Old English

Lecture 2

1. External history

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1.1. The languages in England before English

English was introduced into the island about the middle of the fifth century AD.

Little enough can be said about the early languages of England.

- The first people in England about whose language we have definite knowledge are the Celts. Celtic was the first Indo-European tongue to be spoken in England and it is still spoken by a considerable number of people.

- One other language, Latin, was spoken rather extensively for a period of about four centuries before the coming of English. Latin was introduced when Britain became a province of the Roman Empire.

1.2. The Romans in Britain

- 43-410 AD – Britain is a Roman province

A great number of Latin inscriptions of that time have been found

Latin did not totally replace the Celtic language in Britain. Its use by native Britons was probably confined to members of the upper classes and the inhabitants of the cities and towns

1.3 The Germanic Conquest
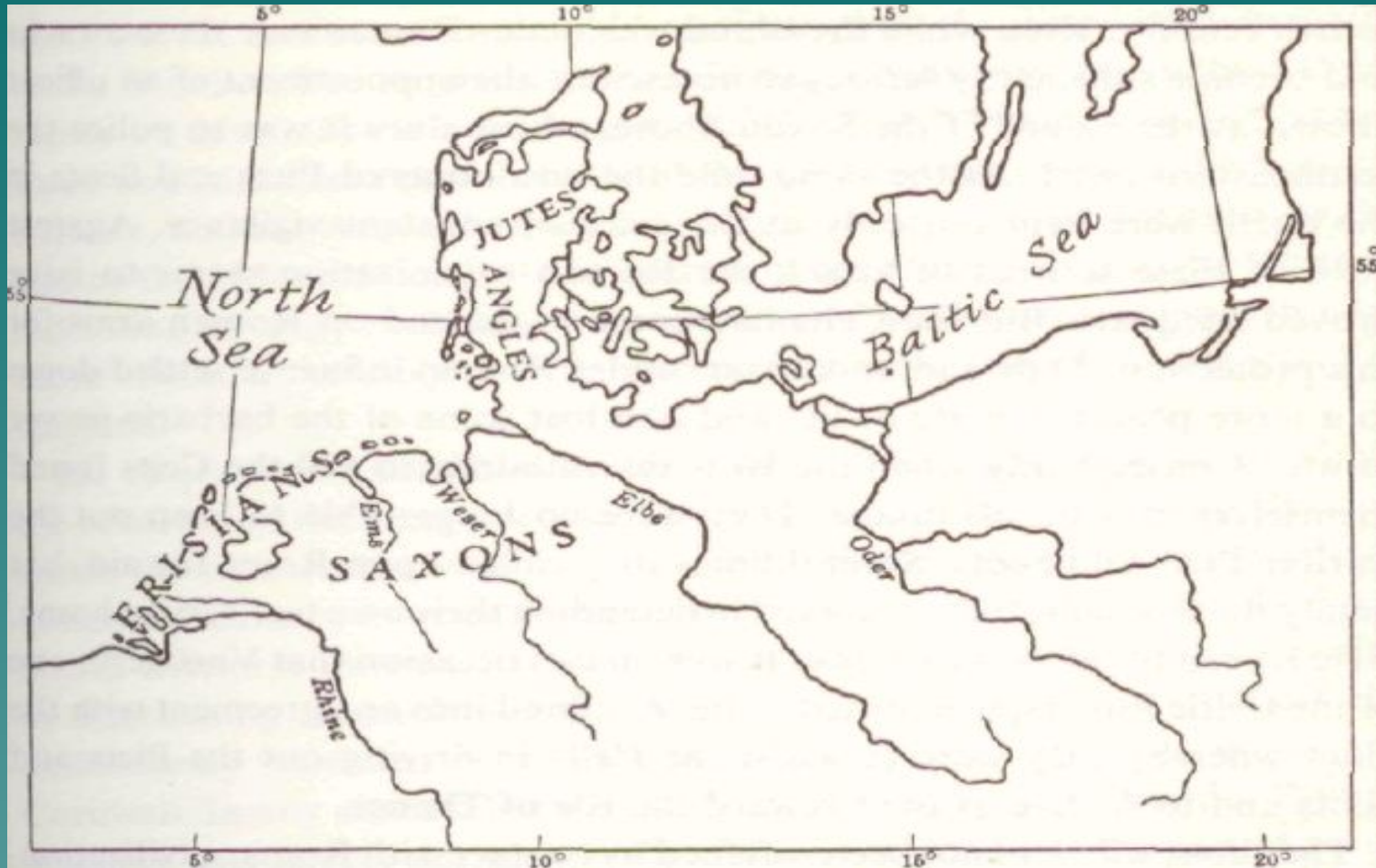
The account of the Germanic invasions goes back to **Venerable Bede** (672/673–735). He was a monk at the Northumbrian monastery of Saint Peter .

