

**THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST  
TRANSCRIPTS**

**EPISODE 63:  
RESTORATIONS AND REMEDIES**

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## **EPISODE 63: RESTORATIONS AND REMEDIES**

Welcome to the History of English Podcast - a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 63: Restorations and Remedies. In this episode, we're going to take the story of English to the eve of the Norman Conquest. The underlying theme of this episode is restorations and remedies. We'll begin with a political restoration – the restoration of the Wessex monarchy under Edward the Confessor. We'll examine at the events which occurred during the first half of his reign. And we'll also look at a different type of restoration – the restoration of health. So this is sort of the second part of the last episode. Last time, we looked at sickness and disease. So this time we'll look at the way the Anglo-Saxons treated sickness and disease.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is [historyofenglishpodcast.com](http://historyofenglishpodcast.com). And some of you have been kind enough to visit the site and make a donation. I always try to send to a personal note of thanks, but let me thank you here as well. And I also want to thank those of you who have posted a review or rating on iTunes. I try not to harp on that too much, but that's probably the best way to get the word out about the podcast. There are so many podcasts out there these days, that it's easy to get lost in the mix. And those reviews are a key tool used by iTunes to feature certain podcasts and to encourage new listeners to give them a try. So thanks again to those of you who have left reviews.

Also, if you hate having to wait between episodes of the podcast, I wanted to let you know that starting this week, I'm going to be contributing a word of the week to David Crowther's History of England Podcast. So be sure to check out that podcast for much more about the overall history of England and a little bit of etymology as well. So with that, let's turn to this episode.

This time, we're going to cover the reign of Edward, known to history as Edward the Confessor. He reigned for nearly a quarter of a century, and his life and death set the stage for the Norman Conquest in 1066.

As we saw last time, Edward's rise was anything but a certainty. He was one of the five half-brothers or step-brothers who had some claim to the English throne when Canute died in the year 1035. But one by one, each of those brothers died. And the key to this story is that each of them died relatively young without any children.

The last two of those five children were Harthacanute and Edward. And they had the same mother – Emma. So Edward and Harthacanute were half-brothers, and they were other's closest male relative. So based on that relationship, Harthacanute brought Edward over from Normandy to be the designated heir to the throne. And in 1042, Harthacanute died at a wedding party after having a stroke or a seizure.

So with Harthacanute's death, Edward became king. He was half-Norman, but he was also half English. He was the son of Aethelred the Unready. So that meant the old West Saxon monarchy was restored. For the first time in over 25 years, a descendant of Alfred the Great sat on the throne.

So let's stop here for a moment and consider that word *restoration*. It's the noun form of the verb *restore*. And those words came into English from French after 1066. The *store* part of *restore* comes from an Indo-European root word which meant 'to stand or put in place.' Of course, a place where you put things is a 'storeroom' or a 'storage' closet. You 'store' things there.

A business has its shelves 'stored' with goods. We call that place a 'store.' So *store* is a Latin word which meant to put in place. And 're-' is a very common Latin prefix. It meant to repeat to do again. So if you 'restore' something, you put it back in place.

But again, that is a French word. So what did the Anglo-Saxons call the process of restoring something? Well, they basically used the word *renew*, or at least their version of the word *renew*. In fact, their word was really an early version of the word *renew*. *New* is an Old English word. So the word *renew* combines that Latin prefix *re-*, which we just saw in *restore*, and the Old English word *new*. That construction was cobbled together shortly after the Normans arrived when the Latin prefix *re-* became common. But before *re-* came into English, the Anglo-Saxons used the prefix *ed-* ('e-d') to mean the same thing. So the Anglo-Saxons had the word *edniw*. And after 1066, *edniw* became *renew*. But the words meant basically the same thing. And a variation of *edniw* was *edniwian*. And that word was used to mean 'restore' or 'put back in place.'

And in the year 1042, that word *edniwian* was likely applied to Edward's selection as king because Edward renewed or restored the traditional West Saxon bloodline. This is actually a important point because that royal bloodline was the oldest in Europe. We'll look a little closer at the Normans next time, but they had been Viking raiders just over a century before. Also, by this point, Carolingian rule had come to an end in France. The new ruling family there descended from Hugh Capet who took power in 983, just over a half century earlier. In the east, the ruling family of the Holy Roman Emperor also came to power in the wake of the Carolingian collapse. So all of those ruling families were relatively new. But the West Saxon line of kings went back over 400 years. So there was a certain reverence for that bloodline, even in continental Europe. And Edward's connection to that line carried some weight.

Edward's coronation took place in the year 1043. And the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for that year reads:

"Her wæs Eadward gehalgod to cinge" – 'Here was Edward hallowed – or consecrated – as king'

"on Wincestre on forman Easter dæg mid myccelum wyrðscype" – 'at Winchester on the first Easter Day with much worship – or honor.'

Note that this passage says that Edward was crowned at Winchester. That was probably no accident. It was the traditional capital of Wessex, and the coronation there helped to re-establish that connection between Edward and the traditional West Saxon monarchy. But for all the efforts to re-establish that link, Edward showed very little interest in his Anglo-Saxon heritage. Remember he was half English and half-Norman, and he had spent most of his life in his uncle's court in Normandy. So he really saw himself as more Norman than English. He preferred the

Norman language and culture. And this preference for all things Norman would create problems throughout his reign.

Also, note that the excerpt from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle says that Edward was consecrated with much *wyrðscype*, the original form of our modern word *worship*. But that word had a slightly different meaning in its original sense. *Wyrðscype* was literally ‘worth-ship’ – the condition of being worthy or honorable. So it was a noun. And here, the use of that word meant that Edward was recognized as being honorable and worthy of his new position. A couple of centuries later, ‘worth-ship’ became a verb to describe the process of honoring someone. And it evolved from ‘worth-ship’ to *worship*. And in the 1300s, it was used to refer to the process of honoring the divine or supernatural, and that is the sense in which we use the word *worship* today.

