

A Traveler's Guide to Old English

By Oswyn of Baðon mka Sean Wilson oswyn969@gmail.com

Shire of Wurmwald, Middle Kingdom, Known World

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This class looks at some of the common elements in Old English and some of the development of the English language. Most of it is a bit of fun; how to make a name, some very basic phrases and some what if Norman French didn't enter English.

Anglo Saxon names

Anglo Saxon names are generally made up of two parts, a prototheme and a deutertheme. Initially, many of these are regional and are specific to gender. But as time goes on, the regionalism and gender shift. The 7 kingdoms gradually become one. The peoples intermix. Celts, Franks, Norse, and Danes add their culture and influence to the developing English character. And of course, towards the end of the Anglo-Saxon period, Norman French dominates.

While the names are often duo-themed, that is not exclusive. Some protothemes and deuterthemes can be used in either place. Some names are single syllables. As Christianity takes hold, traditional biblical names come into the language. The Normans bring their names to the language slightly before the Conquest. Pretty much after the Conquest, many names that we think are traditional English names, like John, Henry, Richard, William, Geoffery, etc. become very common and Anglo-Saxon names become less common. But they don't go away. Edward, Edgar, and even Oswyn are given names today.

There are a few themes that must only be used as either proto or deuthero. Most can be in either place. Also, few are exclusively masculine or feminine. Usually, if it indicates gender, it is a deutherotheme. However, over time, some of the gendered themes end up in other places. For instance, in early Anglo Saxon period, -wyn is a feminine theme. But by the 700's at least, it shows up on both lists. Partly, this is due to non-standard spellings. -wine is a masculine theme. But it can be spelled -wyne. The number of n's and e's can vary a lot. Notice by modern times, there are some men in England named Oswyn (Oswyn Murray for instance) and one of Doctor Who's female companion's was Oswin.

By the strict rules of grammar, a name like Godgod or Wulfwulf should be illegal names. We have a coin from the time of Edward the Confessor with Wulfwulf on it.

Traditionally Masculine themes

There are a lot more that I am not including. These are just a few examples.

Cyne -	-mund	-ric
-stan	-ward	-wine

Traditionally Feminine themes

-flaed	-gifu	-gyth
Hild-	Mil-	-thryth

Other name forms

Some names are not compound words, like Abbe, Offa, Penda. This is often true when double letters exist but not exclusively.

Interestingly, the "u" sound seems to be feminine in these cases.

Regionalism and Families

Especially in early Anglo Saxon times, certain protothemes denote region or family connections. Unlike in Norse and Danish areas, the -son or -ditter patronymic didn't develop yet. The repeating of the prototheme was a way to denote belonging to the same family. Consider these examples:

Several early kings of Wessex were: Cerdic, Cynric, Ceawlin, Ceol, Ceolwulf.

Several early kings of Northumbria were: Osric, Oswald, Oswiu, Oswine, Osred

Several early kings of Essex were: Saeberht, Sigbert, Swidhelm, Sighere, Sighard

Later Kings of Wessex and England were: Albert, Edmund, Aethelstan, Edgar, Edward, Aethelred.

We see the repeating sounds in several of these names. Names like Aethel- were found in several kingdoms. That is not surprising as it means noble. As time moves on, these protothemes can be found anywhere, not just in their particular region.

After contact with the Norse and the Danes, the use of a patronymic surname starts to occur, especially in the Danelaw regions. This is especially true as Norse and Danish names are not as rigid with the use of themes. We see a lot more single theme names in Norse and Danish names.

Nicknames

Another way to distinguish between two people with the same name is with nicknames.

The standard (but again not exclusive) way to form a diminutive of a masculine name is to use the prototheme and add –a. Sometimes letters need to be doubled. Oswyn would be Ossa.

The standard way to form a diminutive of a feminine name is the prototheme and add –e. This would be a pronounced sound. And notice it is how we form many nicknames today. Rebecca to Becky; Susan to Susie.

It is tempting but wrong to think that Offa is a diminutive of Of-<something>. It is not. It is interesting that Mercia seemed to have more of these single themed names than other kingdoms.

Other ways for nicknames are other contractions of standard names. We see this much later in time with Will or Bill for William for instance. It would not have been unusual to see Bertward to be shortened to Bert for instance.

Nicknames were given based on occupation, geographic location, personality trait, or physical characteristics. Eadric Streona, Eadric the Grasper (probably literally strong-handed), Sigert the Serious, and Aethelred the Unready greet us from the history pages. These were ways to tell people apart though I doubt Aethelred was called Unred to his face.

