THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 45: TO COIN A PHRASE - AND MONEY

Presented by Kevin W. Stroud

EPISODE 45: TO COIN A PHRASE - AND MONEY

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 45: To Coin a Phrase - and Money. In this episode, we're going to explore the events of the late 700s. This was a period in which both the Anglo-Saxons and the Franks were ruled by their most powerful kings to date. In Britain, it was Offa, King of Mercia, a king who directly or indirectly ruled over most of the Anglo-Saxons. In the Frankish kingdom, it was Charlemagne – the most powerful European leader since the Roman Empire. Meanwhile, up in Scandinavia, the Vikings were beginning to set sail. And there was something which connected all of these developments during this period – commerce. Commerce and trade linked all of these peoples, and part of that story is revealed in the coins which survive from that period.

Before I begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can reach me by email at kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can follow me on twitter @ englihshistpod. And I'm still working on the Beowulf project between episodes of the podcast. So I'll keep you updated on that as it nears completion.

This time I want to move the story of English forward through the end of the eighth century. And the one underlying theme of this episode is trade and commerce, and more specifically, the coins used in that trade and commerce. Coins are not only currency. They're cultural artifacts. And since they're made of metal, they tend to last a long time – sometimes thousands of years. So unearthed coins are a wonderful resource for historians and archaeologists. They can often be traced back to a specific location and usually a specific time. It was the presence of coins at Sutton Hoo which allowed historians to determine the approximate date of the ship burial. The presence of coins can also reveal trading patterns. A significant increase in coins from a particular region may indicate a period of economic growth. And a sharp decrease in coins may suggest economic decline. And inscriptions on coins can actually tell us a little bit about the language and culture of the people. So coins can tell us a lot about a particular time and place.

Roman coins had once dominated commerce in Western Europe, but when the Western Roman Empire collapsed, that coinage began to disappear. The early Franks in Gaul developed their owns coins, but in Britain, the early Anglo-Saxons weren't as Romanized as the Franks, so they didn't have their own coins as first. And this is kind of important. Because the lack of a coinage limited trade with other regions. Without a coinage, the Anglo-Saxons had to rely upon barter or a foreign currency whenever it trickled in.

The Sutton Hoo ship burial has been dated to the early 600s thanks to some Frankish coins which were found in the ship, but no Anglo-Saxon coins were found there. And that was probably because the ship burial occurred before the Anglo-Saxons began to mint their own coins. But a short time later, they did start to mint some very basic, very crude, coins. Those first Anglo-Saxon coins were struck in gold mainly from mints in London and York. They mimicked Frankish and Roman coins, but those gold coins were short-lived. Gold coins also disappeared from the Frankish kingdom around this same time which suggests that there was a general shortage of gold supply by the late 600s.

With the apparent gold shortage, silver became the metal of choice. Throughout Northern Europe, silver coins began to replace gold coins. And in Britain, the Anglo-Saxons began to produce very crude silver coins called ***sceattas***.

An individual coin was called a ***sceat*** which may have been derived from the same word which gave us the modern word ***sheet***. And that was presumably because the coins began as sheets of metal.

By the way, the Latin word ***plate*** has the same original meaning. It meant a 'flat sheet of gold or silver,' and since coins were made from those sheets, the term ***plate*** was sometimes used for a flat, round coin. Of course, bowls and dishes were also made from those gold and silver sheets, so over time the term ***plate*** was applied to dishes as well.

Those metal sheets were cut into lots of little circular discs. At first, it was just a little plain disc with nothing on it, so it was called a ***blank***, or ***blanc*** in French. There was actually a French coin introduced in the 1300s called a ***blanc***. By the 1500s, a ***blank*** had come to refer to a losing lottery ticket. So if you drew a losing ticket, you 'drew a blank.' By the 1800s, it had come to refer to bullets with no projectile. So you might end up 'shooting blanks.' But originally, a ***blank*** was piece of plain round metal.

The piece of metal was then stamped with a wedge-shaped tool which actually created the image on the piece of metal. The Latin word for 'wedge' was ***cuneus***. And since a wedge-shaped tool was used to create the image, that word ***cuneus*** produced the word ***coin***. Again, ***coin*** was a Latin term. So the Anglo-Saxons didn't call their coins '***coins***.' Remember they called them ***sceattas***.

I should also note here that the Latin word for 'wedge' – ***cuneus*** – also gave us the name of the ancient Near East writing system ***cuneiform***. Those Near Eastern scribes also used a wedge-shaped stylus to press markings into clay tablets. So both ***cuneiform*** and ***coin*** come from the name of the wedge-shaped instruments used to press inscriptions.

By analogy, the process of inventing new words or phrases was compared to the process of minting new coins. In the 1500s, it produced the expression 'to coin a phrase' to refer to the invention of a new word or phrase. Even Shakespeare uses the expression when he wrote, "So shall my Lungs Coine words till their decay."

Now I noted that there was an original preference for gold coins. ***Gold*** is an Old English word with very deep Germanic roots. In fact, ***gold*** can be traced back to an original Indo-European word which was ****ghel*** with a very aspirated 'G' sound at the beginning. It meant shiny or bright. And of course, gold is a very bright or yellow metal. And if fact, the word ***yellow*** comes from the same root as ***gold***.

As we know, the 'G' sound often shifted to a 'Y' sound in many Old English words. We've seen that before in words like ***garden*** and ***yard***. Well, we also have it here. That original Indo-European word ****ghel*** produced ***gold*** with its original 'G' sound and ***yellow*** with that newer 'Y' sound.

Another word which comes from the same root as ***yellow*** and ***gold*** is ***yolk*** which is the yellow part of the egg. Obviously, it has the same 'y' sound as ***yellow***.

