

# ASNC Unofficial Freshers Guide 2011

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Hail, fellow ASNC! Herein lies a selection of articles that will hopefully aid you for the coming weeks as you settle into Cambridge life as a student of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic. The first things you're going to have to think about, however, are your explanations, as you will soon be asked by dozens of your fellow freshers 'what' exactly ASNC is, and why exactly you study it. Hopefully this guide will go some way to answering that question. I usually stick with the user-friendly – 'it's a bit like Lord of the Rings, but real.' Don't get too bogged down in the Germanic Jargon just yet – you'll scare people.

Enjoy!

## The ASNC Society

According to ancient lore the ASNC society was founded to prevent students from doing too much work and to promote such activities as trips to Ely cathedral, ASNC lunch, pub attendance and mead drinking. We are the student-run part of the department, organising everything from speaker meetings in which we invite scholars from around the UK to come and speak to us on topics of interest, to punting trips and pub meets. The basic idea is to give you an opportunity to get to know other ASNCs with whom you can share your enthusiasm for the obscure (often frowned upon by college friends). If you wish to get involved please come along to as many events as possible in your first term and a half. Part way through Lent term the entire present committee will step down, allowing you all an opportunity to become part of the society executive.

To keep up on society events and to discover handy links for fun and for study, check out our exciting website: <http://www.srcf.ucam.org/asnac/>

## Society Events

The society runs a series of different events. Our two core weekly events are ASNC lunch and ASNC pub. ASNC lunch happens from 1-2 pm once a week on a Monday in the departmental common room, and it involves a member of the society picking up all sorts of goodies from Sainsbury's and bringing them in for us to tuck into. It costs £2 for members, or £2.50 for non-members, and it's not uncommon for senior members of the department to drop in and join us.

The other cornerstone of the society is ASNC pub, held every Friday night at the Castle

Inn from 5 pm till closing time. There we gather to relax, chat, and generally celebrate the arrival of the weekend. Again it is not unheard of for lecturers to drop by for a pint or two (or even buy us a pint or two!). Feel free to drop by at any point in the evening, even if only to quickly say 'hi' or have a quick drink—only a particularly hard core of pub goers regularly attends for the full six hours.

Beyond these events we also run a series of annual events. Each year we have an ASNC trip—previous visits have included Glastonbury, Bede's world in Jarrow, Chester, Ely, and this year a road-trip to Brittany is even on the cards. We also hold an annual black tie dinner in Lent term, which is great opportunity to do some fine dining (and drink some fine wine and port) with fellow ASNaCs.

### **Gesta Asnacorum**

'The deeds of the ASNaCs' (Gesta Asnacorum) is a tongue-in-cheek publication run by the society that comes out twice a year, filled with articles essentially taking the piss out of the subjects we study, the department, and (of course) the society itself. Common approaches in articles are to parody either the literature or history we study, the academic writings within the field, or our weekly supervision work, though drawings, quotations and much much more are also included. It is unashamedly scurrilous and always good fun to read. If you are interested in publishing something (or even simply in finding out more about how it works) feel free to email the society's Gesta editors on [gesta@gmx.com](mailto:gesta@gmx.com)! Check out some back issues on the society website.

### **Student Profile: Sara Anderson**



Name: Sara Anderson

College: Queens

Favourite Paper: Palaeography

Favourite Lecturer and Why: It's a toss up between Prof Keynes and Dr Dance - comedy in lectures always helps stave off the week 5 blues!

Best thing about your first year studying ASNC? Meeting other like-minded (slightly strange) fellow Dark Age enthusiasts

Worst thing about your first year studying ASNC? PAT tests. (Preliminary Assessment Tests, as they're known, crop up for you first years at the end of Lent term. They count for nothing and mean very little in terms of your degree, but they're enough of a pain to ruin the last week of Lent term for you if you let them stress you out!)

What's a typical day in the life of an ASNC? Get up, go to a lecture, work on supervision essays/translations, go to the pub... Same as many other arts subjects to be honest!