Now when it comes to Edward, that word *worship* is kind of important because Edward may be more famous for his worshiping than his actual political leadership. He is generally considered to have been a good and honorable man, but he wasn’t a very strong king. During his quarter-century of exile in Normandy, England had changed a lot. Canute had created that new class of earls, and they largely ran their own territories. That system was well-entrenched and firmly established when Edward returned to England. So he was always a bit of an outsider, even in his own kingdom. Even if he had been a young, strong king, it would have been difficult for him to change that system. But by this point, he was older and an outsider. And he never really had the inclination to wrestle power away from the earls. Instead, he generally let them do their own thing, and he focused on he was good at – worshiping and religious matters.

As soon as he became king, Edward decided to build a new church. And being Norman, he wanted to build it in the Norman style. St. Paul’s minster was the primary cathedral in London at the time. It had been started shortly after the first Christian missionaries arrived in the early 600s. But now, Edward found a cleared area about a mile or so west of the city walls. St. Paul’s was the east minster, so Edward’s new church would be the ‘west’ minster. And it’s still known by that name today – Westminster Abbey. That cathedral has been re-built and enlarged over the centuries, but Edward’s original church was very impressive for its day. It’s construction was a massive undertaking. Edward started it as soon as he became king, and it was finished right before his death in 1066 – 24 years later.

When it was finished, it was not only the largest church in England, it was the largest building of any kind in England. Going forward, Westminster placed a central role in English history and politics. It was the place where English kings and queens were crowned. And many important people were buried there – kings, queens, poets, and other prominent people. In fact, Geoffrey Chaucer was buried there, and that later led to the establishment of an entire section of the abbey known as ‘Poet’s Corner’ where prominent poets and playwrights were buried or interred, including Charles Dickens and Rudyard Kipling and Alfred Tennyson. So Westminster Abbey has a fundamental connection to the later history of English.

Now the original construction of that cathedral tells us a lot about Edward. As I said, he was primarily concerned about religious matters. And it was his religious devotion that produced his famous nickname – Edward the Confessor. That name is little confusing to modern English speakers because the meaning of *confess* has changed a little bit over the centuries.

The word *confess* is a French word which was introduced by the Normans after 1066. And it was the Normans who called Edward the ‘Confessor.’ Today, the word *confess* has a bit of a negative connotation. We usually confess something we’re ashamed of. But in Old French, the meaning was more akin to ‘profess.’ It had a more positive connotation. It referred to someone who professed or avowed his religious beliefs in spite of persecution or danger. If the person was killed due to his beliefs, he was a martyr. But if he lived his life without being martyred, he was called a ‘confessor.’ And that is why Edward was known as the ‘confessor.’

In fact, after his death, Edward was recognized as a saint by Pope Alexander III. So why was Edward considered so saintly? I mean, he built a great cathedral. And he was regarded as a pious man. But was that it? Well, that was a big part of it. But there was something else about Edward that supposedly made him unique – and special. According to legend, he had the ability to heal the sick by simply laying his hands on them. So he had the ability to restore health to those who were sick. And this is where the restoration of the Wessex bloodline connects with the ‘restoration of health.’

According to the legend, Edward was walking down the street one day when he met a paralyzed man who was covered with sores. Edward felt sorry for the man, so he picked the man up to carry him to a church. But when he put the man down, the man’s paralysis was cured, and the man began to walk. His sores were also healed. After that, many sick people came to Edward so he could cure them. And it was legendary miracles like that that led to Edward’s later canonization.

The historian William of Malmesbury lived shortly after the time of Edward. And he wrote that Edward cured blindness in several people. But Edward’s alleged ability to heal the sick was primarily associated with one particular illness. That illness was scrofula. I actually mentioned that condition back in Episode 40. You might recall that scrofula was a common type of tuberculosis which affected the lymph nodes in the neck. It was a nasty and ugly condition, and it was said that Edward could cure the disease. Victims reported that their swellings decreased after Edward touched them. Supposedly, Edward’s power was imbued by God and it passed to later English kings and queens as well. Since most people who suffered from scrofula never got to meet the king, sufferers would take a coin with the king’s image on it, and they would rub it on the affected area. In later generations, the preferred coin was one with an image of the archangel Michael. This coin was called an ‘angel-noble’ in English. And the process of rubbing that coin on the affected area led to the phrase ‘touched by an angel.’ So might remember all of that from that prior episode. In England, the whole idea that a king’s touch could cure scrofula began with Edward the Confessor. And in fact, scrofula became known over time as the ‘King’s Evil.’

The legend of Edward's healing touch endured through the centuries. And it was even picked up by Shakespeare in the play Macbeth. And I should mention Macbeth here because Macbeth was actually a real person. He was the King of Scotland from 1040 until 1057. So he ruled Scotland during the same general time period that Edward was King of England. And Edward probably played a role in Macbeth's ultimate defeat and murder.

Macbeth became king upon the death of the prior king, Duncan. And the prior king's son, Malcolm, fled into exile. And this is where there are different historical accounts of exactly what happened. But one version of the story is that Malcolm headed south to England – specifically to Northumbria. And it was there that he convinced the Northumbrian earl to launch an invasion of Scotland. Supposedly, this invasion had the support of Edward the Confessor. And that invasion ultimately led to the defeat and death of Macbeth. Now again, this is one version of the story, but it is the version which Shakespeare liked because his play is roughly based around that version.

