THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODES 131 - 135

Presented by Kevin W. Stroud

©2012-2020 Seven Springs Media, Inc.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Episode 131: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight 1

Episode 132: Food for Thought 24

Episode 133: Breaking Bread with Companions 42

Episode 134: A Lancastrian Standard 62

Episode 135: A House of Cards 81

EPISODE 131: SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 131: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. In this episode, we're going to conclude our look at the English literary revival of the late 1300s with one of the most popular poems of that period – Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. This poem was composed around the same time as the Canterbury Tales, but this particular poem is very different from Chaucer's works. It was composed in a different part of England, so the dialect is different. It also uses alliteration, instead of the rhyming verse that Chaucer used. So it has a much more traditional Old English feel about it. But despite the difference in language and style, it remains one of the most enduring poems from the Middle English period, and so this time, we'll examine the story of Gawain and the Green Knight, and we'll also explore the language used to tell the story.

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 let's turn our attention to Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Over the past few episodes, we've explored a very important period in the history of the English language. I realize that it may seem like the overall progress of the story has stopped, and that we've been stuck in the late 1300s for some time. But that is largely because there was an explosion of English literature in these final two or three decades of the century. Piers Plowman was composed, John Wycliffe and his followers translated the Bible into English, Geoffrey Chaucer composed most of his poetry including the Canterbury Tales. And a poet in the northern part of England composed an Arthurian poem called Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. It's hard to say why this was such an active period for English literature, but it probably had a lot to do with the general re-emergence of English as an officially accepted language around the middle of the century. As we've seen before, French had experienced a bit of a decline in official circles, and in its place, English had become the language of the schools and the language of Parliament. And a decade or so later, there was this massive renaissance of English literature with most of the highly revered works coming around the same time as each other in the last quarter of the century. Then the movement faded a bit as the 1300s gave way to the 1400s.

This is a reminder that literary movements often came in waves, with writers influencing and encouraging each other, leading to periods when certain types of literature flourished. But eventually, those waves dissipated, and those literary movements faded. Well, the same type of thing had happened to Arthurian romances in France over the prior century.

In the late 1100s and 1200s, French writers had been consumed by stories about King Arthur. Many Arthurian romances had been written in France, and the story of Arthur had been fleshed out in those works. Writers like Chretien de Troyes expanded the Arthurian universe with new stories and new characters like Lancelot. In fact, much of what we associate with the modern Arthurian legend was created in those French stories.

But by the late 1300s, that period of Arthurian literature had faded in France. There seemed to be a sense that the material had been taken as far as it could go. But despite the waning interest in France, writers in England were keeping the legends alive. And that was especially true in the north of England. Several Arthurian works were composed in England during the 1300s, and it appears that most of them were composed in the northern regions. And one of those poems was included in a manuscript that was largely forgotten for about five centuries.

At some point in the late 1300s, a scribe compiled a manuscript that contained four poems. It is unlikely that the scribe was the actual poet. He probably was a scribe working in the burgeoning book-making industry, and he simply copied these pre-existing poems for a customer. Whatever motivated the scribe to create the manuscript, it is generally agreed that all four poems in the book were composed by the same poet, though the name of the poet is unknown. All of the poems are written in the same dialect which was a dialect spoken in the northwest Midlands. And they're all written in a similar style, even using some of the same unique word choices. And these poems are only found in this one particular manuscript. There are no other copies from this period, so these were not widely circulated works. The exact date of the manuscript is unknown, but the script that was used and other general attributes of the book suggests that it was compiled at some point in the late 1300s – around our current point in the overall story of English.

The history of the book after that point is unclear, but it ultimately ended up in Robert Cotton's massive book collection in the 1700s. You might remember him from earlier episodes of the podcast. He was the guy who collected all of those Old and Middle English manuscripts – and many of those surviving works were preserved thanks to his collection. His collection also included the only surviving copy of Beowulf. And you might remember that the house where his collection was maintained caught fire at one point, and some of the manuscripts in it were burned and lost forever. But thankfully, this little book of four poems survived the fire.

It wasn't until the next century that scholars really began to read and dissect the book. One of the poems called Pearl is a lament about the death of a small child. Two of the other poems deal with specifically Christian topics, suggesting that the author was a cleric or had been trained in the Church. The final poem is a story about a ghostly green figure who tempts one of King Arthur's most loyal knights named Gawain. It didn't have a title, but it became known as 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.' With its publication in the 1800s – nearly five centuries after it was written – the story finally began to be read by a wide audience, and it proved to be very popular. Within Middle English literature, its popularity is only rivaled by the Canterbury Tales.

Now I noted that this poem survived as part of Robert Cotton's collection which also included the only surviving copy of Beowulf. Well, the Gawain poem has a couple of other things in common with Beowulf. Like Beowulf, it features a monster or supernatural being as one of its main characters. And also like Beowulf, it's composed using alliteration in the style of Old English poetry. Unlike Chaucer, who usually wrote rhyming poetry, this particular poet preferred the more traditional English style.

For this reason, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is part of a larger movement that is sometimes called the 'Alliterative Renaissance' or the 'Alliterative Revival.' It referred to a period in the late Middle Ages when English poets once again resorted to alliteration when composing their poetry. Most of those poems in that style were composed in the northern and western parts of the country. You might remember that Piers Plowman also used alliteration, so it was also part of this movement. Now the term 'Renaissance' or 'Revival' implies that these poets were harkening back to that earlier period of Old English poetry, perhaps because that was the way that English poetry had traditionally been written. So with the revival of English as a literary language, these poets may have thought that that was the way you wrote poetry in English. However, some scholars are skeptical about terms like 'Renaissance' or 'Revival.' They think that the old style never really disappeared in those regions, so it wasn't so much a conscious decision to bring back an old style, as much as a continuation of a style that was still being used.

What's so interesting about the Gawain poet's style is that he did incorporate some rhyming verses as well, and he did so in a very deliberate way. The poem is divided into a series of short stanzas. The total number of lines within each stanza varies, but it's usually around a dozen lines. Again, each line uses alliteration with a series of words that begin with the same sound. But at the very end, each stanza ends with five rhyming lines – the final four being very short lines of just a few words. This little rhyming section at the end of each stanza is often referred to as the 'bob and wheel,' and it's a style that's really unique to this poem.

The alliteration of the poem is also important as it relates to the history of English. In order to write that kind of poetry, you actually need a very large vocabulary, because you need to incorporate words that tell the story, but also begin with specific sounds. So if you're composing a rhyme, you really just focus on the final word in each line. Those are the key words that have to end with the same sound. But if you're composing a poem using alliteration, you have to come up with several words within each line that all begin with the same sound. So it's actually a bit more challenging in that regard, and it requires you to have a pretty broad vocabulary to pull from. You might remember that Old English poets used stock phrases and formulas to satisfy the requirements of the line. Well, the Gawain poet delves into his deep vocabulary of native Old English words, French and Latin loan words, and the Norse words that were so common in the northern Midlands. So we have this fascinating mixture of words – many of which were probably considered to be old-fashioned at the time and aren't really found in English documents beyond this point. In fact, they're rarely found outside of this type of poetry.

So for example, the poem features knights and other characters who interact with each other, so the poet routinely had to refer to a person or man or knight. And that meant that he needed lots of synonyms for ***person***, and he needed a variety of words that began with different letters. So in addition to words like ***man*** and ***knight*** and ***lord*** – all of which came from Old English – he also used a lot of other terms. Sometimes he used the word ***prince*** which came from Latin and French. Sometimes he used the word ***tulk*** which is apparently an Old Norse word. It's only found in a handful of works from this general period, and it appears in a couple of the other poems in the manuscript that contains the Gawain poem.

The poet also used a variety of Old English terms that were quickly disappearing from the language, some of which are rarely found beyond this period. For example, he used Old English words for 'man' like ***gome***, ***lede***, and ***segge***. He also used the word ***wyghe*** which meant 'person.' And he used ***freke*** which meant 'knight.' He also used the Old English word ***burne*** which meant 'warrior.' It's distinct from the word ***bairn*** meaning 'a child' which still survives in some dialects in northern England and Scotland. The poet also used the Old English word ***renk*** meaning 'warrior' which is related to the word ***rank*** in the phrase 'rank and file.' He used the Old English word ***schalk*** meaning 'servant' which survives in the second part of the word ***marshal***. And he also had another interesting synonym at his disposal. It was the word ***haþel***.

That is another one of those words that only appeared in a handful of poems around this period of time from the late 1300s into the 1400s. And the Gawain poet used it quite a bit.

Another interesting thing about the word ***haþel*** is that it appears in all four of the poems contained in this particular manuscript, even though it wasn't a very common word. And it's those types of linguistic clues that have lead many scholars to conclude that all four of the poems in the manuscript were composed by the same author.

There's also another interesting thing about that word ***haþel*** meaning man or warrior. It actually appears to be a portmanteau, and that would make it one of the first known portmanteaus in the English language.

Now a portmanteau is a word that is formed by taking parts from two or more different words and putting them together. So it's what happens when ***breakfast*** and ***lunch*** are combined to form the word ***brunch***. When ***motor*** and ***hotel*** are combined to form ***motel***. When ***smoke*** and ***fog*** form ***smog***. When ***ipod*** and ***broadcast*** form the word ***podcast***. Also think about words like ***Brexit***, ***bromance***, ***frenemy***, ***mansplain***. We create these types of words all the time in Modern English, but it was very rare to do that in older periods of English. As I noted, this word ***haþel*** is one of the first recorded portmanteaus in the language. It combines the Old English words ***hæleþ*** meaning warrior and ***æþel*** meaning noble. And together, ***hæleþ*** and ***æþel*** created this word ***haþel***.

So we see how the Gawain poet pulled from his extensive vocabulary to come up with the words he needed to satisfy the alliteration requirements of the poem.

Now before we get to the poem, let me make a couple of other quick notes about the language of the poem and the hero of the poem.

First of all, as I have noted, the poem is written in a dialect that was spoken in the northwest Midlands. Scholars have even pin-pointed the location to the region around Cheshire, so roughly speaking, the region south of modern-day Liverpool and Manchester. The poet also appears to have had a very good knowledge of the Welsh marches, so that location is consistent with those descriptions. So that was apparently where this dialect was spoken. It's very different from Chaucer's London dialect, and it has a lot of northern features. I'm not going to go through all of those northern features because I covered them in some detail in the last episode, but this poet

used a lot of the same features that Chaucer gave to his northern students in the Reeve's Tale which we explored last time. However, being from the Midlands, the Gawain poet's dialect shows a bit more of a blend of north and south. For example, he used both the northern pronoun ***their*** and its southern equivalent ***her***. He also tended to end his plural nouns with the northern '-S' ending which became standard over time, but he sometimes used the southern '-EN' ending as well. So again, this dialect contains a mixture of northern and southern features which is what we would expect to see in the Midlands.

And then lastly, let me make a quick note about the hero of the poem – Gawain. In the Arthurian legends, he was the nephew of Arthur, and he was actually Arthur's leading knight in the original versions of the legend. So you may be wondering why we don't hear very much about Gawain in the modern re-telling of the legends. Well, this is another one of those cases where we can thank – or blame – the French writers who expanded the legend in the late 1100s and 1200s.

Gawain was a figure in the original Welsh versions of the legend. And he continued to be a major figure in the early Latin version composed by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the 1100s called 'The History of the Kings of Britain.' That book was very popular at the time, and it triggered much of the interest in Arthur in England and France and other parts of Western Europe. Again, Gawain featured very prominently in that version of the story. He was Arthur's right-hand-man. But then those French writers like Chretien de Troyes expanded the story, and he added the character of Lancelot. And over time, Lancelot largely replaced Gawain as the Arthur's greatest knight in the French tradition.

Well, that was the French tradition. Back in England, Gawain remained the principal knight. And that's probably why he was featured as the hero in this poem about the Green Knight. And Gawain's prominence continued for about another century or so. But then, in the late 1400s, Sir Thomas Malory compiled many of the Arthurian stories into his somewhat definitive work called 'Le Morte d'Arthur' – or 'the Death of Arthur.' And he pulled heavily from the French tradition. And that's really when Lancelot started to replace Gawain in the English tradition as well. But again, that change took place at a later date, so Gawain remains the hero here in this poem. By the way, Lancelot is actually mentioned in the poem, but he is just another member of the Round Table.

Also, one last note regarding the name Gawain. I've mentioned that name a few times in earlier episodes of the podcast, and I always get feedback about the proper way to pronounce it. Generally speaking, the A-I-N spelling represents the /ain/ sound in Modern English as in words like ***pain*** and ***chain*** and ***stain***. So the most common modern pronunciation is either /GAH-wain/ or /guh-WAIN/ – depending on which syllable you stress. But if we try to identify the pronunciation in Middle English, things become a little more complicated.

First, if we use the normal spelling G-A-W-A-I-N, we encounter that letter combination A-I in the second syllable. In Old English, that spelling typically represented the /ai/ sound, so that would give us the pronunciation /ga-wine/. But as I noted a few episodes back when I was talking about Chaucer, the sound represented by that spelling shifted in the late Middle English period and became more /æ-ee/ – at least in Chaucer's dialect. So that would give us something more

like /ga-wæ-een/. But again, all of that assumes that the pronunciation was based on the modern spelling G-A-W-A-I-N. In reality, the spelling of the name varied greatly in the Middle English period – suggesting that the pronunciation varied even during that time. In fact, in this particular poem, the poet spells it several different ways, but it's usually spelled it G-A-W-A-N – implying that the pronunciation was more like /ga-wan/ which is another common pronunciation today. And I should also note that the name eventually evolved into the modern name Gavin, and that also indicates that the second vowel sound was shortened over time. So at any rate, the proper Middle English pronunciation is debatable, but for purposes of this episode, I'm using /ga-wain/ for the modern translation and /ga-wan/ for the original Middle English passages since that more closely matches the poet's spelling.

So with that, let's turn to the actual poem. I'm going to take you through the poem by reading and analyzing a few key passages. And as I often do, I'm going to give you the Modern English translation first, and then I'll read the original Middle English version. I'm also electing to keep the stanzas in tact as much as possible without breaking them up into smaller segments. I think that will give you a better sense of the alliteration and the overall flow of the language.

In keeping with tradition, the poem begins by noting the mythical origins of the British kings by stating that the line of kings were descended from the Trojan warrior Aeneas who was also the mythical founder of Rome. This was a widely-accepted mythology at the time, and it served to link Arthur to the ancient Romans, and even to the Trojans and Greeks. The poet tells us that Arthur was the most courteous of all the British kings, and he says that he will now recount a story he heard about a marvelous event that occurred during Arthur's reign. Having set the scene, the poet tells us that it was Christmastime at Camelot.

(L. 37-45)
This king lay at Camelot at Christmastime,
With many lovely lords, leaders of the best,
Revered knights of the Round Table, all the rich brethren,
With rich revelry a-right, and reckless mirth;
There true men rode in tournaments time and time again,
Jousted with jolly these gentle knights,
Then came to the court, and danced to carols,
For the feast was in force for full fifteen days,
With all the meat and mirth that men could envisage.

Þis kyng lay at Camylot vpon kryst-masse,
With mony luflych lorde, ledeȝ of þe best,
Rekenly of þe rounde table alle þo rich breþer,
With rych reuel oryȝt, & rechles merþes;
Þer tournayed tulkes bi-tymeȝ ful mony,
Iusted ful Iolilé þise gentyle kniȝtes,
Syþen kayred to þe court, caroles to make.
For þer þe fest watȝ ilyche ful fiften dayes,
With alle þe mete & þe mirþe þat men couþe a-vyse;

So the poet has told us that it was Christmastime at King Arthur's court. He speaks of the festivities, including tournaments, jousting, dancing and eating. He mentions that the guests danced to 'carols,' and it's important to keep in mind that the word ***carols*** didn't refer to Christmas carols in the modern sense of the term. It referred to medieval dances – usually ring dances – that were accompanied by singing.

And this short passage also shows us how the poet incorporated a lot of synonyms for the guests. He refers to them as ***ledeȝ***, ***rekenly***, ***tulks***, ***knights***, and ***men.*** Each choice helped to maintain the required alliteration in each line.

The poet continues his description of the festivities at the court during Christmastime and the days that followed. He then turns his attention to the New Year's feast held at the court. Arthur and his knights entered the hall. People laughed and played games and entertained themselves until dinner time. Then everyone gathered at the dinner table with Guinevere sitting in the middle of the gathered knights and Gawain sitting beside her.

The dishes were served accompanied by the blaring of trumpets and kettledrums. There was so much food that there was barely room on the table for all of it. Though all were gathered for the meal, Arthur wouldn't eat until all at the tables were served. It was also customary that on such a holiday, the king wouldn't eat until someone told a story of some great adventure or a joust was held between the knights. So Arthur engaged in casual conversation while the guests were served. Finally, the meal was underway, but it was about to be interrupted by an uninvited guest.

(L. 130-146)
Now I will say to you no more of the service,
For all may well know that there were none who were lacking.
But then, another noise and a new one suddenly drew near.
In less time than a guest had leave to take a bite.
For scarcely was the noise in the hall not a while ceased,
And the first course in the court kindly served,
When there hurried in the hall a horrible figure,
The greatest in height of any human in the whole world.
From the neck to the waist, so stout and so thick,
And his loins and limbs so great and long,
Half a giant from under heaven, I hope he was.
To my mind, he was the most intimidating man,
And the mightiest of any man that might ride in saddle,
From his back to his breast, his body was bold and stern,
But his womb (abdomen) and waist were worthily small
And all his features followed in form and proportion, full clean,
For the men were amazed at his color,
Set in this outwardly scene,
He fared as a freakish phantom,
And all over, he was bright green.

Now wyl I of hor seruise say yow no more,
For vch wyȝe may wel wit no wont þat þer were;
An oþer noyse ful newe neȝed biliue,
Þat þe lude myȝt haf leue lif-lode to cach.
For vneþe watȝ þe noyce not a whyle sesed,
& þe fyrst cource in þe court kyndely serued,
Þer hales in at þe halle dor an aghlich mayster,
On þe most on þe molde on mesure hyghe;
Fro þe swyre to þe swange so sware & so þik,
& his lyndes & his lymes so longe & so grete,
Half etayn in erde I hope þat he were.
Bot mon most I algate mynn hym to bene,
& þat þe myriest in his muckel þat myȝt ride;
For of bak & of brest al were his bodi sturne,
Bot his wombe & his wast were worthily smale,
& alle his fetures folȝande, in forme þat he hade, ful clene;
For wonder of his hwe men hade,
Set in his semblaunt sene;
He ferde as freke were fade,
& ouer-al enker grene.

So out of nowhere, the poet has introduced the remarkable character of the Green Knight to the story. And note the 'bob and wheel' ending to that passage. Each line uses alliteration, but at the very end, the last five lines also use rhyming verse. Each stanza of the poem ends this way.

Now after telling us that the knight was bright green, the poet then makes clear that he doesn't mean that figuratively. He means that the knight was literally green. Not only was his skin green, he was also dressed in green. And even the horse that he was riding was green, as was its saddle and bridle. The poet tells us that the horse's saddle "glemered & glent al of grene stones" – 'glimmered and gleaned all of green stones.' Notice the alliteration. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, this is the first recorded use of the word ***glimmer*** in the English language. It's probably from the same Old English root as ***gleam***. The poet then follows that word ***glimmer*** with the word ***glent*** to carry out the alliteration. ***Glent*** is an Old Norse word meaning 'to flash or gleam.' And a little later in the poem, the poet uses the word ***glitter*** for the first time. It was probably derived from a Norse word, and it's ultimately derived from the same Germanic root as ***glimmer*** and ***gleam***. All of these words pop up is this poem in large part because the poet needed words with similar meanings that began with the same sound. So ***glimmer*** and ***glitter*** are used for the first time because they alliterated with words like ***glent*** and ***gleam***, and more importantly, they alliterated with the word ***green*** which was very important to this story.

Now having described the knight's appearance, the poet then provides another important note. We're told that the green knight wasn't wearing a helmet, or chain mail, or armor. He didn't carry a sword or shield. He simply carried a branch of green holly in one hand and an ax in the other.

(L. 221-231)
This knight came near and navigated the hall.
Driving toward the distinguished dais, not disturbed by danger,
Without greeting the gathered guests, glancing over their heads.
Whereupon he spoke his first words, ‘Where’ he asked,
‘is the governor of this gang that I might gladly address?
To set my sight on that sir, I have something to say to him.’
To the knights he cast his eye,
And observed them up and down,
Studying each one as he went by,
To see who had he most renown.

Þis haþel heldeȝ hym in, & þe halle entres,
Driuande to þe heȝe dece, dut he no woþe,
Haylsed he neuer one, bot heȝe he ouer loked.
Þe fyrst word þat he warp, "wher is," he sayd,
"Þe gouernour of þis gyng? gladly I wolde
Se þat segg in syȝt, & with hym self speke
raysoun."
To knyȝteȝ he kest his yȝe,
& reled hym vp & doun,
He stemmed & con studie,
Quo walt þer most renoun.

So the Green Knight took the measure of the guests in the hall. Arthur and his knights sat in stunned silence. The Green Knight had demanded to speak to the ‘governor’ of the group, so Arthur spoke up and identified himself as the leader. He said, “welcum iwys to þis place, Þe hede of þis ostel Arthour I hat” – ‘Welcome indeed to this place, I am the head of this hostel. My name is Arthur.’

Arthur invited the ghostly knight to dismount from his horse and join the festivities. But the Green Knight rejected the offer.

(L. 256-278)
“No,” said the knight, “So help me, from Him that sets on high,
To remain in this mansion for any while is not my motive,
But since thy stature, sir, is held so high,
And thy brilliant castles and brave knights are said to be the best,
Thy men are the strongest in steel-armor to ride on steeds,
The most worthy and well-considered in all the world
Prepared to put up a fight for the pure play of it.
And here chivalry is shown, as I have heard said,
And that has brought me here, at this time.
You may be assured by this branch that I bear here
That I pass in peace, and seek no plight

For if I had fared here in a fighting way
I have a hauberk of chain mail at home, and a helmet too
A shield and a sharp spear shining brightly
And other weapons to wield, I well know their worth,
But since I wish no war, I wear a softer wardrobe
But if thou brothers are as bold as many believe
Thou will goodly grant me the game that I ask by right."
Arthur did answer
And said, "Sir courteous knight,"
If thou crave battle here,
We will not fail to fight."

"Nay, as help me," quod þe haþel, "he þat on hyȝe syttes,
To wone any quyle in þis won, hit watȝ not myn ernde;
Bot for þe los of þe lede is lyft vp so hyȝe,
& þy burȝ & þy burnes best ar holden,
Stifest vnder stel-gere on stedes to ryde,
Þe wyȝtest & þe worþyest of þe worldes kynde,
Preue for to play wyth in oþer pure laykeȝ;
& here is kydde cortaysye, as I haf herd carp,
& þat hatȝ wayned me hider, I-wyis, at þis tyme.
ȝe may be seker bi þis braunch þat I bere here,
Þat I passe as in pes, & no plyȝt seche;
For had I founded in fere, in feȝtyng wyse,
I haue a hauberghe at home & a helme boþe,
A schelde, & a scharp spere, schinande bryȝt,
Ande oþer weppenes to welde, I wene wel als,
Bot for I wolde no were, my wedeȝ ar softer.
Bot if þou be so bold as alle burneȝ tellen,
Þou wyl grant me godly þe gomen þat I ask,
bi ryȝt."
Arthour con onsware,
& sayd, "sir cortays knyȝt,
If þou craue batayl bare,
Here fayleȝ þou not to fyȝt."

So again, notice the alliterating lines and the little 'bob and wheel' rhyming section at the very end. At first glance, this stanza presents the Green Knight as a visitor who is not looking for a fight, but only asking to play a game – to offer a challenge to the gathered knights. But Arthur assumes otherwise, and responds that if the ghostly figure is looking for a fight, he will find it there in the hall. So why does Arthur assume that the Green Knight's motives are not so innocent?

Well, there's a subtle indication that is lost on most modern readers. When the Green Knight addresses Arthur the king, he addresses him with the pronouns ***thou*** and ***thee*** and ***thy***. Now as you may recall, those were the standard second person pronouns inherited from Old English, and they were the ones you used when you were speaking to an individual. Those were the singular forms. The pronouns ***you*** and ***your*** were the plural forms used when addressing a two or more people. And even though this distinction has long disappeared from English, I think most of us recognize this older form of the language because ***thou***, ***thee*** and ***thy*** survived into the early Modern English period. And we still hear those old pronouns in Shakespeare's plays, and in the King James Bible, and other works of literature from the early modern period. Of course, those distinct singular forms eventually disappeared, and they were replaced with the plural forms ***you*** and ***your***. So today, ***you*** does all the work, and we use it for both singular and plural.

But again, in late Middle English when the Gawain poem was composed, the pronouns ***thou*** and ***thee*** and ***thy*** were still being used to address an individual, but the way they were used had evolved. By that point, they resembled the way French uses its second person pronouns. ***Thou*** and ***thee*** and ***thy*** were only used when addressing a family member or close friend or someone who was your inferior. So they were only used in informal situations. If you were addressing a superior, or a stranger who might be your superior, you were expected to use the more formal or polite pronoun which was the plural pronoun ***you***. So the plural pronoun ***you*** was being used as a singular pronoun at this point, but only in formal situations as a polite form of address. Again, if you speak French, that's basically the same way the pronouns work there. And that was the beginning of the evolution of ***you*** from a strictly plural pronoun to the all-purpose pronoun that it has become today.

So given the distinction between informal ***thou*** and ***thee*** and ***thy*** – and formal ***you*** and ***your*** – we would expect that King Arthur would be addressed with the latter. After all, he was the king and a highly revered king at that. Once Arthur had introduced himself to someone, that person would almost always address him with the formal ***you***. But the Green Knight doesn't do that. He addresses Arthur with the informal pronouns ***thou*** and ***thee*** and ***thy***. And that implied that the Green Knight didn't recognize Arthur as his superior. That would have been considered an affront to the king, and it may explain why Arthur assumes that the Green Knight is looking for a fight.

By the way, Arthur also addresses the Green Knight with ***thou*** and ***thee*** and ***thy*** in return. So neither character gives much respect to the other. Throughout their exchange, they 'thou' each other in this same way – choosing not to use the polite form of address which would have been expected. And this would have been very obvious to an English speaker of the late 1300s. The main point here is that the use of these second person pronouns had acquired a social context by this point, and speakers and poets were very particular about the way they used those words. And here, the Gawain poet uses them to indicate that the Green Knight didn't fit into the normal social order recognized at the Arthurian court.

One other quick note about that passage before we move on. In one line, the Green Knight says that he has heard that Arthur and his men are brave and love physical contests. In my translation, he says that the men are "Prepared to put up a fight for the pure play of it," but the original line

was “Preue for to play wyth in oþer pure laykeȝ” – literally ‘Proven for to play with in other pure likes.’ Notice that word at the end – ***laykeȝ*** (/likes/) – spelled L-A-Y-K-E-yogh. Yogh was the Old and Middle English letter that looked like a cursive Z or zed, and it represented several different sounds depending on the context. The Gawain poet used it a lot for the ‘s’ sound at the end of words. Well, this word ***laykeȝ*** (/likes/) meant games or sports. It was a northern dialect word, and it still survives in the north of England as ***lake*** – or /like/ – meaning ‘to play.’ It’s a Norse word which corresponds to a similar Old English word. And the reason why I know that word survives in northern England is because several of you have noted that word in the various voice samples that I have collected over the past few years. Several of you have submitted regional words and phrases that aren’t generally found in standard English, and couple of you from Yorkshire have mentioned that the word ***lake*** is still used as a synonym for ***play***. Here is an example from listener Paul who provides a short sentence – first in his local Yorkshire dialect and then in standard English.

> [CLIP] “When I were a lad, and I were bored, my father had said to me, ‘Go out and lake,’ so I’d go out to the park and start laking with my mates. When I was a boy, and I was bored, my father would say to me, ‘Go out and play,’ so I’d go out to the park and start playing with my friends. The word ‘lake.’ Old English or Norse meaning ‘to play.’”

So as we can see, the poet’s language and word choices may seen very old-fashioned at first listen, but it isn’t as old-fashioned as you might think. Some of these terms are still found in modern English dialects in northern England and Scotland.

Now returning to the poem, the Green Knight has requested to play a game, but Arthur has answered by saying that if the ghostly knight wants a fight, he has come to the right place. Now the Green Knight responds.

(L. 279-300)
No, I have not fared here to fight, in good faith I tell you
There are about this bench nothing but beardless children.
If I were held fast in arms on a high horse,
There is no man here to match me, for your might is too weak.
Therefore, I crave in this court a Christmas game,
For it is Yule and New Year, and here are many young men;
If anyone is this house holds himself in such high esteem
And is so bold in his blood, and brave in his head,
That he dares to swap one stiff stroke for another,
I shall give him as my gift this great battle-ax, this gisarme
This ax, that is heavy enough for him to handle as he likes,
And I shall abide and bear the first blow on my body – as I sit here,
If any soul seated here is so brave to stand and test what I say,
Leap to me quickly and I will let go of this weapon,
He can have it forever, and keep it as his own,
And I shall receive a stroke from him, without shuddering,
But I shall be granted the right to regain my grace a give a blow in return,

when I say,
And I will grant a delay,
For twelve months and a day,
Whereupon the debt shall be repaid.
Now, what do you have to say?

"Nay, frayst I no fyȝt, in fayth I þe telle,
Hit arn aboute on þis bench bot berdleȝ chylder;
If I were hasped in armes on a heȝe stede,
Here is no mon me to mach, for myȝteȝ so wayke.
For-þy I craue in þis court a crystmas gomen,
For hit is ȝol & nwe ȝer, & here ar ȝep mony;
If any so hardy in þis hous holdeȝ hym-seluen,
Be so bolde in his blod, brayn in hys hede,
Þat dar stifly strike a strok for an oþer,
I schal gif hym of my gyft þys giserne ryche,
Þis ax, þat is heué in-nogh, to hondele as hym lykes,
& I schal bide þe fyrst bur, as bare as I sitte.
If any freke be so felle to fonde þat I telle,
Lepe lyȝtly me to, & lach þis weppen,
I quit clayme hit for euer, kepe hit as his auen,
& I schal stonde hym a strok, stif on þis flet,
Elleȝ þou wyl diȝt me þe dom to dele hym an oþer,
barlay;
& ȝet gif hym respite,
A twelmonyth & a day;
Now hyȝe, & let se tite
Dar any her-inne oȝt say."

So the Green Knight made an offer to the gathered knights of the round table. He offered to let any one of them strike him with the ax, but the one who delivers the blow has to agree to let the Green Knight return the favor exactly one year and day later.

At first, Arthur and his men sat in stunned silence. No one said anything, so the green ghost turned in his saddle to see if anyone had the nerve to take him up on his offer. With no response, the Green Knight mocked the gathered men. He said that Arthur and his men were known far and wide, so where was there pride and bluster? He laughed at them and suggested that they were cowards.

