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I

The Language You Thought You Knew

Ye Olde English?

Wander down a small alley off London's Fleet Street and you'll find a pub with a crooked, creaky charm. Its black and white sign says 'Rebuilt 1667', the year after the Great Fire gutted England's largest city. Go inside for a pint in its wood-panelled dining room, where literary greats like Samuel Johnson, Charles Dickens and Mark Twain ate their fill. This may not be London's oldest pub, but it sure looks the part, with atmospheric vaulted cellars that supposedly date back to medieval times. And if you harbour any doubts concerning the pub's antiquity, its name sets you straight: 'Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese'.

It's nearly impossible to spend time in London without seeing a number of traditional 'ye olde' English pubs: 'Ye Olde Mitre', 'Ye Olde Watling' and the curiously named 'Ye Olde Cock Tavern' are just a few. It may seem that these places are real relics, or at least their names themselves are written in an ancient language – but they are not. 'Ye olde' is in fact a pseudo-archaic term; no one ever said 'ye olde' except in imitation of an imagined speech of the distant past.

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But that's not to say it has no roots in the past. Once there was a letter called *thorn* that made a th sound. It looked like this: þ. Over the centuries, þ was written increasingly like the letter y with some scribes using them interchangeably. Early printers even substituted y for þ, so the word 'þe' (the) ended up looking like 'ye'. Eventually þ fell out of use, but people continued using 'ye' to abbreviate the word 'the' in print during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and in handwriting until the nineteenth century. English speakers' memory of the origin of 'ye' faded over time, until people began reading the word anew, pronouncing it wrong, and eventually creating the habit in English of saying 'ye' to sound old.

So if Old English is not 'ye olde' English, what is it and how far back must we go to find it? More than sixty years before the rebuilding of Ye Olde Cheshire Cheese, William Shakespeare wrote this monologue for his tragic hero Hamlet:

> Who calls me villain, breaks my pate across,
> Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face,
> Tweaks me by the nose, gives me the lie i' th' throat
> As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?
> Hah, 'swounds, I should take it; for it cannot be
> But I am pigeon-liver'd and lack gall
> To make oppression bitter, or ere this
> I should 'a' fatted all the region kites
> With this slave's offal.

The phrasing and vocabulary are unfamiliar, but the English is not 'Old'. Hamlet's speech, written by Shakespeare around 1600, is in Early Modern English, the English used from the end of the Middle Ages in the late fifteenth century until the mid to late seventeenth century. The phrase 'gives me the lie in the throat as deep as to the lungs' sounds strange,

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although forcibly shoving unpleasant words down someone's throat is a familiar concept. We still use the words 'villain' and 'slave', but they are no longer common insults, and it's more likely you'll hear 'chicken-shit' or even 'lily-livered' rather than 'pigeon-livered'. People no longer curse with ''swounds', short for 'God's wounds' (although you may spot 'zounds' in a comic book), but in the sixteenth century using God's name in vain like this was considered particularly foul-mouthed. Other Shakespearean oaths included ''slid' (God's lid, i.e. eyelid) and 'God's bodykins' (God's dear body), the origin of the mild, antiquated oath 'odd's bodkins'.

Hamlet's monologue is unlike anything you'd hear in modern English today, but a fluent English speaker can probably get the gist of it. Much of the vocabulary can be found in a modern dictionary, even if some words are now used infrequently. Shakespeare employs unfamiliar syntax, or word order ('who does me this' rather than 'who does this to me'), but overall the passage makes sense grammatically, even to us today.

Compared to Shakespeare's Early Modern English, Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is significantly more difficult to read:

> Lordynges, herkneth, if yow leste.
> Ye woot youre foreward, and I it yow recorde.
> If even-song and morwe-song accorde,
> Lat se now who shal telle the firste tale.
> As evere mote I drynke wyn or ale,
> Whoso be rebel to my juggement
> Shal paye for al that by the wey is spent.
> Now draweth cut, er that we ferrer twynne;
> He which that hath the shorteste shal bigynne.

