THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 59:
LET'S MAKE A DEAL

Presented by Kevin W. Stroud

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 59: Let's Make A Deal. In this episode, we're going to look at the decline of the Anglo-Saxon Golden Age. We'll move the story forward into the eleventh century, and we'll explore how everything started to go wrong for the young English kingdom. During this period, a lot of deals were made, and some of those deals were broken. So one of the underlying themes of this episode is deal-making. And that means we're also going to explore the etymology of deal-making terms.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can always reach me at kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com. And a big thanks to those of you who have made donations to the podcast. As always, I appreciate the support and generosity.

Also, I want to begin to this episode with a little bit of breaking news. There doesn't tend to be a lot of breaking news in the History of English, but a recent study of ancient DNA in Europe has revealed some fascinating results. A lot of you were kind enough to send me links to several articles about the study. So I thought I would mention it here as well.

The research concerns the origin and migration of the first Indo-Europeans. You might recall that I mentioned in earlier episodes that there were basically two theories about the home of the original Indo-Europeans. One theory is that they originated in modern-day Turkey, south of the Black Sea, about 8 or 9,000 years ago. The other theory is the steppe theory which says that the Indo-Europeans originated north of the Black Sea andthe Caspian Sea on the Eurasian steppes about 6 or 7,000 years ago. This steppe theory suggests that the first Indo-Europeans were likely the Yamnaya people who lived in the steppe region around that time based on archaeological research. The steppe theory is the theory which I presented in the podcast, and it is really the more-accepted theory based on the linguistic evidence.

Well, recently, scientists in Europe collected DNA samples from the remains of 69 bodies which have been unearthed in Europe over the years. The remains were from people who lived 3,000 to 8,000 years ago. The researchers looked at DNA patterns to try to identify links between the bodies. What they found is that three-quarters of the bodies found in Germany have DNA links to the bodies of the Yamnaya people in the steppe region north of the Black Sea and Caspian Sea. So a direct DNA link has been established between the two groups. And the link isn't some faint, statistical link. It is actually very substantial. Again, three-quarters of the bodies from Germany show that link.

So this study provides some genetic research to support the linguistic research. And it tends to confirm the steppe theory which I presented in earlier episodes of the podcast. And since it is DNA evidence, it suggests that there was an actual migration and movement of people from the steppe region to the Germanic regions. So it wasn't just a case of the language spreading, it was also a case of people moving and taking their language with them. So this is one more piece of evidence to support the steppe theory.

Of course, there are still a lot of unanswered questions, and the DNA evidence may be subject to other interpretations, but this is still an important step in trying to understand how the original Indo-European language spread throughout Europe.

So with that bit of news out of the way, lets turn to this episode. And this time, we're going to examine the general decline the Anglo-Saxon Golden Age. It was a rapid decline which reversed much of what had been accomplished over the prior century.

As we examine these events, there are a couple of recurring themes. The first is the delicate balance between English and Latin in the late Anglo-Saxon period. The Benedictine Reforms led to a resurgence of monks and clerics who could speak Latin. So Latin was making a bit of a comeback. And as we'll see, the literate Anglo-Saxons were trying to figure out when to use Latin and when to use English.

The other theme which runs through this episode is the art of the deal. Bargains, contracts and alliances are an essential feature of politics. And they shaped the development of Anglo-Saxon Britain in the century leading up to the Normans Conquest.

So let's begin with the word ***contract***. It's a Latin word like most of our modern legal terms. And it came into English with the Normans shortly after 1066. The word ***contract*** consists of two parts – ***com*** which meant 'together' and ***trahere*** which meant 'draw.' In fact, that second part is actually cognate with the English word ***draw*** and the Norse word ***drag*** which we've seen before. So ***contract*** literally means to 'draw together,' which is what happens when two people make an agreement.

Another word for a contract or an agreement is the word ***deal***. And ***deal*** is an Old English word. But whereas ***contract*** meant to 'draw together,' the original Germanic sense of the word ***deal*** was 'to divide.' And we still have that sense in the verb form of ***deal***, as in to 'deal' cards, which means to divide cards between several people. But if you think about it, sometimes we divide things in order to share them. So it is part of mutual agreement. And if we agree how to divide or split some limited resource, then we've made a ***deal***. So despite the fact that ***contract*** meant 'draw together' and ***deal*** originally meant 'to divide,' today the words have the same basic meaning. And notice how the Norman word ***contract*** seems formal and legal. Whereas the native English word ***deal*** seems much more common and familiar. That's often the case when we compare Norman French words and Old English words.

I should also note that the Old English version of ***deal*** gave us the word ***dole***. And that word is often used in the context of dividing or distributing money or food for charitable purposes. So you might 'dole out' food or money. And if you are dependent upon such charity, then you are living 'on the dole.' So ***dole*** and ***deal*** have the same Old English root associated with dividing or distributing something.

Now as I noted, deals are going to be an important part of this episode. So let's return to the history on the ground in the late 900s. As we've seen, this was a period in which England was wealthy and powerful, and English culture flourished.

At the height of this period, in the 960s and early 970s, the king was Edgar. He became king at around 16 years of age. So he was one of six boy kings who ruled during the late 900s. But Edgar's reign really stands out against the others. He was a considered a good leader, and it was a good time to be the king. The country was powerful, and it had a strong navy which kept the Vikings at bay.

But even though it was a period of peace and prosperity, it's difficult to say how much credit Edgar deserves for that because, as we've seen, the dominant figure in the background was the old cleric Dunstan. Dunstan had been around since the time of Aethelstan back when the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were first united. By this point, he was Archbishop of Canterbury. And there is little doubt that he was pulling a lot of strings in the background. In fact, it is difficult to say where Dunstan's authority ended and King Edgar's began. Church and state had blended together, and King Edgar saw himself as a religious leader as much as a political leader.