Arthur's anger gave him the courage to approach the Green Knight. Arthur confronted the green figure and said that the proposed game was senseless. The idea was such madness that it deserved to be granted. Arthur grabbed the ax and prepared to strike the knight, but suddenly, Arthur's nephew Gawain stood up and intervened. He insisted that he be the one to take up the challenge. He said the obligation should fall to Arthur's loyal knights – not to the king himself. Gawain begged his uncle for the right to strike the blow upon the neck the Green Knight.

Arthur relented and gave the ax to Gawain. Gawain approached the Green Knight who asked the young man his name, and Gawain identified himself. The knight reiterated the terms of the agreement. Gawain will strike him across the neck with the ax, but twelve months and a day later, the Green Knight will repay the blow upon Gawain. Gawain agreed, and the terms of the game were settled.

(L. 417-443)
The Green Knight stepped down and stood upon the ground
And leaned his head forward a little to lay bare his skin,
He laid his long lovely locks of hair over his crown
With his naked neck now showing.
Gawain gripped the ax, and gathered it up high,
His left foot he fastened to the floor in front of him.
He thrust the ax through the naked flesh
So that the sharp blade shattered the neck bones
And sank through the soft skin and sliced it in two
Until the bright steel blade bit into the ground
The fair head was freed from the neck and fell to the earth.
The gathered fellows kicked it with their feet across the floor.
The blood bleeding from the body as it blanketed the green skin.
But the frightening figure never faltered nor fell.
He stepped forth on sturdy legs as strong as before.
And reached out among the rollicking knights and retrieved his head.
He picked it up and placed it in the palm of his hand
And then strolled to his steed, and seized the bridle
Stepped into the stirrups and straddled the horse.
He held his head by the hair in his hands.
Said knight sat sternly in his saddle.
As if no mishap had happened to him, though he had no head,
He twisted his trunk about
That ugly body that bled
The guests were afraid, no doubt
When they heard what he said.

The grene knyȝt vpon grounde grayþely hym dresses,
A littel lut with þe hede, þe lere he discouereȝ,
His longe louelych lokkeȝ he layd ouer his croun.
Let þe naked nec to þe note schewe.
Gauan gripped to his ax, & gederes hit on hyȝt,
Þe kay fot on þe folde he be-fore sette,
Let hit doun lyȝtly lyȝt on þe naked,
Þat þe scharp of þe schalk schyndered þe bones,
& schrank þurȝ þe schyire grece, & scade hit in twynne,
Þat þe bit of þe broun stel bot on þe grounde.
Þe fayre hede fro þe halce hit to þe erþe,

Þat fele hit foyned wyth her fete, þere hit forth roled;
Þe blod brayd fro þe body, þat blykked on þe grene;
& nawþer faltered ne fel þe freke neuer þe helder,
Bot styþly he start forth vpon styf schonkes,
& ru[n]yschly he raȝt out, þere as renkkeȝ stoden,
Laȝt to his lufly hed, & lyft hit vp sone;
& syþen boȝeȝ to his blonk, þe brydel he cachcheȝ,
Steppeȝ in to stel bawe & strydeȝ alofte,
& his hede by þe here in his honde haldeȝ;
& as sadly þe segge hym in his sadel sette,
As non vnhap had hym ayled, þaȝ hedleȝ he were,
in stedde;
He brayde his bluk aboute,
Þat vgly bodi þat bledde,
Moni on of hym had doute,
Bi þat his resounz were redde.

So the Green Knight held his head toward the gathered knights, and turned the face in their general direction. The head spoke directly to Gawain – telling him to honor his end of the bargain. Gawain was told to make his way to the Green Chapel in one year's time where the debt was to be repaid with a stoke of the ax upon his head on New Year's Morning. The headless knight said that he was known as the Knight of the Green Chapel, and if Gawain should happen to break his word, he would forever be regarded as a coward. The Green Knight then rode out through the door and disappeared from sight.

With that, the scene in the hall began to return to normal. After a moment, Arthur dismissed the events as a Christmastime apparition, and the gathered crowd returned to eating, drinking, singing and dancing. But the revelry disguised the concern felt by Gawain and his uncle Arthur. They both knew that Gawain would have to honor the deal that had been made, and Gawain's fate was likely sealed.

The New Year's festivities marked the beginning of a new year, and that year quickly passed as one season gave way to the next. In describing the spring and summer time, the poet included the following lines:

(L. 518-20)
Lovely are the leaves that spring thereout,
When that damp dew drops off the leaves,
To abide a blissful blush of the bright sun,

Wela-wynne is þe wort þat woxes þer-oute.
When þe donkande dewe dropeȝ of þe leueȝ,
To bide a blysful blusch of þe bryȝt sunne.

I mention this passage because it contains one of the first recorded uses of the word ***blush*** in the English language. The poet refers to the 'blissful blush of the bright sun,' and here we see the original sense of the word ***blush***. It meant a glimpse or glance or quick look. So the bright sun glimpses or glances at the dew on the leaves. That original sense of the word ***blush*** has largely disappeared, except in the very well-known phrase 'at first blush' which also appeared around this same time in the 1300s. Of course, we all know that 'at first blush' means 'at first glance,' but you may have wondered what 'blushes' have to do with 'glances.' Well, originally, a ***blush*** was a glance. In the early modern period, the sense of the word shifted from 'looking at something' to 'the way something looked.' So it came to refer to a person's general appearance. And from there, it was short step to the reddish appearance that a person gets when they are embarrassed or ashamed. So that was the evolution of ***blush***, and as I noted, this passage in the Gawain poem is one of the first recorded uses of the word in English. It isn't entirely clear where the word came from, but the best guess is that it came from an unrecorded word in either Old English or Old Norse.

Now the Spring and Summer gave way to Autumn, and as the end of the year approached, Gawain finally announced that the time had come for him to depart on his search for the Green Knight in order to repay his debt. Before leaving, he was outfitted in his armor, and the process is described in great detail in the poem. Gawain's horse was also outfitted with a saddle, bridle and accessories that were 'glittering' and sparkling. As I noted earlier, this poem contains the first recorded use of the word ***glitter***, and the description of the ornaments on Gawain's horse is the context for that reference. The poet wrote of the accessories: "Þat al glytered & glent as glem of þe sunne" (l. 604) – 'that all glittered and glinted like the gleam of the sun.'

Fully outfitted, Gawain headed out on his journey to find the castle where the Green Knight lived. He then proceeded through the countryside, and along the way, he asked strangers if they knew of the Green Knight or the Green Chapel. No one had heard of either, so Gawain traveled deeper and further into the frozen countryside. He traveled until Christmas Eve without ever finding the figure he was searching for. Finally, he prayed to Mary for help in finding a house where he could hear Christmas Mass. A short time later, he came upon a massive castle – the most beautiful castle that any knight had ever seen.

Gawain was welcomed into the mansion and led to the central hall where he was greeted warmly by the lord of the castle. The host was large and stout, and he assigned a servant to attend to Gawain. Gawain soon joined the host and other guests at a large dinner. During the meal, the other dinner guests asked Gawain about himself to find out who he was and where he came from. They did so very discreetly. According to the poem:

Then was spied and spoken in a spare way,
By discreet questions of that prince, put to himself.

Þenne watȝ spyed & spured vpon spare wyse.
Bi preue poynteȝ of þat prynce, put to hym-seluen.

Gawain told them that his name was Gawain, and he had come from King Arthur's court. He had been guided to the castle by chance and found himself there on Christmas day. The host and the others laughed and felt honored to be joined by such a prominent guest. They knew that Gawain would exhibit the finest manners and best forms of speech. The poem says that they murmured to each other and said the following:

God has given us his good grace in truth
he has granted us to have such a guest as Gawain

God hatȝ geuen vus his grace godly for soþe,
Þat such a gest as Gawan grauntеȝ vus to haue,

So Gawain was welcomed by all in attendance. Now those two little passages may not seem all that significant, but they point to a very, very important development in the language. It's very subtle, but the spellings indicate that the scribe pronounced a specific sound in a new way. That sound was a vowel sound, and it may be an early indication that the Great Vowel Shift had begun in certain parts of England.

Now we're going to explore the Great Vowel Shift in upcoming episodes. The Great Vowel Shift is the term for the series of vowel changes that took place in English in the transition from Middle English into Modern English. These changes took place over more than two centuries, and they account for the way a large portion of our words are pronounced today, and they also wreaked havoc on spelling because, as we'll see, English spelling became fixed and standardized before the Great Vowel Shift was complete. As a result, when the vowel changes were finally settled, many words were no longer pronounced like they were spelled.

So this is a very important topic in the history of English, and we have some subtle indications that the process was starting to get underway in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. These indications come from the way the scribe spelled the word ***given*** and the Middle English word ***prive*** which meant private or discreet. ***Prive*** is an early form of the word ***privy***, and of course, a variation of the word ***private***. Both ***privy*** and ***private*** are derived from the same Latin root word ***privatus***. The people at the dinner table had asked with 'prive' or discreet questions, and they felt that they had been 'given' God's grace by having Gawain attend the dinner. The initial vowel sound in each of those words was traditionally spelled with an 'I' and pronounced with the sound of the letter 'I' at the time – which was /ee/. So ***prive*** (/preev/) was P-R-I-V-E, and ***given*** was pronounced /gee-ven/ and was spelled G-I-V-E-N. And just to be clear, the letters U and V were not distinct yet, so instead of the modern angular V, they were actually spelled with the curvy U, but it represented the 'v' sound.

So both of those words were spelled with an 'I,' and both were pronounced with the long 'I' sound – which was /ee/. Now the location where that /ee/ sound is pronounced in the mouth is very important to the Great Vowel Shift. That sound is located very high in the mouth. Of all the vowel sounds, it is pronounced at the highest and most forward position in the mouth. I mentioned last time that we still have that pronunciation is some words, especially words which have been borrowed from other languages in recent centuries. I gave examples of Italian food

terms like ***pizza*** and ***spaghetti*** and ***linguini***. So we sometimes use that pronunciation today, but we mostly use the modern long 'I' sound which evolved over the course of the Great Vowel Shift. And of course, that sound is /ai/ as in the name of the letter. Notice that the /ai/ sound is pronounced much further in the back of the mouth. So over time, the sound shifted from /ee/ (high in the front of the mouth) to /ai/ (low in the back of the mouth). We can hear that shift in the difference between Middle English ***prive*** (/preev/) and Modern English ***private***.

Well that sound didn't go directly from /ee/ to /ai/. It actually changed in stages – moving lower and backward one step at a time. The specifics aren't really important here, but I just want to note that the sound shifted backward over time in small gradual steps.

Now that process is very important to the Great Vowel Shift because – during that series of vowel changes – most of the long vowel sounds actually shifted upward and higher in the mouth. But those other sounds couldn't shift upward until the /ee/ sound had moved out of the way. So if you imagine a broken down car blocking traffic on a highway, all the cars behind it can't move until a tow truck comes and moves that broken car out of the way. And once that car is gone, all of the cars lined up behind it can start to move forward. Well, that's what happened in the Great Vowel Shift. As long as the letter 'I' had the /ee/ sound, it was basically blocking the other vowels underneath it. They couldn't move very much. But when that /ee/ sound started to shift backward, it cleared the way for all other vowels underneath it and behind it to move upward and forward. And so scholars look for evidence to pinpoint when this /ee/ sound started to shift backward in the mouth to clear the way. And we can see some potential evidence of that change in the way the Gawain scribe spelled some of these words which traditionally had that /ee/ sound. Rather than spelling them with a letter 'I' which had that sound, he chose instead to spell them with a letter 'E' which represents a slightly lower vowel sound. That suggests that he pronounced the word ***prive*** as /preve/ and ***given*** (/gee-ven/) as /geh-ven/.

Again, some scholars cite these types of spellings in the Gawain poem as an early indication that the long vowel sound represented by letter I was starting to shift backward and was starting to be pronounced with a slightly lower vowel sound, at least by some speakers in the north Midlands. And if that assumption is correct, this poem might be an early indication that the Great Vowel Shift was starting to get underway.

By the way, this evidence is cited by John H. Fisher and Diane Bornstein in their collection of Old and Middle English texts called 'In Forme of Speche is Chaunge.' They cite these unique spellings in the Gawain poem as evidence of that early vowel shift.

We'll leave that issue there for now, but I wanted to plant that seed for you, because it's going to bear a lot of fruit in future episodes.

Now returning to the poem, the dinner came to an end, and Gawain attended mass. The next day, he was invited to a large Christmas feast where he sat beside the wife of his host. At the head of the table was a very old woman who we will later find out was Morgan le Fay – a key figure in the Arthurian legends. She was a witch or sorceress who emerged as a sinister character in the

French versions of the legends. But to Gawain, she was merely an old woman who attended the dinner.

During a conversation with host, Gawain explained that he needed to find the Green Chapel and the knight who guards it. He needed to arrive there in three days time. The host said he knew the location of the chapel, and he invited Gawain to remain as a guest at the castle until the final day, at which time, he would have a servant show Gawain the way. Gawain agreed. The host then told Gawain that he was going on a hunt, and he asked Gawain to remain behind and rest and keep his wife company. The host then proposed that they each agree to exchange whatever they should acquire during their respective adventures. Gawain agreed.

The next morning the host left for the hunt while Gawain slept. The host's wife entered Gawain's bedroom and tried to seduce him. Gawain declined the advances, but ultimately agreed to accept a kiss.

Later the host returned, having killed several deer. He gave all the venison to Gawain, and in exchange, Gawain grabbed his host and kissed him – telling him that the kiss was the only winnings he had acquired. The host accepted the kiss and asked Gawain where he acquired it. Gawain said that such information was not part of the agreement.

The next morning, the host once again left for the hunt, and Gawain remained in bed. And once again, Gawain was visited by the wife who tried to seduce him. And again, Gawain rejected the advances, but this time, he acquired two kisses from the wife. This host finally returned to the manor having killed a boar during the hunt. He gave the boar to Gawain, and Gawain returned the gift with two kisses.

The next morning the host went fox-hunting, and his wife once again entered Gawain's bed chamber to seduce him. It took every bit of willpower Gawain could muster, but he once again resisted his urges. The lady eventually realized that Gawain would not give in to her advances, so she offered him a gift to remember her by. She offered a ring, but Gawain politely declined. Then she offered a green sash which he also declined. But then she told him that the sash had magical powers and would protect him from any strike or blow. Gawain reconsidered and accepted the sash, and both agreed to keep the gift a secret from her husband. When her husband returned with the fox he had killed, he gave it to Gawain, and Gawain provided kisses in exchange, but he said nothing about the green sash.

New Years Day came and the night passed, and Gawain prepared himself for his rendezvous with the Green Knight. He wore his chain mail and armaments, and he also wore the sash – "Bot forto sauen hym-self, when suffer hym by-houed" – 'but for to save himself when it behooved him to suffer.' Gawain then mounted his horse, said goodbye to those he had met at the castle, and headed out to search for the Green Knight with the guide that the host had provided.

Together they traveled through the snow and the mountainous terrain until they finally reached the approach to the Green Chapel. The guide stopped and showed Gawain the path, but warned him not to proceed. He said that the Green Knight was a monster who showed no mercy, and

Gawain should turn around and leave while he still had the chance. But Gawain proceeded to avoid begin considered a coward and to satisfy his destiny.

Gawain traveled the path, but didn't see a proper chapel anywhere. He only found a desolate area and cave with a crevice in it. Gawain thought that it was place where the Green Knight worshiped the devil. But then he heard a noise coming from a high hill. It was a strange sound – "As one vpon a gryndelston hade grounden a syþe' – 'as one upon a grindstone had ground a scythe' – or ax. So it sounded like someone sharpening an ax. Gawain called out for the lord of the place. And then he heard a voice.

(L. 2217)
"Abide there," said someone on the bank, above – over his head,
"and thou shalt have in haste the thing I promised you once."

"Abyde," quod on on þe bonke, abouen ouer his hede,
"& þou schal haf al in hast, þat I þe hy3t ones."

Then he came from behind a crag, and came out of a hole,
Whirling out of a 'wro' – or nook – with a wicked weapon,
A Danish ax – newly ordained – for dealing the blow.

And syþen he keuereȝ bi a cragge, & comeȝ of a hole,
Whyrlande out of a wro, wyth a felle weppen,
A deneȝ ax nwe dyȝt, þe dynt with to ȝelde

And the knight was geared in green, just as the first time,
Both the face and the legs, the locks of hair and the beard.

& þe gome in þe erene gered as fyrst,
Boþe þe lyre & þe leggeȝ, lokkeȝ, & berde

"Gawain," said the green man, "May God guard you!
Why, thou art welcome to my place,
And thou has timed thy travel as a true man should;
And thou knows the covenant made between us."

"Gawayn," quod þat grene gome, "God þe mot loke!
I-wysse þou art welcom, wyȝe, to my place,
& þou hatȝ tymed þi trauayl as true mon schulde;
& þou knoweȝ þe couenaunteȝ kest vus by-twene."

Gawain agreed to accept the stroke of the ax without defense. He lowered his head to accept the stroke. The Green Knight raised his ax up high, but when he started to lower the ax, Gawain flinched. The Green Knight stopped and laughed, teasing Gawain for flinching, saying that he (the Green Knight) had not done so when he received Gawain's blow, thereby declaring himself

to be the better knight. Gawain replied that he wasn't able to restore his head to his body like the Green Knight, so he flinched. But he would not do so again.

The Green Knight raised his ax again and started to swing it downward. Gawain didn't flinch this time, but once again, the Green Knight stopped in mid-swing. He laughed and praised Gawain for not flinching that time. Gawain was now furious, and he demanded that the demon complete the act and deliver the blow. The Green Knight relented.

He lifted lightly his weapon, and let it straight down,
With the edge of the blade by the bare neck.
Though it hammered Gawain heartily, it hurt him no more,
It slightly slashed him on that one side, so that it severed the skin.

He lyftes lyȝtly his lome, & let hit doun fayre,
With þe barbe of þe bitte bi þe bare nek
Þaȝ he homered heterly, hurt hym no more,
Bot snyrt hym on þat on syde, þat seuered þe hyde;

So Gawain received the blow from the Green Knight, but it merely grazed the side of his neck and left a small cut, but other than that, Gawain was fine. He jumped up and withdrew his sword, and told the Green Knight that he had repaid the debt, and if further blows were intended, he was prepared to fight back. The Green Knight responded:

(L.2338-2363)
"Bold man, don't be so belligerent on this battlefield,
No man here has been unmannerly or mistreated you,
Nor conducted himself outside the covenants contained at the king's court,
I owed you a stroke, and you have it, you have been well paid,
I release you of any remnants, and any remaining rights,
If I was determined to deliver a deadly deed,
I could have done so, and dealt you much more harm,
First, I made a motion merrily, not meant to be serious,
I withdrew without a wound, which was warranted,
According the agreement we authored that first night.
You were trusted to act truthfully, and have been true to your word,
All your gains you gave me, as a good man should.
That second motion I made was for the morning
When you were kissed by my wife, and gave the kisses back to me.
For both of those, I barely moved, and bestowed not a blemish,
When true men act truly;
They have nothing to fear,
But the third gift, you didn't tell me,
So I gave you a scratch with my gear.
For it is my woven sash that you wear,
My own wife willed it to you, I know full well,

I know about your kisses, and other conduct,
And the wooing of my wife, I arranged the work myself,
I sent her to test you, and truly I think
that you are as faultless as any fellow to set foot on earth.

"Bolde burne, on þis bent be not so gryndel;
No mon here vn-manerly þe mys-boden habbe,
Ne kyd, bot as couenaunde, at kyngeȝ kort schaped;
I hyȝt þe a strok, & þou hit hatȝ, halde þe wel payed,
I relece þe of þe remnaunt, of ryȝtes alle oþer;
ȝif I deliuer had bene, a boffet, paraunter,
I couþe wroþeloker haf waret, to þe haf wroȝt anger.
Fyrst I mansed þe muryly, with a mynt one,
& roue þe wyth no rof, sore with ryȝt I þe profered,
For þe forwarde that we fest in þe fyrst nyȝt,
& þou trystyly þe trawþe & trwly me haldeȝ,
Al þe gayne þow me gef, as god mon shulde;
Þat oþer munt for þe morne, mon, I þe profered,
Þou kyssedes my clere wyf, þe cosseȝ me raȝteȝ,
For boþe two here I þe bede bot two bare myntes,
boute scaþe;
Trwe mon trwe restore,
Þenne þar mon drede no waþe;
At þe þrid þou fayled þore,
& þer-for þat tappe ta þe.
For hit is my wede þat þou wereȝ, þat ilke wouen girdel,
Myn owen wyf hit þe weued, I wot wel forsoþe;
Now know I wel þy cosses, & þy costes als,
& þe wowyng of my wyf, I wroȝt hit myseluen;
I sende hir to asay þe, & sothly me þynkkeȝ,
On þe fautlest freke, þat euer on fote ȝede;

So it is now revealed that the Green Knight was in fact Gawain's host at the Christmas castle. And Gawain was being tested by the wife while he resided at the castle. The first two times, Gawain was honest and returned the kisses he received earlier in the day. So the Green Knight withheld the first two strokes. But since Gawain didn't confess the receipt of the sash, the Green Knight did deliver a glancing blow on the third stroke, but it was only a minor cut for a minor offence. All in all, Gawain had passed the test that he had been given.

Gawain was relieved to discover the truth, but was disappointed that he had not been entirely truthful about the sash and had given in to the temptation to keep it secret. The Green Knight then revealed that his name was Bertilak, and that the entire ordeal had been arranged by Morgan le Fey – the elderly woman who had attended the dinner back at the castle. She hated Guinevere, and she had sent him to Camelot in the form of the Green Knight to frighten Guinevere to death.

After these disclosures, Gawain returned to Camelot where he was welcomed with celebrations. He revealed what happened and the shame of keeping the green sash a secret and breaking his promise to his host. He said that he would never remove the sash as a sign of his shame. Arthur's knights laughed and assured him that he kept his word more than any other person could have, and they all agreed to wear a similar sash from then on as a sign of solidarity with Gawain.

And that concludes the 14th century poem known as Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. It also concludes our look at this revival of English poetry and literature in the late 1300s. Next time, we'll turn our attention back to the real world, and we'll explore what was happening in actual English court of Richard II. As we'll see, it wasn't all that different from King Arthur's court as described in Gawain poem. The one thing that they both had in common was elaborate feasts and banquets. And that meant they the court needed lots of cooks and chefs. And around this point in the history of English, some of Richard's chefs prepared a collection of recipes used at the court. And that collection of recipes is apparently the oldest cookbook composed in the English language.

So next time, we're going to talk about food and cooking. And we're going to examine how the process of cooking and eating shaped the English language. So until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.

EPISODE 132: FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 132: Food for Thought. In this episode, we're going to talk about food. Specifically, the first cookbook composed in the English language. This collection of recipes was composed by the personal chefs of Richard II – the king of England in the late 1300s who enjoyed a rich and opulent court. This cookbook is fascinating on many levels, not only for the language used to document the recipes, but also for the insight it provides about the nature of food in the late Middle Ages. So in this episode, we'll explore how people ate in medieval England, and we'll see how the language of food 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.

Now this time, we're going to look at the language of food and the first collection of recipes composed in the English language. For food historians, this is an important development because it really provides the first detailed account of what people actually ate in medieval England – at least what people in the royal court ate. Prior to this point, historians have to piece together that information from scattered resources. The Church imposed dietary restrictions regulating what people could eat on specific days of the year. And the government occasionally passed laws called 'sumptuary laws' that restricted what people could eat. Those types of regulations shed some light on the diets of the period. A certain amount of information can also be gleaned from archeological finds, and pictures and illustrations of people eating, and occasional references to food in various accountings and government records.

But one of the best ways to discern the nature of medieval food is to examine the surviving literature from the period. Poems and stories occasionally mentioned what people were eating, and sometimes they provided elaborate details. In Piers Plowman, the poet – William Langland – described the plowman's food as green cheeses, curds and cream, oat cake, beans and loaves of bread. He also said that Piers had parsley, and leeks and cabbage. But the plowman didn't have enough money for a hen, or eggs or salted meat. In the Canterbury Tales, Geoffrey Chaucer wrote about a poor widow in the Nun's Priest's Tale. He said that she ate milk, brown bread, bacon and the occasional egg. The heroine of his Clerk's Tale survived on porridge made from various greens she gathered by the roadside. These types of passages give us a glimpse into the diet of an English peasant in the 1300s.

But we tend to get even more detailed accounts about the food eaten by the nobles. Writers often described elaborate banquets and feasts, and there is no better example of that than the poem we looked at in the last episode – Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. As we saw in that poem, the hero Gawain found himself at a large feast on several occasions. The story opens with a Christmas and New Year's feast in King Arthur's court. Later, when he goes in search of the Green Knight, he ends up at a castle where he is wined and dined.

He arrives at the castle on Christmas Eve, which any reader of the period would have understood was the last day of Advent – the period of fasting leading up to Christmas Day. In the Middle Ages, the Church didn't allow its followers to eat meat or eggs during that period, but they could eat fish. So the poet describes the meal at the castle as an elaborate fish dinner. The poet says that the tables were covered with white table cloths with napkins and salt containers and silver spoons placed on top. He writes that servers served the meal "Wyth sere sewes & sete, sesounde of þe best" – 'With various stews and satisfying dishes, seasoned of the best.' "Double felde, as hit falleʒ, & fele kyn fischeʒ" – 'Double portions were served, and many kinds of fish." He then writes that "Summe baken in bred" – 'some were baked in bread' – "summe brad on þe gledeʒ" – 'some grilled on embers' – "Summe soþen" – 'some were boiled' – "summe in sewe, sauered with spyces" – 'some in stews flavored with spices' – "& ay sawesʒ so sleʒeʒ, þat þe segge lyked" – 'and all the savory sauces that the knight liked." "Þe freke calde hit a fest ful frely & ofte" – 'The knight called it a feast freely and often." So as the poet describes it, the Advent 'fast' had been turned into a 'feast.' (ll. 889-894)

That passage is interesting in the way it describes the elaborate meal that was served, but it is also interesting in the specific choice of words. In one line, the poet says that dishes were "sesounde of þe best" – 'seasoned of the best' – but it meant 'well seasoned' to bring out the most flavor. This passage is actually the first recorded use of the word ***season*** in the sense of adding flavor to food. Now the word ***season*** wasn't a brand new word. It was a French loanword, and it had been around for about a century, but previously, it had only referred to the four periods of the year – Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall or Autumn. Those were the four seasons. And the French word ***season*** actually comes from the same Indo-European root as the native English word ***sow*** as in sowing and planting crops. So the word had to do with the growing periods. Well, a crop that was 'seasoned' was a crop that had been in the field for an entire season or for several seasons. So it was an older crop – one that had been around a while. And we still have some of that sense of the word ***season*** when we refer to a 'seasoned professional' or a 'seasoned politician' meaning someone who had been around for a long time and has a lot of experience. Well, a 'seasoned' crop was one that had been around for a while and was fully ripened. And for many foods – like fruits – it meant that they had reached the peak of flavor. So the word ***season*** came to mean a food that had a lot of flavor. And from there, it came to refer to the process of enhancing the flavor of a meal with herbs and spices. And that gave use the culinary sense of ***seasoning***, which we see used for the first time in that passage from Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. From then on, meals that were packed with flavor were said to be 'seasoned.'

And speaking of flavor, the Gawain poet also gave us the first recorded use of the word ***flavor***. I noted last time that the manuscript that contains the Gawain poem also contains three other poems, and all four poems in the book are thought to be the work of the same author. One of those other poems is called Pearl, and it contains the first known use of the French word ***flavor*** in an English document.

So you seasoned a dish in order to maximize its flavor. And of course, you did that in the process of cooking. ***Cooking*** was certainly not a new word in the 1300s, but it is actually a loanword.

Cook is one of those very old Latin words that was borrowed by the Anglo-Saxons during the period of Old English. But the Anglo-Saxons only used it as a noun to refer to a person who cooks. But around the current point in our overall story of English in the late 1300s, the word also started to appear as a verb – 'to cook.' The original Latin root was ***coquere***, and via Modern French, it has given us other words ***cuisine*** and ***culinary***. And in the late 1300s, it gave us another word meaning 'cookery.' That word was ***cury***. Now this isn't the word ***curry*** in the sense that it's used in Indian food. That's a different word borrowed from the Tamil language of southern India. I'm talking about a different word that was used in Middle English, but has since disappeared from common use.

This earlier word ***cury*** – sometimes rendered as 'kewery' – was borrowed from French, and as I noted, it meant cookery. It appeared around the year 1390 at the current point in our overall story of English. And it appeared in what is considered to be the oldest cookbook composed in the English language. This collection of recipes were compiled by a group of cooks working in the household of the king Richard II. The original manuscript has been lost, but it was copied over the centuries in various fragments. Some fragments contain recipes that were not included in the other fragments. In the 1700s, a collection of the recipes was assembled and published under the title 'The Forme of Cury,' which literally meant 'The Forme of Cookery' or 'The Proper Manner of Cooking.'

That first publication contained well over 200 recipes all preserved in the original Middle English. They are the oldest known recipes to be written down and preserved in the English language. Other versions of the book were subsequently printed which included additional recipes from the other surviving fragments that weren't included in the first publication. So there are actually different versions of the book today, but all of the recipes were apparently compiled and preserved during the reign of Richard II, and they describe dishes that were apparently prepared for the king and his guests on a regular basis. They also point to the importance of cookery in the royal court at the time.

Before we go any further, I should probably refresh your memory a bit about this particular king Richard II. You might remember from prior episodes that he became king as a boy because his father the Black Prince had died at an early age, so Richard inherited the throne when he was still a young teenager. He initially faced the uprising known as the Peasant's Revolt, but he handled that crisis effectively and put down the revolt.

He then had to deal with rebellious nobles who didn't like his opulent spending and his high taxes, and they didn't like the fact that he launched a failed invasion of Scotland and couldn't manage to defeat the French across the Channel in the ongoing conflict that became known as the Hundred Years War.

In the late 1380s, he had to deal with two Parliaments which restricted his powers. This was the period when Geoffrey Chaucer served in Parliament – presumably in an attempt to pack the assembly with Richard's supporters since Chaucer was close to Richard and the royal court. But you might remember that it didn't work. Chaucer ended up losing his government job, and he

headed down to Kent to begin work on the Canterbury Tales. Meanwhile, several of Richard's close advisors were accused of treason and were killed.

But after that, everything settled down a bit. In 1389, at the age of 22, Richard declared himself to be old enough to rule in own right without the supervision of others. And for a while, it looked like he would have a successful reign. He agreed to a temporary truce with France, which meant that he no longer needed to spend a lot of money on the war effort across the Channel. As a result, England's finances improved, and the economy prospered.

But despite that, Richard is not regarded by historians as a particularly good king. Richard was not a warrior like his father and grandfather, but he loved the trappings of kingship. He maintained an opulent court. He entertained lots of guests. And he spared no expense in doing so.