Written in the late 1380s to 1390s, over 200 years before *Hamlet*, Chaucer's writing has more strange spellings and unfamiliar words

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than Shakespeare's. But the grammar is familiar enough that you may understand the passage better just from reading it aloud. The publican Harry Bailly is speaking to his travelling companions, reminding them that the night before they had accepted his invitation to take part in a storytelling contest. Anyone who argues with him, warns Harry, must pay for all the wine and ale he consumes throughout their journey. He orders everyone to draw straws, and the person with the shortest will tell the first tale: 'he which that hath the shorteste shal bigynne'.

Chaucer's English may look ancient but it is not 'Old'. Chaucer wrote in Middle English, the English used from the first half of the twelfth century until sometime during the fifteenth. Some linguists suggest an end date of 1400–1450 based on fundamental changes in the pronunciation of vowels (the Great Vowel Shift). Others give a later end date, closer to 1500, by which time the impact of the printing press had really taken hold in England. The advent of printing in England was in 1476, when William Caxton set up his own press in London. Printing, as opposed to writing by hand, meant that far more books were available, with a much wider circulation, which in turn led to greater standardisation in spelling and pronunciation.

Some of the words that Chaucer uses, like 'juggement' and 'paye', may sound completely 'English', but they, along with many other French loanwords, had only entered the language relatively recently. The Normans defeated the English in the Battle of Hastings in 1066, and this Norman Conquest would add many new words to the English language. Throughout the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, under the influence of the new French-speaking ruling class, English changed bit by bit until it became 'Middle English'. French introduced words like 'juggement' and 'paye', and shaped the way Chaucer and his contemporaries spoke and wrote; slowly, the words that they replaced were forgotten.

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But these forgotten words, the language that the English would have spoken in the Battle of Hastings – this, finally, is Old English. 'Juggement' and 'paye' replaced words like ***dōm*** (judgement) and ***gieldan*** (pay, pronounced YE-ELL-dahn). These older words still persist in our current language, like ghosts from the past, in 'doom' and 'yield'. They are just two words among many that survived the Norman invasion, the Great Vowel Shift, the revolutions of grammar, and Shakespearean reinvention, to crop up in the language we speak today.

The oldest English

How much Old English is around to read today? In all texts that survive (not including duplicate manuscripts) there are only around 3.5 million Old English words, which, as the linguist David Crystal points out, is only 'the equivalent of about 30 medium-sized novels'. Most early medieval English manuscripts that survive were written primarily or completely in Latin. Only 200 manuscripts contain any Old English at all, the earliest dating from around 700 CE. Most surviving literature dates from after the reign of King Alfred (849–99), the period between 900 and 1100. King Alfred feared for the decline in learning in his kingdom following the Viking raids of the late eighth and ninth centuries. During the 870s he promoted education and rebuilt an intellectual community by inviting monks and scholars from abroad to bring their knowledge to his court. King Alfred encouraged literature to be translated into and recorded in Old English rather than Latin, since books written in the vernacular would be accessible to more readers.

The most famous Old English text, the poem *Beowulf*, was copied down around 1000 CE. Because most people couldn't read or write,

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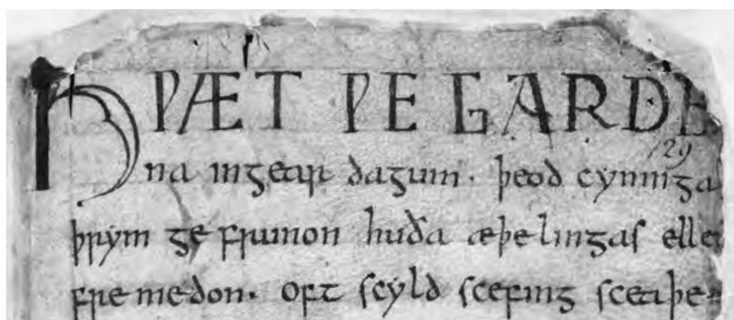
stories were passed down orally for many years, so despite the date of the manuscript it was most likely composed centuries earlier. If other manuscripts containing the 3,182-line poem existed, they have not survived the test of time. The one extant copy was very nearly lost in the Ashburnham House library fire in 1731. Fortunately, the (slightly singed) manuscript was among those rescued and now resides in London's British Library – you can go see it for free in the Treasures Gallery, where it is usually on display.

