

H. M. CHADWICK MEMORIAL LECTURES . 2

BRUCE MITCHELL

H.M. Chadwick, *The Study of Anglo-Saxon:*
Fifty Years On



DEPARTMENT OF ANGLO-SAXON, NORSE, AND CELTIC
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Hector Munro Chadwick (1870-1947) was Elrington and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon in the University of Cambridge from 1912 to 1941. Through the immense range of his scholarly publications, and through the vigorous enthusiasm which he brought to all aspects of Anglo-Saxon studies — philological and literary, historical and archaeological — he helped to define the field and to give it the interdisciplinary orientation which characterises it still. The Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, which owes its existence and its own interdisciplinary outlook to H.M. Chadwick, has wished to commemorate his enduring contribution to Anglo-Saxon studies by establishing an annual series of lectures in his name.

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H.M Chadwick, *The Study of Anglo-Saxon:* Fifty Years On

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I begin by expressing, first, my consciousness of the honour done me by the invitation to give the second H.M. Chadwick Memorial Lecture and second, my gratitude to Dr Lapidge for those generous introductory remarks. I shall do my best to live up to the remarks and to be worthy of the honour.

Dr Lapidge's warm invitation, written in February 1990, included these words: 'The first H.M. Chadwick lecture is being given this year by Donald Bullough on a historical topic; we wish to invite you to give next year's lecture, on a linguistic or literary topic.' I have tried to weave together the two strands, although the bias is linguistic or philological. Here I recall the saying 'Philologists are an *irritabile genus*', at the same time reminding you that one of the themes of Professor Bullough's lecture was *amicitia*. I shall endeavour to bear that in mind.

The title of his lecture was of course 'Friends, Neighbours and Fellow-Drinkers'. My experience on previous visits to Cambridge suggests that this might be an alternative title for the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic. I have no doubt that its members have taken to heart some words uttered by Professor Bullough: 'Your behaviour', say Alcuin and Ælfric, 'should display respectability and temperance, no showiness in dress, dining that is not marked by extravagance and drunkenness but by sobriety and appropriateness to the occasion and the people present.'¹ To that end, I promise that during this lecture there will be no miracle like that at the royal villa of Sinzig, where — by the power of the relics of St Marcellinus — the beer was turned into wine.²

I do not know what factors led the Department of Anglo-

¹ D.A. Bullough, *Friends, Neighbours and Fellow-Drinkers: Aspects of Community and Conflict in the Early Medieval West*, H.M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures 1 (Cambridge, 1991), 4.

² *Ibid.* pp. 4-5.

Saxon, Norse, and Celtic to invite me here this evening. They in their turn do not know something which makes me, if I may say so, a not completely inappropriate choice: though a Melbourne and Oxford man, I can claim to be a philological grandson of Hector Munro Chadwick of Clare College. For in Melbourne I was taught *Beowulf* by Keith Lamont Macartney of the University of Melbourne and Clare College, who in 1930 took a First in Archaeology and Anthropology at the May Examinations and in 1932 took a First in the Anthropology and Archaeology Tripos Section B.³ I am eternally grateful that my first teacher of *Beowulf* was a man nurtured in the liberal tradition of Cambridge rather than in the more rigidly philological approach of the other place; Macartney thought of *Beowulf* first and foremost as a poem.

By a slightly more devious descent, I can also claim to be one of Hector Munro Chadwick's philological great-grandsons as well, because Thomas Pye Dobson of the University of Melbourne and King's College, who first taught me Old English, subsequently worked with Bruce Dickins, took a First in Part II of the English Tripos in 1951 and a First in Section B of the Archaeology and Anthropology Tripos in 1952,⁴ and has been my valued adviser and critic since then. Don Marquis's creation pete the parrot reports that one night in the Mermaid Tavern he overheard Shakespeare saying to Ben Jonson:

here i am ben says bill
 nothing but a lousy playwright
 and with anything like luck
 in the breaks i might have been
 a fairly decent sonnet writer
 i might have been a poet
 if i had kept away from the theatre.⁵

In the same vein, I can fancy that I might have been a Cambridge man if I had kept away from Oxford. I shall therefore take the liberty of adopting the Cambridge custom of referring to Hector Munro Chadwick as HMC rather than as

³ I am indebted to Mrs Suzanne C. Johnston, Archivist of Clare College, for this information.

⁴ I am indebted to Ms J. Cox, Modern Archivist of King's College, for this information.

⁵ D. Marquis, 'pete the parrot and shakespeare', *archy and mehitabel* (London, 1949), pp. 95-6.

Chadwick — I envy those who were privileged to speak of him as Chadders — and to Nora Kershaw Chadwick as NKC rather than as Mrs Chadwick. In this way I can give some expression to the admiration and warmth I have come to feel as I have got to know them better while preparing this lecture.

This is neither the occasion nor the place for me to embark on a detailed appreciation of HMC or of NKC. Nor am I the person to do so, especially in the presence of an audience which — if I may broaden my philological conceit to embrace all those they taught — contains, in the words of Exodus XXXIV.7, their ‘children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation’. For, as those who celebrated NKC’s eightieth birthday on 28 January 1971 were reminded, ‘Chadwick pupils span a long period — from 1893 to 1962’.⁶

But the subject of this lecture is HMC. So I must from time to time separate those who, it is touchingly revealed in the written and spoken tributes, were happily united in work, marriage and life.

The more I understand about them, and the more I read of their works, the more I find to admire. But it has also become abundantly clear to me that, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it, ‘the time would fail me to tell’ of the contribution they made to those areas of learning to which they dedicated their lives; of HMC as, in Dorothy Whitelock’s words, ‘a pioneer’ with ‘an original mind’;⁷ of the heavy burden of administration he carried which provoked from him an observation even more true today: ‘An unfortunate feature of University life to-day is that the time and energy which should go to teaching and research has to be spent in committee rooms. A complicated system of regulations and examinations has been built up; and the advancement of learning must be subordinated to administrative considerations.’⁸ The time would also fail me to tell of the

⁶ *A List of the Published Writings of Hector Munro Chadwick and of his Wife Nora Kershaw Chadwick presented to Nora Kershaw Chadwick on her Eightieth Birthday* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 3 (hereafter cited as *A List*).

