THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODES 116 - 120

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EPISODE 116: THE CELTIC FRINGE

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 116: The Celtic Fringe. In this episode, we're going to turn our attention to the state of English beyond the borders of England in the parts of the British Isles where Celtic languages were traditionally spoken. The spread of English into those regions was mostly a result of military conquest, and most of those regions had experienced some sort of invasion from England over the centuries. Scotland was no exception. It had also been invaded by England, but the English language spoken in the south of Scotland had been native to that region for centuries. And there was little if any difference between the English of southern Scotland and that of northern England. But in the 1300s, that Scottish form of English started to become distinct. And the emergence of that dialect took place in a country that was fighting for its freedom. That Scots dialect is first recorded in a famous poem about that war for Scottish independence called "The Bruce." So this time, we'll look at rise of Robert the Bruce, the beginning of Scots literature, and the state of English in the Celtic Fringe of the British Isles.

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 and get bonus episodes and transcripts at Patreon.com/historyofenglish.

Now this time, I want to look at the state of English outside of England in the early 1300s. This story will take us into the regions where native Celtic languages had traditionally been spoken. This includes Ireland, Wales, Cornwall and Scotland. These regions were particularly important to the English king, Edward I, because Edward felt that those regions were part of his domain. His kingdom didn't end at the English border. He felt that he was the King of all of Britain and the overlord of Ireland. And for a brief a period of time – having defeated the Welsh and the Scots – he could legitimately claim that title.

Edward's desire to rule all of Britain ran deep, and it may have been loosely connected to his fascination with the legends of King Arthur. As we know, stories about Arthur and his knights were very popular throughout western Europe in the Middle Ages. And at the time, it was widely thought that Arthur had been a real life king at some point in the distant past. There was a very fine line between legend and fact, and it wasn't east to distinguish the 'made up' parts from the actual history.

For a king like Edward I, Arthur was the perfect role model. He was a legendary king, admired by all, the personification of chivalry, and most importantly of all, the King of All of Britain. Edward loved those popular stories and legends about King Arthur. He held grand Arthurian-themed festivals and tournaments. And one of those tournaments was held in Winchester in the year 1290. To commemorate that tournament, Edward apparently had a large round table built for the occasion. That round table can still be seen today in Winchester, and it dates to around the time of that grand tournament.

Edward held another one of those Arthurian festivals when he got married for the second time in the year 1299. And two years later, he justified his invasion of Scotland on the grounds that he was Arthur's political heir and, as such, he had a historical claim to rule all of Britain including Scotland.

He actually put this claim in writing in a letter that was sent to the Pope. Edward cited Geoffrey of Monmouth's well-known history of Britain and its version of the King Arthur legend. In the story, Arthur ruled all of Britain and even forced the Irish to pay homage, so in Edward's mind, these various Celtic regions had once been unified under Arthur's kingship. And in his letter to the Pope, Edward asserted that he was merely trying to resurrect what had once existed in the glorious past of Camelot. He wasn't really conquering any foreign nations, he was merely reclaiming what rightly belonged to him as Arthur's heir. It was a creative argument, and it didn't convince anyone beyond the English border. We often consider how history shapes literature, but this may have been a case where literature was helping to shape history.

We know from earlier episodes that Edward conquered Wales early in his reign. He imposed his army and his political will upon the Welsh, but it doesn't appear that he imposed the English language on them. There is no evidence of a Welsh form of English until the 1500s – about two centuries later. The only part of Wales where English was probably spoken as a native language was the Gower Peninsula on the south coast of Wales. An Anglo-Norman settlement had been established there shortly after the Norman Conquest, and the descendants of those local settlers probably spoke English. But otherwise, the English language didn't become widespread in Wales until the Modern English period.

South of Wales in the far southwestern corner of England was Cornwall. Now Cornwall was part of England, but the native Celtic language known as Cornish continued to be spoken there. Around the current point in our story in the 1300s, English started to become more widely spoken in the region. In the 1500s, an English writer named Andrew Boorde wrote that there were two languages spoken in Corwall – "Cornysshe" and "Englysshe." But he added that many people in the region did not understand English. During the 1600s, English finally started to emerge as the dominant language in Cornwall. And during the 1700s, the native Cornish language finally died out. In fact, we actually know the name of the last person to speak Cornish as their native language. Her name was Dorothy Pentreath and she died in 1777. Her grave marker reads in part: "Here lieth interred Dorothy Pentreath who died in 1777, said to have been the last person who conversed in the ancient Cornish. The regular language of this county from the earliest records till it expired in the eighteenth century in this Parish of Saint Paul." So at least according to this grave marker and local tradition, Cornish died out with Ms. Pentreath in the late 1700s.

As we've seen, the spread of English into the westernmost regions of Britain was a slow and gradual process, and it didn't really become widespread until the early Modern English period. But the story was different up in Scotland.

As we know from prior episodes, English had a foothold in the south of Scotland from the late Anglo-Saxon period. In the 11th century, a Scottish military victory pushed the border with England southward several miles. When the Scottish border moved southward, it encompassed a large group of English speakers who had previously been part of Northumbria in northern England. And from that point on, those English speakers became Scots, but they held onto their native English language. And over the next couple of centuries, their dialect spread northward and westward – soon to become widespread throughout much of eastern and southwestern Scotland.

As we saw a few episodes back, most scholars believe that this English dialect of Scotland was essentially the same as the English dialect of northern England. They all constitute the so-called 'Northern Dialect' of Middle English. But that was about to change. A distinct Scottish dialect of English was about to emerge, and the first appearance of that dialect is directly related to the invasion and temporary conquest of Scotland by Edward I in the late 1200s. So let's turn our attention back to Edward I – the English king who known as "Longshanks" during his lifetime and known as 'The Hammer of the Scots' after his death.

In prior episodes, we saw that Edward invaded Scotland after completing his conquest of Wales. He soon claimed victory, and for a while it looked like he was indeed a new King Arthur – in the sense that he could legitimately claim to be the King of All of Britain.

But a short time later, the Scots rose in rebellion under William Wallace. Wallace led his men to a major victory against the English at the Battle of Stirling Bridge. Even though he was not a noble, he was put in charge of the Scottish forces. But a short time later, he was defeated by Edward's forces at Falkirk. Wallace survived and continued to lead a guerilla campaign against the English, but after Falkirk, the control of the Scottish forces returned to the nobles – specifically to a nobleman named John Comyn and another nobleman named Robert the Bruce. Bruce was the grandson of the Robert the Bruce who had claimed the Scottish crown in the disputed succession a few years earlier. Comyn was the nephew of John Balliol who had won that succession dispute and became king before Edward I invaded. So both Comyn and Bruce came from noble families, and both families had heir own respective bases of support in the south of Scotland. Both men were also descended from Anglo-Normans who had settled in the region, and so both men had close connections to the English nobility. That meant that they had divided loyalties. They were Scottish, but they were also of Anglo-Norman heritage. And Edward took advantage of those divided loyalties by purchasing their support with lands and titles.

Families like the Comyns, the Balliols, the Bruces and the Stewarts all had these divided loyalties, and they were all based in the southern part of Scotland where English was spoken. Thanks to the popularity of movies like Braveheart, we tend to associate the fight for Scottish independence with William Wallace. And part of the reason why William Wallace became such a folk hero in life and in death is because he wasn't a noble. He never swore an oath to Edward, and Edward couldn't buy him off with lands or titles. So William led his own resistence to English rule while many of the Scots nobles stood on the sidelines.

In the year 1305, all of that changed when Wallace was captured by Scottish forces who were loyal to Edward. He was turned over to the English forces and taken south to London where he was given a quick trial at Westminster Hall. Even though Wallace had never sworn an oath to Edward, he was accused of treason anyway. His conviction was a foregone conclusion. And the punishment for treason was a brutal execution. Wallace was hanged, drawn and quartered a short time later.

Wallace's execution was a major blow to the fight for Scottish independence. And it was really part of a one-two punch. Around the same time that Wallace was executed, English forces captured Stirling Castle in the south of Scotland. Control of that castle was the key to controlling most of Scotland. It was the most important and strategically-located castle in the country. It was the gateway to the Highlands further north. So with the capture of that castle and the execution of Wallace, it looked like Edward had finally reclaimed control of Scotland and re-secured his claim to the title King of all of Britain.

As I noted earlier, two of the most prominent nobles in Scotland at the time were John Comyn and Robert the Bruce. Between them, they controlled most of the Scottish military, but they were fierce rivals. They had both pledged their loyalty to Edward, but despite that show of loyalty, Bruce soon started to get cold feet. Edward set up a new government to administer Scotland, but Robert's role in the government was very limited. He also became frustrated at the treatment of the local Scots by the occupying forces from England. He started to get restless, and he considered renewing the resistence to English rule.

In February of 1306, Bruce met with his rival, John Comyn, at a church in Dumfries. The meeting is shrouded is mystery. It isn't entirely clear what the purpose of the meeting was or what they talked about. According to some later sources, Robert wanted the two men to combine their forces and take up arms against the English, but John Comyn refused to do so. There's no way to know for certain what they discussed, but what is known for certain is that it ended in an violent argument. And in the course of that argument, Robert the Bruce killed John Comyn. Now this was a big deal. Robert had just killed a nobleman who was loyal to the English king, and he had killed that nobleman in a church. So he knew that he was about to incur the wrath of both Edward I and the Church officials. At that point, he didn't really have much of a choice. His only real option was to go all in. He quickly made his way to the traditional capital at Scone, and he had himself crowned as the King of the Scots. From that point on, there was no turning back. He would either take on the English and defeat them – or he would suffer the same fate as William Wallace.

Now you may know that Robert the Bruce did in fact win the struggle for Scottish independence over the next decade or so. And I want to jump ahead here and give away the ending because Bruce's victory is directly related to the first appearance of a distinctly Scottish form of English.

The story of the Scottish war for independence under Robert the Bruce was later chronicled in a long narrative poem commonly known as "The Bruce." This poem was completed around the year 1375, so about 60 or 70 years after the events covered in this episode. It's an extremely important poem because it was composed in Scotland, and it is in fact the oldest significant piece of literature composed in the English dialect that became known as Scots. So this poem marks the beginning of a new literary tradition in that dialect. It is therefore the first time that we have a distinct form of English with its own literary tradition outside the country of England.

Now let me elaborate on that statement a little bit. First of all, I am calling this manner of speech an English "dialect" because that's really what is was at this point. It was even called "Ingliss" by the early writers in Scotland who write in that dialect. It didn't start to be called "Scots" until the late 1400s and early 1500s after it had evolved further and had become much more distinct. So even though some people consider Scots to be a separate language, I'll reserve that debate for a future episode after the differences have become much more apparent.

Though the language of this poem is very similar to the language of northern England, the poem does have some unique features that stand out. Also, it was composed in Scotland, by a Scots poet, with the specific theme of Scottish independence. So given all of those distinguishing features, this poem marks the beginning of a new Scottish literary tradition.

The poem was composed by a man named John Barbour who was the Archdeacon of Aberdeen in Scotland. He also taught at Oxford and Paris, and he composed the poem while serving at the court of a later Scottish king.

The poem survives in two copies that were made about a century after the original poem was composed. At the title implies, the poem focuses on the life of Robert the Bruce, and it covers the Scottish war for independence in the early 1300s. The poem traces the actual events of the period, but it isn't exactly a chronicle. Barbour occasionally embellishes the story. He begins the poem by noting a good story based on actual facts has a double claim to popularity. It has the entertainment value of a good story and educational value of a historical account. He then says that he intends to tell the story of Robert the Bruce so that Robert's deeds will not be forgotten. The prologue contains a passage that could have been pulled straight from the movie Braveheart. Barbour declares that the Scots yearned for independence and freedom from English oppression. In Modern English, the passage reads:

Ah freedom is a noble thing
Freedom allows man to have pleasure or liking
Freedom all solace to man gives
He lives at ease that freely lives
A noble heart may have no ease
Nor else nought that may him please
If freedom fails; for free will
Is yearned over all other things.

Now here's the same passage in the original language of the poem.

A! fredome is a noble thing!
Fredome mays man to haiff liking;
Fredome all solace to man giffis
He levys at es that frely levys
A noble hart may haiff nane es,
Na ellys nocht that may him ples,
Gyff fredome failyhe: for fre liking
Is yharnyt our all othir thing.

Again the language of the poem has most of the same features that we saw in the Cursor Mundi back in Episode 112. So these dialectal features were common throughout the north of Britain. For example, the poem uses the Northern pronoun forms ***they***, ***them*** and ***their*** – rather than the southern forms that began with an 'h'.

Nouns are made plural by adding an 'S' at the end, instead of the 'E-N' suffix used in the south. And verbs in 3rd person singular end with the northern 'S' rather than the southern 'TH.' So in the passage I just read, we have "He levys" – or "he lives" – rather than 'he liveth.' And the spellings in the poem indicate that the dialect used the Old English long 'A' sound (/ah/) rather than the /aw/ and /oh/ sounds that emerged in the south. So the passage I just read has ***nane*** rather than the Southern forms ***no*** and ***none***.

Beyond those common Northern features, the poem has some other features that were more distinctly Scottish – and were more durable there. For example, the /x/ sound was preserved in words like ***loch***. In the poem we find ***mycht*** instead of ***might***, and ***rycht*** instead of ***right***. Again this sound is still used in Scots and Scottish English.

Also words that begin with a 'WH' – like ***where*** and ***when*** – are almost always spelled with a 'QUH' instead of 'WH.' So ***where*** is spelled Q-U-H-A-R. And ***when*** is spelled Q-U-H-E-N. This seems odd, but it was the way scribes represented an older aspirated pronunciation which still survives in parts of Scotland. So ***where*** would have been more like /hwar/ and ***when*** would have been more like /hwen/.

The poem also expresses past tense with an 'I-T' or 'Y-T' ending rather than the modern 'E-D' ending. So instead of ***lived***, it uses ***lyvyt***. Instead of ***coupled***, it uses ***cowplyt***. Rather than ***called***, the poem uses ***callyt***.

As we proceed with this story, I'll return to parts of this poem. And we'll have an opportunity to hear some more of these unique features in those passages.

So let's return to the story of Robert the Bruce and the war for Scottish independence. Having killed his rival and secured the title of King of the Scots, Bruce set about gathering his supporters to help him take on the English. He established a hideout in the hills, and he attracted the support of ordinary people who yearned for freedom and independence.

A couple of months later he engaged the English army near Perth in the central part of Scotland. Bruce suffered a harsh defeat. His wife and daughter were captured by the English forces and taken as prisoners, but Bruce managed to get away. He once again went into hiding and kept moving to avoid capture.

Bruce's whereabouts during this period are not known with certainty. According to the oral tradition of the Mackenzie Clan, Bruce was welcomed by them in the Highlands of Scotland during this period. The Mackenzies were supporters of Bruce's cause, and he may have spent time under their protection. Now the reason I mention this is because the name of the Mackenzie Clan reflects how the Scots dialect of English evolved in its own direction over time. And it also shows how language sometimes takes unexpected turns.

The name ***MacKenzie*** is the Modern English version of an old Gaelic name. The original Gaelic version was something like ***MacCoinnich*** (/machk-cun-eech/). It meant 'son of the fair' in Scots-Gaelic. As the Scots dialect of English spread across southern and eastern Scotland, this name was Anglicized as ***Mackaingye*** (/meh-keng-yi/). So it had a 'Y' or /yee/ sound at the end.

Now in order to represent that sound in Old English, the Anglo-Saxons used that Old English letter called yogh (ȝ). It looked sort of like a number 3 with long curvy tail at the bottom. Another way to picture it is think of a lower-case 'z' written in a cursive style. So you begin with the first two straight lines of the 'z', but when you get the third straight line at the bottom, you make a long curvy tail instead. Again, in Old English, this letter could represent a hard 'g' sound, or a 'y' sound, or the /x/ sound. The Normans didn't like that Anglo-Saxon letter, so in England it was ditched in favor of either the letter G or Y or the GH letter combination for the /x/ sound.

But in Scotland, scribes held onto that old Anglo-Saxon letter for a longer period of time. And they used it to spell names like ***Mackaingye***. But when the printing press was invented, printers didn't have that old Anglo-Saxon letter. They only had the normal European letters derived from the Roman alphabet. So they had to figure out what to do with those old letters. You might remember that in England they replaced the Old English letter for the 'TH' sound called 'thorn' with the letter Y. So the word ***the*** was often spelled 'YE' instead of 'thorn-E.' And that's how we got the word ***ye*** for ***the*** – as in 'Ye Old Shoppe.' As I've noted before, it is actually the word ***the***, but since it was spelled 'YE,' people thought it was supposed to be pronounced as /yee/.

Well the same king of thing happened in Scotland with the letter yogh. Since the yogh resembled the letter Z in many handwritten manuscripts, printers started to substitute the letter Z for the yogh. And that's what happened with the name ***Mackaingye***. It started to be spelled with a Z at the end since printers didn't have a yogh. And over time, people in the south of Scotland thought the Highland clan name was pronounced with a 'z' sound at the end. So ***Mackaingye*** became ***MacKenzie***. And another common surname ***Menȝies*** (/MING-iz/) was also spelled with a Z and it started to be pronounced as /MEN-zeez/.

Outside of certain surnames and place names which are common in Scotland, this confusion has not had much of an impact on standard English. There are a couple of Scots words that are used in a few English dialects that also show this same change. For example, a type of chicken or cock that is native to the Scottish Highlands is called either a ***capercailye*** (/kæper-KAY-lee/) or ***a capercailzie*** (/kaper-KAYL-zee/). The first pronunciation is the older pronunciation with the 'y' sound and the second pronunciation is the newer pronunciation with the 'z' sound, and that's because it became common to spell that word with a Z at the end. Also, a somewhat obscure term for a beggar is a ***gaberlunzie*** spelled G-A-B-E-R-L-U-N-Z-I-E. But again, that Z was substituted for the older letter yogh, and the word is still pronounced as /gæber-lun-yee/ in some older Scots dialects.

So again, a simple decision about what letter to use actually changed the way some of these words were pronounced over time. And since this particular decision was unique to Scots, it caused a sound change there that didn't happen to the English spoken in England.

So that word ***gaberlunyie*** meaning 'a beggar' became ***gaberlunzie***. And as far as we know, Robert the Bruce was essentially a ***gaberlunzie*** in the later part of 1306 when he was forced into hiding to avoid the English forces that still controlled much of Scotland. At this point early on, the English clearly had the upper hand. Many of the Scottish rebels had been killed or captured, and Edward I mounted a large expedition to head north to put an end to Bruce once and for all. Edward reached Carlisle in northern England and set up camp for the winter. By this point, Edward was an old man and in very poor health, but it didn't stop him from trying to enforce his claims to Scotland.

The tide finally started to turn in favor of the Scots in the early part of the following year. Bruce was able to assemble some supporters and claim victory against the English forces in a couple of small battles in the spring. Meanwhile, a new resistence figure emerged named James Douglas. Douglas was a Scottish knight whose father had been a supporter of William Wallace. He joined with Robert the Bruce as soon as Bruce was crowned as king, and he basically served as Bruce's main lieutenant. He secured several key victories for the Scots early on. And Barbour's poem is as much an ode to James Douglas as it is to Bruce himself.

Douglas was an important figure in the war because he kept the English forces contained in the south of Scotland. And that allowed Bruce to secure his position and gain supporters in the north of Scotland. Douglas was also known for surprise attacks which had a psychological impact on the English. On one occasion, he surprised an English garrison while they were attending Mass. His men killed and captured most of English soldiers even though the soldiers were in a chapel attending Church services. Douglas's men then ransacked and burned the castle that the English garrison had been defending. They then disappeared into the moors and the countryside. This event became known as the Douglas Larder, and it showed that Douglas was a master of psychological warfare. He terrified the English forces and was therefore revered by the Scots. The English soon gave him the nickname "The Black Douglas" because the mere mention of his name invoked a sense of fear and dread among his enemies.

I said that the early part of 1307 marked a turning point in the war for Scottish independence. Not only did Robert the Bruce achieve a couple of victories and James Douglas begin his campaigns against the English, but there was also an even more significant development, and that was the death of the English king Edward I. As I noted earlier, Edward had established a base in northern England and was waiting for the winter to pass before launching his campaign into Scotland to defeat Bruce and put down the uprising. But Edward was hampered by his advanced age, very poor health, and a case of dysentery.

By July of 1307, he was moving north, and he set up camp just south of the Scottish border, but he never made it across the border. On July 7, Edward succumbed to his advanced age and illness, and he died with the border still in sight.

Edward's death is also recounted by John Barbour in his poem "The Bruce." The passage provides a sense of how much disdain there was for Edward in Scotland. The poem says that Edward was visited by several of his men while on his death bed. They had come from the castle at Kildrummy where they had taken several prisoners. They asked Edward what they should do with the prisoners, and Edward responded that the prisoners should be hanged and drawn. Even on his death bed, Edward showed no mercy. Here is the passage, first in Modern English then in the original language of the poem:

And when death was near
The folk that were at Kildrummy
came with the prisoners they had taken,
and went before the King.

And quhen he to the ded wes ner,
The folk, that at Kyldrummy wer,
Com with the presoners at thai had tane,
And syne unto the Kyng ar gane.

And to comfort him, they told
how they captured and held the castle
and how the castle's garrison was brought
before him to do with them whatever he thought.

And for to confort him thai tald
How thai the castell to thame yhald;
And how thai to his will war brocht,
Till do of thame quhat-evir he thocht;

And they asked what they should do with the prisoners.
Then he looked at them angrily
And said grinning, "Hang and draw them."
It was a great wonder that he said such words

That he, who had not long to live
Should answer in such a cruel manner,

And askit quhat thai suld of thaim do.
Than lukit he angyrly thame to,
And said gyrnand "Hangis and drawis."
It wes gret wounder of sic sawis;
That he, that to the ded wes neir,
Suld ansuer apon sic maneir.

Without offering any mercy,
How could he confidently appeal to God
who truthfully judges all things
to have mercy on his soul
When he himself, through his felony,
At such point and time had no mercy?

Forouten menyng of mercy,
How mycht he trastly on hym cry,
That suthfastly demys all thing
To haf mercy for his crying
Of him that, throu his felony,
In-to sic poynt had no mercy?

His men obeyed his command
and he died soon thereafter.
And he was brought to his burial place
And after then, his son was king.

His men his mandment has all done:
And he deit thar-eftir sone;
And syne wes brocht till berynes:
His son syne eftir kyng he wes.

As the poem notes, Edward's death meant that his 23 year old son then became King of England. The son was also named Edward. So the younger Edward became Edward II. Now there's an old saying the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. But in this case, the apple fell in a completely different orchard. The younger Edward had none of his father's political or military instincts. He was weak and indecisive, and he preferred the luxuries of court to political maneuvering and military campaigns.

If Edward I had survived for another year or so, it is very likely that the Scottish rebellion would have been crushed. Bruce faced opposition from the English army, the papacy, and half of the Scottish nobles who had been loyal to John Comyn – the rival that Bruce had killed a few months earlier. But despite those long odds, Bruce got a reprieve with the death of Edward I. The man

who became known as the Hammer of the Scots was dead, but his campaign into Scotland continued under the leadership of his son. Though the campaign continued, it was a largely symbolic effort with the son in command. The younger Edward soon turned back and headed to London to focus on his coronation. With the English retreat, Bruce and his allies took full advantage of the reprieve and consolidated their power throughout Scotland.

Now you might remember from an earlier episode that the younger Edward was the first English prince to have the title of "The Prince of Wales." This reflected the fact that his father had conquered Wales and had bestowed that title on him as a small child.

The elder Edward has also arranged a marriage between the younger Edward and the French king's daughter Isabella. That agreement had been made, but the marriage had never occurred. So the younger Edward quickly headed across the Channel to France for a quick marriage ceremony. He then returned to London with his bride so that they could be crowned together as king and queen. But for Edward, this may have just been a formality because the real object of his affection wasn't his new bride. It was his male companion named Piers Gaveston.

The relationship between Edward and Gaveston has been the subject of much speculation over the centuries even during Edward's lifetime. It is generally believed that the younger Edward was gay or bisexual and that Piers Gaveston was his lover. There is no way to know if their relationship was physical, but there is no doubt that Edward was infatuated with Gaveston and was emotionally attached to him.

Gaveston was a knight from Gascony in southern France which was the only part of France still held by the English crown. Over the prior century of so, quite a few Gascon nobles had been welcomed to the English court. They were often granted land and titles in England which angered the native English nobles. We saw this same scenario play out during the reign of Edward's grandfather Henry III. Well, the Gascons not only received English land and titles, they also tended to be arrogant and haughty. They looked down on the English nobles as uncivilized and uncultured. And Piers Gaveston tended to fit all of those traditional stereotypes.

Gaveston and the younger Edward had a close relationship for several years before Edward I died, and the relationship was a source of friction even then. The elder Edward had sent Gaveston into exile on two different occasions. And in fact, he was still in exile at the time that Edward I died near the Scottish border.

As soon his father died, the younger Edward immediately invited Gaveston back to England. Edward even gave Gaveston the earldom of Cornwall which was one of the more prestigious earldoms in England. So from the outset, the English nobles were suspicious of their new king. He prematurely ended the Scottish campaign, he recalled his exiled companion Gaveston, and he gave Gaveston a prestigious earldom.

And then there was the coronation. It was an elaborate ceremony at Westminster Abbey in January of 1308. Edward and his bride Isabella were crowned as King and Queen, but preceding them down the aisle was Piers Gaveston. Gaveson was given the honor of carrying the crown and

sword of Edward the Confessor. Now that was honor usually given to the highest noble in the kingdom, not some young upstart and court favorite. All of the English barons were dressed in gold colors which was traditional for a coronation. But Piers Gaveston wore purple – the color typically reserved for royalty.

After the ceremony, there was a grand banquet. Normally the king and queen would sit together at the banquet, but Edward sat with Gaveston instead. And according to some reports, Edward let Gaveston choose which of wedding presents he wanted to keep for himself.