The first lines of *Beowulf* are:



HǷÆT ǷE GARDE
na ingear dagum . þeod cyninga
þrym gefrunon huða æþelingas ellen
fremedon . . .

Unlike Shakespearean English, unlike even Chaucer's English, this text defies interpretation by a modern reader. Modern editions of the poem usually add capitalisation, punctuation and line breaks to make it easier to read:

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Hwæt, we Gar-Dena in geardagum,
þeodcyninga þrym gefrunon,
hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.

Still, it's not obvious how it should be read aloud, let alone what it means. Guesswork is hopeless. Even a rough pronunciation guide for these lines is unlikely to help:

> HWAT way GAR-den-ah in YAY-ar-da-gum THAY-odd KUEN-ing-ga THRUEM yeh-FROO-non HOO tha ATH-el-ing-gas EL-len FREM-eh-don

At least that might clarify the sound of some of the Old English letters that no longer appear in modern English: æ (ash), ð (eth) and þ (thorn). But it's obviously not enough. A word-for-word translation is:

> So we Spear-Danes in days gone by great kings glory heard of how those noble men brave deeds performed.

It doesn't make much sense grammatically to us. But for those speaking it, word order wasn't essential. Unlike Middle and modern, Old English uses inflection (word endings) rather than syntax to indicate meaning. When we say 'the cat chased the dog' it means something different from 'the dog chased the cat', even though the spelling and form of the words are identical. The syntax (subject-verb-object) tells you who is chasing and who is being chased. In Old English (as in Latin) you have to look at the word endings (*-um, -a, -as,* etc.) to get the meaning. Armed with this knowledge, if we were to translate these lines using modern syntax, we'd get something like:

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> So! We have heard about the glory of the Spear-Danes' great kings in days gone by, how those noble men performed brave deeds.

This not only makes sense, it has the stirring sound of an epic about to begin. Each time a translator tackles *Beowulf* they must balance how true they are to the text with how easily their translation is understood by modern readers, and on top of that every writer has their own literary style, their own unique voice. Reading a new translation of the poem can sometimes feel like reading a new poem.

It took us many steps to reach an understanding of these lines, and it would be the same with most other Old English texts, whether poems or land charters, sermons or medical remedies. Old English is the language you think you know until you actually hear or see it. It may as well be a foreign language to English speakers today and, as with any foreign language, we learn Old English with study, practice and ideally a good teacher.

This book is not like a language primer so much as an old photo album. Old English words are familiar but also strange, like seeing pictures of your parents as children. There's something recognisable in their smiles. But before digging into the more recent family history, let's skip back a few more generations.

From ᚠᚢᚦᚩᚱᚳ to *englisc*

What was spoken on the island that we now call Great Britain before the language that we now call Old English? The first peoples in Britain included the Picts, the Scoti and the Britons. Relatively little is known about the language of the Picts. The Scoti and Britons spoke languages from which Irish, Scots-Gaelic, Welsh, Cornish and Breton derive.

In 410 CE Emperor Honorius of Rome ordered the Britons to see

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to their own defences. The Roman military forces were pulling out to deal with conflicts closer to home, leaving the Britons to defend themselves or hire mercenaries from other parts of Europe to protect them. Settlement by immigrants from Northern Europe (Saxons, Angles, Frisians, Jutes) lasted for about a century. The settlers' homelands may have become less fertile due to flooding or over-farming. We don't know for sure why so many people decided to make the move, and scholars are divided on whether that settlement was peaceful or aggressive.

Regardless of why or how the settlers came to Britain, they brought with them their own distinct tongues. Because these peoples came from modern-day Netherlands, northern Germany and Denmark, the language of their descendants – Old English – may be easier to learn if you know modern Dutch, German or Danish. Because we lack written records from this time, it's impossible to say with certainty how similar or different the various Germanic tongues were. The newcomers made homes for themselves in all regions of Britain apart from the western and northern highlands, speaking languages that would eventually become the oldest of Englishes. The 'Old English period' is usually said to commence sometime around 550 CE, at the very beginning of the European Middle Ages.

