monastery at Jarrow, where he worked as a writer and teacher. He died in 735, and was buried at Jarrow. His masterpiece, the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* ('Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation'), was begun in his later years, and finished in 731. Its focus is the growth of Christianity in England, but its scope is much wider, and it is recognized as the most valuable source we have for early English history. Written in Latin, an Old English translation was made in the reign of Alfred the Great.

A page from one of the manuscripts of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. The language is Latin.



THE EARLY PERIOD

Before the Anglo-Saxon invasions (§2), the language (or languages) spoken by the native inhabitants of the British Isles belonged to the Celtic family, introduced by a people who had come to the islands around the middle of the first millennium AD. Many of these settlers were, in turn, eventually subjugated by the Romans, who arrived in 43 BC. But by 410 the Roman armies had gone, withdrawn to help defend their Empire in Europe. After a millennium of settlement by Celtic speakers, and half a millennium by speakers of Latin, what effect did this have on the language spoken by the arriving Anglo-Saxons?

Celtic Borrowings

There is, surprisingly, very little Celtic influence – or perhaps it is not so surprising, given the savage way in which the Celtic communities were destroyed or pushed back into the areas we now know as Cornwall, Wales, Cumbria, and the Scottish borders. Many Celts (or Romano-Celts) doubtless remained in the east and south, perhaps as slaves, perhaps intermarrying, but their identity would after a few generations have been lost within Anglo-Saxon society. Whatever we might expect from such a period of cultural contact, the Celtic language of Roman Britain influenced Old English hardly at all.

Only a handful of Celtic words were borrowed at the time, and a few have survived into modern English, sometimes in regional dialect use: *crag*, *cumb* ‘deep valley’, *binn* ‘bin’, *carr* ‘rock’, *dunn* ‘grey, dun’, *brock* ‘badger’, and *torr* ‘peak’. Others include *bannoc* ‘piece’, *rice* ‘rule’, *gafeluc* ‘small spear’, *bratt* ‘cloak’, *luh* ‘lake’, *dry* ‘sorcerer’, and *clucge* ‘bell’. A few Celtic words of this period ultimately come from Latin, brought in by the Irish missionaries: these include *assen* ‘ass’, *ancor* ‘hermit’, *stær* ‘history’, and possibly *cross*. But there cannot be more than two dozen loan words in all. And there are even very few Celtic-based place names (p. 151) in what is now southern/eastern England. They include such river names as *Thames*, *Avon* ‘river’, *Don*, *Exe*, *Usk*, and *Wye*. Town names include *Dover* ‘water’, *Eccles* ‘church’, *Bray* ‘hill’, *London* (possibly a tribal name), *Kent* (‘border land’), and the use of *caer* ‘fortified place’ (as in *Carlisle*) and *pen* ‘head, top, hill’ (as in *Pendle*).

Latin Loans

Latin has been a major influence on English throughout its history (pp. 24, 48, 60, §9), and there is evidence of its role from the earliest moments of contact. The Roman army and merchants gave new names to many local objects

and experiences, and introduced several fresh concepts. About half of the new words were to do with plants, animals, food and drink, and household items: Old English *pise* ‘pea’, *plante* ‘plant’, *win* ‘wine’, *cyse* ‘cheese’, *catte* ‘cat’, *cetel* ‘kettle’, *disc* ‘dish’, *candel* ‘candle’. Other important clusters of words related to clothing (*belt* ‘belt’, *cemes* ‘shirt’, *sutere* ‘shoemaker’), buildings and settlements (*tigle* ‘tile’, *weall* ‘wall’, *ceaster* ‘city’, *stræt* ‘road’), military and legal institutions (*wic* ‘camp’, *dihl* ‘saying’, *scrifan* ‘decree’), commerce (*mangian* ‘trade’, *ceapian* ‘buy’, *pund* ‘pound’), and religion (*mæsse* ‘Mass’, *munuc* ‘monk’, *mynster* ‘minster’).

Whether the Latin words were already used by the Anglo-Saxon tribes on the continent of Europe, or were introduced from within Britain, is not always clear (though a detailed analysis of the sound changes they display can help, p. 19), but the total number of Latin words present in English at the very beginning of the Anglo-Saxon period is not large – less than 200. Although Vulgar Latin (the variety of spoken Latin used throughout the Empire) must have continued in use – at least, as an official language – for some years after the Roman army left, for some reason it did not take root in Britain as it had so readily done in Continental Europe. Some commentators see in this the first sign of an Anglo-Saxon monolingual mentality.

ANGLO-SAXON OR OLD ENGLISH?

The name *Anglo-Saxon* came to refer in the 16th century to all aspects of the early period – people, culture, and language. It is still the usual way of talking about the people and the cultural history; but since the 19th century, when the history of languages came to be studied in detail, *Old English* has been the preferred name for the language. This name emphasizes the continuing development of English, from Anglo-Saxon times through ‘Middle English’ to the present day, and it is the usage of the present book (abbreviated *OE*). Some authors, nonetheless, still use the term *Anglo-Saxon* for the language, the choice of this name reflecting their view that the nature of the language in this early period is very different from what is later to be found under the heading of English.

A reconstruction of Anglo-Saxon huts at West Stow, Suffolk. Each hut is some 15–20 feet (5–6 m) in length.



RUNES

Old English was first written in the runic alphabet. This alphabet was used in northern Europe – in Scandinavia, present-day Germany, and the British Isles – and it has been preserved in about 4,000 inscriptions and a few manuscripts. It dates from around the 3rd century AD. No one knows exactly where the alphabet came from, but it seems to be a development of one of the alphabets of southern Europe, probably the Roman, which runes resemble closely.

The common runic alphabet found throughout the area consisted of 24 letters. It can be written horizontally in either direction. Each letter had a name, and the alphabet as a whole was called by the name of its first six letters, the *futhorc* (in the same way as the word *alphabet* comes from Greek *alpha* + *beta*). The version found in Britain used extra letters to cope with the range of sounds found in Old English; in its most developed form, in 9th-century Northumbria, it consisted of 31 symbols.

The inscriptions in Old English are

found on weapons, jewellery, monuments, and other artefacts, and date largely from the 5th or 6th centuries AD, the earliest (at Caistor-by-Norwich) possibly being late 4th century. They often say simply who made or owned the object. Most of the large rune stones say little more than 'X raised this stone in memory of Y', and often the message is unclear.

The meaning of *rune*

What *rune* (OE *run*) means is debatable. There is a long-standing tradition which attributes to it such senses as 'whisper', 'mystery', and 'secret', suggesting that the symbols were originally used for magical or mystical rituals. Such associations were certainly present in the way the pagan Vikings (and possibly the Continental Germans) used the corresponding word, but there is no evidence that they

were present in Old English. Current research suggests that the word *run* had been thoroughly assimilated into Anglo-Saxon Christianity, and meant simply 'sharing of knowledge or thoughts'. Any extension to the world of magic and superstition is not part of the native tradition. Modern English *rune* is not even a survival of the Old English word, but a later borrowing from Norse via Latin.

For the modern, magical sense of *rune* we are therefore indebted to the Scandinavian and not the Anglo-Saxon tradition. It is this sense which surfaced in the 19th century in a variety of esoteric publications, and which developed in the popular and fantastic imagination of the 20th, perhaps most famously in the writing of Tolkien (p. 197).

(After C. E. Fell, 1991.)

THE OLD ENGLISH RUNIC ALPHABET

This list gives the names of the symbols in Old English, and their meanings (where these are known). It does not give the many variant shapes which can be found in the different inscriptions. The symbols consist mainly of intersecting straight lines, showing their purpose for engraving on stone, wood, metal, or bone. Manuscript uses of runes do exist in a few early poems (notably in four passages where the name of Cynewulf is represented), and in the solutions to some of the riddles in the *Exeter Book* (p. 12), and are in evidence until the 11th century, especially in the north, but there are very few of them.

Rune	Anglo-Saxon	Name	Meaning (where known)
ƿ	f	feoh	cattle, wealth
ᚢ	u	ūr	bison (aurochs)
ᚦ	þ	þorn	thorn
ᚨ	o	ōs	god/mouth
ᚱ	r	rād	journey/riding
ᚳ	c	cen	torch
ᚷ	g[j]	giefu	gift
ᚹ	w	wyn	joy
ᚻ	h	hægl	hail
ᚽ	n	nied	necessity/trouble
ᚿ	i	is	ice
ᛁ	j	gear	year
ᛃ	ǣ	ēoh	yew
ᛅ	p	peor	?
ᛇ	x	eoht	?sedge
ᛈ	s	sigel	sun
ᛉ	t	tiw/tir	Tiw (a god)
ᛊ	b	beorc	birch
ᛋ	e	eoh	horse
ᛌ	m	man	man
ᛍ	l	lagu	water/sea
ᛎ	ng	ing	Ing (a hero)
ᛏ	oe	epel	land/estate
ᛐ	d	dæg	day
ᛑ	a	ac	oak
ᛒ	æ	æsc	ash
ᛓ	y	yr	bow
ᛔ	ea	ear	?earth
ᛖ	g[x]	gar	spear
ᛗ	k	calc	?sandal/chalice/chalk
ᛙ	ḡ	(name unknown)	

EARLY INSCRIPTIONS

There are fewer than 30 clear runic inscriptions in Old English, some containing only a single name. The two most famous examples both date from the 8th century, and represent the Northumbrian dialect (p. 28).

Both inscriptions make some use of the Roman alphabet as well.

- The Ruthwell Cross, near Dumfries, Scotland, is 16 feet (5 m) high. Its faces contain panels depicting events in the life of Christ and the early Church, as well as carvings of birds and beasts, and lines of runes around the edges are similar to part of the Old English poem 'The Dream of the Rood' (*rood* = 'cross') in the *Vercelli Book*. A glossed extract is shown below (there are no spaces between the words in the original inscription; also some scholars transcribe 'blood' as *blodi*).



īh ƿfī mīþ bīfēf bīuīmīh
ic wæs mīþ blodæ bistemid
I was with blood bedewed

- The Franks Casket is a richly carved whalebone box, illustrating mythological and religious scenes, not all of which can be interpreted. The picture shows the panel with the Adoration of the Magi alongside the Germanic legend of Wayland (Weland) the Smith. The inscriptions are partly in Old English, and partly in Latin.



The box first came to light in the 19th century, owned by a farmer from Auzon, France. It is named after Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, through whom it came to be deposited in the British Museum. One side was missing, but it later came into the possession of the Bargello Museum, Florence, and a cast was made of it, so that the box in the British Museum now appears complete.

THE AUGUSTINIAN MISSION

It would be a considerable overstatement to suggest (as one sometimes reads) that St Augustine brought Christianity to Britain. This religion had already arrived through the Roman invasion, and in the 4th century had actually been given official status in the Roman Empire. It was a Briton, St Patrick, who converted Ireland in the early 5th century; and a goodly number of early Welsh saints' names are remembered in place names beginning with *Llan* ('church [of]'). The story of St Alban (said to have been martyred in 305 near the city of Verulam, modern St Albans) is recounted in detail by Bede.

Augustine's task was more specific: to convert the Anglo-Saxons. He had been prior of the monastery of St Andrew in Rome, before being chosen by Pope Gregory for the mission. He and his companions arrived in the Isle of Thanet, to be met by Æthelberht, king of Kent, and they must have been heartily relieved to find that his wife was already a (Celtic) Christian. They were given leave to live and preach in Canterbury, and within a year the king himself was converted. Three bishoprics were established by the end of the decade, with Augustine as archbishop at Canterbury, Justus as bishop at Rochester, and Mellitus at London, as bishop of the East Saxons.

It took some time for this early success to become consolidated. Following Augustine's death (604/5) there was much tension over religious practices between the Roman Christians and their Celtic counterparts, who had lived in isolation from Rome for so long. Matters came to a head in the conflict over the date of Easter, resolved (in favour of Rome) at the Synod of Whitby in 664.

Part of the difficulty in developing the faith must have been linguistic: according to Bede, it was nearly 50 years

THE OLD ENGLISH CORPUS

There is a 'dark age' between the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons and the first Old English manuscripts. A few scattered inscriptions in the language date from the 5th and 6th centuries, written in the runic alphabet which the invaders brought with them (p. 9), but these give very little information about what the language was like. The literary age began only after the arrival of the Roman missionaries, led by Augustine, who came to Kent in AD 597. The rapid growth of monastic centres led to large numbers of Latin manuscripts being produced, especially of the Bible and other religious texts.

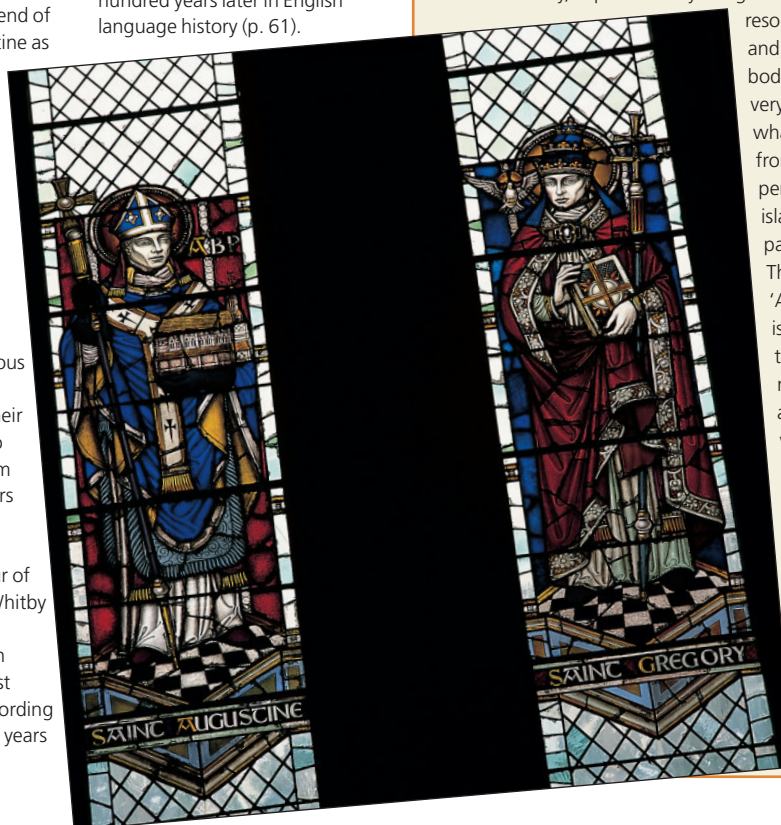
Because of this increasingly literary climate, Old English manuscripts also began to be written – much earlier, indeed, than the earliest vernacular texts from other north European countries. The first texts, dating from around 700, are glossaries of Latin words translated into Old English, and a few early inscriptions and poems. But very little material remains from this period. Doubtless many

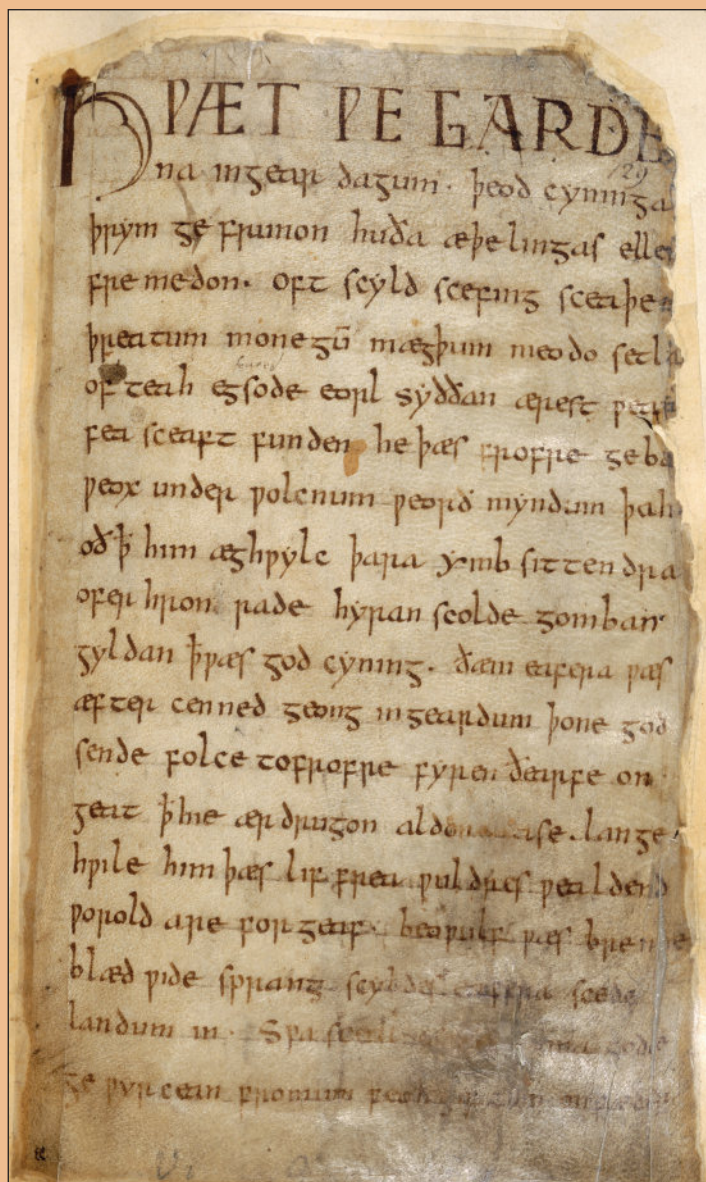
before Anglo-Saxon was being used as a missionary tongue. King Egbert of Kent in 664 had to make a special plea to ensure that an Anglo-Saxon-speaking bishop was appointed, 'so that with a prelate of his own nation and language, the king and his subjects might be more perfectly instructed in the words and mysteries of the faith'. This was the first expression of an issue which would be raised again several hundred years later in English language history (p. 61).

THE GREGORIAN PUN

In Bede there is an account of St Gregory's first meeting with the inhabitants of England. Gregory, evidently a punster of some ability, himself asked to be sent to Britain as a missionary, but the pope of the time refused – presumably because of Gregory's social position, the son of a senator and former prefect of the city. When Gregory became pope himself (590), he sent Augustine to do the job for him. Bede tells the story at the end of his account of Gregory's life (Book 2, Ch. 1).

Nor is the account of St Gregory, which has been handed down to us by the tradition of our ancestors, to be passed by in silence, in relation to his motives for taking such interest in the salvation of our nation [Britain]. It is reported that, some merchants, having just arrived at Rome on a certain day, exposed many things for sale in the market-place, and an abundance of people resorted thither to buy: Gregory himself went with the rest, and, among other things, some boys were set to sale, their bodies white, their countenances beautiful, and their hair very fine. Having viewed them, he asked, as is said, from what country or nation they were brought? and was told, from the island of Britain, whose inhabitants were of such personal appearance. He again inquired whether those islanders were Christians, or still involved in the errors of paganism? and was informed that they were pagans. Then, fetching a deep sigh from the bottom of his heart, 'Alas! what pity,' said he, 'that the author of darkness is possessed of men of such fair countenances; and that being remarkable for such graceful aspects, their minds should be void of inward grace.' He therefore again asked, what was the name of that nation? and was answered, that they were called Angles. 'Right,' said he, 'for they have an Angelic face, and it becomes such to be co-heirs with the Angels in heaven. What is the name,' proceeded he, 'of the province from which they are brought?' It was replied, that the natives of that province were called Deiri. 'Truly they are *De ira*,' said he, 'withdrawn from wrath, and called to the mercy of Christ. How is the king of that province called?' They told him his name was Ælla; and he, alluding to the name, said, 'Hallelujah, the praise of God the Creator must be sung in those parts.' (Trans. J. Stevens, 1723.)





HWÆT WE GARDE-

What We Spear-Danes'

na. in gear-dagum. þeod-cyninga
in yore-days, tribe-kings'

þrym ge-frunon huða æþelingas ellen
glory heard, how the leaders courage

fremedon. Oft scyld scefing sceapena
accomplished. Often Scyld, Scef's son, from enemies'

þreatum monegum mægþum meodo-setla
bands, from many tribes mead-benches

of-teah egsode eorl syððan ærest wearð
seized, terrorised earl[s], since first he was

fea-sceaf funden he þæs frofre gebad
destitute found; he its relief knew,

weox under wolcnum weorð-myndum þah.
grew under skies, in honours thrive,

oð þæt him æghwylc þara ymb-sittendra
until to him each of the neighbours

ofer hron-rade hyran scolde gomban
over whale-road submit must, tribute

gyldan þæt wæs god cyning. ðæm eafera wæs
yield; that was good king! To him heir was

æfter cenned geong in geardum þone god
after born young in dwellings, him God

sende folce to frofre fyren-ðearfe on-
sent to folk for solace; intense misery

geat þ hie ær drugon aldor-[le]ase. lange
saw when they before felt leaderless a long

hwile him þæs lif-frea wuldres wealdend
while; to them for it Life-Lord, glory's Ruler

worold-are for-geaf. beowulf wæs breme
world honour gave, Beowulf was famed,

blæd wide sprang scyldes eafera scede-
renown widely sprang of Scyld's heir Danish

landum in. Swa sceal [geong g]uma gode
lands in. So shall young man by good [deeds]

ge-wyrcean fromum feoh-giftum. on fæder
ensure, by fine fee-gifts in father's...

(After

J. Zupitza,

1882. Trans.

J. Porter, 1991.)

THE SCOP'S TALE

This opening page of the *Beowulf* text is taken from the text now lodged in the British Library, London (manuscript reference, Cotton Vitellius A. xv). The manuscript is a copy made in c.1000, but it was damaged by a fire at the Cottonian Library in 1731, hence the odd shape to the page. The name of the poet, or *scop*, whose version is found here is not known, nor is it clear when the work was first composed: one scholarly tradition assigns it to the 8th century; another to a somewhat later date.

This is the first great narrative poem in English. It is a heroic tale about a 6th-century Scandinavian hero, Beowulf, who comes to the aid of the Danish king Hrothgar. Hrothgar's retainers are under daily attack from a monstrous troll, Grendel, at the hall of Heorot ('Hart') in Denmark (located possibly on the site of modern Leire, near Copenhagen). Beowulf travels from Geatland, in southern Sweden, and after a

great fight kills the monster, and in a second fight the monster's vengeful mother. Beowulf returns home, recounts his story, and is later made king of the Geats, ruling for 50 years. There, as an old man, he kills a dragon in a fight that leads to his own death.

This plot summary does no justice to the depth of meaning and stylistic impact of the work. Apart from its lauding of courage, heroic defiance, loyalty to one's lord, and other Germanic values, *Beowulf* introduces elements of a thoroughly Christian perspective, and there are many dramatic undercurrents and ironies. The monster is a classical figure in Germanic tradition, but it is also said to be a descendant of Cain, and a product of hell and the devil. The contrast between earthly success and mortality is a recurrent theme. While Beowulf is being feted in Hrothgar's court, the poet alludes to disastrous events which will one day affect the Geats, providing a note of doom that coun-

terpoints the triumphal events of the narrative. The poem is full of dramatic contrasts of this kind.

Whether the poem is a product of oral improvisation or is a more consciously contrived literary work has been a bone of scholarly contention. Many of its striking features, in particular its alliterative rhythmical formulae (p. 23), are those we would associate with oral composition, for they would be a valuable aid to memorization; on the other hand, modern scholars have drawn attention to the patterned complexity of its narrative structure, its metrical control, and its lexical richness, suggesting a literary process of composition (p. 23). The critic W. P. Ker expressed one view, in *The Dark Ages* (1904), that *Beowulf* is a 'book to be read' – but if so it is one which makes maximum use of a style which must originally have evolved for use in oral poetry. (For an account of some modern investigative techniques, see p. 489.)

THE EARLIEST ENGLISH LITERATURE

As with foreign languages, there is never complete agreement about the best way of translating Old English texts; nor is there unanimity about the best way of editing them. The extracts on these and adjacent pages are here to illustrate the range and character of the literature of the period, but they also show the varied editorial practice which exists. Some editors have tried to make their text resemble the original manuscript as closely as possible; others have produced a modernized version.

About the need for editing, there is no doubt. To print a facsimile of Old English texts would be to make them unreadable to all but the specialist. There is plenty of scope for editorial intervention. Scribal habits of capitalization, punctuation, paragraphing, word spacing, and word division were diverse and inconsistent, and order needs to be imposed. There are no poetic line divisions in the manuscript of *Beowulf*, for example (p. 11), and these have to be added.

