THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 64:
FEUDALISM AND EARLY NORMANS

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast - a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 64: Feudalism and the Early Normans. In this episode, we're going to turn our attention back across the English Channel to France. We're going to look at the rise of feudalism, and we'll look at some of the words which that system gave to English. We'll also explore the early history of Normandy and how Normandy fits into the larger context of European feudalism. And we'll also see how the Normans quickly abandoned their Old Norse language once they were in France, and they quickly developed their own unique French dialect.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can always reach me directly at kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com.

One quick note before we begin. Since the last episode, a few of you have contacted me to report that most of the older episodes of the podcast are no longer available in iTunes. Only the most recent 20 episodes are there. Well, this is strictly an iTunes issue. In fact, on many platforms like the iTunes app on mobile devices, you can still access all of the episodes This is apparently a glitch in the iTunes store, and hopefully it will be fixed shortly. But if you having a problem accessing the old episodes, you can always go to the website – historyofenglishpodcast.com.

Now let's turn to this episode. Last time, we look at events in England during the reign of Edward the Confessor, but I stopped the story in the early 1050s. And I did that because that is point at which William of Normandy first enters the picture. But before we get to William of Normandy, soon to become known as William the Conqueror, I wanted give a little background to his story. William was a product of Normandy, and Normandy was a product of the feudal age of France. Technically, Normandy was part of France, but it operated as a semi-independent province. And it wasn't alone in that regard. Much of France consisted of these semi-autonomous regions. So to really understand the dynamics which led to the Norman Conquest of England, we need to understand a little bit about the concept of feudalism and how Normandy fits into that larger puzzle. And since the Normans introduced feudalism to England in 1066, it is going to be a very important part of our overall story as we move forward.

Let me begin by noting that *feudalism* is really a loaded term. It can mean different things to different people. It can describe many different aspects of life in medieval Europe. But it's a relatively modern term. The term *feudalism* didn't really appear until the 1600s when scholars were looking back to earlier centuries and examining the social and economic systems in place at that time.

Now, I'm not going to explore all of the various aspects of feudalism here. I just want to examine how that system developed in France, and specifically how it developed in northern France. And to understand that history, we need to go back in time to the period of the early Franks shortly after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire.

As we look back to this early period, we see a society and culture that was in many ways similar to that of the Anglo-Saxons. And that shouldn't be surprising. The Angles, Saxons and Franks all had common West Germanic roots in northern Europe. So initially, the economic and social developments were very similar on both sides of the channel.

A few episodes back, we looked at Anglo-Saxon 'Earls and Churls.' And we saw how agricultural developments like the heavy mouldboard plow and outside threats like the Vikings led to the growth of manors. Free land-owning peasants increasingly turned to local lords for support. Very often, they turned over their land to the local lord, and they agreed to work the land and share the bounty with the lord. In exchange, the lord agreed to provide protection, and he also agreed to provide food and shelter. So both sides benefitted initially. Large collective farms emerged around manors owned by a local lord. Technically, these were voluntary arrangements. A peasant could leave and try to make it elsewhere, but that rarely happened as a practical matter.

Now, these are very broad, general statements about what happened, but these developments were similar on both sides of the channel. Over time, the lords acquired more and more land. Wealth became concentrated in the hands of a few large landholders, and the status of free peasants declined.

But in the 700s, something happened in the Frankish kingdom which started to distinguish the Franks from the Anglo-Saxons. And what happened around this time was the adoption of a certain technology by the Franks. That technology had already changed the history of Europe, and now it was about to bring about further changes. That technology was the stirrup. Specifically, the stirrup on both sides of the horse, which allowed riders to balance and maneuver on horseback in ways that were previously impossible.

Now we've seen this innovation before. I noted way back in the late Roman period that the Huns had mastered that technology on the Eurasian steppes. And that gave them a huge military advantage against traditional European infantry. The Huns tended to fight on horseback. So they could literally run circles around a traditional infantry standing on the ground.

