Collating Cædmon:
Editing Old English Texts & the
Evolution of Anglo-Saxon in Print
* dip him præcencœ po. hætene

Tu meaht me ringan cp. he.

Hæt rceal ic ringan cp. he. ring

me præarcæast da he da da h-

rane onfeng; Da oñgan he po-

na ringan in hepenerre Gōsep

rcyppendær ha reu l da polo

de he nœ̂ne ne gehynoe hapa en-

debyponeerre hir ir ; Nu pe rce-

olan a heñgean heopon uicer pe-

ano. metodoer mihte l hir mœd

gehanc b. reña pulœn pæten. rpa

he cepulœner gehpar ece Dnihten.

ono stæalo he dœ̂ner rcop eon-

dan bearnum heopon to nœfe

halig rcyppendæ. ha miðdan geа̃

mon cynner peano ece Dnihtæ

æþæn fœodegginium pœloane

almihtæ ; Da anar he rnon
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Patrick D. Olson

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Introduction

The corpus of Old English literature, which spans five centuries (ca. 643–1154), may not seem vast when compared to the vernacular output of early continental cultures. The Anglo-Saxon culture was an oral one, and remained so even as Britain entered the twelfth century. Texts were transcribed at the caprice of Christian monks, whose primary language was Latin and whose interest in the vernacular literature—especially the secular variety—was understandably low. There is no extant Old English prose outside the legal realm that predates King Alfred (849–99). As far as poetry is concerned, we possess about 31,000 lines of Old English verse, largely confined to only four manuscripts, dating from roughly the year 1000—relatively late, considering the Anglo-Saxon period officially ended with the Norman Conquest in 1066. To make matters worse, Viking invaders ransacked and ruined many libraries, and, as Michael Alexander notes, “during the centuries after the Norman Conquest surviving Old English manuscripts became unintelligible and apparently valueless” (3).

Half a millennium after the Battle of Hastings, however, the neglected corpus of Old English literature began to rear its ancient head. In the first half of the sixteenth century, Tavistock Abbey in Devonshire became the site of a minor Anglo-Saxon revival. There is some evidence that the monks at Tavistock even possessed a font of Anglo-Saxon type and printed Old English texts, though not one example survives. Anglo-Saxonists best remember Matthew Parker (1504–75), Archbishop of Canterbury, as the first champion of Anglo-Saxon learning. Parker’s primary concern was the defense of current practices in the Anglican Church, particularly the right to use the vernacular language and the right of priests to marry (Parker was married, though Queen Elizabeth strongly discouraged such unions). The Old English corpus was a boon to his cause, as the early accounts of the Christian Church in England yielded a wealth of material useful for his arguments. Through his ardent industry, and with the diligent assistance of his secretary, John Joscelyn (1529–1603), Parker eventually amassed what remains the finest collection of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts in existence, ushering in a renaissance of Old English scholarship.

Following Parker’s initial efforts in the sixteenth century, long forgotten texts slowly found their way into print, culminating in a full-scale academic revival in the nineteenth century. By the 1820s, it was standard to translate Anglo-Saxon texts into English rather than Latin, which served to expand
the audience of the Old English corpus. Poetry, too, finally became commonplace among the published texts. *Beowulf* was first published in 1815. John Josias Conybeare's (1779–1824) *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (1826) introduced a number of important poems, while the complete text of the *Exeter Book*, first published in 1842, filled out the available collection of Old English verse.

With Seamus Heaney’s recent bestselling translation of *Beowulf* (2000), one might say that, nearly a thousand years later, the literature of the Anglo-Saxons finally has come full circle and found its way back into popular culture.
Exhibition Items


With an aim to defend his religious convictions and to reproduce Old English texts more efficiently, Matthew Parker called upon the London printer John Day (1522–84) to cast a font of Anglo-Saxon type, cutting characters that would resemble the medieval script found in the original manuscripts. This homily by Ælfric is a choice example of Parker’s use of ancient texts as a defense against modern criticism of the Church. Printed in 1566 or 1567, scholars now consider this homily to be the first appearance of Anglo-Saxon in print (*A defence of priestes mariages*, edited by Parker, printed by Richard Jugge (ca. 1514–77), and also undated, was issued at roughly the same time). Day employed this handsome font, durably cast in brass, in several later works, including Items 2, 3, and 4.

