THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 60: DANES, DEATH AND TAXES

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 60: Danes, Death and Taxes. In this episode, we're going to look at conquest of England by Scandinavian kings in the eleventh century. In many ways, this was a prelude to the Norman Conquest which took place about a half century later. A couple of the underlying themes of this episode are death and taxes. So we'll also explore the etymology of certain words associated with those inevitabilities of life.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can always reach me directly at kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com. And I am on twitter at englishhistpod.

Also, one quick correction from the last episode. I discussed the coronation of King Edgar. And in discussing that coronation, I said that Edgar was 'coronated,' and several of you contacted me to point out that ***coronated*** is not actually a word. The verb form is actually ***crowned***. Of course, as we saw, ***coronation*** and ***crown*** both come from the same Latin root. But I just wanted to make that note. And trust me, that is probably not the biggest grammatical mistake in the podcast.

Also, I began the last episode with some breaking news about a DNA study which showed some links between ancient Germans and the people who are thought to be the first Indo-Europeans in the Eurasian steppe region. Well, since the last episode, the findings of another big DNA study have been released. And this study concerns DNA in the British Isles. So I wanted to mentioned those results as well because it also impacts our overall story.

As I've noted, before, one of the big questions for historians of Britain is what happened to the native Celtic-speaking Britons when the Anglo-Saxons arrived. One theory is that the native Britons were largely wiped out in what amounted to a genocide. The other theory is that they largely remained in place as an oppressed group and were eventually integrated into the Anglo-Saxon society over time. Prior DNA research has produced mixed results.

Well, now we have this new study. And this new study indicates that there was a lot of mixing between the native Britons and the Anglo-Saxons – at least in southern and central Britain, so basically the Anglo-Saxon heartland. The study was conducted by researchers in Australia and at Oxford University, and it shows that there is actually a lot of DNA similarity throughout Britain. But there are some regional differences. And there is a very basic difference between southern and central Britain and the rest of the island, so basically between England and the Celtic areas in the north and the far west. But northern England is more like Scotland in many respects than the areas to the south.

The focus of the research was on people who lived in rural areas. And the research showed for residents of southern and central Britain, on average about 20% to 30% of their DNA comes from the Anglo-Saxons. But note that it is only about 20% to 30%. So that suggests that there was a lot of mixing with native Britons in the years after the Anglo-Saxon conquest. And that

also tends to confirm that the native Britons were not actually wiped out. They continued to live with and among the Anglo-Saxons.

So with that, let's turn to this episode. We're gradually getting closer to 1066 – the year of the Norman Conquest and the event which ultimately changed English into a language that we can actually understand today. But I noted at the end of the last episode, there was actually a conquest before the Norman Conquest, and that was the Scandinavian Conquest in the early eleventh century. So in this episode, I want to explore those events.

We left off last time with the year 1002, the year in which the English king Aethelred married the Norman princess Emma. As you may recall, Emma was the sister of the Norman leader Richard II. So that marriage provided some important links between the ruling families of England and Normandy. And those links will prove to be very important over time.

As we saw last time, that marriage was part of a larger treaty between England and Normandy. Normandy had agreed to close its doors to the Vikings. So they were no longer able to raid England and head back across the channel to Normandy for refuge. The English king Aethelred was apparently very happy with those developments, because he really thought would solve a lot of his problems.

Emboldened by his new treaty with Normandy, Aethelred became overconfident. And it led him to make one of the worst decisions of his reign. Shortly after his marriage to Emma, Aethelred ordered the murder of all the Danes in England. He claimed that the Danes were plotting to kill him and take his kingdom, so he intended to bring an end to the Danish threat once and for all.

His order was carried out by local officials. At his instruction, they proceeded to kill Danish residents, but just as importantly, they instructed people to kill their Danish neighbors as well.

The overall extent of the order isn't entirely clear. It may have just been intended for Viking mercenaries who were present in various part of England at the time, but it was interpreted as a general order to kill all the Danes. In places like Wessex and Mercia, it may have been relatively easy to identify the Danish minority. But what about in the Danelaw region? A large portion of the population there had Danish ancestry? So were they also included? Well, modern historians aren't entirely sure.

But they do know that a lot of people of Danish descent were killed in various parts of England during that period. In Oxford, it is reported that a group of Danes broke into a church to hide from the onslaught. The church was set on fire, and all inside perished. Most of the killings took place on November 13 which happened to be a holiday known as St. Brice's Day at the time. So this has become known as the St. Brice's Day massacre.

Many of those who were killed remain anonymous. But we do know the name of at least one of the victims. Her name was Gunnhilde. She was married to an English nobleman at the time. And she also happened to be the sister of the King of Denmark – one Sweyn Forkbeard. And if that name sounds familiar, it may be because I discussed him in the last episode. He was the Danish

king who joined with the Norwegian Olaf Tryggvason to invade England a few years earlier. They had been paid to leave with one of the earliest Danegeld payments. Now he was King of Denmark and part of Norway, so he was a very powerful Scandinavian leader, and now his sister was murdered in England under the order of Aethelred the Unready. And Sweyn soon sought retribution for that murder.

But before we get to that retribution, I want to tell you a little more about Sweyn and Gunnhilde's family back in Denmark. Their father was a very significant figure in Scandinavian history. He was also the King of Denmark. And for a brief time, he was also the King of Norway. So he briefly unified those two warring Scandinavian regions. His name was Harald, and like many leading figures from this period, he is known by a nickname to distinguish him from other leaders with the same name.