Nonetheless, editorial practices vary greatly in the way texts are made consistent. Some editors silently

correct scribal errors; others draw attention to them in parentheses. Missing letters at the edge of a torn or burned manuscript may be restored, or their omission may be indicated by special symbols. Some editions add an indication of vowel length. Some replace outmoded letters (p. 16) by modern equivalents. Poetic half-lines may or may not be recognized (both practices are shown below). And editors vary in the attention they pay to the existence of alternative readings in different copies of a manuscript.

An important feature, which can add a great deal to the ‘alien’ appearance of a text, is whether the scribe’s orthographic abbreviations are retained, or are expanded. In some texts, for example, *þ* is used as the abbreviation for *þæt* or for *þþ*, *7* for the various forms of *and*, and the tilde (~) marks an expansion, usually to a following nasal. (For later scribal conventions, see p. 40.)

The Battle of Maldon was fought in August 991. A Viking fleet had sailed up the estuary of the River Blackwater to the island of Northey, near Maldon in Essex. Their passage across the river (now called Southey Creek) was opposed by Byrhtnoth, ealdorman of Essex, and his household. The poem, which lacks a beginning and end in the extant manuscript, tells of how the English reject the Viking demand for tribute, then allow them safe passage across the causeway from Northey, to enable a battle to take place. This turned out to be an unfortunate decision:



THE BATTLE OF MALDON

Byrhtpold mæpelode, bord hafenode—
se pæs eald Ʒeneat—æsc acpehte;
he ful baldlice beornas lærde:
‘HiƷe sceal þe heardra, heorte þe cenre,
mod sceal þe mare, þe ure mæƷen lytlað.
Her lið ure ealdor eall forheapen,
Ʒod on Ʒreote. A mæƷ Ʒnornian
se ðe nu fram þis piƷpleƷan pendan þenceð.
Ic eom frod feores. Fram ic ne pille,
ac ic me be healfe minum hlaforde,
be spa leofan men licƷan þence.’
Spa hi ÆþelƷares bearn ealle bylde
Ʒodric to Ʒuþe. Ofð he Ʒar forlet,
pælspere pindan on þa picinƷas;
spa he on þam folce fyrrest eode,
heop 7 hynde, oð þæt he on hilde Ʒecranc.

*Byrhtwold spoke; he grasped his shield—
he was an old follower—he shook the ash spear;
very boldly he exhorted the warriors:
‘Courage shall be the fiercer, heart the bolder,
spirit the greater, as our strength lessens.
Here lies our chief all hewn down,
a noble man in the dust. He has cause ever to mourn
who intends now to turn from this war-play.
I am advanced in years. I will not hence,
but I by the side of my lord,
by so dear a man, intend to lie.’
Likewise, Godric, the son of Æthelgar, exhorted them all
to the battle. Often he let the spear fly,
the deadly spear speed away among the Vikings;
as he went out in the forefront of the army,
he hewed and struck, until he perished in the battle.*

some of the English flee the field, Byrhtnoth is killed, and the remaining loyal soldiers die heroically. The extract [left] is from the last few lines of the extant text, when Byrhtwold, an old warrior, expresses the heroism which it is the purpose of the poem to commemorate.

The ford which led to the mainland, now built up into a causeway, is shown in the picture. It is only some 77 yards (70 m) long, which would thus enable the English and Viking leaders to shout their demands to each other – an exchange which is dramatically recorded in the poem.

HOW DO TWELVE BECOME FIVE?

Wer sæt æt wine mid his wifum twam
ond his twegen suno ond his twa dohtor,
swase gesweostor, ond hyra suno twegen,
freolico frumbearn; fæder wæs þær inne
þara æþelinga æghwæðres mid,
eam ond nefa. Ealra wæron fife
eorla ond idesa insittendra.

*A man sat at wine with his two wives
and his two sons and his two daughters,
beloved sisters, and their two sons,
noble first-born; the father was in there
of both of those princes,
the uncle and the nephew. In all there were five
lords and ladies sitting in there.*

This is one of the 95 poetic riddles (some of which date from the 8th century) in the Exeter Book, a late 10th-century compilation of secular and religious poetry. By 1072 it belonged to Bishop Leofric of Exeter, who bequeathed it to his cathedral. The solution to the riddle comes from the Book of Genesis, where it is said that Lot’s two daughters lay with him, and each bore him a son.

THE RUNE POEM

Each stanza of this poem (the first six are shown below) begins with the name of the rune printed alongside (p. 9). The poem would have been passed on orally, the rhythm and alliteration making it easy to remember, in much the same way as children today learn ‘Thirty days hath September’.

Feoh byþ frofur fira gehwylcum—

F sceal ðeah manna gehwylc miclun hyt dælan
gif he wile for Drihtne domes hleotan.

Ur byþ anmod 7 oferhymed,

U fela frece deor, feohteþ mid hornum,
mære morstapa: þ is modig wuht!

Þorn byþ ðearle scearp, ðegna gehwylcum

Þ anfeng ys yfyl, ungemetun reþe
manna gehwylcun ðe him mid resteð.

Os byþ ordruma ælcra spræce,

O wisdomes wraþu and witenas frofur
and eorla gehwam eadnys and tohiht.

Rad byþ on recyde rinca gehwylcum

R sefte, and swiþhwæt ðam ðe sitteþ onufan
meare mægenheardum ofer milpaþas.

Cen byþ cwicera gehwam cup on fyre,

C blac and beorhtlic, byrneþ oftust
ðær hi æþelingas inne restaþ.

Wealth is a joy to every man—

but every man must share it well
if he wishes to gain glory in the sight of the Lord.

Aurochs is fierce, with gigantic horns,

a very savage animal, it fights with horns,
a well-known moor-stepper: it is a creature of
courage!

Thorn is very sharp, harmful to every man

who seizes it, unsuitably severe
to every man who rests on it.

Mouth is the creator of all speech,

a supporter of wisdom and comfort of wise men,
and a blessing and hope to every man.

Journey is to every warrior in the hall

pleasant, and biting tough to him who sits
on a mighty steed over the mile-paths.

Torch is to every living thing known by its fire;

bright and brilliant, it burns most often
where the princes take their rest within.

Old English poetic manuscripts contained no titles. Titles such as *Beowulf* or *The Seafarer* have been added by editors, usually in the 19th century. Most of the poetry is also anonymous, the chief exceptions being the few lines known to be by Cædmon (p. 20) and four poems containing the name of Cynewulf woven in runes into the texts as an acrostic (p. 424), so that readers could pray for him. We know more of the prose authors, who included King Alfred, Archbishop Wulfstan, and Abbot Ælfric, but even here most of the surviving material, as in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (p. 14), is anonymous.



From Alfred with love

Ælfred kyning hateð gretan
Wærferþ biscep his wordum
luflice ond freondlice...

King Alfred sends his greetings
to Bishop Werferth in his own
words, in love and friendship...

In the preface to his translation
of Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis*
(‘Pastoral Care’), made c. 893,
Alfred contrasts the early days of
English Christianity with his own
time, for which the destruction
caused by the Vikings would
have been largely to blame
(p. 25). This book was part of a
great programme of learning
which Alfred inaugurated in an
effort to repair the damage,
organizing the translation of
major texts which previously
had been available only in Latin.
Most of the surviving
manuscripts of Old English are
10th-century in origin, and must
owe their existence to the
success of this programme.

The preface continues:

I want to let you know that it
has often occurred to me to
think what wise men there
once were throughout
England ... and how people
once used to come here from
abroad in search of wisdom
and learning – and how
nowadays we would have to
get it abroad (if we were to
have it at all). Learning had so
declined in England that there
were very few people this side
of the Humber who could
understand their service-books
in English, let alone translate a
letter out of Latin into English –
and I don’t imagine there were
many north of the Humber,
either. There were so few of
them that I cannot think of
even a single one south of the
Thames at the time when I
came to the throne. Thanks be
to almighty God that we now
have any supply of teachers.
(Trans. A. G. Rigg.)

THE OPENING LINES OF THE SEAFARER

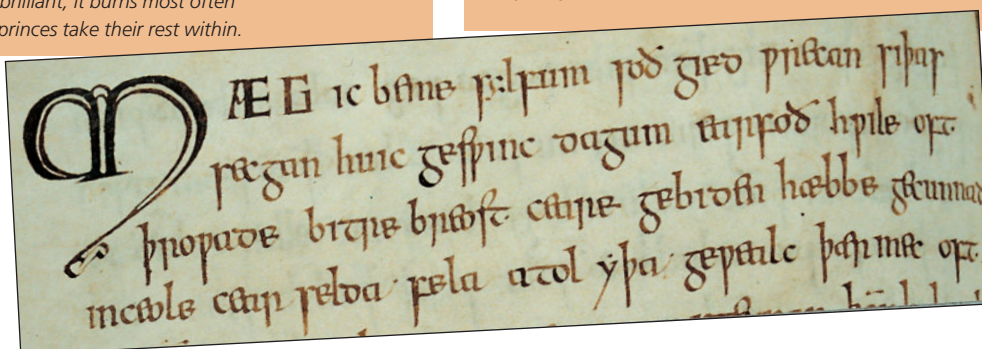
Mæg ic be me sylfum soðgied wrecan,
siþas secgan, hu ic geswincdagum
earfoðhwile oft þrowade,
bitre breostceare gebiden hæbbe,
gecunnad in ceole cearselda fela,
atol yta gewealc.

*Can I about myself true-poem utter,
of journeys tell, how I in toilsome-days
hardship-times often suffered
bitter heart-sorrow have endured,
come to know on ship many sorrow-halls
cruel rolling of waves.*

FROM THE DREAM OF THE ROOD

Þæt wæs geara iu— ic þæt gyta geman—
þæt ic wæs aheawen holtes on ende
astyred of stefne minum. Genaman me ðær
strange feondas,
geworhton him þær to wæfersyne, heton me
heora wergas hebban;
bæron me þær beornas on eaxlum, oð ðæt hie me
on beorg asetton;
gefæstnodon me þær feondas genoge. Geseah ic
þa Frean mancynnes
efstan elne micle, þæt he me wolde on gestigan.

*That was very long ago— I remember it still—
that I was cut down at the forest’s edge
stirred from my root. Strong enemies took me there,
made me into a spectacle there for themselves, ordered me
to lift up their criminals;
men carried me there on shoulders, until they set me on
a hill;
many enemies fastened me there. I saw then the Lord of
mankind
hastening with great courage, that he intended to climb
on me.*



The opening
lines of *The
Seafarer*, from
the Exeter Book.

[illegible]

455 Her Hengest 7 Horsa fuhton wip Wyr̥t georne þam cyninge, in þære stowe þe is gecueden Agæles þrep, 7 his broþur Horsan man ofslog. 7 æfter þam Hengest feng [to] rice 7 Æsc his sunu.

455 *In this year Hengest and Horsa fought against King Vortigern at a place which is called Agælesþrep [Aylesford], and his brother Horsa was slain. And after that Hengest succeeded to the kingdom and Æsc, his son.*

457 Her Hengest 7 Æsc fuhton wip Brettas in þære stowe þe is ge cueden Crecgan ford, 7 þær ofslogon .iiii. wera, 7 þa Brettas þa forleton Cent lond, 7 mid micle ege flugon to Lunden byrg.

457 *In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Britons at a place which is called Crecganford [Crayford], and there slew four thousand men; and the Britons then forsook Kent and fled to London in great terror.*

465 Her Hengest 7 Æsc gefuhton wið Walas neah Wippedes fleote, 7 þær .XII. Wilisce aldr menn ofslogon, 7 hiera þegn an þær wearþ ofslægen, þam wæs noma Wipped.

465 *In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Welsh near Wippedesfleot and there slew twelve Welsh nobles; and one of their thanes, whose name was Wipped, was slain there.*

473 Her Hengest 7 Æsc gefuhton wip Walas, 7 genamon un arimedlico here reaf, 7 þa Walas flugon þa Englan swa fyr.

473 *In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Welsh and captured innumerable spoils, and the Welsh fled from the English like fire.*

477 Her cuom Ælle on Breten lond, 7 his .iii. suna. Cymen, 7 Wlencing, 7 Cissa. mid .iii. scipum, on þa stowe þe is nemned Cymenes ora, 7 þær ofslogon monige Wealas, 7 sume on fleame bedrifon on þone wudu þe is genemned Andreðes leage.

477 *In this year Ælle came to Britain and his three sons Cymen, Wlencing, and Cissa with three ships at the place which is called Cymenesora [The Owers to the south of Selsey Bill], and there they slew many Welsh and drove some to flight into the wood which is called Andreðesleag [Sussex Weald].*

485 Her Ælle gefeaht wip Walas neah Mearc rædes burnan stæðe.

485 *In this year Ælle fought against the Welsh near the bank of [the stream] Mearcraedesburna.*

488 Her Æsc feng to rice, 7 was .XXIII. wintra Cantwara cyning.

488 *In this year Æsc succeeded to the kingdom, and was king of the people of Kent twenty-four years.*

(After C. Plummer, 1892. Trans. G. N. Garmonsway, 1972.)

SOURCES OF THE CHRONICLE

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is not a single text, but a compilation from several sources which differ in date and place of origin. It takes the form of a year-by-year diary, with some years warranting extensive comment, some a bare line or two, and many nothing at all. Most ancient European chronicles were kept in Latin, but the present work is distinctive for its use of Old English – and also for the vast time-span it covers, from year 1 (the birth of Christ) to various dates in the 11th or 12th century.

There are seven surviving chronicle manuscripts, six of which are completely in Old English, the seventh partly in Latin. Scholars have given each text a distinguishing letter name, but they are more commonly known by the name of their source location or that of an early owner.

- Text A¹: the *Parker Chronicle*. This is the oldest manuscript, written in a single hand from the beginning to 891, then kept up to date in 13 or 14 other hands up to 1070. Its name derives from a former owner, Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury (1504–75). It is sometimes called the *Winchester Chronicle*, because its 9th-century subject-matter was compiled at Winchester, being later transferred to Canterbury. This is the version from which the facing extract is taken.
- Text A²: Fragments of an 11th-century copy of the *Parker Chronicle*, almost completely destroyed in the same Cottonian Library fire that damaged *Beowulf* (p. 11).
- Texts B and C: the *Abingdon Chronicles*. Two West Saxon versions: the first (B), extending to year 977, was copied c. 1000, and kept at Canterbury without additions; the second (C), extending to 1066, is a mid-11th-century copy which was kept up to date.
- Text D: the *Worcester Chronicle*. A text, with northern material added, which was sent to the diocese of Worcester. It was written in the mid-11th century, and kept up to date until 1079.
- Text E: the *Peterborough Chronicle*; also called the *Laud Chronicle*, after Archbishop William Laud (1573–1645). This version, copied at Peterborough in a single hand until 1121, extends as far as 1154.
- Text F: the bilingual *Canterbury Epitome*. This is a version of E in Latin and English, written in Canterbury c. 1100.

The Easter Tables

The text opposite shows the years 455 to 490 from Text E, and deals with the events soon after the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons (p. 7). In this part of the Chronicle, the scribe has written a series of years on separate lines, assuming that a single line would suffice for each year. (He missed out year 468, and had to insert it afterwards – an interesting example of how scribal errors can be made.)

The Chronicles are not all like this. They change in style as they develop, and lose their list-like appearance. Many of the later entries, especially those written by contemporaries, contain a great deal of narrative, and take on the character of literary essays under their year headings.

The listing technique shown in the illustration is one which originated with the *Easter Tables*, drawn up to help the clergy determine the date of the feast in any year. A page consisted of a sequence of long horizontal lines. Each line began with a year number, which was followed by several columns of astronomical data (e.g. movements of the Sun and Moon), and the results of the calculation. Of particular relevance was the space left at the end of each line, which was used to write short notes about events to help distinguish the years from each other (such as 'In this year Cnut became king'). The Chronicles grew out of this tradition, but as the intention changed, and they became more like historical records, these end-of-line notes took up more space than was expected, and the scribe had to make room where he could find it. This is why some of the entries in the illustration appear opposite several year numbers.

OLD ENGLISH LETTERS

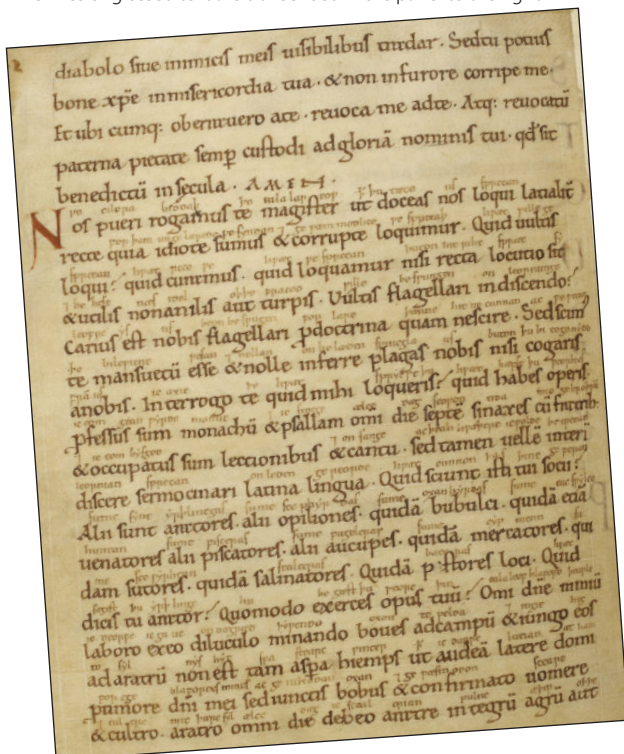
Although there is much in common between Old and Modern English, it is the differences which strike us most forcibly when we first encounter edited Anglo-Saxon texts. The editors have done a great deal to make the texts more accessible to present-day readers, by introducing modern conventions of word spaces, punctuation, capitalization, and line division (p. 12), but there are certain features of the original spelling which are usually retained, and it is these which make the language look alien. Learning to interpret the distinctive symbols of Old English is therefore an essential first step.

Old English texts were written on parchment or vellum. The first manuscripts were in the Roman alphabet, using a half-uncial, minuscule script (p. 270) brought over by Irish missionaries: a good example is Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, illustrated on p. 7. The rounded letter shapes of this script later developed into the more angular and cursive style (called the *insular script*), which was the usual form of writing until the 11th century.

The Old English alphabet was very similar to the one still in use, though any modern eye looking at the original manuscripts would be immediately struck by the absence of capital letters.

- A few of the letters were different in shape. There was an elongated shape for *s*, for example. Modern letter *g* appeared as *ȝ*, often called 'yogh' (for its sound, see p. 18). A few other letter-shapes, such as *e*, *f*, and *r*, also look rather different.
- Several modern letters will not be seen: *j* is usually spelled with a *ȝ*, *v* with an *f*; *q*, *x*, and *z* are very rarely used.

London, British Library, MS Cotton Tiberius A. xv, fol. 60v. The first five lines of glossed text are transcribed in the panel to the right.



- *w* was written using a runic symbol, 'wynn', *p*, which can still be seen printed in older editions of Old English texts (p. 12). Modern editions use *w*. Variant forms using *u* or *uu* are sometimes found, especially in early texts.
- *æ* was called 'ash', a name borrowed from the runic alphabet (p. 9), though the symbol is an adaptation of Latin *ae*, which it gradually replaced during the 8th century. Its sound was somewhere between [a] and [e] (p. 18).

ÆLFRIC'S COLLOQUY

The *Colloquy* is one of the earliest English educational documents. Colloquies were a standard technique of instruction in the monastic schools of Europe, and were especially used for teaching Latin. Ælfric's *Colloquy* takes the form of a conversation between a teacher and a young monk, and deals largely with the daily tasks of the monk's companions in the school and of the monk's own life there. The work is of considerable historical interest for the picture it provides of the life of ordinary people in Anglo-Saxon society. It is also of great linguistic interest as, in one of the four surviving manuscripts (Cotton Tiberius A.iii, shown below left), someone has added glosses in Old English above the lines. This was almost certainly a later teacher, rather than a pupil or Ælfric himself – though the point has been much debated.

Little is known about Ælfric. He was born c. 955, and died c. 1020. He was a monk at Winchester, and he became Abbot of Eynsham in c. 1005. His other writing includes many homilies, saints' lives, and a *Latin Grammar* for which later scholars gave him the title of 'Grammaticus'. He is widely regarded as one of the greatest writers of Old English prose. Certainly, his *Colloquy* is remarkable for

the liveliness and realism, tinged with humour, of the dialogue.

The *Colloquy* shows two writing styles. The Latin uses Carolingian minuscule (p. 270), whereas the Old English is in an older style (as shown by such features as the rounded *a*, the insular *s*, the dotted *y*, and the use of *yogh*). Note the early punctuation system, especially the form for the question mark in the Latin text. A period is used to end sentences, and also in some places where we would nowadays use a comma.

The Old English shows typical features of late West Saxon (p. 28), and probably dates from the first half of the 11th century. Basic punctuation has been added to the above transcript, as an aid for the modern reader – but as the text is a gloss, rather than a coherent narrative, the sentences do not always run smoothly. The gloss is almost complete in these opening lines, but there are several omitted words later in the *Colloquy*.

In this transcript, each turn in the dialogue is placed on a new line. Abbreviated forms marked by a tilde in the manuscript have been expanded in square brackets, but 7 (for *et*) has been left. The transcript does not show the dot over the *y*.

pe cildra biddaþ þe, eala lareow, þ[æt] þu tæce us sprecan forþam unȝelærede
pe syndon 7 ȝepæmmodlice pe sprecað.

hpæt pille ȝe sprecan?

hpæt rece pe hpæt pe sprecan, buton hit riht spræc sy 7 behefe, næs idel oþþe fracod.
pille bespunȝen on leornunȝe?

leofre ys us beon bespunȝen for lare þænne hit ne cunnan.

Nos pueri rogamus te magister ut doceas nos loqui latialit[er] recte quia idiote sumus & corrupte loquimur.

Quid uultis loqui?

Quid curamus. quid loquamur nisi recta locutio sit & utilis, non anilis aut turpis.

Ultis flagellari in discendo?

Carius est nobis flagellari p[ro] doctrina quam nescire.

We boys ask you, master, that you teach us to speak Latin correctly, because we are ignorant and we speak ungrammatically.

What do you want to speak?

What do we care what we speak, as long as the speech is correct and useful, not foolish or base.

Are you ready to be beaten while you learn?

We would rather be beaten for our teaching than not to know it.

- *þ* was called ‘thorn’, both the name and symbol being borrowed from the runic alphabet. It represented either of the ‘th’ sounds [θ] or [ð] (p. 18). This symbol and *ð* (see below) were in fact interchangeable: a scribe might use first one, then the other, in the same manuscript – though thorn became commoner in the later Old English period. (A *th* spelling was also sporadically used at the very beginning of the Old English period, presumably reflecting Irish influence, but it was quickly replaced by the new symbols.)
- *ð* was called ‘that’ in Anglo-Saxon times, though the name given to it by 19th-century editors is ‘eth’ (pronounced as in the first syllable of *weather*, see p. 18). The origin of this symbol is obscure, though it may be an adaptation of an early Irish letter.
- Numbers were written only in Roman symbols (as can be seen in the dates of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, p. 14). Arabic numerals came much later.

The standard Old English alphabet thus had the following 24 letters:

a, æ, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, k, l, m, n, o, p, r, s, t, þ, ð, u, w, y

Several of these letters were used in combinations (*digraphs*) to represent single sound units, in much the same way as do several modern forms, such as *th* and *ea* (as in *meat*).

One other point about spelling should be noted. There was a great deal of variation, reflecting the different preferences of individual scribes, as well as regional attempts to capture local sounds precisely. Practices also varied over time. But even with a single scribe in a single place at a single time, there could be variation, as can be seen from the existence of several variant forms in manuscripts such as *Beowulf*. The spelling became much more regular by the time of Ælfric (in the late 10th century), but

this was a temporary state of affairs. Change was on the horizon, in the form of new Continental scribal practices, an inevitable graphic consequence of 1066 (p. 40).

THE LINDISFARNE GOSPELS

A page from the Lindisfarne Gospels, written at the monastery on the island of Lindisfarne (also called Holy Island), two miles off the Northumberland coast in NE England, and linked to the mainland by a causeway at low tide. The text was written c. 700, if we can trust the brief biographical note added in a space on one of the later pages (fol. 259). This says that Eadfrith, Bishop of Lindisfarne (in office, 698–721), wrote the book, that Æthelwald, Bishop of Lindisfarne (in office,

724–40), bound it, and that Billfrith made an outer casing for it, which he decorated with precious stones. The text is now in the British Museum, but the gems no longer survive.