But outside of ***yellow*** and ***yolk***, most of the words which came from that original root word came in with that original 'G' sound. One of those words was ***gold***. ***Gold*** has the /oh/ vowel sound between the 'G' and the 'L' giving us /gooool-d/. But that vowel sound actually disappeared early on in another variation of that same root word. The result was a 'G-L' sound – /gl/. And that sound appears at the beginning of a lot of words in Modern English which mean bright and shiny. That includes words like ***gleam***, ***glimmer***, ***glitter***, ***glint***, ***glisten***, ***glare***, ***gloss***, ***glass***, ***glaze*** and ***glow***. All of those are Germanic words which mean 'bright or shiny,' and they all derive from the same root as ***gold***.

So 'all that glitters may not be Gold,' but ***glitter*** and ***gold*** are cognate, having derived from the same root word.

Something that was covered in gold was ***gilded*** from the same root. Mark Twain used that term to describe an early period of US history which he called the 'Gilded Age.' And we can thank Shakespeare for the phrase 'gild the lily' to mean 'adorn something with unnecessary decoration.' The phrase derives from a line in Shakespeare's King John which is "To gild refined gold, to paint the lily. To throw perfume on a violet." So if you 'gild refined gold' in the words of Shakespeare, you're literally covering gold with gold. So it's unnecessary decoration.

So that's ***gold*** which was and still is a very precious and valuable metal. But as I noted, there was apparently a gold shortage by the late 600s because gold coins were phased out around that time in both Britain and the Frankish kingdom. And they were gradually replaced with silver coins.

Those early Anglo-Saxon silver coins – those ***sceattas*** – were thick and crude, and they were initially used for local trade and small-scale transactions. And you may be surprised to learn that they weren't issued by kings or kingdoms. They were actually issued by individual moneyers. The moneyers probably paid something to the king for that privilege, and the kingdom probably had some oversight as to the weight and quality of the coins to prevent fraud, but the kingdom itself was not directly involved in the process. So early coins from this period sometimes have the name of the mint or moneyer, but they don't have the name or image of the king.

But all of that started to change in the mid-700s. Around that time, the Frankish kings and the Anglo-Saxon kings began to take control of their respective currencies. For the first time, they started to issue official coins by order of the king. In 755, the denier was made official in the Frankish kingdom. And that innovation soon spread to Britain.

In Britain, Kent was the closest region to France, located just across the channel. So Kent had the closest ties with the Franks and Frankish traders. So shortly after the Frankish kingdom introduced its official coins, the Kentish king did the same thing. The mint in Canterbury produced the first official coinage in Britain. And those new coins began to replace the crude

sceattas which had been minted before. They were also the first Anglo-Saxon coins to identify the king who issued them.

Now, they may not have realized it at the time, but that new official coinage was destined to have a major impact on the economy. It actually produced a massive increase in trade and commerce. And that's because a standardized currency facilitated trade. It made transactions more efficient. Traders didn't have to rely upon barter or crude coins of questionable value. So standardized coins were a huge boost to traders. And that increased trade led to increased revenue for the king. And that was partly because coins made it much easier to collect taxes.

One way in which the kings generated revenue was by minting coins which were valid for a limited period of time – say three or four years. After that period, you had to bring those old outdated coins back to the mint for new coins. But here was the key, if you brought 100 old coins in, you didn't necessarily get 100 new coins. You might only get 95 in return. The extra 5 coins were kept by the mint to cover the cost of production, and a portion of that went back to the king. So in other words, the king collected a hefty tax every time the old coins expired. And this could only be done with a standard currency issued under the authority of the kings. The currency also enabled kings to levy direct taxes. For example, Offa's predecessor in Mercia – Aethelbald – levied a toll on ships.

But the Anglo-Saxons didn't call a payment levied by the King a ***tax*** because ***tax*** is a Latin word which came into English with the Normans. The Anglo-Saxons called a tax or payment to the king a ***scot***. That word ***scot*** still survives as ***scot*** in the phrase 'scot-free' meaning 'penalty-free,' as in "He got away scot-free."

So two important things were happening throughout the 700s. Trade throughout northern Europe was exploding, and kingdoms were getting wealthier. And a new official, standardized coinage was facilitating that process.

By the mid-700s, Offa had emerged as the King of Mercia in the central part of Britain in the Midlands. The Mercians were the traditional rivals of the Northumbrians. You might remember the pagan king of Mercia named Penda who fought against those Christian kings in Northumbria like Edwin, Oswald and Oswy. Well, by this point, Mercia had been converted, and it was staunchly Christian just like the rest of Anglo-Saxon Britain. And Offa was actually a relative of Penda within the same ruling family. And in the years after Penda, Mercia had continued to be a formidable power in central Britain.

Offa came to power shortly before Charlemagne emerged as King of the Franks, so they were contemporaries. And both kings had very long reigns. Offa was king for about 40 years, and Charlemagne was king for about 46 years, so they actually had a long history together.

Offa extended the power of Mercia, and he quickly became the most powerful ruler in Britain. He is generally considered to be the most powerful Anglo-Saxon king before the emergence of the Wessex dynasty under Alfred about a century later. He was also the only western European

king who could deal with Charlemagne on something close to equal footing. Charlemagne famously referred to Offa as his 'brother' in correspondence between the two of them.

Unfortuantely, most of what we know about Offa comes from outside sources. Offa became king shortly after Bede died, so he wasn't part of Bede's important history of early England. And about a century later, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was started at the direction of Alfred, but by that point, we are well beyond Offa's reign. So Offa lived in that narrow period between our two best sources of Anglo-Saxon history.

The most well-known legacy of Offa's reign was the large fortification which was constructed along the entirely of the Welsh border known as Offa's Dyke. A large portion of that fortification still exists today. And since the Mercians and the Welsh spoke different languages, it was not only a political barrier, it was also a linguistic barrier.

Shortly after he became King, Offa set his sights on Kent – the kingdom in southeastern Britain. That was the kingdom where Canterbury was located. And at this point, Canterbury was home to two things which are important to our story. One was the Archbishop of Canterbury who was not at all happy with Offa's attempts to control the region. And that will become important a little later in our story. The other thing in Canterbury was that mint where those first official coins were produced.