A chronicler named John Hardyng was a young man during Richard's reign, and in the next century he composed a history of England. He wrote that Richard's court often entertained and fed ten thousand people, and it had the staff to do that. He wrote that the court had "in the kechin three hundred servitours." So he maintained 300 kitchen servants to feed the people at court. These same numbers were repeated in the late 1500s by the writer John Stow in his history of London called 'A Survey of London.' Now modern historians doubt that the court actually fed ten thousand people on a regular basis, if ever, but there is no doubt that it was an opulent court that entertained a lot of people, and it functioned with a large kitchen staff that produced a lot of high quality food with some of the most exclusive ingredients that were available at the time.

And that was the context for this collection of English recipes that were assembled during his reign. The collection includes recipes from relatively simple soups and snacks to very elaborate main courses. The text begins with the following introduction or preamble – first in Modern English:

'The form of cury was compiled by the master chefs and cooks of king Richard the Second of England after the Conquest, who was accounted and considered to be the best and noblest diner of all Christian kings, and it was compiled with the assent and advisement of the Masters of medicine and philosophy that dwelled in his court.'

Now in the original Middle English:

"fome of cury was compiled of the chef Maister Cokes of kyng Richard the Secunde kyng of Englond aftir the Conquest. the which was acounted þe best and ryallest vyand of alle csten ynges and it was compiled by assent and avysement of Maisters and phisik and of philosophie þat dwellid in his court."

Now there are a couple of interesting things about that passage. First, you'll notice how close the language is to Modern English. Most of the Middle English manuscripts we've explored recently have been poetry where the language is a little looser, but here we have a prose text written in plain English. And we can see that the language seems somewhat modern. The other thing that stands out is the reference to the 'Masters of medicine and philosophy.' The preamble states that

the cooks prepared the recipes with the advice and consent of the doctors and physicians who advised the court. So why did they consult with the doctors, and why did they feel the need to mention that in the preamble?

Well, it was because there wasn't much of a difference between food and medicine in Middle Ages. Food was medicine, and medicine was food. To a certain extent, we still have some of that sentiment today. We've all been told that we are what we eat. And most of us have comfort foods that make us feel better when we're sick.

But the link between food and medicine was more fundamental in medieval England. In an earlier episode, I talked about the old idea that the human body was made up of substances called humors and that sickness was caused when the humors were out of balance. Well, the humors could be brought back into balance by eating certain foods. So the foods essentially served as medicine. But in the same way that certain foods could cure sickness, they could also cause sickness. It was thought that every single item of food had a fundamental nature as either hot or cold or moist or dry. And when different foods were combined in a recipe, they had to be balanced so the dish wouldn't disturb the humors and make people sick. [SOURCE: 'A Cultural History of Food in the Medieval Age,' Montanari, p. 116-7] So an ingredient that was deemed to be hot and moist had to be balanced with an ingredient that was deemed to be cold and dry. And those terms didn't literally mean hot or moist or cold or dry. It had to do with how the ingredients were classified by medieval doctors. And that's why the physicians had to be consulted when formulating these recipes.

We can still see vestiges of this old idea if we look around us and if we know what we're looking at. Today, of you go to a pharmacy or drug store or chemist's shop, you'll probably encounter the symbol 'Rx' which is a standard symbol for a medical prescription. But what you might not realize is that 'Rx' is really an abbreviation, and it's an abbreviation of the word ***recipe***. ***Recipe*** is a Latin loanword, and it shares the same root as words like ***receipt*** and ***receive***. So a ***recipe*** was something you ***received***. When you were sick, you received instructions from a doctor that told you how to get better. In fact, medieval doctors often wrote down their instructions much like modern doctors do, and they almost always began their instructions with the word '***recipe***' which meant 'receive' or 'take this.' The word ***recipe*** was often abbreviated with the letters R-C, but instead of writing the C as a separate letter, it became common to just write the C as a little stroke across the leg of the letter R, which made it look like an X. And that produced the symbol Rx. But originally, it just meant ***recipe*** – the instructions to receive or take a prescribed food or herb. So it was originally a verb, and that's how the word first appeared in English in the early 1300s. Interestingly, the word didn't acquire its modern meaning as the instructions for making a meal until the 1600s, but the original sense of the word still survives in that symbol Rx.

That also explains why the English cooks who compiled the Forme of Cury didn't call the instructions ***recipes***. The word ***recipe*** didn't have that meaning at the time. They just referred to the 'form' of making certain dishes.

Now The Forme of Cury was part of a trend that was sweeping Western Europe in late Middle Ages. Around that time, cooks were starting to write down and preserve their recipes for the first time since the fall of the Roman Empire almost a thousand years earlier. The oldest German cookbook was compiled around the year 1350, and the oldest cookbook from France was composed around the year 1375. Fifteen years later, the English cooks compiled The Forme of Cury

I should also note that there is a collection of recipes from England that actually pre-dates all of those cookbooks I just mentioned. It was compiled around the year 1300 – almost a century before The Forme of Cury. That makes it one of the oldest surviving cookbooks of the Middle Ages, but it wasn't composed in English. It was actually written in French, specifically the Anglo-Norman dialect of French, but I mentioned that earlier text because it allows scholars to compare the recipes that were used at the beginning of the 1300s with those in The Forme of Cury at the end of the 1300s. And, for the most part, the recipes are very similar in both collections.

Now it isn't entirely clear why recipe collections started to pop up around this time throughout Western Europe, but it probably had to do with a general change in eating habits, especially among the upper classes and royal courts where these collections were preserved. As we saw in earlier episodes, a lot of new foods and spices had started to flow into northern Europe from the Mediterranean during the Crusades. They were brought in via the extensive trading networks that reached from England all the way to the Far East. Those were the same trading networks that had brought the Black Death a few years earlier, but they also brought other things like fruits and vegetables and herbs and spices. And the nobles who could afford those new foods, especially those new herbs and spices, experienced a culinary revolution.

Those new foods were also combined with new cooking techniques from other cultures. That was especially true in England where French influences had contributed to English cooking – at least among the nobles. And that's really the key here. These cookbooks and recipe collections were assembled by the cooks working in those upper-class kitchens, and they reflect the cuisine that was being served there. Meanwhile, the food eaten by the peasants probably didn't change very much at all after the Norman Conquest. Those passages from Piers Plowman and the Canterbury Tales which I mentioned earlier suggest that the peasant diet was still very basic.

And that points to one of the most important distinctions when we're talking about English food in the Middle Ages – the distinction between upper-class food and lower-class food, which often meant the difference between French-influenced cuisine for the nobles and native English cooking for the peasants.

This led to what many people consider to be the classic example of Norman French influence on the English language, and that's the difference between the name of an animal in the field and name of the animal's flesh when it was served at the table. So as we've seen before, ***cow*** is an Old English word, and that's what the Anglo-Saxons called the animal when it roamed the fields tended by English-speaking peasants. But when that cow was butchered and served at the noble's dinner table, it was called ***beef*** using the French term for a cow. Similarly, the peasants tended to

pigs and called them ***pigs*** and ***swine*** using those Old English words. But when they were served at the noble's table, those pigs were called ***pork*** using the French word for a pig. Along the same lines, the Old English ***deer*** became French ***venison*** when it was served. And the Old English ***calf*** became French ***veal*** at the dinner table. And the Old English ***sheep*** became French ***mutton*** when it was cooked and served.

By the time the Forme of Cury was composed, all of those French words were being used in English. ***Venison***, ***pork***, ***beef*** and ***mutton*** all appeared around the year 1300. And the Canterbury Tales gives us the first recorded use of the word ***veal***. But the living animals were still known by the Old English names – ***deer***, ***pig***, ***swine***, ***ox***, ***cow***, ***calf***, ***sheep*** and ***lamb***.

Traditionally, these distinctions have been attributed to the fact that the Anglo-Saxons and the Normans encountered these animals in different places. The Anglo-Saxon peasants encountered them as living animals in the pastures and fields, while the Norman nobles encountered them as meat at the dinner table. So the Anglo-Saxon word was used for the animal, and the French term was used for the meal. And that basic reality was certainly a factor in creating these distinctions, but it was likely only part of the story.

First of all, the meat wasn't always given a French name. People still used the Old English word ***lamb*** for the cooked meat of a young sheep as in a 'rack of lamb.' And people still used the Old English word ***ham*** for the back portion of a pig. The same is true for ***chicken***, ***goose***, ***duck*** and most kinds of fish. In those cases, the Old English word was retained for both the animal and the meat. Sometimes it worked the other way – a French word was adopted for the living animal. For example, ***cow*** is Old English, but ***cattle*** is French. And even though we think of words like ***beef*** and ***mutton*** as food terms, I noted that they were originally the French words for the living animals. And it wasn't unusual for English speakers to actually use those same French terms for living animals well into the Modern English period. It is common to find English manuscripts from the 1800s that still refer to a living cow as a ***beef*** and living sheep as a ***mutton***. So as we can see, the real history behind these terms isn't as clean and precise as it sometimes seems. Nevertheless, there really was a social difference in the way people ate, and that social difference probably contributed to the way those words evolved over time.

There was also a more general factor at work, and that was the fact that cooking was one of those areas of English life where people borrowed heavily from French. I noted in an earlier episode that the borrowing of words from French became more specialized over time. As the centuries progressed, the loanwords tended to come from specific activities or functions like government, law, fashion and art. Those were areas where there was still a great deal of French influence, or least French linguistic influence.

Another one of those areas was cooking and the culinary arts. French influence was especially strong in the kitchen – both in the way foods were cooked and the terms that were used.

By the early 1300s, English had already borrowed French terms like ***bacon***, ***biscuit***, ***grape***, ***mustard***, ***lettuce***, ***vinegar***, ***cream***, ***fry***, ***boil***, ***roast***, ***taste***, ***appetite***, ***dinner*** and ***supper***. That process continued on throughout the 1300s and 1400s as English added more and more French

terms for food and cooking. And that process has never really stopped. Just within the past couple of centuries, English has added terms like ***souffle***, ***eclair***, ***croissant***, ***flambé***, ***bouillabaisse***, ***mousse***, ***ratatouille***, ***fondue***, ***fondant***, ***foie gras***, ***filet mignon***, ***gourmet***, and even the very common word ***chef***. In fact, one of the most recent updates to the Oxford English Dictionary added the word ***chef de cuisine***. So the process continues to this day. And as a result, cooking terms in English are dominated by French loanwords. Native English terms tend to be limited to the basic foods and cooking techniques used by the Anglo-Saxons. But most of the developments in English cuisine over the past thousand years are represented by terms borrowed from other languages – most of them from French.

So we have this interesting distinction in English where native words are used for certain animals, but loanwords are used for the meat. As we saw, that's especially true for certain animals like cows, sheep and deer. And interestingly, peasants didn't tend to eat those animals. Most of the meat from those animals was consumed by the upper classes. So maybe that had something to do with the distinction that arose over time. The reason why peasants didn't tend to eat cows and sheep is because those animals helped to sustain life. A cow could provide a peasant family with milk, butter and cheese, and a sheep provided wool. So it was usually better to keep those animals alive. If those animals were slaughtered, the meat was so expensive that it was usually better to sell it in the local market and use the money to buy other basic food stuffs. And as far as deer were concerned, those generally belonged to the local lord who also owned the forest land. Peasants weren't allowed to hunt in the forests and take the lord's deer. So most of the meat from cows, sheep and deer ended up on the tables of the nobles and the upper-class. And there, that meat was called ***beef***, ***veal***, ***mutton*** and ***venison***.

But peasants did have access to other animals like chicken and fish. And they ate those animals on a regular basis – especially fish. And that may help to explain why the native words were retained for the cooked version of those animals. A cooked chicken is still called a ***chicken*** and a cooked fish is still called a ***fish***. So today we have Kentucky Fried Chicken and not Kentucky Fried Poulet. And McDonald's sells a 'filet-o-fish' sandwich and not a 'filet-o-poisson' sandwich.

Now one animal that doesn't fit neatly into these general rules is the pig. Most of our words associated with pigs come from Old English – like ***boar***, ***sow***, and ***swine***. ***Swine*** was actually the main word for the animal in Old English. The words ***pig*** and ***hog*** are also found in Old English, but they weren't very common at the time. They didn't really become common until the Middle English period, but they do appear to be native words. So most of our words for pigs come from Old English.

And the peasants of England raised and ate pigs. In fact, pigs were such a staple of the peasant diet that the upper classes of England associated pigs with peasants. The Norman lords sometimes referred to the peasants as 'hogs' and 'pigs' and 'swine.' And some of those words are still used as derisive terms today. Since peasants had access to pigs, that may explain why the Old English word ***ham*** has survived as a word for part of the pig. But the more general word for pig flesh is a French word – ***pork*** – as in 'pork chops,' and 'pulled pork,' and 'pork loin' – ***loin***

being another French loanword from the 1300s. So here we have a case where the peasants routinely ate the animal, but a French word was adopted for the cooked meat.

Another term for pig flesh is ***bacon***, and that's another French loanword from the same time period. The word came from French, but it actually has Germanic roots. ***Bacon*** is related to the English word ***back*** – because bacon came from the pig's back.

Now when a pig was slaughtered, it wasn't consumed all at one time. It was eaten over several weeks or months, and that meant that the meat had to be preserved so it didn't go bad. Keep in mind that there was no refrigeration, so you couldn't just put the meat in a freezer. You had to find another way to preserve it, and there were several ways to do that. One technique – especially for fruits – was to dry them. Water contributes to the growth of bacteria, so drying the fruit or other foods removed much of the water and inhibited the growth of bacteria. Another technique for meat was to smoke it. Exposing the meat to smoke for a long period of time pulled moisture from the meat, and it provided an acidic coating which helped to block the growth of bacteria.

But the most common technique for preserving meat was to salt it either by literally covering it with salt or by soaking it in a salt water solution called brine. That process also removed water from the meat and preserved it. That's why salt was such an important commodity over the centuries. You might remember that the word ***salary*** is based on the Latin word for salt – which was ***sal***. Soldiers were often paid in salt since it was such a valuable community, and that payment became known as a ***salary*** from ***sal*** meaning salt. It's also how we got the phrase 'worth one's salt' meaning that the person is competent or of high value.

By the way, the word ***salt*** is actually the native Old English word. As I mentioned, Latin had the word as ***sal***. So obviously, they're very similar, and as you might suspect, both words came from the same Indo-European root. And that explains the similarity.

So salt was a very important commodity both as a seasoning and a preservative. And given the fact that England was an located on an island, it meant that the country had direct access to salt from ocean water and other deposits. So there was plenty of salt to go around. And it was therefore easy to preserve meat. And for peasants, that mostly meant salted pork or bacon.

Now, while the meat was being preserved, it had to be stored somewhere – usually in a separate building or smokehouse. And that meant that dogs or other animals could break in and take it. And sometimes people would break in and steal it. And that was big deal for peasants who relied on the salted meat in the winter month, so it was very important to protect or save the bacon from intruders and thieves. And that ultimately produced the phrase 'save the bacon' or 'save one's bacon' to refer to the process of protecting oneself from a loss.

The salting of meat to preserve it also explains another common food term – the word ***sausage***. ***Sausage*** is another French term borrowed around the current point in our overall story of English. It first appeared in English in the 1400s, and it came from that same Latin root word for salt. So ultimately, ***sausage*** and ***salt*** are cognate. So what's the connection? Well, to make

sausage, the meat was ground up with other fillings and salted, and then placed into the casings which were usually intestines that had been cleaned. The salting of the meat in the casing helped to preserve it, and thus that little tube of meat became known as ***sausage***.

Salt was such an important ingredient in medieval cooking that it also gave us other words like ***sauce*** and ***saucer***. Both of those words were adopted from French, and both appeared in English in the mid-1300s. Sauces were common in the fancier dishes prepared for the upper classes, and salt was a key ingredient in those sauces. That's why the word ***sauce*** is derived from that Latin root word for salt. And sauce was often served in a separate bowl which became known as a ***saucer***. Saucers also held the salt which was used as a condiment at the table. So ***salt***, ***salary***, ***sausage***, ***sauce***, and ***saucer*** are all cognate.

Now I talked about the process of making sausage, and there's a modern proverb or idiom that refers to what happens when we pull the curtains back and see how something is really done behind the scenes. Sometimes it isn't as pleasant as we might have thought, so we say that it is like watching how the sausage gets made. In other words, sausage may taste good, but making it is a messy process, so you might not want to see what goes into it or how it's made.

Well, that brings up another issue – the various parts of pigs or other animals that were considered to be of lower quality like the organs or entrails. These were sometimes thrown away especially by cooks in the upper class kitchens. Today, we might say that they were thrown in the garbage. Well, those animal parts actually were garbage in the Middle Ages because the word ***garbage*** literally meant low-quality animal parts. Since those parts were often thrown away, the word ***garbage*** eventually came to mean anything that was thrown away. But originally, it referred to entrails and organs and animal parts, and it was borrowed from French around the current point in our story.

The word ***garbage*** is first recorded in English in the early 1400s, but it had probably been around since the 1300s, and I say that because the word was used in a London ordinance adopted in the year 1379 during the reign of the current king Richard II. The ordinance was written in French, and it specifically said that bakers were making pastries with "rabbits, geese, and garbage, not befitting, and sometimes stinking, in deceit of the people." It then directed that bakers could not use "any garbage from capons, hens, or geese to bake in a pastry."

So what was that all about? Well, apparently cooks in some of the upper class kitchens were taking the entrails and organs and other unusable meat and selling it to bakers who would then turn around and use it as filling for meat pies. But those pies were making people sick. So the ordinance was designed to protect the public health by preventing bakers from using that stuff that was often thrown away. The ordinance also prevented bakers from putting beef into the their pies and then passing it off to customers as venison. That was because beef wasn't considered to be of the same quality as venison. So selling a beef pie as venison was a type of fraud. [SOURCE: 'Fast and Feast,' Henisch, p. 78]

Now the cooks in noble kitchens might throw away this low quality meat, but peasants weren't so picky. They couldn't afford to throw anything away. To use a modern expression, they ate everything but the squeal. Not only were intestines used to make sausages, they were also fried or boiled to make ***chitterlings*** – a word which also appeared around the current point in our story around the 1400. It isn't entirely clear where the word came from, but it was later shortened to ***chitlins*** which many people still associate with rural and poorer communities.

Another word that was similar to ***chitterlings*** or ***chitlins*** was the word ***haslet***. It referred to the inner organs of a pig – the ones that were edible. And it first appeared in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. It appeared in the part where Gawain's host killed a boar during the hunt and slaughtered it. The poem says that he "hatȝ out þe hastletteȝ" – 'took out the hastlets.' The hastlets were usually grilled on a spit over a fire, and sometimes the word was applied to other foods that were cooked in a similar way. That's how the word was used in that early English cookbook The Forme of Cury. That book describes a dish made from figs, dates and almonds which were placed in a spit and roasted. The dish is called 'Hastletes of Fruit.' Both ***hastlets*** and ***fruit*** were French loanwords. And notice that this dish prepared for the royal court didn't actually use innards. It used fruit and prepared it in a way that was similar to haslets. That's why it was called 'haslets of fruit.' So this was a play on a type of food that was normally eaten by peasants.

Another word for animal organs or entrails was ***numbles***. It was another French loanword from the 1300s, and believe it or not, it's the origin of the term 'humble pie.' Again, peasants didn't tend to throw anything away, so they took those numbles and baked them in a pie. That type of pie was called a 'numbles pie.' But you might remember that nouns that began with an 'n' sound sometimes lost that sound in Middle English because they often followed the article 'a'. And people thought the 'n' was part of that preceding article.

I mentioned in an earlier episode that a type of snake was a ***nadre*** – 'a nadre.' But when people spoke, the sounds slurred together, and it sounded like 'anadre' – or 'an adre.' The N moved over to the article. And over time, the word became 'an adder.' So ***nadre*** lost its N and became ***adder***. That actually happened to quite a few words, including the word ***numbles***. Over time, 'a numbles pie' became 'an umbles pie.' So that was the first sound change – the N was dropped at the front of the word – from ***numbles*** to ***umbles***. But then there was another sound change when an H was added to the front of the word – from ***umbles*** to ***humble***. So why did that happen?

Well, in early Modern English, it was common for speakers in England to drop the initial H in words that began with an 'h' sound. So they said things like 'allo' instead of 'hello.' That was especially common in lower class and working class communities. So people started to think that 'umbles pie' was one of those terms where people were just dropping the H at the front. So they thought that 'umbles pie' was really 'humble pie.' And that confusion was encouraged because it was a type of pie that was usually eaten by poor people. So 'humble pie' came to mean a type of pie or food eaten by someone who was humble or poor. And today, if someone 'eats humble pie,' they are acting humbly or with humility. But again, it began in the 1300s as ***numbles*** – the innards of a pig or other animal.

Now, to be fair, I should mention that this royal cookbook – The Forme of Cury – also has a recipe for numbles. The recipe says to take the numbles of a deer or other animal and boil them, and take the broth and thicken it with bread. Then add vinegar and wine and cooked onions, and season it with salt and other seasonings, boil it well, and serve it. So this appears to be a slightly elevated version of the dish.

There was also a similar dish that was common at the time called ***hoggepot*** – or ***hotchpot***. The word actually appeared for the first time in Chaucer's writings. Again, it was a French term, and it combined the French word ***hocher*** meaning 'to shake' and the French word ***pot*** meaning a cooking vessel. A ***hotchpot*** was a thick broth made from a mixture of meat, vegetables, and anything else the cook had lying around. The cook just tossed it all in and cooked it. The Form of Cury has a specific recipe for it called 'Gees in Hoggepot.' You cut up a goose and boil it in water and wine. Add onions and herbs. Cook it for a while and pour it over a layer of bread and add seasonings. Again, this was an elevated version of the dish. For most people, it was more common to just throw in whatever you had available at the time. And that's how the word evolved from ***hotchpot*** to ***hodge-podge*** meaning a mixture or confused jumble.

This also explains the phrase 'Gone to Pot' which appeared in the 1500s. Today, it means something that no longer has any value. It's worthless. It's gone to pot. Well, originally, it referred to the leftovers that were otherwise useless. The cook chopped them up and tossed them in the pot that was constantly simmering over a fire. If the items 'went to the pot,' it meant that they weren't good for anything else. And over time, it has come to refer to anything that has become useless or worthless.

The 1500s also gave us the term 'pot luck' which is based on this same basic idea. Since almost every household maintained a pot on the fire with something cooking in it, the contents of that pot was what was served when visitors came by. The visitors got whatever was cooking in the pot at the time. It might be a good day with a tasty soup full of quality vegetables and maybe even some meat. But usually, it was a bland broth with not very much of substance in it at all. So the visitor had to take whatever was dished out whether good or bad. So what the visitor got depended on luck or chance. That led to these sense of ***potluck*** as a random dish brought to a dinner party or gathering. Again, you don't really know what people are bringing to a potluck dinner. And eventually, the word ***potluck*** came to mean a 'random result' or 'whatever happens by chance.' [SOURCE, 'Bring Home the Bacon and Cutting the Mustard,' p. 137]

I should also mention the word ***potpourri*** which is a French term borrowed in the 1600s. Today, it means a medley of flowers or other aromatics. It's pronounced in the French manner /po-puh-ree/, even though it looks like /pot-purry/ because it has that word ***pot*** in it. Well ***potpourri*** was originally a French term for a type of stew or hotch-pot with a mixture of ingredients. And English initially borrowed the word with that same sense as a stew, but over time, it has come to mean a medley or mixture of other things.

And there was one other important term for a similar type of soup or stew made with random ingredients. That term was ***pottage***, again based on that same word ***pot*** because it was cooked in a pot. The word ***pottage*** is really the most common term for the soups and stews that people ate

in the Middle Ages, and well into the modern era as well. Again, it was made with random vegetables, cereals and whatever else was lying around. If peasants had a little pork or other meat, they would toss that in as well. During the 1500s, the pronunciation of ***pottage*** became slurred a bit, and it evolved into the word ***porridge*** which is probably the more familiar term today. Again, porridge was a basic food staple for peasants. It could be made with a thin watery broth or it could be thickened with breadcrumbs and cereals.

Even though peasants ate a lot of porridge or pottage, the dish could also be found in noble households and even on the dinner table of the king. The Forme of Cury has several pottage recipes like 'Cabbages in Pottage,' 'Rapes or Turnips in Pottage,' 'and 'Gourds in Pottage.' Again, these were elevated versions made with onions, saffron, salt and other spices. The gourd version also called for pork and egg yolks. So the king's version could be a hearty meal in itself.

And since I'm talking about pottages or porridges, I should mention another related dish – ***gruel***. This was another French loanword that appeared in English in the mid-1300s. So it was in use by the current point in our story. It was another type of pottage or porridge, but it usually had a base of oatmeal boiled in water or milk. Again other meats or vegetables could be added in, but it had a reputation as a dish that was filling, but not very appetizing. It was such a basic concoction that it was often given to people who didn't have any other food options. It was the food that was often given as a form of punishment or to those who were being punished. And through that association, the word ***gruel*** became an adjective. Today if we refer to a 'grueling' situation, it means a situation that is exhausting or punishing.

Nevertheless, even the king ate gruel from time to time, assuming he actually ate the dishes described in The Forme of Cury, because it contains a couple of gruel recipes. Here's one called 'Grewel of Almaundes;'

> Take Almaundes blaunched, bray hem with oot meel, and draw hem up with water. Cast þeron Safroun and salt.

In Modern English, it reads:

> Take blanched almonds, bray or crush them together with oatmeal, and draw them up with water. Cast thereon saffron and salt.

So by now we get a sense of how the common people ate. They consumed lots of stews or soups with mixed grains and vegetables and whatever else was available. If they had some pork, they would toss it in. But they didn't generally eat beef or mutton or venison. As I noted earlier, cows were preserved for milk and dairy. Sheep were preserved for their wool. And deer were hard to come by because they lived in the forests, and most of the wilderness and forest land belonged to the king or the local lord. Peasants weren't usually allowed to hunt on that land. Of course, some of them took the risk anyway, and they poached the deer or rabbits or other wildlife. In fact, that type of poaching had become quite common by the current point in our story in the late 1300s.

To deal with this problem, the English Parliament adopted the first set of game laws in England. The laws were adopted by Parliament and approved by the king in the year 1390 – the very same year that The Forme of Cury was compiled. Those new game laws prohibited people from owning or possessing hunting dogs unless they owned lands that produced more than 40 shillings of income per year. Since most peasants didn't have those types of land holdings, it barred them from owning hunting dogs, which effectively prevented them from poaching the animals in the forests.

The word ***poach*** in the sense of stealing wild animals didn't appear in English until the 1500s. It's origin is unclear, though one theory suggests that it is derived from the French word ***poke*** meaning a bag or sack. You might remember that I talked about that word in an earlier episode. A 'pig in a poke' literally meant a 'pig in a sack.' And a small poke or bag was sometimes sewn into the lining of clothing, thereby creating the word ***pocket***. The same root also gave us the word ***pouch***. And this theory suggests that people who stole small animals like rabbits put them in sacks and carried them away. Since they used pokes or pouches, they were called ***poachers***. Again, that's just a theory.

But we also have the word ***poach*** in the realm of cooking when we poach an egg. And that sense of the word ***poach*** appeared for the first time in English in The Forme of Cury. The recipe collection contains specific instructions on how to poach an egg. So is there any connection between a cook who poaches an egg and a thief who poaches an animal in the forest? Well, if the word ***poach*** in the sense of illegal hunting is actually based on the word ***poke*** or ***pouch***, then yes, there is a connection because to poach an egg is literally to envelop it in a sack of egg whites.

When you place a raw egg in very hot water, it starts to cook and the egg whites start to congeal. They actually envelop the yolk which remains at the center of the egg. You can actually remove the egg from the water in tact and place it on a plate. And if the yolk hasn't cooked all the way through, you can cut through the egg whites and the yolk will run out. So in effect, the egg whites become the pouch or poke that holds the yolk inside. And that's why it called a 'poached' egg. And again, that term is recorded for the first time in English in The Forme of Cury.

Now so far, I've talked a lot about meat – or the lack of meat – in the English diet of the 1300s. But it is important to keep in mind that this was a very religious period, and the Church restricted the eating of meat on many days of the year. Specifically, the Church prohibited the eating of meat or eggs on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. That's three out of seven days of every week. The Church also prohibited people from eating during Lent leading up to Easter and Advent leading up to Christmas. When you do the math on all of that, you realize that people were prohibited from eating meat for over half of the days of the year. And those restrictions applied to both the nobles and the peasants and everyone in between. [SOURCE: 'The Time Travelers Guide to Medieval England,' Ian Mortimer, P. 169] So that meant the people needed an alternative to meat, and as I noted earlier in the episode, they had one. Under the rules of the Church, fish was not restricted because it wasn't considered meat. So the restricted days when meat and eggs were prohibited were called 'fish days.' In fact, several recipes in The Form of Cury appear in two versions – one using meat and the other using fish. For example, the

collection includes a recipe for a dish called a chewetes which was a baked dish seasoned with salt and ginger. One version called 'Chewetes on Flesshe Day' was made with pork and egg yolks. The other version was called 'Chewetes on Fyssh Day,' and it was made with four different kinds of fish – turbot, haddock, cod and hake.

Now the people of England had easy access to fish. Britain is an island after all. But there was one fish that tended to dominate and that was the herring. I mentioned way back in Episode 108 that England was a major exporter of herring. They were abundant off the east coast of the country, and they were shipped all over Europe. They were also eaten throughout England, especially on fish days. They were a cheap source of protein, and they were a staple of the peasant diet. [SOURCE: 'England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings: 1075-1225,' Robert Bartlett, p. 366.] But since they were caught by the thousands, they had to be preserved as soon as they were caught, or they would go bad very quickly. They were usually soaked in a salt brine, dried and smoked. This process not only preserved the herring, it also changed the color of the fish from a silvery color to a reddish copper color. [SOURCE: 'A Cultural History of Food in the Medieval Age,' Montanari, p. 51] And that's how we got the term 'red herring.'

Originally, a 'red herring' was literally a 'red herring' – a preserved herring which was commonly found in England in the Middle Ages. Another term for a 'red herring' or a preserved herring was a ***kipper***. Both ***herring*** and ***kipper*** are Old English words. The etymology of ***kipper*** beyond that is not known for certain, but one theory is that ***kipper*** is related to the word ***copper*** because of the copper color of the kipper or preserved fish.

At any rate, the kipper or 'red herring' had a distinct aroma, and it could attract animals. It could also be used to train hunting dogs. By dragging a herring along a path, the dog could be trained to follow the scent. But it could also provide a distraction and lead the dog in the wrong direction. And that was apparently the origin of the modern term 'red herring' to mean a distraction or deception. If we refer to something as a 'red herring' today, we usually mean that it's a misleading clue or something that diverts attention from the real problem. And that figurative sense of the term appeared in the 1800s.