In his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People,* completed in 731, Bede tells that the Germanic tribes which conquered England were the Jutes, Saxons, and Angles.

Venerable Bede

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

The **Anglo-Saxon Chronicle** is a collection of annals in Old English chronicling the history of the Anglo-Saxons. The annals were initially created late in the 9th century, probably in Wessex, during the reign of Alfred the Great. Multiple manuscript copies were made and distributed to monasteries across England and were independently updated.

The initial page of the Peterborough Chronicle.
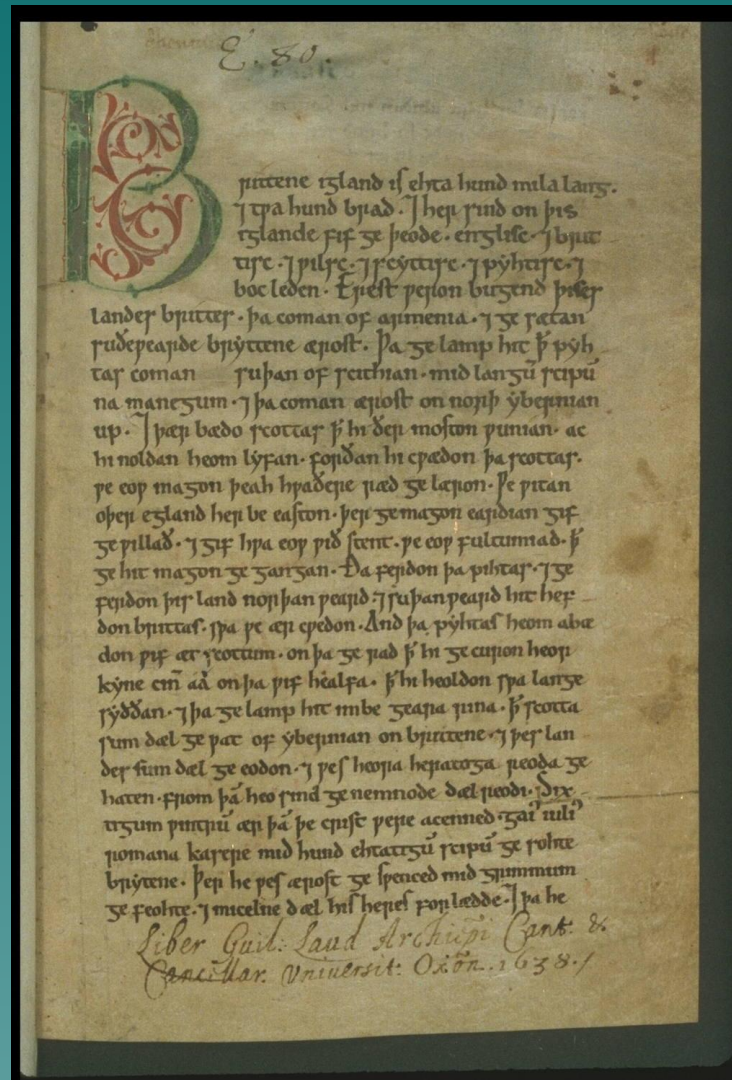
The most prominent of all the kings was **Alfred the Great** (9th cent.) under whom Wessex attained a high degree of prosperity and considerable enlightenment