Needless to say, the relationship between Edward and Gaveston dominated the whole ceremony. The queen's French relatives return to France and reported the events to her father – the French king Philip. They told Philip that Edward loved his male companion more than his wife. The French nobles may have been upset, but they weren't the only ones. The English nobles felt much the same way, especially given that Edward was neglecting the rise of Robert the Bruce up in Scotland.

Now in the same year that Edward II was crowned as king, an important religious scholar from Scotland passed away. His name was John Duns Scotus – often known simply as Duns Scotus. He was one of the most important theologians of this period. He taught at Oxford and later at Paris, and his writings influenced many philosophers and theologians of the late Middle Ages. In his writings, he tried to reconcile the philosophy of Aristotle with the teachings of Christianity, and he became a leader of that movement. Well, he died at this point in the year 1308, and you may be wondering why I am telling you about him. Well, his name gave us a word which we still use in Modern English. Duns Scotus was an important scholar, but ironically, his name gave us the word ***dunce*** – meaning someone who is stupid or can't be educated. For years after his death, the scholars and theologians who promoted his teachings were called ***Dunsmen*** – and later ***Dunces***. The problem was that his teachings were very complicated and too difficult for many people to follow. And with the rise of humanism in the 1500s, his teachings fell out of favor because they were thought to be too technical and complex and argumentative. Those who continued to defend his teachings were ridiculed and rejected, and the term ***dunce*** became associated with students and teachers who refused to embrace the new learning. And that's how we ended up with the modern sense of the word ***dunce*** as someone who is dim-witted or uneducated.

So the word ***dunce*** is derived from the name of the theologian Duns Scotus, and interestingly Duns Scotus acquired his name from the Scottish town where he was born. The name of that town was Duns, Scotland, and it is located in the southeastern corner of Scotland near the English border. It was a region where English was spoken, and it was a region that was still under English control at the current point in our story in the year 1308. For much of this period, the English forces held onto the southern part of Scotland while Robert the Bruce and James Douglas were left to their own devices in the middle and northern parts of the country. Bruce slowly consolidated his power by defeating the nobles who supported his rivals.

Within a couple of years, Bruce and his men were attacking English strongholds in the west and southwest of Scotland and, one by one, they fell to Bruce's forces. His supporters actually started to carry out raids across the border into northern England, and the young English king was doing nothing to stop any of this.

Furthermore, the English barons had become even more irritated with the king's companion – Piers Gaveston. The nobles would have probably tolerated the relationship between Edward and Gaveston if it had been discreet, but it was anything but discreet. Gaveston took advantage of his favored position. He gave the barons insulting nicknames. He treated them as inferiors. And when the nobles tried to meet with Edward to offer him advice and counsel – which was their traditional role – Edward often refused to talk to them. He would only speak with Gaveston, so all communications had to go through Gaveston. The barons took their advisory role very seriously, but Edward was only taking advice from his companion.

Soon, the English barons decided that they had had enough, and they proceeded to take matters into their own hands. In the year 1311, the barons drafted a set of major political reforms, and they forced Edward to agree to it. These reforms are known as the Ordinances of 1311, and if all of this seems like deja vu, it should. History was basically repeating itself. The barons had tried to reign in Edward's great-grandfather John by forcing him to sign Magna Carta. Then a few years later, the barons forced Edward's grandfather Henry III to sign the Provisions of Oxford. You might remember that those reforms stripped Henry of much of his power for a period of time. And now the barons were forcing young Edward to agree to these so-called Ordinances of 1311.

The reforms required that Piers Gaveston was to be exiled. They also provided that Edward was to call a Parliament at least twice a year. Furthermore, Parliament was given the power to veto the appointment of important government officials like the chancellor, and the treasurer, and even some of the officials in Edward's own household. Parliament was also given the power to appoint a royal council to assist with governance, and the king was required to follow its advice and recommendations.

Now all of this was a major intrusion on the authority of the king, but Edward initially agreed to go along with it. Again, history has a tendency to repeat itself, and just as Edward's ancestors ultimately rejected the restrictions placed on them, Edward did the same thing. And just as the earlier restrictions led to war between the king and barons, again the same thing happened here.

The barons had forced Piers Gaveston into exile, but within a few months he had returned and he was once again by Edward's side. The barons summoned troops to force the issue, and Edward and Gaveston headed to the north of England to gather their own forces. The two men operated separately for a brief period, and Gaveston was captured by forces loyal to the barons. One of the barons took Gaveston back to his castle, and he decided to put an end to the king's companion once and for all. Gaveston was beheaded of June 13 of the year 1312.

It was a dramatic development, and it actually caused some of the nobles to back off. The hated Gaveston was dead and, for the first time, Edward was seen as a sympathetic figure by many nobles. Edward and the barons agreed to a truce. The barons largely dropped the restrictions they had tried to impose on Edward, and Edward agreed to try to recover the parts of Scotland that had fallen to Robert the Bruce.

Over the following months, Bruce continued to capture castles and secure his position throughout much of Scotland. He held his own parliaments, he issued charters, and he even established diplomatic relations with other European nations. But the English still maintained a foothold in the south of Scotland thanks to that strategically located castle called Stirling Castle which I mentioned earlier in the episode. You might recall that that castle was the gateway to the north, and whoever held that castle effectively controlled the southern part of Scotland. Bruce knew that he had to take that castle from the English forces if he wanted to be the king of all of Scotland. So in the year 1313, the siege of the castle began.

The siege lasted for many weeks, and the English garrison that held the castle finally agreed to leave and turn it over to Bruce's men if English reinforcements didn't arrive by mid-summer. That agreement essentially set a deadline. It was clear that Edward's forces would arrive by mid-summer to relieve the castle, and Robert the Bruce set a trap for them.

On the approach to the castle, there was a region full of bogs and pools called Bannockburn. The Scots forces anticipated the English approach and they took a position on the dry, high ground to the west of the boggy region. They also dug pits in the marsh and lined them with stakes to slow down the advancing English forces. Young King Edward led the English campaign, and when his troops finally reached Bannockburn, the cavalry got bogged down in the trap. The marshy land made it difficult to maneuver, and the Scots were able to target them from the higher ground. With the English cavalry neutralized, the Scots descended on them. The battle ensued, and the Scots used their advantages to rout the English forces.

John Barbour describes the carnage in several passages of his poem "The Bruce." He writes:

With swords, spears and with clubs
The battle there was so felonious and cruel
And there was such a great spilling of blood
That on the earth, pools of it stood

With swerdis, speris, and with macys.
The battale thair so felloune was,
And sua richt gret spilling of blud,
That on the erd the flus it stud.

The Scots men so well laid them bare
And such great slaughter made to them there
And from so many, the lives were taken
That all the field was left bloody

The Scottis men so weill thame bar,
And sua gret slauchtir maid thai thar,
And fra so feill the livis revit,
That all the feild wes bludy levit.

And the knights on their steeds tumbled
while wearing many rich and royal garments
defiled rudely under their feet.
Some held aloft, some losing their blood or sweat
a long while fighting they were
until noise and cries could no longer be heard.

And see tummyll knychtis and stedis,
With mony rich and ryoll wedis
Defoulit roydly under feit.
Sum held on loft, sum tynt the suet.
A long quhill thus fechtand thai wer,
That men no noyis na cry mycht her.

As the battle progressed, it soon became apparent to Edward that his forces were doomed to defeat. He fled the battlefield, and many of his men abandoned the fight when that saw him in retreat. With that, the Battle of Bannockburn came to an end. And the next day, the Scots forces took possession of Stirling Castle which gave them control of the south of the country. And that made Robert the Bruce the king of all of Scotland.

Bannockburn was the decisive battle in a war for independence that was mostly fought with guerilla and psychological warfare. It is one of the most significant battles in Scottish history because it secured Scottish independence, though the overall struggle with England would continue for several more centuries. The Scottish victory at Bannockburn also meant that the English dialect spoken in Scotland would be the dialect of an independent nation. That English dialect soon developed its own independent literary tradition beginning with John Barbour's poem about the events which I've discussed in this episode. By the early 1400s, the Scottish Parliament had begun to issue its legislation in this English dialect rather than in Latin. And again, the language was still called "Inglis" at the time. But during the 1400s, it became so distinct, that it started to be known as Scots.

Now it is tempting to end this story here, with the Scottish victory at Bannockburn, with Scottish independence secured, and with the birth of a distinct Scots dialect of English. But since this is story of the Celtic Fringe, we have to take these events one step further – to Ireland.

While Robert the Bruce's victory at Bannockburn is well-remembered, what came next is sometimes forgotten. The year after Bannockburn, Robert's brother led what was essentially a Scottish invasion of Ireland. Robert's brother was also named Edward – specifically Edward the Bruce. So we have a lot of Edwards in this story. The old English king Edward I, his son Edward II, and Robert's brother Edward the Bruce.

Now during the time that Scotland was under English rule, the old English king Edward I had used Irish forces in his army. You might remember from Episode 85 that the English had invaded and conquered large parts of Ireland back in the late 1100s . English power and influence in Ireland had decreased during the 1200s, but the English king could still muster troops from the region if he needed them. So that gave the Scots an incentive to intervene in Ireland. If Bruce's men could kick the English out of Ireland, it would ensure that Irishmen would no longer be conscripted to fight for the English king.

Robert the Bruce also had a certain appeal to the nobles of Ireland. The Scots and the Irish had a common Gaelic heritage and ancestry. And when forced to choose between an English overlord or a Scottish overlord, it seemed like an easy choice. Robert's brother Edward was invited to Ireland by local nobles, and he arrived there in the year 1315 with 200 ships. Edward was an important military leader in his own right, and he had played an essential role in the victory at Bannockburn. He began a slow and gradual conquest of Ireland, and over the next couple of years, he racked up victory after victory. His brother Robert soon joined him in Ireland, but the Bruces rapidly wore out their welcome. Their forces routinely burned crops and drove off cattle. This coincided with a famine, and the Bruces were blamed for much of the hardship and starvation. Robert saw the writing on the wall and headed back to Scotland, but his brother Edward remained behind in Ireland. The following year, Edward was defeated in battle and killed. With that, the Scottish invasion of Ireland came to an end, but that invasion did have consequences.

The departure of the Scots left a political vacuum in much of Ireland. The English still maintained a base around Dublin, but they had little influence outside of that region. Furthermore, most of the Englishmen in Ireland had adopted Irish culture over the years. That trend accelerated in the power vacuum that the Scots left behind. By the mid 1300s, most of the English settlers dressed like the Irish and spoke Gaelic. The English government tried to stem that tide in the year 1366 by passing the Statutes of Kilkenny. The law acknowledged that the English language had largely fallen out of use in Ireland. So it required all of the English settlers in Ireland to speak English. The law said that Englishmen who spoke Gaelic should have their lands forfeited until they undertook to speak English. So if they didn't speak English, they had to learn the language in order to maintain their property.

The law also outlawed marriages between the English and the Irish. It required Englishmen to wear English styles of dress. And it required legal disputes to be resolved with English law. Now to be fair, these Statutes of Kilkenny never had much legal effect. The restrictions were largely ignored, and the government was so weak that it couldn't really enforce them. So the English language continued its gradual decline in Ireland over the next few centuries.

So English had completely different trajectories in Scotland and Ireland. In Scotland, its position was secured with the victory of Robert the Bruce and emergence of an independent English-speaking court. But in Ireland, the English language declined during the same period. Many of the English settlers abandoned their native language over time.

Despite the overall failure of the Statutes of Kilkenny, there was one interesting requirement that is often overlooked, and it actually helped to preserve that English heritage in Ireland. In addition to language and fashion and law, the statutes specifically required all Englishmen living in Ireland to retain their English surnames. And if any Irishmen were living among the English, they had to acquire an English surname if they wanted to have the rights of an Englishman.

Now this is a fascinating provision because it points to the important status of surnames by this point in the 1300s. It wasn't just important to have 'a' surname. It was important to have the right kind of surname – an English surname. In other words, one based on an English place name, or an English word for an occupation, or some other English word that helped to identify and distinguish the person from other people that had the same first name.

So next time, I want to explore this aspect of English and European society in the Middle Ages. I'll examine how and why surnames became so common during the first couple of centuries after the Norman Conquest. And I'll look at the interesting origin of many common surnames that still exist today.

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

EPISODE 117: WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 117: What's in a Name? In this episode, we're going to take a look at names. We all have one. In fact, we have more than one. Almost everyone today has a personal name and a surname, and many of us have one or more middle names as well. But that wasn't the case in the Anglo-Saxon period. Before the Norman Conquest, most people in England, and most people in Europe, only had one name. But that started to change after the Norman Conquest as people began to acquire a second or additional name. At first, those second names were not hereditary. They didn't pass from parents to children like modern surnames. But around the current point in our overall story of English in the early to mid 1300s, those second names started to become hereditary family names. Children began to use the surname of their parents. And our modern naming conventions finally started to emerge. So in this episode, we'll explore how names have evolved over time. And we'll see how those changes reflect the overall evolution of English in the Middle Ages.

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 and get bonus episodes and transcripts at Patreon.com/historyofenglish.

Also, one other quick note. If you happen to live in New England, or if you're going to be in the Boston area in early November, I want to invite you to check out the Sound Education conference at Harvard University from November 1 through 3. The conference will focus on educational podcasting, and it'll feature lots of history and other podcasters. I'll be participating in a panel on where we'll be talking about podcasting about language. And I also have plans to present a short lecture which will essentially be a live version of the podcast. The conference is open to the public so I would encourage you to check it out if you're in the area. Just go to soundeducation.fm for more information and details.

Now, let's turn our attention to this episode and the changing nature of names in the 1300s. Last time, I looked at the state of the English language in the Celtic fringes of the British Isles. And I concluded that episode by discussing the Statutes of Kilkenny which were adopted by English officials in Ireland. Those laws were designed to preserve an English culture that was rapidly disappearing in Ireland. One of the rules required English subjects in Ireland to use an English surname. And that was a notable development for a couple of reasons. It shows that surnames had become so common by this point, that it was accepted that most people would have one. The law also shows how a surname can reflect a specific culture and tradition. Apparently, that connection was so important to English officials in the 1300s that they mandated the use of English surnames in order to preserve some of that English culture and identity.

Since the early episodes about the Norman Conquest, I have occasionally made reference to words that eventually became common surnames. The fact is that most common English surnames have a long history that can be traced back to the period after the Conquest. Most of those names are recorded for the first time in the two or three centuries that followed the arrival of the Normans. And the reason why those names started to appear during that time period is

because that's when surnames started to become common. Prior to the Conquest, surnames didn't really exist in England.

When surnames first started to appear, they were not hereditary like modern surnames. In other words, they were unique to the person who bore the name, and they didn't have any connection to the family as a whole. But around the current point in our overall story of English in the early to mid 1300s, all of that started to change. These names started to be used as family names. Records show that children were using the same surnames as their parents. So modern hereditary surnames were finally being used. And many of those early surnames are still in use today. In fact, many of you probably have one of those old surnames.

In this episode, I want to explore the history of English names, and I want to explore where most of our common names and surnames came from. However, this is one of those topics that is too big for one episode. So I'll continue the discussion in the next episode where I intend to explore the growth of towns and cities. We'll see how that population growth led to the development of specialized jobs and occupations, and many of those occupations also gave English lots of common surnames. So I'll cover occupational surnames next time as part of that discussion. But let's begin this episode with a more general look at the history of names.

And a good place to start is with that word ***name***. It's an old word that goes back to Old English. But it's actually much older than that. It began with the original Indo-Europeans. That original Indo-European word has been reconstructed as something like ****no-men***. In fact, this was one of those words that led early scholars to conclude that most of the languages of Europe had evolved from an older common language. And that's because every major Indo-European language family has a version of this root word, and the forms are quite similar across all of those languages.

Not only has the original Indo-European word been reconstructed as ****no-men***, but scholars have also reconstructed a phrase that referred to the actual process of naming something or someone. That phrase was something like ****nomen-dhe***. It combines the root words for ***name*** and ***do***, so it literally translates as 'name do' or 'name put' but it meant to 'give something a name.' That construction can found in Old Czech, Hittite, Sanskrit, and Greek.

From this we can reasonably conclude that the Indo-Europeans had personal names, but we don't really know very much about those names.

If we skip ahead a few centuries to the Greeks, we find this Indo-European root word rendered in Greek as ***onoma***. We still have much of that Greek root in the word ***onomatopoeia*** which refers to a word that is formed based on the sound of thing it describes. So words like ***moo*** for the sound a cow makes, or ***buzz*** for the sound of a bee.

That Greek root also survives in several other English words, and it's a little more apparent in some of those. It forms the 'N-Y-M' or ***-nym*** part of words like ***synonym***, ***homonym***, ***acronym***, and ***pseudonym***. All of those words have to do with the way things are named or what things are called. And the ***-nym*** part at the end represents the Greek root word meaning 'name.'

With respect to personal names, the Greeks tended to use certain regular naming conventions. It was common for parents to name their first son after his grandfather on his father's side. The second son was often named after his grandfather on his mother's side. The naming conventions for girls are not as well documented, but it appears that they followed a similar pattern. So again, it was common to name the first daughter after her grandmother on her father's side, and the second daughter after her grandmother on her mother's side.

But in either case, and whatever the naming convention, the Greeks followed the pattern of most ancient cultures by only using one name – a personal name. They didn't really use surnames or family names. The family lineage and traditions was maintained by giving children names derived from their grandparents. So personal names tended to be maintained within the family over time. But there was no family name or surname.

We can now skip forward to the Romans because the Romans did something very different and very unusual for the time. They actually used multiple names, and they also used an early type of surname.

But let's begin our look at Roman names with their word for 'name.' The Latin word for 'name' was ***nomen***. So once again, we see the resemblance to the Modern English word. The Latin word ***nomen*** can be found in tack in the word ***nomenclature*** – literally a 'name caller.' In its original Latin, it referred to the Roman official who announced visitors. But in Modern English, it's really just another word for a name or the systemic process by which things are named.

The Latin word ***nomen*** is also found in words like ***nominate***, ***nominal*** and ***misnomer***. It's also the root of the word ***noun***. Of course, we use the word ***noun*** as a part of speech, but it originally meant a name. From the original sense of the 'the name of a thing' or 'what something is called,' the word came to be a generic word for anything with a name or anything that can be named. And that gave us the grammatical sense of the word ***noun***.

The Latin root is also the source of the word ***renown*** meaning 'the condition of being well-known' or 'having people know you by name.'

So the Latin word for 'name' is found in many English words today. But what's most interesting about Roman names was the way the Romans used them to identify people. The Romans were very unique among ancient peoples of Europe and the Mediterranean in that they used multiple names. To be fair, this mostly applied to the wealthy and powerful, but it was still an usual system at the time.

Most of these prominent people had three names – what the Romans called a ***praenomen***, a ***nomen*** and a ***cognomen***. This naming convention evolved over the centuries, but generally speaking, the ***praenomen*** was the first name or familiar name – mostly used between family members and close friends. The middle name was called simply the ***nomen***, and it typically represented the name of the person's clan. Clans were made up of various families, so the third name or ***cognomen*** was usually the name of the person's family. A fourth name was sometimes added to the end which was often a descriptive name or a type of nickname.

This helps to explain why most historical figures in ancient history have only one single name until we get to the Roman period, and then all of sudden we encounter people like Julius Caesar and Mark Anthony. But even then, those are not usually their full formal names. Julius Caesar was actually Gaius Julius Caesar. And Marcus Aurelius was actually Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus.

Again, each component of those names was usually based on some type of naming convention – even though that convention changed over time. For example, it was common for a child's praenomen or first name to be based on the name of an older ancestor. That was true for sons – at least up to the fifth son. But after that, sons were often given numerical names. If parents had a fifth son, that son was often called ***Quintus*** meaning 'the fifth.' The sixth son was often named ***Sixtus*** meaning 'the sixth.' The seventh son was ***Septimus*** meaning 'the seventh.' And the eighth son was ***Octavius*** meaning 'the eighth.' I mentioned this fact in a recent bonus episode I did at Patreon, and I wanted to mention here as well because it helps to explain something that you may have wondered about when it comes to our modern month names.

I noted way back in Episode 18 that our month names were borrowed from the Romans. Most of the months are named after gods or goddesses or prominent Romans. But the last four months have number names. ***September***, ***October***, ***November*** and ***December*** are based on the Latin root word for seven, eight, nine and ten, respectively. Now as I noted in that earlier episode, those months were originally the seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth months as their name would suggest. And that was because the calendar year began with the vernal equinox in the spring with March. The first four months– ***March***, ***April***, ***May*** and ***June*** – were based on the names of either Roman, Etruscan or Greek gods. But the fifth month was originally called ***Quintilis*** based on the Latin word for five. The sixth month was ***Sextilis*** based on the word for six. The seventh month was ***September***, then ***October***, ***November*** and ***December***. And it appears that all of these months received number names because that was consistent with the Roman naming conventions at the time. Just as sons received number names starting with the fifth son, the months received number names starting with the fifth month.

Now again, as I noted in that earlier episode, ***January*** and ***February*** were later added to the beginning of the calendar to fill in the previously undefined winter period. And that threw all of the number names off by two. And then ***Quintilis*** was renamed ***July*** after Julius Caesar. And ***Sextilis*** was renamed ***August*** after Augustus Caesar. And that left us with ***September*** through ***December*** with their original numerical names, even though the numbers are still off by two. ***September*** is now the ninth month, ***October*** is the tenth month, and so on. But this helps to explain why the final months of the year are still named after Roman numbers and not after gods or goddesses or people. It all had to do with the Roman naming conventions at the time. And again, those rules generally required the use of multiple names for people.

Now those naming conventions died out the collapse of the Western Roman Empire as the Roman period gave way to the early Middle Ages. And as we move forward to the Middle Ages and the Anglo-Saxon period, we return to a system where people were only known by one name.

Back when we went through the Anglo-Saxon period, we encountered a lot of those names. And you probably remember how funny-sounding a lot of those names were. We came across people with names like Aethelbert, Wulfstan, Alric, Aethelred, Ordric, Godgifu and Stigand. These were just a few of the large variety of names used in the Anglo-Saxon period. They were mostly derived from a combination of two separate Old English root words – and most people only had that one basic name. We have to keep in mind that Anglo-Saxon England was largely a rural society. Most people lived in small communities where everybody knew each other, so most people didn't need more than one name.

Now we know that the Anglo-Saxons did sometimes used descriptive words to help identify a particular person – especially a prominent person. For example, we know that the Anglo-Saxon king Aethelred was also known as Æþelred Unræd – or Aethelred the Unready. You might recall that the name was actually a pun. ***Æþelred*** meant 'noble counsel,' and ***Unræd*** meant 'un-counseled or poorly counseled.' So Æþelred Unræd literally meant 'noble counsel poorly counseled.' People probably got a nice chuckle out of that nickname at the time, but much of that original meaning was lost over time, and today, we have just converted ***Unræd*** into 'unready' which sounds similar and is an accurate description in its own right.

Old English documents also reveal other Anglo-Saxons with similar descriptive names. We have Æþelstan fætta – literally Aethelstan the Fat. And Eadweard se langa – literally Edward the Long or Edward the Tall. We're also told in one chronicle that the Anglo-Saxon king Edmund was very brave and that led to him being called ***Irensid*** – or Ironside – and he is still known as Edmund Ironside in many histories of that period.

Now again, these were additional names or descriptive names. They were unique to the person who bore the name, and they didn't pass on to future generations. So they weren't surnames in the sense that we use them today. And they apparently were pretty rare. Most Anglo-Saxons only had one name.

So for much of the Old English period, people had one – and just one – of those odd-sounding Anglo-Saxon names. But all of that started to change with the arrival of the Normans in 1066. As we know, the Norman Conquest caused a major upheaval that impacted almost every aspect of English society. And that impact extended to English names.

After the Normans arrived, French and Latin became the prestigious languages. Meanwhile, English fell into sharp decline. Of course, people still spoke English, but it was mostly confined to the peasants and the common people. It was seen as an unsophisticated peasant language. And that stigma started to affect those native Anglo-Saxon names. Those traditional names fell out of favor, and in their place, people started to give their children more prestigious and acceptable names from the continent. That included French names like William, Henry, Geoffrey, Richard, Robert, Agnes, Alice and Matilda. It also included names derived from the Bible like John from John the Baptist and Mary from the Virgin Mary. Names like Matthew and Joan and Elizabeth were also derived from the Bible and became common during the period after the Conquest.

Along the way, most of those old Anglo-Saxon names died out. A few survived like Edward, Edmund, Alfred, and Albert. Oswald survived, as did a few female names like Ethel and Edith. But the newer French names and Biblical names were all the rage.

It wasn't just that English parents were choosing names from a different place, they were also choosing names from a smaller list. There simply weren't as many names to choose from. And to compound that problem, parents really preferred a small handful of those names – especially William and John for boys, and Joan, Margaret and Matilda for girls.

In his book entitled "Life in the Middle Ages," historian Martyn Whittock examined the Poll Tax returns from Sheffield in the year 1379. The Poll Tax was a new type of tax that was levied on most of the people of England – not just landholders or traders. Most of those old tax records survive, and they provide a fascinating snapshot of how the common people of England identified themselves in the 1300s. Those records from Sheffield show that 715 men were assessed for tax in 1379. Exactly one-third of them were named John. And another 19 percent were named William. So putting those numbers together, over half of the men listed in those tax records had one of those two names. And that wasn't a brand new problem in the 1300s. It had been a problem for a while. A surviving set of manorial records from the 1200s contains of list of men who were assessed with fines. After recording the names of several men named William, the scribe eventually just wrote down "another William."

The scribe's apparent frustration at having to list all of those men named William points to part of the problem with naming practices in these first couple of centuries after the Conquest. Too many people had the same name, and there was no easy way to distinguish them. But government bureaucrats and tax collectors needed to distinguish them, and even average ordinary people needed to distinguish each other, especially as people poured into the ever-growing towns and cities. I mean if you were speaking to someone about your friend William, and you didn't have some way to identify him, nobody was going to have a clue who you were talking about.