This blending of church and state may explain one of the more curious aspects of Edgar's reign – his coronation. Generally speaking, a king was coronated very shortly after he took the throne. But Edgar's coronation was delayed by about fourteen years. It didn't occur until the year 973 when Edgar was 30 years old. So why was that?

Well, the answer probably goes back to the influence of Dunstan and the overall influence of the church. During this period, a priest couldn't be ordained until the age of 30. And Edgar's coronation was equated with the ordainment of a priest. It was meant to emphasize that Edgar was ordained as king by God. And it emphasized the close link between the Church and the state.

Also, coronations were typically held at Kingston, but Edgar's coronation was held in Bath, an old city from the days of Roman Britain. A lot of Roman buildings still stood there. So the coronation was also an attempt to make a connection to Britain's Roman past. The implication was that Edgar ruled over a new Anglo-Saxon Empire.

The coronation was a really big deal at the time. And the structure and scale of the coronation was so significant that it became the model for all subsequent coronations, even that of Elizabeth II in 1953.

But as far as the story of English is concerned, there was one aspect of the ceremony which is particularly important, and that was the oath. This is one of the first documented cases of an English king swearing an oath as part of the coronation ceremony. And it became a standard part of the ceremony going forward. It was the only part of the ceremony conducted in English. Because the ceremony was both religious and political in nature, it was mostly conducted in Latin. But when it came time for that oath, the language shifted to English. And that tradition was maintained long thereafter.

So this illustrates how the Anglo-Saxons were trying to balance the use of English and Latin. Formal ceremonies like coronations required the use of a formal language like Latin. But that meant that a lot of people in attendance probably didn't understand it. So when it came time for

Edgar to take his oath, that needed to be understood by all in attendance. So it had to be taken in English.

But that oath also reflects our larger theme – the theme of contracts and deals. The coronation oath reflects a very basic notion of government by contract. Edgar was coronated as king, but in return, he pledged in English to defend the land, to uphold its laws, to protect its church, and to rule justly. So this was a deal. Despite the religious overtones of the ceremony, Edgar wasn't king because of some divine right. He was selected as king to do a job, and he agreed to do that job. That oath has evolved a little bit over the centuries, but the essence of that oath is still the same today.

So the coronation oath reflects the notion that there was a basic contract or agreement between the rulers and the ruled. We'll see a further development of this idea in the next episode. And it will be an important concept when we get to Magna Carta in a couple of centuries. By the 1600s and 1700s, this idea fed into the concept of the Social Contract. And that concept provided a philosophical basis for the American Revolution. So it is a very important idea running through English political thought. And we can see some of the roots of that idea here in Edgar's coronation.

I should also note here that ***coronation*** is a Latin word from the Latin word ***corona***. And ***corona*** is the ultimate source of the French word ***crown***. But ***swear*** and ***oath*** are Old English words. So given that etymology, perhaps it makes sense that the coronation was conducted in Latin, but Edgar 'swore an oath' in English.

Now Edgar was married multiple times. He had a child named Edward with his first wife, and I say first 'wife,' but there is some question as to whether he was actually married to her. In fact, virtually nothing is known about her. Nevertheless, she had a son with Edgar, and as I mentioned his name was Edward. And Edward was recognized as Edgar's son, whether he was legitimate or not. So as the eldest son, he was considered by many to be his father's natural successor.

But by the time we get to Edgar's coronation, Edgar was married to another woman named Ælfthryth. And during that coronation, Edgar and Ælfthryth was crowned as the King and Queen. And that actually set a precedent for the coronation of a queen as well as a king. And this turned out to be a significant event as well because Edgar also had a son with the Queen, Ælfthryth. The younger son's name was Aethelred. And for many nobles, the son of this official marriage of the King and Queen was the rightful heir to the throne.

And as it turned out, this dispute over the proper heir had to be resolved sooner rather than later. Edgar died just two years after his coronation at the age of 32. And that meant one of those two sons was going to succeed him. But which one?

Edward was the elder son, but he was only about 16 years old. And the younger son, Aethelred, was probably around 10 years old. Some sources say he was as young as 8. So either selection was bound to continue to line of so-called 'boy kings.' This choice soon caused a split between

the clerics and the nobles who had a say in the decision. Some sided with Edward – the older child. Others sided with Aethelred – the queen's son.

In earlier episodes, I discussed how Dunstan and another cleric named Aethelwold had founded the first two Benedictine monasteries and how they really kick-started that movement and worked together. Well now, even they were divided. Dunstan threw his support with the older son Edward while Aethelwold supported the young Aethelred.

But the power of Archbishop Dunstan may have proved decisive because his choice, Edward, was soon selected by the witan as the new king. There may have been questions about his legitimacy, but at least he wasn't a small child, so Edward's supporters were happy, but young Aethelred's supporters were not. A civil war nearly ensued, but was averted. That division and animosity meant that Edward's reign was tenuous. He never enjoyed the full support which his father had.

Three years after becoming king, Edward traveled to Dorset in southwestern England to visit his young brother Aethelred and his step-mother, the Queen Aelfthryth. While there, he went hunting one day. And when he returned to the castle at the end of the day, he was surrounded by several men. While Edward was still on his horse, at least one of the men stabbed him. It proved to be a fatal blow. Edward – the young king – was dead.

The whole affair was surrounded in mystery. The murderer was never identified. And no one was ever punished for Edward's death. Of course, many people suspected his step-mother Aelfthryth – the surviving queen. It was her son Aethelred who had the other claim to the throne. And he was the likely successor if Edward died before having children of his own. So her royal retainers were the likely culprits. Yet she was never directly implicated. And young Aethelred was too young to have been involved. So mystery and suspicion lingered in the air.