The illustration shows the opening of Matthew 1.18. This verse was held to be the real beginning of this Gospel, as the preceding verses contained only genealogical material, hence the richness of the illumination at this point. The page is of considerable artistic interest because of its

mixture of Irish, Germanic, and Byzantine motifs; but it is also of great graphological interest, as it displays several styles of writing (§18).

The rubric above the monogram is in uncials. The four lines of text below are in ornamental capitals, with elaborate links between some letters to save space. The first line of the Gospel text has been left unfinished. Between the lines is an Old English gloss written in an insular script by a Northumbrian scribe in the 10th century.

*Incipit euangelium secundum mattheum
Christi autem generatio sic
erat cvm esset desponsata
mater eius Maria Iosebh.*

onginned godspell æft~ matheus
Cristes soðlice cynnrecenise ꝛ cneuresu~
suxæ ꝛ ðus
wæs mið ðy wæs biwoedded ꝛ beboden ꝛ
befeastnad ꝛ betaht
moder his

(The glossator is using several Old English words to express one in Latin; these are linked using the abbreviation for Latin *uel* ('or'): ꝛ. He also sometimes adds further explanatory comments, in the margins. For the use of ~, see p. 12.)

The beginning of the Gospel according to Matthew
Now the birth of Jesus Christ was in this wise. When
Mary his mother had been betrothed to Joseph...

(After P. H. Blair, 1977.)

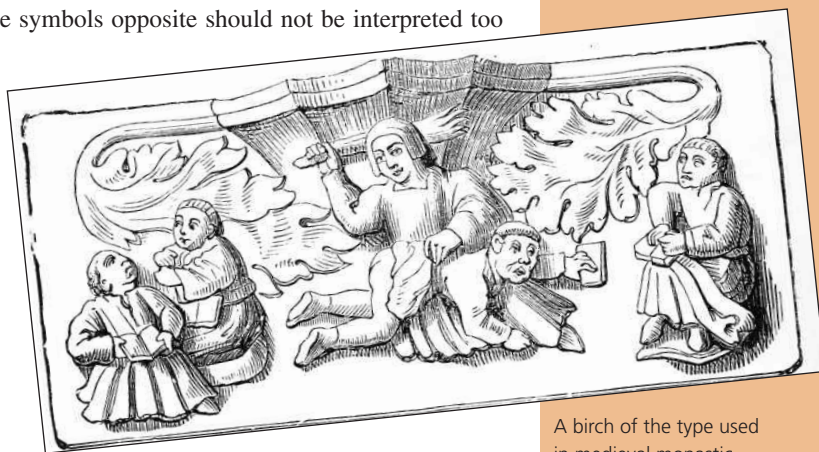


London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero D. iv, fol. 29.

OLD ENGLISH SOUNDS

How do we know what Old English sounded like? The unhelpful answer is that we do not. In later periods, we can rely on accounts by contemporary writers (p. 71) – but there is none of this in Old English. The best we can do is make a series of informed guesses, based on a set of separate criteria (see below), and hope that the results are sufficiently similar to warrant some general conclusions. A great deal of scholarship has been devoted to this issue, and we now have a fair degree of certainty about how most of the sounds were pronounced. If an Anglo-Saxon were available, using the information on these pages we could probably communicate intelligibly.

We would have to get used to each other's accent, of course, in much the same way as modern speakers (unused, say, to Geordie or Cockney speech) need to do. There is no reason to suppose that there was any less phonetic variation in Anglo-Saxon times than there is today, and the symbols opposite should not be interpreted too



A birch of the type used in medieval monastic schools.

narrowly. To say that Old English *æ* was pronounced as an open front vowel (p. 250) is sufficient to distinguish it from *e* and other vowels, but it does not tell us the exact vowel quality which would have been used.

The Evidence

There are four main types of evidence used in deducing the sound values of Old English letters.

- **Alphabetical logic** We know a great deal about how the letters of the Roman alphabet were pronounced, and it seems reasonable to assume that, when the missionaries adapted this alphabet to Old English, they tried to do so in a consistent and logical way. The letter representing the sound of *m* in Latin would have been used to represent the same sound in English. Likewise, if they found it necessary to find a new letter, this must have been because they felt no Latin letters were suitable (as in the case of the new symbol *æ*).

Similarly, a great deal of information comes from the way variations of regional accent and changes over time are shown in the spelling of Old English texts. The scribes generally tried to write words down to show the way they

GETTING IT RIGHT

Generations of Old English students have pored over tables such as this one, in an effort to work out the 'sound' of the language. Many must have identified during their university days with the students of Ælfric (p. 16), caring not so much about what they said, as long as they said it right. But the analogy is only a partial one: 21st-century university tutors of Old English would not, on the whole, beat their charges.

Letter	Example and its meaning	IPA symbol	Modern example
æ	sæt 'sat'	[æ]	Southern BrE sat
ǣ	dǣd 'deed'	[ɛ:]	French bête
a	{ mann 'man' dagas 'days'	[ɒ] ¹	AmE hot
ā	hām 'home'	[ɑ:]	German Land father
c	{ cyrice 'church' cēne 'bold'	[tʃ] ² [k]	church keen
cg	ecg 'edge'	[dʒ]	edge
e	settan 'set'	[ɛ]	set
ē	he 'he'	[e:]	German Leben
ea	earm 'arm'	[æə]	{ as for [æ], [ɛ:], [e], [ɛ:], followed by the first syllable of about
ēa	eare 'ear'	[ɛ:ə]	
eo	eorl 'nobleman'	[eə]	
ēo	beor 'beer'	[e:ə]	
f	{ æfre 'ever' fif 'five'	[v] ³ [f]	ever five
	gyt 'get'	[j] ²	yet
g	fugol 'bird'	[ʁ] ⁴	colloq. German sagen
	gān 'go'	[g]	go
h	{ heofon 'heaven' niht 'night'	[h] ⁵ [ç] ⁶	heaven German ich
	brōhte 'brought'	[x] ⁷	German brachte
i	sittan 'sit'	[i]	sit
ī	wīd 'wide'	[i:]	weed
o	{ monn 'man' God 'God'	[ɒ] ¹ [ɔ]	AmE hot BrE hot
ō	gōd 'good'	[o:]	German Sohn
s	{ rīsan 'rise' hūs 'house'	[z] ⁸ [s]	rise house
sc	scip 'ship'	[ʃ]	ship
þ, ð	{ oþer, oðer 'other' þurh, ðurh 'through'	[ð] ⁸ [θ]	other through
u	ful 'full'	[u]	full
ū	hūs 'house'	[u:]	goose
y	wynn 'joy'	[y]	German Würde
ȳ	rȳman 'make way'	[y:]	German Güte

Notes

Some of the sounds are restricted to certain contexts.

- 1 before m, n, n(g)
- 2 before/after i, and often æ, e, y
- 3 between voiced sounds
- 4 between back vowels
- 5 initially
- 6 after æ, e, i, y
- 7 after a, o, u
- 8 between vowels

The following riddle (No. 86 in the *Exeter Book* (p. 12)) illustrates the use of this transcription in a continuous piece of writing.

(After R. Quirk, V. Adams, & D. Davy, 1975.)

Wiht cwōm gangan [wiçt kwo:m ɡaŋɡan]	þær weras sæton θe:r weras se:ton]
monige on mæðle, [mɒniʒə ɔn mæðlə]	mōde snottre; mo:ðə snɔtrə]
hæfde ān ēage [hævdə a:n e:əʒə]	ond ēaran twā ɔnd e:əran twa:]
ond twēgen fēt, [ɔnd twe:ʒən fe:t]	twelf hund hēafda, twelf hund hɛ:ʌvdɑ]
hrycg ond wombe [hrydʒ ɔnd wɒmba]	ond honda twa ɔnd hondə twa:]
earmas ond eaxle, [e:ərməs ɔnd æəkslə]	ānne swēoran a:n:ə swe:əran]
ond sīdan twā. [ɔnd si:ðan twa:]	Saga hwæt ic hātte! səʒa hwæt iʃ ha:t:ə]

were spoken. They were not in a culture where there were arbitrary rules for standardized spelling (though rigorous conventions were maintained in certain abbeys), so we are not faced with such problems as silent letters: the *w* of *writan*, the ancestor of *write*, was pronounced. Old English is, accordingly, much more ‘phonetic’ than Modern English (p. 284).

- **Comparative reconstruction** We can work backwards from later states of the language to make deductions about how Old English must have sounded. Several of the sounds of Modern English (especially dialect forms) are likely to have close similarities with those of Old English. It is unlikely that there is any real difference in the way most of the consonants were pronounced then and now. The chief problems are the vowels, whose values are always more difficult to pinpoint (p. 249).
- **Sound changes** We know a great deal about the kinds of sound change which take place as language progresses. It is therefore possible to propose a particular sound value for an Old English letter different from the one in existence today, as long as we are able to give a plausible explanation for the change. For example, the Old English equivalent to *it* was *hit*. If we claim that the *h* was pronounced, we have to assume that people stopped pronouncing it at a later stage in the language. Is this a likely sound change? Given that the dropping of *h* in unstressed pronouns is something that happens regularly today (*I saw ‘im*), it would seem so.

- **Poetic evidence** The way in which poets make words rhyme or alliterate can provide important clues about the way the sound system works. So can the rhythmic patterns of lines of verse, which can show the way a word was stressed, and thus indicate what value to give to a vowel appearing in an unstressed syllable – a critical matter in the late Old English period (p. 32).

Complications

There are many pitfalls to trap the unwary philologist. Scribes could be very inconsistent. They were also prone to error. But of course we do not know in advance whether an idiosyncratic form in a manuscript is in fact an error or a deliberate attempt to represent an ongoing sound change or a regionalism. A great deal of detailed comparative work may be required before we can be sure.

The absence of universal spelling rules can also pose a problem, as there was no necessity for scribes to be consistent, and many were not (p. 10). Manuscripts can vary in their use of *þ* and *ð* (p. 16), single or double consonants (*s* or *ss*, *d* or *dd*), and several groups of vowels (notably, *i*, *y*, and *ie*). At one point we might find *hit*, and at another, *hyt*; *gyldan* ‘pay’ might be spelled *gielðan*; *þær* might be *þar*. Such difficulties, it must be appreciated, contribute only to the fortitude and motivation of the true Old English phonologist. *Hiȝe sceal þe heardra, heorte þe cenre* (p. 12).

ANCIENT MUTATIONS

Some English word pairs showing the effects of a phonological change which took place over 1,200 years ago.

goose – geese
tooth – teeth
man – men
mouse – mice
hale – health
doom – deem
full – fill
whole – heal
fall – fell (vb.)
blood – bleed
foul – filth
long – length
broad – breadth
old – elder

THE FIRST VOWEL SHIFT

We can say one thing with certainty about the accent of the Anglo-Saxon invaders after they arrived in Britain: it changed. We know this because the words which emerged in Old English out of the Germanic spoken on the Continent (p. 6) looked (and therefore sounded) very different from their later counterparts in the early days of German. What happened to cause such a difference?

A related observation arises out of the way some Latin words were borrowed into Old English without a change in their vowel, whereas others did change. Latin *caseus* became *cyse* ‘cheese’ in Old English, but *castellum* became *castel* ‘village’. In the first case, the *a* vowel changed; in the second case, it did not. There are many similar examples. What happened to cause such a difference?

i-mutation

The explanation is now a well-established part of Germanic philology. It asserts that the Old English vowels changed in quality between the time the Anglo-Saxons left the Continent and the time Old English was first written down. By examining hundreds of cases, it is possible to establish a pattern in the way this change took place.

In Germanic there were many words where a vowel in a stressed syllable was immediately followed by a high front vowel ([i]) or vowel-like sound ([j]) in the next syllable. The plural of **fōt* is thought to have

been **fōtiz*, with the stress on *fō*. For some reason (see below), the quality of this high front sound caused the preceding vowel to change (mutate). In the case of **fōt*, the *ō* became *ē*, which ultimately came to be pronounced [i:], as in modern *feet*. The *-iz* ending dropped away, for once the plural was being shown by the *e* vowel, it was unnecessary to have an ending as well. *Fēt* therefore emerged as an irregular noun in English – though the process which gave rise to it was perfectly regular, affecting hundreds of cases.

This process has come to be called *i*-mutation, or *i*-umlaut (a German term meaning ‘sound alteration’). It is thought to have taken place during the 7th century. There is no sign of the vowels continuing to change in this way in later periods. The process also explains the Latin example above: *caseus* must have been borrowed very early into English, before the time that *i*-mutation was operating, as its vowel has been affected (in this case, the *a* has become *y*); *castellum*, however, must have been borrowed after the time when *i*-mutation stopped taking place, as its *a* vowel has remained in *castel*.

i-mutation is a kind of ‘vowel harmony’ – a very natural process which affects many modern languages. People, it seems, readily fall into the habit of making one vowel in a word sound more like another in the same word, and this is what happened in 7th-century Old English. All back vowels in the context described above were changed into front vowels –

and all short front vowels and diphthongs were affected, too, being articulated even further forward and higher (with the exception of [i], of course, which is already as far forward and as high in the mouth as any vowel can be).

There are a few exceptions and complications, which analysts still puzzle over, but the general effect on the language was immense, as this sound change applied to the most frequently occurring word classes, all of which had *i* sounds in their inflectional endings. This is why we have in Modern English such pairs as *food* / *feed* (from the addition of an **-ian* verb-forming suffix in Germanic), as well as *strong* / *strength* and several others (from the addition of an **-ip* adjective-forming suffix). Not all the forms affected by *i*-mutation have survived into Modern English, though. In Old English, the plural of *book* was *bec*, but this has not come through into Modern English as *beek*: the forces of analogy (p. 212) have taken over, and caused a change to the regular *books*.

We do not know why *i*-mutation operated when it did. What was it that made 7th-century Anglo-Saxons start pronouncing their vowels in this way? And why did the process not affect all cases of *i* in a following suffix (words ending in *-ing*, for example, were not affected)? This phonological detective story is by no means over.

The asterisk marks a hypothetical form.

SOME FEATURES OF OLD ENGLISH GRAMMAR

THE CÆDMON STORY

Old English prose provides the clearest way in to analysing the grammar of the language (the poetry, as can be seen from the extracts on pp. 12–13, is much more compressed and intricate). This extract is from an Old English translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (Book 4, Ch. 24). It tells the story of Cædmon, the unlettered cowherd who became England's first Christian poet, sometime in the late 7th century. The translation dates from the late 9th century. (The actual text of Cædmon's hymn is given on p. 29.)

To modern eyes and ears, Old English grammar (for grammatical terminology, see Part III) provides a fascinating mixture of the familiar and the unfamiliar. The word order is much more varied than it would be in Modern English, but there are several places where it is strikingly similar. Adjectives usually go before their nouns, as do prepositions, articles, and other grammatical words, just as they do today. Sometimes, whole sentences are identical in the order of words, or nearly so, as can be seen from the word-for-word translation in the Cædmon text below. The main syntactic differences affect the placing of the verb, which quite often appears before the subject, and also at the very end of the clause – a noticeable feature of this particular story.

In Modern English, word order is relatively fixed. The reason Old English order could vary so much is

that the relationships between the parts of the sentence were signalled by other means. Like other Germanic languages, Old English was *inflected*: the job a word did in the sentence was signalled by the kind of ending it had. Today, most of these inflections have died away, leaving the modern reader with the major task of getting used to the word endings, in order to understand the Old English texts. It is necessary to learn the different forms taken by the verbs, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, and the definite article. The irregular verbs, which change their form from present to past tense, are a particular problem (as they continue to be, for foreign learners), because there are so many more of them. Nonetheless, it should be plain from reading the glosses to the Cædmon extract that present-day English speakers already have a 'feel' for Old English grammar. (Long vowel marks (p. 16) are added in the notes below, as an aid to pronunciation.)

wæs he se mon in weoruldhade geseted oð þa tide þe he
Was he the man in secular life settled until the time that he
wæs gelyfdre ylde; ond he næfre nænig leoð geleornode, ond he
was of-advanced age; and he never any poem learned, and he
for þon oft in gebeorscipe, þonne þær wæs blisse intinga
therefore often at banquet, when there was of-joy occasion
gedemed, þæt heo ealle sceolden þurh endebyrdnesse be hearpan
decided, that they all should by arrangement with harp
5 singan, þonne he geseah þa hearpan him nealecan, þonne aras he
to sing, when he saw the harp him approach, then arose he
for scome from þæm symble, ond ham eode to his huse. þa he
for shame from the feast, and home went to his house. When he
þæt þa sumre tide dyde, þæt he forlet þæt hus þæs
that a certain time did, that he left the house of the
gebeorscipes, ond ut wæs gongende to neata scipene,
banquet, and out was going to of-cattle stall
þara heord him wæs þære neahte beboden; þa he ða þær
of which keeping him was that night entrusted; when he there
10 in gelimplice tide his leomu on reste gesette ond onslepte,
at suitable time his limbs at rest set and fell asleep,

þa stod him sum mon æt þurh swefn, ond hine halette
then stood him a certain man beside in dream, and him hailed
ond grette, ond hine be his noman nemnde, 'Cedmon, sing me
and greeted, and him by his name called. 'Cædmon, sing me
hwæthwugu.' þa ondswarede he, ond cwæð, 'Ne con ic noht
something.' Then answered he, and said, 'Not can I nothing
singan; ond ic for þon of þeossam gebeorscipe ut eode ond hider
sing; and I for that from this banquet out went and hither
15 gewat, for þon ic naht singan ne cuðe.' Eft he cwæð,
came, because I nothing to sing not knew how.' Again he spoke,
se ðe wið hine sprecende wæs, 'Hwæðre þu meaht me
he that with him speaking was, 'However you can for-me
singan.' þa cwæð he, 'Hwæt sceal ic singan?' Cwæð he, 'Sing
sing.' Then said he, 'What shall I sing?' Said he, 'Sing
me frumsceaft.' þa he ða þas andsware onfeng, þa ongon he
me creation.' When he this answer received, then began he
sona singan in herenesse Godes Scyppendes, þa fers
immediately to sing in praise of God Creator, those verses
20 ond þa word þe he næfre gehyrde...
and those words that he never had heard...

WORD ORDER

The varying forms of nouns, adjectives, and articles tell us how the parts of the clause relate to each other. In Modern English, the difference between (i) and (ii) is a matter of word order:

- (i) *the woman saw the man*
- (ii) *the man saw the woman*

In Old English, the two sentences would be:

- (i) *sēō cwēn geseah þone guman*
- (ii) *se guma geseah þā cwēn.*

The nominative feminine form *sēō* in (i) has changed to an accusative form, *þā*, in (ii). Similarly, the accusative masculine form *þone* in (i) has become a nominative *se* in (ii).

It is thus always clear who is doing what to whom, regardless of the order in which the noun phrases appear: *þone guman geseah sēō cwēn* has the same meaning as (i).

WÆS HE SE MON...

wæs

The past tense of the verb 'be' has changed little since Old English times, apart from the loss of the plural ending.

- *wæs* 'was' 1st/3rd sg.
wære 'were' 2nd sg.
wæron 'were' 1st/2nd/3rd pl.

The present tense forms, however, show several differences. To begin with, Old English had two sets of words expressing the notion of 'be', one parallel to Latin *esse* and the other to Latin *ui*.

- *wesan*
eom 1st sg.
eart 2nd sg.
is 3rd sg.

- sind(on)* 1st/2nd/3rd pl.
• *bēon*
bēo 1st sg.
bist 2nd sg.
bið 3rd sg.
bēoð 1st/2nd/3rd pl.

There were also subjunctive, imperative, and participial forms of both verbs.

There seem to have been several differences in the

way the two sets of verbs were used, though there is insufficient evidence to draw up hard-and-fast rules. The *bēon* forms were preferred in habitual and repetitive contexts, and especially when there was a future implication. Ælfric's *Latin Grammar* actually equates *eom*, *eart*, *is* to Latin *sum*, *es*, *est*, and *bēo*, *bist*,

bið to *erō*, *eris*, *erit*. There is a clear example of this difference in one of the Homilies, where the speaker addresses the Holy Trinity:

ðu ðe æfre wære, and æfre bist, and nu eart, an ælmihtig God... *you who always were, and ever will be, and now are, one almighty God...*

hē

The personal pronoun system had more members than we find in Modern English, and several of them are well illustrated in this extract (the numbers below refer to lines). Modern equivalent forms are given below, but these do not capture the way in which the pronouns were used in Old English, where gender is grammatical (p. 221): for example, *bōc* 'book' is feminine, and would be referred to as

heo 'she', whereas *mægden* 'girl' is neuter, and would be referred to as *hit*. (This list gives the standard forms found in late West Saxon (p. 28), and ignores spelling variations.)

- *ic* (13) 'I' nom.
mē (16) 'me' acc./dat.
mīn 'my, mine' gen.
- *wē* 'we' nom.
ūs 'us' acc./dat.
ūre 'our(s)' gen.
- *þū* (16) 'thou' (sg.) nom.
þē 'thee' acc./dat.
þīn 'thy, thine' gen.
- *gē* 'ye' (pl.) nom.

- ēow* 'you' acc./dat.
ēower 'your(s)' gen.
- *hē* (1) 'he' nom.
hine (11) 'him' acc.
his (6) 'his' gen.
him (5) '(to) him' dat.
- *hēo* 'she' nom.
hī 'her' acc.
hire 'her(s)' gen.
hire '(to) her' dat.
- *hit* 'it' nom./acc.
his 'its' gen.
him '(to) it' dat.
- *hīl/hēo* 'they/them' nom./acc.
hira 'their(s)' gen.
him '(to) them' dat.

In addition, the language showed the remains of a 'dual' personal pronoun system, but only in the 1st and 2nd persons. The 1st person form meant 'we two' (nom. *wit*, acc./dat. *unc*, gen. *uncer*); the 2nd person form 'you two' (nom. *git*, acc./dat. *inc*, gen. *incer*). This disappeared by the 13th century.

There are obvious correspondences with the modern pronouns in most cases, but not between the old and modern sets of 3rd person plural

forms. The West Saxon forms were supplanted by Scandinavian forms some time after the Norman Conquest, perhaps because people felt they needed to make a clear difference in pronunciation between the 3rd person singular and plural forms – *him*, in particular, must have been a source of confusion. Whatever the reason, Viking influence prevailed, and the modern English forms now begin with *th-*. (For the special problem of *she*, see p. 43.)

se

Old English nouns may be masculine, feminine, or neuter, regardless of the biological sex of their referents. They also appear in nominative, accusative, genitive, and dative forms (p. 214), depending on their

function in the clause. The nominative masculine form of the definite article, *se*, is seen here with *mon* (a common spelling for *man*); the equivalent feminine form, *sēo*, would be found with *hearpe* 'harp'; and the equivalent neuter form, *þæt*, would be found with *hūs*.

Other forms of the article can be seen in the extract – though it should be noted that articles are not used as much as they would be in Modern English, as can be seen from 'in dream' (11) and other such cases:

- *þā* The acc. sg. form of *sēo*,

following the preposition *oð* 'until' (1), or as object of the verb (5, 7). It also appears as the acc. pl. of *þæt* (19, 20).

- *þæm* (6) The dat. sg. of *þæt*, following the preposition *from*.
- *þæs* (7) The gen. sg. of *þæt*.

ABBREVIATIONS

acc.	accusative case
dat.	dative case
gen.	genitive case
nom.	nominative case
pl.	plural
sg.	singular
1st	1st person
2nd	2nd person
3rd	3rd person

...geseted

There are three main kinds of Modern English verbs (p. 216), and all three can be traced back to Old English.

- 1 Those forming their past tense by adding *-ed* to the root form of the present tense: *jump/jumped*. Then as now, the majority of verbs are of this type.
- 2 Those forming their past tense by changing a vowel in the root form of the present tense: *see/saw*. These are called *vocalic* or 'strong' verbs in Old English grammars, and the patterned changes in vowel quality which they display are described as *vowel gradation* or *ablaut*.
- 3 Wholly irregular forms, such

as *can*, *will*, and *be* (see above).