As it turned out, the highest nobles of England had already worked out a solution to this problem. By the 1100s, they were already distinguishing themselves by their landholdings. Now these weren't exactly surnames in the modern sense of the term, but they were the beginning of many modern surnames. We've already seen that prominent nobles were identified by their landholdings and estates. William the Conqueror was known as William of Normandy. Geoffrey Plantagenet was Geoffrey of Anjou. Other major nobles also identified themselves in much the same way, giving us names like Roger of Montgomery, and William of Warenne, and Robert of Gloucester. This extended down to lesser nobles who often identified themselves by their smaller holdings. For example, Robert de Lincoln or Robert of Lincoln is found in the tax records for the year 1130. Around the same time, we find the name of William de Hambleton or William of Hamilton. Those are some of the earliest recorded instances of what eventually became the surnames Lincoln and Hamilton.

Over time, the preposition in the middle was dropped. So Robert of Lincoln eventually just became Robert Lincoln. And William de Hambleton became William Hamilton. Of course, ***de*** is the French word meaning 'of,' and most of these names actually used ***de*** at first – like Simon de Montfort who I discussed in an earlier episode.

Interestingly, for some unclear reason, the word ***the*** was sometimes substituted for ***de*** or ***of***' The Normans also sometimes use ***le*** which was the French equivalent of ***the***, so it may have been borrowed from that Norman practice. But that occasional usage helps to explain by Robert the Bruce was called 'the Bruce.' He name also appears as 'de Bruce' in many Middle English documents meaning Robert 'of Bruce,' and it is generally thought that Bruce is an Anglicized version of Brix in Normandy, which is believed to be where the Bruce family originated. At any rate, the use of ***the*** died out pretty quickly in England, but it survived much longer in Scotland and Ireland, which is why it is much more common to find names using '***the***' in those regions. But again, the ***the*** in 'Robert the Bruce' just meant ***de*** or ***of***. And regardless which word was used – ***de***, ***of*** or ***the*** – they had all mostly disappeared altogether by the 1400s.

Now it made sense that nobles would identify themselves by their landholdings or their estates because those holdings were a fundamental part of their feudal identity. It defined their rights and duties. It also determined how they were taxed. And there was a hereditary aspect to those place names because the estates often passed within the same family from one generation to the next.

The Domesday Book lists the names of nearly 400 Frenchmen who held lands directly from William the Conqueror. 27% of them used names or titles based on place names or estates located in France, and another 6% used names based on places or estates in England. Together, that means that one-third of William's primary vassals were identified by a place name. [*Source: England under the Norman and Angevin Kings - Bartlett (p.541-546)*]

Again, this type of naming convention was initially limited to the nobility, but it was soon extended to commoners. It provided a convenient way to distinguish people who all had the same personal name.

For example, in the mid-1200s, a Parisian man named Lotyn moved to London where he became known as Lotyn of Paris. That place name ***Paris*** eventually led to the modern surname ***Parish***. Other people were also identified by their nationality. Philip of Wales was better known as Philip the Welshman. And that term ***Welshman*** later evolved into the surname ***Walsh***. Along the same lines, a man named Henry from Scotland was known as Henry the Scot, and that national designation led to the surname ***Scott***. Surnames like ***Fleming*** and ***Norman*** also developed in the same way.

Since most commoners did not have landed estates, and most were from rural areas, it soon became common for many of them to use other features to identify their place of origin. A man named John from a forested area might be known as John atte Wood or John atte Woods. It meant that he lived 'at the woods.' In this case, both ***at*** and ***wood*** survived in the surname ***Atwood***, but in most cases the preposition was lost over time. When the preposition ***at*** was dropped, that just left the surname ***Wood*** and ***Woods***.

Many common surnames were acquired in this manner. ***Rivers***, ***Brooke***, ***Hill***, ***Bush***, ***Stone***, ***Fields*** and ***Moore*** were all derived from topographical features. The very common name ***Green*** was also formed in this manner. It referred to an open grassy area – or green. Another name derived from this type of region was ***Meadows***. And belive it or not, the name ***Bradley*** has the same basic origin. A meadow was sometimes called a ***brad-leah*** – literally a 'broad lea.' ***Lea*** meant meadow, so a 'broad lea' was a 'broad meadow.' And that produced the name ***Bradley***.

Shortly after the Conquest, we find a reference to Matilda de Perer – literally 'Matilda from the pear tree.' Presumably she lived near a pear tree in her local community. And that reference ultimately produced the surname ***Perry***.

Sometimes the name was based on a man-made feature instead of a natural feature. The name ***Bridges*** is based on one or more persons who lived near a bridge. The name ***Hall*** is derived from the word ***hall*** – an Old English word for a large covered building and a central feature of Anglo-Saxon society. The name ***Townsend*** was literally 'the town's end,' so it originated with one or more persons who lived at the edge of town.

Now it's important to note that most of these names were not hereditary surnames at first. They didn't usually pass from parents to children. They were merely descriptive names to help identify the person in question. In fact, many people changed their name if they moved or relocated. If Joan lived in a small village by a meadow, she might be known at Joan at Meadow or Joan Meadows. But if she moved to a different region like Kent, she might then be known as Joan of Kent. If she married a man from London and moved there, her son might be known as Robert of London where he lived, rather than Robert of Kent where his mother was from. So again, among commoners, these names didn't really pass on from one generation to the next. They were descriptive and unique to the person who bore the name. And if circumstances changed, the name might also change. However, among nobles, who tended to hold onto the same lands for several generations, these descriptive names tended to be more conservative, and they tended to pass on through the family over time. They therefore tended to be more hereditary. But that wasn't always the case. Estates and land holdings could vary over time. Large estates were often subdivided among the surviving children. And when those children got married, they sometimes combined their estates with those of a spouse. So a name tied to a manor or estate didn't necessarily survive within a family for very long.

Given this variability, some nobles didn't identify themselves in relation to a specific piece of land. Instead, they identified themselves in relation to their parents – usually their father. Again, this made sense because noble children usually inherited their lands from their parents, so it made sense for them to use that relationship to establish their identity.

The Norman nobles often used this approach, and they typically used the word ***fitz*** to mean 'child of.' For example, Robert of Gloucester had seven children with his wife, all of which were known as ***FitzRobert*** – literally 'child of Robert.' The children included William FitzRobert, Roger FitzRobert, Matilda FitzRobert, and so on. Again this was a very common way of forming names in Norman England, and it still survives in surnames like ***Fitzgerald***, ***Fitzpatrick***, ***Fitzsimmons***, and a few others.

Commoners also started to form names in this manner, but unlike the nobles, they preferred to use the native word ***son***. So in that case, Robert's son William would have been known as William Robertson. As I noted in an earlier episode about the Vikings, that was a naming technique that they used as well. The famous Viking Leif Erikson was literally 'Leif, Erik's son' or 'Leif, son of Erik.' His father was Erik the Red. So English commoners preferred to follow that pattern, especially in the old Danelaw region where Norse influence was more durable. Of course, that produced lots of surnames like ***Johnson***, ***Jackson***, ***Wilson***, ***Richardson***, ***Williamson***, and so on. In fact, in the first couple of centuries after the Conquest, these were the most common types of surnames used by commoners. [*Source: Time Travelers Guide to the Middle Ages (p. 87)*]

But again, these were not hereditary surnames. They were literal descriptive surnames. So I noted that Robert of Gloucester had a son named William – William FitzRobert – literally William 'son of Robert.' And later, that son William had a daughter named Mabel. But she wasn't named Mabel FitzRobert. She didn't use her grandfather's name because she wasn't his daughter. She was the daughter of the son William. So she was named Mabel FitzWilliam. Again these names were descriptive, and therefore they changed at each generation. In much the same way, Geoffrey might be the son of John. So he might be known as Geoffrey Johnson. But if Geoffrey had a son named Richard, he would be Richard Geoffrey's son – not Richard Johnson. Again, the names were much more literal early on. By the way, if the name 'Geoffrey's son' seems like a made-up name on my part, it's not. 'Geoffrey's son' still exists today – as the name ***Jefferson***.

I should also note that this same approach was used in the Gaelic areas of the British Isles – in Scotland and Ireland. The 'Mc' part of names like ***McDonald*** and ***McCain*** also meant 'son of.' So ***McDonald*** literally meant 'son of Donald.' The same is true of the 'O' part of Irish names like ***O'Donnell*** and ***O'Brien***. ***O'Donnell*** meant 'son of Donnell.' So this type of naming system became common in one form or another throughout the British Isles.

Now so far, we've seen that people in Norman England were starting to use second names as identifiers. These were descriptive names either based on the person's place of origin or the name of the person's parent. All the names I've mentioned so far were in place by the 1300s. So we can say that surnames were a common feature throughout England by the 1300s. And in fact, the word ***surname*** itself was introduced around the same time.

Surname uses the Latin prefix ***sur-*** meaning 'extra or additional or over.' We also have that prefix in words like ***surpass***, ***surmount***, and ***surcharge***. And here, that prefix was added to the native word ***name***. So ***surname*** literally means an 'extra name,' and it is one of those blended words that combines a Latin prefix with an Old English noun. And that shows how people were starting to mix those grammatical elements together during this period. The word ***surname*** is found for the first time in an English document dated to the year 1330.

While most of these early surnames were not hereditary, one exception had started to emerge during this period, and that was the names used by the nobility. Some of the nobles were starting to pass on their surnames to their children because they were passing on landed estates to their

children, and consistent surnames helped to establish that lineage for record-keeping. But outside of the nobility, there wasn't much need for commoners to use a family surname. In those cases, the names continued to be descriptive and unique to the person who bore the name. And since those names were descriptive, it allowed for the creation of other names that were also descriptive. I mean, there was no reason why a person's identity had to be defined solely by their place of origin or their father's name. Any unique personal characteristic was sufficient. A person's physical appearance or personal demeanor could also be used as an identifying feature.

We've already seen that the Anglo-Saxons sometimes gave people nicknames in this way. Thus Aethelred was 'Unræd' – or 'poorly advised.' And King Edmund was known as 'Ironside.' These types of nicknames were also common among the nobility of France and Norman England. We know that Richard I was known as Richard the Lionheart. His brother John was known as John Lackland because his father had failed to set aside any specific land for him in the initial division of the Plantagenent realm. In fact, that name Plantagenet was based on a flower worn by the founder of the family dynasty – Geoffrey of Anjou. William II was known as William Rufus because the word ***rufus*** was a descriptive term for someone with red hair.

What's so interesting is that these descriptive nicknames also started to be adopted by commoners after the Conquest. And many of those names also evolved into surnames over time.

Many of those early nicknames are fun because they actually reveal something unique about the personality or appearance of the person had bore the name.

The Domesday Book captures a lot of these names. Remember that the book was compiled about 20 years after the Conquest, and it was composed in Latin. It contains a lot of Latin names. One of them translates as Humphrey 'Face of a Wolf,' and another as Humphrey 'Golden-Bollocks.' It also contains the name Roger 'God Save the Ladies.'

Mixed in with those Latin names are a few Old English names based on personal features. We find Ernuin Catenase – literally Ernwine 'Cat's nose.' So presumably, his nose resembled that of a cat. The book also contains the name Goduuinus Softebread – literally Godwine 'Soft-bread.' And we have the name Aluuinus Deule – literally Alwine 'The devil.' Sounds like a pretty bad dude.

You might recall from an earlier episode that the word ***bad*** was first recorded in English as part of surnames like 'Baddecheese' and 'Badinteheved' – literally 'Bad in the Head.' Other records from this period provide the name Henry 'Nevereafered' – literally Henry 'Never Afraid.' We also have the name William 'Standupryght' – literally William 'Stand Up Right.'

Now obviously, most of those names were unique to the individual they described, and once again, they didn't pass from generation to generation. But some of those descriptive surnames did survive. Some terms were used to describe physical characteristics, and several of them are still used today as hereditary surnames. That includes names like ***Long***, ***Short***, ***Little***, ***Young***, and even the name ***Armstrong***. Names like ***Black***, ***Brown*** and ***White*** usually described a person's hair color, but they could also be used to describe a person's complexion, and they also survived

as surnames. The name ***Lamb*** usually described a meek or docile person. Moody was a name for a brave person – which was the original sense of the word ***moody***. So contrary to what you might expect, ***Moody*** didn't refer to an irritable person. Another surname derived from a personal nickname is ***Truman***. It was literally a 'true man' meaning a man who was true or loyal or trustworthy. ***Newman*** was formed along the same lines. It was literally a 'new man,' in other words, someone who was new to the area. ***Darwin*** was originally ***deorwine*** – literally 'dear friend.' The name ***Lightfoot*** referred to someone light on his or her feet, so it meant someone who was nimble or quick.

Again, these are all names that originated as nicknames. And in fact, the word ***nickname*** is also first recorded in English around the current point in our overall story in the early 1300s. That suggests that these types of names were becoming widely accepted at the time.

The word ***nickname*** is found for the first time in a document composed in the year 1303. But in its original form, it wasn't ***nickname***. It was ***ekename***. So it didn't have its modern 'n' at the front. This was another one of those words that we've seen before that either acquired or lost an 'n' at the front due to confusion with the articles ***a*** and ***an***. Those articles came before the noun, so during a time when most people couldn't read, it wasn't always clear if the 'n' belonged to the article or to the noun. So people often referred to "an ekename," but when rendered in normal speech, it was more like "an ekename." So it sounded like the 'n' was part of ***ekename***. Over time, the 'n' moved over from the article to the noun. So instead of saying "an ekename," people started to say "a nekename." And by the 1500s, it had become "a nickname." But again, ***nickname*** began as ***ekename***.

But what was an ***ekename***? What did it mean? Well, it was usually spelled E-K-E-N-A-M-E – and as the spelling suggests, it was literally an 'eek-name.' We still have that word ***eek*** in Modern English. You might "eke out a living." Or your favorite team might "eke out a win." It's an Old English word that meant 'to increase.' So it was something extra or added. In the context of a name, an ***ekename*** was an extra or added name.

Over time, the word ***eke*** (/eek/) came to be used to refer to the process of extending or adding on to something. So a poor peasant might have to 'eke' or 'stretch' out his limited food supply to get by. And that led to the modern sense of the word ***eke*** as 'barely getting by.' So that's why today you might "eke out a living" or "eke out a win." But again, we have that same word hidden in the first part of ***nickname***. And I should also note that the words ***nickname*** and ***surname*** both had the same literal meaning at first. They both meant 'an extra name.' And the two words didn't really become distinct until those extra names became hereditary in the mid-1300s. And at that time, the word ***surname*** was applied to those hereditary names. The word ***nickname*** continued to retain more of its original sense as an extra name, but it came to be used more in the sense of an informal name.

So today, ***surname*** means a formal family name, whereas ***nickname*** usually refers an informal name. And nicknames weren't always used as an extra name in addition to a first name.

They were sometimes used in place of the first name. They were often informal or casual ways of expressing someone's personal name. And they were usually derived from that personal name. A lot of those nicknames are still used today.

Through this process, Edward became Ned or Ted, Richard became Dick, Robert became Bob, and John became Jack. Even today, we still associate those nicknames with the personal name from which they were derived – even if we don't really understand how that happened. I mean, how did we get from William to Bill – and from John to Jack – and from Margaret to Peggy?

Well, the first step usually involved some type of shortening. And that makes sense. We would naturally expect people to come up with a shorter version of a long multi-syllable name – especially if that person was a family member or close friend. So Edward became Ed. William became Will. Richard became Rich or Rick. Margaret became Marg or Marge. But that only takes us part of the way. Those are clearly just shorter versions based on the first syllable of the full name. But how did we get those more unusual variations? Well, several factors contributed to those other nicknames.

One common factor was a tendency to switch an 'r' sound in the middle of a word to an 'l' sound. This happened with a lot of names – names like Harry, Martha, Mary, Dorothy and Sarah. All of those names had an 'r' sound in the middle. But it became common for people to shorten those names and replace the 'r' with an 'l'. So Harry was often rendered as Hal. And Martha and Mary were often shortened to Mol or Molly. Dorothy was rendered as Dol or Dolly. And Sarah was often rendered as Sally. All of those alternate names or nicknames follow this pattern where the name was shortened to the first syllable and the 'r' sound was replaced with an 'l.' And obviously, in the case of Molly, Dolly and Sally, the informal suffix 'y' (/ee/) was added to the end – in the same way that we convert Jim to Jimmy, and Rob to Robbie, and Tom to Tommy. So this pattern explains nicknames like Hal, Molly, Dolly and Sally. [*Source: Life in the Middle Ages, Whittock (p.173)*]

Another factor that contributed to modern nicknames was the medieval tendency to make up rhyming names. They would take a common personal name and create a new name that rhymed with it. This was very similar to the rhyming slang that is still used in certain English dialects like Cockney where the word ***money*** is sometimes rendered as "bees and honey" and the word ***stairs*** is sometimes rendered as "apples and pears." It's a type of word play, and medieval English speakers did the same thing with personal names – usually with the short versions of names.

So Edward was shorted to Ed. But people would often use rhyming variations of Ed – like Ted or Ned. And both of those have survived as modern nicknames for Edward. Again, the informal suffix /ee/ is sometimes added to the end as well giving us variations like Eddie and Teddy.

This also explains how Richard became Dick. Richard was often shortened to Rich or Rick. And then people came up with other variations that rhymed like Hick and Dick. Hick died out over time, but Dick remained, and it is still a common variation of Richard.

Along the same lines, Robert produced the nickname Bob. Robert was shortened to Rob, and then Bob was then coined as a rhyming variation. And Bob is still used as a common nickname for Robert.

This also explains how William became Bill. William was shortened to Will, and then Bill was used as a rhyming variation.

This process also explains how Peg or Peggy became a common nickname for Margaret. Margaret was sometimes shortened to Marg, and Marg was sometimes pronounced as 'Mag' or 'Meg.' Mag then produced Maggie with that informal /ee/ ending. And Maggie is still a common nickname for Margaret. The other short version Meg led to Peg as a rhyming variation. And that produced Peg and Peggy as alternate nicknames for Margaret.

So that process helps to explain a lot of common nicknames that we still use today. But it doesn't explain one very common nickname, and that's the name Jack as a nickname for John. This is not only an incredibly common nickname, but it's also an incredibly common word in the English language. The word ***jack*** is one of those rare names that has passed into the general vocabulary of English, and it is still pervasive throughout English.

Unfortunately, the history of the name Jack is a little unclear. It appears that it is actually derived from two separate names – Jacob and John. Both of those names are actually Biblical names, and they both passed from Hebrew, to Greek, to Latin, to French, to English. So along the way, both of those original names produced lots of variations, and it appears that each one produced a variation that ended up as Jack. In the case of Jacob, it produced shortened versions like Jake and Jock and Jack. It also produced the name James.

But the name John also produced lots of variations over time. Latin had the name as Ioannes (/yo-annes/). And when the name passed into early French, it acquired its modern 'j' sound at the front. So it went from Ioannes (/yo-annes/) to Joannes (/jo-annes/). This was the same process that converted Iupiter into Jupiter, and Iulius into Julius – which we saw in earlier episodes. And again here, it converted Ioannes into Joannes. And Joannes gave us the name John, as well as female names like Joanna, Joanne, and Joan. And it also gave us the surname Jones.

But how did the name John produce Jack? Where did that 'k' sound at the end of Jack come from? Well, it appears that it came from the suffix ***-kin*** which was used to indicate something small. Back in Episode 110, I discussed the cloth industry in Medieval England, and I mentioned that suffix back then. It converted the French word ***nappe*** meaning a tablecloth into the word ***napkin*** meaning a small cloth used at the table. And in Dutch, it converted the word ***man*** into ***manikin*** – literally a 'small man,' but it evolved to mean a model used to display clothing. This suffix was used in Middle English, and it was also used in northern French, but it appears to have originated within Dutch and then spread out into northern France and England.

Now Dutch had also borrowed the name John from Latin, but Dutch retained the origin 'y' sound at the beginning. It was usually rendered as Jan (/yan/) – spelled J-A-N. And within Dutch, the

suffix ***-kin*** meaning 'little or small' was added to that name Jan, thereby producing the name Jankin (/yankin/). It basically meant 'little John.' And it may have originally referred to a boy named Jan. So you might have a father named Jan and his young son might have been Little Jan – or Jankin. Over time, this suffix simply became a term of affection. It was used to indicate a nickname in much the same way that English uses the /ee/ ending today – the way were convert Jim into Jimmy, and Bill into Billy. Well Dutch added this ***-kin*** suffix in a similar way. And Jan (/yan/) became Jankin (/yankin/).

Now some linguists believe that the Dutch name Jankin is actually the ultimate source of the modern word ***Yankee***. The first known use of the word Yankee in an English document was in the 1600s, and it was used in reference to Dutch pirates. And its also important to remember that New York was original a Dutch colony called New Amsterdam. So one popular theory is that Dutch ***Jankin*** gave us the word ***Yankee***. There is some disagreement about that, but if that theory is correct, it means that ***Yankee*** literally translates as 'little John.'

So we have the Dutch name Jankin which was a combination of Jan and the suffix ***-kin***. Well it appears that this same suffix made its way into the French and English version of the name John. It isn't clear if it was borrowed from the Dutch name or if it was created natively, but either way, it produced the name Jankin. So we had Dutch Jankin (/yankin/) and English Jankin (/jankin/). It was the same name with the same construction, and essentially the same pronunciation except for the initial letter. Over time, English speakers converted Jankin into Jakin and then shortened it to Jack. So from John to Jankin to Jakin to Jack. That appears to be the connection between John and Jack, and that's why Jack is still used as a nickname for John.

By the way, that intermediate form Jankin still survives as the surname ***Jenkins*** – from Jankin to Jenkins. That surname is first recorded in the Domesday Book. And again if that etymology of ***Yankee*** is correct, it means that ***Yankee*** and ***Jenkins*** have the same etymology, and they both mean 'little John.' ***Yankee*** would be derived from the Dutch version, and ***Jenkins*** would be derived from the French and English versions.

Also, that ***-kin*** suffix still survives in other surnames as well. ***Wilkins*** in literally 'little Will' or 'little William.' ***Tomkins*** is literally 'little Tom' or 'little Thomas.' ***Watkins*** is literally 'literally 'little Walt' or 'little Walter.' And as we just saw, ***Jenkins*** is literally 'little John.'

Now that surname ***Jenkins*** is kind of important because it reflects that intermediate stage between John and Jack, and it helps to illustrate how Jack became a nickname for John. But here's the more important point. It also helps to explain how Jack became such a common word in the English language.

Earlier I noted that John was an extremely common name. It was so common that a third of the male taxpayers in Sheffield were named John. And now we see that Jack was a common nickname for John. Over time, since so many people went by the name Jack, it started to become synonymous with the common man. Any ordinary average person might be called ***Jack***.

This also happened in France. There the name was also associated with common people or peasants. In French, the name ***Jacque*** became associated with the type of tunic worn by peasants. That type of tunic was called a ***jaque***, but it later entered English in the 1400s as ***jacket***. And of course, we still wear jackets today. So ***jacket*** is derived from this name ***Jack***.

In English, the name Jack was used in a variety of expressions where the sense of the word was a common or average man, and sometimes it carried a negative connotation. It produced the term ***Jack Sprat*** meaning a small or insignificant person. A ***Jack Tar*** was a sailor. A ***Jack Adams*** was a fool. A ***Jack Ketch*** was a hangman. A remarkable person or thing was a ***cracker jack***. The lowest court card in a deck of cards started to be called a ***Jack***. A common man who cut down trees was a ***lumber jack***. We can also include other terms like ***blackjack***, ***jackass***, ***jack-in-the-box*** and ***jack-o-latern***. Of course, some of those terms were later developments in the language.

Since common men often engaged in manual labor, including heavy lifting, the word also became associated with mechanical devices that lift heavy things. That gave us the term ***car jack***. This sense was late extended to ***jackhammer***.

As nursery rhymes developed over the next few centuries, Jack was often adopted as the name of the main male character. So we end up with Jack and the Beanstalk, Little Jack Horner, Jack be Nimble, Jack Sprat, and Jack and Jill.

The name also passed into Scots which retained more of the original French pronunciation as ***Jock***. And that Scottish word also passed back into standard English as ***jock*** – J-O-C-K. According to some scholars, that Scottish name ***Jock*** is the ultimate origin of the word ***jock*** in its sense as an athlete. ***Jock*** was often rendered as ***Jockey*** – in the same way that ***Jack*** is sometimes rendered as ***Jackie***. Again the word ***jockey*** had much of that same sense as a common man, but it later became associated with a common man who takes care of the horses. And from there, it came to mean the person who rides a horse in a race. And that gave us the modern sense of the word ***jockey***. That sense of being in control of a horse led to the extended use of the word as the person in control of the music played on the radio. That gave us the term ***disc jockey*** which has been shortened over time to DJ. And these days, DJ's are sometimes musical stars in their own right. But again, that 'J' in DJ is ultimately based on the Scottish version of the name Jack.

And there's another term that epitomizes the sense of the name Jack as a common man or ordinary laborer. That's the term "jack of all trades." It meant a handyman or a person who was proficient at many different trades.

And that's a very important term as we transition from this episode to the next – because this period in the 1200s and 1300s was a period of increased specialization when it came to jobs. Towns and cities were growing as people poured in from the countryside. Those growing towns created an increased demand for goods and services, and new businesses sprang up to satisfy that demand. During this period, craft guilds flourished, and lots of new words related to jobs and occupations began to appear in English for the first time. Many of these small businesses were family enterprises, and they were passed down from generation to generation. A person's job was such an integral part of his or her identity that it often became part of his or her name.

During this period, occupational surnames became common. And many of those surnames are still used today – like Carpenter, Weaver, Taylor, Butler, Saddler, and the most common English surname of all, Smith. And some modern surnames are based on jobs or occupations that have long since passed into history.

So next time, we're going to roll up our sleeves and go to work. We'll look at the words for occupations that were common in the 1300s, and we'll explore how many of those words became surnames. And along the way, we'll also see how those descriptive surnames finally started to become hereditary during this period.