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 24.

⁸ H.M. Chadwick, *The Study of Anglo-Saxon* (Cambridge, 1941), p. 61 (hereafter cited as *The Study*).

part HMC played in the formation of the English Tripos and in the moving in 1927 of his Department into the Faculty of Archaeology and Anthropology;⁹ of his gifts as a teacher; of the way in which he inspired his pupils to undertake research and (more important) to complete it; and of the happy and wholesome influence of the Chadwick home at The Paper-Mills on the outskirts of Cambridge.

All these things are movingly recorded in various places, including J.M. de Navarro's British Academy obituary of HMC¹⁰ and in the speech given by Dorothy Whitelock at the luncheon in St John's to commemorate the centenary of his birth.¹¹ But perhaps I may be allowed three quotations. The first is a comment about HMC made by Leavis in *Scrutiny*: 'It would be pleasant if students for the English Tripos could be aware of the debt they owe to his disinterestedness, courage and insight.'¹² The second is from the Preface by IH (Dr Isabel Henderson) to *A List of the Published Writings of Hector Munro Chadwick and of his wife Nora Kershaw Chadwick presented to Nora Kershaw Chadwick on her Eightieth Birthday*:

To Nora Chadwick's pupils the days of HMC, famed in story, seemed a truly Heroic Age, but now as the years have passed, with for many of us an ever-increasing debt of gratitude to Mrs Chadwick for help with work, hospitality, and kindnesses of all sorts, we realise that she too has made an indelible impression upon all who know her.

This list of writings is a testimony to two lives lived at an enviably high intellectual level. What the list cannot show is their capacity for stimulating friendship, the influence of which is still powerfully among us.¹³

The third is the concluding paragraph to the British Academy obituary of HMC:

The richness and rare variety of endowments, not only of the scholar but of the man — his faculty of at once penetrating to the core of things,

⁹ See J.M. de Navarro, 'Hector Munro Chadwick', *PBA* 33 (1947), 307-30, at 316-18. E.M.W. Tillyard gives a fascinating blow-by-blow account of the foundation of the English Tripos and of what he calls 'the secession of Chadwick' in *The Muse Unchained: An Intimate Account of the Revolution in English Studies at Cambridge* (London, 1958).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *A List*, pp. 24-7.

¹² F.R. Leavis, 'For Whom do Universities Exist?', *Scrutiny* 14.2 (1946), 136-7.

¹³ *A List*, p. 3.

his quiet yet inflexible tenacity, his gentleness, shyness, delicate courtesy, the humour, dry, ironic, yet not unmingled with a sense of mischief and self-deprecating buffoonery — all these qualities combined to make him an utterly unique being and will keep his memory green to all who were fortunate enough to know him. For those who were not his written work and, it is to be hoped, the School which he laboured so unsparingly to found will remain his monument.¹⁴

With these considerations in mind, I turn to my primary concern — HMC's book *The Study of Anglo-Saxon*, first published in 1941 by Heffer and Sons Ltd. Cambridge, as the author put it, 'on the eve of my retirement'. It was a good buy at three shillings net. One happy coincidence is celebrated in my title:

H.M. Chadwick, *The Study of Anglo-Saxon: Fifty Years On*.

A second is that this year 1991 marks the inauguration of the present chairman of the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, Michael Lapidge, as the Elrington and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon and his addition to that Roll of Honour which, from the first incumbent of the Chair, will then read

Skeat — Chadwick — Dickins — Whitelock — Clemoes — Page — Lapidge.

A third is that the General Board of the University has recently approved a proposal to establish a two-part Tripos of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic.

Not irrelevant to the publication of *The Study of Anglo-Saxon* was the publication of this letter in *The Daily Telegraph* on 19 December 1988 under the caption 'Ye Schoolboyes Tale':

SIR — Regarding the relative merits of teaching Latin and/or Greek in schools (letter, Dec. 12), might I suggest that a more suitable language for study would be Old English?

A child equipped with a knowledge of Old English would better understand the idiosyncrasies of English grammar. Quite apart from access to masterpieces such as Beowulf and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the mastering of later works by Chaucer, Langland and Shakespeare would be facilitated.

It was, I suppose, generally greeted with disregard, dismay, disbelief, or derision. Yet it was in a sense a narrow paraphrase

¹⁴ De Navarro, 'Hector Munro Chadwick', pp. 329-30.

of the dust-jacket blurb for HMC's book:

The age of our ancient culture deserves to be regarded by us — by all Anglo-Saxon peoples — with no less respect than that of ancient Rome. It deserves to be studied not only in Universities, but also by home students who are engaged in various walks of life. The object of this little book is to give some indication of what such study has to offer.

We may glance in passing at the fact that the writer to *The Daily Telegraph* spoke of 'Old English' where HMC used 'Anglo-Saxon'. This raises a point of terminology. In his 1871 Preface to the EETS edition of Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, Henry Sweet wrote: 'I use "Old English" throughout this work to denote the unmixed, inflectional stage of the English language, commonly known by the barbarous and unmeaning title of "Anglo-Saxon".'¹⁵ Yet he suffered the Clarendon Press to publish his *Anglo-Saxon Reader* in 1876, his *Anglo-Saxon Primer* in 1882, and his *First Steps in Anglo-Saxon* in 1897. Oxford has a Rawlinson-Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon. Yet it includes Old English in the syllabus of its English School and has recently replaced Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Primer* and *Anglo-Saxon Reader* with a work entitled *A Guide to Old English*. I had thought that Cambridge had the courage of its convictions: Anglo-Saxon it is and Anglo-Saxon it shall be called. But I now find that, while there is an Elrington and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon, a paper called Old English language and literature appears in the Cambridge Handbook. So any symptoms of schizophrenia I display will pass unnoticed.