Verb inflections

The modern verb has very few inflectional endings. Past tense for regular verbs is marked by the *-ed* suffix in all persons; and in the present tense only the 3rd person singular is distinctive (*-s*). Old English made far more distinctions, as can be seen from the following paradigm (variation between different classes of verbs is not shown):

Present tense

- ic lufie* 'I love'
- þū lufast* 'you (sg.) love'
- hē/hēo/hit lufað* 'he/she/it loves'
- wē, gē, hī lufiað* 'we/you (pl.)/they love'

Past tense

- ic lufode* 'I loved'
- þū lufodest* 'you (sg.) loved'
- hē/hēo/hit lufode* 'he/she/it loved'
- wē/gē/hī lufodon* 'we/you (pl.)/they loved'

Some of the present tense endings weakened and disappeared soon after the Old English period. But the 2nd and 3rd person singular forms stayed on, developing into the familiar *-est* and *-eth* forms of Middle English (*lovest*, *loveth*). Their later development is described on p. 44.

There were several other distinctive inflectional features of the Old English verb:

- The infinitive (p. 216): *-an* or *-ian* was added to the root. Examples in the *Cædmon* text include *singan* 'to sing'

and *nealecan* '(to) approach' (5). The infinitive of 'love' was *lufian*. The use of a suffix to mark the infinitive was lost during the Middle English period, and the particle *to* came to be used as an alternative marker.

- The *-ing* form (p. 216): the equivalent form was *-end(e)*. Examples in the text are *gongende* (8) 'going' and *sprecende* (16) 'speaking'. This form hardly survives the beginning of the Middle English period, being replaced by the *-ing(e)* ending which in Old English had been restricted to nouns.
- The *-ed* form (p. 216): this shows the same kind of vowel changes and endings we see today, but it also had a special prefix, *ge-* (as

in all other West Germanic languages): the form is well represented in the *Cædmon* text, being a past narrative – see *geseted* 'settled' (1), *geleornode* 'learned' (2), etc. It stays well into Middle English, but is lost by c. 1500, apart from in archaisms (such as *yclept* 'called').

- The subjunctive (p. 228): unlike in Modern English, this mood was systematically used, but it had far fewer endings than the indicative. It can be seen especially in subordinate clauses expressing a subjective attitude. Plural forms in both present and past tenses have a distinctive *-en* ending. An example in the text is *sceolden* 'should' (4).

OLD ENGLISH VOCABULARY

The vocabulary of Old English presents a mixed picture to those encountering it for the first time. The majority of the words in the Cædmon extract (p. 20) are very close to Modern English – once we allow for the unfamiliar spelling (p. 16) and the unexpected inflections (p. 21) – whereas those in the poetic texts (p. 12) are not. In the Cædmon text we would have little difficulty recognizing *singan* as *sing* or *stōd* as *stood*; and *ondswarede* is quite close to *answered*, *onslepte* to *asleep*, and *geleornode* to *learned*. Omitting the *ge-* prefix helps enormously, making *-seted* more like *seated*, *-seah* like *saw*, and *-hyrde* like *heard*. Most of the prepositions and pronouns are identical in form (though not always in meaning): *for*, *from*, *in*, *æt* ('at'), *he*, *him*, *his*.

On the other hand, some of the words look very strange, because they have since disappeared from the language. In the Cædmon extract these include *gelimplice* 'suitable', *neata* 'cattle', *swefn* 'dream', *beboden* 'entrusted', and *frumsceaft* 'creation', as well as some of the grammatical words, such as *se* 'the' (p. 21). These examples also illustrate the chief characteristic of the Old English lexicon, the readiness to build up words from a number of parts – a feature which has stayed with English ever since (p. 138). Frequent use is made of prefixes and suffixes, and compound words are everywhere in evidence. The meaning of these words often emerges quite quickly, once their parts are identified. Thus, *endebyrdnesse* is a combination of *ende* 'end' + *byrd* 'birth, rank' + *-nesse*, which conveys the meaning of 'arrangement', or (in the present context) of people 'taking their turn'. *Gebeorscipe* seems to have nothing to do with 'banquet' until we see that it is basically 'beer' + 'ship'.

Particular care must be taken with words which look familiar, but whose meaning is different in Modern English. An Anglo-Saxon *wif* was any woman, married or not. A *fugol* 'fowl' was any bird, not just a farmyard one. *Sōna* (*soon*) meant 'immediately', not 'in a little while'; *won* (*wan*) meant 'dark', not 'pale'; and *fæst* (*fast*) meant 'firm, fixed', not 'rapidly'. These are 'false friends', when translating out of Old English.

WORD-BUILDING

The way Old English vocabulary builds up through the processes of affixation and compounding can be seen by tracing the way a basic form is used throughout the lexicon.

(Only a selection of forms is given, and only one possible meaning of each form.)

gān/gangan 'go'

gang journey

Compounding

æftergengness succession

ciricgang churchgoing

forliggang adultery

gangewifre spider

('go' + 'weaver')

gangpytt privy

hindergenga crab

sægenga sea-goer

Prefixation

beganga inhabitant

begangan visit

bīgengere worker

foregān go before

forgān pass over

forþgān go forth

ingān go in

ingang entrance

niþergān descend

ofergān pass over

ofergenga traveller

ofgān demand

ongān approach

opgān go away

tōgān go into
þurhgān go through
undergān undergo
upgān go up
upgang rising
ūtgān go out
ūtgang exit
wiþgān go against
ymbgān go round
(After D. Kastovsky, 1992.)

Not all Old English prefixes have come down into Modern English. Among those which have been lost are *ge-* (p. 21), *op-* ('away'), *niþe-* ('down'), and *ymb-* ('around'). There is a memorial to *tō-* in *today*, *towards*, and *together*.

SELF-EXPLAINING COMPOUNDS

gōdspel < *gōd* 'good' + *spel* 'tidings': gospel

sunandæg < *sunnan* 'sun's' + *dæg* 'day': Sunday

stæfcræft < *stæf* 'letters' + *cræft* 'craft': grammar

myntermann < *mynster* 'monastery' + *mann* 'man': monk

frumweorc < *frum* 'beginning' + *weorc* 'work': creation

eorþcræft < *eorþ* 'earth' + *cræft* 'craft': geometry

rōdfæstnian < *rōd* 'cross' + *fæstnian* 'fasten': crucify

dægred < *dæg* 'day' + *red* 'red': dawn

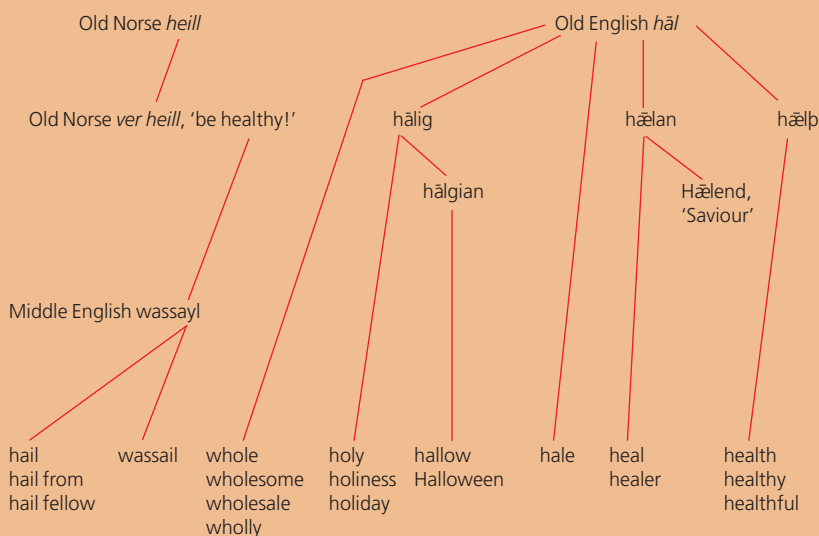
lēōhtfæt < *lēōht* 'light' + *fæt* 'vessel': lamp

tīdymbwlätend < *tīd* 'time' + *ymb* 'about' + *wlätend* 'gaze': astronomer

THE WHOLE STORY

The root form *hāl* is used in Old English as the basis of six words; and the process continues into Modern English, where a further nine words are in evidence (plus many more compounds, such as *whole-food* and *health-farm*).

The diagram also shows a related set of etymologies. Old Norse *heill* and Old English *hāl* both come from the same Germanic root. Much later, the Scandinavian development also affected English. (After W. F. Bolton, 1982.)



Kennings

It is in the poetry (pp.11–13) that we find the most remarkable coinages. The genre abounds in the use of vivid figurative descriptions known as *kennings* (a term from Old Norse poetic treatises). Kennings describe things indirectly, allusively, and often in compounds. Their meaning is not self-evident; there has been a leap of imagination, and this needs to be interpreted. Sometimes the interpretation is easy to make; sometimes it is obscure, and a source of critical debate. Famous kennings include *hronrād* ‘whale-road’ for the sea, *bānhūs* ‘bone-house’ for a person’s body, and *beadolēoma* ‘battle light’ for a sword. Often, phrases are used as well as compound words: God, for example, is described as *heofonrīces weard* ‘guardian of heaven’s kingdom’ and as *moncynnes weard* ‘guardian of mankind’. Some elements are particularly productive. There are over 100 compounds involving the word *mōd* (‘mood’, used in Old English for a wide range of attitudes, such as ‘spirit, courage, pride, arrogance’): they include *mōdcraft* ‘intelligence’, *glædmōdnes* ‘kindness’, *mōdcearu* ‘sorrow of soul’, and *mādmōd* ‘folly’.

Kennings are sometimes a problem to interpret because the frequency of synonyms in Old English makes it difficult to distinguish nuances of meaning. There are some 20 terms for ‘man’ in *Beowulf*, for example, such as *rinc*, *guma*, *secg*, and *beorn*, and it is not always easy to see why one is used and not another. When these words are used in compounds, the complications increase. *Beadorinc* and *dryht-guma* are both translatable as ‘warrior’, but would there be a noticeable difference in meaning if the second elements were exchanged? A careful analysis of all the contexts in which each element is used in Old English can often give clues (and is now increasingly practicable, §25), but this option is of course unavailable when the item is rare. And items are often rare. There

may be only a single instance of a word in a text, or even in Old English as a whole. There are 903 noun compounds in *Beowulf*, according to one study (A. G. Brodeur, 1959); but of these, 578 are used only once, and 518 of them are known only from this poem. In such circumstances, establishing the precise meaning of an expression becomes very difficult.

Kennings were often chosen to satisfy the need for alliteration in a line, or to help the metrical structure (p. 441): there is perhaps no particular reason for having *sincgyfan* ‘giver of treasure’ at one point in *Beowulf* (l.1342) and *goldgyfan* ‘giver of gold’ at another (l.2652), other than the need to alliterate with a following word beginning with *s* in the first case and beginning with *g* in the second. But kennings also allowed a considerable compression of meaning, and a great deal of study has been devoted to teasing out the various associations and ironies which come from using a particular form. A good example is *anpaðas* ‘one + paths’, a route along which only one person may pass at a time. This meaning sounds innocuous enough, but to the Anglo-Saxon mind such paths provided difficult fighting conditions, and there must have been a connotation of danger. The word is used in *Beowulf* (l.1410) at the point where the hero and his followers are approaching the monster’s lair. Their route leads them along *enge ānpaðas* ‘narrow lone paths’, where there would have been an ever-present risk of ambush.

Beowulf stands out as a poem which makes great use of compounds: there are over a thousand of them, comprising a third of all words in the text. Many of these words, and of the elements they contain, are not known outside of poetry. Some, indeed, might have been archaisms. But most are there because of their picturesque and vivid character, adding considerable variety to the descriptions of battles, seafaring, the court, and fellowship in Anglo-Saxon times.

THE CRUEL SEA

sǣ, mere, brim, lagu, wæter, fām (‘foam’), wæg (‘wave’)...

The Icelandic linguists, such as Snorri Sturluson (13th century), distinguished several types of poetic expression. The literalness of *wægflota* ‘wave-floater’ for a ship might be distinguished from the more metaphorical *wæghengest* ‘wave-steed’. Various levels of figurativeness can be seen in the following list of compounds for ‘sea’ – a dozen out of the 50 or more known from Old English literature. Several use one of the ‘sea’ synonyms listed above.

seolbæp seal + bath
ȳpageswing waves + surge
fiscesepel fish + home
strēamgewinn waters + strife
hwælweg whale + way
sǣwylm sea + welling
swanrād swan + road
brimstrēam ocean + stream
merestrēam lake + stream
wæterflōd water + flood
drencflōd drowning + flood
bæpweg bath + way



LEXICAL INVASIONS

The history of early English vocabulary is one of repeated invasions, with newcomers to the islands bringing their own language with them, and leaving a fair amount of its vocabulary behind when they left or were assimilated. In the Anglo-Saxon period, there were two major influences of this kind – one to do with this world, the other to do with the next.

The Effect of Latin

The focus on the next world arrived first, in the form of the Christian missionaries from Ireland and Rome (p. 10). Not only did they introduce literacy, they brought with them a huge Latin vocabulary. The Anglo-Saxons had of course already encountered Latin as used by the Continental Roman armies and the Romano-British, but only a few Vulgar Latin words had come into Old English as a result (p. 8). By contrast, the missionary influence resulted in hundreds of new words coming into the language, and motivated many derived forms. The new vocabulary was mainly to do with the Church and its

services, theology, and learning, but there were also many biological, domestic, and general words, most of which have survived in Modern English. At the same time, many Old English words were given new, ‘Christian’ meanings under missionary influence. *Heaven, hell, God, Gospel, Easter, Holy Ghost, sin*, and several others were semantically refashioned at the time.

The loans came in over a long time scale, and differed in character. Up to c. 1000, many continued to arrive from spoken Latin, and these tended to relate more to everyday, practical matters. After c. 1000, following the rebirth of learning associated with King Alfred (p. 13) and the 10th-century Benedictine monastic revival, the vocabulary came from classical written sources, and is much more scholarly and technical. Sometimes, even, the Latin ending would be retained in the loan, instead of being replaced by the relevant Old English ending: an example is *acoluthus* ‘acolyte’, which first appears in one of Ælfric’s works as *acolitus*. Many of these learned words (such as *epactas* and *collectaneum*) did not survive – though several (such as *fenestra* and *bibliotheca*) were to be reincarnated later in a second stage of classical borrowing (p. 48).

EARLY LATIN LOANS (BEFORE 1000)

Ecclesiastical

abbadissa > *abudesse*
‘abbess’
altar > *alter* ‘altar’
apostolus > *apostol* ‘apostle’
culpa > *cylpe* ‘fault’
missa > *mæsse* ‘Mass’
nonnus > *nonne* ‘monk’
offerre > *offrian* ‘sacrifice’
praedicare > *predician* ‘preach’
scola > *scol* ‘school’
versus > *fers* ‘verse’ (used
in the Cædmon extract,
p. 20, l. 19)

General

calendae > *calend* ‘month’
cavellum > *caul* ‘basket’
epistula > *epistol* ‘letter’
fenestra > *fenester* ‘window’
lilium > *lilie* ‘lily’
organum > *orgel* ‘organ’
picus > *pic* ‘pike’
planta > *plant* ‘plant’
rosa > *rose* ‘rose’
studere > *studdian* ‘take
care of’

LATE LATIN LOANS (AFTER 1000)

Ecclesiastical

apostata > *apostata*
‘apostate’
chrisma > *crisma* ‘chrism’
clericus > *cleric* ‘clerk’
credo > *creda* ‘creed’
crucem > *cruc* ‘cross’
daemon > *demon* ‘demon’
discipulus > *discipul* ‘disciple’
paradisus > *paradis*
‘paradise’
prior > *prior* ‘prior’
sabbatum > *sabbat* ‘sabbath’

General

bibliotheca > *biblioþece*
‘library’
chorus > *chor* ‘choir, chorus’
declinare > *declinian*
‘decline’
delphinus > *delfin* ‘dolphin’
grammatica > *grammatic*
‘grammar’
hymnus > *ymen* ‘hymn’
mechanicus > *mechanisc*
‘mechanical’
persicum > *persic* ‘peach’
philosophus > *philosoph*
‘philosopher’
scutula > *scutel* ‘scuttle, dish’



THE KIRKDALE INSCRIPTION

The best surviving example of an inscribed Anglo-Saxon sundial, now placed above the south porch of the church at Kirkdale, North Yorkshire. The inscription reads as follows:

Left panel

✚ ORM GAMAL / SVNA BOHTE S(AN)C(TV)S /
GREGORIVS MIN / STERÐONNE HI / T WES ÆL
TOBRO /

Right panel

CAN 7 TOFALAN 7 HE / HIT LET MACAN NEWAN
FROM / GRUNDE XPE 7 S(AN)C(TV)S GREGORI / VS
IN EADWARD DAGVM C(I)NG / 7 (I)N TOSTI DAGVM
EORL ✚

Centre panel

✚ ÐIS IS DÆGES SOLMERCA ✚ / ÆT ILCVM TIDE /
✚ 7 HAWARÐ ME WROHTE 7 BRAND PŔS

*Orm, son of Gamal, bought St Gregory's church when it was all
ruined and tumbled down and he caused it to be built afresh
from the foundation (in honour of) Christ and St Gregory in the
days of King Edward and in the days of Earl Tosti.
This is the day's sun-marking at every hour. And Hawarð made
me, and Brand, priest (?)*

Tostig, brother of Harold Godwinson, became earl of Northumbria in 1055, and died in 1066, so the dial belongs to that decade.

The text shows an interesting mix of influences, with the Latin saint's name alongside Old Norse personal names, and Latin *minster* alongside Germanic *tobrocan*.

AND A FEW MORE LATIN LOANS...

abbot, accent, alb, alms, anchor, angel, antichrist, ark, cancer, candle, canon, canticle, cap, cedar, celandine, cell, chalice, chest, cloister, cucumber, cypress, deacon, dirge, elephant, fever, fig, font, giant, ginger, history, idol, laurel, lentil, litany, lobster, lovage, marshmallow, martyr, master, mat, nocturn, noon, oyster, paper, periwinkle, place, plaster, pope, priest, prime, prophet, psalm, pumice, purple, radish, relic, rule, scorpion, scrofula, shrine, sock, synagogue, temple, tiger, title, tunic

The Effect of Norse

The second big linguistic invasion came as a result of the Viking raids on Britain, which began in AD 787 and continued at intervals for some 200 years. Regular settlement began in the mid-9th century, and within a few years the Danes controlled most of eastern England. They were prevented from further gains by their defeat in 878 at Ethandun (p. 26). By the Treaty of Wedmore (886) the Danes agreed to settle only in the north-east third of the country – east of a line running roughly from Chester to London – an area that was subject to Danish law, and which thus became known as the *Danelaw*. In 991, a further invasion brought a series of victories for the Danish army (including the Battle of Maldon, p. 12), and resulted in the English king, Æthelred, being forced into exile, and the Danes seizing the throne. England then stayed under Danish rule for 25 years.

The linguistic result of this prolonged period of contact was threefold. A large number of settlements with Danish names appeared in England. There was a marked increase in personal names of Scandinavian origin (p. 26). And many general words entered the language, nearly 1,000 eventually becoming part of Standard English. Only *c.* 150 of these words appear in Old English manuscripts, the earliest in the treaty between Alfred and Guthrum, and in the northern manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (D and E, p. 15). They include *landing*, *score*, *beck*, *fellow*, *take*, *husting*, and *steersman*, as well as many words which did not survive in later English (mostly terms to do with Danish law and culture, which died away after the Norman Conquest). The vast majority of loans do not begin to appear until the early 12th century (p. 48). These include many of our modern words which use [sk-] sounds (an Old Norse feature), such as *skirt*, *sky*, and *skin*, as well as most of the words listed below.

The closeness of the contact between the Anglo-Saxons and the Danish settlers is clearly shown by the extensive borrowings. Some of the commonest words in Modern English came into the language at that time, such as *both*, *same*, *get*, and *give*. Even the personal pronoun system was affected (p. 21), with *they*, *them*, and *their* replacing the earlier forms. And – the most remarkable invasion of all – Old Norse influenced the verb *to be*. The replacement of *sindon* (p. 21) by *are* is almost certainly the result of Scandinavian influence, as is the spread of the 3rd person singular -s ending in the present tense in other verbs (p. 44).



◀ A signpost in North Yorkshire acts as a Danish memorial.

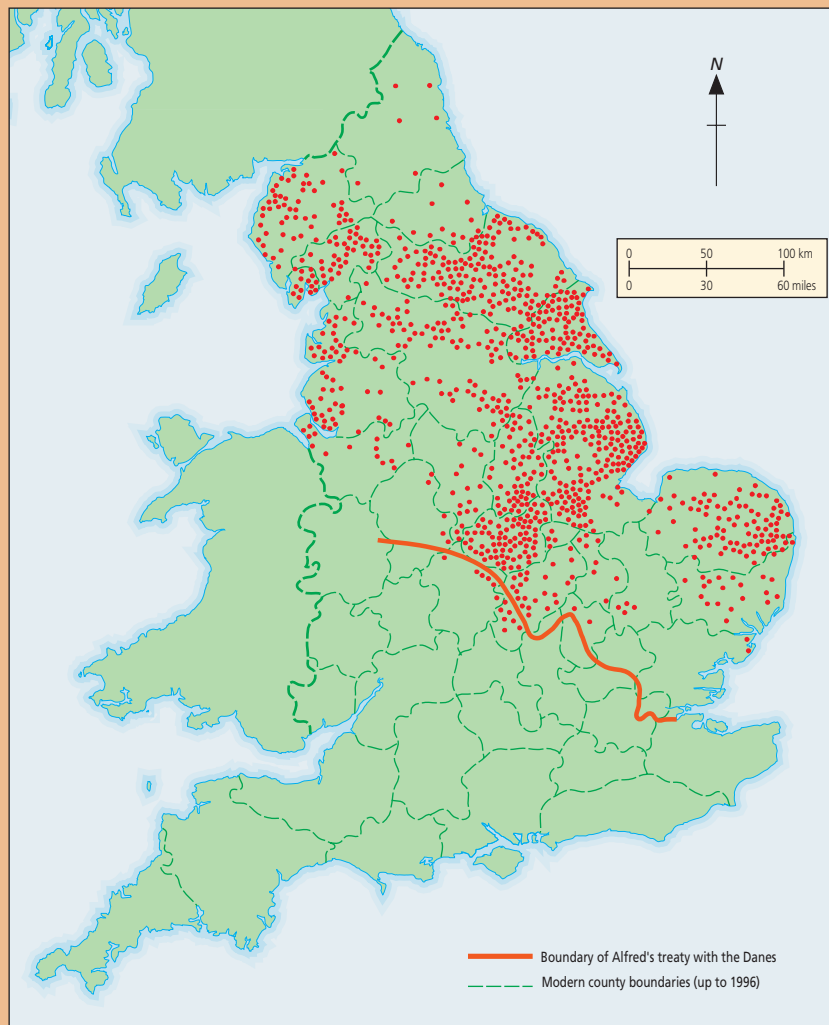
SCANDINAVIAN PLACE NAMES

Scandinavian parish names in England, related to the boundary line of the Danelaw.

There are over 1,500 such place names (p. 151) in England, especially in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. Over 600 end in -by, the Scandinavian word for 'farm' or 'town' – *Derby*, *Grimsby*, *Rugby*, *Naseby*, etc. Many of the remainder end in -thorp ('village'), as in *Althorp*, *Astonthorpe*, and *Linthorpe*; -thwaite

('clearing'), as in *Braithwaite*, *Appleshwaite*, and *Storthwaite*; and -toft ('homestead'), as in *Lowestoft*, *Eastoft*, and *Sandtoft*. The -by ending is almost entirely confined to the area of the Danelaw, supporting a theory of Scandinavian origin, despite the existence of the word *by* 'dwelling' in Old English.

(After P. H. Sawyer, 1962.)