Statue of Alfred the Great

1.4 Dialects of Old English
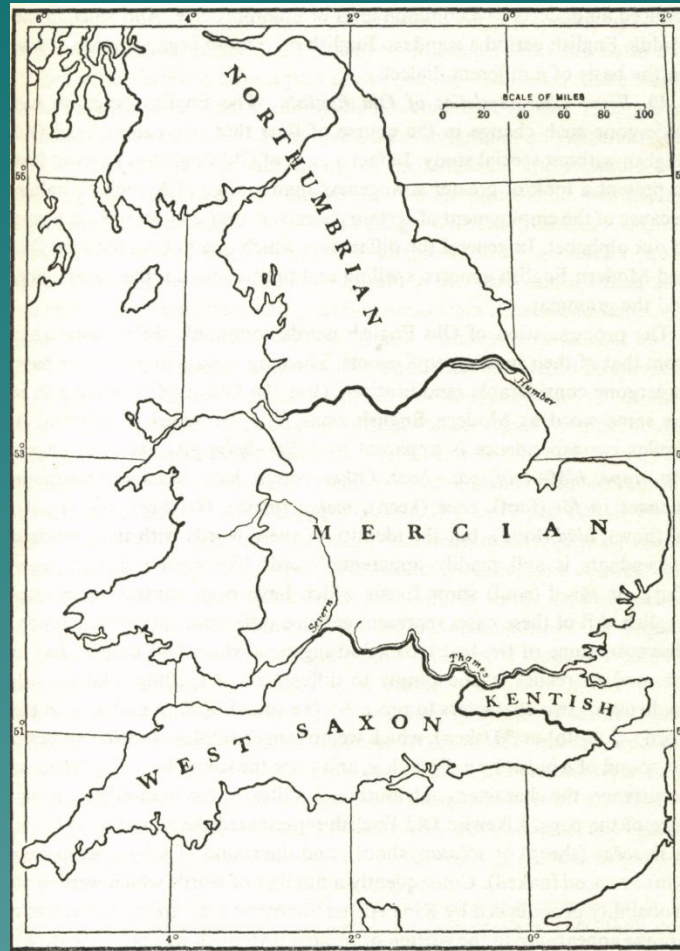
1.5 The Scandinavian Invasion

The Vikings came from Norway, Denmark, and Scandinavia. They attacked the north-east coast of Britain. They invaded in AD 793 and then later in AD 1000-1060. The Vikings raided the land of England for many reasons. Primarily, Viking raiders saw the coasts of England as easy targets for looting, as well as rich lands for farming and settlements.

Danish seamen, painted mid-twelfth century

Danelaw
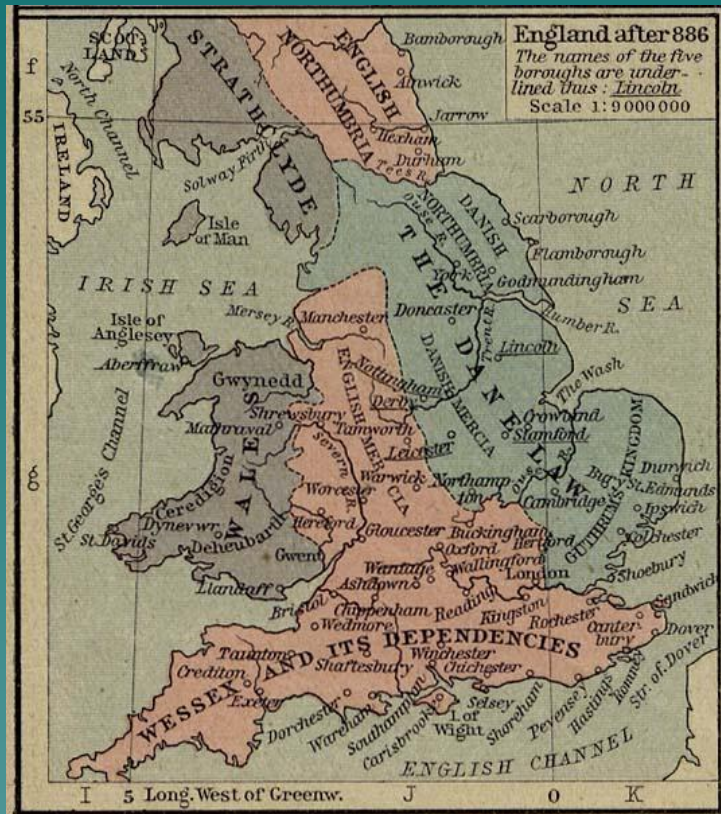
The **Danelaw**, as recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (also known as the **Danelagh**; Old English:*Dena lagu*; Danish: *Danelagen*), is a historical name given to the part of England in which the laws of the "Danes" dominated.