The Old English period lasted for about six centuries; historians tend to give the year 1150 as its end date, although linguistic change is, of course, far more gradual. Old English changed slowly over that time, influenced by other languages. After the arrival of Christian missionaries from Rome in the late sixth century, Latin, the language of the Christian Church, was also spoken among the more learned. In the ninth century, with the arrival of Scandinavian raiders (Vikings) and settlers came yet another language, Old Norse. But Old Norse and Old English are modern names for those medieval languages. People in the ninth century didn't think their speech was 'Old'; it was simply ***englisc*** (ENG-glish).

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The Roman missionaries also brought their alphabet to Britain, the writing system familiar to English speakers today. Before the arrival of the Latin or Roman alphabet people wrote in runes. Runic inscriptions appear on jewellery, tools and weapons in Northern Europe from as early as the second century CE. Most runic inscriptions in Britain are from the eighth and ninth centuries; the latest ones are thought to be from the late tenth or early eleventh century.

Why people continued using runes after the Roman alphabet came to town remains a bit of a mystery. Old English ***rūn*** actually means 'whisper', 'mystery', 'secret', or 'speech not meant to be overheard'. Because of the word's association with secrecy, some scholars think that runes must have originated as a script for magic spells. Other scholars believe that whatever they may have been used for later on, runes were created for more practical, ordinary purposes, administration and commerce rather than magic and religious rituals. The straight, angular lines of runes are certainly easier to carve on wood and stone than the curving letters of the Latin alphabet.

Children learning their ABCs are often taught to associate a word with each letter, a mnemonic device to recall the sound it makes ('a' is for apple, 'b' is for bear . . .). While you may grow up associating the letter 'a' with 'apple', 'a' has neither the pronunciation nor the meaning of 'apple'. 'A' is called 'ay', and 'ay' doesn't mean anything; it's only a sound. Runes, however, have names with meanings. The rune ᚨ is called *æsc* (pronounced ASH), and Old English ***æsc*** means 'ash tree'. Perhaps their dual purpose is why runes persisted for so many centuries. The letter 'w' only represents a sound in the Latin alphabet; the rune ᚹ (***wynn***) does that as well as communicating the concept of joy.

The following chart shows the runic alphabet of early medieval England: the transliteration for each rune (how it's written in the Latin alphabet), the sound it makes, its name in Old English and

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its meaning. The runes are composed of vertical and angled lines, designed to show up better against the horizontal grain of the wood. The first six runes of the alphabet are:

ᚠᚢᚦᚩᚱᚳ
f u þ o r c

We don't know what the runic alphabet was called in the early medieval period, but in the nineteenth century scholars gave it the name 'fuþorc' or 'futhark'. Similarly, we get 'alphabet' from combining the first two letters of the Greek alphabet: *alpha* α and *beta* β. Below are the runes, with question marks to indicate scholarly guesses.

Rune	***Transliteration***	***Pronunciation***	***Name***	***Meaning(s)***
ᚠ	f	**f**an / se**v**en	*feoh*	cattle, wealth
ᚢ	u	m**u**d / p**oo**l	*ūr*	aurochs?
ᚦ	þ, th	**th**in	*þorn*	thorn
ᚩ	o	c**o**rn / t**oe**	*ōs*	mouth, god
ᚱ	r	**r**at	*rād*	journey, riding
ᚳ	c	**c**ave / **ch**ip	*cēn*	torch, flame
ᚷ	g	**g**ate / **y**ellow	*gyfu*	gift
ᚹ	w	**w**et	*wynn*	joy
ᚻ	h	**h**at	*hægl*	hail
ᚾ	n	**n**eck	*nȳd*	need, affliction
ᛁ	i	p**i**n / s**ee**	*īs*	ice

