

TRAVELS THROUGH TIME

Peter Moore: Hello and welcome to *Travels Through Time*, the podcast made in partnership with Jordan Lloyd and ColorGraph

[Intro music]

Peter Moore: Hello, I'm Peter Moore. We have an absolutely brilliant episode for you today, we're traveling back 1000 years with one of the world's favourite historical novelists.

[Music]

Peter Moore: Thirty-one years ago, a long and curious historical novel was published called *The Pillars of the Earth*. The book revolved around an intoxicating dream: the ambition of a community to build a magnificent Cathedral. The book was set in the 12th century and it had a vibrant cast of characters. There was the mason Tom Builder, Aliena, Jack, William Hamley, perhaps some of these names will be familiar to you already, but they really caught the imagination of a generation. The book was bought by the million, *The Pillars of the Earth* came to define the idea of an epic and it is now established as a masterpiece of narrative writing. We're very fortunate and very excited that the author of that book Ken Follett is our guest today, on *Travels Through Time*. The writer of novels like *The Eye of the Needle* and *World Without End*, Ken's career has yielded many number one and international bestsellers. He's now back with one of the most anticipated books imaginable. It's a prequel to *The Pillars of the Earth*. It's set in that same southern English landscape and it's set at the turn of the last millennium. The book is called *The Evening and the Morning*. Thanks to Ken's publishers, we have a couple of first edition hardback copies of *The Evening and the Morning* to give away to *Travels Through Time* listeners. To be in with a chance of winning one, all you have to do is head to our website, tttpodcast.com, and sign up for our newsletter. But first of all, I hope you'll join me and Ken on a tour back into the past. As ever I gave him the chance to travel back to a specific year and to explore it in three telling scenes.

Peter Moore: Welcome to the podcast, Ken, it's a real pleasure to be talking to you.

Ken Follett: I'm very glad to be here.

Peter Moore: All right. Today, we're going to spend a bit of time talking about your new book *The Evening and the Morning*, which is a wonderful new novel I've been engrossed in over the last few days. And we're going to do that through the prism as ever, the *Travels Through Time* format where we go back in time. But first of all, I wanted to ask you a few introductory questions. So right at the start of *The Evening and the Morning*, you have a lovely poised introductory piece. You write, "when the Roman Empire declined, Britain went backwards. As the Roman villas crumbled, the people built one room wooden dwellings without chimneys. The technology of Roman pottery, important for storing food, was mostly lost. Literacy declined. This period is sometimes called the dark ages and progress was painfully slow for 500 years. Then, at last, things started to change." Is this the fundamental attraction of the time that it's the beginning of something magnificent and something new?

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Ken Follett: Yes, you're absolutely right. And I always look for moments in history that I can see as turning points. And I think this was, round about the year 1000, was the moment when people, as it were, looked up from the mud and slime of the Dark Ages and began to have new aspirations. Of course, they didn't fulfil their aspirations. One of the themes of *The Evening and the Morning* is the law and who it serves. And who's subject to the law. In the 11th century, no country in Europe had what we now call the Rule of Law, but people began to aspire to it and those aspirations then created conflict, and that's the kind of thing that is great for me to make a story out of.

Peter Moore: Yeah, this is the sense of something which came through in *The Pillars of the Earth*, I remember reading that many years ago, but even more so now, that one of the great actual Ken Follett characters, I think, is the outlaw, who's often about to jump out of some ditch in the middle of a forest and take people by surprise, and in a way that shows, I think, this idea about law that you're talking about. That there were, you know, kind of ideas about morality that were forming, but they hadn't always been codified, and people were very vulnerable, weren't they?

Ken Follett: Yes, indeed. And of course, danger had a different connotation before the modern period because things like injury, which today would be dealt with and people would recover from, were often fatal. So, for example, if your child fell out of a tree and broke his leg, he'd probably die. Today, if your child fell out of a tree and broke his leg, you'd be terribly upset and you'd call an ambulance, but the child would almost certainly be okay in the end, would make a full recovery. And this kind of thing just didn't happen. In the Middle Ages, even in the Victorian period, injuries, which we now consider not to be fatal, were fatal. So it's not just the outlaws, it's also the fact that getting better after any kind of violence was pretty unlikely.

Peter Moore: So there's this sense of people living on the edge, and I suppose that just makes life all the more vivid. The novel itself spans a decade, which is 997 to 1007. I don't quite know the best format of saying that, 1007. I imagine that if you asked even a pretty well-read person to name an event that happened within this span of years, you know, someone on the streets or in the butcher's queue, they'd be pretty hard pressed to give you an answer. With so little known for sure, whereabouts did you go to research this novel?