AND A FEW MORE NORSE LOANS...

again, anger, awkward, bag, band, bank, birth, brink, bull, cake, call, clip, crawl, crook, die, dirt, dregs, egg, flat, fog, freckle, gap, gasp, get, guess, happy, husband, ill, keel, kid, knife, law, leg, loan, low, muggy, neck, odd, outlaw, race, raise, ransack, reindeer, rid, root, rugged, scant, scare, scowl, scrap, seat, seem, silver, sister, skill, skirt, sly, smile, snub, sprint, steak, take, thrift, Thursday, tight, trust, want, weak, window

THE OTHER WHITE HORSE

This figure was carved to commemorate the victory of King Alfred over the Danes at the Battle of Ethandun (878), modern Edington, Wiltshire. It was a decisive battle. As the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle puts it:

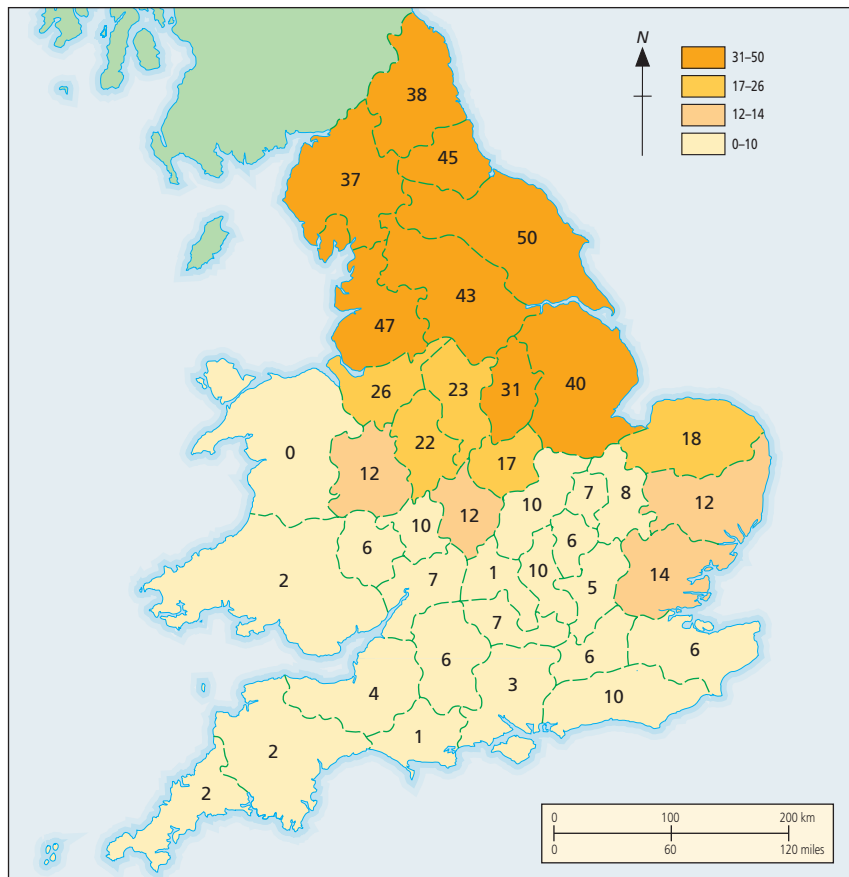
King Alfred ... went from these camps to Iley Oak, and one day later to Edington; and there he fought against the entire host, and put it to flight, and pursued it up to the fortification [probably Chippenham], and laid siege there for a fortnight; and then the host gave him preliminary hostages and solemn oaths that they would leave his kingdom, and promised him in addition that their king would receive baptism; and they fulfilled this promise...

The Edington horse (known locally as the Bratton or Westbury horse) may be less well known to modern tourists than its pre-historic counterpart at Uffington in Berkshire, but it is far more important to English history.



SCANDINAVIAN PERSONAL NAMES

The distribution of English family names (p. 159) ending in *-son*, such as *Davidson*, *Jackson*, and *Henderson*. The figures give the number of different surnames which are thought to have come from each county. The Scandinavian influence in the north and east is very clear, especially in Yorkshire and north Lincolnshire, where over 60 per cent of personal names in early Middle English records show Scandinavian influence.



SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST?

With two cultures in such close contact for so long, a large number of duplicate words must have arisen, both Old Norse (ON) and Old English (OE) providing ways of describing the same objects or situations. It is hardly ever possible in such cases to explain why one word proves to be fitter than another to survive. All we know is that there is evidence of three subsequent developments.

ON 1 OE 0

Sometimes the Scandinavian word was kept. This is what happened with *egg* vs *ey* (OE), *sister* vs *sweostor* (OE), *silver* vs *seolfor* (OE), and many more.

ON 0 OE 1

In other cases, the Old English word stayed, as in *path* vs *reike* (ON), *sorrow* vs *site* (ON), *swell* vs *bolnen* (ON), and also many more.

The linguistic situation must have been quite confusing at times, especially when people travelled about the country, and were uncertain about which form to use (as shown by William Caxton's famous story about the words for 'egg', p. 58).

ON 1 OE 1

In several cases, both words have been retained. For this to happen, of course, the two words would need to develop a useful difference in meaning. These cases include:

ON	OE
dike	ditch
hale	whole (p. 22)
raise	rise
scrub	shrub
ill	sick
skill	craft
skin	hide
skirt	shirt

In many cases, one form has become standard, and the other kept in a regional dialect:

garth	yard
kirk	church
laup	leap
nay	no
trigg	true

Vocabulary Then and Now

It should be plain from pp. 22–3 that there are many differences between the way vocabulary was used in Old English and the way it is used today. The Anglo-Saxons' preference for expressions which are synonymous, or nearly so, far exceeds that found in Modern English, as does their ingenuity in the use of compounds. The absence of a wide-ranging vocabulary of loan words also forced them to rely on a process of lexical construction using native elements, which produced much larger 'families' of morphologically related words than are typical of English now.

A great deal of the more sophisticated lexicon, we must also conclude, was consciously created, as can be seen from the many *loan translations* (or *calques*) which were introduced in the later period. Calques are lexical items which are translated part-by-part into another language. The process is unusual in Modern English – an example is *superman*, which is a translation of German *Übermensch*. In late Old English, by contrast, calques are very common, as can be seen from the following examples.

praepositio 'preposition' > *foresetnys*

coniunctio 'joining' > *geðeodnys*

episcopatus 'episcopate' > *biscopaphad*

significatio 'signification' > *getacnung*

unicornis 'unicorn' > *anhorn*

aspergere 'sprinkle' > *onstregdan*

inebriare 'make drunk' > *indrencan*

trinitas 'trinity' > *þriness*

contradictio 'contradiction' > *wiðcwedennis*

comparativus 'comparative' > *wiðmetendlic*

Ælfric is one who used them widely in his writing, especially when developing the terminology of his *Grammar* (p. 16).

Wiðmetennis

A final comparison. There are, it is thought, around 24,000 different lexical items (§8) in the Old English corpus. This lexicon, however, is fundamentally different from the one we find in Modern English. About 85 per cent of Old English words are no longer in use. Moreover, only 3 per cent of the words in Old English are loan words, compared with over 70 per cent today. Old English vocabulary was thus profoundly Germanic, in a way that is no longer the case. Nearly half of Modern English general vocabulary comes from Latin or French, as a result of the huge influx of words in the Middle English period (p. 46). And the readiness to absorb foreign elements has given the modern language a remarkable etymological variety which was totally lacking in Old English. It is this situation, indeed, which latter-day Anglo-Saxonist language reformers find intolerable (p. 125).

FRENCH BEFORE 1066

French vocabulary influenced Middle English so markedly after the Norman Conquest (p. 30) that it is easy to ignore the fact that French loan words can be found in Old English too. Indeed, it would be surprising if there had been no such influence, given the close contacts which had grown up in the 10th and 11th centuries. The monastic revival (p. 24), in particular, had started in France, and many English monks must have studied there.

Above all, there was close contact between the two cultures following the exile to Normandy of Edward the Confessor, the son of Æthelred II (the *unræd*, or 'ill-advised') and Emma, daughter of the Duke of Normandy. Edward lived there for 25 years, returning to England in 1041 with many French courtiers. When he succeeded to the throne, several of the French nobles were given high positions – a source of considerable grievance among their Anglo-Saxon counterparts.

Whatever the political consequences of these events, the linguistic consequences were a handful of French loan words, among them *capun* 'capon', *servian* 'serve', *bacun* 'bacon', *arblast* 'weapon', *prison* 'prison', *castel* 'castle', and *cancelere* 'chancellor'. Some words gave rise to related forms, notably *prud* 'proud', whose derivatives included *prutness* 'pride' and *oferprut* 'haughty' (compare earlier *ofermod*, p. 22).

Old Saxon

One other language provided a small number of loan words – that spoken by the Saxons who had remained on the continent of Europe. It is known that copies of Old Saxon texts were being made in southern England during the 10th century. A personage known as John the Old Saxon helped Alfred in his educational reforms. There also exists a passage translated in the 9th century from Old Saxon and embedded

within the Old English poem *Genesis* (and known as *Genesis B*). In it we find such forms as *hearra* 'lord', *sima* 'chain', *landscipe* 'region', *heodæg* 'today', and a few others, all of which are thought to be Old Saxon. These words had no real effect on later English, but they do illustrate the readiness of the Anglo-Saxons to take lexical material from all available sources – a feature which has characterized the language ever since.



THE LORD'S PRAYER

The predominantly Germanic character of Old English vocabulary is well illustrated by the standard version of the 'Our Father'. (Long vowels are shown, as an aid to pronunciation: see p. 18.)

Fæder ūre,
þū þe eart on heofonum,
sī þīn nama gehālgod.
Tō becume þīn rīce.
Gewurpe ðīn willa on eorðan swā swā on heofonum.
Ūrne gedæghwāmlican hlāf syle ūs tō dæg.
And forgyf ūs ūre gyltas, swā swā wē forgyfað
ūrum gyltendum. And ne gelæd þū ūs on costnunge,
ac ālȳs ūs of yfele. Amen

[Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom
come. Thy will be done, on earth as it
is in heaven. Give us this day our
daily bread. And forgive us our
trespasses, as we forgive those who
trespass against us. And lead us not
into temptation, but deliver us from
evil. Amen.]

OLD ENGLISH DIALECTS

The Old English texts which have survived come from several parts of the country, and from the way they are written they provide evidence of dialects. As there was no standardized system of spelling (p. 16), scribes tended to spell words as they sounded; but because everyone used the same Latin-based alphabetic system, there was an underlying consistency, and it is possible to use the spellings to work out dialect differences. For example, in the south-east, the word for ‘evil’ was written *efel*, whereas in other places it was *yfel*, suggesting that the former vowel was unrounded and more open (p. 250). Hundreds of such spelling differences exist.

Most of the Old English corpus is written in the West Saxon dialect (see map), reflecting the political and cultural importance of this area in the 10th century. Dialects from other areas are very sparsely represented, with only about a dozen texts of any substance – inscriptions, charters, glosses, and verse fragments – spread over a 300-year period. Nonetheless, Old English scholars have found a few diagnostic features which enable us to identify dialect areas.

The Historical Setting

The major areas are traditionally thought to relate to the settlements of the invading tribes, with their different linguistic backgrounds; but what happened in the 300 years after the invasions is obscure. There is evidence of at least 12 kingdoms in England by the year 600. Seven are traditionally called the *Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy* (Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Kent, Essex, Sussex, Wessex), but it is difficult to know what realities underlie such a grouping. From a linguistic point of view, only three kingdoms emerged with enough power for there to be clear dialectal consequences: Northumbria, in the 7th century, then Mercia, and by the 9th century Wessex, the latter emerging under King Egbert (ruled 802–39). These three areas, along with Kent (whose early importance is suggested by the Augustine story, p. 10) have led to the recognition of four major dialects in Old English.

To talk about regional dialects at all is somewhat daring, given that the areas are so approximate, and the texts are so few. Indeed, regional definition may not be the best approach, given the political and religious situation of the time. Social and literary factors may have been paramount. Because the writing of manuscripts was in the hands of monastic copyists, and copies (as well as the copyists) travelled between centres, dialect features would appear outside a particular geographical region. The use of a ‘koiné’ of poetic conventions may have been widespread. Manuscripts with ‘mixed’ dialect features are thus common.



DIALECT SIGNPOSTS

Old English dialectology is a complex subject, full of meticulous description, cautious generalization, tabulated exception, and (given the limited evidence) controlled frustration. There are no single indicators which will definitively locate a text. Rather, dialect work involves comparing a large number of possible diagnostic signposts, and drawing a conclusion on the basis of the direction to which most of them seem to be pointing. Given the realities of scribal error and dialect

mixture, it is not uncommon to find a text pointing in several directions at once.

Some examples of signposts:

- If you see a manuscript form with the spelling *ie*, this is likely to be a West Saxon text, with the symbol representing a diphthong. In other dialects there would be a pure vowel. Example: ‘yet’ would be *giet* in West Saxon, but *get* elsewhere.
- If you see an *o* before a nasal consonant (*m*, *n*, *ng*), it

is probably a Northumbrian or Mercian text. (Compare the Scots pronunciation of *mon* for *man* today.)

Example: ‘land’ would be *land* in West Saxon and Kentish, but *lond* further north.

- If you see the personal pronouns *mec*, *usic*, *þec*, and *eowic* instead of *me*, *us*, *þe*, and *eow* (p. 20), the text is likely to be Northumbrian or Mercian. Example: see the *Lord’s Prayer* on p. 27.

The Chief Dialect Divisions

The area originally occupied by the Angles gave rise to two main dialects:

- *Northumbrian* was spoken north of a line running approximately between the Humber and Mersey rivers. It extended into the eastern lowlands of present-day Scotland, where it confronted the Celtic language of the Strathclyde Britons. A period of Northumbrian political power in the late 7th century made the north a cultural centre, with several monasteries (notably, Wearmouth and Jarrow) and the work of Bede pre-eminent. Most of the earliest Old English texts (7th–8th century) are Northumbrian, as a result. They include Cædmon's Hymn (see opposite), Bede's Death Song, the Ruthwell Cross and the Franks Casket inscriptions (p. 9), a short poem known as the *Leiden Riddle*, a few glosses, and the 6,000 or so names of people and places in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (p. 7).
- *Mercian* was spoken in the Midlands, roughly between the River Thames and the River Humber, and as far west as the boundary with present-day Wales. Very few linguistic remains exist, presumably because of the destructive influence of the Vikings. The chief texts are various charters, a famous gloss to the Vespasian Psalter, and a few other Latin glossaries. The chief period of Mercian power was the early 8th century, but many later West Saxon texts show the influence of Mercian, partly because several scholars from this area (e.g. Werferth) were enlisted by King Alfred to help the literary renaissance he inspired.
- *Kentish*, spoken in the area of Jutish settlement, was used mainly in present-day Kent and the Isle of Wight. There is very little extant material – a few charters of the 8th–9th centuries, a psalm, a hymn, and sporadic glosses. Scholars have also made some further deductions about this dialect from the way it developed in Middle English (p. 50), where there is more material.
- The rest of England, south of the Thames and west as far as Cornwall (where Celtic was also spoken) was settled by (West) Saxons, and became known as Wessex. Most of the Old English corpus is written in the Wessex dialect, *West Saxon*, because it was this kingdom, under King Alfred, which became the leading political and cultural force at the end of the 9th century. However, it is one of the ironies of English linguistic history that modern Standard English is descended not from West Saxon, but from Mercian, which was the dialect spoken in the area around London when that city became powerful in the Middle Ages (pp. 41, 50).

CÆDMON'S HYMN

The version of Cædmon's hymn (p. 20) usually printed is in literary late West Saxon, and the text here is from an 11th-century manuscript. However, a Northumbrian version has also survived in an 8th-century manuscript, which is thus very close to the language Bede himself must have used. The differences are very evident, though in only one case (l. 3) does an important variant reading occur.

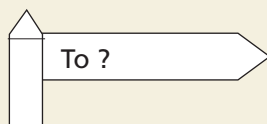
West Saxon

Nu we sceolan herigean heofonrices weard,
metodes mihte 7 his modgeþanc,
werc wuldorfæder, swa he wuldres gehwæs,
ece drihten, ord onstealde.
He æres[t] gescop eorðan bearnum,
heofon to rofe, halig scyppend;
þa middangeard moncynnes weard,
ece drihten, æfter teode,
firum foldan, frea ælmihtig.

Northumbrian

Nu scylun hergan hefaenricaes uard,
metudæs maecti end his modgidanc,
uerc uuldurfadur, sue he uundra gihuaes,
eci dryctin, or astelidæ.
He aerist scop aelda barnum
heben til hrofe, haleg scepen;
tha middungeard moncynnes uard,
eci dryctin, æfter tiadæ,
firum foldu, frea allmectig.

*Now we shall praise the keeper of the heavenly kingdom,
the power of the lord of destiny and his imagination,
the glorious father of men, } when of every glorious thing
the deeds of the glorious father,
he, the eternal lord, ordained the beginning.
He first shaped for the children of earth
the heaven as a roof, the holy creator;
then the guardian of mankind, the eternal lord,
afterwards made middle-earth;
the almighty lord (made) land for living beings.*



WS fæder ure þu þe eart on heofonum
No. fader urer ðu art in heofnu(m)
Me. feder ure þu eart in heofenum
'father our thou (which) art in heaven'

The opening line from a West Saxon (WS, late 11th century), Northumbrian (No., late 10th century), and Mercian (Me., early 10th century) version of the Lord's Prayer illustrates two of the important dialect features of Old English. (After T. E. Toon, 1992.)

- 'father' The original Germanic vowel has come forward in WS, and even further forward in Me., but has stayed back in No.
- 'art' WS and Me. have developed a diphthong before [r] and a following consonant. This has not happened in No., where the vowel has stayed low, and also moved further back.

This extract also shows how not all the variations found in a comparison of manuscripts should be interpreted as dialectal.

- The use of letter 'eth' rather than 'thorn' in the words for 'thou' is not a dialect matter, as these symbols were often interchangeable (p. 16).
- It is not possible to read much into the different spellings of the unstressed syllable of 'heaven', as the sound quality would have been indeterminate (just as it is in Modern English) and the spelling unsystematic.
- There is insufficient dialect evidence in the Old English corpus to draw any firm conclusions from the grammatical variations.

Of course, when we first examine a manuscript, we have to work such things out for ourselves. We are not given the information in advance. Every variant form is a possible signpost. Finding out which lead somewhere and which do not is what makes Old English dialectology so engrossing. And the story is by no means over, for there are many dialect questions which remain to be answered.

The year 1066 marks the beginning of a new social and linguistic era in Britain, but it does not actually identify the boundary between Old and Middle English. It was a long time before the effects of the Norman invasion worked their way into the language, and Old English continued to be used meanwhile. Even a century later, texts were still being composed in the West Saxon variety that had developed in the years following the reign of King Alfred (p. 29).

The period we call Middle English runs from the beginning of the 12th century until the middle of the 15th. It is a difficult period to define and discuss, largely because of the changes taking place between the much more distinctive and identifiable worlds of Old English (§3) and Modern English (§§5–6). The manuscripts give an impression of considerable linguistic variety and rapid transition. Also, the gradual decay of Anglo-Saxon traditions and literary practices, overlapping with the sudden emergence of French and Latin literacy, gives much of this period an elusive and unfocused character. It is not until 1400 that a clear focus emerges, in the work of Chaucer, but by then the period is almost over. Chaucer himself, indeed, is more often seen as a forerunner of Modern English poetry than as a climax to Middle English.

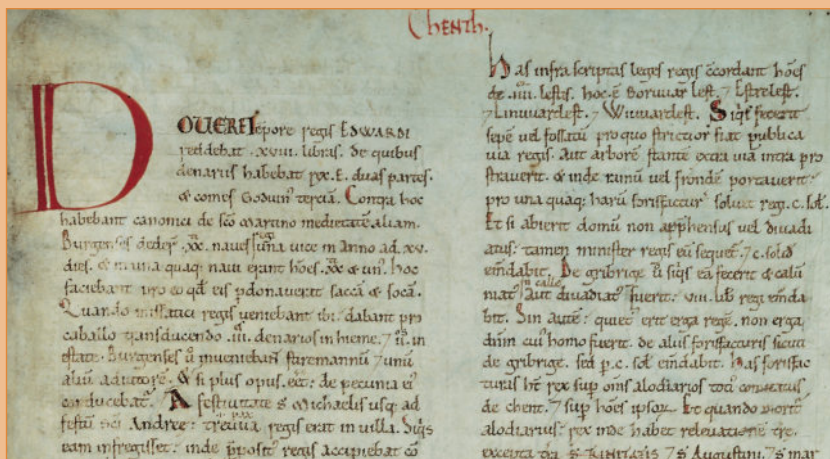
The Rise of French

The main influence on English was, of course, French – strictly, Norman French, the language introduced to Britain by the invader. Following William of Normandy's accession, French was rapidly established in the corridors of power. French-speaking barons were appointed, who brought over their own retinues. Soon after, French-speaking abbots and bishops were in place. Lanfranc, Abbot of St Stephen's at Caen, was made Archbishop of Canterbury as early as 1070. Within 20 years of the invasion, almost all the religious houses were under French-speaking superiors, and several new foundations were solely French. Large numbers of French merchants and craftsmen crossed the Channel to take advantage of the commercial opportunities provided by the new regime. And aristocratic links remained strong with Normandy, where the nobles kept their estates.

Doubtless bilingualism quickly flourished among those who crossed the social divide – English people learning French in order to gain advantages from the aristocracy, and baronial staff learning English as part of the daily contact with local communities. But there is hardly any sign of English being used among the new hierarchy – a situation which was to continue for over a century.

DOMESDAY

A detail from the opening folio of Great Domesday, the larger of the two volumes which make up the Domesday Book, the survey of English land compiled by William I in 1086. It is written in Latin, but it is of value to the English language historian for the information it provides about English personal names and (to a lesser extent) place names. The spelling, however, is troublesome, for the scribes used Latin conventions which were an inadequate means of representing English sounds.



OUI, THREE KINGS

Most of the Anglo-Norman kings were unable to communicate at all in English – though it is said some used it for swearing. However, by the end of the 14th century, the situation had changed. Richard II addressed the people in English during the Peasants' Revolt (1381). Henry IV's speeches at Richard's deposition were made in English. And Henry's will was written in English (1413) – the first royal will to be so.

William I (1066–87) spent about half his reign in France, in

at least five of those years not visiting England at all; according to the chronicler Ordericus Vitalis, he tried to learn English at the age of 43, but gave up.

William II (1087–1100) spent about half his reign in France; his knowledge of English is not known.

Henry I (1100–35) spent nearly half his reign in France, often several years at a time; the only king to have an English wife until Edward IV (1461–83), he may have known some English.

And later?

Stephen (1135–54) was kept in England through civil strife (p. 33); his knowledge of English is not known.

Henry II (1154–89) spent a total of 20 years in France; he understood English, but did not speak it.

Richard I (1189–99) spent only a few months in England; he probably spoke no English.

John (1199–1216) lived mainly in England after 1204; the extent of his English is not known.



William I



William II



Henry I

The Rise of English

During the 12th century, English became more widely used among the upper classes, and there was an enormous amount of intermarriage with English people. The largely monolingual French-speaking court was not typical of the rest of the country. Richard Fitz Neal's *Dialogus de Scaccario* ('A Dialogue on the Exchequer'), written in 1177, reports:

Now that the English and Normans have been dwelling together, marrying and giving in marriage, the two nations have become so mixed that it is scarcely possible today, speaking of free men, to tell who is English, who of Norman race.

By the end of the 12th century, contemporary accounts suggest that some children of the nobility spoke English as a mother tongue, and had to be taught French in school. French continued to be used in Parliament, the courts, and in public proceedings, but we know that translations into English increased in frequency throughout the period, as did the number of handbooks written for the teaching of French.

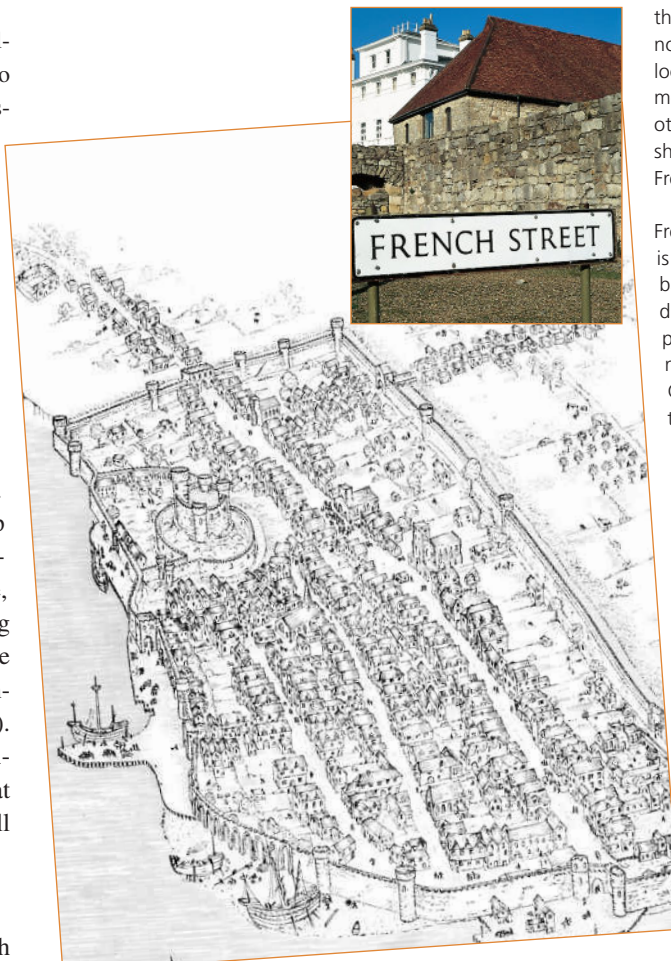
From 1204, a different political climate emerged. King John of England came into conflict with King Philip of France, and was obliged to give up control of Normandy. The English nobility lost their estates in France, and antagonism grew between the two countries, leading ultimately to the Hundred Years War (1337–1453). The status of French diminished as a spirit of English nationalism grew, culminating in the Barons' War (1264–5). In 1362, English was used for the first time at the opening of Parliament (p. 505). By about 1425 it appears that English was widely used in England, in writing as well as in speech.