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Rune	***Transliteration***	***Pronunciation***	***Name***	***Meaning(s)***
ᛄ	j	**y**ellow	*gēr*	year, a year's harvest
ᛇ	ï	p**i**n? / s**ee**?	*ēoh, īh*	yew
ᛈ	p	**p**ot	*peorð*	?
ᛉ	x	ta**x**	*eolhx*	a kind of sedge grass
ᛋ	s	**s**et / depo**s**it	*sigel*	sun
ᛏ	t	**t**all	*tīr*	the god Týr, glory?
ᛒ	b	**b**ill	*beorc*	birch
ᛖ	e	b**e**d / s**a**y	*eh*	horse
ᛗ	m	**m**ilk	*man*	man, person
ᛚ	l	**l**ate	*lagu*	water, sea
ᛝ	ng	si**ng**	*ing*	the hero Ing
ᛟ	œ	s**a**y? / b**e**d? / c**o**rn?	*ēðel*	homeland, estate
ᛞ	d	**d**og	*dæg*	day
ᚪ	a	c**a**r	*āc*	oak
ᚫ	æ	c**a**t	*æsc*	ash tree
ᚣ	y	T**ue**sday	*ȳr*	bow? horn?

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Runes ᛡ and ᛠ are combinations of more than one vowel sound, something we don't have in the alphabet we use today. Old English also has letter combinations that are pronounced differently from what you might expect in modern English: 'sc' is usually pronounced like **sh**ip and 'cg' like bri**dg**e.

Although most surviving Old English texts are from the tenth century, 400 years or so after the introduction of Latin letters, runes still pop up now and again, and you'll come across them throughout this book. One place they appear is in a poem known as *Elene*. (Most Old English texts were untitled, so the titles we use today were invented by scholars long after the medieval period.) We do not know when *Elene* was originally composed, but the manuscript that contains it is from the latter half of the tenth century.

> . . . ᚳ . *drusende þeah he in medo healle maðmas þege*
> *æplede gold* . ᚣ . *gnornode* . ᚾ . *gefera, nearu sorge dreah enge*
> *rune þær him* . ᛖ . *fore milpaðas mæt modig þrægde wirum ge*
> *wlenced* . ᚹ . *is geswiðrad gomen æfter gearum geogoð is gecyrred*
> *ald onmedla* . ᚢ . *wæs geara geogoð hades glæm nu synt geardagas*
> *æfter fyrst mearce forð gewitene lif wynne geliden swa*
> . ᛚ . *toglideð flodas gefysde* . ᚠ . *æghwam bið læne under lyfte* . . .

This passage describes a man troubled by anxiety, like a torch or flame (ᚳ) that fails. The warrior's own horn (ᚣ) grieves for him, the companion in need (ᚾ), who travels the milestone-marked paths on his proud horse (ᛖ). The poet speaks more broadly about the nature of time: over the years, joy (ᚹ) diminishes and youth fades, a radiance that was once ours (ᚢ). (ᚢ *ūr* usually means 'ox' or 'aurochs', but as this doesn't fit the context, translators have interpreted the rune as *ūre,* 'ours'.) In a mood that is quintessentially Old English, the poet comments on the fleeting nature of life's joys, which depart the way the sea (ᛚ) withdraws;

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wealth (ᚠ) is transient under the heavens. The interspersed runes represent actual words in the text of the poem: ᚳ is *cēn* (torch), ᚣ is *ȳr* (horn), and so on. But these eight runes also spell the name of the poet, Cynewulf: ᚳ ᚣ ᚾ ᛖ ᚹ ᚢ ᛚ ᚠ. This sort of runic 'signature' is highly unusual, and Cynewulf is one of only a handful of Old English poets whose name is known. Most Old English texts have no known author.

Manuscripts from the eleventh century onwards rarely include runes apart from ᚦ (*þorn*) and ᚹ (*wynn*), which continued to indicate th and w sounds long after their other meanings were forgotten. Today Renaissance fairs and London pubs still unwittingly retain ᚦ with their 'ye olde' signs, continuing to misinterpret the letter þ. It seems that letters, as well as words, the building blocks of language, are repurposed again and again.

Unlocking the *wordhord*

I have chosen the words in this book for many reasons. Some are familiar, some strange, and some so completely tied to early medieval life that they really can't be translated. Understanding a language is not just about knowing words and grammar: each language tells you something about the people who speak it, their culture, dreams and daily life, how they see the world and their place within it. Old English is no different. The Old English words I've collected for this book will give you a glimpse of life in early medieval England, and hopefully provide some insight into the language you use today. My interest in history comes first from an obsession with words, and this book's approach to the past is thus guided by words, not historical events or individual people.