So in the play, while Malcolm is in Northumbria planning that invasion of Macbeth's kingdom, Shakespeare writes that King Edward arrived. Malcolm is having a conversation with a Scottish thane named Macduff, and they're discussing their mutual hatred of Macbeth when a doctor arrives. Malcolm asks the doctor if the king is coming out? The doctor replies that there are a crew of wretched souls waiting for the king to touch them and cure their disease. Then the doctor leaves. Macduff turns to Malcolm and asks what disease the doctor was referring to. Malcolm replies:

'Tis called the evil  
A most miraculous work in this good king,  
Which often, since my here-remain in England,  
I have seen him do. How he solicits heaven,  
Himself best knows; but strangely-visited people,  
All swoll'n and ulcerous, pitiful to the eye,  
The mere despair of surgery, he cures;

So in Shakespeare's world, Edward cured those sick people with his miraculous touch. And with legendary abilities like that, you can see why later generations revered Edward and considered him a saint.

Of course most sick people never had the opportunity to receive the king's magic touch So they had to resort to the next best option which was medicine. And having mentioned Macbeth, you may see another link between that play and Anglo-Saxon medicine. If you're familiar with Macbeth, you know that it features witches who make potions and predict the future. Well those witches' potions and brews weren't all that different from Anglo-Saxon medicine.

A couple of surviving manuscripts from the late Anglo-Saxon period contain a long list of cures for a variety of medical conditions. They even have purported medical cures for scrofula. According to a nineteenth century translation, you could treat the condition by mixing together coriander and beans and placing that mixture on the tumor. Or you could use water crab and honey. Another concoction was barley meal, clear pitch, wax and oil. If none of those options

worked, you were to make a salve. According to the translation, ‘take swines fat, smear the inside of a broad pan with the fat, boil up, then ease goose sharn into the pan, and make lukewarm, and when it be melted then put it on a linen cloth, lay it on the sore, and swathe up, apply that pretty often in a day.’

These types of salves and potions and other concoctions were the standard medical treatments of the day. And I think you can start to see why people put so much faith in the idea of a king’s magic touch because many of these medical cures didn’t really cure anything. So for most people, a supernatural cure was the only chance they had.

But let’s be clear, the Anglo-Saxons didn’t make the distinction between faith and science that we make today. The fact is that Anglo-Saxon medical treatments always had a element of the supernatural built into them. And to see that, we only have to look at the Old English words for ‘doctor’ and ‘medicine.’

The Old English word for a physician or doctor was a *læce*. And as we look a little closer at that word, we can see a connection between medicine, and the supernatural and language. And that’s because a *læce* was originally a ‘charmer’ – one who used words and charms to cure people. So let’s explore that etymology.

The word *læce* had Indo-European origins. It was *\*leg* in the original Indo-European language. That word meant ‘to collect or gather or consider or choose.’ In fact, the ‘-lect’ part of words like *collect*, *select*, *elect* and *neglect* come from that same root via Latin. Of course, we are always ‘selecting’ some things and ‘neglecting’ others. But one situation where we do that is when we speak. Whenever we speak, we select some words from our overall vocabulary, and we neglect other words. So that same root word also came to refer to this process – basically the process of speaking. That meaning passed into Latin and gave us lots of words related to speech. It gave us *lecture* – the speech of a teacher or professor. A speaker might speak at a *lectern* – another word from that same root. If we attend that lecture, we might be taught a *lesson*. *Lesson* also comes from that root. If words are written down, and you can read them, they are *legible* from that same root. When people recite an old story, it becomes a *legend*, also from that root.

That Indo-European root also passed into Greek and gave us the word *lexicon* meaning our ‘vocabulary’ or ‘collection of words.’ Our particular manner of speech is our *dialect* – the ‘-lect’ part comes from that same root. And some people who have a problem reading are said to have *dyslexia* from the same root. When we speak to each other, we carry on a *dialogue* – the ‘logue’ part also comes from that root. As does the word *logic*.

That same root also passed into the Germanic languages where it came to mean one who speaks magic words, so it was an enchanter. And that word passed into Old English as *læce*. So a *læce* was originally an enchanter, but it came to mean a healer or a doctor. And that shows how important words and chants were in early healing and cures. So the primary tool of an Anglo-Saxon doctor wasn’t necessarily his instruments, or his potions. It was his words.

And in fact, the Anglo-Saxons believed that sickness and disease could be cured with words. They used charms or short poems to ward off evil spirits and to cure sickness. It was believed that those charms had the magical ability to heal the sick. Sometimes, the charms were used in connection with a potion or brew or other concoction.

One of those charms was a charm against a wen. Now that sounds like a charm against a magical creature – but a *wen* was just an Old English word for a wart or lump on the skin. It's actually cognate with the word *wound*, but a *wen* occurred naturally. Now I said that the 'Charm Against a Wen' sounds like a charm against a magical creature, and that's basically how the charm worked. It treated the wart as a magical creature which has suddenly appeared on the skin. So the charm encouraged the wen to leave and return home to its brothers in the hills.

In Modern English, the charm reads:

Wen, Wen, little Wen,  
here you must not build, here have no home  
but you must go north to the nearby hill  
where you have a wretched brother.  
He will lay a leaf at your head.  
Under the foot of the wolf, under the eagle's wing,  
under the claw of the eagle, may you ever wane!  
Shrink like coal on the hearth!  
Wither like filth on the wall!  
Evaporate like water in the pail!  
As you become as small as a grain of linseed,  
and far smaller than a hand-worm's hip-bone and so very small  
that you are at last nothing at all.