Common Old English Phrases for Anglo-Saxon personae

Yes	Gea (Ye-a)		No	Na		Maybe	Eade maeg (EA-the-maey)
Please	Gif þu wylt (if thou wilt)		Thank you	Ic þancie þe (ic Thankie thee)		What do you want?	Hwaet wilt þu (hwaet wilt thou)
Come here	Cum þu her (kum thou her)		Hello	Eala (EA-la)		Good Morning	God morgen (god MOR-gen)
Good bye	Wes þu hal (wes thou hal)		What is your name?	Hu hatte þu? (hu HAT-te thou)		My name is	Ic hatte (ic HAT-te)
What do you do?	Hwaet dest þu? (hwaet		I am a	Ic eom		Hunter	Hunta (Hun-ta)

	dest thu)				
cook	coc (cook)	Merchant	mangere (MAN-ge-re)	Teacher	Magister (MA-gis-ter)
Archer	sceotend (SEO-tend)	Doctor	Laece (LAE-ce),	Knight	Ridere (RI-de-re)
Student	Leornere (LEOR-ne-re),	Lawyer	Lahmann (LAKH-mann)	Warrior	Waepenbora (WAE-pen-bo-ra)
Where is the toll-booth (troll/gate)?	Hwaer is ceapsetl? (hwaer is CEAP-setl)	Where is the feast hall?	Hwaer is beorsele? (hwaer is BEOR-se-le)	Are you coming to the feast?	Cymst pu to beorscipe? (kiemst thu to BEOR-si-pe)?
I like this drink	Pis <drink> licap me (this drink LI-kath me)	Mead, ale, beer, wine	Medu, ealu, beor, win	I like music	Gliwcraeft licap me (GLIW-kraeft LI-kath me)

The Gouth of Hastings – Modern Old English if we had won the Battle of Hastings

There are a lot of French loan words in Modern English and most are a direct result of the Norman Conquest. In particular, in the fields of food and law, one can see these words. For instance, what do you call the food you eat? You probably call it *beef* and *pork*. It might have a *cream sauce* or be served with *mustard* or *mayonnaise*. Perhaps it is in a *casserole* or a *terriner*. Afterwards, you might have a *dessert*; some *custard*, *caramel*, or a *pastry*.

But the English peasant would be eating *cow* and *pig*. It might be served in with a *senep*, in a *bowl* or a *dish*. You might have a sweet *bread* afterwards.

In law, in Modern English, you would appear in *court*, in front of a *judge*. You would have an *attorney* who pleads you *case* to the *jury*.

But, the English peasant would appear in the *hove*, in front of a *dema* or a *thane*. You would argue your *forthsentence*, speaking with *sooth*, and hope for *rightwise*.

I have rendered some of the Old English words in a modern spelling.

So, what if the English won the Battle of Hastings and English continued to evolve without Norman influence? This is the premise of the book *Hasting, 1066- Words We'd Wield If We'd Won* by David Cowley. I can't say he is accurate but it is fun. By and large, the author follows English styles of making words. Most of our adjective and adverb endings are the same in Old English; -ness, -ing, -ly, -ed, -ful. Most of our prefixes are Old English; un-, be-, in-. So, using these parts of speech with good English words, we can develop a bit of a strange sounding but entertaining mode of speech.

Why did things change?

Between 1066 and 1086, 4500 English thanes have been replaced by 180 barons, only 2 were English. There were 1400 middle landowners, only about 100 of which are English. In 20 years, upper English society is basically Norman. In the Early 1100, William of Malmesbury writes, "It is the habitation of strangers and the dominion of foreigners. There is today no Englishman who is either earl, bishop, or abbot. The newcomers devour the riches and entrails of England and there is no hope of the misery coming to an end."

In 1204, France fully incorporates Normandy as part of France proper. Under Henry II, Richard, and John (the Angevin Kings of England), England controlled several French provinces. In 1204, John loses those provinces to the French crown. Lords with lands in both England and France must choose one or the other. While this means the lords of England become more "English", the French language is in the ascendant internationally and more French words enter in English, particularly in law, war, and government.

It is only after the Black Death in the 1340's that French starts to die out in England. As French speaking nobles die to the Plague, native English speakers (who are speaking Middle English which has a good deal of those loan words in it) can move into positions of power.

In 1362 English is the official language in Parliament and Courts of Law.

Henry IV, in 1399, is the first King of England since Harold Godwinson to be a native English speaker.

