

**THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPTS**

EPISODES 106 - 110

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EPISODE 106: AN ILLUMINATING DEVELOPMENT

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 106: An Illuminating Development. In this episode, we’re going to look at a brand new industry that was popping up around Western Europe in the early 1200s – the bookmaking industry and the book trade. For the first time, books were starting to be mass produced. And most of those books will filled with much more than words on a page – they were also filled with color. Most books produced during this period were literally works of art. The pages were adorned with pictures and decorations known as illuminations. So the production of a Medieval book required much more than a scribe and pen. It required a team of trained artisans who worked together to assemble these literary works. And for the first time, most of this work was being done by craftsmen in private workshops, not by monks in a church or monastery. So this time, we’ll explore the birth of bookstores and the book trade, and we’ll also look at how color influenced that industry and influenced the English language.

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 over the past few episodes, I’ve discussed the importance of an early 13th century text called the Ancrene Wisse. And I’ve pointed out a few of the many loanwords that were recorded for the first time in that document. I also noted a few episodes back, that the Ancrene Wisse was the name give to the document in one of the early versions of the manuscript. But several different versions of the document have survived the centuries. Four surviving versions of the manuscript were all produced between the years 1200 and 1250. And there are several more copies from the following century and a half. And there are also fragments of other copies. And the text was translated into Latin and French as well. And multiple copies of those translations also survive.

This points to how popular the text was at the time. But it also points to something else. It shows that certain manuscripts were being mass produced during this period. A few episodes back, I talked about the manuscript composed by Walter of Bibbesworth which was designed to help English children learn how to speak French. And again, I noted that the text was apparently very popular because multiple versions of the book have survived the centuries. So you can notice a trend developing here.

When we looked at Old English documents, we were lucky to have a single surviving copy to examine. But now, in the early Middle English period, we start to get multiple copies of the same text.

This development came about for two complementary reasons – supply and demand. By the early 1200s, Western Europe had a new class of literate consumers who coveted books and other reading materials. This included students at the new universities, as well as lesser nobles, educated bureaucrats, tradesmen, and a small but growing literate class in towns and cities. So

books were no longer the exclusive domain of the churches, and monasteries, and kings and barons. There were lots of other people who wanted their own books.

In order to satisfy that demand, a new industry started to appear. Scribes started to go out on their own and open shops and sell their services to the general public. And they were joined by artists, and parchment makers, and dye makers, and book binders. They all started to get in on the action. And soon there was a steady supply of books to satisfy that demand. So this time, I want to explore how that new book trade developed, and I want to examine how it influenced the English language.

Our story really begins with those universities that I talked about back in Episode 95. As students poured into new university towns like Paris and Oxford, they needed access to the texts that were being taught in those schools. And you might remember from that earlier episode that one of the factors contributing to the rise of universities was the discovery of all of those ancient Greek manuscripts that had been preserved by scholars in the Arab world. Those old documents had been translated from Greek into Arabic, and now they were being translated into Latin. These works introduced Greek philosophy and the Greek knowledge of the world – especially the works of Aristotle. And it also introduced mathematical innovations from the Muslim world, like Arabic numerals, the number zero, and the algebra of al-Khwarizmi. These new works were added to the traditional corpus of theological and religious texts.

Prior to this point, it was possible for a church or monastery or wealthy baron to collect a copy of just about every important manuscript known in Western Europe. But now, that was becoming almost impossible with all of the new manuscripts that were coming on the scene. And even if there was a place where all of the manuscripts could be kept, it wasn't in those burgeoning universities because those universities didn't have libraries yet.

The various teachers or masters had their own books that they used in their lectures, but the students had to obtain their own copies – from somewhere else. So there was a heavy demand for books in those university towns, but there was a limited supply. And as often happens in that situation, a new industry was born. The same universities that generated that demand for books also supplied part of the solution. They were producing graduates who could read and write and who were looking for work. So these two factors reinforced each other. As more students arrived there was a need for books. And as more students graduated, there were more and more scribes who could provide those books. It also meant there were more literate graduates who wanted their own books. So education led to literacy, which led to the demand for books, which led to a brand new industry. And education was really the fuel that powered this new industry.

One of the first places where craftsmen took advantage of this new demand for books was in Paris – next to the very large and important university there. Shops started to pop up where scribes and artists offered to produce books on demand. Sometimes they actually sold completed manuscripts, but in most cases, they only had a sample copy which showed the quality of the work that was produced by the shop. A student or noble or other customer could examine the samples and order a book. They could specify exactly how they wanted the book to be made - how it would be formatted, how it would be decorated or illuminated, and how it was to be

bound. Once the terms were agreed upon and a deadline was set, the bookmaker would go to work and produce the book.

Now, it was not cheap to commission a book to be made. Again, these were works of art, and they required many hours of careful and diligent work to complete. So unless the student came from a wealthy or noble family, he or she wasn't usually able to afford one of these custom-made books. But there was another option.

Most booksellers had copies of the textbooks used by the masters at the local university. The masters usually approved the copies used in those bookstores. And for a fee, the book seller would let students borrow one section or chapter at a time so they could copy it for themselves. This proved to be a lucrative business model since the students did all of the work, and the bookseller only had to lease his sample or exemplar.

So the early Paris book trade was tied to the university, and the university tried to exercise as much control as possible over that trade. It wanted to prevent students from being over-charged and exploited. Remember that this was the whole idea behind the university. Initially, a university was just the collection of students – basically a student union which sought to protect the interests of the students from exploitation. So this was part of the reason why that university or student union existed in the first place. Paris booksellers were licensed by swearing an oath to the university that they would act in good faith and not exploit the students who needed books. And in return, the university recognized the role of the book sellers and approved the samples that the booksellers provided to students.

But remember that these early universities didn't have formal libraries yet. So book collections were held in private – by churches or monasteries or private collectors. You couldn't just go to a local library and check out a book and return it when you were finished reading it. If you wanted a book to read, you either had to borrow one from a friend or purchase one for yourself. And as I noted earlier, there were more and more educated people who wanted books. So these booksellers soon found lots of other customers knocking on their door.

And these customers weren't just interested in the theological texts taught in church schools, or the technical books used in universities. They also wanted storybooks and histories, especially the romance literature that was all the rage in Western Europe. Those were stories about knights and chivalry and King Arthur and Charlemagne.

They also wanted more practical books like cookbooks with recipes, and medical books that explained how to treat illnesses, and language books that would help them learn to speak Latin or French or another language. They wanted bestiaries with pictures and descriptions of exotic animals that supposedly existed in other parts of the world. So the demand for books kept those early booksellers busy, and it led to the rapid growth of the industry from the mid-1100s throughout the 1200s.

According to tax records from this period, there were at least 58 booksellers identified by name in Paris in the 1200s. And there may have been more than that who were not listed by name. Bookmakers and sellers soon opened shops in Italy and England – again initially near universities. By the current point in our story in the mid 1200s, books were being produced by professional bookmakers at Oxford, soon followed by similar shops in Salisbury, York and Westminster. According to the English tax records from the mid-1200s, Oxford had 23 professional scribes who copied the books, and 18 illuminators who prepared the illustrations for the books, and 12 bookbinders who actually took the individual pages and bound them together into a proper book. In fact, the word *bookbinder* is a native English term combining the Old English words *book* and *bind*. And it appears for the first time in an English tax roll from the year 1251 where an individual is identified as “Walteri le Bokbyndere” – ‘Walter the Bookbinder.’”

Most important of all, the Oxford tax records list nine *stationers*, which was the term coined for a bookseller. It was a word adapted from Latin and French, and it referred to the fact that booksellers had shops that were stationary – in fixed locations – usually near universities. So they were distinguished from other merchants and traders who tended to roam about looking for customers. Now today, we don’t usually refer to a bookseller as a *stationer*, but we do sometimes buy *stationery* in a bookstore or office supply store. The word *stationery* – as in paper and envelopes – was coined in the 1700s, and it literally meant the materials sold by a *stationer*. So the noun *stationary* (meaning something that you write on) is related to the adjective *stationary* (meaning a fixed location). And the connection has to do with the fact that the first booksellers were called *stationers* because they had shops at fixed locations in town.

By the mid-1200s, most books were being made by professional bookmakers – not monks working in churches and monasteries. In fact, by the end of the century, some monasteries were outsourcing some of their work to private scribes and illuminators.

So the Church’s monopoly over education had given way to universities. And the Church’s near monopoly over manuscript production had given way to professional bookmakers. That allowed secular literature to become more common. All of this would have long-term consequences for the culture of Western Europe – as the scope of the Church’s influence started to decline.

This development also had linguistic consequences. As long as the Church produced manuscripts, they were almost always produced in the language of the Church which was Latin. But when professional bookmakers took over, that changed. They produced books according to the demands of their customers, so they were much more willing to produce books in the local vernacular. And that helps to explain why books started to be composed in English again in the 1200s.

As long as the Church dominated the production of manuscripts, the work was mostly done by monks, so there was no need for a trade guild for scribes and artists. But as the book industry developed, professional scribes and illustrators started to form guilds, which was common at the time.

In that earlier episode about universities, I noted that the universities were very much a product of the guild system that existed in Medieval Europe where an apprentice studied and trained to become a master – which is why a university graduate can still obtain a ‘master’s’ degree to this day. Well, the guilds formed for the book craftsmen worked the same way.

For example, scribes were more than writers or copiers. They were also calligraphers who had to know how to work with different fonts and characters to satisfy the demands of customers. An aspiring calligrapher had to serve as an apprentice for at least seven years. The final year was devoted to the production of a ideal sample or piece of work by which the apprentice could be judged to be a master in his own right. If the sample piece was deemed to be worthy by the guild, the apprentice was allowed to join the guild as a professional scribe and was permitted to open his own shop. So if the sample piece of work was good enough, the scribe became a master, and that’s why that sample piece of work became known as a *masterpiece*. Today, it refers to a work of perfection, but originally it referred to the best work of an apprentice.

Of course, the scribe was just one of the persons involved in the production of a book. Parchmenters were required to produce the parchment used in the books. Bookbinders were required to sew the pages together and provide a beautiful cover. As I noted, books of this period were usually illuminated with fancy pictures and decorations. So artists were required to illuminate the book.

I should note that book production was not the exclusive domain of men. Women were also actively involved. In fact, there are quite a few mentions of husband and wife pairs – usually with the husband acting as scribe and the wife responsible for the artwork. This often became family business with sons and daughters also involved in the production of books. The children often inherited the business from their parents.

I’ve noted that these Medieval bookmakers made books based on the specifications of their customers. But some books were in such high demand that the bookmakers just mass produced them because they knew there was always an audience for them. One of those books was the Bible – specifically the portable, handheld Bible. This type of Bible was really innovated during this period, and it has remained pretty much unchanged for the last 800 years.

Up until this point, Bibles tended to be large, heavy manuscripts that were very difficult to pick up and move. But I noted a few episodes back that friars made their first appearance in England in the early 1200s. And friars traveled from town to town, preaching to the people wherever they could gather an audience. So they needed a portable Bible – ideally one that could fit in the palm of their hand. Merchants and pilgrims also wanted portable Bibles. So the professional bookmakers came up with a solution.

They used really thin pieces of parchment rather than the thicker cuts used for traditional manuscripts. Rather than using covers made of wood and wrapped in leather, they simply used leather without the wood. They also reduced the size of the font and made very small illustrations. In fact, the bookmakers were always looking for ways to squeeze more words on a page since vellum was expensive. One way to do that was to change the font in a way to make

the letters narrower. The traditional letters used by scribes were known as Carolingian letters. They were fat and round. Now, with the mass production of books, that font was changed to make the letters slimmer and narrower. This was the advent of what became known as Gothic letters. We can still see some of this in modern writing. Think about the letter O. Sometimes it appears as a perfect circle. That was closer to the traditional Carolingian style. But sometimes, it appears more vertical and oval-shaped like it has been pushed together on both sides. Well, that's more like the Gothic style that emerged during this period. And that change was made in order to squeeze more letters – and thus more words – onto a page. When compared to the older Carolingian letters, the new Gothic letters allows scribes to place three times as many letters on a single page of parchment. That reduced the cost of the book since it meant that less parchment was required. It also allowed bookmakers to produce smaller Bibles.

Bookmakers were also adapting other innovations that I have alluded to in prior episodes, and these innovations were also applied to those new portable Bibles. Do you remember the name 'Stephen Langton?' He was the man named as the Archbishop of Canterbury over the objection of King John, and that led to a prolonged conflict between John and the Pope. Well, you might remember that I mentioned one other interesting fact about Langton in that earlier episode. Before becoming Archbishop, we was the man credited with dividing the books of the Bible into the chapters that are used today. Prior to that, the various passages of the Bible were separated by blank lines. But Langton divided them into numbered chapters. That innovation was applied to the new Bibles that were mass produced during this period, and it remains the standard way of subdividing the Bible to this day.

And remember when I talked about glossaries, I also talked about the development of alphabetical order? Well, that was another innovation adopted and expanded by these bookmakers. An alphabetical index of Hebrew names and a separate table of contents were often included in these new Bibles. Other innovations of this period included running titles across the top of the pages and colored paragraph marks. All of these developments were designed to make it easier for readers to find specific passages very quickly. This reflects the fact that books were increasingly being used as reference materials. So books were no longer just being read for leisure and enjoyment. They were being used as practical resources. Again, the portable Bible reflects all of these changes.

The result was a portable, hand-held Bible that was arguably the first mass-produced book in Europe. Now I should note that these Bibles were composed in Latin. Up to this point, we still don't have a complete Bible in the English language, but we're getting close to one. These small portable Bibles were being produced in Paris in the 1230s, and the shape, size and arrangement of the book has changed very little in the eight centuries since then.

I should note that the average household in England and France actually preferred a slightly different book over the Bible, and that was the Psalter. The Psalter was a small illuminated book which mainly consisted of the Book of Psalms. Thus the name Psalter. But it also usually included a calendar in the front that listed the saints' days for the year. The saints' days were almost always written in red ink. And these books were so common, that people started to refer

to those important saints' days as "red letter days." And that gave us the modern term "red letter day" to refer to a notable or important day.

In fact, the use of red ink was really important during this period. It was a way of highlighting parts of the text. Today, we can do that bold print or italics or underlining. But in the Middle Ages, it was done with red ink. Sometimes entire sentences were written in red ink. Titles and chapter headings and side notes were also often written in red ink. This is one of the things that really stands out when you look at a typical Medieval manuscript. This process was called *rubrication* from a Latin word meaning 'red.'

The red ink that was used was either made from a very expensive pigment called *vermilion* or a cheaper pigment called *minium*. And that word *minium* is important because it contributed several words in the English language. A picture or fancy letter drawn in red ink or *minium* was called a *miniature* meaning that it was drawn with minium. Since those pictures or designs were composed in books and were not full-sized paintings, they tended to be small. So the word *miniature* came to refer to a small picture. And over time, within English, it has come to mean any small version of something. We even shorten that word just *mini*, as in a mini-skirt or a mini-series or a mini-cooper. That word *mini* is not some ancient prefix from Latin or Greek. It's just a shorted version of the word *miniature*, which is derived from a type of red ink used in the Middle Ages. We may be tempted to assume that it is derived from Latin or Greek because we also have the Latin word *minimum*, which also means something small. But that word is completely unrelated to the word *miniature*.

So red ink was very important to Medieval scribes, but of course the most common ink was black ink. In fact, the color black was so synonymous with ink that the word for ink in many languages was based on that color. The Greek word for ink was *melan*, which meant black. It's also the ultimate source of the word *melanin*.

Latin had the word *atramentum* for ink, which literally meant 'anything used to dye something black.' And in Old English, the word for ink was – you guessed it – *blæc*. *Blæc* meant the color black, just like today, but it was also the word for *ink*. A scribe wrote with *blæc*, and an inkwell was a *blæchorn* – literally a hollow animal horn used to hold the ink or *blæc*.

But around the current point in our story in the mid-1200s, that Old English word *blæc* started to be replaced with the word *ink* from French. In fact, the word *ink* is first recorded in an English document from the year 1250. The word *ink* is actually derived from the Latin word *encaustum* which was a particular type of ink used in the Middle Ages. The Latin root word also gave us the word *caustic* which means 'biting or burning.' And *encaustum* was a type of ink that had an acidic quality that burned into the vellum or parchment. The original process is not fully known or understood. The Roman writer known as Pliny the Elder wrote that it was a kind of painting executed by fire or heat. It isn't clear how fire or heat was applied to the painting or manuscript, but the ink literally burned or sank into the parchment. So it was permanent and couldn't be erased. The term *encaustic* came to refer to any type of permanent writing, and the word *caustic* was a more general term for 'burning.' That Latin word *encaustum* was shortened to just *enque*

in French, which passed into English around the year 1250 as *ink*. And *ink* gradually replaced the word *blæc* as the preferred English term for the liquid used by scribes.

Of course, the word *black* lives on as a name of a color. In earlier episodes, I noted that the word *black* is cognate with the French word *blanc* and the Spanish word *blanco* which both mean ‘white.’ This is one of those linguistic paradoxes which is apparently explained by the fact the original Indo-European word meant ‘to burn.’ Latin inherited the word in the sense of a bright flame which produced Romance words meaning ‘white.’ But the Germanic languages inherited the word in the sense of something scorched or burnt which produced the English word meaning ‘dark or black.’ In addition to the word *black*, Old English also used the words *sweart* and *wann* to refer to the same color.

Since Old English used the word *black* to refer to dark things, that meant that it needed a separate word for white or bright things, and that was the word *white* – actually *hwit* in Old English. So *black* and *white* are both Old English words.

And I talked about the importance of red ink in Medieval manuscripts. Well the word *red* is also an Old English word. It comes from the same Indo-European root as the French word for ‘red’ which is *rouge*. The root also produced the word *ruby* for a red gemstone, and *rust* for the reddish material that occurs on old iron.

The main point here is that the words *black*, *white* and *red* were used by the Anglo-Saxons. And you might assume that all of our basic color terms go back to Old English, but as we’ll soon see, they don’t. Now you might assume that some Old English words for colors have been replaced with loanwords, but in actuality, Old English didn’t even have common words for some of the basic colors we use today – like blue and orange. So what was going on there? Why didn’t English have words for those basic colors?

Well, I’ll try to explain why in a moment. But let me just note here that English was not really unusual in this regard. The connection between language and color is fascinating, and some linguists have tried to figure out why some languages don’t have words for basic colors. But before we explore that linguistic issue, let me explain why color was so important to Medieval bookmakers.

As I noted earlier, Medieval books weren’t just collections of words. They were also works of art. Drawings and illustrations filled the pages. And these weren’t just scribbles or little decorations. They were elaborate designs, and on many pages, there were more illustrations than there were words. This is obviously something that is better appreciated if you see it rather than having it described to you. So if you’re not familiar with these types of illustrations, I would encourage you to google “Medieval manuscripts” or “Medieval illuminations” to get a sense of this type of artwork.

These illustrations brought color to the page and were intended to attract the eye of readers. We have to keep in mind that most people were still illiterate – or barely literate – especially given that most books were written in Latin. Even a basic knowledge of Latin might not be enough to

fully understand what the text said. So pictures were sometimes just as important as the text itself. It illustrated the subject matter, and sometimes the pictures were more interesting than the words themselves. Even if you couldn't read, you could enjoy the drawings of exotic animals in a bestiary. And in a Bible or Psalter, you could see familiar Biblical stories depicted in color. In fact, some religious books were literally picture books – telling the stories of the Bible through illustrations. So the illustrations were a fundamental part of these manuscripts.

Of course, these types of illustrations weren't new. They had been used for several centuries. But during the 1200s and 1300s, they started to become even more elaborate and sophisticated. Some scholars suspect that the illustrations became more elaborate during this period because professional illuminators rather than monks were putting them together.

The illustrations sometimes served a very practical purpose. Most workshops employed a proofreader who would read over the manuscript and look for errors which were usually missing words. Those types of errors were common because a new manuscript was usually copied from an existing manuscript. And in the process of copying, it was easy to miss a word or sentence. These mistakes are sometimes a good thing for modern scholars because it can help to piece together the history when several copies of the same manuscript are found. If several versions all contain the same mistake or missing word, then scholars can usually discern that they are all connected. They were all made from the same original source document which contained the error.

Anyway, scribes tried to fix those mistakes if they could catch them. If a word was misspelled, the scribe would simply make the correction over the existing word. But if a word was omitted, there might not be enough room to add it in. So the scribe would often write the missing word in the margin and draw a finger pointing to where the word was to be inserted.

But sometimes, the scribe left out an entire sentence or passage. Uh-oh. How do you fix that without re-doing the whole page? Well, you call in the illustrators. The scribe would often write out the missing passage in a blank space in the margin and include a small erasable note to the illustrator explaining how to incorporate the passage into the main body of the text.

In some surviving manuscripts, the passage is framed in a box, and two small men are shown carrying the box toward the main text. A third man is shown next to the main text pointing to where the missing passage belongs. In another manuscript, a missing sentence was added at the bottom of the page. The illustrator then framed the text in a decorative box, and he or she drew ropes from the box to the place where sentence was omitted. A team of little men were then drawn near the point where the sentence was to be inserted, and they are depicted as pulling the ropes connected to the box to try to get the sentence into the right place. These little drawings are like early cartoons – a light-hearted way to solve a practical problem that plagued Medieval scribes – even the professional ones. So the scribes and illustrators worked together to produce these types of books.

In fact, the main scribe had to account for the illustrations and decorations that were to be added later. He or she had to leave space for the drawings. And that usually meant leaving a large blank

space in the upper left corner of the page where a new chapter began. It also meant that the scribe had to remember to leave out the first letter of the first word in the first sentence. So for example, if the first page of a Bible began with the words “In the Beginning...,” the scribe had to remember to leave a big blank space and start the sentence with the letter ‘n’ followed by the words “the” and “beginning.” That’s because the first letter of the first word was almost always illuminated. In other words, the ‘I’ in the phrase “In the beginning” would be drawn in later by the illustrator. It would be much larger than the actual text written by the scribe – sometimes taking up a large portion of the entire page. It would be drawn in a very elaborate font, and it would be decorated with lots of fancy designs and patterns and flourishes. Sometimes figures and entire scenes would be incorporated into the design. This type of initial letter was a work of art in itself.