Now, here is the same charm against a wen broken down into the original Old English and a literal translation:

“Wenne, wenne, wenchichenne,” – ‘Wen, Wen, oh little Wen’

“her ne scealt þu timbrien” – ‘here not shall you timber or build’ (*timber* was actually an Old English word for ‘build,’ and it still survives in the word *timber* as wood used for building)

“ne nenne tun habben” – ‘no none town have’ (‘No none’ is a good example of Old English double negatives which were quite common. And *town* originally meant a homestead or a home, and it still survives today as the word *town*, but in Old English it was *tun*. So once again, “ne nenne tun habben” – ‘no none town have’)

“ac þu scealt north eonene” – ‘but you shall north go yonder’

“to þan nihgan berhge” – ‘to the near bergs or mountains or hills’

“þer þu hauest, ermig” – ‘there thou have something wretched’

“enne broþer” – ‘a brother’

“He þe sceal legge” – ‘He who shall lay’

“leaf et heafde.” – ‘leaf at (your) head’

“Under fot wolues” – ‘under foot of wolf’

“under ueþer earnes” – ‘under feather or wing of an eagle or sea erne’

“under earnes clea” – ‘under eagles claw’

“a þu geweornie.” – ‘ever you wane’

“Clinge þu” – ‘clump or cling you’

“alswa col on heorþe” – ‘just as coal on the hearth’

“sring þu” – ‘shrivel (shrink) you’

“alswa scerne awage” – ‘just as filth on a wall’

“and weorne” – ‘and wane or decline’

“alswa weter on anbren.” – ‘just as water in a pail or bucket made of amber’

“Swa litel þu gewurþe” – ‘As little you become’

“alswa linsetcorn,” – ‘just as linseed corn’

“and miccli lesse” – ‘and much less’

“alswa anes handwurmes hupeban,” – ‘just as a hand-worm's hipbone’

“and alswa litel þu gewurþe” – ‘and just as little you become’

“þet þu nawiht gewurþe.” – ‘that you nothing become.’

Charms like these reflect a time before modern science when it was believed that most sickness was caused by spirits, or elves, or other supernatural creatures. So these remedies worked the same way. They had a mystical aspect to them which was supposed to ward off spirits.

Now I should note that this charm, along with a handful of others, about a dozen in total, survive in their original Old English. And we not only have these charms, we also have a collection of potions, brews and salves which were designed to cure all types of illnesses. All of these remedies survive in two separate books which were compiled in the late Anglo-Saxon period.

These two books are known as ‘Bald’s Leechbook’ and the ‘Lacnunga.’ So let’s me tell you a little bit about these books. The ‘Lacnunga’ is a collection of herbal remedies, charms and prayers which was compiled in the late tenth century or early eleventh century. So that means it was compiled shortly before Edward the Confessor became king. That title ‘Lacnunga’ doesn’t actually appear in the manuscript. The title was created by its first editor, Oswald Cockayne, in the 1800s. *Lacnunga* was an Old English word which meant ‘remedies’ or ‘medicine.’ And that root *lac* is the same root which gave us *læce* – the Old English word for a doctor.

Let me digress here for a second and re-visit a sound change that we’ve seen lots of time before. Going all the way back to Episode 5, you might remember that the ‘K’ sound became a ‘CH’ sound in Old English when it appeared before a front vowel like E – or /eh/. Well that /eh/ sound was a common Old English inflectional ending. So whenever that ending was put on the end of those words, the final consonant would shift to the ‘CH’ sound. So you had a word like *lac* – and when you put that /eh/ inflection on the end, instead of it becoming /lack-eh/, it became *læce* (/latch-eh/) – the word for a doctor.

Since this happened a lot in Old English, a lot of pairs were created where one version of the word ended in a ‘k’ sound and the other ended in a ‘CH’ sound. One example of this is the modern words *lock* and *latch*. Now this is a separate root word, but it worked the same way. To *loc* in Old English was to fasten or grasp. And *latch* was a variation which we still use in the sense of ‘latching onto something.’

Along the same lines, you might ‘bake’ a ‘batch’ of cookies. Again, it works the same way. *Bake* and *batch* were variations of the same word. *Wake* and *watch* are the same. When you are ‘awake,’ your eyes are open. And when your eyes are open, you ‘watch’ things around you. Other pairs include, *make* and *match*, *dyke* and *ditch*, *bank* and *bench*. We’ve also seen the connection between *stick* and *stitch*. So this was very common in English. And *lac* meaning ‘to heal’ or ‘enchant’ also produced *læce* meaning a ‘healer’ or ‘enchanter.’

In later English translations, *læce* was usually rendered as *leech*. And that forms the name of that other surviving Anglo-Saxon medical manuscript. It is called the ‘Leechbook’ from *læce-boc* meaning ‘medical book.’ And more specifically, it is known as ‘Bald’s Leechbook’ because it has a Latin inscription on it that says the book belonged to a man named Bald. This particular medical book is a little older than the Lacnunga. It was likely compiled in the 900s.

Now I should note here that the name of ‘Bald’s Leechbook’ has created some linguistic confusion through the years. When people hear of an Anglo-Saxon medical book called the leechbook, they often assume that it has to do with leeches. You may know that leeches were once used as a form of blood-letting. And it was thought that they could be used to cure sick

people. So a lot of people think the ‘Leechbook’ is a book about leeches. But again, *leech* referred to a doctor – a *læce* – not a parasite.

Now I should note that some scholars think there is a connection between these two versions of the word *leech*. Both words existed in Old English, and sometimes there were spelled the same way, which implies that they were sometimes pronounced the same way. But most scholars think that the word for the parasite was a distinct word with a different root. And they think the two words merged together over time thanks to ‘folk etymology.’ I mentioned ‘folk etymology’ last time. That’s where a word changes its pronunciation or meaning over time because people confuse it with another word, and they assume a connection which isn’t really there. So as the use of leeches became more common in later centuries, people confused the word *læce* meaning ‘doctor’ and *leech* meaning ‘leech.’ And it was thought that one word derived from the other. But it actually appears that they were distinct in Old English.