In the years after his death, Edward was made a saint, and he acquired the nickname 'Edward the Martyr.' And he is still generally known by that title today to distinguish him from the many other Edwards who ruled England.

With Edward's death, his young half-brother Aethlred did in fact become king. But that cloud of suspicion never went away. Even if he was innocent, he was still the beneficiary of his brother's cold-blooded murder. But on top of that, Aethelred was just a lousy king. He is generally considered one of the worst kings in English history. It was during his reign that the powerful English kingdom completely collapsed. As England crumbled, many people attributed his horrible reign to that earlier murder which brought him to power.

Aethelred was only 10 years of age when he became king. So he was another 'boy-king.' And at such a young age, he wasn't really prepared for the job. Like many of the kings of this period, Aethelred acquired a nickname in the years after he was king. It is a very well-known nickname. He is infamously known as 'Aethelred the Unready.' And that name is self-explanatory. He really wasn't ready for the job, but that nickname kind of evolved over the centuries. The original

version of the nickname was 'Aethelred Unread.' But in Old English, it didn't mean he was unready. It meant he was 'poorly advised.' So let's look a little closer at that infamous nickname.

The name ***Aethelred*** was actually a common Anglo-Saxon name. The first part – ***Aethel*** – meant 'noble.' We've seen that nobles was called ***aethelings*** from the same root. And the second part of the name was ***red***. We actually looked at that word in the last episode.

You might remember that ***raed*** meant 'to advise, counsel or guide.' We saw that the word ***raed*** produced the modern words ***read*** and ***riddle***. To become informed by reviewing lines of text was 'to read.' And to read between the lines to discern a hidden meaning led to the word ***riddle***. But the original root word meant 'to advise or counsel.'

So the name Aethelred meant 'noble counsel.' But Aethelred's reign was so disastrous that people began to make a pun on his name. They called him 'Aethelred Unread.' So it meant 'noble counsel – un-counseled – or poorly counseled .' And to understand that pun, we have to consider his advisors.

By the time Aethelred became king, all of those older advisors like Dunstan were getting really old. Within a few years, most of his advisors began to die off. Dunstan died. Aethelwold died. And several other prominent advisors died. Unfortunately, Aethelred was not able to select good replacements. And that lack of guidance probably played a role in his many poor decisions. So he was considered to have been 'poorly advised.' And that explains the original pun on his name.

That nickname first appeared in writing in the 1100s, about a century after Aethelred's death. But it certainly could have been around longer than that, perhaps even during the time of Aethelred's reign. But over the centuries, as the Old English word ***raed*** stopped being used in its original sense, the meaning of that original pun was lost. So later generations converted 'Aethelred Unread' into Aethelred the Unready, which was also true in its own sense because he really was 'unready.' Interestingly, the word ***ready*** is completely unrelated to the Old English word ***raed***. ***Ready*** is a separate Old English word which is actually cognate with the word ***ride***. The original sense was 'ready to ride,' as in 'ready to ride a horse.' But over time, ***ready*** has acquired a general sense of being prepared for any kind of activity or event. Of course, ***unready*** means the opposite – being unprepared. And since Aethelred wasn't prepared for much of anything, the nickname 'Aethelred the Unready' stuck.

The story of England between the time of Edgar and his son Aethelred is a good example of how quickly things can go from being very good to very bad. When Aethelred assumed the throne as a boy, England was strong and prosperous. A single coinage was used throughout the kingdom. And coins were important, especially for trade and small-scale transactions. So merchants and traders relied on coins. But large-scale wealth wasn't really measured in coins or money. It was measured in land. The wealthiest people were large land-owners, and that included many prominent nobles. But it also included the church. And now the nobles and the church leaders started to compete for control of that land.

Since land was the primary form of wealth in Anglo-Saxon England, any threat to those land holdings was taken very seriously. And one potential threat to existing landowners was the growth of the church and the monasteries. All of those new monasteries needed land. They not only needed land for the buildings, they also needed land to support the monastery. Those monasteries were largely self-sustaining. The monks worked the land and provided much of their own food. So a large monastery required a lot of land to function.

In many cases, Edgar had granted royal lands to the monasteries. But in other cases, local landowners had been forced or coerced to transfer land to the monasteries. And the monasteries were granted privileges which weakened the power of local officials. Now if it had just been a few monasteries, these problems would have been limited, but with so many monasteries being built so quickly, opposition began to grow in the countryside. There was a realization that if monastic growth continued at the same rate, the monasteries would soon own half the country. So in many areas, popular sentiment began to turn again the monks.

In some cases, the local nobles began to re-claim their land. In the end, many of the existing monasteries survived, but this push-back really marked the end of that period of monastic growth.

I noted that earlier kings like Edgar had granted royal lands to the church and monasteries, but they also granted land to nobles to secure support from them. And Aethelred continued that tradition as well. Early on, he had a powerful, established group of nobles. But as a Wessex king, most of his royal lands were in Wessex. He didn't have lands to grant in the north, so he was never able to maintain the same level of support there. And that is where Wessex rule was the most tenuous – in the north. So land grants strengthened Aethelred's power in the south, but the lack of those grants weakened his power in the north over the long term.

So large land-holdings signified wealth, and it also signified power. Since land was such an important asset, it was also important to clearly document who owned the land. Land disputes were common. And if they weren't resolved, they could fester and create conflicts between the landowners. That could be a problem, especially if the conflict involved large-scale landowners like nobles or the church. One way to document land ownership or land grants was to put it in writing, but up to this point, writing had been very limited in England. And that meant legal documents were very limited. We've seen before that prominent people occasionally drafted a Will or ***quide*** in Old English, and those documents transferred property at death.