I have long been an admirer of *The Study of Anglo-Saxon*. It was a strong element in my love affair with Old English which began in Melbourne when I was twenty-seven and has continued ever since. When I began to teach at St Edmund Hall in 1954, I found that my immediate predecessor E.J. Dobson had included it among the books to be read by prospective students of English before they came up. He recommended it as a valuable and stimulating book, although (he added), 'we do not agree with everything it says'. I retained both the book and the comment but like to think that, if they

¹⁵ EETS OS 45 (London, 1871), v, n. 1.

had not been in his list, I would have added them to mine.

A brief survey of the scope and contents of *The Study of Anglo-Saxon* is necessary to clear the way for a consideration of how well it has stood the test of time and of some of the issues it raises which are still of concern today.

In his Preface, HMC spoke about the ignorance of, and the prejudice against, Anglo-Saxon then current; promised to demonstrate why it is of value and why it is neglected; and urged that it has much to offer both the university student and those not attending a university: 'Indeed I doubt whether there is any other subject which the home reader will find easier to take up in his spare time, and from which he is likely to obtain more interest and intellectual satisfaction.'¹⁶

Chapter I, 'The Literature and Monuments of the Anglo-Saxon Period', offers a masterly summary of Anglo-Saxon culture, with a proper stress on the length of the period. It is here that English civilization and English culture begin, a civilization and culture already composite from the seventh century, not insular, ready to learn from abroad.

In Chapter II, HMC argued that 'The Value of Anglo-Saxon Studies' is twofold. They throw light on later times — language, literature, political and social history, the Church, agriculture, surface measures, weights, coinage, communications, and art. This was 'the formative period of our national culture'.¹⁷ Hence the second prong of the two-fold value: 'A period which was so important for later times must deserve study in itself.'¹⁸ A valuable historical survey of the neglected Anglo-Saxon period combines with Chapter I's cultural survey to produce this conclusion:

I must repeat that, in order to appreciate the interest of the Anglo-Saxon period to the full, all its activities — intellectual, social, political, artistic — should be taken into account. If this is done, it will be found that very few countries in the world — certainly none in the northern half of Europe — have a past which can compare in length and varied interest with that of our own country.¹⁹

¹⁶ *The Study*, pp. x-xi.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* p. 25.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 36.

The names of H.M. Chadwick and R.W. Chambers are linked by Sir Frank Stenton²⁰ and by J.M. de Navarro.²¹ HMC, in his second chapter, described the three centuries which follow the Norman Conquest as ‘the age of national humiliation’, the age of rule by ‘foreign kings and nobles, who commonly knew little or no English’ and whom, ‘apart from their architectural achievements, we have little to thank for’.²² So it is not hard to believe that he would have approved of Chambers’s vividly-expressed verdict on the Anglo-Saxon period, delivered in 1932:

From some points of view it seems as if England was making hay of the European time-table, and Eleventh-Century England was getting into the Fifteenth; as if England was escaping from the Dark Ages without passing through the later Middle Ages at all. ...

‘On the day that King Edward was alive and dead’, 5 January 1066, not two centuries had elapsed since Alfred was a fugitive at Athelney, with the whole of England harried and burnt up.

And now England possessed a civilization based upon Alfred’s English prose as the national official and literary language. English jewellery, metal-work, tapestry and carving were famed throughout Western Europe. English illumination was unrivalled, and so national that the merest novice can identify the work of the Winchester school. Even in stone-carving, those who are competent to judge speak of the superiority of the native English carver over his Norman supplanter. In building upon a large scale England was behind Normandy. But what little is left to us of Eleventh Century Anglo-Saxon architecture shows an astonishing variety.²³

Chapter III bears the title ‘Kindred and Contributory Studies’. Here HMC stressed the value — for both literature and law — of comparative study. He claimed that a knowledge of Anglo-Saxon is essential for the history of the English language but that the help the later history of the language can contribute to the study of Anglo-Saxon is, in general, slight. To his list of areas in which ‘it might’ give help can be added the possibility that a study of colloquial Middle English may throw

²⁰ *A List*, p. 25.

²¹ De Navarro, ‘Hector Munro Chadwick’, p. 313.

²² *The Study*, p. 26.

²³ R.W. Chambers, *On the Continuity of English Prose from Alfred to More and his School* (London, 1932), p. lxxvii.

light on the form and structure of the unrecorded language of the Old English period.²⁴ But he urged the importance of the early Germanic languages, of Latin and French works of the twelfth century, of contemporary foreign records, of earlier Latin literature, of the vernacular literatures of the Continent, of early Scandinavian studies, of Roman influence, of the relations between the English and the Britons (Scots and Welsh), and of their relations with Ireland.

In Chapter IV, HMC contemplated 'The Future of Anglo-Saxon Studies'. A brief survey of their history led him to criticism of the then-existing state of affairs and particularly of what he described as 'a cleavage ... between linguistic and historical interests',²⁵ criticism which emphasizes HMC's wish and ability to see Anglo-Saxon studies as a whole. From here he went on to formulate what he saw as the way forward, concluding with praise of 'the attitude to new and foreign learning which we find prevailing in that period'.²⁶ It is to the issues he raised and to their present relevance that I now turn.

How then does *The Study of Anglo-Saxon* look to those who read it fifty years after its publication? Inevitably, through no fault of his own, some of HMC's observations have been overtaken by time. He ended his Preface by saying 'Remember our earliest recorded contribution to philosophy, which dates from a time even before the arrival of the English. I mean the heresy which taught that man is naturally good. Could such a doctrine have originated anywhere except in this country?'²⁷ I am not sure whether this means that he regretted that Pelagius was British or Irish, and not of Anglo-Saxon origin. But he was not to know that some modern English psychologists would opine that everybody is to blame for crime except the criminal. He pointed out that 'the political map of England, as it existed a century ago — and as it still exists, in many respects — was a legacy from the Anglo-Saxon period. South of the Humber no new counties have been formed, except Monmouthshire and

²⁴ See Bruce Mitchell, *Old English Syntax*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985) I, lviii.

²⁵ *The Study*, p. 54.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 74.