At any rate, this is still a matter of some debate. But there is no debate about the actual practice of blood-letting. Blood-letting was a common medical treatment during this period throughout much of Europe. And it appears that the Anglo-Saxons borrowed some of the ideas behind blood-letting from continental Europe. But unlike doctors in continental Europe, who often used blood-letting as a ‘cure all,’ the Anglo-Saxon doctors only used it in limited situations. They actually seemed to prefer their charms and potions and medical concoctions.

Blood-letting has a long history, but many of the basic medical notions behind the practice originated with the ancient Greeks. And it was tied to the Greek idea of the four humors. According to the Greeks, there were four basic bodily fluids – blood, phlegm, and two kinds of bile. Yellow bile and black bile. It was thought that the fluids combined in the body, in varying proportions. And those proportions determined a person’s emotional and physical state. If those fluids got out of proportion, so if you had too much or too little of one of them, then it affected your mood or your health.

So let’s look a little closer at those four fluids because they give us some interesting etymology. The four fluids or humors were blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. We know about *blood*. We saw that in the last episode. We know that it is an Old English word, so Greek would have used a different word. But *blood* is native English, and as we saw last time, it comes from an original root word which meant to swell or expand or gush. And we saw that that root word produced a lot of words related to the body in Modern English – words like *boil*, *bladder* and *bullocks*.

Well that is *blood*. Then we have the second humor which was *phlegm*. And believe it or not, *phlegm* actually comes from that same Indo-European root word meaning ‘to swell or gush.’ You might remember that within Greek and Latin, that root word produced a lot of words which began with an ‘F’ sound like *phallus* and *fluid*. Well, it also produced this Greek word *phlegm*. So *blood* and *phlegm* are actually cognate, and they were two of the four humors or bodily fluids.

The other two humors were yellow bile and black bile. Yellow bile was called *khole* in Greek. It is actually derived from the same Indo-European root word which produced the English words *gold* and *yellow*. It also produced the English words *glow* and *yolk* as in an egg ‘yolk.’ We’ve also seen this word before. Well, in Greek it produced this word *khole*, which meant yellow bile. That same word eventually passed into English and gave us the word *cholera* for a specific type of disease which was originally believed to be caused by bile.

The word *khole* also gave us the word *cholesterol* which was a different type of substance found in the body. So that was the yellow bile.

But then there was the fourth humor or fluid which was black bile. And for black bile, the Greeks took that word *khole* meaning ‘bile’ and they put the word *melas* in front of it. *Melas* meant ‘black,’ and it is the same root word which gives us the word *melanin* – a type of skin pigment. So *melas* and *khole* produced the word meaning ‘black bile,’ and that word has passed down to English as the word *melancholy*. So *melancholy* is literally ‘black bile.’ But remember that all of these fluids had to be in balance. If you had too much of one, it affected your mental or physical health. And if you had too much *melancholy* or black bile, it was thought that it made you depressed and sad. And that’s how the word *melancholy* meaning ‘black bile’ came to mean ‘gloomy’ or ‘depressed’ in Modern English.

Now I’ve noted that all four of these essential bodily fluids were called *humors*. Well, that’s actually a Latin term which the Romans applied to this Greek medical concept. *Humor* was a Latin word for fluid. So the four humors just meant the four fluids. And that term *humor* originally passed in the English meaning the same thing. But remember, the balance of the humors in the body affected a person’s state of mind or overall state of health. If a person had too much of a given humor, the condition came to be described as *humorous*. Over time, within English, the word *humor* came to be used as a general term to describe a person’s mood or state of mind. A person might be in good humor or bad humor. And then it came to be used in a more limited sense to mean a peculiar, odd or cranky mood. And from its sense as someone in an odd or peculiar mood, it came to describe a funny or light-hearted mood. And that’s the sense of the word today. When we use the word *humor* to refer to something, we’re generally referring to something that is amusing, funny or light-hearted.

The specific balance of the humors in the body was called the *temper* or *temperament*, using the Latin word *temper*. And that’s why we refer to someone’s general attitude today as their ‘temperament.’ And it’s also why we describe someone who is easily agitated as having a ‘bad temper.’

Another Latin word to describe the balance of the humors was the *complexio*, and that produced the word *complexion*. So *complexion* and *temperament* were synonymous. If a person had a bad temper and became angry, or if they felt sick or nauseous, their skin color would sometimes reflect that. So the word *complexion* was eventually applied to describe the hue or appearance of a person’s skin.

So all of that means that words like *humor*, *complexion*, *temper*, *temperament*, *melancholy*, *cholera*, *cholesterol* and *phlegm* all ultimately derive from this theory of the four humors.

Now I said earlier that there was a link between the four humors and blood-letting. So let me make that connection. The theory of the four humors said that many emotional or physical problems were caused by an imbalance of the four humors. You had too much or too little of one of the fluids. And remember that one of those fluids or humors was blood. It was thought that too much blood in the body led to fevers and other disorders. And so it was important to remove that excess blood in order to get the humors back into proper balance.

Now all of this sounds crazy to us today. Thanks to modern science, we know that the loss of blood is often counter-productive. It only serves to weaken the body further. But people didn't really understand that in the eleventh century. So blood-letting was a common practice. It was usually done by slicing open the veins. But some doctors used leeches because they had a natural coagulant. So you could just put them on a person's skin, and they would suck out the required amount of blood, and you could just take them off when you were done. You didn't have to cut the person open and drain them. So leeches were considered a major medical advancement. But their heyday didn't really come until the 1800s. That's when leeches really became popular. During the early Middle Ages, especially in England, it was more common to just slice someone open.