While herrings were common among the peasants, the upper classes tended to eat other fish. [SOURCE: 'Food in Medieval Times,' Adamson, p. 40] As I noted earlier, The Forme of Cury mentions fish like turbot, haddock, cod and hake. It also mentions pike, and several fish with French names like mackerel, plaice, loach, and salmon. ***Salmon*** replaced the native English word for the fish which was ***læx***. It came from the same Germanic root as the Yiddish word ***lox*** as in bagels and lox.

One particular recipe in The Form of Cury called 'Mortrews of Fyssh' (Mortress of Fish) was a type of soup or porridge made with a mixture of cod, haddock and hake. The recipe begins by directing the cook to "seeþ it wel in water" – 'seethe or boil it well in water' – and "pyke out þe bones" – 'pick out the bones.' And that raises another issue. If you eat a lot of fish, it means that you are constantly picking out the bones. And that led to a couple of other common expressions in English. If you have 'a bone to pick' with someone, it means you have a problem or issue with

that person. It comes from the fact that picking bones out of fish is a problem that has to be resolved before you can eat it.

Sometimes you might have the good fortune of eating or cooking a fish with very few bones. In that case, you might say that you 'found no bones in it.' That phrase appeared in the mid-1400s. And over time, it came to refer an easy situation. So today, if I say that someone 'made no bones about it,' it means that they didn't raise an objection or create a problem.

Now the recipe I just mentioned – 'Mortrews of Fyssh' (Mortress of Fish) – said to pick out the bones, and then "grynde smale the Fysshe" – 'grind small the fish" – before adding the fish to the broth and simmering it with various seasonings. Here the recipe uses the word ***grind***, but in other recipes, it uses the word ***mince***, and The Forme of Cury is one of the first English documents to use the French word ***mince***. ***Mince*** meant to chop finely or make small and comes from the same root as ***minute*** and ***minimum***.

A lot of the recipes in The Forme of Cury involve chopping, or mincing or grinding various ingredients and adding them to a broth or using them to create a sauce. As I noted earlier, the word ***sauce*** is related to the word ***salt*** because it was originally a broth that was well-salted and had a salty flavor. The Forme of Cury used the word ***sauce***, and it also introduced another very similar word – the word ***gravy***. The cookbook contains the first recorded use of the word ***gravy*** in the English language.

The word ***gravy*** was borrowed from French, and is apparently derived from the word ***grain***. In the same way that salt was a key ingredient in early sauces, grains of spices were a key ingredient in early gravies. And that is apparently the connection between ***grain*** and ***gravy***. In The Forme of Cury, the gravies were usually made with almond milk and seasoned with sugar and ginger. So it was sort of a sweet milk sauce. It wasn't until the 1500s that the meaning of ***gravy*** shifted to its modern sense as sauce formed from the juices of the meat being cooked.

Now I said that the word ***gravy*** was 'apparently' derived from the word ***grain*** because the link is somewhat obscured by common scriveners error. French had the word as ***grané*** which was very similar to the word ***grain***. ***Grané*** meant a sauce or stew. So it had an 'n' sound instead of a 'v' sound. But in The Forme of Cury and later English manuscripts, it appeared as ***gravy*** with a V instead of ***grané*** with an N. Now, this appears to be a misspelling by the cooks who wrote down the recipes in the original manuscripts. And then later cooks adopted this same spelling and the pronunciation that went with it.

But why would they have confused an N with a V? Well, I've actually addressed this issue before in an earlier episode of the podcast. Those letters were often confused in medieval manuscripts. Remember that the printing press didn't exist yet, so manuscripts were handwritten in a flowing cursive style where one letter flowed into the next letter. And letters that had a series of vertical strokes were easily confused with each other. The letters I, L, M, N, U and V all tended to resemble each other because they were made up a vertical strokes linked at the bottom. So a word like ***minimum*** was just a series of up and down strokes when it was written in this style. That is part of the reason why words like ***honey*** and ***monk*** got their modern O's. They

were originally spelled with U's, but the U before the N in those words created so much confusion that scribes decided to drop the U and replace it with an O. And keep in mind that the letters U and V were not distinct yet. The letter was always written as a curvy U even though it represented different sounds. So again, it was easy to confuse an N with a U or V in this writing style, and that may explain why English cooks misread ***grané*** as ***gravé*** – which became ***gravy***. And if that is in fact what happened, then we can see the connection between ***grain*** and ***gravy***.

So again, ***gravy*** is apparently derived from grains of spice in the same way that ***sauce*** is derived from the Latin version of salt. And earlier, we saw that the Latin version of salt also gave us the words ***sausage*** and ***saucer***. Well, there's also another common food term from the same Latin word for salt, and that's the word ***salad***. A salad was a dish of mixed vegetables and herbs that was served raw. But to give it some flavor, it was seasoned with salt, so it became known as 'herba salata' in Latin, which literally meant 'vegetables salted.' And over time, that Latin name 'herba salata' was shortened to just ***salat*** – or ***salad*** in English. So ***salad*** actually comes from the Latin word for salt and is cognate with ***salt***, ***sausage*** and ***sauce***.

Now in the 1300s, salads were eaten around the Mediterranean where they were often flavored with a sauce or dressing made from olive oil and vinegar. But salads weren't really common in northern Europe at the time. Peasants might eat raw vegetables, but it wasn't prepared like a salad with olive oil and vinegar. In fact, olive oil had to be imported from the Mediterranean, so it was really expensive. (SOURCE: 'Food in Medieval Times,' Adamson, p. 98) And yet, this early English cookbook – the Forme of Cury – has a recipe for salad, and it's made with oil and vinegar just like in Italy. And in fact, that recipe is the first recorded use of the word ***salad*** in the English language.

This recipe points to something very interesting about The Forme of Cury. While it is dominated by recipes that were probably common in England and France, there are also a handful of recipes that appear to be derived from the Mediterranean, and several specifically from Italy. And at first glance, those recipes seem a little out of place for the British Isles in the 1300s.

In addition to a Mediterranean-inspired salad with oil and vinegar, the book also contains a recipe for 'loseyns' which is actually lasagna. It directs the cook to make a paste from flour and then roll it into thin sheets of pasta like paper. The pasta was to be cooked in water and then arranged in layers with cheese and spices in between. Now Europeans hadn't discovered the New World yet, so there were no tomatoes, and therefore no tomato sauce, but this recipe does describe an early form of lasagna.

In the same collection, there is also a recipe for an early version of macaroni and cheese. It directs the cook to take a think piece of dough, cut it into pieces, boil the pieces in water, and then finish by adding grated cheese and butter. The dish is called either 'Macrows' or 'Makerouns' in the various surviving copies of the cookbook. And that recipe name is the first recorded use of the words ***macaroon*** and ***macaron*** and ***macaroni*** in the English language. Now, you're probably saying, "Wait! Those are different things." Well, they are today. Today, a ***macaroon*** or ***macaron*** is a little sweet cookie or biscuit, and ***macaroni*** is a type of pasta. But originally, the Italian word ***macarone*** simply meant a paste made with flour and egg whites. The

paste could be made with or without sugar. The sweetened dough eventually produced a sweet cookie or biscuit, and the unsweetened dough eventually produced a type of pasta which was later made into small tube shapes. Now that's a vastly oversimplified version of a complicated and obscure history, but it is generally agreed that the sweet treat and the pasta dish stem from the same origin. So if that's how the foods became distinct, what about the names? Well, ***macaroon*** and ***macaroni*** are ultimately derived from the singular and plural versions of the same word. So you have one macaroon when you have a cookie or biscuit, but you have lots of macaroni in a dish of pasta.

And again, we get the first taste of macaroni in The Forme of Cury. So this ancient cookbook includes recipes for macaroni and lasagna, but that's not it. Some of the surviving versions of the manuscript also contain a recipe for ravioli. Again, it's an Italian pasta dish that pops up in an English cookbook in the late 1300s. And here's something else that's interesting. I noted earlier in the episode that there was an even earlier cookbook composed in England about a century earlier in the late 1200s, but it was composed in Norman French, so it doesn't have much to do with the history of English. But that earlier Norman French cookbook also has essentially the same recipe for ravioli. And the reason why that's so interesting is because that earlier recipe is the first recorded reference to ravioli anywhere in the world – even in Italy.

Now pasta was just starting to become firmly established in Italy around that time in the late 1200s. I should note that there are references to pasta dishes all the way back in the Roman period, but the art of pasta-making largely disappeared in Italy for several centuries after the Roman Empire fell. However, it started to make a comeback in the 1100s, perhaps due to Arab influence since pasta was still being eaten in the Arab world. But at any rate, we don't get regular references to pasta and pasta dishes in Italy until the 1300s. So to find a recipe for ravioli in England in the late 1200s is very interesting.

Maybe it came back to England with the Crusaders. Maybe it had to do with the fact that a separate group of Normans conquered and ruled Sicily in the twelfth century. Maybe it came to England with a chef who had spent some time in Italy and was familiar with the dish. It's impossible to say in retrospect, but we can assume from the presence of these recipes that the English nobles were some of the first people in northern Europe to enjoy some of the most popular pasta dishes from Italy.

So I'm going to conclude on that note. Next time, we'll continue to look at medieval cooking, but we'll focus on what happened after the meals were cooked. In other words, we'll look at mealtime – the way people actually ate in the Middle Ages. We'll explore the words we use for meal times, and eating utensils, and the various social rules that accompanied the meal. And that will complete our look at medieval food and the way it impacted the English language.

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

EPISODE 133: BREAKING BREAD WITH COMPANIONS

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 133: Breaking Bread with Companions. In this episode, we're going to continue our look at food in the Middle Ages, and the way that food-related terms shaped the English language. Whereas last time, we looked at terms associated with the preparation of food, this time we're going to look at what happened when that meal was actually served. So we'll focus on meal time – and the way people actually ate. We'll also examine the very important role of bread in the Middle Ages – both in the way it was consumed and the words it contributed to the English language. As you can tell, this is definitely not a low-carb episode. So pull up a chair and sit down – and enjoy this feast of mealtime etymology.

Before we begin though, 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're a twitter user, I'm on twitter at englishhistpod.

Now last time, we looked at the oldest surviving cookbook composed in English. The book is called the Forme of Cury, and it was compiled by the cooks working in the kitchen of the English king Richard II. That discussion gave us the opportunity to look at a variety of common ingredients used in medieval cooking. But in some respects, it is just as interesting to consider the ingredients that were not available at the time. I mentioned in the episode that cooks didn't have access to tomatoes because tomatoes were native to Central and South America, and Europeans hadn't discovered the New World yet. For the same reasons, European cooks didn't have access to potatoes either. They also didn't have yellow corn – what the native Americans called maize. And they didn't have chilies or red, green or yellow peppers. They also didn't have the cocoa bean yet, so no chocolate. *[SOURCE: The Art of Cookery, Scully, p.69*] They did have access to carrots, but the carrots at that time were a wild purple variety that were virtually inedible. The modern orange carrot didn't exist yet. [*SOURCE: the Time Travelers Guide to Medieval England, Ian Mortimer, p. 168*] So the medieval diet was a lot more limited because people simply didn't have access to many of the ingredients that are common today.

As we saw last time, the diet was also limited because the large number of peasants didn't have regular access to meat like beef, mutton and venison. They did have access to pork and chicken, but they still didn't eat those foods on a daily basis. In fact, the average peasant diet relied heavily on grains and vegetables. Grains were used to make beer and ale, and they were used in soups and porridges, but they were mainly used to make bread. And bread was really a staple of the English diet for centuries. It was relatively easy to make, and it could be made and eaten throughout the year, even when other foods were not available. And as we'll see in this episode, people didn't just eat bread, they ate with bread using it as a utensil. And they ate on bread using it as a kind of plate. Bread was all over the dining table, and our language still reflects the importance of bread in the Middle Ages.

I noted in earlier episodes that the words ***lord*** and ***lady*** are derived from a word for bread. The Old English word for bread was ***hlaf***, which became the word ***loaf***. And the male head of the household was sometimes known as the 'loaf guardian' or 'loaf warden.' In Old English, that term was ***hlaf-weard***, which was contracted to ***hlaford***, and then became the word ***lord*** meaning the master of the estate. ***Lady*** has a similar construction. It was originally the 'loaf maiden' – the ***hlaf-dige*** – which was contracted over time to ***lady***. And these are just small examples of how words related to bread permeate the English language.

In fact, there is even a connection between bread and our very basic word ***food***. The English word ***food*** and the Latin word for bread both come from the same Indo-European root word. That original root word was ****pa*** which meant 'to feed or protect.' Under the series of sound changes known as Grimm's Law, the Indo-European 'p' sound became an 'f' sound in the Germanic languages. So the word *****pa*** eventually evolved into the English word ***food***. But within Latin, the word *****pa*** evolved into ***panis*** meaning 'bread.' From there, the word passed into the various Romance languages. So the Spanish word ***pan*** and the French word ***pain*** both mean bread, and both words are therefore distant cousins of the English word ***food***. And that connection helps to illustrate how fundamental bread was as a basic food source for much of European history.

And you might remember from an earlier episode that a person with whom you shared your bread was a ***companion*** – combining the Latin prefix ***com-*** meaning 'with' and that word ***panis*** meaning 'bread.' So the word ***companion*** literally meant 'with bread,' or more specifically, 'the person with whom you shared bread.' Several companions together were a ***company*** using the same construction. So if you work for a company that uses the word ***company*** in its name, that word literally means 'the people who share bread with each other.' And if that company pays you a good salary, I guess that makes you a 'bread winner.'

And if you get together with some friends or companions and have meal together, we might say that you are 'breaking bread' together – another bread-related term, and a term that appeared for the first time around the current point in our overall story in the late 1300s.

So 'to break bread' is to have a meal, which you might do with your companions or 'bread sharers.' And in the Middle Ages, you might have shared that meal with the 'loaf guardian' or ***lord*** or with the 'loaf maiden' or ***lady***.

So I hope you can start to see a theme emerging here. Traditionally, bread was a major part of every meal, and food terms related to bread permeate the English language.

Of course, bread was made from grains, specifically from grains that had been crushed or ground into meal or flour. The people of England had access to a variety of grains that could be used like barley, rye, oats and millet, but the grain that produced the best bread was wheat. It could be ground into a fine white flour. In fact, the words ***wheat*** and ***white*** are cognate. Both are Old English words, and ***wheat*** ultimately means the white grain – or the grain that produces white flour.

Since wheat was so highly regarded, it was in high demand, and therefore it tended to be the most expensive grain. So peasants tended to rely on a lower quality bread made from those other grains. [PLEASURES AND PASTIMES IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND, Compton Reeves, p. 148+]

Whichever grain was used, it had to be crushed into a powder before it could be made into dough and then baked as bread. That grain powder was traditionally called ***meal*** in Old English. But in the 1300s, English borrowed the word ***flour*** from French. ***Flour*** tended to refer to the finest or best type of meal. So today, ***flour*** generally refers to ground wheat, whereas ***meal*** refers to other grains like cornmeal or oatmeal.

Of course, to grind those grains they had to be taken to the ***mill***, which is based on the same root as ***meal*** meaning crushed grains. The process of crushing and grinding and pulverizing those grains ultimately produced the modern phrase 'through the mill' meaning a difficult experience. If your boss puts you 'through the mill,' you've had a tough day. That phrase first appeared in the 1800s, but it is related to this basic process of turning grain into flour, which was then used to make bread.

So as you might imagine, mills were very busy places in the Middle Ages. Sometimes, people would line up to have their grains processed. And this actually appears to be the context for the first recorded version of the phrase 'first come, first served.' In the Canterbury Tales, Geoffrey Chaucer used the phrase "Whoso first cometh to the mill, first grint." It meant, 'Whoever comes to the mill first, grinds first.' It became a common phrase over the course of the following centuries, and Chaucer's use of the phrase is the first recorded use in the English language. Many scholars think this sense was later extended to the much more generic phrase 'first come, first served.'

So at the mill, grain was turned into flour or meal. And you may be wondering if the 'meal' made from grains is the same word that we use for the food that we eat – as in 'mealtime.' Well, no. Despite the temptation to assume that they are related, they actually come from different roots. But meal was made into bread, and bread was an important part of every meal.

Of course, the grinding of the grains into flour or meal was only the first step in making bread. The flour then had to be made into dough and baked. It could be baked in an ***oven***, which is actually an Old English word. The modern pronunciation is pretty close to the original pronunciation. Old English also had the word ***kiln*** to describe a place where things were baked or dried. That word still exists, but over time, it has become mostly restricted to the types of ovens used in pottery or ceramics or brick-making. But Anglo-Saxon kilns were also used for baking bread.

In the 1200s, English also borrowed the word ***furnace*** from French and Latin, and that became another common word for an oven or fireplace where bread was baked. And in the 1600s, English borrowed yet another Latin term for a fireplace or oven. That was the word ***focus*** – F-O-C-U-S.

Today, you might focus or concentrate on something, or you might lose focus. We don't really associate the word ***focus*** with fireplaces anymore, but that's actually what the word originally meant. The fireplace or focus was often the center of activity in the room. In the colder months, it provided heat, and people would gather around it for warmth. And throughout the year, the fire was used to heat or cook food. So there was often a steady steam of people going back and forth to the fire. Again, it tended to be the center of activity. We might say that it was the 'focal point' of the room. And that's how the word ***focus*** evolved from its original sense as a fireplace or hearth to a more general sense as a center of activity or attention.

Well, cooks also used the hearth or focus to bake bread. They could put the bread in the ashes or over the ashes to bake the dough. And that little bit of etymology helps to explain the name of a popular type of Italian bread called focaccia bread. ***Focaccia*** is just an Italian variant of the word ***focus*** meaning a fireplace. And it specifically referred to a type of bread baked the ashes in the hearth or fireplace.

Now in medieval England, many peasants didn't have the luxury of a nice oven or furnace to bake their breads. They had to take their raw dough to the local baker, and the baker would bake the bread for them. So bakers were not just retailers selling their own bread. They were also the actual bakers for many of the people who lived in the town or village.

So bakers and millers had a lot of things in common. They both played an essential role in converting grains into bread. The miller would grind the grain into flour, and the baker would bake the dough into bread. Each was usually paid by keeping a portion of the product for themselves. And millers and bakers had one other thing in common. They both had reputation for cheating their customers.

I've talked about the bad reputation that millers had over the prior few episodes, but the reputation of bakers wasn't much better. They often sold loaves of bread that were much lighter and smaller than they were supposed to be. You might remember from an earlier episode that this was such a problem that Henry III has issued a law back in the mid-1200s called the Assize of Bread and Ale. The law fixed the weight of the loaves that were sold by bakers. If the loaves weighed less than the required amount, the baker could be fined or flogged or imprisoned. So bakers started to add a little extra bread to each order to make sure that they didn't violate the law. If someone bought several loaves, the baker would often throw in an extra loaf just in case the loaves were a little underweight. And that led to the term 'baker's dozen' meaning a dozen plus one.

Whether a family baked their own bread or they took it to the local baker, either way the bread ended up at the dinner table – or the supper table – or the lunch table. And that raises another issue. What did people call those various meals that were eaten throughout the day?

Now at first glance, that may seem like a simple question. But it's not. In fact, even today, English speakers don't agree on those names. Some people eat 'lunch' in the middle of the day and 'dinner' in the evening. Others eat 'dinner' in the middle of the day, and 'supper' in the

evening. And some English speakers eat 'lunch' at mid-day and 'supper' in the evening, reserving the word ***dinner*** for a formal meal eaten on special occasions.

These terms tend to vary by region. For example, in the United States, the word ***supper*** is most common in parts of the upper Midwest, but it's also found in pockets throughout the country, especially in rural areas. So why is the midday meal called ***lunch*** in some places and ***dinner*** in other places? And why is the evening meal called ***dinner*** by some people and ***supper*** by others? Well, as you might have guessed, it has to do with the history of the language and the history of mealtime. And it also has a connection to bread. So let me explain.

In order to make sense out of these terms, we really need to go back to the Anglo-Saxon period. During that early period, people would often eat three meals a day, but they weren't at the same times that most people eat today. The Anglo-Saxons would get the day started with a very light meal or snack which was called the ***morgenmete*** – literally the 'morning meat,' but it meant the 'morning meal.' You might remember from an earlier episode that the word ***meat*** originally meant a meal – even a meal where no meat was served.

The next major meal of the day was tied to the set of Church prayers called the ***nones***. Now I've also talked about this word before. You might remember that the Church has a series of prayers that were conducted at certain times throughout the day, and medieval society was loosely structured around the timing of those prayers. The nones prayers were held at the ninth hour of the day, and in fact, the Latin word ***nones*** and the English word ***nine*** are cognate. The word ***nones*** literally meant the ninth hour of sunlight which was in the middle of the afternoon – around 3 o'clock p.m. today. The word ***nones*** is also the original version of our modern word ***noon***, but remember that the word didn't mean mid-day or 12 o'clock like today. It was actually later in the afternoon.

The nones prayers were very important because it was the time of the day when monks tended take a break from their work. And it was also the time when they tended to eat their primary meal of the day. And this same idea extended throughout the rest of Anglo-Saxon society. So this mid-afternoon meal was the major meal of the day, and it was called the ***nonmete*** – literally the 'noon meat' or the 'noon meal.' But again, ***noon*** meant the middle of the afternoon. Then the Anglo-Saxons would have a third meal late in the day. It tended to be a very light meal or snack, and it was called the ***æfenmete*** – literally the 'evening meat' or 'evening meal.' So that was the typical Anglo-Saxon routine.

But then, you might remember that the nones prayers were moved up a few hours in the 1100s and 1200s. And that's how the word ***noon*** came to mean midday or 12 o'clock. It was because the nones prayers were moved up to around that time. And when those prayers were moved up, the main meal eaten at the time was also moved up. So the primary meal of the day moved up from mid-afternoon to mid-day in the 1100s and 1200s during the early Norman period in England. [SOURCE: Fast and Feast, Henisch, p. 20-21]

Now that move was important to the daily routine because it meant that people were eating their primary meal much earlier in the day. So it became common for people to wait until that meal before eating anything. So the early morning meal largely disappeared and was actually frowned upon by society. To eat a meal early in the morning was considered to be indulgent or gluttonous. Unless you were sick or elderly, you tended to wait until the noon meal, which was now literally the noon meal held around midday. So in the language of the day, there was a morning fast until the noon meal.

Now around the same time that the major meal of the day was moved up to the middle of the day, English speakers adopted the French words ***dine*** and ***dinner***. ***Dine*** meant to eat the primary meal of the day – a meal that typically had several courses. And ***dinner*** was the term for that specific meal. And both of those words appeared in English for the first time in the late 1200s. So by the 1300s, people 'dined' at 'dinner,' which was that large meal served at noon in the middle of the day. [SOURCE: the Time Travelers Guide to Medieval England, Ian Mortimer, p. 168-9]

Now given that people were eating that primary meal a little earlier in the day, there was a need for another meal later in the day after the work day was done. This later meal took place in the late afternoon or early evening. And this is where the story takes us back to bread because that last meal of the day usually consisted of a soup or broth that was eaten with pieces of bread. The bread was dipped into the broth and eaten. This type of meal was very traditional, and Old English had a word for it. It was called the ***sop*** – S-O-P. It comes from the same root as the word ***sop*** because the bread sopped up the juice in the bowl. It's also related to the word ***sip*** because many people sipped the broth directly from the bowl. French also borrowed a version of that same Germanic word, presumably from the Franks, and in French, it produced the word ***soup*** which was a broth or liquid that was often eaten with bread. And that Germanic root also produced another word in French – the word ***supper***. The ***supper*** was the meal that was eaten at the end of the day, and it usually consisted of sops or soups. And that word ***supper*** first appeared in English in the early 1300s. So the Old English ***sop*** or French ***soup*** was eaten at ***supper*** with bread that ***sopped*** up the juice and liquid that was ***sipped*** from the bowl. That's the connection between those words. And that etymology helps to explain the meaning behind the word ***supper*** and the nature of supper in the Middle Ages. It was a relatively light meal consisting of soup and bread eaten late in the day.

So at the current point in our overall story of English in the late 1300s, people ate little or nothing in the morning, then they ate a large meal called ***dinner*** around midday, and then they ate a light meal called ***supper*** late in the day.

But all of that was starting to change around the current point in our overall story of English. First of all, there was that social prohibition against eating in the morning, but a lot of workers were starting to eat a small snack or meal in the morning – to give them energy until the larger meal around midday. This type of morning snack often consisted of a piece of bread dipped in watered-down wine. [SOURCE: the Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages, Scully, p. 119+.]

This early morning snack didn't have a formal name yet, but in the early 1400s, people began to refer to that snack as a 'break in the morning fast.' So it was literally a little break from the period of not eating in the morning. And by the mid-1400s, the phrase had evolved into a brand-new word for that meal – the '***break-fast***,'or as we know it today – ***breakfast***. So ***breakfast*** is a native word coined in the 1400s.

Now by that point, near the end of the Middle Ages, people were eating that small 'breakfast' in the morning, a large 'dinner' at midday, and a small 'supper' in the evening. But in the 1500s and 1600s, that large midday meal called ***dinner*** started to move around again. During that period, people started to eat it later and later in the day, and over time, it gradually moved to the end of the work day. It isn't entirely clear why that happened. It may have had to do with the fact that the daily routine was no longer tied to the traditional Church prayers. So the noon meal was not as important as it had once been. Another factor may have been the reluctance of workers to eat a large meal in the middle of the day. That tended to interrupt the flow of the day, and it might have been difficult to go back to work after eating such a large meal. It may have been easier to eat a quick smaller meal around midday, and then finish off the day with a large meal at the end.

At any rate, during the early modern period, that primary meal called ***dinner*** was gradually moved to the end of the workday. And that left that smaller meal around midday. In the late 1500s, the midday meal started to be referred to as ***lunch***. The origin of this word isn't entirely clear, but ***lunch*** originally referred to a piece or lump of food. Some of the early references mention a lunch of bacon or a lunch of pork, but the term was usually applied to bread. People would eat a lunch of bread. So one theory is that the word ***lunch*** was derived from the word ***lump***. At any rate, the word ***lunch*** appeared as a new word for this smaller midday meal in the 1500s.

So by the time we reach the 1800s and 1900s, we have this altogether new ordering of the daily meals. A morning 'breakfast,' a midday 'lunch' and an evening 'dinner.' And today, some people continue to use that terminology. But others use that older terminology – a midday 'dinner' and an evening 'supper.' And that's why there is still that variation in Modern English.

So as we can see, mealtimes have changed quite a bit over the centuries – as have the names of the meals. But one thing that has not really changed is the fact that people gather around a dinner table when its time to eat. So let's take a closer look at what usually happened at the dinner table in the Middle Ages.

First of all, let's talk about the dinner table – the actual table. Unlike today, dinner tables were not permanent fixtures in the household. They tended to be temporary structures assembled immediately prior to the meal and taken down as soon as the meal was over. Remember that medieval houses tended to have one large common area, so there wasn't a designated dining room. And even in large manor houses, the meal was usually served in a large room that was also used for entertainment. So again, the tables were assembled for the meal and taken down afterwards.

The tables usually consisted of a board or plank that was held up by trestles or braces. So the trestles were brought into the dining area and set up, and then the board was placed across the top. And that helps to explain the words that were used for a table.

The common Old English word for a table was a ***beod***, but around the time of the Norman Conquest, English started using the word ***board*** for a table. Of course, the original sense of the word ***board*** was a plank or a flat piece of wood. That's how it was used in Old English, but since a table was made with a board on trestles, the word ***board*** became synonymous with a table, and it was common in the Middle English period for people to refer to a dining table as a board.

And around the current point in our story in the late 1300s, the sense of the word ***board*** was extended even further to the food that was actually served at the table. That extended sense of the word ***board*** as food is first found in the Canterbury Tales. And that's how we got terms like 'room and board' or a 'boarding house.' So if you are paying for room and board, you are paying for both lodging and meals, and that would make you a ***boarder***. And a place that provides food and lodging would be a 'boarding house.' And a school that provides such things would be a 'boarding school.'

Of course, when people gathered around the table – or board – they didn't just eat. They also carried on conversations with each other. They discussed issues, and sometimes they even solved problems. And that led to the sense of the word ***board*** as a group of people who discuss issues and deal with problems like a Board of Directors, or Board of Governors, or a school board.

So all of those terms are derived from the board or plank that was used to make a table in medieval houses. By the way, the word ***table*** has essentially the same history. ***Table*** is a Latin word, and it also originally meant a board or plank. It was one of those Latin words borrowed very early on by the Germanic tribes back on the continent, so the word is actually found throughout the Germanic languages. Within Old English, it still had the sense of a board or plank, but in early Middle English, the sense was extended to the furniture constructed with the board. So the words ***table*** and ***board*** mirrored each other. They both experienced the same shift in meaning from plank to furniture.

But English didn't really need both words to refer to that piece of furniture. So by the current point in our story in the late 1300s, people were starting to settle on the word ***table***, and the word ***board*** was on its way out in the sense of furniture. However, that older use of the word ***board*** still survives in a few words and phrases. For example, we sometimes call a side table a ***sideboard***. And we have the phrase 'above board' meaning honest. It literally means 'above the table' where everything is out in the open so everyone can see what's going on. But notice what happens when we suggest that someone is acting dishonestly. In that case, we might say that they are doing something 'under the table.' So 'above board' indicates honestly, but 'under the table' indicates dishonestly. Each of those contrasting phrases uses different words for the piece of furniture.

That older sense of the word ***board*** as a table also survives in another word, although it is somewhat disguised by the pronunciation. That is the word ***cupboard***, which is literally the 'cup board' as the spelling indicates. A 'cub board' was a 'cub table' – a small table used to display cups, saucers, and other tableware used during the meal. It was a common piece of furniture in manor houses and large estates where the dining experience was more formal. The 'cup board' was essentially a side table placed against the wall, and it was the place where the pitchers and empty cups were placed during the meal. The server would retrieve the pitcher and cups from the table as needed. Over time, the 'cub board' became more of a display piece where the lord of the manor displayed his finest pieces of tableware, and that led to the modern sense of the word ***cupboard***.

By the way, the word ***cupboard*** appeared for the first time in English around the current point in our overall story in the late 1300s. It was a native English construction combining the words ***cup*** and ***board***. French had a separate term for that type of side table. They called it a ***buffet***. That word was eventually borrowed into English in the modern period where it came to refer to the various food items that were sometimes placed on the side table. People could just go the side table and serve themselves and return to the main table to eat. That gave us the modern sense of the word ***buffet***.

So all of that means that terms like ***room and board***, ***boarder***, ***above board***, ***cupboard***, and ***buffet*** are all derived from words for dinner tables.