### A Quick Word From Your Social Secretary – Adam Kirton



Skip this little excerpt by all means; you may think you've got more important things to do than read my ramblings, but before you turn the page I implore you to listen to the wisdom of a man who lives and breathes ASNC!

Who knows, you may find it useful.

So, just who the Hell am I, and what's it got to do with you?

My name's Adam, and if you've not worked it out from the first sentence I'm from a delightful little place called Manchester, and it just so happens that I'm the current social secretary for our brilliant ASNC society. What that means for you lucky people is that it's my job to work with our committee to organise parties, pub quizzes, picnics... Piss-ups basically.

And trust me; I'm dedicated to this job.

There'll be plenty of events in this term alone, including a Treasure hunt around Cambridge on 9th October, a pub crawl on the 11th, a pub quiz on the 12th, a trip to Ely on 15th, and a trip to Lola Lo (one of Cambridge's new clubs) on 16th. Full details will reach you all soon, don't worry!

All that's left now is for me to offer you a few pearls of wisdom, which may just save your life one day! (Or not, it's not that bad in Cambridge.)

“The foolish man lies awake all night and worries about things; he's tired when the morning comes and everything is just as bad as it was.”

- In other words, Chill out people! Don't work too hard or you'll fry your brains out! Find a pace (whether drinking or working,) that suits you and stick to it.

“The Heron of forgetfulness hovers over the ale-drinking; he steals men's wits”

The trick is to balance your hangovers with your work and lectures! Once you've sussed how to do this you'll be fine. (And avoid Sainsbury's basics Vodka if you don't want to pickle your insides!)

“A man shouldn't hold onto the cup but drink mead (or whatever your poison) in moderation ... no man will blame you for impoliteness if you go early to bed.”

So, know your limits ASNCs!!! And learn when to say 'No'. No one's gonna be happy

if they've got to clean up your mess.

“The foolish man thinks he knows everything if he takes refuge in a corner.”  
Basically guys and gals, don't be a recluse! Get out there, chat to people, make friends, have fun! These are supposed to be the best days of your life, so make the most of them and enjoy yourselves! You're only here once.

That about wraps it up from me! I hope to see you all soon, and remember folks, don't be a stranger!

### **THE 10 COMMANDMENTS OF ASNC** – Caroline Purse

1. Mead shall be drunk regularly and only ever from a drinking horn or suitably ancient-looking goblet. No other vessels are deemed worthy of such a drink.
2. Time spent hissing, spitting and gurgling whilst attempting to speak any of the ASNaC languages is best done away from other students, who will look at you as if you are mad.
3. Thou shalt attend ASNaC pub unless otherwise engaged in deciphering insular cursive minuscule handwriting, engrossed in the latest edition of 'Gesta Asnacorum' or pondering Old English riddles. No other excuse will be tolerated.
4. Get thee accustomed to people asking 'So what are you going to do with that?' whenever you tell them the name of your degree. Pre-prepared answers are also advised in response to questions such as 'What made you choose that?' and 'So what is it that you do, exactly?'
5. Thou wilt, at some point, get lost in the University Library while looking up a particularly obscure tome. Do not panic: someone will find you... eventually.
6. Events taking place after 1250 are considered 'modern' and therefore not real history. Don't expect any trustworthy sources and be prepared to get excited about charters, law-codes and coins.
7. Never ask Professor Keynes to 'briefly outline' an issue for you unless you have a couple of hours going spare.
8. A healthy knowledge of 'The Lord of the Rings', the Arthurian Legends and various not-so-accurate renditions of 'Beowulf' is actively encouraged. Furthermore, programmes such as 'Horrible Histories', 'Merlin' and 'Game of Thrones' do not count as procrastination, merely an extension of ASNaC into the modern social consciousness.
9. ASNaC lunch is without doubt the best meal you will have each week - do not miss it.
10. You are almost guaranteed a lesson at the top of the lecture block – excellent if you are in training to climb Everest, not so fun if you aren't.

