

**THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST  
TRANSCRIPTS**

**EPISODES 66 - 70**

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## EPISODE 66: BROKEN PROMISES AND THE EVE OF CONQUEST

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 66: Broken Promises and the Eve of Conquest. In this episode, we’re going to look at the life and times of William of Normandy – the man who conquered England. William’s influence on the history of England is well-known and well-documented, but what often gets overlooked is his influence on the English language. For more than five centuries, the English language had been a heavily inflected Germanic language with a Germanic vocabulary. But William’s conquest of England wiped away much of that old language. A new form of English would slowly emerge from the ashes. That means that William of Normandy is one of the most important figures in the overall history of English. And this is his story.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is [historyofenglishpodcast.com](http://historyofenglishpodcast.com). And you can always reach me directly at [kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com](mailto:kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com). And I am on twitter @englishhistpod.

So let’s turn to this episode, and the life and times of William of Normandy, and let’s begin where we left off last time in the year 1035. As I noted last time, that was the year in which William’s father died while on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. His father was Robert, Duke of Normandy. And before leaving on that pilgrimage, Robert had designated his young illegitimate son William as his heir and successor. William was only about 7 or 8 years old at the time. And with such a young heir, it wasn’t entirely clear if the nobles were on board. So Robert tried to bolster support for his son before he left. He had the Norman nobles pledge an oath of loyalty to William. And as we’ve seen before, this was very important in the feudal age. This established a feudal bond between William and the Norman nobles.

But when Robert died, reality sat in. The nobles were faced with the prospect of a young boy as their new leader. The fact is that William was too young to rule, so some of the nobles began to rebel, and infighting soon broke out between them. Unrest quickly spread throughout Normandy as William’s rule was challenged. Some of the rebels sought to carve out their own independent province. They even attacked the regents who were looking after William. His tutor and his guardian were both killed.

One fascinating story which illustrates how dangerous the situation was for William is the story of his steward – named Osbern. Osbern was tasked with protecting young William. And to that end, he slept in the same room as William in case anyone tried to assassinate him. Well, one night assassins did break in – and Osbern was killed in bed. But William managed to hide and survive the night. So it was a bleak and dangerous time for the young duke.

The Anglo-Saxons had a word for that kind of peril. It was the Old English word *pliht*. It meant ‘danger,’ and it was specifically the kind of danger that occurred when you exposed something to a risky or perilous situation. The Franks also had that same Germanic root word, and that word passed from the Franks into early French. Within French, that root word referred to the risk of loss that happened when you put property up as collateral or when you guaranteed a debt for

someone. If there was a default, you risked losing your property. The resulting French word was the word *pledge*. Over time, the focus of the word shifted from the risk of loss associated with the transaction to the actual transaction itself. So it came to refer to the actual promise that the person made when they pledged property or guaranteed some action. And that produced the modern sense of the word *pledge* as a promise or guarantee.

Now that little bit of etymology is important because it shows that the original meaning of the word *pledge* meant ‘risk of loss or danger.’ And it is cognate with the Old English word *pliht* which also meant ‘danger.’ But from ‘danger,’ it came to mean a ‘promise.’ So there is a linguistic connection between *pledge* and ‘danger.’ And that connection is relevant to our story, because the danger which young William faced was ultimately the result of broken pledges.

The rebellious barons had pledged to support William if anything happened to his father. They had sworn oaths of loyalty. That made them vassals of young William. But now they were breaking their ‘pledge’ to support him. And that created much *pliht* or danger for William.

And this established a theme which would continue throughout William’s life. Time and again, people broke their promises or pledges to him. And it probably shaped how he viewed the world around him.

Now the thing about danger is that it can work both ways. As a young, weak Duke, William faced a lot of danger from rebelling nobles. But the tables could also be turned. If William was able to survive and became a strong, established Duke, then those rebelling nobles would be the ones in danger. So danger is a product of power. When two sides are in conflict, the more powerful one becomes, the more dangerous it is for the other party. And I make that point, because that is ultimately how we got the word *danger*.

*Danger* is derived from the same root which gave us the French word *domain*. A wealthy lord or landowner was the master of his *domain*, and he was called the *dominus* in Latin. When he exercised his authority over his domain, he was said to *dominate* it. So the word *dominate* comes from the same root. That power was called the *\*dominarium*, and it became *dangier* in early French. That power – or *dangier* – meant that the people underneath the lord were subject to his authority and control. That often put them at risk. And over time, the power of the lord – the *dangier* – came to refer to the risk or peril experienced by the people under him. And *dangier* became *danger* in English.

By the way, I discuss the history of the word *danger* in much more detail in the most recent episode of the History of England Podcast. So check that out if you want a more complete history of the word.

Now I wanted to make the linguistic connection between *danger* and ‘power’ because it is relevant to the early history of William of Normandy. Early on, both William’s reign and William’s life were in peril. But as he solidified his support and become more powerful. That meant he became more dangerous.

Throughout his childhood, the Norman nobles continued to rebel, but William remained alive – often sheltered and protected by his guardians. While some nobles rebelled, others continued to recognize their feudal obligations to William. And there was another feudal obligation that was very important to William’s survival. That was the feudal obligation between William and the King of France – Henri or ‘Henry’ – specifically Henry I. Remember that the Norman Duke was technically a vassal of the French king. So that meant that the duke and the king promised to support and defend each other. And to the extent that he could, King Henry honored his feudal obligation to William. Henry’s support helped William to survive some of these early threats. Yet William continued to remain vulnerable.

All of this reached a head in the year 1046. A little more than a decade had passed since William became the Duke of Normandy. He was now in his late teens. He had managed to survive, but his position was still precarious. In that year, a noble named Guy of Burgundy was able to unify many of the Norman nobles who were opposed to William. This unified opposition was the greatest threat to William’s reign so far. According to one story, they arranged an ambush against William’s forces, but William was once again able to escape by riding through the darkness all night. He ultimately appealed to the French king Henry. He once again asked Henry to fulfill his feudal obligation to help him reclaim his duchy. Henry relented and the following year, William gathered some forces that were still loyal to him, and he met up with Henry’s forces. The combined armies met the rebels at Val-es-Dunes in northwestern France. This turned out to be a decisive battle for the future of Normandy. William and Henry defeated the rebels and secured a decisive victory. Most of the rebels were deprived of their lands and sent into exile. That allowed William to restore order and consolidate his power. The victory permanently secured his position as Duke of Normandy.

Now this victory is important to our story for two reasons. First, it meant that William wasn’t going anywhere. He was now firmly in control of Normandy. But it also leads our story back across the channel to England to Edward the Confessor. As we’ll see, Edward was getting older and didn’t have any children. And as William’s position in Normandy became more stable, Edward increasingly looked to him as a possible successor to the English throne.

Remember that Edward grew up in Normandy in the Norman court. So he actually knew William as a child. There are even surviving charters from Normandy which were witnessed by both Edward and a young William. So Edward had a personal connection to his Norman cousin.

By the year 1051, Edward had been King of England for about nine years, and he was about 47 years old. Meanwhile, William was only about 23 years old. So he was considerably younger, and as Edward looked around for an heir, William appeared to be a good option.

Now I say William was a ‘good’ option, but that largely depends on your perspective. For many native Anglo-Saxons, the prospect of a Norman king wasn’t a particularly good option. They had had Anglo-Saxon kings and Danish kings, but never a French king. But that wasn’t a problem for Edward. Edward not only had a fondness for all things Norman, he actually seemed to prefer Norman culture over Anglo-Saxon culture.

Edward had spent much of his early life in Normandy. He spoke Norman French. He admired French culture. And when he arrived back in England as an adult, he came with a large group of Norman supporters. From the time he became king, Edward injected Norman influences into the English government. He appointed Normans to many high offices. He even appointed a Norman, Robert of Jumieges, as Archbishop of Canterbury. Normans were also appointed out in the country as shire reeves or ‘sheriffs.’ And in the royal court, Norman scribes were used to write official documents. And most of them could not even speak English.

As you might expect, resentment began to grow among the native Anglo-Saxons. Many Englishmen started to complain. They thought the only people who got their petitions heard in Edward’s court were those who spoke Norman French. So the linguistic differences amplified the cultural differences between the two groups.

Now there isn’t much evidence that the Norman dialect was influencing English during this period. The Normans were still relatively few in number, and it appears that they didn’t really mix with the native Anglo-Saxons.

But as we saw last time, their Norman French dialect did ultimately influence English. And most of that influence came in after 1066 when more and more Normans arrived and the Normans took control of the country. So before we move on, I want to spend a little more time on that Norman French dialect.

Last time, I looked at how the Norman pronunciation of certain words was different from the standard French pronunciation in other parts of northern France. And some of those Norman pronunciations survived into Modern English.

Well in some cases, the Normans pronounced words just like the rest of northern France. But then the pronunciation started to change in places like Paris. So the Norman dialect actually held onto the original sound which was lost in standard French. And once again, these Norman French features passed into English. And the result is that French words which passed into English early on are often different from the versions which are found in later French. But in these cases, English actually captures the original form of the words.

One example of this is an ‘S’ sound which was once very common in many French words but was lost in the standard French dialect spoken around Paris. So if we look closely, we can find that English has sometimes preserved the original version with the ‘S’ sound, but it also has a similar word borrowed at a later date without the ‘S’ sound.

We can see distinction in words like *hotel* and *hostel* (‘h-o-s-t-e-l’). *Hostel* reflects the original pronunciation of the Normans, as well as much of northern France at one time. Of course, *hostel* means an inn or lodgings. But that ‘S’ was lost in standard French, and English later borrowed the same word again as *hotel* without the ‘S’ sound.

We can also see this distinction in words like *corpse* (‘c-o-r-p-s-e’) and *corps* (‘c-o-r-p-s’). Both words are still spelled with an S, but the pronunciation of the S was lost in *corps*. Now the root

of both words is the Latin word *corpus*, which meant ‘body.’ And it later produced a French word meaning the same thing, but typically spelled (‘c-o-r-s’). There was no letter P in the word originally. The word ‘c-o-r-s’ was pronounced /kors/, but gradually became /kor/ in the French dialect spoken around Paris as the ‘S’ sound was dropped in a lot of words. The Normans retained the pronunciation /kors/ with the ‘S’ sound and brought that version to England. But later on, English borrowed the word again from standard French. And this second time it came in as /kor/ without the ‘S’ sound. So English ended up with both versions – /kors/ and /kor/ – but neither word was spelled with the letter P.

In later Middle English, there was a desire to re-capture the original spelling of a lot of words which had derived from Latin. And since ‘corpus’ had a ‘P’ in it, the letter ‘P’ started to be added to the spelling of those words. But by this point, the words had become distinct in English. The standard French version *cors* (/kor/) got a new letter P, and it became ‘c-o-r-p-s.’ But both the P and the S remained silent, and they remain silent to this day just as in standard French. Of course, today this version of the word refers to a group of bodies like the ‘marine corps’ or ‘army corps’ or ‘press corps.’

The other version of the word was *cors* (/kors/) which retained that original ‘S’ sound. But again, it also got a letter P in Middle English. And over time, people started to pronounce the P in this version of the word, even though it had been silent up to this point. The result was the word *corpse* (‘c-o-r-p-s-e’) meaning ‘a dead body.’ But again, *corpse* and *corps* both come from the word *corpus*. One version retains the ‘S’ sound and one has lost it. And we can probably thank the Normans for that modern distinction.

And in fact, that Norman influence still lingers in a lot of English words. English has *feast* where French has *fête*. English has *forest* where French has *forêt*. English has *beast* where French has *bête*. English has *August* where French has *Août*.

A similar development occurred with the suffixes *-ary* and *-ory*. These were also standard French suffixes early on. And the Normans pronounced them the same way as everyone else. But within standard French, the suffix *-ary* became *-aire*. So they stopped pronouncing the ‘ree’ part.

So we can still see this distinction in word like English *contrary* and French *contraire* as in ‘au contraire.’ We can also see it in *solitary* and *solitaire*. *Solitary* is the older English version borrowed from the Normans, and *solitaire* was a later borrowing from standard French. So the ‘-ary’ is a holdover from the Normans.

Now I should note here that many dialects in the UK have shortened or slurred this suffix over the past couple of centuries from ‘-ary’ to just ‘-ree.’ So *secretary* became ‘secretree.’ And this type of pronunciation can be found in other parts of the English-speaking world as well. But American English has held onto that original ‘-ary.’ So today, we have American English ‘secre-tary,’ British English ‘secre-tree’ and French *secrétaire*.

Sometimes, the French ‘-aire’ suffix has replaced and supplanted an original ‘-ary’ suffix. Middle English has the word *questionary*, which meant a list of questions. But in the twentieth century,

the modern French word *questionnaire* replaced it. So the newer French ending kicked out the original Anglo-Norman ending. But for the most part, English prefers the Anglo-Norman ‘-ary’ over the French ‘-aire.’

A similar development happened with the suffix ‘-ory.’ That was a common French suffix early on, and the Normans brought it to England. And pretty much all English dialects have retained it. But it became ‘-oire’ in the standard French dialect around Paris. So English has *memory* where later French gave us *memoire*.

We can also hear that same distinction between English *armory* and the later French borrowing *armoire*. And we also have English *repertory* and French *répertoire*.

So again, the suffixes ‘-ary’ and ‘-ory’ still exist in Modern English because those were the suffixes used by the original Normans who settled in England. And some of those Normans were in place before 1066 during the reign of Edward the Confessor. So let’s return to our historical narrative.

By the early 1050s, those French-speaking Normans in Edward’s court were creating that divide which I mentioned earlier. It wasn’t just a linguistic divide, but the language differences contributed to the problem. The Anglo-Saxons were accustomed to Danish nobles who spoke Old Norse, but Old Norse was relatively close to Old English, so close that the two groups could probably communicate with each other. And the Anglo-Saxons were well accustomed to Danish influences by this point.

They had had Danish kings like Swein Forkbeard, Canute and Harhtacanute. And the Danes had become largely integrated with the Anglo-Saxons in the former Danelaw region. But the French culture and the French language were very different, and therefore must have seemed very foreign. So it seems that the Anglo-Saxons accepted Danish influences in a way that they did not accept French influences.

We actually have evidence on the ground from this same time period which shows how much the Danes had integrated into English culture. In the town of Kirkdale in North Yorkshire there is a church called Saint Gregory's church which bears an inscription which has been dated to the 1050s. The church has a sundial embedded in the wall above the main door of the church, and the plate with the sundial also contains an inscription. And that inscription really shows how much the Danes had adopted the English language and culture.

The inscription is a dedication, and it states that the church or ‘minster’ was rebuilt at the direction of a man named ‘Orm Gamalsson.’ So that name literally means ‘Orm who was the son of Gamal.’ As we’ve seen before, this was a typical construction in Scandinavian names, and both Orm and Gamal are Norse names – not Anglo-Saxon names. So a local Danish man had directed that this church be rebuilt. Two other personal names also appear in that inscription – Hawarth and Brand. Both of those names are also Scandinavian names. Some of the work which was done to church during that reconstruction still survives, and that reconstruction was done in a manner which combines Anglo-Saxon and Danish construction styles. From all of that evidence,

modern scholars have concluded that most, if not all, of the congregation were Danes or people of Danish descent. But the inscription was written in Old English, which suggests that the people were speaking English, or they were at least bilingual.

Here is the beginning of the inscription:

Orm Gamalson bought Saint Gregory's minster  
Orm Gamal suna bohte Sanctus Gregorius Minster

when it was all broken and fallen  
ðonne hit wæs æl tobrocen and tofalan

and he had it made anew from the ground for Christ and St. Gregory  
and he hit let macan newan from grunde Christe and Sanctus Gregorius

in Edward's days – the king – and Tostig's days – the earl.  
in Eadward dagum cyning and in Tosti dagum eorl

The inscription on the sundial itself reads:

This is the day's sun marker  
þis is dages sol merca.

Now I should note that even though the inscription is in Old English, it shows a breakdown of inflectional endings, which as we've seen before was common in the areas where Old English met Old Norse. Those endings were typically the biggest difference between the two languages. And it also shows the occasional use of a Norse word rather than an English word. So the word *sundial* is rendered as 'sol merca' – the 'sun marker.' This compound word isn't found anywhere else in Old English, but Old Norse did have that construction.

So this inscription is showing us how much the Danes and the Anglo-Saxons had become integrated by the middle 1050s. Churches, building styles, kings, rulers, language – it was common for English and Danish elements to mix together. But again, we don't see that same kind of mixing when it comes to the Norman French influences. And in fact, there was actually starting to be backlash against those some of those French influences which did exist, especially in Edward's court. And that resentment was probably at its greatest among the Godwin family who were likely eyeing the English throne for themselves.

As we saw in earlier episodes, the most powerful earl in England was Godwin. He was the Earl of Wessex. His sons also held prominent positions. His son Swein had been given a small earldom in the southwest of England, and his son Harold had been designated as the Earl of East Anglia. Godwin had also married his daughter to the king, Edward the Confessor. So the Godwin family was extremely powerful. And that power was resented by many of the Normans in Edward's court.

The royal court was located at Winchester, and Winchester was part of Wessex. So Godwin's Anglo-Saxon supporters and Edward's Norman supporters were living side-by-side in and around the royal court.

In one part of the royal court, the Godwins and their supporters spoke English, they had beards, and they wore English clothing. In the other part of the court, Edward's Norman supporters spoke French, they were clean-shaven, and they wore Norman French clothing. The Normans loved formality and ceremony. The Anglo-Saxons didn't. The Normans resented the way Godwin and his supporters treated Edward. They felt that the Godwins were crude and disrespectful. Meanwhile, the Godwins detested the foreigners in the court and in other positions of power. The two opposing groups became entrenched, and they started to resent each other.

All of this reached a head in the year 1051. In that year, Edward's brother-in-law – Count Eustace of Boulogne – came to the court from France. And it was a visit that nearly led to civil war in England. And one of the underlying causes of the conflict was the growing resentment of the French influences in England.

The events of this year were a major factor in the lead-up to the Norman Conquest, so I want to analyze what happened. And to do that, I want to return to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and the original Old English of the Chronicle.

The story begins with the arrival of Eustace from France and his meeting with Edward. We don't know what the specific purpose of the visit was.

One version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records these events. This is from the version maintained at Peterborough – also known as the E Manuscript. According to this version of the Chronicle:

Eustace came from beyond the sea  
“com þa Eustatius fram geondan sæ”

And went to the king.  
“7 gewende to ðam cynge.”

And spoke with him of what he would.  
“7 spæc wið hine þæt þæt he þa wolde.”

And then turned homeward.  
“7 gewende þa hamweard.”

According to the Chronicle, Eustace and his men then traveled down to Canterbury and then proceeded to Dover on the coast. They planned to spend the night there before sailing home, but something went wrong in Dover. Apparently, Eustace's men were looking for accommodations for the night. According to the Chronicle, they decided to find lodging wherever it pleased them.

The passage reads:

When they came, they would inn themselves where they liked.  
Ʒa hi Ʒider comon. Ʒa woldon hi innian hi Ʒær heom sylfan gelicode.

Note that the passage used the word *innian* as a verb meaning ‘to find lodging.’ It literally meant ‘to find somewhere to stay inside.’ And it is basically the verb form of the word ‘*inn*’ (‘i-n-n’) meaning a dwelling or lodging. So that word *inn* for a type of hotel goes back to Old English. And it also had a verb form as well.

Now apparently, the people of Dover didn’t really want to open their homes to the traveling Frenchmen. And a fight soon broke out between the Frenchmen and the townspeople.

The Chronicle says that one of the residents refused to let the Frenchmen enter his home. It says that the French soldier retaliated and ‘wounded the house dweller’ – “gewundode Ʒone husbundon.” Notice that the chronicle refers to the resident with the term *husbundon* – the original form of the word *husband*, but here it was used in its original sense as a ‘house dweller’ or home owner.

The Chronicle says that the man or *husbundon* fought back and killed the Frenchman. It reads:

The husband – or house-dweller – slew the other man.  
“se husbunda ofsloh Ʒone oðerne”

With the death of one of their comrades, Eustace’s men retaliated and killed the home owner. But they weren’t done. They went throughout the town and killed more people. The Chronicle says that they went ‘within and without’ – “wiðinnan ge wiðutan” – and killed twenty men.

But then the townspeople fought back. In turn, they killed nineteen of the Frenchmen. The Chronicle says:

The men of the burg slew nineteen men of the other half.  
“Ʒa burhmen ofslogon nigon-tene menn on oðre healfe”

After the *melée*, Eustace and his men fled back to Edward’s court where they complained about their treatment in Dover. Eustace told the king that the townspeople were at fault, and his men were innocent. According to the Chronicle:

Eustace had made it known to the king  
“Eustatius hæfde gecydd Ʒam cynge”

that it should be more the guilt of the men of the burh than his  
“Ʒet hit sceolde beon mare gylt Ʒære burhwaru Ʒonne his.”

Then the Chronicle entry concludes:

But it was not so.  
“Ac hit næs na swa.”

So the Chronicle implies that the Frenchmen were just as much at fault, if not more so.

Since Edward only got one side of the story, he was outraged by what had happened, and he felt embarrassed that his guest had been treated so poorly. Dover was part of Wessex. So Edward ordered Godwin the Earl of Wessex to harry or plunder the town. That was a common punishment at the time.

But by this point, Godwin was apparently getting a different version of the story. He was being told that Eustance’s men had started the fight down in Dover. And we have to keep in mind Godwin’s increasing resentment of the French influence in the royal court.

And now, Godwin was being order to go and plunder his follow Anglo-Saxons because a French noble and his armed forces had forced their way into town and started a mini-riot. All of this was too much for Godwin, so he flat out refused Edward’s order to attack the town.

This refusal was tantamount to rebellion, and it looked like the country was about to erupt into a actual full-scale rebellion. Godwin assembled an army and demanded that Edward surrender Eustace and to him. But by this point, the earls from northern England had arrived. Those northern earls resented Godwin’s power, and they resented his defiance of the king’s orders.