English is constantly changing, taking in fresh words for contemporary concepts and forgetting words that have outlived their

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purpose. Every decade has new words for new concepts: 'feminist' (1850s), 'nine-to-five' (1900s), 'genome' (1920s), 'cybercrime' (1990s), 'selfie' (2000s). Each new invention is quickly followed by a new word to describe it: 'light bulb' (1884), 'television' (1900), 'smartphone' (1980). The June 2019 update to the *Oxford English Dictionary* included new entries like 'gamification', 'spit take', 'schmoozefest' and 'twattery', and noted five additional meanings of the word 'stupid'. Today's newly coined words reflect contemporary concerns.

Some words, like Old English ***word*** (word), have remained completely unchanged, perhaps showing how certain ideas and concepts endure. We have always needed a word for 'word'. While some words have persisted across centuries, others have slipped into obscurity. Archaic words like 'nithing' (coward, villain, outlaw) used to be commonplace but have become rarities. In Old English a ***nīþing*** is a villain, someone who commits a vile action. If you use the word 'nithing' today you will sound a bit like a time traveller, or at the very least old-fashioned. It's found in texts that describe or harken back to medieval times, whether in the form of fiction, history or epic verse. Obsolete words have been deemed no longer useful or acceptable for contemporary speech. Although Old English ***friþ*** (peace) appears in many different texts and compound words, modern English 'frith' (peace, protection, security) is obsolete.

Some Old English words are so strange that, even in translation, they seem to confirm that the past is a foreign country: the word ***gafolfisc*** (tax-fish), for example. Other words may still resonate with us, even in their obsolescence, words like ***ūht-cearu*** (pre-dawn anxiety) or ***ān-genga*** (one who walks alone), perfect single words for the worries that keep you awake in the wee hours of the morning, or your introverted colleague who enjoys long, solitary walks.

One obsolete word that continues to resonate with me in this way is ***wordhord***. A 'word-hoard' is exactly what it sounds like: a hoard

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or store of words. *Wordhord* appears only seven times in extant Old English literature, most often alongside the verb ***on-lūcan*** (to unlock). Christ, in the guise of a sailor, unlocks his *wordhord*:

> Again the Guardian of the way unlocked his word-hoard (*wordhord onleac*). The man over the gangway spoke boldly.

The warrior Beowulf unlocks his *wordhord* when addressing King Hrothgar's watchman:

> The most senior answered him, the leader of the band, unlocked his word-hoard (*wordhord onleac*).

Even the personification of Wisdom has a *wordhord* to unlock:

> Then Wisdom unlocked her word-hoard (*wordhord onleac*) again, sang her own truths and spoke thus.

We know from our own language that a hoard's contents are always valuable, if not to everyone then certainly to the hoarder. Hoards are often associated with physical treasure (perhaps gold bullion hidden by pirates on a desert island or gemstones guarded by a fearsome dragon), but words are their own kind of treasure. And, like other kinds of treasures, these ones are revealed on special occasions, when the hoard is 'unlocked'. *Wordhord* brings to mind libraries big and small, notebooks full of scribbled pages, quotes underlined to be remembered later, and precious letters stored in boxes.

But what did *wordhord* mean in Old English? In the Middle Ages, poetry was shared primarily through speaking and singing rather than writing, and in songs instead of books. If you're reciting hundreds or even thousands of lines of poetry, you need to have a well-stocked

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'hoard' of words to draw upon. A *wordhord* wasn't a physical object like a dictionary, or even a library, but a metaphor for the collection of words and phrases a poet memorised and drew upon for their craft.

This book is a *wordhord* of sorts, a hoard of words collected, treasured and shared. It was inspired by ***hord-wynn*** (hoard-joy), the joy that comes from hoarding. As I gathered words like gems, I realised that they weren't just funny, strange and beautiful, but that together they told a story about people's lives more than a millennium ago.