Ken Follett: There are a few Anglo-Saxon buildings left in England, and I think I've visited them all. Much more common is a fragment of an Anglo-Saxon building that still exists within a more modern and more recent structure. So there are lots of medieval churches that have bits of Anglo-Saxon masonry in them. But by and large, the Anglo-Saxons built very, very little in stone, their houses were made of wood, all their buildings were made of wood, there were no castles at all in Anglo-Saxon England. They did not write very much down, there are quite a lot of contracts having to do with land being sold or gifted, but very little else was written down. And there weren't many pictures, there was not much painting and drawing at the time. The one thing we have got, which is enormously helpful, is embroidery. Embroidery seems to have been one of the two great art forms of Anglo-Saxon England. Embroidery was one, jewellery was the other. And of course, we have one marvellous historical document in the Bayeux Tapestry, which is technically not a tapestry, it's a work of embroidery. And that really is *the* most important piece of evidence about what life was like, in the 11th century. You'll know, Peter, that it's the mother of all strip cartoons. And it tells the story of the Norman Conquest of England. But it also as it were, accidentally, gives us all kinds of little details about everyday life in England and Normandy at the time. Things that just just don't appear in

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anything written down, for example, one of the panels shows a group of men having dinner, which enables us to see their cutlery and the food they ate and their drinking vessels. We also see their servants and we see people cooking. This kind of thing is gold dust. We might wonder how people boarded ships in the 11th century when there basically weren't any jetties and docks and we see in one of the panels of the Bayeux Tapestry, we see that what people did was they hitched up skirts of their tunics and waded through the water to get to the boats! That's that's how you boarded a ship. Rather charming actually, because one of the characters in the tapestry is wading through the shallows to get to his boat and he's carrying his dog in his arms, which I think is a rather charming, funny thing. Dogs can swim, of course. So this must have been a rather precious dog to actually been carried onto the ship. Anyway, that's the kind of little detail that we get in the Bayeux Tapestry that is tremendously helpful.

Peter Moore: Yeah, the ones that I've picked up from reading through is when you mentioned that the English had moustaches but no beards which is kind of...

Ken Follett: Isn't that funny? Isn't that funny. I mean that's also directly from the the Bayeux Tapestry, because you can tell the Normans from the English in the Bayeux Tapestry. The Normans have this really silly haircut, their hair is shaved at the back all the way up to the crown of the head – looks very funny and it's very distinctive. And that the English don't have that, but they all have these little pencil moustaches which – I mean they're probably pencil moustaches because they're done with one stitch of wool, you know. People didn't shave very often in the Dark Ages, I don't believe people had carefully trimmed moustaches, but I think that the pencil moustache are a consequence of the fact that it's depicted by a piece of wool sewn onto a piece of linen.

Peter Moore: I think you have some good fun as well with Edgar, your character, who you have as washing once a year, which is another little peek into cleanliness of that period. But I think my favourite of all the details – I had to mention this because it put a smile on my face – is when you are talking about Dreng's Ferry, I think your little hamlet,

Ken Follett: Yes, Dreng's Ferry.

Peter Moore: And there's a lady there who's got a cheese safe. And I thought, well, that's wonderful. You know, if there's one thing that John Lewis should sell nowadays, it's a cheese safe. I don't know – how can we talk about evolution, if in 1000 years, we'd lost that! But again, it just it's a nice little detail, which I think shows you kind of surprising feature of life at that time. Anyway, let's have all this as a bit of build up, that works for a setup. And now I want to ask you, Ken Follett, the question we ask all of our guests that come on this podcast, if you could travel back through time to a specific year, what year would you choose?

Ken Follett: I would go to the 1002. And this is partly, this is largely, as a result of my having written *The Evening and the Morning*, because there were so many things that I couldn't check. While I was writing *The Evening and the Morning*, many – we've talked a little already Peter about some of the little details that I found in the research – but there were many things that I couldn't figure out, many things that just nobody knows, I had to guess at and I'm still wondering about. It's partly that the curiosity that has been aroused in me by *not* being able to discover certain bits of information, certain

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things about this period of time, things that I would have liked to know while I was writing *The Evening and the Morning*, and I wasn't able to find out.

Peter Moore: These things that you mentioned here, are they the small social things, the matter of life as we were talking about little moments then, or do they relate more to bigger events like geopolitics or dynastic warring and feuds?

