THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODES 101 - 105

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Episode 101: The Birth of English Song 1

Episode 102: A Medieval Glossary. 17

Episode 103: Solitary Confinement 33

Episode 104: Prefix Preferences 49

Episode 105: Suffix Summary 63

EPISODE 101: THE BIRTH OF ENGLISH SONG

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 101: The Birth of English Song. In this episode, we're going to look at the oldest surviving songs composed in the English language. These songs first appeared in the early to mid-1200s around the current point in our overall story of English. Even though the Anglo-Saxons composed songs in Old English, we don't have any of the surviving music from that period. We just have lyrics. But now, in the early 1200s, we have an early form of sheet music to accompany the lyrics. So we finally get the melody that goes along with some of those old songs. And that allows us to sing those songs today in much the same way as they were performed 800 years ago. So this time, we'll explore the birth of the English song.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can sign up to support the podcast at Patreon.com/historyofenglish. And as always, you can reach me by email at kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com

Now this time, I want to explore the earliest surviving examples of songs composed in the English language. And I want to begin this story in the north of England in Yorkshire on July 25 of the year 1225. That may seem like a very specific time and place to begin a story about such a broad topic, but something happened on that date which deserves a quick mention at this point. We're about nine years into the reign of King John's son, Henry III. This was around the time that Henry was getting to be old enough that he could rule England without a regent or guardian. And in the summer of 1225, a group of royal judges held an assize or inquest in Yorkshire.

Now the word ***assize*** is a French word meaning an inquest or judicial proceeding. It was sometimes shortened to just ***size*** – spelled S-I-Z-E. And over time, ***size*** came to mean an ordinance or regulation issued by an assize or by the government. It then came to mean any kind of fixed standard or quantity. And that gave us the modern word ***size***. But again, the original version of the word ***size*** was ***assize***, and it meant a judicial proceeding or inquest.

Now this particular inquest held in Yorkshire in 1225 was typical in that it heard disputes and issued fines and punishments for criminals. The records of this inquest still survive, and the documents indicate that one of the cases brought before the judges concerned a man named Robert Hod. He owed a significant debt to the local abbey and church which means he was probably a tenant of the church. At the inquest, he was called to answer for the debt, but he failed to appear. So he was deemed a fugitive, and in later records an outlaw. He was fined thirty-two shillings and a sixpence, and his property was confiscated. The fine was recorded in the records of the Exchequer, and we know that he remained a fugitive for a while because subsequent inquests in later years continued to list him as a fugitive and an outlaw. In some years, his names was listed as "Robert Hood." And in one year it was listed as "Hobbehod," which could have been a nickname or it could have been a misspelling.

By now, you might have noticed where I'm going with this story. You've certainly heard of Robin Hood – the outlaw who lived in Sherwood Forest. And some scholars think the legend actually has its origins in Yorkshire. So for historians who have tried to determine if legends were based on a real person, this Robert Hod of Yorkshire is a prime candidate. Scholars have poured over old records and have found quite a few people with names similar to Robin Hood. But this Robert Hod of Yorkshire is the only one which appears in those old records as a fugitive and an outlaw. Unfortunately, we don't know anything else about this real-life fugitive. And we don't know if he had anything at all to do with the later legends of Robin Hood. But I wanted to mention him here because he lived during this period of the early 1200s.

So what does Robin Hood have to do with the birth of English song? Well, it confirms that the common people of England sang songs and ballads to each other in English even when English writing was still rare. The oral tradition continued though songs and ballads even though English itself wasn't considered fit for writing or formal education.

The earliest recorded reference to the legend of Robin Hood took place about a 150 years later in a famous Middle English poem called Piers Plowman. In the poem, a lazy priest named Sloth is described as a man who prefers 'idle tales' to the word of God. The poem says that he doesn't really know his Lord's Prayer, but he does know the 'rhymes' of Robin Hood. There are no surviving songs about Robin Hood prior to this reference, but this poem confirms that stories about Robin Hood were being told through rhymes and songs well before they were finally put into writing a few decades later. A couple of decades after this first reference to Robin Hood, we have a surviving sermon from a priest who complained that people in his congregation would rather hear 'a tale or a song of Robyn Hood' than listen to a sermon.

So the legend of Robin originated and passed through songs. But Robin Hood was not the first folk hero to be immortalized in English song. In an earlier episode of the podcast, I mentioned a leader from East Anglia who led a resistence movement against the Normans shortly after the Conquest. His name was Hereward the Wake. He became a bit of a folk hero, and several books composed in Latin the 1100s mention him. Three of those books *(Gesta Herwardi, Book of Ely, Pseudo-Ingulf)* mention that many people – including peasants – sang songs about Hereward, which annoyed his enemies. A later account of his life was composed in Latin. And that Latin text says that it was based on an earlier English text that had been badly damaged. So the author says that he had to rely upon the oral history of Hereward to fill in the gaps and complete the story. So again, it appears that his legend was spread through song by the English-speaking peasants.

All of this points to the fact that the oral tradition was alive and well in England in the wake of the Norman Conquest. And even during the darkest days of English, when English writing ceased to exist, people still told stories and sang songs in English. So the language was being kept alive in song. And when English writing started to reappear around the current point in our story, some of those songs started to be written down preserved for the first time.

All of this is very similar to what happed in Greece about 2,000 years earlier. As you may recall, Greek writing also disappeared during the so-called Greek Dark Age from around 1100 BC until

around 800 BC. But during that period, people continued to pass along stories and legends about the Trojan War in the oral traditon. And when the Greek alphabet was adopted around the year 800 BC, writing started to re-emerge. And some of those stories and legends were put in writing for the first time. The result was The Iliad and The Odyssey.

I mentioned the Greeks because they play an important role in this story. In fact, the birth of English song can really be traced back to the Greeks. So I want to revisit the Greeks for a moment. And then I'll take the story of song and music forward from there up to the current point in our story.

Now, Classical Greece was a very musical culture. The Greeks loved to play music and to listen to music. They were fascinated by it. But they didn't just enjoy it as entertainment. They also studied it. They examined the structure and composition of music. And not surprisingly, most of our words associated with music come from the Greeks. That includes words like ***melody***, ***harmony***, ***rhythm***, ***chord***, ***chorus***, ***symphony***, ***orchestra***, ***hymn*** and ***anthem***. They're all Greek words. And it shows how the Greeks loved to analyze and study music.

The Greeks also gave us the words for the two essential parts of any song – lyrics and music. As we'll see, it was easy to write down lyrics and save them for history, but it was much harder to write down music.

The Greek word ***lyric*** reflects the fact that Greek poetry was usually performed to music. The lyre was a popular stringed instrument. And singing while the lyre played was called ***lyrikos***. And that gave us the word ***lyric*** – literally meaning the words sung to the accompaniment of the lyre.

And as I noted, the Greeks also gave us the word ***music***. And again, the word ***music*** reflects the connection between music and poetry. The Greeks believed that all poets were inspired by goddesses called ***Muses***. Traditionally, there were nine different Muses, and Greek poetry could not be composed or performed without the assistance of the Muses. They inspired poets to compose their verses, and they helped singing poets to remember and improvise their lyrics. They were essentially the goddesses of poetry and song.

Today, we still use the term ***muse*** to refer a person (usually a woman) who inspires an artist. And that word ***muse*** is the ultimate source of the word ***music***. ***Music*** began as an adjective, and it was a way of describing something associated with the Muses. Since the Muses inspired poetry, and since all Greek poetry was intended to be sung, those songs were ***music*** – meaning that they were inspired by the Muses. And that produced the modern sense of the word ***music***.

Now you may have never made the connection, but the word ***music*** is closely related to the word ***museum***. ***Museum*** is another word associated with the Muses. The Greeks sometimes built shrines to the Muses. Those shrines were called ***mouseion*** – or in Latin a ***museum***. Those shrines were places where poets would gather to compose music and where students would gather to learn about music. From that sense, the word ***museum*** became associated with centers of learning, like the famous Library in Alexandria which was also called a museum. The word then fell out of use for several centuries, but it was revived in the 1600s to refer to a place where

objects were gathered and collected for observation and study. So the term was still associated with education, but no longer associated specifically with music. And of course, today it refers more broadly to a building that contains a collection of antiquities or other objects. But originally, people went to a ***museum*** to learn about ***music*** which was inspired by the Muses. So a lot of English words pertaining to music came from the Greeks.

Now as I said, it was easy to write down the words or lyrics to a song. And in fact, many Greek poems that survive to this day were probably the lyrics to songs that were actually sung when they were performed. But it was much more difficult to transcribe the sound or melody of the music.

The Greeks experimented with musical notation. In other words, they came up with ways to write down the melody of a song. They weren't the first people to invent musical notation. Clay tablets with an ancient form of musical notation have been discovered in Mesopotamia – and those tablets date to around 2000 BC. And other cultures also tried to represent the way music sounded in writing. But the Greeks came up with their own system.

The Greek system actually used letters of the Greek alphabet above the words to represent the tone and melody to be used. Now this system largely died out with the decline of Classical Greece. And the early Romans didn't really have a good way to represent music in written form, at least not one that has survived the centuries. So in the early 500s, a Roman scholar named Boethius compiled a text that laid out a new system for musical notation. His text also required the use of letters to identify specific musical notes. It is believed that this system was derived from that earlier Greek system which also used letters. And that is the origin of our modern system of using letters as the names of musical notes – like A sharp and B flat.

Boethius's textbook became a cornerstone of music education in the early Middle Ages. And in fact, music was one of the four subjects taught in the quadrivium which I've discussed in previous episodes. The four advanced subjects of the quadrivium were arithmetic, astronomy, geometry and music. And if seems a little odd that music was included in that group, you have to understand that students didn't really study music in the way we might study music today. They really focused on the study of harmony, musical intervals and scales. So it was more of a mathematical study of music.

Again the precise forms of music notation that we use today didn't really exist during the early Middle Ages. The forms of musical notation that did exist at the time were very basic. So most music was passed down by from one person to the next by memory.

Knowledge of music and song was very important in the early Middle Ages. And a properly educated person was supposed to know how to play music, just as they were supposed to understand rhetoric and arithmetic and geometry.

And that takes us to the story of Caedmon the cowherd poet who I told you about at the beginning of the Old English period in the 600s. You might remember that Caedmon cared for the animals at Whitby Abbey in Northumbria. And during meal times, he would eat with the

monks. The monks would sing songs and pass around the lyre. But Caedmon always excused himself before the harp got to him because he wasn't able to sing or compose songs like the other monks. And then according to the famous legend, he received divine inspiration and composed a poem known as Caedmon's Hymn which is considered to be the oldest surviving poem composed in English. That story illustrates the important role of song in the early Middle Ages and also in the early Anglo-Saxon period. It also shows that music was to be treated with respect, and people without an education often lacked the ability to sing and compose music by the standards required at the time.

Again, we have the lyrics or words to Caedmon's Hymn, but we don't have the music. Music notation of any kind was still very rare during the early Middle Ages. So we don't know what the song sounded like when it was performed.

The lack of any surviving music from the Old English period is also due to the fact that music was part of a formal education – which meant a church education. So hymns and religious music were acceptable, but secular music was frowned upon.

In fact, Boethius and other writers in the early Middle Ages wrote about music as a corrupting force. Secular music was often thought to be inspired by the devil. So music was only acceptable if it had a divine purpose and motivation. And monks and other church scribes were responsible for copying and preserving manuscripts. That helps to explain why most surviving musical manuscripts were written in Latin and why most surviving pieces of music are hymns or religious music.

During this earlier period, in the 800s and 900s, the Gregorian Chant developed in churches and monasteries throughout central and western Europe. And over the next couple of centuries, it gradually replaced some older forms of chant. Here's an example of Gregorian Chant. (GREGORIAN CHANT EXAMPLE)

So this is Gregorian Chant. It is important to note that the word ***chant*** originally had a more of a sense of singing. The word was borrowed from French – but it was ultimately derived from the Latin word ***cantare***. So this is another word where the Latin C-A – or /ka/ – sound shifted to a C-H sound in Parisian French. And that was the form that passed into English as ***chant***. This also helps to explain the link between ***incantation*** and ***enchant***. ***Incantation*** retains the original Latin C-A sound, and it means 'a chant or utterance that has magical power.' And 'to uttter an incantation' – thereby putting someone under a spell – is to ***enchant*** using a Parisian form of the word. So ***incantation*** and ***enchant*** represent the Latin and Parisian forms of the same root word.

Of course, we also have the word ***cantor*** meaning 'a type of singer, especially one who leads the singing of songs in a religious service.' And that word reflects the original meaning of the Latin root word which was 'to sing.'

Modern French still has that word ***chant*** – pronounced today as (/shaw/). It's still spelled C-H-A-N-T in French. But it doesn't have the same meaning as the English word. In French, it means a song. The word ***chasons*** is another variation of the word that also means 'a song.' And we

actually have a variation of those words in English. We have ***chanteuse*** which is 'a female singer.'

But in English, the word ***chant*** was borrowed at a time when it was closely associated with the rhythmic utterances used by monks like the Gregorian Chant. So in English, the word acquired a more limited sense. It came to mean 'a repetitive utterance usually performed without musical accompaniment.'

This also helps to explain another term we have in English which comes directly from Latin – the term ***a cappella***. ***A cappella*** means music performed without instruments using just the human voice. The Gregorian chant was a type of ***a cappella*** music.

And notice something about that Latin term ***a cappella***. The second part is ***cappella***, and we've actually seen that word before. Remember that the word ***cape*** comes from the Latin word ***cappa*** which also meant 'a cape or a cloak.' And St. Martin's famous cape or cloak was housed in a shrine that came to be called a ***cappella***, which later became ***chapel*** in English. So a ***cappella*** was a chapel or church. And ***a cappella*** music was originally the music performed in a church – like the Gregorian Chant. So ***a cappella*** literally means 'in the chapel,' and it refers to a type of chant or music that was performed without musical instruments.

Though most church music was performed ***a cappella***, instruments were sometimes used – especially on feast days. A musician of this period could choose from a variety of stringed, wind, or percussive instruments. These included the lyre or harp. They also included horns made from carved wood or animal horn. Panpipes, flutes, bells, drums, and organs were all widely used in Anglo-Saxon England.

Though most of the surviving musical notation from this period concerns church music, we know that secular music was also very popular even if the music itself wasn't written down. Of course, traveling minstrels had performed at royal courts for centuries. And the troubadours were famous for their love songs in the south of France. But those songs mostly survive as poetry. Most of the actual music was lost to history.

This takes us to the year 1166 – exactly one century after the Norman Conquest of England. In that year, a monk at Ely in eastern England wrote down a song that was attributed to a king who had lived prior to the Conquest. The king was Canute. You might remember him. He was the Danish king who ruled England in the late Anglo-Saxon period. And this particular song is known as the "Song of Canute."

Now the story goes that Canute paid a visit to Ely during his reign. And he was being rowed on a boat in the river that passed by the monastery there. As Canute passed by the monastery on the boat, he heard the sound of the monks chanting or singing inside. Supposedly, Canute demanded that they stop the boat so that they could listen to the singing. And according to legend, he composed a short song on the spot. This was the song that the monk wrote down over a century later in the year 1166. And the monk who recorded the song wrote that "This is sung in chorus among the people to this day." But again, as was common for this period, the monk only wrote

down the words – not the music. In fact, he didn't even give us all the words. He merely wrote that this is how the song 'began.' So we got the first verse. Here is what he wrote – first in Modern English, then in the original English of the monk:

Sweetly sang the monks in Ely
as King Canute rowed by.
Row, men, nearer the land
so we can hear these monks sing.

Merie sunge the munecheës binnen Ely,
Tha Cnut ching rew ther by.
Roweth, cnihtës, noer the land,
And herë we these munechës sung.

Now I should note that modern scholars doubt that Canute actually composed that song. It was written down in 1166 – more than a century after his death. But apparently, it had been sung for many years and was quite well known. And this is more evidence that there was a vast world of English song and secular music that has been lost to history.

And again, even with this song, we only have the words. No music was written down. So we can't really call this the oldest surviving English song. We need music for that.

But by this point, it was possible to write down that music in a very precise way. About a century earlier in Italy, a Benedictine monk named Guido d'Arezzo was teaching music to his students. And he had the bright idea of drawing a line on the page, so that notes can be placed with a fixed pitch. He began by using a single red line which he labeled with a specific note. And that was the starting point. Additional notes were then written down – either on the line or above it or below it – to show the relative pitch of the notes. Over time, he added more lines and different colors. For the first time, sheet music could accurately reflect the pitch and rhythm of the notes. This was really the beginning of the modern system of musical notation that we use today.

And this allowed both religious and secular music to be preserved with accuracy for the first time in the Middle Ages. By the 1100s, we actually start to get some surviving manuscripts with songs that have their melodies preserved with this new method. Around the same time that the Song of Canute was written down, another manuscript was composed in the east of England, and that manuscript contained four songs with English lyrics and a melody preserved with this new form of musical notation. So these are the oldest songs composed in English where we have the complete song – the lyrics and music.

The manuscript was written by a monk named Reginald of Durham. And it is a biography of a man he knew in the mid-1100s named Godric of Finchale. Godric was an Englishman and had been a merchant and a sailor as a young man, but he experienced a religious awakening later in life. He made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and when he returned to England, he became a hermit. At some point, he met Reginald and they became friends. And after Godric died, Reginald wrote

a biography about him – about his travels and his life. And Reginald wrote that Godric composed four short hymns or songs with verses in English. Reginald's manuscript includes the lyrics, but more importantly, it also includes the music.

According to Reginald's text, one of the songs came to Godric when the Virgin Mary came to him in a vision. Another was supposedly sung by Godric's deceased sister when she also appeared to him in a vision.

Now Godric died around the year 1170, and Reginald's biography was composed in Latin a short time later. So these songs date to the mid-1100s. And again, they are oldest surviving songs composed in the English language where we have both the lyrics and the music.

The most famous of the four songs is the song that supposedly came to Godric when he a vision of the Virgin Mary. Here are the lyrics – first in Modern English, then Godric's original lyrics:

Saint Mary, Virgin,
Mother of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,
Receive, shield, help your Godric;
Receive, bring him on high with you in God's kingdom.

Saint Mary, abode of Christ,
Purest of maidens, flower of mothers,
Wipe away my sins, reign in my mind,
Bring me to joy with that same God.'

Now here are Godric's original lyrics:

Sainte marie uirgine
moder ihesu cristes nazarene
onfo schild help þin godric
onfang bring heʒilich wið þe in godes riche

Sainte marie xristes bur
maidenes clenhad moderes flur
dilie min sinne rix in min mod
bring me to winne wið þe selfd God

Now if you're curious what the song actually sounded like, here is the first verse performed by a vocal group called Ensemble Sequentia. This is part of a larger performance of Godric's songs available on YouTube. Again, I'll put a link to these clips on the website. (SOUND CLIP)

Before we move on, let me mention a couple of things about Godric's lyrics. First of all, in those two short verses, he uses several Latin and French words. ***Saint***, ***virgin*** and ***flower*** are all words that were borrowed from French and ultimately from Latin. ***Saint*** and ***virgin*** were closely associated with the Church, so it isn't surprising to find those words in an English song from the

mid-1100s. But we also have ***flower***. All three of those words were probably in the English language at the time. The Oxford English Dictionary cites the first use of each of those words in the late 1100s or early 1200s. But interestingly, the OED does not cite Godric's songs as the first use, even though those songs likely pre-date the sources mentioned in the OED.

Now as I noted, Godric's songs are the oldest surviving songs composed in English – where we have both the lyrics and the music, but they were not folk songs. They weren't songs sung by common people. These were hymns, and Godric composed them himself. And given that he was a hermit, we don't even know if anyone other Godric and Reginald ever heard these songs during his lifetime.

But a few decades later, a couple of other English songs were preserved in writing. And those songs were very different. They were folk songs. They were secular, and it appears that they were widely known and sung by people who spoke English. Their author is unknown, and its possible that they had been around for quite while before they were finally written down with this new system of musical notation. They both deal with similar themes, and they both are usually dated to the early 1200s. So these songs appear in writing for the first time around the current point in our story during the early reign of Henry III.   The first is called "Mirie it is while sumer ilast" – or "Merry it is while Summer lasts." The other song is called "Sumer Is Icumen In" – or "Summer Has Come In." It is also known as the 'Cuckoo Song.' Now these songs are the oldest surviving secular or folk songs in the English language where we have both the lyrics and the melody.

Both of these songs deal with the joys of summer and springtime. And before we look at these songs, I should clarify the meaning of that term ***sumer*** – or 'summer' – that's used in both songs. During this period, the word ***summer*** was used very broadly to refer to the warm half of the year. So it also included what we know today as spring and summer. In fact, the word ***spring*** wasn't used to refer to a season of the year until the late 1300s. So even though these songs use the word ***summer***, they're really referring to period from springtime through summer.

And it makes sense that the oldest surviving folk songs in the English language have to do with that time of the year. That was a time for singing and celebration. I've noted before that in earlier periods of history, life was very difficult in the wintertime, especially for people who lived off the land – which was most people. In northern Europe, the weather was harsh in the winter. Crops didn't grow. And even if cows and goats could provide some milk and cheese, those animals also had to be fed. So people lived on the verge of starvation in the wintertime.

But when spring and summer came around, the weather got warm, flowers bloomed, crops were planted, and hopefully the harvests were plentiful. And most cultures had celebrations around the time that spring began. And they also tended to hold a celebration around the end of the harvest season in late fall and early winter to begin preparing for the harsh winter.

At the time I'm preparing this episode, it is the middle of October. So Halloween is quickly approaching. And Halloween has its origins in one of these celebrations held at the end of the harvest season. It was a Celtic celebration called Samhain. But unlike the joyous celebrations at

the beginning of spring, this end-of-harvest celebration had a darker tone to it – literally darker. The days were becoming shorter and colder. The nights were longer. There was unease and anxiety in the air because the people had to live on the stored harvest through the winter. And a poor harvest meant there was a very real prospect of starvation and death. So there was a morbid aspect to Samhain.

The Samhain holiday marked a transition from the light half of the year to the dark half of the year. And in Celtic mythology, there was a basic separation between the world of the living and the world of the dead. That separation was at its greatest in Spring, when the growing season began, when the days were becoming longer and warmer, and when optimism filled the air. But that separation became shorter as the growing season ended and winter loomed on the horizon. The realm of the dead got closer and closer. And it was believed that Samhain marked the point when that separation between the world of the living and the world of the dead was at its thinnest. In fact, it was so thin on that night that spirits of the dead could actual travel into the living world, and living people could wander into the realm of the dead. So spirits of the dead walked the earth on Samhain. And in the Middle Ages, the Church co-opted this Celtic holiday by moving a Roman holiday called All Saints' Day to this same general time period – November 1. English speakers called this Roman holiday 'All Hallows Day.' And the Samhain celebrations that were held immediately before All Hallows Day became known as 'All Hallows Eve,' or as we know it today – ***Halloween***.