With the support of the northern earls, Edward was actually able to match Godwin’s army. It was a classic stand-off. The Chronicle tells us that Edward called for a meeting of the Witan to resolve the matter. The Chronicle says,

Then the king sent after all his witan  
“Ða sende se cyng æfter eallon his witan.”

The nobles and church officials who made up the Witan arrived, and they promptly sided with Edward. At this point, Godwin saw the writing on the wall and consented to defeat. Edward, the Witan and the northern earls all aligned themselves against Godwin and his sons. The Godwins were all given five days to leave the country. The Chronicle says:

Earl Harold went to west to Ireland.  
“Harold eorl gewende west to Yrlande”

As far as the other Godwins, they ‘went beyond the sea’ – “gewendon heom begeondan sæ.”

Specifically, they went to Flanders for the winter.

So things were looking up for Edward the Confessor. He had stood up to the Godwins and forced them out of England. And he had the support of the Witan and the northern earls. Meanwhile, things were also looking up for his young cousin William across the channel. As we saw earlier, William had also stood up to the rebels in Normandy, and he had finally secured his position as Duke. So the two cousins dominated their respective sides of the English Channel. And it was at this point that Edward apparently decided that his young cousin in Normandy would make a worthy successor to the English throne. According to some sources, Edward reached out to William and promised William the throne, but this is the subject of much dispute. So let's consider the sources.

Let me begin by noting that this is really where the Norman version of events starts to diverge from the Anglo-Saxon version. And as we consider the Norman sources, we have to keep in mind that most of these sources were written down after 1066. That means that there may have been some revisionist history at work to justify the conquest which had just occurred. So we have to treat the sources with some scepticism.

At any rate, two different Norman historians, William of Jumièges and William of Poitiers, both wrote about a supposed promise from Edward to William. They reported that Edward the Confessor sent an emissary to William around this time in the year 1051 or 1052. This would have been shortly after the Godwins had been forced out of England. The emissary was the Archbishop of Canterbury – the Norman who Edward had been appointed to that position about a year before. For the Normans, this trip was very important, because it justified William's claim to the English throne. But again, even though these two Norman historians wrote about the promise, most of the Anglo-Saxon sources make no mention of these events at all.

However, there is one short entry in one version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle which might provide some evidence to support the Norman claims.

This particular copy of the Chronicle maintained at Worcester says that William made a trip to England in the year 1052. So again, it doesn't mention an emissary being sent to Normandy. It says the opposite. It says William came to England. But either way, it implies some type of meeting or arrangement between the two leaders.

This particular entry reads:

Then soon came Earl William from beyond the sea with a great retinue of Frenchmen,  
“*Ða sone com Willelm eorl fram geondan sæ mid mycclum werode Frencisra manna*”

Note that the entry describes William as ‘earl’ – not duke. The entry then says:

the King received him with as many companions as were convenient to him, and let him go again.

“*se cyning hine underfeng, 7 swa feola his geferan swa him to onhagode 7 let hine eft ongean*”

And that's it. It doesn't provide any other details and it doesn't specifically say what the visit was for. But for the later supporters of William, it was enough for them to find confirmation that a promise had indeed been made to William. And the supposed purpose of the visit was to confirm that promise in a face-to-face meeting.

But the sceptics remain skeptical. This entry only appears in the Worcester version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. No other English document mentions this trip by William. And none of them mention a promise being made to William. Sceptics also note that the throne wasn't something that Edward could promise to someone else anyway. The King of England was actually selected by the Witan. But the counter-argument is that Edward himself had been promised the throne by his predecessor Harthacanute. And when Harthacanute died, the Witan deferred to that appointment and named Edward as king. So maybe Edward was trying to make the same kind of arrangement with William.

Again, this debate rages on and may never be resolved. But there is reason to believe that some type of promise or assurance was given to William. And the reason I say that is not just the Norman sources or William's purported visit to England, it is also because Edward had shown such a strong inclination towards his fellow Normans. And I say 'fellow Normans' even though he was technically half-English and half-Norman. But it really appears that he saw himself as more Norman than English.

As we've seen, he surrounded himself with Normans in the English court. And he appointed Normans to positions of authority throughout England, even appointing one as Archbishop of Canterbury. So it seems very plausible that he favored his Norman cousin over any other claimants to the English throne.

And whether or not overtures were actually made to William, it seems that many people in England thought and suspected that overtures were being made. And that was a great concern for many Anglo-Saxons. Edward's support among the Witan and the earls quickly deteriorated. And there was another problem for Edward. The Godwin family may have been exiled, but there was always a chance they could come back at any time. And that's exactly what they did in the year after their exile – the year 1052.

Early in that year, they returned with their own troops, and they settled on the southeastern coast. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle suggests that they met some resistance, but they also found support. They began to raise more troops, and they soon made their way to London where they confronted Edward's forces for a second time. In the prior year, Edward enjoyed the support of the Witan and northern earls, but that didn't happen this time. This second stand-off is recorded in two different copies of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle – the Abingdon version (known as the C Chronicle) and the Peterborough version (known as the E Chronicle). They tell the same basic story, but with slightly different details.

Both versions tell us that Godwin's forces made their way up-river to London where they were met by Edward's forces and the forces of the other earls. But then both Chronicles report that there was a refusal to fight. The Peterborough Chronicle implies that the earls were unhappy

with Edward, and that there was a mutiny. It says that the earls had been deprived of many things by the king, and they demanded that those things be returned. It reads:

The earls then sent to the king  
“Ʀa sendon Ʀa eorlas to Ʀam cyng.”

and demanded that they be given back all the things which they had been un-rightly taken from them.

“7 gerndon to him Ʀæt hi moston beon wurðe ælc Ʀæra Ʀinga Ʀe heom mid unrihte ofgenumen wæs.”

The king delayed for some time though,  
“Ʀa wiðlæg se cyng sume hwile Ʀeah”

so long that the folk with the earl were strongly stirred against the king.

“swa lange oð Ʀet folc Ʀe mid Ʀam eorle wes wearð swiðe astyred ongean Ʀone cyng.”

So in essence, the earls and their men had demanded the return of certain things from the king, but the king’s delay cause them to revolt. Now we aren’t told what had been taken from the men. But the implication is that it was power, titles and/or land which had been given over to the Normans.

The Abingdon Chronicle gives us a slightly different take. It says of Edward’s men:

they were most of them loathe to fight with their own kinsmen

“hit wæs heom mæst eallon lað Ʀæt hig sceoldon fohtan wið heora agenes cynnes mannum”

for there was little else of any great importance but Englishmen on either half – or either side

“for Ʀan Ʀar wæs lytelles Ʀe aht mycel myhton buton Englisce men on ægƦer healfe”

It then states that Edward’s Anglo-Saxon forces didn’t want to kill their fellow kinsmen and expose the country to ‘outlandish people’ – “utlendiscum Ʀeodum.” This is literally ‘people from outside the land,’ in other words, ‘foreign people.’ So once again, if we read between the lines, we see this concern with foreigners in the English court. It could be concern over Danish or Viking invaders, but many scholars think the implication here is fear of a Norman invasion. Edward’s English army may have been concerned that if they fought each other in a civil war, they would become so weakened that they would be vulnerable to attack by Edward’s cousin across the channel. And if we read these provisions in conjunction with the entry in the Worcester Chronicle that William had made a trip to England earlier in the year, we start to see these various pieces coming together.

The implication is that Edward had so favored his Norman relatives and supporters during Godwin’s absence, that the Anglo-Saxons had started to see the writing on the wall. When Edward died, William was likely to claim the throne. And that was unacceptable to many of

them. So in the midst of this military stand-off, they were once again forced to choose sides. This time, the Anglo-Saxon earls broke with Edward, and they sided with Godwin.

We're told that a quick truce was arranged, and the Witan was once again called to assemble to outside of London. When the Witan met, they exonerated Godwin and his sons. All of the Godwins were returned to their original positions. But more importantly, most of the Normans were kicked out, including the Robert of Jumieges – the Norman who had been appointed as Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Peterborough Chronicle reads:

Archbishop Robert was declared an utter outlaw, with all the Frenchmen, because they caused most of the discord between earl Godwin and the king.

“cweð man utlaga Rotberd arcebiscop fullice, 7 ealle þa Frenisce menn. forðan þe hi macodon mæst þet unseht betweenan Godwine eorle 7 þam cyng.”

The Abingdon version of the Chronicle renders an even harsher judgment. It reads:

Then they outlawed all Frenchmen  
“and geutlageden þa ealle Frenisce men”

who before rendered unjust laws and exercised bad judgments,  
“þe ær unlage rærdon 7 undom demdon”

and brought bad counsels into this earth  
“7 unræd ræddon into ðissum earde”

The Chronicle then states that a few Frenchmen who were loyal to the country remained in Edward's service, but the rest were exiled

Edward had lost. He lost his influence and much of his power. And he lost many of his Norman supporters as well. The only thing he retained was the title of king, but from this point on, he was merely a figure-head. He was humiliated and he largely removed himself from public life. In fact, for the last decade of his reign, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle barely mentions his name at all.

Godwin was once again Earl of Wessex. His son Harold returned to his position as Earl of East Anglia. And when the Northumbrian earl Siward died a short time later, Godwin's son Tostig was appointed as the new Earl of Northumbria, even though he had no natural connection to the region.

Despite having engineered one of the greatest political comebacks in English history, Godwin didn't enjoy his success for very long. A year after returning to England, he died in April of 1053. His son, Harold, succeeded him as Earl of Wessex. And his son Tostig remained as Earl of Northumbria. As the new Earl of Wessex, Harold Godwinson was really the most powerful man

in England going forward. Technically, the king was above him on the totem pole, but that was just a formality. For all practical purposes, Harold was the de facto ruler of the country.

Edward was an aging king without an heir and without any real power at this point. And as people looked to his eventual passing, it now appeared likely that Harold would step into his shoes and fill that vacuum. And a new English royal family would emerge – the Godwin family.

But there was that issue of that earlier promise made to William in Normandy. What was to become of that? For the answer to that question, we have to turn our attention back across the channel to Normandy. And we have to return to our original theme of broken promises.

William may very well have had an expectation that he would be offered the English throne at Edward's death. But for now, in the middle 1050s, he had more pressing concerns. To the southwest of Normandy was the region known as Anjou. The leader of that region was Geoffrey Martel – the Count of Anjou. He was a very powerful leader, and he had been expanding toward the disputed border with Normandy. So William sent his forces to the region and defeated Geoffrey's forces. But then William experienced another broken promise.

For several generations the Norman dukes had been loyal vassals of the French king. And the French king had even come to William's defense as a young duke. But now the French king Henry began to see William as a rival. Normandy was increasingly powerful. And maybe Henry had also gotten word that William was eyeing the English throne. If that happened, William would be a king in his own right, and his power would eclipse Henry's. Whatever the specific reason, Henry decided to abandon William and throw his support to Geoffrey in Anjou. The two formed an alliance and sought to take William down. But Henry miscalculated. As Henry's forces entered Normandy, they were routed by William's forces. The defeat was so overwhelming that both Henry and Geoffrey retreated.

They would soon return. But over the next few years, William continued to defend Normandy. Ultimately, the hostilities didn't end until the year 1060. In that year, both Henry and Geoffrey died. So William outlived his southern enemies.

The big point to take from these developments is the fact that William was once again the victim of a broken promise. The king had broken his feudal promise to protect and defend William as his vassal. But William overcame that broken promise through self-reliance and military might.

With the death of William's rivals to the south, Normandy's southern borders were secure. But then the northwestern border with Brittany became an issue. The Breton Duke was named Conan – specifically Conan II. You might remember from the last episode that Brittany had been largely under Normandy's control since the time of William's grandfather. The Bretons had tried to break free during the time of William's father, but William's father had suppressed that earlier revolt. Now the Bretons were trying to rebel again. So William decided to launch an expedition into Brittany to bring the region under control in the year 1064. His aim was to support the Breton vassals there that were still loyal to Normandy.

But this is where events in England once again intersected with events in Normandy, at least according to the Norman sources. Just as William was preparing that expedition into Brittany, who should show up in Normandy one day but one Harold Godwinsson, the Earl of Wessex and arguably the de facto ruler of England. And this visit is extremely important to the history of the Norman Conquest because supposedly Harold arrived with a message for William. And that message was that William was still Edward's chosen successor in England. But once again, this story comes from the Norman side, not the Anglo-Saxon side. So let's look at the sources.

Let's begin by emphasizing that there is no mention at all of this visit in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle or any other Anglo-Saxon records. But this supposed visit is mentioned in several Norman sources. And the best source of this story is the famous Bayeux Tapestry.

So let me tell you a little bit about that tapestry. A few years after the Norman Conquest, a large tapestry was embroidered by seamstresses, probably in England. It's a massive tapestry over about 230 feet long and about 20 inches wide. And it was created by William's supporters.

So why did they create it? Well, the best guess is that it was a brilliant piece of propaganda. It tells the story of the Norman Conquest from the Norman perspective. But it tells the story in pictures – not words. So it was clearly designed for an audience who couldn't read. And most of the common people were still illiterate. So it appears to be aimed at the general public. By the way, the tapestry is still on display in Bayeux in Normandy, which is why it is called the Bayeux Tapestry today.

Now again, the exact date of the tapestry is unknown. But it is believed to have been created shortly after the Norman Conquest. And the first third or so of the tapestry is designed to show that William had the right to invade England. And the first part focuses on this supposed visit to Normandy by Harold Godwinson – the Earl of Wessex.

The tapestry shows Harold landing on the Norman coast and being detained by one of William's vassals. The reason for the visit is not stated. Maybe it was an official visit. Maybe he was blown off course and was shipwrecked. Again, the tapestry is open to interpretation.

The tapestry then shows Harold being presented to William and being taken back to William's court at Rouen. The tapestry then shows a military campaign. It was William's military campaign in Brittany in 1064. The tapestry indicates that Harold accompanied William on that campaign. It then shows two of William's men being trapped in quicksand, and Harold actually rescuing them. Ultimately, the campaign was successful. William was able to put down the rebellion in Brittany.

The tapestry then returns the scene to William's court. And this is the most important segment for our story. At this point, Harold is shown making an oath to William. It doesn't specifically say what the oath was for, and that's probably because the tapestry was prepared after the Conquest and everyone knew what the oath was (or was supposed to be).

In case there was any doubt about that oath, we also have the accounts of those early Norman historians which I mentioned earlier – William of Jumieges and William of Poitiers. William of Jumieges wrote that Harold took ‘many oaths’ in support of William. William of Poitiers provided a similar account. He wrote that Harold swore fealty to William and agreed to become a vassal of William. He added that Harold promised William possession of England when Edward died. And until then, Harold agreed to be William’s representative at the Edward’s court.

But here is the other important thing about that oath. According to William of Poitiers and the Bayeux Tapestry, Harold’s oath to William was sworn over holy relics. The tapestry suggests that the relics were concealed, so it isn’t clear if Harold was aware that he was actually swearing over holy relics. But those relics added extra force to the oath, at least in the minds of the Normans.

So according to the Norman perspective, we have two separate promises to William. Edward the Confessor had made a promise to William back in the year 1052. Now in the year 1064, Harold Godwinson, the Earl of Wessex, had made a separate oath to affirm that earlier promise. So the two most powerful men in England – the King and the Earl of Wessex – had both promised the throne to William.

But again, the Anglo-Saxon sources are silent about all of this. From the English perspective, this was all Norman propaganda. Harold was the most powerful man in England, certainly the most powerful man after the king. And he was in the best position to succeed Edward. So why would he just give away any claim he would have to the throne? And it wasn’t even his decision to give away. It was ultimately the decision of the Witan.

Whatever the real story is, the tapestry definitely goes out of its way to depict Harold as an oath breaker and a usurper. And that’s because Edward the Confessor died a few months later. And according to the Anglo-Saxon sources, on his death bed, Edward designated Harold as his chosen successor. So if true, he broke that earlier promise to William, assuming he actually made such a promise. And shortly after Edward’s death, the Witan confirmed Harold Godwinson as the new king of England. So by accepting that position, Harold also broke his promise to William. We’ll look at some of these details in the next episode. But the bigger point here is that William was once again the victim of broken promises.

As a young child, his father’s vassals had broken their promise to support him as Duke. They had rebelled, but William was eventually able put down the rebellion by force. Years later, Henry the King of France broke his feudal oath to support and defend William. But once again, William stood up to the oath-breaker and defeated him.

And now in the year 1066, William was once again the victim of broken promises. William had always overcome those broken promises with cunning and force. And now, William sought to do what he always done – take what he had been promised, by military force if necessary.

Next time, we’ll complete our look at the Norman Conquest by focusing on the year 1066. It was one of the most eventful and important years in English history. And it was arguably the most important year in the history of the English language. It was a year which England was ruled by

three different kings. And it was a year in which the competing claims of the Anglo-Saxons, the Normans and the Vikings were finally resolved once and for all. Next time, we'll follow that history by tracing the language of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. And that will give us one last look at Old English before major changes started to set in.

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

## **EPISODE 67: THE YEAR THAT CHANGED ENGLISH**

Welcome to the History of English Podcast - a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 67: The Year That Changed English. In this episode, we're going to look at the events of 1066 – one of the most important dates in English history and in the history of English. Of course, this was the year of the Norman Conquest and the beginning of the end of Old English. It was an incredibly active year. So much happened. And if the events had not unfolded in just the way they did, William's conquest would have probably failed. And English would be a completely different language today. So this time, we're going to explore how these events unfolded and how William the Bastard became known to history as William the Conqueror.

But first, I have a few quick announcements to make before we begin.

Since the last episode, several of you were kind enough to send me links to the new book by Paul Kingsnorth called *The Wake*. And I thought I should mention it to you if you are not familiar with it. The book was previously released in the UK, and it has now been released in the US. It is a fictional novel set in England in the immediate aftermath of the Norman Conquest. So the setting is very timely given where we are in the overall story of English. But what makes this particular novel so interesting is that Kingsnorth actually attempts to render the original language of the Anglo-Saxons. Of course, it isn't actually Old English because a modern audience wouldn't be able to read that. It's more of a modernized version of Old English than can be read and understood by a modern audience. So it combines Old English words and spellings with a more Modern English grammar. And given the period of history covered by the novel and the way that it treats the language spoken at the time, I thought many of you might find it interesting and might want to check it out. So again, the name of the book is *The Wake* and the author is Paul Kingsnorth.

And speaking of Old English, there is a brand new podcast out there called 'Learn Old English' by Bob Kiley. Bob was kind enough to contact me to let me know that he was putting it together, and the first few episodes are now up. They're very good, and they provide a much more technical insight to the language than I provide here. So again, the name of that podcast is 'Learn Old English,' and it is available through iTunes as well as most other podcast directories.

Also, I have previously mentioned the fact that I am working on a book version of the material presented in the podcast. It will actually include a lot of etymology and material not included in the earlier episodes. And it was originally my intention to prepare this book rather than release transcripts of individual episodes. However, the book seems to be taking forever, so I have decided to go ahead and put together the transcripts for those of you who want those. So I will start putting those up in a few days, probably next week. I have the first 25 episodes or so ready now, and I will add continue to update the list until they are all there. And I still plan on completing the book – probably early next year. So I'll make a note of that when it's ready.

So with that, I'm going to go turn to the events of 1066. And in putting this episode together, I thought it might be helpful to have to a map to illustrate the various places and events which I am going to be discussing. So Louis Henwood has once again been kind enough to prepare a map.

Just go to Episode 67 at [historyofenglishpodcast.com](http://historyofenglishpodcast.com), and you can refer to the map there if you want to get a sense of where these events occurred.

OK, so let's turn to the big event – the Norman Conquest. It is the one event which I have mentioned is just about every episode of the podcast since I began. And it is almost impossible to discuss the development of the English language without making some reference to this historic event.

As I've noted before, many scholars consider the Norman Conquest to be the most important and significant event in the overall development of the English language. It may seem strange that a battle could so fundamentally change a language, but it did. And if we want quick proof of that change, all we have to do is look at the words which we use for warfare.

Since the Normans emerged victorious in battle, today we tend to use their words when we're discussing the military. Almost all of the common English words for warfare, military personnel, strategy and tactics come from French. That includes words like *war*, *warrior*, *battle*, *military*, *army*, *navy*, *soldier*, *troop*, *division*, *rank*, *private*, *captain*, *corporal*, *lieutenant* (or 'left-tenant'), *infantry*, *cavalry*, *comrade*, *ally*, *enemy*, *invade*, *assail*, *advance*, *attack*, *defend*, *retreat*, *defeat*, *surrender*, *strategy*, *campaign*, *victory* and *champion*. And I am sure there are many, many more. And they all came into English because William the Conqueror and his descendants gave us the language in which English warfare was conducted after 1066.

In fact, you actually have to work to find military terms which survived from the defeated Anglo-Saxons. Most of those words actually relate to the equipment they used and which has continued to exist in some form even to this day. So the Anglo-Saxons gave us words like *sword*, *shield*, *ax*, *spear*, *helmet*, *bow*, *arrow* and *weapon*. But other than surviving tools and equipment, we generally have to look to the French for our military terms. And that's a good example of how the French conquerors changed the language of the Anglo-Saxons.

So as we turn to the conquest, let's pick up the story where we left off last time – with the last illness and death of Edward the Confessor. Edward had become very sick late in the year 1065, and his condition got progressively worse. By late December, he was bedridden.

As it turned out, his last illness coincided with the completion of his favorite project – the construction of Westminster Abbey just up river from London. Throughout his reign, Edward has supervised and overseen the construction of the church. And now, late in the year 1065, it was finally completed. The consecration and dedication of the church was set for December 28. But despite the fact that it had been his lifelong passion, Edward the Confessor was too ill to attend the dedication ceremony.

Rumors of Edward's illness were probably widespread by this point. And his failure to attend the Westminster dedication confirmed to everyone that he was likely in his final days. Edward held on for another week. So as we enter the first week of January 1066, Edward was still the King of England, but that reign was coming to an end.