## **Profile: Caroline Purse**



Name: Caroline Purse

College: Clare

Favourite Paper: Medieval Welsh Language and Literature

Favourite Lecturer and Why: Dr Paul Russell. You just have to listen to him getting very excited about Welsh triads or reciting Medieval Welsh fairytales to realise that, in accordance with popular opinion among ASNaCs, he is Merlin reincarnated.

Best thing about your first year studying ASNC? It's quite a small department so you get to know people who are as interested (and hopefully interesting) as you are from different colleges. There is a really good social element and a fantastic ASNaC Society which organises lots of fun events so there is a great feeling of camaraderie which you don't find in many other subjects.

Worst thing about your first year studying ASNC? Some of the books which we need for essays can be difficult to get hold of, and I don't find that my college library is very useful for the more detailed books.

What's the typical day in the life of an ASNaC?

There are never any 9am lectures for 1st and 2nd years, so getting up in the morning is never too much of a struggle, and there is normally an hour or two in which you can finish that translation or grammar exercise which has been left to the last minute! After either a language class, a literature lecture or a history lecture, I tend to go to the English Faculty library (which contains our ASNaC library) or the University Library to collect the books which I need from my reading list to peruse for helpful information for my essay. I will normally spend roughly 4-6 hours a day reading, taking notes, doing translation work for language modules, and writing an essay. This may sound a lot, but most of the course is based on us making the effort to do independent research as there are only normally about 9 contact hours in the week anyway, and it doesn't feel as if the work is overwhelming. There is always time for some relaxation with friends at the end of the day either in the college bar, one of Cambridge's nightclubs, or more likely for ASNaCs, at the pub.

### **The Top 5 ASNC Beverages - Will Addison –**

A fittingly large chunk of this guide has devoted to one of the most important subjects an ASNC must master: drinking. Will Addison, in his official capacity as 'Officer for the Provision of Cider and Mead', tells us why...

As any studious ASNC will tell you, the only way to really understand the importance of feasting and drinking within early medieval culture is to engage in some of your own! The banquet hall was the central location for interaction, entertainment and merriment in Dark Age society, not completely unlike your favourite pub. And as well as the 10th century equivalent of a quiet pint, there is also mention of some monumental binges that would definitely herald lecture-abandoning hangovers (Thor nearly drained the sea, and Egil could out-rink the Ferretz on his own).

Accordingly we pay homage to this ubiquitous facet of the ASNC course with a weekly pub session. Other events throughout the year will often involve some kind of drinking horn (of which size matters not) and everyone trying to get at least as much alcohol into their mouths as around it. As cider and mead provision officer, it's my job to make sure that barrel and horn never run dry!

Therefore, here are the top 5 ASNC beverages of choice:

**Mead** - Sweet ambrosia quaffed by gods and men alike, mead is the quintessential ASNC tipple. This honeyed wine was the object sworn upon by kings and their retainers, and even had its own origin myth dealing with a man made of spit, a pair of murderous dwarves and the birth of poetry itself. Exciting stuff. We ASNCs will get hold of a few bottles of this golden amber for specific events, so expect to be handed a piece of cow (or very possibly some sort of goat) with mead sloshing about in it very soon. Don't worry, it's not some weird initiation you get bullied into, and it tastes as good as the Vikings say it does. Guaranteed to bring you one step closer to Valhalla!

**Ale** - Although perhaps not as elegant or emblematic as mead, beer and ale have an important position as the stalwart brew for any pub-faring ASNC. The Castle, the aptly named venue for ASNC pub and the hotly anticipated second ASNC pub quiz, has a wide range of real ales and cosy surroundings to enjoy them in. It's also situated on Cambridge's only hill. If you don't feel like hiking up a molehill, Cambridge is punctuated by a number of decent pubs serving real ale for that much needed post-library pint. The Elm Tree, just across Parker's Piece, also serves mead as well as putting on folk nights so you can get your jig on.

**Old Rosie** - Technically Old Rosie is a cider, but such an alluring yet dangerous mistress needs a whole entry to herself. You'll find her brooding in the depths of The Maypole, a popular hangout tucked well away from the tourists down the road from the ADC bar. Weighing in at nearly 8%, after some clever maths we have ascertained that one pint of this seductive scrumpy is often the equivalent of two contenders. Therefore, unit for unit, she's quite affordable. This saucy wench has misled many an innocent wayfarer, yet she also has the potential to turn an average night into something truly special. Approach with fortitude, courage and a strong stomach.