²⁷ *Ibid.* p. xii.

possibly Rutland.²⁸ But he was not to know that within fifty years some sagacious statesman or some bee-bonneted bureaucrat would abolish Rutland and would extend the boundaries of Oxfordshire into Alfred's Berkshire. He suggested the probability that the great majority of our roads, except in urban districts, have been in use since Anglo-Saxon times.²⁹ But he did not live to be driven by NKC on today's motorways³⁰ or to enjoy (as he would have)³¹ the compliment paid to Roman roads by a letter-writer to the BBC who asked why the Romans could build roads which had lasted two thousand years when modern motorways crumble in twenty. He stated that 'there can be no question that in "Beowulf" the poet is representing normal English conditions when he describes the Danish king and his court, as "inhabitants of a Roman city" and when he makes visitors arrive at the palace by a paved Roman road.'³² But he could not know that future research would in fact bring this into question. He regretted the neglect of Anglo-Saxon history.³³ But he could not have foreseen the controversies at present raging about the teaching of history in general. He lamented the disappearance of Greek 'from the compulsory requirements of the Universities' on the grounds that 'Latin is a difficult language to use for comparative purposes'.³⁴ But he was not to know that in 1990 one of the North American Ivy League universities would, pursuing humanity in a more literal sense, allow all those seeking admission to substitute the deaf and dumb sign language for Latin or another foreign language. Nor, even in his most pessimistic moments, would he have suffered his mind to entertain the thought — or nightmare — that in fifty years, Latin itself would no longer be a compulsory requirement in universities, that it would be fighting for its very existence in

²⁸ *Ibid.* p. 23.

²⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 24-5.

³⁰ De Navarro, 'Hector Munro Chadwick', p. 324.

³¹ *Ibid.* pp. 329-30.

³² *The Study*, pp. 42-3.

³³ *Ibid.* pp. 25-7.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 56.

school curricula, and that a seminar of the Latin Union meeting in Rome would be told that ‘Britain was the barbarian outpost of a classically educated Europe’.³⁵ One of HMC’s earliest memories, the British Academy obituary tells us, was peering through a window looking for the bear which (his father threatened) would come and carry him off if he did not learn his Latin.³⁶ I wondered whether, if he were alive today, HMC would ponder the therapeutic value of the two she bears which came out of the wood after the children of the city mocked Elisha.³⁷ No! He was too kind a man.

But these things are minor and do not affect the thrust of the book. In most major matters *The Study of Anglo-Saxon* has passed the test of time with distinction. Let me speak first of the one which is perhaps of greatest relevance tonight. Chapter III of the book ends with these words:

To summarise briefly what has been said above — the value and interest of Anglo-Saxon studies may be increased very greatly by combining them with the study of contemporary history and literature, whether Continental (late Roman), Celtic or Scandinavian, or with that of the earlier history and antiquities of this country, or again with a comparative study of life or literature among peoples in a similar stage of civilisation. My own experience as a teacher has shown that among these the subjects which usually appeal most to young students are either the earlier history and antiquities of the country or the Celtic and Scandinavian studies; and in the latter case it is to be remembered that the Celtic languages present much greater difficulties than the Scandinavian. All these subjects, however, will contribute in one way or another to enhance the value of our studies.³⁸

This seems in a very real sense to be the blueprint for, and to present the vital essence of, the Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic Tripos as set out in the *Cambridge Handbook*. Thus it may be said that *The Study of Anglo-Saxon* unites the two things linked by J.M. de Navarro in the concluding sentence of his obituary of HMC: ‘For those who were not [fortunate enough to know him], his written work and, it is to be hoped, the School which he laboured so unsparingly to found will

³⁵ *The Sunday Telegraph* 7 October 1990, p. 1.

³⁶ De Navarro, ‘Hector Munro Chadwick’, p. 308.

³⁷ II Kings II.23-4.

³⁸ *The Study*, p. 52.

remain his monument.³⁹

Time has also ratified as sound HMC's opposition to the teaching of compulsory philology for students of languages at universities, opposition expressed in his article 'Why Compulsory Philology?'⁴⁰ and in *The Study of Anglo-Saxon*.⁴¹ Here J.M. de Navarro makes an important point:

He held that philology appealed to a very small number and, while believing that students who were interested in the subject should have an opportunity of studying it, he regarded it as best suited for post-graduate work. This has led some to believe that he had grown to dislike philology. Nothing could be further from the truth: his last two books bear witness to his constant use of it as a favourite and delicate instrument.⁴²

HMC was not a pioneer in this opposition. In 1882 Henry Sweet wrote in the Preface to the first edition of his *Anglo-Saxon Primer*: 'In the Grammar I have cut down the phonology to the narrowest limits, giving only what is necessary to enable the beginner to trace the connection of forms within the language itself.'⁴³ Sweet returned to the fray in *First Steps in Anglo-Saxon* (1897):

As the *Primer* is intended as an introduction to a scientific as well as a purely practical knowledge of Old English, it includes an exposition of some of the fundamental facts of historical grammar, such as the laws of mutation and gradation, which are certainly not necessary for the beginner, even if we admit that they have a practical value in helping to fix the forms in the memory. I have, accordingly, rigorously excluded all such details from the grammar in the present work, which is intended to be a purely practical introduction to the language.⁴⁴

In the same year, another Cambridge man A.J. Wyatt — who expresses a debt to HMC and to whom I remain grateful for *An Anglo-Saxon Reader*, with its well-chosen variety of texts and the moving tribute to his collaborator Bernard Pitt, lieutenant in the Border Regiment, killed in action in France in 1916⁴⁵ — made the point starkly in the preface to *An*

³⁹ De Navarro, 'Hector Munro Chadwick', p. 330.

⁴⁰ *Universities Quarterly* 1 (1946), 58-63.

⁴¹ *The Study*, pp. 55-8.

⁴² De Navarro, 'Hector Munro Chadwick', p. 325.

⁴³ (Oxford, 1882), p. vii.

⁴⁴ (Oxford, 1897), p. iv.

⁴⁵ *An Anglo-Saxon Reader* (Cambridge, 1919), p. v.