Now I realize that that was a bit of a digression, but I wanted you to see that Halloween is a descendant of these pagan festivals held at the end of harvest. And Halloween has an association with ghosts and ghouls and death because that was what people were thinking about when summer ended and winter was on the horizon. And that also helps to explain why people were so happy when winter finally came to an end, and the warm weather of springtime and summer arrived.

That joy was expressed through song, and some of those songs are the oldest secular songs recorded in the English language. And as I noted earlier, the first of those songs is known as "Mirie it is while sumer ilast" – or "Merry it is while Summer lasts." This song reflects the joys of spring and summer, but then it contrasts that joy with concern for the approaching winter.

The song was kept in a book that is known as the Book of Psalms. The book itself was compiled in the late 1100s, and it still exists today at Oxford. A few decades after the original book was completed, an unknown scribe added a single page to the front of the manuscript. That page contains the music and words to two French songs and this one English song. The page containing this song is dated to around the year 1225. So this song is usually dated to the year 1225, though it certainly could have been sung for many years before that. By the way, that year 1225 was the same year that those royal judges went to Yorkshire and held an inquest and deemed Robert Hod to be a fugitive for failing to pay his debts. So if Robert Hod was indeed an inspiration for the Robin Hood legend, then that legend has its origins in the same time period when the first folk songs were being written down in English.

Here are the lyrics – first in Modern English – and then in the original Middle English:

Merry it is while summer lasts
Amid the song of the birds
But now the wind's blast nears
And hard weather.
Alas, how long the night is
And I, with much grief,
Sorrow and mourn and [fast].

[M]Irie it is while summer ilast with fugheles song
oc nu necheth windes blast and weder strong.
Ei ei what this nicht is long
And ich with wel michel wrong.
Soregh and murne and [fast].

Now let me play you a clip of the song so you can hear the words set to the original music. This excerpt is performed by a vocal trio called Ensemble Belladonna. Again I'll put a link to this clip on the website. (SOUND CLIP)

Now let me break down the lyrics for you a little bit more. The first line is "Mirie it is while summer ilast with fugheles song." The first word is ***Mirie*** – or ***merry*** – M-E-R-R-Y. In the song, the word is given three distinct notes, so that suggests that it was intended to be sung as three syllables – not two. So ***Mirie*** (meer-ee-ay). Merry it is while summer lasts "with fugheles song." ***Fughel*** is an early version of the word ***fowl*** – F-O-W-L. So it meant 'bird.' And "fugheles song" meant the 'fowl's song' or the 'song of the birds.' So 'Merry it is while summer lasts with the song of the birds.'

All of those words are Old English words, including the word ***song***. I haven't mentioned the etymology of that word yet. But ***song***, as well as the related words ***sing***, ***sang*** and ***sung***, are all Old English words. As I noted earlier, we don't have very many native words related to music, but those are native words. In fact, those who like to look for comparisons between English and German often point to the conjugation of the verb ***sing***. Where English has ***sing***, ***sang***, ***sung***, German has S-I-N-G-E-N (/zingen/), S-A-N-G- (/zang/), and G-E-S-U-N-G-E-N (/ge-zoon-gen/). So even though the pronunciation is a bit different, you can see the connection in the conjugation and spelling of those words.

The second line of the song is "oc nu necheth windes blast and weder strong" – 'but now nears the wind's blast and the weather strong.' So winter is approaching. ***Necheth*** is just a variation of words like ***near***, and ***nigh***, and ***next***. They're all closely related Old English words. So when the song says that winter's blast ***necheth***, it means that it 'draws near' or 'approaches.'

The next line is "Ei ei what this nicht is long" – 'Alas, what this night is long,' but it means 'the nights are becoming long.' Then "And ich with wel michel wrong, soregh and murne and [fast]" – literally translated as 'And I with well much wrong, sorrow and mourn and fast.'

So here, where the song refers to "much wrong", the sense is that the approaching winter will cause wrong or suffering, as well as sorrow and mourning. The last word is actually missing from the surviving text. But given the rhyming scheme, scholars generally agree that the missing word had to rhyme with ***last*** and ***blast***, which were both used earlier in the verse. So it is generally agreed that the final word is ***fast*** – meaning that the singer is going to fast or go without food during the upcoming winter.

Again, assuming the last word is ***fast***, all of the words in this song are from Old English. That suggests that the song might be much older than the surviving page that preserved the song. So even though this song is generally dated to around the year 1225, it may in fact be much older than that.

Now this is one of two songs about summer that appear for the first time in the early 1200s. The other song is a little more well-known. It is usually known as "Sumer is Icumen In" – or "Summer Has Come In." It is also known as the 'Cuckoo Song' based on the refrain of the song.

First of all, let's consider where this second song came from. It is also part of a larger manuscript, and this particular manuscript has been dated to the 1261 – give or take a couple of years. The manuscript was housed at Reading Abbey just west of London. And the book contains a variety of documents composed in Latin and French, including poems, fables and medical texts. But it has one document composed in English. And that document is the only surviving copy of this song.

Now even though the manuscript is dated to around the year 1261, the song itself is usually dated a bit earlier – often between 1225 and 1250. So this song was probably copied down around the same time as, or just after, the prior song we looked at – "Merry It Is While Summer Lasts." That means that both of these songs were probably being sung around the same time in the early 1200s.

I should note that this second song is a rota or round. That means that it was intended to be sung by multiple people in succession. In this case, it was designed to be sung by six people. One would start, and then at a specific point, the second person would start, and then when the second person got to that same point, the third person would start, and so on. And on the page, there are actually specific instructions in Latin explaining how the song was to be sung in this manner. That makes this the oldest known rota or round in English, and it is in fact the oldest known rota in any language that uses six voices.

So I've talked enough about the background of the song, now let me read you the lyrics. First in Modern English, then the original lyrics in Middle English.

Summer has come in,
Sing loudly, cuckoo!
The seed grows
And the meadow blooms,
The wood springs now
Sing, cuckoo!

The ewe cries out to her lamb
The cow lows after her calf;
The bullock prances; the buck darts or farts *(I'll come back to that)*
Merrily sing, cuckoo!

Sing merrily, cuckoo!
Cuckoo, cuckoo,
You sing well, cuckoo,
Don't ever stop.

Sing cuckoo now. Sing cuckoo.
Sing cuckoo. Sing cuckoo now.

OK, so here's the original Middle English version:

Sumer is icumen in
Lhude sing cuccu
Groweþ sed
and bloweþ med
and springþ þe wude nu
Sing cuccu

Awe bleteþ after lomb
lhouþ after calue cu
Bulluc sterteþ
bucke uerteþ

murie sing cuccu
Cuccu cuccu
Wel singes þu cuccu
ne swik þu nauer nu

Sing cuccu nu, Sing cuccu.
Sing cuccu, Sing cuccu nu.

Now here's a performance of the song with its original melody. (SOUND CLIP)

So that's the Cuckoo Song. And just like before, I want to take you through the lyrics of the song. The first line is "Sumer is icumen in." So that's 'Summer is come in,' but it means 'Summer has come in' or 'Summer has arrived.'

Then, "Lhude sing cuccu" – 'Loudly sing cuckoo.' Of course, the cuckoo is the cuckoo bird.

"Groweþ sed and bloweþ med" – 'groweth seed and bloweth meadow,' but it means 'the seed grows and the meadow blossoms.' That makes a little more sense when we consider that the word ***blow*** had a secondary meaning in early English. Of course, it could refer to the moving wind or a moving hand or weapon, as when you strike a blow against another person. But it could also meant 'to bloom or blossom.' So think of it as 'to blow up' like a balloon. That's what flowers do when that blossom. And in fact, we still have the phrase "full-blown" which is derived from this sense of the word as 'bloom' or 'blossom.' It means 'fully mature.' And I should also note that ***bloom***, ***blossom*** and ***blow*** are cognate. They come from the same root word. So 'The seeds grows and the meadow blows or blooms.'

The next line is "and springþ þe wude nu, Sing cuccu" – "and springeth the wood now, sing Cuckoo." This means that 'the wood or woods are springing forth,' so leaves are returning to the trees. And it is this sense of 'springing forth' that ultimately led to the word ***spring*** being adopted as a word for the season when leaves and flowers spring forth.

Then we have "Awe bleteþ after lomb" – 'The ewe bleats after the lamb,' but it means 'The ewe cries out to her lamb.' Of course, ***ewe*** – E-W-E – is a word for a female sheep. It's an Old English word. And here, the word is rendered as ***awe***, which is just an earlier version of the word. And it says that the ewe ***bleateth*** after her lamb. ***Bleat*** is an old word that meant 'a sheep's cry.' It has largely died out of English, and has since been replaced with 'baaa.'

The next line is "lhouþ after calue cu" – 'loweth after calf cow.' Now if we work our way around that old syntax, and re-order the words to fit Modern English, we get 'Cow loweth after calf' – or 'The cow lows after her calf.' If you've spent much time on a farm, you probably know that when a cow makes a loud moaning sound, that's called ***lowing***. If you're not from the farm, you might say that it is ***mooing***. But it's basically the same thing.

Then we have "Bulluc sterteþ" – 'the bullock starts or jumps or prances.' ***Bullock*** means a young bull. And ***sterteþ*** is literally 'starteth' or 'start,' but it meant 'to jump or prance.' Now that may seem odd, but that was actually the original meaning of the word ***start***. Think about the word ***startle***. That's just a variation of the word ***start***, and it has retained much of its original meaning. It still means 'to jump or jerk.' The modern sense of the word ***start*** as 'begin' didn't really emerge until the 1500s. Think about the term ***jump-start*** and you can get of sense of how the word evolved. When you're startled, you jump or jerk. You go from a state of sitting still to moving really fast. And that is what animals tended to do when you tried to get them to move really quickly. That would ***start*** in the sense of 'jumping,' but over time, the word ***start*** came to refer to 'the point when something first moved.' So when that movement began, it was said 'to start.' And that led to the sense of the word ***start*** as 'to begin.' So here, when the song says that the "Bulluc sterteþ," it simply means that the young bull jumps or prances around.

Then we have the next line – "bucke uerteþ." Now this is one of the most debated lines in all of Middle English song. ***Bucke*** is an early version of the word ***buck***. Now today, we think of a buck as 'a male deer.' But in Old and Middle English it could also refer to 'a male goat.' So the word can be read either way. And then we have that word ***uerteþ***, which has caused a lot of debate among modern scholars.

First of all, that word isn't found in any other documents in Old English or early Middle English. So it isn't entirely clear what the word means. Scholars have proposed two theories. One theory is that the word is derived from the Latin word ***vertere*** meaning 'to turn or overturn.' We have that root word in modern words like ***convert***, ***divert***, and ***revert***. And the simple word ***vert*** did enter English meaning to 'turn up, or root up, or twist.' So this theory proposes that "bucke uerteþ" means 'the buck jumps and twists and darts about.' The problem with this theory is that the word ***vert*** as a distinct verb isn't found in any other English document until the late 1500s – over three and a half centuries later. And the song doesn't have any other words from Latin or French. All of the other words are native Old English words. So it seems unlikely that this early English folk song would have an obscure Latin word stuck in it.

The other theory is the word ***uerteþ*** meant farteth – so the 'buck farts.' Now in prior episodes, I have mentioned that in the far south of England, people often pronounced the initial 'f' sound as a 'v'. So ***fox*** was pronounced as ***vox***, and that's how we got the word ***vixen*** meaning 'a female fox.' So if this song was composed in that region, it would have been common to pronounce ***fart*** as ***vart*** – and ***farteth*** as ***varteth***. And in fact, that '-eth' ending is also a clue. In southern and central England, verbs ended in '-eth,' where in the north of England, they ended '-s.' So in southern and central England, people would say "he starteth," but in northern England, people would say "he starts." Obviously, the northern '-s' form won out over time, and it eventually replaced the southern '-eth' form. But the fact that this song uses verb forms like ***sterteþ*** and ***uerteþ*** with that '-eth' ending means that it was not composed in the north of England. So that lends some credence to the theory that the song was composed in the south of England – in the old Wessex region where 'f's were often pronounced as 'v's. And therefore, ***uerteþ*** was simply a local way of pronouncing 'ferteth' – or 'farteth'.

The Oxford English Dictionary accepts this theory, and it cites this song 'Sumer Is Icumen In' as having the first recorded use of the word ***fart*** in the English language. So there you go.

Now the final lines are pretty straight-forward. "Murie sing cuccu" – 'Merrily sing cuckoo.' "Wel singes þu cuccu" – 'Well sing you cuckoo' or 'you sing well cuckoo.' "Ne swik þu nauer nu" – 'No cease you never now,' but it means 'Never stop, or do not stop now.'

So there you have it. The oldest surviving songs composed in English. Before I conclude, I did want to mention one more thing about 'Sumer Is Icumen In' or the 'Cuckoo Song.' Of all the songs I've discussed in this episode, it is the one that had the most enduring legacy. Not that you're going to hear it on the radio or that you probably have it on your iPhone, but some school students do still learn that song today. And in fact, it is known far beyond the English-speaking world.

I mentioned that the song uses exclusively Old English words – assuming that ***verteth*** is not a Latin loanword. So it has a very Germanic foundation. Given that, it may not be surprising that the song also found an audience in Germany. In fact, in 1972, the organizers of the Olympic Games in Munich decided to use the song as part of the opening ceremonies for the games. The song was featured as thousands of German children performed a choreographed number. It was one of the first large-scale choreographed numbers at an Olympic opening ceremony – something that has become standard today. And in case you're curious, here is part of the audio of that performance from the 1972 Olympics. (SOUND CLIP)

So there you have it – the 'Cuckoo Song' – one of the oldest songs in English history, and it still lives on to this day.

Again, I'll post a link to all of these audio clips on the website – historyofenglishpodcast.com. And until next time, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.

EPISODE 102: A MEDIEVAL GLOSSARY

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 102: A Medieval Glossary. In this episode, we're going to look at the interaction of English and French in the early 1200s. As we know, English borrowed a lot of words from French during the Middle English period. But much of that borrowing occurred after the mid-1200s. In the early 1200s, as English documents started to reappear, French loanwords were still few and far between. During this period, English and French existed side-by-side, but they didn't tend to invade each other's space. For the most part, English manuscripts used English words. But French was starting to encroach on the margins – and 'in' the margins. Some of the first evidence we have of the changes that were about to take place can be found in the notes and translations left behind by scribes who were trying to manage the growing interaction of English, French and Latin. This is the story of Medieval glosses.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can sign up to support the podcast at Patreon.com/historyofenglish. And as always, you can reach me by email at kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com

Now this time, I want to continue looking at developments during the first half of the 1200s. We're still in the early part of the reign of Henry III who reigned as king for 56 years in total. As I've noted before, this was a period in which English writing was starting to make a comeback, but English documents were still rare. Most manuscripts were composed in Latin, and increasingly, French was being used as an alternative. But in England, most of the scribes spoke English as their native language, so they had to learn Latin and French as foreign languages. And some of them only acquired a basic working knowledge of those languages.

As they worked with documents composed in those other languages, they would often scribble little notes in the margins. Those notes were often in English, and they were usually translations of foreign words or summaries of specific passages. These notes not only helped the scribe who made them, but also helped anyone else who might read the manuscript in the future and might also be stumped by the same obscure words in the document.

Now this was not a new development. I've alluded to these types of notes or translations in earlier episodes. They were essential for any scribe who was working with a document that was composed in another language. In fact, these types of notes can be found in the earliest writings composed by human beings. The ancient civilization of Sumer in modern-day Iraq produced some of the oldest human writing. That writing was done on clay tablets, and those tablets show that the Sumerians often wrote down and kept extensive word lists. In 2340 BC, the Sumerians were conquered by the Semitic-speaking Akkadians. And after that conquest, the Akkadians had to interpret the tablets written in the language of the Sumerians. So they started to put together word lists in both languages to help with the translation.

They would take those old Sumerian word lists, and they would translate them by putting the equivalent Akkadian word beside the Sumerian word. Some scholars consider these bilingual word lists to be the first dictionaries. One of those surviving lists has over 9,700 separate words recorded on 24 tablets. Again, those lists were essential to scribes who were trying to work with both of those languages.

If we jump forward a couple of thousand years to the Greeks, we find that they also had to deal with a similar problem. Classical Greek was divided into several regional dialects, and it could be difficult for a Greek speaker in one part of Greece to understand a Greek speaker in another part of Greece. And Greece was a very literate world which produced a lot of documents. In fact, like all languages, the Greek language evolved over time. When Greek scribes in the second century BC looked back to the original version of the Iliad and the Odyssey – which had been composed about five centuries earlier – they had a tough time working through that earlier form of the language. So those early Greek scribes had a lot of the same problems as the later English scribes. They were dealing with a language that had changed quite a bit, and they were dealing with a lot of regional dialects that were quite different from each other.

When those Greek scholars tried to update those old texts like the Iliad and the Odyssey, they would often make notes about the changes that had taken place in the language over the centuries. They would include explanations or translations of words that were no longer understood by most Greek speakers. Those obscure or foreign words were called ***glossai*** in Greek. The word was actually derived from a Greek word for the 'tongue.' The term was later extended to words, so it could mean 'words' or 'language.' The sense of the word as 'language' exists in the second part of the term ***polyglot*** which literally means 'many languages,' but specifically refers to someone who speaks several languages.

In the more restricted sense of the term as 'words,' the Greek term was applied to obscure words – words that required a translation. And over time, the term was extended to include the actual translation or explanation itself. The term passed into Latin as ***glossa*** and then into English as ***gloss***. So those little notes in the margins of manuscripts became known as ***glosses***.

I should note that this word ***gloss*** is completely unrelated to the other word ***gloss*** meaning shiny or bright. That's actually a separate word of Germanic origin, and it's probably related to words like ***glass*** and ***glow***. But here, I want to focus of the other meaning of ***gloss*** – the Greek version – the word meaning a translation of an obscure word or term.

Outside of the literary field, we don't use this word ***gloss*** in reference to manuscripts much anymore. But we do use it in other contexts. As I noted, a gloss was a translation or an explanation. And sometimes, when we're explaining something, we focus on one aspect of the explanation and ignore the other parts. In that case, we are said to 'gloss over' the part that we downplay or ignore. So today, we use that word ***gloss*** as a verb, usually in the phrase ***gloss over*** to mean that we are intentionally ignoring or obscuring some underlying meaning or intent. And again, that usage is derived from the original meaning of the word ***gloss*** as an explanation or translation.

Depending on the document and the scribe, the gloss could be added just about anywhere on the page. At the top or bottom, on the side, or even between the lines of text directly above or below the word being translated.

Sometimes, a scribe would take all of those terms that had been translated or explained, and the scribe would put them together in a separate list. This list could then be attached to the front or back of the manuscript. And this type of list of glosses became known as a ***glossary*** which is a term we still use today. So a ***glossary*** is just a list of glosses or translations, usually words associated with a particular text.

As documents were copied by scribes, these glossaries were also copied along with the rest of the text. But over time, some scribes started to take these various glossaries and put them together to create a master glossary independent of any particular manuscript. So it was a master list of common terms encountered by scribes who were working with different languages or dialects. These master glossaries were sort of like those long lists of terms used by the Akkadians back in ancient Babylonia. And again, they are the direct ancestor of our modern dictionaries.

These early master glossaries were usually organized by themes or categories. So words for parts of the body were put together. And words for precious stones were put together. Other categories might include words for plants or animals, or medicinal herbs. But some scribes decided to take a broader approach and put all the words together and organize them based on their first letter. So all of the words that began with an A were put together, and all of the words that began with a B were put together, and so on. But the order didn't extent beyond the first letter. So all the A words were put together, but beyond the first letter A, the words were listed in random order. So it wasn't the full alphabetical order that we use today. It was limited solely to the first letter.

These types of early glossaries existed in many languages – including Old English. Several Anglo-Saxon scribes maintained them to aid with translations. In fact, the four oldest surviving English glossaries date to the Anglo-Saxon period. The oldest one probably dates to the early 700s. And the words are arranged in that 'sort-of' alphabetical order that I just described. Words were grouped together by their first letter, but just the first letter. Alphabetical order didn't extend to any of the other letters. But as the glossaries grew, scribes needed to provide more order and structure to make the words easier to find. So they started to extend the alphabetical order to the second letter as well as the first. And then, by the 900s, it was extended to the third letter in some glossaries. But that was as far as Anglo-Saxon glossaries went.

Most of those early English glossaries consisted of long lists of Latin words with an English translation. And those lists were intended to help English scribes who didn't speak Latin very well and needed help translating those Latin words. So the Latin words came first, followed by the English translation. But around the current point in our story, we finally got the opposite – an alphabetic list where the English words appeared first followed by a Latin translation.

In the early 1200s, a scribe in the West Midlands of England started to put together some of these English word lists with Latin translations. It may seem like English word lists would have been used before, but there is no evidence of such lists until this point.

The man who made these lists was almost certainly a monk, and he apparently lived in the Priory and Cathedral at Worcester in the West Midlands. His name is unknown, but scholars are fascinated by his work because he glossed manuscripts in the Cathedral for many years. His glosses and translations are found in over 20 documents, and during his lifetime he translated about 50,0000 words. The reason why scholars know that all of this work was carried out by the same man is because he had a very distinctive handwriting style. He apparently had a tremor because his handwriting was very shaky. And it was very distinct from the handwriting of all the other scribes in the region. For this reason, he is known to modern scholars as the Tremulous Hand. And since that is his given moniker, that's how I'll refer to him.

It appears that the scribe's tremor prevented him from working as a regular copyist. Instead, he spent most of his time working with old Anglo-Saxon manuscripts that were composed before the Norman Conquest. As he poured through those old documents, he made little notes and translations in the margins. Those glosses are priceless to modern scholars, because they reveal a lot about how the English language had changed in the century and half since the Conquest. And that's why this scribe's work has been studied so much by modern scholars.

It appears that his tremor worsened over time as he got older. And based on that change, modern scholars have pieced together a rough chronology of his glosses and documents he worked with. And it appears that early in his career, he glossed or translated those Old English documents into his West Midlands dialect of Middle English. His glosses were substantial, especially given that he was theoretically working with documents in the same language. In some documents, he glossed or translated as many as one out of every four words. Very often, he would pick out the old words that he didn't know or understand and he would jot them down in the margins of the manuscript. Those were the words he tried to translate or define.