In his final days, Edward was surrounded by a small handful of retainers and close associates. One of those associates was the man who had been the effective ruler of England over the prior decade – Harold Godwinsson, the Earl of Wessex and the son of the late Earl Godwin. Godwin the father had been a rival of the king, but his son Harold generally ruled as an ally. It appears that Edward came to trust Harold over time. And now, as Edward lay dying, he designated Harold as his successor. On his death bed, the king told Harold that he wanted to be buried at Westminster, and he commended the kingdom to Harold's protection. Early in the morning of January 5, Edward finally passed away.

What is so fascinating about the death of Edward is how quickly events moved afterwards. With Edward's death, he had to be buried and a new king had to be chosen. Under normal circumstances, the selection of a new king might take a few days or a few weeks. But as it turned out, the witan was always summoned at Christmastime. And given Edward's dire condition, they were still in town waiting for the inevitable. So as soon as Edward died, the witan were gathered to select a new king. And they immediately selected Harold.

On the day after Edward died, two major events occurred. In the morning Edward was laid to rest at Westminster. And in the afternoon, Harold was crowned as the new king. The day of the burial and coronation was known as Twelfth Mass at the time because it was twelfth day after Christmas. So the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records the following:

King Edward died or 'went forth' on Twelfth Mass eve.  
"se cyng Eadward forðferde on twelfta mæsse æfen."

And he was buried on Twelfth Mass Day.  
"7 hine mann bebyrgede on twelftan mæssedæg."

In the newly hallowed/consecrated church at Westminster.  
"innan þære niwan halgodre circean on Westmynstre."

And Earl Harold succeeded to the kingdom of England.  
"7 Harold eorl feng to Englalandes cynerice."

So thanks to these rapidly moving events, England had a new king before most of the country even knew the old king was dead. This fact is even more fascinating given that Harold had no blood claim to the throne. But the issue of the succession had been hanging over everyone's heads for over a decade. So by this point, the Witan likely knew what they were going to do when Edward died and that was choose Harold – the man who had effectively been ruling England for several years.

I should note here that there was actually one other potential heir in Edward's family line – a grand-nephew who was a descendant of Edmund Ironsides who I mentioned in an earlier episode. His name was Edgar the Aetheling, but he was never given any serious consideration. He was a small child who had actually been born and partially raised in the Hungarian royal court. By the time Edward the Confessor died in 1066, the boy was about 13 years old, but he had no real

support among the nobles or the Witan. Everyone knew that there would probably be many claims to the throne. So a 13-year-old boy was not a good option to defend the country. And the Witan was never strictly bound to the next of kin anyway. So for now, young Edgar the Aetheling was disregarded.

So Harold Godwinsson became King Harold in January of 1066. But as he assumed the throne, he was surrounded by enemies, especially beyond the sea. There were three specific enemies out there on the horizon. So let's briefly consider each one because each one plays a role in this story.

Let's begin close to home with the Godwin family. As we know, the Godwin family had come to dominate English politics. Harold had emerged as king. He also had two brothers who were earls in the south. And he had a brother named Tostig who became the Earl of Northumbria. But Tostig's position in the north was always a little awkward. The Godwins were based down in Wessex, and so Tostig didn't really have a base of support in the north. On top of that, he proved to be a bad leader.

He often ignored the Danish laws and customs which were still common in the region. He also imposed very high taxes. Over time, he made many enemies. And apparently, he had several of those enemies murdered. He alienated so many people in the region that a full-scale rebellion broke out in Northumbria. The thanes and nobles demanded that Tostig be removed and replaced with an earl from Mercia.

When we last looked at Mercia, the Earl there was Leofric – the husband of Lady Godiva. By this point, Leofric and Godiva had both died, and Mercia was being ruled by their grandson Edwin who was in his late teens. He had a brother named Morcar who was also a teenager. And the thanes and nobles of Northumbria demanded that Morcar be brought in to replace Tostig.

Now this rebellion against Tostig broke out in 1065 – the year before Edward the Confessor died. And Harold had been sent to the north to deal with the problem. Of course, Tostig was Harold's brother, so everyone just assumed that Harold would side with Tostig, but he didn't. Harold actually realized that his brother was largely at fault. And Harold ended up supporting the rebels. So he had Tostig exiled, and Morcar was allowed to take Tostig's place as the Earl of Northumbria. This is often cited as an example of Harold's fairness and his willingness to put the interest of the people above those of his family. And while that may have been the case, there was also a more practical consideration.

At the time, Harold was positioning himself to succeed Edward. He knew that he had strong support in the south, but he needed the support of the north if he wanted the Witan to make him king. So by siding with the rebels, Harold helped to ensure that he had that support. And that left Leofric and Godiva's grandsons as the Earls of Mercia and Northumbria.

So Harold made allies in the north, but in the process, he had his brother Tostig exiled. And in 1066, Tostig was still in exile in Flanders, and he was looking for revenge. So Tostig was the first potential threat beyond the sea.

The next potential threat came from Scandinavia. I have alluded to this threat in earlier episodes, but let's examine it one more time just so we have all the players on the table. The Scandinavian claim came from Norway, and it goes back to the time of Harthacanute. Remember him? You might remember that he was a son of Canute, and he was in charge of Denmark while his father was in England. When Canute died, Harthacanute was the presumed heir in England, but he was tied down in Denmark fighting the Norwegian king Magnus. They eventually settled their dispute with a truce in which they agreed that the survivor would inherit the kingdom of the one who died first. Well, that freed up Harthacanute to travel to England where he became king. And then he died. So Magnus of Norway then claimed Denmark and England, but he never really pursued those claims to the English throne.

When Magnus died a few years later, his half-brother Harald Hardrada inherited his kingdom. And Hardrada was one of the most well-known and feared Viking warriors in all of Europe. But the people of Denmark didn't really want him as their king, so Hardrada got tied down in Denmark for about fifteen years trying to kill or overthrow the local leaders there. As a result, he also never really pursued his inherited claims to England. But in 1063, Hardrada finally made a truce with the Danes. So when Edward the Confessor died in England a couple of years later, Harald Hardrada was free to pursue his inherited claims if he chose to do so. So Harald Hardrada was the second threat across the sea.

The third threat across the sea was the obvious threat – William of Normandy. I discussed his claims to the throne in the last episode, so I won't repeat them here. But as we saw, William felt that he had been promised the throne by Edward and that Harold Godwinsson had confirmed that promise by taking an oath to William. So as word spread that Edward the Confessor was terminally ill in England, William was probably planning a trip across the channel to receive his new title. But that's not what happened.

The news of Edward's death and Harold's coronation reached William very quickly. William was informed of both events at the same time. And needless to say, it was not the news he expected to hear. According to a Norman history (the *Roman de Rou*) written a hundred years later, the news reached William while he was on a hunting trip. When he received the news, he was so angry that he couldn't speak. It was an era before buttons existed, so the history says that William just stood there in silence, tying and untying the fastenings on his cloak. He returned to his palace and sat down on a bench and pulled his cloak across his face.

For years, William had let it be known around Normandy that he was Edward's heir – that he would one day be the King of England. Now he had been made a liar and made to look like a fool.

I noted that the historical sources say that William tied and untied his cloak because buttons were not yet a fashion accessory. And I make that note because there is actually a linguistic connection between *buttons* and William's ultimate response to the news he received. The word *button* is in fact a French word, though it has Germanic and ultimately Indo-European roots. The Indo-European root word was *\*bhau*, and it meant 'to push or strike.' And a button was a fastener which you had to push through a small opening. So that root word produced the word *button*.

And that same sense of pushing or striking something also produced the Old English word *beat*. So *beat* and *button* are cognate. And you might beat something with a *bat* from the same root. If you beat someone with a bat, you might get charged with *battery* from that same root via French. If you have an argument with someone, you might *butt* heads – again via French. If the argument leads to a physical confrontation, then you might engage in *combat* from the same root. And if you gather supporters and face off against your opponent, then you might have a *battle*, again from the same root via French. So all of that means that *beat*, *bat*, *butt*, *button* and *battle* are cognate. They come from the same root. And even though William might not have known anything of buttons, he definitely knew about battles. And the ultimate kingship of England was going to have to be determined by a battle – actually two different battles.

In February of 1066, about a month after Edward died, William arranged a meeting of his closest allies and vassals. He told them that he planned to gather an army and invade England in the summer. Now this announcement was probably expected, but it was still met with a lot of skepticism. Many of William's allies and supporters weren't sure that he could pull off a successful invasion by sea. Yes, the Vikings had invaded England by sea, but they were skilled and adept at sailing and boat-building. The Normans on the other hand were a land power – not a sea power. They didn't have the ships or the maritime skill to launch an invasion of England.

Furthermore, when the Vikings invaded England, they fought on foot, just like the Anglo-Saxons did. But the Normans had a cavalry and fought on horseback with chain mail and armor. So horses would also have to be transported across the channel, along with all of the knights' equipment.

Beyond the logistics of building ships and gathering an army big enough to actually win, they would be completely dependent upon the wind to get there. Again, Viking ships could be rowed if the winds weren't favorable. But Norman ships relied solely upon the wind and sails. And the winds were unpredictable in the North Atlantic. No wind would leave them stranded. And too much wind in the wrong direction would send them off course. So the logistics were a nightmare.

And assuming they actually made it across the channel in tact, the English army would certainly be waiting for them. It wasn't going to be a surprise attack like most of the Viking raids because everyone in England knew that William would be coming. And England was larger and richer than Normandy. So England could muster large armies, while William could only fight with the number of troops he could actually bring across the channel on boats.

In order for William to pull this off, he was going to have to be a 'pretty' man. And by *pretty*, I don't mean the modern sense of the term as 'good-looking.' I am referring to the original Old English meaning of the term. In Old English, the word *pretty* was *prættig*, and it meant 'cunning, skillful or tricky.' In order for William to launch a successful invasion of England, he was going to have to be either a miracle-worker or a magician. So he was going to have to be *prættig*. But if he was successful, he would be remembered for working wonders and doing what no other man could do. And that is how the sense of the word *prættig* evolved over time. By the Middle English period, it meant 'manly' in the sense of a successful, honorable or admirable man. So a man you admired or respected might be a 'pretty man.' By the time of Modern

English, the meaning of *pretty* had shifted to mean ‘attractive’ in a more physical sense. As it came to refer more and more to a person’s physical appearance, it was applied to women more than men. But in 1066, *prættig* still meant ‘cunning, skillful, or wily.’

But while William’s supporters admired him and considered him cunning and skillful, they didn’t necessarily think he could invade and defeat the Anglo-Saxons. They suggested that William convene a wider council of all the barons in Normandy to get their input. In early Spring, William did just that. But once again, William didn’t get the response he wanted. The barons initially balked at William’s proposal. But rather than give up, William met with each baron individually to convince them. One by one they gradually agreed, and each one promised to provide a certain number of soldiers and ships.

Having finally secured the support of the Norman barons, William moved forward with his plans for invasion. But Norman support wasn’t going to be enough. This was going to be a massive effort, not just a few Norman knights. So William quickly concluded that he needed support from other nobles throughout northern France. So he visited the neighboring counts and dukes to drum up support there as well.

And it was at this point that William did something that proved to be crucial to the success of the overall mission. But more important for our story, he did something that ultimately contributed to the decline of Old English as a written language. So let me explain.

Realizing that he needed support throughout France for his planned invasion, William decided to seek the approval of the one person who would give his mission legitimacy – the Pope. The Crusades were still about thirty years away, but the idea of Papal support for a military mission wasn’t new. If the Pope gave his blessing, all who died in support of the mission were deemed martyrs, and they would be guaranteed eternal salvation. So it was a great way to drum up support for the expedition. And as it turned out, William had an inside connection to the Pope.

The Pope was Alexander II. About twenty years earlier, as a young cleric, Alexander had studied at a monastery in Normandy. While there, one of his teachers was a monk named Lanfranc. And Lanfranc was now a bishop in Normandy. He was not only a close ally of William, he was also a close friend of the Pope. So Lanfranc acted as a go-between.

William was seen as sympathetic figure in Rome. He had been a strong patron of the church in Normandy. And Pope Alexander remembered his time in Normandy with great fondness. But more importantly, William argued that the English church was out of line with Rome’s teachings, and only he could bring it back into compliance.

In the last episode, we saw that the Norman Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert of Jumeiges, had been kicked out of the country when the Godwins returned from their exile. And he was replaced with a loyal Godwin supporter. Well, the papacy had never fully accepted that development. And the Godwins were seen as the ones responsible for the exile of the Archbishop. So the deck was already stacked against Harold in Rome.

Furthermore, the English Church was so far away that Rome didn't always have a good sense of what was going on in England. That made it easy to convince the Pope that the English Church was out of control. But the biggest problem for the English Church may have been the fact that much of its literature and pastoral work was being composed in English rather than Latin. Since the time of Alfred the Great, the English Church had been translating parts of the Bible and other religious texts into English. And that was unusual at the time.

The original Latin texts were considered sacred, and any attempt to render them into a local vernacular was viewed with suspicion in Rome. The Roman Cardinals and church officials didn't speak English, so they weren't exactly sure what was being taught to English congregations. They suspected that the true meaning of the original texts was being lost in those translations.

So here we may find part of the answer for why Old English writing disappeared so quickly in the wake of the Norman Conquest. Certainly, the Church scribes in England didn't stop speaking English. So why did so many of them immediately stop writing in English after 1066? Well, it appears that this was all part of William's agenda. He promised to reform the English Church in order to get papal support for his invasion. And part of those reforms probably included a return to Latin and the relegation of English to a secondary role. So after the Conquest, Latin once again became the primary language of the English Church. And Old English writing began to disappear. So here we see some of the first linguistic consequences of the Norman Conquest.

William's arguments ultimately convinced the Pope to give his blessing. And the Pope also granted William a papal banner to carry with him to England to show that he had the support of the Church. With the blessing of the Church, volunteers started to pour into Normandy from Flanders, Aquitaine and especially Brittany, which had many landless knights. William had effectively made them an offer they couldn't refuse. They were guaranteed landed estates if they succeeded, and salvation if they failed.

In the end, only about one-third of William's army was actually Norman. About one-third was Breton. And the remaining one-third was made up of other mercenaries – mostly from other parts of northern and central France. So the whole northern part of France had been pressed into service. Work soon began on the construction of ships to transport those troops across the channel when the time was right. As winter turned into spring, planning for the Norman Conquest was underway.

Meanwhile, across the channel, King Harold had traveled to the north of England to shore up his support with the nobles there. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle reports that he headed south to London and arrived at Westminster on Easter Day in 1066. According to the Chronicle entry for 1066:

In this year, King Harold came from York to Westminster on the Easter after the midwinter when King Edward went forth.

In the original Old English it reads:

“On þissum geare com Harold cyng of Eoforwic to Westmynstre to þam Eastran þe wæron æfter þam middanwintre þe se cyng forðferde.”

The Chronicle then tells us that Easter fell on April 16 in that year. So Harold arrived back at Westminster on April 16 – Easter Day.

Now notice that the Chronicle states that Edward the Confessor died in *middanwintre* – ‘midwinter.’ So *winter* was an Old English term. And if we trace the word *winter* back to its original Indo-European root, we find that it’s cognate with the words *water* and *wet* – also both Old English words. So *winter*, *water* and *wet* are all derived from the same root. And I mention this because most scholars believe that the word *winter* originally meant the ‘wet season.’ Of course, it was also the cold season. And that’s why battles and wars were rarely fought in the wintertime. The fighting season didn’t begin until spring and summer when the weather improved. In the springtime, crops were planted. And they didn’t have to be harvested until the fall or autumn. So that left many of the available fighting men free to fight in the summer.

This is an important point because it meant that there was a window of opportunity for William to invade England. Beyond mid-autumn, William would probably have to wait to the next year. And everyone on both sides of the channel understood that.

So when the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle says that Harold returned to London on Easter Day, we know that it was early spring, and the fighting season was about to start. So it was time for Harold to prepare his defense of England.

Now I should note here that Harold would not have described this season as spring. He would called it *lent* in Old English. And *lent* produced the word *Lent*. And *Lent* was later appropriated by the Church for the Christian holiday. But originally, the word just referred to the spring season. In fact, the word *lent* is cognate with the words *long* and *length*. And that’s because the springtime was the time when the days grew longer. The original Germanic word for the season has been reconstructed as *\*langi-tinaz* – literally ‘long days.’ And that term was later shortened to *lent*. And the season of *lent* roughly coincided with the forty days of penitence and fasting that preceded Easter. So *lent* gradually acquired that specific Christian meaning. Since *lent* acquired a specific religious meaning over time, it became necessary to find a more general term to refer to the season itself.

And since that season corresponded to the time of year when plants and flowers and leaves ‘spring forth,’ that season started to be called *spring* or *springtime* in Middle English. But in 1066, it was still called *lent*. And that time of year meant the fighting season was about to begin.

Of course, the spring and summer comprise several months. So Harold didn’t know exactly when the invasion would come, but he did know the direction it would come from. It would come from the south – from across the channel. So Harold’s only option was to station as many forces as he could across the southern coast of England. And that is what he did.

From the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, we're told that 'King Harold . . . gathered so much a ship-force and also a land-force as no king ever did before because he was informed that William the bastard would come hither and strive for this land.' In Old English, the passage reads, "Harold cyng . . . gegædrade swa micelne sciphere 7 eac landhere swa nan cyng her on lande ær ne dyde, for þam þe him wæs gecyðd þæt Wyllelm bastard wolde hider 7 ðis land gewinnen . . ."

Now within that passage, we see several examples of Old English military terms which have since been replaced by French terms. First of all, it uses the term *here* for 'army.' *Here* is Old English, and *army* is French. We've seen that term *here* before in the term *heregeld* which was the 'army tax.' And a version of the word still survives when we speak of an army *harrying* a town or region. So English *here* was replaced with French *army*.

The Chronicle says that Harold raised a *scip-here*, literally a 'ship army,' and a *land-here*, literally a 'land army.' Of course, *scip-here* – or 'ship army' – was later replaced with the French word *navy*. And *landhere* – or 'land army' – was replaced with the French word *infantry*. So the Chronicle captures these English words shortly before they were wiped away. And these are just small examples of what was getting ready to happen to the language.

Now in order to understand the challenge that faced Harold, we have to consider the nature of the English military at the time. It included a band of professional soldiers who were highly trained and were a very formidable force. These troops were called the *huscarls*. The term *huscarl* is a Norse term that was brought to England by Canute who had his own band of huscarls. The huscarls were still around during the time of Harold, and they were his strongest warriors. They fought on foot with axes and swords in a manner inherited from the Vikings. The only problem with the huscarls is that there simply wasn't enough of them to defend the county against the William's forces.

So beyond the huscarls, Harold relied upon the *fyrð* – or /furd/ in Old English. This was the local militia – the citizen soldiers. And once again, we see an Old English military term – *fyrð* – which has been largely replaced by a French term – *militia*. And I should note that the word *fyrð* is closely related to the word *ford*, which was a shallow crossing-point in a river. And *fyrð* and *ford* are related to the words *far* and *farer* as in *seafarer*.

The connection between all of those words is that all have to do with traveling. And the *fyrð* was called that because armies were always on the move. So the *fyrð* were basically armed travelers.

Now Harold could call up lots of men of the *fyrð* or militia, but they were all amateurs. They had very basic training, if any at all. And they had rarely been summoned over the past half a century. So most of them had never seen any combat. And that meant that they might not be reliable once a battle was underway.

The other problem with the *fyrð* is that most of the men came from farms across the countryside. So they would have to return to the farms in the fall in time to harvest the crops. Otherwise, mass starvation would occur across the country.

As Harold began to mobilize his army and navy across the southern coast of England, an ominous sign appeared in the sky. Just four days after Harold returned to London, Haley's Comet appeared. Of course, they didn't know it as Haley's Comet, and since it only appears every 75 years, most of them had never seen anything like it before. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records the following entry:

Then it happened that all through England such a sign in the heavens was seen as no man had seen before.

“Þa wearð geond eall Englalund swylc tacen on heofenum gesewen swylce nan man ær ne geseah.”

Some men said that it was the comet-star that some men call the long-haired star.

“Sume men cwedon þæt hit cometa se steorra wære, þone sume men hatað þone fæxedon steorran.”

For many Anglo-Saxons, this bright light in the night sky was believed to be a bad omen – a sign of God's wrath. The Chronicle says of the comet that it shone for seven nights – “7 swa scan ealle þa seofon niht.”

And perhaps it was an omen, because as soon as it disappeared from the night sky, the first of Harold's enemies appeared on the horizon. But it wasn't William. It was Harold's brother Tostig who was returning from exile.

Tostig arrived with a fleet of ships along the southeastern coast seeking revenge and reinstatement to his prior position as Earl of Northumbria. But Tostig didn't have enough of a force to actually pose a serious threat. He was repeatedly turned away from the southern coast, but a southerly wind gave him no option but to sail up the eastern coast of England. When he reached the Humber south of York, he tried to go ashore again. And again, he was turned away. So Tostig's feeble attempt at invasion had apparently come to an end. And he continued to head north to Scotland. But that was not the end of Tostig's story. From Scotland, he sailed cross the North Sea to Norway. And guess who he met there? If you guessed Harold Hardrada, you would be correct.

Tostig actually made an alliance with Hardrada. Together, they agreed to launch a joint invasion of England later in the summer. But no one in England actually knew that at the time.

In England, the focus was on William to the south. The fyrd waited and waited along the southern coast. But there was no invasion. In fact, the Chronicle makes no report of any event in England from June until September. So the entire Summer season passed without an invasion from the Normans or the Scandinavians.

Earlier I discussed the words *winter* and *spring*. So as summer turned into autumn, let's consider the origin of those words. *Summer* is also an Old English word. It was originally *sumor*. And for the following season, we have two different words – *fall* and *autumn*. But neither word is Old English. *Autumn* was borrowed from French during the Middle English period. *Fall* actually developed a bit later in the 1600s. Just as *spring* referred to the time when leaves sprang from the trees, *fall* referred to the season when those leaves fell to the ground. It was in common use in England in the 1600s and 1700s when English settlers were migrating to North America. So American English still tends to use that term. But the word *fall* fell out of favor in England in later centuries, and today British English prefers the word *autumn*.

