

**THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPT**

**EPISODE 103:
SOLITARY CONFINEMENT**

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 103: Solitary Confinement. In this episode, we’re going to look at one of the most important documents composed during the early Middle English period. It is a guide for female hermits or recluses who were called Anchoresses. The manuscript is called Ancrene Wisse – literally the Anchoress’s Guide. The text is important for a couple of reasons. It shows how the English language was continuing to evolve, and it is also notable because it’s one of the first English documents to contain a large number of French loanwords. Unlike prior documents which have a few loanwords here and there, the Ancrene Wisse features lots of new words. In fact, over 200 common words that we use everyday appear for the first time in the manuscript. So this time, we’ll examine how this important text came about, and we’ll also examine a few of the common words that were introduced in the manuscript.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can sign up to support the podcast at Patreon.com/historyofenglish. And as always, you can reach me by email at kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com

Now this time, I want to begin in a very familiar place – monasteries. Throughout much of the Old and Middle English period, I’ve talked about monks and monasteries. And I’ve done that because many of the surviving documents from those periods were written or copied by monks, and many of them were preserved in libraries in monasteries and cathedrals. That also helps to explain why so many of the surviving documents have religious themes.

I mentioned the origin of monks way back in Episode 33. I noted in that episode that in the 3rd century a man named Alexander sought to avoid the persecution of Christians by heading out to the Egyptian desert to live by himself and practice his religion. He wanted to live a simple and devout life in solitude. He was later joined by other recluses who sought to live separately from the rest of the world. Today, we might call these people *hermits*, and that term is derived from an old Greek word that meant ‘desert’ or ‘a place where no one lives.’ So a hermit was literally a ‘desert-dweller.’ Since these hermits lived in isolation and solitude, they also came to be known as *monks* from the Greek word *monos* meaning ‘one or alone.’ That Greek root word also produced the word *monastery* for the place where monks lived and worked.

So even though monks sought isolation, they actually ended up living together in those early monasteries. Over the next few centuries, monasteries spread throughout the Mediterranean and Europe. But even though monasteries became common-place in the Christian world, they were not *monolithic* – which by the way is another word from the same root as *monk* and *monastery*.

Throughout the podcast, I’ve talked about monasteries in a very generic way. And that may have left the impression that they were all pretty much the same. But in reality, there was quite a bit of variation between them.

One of the biggest differences between monasteries was the particular ‘rule’ that each group of monks followed. The rule was a code that specified how the monastery was structured, and the specific duties of the monks. Some rules were so detailed that they regulated almost every aspect of a monk’s life. They specified when the monks should pray, when they should eat, when they should and should not speak, what clothes they should wear, and so on.

One of the earliest rules was the Rule of St. Augustine written around the year 400. It is sometimes called the Augustinian Rule. It was short and general consisting of eight chapters. It emphasized harmony and chastity, and it rejected private property. Because it was broad and general, it was adaptable and followed by many monasteries.

About a century after St. Augustine established the Augustinian Rule, St. Benedict of Nursia established a separate rule which became known as the Benedictine Rule. And that was the rule that really caught on in the early Middle Ages. The Benedictine Rule was very detailed consisting of 73 separate chapters. It emphasized silence and prayer, and it found an early advocate in Charlemagne who had the rule copied and distributed to monasteries throughout western Europe. He wanted the Benedictine Rule to serve as the model for all of those monasteries. And soon, most of the monasteries in western Europe followed that rule.

We can now jump forward a few centuries to the Norman Conquest of England. At the time of the Conquest, England had 37 Benedictine houses for men and 10 for women. The Benedictine houses were the oldest and richest in England. In fact, the first Augustinian house wasn’t founded in England until about 30 years after the Conquest.

Now you might have noticed an interesting development in the evolution of these monasteries. The words *monk* and *monastery* were based on a Greek word that meant ‘alone,’ but for most of their history, monasteries were really a form of communal living. Monks lived together, and followed strict rules that regulated their daily activities. So during the Middle Ages, they were no longer living alone. And those monasteries were very much a part of the feudal system. Many had large land holdings which generated a lot of revenue. So they became very wealthy.

Around this time, many religious leaders became concerned about the role of those monasteries in European society. They felt that those monasteries had gotten too far away from Benedict’s original rule. And this wasn’t the first time that those concerns had been expressed. Back before the Norman Conquest, there had been a series of reforms throughout Europe that were designed to get the monasteries back in line with the original rule.

I noted that the first Augustinian house was founded in England about 30 years after the Conquest. Well around that same time – in the year 1098 to be exact – a group of Benedictine reformers in France decided to establish a new monastery at Cîteaux Abbey southeast of Paris. The founding monks wanted to more strictly follow the Benedictine Rule. And they emphasized the value of isolation as a way of achieving greater perfection.