**Jagermeister** - Perhaps not a particularly ASNC themed drink, Jagermeister has certainly cemented itself amongst students as one of the best routes to oblivion, especially when combined with the life-restoring properties of cheap energy drinks. Whether it be after 20 minutes waiting at the Wetherspoon's bar, or whilst concentrating on not being trampled by the seething, roiling masses in any of Cambridge's nightclubs, often you will see an alarming number of jagerbombs lined up ready to be bolted down by sweaty clubbers. Indeed a background in medieval military tactics is probably quite useful when it comes to ordering a drink on a Wednesday night in Cindies: power through that shield wall and get your share!

**Beer Festivals** - Ok, I cheated, this isn't one drink but a vast collection of beers, ales, ciders, perrys and even some mead stalls. Odin will forgive me. Oktoberfest and the summer and winter festivals are run by CAMRA (Campaign for Real Ale), and although a little pricey for the average poverty-stricken student living off noodles and biscuits, they're worth a visit. Would that it were still viable to raid abbeys! Award winning ales and local brews are plentiful, and the festivals are also home to an apparently equally splendid cheese competition to accompany the swilling of many an exotic beverage. The summer festival in particular is magnificent, being the third largest in the country and serving a record-breaking 90,000 pints this year alone!

**Student Profile: Hannah Malcom**



Name: Hannah Malcom College: Fitzwilliam

Favourite Paper: It's got 'o be Anglo-Saxon History.

Favourite Lecturer and why: Prof Keynes, for his frequent tangents and the fact he has a personal 'map-maker' for his lectures.

Best thing about your first year studying ASNC? Enthusiasm of the department supervisors  
Worst thing about your first year studying ASNC? No books in college library!

What's a typical day in the life of an ASNC? Get up- not before 9, as all my papers don't start till 10. Did I pick my subjects based on their timetable? Who knows. Head to a lecture, then off to UL to get out some obscure sounding titles from my next reading list, preferably the ones which only have one chapter necessary in them. Back to College, go to cafe to read/chat/complain about my next essay deadline (women and Cambridge students can multi-task) and explain for the thousandth time what an ASNaC is and why anyone would do it. My current line is that it's kind of like studying classics as it's multi-disciplinary but a few hundred years on. I confirm to someone that I am not in fact a hobbit despite my suspect height and subject choice and cycle back to the Sidgwick site for another lecture. Back to college again, and it's essay writing time, between choir rehearsals and meetings for various committees. Lots of people write their essays all in one go. I prefer to do it bit by bit during the week to prevent 4am writing sessions. Go and catch bits of a jazz night or film showing in college, and I'm done for the day. Sweet dreams!

**Life after ASNaC...** - Stephanie Rolt

Yes, believe it or not your three years as an ASNaC will fly by and soon you'll have to face life in the real world! But do not worry, a degree in ASNaC will equip you well for

the world of work (honest!), or indeed post-graduate study, which many ASNaCs also go on to do.

I graduated this year with a degree in ASNaC from Girton College, and in September I started work as an archives trainee at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Kew. Although I don't exactly encounter Anglo-Saxon Charters or the Old Norse Sagas on a regular basis (although it could be a possibility in my chosen profession!), I'm really enjoying the job and feel that the skills I picked up over the last three years are really helping me. Studying palaeography has helped me to read the intricate handwriting used in letters from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries preserved in Kew's collections, and the research I had to do towards my third year dissertation has been useful in preparing me for looking into people's enquiries about individuals who may have worked at Kew in the past, which requires a certain amount of "detective work".

But, despite having graduated, I'm certainly not going to loosen my ties to the department and the wonderful people I met. As a wise ASNaC once said, "Once an ASNaC, always an ASNaC", and through Alumni events, Black Tie Dinners, Conferences and Garden Parties, I intend to always remain one!