

**THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPTS**

**EPISODE 41:
NEW WORDS FROM OLD ENGLISH**

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast - a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 41: New Words From Old English. In this episode, we're going to explore the how the Anglo-Saxons expanded their vocabulary by creating new words from old words. This included putting two or more existing words together to create new compound words. It also included the use of prefixes and suffixes, many of which survive into Modern English. And once we've explored this process, we're going to see how this new expanded vocabulary combined with the expansion of learning to make Old English a true literary language capable of producing sophisticated literature, including the most well-known work in Old English – Beowulf.

A quick note before we begin. This episode is about words – lots of words. In fact, this episode is probably more ‘word-heavy’ than any other episode. And that’s because I want to illustrate how the Anglo-Saxons were constantly creating new words within Old English. And all of those new words ultimately allowed English to emerge as a fully mature literary language.

It is important to keep in mind that the original Germanic language was a very basic ‘earthy’ language. By now, you will have probably noticed that Old English words tend to be short and simple. They are often single-syllable words, and they tend to express basic ideas and concepts. They’re the types of words that children learn very early on. Imagine trying to write a novel or an epic poem with the vocabulary of the average small child. You might be able to do it, but it would be a challenge. And that was the problem with earliest version of Old English. But over time, Old English added more and more new words. Some were borrowed, some were translations of foreign words, and many were new native words. As the vocabulary grew, English was better able to express subtly, nuance and emotion.

It’s difficult to say when English reached this critical mass. There probably wasn’t a specific point and time. It just became easier over time to compose more expressive poems and stories. But by the middle 700s, we can say with some certainty that English had achieved the threshold of a great literary language because that was the period when Beowulf was likely composed. And Beowulf is still considered by many scholars to be the greatest surviving literary work in Old English.

So let’s look at the growth of the Old English vocabulary. And as we’ve seen over the past couple of episodes, English was growing during the 600s and 700s thanks to the influence of Latin. Sometimes those Latin words were translated into English by using older English words in new ways. And increasingly, those Latin words were beginning to be borrowed directly into English. But in addition to the influence of Latin, English was also enriching its vocabulary from within by creating new native words.

In earlier episodes, I’ve noted that the Anglo-Saxons loved to use compound words. This had always been a feature of Anglo-Saxon poetry because that type of poetry relied upon alliteration. And alliteration required poets to use words which began with certain sounds at specific places in each line of the poem.

So Old English poets routinely invented new compound words to make the alliteration work the way it was supposed to. And as we saw, they also relied upon certain stock phrases which allowed them fill in a blank space with a word which began with the right sound.

Well this process of creating compound words was not limited to poets. This was actually the traditional way of creating new words within the language. And this process of making new compound words is a legacy of Old English which survives into Modern English. We still do it all the time. When we encounter new technology, we often invent new compound words to describe it. Think about the vocabulary of the modern computer and internet age. English had to come up with new words to describe all of that new technology. So English speakers created words like **chatroom**, **newsgroup**, **doubleclick**, **flash drive**, **flat screen**, **widescreen**, **laptop**, **smartphone**, **photobomb**, **website**, **webpage**, **homepage**, **username** – and even the word **podcast** is a compound word from pieces of other words – **iPod** and **broadcast**. So English still makes new compound words all the time.

So let's take a closer look at some of the oldest compound words in English.

Some of those words used by the earliest Anglo-Saxons have actually survived into modern English in basically their original form, and we still use them all the time. Words like **sunbeam**, **earring**, **landmark**, **rainbow** and **butterfly** all exist today virtually unchanged from the time of the Anglo-Saxons. Even the term **ice cold**, which is two separate words today, was once a compound word in Old English. It's pronunciation and meaning have changed very little over the centuries.

Sometimes the compound nature of the word has been lost over time. In previous episodes, I have given the example of **garlic**. It was originally a compound word – **gar** meaning 'spear' and **leac** meaning 'leek.' So it was a spear-shaped leek. But over time, that original meaning has been lost, and we not longer recognize it as a compound word.

Another example of this is place names. A few of these place names have popped up in earlier episodes. **England** was originally a compound word – **Engla-lond** – Land of the Angles. **Oxford** was the 'ox ford' – the place where oxen crossed the river. **Canterbury** was a combination of **Cant** meaning 'Kent,' **ware** meaning 'people,' and **buruh** meaning 'walled or fortified town.' So it was the fortified town of Kentish people.

Another Old English compound word which we still have in modern English is **headache**. It was originally **heafod-ece**. Another Old English word for 'headache' was **heafod-weore** which was literally 'head-weary.'

In addition to **headache**, Old English also had the word **heartache** which was **heort-ece**. But the original meaning was much more literal. It was literally a pain in your heart or your chest. To express the idea of sadness or grief, the Anglo-Saxons used a similar word – **heart-sarnes**, which was literally 'heart soreness.' So there was a difference between having a 'heartache' and

having ‘heart soreness,’ but you can see how the meaning of sadness shifted from one term to the other over time since they were so similar.

One other quick note about that word **ache** before we move on. In Old English, the word **ache** could be either a noun or a verb just like today. So you could have an ache in your head (a noun) or your head could ache (a verb). But the pronunciation was slightly different in each case. The verb form was /ock/ – pronounced today as /ake/. So your head might /ock/ – or ‘ache’ – if you had a hangover after drinking too much mead.