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

EPISODE 118: TRADE NAMES

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 118: Trade Names. In this episode, we're going to continue our look at the development of English surnames in the 1300s. Specifically, we're going to explore the rise of occupational surnames. Like other surnames, names based on specific jobs or trades became common in the period after the Norman Conquest. And they were really an outgrowth of the changing job market during the Middle Ages. Towns and cities were growing, and jobs were becoming more and more specialized. And it was increasingly common to refer to people by their occupation. A job title helped to distinguish people who otherwise had the same first name. And many of those occupational surnames still exist today. In some cases, those surnames still exist even though the original word for the job or trade has largely disappeared. So those names serve as relics of time when the job market was very different from today.

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 and get bonus episodes and transcripts at Patreon.com/historyofenglish.

Also, if you missed my recent announcement, I had the opportunity to sit in on the Lexitecture Podcast when I was in Boston for the Sound Education conference. In keeping with the format of that show, we each introduced a word and discussed its etymology. That episode is Episode 26, and again, it's the Lexitecture Podcast. Also, while I was at the conference, I sat down with Mark and Aven of the Endless Knot Podcast, and we talked about the history of English and the history and future of this particular podcast as well. So if you have time, be sure to check out that episode as well. It is Episode 64 of the Endless Knot Podcast. That's ENDLESS KNOT Podcast. While I was at the conference, I also spoke on a panel about language podcasting, and I gave a short talk about the history of English. That audio should also be available in a few weeks, so I'll post some of that audio as well when its ready. So with that, let's turn to this episode.

Last time, we looked at the adoption of surnames in the wake of the Norman Conquest of England. At first, the names were largely descriptive – identifying the person by reference to his or her parents, or place of residence, or some personal characteristic. So the earliest surnames were unique to the individual who bore the name. They were not hereditary. They didn't necessarily pass on to the person's children and grandchildren. But that started to change around the current point in the overall story of English in the 1300s. During this period, those names became family names, and it became common for them to pass from generation.

Together with the descriptive names that I described last time, there was one other type of surname that was extremely common, and that was a name based on the person's job or occupation.

Those types of surnames are fascinating because they reveal a great deal about the culture in which they evolved. They indicate the types of jobs and careers that were common at the time. But they also reflect how the job market had changed by the High Middle Ages. A quick survey of occupational surnames reveals just how specialized many occupations had become during this

period. Most common trades like cloth making, carpentry, iron working, and leather making were all divided into numerous sub-specialities. And the surviving names reflect just how specialized those jobs had become.

This part of the story is fundamentally tied to the growth of towns and cities in the Middle Ages. In England, this growth was especially notable in the period after the Norman Conquest. There were lots of factors that came together to allow for that growth during that period.

One of those factors was an increase in agricultural production. Farm tools and machinery had improved and had become more widespread. Farmers had started to master crop rotation practices to produce a greater yield on the same land. More land had been cleared and drained which made more land available for farming. So England was producing more food, and that meant that the country could support a larger population. And in fact, the overall population of England was growing in both the urban areas and in the countryside. At the time of the Norman Conquest, the population of England was probably no more than two million people. But by the year 1300, the population had tripled to around six million.

In addition to the overall growth that was taking place, there was also a significant amount of migration from the countryside into the towns and cities. For many peasants, there were more opportunities in the urban areas. Also, many rural peasants essentially lived as serfs – tied to the land they farmed. Some of them escaped that burden by leaving for the city and hiding out among the urban population. So towns grew in size as more and more people moved in from the countryside.

Let's look at some numbers to get an idea of how much towns and cities grew in the two centuries after the Conquest. As we know, the Domesday Book was compiled shortly after the Conquest in the year 1086. It provides a wealth of knowledge about the population of England at the time. It indicates that only about 10% of the population lived in urban areas. But over the next two centuries, that percentage essentially doubled. By the current point in our overall story in the early 1300s, the percentage of people who lived in urban areas had increased from 10% to around 20%. This urban growth is also reflected in the changing population of London. Around the time of the Domesday Book, the population of the city was about 25,000 people. But by the early 1300s, it had quadrupled to about 100,000. *[Source: "Life in the Middle Ages," Whittock, p.55.]*

As more and more people moved to towns and cities, a subtle cultural shift started to take place. Self-sufficiency started to give way to interdependency. In rural areas where people lived on farms and manors, there was a great deal of self-sufficiency. Many rural communities largely lived on the products they produced locally. Peasants worked the fields, tended the flocks, spun yarn, mended clothing, and did whatever else they needed to do. Jobs were a bit more basic, and a rural peasant was more likely to be a 'jack of all trades.'

But as towns grew – with more and more people living together in confined quarters – there wasn't enough room for people to grow their own crops and tend their own flocks. They had to rely on other people to provide those necessities. And their income had to come from other sources.

So the economy of the city was very different from that of the country. The urban economy relied on trade and commerce for survival. People made their living by providing whatever goods and services their skills allowed them to provide. They served as builders and day-laborers. They sold bread and other basic food items. They sold a wide variety of hand-made consumer products. If adequately trained, they provided administrative services to the government or the church. And after many years of training, some urban residents could provide more specialized services. That included workers who made sophisticated products from iron, wood, glass, leather and other materials.

So urban life required people to focus on a particular job or profession, and that job or profession didn't usually involve traditional agriculture. In fact, a town could be defined as a place where a sizeable portion of the population made their living in an occupation other than agriculture.

The key to all of this was the local market. Farmers from the countryside traded with the local townspeople, and the townspeople traded with each other. Townspeople bought food products from the countryside, and rural peasants bought a wide variety of consumer items made in towns and cities. So the market was the lifeblood of the city.

In many cases, towns and cities were established by barons or landholders mainly because they could collect a fee for the right to have the market. Markets generated a lot of revenue for landholders, so they were more than willing to set aside some of their land for a new town or city which would include a market to fuel the local economy.

Markets were so important that many people made their living as traders. They bought and sold goods for profit. You might remember from earlier episodes that the Anglo-Saxons called a market a ***ceap*** which ultimately is the source of our modern word ***cheap*** meaning inexpensive. And a trader or salesman was called a ***ceapman***. That old word has largely disappeared from English, but it still survives as the surname ***Chapman***, as well as the name ***Chipman***. These surnames became common and widespread throughout the 1200s.

During this same time period, that old word ***ceapman*** started to be replaced with the French word ***merchant***. ***Merchant*** has also survived as a surname. Another variation of ***merchant*** was ***mercer***, and ***Mercer*** is an even more common surname today. If there was any difference between a ***merchant*** and a ***mercer***, it was that a ***mercer*** was usually a dealer in textiles and cloth – especially fine cloth like silk, satin and velvet.

It is important to keep in mind that names like ***Merchant*** and ***Mercer*** were descriptive names. They weren't fixed hereditary names yet. So the same person could be identified in some records as "Chapman" and in other records as "Merchant." We actually have examples of this. A survey from the village of Elton north of London identifies a man as Robertus Chapman with the Old

English term for a trader. But in a separate record composed in Latin, the same man is identified as Robertus Mercator with the Latin version of the word ***merchant***. So these weren't fixed surnames yet. They were merely descriptive. *[Source: "Life In a Medieval Village," Gies, p. 69-72.]*

Now today, I think we tend to think of merchants as salespeople. But in the markets of the Middle Ages, merchants were both buyers and sellers. Sometimes the merchant would buy small items or commodities from people who were looking to sell those items. And then the merchant would turn around and sell those items to someone else.

We might call that type of merchant a broker today. And in fact, the word ***broker*** was a brand new word in the English language in the mid-1300s. It was borrowed from French, where the original sense of the word was more of a wine dealer. ***Broker*** is actually related to the word ***broach***, and the original sense of the word ***broker*** was the person who broached or tapped a cask with wine in it. The broker would buy the barrel or cask of wine, and then tap it for resale to the public.

Once the word ***broker*** was borrowed into English, the meaning expanded. The term acquired a more general sense of one who buys a commodity and then resells it. So it was no longer limited to wine. It could refer to anyone who bought an item and then resold it, and it could also refer to a person who coordinated that type of transaction. So it could mean a middleman – a person who coordinated a transaction between other parties – which is more of the modern sense of the word. But ***broker*** was new in the language in the 1300s, and it also contributed to the surname ***Brooker***. The name ***Brooker*** was also coined as a place name meaning someone who resided near a brook. So the name was derived from two different sources. But one of those sources was a broker or merchant.

Now a broker or merchant who has a stall in a town market had to be careful when buying items from the general public. There were lots of people running scams even back them. They would often bring their goods in a sack or bag. Sometimes, the person was trying to sell a live animal – like a piglet or a chicken or rabbit or other animal. Of course, the merchant usually checked the merchandise, but if it was a live animal, it could jump out and run away. So the merchant sometimes bought the animal without opening the bag – sight unseen. This type of transaction gave English two common phrases.

One of those phrases refers to a scam where a peasant purported to sell a small animal to a merchant like a rabbit or chicken, but the peasant was actually selling a common animal like a cat. In a busy market, the merchant might not bother to check the sack for fear of releasing the animal. But a prudent merchant would take the time just to make sure. Since cats were often used for this type of subterfuge, this type of check became known as "letting the cat out of the bag." Over time, the phrase came to mean an important discovery or revelation. The phrase isn't actually found in an English document until the 1700s, but most scholars think the phrase is much older than that. For example, French, Dutch and German all had similar expressions which applied to merchants who weren't so prudent. In those cases, it was said that the merchant had "bought a cat in a bag." It meant that the buyer had purchased false goods – and had been

scammed by the seller. The English phrase "let the cat out of the bag" is just a different take on the same idea. Instead of 'buying a cat in a bag' and being scammed, the English phrase is "let the cat out of the bag" meaning to reveal the scam or to otherwise disclose a secret.

English also developed another expression as a warning to careless buyers. And that phrase was "Don't buy a pig in a poke." That expression makes a lot more sense when you realize that ***pig*** actually meant a small piglet in Middle English, and a ***poke*** meant a bag or a sack. So "Don't buy a pig in a poke" literally means "Don't buy a small piglet in a bag."

The idea is that some sellers would try to pass off a small piglet or a runt as an older pig. When the merchant didn't check the bag or poke to make sure, he was sometimes stuck with a piglet in the bag – or a "pig in the poke." So the phrase "Don't buy a pig in a poke" meant "Don't get taken advantage of." In other words, "Buyer beware."

Evidence of this warning can be found in a manuscript that was composed in the early 1300s called The Proverbs of Hendyng. It's a collection of proverbial sayings, and one of them reads: "Wan man ȝevit þe a pig, opin þe powch." In Modern English, it reads, "When a man gives you a pig, open the pouch." By the 1500s, this old proverb was being rendered in its modern form with the word ***poke*** instead of ***pouch***. So the phrase "Never buy a pig in a poke" can be traced back to the early 1300s.

Now that word ***poke*** is important for another reason. Outside of that phrase "pig in a poke," only a few dialects still use the word ***poke*** for a bag. But it is much more common in a slightly altered form as the word ***pocket***. And that was another brand new word in the mid-1300s.

In the Middle Ages, people didn't really have pockets on their clothing. So in the markets of these growing towns and cities, people carried their money and other valuables in a pouch or poke that hung from their belt. Since this was usually a small bag, it was given the '-et' ending which was used to indicate something small. So instead of a ***poke***, this type of bag was called a ***pokete***. But the problem with the ***pokete*** is that it hung from the belt which was exposed to the public. And that meant that a thief could grab it and steal it. So people started to wear the ***pokete*** under their clothing. And over time, the pokete was sewed into the clothing itself to make it more secure, at which time it actually became part of the clothing. And that gave us the modern sense of the word ***pokete*** – or ***pocket***.

Men were much more likely to have these types of early pockets since men's clothing was bulkier and the sewed-in bags could be more easily concealed. Women's clothing tended to be tighter and more form fitting, so there wasn't enough room for a bulky bag or pokete to be added as an early type of pocket. So women continued to carry their valuables in a bag or poke. And that's is still common to this day, at least when men and women dress formally. Men are more likely to carry their money or valuables in a pocket, whereas women are more likely to carry it in a bag or purse. And to a large extent, that has to do with traditional fashions and the bulky nature of early pockets which were really just bags or pokes that were sewed into clothing.

Again, these sewed-in pockets came along in the 1600s and 1700s. So at the current point in our story, merchants and market patrons still carried their valuables in a bag on their belt. Though pockets in the modern sense didn't exist yet, the word ***pocket*** – or ***pokete*** – was being used to refer to those bags. And interestingly, the word was also being used as a surname. Names like Adam Poket and Robert Poket were being used in the 1200s. The exact meaning of those surnames is unclear. It may have referred to a person who made those types of bags.

Now we've seen that the Medieval English market was really the lifeblood of most towns and cities. And in the first couple of centuries after the Norman Conquest, those merchants and peddlers began to organize themselves into groups that became known as Merchant Guilds.

I've mentioned these Merchant Guilds before. Back in Episode 74, I discussed how they became the first governing bodies of most towns and cities in the Middle Ages. Rather than individual residents paying rent to the lord who owned the land where the town was located, these Merchant Guilds would collect the rent from the tenants and then pay it to the lord in a lump sum each year. And for an extra fee added in, the Merchant Guild was given a degree of independence to run the town without interference from the lord. These were really the first guilds.

But over time, as jobs became more specialized, specific occupations began to organize themselves in a similar manner. So bakers, carpenters, clothworkers, butchers – they all eventually formed their own guilds. This process began in the 1100s, but the heyday of the craft guilds was really the late 1200s and early 1300s. The various guilds essentially operated as a cartel in the cities by restricting competition and protecting the quality of the goods and services that were being provided. The guilds were dominated by masters – or people who had practiced the particular craft for many years. In order to join a guild, a person had to serve several years as an apprentice under the supervision of a master. Then he or she could become a journeyman working for other masters. Eventually, after many years, the worker could be accepted as a master in his or her own right. The guilds regulated the prices of their products, as well as the quality of the goods and services provided. They prevented outsiders from competing. And if a member became disabled or died, the guild would step in to provide assistance to the master or the master's family.

So guilds controlled specific occupations. And they ensured that the elite masters kept control over their particular craft or occupation.

The young apprentices who studied under the masters usually did so with little or no compensation. The apprentice might be given food and a place to sleep, but he didn't have the rights or benefits of a modern-day employee. He was a type of indentured servant, and in fact, this type of apprenticeship arrangement was called an ***indenture*** using that newly borrowed word from French and Latin. The indenture was the contract between the apprentice and the master, and the terms usually meant that the young apprentice gave up his freedom for a certain period of time essentially agreeing to a type of forced servitude.

That word ***indenture*** has an interesting etymology which reflects the nature of these Medieval contracts. And believe it or not, an ***indenture*** is actually related to the word ***dentures***. They both come from the same Latin root word, and they both have to do with teeth. An ***indenture*** is also a variation of the word ***indent***. The ultimate connection is the Latin word ***dens*** meaning tooth. Of course, this is the root that gives us words like ***dentist***, ***dental***, and ***dentures***. But teeth often have a jagged appearance – especially the teeth of animals with sharp canines or a person with a few missing teeth which was common in the Middle Ages. And that produced the word ***indent*** meaning to notch something or create a mark or offset that resembles a tooth mark.

So what did teeth and notches have to do with an indenture – the type of contract executed by an apprentice? Well, that type of contract between the master and the apprentice was usually written down on a piece of parchment, and the parchment was the cut down the middle with a jagged, zig-zag line. As a result, each piece of the contract was left with a jagged edge that resembled teeth. Thus the name ***indenture***. And the reason that was done was to ensure that the two portions of the contract fit together at the point of the cut. The matching edges proved that each person's portion of the contract was authentic and part of the original document. The word ***indenture*** is still a common term in law and finance. It usually refers to specific types of contracts today.

So a young apprentice was a type of indentured servant. After a certain number of years, the apprentice was freed from the restrictions of the indenture and was able to become a journeyman. Journeymen were skilled and trained workers, but they didn't have their own workshops. They worked for other masters. At the top of totem pole were the masters, and the masters typically had their own shops or workshops. They also owned their own tools and equipment. And this points to another important development of this period. The rise of the free-standing shop.

In many cases, the person's shop was also his or her home, but it was still a notable development because most commerce had previously been conducted in the local market or the local fair. Now, workers were starting to open their own shops in town. So the town itself was starting to develop a business district.

Today, we might call these businesses 'retail' outlets, and the word ***retail*** was a another new word in the language in the mid-1300s. A person who made articles of clothing might have a shop in his or her home where clothing was made to order. That person was a ***tailor*** – another new word in the language having been borrowed from French. So a tailor might have a retail shop. And you might notice some similarity between those words ***tailor*** and ***retail***.

They both appeared in English in the early to mid-1300s, and they are both derived from the same Latin root word. The root word was ***taliare*** meaning to split or cut. So a ***tailor*** was someone who cut cloth or fabric to make articles of clothing. Within French, the word ***tailor*** could also refer to a stonemason – someone who cut stone. That word ***tailor*** also gave us the surname ***Taylor*** – usually spelled T-A-Y-L-O-R today.

But the word ***retail*** is a much broader term referring to shops that sell all kinds of goods. So what's the connection between tailors and retailers? Well, a retailer took a large group of items and then split them up into small parts for sale. So a baker would bake many loaves of bread, and then divide them up for sale. And a butcher would take a large animal, and then cut it up into small pieces for sale. So the word ***retail*** literally means to cut or divide a large item or a large group of items into smaller parts for sale to the public. And this makes even more sense when we compare that term to the word ***wholesale*** which appeared a few years later in the early 1400s. ***Wholesale*** was literally 'to sell the whole.' So a wholesaler sold a bundle or whole group of items, and the retailer divided those items into small parts for sale. And again, retail is derived from the same Latin root word meaning to cut or divide just like the word ***tailor***.

Now I said that the word ***wholesale*** entered English in the early 1400s. And it is not a loanword. It is actually a native construction. Both ***whole*** and ***sale*** are Old English words. So people started to combine those native words in the 1400s to form the compound word ***wholesale***. But in addition to that natively formed word, there was another word that expressed a similar idea, and it was a loanword from French. That was the word ***grocer***. It referred to someone who sold items in bulk, so it was basically a wholesaler.

Now today, we think of a ***grocer*** as a person who sells food. We go to the grocery store to buy groceries. But the word originally meant something quite different. The word ***gross*** meant large or a large amount. Today, in the realm of numbers, it has a very specific meaning of 144 – or a dozen dozen. You might remember from the recent episode on numbers that the word was acquired from the French phrase a 'gross dozen' which literally meant a 'large dozen,' but came to mean a dozen dozen. So ***gross*** meant a large amount. And someone who sold items or commodities in large quantities was therefore called a ***grocer***. So again, it basically meant a wholesaler. And then the retailer would cut or divide that bulk quantity into smaller units for resale.

Well, the word ***grocer*** is recorded for the first time in English in the early 1400s, but it was almost certainly being used by English speakers in the early to mid 1300s. And we know that in part because it was being used in that earlier period in Latin and French document composed in England. But more notably, the grocers guild was founded in England in the year 1344. That guild was called the Company of Grocers. ***Company*** was another new loanword from French in the 1300s. And a closer look at the Company of Grocers explains how the word ***grocer*** acquired its modern sense over time.

The Company of Grocers – or the grocer's guild – was made up mostly of wholesalers who bought items in bulk from international traders, especially spices and other foreign foodstuffs like dried fruits and sugar. So these early grocers were selling all types of items, but they were mostly selling imported food items. So naturally, over time, the word ***grocer*** became associated with the sale of foodstuffs. And by the late 1400s and 1500s, the word had been largely restricted to that modern sense.

As the meaning of ***grocer*** became more and more restricted to food-sellers, English needed a word to fill the gap that was left behind. In other words, English needed a new word for traders who sold all kinds of items in bulk – not just food items. So that's why that newly-coined word ***wholesaler*** came in to fill in that gap that was being left behind.

Now before that digression into retailers, wholesalers and grocers, I noted that many merchants were operating their own shops by the mid-1300s. I alluded to this development back in Episode 106 about illuminated manuscripts. In that episode, I mentioned that booksellers were called ***stationers*** because they operated shops that were stationary – in fixed locations usually near universities. And that ultimately gave us the word ***stationery*** referring to certain types of paperwork.

Well now that we are a little deeper into the Middle Ages, more and more merchants operated out of fixed locations. Again, that location was often their home, but it was still a notable development.

As shops began to become more common, shop owners needed to promote their shops to the public. They needed to let everyone know what type of goods or services they provided. Today, shop owners just put up a sign that says what they are selling. But in the Middle Ages, most of their potential customers couldn't read. So they had to find other ways to describe or distinguish their businesses. So they tended to use objects or pictures in their signs.

The use of pictures or symbols on Medieval signs helps to explains the creative names often used by pubs. Pub owners tended to use names that could be represented with pictures like The Fox and the Hound, The Golden Dove or The Boar's Head.

Many shop keepers created signs that incorporated a common tool of the trade. So for example, tailors often used signs that contained a picture of scissors. And shoemakers marked their shops by hanging a large shoe outside of their shop, or sometimes they used a sign with a shoe on it. You didn't have to read to figure out that a shoe represented a shoemaker's shop.

Over time, as literacy spread, shop keepers started to use more words in their signs. And a lot of those old occupational symbols disappeared, but a couple of those old occupational symbols have survived into the modern era. For example, pawnbrokers still use a symbol that contains three hanging balls, and that symbol goes back to the Middle Ages. It was originally a symbol adopted by the money lender's guild of Florence, Italy, and it was associated with the famous Medici family of Florence. Over time, pawnbrokers throughout Europe adopted that symbol, and as I noted, it is still widely used today.

Another occupational sign from the Middle Ages that still exists today is the red and white barber's pole. You're probably familiar with those poles, but you might not know that they have their origin in England at a time when barbers were also surgeons.

In the Middle Ages, barbers didn't just cut hair and trim beards. If there was any kind of cutting to be done to the human body, the barber was usually the person who handled it. They had access to razors or other cutting tools, so if you had a boil that needed to be lanced, or a tooth that needed to be extracted, you went to the barber.

Also, as I noted in an earlier episode, blood-letting was a common treatment for a variety of illnesses. So if you needed someone to cut you and drain some blood, you went to the barber. Whenever barbers let blood, they had their patients grab a pole and squeeze it tightly. That made the veins swell. But as the blood drained, some of it would inevitably get on the pole. So barbers tended to paint the pole red to hide or conceal the blood that ended up on the pole. And this became the standard symbol of those barber surgeons. They would hang that red pole outside of their shops in the same way that a shoemaker would put out a shoe or a pawnbroker would place a sign with three hanging balls.

In the year 1308, the first Barber's guild was formed in England. It later became known as the Company of Barbers and Surgeons. As far as the red-and-white spiral design of the barber's pole, there are a few theories about that design. One common story is that the barbers would often wrap white gauze around the red barber pole that hung outside of the barbershops. This was the same white gauze that was used to tie up a patient's arm after the blood was let. Over time, it became common to simply paint the pole in this same manner with a red-and white spiral to represent the white gauze wrapped around the traditional red pole. Again, there are some other variations of this story, but that design was in common use until the guild of Barbers and Surgeons was finally disbanded in the 1700s. After that, the barbers and surgeons went their separate ways, but interestingly, it was the barbers who kept the pole even though its design reflected the surgical aspect of the profession. American barbers have tended to replace the traditional red and white pole with a red white and blue pole to reflect the national colors, but it has the same ultimate origin. And of course, the name ***Barber*** still survives as a common occupational surname.

Now so far, we've focused on some of the factors that led to the specialization of occupations. In the second half of this episode, I want to take you around a typical town or city in the Middle Ages to see what kind of occupations existed, and to see how those jobs contributed to the development of many modern surnames.

If you were to travel to a medieval town of city, you would encounter many different types of craftsmen. The common Old English word for a craftsman was a ***wrihta*** which became modern ***Wright*** – W-R-I-G-H-T. ***Wright*** is actually related to the word ***work***. If something is 'worked,' it is said to be ***wrought*** like wrought iron. And from ***wrought*** to ***wright***, we can start to hear that connection. So a ***wright*** was literally a worker, but it really meant a craftsman or builder.

The word ***wright*** still exists as a common surname, like the Wright Brothers who built bicycles and airplanes. But outside of names, we don't tend to use the word very much by itself anymore. We mostly use it in combination with other words like ***playwright*** – literally a 'play worker.' Other combinations were also common at one time like ***wheelwright*** meaning a 'maker of

wheels' and ***shipwright*** meaning a someone who made ships. A few of these combinations still exist as surnames. That includes ***Wainwright*** which meant a maker of wagons. ***Wain*** was a variation of the word ***wagon***.

Another job that was very similar to a ***Wainwright*** was a ***Cartwright*** which meant a maker of carts. And ***Cartwright*** also survives as a surname.

Now carts and wagons were very important in the Middle Ages. They were essential to the movement of goods and commodities across land. Of course, they were usually pulled by oxen or horses. So they were pulled behind the animals. But to express the idea that someone was overly eager, one could say that they "put the cart before the horse." That expression still exists today, and we can find its origin in English in a document that was composed around the current point in our overall story. Around the year 1340, a writer named Dan Michel composed a text called "Ayenbite of Inwit" which literally translates as "Remorse of Conscience." It was a translation of an earlier French manuscript, and in one passage, he wrote "Moche uolk of religion zetteth the zouly be-uore the oksen." In Modern English, it reads, "Many religious folk set the plow before the oxen." Over the next couple of centuries, this expression evolved into the more modern version – "put (or set) the cart before the horse." I should note that this concept is much older than that English phrase. The Romans even had a similar saying, but Dan Michel gave us the first known English version of the proverb in the mid-1300s.

Now cart drivers or wagon drivers didn't usually get the cart before the horse. If they did, that would have been a big problem. A cart driver was sometimes called a ***carter***, and that term still survives as the surname ***Carter***. And I mentioned that the word ***wain*** was a variation of the word ***wagon***, and a 'wain driver' or 'wagon driver' was one of the sources of the modern surname ***Wayne*** – W-A-Y-N-E.