ESTC: S122220; STC (2nd ed.): 159.5; Shelfmark: IUA00080.

Possibly even before Day’s type had been cut, Nowell began compiling Anglo-Saxon laws for their inaugural publication. Originally intending to publish them with an English translation, Nowell eventually presented his manuscript to his pupil, William Lambarde (1536–1601), who published them here with his own Latin translation.

ESTC: S122075; STC (2nd ed.): 15142; Shelfmark: 346 L17.


This Old English version of the Gospels went a step further in defending the Church of England. Along with the Protestant Reformation came the divisive issue of translating the Scriptures into vernacular languages. In printing this text, Parker, who directed its publication, proved that vernacular translations had been made in England centuries earlier. “The religion presently taught & professed in the Church at thys present,” John Foxe (1516–87) famously wrote in the preface, “is no new reformation of thinges lately begonne, which were not before, but rather a reduction of the Church to the pristine state of olde conformitie which once it had” (fol. ¶2r). The accompanying English translation is from the Bishops’ Bible (1568), the translation commissioned by Queen Elizabeth and edited by Parker.

ESTC: S102559; STC (2nd ed.): 2961; Shelfmark: IUA01549.


Asser’s enduring biography, written in 893, remains the primary source for the life of King Alfred. Although the text is in Latin, Day rather curiously chose to print it with his Saxon type. As he explained in his preface, he hoped that his readers, once familiar with the Saxon characters, would go on to study the language. This being Day’s last work printed in Anglo-Saxon, he ends his Old English production on a fitting note, encouraging his readers to advance the study of a language he helped revive.

ESTC: S118080; STC (2nd ed.): 863; Shelfmark: Q. 942.01 Aль2Was 1574.
Item 3. Using the same type as in Items 1, 2, and 4, John Day reproduced the West Saxon version of the Gospels, accompanied by an English translation from the Bishops' Bible set in a more familiar black letter type.

Appended to this edition of Bede’s *Ecclesiastical history of the English people*—which includes King Alfred’s Old English translation—is the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. The *Chronicle* exists in seven manuscripts (sometimes reckoned nine by including the Cottonian Fragment and the Easter Table Chronicle), which variously cover notable events beginning with the reign of King Alfred and ending in 1154. The *Chronicle* is remarkable for being “the only vernacular history, apart from Irish annals, from Europe in the dark ages” (Alexander, 173). The publication of the *Chronicle* was an important step, but this edition falls short by modern standards. While preparing the *Chronicle* for print, the editor, Abraham Wheelocke (1593–1653), consulted only two of the manuscripts. Nonetheless, with his 1643 edition, Wheelocke was the first to bring the *Chronicle* into print. Also significant, it contained *Cædmon’s Hymn*, possibly the earliest and undoubtedly one of the most popular poems in the Old English corpus. This 1644 imprint is a reissue of the first edition with the addition of the laws of William I (1027/8–87) and Henry I (1068–1135), two separate glossaries, and a reissue of *Archaionomia* (Item 2).

ESTC: R11643; Wing (2nd ed.): B1662; Shelfmark: IUQ00441.


Gibson’s edition of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* significantly improved upon Wheelocke’s, which the leading scholars soon deemed lamentably inadequate. Wheelocke’s Latin translation, for example, tended to wax poetical, depriving his readers of an honest semblance to the original; Gibson’s translation was much more literal. Perhaps most important, Gibson consulted five manuscripts instead of two, creating a more complete edition. Unlike Wheelocke, whose edition ends with the year 1070, Gibson incorporated entries from what is now known as the *Peterborough Chronicle*, which ends in 1154 and contains unique
information on the period following the Norman Conquest.
ESTC: R1430; Wing (2nd ed.): A3185; Shelfmark: 829.6 An4Lg.