In some cases, he recognized the word but the pronunciation had changed so much since the Anglo-Saxon period that he had to revise the spelling to reflect the current pronunciation. Sometimes the Old English words had inflections that had either changed or disappeared. So he had to update those words as well. But very often, the Old English word had completely fallen out of use. If he could figure out what the old word meant, he would gloss the old word with a modern translation. If there was another English that meant the same thing, he would use that contemporary English word as a gloss. But sometimes there was no other word in English that meant the same thing, so in those cases he would use a Latin or French word as a translation. Scholars find this fascinating because the Tremulous Hand was not translating from one language to another – as was normally the case. He was actually working in what was theoretically the same language. He was glossing Old English documents for Middle English readers. That was how much the language had changed over the past couple of centuries. And scholars use those glosses to verify that Old English was essentially a dead language by the early 1200s.

When I say that the language had changed, I'm referring to the changes we've explored over the course of the podcast since the Norman Conquest. The structure and grammar and syntax of the language had changed substantially. English still had relatively few loanwords, but a lot of Old English words had already started to disappear and were replaced by Norse or French or Latin words. Old English words themselves were often pronounced differently, and that meant they

were spelled differently. And they often had different inflections or no inflections at all. So it was very difficult for an English scribe in the 1200s to read an Old English document without the help of glosses and translations.

It appears that at some point the Tremulous Hand came up with novel way to translate some of those Old English words that he didn't recognize or understand. He probably realized that many of those old documents had been translated into Latin during the Anglo-Saxon period. So he went in the Worcester Cathedral library and pulled out those Latin translations and he started to use them as a guide for his translations. He used the Latin version to figure out what those Old English words meant. Again, this shows how much the English language had changed. He had to use a Latin translation to figure out the earlier English vocabulary.

He then went back and glossed those Old English manuscripts with those Latin translations. In the margins, he started to keep lists of English and Latin word pairs. And from there, he started to compile a master word list with the English word first followed by the Latin translation. The English words were arranged by first letter only since full alphabetical order was still rare. This alphabetical English word list is the oldest surviving glossary of English words with Latin translations. And that was a notable development because the list was used to decipher Old English manuscripts – not Latin manuscripts. So Old English was essentially being treated as a foreign language.

Now I mentioned that the handwriting of the Tremulous Hand was so shaky that he didn't tend to copy or compose entire documents. But one manuscript does exist in his handwriting. It is part of a set of documents which are known as the 'Worcester Fragments.' His work includes a copy of his word list and two separate poems. It isn't clear if he composed the poems himself or he simply copied them from another source. Either way, the first of the two poems is well-known to scholars of this period. And it is notable because it laments the fact that English school students were no longer being taught in the English language.

In fact, I mentioned this poem way back in Episode 37 when I talked about Old English poetry. I talked about the structure of Old English poetry and the way that it used alliteration in a very specific way. And at the very end of that episode, I mentioned how that type of traditional Germanic poetry disappeared in the wake of the Norman Conquest. And a few years later after the Conquest, an English poet composed a poem based on that traditional style which was disappearing. And the poem lamented the loss of English learning after the Conquest. Well, that poem is preserved in the handwriting of the Tremulous Hand. I should note that in the earlier episode, I said that his poem was composed about a generation after the Norman Conquest. But it was more like a century and a half after the Conquest.

Again, we don't know if the Tremulous Hand actually composed the poem, but many scholars think that he did because he spent so much of his life studying and translating Old English documents. So obviously he had an interest in those old manuscripts, and he was apparently fascinated by the older form of the language and how much it had changed. Back in Episode 37, I just gave you the Modern English translation of the poem. Well, here is it is in the Middle English of the Tremulous Hand. I am going to delete a section in the middle where he includes a

long list of Anglo-Saxon bishops, but otherwise, this is the poem – first in Modern English and then in the Middle English of the West Midlands:

Saint Bede was born here in Britain with us
And he wisely translated books so that the English
People were taught through them

Sanctus Beda was iboren her on Breotone mid us
And he wisliche bec awende thet theo Englise
leoden thurh weren ilerde

Abbot Aeflric whom we call Alcuin
Was a writer and translated five books
Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Numbers, Leviticus
Through these were our people taught in English

Aelfric abbod, the we Alquin hoteth,
He was bocare, and the fif bec wende,
Genesis, Exodus, Vtronomius, Numerus, Leuiticus,
thurh theos wæren ilærde ure leoden on Englisc

These people taught our people in English
Their light was not dark but it glowed fairly
Now is that teaching forsaken and our people lost
And another people teaches our folk
And many of our teachers are damned
And that folk with them

theos lærden ure leodan on Englisc,
Nes deorc heore liht, ac hit feire glod.
Nu is theo leore forleten, and thet folc is forloren.
Nu bes othre leoden the lereth ure folc,
And feole of then lortheines losiæth
and thæt folc forth mid.

I should note that the poem mentions a couple of Anglo-Saxon writers, Aelfrich and Alcuin, and it says that they were the same person. Well, they were not. They were two distinct people. Aelfric translated the writings of Alcuin, and it appears that the poet was confused by that fact since he suggested that they were the same person.

Beyond that mistake, the poet is addressing the fact that English had been relegated to the background during the period after the Conquest. It had largely disappeared as a written language. Formal education was in Latin, and French was making inroads in official documents and literature. But English itself had ceased to be language of learning and education.

For scribes like the Tremulous Hand, this was considered to be a great loss. Even if he didn't write that poem, he certainly felt strongly enough about the loss of English learning that he preserved the poem for posterity.

So thanks to the work of the Tremulous Hand, we know that Old English had essentially become a dead language that had to be glossed and translated to be fully understood. And English itself wasn't considered fit for a proper education in England. But even though Old English had disappeared, a new type of English had emerged like a phoenix rising from the ashes. And the influence of this new type of English was rapidly expanding.

The first piece of evidence we have for the ascendancy of this new type of English is the re-emergence of English writing during this period. The other piece of evidence we have is the fact that English was replacing French as the native language of the nobility. And that was a big deal. For the past century and half, the nobility of England had spoken French as their first language. Early on, most of them only spoke French. After a few generations, they were probably bi-lingual – speaking both French and English as first languages. But now we have evidence in the early 1200s that most of them no longer spoke French as a first language. They only spoke English as their native language. So French had to be learned. And we know that this change had taken place because surviving documents from this period mention that many nobles were sending their children to Paris to learn how to speak French or to improve their French. But more importantly, this period saw the production of textbooks and guides that were designed to teach English children how to speak French. These guides were specifically intended for the children of nobles. And that suggests that these noble children weren't speaking French as a first language anymore.

I noted a few episodes back that Henry III invited many French nobles to England during his reign. And the arrival of those nobles reinforced the role of French among the nobility, and it contributed to the use and acceptance of Parisian French over Norman French. Well, that was partly because many of the English nobles weren't speaking Norman French as a native language anymore. And as we'll see in an upcoming episode, this created a conflict between the native English nobles and Henry's new French nobles.

English may have expanded among the nobility, but it isn't clear if it extended to the young king himself. Henry certainly spoke French, but there is some evidence that he also spoke English – at least as a second language. This evidence is based on the fact that Henry's brother was elected as the King of the Germans in the year 1257 – a little later in Henry's reign. Henry's brother was named Richard and he was the Earl of Cornwall. He was elected as King of the Germans by the German princes who had the authority to choose to a king, even though the title didn't really mean very much or grant him much authority. So what does Richard's election as the German king have to do with Henry's ability to speak English? Well, Matthew Paris was a well-known chronicler who lived during this period, and he wrote that Richard was chosen as German king partly "on account of his speaking the English language, which is similar in sound to German." So Henry's brother Richard could speak English which was still seen as a close relative of German.

And if Richard could speak English, then that suggests that Henry could also speak English either as a first language or a second language. But again, we don't have any real direct evidence to confirm that.

Even if English wasn't spoken in the royal court, it appears that it was spoken by most of the nobles, and their children only knew English as a first language. So they needed those new guides and textbooks that were designed to teach them how to speak French.

The most well-known of these early textbooks was a manuscript composed by a nobleman named Walter of Bibbesworth. It was composed in the 1230s, around the current point in our overall story. It's really an extended poem, but it was intended to serve as a guide to help children learn French. Many copies of this text have survived the centuries, and there were several different versions produced by later writers who edited and modified the original text. Based on the large number of surviving copies, it appears that the guide was quite popular at the time, apparently because it was in high demand.

The preface of the poem says that it was composed for Lady Dionysia de Mounchensy, and some versions contain a dedication that says that the poem was composed at her request to help her children learn French. It isn't really clear how Walter knew Lady Dionysia, but we know from other sources that "de Mounchensy" was part of her husband's name, and she married him in the year 1234. So that is a clue as to the date of the poem.

Now you may be wondering what Walter's popular manuscript has to do with glosses. Well, that is actually how Walter structured his manuscript. The poem itself was composed in French, but he glossed the difficult French words with English translations. In other words, he wrote out the lines in French, but in certain places, above the French words, he would write in the English translation. And Walter said that he did that intentionally. He wrote that "everything [I] say you will find first the French and then above the English." Of course, that in an English translation of his original French text.

The manuscript was designed to teach French, but more specifically, it was designed to teach the words that a noble was expected to know. The text begins with parts of body, and then moves on to include things like clothing, animals, food, and eating utensils. It also includes terms associated with falconry.

Along the way, many of the French words contain English glosses, but not all of them do. In fact, Walters' glosses are fascinating because they shed some light on which French words were commonly known and didn't need a translation versus the ones that were unfamiliar and did need a translation.

Apparently the French names for birds were not widely known in England because Walter glossed those terms with English translations. In one passage, Walter mentions larks, but since he writes in French, he uses the French word. The modern French word is ***alouette*** which you might know from this popular children's son: [Song Clip].

In case you're curious, that's:
Alouette, gentille alouette, (Lark, gentle lark)
Alouette, je te plumerai. (Lark, I will pluck you – or I will pluck your feathers off)

Anyway, Walter used that French word ***alouette*** in his manuscript. He actually used an earlier Anglo-French version of the word – ***alouues***. But then, above that word, Walter wrote "***larkes***" – or ***larks***. So he glossed the French word with an English translation.

By the way, I should mention that the second line in that children's song I played is "Alouette, je te plumerai" – 'Lark, I will pluck your feathers.' Well, we actually have a version of that French word ***plumerai*** in English. We have it as the word ***plume*** meaning 'an ornamental feather or a group of feathers.' By extension, the word is also used to describe other things that float in the air like 'a plume of smoke.' Well, Old English also had a version of that word which was ***fleece***. So ***plume*** and ***fleece*** are actually cognate. And this is another example of the P-to-F sound change identified by Jacob Grimm. ***Plume*** comes from French and Latin with its original Indo-European 'p' sound, and ***fleece*** comes from Old English with its Germanic 'f' sound.

Now returning to Walter's manuscript for students of French, he not only glossed the French word for 'larks,' he also glossed the French word for 'cranes.' The Modern French word for 'crane' is ***grue***. Walter wrote it as "***gruwes***," and above that French word, he wrote "***cranes***" – or ***cranes***. By the way, French ***grue*** and English ***crane*** are also cognate. This is another one of the sound changes identified by Jacob Grimm – specifically the shift from the 'g' sound to the 'k' sound. That's how we got Latin ***agriculture*** with a 'g' sound and Old English ***acre*** with a 'k' sound from a common root. And here, French got ***grue*** where English got ***crane***, again from a common root.

There are lots more examples of these types of glosses or translations in Walter's manuscript. For example, in a passage where he discusses curly hair, he uses the Anglo-French term 'les cheveuz recerciliez,' but he glosses it with 'lockes crispe' – literally 'crisp locks.' ***Lock*** is an Old English word for 'hair,' and we still use that term today when we refer to a 'lock of hair,' or someone's 'curly locks,' or the fairy tale character Goldilocks – literally 'golden-haired.' But Walter's translation was 'lockes crispe' – or 'crisp locks' – not 'curly locks.' So why did he describe curly hair as ***crisp***? Well, because the word ***curly*** or ***curl*** didn't exist yet in English. It doesn't appear in an English document until around the year 1400. So Walter used an Old English word that meant 'curly,' and that's the word ***crisp***. Believe it or not, the original meaning of ***crisp*** was 'curly.' And even though the word was used by the Anglo-Saxons, they had actually borrowed it from the Romans, so it has Latin roots. The word ***crisp*** didn't come to mean 'brittle' until the 1500s. It isn't clear why the meaning changed, but one theory suggest that when something starts to burn, it quickly dries out and tends become wrinkled and curly. So it is 'crisp' in the original sense of the word as 'curly.' But then, it also starts to become brittle. So perhaps, over time, the meaning of the word ***crisp*** shifted from the curliness of the object to the brittleness of the object. Anyway, that's just a theory. But either way, Walter used the word to gloss the French term for curly hair.

Walter's guide helped to teach that kind of basic French vocabulary, but it went far beyond that. It also emphasized subtle distinctions between words that sounded very similar. Walter noted that the words needed to be spelled properly in order to clearly indicate the differences in pronunciation. And in fact, his text is the first English document to use the word ***spell*** to mean the process of putting letters together in their proper order. And Walter includes the word ***spell*** as a gloss for a phrase written in French. In the Anglo-French of the early 1200s, Walter wrote, "Espau nautrement ki les lettres ensemble prent," which roughly translates as 'put the letters together in their natural order.' But above that French passage, Walter wrote the word "***spelieth***."

Now this particular gloss or translation is interesting because the word ***spell*** is an old word, but generally speaking, it wasn't used in the modern sense of putting letters in proper order until the late 1300s and 1400s. So Walter's textbook suggests that the word was being used with that modern meaning at least a century earlier – in the early 1200s.

I've talked about the word ***spell*** before. Back in Episode 95, I noted that the word is a Germanic word that meant 'to speak or talk.' So the original meaning of ***spell*** is actually very similar to the original Greek meaning of the word ***gloss***. The word ***spell*** is found in Old English, but the Franks also had a version of the word. And the Frankish version passed into French and then into English. So English ended up with two slightly different versions of the same word – one native and one from French. Within Old English, the word ***spell*** had a sense of something spoken. That could include a story or an important message. And in Old English, a 'god spel' meant a 'good story' or 'good news.' And that term 'god spel' became the word ***gospel*** as used in the Church. The word also became associated with magical charms and utterances. And that led to the sense of the word ***spell*** as in 'to put a spell on someone.'

As I said, the Franks also had that Germanic word, and the Frankish version passed into French where it meant to explain something – usually in a step-by-step process. So it's like when we say, "I am going to spell it out for you," which means I'm going to break it down piece by piece. That version of the word started to appear in English documents in the 1300s, and it meant 'to read a difficult text word for word.' So if you were an English speaker trying to read a Latin text, you might have to break it down word by word. So you would 'spell' the text. But over time, by extension, the word ***spell*** came to refer to the process of breaking down individual words letter by letter. You had to put the letters in the right order. And that led to the modern sense of ***spell*** as in a 'spelling bee.' But again, even though this evolution in meaning is documented in later English documents, Walter of Bibbesworth uses the word ***spell*** in this same sense as a gloss in the early 1200s. So that suggests that the word had that modern sense even earlier that the later documents suggest.

By the way, whenever I mention the word ***spell***, I usually get questions about the use of the word in the sense of 'come over and visit for a spell.' And when referring to the weather, we might say that we're having a cold spell or hot spell. Well, that's actually a completely different word that was also found in Old English. It actually comes from a different root, so it doesn't have anything to do with the other senses of the word ***spell*** – as in speech, or charms, or putting letters in order.

By the way, Walter's warning to his readers to mind their spelling is emphasized in a passage where he distinguishes the word ***rubie*** and ***rupie***. Of course, a ***ruby*** is a precious stone, but ***rupie*** was an Old French word for 'snot' or 'the drop of water that forms at the tip of your nose when you have a cold.' Walter includes the following passage, here translated into Modern English:

Great worth have rubies with a 'b', Surpassing 'rupies' with a 'p'. If this purse had as many rubies, let's suppose, As drops that fall from a runny nose, With precious jewels rich he would be As he who possessed so many rubies.	Meuz vaut la rubie par .b. Ki ne fet le rupie par .p. Car ci bource eut tant des rubies Cum le nes ad des rupies, Mult serreit riches de pirie Qui taunt eut de la rubie.

So Walter is teaching his students the difference between a ruby and a rupie, but he is also pointing out that the main difference lies in pronunciation, and therefore in the spelling of the words when they are written down. So the student has to pay careful attention to the way the words are spelled.

This is also a notable development because spelling was still very fluid during this period. As I noted before, modern dictionaries didn't exist yet. So words were spelled phonetically. And since pronunciations varied, spellings also varied. That was also why those early glossaries didn't use complete alphabetical order in the way we use it today.

I noted earlier that the first glossaries just grouped words together by their first letter. And then gradually that was extended to the first two letters – and then the first three letters. Well during this period, English glosses couldn't go much further than that because there were no standard spellings. When a word was spelled, most scribes would agree on the first letter. And depending on the word, they would probably agree on the second or third letter, but then the spellings would break down. So alphabetical order didn't really go beyond the third letter.

Over the next few centuries, a few writers experimented with full alphabetical order using every letter in a word, but that didn't really become standard practice in English until the 1600s – when English dictionaries finally started to fix the spelling of words. In fact, the manuscript that is considered the first proper English dictionary was composed in 1604 by a man named Robert Cawdrey. His was the first manuscript to list English words in complete alphabetical order and to define those words with English explanations or definitions. The alphabetical order was still so unique that he titled the dictionary "A Table Alphabeticall, Conteyning and Teaching the True Writing, and Understanding of Hard Usuall English Words." In his preface, Cawdrey felt the need to explain to his readers how alphabetical order worked. He wrote the following:

> If thou be desirous (gentle Reader) rightly and readily to understand, and to profit by this Table, and such like, then thou must learne the Alphabet, to wit, the order of the Letters as they stand, perfectly without booke, and where every Letter standeth: as 'b' neere the beginning, 'n' about the middest, and 't' toward the end. Nowe if the word, which thou

> art desirous to finde, begin with 'a' then looke in the beginning of this Table, but if with 'v' looke towards the end. Againe, if the word beginne with a 'ca' looke in the beginning of the letter c, but if with 'cu' then looke toward the end of that letter. And so of all the rest.

Cawdrey's manuscript established the model for all future English dictionaries, but again, those developments took place almost four centuries later in our story in the early Modern English period. At the current point in our story, in the early 1200s, scribes only had access to glossaries that were organized by the first letter – or first few letters – and which usually consisted of a list of words in one language with a translation into another language. And again, those lists were an extension of the traditional glosses which had been used by scribes for centuries.

Now returning to Walter's glosses in his textbook for English students, he not only taught his readers French vocabulary, he also taught them grammar and, specifically, he taught the use of proper articles when using a French word. It was the distinction between masculine ***le*** and feminine ***la***. Walter instructed his students to pay careful attention to this distinction and to make sure they used the correct article, because in French that was the main way to distinguish two words that were otherwise pronounced and spelled the same way. If one was masculine and one was feminine, you had to make that distinction clear with the correct article. So he distinguished 'la levere' from 'le levere.' The first word is glossed with the English word ***lip***, the second word is glossed with the English word ***hare*** – H-A-R-E. He then distinguished 'la livere' from 'le livre.' The first term is glossed with the English word ***pount*** – or 'pound.' The second term is glossed with the word ***book***. In these back-to-back lines, Walter explains the difference between the two pairs of words which are homonyms, and he notes that the only difference between them is the proper article to use. So the difference is that one is masculine and one is feminine.

Again, in these passages, Walter is trying to explain the concept of grammatical gender. It is pretty much the same lesson that students would learn today if they were trying to learn French because English no longer has grammatical gender. And the fact that Walter felt the need to do the same thing in the early 1200s suggests that his English students didn't really understand this concept either. As we know, Old English had grammatical gender, and we saw that concept disappearing in some English manuscripts written shortly after the Norman Conquest. Walter's French textbook suggests that grammatical gender was completely gone by this point in the early 1200s. So even though the manuscript was designed to teach French, it actually tells us quite a bit about the state of English.

It tells us that grammatical gender was now a foreign concept. And when combined with the work of the Tremulous Hand, it tells us that English had changed significantly since the Norman Conquest. Walter's book also it tells us that this new form of English had spread into the nobility, and most of the noble children were no longer bi-lingual. They spoke English from birth and they had to learn French as they got older.

Walter's book also shows us how English students learned that French vocabulary. They did it in much the same way that we would do today. They learned the French word and its English equivalent. And in a society where both languages were spoken, there was a natural tendency to

use the words interchangeably. English speakers may not have been fully bi-lingual, but they could often recognize the French version of an English word. And increasingly, English speakers felt comfortable using the French word as a synonym – and usually the French word had a slightly more elevated sense. So it gave English speakers a better way to express nuance and subtlety. And this was to have major repercussions for the English language. It meant that English was acquiring two different ways of saying the same thing. One way in native English – and one way in French. And any differences in meaning allowed one to be used in common situations and the other in more formal situations.

If an English man or woman prepared a meal for family or friends, they could ***eat*** in English or ***dine*** in French. They might eat in an English ***house*** or a French ***manor*** or ***castle***. Or if the host was a peasant, they might eat in an English ***hut*** or a French ***cottage***. The host might prepare a meal to ***feed*** his guests in English or ***nourish*** them in French. If the person preparing the meal needed help, he or she could 'ask for help' in English, or 'request assistance' in French. The guests might be served English ***cow*** or French ***beef***, English ***sheep*** or French ***mutton***, English ***calf*** or French ***veal***, English ***pig*** or French ***pork***. The meat might be cooked over English ***fire*** or French ***flames***. The liquid in the pots might ***seethe*** in English, or ***boil*** or ***stew*** in French. This might be part of an English ***broth*** or a French ***soup***. The cook might work up an English ***sweat*** or French ***perspiration***. When the guests arrived, the host might meet them with an English ***kiss*** or a French ***embrace.*** The host would give them a 'hearty welcome' in English, or a 'cordial reception' in French. After a while it might be time to ***start*** or ***begin*** the meal in English or ***commence*** the meal in French. The guests would be called to the English ***bench*** or the French ***table***, which was located in an English ***room*** or a French ***chamber***. The guests would 'go in' in English or 'enter' in French. During mealtime, the guests might tell stories that were described as ***funny*** in English or ***amusing*** in French. The guests would consume a lot of food, but when they were full, they would ***stop*** in English or ***cease*** or ***finish*** in French. At the end of the evening, the guests would ***leave*** in English or ***depart*** in French. So you get the idea. English gradually started to acquire two different ways of saying the same thing. One way with common native English words and another way with French words that were considered slightly more elevated.