Again, these types of decorated letters sometimes served a more practical purpose. It enabled a reader to locate the point where a new paragraph or chapter began.

I should note here that the word *letter* was a brand new word in the English language at the current point in our story in the early 1200s. In fact, the Ancrene Wisse contains one of the first known uses of the word in the English language. Layamon’s Brut had used the word *letter* in the sense of a written statement – when you write a letter to someone. But the Ancrene Wisse used the word *letter* in the other sense as a letter of the alphabet. So the word *letter* has been used in both ways since the early 1200s. This new word *letter* gradually replaced the Old English word for a letter which was *boc-stæf* – literally a ‘book staff.’ A *staff* usually meant a walking cane, so it was often curved and bent. And when the Roman alphabet was first introduced to the Anglo-Saxons, they apparently thought that the various letters sometimes resembled little walking canes or staffs, so they called them staffs. And the staffs used to make words in a scroll or book were called *boc-stæf*. But again, that term was replaced by the word *letter* around the current point in our story.

As I noted, Medieval manuscripts made a point to decorate or illuminate the initial letter at the beginning of a page or chapter. The letter was depicted as a fancy uppercase letter – what we might also call a *capital* letter today. And that elaborate capital letter marked the beginning of a new chapter. Umm. *Capital* and *chapter*. Do you sense a connection there? Well, you should. Because they are both cognate, and in fact, the word *chapter* first appeared in English documents as *capitul*. That’s how closely related the words are. Both of these words have their origin in Latin, and they were being used in early Middle English around the current point in our story in the early 1200s.

The words *capital* and *chapter* have their ultimate origin in the old Latin word *caput* meaning ‘head.’ We’ve seen that root word a lot in the podcast, and here we see it again. It has given us words like *chief* and *chef* and *chapeau* and *cape* and *chapel*, just to name a few. You might also remember that Latin *caput* is also cognate with the English word *head*. Both words came from the same Indo-European root word.

So in almost all the words derived from *caput*, there is some connection to the head or the ‘head place’ meaning the primary place. Today we have both of those senses in the word *capital*.

Capital punishment is punishment that causes death, traditionally by removing the convicted person's head. So *decapitation* – literally ‘the removal of the head’ – was a type of *capital* punishment. And today, the main city of government administration is the *capital* city. We might even refer to a place where government business is conducted as a *capitol* building.

Well, in Medieval manuscripts, any prominent object standing at the head or top of the page was also called a *capital*. And since that object was usually a large elaborately decorated letter, that type of letter came to be called a *capital* letter. Today, it simply means any uppercase letter – which is larger and more prominent than a lowercase letter. But originally, it had more to do with its location on the page. The fact that it was big and fancy is the sense that has been retained over time in the modern use of the term *capital letter*.

So that takes us to the word *chapter* which is derived from the same root, and in fact was initially rendered as *capitul*. The first thing we should note is that *chapter* begins with a C-H sound, unlike *capital* which begins with a C-A or /ka/ sound. Well, by this point, we should instinctively know why that is. The Latin C-A sound became a C-H sound in the central dialects of France, including the dialect spoken around Paris. And this is another one of the Parisian forms that was starting to enter English in the early 1200s.

So what's the connection between a chapter of a book and the Latin word for ‘head?’ Well, it has to do with the fact that a chapter is the primary or main division of a book. If you break down a book into its major components, you would begin with the various chapters, then the paragraphs, then the sentences, then the words, then the letters. So the chapter is the main part of the book in the same way that the head was thought to be the main part of the body. And as I noted earlier, a new chapter was often marked with a large illuminated letter which was also a ‘capital’ letter in the sense that it was located at the head of the page. So book *chapters* and *capital* letters are connected thanks to those illuminated letters in Medieval manuscripts.

As I noted, the initial scribe would leave a blank space for the illustrator to draw in the letter at a later time. Sometimes the scribe would leave very specific instructions about the design that he or she wanted the illustrator to draw. The illustrator would then do an initial sketch or outline of the design with a type of pencil. This allowed small changes to be made if necessary. Then he or she would go over the outline with a thin ink to better establish the design. Then the same illustrator or another illustrator would start adding color to the drawing. Traditionally, this began by adding gold leaf to the image. Of course, gold leaf is gold that has been beaten into a very thin sheet as thin as paper or even thinner. It was a delicate material, and it required a skilled artisan to apply it correctly.

The application of gold leaf helps to explain why these are called *illuminations*, because they literally illuminated the page. When held up to the light, the gold leaf would shine. So technically speaking, an illuminated letter had gold leaf, but gold leaf was expensive, so it became common to use a yellow or gold paint as a substitute in lieu of the real thing.

Interestingly, even when yellow or gold paint was used, it was still applied first before the other colors. So it was treated the same as gold leaf. So now, I've introduced a couple of more colors to the story – yellow and gold. And you might remember from an earlier episode of the podcast that both of those words are also cognate, and they are both native to Old English. The original Indo-European root word was something like **ghel*, and it meant 'to shine.' It produced the Old English words *gold*, *golden* and *gilded*. But in Old English, when that hard 'g' sound appeared before a front vowel – like E or I – it often shifted forward and became a 'y' sound. That's how we got the word *yellow* with a 'y' sound at the front. So in our group of primary colors that come from Old English, we have *black*, *white*, *red*, and now we can add *yellow*.

I should also remind you that *yellow* and *gold* are also cognate with the word *yolk* as in an egg yolk. The word *yolk* was originally *geolca* (/yeh-ol-ca/) – spelled G-E-O-L-C-A. So that G originally came before an E, and that's why it begins with a 'y' sound today. The word *yolk* literally meant 'the yellow part,' of course it was the yellow part of an egg. And I mention that connection because Medieval illuminators and painters used egg yolks and egg whites as a binder for paint. They had colored pigments, and they added water to the pigment, but they also need something to bind those pigments together to make paint, and egg whites and yolks were a standard ingredient in those paints for centuries.

I should also remind you that the word *paint* was a brand new word in the language at this point in our story. It was borrowed from French, and the verb *paint* was first used in the Owl and the Nightingale. When you paint a picture, you get a *painting*, and the noun *painting* was used for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse.

And paint was the last thing added to an illuminated letter. Generally speaking, the paler colors came first – yellows, light browns and light greens. *Brown* and *green* are also Old English words going back to the original language of the Anglo-Saxons. But *brown* didn't refer to a specific color at the time. It simply meant 'dark or dusty.' The word *brown* didn't acquire its modern color sense until the late 1300s. So at the current point in our story, an illuminator would not have described that color as *brown*. Depending on the shade, it might be described as a type of red or black or even yellow.

However, he or she would have had no problem describing the color green as *green* because *green* had that same sense in Old English. I noted in an early episode of the podcast that the word *green* is related to the words *grass* and *grow*. They are all Old English words, and they are all cognate having evolved from a common Indo-European root word that meant 'to grow' or 'to become green.' So there was always a sense of color in words like *grass* and *grow*. And in English, we sometimes we refer to a large grassy area as a *green*. A specific area of a golf course is a *green* or *putting green*. And the person who takes care of a golf course is a *greens keeper*. So the color green has an ancient connection to green plants.

That gives us five colors that were identified by common words in Old English – *white*, *black*, *red*, *yellow*, and *green*. So an English illuminator in the early 1200s would have used those same words to describe the colors that he or she was adding to that elaborate letter that was being created. But what happened when the illuminator added those final darkest colors to the letter –

when he or she added the deep blues and purples and bright oranges? Well, he or she wouldn't have used native English words because the original language of the Anglo-Saxons didn't have common words for those colors. And this is where things get interesting. Those colors would probably have been described as shades of black, or green or yellow or red, depending on the specific shade. But really? No blue or purple or orange? Well, no.

Now to be a little more specific, the Anglo-Saxons did have some words they could use for some of those colors, but they were technical terms used by artists or dye makers or other persons who needed specific color terms. For example, Old English had the word *hæwan* which could refer to blue or bluish-gray or even green. And the word *woad* could also be used to refer to a shade of blue. But again, when those terms are found in an Old English text, they usually refer to pigments and dyes. They had a more specific usage. Anglo-Saxons didn't describe the sky as *hæwan* or the ocean as *woad*. Those words had a much more restricted sense, sort of like when we use words like *fuchsia*, or *mauve* or *chartreuse*. Those words represent specific colors, but they tend to have specific technical uses, and they're not words used in common everyday conversations to describe the color of things – at least not by most people.

Now if it seems odd to you that the early Anglo-Saxons didn't have common words for colors like blue, and purple and orange, well it also seemed odd to many linguists. And linguists also noticed that other languages also lacked common words for basic colors, at least at earlier points in their history.

So in 1969, a couple of linguists named Brent Berlin and Paul Kay decided to study this issue in detail. They looked at a variety of languages around the world, and they found something very interesting. They concluded that almost all cultures introduce color terms into their language in the same general order. Now again, they focused on common color terms used by all speakers in a given language, not technical or specialized terms. So in other words, they looked at the color terms that a small child might use, like *red* and *green* and *blue*, not specialized terms like *fuchsia* or *chartreuse* which might only be used by a small group of those speakers.

They found that some languages have as few as two common words for color. And in those languages, one of those words always meant 'white or bright' and the other word always meant 'black or dark.' So words for 'white' and 'black' are pretty-much universal.

The researchers then found that some languages only have three common words for colors, and in all of those languages the words represent the colors white, black and red.

They then found that some languages only have four common words for colors, and in those languages the words represent the colors white, black, red and either yellow or green.

Then they found that some languages have only five common words for colors, and in those languages the words represent the colors white, black, red and both yellow and green.

Languages that have six terms add the color blue. Those with seven add the color brown. Those with more than that add the colors purple, orange, pink and so on.

So this study suggested that as languages develop over time, they tend to add more and more common words for basic primary colors. And they tend to add those words in a specific order. First black and white, then red, then yellow and green, then blue, then brown and the other colors. And English worked in the same order. It started off with black, white, red, yellow and green. And that was the state of things at the current point in our story in the early 1200s.

Then around the year 1300, it added the word *blue* from French, and not surprisingly, the word *blue* is actually a Frankish word related to the English word *black*, so in that sense we can see how at least the darker shades of blue were once seen as a shade of black. A short time later, in the late 1300s, the word *brown* started to be used to refer to a specific color. Around the same time, the word *violet* also entered English from the flower known as a violet. The word *orange* didn't enter English as a color term until the 1500s. It was taken from the color of oranges that were being imported from the Mediterranean. So the fruit came first, then the color.

So English has followed the same pattern recognized by the Berlin and Key in their classic study of color words. The only real exception is the word *purple*. *Purple* tends to be one of the last color words to become commonly accepted within a language, but English borrowed the word *purple* early on from Latin during the late Anglo-Saxon period. So the Anglo-Saxons did have the word *purple*. But they only had that word because the purple was closely associated with Roman emperors, and then was adopted as a royal color by many European kings. So it had a specific use that was imported from across the Channel.

That allowed the word to come in a little bit early because of a unique set of events. Had that color not been so closely associated with European royalty, English probably would not have had a common word for that color until the late Middle English period.

Now there is one other interesting aspect about the order in which color terms enter a language. It happens to be the same order used by Medieval bookmakers when they added color to the pages of a manuscript.

Remember that they started with a clear or almost white piece of parchment. Then they added black ink known as *blæc* in Old English. Then the scribe added red ink to mark the highlighted portions – the process called *rubrication*. Then the illuminator was called in to decorate the manuscript. He or she added either gold leaf or yellow paint. Then the illuminator added pale colors like light green, and finally the darker colors were added – blues, browns, purples, oranges, and so on. So from white to black to red to yellow to green to blue and orange, that's the same order in which those color words enter most languages. So in that sense, one of those beautiful illuminated manuscripts was essentially a metaphor for the English language itself. Those artists added color to the page in the same way that the English speakers added color to the English language.

And with that, I'm going to conclude this episode about the Medieval book trade and the role of color in early Middle English. I should mention that I'll have much more to say about the colors blue, violet and orange in a future episode because all of those terms came into the language a bit later. So stay tuned for that discussion.

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

EPISODE 107: PARLEZ-VOUS ANGLAIS?

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 107: Parlez-Vous Anglais? In this episode, we’re going to continue our look at the re-birth of English writing in the early Middle English period. This time we’ll explore the political events that led to the first major political document issued in English since the Norman Conquest. It is an important document not only for the English language, but also for the English government because it laid the foundation for Parliament. And interestingly, the term *Parliament* is based on a French word meaning ‘to speak.’ So from its very beginnings, Parliament was a place where people went to speak. But speak what language? English? French? Latin? This time we’ll explore the complicated interaction of those three languages in the English government during the 1200s.

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 over the past few episodes, we’ve looked at several important developments that took place in the late 1100s and early 1200s. If there is one constant theme that has emerged through those episodes, it is the gradual re-emergence of English after more than a century in the wilderness. We saw it return in the form of epic poetry in Layamon’s Brut and in the debate poetry of the Owl and the Nightingale. We saw it endure in the oldest surviving songs composed in English. And we even saw it being used in important religious documents like the Ancrene Wisse and the related group of documents composed in the West Midlands known as the Katherine Group.

However, there was one place where English had yet to make an appearance, and that was in legal and government documents. Those were still the exclusive domain of Latin and increasingly French. This was an area where English met some of its strongest resistance. For most of the post-Conquest period, the English language was largely unknown in the English government.

So up until now, evidence of early Middle English has to be found elsewhere. Over the past few episodes, we’ve found some of that evidence in the Ancrene Wisse – an important religious text composed in the early 1200s. I’ve mostly focused on the French influence in that document, but the changes weren’t limited to a bunch of new French words. The English language itself was also evolving and growing. And we can find that evidence as well.

The Ancrene Wisse uses a lot of Old English words in new ways to create new phrases and new figures of speech. Several very common phrases and compound words appear for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse and the related group of documents called the Katherine Group. Again, these are not loanwords. They’re new constructions using native English terms.

For example, we find the first use of the phrase “at once” rendered as *et enes*. The phrase “as often as” appears as *ase ofte asa*. “As much as” appears as *ase mucche ase*. “Whosoever it be” appears as *hu se ever it beo*. “Once a week at the least” is rendered as *enes a wike ette leste*. We also find new terms coined for the first time from existing words. That includes terms like “sometime” – *sumetime*. “Albeit” – *al beo*. “Beforehand” – *bivorenhond*. “Everywhere” – *eauer ihwer*. “Over take” – *ouer token*. And “overturn” – *ouerturneð*.

These were terms that would have been understood, and would have probably been used, by the recluses and anchorites who read the *Ancrene Wisse*. And given that this guide was written for them in English, we can assume that they mostly spoke and conversed in English. Now you may be wondering how a recluse living in solitude in an enclosed cell could converse with other people. Well, anchorites did have access to visitors, and they did make confessions to priests. But they didn’t usually leave their cell. Instead, they had windows which they could open to speak with visitors. Actually, according to the *Ancrene Wisse*. They had three windows.

The cell was often attached to a church, so there was a window between the cell and church itself. There was also a window between the cell a separate servant’s quarters which was also attached to the church. So that window was where a servant or maiden who worked at the church could bring food or otherwise attend to the anchoress. And there was also a third window open to a separate room where outside visitors could speak with the anchoress. This separate room was where visitors gathered and where conversations could be held. To describe this room adjacent to the cell, a French term was used. It was the word *parlur*. This is an early form of the word *parlor*, and it appears for the first time in English in the *Ancrene Wisse*.

Now the word *parlor* is based on the French word *parler* meaning ‘to speak.’ Even if you don’t speak French, you’re probably familiar with the phrase “Parlez-vous Francais” which means “Do you speak French?” – literally “Speak you French?” You might know another variation of that question. “Parlez-vous Anglais?” – “Do you speak English?” Those phrases come in very handy if you’re visiting France or a French-speaking country.

Well that word *parler* meaning ‘to speak’ was used to describe the room where visitors would gather to speak with the anchoress – the *parlor*. The *Ancrene Wisse* specifically instructed the anchoress how to use the three windows in her cell. I’m going to read you that passage, but let me remind you that the word *window* is a Norse word, and it appears for the first time in the *Ancrene Wisse*. But as a general rule, the text preferred the traditional Old English word which was *thurl*. *Thurl* meant an opening, and we still have it in the word *nostril* which is literally ‘the nose thurl’ or ‘the nose opening.’ So in this passage from the *Ancrene Wisse*, that word *thurl* is used instead of *window*. Here is the passage. First a Modern English translation, then the original Middle English:

Do not talk with anyone through the church window, but revere it because of the holy sacrament that you see through it.

Ut thurh the chirche-thurl ne halde ye tale with na-mon, ah beoreth ther-to wurthmunt for the hali sacrement thet ye seoth ther-thurh.

And use the house window for talking sometimes with your women; for others, use the parlor window. You should not speak except at these two windows.

ant neometh other-hwile to ower wummen the huses thurl, to othre the parlur. Speoken ne ahe ye bute ed tes twa thurles.

Now, if an anchoress was to receive a visitor, the manuscript advises her to determine the identity of the person before going to speak with him or her. Here's the passage:

First of all, when you have to go to your parlor window, find out from your maid who it is who has come, for it might be someone you should excuse yourself from seeing.

On alre earst hwen ye schulen to ower parlurs thurl, witeth ed ower meiden hwa hit beo thet beo i-cumen. For swuch hit mei beon thet ye schule essinien ow.

Again, these are the first recorded uses of the word *parlor* in the English language – meaning a room specifically set aside for speaking or carrying on a conversation. Over time, the word *parlor* came to mean any room in a house where guests were invited to speak and have discussions. Sometimes it referred to a separate private room away from the main room. Other times, it referred to the main room for entertaining. In American English, the term was extended to certain types of businesses like an ice cream parlor, or a beauty parlor or a funeral parlor. But originally, a *parlor* was a place where people spoke to each other from the French word *parler*. And it was first used in the *Ancrene Wisse*.

The French word *parler* was also being used in another word that was starting to pop up in England around this same time. That was the word *parliament*. Whenever a king met with his nobles and leading church officials to discuss important political matters, the gathering was known as the *Magnum Concilium* in Latin – literally translated as the *Great Council*. But since the meeting was an opportunity to speak and exchange thoughts, the meeting was also called a *parlement* using the French term.

The first time the word *parliament* appeared in a document in England, it was in a Latin record dated to the year 1236. The document called for a meeting of the Great Council. And this is the first time that a meeting of the council was specifically called a *parliament*. Now this record was not in English. And in fact, we don't find the word *parliament* in an English document until around the year 1300, but we also have to keep in mind that government and legal documents weren't generally composed in English. So even though the word doesn't appear in an English document for several more decades, it is increasingly found in Latin and French documents from this period.

Again, the word *parliament* didn't refer to the Great Council itself. It simply meant a meeting of the Council. So each meeting of the council was called a *parliament*. And the reason why a French word started to be used for those meetings is because the meetings were usually conducted in French. The king and his royal council spoke French, and the barons and major church

officials also spoke French either as their first language or as a second language. So as far as we know, French dominated those meetings.

That first meeting of the Great Council to be referred to as a *parliament* took place in January of 1237. King Henry had just gotten married in what turned out to be a very expensive wedding. Meanwhile, his sister Isabella had just married the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II, who had demanded a dowry from Henry in the amount of 20,000 pounds which was a very large sum of money at the time. So part of the reason why Henry had called that meeting was to get approval for a tax to help pay those expenses.

This tradition went back to Magna Carta. The original version of Magna Carta specifically required the consent of the barons when the king wanted to impose a tax. That requirement was later dropped, but King Henry still followed that tradition since the tax burden tended to fall heavily on the barons. When Henry called them to that meeting in 1237, they agreed to the tax, but they demanded that Henry reaffirm and reissue Magna Carta in return. And that became the standard practice going forward. Whenever Henry wanted new taxes, he would call the barons to a meeting, they would consent, and Henry would re-issue Magna Carta. As we'll see, the barons eventually grew tired of that arrangement.

As I noted, these meetings or parliaments were conducted in French. And most formal legal and government records were maintained in Latin. So there wasn't much room for English. But English was there, and it was trying to break through.

It might not have been the language used in formal gatherings of the Great Council or in formal government documents, but otherwise, many of the barons and church officials and scribes and other officials were conversing in English. And we get some evidence of that in the year 1241.

The evidence comes from legal records of a court case brought by King Henry against one Gilbert the Marshall. Henry claimed that he was owed 10,000 marks by Gilbert. The amount seemed so excessive to the clerk keeping the plea roll that he wrote that it was 'illud namels fremeles' – roughly translated as "it was nameless and pointless." [Curia Regis Rolls, vol 16, p. 290] What is so interesting is that the roll was maintained in Latin, but it uses that word *namles* which is the English word *nameless*. Here it was used in the sense of 'unspecific or pointless.' Apparently the scribe couldn't find a suitable Latin word to express the idea, so he just used an English word. The reason why that is notable is because it is first evidence we have of an English word appearing in a Latin document. For all the Latin and French words that were pouring into English, here we find an English word going in the opposite direction and being borrowed into an official document maintained in Latin.

The year after that legal proceeding was recorded in Latin with an English word, Henry decided that he wanted to make another effort to recover the lost region of Poitou in northern Aquitaine. We saw a few episodes back that several missions had been launched to recover the territory from the French king, but to no avail. This time, Henry didn't consult with the barons, and the mission once again ended in failure. When Henry called another Great Council and asked for new taxes to pay for the failed mission, the barons refused. They were annoyed by the request, in

part because they had not been consulted about the mission in the first place. And for the first time, Henry had to pay out of his own pocket.