Reasons for Survival

How had the language managed to survive the French invasion? After all, Celtic had not survived the Anglo-Saxon invasions 500 years before (p. 8). Evidently the English language in the 11th century was too well established for it to be supplanted by another language. Unlike Celtic, it had a considerable written literature and a strong oral tradition. It would have taken several hundred years of French immigration, and large numbers of immigrants, to have changed things – but the good relations between England and France lasted for only 150 years, and the number of Normans in the country may have been as low as 2 per cent of the population.

This 150 years, nonetheless, is something of a 'dark age' in the history of the language. There is very little written evidence of English, and we can thus only speculate about what was happening to the language, though our understanding of the period is growing (M. Swan & E. M. Treharne, 2000). Judging by the documents which have survived, it seems that French was the language of government, law, administration, literature, and the

Church, with Latin also used in administration, education, and worship. The position of English becomes clearer in the 13th century, when we find an increasing number of sermons, prayers, romances, songs, and other documents. Finally, in the 14th century, we have the major achievements of Middle English literature, culminating in the writing of Geoffrey Chaucer (p. 38).



THE ONOMASTIC CONQUEST

A modern drawing of Southampton, Hampshire, c. 1500. At that time, one of the two most important streets of the town was called French Street (it is the middle of the three thoroughfares running north–south), evidently a location for many French merchants and settlers. Several other towns in the south showed early influence of French settlement.

One way of trying to plot French influence in the period is through the analysis of baptismal names (see the discussion of onomastics, p. 150). Native pre-Conquest names were chiefly West Germanic (p. 6), but showed the influence of Scandinavian in the Danelaw, and also of Celtic in the border areas – *Godwine, Egbert, Alfred, Wulfic, Haraldr, Eadric*, and the like. Within a century of the Conquest, most of these had been replaced by such names as *John, Peter, Simon*, and *Stephen*. A Canterbury survey made in the 1160s shows that 75 per cent of the men had Continental names. And the history of English naming has reflected this influence ever since.

ALL UNDERSTAND THE ENGLISH TONGUE

Contemporary writers sometimes provide insights into the linguistic state of the nation. A much-quoted example is from William of Nassyngton's *Speculum Vitae* or *Mirror of Life* (c.1325). Although some who have lived at court do know French, he says, nobody now knows only French. Everyone, whatever their learning, knows English. (For grammatical endings, see p. 44; spelling conventions, see p. 40. The extract uses two earlier English symbols (p. 14): thorn, þ, later replaced by *th*, and yogh, ȝ, later replaced by *y*. Modern *u* is written *v*, and vice versa.)

In English tonge I schal ȝow telle,
ȝif ȝe wyth me so longe wil dwelle.
No Latyn wil I speke no [nor] waste,
But English, þat men vse mast [most],
Þat can eche [each] man vnderstande,
Þat is born in Ingelande;
For þat langage is most chewyd [shown]
Os [as] wel among lered [learned] os lewyd [unlearned].
Latyn, as I trowe [believe] can nane [know none]
But þo [except those] þat haueth it in scole tane [school taken],
And somme can [some know] Frensche and no Latyn,
Þat vsed han [have] cowrt [court] and dwellen þerein,
And somme can of Latyn a party [part]
Þat can of Frensche but febly [feebly];
And somme vnderstonde wel Englysch,
Þat can noþer [neither] Latyn nor Frankys [Frankish, i.e. French].
Boþe lered and lewed, olde and ȝonge,
Alle vnderstonden english tonge.

THE TRANSITION FROM OLD ENGLISH

A fundamental change in the structure of English took place during the 11th and 12th centuries – one without precedent in the history of the language, and without parallel thereafter. Grammatical relationships in Old English had been expressed chiefly by the use of inflectional endings (p. 20). In Middle English, they came to be expressed (as they are today) chiefly by word order. Why did this change take place? Few subjects in the history of English have attracted so much speculation.

The Decay of Inflections

About one fact there is no doubt. There are clear signs during the Old English period of the decay of the inflectional system. The surviving texts suggest that the change started in the north of the country, and slowly spread south. Several of the old endings are still present in the 12th-century text of the *Peterborough Chronicle* opposite, but they are not used with much consistency, and they no longer seem to play an important role in conveying meaning.

But why did the Old English inflectional endings decay? The most obvious explanation is that it became increasingly difficult to hear them, because of the way words had come to be stressed during the evolution of the Germanic languages (p. 6). The ancestor language of Germanic, Indo-European, had a ‘free’ system of accentuation, in which the stress within a word moved according to intricate rules (p. 260). In Germanic, this system changed, and most words came to carry the main stress on their first syllable. This is the system found throughout Old English. As always, there were exceptions – the *ge-* prefix, for example (p. 21), is never stressed.

Having the main stress at the beginning of a word can readily give rise to an auditory problem at the end. This is especially so when there are several endings which are phonetically very similar, such as *-en*, *-on*, and *-an*. In rapid conversational speech it would have been difficult to distinguish them. The situation is not too far removed from that which still obtains in Modern English, where people often make such forms as *-ible* and *-able* (*visible*, *washable*) or *Belgian* and *Belgium* sound the same. This ‘neutralization’ of vowel qualities undoubtedly affected the Old English system.

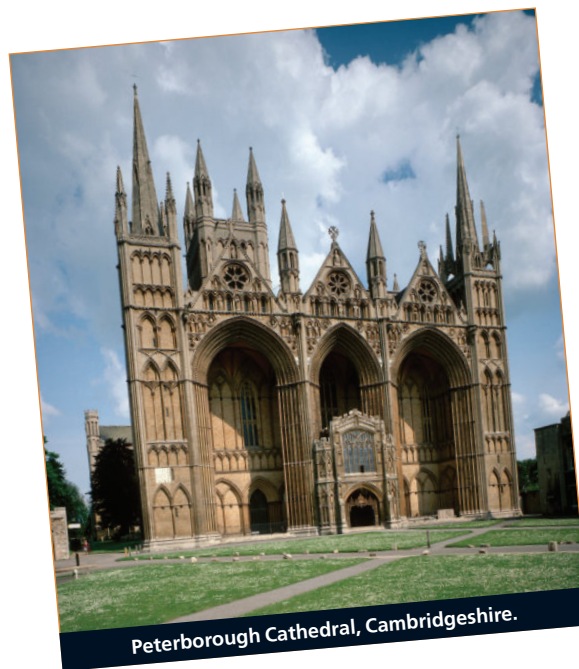
The Contact Situation

However, auditory confusion cannot be the sole reason. Other Germanic languages had a strong initial stress, too, yet they retained their inflectional system (as is still seen in modern German). Why was the change so much greater in English? Some scholars cite the Viking settlement as the decisive factor (p. 25). During the period of the Danelaw, they argue, the contact between English and Scandinavian would have led to the emergence of a pidgin-like variety of speech between the two cultures, and perhaps even eventually to a kind of creole which

was used as a lingua franca (p. 344). As with pidgins everywhere, there would have been a loss of word endings, and greater reliance on word order. Gradually, this pattern would have spread until it affected the whole of the East Midlands area – from which Standard English was eventually to emerge (p. 50). At the very least, they conclude, this situation would have accelerated the process of inflectional decay – and may even have started it.

Whether such arguments are valid depends on how far we believe that the speakers of Old English and Old Norse were unable to understand each other at the time, and this is largely a matter of speculation. Perhaps there existed a considerable degree of mutual intelligibility, given that the two languages had diverged only a few hundred years before. The roots of many words were the same, and in the Icelandic sagas it is said that the Vikings and the English could understand each other. Whatever the case, we can tell from the surviving Middle English texts that the Danelaw was a much more progressive area, linguistically speaking, than the rest of the country. Change which began here affected southern areas later. Some form of Viking influence cannot easily be dismissed.

As inflections decayed, so the reliance on word order became critical, resulting in a grammatical system which is very similar to that found today. There is no sign in the *Peterborough Chronicle* extract of the Old English tendency to put the object before the verb, for example (p. 44). The Subject–Verb–Object order, already a noticeable feature of Old English, has become firmly established by the beginning of the Middle English period.



Peterborough Cathedral, Cambridgeshire.

INFLECTIONAL CARRYING POWER

This is a list of the most important endings in Old English regular nouns and verbs (p. 20), along with one lexical example of each. All endings which consisted of just a vowel, or a vowel plus nasal, disappeared from the language during the Middle English period. The only endings to survive were the ones with greater carrying power – the high-pitched *-s* forms (*kings*, *king's*, *lovest*), the *-th* forms (*loveth*, later replaced by *-s*, p. 44), and the distinctive *-ende* of the participle (later replaced by *-ing*, p. 45) and past tense.

Nouns

(*cyning* ‘king’, *scip* ‘ship’, *glof* ‘glove’, *guma* ‘man’)
-e, *-n* (acc. sg.) *glofe*, *guman*
-es, *-e*, *-n* (gen. sg.) *cyninges*, *glofe*, *guman*
-e, *-n* (dat. sg.) *cyninge*, *guman*
-as, *-u*, *-a* (nom. pl.) *cyningas*, *scipu*, *glofa*
-n, *-as*, *-u*, *-a* (acc. pl.) *guman*, *cyningas*, *scipu*, *glofa*
-a, *-ena*, (gen. pl.) *cyninga*, *glofa*, *gumena*
-um (dat. pl.) *cyningum*, *glofum*, *gumum*

Verbs

(*fremman* ‘perform’, *lufian* ‘love’, *deman* ‘judge’)
-e (1 sg. pres. ind.)
fremme, *lufie*, *deme*
-est, *-ast*, *-st* (2 sg. pres. ind.)
fremest, *lufast*, *demst*
-eð, *-að*, *-ð* (3 sg. pres. ind.)
fremeð, *lufað*, *demð*
-að (1–3 pl. pres. ind.)
fremmað, *lufiað*, *demað*
-e (1–3 sg. pres. subj.)
fremme, *lufie*, *deme*
-en (1–3 pl. pres. subj.)
fremmen, *lufien*, *demen*
-de (1 & 3 sg. past ind.)
fremede, *lufode*, *demde*
-dest (2 sg. past ind.)
fremedest, *lufodest*, *demdest*
-don (1–3 pl. past ind.)
fremedon, *lufodon*, *demdon*
-de (1–3 sg. past subj.)
fremede, *lufode*, *demde*
-den (1–3 pl. past subj.)
fremeden, *lufoden*, *demden*
-ende (pres. part.)
fremmende, *lufiende*, *demende*

Abbreviations (see Part III)

acc. accusative; *dat.* dative; *gen.* genitive; *ind.* indicative; *nom.* nominative; *part.* participle; *pl.* plural; *pres.* present tense; *sg.* singular; *subj.* subjunctive; 1, 2, 3 1st, 2nd, 3rd person.

THE PETERBOROUGH CHRONICLE

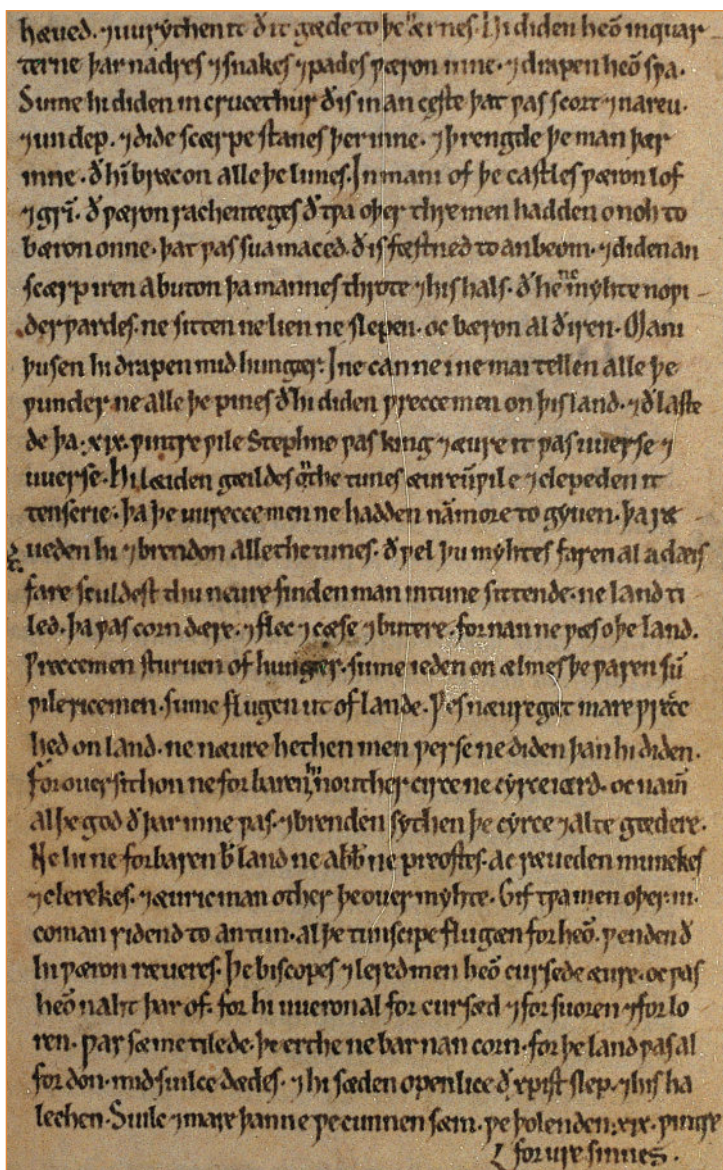
We are fortunate to have the later years of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (p. 14), which continues to the middle of the 12th century, to illustrate this period of change. In 1116, most of the monastery at Peterborough was destroyed by fire, along with many manuscripts. The monks immediately began to replace the writings which had been lost. They borrowed the text of the Chronicle from another monastery, copied it out, and then carried on writing the history themselves. They continued until 1131, but then the writing stopped – doubtless because of the chaotic conditions of civil war which existed in the reign of King Stephen, some of which are described in the extract below.

This extract is from the Chronicle when it begins again in 1154, after the death of Stephen, adding

several events from the intervening years. The language is now quite different. Despite points of similarity with the previous work, the overall impression is that the writer is starting again, using vocabulary and grammatical patterns which reflect the language of his time and locality, and inventing fresh spelling conventions to cope with new sounds. The extract has been set out in a word-for-word translation, but (unlike the Old English extract about Cædmon on p. 20), it is no longer necessary to add a free translation as well. Apart from a few phrases, the language now seems much closer to Modern English.

The later material from the *Peterborough Chronicle* looks back towards Old English and ahead towards Middle English. Scholars have indeed argued at length

about whether it is best to call it 'late Old English' or 'early Middle English'. Some stress the archaic features of the text, pointing to similarities with the West Saxon dialect of Old English (p. 29); others stress the differences, and consider it to be the earliest surviving Middle English text. The Chronicle illustrates very clearly the difficulty of drawing a sharp boundary between different stages in the development of a language. But it does not take much longer before the uncertainty is resolved. Other texts from the 12th century confirm the new direction in which the language was moving; and within a century of the close of the Chronicle, there is no doubt that a major change has taken place in the structure of English. (The first twelve lines of the illustration are transcribed and translated below.)



[Me dide cnotted strenges abuton here] hæued and
[One placed knotted cords about their] head and
uurythen it ðat it gæde to þe hæernes. Hi diden
twisted it that it entered to the brains. They put
heom in quarterne þar nadres and snakes and pades
them in cell where adders and snakes and toads
wæron inne, and drapen heom swa. Sume hi diden in
were in, and killed them so. Some they put in

- 5 crucethur[s], ðat is in an ceste þat was scort, and nareu,
torture-box, that is in a chest that was short, and narrow,
and undep, and dide scærpe stanes þerinne, and
and shallow, and put sharp stones therein, and
þrengde þe man þær-inne, ðat him bræcon alle þe limes.
pressed the man therein, that they broke all the limbs.
In mani of þe castles wæron lof and grin, ðat
In many of the castles were headband and halter, that
wæron rachenteges ðat twa oþer thre men hadden onoh
were fetters that two or three men had enough
- 10 to bæron onne; þat was sua maced, ðat is fæstned to an
to bear one; that was so made, that is fastened to a
beom, and diden an scærp iren abuton þa mannes throthe
beam, and put a sharp iron about the man's throat
and his hals, ðat he ne myhte nowiderwardes, ne sitten
and his neck, that he not might in no direction, neither sit
ne lien ne slepen, oc bæron al ðat iren. Mani
nor lie nor sleep, but bear all that iron. Many
þusen hi drapen mid hungær.
thousand they killed by means of hunger.

- 15 I ne can ne I ne mai tellen alle þe wunder ne alle þe
I not know nor I not can tell all the atrocities nor all the
pines ðat hi diden wreccemen on þis land, and ðat
cruelties that they did to wretched people in this land, and that
lastede þa xix wintre wile Stephne was king, and æure it was
lasted the 19 winters while Stephen was king, and always it was
uuerse and uuerse.
worse and worse.

THE MIDDLE ENGLISH CORPUS

The Middle English period has a much richer documentation than is found in Old English (p. 10). This is partly the result of the post-Conquest political situation. The newly centralized monarchy commissioned national and local surveys, beginning with the Domesday Book (p. 30), and there is a marked increase in the number of public and private documents – mandates, charters, contracts, tax-rolls, and other administrative or judicial papers. However, the early material is of limited value to those interested in the linguistic history of English because it is largely written in Latin or French, and the only relevant data which can be extracted relate to English place and personal names (§10). Most religious publication falls into the same category, with Latin maintaining its presence throughout the period as the official language of the Church. A major difference from Old English is the absence of a continuing tradition of historical writing in the native language, as in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle – a function which Latin supplanted, and which was not revived until the 15th century.

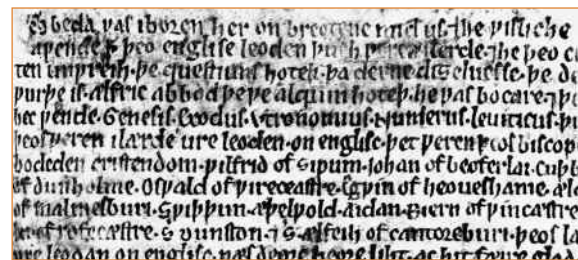
Material in English appears as a trickle in the 13th century, but within 150 years it has become a flood. In the early period, we see a great deal of religious prose writing, in the form of homilies, tracts, lives of the saints, and other aids to devotion and meditation. Sometimes a text was written with a specific readership in mind; the *Ancrene Riwe* ('Anchorites' Guide'), for example, was compiled by a spiritual director for three noblewomen who had abandoned the world to live as anchoresses. During the 14th century, there is a marked increase in the number of translated writings from French and Latin, and of texts for teaching these languages (p. 31). Guild records, proclamations, proverbs, dialogues, allegories, and letters illustrate the diverse range of new styles and genres. Towards the end of the century, the translations of the Bible inspired by John Wycliff appear amid considerable controversy, and the associated movement produces many manuscripts (p. 54). Finally, in the 1430s, there is a vast output in English from the office of the London Chancery scribes, which strongly influenced the development of a standard written language (p. 41).

The Poetic Puzzle

Poetry presents a puzzle. The Anglo-Saxon poetic tradition apparently dies out in the 11th century, to reappear patchily in the 13th. A lengthy poetic history of Britain known as *Lazamon's Brut* (p. 36) is one of the earliest works to survive from Middle English, and in the 14th century come the important texts of *Piers Plowman* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (p. 37). What is surprising is that the alliterative Old English style (p. 23) is still present in all these works, despite an apparent

break in poetic continuity of at least a hundred years. The conundrum has generated much discussion. Perhaps the alliterative technique was retained through prose: several Middle English prose texts are strongly alliterative, and it is sometimes difficult to tell from a manuscript which genre (poetry or prose) a piece belongs to, because the line divisions are not shown. Perhaps the Old English style survived through the medium of oral transmission. Or perhaps it is simply that most poetic manuscripts have been lost.

Middle English poetry was inevitably much influenced by French literary traditions, both in content and style. One of the earliest examples is the 13th-century verse-contest known as *The Owl and the Nightingale* (p. 36). Later works include romances in the French style, secular lyrics, bestiaries, ballads, biblical poetry, Christian legends, hymns, prayers, and elegies. The mystical dream-vision, popular in Europe, especially in Italy and



Ælfric abbot, þe we Alquin hoteþ, he was bocare, and þe fif bec wende, Genesis, Exodus, Vtronomius, Numerus, Leuiticus. þurh þeos weren ilærde ure leoden on Englisc. þet weren þeos biscopes þe bodeden Cristendom: Wilfrid of Ripum, Iohan of Beoferlai, Cuthbert of Dunholme, Oswald of Wireceastre, Egwin of Heoueshame, Ældelm of Malmesburi, Swithun, Æpelwold, Aidan, Biern of Wincæstre, Paulin of Rofecæstre, S. Dunston, and S. Ælfeih of Cantoreburi. þeos lærden ure leodan on Englisc. Næs deorc heore liht, ac hit fære glod. Nu is þeo leore forleten, and þet folc is forloren.

France, is well illustrated by the poem modern editors have called *Pearl*, in which the writer recalls the death of his two-year-old daughter, who then acts as his spiritual comforter. Drama also begins to make its presence felt, in the form of dialogues, pageants, and the famous cycles of mystery plays (p. 58).

Much of Middle English literature is of unknown authorship, but by the end of the period this situation has changed. Among the prominent names which emerge in the latter part of the 14th century are John Gower, William Langland, John Wycliff, and Geoffrey Chaucer, and some time later John Lydgate, Thomas Malory, William Caxton, and the poets who are collectively known as the Scottish Chaucerians (p. 53). Rather than a somewhat random collection of interesting texts, there is now a major body of 'literature', in the modern sense. It is this which provides the final part of the bridge between Middle and Early Modern English (§5).

POETRY OR PROSE?

The Worcester Fragments are the remains of a manuscript which was used to make the cover of a book in the Chapter Library at Worcester. The result of piecing together the fragments was a piece of continuous text, probably copied c. 1200 from a much earlier text. The manuscript contains Ælfric's *Grammar* (p. 16), a passage on the *Debate of the Soul and the Body*, and an item on the disuse of English.

Part of this last item is given here. Modern editions usually print the text in lines, as if it were a poem, but the rhythm and alliteration are extremely free and unpredictable, and it is difficult to identify lines of a conventional kind. In other words, it would be just as plausible to print the material as prose. The editor has filled out the text in a few places where there were holes in the manuscript. An interesting linguistic feature is the preservation of the irregular form of the noun for 'books', bec. (After B. Dickinson & R.M. Wilson, 1951.)

Abbot Ælfric, whom we call Alquin, he was a writer, and translated five books, Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Numbers, Leviticus. Through these our people were taught in English. These were the bishops who preached Christianity: Wilfrid of Ripum, Iohan of Beoferlai, Cuthbert of Dunholme, Oswald of Wireceastre, Egwin of Heoueshame, Ældelm of Malmesburi, Swithun, Æthelwold, Aidan, Biern of Wincæstre, Paulin of Rofecæstre, S. Dunston, and S. Ælfeih of Cantoreburi. These taught our people in English. Their light was not dark, and it shone brightly. Now is this knowledge abandoned, and the people damned...

JOHN OF TREVISA

The Cornishman John of Trevisa (d. 1402), who became an Oxford scholar and clergyman, made in 1387 a translation of Ranulf Higden's Latin *Polychronicon* – so called because it was the chronicle of many ages, from the Creation to 1352. At one point, Higden reviews the language teaching situation in England, and gives two reasons for the decline of the mother tongue.