This idea of blood-letting was imported from the continent. And it appears that the Anglo-Saxons were a little bit reluctant to use it as a medical treatment. Their tradition relied more upon charms and potions. Those charms and potions might not heal you, but they probably wouldn't kill you either. But when it came to blood-letting, the Anglo-Saxons treated it as a more radical procedure. They also seemed to struggle with the overall concept of the humors which was a bit foreign to them.

Now Latin medical texts were highly developed on the practice of blood-letting. But Bald's Leechbook – the Anglo-Saxon medical text – only mentions blood-letting in passing. The book says that blood-letting is a remedy in certain cases, but it shouldn't be misused. And it should only be done at certain times of the year, and at certain times of the month, and at certain times of the day. The best time is early Spring. The best time of all is the first day of April. The Leechbook says that that is a good time because “þa yfelan wætan” – literally ‘the evil wetness’ or ‘the evil flow’ – has been drunk in winter and are then gathered together. Now, it isn't exactly clear what that means, but it is interesting that the book uses that phrase “þa yfelan wætan” – the ‘evil wetness’ or ‘evil flow.’ It is usually translated into Modern English as the ‘evil humors.’ So this is the only possible mention of the humors in the book. And it speaks of them as the ‘evil’ humors. So the book doesn't really use the original idea of the humors being out of balance. According to the Greeks, the humors were not inherently good or bad. They were just in balance or out of balance. But Bald's Leechbook says that sickness is caused by evil humors. And those evil humors sometimes need to be drained from the body. So the book mixes this continental idea of the four humors with this Anglo-Saxon idea that sickness was caused by evil spirits.

Now the important thing to take from these two Anglo-Saxon medical books is that continental remedies like blood-letting might be used from time to time, but if you really wanted to get healthy, what you needed to do was use a charm or whip up a potion.

In fact, there is some overlap between the two books with similar remedies being found in both. But Bald's Leechbook is the most exhaustive in its treatments and remedies. It takes the form of a physician's manual. It has drawings and commentaries, and its remedies are listed in descending order from head to toe. It covers everything from shingles, to infections to spider bites, to hair loss, to headaches, and much, much more. Most of the remedies involve potions or salves or herbal remedies.

The remedy for shingles required the preparation of a potion containing bark from fifteen different varieties of trees. For chapped or sore lips, you were supposed to smear honey on the lips, then take the film of an egg, add pepper and apply to the honey coating. For dandruff, make a salve from watercress seeds and goose grease. Pimples could be cured with a salve of 'great wort' root stirred into oil.

If you were bitten by a poisonous spider, you were to fry black snails in a hot pan and ground them to powder with pepper. Then eat the powder or add it to a liquid and drink it.

Here's a cure for warts in the original Old English.

Take a dog or hound's urine – "Genim hundes micgean"

and a mouse's blood – "& muse blod"

mingle together – "meng to somne"

smear the warts with it and they will go away – "smire mid þa weartan hi gewitaþ sona aweg"

The Leechbook also includes several remedies for a stye or infection in the eye – what the Leechbook calls an 'eye wen' or an 'eye sore.' According to one of the remedies, if you have that condition, you were to make a salve from leeks and garlic in equal amounts. You were to pound them together very well. Then take wine and bullocks gall (so bile from an cow's stomach) in equal amounts and mix that with the leek and garlic concoction. You were then to put this mixture into a brass vessel and let in stand for nine days. Then wring it out through a cloth, put it into a horn, and apply it to the eye with a feather at night time. Of all the remedies for an eye infection, the leechbook says that this is the best 'leechdom' or cure.

It all sounds very funny. Almost like Macbeth's witches. "Eye of newt and toe of frog. Wool of bat, and tongue of dog." But you see, here's the thing. It wasn't always as crazy as it sounds. And we know that in part thanks to the University of Nottingham in England. Their Centers for Biomolecular Sciences recently studied that recipe which I just gave for a stye or eye infection. Now the University of Nottingham is well-known for two things – the study of Anglo-Saxon and Viking history and the study of microbiology. And Christina Lee, an expert on the Anglo-Saxons from the School of English, recently consulted with Freya Harrison from the School of Life Sciences. Dr. Lee translated that recipe I just gave you from Bald's Leechbook, and Dr. Harrison assembled the concoction in the lab. The bacteria which causes a stye is essentially the same as the bacteria which causes MRSA, which you may know if a very serious type of infection which

is difficult to treat with conventional antibiotics. So they were looking to see if this old Anglo-Saxon remedy would have any affect on the treatment of MRSA. And earlier this year, back in March, it was announced that the tests were successful – actually VERY successful. This was big news at the time and several of you were kind enough to forward some of the news articles to me.

So let me play a short interview here with Dr. Lee and Dr. Harrison which discusses how they went about testing this old Anglo-Saxon remedy. The first voice you will hear is Christina Lee – the Anglo-Saxon scholar. The second voice you will hear is Freya Harrison the microbiologist.

[AUDIO CLIP]

So it turns out that this Anglo-Saxon recipe kills up to 90% of MRSA bacteria. The researchers are not exactly sure why it works. There are probably some active components in the mixture that naturally fight bacteria and steeping that mixture in alcohol may enhance that potency. Whatever the cause, the larger point here is that even though many of these old remedies seem a little wacky, at least some of them probably did work – for whatever reason. And those two medical books – the Leechbook and the Lacnunga – were likely a collection of all of the known medical knowledge of the day. Some of it was superstitious and some of it actually had medicinal value.