And very often, they would use both of those words together to reinforce the point and to make sure that the person they were speaking to understood what they were saying. During the early Middle English period, as English documents re-emerged, we see the use of these types of French and English pairs. Writers referred to the 'nobyll and worthy' – 'noble' being French and 'worthy' being English. They would refer to "informacion and loore' – 'information' being French and 'lore' being English. They would speak of 'mervayls and wondres' – 'marvels' being French and 'wonders' being English.

This type of pairing became very common in English speech. In a sense, English speakers were doing what scribes had always done. They were glossing their own language. They were using a French word beside the English word to make the meaning clear.

During this same time period in the early 1200s, a very important manuscript was composed in the West Midlands in the same area where the Tremulous Hand lived and worked. The text is called the Ancrene Wisse, and I'm going to discuss it in more detail in the next episode. It is notable in part because it contains so many French words, most of which were used for the first time in a surviving English document. The manuscript suggests that the English flood gates were starting to open to French. But it is clear from the text that the author was working with two different languages, and he isn't always certain that the reader will understand the French word. So very often, he glosses the French word with an English synonym, but he does it within the text itself – not in the margins.

In one part of the text, the author mentions the importance of being humble and doing good deeds in secret – using the phrase "privite, ant dearnliche" – 'private and dearnliche.' ***Private*** is French word and ***dearnliche*** is an Old English meaning 'secretly.'

In one version of the manuscript, the text uses the phrase "mid ouerpreisunge and herunge." The first word ***ouerpreisunge*** is based on the French word ***praise***. It literally means 'overpraise' or 'glorification.' And it's paired with its Old English equivalent ***herunge***. So the author used an English word as a synonym to explain the French word that was being introduced.

Very often, the manuscript uses a French word, and then it introduces the English equivalent with the phrase 'that is.' So the text refers to "cherité þat is luve" – 'charity that is love.' And it refers to "desperaunce þet is unhope" – 'desperation that is unhope' or hopelessness. The text mentions "ignoraunce þet is unwisdom" – 'ignorance that is unwisdom.' Again, all of these examples introduce a French word and then follow it with an English synonym.

An Old English word for 'patience' was ***þolemodnesse*** or 'thole-mood-ness.' So one part of the text refers to "pacience, þet is þolemodnesse" – 'patience that is thole-mood-ness.'

And in an earlier episode of the podcast, I mentioned that ***golnesse*** was an Old English word for 'lechery.' So the text refers to "lecherie þet is golnesse."

In one part of the text, the author refers to ***conscientia***, the Latin form of the word ***conscience***. But he also explains the meaning of the word in English by writing "thet is cleane and schir inwit" – "that is clean and shining inner wit' or inner wisdom.

In another passage, the manuscript refers to the contemplation of a bird flying at night. It uses the phrase "contemplatiun thet is, with heh thoht, ant with hali bonen" – "contemplation, that is with high thought and holy prayers." Again, we have the French word ***contemplation*** followed by a short definition in English.

What we see here is a type of glossing – a technique whereby the writer introduces French words which may be very familiar to some readers but not others. So he pairs them with an English synonym or translation.

This became a standard technique in the early Middle Ages – and we can also see it in the writings of Geoffrey Chaucer in the late 1300s. In the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, he refers to sauces that are "poynant and sharp." ***Poignant*** is a French word and ***sharp*** is an English synonym. He also refers to an idle monk who objects to manual labor or having to "swinken with his handes and laboure" (l. 186) – literally 'work with his hands and labor.' 'Swinken or work with his hands' is an English phrase. ***Labor*** is a French synonym.

So in these examples, we see how writers were dealing with the challenge of having to communicate with a mixed vocabulary. They did it with glosses and translations. But rather than putting them in the margins, they just incorporated the synonyms into the text itself.

There was one profession where this approach was especially important – where words had very precise and specific meanings and where the choice of the right word was essential. And that was the legal profession. The legal profession was becoming standardized in England throughout the 1200s. Old English legal codes had been largely replaced with codes written in Latin. But French was starting to be used beside Latin in the courts and, by the year 1300, English courts were just using French. So all of this posed a challenge to English lawyers. They had to deal with Anglo-Saxon legal concepts mixed with Latin and french legal terminology. So if you were a Medieval English lawyer, which word did you use – the traditional Old English word or the French equivalent? For the most part, the lawyers decided to cover their bases by using both. They paired the English and French terms to avoid any ambiguities. This was what scribes had been doing for years, and it became essential in the legal writing of Medieval England. And it is a standard feature of modern legalese to this day.

The following legal phrases combine at least one word used in Old English with a French or Latin word. We have

law and order
goods and chattels
last will and testament
acknowledge and confess
breaking and entering
fit and proper
keep and maintain
pardon and forgive
bind and obligate
deem and consider
give and grant
indemnify and hold harmless
hide and conceal
lewd and lascivious
free and clear
sale and transfer
land and tenements
true and correct

make and enter into
every kind and nature
give, devise and bequeath
right, title and interest

So as you can see, this very old technique of combining English and French words survives to this day, even if we no longer recognize that that's what we're doing. And it also helps to explain why modern legalese can be so ponderous.

But it's not just legal documents. When we use phrases like 'wrack and ruin,' 'love and affection,' 'soft and gentle,' 'kind and generous,' 'bells and whistles,' and 'greetings and salutations,' we're combining Old English and French words. We're tapping into both vocabularies to express the same basic idea. Of course, today we would consider all of those words to be English words, but this approach can be traced back to the introduction of French words into English in the early 1200s. And in some respects, this approach is an extension of the glosses that were once used to translate Medieval documents – when scribes had to find a way to communicate with a mixed vocabulary.

Next time, we'll look more closely at the early interaction between English and French. We'll see how a group of writers in the West Midlands were composing a lot of new manuscripts in English during this period. Those works had similar religious themes, but one of them stands out among the others. It that manuscript I mentioned earlier – a guide written for female recluses or hermits called the Ancrene Wisse. This may seem like an obscure religious text, but for scholars of Middle English, it is one of the most important pieces of literature composed in the 13th century. Beyond the actual prose of the text, it is important because it contains the first known use of hundreds of French words in the English language. Even though they are loanwords, they are some of the most commonly used words in English today. And mixed in with those loanwords were lots of English words that were being used in new ways, in new compounds, and new expressions, and new figures of speech, all of which we can recognize today without any problem. In many respects, this is the transitional document that we've been looking for. It bridges the gap between the Old English of Beowulf and the Middle English of Geoffrey Chaucer. And that's part of the reason why it has intrigued so many scholars.

So next time, we'll see what this 800 year old manuscript can tell us about the development of Modern English. Until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.

EPISODE 103: SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 103: Solitary Confinement. In this episode, we're going to look at one of the most important documents composed during the early Middle English period. It is a guide for female hermits or recluses who were called Anchoresses. The manuscript is called Ancrene Wisse – literally the Anchoress's Guide. The text is important for a couple of reasons. It shows how the English language was continuing to evolve, and it is also notable because it's one of the first English documents to contain a large number of French loanwords. Unlike prior documents which have a few loanwords here and there, the Ancrene Wisse features lots of new words. In fact, over 200 common words that we use everyday appear for the first time in the manuscript. So this time, we'll examine how this important text came about, and we'll also examine a few of the common words that were introduced in the manuscript.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can sign up to support the podcast at Patreon.com/historyofenglish. And as always, you can reach me by email at kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com

Now this time, I want to begin in a very familiar place – monasteries. Throughout much of the Old and Middle English period, I've talked about monks and monasteries. And I've done that because many of the surviving documents from those periods were written or copied by monks, and many of them were preserved in libraries in monasteries and cathedrals. That also helps to explain why so many of the surviving documents have religious themes.

I mentioned the origin of monks way back in Episode 33. I noted in that episode that in the 3rd century a man named Alexander sought to avoid the persecution of Christians by heading out to the Egyptian desert to live by himself and practice his religion. He wanted to live a simple and devout life in solitude. He was later joined by other recluses who sought to live separately from the rest of the world. Today, we might call these people ***hermits***, and that term is derived from an old Greek word that meant 'desert' or 'a place where no one lives.' So a hermit was literally a 'desert-dweller.' Since these hermits lived in isolation and solitude, they also came to be known as ***monks*** from the Greek word ***monos*** meaning 'one or alone.' That Greek root word also produced the word ***monastery*** for the place where monks lived and worked.

So even though monks sought isolation, they actually ended up living together in those early monasteries. Over the next few centuries, monasteries spread throughout the Mediterranean and Europe. But even though monasteries became common-place in the Christian world, they were not ***monolithic*** – which by the way is another word from the same root as ***monk*** and ***monastery***.

Throughout the podcast, I've talked about monasteries in a very generic way. And that may have left the impression that they were all pretty much the same. But in reality, there was quite a bit of variation between them.

One the biggest differences between monasteries was the particular 'rule' that each group of monks followed. The rule was a code that specified how the monastery was structured, and the specific duties of the monks. Some rules were so detailed that they regulated almost every aspect of a monk's life. They specified when the monks should pray, when they should eat, when they should and should not speak, what clothes they should wear, and so on.

One of the earliest rules was the Rule of St. Augustine written around the year 400. It is sometimes called the Augustinian Rule. It was short and general consisting of eight chapters. It emphasized harmony and chastity, and it rejected private property. Because it was broad and general, it was adaptable and followed by many monasteries.

About a century after St. Augustine established the Augustian Rule, St. Benedict of Nursia established a separate rule which became known as the Benedictine Rule. And that was the rule that really caught on in the early Middle Ages. The Benedictine Rule was very detailed consisting of 73 separate chapters. It emphasized silence and prayer, and it found an early advocate in Charlemagne who had the rule copied and distributed to monasteries throughout western Europe. He wanted the Benedictine Rule to serve as the model for all of those monasteries. And soon, most of the monasteries in western Europe followed that rule.

We can now jump forward a few centuries to the Norman Conquest of England. At the time of the Conquest, England had 37 Benedictine houses for men and 10 for women. The Benedictine houses were the oldest and richest in England. In fact, the first Augustinian house wasn't founded in England until about 30 years after the Conquest.

Now you might have noticed an interesting development in the evolution of these monasteries. The words ***monk*** and ***monastery*** were based on a Greek word that meant 'alone,' but for most of their history, monasteries were really a form of communal living. Monks lived together, and followed strict rules that regulated their daily activities. So during the Middle Ages, they were no longer living alone. And those monasteries were very much a part of the feudal system. Many had large land holdings which generated a lot of revenue. So they became very wealthy.

Around this time, many religious leaders became concerned about the role of those monasteries in European society. They felt that those monasteries had gotten too far away from Benedict's original rule. And this wasn't the first time that those concerns had been expressed. Back before the Norman Conquest, there had been a series of reforms throughout Europe that were designed to get the monasteries back in line with the original rule.

I noted that the first Augustinian house was founded in England about 30 years after the Conquest. Well around that same time – in the year 1098 to be exact – a group of Benedictine reformers in France decided to establish a new monastery at Citeaux Abbey southeast of Paris. The founding monks wanted to more strictly follow the Benedictine Rule. And they emphasized the value of isolation as a way of achieving greater perfection.

Very soon, other monasteries started to be founded on the same model, and those who followed this model became known as the Cistercians based on the name of the abbey of Citeaux where the first monastery was founded.

Now the Cistercians didn't give up on communal living. The monks continued to live together. They just preferred to withdraw from the world and live together in isolated areas behind secure walls. The Cistercian monasteries were often established in the wilderness, but even when they were founded near a town, they still lived together in isolation and solitude. The idea was to mimic the monastic life as it had existed during St. Benedict's lifetime. They soon emerged as the most powerful and influential religious order in western Europe.

The Cistercians were trying to return to the roots of the monastery, living together in isolation, adhering to a strict and demanding set of rules. But some monks felt the need to go even further. They wanted to live by themselves, essentially as hermits in solitude and isolation. But they also wanted the benefits of communal living. The challenge was figuring out to balance those two objectives.

So around the year 1084, a group of monks in the mountains of southeastern France found a solution. A cleric named Bruno of Cologne joined with several companions, and together they founded a monastery in the Chartreuse mountain range located in the French Alps. The monastery was designed so that each monk had is own separate cell where he spent most of his time praying and working in isolation and silence. There was also a common area where the monks could gather for certain religious services and meals, but those communal gatherings were rare and brief. For the most part, it was a life of seclusion.

This order of monks created their own rule, and the order soon spread throughout western Europe. The order came to be known by the mountain range where the original monastery was located. I noted that the mountain range is called the Chartreuse Mountains today, but that French name is derived from a Latin name for the range which was Carthusianus. So this monastic order came to be called the Carthusian Order.

Now remember that the Latin CA sound became a CH sound in Parisian French. So that's how the name went from Carthusianus – to /char-truce/ – to modern Chartreus (/shar-truce/). And I mention that the French version of the name became the original monastery there in the Alps became known as the 'la Grande-Chartreuse,' and it is still the mother-house to this day. In the 1700s, the monks needed a way to raise some money to help pay the expenses of the monastery and to support their mission. So they decided to produce a liqueur on the grounds of the monastery. That liqueur was called ***Chartreuse*** after the name of the mother-house. It had a very distinct apple-green color. And by the 1800s, that color also came to be known as ***chartreuse***. So this monastery in the French Alps gave its name to both a liqueur and a color.

Now as I noted, the Carthusian Order emphasized solitude and silence. Even though they were part of a monastery, the monks had their own personal cell or chamber where they spent most of their time. Each cell usually had a garden area where the monk could meditate and grow flowers

and vegetables. They even had most of their meals delivered to them in their cells. A lay brother would provide the food through a small window or opening next to the cell door.

Now all of this may seem like living in a prison and, in fact, today we might use the word ***cell*** to refer to a 'prison cell' or a 'jail cell.' But that sense of the word ***cell*** is a relatively recent development. It only came about in the 1700s. Prior to that, the word ***cell*** was mainly limited to monasteries and nunneries.

And I mention nunneries because both men and women chose to live in this manner. The idea of sealing yourself away in a closed room to worship God didn't begin with the Carthusians. It had been around for a long time. But the Carthusians helped to revive this idea, and many monks and nuns were compelled to seek a life of solitude. Soon, other monasteries started to pick up on this same idea, and many of them established similar living arrangements. Even some Benedictine monasteries maintained these types of isolated cells.

Now as I noted earlier, these people were sometimes called ***hermits***. But there was also another term applied to them, and that term was ***ancre***, or as it came to be known in later English – ***anchorite***. And a female anchorite was sometimes called an ***anchoress***. These words are all derived from an original Greek word that meant 'to retire or retreat.' So all of these words for people who lived in solitude have Greek origins. That includes ***monk***, ***hermit***, ***ancre***, ***anchorite***, and ***anchoress***.

Now at one time, the words ***hermit*** and ***ancre*** were used interchangeably. But by the 1200s, those two words were starting to be distinguished. ***Hermit*** had reverted back to more of its original meaning as one who lives in the desert or wilderness. And ***ancre*** referred to someone who lived in one of these cells attached to a monastery or church. So as we move forward, I might refer to these monks and nuns as ***hermits*** or ***recluses***, but the technical term for them at the time was ***ancre***.

Now you might notice a similarity between the word ***anchor*** – as in the thing that holds a boat in place – and the words ***ancre***, ***anchorite*** and ***anchoress***. But there is no connection. A boat anchor has nothing to do with monks and nuns who lived in solitude. The word ***anchor*** – as in a boat anchor – is also a Greek word, but it is derived from a completely separate root. So it's not related to the words I'm discussing here.

As I noted, the number of monks and nuns who chose to live as anchorites increased significantly throughout the 1100s and 1200s. Now everything is relative. So when I say the number increased significantly, there were still only a few dozen anchorites at any given time in England during this period. It was a harsh and even brutal lifestyle. It was considered to be a type of living death, confined to a cell with little or no comforts of life. There was no central heating or air conditioning, so the anchorites suffered from stifling heat in the warm months and bitter cold in the wintertime. They fasted for extended periods, with small amounts of food delivered to them from time to time to sustain life. There was nothing to do but pray and meditate and perhaps tend to a small garden of flowers and vegetables. It was a type of self-imprisonment.

In fact, when a man or woman became an anchorite, confinement was usually preceded by a solemn religious ceremony in which the anchorite lied prostrate on the floor while prayers for the dying were recited. At the end of the ceremony, the anchorite was led to the chamber where the door was sealed behind him or her. The local bishop often participated in the ceremony, and he would sometimes attach his bishop's seal to the door of the cell. The locking of the door was sometimes literal and sometimes symbolic. In some cases, the anchorite could leave the cell to relive himself or take an occasional break, but in other cases, the anchorite was literally imprisoned with no opportunity to leave. This helps to explain why there were never more than a handful of anchorites at any given time.

According to some estimates, there were only about 100 anchorites in England in the 1100s, but that number doubled to around 200 in the 1200s. Interestingly, the numbers indicate that there were more women anchorites than men. In the 1200s, there were probably three or four female anchorites for every male anchorite.

Now around the current point in our overall story of English in the early 1200s, it appears that three sisters from a prominent family in the West Midlands decided to become anchoresses. The exact details are obscure, but apparently after making that commitment a local priest decided to compose a manual to instruct them and guide them during their years of confinement. This manual was composed in English, and in one early version it was given the title "Ancrene Wisse." ***Wisse*** is an Old English word related to words like ***wise*** and ***wisdom***. It meant 'sage advice,' but the word is usually translated as 'guide.' So Ancrene Wisse literally meant 'the Anchoress's Guide.'

Note that the first word is ***Ancrene*** – not ***Anchoress's***. That's because the S and ES endings we use today for plural nouns, and the apostrophe S that we use to show possession, weren't really used in this part of England at the time. In much of the south of England, nouns were made plural by adding EN to the end of the word – a technique that still survives in words like ***children***, ***brethren*** and ***oxen***. And to show possession with those plural nouns, you added ENE – or /ene/ – to the end of the word. So therefore, the plural version of ***ancre*** was ***ancren***. And to show possession by several ***ancren***, the word became ***ancrene***. That's why the first word is ***Ancrene*** – not ***Ancress's*** or ***Anchoress's***. The modern S and ES endings that we use today really began in the north of England and gradually spread southward during the Middle English period.

So this text is known as the Ancrene Wisse based on the title of one of the surviving manuscripts. It was basically the rule to be followed by the anchoresses – akin to the Augustinian Rule or Benedictine Rule. And that helps to explain the other name that is sometimes given for this text – the Ancrene Riwle – literally 'the Anchoresses Rule.' But that is actually a relatively modern title invented by scholars in the mid-1800s.

Today, the two titles are often used interchangeably, but some scholars tend to call the earlier forms of the text the Ancrene Wisse based on that original title, and they call the slightly later revised versions of the text the Ancrene Riwle. But they are all variations of the same original manuscript.

Now unfortunately, we don't know who composed the original manuscript, and we don't exactly know when and where the text was composed. It appears to have been composed by an unknown priest in the West Midlands in the early 1200s. The original text was apparently lost, but several copies were made a short time later. And the oldest surviving copy of the text is dated to around the year 1225.

An early version of the document mentions that it was composed at the request of three sisters from a noble family who were becoming anchoresses. A slightly later copy contains glosses which were intended as revisions or corrections. Then another copy was made that incorporated those changes. That version is considered by many scholars to be the definitive version. It was maintained at Corpus Christi College at Cambridge. So it is known as the Corpus manuscript. Most scholars agree that very little time separates these surviving versions – perhaps as little as a decade.

Interestingly, the Corpus version dropped the reference to the original three sisters, and instead, it is addressed to the all the anchoresses of England which it says are about 20 in number. The passage reads, "You be the anchoresses of England, very many together – twenty, now, or more." In the original Middle English, it reads: "Ye beoth the ancren of Englond, swa feole togederes, twenti nuthe other ma." This suggests that the intended audience of the manuscript was rapidly expanding in the early 1200s.

In fact, this text became so popular that it was copied many different times over the next couple of centuries. And it was even translated into Latin and French which was unusual for an English document.

As I said, scholars are reasonably certain that the original text was composed in the West Midlands since the earliest copies were all written in a West Midlands dialect, but it is difficult to pinpoint a specific location. It also appears that the original manuscript was composed sometime between the years 1200 and 1225. That's based in part of the Corpus version of the text that I mentioned earlier. As part of the many revisions that are contained in that version, it specifically states that 'friars' were in England at the time. And that's important because the friars didn't arrive until the year 1221. In fact the friars are an important part of this story, so let explain who they were.

The friars were part of brand-new movement at the time. These were monks who wanted to leave the traditional monasteries and live among the people where they could preach and spread their message. Most of them lived in the burgeoning towns and cities, not in some secluded monastery. So they were really the opposite of anchorites or recluses. The first group of friars to arrive in England were the Dominicans in the year 1221, and they were followed three years later by another group of friars called the Franciscans. Since the Corpus version of the manuscript makes specific reference to the friars, it had to have been composed after the year 1221. But the language and handwriting of the text suggests that it couldn't have been written down much later than that. So the Corpus manuscript is usually dated to around the year 1225. And as I noted earlier, this version is believed to have been composed about a decade or so after the original version, so that dates the original version to the first decade or so of the 1200s.

Now I noted that the reference to friars helps to date the text because friars arrived in England in the 1220s. And friars were really the opposite of anchorites because they lived among the people in towns and cities. Well they were not the only ones. Around this time, another religious order was active in northern Europe, and this order was specifically for women. It was really more of a sisterhood than a formal religious order. It didn't have the formal rule and structure of other orders, and the women didn't take any specific religious vows. The women could basically come and go as they pleased. They lived together or near each other in towns and cities, and they committed themselves to prayer and doing good works. They survived by asking people for donations. So this sisterhood had a religious purpose, but it was also a way for women to support themselves and each other.

In the late 1100s, a priest at Liège in Belgium organized some of these loose-knit groups and established a basic rule for them to follow. His name was Lambert le Bègue. ***Bègue*** is a French word that means 'stammerer or stutterer.' So his name was literally 'Lambert the Stammerer' which suggests that he spoke with a stutter. Anyway, these communities of women who helped the poor and performed good deeds became known as Beguines, presumably from the name of Lambert le Bègue.

By the early 1200s, groups of men were starting to form similar communes. Male Beguines were usually called Beghards. The problem is that there was very little formal structure to this order, so just about anyone could go around claiming to be a Beghard and solicit money. It soon attracted thieves and other men who took advantage of people's charity. Very soon, the term ***Beghard*** came to be a general term for anyone on the street who was asking for money. And in England, that term was Anglicized to ***beggar***. And through a back formation, the act of asking for money became '***to beg***.'

Now some scholars dispute this etymology and claim that the words ***beg*** and ***beggar*** may have been derived from a rarely attested Old English word, ***bedecian***, which had a similar meaning. But there is no clear connection between those words other than the fact that they both begin with B-E.

