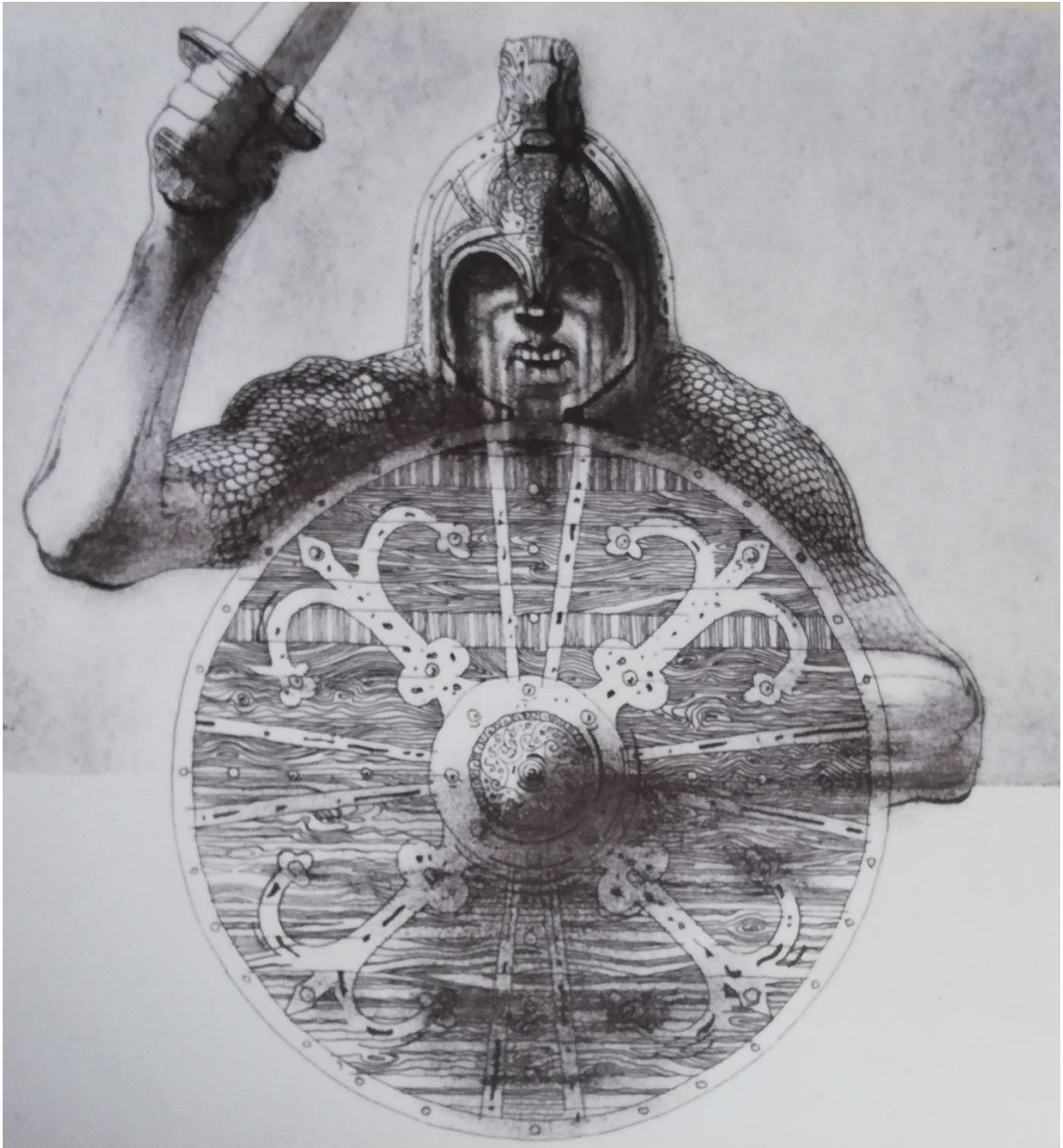




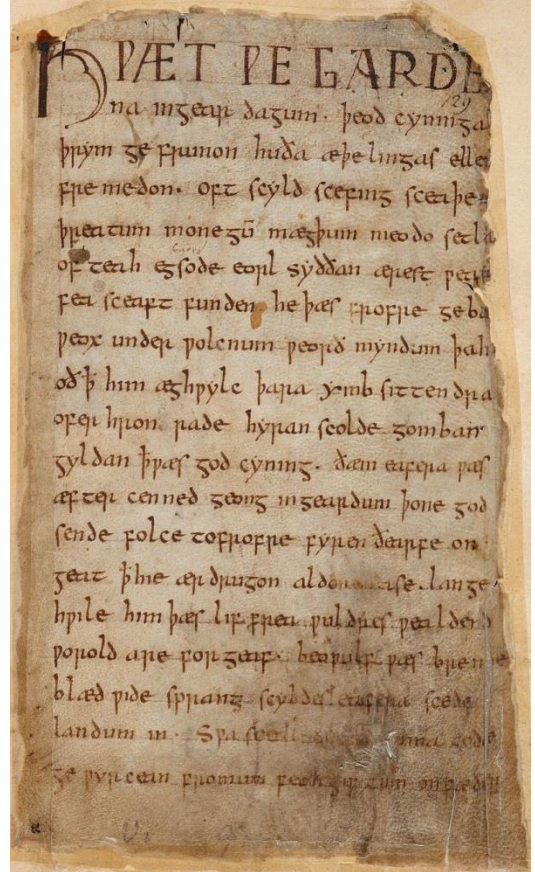
Beowulf

*Text by Kevin Crossley-Holland
Illustrated by Charles Keeping*

Introduction

Beowulf is an old story. It is one of the oldest stories in English. In fact, it is so old that it wasn't even written in modern English. It was written in a language that you would barely recognise as English. It was written in Old English – a language that some people call Anglo-Saxon.

It is thought that the story of Beowulf was originally written down somewhere between 700-1000 AD. You can see the first page of a handwritten copy in the image on the right. Historians aren't sure when the story was first told however, as the copies that were found may have been written many years after the story was first made up. It also dates from a time when most stories were told, or sung, by bards. They did this from memory and did not write them down. One theory is that Beowulf was written in the royal court of King Edgar the Peaceable, but there's no way to be certain.



This version of *Beowulf* was translated and written by a man called Kevin Crossley-Holland, who studied Old English (Anglo-Saxon) for many years.

Beowulf in Old English is a narrative poem. While Kevin Crossley-Holland has not included the rhyming structure of the poem, he has tried to keep some of the rhythm, some of the alliteration and some of the kennings. Kennings are two words that are put together to create a descriptive phrase. For example, whale-road, battle-sweat or heaven-candle. The road that a whale travels is the sea. The sweat produced in battle is blood. The candle in the heavens is the sun.