Ken Follett: It's mainly the little things, it's mainly the little things. And I'll give you an example: underwear. Nobody knows what underwear the Anglo-Saxons wore. Not something that's ever been written about. It's not depicted in any kind of drawing paintings, drawings, illustrations. As a historical novelist, basically, if I do everything I can to find out the truth and it proves elusive, then I have to make something up. And so, I still don't know what kind of underwear people wore in the 11th century [*laughter*].

Peter Moore: Well, on its own that justifies this whole time travel, I think just to just to work out the underwear –

Ken Follett: But it could be a bit embarrassing, Peter, I have to go around lifting people's skirts! [*Laughter*].

Peter Moore: I'm not quite sure what the morality of the time was in relation to that. But what I also wanted is, can you just give us a general picture of the world as it was 1000 years ago, and in 1002, which – obviously it's a time so distant towards – but if we're talking about the south of England, which is, I suppose the primary focus of the novel, I know you go backwards and forwards between France as well, but could you just give us a bit of a picture of what was happening from a kind of eagle eye view?

Ken Follett: First of all the eagle's eye would notice that it was a thinly populated place, even by comparison with the Middle Ages, never mind the 21st century. The main landscape would have been small villages and hamlets surrounded by cultivated fields and woodland. There were cities, of course, but you would hardly recognise them because the city would consist of a few 100 wooden huts with thatched roofs there would be no roads, no paved roads at all. And if you saw people traveling, which they did not do very much, but if you saw people traveling, they would be walking or riding small horses along the tracks, through the woods and between the fields. There would have been activity on the rivers, the rivers were important, you would have noticed quite a lot of water mills and some fish ponds. A few bridges, not that many, and basically, the landscape would not be all that much affected by human beings.

Peter Moore: Okey dokey, well, let's go exploring this world a little bit. We're going to do this, as ever, by going to three scenes which we can look at imaginatively and analytically. And the first one, well I'll ask you, where would you like to go first?

Ken Follett: I'd like to go to the slave market in Bristol.

Peter Moore: Well, this seems tremendously topical at the moment, because I think everyone who's listening to this will have seen the pictures of the slave trader Edward Colson's statue being thrown

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into Bristol harbor. They went around the world and we instantly think of the Atlantic slave trade and all the horrors of the Middle Passage.

Ken Follett: Yes, people who don't know very much history think that slavery was invented by the 16th century English seafarers, and that, of course, is completely wrong. Slavery was actually a pretty much normal part of human civilisation. It's existed in most eras, and it was very strong in England. The Domesday Book is our key reference here. Listeners may know that the Domesday Book is a sort of inventory that the Normans made of England once they had conquered it, a book that would tell them everything that they owned. And of course, it mentions slaves. And the calculation, made on the basis of the Domesday Book, is that 10% of the population of England were slaves – very high number – it means, basically, a slave owning society. People lose sight of this, partly because we think of slavery, as you've said, in connection with the Atlantic slave trade. It's partly because Anglo-Saxon historians are a little bit bashful about this. Most people who study the Anglo-Saxon era would like to think well of it, they would like to think that it wasn't as a sort of law of the jungle, brutal, horrible society, they point to the strong elements in Anglo-Saxon civilisation and they're a little bit embarrassed by the slavery. And they're inclined to say, one of my advisors for *The Evening and the Morning* said to me, “well, yes, there were slaves. But you know, it wasn't really that bad.” And I just don't believe that. I don't believe slavery was ever not really that bad. Slavery is horrible and terrible. And I suspect it always was. That's part of the reason why we don't hear much about slaves in Anglo-Saxon England because the historians play it down. But 10% of the population! Those slaves must have done a great deal of the housework, a good deal of the heavy labor in the field, they probably did a great deal of the unpleasant work, the shovelling of manure and that sort of thing. I'm afraid they would, both males and females, have been prostitutes. That would be why, I mean, everybody knows that all slave traders, their preferred prey, as it were, is adolescent boys and girls. And that's because they are the most valuable as prostitutes. So it's a very grim aspect of Anglo-Saxon England, but I think it's one that must be confronted.

Peter Moore: And you have pinpointed Bristol as the place where there was a particular slave market. And so that begs the question, well, it begs a few questions, I think. First of all, what kind of place was Bristol at this time? And was it a likely location for a slave market? Or was it just a typical town where there's a slave market and there might be any number the same.