Part of the reason why the etymology is a little unclear is because the words ***beg*** and ***beggar*** suddenly appeared out of nowhere in the early 1200s. And both words appeared for the first time in the same document. And that document was the Ancrene Wisse.

Even if you don't accept the connection between ***beggars*** and the Beguines, the story of the Beguines provides some important context for the Ancrene Wisse. It shows a fundamental connection between women and the Church during this period. For the most part, women had very little property of their own. And if they were unmarried or widowed, they didn't have very many options available to them outside of the Church. Some were able to rely upon other family members. Some found work in the burgeoning towns and cities. But many entered convents or joined less formal communities like the Beguines.

We should also keep in mind that this was a period of more-or-less constant warfare – including the Crusades. So lots of young men went off to war and never came back. And many of the

women who were left behind turned to monasteries and nunneries for support. And some took the even more extreme step of becoming a recluse or anchoress within one of those monasteries. It also helps to explain why more women than men became anchorites during this period.

I should note the Ancrene Wisse did not appear in isolation in the West Midlands. It actually appears to be part of a larger literary movement in the region during this period when English writing was starting to re-emerge. In fact, manuscripts composed in this region really dominated early Middle English.

As we saw in earlier episodes, Layamon's Brut was composed in the West Midlands, as was the Owl and the Nightingale. And during this same period in the same region, a series of religious works were composed or copied in early Middle English. In addition to the Ancrene Wisse, several stories about the lives of virgin female Martyrs were translated from Latin into English. The martyrs were Saint Katherine, Saint Margaret and Saint Juliana. The works emphasize their chastity. Another work translated during this period in the same region was called Sawles Warde – literally the "Soul's Guardian" or "the Soul's Keeping." Then a fifth work was composed in English called Hali Meithhad (literally "Holy Maidenhood"). It was another work in praise of virginity.

These five documents are sometimes collectively referred to as the Katherine Group. And it appears that the Ancrene Wisse was composed shortly after this earlier group of documents. Again, all of these documents were composed around the same time in the same region, and they all appear to have been composed for nuns and anchoresses in the region.

Most of the works in this group cross reference each other. The books that preserve these works also tend to contain several of them together. These works are also written in the same literary style using a lot of the same spellings and same grammatical features. Later scholars like J.R.R. Tolkien even gave this West Midland literary style its own name. He called it the "AB Language." It is also the language of the Ancrene Wisse. This literary style uses a lot of the same loanwords, including not just French words, but also Norse and Welsh words.

Modern scholars have determined that all of these works were probably composed and copied by the same group of scribes in the region who established a common standard literary style in much the same way that the old Wessex style was somewhat of a standard in late Old English.

Last time, I introduced you to a scribe in the region called the Tremulous Hand – a scribe known for his glosses and his shaky handwriting. Well, it appears that he was also a part of this same group of scribes.

The fact that women were the apparent audience for most of these works may also help to explain why they were composed in English rather than Latin or French. The educational opportunities for women were more limited, so they were less likely to know Latin or have a fluent knowledge of French. So it made sense to compose the documents in English.

It is also possible that the nuns and anchoresses themselves were involved in the revisions and updates to the Ancrene Wisse over those first few years. The glosses and revisions that were made to the original text may have been inserted by the anchoresses who poured over the original copies of the manuscript. Some of the nuns may have served as scribes and contributed to these resources. So for perhaps the first time in our story, we may have women involved in the production of documents about women for other women to read. And again, all of this was being done in a specific literary style of English that common in the West Midlands.

Now those five earlier works that are known as the Katherine Group have a large number of French loanwords, but nothing compared to the number found in the Ancrene Wisse. And that is part of the reason why this manuscript is so compelling to modern scholars.

Way back in Episode 3 of the podcast, I presented a list of the 50 most commonly used words in the English language. And I did that to illustrate how Germanic words dominate our core vocabulary even though they represent a relatively small percentage of our overall vocabulary. Well, you might remember that there was only one French word in that list of the 50 most commonly used words in English. That word was ***use*** – USE. It is so common today that it doesn't even seem like a loanword. Well, one of the first English documents to contain that French word was the Ancrene Wisse.

The Ancrene Wisse also gives us the first use of common words like ***ease***, ***easy***, ***city***, ***ball***, ***comfort***, ***joy***, ***grief***, ***cruel***, ***point***, ***plenty***, ***instead***, ***intent***, ***cause***, ***cry***, ***catch***, ***change***, ***excuse***, ***debt***, ***minor*** and ***piece*** – PIECE. It also provides the first recorded use of Norse words like ***skull***, ***sky***, ***trust***, ***loose***, ***bag***, and the word ***rotten*** which is a Germanic word from either Old Norse or Old English. It isn't entirely clear which one.

Again, those are all common words that we use all the time. The common nature of the words used for the first time in the text can be shown by the word I've used in this episode to tell this story. I talked about the first monks who lived in the desert. Well, the French word ***desert*** appears for the first time in this manuscript. I talked about the important role of the monastic rule, and how each order followed a specific rule. Well, the word ***rule*** appears for the first time in the document. I also discussed some of the early monastic orders. The word ***order*** also appears for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse and the Katherine Group of documents. The word ***order*** specifically referred to the orders of the Christian Church.

I also discussed the Carthusians who spent most of their time in separate cells within a large monastery. Their lodging consisted of a small chamber or cell. The words ***lodge*** and ***chamber*** appear for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse. The word ***cell*** had been borrowed at an earlier date, but the word ***cellar*** appears for the first time in the text. ***Cellar*** is a just a variation of the word ***cell*** and it was originally used to mean a storeroom. The Carthusians emphasized contemplation through silence where they wouldn't be disturbed. The words ***contemplation***, ***silence*** and ***disturb*** also appear for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse.

Their meals were often provided through a small opening or window near the door of the cell. Well, the word ***window*** is a Norse word, and it also appears in English for the first time in this document.

I noted that the Carthusian cells usually had a garden area where the monks could grow flowers and vegetables in small patches of soil. The words ***soil*** and ***flower*** also appears for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse.

By the way, the word ***flower*** (FLOWER) and ***flour*** (FLOUR) are homonyms in Modern English. They're both pronounced the same way. Well there's a good reason for that. They're actually the same word, or at least they once were. In fact, they were usually spelled the same way until the 1800s. It was once common to refer to the best part of something as the flower of the larger part. So cream was the flower of milk. And the powder used for baking was the best part of the wheat when all of the other parts had been removed. So it was the flower of the wheat. And over time, that refined powder became known simply as flour, and it eventually acquired a separate spelling FLOUR to distinguish it from the other sense of the word – FLOWER. Again, the word ***flower*** – as in a blossoming plant – appeared for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse.

Now when I was discussing the Carthusians, I mentioned that the mother house of the order in the French Alps still produces a liqueur called Chartreuse. Well the word ***liqueur*** is a Modern French word, but the original Old French version was borrowed as ***liquor*** in the 1200s, and it appears for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse.

Then I focused on the anchorites who locked themselves away in private cells. They were voluntarily imprisoned for spiritual reasons. Well, the word ***prison*** appears for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse. The word ***cage*** was also used for the first time – as in a bird cage or animal cage.

I noted that the anchorites were ***recluses*** – another word that appears for the first time in the document. The lived in poverty, without comfort, and faced incredible challenges and adversity. ***Poverty***, ***comfort***, ***challenge*** and ***adversity*** all appear for the first time in the guide.

I mentioned that many widows and unmarried women during this period entered convents and monasteries. The word ***convent*** is also used for the first time in the document.

And I previously noted that words like ***beg*** and ***beggar*** were also used for the first time in the manuscript.

So you can see how many common loanwords were introduced in this important text. I've talked a lot about the manuscript, and why it is so important to scholars. Now let me read a few passage to you so you can get a sense of the language. I'm going to read you the first part of the Preface from the Corpus manuscript. In this introduction, the author tries to distinguish between the so-called Inner Rule and Outer Rule. The Inner Rule is the rule that governs the inner spiritual self, whereas the Outer Rule governs the more practical aspects of life – like the proper way to eat,

dress and sleep. Most of the manuscript is dedicated to the Inner Rule, but the last chapter is dedicated to the Outer Rule.

Now in this introduction, the text mixes in several passages written in Latin. I am going to ignore those Latin passages and just focus on the English passages. So here are the opening lines of the manuscript – first in Modern English and then in the original Middle English:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, here begins "The Anchoresses' Guide."

I the Feaderes ant i the Sunes ant i the Hali Gastes nome her biginneth Ancrene Wisse.

"Lord," says God's bride to her precious spouse, "The righteous love you." They are righteous who live according to a rule; and you, my beloved sisters, have for many days begged me for a rule. Many kinds of rules there are, but there are two among all of them that I will speak of at your request, with God's grace."

"Laverd," seith Godes spuse to hire deore-wurthe spus, "the rihte luvieth the." Theo beoth rihte the luvieth efter riwle. Ant ye, mine leove sustren, habbeth moni dei i-cravet on me efter riwle. Monie cunne riwlen beoth, ah twa beoth bimong alle thet ich chulle speoken of thurh ower bone, with Godes grace.

One rules the heart and makes it even and smooth, without the lumps and hollows of a crooked and accusing conscience which says, "here you sin," or, "This is not yet amended as well as it should be." This rule is always within and sets the heart right.

The an riwleth the heorte ant maketh efne ant smethe, withute cnost ant dolc of woh in-wit ant of wreiyende, the segge "her thu sunegest!" other "this nis nawt i-bet yet ase wel as hit ahte!" Theos riwle is eaver in-with ant rihteth the heorte.

The outer rule is entirely concerned with outward things, and rules the body and bodily deeds. This teaches everything about how a person should behave outwardly – how to eat, drink, dress, sing, sleep, and keep vigil. And this rule exists only to serve the other. The other is like the lady, this like her handmaid. For all that a person ever does according to the latter, outwardly, is only to rule the heart within.

The other riwle is al withuten ant riwleth the licome ant licomliche deden, the teacheth al hu me schal beoren him withuten, hu eoten, drinken, werien, singen, slepen, wakien. Ant theos riwle nis nawt bute for-te servi the other: the other is as leafdi, theos as hire thuften. For al thet me eaver deth of the other withuten nis bute for-te riwlin the heorte withinnen.

Now you ask what rule you anchoresses should hold. You should in all ways with all your might and strength guard well the inner, and the outer for her sake. The inner is always the same, the outer differs; for each should keep the outer according to the way she can best serve the inner using her.

Nu easki ye hwet riwle ye ancren schulen halden. Ye schulen alles weis, with alle
mihte ant strengthe, wel witen the inre, ant te uttre for hire sake. The inre is eaver i-lich;
the uttre is mislich, for euch schal halden the uttre efter thet ha mei best, with hire servi
the inre.

So I hope that gives you some since of the language of the text. If you can get beyond the word forms and older vowel sounds, the sentences should start to sound somewhat familiar. There are still a fair number of Old English words that are no longer in use. And that makes it hard to follow along. But most of the words in those passages are still used in Modern English. And the syntax or word order is much closer to modern English.

Now I noted that the Ancrene Wisse contains a large number of new loanwords – especially French words. I've already mentioned a few of them. And since I have been focusing on words related to Christianity and monasteries, I thought I would conclude this episode by mentioning a few other related words that were used for the first time.

For example, the word ***religion*** was used for the first time in the document, as were the words ***preach*** and ***preacher***. We also find the first known English uses of the words ***crucifix***, ***devout***, ***chaste*** and ***chastity***.

The text also contains the first use of the word ***save*** and the closely-related word ***salvation*** – both of which are derived from the same Latin root. ***Save*** is a very common word today, but it was originally used in the religious sense as in 'to save someone's soul.' And that helps to explain the connection to the word ***salvation***.

We also find the first use of the word ***blasphemy*** and one of the first uses of the word ***blame*** – both of which share a common root. The original Greek root word meant 'to slander' or 'speak evil words about someone.' ***Blasphemy*** restricts that original meaning to words spoken against God. Of course, ***blame*** can apply to words spoken against anyone. The word ***blame*** originally meant any kind of criticism or critical speech, but over time it came to mean a type of speech where someone assigns responsibility for a problem or fault.

The Ancrene Wisse also contains the first use of the words ***tempt*** and ***temptation*** in an English document. The words were originally used in the sense of being tempted into sin or evil. Again, those words have taken on a broader meaning over time.

We also have the first use of the words ***virtue***, ***grant*** and ***obedience***. ***Obedience*** was used in the sense of obedience to God.

The word ***hypocrite*** also appears for the first time. It meant someone who claims to be pious but really isn't. So again, it was originally associated with religion, but has since acquired a broader usage as someone who says one thing and does the opposite.

The Ancrene Wisse also introduces us to the words ***pity*** and ***jealous*** which both had associations with the Church. Those connections are more apparent when you consider that ***pity*** is just another version of the word ***piety***, and ***jealous*** is just another version of the word ***zealous***. ***Pity*** and ***piety*** were once used interchangeably. They referred to someone who was very religious and followed the teachings of the Church. As the two words became distinct, ***piety*** retained more of the original meaning, and ***pity*** referred more to the compassion and mercy shown by devout Christians.

As I noted, the word ***jealous*** also appeared for one of the first times in the text, and it is actually an early version of the word ***zealous***. So the word was borrowed twice, first in the early 1200s from French as ***jealous***, and then again in the 1500s from Medieval Latin as ***zealous*** with a 'z' sound at the front. We still use the word ***zealous*** in a religious sense, to refer to someone who is a passionate and true believer. We might call that person a ***zealot***. Well originally, the French word ***jealous*** had much of that same meaning. It meant 'zealous or passionate.' And when it was used in the Ancrene Wisse, it was used to refer to a person's zeal or passion for God. So it had much of the same sense as ***zealous***. But ***jealous*** could also be used in a broader sense to mean 'zeal or passion for another person' – usually in a romantic context. And that zeal or passion for another person often led to resentment if any rival showed similar affections to that same person. And that led to the modern sense of the word ***jealous***. So today, ***jealously*** is just one type of ***zealous*** behavior.

In the document, we also have the first use of the word ***relic*** – which originally meant the physical remains of a deceased holy person or something sanctified by contact with that holy person. Again ***relic*** has acquired a broader meaning over time, and today it can refer to any old or historical object.

The Ancrene Wisse also gives us the first use of the word ***hour*** – HOUR. But interestingly, it wasn't used in the sense of time like we use it today. It was used to refer to a specific set of prayers. So let me explain. The word ***hour*** is a Greek word that could refer to any period of time. It eventually came to refer to specific increments of the day, and after the Benedictine Reforms in the Middle Ages, the word was used to refer to the points in the day when specific prayers were to be recited. And over time within the Church, those specific prayers came to be called ***hours*** – or ***canonical hours*** – since they were recited at specific times. And that was the way the word ***hour*** was used in the Ancrene Wisse – as a word for 'prayers.' It later entered English with its original meaning as a specific increment of the day.

And speaking of 'the day,' the Ancrene Wisse also gave us the first English use of the word ***journey*** which literally meant 'the distance that could be traveled in a day.' The key is the first part of word – JOUR – which meant 'day' in French. We can still see that in the French greeting ***bonjour*** which literally means 'good day.' So ***journey*** meant 'a day's travel,' and by the time it was used in the Ancrene Wisse, it had come to refer to the actual act of traveling, and it was specifically used in the sense of a pilgrimage.

By the way, the word ***journal*** came in from the same root about a century later, and it also originally had an association with the Church. It referred to a written record of the Church services that were conducted throughout the day. So ***journey*** and ***journal*** are cognate, and they are both based on the Latin and French word for 'day.'

By the way, the original Latin root word was ***dies*** with a 'd' sound. It went from ***dies*** to ***diurnus*** and ***diurnalis***, and then the first consonant was slurred in French and produced the French versions ***journey*** and ***journal***. Well that original Latin root word ***dies*** also gave us the word ***diary*** which was another type of journal – specifically a daily journal.

And it gave us the word ***diet*** which was a daily food allowance. And the word ***diet*** also appears for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse. So ***diet*** is cognate with ***diary***, ***journal*** and ***journey***. And two of those four words appear for the first time in the guide for anchoresses.

Now I noted that the word ***journey*** is recorded for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse. Well, when you make a journey, you visit other places. And the word ***visit*** is also used for the first time in the manuscript. Again, the word was used in a specific religious context. It referred to God's arrival to provide comfort or relief. I think we still have some of that original supernatural sense of the word when we refer to the presence of a ghost as a ***visitation***. That was closer to the meaning as used in the Ancrene Wisse.

Now the word ***visit*** is cognate with two other words that appear for the first time in English in this same document. And these other two words are very important to this podcast – really essential to this podcast. And those are the words ***story*** and ***history*** – which again are two different versions of the same word. ***History*** actually appears in a few Old English documents in in its original Latin form – ***historia***, but ***story*** came in from French at this point in our story – in the Ancrene Wisse.

As was common in Late Latin and early French, the initial 'h' sound had become silent in many words. So the French version of the word was ***estoire***. And that's how the word was borrowed into English the second time in the Ancrene Wisse. Over time, the 'e' sound at the front disappeared, and left us with the word ***story***. The same thing happened with other words, like ***estate*** which became ***state***, and ***estrange*** which became ***strange***. And here, ***estoire*** later became ***story***.

Meanwhile, the 'h' at the beginning of the original Latin version of the word ***historia*** was later reintroduced as part of a larger movement to make English words reflect their Latin roots. So since the original Latin word started with an 'h,' some English writers started to put an 'h' at the front of ***estoire***, but the 'h' was still silent. In the early Modern English period, people started to get all of this confused because an initial 'h' was sometimes pronounced in English and it was sometimes silent. And there was a period when a lot of people started to play it safe and just pronounce all of those 'h's in those words. Sometimes both pronunciations survived – like HERB. In Britain, /herb/ with the 'h' won out, but in America /erb/ without the /h/ won out. And sometimes, as in the case of ***history*** and ***story***, both versions survived as distinct words.

This also helps to explain why some people say 'a historian' or 'a historic site', and other people say 'an historian' or 'an historic site.' Technically, it should be 'a' since ***historian*** and ***historic*** began with a consonant sound today. But those 'h's were once silent. So it was common to say "an 'istorian" or "an 'istoric site." So the article you use today probably depends on how you pronounce those words – specifically whether or not you pronounce the 'h' in that context. And this feature of English is still quite variable.

So we've seen how ***history*** and ***story*** became distinct words, so how did they come to have their modern meanings? Well, the original Latin root word meant an account or tale about something that happened in the past. So it was similar to the modern sense of the word ***story***, but it only referred to past events. If I made up a tale about something that takes place in the future, that wouldn't be considered a 'story' in the original sense of the word. You could only tell a story about something that had already happened. So there were two elements of the original word – a narrative or tale and something that had taken place in the past. And over time, those elements became separated.

The word ***story*** retained the first element – the tale or narrative. And the time element was lost. The word ***history*** retained the second element – something that happened in the past. And it no longer had to be conveyed through a tale or narrative. ***History*** was just what had happened, regardless of how it was presented. And as I noted, this French version of the word – ***story*** – passed into English in the 1200s in the Ancrene Wisse.

I began this discussion about ***history*** and ***story*** by noting that they are actually cognate with the word ***visit***. They all share the same Indo-European root. ***History*** and ***story*** are ultimately Greek versions of that root, and ***visit*** is a Latin version of the root. And that helps to explain why the initial consonant sounds are different in those words, because those initial sounds developed differently within those two language families. But if we ignore those initial consonants, we can actually see the connection in the 'IST' of ***history*** and 'ISIT' of ***visit***.

The original root word was ****weid*** and it meant 'to see.' In Greek, it acquired a sense of the knowledge you obtained through seeing and observing the word around you. That acquired knowledge was usually passed along in narrative form, thus the words ***story*** and ***history***. In Latin, the root word came to refer to the process of seeing or looking at something very closely. So it meant 'to inspect.' And inspectors often had to travel around to various places to make their inspections, so they would pay a visit to the place of inspection. And that's how we got the word ***visit*** from Latin and French.

Again, ***story*** and ***visit*** are not only cognate – they also both appear for the first time in English in the Ancrene Wisse.

So I hope you found that interesting. I've looked at quite a few loanwords introduced in the guide of Anchoresses, but I've only scratched the surface. Next time, I'm going to explore some more of those words, and I'm going to focus on one particular aspect of those words – the common prefixes and suffixes which many of those words used. Many of those prefixes and suffixes were

used for the first time in the English language. Those word elements are so common in English today that they are a fundamental part of the language. And they make the Middle English text look more like Modern English – even though most of those elements were borrowed from elsewhere.

So next time, I'm going to explore how many Old English prefixes and suffixes started to fall out of use – and how they were replaced by prefixes and suffixes from Greek, Latin and French. And we'll see how that change is reflected in the Ancrene Wisse.

So until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.

EPISODE 104: PREFIX PREFERENCES

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 104: Prefix Preferences. In this episode, we're going to look at an important development that took place within English during the 1200s. Not only did English start to borrow a large number of words from French and Latin, it also started to borrow a lot of the standard prefixes and suffixes used in those languages. And many of those new elements appeared for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse which was composed in the early 1200s. Those new prefixes and suffixes were embraced by English speakers, and soon those speakers were sticking them on the front or back of native English words. So over the next couple of episodes, we'll focus on those new word elements, and we'll explore their overall impact on English.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can sign up to support the podcast at Patreon.com/historyofenglish. And as always, you can reach me by email at kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com,

Let me begin with a quick correction from the last episode. Last time, we looked at an important early Middle English text called the Ancrene Wisse, and I noted that the words ***journey*** and ***diet*** were used for the first time in that text. And I also stated that the two words are cognate – having derived from the same root word meaning 'day.' Well both words were attested for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse, but they are not actually related to each other. The word ***diet*** as in 'food' is derived from a different root. Now you may be familiar with another version of the word ***diet*** – as in 'an assembly.' Well, that version of the word ***diet*** is the version that is cognate with ***journey*** and is based on a root word that meant 'day.' So I mixed up the two versions of the word ***diet***. ***Diet*** as in 'food' appeared for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse, and ***diet*** as in 'an assembly' is cognate with ***journey***. But the two versions of ***diet*** are otherwise unrelated. So with that correction out of the way, let's turn to this episode and the changing role of prefixes and suffixes in the early 1200s.

Last time, as I explored the Ancrene Wisse, I noted that a quick review of that text reveals a language that 'looks' a lot more like Modern English than most earlier manuscripts. That's partly because it contains fewer Old English words that have disappeared from the language, and it contains more loanwords that we still use in Modern English. It's also because the syntax or word order is closer to Modern English. But one of the things that really stands out as you look over the text is that there are lots of words with familiar prefixes and suffixes.

