

## Bede and the History of Early England

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**Start date** 26 February 2016                      **End date** 28 February 2016

**Venue**                      Madingley Hall  
                                    Madingley  
                                    Cambridge

**Tutor**                      Professor Edward James                      **Course code** 1516NRX089

**Director of Programmes**                      Emma Jennings

**For further information on this course, please contact**                      Public Programme Co-ordinator, Clare Kerr  
[clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk](mailto:clare.kerr@ice.cam.ac.uk) or 01223 746237

**To book**                      See: [www.ice.cam.ac.uk](http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk) or telephone 01223 746262

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### Tutor biography

Edward James is Emeritus Professor of Medieval History at University College Dublin. He has held Chairs of Medieval History at both Reading and UCD; before that he was in the Department of History at the University of York, where he directed the Centre for Medieval Studies between 1990 and 1995. He has held research professorships at Rutgers and Sydney.

His DPhil from Oxford was in early medieval archaeology, and he has always emphasised the importance of archaeology for understanding the history of this period, and vice versa. He has published numerous articles on the archaeology and history of early medieval Europe, focussing on France. His first book was *The Merovingian Archaeology of South-West Gaul* (1977), which was followed by an edited book on Visigothic Spain (1980), *The Origins of France* (1982), *The Franks* (1988), *Britain in the First Millennium* (2000) and *Europe's Barbarians* (2009). His translation of Gregory of Tours' *Life of the Fathers* was the first book to appear in Liverpool University Press's Texts in Translation series (1985); he is currently working on a book on Gregory of Tours. Hardly a year went by during his teaching career when he did not teach either Gregory of Tours or Bede.

In another life he is a science fiction and fantasy fan. He published *Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century* with Oxford UP in 1994, and with Farah Mendlesohn edited *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction* (2003), which won a Hugo Award at the 2005 World Science Fiction Convention, and *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature* (2012). Their book *A Short History of Fantasy* appeared in 2009. In 2014 he prepared an extensive website on "Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of the Great War". He is currently Chair of the Science Fiction Foundation.

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## Course programme

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### Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00	Dinner
20:30 – 22:00	<i>Who was Bede?</i>
22:00	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### Saturday

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	<i>Bede, Gildas, and the Anglo-Saxon Invasions</i>
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	<i>Bede and the Conversion</i>
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 16:00	Free
16:00	Tea
16:30 – 18:00	<i>Bede and the Northumbrian kings</i>
18:00 – 18:30	Free
18:30	Dinner
20:00 – 21:30	<i>Bede and “the Celtic Church”</i>
21:30	Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### Sunday

07:30	Breakfast
09:00 – 10:30	<i>Bede and the church of Theodore and Wilfrid</i>
10:30	Coffee
11:00 – 12:30	<i>Bede and eighth-century monasticism</i>
12:45	Lunch

**The course will disperse after lunch**

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## Course syllabus

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### Aims:

- Outline the history of the Anglo-Saxons from their arrival in Britain in the fifth century to the death of Bede (AD 735)
- Discuss the ways in which a critical reading of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* contributes to our understanding of the early history of England
- Introduce the critical assessment of other forms of evidence for this period

### Content:

Much of what we know about the first two or more centuries of Anglo-Saxon domination in Britain still comes from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. What were his sources, and how did he use them? How far is the picture that he gives us shaped or even distorted by his own concerns and interests? Scholars over the last generation have learned how to read between Bede's lines, and to listen to his silences as well as to his words. This course will examine the whole text of Bede's *History*, trying to understand what Bede tells us, and what he doesn't, and adding to it what we know from other sources (written texts and archaeology) where appropriate. The first introductory session will be about what we know of Bede himself (c.673-735), from his own writings and those of others, and will focus in particular upon his *Letter to Egbert*. Thereafter the sessions will follow the story from Book I (the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in Britain), through the history of the conversion, up to the uncertainty of his own times: the troubled kingdom of Northumbria in the early eighth century.

### Presentation of the course:

Each class will begin with a short lecture, followed by a class discussion of the relevant section of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. Everyone should come to the classes with a copy of the Penguin Classic translation by Leo Sherley-Price, *not* in the first edition but in the version corrected by D.H. Farmer, which has Farmer's translation of Bede's *Letter to Egbert* at the end of the book.

### Outcomes:

**As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:**

- Demonstrate a knowledge of the main outline of early Anglo-Saxon history
- Critically read Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and other sources for early Anglo-Saxon history
- Begin to understand the gaps in our knowledge and the problems in understanding early Anglo-Saxon history

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## Reading and resources list

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Everyone should buy, bring along to the weekend, and preferably *read beforehand*, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. It is available in various translations, but the recommended one is the Penguin Classic version, translated by Leo Sherley-Price, but in the edition revised by D.H. Farmer. Any version printed after 1990 should be fine (and should contain the *Letter to Egbert* at the end); it is a text very easily found second-hand as well as new.

**Listed below are a number of texts that might be of interest for future reference, but do not need to be bought or consulted for the course:**

Blair, Peter Hunter. *The World of Bede* (Cambridge UP, 1970/1990)

Brown, George Hardin, *A Companion to Bede* (Boydell Press. 2009)

Campbell, James, ed. *The Anglo-Saxons*. New Edition (Penguin, 1991)

Darby, Peter. *Bede and the End of Time* (Ashgate, 2012)

DeGregorio, Scott, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Bede* (Cambridge UP 2010)

Farmer, D.H. *The Age of Bede* (Penguin Classics, 1998)

Fleming, Robin. *Britain after Rome: the Fall and Rise, 400 to 1070* (Penguin, 2011)

Higham, Nick. *(Re-)Reading Bede: The Ecclesiastical History in Context* (Routledge, 2006)

James, Edward. *Britain in the First Millennium* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2000)

Rollason, D.W. *Northumbria, 500-1100* (Cambridge UP 2008)

Wormald, Patrick, ed. Stephen Baxter, *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Christian Society and Its Historian* (Blackwell, 2006).

Wright, J. Robert. *A Companion to Bede: A Reader's Commentary of the Ecclesiastical History of The English* (Eerdman's, 2008)

Many of Bede's other writings have now been translated, mostly in Liverpool University Press's "Translated Texts for Historians" series (TTH)

Connolly, Seán, ed. *Bede: On the Temple* (TTH 21, 1995)

Connolly, Seán, ed. *Bede: On Tobit and on the Canticle of Habakkuk* (Four Courts, 1997)

DeGregorio, Scott, ed. *Bede: On Ezra and Nehemiah* (TTH 47, 2006)

Foley, W. Trent and Arthur G. Holder, eds. *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany* (TTH 28, 1999)

Holder, Arthur G. ed. *Bede" On the Tabernacle* (TTH18, 1994)

Martin, Laurence T., ed. *Bede: Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Liturgical Press, 1989)

Kendall, Calvin B. ed., *Bede: On Genesis* (TTH 48, 2008)

Kendall, Calvin B. and F. Wallis, eds, *Bede: On the Nature of Things and On Times* (TTH 56, 2010)

Wallis, Faith, ed. *Bede: The Reckoning of Time* (TTH 29, 1999)

Wallis, Faith, ed. *Bede: Commentary on Revelation* (TTH 58, 2013)

Bertram Colgrave published translations of various other contemporary texts:

Lives of Saint Cuthbert (1940); Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac (1956); The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus (1927); The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great (1968). (All Cambridge UP).

**Note** Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

*Information correct as of:* 09 February 2016