But the noun form was /ah-che/. So if we shift the sound of that vowel to our modern vowel sound, it would be /ay-che/ for the noun. So you would have an /ay-che/ in your head. But your head would /ake/. And that may seem a little strange, but it really isn’t. Think about words like **speak** and **speech**. And **stink** and **stench**. So the verb forms are /ake/, **speak** and **stink** – all with the ‘K’ sound at the end. And the noun forms are /ay-che/, **speech** and **stench** – all with that ‘CH’ sound at the end. So these were common constructions in Old English. But whereas, modern English has retained words like **speak** and **speech** – and **stink** and **stench**, it didn’t retain both /ake/ and /ay-che/. But interestingly, it retained the pronunciation of one and the spelling of the other.

Notice the spelling of the word **ache** – A-C-H-E. So English retained the verb form – /ake/ – for pronunciation. But it retained the spelling of the noun form – /ay-che/. So this is one more example of why Modern English spellings are so complicated. Sometimes speakers used one version and scribes used the other, and after that, the two versions no longer matched phonetically.

Another Old English compound word which survives in British English, but is rarely found American English, is **fortnight**. In America, we generally hear the term used in conjunction with British events – like the Wimbledon Tennis Championships. But otherwise, it doesn’t really exist in American English. The term **fortnight** is literally ‘fourteen nights’ – or ‘two weeks.’ The Old English word was **feowertyne-niht** – ‘fourteen night’. But over the years, the word was shortened and abbreviated to simply **fortnight**.

So you may be wondering why it was called ‘fourteen nights’ and not ‘fourteen days.’ Well, this was actually derived from the original Germanic tribes who tended to count by nights. This was actually mentioned by Tacitus in Germania. And the Anglo-Saxons inherited that tradition. And they not only had a word for ‘fourteen nights’ meaning ‘two weeks’ – they also had a word for ‘seven nights’ meaning ‘one week.’ That word **seofon niht** – literally ‘seven nights.’ It was shortened to **sennight** in Middle English, but it eventually disappeared, whereas **fortnight** was retained.

Another example of this process is the word **daisy** – as in the flower. It also started out as an Old English compound word, but over time it got shortened and the compound nature of the word was lost. It was originally **dæges eage** which was ‘day’s eye.’ It was called a ‘day’s eye’ because the petals opened at dawn and closed at dusk. And over time, ‘days eye’ became **daisy**.

And speaking of dawn and dusk, the word **dawn** was originally a compound word in Old English. It was **dæg-red** which was literally ‘day red,’ perhaps a reference to the morning sun.

Another Old English word for ‘dawn’ was **ær-dæg** which was literally ‘early day.’

Both of these words were later replaced by the Norse word **dawn** after the Vikings arrived. The word **dawn** was a variation of the word **day**, so **day** and **dawn** are actually cognate.

Now a few episodes back I discussed Anglo-Saxon marriage terms, and I noted that the word **bridal** was originally a compound word – **bride ale**, which was the ‘bride celebration’ or the wedding reception. And as you may recall, an **ale** was a feast or celebration derived from the word **ale** as beer or malted beverage, presumably because a lot of beer was consumed at those feasts.

Well, ale was sometimes consumed at a specific place, sort of like an early bar or pub. And the word for that place survives to this day. It was called an **ealo-hus** – an ‘ale house.’ And even today, the term ‘ale house’ is still a popular term for bars. And if you’re familiar with Beowulf, you know another name for this type of place – the **medu heall** – the ‘mead hall.’

And when you drink a lot of ale at the ale house or mead hall, you might get drunk. And **drunk** is also an Anglo-Saxon word. And the Anglo-Saxons created a couple of other compound words to describe that condition. If you were drunk on wine, you were **win-druncen** – wine drunk. And if you were drunk on beer, you were **beore-druncen** – beer drunk.

Now beginning with the late Anglo-Saxons, an English official was assigned to travel around and test the ale to make sure it up to par. He would travel to ale-houses and order a pint and sample it. Depending upon the quality of the brew, he could actually dictate the price that could be charged for the ale. But how did he evaluate the quality of the drink? Well, believe it or not, he would pour it on his bench and sit in it for 30 minutes. When he stood up, if the ale stuck to his pants, the ale-house could be fined for serving poor quality ale which was too sweet or had illegal additives. This official was called an **ale-connor**. **Connor** was an Old English word which meant examiner or inspector. And it’s also the root of the modern surname **Conner**.

Now I noted that ale or mead was also consumed in the ‘mead hall.’ **Hall** was an Anglo-Saxon word, but another word for ‘hall’ was **stig** (/stee/). It was the same word used for an animal pen as in **pig stig** – or ‘pig sty’ using the modern pronunciation. But as I said, **stig** could also describe a ‘hall’ or ‘meeting place.’ The person who was in charge of the **stee** was the **stee guardian** or the **stee ward**. And **stee ward** ultimately became **steward** (S-T-E-W-A-R-D) in Modern English. So **steward** was originally a compound word. And by the way, **steward** is also the root of the modern surname **Stuart** which will become a very important surname in later English royal history.

Believe it or not, some incredibly common English words like **none**, **never** and **nothing** were all originally compound words. **None** was ‘not one,’ originally pronounced ‘**ne an**.’ Over time the two syllable ‘**ne an**’ became the single syllable **nan**, and later **none**.