On ys for chyldern in scole,
aȝenes þe vsage and manere of
al oþer nacions, buþ compelled
for to leue here oune longage,
and for to construe here lessons
and here þinges a Freynsch, and
habbeþ suþþe þe Normans
come furst into Engelond. Also
gentil men children buþ ytauȝt
for to speke Freynsch fram tyme
þat a buþ yrokked in here cradel,
and conneþ speke and playe wiþ
a child hys brouch; and oplon-
dysch men wol lykne hamsylf to
gentil men, and fondeþ wiþ gret
bysynes for to speke Freynsch,
for to be more ytold of.

*One [reason] is that children in
school, contrary to the usage
and custom of all other nations,
are compelled to abandon their
own language, and to carry on
their lessons and their affairs in
French, and have done since the
Normans first came to England.
Also the children of gentlemen
are taught to speak French from
the time that they are rocked in
their cradle, and learn to speak
and play with a child's trinket; and
rustic men will make themselves
like gentlemen, and seek with
great industry to speak French, to
be more highly thought of.*

At this point, John of Trevisa adds the following:

Bys manere was moche y-vsod
tofore þe furste moreyn, and ys
seþþe somdel ychaunged. For
Iohan Cornwall, a mayster of
gramere, chayngede þe lore in
gramerscole and construccio
of Freynsch into Englysch; and
Richard Pencrych lurnede þat
manere techyng of hym, and
oþer men of Pencrych, so þat
now, þe ȝer of oure Lord a
þousond þre hundred foure
score and fyue, of þe secunde
kyng Richard after þe Conquest
nyne, in al þe gramerscoles of
Engelond childern leueþ
Frensch, and construeþ and
lurneþ an Englysch, and habbeþ
þerby avauntage in on syde, and
desavantaue yn anoþer. Here
avauntage ys þat a lurneþ here
gramer yn lasse tyme þan
childern wer ywoned to do.
Desavantaue ys þat now chil-
dern of gramerscole conneþ no
more Frensch þan can here lift
heele, and þat ys harm for ham
and a scholle passe þe se and
trauayle in strange londes, and
in meny caas also. Also gentil
men habbeþ now moche yleft
for to teche here childern
Frensch.

Plus ça change...

*This practice was much used
before the first plague, and has
since been somewhat changed. For
John Cornwall, a teacher of
grammar, changed the teaching in
grammar school and the
construing of French into English;
and Richard Penkridge learned that
method of teaching from him, and
other men from Penkridge, so that
now, AD 1385, the ninth year of
the reign of the second King
Richard after the Conquest, in all
the grammar schools of England
children abandon French, and
compose and learn in English, and
have thereby an advantage on the
one hand, and a disadvantage on
the other. The advantage is that
they learn their grammar in less
time than children used to do. The
disadvantage is that nowadays
children at grammar school know
no more French than their left heel,
and that is a misfortune for them if
they should cross the sea and travel
in foreign countries, and in other
such circumstances. Also,
gentlemen have now largely
abandoned teaching their children
French.*

A PASTON LETTER

This is an extract from one of the collection of letters written by members of the Norfolk family of Paston during the 15th century. There are over a thousand items in the collection, dealing with everything from legal matters to domestic gossip, and written throughout in a natural and often vivid style. Most of the collection is now in the British Museum. The present example comes from a letter written 'in hast[e]' by Margaret Paston to her husband John on 19 May 1448, Trinity Sunday evening.



Ryght worshipfull husbond, I recomaund me to yow, and
prey yow to wete þat on Friday last passed be-fore noon, þe
parson of Oxened beyng at messe in our parossh chirche, euyn
atte leuacion of þe sakeryng, Jamys Gloys hadde ben in þe toвне and come homward
by Wymondams gate. And Wymondam stod in his gate and John Norwode his man
stod by hym, and Thomas Hawys his othir man stod in þe strete by þe canell side. And
Jamys Gloys come wyth his hatte on his hede between bothe his men, as he was wont
of custome to do. And whanne Gloys was a-yenst Wymondham he seid thus, 'covere
þy heed!' And Gloys seid ageyn, 'so i shall for the.' And whanne Gloys was forther
passed by þe space of iii or iiij strede, Wymondham drew owt his dagger and seid,
'Shalt þow so, knave?' And þerwith Gloys turned hym and drewe owt his dagger and
defendet hym, fleyng in-to my moderis place; and Wymondham and his man Hawys
kest stonys and dreve Gloys into my moderis place. And Hawys folwyd into my moderis
place and kest a ston as meche as a forthyng lof into þe halle after Gloys; and þan ran
owt of þe place ageyn. And Gloys folwyd owt and stod wyth-owt þe gate, and þanne
Wymondham called Gloys thef and seid he shuld dye, and Gloys seid he lyed and
called hym charl, and bad hym come hym-self or ell þe best man he hadde, and Gloys
wold answer hym on for on. And þanne Hawys ran into Wymondhams place and
feched a spere and a swerd, and toke his maister his swerd. And wyth þe noise of þis
a-saut and affray my modir and I come owt of þe chirche from þe sakeryng, and I bad
Gloys go in-to my moderis place ageyn, and so he dede. And thanne Wymondham
called my moder and me strong hores, and seid þe Pastons and alle her kyn were [hole
in paper] ... seid he lyed, knave and charl as he was. And he had meche large langage,
as ye shall knowe her-after by mowthe.

*My dear husband, I commend myself to you, and want you to know that, last Friday
before noon, the parson of Oxnead was saying Mass in our parish church, and at the
very moment of elevating the host, James Gloys, who had been in town, was coming
home past Wyndham's gate. And Wyndham was standing in his gateway with his man
John Norwood by his side, and his other man, Thomas Hawes, was standing in the
street by the gutter. And James Gloys came with his hat on his head between both
his men, as he usually did. And when Gloys was opposite Wyndham, Wyndham said
'Cover your head!' And Gloys retorted, 'So I shall for you!' And when Gloys had gone
on three or four strides, Wyndham drew out his dagger and said, 'Will you, indeed,
knave?' And with that Gloys turned on him, and drew out his dagger and defended
himself, fleeing into my mother's place; and Wyndham and his man Hawes threw
stones and drove Gloys into my mother's house, and Hawes followed into my mother's
and threw a stone as big as a farthing-loaf into the hall at Gloys, and then ran out of
the place again. And Gloys followed him out and stood outside the gate, and then
Wyndham called Gloys a thief and said he had to die, and Gloys said he lied and called
him a peasant, and told him to come himself or else the best man he had, and Gloys
would answer him, one against one. And then Hawes ran into Wyndham's place and
fetched a spear and a sword, and gave his master his sword. And at the noise of this
attack and uproar my mother and I came out of the church from the sacrament, and I
told Gloys to go into my mother's again, and he did so. And then Wyndham called my
mother and me wicked whores, and said the Pastons and all her kin were (...) said he
lied, knave and peasant that he was. And he had a great deal of broad language, as
you shall hear later by word of mouth.*

Such a story could have appeared in any modern tabloid. (The hole in the paper is fortuitous, and is unlikely to be an 'expletive deleted'.) The experience shocked Margaret, who 'wolde not for xl li. have suyche another trouble' ('wouldn't have another such disturbance happen for £40').

THE OWL AND THE NIGHTINGALE

This is the first example to appear in English of the debate verse form which was so popular in Europe during the 12th and 13th centuries. In the poem, the two speakers argue their views in the manner of a lawsuit. The work has become famous for its humour and irony, and for the lively way in which the characters of the two birds are portrayed. It displays a French-inspired scheme of four-beat lines in rhyming couplets. Its authorship has not been established, though the dialect represented is southern, and it was probably composed c. 1200. From a reference in the poem to a Master Nicholas of Guildford (who the birds agree should judge the debate), that area of Surrey has been suggested as a possible source. The following extracts are of the opening lines, and part of one of the nightingale's diatribes.

Ich was in one sumere dale,
In one suþe diþele hale,
Iherde ich holde grete tale
An hule and one niztingale.
Þat plait was stif & starc & strong,
Sumwile softe & lud among;
An aiþer aþen oþer sval,
& let þat vole mod ut al.
& eiþer seide of oþeres custe
Þat alreworste þat hi wuste...

*I was in a summer valley,
In a very hidden corner,
I heard holding a great argument
An owl and a nightingale.
The dispute was fierce and violent and strong,
Sometimes soft and loud at intervals;
And each swelled in anger against the other,
And let out their bad temper.
And each said of the other's qualities
The worst things that they knew...*

& þu tukest wroþe & vuele,
Whar þu miȝt, oversmale fuþele...
Þu art lodlich to biholde,
& þu art loþ in monie volde;
Þi bodi is short, þi swore is smal,
Grettere is þin heued þan þu al;
Þin eþene boþ col blake & brode,
Riȝt swo ho weren ipeint mid wode...

*And you ill-treat cruelly and badly,
Wherever you can, very small birds...
You are hateful to behold,
And you are hateful in many ways;
Your body is short, your neck is small,
Your head is bigger than the rest of you;
Your eyes both charcoal-black and wide,
Just like they were painted with woad...*

THE CUCKOO SONG

This well-known song is one of several secular lyrics dating from c. 1225. It is one of a very few such lyrics which have musical notation in the manuscript (as well as an alternative religious text in Latin).

Svmer is icumen in,
Lhude sing cuccu!
Groweþ sed and bloweþ med
And springþ þe wde nu.
Sing cuccu!

*Summer has come in,
Loudly sing, cuckoo!
The seed grows and the
meadow bursts into flower
And the wood springs up now.
Sing, cuckoo!*

Awe bleteþ after lomb,
Lhouþ after calue cu,
Bulluc sterteþ, bucke uerteþ.
Murie sing cuccu!
Cuccu, cuccu,
Wel singes þu cuccu.
Ne swik þu nauer nu!

*The ewe bleats after the lamb,
The cow lows after the calf.
The bullock leaps, the buck farts.
Merry sing, cuckoo!
Cuckoo, cuckoo,
You sing well, cuckoo.
Never cease you now!*

LAZAMON'S BRUT

This is a poem of c. 16,000 lines telling the history of Britain from the landing of Brutus (the *Brut* of the title, the reputed founder of the Britons) to the last Saxon victory over the Britons in 689. It uses an alliterative line, showing the influence of Old English (p. 11), and many of its themes reflect those of earlier Germanic times; but the approach was also much influenced by French chivalric romances. The text actually uses as a source a French verse chronicle, *Roman de Brut*, made by the 12th-century Anglo-Norman author, Wace.

Little is known of Lazamon (modern spelling, Layamon), other than what he tells us in the opening lines of the work – that he was a parish priest of Ernleze (modern Areley Kings, Worcestershire). There are two extant manuscripts, both dating from the first half of the 13th century, and separated in time by about a generation. This has given scholars a rare chance to make a comparison, to see if the two versions throw some light on the way the language could have changed during that time.

The poem is written in long lines, divided into half-line groups, and a great deal of use is made of alliteration, rhyme, and other phonological features which give the units their structure (p. 441). A surprising feature of the text is that, despite being written 150 years after the Conquest, it has very few French loan words. It is likely that the poem's subject-matter, much concerned with battles within the epic tradition, motivated Lazamon to use an older vocabulary, associated more with the Old English period. However, there are no kennings in the text (p. 23). The later version also contains rather more French loans, suggesting that the scribe was to some extent trying to modernize the language. (Extracts and translation from N. Blake, 1992.)

Earlier version (lines 8949 ff.)

Nu haueð Vortigernes cun Aurilien aquald.
nu þu ært al ane of aþele þine cunne.
Ah ne hope þu to ræde of heom þat liggeð dede.
ah þenc of þe seoluen seolðen þe beoð ȝiueþe.
for selde he aswint þe to him-seolue þencheð.
þv scalt wurðen god king & gumenene lauerð.
& þu to þere mid-nihte weþne þine cnihtes.
þat we i þan morȝen-liht mæȝen come forð-riht.

Later version (lines 8219 ff.)

Nou haueþ Vortigerne his cun Aurelie acwelled.
nou hart þou al one of alle þine kunne.
Ac ne hope þou to reade of ham þat liggeþ deade.
ac þench ou þou miht þi-seolf þine kinedom werie.
for sealde he aswint þat to him-seolue tresteþ.
þou salt worþe god king and steorne þorh alle þing.
And þou at þere midniht weþne þine cnihtes.
þat þou at þan moreliht mæȝe be a-redi to þe fiht.

*Now that Vortigern's family has killed Aurilie,
you are the sole survivor of your family.
But do not expect any support from him who lies dead.
Put your trust in yourself that help is granted you,
for seldom is he disappointed who puts his trust in
himself.
You will become a worthy king and ruler of people.
And arm your followers at midnight
so that we may advance in the morning.*



SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

This story from Arthurian legend is an account of two adventures – the arrival of a green knight at Arthur's court and the challenge he issues, and the temptation of Sir Gawain, who takes up the challenge at the green knight's chapel. The story was probably written towards the end of the 14th century, and shows the influence of the French courtly tradition. The poem is written in a West Midland dialect, and there is some evidence from the language that it originated in south Lancashire. The manuscript, which contains three other poems written in the same neat angular hand, is now in the British Library. In the present extract, the editors have added modern capitalization and punctuation. (After J. R. R. Tolkien & E. V. Gordon, 1925.)

Siben þe sege and þe assaut watȝ sesed at Troye,
 Þe borȝ brittened and brent to brondez and askez,
 Þe tulk þat þe trammes of tresoun þer wroȝt
 Watȝ tried for his tricherie, þe trewest on erthe:
 Hit watȝ Ennias þe athel and his highe kynde,
 Þat siben depreded prouinces, and patrounes bicom
 Welneȝe of al þe wele in þe West Isles.
 Fro riche Romulus to Rome ricchis hym swyȝe,
 With gret bobbaunce þat burȝe he biges vpon fyrst,
 And neuenes hit his aune nome, as hit now hat;
 Tirus to Tuskan and teldes bigynnes,
 Langaberde in Lumbardie lyftes vp homes,
 And fer ouer þe French flod Felix Brutus
 On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayn he setteȝ
 with wyne,

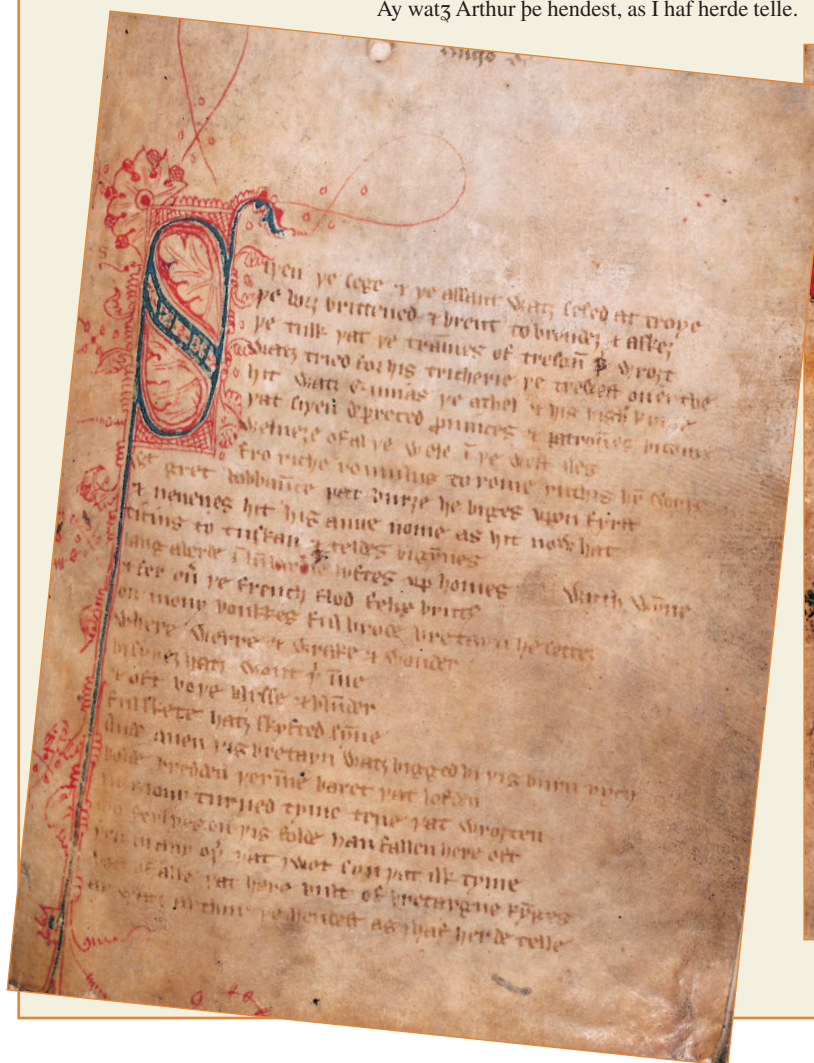
Where werre and wrake and wonder
 Bi syȝeȝ hatȝ wont þerinne,
 And oft boȝe blysse and blunder
 Ful skete hatȝ skyfted synne.

Ande quen þis Bretayn watȝ bigged bi þis burn rych,
 Bolde bredden þerinne, baret þat lofden,
 In mony turned tyme tene þat wroȝten.
 Mo ferlyes on þis folde han fallen here oft
 Þen in any oȝer þat I wot, syn þat ilk tyme.
 Bot of alle þat here bult of Bretayne kynges
 Ay watȝ Arthur þe hendest, as I haf herde telle.

*Since the siege and the assault came to an end in Troy,
 The city destroyed and burnt to brands and ashes,
 The man who there devised the devices of treason
 Was tried for his treachery, the truest on earth:
 It was the noble Aeneas and his noble kindred
 Who later subjugated provinces, and became lords
 Of almost all the wealth in the Western Isles.
 When noble Romulus quickly makes his way to Rome,
 With great pomp that city he builds up first,
 And names it with his own name, as it is now called;
 Tirus founds buildings in Tuscany,
 Langaberde builds up dwellings in Lombardy,
 And far over the English Channel Felix Brutus
 Upon many broad hillsides founds Britain with joy,*

*Where fighting and distress and wondrous deeds
 At times have been found therein
 And often both happiness and sadness
 Have since then quickly alternated.*

*And when this Britain was founded by this noble man,
 Bold men multiplied there, who loved fighting,
 In many a later time who brought about harm.
 More marvels in this land have often happened here
 Than in any other that I know of, since that same time.
 But of all of Britain's kings who dwelled here
 Always was Arthur the noblest, as I have heard tell.*



THE CHAUCERIAN ACHIEVEMENT

The tiny voice of this book can add nothing to the critical acclaim which has been given to Chaucer's poetic and narrative achievements, or to his insights into medieval attitudes and society; but it can affirm with some conviction the importance of his work to any history of the language. It is partly a matter of quantity – one complete edition prints over 43,000 lines of poetry, as well as two major prose works – but more crucial is the breadth and variety of his language, which ranges from the polished complexity of high-flown rhetoric to the natural simplicity of domestic chat. No previous author had shown such a range, and Chaucer's writing – in addition to its literary merits – is thus unique in the evidence it has provided about the state of medieval grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

Chaucer's best-known work, *The Canterbury Tales*, is not of course a guide to the spoken language of the time: it is a variety of the written language which has been carefully crafted. It uses a regular metrical structure and rhyme scheme – itself a departure from the free rhythms and alliteration of much earlier poetry (p. 36). It contains many variations in word order, dictated by the demands of the prosody. There are also frequent literary allusions and turns of phrase which make the text difficult to follow. What has impressed readers so much is that, despite the constraints, Chaucer has managed to capture so vividly the intriguing characters of the speakers, and to reflect so naturally the colloquial features of their speech. In no other author, indeed, is there better support for the view that there is an underlying correspondence between the natural rhythm of English poetry and that of English everyday conversation (p. 438).



Whan that Aprille with hise shoures soote
When April with its sweet showers
'hwan θat 'a:prɪl, wɪθ hɪs 'ʃu:ɹəs 'so:ɹə

The droghte of March hath perced to the
roote

has pierced the drought of March to the root
θə 'drɔxt of 'mɑ:ʃ həθ 'pɜ:səd ,tə: ðə 'rɔ:tə

And bathed every vein in swich licour
and bathed every vein in such liquid
and 'bɑ:ðəd 'e:vri 'veɪn ɪn 'swɪʃ lɪ'ku:ɹ

Of which vertu engendred is the flour
from which strength the flower is engendered;
of 'hwɪʃ ver'tu en'ʒendəd ,ɪs θə 'flu:ɹ

5 Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
When Zephirus also with his sweet breath
hwan ,zɛf'i:rʊs eɪk, wɪθ hɪs 'swetə 'bre:θ

Inspired hath in euery holt and heeth
has breathed upon in every woodland and
heath
ɪn'spi:rəd 'həθ ɪn 'e:vri 'hɔlt and 'he:θ

The tendre croppes and the yonge sonne
the tender shoots, and the young sun
θə 'tendə 'krɒpəs ,and ðə 'jʊŋgə 'sʊnnə

Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne
has run his half-course in the Ram,
'həθ ɪn ðə 'rɑm hɪs 'hɑlf 'kɔ:rs ɪ'rʊnnə

And smale fowules maken melodye
and small birds make melody
and 'smɑ:lə 'fu:ləs 'mɑ:kən 'melə'di:ə

10 That slepen al the nyght with open eye
that sleep all night with open eye
θat 'sle:pən 'a:l ðə 'niçt wɪθ 'ɔ:pən 'i:ə

So priketh hem nature in hir corages
(so nature pricks them in their hearts);
sɔ: 'prɪkəθ 'hem nɑ:'tiʊɹ ɪn 'hɪr kɔ:rɑ:ʒəs

Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages...
then people long to go on pilgrimages...
θæn 'lɔ:ŋgən 'fɔlk tɔ: 'gɔ:n ɔn 'pɪlgrɪ'mɑ:ʒəs

(Phonetic transcription after A. C. Gimson, 1962.)

GEOFFREY CHAUCER (?1345–1400)

Chaucer provides us with an unparalleled insight into the speech and manners of medieval London, from gutter to court. Very little is known of his life, and what biographical information there is gives us no hint of his role as a writer.

He was born in the early or mid-1340s, the son of John Chaucer, a London vintner, who had some standing at court. In 1357 Geoffrey became a page in the service of the wife of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, and later joined the household of King Edward III. He served in the French campaign, was taken prisoner, and ransomed. In the mid-1360s he married the daughter of Sir Payne Roet, Philippa, through whose sister he was later linked by marriage to John of Gaunt.

By 1368 he was one of the king's esquires. He travelled widely on diplomatic missions abroad during

the 1370s, notably to Italy, and received several official appointments. In 1382 he was made comptroller of the Petty Customs, and in 1386 was elected a knight of the shire for Kent. He then lost his offices, probably as part of the political strife surrounding the authority of the young King Richard II, and fell into debt. In 1389, when Richard came of age, Chaucer was appointed Clerk of the King's Works, but in 1391 left this post, becoming deputy forester at Petherton in Somerset. In 1399 he took a lease of a house in the garden of Westminster Abbey, and died the following year. He was buried in the Abbey, and it is through this that part of the building came to be known as Poets' Corner.

His first poetry is the elegaic love-vision, *The Book of the Duchess*, written c. 1370 to commemorate the death of the wife of John of Gaunt. Other important

works are the translation of part of the French *Roman de la Rose*, the allegorical *Parliament of Fowls*, the love-vision *The House of Fame*, and the unfinished legendary, *The Legend of Good Women* – a tribute to classical heroines who suffered out of devotion to their lovers. His longest romance, *Troilus and Criseyde*, is the crowning work of his middle period. His visits to Italy were a major influence on both the style and content of his writing, as can be seen throughout the 24 stories of *The Canterbury Tales*. These, written over a period of at least a decade, but left unfinished, have been a continuing source of scholarly debate over their order and dating. No original manuscripts in Chaucer's hand have survived, but there are many copies of his works – over 80 of the *Tales* – which have kept generations of editors busy in the task of identifying and eradicating errors.

POETRY FOR THE EAR

'Delightful', 'enchancing', and 'beguiling' are just some of the terms critics have used to express their feelings about the opening lines of the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*. The lines unquestionably demonstrate Chaucer's great skill in poetic description, for, when we look carefully at their grammatical structure, they ought not to generate such responses at all. On the face of it, it is improbable that a term like 'enchancing' would ever be used of a sentence which begins with a four-line subordinate clause with a coordinate clause inside it, and which is immediately followed by a six-line subordinate clause with two more coordinate clauses inside it, and which also includes a relative clause and a parenthetical clause, before it reaches the main clause. Sentences with multiple embeddings (p. 239), such as the one you have just read, are not usually described as 'enchancing'. The

fact that we not only cope with Chaucer's sentence but have the aural impression that it flows along so smoothly and simply is a tribute to his poetic genius.

