

Anglo-Saxon charters and 'pragmatic literacy' in Old English
THREE CLASSIC EDITIONS AVAILABLE AGAIN FROM CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

ANGLO-SAXON CHARTERS IN THE VERNACULAR

In 1912, Hector Munro Chadwick became Elrington and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon in the University of Cambridge, in succession to W. W. Skeat. The centenary of the beginning of his 30-year tenure of the chair (1912–41) falls next year.

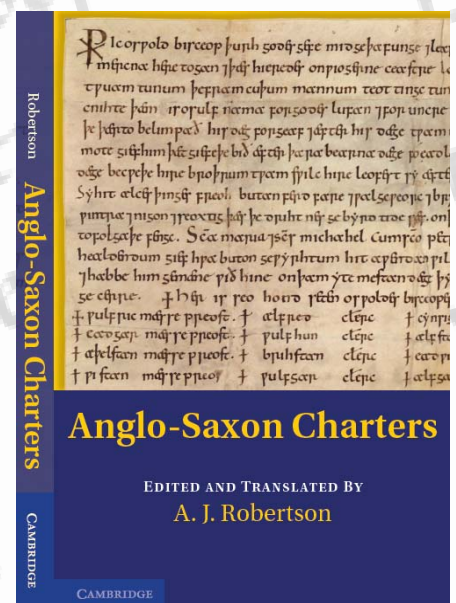
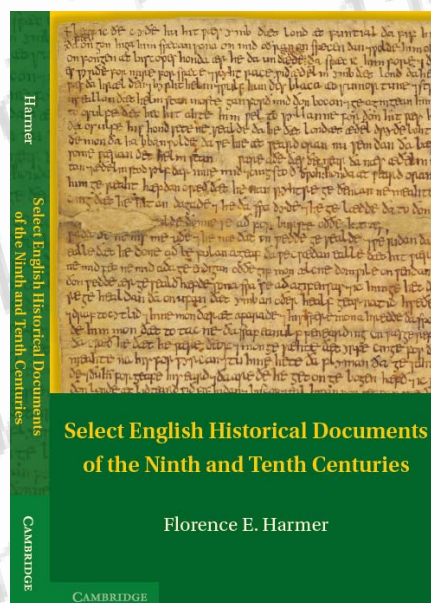
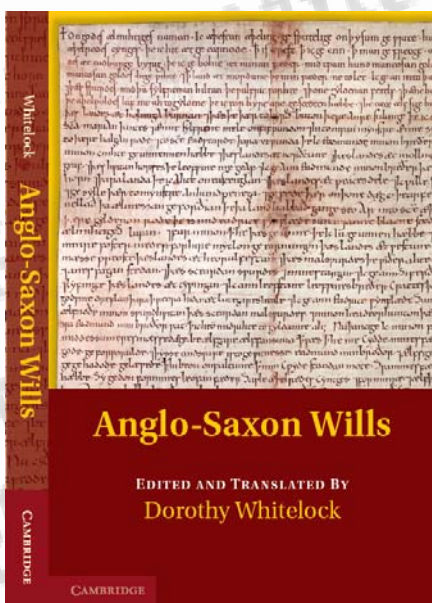
During his period of office, Chadwick set three of his students to work on producing new editions, with translations and commentaries, of parts of the surviving corpus of about 200 Anglo-Saxon documents in the vernacular.

The charters were published by Cambridge University Press in three volumes, over a period of 25 years. F. E. Harmer's *Select English Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* appeared first, in 1914; Dorothy Whitelock's edition of *Anglo-Saxon Wills* followed next, in 1930; and A. J. Robertson's *Anglo-Saxon Charters* brought up the rear, in 1939.

Their contents do not overlap; and they were complemented some years later by Harmer's *Anglo-Saxon Writs* (Manchester, 1952).

The three Cambridge volumes bear little outward indication that they belonged to a single enterprise; and the form of publication has since hindered appreciation of these texts as part of a single body of material. The charters comprise records of various kinds, ranging from royal and 'private' (non-royal) grants, episcopal leases, and wills, to documents generated by the processes of litigation (including the 'Fonthill Letter'), lists, surveys, and farming memoranda. As a group, the documents reveal much about the use of Old English for purposes of government and administration between c. 800 and c. 1100.

All three of these volumes are now made available again, separately or as a set, with introductions by Simon Keynes and with concordances which will enable users to find their way to all that has been published on these documents up to the present day.



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