Now I've talked about sideboards or side tables that were used in the Middle Ages, but there was one other type of side table that was common in elegant dining rooms. It was the table where food was tested. In many noble households, it was common to have a food taster whose job was to check the food as it came into the dining room from the kitchen. There were actually a couple of fancy names for that job. One term was an ***assayer*** and the other was a ***sewer*** – unrelated to the modern word ***sewer***. Both of those terms were borrowed from French in the late 1300s around the current point in our overall story. The sewer or assayer's job was to taste the food to make sure that it was OK to eat. In a time when it was hard to preserve food, there was always the possibility that the food had spoiled or gone bad. And in some cases, there was a fear or poisoning or sabotage. So the sewer or assayer tasted everything at a separate side table to make sure the food was edible. If he gave his OK, the food went on to the main table. So the taster's blessing and approval instilled confidence that the meal was safe to eat. We might say that it gave the meal ***credence*** using another French loanword from the late 1300s. And in fact, when the word ***credence*** was first borrowed into English, it was often used to refer to this process of tasting food to check its quality. And the word ***credence*** also explains the name given to the side table where the food was tasted. That table was actually called the ***credence*** – or (/cray-DONCE/) in French – and English adopted that sense of the word as well. But in the modern era, English opted for the Italian version of that name – ***credenza***. And the word ***credenza*** came to mean a type of cupboard or sideboard used for storage and display. So ***credence*** and ***credenza*** are really two variations of the same word related to the process of tasting food in the Middle Ages.

By the way, just to be clear about the timing on those words, ***credence*** first appeared in English in the late 1300s around the current point in our overall story, but ***credenza*** wasn't borrowed until the 1800s.

Now I've talked a fair amount about dinner tables and sideboards. And I should also mention that in a manor house or any other formal setting, the dinner table was almost always covered with a tablecloth at mealtime. It was simply called a ***cloth*** in Old English, but French called it a ***nappe***, and that word popped up in a few English documents in the late 1300s and early 1400s.

The word ***nappe*** is much more common in Modern English though a derivative of the word – the word ***napkin***. I mentioned this in an earlier episode, but ***napkin*** literally meant a small cloth – and that word appeared in English for the first time in the late 1300s. And the appearance of that word points to another interesting development in medieval dining, and that development was an emphasis on proper table manners while eating.

In earlier centuries, it had been common for diners to simply wipe their hands or mouth on the table cloth itself. But by the late 1300s, people were expected to keep the table cloth clean by using a separate napkin for cleaning and wiping up messes.

This was one of a long list of rules that applied to diners who were eating in formal settings. To a certain extent, these rules were associated with the rise of chivalry and courtliness over the prior couple of centuries. The knights and nobility were expected to adhere to certain rules of behavior, especially when they were at court. And that included proper behavior at the dining table. Those rules were taught to young aspiring knights and the children of the nobility from an early age. And over time, those rules extended to other parts of the society as well.

We got a glimpse of this development in Sir Gawain and Green Knight. When Gawain joined the dinner guests at the Christmas castle, they were excited to see him because he came from King Arthur's court, and therefore he was expected to display the finest manners at the table. The poet wrote that the guests said to each other, "Now schal we semlych se sleȝteȝ of þeweȝ" – literally 'Now shall we seemly see the slights of thews,' but it meant 'Now shall we see the most refined manners.' ***Thews*** was an old word for manners. So as a member of the royal court, Gawain was expected to display the finest table manners, and that was a sight to behold for the gathered guests.

As I noted, these types of manners were taught to anyone who might be expected to attend a formal dinner or who might be expected to work in a household where such dinners were served. These rules were also written down so they could be studied and learned. Throughout the 1200s and 1300s, etiquette books started to be produced throughout Europe mainly for young people. For the first time since the fall of the Western Roman Empire, table manners were a big deal again. And one the earliest such manuals composed in English appeared in the mid-1400s. It was called "The Boke of Curtasye" – or in Modern English, 'The Book of Courtesy.' (c.1460) It was really an extended poem, and it contained specific guidelines for the proper way to eat at the dinner table.

For example, with respect to the table cloth, the poem instructed the diners not to wipe their hands on the cloth. Here's the passage – first in Modern English, then in the original Middle English.

Let no grease or browning on thy fingers
defoul the cloth set before thee.

Loke no browynge on þy fyngur þore
Defoule þe clothe þe be-fore. (ll. 75-76)

It later adds:

Also eschew without strife
To foul the board cloth with the knife

Also eschewe, with-outen stryfe,
To foule þe borde clothe with þi knyfe (ll. 109-110)

So you weren't supposed to wipe your fingers or your knife on the table cloth. But what about your mouth? Well, the poem covers that too. It says, 'Do not with the board cloth thy teeth wipe' – "Ne with þo borde clothe þi tethe þou wype.' (l.115) So don't wipe your teeth on the table cloth.

Of course, table cloths were only one concern. These manuals covered all aspects of proper dining behavior. For example, the Book of Courtesy instructs diners not to spit at the table (ll. 85-86), or argue with the other dinner guests (l.54) or make faces while others are speaking (l.55). It also offers the age old advice to not speak while your mouth is full. (ll.67-68).

And returning to our theme of bread, the book provides the following instructions:

Let never your cheeks be made too great
With morsels of bread that thou shall eat;
Men will say that you look like an ape;
that bread and flesh in your cheeks do bake.

Let neuer þy cheke be Made to grete
With morselle of brede þat þou shalle ete;
An apys mow men sayne he makes,
Þat brede and flesshe in hys cheke bakes (ll. 57-60)

So don't cram your mouth full of bread and look like an ape. In other words, be on your very best behavior.

Now, sitting down at the table in the late 1300s, you would find a variety of tableware. You would find cups and bowls and pots. You might also find items with brand new French names like ***bottle*** and ***goblet*** – both of those words having appeared for the first time in the late 1300s. You might hear a large cooking vessel referred to as a ***pot***, which was a word used in both Old English and French. In fact, the word ***pot*** is found in various forms throughout the languages of Western Europe, including Germanic, Romance and Celtic languages. Despite its commonality – or perhaps because of it – scholars still aren't entirely sure where the word originated.

Even though Old English had the word ***pot***, the more common Old English word was ***croc***, which became the modern word ***crock***. Of course, today we sometimes combine those two words if you cook in a 'crock pot,' which is a type of slow cooker. An early trade name for that type of ***pot*** was the "Simmer Crock," but in the early 1970s, the manufacturer coined the name "Crock Pot" for the device. But again, the name ***crock*** goes back to this Old English word for a pot.

Of course, pots were often a type of ***pottery*** made by ***potters***, and for the same reason, crocks were a type of ***crockery*** made by ***crockers***. All of those terms were somewhat synonymous at one time. And the occupations of ***potter*** and ***crocker*** both survive as surnames. And one of the most famous Crockers today is a fictional cook – Betty Crocker. Her name is used for a variety of products sold around the world, especially mixes for cakes, pancakes, cupcakes, and other bread products. So as you can see, everything connects back to bread. It's sorta like the Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon game, except instead of bacon we're using bread. All roads lead back to bread.

And speaking of bread and tableware, believe it or not, bread was also used as tableware. It was very common throughout the Middle Ages for people to take a thick slice of hard bread and use it as a plate or bowl. Those bread plates were called ***trenchers***. Again, that was a French loanword from the 1300s, and the word could theoretically refer to any type of plate. But in the late 1300s, it was specifically applied to bread plates.

The use of bread in this way is another illustration of the very important role that bread played in the medieval dining experience. It wasn't just a food. It was a very versatile product. It could also be used as a makeshift napkin if you needed to wipe your fingers or mouth. And it could be as a pot holder if you needed to pick up or move a hot pot. [SOURCE: Fast and Feast, Henisch, p. 160] And as I noted, it could be used as a plate or a bowl.

Of course, bread that was used as trenchers or plates tended to be older bread that was hard, and it was usually cut into very thick slices. Over the course of the meal, the bread would soak up the juices from the food that was placed on it. That would soften the bread and make it edible. Peasants might actually eat the bread as part of the meal, but in upper class dining rooms, the dirty bread plates were usually thrown to the dogs or given away to the poor. [SOURCE: Fast and Feast, Henisch, p. 160]

Remember that English book of table manners called the Book of Courtesy? Well, it contained specific instructions on the proper way to cut a trencher from a loaf of bread. Again, it was composed as a poem, and here is the passage – first in Modern English and then in the original Middle English.

Pare (/pair/) the bread and carve it in two
Dividing the upper crust from the bottom,
Then cut the upper portion into four parts,
And set them together as a whole;
Then cut the lower portion into three parts,
And turn it down, learn this from me.
And lay your trencher before yourself,
And sit upright for any meal.

Pare þy brede and kerue in two,
Tho ouer crust þo nether fro;
In fowre þou kutt þo ouer dole,
Sett hom to-gedur as hit where hole;
Sithen kutt þo nether crust in thre,
And turne hit down, lerne þis at me.
And lay thy trenchour þe be-fore,
And sitt vp-ryzht for any sore. (ll. 35-42)

Now you'll note that that passage begins by requiring the bread to be cut across the middle, thereby separating the top portion from the lower portion. And according to many popular etymologies, that upper portion – known as the 'upper crust' – was considered the more desirable part of the loaf, and it was typically given to the lord of the manor or other leading noble at the dining table. And supposedly, that is the origin of the term 'upper crust' to refer to the upper classes. There are many variations of that etymology, but I should note that a lot of scholars remain unconvinced. It is true that the first recorded use of the phrase 'upper crust' is in exactly that context – the removal of the upper crust from a loaf and the delivery of that crust to the leading noble at the table. That was in the mid-1400s in another book of etiquette similar to the Book of Courtesy. But that was a literal use of the term 'upper crust.' It wasn't used figuratively to refer to the upper classes until the mid-1800s, and even then it was mostly used in American English. So it actually appears to be an Americanism. Again there may be some ultimate connection to the crusts that were served to medieval aristocrats, but that connection is not certain and not universally accepted.

So we've seen that bread was a very versatile food product. It could be eaten. It could be used as a plate. And it could be used as a makeshift napkin or potholder. Well, it could also serve as an eating utensil.

Medieval diners actually had several options when it came to utensils. They had spoons which were used for eating soups and broths. And they had knives which were used for cutting food. But interestingly, they didn't have forks. Forks have a very vague history, but they were not common in medieval dining rooms until the 1400s. Cooks used forks in the kitchens to remove large pieces of meat from a pot, but diners didn't usually eat with a fork at the dining table.

Now going back in time, ancient records make the occasion rare reference to a fork, but they aren't generally found in written descriptions, or household inventories, or among the items mentioned in wills, or even in paintings of people eating at a table. It does appear that table forks were being used in Tuscany in northern Italy in the eleventh century. And one theory holds that forks came into use there as pasta became common around the same time. Presumably, pasta was easier to eat with a fork. [SOURCE: A Cultural History of Food in the Medieval Age, Montanari, p. 162] Again, that's just a theory. All we can really say is that table forks didn't become common among the nobility of England until the 1400s, and they didn't become common among the lower classes until the 1600s and 1700s.

So if people in the late Middle Ages didn't have access to a table fork, how did they eat small morsels of food? Well, they could use their knife, but that was frowned upon at formal dinners. The Book of Courtesy contains the following prohibition: "with mete ne bere þy knyfe to mowthe" (l.113) – literally 'with meat or food do not bear thy knife to thy mouth' – so 'don't eat your food with your knife.' Knives were used for cutting food, not bringing the food to the mouth. So diners had to use something else, and fortunately, most of them had a natural tool which they could use – their fingers.

It was common and fully acceptable to eat with your fingers in the Middle Ages. Once the food was cut, you simply pinched it with your fingers and brought it to your mouth. That's why napkins came into common use – because people got food on their hands while eating. And that also explains why etiquette books at the time but a strong emphasis on clean hands. After all, if everyone was reaching into the pots and plates for the same food, it was important to keep the hands as clean as possible.

Every meal began with the diners washing their hands. And this is further reflected in the Book of Courtesy. That text provides the following instruction. "With hondes vnwasshen take neuer þy mete" (l.343) – literally 'With unwashed hands never take meat (or food).' The book also instructs diners to maintain clean fingernails. (ll.47-8) And it directs them to never pick their nose at the table (ll. 327-328), presumably for the same reason.

So to eat their food, medieval diners used spoons, knives and their fingers, but as I noted earlier, they would also use bread. Among its many uses at the dinner table, bread was also an eating utensil. The diner would cut or pinch off a piece of bread from a loaf, and then he or she would use that piece of bread to sop up the juices in a bowl. That was a very standard way of eating soups and broths, which were a major part of every meal. So in this way, the bread functioned as a type of spoon.

And this is actually how the word ***bread*** acquired its modern sense in the English language. I noted earlier that the main word for bread in Old English was ***loaf***. That was the more general term. The word ***bread*** merely meant one of those pieces that had been cut off from the main loaf. But over time, the meaning of ***bread*** expanded to become the more generic term, and the meaning of ***loaf*** narrowed to the full piece of bread that's baked in the oven.

This process of removing a piece of bread from the loaf and eating it – or eating with it – also explains that phrase 'to break bread' which I mentioned earlier in the episode. That phrase was first used in the late 1300s in the Wycliffe Bible. And it specifically referred to the fact that diners would break off a piece of bread from the loaf and eat it – or eat with it. So 'to break bread' with someone was to literally break a loaf of bread into smaller pieces. Of course, it became a figurative term for having a meal with that person.

Since the loaf was shared with the other people at the table, there were specific rules of etiquette that applied to the breaking of the loaf – and the eating of the bread. For example, the Book of Courtesy instructs diners to break off what they need with their hands, but not to take a direct bite out of the loaf and return it to the table. Here's the passage – first in Modern English, then in the original Middle English:

Don't bite from your bread and lay it back down.
That is not a courtesy to use in a town or a civilized place;
But break off as much as you will eat,
The remnants or leftover portion you should give to the poor.

Byt not on thy brede and lay hit doun,
That is no curteyse to vse in town;
But breke as myche as þou wylle ete,
The remelant to pore þou shalle lete. (ll. 49-52)

The book also discourages double-dipping with the bread. So don't sop your bread in juices, eat from it, and then put it back in the dish to sop up more juice. Just finish that first piece of bread, and when you're done with it, get another piece. Here's the passage:

In the dish if thou wet thy bread,
make sure that thou not be led
to cast it again the dish into
thou art unrefined if thou so do.

In þi dysche yf þou wete þy brede,
Loke þer-of þat nozt be lede
To cast agayne þy dysche in-to;
Þou art vn-hynde yf þou do so. (ll. 77-80)

So as we've seen, medieval diners didn't just eat bread . They also ate with bread. It was both a food in itself, and a tool to use when eating other foods. And this use of bread as an eating utensil also helps to explain two common meanings of the word ***toast***. Now ***toast*** is a French word, and it first appeared in English around the current point in our story in the late 1300s. And when it first appeared in English, it had the modern sense of exposing a piece of bread to heat, thereby making it slightly brown and crunchy. So you might eat a piece of crunchy toast. But you might also make a 'toast' to someone during a meal by having a drink in their honor. So what does the toast that you eat have to do with the drink that you consume in someone's honor?

Well, the answer has to do with the fact that people often dipped bread in wine or ale and then ate it. This was an era when there was a lot of poor quality wine and ale, and a lot of people thought that dipping bread into it actually drew out the bad flavors, so bread made the wine or ale taste better. Again, that was probably just one of those things that people said, and a lot of people believed it, even if it didn't really work. But it fostered this notion that toast or bread actually improved the flavor of those beverages. They tasted better with bread. And in the 1600s, it became common for people to have a drink in honor of the lady of the house or the most prominent lady attending the dinner. It was said that having that drink in her honor would also improve the flavor of the wine or ale that was being served. So in that way, she was just like the toast that was dipped into the drink. They both made the drink taste better. And that connection between bread and honorary drinks led to the modern sense of the word ***toast*** as the act of having a drink in someone's honor. But it all began with pieces of bread that were broken off and dipped into wine or ale.

The fact that medieval diners often broke off a piece of bread for various purposes also accounts for another common word in English – the word ***bribe***. ***Bribe*** is a French word that appeared for the first time in English in the Canterbury Tales. So it was another brand new word in English around the current point in our overall story in the late 1300s. And this might come as a bit of a surprise to you, but the word ***bribe*** originally meant a piece of bread. It could also mean a piece of some other type of food, but it was usually used in reference to bread. So how did a bribe go from a piece of bread to an illegal payment? Well, in France, small pieces of bread were often given to beggars to satisfy them and to get them to go away, and that appears to be how the word came to be associated with a financial transaction – the giving of something of value in exchange for something else. At the time English borrowed the word in the late 1300s, it had already acquired the sense as something extorted or stolen. And from there, the word ***bribe*** came to refer to an illegal payment made to someone to get that person to do something or not to do something. But the word began as a term for a piece of bread given to or extorted by beggars.

Now some foods were actually served with pieces of bread that had been cut into strips ahead of time. Again, these bread fingers were used as utensils by dipping them into a soup or broth and then eating them. That was also the way that custard was sometimes served. Custard was made with beaten eggs and milk or cream that were mixed together. It was often sweetened, and served in a bowl to be eaten with bread fingers. The custard could also be placed in a pie shell and baked. In fact, that was more of the original sense of the word ***custard*** when it first appeared in English. It first appeared as the French word ***crustade*** in that early English cookbook – the Forme of Cury.

A little pie made with custard was sometimes called a ***tart*** using another French word that entered English around the current point in our overall story. Originally custards and tarts could be made with meat, as well as fruit. But over time, the terms became associated with sweet treats. And I mention that because it points to the way that people were starting to conclude a formal meal – with a sweet treat at the end. It was commonly believed in the Middle Ages that the best way to aid the digestion of a large meal was to end it with a bit of sugar and spice. That was the origin of what we know today as ***dessert***, even though the word ***dessert*** wasn't borrowed from French until the 1600s. At this earlier point, it was just the final course of the meal.

The mixture of sugar and spice sometimes took the form of a spiced wine sweetened with sugar or honey. It was called ***hippocras*** – a term that was first recorded in the Canterbury Tales. Other options included fruit served in sugar or honey, or a tart made with fruit or custard. [SOURCE: The Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages, Terence Scully, p. 135-6]

There was also a French dish called ***pain perdu***. That was a type of French toast that literally meant 'lost bread.' The bread was sliced and then dipped in a beaten egg and fried in butter. It was usually served with a sprinkle of sugar on top. Many cooks probably served it because it was a good way use up old or stale bread. The firmness of old bread was actually ideal for that type of dish. That fancy French name ***pain perdu*** has largely disappeared from English, and today, we would probably just call it 'French toast.'

Another item that might be served at the end of the meal was a wafer. This wasn't bread in the traditional sense of a baked loaf. It was actually made from a thin batter comprised of flour, eggs, cream and sugar. So unlike a thick custard, this was a thin batter that was placed in a special wafer-iron consisting of two thin plates that held the batter in place while it was cooking. It produced a relatively thin cracker or biscuit, often with a criss-cross pattern on it. The word ***wafer*** appeared for the first time in Piers Plowman in the late 1300s. It was borrowed from French, but it has Germanic roots. In fact, ***wafer*** is derived from the same Germanic root that produced the Dutch word ***waffle***.

Now these candied fruits and tarts and custards and wafers point to an increased interest in sweet foods in the late Middle Ages. In prior centuries, northern Europeans had limited access to sweeteners. They generally used honey because access to sugar was limited. Sugar had to be imported from the Near East and South Asia. That meant that it was expensive. And that was still the situation at the current point in our overall story in the late 1300s. Upper class kitchens might have access to sugar, but lower class cooks didn't tend to use it very much at all. But within a few decades – by the middle of the 1400s – all of that had started to change. Sugar started to be grown in parts of Spain and Portugal, and that increased the supply that was available to Europeans. That also meant that the price of sugar went down. So recipes that had previously called for honey now recommended the use of sugar.

That new supply of sugar satisfied the sweet tooth of many northern Europeans, and in fact, the term 'sweet tooth' appeared in the English language around this same time. If you had a 'sweet tooth,' it meant that you had a desire for sweet foods. The term was recorded for the first time in the writings of Chaucer's close friend and colleague John Gower. And it confirms that many people in the late 1300s did in fact have a sweet tooth, and sugar increasingly satisfied that craving.

Sugar also changed the nature of breads because the increased availability of sugar meant that it could be added to bread dough. And that meant that sweetened breads and pastries became more and more common over the next few centuries. This development also helps to shed some light on the complicated and inconsistent meanings of words like ***cake***, ***cookie***, ***cracker*** and ***biscuit***.

These words have a variety of meanings, depending on the particular food item you're talking about and depending on which side of the Atlantic you happen to be standing on. So let me conclude this episode by trying to explain how those terms developed and evolved.

Again, up until the current point in our story in the late 1300s, most bread products were unsweetened. The word ***bread*** was used in the sense of a loaf of bread which was unsweetened and also leavened so that it rose while it baked. English also had the word ***cake*** which had been borrowed from the Vikings. The word ***cake*** referred to a specific type of bread. It was unsweetened like regular bread, and it was also leavened like regular bread. It just happened to be smaller and flatter that regular bread, and it tended to be round. A ***cake*** was also turned over while it was cooking, so it was baked on both sides and was therefore harder than a regular loaf of bread. But again, there wasn't really all that much difference between bread and cake.

English also had the word ***biscuit*** which was different from the other breads in that it was unleavened. So it didn't really rise or expand while it was baking. It was therefore a dense and hard piece of bread. And again, just like the other breads, it wasn't usually sweetened at this point either.

Now the word ***biscuit*** was borrowed from Latin and French in the early 1300s, and if we look a little closer at that word, we can start to understand how biscuits came about in the first place. The word actually has its origin in ancient Rome. The Romans needed a way to preserve bread for long periods of time – especially on long journeys. Bread would become moldy and stale after a few days, but Roman bakers realized that if you took bread and put it back into the oven for a while, it would dry out. It would become hard and crunchy, but it would also last for a very long time without going bad. Since this type of bread was essentially baked twice, that's what the Romans called it. They combined the Latin word ***bi*** meaning 'two' with the word ***coctus*** meaning 'cooked' from the same root as the word ***cook***. So this type of bread was described as ***bicoctus*** – literally twice-cooked or twice-baked. And ***bicoctus*** later evolved into the French word ***biscuit***. It also evolved into the Italian word ***biscotto***. And if you're familiar with Italian ***biscotti*** bread, you can get a sense of what the original biscuits looked like. ***Biscuit*** and ***biscotti*** are two variations of that same Latin root word meaning 'twice-baked.'

By the time the word ***biscuit*** was being used in English in the late 1300s, it still referred to a crisp dry type of bread, but it was usually a thin hard wafer that wasn't leavened. So it didn't rise when it was baked.

So again, English speakers had loaves of 'bread' and smaller and harder 'cakes,' both of which were leavened. And they had thin and crispy 'biscuits,' which weren't leavened. And all of those bread items were usually served without sweeteners. But in the 1400s and 1500s, bakers started to added sugar to cakes and biscuits. So cakes started to become sweeter than regular loaves of bread, and that was a distinction that grew greater over time. Meanwhile biscuits could be either sweetened or unsweetened.

Now within British English, the word ***biscuit*** hasn't changed very much since them. It still refers bread-based products that are thin and crispy, and they can either be sweetened or unsweetened. But that's not what the word typically means in American English. In North America, we would tend to call those items either crackers or cookies. The word ***biscuit*** refers to something quite different here. So what happened within American English to cause those changes? Well, believe it or not, the short answer is Dutch – specifically, the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam which later became the colony of New York.

After the British took over, Dutch continued to be spoken alongside English for a while. And Dutch had coined a term for a small cake. That word was ***koekje*** – the original version of our modern word ***cookie***. Again, it literally meant a 'small cake' in Dutch, and it was derived from the same Germanic root as the Norse word ***cake***. In North America, that word ***koekje*** was a very broad term. It was used to refer to both small leavened cakes and thin crunchy wafers. So the word encompassed what the English called ***biscuits***. And initially, it appears that the Dutch word was preferred over the word ***biscuit***.

But eventually, American colonists wanted to distinguish the small leavened cakes which were softer from the unleavened wafers which were hard and thin and crispy. Since those thin wafers or biscuits cracked when they were broken in half or eaten, they were called ***crackers***. That term was in place by the mid-1700s, and it encompassed much of what had previously been known as biscuits. And the softer leavened cakes continued to be called by the Dutch word ***koekje*** or ***cookie***. And that's why English 'biscuits' are called ***crackers*** and ***cookies*** in much of North America today.

Now when early American English adopted the words ***cookie*** and ***cracker***, it didn't really need the word ***biscuit*** anymore. Again, much of that original meaning was now covered by the word ***cracker***. So that allowed the meaning of the word ***biscuit*** to shift to other types of bread. And in the early 1800s, Noah Webster noted that American biscuits were 'fermented,' which meant that they were leavened, and were therefore softer and fluffier that the traditional British biscuit. [SOURCE: Listening to America, Stuart Berg Flexner, p. 74-5.] And that implies that the word ***biscuit*** was already being used in the modern American sense when Noah Webster was alive. At first, those American biscuits were more commonly known as 'baking-soda biscuits' or simply 'soda biscuits' to distinguish them from the traditional hard biscuits, but there was no reason to maintain that distinction once American English stopped using the word ***biscuit*** in the original sense of the word. So over time, those fluffy 'soda biscuits' just became known as ***biscuits***. And that's how the various meanings of ***biscuit*** became distinct on each side of the Atlantic.

Now before I conclude, I should note that the English dialects of Scotland also had the word ***cookie***, but it had a completely different meaning there. It meant a plain bun, and the word apparently originated there independently of the Dutch word. So the word ***cookie*** in Scotland has an altogether different history and a different meaning.

So with that brief look at early desserts, we've reached the end our meal, and we can conclude our look at mealtime in the Middle Ages.

As we've seen, bread has been a major part of our diet and our language since the time of the Anglo-Saxons. The modern focus on low-carb diets may reduce the overall amount of bread that we eat, but it's not likely to change the number of bread-related terms in the language. The presence of those terms throughout the language points the importance of bread throughout history and the important role that bread played in shaping the English language.

Next time, we'll turn our attention back to our overall historical narrative, and we'll explore the political events that we're taking place as our story enters the 1400s. We'll examine the forced abdication of the king, and the rise of a new political dynasty. We'll also look as the emergence of a standardized form of English known as the Chancery Standard. That was actually the first major step toward a standard form of English – a development that was accelerated with the arrival of the printing press a short time later. So next time, we'll set the stage for some very important developments in the history of the language.

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

EPISODE 134: A LANCASTRIAN STANDARD

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 134: A Lancastrian Standard. In this episode, we're going to take the story of English out of the 1300s into the 1400s. This new century was marked by two very important developments in the English language. The spoken language became more unstable as the Great Vowel Shift got underway, and those shifting vowels combined with the various regional dialects to create a great deal of uncertainty in English pronunciation. But while the spoken language was very fluid, the written language was actually becoming more standardized. That process coincided with the arrival of a new ruling family in England – the House of Lancaster. And it appears that the Lancastrian kings of the early 1400s actually contributed to the standardization of English. They promoted English as the language of the government and the bureaucracy, and their scribes adopted a writing standard for all correspondence which became known as the Chancery Standard. That was the first step in a long process that produced the written language we have today. So this time, we'll look at the rise of the House of Lancaster and the beginnings of standard written English.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can sign up to support the podcast and get bonus episodes and transcripts at Patreon.com/historyofenglish. Also, if you're a twitter user, I'm on twitter at englishhistpod.

Now this time, we're going to transition from the 1300s to the 1400s. Politically, this was a period of turmoil as the main line of Plantagenet kings gave way to a new branch known as the House of Lancaster. This new family dynasty was descended from John of Gaunt – a member of the royal family who we've encountered several times in prior episodes. The Lancastrians had a dubious claim to the throne, and their ascent created a split in the royal family that ultimately led to the Wars of the Roses later in the century.

This period of political turmoil was matched by a period of linguistic turmoil – at least in the way words were pronounced. During the 1400s, the long vowel sounds in English became increasingly unstable. People starting pronouncing those vowel sounds in new ways. And that was the beginning of what became known as the Great Vowel Shift. And it was a process that continued for at least a couple of centuries.

Of course, English also a lot of distinct regional dialects, so the Great Vowel Shift combined with those regional dialects to create a great deal of variation in the way people spoke. But while the spoken language was fluid and variable, the written language was actually moving in the opposite direction. Written English was starting to become standardized for the first time since the Norman Conquest. Government scribes and bureaucrats were starting to weed through all of the various spellings and grammatical features found in English writing, and they were starting select the versions that they wanted to use in government documents. Those decisions narrowed the range of possibilities, and in many cases, the process enshrined one particular version of a word as the standard version going forward.

This new writing standard became known as the Chancery Standard, and many of its features were later adopted by printers when the printing press was introduced. So these early standards influenced the development of Modern English, and we still use some of those Chancery features to this day.

As we move forward with the story of English, I think it's very important to keep these countervailing trends in the back of your mind. The spoken language was headed in one direction, while the written language was headed in the other. The written language was starting to become more standardized and fixed, while the spoken language was still evolving. As a result, the written language became increasingly disconnected from the spoken language. Previously, people wrote the language phonetically based on the way they spoke, and their documents reflected their dialect. Now, they increasingly wrote with a more neutral generic form of English that was uniform throughout the country. So it no longer matched their particular dialect or manner of speech. That meant they had to learn arbitrary rules of spelling and grammar. And that disconnect between spoken English and written English would only increase with time. But it really began here in the early 1400s, and that development can be traced back to certain key decisions and policies promoted by the new ruling family of England – the House of Lancaster.

As I noted, the Lancastrian claim to the throne was somewhat dubious, but the Lancastrians were strong advocates of the English language, and their embrace of English created an environment where the English language could flourish, even to the point of replacing Latin and French as the language of day-to-day government business.

And let me begin this story with a person who took full advantage of that standard form of English as it evolved over the next couple of centuries. Maybe you've heard of him. His name is William Shakespeare. Here's a short clip from one of his history plays called Richard II. This monologue is one of his great patriotic passages. It's a description of England delivered by the character of John of Gaunt – portrayed here by Sir Patrick Stewart:

[CLIP – 'This Sceptered Isle' speech from Richard II]

That's the 'standard English' of William Shakespeare. As I noted, that excerpt is part of a larger monologue which is considered to be one of the great patriotic speeches in the history of England. It features Shakespeare's well-known reference to Britain as 'this sceptered isle.' And it appears in the play Richard II, which is the first of a series of history plays composed by Shakespeare which cover the line of kings from Richard II at the very end of the 1300s to Richard III in the late 1400s. Those plays include a wide range of events, but they are essentially the story of the Rise and Fall of the House of Lancaster.

That monologue is delivered by the character of John of Gaunt. And as I noted earlier, the story really begins with Gaunt because he was the Lancaster for whom the family dynasty was named. He was the Duke of Lancaster, and his descendants were therefore known as the Lancastrians.

We've encountered Gaunt quite a few times over the prior episodes. He was always lurking in the background, but he was never the king. Nor was he in line to be the king. And that's really one of the most important parts of this story. His descendants were not the natural heirs to the throne, but they established a family dynasty that ruled England for the first half of the 1400s. So let's backtrack for a minute, and let's understand how this family dynasty came about.