The areas that comprised the Danelaw are in northern and eastern England.

There existed the basis for an extensive interaction of Old English and Old Norse upon each other, and this conclusion is confirmed by a large number of Scandinavian elements found in English

2. Internal history

2.1 Phonetic peculiarities
Consonants

Consonants

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop	p b			t d			k g	
Affricate					tʃ (dʒ)			
Nasal	m			n			(ŋ)	
Fricative		f (v)	θ (ð)	s (z)	ʃ	(ç)	(x) (ɣ)	h
Approximant				r[1]		j	w	
Lateral approximant				l				

Vowels

Monophthongs	Short		Long	
	Front	Back	Front	Back
Close	i y	u	iː yː	uː
Mid	e (ø)	o	eː (øː)	oː
Open	æ	ɑ	æː	ɑː

- 7 monopthongs

- 2 diphthongs

All of them could be short or long

Long vowels modification

stān – stone

hālig – holy

gān – go

bān – bone

rāp – rope

hlāf – loaf

bāt – boat

fōt (foot)

cēne (keen)

fўr (fire)

riht (right)

hū (how)

hlūd (loud)

2.2. Grammar

Inflectional languages fall into two classes: synthetic and analytic.

A *synthetic* language is one which indicates the relation of words in a sentence largely by means of inflections.

Languages which make extensive use of prepositions and auxiliary verbs and depend upon word order to show other relationships are known as *analytic* languages.

- ◆ The OE noun had grammatical categories of case, number, gender and declension

The OE Noun

Singular

N. stan   gief-u   hunt-a
G. stan-es gief-e   hunt-an
D. stan-e   gief-e   hunt-an
A. stan   gief-e   hunt-an

Plural

N. stan-as   gief-a   hunt-an
G. stan-a   gief-a   hunt-ena
D. stan-um gief-um   hunt-um
A. stan-as   gief-a   hunt-an

Grammatical Gender

 As in Indo-European languages generally the gender of Old English nouns is not dependent upon considerations of sex. While nouns designating males are generally masculine and females feminine, those indicating neuter objects are not necessarily neuter.

Stān (stone) is masculine,

mōna (moon) is masculine,

but *sunne* (sun) is feminine.

- Often the gender of Old English nouns is quite illogical. Words like *mægden* (girl), *wīf (wife), bearn* and *cild* (child), which we should expect to be feminine or masculine, are in fact neuter, while *wīfmann* (woman) is masculine because the second element of the compound is masculine.

The OE Adjective

The OE adjective had grammatical categories of case, number, gender, declension (weak and strong) and degrees of comparison (synthetic)

An important feature of the Germanic languages is the development of

- the strong declension, used with nouns when not accompanied by a definite article or similar word (such as a demonstrative or possessive pronoun),

◆ the weak declension, used when the noun is preceded by such a word.

Thus we have in Old English *gōd mann* (good man) but *sē gōda mann* (the good man).

OE Personal Pronoun

Singular					
N.	ic	ðū	hē (*he*)	hēo (*she*)	hit (*it*)
G.	mīn	ðīn	his	hiere	his
D.	mē	ðē	him	hiere	him
A.	mē (mec)	ðē (ðec)	hine	hīe	hit

Dual			
N.	wit (*we two*)	git (*ye two*)	
G.	uncer	incer	
D.	unc	inc	
A.	unc	inc	

Plural			
N.	wē	gē	hīe
G.	ūser (ūre)	ēower	hiera
D.	ūs	ēow	him
A.	ūs (ūsic)	ēow (ēowic)	hīe

The OE Verb

The OE verb had grammatical categories of tense, mood, number and person.

A peculiar feature of the Germanic languages was the division of the verb into two great classes, the weak and the strong

7 Classes of Strong Verbs

I. drifan *(drive)*   draf   drifon   (ge) drifen
II. ceosan *(choose)* cēas   curon   coren
III. helpan *(help)*   healp   hulpon   holpen
IV. beran   *(bear)*   bjer   bairon   boren
V. sprecan *(speak)* spræc   spræcon   sprecen

VI. faran   *(fare, go)* fōr   fōron   faren
VII. feallan *(fall)*   fēoll   fēollonfeallen

2.3. Vocabulary

The vocabulary of Old English is almost purely Germanic. A large part of this vocabulary has disappeared from the language.