In terms of our modern English, about 4500 words survive from Old English to Modern English. That is about 1% of the OED. These are common words though like: day, year, chest, arm, heart, eat, love, think, wife, become. FDR's famous speech has the sentence, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." These are all Old English words in origin.

The Danelaw introduced some Old Norse words into English. These two languages are related so speakers of either probably understood one another on a basic level. Old Norse introduces words like: law, murder, they, them, their, leg, and husband.

The greatest change to Old English is after the Norman Invasion. As shown above, Norman French becomes the de facto language for court and the nobility. About 10,000 words in modern English trace back to Norman French.

Examples: Numeral level is the time period. Then a is French/Latin and b is Old English

1) 1100's

- a. war, court, market, peace, treasure, fruit, mercy
- b. hild, hove, chepstow, frith, mathum, wastum, milce

2) 1200's

- a. Obedience, poor, service, heritage, noble, place, prince, change, face
- b. Hearsomeness, earm, thaning, yearve, athel, stead, atheling, wending, anleth

- 3) 1300's
 - a. Savior, age, officer, remember, royal, authority, question, perjury
 - b. Healand, eld, wike, eftmind, kingly, onwield, frayn, oathbreach

- 4) 1400's
 - a. Loyalty, public, prevent, solar
 - b. Holdsomeness, folkly, forstand, sunly

- 5) 1500's
 - a. Legal, conspicuous, external
 - b. Lawly, forthseen, outkind

French Words in English

Judicial: justice, judge, jury, attorney, court, case

Food: Veal, beef, pork, mutton, petit four, soufflé, mille-feuille, croissant, pastry, gateau, baba au rhum, cream, caramel, custard, marmalade, meringue, clafoutis, flognarde, beef bourguignon, cassoulet, casserole, confit, gratin, mustard, mayonnaise, sauce, pâté, foie gras, terrine

Other words: **Money** (from the French 'monnaie'), **bottle** (from the French 'bouteille'), **chair** (from the French 'chaise'), **road** (from the French 'route'), **table** (from the French 'table'), **chamber** (from the French 'chambre'), **air** (from the French 'air'), **flower** (from the French 'fleur'), **fork** (from the French 'fourchette'), **garden** (from the French 'jardin'), **lamp** (from the French 'lampe'), **farm** (from the French 'ferme'), **forest** (from the French 'forêt'), **hotel** (from the French 'hôtel'), **brick** (from the French 'brique'), **image** (from the French 'image'), **plate** (from the French 'plateau'), **story** (from the French 'histoire'), **odour** or **odor** (from the French 'odeur'), **stranger** (from the French 'étranger'), **beef** (from the French 'boeuf'), **vinegar** (from the French 'vinaigre'), **parent** (from the French 'parent'), **herbs** (from the French 'herbes'), **arm** (from the French 'arme'), **army** (From the French 'armée'), **source** (from the French 'source'), **grand** (from the French 'grand'), **joy** (from the French 'joie'), **fluid** (from the French 'fluide'), **ray** (from the French 'rayon'), **bicycle** (from the French 'bicyclette'), **tube** (from the French 'tube'), **car** (from the French 'char'), **eagle** (from the French 'aigle'), **lake** (from the French 'lac'), **mountain** (from the French 'montagne'), **lion** (from the French 'lion'), **voyage** (from the French 'voyage'), **lizard** (from the French 'lézard'), **bullet** (from the French 'balle'), **hero** (from the French 'héro'), **hazard** (from the French 'hasard'), **cave** (from the French 'cave'), **current** (from the French 'courant'), **carbon** (from the French 'charbon'), **autumn** (from the French 'automne'), **case** (from the French 'cas'), **pedestal** (from the French 'piédestal'), **parachute** (from the French 'para-chute'), **habit** (from the French 'habitude'), **altitude** (from the French 'altitude'), **attitude** (from the French 'attitude'), **final** (from the French 'finale'), **revenge** (from the French 'revanche'), **itinerary** (from the French 'itinéraire'), **orange**(fruit) (from the French 'orange'), **ticket** (from the French 'ticket'), **barrel** (from the French 'baril'), **retard** (from the French 'retarder'), **appeasement** (from the French 'apaisement'), **aviation** (from the French 'avion'), **miracle**