Never was originally ‘not ever’ pronounced ‘**ne æfre**’ (/nay av-re/). And again, it was such a common expression that it eventually evolved into a single word – **never**.

And **nothing** was originally a combination of **none** and **thing**. It was pronounced ‘**nan þing**’ in Old English. And later it evolved into modern **nothing**.

Another area where a lot of those original compound words survive into modern English is maritime activity. As we’ve seen before, the Anglo-Saxon culture was originally a maritime culture, and a lot of Old English words related to ships and shipping are still found in the language today. And since the Anglo-Saxons occasionally had to come up with new maritime words, they often used compound words.

In earlier episodes, we saw how Old English poets created numerous compound words for the sea and for ships. So a boat was sometimes called **sea wood**, or a **wave-courser**, or a **curved stem**. And the sea was sometimes called the **whale road** or the **water’s back**. These were mainly poetic compounds which are sometimes called ‘kennings.’ And in some cases, these compounds were so commonly used as stock phrases that they began to filter into general usage beyond poems. And many of those compounds are still used today.

Words like **seawall** and **ship rope** were commonly-used words in Old English.

A stormy sea was **storm-sæ** – literally ‘storm sea.’ The open sea was **wid-sæ** – literally ‘wide sea.’

We also know that the Anglo-Saxons used the word **mere** for ‘sea’ as in **mermaid**. Well if you were tired of being at sea, you were **mere-werig** – literally ‘sea weary.’

If you were ‘sea weary,’ you might prefer to be a **landlubber** – another Old English compound word which survives into Modern English. **Landlubber** is another one of those words which has acquired a different meaning over time. The word originally meant a vagabond or homeless person. The etymology of **landlubber** is directly related to the word **lope** meaning ‘run’ in Old English. We actually saw that word a few episodes back in the context of marriage terms. You might remember that **lop** is cognate with **leap**, and it ultimately gives us the word **elope** – meaning ‘to run away to get married.’

Well a person who runs around on land was a **land-loper** – ‘a land runner.’ It was originally used to describe a person without a fixed home who travels around from place to place. So it was basically a vagabond or hobo. But as the word **lop** gradually disappeared from English, the original meaning of the word was lost. That word **loper** gradually evolved into **lubber**. And

over time, the word began to sound like ‘land lover.’ So the word began to acquire a new meaning. And it started to mean a person who loves land, as opposed to the sea.

In Old English, a ‘shipwreck’ was a **scipge-broc** – a ‘ship break.’

A person who worked on a ship was **sea man**. And that word still exists as **seaman**.

Another word for seaman was a **shipwright** which was literally a ‘ship worker.’ The word **wright** meant ‘worker.’ It was also used by the Anglo-Saxons to create a word for a jeweler. A jeweler was a **gimm-wyrhta** – a gem worker. And it was used to describe a wagon builder. The original version of **wagon** was **wain**, so a ‘wagon worker’ was a **wainwright**. That term no longer exists, except as a family surname. However, thanks to Middle English, we do still have the word **playwright** which is literally a ‘play-worker.’

Today, the word **flood** means an overflow of water, but the original version of the word in Old English had a slightly different meaning. It was a more general term for a body of water – either the sea, or a lake, or a river. So the Old English word for ‘deep water’ was **heah-flod** – literally ‘high flood,’ but it meant ‘high water.’

The Anglo-Saxons also had the compound word **heah-tid** which was ‘high tide,’ but it didn’t mean ‘high tide’ in the sense that the phrase is used today. It was actually a term for a festival or prominent day. In Old English, the word **tid** – or **tide** – didn’t refer to the change in the ocean level. It was actually a term which meant ‘time.’ In fact **tide** and **time** are cognate. And we still have that original usage in some words. For example, **yuletide** actually means ‘yule time.’

So the compound word **high tide** actually meant ‘high time,’ sort of like in Modern English when we say “It was high time you got here.” So it actually meant a prominent time of the day or of the year, and it was usually used in reference to a celebration or a festival. And we actually still have the phrase “A high time was had by all” which is basically the same usage. But again, in Old English it was **high tide**. So we might have said ‘A high tide was had by all.’ So ‘high tide’ didn’t have anything to do with the sea level.

All of that changed in Middle English. During that later period, people would speak of the ‘tide’ or ‘time’ when the sea level was at its highest. And the ‘tide’ or ‘time’ when it was at its lowest. And it was through this usage that the phrases **high tide** and **low tide** came into being - again originally meaning ‘high time’ and ‘low time.’

By the way the sense of the word **tide** as ‘time’ led to the word **tidy** as well. It originally meant ‘timely’ – or ‘punctual.’ Basically having everything in order at the right time. But now it just means having everything in order, so it means neat or organized.

If you were a seaman or a sailor, you had to be careful or you might fall ‘overboard’ – another Old English compound word which has changed very little over the past thousand years or so.

Just like it Modern English, the word **board** had two meanings. It could refer to a wood plank, or it could refer to the side of a ship as in the word **overboard**. And since ships were made from wood, it is very tempting to assume that **board** – meaning a piece of wood – led to the word **board** meaning the side of the ship. And while that is possible, not everyone agrees with that etymology.