But what if you wanted or needed to transfer land while you were living. Well, before writing was common, the traditional way of transferring land was for the new owner to come to the land with witnesses. The new owner took physical possession of the land and the old owner left. And the witnesses confirmed the transaction or the deal. So it was a physical act.

But during the Anglo-Saxon period, writing was gradually introduced. And written land charters started to be maintained. By the late Anglo-Saxon period, land charters had become the most common type of legal document in England. Of course, those charters required scribes to write them down. And most of those scribes lived in the monasteries. As we know, they were trained

in monastic and church schools. So many of these land charters were prepared by church-trained scribes, and they kept them in the monasteries. So not surprisingly, those old land charters tended to resemble church documents. Over time, those charters grew larger and larger with more and more religious language.

And they were almost always written in Latin since it was the language of the Church and the formal language of the day. And as I said, those charters often blurred the line between a legal document and a sermon. They sometimes proclaimed that anyone attempting to violate or infringe upon the land grant would be committing blasphemy, and they would burn in the devouring flames of hell for eternity. And in many cases, the language went far beyond that. So they weren't like simple deeds. They were complex semi-religious documents written in Latin.

Now land signified wealth. But sometimes landowners needed to raise money. And when that need arose, they had the same basic options which we have today. The could either sell the land or borrow money and use the land as collateral for the loan. So let's look at each of those options.

The first option was to sell the land, but in early Old English, the word ***sell*** didn't mean what it means today. It meant to 'give something away.' So if you read in an early Charter that an Anglo-Saxon 'sold' his land, it actually meant that he gave it away and got nothing in return. But by this point in our story around the year 1000, the sense of the word ***sell*** has changed. It now meant that the person transferring the property was getting something in exchange. So the modern meaning of the word ***sell*** had emerged. But it could still be used to mean a gift well into Middle English, and even Geoffrey Chaucer used the word ***sell*** to mean a gift.

Now if the landowner didn't want to sell his property, his other option was to borrow the money and use the property as collateral for the loan. We saw in the last episode that ***lend*** is an Old English word, and ***loan*** is the Norse version of that word which was borrowed into Old English. Those words retain much of their original meaning.

But what about the word ***borrow***. Well, ***borrow*** is also an Old English word. The word was ***borgian***. But just like the word ***sell***, the meaning of ***borrow*** has changed over time. It's kind of a strange word because the original meaning wasn't ***borrow***. It was actually the opposite. It meant 'to lend,' and it had a sense of lending something in exchange for some collateral. When the lender took the collateral, he was said to 'borrow' it. So he was both the 'lender' of the loan, and the 'borrower' or recipient of the collateral. So 'lend and borrow' went together, but the words described two different parts of the lender's transaction.

So let's use a modern example – a car loan. A bank loans you some money to buy a car, and you give the bank the title to the car to hold until the debt is re-paid. In Modern English, the bank is the lender and you are the borrower. But in Old English, you would say that the bank 'loaned' you the money, and the bank 'borrowed' the car in return. So again, 'borrowing' was something the lender did. He took some collateral in exchange for the loan, but it was part the lending process. Of course, when the lender 'borrowed' or received the collateral, he was expected to return it when the loan was repaid. So the transfer was temporary. And that's how we got the modern sense of the word ***borrow***. Today, we use the term to mean the temporary possession of

money or property. So when you receive that money from the bank for the car loan, you have to return it at some point. So today, you are the borrower of the money. The sense of ***borrow*** has therefore shifted from the collateral to the loan.

Interestingly, the word ***borrow*** has a closely-related cognate in Modern English. That word is ***bargain***. Just as the Anglo-Saxons had ***borgian*** which became ***borrow***, the Germanic Franks on the continent had their own version of that same Germanic root word. The Frankish version of the word passed into French and produced the word ***bargain***. And the Normans brought that word with them to England in 1066. So ***borrow*** and ***bargain*** are cognate. And of course, ***bargain*** is another word for a deal.

Now if you borrow money and transfer land as collateral, the lender may want some written evidence that he has title to the land until the debt is repaid. And that written evidence is called a ***mortgage***. And once again, we can thank the French for that word, but it uses a Germanic root. The word is a combination of ***mort*** meaning 'death' and ***gage*** meaning a pledge or promise or an exchange. So a ***mortgage*** was a type of exchange – in this case, money for property. And when the loan was re-paid, the loan essentially expired or died at that time. So at that point, the lender had to return the property. So the 'death' or 'mort' part of ***mortgage*** is referring to the expiration of the loan itself, not the expiration or death of one of the parties.

I said that ***gage*** meant a pledge or promise. It comes from French, but it was originally a Frankish word with deep Germanic roots. And we have that same root in English. The original Germanic version of the word was ****wadi***, and it also meant to pledge or promise something. It produced the Old English words ***wed*** and ***wedding***, which are also types of pledges or promises, specifically the promises made by two spouses to each other. Over on the continent, the Frankish version of the word produced the French word ***wage***, which was the payment made to someone in exchange for labor or services. So again, it involved an exchange of promises. So ***wed*** and ***wage*** are cognate. One is English and one is Frankish.

But remember that the French sometimes had a problem with that Germanic 'W' sound at the beginning of those words, and they often pronounced it with a 'G' sound. So a word like ***warden*** became ***guardian*** in French. And a name like ***William*** became ***Guillome***. So ***wage*** became ***gage*** in some French dialects. And ***gage*** came in as the second part of ***mortgage*** as I noted earlier.

But ***gage*** also came in as part of the word ***engage***. Of course, one definition of ***engage*** is to agree to become married. So there were see that connection to the word ***wed*** from Old English. So based on that etymology, ***wed*** and ***engage*** are cognate. Of course, when two people get 'engaged,' they exchange a mutual promise to marry. So they are basically making a deal. And ***engage*** can also be used in that more general sense to mean an exchange between two parties. So two armies might engage in battle, and two people might engage in an argument. And two competing nations might engage in peace talks. So ***engage*** also has that general sense of a give and take.