The story itself tells of a young warrior called Beowulf who belongs to a tribe of people called Geats. The Geats lived in the south of what we now call Sweden. Beowulf hears of the woes of Hrothgar, king of the Danes, whose people are being tormented by a vicious monster called Grendel. Beowulf vows to kill the beast.

Guide to pronunciation

While the story here is retold in modern English, there are a few Anglo-Saxon names for characters, places and even a sword or two.

Anglo-Saxon (or Old English) personal and place names are at first unfamiliar, but are not difficult to pronounce. It's also interesting to note that the closest modern language to Anglo-Saxon is not English, but Swedish. As such, the stress should fall on the first syllable and then fall off, before rising again rather than remaining fairly flat like in English.

Most Anglo-Saxon letters are spoken – most of our silent letters come from Anglo-Saxon words. e.g. our word *knight* comes from the Anglo-Saxon *cnicht* c-ni-ght.

There are a few different sounds to be aware of:

Æ æ = short a ah like in cat

sc = sh

cg = j like in edge

c at the end of a syllable = soft ch like in church

e at the end of a syllable = ay

Beowulf: Bay-oh-wolf

Hygelac: Hidger-lark

Gangleri: Gang-leery

Ecgtheow: Edge-thay-ow

Hrothgar: Hroath-gar

Scyld Scefing: Shild Shay-fing

Beow: Bay-oh

Healfdene: Hay-alph-dayner

Grendel: Gren-del

Geat: Gay-at

Heorot: Hay-or-ot

Unferth: Oon-ferth

Breca: Bray-car

Wealhtheow: Way-al-thee-ow

Leofric: Lay-oh-fritch

Sigemund: Seeg-err-moond

Æschere: Ash-err-er

Hrunting: Hroont-ing

Wiglaf: Weeg-laugh

Nægling: Nag-ling