Elementary Old English Grammar: ‘Sievers assumes that the student possesses a certain knowledge of Germanic, and makes it the basis of his classification; Cosijn believes that the ready way to the Old English tongue is to learn Gothic first — a theory not difficult to reduce *ad absurdum*.’⁴⁶

But these arguments did not influence other writers of introductory Old English grammars and were not heeded by most of those who taught from them. There is more than one reason for the present neglect of Old English. They include the pressure of an ever-expanding corpus of modern literature; the great attention given to critical theory, often at the expense of the literature itself; the time and effort required for the learning of Old English grammar (I discuss this later); active hostility from some who were nurtured in a crabbedly linguistic tradition in which the marks on the page were more important than the literary merits of what was being said and in which the Anglo-Saxons were regarded as people who made interesting scribal errors rather than as individual members of a society; and a passive indifference to what is in some universities its terminal illness on the part of some to whom it has been entrusted. Much of the opposition to compulsory Old English, both here and in North America, is (I believe) due to unsympathetic insistence by teachers of Old English on the importance for beginners of philological niceties which are better regarded as spelling variations — with the exception of *i*-mutation, whose effects still linger in English today. As HMC, echoing Wyatt’s 1897 barb, rhetorically asked: ‘What would be thought of a Latin course which took no account of ancient Rome, or indeed of any question except the phonetic process by which — in later times — the word “homo” became “uomo” or “homme”?’⁴⁷

This was to be sure somewhat below the belt. But it was not a complete caricature of the atmosphere which prevailed at Oxford when I came up to Merton in 1952. There were then three courses available in the Honour School of English

⁴⁶ *An Elementary Old English Grammar (Early West Saxon)* (Cambridge, 1897), p. v.

⁴⁷ *The Study*, p. ix.

Language and Literature. Accidentally or not, the priorities of the School were revealed by the fact that the course covering English Literature from Old English to 1830, which was taken by some ninety per cent of candidates, was Course III and that the running heads in the *Examination Statutes* read 'Honour School of English Language, etc.' Course I allowed candidates to go as far as Chaucer, Langland and Gower; Course II as far as Shakespeare. The emphasis was linguistic, in the older derogatory sense of the word. I gave up believing in the validity of such courses very soon after I started teaching them. I sometimes wonder whether I would ever have written *Old English Syntax* if I had persisted in my original intention of reading Course I instead of following the suggestion made by G.V. Smithers, my tutor-designate, that I should write a doctoral thesis. In Course III, the demands made by the Old English syllabus were unreasonable — two three-hour papers in the Preliminary Examination, one involving unseen translation and questions on sounds, inflexions, and syntax, and one three-hour paper in Schools. It was easy — indeed, perhaps necessary — to spend more time on Old English than on Shakespeare.

Since 1952 the balance has gradually shifted. The running heads now read 'English Language and Literature'. In Course I, General Course in English Language and Literature, Old English is retained but is compulsory only in the first year of the three-year course, where the Honour Moderations, which all candidates reading three years of English must do, include papers on Old English literature, Old English translation, and English literature from 1832 to the present day. Thereafter candidates must choose either Course II or Course I General Course in English Language and Literature, which covers the history of the English language, Middle English, and English literature from 1509 to 1832. In their three years such candidates study English literature from Old English to the present day. Course II, Special Course in English Language and Early English Literature, demands detailed knowledge of the history of the English language up to the present day and of

English literature up to 1400, with options up to Milton. This is an improvement. But I still think, as I have long thought, that anyone reading a pure English school should cover the whole range from Old English to the twentieth century, with the possible exclusion of writers who are still alive; here I have a lot of sympathy with the view I have heard expressed by Lord David Cecil and others that the exciting exploration of contemporary writing should not be shackled by the fetters of examiners. Be that as it may, it is not illogical for me to express fear that Old English is now in mortal danger, even in Oxford, where the continuing interest in philology has not always proved capable of self-perpetuation; by an irony which has not escaped some, not one of Oxford's products could be found who was capable, or alternatively was desirous, of filling the chair of English Language on the retirement of Norman Davis and E.J. Dobson.

I speak of Oxford because it is the place I know rather than because I think its academics more guilty than any other academics. Many of the earlier editions of individual Old English poems show more interest in the spelling than in the poem. Here Dunning and Bliss, both of whom studied in Oxford, blazed a trail for all future editors by their serious and organized treatment of syntax and vocabulary in *The Wanderer*.⁴⁸ What distinguished the first edition of *A Guide to Old English*⁴⁹ from all its predecessors and what has made the book popular — if that is the right word — with those trying to learn Old English grammar is the fact that sound changes are not treated as an abstract system divorced from texts but are discussed when they become relevant to an understanding of apparent irregularities in inflexion. Yet it was this very feature which caused an eminent university press in the USA to reject the offer of the North American rights.

In the course of his comments on this narrow linguistic approach, HMC observed: 'As a result, Anglo-Saxon studies have come to be regarded in a somewhat unsympathetic light

⁴⁸ T.P. Dunning and A.J. Bliss, *The Wanderer* (London, 1969).

⁴⁹ Bruce Mitchell, *A Guide to Old English* (Oxford, 1964).

both in the Universities and in the country generally. Their true character and scope were lost to view.⁵⁰ As a further result, the baby was thrown out with the water and Old English was either dismissed from university English syllabuses or made an option, as in both Part I and Part II of the English Tripos in Cambridge.

I accept without reservation the validity of the statement in the current *Cambridge Handbook* that ‘the Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic Tripos ... provides a diverse education of general value or, if desired, a stage in the training of future scholars in this field’.⁵¹ While not wishing to re-open old controversies, I accept that the Tripos as now constituted would not be at home in the English course. In 1952 Alistair Campbell wrote: ‘The first business of the student of any language is to understand the art with which it is handled by its masters. This is the approach which classical scholarship suggests, and it is one peculiarly suited to Old English with its rich literature, crowned by a poetry of superb technique and the stately prose of Ælfric.’ To the words ‘This is the approach which classical scholarship suggests’ he added this footnote:

This is the antidote to undue preoccupation with phonology, not the concentration upon history and law urged by Chadwick (*The Study of Anglo-Saxon, passim*), which amounts to a denial that Old English is an independent humanity. Of course, the Old English scholar should know some law and history: also he should acquire the elements of theology, as essential for him as philosophy for the Greek scholar.⁵²

Such an understanding of Old English literature is available to those who work within the Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic Tripos; the scholars it has turned out testify to this. Campbell claimed that *The Study of Anglo-Saxon* denies that ‘Old English is an independent humanity’. But to my mind *The Study of Anglo-Saxon* amounts to a claim that Anglo-Saxon is an independent humanity. So I do not properly understand what Campbell meant — unless he was claiming that Old English literature *per se* is one. I would not accept this. I would

⁵⁰ *The Study*, p. ix.