The following year, Henry had to deal with an uprising in Wales, and once again, he had to fund the Welsh campaign out of his own resources.

The barons were becoming more and more frustrated with Henry's bad military decisions and constant requests for money. But all of that was compounded by Henry's invitation to various French nobles to come to England and receive English titles of nobility – and English lands. The entrenched English nobles didn't like having titles and lands doled out to foreigners. I discussed this in some detail back in Episode 99, so I won't revisit all of those developments here. But you will probably remember that a lot of those French nobles were Henry's in-laws and other relatives. First, there were his wife's relatives. And then, after his father died, his mother had returned to Aquitaine and re-married. When she died, her in-laws were also invited in. And those relatives were especially despised because they were cruel to their English subjects, and Henry repeatedly protected them in part because they loaned him money when he was in a bind.

But not all the French nobles who arrived in England during this period were Henry's relatives. Another visitor from across the Channel during this period was a man named Simon de Montfort, and he is very important to this story.

Simon was from a prominent French family, and he had a claim to the Earldom of Leicester in England through his father and his grandmother. The claims to that earldom were shaken up when Normandy was lost and the nobles had to choose between England and Normandy. Simon returned to England early in Henry's reign to press his claims to the earldom. Simon had a lot of connections to the French court in Paris, and early on, Henry was enamored with him and the two became friends. Simon then married Henry's sister Eleanor. So Simon ended up becoming a relative of Henry as well thanks to that marriage. Simon eventually secured his claims to the earldom of Leicester.

The great irony of Simon's political rise in England is that he was Frenchman who spoke little or no English – and was one of Henry's favorites. Yet he ended up becoming the leader of the English barons against the French nobles that Henry had invited to England. And in the process, he became the leader of the English barons against Henry himself.

So why was Simon de Montfort from France embraced by the English nobility against the other Frenchmen? Well, part of the answer lies in the fact that Simon was from northern France and shared a French dialect and culture that was similar to those of the Norman nobles in England. This was in contrast to most of the French nobles invited by Henry who were from Poitou, Aquitaine and other parts of southern France. As we've seen before, the language and culture of southern France was very different from that of northern France. It was more of a Mediterranean culture closer to the Italians and Spaniards. So they stood out among the traditional English nobles who had ties to northern France.

They would have been better tolerated had they slipped into England and tried to fit in. But they didn't. They took advantage of their new positions and tried to squeeze every penny out of their subjects. That was especially true of Henry's in-laws from Poitou. They were considered ill-mannered and violent. They sometimes looted and stole to fill their coffers. And Henry protected them. So there was no recourse to be had against them in the English courts.

During this period, the Bishop of Lincoln was Robert Grosseteste, and he was one of Henry's biggest critics. And he railed against the new nobles and church officials from southern France. Here is a quote from the Bishop from the year 1252. This is an English translation of the original Latin passage. "The Church is being worn out by constant oppressions; the pious purposes of its early benefactors are being brought to naught by the confiscation of its ample patrimony to the uses of aliens, while the native English suffer. These aliens are not merely foreigners; they are the worst enemies of England. They strive to tear the fleece and do not even know the faces of the sheep; they do not understand the English tongue, neglect the cure of souls, and impoverish the kingdom." So among the Bishop's many complaints against the intruders, he specifically points out their inability and unwillingness to speak English. And this shows that English identity was increasingly associated with the English language. And that had not really been the case since the Norman Conquest.

Opposition to the foreigners tended to unite the English barons, and it also allowed them to forge an alliance with the slowly expanding middle class of England.

What they really needed was a leader, and around this point in the mid-1250s, Simon de Montfort emerged as that leader. Simon had been put in charge of Gascony in the far south of France, but he and Henry fell out with each other over the administration of that region. Simon was eventually recalled to England and relieved of his command. He then became one of many barons frustrated with Henry's decision-making.

The following year, Henry launched another campaign in Gascony to put down rebellions there. It was expensive, and once again, Henry had to pay for the campaign out of his own resources. And as we've seen, he had doled out lands and revenues to his southern French relatives. So Henry's finances were in a perilous state. And then he made the situation even worse.

This final straw stemmed from events in Sicily in the Mediterranean. For several years, control of Sicily had been disputed between the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire. The Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II claimed Sicily as part of his domain, but the Pope claimed it as a papal fief. Well, Frederick died in the year 1250, and the Pope wanted to cut off any claims to Sicily by Frederick's heirs. So the Pope started to shop around the throne of Sicily to anyone in Western Europe who might be interested in it and might be willing to pay for it. And Henry up in England was the perfect mark.

He agreed to assume the enormous debt that the papacy had incurred in its campaigns against the Holy Roman Emperor in Sicily. It was a sum in excess of 90,000 pounds which was an incredible amount of money as the time. In exchange for assuming that debt, the Pope agreed to recognize Henry's second son Edmund as the King of Sicily. It was all part of Henry's attempt

to become a major player in continental politics. But there was one major problem. Sicily was still controlled by Frederick's heirs, specifically Frederick's illegitimate son. So not only did Henry agree to assume a massive debt, he then had to mount a military campaign to go to Sicily and defeat the forces that actually controlled the island. At some point, Henry must have realized that he had bitten off more than he could chew and more than he could afford, but he couldn't back out. He didn't want the personal embarrassment of reneging on a promise, but more importantly, the Pope threatened to excommunicate him if he rescinded the agreement. And the Pope threatened to put England back under interdict.

Henry had no choice but to go to the barons with his tail between his legs. His finances were in a mess. He had assumed debts that he couldn't pay. And he had put the whole country in jeopardy through his poor decision-making.

Another meeting of the Great Council was called in May of 1258 in Oxford. At that meeting, Henry asked the barons to consent to a new round of taxes to pay all of Henry's obligations. Specifically, he asked for a tax equal to a third of all the goods in the country – both moveable and immovable. So the tax was to be levied on everything from land to livestock. This time, the barons gave Henry an ultimatum. The king could have his taxes only if he agreed to a series of sweeping reforms – reforms that were so broad that they effectively turned Henry into a mere figurehead. Henry had little choice but to agree to their demands.

In many ways, this was repeat of what had happened to Henry's father John almost a half century earlier when he was forced to agree to Magna Carta. Once again, the barons had had enough and demanded political reforms

The gist of the baron's demands was that Henry turn over most of the government decisions to a new council of fifteen members. He had to agree to follow its decisions. So in essence, this new Council of Fifteen would effectively rule the country in Henry's name. Henry had operated without a chancellor, a treasurer and a justiciar for 14 years. Those were the three most important administrative positions in the English government. So the new Council of Fifteen was to choose persons to fill those offices, and those officers would also have to answer to the council.

The Council was also given authority over sheriffs and local officials in make sure that they were not abusing their authority. Henry's relatives from Poitou were also exiled. Ultimately, Henry had no choice but to agree to all of those reforms.

The membership of the new Council of Fifteen was heavily weighted in favor of the nobles who opposed Henry. It included five barons and seven earls. And one of those earls was the king's brother-in-law, Simon de Montfort. The council was rounded out with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of Worcester and a royal clerk.

Again, the net effect of these reforms was to strip Henry of most of his power and place it in the hands of this new Council of Fifteen. These new reforms were known as the Provisions of Oxford. And they specifically required the Great Council to meet three times a year to supervise

the work of the smaller Council of Fifteen. The surviving summaries of those provisions specifically describe those regular meetings as *parliaments* – or *parlemenz* using the French term. Once again, the term referred to the meetings, not the council itself.

As soon as the general terms of the Provisions of Oxford were settled, the people of England were notified of the reforms through a letter that was sent to each shire. The shires were directed to obey the decisions of the council and were instructed to maintain a copy of the letter in the local archives. But here's the interesting thing. Those letters sent to each shire were written in French and English. For the first time in nearly two centuries, an official proclamation of the English crown was written in English. And there is little doubt why. Despite the fact that the letter was issued in Henry's name, it seems clear that the council directed it to be sent out. And it seems clear that the intent was to make sure that everybody in the countryside knew what was going on. And the only way to do that was to put it in English so everybody could read it, or have it read to them, in their own language.

Let me read the English version of that letter to you. As always, I'll give you a Modern English translation first, then the original Middle English. And I'm going to delete the final paragraph which is just a list of all the council members who joined in the execution of the letter.

Henry by God's grace, king of England, Lord of Ireland, Duke of Normandy and of Aquitaine and Earl of Anjou, sends greeting to all his subjects, learned and lewd, in Huntingdonshire.

Henri, thurgh Godes fultume King on Engleneloande, Lhoauerd on Yrloande, Duk on Normandi, on Aquitaine, and Eorl on Anjow, send igretinge to alle hise holde, ilærde and ileawede, on Huntendoneschire.

That you all may know well that we want and desire that our counsellors, the greater part of whom have been chosen by us and by the people in our kingdom, to act and should act according to the honour of God and loyalty to us, and for the good of the realm, according to the provisions of those aforesaid counsellors, that they be steadfast and firm in all things forever.

Thæt witen 3e wel alle thæt we willen and unnen thæt, thæt ure rædesmen alle, other the moare dæl of heom, thæt beoth ichosen thurgh us and thurgh thæt loandes folk on ure kuneriche, habbeth idon and shullen don in the worthnesse of Gode and on ure treowthe, for the freme of the loande thurgh the besigte of than to foreniseide redesmen, beo stedefæst and ilestinde in alle thinge a buten ænde.

And we command and admonish all faithful and loyal men by the fealty that they owe us, firmly to hold and to swear to observe and maintain those statutes which have been made or shall in future be made by the council or by the majority thereof in the manner stated.

And we hoaten alle ure treowe in the treowthe thæt heo vs o3en, thæt heo stedefæstliche healden and swerien to healden and to werien tho isetnesses thæt beon imakede and beon to makien, thurgh than to foren iseide redesmen, other thurgh the moare dæl of heom, alswo also hit is biforen iseid;

And that all men help each other in doing this by the same oath against all men who either give or receive a bribe;

and thæt æhc other helpe thæt for to done bi than ilche othe agenes alle men right for to done and to foangen.

And that none shall take land or goods in any way which would infringe or impair this provision in any way.

And noan ne nime of loande ne of eghte wherthurgh this besighte mughe beon ilet other iwersed on onie wise.

And if any should oppose this decree, we will and command our faithful subjects to treat them as our mortal enemies.

And gif oni other onie cumen her ongenes, we willen and hoaten thæt alle ure treowe heom healden deadliche ifoan.

And since we wish this act to be steadfast and lasting, we are sending you this open writ sealed with our seal, to be held among you in your archives or hoard.

And for thæt we willen thæt this beo stedefæst and lestinde, we senden 3ew this writ open, iseined with ure seel, to halden amanges gew ine hord.

Now let me highlight a few parts of that proclamation. The first thing I should note is that the letter was drafted in Westminster, so it was composed in the London dialect of early Middle English, and it's the earliest example we have of that Middle English dialect. As we might expect, it has many features of southern dialects, but it also mixes in some other regional features. And that may be because people around the country were being drawn to London during this period so it was picking up a blend of linguistic features.

Also, as I noted earlier, this letter was sent out to the shires in French and English. So we can actually compare the two languages side-by-side. And in fact, most scholars agree that the English version is actually a translation of the French version. And it appears that the English version intentionally used a more traditional, conservative form of English. It generally avoids French words, except for commonly accepted titles like *duke*, *count* and *marshal*, and the words *sign* and *seal* which were standard terms used to confirm the formal execution of a document. But in most cases, the letter avoids French words and prefers Old English words, even when the equivalent French term was already being used in English.

So the last word in the passage I read to you was *hord* (H-O-R-D), which we still have as the word *hoard* (H-O-A-R-D). Here it is used in the sense of an archive – a place where valuable objects are stored. But the French version of the letter uses the word *tresor* – or *treasure*. And that French word was first found in English in the Peterborough Chronicle which was composed

north of London about a century earlier. So it seems likely that most English speakers would have understood that French term, but the Old English word was used instead.

Also, the men who comprised the new Council of Fifteen are identified as *conseil* in the French version. That's an early form of the word *councillor*. Well, the word *council* is also recorded in the Peterborough Chronicle. In fact, it appears multiple times in that manuscript. And it also appears in the Ancrene Wisse. But in this letter, those councillors are referred to as *rædesmen* using that Old English word *rædan* which meant 'to advise or counsel.' We recently saw that *ræd* was also used as a suffix in words like *hatred* and *kindred*. And we know that it was used in names like *Alfred* and *Aethelred*. *Alfred* was literally 'elf counsel.' And *Aethelred* was literally meant 'noble counsel.' And we know that it created the Old English pun *Aethelred Unread* – literally 'noble counsel poorly counseled.' And here, the English translator used that very traditional Old English word in the term *rædesmen* rather than *councillor*.

The opening of line of the letter begins, "Henry by God's grace, king of England, Lord of Ireland, Duke of Normandy and of Aquitaine and Earl of Anjou." So we can see that Henry still claimed his title to all of those French territories that had been lost. Well the French version reads, "Henri, par le grace Deu..." – "Henry by the grace of God..." But the English version translates that as "Henri, thurgh Godes fultume" – "Henry through God's fultume." So Old English *fultume* is used in place of the French word *grace*. *Fultume* meant 'help or support' in Old English. But *grace* was already being used in English manuscripts. It appears in the Ancrene Wisse and several other religious texts written in English in the early 1200s. So again, we see the use of a traditional Old English word rather than a French word that was probably known by most English speakers.

Some scholars have suggested that those word choices were intentional. That this English proclamation was a fine piece of propaganda. That it was introducing some pretty radical political reforms, and it was intentionally written in English to appeal to the common people of England. They believe that it was designed to tap into a burgeoning anti-French sentiment in the English countryside by using a very traditional form of English that avoided French terms. If so, this is an early sign that politicians were starting to use English as a rallying cry to unite the English people.

We'll get a much more explicit example of this when we get to Henry's son Edward who once called his subjects to action by declaring that the French king wanted to wipe out the English language. So this letter may be some early evidence that an appeal to the English language was being used as a way to appeal to the English people. And that was a new development since the end of the Norman Conquest.

Let me mention a few other interesting things about that letter. We see another interesting translation in the English phrase *deadliche ifoan* – literally 'deadly foes.' Well, the French version used the phrase *enemie mortel* – literally 'mortal enemies.' Today, we use both phrases in English – 'deadly foes' and 'mortal enemies.'

Also notice that the word *foes* is rendered as *ifoan*. So we see that the plural ‘-s’ still hasn’t made its way down to London from the north of England. In the final paragraph, the word *words* is rendered as *worden*. And in another passage, the word *things* is rendered as *thinge*. So again, this is a conservative form of English without the plural ‘-s’ innovation which was gradually moving down from the north.

The letter also uses the word *nime* – a form of the Old English word *niman* which meant ‘to take.’ You might remember that *take* is a Norse word, and it replaced Old English *niman*. Well, *take* was already in regular use in English. It was used in the Peterborough Chronicle, the Ormulum, and several other early Middle English manuscripts. But again, the translator sticks with an Old English word that was already on its way out.

A couple of other quick notes. We see the changing pronunciation of that Old English prefix ‘ge-’ (/ye/) – spelled G-E. In this letter, it appears as part of several words, but it is always rendered with a simple ‘I.’ So we have *ichosen* rather than *gechosen*. And the word *learned* is rendered as *ilærde* rather than *gelærde*.

Let me also mention something about the spelling of some of those words. The word *ilærde* is spelled I-L-Æ-R-D-E. Æ was that Old English letter that looked like an A and an E pushed together. It represented the /æ/ sound. This old letter also appears in several other words in the proclamation. Now, as I’ve noted before, the French-trained scribes hated that letter because it wasn’t used in French. And by this point, it had largely disappeared from English manuscripts. In fact, this letter is considered to be the last English document to use that letter.

However, it did re-appear in a few words in the Modern English period. You have probably seen the word *encyclopedia* spelled with that letter sometimes. And you might have seen the word *archaeology* spelled with that letter. Well those are loanwords that didn’t become common in English until the Modern English period. And when those words were borrowed, some printers decided to bring that old letter back to represent a specific sound in those words. But in its original use as a regular letter to spell Old English words in English manuscripts, it was used for the last time in this proclamation confirming the Provisions of Oxford.

So once again, we see the scribe using an older feature of the language that had almost disappeared by that point. Whether or not these linguistic choices were intentional, it is clear that the parties involved thought that it was important to convey the message to the English people in English. And that was in part because the reforms radically changed the traditional role of the king in English government.

Despite the fact that Henry initially consented to the reforms, he soon became exasperated. The council sometimes met without even informing him of their meetings. When Henry did attend, they often ignored his advice. In one surviving record, the council responded to Henry’s complaints by stating that they followed his advice “when he talks sense.” [Making of England to 1399, Hollister, p. 275]

Soon, some of the barons started to have second thoughts about the whole arrangement. Henry's French relatives were now in exile. And the debt owed to the papacy was resolved by simply refusing to pay. The Pope backed down and looked for another candidate to assume the Sicilian crown.

With those major problems resolved, some of the barons started to prefer a return to the traditional order. They had no problem with the Council serving as advisors, but the council was acting independently of the king. And that was too much for some of the barons. In the year 1263, Henry took advantage of this split among the barons and withdrew his support for the reforms. He formally abolished the Council and brought back his French relatives and the abuses that they unleashed. This was the same thing John had done with Magna Carta. He initially supported it, then declared it null and void. And that led to a war with his barons. Well, the same thing happened here. When Henry rescinded the reforms, the barons took up arms.

Not only had the hated nobles from southern France returned, but Henry now had the open support of the French king. The barons who supported the reforms accused anyone who opposed them of being aliens or anti-English. By this point, Simon de Montfort had emerged as the clear leader of the barons. And he positioned himself as the defender of the English people against the French meddlers. Anyone who didn't speak with an English accent was viewed with scepticism and treated as a potential enemy. Of course, the great irony is that Simon himself barely spoke any English at all, but that just shows how good a politician he was.

He was also a great general, and in the year 1264, his forces defeated Henry's forces at the Battle of Lewes. Henry surrendered to the rebels and his eldest son Edward was taken hostage. Edward was the heir to the English throne, but for now, he was the prisoner of Simon de Montfort.

Simon was now the de facto ruler of England, and he re-instituted the reforms that Henry had revoked. But rather than being ruled by a Council of Fifteen, England was really ruled by Simon de Montfort for the next few years.

The following year Henry did something that may not have seemed like a big deal at the time, but it ultimately shaped the future of the English government. He decided to call another meeting of the Great Council. This was a parliament – an opportunity to discuss the important political issues of the day. But this parliament was different. Simon didn't just call the barons and earls and bishops. In order to generate widespread support for his rule, he called commoners as well. Every shire was directed to send two knights to give their views at the meeting. And several towns and cities were invited to send two representatives as well. Those representatives were to be elected and sent to Westminster. This shows the growing power base of the cities. And it also represents a major step in the direction of a type of representative government.

These knights and townsmen may not have been peasants, but they were commoners. The meetings of the Great Council were usually limited to the barons and earls and high church officials. But here, Simon de Montfort decided to include people outside of that traditional noble class. Simon probably realized that he was in a precarious position – essentially acting as the

king without actually being the king. It seems that he was trying to get the country behind him by appealing to all of the people of England – not just the barons.

Later scholars, especially the Victorians, considered this meeting in 1265 to be the first real parliament in England. And they also considered it to be ultimate origin of the House of Commons. The traditional barons and earls and bishops constituted what would later become known as the House of Lords. And the other invitees were the first version of what would eventually become the House of Commons. Of course, those two distinct houses were later developments. The knights and town representatives didn't set separately from the nobles until the 1320s.

Even though the House of Commons was a later development, Simon's 1265 parliament was the first major step in that direction. And for that reason, Simon de Montfort is sometimes called the "Father of Parliament." And believe it or not, a portrait of Simon de Montfort hangs in the United States House of Representatives. His is one of 23 portraits that hang over the gallery doors of the House Chamber. The portraits depict historical figures who contributed to the modern representative government.

Unfortunately for Simon, his time as the de facto ruler of England was short-lived. It was too much of a break from tradition for an earl to rule England. And his support eroded over time.

One of the reasons why the 1265 parliament was called in the first place was to discuss the terms for releasing Henry's son Edward from house arrest, but that issue resolved itself five months later when Edward escaped. He then proceeded to raise an army, and in August of 1265, his forces soundly defeated Simon's forces at the Battle of Evesham. Simon was killed, and his body was chopped to pieces. This grand experiment in baronial government came to an end. The Provisions of Oxford were once again annulled – this time permanently. And even though Henry III resumed his authority, he was getting pretty old by that point. He had reigned for nearly 50 years. So over the next few years, his son Edward assumed more and more power and responsibility. And Henry increasingly faded into the background.

In many ways, the events of this period mirrored the events associated with Magna Carta a few years earlier. And if Magna Carta laid the foundation for the House of Lords, the Provisions of Oxford laid the foundation for the House of Commons.

Going forward, the meetings of those nobles and representatives were known as parliaments, and eventually the institution itself became known as Parliament. As the etymology of the word *parliament* suggests, it was a place where nobles and representatives met to discuss the important political matters of the day. For most its history, Parliament was not a barrier in the king's way. It was actually an extension of the king's authority. Its role in English government was really secured by Henry's son Edward who used it in a skillful way to implement his royal policies.

Despite these important developments in English government, the English language continued to take a backseat in political and legal affairs. For now, almost all government records continued

to be kept in Latin. Soon, more and more records were maintained in French. And French became the official language of Parliament. But English was nowhere to be found. In fact, it would take nearly another century for English to be declared the official language of England for government and legal proceedings.

But that long road back to acceptance really began in 1258 with that letter to the English people in the countryside announcing a series of sweeping political reforms that ultimately led to Parliament.