But if we go back in time to the period of Old English, we find that the Anglo-Saxons actually called the season *hærfest*, and it still survives as the word *harvest*. In fact, the word *harvest* originally was a seasonal term. It referred to a specific time of year – *autumn*. Of course, that was also the time when crops were gathered. So after the words *autumn* and *fall* came into use, the word *harvest* began to change its meaning, and it took on a more restricted sense. It went from referring to the time when crops were gathered to the actual gathering of crops. Some of the original sense of the word still survives in the term 'harvest moon,' which is a full moon that occurs within two weeks of the beginning of autumn.

Now that little bit of etymology about the Anglo-Saxon season of *harvest* is actually important to our story because, when the harvest season began, the men of the fyrd had to return home to harvest the crops. So harvest meant the Anglo-Saxon defenses would have to be withdrawn. Harold was probably counting the days as summer came to an end and the harvest season approached. But there was still no William.

By this point in mid-August, both William of Normandy and Harald Hardrada in Norway had assembled their respective fleets. Estimates vary, but it appears that William had about 700 ships in Normandy and Harald Hardrada had about 300 ships in Norway. They were both ready to go whenever the winds were right.

But here's the thing. Normandy is south of England, and Norway is northeast of England. So William and Harald Hardrada were each waiting for different winds. William wanted a southerly wind to carry his fleet north. But Hardrada wanted the opposite. So the winds were literally winds of fate. They would determine the future of England.

And as it turned out, the wind was coming out of the north which was just what Harald Hardrada wanted. So around August 12, Hardrada was able to leave port on his way to Britain to meet up with Tostig, but William was still stuck in Normandy.

A few days later, Hardrada's fleet landed in the islands north of Britain. He gathered additional men and supplies and met up with Tostig. His 300 ship fleet was the largest Viking fleet seen in Britain in over fifty years.

By all accounts, neither King Harold of England nor William of Normandy was aware of Hardrada's arrival in northern Britain. William was still waiting for a favorable wind in

Normandy. And Harold was still waiting for William on the other side of the channel. That meant the north was left largely undefended.

We're now in early September. The Anglo-Saxon fyrd had been stationed along the southern coast for most of the summer. And they were tired of waiting. By custom, service in the fyrd was limited to two months. So that time had run out. Provisions for the soldiers were also running low. And now it was harvest time. And the entire country was dependent upon the harvest to avoid starvation.

So on September 8, Harold made the decision to disband the fyrd and allow them to return home. That happened to be a holiday known as the Nativity of St. Mary. And it may have been agreed in advance that if William had not appeared by that date, everyone would be allowed to go home for the harvest season. They may have thought that it would be too late in the season for William to invade beyond that point. So the fyrd was sent home. That left Harold with only his huscarls – his professional soldiers. As we've seen, Hardrada and Tostig were already in northern Britain by this point. But Harold and his huscarls didn't know that yet.

With the fyrd disbanded, Harold rode with his huscarls back to London. A couple of days later, on September 12, Hardrada's forces in the north descended upon the town of Scarborough, and they burned it to the ground. It was only at this point that the people in the north became aware that Harald Hardrada had landed. The news was sent to King Harold down in London, but even by horse, it would still take several days for the news to reach him.

From Scarborough, Hardrada and Tostig's fleet headed south to the Humber to approach York. York was second in size only to London, and it was the largest and most important city in the north. Six days after the burning of Scarborough, Hardrada and Tostig sailed up the Humber and disembarked from their ships. They headed toward York, but they were intercepted at a place called Fulford Gate by the two northern earls, Edwin and Morcar. Remember, that they were the grandsons of Leofric and Lady Godiva. And Morcar was the earl who had replaced Tostig when Tostig was exiled.

The two Anglo-Saxon earls were mere teenagers and had never fought in a major battle. Meanwhile, Harald Hardrada was one of the most experienced and well-known Viking warriors in northern Europe. So it was no match. Hardrada's forces won a decisive victory, but the two earls survived. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle briefly records these events. It says of Hardrada and Tostig:

They both went into the Humber until they came to York,  
“hi foron þa begen into Humbran, oð þæt hi comon to Eoforwic,”

and fought with them there, Earl Edwin and Earl Morcer his brother;  
“7 heom þær wið fuhton Eadwine eorl 7 Morkere eorl, his broðor,”

but the Norwegians had the victory.  
“ac þa Normen ahton sige.”

The day after Hardrada's victory, the northern earls surrendered York, and for this brief period, Harald Hardrada was the effective ruler of northern England. More importantly, there was an agreement to provide Hardrada with hostages at a place called Stamford Bridge about seven miles east of York.

The date was September 19 or 20. And by all accounts, the news of the burning of Scarborough a few days earlier was just now reaching Harold down in London. At this point, Harold realized that he had made a mistake. He had spent the entire summer focused on William's threat from Normandy – a threat which had never materialized. But now, Harald Hardrada was invading from the north. Furthermore, the fyrd had just been disbanded, so he didn't have a full army to mobilize. So he did the only thing he could do at the spur of the moment.

As soon as he got the news that Hardrada was in the north, King Harold pulled together his huscarls and any other troops that he could, and he headed north. On September 20, he pulled out of London. Estimates are that he had about 7,000 men with him. Just four days later, the Anglo-Saxons army arrived near York – 190 miles away. It was an incredible feat just to cover that much ground in such a short period of time with 7,000 men.

Harold arrived near York just as the Hardrada and Tostig were set to receive hostages from the conquered city. Harold's troops completely surprised Hardrada and Tostig at Stamford Bridge. Hardrada's forces weren't expecting battle, so they were spread out and disorganized. Despite the long and exhausting march, Harold's rapid attack had worked. He had the element of surprise on his side.

The Anglo-Saxons actually had a word for that type of surprise attack. It was called a *fær*. And even though that word has lost its original military sense, it still survives in Modern English as the word *fear*. And that's because a *fær* generated 'fear' in the enemy.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records these events. It says:

Then came our king Harold on the Norwegians unawares  
“Ða com Harold ure cyng on unwær on þa Normenn”

and met them beyond York at Stamford Bridge with a great host of English folk;  
“7 hytte hi begeondan Eoforwic æt Steinford Brygge mid micclan here Englisces folces,”

The battle began when Harold's army crossed the bridge to confront Hardrada's forces. The two sides met and began to fight in hand-to-hand combat. By all accounts, it was a brutal battle. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle says:

there was that day a very fierce battle fought on both sides.  
“7 þær wearð on dæg swiðe stranglic gefeoht on ba halfe.”

In the course of the battle, both Harald Hardrada and Tostig were killed. The Scandinavians soon realized that they had been defeated, and they began to retreat to their ships. The Chronicle records:

the Norwegians that were left were put to flight,  
“þa Normen þe þær to lafe wæron wurdon on fleame,”

and the English fiercely struck them from behind,  
“7 þa Englisca hi hindan hetelice slogon,”

until some of them came to ship,  
“oð þæt hig sume to scype coman,”

Some drowned,  
“sume adruncen”

some were burnt,  
“7 sume eac forbærnde,”

some perished in various ways,  
“7 swa mislice forfarene,”

so that there were few left,  
“þæt þær wæs lyt to lafe,”

And the English had the power of the battlefield.  
“7 Engle ahton wælstowe geweald.”

And then the Chronicle suggests the extent of the devastation. It reads:

And the king let them fare home with twenty-four ships.  
“7 se cyng hi let ham faran mid .xxiiii. scypum.”

So the Viking army arrived with 300 ships full of men, but it only took 24 ships to take the survivors home. After the Battle of Stamford Bridge, Harald Hardrada – one of the mightiest Viking warriors – was dead. And Tostig was dead. The massive Viking army had been vanquished. But more importantly, the Scandinavian claims to the English throne were now extinguished. For all practical purposes, this was the last battle of the Viking Age in Britain.

While Harold’s men cleared the battlefield and piled up the bodies, they probably thought they could take a deep breath. They had survived a surprise attack and ended the Viking claims to the throne. But on the night of September 26, the day after the Battle of Stamford Bridge, the winds finally shifted on the English Channel. A southerly wind was finally available to William. At his direction, the Norman fleet was readied, and they headed across the Channel the next day. On

the morning of September 28, they arrived at Pevensey Bay on the southern coast of England. William's army landed on the English shore without any opposition.

As we know, the fyrd or militia had been called off about twenty days before. On top of that, Harold and his army were still at Stamford Bridge clearing the battlefield there and having a celebratory feast. When William arrived in Pevensey, it is unlikely that he knew anything about the Battle of Stamford Bridge, but he could probably surmise that Harold's troops were occupied elsewhere. The lack of resistance allowed the Normans to occupy the small town of Hastings near the southern coast, and he built a fortification there.

Once again, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records these events:

Then Count William came from Normandy to Pevensey on Michaelmas Eve (September 28)  
“Ða com Wyllelm eorl of Normandige into Pefnesea on Sancte Michæles mæsseæfen,”

and as soon as they were prepared, they built a castle at the town of Hastings.  
“7 sona þæs hi fere wæron, worhton castel æt Hæstingaport.”

Now this is the first mention of the town of Hastings, and it is about to become very famous for the final battle which was fought there. I should note here that the original Saxon town of Hastings now lies under water, and in fact the entire coastline looks much different today that it did a thousand years ago. In 1066, Hastings was located on a small peninsula which stick out into the ocean. It was basically a triangle roughly 10 miles by 6 miles. It was an ‘odd’ piece of land. And I use the word *odd* in the original sense of the word.

The word *odd* comes to us thanks to the Vikings. It was originally the Old Norse word *odd*. And it originally meant a piece of land which stuck out in the water. Since those pieces of land were often triangle-shaped, the word *odd* came to refer to a triangle or something three-sided. In later years, it came to refer to the third part of something. So in a dispute, that third party was the deciding vote. We still have that sense of the word when we speak of odd numbers and even numbers. An odd number is a number with a tie-breaker. In a three-way vote, it is often two against one. And the one that was different was sometimes called the ‘odd man.’ His views and opinions were not shared by the majority. And that is how we got the modern sense of the word *odd* as something strange or different.

Anyway, since the word *odd* was a Norse word, it was entering English around this time in the eleventh century. And Hastings was located on an *odd* along the southern English coast.

After settling in the area, the Normans laid waste to the surrounding coastal areas, and they spent the remaining days resting and preparing for battle against the Anglo-Saxon army.

As soon as William landed on the English shore, word went out that the Normans had finally arrived. But King Harold was still in the north of England cleaning up after the Battle of Stamford Bridge. Estimates are that it took about three days to get the word to Harold about 250

miles away in the north. So around October 1st or 2nd, Harold was finally informed that William and the Normans had invaded, and that they had gathered around Hastings.

It had only been a week since the Battle of Stamford Bridge, and even though Harold's army had won, it was still tired, wounded and depleted. Nevertheless, Harold felt that he had no choice but to gather his tired army and quickly head south to meet William. In fact, the troops of the northern earls – Edwin and Morcar – were too depleted to join the trek. So within one day, Harold gathered his huscarls and any other troops he could cobble together, and they headed south. They traveled through London and gathered a few more troops there. On October 10, he headed out of London toward Hastings about seventy miles away. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle tells us that the rendezvous point was an old apple tree which stood on a hill called Senlac. The hill cut across the only road out of Hastings. So it was a good defensive position. It was high ground, and it blocked William's only way out. Harold and his men arrived at the hill on October 13.

Over the past two weeks, Harold had marched a small band of soldiers from London to Stamford Bridge and defeated a formidable Viking army. He had then turned around and marched a depleted army all the way back down to the southern coast to face William of Normandy. In retrospect, this was probably a mistake. It is generally agreed that had Harold waited a few days before proceeding to Hastings, he could have gathered many more men. But Harold proceeded anyway.

The morning after Harold's troops arrived at Senlac hill, William gathered his forces for battle. The date was October 14, 1066 – the day of the Battle of Hastings. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle suggests that it was William who had the element of surprise. The Chronicle says of Harold's forces:

William came upon them unawares, before they were drawn up for battle.  
“Wyllelm him com ongean on unwær, ær þis folc gefylced wære.”

Historians continue to debate how many troops there were on each side. Harold probably had around 5,000 trained soldiers plus some farmers and peasants who had joined him on his trek south. In all, it was probably about 7,000 or 8,000 men.

William's army was probably about the same size – about 7,000 or 8,000 men. But all of William's forces were highly-trained professional soldiers.

Even though the two armies were about the same size, they were completely different in structure. As I've noted, the Harold's Anglo-Saxon army fought on foot, just as they always had. But William's army was much more diverse. He had about 4,000 infantrymen. And he also had about 1,000 archers or bowmen. But then he had about 3,000 men who fought on horseback. And remember that the Norman cavalry was a product of the French feudal age. Even though the Anglo-Saxons didn't fight on horseback, they did have a word for it. It was called the *ored*. But after Hastings, it was replaced with the French word *cavalry*.

As the two forces met at Hastings, Harold took up his defensive position on the crest of the hill. His forces stood shoulder to shoulder to form a shield wall against the cavalry and archers. Harold placed his huscarls in the middle of the line and the men of the fyrd on either end.

Meanwhile, William divided his army into three roughly equal parts. The center consisted of the Normans. On the left flank, he stationed his Breton allies. And on the right flank, he placed his other French and Flemish allies.

William's archers allowed them to take aim at the English infantry from a distance. The cavalry would then attempt to smash through the shield wall. But that plan didn't work as William intended. As his cavalry approached Harold's shield wall, they were turned away again and again. This continued for the entire morning. So despite having a tired and depleted army, it actually looked like Harold's forces would emerge victorious.

At around 11:30 in the morning, there was a break in the action. Everyone caught their breath. Around 2:30 in the afternoon, the battle began again. For more than two hours, the Normans tried to break through the English shield wall, but continued to be unsuccessful. The Normans were accustomed to fighting against other cavalries. But they had never encountered anything like the Anglo-Saxon shield wall before.

At one point in the afternoon, the Normans gave up and started to retreat, but the untrained Anglo-Saxon fyrd on either end of the shield wall made the mistake of breaking ranks to pursue the fleeing Normans. They followed them down to level ground. And there on level ground, without the benefit of the shield wall, the Normans had the advantage. William rallied his troops to counter-attack. The Norman cavalry turned around. Standing in their stirrups, the Normans started to cut down the Anglo-Saxon fighters. The tide slowly turned in William's favor.

In the course of this counter-attack, Harold was killed., but it isn't entirely clear how he was killed. The Bayeux Tapestry suggests that he was shot through the eye with an arrow. Other sources say that a group of Normans attacked him and hacked him to death.

With Harold's death and the darkness of the late afternoon, the Anglo-Saxon shield wall finally broke down. The Normans then proceeded to cut them apart. The fallen soldiers included the king and his brothers, thereby leaving no surviving male member of the Godwin family. A large portion of the nobility of southern England was also wiped out. At the end of the day, William had won the Battle of Hastings, and much of the English aristocracy had been decimated. According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle:

the French held the field of the dead  
“þa Frencyscan ahton wælstowe geweald,”

With Harold dead, England had no king. And there was no obvious choice left to succeed him. And the key towns and cities could no longer be fortified. But William didn't advance directly to London. He returned to the coastal and port cities of southeastern England, and he forced them

to submit. That included Dover and Canterbury. That ensured that he had way to retreat back to Normandy if he needed it.

Up in London, the remaining members of the Witan – mostly church officials – tried to pick a new king before William arrived. They selected the only remaining member of the old Wessex line of Kings. It was that young grand-nephew of Edward the Confessor known as Edgar the Aetheling. He was still a boy, but there was no other choice. According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle,

Archbishop Aldred and the townspeople of London would then have child Edgar for king,  
“Aldred arcebiscop 7 seo burhwaru on Lundene woldon habban þa Eadgar cild to kynge,”

as was his natural right,  
“eallswa him wel gecynde wæs.”

But even though he was selected as king, Edgar was never crowned. By this time, William was closing in on London. As William slowly advanced, day after day, the resistance began to fade away. The fact that William had that Papal banner may have been a decisive factor here. Most of the southern nobles had been killed at Hastings. The northern earls, Edwin and Morcar, were still alive, but they were only teenagers. So the church officials were effectively in charge at this point, specifically the Archbishops of Canterbury and York. And by this point they knew that William had received the blessings and the banner of the Pope. The fact that William had defeated the Anglo-Saxons seem to suggest that God was indeed on his side. And at this point, William’s capture of London seemed inevitable.

So the Archbishop of Canterbury came to meet William and acknowledged him as the new ruler of England. That enabled William to take London without a fight, and young Edgar was abandoned. William then met with the leaders of London and a coronation ceremony was set for Christmas Day.

William chose to receive the crown at the brand-new Westminster Abbey – the church had that been dedicated almost exactly one year earlier. And that choice was intentional. William wanted to reinforce the idea that he was the legitimate heir of Edward the Confessor. What better way to do that than to be the first king crowned in Edward’s church?

On Christmas Day 1066, William was crowned King of England in Westminster Abbey. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle records the event as follows:

And William this land conquered. And came to Westminster.  
“Willelm þis land geode. 7 com to Westmynstre.”

And Archbishop Ealdred consecrated or hallowed him as king.  
“7 Ealdred arcebiscop hine to cynge gehalgode.”

William's coronation ceremony was conducted in both Latin and English. And during the coronation, a new element was introduced – a call for the people to consent to William's rule. The people assembled in the abbey were questioned in both French and English as to whether they accepted William as their ruler. The congregation shouted "Vivat Rex!," and then in English "Long Live the King."

William's assembled knights outside of the abbey misinterpreted the commotion inside. They heard the yelling and thought a revolt was underway, so they went on a rampage and set fire to the surrounding buildings and killed many of the Saxons who were assembled outside.

It was an ominous beginning to William's reign. The political and social changes were just beginning. And so were the linguistic changes. Old English texts became much less common after Hastings. Latin and French would become the standard written languages going forward. In fact, the Abingdon version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle ended abruptly in 1066 after recording the Battle of Stamford Bridge. The version of the Chronicle known as the Parker Chronicle contains only one more entry in Old English after 1066. That entry was in the year 1070. After that, the remaining entries were written in Latin. Another version was maintained in Old English until 1079. But only one surviving version was maintained in English beyond that. The Peterborough Chronicle in the north was maintained until the year 1154, and it is one of the few surviving documents that was still being written in English at that late date.

Next time, we'll turn our attention to the aftermath of the Norman Conquest. And we'll look at the surviving documents to try to trace the changes that were starting to occur. As we shift our focus to the post-Conquest period, we will return to the actual language itself. And we'll try to follow the relatively quick transition from Old English to Middle English.

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

## **EPISODE 68: REBELS WITH A CAUSE**

Welcome to the History of English Podcast - a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 68: Rebels With a Cause. In this episode, we're going to look at the early reign of William the Conqueror as King of England. After the Battle of Hastings, everything seemed to be going William's way for a while. He even tried to maintain and work with the native Anglo-Saxon nobles and officials. But soon, the country exploded into rebellion. So this time, we'll look at those events, and we'll start to see how William's attitude toward his English subjects changed. In the wake of those rebellions, William decided to impose his will on the English people. And the English language which he initially embraced was soon abandoned. The Anglo-Saxons were soon replaced by William's French allies at just about every position of power. And a new divide was created. It was a political, social and linguistic divide. At the top were French-speakers, and the bottom were English-speakers. And that divide has influenced the English language ever since.

But before we begin, I wanted to let you know that I have posted the transcripts for the first 20 episodes of the podcast at the website. Just go to the 'Transcripts' tab at [historyofenglishpodcast.com](http://historyofenglishpodcast.com). I will continue to update that list, and I hope to have all of the transcripts up shortly.

Now this time, we're going to begin our look at the Norman settlement of England. As we already know, the conquest of England by French speakers fundamentally changed the English language. This overall process was complicated, and frankly, it was a little bit mysterious. It is fascinating that such a small number of Normans could so drastically change the language of over a million Anglo-Saxons, but that's what happened over the next few centuries.

In order understand this process, we have to keep in mind the nature of what happened. The French influence on English was vertical, not horizontal. And let me explain what I mean by that.

Very often, when two different groups of people speaking different languages come into contact with each other, the language exchanges are horizontal. They trade with each other. They work with each other. They marry each other. The two groups of speakers share the same general class, so there is a lot of give and take. And there is some evidence that this was the case when the Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians mixed together in the Danelaw.

But the situation was different with the Normans. They didn't really live side-by-side with the English. They 'ruled over' the English. They were the aristocrats, the nobles, the landholders, the lords, and the bishops. They were the upper class. Meanwhile, the English were at the bottom of the social ladder. They were the peasants, the serfs, the tradesmen, the manual laborers.

In that environment, the French influence on English was vertical. It came from the top down. French was prestigious, but English was looked down upon and stigmatized.

And that basic fact is still reflected in Modern English. When we look at synonyms in Modern English, we often find an Old English word and French word with similar meanings. The native Old English word is usually the more basic or common word, while the French word is usually more elevated and sophisticated.

So we might have an English *house* or a French *manor* or *mansion* or *domicile* or *residence*. You might have an English *car* or a French *automobile*. You might have English *underwear* or French *lingerie*. You might have an English *wife* or *husband* or a French *spouse*. You might *lust* for someone in English or *desire* someone in French. You might *start* or *begin* a project in English, or you might *commence* the project in French. And, in a classic example, I might tend to Old English *pigs*, *cows* and *sheep*, but when I go to a restaurant, I order French *pork*, *beef* and *mutton*.

So the words borrowed from French tend to be a bit more sophisticated or elevated compared to the native Old English words. And the reason why we have that general rule in English today is because of what happened immediately after the Norman Conquest. So to see what happened, let's return to our historical narrative.

As we saw last time, William was crowned as King of England on Christmas Day in 1066. The Anglo-Saxon army had just been defeated at Hastings. And a large number of English thanes and nobles had been killed in the process, especially southern nobles. The northern earls Edwin and Morcar were still around. They had remained in the north following the Battle of Stamford Bridge a few days earlier. And many of the Anglo-Saxon bureaucrats and local officials were still around as well.