This early king of Denmark and Norway is known as Harald Bluetooth based on a Norse nickname. In Old Norse, the word ***blue*** could also mean 'dark' or 'black.' So it is assumed that Harald probably had bad teeth that were discolored. But as I noted, he is well-known for having briefly unified Denmark and Norway which had been at war with each other.

Now let's skip ahead about a thousand years to the year 1996. A man named Jim Kardach was designing a way to make mobile telephones communicate with computers without wires. In other words, he was designing a technology that would unify mobile telephones and computers. And he happened to be reading a book about Vikings. And he came across this figure Harald Bluetooth who had unified Denmark and Norway. So he saw an analogy between the unification of those two nations and the unification of phones and computers. So he decided to call his new technology ***bluetooth***. And if you have a bluetooth headset, now you know where that name came from. It came from the name of a Danish king, Harald Bluetooth.

As I noted, Harald had a son named Sweyn Forkbeard who succeeded him as King of Denmark. And he had that daughter named Gunnhilde in England. He also had a wife named Gunnhilde. And in fact, Gunnhilde was a very common name for a woman in Old Norse. And that name actually gave us a very common word in English.

Both parts of the name, ***gunn*** and ***hilde***, were Germanic words which meant 'war' or 'battle.' So the name was associated with warfare. And it was a tradition to name weapons after women, kind of like we might call a large weapon today something like 'Big Bertha.' Well, in the 1300s, Windsor Castle had a large cannon called Queen Gunhilda, sort of like their version of Big Bertha. The name of that cannon is actually listed on a munitions inventory from the castle in the year 1330. And this is the first known reference to a weapon bearing the name ***Gunnhilda***. But it soon became common name for large cannons. And that name was later shortened to just ***gunne***.

Over time, the technology evolved, and they started to produce a small cannon that was lightweight and portable. It was literally a small handheld cannon that fired a small projectile. The weapon was sometimes called a 'hand cannon,' but since a cannon was also called a ***gunne***, it was sometimes called a ***handgunne***. It was the first handheld firearm. And that word ***gunne***

eventually evolved into ***gun***. So the Modern English word ***gun*** derives from this Old Norse name ***Gunnhilde***.

Now as I noted, Harald Bluetooth had a wife named Gunnhilde and a daughter named Gunnhilde. And now in the year 1002, that daughter had been a victim of the St. Brice's Day massacre in England ordered by the English king Aethelred the Unready.

That massacre turned out to be the beginning of the end for Aethelred the Unready. Gunnhilde's brother, Sweyn Forkbeard, had already conducted raids in England. So he knew how wealthy the kingdom was. But now it was personal. So he soon sought revenge.

That revenge ultimately came in the form of conquest. But for now, Sweyn just resumed the raids along the English coast. Those raids brought stolen wealth, and they sometimes ended with the payment of Danegeld to leave. So it was a lucrative enterprise. And it allowed Sweyn to get the lay of the land and to plan his ultimate invasion.

A year after the massacre, Sweyn attacked Wessex in the south and returned home. The following year, he returned and raided East Anglia in the east. Meanwhile, other Vikings also conducted raids. So Aethelred's treaty with Normandy wasn't helping very much.

In the next year – 1005 – the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records that a great famine occurred in England. It was so bad that no one could ever remember a famine so grim. The Chronicle reads:

Her on þissum geare wæs se micla hungor geond Angelcyn
Here in this year was so much hunger in England

swylce nan man ær ne gemunde swa grimne
such that no man remembered it ever being so grim

The likely cause of this famine was crop failure caused by the Viking invasions. During the raids, fields were set ablaze and farmers were called away to defend the kingdom, so the crops were neglected. And that often meant there was no yield for the year. And crop failure led directly to famine. That's because meat was a rarity in the Anglo-Saxon diet. Most people were dependent on cereals like wheat, barley, oats and rye. And bread was a staple of all diets. Remember that terms like ***lord*** and ***lady*** originally meant 'the loaf guardian' and 'the loaf maiden.' So bread was fundamental to the diet. And when crops failed, bread was hard to come by.

In fact, famine was a constant threat in Anglo-Saxon England, as it was in most societies during the Middle Ages. The looming threat of a famine was never far from people's minds. And most people experienced a famine at some point in their lifetime. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle has numerous entries recording famine, including the years 975, 976, 986, and this year 1005. And the Chronicle says that the famine in 1005 was particularly bad.

When famines occurred, people were forced to scavenge for nuts or whatever they could find. Livestock were killed for food. Sometimes children were sold into slavery for food or money. A few centuries earlier, we looked at the famous writer Bede, and he had recounted stories of mass suicides during famines, with groups of people joining together and holding hands as they jumped off of a cliff. This also helps to explain why the Winter festivals and Spring festivals were so important to the culture of this period because they were based around the beginning and the end of the harvest season. And the difference between a good harvest and a bad harvest could mean the difference between life and death.

Death hung in the air during this period. The average life expectancy was just over 30 years of age. So people tended to die at a young age. And it wasn't just because of warfare and famine. The diet of most people was poor in general. Conditions were unsanitary. Diseases were common. And modern medicine didn't exist, so even a basic illness could result in death.

One the biggest problems was childbirth. It was dangerous in the best of circumstances. Infant mortality was very common, as was the death of mothers while giving birth. The high rates of infant mortality actually skew the numbers a little bit. We know that many people from this period did in fact live a long life, but with so many people dying so young, the average life expectancy was very short.