Next time, we'll continue to look at events during this period. We'll turn our attention to a growing threat from the east, and the important role of trade and commerce in the late 1200s. And as always, we'll see how these events shaped the English language.

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

EPISODE 108: ON THE MOVE

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 108: On The Move. In this episode, we’re going to look at ‘movement,’ specifically the movement of people and their money. This is a story of conquest and trade and international finance. These were all important subjects in the late 1200s, and they shaped the English language by changing the way we talk about money and business. During this period, the English language acquired lots of new words related to those subjects – and it gave us a financial vocabulary that we still use today. So this time, we’ll look at people and their money on the move.

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](https://patreon.com/historyofenglish). And as always, you can reach me by email at kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com.

Now throughout this podcast series, there have been a few themes that keep popping up. We’ve explored the evolution of writing and literacy and education. Those topics are all interrelated, and they have all contributed to the spread of language. Another factor that contributes to the spread of language is movement. Time and again, we’ve seen how languages travel with people – the Indo-European migrations, the spread of the alphabet, the spread of Latin through Roman Conquest, the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain – all of those events shaped the English language. And of course, it was a later movement of people that led to the European conquest of the New World, and the spread of English around the world. That’s why I keep coming back to the idea of movement and how it impacts the evolution of language.

Of course, the Norman Conquest of England was another case of movement shaping language. And we’ve seen that the period after that Conquest was a period of economic growth in Western Europe. International trade routes expanded. New products from the Mediterranean and beyond flowed into Western Europe, and European goods were sold by merchants along those same trade routes. Meanwhile, new towns were established, and local markets grew and expanded within those towns and cities.

If you were a merchant looking to take advantage of all of that new commerce, you could head to a local market like merchants had done for centuries. But you also had a new option – the regional fair. So let’s begin by examining the differences between those two venues.

A market was the traditional place where goods were bought and sold. Since the beginning of human civilization, almost every town had some type of market. It was the place where local residents could buy basic provisions – the things they needed for daily life. And most of the sellers were also local people selling products that were produced locally. The market was usually open one day a week, but as towns grew, they were sometimes open several days a week.

The Old English word for a market was a *ceap* – usually spelled C-E-A-P. It was a very broad term. It could refer to an actual market, but it could also refer to a specific transaction at a market. It could also mean a bargain. And it was in that sense as a bargain that it has survived into Modern English. Since a bargain was a good deal where you bought something for a low price, it evolved into the modern word *cheap* – C-H-E-A-P.

A person who sold items at a market or *ceap* was called a *ceapmon* – literally ‘cheap-man’ which meant a ‘market-man.’ That term still survives as the surname *Chapman*. And if you know someone with that surname, there is a good chance that he or she had a distant ancestor who was a trader or merchant.

Of course, the main activity at those markets was buying and selling, and the words *buy* and *sell* are also Old English words. You’ll notice that both of those verbs are strong verbs meaning that they don’t use the traditional ‘E-D’ ending for past tense. *Buy* becomes *bought*, and *sell* becomes *sold*. As we’ve seen before, verbs that do that tend to go back to Old English.

Today we call this type of commercial activity a *business* and, believe it or not, the Anglo-Saxons also used the word *business*. It’s a native English term even though it feels like a loanword with its multiple syllables. *Business* is literally ‘busy-ness’ – the state of being busy. And *busy* is an Old English word – originally *bisig*. Over time, the term came to refer to a person’s occupation, and then in the 1700s it came to refer to commerce in general.

So a few Old English terms for trade and commerce still survive in Modern English, but most of our modern business terms are loanwords, and a large number of those words came in after the Norman Conquest as international trade and commerce were rapidly expanding.

Very soon after the Conquest, the Old English word *ceap* started to be replaced with the Latin and French word *market*. It appeared in English for the first time in the Peterborough Chronicle at the very end of the Old English period. It was one of the first French loanwords to enter English after the Norman Conquest.

By the early 1200s, the Old English word *ceapman* was being replaced with the French word *merchant*. And just as *ceap* and *ceapman* were closely related words, so were *market* and *merchant*. They were really two different version of the same root word. The earlier loan word *market* has the original Latin ‘c’ or ‘k’ sound in the middle. But the later loanword *merchant* has the Parisian ‘ch’ sound in the middle.

Another loanword that came in during the early Middle English period was the word *fair*. And the word *fair* came in during this period because fairs were a relatively new development in our story. They started to become common in the 1100s and 1200s.

As I noted, fairs were similar to markets, but there were also some important differences. A fair was a huge gathering of traders and merchants from all over. Not just from the local region, but from countries throughout Europe and the Mediterranean. These were professional merchants, and they sold goods from every corner of the known world, including exotic items from the Near East, Persia, India and beyond. A fair was such a big event that only certain towns and regions had them. And they were normally held once a year. They were scheduled so that they were held at different times, thereby creating a trading circuit. That allowed professional merchants to travel from fair to fair selling their wares.

These types of regional fairs were introduced in the Middle Ages as trading networks expanded. They didn't really become common in Europe until the Crusades were underway and the Mediterranean trading networks started to bring more and more of those exotic goods into the region.

Since fairs didn't really appear in England until after the Norman Conquest, it probably isn't surprising that the word *fair* is a French word. *Fair* is derived from a Latin root word that meant 'holiday.' Fairs were really an outgrowth of holidays when a large number of people would gather at a local church or priory on a saint's day. Since traders were always looking for large crowds to peddle their wares, it became common for them to set up shop near those churches on special occasions. Over time, the word *fair* was transferred from the holiday itself to those large gatherings of traders. And the word appeared in English for the first time around the current point in our story – in a document composed in the year 1300.

By the way, the adjective *fair* as in 'fair play' or 'My Fair Lady' is a completely different word. It is derived from an Old English word and, over time, the pronunciation and spellings of the two words have merged.

So the word *fair* came into English along with the introduction of fairs to England. And a fair was a place where lots of money changed hands. And the word *money* was also a new word in English around the current point in our story. The Anglo-Saxons tended to use the word *geld* for 'money,' as in the term *wergeld* meaning the money that had to be paid as compensation for a crime. But in the early 1300s, the Latin and French word *money* started to replace that Old English word.

Whether you preferred the older word *geld* or the newer word *money*, either way you were referring to coins. That's because coins were the only official currency in England and the rest of Europe. Paper money didn't exist yet, at least not in Europe (but more on that later). The Anglo-Saxons called those coins *sceatt*, but in early Middle English, that word started to be replaced with the French word *coin*. So once again, the older term gave way to a new French word.

Again, coins were the standard currency throughout Europe, and in most cases, those coins were silver coins. But in England, Henry III decided to experiment with gold coins in the mid-1200s. Henry's gold coins were issued in the year 1257, just before the barons stood up to him and forced him to agree to the Provisions of Oxford which I discussed last time.

Each gold coin was worth twenty times as much as a typical silver coin. That meant that it couldn't really be used for small market transactions. For that reason, the coins were unpopular despite how shiny and pretty they were – and they were soon withdrawn from circulation. It would be almost another century before the English crown would issue another gold coin.

Now I mention Henry's pretty gold coins because many sources suggest that they are the ultimate source of the term 'pretty penny' to refer to something expensive or valuable, as in "That car costs a pretty penny." According to those sources, a few of the gold coins remained in circulation even after most of the coinage was withdrawn. Those surviving coins came to be prized for their appearance and were even used as good luck pieces. They soon became valuable to collectors and since they were gold, people started to call them 'pretty pennies.' Over time, it became common to refer to something valuable or expensive as being worth a 'pretty penny.' The only problem with that etymology is that the term 'pretty penny' isn't found in an English document until the early 1700s – almost 500 years later. And other gold coins were issued during those intervening five centuries. So it is possible that the term 'pretty penny' refers to gold coins which were worth a whole lot more than silver coins, and it's possible that it refers to Henry's gold coins, but the connection is not clearly established.

Now today, when we buy something and pay with cash, we sometimes get a handful of coins in return. And we call those coins *change*. Well that word *change* also dates from this period. In fact, it was used for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse. It's another French word, and it is also part of the word *exchange*. And early on, *change* and *exchange* basically meant the same thing. It meant any transaction where one thing is given and something else is received in return.

Today, we tend to use the word *change* in a very general way – to refer to any situation where one thing was replaced with another. So you might change your clothes – or the seasons might change. But the word *change* has retained an older financial sense as well. We still use it in the sense of a money exchange – usually when coins are exchanged for bills. This is what happens when you ask someone if they have 'change' for a dollar. And that led to the association between coins and the word *change*. So if you have a few coins in your pocket, you might have 'loose change' or 'pocket change.' And if you buy something and get some money back, that money is referred to as the *change*. So the words *change* and *exchange* both retain a financial sense, and again, both words were borrowed into English around the current point in our story.

Now I noted that the words *buy* and *sell* are Old English words. Well around the current point in our story, the word *buy* was supplemented with the French word *purchase*. *Purchase* is recorded in English for the first time around the year 1300. And that word *purchase* tells us a lot about the nature of markets and fairs in the Middle Ages. At this point, stores at fixed locations were still the exception more than the rule. So if you wanted to purchase food or other goods, you had to go to the market or fair. You had to hope the market or fair had what you needed, and you had to search and hunt for it. So it was a type of *chase* like hunters on the search for wild game. And that helps to explain the word *purchase* which is literally a combination of the prefix *pur* and the word *chase*. Again, it meant 'to search and seize,' and it later acquired its modern financial sense as a business transaction.

Of course, a purchase is largely dependent on price and the ability to pay. And *price* and *pay* are two other French loanwords that appeared in English for the first time in the early 1200s. In fact, they both appeared for the first time in the *Ancrene Wisse*.

So as we can see, trade and commerce were having an impact on both English society and the English language in the 1200s and early 1300s. Even though England was located on an island in the northwestern corner of Europe, it was still very much a part of the trading networks that extended across Europe. It not only imported a lot of goods, it also exported many products – especially raw materials.

Across the Channel, Flanders had a booming cloth and textile industry, and England provided much of the wool for that industry. England also exported lead and tin and foodstuffs like grain and cheese. And being an island country, it also exported fish – especially herring. After the herring were caught, they were salted to help preserve them, and then they were sold to foreign merchants.

Every year, merchants from Europe came to buy herring at places like Yarmouth on the east coast of England. But something very odd happened in the year 1238. In that year, the traders didn't come. And without those buyers, the fish just rotted in the markets. It was an ominous sign. Clearly something had happened to prevent the merchants from coming. But what?

A well-known chronicler of the period gives us the answer. His name was Matthew Paris, and I've mentioned him before. He maintained a Latin chronicle at St. Albans Abbey in England. And he recorded an account of what happened in that year. He wrote that the traders never came to Yarmouth. And during that same year, he wrote that Muslim officials from the Near East arrived in England to appeal for help. He said they spoke of a great disruption that had taken place in the East. They reported that "A monstrous and inhuman race of men had burst forth from the northern mountains and had taken possession of the extensive, rich lands of the East."

Today, we know these invaders as the Mongols led by Genghis Khan. But most Western writers of this period including Matthew Paris referred to them as the Tartars. Much like the original Indo-Europeans and the later Huns, they were horsemen from the Eurasian steppe.

As I noted, most Europeans called these people the Tartars, but Genghis Khan actually led a confederation of tribes from the steppe region – including Tartars, Mongols and Turks. He unified those otherwise warring groups and formed a powerful coalition. So the Tartars were technically just part of that larger confederation. But it appears that Westerners liked to refer to the whole group as the *Tartars* because the Latin word *Tartarus* meant 'underworld.' So *Tartars* conveyed a sense that these were warriors unleashed from Hell.

By this point, most European nations had an experienced cavalry like the mounted knights of Western Europe, but they were no match for Genghis Khan's warriors who spent most their life on horseback. Unlike knights who were heavily armored, the steppe warriors were lightly armored and quick. The Mongols also didn't adhere to the notions of chivalry that governed Western knights.

Genghis's warriors would do whatever it took to win. If needed, they would use subterfuge and misdirection. They used literal smoke screens to hide their movements. And when they advanced, they would destroy everything in their way. It was an older, more brutal form of warfare. And it also contained an element of shock and awe. The fear of the Mongols was so great that very often people in their way just gave up without a fight rather than risking annihilation.

Early on, the Mongols or Tartars spread east and looted Beijing in China in the year 1215. They soon conquered northern China, and then they turned westward and conquered Persia a few years later. Then Genghis Khan's forces swept through modern-day Turkey and reached the Caucasus region in the year 1221. They then moved northward and invaded Russia the following year. Genghis Khan's intention was to conquer all of Europe, and create an empire that extended from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Panic soon spread throughout Western Europe. But central Europe was spared for a while when Genghis Khan died in 1227. The campaigns resumed under the leadership of Genghis's son, and a decade later, the Mongol forces swept through Moscow, and over the next four years, they completed the conquest of Russia and the Ukraine. And that was the state of things in the year 1238 when merchants from northern Europe didn't come to Yarmouth to buy herring.

This shows how formidable and fierce the steppe warriors were even at this late date. Their opponents were often surprised at how much territory the Mongol riders could cover on horseback. Not only were they fast, they simply didn't stop. They would ride for miles and miles all day long without stopping.

Now this raises an interesting question. How did the Mongols ride for so long without stopping to rest or stopping to eat? I mean, it wasn't like there were restaurants along the way. Well, the Mongols or Tartars had found a solution to that problem. They invented fast food – literally 'fast' food. And in some ways, McDonalds owes a debt to the Mongols.

The Mongols ate raw meat. So they didn't have to take time to cook it. But being raw, it was tough to eat. So they developed a way to tenderize the meat. They would take a slab of raw beef and place it under their saddle. As they rode throughout the day, the up-and-down motion of the saddle tenderized the beef. This process actually shredded the beef and cut it into small pieces. The riders could take the bits and morsels and eat it as they were riding. They could also wait until they completed their ride, and then season the ground beef and eat it that way.

When the Mongols or Tartars completed their conquest of northern Europe, this new type of cuisine was introduced to Russia. This dish of seasoned raw ground meat later became popular in France where it was called *steak tartare* after the people who had introduced it to Western Europe. And we still have that dish to this day. In France, the dish was sometimes served with a mayonnaise-based sauce called *tarter sauce* which we still have today.

By the 1600s, the ground-beef dish had made its way to Hamburg in Germany. It was served in a patty that was cooked, and it was such a popular dish that people throughout Europe started to call it 'Hamburg steak.' The meat dish eventually spread to North America with a wave of

German immigration in the 1800s. And in America, the Hamburg steak was often served in a bun as a sandwich called *hamburgers*. Now I should note that food historians don't always agree on the ultimate origin of some of these common foods. But this version of the story is widely accepted, and that means that modern fast food that we eat 'on the move' may indeed owe at least some of its origins to the Mongol hordes.

And speaking of hordes, that's another term that can be traced back to the Mongols. In fact, it was another general term for the Mongol warriors. So they might have been referred to as the Mongols, or the Tartars, or simply as the *horde*. The word actually comes to us from the language of the Mongol and Turkish horsemen. The Mongol and Turkish languages are often grouped together within the same language family called the Altaic family. And the Turkic word for their camp was *ordu*. Of course, the camp or *ordu* moved with the horsemen. So the word *ordu* became synonymous with the warriors themselves. Eastern Europeans were keenly aware of the movement of the Mongols, and the threat that the Mongols posed. So the word *ordu* passed into most of the Eastern European languages as a general term for the Mongol warriors. Within Polish, it picked up a slight 'h' sound at the front – from *ordu* to *horda* – and from there, it made its way into English as *horde* in the 1500s. Again, even within English, it was originally used to refer to the Mongol tribes, but over time, it has acquired a much broader meaning as a large group of fierce or uncontrollable people. I mentioned last time, that Old English also had the word *hoard* meaning a collection of valuables or other objects. That's where we get the term *hoarder* for someone who can't throw anything away. And since both words convey a sense of a collection or large group of things, they often get confused. So H-O-A-R-D – meaning a collection of objects – is the Old English word. And H-O-R-D-E – meaning a rough, uncivilized gang – is the word borrowed from the Mongolian horsemen.

Now as I noted, the Mongol horde conquered Russia, and presumably introduced steak tartare to the region. But they weren't satisfied with that. They then proceeded into Poland and Hungary and conquered those regions as well. By that point, most of north-central Europe had been devastated by the Mongols. And their plan was still to proceed further west – all the way to the Atlantic.

Concern and panic spread throughout Western Europe. But Western Europe was spared. The Mongol leader – Genghis's son Ogedei – died the following year. In keeping with custom, the Mongol armies withdrew and returned home to elect a new Khan.

The new Khan was Genghis's grandson, Kublai. His focus was much more on the east than the west. So rather than continuing the invasion of Europe, he chose instead to complete the conquest of China. And once China was under his control, Kublai Khan established the Yuan dynasty there. Technically, the Mongol Empire included China, Korea, Tibet, Persia, Russia, and parts of Eastern Europe and the Middle East. It was the largest empire the world had ever seen. But despite the massive size of the empire, Kublai Khan focused his direct rule on China. The governance of the western regions was left to local rulers.

In later centuries, after the main Empire had collapsed, one those local rulers in the West conquered much of India and formed what became known as the Moghul Empire based on an Arabic and Persian version of the word *Mongol*. The rulers of that empire were also known as Moghuls. And over time, the word *Mogul* was applied to any powerful person, and that's how the word came to be used in English in the 1600s. So a wealthy land developer might be called a 'real estate mogul.'

That little bit of etymology is actually important to our story. It shows the connection between *Mongol* and *mogul*, and thus the linguistic link between conquerors and powerful business leaders. And as it turned out, the Mongols were actually good for business. By unifying much of Asia and eastern Europe under the same leadership, it made it possible for Western merchants to travel deep into Asia for the first time.

The important thing to understand here is that trading networks had connected Asia and Europe for centuries – especially the Silk Road which extended from China to the Mediterranean. But no single merchant made the entire journey from one end to the other. Goods passed along those routes by intermediaries – meaning that one merchant would move goods from one town to another, then a separate merchant would transport the goods from there to the next destination, and then another merchant would be responsible for the next leg, and so on. So goods passed through many different hands along the full journey. That meant that Western merchants never really traveled deep into Asia, and vice versa.

Most European merchants considered a trek across Central Asia to be far too dangerous to justify the risk. First of all, it was a long and grueling journey under the best of circumstances. On top of that, the trade routes would have carried them through regions controlled by local rulers who might not have given the merchants protection and safe passage. So very few Western traders had made the trek to Persia or India, and virtually none had ever traveled beyond that to China. As a result, Westerners had only a vague concept of India, and they knew virtually nothing about China. They had probably heard legends and myths about an exotic country on the eastern edge of the world, but there were no first hand accounts of what China was really like.

But when the Mongols conquered Central Asia, all of that changed. The various local rulers were wiped out, and all power was consolidated under one Mongol ruler. After the initial period of conquest, everything settled down a bit, and Mongol rule brought relative peace and stability.

That allowed the land routes through Central Asia to open up again. With those routes open, Western merchants started to approach the Mongol authorities for permission to trade within the western portions of the Empire in places like Persia and Russia. But here's the thing, once merchants had permission from the Mongol authorities to trade within the Empire, there was nothing that required them to stop at the western fringes.

Theoretically, the merchants could continue eastward through Central Asia under the protection of the Mongol leaders. And if they wanted, they could travel all the way to China. And that exactly what two brothers from Venice did around the year 1260.

Their names were Niccolo and Maffeo, and they loaded a ship with expensive jewels and set sail from Constantinople across the Black Sea to modern-day Ukraine. That trek was not unusual for Western merchants. But by this point, the Mongol leaders had amassed a lot of wealth through plunder and conquest. And they were eager to trade some of that wealth for luxury goods from the West. So the two brothers were invited to travel eastward to the court of the Kublai Khan in China. They soon headed out through southern Russia and made their way through Central Asia and eventually found their way to Beijing where they met Kublai Khan himself.

The Mongol leader was impressed with the two brothers and the stories they told of the West. He asked them to return home and deliver a message to the Pope. He also asked the two brothers to come back to China with 100 missionaries or 'learned men' from the West.

After the two brothers returned to Italy, they were able to deliver the Khan's official letters to the Pope. And Niccola started making plans for his return journey to China. But for his return, he decided to bring his teenage son with him. In case, you haven't figured it out by now, the young son's name was Marco – Marco Polo. He joined his father and uncle, and they headed out from the Near East on their way to Kublai Kahn's court in China. They couldn't gather 100 missionaries, but they were joined by two friars. The friars didn't make it very far though. Travel across Central Asia was so daunting that they soon turned back. But the Polos continued on. And thanks to Marco's accounts of his journey to the Far East, China was about to be opened up to the West for the first time.

I should note that Marco Polo's accounts of his time in Asia were compiled after he returned to Italy several decades later. And they weren't actually composed by Marco himself. After he returned home, he was involved in a war between Venice and Genoa. During that conflict, he was captured and taken as a prisoner of war. While in custody, he recounted his stories to a fellow prisoner named Rusticiano of Pisa who later published the original account of Polo's adventures. That original version has been lost to history, but many later translations survive from the period before the printing press was invented. Those copies vary quite a bit – suggesting that later copiers took some liberties with the original text. Nevertheless, the various versions of the book were very popular in Western Europe. Many readers at the time thought the book was mostly fiction. They simply couldn't believe some of the things they read. But as it turns out, most of his descriptions were confirmed by later accounts and sources.

Now I should note that there are still many who believe that Marco Polo made up his stories based on the accounts he heard from other traders, and I'm not going to resolve that debate here. Most scholars think that Marco Polo did indeed reach the Far East, even if some liberties were taken with his stories.