And one type of 'give and take' is that mortgage which I described earlier, which also uses that root word ***gage***. Even though the word ***mortgage*** came in from French after 1066, the concept of

the mortgage already existed in Anglo-Saxon England. There are at least two surviving mortgage charters from the Anglo-Saxon period. And of course, like all of the other charters, they were written in Latin - not English.

So lets talk a little more about those Latin charters because they were starting to be a problem. They were large, bulky, and ponderous. They were written in a complex legalese which mixed legal and religious language, and the entire document was written in Latin. So very few people could actually make sense of them. And charters weren't just used for land records. They were used for all kinds of official government edicts. So every time the king wanted to send orders to local officials, a bulky charter has to prepared, which most people couldn't read or understand without a translator. So there was an increasing need for a simple legal document – a letter providing basic instructions which could be written in English, so everyone could clearly understand it.

By the time of Aethelred, that type of document was in common use. It was called a ***writ*** from the same English root word which gave us the word ***write***. Whereas charters were large, bulky documents intended to be permanent records, writs were different. They were short, brief orders addressed to specific local officials.

The writ evolved as an attempt to use written documents to govern a largely illiterate population. By composing writs in English, they could be delivered and then read out loud to people in attendance at an assembly or meeting. No one knows exactly when the English writ first occurred. There are vague references to writs as far back as the time of Alfred. But the oldest surviving writs are from the time of Aethelred in the late 900s. They were a common device used during his reign to send instructions to the local shires.

But for our purposes, the invention of the writ shows how the late Anglo-Saxons were trying to balance the use of Latin and English. Latin was used for large formal documents which were intended to be permanent records. English was used for short direct orders to local officials, which were intended to be read out loud and understood by all those in attendance. So each language had a specific role in those types of legal documents.

And this was actually a sophisticated development with certain languages being used for certain purposes. And that sophistication reflects how advanced the Anglo-Saxon kingdom had become in the later half of the tenth century. But that Golden Age was about to come to an end.

England's wealth during this period was both a blessing and a curse. The nation had prospered, but that also made it a target. And the biggest threat came from the Vikings who were increasingly organized under powerful Scandinavian leaders. For several decades, the Vikings had been kept at bay, but now, during the early reign of Aethelred, all of that began to change.

In the western part of Britain in Wales, the various Welsh princes had been fighting each other. Norse Vikings from Ireland decided to exploit those divisions, and they began to conduct raids in Wales. Now some of those raiders began to test the waters across the border in England. The

wealth and prosperity of England made it irresistible. And the Vikings soon found that the resistence was not as great as it had once been.

In the year 980, just a couple of years after Aethelred became king, Vikings raiders attacked the southern English coast, as well Cheshire near the Welsh border. This was the beginning of a new wave of Viking activity in England. Almost every year for the next 30 years, some part of England was attacked by Vikings. Initially, these new raids were aimed at plunder. They weren't really looking to conquer the region, at least not yet.

Following those initial raids in 980, the next three years saw additional raids in cities in the southwest of England. By the mid and late 980s, England was under regular attack. And this is when Aethelred began to lose his elder advisors. Aethelword – the Bishop of Winchester – died in 984. He had been a major figure in the development of the Late West Saxon writing standard. He had also been an important advisor. And now he was gone.

Four years after Aethelwold's death, Archbishop Dunstan died. The year was 988. Dunstan had been an advisor to the various 'boy-kings' of England for almost 50 years. He had been around during the later years of the first Viking period. So he had lived throughout that entire Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Britain. Now with the Viking raids renewed, he too was gone. And that left Aethelred without two very important and very experienced advisors.

Three years after Dunstan's death, we find ourselves in the year 991 – a very important date for several reasons. One reason this date is important is because it is the year in which England and Normandy entered into a formal treaty – the first treaty between those two regions. So if we want to trace the events leading to 1066, this was sort of the first step in that process.

The treaty concerned the presence of Viking raiders in Normandy. The leader of Normandy at the time was named Richard. He was the grandson of Rollo – the Viking leader who had founded Normandy. As Duke of Normandy, Richard was allowing the Viking fleets to use Normandy as a base. They would launch from there, raid England, and return to Normandy for refuge.

Aethelred demanded that Richard kick the Vikings out of Normandy, but Richard ignored the demands. Since the direct appeal didn't work, Aethelred decided to contact the Pope regarding the problem. By this point, the Normans had converted to Christianity, so the Pope had some influence with the Norman leader. After the papal intervention, Richard came around and agreed to a treaty with Aethelred in 991.

Under the treaty, both leaders agreed not to shelter the other's enemies, which was great in theory, but in reality, Richard did very little to enforce the treaty. Within a few years, the Vikings were once again using Normandy as a place of refuge. But the real significance of this treaty is that it was the first formal agreement between England and Normandy. And as we'll see in a few moments, the breakdown of that treaty moved us one step closer to the Norman Conquest.

Now I should note here that a treaty is just another type of deal. It's a contract between two nations. And in fact, the word ***treaty*** is actually cognate with the word 'contract.'

The ***tract*** part of ***contract*** comes from the same Latin root which produced the word ***treaty***. And remember from earlier in the episode that that Latin root is also cognate with the English word ***draw*** and the Norse word ***drag***. In ***contract***, the root meant to 'draw together or pull together.' And the sense of pulling or dragging something led to a sense of trying to manage or deal with something. And that sense produced the words ***treat*** and ***treaty***. In medicine, you might manage an illness by 'treating' it. And in politics, you might manage a relationship with a foreign power by entering into an agreement with that power, and that agreement was called a ***treaty***. So ***treat*** and ***treaty*** both come from this same Latin root.