Though all but forgotten today, this anonymous translation, “undertaken by a Lady in the Country,” as the preface notes, represents the first English translation of the *Chronicle*. “The present very limited impression,” the preface continues, “is intended for private circulation” (fol. [A]2’). Wider publication was obviated when Gurney learned of James Ingram’s (1774–1850) more ambitious endeavor (Item 8). Gurney lacked access to the original manuscripts and instead relied on the printed editions of the day. The actual copy of Wheelocke that Gurney probably used to prepare her translation is held by Illinois and on exhibit here (Item 5): the front board bears the coat of arms of her half-brother, Hudson Gurney (1775–1864). Shelfmark: 829.6 An4Egu.


By collating the printed editions of Wheelocke and Gibson, and two additional manuscripts untapped by his predecessors, Ingram prepared an edition of unprecedented authority and completeness. Wheelocke’s entry for the year 1066, which recounts the Norman Conquest, barely occupies seven lines. Ingram’s entry fills nearly nine columns. Ingram’s original plan, however, was less ambitious. He intended this edition to be merely a reprint of Gibson’s 1692 edition, but with an English rather than a Latin translation. His finished product proved to be an edition that amended the errors and omissions of earlier attempts. While Gurney’s translation was the first in English, Ingram’s edition, because of its wider publication, is due more credit for vastly expanding the *Chronicle’s* audience.
Shelfmark: Q. 829.6 An4Ei 1823.
By the time King Alfred ascended the throne in 871, the state of learning in Britain was in poor shape, largely due to the ravages of Viking raids. Acknowledging this deficiency, Alfred translated or commissioned translations of six books into Anglo-Saxon: the Dialogues and Pastoral Care of Pope Gregory I (540–604), Bede’s Ecclesiastical History, the Histories of Orosius (b. ca. 380–90), Boethius’s (d. 524) Consolation of Philosophy, and Saint Augustine’s (354–430) Soliloquies. Writing in his preface to Pastoral Care, he regrets that

Item 9. The opening lines of King Alfred’s translation of Boethius’s Consolation of Philosophy, incorporating an engraved initial featuring an ideal likeness of Alfred himself. The type was cast at Amsterdam in 1654 at the request of Francis Junius.
“there were very few on this side of the Humber who could understand their rituals in English, or translate a letter from Latin into English.” Alfred distributed these translations to select monasteries in Britain, hoping that they would help redress his kingdom’s woeful ignorance. This edition of Boethius, edited by Christopher Rawlinson (1677–1733), was the second of Alfred’s translations to appear in print, following Wheelocke’s edition of Bede in 1643. Both the principal manuscript from which it was copied and the type used in the printing previously belonged to Francis Junius (1589–1677), the Dutch Anglo-Saxonist and antiquarian. A mere 250 copies came off the press, most of which Rawlinson distributed to friends and colleagues.

ESTC: R8772; Wing (2nd ed.): B3429; Shelfmark: IUA13378.


While the preface to Alfred’s translation of Pastoral Care had been printed several times before, it was only in 1871 that the complete text finally appeared in print. In his preface to this edition, Henry Sweet (1845–1912) remarks that, “of all the unpublished Old English texts, the present is perhaps the most important. Preserved in two MSS. written during Alfred’s lifetime, it affords data of the highest value for fixing the grammatical peculiarities of the West-Saxon dialect of the ninth century” (v). The long delay in publication may seem surprising in light of the fact that William Elstob (1673–1715) had made preparations for a published edition more than a century and a half earlier.

Shelfmark: Q.820.8 Ea7 no. 45, 50.