Well, within the first decade of Offa's reign, he had assumed effective control of Kent, and that meant that he had assumed control over that mint at Canterbury. And once he got control over it, he had the name and image of the Kentish king removed from the coins, and he had his own name and image inserted in its place. And this is the other important legacy of Offa – his coins. The silver coins produced during Offa's reign became the standard for Anglo-Saxon currency for the next five centuries until the late Middle Ages. The new coins were of very high quality and very artistic. His coins have been found throughout Europe, and even beyond into the Middle East. The widespread distribution of Offa's coins indicates how powerful his kingdom was, and it also illustrates how extensive the trade was during this period.

Offa's silver coins were called ***pennies***, and there is considerable debate about the origin of that name. Many scholars think the name of the ***penny*** was derived from the name of Offa's ancestor Penda who was that earlier King of Mercia. Another theory links the word ***penny*** with the word 'pawn' thanks to a proto-Germanic word – ***panda***. But the etymology is still a matter a dispute.

And with respect to Offa's coins, we once again find a connection between events in the Frankish kingdom and events in Britain. During this period, Charlemagne reformed the official coinage in the Frankish kingdom. He decided to tie everything to a pound of silver – or ***livre*** of silver in French. A pound of silver was divided into 20 equal parts to create a ***solidus***. And a ***solidus*** was divided into 12 equal parts to create a ***denier***.

And that became the standard French currency. The plural form of ***solidus*** is ***solidi***. And ***solidi*** were used as the standard currency for paying mercenaries and other fighters. And in French, a fighter who was paid with ***solidi*** became known as a ***soldier*** (/sol-dee-air/) – or ***soldier*** today.

Now, it is important to note that the decimal system was not in use when Charlemagne reformed and standardized Frankish currency. So they didn't use the modern increments of 10 that we use today. It took 12 deniers to make a solidus, and 20 solidi to make a pound – or 'livre' of silver. So by that math, it took 240 deniers to equal a pound a silver. So the math was little more complicated.

But the Anglo-Saxons apparently decided that Charlemagne had the right idea because Offa's coins were soon reformed to copy that new Frankish system. Offa's penny was the equivalent of the French denier. The English ***shilling*** was the equivalent of the French ***solidus***. And the English ***pound*** was a direct translation of the French ***livre***. And the same increments were used for new English coinage. It took 12 pennies to make a shilling, and 20 shillings to make a pound. And that type of coordination helps to illustrate how close the trade was between the Franks and the Anglo-Saxons. They each had their own currencies, but they were both designed around the same basic formulas, and they were both based on the same fixed silver standard, so the respective coins were somewhat interchangeable. And again, that made trade between the two kingdoms much easier and more efficient.

So all of that means that a British ***pound*** once equaled a pound of silver. It also meant that the silver penny was the basic unit of English currency. And just like in France, penny math was done in increments of 12. 12 pennies was a shilling, and 240 pennies was a pound. And since it took 12 pennies to make a shilling, half a shilling was 'six pennies' or ***sixpence***. And the ***sixpence*** became its own coin in the 1500s.

The term ***pence*** as the plural form of ***penny*** really emerged in the Middle English period. You might have six individual pennies. And collectively, they would be worth 'six pence.' And both ***sixpenny*** and ***sixpence*** found their way into Modern English. Since 'six pennies' were half of a shilling, the term ***sixpenny*** came to mean something cheap or low quality. Meanwhile, ***sixpence*** was used as a standard unit of currency – again half a shilling.

Of course, in American English we know that term ***sixpence*** primarily through a nursery rhyme:

Sing a song of sixpense a pocket full of rye,
Four and twenty *blackbirds baked in a pie.*
And so on.

That nursery rhyme dates from the 1700s. But that particular rhyme didn't coin the phrase 'sing a song of sixpence.' It had actually been around for a while. Shakespeare had used a variation of it in the 1600s. It was used in the context of giving someone a sixpence coin in exchange for a song.

By the way, have you ever wondered why that nursery rhyme says 'four and twenty blackbirds' instead of 'twenty-four blackbirds'? Well, here's the answer. Because that's the way the Anglo-Saxons counted.

As we've seen before, the Anglo-Saxons used the same basic words for numbers that we use today. They just used an older pronunciation. But instead of twenty-one, they would say 'one and twenty.' And instead of thirty-five, they would say 'five and thirty.' So they would put the smaller number first. This was actually the standard Germanic way of formulating those numbers, and it's still the way those numbers are formed in many modern Germanic languages. But after the Normans arrived in 1066, English was influenced by French which puts the larger number first and the smaller number second, and so 'four and twenty' became 'twenty-four.' But it took a long time for that Old English formulation to die out. And it was apparently still lingering around in the 1700s when 'Sing a Song of Sixpence' was composed.

So that was the ***sixpence***. But let's go back to Offa's pennies. I noted that his pennies were of a very high quality, and that was especially true for the designs of the coins. They often contained an image of Offa, or at least a rudimentary design which was supposed to be him. They were usually inscribed with "Offa Rex" which meant 'King Offa' in Latin. Latin was still considered the international language of Europe. But the 'x' in Rex was sometimes rendered in the form of a Christian cross. It was sometimes moved to the other side of Offa's image to stand out. So the coin would say 'Offa R-E' on the right side, and the X was rendered as a cross on the left side. And that may not seem impressive by today's standards, but that type of artistic design was really unusual in the 700s. Remember, official coins were still a relatively new concept for these kingdoms.

Offa also issued coins in the name of his wife – the Queen of Mercia. And those were the only coins minted during the entire Anglo-Saxon period with a queen on them.