Now at first glance, this may not seem like an important development, but if you look closely at a Modern English text, you'll notice that a lot of words begin or end with the same elements.

According to some estimates, about one out of every five words in Modern English employs a prefix or suffix. And most of those prefixes and suffixes were borrowed from French, Latin or Greek. They came into English attached to various loanwords. And since the Ancrene Wisse has a lot of loanwords that were used for the first time, that text also gives us the first widespread use of a lot of new prefixes and suffixes.

Now that's not to say that prefixes and suffixes were new. Old English had them too. And some of them were actually related to the ones used in Latin and French and Greek – having come from the same Indo-European roots. But during this period, a lot of those Old English prefixes and suffixes started to fall out of use. Some disappeared altogether. Some survived – but only as a part of older words that were already in place. They weren't used to create any more new words. And some lived on and are still actively used today.

So over the next couple of episodes, I want to explore those developments. This time, I'll focus on prefixes. And next time, I'll focus on suffixes.

As I noted, some of the prefixes and suffixes come Old English, but most of them come from elsewhere. And in Modern English, we are not limited to just one prefix or suffix. We can keep adding them to the beginning or end of words to create new words. Let me give you an example. I noted that a lot of these elements came in from French. And we saw in earlier episodes that the words ***France*** and ***French*** are derived from the name of the Franks who founded the Frankish kingdom which became modern-day France. Well, the name of the Franks also produced the adjective ***frank*** – which meant 'free' – since the Franks enjoyed certain freedoms within the Roman Empire.

Within French, that word ***frank*** meaning 'free' was converted into a noun by adding the suffix '***-ise***' to the end, producing the word ***franchise***. A ***franchise*** was a specific freedom or legal privilege, and it entered English around the year 1300. Then in the 1500s, English converted ***franchise*** into a verb by adding the prefix '***en-***' to the front, producing the word ***enfranchise*** meaning 'to set free or grant a privilege.' Today, we tend to use it to refer to the privilege of voting. Then in the next century, the prefix '***dis-***' was added to the front to create the word ***disenfranchise*** meaning 'to take away a freedom or privilege' – again usually used to day to refer to the process of taking away a person's right to vote. Then in the 1700s, that verb was converted into a noun by adding the suffix '***-ment***' to the end creating the word ***disenfranchisement***. So from ***frank***, to ***franchise***, to ***enfranchise***, to ***disenfranchise***, to ***disenfranchisement***, we just keep adding on those word elements to create new words. And appropriately enough given that root word, all of those prefixes and suffixes were borrowed from French which shows how important that borrowed elements are to Modern English.

So let's begin our look at prefixes with some of the common prefixes that existed in Old English. As I noted earlier, some of these prefixes disappeared altogether, and some survive in older words, and some are still used to create new words.

So let's take them in that order and begin with one of the most common prefixes used in Old English which completely disappeared in the Middle English period. And that's the prefix ***-ge*** which was spelled G-E in Old English. Remember that the 'g' sound shifted to a 'y' sound in a lot of Old English words, so Old English 'g' is often pronounced as a 'y' – especially before the front vowels. And here, that very common G-E prefix was pronounced as /ye/.

This was a very common Germanic prefix, and it was found throughout the Germanic languages. It has disappeared in some of those languages like English, but it still survives in others – most notably German where it is still pronounced as /ge/.

In Old English, it had a variety of uses and meanings, and it was by far the most common prefix used in Old English. It's difficult to read a passage in Old English without encountering that prefix – often multiple times.

Take for example the word ***sound*** in its use as an adjective as in 'safe and sound.' In Old English, it was ***gesund*** with that ***ge-*** prefix. And it appeared in the exact same form in early German – pronounced as /ge-soond/. It meant 'healthy' or 'safe' in both languages. By the current point in our story in the early 1200s, the ***ge-*** prefix had already started to disappear in the word in English. I discussed the Ormulum and the Bestiary in earlier episodes, and they were both composed in the late 1100s or early 1200s. And the word ***gesund*** appears as simply ***sund*** in both of those documents. And after the Great Vowel Shift, the word ***sund*** became ***sound*** in Modern English.

Now the word also survived in German where it retained its prefix and continued to be pronounced as /ge-zund/. And in its sense as 'health,' it formed part of a common expression that people used to wish someone good health when they sneezed. Of course, that word was ***gesundheit***, and it passed into English in the early 1900s. So ***sound*** is the English version without the prefix, and the 'gesund' part of ***gesundheit*** is the German version with the original prefix still in tact.

Now again, that ***ge-*** prefix was once very common in English, and it could be used in a variety of subtle ways. Sometimes it's difficult to discern the exact sense it which it used in a particular word. It could be used to provide a sense of 'togetherness.' So to express the idea of several animals or other living creatures running together, Old English had the word ***gerunnen***. To express the idea of dragging or drawing a group of things together, Old English had the word ***gedræg***. It could refer to a group or an assembly. To express the idea of several people traveling or faring together, Old English had the word ***gefera*** which meant 'a companion.' Timber meant wood, and a bunch of timber could be put together to build a structure. So a building was sometimes called a ***getimbru***.

The prefix could also be used to show a completed action. So you might inquire with the Old English word ***ask***, but if you asked and got the answer, that was described as ***geascian***. So it was used where the action was completed. I've noted before that the word ***win*** meant to 'fight or struggle' in Old English. But to complete a fight and emerge victorious was described as ***gewinnan*** since the fight was brought to completion. And that helps to explain how the word ***win*** evolved from an original sense of 'fight' to the modern sense of 'victory.' ***Winnan*** was 'to fight,' and ***gewinnan*** was 'to be victorious.' When the ***ge-*** prefix disappeared, ***gewinnan*** reverted back to just ***winnan***, and was later shortened even further to modern ***win*** with its current meaning.

The sense of a completed action also contributed to another use of the ***ge-*** prefix. It could be used as an intensifier. So think about the word ***tear***. We can ***tear*** a piece of paper. But if we keep tearing to the point that the paper is completely destroyed, we 'tear up' the paper. We use that ***up*** as an intensifier to mean 'completely torn or destroyed.' And if something burns to the point that it is completely destroyed, we might say that it has ***burned up*** or ***burnt up***. Again, we use that ***up*** as an intensifier. Well in Old English, instead of putting ***up*** after the verb, you could express a similar idea by putting ***ge*** before the verb.

These were just a few of the ways in which ***ge-*** could be used in Old English, but as I noted, it started to disappear in early Middle English. In some words and dialects, it completely disappeared, which is how ***gesund*** became ***sund*** and then ***sound***. Sometimes, it underwent a transition where it lost the 'y' sound at the front and just became /eh/ or /ee/. So the prefix is often rendered in Middle English documents with a simple I or Y. So for example, ***gesund*** was rendered as ***isund*** – I-S-U-N-D – in Layamon's Brut. But by the end of the Middle English period, that shortened form /eh/ or /ee/ also stopped being used in most words. So today, this very common Old English prefix has essentially disappeared. But we do have some vestiges of it in a few words. You use these words all the time, and you probably never realized that they had an old prefix buried within them.

A good example of that old prefix hanging on in a modern word is the word ***enough***. The 'e' at the front was originally this ***ge-*** prefix. As I noted, in Middle English, the prefix completely disappeared in some words, but other words just lost the 'y' sound at the front. That what happened here. The ***ge-*** simply became /eh/ or /ee/.

This word is also a good example of why Old English manuscripts are so difficult for modern readers and how the changes in Middle English made the texts much easier to read. In Old English, the word ***enough*** was spelled G-E-N-O-G. So it looked like it should have been pronounced /ge-nog/. But remember that the initial G-E was the prefix pronounced /ye/. And the G at the end represented that guttural /x/ sound. So the word was actually pronounced /ye-nox/. In Middle English, the /ye/ became /eh/ at the front, and the G at the end was re-spelled as GH. So we start to find the word spelled as I-N-O-G-H and E-N-O-G-H. So that spelling was very close to the modern spelling and much more recognizable to modern readers. And over time, as that /x/ sound disappeared from English, that GH at the end started to be pronounced as an 'f' sound like in the words ***rough*** and ***tough*** and ***cough***. And that ultimately gave us the modern word ***enough***. But again, that 'e' at the front was originally the ***ge-*** prefix.

That ***ge-*** prefix also survives at the front of the word ***afford***. The 'ford' part of ***afford*** was originally ***forð*** as in 'to go forth.' And remember that you could use the ***ge-*** prefix if you wanted to express the idea of a completed action. So to indicate that something had moved forth to the point of completion, you could use the word ***geforðian***. Again, it had a sense of something accomplished or completed. And over time, the ***ge*** prefix was reduced to just /uh/, thereby producing the word ***afford***, but it still had a sense of something accomplished. Over time, it acquired an association with financial transactions. If you wanted to make a large purchase, you had to work to pull together the resources to make the purchase. If you were successful in amassing the resources, you could 'complete' the purchase, or ***afford*** the purchase in the original

sense of completing an action. From there, the word ***afford*** just came to mean the ability to complete a purchase. So today, when we say that we can 'afford' something, we are literally saying that we can 'go forth' with the transaction. And the 'a' in ***afford*** is derived from the original prefix ***ge-***.

The same thing happened with the word ***aware***. The 'ware' part of ***aware*** meant 'to be watchful or vigilant.' It's related to the words ***wary*** and ***warden*** and ***guardian***. The general sense of the root was 'to watch out for.' And in the word ***gewær***, the ***ge-*** prefix was used in its sense as an intensifier to mean 'watch closely' or 'be vigilant.' Over time, the ***ge-*** prefix was reduced to 'a' (/uh/), and that gave us the word ***aware***.

Another word where the ***ge-*** prefix has survived in an altered form is the word ***handiwork***. The /ee/ part in the middle of ***handiwork*** was originally the ***ge-*** prefix. Now today, you probably think of the word ***handiwork*** as 'handy work' – work that is 'handy.' But if you think about it, that doesn't really make sense. How can work be 'handy?' Well, it really isn't. That's just a modern interpretation of the word. ***Handiwork*** is literally 'hand work' – work done by hand. In fact, the word was sometimes rendered as ***handweorc*** in Old English. So where does that /ee/ in the middle of ***handiwork*** come from? Well, as I noted, it's that old ***ge-*** prefix.

In most cases, the word ***work*** was rendered as ***geweorc*** with that ***ge-*** prefix to indicate work that was completed or finished. So that produced the Old English word ***hand-geweorc***. But in Middle English, the ***ge-*** was reduced to just /ee/, and the word became ***hand-iwerc***. But by the Modern English period, that prefix was largely gone, and people no longer recognized the word ***iwerc***. They only recognized the word ***work***. But they did have the word ***handy*** which was an adjective formed from the word ***hand***. So when they heard the word ***handiwork***, they just assumed that it was 'handy work,' when in actuality it was 'hand-iwork' or 'hand work.' Again the /ee/ was a relic of the original prefix which was attached to the front of ***work***.

The same thing happened with another word, and this word actually appears for one of the first times in the Ancrene Wisse. That word is ***everywhere***. And again, most people today assume that it is a combination of ***every*** and ***where***. But it's not. It's actually a combination of ***ever*** and ***where***. Once again, that /ee/ sound in the middle is a remnant of the prefix that was once attached to the front of ***where***. So it was ***gehwær***.

By the time the Ancrene Wisse was composed, that ***ge-*** prefix had been reduced to /ee/, and the Old English word ***gehwær*** has been reduced to ***ihwer***. And in the Ancrene Wisse, the phrase 'ever ihwer' was used for one of the first times in English. This new word was also used in some of the related manuscripts in the 'Katherine Group' of documents that I mentioned last time from this same time period. So again, the word was '***ever ihwer***' – often rendered as two distinct words. But when the two words were put together as ***everywhere***, people just assumed that the word meant 'every where' rather than its original '***ever ihwer***.' Again, that /ee/ sound in the middle of the word is a relic of the old ***ge-*** prefix.

So as we've seen, that old prefix mostly disappeared from English and only exists as an /eh/ or /ee/ sound in a small number of words today. But many other Old English prefixes survived in tact, even if they stopped being used to create new words.

One of those old prefixes that lives on in old words, but not new words, is ***be-***. We have it in words like ***become***, ***before***, ***begin***, ***behalf***, ***behave***, ***belong***, ***behind***, ***behold*** and so on. This was another common Old English prefix. In some ways it was similar to the ***ge-*** prefix in that it could be used in a variety of ways. In fact, it could be used in some of the same ways as ***ge***. They could both be used as an intensifiers. The ***be-*** prefix was derived from the preposition ***by***, so ***be-*** could be used to indicate closeness or being surrounded by the action taking place. We can see that sense in words like ***behold*** and ***befall***. It could also change the quality of a verb in a variety of other ways.

Now even though the ***ge-*** prefix was dying out in early Middle English, the ***be-*** prefix remained quite popular for a while. In fact, in some ways, ***be-*** took over some of the space left behind by the decline of ***ge-***. Consider the word ***believe***. The word can be traced back to Old English where it originally had the ***ge-*** prefix. In Old English, ***believe*** was ***gelyfan***. The word is actually closely related to the word ***love***, and it meant 'to love an idea' or 'hold it dear.' By the current point in our story in early Middle English, the ***be-*** prefix was already being used in place of the ***ge-*** prefix, and the word ***gelyfan*** was routinely being rendered as ***believe***. In fact, Layamon's Brut uses both versions of the word, suggesting that they were somewhat interchangeable for a while before ***believe*** finally won out.

The continued popularity of the ***be-*** prefix can be illustrated in another way – another very important way. In Middle English, it actually became common to attach that Old English ***be-*** prefix to newly borrowed French words. And that is fascinating because it is more evidence of how English and French were starting to meld together. In an earlier episode, I noted that the French word ***siege*** got this prefix, and that produced the word ***besiege***.

We also have specific evidence of this phenomenon in the Ancrene Wisse. The word ***sample*** is a French word. It's actually a variation of the word ***example***. And the original sense of the word ***sample*** was much closer to ***example***. It meant 'a fact or incident used to prove a larger point.' It could also describe a person's behavior as a model for other people to follow. So it was sort of like when we say to someone that they should set an example with their behavior. Well the words ***sample*** and ***example*** don't in appear in English documents in their current form until the 1300s. But the Ancrene Wisse does use a version of the word ***sample***. It uses the word ***bisampleth***, containing the English prefix ***be-*** with the French word ***sample***. It was used in the sense of moralizing or setting an example with one's behavior.

So for a while, the ***be-*** prefix continued to be used to create new words, even in combination with French root words. Even as late as the 1500s, new words were being created in this manner, like ***bejewel***, ***bedazzle***, ***bepuzzle***, ***bespeckle*** and so one. But that process didn't really continue beyond that point. For the most part, the ***be-*** prefix stopped being used to create new words in early Modern English. So when we come across words with that ***be*** prefix, they usually pre-date Modern English.

There were several other Old English prefixes that still survive in English even though they stopped being used to create new words several centuries ago. I noted earlier that the old ***ge*** prefix survives as 'a' in words like ***afford*** and ***aware***. Well lots of other words have an 'a' prefix that goes back to the Old English preposition ***on***. ***On*** was reduced to/uh/ – spelled with the letter 'A' in many of those words in Middle English. And that produced words like ***aside***, ***alive***, ***aboard***, ***ahead***, ***above***, ***asleep***, and so on. But again, this 'a' or /uh/ prefix stopped being used as a prefix for new words by the end of the Middle English period.

The Old English prefix ***to*** was common at one time, but it also fell out of use for new words. It survives in older words like ***together***, ***toward***, ***today***, ***tomorrow*** and ***tonight***.

The Old English prefix ***for*** also survives in a handful of words – ***forgive***, ***forget***, ***forbid***, ***forlorn***, ***forgo***, ***forbear***, ***forsake*** and ***forswear***. Those words can all be traced back to Old English or very early Middle English. ***For*** was still being used to create some new words during the Middle English period – but those words were all short-lived. The word ***forhang*** meant 'to put to death by hanging.' The word ***forcleave*** meant 'to cut to pieces.' ***For*** was even added to some French words – like ***forcover*** and ***forbar***. But again, the ***for*** prefix eventually became obsolete and is no longer used to create new words in English.

Now all of the Old English prefixes I've discussed so far are no longer being actively used to create new words. But some Old English prefixes survived and are still used in word formation. By far the most durable Old English prefix is ***un-***, used to express negation or the opposite of something. Not only is it the most durable Old English prefix, it is actually the most used prefix in the English language today. In fact, of the five most common prefixes used in English, it is the only one that is native to English.

Even though the ***un-*** prefix is very common today, there is something very interesting about its history. It almost disappeared in early Middle English as older prefixes declined and newer prefixes from other languages came in. But in the 1500s, as Middle English gave way to Modern English, the ***un-*** prefix re-emerged stronger than ever. And it was routinely attached to both native and borrowed words.

Beyond the Old English prefix ***un-***, a few other older prefixes are still used to create new words in Modern English, and most of those prefixes are prepositions used to express location. So we still routinely use Old English prefixes like ***over***, ***under***, ***up***, ***down***, ***in***, ***out*** and so on. Of course, these prefixes also survive as distinct words in Modern English, and that may help to explain why they continue to be used as prefixes.

So consider the word ***over***. It is an extremely common word in Modern English, and in Old English it was also used as both a distinct word and as a prefix. It produced Old English words like ***overcome***, ***overdone***, ***overflow***, ***oversee***, ***overhead***, ***overhear***, ***overrun***, and many others. And it continued to be used in Middle English to create new words.

In fact, the Ancrene Wisse gives us the first recorded use of several new words using that prefix. We find the word ***overtake*** for the first time in the document. And ***overturn*** also appears for the first time in the text. The document also introduces the word ***overcast*** which originally had a sense that was similar to ***overturn***. It also introduced the word ***overforth*** which meant 'very far forward,' but it didn't survive for very long.

Of course, ***over*** is still used to create new words. Within the past century and a half, we have new words like ***overexpose***, ***overextend***, ***oversimplify***, ***overprotective***, and ***overachiever***, as well as many others.

This is also true with the Old English prefix ***under***. In the past century or so, it has given rise to words like ***undercover***, ***underdog***, ***underwear***, and ***underdeveloped***.

Other Old English prefixes that are still in active use include ***up***, ***down***, ***in***, and ***out***. Other prefixes like ***before***, ***after*** and ***through*** are sometimes used in new constructions, but they're pretty rare in Modern English. We find them in more recent words like ***afterburner*** and ***throughput***, which is the number of items passing through a system.

Now there are two other Old English prefixes that I should mention – ***mid*** and ***with***. I mentioned these words way back in Episode 52 when I was going through Old English. You might remember that the word ***with*** didn't have the sense that it has today. Today it means 'together or beside.' But in Old English, it actually meant the opposite. It meant 'against.' And the word ***with*** was sometimes used as a prefix where it had that original sense of 'against.' For example, Old English had the word ***withstand*** which was literally 'to stand against.'

So to express a sense of togetherness, the Anglo-Saxons didn't use the word ***with***. They used the word ***mid*** instead. And ***mid*** was also used as a prefix. It produced Old English words like ***midnight***, ***midday***, ***midway***, and ***midriff***.

Now in late Old English and early Middle English, the word ***mid*** started to decline in English and that sense of 'togetherness' was replaced with the word ***with***. As I noted in that earlier episode, this change was partly due to the Vikings because they had a version of the word ***with*** in Old Norse, and it had more of a sense of 'togetherness' since conflict between two opposing sides usually implies a close proximity to each other. In fact, the Ancrene Wisse is one the first documents to routinely use the word ***with*** instead of Old English ***mid***. And it also continued to use the word ***with*** to create new words. The Ancrene Wisse gives us the first known use of the word ***withdraw***, and one of the first uses of the word ***withhold***.

As the Middle English period progressed, the word ***with*** largely replaced ***mid*** as a preposition when it was used as a distinct word by itself. So today , we say "I'll go with you," not "I'll go mid you." But when those words were used as prefixes, the opposite happened. ***With*** fell out of use as a prefix, but ***mid*** lived on with a sense of the center or middle of something. So within the last century and a half, English speakers have coined new words like ***midlife***, ***midfielder***, ***midrange*** and ***midline***.

But again, no new words have been coined with the ***with*** prefix. And in fact, many older words that used ***with*** as a prefix have fallen out of use. Some of those older words have been replaced with words borrowed from French or Latin. ***Withsay*** – meaning 'to say or speak against someone' – was replaced with the French word ***renounce***. ***Withspeak*** – which had a similar sense – was replaced with the Latin word ***contradict***. ***Withset*** – which meant 'to set against' – was replaced with the French word ***resist***.

And notice something interesting about those new words that were borrowed into English – ***renounce***, ***resist*** and ***contradict***. They have prefixes too. The French prefix ***re-*** was used in ***renounce*** and ***resist***, and the Latin prefix ***contra-*** was used in ***contradict***. And that is really the important thing to take from this discussion. As English evolved over the Middle Ages, lots of the Old English prefixes fell out of use or disappeared altogether, and they were largely replaced with new prefixes borrowed from across the Channel.

So let's turn our attention from Old English prefixes to those that were borrowed from elsewhere. And let's begin with that prefix ***re-*** as in ***renounce*** and ***resist***. Of course, it means 'again' and it can be used to indicate a repeated action or a reversed action. It has its origins in Latin, and it was preserved in French. English borrowed the prefix from both languages. It made its first widespread appearance in English in the Ancrene Wisse. And today, it is the second most commonly used prefix in English trailing only the Old English prefix ***un-***.

The ***re-*** prefix was essentially unknown in Old English. I say 'essentially' – because some religious manuscripts preserved some Latin words in more or less their original form. One such word was ***reliquiae*** (/REH-li-kwee/) – which was an early form of the word ***relic***. It appears in a few religious documents written in Old English. But outside of some of these Latin terms used in religious documents, it appears that the ***re-*** prefix was essentially unknown in the common speech of the Anglo-Saxons.

It isn't really found in regular use in English until the appearance of the Ancrene Wisse in the early 1200s. Several loanwords with that prefix are introduced in the text. That includes the first use of the word ***relic*** which is the modern version of that Latin word ***reliquiae***. The Ancrene Wisse also contains the first recorded use of several other words with that prefix, specifically the words ***recluse***, ***recoil***, ***record***, ***remedy***, ***remission*** and ***relief***. So the various versions of the Ancrene Wisse really introduced that second most common prefix into the English language.

Beyond the ***re-*** prefix, lots of other prefixes were also borrowed during this period as French and Latin words came into English. Those words came in with prefixes that were previously unknown, and initially they were just part of the words that were being borrowed. But over time, English speakers recognized these beginning elements as prefixes, as distinct parts of the words that were being borrowed with specific meanings. Eventually, English speakers adapted them to English and even used them to form new words.