⁵¹ *Cambridge Handbook* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 47.

⁵² *RES* 3 (1952), 166.

not like to see a Tripos which restricted itself to Old English literature or to Old and Middle English literature. As I see it, the existence of a course like the present Oxford Course II, in which English literature from 1400-1832 need not be studied and in which English literature from Milton to 1832 cannot be studied, has no more justification than a course without Old English. I fear that Oxford mediaevalists may find before long that the existence of Course II will prove an irresistible argument for the removal of Old English from Honour Moderations and thus for a three year English course with no Old English.

I now believe as firmly as I ever did that some knowledge of Old English is essential to a meaningful study of the English language and of English literature. Old English is where the English language began. It is where English prose began. It is where one tributary of the great river of English poetry began. I believe that HMC underestimated when he wrote that 'in literature very little continuity is traceable'.⁵³ But I cannot pursue the point here. However, in defining my phrase 'some knowledge of Old English', I do not adopt the antediluvian position rightly condemned by HMC. The proper solution to the Old English problem, as I see it, is not to throw Old English out, not to teach it in translation, but to put it in its place, to tame it, to teach it with due regard to its rightful and essential but limited place in an English syllabus, to teach it without making unreasonable demands, and — above all — (as Campbell said) to teach it as literature. To read English literature without some knowledge of, and some feeling for, Old English is to cut oneself off from one of the main traditions which have nourished that literature.

I have to confess that one thing I find puzzling in *The Study of Anglo-Saxon* is HMC's blanket opposition to compulsory Old English in any form, even granting that his concern was 'with Anglo-Saxon, not with English studies':⁵⁴ '... my own experience has been that, when Anglo-Saxon is compulsory, it

⁵³ *The Study*, p. 22.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

is disliked, and the students gain little or nothing from it. ... To force it upon a larger number of students is, in my experience, a mere waste of time for both student and teacher. Most of the students regard it as a nuisance.⁵⁵ This is a reflection on the attitude of, and teaching in, those departments where it is true. It is not a reflection on the subject itself. And it is not always true; HMC's experience and mine differ here. Some students of English will hate anything which requires any effort. But many of my Oxford students have confessed — without, I hope, undue pressure from Big Brother — that they have derived enjoyment and profit from Old English. It is clear that HMC was an excellent teacher. It is clear that he was devoted to Anglo-Saxon. It is clear that he saw what was wrong with the way it was taught and that he knew there were better ways:

In point of fact no language is easier to read than Anglo-Saxon. Anyone who has had any linguistic training — anyone who knows some Latin and a modern foreign language — can easily learn to read ordinary Anglo-Saxon prose in a few days, if he spends an hour each day upon it. Some elementary books contain simple sentences or passages for beginners. If the learner will spend three or four hours on these, or on simple passages from the Anglo-Saxon translation of the Gospels — which should, of course, be chosen with some care — he should then be able to make out an ordinary prose narrative, at any rate with the help of a translation. My experience with elementary classes is that they can generally make out such narratives in their fourth hour. They must, of course, look out a good many words in the dictionary or glossary, and also at first refer very frequently to the grammar, especially for the forms of verbs; but that is the case in beginning any new language. Proficiency can only be acquired by time. A teacher can be of considerable help by pointing out items in the grammar which are specially worth noting. But he is by no means indispensable. I myself never received any instruction or attended any lectures in Anglo-Saxon. Syntax seldom causes any difficulty, except in works or passages translated from Latin. The poetry, however, is less easy, and should be left until one has obtained a mastery of the prose. Really satisfactory translations of it require long study.⁵⁶

HMC must have known of, but does not mention, Henry Sweet's *First Steps in Anglo-Saxon* or A.J. Wyatt's *The Threshold of Anglo-Saxon*,⁵⁷ books which were closer than

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-1.

⁵⁷ (Oxford, 1897) and (Cambridge, 1926), respectively.

many to what HMC saw as the proper way of introducing Old English. I do not blame him for not producing such a book but I regret his failure to mention its possibility and to encourage its production.

The book now in use at both Oxford and Cambridge is the fourth edition of *A Guide to Old English*.⁵⁸ A fifth edition of this *Guide*, which will include Ælfric's life of St Edmund and an appendix on metre, is now ready for press. It will be the best the authors can do at the moment in the way of a book for those who want to acquire a sound knowledge of the language and a reasonably wide acquaintance with the literature. But this is not the aim of all those who are reading English. I do not see why it should be. We need a book which, without demanding an unreasonable allotment of time to Old English, will give enough acquaintance with the grammar to enable the student of the history of the English language to make the necessary use of it and enough knowledge of, and sympathy with, the literature to give the student an understanding of its relevance. The writer of such a book will be indebted to HMC for his already-quoted comments on the ease of acquiring an elementary knowledge of the language,⁵⁹ for his belief in the importance of self-help,⁶⁰ and for his plea for the popularization of Anglo-Saxon studies.⁶¹ He will also be indebted to Henry Sweet, whose own sequence *First Steps in Anglo-Saxon — An Anglo-Saxon Primer — An Anglo-Saxon Reader* was never properly appreciated. I now pause for a commercial announcement: Basil Blackwell have agreed to publish a book designed to meet these needs which I am preparing under the title *An Invitation to Old English*.

The Study of Anglo-Saxon then is a book which, while unsurprisingly failing to attract complete agreement, prepared the blueprint for an enterprise which has been brought to successful fruition under HMC's successors, which still strikes

⁵⁸ Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, *A Guide to Old English*, 4th ed. (Oxford, 1986, repr. 1987, 1988 and 1990).