By the way, that same Indo-European root produced the word ***train***. Think of ***train*** in its original sense. It was the part of a gown or cloak that drags behind someone when they walk. We might say that it 'trails' behind, and ***trail*** is another variation of the same root word. Of course, the word ***train*** also had a specific verb sense. When you manage or deal with someone who is unskilled, and you try to teach them new skills, so you ***train*** them. So there we see that sense of trying to manage some problem or difficulty. Of course, in the modern age, the idea of a locomotive pulling cars down the railroad tracks produced the sense of the word ***train*** as a method of transportation. Another big piece of equipment which pulls something is a ***tractor*** – another word from that same root. So all of those words – ***treat***, ***treaty***, ***contract***, ***trail***, ***train*** and ***tractor*** – all come from the same Latin root, and all have a sense of pulling something or managing something.

For our purposes, the key is the fact that the original root word produced the words ***treaty*** and ***contract***. And that first treaty between England and Normandy took place at this point in the year 1991. And as I noted, it wasn't very effective. Less than three months after the treaty was signed, the Vikings were back in England.

In June, a fleet of Viking ships attacked the eastern seaboard of England. After attacking the eastern coast, they then turned south to the area around Maldon in eastern England, near the mouth of the River Blackwater. This was the region of Essex. And after entering the mouth of the river, they settled on an island there, likely the island known today as Northey Island.

The island is located in the middle of the river, but during low tide, the water levels became low enough that people could cross to the mainland via a thin passage or causeway. And in 991, the Vikings found themselves on that island with intentions of crossing over to the mainland to loot and plunder Essex. But, the Anglo-Saxon Earl of Essex named Bryhtnoth decided to prevent the Vikings from crossing over. So Bryhtnoth brought his troops to the river, and he lined them along the bank on the mainland side of the causeway. And the stage was set for a great battle.

That battle became known to history as the Battle of Maldon, and it is very important to our story. It produced one of the great poems of the Old English period known as the Battle of Maldon. It's another great battle poem in the tradition of the Battle of Brunanburh which we looked at in an earlier episode. And many scholars consider this poem – the Battle of Maldon – to be one of the greatest poems of the entire Old English period. It is highly revered in part because it doesn't describe a great victory like Brunanburh, it actually describes a great Anglo-

Saxon defeat. But it does so in very heroic terms. So there is a tragic nature to this poem which doesn't exist in Brunanburh.

It should be noted that most of what we know about this particular battle comes from the poem itself. So it is difficult to know how much of the poem is an accurate account of what happened. Certainly, we can assume that the poet took some artistic license with the story. In fact, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle only notes that the Essex leader Bryhtnoth was killed in battle at Maldon in 991. And that's it. It doesn't really provide any other details.

It is believed that the poem was composed several years after the actual battle. Estimates are anywhere from ten to forty years later.

The poem begins with the Anglo-Saxon army preparing for battle. The Essex leader Byrhtnoth commands his men to let go of their horses and advance on foot. He gives his men advice and tells them 'how they should stand' – "hu hi sceoldon standan." He shows them how to hold their shields correctly tightly in their hands.

On the bank of the island stands a 'Viking messenger' – "wicinga ar." The messenger informs Bryhtnoth that it is unwise to fight. He says that his Vikings will destroy the assembled English army. It is smarter for them to simply pay the Vikings tribute and avoid a storm of spears. He says, 'We will with that gold agree to a truce.' In Old English, the passage reads, "we willað wið þam golde grið fæstnian" (line 35). The poem says that the messenger asks for 'money for peace' – "feoh wið freode" – literally 'fee with friendship.' If the money is paid, the Vikings will set sail and leave the English in peace. So the messenger is asking to make a deal.

From our perspective, what is so fascinating about this passage is how the poet attempts to render the speech of the Viking messenger. He peppers the messenger's speech with Norse words. This was probably done to emphasize the fact that the Viking messenger spoke Norse – not English. So in one of the lines I just read, the messenger uses the Norse word ***grið*** to mean a truce or peace. This is the first known instance of the use of that Norse word in Old English. So it wasn't a common word at the time, but English speakers must have been familiar enough with Old Norse to understand what the term meant.

The messenger also uses the term ***gârræs*** (line 32) which meant 'to attack with spears.' It was literally a 'spear-rush.' And he also uses the phase "hilde dælon" (line 33) which literally meant to 'deal out battle.' Those phrases were unknown in English before this poem, but Old Norse had equivalent phrases. And notice what the messenger threatens to do with battle. He threatens to 'deal' it out to the Anglo-Saxons. So there we see the use of that word ***deal*** in the sense of handing something out.

Now I noted that the Viking messenger uses the Norse word ***grið*** meaning truce or peace. The equivalent Old English word was ***friþ***. And actually, in later Middle English, it was common for speakers to combine the two words in the expression 'griþ and friþ.' Well, in this passage, the messenger not only uses his native Norse word ***griþ***, he also uses the English word ***friþ***, and he uses it as a direct object in the sentence. And when he uses the word, he adds an inflection to the

end of it so that it becomes ***friþes***. But this inflection is not the correct English inflection for ***friþ*** in that context. It should have been just ***friþ***. Some scholars think was done intentionally by the poet to emphasize that the Viking messenger had a problem with English inflectional endings when he used English words. Remember that Old Norse used different inflectional endings. So it is believed that English and Norse speakers routinely mixed up those endings to the point that they were eventually dropped altogether. And in this passage from the poem, we may have some evidence that Norse speakers were doing just that. The poet may have been mimicking the types of mistakes which were common among Norse speakers.