So ironically, death was just a part of life. And not surprisingly, many of our basic words for death come from this period. As we saw in an earlier episode, the word ***dead*** is an Old English word. The word ***die*** is a related Germanic word which was borrowed from Old Norse.

Given the constant looming threat of famine, it may not be surprising that the word ***starve*** originally meant 'to die.' It was ***steorfan***. And in Old English, it was a general word for dying. It's meaning became restricted to death from lack of food in the 1500s.

The word ***swelter*** also originally meant 'to die.' The word ***cringe*** also once had an association with death. To fall in battle was ***gecringan*** – the original form of the word ***cringe***. When a soldier was mortally wounded, he would often lie curled up on the ground. And that sense of something curled up or twisted led to the word ***cringe***. It also produced the word ***crinkle*** and the word ***crank***.

We've seen before that ***slay*** is an Old English word, and ***slaughter*** is a related word borrowed from Old Norse. The word ***murder*** is an also Old English word from the same Indo-European root which gives us the Latin word ***mortal***. The word ***smite*** is also an Old English word.

Another Old English word for a 'slayer' or 'killer' was ***bana***. That word still exists as the word ***bane***. We use it in the phrase 'the bane of my existence' meaning something that causes ruin or anguish. The original Germanic sense of the word was to strike at something. So you might strike at a person, but if you were trying to clear a path or road, you had to strike as the brush to clear it. In German, the same root word came to mean a path or road. And it exists today in German as ***bahn***, as in the ***autobahn***. But the English version is ***bane***.

Of course, death is an uncomfortable subject for many people, so we tend to use a lot of euphemisms like pass away or kick the bucket. Old English also used euphemisms for death. They would often say ***forðgan*** meaning to 'go forth,' or ***forðferan*** meaning 'to travel forth.'

Now I don't want to bring you down with all of this discussion about death, but it actually had one very important consequence to our overall story. The fact that so many people died so young meant that many people died without any living children. And that included kings. And even when kings did have children, if he died in his 20s or 30s , as was common, his children were typically infants. So they weren't in a position to succeed their father as king.

Over the past century of English history, I have discussed the long line of boy kings from Aethelstan to Aethelred the Unready. Well, that's why there were so many boy kings.

So the future of the English throne was always in doubt. There was always the possibility that a king would die without an heir, or at least an heir old enough to serve. When necessary, an illegitimate child could be handed the throne. That wasn't unusual. We've seen that before. And this was also common on the continent. As you may know, before William the Conqueror was known as 'the Conqueror,' he was known as William the Bastard because he too was illegitimate. But again, that wasn't really a problem because sometime the nobles didn't have a lot of options.

I mention this because it sets the stage for the political maneuvering which took place leading up to 1066. Lots of people were jockeying for position in case the Wessex king died without an heir, and that's exactly what happened in 1066.

As we know, the English king was ultimately chosen for the position. A group of nobles and church officials called the Witan made the decision. The choice was usually limited to male members of the royal family. And if necessary, that family could extend to cousins like those new Norman cousins thanks to that marriage of Aethelred and Emma.

The idea that the king was chosen, and not automatically born into the position, was expressed in Old English by one of the most prominent writers of the Anglo-Saxon period. His name was Aelfric. He was an abbot, and in an early Christian text, he wrote that people have free will – which included the free will to choose whether to commit sins. And he made his point by comparing that choice to the selection of a king. He wrote, 'No man may make himself a king, for the people have the option to choose him for king who is agreeable to them.'

In the original Old English, it reads:
Ne mæg nan man hine sylfne to cynge gedon, ac þæt folc hæfð
cyre to ceosenne þone to cyninge þe him sylfum licað

But he added that but once the man had been selected as king, he had power over the people, 'and they may not shake his yoke from their necks' – "and hí ne magon his geoc of heora swuran asceacan."

So a king was freely chosen, but once he was selected, he wielded his power over them. They couldn't just select someone else if they regretted the choice.

Now I mention Aefric here because he lived and wrote during this period in the late tenth century and early eleventh century. And no history of Old English would be complete without discussing him. As I noted, he was a monk and an abbot, and he was the most prolific writer in Old English. He had been a student of Dunstan and Aethelwold – the clerics who I discussed in prior episodes.

His earliest writings were two sets of Catholic homilies. And that passage about the selection of the king came from that first set of homilies. A homily was kind of like a sermon. It was a paraphrase of part of the Bible, and also a discussion about the meaning and consequences of that passage.

After those early homilies, he composed a series of works which tend to fascinate scholars of English. He wrote three manuscripts which were intended to help students learn Latin. So these works were specifically designed to teach Latin to English-speaking students. It was part of a larger effort to revive Latin, and it shows that Latin was making a comeback in England.
The first of these three works was a Latin grammar book written in English, and it is considered the first Latin grammar to be written in a local vernacular anywhere in Europe. The second work was a glossary of Latin words.

The third – and maybe the most fascinating – work was called the 'Colloquy.' It was a series of conversations written in Latin. It was designed so that the teacher would ask questions and students would respond in character based on the role they were assigned. The roles included common professions like a monk, a shepherd, a fisherman and a plowman. So the teacher would ask the monk about his life and his work, and the student playing the role of the monk would reply, "I am a monk who is fluent of speech. I sing seven times each day with my brothers. I spend most of my day reading and singing, but when I have time, I learn to speak the Latin language." And then the conversation passes to the other roles played by other students.