Very soon, other monasteries started to be founded on the same model, and those who followed this model became known as the Cistercians based on the name of the abbey of Cîteaux where the first monastery was founded.

Now the Cistercians didn't give up on communal living. The monks continued to live together. They just preferred to withdraw from the world and live together in isolated areas behind secure walls. The Cistercian monasteries were often established in the wilderness, but even when they were founded near a town, they still lived together in isolation and solitude. The idea was to mimic the monastic life as it had existed during St. Benedict's lifetime. They soon emerged as the most powerful and influential religious order in western Europe.

The Cistercians were trying to return to the roots of the monastery, living together in isolation, adhering to a strict and demanding set of rules. But some monks felt the need to go even further. They wanted to live by themselves, essentially as hermits in solitude and isolation. But they also wanted the benefits of communal living. The challenge was figuring out to balance those two objectives.

So around the year 1084, a group of monks in the mountains of southeastern France found a solution. A cleric named Bruno of Cologne joined with several companions, and together they founded a monastery in the Chartreuse mountain range located in the French Alps. The monastery was designed so that each monk had his own separate cell where he spent most of his time praying and working in isolation and silence. There was also a common area where the monks could gather for certain religious services and meals, but those communal gatherings were rare and brief. For the most part, it was a life of seclusion.

This order of monks created their own rule, and the order soon spread throughout western Europe. The order came to be known by the mountain range where the original monastery was located. I noted that the mountain range is called the Chartreuse Mountains today, but that French name is derived from a Latin name for the range which was Carthusianus. So this monastic order came to be called the Carthusian Order.

Now remember that the Latin CA sound became a CH sound in Parisian French. So that's how the name went from Carthusianus – to /char-truce/ – to modern Chartreus (/shar-truce/). And I mention that the French version of the name became the original monastery there in the Alps became known as the 'la Grande-Chartreuse,' and it is still the mother-house to this day. In the 1700s, the monks needed a way to raise some money to help pay the expenses of the monastery and to support their mission. So they decided to produce a liqueur on the grounds of the monastery. That liqueur was called *Chartreuse* after the name of the mother-house. It had a very distinct apple-green color. And by the 1800s, that color also came to be known as *chartreuse*. So this monastery in the French Alps gave its name to both a liqueur and a color.

Now as I noted, the Carthusian Order emphasized solitude and silence. Even though they were part of a monastery, the monks had their own personal cell or chamber where they spent most of their time. Each cell usually had a garden area where the monk could meditate and grow flowers

and vegetables. They even had most of their meals delivered to them in their cells. A lay brother would provide the food through a small window or opening next to the cell door.

Now all of this may seem like living in a prison and, in fact, today we might use the word *cell* to refer to a 'prison cell' or a 'jail cell.' But that sense of the word *cell* is a relatively recent development. It only came about in the 1700s. Prior to that, the word *cell* was mainly limited to monasteries and nunneries.

And I mention nunneries because both men and women chose to live in this manner. The idea of sealing yourself away in a closed room to worship God didn't begin with the Carthusians. It had been around for a long time. But the Carthusians helped to revive this idea, and many monks and nuns were compelled to seek a life of solitude. Soon, other monasteries started to pick up on this same idea, and many of them established similar living arrangements. Even some Benedictine monasteries maintained these types of isolated cells.

Now as I noted earlier, these people were sometimes called *hermits*. But there was also another term applied to them, and that term was *ancre*, or as it came to be known in later English – *anchorite*. And a female anchorite was sometimes called an *anchoress*. These words are all derived from an original Greek word that meant 'to retire or retreat.' So all of these words for people who lived in solitude have Greek origins. That includes *monk*, *hermit*, *ancre*, *anchorite*, and *anchoress*.

Now at one time, the words *hermit* and *ancre* were used interchangeably. But by the 1200s, those two words were starting to be distinguished. *Hermit* had reverted back to more of its original meaning as one who lives in the desert or wilderness. And *ancre* referred to someone who lived in one of these cells attached to a monastery or church. So as we move forward, I might refer to these monks and nuns as *hermits* or *recluses*, but the technical term for them at the time was *ancre*.

Now you might notice a similarity between the word *anchor* – as in the thing that holds a boat in place – and the words *ancre*, *anchorite* and *anchoress*. But there is no connection. A boat anchor has nothing to do with monks and nuns who lived in solitude. The word *anchor* – as in a boat anchor – is also a Greek word, but it is derived from a completely separate root. So it's not related to the words I'm discussing here.