John of Gaunt was a son of Edward III. Edward III was the great warrior king who launched the Hundred Years War with France, and who won the Battle of Crecy. He had five sons who lived to adulthood, and John of Gaunt was the middle son. So Gaunt had two older brothers and two younger brothers.

The eldest brother was Edward – known as the Black Prince. He was a great hero of the Hundred Years' War, and he was also the heir to the throne. But he acquired a terminal illness in the prime of life, and he died shortly before his father, so he never became king. Instead, the throne passed to his young son Richard who became Richard II. He was the king throughout so many of the events we've covered over the past few episodes from the Peasants' Revolt, to Piers Plowman, to John Wycliffe and the Wycliffe Bible, to the important poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer. So his reign coincided with that great flourishing of English literature in the late 1300s, and he was still the king at the current point in our overall story in the 1390s.

But the important thing to remember about Richard is that he didn't have any children. So without an heir, the line of the eldest son the Black Prince was about to come an end. That meant that the next king would have to come from one of the other sons of Edward III. And the next oldest son after the Black Prince was named Lionel. I actually mentioned Lionel in an earlier episode. When we first encountered Geoffrey Chaucer, he was a young man serving as a page in Lionel's household.

As the second oldest son, Lionel would have inherited the throne after King Richard, but Lionel had also died as a young man in his 20s. Before he died, he had a daughter, and she went on to have children and grandchildren of her own. So Lionel had descendants who were living at the time. Now under French law, the throne couldn't pass through a female line, so Lionel's descendants would have been disqualified under French law since they were all descended from his daughter. But this was England, not France. And even though England didn't have a specific law to deal with the issue, English tradition held that the throne could indeed pass through a female descendant. But it wasn't that simple. Lionel's daughter was also deceased. And she had a son, but he also died in the late 1300s. That son was survived by a young boy and girl, but they were both small children. The young boy's name was Edmund. He was Lionel's great-grandson, and he was technically next in line to the throne.

So the line of the eldest son, the Black Prince, was about to come to an end. And the line of the second oldest son, Lionel, was preserved by a small child. The next oldest son was John of Gaunt, and at this point, there was no expectation that he or his descendants would ever ascend to the throne. They were too far down the line and too far removed from main line of descent from Edward III. John of Gaunt also had two younger brothers who even further removed from the main line.

So at the current point in our story, John of Gaunt was content with being the elder uncle of the king, and he was happy to dispense his counsel and advice whenever he was called upon.

As I noted, we've encountered John of Gaunt quite a few times in the earlier episodes of the podcast, so let me recap a few of those key moments for you. Like most nobles of this period, he was apparently fluent in both English and French, and he also had formal training in Latin. [*SOURCE: 'The Last Knight,' Norman F. Cantor, p. 87.*] Despite being trilingual, it appears that he had a special affection for English. He was an early patron of Geoffrey Chaucer, and he apparently encouraged Chaucer's decision to compose poetry for the royal court in English. In fact, Chaucer's first major literary work was a poem to commemorate the death of Gaunt's first wife named Blanche.

The next time we encountered Gaunt was in the episode about John Wycliffe and the first English Bible. You might remember that Gaunt was a staunch defender of Wycliffe, and when Wycliffe came under attack by Church authorities, Gaunt stood up at the hearing and threatened to drag the bishop out by his hair. Reportedly, Gaunt later said that if France and other nations had a translation of the Bible in their languages, then England should have a copy in English as well. So again, we see Gaunt acting as a promoter and defender of English.

Now after his first wife Blanche died, Gaunt remarried. His second wife was a Castilian heiress named Constance. She was the daughter of the former king of Castile in northern Spain. Her father had been deposed by a rival claimant to the throne, but Gaunt contended that his new wife was still the proper heiress, and that as her husband he was entitled to defend her claims. So he soon led a military campaign to northern Spain to overthrow the rival claimant to the throne. The plan was that he and Constance would rule Castile together as the king and queen. And this Spanish campaign had some interesting consequences.

First of all, Gaunt felt that he needed the support of Portugal, so he made an alliance with the Portuguese king. The alliance was sealed with a marriage between the Portuguese king and Gaunt's daughter Philippa. So Gaunt's daughter became the Queen of Portugal, and all subsequent Portuguese monarchs were descended from that marriage until the Portuguese monarchy finally came to an end in the early 1900s. So the Portuguese monarchs from the 1400s to the 1900s were all descended from John of Gaunt.

His daughter Philippa not only gave birth to a son who became the king of Portugal, she also gave birth to another son named Henry – or Henrique – who became a famous explorer. He became known as Henry the Navigator, and many scholars credit him with launching the Age of Discovery or the Age of Exploration in Western Europe.

Now this is a bit of a digression, but it is both fascinating and ultimately relevant to our overall story of English. Up until this point in history, European sailors traveled the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Coast of Europe, but they didn't travel very far southward along the western coast of Africa. In fact, they would only travel a few miles down the northwestern coast to a place called Cape Bojador in modern-day Morocco.

The reason why they would stop there is because that's where the westward-flowing trade winds would come off of northern Africa and blow out to sea. Westerly sea currents also took ships out to sea at that point. Now that was a problem because navigators tried to hug the coast in those days. But the westward-flowing trade winds and sea currents near Cape Bojador prevented ships from doing that. A ship might be able to travel beyond the cape, but it couldn't get back home. As soon as the ship made it back to the cape, it would just get blown out to sea. So for all practical purposes, European navigators considered Cape Bojador to be the end of the world. It was thought that no ship could pass beyond the cape and return. And that led to many common superstitions. It was said that sea monsters and whirlpools were found beyond the cape, and they would swallow up any boat that ventured beyond that point. Even if you avoided the sea monsters and whirlpools, it was widely thought that the edge of the world lay beyond the cape. So any ship that ventured beyond the cape would be lost forever.

Well, Henry the Navigator – John of Gaunt's Portuguese grandson – sponsored several expeditions that were designed to test those old superstitions to see if Portuguese ships could make it beyond the cape and return. And those expeditions were successful. Here's how they figured out how to do it. Rather than hugging the coastline, which was nearly impossible along that part of the African coast, they simply let the westward-flowing trade winds take them out to sea. Then they tacked north in the middle of the Atlantic and caught the eastward-flowing trade winds which move in the opposite direction, and those winds took them back home to Europe. By using this roundabout course, and combining the westerly and easterly trade winds, Portuguese ships could maneuver around the northern part of Africa and make it back home. It was counter-intuitive. I mean, they had to sail out to sea away from the coastline in order to make it back home, but it worked. And that opened up western Africa for Portuguese trade and exploration.

A few years later, another Portuguese sailor named Bartolomeu Dias sailed all the way down the western coast of Africa to the Cape of Good Hope, and he then sailed around the cape and reached the Indian Ocean on the other side of Africa. That expedition showed that Europeans could make it to the Indian Ocean without having to go through the Mediterranean. And shortly after that, another Portuguese sailor named Vasco de Gama made the same trek around the southern tip of Africa, but he didn't stop when he got to the Indian Ocean. He kept sailing and made it all the way to India. And that proved that Europeans could reach India by sea without having to follow the traditional trade routes through the Near East. And from there, Portugal and then Spain were off to the races – launching the age of European discovery and exploration. Of course, that also led to colonization, which took Europeans and their languages around the world. And all of that really began with John of Gaunt's Portuguese grandson Henry the Navigator.

So let's return to Gaunt's attempted conquest of Castile. He had his alliance with Portugal, so he proceeded to Castile, and he laid siege to the region, but he was never able to secure a decisive victory. The campaign lingered on, and after several years, he finally gave up and decided to return to England.

As part the truce which ended the war in Castile, Gaunt agreed to another arranged marriage. The Castilian king's son was the heir to the throne, so it was agreed that the son would marry Gaunt's young daughter Catherine. That was Gaunt's daughter with his second wife Constance. Through that marriage, young Catherine eventually became Queen Catherine of Castile. And all of the subsequent Castilian and Spanish monarchs were descended from that marriage. So that means that both the Portuguese and Spanish monarchs were descended from John of Gaunt thanks to those two arranged marriages.

And here's another interesting fact. Those Castilian monarchs included his great-granddaughter Isabella who married Ferdinand of Aragon, and that effectively unified those two kingdoms bringing about modern Spain. Well, if you know a little bit about this period of history, you've probably heard of Ferdinand and Isabella before because they famously sponsored Christopher Columbus's voyages to the New World in the late 1400s.

Remember how the Portuguese had figured out how to take the westward-flowing trade winds out to sea in the Atlantic and then tack north and catch the eastward-flowing trade winds back home? Well, Columbus had the bright idea to take those same westward-flowing winds all the way across the Atlantic to the Indies. He could then catch the eastward-flowing winds back home. If it worked, it would be a direct route across the ocean to the Indies – much closer than going all the way around Africa. The only problem is that Columbus, and Isabella and Ferdinand, didn't know about North and South America. So Columbus actually landed in the Caribbean and Central America, not the Indies. But the main point here is that Portugal and Spain dominated the early period of exploration, and they did so in part due to the key contributions made by John of Gaunt's grandson Henry the Navigator and his great-granddaughter Isabella of Castile. And that's why today, most of Central and South America speaks either Spanish or Portuguese. All of that stemmed from Gaunt's expeditions in Spain in the late 1300s.

Now when John of Gaunt returned to England, he found that the political situation there had deteriorated in his absence. Of course, his nephew Richard was the king, but while Gaunt was away, Richard had come under attack by a group of nobles who were known as the Lords Appellant. I touched on this development in the prior episodes. That was the period of the so-called Merciless Parliament when several of Richard's close advisors were accused of treason and executed. The Lords Appellant who led the opposition consisted of five prominent nobles, including John of Gaunt's eldest son Henry Bolingbroke, but Henry didn't play a major role.

When Gaunt returned to England, the Lords Appellant backed off. And that allowed Richard to declare himself to be of age and old enough to rule in own right without supervision. After that, things settled down and the political situation stabilized for a while. But Richard seethed with anger at the nobles who had opposed him and killed his advisors. And he waited for the right time to get his revenge.

A few years later, John of Gaunt's second wife Constance died. That marriage had always been a political marriage, and it doesn't appear the two had much personal affection for each other. Throughout that marriage, Gaunt had been carrying on an open affair with one of the ladies of his household named Katherine Swynford. In fact, they had several children together. And when Constance died, Gaunt decided to marry Katherine in part to legitimize the children that they had together.

Now Katherine's name might ring a bell for you because she was the sister of Philippa Chaucer – Geoffrey's Chaucer's wife. And so, by virtue of Gaunt's third marriage, he and Geoffrey Chaucer actually became brothers-in-law.

Now Gaunt's third marriage to Katherine was another important development in our overall story because it legitimized the children which they had together. One of their sons was named John, and he later had a son of his own named John, who had a daughter named Margaret. And Margaret married a noble from a prominent Welsh family named Edmund Tudor. And their son Henry Tudor eventually became Henry VII – the first of the Tudor monarchs. So all of the very well-known Tudor monarchs like Henry VIII and Elizabeth I were descended from John of Gaunt, and we're also descended from Katherine Swynford who was Geoffrey Chaucer's sister-in-law.

I mention that connection because we can now see that John of Gaunt's descendants included the kings and queens Portugal, Spain, Lancastrian England, and Tudor England. They were all descended from Gaunt and one of his three wives. And of course, that included Queen Elizabeth I of England who was Gaunt's great, great, great, great grand-daughter. And she was the queen who authorized the establishment of the first English colony in North America. So we saw earlier that Gaunt's descendants played a key role in the settlement of the New World by the Portuguese and the Spanish. And now we can see that another one of his descendants, Elizabeth I, played a key role in the settlement of the New World by the English. So the people responsible for exporting Spanish, Portuguese and English to the New World all have a common connection in John of Gaunt.

Now shortly after marrying Katherine Swynford, England entered another period of turmoil. And that turmoil stemmed from King Richard's desire to take revenge on his old enemies. There are suggestions that Richard might have been having a mental breakdown with the death of his wife around the same time, but whatever the cause, he began exacting his revenge. He detained the three main nobles who led the opposition against him a few years earlier. One of them was tried and executed, another was banished from the kingdom, and the third was murdered before he could be brought to trial.

So Richard's three leading critics were now out of the way. And Richard seized their respective lands and distributed much of those lands to his own supporters. [*SOURCE: 'Making of England to 1399,' Hollister, p. 356.*] That raised the ire of many of the other nobles who didn't like the idea that the king could get rid of his critics so easily and seize their lands.

Then in the following year, a dispute broke out between the two remaining men who had been involved in the opposition to the king's rule. Those two men were a noble named Thomas Mowbray and John of Gaunt's son, Henry Bolingbrook. Each of them accused the other of treason, and this is where Shakespeare's cycle of history plays covering this period begins. It begins with the play Richard II, and in Shakespeare's version of the story, Thomas Mowbray takes offense at the accusations made against him. He addresses the king and says "My dear lord, The purest treasure mortal times afford is spotless reputation . . ." [*Richard II, Act, Scene 1, 176–181*]. And even though that passage was written by Shakespeare two centuries later, it contains the first recorded use of the term 'spotless reputation.' So that was one of many terms coined by Shakespeare, and it was first used in that context.

Now in real life, King Richard wasn't able to decide who was telling the truth, so he banished both of the men from the kingdom. Mowbray was banished for life, and once again, his lands were confiscated and redistributed. John of Gaunt's son Henry was also banished, but his exile was limited to a period of ten years.

A short time later, John of Gaunt finally died. Some historians suggest that he died of a broken heart because his son had been exiled from the kingdom, but by this point, Gaunt was nearly 60 years old which was quite old for the late Middle Ages. And this is where the king, Richard II, made a fatal mistake. Immediately after Gaunt's death, the exile of Gaunt's son Henry was made permanent. That meant that Henry couldn't return to England. And Richard compounded that decision by declaring that Henry was no longer entitled to inherit his father's lands. Instead, Richard seized all of Gaunt's lands. So instead of the massive Lancastrian estate passing to Gaunt's son Henry, it was seized by Richard. And that freaked out most of the other nobles in England. John of Gaunt had been one of the biggest landholders in England with holdings that rivaled those of the king. If Richard could casually seize those lands, then he could seize anybody's lands.

Richard compounded that lack of judgment with another major mistake. The English foothold in Ireland was coming under attack by Irish rebels there, so Richard headed to Ireland to put down the uprisings. So at the very moment when he seized Henry's inheritance and freaked out many of the nobles, he decided to leave the country and head to Ireland. That left England wide open for Henry to return and take his lands back by force. And that's exactly what he did.

Henry sailed back across the Channel from France and landed in York in June of 1399. He quickly gained the support of the northern nobles who agreed to help him reclaim his lands. It seems that Henry's supporters were initially moved to help him take back his rightful inheritance, but it soon turned into something bigger. Many of the nobles wanted Henry to replace Richard altogether. [*SOURCE: 'Making of England to 1399,' Hollister, p. 356*] Within a few weeks, most of important nobles in northern and eastern England had allied themselves with Henry's cause. And by the time Richard got word of what was happening, it was too late. He headed back to England, but by the time he arrived, all of the major nobles had turned against him and sided with Henry. Richard was captured and taken into custody. Henry now had the support of the major power-brokers throughout the country. And all that was left was for a formal transfer of power to take place. But there were two major problems with that.

First, Richard had to agree to abdicate – to give up the throne. And second, even if he did that, Henry wasn't actually next in line to the throne. Remember that Henry was the son of John of Gaunt, but Gaunt had that older brother Lionel. And Lionel's heir was his great-grandson Edmund. I mentioned him earlier in the episode, and he was technically next in line to the throne.

Now Henry didn't really have a good argument to get around that claim. He tried to argue that under French law, the throne didn't pass through a female heir, so that excluded Lionel's descendants since they were all descended from Lionel's daughter. But French law didn't apply in England. Henry also tried to point to the fact that his mother Blanche had royal blood as well. She was a direct descendant of an earlier king – Henry III. So he tried to argue that he had a superior claim through his mother's line, but that didn't really work either because she was descended from a younger brother as well. So it didn't matter if he traced his line through his mother or his father. His cousin Edmund still had the better claim either way.

Henry ended up basing his claim to the throne on a vague notion of inherited right combined with the support of the nobles, but that argument was also tenuous because there was no guarantee that the nobles would continue their support. All of that uncertainty clouded Henry's reign, and it ultimately led to the Wars of the Roses later in the century because Lionel's descendants never gave up their claims to the throne. So the split in the Plantagenet family really began here with Henry's selection as the new king and the rise of the House of Lancaster.

But before he could become the new king, there was the matter of current king Richard who was still alive and still technically the king. Only a sitting king could call Parliament, so Henry's supporters forced Richard to call Parliament into session, and then they forced him to abdicate in favor of Henry. Richard was brought before the assembly where he read a statement of resignation. The written statement was composed in both Latin and English, but not French. Then a list of thirty-three articles of deposition were read out loud. These were a list of Richard's failings and wrongful acts. And again, the Parliamentary records indicate that the articles were read out loud in both Latin and English, not French. Richard didn't object to the articles, and it was formally declared that he was no longer the king. [*SOURCE: 'The Last Plantagenets,' Costain, p. 232-3.*]

Henry then stepped forward to claim the throne. And he addressed the assembly in English. The Rolls of Parliament include the statement that he delivered, and interestingly, the records specifically state he delivered the statement in English because that was his 'mother tongue.' [*Rolls of Parliament, III, p. 422*] That is a very interesting statement because it is the first time since the Norman Conquest where we have an official recognition that the English king actually spoke English as his native language.

Now it is often said that Henry only spoke English, and that he was the first king to speak English exclusively since the Norman Conquest. Well, that's probably an exaggeration. He had certainly been trained in Latin and French, and he probably used those languages when he needed to. But he definitely had a strong preference for English, and he used English when he addressed Parliament and when he was at court. [*SOURCE: 'The Wars of the Roses,' Alison Weir, p. 31.*]

And that isn't really surprising when we consider that Henry's father was John of Gaunt, and Gaunt had been an active promoter and defender of English. So when the Lancastrians claimed the throne, they did so in English, and English finally re-emerged as a formal language of the royal court.

By the way, here is the speech that Henry made to the assembly in which he claimed the throne – first in Modern English and then in the original Middle English:

> In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, I, Henry of Lancaster, claim this realm of England and the crown with all of its members, appurtenances and privileges, as I am descended by the right line of blood coming from the good lord King Henry the Third, and through that right which God's grace has granted me, with the help of both my kindred and my friends to recover it, because the said realm was at the point of being undone due to poor governance and the undoing of good laws.
>
> "In the name of Fadir, Son, and Holy Gost, I, Henry of Lancaster chalenge this rewme of Yngland and the corone with all the members and the appurtenances, als I that am disendit be right lyne of the blode comying fro the gude lorde Kyng Henry Therde, and thorghe that ryght that God of his grace hath sent me, with the helpe of my kyn and of my frendes, to recover it - the whiche rewme was in poynt to be undone for defaut of governance and undoing of the gode lawes."

A few days later, Henry – also known as Henry Bolingbroke or Henry of Lancaster – was officially crowned as the new King of England, and thereby became Henry IV.

I should note that the deposed king Richard was shuttled away to a castle in the north of England where he was held in captivity. He died a short time later, in the first few weeks of the year 1400. The official account was that he went on a hunger strike and died of starvation, but most historians think he was intentionally starved to death. At any rate, Richard was now out of the picture.

So we begin a brand new century with a new king, a new ruling family, and a more prominent role for English at the royal court.

Even though Henry spoke English as his native language, his official court documents continued to be written in French and Latin. So at this point, English was still not fully accepted as an official written language. You might remember that I talked about the Statute of Pleading a few episodes back. That was the law which authorized the use of English for oral arguments in Parliament and in court. That statute was a big deal in terms of the acceptance of English as an official language. But you might also remember that the statute made this odd distinction whereby it continued to require that written records be maintained in Latin. So English was accepted as an official spoken language, but it wasn't fully accepted as an official written language. And that distinction applied to the royal court as well. By all accounts, Henry IV spoke English at court, but most of his official documents continued to be written in French and Latin.

Now despite the dramatic circumstances that led to Henry's coronation, his actual reign wasn't all that memorable. Since his claim to the throne was dubious from the start, he spent the first few years trying to secure his position. He needed the support of the Church, so he agreed to go along with one of their controversial demands. The followers of John Wyclifffe were running around England spreading their message and making copies of their new English Bible. They were called the Lollards, and their views challenged a lot of the traditional teachings of the Church. So the Church wanted a law that could be used to crack down on the movement. And Henry agreed to enact that law. In Latin it was called De Haeretico Comburendo – literally 'On the Burning of Heretics.' It was the law that allowed heretics to be burned at the stake. And it was a law that would be used – and abused – for centuries to come. It was initially used against the Lollards, but over time, it was used against all kinds of people who were deemed to be enemies of the Church or the State.

Though Henry tried to shore up his support early on, he faced rebellions throughout the first few years of his reign. First, there was an uprising in Wales, and then several other prominent nobles joined in. Henry spent the first half of his reign trying to put down those challenges and rebellions. In Shakespeare's account of Henry's life, in the play Henry IV, he has Henry utter the famous line, "Uneasy lies the head that wears a Crown." [*Henry IV, Part 2, Act 3, Scene 1, 26-31*] That's where that quote originated, and it referred back to Henry's troubled reign in the early 1400s.

Shakespeare's story of Henry IV was actually composed in two parts. And much of the story centers around Henry's son the young prince. He was also named Henry, but Shakespeare refers to him as Prince Hal.

In Shakespeare's story, Prince Hal hangs out a bar called the Boar's Head Inn. One of his drinking buddies is the comic character Falstaff. He's an older overweight knight who loves to brag and boast, but he's actually a coward in battle. Shakespeare depicts a famous battle called the Battle of Shrewsbury where the young prince defeated a rebel army in the year 1403. In Shakespeare's version of the story, Falstaff fights alongside Prince Hal, but Falstaff lies on the ground and pretends to be dead in order to avoid getting hurt. When we later discover that Falstaff was faking his injuries, he utters the famous line, "The better part of valor is discretion, in the which better part I have sav'd my life." [*Henry IV, Part 1, Act 5, Scene 4, 120-121.*] And that's where we get the phrase "Discretion is the better part of valor." Falstaff later ends up back at the pub, eating and drinking, and not paying his tab. The frustrated hostess says of Falstaff, "He hath eaten me out of house and home, he hath put all my substance in that fat belly of his." [*Henry IV, Part 2, Act 2, Scene 1, 74-79*] And that's where we get the phrase "to eat someone out of house and home." Those phrases come from Shakespeare's account of this period in his history play Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2.

Now as Henry IV got older, he acquired a debilitating disease. Contemporary accounts described it as leprosy, but the physical descriptions suggest that it was something else. Whatever it was, it consumed Henry's life and reign from around the year 1406 onward.

And speaking of illness, there is an interesting little side note from this same time period regarding the treatment of sick people in London. There was a hospital in London called The Hospital of St. Mary of Bethelem, but it was often simply referred to as 'Bethelem Hospital.' It treated people who were physically sick, but in the early 1400s, it also started to treat people who were mentally ill. And it soon became an institution for the insane and the mentally ill. And the name Bethelem was later slurred and shortened to ***Bedlam***. And that's actually where we get the modern word ***bedlam*** meaning madness, or confusion or an uproar. It's really just a shortened form of ***Bethelem***. The term ***bedlam*** was originally associated with the hospital and the perception of the people who were treated there. And over time, the word became a general term within the language.

Now it appears that King Henry's problems were more physical in nature – not mental. And his condition worsened over time, probably due to one or more strokes. *[SOURCE: 'The Wars of the Roses,' Alison Weir, p. 52.*] He finally died in the year 1413 having ruled England for about 14 years. His Will was written in English, and it was the first time since the Norman Conquest that a king left a Will composed in English.

At his death, Henry was succeeded by his son, Prince Hal, who then became Henry V. The younger Henry continued the line of Lancastrian kings, and this particular Henry is regarded as one of the great kings of English history.

He is most famous for turning around England's fortunes in the Hundred Years' War with France. You'll notice that haven't mentioned that war very much over the past few episodes. And that's partly because there wasn't much to say about it. Technically, the war lingered on, but England had lost most of its captured territories in France about 40 or 50 years earlier. England really hadn't achieved a major victory in the war since then. But the English kings still claimed the French throne. And the new English king Henry V was determined to make good on those claims. And in a very short period of time, he almost conquered France. In fact, if had lived a few weeks longer than he did, he would have been crowned as the King of France under a peace treaty that he negotiated. But his life was cut short before that could happen.

So Henry V is mainly remembered as a warrior, but his military prowess has largely overshadowed another major contribution for which he should be better remembered, and that contribution was the adoption of English as an official written language for government purposes. And that decision had another impact on the history of English. It led to the first attempts to standardize English writing after the Norman Conquest. Unlike his father who continued to use French and Latin for written documents, Henry decided to make the shift to English. He was the first English king since the Conquest to use English for the day-to-day business of government. His letters and writs and other basic documents were mostly composed in English – not French or Latin. And the office of the Chancery that produced those documents adopted a standard version of the language which was later adopted by printers, and which had a significant impact on the development of modern standard English. Believe it or not, some of our modern spellings and grammatical features can be traced back to the standards adopted by Henry's scribes in the early 1400s. So let's take a closer look at the reign of Henry V.

Since the younger Henry is mostly remembered for pursuing the war against France, let's begin there. His effort in the war was aided by the fact that the French king was mentally ill. I mentioned a moment ago that a hospital for the mentally ill in London became known as ***Bedlam***. Well, when Charles VI of France became mentally ill, 'bedlam' is what happened in France as well. The king's illness had manifested itself about 20 years earlier, and it was a condition that came and went, but overall, it prevented him from being an effective king. He became known as Charles the Mad. Over time, political power in France shifted down to the great nobles, and France became divided into two factions – those loyal to the king's uncle, the Duke of Burgundy, and those loyal to the king's brother, the Duke of Orleans. Those two factions fought against each other, and that left France in a weakened state.

When Henry came to power in England, he demanded that France return all of the lands that had once been held by the English kings – basically the old Angevin Empire, so most of northern and western France. It was a ridiculous demand, especially considering the fact that the English hadn't posed a serious threat in France for decades. When the demand was rejected, Henry led an expedition across the English Channel to the town of Harfleur at the mouth of the River Seine. After a few weeks, Henry broke the French defenses, and captured the town. Rather than heading up river toward Paris, Henry decided to head to the port city of Calais which was one of the few cities that the English still held. Henry's troops moved northeast toward Calais traveling parallel to the coast.

But before Henry could reach Calais, he was cut off by French forces outside the town of Agincourt. Henry's forces were vastly outnumbered. Estimates vary, but Henry's forces were probably outnumbered about 3 to 1, or perhaps even 4 to 1. Even though he had a much smaller army, the vast majority of his men were archers skilled at the longbow. [*SOURCE: 'A History of England: Prehistory to 1714,' Roberts, p. 198*.]

So Henry faced a daunting prospect. He had to fight a much larger French army on French soil where the English had not won a significant victory within the lifetime of most of his men. Prior to the battle, Henry supposedly delivered a speech to his soldiers – to encourage them and give them the confidence to defy the odds. In Shakespeare's account of the story, he has Henry deliver a very patriotic and rousing speech to his men, and it is one of the most famous speeches composed by Shakespeare. It is often known as the St. Crispin's Day Speech because the battle was fought on a holiday known as St. Crispin's Day. The speech is famous for Henry's reference to his men as a 'band of brothers' – a term which is still used today for a group of soldiers. I would be remiss if I didn't play you a portion of that speech since it is considered to be one of the great patriotic speeches in English literature. Here is Laurence Olivier's version from the 1940s:

[CLIP - 'St. Crispin's Day speech]

So that's Shakespeare's version of the speech. We don't what Henry actually said that day before the Battle of Agincourt, but whatever it was, it worked.

Even though the French had a lot more soldiers, they made a strategic mistake. The battlefield was located in an open field with woods on each side. And as the French cavalry advanced on the English, the wooded area on each side acted as a funnel. It forced the cavalry together, creating a bottleneck and that slowed them down. There had also been very heavy rains the night before, so the mud was a further impediment. When the French advance stalled, the English archers fired away with one barrage of arrows after another decimating the French troops. According to some estimates, the French lost more than five thousand men, compared to only two or three hundred for the English. [*SOURCE: 'A History of England: Prehistory to 1714,' Roberts, p. 198.*] The English victory at Agincourt is still remembered as one of the greatest military victories in the history of England. It sparked a new sense of nationalism, and the whole of England enthusiastically renewed the war effort against France.

Though Henry won the Battle at Agincourt, it was still just one battle. It would take a concerted effort, and many more victories, to bring an end to the war. Two years after Agincourt, Henry returned to France to continue the war effort. And in fact, Henry spent much of his relatively short reign in France pursuing the war. That meant that he had to govern England from across the Channel, and that required him to dispatch letters back to England on a regular basis.

Beginning around this time, in the year 1417, we have a series of surviving letters issued by Henry and written down by his personal scribes who traveled with him. And what is so fascinating about these letters is that they're written in English, not the traditional French used by prior kings. Henry apparently directed his scribes to use English in his official correspondence, and that was the first sign that the day-to-day business of government was going to be conducted in English going forward. Here is an excerpt from one of those letters sent in September of 1417 – first in Modern English and then in the original Middle English:

> By the King: Worshipful father in God we ask that you do make writs of proclamation into all our ports of England . . . for all manner of men that will bring victuals (that's 'food and provisions') unto our town of Caen for the refreshing of us and of our host in our Duchy of Normandy and that they shall pay therefore no custom so that they might find sufficient certainty and reassurance; that they shall bring the said victuals into our said town of Caen for the refreshment . . . of our said host . . .
>
> "By the Kyng: Worshepful fader in god we wyl that ye doo make writtes of proclamacion in to alle oure portes of Englond . . . al maner men that wil bryng vitailles vn to oure tovn of Caen for the Refresshing of vs and of our hoost in our Duchie of Normandie that they schul paye therfor no custume / so that they fynde sufficeant seurte. that they shal brynge the sayd vitailles vn to our said tovn of Caen for the refress. . . of our seyd hoost . . ." [*1417C81/1364/37Signet of Henry V*]

Now these types of letters became somewhat standard during the years that followed. From this period in 1417 until Henry's death five years later, nearly all of Henry's letters to government officials, town councils, guilds and other institutions were composed in English. [*SOURCE: 'From Dialect to Standard,' Hans Frede Nielsen, 138.*]

The letters were written down by the scribes who followed the king. They were basically his personal secretaries, and they comprised what was known as the Office of the Signet. That was the office responsible for preparing the king's personal documents and maintaining his official royal seal. And the fact that those scribes adopted English during this period appears to represent an intentional decision by Henry to use English as his official language going forward. [*SOURCE: 'Henry V, the English Chancery, and Chancery English,' Malcolm Richardson, Speculum, 55,4 (1980), p. 727*]

And those letters were arguably the very beginning of a standard form of written English because the use of English soon spread beyond Henry's personal Signet Office to the main administrative office of the English government known as the Chancery, which was a shortened version of the word ***Chancellery***. That was the office that generated legal and government documents that were read and implemented throughout the country. And much of that Chancery standard was then adopted by printers when the printing press was introduced at the end of the century. So in that sense, we can trace the beginning of a standard form of written English to Henry's letters and other official correspondence in the early 1400s.