So I began this discussion with terms like ***wainwright*** and ***cartwright*** and ***wheelwright***. Those words referred to makers of wagons, carts and wheels, respectively. As you can see from these examples, the word ***wright*** often referred to a person who built things. So it was commonly used to mean a wood-worker or carpenter. Up to this point, English speakers didn't actually use the word ***carpenter*** because it wasn't a word native to English. But around the current point in overall story, the word ***carpenter*** was borrowed from French. It first appeared in an English document composed around the year 1325. And of course, the word ***carpenter*** also become a common surname over time.

Now as we might expect, carpenters or wood workers were in high demand. Many items were made out of wood – from houses, to carts, to furniture, to small utensils. Wood working began with the person who sawed timber into planks and boards. That occupation gave us the surname ***Sawyer***. Some craftsmen specialized in carving wood or other substances thereby producing the surname ***Carver***.

Some wood workers carved wood with a knife or other sharp object, but others used a lathe. A lathe would spin the wood allowing the craftsman to make circular or other rounded shapes. That was essential for making spokes and spindles used to make wheels, chairs, tables and other

objects. The person who worked a lathe was called a ***turner*** because the lathe turned the wood that was being shaped. And that ultimately gave us the surname ***Turner***.

Some wood workers specialized in making smaller objects like boxes and chairs and other pieces of furniture. This required the worker to prepare the individual pieces and them assemble them into the finished product. The assembly required the pieces to be joined together, so these types of carpenters became known as ***joiners*** using the French term ***join***. And that gave us the surname ***Joiner***.

Some wood workers specialized in making fences. That profession came to be known by a French term – ***paliser***. That word is related to the word ***palisade***. So a ***paliser*** was a fence maker, and it was once a common surname, though it is pretty rare today.

Of course, carpenters and wood workers also built houses and other buildings. A person who made tiles was called a ***tiler*** which produced the surname ***Tyler***. A worker who made or laid slate was called a ***slater*** which gave us the surname ***Slater***. A person who thatched roofs was called a ***thatcher*** giving us the surname ***Thatche***r.

Of course, construction didn't just depend on wood. Builders also used stone and brick. A person who worked with stone was called a ***mason*** which was borrowed from French in the late 1200s. We still use that word today, and we still have the surname ***Mason***.

A person who made bricks was called ***burner*** because bricks had to be hardened by fire. During the Middle English period, ***burner*** became ***brennar***, and that gave us the surname ***Brenner***. So a ***brenner*** was a brick maker.

Builders also worked with iron and other metals – especially nails. Just as today, nails were essential to carpenters. Very often, a carpenter would drive a nail through two or more pieces of wood, and then he would take his hammer and bend the nail on the back side so it wouldn't come out. That was a clinching technique, but anytime a nail was bent in this fashion, it was said to be 'dead,' because bent nails can never really be used again. This technique was commonly used when building doors, and that helps to explain the phrase "dead as a doornail." It literally meant a doornail that had been bent during the construction of the door. The phrase is found in English for the first time in the mid-1300s in the well-known Middle English poem called Piers Plowman. It isn't clear why this particular phrase has endured the centuries, but it may have to do with the alliteration and the short rhythmic nature of the phrase "dead as a doornail."

Now nails were used by carpenters and wood workers, but they were made by other craftsmen. Sometimes they were made by specialist nail makers called ***nailers***. They actually had their own guild, and the occupation produced the surname ***Naylor*** – N-A-Y-L-O-R.

Other times, nails were made by blacksmiths and ironmongers. And of course, blacksmiths were in high demand. They made a wide variety of items like tools, swords, chains, weapons, armor and horseshoes. And their profession gave us one of the most common surnames of all – the name ***Smith***. The name is ultimately derived from the same Germanic root as the word

smite. So a ***smith*** was literally a person who smites or cuts or forges. It was mostly used in reference to craftsmen who worked with iron and other metals.

In fact, early on, there were actually blacksmiths and whitesmiths. A ***blacksmith*** tended to work with darker metals like iron, whereas a ***whitesmith*** worked with lighter-colored metals like tin. Whitesmiths also made metal objects with a shiny luster. The smiths who worked with silver were sometimes called ***silversmiths***, and the smiths who worked with gold were called ***goldsmiths***. But ***blacksmith*** has endured as a somewhat generic term for all craftsmen who work with metals.

The word ***smith*** was also applied to other words to indicate a specific type of craftsman. For example, a craftsman who made or repaired locks was – and still is – called a ***locksmith***. And a person who made knives was called a ***knife-smith*** which later produced the surname ***naesmith***.

In addition to the native term ***knife-smith***, English also borrowed a French term for a knife maker which was ***cutler***. And ***Cutler*** also survives as a surname. The trade of the cutler was called ***cutlery***, and that term is still used today for the knives and other related items made and sold by cutlers.

Now over the centuries, the word ***cutlery*** has acquired an even broader meaning, including forks and spoons as well as knives. It basically includes all kinds of eating utensils. Knives were common utensils in the Anglo-Saxon period, and the word ***knife*** was a common Old English word. The Anglo-Saxons also had the word ***fork***, but they didn't really eat with forks. They only used the word fork in the sense of a farming implement like a pitchfork. The Anglo-Saxons used their fingers when they ate so they didn't really need forks.

For soup, porridge and other liquids, the Anglo-Saxons would usually drink out of a bowl. They didn't normally use spoons, but they were familiar with them. A couple of silver spoons were found in the old Anglo-Saxon ship buried at Sutton Hoo. And other Anglo-Saxon spoons have been uncovered over the centuries. But it doesn't appear that everyday Anglo-Saxons used them very much. They were mainly reserved for the nobles and the wealthy. There also isn't a clearly attested word for a spoon in Old English.

However, Old English DID have the word ***spoon*** – or ***spon*** – as it was probably pronounced at the time. That may seem like a contradiction, but the word ***spoon*** didn't refer to an eating utensil at the time. It actually referred to a chip or splinter of wood. In fact, these types of chips – or spoons – were used for tiles. So a person who worked with these types of tiles could be called either a ***tiler*** or a ***spooner***. And both terms still survive as surnames.

But in the mid 1300s, around the current point in our overall story, the word ***spoon*** started to be used in its modern sense as an eating utensil. It appears that this new sense of the word came from the Vikings. As we know, the Viking spoke Old Norse, and Old Norse also had this same Germanic word for a chip or splinter. In Old Norse, it was more like ***span***, and the meaning had evolved over time to mean an eating utensil used to eat soups and other liquids. English

apparently borrowed this sense of the word, and it became the primary meaning within English as well.

It isn't entirely clear why the meaning of the word evolved within Old Norse. One possibility is that Norse speakers used chips to eat soft foods in the same way that we dip potato chips or crisps into dip, or the way we dip tortilla chips into salsa or quacamole. Another possibility is that it evolved out of the sense of the word ***spoon*** as a splinter or piece of wood. We know that the Vikings carved spoons out of wood. And they probably began with large splinters or chips of wood. Either way, the word ***span*** or ***spoon*** evolved from a chip to an eating utensil.

Now Old Norse didn't just give English a new meaning for the word ***spoon***. It also gave English a new expression – "span new." It literally meant 'spoon new,' but it was used to mean something that was new and unsoiled. Most eating utensils became dirty over time, but a newly made spoon was perfectly clean. That spoon could have been a newly carved spoon from wood or a new metal spoon forged by a blacksmith. Either way, it was clean and unused. That phrase "span new" is found in English in the early 1300s, and it continued to be used in that sense for several centuries.

However, in the 1500s, a variation of the phrase "span new" appeared. This new variation was "spick and span new." It had the same sense of the original, but it added the word ***spick*** to the front. ***Spick*** is just a variation of the word ***spike***. It had the sense of a spike or nail newly forged in fire by a blacksmith. So "spick and span new" literally meant 'spike and spoon new' meaning the pure and unblemished state of a newly forged nail or spoon. About a century later, in the 1600s, the word ***new*** was dropped from the end of the phrase, and that left the phrase as simply "spick and span" meaning perfectly clean. But the major point here is that the phrase "spick and span" has an ultimate association with blacksmiths and the forging of metal utensils and tools in fire.

By the way, this is the same sense that we find in the term "brand new." "Brand new" is literally 'firebrand new' or 'branding iron new.' It means new like a metal object that has just been forged in a blacksmith's shop.

Of course, the work of a blacksmith has given us other phrases over the centuries like "Strike while the iron is hot," but most of those phrases were adopted during later periods of English.

Now I've talked about blacksmiths and wood workers, but some craftsmen specialized in combining aspects of both skills. For example, wooden buckets and barrels and tubs were very important in the Middle Ages. It required great skill to make those out of wood so that they would hold water. Buckets and barrels required the careful placement of metal hoops around wooden slats. The craftsmen who specialized in that trade were highly valued at the time, and they were generally called ***coopers***, presumably from a word related to the word ***cup***. Of course, ***cooper*** has also survived as a surname. These craftsmen were also sometimes called ***hoopers*** because of their skill in the use and placement of metal hoops. A ***hooper*** was also a person who made these types of hoops. And ***Hooper*** can still be found as a surname.

Another specialized profession was the making of bows and arrows. Those were essential to both hunting and warfare. The people who made bows were called ***bowyers*** which produced the surname ***Boyer***. And the craftsmen who made arrows were called ***fletchers***. The word was borrowed from French, but it appears to be a Germanic word, so it may be a Frankish word that passed into French and then into English. It probably has the same root as words like ***fly***, ***flutter*** and ***flee*** – F-L-E-E. Of course, the word ***Fletcher*** is still used as a surname.

Not all craftsmen worked with wood or metal. Some worked with pottery. Of course, a person who made pottery was a ***potter*** which is still a common surname as any fan of Harry Potter will attest. But another common word for a potter was a ***crocker***. And ***crocker*** also still exists as a surname as any fan of Betty Crocker will attest. ***Crocker*** is derived from the Old English word ***croc*** which was a type of earthernware pot. Of course, we still have that word for the slow cooking pots called ***crock pots*** and the word ***crockery*** which refers to that type of glazed pottery or stoneware.

And speaking of 'glazed pottery,' a person who specialized in the application of glazes was called a ***glazer***. And a very similar word was used to refer to a craftsman who worked with glass. That person was a 'glass-ier' which became ***glazier*** (/glay-zee-er/ or /glay-zhure/). Of course, ***glazer*** and ***glazier*** are still used as surnames.

One specific profession that worked with glass was a bottle maker. The word ***bottle*** was borrowed from French in the early 1300s, and it gave English another common surname – the name ***Butler***.

Of course, ***Butler*** is an occupational surname derived from the occupation of the butler. And yes, ***butlers*** are related to ***bottles***. A ***butler*** was originally a person responsible for bottles. Specifically, in the household of nobles, the butler was the person in charge of the bottles of wine in the wine cellar. That also meant that he was usually the person who served the wine. And from that sense, the word ***butler*** was extended over time to the primary household servant of a wealthy person. The word ***butler*** became common in the 1300s, but it is found as a surname as early as the 1100s. In that earliest usage as a surname, it may have simply meant a bottle-maker.

So we seen lots of professions engaged in the manufacture of specific objects. Another one of those was the candlemaker who was also known as a ***chandler*** from the same French root as ***chandelier***. Technically, a ***chandler*** was either a candle-maker or a candle-seller or both. ***Chandler*** is of course another common surname. And I should also note that the French word ***chandler*** is derived from the same root as the Latin word ***candle***. ***Candle*** came into English directly from Latin with its original C-A sound at the front. But as we know, within early French, that C-A sound became a C-H-A sound. And that basic sound change helps us to see the connection between ***candle*** and ***chandler***.

Now before we conclude, let's turn to another important trade in the Middle Ages, and that was the leather or tanning industry. Leather was a very important substance used in a variety of goods, including clothing, footware, saddles, harnesses, sheaths, bags, cases, and lots of other items.

The production of leather required many different kinds of craftsmen who specialized in different aspects of the trade. And these various leather occupations were so important and widespread that a large portion of the overall population of England was involved in the production of leather. It has been estimated that in the city of York in the 1200s, as many as one-third of the freemen were involved in the leather industry. That was more than in any other trade or occupation. *[Source: "Angevin England," Mortimer, p. 174)]*

The process often began with butchers who sold the flesh of various animals and preserved the hides. Of course, we still have the word ***butcher***, and it also survives as a surname. By the way, ***butcher*** is a French word that was borrowed in the early 1300s. It was probably derived from the Frankish version of the word ***buck***. ***Buck*** is the Old English version of the word. So English gave us ***buck*** and the Franks gave us ***butcher*** – via French. Today, we use the word ***buck*** to refer to a male deer, but you might remember from an earlier episode that the original meaning of the word was actually a male goat. The word probably had the same meaning in the Frankish language. So ***butcher*** was probably derived from a word that meant the person who slaughtered goats. And again, butchers were one source of hides for making leather.

Another source of hides were the ***skinners***. Skinners were workers who specifically dealt in animal hides. In the original sense of the word, they also removed the hides from animals that had been trapped or slaughtered. But the term was also used to refer to people who sold pelts and furs. Of course, ***skinner*** still exists as a surname.

Now once the butcher or the skinner had prepared the hides for sale, they were sold to the ***tanner***. The tanner was the person who began the process of turning the hides into leather. One of the first steps was removing the hair from the hide. This required the hide to be soaked in a special solution for several days. When removed, the hair could be taken off with relative ease. This could be done by either the skinner or the tanner.

This process also gave us a common phrase. When we refer to nothing at all, we sometimes use the phrase "neither hide nor hair." We almost always use it in the negative today – 'neither' hide 'nor' hair. But when the phrase first appeared in the 1330s, it appeared in both its modern negative form and in an affirmative sense – as "in both hide and hair." 'Hide and hair" meant 'everything.' So it was a reference to the entire hide before the hair was removed. And "neither hide nor hair" meant 'nothing.' So there was neither any hide nor any hair at all. Again this phrase first appeared in English documents around the current point in our overall story in the early 1300s.

Now once the hair was removed from the hide, the tanner turned it into leather. He did that by soaking the hide in a substance that prevented it from decomposing. The substance eventually hardened and darkened the hide and turned into leather. Of course, the word ***tanner*** still exists as a surname. We also have that sense of darkening skin in the word ***tan*** – as in a suntan.

Now in the Middle Ages, one of the major ingredients used in the tanning solution for hides was tree bark. And that developed into its own occupation. There were craftsmen whose sole job was to strip bark from trees so the bark could be used for the tanning solution. Those bark-strippers were called ***barkers***, and that word also still exists as a surname.

Now once the hide had been turned into leather, it could be sold to the various artisans who turned it into various products for sale. A leather worker who made saddles was called a ***saddler***, and that occupation also survives as a surname. A person who turned leather into gloves was called a ***glover***, and that's another common surname.

Of course, leather was also used to make shoes. And a person who made shoes was of course a ***shoemaker*** which is also a modern surname. Another term for a shoemaker was a 'shoe-man' which survives as the surname ***Schuman***. Interestingly, both of those names appear to have been borrowed from German after the Middle Ages. In late Anglo-Saxon England, a shoemaker was usually called a ***sutere*** – a word apparently borrowed from Old Norse. That old word still survives as the surname ***Suitor***.

Another word for a shoemaker – or a person who repaired old shoes – was a ***cobbler***. That word appeared in the mid-1300s, but its origin is unclear. It is apparently related to the verb ***cobble*** as in 'to cobble something together' meaning to put together clumsily. But the verb actually appeared after the noun ***cobbler***. The occupation of the cobbler still survives in the surnames ***Cobbler*** and ***Coble***.

Another word for a shoemaker that appeared after the Norman Conquest was the term ***cordwainer***. That word was actually derived from the name of the city of Cordoba in southern Spain. That region produced a high quality leather, and even if the shoemaker didn't use that highly valued leather, he was still sometimes called a ***cordwainer***. The term could actually be used for anyone who worked with that kind of leather – not just shoemakers. That old word ***cornwainer*** still survives as the surname ***Cordwainer***, as well as the more common surname ***Corden***. ***Corden*** could also refer to a seller of cord or ribbon. So it is derived from both occupational surnames.

So we have a lot of surnames related to shoemakers – ***Shoemaker***, ***Suitor***, ***Cobbler***, ***Coble***, ***Cordwainer*** and ***Corden***. But there was another common term for a shoemaker that is especially important to the history of English. This other common term was a French word that was borrowed into English. That term was ***chaucier***. And it produced the surname Chaucer – as in Geoffrey Chaucer. We'll soon be introduced to Geoffrey Chaucer who was born in the mid-1300s.

So shoemakers, and glove makers both used leather for their clothing accessories. And speaking of clothing accessories, that takes us to the makers of clothing in general. I talked about the cloth industry in Flanders and England back in Episode 110. And in that episode, I explained the origin of many common surnames related to that industry. I'm not going to go back through that discussion here, but I do want to remind you of a few common surnames derived from that

industry. Those surnames include ***Spinner***, ***Webb***, ***Webster***, ***Weaver***, ***Fuller***, ***Walker***, ***Sherman*** and ***Dyer***.

We can also add in the name ***Taylor*** which I mentioned earlier in the episode. The name ***Taylor*** is derived from the occupation of the tailor meaning the person who tailored clothing. A ***tucker*** was another word for a fuller who walked and trampled the rough cloth in a vat. A ***dexter*** was a female dyer. A ***hosier*** was a person who made or sold socks or stockings. A ***draper*** was a cloth dealer. Again, all of those occupations also survive as surnames.

So we've explored lots of occupations that gave rise to surnames. And I've only scratched the surface of all the occupational surnames that have their origin in this period. But I think you can get a sense of how specialized many of these occupations had become in the 1300s. And I think you can see how those occupations were often adopted as common descriptive surnames.

And by the current point in our story in the early to mid-1300s, those surnames were not only common, they were also becoming hereditary. Many of the businesses and professions that I described were family businesses with children following the same line of work as their parents – often at very young ages. So it made sense that children would use the same occupational surnames as their parents. And as these craftsmen and artisans got older, and left their property and wealth and tools to their children, their children inherited that property and tended to keep those surnames as a matter of convenience and record-keeping. So these names were no longer just descriptive terms. They were true family names – many of which still exist today.

These events also point to a larger development that ultimately contributed to the resurgence of English. All of these growing towns and cities allowed a middle class of merchants and artisans to emerge. This created a new power base within England that was starting to challenge the traditional power and authority of the nobility. We've already seen that representatives of these townspeople were now being included within Parliament, and a distinct House of Commons also emerged during this period. These commoners spoke English, and most of them only knew English. So the rise of the urban middle class also gave English a boost.

But that development was nothing compared to what was about to happen. The rest of the 1300s will see England racked by war, famine, and plague including the devastating plague known as the Black Death. All of these factors combined will wipe out somewhere between 1/3 and 1/2 of the population of England by the end of the century. The personal loss will be unimaginable, and it will turn English society on its head. It will hasten the end of the feudal system, and with it, it will hasten the decline of French of Latin. By the end of the century, English will be the undisputed language of literature, education, and government in England for the first time since the Norman Conquest.
Over the next few episodes, we'll explore those developments, and we'll see how English re-secured its position as the primary language of England.

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

EPISODE 119: THE ROAD TO WAR

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 119: The Road to War. In this episode, we're going to look at the lead up to the extended period of warfare between England and France that has become known as the Hundred Years War. For military historians, this is one of the most important conflicts of the Middle Ages. But its also important for our purposes. As the war dragged on, a sense of nationalism arose within both countries. And as English nationalism grew, so did the hatred and resentment of all things French. That included the French language. So this long, extended war was an important factor in the decline of French and the return of English as the official language of England. In this episode, we'll trace the events that led to the great conflict, and we'll see how it 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 and get bonus episodes and transcripts at Patreon.com/historyofenglish.

So let's turn to this episode, and the road to the Hundred Years War. This is one of those major historical events that many people have heard of, but perhaps don't know very much about. In this episode, I want to trace the important events that led to the war, and I'll also discuss the early part of the war. But more importantly, I also want to focus on the linguistic consequences of the war. This long, extended conflict was one of several key events in the 1300s that allowed English to return to prominence by the end of the century.

We know that English had experienced a severe decline after the Norman Conquest. It was largely restricted to the peasants and serfs. And English writing virtually disappeared. The nobility and Church officials conducted their business in French and Latin. So English was very much at the bottom of the social pecking order.

All of that started to change in early 1200s when King John lost control of most of the English territories in France, except for Aquitaine in the far south of France. That certainly weakened the influence of French in England. Over the course of the 1200s, English starting to make a gradual recovery, but French and Latin remained the prestige languages. Those were the languages taught in school. And they were still the primary languages of literature, law, and government. It was also the language of the royal court.

That was still the state of things in the early 1300s at the current point in our overall story. But by the end of the century, just a few decades later, English had overtaken Latin and French. Geoffrey Chaucer had composed the Canterbury Tales. John Wycliff had translated the Bible into English. Other great works of Middle English literature had also been composed like Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and Piers Plowman. English had also been declared the official language of Parliament and the courts. So English reclaimed its status as the primary language of England over these next few decades.

So what happened in such a short period of time to cause such a major linguistic change?

Well, the answer is that there was a social and economic revolution. The feudal system imposed by the Normans broke down and started to deteriorate. That system had been maintained by a nobility that valued French and imposed French on English society. But when that system fell into decline, so did the status of French. The collapse of the feudal system allowed English to return to its rightful place at the top of the heap. So this was very much a 'bottom up' movement.

We've already seen that there was a rising merchant class and urban middle class. These people had already secured representation in Parliament. They were commoners, and they came from classes of English society where English had always been the dominant language. They were also starting to acquire more wealth and power. And that process was accelerated in the mid-1300s. Several factors contributed to their rise to prominence.

The middle of the century was a period of great turmoil, death and destruction. England was wracked by famine, plague, warfare and social unrest. And all of that disruption set the stage for a new social order. English society was turned on its head. The traditional English-speaking classes reclaimed power, and that allowed the English language to re-emerge as the dominant language of the country. Over the next few episodes, we'll explore all these events. But we have to start somewhere, and the best place to start is where we left off a few episodes back – with the Scots victory over the English at the Battle of Bannockburn.

That victory secured Scottish independence, but the year after that victory, both Scotland and England were wracked by famine. This famine affected almost all of Europe. It is sometimes called the Great Famine of 1315-1317, and it was one of the worst famines to ever affect Europe. Scholars have estimated that it killed about 10% of the population of Europe. Some scholars think it was closer to 15%. Some towns on the continent lost half their residents to starvation and sickness. The famine was caused by constant rainfall in the summer months that damaged the grain crops. And grain was absolutely essential to the medieval diet. Grain was turned into flour which was then baked as bread. And much of the population depended on bread for survival. So when the grain crops failed, starvation and famine ensued. But as bad as this famine was, it was only a preview of things to come over the next few decades.

In a period when food supplies were so limited, many towns and cities where absolutely dependent on trade with other regions. If the local crops failed, the people needed access to products from other communities or other nations. Fortunately, the European trading networks ensured a constant movement of goods from region to region. But some of those trading networks started to break down about the same time as the Great Famine.

In order to move goods from the Mediterranean to northern Europe, the goods had to move over land. Most of the trading networks passed through France, and that included the trade between the port cities of Italy and the major cloth-making center in Flanders on the North Sea. That trade depended on those overland routes.

But by this point, a dispute had broken out between the Venetians in northern Italy and the French government. That dispute made it difficult for Venetian traders to use those traditional land routes through France. So in the year 1317 – in the midst of that famine – the Venetians came up with another option. They decided to send a fleet of ships westward through the Mediterranean and into the Atlantic. From there it traveled up the western coast of Spain, Portugal and France, and then entered the English Channel. Once in the Channel, the fleet docked in England on its way to its ultimate destination in Flanders.

This fleet paved the way for a new sea route to northern Europe. The Venetian ships that made this trek became known as the Flanders Fleet, and it provided a direct link between Venice and England via the sea. Trade between the two regions no longer had to pass overland through France.

Now I mention this new sea route for a reason. It points to the growing importance of sea routes in European trade. With access to the sea, merchants and traders could access new markets that were previously difficult or impossible to reach. These seafaring fleets created new ways to move and deliver goods. But sometimes, they delivered other things – like rats, fleas, and plague. I'll discuss the horrible impact of the Black Death in the next episode, but it's worth mentioning here that the disease was spread through trading routes, and it reached Europe on fleets of ships not very different from the fleet that made its way to England in the year 1317.

The plague that become known as the Black Death had its origins on the Eurasian steppe. It gradually spread southward and eastward over those trading networks – eventually reaching Western Europe in the mid-1300s. But there was something else that spread eastward with those networks, and that was gunpowder.

About four centuries earlier, Chinese alchemists had figured out how to combine sulfur, charcoal and saltpeter to make a highly flammable powder. When mixed together in the right proportions, it could explode, creating a loud bang. And if the makers weren't careful, it could also cause an uncontrolled explosion leading to loss of life and property. Since this powder was discovered by alchemists looking for magical elixirs, the Chinese called the powder 'huo yao' – literally 'fire drug.'

Over the next few centuries, the Chinese perfected the mixture. They often packed gunpowder in sticks of bamboo and then detonated them. They mostly used this new powder for fireworks. People were fascinated by the bright, colorful explosions. By the 1100s, the Chinese were starting to experiment with the powder for miliary uses. Around this time, there are reports of Chinese armies using gunpowder in battle, but they didn't use it to fire projectiles at each other. They simply used the loud explosions to scare and confuse the enemy.

By the early 1200s, they had started to place the powder in iron casings to create an early type of bomb. They used those rudimentary bombs against the attacking Mongols, but the weapons were still very much a novelty. They often exploded by mistake – killing their own troops. So for now, the use of the bombs was very limited.

By the mid-1200s, gunpowder had reached Europe. The English scholar Roger Bacon wrote about the exploding powder used in the east as early as the year 1267. That was the first reference to gunpowder in Europe. It isn't clear how the knowledge arrived in the West. It could have been acquired through those trading networks, but no one really knows for sure.