His coins also give us a sense of the limitations of language in the 700s. That growing international trade was bringing in coins from Arab traders in the Middle East and Northern Africa. Offa's minters were apparently fascinated by those exotic coins because they decided to issue their own copies. They just added the standard 'Rex Offa' to them. But apparently very few Anglo-Saxons had any knowledge of Arabic because the Arabic coins contained an inscription written in Arabic. And the Anglo-Saxons either didn't care what it said, or they just thought it was decoration because Offa's version of the coins included the same inscription. And the inscription reads, "There is no God but one and Mohammed is his prophet." And those coins were actually issued during Offa's reign. Modern scholars are in pretty much universal agreement that this was an oversight. No Christian King of that period would have knowingly issued a coin with an Islamic inscription on it. But ultimately, it was a case of 'no harm, no foul.' The Anglo-Saxons apparently weren't bothered by it because they couldn't read it, and they didn't know what it meant.

As I noted earlier, Offa's very advanced and very widespread coinage suggests that there was a considerable amount of wealth flowing into Britain during this period. Much of that coinage was being used to buy goods from foreign traders, especially those from Scandinavia and the Frankish kingdom.

With the growth of trade, new trading centers were also starting to pop up throughout the region. In Britain, a trading center of this type was usually called '***wic***,' and thanks to that Old English sound shift where a 'K' sound sometimes became a 'CH' sound, that type of trading center was also sometimes called a ***wich***. So ***wic*** and ***wich*** were variations of the same word. This was an Old Germanic word which meant 'harbor,' but as traders began to arrive in increasing numbers, those harbors emerged into trading centers. And many of those early trading centers in Britain use ***wic*** or ***wich*** as part of their name.

The major trading center in Wessex was ***Hamwic*** – later known as Southampton. In Northumbria, the major trading center was ***Eoforwic***. And that name may seem strange, but it was later shorted to ***York***.

London also started to emerge as a major trading center, it was called ***Lundenwic*** in the late 600s.

Most of the other trading centers used the other version of the word – ***wich***. The port at Canterbury was called ***Fordwich***. The major trading center in East Anglia was called ***Ipswich***.

The town of ***Sandwich*** also emerged as a trading center in Kent on the Southeastern Coast. ***Sandwich*** was literally the 'sandy trading center,' or the trading center built on sand. And since the sandwich that you have for lunch was supposedly named for the Earl of Sandwich, it means that that Old English word for a trading center is still a part of our modern diet.

But there is another interesting aspect of that word ***wich*** – or ***wic*** – meaning a harbor or trading center. As I said, it was an old Germanic word, and the Scandinavians had their own version of the word, which was ***vik***. The word ***vik*** had a meaning which was similar to the original Old English meaning which was a harbor. In Scandinavia, it meant an inlet or small bay. We see that Norse ending in the name of the Icelandic capital ***Reykjavík***. The first part of the name meant 'smoke' in Old Norse, and it is actually cognate with the Old English word ***reek*** which originally meant the smell or stench which came from something that was burning. The original settlement of Reykjavík was built near natural hot springs which produced steam. So it was called ***Reykjavík*** which meant 'bay of smoke' or the 'smoky cove.'

But Reykjavík was just one of many viks throughout Scandinavia. And the people who inhabited those viks were called the ***Vikings*** (/veek-ings/), or as we know them today – the ***Vikings***.

And this little linguistic note is important to our overall story because the Scandinavians were also benefitting greatly from all of that increased trade in northern Europe. And that was largely because Scandinavian furs were in demand throughout Europe. They had been trading furs for centuries. Even Tacitus had mentioned the Scandinavian fur trade. But all of that economic growth and new money in northern and western Europe meant that those furs were in even greater demand.

But the Scandinavians didn't just trade with other northern Europeans. They traveled down the rivers from the Baltic through Eastern Europe all the way down to the Black Sea. A group of

Swedish traders established a settlement around Kiev in the 800s. These settlers were called the ***Rus*** from an Old Norse word meaning 'to row' as in rowing a boat. And the Rus gave their name to the new trading settlements which started to pop up in that region, which became known as ***Russia*** (/roo-see-ah/) or ***Russia***. So the Russian state actually owes its ultimate origins to the Vikings.

But the key to this Scandinavian trade is that those traders actually needed stuff to trade. And most of those traders weren't really artisans or manufacturers. They got most of their furs and other inventory from raiding, piracy, threats and extortion. So for example, as the Scandinavians traveled through the Baltic and Eastern Europe, they would threaten to destroy settlements and farms along the way unless they were paid off. And very often, they were paid off in furs. And they would then take those furs and trade them far and wide for money or luxury goods. So now, we can start to see these pieces coming together.

In order to continue and expand their trading networks, and in order to obtain more wealth, they needed new places to plunder and raid, and they needed new people to extort.

Now the traditional view has been that the Viking expansion was the result of population growth in Scandinavia. And other theories attribute expansion to the fact that the oldest son inherited his father's wealth, so that left the younger sons without wealth or inheritance. And those were also important factors here. But the key to the expansion was the growing trade networks. Whether it was due to overpopulation, or just the bad luck of the being the younger brother, those trading networks created new opportunities for those young Vikings. They could make their wealth through trading and plunder.

Those traders were coming into contact with new centers of wealth, especially in Britain and the Frankish kingdom. And they had access to lots of new wealth in those regions, as well as lots of old wealth. They gave then new people to trade with and new places to plunder. And plunder gave them new goods to sell elsewhere. And so on. So it became a general way of life. It was how they made their living.

Within Scandinavia, Denmark was quickly emerging as the wealthiest and most powerful region because of those trading networks and because of Denmark's strategic location between the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. But while the Danes kept one eye on those trading networks to the north, they kept the other eye on the increasing power of Charlemagne to the south. The Frankish kingdom was still expanding to the east into Germany. So the Danes were concerned about that threat to the south. But between the Danes and the Franks were the Saxons who had remained on the continent in what came to be known as Old Saxony. So Old Saxony was essentially a buffer-zone between the Danes and the Franks. But the Charlemagne was busy trying to conquer the Saxons.