Ken Follett: It was a likely location because it was a seafaring town. The slave trade was, as best we can make out, the slave trade was mostly run by the Vikings, and they had three large slave markets, and they were in Bristol, Dublin, and Rouen, all port cities. And that would have been essential because the Vikings would raid as everybody knows, they would they raided coastal towns and villages and they also sailed up river when they could to raid cities and towns that were river ports. And one of the things that they stole was people, and they would capture people and load them onto their boats, and then they would take them to a slave market where they would be sold. So it's clearly the best place to have your slave market is in place that is already a thriving port city, with all the facilities all the docking facilities and so on that go along with that. So yes, Bristol is absolutely a good place to have a slave market.

Peter Moore: And is it, by this time, already a substantial settlement?

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Ken Follett: To tell you the truth I'm not sure about that. I think it must have been. But I have never read a description of Bristol in the 11th century and I'm not sure that very much is known about it other than that there was a big slave market.

Peter Moore: Okay. And so, to go there, at this moment in 1002 – you said before your primary motivation for this travel was to kind of find out the little details. So would it be really to observe the modes of exchange? You know, the kind of, I suppose the whole – what shall we say? – the whole panorama of life that was going on in the slave market, which which is probably lost to us today.

Ken Follett: Yes, I would like to know, the subtleties of pricing. For example, were females, more expensive or cheaper than men? What about as opposed to adolescents? What about children? I would have liked to know, what if anything happened to families? Was it ever possible for people who had been a family together before they were captured, was it ever possible for them to stay together? Would we see in this slave market, those harrowing scenes of children being taken away from parents and so on? And I'd like to know, I'd like to know more about what the buyers were, who the buyers were, what they were looking for? And was it all about strength? If you were buying a slave to work in the house, did you want somebody who didn't look too, too tough. Somebody who looked as if they didn't make trouble, that sort of thing. I would have loved to be able to go into that sort of thing in a bit more detail in *The Evening and the Morning*, but the information just isn't available. And so what I, you know, what I did of that kind of thinking is guesswork.

Peter Moore: Yeah. It's absolutely the kind of scene that would attract a novelist, I can see that immediately. And slavery as a theme is something which is embedded at the, you know, kind of centre of your book. It happens – I know, you've got the blood of Dreng's Ferry, but then, like, kind of right from the very beginning – I mean, I'm trying not to give things away, actually – but I'll say right at the beginning there's a scene where lots of people are in danger of becoming slaves. And there's also another thing which you mentioned, which intrigued me, which was this idea of voluntary slavery, where people might themselves, they'd be so destitute and hungry, I suppose more than anything, that they would kneel before someone and I suppose volunteer themselves as slaves.

Ken Follett: Yes, it's a very interesting phenomenon. And I haven't heard of it in any other society, in any other period of history. But the rules are laid down quite carefully in documents from the Anglo-Saxon period. And there's a little ceremony you have to go through if you offer yourself as a slave. I can easily imagine how this would come about. Because anybody who is dependent on agriculture, to feed themselves and their children is in a dangerous position, you only need a couple of years of bad harvests and you're hungry! And it's easy to imagine, people who had not a very good farm, not very fertile land, living from hand to mouth. And when there's a couple of years of bad weather, or the hay crop is washed out by summer rainstorms, you can imagine them just having no resort, no way to feed themselves. And if there was a noble man who was willing to give them food and shelter, and possibly clothing as well, in exchange for a lifetime of labour, they might have thought this is better than dying.

Peter Moore: And there in you have a paradox, don't you, that you kind of give your life away to retain your life, but your liberties gone but you're still alive. And I think you have a couple of your characters discussing this at one point. And one of them's like, "I would never do that" and the other one is saying, "well, maybe I would." I can't quite remember the scene but I think, for me, it's

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amplifying my understanding of this moral crime of slavery in ways that maybe I hadn't appreciated before. And I think as well, you get this later on in, for example, with the navy of the 17th and 18th century where people will sign away their lives to go aboard ship because they're looked after you know, they kind given a rudimentary set of rations, and if they become ill they are physicked to some level, whereas the alternative is to stay home and starve. But I think that's just a kind of a twist on a story that we're very familiar with, in one sense, to be there in Bristol to, I suppose be at the centre of it in Britain, because as you said that's the only British being slaving place with Dublin and Rouen being number two, there would be nowhere better, would there?