One of the reasons why modern scholars are so fascinated by the Colloquy is because it gives such a great insight into the daily lives of common people. And we don't generally get that from the surviving texts. Most of that knowledge has to be discerned from archaeology or other sources. But Alfric's characters describe their lives and their jobs in great detail. For example, the plowman describes his incredibly hard life. He says that it is very hard work. He goes out at daybreak to drive the oxen in the field. And he does it out of fear of his lord. He says that there is no winter so severe that he will dare stay at home. He has to plow a full acre or more every day. He has a young companion who helps him, but he is hoarse from the cold and having to shout to drive the oxen through the field. He says he also has to feed the oxen every day, and he has to carry their muck outside. He concludes by saying that it is hard work because he is not free.

It's an amazing insight into the life of the common people of the day written by a contemporary writer.

Now I should note that Aelfric wrote the Colloquy in Latin – not English. And that was kind of the point. It was intended to help students speak in conversational Latin. But, at some point, either Aelfric or someone else wrote a complete English translation in the margins of one of the copies. And that copy with the Old English translation survived the centuries and eventually made into Robert Cotton's famous library. And so we have Alfric's Colloquy in both its original Latin and a contemporary Old English translation.

After composing these educational manuscripts, he went back to writing Christian texts. He wrote a text about the lives of saints called, appropriately enough, 'Lives of Saints.' And he continued to write more homilies.

In fact, over thirty manuscripts containing his *Catholic Homilies* survive. And it is very unusual to have so many surviving copies of a particular work. The fact that there are so many surviving copies proves how popular they were.

As far as the history of English itself, I should note that Aelfric helped to establish and formalize the Late West Saxon writing standard. He adopted that standard in his own writings. And later in his life, he actually went back and revised some of his earlier writings to reflect that standard. When he went back and revised those older texts, it confirmed that a standardized form of written English had finally emerged.

Aelfric's massive catalogue of Old English writings came to a close with his death in the year 1010. By this point, the raids from the Vikings were in full swing. And the Danegeld continued to be paid. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle describes one town after another being attacked or looted. The Chronicle says of the Vikings and the Danegeld: "... for all this truce, treaty and tribute, they went everywhere in raiding bands, and plundered and killed our wretched folk."

Late in the year, the Danes sacked Canterbury. They seized the Archbishop of Canterbury – the head of the Church in England. His name was Aelfheah. And when the Vikings finally left and returned to their ships, they kept the Archbishop as a hostage.

A short time later, it was decided to pay the Vikings a Danegeld of 48,000 pounds to leave. Shortly after that payment, the Danes demanded an additional payment for the return of the Archbishop. The Archbishop refused to allow any more money to be paid for his release. And in anger, the Vikings killed him. He was struck in the head with an ax. It was miserable event. The country had been ravaged, a massive Danegeld had been paid, and despite all of that, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Aelfheah, had been murdered. He was buried in St. Paul's minster in London.

So I've spoken a lot about death, now I want to talk about taxes. As we've seen, the Danegeld was a massive payment to the Vikings to buy a temporary peace, but it kept getting larger and larger. And it's important to keep in mind that it was ultimately a tax. The king didn't pay the Danegeld out of his own pocket. He didn't have that much money anyway. The only way to pay the Danegeld was to collect the money from the people. And as the Danegeld grew larger and

larger, the burden on the people grew heavier and heavier. People who were living on the edge, we're now starting to be pushed over the edge.

For all the criticisms of Aethelred's reign, he turned out to be very good at one thing – collecting taxes. By this point, his reign really depended on paying those heavy ransoms to the Vikings. And that meant that his reign was dependent on collecting taxes.

It's also important to keep in mind that there was no income tax like today. The Danegeld was paid with a land tax. It was assessed in hides. Traditionally, a hide was the amount of land required to support a household or a single family, but by this point in the history, a hide was basically just a fiscal unit. Taxes were levied by hide. So if the tax was one pound per hide, an estate of 10 hides had to come up with ten pounds. And that tax had to be paid in silver coins.

And it didn't matter if you were a large landholder or a poor peasant who lived on a single hide. You had to come up with the money either way. Over the years, the repeated payments became excessive. Some historians describe it as appalling.

I noted that the Danegeld payment in the year 1012 of 48,000 pounds. Based on the total number of hides and the typical income produced by each hide, it is estimated that that one Danegeld payment amounted to a 60% tax on the hide's income. [SOURCE: Bloodfeud, p. 99.]

On top of that, a new tax was implemented that same year. This new tax was called the ***Heregeld*** or 'army tax.' The Danegeld was paid directly to the Vikings to get them to go away. The Heregeld was implemented to fund an army to fight the Vikings when they came back. So this ended up being an additional tax on top of the occasional Danegeld.

I said that the Heregeld was the 'army tax,' and that's because ***here*** meant 'army' in Old English. ***Army*** is actually a French word, and it replaced ***here*** after the Norman Conquest. But ***here*** still survives in the verb ***harry*** meaning to 'make war, lay waste or plunder.' So if we say that an army 'harried' a particular place, we're using the Old English term. And the Germanic root survives in a word like ***harness*** – a piece of equipment originally associated with a cavalry. It also survives in the word ***harlot*** which is a prostitute, but originally it had a sense of a camp follower, so a prostitute who followed an army around. And it also survives in the names ***Harold*** and ***Herman***. ***Herman*** comes from German where is was literally a 'war man,' so it meant a ***warrior***. And again, Old English used the term to refer to the ***Heregeld*** – the tax levied to raise an army to fight the Vikings.