In the last episode, I mentioned that Charlemagne's great-grandfather Pepin II had become Mayor of the Place in the late 600s about a century earlier. He was the leader who wanted to convert the Germans east of the Rhine to Christianity so it would be easier to conquer them and bring them within the greater Frankish kingdom. And you might remember that he relied heavily upon

Anglo-Saxon missionaries because they spoke a language which was very similar to the continental Germans.

Well, those missionary efforts had mixed success. In southern and central Germany, the people were converted without too much difficulty. But it was a different outcome in the north in places like Saxony. Some of the missionaries there were killed and became martyrs. When Charlemagne became King of the Franks, the missionary activity was still ongoing in this region. And the Franks were still relying upon the Anglo-Saxons for much of that missionary work.

Shortly after Charlemagne became king, he was able to bring Frisia under Frankish control, but Saxony continued to be his nemesis. His initial effort to conquer the Saxons began in 772 just four years after he became king. And the invasion of Saxony was largely successful at first, but a couple of years later, there was a Saxon resurgence. And this would establish a theme for the next thirty years of so. The Franks would invade and put down an uprising, and they would bring in the missionaries, and as soon as the Franks were distracted by events elsewhere, the Saxons would rise in rebellion. A second invasion led to a third invasion, and a fourth, and a fifth, with additional smaller incursions after that. During the early part of this period, the Saxon rebel leader would flee to hide in Denmark while the Franks invaded. And as soon as the Franks let up pressure, he would return to lead another uprising. As I noted, the Danish king was consumed with the Frankish threat, and the Saxons provided that convenient buffer. So the Danes continued to let the Saxon rebels hide in Denmark waiting for the next opportunity for an uprising.

And we get a sense here of just how brutal Charlemagne could be. After that fifth incursion, he had 4,500 Saxon prisoners beheaded. And after that, Saxony was officially annexed into the Frankish Empire. There were still some uprisings, but for the most part, Saxony was finally brought under Frankish control.

The conquest of the Saxons, combined with the conquest of Bavaria and a large part of northern Italy, helped Charlemagne to emerge as the most powerful leader Europe had seen since the Roman Empire. His kingdom eventually encompassed most of central and western Europe. But for our purposes, the most notable legacy of Charlemagne was the so-called Carolingian Renaissance. And the origins of that intellectual renaissance really began with the attempts to convert the Frisians and Saxons. And it had a direct connection to the Northumbrian Renaissance in Britain.

Those Anglo-Saxon missionaries may have shared a more or less common language with the Germans, but that language was not the language of the Church. The language of the Church was Latin. And the missionaries realized that the native German clergy had to be educated in Latin if the missionary work was to have any permanent success. That was the only way the clergy could read the scriptures and interpret the Scriptures to the people. So the German clergy had to be taught Latin.

But it wasn't just the new German clergy that was the problem. Even within the Frankish kingdom, much of the clergy there no longer spoke Classical Latin. As we saw last time, the

Gallo-Roman dialect had diverged greatly from Classical Latin. And when Charlemagne came to power, he realized that many of the clergy in his own kingdom didn't read or speak the Classical Latin used by the Church. Most of them either spoke the local Vulgar Latin dialect or the native Germanic language of the Franks.

So what Charlemagne needed was a scholastic revival to train the clergy in Germany and re-train the clergy in the Frankish kingdom. To carry out this revival, he began to establish new schools throughout the Frankish kingdom. Monks and abbots were directed to establish places within the monasteries so the clergy could be educated there. The most prominent school established by Charlemagne was a Palace School established for Frankish nobles at his court at Aachen.

But those new schools needed teachers, so he invited famous scholars to his court to help establish the schools and to help develop the curriculum. And perhaps the most important person which he invited was an Anglo-Saxon scholar named Alcuin. Alcuin quickly emerged as an absolutely essential figure in the emerging Carolingian Renaissance.

Alcuin had been a student of Bede in Northumbria. He was apparently in charge of the library at York, which had emerged as the center of scholarship in Northumbria. It was one of the great European libraries at the time. Alcuin had also been actively involved in the missionary efforts in Frisia and other parts of Europe. While assisting the missionary efforts there, he met Charlemagne. And Charlemagne invited him to join the other scholars at his court.

Once he joined the other scholars, he became the virtual head of the palace school at Charelemagne's court. And he also attracted other Anglo-Saxon scholars to join him at the court. Alcuin helped to develop the curriculum in all of those new Carolingian schools. In keeping with the Northumbrian tradition, he played a critical role in introducing the seven liberal arts to the curriculum. So the education mixed secular studies with religious studies. And he later became a prominent advisor to Charlemagne himself.

Charlemagne continues to fascinate scholars of Medieval history because he was a very effective military and political leader, but he also placed a such a strong emphasis on education and scholarship. He was considered a very well-spoken leader, and by all accounts, he loved books. But interestingly, most historians think that Charlemagne was illiterate.

He reportedly had books read to him during meals. And he tried to learn how to write, but he was too old to learn. He actually slept at night with a slate containing the letters under his pillow so he could learn them by osmosis. But it didn't work. I should note that some historians dispute these claims, and they assert that he could actually read Latin on some basic level, but regardless of his actual ability to read and write, it does appear that he was frustrated by the level of his own education. And that was probably a big reason why he felt education was so important and why he became such a major proponent of education.

So I know what you're thinking – what does all of this have to do with English?

Well, if you read and write English, you can thank Charlemagne and Alcuin for the letters which you use – at least the lower-case letters. We know that the uppercase letters came from the Romans. But all of those lower-case letters, which is what we mostly use when writing, they came from Charlemagne's court.

When Charlemagne became king of the Franks, not only had the Classical Latin speech of the Romans largely disappeared, the Classical Latin script had also fallen out of use. There was no standard script in the kingdom anymore, and writing had become increasingly illegible. So one of the items on the reform agenda was the development of a new standardized script. The new script needed to be easy to read and write, and it needed to be made standard throughout the kingdom. And Alcuin was a key figure in developing that new script. He turned to the script which had been used in Northumbria. And the new script combined the Anglo-Saxon version with an earlier Roman version. And the result was the script which came to be called – appropriately enough – the Carolingian script.