Prior to that point, English writers wrote like they spoke. In other words, they wrote phonetically in their own local dialect. Their spellings reflected the way they pronounced words, and their grammar and syntax reflected the way they put words together when they spoke. But now, an official form of English was emerging that people were adopting and using, even if it didn't necessarily reflect any particular dialect or manner of speech. So it was a somewhat neutral standard, no longer inherently personal to the writer.

In fact, Henry V may ultimately be responsible for the usual way that we form adverbs from adjectives in Modern English. We do that today with the common suffix '-ly' (L-Y). That's how we turn ***quick*** into ***quickly***, and ***quiet*** into ***quietly***, and ***secret*** into ***secretly***. Well, you might remember that the pronunciation of that particular ending varied in Middle English. The southern dialects pronounced it /-lich/, which was basically the Old English version of the suffix. But in the north and in parts of the East Midlands, the consonant at the end was dropped, and it was simply pronounced as '-ly' (/lee/). Well, during the 1300s, there was a significant migration of people from the East Midlands into London. This was partly due to the collapse of the feudal system after the Black Death. The East Midlands was the most populous part of the country, and as those people moved into London, the London dialect took on a lot of East Midland features like that 'L-Y' adverb ending. In the late 1300s and early 1400s, '-lich' and 'ly' were both used around London. But Henry's letters back to England almost always used the 'L-Y' form of the suffix. They included words like ***expressely***, ***redely***, ***yeerly***, ***gretly***, ***cleerly***, ***effectuelly*** and ***resonably***. And that may have been because that was the ending that Henry used when he spoke, and so that was the way he dictated his letters. All we can say for certain is that the 'L-Y' suffix was used in most of his letters, and it also became the standard form of the suffix used by the Chancery a short time later. And from there, it became the standard form of the suffix used by printers. And from there, it became the standard form of the suffix used in Modern English. So it is altogether possible that today we say ***quickly*** instead of ***quicklich*** and ***greatly*** instead of ***greatlich*** because that's the way Henry V spoke.

Now you might wonder how Henry's personal correspondence could have such widespread influence. Well, his letters were sent to a variety of institutions around England, and we have a clear indication that his choice of language and writing style had an immediate impact. Five years after Henry adopted English for his official documents, the Brewer's Guild of London decided to change the language it used for its official records. It had previously used Latin like the other guilds, but in 1422, it decided to switch to English. And in a statement explaining its decision, it specifically cited Henry's use of English in his official letters and documents. The memorandum was actually written in Latin, but here is an English translation of that part of the statement:

> ". . . our mother tongue, to wit, the English tongue, hath in modern days begun to be honorably enlarged and adorned; for that our most excellent lord king Henry the Fifth hath, in his letters missive, and divers affairs touching his own person, more willingly chosen to declare the secrets of his will [in it]; and for the better understanding of his people, hath, with a diligent mind, procured the common idiom (setting aside others) to be commended by the exercise of writing." [*Quoted in THE OXFORD HISTORY OF ENGLISH, Lynda Mugglestone, p. 141*]

So the Brewer's Guild followed Henry's lead. And other London guilds soon followed suit. (*SOURCE: 'From Dialect to Standard,' Hans Frede Nielsen, Note 10, 138-9*). And that trend continued when the Office of the Chancery also started to generate its documents in English.

As I noted earlier, the Chancery was the primary office for document-production in the English government. Almost all of the legal and government documents required to run the kingdom were generated by the Chancery Office. It produced legal writs, licenses, inheritance records, deeds for transferring property, business agreements and a variety of other official documents. The office was staffed with about 120 clerks in the early 1400s, so it was much larger than the king's personal Signet Office. [*SOURCE: 'The Stories of English,' David Crystal, p. 233.*] The Chancery documents were read and administered throughout the country, which meant that the language used in the documents established a written standard that was used everywhere, regardless of dialect. Traditionally, those documents had been written in either Latin or French, but the office gradually followed Henry's lead and began using English in the 1420s. By the 1430s, the Chancery was routinely using English in its documents, and it was using a form of English that had become somewhat standardized. [*SOURCE: 'Henry V, the English Chancery, and Chancery English,' Malcolm Richardson, Speculum, 55,4 (1980), p 726.*]

The dozen or so masters who oversaw the office apparently selected certain spellings and certain grammatical features to be used as a general practice. Now it's easy to exaggerate the degree of uniformity in those documents. The fact is that there was still quite a bit of variation in the language that was used. But there is no doubt that the Chancery adhered to certain general rules when it came to spellings and word choices.

As I noted, the Chancery tended to use the '-ly' adverb ending over the alternate '-lich' ending. And that adverb ending was later adopted by printers and became the standard adverb ending in Modern English.

Similarly, you might remember from the Chaucer episodes that our first person pronoun '***I***' was originally pronounced with a different vowel sound. It was pronounced as /ee/ in the north of England, but it was ***ich*** in the south with a 'C-H' ending. Again, just as the Chancery preferred '-ly' over '-lich,' it also preferred '***I***' (/ee/) over ***ich***. ***Ich*** gradually fell out of use, and that left us with the single letter pronoun pronounced /ee/ at the time, which became '***I***' during the Great Vowel Shift. [*SOURCE: 'The Story of English,' Joseph Piercy, p. 97*.]

Lots of basic words also got their modern spellings in the Chancery. Words like ***and***, ***any***, ***but*** and ***not*** had lots of different spellings in Middle English, but the Chancery adopted the spellings that we use today. The word ***if*** was often spelled with a Y in Middle English, as either Y-I-F or Y-E-F, but Chancery dropped the Y and adopted the modern spelling I-F.

The word ***which*** (W-H-I-C-H) was often spelled with just a W at the front in Middle English, but Chancery adopted the 'W-H' spelling that is still used today. Similarly, the word ***such*** was highly variable in Middle English. The vowel sound was represented with various letters – sometimes with an I, sometimes a Y, sometimes an E and sometimes a U. And a W was often inserted after the S, producing the word ***swiche,*** which was based on the Old English pronunciation of the word. Chancery dropped that W and adopted the letter U for the vowel, thereby giving use the modern spelling S-U-C-H, which probably helped to standardize the pronunciation of the word over time. The word ***much*** also acquired its modern spelling in the Chancery Office. A word like ***land*** was often spelled with an O in Middle English. That's the way Chaucer spelled it. But the Chancery tended to use an A, and that gave us the modern standard spelling L-A-N-D. *[SOURCE: 'The Story of English,' Joseph Piercy, p. 97*.]

Chancery also made a couple of other spelling decisions which had a major impact on the way we spell words today. The /sh/ sound at the beginning of words could be represented many different ways in Middle English. Old English had used 'S-C' for that sound. In the 1200s, scribes started to represent that sound with 'S-C-H.' Scribes in Canterbury often represented the sound with 'S-S.' Some northern scribes even used an 'X' for that sound. The modern letter combination 'S-H' first appeared in the Ormulum which I discussed in an earlier episode. In the 1300s, 'S-H' became common among London scribes, and that may have influenced how Chancery decided to represent that sound. The Chancery scribes mostly used 'S-H,' especially in words like ***shall*** and ***should***. And that decision played a key role in the modern use of 'S-H' to represent the /sh/ sound. [*SOURCE: 'A History of English Spelling,' D. G. Scragg, p. 46.*]

Chancery made another spelling decision which has lingered into Modern English, and which frustrates children learning to spell English to this day. As I've noted before, Old English and early Middle English had a /x/ sound which has largely disappeared from Modern English. It still lingers in some regional dialects, like those of Scotland and some in northern England. But that sound was very common at one time, and it was represented with a variety of letters and letter combinations over the centuries. Most Middle English scribes had settled on the letters 'G-H' to represent that sound. But in the early 1400s, that sound was disappearing from English, and we know that because it became common to spell words with no letter at all for that sound.

But Chancery made the very conservative decision to preserve the traditional 'G-H' spelling in words like ***right***, ***night***, ***high***, ***though***, and ***ought***. And that decision helped to preserve all of those GH's – which are usually silent in Modern English. [*SOURCE: 'Chancery and the Emergence of Standard Written English in the Fifteenth Century,' John H. Fisher, Speculum, 52 (1977), p. 881.*]

The Chancery Office also helped to shape the forms of grammar used in written English. As I've noted before, plural nouns were often indicated with an 'S' ending in the north of England, like in ***dogs***, and ***cats*** and ***trees***. But in the south of England, the plural form was often indicated with an 'E-N' ending, like in ***children*** and ***oxen*** and ***brethren***. Well, by the early 1400s, the 'S' ending had spread southward and was increasingly common around London. So Chancery adopted the 'S' ending as a general rule, and that probably contributed to the continued decline of the E-N ending with plural nouns. [*SOURCE: 'The Emergence of Standard English,' John H. Fisher, p. 14.*]

Chancery also preserved the Southern third person verb ending that was used in present tense. You might remember that southerners ended those verbs with a 'T-H' sound, as in ***hath***, and ***doth***, and ***seemeth***. Northerners actually used the modern 'S' ending, as in ***has***, and ***does*** and ***seems***. Chancery mainly used the Southern 'T-H' ending which lingered on well into the 1600s, and is still familiar to us today in the works of writers like Shakespeare. Of course, that was a case where the Chancery decision was eventually replaced with a competing option, which was of course the modern 'S' ending. [*SOURCE: 'The History of English: An Introduction,' Stephan Gramley, p.105.*]

Chancery also preserved the traditional singular pronouns ***thou***, ***thee*** and ***thy***, and those pronouns also lingered into the time of Shakespeare, but of course, they were eventually replaced with the pronoun ***you***, which thereby became the standard form used for both second person singular and plural. [*SOURCE: 'The Emergence of Standard English,' John H. Fisher, p. 14.*]

So some of Chancery's decisions were more enduring than others, and again, those decisions were not always universal. There was often some variation within the documents. But the important point is that the writing standard used at Chancery spread throughout the country. And again, much of it was later adopted by printers. By the end of the century, most of the documents written in English were based on a common writing standard, no matter where they were composed. By that point, it was no longer possible to identify where the document was composed based on the particular dialect of the writer. [*SOURCE: 'From Dialect to Standard,' Hans Frede Nielsen, 140.*] Almost all writers were using a more standard generic form of English in their documents, and that standard can be traced back to the documents produced by the English Chancery, which can be traced back even further to the documents produced by the personal secretaries of Henry V.

Henry V is most famous for his military victories, but those victories were fleeting. Most of his military gains were lost after he died. But his decision to use English instead of French left a much more enduring legacy. And that legacy has its roots in an attitude toward English that was shared by all of the early Lancastrians. That attitude was based on the notion that England

should be governed in its native language, not the language of its enemies across the Channel. And that attitude forged those first steps toward a standard form of written English in the early 1400s.

Those first baby steps soon turned into a marathon when the printing press was introduced a few decades later. And in fact, around the time that the Chancery Office started producing documents in English, the first printing press appeared in Germany. And that invention fundamentally changed the English language by standardizing the language in a way that the Chancery Office never could have done. So next time, we'll take a closer look at the invention of the printing press. And we'll see how the printing press changed both the written word and the world in which those words were used.

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

EPISODE 135: A HOUSE OF CARDS

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 135: A House of Cards. In this episode, we're going to turn our attention to printing. We've spent many episodes discussing the important role of scribes and nature of handwritten manuscripts. But in the 1400s, those scribes suddenly faced a new source of competition – the printing press. In this episode, we're going to examine the history of the printing press, but we're going to take a broader look and explore the larger history of printing. And that story requires us to look at another innovation which also appeared in Europe around this same time period, and that's the popular pastime of playing cards. The appearance of playing cards and the printing press around the same time wasn't really a coincidence because in many ways, the two innovations are directly tied to each other. So this time, we'll explore those developments, and we'll see how both of those innovations 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.

Now let's turn our attention to some important developments that were taking place in the early 1400s, and let's begin by picking up where we left off last time. In the last episode, we explored the rise of the House of Lancaster. As we saw, the Lancastrian dynasty began when Henry IV essentially overthrew the prior king Richard II. But Henry wasn't next in line to the throne at the time.

When the Lancastrians seized the throne, they interrupted the normal line of succession. The Lancastrians were descended from John of Gaunt, but Gaunt had an older brother named Lionel who had a couple of living descendants at the time when Richard was deposed. Those descendants were his great-grandson Edmund and his great-granddaughter Margaret. They preserved Lionel's line, and the young boy Edmund was technically the next in line to the throne.

Because of Edmund's potential claims, he was initially placed under a type of house arrest, but he was eventually given a reprieve and allowed to maintain his own household. We don't know very much about young Edmund, but we do have the surviving financial records from his household. And the records from the year 1413 reveal something very interesting about him. It turns out that he was a big gambler. The expense ledgers show that he incurred a lot of gambling debts which had to be paid out in that year. The debts were incurred from a variety of games, including games involving playing cards. [*SOURCE: Lords and Lordship in the British Isles in the Late Middle Ages, R.R. Davies, p. 96*]

Those financial entries are fascinating because that reference to Edmund's gambling debts is one of the first references to playing cards in all of England. And it may actually be the very first mention of playing cards since the references in other sources are difficult to date.

Edmund's accounts were written in Latin, and they refer to the debts incurred with ***cartys*** and ***cardys***. One reference spelled the word with a 't' and another spelled it with a 'd,' suggesting that the word was probably pronounced both ways at the time. As we saw in an earlier episode, the word ***card*** was ultimately derived from the Greek word ***khartes*** meaning a layer of papyrus. It passed to Latin where it became ***carta*** as in Magna Carta. It meant a document, or more specifically a ***charter*** – which is a French version of the word ***carta***. From there, the word passed into English as ***cart*** and ***card***. ***Cart*** with a 't' survived in Scotland, and it still survives in the French term ***cart blanch*** literally meaning a 'blank card.' But most of England quickly settled on the pronunciation with a 'd' sound at the end. And when the word ***card*** made its first appearances in English documents in the 1400s, it specifically referred to playing cards.

The fact that young Edmund spent his spare time playing cards is actually important to our overall story because it means that playing cards had made their way to England, and wherever you have playing cards, you have evidence of printing. Most playing cards from the 1400s were printed using block stamps, so those cards confirm that people knew how to mass produce items using a very basic form of printing.

Now even though playing cards were new to England in the early 1400s, and relatively new to the rest of Europe, they actually had a pretty long history by that point. Like so many innovations that we've seen before, they had their origin in East Asia, and they spread westward over time to the Near East then to Europe, eventually reaching England in the early 1400s.

In fact, many of the key elements required for printing have their origin in China. Back in Episode 123, we saw that paper had its origins there about two thousand years ago. Then about 1500 years ago, the Chinese started using wooden stamps for printing. Stamps were used by many ancient societies. Some cultures pressed them into clay, but others figured out how to apply ink to the stamp. That way the stamp could reproduce the same image over and over again.

It took a little work to make one of those stamps, but the idea was very simple. You simply took a piece of wood or stone or metal, and you drew an image on it. Then you carved out the empty spaces around the lines of the image so that the image stood out in relief. At that point you had a stamp that could be dipped in ink, and then you could press that image on fabric or parchment or paper over and over again.

The Chinese used stamps like many other cultures. But what made the Chinese innovation so important is that they had also developed the ability to make paper. And that combination of stamps and paper allowed them to engage in an early form of printing by the 600s. [*SOURCE: The Book: a Global History, P. 131*]

And this points to a very basic and very obvious point about early printing. It involved a fixed object like a stamp that was pressed into paper or some other material. And that was the key. The pressing of the stamp over and over again. This is why the printing press is called a ***press*** – because it worked by applying ***pressure*** to press the image into the material, thereby leaving an ***impression***. And if that impression is stamped in your mind, then it might leave a different kind of impression. And if it leaves a positive impression, you might be ***impressed***.

Press, ***pressure***, ***impression*** and ***impress*** are all derived from the same Latin root word. And of course, this is also where we get the term ***press*** as a generic term for newspapers and other related media. That's why we refer to 'the freedom of the press.' It all relates back to the basic idea of pressing an image into paper or some other material over and over again.

Now all of that may seem pretty obvious, but what you may not realize is that the word ***print*** comes from the same basic root as the word ***press***. The Indo-European root word *****per*** meant 'forward or through.' And it not only produced the Latin word ***press***, it also produced the Latin word ***print***, which had the same basic idea. 'To ***print***' literally meant to make an impression. And that impression might also be called an ***imprint*** from the same word. So the term 'printing press' is actually a bit redundant. Both ***print*** and ***press*** are cognate, having the same Indo-European root and similar underlying meanings.

A Greek word for an impression or imprint was a ***typos***, and that gave us the word ***type*** which originally meant an image left by pressing or striking. Of course, those images came to be used as symbols for various things, and those symbols helped people to distinguish one thing from another. And that's how we got the more extended sense of the word ***type***, as in 'different types of things.' And of course, we still associate the word ***type*** with printing when we refer to the actual stamps or levers used for printing as in a ***typewriter***, which of course gives us the verb 'to ***type***' meaning to write using a mechanical device, as opposed to writing by hand.

The key to all of this is the basic idea of leaving a fixed impression on paper or some other material. And in its most basic form, it is a very old idea. As I noted, the Chinese combined stamps and paper at a very early date, and they also developed very large and elaborate stamps for printing entire pages. These stamps sometimes included writing as well. Of course, the writing couldn't be altered once it was carved into the stamp, but it was another step in the direction of the printing press.

The Chinese used those large block stamps to produce images on all kinds of paper-based products. They created books or scrolls made up of several of those block images. Some of those printed images date back to the 700s [*SOURCE: Paper: Paging Through History, Mark Kurlansky, P. 99*], and the oldest surviving book printed in this way is called the Diamond Sutra from the year 868. [*Ibid, p. 102*] Those techniques soon spread to Korea and Japan as well. [*Ibid, P. 104*]

The Chinese also used block printing to make other products like paper money. I mentioned that in the earlier episode about paper. And they also used those block prints to make something else – playing cards. Both paper money and playing cards could be mass produced with pre-cut stamps, and they both appeared in China in the 700s. But those early Chinese playing cards were not like modern Western playing cards. They actually resembled the paper money, and in fact, some scholars think that the paper money and the playing cards were basically the same thing at first. Essentially, people devised games that could be played with the paper money, and the winner would keep the money that was won. Through this process, the money became an early type of playing cards. [*SOURCE: The Fireside Book of Cards, Jacoby and Morehead*]

And interestingly, as those playing cards developed in China, they were eventually divided into four distinct suits – each based on units of currency. The most basic unit was coins. One card had one coin, another had two coins, another three coins, and so on. The second suit consisted of strings of coins. So one card had one string of coins, another had two strings, another had three strings, and so on. The third suit consisted of groups of those strings called myriads. And the fourth suit consisted of groups of myriads. So the result was a deck of playing cards divided into four distinct suits, each based on units of money.

So by the 11th century, the Chinese were routinely using block printing combined with paper to produce all kinds of objects like paper money, playing cards and even scrolls or books. But as I noted, block printing had one major drawback. Each page was printed from a pre-cut block, and that block couldn't be changed or altered. So if the block included writing or text, that text was always the same.

But in the 11th century, a Chinese inventor named Pi Sheng had a novel idea. He realized that he could create a series of individual stamps with a different Chinese character on each one. Remember that China didn't use an alphabet. It used thousands of individual characters. But by creating stamps for many of those common characters, Pi Sheng could then line them up to create a sentence. He could then place ink on those stamps and use them to print that sentence on a piece of paper. Then he could move those stamps around or switch them out with different stamps to create an altogether new sentence. What he had discovered was moveable type. I mentioned this early invention back in Episode 75. It was the same fundamental idea that led to the printing press in Western Europe, but it wasn't the printing press, and interestingly, the idea never really took hold in China. So why didn't moveable type become common there?

Well, the answer appears to lie in the characters required to write Chinese. China didn't use an alphabet. It used thousands of individual characters. So in order for this idea to reach its maximum potential, Chinese printers needed thousands of individuals stamps or blocks, each one with a different character. And in fact, they needed multiple stamps for common characters which might appear several times on a given page. But that really nullified the main advantage of printing. Printing is supposed to be quicker and easier than handwriting, but for a written language like Chinese, printing didn't offer much of an advantage. In many cases, it was easier to just write out the text by hand. [*SOURCE: The Gutenberg Revolution, John Man, p. 108*] Also, Chinese culture put a strong emphasis on calligraphy and the artistic aspects of handwriting. So that may have created a cultural barrier. But either way, China never really adopted printing with moveable type beyond its initial stages. And it appears that the later Europeans who came up with the same idea did so independently of this earlier invention in China.

Even though the idea of moveable type didn't really spread to the West, paper and playing cards did. Cards were apparently traded and played along the Silk Road, eventually reaching Egypt by the 1200s. In Egypt, the cards continued to be divided into four distinct suits, but the suits were changed to reflect Egyptian culture. One suit was gold coins, apparently retained from the original Chinese cards. The other three suits were cups, swords, and polo sticks. Polo was a popular sport at the time in Egypt.

The deck also featured three court cards within each suit in addition to the number cards. There was a king, a deputy king, and an under-deputy. So we now have four suits made up of distinct objects, and three court cards within each suit. So we have a deck that is starting to resemble the deck of cards found in much of the English-speaking world today.

By the mid-1300s, those playing cards had made their way across the Mediterranean and were becoming common in southern Europe in places like Italy and Spain. Though there were some minor differences between the cards used in Italy and Spain, they were generally the same, and those cards are sometimes collectively referred to as the Latin deck. The Latin deck kept the four suits used in the Egyptian deck, but since polo was not common in Europe, the polo sticks were changed to simple sticks or batons. And keep that little change in the back of you mind because it probably explains why one of the modern suits is called ***clubs***. The other three Latin suits were coins, cups and swords, just like the Egyptian deck.

The Latin deck also converted the court cards into more familiar European royalty. It featured a king, a knight, and a knight's servant or knave. So despite some slight modifications, the Latin deck retained many of the features of the older Egyptian deck.

Also, the European playing cards from this period were hand-painted. So they could be very elaborate, but they also tended to be very expensive. That meant that they were mostly found among the upper classes.

By the mid-1300s, playing cards were starting to be found in central Europe. There are a couple of ways to trace the spread of cards during this period. One way is through references to cards in surviving manuscripts and written records. The other way is through the laws that were adopted during this period that were designed to restrict or outlaw the playing of cards. Church officials hated playing cards because it was thought that cards promoted gambling. So during the 1360s and 1370s, various European cities and countries started to ban them or restrict them. Those proclamations provide further evidence of the spread of cards throughout the region.

The earliest of those restrictions were adopted in Bern, Switzerland in 1367. [*SOURCE: The World in Play: Luxury Cards, Timothy B. Husband, p. 13.*] And that was a sign that cards were spreading northward at a rapid rate. Within another decade or so, we find references to playing cards in Germany and the Netherlands. And in Germany, we find a couple of more important developments.

First, German card makers modified the design of the deck. The four Latin suits of coins, cups, swords and batons were replaced with four new suits. The new German suits were hearts, bells, leaves and acorns. It isn't entirely clear why they changed the symbols, but the leaves and acorns may simply reflect the more rural and agrarian culture of Germany at the time. And as we'll see, those German hearts, leaves and acorns were probably the origin of the modern symbols used for hearts, spades and clubs. But again, more on that in a moment.

So the German card makers made some important design changes. But they also made another decision that's very important to the history of printing. Rather than painting their cards by hand, they decided to start printing them with wooden stamps or wooden blocks in much the same way that the Chinese had done about six or seven centuries before.

This appears to have been a completely separate and independent development in northern Europe. Wood block printing had initially been used by artisans to print religious scenes on fabric. But by the early 1400s, this same technique was applied to the new fad of playing cards. [*SOURCE: A Short History of Technology, p. 231-5*] And that allowed German printers to mass-produce playing cards for the first time in Europe, thereby making them cheaper and more accessible to the average person. That also helps to explain why the new German designs had such a strong influence on the development of playing cards going forward. People throughout northern Europe suddenly had access to those relatively cheap German cards. So in places like France and England, people were familiar with the terminology and symbols of both the German deck and the Latin deck. And as we'll see, the modern English deck is essentially a blend of those two earlier decks.

Now this takes us back to where we began – with young Edmund, the disputed heir to the English throne, playing with cards in England. I noted earlier that his household accounts list his gambling debts from playing cards, and those accounts confirm that the cards had reached England by the year 1413. We don't know what kind of deck he had, whether it was a fancy hand-painted Latin deck or a cheaper printed deck from Germany. But whichever it was, he probably should have thrown it away because it was costing him a lot of money in gambling debts.

While Edmund spent his time playing cards, his cousin Henry V continued to rule England as the second Lancastrian king. As we saw last time, Henry defeated the French at Agincourt in 1415, and that victory completely turned the tide of the Hundred Year's War. For the first time in nearly half a century, the English took the upper hand in the war. One French town after another fell to Henry's forces. He soon recaptured Normandy, and then added much of northern and southwestern France. He was quickly re-assembling the old Angevin Empire, but his ultimate goal was the complete conquest of France.

Remember that the Hundred Year War had been launched because the English kings were in one line of succession to the French throne. The line passed through a female ancestor, so it wasn't recognized under French law, but the English kings still felt that they were entitled to both thrones, and Henry V almost made that a reality.

You might remember from the last episode that the French king was Charles VI, but he became known as 'Charles the Mad' because he suffered from dementia and mental illness. With his decline, France became divided into two factions – those loyal to the Duke of Burgundy and those loyal to the Duke of Orleans. Those two factions fought against each other, and in 1420, the Duke of Burgundy entered into a formal alliance with England. The Duke probably saw the writing on the wall, and he decided to go ahead and throw in his lot with Henry.

The alliance between Burgundy and England was a devastating development for the French king and his advisors. They knew they had no chance of victory against that alliance, so they entered into negotiations with Henry for a final settlement to the war.

The resulting treaty ensured that the next King of France would be English. Whenever Charles the Mad died, the French throne would pass to Henry of England. If Henry was dead, it would pass to Henry's heir. But Henry didn't have a heir, so it was agreed that Henry would marry the French king's daughter Catherine. That way, Henry's future son would be half English and half-French, and he would rule as both King of England and King of France. The treaty was enacted, and Henry married Catherine as everyone had agreed. She gave birth to a little boy a short time later. The little boy was also named Henry. But little Henry had a problem that nobody knew about at the time. Whatever was causing the French king's mental illness, it was apparently genetic, and that gene passed to the little boy. He didn't show the symptoms of mental illness until he was an adult, but he eventually suffered many of the same problems as his grandfather.

So, at the time, it looked like this treaty would bring an end to Hundred Years War, but there was one major problem with this whole arrangement. The treaty said that Henry or Henry's infant son would be the future King of France, but the French king already had an heir. He had an adult son named Charles who was commonly known as the 'Dauphin.' That was a French term that basically meant the 'heir to the throne,' and he wasn't interested in giving up his inheritance to Henry of England or Henry's son.

All of this came to a head late in 1422 when both kings died within a few weeks of each other. The death of Charles in France was not really a surprise given his overall mental and physical condition, but Henry V of England was still a young man, and his death did come as a surprise. While besieging a town in France, he contracted dysentery – the condition that killed so many soldiers in their prime in the Middle Ages. Interestingly, Henry died a few weeks before Charles, so he never actually became the King of France. But when Charles died a short time later, both thrones passed to Henry's infant son – who became Henry VI.

The new king was only nine months old, so a council had to be appointed to run the country on his behalf. Meanwhile, back in France, the mad king's eldest son, Charles the Dauphin, refused to recognize the English baby as king. He established a rival court at Bourges in central France. And that meant that France was now effectively split in two.

The River Loire runs through the middle of France, and generally speaking, the English or their Burgundian allies controlled the area north of the river, as well as Gascony in the far southwest. But the rest of the country south of the Loire remained loyal to the Dauphin – the dead king's son. He was still considered by many to be the rightful heir to the French throne. [*SOURCE: The Wars of the Roses, Alison Weir, p. 67*] However, he was weak and penniless. So it seemed to be only a matter of time before the English forces completed their conquest of France.

The biggest obstacle for the English was the Loire itself. There were only a few major bridges spanning the river which the English could use to transport their forces across to the south into the regions still held by the Dauphin. One of those bridges was at the city of Orleans in the center

of the country. So the English laid siege to the city in 1428. If they could capture the city, the English planned to move their forces south across the river and complete the conquest of France. For the Dauphin, this appeared to be inevitable.

But it was at this point that one of the most fascinating events of the Middle Ages took place. A teenage peasant girl in the northeast France starting having visions of saints and she started hearing the voices of angels. At least that's what she claimed. Supposedly, those visions and voices told her to go to the Dauphin, and lead him to the city of Reims where French kings were normally crowned. He was to be crowned there as the rightful king of France, and then she was to help him expel the English and reclaim the country. She said that it was all ordained by God.

The young girl was Jeanne d'Arc, or as she is known in English, Joan of Arc. Over the next few weeks, she made her way to the Dauphin, and she eventually managed to get an audience with him. She told him of her visions and her divine mission. She was examined by doctors and theologians, and it was determined that she was not insane or a witch. [*SOURCE: Wise and Foolish Kings, Anne Denieul-Cormier, p. 271*] This was all the confirmation the Dauphin needed. He agreed to send her, together with a contingent of French troops, to Orleans to help relieve the city and to repel the English.

Joan was accompanied by a few prominent knights who also believed in her and supported her cause. After they arrived in Orleans, they were able to repel the English and maintain French control of the city. It was a surprising victory, and very soon, people throughout France heard of Joan's visions and her victory over the English. And it sparked a renewed sense of nationalism throughout France. The English were never able to stop the momentum that gathered around Joan in the weeks and months that followed. She and her French troops secured another victory at Patay north of Orleans a month later. That allowed Joan to accompany the Dauphin to Rheims where he was crowned as King Charles VII of France, just as she had envisioned. But France was still divided, so he had to flee back to the south as soon as the ceremony was over. Joan remained in the north and continued to lead the increasingly patriotic French troops against the English. [*SOURCE: The Story of Britain, Fraser, 221-2*]

Now you probably know Joan's fate. A few months later, she was captured by the Burgundian troops who were allied with the English. They turned her over to the English who accused her of heresy and witchcraft and put her trial. The tribunal found her guilty, and she was burned at the stake. The English may have removed Joan from the picture, but they made her a martyr in the process. She continued to inspire the French people and the French troops. Over the course of the next decade, the French forces reclaimed one town after another. Joan's life and death marked the beginning of the end of the Hundred Year's War.

