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978-1-108-04285-7 - The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: According to the Several Original Authorities: Volume 2: Translation

Edited and Translated by Benjamin Thorpe

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Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores, or The Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages, usually referred to as the 'Rolls Series', was an ambitious project first proposed to the British Treasury in 1857 by Sir John Romilly, the Master of the Rolls, and quickly approved for public funding. Its purpose was to publish historical source material covering the period from the arrival of the Romans to the reign of Henry VIII, 'without mutilation or abridgement', starting with the 'most scarce and valuable' texts. A 'correct text' of each work would be established by collating 'the best manuscripts', and information was to be included in every case about the manuscripts used, the life and times of the author, and the work's 'historical credibility', but there would be no additional annotation. The first books were published in 1858, and by the time it was completed in 1896 the series contained 99 titles and 255 volumes. Although many of the works have since been re-edited by modern scholars, the enterprise as a whole stands as a testament to the Victorian revival of interest in the middle ages.

### The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

Benjamin Thorpe (1781/2–1870) was a scholar of Old English and Member of the Royal Academy of Sciences at Munich. Through his work, he sought to promote the study of the old vernacular, against the trend of scholarly apathy towards Anglo-Saxon literature. One of his greatest contributions was this two-volume edition, published as part of the Rolls Series in 1861, of the oldest and most important chronological accounts of Anglo-Saxon affairs. Covering the period from Julius Caesar's invasion of Britain to around the accession of Henry II in 1154, this volume is a translation of the chronicle into English, drawn from seven manuscripts and including notes. As none are the original, the authorship is unknown, although Thorpe argues that several elements indicate the influence of King Alfred (848/9–899) upon the chronicle's compilation. The text provides rich insights into Old English language, dialect and history.

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# The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

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BENJAMIN THORPE



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[More information](#)

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RERUM BRITANNICARUM MEDII ÆVI  
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OR

CHRONICLES AND MEMORIALS OF GREAT BRITAIN  
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[More information](#)

---

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE CHRONICLES AND MEMORIALS  
OF  
GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND  
DURING THE MIDDLE AGES.

PUBLISHED BY THE AUTHORITY OF HER MAJESTY'S TREASURY, UNDER THE  
DIRECTION OF THE MASTER OF THE ROLLS.

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ON the 26th of January 1857, the Master of the Rolls submitted to the Treasury a proposal for the publication of materials for the History of this Country from the Invasion of the Romans to the Reign of Henry VIII.

The Master of the Rolls suggested that these materials should be selected for publication under competent editors without reference to periodical or chronological arrangement, without mutilation or abridgment, preference being given, in the first instance, to such materials as were most scarce and valuable.

He proposed that each chronicle or historical document to be edited should be treated in the same way as if the editor were engaged on an *Editio Princeps*; and for this purpose the most correct text should be formed from an accurate collation of the best MSS.

To render the work more generally useful, the Master of the Rolls suggested that the editor should give an account of the MSS. employed by him, of their age and their peculiarities; that he should add to the work a brief account of the life and times of the author, and any remarks necessary to explain the chronology; but no other note or comment was to be allowed, except what might be necessary to establish the correctness of the text.

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[More information](#)

4

The works to be published in octavo, separately, as they were finished; the whole responsibility of the task resting upon the editors, who were to be chosen by the Master of the Rolls with the sanction of the Treasury.

The Lords of Her Majesty's Treasury, after a careful consideration of the subject, expressed their opinion in a Treasury Minute, dated February 9, 1857, that the plan recommended by the Master of the Rolls "was well calculated for the accomplishment of this important national object, in an effectual and satisfactory manner, within a reasonable time, and provided proper attention be paid to economy, in making the detailed arrangements, without unnecessary expense."

They expressed their approbation of the proposal that each chronicle and historical document should be edited in such a manner as to represent with all possible correctness the text of each writer, derived from a collation of the best MSS., and that no notes should be added, except such as were illustrative of the various readings. They suggested, however, that the preface to each work should contain, in addition to the particulars proposed by the Master of the Rolls, a biographical account of the author, so far as authentic materials existed for that purpose, and an estimate of his historical credibility and value.

*Rolls House,  
December 1857.*

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