The key to the new script is that it allowed the letters to be written very easily and quickly. Most of the letters could be written in one motion without lifting the pen. Compare the old Roman uppercase E with the Carolingian lowercase E. Uppercase E requires four distinct strokes, whereas lowercase E only requires one stroke. Think of uppercase E as a little line in the middle surrounded by a box on three sides. Well, the new script would begin with that little middle line written from left to right, and then curve the line around in a 'c' shape to represent the surrounding box. And that's how we got from old, blocky, uppercase E to the newer, quicker, more efficient lowercase E.

And that type of simplification was important to all of those scribes who were busy copying books by hand. So not surprisingly, book production exploded after the new script was introduced. And these educational reforms, and language reforms, and script reforms meant that there was a brand new generation of literate and educated scholars, including poets, historians and philosophers. And all of this is really the essence of the so-called Carolingian Renaissance.

But that renaissance sometimes created its own problems. As I noted, part of the educational reforms involved getting the clergy to speak proper Classical Latin, not the local Vulgar Latin. And to facilitate that process, Alcuin developed his own textbook on Latin pronunciation. All of this education meant that the clergy started to speak proper Classical Latin, which was just fine in the palace school and all of those monasteries. But what about the actual people who they were supposed to be preaching to?

When the clergy began to conduct services in Classical Latin, the congregations couldn't understand it. So the French Church began to have the same problem that the Anglo-Saxon Church had once had. The people couldn't understand the message. So in the last episode, I noted that the Council of Tours had to issue an edict encouraging priests to deliver sermons in "the rustic Roman language," by which they meant the regular language of the people. So in essence, they actually had to backtrack on some of those reforms because the reforms were moving the language of the Church away from the language of the people.

By the end of the eighth century, the Carolingian Renaissance was well under way. Over the next few years, the literary power of the Frankish Kingdom began to eclipse to scholarship of Northumbria in Britain. The death of Bede was a huge loss for Northumbria. And Northumbrian scholars like Alcuin had started to relocate to France. So there started to be a general decline in scholarship in northern England. Northumbria was also starting to experience a political decline. Internal political divisions and feuds sat in. The Picts in the north started to experience a resurgence, and that drained additional resources and energy away from the kingdom. But one of the biggest factors in the decline of Northumbria was the rise of Mercia under the leadership of Offa.

Mercia had always been a rival of Northumbria going all the way back to Penda and his battles against the Northumbrian kings. So as Mercia became richer and more powerful under Offa, the relative political power of Northumbria began to decline.

Having expanded into Kent in the southeast, Offa later assumed control of Sussex in the south and East Anglia to the east. He effectively ruled all of England except Northumbria and Wessex in the southwest. And when he later married his daughter to the Wessex king, he had indirect power and influence over that kingdom as well.

Offa's predecessor Æthelbald had declared himself 'King of all South England,' but Offa took that title one step further. He was described in some charters as 'rex Anglorum' – King of the English. But he was never actually the King of Northumbria, and he only had indirect control over Wessex. So we're almost to a leader that we can call the first King of England, but we're not quite there yet.

Very little is known about the overall quality of scholarship in Offa's kingdom, but modern scholars have noted that the scripts used by scribes in Mercia during this period were actually very advanced and well-practiced. The scripts from some of the other regions were very crude by comparison. So from that, scholars have concluded that the Mercian court was actually quite advanced.

There is also a popularly-held belief that Beowulf was composed in Offa's court. The best evidence for this is that fact that the poem features a digression about a distant ancestor of Offa who was king of the Angles back on the continent, and who was also named Offa. The poem praises this earlier Offa in a passage that doesn't really have any other purpose in the poem. And so some scholars think Beowulf may have been composed by a poet in Offa's court, and this passage was intentionally inserted as indirect praise of the Mercian king. The time frame works, but there is no way to know for certain if the poem was actually composed there.

As I noted earlier, Offa had extended Mercian rule into Kent very early on. That's where he took control of the mint at Canterbury. And I noted that the Archbishop of Canterbury was none to happy with those developments. The Archbishop apparently hated Offa, and the feeling became mutual. The Archbishop continued to oppose Offa's excursions into Kent, and he remained a thorn in Offa's side. In addition to this problem, Offa was getting older and he saw how other kingdoms had fallen apart when the king died as the king's heirs battled each other for power.

So in the year 786, a great church conference was held in Britain, and Offa used that conference as an opportunity to solve some these problems. Papal delegates traveled from Rome to attend the meeting, and Anglo-Saxon dignitaries from other kingdoms were also in attendance. One item on the agenda was to get the Church in Rome to sanction Offa's son Ecgfrith as his successor. This had been done on the Continent, but no Anglo-Saxon king had ever had his heir consecrated in advance by the Church.

The other item on the agenda was to weaken the power of the Archbishop of Canterbury down in Kent. So Offa announced the establishment of a new archbishopric to be created for Mercia at Lichfield. This was intended to deprive the archbishop of Canterbury of some of his standing and power.

Unfortunately for Offa, both of his objectives at the conference ultimately failed. When Offa died a decade later, his son only survived him by five months, and his son didn't have any children. So all that advanced planning for an orderly and long-term succession went out the window. And Mercia experienced the very succession problems which Offa had sought to avoid.

And that new archbishopric at Lichfield was established, but it only had one Archbishop. And when he died, it completely was abandoned.

But let's go back to that religious conference for a minute. It was apparently a really big deal at the time because a short time later there was correspondence between Charlemagne's court and the Pope about the conference. And the reason why that correspondence is important to our story is because it mentions the languages which were spoken at the conference. Specifically, it says that the Anglo-Saxons spoke "þeodice." And this reference is actually kind of important.