The word **board** was important in another Old English compound word as well – the word **starboard** meaning the right side of the ship. The original compound word was actually **steorbord** which was literally ‘steer-board’ – the board used for steering. Early ships were steered with a large oar or rudder which was actually called the **steer**. So **steer** was also a noun in Old English. The rudder or steer was typically located on the right side of the ship. So that became the ‘steer board’ which meant the ‘rudder side.’ So contrary to what a lot of people assume, the word **starboard** doesn’t actually have anything to do with the stars. Over time, the pronunciation of the word just evolved and changed from ‘steer board’ to ‘star board.’

Since the steering mechanism of the ship was usually located on the right side, it meant that ships had to dock on the left side. So they were loaded and unloaded at port on the left side. This side came to be known as the **laddeborde** in Middle English, which was literally the ‘loading side’. The term later became **larboard**, but it was apparently confused with **starboard**. And if you were trying to maneuver a ship in a severe storm, you didn’t want the sailors to be confused between **starboard** and **larboard**. So **larboard** was soon dropped in favor of another term. Since the **larboard** or ‘loading side’ was the side where the port was, it came to be known as the **port** side. And that resolved the confusion with the similar names. So today we have the ‘port side’ and the ‘starboard side.’ But **starboard** is an Old English compound word which still exists in Modern English.

Now the port side of the ship was literally the port side – the side where people and goods were loaded and unloaded. Well, in order to move people and goods onto and off of the ship, a portable ramp was placed between the ship and the pier. This ramp or passage was called the **gangweg** on Old English. And it became known as the **gangway**. And it’s still sometimes used as the interjection – like “Gangway!” to mean ‘Get out of the way, I’m coming through.’

Another Old English compound word related to maritime activity was **sund-gyrd** which was literally ‘sound gird.’ The word **sound** in Old English was a verb used to describe the process of determining the depth of the sea. And it was probably from the use of the word **sound** as a channel of water. And the word **gyrd** came from the same root as **yard** and **garden**. Specifically, it meant to encircle or surround something. So a **sund-gyrd** was a sounding pole or line to determine the sea depth of the water around a ship. Even though that compound word no longer exists in English, each of its two root words are still found in English. We still use the phrase ‘to sound out’ to mean the process of discerning or determining something. And sometimes we use a ‘sounding board’ to mean a group which discerns or evaluates ideas. Both of these uses of the word ‘sound’ come from the sense of trying to determine the depth of the water around a ship.

The word **gyrd** also still exists. Remember it originally meant ‘to encircle or surround.’ From that original use, it came to describe something that encircles a person’s waist. And it gave us the words **girth** and **girdle** – originally meaning a belt or sash worn around the waist. This led to the sense of the word **gird** to mean something that provides support. And from there, it gave us the word **girder** meaning a support beam.

So we’ve seen a lot of compound words which still exist in some form in Modern English. But of course, there were a lot of compound words which haven’t survived. And those are kind of fun to look to at because it shows how the Anglo-Saxons used existing words to create new words.

So for example, a crime was a ‘high sin’ (**heahsynn**). And a lamp was a ‘light vessel.’ (**leoht-fæt**)

I mentioned in the last episode that the word **purple** came into English from Latin. But the Anglo-Saxons also had a native English word for the color. Purple dye was derived from shellfish mainly in the Mediterranean. The early Phoenicians were specialists at producing the dye, and in fact **Phoenicia** meant ‘land of the purple.’ The Anglo-Saxons must have had some knowledge of how purple dye was obtained, because they originally called the color purple ‘fish dye’ (**fisc-daeg**). The word **purple** actually appeared for the first time in the Lindisfarne Gospels. And it quickly replaced ‘fish dye’ as the name for the color.

In Old English, a distant relative was a **feor-sibb** – a far sibling.

Someone who was cheerful was **glæd-mod** (/glad-mode/) which was ‘glad mood.’

Someone who was arrogant was **ofer-modig** (/over-mode-y/) – literally ‘over moody.’

Something that was precious was **deor-wurþe** which was literally ‘dear worth.’

Something that was desirable was **lust-bære** (/loost bæ-re/) – ‘lust bearing.’

So you can see how English was becoming more expressive as a language. All of those compound words were providing a subtlety of expression which hadn’t existed before.

Something that was ‘very high’ was ‘high steep.’ (**heah-steap**)

We’ve seen before that the word for ‘creation’ was **frumsceaft** – literally ‘from shaping’ or ‘origin shaping.’ Another word used for ‘creation’ was **frum-weorc** – literally ‘from work’ or ‘beginning work.’

The basic law of the people – what we call ‘common law’ today – was called the ‘folk right’ (**folc-riht**) or ‘folk law’ (**folc-lagu**).

We’ve seen before that property was called **feoh** in Old English. Well, household goods were called **innefeoh** – ‘inside property.’

A ‘stranger’ was a **ni-fara** – a ‘new farer’ which used the same construction as **seafarer** and **wayfarer**.

The word **galon** meant ‘to sing’ in Old English. Remember that the ‘G’ sound shifted to a ‘Y’ sound in a lot of Old English words – especially before the front vowels I and E. So **galon** has a related word **giellan** which ultimately produced the word **yell** in Modern English. But **galon** retained its original ‘G’ sound since the initial G in that word came before a front vowel - A. So **galon** became **gale**. And a bird which sang at night was a ‘night gale’ – or a **nightingale** today.

A **gale** or song could be enchanting and could send someone into a trance-like state. So an Old English word for ‘magic’ was **galdor-cræft** – or ‘singing craft.’