So as William took the throne, he initially sought to use that existing bureaucracy. He wanted to rule as a later-day Cnut. He would be the king, but he would allow the native Anglo-Saxons to run the hundreds and shires and shire courts. So William maintained a lot of them in prominent positions within both the government and the church.

I noted that the northern earls Edwin and Morcar were still alive because they didn't fight at Hastings. So they were a potential threat to William. But William allowed Edwin to remain as the Earl of Mercia. However, he did replace Morcar as Earl of the Northumbria.

And you might remember from the last episode that the only other person with a blood claim to the throne was Edward the Confessor's young grand-nephew, Edgar the Aetheling. In other times, young Edgar might have been killed or exiled. But William actually approached Edgar and gave him residence at the royal court.

And beyond those nobles, many of the Anglo-Saxon landholders were allowed to retain their lands, as long as they paid a tax to the crown. The best estimates suggest that there were somewhere between 2,000 and 4,000 Anglo-Saxons landholders. So there was still an Anglo-Saxon aristocracy in the immediate aftermath of the Conquest.

Now, as we know, William had promised property and estates to his French supporters, and that land had to come from somewhere. And as it turned out, many of the nobles of southern England had been killed at Hastings, including most of the Godwin family. And since those nobles owned a lot of land, William was able to use that land to satisfy his obligations to his French supporters.

This established a policy that would continue for the rest of William's reign. Those who fought against him or challenged his authority would have their lands confiscated. And he would then turn around and grant that land to the men who had supported his Conquest. So some land was redistributed to Frenchmen early on. But most of the land remained in the hands of Anglo-Saxons at first, and many Anglo-Saxons retained their old titles and positions.

The total population of England at this point was somewhere between one to two million people, probably a little closer to one million. And it is estimated that William brought between five to fifteen thousand people with him from France. That included soldiers, retainers, translators and various other people. So only around one percent of the total population would have been French.

So early on, it was important for William to maintain as much of the existing infrastructure and bureaucracy as he could. And he also maintained the use of the English language for certain functions. When he arrived in England, he found that many official documents were being written in English, not the Latin he was accustomed to back in Normandy.

We're told by historical sources that William actually embraced English early on. He tried to learn English so he could better communicate with his subjects. That way, he could participate in court hearings and assemblies without an interpreter. But we are also told that he never actually learned the language. He had too much on his plate to learn a new language. Now this story comes to us from an English monk and chronicler named Orderic Vitalis. He was born in 1077, so just a decade after William became king. And he wrote a very important social history of England in Latin. But one of the interesting things about Orderic is that his father was French, and his mother was English. And one of his contemporaries was the great English historian William of Malmesbury. And guess what, his father was also French and his mother was also English. And I just wanted to mention that fact at this point to plant that seed for you. Because those French and English marriages became quite common during this first decade or so after the Conquest. And those marriages produced lots of children, most of whom were probably bilingual, speaking the French of their father and the English of their mother. And that will also become an important part of our story. But for now, let's return to William's court and see how he was dealing with this language issue.

As the new king, William had to issue edicts and orders to local officials. And those usually came in one of two forms – either charters or writs. We've looked at those documents before. Charters were long, detailed documents, and they were typically written in Latin even in England. But writs were shorter, less formal documents, and they were often written in English. They were usually addressed to specific local officials, and they were often read aloud at public assemblies, which is why they were often written in English so everyone could understand them.

So after William arrived, he decided to continue that practice. During his early reign, he issued writs in both English and Latin, but interestingly, not in French. That would come later.

William's decision to use English in some of his official documents was probably meant to emphasize that he was now the 'English' king, and not just a Norman conqueror. But as we'll see, the use of English in those legal documents died out about a decade into his reign. After the year 1080, all writs and other legal documents were being issued in Latin. And that's consistent with the general theme of this episode. English was allowed at first, but it soon disappeared.

So as we look at the situation on the ground in the immediate aftermath of the Conquest, it looked like William was going to rule as a later-day Cnut. He was going to let England be England, and he was just going to serve as the monarch.

But William was not a naive man. He knew that rebellions and revolts could occur at any time, so he needed to secure his position. And in order to do that, he imported something that had been used to great effect back in France – the castle. As soon as William arrived in England, he made it his policy to build fortified castles around the country. Castles had a long history back in France. They were used to defend a particular region. But those castles were a relatively new concept in England.

Rather than castles, England had tended to use burhs. Burhs were fortified towns or villages. They were very effective, but they were actual towns. A castle on the other hand was a small fort that could be built just about anywhere. And unlike burhs, the Normans could build as many castles as they wanted. And once they were in place, they provided a place to station troops, and they were very, very difficult for opponents to penetrate.

Now as we have seen before, the word *castle* is a Norman French word. And in fact, it appears to be one of the earliest Norman French words borrowed into English. It appears in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle less than ten years after the Conquest. So the English became very familiar with both castles, and the word *castle*, in the decade after 1066.

*Castle* was derived from the Latin word *castellum* which meant a fort or fortified village. So the original meaning of *castellum* was very similar to the Old English *burgh*. And in fact, the Anglo-Saxons had borrowed that Latin word very early on in the period of Old English. They used the word in a variety of place names. The word evolved into *caster* and *chester*, and it contributed to place names like *Lancaster* and *Manchester* and many others. But again, that was an earlier borrowing when the word still meant 'a fortified village.'

But now, after the Conquest, the word came in again as *castel* – this time from Norman French. And this time, when it came in, it came in with this later Norman meaning.

Now I should note that these early Norman castles were probably not what you envision when you think of a castle. We're not exactly talking about Cinderella's castle here. These early fortifications were the type referred to as 'motte and bailey' castles. The Normans would basically construct a large man-made hill. On top of that hill, they would build a simple wooden

structure to house the troops garrisoned there. At the bottom, a ditch was dug all the way around the hill or mound.

The mound itself was called the *motte* or /moat/ in French. And at the bottom of the mound was an open court surrounded by a wall or fence. The wall or fence was called a *bailey*. And sometimes the open court in between the mound and the fence was also called a *bailey*. So today, these very basic fortifications are known as ‘motte and bailey’ castles.

Now over time, the meaning of that word *motte* – or /moat/ in French– changed. Instead of referring to the mound, it came to refer to the ditch that surrounded the mound. That ditch was often filled with water. And the result was the word *moat* which we still use today to refer to the water that surrounds a castle.

The word *bailey* meaning a ‘fence or wall’ was actually based on the French word *bail* which meant a ‘stake’ or a ‘fence made of stakes.’ And that word *bail* not only gave us the word *bailey* for this type of castle wall, it also gave us the word *bailiff*. A *bailiff* was originally the person in charge of one of these castles. And over time, the word acquired a much more general sense as a local administrator. It specifically acquired the meaning of a person who assisted the shire reeve or *sheriff* for short. And even today, the term *bailiff* is still used to mean a court official or a deputy. But again, *bailiff* was a very early French word which entered English because of its association with these ‘motte and bailey’ castles.

So the word *bail* meant a stake or fence. And thing about a fence is that it works two different ways. It can keep intruders out like a castle’s walls, but it can also keep prisoners in. And it is that sense, that we got the word *bail* as in to ‘bail’ someone out of jail. The word *bail* acquired a meaning of ‘captivity or custody.’ And in later use, it came to refer to the process by which a prisoner was released from jail into the custody of another person who posted a bond. And of course, today a person or company might seek a *bailout* if they get in financial trouble. But all of those words are rooted in the French word for fence – the same type of fence found in the early Norman castles.

As we’ll see, these rudimentary castles were built throughout the countryside, and they enabled the Normans to control the countryside. And over time, many of these forts were enlarged and expanded. And that ultimately produced the massive stone structures that we think of today when we think of castles.

Now I noted that castle walls worked both ways. They kept invaders out, but they could also be used to keep prisoners locked inside. And the best example of this is the castle that William built in London as soon as he became king. One of the first castles he built was located on the north bank of the Thames. It was a very basic fortification at first. But later in William’s reign, stone was brought over from Normandy to enhance the structure. That structure became known as the White Tower. And the complex that developed around it became known as the Tower of London. So the Tower of London has its origins as a small castle built by William the Conqueror shortly after the Conquest.

So as we look at the situation on the ground in early 1067, we see a relatively stable England. William was maintaining much of the existing English bureaucracy, and he was building fortifications to ensure that he could maintain law and order in case any problems arose. But for now, there were no significant problems. So in March of 1067, just three months after his coronation, he decided to return to Normandy. And that suggests that he felt comfortable with the situation on the ground in England.

But soon after he left, the strains of the conquest started to show. Signs of unrest started to appear throughout England. The first open revolt against Norman rule broke out in Exeter in the southwest of England in late 1067. William returned to England that December, and he led a combined Norman and English army into the southwest to put down the rebellion.

With the southwest under control, William made arrangements for the coronation of his wife Matilda as the new Queen of England. She was brought across the channel and crowned as Queen of England in May of 1068. Now I should mention a couple of things about Matilda and William before I move on. They had nine children together. And among those nine children were three sons who inherited parts of William's realm when he died. One of those sons ended up as Duke of Normandy, and the other two sons ended up as future Kings of England. In fact, all subsequent Kings and Queens of England traced their lineage back to William the Conqueror, and that includes the current monarch Elizabeth II.

Now this fact may raise an interesting question for some of you. In earlier episodes, I noted that Queen Elizabeth is a distant descendant of earlier Anglo-Saxon kings like Alfred the Great. So how is that? If the Anglo-Saxon royal line was wiped out by William the Conqueror, and all later monarchs are descended from William, how is Elizabeth also a descendant of Alfred the Great? Well the answer is that the European royal families were so incestuous that almost all of the monarchs are related to each other if you look far enough. Marriage alliances were such a standard arrangement that they were all cousins.

And in fact, we can trace Elizabeth's lineage back to Alfred the Great a couple of different ways. But one of the easiest ways is through this marriage of William and Matilda. William's wife Matilda was actually a direct descendant of Alfred the Great. She was the great, great, great, great, great grand-daughter of Alfred the Great. (That's a lot of greats.) And that line of descent was based on a daughter of Alfred the Great who married the Count of Flanders. So Matilda came from the Flanders royal family, but she was ultimately a direct descendant of Alfred.

So all of that means that all of William and Matilda's children were descendants of both William the Conqueror and Alfred the Great. So in that sense, the Anglo-Saxon bloodline did live on in a very indirect way.

So with Matilda now officially crowned as the Queen of England, William turned his attention to the growing unrest on the ground. The relationships he had formed with the native Anglo-Saxons were beginning to break down. And the rebellion in Exeter was an early sign that William's reign was not going to be as easy as he originally thought. He was going to have to deal with uprisings

and rebellions, and he was going to have to suppress those rebellions if he wanted to keep his crown.

As we've seen in earlier episodes, there was already a resentment of the Normans going back to the reign of Edward the Confessor. And now the land of the nobles killed at Hastings was being redistributed to Normans and other French allies. In fact, Godwin's earldom of Wessex ceased to exist as a political entity. It was now just part of William's realm. So many of the remaining Anglo-Saxon nobles, especially those in the north, feared and resented William's rule.

Furthermore, there had always been a north-south divide in English politics. The northerners had never been crazy about southern rule from Wessex. And there was still a heavy Scandinavian influence in the north. So the northerners had reluctantly accepted a Wessex king and even Danish king like Cnut, but they were not the least bit interested in a French king. So William faced his greatest challenges in the north.

As the native Anglo-Saxons began to look around for an alternative to William, there were a few options on the table. Edward the Confessor's grand-nephew, Edward the Aetheling, was still out there. I mentioned him earlier. He had been born in Hungary as the descendant of an exiled child of Edmund Ironsides. So you really have to do some genealogical research to follow that family line. But he was ultimately the great-grandson Aethelred the Unready. But he had been far too young and far too removed from English politics to garner any support from the Anglo-Saxon nobles. But he was technically a member of the Wessex royal dynasty. And he was still alive, and he was willing to serve as king if William could be overthrown. There were also a few leaders in the north who still capable of organizing some resistance. That included Edwin of Mercia and his brother Morcar, formerly the Earl of Northumbria.

Meanwhile, some of the Anglo-Saxons reached out to the King of Denmark for assistance. So William had a lot to deal with over the next few years.

In the year 1068, the north fully erupted into rebellion spurred along by Edwin and Morcar. Initially, those rebellions were put down. But in the following year, 1069, an even more serious rebellion broke out in the north. Once again, Edwin and Morcar were actively involved.

The rebels killed William's governor in Durham. Then the people of York rose up and destroyed the Norman garrison there. Now this was a massive rebellion and a serious threat to William's reign. This is where everything could have fallen apart for William. The rebellion soon began to spread down into Mercia and the southwest. The unrest also received support from the king of Scotland who was married to Edgar the Aetheling's sister. And a large Danish fleet even appeared off the English coast with aims of removing William from power.

So with all of this rebellious activity occurring with a few years of the Norman Conquest, it probably isn't surprising that the word *rebel* is French word – and it is one of the early words which passed into English after the Conquest. The word *rebel* is based on the Latin word *bellum* meaning 'war.' We actually saw that word in one of the early episodes of the podcast. It gave us the word *ante-bellum* meaning 'before the war,' and specifically meaning 'before the America

Civil War.’ It is also cognate with words like *belligerent* and *bellicose*. And in this case, the root gave us the French words *rebel* and *rebellion*.

But despite the size and scope of the rebellions against William the Conqueror, the rebels were never able to overthrow him. There were several reasons for the failure. First, all of those castles that William had built finally came into play. The rebels were never able to capture them and dislodge the Norman troops.

Another factor was the division among the rebels. Though they all agreed on removing William, that was about all they agreed on. Edgar the Aetheling’s supporters wanted a return of the Wessex monarchy with him as king. The northern earls were more interested in independence. The Danish king was interested in claiming the throne for himself. So the rebels were never able to unite under a single leader.

But the biggest factor may have been a change in William’s overall attitude towards the Anglo-Saxons. Up to this point, William had tried to rule with the consent of the Anglo-Saxon nobles and bureaucrats. But that wasn’t working anymore. All over northern England, the nobles and thanes were supporting various rebels. So at that point, William abandoned his support of the native nobles, and he decided to rule as a conqueror. And in order to do that, he had to break the will of the rebels.

In late 1069, William’s forces fought their way up to York – the largest and most important city in the north, and therefore the key to controlling the north. The Danes that had arrived to support the rebellion retreated to their ships. William didn’t have a navy at his disposal, so he ultimately bought peace with the Danes and paid them to leave. He then secured the city of York.

From a staging point at York, William ordered the destruction of everything within a 100 mile radius. Every day, William’s soldiers were sent out to kill everything in sight – men, women, children and livestock. Houses and crops were burned. Many people were killed by Norman soldiers, but many, many more fled their homes and eventually died in the countryside due to exposure and starvation.

It was an incredibly devastating event which became known as the ‘Harrying of the North.’ And it created a wasteland in the region. The later survey of England known as the Domesday Book describes most of this region with the Latin term *vasta* meaning ‘wasted or destroyed.’

The northern earls Edwin and Morcar were driven out of the north, and they headed south to East Anglia. There they joined a local thane named Hereward the Wake who was leading some local resistance. The resistance basically turned into a guerilla war for a while.

Hereward’s guerilla war was eventually suppressed by the Normans, but Hereward himself became a folk hero and legendary figure in the process. About fifty years after his rebellion, a semi-fictional account of his deeds was recorded in a book called in Latin “Gesta Herewardii Saxonis.” It translates as the ‘Deeds of Hereward the Saxon.’ It’s a fascinating story, and many

scholars think that it influenced the later tales of Robin Hood which began to appear in the 1300s.

For example, the history says that Hereward fought against the Norman oppressors, just like Robin Hood did. And it says that his father was a noble, and Hereward stole from his father's estate and distributed the money and property to his followers. So this may have contributed to the legend of Robin Hood stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. But the strongest connection between Hereward's story and Robin Hood occurs in one of the earliest recorded ballads about Robin Hood.

That ballad is called 'Robin Hood and the Potter,' and it tells the story of Robin Hood and a potter who was passing through the forest one day. Robin Hood approaches the potter and tries to make him pay a toll to pass through the forest. The potter refuses and the two fight each other, and the potter actually wins. Robin Hood then befriends the potter, and he persuades the potter to switch clothes with him so Robin can go into Nottingham in disguise. Robin Hood then goes into town disguised as the potter where he encounters the Sheriff of Nottingham and the Sheriff's wife. Now that's just part of the ballad, but compare that to the earlier story of Hereward the Wake. In Hereward's story, the Norman soldiers have surrounded the area where he is encamped. So Hereward decides to go out in disguise. So he dresses up as – you guessed it – a potter. He makes his way to the king's court. There, the Normans discuss their plans openly because they think the disguised Hereward is a peasant, and therefore they presume that he doesn't understand their language. But Hereward is able to discover their plans through this ruse.

Now I mention this story for two reasons. First, to draw a connection between Hereward and the Tales of Robin Hood, which I will explore in more detail in a future episode. But I also mentioned this story because it shows the linguistic divide that existed during this period. At this early stage, there were French speakers and there were English speakers. The two languages were distinct. And it doesn't appear that many people were bilingual. People tended to speak one language or the other, but not both. So even though it is fictional, Hereward's story tends to confirm that England wasn't really bilingual yet. The Normans could discuss their plans openly in French in front of an English peasant because peasants had no knowledge of French at that point.

Now as I said, Hereward's rebellion was eventually put down in the year 1071. At that point, Hereward disappeared from recorded history. No one really knows what happened to him. The former northern earl Morcar was captured and spent the rest of his life in a Norman prison. Edwin of Mercia headed north to Scotland, but he was murdered by his own men before he arrived there. Edgar the Aetheling also fled to Scotland. I mentioned that his sister was married to the Scottish king. So he found safe haven there. Many years later, he made amends with William, and he recognized William as the legitimate king of England.

With Edwin and Morcar out of the picture, the northern earldoms of Mercia and Northumbria also came to an end, just as Wessex has ended with the death of Harold Godwinson.

By this point, there was only one remaining Anglo-Saxon earl. His name was Waltheof, and he was the earl of a small region in the Midlands. But in 1075, he participated in another rebellion that was quickly put down. He was then captured and beheaded. And his death is significant because he was the last surviving Anglo-Saxon earl. So that brought an end to the traditional Anglo-Saxon earldoms. Some smaller earldoms were later created by the Normans, but many of those lapsed and disappeared over time. And of course, the title of *earl* would live on, but the power of those original earldoms was gone forever.

So those traditional mini-kingdoms of Mercia, Wessex, and Northumbria came to an end. Those earldoms were comprised of shires and hundreds. And going forward, those shires and hundreds would become the main local units in England. So where we once spoke of the local *earls*, we will now start to refer more and more to the ‘shire reeves’ or *sheriffs*. And we’ll look at these developments in a future episode.

So by the early 1070s, William had crushed the massive northern rebellion. A few more rebellions broke in the mid-1070s, like Waltheof’s rebellion, but those were also quickly suppressed.

Now one often-repeated story is that William introduced the *curfew* to England to keep the population under control and suppress any further revolts. But this story is a little misleading. To understand this story, we have to consider that word *curfew*. It is a French word, and it did come into English shortly after the Norman Conquest, but the original meaning of the word was quite different from today.

*Curfew* is a combination of two different root words – *couvre* meaning ‘cover’ and *feu* meaning ‘fire.’ *Couvre* is in fact the original version of our word *cover* – a word borrowed from French very early on. And *feu* is the French word for ‘fire.’ It has the same root as the word *fuel*, which originally meant the material used for a fire. By the way, *fire* is a native Old English word which is unrelated to the French word *feu*.

So *couvre-feu* meant ‘cover the fire.’ And *couvre-feu* was eventually shortened to just *curfew*. So *curfew* literally means ‘cover the fires.’ And that term stems from a time in the Middle Ages when a town or village would ring a curfew bell in the early evening to let everyone know that it was time to put out all of the fires.

That included fires in the common area as well fires in the homes. If fires were left unattended at night, it could spread and burn down the village. So the point of the curfew bell was simply public safety. It wasn’t really intended to keep people from rioting.

And in fact, there are written reports that a type of curfew bell was rung in Oxford during the time of Alfred the Great. So England definitely had the ‘curfew’ bell long before William the Conqueror arrived. But again, it was designed to prevent fires.

In the 1500s, an Italian scholar living in England named Polydore Vergil wrote a history of England. And he claimed that William the Conqueror introduced the curfew to England as a means of oppression. Presumably, the idea was that people retired to bed when the fires were extinguished because there was no light in town after that point. So William used the traditional curfew bell, not so much to prevent fires, but to ensure that people were in their homes in bed and not outside rioting or plotting rebellion.

Now Polydore Vergil's history in the 1500s is the first known account of William instituting the curfew. So it is impossible to verify. But William of Malmesbury, writing a few years after William's reign, claimed that there was a curfew in place during the reign of William's children, William Rufus and Henry. And he implies that it began during the reign of William's son, William Rufus. He also writes that it was so unpopular that his brother Henry ended it around the year 1100. So that may have been where Polydore Vergil picked up the idea that William the Conqueror instituted the curfew. Either way, it does appear that some type of curfew was implemented around this time either by William or his son. But again, it may have simply been a standard curfew bell designed to minimize fires. One thing we can say for certain is that the word *curfew* entered English shortly after the Norman Conquest.

Now, regardless of whether William himself actually implemented a curfew, it is consistent with his overall approach to the native Anglo-Saxons during this period in the 1070s. The various rebellions had changed William's view of the natives. He concluded that he could no longer trust them to administer their own regions. They were too busy plotting against him. So from the outbreak of the northern rebellions in 1069 through the 1070s, Anglo-Saxons were gradually removed from virtually all positions of authority in England. William wanted people he could trust. He wanted his Norman supporters. They would maintain order and control and prevent any further rebellions.

So as the remaining Englishmen were removed from power, they were gradually replaced by William's French-speaking supporters. And this was done across the board. It included Church officials, government officials and landholders. So let's begin our look at this process with the Church officials.

