THE CAMBRIDGE

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

DAVID CRYSTAL

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PREFACE

A book about the English language – or about any individual language – is a daring enterprise, for it has as many perceptive critics as there are fluent readers. The language as a whole belongs to no one, yet everyone owns a part of it, has an interest in it, and has an opinion about it. Moreover, whenever people begin to talk about their own language, they all have something to offer – favourite words or sayings, dialect anecdotes and observations, usage likes and dislikes. Individual linguistic memories, experiences, and abilities enable everyone to make a personal contribution to language chat. In a sense, we are all truly equal when we participate – even though this democratic vision is disturbed by the widely-shared perception that some (notably, those who have learned the terminology of language study) are more equal than others.

The stories of English

That is why the metaphor of 'the story' (as in 'the story of English') is somewhat misleading. There is no one 'story' of English. There are innumerable individual stories. And even if we look for broad narrative themes, there are several dimensions competing for our attention. For example, there is the structural story – the way the sounds, grammar, and vocabulary of the language have evolved. There is the social story – the way the language has come to serve a multiplicity of functions in society. There is the literary story – the way writers have evoked the power, range, and beauty of the language to express new orders of meaning. And there is the chronological story – apparently the most straightforward, though even here it is not possible to give a simple account, in terms of a beginning, middle, and end. There is no single beginning to the story of English, but several, with waves of Anglo-Saxon invaders arriving in various locations, and laying the foundations of later dialect difference. There is no single middle, but several, with the language diverging early on in England and Scotland, then much later taking different paths in Britain, North America, and elsewhere. And, as we observe the increasingly diverse directions in which English is currently moving around the world, there is certainly no single end.

A traveller's guide

The biggest problem in compiling this book, accordingly, was what order to impose upon the mass of material which presents itself for inclusion. I have started with history, moved on to structure, and concluded with use. But it might have been otherwise, and I have written the six parts so that it is possible for readers to begin with any one of them and move in any direction. The same principle was applied to the structure of each part. While there is a certain logic of exposition in some topics (such as Part I, the history of English), there is none in others (such as Part V, the account of major regional or social varieties). In all cases, therefore, chapters, and sections within chapters, have been planned as self-contained entities, with relevant conceptual underpinning provided by the frequent use of cross-references.

The basic unit of organization in the book is the double-page spread. Sentences never cross turn-over pages, and the vast majority of topics are treated within the constraints of a single spread. I have tried to ensure that it will be possible for readers to dip into this book at any point, and find a coherent treatment of a topic in a single opening. There is too much in any language for the information to be assimilated in a continuous reading, and this is especially so in the case of English, with its lengthy history and vast range of use; and while some may wish to read this book 'from left to right', I suspect most will prefer to make more leisurely excursions over a period of time – more a casual stroll than a guided tour. The double-page spread approach is designed for that kind of traveller. Indeed, the metaphor of travelling is far more suitable for this book than the metaphor of story-telling.

Treatment and coverage

I have kept several criteria in mind while writing *CEEL* (pronounced 'seal', as we have come to call it). I have tried to find a balance between talking about the language and letting the language speak for itself. Most spreads distinguish between an expository overview and detailed examples (largely through the typographic convention of main text vs panels). Then within each spread, I have tried to provide examples of the wonder which can be found when we begin to look carefully at the language. All languages are fascinating, beautiful, full of surprises, moving, awesome, fun. I hope I have succeeded in provoking at least one of these responses on every page. I would be disappointed if, after any opening, a reader did not feel to some extent entertained, as well as informed.

Obviously it has all been a personal selection. The hardest part, in fact, was the choosing. Once I had decided on a topic for a spread, I would collect material relating to it from as many sources as I could find. I would write the opening perspective, and then look at all the material to find textual and pictorial illustrations. Invariably I had enough material to fill several spreads, and choosing what to put in and what to leave out was always painful. The moral is plain. There are several other possible encyclopedic worlds.

Wider horizons

In particular, there has not been space to go into the many applications of English language studies in proper detail. I touch upon some of these areas in Part VI, but the aim of that part is not to be comprehensive, but simply to illustrate the various directions that applied language studies can take. There are many other horizons which can only be approached by using systematic information about the language, but this book does not try to reach them. However, in view of its special place in the history of language study, I do try to reach out in the direction of literature as often as possible, and it is perhaps worth drawing attention to the way that literary examples are dispersed throughout the book. I have always been strongly

opposed to the great divide which traditionally separates 'lang' and 'lit'. It seemed to me that it would only reinforce that divide if I were to include a separate chapter called something like 'literary language', so I have not done so – a position which is discussed towards the end of Chapter 22. Many pages, accordingly, display a literary presence – sometimes by way of stylistic comment, often through extensive quotation.

Acknowledgements

If an enterprise of this kind has succeeded, it is because its author has managed to balance on the shoulders of many others, without too often falling off. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Professor Whitney Bolton, of Rutgers University, who read the whole text of the book and offered innumerable valuable comments and suggestions. I must thank Dr Andy Orchard and Professor David Burnley for their advice on several points in the Old and Middle English chapters. And a number of other scholars or organizations have helped me find the best illustration of a particular topic: these points of contact are acknowledged formally at the end of the book, but I would want to record personal thanks to Henry G. Burger, Lou Burnard, Kenneth Cameron, Jack Chambers, Vinod Dubey, Leslie Dunkling, Charles Jones, Kevin Kiernan, Edwin D. Lawson, Geoffrey Leech, Valerie Luckins, Angus McIntosh, Chrissie Maher, Chris Upward, Maggie Vance, and Lyn Wendon. Anne Rowlands helped me compile the indexes. It is perhaps unusual to thank a journal, but I have to acknowledge an enormous debt to *English Today*, and thus to its editor, Tom McArthur, for bringing together such a valuable collection of English-language material. For anyone who wishes to maintain a healthy English language lifestyle, I prescribe the reading of *ET* three times a day after meals.

