Linguistics 801 — Homework Assignment #1: Ferreting out Regularity

In class, fairly complete lists of forms relevant for the development of English #kn- and of English ū were given, in order to provide examples of convincing cases of fairly widespread (i.e. abundantly evidenced) regular sound change (even though we will ultimately see that regularity can be defined by a very small number of cases).

Your task is to provide the same sort of inventory for forms relevant for the development of other initial sounds in English (initial position being the focus since it allows you to easily find the necessary data using a dictionary).

Thus, you are to investigate the development of any of the following initial clusters in English:

#wr-
#hl-
#hn-
#hr-

by putting together as complete a list as you can of relevant forms from some earlier stage (e.g. Old English or Middle English) of the language and their outcomes in some later stage (e.g. Middle English or Modern English).

The easiest way to do this is to consult an authoritative dictionary of Old English (e.g. J. Bosworth & T. Toller et al. (1898) An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary [PE279B74, in the English/Theatre/Communication (ETC) library on 2nd floor of Main Library], or G. Jember et al. English-Old English, Old English-English Dictionary [PE279J4, in ETC], or J. Hall A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary [PE279H17, in main stacks]) or Middle English (especially H. Kurath Middle English Dictionary [PE679M5, in ETC]), and work forwards, so to speak, or a large and reliable dictionary of Modern English (the American Heritage Dictionary or Webster’s International or the Oxford English Dictionary would be good ones to start with), using the spelling as your guide for what to look up (i.e. for earlier stages of the language you can take the spelling at face value, as we saw in class, whereas for Modern English spelling you have to be sensible about how to interpret things).

Give this list, and describe the extent to which you discover regularity in the developments you look at; finally, note any problematic aspects of your search.