Another similar word for magic which still exists is the word **wicce-cræft** – literally ‘witchcraft.’ I noted in an earlier episode that the Anglo-Saxons sometimes called a spider a **ganglewavre** – a ‘going weaver.’ They also used the word **spiðra** which is the original version of our word **spider**. The word **spiðra** meant ‘the spinner,’ and it is actually cognate with the word **spin**.

But the most common word for a spider in Old English was another compound word – **atter-coppe** – literally ‘poison head.’ In Old English, **ator** meant ‘poison or venom,’ and **copp** meant ‘top, summit or round head.’ So apparently the Anglo-Saxons thought all spiders were poisonous. And some people today still share that opinion. At some point though, **atter-coppe** was shortened to simply **coppe**. And the web which was spun by a spider or **coppe** was a **cop-web** – or **cobweb** today.

The word **cucumber** came in after the Normans from French. But the Anglo-Saxons already had that vegetable. They called it **eorþ-æppla** – literally ‘earth-apples.’

And as you might imagine, the Anglo-Saxons had lots of words for warriors and fighters. **Berend** meant ‘bearer.’ So a warrior was sometimes called a **gar-berend** – a ‘spear bearer.’ Or a **helm-berend** – a ‘helmet bearer.’

I’ve also noted before that ‘**sword-play**’ was an Old English compound word. It meant a battle or fight. They also sometimes used phrases which translate as ‘weapon exchange’ (**wæpunge-wrixl**) and ‘death-spear exchange’ (**wæl-gara wrixl**). They had a term for an argument which translated as ‘word exchange’ (**wordum wrixlan**). This phrase was used in Beowulf, – and it still exists in Modern English as the phrase an ‘exchange of words.’

And the Anglo-Saxons had several words for a sword. The word **sword** was an Anglo-Saxon word – **sweord**. But they had another term which is really interesting if you are a Star Wars fan. They sometimes called a sword – a **beado-leoma** – literally a ‘battle light.’ Which is really not that far from a ‘light saber.’

So by now, you can see how the Anglo-Saxons were very adept at creating new words by combining existing words.

A slightly different aspect of this process was the use of prefixes and suffixes. So instead of combining two or more independent or stand-alone words, they sometimes added a standard

prefix or suffix to an existing word to create a new word. And we still do that today. In fact, we still use many of the same prefixes and suffixes which were used by the Anglo-Saxons.

The prefix ‘**a**’ (/ah/) or /ay/ was used in both Old English and Latin. The Latin version meant ‘not’ or ‘away from.’ But the Old English version meant ‘on,’ and it produced words like **alive**, **asleep** and **afoot**.

After was a common Old English prefix. The period after noon became **afternoon**. In an earlier episode we saw that the month after Yule – so basically our modern January – was **AfterYule**. And the Latin word **epilogue** was translated as **afterword**.

The prefix ‘be-’ produced words like **before**, **behead** and **become**.

The prefix ‘for-’ produced words like **forget**, **forgo**, **forbid**, and **forgive**.

The prefix ‘forth-’ produced words like **forðcuman** – which we know today as **forthcoming**.

The prefix ‘in-’ produced word like **income** which was originally a literal compound. It meant to come in or arrive, but it later came to mean ‘incoming money.’ And that is the sense of the word today.

The prefix ‘mis-’ produced words like **misdeed** meaning a ‘bad deed’ or ‘sin.’ It also produced the verb **misdo** meaning ‘to do something incorrectly’ or ‘to do something evil.’ **Mislike** was ‘to do something offensive or displeasing.’ To **misthink** something was ‘to be mistaken.’ To **mistime** something was ‘to fail to time something properly,’ and that’s a construction which we still use.

The prefix ‘over-’ produced words like **overall**, **overcome**, **overdo**, and **override**.

The prefix ‘to-’ produced words like **together**, **today** and **tonight**. It also produced the word **tomorrow** meaning ‘to the morrow’ or ‘to the morning.’

The prefix ‘through-’ (**thurh**) produced the word **throughout**.

The incredibly common prefix ‘un-’ meaning ‘not’ was also an Old English prefix. It produced Old English words like **unbind**, **unborn**, **unclean**, **uncouth**, **undo**, **uneven**, **unfair** and many, many others.

The prefix ‘under-’ produced words like **undergo**, **underlie**, **underneath** and **understand**. It was also used to translate the Latin word **subscribe** meaning ‘to write at the bottom of something.’ **Subscribe** was translated as **underwrite**.

In a similar manner, the prefix ‘up-’ produced words like **upright** and **upon** which was literally ‘up on.’

The prefix ‘out-’ produced words like **outward** and **outlaw** – someone outside of the law. And **outlandish** which was originally a reference to an **outlander** – in other words a ‘foreigner.’ Foreigners sometimes had odd customs, and they behaved strangely. And **outlandish** came to refer to strange or bizarre behavior.

The prefix ‘with-’ produced words like **within**, **without** and **withstand** in Old English.

In addition to many common prefixes which still survive, the Anglo-Saxons also used a lot of common suffixes to create new words. Many of those suffixes have continued into Modern English, and in fact are even more common today than they were during the Old English period.

To create adjectives, they used a suffix like ‘-sum’ which can be found in Old English words like **lovesome** and **winsome**. And of course, we find that suffix in lots of words today.