The book has been a real collaboration with in-house staff at Cambridge University Press, and involved many planning meetings both in Cambridge and Holyhead, over a period of some three years. It is therefore a real pleasure to acknowledge the roles of Geoff Staff and Clare Orchard, who managed and coordinated the project at Cambridge, Paula Granados and Anne Priestley, who carried out the picture research, and Carol-June Cassidy, who read the text from the point of view of American English. I have much enjoyed collaborating once again with Roger Walker, whose design experience will be evident on every page. I am especially grateful to Adrian du Plessis, director of Cambridge Reference, for his personal interest and encouragement from the earliest days of this project. And, in a different sense of in-house, I thank my wife, Hilary, whose editorial comments have greatly improved the clarity of the text, and whose role in relation to the book's planning and production has been so great that it defies any attempt at conventional expression.

David Crystal
Holyhead, October 1994

Preface to the paperback edition

I have been delighted by the enthusiastic reception given to the appearance of *CEEL*, which has permitted the early production of a paperback edition. For this edition I have taken the opportunity of correcting a number of typographical errors which slipped through in the first printing, and have made a number of small textual modifications in response to points made by readers and reviewers. The only major authorial change affects Chapter 7, where I have brought the table of world English statistics up to date, using 1995 population estimates; this has also involved a rewriting of the associated commentary.

Several other changes have affected later sections of that chapter, largely as a consequence of the rapidly growing position of English throughout the world. Indeed, since the text of *CEEL* was completed, in 1994, this topic has attracted greatly increased media attention, with the millennium providing the excuse for fresh discussion of 'the future of English'. A related publication, *English as a Global Language* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), has enabled me to deal with this issue in proper depth, supplementing the historical story outlined in the first part of Chapter 7 with a fuller account of contemporary developments (such as the role of English on the Internet) than it has been possible to present in the present book.

This preface gives me an opportunity to thank the many readers of the first edition who have sent in facts, comments, and anecdotes about the way English is used in various parts of the world. These are far too numerous and extensive to be easily included in a book like *CEEL*, but they have all been carefully filed, and it is my hope that before too long there will be an opportunity to use this information as part of an archive about the English language, whose absence (referred to at the end of the book) I continue to lament.

David Crystal
Holyhead, February 1997

CONTENTS

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1 · MODELLING ENGLISH

An essential early step in the study of a language is to model it. A 'model', in this context, is not a three-dimensional miniature replica: this book does not devote its space to techniques of moulding the English language in Play-Doh®, Meccano®, or Lego®. To model the English language is, rather, to provide an abstract representation of its central characteristics, so that it becomes easier to see how it is structured and used.

Two models provide this first perspective. The first, shown below, breaks the structure of English down into a series of components; and these will be used to organize the exposition throughout Parts II to IV. On the facing page, there is a model of the uses of English; and this will be used as a perspective for Parts I and V. The omnicurious eye of the English linguist surveys the whole scene, in ways which are examined in Part VI.

Text
A coherent, self-contained unit of discourse. Texts, which may be spoken, written, or signed, vary greatly in size, from such tiny units as posters, captions, and bus tickets, to such large units as novels, sermons, and conversations. They provide the frame of reference within which grammatical, lexical, and other features of English can be identified and interpreted. (See Part V, §19.)

Sign
A visual language used chiefly by people who are deaf. This book refers only to those signing systems which have been devised to represent aspects of English structure, such as its spelling, grammar, or vocabulary. (See §23.)

Graphology
The writing system of a language. Graphological (or orthographic) study has two main aspects: the visual segments of the written language, which take the form of vowels, consonants, punctuation marks, and certain typographical features; and the various patterns of graphic design, such as spacing and layout, which add structure and meaning to stretches of written text. (See Part IV, §18.)

Phonology
The pronunciation system of a language. Phonological study has two main aspects: the sound segments of the spoken language, which take the form of vowels and consonants; and the various patterns of intonation, rhythm, and tone of voice, which add structure and meaning to stretches of speech. (See Part IV, §17.)

Lexicon
The vocabulary of a language. Lexical study is a wide-ranging domain, involving such diverse areas as the sense relationships between words, the use of abbreviations, puns, and euphemisms, and the compilation of dictionaries. (See Part II.)

Grammar
The system of rules governing the construction of sentences. Grammatical study is usually divided into two main aspects: *syntax*, dealing with the structure and connection of sentences; and *morphology*, dealing with the structure and formation of words. (See Part III.)