At the time of the Conquest, the English Church was dominated by Anglo-Saxon clerics. But now, that gradually came to an end. Just as today, England had two Archbishops – one at Canterbury in the south and one at York in the north. The Archbishop of Canterbury was Stigand – a loyal Anglo-Saxon. He was the cleric who had been brought in to replace the exiled Norman Archbishop Robert of Jumieges during the time of Edward the Confessor. The Godwins were largely responsible for his appointment, so he was an obvious target for William's purges.

In 1070, in the midst of those northern rebellions, Stigand was removed as Archbishop and his property was confiscated. William replaced him with his Norman friend Lanfranc. I mentioned Lanfranc last time. He was the Norman bishop who had helped to arrange papal support for the Norman Conquest. So he was close to both William and the Pope. And now he was brought across the Channel to be the new Archbishop of Canterbury.

Meanwhile, the Archbishop of York was Ealdred – another Anglo-Saxon. He was the Archbishop who had performed the coronation ceremonies for both William and his wife Matilda. He had remained a supporter of William, and he was allowed to remain in his position in York until he died in the year 1069. At that point, he was also replaced by a Norman. So by 1071, both Archbishops were Norman.

As I noted, the new Archbishop of Canterbury was Lanfranc – an old ally of William, and his authority came to dominate the English Church. It was during this period that the power of the Archbishop of Canterbury started to eclipse that of the Archbishop of York. In 1072, several sees in the Midlands were transferred from York to Canterbury. And this increased the overall influence of Canterbury.

Lanfranc also made many changes to the organization of the Church. Celibacy among the clergy was enforced. Priests were no longer permitted to have a wife or children. Many churches and abbeys were built or re-built along Norman lines. And most importantly for our purposes, he replaced many of the English clergy with better-trained Normans. Over the next few years, most of the bishops around the country were replaced with Normans. In 1075, as the rebellions were coming to an end, thirteen of the twenty-one bishops were still English. But twelve years later, at the end of William's reign, only three bishops were English. So the archbishops and most of the bishops were French-speaking by that point. And beyond that, many monks flocked to England from Normandy. They soon filled the English abbeys and monasteries. Some even founded new abbeys and monasteries. As a result, most of the abbots and most parish priests were also French-speakers now.

The impact of these changes on the English language cannot be overstated [Editor's Note: The line should read. "The impact of these changes. . . cannot be understated."] Most of the education in England, and most of the literacy in England, was directly tied to the church and monastery schools. Going back to the time of Alfred the Great, it had been acceptable to use both English and Latin for church business in England. That had allowed a great flourishing of Old English literature. But now, that largely came to an end. Most of the new clerics didn't speak English. And even if they did, Latin was the traditional language of the Church where they came from back on the continent. So they directed that Latin be used for Church business going forward. And that meant that most of the education in those Church schools was conducted in Latin. And Old English, as a written language, gradually disappeared.

Now I say it 'gradually disappeared,' but to be fair, some new English documents were produced, and quite a few older English texts were copied and compiled during this period. In all, about fifty manuscripts survive in Old English from the period after 1066. But that is a tiny number compared to the documents that were being written in Latin and French. And the production of English documents gradually decreased over the following century to the point where they stopped altogether.

The best examples of this decline are the chronicles which were typically maintained in monasteries. As I noted last time, the monks who maintained the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle at Abingdon stopped recording entries in the year 1066.

The version maintained at Winchester – the so-called Parker Chronicle – contains an entry in Old English for the year 1070. But after that, all subsequent entries were written in Latin. A copy was also maintained at Peterborough, but that monastery was largely destroyed by a fire about fifty years after the Norman Conquest. The monks then got a copy of the Chronicle from somewhere else – probably Canterbury – and they copied it around the year 1121. And from that point until 1154, they maintained it in English. So it was maintained for almost a century after the Conquest. And that was very unusual for an English document. So modern scholars actually use that version of the Chronicle to trace the evolution of the language in that first century after the Conquest. And we'll look at that version of the Chronicle in an upcoming episode.

Another local chronicle was maintained at Canterbury called the 'Annales Anglo-Saxonici Breves' in Latin. Some scholars consider this to be another version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, but it only focuses on local events around Canterbury. So it's really a completely different document. It was apparently started in the year 1073 shortly after the Conquest, and it was initially maintained in English. But after the year 1109, a little more than forty years after the Conquest, the language shifted to Latin, and all subsequent entries were in Latin.

So the major point here is that English essentially disappeared as a written language in the century after the Norman Conquest. And that was actually a very important development in the overall history of English. With the loss of written English, monks stopped learning how to write it. And the West Saxon dialect which had been used for writing gradually lost its prestige and importance. Without a common prestige dialect to hold the language together, each regional dialect started to go its own way. As a result, the English language became very fractured. As we'll see, accounts from the next century indicate that English-speakers in one part of the country were no longer able to understand English speakers in other parts of the country. Again, we'll look at these developments in an upcoming episode, but that entire process really began with the loss of Old English writing and education. And that process stemmed from the replacement of English-speaking Church leaders with French-speaking Church leaders from the continent.

So as we return to the later years of William's reign, the English Church was now firmly under Norman control. But of course, it wasn't just the Church. We've already seen how the various earls were replaced. One-by-one, they were killed, imprisoned or exiled. When Waltheof was killed in the year 1075, the last of the Anglo-Saxon earls died.

Though the traditional earldoms disappeared, I noted that the underlying shires and hundreds were maintained. And those really became the main local political entities going forward. And out in the countryside, a social revolution was taking place. In every corner of England, Anglo-Saxon nobles and landholders were being replaced by French barons and landholders. And this process shows the extent to which William had abandoned his original plan to work with local English nobility. Of course, this process also created the new French-speaking aristocracy that so heavily influenced the English language going forward.

So next time, I want to look at what happened in countryside. I want to explore how the new French aristocracy came into being and how Norman feudalism was transplanted to England. I

also want to look at the creation of the so-called Domesday Book. And along the way, I want to see how the English language was being impacted these changes.

Before I conclude this episode, I want to make a quick note. Many of you long-time listeners will have noted that the time between each episode of the podcast has grown longer over the past few months. That is partly because many of the Old English episodes were based around certain themes, and in order to develop those themes, those episodes grew longer and longer, and the time required to put them together grew longer and longer. But it has always been my plan to return to the original format of the podcast when we got to Middle English. That is why this episode is a little shorter. So going forward, I am going to try to return to the slightly shorter episodes with a new episode every two weeks.

This will require a certain time commitment on my part which I will try to maintain. And to that end, I always welcome your support for the podcast both monetary and otherwise. So if you would like to support the podcast, you can always do so at [historyofenglishpodcast.com](http://historyofenglishpodcast.com).

And until next time, which will hopefully be in two weeks, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.

## **EPIISODE 69: FROM CONQUEST TO DOMESDAY**

Welcome to the History of English Podcast - a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 69: From Conquest to Domesday. In this episode, we're going to continue our look at the Norman settlement of England. We'll look at how most of the land in England passed into the hands of the French-speaking nobles. This process not only brought the feudal system to England, it also brought the French language to the peasants out in the country. And that development is fundamental to the story of English as we go forward. It meant that French wasn't going to be limited to a handful of retainers in the king's court, as was the case during the time of Edward the Confessor. It wasn't going to be restricted to a small group of people around Winchester or London. Instead, the French language of the nobles was destined to penetrate every nook and cranny of the country. And that meant that no one was exempt from the influence of French. Even the isolated peasants were going to have to pick up some French words to communicate with their new masters. So this time, we'll look at how that process came about.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is [historyofenglishpodcast.com](http://historyofenglishpodcast.com). And you can always reach me directly by email at [kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com](mailto:kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com). I'm also on twitter at [englishhistpod](https://twitter.com/englishhistpod).

Now last time, we explored the years immediately after the Norman Conquest. We saw that William the Conqueror initially tried to work with the existing Anglo-Saxon bureaucracy. But after the country rose in rebellion, he began to replace the native Anglo-Saxons with French-speaking allies. And we also looked at how this process played out within the English Church. But of course, it wasn't limited to the Church. It extended into almost every aspect of English society. And it extended into the English countryside. When historians say that the Normans brought the feudal system to England, this is really what they are referring to.

At the time of the Conquest, there were several thousand Anglo-Saxon landholders in England, probably somewhere between 2,000 and 4,000 landholders. And William didn't just walk in and confiscate their lands. He allowed them to remain in place at first. But it was Norman policy that any landholder who rebelled or challenged the king's authority automatically surrendered his lands to the crown. And that was really the process by which most of the Anglo-Saxon nobles lost their lands. As we now know, from the late 1060s through the mid-1070s, there were continuous rebellions. Through this process, most of the lands held by Englishmen had been claimed by William. William then turned around and granted those lands to French supporters in exchange for fealty oaths. So he basically re-created the feudal structure that had existed back in Normandy.

Within a couple of decades after the Conquest, the total number of landholders had been reduced from several thousand Anglo-Saxons down to around 180 barons, almost all of whom were French. Of course, those French-speaking barons then delegated that land to their own vassals. So once again, we see the same type of structure that was common in feudal Europe.

For the native Anglo-Saxon landholders, there were no good options. Some of them died in battle during the rebellions. Some fled the country and went into exile. Those who lived and remained in England had no choice but to become vassals of French lords. In those cases, they went from free landholders, to tenants bound to provide service and fees to their new masters. The feudal system had finally arrived in England.

This process not only shifted land ownership from Anglo-Saxons to Frenchmen, it also concentrated the land into the hands of a relatively few barons. And this new class of barons had a great deal of power based upon their massive landholdings. As was customary, many of those landholders were appointed to various government positions as well.

Now it is important to point out that the process of redistributing land from Anglo-Saxons to Frenchmen was a piecemeal process. It didn't happen in one fell swoop. When an Anglo-Saxon noble rebelled or challenged the William's authority, he surrendered his land, and it was then parceled out to one or more of William's supporters. And this process continued over several years as the rebellions continued. As a result, a baron might end up with parcel here and a parcel there. His lands were usually scattered all over the country. It wasn't exactly a clean and orderly process. Some historians have argued that William did that on purpose to prevent the barons from having large estates concentrated in one place. That way, they couldn't become mini-kings with a power base that might challenge his authority. But it is just as likely that the estates were spread out due to the piecemeal nature of the process.

Either way, this process occurred so quickly over such a large area that it wasn't always clear who got what. Sometimes various barons would lay claim to the same lands. And sometimes, when a baron received multiple grants, each grant might have been on different terms. So his obligations for one tract might have been different from those of another tract. And this started to become a problem for William. It was especially a problem for the collection of taxes. William continued to impose the land tax called the Danegeld, and the collection of those taxes depended on a good and accurate knowledge of what land was out there and who had the obligation to pay the taxes on that land.

So these competing claims had to be resolved. Local officials sorted through the mess and tried to resolve disputes when they arose. When the disputes were documented, they were recorded in Latin. And in Latin, these disputes were called *clamores*. That Latin word *clamores* produced the French word *clamer*. And English borrowed that French word as the word *claim* shortly after the Norman Conquest. So the word *claim* came from the Normans.

And those competing 'claims' sometimes got very heated, and that could lead to a lot a *clamor* – another French word from the same root that passed into English around the same time.

Now *claim* and *clamor* are both French words that came from Latin. And both words ultimately came from an Indo-European root word which was *\*kele*. And that root word meant 'shout' in the original Indo-European language. So if you have an argument with someone and your stating your case, you might shout or raise your voice. And if you make a 'claim' to something, you might raise your voice to be adamant about it. And if a lot of people are yelling, that might

create a lot of ‘clamor.’ So that’s the connection between the *claim*, *clamor*, and the Indo-European root which meant ‘shout.’

Now let’s explore the history of this root word a little further because it produced several of the earliest French words to pass into English after the Conquest. Going back to the time of the Romans, that root word meaning ‘shout’ produced the Latin word *calare* meaning to ‘call out or proclaim.’ And on the first day of each month, priests would shout out and ‘call’ the people together to announce the days on which the upcoming festivals would be held. Most people didn’t have a way to keep track of that otherwise. So that meeting on the first day of each month was important to let everyone know what important days were coming up. And that ensured that those holidays would actually be observed and kept sacred. From that Latin word *calare*, this day of gathering on the first day of each month came to be called the *calendae* or *calends*.

In Roman banking, monthly interest payments on loans were usually due on the *calendae* – the first day of the month. And the lender’s account book came to be called a *calendarium*. And that word passed into French where it referred to any list or register of items. The word then passed into English as *calendar*. And in fact, that word appears in one of the earliest documents written in Middle English around the year 1200. And just as today, it was used to refer to a document that listed the various days and months of the year. So *calendar* comes from the same root as *claim* and *clamor*, and it relates back to a time when Roman priests called everyone together on the first day of each month.

And speaking of the calendar, I should note that the Latin month names that we use today finally started to replace the Anglo-Saxon month names during this period. Some of those Latin month names had already filtered into a few Old English documents before 1066. And that isn’t really surprising given that most of the scribes spoke Latin, and probably used those Latin month names for Church business. But most of those Latin month names don’t actually appear in English documents until after the Conquest.

*January* was called *Æftera Geola* in Old English. It was literally ‘After Yule.’ So it meant the month after Yuletide. The month was also called *Wulf-monath*, which literally meant the ‘wolf month.’ After the Conquest, those terms were soon replaced with the Latin name *January*.

The second month was called *Sol-monath* in Old English. It meant ‘the mud month.’ No one is really sure what that name referred to. In Germanic tradition, this was the month in which cakes were offered to the gods. So one theory is that the cakes resembled ‘mud’ or had a gritty texture like mud, and that is why it was called the ‘mud month.’ But that’s just a theory. The month was also sometimes called the *Kale-monath* or ‘kale month.’ So it was named for a type of cabbage. But those names were soon pushed out and replaced with Latin name *February*.

March was *hreoð-monap*. Again, the exact meaning of the name is uncertain. One theory is that it is based on the name of the Germanic goddess Rheda, and this was the month in which sacrifices were made to Rheda – thus *hreoð-monap*. Again, it was replaced with *March* at the time of the Conquest. And *March* appears in the earliest Middle English documents.

The fourth month was called *Eostre-monath* – the ‘Easter month.’ But keep in mind that Eostre was a Germanic fertility goddess. Her name was later borrowed by the English Church for the Christian holiday. So the Germanic month name refers back to the goddess Eostre because sacrifices were made to her during that month. But after 1066, that Old English name was soon replaced with Latin name *April*.

The fifth month was *Thri-milce* – or ‘three milkings.’ This was the month when livestock were so well fed on spring grass that they could be milked three times a day. But that month was now replaced with Latin name *May*.

The sixth and seventh months occurred in the heart of summer. During those months, the weather was mild, so an Old English word meaning ‘mild or gentle’ was used to name those months. That word was *liða*. The sixth month was *Ærra-liða* – or ‘Before Mild.’ And the seventh month was *Æftera-liða* – or ‘After Mild.’ Those names were soon replaced with the Latin names *June* and *July*.

The next month was *Weod-monath* – the ‘weed month.’ It meant the plant month. And now it became Latin *August*.

The next month was *Haleg-monath* – literally the ‘holy month.’ It was the month for celebrations to offer gratitude for the harvest. It was also sometimes called the *Hærfest-monath* – literally the ‘harvest month.’ But now, it was replaced with Latin *September*.

The tenth month marked the beginning of winter in Anglo-Saxon culture. Winter officially began with the first full moon during that month. So the month itself was called the *Winterfylleth* – literally the ‘winter full’ meaning the ‘Winter Full Moon.’ But now, it became *October*.

The next month was *Blot-monath* – literally the ‘blood month.’ It meant the month of sacrifices when the cattle that couldn’t be fed during the winter months were killed and eaten. But now it became *November*.

The last month was the month before Yule or the winter festival. So it was called *Ærra Geola* – literally ‘Before Yule.’ But it now became *December*. And then the year started all over again with *Æftera Geola* or ‘After Yule’ – or *January* as we know it today.

So these Latin month names were some of the earliest words borrowed from French and Latin after the Conquest. Again, it is likely that some of the Latin month names were used before 1066. Since the Church used those names, some Anglo-Saxons may have used them alongside their native terms. But those Latin names didn’t really become widespread and accepted in English until after 1066.

So the word *calendar*, and all of the Latin month names in that calendar, became English words. And I began that digression by mentioning how the word *calendar* was related to words like *claim* and *clamor*. They are all cognate because they all came from the same Indo-European root

word meaning ‘to shout.’ And I noted that out in the countryside after the Conquest there was a lot of ‘clamor’ because there were many competing ‘claims’ to land.

Those new French nobles wanted to ‘clear’ up that confusion and get ‘clear’ title to their lands. And guess what, the word *clear* comes from that same Indo-European root as *claim* and *clamor* and *calendar*. Remember that the common root word meant ‘to shout.’ If you’re in a crowded room, you might ask someone to shout so you can hear them. That way, you can hear them ‘clearly.’ And that’s how we got the word *clear* meaning transparent and obvious. It’s another French word that entered English shortly after the Conquest.

And let’s extend that thought a little further. Sometimes, people might shout or speak loudly to convene a meeting and to be heard in front of a group of people. I noted earlier that that is how we got the word *calendar*, which referred back to the meetings called by Roman priests on the first day of each month. Well, when people are called together, they assemble. And another word for an assembly or meeting is the word *council*. And once again, the word *council* is a French word that comes from the same root as *claim*, *clamor*, *calendar* and *clear*. And *council* also entered English from French, at least as early as the 1100s. So it is one of the first attested French words which entered English after 1066.

And we have another French word from this same root which also entered English. It’s the word *class*. In early Rome, people were called to arms during times of conflict. This sometimes involved a literal ‘call to arms’ where Roman officials literally shouted to announce the impending danger or conflict. From this same ultimate root word meaning ‘shout,’ the Romans produced the Latin word *classis*, which meant a ‘group of soldiers who were assembled together.’ It later evolved to mean ‘a particular division of soldiers.’ And that sense as a distinct division or group gave us the word *class*. And with a new aristocracy in England, we started to see the emergence of two distinct classes – a French-speaking nobility and an English-speaking peasantry. But the word *class* didn’t actually enter English at this point. It came in later in the 1600s. But again, it is ultimately cognate with words like *claim*, *clamor*, *calendar*, *clear* and *council*. And they all relate back to that Indo-European word that meant ‘shout.’

So let’s put some of these words together and see how they relate to our theme. The new French upper ‘class’ often had competing ‘claims’ to land. And they wanted ‘clear’ rights to their new estates. So the Normans convened ‘councils’ to resolve some of these issues.

It was actually very important that these issues be resolved. These competing claims could lead to rivalries between nobles, and that increased the chances of a civil war between those nobles down the road. That’s what had tended to happen back in France. And William wanted to avoid that instability in England. But there was a more immediate concern as well.

England still relied heavily upon a land tax for revenue. And you couldn’t really have an effective land tax if you didn’t know exactly what was out there in the countryside, and you didn’t really know who was responsible for paying the tax on the land. And William and all of his new French nobles were new to this land, so they needed to sort out exactly what was there,

who had the rights to possess it, who held what lands from whom, and where the boundaries were from one tract to the next.

By the year 1085, William had been back in Normandy for several years dealing with issues there. But in that year, 1085, William returned to England to sort out some of these issues. At Christmas of that year, he held a meeting or council of the most important landholders in England, most of whom were now French. And at that meeting, he announced that he was ordering the preparation of a massive survey of all the land in England. The survey would identify every parcel of land. It would also identify the holder of the land, and the value of the land.

And to put all of this into some context, when William arrived back in England, the Danes were preparing another invasion of England. As it turned out, internal troubles in Denmark prevented that attack from ever occurring, but it shows that the Danes were still a threat out beyond the horizon.

Meanwhile, back in Normandy, William found himself in more or less constant battle with his neighboring provinces. The French king was also looking to take William down since he was now a king in his own right. And even his son Robert was rebelling against him in Normandy.

So as William announced plans for the English land survey, he was probably thinking about the tax implications and the need to raise revenue. But he was also probably thinking about the need to defend England from outside attack while at the same time pursuing his wars in Normandy. So some historians think all of this connected.

The survey was conducted and completed by August of the following year. And when the survey was complete, William held another meeting at Salisbury. And at Salisbury, William asked all of the landholders present to swear an oath of fealty, not only to provide military service to him in England, but also to provide military service in France. And that was really an expansion of the traditional duties owed by the barons. It was one thing for a baron to take land in England in exchange for an oath to provide service in England, but now they were being asked to fight in France as well. So two important events occurred at that Salisbury meeting. The land survey was completed and made public, and the barons swore this new oath of fealty to William. And it wasn't just the barons. A lot of the vassals who held land under the barons also swore that oath.

The British historian J.C. Holt has argued that these two events were connected – that the survey was prepared partly in exchange for that new fealty oath. So the survey was a way for William to basically kill two birds with one stone, so to speak. The survey identified all of the land in England so it could be taxed. And that allowed William to pay for the defense of England. But it also identified the persons entitled to possession of each tract. So it basically resolved most of those pending disputes among landholders. It cleared up any lingering confusion. And going forward, the barons and nobles could use that survey as the final, definitive record of all the landholdings in England. So the barons and the landowners finally secured clear rights to their lands. And in exchange for that clarity and certainty which William offered them, they swore a

fealty oath back to him. It was an oath to fight for him and defend him in both England and France.

Now we can't be absolutely certain that these pieces were connected in this way, but it makes sense. And in fact, this view helps to explain the name that was ultimately given to the survey. Like most official documents, the survey was written in Latin. And the name of the survey in Latin was 'Liber de Wintonia' – literally the 'Book of Winchester' because that is where it was maintained. But it wasn't just a survey. It was the final definitive word on land ownership in England.

If two landholders disagreed over the rights to a piece of land, they would appeal to this survey. And they were bound by the survey. It was the final word on the matter. And there are several surviving reports of this process at work. During the reign of William's son and successor, William Rufus, an abbey in Norfolk appealed to the survey seeking the return of certain lands. And the abbey got those lands back because it was identified as the owner in the survey book. Similarly, in the year 1111, the abbot of Abingdon appeared in Winchester to claim certain lands, and again, he proved his case by referring to the survey.