What can words tell us about those people? Words can tell us about the things people do every day, the things closest to their hearts. Words that have endured reveal what has remained significant over time. Forgotten words tell us about things now foreign to the modern world, ideas or concepts we've lost. Words reflect changes in society, showing how people view the world around them and make sense of the cosmos beyond them. The following chapters unlock a *wordhord* that explores all of these topics, taking you on a journey through Old English, from our basic needs to our loftiest pursuits. Language and our understanding of it affect the way we see our world. The secret histories of words, the stories behind words we read, write and speak every day, not only teach us about the past; they enrich our present.

This book will share the journeys of words through time, some of which have taken many twists and turns over the centuries. One such word is ***hāl*** (whole, hale, sound). In Old English, *hāl* appears in a common ***grēting-word*** (greeting-word, salutation), the phrase ***wes hāl*** (be well). *Hāl* is the root of modern words like hale, whole, wholesome, wholesale, holy, holiday, hallow, Halloween, healer and healthy. By the thirteenth century 'wæs hail' had narrowed semantically from a standard greeting to a greeting you make when offering someone an alcoholic beverage. Over time 'wesseyl' or 'wassail' took on the meaning of the drink itself, especially a hot, spiced alcohol served at Yuletide. By the 1600s 'wassailing' referred to the revelry and carousing during

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which one partook of the wassail. Today English speakers still sing 'Here we come a-wassailing' at Christmas without knowing what it once meant to *wes hāl*.

Though the phrase *wes hāl* is perfectly sound, it doesn't seem quite the right *grēting-word* to start our word journey. I choose instead a *grēting-word* that requires no translation because something like this word exists everywhere, a simple sound that demands your attention. That word is ***ēalā*** (pronounced AY-ah-la), not far off from 'oh!', 'hey!', 'eh!', or 'oi!'.

Ēalā, dear reader! Enter. The *wordhord* is unlocked.

First *wordhord*

(Old English spans several centuries, and there are variations to its pronunciation across this period, not to mention differences in dialect. My pronunciations thus reflect only one version of Old English. The pronunciations of each word are given in two styles: a simpler but slightly less precise one, and one that uses the International Phonetic Alphabet.)

ān-genga, noun (AHN-YENG-ga / ˈaːn-ˌjɛŋ-ga): Solitary walker, lone wanderer.

æsc, noun (ASH / ˈæʃ): Ash, ash tree; name of the Æ-rune ᚨ.

dōm, noun (DOAM / ˈdoːm): Judgement.

ēalā, interjection (AY-ah-la / ˈeːa-laː): Oh!

englisc, noun (ENG-glish / ˈɛŋ-glɪʃ): English, the English language.

friþ, noun (FRITH / ˈfrɪθ): Peace.

gafol-fisc, noun (GA-voll-FISH / ˈga-vɔl-ˌfɪʃ): Fish paid as tax or tribute.

gieldan, verb (YE-ELL-dahn / ˈjɪɛl-dan): To yield, pay.

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grēting-word, noun (GRAY-ting-WORD / ˈgreː-tɪŋ-ˌwɔrd): Word of greeting, salutation.

hāl, adjective (HALL / ˈhaːl): Whole, hale, sound, safe, secure.

hord-wynn, noun (HORD-WUEN / ˈhɔrd-ˌwyn): Delightful treasure (hoard-joy).

nīþing, noun (NEETH-ing / ˈniːθ-ɪŋ): Villain, one who commits a vile action.

on-lūcan, verb (on-LOO-kahn / ɔn-ˈluː-kan): To unlock, open, disclose.

rūn, noun (ROON / ˈruːn): Mystery, secret; speech not meant to be overheard, a whisper.

ūht-cearu, noun (OO'HT-CHEH-ah-ruh / ˈuːxt-ˌt͡ʃɛa-rʌ): Care that comes in the early morning.

wes hāl, phrase (wess HALL / wɛs ˈhaːl): 'Be well' or 'be healthy' (a greeting).

word, noun (WORD / ˈwɔrd): Word; saying, maxim; tale, story; report, tidings; command, order; message, announcement; promise, oath; speech, language.

wordhord, noun (WORD-HORD / ˈwɔrd-ˌhɔrd): Hoard or trove of words (word-hoard).

wynn, noun (WUEN / ˈwyn): Joy, delight; something that causes pleasure; name of the W-rune ᚹ.

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