So at this point early in the poem, the Viking messenger has proposed a deal. Pay us, and we'll go. Now if you know a little bit about this period of history, you will know that this was the big mistake made by Aethelred over the next few years. Time and time again, Aethelred agreed to pay off the Vikings, which bought a temporary peace, but it only encouraged more and more Vikings to show up and demand money. So it not only encouraged more Vikings raids, it also drained the coffers of the English kingdom. The country ran out of money and men as it tried to turn away the Vikings.

By the end of Aethelred's reign, this was considered one of his greatest failings. So it is interesting that this poem says that Byrhtnoth refused to pay the Vikings. The poet may be trying to draw a contrast between the brave Byrhtnoth at Maldon and the mis-guided Aethelred in later years.

Now I say that Byrhtnoth refused to pay the Vikings. He actually gave the messenger a bold response. He basically says, 'yeah, we 'll pay you tribute, but we're going to pay it with spears and swords.' He says of his army, 'They will pay you spears as tribute – deadly spears and old swords – weapons that will slay you in the storm of battle.' Bryhtnoth says that it is shameful that the Vikings have traveled so far, and they don't even want to fight. They just want to be paid. He says they won't get treasure so easily. They will have to negotiate with their swords first.

Since Bryhtnoth refuses the payment, no deal is made, and a battle becomes inevitable. But the respective armies can't get to each other because the tide is still high and the passage to the mainland is covered with water. The armies wait in their respective positions for a long time. But eventually, the tide or flood goes out – "Se flod ut gewat."

The first Vikings start to advance across the causeway, but the Anglo-Saxon warriors block the passage and kill the Vikings who try to cross. The Vikings soon realize that it isn't possible to breach the line of defenders. So the Vikings then request that they be allowed to pass over so they can engage the English in battle. Surprisingly, Bryhtnoth allows them passage. The poem says that he did that because of his pride using the Old English term for 'pride,' which was ***ofermode*** – literally 'over moody.'

Bryhtnoth commands his army to make a battle-wall with shields. The time for battle has come. The poem then describes the bloody battle, the fallen warriors, and the many individuals who were killed. The bravery of the Anglo-Saxon soldiers is described as they resist the Viking advance.

During the ensuing battle, Bryhtnoth is attacked by Viking warriors, and he is eventually killed in battled. At that point, some of the Anglo-Saxon fighters flee to the woods to save their lives. But Bryhtnoth's loyal retainers stand by him even after he has fallen, and they continue the fight. This was the traditional Germanic warrior code. A warrior never leaves or abandons his lord even when the fight is hopeless. It is better to die in battle than to live to fight another day as a coward. The poem says that those who continued to fight would not retreat while better men lay dead.

One by one, the brave warriors are slain. They are 'wound weary and fall to the Earth' – "wundum werige. Wæl feol on eorþan." What survives of the poem concludes with each of the warriors declaring their intention to die in battle rather than flee and abandon their lord.

So that's the Battle of Maldon. Again, we don't know if it is an accurate account of the battle, but it depicts the bravery and loyalty of the Anglo-Saxons.

For our purposes, the most fascinating aspect of this poem is probably that exchange at the beginning between the Viking messenger and Bryhtnoth. It is interesting to see how the English poet depicts the Norse language of the Viking messenger. But the substance of that exchange is also important. The Vikings' primary goal was money and valuables. They were willing to fight for it, but they preferred to have it handed to them. So they would gladly accept a payment and head elsewhere to extort someone else.

And as it turned out, after the defeat at Maldon, the Anglo-Saxons did pay off the victorious Vikings. Rather than avenging the defeat, Aethelred simply paid them 10,000 pounds of silver to leave. The Vikings accepted the payment and left. So a deal was made. But it was a bad deal for the English. They lost the battle and they paid the money. It was a bad precedent. And that payment was the first in a long series of such payments which grew larger and larger over time.

Those payments eventually became known as the Danegeld. The Danegeld was essentially a bribe, but we can think of it as a type of deal or bargain. The ***Dane*** part of ***Danegeld*** is self-explanatory. ***Dane*** was a general word for Vikings in England. A ***geld*** was a payment or tax. We've seen that word before in the term ***wergeld***, which literally meant 'man money.' If a person was killed or injured by another person, the ***wergeld*** was the payment made to the victim or the victim's family.

The Anglo-Saxons also had the concept of the ***hidegeld***, which was literally the 'hide-money' or the 'skin-payment.' It was the amount of money you could pay to avoid a flogging. This idea was extended into later English history. In later centuries, a prince could avoid a flogging by having a servant take the punishment for him. That servant was called the 'whipping boy,' and that is actually the origin of the term 'whipping boy' in Modern English.

That 'G' sound at the beginning of ***geld*** eventually shifted to a 'Y' sound as so often happened in Old English. It produced the word ***yield*** as in 'to yield a payment to someone,' but it also exists as a noun in terms like 'crop yield' and 'stock yield.' The sense of giving up something or surrendering survives in the other meaning of ***yield*** as in 'to yield the right of way.' So in that

sense we can think of the Danegeld as the 'Dane-yield' – an amount of silver which was yielded to the Danes and also the process of yielding or surrendering to the Danes.

I should note here that the Danegeld was paid as part of a deal between the English and the Vikings. The English were basically buying peace, albeit a temporary peace. As I noted earlier, the Vikings called this type of truce a ***griþ***, and the Anglo-Saxons called it ***friþ***. But when the Norman French arrived, they brought the word ***peace***. And ***peace*** replaced those Germanic terms – ***griþ*** and ***friþ***. Today, we might think of a peaceful day or a peaceful sleep, but ***peace*** was originally the settlement of a dispute. So it was what you got when you made a deal. And in fact, the word ***peace*** is derived from the same Latin root which gives us word likes ***pact***, ***pacify*** and ***appease***. So it was the period of calm which followed an agreement or a deal.