Another common adjective suffix was ‘-wis’ – pronounced ‘wise’ today. The Anglo-Saxons used it in the word **otherwise**. They also combined the word **right** with that suffix, and they produced the word **rihtwis** – ‘right-wise.’ But over time the form of the word changed. It eventually became **righteous**.

The suffix ‘-ful’ was also used by the Anglo-Saxons. They used it to create words like **handful** and **wonderful**.

The suffix ‘-leas’ is the origin of our modern-day ‘**less**.’ The Anglo-Saxons used it in words like **careless**, **endless**, **headless** and **lifeless**.

And two of our most common adjective suffixes also originated during this early period. ‘-ish’ was used a suffix in **childish**, **manish** and the word **outlandish** which I gave earlier. It was also commonly used as a place of origin. Words like **English**, **British**, and **Danish** we’re all created during the Anglo-Saxon period.

The suffix /ee/ – spelled with a ‘Y’ also originated with the Anglo-Saxons. But it was originally spelled ‘I-G.’ As we know by now, that ‘G’ sound shifted to a ‘Y’ sound in a lot of words - and this was another situation where that occurred. So even though the spelling was ‘I-G,’ – the pronunciation shifted from /eeg/ to simply /ee/. That suffix was used in words like **bloody**, **speedy**, **crafty**, **mighty** and **greedy**.

Another common Old English suffix was ‘-like,’ originally spelled either ‘L-I-C’ (pronounced /leek/) or sometimes spelled ‘L-I-C-E’ (pronounced /lee-che/). It survives in the suffix ‘-like’ in words like **childlike** or **ladylike**.

But that suffix evolved into another form which is much more common in Modern English. The final consonant – /k/ or /ch/ – disappeared over time. So /leek/ or /lee-che/ simply became /lee/ during Middle English. And that suffix became our very common adjective and adverb suffix ‘L-

Y.’ So a word like **friendly** was originally **freondlic** – ‘friend-like.’ **Deadly** was **deadlic** – ‘dead-like.’

The word **fatherly** was **fæderlic** – ‘father-like.’ But eventually all of those final consonants disappeared, and we were left with just /lee/ – **friendly**, **deadly**, **fatherly**.

As a general rule, the ending ‘-lic’ – L-I-C – was used for adjectives. And the suffix ‘-lice’ – L-I-C-E – was used for adverbs. So lets look at a few of those early adverbs.

So the adverb **carefully** was **carful-lice** – ‘careful-like.’ The adverb **dearly** was **deorlice** – ‘dear-like.’ **Evenly** was **efenlice** – ‘even-like.’ But again, the final consonant /ch/ eventually disappeared. And today we just have that common adverb suffix /lee/ – spelled L-Y.

The Anglo-Saxons also used a lot of noun suffixes. In an earlier episode, I noted that the word **dom** meant law or judgment in Old English. And that word was used as a suffix, and gave us our modern suffix D-O-M. So the realm of the king’s judgment was the **kingdom**. And it was applied by extension to words like **earldom**, **freedom**, and **wisdom**.

The suffix ‘-had’ is the origin of our modern suffix ‘-hood.’ It produced words like **childhood**, **knighthood** and **priesthood** in Old English.

The suffix ‘-ere’ was a suffix to indicate agency, and it was the original version of our modern ‘E-R’ ending. It survives in words like **worker**, **baker** and **speaker**. The related feminine suffix ‘-estre’ was also used. It created a word like **songster** in Old English which meant a ‘female singer.’ In early Middle English, it created the word **spinster**. But it eventually lost its original sense as a feminine suffix. And today it is used for words like **gangster**, **teamster**, **youngster** and **pollster** which are all gender neutral.

The suffix ‘-nes’ was used to create Old English nouns like **greatness**, **fairness**, **thickness** and **sickness**.

The suffix ‘-ship’ created words like **friendship**, **kingship** and **lordship**. It meant ‘quality or condition.’ So **friendship** was the condition of being friends. And **kingship** was the condition of being the king. The condition or quality of land was **landscipe** – ‘landship.’ But around the year 1600, English borrowed the Dutch version of the same word. Remember that the ‘SH’ sound had evolved in English out of the original Germanic ‘SK’ sound. So when English borrowed the Dutch version of **landship**, it came in with its original ‘SK’ sound, and it came in as **landscape** which is the version which we still use today.

Another common Old English suffix was ‘-kin’ – pronounced ‘cynn’ in Old English. This was literally the word **kin** meaning a relative. It had produced the word **cyning** meaning leader of the family, and **cyning** eventually became our modern word **king**. But that word **kin** – or **cynn** – was also used as a suffix. The word **anglecynn** was a term which preceded the word English. It meant the ‘Angle-kin’ – or ‘Angle-kindred.’ But at the end of words, **kin** or **cynn** became **kind** –

and we still see it in words like **mankind** and **humankind**. So in its literal sense, **mankind** is the ‘man-kindred’ – the ‘kindred of people.’

Another suffix which the Anglo-Saxons used was **mæl**. It meant ‘measurement, fixed time or occasion’. And it’s one of those suffixes which largely disappeared over time. In its sense as measurement, the word **mæl** is actually cognate with the words **measure** and **meter** from Latin thanks to common Indo-European roots. The plural version of **mæl** was **mælum**. And when it was combined with a specific unit of measurement, it became an adverb used in the sense of ‘item-by-item’ or one at a time.