So this survey book rendered the final judgment on such matters. It was considered the legal equivalent of Judgment Day. In the Christian tradition, when a person died, the fate of his or her soul was determined on Judgment Day, and that was a final judgement. There was no appeal. So people began to make that connection between the final judgment rendered by this survey and the final judgments rendered on Judgment Day. But *judgement* was a French word – not an Old English word. The Old English word for 'judgment' was *domas*. We've seen that word before. It also gave us the word *deem* in the sense of making a judgment about something – to 'deem' it to be good or bad. And Old English had used that word *domas* to translate 'Judgment Day' into 'domes dæg.' And now, the 'Judgment Day Book' became known in English as the 'domes dæg book' – or 'Domesday Book.' And the Domesday Book continued to provide the final judgment in any dispute over land in England.

The Domesday Book was very unusual for its period. There was nothing else like it in western Europe. The amount of detail was incredible, and it remains an essential source for historians of Medieval England. In fact, the process by which the survey was assembled is mentioned in the Peterborough version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which remember was the only version of the Chronicle that was still being maintained in English at this point. And the scribe who recorded the entry indicates just how intrusive the survey was. And his tone suggests that the native people resented the whole process.

It wasn't enough that William sent out officials to record the land. They recorded almost everything else – cows, oxen, pigs. If it had value, the Norman surveyors wrote it down and recorded it for posterity. The scribe writes of William:

So very closely did he let it be traced out  
"Swa swyðe nearwelice he hit lett utaspyrian."

that there was not a single hide nor yard of land  
“þæt næs an ælpig hide. ne an gyrde landes.”

nor, further, it’s shameful to tell, though it seemed to him no shame to do it  
“ne furðon, hit is sceame to tellanne. ac hit ne þuhte him nan sceame to donne.”

that not an ox, nor a cow, nor a swine existed that was not set down in his writ  
“an oxe. ne an cu. ne an swin. næs belyfon. þæt næs gesæt on his gewrite.”

So that’s how detailed the survey was. No stone was left unturned. Now all of this does raise an interesting question though. If the Domesday Book identified the person entitled to possession each tract of land, how did the surveyors come to those conclusions? In other words, how did they resolve the disputes among the bickering nobles.

Well, as the surveyors proceeded from village to village, they called on the local lords and peasants to furnish them with information. And whenever there was a disagreement over a particular matter, it was Norman tradition to set up a panel of inquiry. They would often meet in open air in the village green. And there they would hear each side and then determine the boundaries and the rights and obligations of each estate. As each side presented their case, they had to swear that they were telling the truth. The Latin word for swear was ‘juro’ (/yoo-ro/) – now being pronounced ‘jur-ro’ in Medieval Latin. And the panel who heard and decided those completing claims was called the *jury*. And again, the word *jury* was one of the first French words to enter English after the Norman Conquest. In fact, the Normans often – but not always – used a twelve-person jury to decide disputes, just as we typically do today. Now the ultimate origin of the jury system is a matter of some debate. The Germanic tribes had used panels of people to decide disputes as well. But most legal historians agree that the jury system as we would come to know it came in with the Normans. And certainly, the word *jury* came with them. We’ll look a little more at juries next time, but I just wanted to note that one of the first roles of the jury in England was to settle these types of land disputes.

Of course, that word *jury* features the same root as words like *justice*, *judge* and *judgment*. And those words take us back to the name of that survey – the Domesday Book. The words *jury* and *justice* were attested very early on. But *judge* and *judgment* are not attested in English until the late 1200s and 1300s. So at the time the survey was completed in 1086, the word *judgment* had not yet passed into English. And that’s why English speakers didn’t call it the ‘Judgment Day Book.’ Instead, they used the Old English word *domas*, and they called it the ‘domes-daeg book.’

Now I noted that historians of this period salivate over the detail contained in the book. And I should note that it is actually two different books because there is so much information contained in the survey. So the survey tells us a great deal about the changes that had taken place in the countryside over the prior twenty years.

It tells us that about ninety percent of the people in England still lived in rural communities. So this was still mainly a rural society. It also indicates that the eastern part of the country was densely populated, but the population in the north was relatively small. This is believed to be the

result of the massive destruction which William had ordered in the north when the rebellions broke out there – the so-called ‘Harrying of the North.’

The survey doesn’t give an exact population of the country, but estimates suggest that it was somewhere between one to three million people. It is believed that a large number of Anglo-Saxon had died over the prior twenty years. Some were killed in uprisings and rebellions. Others died due to starvation when their land and livestock were seized. Some estimates suggest as many as 300,000 Anglo-Saxon died during this period. That would have been anywhere from ten to twenty percent of the total population. But again, no one knows the exact number.

During that same time period, many people from France had continued to migrate to England. Again estimates vary. Some suggest around 30,000 French immigrants, others put the number closer to 200,000. It is really difficult to put specific numbers on the migration. But it does appear that the significant loss of life among the Anglo-Saxons was somewhat offset by the large number of Frenchmen who were moving in. They still represented a distinct minority, but their language took on a greater and greater influence as more and more of them arrived.

And I should emphasize that not all the Frenchmen were Normans. They were coming from other parts of France as well, especially other parts of northern France. I noted a couple of episodes back that about one-third of William’s army at Hastings was made up of Bretons from Brittany. By the time of the Domesday Book, as much as twenty percent of England may have been held by Bretons – not Normans. There was an especially strong concentration of Bretons in southwestern England – in the Welsh border regions. These areas were geographically close to Wales, and so there was a lingering Celtic influence in some of these regions. And you might remember from earlier episodes that Brittany had been founded in part by native Celtic-speaking Britons who had fled Britain when the Anglo-Saxons arrived several centuries earlier. They had poured across the Channel to northwestern France. And this is why Brittany came to be called *Brittany* because many of the people who settled there came from Britain. And the Celtic connections were still strong there in the eleventh century. In fact, to this day, Brittany is the only place outside of the British Isles where a Celtic language is still spoken.

As I noted, a lot of Bretons had fought with William at Hastings. Many of the them were landless nobles back in Brittany. A lot of them were the younger siblings of prominent nobles or nephews of nobles. They didn’t have their own lands since they weren’t eldest sons. So they had supported William in hopes of acquiring estates in England. And now they had those estates, and they were being joined by other Breton relatives from Brittany.

Some of the new arrivals became vassals of existing Bretons and Normans. And when they arrived in England, many of them chose to settle in the region that many of their ancestors had abandoned several centuries earlier. That region of southwestern England near the Welsh border.

And you might remember that the Bretons brought tales of King Arthur with them. The legend of Arthur had begun in the Celtic tradition. He was originally a Celtic leader who had fought against the invading the Anglo-Saxons many centuries earlier. Those stories has passed with the fleeing Britons to Brittany and Wales. And now, the descendants of those original Bretons were

returning to England. And they were bringing those legends of Arthur with them. All of this culminated with Geoffrey of Monmouth's book, the 'History of the Kings of Britain.' It was written in Latin around the year 1136. So that was only 50 years after the Domesday Book. And Geoffrey's history is the work that really introduced King Arthur to the literate world. Geoffrey himself was likely of Breton descent.

And while I am referring to the Breton influence on England, I should note here that one particular Breton family became prominent in England after the Conquest. And they later found their way to Scotland where their descendants founded the House of Stuart. And if you know your British history, you know that the House of Stuart came to rule Scotland, and after the Tutors, they came to rule England as well. So the Stuart kings and queens could actually trace their ancestors back to Brittany.

Now the Domesday Book also tells us the extent to which the French-speaking nobles had replaced the native Anglo-Saxons nobles. As I noted earlier, the survey reveals that several thousand Anglo-Saxon landholders had been replaced with about 180 new barons – almost all of whom were French. Those barons had then parceled out their lands to their various vassals in the feudal tradition. Below these 180 barons, there were about 1400 medium-sized land holders or vassals. And out of that 1400, only about 100 were Anglo-Saxon. Under them were about 6000 sub-tenants. And here is where we actually find a large number of Anglo-Saxons. So many of the Anglo-Saxons were now leasing lands that they had once owned. To put it another way, they had been bumped down the social and economic ladder.

Now as I noted, the Domesday Book was completed by the time of that large meeting at Salisbury in August of 1086. The Conquest was now twenty years old, and William was nearing the end of his life.

It is probably fitting that the Domesday Book was his last great accomplishment as the King of England because it confirmed that the Norman Conquest had been completed. It legalized the massive changes which had wiped away most of the English landholders and put Frenchmen in their place. In incredible detail, it lists the names and holdings of each and every baron in England, but it is rare to find an English name listed among them.

I should note here that I have referred to these nobles as land-‘holders’ – not land-‘owners’ – and I have been very careful about that because technically none of these baron or nobles ‘owned’ the land. The only person who ‘owned’ the land was the king – William. Everyone else – even the 180 barons – ‘held’ their lands through him or through the lord above them. This is the basic element of the feudal system, and now the Domesday Book confirms that it had been transplanted to England.

I should note here that the Domesday Book indicates that those 180 barons actually held slightly more than half the land in England – 54% to be exact. William retained about 17% of the land for himself. About 26% was held by the Church, but the Church then parceled out its land to vassals just like the nobles did. That left about 3% that was held in some other type of tenancy. So William was French, and almost all of the barons were French, and the Church was

dominated at the highest levels by Frenchmen. So just about all the land in England was now under the direct or indirect control of Frenchmen.

So the Norman settlement was complete. England's nobility had been replaced. But what about their English language? Well, of course, it was still there. We're only twenty years removed from Hastings. So everyone who spoke English before was still speaking English. But now they were doing it beside French-speaking nobles and clerics.

At this point, in the late eleventh century, there was a clear divide between the new French-speaking aristocracy and the English-speaking commoners. Their languages were still distinct. So we don't have Middle English yet. But over the next couple of centuries, the two languages started to blend together, and a new form of English emerged. But ultimately, it was still English. Yes, a lot of French words came in, but the people who spoke English didn't give up on their native language. They didn't start to speak an Anglicized form of French. They kept their native language and they added a heavy dose of French vocabulary to it.

To emphasize this point, I want to look at a history of the Norman period that was written about 200 years later by a writer named Robert of Gloucester. He wrote a history of England that included the period after the Norman Conquest. And he noted the linguistic divide that existed shortly after the Conquest. He also wrote about the resiliency of English during that period – and the period that followed. Since he was writing around the year 1300, that means he was writing in a very early form of Middle English. So I want to take you through this passage. First, I want to focus on the substance of what he wrote. So here is a completely modern translation of his account. He wrote:

England came into the hands of Normandy. And at that time, the Normans could not speak any language but their own. They spoke French at home and they taught French to their children. As a result, all of the English nobles that descended from them now speak the same French language that they inherited. And if a man cannot speak French, people think very little of him. But the low men and commoners hold onto their native English. I think there is no other country in the world where people hold onto their own language like the people of England do. Because people know that is important to speak both languages, for the more a man knows, the more worthy he is.

Now I want to take you through that passage again and focus on the language itself this time – the language as it existed around the year 1300. So that about two centuries away from where we are now in the overall narrative. And I want you to see how familiar the language has become by the end of that period as we start to enter into the period of Middle English.

Now the language is still a little tough for modern ears, so let me give a more literal translation first. And then I'll go back through it in the original Middle English. That way, the Middle English may make a little more sense. So here is a translation that is very close to a literal translation using Modern English:

Thus came lo England into Normandy's hand  
& the Normans not could speak then. but their own spech.  
& spoke French as they did at home. & their children did also teach.  
so that high men of this land. that of their blood come.  
hold all the same spech. that they from them took.  
for but a man knows French. one tallies of him little.  
but low men hold to English. & to their own spech yet  
I think there be not in all the world. countries none.  
that not hold to their own spech. but England alone.  
But well men know that to know both - well it is  
for the more that a man knows. the more worthy he is.

So that's a more literal translation. Now let's go through it one more time in the original Middle English. By the way, you'll notice that it was originally composed in rhyming verse which was quite common in Middle English.

þus com lo engelond. in to normandies hond.  
& þe normans ne couþe speke þo. bote hor owe speche.  
& speke french as hii dude at om. & hor children dude also teche.  
so þat heimen of þis lond. þat of hor blod come.  
holdeþ alle þulk speche. þat hii of hom nome  
vor bote a man conne frenss. me telþ of him lute.  
ac lowe men holdeþ to engliss. & to hor owe speche ʒute.  
ich wene þer ne beþ in al þe world. contreyes none.  
þat ne holdeþ to hor owe speche. bote engelond one.  
ac wel me wot uor to conne. boþe wel it is.  
vor þe more þat a mon can. þe more wurþe he is.

Now a few things stand out about that passage. First, it's still a long way from Modern English, but it's starting to sound more familiar. The grammar is still a little odd, and there are still some strange words in there, but we're getting closer to Modern English.

One thing that stands out is the use of multiple negatives. The prohibition against double negatives had not taken hold yet. People still used double negatives for emphasis. In fact, Robert uses a triple negative. He writes:

I think there be not in all the world. countries none.  
that not hold to their own spech. but England alone.

Try getting that pass an English teacher today.

The other thing that stands out about that passage is that all the words but one are from Old English. And that one exception is the word *country*. The word *country* was an early borrowing from French. Old English just used the word *land*. Someone might be from another land. And in fact, Robert used that word early in the passage. He referred to 'high men of this land.' But

later he uses ‘country’s,’ primarily referring to foreign countries. So that’s interesting. And maybe the etymology of the word *country* helps to explain that. *Country* comes from the Latin root *contra* meaning ‘opposite or against.’ We still have that sense in the word *contrary*. So the original sense of the word was a foreign or new land. So it is interesting that Robert chose to use the word *country* – the only French word he used – to describe foreign nations.

Of course, today we use the word *country* in a different way. To refer to the ‘countryside.’ When we speak of rural areas, we speak of the ‘country.’ People might live ‘in the country,’ and listen to ‘country’ music. And I make that point because it shows that the nations of the Middle Ages was mostly rural societies. When people thought about a country, they thought about vast stretches of land. They thought about the countryside. It was the same way for Old English *land*. *Land* referred to the land you were standing on, and it referred to the nation you were living in. They were two sides of the same coin.

And that’s why the redistribution of land was so important to the history of England going forward. That fundamental connection between homeland and land, and country and countryside, was now broken. Over ninety percent of the English people lived in the country, but it wasn’t their country anymore. And the English peasants still worked the land. But their land now belonged to the French. And I think that’s the broken connection that Robert was getting at with that passage.

But despite that broken connection, Robert tells us that the English people held onto their native language. And Robert’s passage confirm that. Only *country* came from French. Every other word was native English. But make no mistake, those French words were starting to pour in.

So next time, we’re going to continue our look at the transition from Old English to Middle English. We’ll also look at William’s death and the sons who succeeded him. And we’ll see what life was like for all those English-speaking peasants out in the countryside who were now living under French-speaking lords.

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

## EPISODE 70: MIND YOUR MANORS FOR PETE’S SAKE

Welcome to the History of English Podcast - a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 70: Mind Your Manors For Pete’s Sake. In this episode, we’re going to continue to look at the Norman settlement of England. We’ll look at life in the countryside, and we’ll look at how the Norman masters interacted with the English peasants. This arrangement brought lots of words from French and Latin into English, and those words are still very common in the language today. So this time, we’ll look at how many of those words came into English, and we’ll see how their meanings have changed over time.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is [historyofenglishpodcast.com](http://historyofenglishpodcast.com). And you can always reach me directly by email at [kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com](mailto:kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com). And I wanted to say ‘thanks’ to those who have donated to the podcast. I appreciate the support, and I hope you enjoy the slow transition we’re making from Old English to Middle English.

And speaking of that transition, I want to begin this episode by focusing on the gradual evolution of the language in the years after the Norman Conquest. As I’ve noted before, this was a period in which Old English writing fell out of favor. Many scribes still spoke English, and they continued to copy older English manuscripts. But those documents were just copies. Most new documents were being composed in Latin. And in a few years, a lot of documents were being written in French. But English was no longer the language of government or literature. So these were basically the Dark Ages of English. The written record went silent, and that makes it difficult to trace the specific changes that were taking place within the language.

So we have this period during which written English was on hiatus. And even though we don’t have documents to trace the changes, we know that the language was evolving during this period. When English started to re-appear, it was quite different. And it included a lot of French words that were not there before the Conquest. So we can say with some certainty that those French words entered English during this period of the early Norman settlement. So that’s what I want to focus on in this episode. I want to examine those Latin and French words that were flowing into English – and would soon appear in those early Middle English manuscripts.

A lot of those new words relate to what was happening in the countryside where most of the people lived. So let’s turn our attention to the English countryside in the years immediately following the Norman Conquest.

Last time, we looked at how thousands of Anglo-Saxon landholders were pushed aside and displaced by a small group of Norman barons. So this is a good place to start our look at those new French words – with the word *baron*. You may have noticed that I didn’t use the word *baron* during the Old English period. But I suddenly started using it in the last couple of episodes. Well, that’s because it is a French word that came to England with the Normans.

The Anglo-Saxons had earls, and ealdormen and thanes. But these new French landholders who received massive estates directly from the king were called *barons* using that French term. The

ultimate etymology of *baron* is a little obscure, but it probably came from the Germanic language of the Franks. In fact, Old English had the word *beorn* which meant a warrior or nobleman. And many scholars think Old English *beorn* and French *baron* were cognate with common Germanic roots. One theory is that both words are related to the word *bear*, and they originally meant a powerful warrior who fought like a bear. Remember that the name *Beowulf* meant the ‘bee hunter’ and was a euphemism for ‘bear.’ So there might be an ultimate linguistic connection between *baron* and *bear*, but again that is just a theory.

Whatever the original meaning of the word was, the word *baron* now referred to these major landholders, almost all of whom were French. And the land of those landholders was called the *demesne*. Now I should note that the early Norman and Middle English scribes typically spelled the word *demesne* ‘d-e-m-e-s-n-e.’ That was just a variation of the original French spelling. Over time, that original Norman spelling gave way to a more traditional French spelling, and that gave us ‘d-o-m-a-i-n’ by the early 1400s. But regardless of the spelling, both words basically meant the same thing.

So we have the *baron* and the baron’s *demesne*, both brand-new words in English. Now another word for a large domain is an *estate*, and the word *estate* also came in around this time. But the original meaning of the word was a little different than today. The Old French word was *estat*. Now over time, Modern French has converted *estat* into *etat*. And we actually have that Modern French version of the word in the term ‘coup d’etat,’ which is literally the ‘blow or stoke of the state.’ But again, the original Old French version was *estat*.

And *estat* meant ‘status or condition.’ In fact, the word *estat* comes from the Latin word *status* – or /staht-oos/. So Latin *status* became Old French *estat*. As the Normans were settling into England, some English speakers took that word *estat* and dropped the /ay/ part at the beginning, and that produced the word *stat*, and after a later vowel change, it became *state*. So if we refer to someone’s *status* or condition, we refer to their *state*. We might refer to their ‘state of mine.’ And I might ask you about the ‘state of things.’ Each year, the President of the United States gives an address called the ‘State of the Union.’ That was the original sense of the word *state*. So again, *status* was borrowed directly from Latin, and *state* is just a variation of the same word that came to us via French.

So how did *state* evolve from ‘status or condition’ to a word referring to a political entity as in the ‘Secretary of State’ or an ‘enemy of the state?’

Well, soon after *state* or *stat* entered English, it became common to refer to the ‘state of things.’ The ‘state of the country,’ the ‘state of the church,’ the ‘state of the barons,’ the ‘state of the knights,’ and so on. By the 1300s, the word *state* had acquired a new sense. It now referred to a collection of prominent people. The ‘state of the king and nobles’ was gradually shortened to just the *state*. And that gave us the modern sense of the word *state* as a ‘political group or entity.’

So *state* came in with the Normans, and it came from their Old French word *estat* after the /ay/ part was dropped at the front. Well, the word *estat* also survived with that /ay/ part at the front. And that gave us the word *estate*, as distinguished from just *state*.

Now *estate* also originally meant ‘status or condition.’ So early on, an English speaker with a good knowledge of French would say *estat* in the proper French way. But an English speaker who didn’t know French very well would Anglicize it to just *stat*. So *estat* and *stat* were just two different pronunciations of the same word, and it ultimately gave us the distinction between *estate* and *state*.

So, as I said, both words originally meant the same thing – ‘status or condition.’ But over time, *estat* came to refer to a ‘good or favorable condition.’ So if I referred to someone’s *estate*, I wasn’t really referring to their land. I was referring to their ‘good status and prominent condition.’ So if a baron acquired several tracts of land, I might refer to his improved estate meaning his improved status. Over time, the sense of the word shifted from the person’s prominent status to the thing that made his status prominent – his property. And specifically, it came to refer to his landholdings. And that is how we got the modern sense of the word *estate* to refer to someone’s property or possessions. And notice the parallel evolution of the words *state* and *estate*. *State* came to refer to the ‘public’ or ‘government’ resources controlled by the nobles. Whereas, *estate* came to refer to the ‘private’ resources controlled by the nobles.

So we’ve looked at barons, and demesnes and estates. So you probably recognize an emerging theme. A lot of these new French words related to the new French nobility. And in fact, that’s another word that entered English around this same time – the word *nobility* and the related word *noble*.

Whereas *baron* had a specific meaning as a prominent landholder, the word *noble* was a more generic term for a prominent or well-known person. It could also refer to a person born to a prominent family. As I said, *noble* comes from French, and ultimately from Latin. But if we trace the word back to its Indo-European root, we find that it is actually cognate with the Old English word *know* – ‘k-n-o-w.’ And the ultimate link between *know* and *noble* is that nobles came from prominent families, so they were well-known. We might say they were *notable* – another word that came in from French around this same time. So English *know* and French *notable* and *noble* are all cognate. They all came from the same Indo-European root word.

So we have explored the etymology of *barons*, *demesnes*, *states*, *estates* and *nobles*. Another word associated with those new French barons and nobles is the word *manor* – ‘m-a-n-o-r.’ Today, we think of the word *manor* as a large house. But the original sense of the word was a large feudal estate. At the center of the manor was often a manor house. But the entire estate was called the *manor*.