The first English translation of Marco Polo's book was compiled in the late 1500s. And the book became known in English as "The Travels of Marco Polo." Note that the title contained the word *travel* which was another brand new word in English around the current point in our story in the late 1200s. It was also borrowed from French, and it replaced the traditional Old English word *faran* found in words like *seafarer* and *wayfarer*. The word *travel* appeared for the first time in

English in a document composed in the year 1290. And that means that the word *travel* actually entered English at the same time that Marco Polo was traveling in the Far East.

And there is something else interesting about the word *travel*. It is closely related to the word *travail* which was also borrowed into English in the 1200s. In fact, *travel* and *travail* are really just two versions of the same French root word that meant ‘to labor or toil or torment.’ Of course, *travail* still retains much of that original meaning. But *travel* acquired a specialized sense reflecting the labor and toil required to traverse the roads and highways of the Middle Ages with their rough condition, secluded locations, flimsy or non-existent bridges, and thieves and bandits that were always lying in wait. So *travel* was often a kind of *travail* or torment. English distinguished these two words by shifting the accent forward in *travel* to reflect a more traditional English pronunciation with the accent on the first syllable. That was common in Old English and other Germanic languages. *Travail* retains the original French emphasis on the final syllable as is common in French words.

There is little doubt that Marco Polo experienced many ‘travails’ on his ‘travels’ to the Far East. But he and his father and his uncle made it. And they were some of the first Europeans to visit China, at least the first to be documented in a written account that could be read by other Europeans. So Marco Polo’s book described a brand new world. He described the caravan routes that he traveled to reach the Far East and the people and things he witnessed along the way. Upon arriving in Beijing, the Polos met with Kublai Khan who was happy to see that Marco’s father had returned. He was especially pleased to meet young Marco who delighted the Mongol leader with stories of his homeland. Marco remained in China for many years, and during that time, Kublai Khan sent Marco on many fact-finding missions to distant parts of the empire.

That allowed Marco to compile a detailed account of not only the Mongolian court, but also many other parts of Central Asia and the Far East. And to the surprise of many Westerners, he described a region that was wealthy, civilized, and technologically advanced.

Now Marco traveled to the far-flung corners of the Mongolian Empire, and he collected accounts of other adjacent regions. He provided the first written description of Japan as well – an island nation which he called *Cipangu* based on the Chinese name which meant “Land of the Rising Sun.”

Now Japan was never part of the Mongolian Empire, even though the Mongols launched at least two major invasions by sea to capture the island in the late 1200s. Both invasions were disrupted by high winds and rough seas – perhaps a typhoon. Marco Polo’s accounts even contain a description of one of those failed naval campaigns. In Japan, the heavy winds that turned back the Mongol fleet were regarded as divine intervention, so they called those winds the ‘divine winds’ or in the original Japanese – *kamikaze*. Of course, that term was later applied to the Japanese bombers who flew suicide missions in World War II, and after that, the Japanese word *kamikaze* entered English. Today, it usually denotes an action that is either reckless or self-destructive. But ultimately, the word can be traced back to a failed Mongol invasion of Japan around the current point in our story.

Marco Polo not only encountered new places and new cultures, he also encountered new things. According to legend, one of the things that Marco Polo supposedly discovered in China and brought back to Italy was pasta. Pasta had been made and eaten in China for centuries, and Marco Polo did describe a type of pasta in his accounts, but the idea that he actually introduced pasta to Italy is unlikely.

Arab cultures had been eating pasta dishes for several centuries prior to Marco's excursion to China, and Arab traders were in constant contact with Italian traders around the Mediterranean. So most scholars suspect that pasta came to Italy from the Arab world. Also, an Arab geographer named Idrisi described pasta that he found in Sicily in the year 1154 – exactly one century before Marco Polo was even born. So while there isn't definitive proof one way or the other, you might want to take the legend that Marco Polo introduced pasta to Italy with a grain of salt, or if you're making a pasta dish, with a pinch of salt.

So when Marco Polo encountered pasta in China, he may or may not have seen it before. But there was something else that he definitely saw for the first time in China. And that other thing is very important to the theme of this episode. In the accounts of his travels, Marco Polo said that he routinely encountered money made from paper. And that was mind-blowing to Europeans – especially European merchants.

Remember that Europe only knew money in the form of coins – and mostly silver coins. The idea that merchants could just use some random material like paper was unheard of in the West. In fact, paper itself was still very rare in northern Europe. It was in limited use around the Mediterranean, but even there, people didn't consider a man-made product with little inherent value to be suitable for a type of currency.

It appears that the Chinese were using paper money on a limited basis before the Mongolian conquest, but the Mongols really embraced the idea. And it was during their rule that paper money became a standard medium of exchange. Marco Polo was so impressed by the idea that one of his chapters was titled "How the Great Kaan Causeth the Bark of Trees, Made Into Something Like Paper, to Pass for Money All Over his Country."

This period in the 1200s and 1300s was really the first time that any country used paper money on a widespread basis before the modern era. The Mongolians liked the idea of paper money because they had to administer a massive empire. For example, paper money made it easier to collect taxes from the far flung corners of the empire. Without paper, tax collectors had to load coins onto wagons and transport them over rough and dangerous roads for thousands of miles. Remember the 'travails' of 'travel' in the Middle Ages. This was also a problem for merchants. They also had to transport large sums of money. But paper money was lightweight and could be issued in large denominations. So it was much easier to move and transport. It was also easier to replace if it was lost or stolen.

Now as it turned out, back in Europe, Western merchants were trying to solve some of these same problems. They didn't come up with paper money, but they did come up with a money substitute. And that innovation led to the modern banking and financial system that we use

today. And that innovation also changed the vocabulary of the English language. So let me conclude this episode by explaining how the long-range movement of money shaped the modern financial system and shaped the English language.

Now when it comes to the movement of money along those long-distance trading routes, there were two major problems. One was financial and one was practical. The first problem was the financial problem – the fact that currencies varied from one region to the next. Obviously, England didn't use the same currency as France, or Florence, or the Mongolian Empire. That meant that money had to be changed from one currency to the next as goods moved from region to region. So the increase in international trade in the Middle Ages led to an increased need for money changers – people with the expertise and ability to take exchange one currency for another at the proper exchange rate. And the people who were in the best position to handle those exchanges were the merchants right in the middle of those international trade networks. And those were the merchants in Italy. They were located at the transition point between the East and the West. So as goods came into or out of Western Europe, the Italian merchants were in the perfect position to handle the money transactions.

The other problem with international trade in the Middle Ages was the more practical problem of moving coins over long distances. Roads were rough. Bridges were not always reliable. Wagons broke down. Bandits and thieves were everywhere. Again, it was the 'travail' or 'travel.'

Once again, the Italian merchants and money-changers were in a prime position to deal with these problems.

The Italian merchants perfected a type of credit transaction called a Bill of Exchange. And it solved both of the problems I just mentioned. It enabled a merchant in one country to buy a goods in another country without having to figure out the currency exchange rate and without having to carry a wagon full of coins over hundreds or thousands of miles.

These were sophisticated financial instruments, but to simplify it a bit, the buyer essentially took out a loan with the Italian financier. But rather than receiving money, the buyer received an IOU document that he could deliver to the seller. When the buyer received the goods from the seller, he handed over the financier's IOU as payment. The seller could then redeem that IOU from the Italian financier in the seller's own local currency. But how was he supposed to do that? Well, remember all of the fairs held throughout Europe that I discussed earlier in the episode? Those fairs attracted merchants and traders, but they also attracted those Italian financiers and their agents. In fact, that's where they did much of their business in central and northern Europe. All the seller had to do was to go to the next regional fair and meet with the financier's agents, and they would redeem the IOU and handle the exchange of the currency at the same time. Of course, the seller might have outstanding accounts with the same financier, so those debts were also settled at the same time.

All of this meant that it was no longer necessary to move wagons full of coins over hundreds of miles. The money was simply moved on paper or parchment – from one merchant's account to the another. Just a few seconds and no heavy lifting or broken down wagons. No thieves hiding

in the forest. No more ‘travails’ of ‘travel.’ It was all handled on the accounts of the financiers. And not surprisingly, the word **account** appeared for the first time in an English document around this time in the year 1300.

By providing these types of financial services, these financiers were basically acting as bankers before banks were free-standing buildings with branches around the world. Instead of going to a local branch of the bank, the selling merchant just went to the nearest fair where the financiers met and conducted their business. In fact, it was this type of process that gave us the word **bank**. The financier’s agents usually worked from tables where they could stack and count the coins and exchange the currencies as needed. The word **bank** is a Germanic word that had been borrowed into Italian and French. The original Germanic word meant ‘a slope or raised mound.’ It produced Norse word **bank** as in the bank of a river. And it produced the Old English word **bench** as in a type of furniture that you sit on. And in Italian, it produced the word **banca** meaning a bench or table. So when those merchants went to a fair or other location where the financiers worked, the merchants had to go to the **banca** or table where the financier worked and where the money was being exchanged.

And over time, that sense of meeting the financier at the **banca** led to the modern word **bank**. And we still use that term for the financier’s office – the place where money transactions occur.

I should note that English had already borrowed the word **bank** in the sense of ‘a bench’ in Layamon’s Brut. So English was already using the word in that original sense. It wasn’t really until the 1400s that financiers started to open separate offices around Europe. Those were really the first banks. And that was one of the primary reasons why the Medieval fairs experienced a decline in the late Middle Ages.

So then, rather than having to go to a regional fair, a merchant could just go to his nearest bank which had a fixed location and was open all year. That also explains why the word **bank** as a financial institution didn’t appear in English until the late 1400s. The word itself was already in the language meaning a type of bench, but the modern sense didn’t develop until later.

Now I noted that these early financial transactions centered around a specific type of document called a Bill of Exchange, and it was essentially a loan from the financier which was repaid by the buyer at a later date. So it was similar to a modern credit card transaction where your bank pays the store for the merchandise and then you pay the bank back at a later date. So the bank is the lender and you are the borrower – in the same way that the Medieval financier was the lender and the Medieval merchant was the borrower.

Words like **lend** and **borrow** are very old words in the English language going all the way back to Old English. And that confirms that the Anglo-Saxons routinely borrowed items from each other. The word **borrow** is actually cognate with the word **bargain**. **Borrow** is the native English word and **bargain** is the French version of word – presumably inherited from the Franks. As I noted earlier, the word **bargain** was borrowed into English in the early 1300s. So around the current point in our story, English had both **borrow** and **bargain** in its vocabulary.

Of course, if a merchant borrowed money from a financier, that merchant incurred a *debt*, and he became a *debtor*. The words *debt* and *debtor* were borrowed from Latin and French, and both of those words were brand new words in English in the early 1200s. Both words were found for the first time in English in the Ancrene Wisse.

I mentioned that these transactions were very sophisticated and that was in part because the financiers had to get around the restrictions on usury imposed by the Church. *Usury* referred to the interest charged by the lender. It was the lender's profit. But the Church said that was a sin, and a lender could theoretically be excommunicated for charging interest. So the interest had to be disguised. It was sometimes disguised as a late fee, and modern scholars are confident that the late fee was intended as interest in those loans because for some lenders every single loan incurred the late fee.

Usury is a Latin term, and it's actually from the same root as the word *use*. *Usury* was the cost of 'using' someone else's money for a certain period of time. The word *usury* started to appear in English documents around the year 1300, but English merchants were very familiar with the word before that because it was the biggest obstacle to these loan transactions. It was a sinful action, so it always had a negative connotation. There was no such thing a 'good' *usury*.

A couple of centuries later, the word *interest* was borrowed into English. And by that point, the harsh restrictions on usury had been relaxed. So the word *interest* came to refer to the legally acceptable interest that a lender could charge, and *usury* retained its original sense as something sinful or illegal. So today, *usury* mostly refers to interest that exceeds the rate permitted by law.

As I noted, these loans had to be paid back at some point, often at the regional fairs where these types of financial accounts were settled. Now when a debt was paid back, you could describe the debt as *paid*. As we saw earlier, the word *pay* was a brand new word in the English language – being used in the Ancrene Wisse for the first time. But there was also another pair of words that could be used to describe the repayment of the debt. And those words were the words *quit* and *acquit*. Those are really just two versions of the same Latin and French root word – and they were both used interchangeably to refer to the payment of a debt. And both words appear for the first time in English in the Ancrene Wisse.

As we can see, English was borrowing lots of words in the 1200s and early 1300s related to finance. That included words like *pay*, *price*, *money*, *coin*, *change*, *exchange*, *bargain*, *account*, *debt*, *debtor*, *usury*, *quit* and *acquit*. The appearance of those words reflects how the English vocabulary was being expanded by these financial developments. And these financial developments were largely tied to the movement of money and people across vast distances.

Interestingly, many of the developments I discussed in this episode were interrupted over the next couple of centuries. The Mongolian Empire started to fracture and fall apart during the 1300s. The Ming Dynasty overthrew the Mongols in China. They once again turned inward, and the Central Asian trading networks started to dry up again. Inflation caused the Chinese to stop using paper money. And the Hundred Years War and the historic plague known as the Black Death swept across Europe and weakened the financial networks of the Italian merchants. It wasn't

until the late 1400s that these trends were reversed. It was then that the Medici family started to give Italian banking a new life, and European explorers like Christopher Columbus looked for new ways to reach China – this time by sea.

And obviously those developments are very important to the spread of English around the world. But it's important to keep in mind that there was this brief period of exploration in the 1200s and early 1300s when the Far West met the Far East, when traders and missionaries moved around the known world with relative ease, when trade and commerce expanded at a rapid rate, and when the English language borrowed lots of new words to reflect those developments.

Next time, we'll return to the language itself, and we'll look at some important grammatical developments that were taking place in English in the late 1200s. We'll also explore a couple of new songs that were composed in English during the same time period.

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

EPISODE 109: THE ROMANTIC WARRIORS

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 109: The Romantic Warriors. In this episode, we’re going to look at the rise of English romance in the late 1200s. Over the prior century or so, Medieval romances had become all the rage in the courts of Europe. That included stories about Charlemagne, and the legends of King Arthur and his knights. Those stories mixed together themes of bravery and warfare with elements of chivalry, love and romance. The stories were popular throughout Europe, including the English court, but they weren’t composed in English. That finally started to change around the current point in our story in the late 1200s. For the first time, romantic literature started to be composed in English. And that also included songs with romantic themes. So this time, we’ll explore the birth of English romance. And we’ll also look at the early reign of Edward I – a king who was considered a brutal oppressor by some and a romantic warrior by others.

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, let’s return to our overall historical narrative and the end of the reign of Henry III. As we saw a couple of episodes back, Henry had to deal with a revolt by his barons late in his reign. He was forced to agree to the Provisions of Oxford, and a letter confirming the new political arrangement was sent to the counties. That letter was one of the first government proclamations issued in English since the Norman Conquest. As we saw, the leader of the barons was Simon de Montfort. And he was later killed in a battle when his forces met those led by Henry’s son Edward. Edward’s victory essentially ended the rebellion. His father Henry resumed his authority as king, but Henry started to withdraw from political life, and that allowed Edward to fill the vacuum and emerge as the dominant figure in the English government.

In the year 1270, Edward left England to head to the Holy Land on Crusade, and he was accompanied by his wife who was also descended from Crusaders. Edward’s wife was Eleanor of Castile, so she was from Spain, and her father and great-grandfather had been Crusaders having fought to re-claim Spain from its Muslim rulers. The couple had been married 16 years earlier. It was a political marriage as was common at the time, but it was also somewhat unique in that it seems that couple were actually in love with each other. They were virtually inseparable, and Eleanor often accompanied Edward on his travels and his military excursions. So when Edward headed to the Near East, Eleanor traveled with him.

The Crusade itself never amounted to very much. Edward remained in the region for more than a year, and he organized raids into Muslim territories. But the Crusade was not without drama. Edward was almost killed, but not in battle. It was an assassin that almost ended his life.

One night, Edward lay in bed with Eleanor when a messenger arrived bearing gifts and claiming to have secret information. Edward's servants woke Edward and asked him to meet the visitor. Edward appeared in his nightclothes, but the visitor rushed at Edward with a dagger and stabbed him. Edward responded by punching the man in the head and knocking him to the ground. Edward then grabbed another dagger from a table and stabbed the attacker – killing him on the spot.

Now I tell you this story for two reasons. First, it illustrates Edward's reputation as a fierce warrior who killed would-be assassins with own hands. The other reason I tell you this story is because, according the account of a chronicler known as the Templar of Tyre, Eleanor rushed into action to save her husband's life. Apparently, it was feared that the dagger that struck Edward was poisoned. So Eleanor sucked the blood from the wound to remove any poison before it could take effect. Now modern scholars are skeptical of this account and suspect that Eleanor didn't actually suck any poison from Edward's wound, but the story itself shows how close the couple were and how much affection they had for each other.

A short time after the attack, the couple headed back to England, but they took their time along the way. While spending some time in Italy in November, Edward received news that his father had died in England. At that point, the couple knew that they would be crowned as the new king and queen as soon as they returned home.

You might think that they would have rushed to England to claim the throne, but that wasn't the case. They continued to take their time. In fact, it took nearly two years for Edward to make his way back to England. That was how stable the country was in his absence, and it was a sign of how much the nobles respected Edward. There was no concern about a new challenge from the barons while he was away.

Edward eventually returned home and was officially crowned as king in August of 1274. He thereby became Edward I. And I should probably note the obvious which is that he is known as Edward I even though he was actually the third English king named Edward. You might remember Alfred the Great's son was named Edward, and technically he was the first King Edward. And of course, there was Edward the Confessor. But the numbering of kings usually applies to those who reigned after the Norman Conquest, so even though he was the third Edward to rule England, he is known to history as Edward I.

He was also the first Plantagenet king to have an English name. His predecessors included Williams, and Henrys and Richards – all French names. But Edward had a native Anglo-Saxon name, and that was because his father Henry adored Edward the Confessor, and he named his son after the former Anglo-Saxon king.

Edward was also known by the nickname "Longshanks," which literally meant 'long-legs' or 'long-legged.' I've noted before that the word *leg* is actually a Norse word. Before it was borrowed into English, the original Old English word for a leg was *scanca* – or as it we know it today – *shank*. So the nickname "Longshanks" meant 'long-legs' because Edward was very tall. His tomb was actually opened several centuries later in 1774, and when the tomb was opened, his

bones indicated that he about 6 feet 2 inches tall, which meant he was about 6 inches taller than the average man of his time.

Now admittedly, most of the kings and queens I've discussed in the podcast are obscure figures from Medieval history. But there is a chance that you might already know a little bit about Edward I – especially if you're a fan of movies set during this period. If you've ever seen the movie *Braveheart*, you might recall that Edward was the English king who was trying to conquer Scotland and meeting fierce resistance from the Scots in the process. Well, even though the film takes a lot of liberties with the story, the movie is based on actual events. Most of those events took place later in Edward's reign. So we'll look at those developments in a future episode.

But Edward's claims to all of Britain were on full display from the very beginning of his reign. Before Edward turned his attention north to Scotland, he first took aim at Wales in the west. Wales had always been a thorn in the side of English kings. From time to time, English kings claimed the right to rule Wales, and they demanded that they local rulers recognize the English king as their overlord. Sometimes, the English kings invaded the region and forced the issue. But inevitably, the Welsh rulers would rise up and rebel and re-assert their independence. That's what happened when the barons rebelled against Edward's father Henry a few years before. The Welsh ruler named Llywelyn had formed an alliance with the Simon de Montfort.

So when Edward came to power, he already bore a grudge against the Welsh prince. Llywelyn then refused to recognize Edward as his feudal lord. And Llywelyn also broke an earlier agreement to provide a tribute payment to the English crown.

Very soon after becoming king, Edward invaded Wales with the intention of subduing the Welsh rebels. His Welsh campaigns began in 1277, and he ultimately forced Llywelyn to pay homage.

A short time later, Llywelyn rose in rebellion again. This time, Edward intended to put an end to the rebellions once and for all. He no longer claimed to be some type of feudal lord over the region. He wanted to crush the rebels and completely conquer the region. He wanted to govern Wales directly and bring it under the authority of the English crown.

He raised a large army and invaded for a second time. And this time, the conquest was permanent. Edward organized a massive and multi-faceted invasion. He broke the power of the Welsh rulers, and Llywelyn was killed in battle. By the spring of 1283, all of Wales was in Edward's hands. And it was brought under permanent English rule.

Thereafter, the title "Prince of Wales" no long applied to the local Welsh rulers. It was a title that Edward bestowed upon his son and eventual heir to the throne. So the tradition of English kings designating their heir as the "Prince of Wales" really began with Edward.

In order to secure his hold on Wales, Edward directed the construction of a series of enormous castles throughout the region. They were designed to intimidate the people and to discourage any further resistance. It was the same strategy used by William the Conqueror, and many of those castles remain to this day.

So we find ourselves about a decade into Edward's reign. And from the very beginning, Edward established himself as a warrior and conqueror – and also a loyal husband devoted to his wife.

In fact, in many respects, these were basic elements of Medieval romances. They usually featured a king or knight engaged in some type of heroic or daring activity. And that warrior was usually guided by notions of bravery and chivalry. And at the same time, he was usually in love with a maiden or noble lady, and the hero's bravery and daring were usually designed to win the love and affection of the lady. In the Arthurian legends, the central figure was often one of Arthur's knights. So as Arthurian romances developed during this period, there was increasing emphasis on the knights, and less of a focus on Arthur himself. Figures like Lancelot and Percival and Gawain emerged as the leading figures in many of these stories. But these stories were mostly composed in languages like French – not English.

In fact, up until this point, there really had not been a romance composed in English. Layamon's Brut was the first telling of the Arthurian legend in English. It had been composed about a century earlier, but it wasn't really a romance. It was based on Geoffrey of Monmouth's original version of the story, and it was more of an epic tale with Arthur as conqueror. The early development of the Arthurian legend into Medieval romances really took place in France with French writers like Chretien de Troyes.

But around the current point in our story, romantic literature finally started to appear in English. And interestingly, that new literature was not part of the Arthurian legend. It was a completely different story called King Horn. Since this is generally considered to be the first English romance, I want to take you through the poem, and I also want to look at the language that was used in the poem to show how English was evolving during this period.