As I noted, the number of monks and nuns who chose to live as anchorites increased significantly throughout the 1100s and 1200s. Now everything is relative. So when I say the number increased significantly, there were still only a few dozen anchorites at any given time in England during this period. It was a harsh and even brutal lifestyle. It was considered to be a type of living death, confined to a cell with little or no comforts of life. There was no central heating or air conditioning, so the anchorites suffered from stifling heat in the warm months and bitter cold in the wintertime. They fasted for extended periods, with small amounts of food delivered to them from time to time to sustain life. There was nothing to do but pray and meditate and perhaps tend to a small garden of flowers and vegetables. It was a type of self-imprisonment.

In fact, when a man or woman became an anchorite, confinement was usually preceded by a solemn religious ceremony in which the anchorite lied prostrate on the floor while prayers for the dying were recited. At the end of the ceremony, the anchorite was led to the chamber where the door was sealed behind him or her. The local bishop often participated in the ceremony, and he would sometimes attach his bishop's seal to the door of the cell. The locking of the door was sometimes literal and sometimes symbolic. In some cases, the anchorite could leave the cell to relive himself or take an occasional break, but in other cases, the anchorite was literally imprisoned with no opportunity to leave. This helps to explain why there were never more than a handful of anchorites at any given time.

According to some estimates, there were only about 100 anchorites in England in the 1100s, but that number doubled to around 200 in the 1200s. Interestingly, the numbers indicate that there were more women anchorites than men. In the 1200s, there were probably three or four female anchorites for every male anchorite.

Now around the current point in our overall story of English in the early 1200s, it appears that three sisters from a prominent family in the West Midlands decided to become anchoresses. The exact details are obscure, but apparently after making that commitment a local priest decided to compose a manual to instruct them and guide them during their years of confinement. This manual was composed in English, and in one early version it was given the title "Ancrene Wisse." *Wisse* is an Old English word related to words like *wise* and *wisdom*. It meant 'sage advice,' but the word is usually translated as 'guide.' So Ancrene Wisse literally meant 'the Anchoress's Guide.'

Note that the first word is *Ancrene* – not *Anchoress's*. That's because the S and ES endings we use today for plural nouns, and the apostrophe S that we use to show possession, weren't really used in this part of England at the time. In much of the south of England, nouns were made plural by adding EN to the end of the word – a technique that still survives in words like *children*, *brethren* and *oxen*. And to show possession with those plural nouns, you added ENE – or /ene/ – to the end of the word. So therefore, the plural version of *ancre* was *ancren*. And to show possession by several *ancren*, the word became *ancrene*. That's why the first word is *Ancrene* – not *Ancress's* or *Anchoress's*. The modern S and ES endings that we use today really began in the north of England and gradually spread southward during the Middle English period.

So this text is known as the Ancrene Wisse based on the title of one of the surviving manuscripts. It was basically the rule to be followed by the anchoresses – akin to the Augustinian Rule or Benedictine Rule. And that helps to explain the other name that is sometimes given for this text – the Ancrene Riwe – literally 'the Anchoresses Rule.' But that is actually a relatively modern title invented by scholars in the mid-1800s.

Today, the two titles are often used interchangeably, but some scholars tend to call the earlier forms of the text the Ancrene Wisse based on that original title, and they call the slightly later revised versions of the text the Ancrene Riwe. But they are all variations of the same original manuscript.

Now unfortunately, we don't know who composed the original manuscript, and we don't exactly know when and where the text was composed. It appears to have been composed by an unknown priest in the West Midlands in the early 1200s. The original text was apparently lost, but several copies were made a short time later. And the oldest surviving copy of the text is dated to around the year 1225.

An early version of the document mentions that it was composed at the request of three sisters from a noble family who were becoming anchoresses. A slightly later copy contains glosses which were intended as revisions or corrections. Then another copy was made that incorporated those changes. That version is considered by many scholars to be the definitive version. It was maintained at Corpus Christi College at Cambridge. So it is known as the Corpus manuscript. Most scholars agree that very little time separates these surviving versions – perhaps as little as a decade.

Interestingly, the Corpus version dropped the reference to the original three sisters, and instead, it is addressed to the all the anchoresses of England which it says are about 20 in number. The passage reads, “You be the anchoresses of England, very many together – twenty, now, or more.” In the original Middle English, it reads: “Ye beoth the ancren of Englonde, swa feole togederes, twenti nuthe other ma.” This suggests that the intended audience of the manuscript was rapidly expanding in the early 1200s.

In fact, this text became so popular that it was copied many different times over the next couple of centuries. And it was even translated into Latin and French which was unusual for an English document.