So the Old English word **dropmælum** was literally ‘drop-measurements,’ but it meant drop-by-drop. And **footmælum** was literally ‘foot-measurements,’ but it meant foot-by-foot. And **gearmælum** meant ‘year-by-year.’ So as you can probably discern, this particular suffix died out over the centuries, except in one word – the word **piecemeal**.

During early Middle English, people in England still remembered that old construction using **mælum** at the end of a word. And thanks to the Normans, they now had the French word **piece**. So in order to express the idea of ‘piece-by-piece,’ they went back and used that Old English suffix, and they created the word **piece-mælum** which survives today as **piecemeal**.

Knowledge of this suffix must have survived for a long time after people stopped using it because Shakespeare used it in the early Modern English period. He used the phrase ‘to tear her limbmeal’ to mean ‘tear her limb-from-limb.’

So as you can see, the Anglo-Saxons were creating lots of new words to add to their vocabulary. Those original Germanic single-syllable words were growing and becoming much more expressive. Words were being combined. Prefixes and suffixes were being added. And all of this was happening at the same that Latin words were starting to come into English in large numbers. English was slowly emerging as a literary language.

And the final step in this process was a development which we’ve explored over the past few episodes. You can’t have a great literary language without literacy. So the growth of formal education and literacy within Britain was that last fundamental step on the way to English becoming a great literary language.

With the rise of education, the Anglo-Saxons had to come up with new words to express many of those new ideas. A library or a place where books were kept was the **boc-hord** (‘book hoard’). A school was a **lar-hus** (a ‘lore house’ – or learning house). Education brought new concepts. The word **geometry** eventually found its way into English, but it was originally **eorþ-craeft** (‘Earth craft’).

Medicine was also improved thanks to education and learning. A doctor in Old English was a **læce** – one who speaks magic words to bring about a cure. In fact, **læce** is cognate with the Latin

word **lecture** thanks to common Indo-European roots. So in Old English, medicine was originally **læcedom** (leechdom) or **læcecræft** (leechcraft).

Epilepsy was the **fielle-seocnes** ('falling sickness'). Gout was the **fot-adl** (foot-disease). The body was the **flæschama** ('flesh home') or the **sawol-hus** ('soul house'). The eye was the **heafod-gim** (the 'head gem').

So just as new technologies created the need for new words, so did the burgeoning education system. And English proved to be very adept at creating new words related to education.

So I want to digress here for moment and look at the origin of a few English words associated with learning. And let's start with the word **learn**.

If you've ever sat through a boring lecture staring at the clock counting the minutes as they go by, then you might not be surprised to learn that the word **learn** and the word **last** (as 'to endure') are both cognate. They both come from common Indo-European roots. The original Indo-European word was something like **leis**, and it meant 'footprints or track.' So if you were tracking an animal, you had to 'stay on track' to learn its whereabouts. Similarly, if you were following someone else's lead, you also had to 'stay on track' and 'follow in their footsteps.' So this process became associated with learning or acquiring knowledge. To learn you had to 'follow a track or path'. So this process of acquiring knowledge became **læran** in Old English. And what you actually learned – the noun – was called **lar** which is the original version of the word **lore**. I noted earlier that a school was called a **lar-hus** in Old English which was a 'lore house.' And we still have the word **lore** in a compound word like **folklore** which is literally the 'folk's learning' or the 'people's learning.'

So **learning** was the equivalent of following the teacher's lead. And that meant that you had to be persistent. You had to 'stay on track.' And this produced the Old English word **læstan** which meant to 'last or endure.' So ultimately, **learn** and **last** came from the same source.

By the way, the sense of **last** as a 'final position' actually comes from a completely separate Old English word.

Now the Latin version of the same Indo-European root word **leis** was **lira**, and in Latin it retained more of its original Indo-European meaning. It meant 'furrow or track'. But sometimes you might deviate from the track. To describe that kind of deviation, the Romans combined the prefix 'de' meaning 'away from' with that word **lira** meaning 'path'. So **delira** meant a deviation from the normal path. And that word came into English as **delirious** and **delirium**. So if you're taking a class about folklore, and you're trying to learn, and you think you're becoming delirious because you can't last to the end of class, you can at least rest assured that all of those key words are cognate. They all come from the Indo-European word for 'footprints.'

Of course, **footprints** is another compound word. But it's not an Old English compound word because **print** is a French word which came in with the Normans. **Footstep** is actually composed

of native Old English words – **foot** and **step**. But the first written evidence of **footstep** is from the early 1200s in the early Middle English period. So while it may have been an Old English compound, there’s no surviving written evidence of it during that period.

In Old English, **footprints** was rendered as **fotswæð** which was literally ‘foot swath.’ But the Beowulf poet used another compound word for **footprints**. And that poet harkened back to the original Germanic word which gave rise to words like **learn** and **last**. He called footprints – **fo-last** (‘foot last’). So in a sense, footprints were foot-learning.

The Beowulf poet uses the word ‘foot last’ after introducing the dragon in the last portion of the poem. The dragon is guarding gold and other valuables in his lair, but a thief awakens the ire of the dragon when he breaks in and steals some of the valuables. The dragon discovers the trespass by observing the thief’s footprints – or foot last.