Note that the correspondence doesn't say that the Anglo-Saxons spoke "English." They spoke "þeodice." And that's because "English" wasn't a widely-accepted term yet, certainly not outside of Britain. So what was "þeodice"?

Well, ***þeodice*** was the general term used during this period for the language of the Germanic peoples. So it was used to refer to the language of the people east of the Rhine, and it was used to refer to the native Germanic language of the Franks which was still spoken in parts of the Frankish kingdom. And here we see that it was also applied to the Anglo-Saxons. So this really illustrates how similar all of those languages were at the time.

From the perspective of Charlemagne's court and the Church in Rome, the Anglo-Saxons spoke the same language as all the other Germanic peoples on the Continent. It was all ***þeodice***. So this suggests that the various Germanic languages were still intelligible to each other throughout most of Europe, including Britain.

The Anglo-Saxons also used the term. In Old English it was called ***þeodisc***. So we can say that the Anglo-Saxons spoke the English dialect of ***þeodisc***. But the reason why that term ***þeodisc*** is kind of important to our story is because it eventually evolved into the words ***Deutsch*** and ***Dutch***.

The history here gets a little bit complicated, but within most of modern-day Germany, the term evolved from ***þeodisc*** to ***Deutsch*** which is still the name for the German language in German. And of course, ***Deutschland*** is the name of Germany in German.

In Northern Germany and the Netherlands, the word ***þeodisc*** developed different pronunciations over time, and those variations were sometimes applied to specific Germanic dialects. But one of those variations was ***Duutsch*** (/doo-tch/) which passed into English as ***Dutch*** in the 1300s. By that point, ***þeodisc*** had largely disappeared from English having been replaced with - well - ***English***. But now English took in this new word ***Dutch*** which was really just a later version of ***þeodisc***.

At first, ***Dutch*** had the same general sense as ***Deutsch*** or ***þeodisc***. In other words, it meant German. And that original sense still survives in the name of the Pennsylvania Dutch who settled in the United States from Germany – not the Netherlands. So Pennsylvania Dutch really means Pennsylvania Germans using the original meaning of ***Dutch***.

So how did ***Dutch*** come to refer to the language and people of the Netherlands specifically?

Well, in the 1600s the distinction between the language of the Netherlands and the language of Germany began to be better defined. Of course, there was no such nation as Germany yet, just a bunch of independent provinces and city-states. So there was no standard word for the region. And that's why the name of Germany varies so much in other languages today. In French and Spanish, the name is based on the Allemanni tribe. In Finnish, the name of Germany is ***Saksa*** based on the name of the Saxon tribe. In modern English, we use the name ***Germany*** ultimately based on the old 'Germani' tribe and on the Latin term ***Germania***. But the name ***Germany*** wasn't really used in English until the 1500s and 1600s.

Prior to that, it was still ***Dutch***. But around the 1600s, several different terms started to emerge to distinguish the dialects of the region. It was around this time in the 1600s that ***Deutsch*** and ***Dutch*** really began to become distinct. Also, sometimes the Low German dialects of Germany were called ***nederduytsch***. ***Neder*** meant 'low,' and it's actually cognate with the Old English word ***nether*** – still found in words like ***netherworld*** for Hell. So ***nederduytsch*** literally meant 'Low German.' But the other dialects spoken around the mouth of the Rhine were called ***nederlandsch*** which was literally 'lower landish.' Of course, that term produced the modern term ***Netherlands***.

In Britain, these high and low distinctions also started to be made. The language of the Netherlands started to be called ***Low Dutch*** and the language of German regions was called ***High Dutch***. So ***High Dutch*** was basically what we know today as ***German***.

But all of this coincided with the rise of the Dutch Colonial Empire in the 1600s and the 1700s. So the British found themselves in constant contact with the Low Dutch in the Netherlands. They traded with them, they fought against them, and they were rivals for the same territory in the New World and beyond. As you might know, New York City was originally a Dutch fur trading settlement called New Amsterdam. And because of that close contact rivalry between the

Dutch and the British, the term ***Low Dutch*** started to become simply ***Dutch***, and from that point on, the term ***Dutch*** became associated exclusively with the Netherlands. And with respect to the rest of the Germanic regions, the term ***High Dutch*** just fell out of use, and it started to be replaced with the newer word ***German***.

So English basically narrowed the meaning of ***Dutch*** over time to this one specific region.

The rivalry between the British and the Dutch during this period was actually reflected in the English language. ***Dutch*** became a negative word in English. And during the 1600s and 1700s, English speakers began to invent a lot of new expressions with the word ***Dutch***, and most of them had a negative or pejorative connotation. ***Double Dutch*** was double talk or gibberish. Suicide was called the ***Dutch Act***. A ***Dutch bargain*** was a one-sided bargain. ***Dutch courage*** was courage or bravery inspired by liquor or booze. ***Dutch luck*** was undeserved luck. ***Dutch praise*** was a euphemism for condemnation. And ***Dutch treat*** was a date or outing where you had to pay your own way. So a ***Dutch treat*** wasn't really a 'treat' at all. A ***Dutch uncle*** was a very critical person. If you were ***in Dutch***, it meant that you were 'in trouble,' probably 'in jail.' And that is just a few of the common expressions at the time.

This pejorative use of ***Dutch*** in English wasn't lost on the Dutch themselves. They spoke English well enough to know what was going on. And in the early 1900s, Dutch officials were so aware of this connotation that they ordered the government to stop using the term ***Dutch*** altogether. It was decided to use the official term ***Netherlands*** instead.

So I hope you found that interesting. But the main point is that ***Dutch*** was once a general term for 'German,' and it is a later version of the word ***þeodisc*** which was also a general word for Germanic languages, including English. And it was in fact a term used by Charlemagne for the English language.