We can think of a *manor* as a large centralized farm held by a lord and worked by a variety of peasants who were bound to the land through a variety of obligations. The English countryside was dominated by these manors. Now in fairness, this wasn’t a new arrangement. As we saw in earlier episodes, these types of farms or estates had emerged during the Anglo-Saxon period. But

the Normans gave them a new name – the *manor*. And the Normans also gave them a unique legal status which we will examine later.

Now much of rural England was dominated by these manors. This was especially true in the Midlands and southern England.

The word *manor* is closely tied to the Domesday Book which we looked at the last episode. When William's clerks went around England and catalogued the various land holdings, they based the survey around manors. So for them, it was the basic way to categorize the economy and land holdings of rural England.

Now it might not surprise you that the word *manor* is cognate with the word *mansion*. Both words come from the same Latin root. And another word from that same root is the word *menial*. In Norman French, the word *menial* was an adjective to describe things pertaining to the manor house or household. It was also used as a noun to mean a household servant. So a lord might have one or more 'menials' to help him take care of the manor house. The lowly, humble work of the 'menial' came to be described as, well, *menial*. And that's how we got the modern sense of the word *menial* to refer to any kind of lowly or humble task – the type that might be performed by a servant.

Now speaking of *servant*, that was another word brought by the early Normans. In fact, they had two slightly different pronunciations of the same word – *servant* and *serjant*. They both meant a *servant*. But the later pronunciation acquired a distinct meaning as a military servant. And it eventually evolved into *sergeant*. But originally, *servant* and *sergeant* meant the same thing.

Now obviously, *servant* is closely related to other words like *serve* and *service* which also came in around this same time in the first century or so after the Conquest. Middle English also had the word *servage* which was basically the same thing as *service*, but it fell out of use over time.

Now all of these words – *servant*, *sergeant*, *serve*, and *service* – came from a common Latin root word which was *servus*. And in Latin, that word meant 'slave.' So these words derived from an original sense of forced labor or service. But over time, they acquired a more general sense of any work or labor performed or any duty owed to someone else.

Another word from that Latin word *servus* was the word *serf* – 's-e-r-f.' And a *serf* was basically a slave. It was specifically a slave who was tied to the land. So if the land changed hands, the serf passed with the land to the new land holder.

Now the word *serf* was very common back in France, but it wasn't really used very much in England. In fact, it doesn't appear in any English documents until the late 1400s – about four centuries away from where we are now.

Another term for the rural inhabitants of England is *peasants*. But again, the Normans didn't really use that term. In fact, the word *peasant* didn't come into English until the 1400s – around the same time that *serf* came in.

So if the Normans didn't use words like *serf* or *peasant*, what words did they use? Well, they actually had lots of terms for people who lived and worked in the countryside. Remember that ninety percent of the population lived in the countryside. So the Normans classified and labeled them with lots of different terms. And remnants of those terms can still be found throughout Modern English.

Before I go through these terms, let me note that some of these terms are Latin and some are French. And the reason for that is because most of the official documents in the first century after the Conquest were written in Latin. Then, after that, the Normans started to use French for official documents. So the early literature tends to use Latin terms, and the later literature tends to use French terms. But as we know, the French terms were usually just variations of the earlier Latin terms.

The best example of this are the terms *villanus* and *villein*. These were probably the most prevalent terms used by the Normans to describe peasants or certain groups of peasants. *Villanus* is the original Latin term. The plural version was *villani*. And those terms were used in early documents like the Domesday Book that were composed in Latin. The word *villein*, spelled 'v-i-l-l-e-i-n,' was a later French version of the same Latin root word. It became more common as French documents became more common.

Now many modern scholars think that the Latin term *villanus* had a slightly different meaning than the French term *villein*, but I'm not going to dwell on those differences here. The important thing to know is that, regardless of the term, the Norman administrators tended to lump most peasants into this category. In fact, it was probably a bit of a catch-all term. If a peasant didn't get some other particular classification, they were usually labeled as *villani* or *villeins*. At the time of the Domesday Book, they were about forty percent of the rural population of England.

The peasants in this group held tracts of land from a lord. Of course, in exchange for that land, they had to provide certain services to the lord, and they often had to pay certain fees to the lord. And they couldn't just leave or transfer their land holdings to someone else without the lord's consent, so they were tied to the land. They were not free. But their holdings were usually large enough to support their family – typically around 15 to 40 acres.

By now, you have probably already noticed an important linguistic connection between that French word *villein* and our Modern English word *villain*. In fact, they are the same word, even though our modern word *villain* is spelled differently. Over time, the meaning of the word evolved from a simple peasant to a sinister or evil person. And that shows how the old social structures affected the evolution of the language. Peasants were subject to rigid and strict laws that inhibited their freedom. They were often exploited. And naturally, they looked for ways to improve their lot in life. But that often meant violating some of the strict rules that held them in place. So over time, the word *villain* acquired a more sinister sense. But it also reflects the perspective of the lords and barons at the top of the social ladder.

This perspective can also be found in another common English word connected to medieval villeins. In Latin, the suffix *-aster* was sometimes added to a word as a pejorative ending. So if

you stuck *-aster* on the end of a noun, it gave the noun a negative meaning. It is sort of like how we put *-gate* on the end of a word today to indicate a scandal – like *troopergate*, *nannygate* or *deflategate*.

Well, in Latin, you could *-aster* in a similar way. If you put it on the end of a noun, it suggested that the noun was bad or nefarious. And that usage passed into Middle English as well. So a *medicaster* was a bad medic or doctor. So it was a quack. A *historiaster* was a contemptible historian. A *poetaster* was someone who wrote trashy poetry.

Well, since the upper classes looked down on peasants, they applied the same construction to villeins. In Old French, a contemptible or disgusting peasant was a *villenastre*. But by the 1400s, that word had become shortened to just *nastre*. And that is the original version of our word *nasty*. So *nasty* originally referred to a dirty or filthy peasant.

Before I move on from *villeins*, I should remind you that the ultimate root of *villein* is the Latin word *villa*. I discussed this back in Episode 19. *Villa* was a Roman word for a country house or farmstead. And it later passed into English in its own right in the early Modern English period. As the villas or farmsteads grew in size, the number of peasants required to work on those farms also grew. So small settlements began to emerge around those villas, and that produced the word *village*. So *villein*, *villa* and *village* are all cognate.

So those were the *villeins*. Another Norman term for peasants was *cottars* or *cottagers*. These were similar to villeins but they held smaller tracts of land, usually less than 5 acres, sometimes less than an acre. So their land wasn't large enough to support themselves or their family. So they had to rely upon the lord for help and support.

Again, the *cottars* or *cottagers* were unfree and subject to the lord's control. The name *cottar* or *cottager* is believed to derive from the fact that they typically lived in a small hut with a small attached piece of land. That type of hut was called *cote* in Old English. The Vikings also had that same Germanic word. And that word passed from the Old Norse language of the first Norman Vikings into Norman French. So when the Normans arrived in England in 1066, they brought that word *cote* with them. So Old English and Norman French both had the word *cote* meaning a hut. The Normans described the *cote* and the property that surrounded it as the *coteage*, and that word then passed into English as *cottage*. And we still have that word today. So that word *cote* gave us *cottage*, as well as the terms *cottars* and *cottagers*.

Another term sometimes used for a peasant was the Latin word *rusticus*. That Latin word ultimately gave us the word *rustic* to mean something rural, plain or simple.

Another term for a peasant was Latin *nativus*, which meant someone born into bondage. This is the same root word that gave us the English word *native*. And in fact, the word *native* originally had this same sense in Middle English. It was a person born into bondage. A French version of that word was *neif*, and that French word was also used to mean a peasant. So once again, documents written in Latin used Latin *nativus* and documents written in French used the French *neif*, but the French word came from the Latin word. The French version of the word *neif* later

produced the word *naive* meaning ‘simple or innocent.’ And that word also passed into English in the 1600s.

Many peasants worked in the fields, but some worked in the lord’s household. So they were household servants. A peasant who worked in the household was a *famulus*. A group of such servants was a *familia*. Since the *familia* lived with the lord and his wife and children in the manor house, they typically had a close relationship with other. Of course, the word *familia* gave us the word *family*. And over time, the meaning of the term shifted from the household servants to the actual relatives who lived in the household. And that same root word also gave us the word *familiar*.

So in summary, words like *cottage*, *rustic*, *native*, *naive*, and *family* all have roots in the French words used to describe English peasants. And we can add to that words like *villain*, *nasty*, *serve*, *servant*, *sergeant*, and *serf*.

So all of those words have origins in English peasantry. But there were people in the English countryside who were actually below the peasants. They were the slaves. Some were personal slaves – the property of a specific lord. Others were tied to a piece of land, like the serfs found in France. Either way, they were unfree and had little, if any, legal rights. They were basically just property.

The Domesday Book was written in Latin, so to describe these people, the book used that traditional Latin term *servus* that I discussed earlier. That’s the word that gave us words like *serve*, *service* and *servant*. But remember that the original Latin word *servus* meant ‘slave.’

So when the surveyors used that term in the Domesday Book, it is assumed that they meant it in that traditional sense. And slavery was a common feature of Anglo-Saxon society. So many of the people who were slaves before the Conquest remained in slavery after the Conquest. And the Domesday Book reflects that by telling us that about ten percent of the rural population were still enslaved when the book was compiled in the year 1086.

But shortly after the Domesday Book was compiled, slavery was officially abolished by the Normans. As I’ve noted before, the Normans not only took control of the English government, they also took control of the English Church. And the new church leaders denounced slavery as a sin. So in the year 1102, only 16 years after the Domesday Book, the Council of Westminster formally prohibited slavery and the slave trade in England.

Now you shouldn’t make too much out of this prohibition. The fact is that the day-to-day life of the average slaves didn’t change very much. In fact, it appears that the Normans just stopped using the term *servus* or slave, and they just labeled most of them as something else, usually one of those terms I mentioned earlier. So a *servus* now became a *rusticus*, or a *neif*, or a *famulus*. So they went from a slave to an unfree peasant. It was a subtle legal distinction that probably made little difference to the day-to-day life of the former slave.

So if the slaves had existed below the peasant class, what existed above the peasant class? Well, the answer is the free landholders. They were the people who held their own lands. They typically had a lord, but they could choose their own lord. If they were unhappy with a given lord, they could find another one. They could also give and transfer their land holdings to other people. And they could leave their property to their children and other heirs. They typically had to provide some service to their lord, but otherwise, they were free to use their property as they pleased. They were also considered free under the law. So they had legal rights that the peasants didn't have.

The Normans sometimes referred to these free land holders with a Latin term – ‘*liberi homines*’ – literally the ‘free men.’ The Normans also picked up an Old English word which referred to free land holders. That term was *sokemen*. And that term *sokeman* was actually more common in the east – in the old Danelaw region.

As I noted, the term *sokeman* was derived from an Old English expression. When an Anglo-Saxon king conferred land to a supporter, it was specifically stated that the king granted ‘sake and soke’ upon the landholder. It meant that the new landholder had free rights over the property. *Sake* was *saku* in Old English and it meant an ‘accusation or a claim.’ And *soke* was *socn*, and it meant jurisdiction. So ‘sake and soke’ meant that the landholder had the jurisdiction or right to make certain claims to the property. And that right of ‘sake and soke’ produced the word *sokeman* for the person who held those rights. The property itself was sometimes call *soke* property.

Now there is another interesting aspect of ‘sake and soke.’ Both words are cognate with the word *seek*, also from Old English. So if you ‘seek’ something, you are pursuing something. And that is the connection with the word *sake*, which meant something pursued like ‘an accusation or a claim.’ So if you ‘seek’ a ‘sake,’ you’re pursuing a claim.

If you had a good claim, you were ‘with sake.’ But if your claim was bad or groundless, you were ‘without sake.’ In other words, ‘without a claim.’ Well, shortly after the Normans arrived, they picked up this Old English word and applied it to legal proceedings. If peasant John made a claim in court, it was said that the remedy was being sought ‘for the sake of John’ – in other words, for the claims of John. Well, that type of phrase became very popular. And so, people might refer to something being for ‘John’s sake’ – in other words, being in support of John’s claims or for John’s benefit. And so *sake* acquired the modern sense of benefit. I might work hard for my own sake and for the sake of my family. But by the 1300s, the phrase was adopted for exclamations by adding a religious element to it. People said things like ‘For God’s sake,’ or ‘For Christ’s sake’ to add emphasis to a statement. Some people were uncomfortable with that type of language, and so they converted it into phrases like ‘for goodness sake,’ or ‘for pity sake,’ or ‘for Pete’s sake’ – the ‘Pete’ presumably referring to St. Peter. But it all goes back to that Old English word *sake* meaning a claim.

Another expression evolved along the same lines as ‘for Pete’s sake.’ If I wanted to say something and add a personal note of emphasis to it, I might make the statement and then add the phrase ‘for my own name’s sake’ to the end. So it was a way of saying that I am making this

statement for my own benefit, and I want people to remember that I said it. So I might say something like, “I’m going to be there for you for my own name’s sake.” So it was a way of saying that I put my name behind something, and I intend to protect my good name by honoring my promise. Well, that expression – ‘for my own name’s sake’ – became common in early Modern English, and it ultimately produced the word *namesake*. *Namesake* was another way of preserving one’s good name over time. In this case, it meant to literally preserve one’s name by giving it to someone else. So William the Conqueror was a Norman king, as was his son and namesake William Rufus.

That same type of construction also led to the word *keepsake*. A *keepsake* is something given to you that you keep for the sake of someone else. In other words, you hang onto it in order to keep that keep the memories of that person’s alive. So you might keep your grandmother’s wedding ring a keepsake if she passes away.

So in words like *namesake* and *keepsake*, and an expression like ‘for Pete’s sake,’ we see a linguistic connection back to the term ‘sake and soke’ to refer to free landholders in Norman England.

So I hope you’re still with me after all of that etymology. I wanted to take you through those words for serfs, peasants, and free landholders to show you how those Latin and French words were flowing into English. And how those initial words produced even more words over time.

But I want to conclude this episode by returning to those manors where most of the peasants lived and worked. As the Norman period progressed and eventually gave way to the Angevin period in the 1150s, the status of the peasants declined even further. Most of the rural inhabitants of England were compressed into one large class of unfree peasants. Whereas the Domesday Book classified peasants into a variety of categories, now those categories started to blur together. For example, slaves once held a distinct position below the peasants. But with the abolition of slavery, slaves acquired a few more legal rights. So they moved up and essentially became unfree peasants. Again, the legal status may have improved slightly, but their overall economic status didn’t change very much.

Meanwhile, the status of the villeins actually decreased. They lost some of their legal rights and became increasingly obligated to the local lords. So as we move forward, a lot of the fine distinctions between these various peasant groups became blurred. Even the sokemen or free landholders experienced a decline in their status. Whereas they once were able to leave a particular lord and find a new lord, many of them lost that right as well. So most of them also became permanently attached to a specific lord.

So the various rural social classes were compressed into one big group of unfree peasants. And the key part of that is that they were ‘unfree.’ As English law developed over the next couple of centuries, this became a fundamental distinction in the law. Were you free or unfree? And in order to understand why this distinction was so important, we have to go back to those manors in the countryside.

Most of the peasants were attached to a particular manor. And under Norman law, each of these manors was entitled to establish their own private court to deal with matters associated with the manor. These manor courts – or manorial courts – were independent of regular King’s courts. So now, there were two different legal systems at work in rural England. And this was a very important development because it tended to tie the peasants to the land in a way that was virtually unbreakable. So let me explain what I mean.

First, let me note that the word *court* is another one of those French words that came in immediately after the Norman Conquest. *Court* originally had the sense of a courtyard. And it was first used in English to refer to the ‘King’s court,’ so it was the place where the king resided and therefore met with his advisors. It soon came to refer to a meeting of those advisors. And it then came to refer to any meeting of prominent persons who met to make a decision about something or to render a judgment about something. As I noted in an earlier episode, Old English tended to use the word *mot*, which is related to the words *meet* and *meeting*. But now, the word *court* came in.

Now the King’s courts included the traditional courts out in the hundreds and the shires. Traditionally, if there was a dispute between peasants or landholders, that is where they went to have the dispute resolved. But as I noted, lord’s were now given the right to establish their own courts at the manor. And those were completely independent of the traditional courts.

The manor courts not only covered the manor itself, they also covered the small villages that were emerging around those manors. We’ll look at life in those villages in an upcoming episode, but for now, it is important to understand that most of the people who lived in those villages were peasants who worked on the farms. So the villagers were also subject to the law of the local manor.

So these manor courts were almost like the private courts of the lord. And that meant that the lord could use those courts to keep the peasants down and exploit them. The manor court not only settled disputes between the peasants, it also settled disputes between the peasants and the lord himself. In other words, if a peasant felt that he was being exploited – that the lord was taking advantage of him by demanding services or payments that weren’t actually owed – then the peasant’s only option was to go to the manor court. But the lord often controlled that court. So you can start to see the problem here. The manor court gave the lord control over his peasants. They really had nowhere else to go if they were being exploited or oppressed.

So the manor court became a tool used by the lord to control the peasants. And the court actually had very broad authority. It decided the rules of the manor, and it punished anyone who failed to follow the rules. It made sure that the required payments were being made to the lord, and the required services were being performed for the lord’s benefit.

But beyond handling the administration of the manor, the manor court was also an actual court. It heard disputes between the peasants. This could include variety of disputes, like unpaid debts, broken promises, slander, and any number of other wrongdoings. The penalty for the guilty party was typically a fine. As I noted, the manor court also heard disputes between the peasants and

the lord himself. So if a peasant felt that the work he was required to perform was excessive, he went to the court. Or if he was being assessed with excessive fines or fees, he would have to go to the same court. And this is where the exploitation and abuse of the peasants really began to set in.

Not only did the peasants owe labor to the lord, they also owed the lord a variety of fees. If a peasant died, his son couldn't take his father's lands without paying a fee called a *relief*. If a peasant's daughter wanted to get married, the peasant might have to seek the lord's approval and pay a fee to the lord. Sometimes, the obligation to provide labor was converted into an obligation to pay rent. So the peasant had to pay a certain amount to the lord just to keep his holdings. And the lord could increase those rents. On top of that, fines could be imposed for a variety of offenses. And in every case, the unfree peasant had no choice but to pay the fees, perform the services, or go the manor court which was often controlled by the lord. So the manor court was an effective way for the lord to generate revenue from his peasants. And it was also a way to keep the peasants tied to the farm.

When the manor court met, which was at least twice a year, it was presided over by the steward of the manor. The court itself was made up of peasants and free landholders. There were usually twelve of them. So this was another version of the Norman jury. But the peasants and free landholders who made up the jury held their lands directly from the lord. So when a dispute involved the lord, they rarely ruled against him.

Furthermore, the same jurors often met over and over again. So they formed a more or less permanent body. And that made them even more susceptible to the lord's control.

Not all peasants and free landholders could serve on the jury. Only certain ones had a special obligation to attend the court's proceedings and serve on the jury. Those were the ones who had an obligation called 'suit of court.' *Suit* was word for the required attendance at the court's proceedings. This is the ultimate origin of the legal sense of the word *suit*, as in a *lawsuit*, or 'to file suit' against someone in court.

And whenever court proceedings were held in Norman England, whether it be the manor courts or the King's courts, it was expected that everyone would wear formal attire. All the officials dressed like each other. It was said that everyone was 'in suit' or 'of suit' with each other. This is sort of like playing cards where every card might be of the same suit. Well, since the court officials were said to be 'in suit' when they wore the same clothing, that formal attire came to be known as a *suit*. So that's the connection between a lawsuit and business suit.

So as you can see, the manor courts were a major problem for poor peasants who were being exploited by their lords. In some cases, a peasant might try to side-step the manor court to have his claims heard before the king's courts, in other words the hundred court or the shire court. Those courts weren't under the lord's control. But this is where that fundamental distinction between being free or unfree came into play. Only 'free' peasants could use the King's courts. So in order to have your claim heard there, you had to prove that you were a 'free' peasant. Otherwise, the dispute was kicked back to the manor.

Now as I noted, earlier, most of the peasants were deemed to be unfree by this point. So in most cases, all the lord had to do was claim the peasant was unfree, and the matter went right back to the manor court. But sometimes a peasant was actually able to succeed. If he could prove that his obligations to the lord were very minimal, he might be deemed a free peasant. He could then challenge the lord in the king's courts. But that was pretty rare. For the most part, the peasants were squarely under the thumb of the local lord.

So as I conclude this episode, we can now identify two major changes that the Normans brought to the English countryside. First, the old Anglo-Saxon nobles and landholders were replaced with a new Norman aristocracy. And most of that Norman power was concentrated in the hands of powerful lords who spoke French and maintain large manors. The second major development was the creation of the manor courts which gave those lords almost complete control over their peasants. Any social mobility that once existed before the Conquest was now gone. The divide between the French nobles and English peasants was now made permanent, or at least semi-permanent.

The native Anglo-Saxons were now relegated to second-class status in their own country. And there wasn't much they could do about it.

But these developments had another linguistic consequence which we will explore over the next couple of episodes. The English peasants were now tied to the land in a way that was even more restrictive than before. That meant that English speakers in one area rarely traveled beyond the manor or local village, and they rarely had an opportunity to communicate with English speakers in other parts of the country. That separation was coupled with the loss of English as a written language. And English was no longer being taught in those church schools. So there was no longer a national standard to hold the language together.

And all of that meant that regional dialects started to become more diverse. The Old Norse language of the Viking settlers had already changed English in the Danelaw. But now, other regional dialects were becoming more distinct. So as we move forward over the next couple of episodes, we're going to see how complicated this became. We'll have an increasingly fractured English language. We'll have a heavy Norse influence in the north. We'll have an aristocracy who spoke French. We'll have an increasing number of English speakers who were learning French, either out of desire or necessity. And on top of all of that, Latin was still the standard language for Church business and most written documents. So England was increasingly a polyglot nation. And this linguistic confusion contributed to a new form of English. And that new form of English borrowed heavily from all of those influences.

We'll explore those developments over the next few episodes. So until next time, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.