EVENT · STRUCTURE · TEXT · SIGN · GRAMMAR · TRANSMISSION · GRAPHOLOGY · PHONOLOGY · LEXICON · CORE
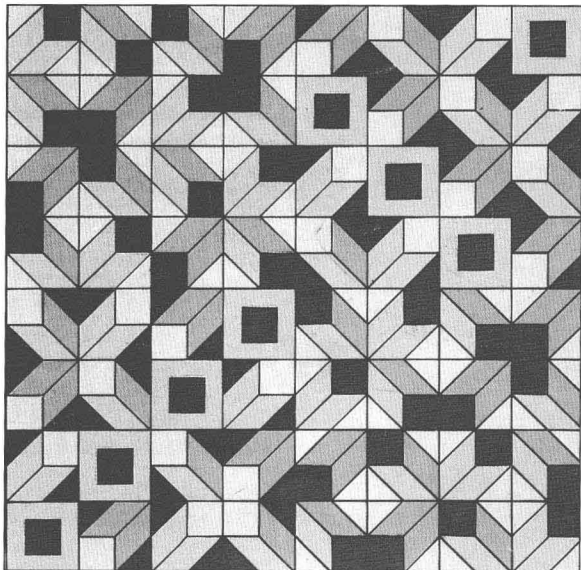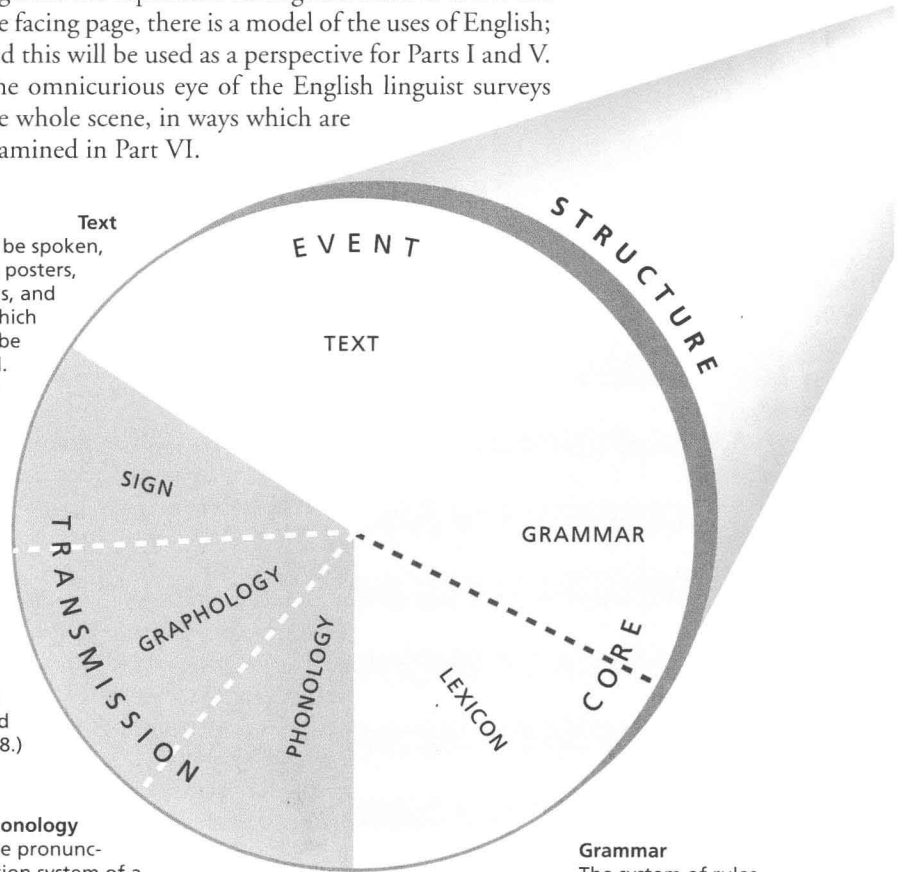
BUT IS IT ART?

Just occasionally, someone tries to visualize language in a way which goes beyond the purely diagrammatic. This print was made by art students as part of their degree. They were asked to attend lectures from different university courses, and then present an abstract design which reflected their perception of the topic. As may perhaps be immediately obvious, this design is the result of their attending a lecture on the structure of the English language, given by the present author. The design's asymmetries well represent the irregularities and erratic research paths which are so much a part of English language study. (Equally, of course, they could represent the structural disorganization of the lecturer.)

WHY JANUS?

The Roman god, Janus, here seen on a Roman coin in his usual representation with a double-faced head. A spirit associated with doorways and archways, looking backwards as well as forwards, he is also often regarded as the god of beginnings. The month of January is named after him.

His location on this opening spread has, however, a further significance. The two facets of language study represented on these pages – of structure and use – have traditionally been studied independently of each other (§14). A major theme of the present book is to assert their interdependence. What are English structures for, if not to be used? And how can we understand the uses of English, without investigating their structure? Structure and use are two sides of the same coin, Roman or otherwise, and this principle is reflected in the organization of the present book (see Preface).

Social variation

Society affects a language, in the sense that any important aspect of social structure and function is likely to have a distinctive linguistic counterpart. People belong to different social classes, perform different social roles, and carry on different occupations. Their use of language is affected by their sex, age, ethnic group, and educational background. English is being increasingly affected by all these factors, because its developing role as a world language is bringing it more and more into contact with new cultures and social systems. (See Part V, §21.)

Personal variation

People affect a language, in the sense that an individual's conscious or unconscious choices and preferences can result in a distinctive or even unique style. Such variations in self-expression are most noticeable in those areas of language use where great care is being taken, such as in literature and humour. But the uniqueness of individuals, arising out of differences in their memory, personality, intelligence, social background, and personal experience, makes distinctiveness of style inevitable in everyone. (See Part V, §22.)

USE

TEMPORAL VARIATION — LONG TERM — SHORT TERM

SOCIAL VARIATION

REGIONAL VARIATION

PERSONAL VARIATION
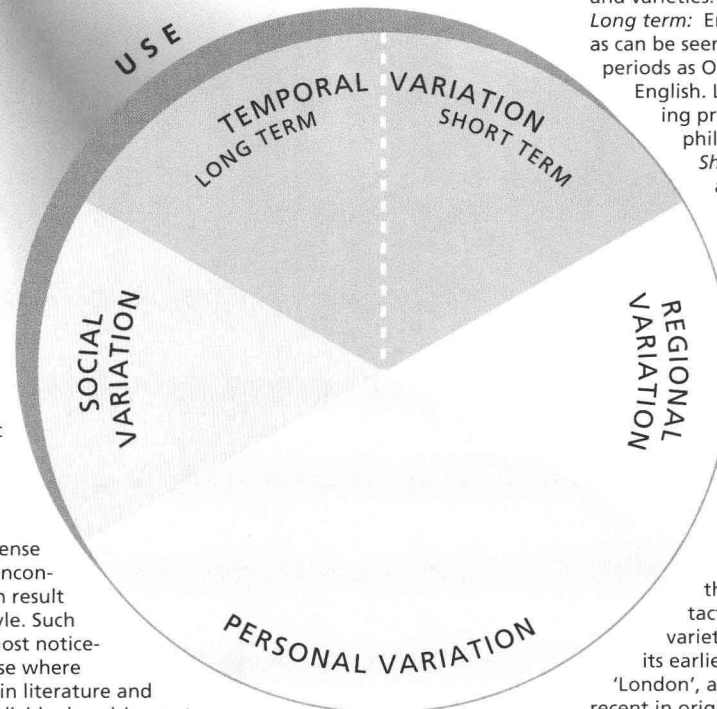
Temporal variation

Time affects a language, both in the long term and short term, giving rise to several highly distinctive processes and varieties.