The lines work partly because of the rhyme, which organizes the meaning into units that our auditory memory can easily assimilate, and partly because of the metre, which adds pace and control to the reading. The long sequence of clauses, identifying first one aspect of the time of year, then another, also promotes a leisurely, storytelling atmosphere which anticipates the vast scale of the work to follow. It is as if the poet were asking us, through the syntax and prosody, whether we are sitting comfortably, before he begins. As some critics have put it, it is poetry for the ear rather than for the eye.

The artifice of the grammar of these opening lines can also be seen in several points of detail. The normal order of clause elements is reversed

in l. 11 and l. 12 (verb before subject), and in l. 2 (object before verb). The normal order of phrase elements is reversed in l. 1 (adjective after noun) and l. 6 (auxiliary verb after main verb). As a further aid to the metre, we see an extra particle brought into the opening line (*Whan that Aprille...*) and a prefix added to a past participle in l. 8 (*yronne*). These were some of the stylistic options available to Chaucer at the time: it would have been perfectly possible for him to have written *Whan Aprille* and *ronne*. The existence of variant forms in a language is of considerable poetic value, providing the writer with options to suit different metrical contexts – if *also* or *better* will not fit a line, then *als* and *bet* might – to ensure the verse 'does not fail' (see below). A modern poet might similarly enjoy the freedom of choice between *happier* and *more happy*, or between *all work*, *all the work*, and *all of the work*.

The way in which Chaucer can capture the natural features of colloquial speech is not well illustrated by the Prologue – at least, not until towards the end, when the Host starts to speak. The following extract, from *The Summoner's Tale* (ll. 2202–6) provides a better example:

'Ey, Goddes mooder', quod she, 'Blisful mayde!
Is ther oght elles? telle me feithfully.'
'Madame,' quod he, 'how thynke ye herby?'
'How that me thynketh?' quod she, 'so God me speede,
I seye, a cherl hath doon a cherles deede.'
(*Ee*, God's mother', said she, 'Blissful maiden! Is there anything else? Tell me faithfully.'
'Madame', said he, 'What do you think about that?'
'What do I think about it?' said she, 'so God help me, I say a churl has done a churl's

deed.') Here we see the way in which Chaucer keeps a dialogue going, with quickfire questions and answers within the verse structure. The words are uncomplicated, mostly just one syllable long. The passage also shows one of his favourite stylistic tricks, the use of a rhyming tag with a natural conversational rhythm to it: so *God me speede* – like his use elsewhere of *as I gesse* ('as I guess') and many other such 'comment clauses' (p.241). Other important characteristics of conversation are seen in the example, such as the 'I said/he said' pattern still found in narrative today, as well as an exclamation, an oath, and the use of direct address (*Madame*). Along with a goodly store of vulgarisms and name-calling – for *Goddes bones*, by *Seinte Loy*, *olde fool*, by *my feith* – these features demonstrate why Chaucer's conversational poetry is so distinctive and so real.

SOME LESSER-KNOWN EXTRACTS

These two extracts further illustrate the variety of Chaucer's writing. The first is the opening of the scientific discourse he wrote in c.1391 for 'little Lewis, my son', *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* (an early instrument for observing the position and altitudes of celestial bodies). The second is the opening of his 'ABC', an early poem in which the first letter of each verse follows the order of the letters of the alphabet. It was possibly written in the mid-1360s for devotional use by Blanche, the first wife of John of Gaunt.

Lyte Lowys my sone, I aperceyve wel by certeyne evidences thyn abilitie to lerne sciences touching nombres and proporciouns; and as wel conside I thy besy praier [*anxious prayer*] in special to lerne the tretys of the Astrelabie. Than [*then*] for as moche [*much*] as a filosofre saith, 'he wrappeth him in his frend, that condescendith to the rightfule praieris of his frend,' therfore have I yeven the [*given thee*] a suffisant Astrelabie as for oure orizonte [*horizon*], compowned [*constructed*] after the latitude of Oxenforde [*Oxford*]; upon which, by mediacioun [*mediation*] of this litel tretys, I purpose to teche the [*thee*] a certain nombre of conclusions aperteyning to the same instrument. I sieie a certain of conclusions, for thre [*three*] causes. The first cause is this: truste wel that alle the conclusions that han [*have*] be founde, or ellys possibly might be founde in so noble an instrument as is an Astrelabie ben [*are*] unknowe parfittly [*perfectly*] to eny mortal man in

this regioun, as I suppose. Another cause is this, that sothly [*truly*] in any tretis of the Astrelabie that I have seyn, there be somme conclusions that wol [*will*] not in alle thinges parfomen her bihestes [*fulfil their promise*]; and somme of hem ben to [*them are too*] harde to thy tendir age to conceyve.

Almighty and al merciable queene, To whom that al this world fleeth for socour [*help*],
To have relees of sinne, of sorwe, and teene [*hurt*],
Glorious virgine, of alle floures flour [*flower of all flowers*]
To thee I flee, confounded in errour.
Help and releeve, thou mighti debonayre [*gracious one*],
Have mercy on my perilous langour [*affliction*]
Venquished me hath my cruel adversaire.

Bountee so fix hath in thin [*thy*] herte his tente,
That wel I wot [*know*] thou wolt [*will*] my socour bee;
Thou canst not warne [*refuse*] him that with good entente
Axeth [*asks for*] thin helpe, thin herte is ay [*always*] so free [*generous*].
Thou art largesse of pleyn felicitie [*absolute bliss*],
Haven of refut [*refuge*], of quiete, and of reste.
Loo (*Lo*), how that theeves sevene [*the seven deadly sins*] chasen mee!
Help, lady bright, er that [*before*] my ship tobreste [*is wrecked*]!

THE -e QUESTION

The chief difficulty in trying to read Chaucer's verse aloud in its original pronunciation is knowing when to sound the -e which appears at the end of so many words (p. 32). The opening lines of the *Tales* provide several examples: do we add a 'weak' ending to *soote*, *droghte*, *roote*, *sweete*, *melodye*, and others? The transcription given suggests that we do, in most cases, but is this transcription the only one?

Final -e was certainly on its way out of the language at this time, and a generation or so later it would be completely gone. But in Chaucer's time, there would have been considerable variation. Older speakers might keep it; younger ones drop it. Or perhaps the -e would be kept in careful recitation style. It would almost certainly be elided (p. 259) before a vowel, as in *droghte* (l. 2). And when it represented an earlier inflectional ending (and not a later spelling idiosyncrasy), it would probably have been pronounced. But many cases cannot be resolved so easily.

Scholars are divided on the issue, some recommending the pronunciation in doubtful instances, others rejecting it. That Chaucer himself was aware of the importance of metrical regularity is suggested by his request to Apollo (in *The House of Fame*, l. 1098) to guide him in making his poetry pleasing, 'Though som vers fayle in a sillable' ('Though some lines fail in a syllable'). But no one has yet found a foolproof way of determining Chaucer's prosodic intentions, and different readings continue to be heard.

MIDDLE ENGLISH SPELLING

What is immediately noticeable from the range of texts illustrated in the preceding pages is the extraordinary diversity of Middle English spelling – far greater than that found in Old English (p. 16). Students who are new to the period quickly learn the skill of glossary delving – encountering a variant spelling in an edited text (e.g. *naure*, *næure*, *ner*, *neure*), then trawling through the back of the book to track down what it is a variant of (in this case, of *neuer* ‘never’). A good editor makes the job easy, by providing copious cross-references. Some words have a dozen or more variants.

This situation results from a combination of historical, linguistic, and social factors. The sociolinguistic impact of the French invasion, the continuation of the processes of sound change which began in Anglo-Saxon times, and the considerable growth and movement in population during the medieval period, especially in the south-east of the country, all helped to influence the shape of the writing system. The change is quite dramatic. There is a marked contrast between the diverse and idiosyncratic forms used at the beginning of the period and the highly regularized system of spelling which begins to appear in the 15th century, in the work of the Chancery scribes and William Caxton (p. 56).

Some Textual Features

The text of the *Peterborough Chronicle* (p. 33), dating from the very beginning of the period, shows some of the important features of Middle English spelling. The Old English runic symbols are still in use, but there is some inconsistency. The *-th* spelling makes a sporadic appearance for *þ*. The symbol *p* is used in the manuscript, but this has been represented on p. 33 by *w* (as is usual in modern editions of these texts). *uu* is also a common spelling for this sound; the word for ‘wretched people’, for example, is spelled both ways in the illustration (ll. 11, 14). The letter *g* is used for a sound which most other texts of the time spell with *ȝ*. There is some alternation between *æ* and *a*. In addition, *u* is used where we would now find *v*, in such words as *gyuen* ‘give’ and *æure* ‘ever’.

Because of the spelling, several words look stranger than they really are. An example is *wreccemen*, which would have been pronounced like *wretch-man* (but with the *w* sounded), and is thus very close to modern *wretched*. *Cyrceiærd* likewise would have been close to the modern pronunciation of *churchyard*, because the two *c* spellings each represented a *ch* sound, and *i* stood for the same sound as modern *y*. And *altegaedere* is not far from *altogether*, nor *læiden* from *laid*.

MIGHT IS RIGHT

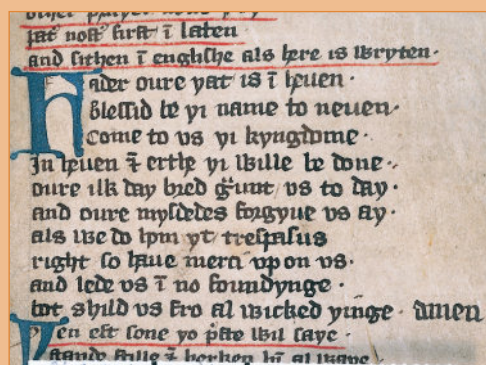
The various spellings of *might* clearly illustrate the way grammatical, dialectal, and scribal variants complicate the study of Middle English texts. All the following are listed in one standard collection of early extracts (B. Dickens & R. M. Wilson, 1951).

maht	miztte
mahte	mihhte
mayht	mihte

micht	mist
michtis	mithe
micthe	mouth
mizt	myht
mizte	myhte
mizten	myhtes
miztest	myhtest

Some of the variation can be explained by grammatical context (e.g. the *-est* endings for the 2nd person singular). Some is probably due to

scribal error (e.g. *mayht*). A good example of a dialectal variant is *micht*, which suggests an origin in the north-east (compare modern Scots *nicht* ‘not’). However, by the time of William Caxton (p. 56), many of the variations had died out, and Caxton’s own use of the *myght* spelling proved to be a major influence on the emergence of the modern form.



Fader oure þat is ī heuen.
blessid be þi name to neuē.
Come to us þi kyngdome.
In heuen 7 erth þi wille be done.
oure ilk day bied ȝint vs to day.
and oure mysdedes forȝyue vs ay.
als we do hom þt trespassus
right so haue merci vpon us.
and lede vs ī no foundynge.
bot shild vs fro al wickid tinge.
amen.

(After C. Jones, 1972.)

SOME MANUSCRIPT FEATURES

This is an extract from a 14th-century manuscript – a translation of the Lord’s Prayer used in *The Lay Folk’s Mass Book*. It is written in *book hand*, a script which was widely used during the Middle English period.

- Old English thorn (*þ*) is used, but written identically to *y* (see further, p. 41): compare the first symbol of *þi* (l. 2) with the last symbol of *day* (l. 5) in the manuscript. *þ* is beginning to be replaced by *th*, as in *erthe* (l. 4).
- The yogh (*ȝ*) and ash (*æ*) symbols have been replaced by *g* (as in *forȝyue*, l. 6) and *a* (as in *fader*, l. 1), respectively. There is an unusual replacement for Old English *p*, seen in *wille* (l. 4). The new symbols show the influence of the Carolingian script widely used in Continental Europe (p. 270).
- The long *s* symbols, also found in Carolingian script, are used in such words as *blessid* (l. 2). There is a later example in the extract from Shakespeare (p. 63). The shape continued to be used in print until the 18th century.
- Some of the symbols are beginning to take on a modern appearance, compared with their earlier use in insular script (p. 16). A long downward stroke is no longer used in *r* (*erth*, l. 4). The top of *f* now ascends above the general level of the line (*forȝyue*, l. 6), and the ascender in *t* now goes through the crossbar (*right*, l. 8).

As a result, these symbols are much easier to distinguish than they were in Old English.

- Several abbreviations are used, including a line suspended above a symbol to show a missing *n* (l. 1), a superscript standing for *ra* (l. 5), and a shorthand form of *and* (l. 4).
- There is no real punctuation. A mark resembling a period is used after most lines, but its function is unclear.

Minim confusion

Texts of this period show a problem known as *minim confusion* (p. 273). A *minim* is a short vertical stroke of the pen, as in the *i* of *is* (l. 1) or *þi* (l. 2). Several letters were formed by a sequence of such strokes – *u*, *n*, *m*, *v*, and sometimes *w* (*uu*). Because scribes did not usually leave space between different letters, any word which contained these letters in adjacent positions would be difficult to read. A sequence of six minims could be read as *mni*, *imu*, *inni*, and several other possibilities. Compare the *m* of *merci* (l. 8) with the *un* of *foundynge* (l. 9). Because there were so many possible ambiguities, Norman scribes introduced the Carolingian convention of writing the minims representing *u* as an *o*, whenever a sequence of two or three other minims followed (as in *come*, l. 3). No new pronunciation is implied by this change. As with the later dotting of *i*, and the reshaping of the tops of *m* and *n*, there was a purely graphic reason for it – to help keep different letters apart.

NORMAN INFLUENCE

As the period progressed, so the spelling changed. The Norman scribes listened to the English they heard around them, and began to spell it according to the conventions they had previously used for French, such as *qu* for *cw* (*queen* for *cwen*). They brought in *gh* (instead of *h*) in such words as *night* and *enough*, and *ch* (instead of *c*) in such words as *church*. They used *ou* for *u* (as in *house*). They began to use *c* before *e* (instead of *s*) in such words as *cercle* ('circle') and *cell*. And because the letter *u* was written in a very similar way to *v*, *n*, and *m* (see opposite), words containing a sequence of these letters were difficult to read; they therefore often replaced the *u* with an *o*, in such cases as *come*, *love*, *one*, and *son*. *k* and *z* came to be increasingly used, as did *j* (a visually more distinct form of *i*). And one pair of letters came to be used in complementary ways: *v* at the beginning of a word (*vnder*), and *u* in the middle (whether consonant or vowel, as in *haue*). By the beginning of the 15th century, English spelling was a mixture of two systems, Old English and French. The consequences plague English learners still (p. 286).

YE OLDE LETTERS



How did *the* become *ye* in *Ye Olde Pork Pie Shoppe* and other such institutions?

Of the four Old English letters, only thorn (*þ*) continued to be much used throughout the Middle English period, eventually being replaced by *th*. However, scribal practice altered during that time, and the symbol took on a new shape (see illustration opposite), becoming so like a *y* that some writers actually added a dot above the symbol to help distinguish it. This new shape was used in such grammatical

words as *the*, *thou*, and *that*, and was often abbreviated (e.g. as *ye*, *yt*).

The writing of *þe* 'the' as *ye* continued in some manuscript styles until the 19th century, by which time people had long forgotten the original letter shape and the 'th' sound it once represented. They saw the letter as a *y*, gave it the expected modern value, and pronounced the word as 'ye' – a usage still found today in such mock-archaic contexts as pub names (*Ye Olde Fighting Cocks*), shoppe names, and comic dialogue (see further, p. 197).

THE CHANCERY LINE

Some of the royal Chancery records, kept on skins of parchment which were then sewn together and rolled up. Systematic record-keeping was an essential part of the monarchy's attempt in the 12th century to develop more effective government. At first the Chancery consisted of a small number of scribes who travelled with the king and prepared his documents; but during the 13th century they came to be permanently located in Westminster.

The importance of the Chancery is its role in fostering the standardization of English, in handwriting, spelling, and grammatical forms. The 'Chancery hand' developed in Italy in the 13th century, and spread to London via France. From c. 1430 a vast number of documents emerged. Careful analysis of the manuscripts in the Early Chancery Proceedings has shown that the clerks imposed a great deal of order on the wide range of spellings

which existed at the time, and that the choices they made are very largely the ones which have since become standard. The genealogy of modern Standard English goes back to Chancery, not Chaucer.

Although other varieties of English had achieved some degree of standardization, they were soon overtaken by the quantity of material which emerged from the Chancery office. When Caxton established his press, also in Westminster (1476), 'Chancery Standard' already carried enormous prestige. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that it is this set of practices which, associated with the authority of the court and fostered by the power of the press, eventually exercised such influence around the country – though not all Chancery features were retained by the printing-houses.

An example of Chancery influence is its choice of *such*, as opposed to *sich*, *sych*, *seche*, *swiche*, and other variants. *Can*, *could*, *shall*, *should*, and other grammatical words were also

given their modern form here. Moreover, there are clear differences between Chancery Standard (CS) and Chaucer's spelling preferences (p. 38) – for example, *not* (CS) for *nat*, *but* (CS) for *bot*, *gaf* (CS) for *yaf* ('gave'), *thes(e)* (CS) for *thise*, and *thorough* (CS) for *thurh* ('through').

Chancery Standard does not derive from the language and style found in the works of Chaucer and Gower, and other major literary figures, therefore; and it took a while before Chancery features emerged in literary texts. Rather, it is a quite distinct variety, showing the influence of the Central and East Midland dialects (p. 50), as well as features associated with London. This mixture is not surprising, given that we know large numbers of people were attracted to the London area from the Midlands in the 15th century. But it does give the Midland dialect area a somewhat larger role in the shaping of modern Standard English than was traditionally thought to be the case (p. 54).



MIDDLE ENGLISH SOUNDS

At the same time as new letter shapes and preferences were emerging (pp. 40–1), there was a continual process of change affecting the way English was pronounced. The result is a degree of complex interaction between the writing and sound systems which has no parallel in the history of English. It is not possible for these pages to provide a systematic description, but they can at least indicate the general character of the pronunciation developments throughout the period. For those interested in the history of spelling (p. 286), especially, it is a particularly important time, as this is when many rules and idiosyncrasies of the modern system were introduced.

New Spelling Conventions

Several consonant sounds came to be spelled differently, especially because of French influence. For example, Old English *sc* /ʃ/ is gradually replaced by *sh* or *sch* (*scip* becomes *ship*), though some dialects use *s*, *ss* or *x*. Old English *c* /tʃ/ is replaced by *ch* or *cch* (as in *church*), and the voiced equivalent /dʒ/, previously spelled as *cg* or *gg*, becomes *dg* (as in *bridge*).

New conventions for showing long and short vowels also developed. Increasingly, long vowel sounds came to be marked with an extra vowel letter, as in *see* (earlier *sē*) and *booc* (earlier *bōc*). Short vowels were identified by consonant doubling, in cases where there might otherwise be confusion, as in *sitting* vs *siting*. This convention became available once it was no longer needed to mark the lengthened consonants which had been present in Old English, but lost in early Middle English.

A similar redeployment of graphic resources followed the loss of the unstressed vowels that originally distinguished inflectional endings, as in *stane* ‘stone’ (p. 39). Although the final /ə/ sound disappeared, the *-e* spelling remained, and it gradually came to be used to show that the preceding vowel was long. This is the origin of the modern spelling ‘rule’ about ‘silent e’ in such words as *name* and *nose* (p. 284). The availability of such a useful and frequent letter also motivated its use in other parts of the system: for example, it marked the consonantal use of *u* (*haue*) and the affricate use of *g* (*rage* vs *rag*), and it helped distinguish such modern pairs as *teasel*/*teas* and *toltoe*.

New Pronunciations

Several sounds altered during the early Middle English period. Some took on a different value; some disappeared altogether. In particular, there was a restructuring of the Old English vowel system (p. 18). The original diphthongs became pure vowels, and new diphthongs emerged. Some of the new units arose when certain consonants at the end of a syllable came to be pronounced

in a vowel-like manner – an example is *wei* ‘way’, from Old English *weg*. French loan words also introduced new diphthongs, in the form of /ɔɪ/ and /ʊɪ/ – unusual sounds for English, and the ancestors of modern /ɔɪ/ in *joy*, *point*, etc.

Several of the pure vowels also changed their values. For example, in most parts of the country (except the north), Old English /ɑ:/ came to be articulated higher at the back of the mouth, as is shown by such spelling changes as *ban* becoming *bon* ‘bone’ or *swa* becoming *so*. Northern speech followed its own course in several other areas too (p. 50); for example, several of the new diphthongs were far more evident in the south, being replaced by pure vowels in the north (*light* vs *licht*).

An interesting change happened to [h]. This sound appeared before a consonant at the beginning of many Old English words, such as *hring* ‘ring’ and *hnecca* ‘neck’. It was lost early on in the Middle English period – the first sign of the process of ‘aitch-dropping’ which is still with us today. The loss of *h* before a vowel began some time later, producing variations in usage which continued into the 16th century. Middle English manuscripts show many examples of an *h* absent where it should be present (*adde* for *had*, *eld* for *held*) or present where it should be absent (*ham* for *am*, *his* for *is*). The influence of spelling (and doubtless the prescriptive tradition in schools) led to the *h*-forms being later

SOUND SYSTEM 1350–1400

By 1400 the sound system emerging in the south-east of the country (as used by the Chancery and Chaucer) would have had the following inventory. (There is continuing controversy over the number and phonetic quality of the diphthongs.)

The spelling shown in the examples is in many cases just one of several possibilities. The asterisk identifies emerging phonemes (see above).

Consonants

p, b *pin*, *bit*
t, d *tente*, *dart*
k, g *kin*, *good*
tʃ *chirche* ‘church’
dʒ *brigge* ‘bridge’
m, n, ŋ* *make*, *name*, *song*
l, r *lay*, *rage*
w, j *weep*, *yelwe* ‘yellow’
f, v* *fool*, *vertu* ‘virtue’
s, z* *sore*, *Zephirus*
θ, ð *thank*, *the*
ʃ, ʒ, x *shour*, *nyght*, *droghte*
h *happen*

Long vowels

i: *ryden*
e: *sweete*
ɛ: *heeth*
ɑ: *name*
u: *houre*
o: *good*
ɔ: *holy*

Short vowels

ɪ *this*
ɛ *men*
a *can*
ə *aboute* (in unstressed syllables)
ʊ *but*
ɔ *oft*

Diphthongs

æɪ *day*
ɔɪ* *joye*
ɔɪ* *joinen* ‘join’
ɪʊ *newe*
ɛʊ *fewe* ‘few’
aʊ *lawe*
ɔʊ *growe*

THE ORMULUM

ȝiss boc iss nemmedd
Ormulum, forþi þatt
Orm itt wrohhte.

*This book is called Ormulum,
because Orm wrote it.*

Little else is known about the author. The opening lines of the Dedication (see below) tell us that he has a brother, Walter, who is also an Augustinian canon. The text is c. 1180, and the dialect is probably north Midland. It is a series of homilies, intended to be read aloud. Over 10,000 full lines survive, and this (according to the contents) may be only about an eighth of the projected work.

Orm’s work is of interest not for its poetic style (a series of 15-syllable lines, meticulously kept, but with little ornament) nor especially for its content, which has attracted such epithets as ‘intolerably diffuse’ and ‘tedious’. Its significance is the idiosyncratic orthography, and in particular his system of consonant doubling. He has tried to devise a foolproof way of helping his intended readers, so that they make no mistakes when reading aloud.

Orm’s basic rule is to double a consonant after a short vowel in a closed syllable – a principle he implements scrupulously. His concern has been of great value to linguists, providing a major source of evidence about the length of vowels in early Middle English. He is very aware of what he is doing, and evidently quite proud of his system: indeed, at one point in his Dedication he warns future copyists to make sure they get his double lettering system right. No wonder that some have called him the first English spelling reformer.

Nu broþerr Wallterr,
broþerr min, affterr þe
flæshess kinde,
Annd broþerr min i
Cristtenndom þurrr
fulluht annd þurrr
trowwþe...

*Now brother Walter, my
brother, after the manner of
the flesh and my brother in
Christianity through baptism
and through faith...*