As the corpus of Old English literature worked its way into print, nothing was more sorely needed than a printed dictionary and grammar. Seeking assistance, some aspiring Anglo-Saxonists turned to the Grammar of Ælfric, which dates from the early eleventh century and was available in several manuscripts. The dictionary tradition, too, existed only in manuscript form during the early days of Old English scholarship. Again, some scholars turned to Ælfric’s Glossary. More enterprising academics, however, sometimes compiled their own lexicons. The most famous example is Laurence Nowell’s Vocabularium Saxonicum. Nowell’s manuscript dictionary, which eventually passed into the Bodleian Library at Oxford (MS. Selden Supra 63), once
Item 11. A list of Old English words and their Latin equivalents transcribed by Laurence Nowell.
was used by William Lambarde, and later by William Somner (1598–1669), who compiled the first published Anglo-Saxon dictionary (Item 12). The interleaved copy of Huloet’s English-Latin dictionary here on exhibit bears evidence of this manuscript tradition: it includes extensive text in the hand of Nowell, who used this copy between 1561 and 1566, almost certainly in preparation for his Vocabularium. This copy also passed through the hands of Lambarde, whose handwriting appears on several pages as well.

ESTC: S117241; STC (2nd ed.): 13940; Shelfmark: Q.423.71 H878a.


Despite the desperate need for a printed dictionary, no endeavor seemed to be plagued with so many failed attempts. True, glossaries had been appended to earlier works, including Wheelocke’s 1644 edition of the *Chronicle*, and Richard Verstegan’s (ca. 1550–1640) *A restitution of decayed intelligence* in 1605 (which employed a strictly Roman font). In 1626, and at his own cost, Henry Spelman (1564?–1641) published the first part of a Saxon-Latin glossary, containing letters A–L only. Unfortunately, few copies sold; two booksellers purchased the remaining stock eleven years later. His complete glossary was not published until 1664. Following Spelman’s initial effort, Abraham Wheelocke intended to produce a dictionary, though his unpublished preparations went to the British Museum upon his death. One John de Laet (1581–1649), a friend of Francis Junius, also hoped to publish a dictionary. De Laet’s endeavor was ultimately abandoned, much like Junius’s own attempt at a glossary begun around 1654. Not until the publication of Somner’s dictionary—providing a lexicon in Anglo-Saxon, Latin, and English—was the gap properly filled.

ESTC: R15040; Wing (2nd ed.): S4663; Shelfmark: IUQ02235.


The accomplished Anglo-Saxonist George Hickes published the first Anglo-Saxon grammar in 1689, thirty years after the appearance of the first dictionary. Its publication was a boon to scholars, finally providing a reliable method for learning Old English. Since Ælfric’s *Grammar* had approached Old English from Latin, and since the language of academia had been Latin for centuries, it was natural for Hickes’s *Institutiones* to appear in Latin. Today,
however, scholars recognize that Hickes was too rigid in basing Old English syntax on the classical model. Because the several Old English grammars that followed in the eighteenth century were directly or indirectly based on the *Institutiones*, this shortcoming was perpetuated at least until the grammar appended to Edward Lye’s (1694–1767) *Dictionarium* appeared in 1772.

ESTC: R8123; Wing (2nd ed.): H1851; Shelfmark: 429 H52i.


Although Elizabeth Elstob was among those who followed the traditional model of the Latin grammar, she did go a step further than Hickes by approaching Anglo-Saxon from modern English, making it accessible to those with no command of Latin. If nothing else, this effort helped to expand the audience of the Old English corpus. Its coming was not without delay, however, as the printer’s presses burned in 1712–13. When finally published, those typically outside the elite realm of academia—including women, Elstob hoped—had the means to pursue the study of Old English.

ESTC: T72424; Shelfmark: 429 Eℓ79r.