The first thing I should note is that we know very little about the ultimate origin of this story. Most of the characters and locations in the poem are fictional. However, the poem does specifically set part of the story in Ireland. And most of the other places mentioned in the story are usually associated with the Celtic areas of western Britain like Wales, Cornwall and far southwestern England. Many scholars think the story is native to Britain and probably Celtic in origin.

The poem itself has an uncertain date. The manuscripts that contain the three surviving versions of the poem all date to the early 1300s, but scholars are confident that the poem itself was composed in the 1200s. Some suggest the first half of the 1200s, but the modern trend is to date it a bit later – perhaps around the time that Edward was completing the conquest of Wales.

Now all three surviving versions of the poem tell the same basic story, but they vary quite a bit from line to line. And that suggests that the poem originally passed in the oral tradition before it finally started to be written down around the current point in our story. We get a sense of the oral nature of the poem in the first few lines. The poem begins:

All be they of cheer
that to my song you hear
A song I shall to you sing
of Murry the king.

Here's the same passage in the original Middle English:

Alle beon he bliþe
That to my song lythe!
A sang ich schal you singe
Of Murry the Kinge.

Now this type of opening was common for poems or songs that were sung by a minstrel to an audience. He invites his audience to listen to his song and be entertained by it. So again, this appears to be a song that was transcribed at some point in the mid to late 1200s.

We're told that the story begins with Murry – the king of Sudene. Again, this is a fictional location, but many scholars associate it with either Devon or Cornwall – so somewhere is the southwestern part of Britain. And in the poem, we soon find out that King Murry's son was named Horn. Horn is a young man, 15 years old, and most fair and admirable. According to the poem:

There was no thane fairer than he was
He was bright as the glass
He was white as the flower
Rose red was his color
He was fayr and also bold
And he was 15 winters old
In all the kingdoms
there was like him none
Twelve companions he had
And by Horn they were all led
All were sons of rich men
And all were fair men.

Fairer nis non thane he was:
He was bright so the glas;
He was whit so the flur;
Rose red was his colur.
He was fayr and eke bold,
And of fiftene winter hold.
In none kinge riche
Nas non his iliche.
Twelf feren he hadde
That he alle with him ladde,

Alle riche mannes sones,
And alle hi were faire gomes

By the way, this passage contains the first use of the word *color* in the English language. The Old English word was *hue* which still survives, but *color* is the more common word today.

Also note the final word *gomes* meaning ‘men.’ We’ve actually seen that word before – a long time ago. The word was *guma* in Old English, and it meant ‘man.’ And you might remember that *guma* – or *gomes* here – ultimately became the second part of *bridegroom* which was literally ‘the bride’s man.’ And over time, that compound word was shortened to just *groom*. The word started to acquire its ‘r’ sound after the ‘g’ in the 1500s. So that’s how an Old English word for a ‘man’ acquired a modern sense as ‘the man in a wedding ceremony.’

Now after introducing us to Horn and his immediate family, we are told that their kingdom was invaded by brutal warriors. King Murry is killed, but Horn is spared. Rather than being killed, he and his 12 companions are forced into exile. They are given a boat which they row until they eventually come to the kingdom of Westernesse. There the king is named Almair, and he welcomes Horn and his companions. King Almair is impressed with Horn, and he soon becomes a favorite at court.

The king’s daughter is named Rymenhild, and after a period of time, she falls madly in love with Horn. She sends messengers to bring Horn to her. We then have the following passage:

Rymenhild rose to stand
And took him by the hand:
She sat with him on the bed or pelle
And offered wine to drink his fill:
She made him faire cheer
And took him about the neck or swere.
She offered him kisses,
As she lusted with bliss.
"Horn," she said, "without strife,
Thou shalt have me to thy wife."

Here’s the same passage in the original Middle English:

Rymenhild up gan stonde
And tok him bi the honde:
Heo sette him on pelle
Of wyn to drinke his fulle:
Heo makede him faire chere
And tok him abute the swere.
Ofte heo him custe,
So wel so hire luste.

"Horn," heo sede, "withute strif,
Thu schalt have me to thi wif.

Now I hope you can hear how familiar this Middle English passage sounds. The overall sentence structure is close to Modern English and many of the words are familiar. But we still have a few antiquated terms. Instead of *neck*, the poem uses another Old English word which was *swere*. Both words meant ‘neck,’ and both go back to Old English, but *swere* or *swire* has largely disappeared from English over time.

The passage also uses the word *pelle* which meant ‘fine cloth,’ and in this context presumably meant bed covering or bed sheets. The word still exists as a *pall* which is a fine sheet that is sometimes used to cover a casket. Of course, that gave us the term *pallbearer*.

You might also notice the continued use of the Old English pronouns. The poem doesn’t generally use the modern pronoun *she*. It tends to use the older pronoun *heo*. So the older pronoun forms were still in common use.

Now returning to the poem, Princess Rymenhild has declared her love for Horn and proposed to him. Horn loves her too, but he faces a predicament. Her father the king doesn’t know that Horn is an exiled prince. He thinks Horn is a peasant or ‘thrall.’ So Horn realizes that he cannot marry a princess given his current status. He replies:

I am come from a peasant or thrall
And a foundling befall.
It would not be naturally found
For you as my spouse to be bound.
It would be no fair wedding
Betwixt a thrall and a king.

Ich am icome of thralle
And fundling bifalle.
Ne feolle hit the of cunde
To spuse beo me bunde.
Hit nere no fair wedding
Bitwexe a thral and a king.

Let me note that this passage contains the word *spuse* or ‘spouse.’ That’s a French word which we sometimes use in place of native words like *husband* and *wife* – especially if we want to sound a little more formal. This isn’t the first use of the term in English, but it was a relatively new word in the language at this time. It is also found in the Ancrene Wisse and a few other documents from the early 1200s.

So despite his love for the princess, Horn expresses his reservations about becoming her spouse. Upon hearing Horn’s reply, the princess swoons, and her heart is broken. But Horn offers a possible solution to their dilemma. If she will help him to become a knight, then they can be

married. She promises that he will soon be made a knight. She has her father's steward make an appeal on Horn's behalf. And the king agrees to make Horn and his companions knights. A short time later, they are all knighted.

Princess Rymenhild then calls again for Horn. She expresses her love and says he should honor his promise to marry her. Horn the replies with the following passage:

"Rymenhild," quoth he, "be still!
I will do all thy will,
Also as it may by chance
With spear I shall first ride,
And my knighthood prove,
Before I begin to woo thee.

Now here's the original Middle English:

"Rymenhild," quath he, "beo stille!
Ich wulle don al thi wille,
Also hit mot bitide.
Mid spere I schal furst ride,
And mi knighthod prove,
Ar ich thee ginne to woghe.

So Horn basically says, "I will marry you like I said, just not right now." He says that a knight must prove his worthiness to his lover. This was the traditional notion that a knight had to win the love of his maiden through his bravery and heroic actions. So Horn is saying that he must prove himself in this manner first, then he will return to marry her.

Now this passage sets up the events that are commonly found in Medieval romances, but it also does something else. It shows a very interesting and important development in the language. And that development is the early use of our modern future tense. Specifically, the use of the words *shall* and *will* to indicate that something will take place in the future.

Now back when we looked at Old English, we saw that English had specific ways to indicate present tense and past tense by adding an inflectional ending to the verb.

For present tense, most of those inflectional endings have disappeared over time. So today, we can just use the basic verb – what we might call the infinitive. So for the verb *jump*, if we want to indicate that the action is happening right now, we can just use that basic verb form. "I jump." "You jump." "We jump." "They jump." The only exception is third person singular where we add an 's' to the end. "He/she/it jumps." So we do still use that inflection to help us mark present tense.

For past tense, we add a different inflectional ending – usually E-D. So "I jumped," "You jumped," "They jumped." Sometimes, we add a 't' like in "I slept" or "You slept."

But notice that we don't have an ending to mark future tense – to indicate that the action will take place at some point in the future. Some other Indo-European languages have a verb ending that will do that, but like other Germanic languages, English doesn't have that type of ending because the original Germanic language didn't have a future ending either.

So how did the Anglo-Saxons indicate future tense? Well, they just used the present tense. In some situations, they could add a time element to the sentence to make it clear that the action was to take place in the future. So the person might say something like “I jump tomorrow” or “I jump next week.” But in most cases, the speaker simply relied upon context. In the context of a particular sentence, “I jump” might mean that I am jumping right now, or it might mean that I will jump at some point in the future, or it might mean both. Again, context usually made the time frame clear.

But in early Middle English, a new grammatical feature developed whereby a speaker could indicate future tense by using either the word *will* or *shall* before the verb. So “I will jump” or “I shall jump.” There is actually some indication that this new way of indicating future tense was present in late Old English, but it wasn't common until the 1200s and 1300s.

So why were the words *will* and *shall* appropriated to this new use? Well, both of those words are Old English words, and they had specific uses in Old English. The word *will* indicated a desire or wish to do something. So you might ‘will’ something to be done. You might also be ‘willing’ to do it. It could also be used as a noun. So I might impose my ‘will’ upon you. Well, if you express a ‘will’ to do something, that action is going to take place at some point in the future. So we can see how the word *will* often had an implied sense of the future.

In the context of the King Horn poem, it's a small leap from “I will myself to marry you” to “I will marry you.” There is a subtle shift in the use of the word *will* from the desire to do something in the future to simply a marker of the future tense. In the passage I read to you earlier, Horn says that he will marry Rymenhild. He says “I will do all thy will” – “Ich wulle don al thi wille.” He is literally saying, “I will do that that you want me to.” And in that sentence, he uses the word *will* twice. The first time is to mark the future tense – “I will do.” And the second time is the more traditional use of the word – he is going to “do thy will.” So we can see the word *will* being used both ways in that sentence.

The word *shall* also had a more limited sense in Old English. And it's a sense that we still have today. It meant ‘must’ or ‘ought to.’ So if you ‘shall’ do something, you are obligated to do it. We still use the word in that sense – especially in legal documents. For example, a lease provision might provide that the tenant ‘shall’ pay rent in a specified amount.

Again, the word has that traditional sense of an obligation, but notice that the obligation is satisfied at some point in the future. So again, the word *shall* always had that implied sense of the future. It was a small step from “The tenant ‘shall’ pay rent in the amount of \$500” meaning the tenant is obligated to pay that amount – to “The tenant shall pay \$500” meaning the tenant is going to do that in the future. So just like with the word *will*, the word *shall* was starting to be used to mark the future tense in early Middle English.

In the same passage from King Horn that I read earlier, Horn says “With spear I shall first ride,” – “Mid spere I schal furst ride” – meaning “With my spear, I shall go out.” So this is an example of the word *shall* being used to indicate future tense.

Now throughout the Middle English period, either *will* or *shall* could be used to indicate a future action. And there doesn’t appear to have any grammatical distinction between the two. But in the early 1600s, an Oxford professor named John Wallis published a grammar guide, and he stated that *shall* should be used for first person and *will* should be used for second and third person. So “I shall” and “we shall” – but “you will,” “he will,” “she will,” and “they will.” Some modern grammar guides still advocate this rule, but it is rarely followed by most Modern English speakers – especially in American English where *will* has always been the preferred form in all persons.

By the way, English speakers also created a couple of other ways to express future action. One way was to combine the verb *to be* with the word *going* and then the main verb. So “I am going to jump.” or “He is going to run.” This construction started to pop up in late Middle English. In fact, it appeared for the first time in a document composed in the year 1482. So that was a couple of centuries later in our story.

The other future construction found in English is the verb *to be* plus the word *about* and then the main verb. So “I am about to jump.” and “She is about to run.” We use this construction to indicate that something is going to happen in the immediate future. And again this construction first appeared later in our story in late Middle English. So around the current point in our story – in the late 1200s – English was relying upon *will* and *shall* to mark the future tense, and this was still a relatively new development in the language.

Now returning to the story of King Horn, Horn delays his marriage to Rymenhild so he can go out and perform some acts of bravery and prove his worthiness. Rymenhild gives him a ring and asks him to wear it as a sign of his love. She also says that the ring will protect him if he looks at it and thinks of her. Horn then takes his leave.

A short time later, he meets a group of invaders. Horn slays the leader, and then after looking at the rings, he slays a hundred more. He puts the leader’s head on a spear and brings it back to the king.

The next day, Horn goes to see Rymenhild. She is upset, and recounts a dream where she caught a fish, but the fish broke through the net and escaped. They both consider the dream to be a bad omen. Horn comforts her and renews his pledge to marry her.

Now one of Horn’s companions is named Fickenhild. And he betrays Horn. He tells the king that Horn has seduced Rymenhild and is planning to seize the throne by killing the king and marrying his daughter. The king believes the story and banishes Horn from the kingdom.

Before leaving, Horn visits Rymenhild and tells her that her dream has come true – that he has been banished, and he is going to an unknown country for seven years. He tells her not to wait more than that length of time. They kiss and she faints. The passage reads:

They kissed each other for a while or stound
And Rymenhild fell to the ground.

He custe him wel a stunde,
And Rymenhild feol to grunde.

This passage uses the word *stunde* – or *stound* – which is an old word for a moment or a short period of time. It's a native English word, but it's related to the word *instant* from Latin and French. It's also related to the English word *stall* meaning to delay for a short period of time. It's also related to the English word *stand* and the French word *stay*. Now today this word *stound* may linger on in a few regional dialects, but it has largely disappeared from standard English.

So after this brief encounter between Horn and the princess, Horn leaves and travels to Ireland where he is welcomed by the local Irish king. While there, he battles and kills a giant and a group of invaders who threaten the kingdom.

A long time passes, and because of Horn's exile from Westernesse, Rymenhild has no contact with him. Meanwhile, her father arranges for her to be married to another king as part of a marriage alliance. She doesn't want to go forward with the marriage, but she doesn't have a choice. A few days before the wedding, she sends a messenger to Horn to inform him of the impending marriage.

When Horn receives the message, he leaves to return to Rymenhild and is accompanied by several Irish warriors. He arrives just as the wedding has begun. He dons a disguise, but a gate-keeper on a bridge forbids Horn from entering the Hall where the wedding is taking place. Undeterred, Horn throws the gate-keeper from the bridge. Here's the passage:

Horn went to the gate turn
And that wicket opened or unspurned
The boy he should have to pay
Horn threw him over the bridge
That his ribs he did break
And Horn quickly came through the gate

Now here's the original Middle English version:

Horn gan to þe 3ate turne,
And þat wiket vnspurne.
þe boye hit scholde abugge;
Horn þreu him ouer þe brigge,

Pat his ribbes him to brake;
And suppe com in atte gate.

Now this passage is important for one primary reason. The gate-keeper is called a **boy**, and this is the first known use of the word **boy** in the English language. And that may be surprising because **boy** is such a common and familiar and short little word that it feels like it should be an Old English word, but it's not found in any Old English documents. It doesn't appear in writing until now – in the mid to late 1200s. The original meaning was more along the lines of a young servant, but over time, its meaning was extended to any young man or male child. So the word **boy** appears for the first time in English in this poem – King Horn.

And here's another interesting fact. The word **girl** also first appeared around this same time. And again, **girl** seems like it should be a native English word because it is such a common and basic word. But apparently, it's not. It isn't found in any Old English documents. The word **girl** doesn't appear in King Horn, but it is found for the first time in a story about Thomas Becket contained in a collection of sermons and saint's lives called "The South English Legendary." That manuscript is dated to around the year 1300, so just a few decades after King Horn.

So **boy** and **girl** arrived in English around the same time in the early Middle English period. And I guess that it is appropriate that **boy** and **girl** would appear in English around the same time that English romances were starting to appear because both terms can refer to young adults who aren't married yet. But when they first appeared in the language, the words **boy** and **girl** had very different meanings.

As I noted, the word **boy** meant a young servant – usually a male servant – but the emphasis was more on the occupation than the gender. And believe it or not, the word **girl** could refer to a child of either gender. So if someone used the word **girl**, they could actually be referring to a boy or girl. Sometimes a boy was referred to as a 'knave girl.' That general usage was common for about a century. Even in the late 1300s, when Geoffrey Chaucer wrote the Canterbury Tales – he referred to children of both genders as "yonge gerles." But a short time later, the term started to be restricted to young females, and by the late 1400s, it was no longer used to refer to boys.

It is very likely that the word **girl** became limited to females as the word **boy** became more and more common in English throughout the 1300s. So as **boy** shifted from its sense as a servant to its sense as a young male, that allowed the word **girl** to become restricted to young females. So it appears that the words **boy** and **girl** developed in conjunction with each other.

I said that neither word is found in Old English, and the ultimate origin of both words is unknown. There are lots of theories about the origin of those two words, but none of them are generally accepted. For example, Swedish, Norwegian and the Low German dialects all have words similar to **girl** that can refer to a young child. So some scholars have speculated that the word **girl** is a Germanic word that was probably used in Old English, but it doesn't survive in any Old English documents. That's possible, but the connection between those words is uncertain. And if the word was native to English, the hard 'g' before the 'i' would have probably shifted to

a ‘y’ sound as tended to happen in early Old English. So English would have the word today as *yirl* instead of *girl*.

Along the same lines, Frisian and Dutch have words similar to *boy* that mean a servant or young man, so there could be an ancient connection to those words. French also had a word *embuie* which referred to someone shackled or chained. So that could also have been an influence. Again, there is no clear indication where the word *boy* came from.

All we know for certain is that it appears for the first time in *King Horn* – in the passage where he throws the boy or servant from a bridge. Returning to the poem, Horn makes his way to the wedding still in disguise. He approaches Rymenhild who doesn’t recognize him. She offers him a horn filled with wine. Horn slips the ring she gave him several years earlier into the drink. He then tells her to “drink to horn of horne” – literally “drink to Horn from the horn.” Rymenhild is confused by that request. She returns to her room and finds the ring in the horn.

She then sends for the strange man who asked her to drink from the horn. Horn arrives and reveals his true identity. He says:

I am Horn, thine own
Me, how can you not know?
I am Horn of Westernesse
In your arms, you me kiss.
They kissed each other
and made much bliss.

Now here’s the original Middle English:

Ihc am horn þin oʒe;
Ne canstu me noʒt knowe?
Ihc am horn of westernesse;
In armes þu me cusse.
Hi custe hem mid ywisse,
And makeden mucche blisse

Horn tells her that he has armed men with him, and they will prevent the wedding to the foreign king. Horn and his men then proceed to slay the wedding guests who had betrayed Horn earlier and forced his exile. He then marries Rymenhild. Afterwards, Horn and his Irish warriors return to Horn’s homeland of Sudene and they proceed to re-capture the kingdom that had been lost many years before. Horn becomes king of Sudene and Rymenhild becomes queen. So that’s the story in a nutshell.

As you can see, the poem has a lot of the same elements as epic poetry. There are lots of battles and lots of killing, but this poem had a central love theme that really drives the story. And for the first time, this type of Medieval romance was recorded in English.

Now around the same time that King Horn was being transcribed and preserved for history, a scribe at the Priory of Saint James, near Exeter, came across an old document. It was Papal edict dated about a century earlier to the year 1199. Now we don't know what the scribe was doing with that old document, but for some reason, he decided to write down something in brown ink on the back. And what he wrote down was a song – a love song. We don't really know where this song came from, but it was preserved in English on the back of the Papal edict in the last decade or so of the 1200s – so a short time after King Horn was written down. And this song is generally considered to be the oldest surviving love song in the English language.

The song is called “Bryd One Brere” – literally “Bird on a Briar.” But the bird in this song is not an actual bird. It is a woman. And in fact, that's a good place to begin the discussion of this song – with the historical link between the word *bird* and women. In modern British English, the word *bird* is still a commonly used slang term for a woman. And that connection goes back to early Middle English where the word *bird* was sometimes used to mean a maiden or girl.

I should also note that a parallel development took place in American English in the early 1900s. During that time, American English began using the word *chick* in a similar way. And today, *chick* is still sometimes used as a slang term for a girl or woman. I should also note that the word *hen* is sometimes used as a derogatory slang term for woman – especially an older woman. So this connection between birds and women is still common in the language today. But why did that connection develop?

Well, to understand how the word *bird* came to be used as a slang term for a woman, we have to consider the fact that early Middle English actually had three different words that were pronounced in a very similar way and could all be used to refer to a girl or woman.

Let's start with the word *bird* itself – meaning a type of fowl. The first thing to note about the word *bird* is that it was rendered two different ways in Old English and Middle English. Sometimes the ‘r’ came after the vowel like in Modern English. So we find the word spelled as B-I-R-D and probably pronounced something like /beard/. This was especially common in the north of England. But in the south, it was often spelled with the ‘r’ before the vowel. So there, we often find it spelled B-R-I-D or B-R-Y-D and pronounced something like /brid/. This type of variation where two sounds are sometimes reversed is actually quite common. And in this first English love song, the word was spelled both ways.

So we have *bird* rendered as either /beard/ or /brid/. Either way, it could mean a literal bird or it could be used as a slang term for a girl or woman.

Early Middle English also had a very similar word – *burde* – which was a poetic term for a woman or lady. So it is only found in poems, not in other documents. This word was usually spelled with a ‘u’ so it had a slightly different vowel sound. Despite the similarities with *bird*, most scholars think this word *burde* was a distinct word at the time.

And then we have another word – the word *bride* or *bryd*. Again, this in an Old English word, and we still have it today. And just like today, the word meant a woman about to be married or just married.

So all three of these words began with a ‘b’ and ended with a ‘d’ and had a ‘r’ sound in the middle. In that poetic term for a woman – *burde* – the ‘r’ came after the vowel. And in the word *bride* or *bryd*, the ‘r’ came before the vowel. And the word *bird* could be rendered either way – either with the ‘r’ before the vowel or after the vowel. So if *bird* was rendered one way, it was a virtual homonym for *bride*. And if it was rendered the other way, it was a virtual homonym for that poetic term for a woman.