(from the French 'miracle'), **tablet** (from the French 'tablette'), **pincer** (from the French 'pincer'), **tennis** (from the French 'tenir'), **exercise** (from the French 'exercice'), **repetition** (from the French 'répétition'), **proposition** (from the French 'proposition'), **police** (from the French 'police'), **apartment** (from the French 'appartement'), **atrocitiy** (from the French 'atrocité'), **ignorant** (from the French 'ignorant'), **arrogant** (from the French 'arrogant'), **large** (from the French 'large'), **brave** (from the French 'brave'), **stupid** (from the French 'stupide'), **luminous** (from the French 'lumineux'), **to push** (from the French 'pousser'), **to touch** (from the French 'toucher'), **to cry** (from the French 'crier'), **to gain** (from the French 'gagner'), **to join** (from the French 'joindre'), **to pray** (from the French 'prier'), **to marry** (from the French 'se marier'), **to divorce** (from the French 'se divorcer'), **to return** (from the French 'retourner'), **to sign** (from the French 'signer'), **to mention** (from the French 'mentionner'), **to paint** (from the French 'peindre'), **to pave** (from the French 'paver'), **to launch** (from the French 'lancer'), **to visite** (from the French 'visiter'), **to reduce** (from the French 'réduire'), **to obtain** (from the French 'obtenir'), **to promise** (from the French 'promettre'), **to admit** (from the French 'admettre'), **to appear** (from the French 'apparaître'), **to disappear** (from the French 'disparaître'), **to vomit** (from the French 'vomir'), **to train** (from the French 's'entraîner'), **to refuse** (from the French 'refuser'), **to invent** (from the French 'inventer'), **to mock** (from the French 'se moquer de'), **to emerge** (from the French 'émerger'), **to install** (from the French 'installer'), **to reject** (from the French 'rejeter'), **to guard** (from the French 'garder'), **to treat** (from the French 'traiter'), **to secure** (from the French 'securiser'), **to attack** (from the French 'attaquer'), **to complete** (from the French 'compléter'), **to consider** (from the French 'considérer'), **to advance** (from the French 'avancer'), **to arrest** (from the French 'arrêter'), **to distract** (from the French 'distraindre'), **to partake** (from the French 'partager'), **to forfeit** (from the French 'forfait'), **to reflect** (from the French 'réfléter'), **to render** (from the French 'rendre'), **to adore** (from the French 'adorer'), **to engage** (from the French 'engager'), **to navigate** (from the French 'naviguer'), **to evoke** (from the French 'évoquer'), **to compromise** (from the French 'compromettre'), **to reinforce** (from the French 'renforcer'), **to negotiate** (from the French 'négocier'), **to cascade** (from the French 'cascader'), **to appreciate** (from the French 'apprécier'), **to pulverise** or **to pulverize** (from the French 'pulvériser'), **to clarify** (from the French 'clarifier'), **to restore** (from the French 'restaurer'), **to refine** (from the French 'raffiner'), **to pardon** (from the French 'pardonner'), **to excuse** (from the French 'excuser'), **to adjust** (from the French 'ajuster'), **to glorify** (from the French 'glorifier'), **to (e)rase** (from the French 'raser'), **to enrich** (from the French 's'enricher'), **to depart** (from the French 'départ'), **to contain** (from the French 'contenir'), **to maintain** (from the French 'maintenir'), **to envelop** (from the French 'envelopper')

Norse Loan Words

As much as I like to bash the Normans, there are plenty of other loan words in English. Old English and Old Norse share a common linguistic ancestor so some words are from that common Germanic language. But other words are straight influences. Since 793 when the Vikings sacked Lindisfarne, words have come into English from Norse. Here are some examples.

Loan, Leg, Law, anger, -by (often as a suffix for a placename) and then bylaw, cake, dirt, egg (interestingly, yolk is English and gold is Norse), happy, ugly. There are many others.

Additional loan words are from Celtic languages (mostly Welsh and Irish), Latin, Greek, and Arabic. Nearly any language can loan words into English.

Shift in how words are formed

One last note of interest to our poets. Old English, like many languages, like German or Latin, determined the word function by a suffix. A sentence could be formed with almost any word position and still make sense because the ending of the word would tell you if it was subject, verb, or object. Hence, Old English poetry was alliterative. You could adjust the beginning of a sentence to contain the same letter or sound. You almost had to.

Starting in Middle English and finalized in Modern English, it is much easier to rhyme in poetry. English and Norse are similar but they had different endings to denote word function. Over time, as these groups of people developed a pidgin language to communicate, the endings simplified. Also, word position became more important in determining word function. In general, an English sentence begins with the subject, then goes to the verb, then the object. Endings tend to be –s for plural. –ed for past tense. –ly for an adverb. Etc. English has much fewer regular verb tenses than other languages. There are still plenty of word endings but not nearly as important as previously.