But there is another Latin word which comes from that same root as ***peace***, and given our discussion of the Danegeld, this other word should not be surprising. The Latin root which gave us ***peace*** also gave us the word ***pay***. The word ***pay*** literally meant 'to make peace.' So you had to pay, to make peace. And that was a lesson which Aethelred learned very quickly.

Time and again, he paid the Danes for peace. But as I noted earlier, the constant payments not only impoverished the nation, it also encouraged more Viking raids. It was a terrible mistake. That sentiment is probably best expressed in a famous poem composed by Rudyard Kipling. He wrote:

> It is always a temptation to a rich and lazy nation
> To puff and look important and to say: –
> 'Though we know we should defeat you, we have not the time to meet you
> We will therefore pay you cash to go away.'
>
> And that is called paying the Dane-geld;
> But we've proved it again and again,
> That if once you have paid him the Dane-geld
> You never get rid of the Dane.

Unfortunately, Kipling wasn't around to advise Aethelred. So the payments became standard. Word must have quickly spread throughout Scandinavia, because the raids soon grew in intensity. And the destruction became more and more widespread.

Just three years after the Battle of Maldon, and the first large Danegeld payment, England was under attack from a combined force of Vikings. The King of Denmark was Sweyn Forkbeard. He will eventually become a very important part of our story, and he will eventually become King of England – at least for a while. But in 994, he was King of Denmark. And he joined with the Norwegian Viking Olaf Tryggvason to attack England. Olaf will soon return to Norway and become King of Norway. So we're dealing with the King of Denmark and the future King of Norway. So these were no slouches.

They sailed up the river Thames and attacked London, but the residents of London actually drove the Vikings back. And this is going to be a recurring theme as we go forward. Time and time again, the Vikings were repelled from London. And this was really the period when London started to play a very strategic political role in the history of England. There wasn't really a formal capital of England at the time. The royal court moved around all the time. But London was increasingly a safe haven from the Vikings. As we'll see next time, Aethelred will eventually seek refuge there.

After the two Viking leaders were driven out of London, they attacked the southern coast of England. They did a lot of damage, but they met a lot more resistence than they had anticipated. And the alliance between the current and future Viking Kings – Swein and Olaf – was very precarious. So when Aethelred offered them 16,000 pounds of silver to leave, they accepted the deal. Once again, the Danegeld was paid – from 10,000 pounds three years earlier to 16,000 pounds now. And Swein would be back several more times.

I mentioned that it was an uneasy alliance between the two Scandinavian Kings. Well, for now, Swein went back to Denmark, and Olaf returned to Norway. As I noted, Olaf soon became King of Norway. One of his huscarls or thegns was a gentleman named Leif Ericsson who had traveled to Norway from Greenland. King Olaf was a Christian, so he baptized Leif Ericsson. And Leif soon headed back to Greenland with a priest to convert the rest of his people. But according to some versions of the story, Leif was blown off course on his way back and ended up in North America. In the process, Leif became the first known European to discover the New World nearly five centuries before Christopher Columbus.

Despite that earlier alliance between the two Viking kings, Swein and Olaf, they soon became bitter enemies. Swein formed an alliance with other Scandinavian leaders. And together they defeated and killed Olaf. The allied leaders then made a deal. The agreed to 'deal out' or 'divide' the Norwegian territory between them.

As a result of that division, a large portion of Norway passed to Swein. Swein was now king of Denmark and part of Norway. And he would soon add England to that Scandinavian Empire, but we'll cover that in the next episode.

Meanwhile, the Viking raids continued. And the Vikings continued to operate out of Normandy, despite that earlier treaty with Richard of Normandy. But Richard had died in the year 996. And now his son, Richard II, was Duke of Normandy. In case you're curious, Richard II was the grandfather of William the Conqueror.

So with a new young king in place in Normandy, Aethelred decided to do something about the Norman failure enforce that earlier agreement. In either the year 1000 or 1001, Aethelred launched an attack on the Norman coast, but the English who landed on the shore were wiped out. It was another defeat for Aethlered. But over in Normandy, young Richard II realized that he had a growing problem. That English attack must have gotten Richard's attention, because shortly afterwards, he and Aethelred negotiated a new treaty. Normandy agreed again to kick out

the Vikings, and England agreed to become Normandy's ally in the region. It was basically the same agreement as before, but there was something different about this new treaty.

Unlike the old agreement, the new agreement was sealed with a marriage alliance. Specifically, Aethelred agreed to marry Richard's sister, Emma. In case you're doing the math here, Richard II was the grandfather of William the Conqueror, so that made Emma the great-aunt of William. And now, in the year 1002, she became the Queen of England. And she was going to give birth to a son who would become the future King of England – a son whose death in 1066 would trigger multiple claims to the throne. And one of those claims came from William in Normandy. And William's claim to the English throne was ultimately based on his blood connection through Emma. It wasn't necessarily the best claim, but it was good enough for a Norman warrior who looking to add the English throne to his Norman Dukedom.

So that treaty and marriage alliance in 1002 was a pivotal event in the history of England, and as we know, it would therefore be a pivotal event in the history of English. For the first time, a political and marital alliance was formed between England and Normandy. The English descendants of this royal marriage would have Norman blood. And that meant that Normans might be able to make claims to the English throne.

But there was someone else who was also looking to make a claim to the English throne. And that was the Danish King, Sweyn Forkbeard. Sweyn was about to return to England. And he would eventually force Aethelred out of England, and he would take the English throne for himself. So before we get to the Norman Conquest and the Norman Kings of England, we have to cover the Scandinavian Conquest and the Scandinavian Kings of England.

So next time, we'll look at that first conquest from Scandinavia. After that, we can then turn to the second conquest from Normandy. So until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.