For the next 40 years, the Heregeld was levied yearly by successive kings. Even after the Scandinavian Conquest of England, the Heregeld was still raised to pay for the standing armies.

But there is an old saying, 'You can't get blood from a stone.' And that's what Aethelred was trying to do at this point. For many landowners, they had little or nothing left to give. So what was a landowner to do?

Well, last time I mentioned that a landowner could sell his land – let someone else be responsible for the tax. But then what would the landowner do to live? How would he support his family? He sometimes had no choice but to give his land to a local lord who would allow him to continue to live on the land and work as a tenant to earn his keep. He went from being a free landowner to a peasant who was forced to work the land for a lord. In some cases, this happened voluntarily. In other cases, it was involuntary. Under Anglo-Saxon law, if a landowner couldn't pay the tax, someone else could come forward and pay it. And that person could then claim title to the land. As a result, many small landowners lost their property to local lords through this legal process. The rich got richer and the poor got poorer.

Sometimes, the poor had no choice but to sell themselves or their children into slavery. If we think back to Aefric's Colloquy about the life of the poor plowman, he said that his life was hard because he was forced to work for his lord, and he was not free. So this process wasn't new, but it was becoming much worse. The countryside became increasingly impoverished. By this point in Anglo-Saxon history, there were very few free peasants who owned their own land and answered only to the king.

Now I know what you're thinking. All of this stuff about the Danegeld and taxes and peasants is all very interesting, but what does it have to do with English. Well, let me tell you.

You see, the Danegeld and the Heregeld were taxes on land – not income. So the burden was especially hard on landowners and peasants in the countryside. But townspeople didn't have the same heavy burden. They didn't tend to own much land, if any at all. So as the situation became increasingly dire in the countryside, more and more peasants began to move to the towns and cities, assuming they were free to leave, which wasn't always the case.

One city in particular attracted a lot of new residents. And that was the city of London. London had been the first real city within Roman Britain. The London bridge across the Thames made it an essential trading point. But it had fallen into decline during the early Anglo-Saxon period. The Anglo-Saxons built the settlement of Lundenwic to the west of the old Roman walled city. But then the Vikings came, and that settlement was raided. When Alfred the Great and Guthum the Viking agreed to divide England and create the Danelaw, London was right on the dividing line between the English side and the Danish side.

Initially it was part of the Danelaw, but Alfred later re-claimed it, and it passed back to the Anglo-Saxons. Archaeological research shows that the settlement at Lundenwic was abandoned, and people moved back within the walls of the old Roman city. It now became known as Lundenburg – the burg or fortified city of London.

After people moved back to the old Roman city, there was a revival of trade. London grew slowly for the next few decades until mid-900s. That was the beginning of the Anglo-Saxon Golden Age, and during that period the city really began to grow at a rapid rate. By the current point in our story, it was by far the largest city in England. It became the main center for foreign traders. It had more moneyers minting coins than any other city. And people were moving in from the countryside. Since it was centrally located, people were coming from both the Anglo-

Saxon regions and the former Danelaw regions. So London started to become a linguistic melting pot.

And here's to key to all of this. The standard version of English which became Modern English was really the dialect of London. It was very similar to what happened in France where the Parisian dialect of French became the standard French dialect.

And that is really how all of those Norse words from the Danelaw region began to influence standard English. Had those local dialects not converged in London, those Norse words would have probably been relegated to the north. But now, many local dialects started to mix together in and around London. Scribes in the city were finally hearing a lot of those Norse words. And they started to appear in late Old English texts for the first time. So London was an incubator for what would eventually become Middle English, and ultimately Modern English. So in some ways, the Danegeld led to Modern English.

Another interesting dynamic also began to emerge during this period. Aethelred was losing support in the countryside as I just explained, and that was especially true in the north where Wessex rule was always a little tenuous. But he maintained support in London. Again, London was doing OK despite all of the problems around the country. We saw last time that the people of London had repelled Sweyn Forkbeard on his first raid in 994. They repelled another invasion in the year 1010. So it remained a formidable obstacle for the Vikings. But that resistence was getting ready to be put to the test.

Early in the year 1013, Sweyn Forkbeard in Denmark was planning his final assault. He returned to England again in that year, but this time he established a permanent base at Gainsborough in the north. This was the old Danelaw region. And given the lack of support for Aethelred in the region, Sweyn found some support there. This became the main Danish base for the next two years. Very soon thereafter, Northumbria submitted to him, followed by eastern Mercia, and then most of the old Danelaw.

As I noted, Wessex rule had always been weak in the north, and Aethelred's incompetence had led many to decide that it was better to side with the Danish king. Sweyn then took provisions and headed south. He left his teenage son Canute in charge at Gainsborough.

Aethelred soon realized that he couldn't defeat Swein's forces, especially with Swein's new English recruits from the north. But he didn't flee yet. London had been a center of resistence and had held out in the past. And the people of London were still loyal to him. So Aethelred headed there.

Meanwhile, Sweyn moved south and soon forced the surrender of Oxford, then he captured the traditional Wessex capital of Winchester.