So you can probably see how birds became associated with women – especially in poetry. It was very easy for a poet to play on those linguistic similarities. When talking about a bird, the audience would instinctively notice the similarity to those other words meaning a girl or woman. So whenever we come across a Middle English poem or song about a bird, there is always a chance that the bird symbolically represents a woman.

And that’s definitely the case here with “Bryd One Brere.” So let’s go through the lyrics of the song – first in Modern English then in the original Middle English. Then I’ll play you a version of the song so you can hear the melody. Here’s the Modern English translation:

Bird on a briar, bird, bird on a briar,
Mankind comes from love, thus love we crave.
Blissful bird, have pity on me,
Or dig, love, dig for me my grave.

I am so blithe, so bright, bird on briar,
When I see the handmaid in the hall:
She is white of limb, lovely, true,
She is fair and the flower of all.

Might I her at my will have,
Steadfast of love, lovely, true,
From my sorrow, she may save me
Joy and bliss would wear me new.

Now here are the original Middle English lyrics:

Bryd one brere, brid, brid one brere,
Kynd is come of love, love to crave
Blythful biryd, on me thu rewe
Or greyth, lef, greith thu me my grave.

Hic am so blithe, so bryhit, brid on brere,
Quan I se that hende in halle:

Yhe is whit of lime, loveli, trewe
Yhe is fayr and flur of alle.

Mikte ic hire at wille haven,
Stedefast of love, loveli, trewe,
Of mi sorwe yhe may me saven
Ioye and blisse were were me newe.

Now here's a version of the song performed with the original melody. This version comes from a collection called "English Medieval Songs" by Russell Oberlin.

So that's "Bird on a Briar" – the oldest known secular love song in the English language.

Throughout this episode we've explored the concept of romance and love. We've explored the origin of words like *boy* and *girl*, and *groom* and *bride*, and *spouse*. We've looked at the oldest love song in English. And we went through the oldest romance composed in English – a poem about a warrior and conqueror named Horn who was madly in love with his queen.

And that description of Horn also applies to the English king of this period – Edward I. He was also a warrior and conqueror who deeply loved his wife Eleanor.

But in the year 1290 – about 16 years into Edward's reign – Eleanor suddenly took ill at Nottinghamshire. A short time later, she died in Edward's arms. The decision was made to take her body to Westminster Abbey to be interred. As the procession slowly made its southward toward to London, a distraught Edward followed the procession. He erected a series of crosses to mark the places where her body rested as it made the journey. There were 12 crosses in all which became known as Eleanor Crosses, and some of them are still standing to this day. Edward's despair was reflected in his writings. He later wrote, "My harp is turned to mourning. In life I loved her dearly, nor can I cease to love her in death."

Edward and Eleanor had been inseparable for 36 years. And for the rest of his life, Edward struggled both personally and politically.

Scholars of this period often divide Edward's reign into two distinct periods. The first part of his reign was marked by political and military successes. But around the time that Eleanor died, all of that started to change. The latter part of Edward's reign was marked by policies that were inconclusive and a foreign policy that was met with rebellion – especially up in Scotland.

Next time, we'll continue to look at some of the developments during the first part of Edward's reign. That was the period when Edward enjoyed many successes, and during that time, he implemented a large number of administrative and legal reforms. And some of those reforms reflect interesting developments in the culture at the time, and those developments were also reflected in the language. So next time, we'll continue to explore how the events of this period shaped the English language. Until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.

EPISODE 110: DYED IN THE WOOL

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 110: Dyed in the Wool. In this episode, we’re going to look at an aspect of English society that was undergoing some major changes in the late 1200s, and that’s the wool and cloth industry. It may not seem like a sexy topic, but this was a period when Medieval fashions were changing. Clothing was becoming shorter and tighter and more closely tailored, and older articles of clothing were starting to be replaced by newer articles of clothing. In this episode, we’ll explore the important role of the English wool industry, and we’ll see how new innovations were changing both the production of cloth and the clothing that was made from that cloth. We’ll also examine how the Medieval wool and cloth industry shaped the English language.

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 let’s turn to this episode, and let’s begin by considering our modern words for basic articles of clothing. As we’ve seen before, many of our most basic words can be traced back to Old English. The first words that we learn as small children tend to be very old words – words that go back to the Anglo-Saxons. That’s the case with numbers, and family relations like *mother* and *father* and *brother* and *sister*. It’s true for basic parts of the body like *head*, *arm*, *foot*, *finger*, and so on. These words are part of our core vocabulary. We learn them very early on, and they tend to be very conservative – passing from one generation to the next over many centuries with very little change.

So based on that premise, you might think that most our words for basic clothing items also go back to Old English, but that isn’t really the case. Consider these simple words for the various items of clothing that we wear, starting with the feet and working our way up. We have *shoes*, *boots*, *socks*, *stockings*, *pants*, *jeans*, *trousers*, *shorts*, *skirt*, *belt*, *shirt*, *blouse*, *dress*, *gown*, *jacket*, *coat*, *sweater*, *cap* and *hat*. We can also add in undergarments like *underwear*, *panties* and *bra*. That’s twenty-two basic words for clothes that people wear today, but only four of those words are native words used by the Anglo-Saxons – *shirt*, *shoe*, *belt* and *hat*. All the others came from somewhere else or were created within the language at a later date.

Now we know from the earlier episodes about the Vikings that *shirt* and *skirt* originally referred to the same basic article of clothing. *Shirt* is the native English word, and *skirt* is the Norse version of the word used by the Vikings. The Norse word *skirt* was borrowed into English, and over time, the two words became distinct and came to refer to different articles of clothing. So *skirt* is a loanword. The Anglo-Saxons may have been familiar with the word, but it doesn’t appear in an English document until around the current point in our overall story – in the early 1300s.

Similarly, the words *sock* and *cap* are found in Old English documents, but that are actually early loanwords from Latin. So they are not native to English either.

Shorts, *sweater* and *slacks* and *stockings* are all based on Old English root words – *short*, *sweat*, *slack* and *stock*, respectively. But the word *stockings* wasn't coined until the late 1500s, and the three others didn't appear in English until the 1800s.

So if the words for basic items of clothing are part of our core vocabulary, why are so few of those words native to Old English? Well part of the answer is that clothing changes over time. And most of the articles of clothing I just mentioned didn't exist during the Anglo-Saxon period – at least not in the form that we recognize them today. So as fashions changed, words for old types of clothing tended to disappear from the language, and words for the new clothing items were either borrowed from elsewhere or were formed by coining brand new words from within the existing vocabulary.

If we think back to the clothing worn by the Greeks and the Romans, we tend to think of very loose-fitting clothing that was wrapped around the body – togas and loose-fitting gowns and tunics. These styles evolved in Europe during the early Middle Ages, but again, most clothing involved cloth that was draped over the body in a very relaxed and loose way. And part of the reason for that is because people didn't have a good and efficient way to secure the clothing to their bodies.

Take the tunic for example. It was probably the most basic article of clothing in Europe in the Middle Ages. It was essentially a large piece of cloth with a hole in the top for the head and secured around the waist with a belt. Both men and women wore tunics, and in fact there was relatively little difference between the clothing of men and women – especially basic clothing like this that was typically worn by peasants and workers. The legs were usually covered by some type of stocking – not pants as we know them today. A type of basic pants existed, but most people wore a leg wraps or stockings. And again, both men and women dressed in this manner. If it was cold, the person might wear a cloak or mantle on top of the other clothing. Again, this was usually just a large piece of cloth worn around the neck, and sometimes secured with a brooch. So people wore these large, loose-fitting clothes, and they didn't usually have access to any type of tailored clothing that fit the contours of the body.

But all of that started to change around the current point in our story from the mid-1200s into the early 1300s. One of the major reasons for that change was a brand new innovation – the button. Believe it or not, the simple button that we use all the time changed fashion in Medieval Europe. It made its first appearance in Western Europe in the mid-1200s. The innovation soon spread to England as well.

English-speakers borrowed the name of this new innovation from French, but the ultimate root word is Germanic. The word *button* is actually cognate with the native English word *beat*, as well as the Germanic word *butt* as in to 'butt heads.' The root word meant 'to thrust or strike or push violently,' and for this little clothing innovation, it referred to the fact that the button was pushed through a small opening to secure the clothing.

The word **button** was first recorded in an English document composed around the year 1320, so by that point, buttons had become so common that the word had entered the English language and was being used in English documents.

So you may be wondering why the button itself was such a big deal. Well, it fundamentally changed fashion in Europe. Up until this point, clothing tended to hang loosely from the shoulders, but now, clothes could be tailored and fitted. Cloth could be cut to fit the shape and contours of the human body, and it could be easily fastened and secured with a few buttons. That meant that clothing started to become tighter and more form fitting and more modern. Rather than large loose-fitting tunics that covered most or all of the body, the new clothing styles meant that people started to wear specific articles of clothing that were made for specific parts of the body. This fashion change allowed for the creation of shirts and pants and coats that were much more modern in appearance and style. The changes didn't occur overnight, but they were initiated with the arrival of the button.

As I said, buttons allowed clothing to become tighter and more snug, but it also made it easy for people to put on and take off those clothes with relative ease. So rather than clothing being wrapped around or draped over the body, people now started to speak of 'putting on' their clothes – referring to the process of placing several different clothing items on the body and fastening them one at a time. In fact, the phrase 'put on' in this sense of 'putting on clothes' first appeared in the 1300s.

Today we might also say that we are 'dressing' or 'getting dressed.' Well the word **dress** has an interesting history, and it's modern sense is directly related to this relatively new process of 'putting on' clothes one piece at a time. Like so many of the loanwords from this period, **dress** was borrowed from French and Latin, and it can be found in English for the first time in the early 1300s. But the original sense of the word didn't have anything to do with clothing. It meant 'to set something right or to put something in order or to prepare something.' We still have some of that original sense in the word **address**. When you 'address a problem,' your goal is to work through the problem and fix it. Well, by the 1400s, the word **dress** had evolved from a general sense of putting things in order to a more restricted sense of putting clothing in order. In other words, it came to mean the process of laying out specific articles of clothing and then putting them on one piece at a time. So that gave us the modern sense of 'getting dressed.' By the way, it wasn't until the 1600s that the word **dress** came to refer to an actual piece of clothing – a lady's gown or frock.

So buttons not only changed the nature of clothing, they also changed the process of getting dressed, and that gave us the modern sense of the verb '**to dress**.'

As clothes started to become more tailored to the contours of the human body, men's and women's fashions started to diverge. Rather than everyone wearing loose tunics, men and women started to wear much more distinct clothing. This may also help to explain how **shirt** and **skirt** became distinct. As we know, those are just the Old English and Old Norse versions of the same word. The words were coined at a time when both men and women wore loose fitting tunics that were very similar. But thanks to this new fashion, large flowing tunics started to be

replaced with separate upper and lower garments. And *shirt* gradually became reserved for the upper garment, and *skirt* was reserved for the lower loose-fitting garment.

I should note that there is an analogy here with the words *cape* and *cap*. Both of those words come from the Latin word *cappa* which meant a loose fitting cloak with a hood. But over time, *cape* became restricted to a loose fitting cloak worn below the neck, and *cap* became restricted to a type of hat worn on top of the head. So over time, as fashion evolved, words sometimes became distinct to account for the changing style of clothing.

Now these fashion changes tended to affect the nobles and the affluent first. They were the ones who could afford the new buttons and the new styles of clothing. Peasants continued to wear the traditional clothing for a while, but even their clothing changed over the next couple of centuries.

Regardless of fashion, both peasants and nobles did have one thing in common when it came to clothes and that was the fabric that was used for most clothing items during this period. That fabric was wool. And you can't really appreciate this history of Medieval England without considering the important role that wool played at the time.

I've alluded to the English wool trade a few times in the podcast, but let's take a closer look at why wool was so important to England during this period.

As you probably know, wool is made from the hair of sheep, and sheep were very common in England even during the Anglo-Saxon period. But the engine that drove the English wool industry was really located across the Channel in Flanders – basically part of modern-day Belgium and the Netherlands. A massive cloth industry had developed there in the Middle Ages – really the most important cloth-making center in Europe. And to produce all of that cloth, they needed wool. England became the primary supplier of wool to Flanders. So there was a symbiotic relationship between the two regions. Each one was dependent on the other, and that would have major political consequences as we'll soon see.

Wool emerged as England's primary export, and the English economy made lots of money through this lucrative wool trade. It was so important to the English economy and English society that, even today, the seat of the Lord High Chancellor in the House of Lords is a large square bag of wool called the 'woolsack.' It reflects how important wool was to the English economy in the Middle Ages.

As I noted, wool required sheep, and by the year 1300, the English countryside had about 10 million sheep, and they were producing about 40,000 sacks of wool a year, some of it being sold to Italian merchants in Italy, but most of it earmarked for Flanders.

And speaking of *earmarked*, that's another term that can be traced back to the sheep and wool industry. You might remember from an earlier episode that it was common in the Anglo-Saxon period for sheep and other animals to graze on large fields maintained by the village. This was common land, so everyone used it. But that meant that a 'sheep herder' – or *shepherd* for short – had to keep track of his own sheep. One way to do that was to notch the ears of the sheep. Each

shepherd or farm had their own unique mark. Those notches were called earmarks. And by the late 1500s, the term had been extended to any type of identifying mark. And soon thereafter, the word *earmark* started to be used as a verb with its modern meaning ‘to mark or set something aside for a particular purpose.’

By the current point in our story, a lot of farmers and shepherds were maintaining their own land for grazing rather than using the common land. In order to keep the sheep from grazing beyond that private land, farmers had to construct barriers or fences to keep the sheep in place. Wooden fences were sometimes used, but the most common type of fence was natural. Most farms used hedges to mark the boundaries of the property. These hedges kept the animals in and kept everyone else’s animals out.

Scholars of this period note that the increase in hedges marked a societal shift from a communal society to a society in which private and exclusive property was increasingly the norm. But hedges didn’t always work. Sometimes the animals got out and had to be tracked down and returned. So many sheep farmers had a designated person called a ‘hedge warden’ to keep an eye on the hedges and the animals. Over time, that term ‘hedge warden’ was shortened. In the same way that ‘shire reeve’ was shortened to *sheriff*, and ‘sheep herder’ was shortened to *shepherd*, the term ‘hedge warden’ was shortened to *hayward*. The ‘hay’ part of *hayward* didn’t have anything to do with hay. It was a shortened version of the word *hedge*. This contracted word actually appeared for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse. And I mention the job of the hayward for a couple of reasons.

First, it is the ultimate source of the surnames *Hayward* and *Haywood*. Surnames were relatively new at this point, but they were starting to become common. And many early surnames that were based on a person’s job or profession. And the surnames Hayward and Haywood were based on the common job of the hayward in the Middle Ages.

The other reason why I mention the role of the hayward is because it helps to explain the meaning behind a very well-known nursery rhyme. If you’re familiar with the nursery rhyme “Little Boy Blue,” and you’ve ever wondered what it was about, well Little Boy Blue was a hayward. As was common at the time, his job was to keep an eye on the animals, and if the animals got out, his had a horn which he could blow to inform others to come and help retrieve the animals. Here’s a common version of the nursery rhyme:

Little Boy Blue, come blow your horn,
The sheep's in the meadow, the cow's in the corn.
But where is the boy, who looks after the sheep?
He's under a haystack, he's fast asleep.
Will you wake him? No, not I,
For if I do, he's sure to cry.

So Little Boy Blue was a hayward, and *hayward* literally meant ‘hedge warden.’ Now today, we still use the word *hedge* to mean a row of bushes, but we also use it as a verb when we ‘hedge our bets’ or you might make a particular investment as a ‘hedge against inflation.’ It has a sense of protection or a defense against a risk. The financial sense also created the term ‘hedge fund’ for a specific type of financial investment. So how did a row of bushes become associated with money and finance? Well, it had to do with the sense of protection that was afforded by hedges. Hedges provided shelter for birds and other small animals. And as I noted, hedges not only kept a landholder’s animals in, it also kept everyone else’s animals out. So there was always a defensive or protective aspect to hedges. And by the late 1300s, the word *hedge* was being used a verb meaning ‘to protect or secure against a loss.’ And that helped to provide the connection between hedges and financial investments.

And speaking of financial investments, we’ve seen that one of the biggest financial investments in Medieval England was a large flock of sheep. They not only provided milk and cheese, they also provided wool, and that’s where most of the money was made.

Now as I’ve noted before, the word *sheep* is an Old English word, but it wasn’t the only word for the animal. In Old English, a sheep was sometimes called a *wether*. It specifically referred to a male sheep and usually a castrated male sheep. It was common for the shepherd to put a bell around the neck of one of these castrated sheep so that he could lead the flock. So this sheep or *wether* became known as a *bellwether*. The *bellwether* was usually the sheep at the front or head of the flock. And over time, it came to mean anything that signals future trends. Today, a *bellwether* is a sign of things to come.

So if you are a ‘hedge’ fund manager, you might ‘ earmark’ certain funds for investment in a certain new industry, and you might invest some of those funds in a ‘bellwether’ stock which is stock in a company considered to be a leading indicator of that industry. As you can see, these old sheep words still have financial implications to this day.

Now, not all sheep were created equal. English sheep tended to produce a very fine wool which was why it was such high demand on the continent. The fine wool was necessary to produce a high quality cloth. So when the sheep were sheared, the wool was bundled in what were called sacks, and much of it was sold to foreign merchants.

Some of the wool was retained for local cloth-makers, but up to this point, England’s cloth-making industry was very small and limited to local consumption. For the most part, the wool was sold to Flanders where it was turned into cloth, and then England would turn around and buy the finished cloth from the Flemish cloth-makers.

Again, this meant that England and Flanders were tied together at the hip. England depended on the export of wool to Flanders, and Flanders depended in the import of wool from England. But that didn’t mean the two regions always saw eye-to-eye. Flanders imposed customs duties on English merchants, and in the year 1270, a dispute arose over the payment of those duties. The Count of Flanders took the drastic step of imposing an embargo on English wool, effectively shutting down the import of wool from across the Channel. It was an attempt to force the issue

over those unpaid duties, but the matter remained unresolved for several years. Increasingly, English farmers sold their wool to Italian merchants who used it for the cloth-making industry in Italy.

This was the state of things when Edward I became king in 1274. You might remember from the last episode that Edward was on his way home from Crusade when he found out that his father had died in England, and that he was destined to become the new king.

I mentioned that Edward took his time returning to England. It actually took about two years for him to make his way back. Well, part of the reason for that delay is because Edward was attending to other matters on his return. And one of those matters was that embargo on English wool in Flanders. On his way home, Edward met with the Count of Flanders, and together, they resolved the trade dispute. The Flemish market was once again opened to English wool. So when Edward finally arrived back in England, he enjoyed the support of the nobles and wool merchants who depended in that trade.

As soon as he was crowned king, Edward called his first Parliament. And Edward followed Simon de Montfort's example by calling representatives of the towns and cities, as well as the merchants. So commoners joined the nobles at the Parliament. And there was a good reason for that.

As was the case with his father and grandfather, one of Edward's biggest concerns was money. Edward was heavily indebted to the Italian merchants from whom he had borrowed large sums of money before he became king. Crusades were not cheap. Nor was the general lifestyle of an English prince. So like his predecessors, Edward needed money, and that meant new taxes. But he also knew the problems that his father Henry and grandfather John had encountered when they pushed the barons too far with taxes. He didn't want to risk another baronial revolt by having his first act as king to be a large tax on the baron's lands. So he did something else. He imposed a tax on wool exports. The wool merchants didn't really object because Edward had just negotiated an end to that wool embargo in Flanders. And maybe this was all part of Edward's master plan because Edward got his wool tax with virtually no objection. In the end, even with the tax, the wool producers were in a whole lot better shape than they had been before Edward came to power. So Edward got his tax, and the wool merchants got entry to the Flanders market again.

The tax was relatively modest – a half a mark on every sack of wool exported. That was 7 shillings and 6 pence. This became known as the 'Great and Ancient Custom,' and it was really the beginning of the long-term policy of taxing exports. By the mid-1300s, all goods imported and exported were taxed. And this shows how the feudal system was eroding. Rather than traditional feudal taxes on barons and nobles and other landholders, we see the English crown looking to tax trade and commerce. This reflects a break from tradition, and it shows the rising power and wealth of the merchant class as opposed to the traditional nobility. For the rest of the Middle Ages, the taxes on imports and exports were the crown's largest source of income.

So with the Flanders market re-opened, English wool was once again exported across the Channel in massive quantities. Once the wool was received, it was then processed into cloth. So let's consider that process. The steps were basically the same whether they were done for the local market in England or for the international market in Flanders.

The first step was to sort through the wool and divide it into three grades – fine, medium and coarse. The wool was then washed in lye to remove grease. Then it was spread on boards to dry. Soil and other particles were then removed by hand or cut out with shears.

Now at any point in the process, the wool could be dyed. It could be dyed at this point when the wool was still unprocessed, or it could be dyed after it was spun into yarn. But most of time, it was dyed at the very end after it had been woven into cloth. The dyes sometimes faded and gave up their color over time, but if the wool was dyed at the beginning of the process – before it was spun into yarn and before it was made into cloth – it tended to hold its color better and longer. The color was more firmly fixed and didn't tend to break down or lessen over time. That basic fact gave us the modern phrase 'dyed in the wool.' Today, it usually refers to someone who has very strong beliefs that are unwavering or unchanging. So you might have a dyed in the wool Chicago Bears fan, or a dyed in the wool conservative or liberal. They hold onto their beliefs and passions in the same way that dyed wool holds onto its color.

Now whether or not the wool was dyed during this initial stage (and it usually wasn't), the next step in the process was called carding or combing. When the wool was cut from the sheep, it consisted of clumps and curls that had to be straightened out. So this step literally involved a type of combing procedure where the wool was disentangled and pulled into long straight fibers.