⁵⁹ *The Study*, pp. 70-1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 73.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* pp. 67-70.

sparks today, and which will continue to influence future scholars and students of the period. It is certainly not a victim of what I call (with due acknowledgements to Hans Christian Andersen) 'the Emperor's new clothes are beautiful' virus, a virus which is spreading rapidly in Academia and elsewhere. Its symptoms include a too- 'willing suspension of disbelief', a passionate readiness to discard the time-proven for the latest gimmick, and an indiscriminating eagerness to adopt the trendy, the new, the exciting.

The Prince of Wales has identified the virus in modern architecture; the critic Charles Osborne in the Royal Shakespeare Company; frustrated readers whose book order slips are returned marked NIP (Not In Place), in the Bodleian Library's enthusiasm for its new OLIS (Oxford Library System) computer catalogue; and the Prayer Book Society in the new versions of the scriptures and in the new liturgies of the Church of England, though similar complaints no doubt accompanied the introduction of the Authorized Version and of the Book of Common Prayer — and Henry Sweet's grave in Wolvercote Cemetery prefers the Coverdale version of Psalm XXV.4 'Lead me forth in thy truth and learn me.' The virus has been found in other places, including the teaching of the three Rs, the new system of school examinations, modern literary criticism, and modern linguistics.

It has not left Old English studies untouched. I have already commented, especially in the conclusion to *On Old English*,⁶² on what I see as undesirable tendencies. Here I must content myself with citing three publications in which I diagnose 'the Emperor's new clothes are beautiful' virus. An examination by Sandor Rot of grammatical innovations in late Old English and early Middle English concludes:

The 'inherent variability', the 'non-code-switching' linguistic interference of the Anglo-Old Scandinavian language contacts and the 'code-switching' linguistic interference of Anglo-Norman French language contacts brought forth the motive forces (or 'actuation riddles') which make up an interwoven bundle worked in a non-linear

⁶² Bruce Mitchell, *On Old English* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 332-44 (hereafter abbreviated to *OE*).

causality in the formation of grammatical innovations and structural-typological shiftings Late Old English and Middle English exhibits.⁶³ This is obviously a terminal case. Carole Frances Baker's 1975 dissertation 'strives, using the parameters of hypotaxis and parataxis, to apply linguistic analysis to literary criticism. Some concepts from transformational grammar are used to define and describe modes of conjunction at the inter-sentence level of syntax, where the connective "bones" shape our perception of the images and ideas, the "rags", within a literary structure.'⁶⁴ Mary Faraci, writing on 'Phenomenology: Good News for Old English Studies', brings us this good news: 'The phenomenological lesson in reading is cause for celebration: Old English critics can begin, now, to read for pleasure.'⁶⁵ I am duly thankful, yet unaware that this privilege had hitherto been denied me.

It is true that 'you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs'. Indeed, according to the *Kalevala*, more than omelettes came from broken eggs. For it relates how, after the Virgin of the Air descended into the sea, was fertilized by the winds, and became the Water-Mother, a teal built its nest on her knee and laid eggs. As the teal brooded on the nest, the Virgin felt her knee getting hot, jerked it, and caused the eggs to fall into the water and break.

In the ooze they were not wasted,
Nor the fragments in the water,
But a wondrous change came o'er them,
And the fragments all grew lovely.
From the cracked egg's lower fragment,
Now the solid earth was fashioned,
From the cracked egg's upper fragment,
Rose the lofty arch of heaven,
From the yolk, the upper portion,
Now became the sun's bright lustre;
From the white, the upper portion,
Rose the moon that shines so brightly;
Whatso in the egg was mottled,
Now became the stars in heaven,

⁶³ See item 95 in Bruce Mitchell, *A Critical Bibliography of Old English Syntax to the End of 1984* (Oxford, 1990) (hereafter abbreviated *OES: CB*).

⁶⁴ See *OES: CB*, item 926.

⁶⁵ *Language and Style* 15 (1982), 224.

Whatso in the egg was blackish,
In the air as cloudlets floated.⁶⁶

It is true that we can't stand still; development is desirable, change inevitable. But if we break all the eggs, we won't have any birds.

In what directions then should Anglo-Saxon studies now move? As HMC pointed out, there are many interesting problems awaiting solution.⁶⁷ Those he mentioned are historical. But such things are outside my brief tonight, which was defined as linguistic or literary. In these three areas, we should feel gratitude for the great advances which have been made. To the catalogue I gave in *On Old English*,⁶⁸ I add in particular one item which would have gladdened the hearts of HMC and NKC: the collaborative edition of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle under the general editorship of David Dumville and Simon Keynes. But my broad definition of what is needed in the linguistic and literary spheres is:

Save Old English from those who wish to abolish it; from those who imperil its place in university syllabuses by exaggerated claims and over-zealous demands; and from 'the Emperor's new clothes are beautiful' virus.

More work, based on the full corpus, not on representative collections, is needed in semantics — perhaps one day, through the *Dictionary of Old English* or some individual worker, I shall know the difference between *dom* and *lof* — and in syntax — here, as one who has devoted over forty years to the subject, I found HMC's observation that 'syntax seldom causes any difficulty'⁶⁹ somewhat dispiriting and deflating.

Five issues close to my heart cry out for mention. First, I repeat my plea for a joint venture to produce a new collective edition of Old English poetry.⁷⁰ Second, I repeat my plea for a commonsense re-assessment of the theological sophistication

⁶⁶ *The Kalevala* Runo I, from the translation by W.F. Kirby (London, 1907).

⁶⁷ *The Study*, p. 35.

⁶⁸ *On OE*, pp. 327-32.

⁶⁹ *The Study*, p. 71.