Ken Follett:No. We certainly don't know of any other major slave markets in England, there would have been informal ones from time to time. And of course, I do describe in *The Evening and the Morning*, there is one scene that takes place at an informal slave market after the warrior chieftain comes back from battle he brings, as they always did, he brings captured enemies soldiers to sell as slaves. And so I've imagined a sort of small, impromptu slave market, in a town. When you're making history up, you have to be very careful. And if I could just get into this time machine and go back to Bristol in 1002, I'd have all the information I needed.

[Short instrumental]

Artemis Irvine: *Hi, I'm Artemis, you'll know me as one of the presenters on this podcast. At Travels Through Time, we're incredibly proud to be partnering with Jordan Lloyd, one of the world's leading visual historians. His extraordinary photo colourisation work has appeared on the covers of National Geographic, LIFE and People magazines, and he's worked on special projects for titles like the Times of London and NPR. Through his work, Jordan brings some of the most significant historical events and people to life, whether it's his portrait of Charles Darwin, the beaches of Normandy on D day, or one of my personal favourites, which is his colourisation of the March on Washington in 1963. Looking at this photo, you can see hundreds of 1000s of people gathered at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial who were brought to life through Jordan's colourisation work. And I think were offered a glimpse of how powerful it must have been to be a member of that crowd about to hear one of the most famous addresses of the 20th century, which was, of course, Martin Luther King's I Have a Dream speech. It's almost like you are a member of the crowd yourself. All of these images and many more are available as really beautiful prints and they make an unusual and striking present for that friend or family member of yours who loves the past. What's more Travels Through Time listeners get 10% off when they use the code TTT at the checkout to find your favourite historical image Have a look at Jordans site at www.collograph.co and that's colorgraph spelt C o l o r, collograph.co*

[Short instrumental]

Peter Moore: Wow. Let's keep this time machine going a little bit further for your second scene and we're not going too far away. Where are we going to go to?

Ken Follett:Exeter. Exeter was a rather wealthy town, had a cathedral, has a cathedral now, of course, lovely Cathedral. It's a river port, Exeter is a river port. And, you know, in some ways of being a river port is ideal because you've got navigation but it's not *quite* so easy to raid and pillage a city that's up a river. And Exeter also had a wall – there's actually a bit of the wall left. If you go to Exeter, you can find this bit of construction from the old walled town. And actually the Vikings attack, many times,

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they really saw Exeter as a great prize, but it was pretty well defended. Maybe because they were used to being raided, I don't know. But Exeter was well defended and there were several battles over this period, during this period, and the Vikings were beaten off several times. But in the end they took Exeter. They weren't very good at sieges the Vikings, they were hit and run types, take the money and run types, they they didn't want to sit around outside the walls of a city and and wait until the inhabitants starved, that wasn't their technique at all, they were fast moving. So several times they raided Exeter, they were driven off and they just said that, 'oh the heck with it' and went around raiding surrounding villages and picking up what they could from the much less prosperous settlements all around Exeter in that part of the southwest of England. But then finally, they did eventually defeat the people of Exeter and they were able to get into the city and and killed people and take slaves and, of course, take, we assume, I don't think we know the actual details, but there's no doubt that they would have taken a lot of precious ornaments from the cathedral. There would have been silver candlesticks, and all of the, you know, the decorated gold and silver and jewelled boxes that were made to hold the bread for the mass and also the relics of saints, the bones of saints, reliquaries that held these objects that were really thought of as having magical powers, certainly the power to heal and so on. Off they would go and they would sell it somewhere else. And they would go to often France or Normandy where they could sell this kind of stuff. I'd like to see one of those battles. The Vikings, their actual armaments were not particularly impressive. They did have helmets, we're pretty sure, although contrary to what you've seen, in cartoons, they didn't all have horns on their helmets. That's a myth. But they did have helmets, pretty serious helmets, to protect their heads in battles and they had axes. The most common weapon, the standard weapon for anybody going into battle was actually a spear. You know, with a spear you can kill or disable somebody at something of a distance. Generally speaking, that was the favoured weapon. Although people did have swords and bows and arrows and axes. At the time, most people who had a purpose made weapon would have had a spear. And some people I think, would not have had a purpose made weapon, I mean, if the king raised an army from among the peasantry, he certainly, in my opinion, he certainly wasn't going to give each and every one of those those impecunious peasants an expensive iron sword. I imagine they would have to bring hammers, sledge hammers and scythes, and so on, that they normally used in agriculture, bring those to the battle. But once again, that's something on which we don't have events. The battle that we have a picture of is the Battle of Hastings. But all of the participants in that are depicted as having armour and horses and purpose made weapons. We don't see any of the riffraff, the cannon fodder, as they would have been called in a later period of history. We don't see those unfortunately, in the Bayeux Tapestry.