Once the wool fibers were prepared in this way, they could then be spun into thread or yarn. Traditionally, this was done by hand with a couple of instruments called a distaff and a spindle. A distaff was basically a stick with wool gathered at the top. The wool was pulled out in long strands and gathered around the spindle which literally spun and twisted the wool forming a tightly-wound thread or yarn. But around the current point in our story, a new invention allowed spinners to produce a lot more yarn much quicker. That invention was the spinning wheel.

The spinning wheel was first introduced to Europe in the late 1200s. It may have originated in the Near East because the oldest known illustration of a spinning wheel is from Baghdad in the early 1200s. The device quickly made its way to Europe because the first references to it in Europe occur around the year 1280 – so just about six years after Flanders market was re-opened to English wool.

At first there was resistance to the spinning wheel because it produced a lower-quality thread that was rough and uneven. And that was the context for the first references to the device in Europe. Like most professions, spinners were organized into guilds, and guild regulations from this period banned the use of the spinning wheel because it produced lower quality thread. But after some modifications were made to the device, those problems were solved. Soon, the quality of the thread produced by the spinning wheel was just as good as that produced by the old-fashioned distaff and spindle. It also meant that the thread could be spun much faster and more efficiently.

Now this was a period in which many professions were largely restricted to one gender or the other. And the spinning of wool into thread or yarn was very much a woman's profession. In fact, it was one of the few careers that welcomed women. Those women were called *spinsters*.

Now they weren't called *spinnners* because the '-er' ending was traditionally a masculine ending. In Old English, '-er' was used to indicate a male worker, and '-ster' was used to indicate a female worker. So theoretically, a *spinner* would have been a male worker and a *spinster* would have been a female worker. But since males spinners were very rare, almost all people involved in this profession were *spinsters*.

Now younger women who had this job often got married and had children, and they stopped doing this work at some point at least as a career. But women who didn't get married or have children usually stayed on and continued to spin well into old age. So it was very common to find older unmarried women engaged in this profession. And over time, the word *spinster* became synonymous with older unmarried women, and that gave us the modern sense of the word *spinster* as an old maid.

Now I should note that the '-ster' ending found in a word like *spinster* has undergone some changes over time. And some of those changes were underway in early Middle English. Today, we still use that old ending, but it is no longer restricted to women. We use it in words like *gangster*, *shyster*, *mobster*, *prankster* and *pollster* – none of which are limited to any particular gender. So what happened?

Well, part of the answer is that that old feminine '-ster' ending started to lose its association with females in Middle English and started to become more gender-neutral. This happened first in the north of England. It didn't really reach the south until the end of the Middle English period. At the same time, English was also in the process of adopting the '-ess' ending from French which is the ending we tend to use today as a feminine ending for a particular job or profession. So we might have an *actress*, or a *seamstress*, or a *princess*. That ending can ultimately be traced back to Greek, and it had passed through Latin into French, which is where English started to acquire it. You might remember that one of the first French loanwords that we saw way back in the Peterborough Chronicle was *countess*. So this ending became very familiar to English speakers during the Middle English period. And over time, that ending really replaced the more traditional '-ster' ending that had been used in Old English. And *spinster* is one of the few words with the '-ster' ending that still retains its original feminine sense.

So spinsters played an essential role in the cloth-making process – turning raw wool into thread or yarn. Once the thread and yarn were produced, the next step was weaving those materials into cloth. Traditionally, this was a job that could be handled by either gender, and that explains the origin of two very common surnames – *webber* and *webster*. A *webber* was technically a male weaver, and a *webster* was a female weaver with that feminine '-ster' ending. In Old English, a *web* was something that was woven. And of course, that original sense still survives in a term like *spider web*, but it could also refer to cloth, and webbers and websters turned thread and yarn into cloth.

That *Webster* surname is kind of important to the history of English because it was the surname of Noah Webster who produced the early dictionary that really shaped the beginning of American English. So even today, Webster's is a synonym for dictionary in the United States.

Over time, the term *weaver* was also applied to this profession. And of course, that was the origin of another common surname – *Weaver*.

Now once the weavers were finished, there was actual piece of cloth, but it wasn't ready for the market yet. The cloth was loose and not really fit for making clothes. So the next step was called fulling. This is what actually produced finished cloth. Fulling involved the soaking of the cloth in a vat or trough. Workers then walked on the cloth in the vat to get the desired product. The water in the vat was mixed with a substance called 'fuller's earth.' That was a type of fine mineral or clay that helped to cleanse the cloth. It was also common for cloth makers to add urine to the mix. So the people who had to walk in those vats had a dirty and unpopular job. Once again, this job gave rise to a couple of common surnames. The surname *Fuller* is derived from this job, as is the surname *Walker* because these people were sometimes called 'walkers.'

The fulling process matted and shrank the fabric and pressed it together. It made the cloth harder and firmer. It also cleaned the cloth by removing oil and grease.

The cloth was then hung to dry on a wooden frame called a *tenter*. This allowed the cloth to dry and also stretched the cloth. The tenter had a series of hooks, and the cloth was hung from those hooks. Now given that this was one of the last steps in the cloth-making process, most cloth makers were eager for the cloth to dry as quickly as possible so they could get it on the market or get it over to the dyers who would add color the cloth before it was sold. It was probably hard for the cloth makers to wait for this process to be completed. And the cloth itself was pulled and stretched causing tension in the fabric. And that led to another common expression – 'to be on tenterhooks' – meaning to be tense and held in suspense. So if you ever find yourself on tenterhooks, know you know that it's an expression that goes back to the Medieval cloth industry.

By the way, the technical term is *tenterhooks* with a T, not 'tenderhooks' with a D. The phrase is commonly rendered as 'tenderhooks' in part because American English tends to convert a 't' sound in the middle of a word into a 'd' sound. And also because most people are familiar with the word *tender*, but they've probably never heard of the word *tenter*.

Now when the cloth was finally dry, there were often little fuzzy bits of wool on the surface of the cloth. These little pieces of wool were called the nap, and they had to be sheared off in order for the cloth to have a smooth surface. The person who sheared or cut off the nap was called a 'shear man' which actually gave us the common surname *Sherman*. Now outside of the cloth industry, we don't tend to use the word *nap* very much, but it has produced a slang term that is somewhat common in American English. That's the word *nappy*. Today, it's usually used as a derogatory term for frizzy hair, but it's ultimately derived from the rough surface of cloth called *nap*.

Now at this point, the cloth typically still had its natural color. As I noted, dye could theoretically be added at any step in the process, but it was usually left undyed until the very end. So this cloth was still in a somewhat pure and natural state. And sometimes it was sold as is without dye.

A common French word for cloth was *drap* or *draperie* which gave use the word *drapery*. And that word appeared in English around the year 1300. And over time, it even became a verb ‘*to drape*’ meaning to cover with a cloth or have the appearance of being covered with a cloth. Well, it appears that English speakers sometimes referred to this natural undyed cloth with that same French term – *drap*. This drap cloth was dull and lacked any real color. And it appears that drap cloth evolved into the word *drab* by the early Modern English period. When the word *drab* first appeared as a distinct word, it was almost always used in reference to this type of cloth. So today, when we describe something as *drab*, we’re really referring back to the color of undyed cloth.

So that type of cloth typically required one final step – the dyeing process to add color. Dyeing was a specialized trade regulated by guilds. In fact, most dyers only worked with one particular type of dye and one particular color.

Dyes could be made from lots of substances. Some were made from animals, some were derived from plants, others were acquired from minerals. Some dyers made their own dyes, but many of them purchased dyes made by other experts. In fact, some of the dyes were very difficult to obtain. And of course, expert dyers could produce a large variety of colors – both basic as well as subtle shades and blends.

I noted in an earlier episode about the Medieval book trade that our words for primary colors were much more limited in early Middle English. There were native Old English words like *white*, *black*, *red*, *yellow*, and *green*, and I noted in that episode that words for those colors entered most languages in that same basic order. English was no exception, but English also had the word *purple* which had been borrowed from Latin and had a close association with the Roman Emperors and early Medieval royalty. So up to this point, English had words for most of our primary colors, but not all of them. English still did not have the words *blue* or *orange* yet. And the word *brown* wasn’t being used to refer to a specific color. Well, that started to change around the current point in our story because it was finally time for blue to make its appearance – at least time for the word *blue* to make its appearance.

The word *blue* is first attested in English in a document that dates to around the year 1300. The document is a poem called “The Infancy of Jesus.” It is contained in one of the manuscripts that also had one of the original copies of King Horn which I discussed in the last episode. When the word *blue* is used in that poem, it’s specifically used in reference to cloth. Here’s the line from the poem:

Pis on schal beo fair blu cloth, þis oþur grene. (Which translates as. . .)
This one shall be fair blue cloth, this other green.

So where did the word *blue* come from, and why did it come into English at this point? Well, the word comes from French, but beyond that, the history is a little unclear. Some sources suggest that French inherited the word from Late Latin because Late Latin had the word *blavus* meaning blue and *blavius* specifically meaning blue cloth. These Latin words appear to have been borrowed from the Germanic languages.

Other sources suggest that French borrowed the word *blue* from the Franks, and that provides the Germanic source of the word. Other than noting an ultimate Germanic source, and the fact that the word *blue* is cognate with the word *black*, it's difficult to say much definitive about the history of word prior to this point.

Prior to borrowing the word *blue*, English had used native words like *hæwan* and *woad*, but those words usually referred to pigments and dyes. In fact, woad was actually a plant which produced a blue dye. Even though woad was common as a blue dye, the blue cloth it produced tended to have a grayish washed-out tone. It was mostly worn by peasants, and it wasn't highly valued.

Another blue dye was indigo, and it could produce a more desirable color of blue. But indigo came from a plant found in India which is why the Romans had called it *indigo* – actually *indicum*. It produced a brilliant and concentrated blue color, but the form in which it was exported was insoluble, and it was mostly used by painters. European cloth-makers had a tough time figuring out how to use indigo to dye clothing with that color. It was actually Marco Polo that helped to solve this problem. His book contained a first-hand account of how indigo was used to dye wool from his travels through India. Based on that description, dyers in Venice started to use indigo to produce a much more vibrant blue cloth.

In the rest of Europe, dyers also started to figure out how to produce a much more stable bright blue with their native dyes. This color was soon adopted by the nobility, and it appears that this more vibrant color became known as *blue* as opposed to older terms like *hæwan* and *woad* which were more associated with a duller color. Over time, the word *blue* pushed those other words out of the way leaving *blue* as the primary word for that color in English today.

So that's blue, but let me mention a couple of things about the color red. In order to dye the cloth red, dyers would sometimes use a substance called madder. It was derived from a plant that was grown in Europe. But many dyers preferred a different substance to get a bright red color, and that substance was kermes. Kermes specifically referred to a small insect with worm-like larvae found in the Mediterranean. The larvae were used to make the dye. Kermes actually gave us the word *crimson* meaning a deep red color. *Crimson* was borrowed from French and Latin in the 1400s.

Since kermes was an imported dye, it was quite expensive. So dyers sometimes used it for the finest quality woolen cloth which was called *scarlet*. Now today, *scarlet* refers to a bright red color, but originally it referred to a type of fine woolen cloth dyed with kermes. The word *scarlet* in this original sense as a type of fine cloth first appeared around the current point in our story in the mid-1200s. Now again, the word originally refer to cloth – not color. Kermes produced a

vibrant red cloth, but sometimes other dyes were added in, like woad. So you could actually have a purple scarlet or even a bluish scarlet, but most of the time scarlet cloth was produced without other dyes leaving that pure red color. Over time, the cloth was so closely associated with that bright red color that the word *scarlet* came to refer to the color itself.

So once the dyers finished coloring the cloth, the process was essentially complete. The cloth was then brushed, pressed and folded. And from there, it hit the market and was available to buyers.

The cloth could appear in a variety of textures and thicknesses. One type of thick woolen cloth called *carpet* was used for a variety of purposes. It was mostly used as a bedcover or tablecloth. Some religious orders even used it as a garment. Over the next couple of centuries, people started to place these thick bedspreads and tablecloths on stone floors to protect against the cold. And that gave us the modern sense of the word *carpet* as a floor covering. The word *carpet* meaning a thick cloth was borrowed from French and Latin, and it's found in Latin documents in England in the late 1200s, and it appears in an English document for the first time in the mid-1300s. So *carpet* is another word that can be traced back to this period.

I noted that carpet cloth was commonly used for bedspreads and tablecloths, and that helps to explain a very common expression using the word *carpet*. If someone is in trouble, they might be called "on the carpet." Well, originally, that phrase referred to a council table covered with carpet cloth. When a matter was under discussion or consideration, it was done "on the carpet" meaning 'at the council table covered with a carpet tablecloth.' So if you're called "on the carpet," you're really just being called to the table.

Now speaking of tablecloths, we have another group of related words that show how versatile cloth was in the Middle Ages. Those words are *map*, *apron*, and *napkin*. Believe it or not, all three words come from a single Latin word that meant cloth. The original Latin word was *mappa*. It meant cloth, and in a time before paper was common and when parchment was very expensive, it was common to use pieces of cloth to draw directions or other topographical features, and that ultimately gave us the word *map*. But that word was a relatively late borrowing in the 1500s.

Now the same Latin root word passed into early French, and the 'm' sound switched to a 'n' sound in the process. It produced the French word *nappe* which meant a tablecloth. English borrowed this word in the 1300s and added the English ending '-kin' to the end. This was an English ending that was used to indicate something small. And the result was the English word *napkin* which literally meant a small tablecloth, but it came to mean a towel or cloth used at the table to wipe one's face and hands. The connection between tablecloths and napkins becomes more apparent if you realize that it was common in the Middle Ages for tablecloths to hang long on the side of the table where people ate. That way, they could just use the excess tablecloth to wipe their faces and hands. So the tablecloth was like one big communal napkin. But that custom gave way to personal napkins over time – thankfully. So English reduced the French *nappe* or tablecloth to English *napkin*.

And French actually had the same idea. It also created a variation of *nappe* to mean smaller cloth, but rather than adding the English ‘-kin’ to the end, they added a French ending which converted *nappe* into *naperon*. Again, this new word had a sense of a smaller cloth used in a kitchen or dining area. Within French itself, it also came to be mean napkin over time, but the word was borrowed into English around the current point in our story in the early 1300s. And within English, the word came to refer to a small piece of cloth worn around the body to protect the clothing from stains while cooking. Of course, we know that word today as *apron*. So how *naperon* lose its N and become *apron*.

Well, it was a process I’ve mentioned before where people got confused by the article at the front of the word. In early Middle English, the word *an* started to be used a generic article before nouns. And it was soon shortened to just *a* when it appeared before nouns that began with a consonant. So ‘an apple’ and ‘a dog.’ But people sometimes got confused when a word began with an N – especially a new word like *naperon*. When people said ‘a naperon’ were they saying ‘a naperon’ or ‘an aperon’? Did the N go with the article or the noun? Over time, this confusion led people to shift the N over to the article, and ‘a *naperon*’ became ‘an *apron*.’

So English ended up with the words *napkin* and *apron* from a word that originally meant tablecloth. I should also mention that the word *towel* was also borrowed into English during this same period. It was borrowed from French, and first appears in English in the late 1200s.

So up to this point, we’ve seen how the wool industry was an important economic engine for England, and it was also the source of many new English words. And as we’ve seen, England mostly provided the wool as a raw material while the cloth itself was made elsewhere in places like Flanders or Italy. England did have some small-scale cloth-makers, but they mostly sold to local buyers. They didn’t really produce cloth for export, but that started to change during the 1300s. And there were several factors that contributed to that change.

One factor was a new invention – the waterwheel and water-powered machinery. Traditionally, the cloth-making process was done almost entirely by hand with the help of a few simple tools. And that was because that was all people had to work with. That started to change with the introduction of the spinning wheel which I discussed earlier. The spinning wheel increased the production of thread and yarn, but the big change took place when the power of rivers and streams was applied to the fulling process.

As I noted earlier, the fulling process was the part that took place near the end when the cloth was soaking in a trough and people called ‘fullers’ or ‘walkers’ had to walk on the cloth for an extended period of time. The material in the trough was dirty, and it was not a fun job at all. But by the late 1200s, people had started to harness the power of the rivers with waterwheels. An axle extending from the waterwheel could reach into a building where a series of pistons or hammers would raise and lower as the wheel turned. Originally, this type of mill was used to grind corn or wheat or other grains into flour, but in the 1200s, it started to be used for the fulling process. Now, rather than having people walk over the cloth, those water-driven pistons and hammers could do all the work. That meant that a lot more cloth could go through the fulling process much quicker.

England had rivers and streams that were perfectly suited for these types of fulling mills, and they soon spread across the English countryside, especially in the west and in the north. Again these were called fulling mills, but in the west country, they were sometimes called ‘tucking mills.’ And in the north, they were sometimes called ‘walk mills.’

The first known fulling mill was built in Yorkshire in the late 1100s, but they didn’t start to become common until the mid and late 1200s. And by the 1300s, they were allowing England to produce enough native cloth that the country actually started to export the finished material.

Another factor that contributed to the growth of the English cloth industry was the arrival of immigrants from Flanders in the 1300s. Political problems in Flanders led some to seek employment across the Channel in England’s burgeoning cloth industry. The English crown welcomed the immigrants, and that also played a role in the development of the industry.

In fact, the founder of the first recorded textile factory in Bristol was a Fleming named Thomas Blanket. He produced a thick woolen cloth that people could put on their bed to keep warm in the cold winter months. And it was once a commonly-accepted etymology that Thomas Blanket gave his name to that cloth which became the modern word *blanket*. In actuality, the word *blanket* is found in English for the first time around the year 1300 – several decades before Thomas’s arrival in England. It’s derived from the French word *blanc* meaning ‘white.’ The word originally meant ‘white wool stuffing.’ So Thomas Blanket probably took his surname from that material rather than the other way around. As we’ve seen, lots of surnames were derived from various aspects of the cloth industry.

Now even though the word *blanket* was not apparently borrowed from a Flemish immigrant, several other English words related to cloth were borrowed from Dutch during this period. And that was likely due to the overall influences of the Flanders cloth industry, as well as the many new Flemish arrivals in England in the 1300s – some of whom spoke Dutch.

One of the new words borrowed from early Dutch during this period was the word *spool* which was an item essential to spinsters. More notably, English borrowed several Dutch words during this period related to packing and shipping, and it is likely that much of that packing and shipping involved wool and cloth. Those other new Dutch loanwords include the word *pack*, as well as *bundle*, and the word *bale* – B-A-L-E – as in a large bundle of something like a ‘bale of hay’ or a ‘bale of wool.’

English also borrowed another Dutch word which is somewhat relevant here. The word wasn’t actually borrowed into English until the 1500s, but I would be remiss if I didn’t mention it here. Do you remember earlier when I was discussing the French word *nappe* meaning tablecloth, and I mentioned that English borrowed that word and gave it a common English suffix at the time which was ‘-kin’? That suffix meant ‘little or small.’ And it gave us the word *napkin* meaning a small cloth used at the table.

Well, Dutch had essentially the same Germanic suffix, and it was added to the word *man* to create the Dutch word *manikin* which meant ‘little man.’ This word actually entered English in the 1500s. The spelling varied, but it was usually something like M-A-N-I-K-I-N. Of course, the word also passed into French, and that’s where we got the modern spelling of the word – M-A-N-N-E-Q-U-I-N. The clothing industry still relies upon mannequins to display its apparel, but the word actually comes from Dutch – not French.

So we’ve seen that the English cloth industry was spurred on by the rise of fulling mills and Flemish immigrants. But there was also another factor. And that takes us back to Edward I.

As I noted earlier, one of Edward’s first acts as king was to impose a modest tax on the export of every sack of English wool. At the time, no one really objected because the tax was small and because Edward had just negotiated an end to the embargo on English wool in Flanders.

Well, all good things come to an end. The tax on wool proved too lucrative to resist. And by the last decade of the 1200s, war with France loomed on the horizon, and Edward needed money. So he decided to return to the well. In 1294, Edward ordered the seizure of all the wool in England. Its release was only permitted upon the payment of a tax in the amount of 40 shillings per sack. The old customs tax had only been about one-sixth of that amount. Whereas the wool producers and merchants tolerated the first tax, this one was called the ‘maltolt’ – a French term that meant ‘the evil takings.’ It could mean either the government’s evil taking of their wool in the first place or the government’s evil taking of their money in order to get the wool back. Either way, there wasn’t much they could do about it other than pay. The tax was lifted a few years later, but it set a precedent that Edward successors also tried to exploit. As English wool growers found themselves having to pay more and more to export wool, it became cheaper to sell it to native cloth makers. So even though the wool merchants weren’t happy about it, the crown’s increasing taxes on wool exports actually bolstered the growth of the English cloth industry in the 1300s.

I wanted to conclude this episode with Edward’s changing attitude towards the wool tax because it marks an important period which I want to explore in the next episode. As I noted, Edward became more desperate for taxes from wool because war appeared to be looming on the horizon. He had ambitions in Scotland which he wanted to pursue, but he also had lands in southern France that he was trying to hold onto in the face of renewed challenges from the King of France. The French challenge led Edward to appeal to English nationalism in a way that was really unheard of since the Norman Conquest. Edward told his people that the King of France intended to wipe the English language from the face of the earth. It was an appeal to the English language as a national rallying cry. That’s something we might expect from Alfred the Great, not some Plantagenet king who claims to the throne flowed from some Norman conqueror. But it shows how much of a comeback English had made by the turn of the century.

So next time, we'll look at the threat that led Edward to make this appeal. And we'll also look at the evolving relationship between English and French in Medieval England. In some ways, French was experiencing a notable decline in England, but in other ways, it was as strong as ever, and a mass influx of French words into English was only just beginning. So next time, we'll try to sort through those conflicting signals.

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