⁷⁰ *On OE*, pp. 342-3.

of Anglo-Saxon poets and audiences.⁷¹ Here I am encouraged by the recent publication of a book which argues that ‘English religious poetry in the early medieval “age of faith” was intended to convey conventional Christian teaching to unlearned audiences ... and [that] the exegetical perceptions often assumed in modern criticism are not justified’.⁷² Third, I repeat my plea for a more serious consideration of the problems created by the use of modern punctuation for Old English texts.⁷³ I find regrettable the following confession by the editor of Manuscript A of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*:

Punctuation is modern, with the use of full stops, semicolons, commas and dashes at once arbitrary and a compromise, reflecting an attempt to reconcile two conflicting interests. On the one hand, there is the desire for clarity for the modern reader; on the other, there is the need to respect the syntax and style of the authors and to acknowledge the Anglo-Saxon Chroniclers’ habit of writing in ‘paragraphs’, with coordination where Modern English would have either new sentences or subordination. Because this compromise was not decided upon until proof stage, it has not been possible to include the detailed analysis of word-order which would indicate those places where the modern punctuation may be distorting mediaeval practice.⁷⁴

I cannot accept the proposition that the two interests are conflicting and believe that, given the necessary time and effort, a solution is possible. I am no longer satisfied with the solution I proposed in 1980 in ‘The Dangers of Disguise: Old English Texts in Modern Punctuation’.⁷⁵ But I have drafted a new system and am collaborating with Daniel Donoghue of Harvard University in an attempt to make it acceptable. Fourth, I repeat my plea for a critical re-appraisal of Kuhn’s Law,⁷⁶ a plea described by one reviewer of my *Old English Syntax* as ‘ill-conceived’.⁷⁷ Here I am encouraged by the fact

⁷¹ *Ibid.* pp. 335-7.

⁷² Quoted from the publisher’s blurb to J.N. Garde, *Old English Poetry in Medieval Christian Perspective: A Doctrinal Approach* (Woodbridge, 1990).

⁷³ *On OE.*, pp. 338-40.

⁷⁴ *MS A*, ed. J.M. Bately (Cambridge, 1986), pp. clxv-clxvi.

⁷⁵ *RES* 31 (1980), 385-413, reprinted in *On OE* as item 18.

⁷⁶ *On OE*, p. 339, and *OES: CB*, item 1074.

⁷⁷ R.D. Fulk, *PQ* 66 (1987), 183.

that several scholars are working on this ‘ill-conceived’ project and by reading the following comment by a contributor to *Old English Newsletter*: ‘The fact that breaches occur in a good fifteen major OE poems ... suggests that Kuhn’s lawyers take Kuhn’s Laws more scrupulously than did OE poets’.⁷⁸ Fifth, I repeat my plea that more attention be paid to the work of Herbert Meritt on the *apo koinou* construction and of G.P. Krapp on parenthesis.⁷⁹ Here too I see encouraging signs.

But now the time has failed me to tell . . . Soon you, members of my audience, will be able to share Swinburne’s relief:

We thank with brief thanksgiving
Whatever gods may be ...
That even the weariest river
Winds somewhere safe to sea.

It is not easy to find the right words. One of the characteristics of the English language in its never-ending quest for new words in which to express new ideas — and, not infrequently, old ideas — is its ruthless plundering of the verbal resources of other languages. In my writings, and in this lecture, I have in the same way made use, with due acknowledgement, of the treasures of other men’s minds, in the belief that the originator of the idea is most likely to find the right words in which to express it. Appropriately enough, my last victim tonight is Michael Lapidge, the current chairman of the influential and flourishing department which is found in embryo in *The Study of Anglo-Saxon* and which sponsors the H.M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures. In writing the appreciation which follows in an article entitled ‘Anglo-Saxon Studies in Cambridge’, he allows me to re-unite HMC and NKC after the separation imposed by the terms of this lecture series:

A different, and wider, dimension was given to the subject by Hector Munro Chadwick, who during the latter part of Skeat’s tenure of the chair was University Lecturer in Scandinavian. Chadwick’s interest embraced not only Old English and Old Norse (as seen in his two earliest publications, both of which appeared in 1899: *Studies in Old English* and *The Cult of Othin*), but also the historical and

⁷⁸ J.R. Hall, *Old English Newsletter* 20.1 (1986), 63.

⁷⁹ See *OES: CB*, items 1021 and 1023.

archaeological context of these languages and literatures. His *Studies on Anglo-Saxon Institutions* (1905) was a pioneering work which drew on semantic, literary and numismatic evidence in the attempt to illuminate the historical record. Similarly, his book *The Origin of the English Nation* (1905) attempted for the very first time to combine the evidence of Anglo-Saxon archaeology with that of the written record. The importance of Chadwick's work was quickly recognized, and on the death of Skeat in 1912 he was elected to the professorship, a post which he held until his retirement in 1941. During this long tenure Chadwick gave to Anglo-Saxon studies in Cambridge the individual stamp which they bear to this day, namely that Old English (as well as other Germanic languages and literatures, especially Old Norse) are most profitably studied within the wider context of historical and archaeological evidence. A wider dimension still, namely that of the neighbouring Celtic languages and literatures (Old Irish and Welsh), was brought to the subject as studied in Cambridge when in 1922 Chadwick married Nora Kershaw, who was subsequently to publish *An Early Irish Reader* (1927) and who, working in collaboration with H.M. Chadwick on *The Growth of Literature* (3 vols.: 1932-40), contributed much to the vast perspective and range which that monumental work of comparative literature possesses. From the time of the Chadwicks' marriage, Celtic studies in Cambridge were wedded indissolubly to Anglo-Saxon and Norse.

Subsequent holders of the Anglo-Saxon Chair have developed the subject along the broad lines laid down by the Chadwicks.⁸⁰

To these words I add in conclusion the time-hallowed prayer: *Requiescant in pace.*

⁸⁰ *Mediaeval English Studies Newsletter* (Tokyo) 21 (1989), 18-19.

The Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic offers programmes of study, at both undergraduate and graduate level, on the pre-Norman culture of the British Isles in its various aspects: historical, literary, linguistic, palaeographical, archaeological. The Department also serves as a focal point for scholars visiting Cambridge from various parts of the world, who are attracted to Cambridge by the University Library (one of the largest in the world), the collections of Anglo-Saxon and Celtic manuscripts in the University and various college libraries, the collection of Anglo-Saxon, Celtic and Scandinavian coins in the Fitzwilliam Museum, or the rich collection of Anglo-Saxon artefacts in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. It is possible for the Department to host a small number of Visiting Scholars each year.

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