And here’s the actual passage from Beowulf – lines 2287-2290

First, here’s a modern translation:

Then the dragon awakened	his anger was renewed
sniffing along the stones	the dragon discovered
the enemies footprints	the thief had stepped
secretly and craftily	near the dragon’s head

And here’s the original version in Old English:

Ða se wurm onwoc,	wroht wæs geniwad;
stonc ða æfter stane,	stearcheort onfand
feondes fotlast;	he to forð gestop
dyrnan cræfte	dracan heafde neah.

So let’s break that down into each half-line and see if we can do a literal translation. The first half-line is “Ða se wurm onwoc” – ‘then the worm awoke’ or ‘then the dragon awakened.’

The second half-line is “wroht wæs geniwad” – ‘wrath was renewed’ or ‘his anger was renewed.’

“stonc ða æfter stane” – ‘stunk then after stone’ but it really meant ‘sniffing along the stones.’

“stearcheort” – ‘stark-heart’ which was really a euphemism for the dragon. “onfand” – which meant ‘found out.’ So “stearcheort onfand” was ‘the stark-heart found out’ or ‘the dragon discovered.’

The next half-line is “feondes fotlast” – ‘fiend’s footprints’ or ‘the enemy’s footprints.’

“he to forð gestop” – ‘he too forth stepped’ – ‘the thief had stepped.’

“dyrnan cræfte” – **dyrnan** was an Old English word that meant ‘secretly.’ So **dyrnan** is ‘secretly’ and **cræfte** is ‘craftily.’ So ‘secretly and craftily.’

And the last half-line is “dracan heafde neah” – ‘dragon’s head near’ or ‘near the dragon’s head.’

I wanted to read that passage to you for a couple of reasons. First, I wanted you to see how the Beowulf poet used the phrase ‘foot last’ for footprints. But I also wanted to illustrate how English had become a literary language by the end of the eighth century – by the time many scholars think Beowulf was composed.

The poet was capable of combining and shaping words in a very sophisticated way. Not only does the passage satisfy the required alliteration of the poem, it also illustrates how the poet could avoid redundancy by pulling from different sources and by making new words. The primary focus of the passage is the dragon which is actually a Latin word. And in that short passage, the poet refers to the dragon three different ways. Each of the ways represents one of the techniques which we have covered over the last three episodes. First, he calls it the **worm** – a simple, basic Germanic word used to translate the Latin word **dragon**. Then he uses an Old English compound word to describe the dragon poetically. He calls it the ‘stark heart.’

And finally, he then calls it **dracan** which is a version of the word **dragon**, and thus represents a word borrowed from Latin. So in that one passage, we can see how English had combined these techniques to become a full-fledged literary language.

But even though much of this growth in the language has been spawned by the Northumbrian Renaissance, that renaissance was slowing fading away. So I want to conclude this episode by looking at the changing landscape of Anglo-Saxon Britain in the mid and late 700s.

By the middle 700s, the political power of Northumbria was gradually being replaced by another kingdom – the kingdom of Mercia to the south. Mercia had been a threat to Northumbria for decades. Its king Penda had been partially or fully responsible for the defeat and death of the Northumbrian kings like Edwin and Oswald. But Oswald’s bother, Oswy, had finally defeated Penda. And Northumbria prospered in the aftermath of Penda’s defeat.

But in the year 716, Æthelbald assumed power as King of Mercia in the English midlands. He quickly emerged as the strongest ruler of his day. And his power extended well beyond Mercia to the other kingdoms in southern Britain. Even though the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle doesn’t list him as a bretwalder or overlord, most scholars have no problem giving him that label. Æthelbald ruled during Bede’s lifetime, and Bede described him as the ruler of all of England south of Northumbria. In fact, a charter of the year 736 identifies Æthelbald as “King, not only of the Mercians, but of all the provinces which are called by the general name South English.” He even began to call himself ‘King of All South England.’ But the powerful Æthelbald was murdered by his bodyguard a couple of decades after that charter. And a period of civil war followed in Mercia. By the end of the year 757, another relative of Penda had claimed the throne. And this king would eventually surpass Æthelbald in terms of power and prestige. That king was Offa. During the later half of 700s, Offa ruled over a Mercian kingdom that was unrivaled within Britain. And even

though Offa never controlled Northumbria, there was no question where the political and social power lay during the later portion of the eighth century.

But the rise of Merica wasn't the only problem for Northumbria. Across the channel in France, the Frankish kingdom was at the height of its power under the rule of Charlemagne. And Charlemagne, oversaw the Carolingian Renaissance there. And that saw the Frankish Kingdom bring in some of the leading scholars from Northumbria. And within a few years, the Frankish kingdom had replaced Northumbria as the leading center of education in Western Europe.

In addition to those developments, there was another – even greater – threat on the horizon. Literally on the horizon. The Vikings from Scandinavia began to arrive in Northumbria at the end of the 8th century, and all of those great monasteries which I've discussed – Lindisfarne, Iona, Whitby, Jarrow – they were all ransacked and plundered. And most were destroyed.

Over the next few episodes we're going to explore all of those developments and the impact which those developments had on the English language. Next time, we're going to turn our attention to the east – to Scandinavia – to the ancestors of the Vikings. We going to explore what was happening in Scandinavia while the Anglo-Saxons were busy carving up Britain. And we're going to explore the origins of the Viking culture.

And this early period is kind of important to the history of English because it provides the setting and backdrop for a poem which I keep mentioning in the podcast. That little poem about a man named Beowulf.

So next time, we'll explore the historical roots of the Vikings and of origins of Beowulf.

Until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.