Peter Moore: Yeah, what you're describing, I suppose, is a confluence of the domestic and the military because you have the farmer swinging the scythe and someone with the spear, but more than that, the overriding sense I get from listening to and also reading the book, is that it's kind of like an Anglo-Saxon form of blitzkrieg, which the Vikings are inflicting on places, they just go so quickly, don't they? Their boats, their long boats, are designed to move through the water very, very swiftly. And I mean, I suppose we can say that the book begins with a depiction of one of these raids, which is just happening in lightning speed. And we wouldn't have to be there very long in Exeter to see the whole thing. Maybe this would be over the course of a few hours, and then all that would be left would be the smoke of burnt dwellings. Is that right?

Ken Follett: I think that's absolutely right. I think it must have been very quick, because that was the Vikings strength. And if that didn't work for them, if speed and surprise didn't work for them, then

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they really didn't have anything else. You know, they didn't have any means of pulling down city walls, for example, that was just not part of their culture. And you're right about the boats. Those boats were remarkable. And one of the highlights of my research for *The Evening and the Morning* was visiting the Viking Ship Museum in Oslo, where they have two Viking ships that are – they've been restored but a good deal of the timbers are the original timbers – and they have them raised, well you can imagine, they're not in the water, so they're on a sort of wooden structure that keeps them upright and because of that you look up and probably somebody's sitting, you know, on the beach or beside the river and seeing one of these emerge in the morning mist would have looked up at it, as you look up at it when you walk into the Viking Ship Museum in Oslo, and it is very impressive. There it also technically remarkable, they're narrow, they're fast. They also had a keel, which was a new thing in those days, a key or a keel, which probably most listeners will know this, but it's a flat piece of wood that sticks out on the bottom of the boat, and it keeps the boat stable. It makes it less likely to sway from side to side, rock from side to side. And it's probably why the Vikings were able to cross the North Sea, you know, crossing the North Sea in an open boat is no picnic. It's very dangerous. North Sea has, as you know, proper weather, goodness knows how many of these Viking ships actually never been made it across the North Sea, but enough of them did to cause us an awful lot of trouble. And the fact that they did and also, you know, when they went to Greenland and there's some evidence that they reached what is now America. So it was a remarkable technical achievement. And that was really, that was really – the boats had quite a shallow draft, or ships, they are seagoing so we should call them ships, although they're not very big, they had a shallow draft so they could also come up river. And their construction was quite light. So they could even, if necessary, they could be dragged on the land and they could be dragged over shallows if necessary. They were absolutely tremendous. In other respects, the Vikings didn't have much over the Anglo-Saxons in terms of weaponry. So you're absolutely right to say surprise and speed were essential to their success.

Peter Moore: Yeah, there's a few things here then that combine to make this a really good scene, of course, you have the drama of the fighting, and actually seeing what's you know, kind of going on and around the dwellings and people going in and out. But also, it is the technological component of the ships. And I'd love to see that as well. You know, the oars swinging as they come out to the horizon must have been an absolutely terrifying sight and one from which you could probably not escape very easily, which is the reason why I suppose you and I probably both got a bit of Viking blood in us today. But anyway, we can only imagine.

Ken Follett: Well, certainly it's certainly true. And I've got dark hair on it anyway, it was dark before it turned grey and brown eyes. But when I meet somebody who has that wonderful Scandinavian blond hair or red hair, I always think that person must have Viking DNA.

Peter Moore: Yeah, well, you'll have to take one of those tests where you can, you know, ancestry will tell you the whole story maybe, but we'll leave that suspended because it's enjoyable, really informative. But we've got one more to do before we head back and I want to get this one in as well. So what's the third scene you would like to visit?

Ken Follett: This took place in the year 1002. And it's the wedding of the King of England, King Æthelred the Unready as he's now called, to a Norman princess Emma of Normandy. She was actually half Norman and half Danish, Emma. And this was a pretty big thing. You can imagine that this is not just a wedding. This is a political alliance between two very powerful nations: the the Normans and

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the English. I would have liked to be there. We're very vague about what happened at Anglo-Saxon weddings. They were not church affairs. At this stage, the church had not taken over the supervision of marriage. And so it was entirely a civil ceremony in which two people made legally binding promises to one another. Of course, I can imagine, and indeed, there is a noble wedding in *The Evening and the Morning*, and of course, I can imagine the festivities. The vows, I think we know what they said in the vows and they were rather short, and to the point. But exactly what else went on all around the man and the woman is not always clear. And I've taken, in the big wedding takes place in *The Evening and the Morning*, I've taken everything that I could find out in the research and added quite a lot of stuff that I had to make up.