As a result, a closer look at each book reveals some sage advice which even modern doctors would give their patients. For example, Bald’s Leechbook advises pregnant women to avoid drunkenness. And they were told not to ride on horseback. The book also describes in detail how the liver works. And the book has the oldest known description of plastic surgery in the English language. It describes how to correct a harelip by cutting the affected area and sewing it back together with a special concoction, presumably to minimize infections.

And as we just saw, the remedy for a sty has actual anti-biotic properties. It is also interesting that many of the concoctions in the Leechbook require the use of honey. I noted earlier that a treatment for chapped lips required the use of a honey salve. Honey, in combination with other ingredients, was also used to treat cuts and incisions, blisters, boils, spider bites, dog bites, and many other conditions, including headaches.

Now modern medicine has rediscovered the medicinal value of honey. Honey actually has antibiotic properties. And believe it or not, some modern hospitals are actually using honey to treat infections that are difficult to fight with conventional medications.

Honey was not only a common ingredient in medical remedies, it was also the primary ingredient in something else – mead. And mead is important to our story because certain types of mead were also thought to have medicinal value. This isn’t really surprising because mead was a type of alcohol and that meant that it could dull certain aches and pains.

Mead was sweet, and it was also very potent. I’ve noted before that *mead* goes back to the original Indo-Europeans. The Indo-European root word was *\*medhu*. And that drink must have been extremely popular because that root word is well-attested throughout the various Indo-European languages.

Of course that root word produced *mead* in English. The root also passed into Greek where it produced the word *methy*. Whereas mead was made with honeycombs, the Greeks had access to lots of grapes. So they began to make wine instead of mead, but they continued to use that same word *methy* for this new fruity alcoholic beverage. So the word *methy* came to mean ‘wine’ in Greek. A variation of that word was *methystos*, which meant drunk or intoxicated. Now the Greeks would put an ‘A-’ at the front of word to mean ‘not’ or to mean the opposite. We still do that when we convert *moral* into *amoral*, and *typical* into *atypical*. Well, the Greeks converted *methystos* meaning drunk into *amethystos* which meant ‘not drunk.’ Now within ancient Greek culture, it was thought that you could drink wine without getting drunk if you wore a purple or wine-colored gemstone around your neck. In other words, if you wore this particular gemstone you would remain *amethystos* – not drunk. And that particular gemstone became known as *amethyst*. So *amethyst* comes from the same root as the word *mead*. They both have a connection to drinking and getting drunk.

Now in later centuries, people began to burn and distill wood, and it produced a lot of byproducts like tar and turpentine and charcoal. But it also produced a gas. And when that gas was distilled and turned into a liquid, it actually resembled the type of alcohol that people drank. In the 1800s, a couple of French scientists worked with this compound in its gas form, and they called *methylene*, which combined that Greek word *methy* meaning wine or alcohol, and the Greek word *hyle* meaning ‘wood,’ since it was related to this type of alcohol derived from wood. The liquid form became known as *methanol*.

Now when chemists studied methylene closely, they discovered that it had a single carbon atom bonded to two hydrogen atoms. So its chemical formula was CH<sub>2</sub>. Well, chemists began to apply this root *meth* to other compounds which had a single carbon atom bonded to two or more hydrogen atoms. So CH<sub>4</sub> – one carbon atom and four hydrogen atoms – and that became known as *methane*. Another group of *methyl* compounds arose when there was one carbon atom and three hydrogen atoms. One of those compounds was a powerful stimulant called *methamphetamine*. It was actually approved as a drug to treat certain modern illnesses and conditions like ADHD and obesity. It is also sold in one form as a decongestant. But it is probably most famous today as a very powerful and destructive illegal drug, usually going by the name ‘crystal meth’ or just *meth*. But all of that means that the *meth* in ‘crystal meth’ is related to the word *amethyst*, and both are ultimately derived from the Greek version of the word *mead*.

Now I noted that honey and mead was used for medicinal purposes. And in the late Middle Ages, one particular type of mead was developed as a drug to treat sickness. It was called *metheglin*. This type of mead was originally produced in Wales and it was produced by brewing mead with a variety of herbs or spices. One old recipe required the use of thyme, sage, oregano, rosemary and other herbs. Another recipe used spices like ginger, cloves, and cinnamon. And as I said, it was specially used as a type of medicine.

And in fact, there is a linguistic connection between *metheglin* and *medicine*. I said that the concoction first developed in Wales, and *metheglin* was a Welsh word. The last part was ‘-llyn’ which meant liquor in Welsh. But what about that first part – *meth*? Well, it was derived from the Welsh word *medd*, which had two different meanings in Welsh. One was *mead* from that

same Indo-European root. And some scholars think that *metheglin* was based on that root word, so it meant ‘mead’ or ‘honey liquor.’

But I said that *medd* had another meaning in Welsh, and most scholars think *metheglin* was actually derived from this other root. This other root was *medd* or *meddyg*, and it was borrowed from Latin. It meant ‘healing,’ so *metheglin* meant the ‘healing liquor.’ Now here is the important point. That Latin root *med* passed into Welsh and gave us *metheglin*, but it also passed into English and gave us the *med* in *medicine* and *medical*. And it also gave us the *med* in the word *remedy*. So *metheglin* is cognate with *medicine*, *medical* and *remedy*.

And those words bring us full circle back to the beginning. So we’ve taken a close look at remedies and the restoration of health. But as we saw earlier, if none these remedies worked, and you were living during the middle part of the eleventh century, you only had one other option. You could follow around Edward the Confessor and hope that he healed you with his magic touch.

Even though Edward supposedly had a magic touch when it came to healing, he didn’t have a magic touch when it came to ruling. For the most part, he let the local earls run their own territories, not that he had much choice. In many respects, they were real power in England, and even Edward understood that. And the most powerful earl of all was Godwin down in Wessex.