Long term: English has changed throughout the centuries, as can be seen from such clearly distinguishable linguistic periods as Old English, Middle English, and Elizabethan English. Language change is an inevitable and continuing process, whose study is chiefly carried on by philologists and historical linguists. (See Part I.)

Short term: English changes within the history of a single person. This is most noticeable while children are acquiring their mother tongue, but it is also seen when people learn a foreign language, develop their style as adult speakers or writers, and, sometimes, find that their linguistic abilities are lost or seriously impaired through injury or disease. Psycholinguists study language learning and loss, as do several other professionals, notably speech therapists and language teachers. (See Part VI, §23.)

Regional variation

Geography affects language, both within a country and between countries, giving rise to regional accents and dialects, and to the pidgins and creoles which emerged around the world whenever English first came into contact with other languages. *Intranational* regional varieties have been observed within English from its earliest days, as seen in such labels as 'Northern', 'London', and 'Scottish'. *International* varieties are more recent in origin, as seen in such labels as 'American', 'Australian', and 'Indian'. Regional language variation is studied by sociolinguists, geographical linguists, dialectologists, and others, the actual designation depending on the focus and emphasis of the study. (See §7 and Part V, §20.)

WHY STUDY THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE?

Because it's fascinating

It is remarkable how often the language turns up as a topic of interest in daily conversation – whether it is a question about accents and dialects, a comment about usage and standards, or simply curiosity about a word's origins and history.

Because it's important

The dominant role of English as a world language forces it upon our attention in a way that no language has ever done before. As English becomes the chief means of communication between nations, it is crucial to ensure that it is taught accurately and efficiently, and to study changes in its structure and use.

Because it's fun

One of the most popular leisure pursuits is to play with the English language – with its words, sounds, spellings, and structures. Crosswords, Scrabble®, media word shows, and many other quizzes and guessing games keep millions happily occupied every day, teasing their linguistic brain centres and sending them running to their dictionaries.

Because it's beautiful

Each language has its unique beauty and power, as seen to best effect in the works of its great orators and writers. We can see the 1,000-year-old history of English writing only through the glass of language, and anything we learn about English as a language can serve to increase our appreciation of its oratory and literature.

Because it's useful

Getting the language right is a major issue in almost every corner of society. No one wants to be accused of ambiguity and obscurity, or find themselves talking or writing at cross-purposes. The more we know about the language the more chance we shall have of success, whether we are advertisers, politicians, priests, journalists, doctors, lawyers – or just ordinary people at home, trying to understand and be understood.

Because it's there

English, more than any other language, has attracted the interest of professional linguists. It has been analysed in dozens of different ways, as part of the linguist's aim of devising a theory about the nature of language in general. The study of the English language, in this way, becomes a branch of linguistics – English linguistics.

PART I
The history of English

The history of English is a fascinating field of study in its own right, but it also provides a valuable perspective for the contemporary study of the language, and thus makes an appropriate opening section for this book. The historical account promotes a sense of identity and continuity, and enables us to find coherence in many of the fluctuations and conflicts of present-day English language use. Above all, it satisfies the deep-rooted sense of curiosity we have about our linguistic heritage. People like to be aware of their linguistic roots.

We begin as close to the beginning as we can get, using the summary accounts of early chronicles to determine the language's continental origins (§2). The Anglo-Saxon corpus of poetry and prose, dating from around the 7th century, provides the first opportunity to examine the linguistic evidence. §3 outlines the characteristics of Old English texts, and gives a brief account of the sounds, spellings, grammar, and vocabulary which they display. A similar account is given of the Middle English period (§4), beginning with the effects on the language of the French invasion and concluding with a discussion of the origins of Standard English. At all points, special attention is paid to the historical and cultural setting to which texts relate, and to the character of the leading literary works, such as *Beowulf* and *The Canterbury Tales*.

The Early Modern English period (§5) begins with the English of Caxton and the Renaissance, continues with that of Shakespeare and the King James Bible, and ends with the landmark publication of Johnson's *Dictionary*. A recurring theme is the extent and variety of language change during this period. The next section, on Modern English (§6), follows the course of further language change, examines the nature of early grammars, traces the development of new varieties and attitudes in America, and finds in literature, especially in the novel, an invaluable linguistic mirror. Several present-day usage controversies turn out to have their origins during this period. By the end of §6, we are within living memory.

The final section (§7) looks at what has happened to the English language in the present century, and in particular at its increasing presence worldwide. The approach is again historical, tracing the way English has travelled to the United States, Canada, Africa, Australia, South and South-East Asia, and several other parts of the globe. The section reviews the concept of World English, examines the statistics of usage, and discusses the problems of intelligibility and identity which arise when a language achieves such widespread use. The notion of Standard English, seen from both national and international perspectives, turns out to be of special importance. Part I then concludes with some thoughts about the future of the language, and about the relationships which have grown up (sometimes amicable, sometimes antagonistic) between English and other languages.

A map of Anglo-Saxon England taken from Edmund Gibson's 1692 edition of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The Latin caption (top left) explains that the map shows the places mentioned in the Chronicle and in Old English literature.

'To Aëtius, thrice consul, the groans of the Britons.' Thus, according to the Anglo-Saxon historian, the Venerable Bede, began the letter written to the Roman consul by some of the Celtic people who had survived the ferocious invasions of the Scots and Picts in the early decades of the 5th century. 'The barbarians drive us to the sea. The sea drives us back towards the barbarians. Between them we are exposed to two sorts of death: we are either slain or drowned.'

The plea fell on deaf ears. Although the Romans had sent assistance in the past, they were now fully occupied by their own wars with Bledla and Attila, kings of the Huns. The attacks from the north continued, and the British were forced to look elsewhere for help. Bede gives a succinct and sober account of what then took place.