So let me return briefly to Charlemagne and Offa. About three years after that big church conference in Britain where Offa tried to deal with some of his local problems, he was contacted by Charlemagne. Charlemagne wanted to show his respect for Offa by trying to arrange a marriage between Charlemagne's son, Charles, and one of Offa's daughters. Charlemagne assumed that Offa would eagerly accept the offer, but Offa actually made a counter-offer. He would agree to Charlemagne's proposed marriage alliance only if Offa's son Ecgfrith could marry one of Charlemagne's daughters. In other words – quid pro quo.

Charlemagne was apparently shocked and taken aback by this counter-offer. The warm relationship between the two leaders suddenly became really cold. Charlemagne refused the counter-offer, and the marriage alliance never happened. And going back to our original theme, the two leaders started to quibble over trade. They each imposed an embargo on traders from the other country. It was during this period that Offa drove out the rival king in Wessex and imposed his protégé there. But Charlemagne gave refuge to the rival claimant to the Wessex throne – Egbert. By this point, Offa had become convinced that Charlemagne was trying to disrupt his kingdom.

But this is when Alcuin stepped in. Remember Alcuin? The Northumbrian scholar who helped to spur the Carolingian Renaissance and gave us our modern lowercase letters. Well, he helped to mediate the dispute between Charlemagne and Offa. He wrote a letter to the archbishop of Canterbury to try to assure Offa that Charlemagne had no intention to threaten Mercia or the surrounding regions. And it actually worked. Afterwards, the Cold War began to thaw, and the two leaders started to get on again.

The respective trade embargos were dropped. In 796, about seven years after the disputes started, Charlemagne sent a letter to Offa. He once again referred to Offa as his 'dearest brother.' He agreed to allow Anglo-Saxon traders to enter his kingdom, and he assured their protection while they were there. His letter indicates that there was a mutual agreement in place, and that Offa was to offer the same protection to Frankish traders. And this is considered one of the first trading treaties between kings in Western Europe.

And this development brings our discussion full circle. We once again see the overriding importance of trade. In the old days, a rejected offer for a marriage alliance might lead to war. And harboring a rival's political enemy could definitely lead to conflict. But this was the eighth century – the era of traders and tremendous wealth. And all of that political back and forth was fine, but it couldn't jeopardize those lucrative trading networks. The old Germanic notions of 'might makes right' were giving way to notions of diplomacy and negotiated settlements.

And there was another factor bringing these two leaders back together, and that was a common shared threat. During that period of brief Cold War between Offa and Charlemagne, something happened which likely stunned and shocked both leaders.

According to the later Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, in the year 789, three ships of Scandinavians arrived on the Wessex coast. An official went out to meet the ships to see what they wanted, but the so-called ***Northmen*** killed him. The Chronicle then says that those were the first ships of 'Danes' to come to England. ***Danes*** was a generic term for Viking in Britain. So the fact that they were initially referred to as 'Northmen' has led modern scholars to conclude that these were ships from Norway. And that is all we have from that Chronicle entry – just a couple of lines. But those lines suggest that the era of the Viking Invasions had arrived.

Those Scandinavians had made a living out of trade and plunder, and now they found their way to Britain. They had been trading there for some time, but this type of aggressive activity was usually reserved for their neighbors in Scandinavia and the Baltic. Now it was moving westward.
Other sources tell us that Offa began to arrange coastal defenses. The natural conclusion is that those defenses were intended for those Scandinavian pirates. Three years after that first skirmish, the Vikings returned. For the year 792, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle gives us the following passage:

> "In this year, dreadful foreboding warnings came over the land of Northumbria, terrifying the people most woefully. There were excessive whirlwinds and lightning storms. Fiery dragons were seen flying across the sky. These signs were soon followed by a great

famine, and shortly after, on January 8th, the ravaging of heathen men destroyed God's church in Lindisfarne through brutal robbery and slaughter."

This is typically sighted as the first official Viking raid in Britain. And the effect of that surprising attack cannot be overstated. The Lindisfarne monastery was looted. Many of the monks and much of the cattle were killed. The Vikings sailed away with gold, jewelry and sacred items. Though we know virtually nothing about the raiders, some scholars believe that they were Norwegian traders who had been in Britain for a while before they turned on the local populace and attacked the monastery.

But for the people of Christian Europe, it didn't really matter who they were. They couldn't that a monastery of all places had been looted. That was considered completely out of the realm of possibility. Down in Charlemagne's court, Alcuin wrote a famous letter to monks in Britain after the attack. He stated that the Anglo-Saxons had never seen such a terror in their entire 350 years in Britain.

But the terror was just beginning. The next year, the Viking raiders returned, and they attacked Bede's monastery at Jarrow. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle says that Northumbrians were a little better prepared that time. Some of the Viking war leaders were killed in the attack. And some of their ships were broken up in bad weather. When the Viking sailors from the sinking ships made it to shore, they were promptly killed, but that was little consolation. Another prominent monastery had been looted and plundered. The next year, the raiders returned again and sacked the monastery at Iona on the western coast of Scotland. So the raiders were beginning to focus on the regions around Scotland and Ireland. Offa died the next year, but the raiders kept coming. Three years after Offa's death in the year 799 – the last year of the eighth century – the first Viking raids took place in Charlemagne's Frankish kingdom. And now Charlemagne began to fortify river defenses to prevent inland incursions.

Thanks to the Old Norse influence on English, we can describe these Viking raids with their own words. And those words enable us to express the horror of those raids. The words ***raid*** and ***ransack*** come from the Vikings. ***Burn***, ***scathe*** and ***scorch*** are Old Norse words. ***Lift***, ***drag***, ***lug***, ***thrust*** and ***take*** reflect the activity of the raiders. And even though the Vikings took gold and valuables from Britain, they left behind several words which reflect the general sentiment at the time. Those words were ***scare***, ***shriek*** and ***die***.

In the next episode, we will explore how the Viking raiders eventually became the Viking conquerors. We'll examine the rise of Wessex and the beginnings of England. And we'll look at the how Charlemagne, the King of the Franks, became Emperor of the Romans. And along the way, we'll see how these events impacted the English language.

So until next time, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.