Most of these new prefixes could be traced back to Latin and/or Greek. And very often, they had even older roots – going all the way back to the Indo-Europeans. And as you might expect, thanks to those Indo-European roots, many of those borrowed prefixes were related to native prefixes used in Old English. In other words, many of those French and Latin and Greek prefixes had cognates within English.

Consider the Old English prefix ***ge-*** that I mentioned earlier. Remember that it was spelled G-E – and was originally pronounced as /ge/ before the pronunciation changed to /ye/ in Old English. Well, that prefix can be traced back to the Indo-Europeans where it has been reconstructed as ****kom***. Remember that the Indo-European 'k' sound shifted to a 'g' sound under Grimm's Law. So the initial root word had a 'k' sound. And that root word ****kom*** meant 'near or beside.' That was the same sense that the ***ge-*** prefix had in a lot of Old English words.

Well, that root also passed into Latin where it created the prefix ***com-***, which was also rendered as ***con-*** and sometimes simply as just ***co-***. This accounts for lots of words that have a sense of togetherness, or more specifically, two of something . It produced words like ***co-exist***, ***co-dependent***, ***coincide*** and ***companion***. In fact, I noted earlier that a fellow traveler was called a ***gefera*** in Old English using that ***ge-*** prefix. And Latin gave us the synonym ***companion*** with ***com-*** prefix. And again, both of those prefixes are ultimately derived from the same Indo-European root which meant 'beside or near.'

This prefix was largely introduced in the Ancrene Wisse where it appears in the words ***comfort***, ***consent***, ***convent*** and ***contemplation*** – all used for the first time in English.

The English prefix ***for-*** also had cognates in Latin and Greek, and some of those prefixes can also be found in the Ancrene Wisse for the first time. ***For-*** was derived from an Indo-European root that has been reconstructed as ****per***. Remember that the Indo-European 'p' sound became an 'f' sound in the Germanic languages. So Indo-European ****per*** produced English ***for-***. The Indo-European root meant 'forward,' so it could be used to express the idea of moving forward. But by extension, it could also be used to express the idea of being in front or first, or in some cases simply 'near' or 'beside.'

These various senses gave rise to the Latin and Greek prefixes ***para-*** which meant 'beside, against, or protection against.' And it produced words like ***paragraph***, ***parallel***, and ***parachute***. A ***parachute*** used the sense of the prefix as 'protection against.' It was a device that provided protection against a fall. The same Indo-European root also gave rise to the Latin prefix ***per-*** meaning 'through' which gave rise to words like ***perform*** and ***perpetual***. The sense of the root as 'in front' or 'first' gave rise to the prefix ***pro-*** from Latin and Greek and the prefix ***pre-*** from Latin. ***Pro-*** meant 'before' or 'on behalf of,' and it produced words like ***produce***, ***proceed*** and ***progress***. And in the Ancrene Wisse, it produced the word ***profession*** which appeared for the first time in English.

The prefix ***pre-*** produced words like ***prefix*** itself, as well as words like ***preview*** and ***precede***. And in the Ancrene Wisse, the prefix ***pre-*** appears for one of the first times in English in the words ***present*** and ***presumption***.

By the way, that same Indo-European root also produced the Greek prefix ***proto-*** meaning 'first.' It appears in a word like ***prototype***, and more notably for our purposes, we know it as a linguistic prefix to mean 'the first language' – as in ***Proto-Indo-European***, ***Proto-Germanic***, and so on.

All of these new prefixes started to change the English language. They changed the way words looked as more and more words adopted these common prefixes. And they also gave English a variety of similar prefixes to choose from. That is especially true for prefixes that were used to express negation or the opposite of a given root word.

As I noted earlier, English already had the prefix ***un-***, as in ***undo***, ***unkind***, ***unhappy*** and so on. And it remains the most commonly used prefix in English. But English ended up borrowing several new prefixes that could be used in the same way. And that helps to explain why English has so many prefixes today that basically serve the same function. According to most scholars, three of the six most common prefixes in English are used to express negation or the opposite of a given root word.

Among those three negative prefixes, ***un-*** is the most common, but is the only one native to English. The other two came from Latin. They are the prefix ***in-***, as in ***inactive***, ***incompeten***t and ***insincere***, and ***dis-***, as in ***dissimilar***, ***disfavor***, and ***discontent***. And once again, the Ancrene Wisse provides some of the first uses of these newer prefixes.

Let's start with the prefix ***in-***. It is the third most common prefix in English – after ***un-*** and ***re-***. As you might expect, Latin ***in-*** and English ***un-*** are related. They are both derived from the same Indo-European root word ****ne*** which also gave us the words ***no*** and ***not***. So all of those words that we use to express negativity are related. In fact, the words ***negate*** and ***negativity*** are also derived form the same root.

The Indo-European root word ****ne*** acquired a vowel sound at the front very early on because it appears in a variety of Indo-European languages with a vowel sound at the front – including Old English ***un-***, Latin ***in-***, Greek ***an-***, Old Irish ***an-***, and Sanskrit ***an***-, all of which were used as a prefix to mean 'not.'

As I noted, the Greek version was ***an-***, but it was sometimes shortened to just ***a-***. And it was also borrowed into English. We find that Greek version in words like ***anarchy***, ***anemia***, ***amoral*** and ***asexual***.

The Latin version came in as ***in-***. But that ***in-*** prefix was sometimes altered depending on the initial consonant in the root word that followed the prefix. So in many words, it became ***im-***. In the Ancrene Wisse, we find this new prefix in a brand new word borrowed from French – the word ***impatience***.

This same process altered the prefix to ***il-***, in words like ***illogical*** and ***illegitimate***, and to ***ir-***, in words like ***irrational*** and ***irreconcilable***. Again, these are all just variations of the original Latin prefix ***in-***.

So these new Latin prefixes entered English beside the native English prefix ***un-***, and they could all be used to make a word negative or to indicate the opposite of the given word. And as these new prefixes became more acceptable, it probably isn't surprising that English speakers started to use them interchangeably. Take the root word ***able***. It's a French word ultimately from Latin. So if we wanted to make that word negative, and if we wanted to be purists about it, it should have the Latin prefix ***in-***, a Latin prefix with a Latin root word. And we do have that construction in the word ***inability***. But notice what happens when we use it as an adjective. It becomes ***unable*** – not ***inable***. We use the Old English prefix ***un-*** with the Latin and French root word. And part of the reason why we do that is because the two prefixes were once interchangeable. In fact, ***inability*** and ***unability*** were both considered to be acceptable until the 1700s, when ***inability*** won out.

So sometimes there is confusion over the proper prefix – ***in-*** or ***un-***. But other times, we have to deal with a different type of confusion – a confusion over the precise meaning of the prefix that we're trying to use. And this also happens with the ***in-*** prefix. Obviously, the word ***in*** is a distinct word in English. By itself, the word ***in*** is an Old English word that meant the opposite of ***out***. And we sometimes use that word as part of a compound with another word – as in ***inside*** or ***indoors***. So in those cases, it resembles a prefix. But that word also has Indo-European roots, and the ultimate root produced a separate prefix in Latin which was also rendered as ***in-***. And this other ***in-*** prefix in Latin meant 'in, into or upon.' So Latin gave English two different identical prefixes. One meant 'not' and the other meant 'in or upon'.

We have the latter in words like ***inquire***, ***inflict***, ***infighting*** and ***inform***. And this other version of the ***in-*** prefix can also be found for one of the first times in English in the Ancrene Wisse. It appears in the word ***intent*** which is recorded for the first time in that document.

We also find this second version of the ***in***- prefix in the word ***inflame***. In some cases, person's passions may be come inflamed – meaning that they have a burning passion inside. Or you might have a medical condition where a sore or blister becomes ***inflamed***. In might lead to ***inflammation***, another variation of that word. And something that is capable of burning up or exploding can be described as ***inflammable***.

But here is where the confusion sets in. Remember that we also have that other Latin prefix ***in-*** which meant 'not.' So ***inflammable*** can also be interpreted as 'not flammable.' So which is it? Does ***inflammable*** mean that something is likely to burn or not likely to burn. That's a pretty big difference – especially if you're trying to prevent unwanted fires. At one time, this word created a lot of problems in English. If you marked a substance as ***inflammable***, how would a user interpret that word? Would he or she be careful because the substance could explode, or would he or she assume that the substance was safe since it couldn't catch fire?

Now as I noted, the word ***inflammable*** was just an extension of words like ***inflame*** and ***inflamation***, so it meant that it was likely to catch fire. But people started to get confused by that prefix and thought it meant the opposite. Technically, if you wanted to say that something was 'not capable of burning,' you would say that it was ***nonflammable***. So ***inflammable*** for things that burn – and ***nonflammable*** for things that don't burn. But you can see how easy it was to get those prefixes mixed up – because they could both mean the same thing.

Eventually, English speakers tried to clear up this confusion by dropping the prefix altogether, thereby creating the word ***flammable***. Without the confusing prefix, the word ***flammable*** could clearly indicate that something was capable of burning. This new word was first recorded in the 1800s, and it seemed to solve the problem.

In the 1920s, the National Fire Protection Association in the United States jumped on this bandwagon, and it called for using the word ***flammable*** instead of ***inflammable*** to avoid any confusion. The organization was soon joined by insurers and fire safety advocates who approved of this version of the word without the prefix. And in 1959, the British Standards Institution joined in. It issued the following statement on the matter: "In order to avoid any possible ambiguity, it is the Institution's policy to encourage the use of the terms 'flammable' and 'non-flammable' rather than 'inflammable' and 'nonflammable.'"

So as this anecdote shows, the multiple meanings of some prefixes can create confusion, and it sometimes requires English to coin new words to solve the problem. By the way, I got this anecdote about the word ***inflammable*** from Patricia T. O'Conner's book, "The Origins of the Specious." (p. 183) So I wanted to acknowledge that source.

Now we've looked at two different negative prefixes – Old English ***un-*** and Latin ***in-***. The other negative prefix that I mentioned earlier was ***dis-***, as in ***dishonest*** or ***disallow***. It also came in from Latin, and we also have evidence that it was entering English in the early 1200s in the Ancrene Wisse. But in the text, it wasn't generally used with the meaning of 'not.' It was used in a secondary sense as 'apart or away,' and it appears in the words ***distinction*** and ***discord***, which both appear for the first time in English in that document. The text includes the word ***disturb*** which is also recorded for the first time.

I should note that English also started to borrow another negative prefix during this period from Latin and French, and it is actually very similar to ***dis-***. It's the prefix ***de-***. We have it in words like ***defrost*** and ***defuse***. It could also be used in the sense of 'down' or 'away,' which we have in words like ***decline***, ***debase*** and ***demean***. Now despite the similarities between ***dis-*** and ***de-***, the two prefixes are not actually related even though they both came in from Latin and were sometimes used in similar ways.

Several words with this ***de-*** prefix appear for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse, including ***delight***, ***depart***, ***desert***, ***devout***, ***devotion***, ***demur***, ***destroy*** and ***default***. In most of these words, the ***de-*** prefix was in the secondary sense of 'down' or 'away.'

I should also mention that English has a lot of other negative prefixes in addition to ***un-***, ***in***-, ***dis***- and ***de-***, and their respective variations. English also uses ***anti-*** from Greek, ***non-*** from Latin, ***mis-*** from Old English, as in ***mistake*** or ***misdeed***, and ***mes-*** from French loanwords which was usually re-spelled as ***mis-*** after those words entered English. That's what happened in the case of words like ***mischief***, ***miscreant*** and ***misadventure***.

All of these negative prefixes give English lots of subtle ways to express negativity. For example, there is a subtle difference between ***misinformation*** and ***disinformation***. And there's a difference between being ***unfamous*** and ***infamous***. And there's a difference between having an ***inability*** and a ***disability***. These subtle distinctions can be made today because we have preserved so many of these prefixes over the years.

Anyway, the main point of this episode is that early Middle English saw the introduction of lots of new prefixes from French, Latin and Greek. And they were quickly adopted by English speakers. But within English, most of those borrowed prefixes remained attached to borrowed words. They were not regularly attached to native Old English words. In early Modern English, that started to change, and some of these borrowed prefixes started to break free, and speakers began to use them with native English words. So we got words like ***rewind***, ***renew***, ***disbelief***, ***preheat***, ***engrave***, and ***nonstop*** – all Old English words with borrowed prefixes. But make no mistake, for the most part, borrowed prefixes were mainly used with borrowed words – and that's still the case to this day.

But Old English prefixes were different. They retained their flexibility, and many of them were routinely attached to words without regard to their origin. We find Old English prefixes attached to Latin and French words all the time, as if they had always been there – words like ***unpopular***, ***unchanged***, ***unplanned***, ***understatement***, ***underachiever***, ***outnumber***, ***outclass***, ***overconfident***, ***overextend***, ***overview*** and so on.

And speaking of ***overview***, that's a general overview of the prefixes in early Middle English. Next time, in what is really the second part of this topic, I'm going to switch from word beginnings to word endings, and I'll look at suffixes. In many respects, the changes to suffixes over time have been even more substantial. So next time, we'll look at Middle English suffixes.

Until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.

EPISODE 105: SUFFIX SUMMARY

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 105: Suffix Summary. In this episode, we're going to look at the changing nature of suffixes in early Middle English. Last time, we explored how prefixes were evolving during this period. So this is really the second part of our look at new word elements that entered English with the arrival of loanwords from across the Channel. Once again, we'll begin with suffixes that were common during the Old English period before the Norman Conquest. Then we'll look at some of the new suffixes that were introduced from Latin and French after the Conquest. Along the way, we'll also look at evidence of these new suffixes in the Ancrene Wisse.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can sign up to support the podcast at Patreon.com/historyofenglish. And as always, you can reach me by email at kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com,

So let's turn to this episode and the evolution of suffixes in the early Middle English period. This time, I'm going to explore some of the common suffixes that were used in Old English and early Middle English. I'm going to focus on those that still exist in Modern English, because it would be almost impossible to discuss every suffix that existed in the earlier periods of English.

Just as we saw with prefixes in the last episode, suffixes range from the very common to the really obscure. And there are so many of them, that it is even difficult for scholars to list all of them.

Back in the late 1800s, a Cambridge professor named Reverend Walter W. Skeat, produced a book titled "An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language." (1882). Even though it's a bit dated, it's a great source for early research in English etymology. In the appendix to the book, Skeat attempted to list the prefixes and suffixes used in English. He included over 400 prefixes, but when he tried to list the suffixes, he apparently gave up. In the section on suffixes, he wrote the following: "The number of suffixes in Modern English is so great, and the forms of several, especially the words derived through the French from Latin, are so variable, that an attempt to exhibit them all would tend to confusion." So instead of including an actual list of suffixes, he simply referenced other sources where various lists could be found.

Part of the reason why there are so many suffixes in English is because inflections were traditionally added to the end of words. So lots of suffixes serve very specific grammatical functions. If we want to make a noun plural, we usually add something to the end of the word – an ***-s***, an ***-es***, or an ***-en*** like in ***children***, or an ***-i*** like in ***alumni***, and so on. Those are all suffixes, but I'm not going to focus on those types of grammatical suffixes. Instead, I want to explore the suffixes we use to form new words.

Of course, these suffixes sometimes serve a grammatical function as well. We can take a verb like ***inflate*** and turn it into a noun by adding an -ION to the end producing the word ***inflation***.

We can turn that noun into an adjective by adding -ARY to the end producing the word ***inflationary***. So sometimes these suffixes allow to create variations of existing words.

And again, there are lots of them in Modern English. Laurence Urdang was a well-known scholar and lexicographer, and he was the managing editor of the Random House Dictionary. He passed away a few years ago, but during his lifetime, he published a collection of English suffixes that was over 250 pages long.

A few episodes back, I mentioned that the first proper English dictionary was composed in the year 1604 by a man named Robert Cawdrey. Over half of the words in his dictionary contained suffixes.

So we deal with suffixes all the time when we speak and write English, and most of the time we don't even give them a second thought. But they are fundamental to the language.

Now if we try to narrow down that long list of suffixes to the basic ones that we use all the time, we would find that we mostly use about 50 or 60 common suffixes in our everyday speech. Those are found in a large percentage of the words we use everyday. And those most common suffixes are a blend of Old English suffixes and suffixes from across the Channel.

Last time, we saw that Old English prefixes experienced a decline in Middle English – as Latin, Greek and French prefixes came in. And the same thing happened with suffixes, but the older suffixes tended to be a little more durable. Many of those Old English suffixes have survived into Modern English even if they are no longer used to create new words. And that's the case with the Old English suffix ***-lock***.

-lock was usually spelled L-A-C in Old English, and it was used to refer to certain actions or proceedings associated with a given root word. It was somewhat common in Old English. So the word ***feohtlac*** – or 'fight-lac' – meant 'the action of fighting.' So it meant 'warfare.' But this common Old English suffix fell out of use in Middle English. Today, it only survives at the end of one Modern English word, and that's the word ***wedlock***. Since we don't really use that suffix today outside of that one word, most people don't realize that the 'lock' part of ***wedlock*** is a suffix. Many people think it's the modern word ***lock***, so they think of ***wedlock*** as 'the state of being locked or bound together in marriage.' But it doesn't actually meant that. The 'lock' part of ***wedlock*** is just a lingering Old English suffix, and it's actually unrelated to the modern word ***lock***.

Another Old English suffix that has largely disappeared is the suffix ***-red*** (R-E-D). It was used to indicate a specific state or condition. It is actually derived from the Old English word ***rædan*** which meant 'to advise or counsel.' It was sometimes used at the end of Old English personal names – like ***Alfred*** and ***Aethelred***. In fact, you might remember that it was used as a pun on Aethelred's name – "Aethelred the Unready" – which meant 'Aethelred the poorly advised.' This word fell out of use in Middle English, and that included its use as a suffix. Outside of personal names like ***Alfred***, it only survives today at the end of the words ***hatred*** and ***kindred***.

Another Old English suffix that experienced a decline was the suffix ***-wise***. I've noted before that the Old English word ***wisdom*** is cognate with the Latin word ***vision***. They are both derived from an Indo-European root word that meant 'to see.' The sense of observing the world around you and acquiring knowledge led to the modern sense of the Old English words ***wisdom*** and ***wise***. But the word ***wise*** also acquired a different sense in Old English. If you observed the world around you, you noticed how things worked and how they behaved. You noticed habits and customs and routines. And that led to the word ***wise*** as a noun which referred to a particular manner or way or condition. And it was sometimes combined with other words as in the word ***otherwise*** from Old English. It continued to be used well into the Middle English period forming words like ***likewise***, ***crosswise*** and ***lengthwise***. It even made it into the Modern English period in the word ***clockwise***. But the only common word ending in ***wise*** that was coined in the past century is the word ***streetwise*** – but that word uses ***wise*** in the more usual sense as 'smart.' So it isn't really the traditional ***-wise*** suffix. That means there hasn't really been a common word formed with that suffix in English since ***clockwise*** in the late 1800s.

A couple of other common Old English suffixes were ***less*** and ***full***, both of which also survive as distinct words. Of course, ***-less*** was used as a suffix to indicate the lack of something, and ***-ful*** was used a suffix to meant a great deal of something. We have the ***-less*** suffix in words like ***hopeless***, ***timeless***, ***reckless***, and so on. And we have the ***-ful*** suffix in the Old English words ***wonderful***, ***careful*** and ***handful***. The Ancrene Wisse also gives us the first recorded use of the word ***dreadful*** which is a combination of the Old English word ***dread*** and the ***-ful*** suffix.

The ***-less*** and ***-ful*** suffixes have remained popular over the centuries, and they have routinely been attached to root words from Latin, French and other languages. That has given us hybrid words like ***useless***, ***regardless***, ***graceful***, ***grateful***, and ***beautiful***, just to name a few. In all of those words, the Old English suffix is attached to Latin or French root words.

By the way, the word ***full*** is derived from an Indo-European root word that meant 'to fill' and has been reconstructed as ****pele-***. Remember that the Indo-European 'p' sound became an 'f' sound in the Germanic languages. Well, the Latin version of that word produced the words ***plural*** and ***plenty***. And I mention that because the word ***plenty*** also appears for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse. And in the 1400s, the ***-ful*** suffix was added to the word ***plenty*** producing the word ***plentiful***. So the word ***plentiful*** is technically redundant – it literally means 'full of fullness.' The root word and the suffix are cognate and both mean 'full or abundant.'

Old English also had several other suffixes that were used to form adjectives from other parts of speech. So if you wanted to create a word to describe something, you could use one of these suffixes. Several of these are still used in Modern English. One was the E-N suffix – ***-en***. It allows us to turn ***gold*** into ***golden***, and ***old*** into ***olden***. ***Wood*** turns into ***wooden*** and ***wool*** into ***woolen***. This suffix was once very common, but has stopped being used to create new words in English. Today, we generally ignore the prefix and just use the root word if we want to use an adjective.

So rather than referring to a 'golden ring,' we are more likely to just refer to a 'gold ring.' Rather than discussing the 'olden days,' we are more likely to just refer to the 'old days.' Instead of a

‘wooden chair’ and a ‘woolen sweater,’ we are just as likely to refer to a ‘wood chair’ and a ‘wool sweater.’ So today, that suffix is generally optional for adjectives, and when we use it, it tends to make our word choice sound older and more formal.

Another Old English way to form adjectives was the E-D suffix – ***-ed***. Of course, we also use an E-D suffix on verbs when we want to express past tense – “I talked.” “You listened.” But that’s a completely different suffix, even though it looks the same. That suffix is attached to verbs, but the suffix I’m discussing here is attached to nouns to convert them into adjectives. So it turns ‘a man with a beard’ into a ‘bearded man.’ A ‘giant with two-heads’ into a ‘two-headed giant.’ A ‘truck with six wheels’ into a ‘six-wheeled truck.’ Other examples include a ‘saber-toothed’ tiger and a ‘wooded’ area. So this suffix is still used quite a bit today.

Another way to form an adjective was to use the Old English suffix ***-some*** – S-O-M-E. It allows us to convert ***lone*** into ***lonesome***, and ***whole*** into ***wholesome***, and ***awe*** into ***awesome***, and so on.

We can also form adjectives by adding a simple ***-y*** suffix to a word – to convert ***blood*** into ***bloody***, and ***thirst*** into ***thirsty***, and ***dream*** into ***dreamy***. Of course, this is still a very common suffix, and it was originally a very common Germanic suffix rendered in Old English as ***-ig*** – spelled I-G. That ‘g’ may have been pronounced early on, but it was probably silent for much of the late Old English period. So ***sandy*** was rendered in Old English as S-A-N-D-I-G. And ***dusty*** was D-U-S-T-I-G. But modern scholars are confident that the ‘g’ was silent in late Old English because almost all of the words with this suffix were re-spelled in the earliest Middle English documents without the ‘g’. That suggests that the ‘g’ was just a standard spelling convention within Old English. And after the Conquest, the French-trained scribes completely disregarded what had become a silent letter at the end. That just left an ‘i’ at the end which was re-spelled as ‘y.’