As I said, scholars are reasonably certain that the original text was composed in the West Midlands since the earliest copies were all written in a West Midlands dialect, but it is difficult to pinpoint a specific location. It also appears that the original manuscript was composed sometime between the years 1200 and 1225. That's based in part of the Corpus version of the text that I mentioned earlier. As part of the many revisions that are contained in that version, it specifically states that 'friars' were in England at the time. And that's important because the friars didn't arrive until the year 1221. In fact the friars are an important part of this story, so let explain who they were.

The friars were part of brand-new movement at the time. These were monks who wanted to leave the traditional monasteries and live among the people where they could preach and spread their message. Most of them lived in the burgeoning towns and cities, not in some secluded monastery. So they were really the opposite of anchorites or recluses. The first group of friars to arrive in England were the Dominicans in the year 1221, and they were followed three years later by another group of friars called the Franciscans. Since the Corpus version of the manuscript makes specific reference to the friars, it had to have been composed after the year 1221. But the language and handwriting of the text suggests that it couldn't have been written down much later than that. So the Corpus manuscript is usually dated to around the year 1225. And as I noted earlier, this version is believed to have been composed about a decade or so after the original version, so that dates the original version to the first decade or so of the 1200s.

Now I noted that the reference to friars helps to date the text because friars arrived in England in the 1220s. And friars were really the opposite of anchorites because they lived among the people in towns and cities. Well they were not the only ones. Around this time, another religious order was active in northern Europe, and this order was specifically for women. It was really more of a sisterhood than a formal religious order. It didn't have the formal rule and structure of other orders, and the women didn't take any specific religious vows. The women could basically come and go as they pleased. They lived together or near each other in towns and cities, and they committed themselves to prayer and doing good works. They survived by asking people for donations. So this sisterhood had a religious purpose, but it was also a way for women to support themselves and each other.

In the late 1100s, a priest at Liège in Belgium organized some of these loose-knit groups and established a basic rule for them to follow. His name was Lambert le Bègue. *Bègue* is a French word that means 'stammerer or stutterer.' So his name was literally 'Lambert the Stammerer' which suggests that he spoke with a stutter. Anyway, these communities of women who helped the poor and performed good deeds became known as Beguines, presumably from the name of Lambert le Bègue.

By the early 1200s, groups of men were starting to form similar communes. Male Beguines were usually called Beghards. The problem is that there was very little formal structure to this order, so just about anyone could go around claiming to be a Beghard and solicit money. It soon attracted thieves and other men who took advantage of people's charity. Very soon, the term *Beghard* came to be a general term for anyone on the street who was asking for money. And in England, that term was Anglicized to *beggar*. And through a back formation, the act of asking for money became '*to beg*.'

Now some scholars dispute this etymology and claim that the words *beg* and *beggar* may have been derived from a rarely attested Old English word, *bedecian*, which had a similar meaning. But there is no clear connection between those words other than the fact that they both begin with B-E.

Part of the reason why the etymology is a little unclear is because the words *beg* and *beggar* suddenly appeared out of nowhere in the early 1200s. And both words appeared for the first time in the same document. And that document was the Ancrene Wisse.

Even if you don't accept the connection between *beggars* and the Beguines, the story of the Beguines provides some important context for the Ancrene Wisse. It shows a fundamental connection between women and the Church during this period. For the most part, women had very little property of their own. And if they were unmarried or widowed, they didn't have very many options available to them outside of the Church. Some were able to rely upon other family members. Some found work in the burgeoning towns and cities. But many entered convents or joined less formal communities like the Beguines.

We should also keep in mind that this was a period of more-or-less constant warfare – including the Crusades. So lots of young men went off to war and never came back. And many of the

women who were left behind turned to monasteries and nunneries for support. And some took the even more extreme step of becoming a recluse or anchoress within one of those monasteries. It also helps to explain why more women than men became anchorites during this period.

I should note the *Ancrene Wisse* did not appear in isolation in the West Midlands. It actually appears to be part of a larger literary movement in the region during this period when English writing was starting to re-emerge. In fact, manuscripts composed in this region really dominated early Middle English.

As we saw in earlier episodes, *Layamon's Brut* was composed in the West Midlands, as was the *Owl and the Nightingale*. And during this same period in the same region, a series of religious works were composed or copied in early Middle English. In addition to the *Ancrene Wisse*, several stories about the lives of virgin female Martyrs were translated from Latin into English. The martyrs were Saint Katherine, Saint Margaret and Saint Juliana. The works emphasize their chastity. Another work translated during this period in the same region was called *Sawles Warde* – literally the “Soul’s Guardian” or “the Soul’s Keeping.” Then a fifth work was composed in English called *Hali Meithhad* (literally “Holy Maidenhood”). It was another work in praise of virginity.

These five documents are sometimes collectively referred to as the Katherine Group. And it appears that the *Ancrene Wisse* was composed shortly after this earlier group of documents. Again, all of these documents were composed around the same time in the same region, and they all appear to have been composed for nuns and anchoresses in the region.