A large portion of England was now under Swein's control, but he still needed to capture London. But just as before, the citizens of London resisted and repelled his forces. With no luck in London, Swein turned westward, and he forced the western shires to submit. By this point, the

royal council in London could see the writing on the walls. The decision was made to send Aethelred's wife Emma and their small children to Normandy. Emma's family in Normandy would give them protection there.

At this point, the entire nation of England outside of London had accepted Swein as ruler. So the citizens of London finally submitted to avoid destruction at the hands of Sweyn's forces. With no country left to rule, Aethelred also fled to join his wife and children in Normandy.

Now for the first time since the Anglo-Saxons had arrived over five centuries earlier, the entirety of the English-speaking world was under the rule of a foreign king, Sweyn Forkbeard. For that year, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle says of Sweyn: "eal þeodscype hine hæfde þa for fulne cyng" – literally 'all the nation accepted him as full king.'

I noted earlier that life was hard in the eleventh century. And death was always lingering in the air. And now death made a re-appearance. Before Sweyn even had an opportunity to be crowned, he died. The cause of his death is unknown, but his rule as the King of England was literally counted in days, not years.

Sweyn's Danish army in England immediately turn to his son Canute to be the successor. But as we know, the Anglo-Saxon Witan officially chose the next king. And they decided to bring back Aethelred. Ultimately, the Wessex line trumped those Danish princes.

So Aethelred was offered his old job back, but there was a catch. He could return to the throne if he agreed to abide by certain conditions. There were to be no more excessive taxes. The old laws had to be honored and upheld. And Aethelred had to agree to be guided by the counsel of the Witan in the future. The 'poorly-advised' king was going to be better advised this time around.

This is yet another example of the unique nature of the English kingship. Almost exactly two centuries before Magna Carta, we have another example of how the king's power was not unlimited. The king was selected by the Witan and took an oath agreeing to fulfill certain obligations to the country, and now his rule was subject to certain conditions imposed by the Witan.

Aethelred agreed to the terms, and he made his return, but he didn't come alone. He was accompanied by a Norwegian ally, Olaf Haraldsson. Olaf led his own force of Norwegians. Taking back London was a top priority. It was the biggest city. It was strategically important, and its citizens were still loyal to Aethelred. But the Danes were still in control of the city. The biggest obstacle was London's bridge across the Thames. The Danes controlled the bridge, and thus had a strategic advantage which prevented any naval attacks from down river. To solve this problem, Aethered's ally Olaf secretly approached the bridge, and he attached cables around the supports, and he carried the lines to ships down river. The ships were able to pull the bridge down. And with the bridge down, the Danes strategic advantage was lost, and Aethelred and Olaf were able to retake London.

Now these events are kind of important to the history of English because they produced a very famous children's nursery rhyme. "London Bridge is falling down, Falling down, falling down. London Bridge is falling down, My fair lady." The English version of that poem first appeared in the 1600s. But many scholars believe that it was based on an older Norse saga about Aethelred's ally, Olaf Haraldsson. He later became King of Norway. And the saga about his life contains a poem about his role in the destruction of London Bridge. In English, it reads:

London Bridge is broken down.
Gold is won, and bright renown.
Shields resounding, War-horns sounding,
Hild is shouting in the din!
Arrows singing, Mail-coats ringing
Odin makes our Olaf win!
King Aethelred has found a friend,
Brave Olaf will his throne defend,
In a bloody fight maintain his right,
Win back his land with blood-red hand,
And Aethelred's son on his throne replace
Edmund, the star of every royal race.

Of course, that Norse poem – written years later – gives away part of the story. Aethelred re-captured London, but Sweyn's son Canute was still at the Danish base in Gainsborough. He was preparing for a raid into the south. But Aethelred led his troops to the north before Canute could complete his preparations. Canute was caught off-guard, so he left and he fled back to Denmark. But as per ususal, the campaign ended with Aethelred paying another Danegeld of 21,000 pounds to the Danish army camped south of London.

Sweyn's son Canute had gone back to Denmark, but he didn't stay there for long. The next year he returned. And this time, he was supported by several other Viking leaders. But once again, death was in the air. Before Canute's ships could arrive in London, Aethelred died in April of 1015.

With Aethelred's death, his counselors in London chose his son, Edmund, as the new king. This was an elder son of Aethelred from a marriage prior to Emma. So he wasn't Emma's son. Aethelred's younger children with Emma were still in Normandy waiting for things to settle down a bit in England.

England now erupted into full scare warfare between the new English king Edmund and the Danish prince Canute. And as it turned out, Edmund didn't inherit his father's incompetence. He was actually a very good warrior. And he became known to history as Edmund Ironside.

He engaged Canute's forces and secured several victories. Skirmishes between the two sides continued into Mercia. And Edmund continued to defeat the Danes. It finally looked as if Edmund was on the verge of restoring Anglo-Saxon rule for good.

After five consecutive victories, a final showdown took place at Ashingdon – not far from the Essex coast. Up to this point, A powerful Mercian noble named Eadric has supported Canute the Dane. But now he switched his allegiance to Edmund. This looked like a major coup for Edmund, and a final victory of the Canute appeared inevitable. But as soon as the battle at Ashindon was underway, Eadric withdrew his forces. Eadric, who had flipped sides to join Edmund, now walked away from the battle. Many scholars think the whole scenario was planned in advance between Eadric and Canute. Eadric's loyalty to Edmund was all a ruse. All the main Anglo-Saxon leaders were killed, and Canute emerged victorious.