And this ***-y*** suffix remained very popular in early Middle English producing words like ***happy***, ***needy*** and ***sleepy*** during that period. And it lives on to this day in new words. If a stew has a lot of onions in it, we might say that it has an ***oniony*** flavor. It might be served with mashed potatoes that are ***lumpy***. And when you’re finished eating, you might leave a table that is ***messy***. Those are all Modern English words formed with that very old suffix.

And I should also note that Greek and Latin gave English another ***-y*** suffix attached to some words borrowed from those languages or borrowed from French. And it serves much of the same function as the native English suffix. So as a very general rule, when we see that ***-y*** at the end of a native English word, it usually came from Old English, and when we see it on the end of a loan word, it usually came in via Latin and Greek. But outside of tracing the etymology, there is no easy way to distinguish those two -y suffixes in Modern English. And as far as Modern English is concerned, it is really just one suffix today.

Another Old English suffix that was used to form adjectives was the suffix I-S-H – ***-ish***. And this particular suffix has found renewed life in Modern English. The suffix is used to form words like ***childish***, ***foolish*** and ***selfish***. It is also used to form words related to national origin and languages associated with those regions – thus words like ***English***, ***Spanish***, ***Danish***, and so on.

But it is in its sense as 'somewhat' or 'sort of' that it has gained renewed vigor in Modern English. Traditionally, that 'sort of' sense has been used in reference to things like colors – producing words like ***reddish***, ***greenish***, ***brownish***, and so on. But it has also been applied to other adjectives to express that same sense of 'almost, but not quite.' Rather than meeting someone at exactly nine o'clock, we might plan to meet at '9-ish.' We might describe a slightly humorous movie as 'funny-ish.' A recent television show in the United States about an upper middle-class African-America family was called "Black-ish." So this very old suffix is still very popular.

Now we find that Old English suffix at the end of a word like ***childish***. But we also have the word ***childlike***. And they are somewhat interchangeable in Modern English. And we once had the word ***childly*** which had essentially the same meaning. So ***childish***, ***childlike*** and ***childly*** have all existed as English words. And those other two suffixes ***-like*** and ***-ly*** (L-Y) are both native to Old English. They can all be used to form adjectives, and L-Y is actually the main way that we turn an adjective into an adverb. So from ***quiet*** to ***quietly*** and from ***large*** to ***largely***. The adjective and adverbs forms of that suffix were slightly different in Old English, but in Middle English they converged into the same L-Y form for both.

Now sometimes we still use both the ***-like*** suffix and the ***-ly*** (L-Y) suffix with the same root word. So we have the words ***womanlike*** and ***womanly*** and ***godlike*** and ***godly***. And not only are those two suffixes used in similar ways, they are also related. The L-Y suffix was originally -L-I-C in Old English. It was a word that meant 'body or corpse.' It was attached to the end of nouns to create adjectives to mean 'in the form of' or 'in the appearance of' the noun. So if something was in the form of a child, it was ***cildlic*** – C-I-L-D-L-I-C. But that final C or 'k' sound became silent over time especially in the south of England. And that produced the word ***childly*** that I mentioned earlier.

But in the north of England, that C or 'k' sound at the end was retained. There may have been some Norse influence at work as well since Old Norse had a version of that same word where the 'k' sound was retained. Anyway, that word eventually emerged as the distinct word ***like*** in Middle English. And that northern form eventually spread south and was adopted as the ***-like*** suffix with a similar meaning as the older L-Y suffix. By the 1500s, English had the word ***childlike*** which eventually replaced the older form ***childly***.

But as I noted, in some cases both versions still exist in Modern English with pairs like ***womanlike*** and ***womanly*** and ***godlike*** and ***godly***. And ***gentlemanlike*** and ***gentlemanly***.

So we've looked at a variety of Old English suffixes used to create adjectives and sometimes adverbs. That includes ***-wise***, ***-ful***, ***-less***, ***-en***, ***-ed***, ***-some***, ***-y*** (which is just the letter Y), ***-ish***, ***-like***, and ***-ly***. All of these are still used to some extent in Modern English, and that shows how durable Old English suffixes have been.

We've looked at the creation of adjectives and adverbs in Old English. Now let's turn to nouns. Old English gave us several suffixes used to create abstract nouns. These nouns were usually used to express a general state or condition.

One of those suffixes was ***-dom*** – D-O-M. It was used in Old English words like ***kingdom***, ***earldom***, ***wisdom*** and ***freedom***. You might remember that word ***dom*** (D-O-M) meant a 'law' or 'judgment' in Old English. And that was the origin of this D-O-M suffix. In words like ***kingdom*** and ***earldom***, it had a sense of the realm that was subject to the king's judgment or the earl's judgment. So it has a sense of jurisdiction. And from there, the meaning was extended to refer to a general state or condition. The state of being 'wise' was ***wisdom***, and the state of being 'free' was ***freedom***. The ***-dom*** suffix survived into Middle English, but it has been in decline ever since then. Today, it mostly exists in old words coined before the Modern English period. However, it hasn't completely disappeared in new words. Within the past century of so, it has been used to form new words like ***fandom*** and ***stardom***.

Another Old English suffix used to form abstract nouns was ***-hood*** – H-O-O-D. Again, much like ***-dom***, it was used to express a certain 'state or condition of being.' It gave us words like ***childhood***, ***manhood***, ***womanhood***, ***likelihood***, and so on. The suffix was ***-had*** in Old English, and it meant 'condition or quality or status.' And much like ***-dom***, this ***-hood*** suffix experienced a decline in Middle English. It has rarely been used to form new words since then. Over the past few centuries, it has produced the words ***boyhood*** and ***girlhood***, but those words are really just an extension of older terms like ***manhood***, ***womanhood***, ***brotherhood***, and ***sisterhood***. And other than those specific exceptions, the ***-hood*** suffix is mainly a relic today.

Another Old English suffix with a meaning similar to ***-dom*** and ***-hood*** was ***-ship***. Again it was used to form abstract nouns. It was used to form Old English words like ***friendship*** and ***worship***. By the way, this ***-ship*** suffix is not directly related to the word ***ship*** as in a boat even though they both existed in Old English. The suffix ***-ship*** is actually related to the word ***shape***. Anyway, this suffix was common in Old English, and it survived into the Middle English period. In the Ancrene Wisse, it appears in the words ***hardship*** and ***fellowship*** which are both recorded for the first time in that document. Like the other similar suffixes ***-dom*** and ***-hood***, this ***-ship*** suffix underwent a decline in Middle English. Very few words have been formed with that suffix since then. One of the few words to appear with that suffix in Modern English is the word ***relationship***.

So ***-dom***, ***-hood***, and ***-ship*** all declined in Middle English as new borrowed suffixes started to come in. But it wasn't just the new suffixes that replaced ***-dom***, ***-hood, and -ship*** . It was also another Old English suffix – the suffix ***-ness*** (N-E-S-S).

This has been the most durable of the four Old English suffixes used to create abstract nouns. It gave us Old English words like ***darkness***, ***sickness*** and ***sadness***. I noted a few episodes back that Layamon's Brut contained the first use of the word ***wilderness*** which was literally 'wild deer ness.' That word also appeared several times in the Ancrene Wisse.

Now as I said, this ***-ness*** suffix has really overtaken some of those other Old English suffixes like ***-dom***, ***-hood***, and ***-ship***. It has become a standard way for us to convert an adjective into a noun. In the Modern English era, we have new words like ***randomness***, ***homesickness***, and ***cohesiveness***.

Over time, this ***-ness*** suffix has even replaced some of the other suffixes like ***-ship***. Layamon's Brut used the word ***boldship***, but that word was later replaced by the word ***boldness***. During this same period in the early 1200s, the words ***cleanship*** and ***cleanness*** were both in common use – sometimes in the same document. (*Hali Meid*). But again, ***cleanness*** with the ***-ness*** suffix won out over time.

Even though the ***-ness*** suffix has taken up some of the space left behind by the other Old English suffixes, it has not been without challengers – especially from Latin and French. Consider the word ***clear***. It's a French word, and it entered English in the late 1200s. English speakers soon took that word and added the English suffix ***-ness*** to the end producing the word ***clearness*** as a noun. So ***clearness*** is a hybrid word – a French root word with an Old English suffix. The word ***clearness*** was once very common in English, and it's still used to a certain extent in Modern English. But a short time after the word ***clearness*** was coined, English borrowed the noun version of the word ***clear*** directly from French as ***clarity***. So ever since then, ***clearness*** and ***clarity*** have existed side-by-side. ***Clearness*** has the Old English suffix ***-ness***, and ***clarity*** had the Latin and French suffix – I-T-Y. Over the past few centuries, ***clarity*** has emerged as the more accepted version within English. And that shows how much French and Latin suffixes have been embraced by English to the extent that they are often preferred over native suffixes. So with that, let's shift our focus from Old English suffixes to those borrowed from Latin and French.

And let's begin with that I-T-Y suffix that I just mentioned in a word like ***clarity***. It was borrowed from Latin and French where it was used to change the root word into a noun. So the word ***pure*** can be converted into ***purity***. Now the word ***purity*** appears for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse.

In fact, in Middle English, the suffix was often spelled as I-T-E and sometimes as E-T-E. So the Ancrene Wisse also gives us the first use of the French words ***chaste*** and ***chastity***. ***Chastity*** is spelled as C-H-A-S-T-E-T-E. The document also gives us the first recorded use of the word ***adversity*** in English which was spelled with I-T-E. The word ***authority*** also appears for the first time again spelled with I-T-E. And familiarity is also attested for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse also spelled with I-T-E. These words didn't get their modern spellings until the Modern English period.

I should note that the suffix T-Y as in ***beauty*** and ***safety*** and ***plenty*** is also derived from same original Latin suffix as I-T-Y. So one version has an 'I' and one doesn't. Again, in early Middle English, it usually appeared as T-E instead of T-Y. As I noted earlier, the French word ***plenty*** appeared for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse, and it was spelled P-L-E-N-T-E. Interestingly, the original Latin root word was ***plenitas***, so it had the 'I' in the original Latin suffix. And that word was borrowed into English for a second time in the 1600s as ***plenity***. So ***plenty*** and ***plenity*** existed side-by-side in English for about a century or so, before ***plenity*** finally disappeared.

Another very common suffix that we use to form nouns is the I-O-N suffix – often rendered as T-I-O-N. Again, this suffix was borrowed from French and Latin. We typically use it to turn an adjective into a noun – so from ***act*** to ***action***, ***motivate*** to ***motivation***, ***direct*** to ***direction***, and so on.

This new suffix appears in quite a few words for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse. It appears in words like ***contemplation***, ***devotion***, ***temptation***, ***distinction***, ***salvation*** and ***presumption***. Again, all were first attested in the Ancrene Wisse.

In most of these words, the suffix is actually spelled C-I-U-N which was common in early Middle English. The T-I-O-N spelling didn't really become common until later in the Middle English period. This original spelling is interesting because spellings were mostly phonetic during this period, and C-I-U-N indicates that the pronunciation was close to Modern English – either /see-un/ or /shun/. So why do we spell it T-I-O-N today?

Well, it's because most of these words can be traced back to Latin where they ended in T-I-O /tee-oh/). And Latin had a lot of inflectional endings, one of which converted that ending to ***-tionem*** (T-I-O-N-E-M). So this original Latin form of ***distinction*** was ***distinction-em***. And the Latin form of ***temptation*** was ***temptation-em***. The 'em' part at the end was dropped in French and English. So that produced the T-I-O-N suffix, but again, the original pronunciation was /tee-own/. Then in late Latin and early French, certain consonant sounds turned into sibilant sounds.

In earlier episodes of the podcast, we saw that this process was called assibilation or palatalization. We saw that the 'k' sound shifted to an 's' sound before the front vowels (E and I). And the hard 'g' sound shifted to a soft 'g' sound before the same front vowels. Well, this same process affected the 't' sound before I in the suffix T-I-O-N. It became /she-own/ and /see-own/. And that converted ***distinction*** (/dis-tinc-tee-own/) to ***distinction***, and ***temptation*** (/temp-tah-tee-own/) to ***temptation***. This was really just a slurring and softening of the pronunciation. And it wasn't limited to this suffix. It also helps to explain why we pronounce I-N-E-R-T-I-A as ***inertia*** and not /in-er-tee-ah/. And P-A-T-I-E-N-C-E as ***patience*** and not /pah-tee-ence/. So this was just a common sound change that took place in late Latin and early French. By the way, the word ***patience*** appears for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse.

As I noted earlier, this suffix often appears as T-I-O-N in Modern English, but it sometimes follows a Latin root word that ended in I-O rather than T-I-O. So the suffix sometimes just appears as I-O-N instead of T-I-O-N. So in the Ancrene Wisse, we get words like ***champion*** and ***scorpion*** with a simple I-O-N suffix, both of which are recorded for the first time in English. Regardless of form, this I-O-N or T-I-O-N suffix is one of the most common suffixes in the English language today.

Another very common suffix that we use to form nouns is the suffix ***-ment*** – M-E-N-T. This suffix was borrowed from French, and it ultimately comes from the Latin suffix ***-mentum***. It appears in the Ancrene Wisse in words like ***judgment*** and ***ornament***. Both of those words appear for the first time in English in that text. Over the centuries, the ***-ment*** suffix has been usually attached to French and Latin root words. But it has become so accepted within English, that it is sometimes attached to native English root words. When combined with English roots, it has resulted in words like ***acknowledgment*** and ***atonement***.

Another suffix borrowed from Latin and French to convert a verb into a noun was ***-ance*** (A-N-C-E) which also appears as ***-ence*** (E-N-C-E). These can be traced back to the Latin suffixes ***-antia***

(A-N-T-I-A) and ***-entia*** (E-N-T-I-A). This was really the same suffix. The form varied depending on the vowel sound in the root word that the suffix was attached to. In French, these two separate versions converged into ***-ance*** (A-N-C-E). But then, the form with the 'e' started to be adopted when the original Latin root word ended in ***-entia*** (E-N-T-I-A). So over the years, English has borrowed words with both versions of the suffix.

In the Ancrene Wisse, the -A-N-C-E suffix appears in the words ***ignorance*** and ***acquaintance***, which both appear for the first time in English. And the -E-N-C-E ending appears in the word ***patience***, which as I noted earlier is also recorded for the first time in English in the Ancrene Wisse.

Another suffix that is used to create nouns in English is the suffix ***-age*** – A-G-E. This is another suffix from Latin and French, and it has an interesting history within English. It came in very early on with the Normans, and it is actually more common in Modern English than Modern French. So it was one of those French suffixes that was embraced in the early Middle English period, and it has thrived ever since. Today we have it in words like ***message***, ***beverage***, ***average***, ***storage***, ***damage***, ***postage*** and so on. But if we go back to the origin of the suffix in English, we would find that it has a close association with European feudalism.

The original Latin suffix was ***-aticus*** or ***-aticum*** depending on how it was being used in a sentence. That original suffix meant 'belonging to' or 'related to.' Though it was used in many words in Latin, it had one particular association with words related to payments. For example, Latin had the word ***pulveraticum*** which was a payment for hard agricultural labor. It became ***pulverage*** in French.

As the feudal system became ingrained in France in the early Middle Ages, it was a system that depended on a variety of relationships typically defined by various services and obligations, and also defined by specific payments. As these new types of payments and obligations emerged, new words had to be coined within French to describe those features. And many of those new words were modeled on existing words like ***pulverage*** which was a specific type of payment.

Within French, this produced words like ***homage***. As we know, a vassal had to swear an oath of homage to his lord. A toll or fee on the use of a cellar or storehouse was called ***cellarage***. A collection of prominent nobles was known as the ***baronage***. And a collection of vassals was the ***vassalage***. The peasants or villeins were called the ***villeinage***.

We can see this link between feudalism and the ***-age*** suffix very early on in English. One of the first words to appear in an English document with this ***-age*** suffix was another word associated with feudalism. But interestingly, it was a native English construction. In a charter that was written down in the year 1195, the word ***hideage*** appears. You might remember that a ***hide*** was a specific amount of land in Old English. So ***hide*** is an Old English word. After the Norman Conquest and the forced introduction of feudalism to England, a tax was levied on each hide of land. And English speakers were already familiar enough with French terms associated with feudalism, that they coined their own term ***hideage*** based on the model of similar French terms.

English soon coined other words in this same manner – by attaching the ***-age*** suffix to a native English words. The word ***thanage*** – meaning the land held by a thane – appeared around the current point in our story in the early 1200s. The word ***bondage*** appeared a short time later. ***Bond*** is a native English word, and the word ***bondage*** referred to the system of obligations that bound a vassal to a lord. English also coined the word ***barnage*** in early Middle English. ***Bairn*** was an Old English word for a small child. It still survives in northern England and Scotland. So ***barnage*** meant 'childhood or infancy.'

This suffix also made an appearance in the Ancrene Wisse. It appeared in the word ***heritage*** which is the first recorded use of that word in English. The document also contains the first English use of the word ***pottage***, which is an early form of the word ***porridge***.

And from there, it became a very common suffix in English forming other words like ***marriage***, ***village***, ***package*** and even the word ***language*** – which is kind of important to this podcast.

So that's the suffix ***-age***. Another very common English suffix borrowed from Latin and French is -E-R-Y – as in ***robbery***, ***treachery***, ***bribery***, ***pottery***, ***bakery*** and ***battery***. In fact, the first two of those words, ***robbery*** and ***treachery***, appear for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse. That suffix is closely related to the A-R-Y suffix that we also use in English, as in ***necessary***, ***secretary***, ***dictionary***, ***glossary***, and ***January***. We also have it in the word ***anniversary*** which appeared for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse.

Both of these suffixes are ultimately derived from Latin, specifically the related Latin suffixes ***–*** ***-arius*** and ***-arium***. Early on, there was a split in the way this suffix evolved in the various French dialects. Within Norman French, and more specifically the Anglo-Norman dialect spoken in England, it evolved into the -A-R-Y suffix that we use today. But within the dialects of central France, the suffix evolved into -I-E-R, which produced the E-R-Y suffix in Middle English words borrowed from French.

The important thing to take from all of that is that the -A-R-Y suffix is really derived from the early Anglo-Norman dialect, and is really a development that mostly took place within England. Back in France, the original Latin suffix evolved into ***-aire*** (A-I-R-E). That is why English has ***contrary*** where French has ***contraire***.

So when English borrowed words from French, it tended to replace that French ***-aire*** suffix with the more English version ***-ary***. So English has ***necessary*** where French has ***necessaire***. And English has ***solitary*** where French has ***solitaire***. In fact, English borrowed the word ***solitaire*** from later French, so English actually has both versions of that word today.

Sometimes, the French ***-aire*** suffix has been borrowed in beside a word with the ***-ary*** suffix, and over time, the version with the French ***-aire*** suffix has emerged as the standard version in English. So for example, Middle English has the word ***questionary*** which meant 'a list of questions.' But in the 20th century, the modern French word ***questionnaire*** replaced it. So the newer French suffix replaced the original Anglo-Norman suffix.

I should also note that the pronunciation of that ***-ary*** suffix varies within Modern English. Over the past couple of centuries, many Modern English dialects have shortened this suffix from ***-ary*** to just /-ree/ in a lot of words. So ***secretary*** became /secretree/. But American English has held onto that original ***-ary*** pronunciation.

So that has left use with lots of different pronunciations of that old suffix. Today, we have American English /sec-re-tary/, British English /secretree/ and French 'secrétaire.' But again, these are all variations of the same suffix that can be traced back to Latin.

Now in addition to the -E-R-Y and -A-R-Y suffixes from Latin and French, we also have the -O-R-Y suffix ***-ory***. We have it in words like ***oratory***, ***observatory***, ***purgatory*** and ***dormitory***. This suffix was mainly derived from the Latin suffixes ***-oria*** (O-R-I-A) and ***-orium*** (O-R-I-U-M). Again those suffixes became ***-orie*** (O-R-I-E) in the Norman dialect of England, and eventually came to be spelled as O-R-Y.

Sometimes, we have both the Norman-English verison of a word and the original Latin version. That's the case with ***crematory*** and ***crematorium***.

This suffix is attested for one of the first times in English in the Ancrene Wisse. It appears in the word ***purgatory*** which is the first recorded use of that word in an English document. The Ancrene Wisse also includes a few other French word with that ending – words like ***memory***, ***history*** and ***story***, but in those words the endings are not actually suffixes. They're just part of the root word. But I wanted to mention those word, specifically the word ***memory***, because it shows how this suffix has evolved separately within Modern French.

Again the word ***memory*** is recorded for the first time in English is the Ancrene Wisse. ***Memory*** reflects the Norman pronunciation of that word ending as /-ory/. But in standard French, it became '-oire' (/wahr/). And English borrowed that word again from later French as ***memoire*** (/mem-wah/ or mem-wahr/). American English tends to pronounce the 'r' sound at the end, British English doesn't.

Another word that appears for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse is the word ***arms*** as in weapons. It was borrowed from French. And a short time later, English borrowed the word ***armory*** which meant 'a weapons arsenal' or 'a place where weapons were kept.' But in the 1500s, that word was borrowed again from French as ***armoire*** with its Modern French ending. And today, we use that Modern French version of the word to mean a cupboard or wardrobe.

Now before I conclude, let me mention one other French and Latin suffix that appeared in the Ancrene Wisse. The suffix ***-ous*** (O-U-S) appeared in words like ***jealous***, ***malicious*** and ***dangerous***. It is based on the Latin suffix ***-osus*** (O-S-U-S) which became O-U-S in French, and was introduced to English around the time of the Ancrene Wisse.

So as you can see, a lot of Latin and French suffixes were starting to pour into English in the early 1200s, and the Ancrene Wisse contains a lot of those suffixes for the first time in an English document. Over the past couple of episodes, I've tried to focus on prefixes and suffixes that were being used in the 1200s. So that included those from Old English as well as some of the early borrowings from Latin, French and Greek. As the Middle English period progressed, more and more of those elements from across the Channel came in. And I'll probably look at some of those prefixes and suffixes that came in later in future episodes.

But for now, I'll leave the topic there. Over the next couple of episodes, we'll move the story forward into the mid and late 1200s. We'll pick back up with the historical narrative as we progress deeper into Middle English period. And we'll explore some other interesting developments that impacted the evolution of English.

So until next time, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.