Most of the works in this group cross reference each other. The books that preserve these works also tend to contain several of them together. These works are also written in the same literary style using a lot of the same spellings and same grammatical features. Later scholars like J.R.R. Tolkien even gave this West Midland literary style its own name. He called it the “AB Language.” It is also the language of the *Ancrene Wisse*. This literary style uses a lot of the same loanwords, including not just French words, but also Norse and Welsh words.

Modern scholars have determined that all of these works were probably composed and copied by the same group of scribes in the region who established a common standard literary style in much the same way that the old Wessex style was somewhat of a standard in late Old English.

Last time, I introduced you to a scribe in the region called the Tremulous Hand – a scribe known for his glosses and his shaky handwriting. Well, it appears that he was also a part of this same group of scribes.

The fact that women were the apparent audience for most of these works may also help to explain why they were composed in English rather than Latin or French. The educational opportunities for women were more limited, so they were less likely to know Latin or have a fluent knowledge of French. So it made sense to compose the documents in English.

It is also possible that the nuns and anchoresses themselves were involved in the revisions and updates to the Ancrene Wisse over those first few years. The glosses and revisions that were made to the original text may have been inserted by the anchoresses who poured over the original copies of the manuscript. Some of the nuns may have served as scribes and contributed to these resources. So for perhaps the first time in our story, we may have women involved in the production of documents about women for other women to read. And again, all of this was being done in a specific literary style of English that common in the West Midlands.

Now those five earlier works that are known as the Katherine Group have a large number of French loanwords, but nothing compared to the number found in the Ancrene Wisse. And that is part of the reason why this manuscript is so compelling to modern scholars.

Way back in Episode 3 of the podcast, I presented a list of the 50 most commonly used words in the English language. And I did that to illustrate how Germanic words dominate our core vocabulary even though they represent a relatively small percentage of our overall vocabulary. Well, you might remember that there was only one French word in that list of the 50 most commonly used words in English. That word was *use* – USE. It is so common today that it doesn't even seem like a loanword. Well, one of the first English documents to contain that French word was the Ancrene Wisse.

The Ancrene Wisse also gives us the first use of common words like *ease, easy, city, ball, comfort, joy, grief, cruel, point, plenty, instead, intent, cause, cry, catch, change, excuse, debt, minor* and *piece* – PIECE. It also provides the first recorded use of Norse words like *skull, sky, trust, loose, bag*, and the word *rotten* which is a Germanic word from either Old Norse or Old English. It isn't entirely clear which one.

Again, those are all common words that we use all the time. The common nature of the words used for the first time in the text can be shown by the word I've used in this episode to tell this story. I talked about the first monks who lived in the desert. Well, the French word *desert* appears for the first time in this manuscript. I talked about the important role of the monastic rule, and how each order followed a specific rule. Well, the word *rule* appears for the first time in the document. I also discussed some of the early monastic orders. The word *order* also appears for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse and the Katherine Group of documents. The word *order* specifically referred to the orders of the Christian Church.

I also discussed the Carthusians who spent most of their time in separate cells within a large monastery. Their lodging consisted of a small chamber or cell. The words *lodge* and *chamber* appear for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse. The word *cell* had been borrowed at an earlier date, but the word *cellar* appears for the first time in the text. *Cellar* is a just a variation of the word *cell* and it was originally used to mean a storeroom. The Carthusians emphasized contemplation through silence where they wouldn't be disturbed. The words *contemplation, silence* and *disturb* also appear for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse.

Their meals were often provided through a small opening or window near the door of the cell. Well, the word *window* is a Norse word, and it also appears in English for the first time in this document.

I noted that the Carthusian cells usually had a garden area where the monks could grow flowers and vegetables in small patches of soil. The words *soil* and *flower* also appears for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse.

By the way, the word *flower* (FLOWER) and *flour* (FLOUR) are homonyms in Modern English. They're both pronounced the same way. Well there's a good reason for that. They're actually the same word, or at least they once were. In fact, they were usually spelled the same way until the 1800s. It was once common to refer to the best part of something as the flower of the larger part. So cream was the flower of milk. And the powder used for baking was the best part of the wheat when all of the other parts had been removed. So it was the flower of the wheat. And over time, that refined powder became known simply as flour, and it eventually acquired a separate spelling FLOUR to distinguish it from the other sense of the word – FLOWER. Again, the word *flower* – as in a blossoming plant – appeared for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse.

Now when I was discussing the Carthusians, I mentioned that the mother house of the order in the French Alps still produces a liqueur called Chartreuse. Well the word *liqueur* is a Modern French word, but the original Old French version was borrowed as *liquor* in the 1200s, and it appears for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse.