About 85% of OE words are no longer in use.

Anglo-Saxon Words

Pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, auxiliary verbs.

Fundamental concepts like *mann* (man), *wīf* (wife), *cild* (child), *hūs* (house), *benc* (bench), *mete* (meat, food), *gærs* (grass), *lēaf* (leaf), *fugol* (fowl, bird), *gōd* (good), *hēah* (high), *strang* (strong), *etan* (eat), *drincan* (drink), *slæppan* (sleep), *libban* (live), *feohtan* (fight).

The Celtic Influence

The Celtic influence has survived mostly in place-names*.*

Kent < Canti or *Cantion*

Deira and *Bernicia* < Celtic tribal names.

Devonshire contains in the first element the tribal name *Dumnonii*

Cornwall means the 'Cornubian Welsh'

Cumberland is the 'land of the Cymry or Britons'

London

The first syllables of *Winchester, Salisbury, Exeter, Glouchester, Worchester*

Three Latin Influences on Old English

Zero period. The period of early contact between the Romans and the Germanic tribes on the continent.

Camp (battle), *segn* (banner), *pīl* (pointed stick, javelin), *weall* (wall), *pytt* (pit), *stræt* (road, street) and *mīl* (mile). More numerous are the words connected with trade: *cēap* (bargain), *mangian* (to trade), *wīn* (wine), *flasce* (flask, bottle). A number of the words relate to domestic life: *cytel* (kettle), *mēse* (table), *tepet* (carpet), *cycene* (kitchen), *cuppe* (cup), *disc* (dish), *cīese* (cheese), *spelt* (wheat), *pipor* (pepper), *butere* (butter).

<u>First period</u>.

ceaster < *castra* (camp)

It forms a familiar element in English place-names such as *Chester*, *Colchester*, *Dorchester* and many others.

A few other words are thought to belong to this period: *port* (harbour, gate, town), *munt* (mountain), *wīc* (village).

<u>Second period.</u>

Introduction of Christianity into Britain in 597.

Abbot, altar, angel, candle, canon, hymn, noon, nun, offer, palm, pope, priest, temple etc.

Names of articles of clothing and household use: *cap, sock, silk, purple, chest, mat, sack*; words denoting foods, such as *beet, caul, lentil, pear, radish, oyster, lobster, cook*.

A number of words having to do with learning and education reflect another aspect of the church's influence: *school, master, Latin, grammatical, verse* etc.

The Scandinavian Influence

Nouns: *axle-tree, band, bank, birth, boon, booth, brink, bull, calf* (of leg), *crook, dirt, down* (feathers), *dregs, egg, fellow, freckle, gait, gap, girth, guess, hap, keel, kid, leg, link, loan, mire, race, reef* (of sail), *reindeer, rift, root, scab, scales, score, scrap, seat, sister, skill, skin, skirt, sky, slaughter, snare, stack, steak, swain, thrift, tidings, trust, want, window.*

Adjectives: *awkward, flat, ill, loose, low, meek, muggy, odd, rotten, rugged, scant, seemly, sly, tattered, tight,* and *weak.*

Verbs: *to bait, bask, batten, call, cast, clip, cow, crave, crawl, die, droop, egg (on), flit, gape, gasp, get, give, glitter, kindle, lift, lug, nag, raise, rake, ransack, rid, rive, scare, scout* (an idea), *scowl, screech, snub, sprint, take, thrive, thrust.*

Prayer Our Father
King James Version

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed by Thy name.
Thy kingdom come, Thine will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive those who trespass
   against us.
And lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil.

Our Father

Fæder ūre,

þū þe eart on heofonum,

sī þīn nama gehālgod.

Tō becume þīn rīce.

Gewurþe ðīn willa on eorðan swā swā on heofonum.

Ūrne gedæghwāmlīcan hlāf syle ūs tō dæg.

And forgyf ūs ūre gyltas, swā swā wē forgyfað ūrum gyltendum.

And ne gelæd þū ūs on costnunge,

ac ālȳs ūs of yfele. Amen