Now earlier I mentioned that Joan was accompanied by several prominent French knights during her military campaigns. They believed in her mission and helped with the logistics since Joan wasn't a trained soldier. One of those knights was named Etienne de Vignoles. But he was better known by his nickname La Hire – literally 'the ire.' It was a shortened version of La Hire-Dieu – 'the ire or wrath of God.' That name reflects his fierce reputation. He accompanied Joan at Orleans and Patay, and he was one of her most loyal knights and commanders. And the reason

why he is so important to this story is because a French legend holds that he was the person who designed the deck of playing cards that most of us still use today. [*SOURCE: Encyclopedia of Occult Sciences, p. 220*]

In fact, it soon became common in France to associate each of the court cards in the deck with a prominent historical figure. The Queen of Spades was thought to represent Joan of Arc, and the Jack of Hearts was actually named La Hire after the loyal knight who supposedly designed the deck.

Now the story that La Hire designed the deck is probably more of a legend than fact. According to the legend, the prior king Charles the Mad had banned playing cards soon after they appeared in France because they were thought to promote gambling. Supposedly, La Hire wanted to bring the cards back into favor, so he devised a new card game to entertain the king. The game was called piquet. That was the first really popular card game in France, and it even achieved a degree of popularity in England. And it actually gave us a very common English word. If a player lost all the tricks or rounds in a hand, it was called 'etre capot' – literally 'to be capot.' That phrase passed through German into English and gave us the term ***kaput*** (K-A-P-U-T) meaning 'finished or useless or destroyed.' So if you say that something "went kaput," you're actually using a term form the card game of piquet.

Well, anyway, French legend held that La Hire invented the game of Piquet and modified the design of the deck to better fit the play of that game. Now most historians doubt that story, but it is true that a new modified deck of cards appeared in France around that time, and that French deck is the basis of the modern deck that many of us still use today.

I have already alluded to one important change. I noted that the Queen of Spades was often associated with Joan of Arc. Well, this new French deck adopted the queen as part of the three court cards within each suit. The queen replaced the knight that had been used previously. Now to be fair, there are Latin and German decks from this same period that also use queens, but the queens became a standard fixture in the new French deck. So the four knights were out, and they were replaced with the four queens.

That gave the French deck four kings, four queens, and four valets. Those valets were originally the like yeomen or squires or attendants to the knights, but when the knights were removed from the deck, their meaning and purpose became somewhat obscured. In English, the valets were called ***knaves*** using the Old English word ***knave***. So the English deck had kings, queens and knaves.

Knave meant 'a boy' in Old English, but over time, it developed a broader sense as a male servant or attendant – especially a knight's attendant. That sense of the word continued to evolve in later centuries when feudal knighthood came to an end. Much like the word ***villain***, it acquired a negative and pejorative sense over time, and that's generally the way people use the word ***knave*** today. But it once meant a knight's attendant. And that's why the lowest court card was called a ***knave*** in English, and it continued to be called a ***knave*** until the late 1800s. But of course, today, we call it a ***jack***. So why did the name change?

Well, believe it or not, it had to do with spelling. In the 1800s, card makers in America started putting little indices or symbols in the corner of each card to make it easier to identify the card when you were holding several cards together in your hand. Imagine the cards being held together at the bottom and spread out at the top like a fan. Well, by putting those symbols in the corner of each card, you could easily tell what each card was in the hand. So for a six of hearts, the card maker would put a little heart and a little number 6 in the corner. For the court cards, the manufacturers just put the first letter of each card's name. So a K for the king, and a Q for the queen. But what about the knave – K-N-A-V-E? It also began with a K just like the king. And even if they used the first two letters – KN – it could still be confused with the king. So those card makers in the 1800s had to come up with another option. At that point there was another popular card game called 'All Fours,' and in that game the knave was sometimes called a ***jack***. That name may have derived from the general sense of the word ***jack*** as common man which I discussed in a prior episode, like in the term 'Jack of All Trades.' At any rate, through that association, the knave was sometimes called a ***jack***. So those American card makers just adopted that term ***jack*** since it began with the letter J. That allowed them to put a little J in the corner of the card, and that avoided any confusion with the king. And that's how the lowest court card became known as a ***jack*** in English. It was mostly a spelling issue.

Now that explains the king, queen and jack, but you may be wondering about the joker. Well, there was no joker in the deck at this point in the 1400s. The joker was added in the 1800s by those American card makers. It was the name of the highest card in the game of Euchre, and some scholars think the name of the joker was actually derived from a common mispronunciation of the game of Euchre. Some people referred to Euchre as /juker/. And the highest card in the game was sometimes called the 'Juker card.' And some people may have misinterpreted the 'juker card' as the 'joker card.' But whatever the etymology, the joker is a relatively recent addition to the deck.

So the modern court cards – the king, the queen and the knave or jack – all took their modern form in France in the 1400s. But just as importantly, the new French deck also adopted the four modern suits – hearts, diamonds, clubs and spades. And the deck also adopted the symbols that we use for those respective suits today.

Now with respect to those four suits, the details are obscure, and there are a lot of different theories about their origin and meaning. For example, it is often said that each of those suits represented a different class of medieval society, like the clergy, the knights, the archers, and the peasants. But playing card historians haven't really found any evidence to support those theories.

Today, most of those historians think they the four suits were actually a blend of the suits used in the earlier Latin and German decks. So here's what apparently happened.

First, with respect to hearts, it seems pretty clear what happened there. Remember that the German deck used hearts as one of its suits. So hearts were borrowed directly from the German deck. And the symbol was also borrowed. English simply used its native word ***heart*** in place of the French word ***coeur*** with the same meaning.

Next up, we have spades. The symbol for spades is another direct borrowing from the German deck. Remember that one of the suits in the German deck was leaves. The leaf symbol looked almost identical to the modern symbol for spades. So it appears that the French card makers simply adopted that symbol from the German deck, but the French card players didn't call them leaves. They called them ***piques*** – or ***pikes*** in English. That was apparently because one of the suits of the traditional Latin deck was swords which the French converted to pikes. But why did the French associate the leaf symbol with pikes? Well, many medieval pikes had a fancy iron head or decoration at the top, and that design at the head of a pike was often shaped like a leaf. So it resembled that leaf symbol. French card players knew that one of the suits in the Latin deck represented a sword or pike, and this new leaf symbol looked like the head of a pike. So they just called that leaf-shaped symbol a ***pique*** – or ***pike***.

But when the deck reached England, English card players didn't call them ***pikes***. They also made same connection between the Latin swords or pikes and this new leaf symbol. The swords were called ***spada*** in Italian and ***espada*** in Spanish. That was the term for swords in those languages. English players were probably already using used those terms since they were associated with the older Latin deck. So those English card players just kept that word, and it became ***spades*** in English. It also turned out that English had a native word ***spade*** as well. It referred to a type shovel or digging tool. And that leaf-shaped symbol on those cards sort of resembled the head of a spade or shovel. So that may have also influenced English players to call that symbol a ***spade***. So spades is a blended suit. The symbol is based on the leaf from the German deck, but the name is based on the word for swords used in the Latin deck.

Of course, the word for that particular suit also gave us the term "in spades" meaning 'in abundance,' as in "He handed out complements in spades." It's a term derived from the game of bridge where spades is the highest-ranking suit. We also have the phrase "to call a spade a spade," but that's based on the other sense of the word ***spade*** as a digging tool. It's actually an English version of a old Greek proverb. So it doesn't really have anything to do with cards.

So that's hearts and spades. The next suit that was created in the French deck was the suit that we call ***clubs*** today. Just like with spades, it appears that clubs is a blended suit. The symbol was derived from the German deck, and the name was derived from the Latin deck. Remember that one of the German suits was acorns. If you picture an acorn, you'll probably imagine a little round nut sitting inside of cupule or cup. If you turn it upside down, that cup looks like a little hat or beret on top of the nut. Well, in the German deck, the acorn was usually depicted with the cupule or cup on the bottom, and a little stem protruding from the bottom of that. So the design was rounded on top and then it flared out and was also rounded on each side on the bottom. One theory is that the French designers took that basic symbol for an acorn and made it more symmetrical with three equal circles protruding from the stem. That design change actually made the symbol look like a clover, so French card players started calling it a ***trefle***, which meant a clover in French. But English speakers didn't call it a ***clover***. They called it a ***club***. And that appears to be because they were familiar with the Latin deck which had a symbol for sticks or batons, which the English apparently called ***clubs***. ***Club*** is an Old Norse word, and English card players just kept using that term, even though it no longer matched the symbol. So the symbol

for a clover in French came to be known as ***clubs*** in English. Again, the suit combines a symbol derived from the German deck and a name derived from the Latin deck.

The final suit is known as ***diamonds*** in English, and that suit is the most difficult to explain. Neither the German deck nor the Latin deck had diamonds as a suit, nor the symbol that we associate with diamonds today. The symbol first appeared in the French deck where it was called a ***carreau*** in French. That's the French word for a tile. So French card players apparently thought the symbol represented the type of pavement tiles that were used in walkways and courtyards. That tile shape was very common in France in the 1400s. When English card players encountered the symbol, they called it ***diamonds***. But why? Well, no one knows for certain, but remember that one of the suits in the Latin deck was coins, so one theory is that the suit of coins was thought to represent money or wealth, and English speakers felt that one of the new suits should continue to represent those things. The French tiles didn't really look like coins, but the shape did reflect the way that diamonds were sometimes cut. So that may be why the suit came to be called ***diamonds*** in English. But again, no one knows for sure.

So the standard deck of cards that most of us use today took shape in France in the 1400s. Most of those English terms associated with the deck didn't appear in writing until the following century – the 1500s. That was when terms like ***hearts***, ***spades***, ***clubs***, ***diamonds***, ***deck***, ***pack***, and ***suit***, are found for the first time in reference to playing cards.

The term ***ace*** also appeared in reference to playing cards around that same time. Interestingly, ***ace*** was already in the language. You might remember from an earlier episode that the word ***ace*** originally referred to the side of a die or dice with one dot on it. Well, the term was extended to playing cards in the 1500s.

The prominent role of the ace in playing cards has actually impacted the English language. It has contributed several common phrases. If you have a secret advantage, someone might say that you have "an ace up your sleeve" or an "ace in the hole." And if you have control of a situation, someone might say that you're "holding all the aces."

In fact, the English language is peppered with words and phrases that relate back to playing cards. For example, when 'the chips are down,' you might 'raise the stakes' or 'double-down.' You might 'call someone's bluff' and 'put all your cards on the table.' But don't 'overplay your hand' or 'play your trump card.' You might have to 'stand pat' or 'play close to your chest.' Even if someone 'sweetens the pot,' don't 'fold' in the face of a challenge or 'pass the buck' because 'the buck stops here.'

All of those phrases relate back to playing cards, and yes, even those last two phrases – "pass the buck" and "the buck stops here." Like most of those phrases I just mentioned, they derive from the game of poker. It was once common for poker players in America to pass a buck knife to a player when it was his or her turn to deal the cards. If the player didn't want to deal, he or she would literally 'pass the buck' to someone else, which is where we get the phrase "pass the buck." But President Harry Truman turned that phrase on its head. He assured his constituents that "the buck stops here," meaning that he took personal responsibility for his office. Like many

of the phrases I just mentioned, it began as an Americanism, but it passed into more general usage over time.

So as you can see, playing cards have had a significant impact on the English language. And the deck which so influenced the language had its origins in France in the 1400s. Despite legends suggesting that the French knight La Hire was responsible for that deck, we don't really know who came up with the design. What we do know is that the deck was soon adopted in England, and from there, it passed on to much of the English-speaking world.

One of the reasons why the French deck became so popular in places like England is that it was mass-produced thanks to block printing, and it was therefore relatively cheap and accessible. That meant that it became popular among common people, not just the upper classes.

Around the year 1440, block printing was extended from playing cards to something else very important to our story. Around that time, some European printers began to produce entire books with block prints. The text of an entire page was carved on a block, and then the block was inked and pressed onto a piece of paper or parchment. So the entire page was printed at one time. And those pages were assembled into books. As I noted earlier, this same idea had been implemented in East Asia, but these European block books appear to have been a completely independent development. [*SOURCE: Paper: Paging Through History, Mark Kurlansky, p. 110-11.*] Many scholars think that the use of block-printing for books evolved out the widespread use of block printing for playing cards. [*SOURCE: A Short History of the Printed Word, Warren Chappell, p. 9-10.*]

The major problem with these early block-printed books was the time and effort required to produce the individual blocks or stamps. It took a lot of time and skill to carve a large wooden block with raised text made up of lots of individual letters. And an entire book required a lot of those pages. So even if a book could be mass-produced in that way, it wasn't an easy task. But there was a simple solution to that problem that was just sitting there waiting for someone to discover it. It was the same solution that Pi Sheng had discovered in China about four centuries earlier.

All someone had to do was create a lot of individual letters as small blocks or stamps. Those letters could then be arranged and re-arranged as needed to produce the text of each page. That method would allow a printer to create an entire page of text in a few minutes. Once that page was printed, the letters could be re-arranged to create the text of the next page. And once all of the pages had been printed, they could be bound together into a book. By printing multiple copies of each page, the printer could make as many copies of the book as he wanted. He could produce as many books in a week as a scribe could produce in a year.

The reason why this idea would work so well in Europe is because European languages are written with an alphabet. So a printer only had to make a handful of letters, as opposed to thousands of Chinese characters. Of course, the printer needed multiple copies of those letters, but once a mold had been created for each letter, they could be easily reproduced.

By the early 1440s, several people were apparently playing around with the idea, but the first one to fully develop it was living in Germany – the same place where playing cards had been produced with block prints for several decades.

That man was Johannes Gutenberg. We don't know much about his early life, but he pops up in the court records of Strasbourg, Germany in the year 1439. He was involved in a business venture there that came to an end when one of the partners died. A lawsuit was filed to resolve that partner's interest in the business. Unfortunately, the nature of the business isn't clearly stated. The records indicate the Gutenberg wanted to keep the project a secret, and some historians suspect that the secret project was an early version of the printing press. (*SOURCE: The Gutenberg Revolution, John Man, p. 74-81.*) If that's what it was, it was never put into operation in Strasbourg.

A few years later, Gutenberg returned to his home town of Mainz. And once he was back home, he pieced together a prototype of the printing press using moveable type. He may have simply picked up where he left off in Strasbourg a few years earlier, but we can't say for certain. He was a goldsmith by trade, so he knew how to work with metal to create the metal letters required for the moveable type. He also brought in investors, most notably a man named Johann Fust who loaned Gutenberg some money for the project. Fust was a book dealer who sold those new books made with block prints. So he had a particular interest in printing technology. Fust's loan was secured by a lien on Gutenberg's equipment, which meant that Fust could foreclose on the equipment if Gutenberg couldn't pay back the loan. And that would prove to be very important over time. [*Ibid., p. 148-9.*]

By around 1450, Gutenberg's press was ready to go. Since it was a business enterprise, he needed to turn a profit. So he apparently looked for a book to print that would be in high demand – but also relatively short and easy to print. He settled a widely used book of Latin grammar called the Ars Grammatica – commonly known by the name of its author, Aelius Donatus. The book was used in schools and universities throughout Western Europe, and it had the added benefit of being relatively short. Gutenberg's copy was a mere 28 pages. Even though the surviving copies don't contain a publication date, most scholars agree that it was the first book published by Gutenberg. [*Ibid., p. 147.*]

We don't know if he made any money with that Latin grammar book, but events the following year provided another great opportunity to turn a quick profit. In the southeastern corner of Europe, the Byzantine Empire was under threat by the Ottoman Turks, and it was hanging on by a thread. The Byzantine Empire evolved out of the old Eastern Roman Empire, but much of it had fallen to the Ottomans, and they were closing in on the capital city of Constantinople.

The Ottomans were also threatening the island of Cyprus in the eastern Mediterranean. The King of Cyprus appealed for help, and the Pope offered to raise money to defend the island hoping that the money could be used to hire mercenaries. And it just so happened that the Church had developed a way to raise a lot of money very quickly. And that was through the sale of indulgences. You may remember that indulgences were basically pardons from sin. The Church would sell you an indulgence, and your sins were forgiven. It was a practice that was condemned

by some Church leaders like John Wycliffe, as well as later critics like Martin Luther. But in the mid-1400s, the Church was still making a lot of money by selling them.

As part of its larger effort to raise money for Cyprus, the Church ordered the preparation of 2,000 indulgences to be sold in Frankfort, just a few miles from Gutenberg's new printing shop in Mainz. An indulgence was a standard form with the name of the purchaser and the date left blank. Normally, a large order of those indulgences had to be written out by hand – a process that could take weeks, but Gutenberg's printing press could produce thousands in just a few days. We don't know exactly how many Gutenberg produced, but some of those printed indulgences still survive. So he clearly took advantage of the opportunity. [*Ibid., p. 154-5*]

Whatever money Gutenberg made from his grammar book and indulgences, he apparently put most of it back into the business because he once again had to borrow money from his main partner Johann Fust. Gutenberg needed that money because he was starting work on his next project, and that project would end up being his most well-known publication. That new publication was the Bible, known by many people today as the Gutenberg Bible. His goal was to produce multiple copies of the Bible for sale to churches and cathedrals throughout Europe. He eventually decided to print about 180 copies in total. [*SOURCE: The Written World, Martin Puchner, p. 157-8.*]

Now obviously, producing that many copies of the Bible was a massive undertaking. The Bible wasn't a single page indulgence – or a 28 page grammar book. Each copy would require over a thousand pages. It actually ended up being about 1,200 pages in total. [*SOURCE: The Book: a Global History, p. 132.*] That meant that Gutenberg needed more employees and more presses. He also needed to buy all of the expensive parchment that he intended to use for the Bibles. He eventually switched to paper which was cheaper, but he still needed a cash infusion to get underway, and Fust gave him the money he needed.

Gutenberg went to work on the publication of his Bibles, and it appears that he had multiple presses in operation by that point based on the slightly different type used in the surviving copies. [*SOURCE: Printer's Error, J.P. Romney and Rebecca Romney, p. 40.*]

Printing may have been more efficient that handwriting, but that didn't necessarily mean it was easy. The typesetters were literally 'type setters.' They selected each 'type' or letter and set it in place on the bed of the press. They had to make sure that each letter was spaced properly and turned the right way. They used both capital and minuscule letters, but they needed to keep them separate, so the capitals and minuscules were usually kept in separate cases or trays.

The cases were laid out for easy access with the case containing the capitals on the top and the case containing the smaller letters on the bottom. And that is actually why we call the capital letters ***uppercase*** letters and the minuscules ***lowercase*** letters. [*SOURCE: The 20 Letters, Oscar Ogg, p. 222-3; and The Book: a Global History, p. 135.*] The uppercase letters were literally the ones in the upper case, and the lowercase letters were the ones in the lower case.

You should also keep in mind that the text created by the moveable type was the reverse image of the text that was printed on the page. It's the same thing that happens when you look in a mirror. You're actually looking at a reverse image of yourself. So all of the individual letters had be created as reverse images of the actual letters. And the sentences had to be laid out in reverse order. So that took some getting used to. Even diligent and careful printers made mistakes.

Assume you wanted to print the word ***print***. The first letter is P. But the P you would use in the printing press would be the reverse image of a P. So the loop would be on the left side of the stem, not on the right. That made it look like a lowercase Q. And if you needed a lowercase Q, you needed to grab the letter with the loop on the right side of the stem – in other words, the letter that looked like a P. Even a careful printer sometimes grabbed the wrong letter by mistake. So he literally mixed-up his P's and Q's. And according to some scholars, that is where we get the sage advice to "mind your P's and Q's." In other words, be careful. Now, there are other theories about the origin of that phrase, but the connection to printing is one of the most popular explanations. [*SOURCE: A Hog on Ice, Chares Earle Funk, p. 199.*]

So Gutenberg's employees had to be careful as they laid out the text of the various pages of the Bible. While they were hard in work in 1453, much of the world around them was in turmoil. And the events of that year shaped the future of Europe for centuries to come. In many respects, Gutenberg's press combined with those outside events to set in motion Europe's transition from the Middle Ages to the modern world.

First of all, in May of that year, Constantinople finally fell to the Turks, and the Byzantine Empire came to an end. Those developments interrupted the overland trading routes that linked the East and West. [*SOURCE: The Written World, Martin Puchner, p. 154.*] That encouraged Europeans to find alternate sea routes to the East. And that contributed to the age of discovery and exploration by sea in the years that followed.

The fall of Constantinople also forced the Greek scholars there to find refuge somewhere else. Many of them headed to Italy, and they brought their ancient Greek manuscripts with them. Some of those works were already known in the West, but a lot of them were introduced for the first time. Those new manuscripts dealt with ancient Greek history, astronomy, geography, and philosophy. Those manuscripts would have been largely confined to the universities had it not been for that printing press that was working overtime in Mainz. In a few years, much of Western Europe would have access to a local printing press, and much of that pre-Christian Greek literature was mass-produced. All of that new information created a revolution in thought and philosophy and art and literature. Today, we call that period the Renaissance, and much of it was sparked by the fall of Constantinople combined with the invention of the printing press. [*SOURCE: The History Book, p. 154.*]

Around the same time that Constantinople was falling to the Ottomans, the Hundred Years War was finally coming to an end. The French had claimed the upper hand in the war when Joan of Arc appeared, and the momentum continued after her death. In 1435, the Duke of Burgundy abandoned his alliance with England, and that effectively sealed England's fate. During the intervening years, England lost control of Paris, Anjou, Maine and Normandy. Two months after

Constantinople fell to the Ottomans, the English suffered a final defeat in Gascony. The Battle of Castillon was the last battle of the war. At the battle, the French relied on their cannons and other artillery. The artillery tore through the English infantry. [*SOURCE: The Wars of the Roses, Martin J. Dougherty, p. 67*.] And that proved the effectiveness of gunpowder as a weapon of war. The armored knight was no longer invincible, and the era of the mounted knight soon came to an end. [*SOURCE: This Realm of England: 1399-1688, 8th ed., Lacey Baldwin Smith, p. 25*.] Interestingly, the decline of feudal knighthood took place around the same time that French card makers removed the knights from the deck and replaced them with the queens. So maybe those card markers saw the writing on the wall.

With the loss of Gascony, England's only remaining possession in France was the small port city of Calais on the northern coast. The English would never again recover its former possessions in France. And with the loss of those possessions, England would soon shift its attention to maritime exploration, and eventually to the new continent that was about to be discovered on the other side of the Atlantic.

England's infant king Henry VI was now 32 years old. During his largely inept reign, he had lost the French throne, he lost all of the French territories his father had conquered, he lost the Hundred Years War, and he had left England in a state of bankruptcy. People were not happy. And then, about a month after the last battle of the Hundred Years War, Henry suffered the first bout of dementia and mental illness which he had inherited from his grandfather. That meant that political power shifted to those around him, and England soon devolved into a civil war which became known as the Wars of the Roses.

All of that happened within the course of a few months in the Spring and Summer of 1453 – while Johannes Gutenberg was working on the publication of his massive Bible. The first run of those Bibles was finally ready by the middle of the following year. Somewhere between 150 to 180 copies were made available for sale. [*SOURCE: The Gutenberg Revolution, John Man, P. 180.*]

The Bibles were not only printed. They were also beautifully decorated. And it appears that some of the decorations were added by an artist in Mainz who is considered to be one of the greatest playing card designers. During the early 1400s, artisans in Germany had developed a new type of block printing that used engravings on copper instead of wood. Copper allowed the artists to produce beautifully elaborate and detailed designs. In Mainz, one particular artist was using that technique to produce very high quality playing cards that featured images of plants, animals and other decorations. His identity is unknown, so he is simply known as the Master of Playing Cards.

Well, the illustrations in Gutenberg's Bible featured elaborate images and designs that are identical – or virtually identical – to the designs on those playing cards. For that reason, many scholars think the Master of Playing Cards worked with Johannes Gutenberg on those first Gutenberg Bibles. [*SOURCE: Lehmann-Haupt, 1966.*] And if that's true, those Bibles represent the culmination of the art of card making and art of printing in the late Middle Ages.

But interestingly, Gutenberg's name never appeared on any of his Bibles, and it seems that he never enjoyed the profits or financial rewards of his world-changing invention. And that's because his primary investor Johann Fust finally called all of his loans due while the Bible production was wrapping up. Since Gutenberg had rolled all of his profits into the business, and since he hadn't received the money for his Bibles yet, he couldn't repay the loans. If Fust had waited a few more months, he almost certainly would have been repaid. But he didn't wait. He filed a lawsuit and foreclosed on Gutenberg's equipment in 1455. He then opened his own printing shop with his son-in-law, Peter Schoeffer. [*SOURCE: The 20 Letters, Oscar Ogg, p. 192.*] Two years later, they published a Psalter which was the first book to include a printer's imprint. It read, "[F]ashioned by a mechanical process of printing and producing characters, without use of a pen, and ... completed ... by Joachim Fust ... and Peter Schoffer." [*SOURCE: Printer's Error, J.P. Romney and Rebecca Romney, p. 29.*] After that Psalter was published, Fust and Schoeffer went on to produce many more works using their foreclosed printing press.

So what happened to Gutenberg? Well, that's a little unclear. Most of what we know about him comes from the records of the various lawsuits he was involved in. When he died about a decade later, he left some printing materials in his Will, so it appears that he either maintained one of his presses or built another one. He probably printed other books before he died, but none of them bear his name. [*SOURCE: The 20 Letters, Oscar Ogg, p. 194, and The Book: a Global History, p. 132.*]

Even though Gutenberg largely disappeared after he lost most of his equipment, his ideas and his invention lived on. By the end of the century, printing presses could be found all over Europe. A decade after Gutenberg's Bible was published, the printing press was in Italy. Some Italian printers came up with a new design for the letters that were used in their press. A popular Venetian printer used a fancy slanted letter style that was much slimmer than the thick Gothic typeface used in Germany. The thinner letters allowed them to print smaller pocket-size books, and that thin Italian style became known as ***italics***, which literally meant the Italian letters or type.

About five years after Italy, a printing press was in operation in France. About three years after that, there were presses in Holland and Belgium. And in 1476, William Caxton brought a printing press to England. (*SOURCE: The 20 Letters, Oscar Ogg, P. 210.*)

Since it took a couple of decades for the printing press to find its way to England, I'll discuss the specific consequences for the English language in a future episode when we look at Caxton's press. But for now, let's consider the broader consequences of the printing press for Western Europe.

The first and most obvious consequence was the fact that books were soon to be everywhere. What had previously been a work of art and a valued treasure was now just another commodity. By the end of the century – less that 50 years after Gutenberg – there were about 1,700 printing presses in operation around Europe. [*SOURCE: The Kingfisher Illustrated History of the World, p. 313.*] Those presses had produced about 15,000 different book titles.[*SOURCE: 1492: The Decline of Medievalism and the Rise of the Modern Age, Barnet Litvinoff, p. 32.*] And whereas it

took a scribe about a month to copy a single book, the printers usually produced 500 copies in a week. [*SOURCE: The Gutenberg Revolution, John Man, p. 15*.] If we do the math on that, 500 copies of 15,000 different book titles means that printers had produced nearly 8 million individual books by the end of the century. [*SOURCE: The Day the Universe Changed, James Burke, p. 113*.] And to put that into some perspective, that is more printed books in 50 years than all of the handwritten books produced in Europe in all of the Middle Ages put together. [*SOURCE: Palimpsest: a History of the Written Word, Matthew Battles, p. 167*.] Those new printed books contained virtually all of the Western world's accumulated knowledge and learning. And the generous supply of books meant that they were relatively cheap, so anyone who could read and had a little extra spending money could suddenly get access to that knowledge.

Modern historians compare this development to the invention of the internet in the 20th century. It opened a vast floodgate of information to the general public. Not just the elites, and the rich and the scholars, but everybody. At least everybody who could read, which was another consequence of the printing press. More and more people wanted to read what was in those books, so more and people learned to read, and they made sure their children could read. So there was a significant increase in literacy throughout Europe over the following century.

Of course, people wanted those books in their own native languages – like English, and German and Italian. They didn't want books in a language like Latin that they didn't understand. So local vernaculars were suddenly given priority over Latin. This contributed to the gradual decline of Latin in the modern era, and it encouraged the use of local languages. In England, that meant that there was less of use of Latin – and the decline of French was further accelerated.

With local languages like English now being used as standard published languages, those languages started to become more standardized. Whereas local vernaculars tended to vary to region to region and town to town, printers started to adopt certain dialect features and reject others. That produced a somewhat standard written language. Specific spellings were also adopted. Once those languages became more standardized, printers started to produce grammar books and dictionaries in those local languages to help people learn how to read and write. That created the notion of a "correct" form of the language, which was really unheard of prior to that for most local vernaculars.

Of course, all of that gave those local languages a prestige that they hadn't enjoyed before. People became more aware and self-conscious of their language and the languages of others. A shared language brought people together leading to a rise in nationalism among those groups.

In matters of religion, a Bible composed in the local vernacular combined with the printing press was an explosive combination. That gave the average person direct access to the Bible. They no longer needed to go through the clergy or the Church. It also allowed Church critics like Martin Luther to spread their criticisms far and wide. That further weakened the status of the Church. In Europe, it also led to the Reformation.

As I noted earlier, the printing press also contributed to the Renaissance by provided people with access to much of that lost pre-Christian literature from ancient Greece. That forced people to rethink the world around them, and it provided yet another challenge to the power of the Church.

The printing press also changed the way people learned about the world around them and the way they contributed to that body of accumulated knowledge. In a world without books, people relied on memory and tradition. That meant that those ideas were often fluid and variable. And those ideas were usually exchanged face to face. Now with much of that information compiled in books, those ideas could be challenged and tested. The ideas could be spread over thousands of miles to many different people even across different generations. Along the way, those ideas could be verified or rejected or modified. That process produced a reservoir of knowledge that could be expanded as younger generations added to the knowledge that had been accumulated over time. Scholars could pick up where others left off without reinventing the wheel each time. That meant the overall body of accumulated knowledge grew at a rapid rate. And it allowed for specialization in many fields.

Fields like architecture, astronomy, geography and mathematics were revolutionized through this process. Of course, it wasn't limited to academics.

Many craftsmen had died during the Black Death, and much of their practical knowledge and skills had been lost over time. Now printers were produced a lot of 'how to' books. That allowed common people to acquire practical skills that were in high demand. And they didn't have to serve as an apprentice under a master in a guild to acquire that knowledge. So the power and influence of individual craftsmen grew, and the power of medieval craft guilds declined.

So you get the idea. The printing press changed the world. And it was a major factor in the transition from the Middle Ages to the Modern era. The medieval world was coming to an end. It was much like the Byzantine Empire, and England's conquest of France, and Johann Gutenberg's printing business. They all came crashing down like a house of cards.

Next time, we'll turn our attention back to the literature of England. And we'll examine the earliest surviving manuscripts that tell the story of a popular outlaw and folk hero. Of course, that outlaw was Robin Hood. And we get the first written accounts of Robin Hood in the mid-1400s. So we'll look at those early stories and the role of outlaws in medieval England. We'll also examine the texts for evidence of the Great Vowel Shift which was certainly underway by this point in the mid-1400s.

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