They consulted what was to be done, and where they should seek assistance to prevent or repel the cruel and frequent incursions of the northern nations; and they all agreed with their King Vortigern to call over to their aid, from parts beyond the sea, the Saxon nation…

In the year of our Lord 449… the nation of the Angles, or Saxons, being invited by the aforesaid king, arrived in Britain with three long ships, and had a place assigned them to reside in by the same king, in the eastern part of the island, that they might thus appear to be fighting for their country, whilst their real intentions were to enslave it. Accordingly they engaged with the enemy, who were come from the north to give battle, and obtained the victory; which, being known at home in their own country, as also the fertility of the country, and the cowardice of the Britons, a more considerable fleet was quickly sent over, bringing a still greater number of men, which, being added to the former, made up an invincible army…

Bede describes the invaders as belonging to the three most powerful nations of Germany – the Saxons, the Angles, and the Jutes. The first group to arrive came from Jutland, in the northern part of modern Denmark, and were led, according to the chroniclers, by
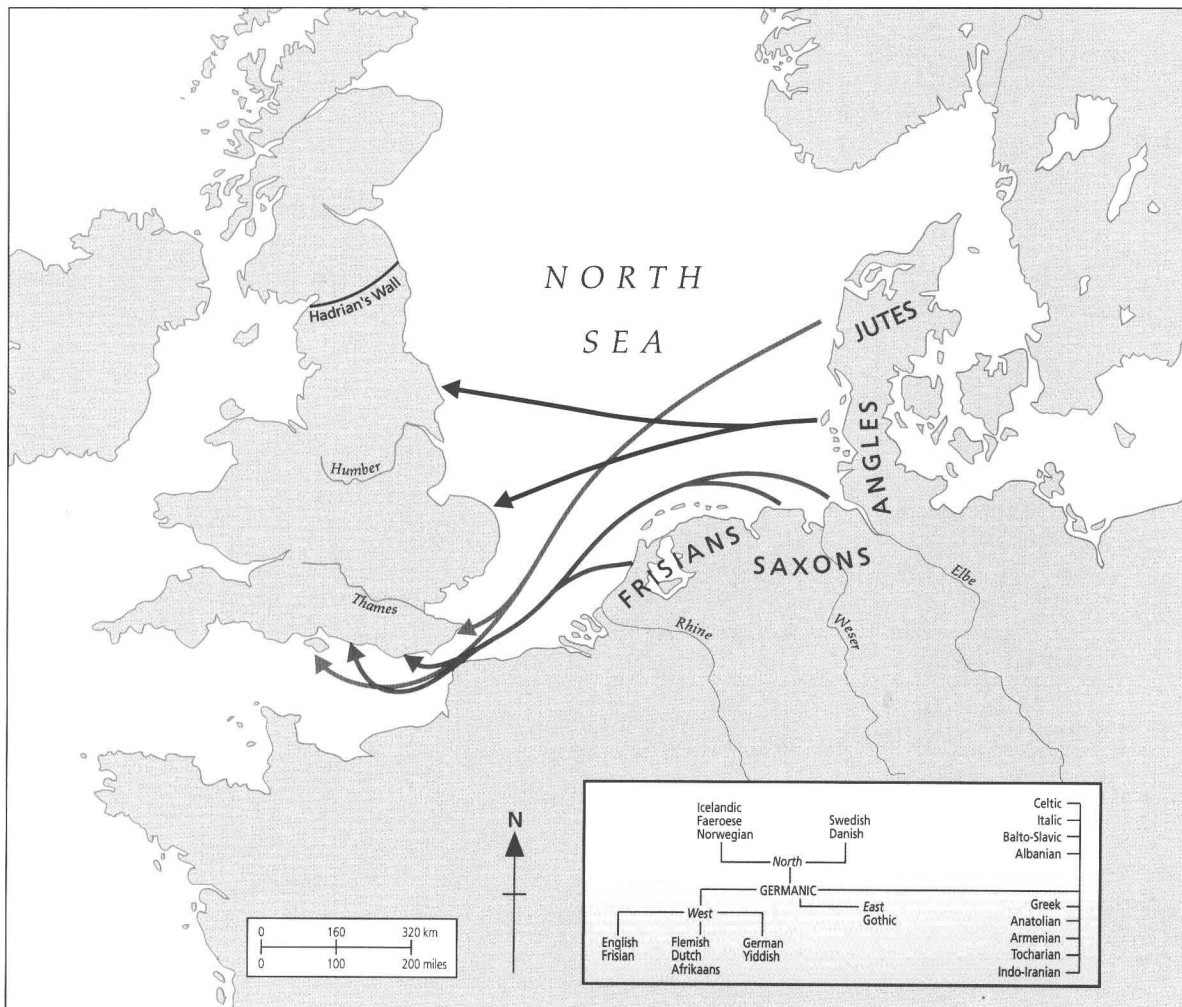
The homelands of the Germanic invaders, according to Bede, and the direction of their invasions. Little is known about the exact locations of the tribes. The Jutes may have had settlements further south, and links with the Frisians to the west. The Angles may have lived further into Germany. The linguistic differences between these groups, likewise, are matters for speculation. The various dialects of Old English (p. 28) plainly relate to the areas in which the invaders settled, but there are too few texts to make serious comparison possible.

English is a member of the western branch of the Germanic family of languages. It is closest in structure to Frisian – though hardly anything is known about the ancient Frisians and their role in the invasions of Britain. Germanic is a branch of the Indo-European language family.

two Jutish brothers, Hengist and Horsa. They landed at Ebbsfleet in the Isle of Thanet, and settled in the areas now known as Kent, the Isle of Wight, and parts of Hampshire. The Angles came from the south of the Danish peninsula, and entered Britain much later, along the eastern coast, settling in parts of Mercia, Northumbria (the land to the north of the Humber, where in 547 they established a kingdom), and what is now East Anglia. The Saxons came from an area further south and west, along the coast of the North Sea, and from 477 settled in various parts of southern and south-eastern Britain. The chroniclers talk about groups of East, West, and South Saxons – distinctions which are reflected in the later names of Essex, Wessex, and Sussex. The name Middlesex suggests that there were Middle Saxons too. Bede's account takes up the story:

In a short time, swarms of the aforesaid nations came over the island, and they began to increase so much that they became terrible to the natives themselves who had invited them. Then, having on a sudden entered into league with the Picts, whom they had by this time expelled by the force of their arms, they began to turn their weapons against their confederates.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (see p.15), compiled over a century later than Bede under Alfred the Great, gives a grim catalogue of disasters for the Britons.