Then I focused on the anchorites who locked themselves away in private cells. They were voluntarily imprisoned for spiritual reasons. Well, the word *prison* appears for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse. The word *cage* was also used for the first time – as in a bird cage or animal cage.

I noted that the anchorites were *recluses* – another word that appears for the first time in the document. They lived in poverty, without comfort, and faced incredible challenges and adversity. *Poverty, comfort, challenge* and *adversity* all appear for the first time in the guide.

I mentioned that many widows and unmarried women during this period entered convents and monasteries. The word *convent* is also used for the first time in the document.

And I previously noted that words like *beg* and *beggar* were also used for the first time in the manuscript.

So you can see how many common loanwords were introduced in this important text. I've talked a lot about the manuscript, and why it is so important to scholars. Now let me read a few passage to you so you can get a sense of the language. I'm going to read you the first part of the Preface from the Corpus manuscript. In this introduction, the author tries to distinguish between the so-called Inner Rule and Outer Rule. The Inner Rule is the rule that governs the inner spiritual self, whereas the Outer Rule governs the more practical aspects of life – like the proper way to eat,

dress and sleep. Most of the manuscript is dedicated to the Inner Rule, but the last chapter is dedicated to the Outer Rule.

Now in this introduction, the text mixes in several passages written in Latin. I am going to ignore those Latin passages and just focus on the English passages. So here are the opening lines of the manuscript – first in Modern English and then in the original Middle English:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, here begins “The Anchoresses’ Guide.”

I the Feaderes ant i the Sunes ant i the Hali Gastes nome her biginneth Ancrene Wisse.

“Lord,” says God’s bride to her precious spouse, “The righteous love you.” They are righteous who live according to a rule; and you, my beloved sisters, have for many days begged me for a rule. Many kinds of rules there are, but there are two among all of them that I will speak of at your request, with God’s grace.”

"Laverd," seith Godes spuse to hire deore-wurthe spus, "the rihte luvieth the." Theo beoth rihte the luvieth efter riwle. Ant ye, mine leove sustren, habbeth moni dei i-cravet on me efter riwle. Monie cunne riwlen beoth, ah twa beoth bimong alle thet ich chulle spoken of thurh ower bone, with Godes grace.

One rules the heart and makes it even and smooth, without the lumps and hollows of a crooked and accusing conscience which says, “here you sin,” or, “This is not yet amended as well as it should be.” This rule is always within and sets the heart right.

The an riwleth the heorte ant maketh efne ant smethe, withute cnost ant dolc of woh in-wit ant of wreyende, the segge "her thu sunegest!" other "this nis nawt i-bet yet ase wel as hit ahte!" Theos riwle is eaver in-with ant rihteth the heorte.

The outer rule is entirely concerned with outward things, and rules the body and bodily deeds. This teaches everything about how a person should behave outwardly – how to eat, drink, dress, sing, sleep, and keep vigil. And this rule exists only to serve the other. The other is like the lady, this like her handmaid. For all that a person ever does according to the latter, outwardly, is only to rule the heart within.

The other riwle is al withuten ant riwleth the licome ant licomliche deden, the teacheth al hu me schal beoren him withuten, hu eoten, drinken, werien, singen, slepen, wakien. Ant theos riwle nis nawt bute for-te servi the other: the other is as leafdi, theos as hire thuften. For al thet me eaver deth of the other withuten nis bute for-te riwlin the heorte withinnen.

Now you ask what rule you anchoresses should hold. You should in all ways with all your might and strength guard well the inner, and the outer for her sake. The inner is always the same, the outer differs; for each should keep the outer according to the way she can best serve the inner using her.

Nu easki ye hwet riwle ye ancren schulen halden. Ye schulen alles weis, with alle mihte ant strengthe, wel witen the inre, ant te uttre for hire sake. The inre is eaver i-lich; the uttre is mislich, for each schal halden the uttre efter thet ha mei best, with hire servi the inre.

So I hope that gives you some sense of the language of the text. If you can get beyond the word forms and older vowel sounds, the sentences should start to sound somewhat familiar. There are still a fair number of Old English words that are no longer in use. And that makes it hard to follow along. But most of the words in those passages are still used in Modern English. And the syntax or word order is much closer to modern English.

Now I noted that the Ancrene Wisse contains a large number of new loanwords – especially French words. I’ve already mentioned a few of them. And since I have been focusing on words related to Christianity and monasteries, I thought I would conclude this episode by mentioning a few other related words that were used for the first time.

For example, the word *religion* was used for the first time in the document, as were the words *preach* and *preacher*. We also find the first known English uses of the words *crucifix*, *devout*, *chaste* and *chastity*.