Hickes’s *Thesaurus* is arguably the most monumental publication in the history of Anglo-Saxon scholarship. Originally smaller in scale and intended for publication in a single volume, this comprehensive treatment of northern languages eventually appeared in three. It includes grammars for Anglo-Saxon, Moeso-Gothic, Franco-Gothic, and Icelandic; a variety of essays; and, perhaps most important, Humphrey Wanley’s (1672–1726) *Librorum
vett. septentrionalium . . . catalogus historico-criticus. When only twenty-two years old, Wanley began scouring England for Anglo-Saxon manuscripts to include in his bibliographic catalog, which was translated from English into Latin by Edward Thwaites (1667–1711) for publication. It remains valuable today, as most of the major manuscript collections have come to us intact from Wanley’s day. In addition, it contains records of manuscripts that since have been lost or damaged, including many that were subject to the fire at Ashburnham House in 1731, which destroyed part of Sir Robert Cotton’s (1571–1631) peerless library. Every manuscript bears a description, including dates of production and excerpts from the texts. Wanley’s catalog is also noteworthy for containing the first printed fragments of the poems Beowulf, Christ, Guthlac, The Phoenix, and The Wanderer.

ESTC: T108393; Shelfmark: Q.429 H52ℓ.


If Old English texts only trickled from the presses of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, they poured from the presses of the nineteenth century. We begin to see many more translations into modern English, complemented by a long overdue appreciation of Anglo-Saxon poetry. Here, for the first time in print, Conybeare provides us with The Riming Poem, Bede’s Death Song, Widsith, Deor, The Wife’s Lament, The Ruin, several Riddles from the Exeter Book, and yet more fragments. Conybeare’s death prevented him from achieving the full scale of his intentions, which included illustrations of early French poetry, but his brother, William Daniel Conybeare (1787–1857), completed the book much to the satisfaction of his contemporaries.

Shelfmark: 829.1 C76i.


Continuing the nineteenth century’s trend in publishing Old English poetry, Benjamin Thorpe, one of the century’s leading Anglo-Saxonists, prepared this edition of what is commonly known as the Exeter Book. The manuscript preserves a remarkable collection of Anglo-Saxon poetry—after Beowulf, many consider this the best of Old English verse—and its publication provided access to a treasury of poems never before published. The popular elegies The Wanderer and The Seafarer make their first complete appearances here, as do most of the celebrated Riddles. To underscore the value bestowed upon Old English poetry before its belated revival, it is worth mentioning that the
Exeter Book, at some point, was burned by a brand or poker. It is also clear that the manuscript was once used as a cutting board, not to mention as a coaster for a mug of beer.

Shelfmark: 829.1 Ex3c.


No exhibition of Old English literature would be complete without the first printed edition of *Beowulf*. It seems rather strange that what is now the most popular work in the Anglo-Saxon corpus was published for the first time so recently, particularly when Humphrey Wanley drew attention to the manuscript more than a century earlier. The translator and editor, Grímur Jónsson Thorkelin, made his transcript of the sole surviving manuscript (Cotton MS. Vitellius A xv, now in the British Library) while visiting England in 1786. Thorkelin’s translation was ready for publication as early as 1807, but was destroyed that same year during the Second Battle of Copenhagen. His patron, Lord John de Bulow (1751–1828), to whom the book is dedicated, requested that Thorkelin prepare another translation. The Illinois copy has a particularly distinguished provenance, bearing both a presentation inscription from Thorkelin and the bookplate of Paul Edouard Didier (1836–88), Count Riant, the notable French medievalist and antiquarian.

Shelfmark: 829.3 T392d.


After it was published in 1922, Friedrich Klaeber’s (1863–1954) exhaustive edition of *Beowulf* remained the standard student text for years. Today’s teachers, however, have a host of editions from which to choose when it comes time to introduce their students to the ancient epic. Dedicating 318 pages to a poem of only 3,182 lines, Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson here provide the contemporary student with an authoritative edition of the text, a history of the poem, an analysis of its composition, background information, a glossary, notes, and several related Old English poems. This is, in essence, the product of generations of scholarship that began nearly three centuries earlier. Now, long after Wanley first drew attention to *Beowulf* in 1705, Mitchell and Robinson have provided today’s student with unprecedented access to England’s oldest epic.

Shelfmark: 829.3 M692.
Item 18. The title-page from the first printed edition of Beowulf.
Bibliography and Suggested Reading


Reed, Talbot Baines. 1887. *A history of the old English letter foundries, with notes, historical and bibliographical, on the rise and progress of English typography*. London: Elliot Stock.


