

Pre-ASNC Reading Suggestions

Are you a fresher or potential fresher looking to do ASNC? Are you thinking about doing some reading around the subject to find out where your interests lie/get some inspiration/put something on your personal statement/ want to deepen your knowledge/ just want something to read? Fear not! We, the current ASNCs, have put together a list of books that we have found to be particularly interesting, useful and fairly accessible introductions to the various subjects covered in the first year of ASNC.

There is an official reading list provided by the department which is well worth checking out as well (link: <http://www.asnc.cam.ac.uk/currentstudents/undergraduates/reading-lists/intro-reading.htm>) but some of the books on it can be difficult to get hold of, hence this unofficial alternative.

Please do remember that this is **all optional extra reading**. **Do not try to read everything on this list!** Several are quite hard to get hold of and the ASNC library has them anyway so don't spend a fortune (and do check to see if they're available online). You will have plenty of opportunities for reading (and substantial library resources) if/when you come to Cambridge. The ASNC course requires no prior knowledge about the subject at all. Any knowledge you have is considered a bonus, so **do not stress about pre-reading**. 😊

Anglo-Saxon History

'*A Brief History of the Anglo-Saxons*' by Geoffrey Hindley

'*The Anglo-Saxons*' – James Campbell (Very valuable overview)

The King in the North – Max Adams (I love this book! Lots of great research, well written, and on a delightfully obscure corner of ASNC)

The Year 1000 – Robert Lacey and Danny Danziger (take its information with a pinch of salt, but it's an easy basic read)

Scandinavian History

The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings – Peter Sawyer (Very valuable overview)

A Brief History of the Vikings – Jonathan Clements

The Penguin Historical Atlas of the Vikings – John Haywood (Basic but a good starter)

Some wonderful person has put a lot of information about rune stones onto Wikipedia, which is worth a look. (Forget what you were taught in secondary school, Wikipedia is now your friend! Don't quote it in essays, but it's great for basic overviews and really fun to follow interesting ASNC-y rabbit trails.)

History of the Gaelic-Speaking Peoples

A Brief History of the Celts' – Peter Berresford Ellis

Alba: The Gaelic Kingdom of Scotland AD 800-1124 – Stephen T. Driscoll

History of the Brittonic-Speaking Peoples

The Welsh Kings – Kari Maund

From Pictland to Alba – A. Woolf

Old English Literature

(most of these are anthologies that overlap a lot, so you don't need to go out and buy all of them!)

Anglo-Saxon Poetry – S.A.J. Bradley (he's verbose and old-fashioned but it's a classic.

Includes Beowulf.)

Beowulf and Other Stories – Richard North and Joe Allard

Anglo-Saxon World – Kevin Crossley Holland

Beowulf – translated many times. I would choose Tolkien’s translation over Heaney’s as it is MUCH more understandable, but it’s up to you.

Old Norse Literature

Longman Anthology of Old English, Old Icelandic and Anglo-Norman Literatures – Richard North and Joe Allard

The Poetic Edda –Carolyn Larrington (Highly recommended! It’s reasonably easy and a really fun read)

Snorra Edda – Anthony Faulkes (Less of an easy read, so try dipping into it at first. A basic book of Norse Mythology might be a good place to start as they tend to rely heavily on the two Eddas.)

The Sagas of Icelanders, ed Smiley. (It’s massive, so perhaps start with the Vinland Sagas (The Saga of Eirik the Red, and the Saga of the Greenlanders) as they are fun and fairly short, as are Hrafnkel’s Saga Frey’s Goði and The Saga of the Confederates)

Several translations of various sagas (along with a treasure trove of articles and essays) can be found for free on the Viking Society for Northern Research’s website: <http://www.vsnrweb-publications.org.uk/>

Old Irish Literature

The Táin – Thomas Kinsella

Early Irish Myths and Sagas – Jeffrey Gantz

Medieval Welsh Literature

The Mabinogion – Sioned Davies

Geoffrey of Monmouth’s History of the Kings of Britain

Look up Wikipedia articles on Y Gododdin, Englynion, Taliesin... whatever catches your interest.

Insular Latin

Age of Bede – Farmer and Webb

The Bible – (You don’t have to believe in it to read it)

The Bible in Western Culture – Dyas and Hughes (A good alternative to reading the Bible itself)

Wikipedia: the prose *Life of Cuthbert*, *The Life of Guthlac*, Gildas’ *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae*, Aldhelm’s *Enigmata*, Letters of St Boniface, Adomnan’s *Life of Columba*, Alcuin – the letters and the poems (*O mea cella* comes recommended).

Paleography

Anglo-Saxon Art – Leslie Webster

The Lindisfarne Gospels – J. Backhouse

Early Medieval Manuscripts – Michelle Brown

Wikipedia is your friend again here – try looking up rune stones, the Franks Casket, manuscripts, etc.

(Do be aware when looking up runes on the internet that a lot of the pages you get will be about modern uses/interpretations of runes, which can be fascinating, but don’t always have much basis in historical evidence. An actual book might be more informative about the historical use of runes. I found Martin Findell’s book *Runes* at the British Museum, and it’s a good little guide.)

Movies and Light Relief

(this section is obviously absolutely vital to your academic career)

The Thirteenth Warrior (movie)

Vikings (TV show) (Have fun playing spot-the-historical-inaccuracies, but they include some of the original languages, which is cool)

The Secret of Kells (movie)

The Saxon Series – Series of books by Bernard Cornwell, and the BBC is making a TV adaptation. (I have heard both good and bad things about these!)

Horrible Histories have done several ASNC-period videos. Check out the Funky Monks' Song, 'Literally: the Viking Song', 'We Sell Any Monk', and the one about Alfred the Great.

If you watch no other film version of Beowulf, watch this one: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EauaQbpCAtA>

There has been a lot of scholarship about the various ASNC subjects over the years, and we couldn't fit it all on here, so anything that you can get your hands on and you find interesting is absolutely worth a read! If it's that good, maybe write it down and remember it for the next time someone is trying to update/remake this suggestions list...

Aside from reading, go to museums, cathedrals, archaeological sites, archives, random little churches in the middle of nowhere that happen to have early inscriptions... once you start looking, ASNC is everywhere. 😊