The text also contains the first use of the word *save* and the closely-related word *salvation* – both of which are derived from the same Latin root. *Save* is a very common word today, but it was originally used in the religious sense as in ‘to save someone’s soul.’ And that helps to explain the connection to the word *salvation*.

We also find the first use of the word *blasphemy* and one of the first uses of the word *blame* – both of which share a common root. The original Greek root word meant ‘to slander’ or ‘speak evil words about someone.’ *Blasphemy* restricts that original meaning to words spoken against God. Of course, *blame* can apply to words spoken against anyone. The word *blame* originally meant any kind of criticism or critical speech, but over time it came to mean a type of speech where someone assigns responsibility for a problem or fault.

The Ancrene Wisse also contains the first use of the words *tempt* and *temptation* in an English document. The words were originally used in the sense of being tempted into sin or evil. Again, those words have taken on a broader meaning over time.

We also have the first use of the words *virtue*, *grant* and *obedience*. *Obedience* was used in the sense of obedience to God.

The word *hypocrite* also appears for the first time. It meant someone who claims to be pious but really isn’t. So again, it was originally associated with religion, but has since acquired a broader usage as someone who says one thing and does the opposite.

The Ancrene Wisse also introduces us to the words *pity* and *jealous* which both had associations with the Church. Those connections are more apparent when you consider that *pity* is just another version of the word *piety*, and *jealous* is just another version of the word *zealous*. *Pity* and *piety* were once used interchangeably. They referred to someone who was very religious and followed the teachings of the Church. As the two words became distinct, *piety* retained more of the original meaning, and *pity* referred more to the compassion and mercy shown by devout Christians.

As I noted, the word *jealous* also appeared for one of the first times in the text, and it is actually an early version of the word *zealous*. So the word was borrowed twice, first in the early 1200s from French as *jealous*, and then again in the 1500s from Medieval Latin as *zealous* with a ‘z’ sound at the front. We still use the word *zealous* in a religious sense, to refer to someone who is a passionate and true believer. We might call that person a *zealot*. Well originally, the French word *jealous* had much of that same meaning. It meant ‘zealous or passionate.’ And when it was used in the Ancrene Wisse, it was used to refer to a person’s zeal or passion for God. So it had much of the same sense as *zealous*. But *jealous* could also be used in a broader sense to mean ‘zeal or passion for another person’ – usually in a romantic context. And that zeal or passion for another person often led to resentment if any rival showed similar affections to that same person. And that led to the modern sense of the word *jealous*. So today, *jealously* is just one type of *zealous* behavior.

In the document, we also have the first use of the word *relic* – which originally meant the physical remains of a deceased holy person or something sanctified by contact with that holy person. Again *relic* has acquired a broader meaning over time, and today it can refer to any old or historical object.

The Ancrene Wisse also gives us the first use of the word *hour* – HOUR. But interestingly, it wasn’t used in the sense of time like we use it today. It was used to refer to a specific set of prayers. So let me explain. The word *hour* is a Greek word that could refer to any period of time. It eventually came to refer to specific increments of the day, and after the Benedictine Reforms in the Middle Ages, the word was used to refer to the points in the day when specific prayers were to be recited. And over time within the Church, those specific prayers came to be called *hours* – or *canonical hours* – since they were recited at specific times. And that was the way the word *hour* was used in the Ancrene Wisse – as a word for ‘prayers.’ It later entered English with its original meaning as a specific increment of the day.

And speaking of ‘the day,’ the Ancrene Wisse also gave us the first English use of the word *journey* which literally meant ‘the distance that could be traveled in a day.’ The key is the first part of word – JOUR – which meant ‘day’ in French. We can still see that in the French greeting *bonjour* which literally means ‘good day.’ So *journey* meant ‘a day’s travel,’ and by the time it was used in the Ancrene Wisse, it had come to refer to the actual act of traveling, and it was specifically used in the sense of a pilgrimage.

By the way, the word *journal* came in from the same root about a century later, and it also originally had an association with the Church. It referred to a written record of the Church services that were conducted throughout the day. So *journey* and *journal* are cognate, and they are both based on the Latin and French word for ‘day.’

By the way, the original Latin root word was *dies* with a ‘d’ sound. It went from *dies* to *diurnus* and *diurnalis*, and then the first consonant was slurred in French and produced the French versions *journey* and *journal*. Well that original Latin root word *dies* also gave us the word *diary* which was another type of journal – specifically a daily journal.

And it gave us the word *diet* which was a daily food allowance. And the word *diet* also appears for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse. So *diet* is cognate with *diary*, *journal* and *journey*. And two of those four words appear for the first time in the guide for anchoresses.