All we know for certain is that Europeans were trying to figure out how to use this new powder for military purposes by the current point in our story in the early 1300s. The first recorded use of gunpowder in a European military action was in the year 1324. In that year, King John of Bohemia laid siege to the town of Metz in northeastern France. Accounts of that siege indicate that cannons were used, and that's the first known instance of a cannon or gun being used in a military action in Western Europe. King John of Bohemia later became known as John the Blind because he lost his eyesight around the age of 40. But that didn't keep him from fighting. Keep him in the back of your mind because we'll encounter him again a littler in this episode.

A couple of years after that siege at Metz, we get the first known illustration of a cannon in Europe. It was included in a manuscript composed by an English Chancery clerk named Walter of Milemete. The illustration shows a soldier firing a large cannon similar in the shape to a vase – or /vaze/ – depending on your pronunciation. The picture also shows an arrow-shaped projectile protruding from the mouth of the cannon.

By the way, the word ***cannon*** is derived from the same root as the word ***cane***, and that connection takes us back to the Chinese who packed gunpowder in bamboo. This type of weapon was also called a ***pot de fer*** which is a French term that literally means 'pot of iron' or 'iron pot.'

By the way, that English manuscript that contains the oldest picture of this weapon was commissioned by the Queen of England – Isabella. The manuscript was a guide to kingship, and Isabella requested that the text be prepared for young son Edward.

Edward was the young prince – only about 14 years old at the time. And its interesting that his mother wanted him to have a book on kingship because at the same time that the manuscript was being composed, she was plotting the overthrow of her husband Edward II. And she planned to have her young son crowned as the new king in his place.

Now this is one of those intriguing stories that makes medieval English history so fascinating. So let's backtrack for a minute to figure out what was going on at the time in the royal court. The last time I mentioned Isabella was a few episodes back when I talked about the coronation of her husband as king. You might remember that she was overshadowed by her husband's companion Piers Gaveston. At the coronation, the new king largely ignored Isabella and spent all of his time with Gaveston. Isabella was the daughter of the French king Philip IV. And when the French nobles who attended the coronation returned to France, they reported that the English king apparently loved his companion more than his new wife.

Needless to say, it was a rocky marriage. Isabella did give birth to several children, but it appears that it was strictly a political marriage. By all accounts, Isabella came to despise her husband over time.

A lot of the nobles continued to despise him as well. The Scottish victory over the English at Bannockburn only added to the resentment. Several years later, a group of barons from the north of England and from the Welsh Marches rose in rebellion, but Edward was able to defeat them. Most of the rebel leaders were either killed or imprisoned in the Tower of London. One of those Marcher Lord rebels was named Roger Mortimer. He was thrown in the Tower, but he soon escaped and made he way to France.

Meanwhile, Isabella's father – the King of France – died. The French crown then passed to her three brothers in succession because none of her brothers had any sons. So the crown passed from brother to brother to brother with the ultimate fate of the royal line left in doubt without any sons to inherit the throne. That wasn't the only thing in France that shrouded in uncertainty. The fate of Gascony in south of France was also left in doubt.

Gascony was the territory of southern France that was still held by Edward as a vassal of the French king. It was basically what was left of the old region of Aquitaine. And it was an on-going source of dispute between the French and English kings. The French kings were trying bring many of those semi-independent regions back under their direct control. In other words, they were trying to consolidate power and re-unify France under the direct leadership of the French kings. This was essentially the same thing that the English kings were trying to do in Britain. So in the same way that the English kings were trying to rule Scotland, the French kings were trying to regain control of Gascony and its lucrative wine trade. And that brought them into conflict with the English kings. To complicate the matter even further, France had become an ally of Scotland in its struggles with England. So the English kings found themselves in conflict with the French kings in both the far north of Britain and the far south of France.

Edward faced these same conflicts and the same challenges with France when he became the king of England, so he sent his wife Isabella to France to negotiate a settlement to the ongoing dispute. At this point, the French king was her brother Charles IV, so it was thought that she might be able to convince him to make a deal.

In France, Charles agreed to a truce with Edward, provided Edward would come to France and swear an oath of fealty in exchange for Gascony. But Edward refused to go. It was eventually decided that his son – the teenage Prince Edward – would go to France in his place and swear the oath. That was a bad decision because after the younger Edward went to France and joined his mother, they both decided to stay there. Isabella was now living in France under the protection of her brother – the French king – and she now had possession of the heir to the English throne. And to make matters worse for Edward back in England, he was about to lose his wife to one of his rivals. Isabella became the lover of Roger Mortimer, the Welsh Marcher Lord who had escaped from the Tower of London and fled to France a few years earlier. And together, Isabella and Roger Mortimer started to plot their revenge against Edward.

It was during this period that Isabella commissioned that book to be composed about kingship for her son, Prince Edward. And that may have been because she and Roger Mortimer were making plans to overthrow her husband and replace him with the young Prince. The plan was for Isabella and Roger to amass a small army of mercenaries and travel to England as a couple, along with the young prince. Once in England, they would gather support from the English nobles who hated her husband. And together, they would overthrow her husband and replace him with the young prince.

It may have sounded like a crazy plan, but it worked. In the year 1326, Isabella and Roger Mortimer landed in Suffolk in southeastern England. They were promptly joined by a number of English barons and nobles. In the fighting that ensued, the king and his supporters were driven into the Welsh Marches. A short time later, he was captured and imprisoned. And his teenage son – Prince Edward – was then declared as the new king, thereby becoming Edward III.

The elder Edward lingered in captivity for a while before he was finally murdered. According to legend, his death came at the hands of executioners wielding a red-hot poker. It was a brutal end for one of England's more ineffective kings.

His son Edward III was now the king, but given Edward's relative youth, the country was effectively ruled by his mother, Isabella and her lover Roger Mortimer.

Shortly after young Edward became king, that guide to kingship composed for his benefit was presented to him. Remember that the manuscript included that first crude picture of a European cannon. And perhaps that was appropriate because young Edward proved to be one of the most effective military leaders of the entire Middle Ages.

The book that Edward received was composed in Latin, and Edward could presumably read it because he had been educated to read Latin. He also spoke French and English like most of the highest nobles of England. It also appears that he could understand German and Flemish. And all of those languages came in handy over the course of his life – because he spent a LOT of time on the continent – fighting his enemies and forging alliances with various nobles throughout northern Europe.

But for now, he had to bide his time while his mother Isabella and her lover Roger Mortimer ran the country in his name. The next year, the scope of his realm was almost extended to France itself. In that year – 1328 – the French king Charles IV died. Remember this was Edward's uncle. He was the last of the three brothers to sit on the throne, and as I noted earlier, none of them had any sons. So there was no male heir. Without an heir, it meant that the family dynasty known as the Capetians came to an end. They had replaced the Carolingians in the 900s, and they had ruled France for three and a half centuries. But now the nobles had to choose a new king and a new ruling family.

Now remember that there was a surviving sister Isabella – mother of the young English king Edward. And if the line passed through her as the surviving sister, it meant that her son Edward was also entitled to the throne of France. And she made that claim on Edward's behalf to the

French nobles. But the French nobles didn't want an English king. So they looked elsewhere. They took the position that the succession could not pass through a female line, so they looked to a male cousin whose descent followed a male line from Isabella's grandfather. That cousin was Philip of Valois, and he was chosen as the new king of France in 1328, thereby establishing a new French dynasty – the House of Valois. Philip became the new king despite the fact that young Edward in England was more closely related to the prior king.

So all of this helps to set the stage for the long war to come because the Hundred Years War was in part a war for control of the French crown itself.

Meanwhile, back in England, the country was still being run by Isabella and her lover, Roger Mortimer. And for most practical purposes, it was really being run by Mortimer. The relationship between Isabella and Roger Mortimer was controversial to say to the least. It was in illegal act to overthrow a king, but at least Isabella was the queen. Roger Mortimer had no right to be a de facto king. Meanwhile, the couple used their power and position to enrich themselves and to increase the size of their estates.

They had also taken no action to secure Edward's rights in Gascony and to prevent French incursions there. Edward became frustrated at the decisions that were being made in his name by his mother and her lover. He harbored resentment at the way they had dethroned and murdered his father. By the year 1330, he had had enough of the regency that ruled in his name.

While Isabella and Mortimer lay sleeping at Nottingham Castle, Edward and a group of soldiers stormed in through an underground passage and dragged Mortimer from his bed. A short time later, Mortimer was hanged at a gallows that was used for common criminals.

Edward then declared that the regency was over. From now on, he would now rule in his own name. He was now the fully empowered King of England. His mother Isabella was exiled to a manor where she lived out the rest of her life – another thirty years.

In the same year that Edward seized power and ended the regency that governed in his name, an inventory was taken of all the munitions in Windsor Castle west of London. The inventory was composed in Latin, and it mentions one particular item in the following passage: "una magna balista de cornu quæ vocatur Domina Gunilda." In English, it reads: "A large ballista from Cornwall called Lady Gunhilda." A ballista was a weapon that resembled a large crossbow. It was used to shoot large stones at enemy troops. It was similar to a catapult. So it wasn't a cannon. It didn't use gunpowder, but it was still an effective weapon. And this large one in Windsor Castle was called Lady Gunhilda.

Now I've mentioned this weapon before. Way back in Episode 60, I mentioned it in the context of Old Norse because Gunhilda was a Norse name that become common in England. And that name was given to this weapon in the same way that the name 'Big Bertha' was assigned to a huge cannon mounted on a railway car in World War I. It has been common over the centuries to give weapons a female name. And you might remember from that earlier episode, that the name Gunhilda was soon extended to similar weapons – in particular those new cannons that fired

projectiles using gunpowder. And over time, the 'hilda' part was dropped at the end, thereby shortening the name from Gunhilda to ***gun***. And that is the origin of the word ***gun***. It can be traced back to this weapon maintained in Windsor Castle at the time Edward III took power in the year 1330.

Now a couple of notes about guns and cannons. I noted that this weapon in Windsor Castle that gave us the word ***gun*** was a type of crossbow. It relied on mechanical propulsion. It didn't use gunpowder. And that illustration of a canon in that book on kingship shows an arrow protruding from the cannon. So even though gunpowder was starting to become more common, it was still very much a novelty around the year 1330 when Edward seized power.

One of the problems with using gunpowder in cannons is that it was tough for metal-workers to construct a cannon that could withstand the blast. The metal tube would crack or explode when the gunpowder ignited. This problem was gradually solved by taking long metal slats and arranging them side by side in a circular manner to create a tube. The metal slats were welded together to create the long metal tube, and then that metal tube was surrounded by rings to hold everything in place during the blast. That was the same basic technique that was used to create buckets or barrels where long wooden slats were arranged in a similar manner and then held in place by metal rings. So this barrel-making technique was extended to cannons, and that helps to explain why that metal tube in a cannon or gun is called the ***barrel***.

As metal-workers perfected these techniques, iron cannons started to become more common. But at first, they were mainly used as defensive weapons. They were placed in castles and used to shoot stone balls or other projectiles at the men who were attacking the castle.

The cannon was sometimes placed in a window or opening in the side of the castle. That protected the men who loaded and fired the cannon. Of course, traditional archers also fired arrows from those holes since the small openings offered protection from incoming arrows and projectiles. This type of small opening in a castle wall was called a ***loop***, which was a word apparently borrowed from Dutch. It first appeared in English in the late 1300s, and it is unrelated to the word ***loop*** in the sense of a string or rope tied in a circular or ring-like manner. The use of the word ***loop*** as a small opening used for shooting projectiles ultimately gave us the wood ***loophole***. A ***loophole*** was a literal opening that provided protection, and it allowed an archer to avoid direct fire. And that gave us the more modern sense of the word ***loophole*** which is a legal opening that provides protection. It's a technicality that allows someone to avoid prosecution or other legal attack. So the word was extended from its original military use to a specific legal use over time.

So loopholes were initially used by archers, but with the advent of cannons, they started to be used by gunners firing stones or cannonballs at attackers. And the new English king – Edward III – would soon extend the use of those cannons to the battlefield.

Over the next couple of years, Edward found himself in repeated conflict with the French king Philip. The major source of animosity was the old disputed province of Gascony in southern France. Edward still held that region as a vassal of Philip, but Philip wanted to take it back and rule it directly. And that was the ultimate source of conflict that led to the Hundred Years War.

In the spring of 1337, the French king Philip sparked the war by invading Gascony with the intent of bringing it under his direct rule. He declared that Edward no longer had any rights to the region as a vassal. But Philip underestimated Edwards' response, and in doing so, he initiated a century of warfare between England and France that became known as the Hundred Years War.

Now I should note that this war wasn't called the "Hundred Years War" until the 1700s. And in fact, that name is misleading in many respects. First of all, it didn't last exactly a hundred years. It actually lasted 116 years. Also, it wasn't a continuos war. It was a conflict that ran hot and cold. There were long extended periods of several years when there was no fighting at all. But then the conflict would flare up again and the fighting would resume. Part of the reason why this is seen as a distinct war, separate from the many battles that preceded it, is because it was a war for the French crown itself. Previously, the English kings were vassals of the French king, and when they fought the king, they usually did so as vassals. But now Edward III claimed to be the actual king of France. He asserted that he was the rightful heir to the French crown through his mother. So this war was in large part a power struggle to determine the rightly claimant to the French throne.

In the same year that Philip invaded Gascony (1337), Edward called a meeting of Parliament to address the conflict. At the assembled Parliament, Edward's representative explained the nature of the French threat, and he asked for money to finance a war with France. Interestingly, the arguments were made in English – not the usual French. According to the chronicles of the period, the king's representative spoke in English "to the end that he might be better understood by all."

Edward did receive some funding for a war, but his invasion plans were so massive, that it wasn't enough. It actually took him a couple of years to secure the money he needed though taxes, loans and other financing. So the war had begun, but the actual fighting was put on hold for a while.

Even though that 1337 Parliament had been addressed in English, Edward realized something very interesting about the relative importance of English and French when it came to war. The nobles and commoners who met at Parliament spoke English as their native language, and the men who filled the ranks of the English army spoke English, but the language of war was French. That had been the case since the Norman Conquest in large part because the Norman Conquest was a conquest. The Anglo-Saxons had been defeated in war, and the French language had been imposed upon them by the conquerors. In fact, as we saw in an earlier episode, the word ***war*** was one of the first words to be borrowed from French after the Conquest.

In the same way that French came to dominate English law and government, it also dominated the English military. From the time of the conquest, most of the English military leaders came from the Norman ruling class, so they had traditionally spoken French as their native language. Knighthood also became an established institution in England, and many aspects of knighthood were borrowed from France. Knights wore impenetrable armor. They fought on horseback. And they were bound by notions of chivalry. That was the new type of warfare that the Normans had brought to England, and it dominated much of the Middle Ages.

The English had also fought many battles in France over the prior two and half centuries as they tried to hold on the vestiges of the old Angevin Empire, which included a large portion of France. That meant that they formed alliances with other French nobles, and they routinely negotiated with their French opponents. So French was the language of war and diplomacy – even in England.

Being well aware of this, Edward told his assembled Parliament that they should encourage their children to use French. According to a French chronicler of the period named Jean Froissart, Edward told the assembled nobles and commoners that "all lords, barons, knights, and respectable men of good towns should take care and diligence to teach their children the French language in order that they might be more able and familiar with it as they go off to war." *[Source: The Auchinleck Manuscript, New Perspectives, Susanna Fein, ed., p. 64.]*

This shows how much French had declined as a spoken language in England. Even the barons and nobles had to be encouraged to teach their children French. But more importantly, it shows that French was still the language of war and diplomacy in England. No alliance could be forged, and no lasting truce could be negotiated, without fully understanding French. Notice the subtle shift in the status of French. Knowledge of the language was now being encouraged, not because it was the cultivated language of the English nobility, but because it was the language of the enemy across the Channel. It was encouraged to ensure that English soldiers and diplomats fully understood the subtle intentions of their rivals. So knowledge of French was now a weapon a war.

All of this helps to explain why so many words associated with warfare were borrowed from French during this period. Through the late 1300s, English borrowed words like ***army***, ***navy***, ***soldier***, ***scout***, ***spy***, ***battle***, ***armor***, ***enemy***, ***ambush***, ***retreat***, ***defeat***, ***besiege***, and ***garrison***. English also borrowed words that reflect the nature of warfare during that period, and which mostly survive today as relics of that earlier period. That includes words like ***archer***, ***lance***, ***dart***, ***banner***, ***mail*** and ***moat***.

English also borrowed terms for certain positions within the military. It borrowed ***marshal***, ***constable***, ***sergeant***, ***captain***, and ***lieutenant*** (or /left-tenant/).

By the way, you may be wondering why Americans tend to say /loo-tenant/ and Brits tend to say /left-tenant/. Well the first part of that word is the French word ***lieu*** meaning 'place.' We also have that word in the phrase 'in lieu of' meaning 'in place of.' The second part is ***tenant*** meaning 'one who holds something.' Today we tend to think of it as a person who holds a piece of land,

but it originally had a broader meaning. So a ***lieutenant*** was literally a 'place holder' – in other words, it wasn't the primary leader. It was a substitute or a deputy or a viceregent. Over time, it became a formal title. Now the French sometimes pronounced ***lieu*** as /loof/ with a slight 'f' sound at the end. And it appears that some English speakers picked up on that pronunciation, and they started to pronounce it as /loof-tenant/. And over time, it became /left-tenant/. Both pronunciations were once common in English, and this is one of those words where British English settled on one pronunciation and American English settled on the other. Sort of like ***herb*** (/herb/) and ***herb*** (/erb/).

Lieutenant entered English around the same time as words like ***captain*** and ***sergeant***, but the larger point is that French influenced the language of warfare long after it died out as the primary language of the English nobility.

As I noted earlier, the Hundred Years War officially began in 1337, but it took several years for any major battles to occur. Edward spent that time forging alliances with several important German provinces and accumulating the funds for a major invasion of northern France.

By the later part of 1339, Edward and his allies were finally ready to begin their campaign. Edward traveled to the city of Ghent in Flanders to make preparations for the invasion of France. While in Ghent, Edward formally proclaimed himself to be the King of France. According to Edward, the planned invasion was designed to arrest the throne from a usurper.

But after he launched his invasion, Edward couldn't manage to get the French forces to fight – not even a skirmish. It was all part of the French king's strategy. By avoiding a direct confrontation, he forced Edward to pay his mercenary troops to march around northern France accomplishing nothing. As the weeks passed, Edward started to run out of money. So he decided to head back to England to ask for more funding for the war.

Now I said that Edward couldn't even manage a skirmish during this initial campaign. And the word ***skirmish*** was another French loanword that came into English around this time. It appeared for the first time in an English document about 30 years later in the writings of Geoffrey Chaucer. The word ***skirmish*** is actually based on a word that meant a sword fight or sword fighter. And almost exactly 600 years after Chaucer introduced the word in his writings, another English poet introduced a variation of the same root word to modern popular culture. That later poet was Freddie Mercury of the rock group Queen. And here is the version that he introduced:

[BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY SOUND CLIP]

Did you catch it? It's the word ***scaramouche***. That's obviously a short passage from the song Bohemian Rhapsody, and the popularity of that song over the past 40 years or so has caused that word ***scaramouche*** to pass into popular culture, even if most people don't know what it means and only associate it with that song. Some people think it was a made-up word, but it's not.

The word is actually the name of a common character in a popular form of Italian theater called Commedia dell'arte. It was popular throughout Europe from the 1500s through the 1700s. And it used a lot of stock characters that represented certain stereotypes in Italian culture. For example, a character that represented a stereotypical Venetian merchant was called Pantalone. The character almost always wore a costume with a pair of red leggings. Through that association, the name Pantalone passes into English as ***pantaloon*** meaning long trousers or similar attire. And within American English, the word was shortened from ***pantaloon*** to ***pants***. So the word ***pants*** can be traced back to one of these Italian characters.

Well, another common stock character in that style of Italian theater was called ***Scaramouche***. The character usually dressed like an Italian nobleman, but the name was derived from the Italian word ***scaramuccia*** which literally meant 'little skirmisher' or 'little sword fighter.' The character was foolish braggart, and the name of the character actually become somewhat common in early Modern English when that type of Italian theater was so popular. The word ***scaramouche*** came to mean a rascal or scamp. But its association with musical theater is presumably why Freddie Mercury incorporated it into Bohemian Rhapsody.

Now I began this digression by noting that ***Scaramouch*** and ***skirmish*** are both derived from a common word that meant a 'sword fight' or 'sword fighter.' The common root word was the Italian word ***scaramuccia*** which today simply means 'skirmish.' And I know what a lot of you are probably thinking, especially if you follow American politics. For a very brief period in 2017, the White House communications director was Anthony Scaramucci. And a lot of people were intrigued by that surname. Well, that surname is derived from the same root word. So it's an Italian occupational surname – literally a 'skirmisher' or 'sword fighter.'

That old Italian root word passed into French as ***scaramouch*** in the Middle Ages, and it then passed into English as ***skirmish*** in the 1300s. Again, it is first found in writings of Geoffrey Chaucer.

And speaking of Geoffrey Chaucer, he was born in the year 1343 around the time that Edward was organizing the initial campaigns of the Hundred Years War. So that's how close we are to the period in which Middle English literature reached its peak. Many of the people who contributed to that movement were born during this period in the mid-1300s. And as we'll see in a future episode, Chaucer was actually a soldier in the Hundred Years War, and he was later an English diplomat during the war. So he lived his entire life in the midst of the Hundred Years War.

One of Chaucer's most important supporters and patrons was actually a son of Edward III named John of Gaunt. In fact, John of Gaunt and Geoffrey Chaucer were married to sisters at one point, so they were actually brothers-in-law. Well, John of Gaunt was called 'John of Gaunt,' but ***Gaunt*** was actually an Anglicized version of the word ***Ghent***, as in the city in Flanders where Edward had formally proclaimed himself as the King of France. The reason why John of Gaunt was named after the city of Ghent is because that's where he was born shortly after his father made that proclamation and then launched his first ineffective campaign into northern France.

As I noted earlier, the French king avoided any direct confrontations, and Edward started to run out of money. So he headed back to England to ask for additional funding. He actually left his pregnant wife in Ghent in Flanders. And she gave birth to John while Edward was away.

John of Gaunt will become an important figure in our story, not only for his later support of Geoffrey Chaucer, but also because he was the founder of the House of Lancaster – one of the two families that fought for the English crown in the so-called 'Wars of the Roses.' So we'll see more from John as an adult in a few years.

Now so far, the Hundred Years War has gotten off to a slow start. Three years in, and there still had been no major battles between the English and French forces. Edward had returned to England and raised some more money, but he faced a more immediate threat. The French were amassing a fleet on the northern coast of France with plans to launch an invasion of southern England. So Edward assembled some ships and made a surprise attack on the French fleet while it was still in port. His forces killed many of the sailors and destroyed many of the ships, which ensured that there would be no invasion of England for the foreseeable future.

So interestingly, the first significant battle of the Hundred Years War was a naval battle. And ***navy*** is one of those French and Latin words that was borrowed into English in the mid-1300s. While the victory thwarted any French invasion of England, it did very little to help Edward win the war itself. In order to do that, he had to invade France with a land force – an ***army*** (another new loanword from French). The problem is that he had already tried that, but the French had avoided a direct battle. So he didn't make any real progress, and he burned through a lot of money, so he had to come up with a new plan.

Edward soon decided to forego grand alliances with European kings and expensive invasions with massive armies. He decided instead to use a smaller army, and he adopted a scorched-earth policy. This was when the war shifted from a traditional feudal conflict to something resembling a terror campaign.

Edward planned another invasion, but this time he intended to use a smaller contingent of soldiers, and they would burn and loot and plunder every town and village they encountered. They would destroy everything in their path. This would bring the war to the actual people of France. It was no longer going to be a conflict between nobles and paid mercenaries. Instead, it was going to a direct attack on the peasants and townspeople of northern France. The plan was to destroy the morale and will of the people – to scare them and intimidate them and make them so sick of the destruction that they would surrender.

There's actually a word for this – the word ***havoc***. And that word actually comes from a military command that was used during this period. It's a command that was borrowed from French. It was 'Havoc!' and it was the order given to an assembled army that they should loot and plunder a village or town. This became Edward's standard policy going forward, and his forces 'wreaked havoc' on the French countryside in the year 1346.

In that year, Edward crossed over to Normandy with an army of about 15,000 men half of which were archers. He was accompanied by his eldest son who was also named Edward. He was the heir to the English throne, and he is better known to history as the 'Black Prince' because he wore black armor into battle. He will also become an important figure as the war proceeds.

After arriving in Normandy, Edward kept to his strategy of conducting raids, sacking towns, burning crops, and robbing and killing anyone in the way. His army then moved eastward across the northern part of Normandy parallel to the coast. The French king Philip got word of the raids, and he soon left Paris with his own army in pursuit of Edward's forces. The two kings finally met outside the town of Crecy on the northeastern coast of France. The English forces arrived first and took the high ground on a slope. Edward's right flank was commanded by his son the Black Prince.

When Philip's French army arrived, it was much larger than Edward's. There were about there times as many French soldiers. That was one of the dangers of relying on a smaller army. It was cheaper and more mobile, but it was easily outnumbered on foreign soil.

Despite the French numerical advantage, Edward had several things going for him. First, he took the high ground on a slope, thereby forcing the French cavalry to charge up the slope at his forces. He also had two weapons in his arsenal that the French weren't prepared for.

The first was a cannon – actually several cannons. The battle of Crecy was one of the first major battles in European history to use cannons and gunpowder as offensive weapons. The other weapon in Edward's arsenal was the longbow. And this was the real advantage. In fact, other than size, the major difference between the English army and the French army was the type of archers that each one possessed.

The French army relied on traditional crossbows. The crossbow had a handle or stock that resembled that of a rifle, and it had a bow across the top that was parallel to the ground when fired. The weapon fired projectiles called bolts, and it was a very effective weapon. At close enough range, it could pierce the armor of a knight, but generally speaking, crossbows were no match for the mounted cavalry and armored knights. Crossbows were much more effective against an opposing infantry. At the battle of Crecy, most of the crossbowmen in the French army were actually mercenaries from Genoa.