But Edmund actually survived and retreated. Canute followed him and the two leaders met a short time later. Despite Edmund's defeat, his forces and Canute's forces were still evenly matched. And Edmund had earned Canute's respect. So the two leaders made a deal. They agreed to divide the kingdom between them. Edmund would rule Wessex, and Canute would rule Mercia and the north. It was basically a deal to revive the old Danelaw. But as part of the deal, Canute got London. And it basically became an occupied city.

But as always, death was in the air. That deal between the two leaders lasted only a month because Edmund died a month later in Wessex. He may have been murdered by those in alliance with Canute, but we can't say for sure.

Edmund was now dead, and Canute was the most obvious successor, especially if the Witan wanted to avoid additional war. For the year 1017, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records the following:

Her on þissum geare feng Cnut kyning to eallon Angelcynnes ryce
Here in this year, Cnut received all the English kingdom.

With Canute now King of all of England, London remained under Danish occupation. Canute's troops were posted along the walls and at all points of entry. And they were also stationed in other parts of the country. So there were lots of Danish troops to be paid. And Canute also had lots ships which were manned with Danish troops. So it was starting to get really expensive to maintain those forces. The new government continued to levy taxes. And the English people were paying for their own occupation.

By the next year, Canute felt that he no longer needed such a large Danish force. So he decided to pay them off and send them back to Denmark. Canute imposed a whopping tax of 72,000 pounds to raise the funds to pay off his army. Now there were about 70,000 total hides in England. So that came out to about 1 pound per hide. Each hide only generated about 1 pound of income per year. So that one Danegeld was basically the equivalent a 100% tax. He basically confiscated all of the earnings of the people for that year. But this time, the tax didn't just hit the countryside hard. Canute levied a separate tax of 10,500 pounds on the citizens of London. It was basically a punishment for the city having been so loyal to Aethelred.

After the Danish forces returned to Denmark, Canute formed a new army in England, as well as a new fleet of 40 ships. His new English army and navy needed to be supported, so he continued to impose the annual Heregeld tax.

In the first few months of Canute's reign, it looked to be a case of 'Meet the new boss, same as the old boss.' The people were starting to get restless. Rebellion was a real possibility. Later in the year, Canute convened an assembly at Oxford to smooth over some of these problems. The leading English officials joined Canute's Danish supporters at the assembly. The two sides sat down to work out their differences and to find a way to set the nation back on the right track.

This type of assembly was famously called a ***thing*** in Old Norse. And Old English actually used the same term. It was a common Germanic term and is well attested in early Old English. By this point in late Old English, the sense of the English word had changed to any matter brought before the assembly for consideration. So early on, you might have attended a thing. Now you would raise a thing before the assembly. As we move into Middle English, the sense shifted again to refer to any matter under consideration at any given time. So you might have a thing which you need to do. And from there it has become one of the most general words in the English language. Today, you can describe just about any'thing' as a ***thing***.

But originally, a ***thing*** was an assembly. And this assembly at Oxford in 1018 was actually very successful. The Danes and the English agreed to observe and abide by the laws of the last great Wessex king, Edgar. He was the king during that Golden Age a half century earlier. Notice that they ignored any reference to the more recent laws of Aethelred the Unready.

But the key is that England was not to become one big Danelaw. Canute was not going to impose Danish law, he would rule as an English king and adhere to English law. Canute also agreed to scale back the heavy handedness. The tax burden was lowered. Canute soon added Denmark to his kingdom, so as the king of both nations he was able to prevent further Viking raids. So even though the annual Heregeld or army tax remained in place, there was no longer any need to impose the Danegeld. So conditions actually started to improve during his reign.

Canute embraced English customs and culture. He ruled for the next twenty years, and he is generally considered to have been a good king. But London remained a problem. The city had bitterly opposed his rule, and Canute had forced them to pay their own Danegeld as a punishment.

In fact, despite the growing importance of London, Canute largely avoided the city and used the traditional Wessex capital of Winchester as his base. There was one particular place in London that became a focus of Danish hatred. That was the gravesite of the late Archbishop of Canterbury Aelfheah. Remember he was the Archbishop that was killed by the Vikings when he refused to allow an extra Danegeld payment to be made for his release. Aelfheah became a martyr. And his gravesite attracted those in London who resented Danish rule.

But down in Canterbury, the people were upset that the late Archbishop had been buried up in London, not in Canterbury where former Archbishops were typically buried. So Canute made a shrewd political decision. He decided to move Aelfheah's body from London to Canterbury. That would remove the gravesite from London where it was a focus for those who hated the Danes. And it would also please the people of Canterbury who wanted the body.

Eleven years after his martyrdom, the body of the former Archbishop of Canterbury was exhumed. The coffin containing the body was slowly moved to Canterbury so the late Archbishop could be interred as a saint. But they didn't that container a coffin. ***Coffin*** is Latin word which came in with the Normans. They called it a ***cist*** or ***cest***. Basically, our modern word ***chest***. It originally meant any kind of box or container. It was also ultimately a Latin word, but it had been a common word within the Germanic languages for centuries. It was one of those early borrowings by the Germanic tribes on the continent from Roman traders several centuries before.

By the way, coffin comes from the same Latin root that gives us the word ***coffer***. And this provides a convenient link between death and taxes. A ***coffer*** is a container where you might keep your money. And high taxes might drain your coffers. And when you die, you might end up in a different type of container – a ***coffin***. Both word come from the same Latin root.