Now I noted that the word *journey* is recorded for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse. Well, when you make a journey, you visit other places. And the word *visit* is also used for the first time in the manuscript. Again, the word was used in a specific religious context. It referred to God’s arrival to provide comfort or relief. I think we still have some of that original supernatural sense of the word when we refer to the presence of a ghost as a *visitation*. That was closer to the meaning as used in the Ancrene Wisse.

Now the word *visit* is cognate with two other words that appear for the first time in English in this same document. And these other two words are very important to this podcast – really essential to this podcast. And those are the words *story* and *history* – which again are two different versions of the same word. *History* actually appears in a few Old English documents in its original Latin form – *historia*, but *story* came in from French at this point in our story – in the Ancrene Wisse.

As was common in Late Latin and early French, the initial ‘h’ sound had become silent in many words. So the French version of the word was *estoire*. And that’s how the word was borrowed into English the second time in the Ancrene Wisse. Over time, the ‘e’ sound at the front disappeared, and left us with the word *story*. The same thing happened with other words, like *estate* which became *state*, and *estrange* which became *strange*. And here, *estoire* later became *story*.

Meanwhile, the ‘h’ at the beginning of the original Latin version of the word *historia* was later reintroduced as part of a larger movement to make English words reflect their Latin roots. So since the original Latin word started with an ‘h,’ some English writers started to put an ‘h’ at the front of *estoire*, but the ‘h’ was still silent. In the early Modern English period, people started to get all of this confused because an initial ‘h’ was sometimes pronounced in English and it was sometimes silent. And there was a period when a lot of people started to play it safe and just pronounce all of those ‘h’s in those words. Sometimes both pronunciations survived – like HERB. In Britain, /herb/ with the ‘h’ won out, but in America /erb/ without the /h/ won out. And sometimes, as in the case of *history* and *story*, both versions survived as distinct words.

This also helps to explain why some people say ‘a historian’ or ‘a historic site’, and other people say ‘an historian’ or ‘an historic site.’ Technically, it should be ‘a’ since *historian* and *historic* began with a consonant sound today. But those ‘h’s were once silent. So it was common to say “an ‘istorian” or “an ‘istoric site.” So the article you use today probably depends on how you pronounce those words – specifically whether or not you pronounce the ‘h’ in that context. And this feature of English is still quite variable.

So we’ve seen how *history* and *story* became distinct words, so how did they come to have their modern meanings? Well, the original Latin root word meant an account or tale about something that happened in the past. So it was similar to the modern sense of the word *story*, but it only referred to past events. If I made up a tale about something that takes place in the future, that wouldn’t be considered a ‘story’ in the original sense of the word. You could only tell a story about something that had already happened. So there were two elements of the original word – a narrative or tale and something that had taken place in the past. And over time, those elements became separated.

The word *story* retained the first element – the tale or narrative. And the time element was lost. The word *history* retained the second element – something that happened in the past. And it no longer had to be conveyed through a tale or narrative. *History* was just what had happened, regardless of how it was presented. And as I noted, this French version of the word – *story* – passed into English in the 1200s in the Ancrene Wisse.

I began this discussion about *history* and *story* by noting that they are actually cognate with the word *visit*. They all share the same Indo-European root. *History* and *story* are ultimately Greek versions of that root, and *visit* is a Latin version of the root. And that helps to explain why the initial consonant sounds are different in those words, because those initial sounds developed differently within those two language families. But if we ignore those initial consonants, we can actually see the connection in the ‘IST’ of *history* and ‘ISIT’ of *visit*.

The original root word was **weid* and it meant ‘to see.’ In Greek, it acquired a sense of the knowledge you obtained through seeing and observing the world around you. That acquired knowledge was usually passed along in narrative form, thus the words *story* and *history*. In Latin, the root word came to refer to the process of seeing or looking at something very closely. So it meant ‘to inspect.’ And inspectors often had to travel around to various places to make their inspections, so they would pay a visit to the place of inspection. And that’s how we got the word *visit* from Latin and French.

Again, *story* and *visit* are not only cognate – they also both appear for the first time in English in the Ancrene Wisse.

So I hope you found that interesting. I’ve looked at quite a few loanwords introduced in the guide of Anchoresses, but I’ve only scratched the surface. Next time, I’m going to explore some more of those words, and I’m going to focus on one particular aspect of those words – the common prefixes and suffixes which many of those words used. Many of those prefixes and suffixes were

used for the first time in the English language. Those word elements are so common in English today that they are a fundamental part of the language. And they make the Middle English text look more like Modern English – even though most of those elements were borrowed from elsewhere.

So next time, I'm going to explore how many Old English prefixes and suffixes started to fall out of use – and how they were replaced by prefixes and suffixes from Greek, Latin and French. And we'll see how that change is reflected in the *Ancrene Wisse*.

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