But Edward's men had a new weapon – the longbow. This was a weapon that probably has its origins in Wales, but it had been adopted by Edward's grandfather Edward I, also known as Longshanks. Longshanks had discovered the value of the weapon in his Welsh campaigns, and he had incorporated it into the English army.

As its name suggests, the longbow was literally a 'long bow.' It was about 5 or 6 feet long, so it was as tall as the average archer. That meant that the arrow could be pulled back much further – and when released, the arrow would travel with tremendous force. It could easily pierce a knight's armor. But its major advantage over the crossbow is that it could also fire arrows in rapid succession – as many as 10 in a minute. Crossbows had to be re-loaded each time they were

fired, and that took a while. The crossbow had a mechanism that had to be cranked to get the bow into the firing position. So it was a much slower weapon that couldn't match the volleys of the longbow.

The only real problem with the English longbow is that it was so big that an average archer couldn't use it. The bow was big and heavy. It required a lot of strength to use it. It was best to identify potential longbowmen as children, and then train them as they grew up. That allowed them to develop the arm and shoulder muscles required to use the heavy bow. So Edward trained boys from youth in archery on the village green of towns and cities. He went so far as to ban all other sports from the village green. That meant that early versions of tennis and football (or soccer) were outlawed. This allowed potential longbowmen to be identified early on and to be thoroughly trained until adulthood.

Just like today, archers trained by shooting arrows at targets. Targets used concentric circles and the goal was to place the arrow as close to the middle as possible. Targets usually had a very small circle in the middle. Today, we call that small circle a ***bulls-eye***, but that's a very modern term. The term wasn't used to mean the center of a target until the 1800s. Before that, some people used the French term for the center of the target which was 'de pointe en blanc.' It literally meant the 'white point' or 'white mark' because the bulls-eye was usually white on archery targets. That French term was borrowed into English and Anglicized as ***point blank***. So the ***point blank*** was the bulls-eye. The term ***point blank*** was first recorded in English is the 1500s.

The only way most archers could hit the ***point blank*** – or bulls-eye – was to stand very close to the target. So within English, the term ***point blank*** came to refer to a very close archery shot or a very close shot from a firearm. That's what we mean when we say that a shot was fired from 'point blank range.' We mean very close. That also produced the extended sense of the term as something direct or blunt. So if your boss asks you point blank, "Why did you miss work on Monday?" he or she is being very direct and to the point just like an arrow shot at point blank range.

Now with a fair amount of training, Edward's archers found it easy to hit the bulls-eye even if they weren't at point blank range because the longbow was a massive bow that could deliver large arrows at high speed. Given that speed, the arrows could maintain a straight trajectory for a long distance which made it easier to hit the bulls-eye at a long distance.

But again, the major advantage of the longbow is that it could be fired repeatedly. The longbowmen could deliver one barrage of arrows after another with little, if any, break in between. So Edward's 'army' was 'armed' with 'armaments' and 'artillery' including longbows that could pierce the 'armor' of mounted knights. The French knights were probably 'alarmed' when they realized the devastating power of that weapon. You might have noticed a common theme there – ***army***, ***armed***, ***armaments***, ***artillery***, ***armor*** and ***alarm*** – they're all cognate.

They're all derived from a common Indo-European root word which was something like ***ar***. It meant 'to fit things together.' We also have that root in the Greek word ***harmony***. Within early Latin, the word evolved into ***arma*** which specifically referred to tools or weapons. Since it could refer to tools, it also became associated with craftsmen who worked with tools. They often had to fit things together. So within Latin, the word became associated with craftsmen. This process also gave us the words ***art*** and ***artist***.

As I noted, the word was also applied to weapons which were 'tools of war.' That gave us the word ***arms*** in the sense of weapons. It also gave us the verb '***to arm***' meaning to equip with weapons. Both versions of the word ***arm*** entered English in the early 1200s. So they were very early loanwords from French after the Conquest.

By the way, the military sense of the word ***arm*** is also distantly related to the body part. We might use our arms to wield certain arms like a bow and arrow. I noted earlier that the longbow required a tremendous amount of arm strength and shoulder strength. Well ***arms*** in the sense of weapons comes from Latin and French, but ***arms*** in the sense of body parts is an Old English word. They both come from same Indo-European root, but within the Germanic languages, the sense of fitting things together came to apply to a joint where two things fit together. And that produced the English word ***arm*** meaning the body part that extends from the shoulder joint. In fact, Latin and Greek also used the word in a similar sense. Latin had the word ***armus*** which meant shoulder. And Greek had the word ***arthon*** which meant a joint. It gave us the word ***arthritis*** which means an inflammation of the joints. So the shoulder joint provides the literal connection between ***arms*** as body parts and ***arms*** as weapons.

By the year 1300, English had also borrowed the word ***armor*** from French which was another variation of the same root word. ***Armor*** is related to the word ***arms*** in the sense of military weapons or equipment. So armor was considered another tool of war. Knights were armed with weapons and armor. And that made then almost invincible against swords and traditional bows and arrows.

Around the time a***rmor*** was borrowed, English also borrowed the word ***armory***. An ***armory*** was a place where arms where kept.

By the end of the 1300s, English had also borrowed the word ***army*** from French. An ***army*** was a collection of armed men or soldiers, so the word ***army*** came in around the same time as ***navy***. Both words appear for the first time in the second half of the 1300s.

Shortly after the word ***army*** appeared in English, English picked up the word ***alarm*** which believe it or not was originally a military term. It was a call to arms. It was literally 'a le arme' which means 'to the arms.' When a scout identified that enemy troops were approaching, the call was 'All arme! All arme!' Literally 'To the arms! To the arms!' And 'All arme!' became ***alarm*** in English.

Another military term with that same root is the word ***artillery*** which first appeared in an English document around the year 1400. Today, we tend to think of artillery as large-caliber firearms like cannons, mounted guns and mortars, but the word was borrowed at a time when most projectiles were fired from bows or similar mechanical devices. So originally, the word ***artillery*** referred to bows, slings and catapults.

That meant that most artillery was originally used by ***archers***. And ***archer*** was another new word in the language at the current point in our story. It comes from an altogether different root word, but it was borrowed from French in the late 1200s. By the way, ***bow*** and ***arrow*** are Old English words. So a person who used a bow and arrow was either a ***bowman*** using a native English construction or an ***archer*** using that French loanword.

And as I noted earlier, Edward III of England stocked his army with a large number of bowmen or archers most of whom used the longbow. And that was the weapon that made the difference in that famous battle at Crecy in northern France in the year 1346. Edward's archers were stationed along with the rest of the English forces at the top of the slope where they had taken position before the French troops arrived. When the battle commenced, the French king tried to weaken the English lines by having his crossbowmen fire bolts at the English forces. But they were no match for the English longbows. Soon the French crossbowman started to fall back, and they were replaced by the French cavalry which charged up the slope. For most of the Middle Ages, the mounted cavalry had been invincible. The well-protected knights usually had their way with opposing infantrymen. But all of that changed at Crecy. The English longbows pierced the knights' chain-mail and armor, and it repelled the cavalry time and again. Around a dozen times, the French knights tried to make it up the slope, and every time they were turned back.

In the midst of this melee, Edward directed that his cannons be fired. These early cannons were small bronze or iron tubes strapped to wooden frames. The frame was probably similar to a wheelbarrow. The guns weren't strong enough to do any actual damage, but the sound they made frightened and confused the French troops. Remember that most of those troops had never heard a cannon fired before. And if you've ever stood near a cannon when its fired, it can be a startling experience even if you know it's coming. But most of the French troops didn't expect it in the middle of a battle.

The noise sounded like thunder. It frightened the soldiers and their horses. And it added to the mass of confusion on the French side. You might say that the French troops was ***stunned***, and ***astounded***, and ***astonished*** by the thundering sounds of the cannons. Well, not only are ***stun***, ***astound***, and ***astonish*** three variations of the same Latin root word ****extonare***, they were also all borrowed from French in the early 1300s around the current point in our story. And that original Latin root word ****extonare*** was a combination of the Latin prefix ***-ex*** meant 'out' and the root word ***tonare*** meaning 'thunder.' In fact, ***tonare*** has the same Indo-European root as the Old English word ***thunder***. So ****extonare*** literally meant 'to leave someone thunderstruck.' And that also means that words like ***stun***, ***astound***, and ***astonish*** are all cognate with the word ***thunder***. And that's why Edward's thundering cannons literally left the French troops ***stunned***, and ***astounded***, and ***astonished***. It was the sound of the cannon that was the real weapon, not the projectiles that were fired from it.

By the way, Dutch-speaking soldiers of the Netherlands had the same impression when they first encountered the sound of the cannon. They called it a ***donderbus***. ***Donder*** is the Dutch word for thunder, and again it's derived from the same Germanic root as ***thunder***. It's just the Dutch version. And a ***donderbus*** was literally a 'thunder box' or 'thunder tube.' As I've noted before, English borrowed a LOT of Dutch words in the 1600s when England and the Netherlands were maritime rivals. And ***donderbus*** was one of those Dutch words borrowed into English. But English speakers confused ***donder*** with ***blunde***r, and the word became ***blunderbuss*** within English. But again, the word ***blunderbuss*** was derived from the Dutch word for thunder, and it shows how medieval soldiers were often stunned by the sound of the weapon. And that was certainly the case at Crecy.

When all was said and done, the heavily outnumbered English troops were victorious. Estimates suggest that the English lost about 500 men in the battle, but the French lost over 10,000 men – twenty times as many. But the French losses were ultimately worse than that. Much of the French nobility lay dead on the battlefield. When the English counted the dead after the battle, about 1500 lords, knights and lesser nobles were found among the dead. *[Source: The Historical Atlas of Knights and Castles, Barnes, 109-110]*

That included King John of Bohemia who was ally of the French. I mentioned him earlier in the episode, and I noted that he may have been the first European king to use a cannon in a military action, but he died on the battlefield in Crecy. He had gone blind by this point, so he is often known as John the Blind. Despite his blindness, he wanted to lead a charge with his men, so he and his men tied their bridles together so he could join the attack. But he was cut down just like the others.

One of the English soldiers discovered his body and took his crest back to Edward's son the Black Prince. The crest consisted of three tall white ostrich feathers. The king's motto had been Ich Dien – literally "I serve." The young English prince was so impressed by the dead king's bravery that he adopted both the crest of feathers and the motto, and both have been incorporated into the official badge of the Prince of Wales ever since.

And according to many sources, this is also the origin of the phrase "a feather in your cap" to mean a significant accomplishment. John the Blind's crest consisted of three ostrich feathers, and the Black Prince adopted those feathers for his own official badge. Supposedly, it thereafter became a common practice to honor a knight who had fought bravely in battle by giving him a feather to wear in his helmet. And that's why today a particular honor or distinction might be described as 'a feather in your cap.' Despite the popularity of this etymology, it's a little bit sketchy. Displaying a feather to mark an accomplishment is actually widespread among many cultures. It was even a common practice among some Native American tribes who added a feather to the head-dress of a warrior who performed a brave act. And the phrase "a feather in one's cap" isn't found in English until around the year 1600, so it's hard to link it directly to the Battle of Crecy. But again, many sources do make that connection.

Now the Battle of Crecy is significant because it was the first major battle of the Hundred Year's War, and it was a somewhat surprising victory for the English. No one really thought that the English could muster a force that could defeat the French on their own soil. Memories of the English defeat at the hands of the Scots a few years earlier were still widespread in France and the rest of Europe. So the English victory at Crecy was a shock to many observers at the time. But the English masterly of the longbow gave them an advantage at Crecy, and it continued to give them an advantage for several more years. The French were slow to adopt the weapon. And remember that English longbowmen were trained from youth. So even when the French realized the value of the weapon, it took them several years to train enough soldiers to make it viable option. That allowed the English to dominate the early years of the war.

Thanks to the longbow, the Battle of Crecy marked a major turning point in medieval warfare. The mounted knights and the French cavalry had been soundly defeated by archers. This was the beginning of a shift in power. The days of the armored knight were numbered. And as firearms became more common, the knights' demise was hastened even further. The archers and gunners who replaced them were mostly commoners who spoke English. And whereas the knightly class had placed a high value on French culture and the French language, the English archers and infantry didn't. This was another part of that larger societal shift that allowed the English-speaking classes to become more powerful and influential in England.

By the late 1300s, cannons had been perfected to the point that their projectiles were more dangerous than their sound. The cannonballs fired from a cannon could take down stone walls. And that brought an end to another common symbol of the Middle Ages – the castle. When William the Conqueror defeated the Anglo-Saxons, he secured his hold on England by building castles around the country. For nearly three centuries, they had been a symbol of Norman and Plantagenet miliary power and superiority, but the brand new cannons fired by English commoners brought down those castle walls with relative ease.

Again this was a gradual process that took place over the course of a century or more, but we can find its origins here in the mid-1300s, and more specifically we can find it on the battlefield of Crecy in the year 1346.

The English victory at Crecy was followed by a siege on the port city of Calais. The city eventually fell to the English forces after a protracted siege. That gave the English a foothold in northern France for the rest of the war. In fact, it remained under English control for two centuries.

These early English victories certainly stunned the French, and it probably gave Edward III reason to believe that he would soon wear the French crown as well as the English crown. But that didn't happen. The French eventually re-grouped and fought back. And as the war progressed – year after year and decade after decade – a sense of nationalism took hold on each side of the Channel. This sense of English pride was combined with a hostility toward all things French. The French language became the language of the enemy. And that hostility was another factor in the return of English as the dominant language of England.

As I noted earlier, the Hundred Years War ran hot and cold. There were extended periods when there were no battles at all. And one of those lulls took place after Crecy. The fighting stopped because the French and English had a bigger threat to deal with. That threat was the Black Death. It arrived in northern Europe at almost the exact same time that the English forces captured the port city of Calais.

So next time, we'll turn our attention to the horrible plague known as the Black Death. We'll see how it wiped out a large portion of Europe. And we'll see how it turned English society on its head as the surviving peasants suddenly found their labor to be in very high demand. In the same way that new weapons brought an end to the military aspects of feudalism, the Black Death brought an end to the economic aspects of that system.

So next time, we'll look at those developments, and we'll explore how it impacted the English language. Until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.

EPISODE 120: THE END OF THE WORLD

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 120: The End of the World. In this episode, we're going to continue our look at the social and linguistic upheaval of the mid-1300s. And specifically, we're going to look at the devastating plague known as the Black Death. It was one of the worst plagues in human history – perhaps the worst. It killed about one out of every three people in Europe, and when it reached the English shores, it turned English society on its head. Most scholars agree that the Black Death was one of the major factors that led to the end of feudalism in England. The social and economic structure imposed by the Normans three centuries earlier started to break down. The new system that emerged in its place put an emphasis on the use of English for the first time since the Conquest. So this time, we'll explore those developments, and we'll see how the French language was one of the many victims of the Black Death in England.

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 and get bonus episodes and transcripts at Patreon.com/historyofenglish.

Now this time, I want to look at one of the most tragic events in human history – the great sickness that swept through Europe and Asia in the mid-1300s. It wasn't the first plague to hit Europe, but it was certainly the most devastating since the collapse of the Roman Empire. It's almost impossible for us to comprehend the massive loss of life that occurred within a very short period of time.

Societies deal with the circle of life all the time. No society is immune from death. And a certain amount of attrition is to be expected. Usually, as individual citizens pass away, the institutions of society continue on without interruption. But there is a breaking point. There's a point at which so many people die within such a short period of time, that the society can no longer cope with the consequences. There aren't enough people to grow food, to provide basic goods and services, to operate the government, to pay taxes, to provide protection. There aren't even enough people to bury the dead. When that happens, those traditional institutions of society break down, and a new social order has to be cobbled together from whatever remains. That was what happened in England and much of the Europe in the mid-1300s. And that is why this event is so important to modern historians. Almost every aspect of society was affected. The economy, the social structure, the Church, the language. They were all fundamentally changed by this massive plague and the tremendous loss of life that resulted.

That is why many historians link the Black Death with the collapse of the feudal system in western Europe. And over the next couple of episodes, I'm going to discuss how these two important events are fundamentally connected. Of course, our primary focus will be on the linguistic consequences of the plague, and in that regard, there were both immediate direct consequences and long-term indirect consequences.

The long-term consequences had to do with the collapse of the traditional social order which had been imposed by the Normans. That social order was ruled by a small nobility who valued French and Latin over English. When that social order collapsed, the power of those nobles declined, and the power of the traditional English-speaking classes increased. And with that shift in power and influence, English was once again embraced as the primary language of the country. So again, in that regard, the English language was a beneficiary of these larger social and economic changes that were taking place.

But in this episode, I want to focus on the more immediate and more direct consequences of the Black Death. When the plague hit England in 1348, there was an immediate impact in the churches and schools of England. The church was one of the hardest hit institutions because priests performed the last rites on the dying. So they were constantly exposed to the contagion. Monasteries were also confined to institutions where the plague quickly spread from person to person. So within a couple of years, many of the educated clerics who were trained in Latin and French died out. Many of these clerics also served as teachers, and when they died out, that left the schools with a shortage of teachers who spoke Latin and French. Many of the new teachers who replaced them only spoke English. And that allowed English to re-emerge as the dominant language in the schools of England. So this time, we'll focus on those immediate developments. And next time, we'll explore some of the more long-term consequences.

Since this episode will focus on the plague and its consequences for the schools of England, I wanted to begin by taking you back to a poem that I've mentioned in a couple of earlier episodes – most recently in Episode 102. This is a poem about the disappearance of English from the schools of England after the Norman Conquest, and it survives in the handwriting of the scribe who is known as the Tremulous Hand because of his shaky writing style. We don't know if he composed the poem or simply copied it from another source, but it is a very emotional account of how the English language had been pushed aside by the Norman conquerors. Specifically, it laments the fact that English students were no longer being taught in their native language. Here is the main part of that poem in Modern English just to remind you of the sentiment. It reads:

Saint Bede was born here in Britain with us
And he wisely translated books so that the English
People were taught through them
Abbot Aeflric whom we call Alcuin
Was a writer and translated five books
Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Numbers, Leviticus
Through these were our people taught in English
These people taught our people in English
Their light was not dark; it glowed fairly
Now is that teaching forsaken and our people lost
And another people teaches our folk
And many of our teachers are damned
And that folk with them.

I wanted to read that poem again because it reflects the overall state of education in England from the time of the Conquest until the arrival of the Black Death in the mid-1300s. It shows how English was perceived as a peasant language – a local vernacular not worthy of formal education or serious literature.

Having said that, we also know from prior episodes that English was making a comeback in the 1200s and early 1300s. Most people in England now spoke English as a first language. French was still the prestige language, and the nobles and other elite still tried to learn French because it was so valued, but it was clearly experiencing a decline.

In the last episode, I mentioned how the English king, Edward III, tried to stop the decline of French by encouraging the members of Parliament to teach it to their children. He said that it would benefit them when they went off to war. So in that case, we see that even the nobles had to be encouraged to preserve the use of French.

Well, the churches and monasteries were experiencing similar problems. In most cases, the monks weren't allowed to speak English. They were expected to speak Latin or French. But most of the monks spoke English as their first language, so it was common for them to speak to each other in English. That irritated the abbots and other clerics who were in charge. So in the 1200s, the Benedictine monasteries at Canterbury and Westminster specifically prohibited the use of English, and they required all conversations to be in French. [*Source: History of the English Language – Cable/Baugh, p.138-9.*]

This same problem was also occurring in the schools. Most grammar schools were essentially church schools tied to a particular church or monastery. And as we just saw, teachers generally lectured in French. And students were taught to read and write in Latin. This same approach was extended to universities. And again, students were expected to converse in those educated languages – not English. But those rules were starting to be ignored. The universities tried to stop this trend, and the only way they knew how to do that was to prohibit the use of English altogether, just like many monasteries had done. So in the 1320s, several colleges at Oxford adopted specific rules that 'encouraged' students to converse in Latin and 'allowed' them to converse in French, but they were absolutely prohibited from speaking English. Peterhouse College at Cambridge adopted similar rules.

All of this reflects the relative state of English and French at the time. Elite institutions throughout society required a knowledge of French or Latin, and those institutions did all they could to preserve that knowledge, even if it meant prohibiting the use of English.

Around the same time that those university restrictions were being adopted, a monk named Ranulph Higden was working on a history manuscript which covered the entire history of the known world. Higden called the manuscript Polychronicon, combining the Greek roots ***poly***- meaning 'many' and ***khronikos*** meaning 'time.' ***khronikos*** is also the root of words like ***chronicle*** and ***chronology***. So Polychronicon literally meant 'many times,' and the manuscript was called that because it was a chronicle that covered many different periods of time.

Despite the Greek-sounding name, the manuscript was composed in Latin as was common at the time. Higden began the document in the 1320s, and it wasn't completed until the 1350s shortly after the Black Death. So the work on the manuscript continued for nearly three decades. Higden actually stopped working on the project at some point during that period, and one or more other scribes took over and completed the manuscript.

Now early on in the project, Higden composed an entry in which he discussed the state of education and state of the English language at the time. This passage was composed around the year 1326 – a couple of decades before the Black Death arrived in England. And it's an incredibly fascinating passage because of what it tells us about language and education in England immediately prior to the plague that killed so many people. About 60 years later, the original Latin chronicle was translated into Middle English by a cleric named John of Trevisa. In fact, I actually quoted part of Trevisa's translation in an earlier episode because the manuscript passage contains one of the more memorable statements about the differences between southern English and northern English.

This was the passage where Higden wrote that the people of southern England couldn't understand the people of the north, and he described the northern form of English as "strange stammering, chattering, snarling, and growling gnashing of teeth." Of course, Higden was from the south of England, and he considered the northern form of English to be inferior to his native dialect. But Higden said that the state of the entire language was poor at the time. After making that statement about Northern English, Higden attempted to explain why English was in such bad shape. Here is a Modern English translation of Higden's original comments:

> "This impairing of the birth-tongue is because of two things. One is because children in school, contrary to the usage and manner of all other nations, are compelled to forsake their own language, and to construe their lessons and [name] their things in French, and have [done so] since the Normans came first into England. The second reason is because the children of nobles are taught to speak French from the time that they are rocked in their cradle, and know how to speak and play with a child's toy; and uplandish or ambitious men who would like to present themselves as if they were noble men, try with great effort to speak French in order to be more highly thought of."

Now here's the same passage in Middle English from John of Trevisa's translation:

> Þis apeyryng of þe burþtonge ys bycause of twey þinges. On ys for chyldern in scole, aõenes þe vsage and manere of al oþer nacions, buþ compelled for to leue here oune longage, and for to construe here lessons and here þinges a Freynsch, and habbeþ suþthe þe Normans come furst into Engelond. Also gentil men children buþ ytauõt for to speke Freynsch fram tyme þat a buþ yrokked in here cradel, and conneþ speke and playe wiþ a child hys brouch; and oplondysch men wol lykne hamsylf to gentil men, and fondeþ wiþ gret bysynes for to speke Freynsch, for to be more ytold of.

So Higden's point here is that the emphasis on French over the prior two and half centuries caused English to be neglected. And he suggests that the lack of formal education in English caused the English language to deteriorate – leaving it in a fractured state to the point that the people in one part of England could barely understand the people in the other part. There was no fixed standard that everyone learned and was expected to adhere to. So English was allowed to drift and evolve to reflect the whims of each community.

As I noted earlier, Hidgen stopped working on his chronicle at some point, apparently in the 1340s. And after then, one or more other scribes continued to work on it through the early 1350s. So it was continued through the events I described in the last episode. In its summary of the year 1346, the chronicle contains a brief entry about the English victory over the French at Crecy. The text then refers to the siege and capture of Calais on the northern coast of France which I mentioned at the conclusion of the last episode.

I thought it might be interesting to examine this passage about the capture of Calais. Here is the passage in Modern English. It reads:

> "King Philip of France came around the feast of St. Bartholomew near to Calais in order to dissolve the siege, but in the morning he fled, leaving his tents full of vittels – or food. The men of Calais perceived that, and they yielded the city to the king of England, who tarried or remained there and disposed of the city at his pleasure (in other words, 'put the city in order as he pleased.') After a month, he returned to England."

Now here's the same passage in Trevisa's Middle English version:

> Philippe kynge of Fraunce come abowte the feste of seynte Bartholomewe nye to Calese, as to dissolve that sege, but in the morowe he fledde, levynge his tentes fulle of vitells. Men of Calyse perceyvynge that, yeldede that cite to the kynge of Ynglonde, whiche taryenge þer and disposynge that cite after his pleasure by a monethe, returnede into Ynglonde.

Now the syntax and grammar of that passage are largely the same as Modern English. Most of the vocabulary is also preserved in Modern English. In translating that passage from Latin into Middle English, Trevisa used the word ***vittels*** for food. That word is derived from the Latin word ***victual*** which meant food. The word passed through French where the 'c' or 'k' sound in the middle was usually dropped, so it ended up as ***vittels***. And that's how English borrowed the word. It was in common use in the 1300s, but today ***vittels*** mostly survives in rural American dialects. And even there, it is largely seen as an old-fashioned word.

The passage also gives us 'in the morrow' – or 'in the morning.' ***Morrow*** also gave us the word ***tomorrow*** which really evolved out of this original sense of the next morning.

Now these passages about the English victories at Crecy and Calais are immediately followed by the following passage. In Modern English, it reads:

> "Then a great mortality and death of men followed though the world, beginning from the plagues of the south and of the north, so that scarcely half of the people remained alive."

Here's the Middle English version:

> "Whom a grete mortalite and dethe of men folowede thro the worlde, begynnynge from the plages of the sowthe and of the northe, that unnethe the halfe parte of men remayuede on lyve."

Now this is obviously a reference to what we know today as the Black Death, but in jumping from the capture of Calais in the summer of 1347 to the arrival of the Black Death in the summer of 1348, the chronicle skips over about a year of history. And that year is very important because that was the period in which the plague first appeared in Europe and spread across the continent. By examining the surviving accounts from that period, modern scholars have been able to piece together where the plague came from, how it spread , and why it killed so many people in such a short period of time.