Another Latin word for a coffin is ***casket***. It originally meant a small jewel box. And it also produced the word ***cassette*** – as in cassette tape. And if you don't know what a cassette tape is, ask your parents. And if you don't know what an 8-track cassette is, ask your grandparents.

So today we have ***coffin*** and ***casket*** – both Latin words – ***coffin*** borrowed in the 1300s and ***casket*** borrowed in the 1400s.

And what do you do with a coffin or casket? Well, you bury it. And ***bury*** is an Old English word. The Germanic root word meant to protect or provide shelter. So it produced the word ***bury*** meaning to inter or place a body in the ground. That root word also produced the words ***burg*** and ***bury*** which we've seen before, and those words meant a fortified city which provided protection. So Lundenburg was the fortified town at London. And Canterbury was the fortified town of the Kentish people. So the martyred Archbishop was being moved from Lunden'burg' to be 'buried' Canter'bury.' So we see that root in all of those terms. And all of those words have to do with providing shelter or protection.

And when that coffin was buried in the ground, the burial place became his ***grave*** – another Old English word. The Germanic root meant 'to dig or scratch.' So a hole dug in the ground for a body was a ***grave***. But if you scratch your initials on a piece of metal or wood, you ***engrave*** it from the same root. You might also have a ***graven*** image meaning a carved image.

Of course, we tend to find graves in a cemetery or graveyard. I've made the note before that English often has two ways of saying the same thing – one from English and one from Latin. Well, here's another example of that. ***Cemetery*** is a Latin word which came in via Norman French. But ***grave*** and ***yard*** are Old English words. So ultimately, ***graveyard*** can be traced back to Old English. I say 'ultimately' because the root words go back to Old English. And it sounds

like an Old English compound word. But the term ***graveyard*** as a compound word didn't actually appear in English until the 1700s. The Anglo-Saxons actually used the term ***lictun***, which was literally the 'body town.' Which I kind of prefer over ***graveyard***.

So let's return to the Archbishop's coffin – or chest. When it arrived in Canterbury, it was covered in silks and finely woven cloth which was the custom of the day. This type of silk or cloth was called a ***pæll*** in Old English. It was actually a church borrowing from Latin. But it is well-attested in Old English. The word ***pæll*** eventually became ***pall*** in Modern English. When a coffin was moved to a gravesite in a wagon, someone needed to hold the pall so it wouldn't blow off. These people became known as the 'pall bearers' in the 1700s. Today, the term just refers to the persons who carry the coffin itself, but it originally referred to the silk or fine cloth which covered the coffin.

When the Archbishop's coffin arrived in Canterbury, a large formal ceremony was held. It was attended by Canute and the leading earls and church officials of the day. It was a solemn occasion. And it was also intended to show Canute's piety and his respect for the English martyr.

Today we call the formal ceremony to honor a deceased person the ***memorial*** or ***funeral*** – both words from Latin. ***Memorial*** obviously comes from the same Latin root which gives us words like ***memory*** and ***remember***. But if we trace that Indo-European root back through the Germanic languages, we get an Old English word ***mourn*** which is what you might do at a memorial. We can also trace that root back through Greek, and we get another word, the word ***martyr***. So Canute and these leading officials ***mourned*** (English) at the ***memorial*** (Latin) for the fallen ***martyr*** (Greek). All those words again coming from the same Indo-European root word.

Funeral is another Latin word which came with the Normans. It ultimately comes from the Latin word ***funus*** which meant 'death' or 'corpse.' Beyond that, the etymology is uncertain, but some scholars have noted that the Latin 'F' sound sometimes developed from a sound shift from an original 'D' sound. We've actually seen that before in the podcast. That's how we have the English word ***door*** with its original 'D' sound and the Latin-derived term ***foreclose***, which is literally to close the door. Well, those scholar believe that Latin ***funus*** was a product of a similar sound shift, and it derived from an Indo-European word which began with a 'D' sound – specifically the word ***dheu***. And that's the same root word which gave us English words like ***die***, ***dead***, ***death***, and ***dearth***. And if that connection is correct, it would make ***funeral*** cognate with ***die*** and ***death***.

So this memorial or funeral for the late Archbishop Aelfheah was a way for Canute to show his respect for the Anglo-Saxon hero and martyr who had defied the Danes.

The Archbihsop's shrine in Canterbury became the source of many pilgrimages. He became known as St. Aelfheah. And until the time of Henry II, about 150 years later, that was the reason why many people made pilgrimages to Canterbury. But under Henry II, another Archbishop of Canterbury was murdered. That was Thomas Becket. And Becket was said to have invoked Aelfheah's name in his dying breath. After Becket's death, his shrine became the shrine that

everyone wanted to see. And it was Geoffrey Chaucer who captured the importance of those pilgrimages to Canterbury in the most important work of Middle English – the Canterbury Tales.

But before we get to Middle English, we have to wrap up Old English. So next time, we're going to examine the twilight of Anglo-Saxon England. We'll complete our look at Canute's reign and his death. With Canute's passing, there was a brief restoration of the Wessex line of kings. The last of that line was Edward the Confessor. And his death in 1066 without an heir triggered many claims to the throne. Some claims came from Wessex relatives. Some claims came from unrelated Anglo-Saxons. Thanks to Canute, some claims came from Scandinavia. And thanks to Emma, at least one claim came from Normandy. So we'll try to sort out those claims in the next episode. And we'll also start to wrap up our look at Old English.

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