457 · In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Britons at a place which is called Crecganford [Crayford, Kent] and

A page from one of the manuscripts of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. The language is Latin.

there slew four thousand men; and the Britons then forsook Kent and fled to London in great terror.

465 · In this year Hengest and Æsc fought against the Welsh near Wippedesfleot and there slew twelve Welsh nobles; and one of the thanes, whose name was Wipped, was slain there.

473 · In this year Hengest and Aesc fought against the Welsh and captured innumerable spoils, and the Welsh fled from the English as one flies from fire.

The fighting went on for several decades, but the imposition of Anglo-Saxon power was never in doubt. Over a period of about a hundred years, further bands of immigrants continued to arrive, and Anglo-Saxon settlements spread to all areas apart from the highlands of the west and north. By the end of the 5th century, the foundation was established for the emergence of the English language.

THE NAME OF THE LANGUAGE

With scant respect for priorities, the Germanic invaders called the native Celts *wealas* ('foreigners'), from which the name Welsh is derived. The Celts called the invaders 'Saxons', regardless of their tribe, and this practice was followed by the early Latin writers. By the end of the 6th century, however, the term *Angli* ('Angles') was in use – as early as 601, a king of Kent, Æthelbert, is called *rex Anglorum* ('King of the Angles') – and during the 7th century *Angli* or *Anglia* (for the country) became the usual Latin names. Old English *Engle* derives from this usage, and the name of the language found in Old English texts is from the outset referred to as *Englisc* (the *sc* spelling representing the sound *sh*, /ʃ/). References to the name of the country as *Englaland* ('land of the Angles'), from which came *England*, do not appear until *c.* 1000.

The remarkably preserved body of a man, found in a peat bog in Denmark. Over 500 such remains have been found throughout northern Europe, many in the area formerly occupied by the Germanic tribes. The person has been murdered, possibly as a sacrificial victim to the Earth goddess. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote of the tribes in his *Germania*, and at one point mentions a group of tribes including the Eudoses and the Anglii: 'These tribes are protected by forests and rivers, nor is there anything noteworthy about them individually, except that they worship in common Nerthus, or Mother Earth, and conceive her as intervening in human affairs, and riding in procession through the cities of men.' (Trans. M. Hutton, 1914.)

The Northumbrian monk, Bede, or Bæda, known as the Venerable Bede. Born at Monkton on Tyne in c. 673, he was taken at the age of 7 to the new monastery at Wearmouth, moving in 682 to the sister monastery at Jarrow, where he worked as a writer and teacher. He died in 735, and was buried at Jarrow. His masterpiece, the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* ('Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation'), was begun in his later years, and finished in 731. Its focus is the growth of Christianity in England, but its scope is much wider, and it is recognized as the most valuable source we have for early English history. Written in Latin, an Old English translation was made in the reign of Alfred the Great.

3 · OLD ENGLISH

THE EARLY PERIOD

Before the Anglo-Saxon invasions (§2), the language (or languages) spoken by the native inhabitants of the British Isles belonged to the Celtic family, introduced by a people who had come to the islands around the middle of the first millennium BC. Many of these settlers were, in turn, eventually subjugated by the Romans, who arrived in 43 BC. But by 410 the Roman armies had gone, withdrawn to help defend their Empire in Europe. After a millennium of settlement by speakers of Celtic, and half a millennium by speakers of Latin, what effect did this have on the language spoken by the arriving Anglo-Saxons?

Celtic borrowings

There is, surprisingly, very little Celtic influence – or perhaps it is not so surprising, given the savage way in which the Celtic communities were destroyed or pushed back into the areas we now know as Cornwall, Wales, Cumbria, and the Scottish borders. Some Celts (or Romano-Celts) doubtless remained in the east and south, perhaps as slaves, perhaps intermarrying, but their identity would after a few generations have been lost within Anglo-Saxon society. Whatever we might expect from such a period of cultural contact, the Celtic language of Roman Britain influenced Old English hardly at all.

Only a handful of Celtic words were borrowed at the time, and a few have survived into modern English, sometimes in regional dialect use: *crag*, *cumb* 'deep valley', *binn* 'bin', *carr* 'rock', *dunn* 'grey, dun', *brock* 'badger', and *torr* 'peak'. Others include *bannoc* 'piece', *rice* 'rule', *gafeluc* 'small spear', *bratt* 'cloak', *luh* 'lake', *dry* 'sorcerer', and *clucge* 'bell'. A few Celtic words of this period ultimately come from Latin, brought in by the Irish missionaries: these include *assen* 'ass', *ancor* 'hermit', *stær* 'history', and possibly *cross*. But there cannot be more than two dozen loan words in all. And there are even very few Celtic-based place names (p. 141) in what is now southern and eastern England. They include such river names as *Thames*, *Avon* 'river', *Don*, *Exe*, *Usk*, and *Wye*. Town names include *Dover* 'water', *Eccles* 'church', *Bray* 'hill', *London* (a tribal name), *Kent* (meaning unknown), and the use of *caer* 'fortified place' (as in *Carlisle*) and *pen* 'head, top, hill' (as in *Pendle*).

Latin loans

Latin has been a major influence on English throughout its history (pp. 24, 48, 60, §9), and there is evidence of its role from the earliest moments of contact. The Roman army and merchants gave new names to many local objects and experiences, and introduced several fresh concepts. About half of the new words were to do with plants, animals, food and drink, and household items: Old English *pise* 'pea', *plante* 'plant', *win* 'wine', *cyse* 'cheese', *catte* 'cat', *cetel* 'kettle', *disc* 'dish', *candel* 'candle'. Other important clusters of words related to clothing (*belt* 'belt', *cemes* 'shirt', *sutere* 'shoemaker'), buildings and settlements (*tigle* 'tile', *weall* 'wall', *ceaster* 'city', *stræt* 'road'), military and legal institutions (*wic* 'camp', *diht* 'saying', *scrifan* 'decree'), commerce (*mangian* 'trade', *ceapian* 'buy', *pund* 'pound'), and religion (*mæsse* 'Mass', *munuc* 'monk', *mynster* 'minster').