So I want to conclude this episode by looking at Edward’s turbulent relationship with Godwin because that relationship played a key role in the Norman Conquest in 1066.

Edward’s selection as king in 1042 had come with the support of Godwin, as well as the other prominent earls of the day, Leofric of Mercia and Siward of Northumbria.

Of all the earls, Godwin was the wealthiest and most powerful in part because his power base was in Wessex, and in part because he was shrewd politician who constantly made political moves to enhance his position. We saw last time that he had supported Emma and Harthacanute early on, then he flipped to Harold Harefoot when it became apparent that Harold had secured his position as King of all England. And when Harold died, Godwin flipped back to Harthacanute. And when Harthacanute died, he supported the somewhat naive Edward, in part because Edward wouldn’t rock the boat.

Three years later, Godwin secured his position by arranging a marriage between his daughter Edith and Edward the Confessor. It was strictly a political marriage used to establish an alliance between Godwin and Edward. Edward now had Godwin’s loyal support. But Godwin had eyes on the throne. Not necessarily for himself, but for his descendants. If Edward and Edith had a son, that son – Godwin’s grandson – would be King of England. So this was a very strategic marriage. But it was also apparently a loveless marriage. No child was ever born to the marriage, and in fact, it appears likely that the marriage was never even consummated. Nevertheless, that marriage between Edward and Edith ensured Godwin’s position as the most powerful earl in the land.

Having married his daughter to the king, Godwin now arranged to have his son Harold appointed as the Earl of East Anglia. Godwin's power continued to grow over time. And he continued to put his children in strategic positions. Another son named Tostig will eventually become the Earl of Northumbria. But as Godwin's power grew, Edward's relative status and power declined. He was increasingly playing the role of figurehead.

Edward did retain some authority as king. Unfortunately, he squandered much of the authority. By the year 1051, he had decided to disband the small permanent naval fleet which protected England's coast. And he also abolished the heregeld – or army tax – which was required to pay his own retainers. It was a popular decision with his subjects. Lower taxes are always popular. But those decisions weakened his military position.

Meanwhile, Edward and Godwin were operating in completely different social circles. Godwin operated in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, surrounding himself with loyal West Saxon supporters. But Edward continued to surround himself with Normans who spoke a different language, dressed differently, wore their hair in a different style, and had different customs and sensibilities.

So as we enter the year 1051, we have this increasing divide between Godwin and Edward. Godwin was exercising a lot of power behind the throne, and Edward was starting to resent Godwin's power.

There was also the problem of the heir. Edward was an older man when he became king. He was probably about 37 or 38 years old at the time. Now he was approaching 50, and he and Edith still had no children. Godwin had waited patiently for that grandson to be born. But that hadn't happened, and it was starting to be clear that it wasn't going to happen.

Remember that Edward was the last of those five children who had a claim to the throne at Canute's death. Every one of them had died without children. And now, it was becoming apparent that Edward would continue that tradition. There would not be any obvious heir when Edward died, and given his age, that could happen at any time.

Godwin was certainly aware of this dilemma. And there is little doubt that he had his own ideas about that succession. If Edward wasn't going to give Godwin a grandson to sit on the throne, then the Godwins might just have to force the issue because, in Godwin's mind, the next king needed to be a Godwin, and as we'll see next time, he was right.

Meanwhile, over in Scandinavia, there were others keeping a close eye on England, and the lack of a male heir to the throne. You might remember from the last episode that Canute's son Harthacanute had been King of Denmark, and Harthacanute couldn't return to England at his father's death because he was fighting with the Norwegian king Magnus. Well, those two leaders made that agreement where they agreed to stop fighting each other, but whenever one of them died, the survivor would get to keep both kingdoms. Well, that freed Harthacanute to return to England. And then Harthacanute died – first. So he had added England to his realm when he died. And that meant that Magnus back in Norway claimed both Denmark and England when

Harthacanute died. But then Magnus himself died in 1047. And he was succeeded by his uncle, Harald Hardrada – literally Harald Hard-Ruler. And Harald Hardrada maintained his nephew's claim to Denmark and England under that earlier agreement. So as Edward the Confessor grew older, and as it became increasingly apparent that there was not going to be an heir, Harald Hardrada began to make his plans for a conquest of England to enforce his inherited claims.

But there was someone else who was also keeping an eye on developments in England. That was the leader of Normandy – one William, Duke of Normandy. He was Edward's cousin. Edward's mother Emma was William's great-aunt. They had actually grown up together in the Norman court. And Edward had maintained a close relationship with Normandy. William was one of Edward's closest living male relatives, and William certainly thought that he was the one most capable of succeeding Edward when Edward died. And more importantly, it appears that Edward actually felt the same way. It is believed that Edward promised the English throne to William during this period in the early 1050s.

So we now have all of the important players at the table. They're all ready to fulfill their destinies to shape the future of England and the English language. Will the Godwin family continue the Anglo-Saxon tradition? Will Harald Hardrada continue the Scandinavian legacy of Sweyn Forkbeard and Canute. Or will William of Normandy send England in a completely different and new direction under his Norman rule? Well, we already know the answers to those questions. But next time, we'll see how it all played out.

We'll begin by taking a closer look at the situation in Normandy. We haven't really looked at events on the ground in northern France since the founding of the Normandy in the year 911. I covered that back in Episode 49. Next time, we'll see how the Norman state had evolved over the prior century and half to become one of the most powerful regions of France. And we'll also take a look at how the Norman language had evolved during that time. And then we'll explore the last few years of Edward the Confessor's life to see how these three claimants to the throne jockeyed for position, and then settled their respective scores with two major battles the year 1066.

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