It appears that the Black Death was ultimately caused by a combination of factors that came together at just the right time to produce a massive death toll. Let's begin by noting that it was a disease, and the word ***disease*** was a brand-new word in the English language when the Black Death arrived. ***Disease*** is recorded for the first time in the year 1330. The word was borrowed from Latin via French, and as I've noted before in an earlier episode, the word ***disease*** is literally 'dis-ease' or the lack of ease or comfort.

The root of this particular disease was an infection of the lymph nodes called the bubonic plague. This plague was caused by a bacterium that was carried by rodents – especially black rats. Over the centuries, black rats have been largely replaced with brown rats in much of Europe, but black rats were the more common variety in the 1300s. And they were common throughout Europe and Asia.

This kind of plague is called the 'bubonic' plague because it produces what are called ***buboes*** which are large swellings in the lymph nodes, especially in the groin, armpits, and neck. These ***buboes*** are filled with pus and other fluids, and they can reach the size of eggs. Once contracted, bubonic plague was very deadly. Well over half of all persons who contracted bubonic plague ultimately died from it. Some estimates suggest that the death rate was as high as 90%. And death usually occurred in 4 to 7 days. So it was a lethal disease, but it wasn't really contagious. People didn't give bubonic plague to each other. It had to come from the bite of an infected animal, and that included rats.

Even though rats were common in Middle Ages, and rat bites happened, they weren't common enough to spread the disease across all of Europe in two years – wiping out over a third of the population in the process. So there had to be another factor. And that second factor was fleas.

The bubonic plague was also spread by infected fleas. Certain species of fleas were attracted to the fur of the black rat. The fleas would bite the infected rat and acquire the plague bacteria, and then the fleas would jump to humans and infect the humans. That allowed for a much more rapid expansion of the disease. But even so, in its basic form, the spread of the bubonic plague still required a bite. And if the disease had been limited to bubonic plague, the overall impact and death rate would have probably been much lower. But there was another even more deadly phase called pneumonic plague.

The pneumonic plague is really just the bubonic plague combined with pneumonia. Instead of settling in the lymph nodes, this version settled in a person's lungs, and that meant that it could be spread through coughing, sneezing, and in some cases, through breathing and speaking. In that respect, language itself was partially responsible for the spread of the disease. Once the disease reached this stage, it became a true contagion. Merely coming in contact with an infected person was enough to contract the disease. And given the growth of towns and cities, there were lots more people living together in close proximity. So that allowed the disease to spread rapidly throughout a village, town, or city.

Now I should note that there is still ongoing research into the factors that contributed to the Black Death. What I just presented is the traditional view that has developed over the past couple of centuries, but it is still subject to some refinement, and some experts believe that other factors were also at work. Recent research suggests that fleas may have spread the disease from person to person – not just from rats to people. As you may know, the study of insects is called entomology, and I'm much more comfortable discussing etymology that I am entomology. So I'll stick with the traditional view, but the important thing to understand is that the Black Death wasn't simply bubonic plague. It was a combination of diseases that were all ultimately derived from black rats that were infected with the plague bacteria. The disease evolved and took different forms and became more deadly as it spread to humans.

I should note that the bubonic plague wasn't new in the 1300s, and it didn't disappear after the 1300s. There was actually a massive outbreak of bubonic plague in Europe several centuries earlier near the end of the Roman Empire, and many scholars believe that that earlier outbreak contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire. So this type of plague has haunted humanity for centuries. But that begs the question, why was the outbreak of the bubonic and related plagues in the mid-1300s so bad? Why did it kill so many people in such a short period of time? And why did it encompass so much of the known world when earlier outbreaks tended to be confined to specific regions.

Well, this is where a final important factor comes into play. And that factor was the rise of medieval trade routes that linked almost every major town and city from China to the British Isles. Since the mid-1200s, the east and west had been fundamentally linked by these trade routes that carried merchants and goods across Europe and Asia.

In an earlier episode, I explained how the massive Mongolian Empire linked those two regions like never before. Most of the east-west trade was conducted along the trade route known as the Silk Road. As goods headed west from Asia, they eventually reached the Black Sea and the

Mediterranean. From there, other trade routes carried the goods to Italy, and from there into France, and across France to Flanders and England. And as I noted at the beginning of the last episode, Venetian merchants had started to send ships to England and Flanders via the Atlantic Ocean and the English Channel. So all of these regions were linked in ways that they had not been a couple of centuries before.

And that was really the final piece of our puzzle. If the bubonic plague reached those trade routes, it could quickly spread throughout the known world. And that's exactly what happened in the 1340s.

Now the ultimate origin of this plague is shrouded in mystery, but most modern scholars agree that it began in the Eurasian steppe region – the same region where the Proto-Indo-European language had its ultimate origin several thousand years earlier. Rodents in that region tended to carry the bubonic plague, and they still do to this day. That included rats and marmots. Marmots are a type of rodent that live in the steppe region, and unlike rats, people actually wanted marmots. They were captured and sold for their hides. They were also traded along the Silk Road to merchants from both Europe and Asia.

One theory is that the hides of infected marmots – which also contained infected fleas – were boxed and sent to the port city of Kaffa on the northern coast of the Black Sea on the Crimean Peninsula. That port city is known today as Feodosia, but it was once called Kaffa. No one knows for certain if the plague arrived in Kaffa via marmots or rats or some other rodent, but the Black Death made its first known appearance there in the year 1346. And given that marmots were traded out of that port, they seem like a logical source of the plague.

An Islamic writer named Ibn al-Wardi recorded that traders told him the plague arrived in Kaffa in later half of 1346. That would have been a few months after the English victory over the French at Crecy. So in our overall time line, the arrival of the plague in the Black Sea region would have been around the same time as the events I discussed in the last episode.

Now Kaffa had become a major trading base thanks to merchants from Genoa in northern Italy. They built a trading settlement there, and it soon became a Genoese trading base. And again, it appears that that trading settlement at Kaffa was the point of contact where the bubonic plague reached one of those major trading routes of the late Middle Ages.

An Italian writer of the period named Gabriele de Mussis provided a written account of what happened. According to his account, some Genoese merchants in the region got into an argument with Mongol forces who controlled the surrounding territory. The merchants retreated behind the city walls of Kaffa for protection, but the Mongols besieged the town. During the siege, the plague hit the Mongol forces who were gathered outside of the walls. Perhaps some of the boxes containing infected marmot hides were opened, thereby releasing the fleas on the unsuspecting Mongols. But again, no one knows for sure. According to de Mussis's account, the Mongols who were besieging the city started to die in great numbers. He wrote that the Mongol leader directed that the corpses of the men who died be catapulted into the city. So many Mongols were dying that they soon lifted their siege and pulled back. The merchants inside the city took

advantage of the opportunity and fled to their ships to sail back to Italy. But it was too late. Some of the merchants and sailors had already contracted the disease. And like all ships of this period, the Genoese ships were infested with rats, and the rats had fleas, and some of those fleas spread the disease among the humans on the ships.

According to de Mussis's account, this group of ships made several stops on their way back to Italy, and the plague soon appeared in each one of the port cities where the ships docked. So supposedly, this fleet of ships was the immediate cause of the Black Death in Europe. Now it's a fascinating story, and it may have the added benefit of being true, but de Mussis based his account on the stories that were told to him by others, and it is doubtful that one specific fleet of ships did all the damage. Again, these were very active trade routes, and the Black Death was highly contagious. It spread at a rate never seen before. So it is likely that there were numerous ships spreading the disease.

Based on surviving records, it appears that the disease reached Constantinople in the spring of 1347. A few months later, it was killing the people of Sicily and southern Italy by the thousands. Once the disease found its way into a port city, it spread outward from the city at a rate of about 2.5 miles per day. At that rate, it didn't take long for an entire region to be affected.

Over the following winter and spring, the plague continued to spread northward along the Italian coast. Venice, Florence, Genoa and other parts of northern Italy were soon impacted. And in those regions, writers started to provide vivid accounts of the plague.

A tax collector in Sienna, Italy recorded a first-hand account of the disease as it arrived. His name was Agnolo di Tura, and here is a portion of his account in Modern English:

> "The mortality in Siena began in May. It was a cruel and horrible thing. . . . It seemed that almost everyone became stupefied seeing the pain. It is impossible for the human tongue to recount the awful truth. Indeed, one who did not see such horribleness can be called blessed. The victims died almost immediately. They would swell beneath the armpits and in the groin, and fall over while talking. Father abandoned child, wife husband, one brother another; for this illness seemed to strike through breath and sight. And so they died. None could be found to bury the dead for money or friendship. Members of a household brought their dead to a ditch as best they could, without priest, without divine offices. In many places in Siena great pits were dug and piled deep with the multitude of dead. They died by the hundreds, both day and night, and all were thrown in those ditches and covered with earth. And as soon as those ditches were filled, more were dug. And I, Agnolo di Tura ... buried my five children with my own hands. And there were also those who were so sparsely covered with earth that the dogs dragged them forth and devoured many bodies throughout the city. There was no one who wept for any death, for all awaited death. And so many died that all believed that it was the end of the world." [*Source: The Plague in Siena: An Italian Chronicle, Agnolo Di Tura, 1348.*]

From Sienna, the disease spread north to Florence. And the arrival of Black Death in Florence was vividly captured by a writer named Giovanni Boccaccio. His account of this period is contained in a book called The Decameron. It is one of the most famous accounts of the Black Death in Europe.

The book is the story of ten noble men and women who flee the city of Florence to escape the plague. To pass the time, they tell each other stories, and the book is a collection of their respective tales. Now if that sounds vaguely familiar, it should. It is the same approach that Geoffrey Chaucer used in the Canterbury Tales which is a collection of stories told by various pilgrims on their way to Canterbury. And that probably is not a coincidence. As I noted in the last episode, Chaucer was an English envoy and diplomat during the Hundred Years War. And at one point, he spent some time in northern Italy. Many scholars think that he became aware of Boccaccio's writing during that period and that the Canterbury Tales was specifically influenced by the Decameron.

Now around the same time that the plague reached northern Italy, it also reached the southern coast of France. From there, the Black Death spread westward across southern France to Gascony – the region that was held as a vassal state by the English king Edward III. Gascony was located in the southwestern corner of France, and the main city in the region was Bordeaux. And by August of 1348, the plague was ravaging the city. And this is where the storyline of the Black Death intersects with the storyline of the English nobility.

Edward III had just made a marriage alliance with the king of Castille in what is today northern Spain. Castille was located just south of Gascony, and Edward wanted Castille to be a strong ally in his ongoing war against the king of France. So Edward agreed to a marriage between his daughter Joan and the heir to the kingdom of Castille. This was a good old-fashioned marriage alliance, and it was ultimately another chess move in the larger war with France.

So Edward's daughter Joan and her entourage boarded four ships in England and headed for Castille. The plan was to stop at the port of Bordeaux in Gascony. From there, they would disembark and continue overland to Castille. So the ships headed for Bordeaux at the exact same time that the city was experiencing the first outbreak of the Black Death.

Bordeaux was located along the west coast of France, and there was also a royal palace there. Joan and her entourage planned to stay there for a few days before continuing on to Castille. But when the English ships arrived in the port, the mayor of Bordeaux greeted the fleet and tried to encourage them to continue their journey without lingering in the city. He told them that the city was being ravaged by a plague and bodies were piling up in the streets. Unfortunately, the English officials ignored the warning. They had just come from England which had not yet been affected by the plague. So they had no idea how serious the situation was.

As it turned out, the royal castle was located near the port where the rat-infested ships came and went. It was one of the worst places to be in the summer of 1348. Within a few days, the members of Joan's entourage started to die one by one. And a short time later, Joan herself became sick, and she died a short time later.

Messengers were sent back to England to inform Edward that his daughter and much of her entourage had died in Bordeaux. Needless to say, Edward was devastated by the news. He sent a group of men to Bordeaux to recover Joan's body and bring it back to England for a proper burial, but the body was never found. No one can say for certain what happened to her body, but it is very likely that she was buried in one of the mass graves along with the thousands of other people who died in the city. It is important to remember that she was the daughter of the English king Edward, and Edward held Bordeaux as part of Gascony. And Edward also claimed the title of King of France, and at this point after the victory at Crecy, it looked like he was about to make that claim a reality. So one would think that his daughter's body would have been preserved and guarded with utmost care. But it wasn't. And that shows just how quickly the societal norms broke down when people started to die by the thousands. The Black Plague didn't really care who you were or who your father was. And the people who were left behind struggled to dispose of the dead and get through the day without becoming victims themselves. It didn't really matter if you were a princess or a pauper.

Around the same time that Bordeaux was hit by the plague, it also struck Paris. It is estimated that 50,000 people died in Paris when the Black Death first arrived there in the summer of 1348. And remember that Paris of the mid-1300s was a much smaller city than it is today..

By the end of the summer, the disease had crossed the English Channel and finally made its first appearance in England. It was first recorded on the southwestern coast of England around Southampton, presumably brought by ships that docked in the local ports. The disease quickly spread throughout the southwest of the country during the fall, and by winter it had reached London. By the spring and summer of the following year, it was ravaging the central and eastern counties. (MAKING OF ENGLAND TO 1399, p. 336+) In the following year, it consumed the north of England and Scotland.

The devastation was unimaginable. Exact numbers are not known for certain, but prior to the Black Death, England may have had as many as 6 million people. It has been estimated that around 2 million of those people died in this first major outbreak. So about one-third of England's population succumbed to the disease. Some estimates suggest that the percentage was even higher. In fact, it took four centuries for England's population to recover and return to the levels that had existed prior to the Black Death. The population finally reached the 6 million figure again in the mid-1700s. So the overall numbers are remarkable.

By the way, the death rate was basically the same throughout Europe. About one-third of the population of Europe died from the Black Death – somewhere in the range of 20 to 25 million people overall. [*Source: The Great Wave, David Hackett Fischer (p. 41-45)*] Some estimates suggest that the rates were even higher in France and Italy where as much as half of the population may have died.

And it's important to remember that those are averages. The actual death toll varied from one region to the next. Some towns and cities experienced death rates well over 50%. Many smaller villages were completely wiped out. Not a single resident survived. In those cases, the villages

ceased to exist. Some estimates indicate that England lost as many as 1300 villages to the Black Death. [*Source: Life During the Black Death, John M. Dunn*]

Of course, the manors of England were also affected. On some of the manors, everyone died. On others, there were a few surviving peasants, but no lord. Some manors had the opposite problem. There was a surviving lord, but no peasants to work the land or tend the crops. This situation had major social and economic consequences, and it ultimately brought an end to the feudal system itself which I'll discuss in more detail in the next episode.

For now, it's important to note that the massive death toll created its own problems. With a lack of people to tend the farms, the crops rotted in the fields, and the livestock either died from disease or neglect or they roamed the countryside with no one to tend to them. That meant that food production plummeted during this period which only added to the death and misery.

And the survivors couldn't rely on traders from other communities because they were also affected – or maybe I should say that they were also 'infected.' Traders used the same trade routes and the same ports where the disease flourished, so they were especially vulnerable to the disease.

This was the situation described in that passage from Polychronicon that I read earlier in the episode. John of Trevisa's Middle English translation described it as 'grete mortalite and dethe of men' – a 'great mortality and death of men.' This term 'The Great Mortality' was a common term for the disease that ravaged Europe during this period. It was a term borrowed from French. The outbreak was also referred to as 'the Plague' or 'the Pestilence' – both loanwords from French. Sometimes, it was simply called 'the Death' using a native English word. But it wasn't called 'the Black Death' – at least not yet.

The term 'Black Plague' first appeared in the 1600s, and 'Black Death' appeared in the 1700s. There are two different theories about why the disease came to be called the'Black Death' or 'Black Plague.' One theory is that it was such a dark and miserable period, that the word ***black*** was used to describe the general mood that prevailed at the time. The other theory is that it is based on a physical ailment caused by the plague. Victims often experienced bleeding under the skin that appeared as huge black splotches. So the 'Black Death' may have been a reference to that common condition. Either way, it has become the accepted term for this outbreak of plague in the mid-1300s.

Whatever it was called, it devastated almost every community it encountered. It didn't discriminate between rich and poor, noble and commoner, or believer and non-believer. In fact, religious communities were some of the hardest hit. And that was true at all levels. England had a tough time keeping an Archbishop of Canterbury because so many died during the three years of the Black Death.

John de Stratford was the archbishop when the plague arrived, and he died around the time the plague made its first appearance in England, though he didn't actually die from the plague. He had been sick for a while before he died. The next choice was John de Ufford, but he died of the

plague before he could be consecrated. Next up was a prominent English scholar named Thomas Bradwardine. He was the personal chaplain of the king, Edward III. He had even accompanied Edward to the battle of Crecy and preached at the mass after the victory. He was consecrated as the new archbishop in July of 1349. But a month later, he developed a high fever. Then came the dreaded buboes and black welts. He died five days later.

The lower clergy didn't fare much better. In fact, modern scholars have determined that the death rates were higher among the clergy than in the society at large. About a third of the general population died, but it appears that nearly half of the clerics fell victim to the disease. [*Source: The Great Wave, David Hackett Fischer (p. 41-45)*]

Part of the reason for this high mortality rate was because clerics were expected to hear confessions and provide the last rites to dying persons, so that put them into direct contact with infected victims. So many priests died that many churches stopped having services.

Monasteries and nunneries were also highly impacted. Anywhere where people congregated, the death toll soared. Since monks or nuns lived together as a community, they were especially vulnerable when the disease struck. And the disease was a constant threat because sick people often went to those facilities for medical care and aid. The net result is that the church was one of the hardest hit institutions in England.

Most of the clergy were educated in Latin and French. The church was also the source of much of the education in England. Most of the grammar schools were associated with a church or monastery, and that's why the schools were staffed with teachers who spoke Latin and French. But now, nearly half of those clerics and teachers were dead. And there was a desperate need to find replacements.

Generally speaking, the church looked to younger member of society. Rules were changed to allow priests to be ordained at the age of twenty rather than twenty-five. Monastic vows were allowed to be administered at the age of fifteen rather than twenty. These changes produced an influx of younger priests and monks. But many of those younger recruits had very little, if any, formal education. Most of the new clergy could only speak English. They couldn't speak French or Latin, and many could barely read and write at all.

Nevertheless, the massive death rate created opportunities for those people, and some of the replacement clerics rose to prominent positions as priests and abbots and prioresses. They were very different from their predecessors. They valued English, and many of them actually encouraged the use of English in schools and monasteries.

And this brings us back to where we started – with that historical chronicle called Polychronicon. I noted at the beginning of the episode that the chronicle was composed by Ranulf Higden before the Black Death occurred. And I read the passage where he attributed the poor state of English at the time to the fact that there was no formal education in English. I also noted that the original Latin text was later translated into Middle English in the late 1300s after the Black Death had passed. John of Trevisa made that English translation, but when he got to the passage about the

lack of education in English, he felt that the sentiment was misleading because things had changed so much since Higden composed the original passage about 60 years earlier. So Trevisa decided to add in a new passage with some personal comments of his own. He wrote that the educational system had changed in England since Higden wrote the original text. He said that teachers abandoned French after the plague, and they started to teach in their native English.

Here is that passage added by Trevisa after the plague. It immediately follows the original passage that described how French was required in schools. In Modern English, the new passage reads:

> This manner was much used before the first plague, and was later somewhat changed. For John Cornwall, a master of grammar, changed the lore (or teaching method) in grammar school and changed the construction of French into English; and Richard Pencrych learned that manner of teaching from him, and other men from Pencrych, so that now, the year of our lord 1385, being the ninth year of King Richard's reign, in all the grammar schools of England children leave (or abandon) French, and construe and learn in English, and have thereby an advantage on one hand, and a disadvantage in another. Their advantage is that they learn their grammar in less time than children were accustomed in the past. The disadvantage is that now children of grammar school know no more French than they know their left heel, and that is harmful for them if they should pass across the sea and travel in strange (or foreign) lands, and in many [other] cases also. Also gentle men have largely stopped teaching their children French.

Now here's the same passage in Trevisa's original Middle English:

> Þys manere was moche y-vsed tofore þe furste moreyn, and ys seþthe somdel ychaunged. For Iohan Cornwal, a mayster of gramere, chayngede þe lore in gramerscole and construccion of Freynsch into Englysch; and Richard Pencrych lurnede þat manere techyng of hym, and oþer men of Pencrych, so þat now, þe õer of oure Lord a þousond þre hondred foure score and fyue, of þe secunde kyng Richard after þe Conquest nyne, in al þe gramerscoles of Engelond childern leueþ Frensch, and construeþ and lurneþ an Englysch, and habbeþ þerby avauntage in on syde, and desavauntage yn anoþer. Here avauntage ys þat a lurneþ here gramer yn lasse tyme þan childern wer ywoned to do. Disavauntage ys þat now childern of gramerscole conneþ no more Frensch þan can hire lift heele, and þat ys harm for ham and a scholle passe þe se and trauayle in strange londes, and in meny caas also. Also gentil men habbeþ now moche yleft for to teche here childern Frensch

So Trevisa confirms that grammar schools in England abandoned French and reverted to English after the Black Death. For the first time since the Norman Conquest, English was once again the official language in the schoolrooms. And that was a major step toward the return of English as the unrivaled language of England.

He attributes this change to two educators – John Cornwall and Richard Pencrych. It isn't known for certain who these people were, but surviving records indicate that there was a man named

John Cornwall who taught Latin grammar in Oxford at the time of Trevisa's translation. Both his name and Pencrych's name appear in the records of Merton College at Oxford. So it appears that these two men had a connection to Oxford. And it also appears that their early innovations in English teaching quickly spread throughout the country and became standard by the year 1385.

It also appears that this trend was extended to the universities as well. During this same general time frame, Oxford adopted a rule that required teachers to teach in French as well as English "lest the French language be entirely disused." So the universities were still trying to preserve a place for French alongside English, but it was ultimately a losing battle.

Ironically, in the passage where Trevisa says that English replaced French in the schools, he uses a lot of French words. And that shows how English continued to borrow French words even though formal education in French was abandoned. In the short passage I just read, Trevisa uses the following French loanwords: ***manner***, ***used***, ***changed***, ***master***, ***grammar***, ***school***, ***second***, ***Conquest***, ***pass***, ***travail***, ***strange***, ***cases***, ***advantage*** and ***disadvantage***. In fact, this is the first known use of the word ***disadvantage*** in an English document. He also provides the first recorded use of the French word ***construction***. The passage also contains the word ***construe*** which was borrowed directly from Latin. And to describe the plague itself, Trevisa uses the French word ***moreyn*** which was borrowed into English as a term for an infectious disease, but isn't used very much today.

Now overall, the Middle English passage I just read is very close to Modern English. The grammar and syntax are very similar, and the vocabulary is mostly modern. It shows how much the language had evolved in the three centuries since the Norman Conquest.

The main differences between this passage and Modern English are the pronunciation of the words and the spelling of the words. The Great Vowel Shift had not occurred yet, so these words still had the older vowel sounds. And spelling was still phonetic. It tended to vary from one scribe to the next. The passage also continues to use that Old English letter thorn (þ) for the 'T-H' sound. It looked sort of like a 'p' with the circle in the middle of the line rather than at the top of the line. The other unique Old English letters had stopped being used by this point, but the thorn (þ) survived. It didn't really disappear from English until the invention of the printing press which lacked that letter.

Interestingly, there are a few cases where Trevisa wanted to double that sound. In other words, he wanted to spell a word with two back-to-back 'T-H' sounds. For example, in one passage, he used the word ***suþthe*** for 'since.' And in the passage I just read, he used ***seþthe*** for 'later.' In both words, he used a thorn (þ) for the first part of the sound and 'T-H' for the second part. He spelled ***suþthe*** – S-U-þ-T-H-E. And he spelled ***seþthe*** – S-E-þ-T-H-E. So even though thorn (þ) and 'T-H' were two different ways of representing the same sound, Trevisa sometimes used them together. That suggests that the two were somewhat interchangeable at the time. So that made it easy for English writers to drop the thorn (þ) altogether when the printing press came about. They were already using 'T-H' to represent the same sound, so they didn't really need the thorn (þ) anymore. So it disappeared from English in the 1500s.

Also, in the passage that I read at the beginning of the episode, Trevisa said that ambitious men tried to speak French 'in order to be better thought of' – or as he wrote "for to be more ytold of." So here, he ends the sentence with the preposition ***of***. Now, today, we're told that it is bad English to end a sentence in a preposition, but that rule hadn't been adopted at this point in the 1300s. So here we can see that it was in fact common to end a sentence in a preposition in Middle English, and it's still common today, despite the technical rules of English grammar.

Trevisa's translation of Polychronicon reveals a great deal about the state of English in the late 1300s, but perhaps the greatest thing it reveals is that the Black Death had elevated the role of English in schoolrooms across England. Three years after the plague arrived in England, it subsided, and this first massive wave of death came to an end. The plague would return over the next few decades, but it was never as severe as this initial outbreak from 1348 to 1351.

One immediate consequence was a new generation of English-speaking clerics and school teachers, many of whom didn't speak French or Latin and had little interest in learning those languages. But this was only a small part of a larger transition that was taking place within English society. For those who were fortunate enough to survive the plague, many experienced a general increase in power and wealth. Suddenly, there was a lot of unclaimed land, and there was an increased demand for labor. The poor down-trodden peasants found themselves in a position where they were able to bargain and negotiate for their services. That gave them a degree of power and wealth not seen since the feudal system arrived, and it was the beginning of the end of the feudal system itself. With the rise of these traditional English-speaking classes, there was also a rise in the prestige of the English language.

Over the next decade, English would become the official language of the courts and of Parliament, thereby giving English an official status that it hadn't enjoyed since the Conquest. These changes took place in conjunction with the ongoing Hundred Years War with France. So we really start to see how the war and the plague broke the hold that French had on English society. These events started to push French to the margins, and it paved the way for English to return as the dominant language of England.

Next time, we'll explore some of the developments that took place in the decade after the Black Death subsided. We'll see how English benefitted from the disruptions and devastation left in the wake of the plague. And we'll see how English once again became the language of the English government.

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