Peter Moore: And I suppose as it's a wedding, we should have a little glimpse of the two participants. You mentioned already Æthelred the Unready, I think that's a name which will be familiar to quite a lot of people, although I'm not sure how well he's known beyond that soubriquet and Emma of Normandy. So should we start with King Æthelred? He's presumably got a bit of a biography that we can study.

Ken Follett: Yes. His nickname was unread, which means ill-advised. He wasn't unready in the modern sense of that word, the nickname has sort of morphed into something that he wasn't.

Peter Moore: So it wasn't in a, kind of, Boris Johnson sense of unready?

Ken Follett: [Laughter] No, he was – in fact, I've called him Æthelred the Mised because unread is ill-advised, so I've called him Æthelred the Mised. Although there is an argument that says he wasn't even called Unread in his own time, that it was a nickname that came from later historians, I'm not sure whether that's right or not, I've called him Æthelred the Mised. He ruled for a long time, from memory I think it was something like forty years, which in itself tells you he wasn't incompetent. An incompetent King doesn't last that long, I don't think. He did his best in very difficult circumstances. During his reign, the Viking raids were renewed, he didn't have the talents of Alfred the Great, so he was not able to organise the defence of England against these Viking raids. Basically the Vikings treated England like a supermarket where you didn't have to pay. They basically showed up, took what they wanted and went off again. Æthelred wasn't able to cope with that but then most English kings had been able to do much about the Vikings.

Peter Moore: I was just going to say, I like the way you characterise this problem of policy in the book. You say, 'Great King Alfred chased the Vikings off but he was the only monarch to fight back effectively. England is a rich old lady with a box full of money and no one to guard it.' And that's the essential point, isn't it?

Ken Follett: I think so. There was no standing army at this time. If the King wanted to fight a battle he had to raise an army specifically for that battle. Within the Anglo-Saxon monarchy there were not the tools for a national defence against a national menace. He also, the King had no civil service, there was no apparatus, there was no, what the French call, fonctionnaires, there's no civil service. So it was very difficult to enforce his will. Æthelred might have said, 'every city with a population of more than a 1,000 people has to build a wall'. That would have been a very sensible thing to do and he could've said it, but he couldn't have done anything about it, he couldn't have made people build walls. They would have all argued about 'who's going to pay for it? Who's going to do the work? And

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of course most of the time it didn't get done. Although he failed, it's sort of not surprising he failed. The other thing he did was he did pay the Vikings off a couple of times, and certainly you've got to give him credit for being able to raise money, he was a very good Chancellor of the Exchequer. He paid the Vikings, this is from memory again, but on one occasion £16,000 and on one occasion £24,000. It was an enormous sum of money, equivalent to billions today, equivalent to billions. And that, in itself, is something of an achievement, I think, of Æthelred's. So I don't think he was stupid and I don't think he was useless but he certainly failed in the primary duty of defending his country from invasion.

Peter Moore: And this is where Emma of Normandy comes in, I imagine?

Ken Follett: Yes, she was eighteen in 1002. And she was at the beginning of an extremely distinguished career. She married an English king, she married Æthelred, and after he died she married King Cnut. So she was the wife of two English kings and she was also the mother of Edward the Confessor. So she was the mother of one of the great English kings, the man who built the original cathedral at Westminster Abbey.

Peter Moore: It's almost a bit Eleanor of Aquitaine, this idea that she has all of these connections to big history.

Ken Follett: Yes. Yes, and she survived and remained powerful over this long period of time which in itself is an indication of great ability, I think. There must have been constant rivalry for the King's ear and so on, and different people, wives and concubines, all struggling to push their progeny forward and she obviously excelled at that kind of thing. Despite her youth when all of this began she obviously learned tremendously quickly and was in the end very effective. So if I was going to meet one person, in my voyage, in this time machine, Emma of Normandy is the one I'd like to meet. I'd like to talk to her and, you know, at this moment at the beginning of her marvellous career, I'd like to say 'what are your hopes and fears? What are you hoping to do?'

Peter Moore: There's a great opacity to these people in the sense that we don't always know what they look like but apparently Emma's quite well represented in the visual record.