Whether the Latin words were already used by the Anglo-Saxon tribes on the continent of Europe, or were introduced from within Britain, is not always clear (though a detailed analysis of the sound changes they display can help, p. 19), but the total number of Latin words present in English at the very beginning of the Anglo-Saxon period is not large – less than 200. Although Vulgar Latin (the variety of spoken Latin used throughout the Empire) must have continued in use – at least, as an official language – for some years after the Roman army left, for some reason it did not take root in Britain as it had so readily done in Continental Europe. Some commentators see in this the first sign of an Anglo-Saxon monolingual mentality.

A reconstruction of Anglo-Saxon huts at West Stow, Suffolk. Each hut is some 15–20 feet (5–6 m) in length.

RUNES

Old English was first written in the runic alphabet. This alphabet was used in northern Europe – in Scandinavia, present-day Germany, and the British Isles – and it has been preserved in about 4,000 inscriptions and a few manuscripts. It dates from around the 3rd century AD. No one knows exactly where the alphabet came from, but it seems to be a development of one of the alphabets of southern Europe, probably the Roman, which runes resemble closely.

The common runic alphabet found throughout the area consisted of 24 letters. It can be written horizontally in either direction. Each letter had a name, and the alphabet as a whole was called by the name of its first six letters, the *futhorc* (in the same way as the word *alphabet* comes from Greek *alpha* + *beta*). The version found in Britain used extra letters to cope with the range of sounds found in Old English; in its most developed form, in 9th-century Northumbria, it

consisted of 31 symbols.

The inscriptions in Old English are found on weapons, jewellery, monuments, and other artefacts, and date largely from the 5th or 6th centuries AD, the earliest (at Caistor-by-Norwich) possibly being late 4th century. They often say simply who made or owned the object. Most of the large rune stones say little more than 'X raised this stone in memory of Y', and often the message is unclear.

The meaning of *rune*

What *rune* (OE *run*) means is debatable. There is a long-standing tradition which attributes to it such senses as 'whisper', 'mystery', and 'secret', suggesting that the symbols were originally used for magical or mystical rituals. Such associations were certainly present in the way the pagan Vikings (and possibly the Continental Germans) used the corresponding

word, but there is no evidence that they were present in Old English. Current research suggests that the word *run* had been thoroughly assimilated into Anglo-Saxon Christianity, and meant simply 'sharing of knowledge or thoughts'. Any extension to the world of magic and superstition is not part of the native tradition. Modern English *rune* is not even a survival of the Old English word, but a later borrowing from Norse via Latin.

For the modern, magical sense of *rune* we are therefore indebted to the Scandinavian and not the Anglo-Saxon tradition. It is this sense which surfaced in the 19th century in a variety of esoteric publications, and which lives on in the popular and fantastic imagination of the 20th, perhaps most famously in the writing of Tolkien (p. 185). (After C. E. Fell, 1991.)

THE OLD ENGLISH RUNIC ALPHABET

This list gives the names of the symbols in Old English, and their meanings (where these are known). It does not give the many variant shapes which can be found in the different inscriptions. The symbols consist mainly of intersecting straight lines, showing their purpose for engraving on stone, wood, metal, or bone. Manuscript uses of runes do exist in a few early poems (notably in four passages where the name of Cynewulf is represented), and in the solutions to some of the riddles in the *Exeter Book* (p. 12), and are in evidence until the 11th century, especially in the north, but there are very few of them.

Rune	Anglo-Saxon	Name	Meaning (where known)
	f	feoh	cattle, wealth
	u	ür	bison (aurochs)
	þ	þorn	thorn
	o	ōs	god/mouth
	r	rād	journey/riding
	c	cen	torch
	g[j]	giefu	gift
	w	wyn	joy
	h	hægl	hail
	n	nied	necessity/trouble
	i	is	ice
	j	gear	year
	ᴣ	ēoh	yew
	p	peor	?
	x	eolh	?sedge
	s	sigel	sun
	t	tiw/tir	Tiw (a god)
	b	beorc	birch
	e	eoh	horse
	m	man	man
	l	lagu	water/sea
	ng	ing	Ing (a hero)
	oe	eþel	land/estate
	d	dæg	day
	a	ac	oak
	æ	æsc	ash
	y	yr	bow
	ea	ear	?earth
	g [ɣ]	gar	spear
	k	calc	?sandal/chalice/chalk
	k̄		(name unknown)

EARLY INSCRIPTIONS

There are less than 30 clear runic inscriptions in Old English, some containing only a single name. The two most famous examples both date from the 8th century, and represent the Northumbrian dialect (p. 28). Both inscriptions make some use of the Roman alphabet as well.

• The Ruthwell Cross, near Dumfries, Scotland, is 16 feet (5 m) high. Its faces contain panels depicting events in the life of Christ and the early Church, as well as carvings of birds and beasts, and lines of runes around the edges are similar to part of the Old English poem 'The Dream of the Rood' (*rood* = 'cross') in the *Vercelli Book*. A glossed extract is shown below (there are no spaces between the words in the original inscription; also some scholars transcribe 'blood' as *blodi*).

ic wæs miþ blodæ bistemid
I was with blood bedewed

• The Franks Casket is a richly carved whalebone box, illustrating mythological and religious scenes, not all of which can be interpreted. The picture shows the panel with the Adoration of the Magi alongside the Germanic legend of Wayland (Weland) the Smith. The inscriptions are partly in Old English, and partly in Latin.
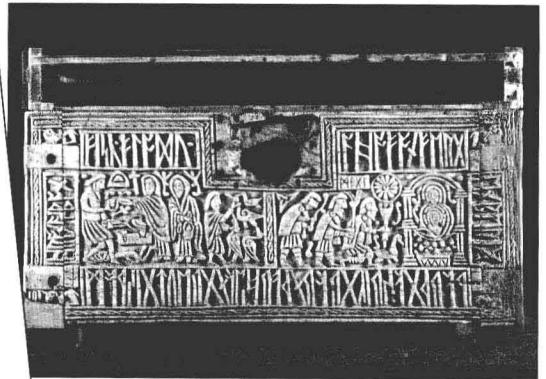
The box first came to light in the 19th century, owned by a farmer from Auzon, France. It is named after Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, through whom it came to be deposited in the British Museum. One side was missing, but it later came into the possession of the Bargello Museum, Florence, and a cast was made of it, so that the box in the British Museum now appears complete.