Ken Follett: Well there are some pictures of her but artists of this period did not really have the sense of making a likeness. They're very general, the pictures are very general. I'm actually looking now at the cover of a biography of Emma of Normandy which has an illustration of her. But I can't believe she actually looked like that. There's a biography called *Emma: The Twice-Crowned Queen* by Isabella Strachan which has very helpful to me but I'm afraid I don't believe Emma looked like that. Well look, she was half Danish, half Norman, the Normans themselves basically were mostly Viking DNA, although they had become much more civilised. So if were to guess, it's very likely that she would have been light-skinned and light-haired and she might well have had blue or green eyes.

Peter Moore: Well one way to solve this riddle is to send you back to the wedding of course and you could have a good look yourself, not just at the bride and groom but at the ceremony and see how it all came together because they're great unknowns but they're completely tantalising at the same time. So we're going to step back into 2020 and leave this distant past a long, long way away. But before

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we do, let me ask the last question, I think, which is: if you could bring a tangible moment back with you, to have in your writing office or something, what would you bring from the year 1002?

Ken Follett:I'm going to bring back a four-legged stool. There don't seem to have been very many, if any, regular chairs in this period. If we look at the Bayeux Tapestry, even the really important people, like Duke William of Normandy and other Counts, powerful people in the Bayeux Tapestry, they don't sit on any kind of throne, they sit on a four-legged stool. It's an imposing piece of furniture, it's decorated and it has cushions so they weren't too uncomfortable. But it would've been, first of all it probably would've been a very exquisite piece of furniture and secondly, it would've been the seat from which justice was dispensed and laws were propounded and orders were given to men to go and do battle in various places including Hastings. So I'd like one of those four-legged stools and I could look at it and I could think, 'I wonder what evils were perpetrated from someone sitting on that chair [*laughter*]

Peter Moore: What a wonderful thing to have in your house and also if you were going to a kind of George R. R. Martin job on this you could replace the Iron Throne for the four-legged chair which sounds quite good fun as well [*laughter*] sounds quite English, doesn't it?

Ken Follett:Yes it does!

Peter Moore: Listen, this has not only been a really fun conversation but I've enjoyed the book enormously as well, it really is a book which will immerse people in a period but it's as ever, with your writing, it's the plot that's everything, isn't it, and it twists and it turns and it's the kind of thing that will keep you going till three in the morning. Was it a pleasure to write? And was it good fun?

Ken Follett:Yes I did enjoy it very much, yes, and you're absolutely right that, you mention twists and turns of plots, it is important in a story like this as far as I'm concerned that every now and then something happens which makes the reader say, 'oh! I wasn't expecting *that!*' [*laughter*]

Peter Moore: Yes exactly. And I know from many years ago, I read that you – this is more of a writing question but I'll get it in whilst I've got the opportunity – I think you plot everything out quite carefully before you start the writing process so you know exactly where you're going, is that correct?

Ken Follett:I do yes. It works for me, it doesn't work for all writers, but it certainly works for me to have a very detailed outline of the plot before I actually sit down and write chapter one.

Peter Moore: Wow. That's a thought for people who might be thinking of the trilogy of the four-legged wooden chair. Or there might be a PhD student out there who's wanting to write a thesis on the underwear of the Anglo-Saxons, who knows, who knows.

Ken Follett:[*Laughter*]

Peter Moore: Thank you very much Ken Follett, it's been a real pleasure, thank you.

Ken Follett:I enjoyed it, thank you.

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Peter Moore: That was me, Peter Moore, talking to Ken Follett about his new book, the prequel to *The Pillars of the Earth*, it's called *The Evening and the Morning* and it's going to be published in just a few weeks time. Also, I have to remind you that we have this amazing competition for you, we have two hardback copies of *The Evening and the Morning* to give away exclusively to Travels Through Time listeners. To be in with a chance of winning all you have to do, this is really simple so please go and do it, all you have to do is head to our website, ttpodcast.com, and sign up to our newsletter. As soon as you do you will be in the hat. Also at our website you'll find a specific page for this episode, we've illustrated it with the very best of the images we could find, of course, and the show notes and biographies of the characters involved and lot's more as well. You can also explore a timeline on the website which includes all of our episodes, there's almost fifty on there now, Ken is the first of our time travellers to head back to the 11th century, in fact his nearest neighbour is Dan Jones on 1147, of course that's the start of the second crusade. Thank you very much for listening, I hope you enjoyed this episode, if you did, please subscribe to our feed or leave us a five-star review on Apple podcasts. We'll be back with another adventure into the past next week, though for me for now, that's it, goodbye!

[Clock ticking]