THE AUGUSTINIAN MISSION

It would be a considerable overstatement to suggest (as one sometimes reads) that St Augustine brought Christianity to Britain. This religion had already arrived through the Roman invasion, and in the 4th century had actually been given official status in the Roman Empire. It was a Briton, St Patrick, who converted Ireland in the early 5th century; and a goodly number of early Welsh saints' names are remembered in place names beginning with *Llan* ('church [of]'). The story of St Alban (said to have been martyred in 305 near the city of Verulam, modern St Albans) is recounted in detail by Bede.

Augustine's task was more specific: to convert the Anglo-Saxons. He had been prior of the monastery of St Andrew in Rome, before being chosen by Pope Gregory for the mission. He and his companions arrived in the Isle of Thanet, to be met by Æthelberht, king of Kent, and they must have been heartily relieved to find that his wife was already a (Celtic) Christian. They were given leave to live and preach in Canterbury, and within a year the king himself was converted. Three bishoprics were established by the end of the decade, with Augustine as archbishop at Canterbury, Justus as bishop at Rochester, and Mellitus at London, as bishop of the East Saxons.

It took some time for this early success to become consolidated. Following Augustine's death (604/5) there was much tension over religious practices between the Roman Christians and their Celtic counterparts, who had lived in isolation from Rome for so long. Matters came to a head in the conflict over the date of Easter, resolved (in favour of Rome) at the Synod of Whitby in 664.

Part of the difficulty in developing the faith must have been linguistic: according to Bede, it was nearly 50 years before Anglo-Saxon was being used as a missionary tongue. King Egbert of

Kent in 664 had to make a special plea to ensure that an Anglo-Saxon speaking bishop was appointed, 'so that with a prelate of his own nation and language, the king and his subjects might be more perfectly instructed in the words and mysteries of the faith'. This was the first expression of an issue which would be raised again several hundred years later in English language history (p. 61).

THE OLD ENGLISH CORPUS

There is a 'dark age' between the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons and the first Old English manuscripts. A few scattered inscriptions in the language date from the 5th and 6th centuries, written in the runic alphabet which the invaders brought with them (p. 9), but these give very little information about what the language was like. The literary age began only after the arrival of the Roman missionaries, led by Augustine, who came to Kent in AD 597. The rapid growth of monastic centres led to large numbers of Latin manuscripts being produced, especially of the Bible and other religious texts.

Because of this increasingly literary climate, Old English manuscripts also began to be written – much earlier, indeed, than the earliest vernacular texts from other north European countries. The first texts, dating from around 700, are glossaries of Latin words translated into Old English, and a few early inscriptions and poems. But very little material remains from this period. Doubtless many manuscripts were burned during the 8th-century Viking invasions (p. 25). The chief literary work of the period, the heroic poem *Beowulf*, survives in a single copy, made around 1,000 – possibly some 250 years after it was composed (though the question of its composition date is highly controversial). There are a number of short poems, again almost entirely preserved in late manuscripts, over half of them concerned with Christian subjects – legends of the saints, extracts from the Bible, and devotional pieces. Several others reflect the Germanic tradition, dealing with such topics as war, travelling, patriotism, and celebration. Most extant Old English texts were written in the period following the reign of King Alfred (849–99), who arranged for many Latin works to be translated – including Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* (p. 7). But the total corpus is extremely small. The number of words in the corpus of Old English compiled at the University of Toronto, which contains all the texts (but not all the alternative manuscripts of a text), is only 3.5 million – the equivalent of about 30 medium-sized modern novels. Only *c.* 5 per cent of this total (*c.* 30,000 lines) is poetry.

THE GREGORIAN PUN

In Bede there is an account of St Gregory's first meeting with the inhabitants of England. Gregory, evidently a punster of some ability, himself asked to be sent to Britain as a missionary, but the pope of the time refused – presumably because of Gregory's social position, the son of a senator and former prefect of the city. When Gregory became pope himself (590), he sent Augustine to do the job for him. Bede tells the story at the end of his account of Gregory's life (Book 2, Ch. 1).

Nor is the account of St Gregory, which has been handed down to us by the tradition of our ancestors, to be passed by in silence, in relation to his motives for taking such interest in the salvation of our nation [Britain]. It is reported that, some merchants, having just arrived at Rome on a certain day, exposed many things for sale in the market-place, and an abundance of people resorted thither to buy: Gregory himself went with the rest, and, among other things, some boys were set to sale, their bodies white, their countenances beautiful, and their hair very fine. Having viewed them, he asked, as is said, from what country or nation they were brought? and was told, from the island of Britain, whose inhabitants were of such personal appearance. He again inquired whether those islanders were Christians, or still involved in the errors of paganism? and was informed that they were pagans. Then, fetching a deep sigh from the bottom of his heart, 'Alas! what pity,' said he, 'that the author of darkness is possessed of men of such fair countenances; and that being remarkable for such graceful aspects, their minds should be void of inward grace.' He therefore again asked, what was the name of that nation? and was answered, that they were called Angles. 'Right,' said he, 'for they have an Angelic face, and it becomes such to be co-heirs with the Angels in heaven. What is the name,' proceeded he, 'of the province from which they are brought?' It was replied, that the natives of that province were called Deiri. 'Truly they are *De ira*,' said he, 'withdrawn from wrath, and called to the mercy of Christ. How is the king of that province called?' They told him his name was Ælla; and he, alluding to the name, said, 'Hallelujah, the praise of God the Creator must be sung in those parts.' (Trans. J. Stevens, 1723.)