Like many Germanic tribes, the Franks had once fallen victim to this technology, but by the 700s, the Franks had adopted the stirrup for themselves, and they soon came to master its military potential. And when that happened, it ensured that the Franks would soon come to dominate Western Europe. From this point on, the Franks would utilize a cavalry while other Germanic tribes like the Anglo-Saxons would continue to rely upon an infantry. The Franks would learn to fight on horseback while their neighbors would fight while standing on the ground. And this was a huge advantage for the Frankish military. It allowed the Franks to consolidate power in Western Europe. And it ultimately allowed Charlemagne to emerge as the master of much of Europe. In fact, the Anglo-Saxons continued to rely upon an infantry all the way up to the Norman Conquest in 1066. And that gave the Norman cavalry a decisive advantage at Hastings.

Now the Franks not only developed the use of a cavalry. They also added another feature. And that feature is very important to our story. Secured by those stirrups, the Frankish cavalry began to use large spears as lances. That made the cavalry even more lethal. And they also adopted the chain mail and helmets typically word by infantry. Over time, chain mail was gradually replaced by large armored plates, and in later years, entire suits of armor. This new type of warrior was the mounted knight.

But they weren't called *knights* yet. *Knight* is actually a native English word. It was *cniht* in Old English, but it merely meant a 'boy or servant or attendant.' It didn't mean a mounted warrior until yet. That meaning wasn't applied until such warriors were introduced by the Normans after 1066. Note that *cniht* is pronounced with a 'k' sound at the beginning. So the modern spelling of *knight* ('k-n-i-g-h-t') reflects the fact that the K was once pronounced.

And in fact most of our modern words that begin with a 'K-N' letter combination can be traced back to Old English where the 'k' sound was pronounced. That includes words like *knead* ('k-n-e-a-d'), *knee* ('k-n-e-e'), *kneel* ('k-n-e-e-l'), *know* ('k-n-o-w'), *knife* ('k-n-i-f-e'), *knit* ('k-n-i-t'), and *knock* ('k-n-o-c-k'). All of those words go back to Old English, and they were all once pronounced with an initial 'K' sound. But we should keep in mind that the Anglo-Saxons didn't use the letter K, they only used the letter C. So all of those words were actually spelled with a <CN> letter combination in Old English.

So if *knight* is an Old English word used by the Anglo-Saxons, what did the Franks call those mounted warriors? Well, since they fought on horseback, they used the French word for horse, which was *cheval*. And they became known as *chevaliers*.

The state of being a *chevalier* was *chevalerie*. And that ultimately produced the word *chivalry* in English. *Chivalry* was the code of the mounted knight.

Now since English uses the word *knight* for this class of mounted warriors, that's the word I'll use here. And for now, in the 700s and 800s, that class of knights was a relatively new thing in the Frankish kingdom.

Now knights really changed the nature of warfare in Western Europe. They had the traditional advantage of being on horseback. But now, they had the added advantage of being protected by chain mail and armor. And they used lances which were deadly weapons in the hands of a skilled knight. In many ways, they were the medieval equivalent of a tank. Thy were armored, mobile and deadly. A small handful of highly trained knights could be more effective than a large force of rag-tag infantry culled together from peasants in the countryside. This was the new state of warfare.

And the Franks found themselves in a more or less constant state of warfare. They were under constant assault. Early on, they had to deal with Muslim invasions from the south. Then they had to deal with threats from the east. That included Eurasian and Central European tribes like the Slavs and the Magyars. Then the Vikings came from the north.

As these threats continued, the Franks were looking to expand their kingdom. So that also required constant warfare on the periphery and borderlands of the kingdom. The net result of all of this was a need for a permanent fighting force, specifically a permanent fighting force of knights.

Initially the Franks were very much like the Anglo-Saxons and other Germanic tribes. There was no permanent standing army. The king had a small retinue of warrior and thanes, but armies had to be cobbled together in times of war by bringing in peasants from the countryside. They weren't professional fighters, and eventually they had to return to the farms. Otherwise, crop failure and starvation would result. This was one of the reasons why the Anglo-Saxons had struggled so much against the Vikings. They lacked a permanent standing army.

But now, the constant state of warfare in the Frankish kingdom meant that the king and nobles really needed a permanent army. The king had to protect his kingdom, and the nobles and lords had to protect their peasants. And the mounted knights offered a perfect solution. A few knights were just as effective as a large standing army.

But there was one problem with those knights. They were incredibly expensive to maintain. Not just anyone could be a knight. They were highly skilled warriors. To maneuver a horse in heavy chain mail or armor was difficult by itself. But then to manage a lance and other weapons, and to use them effectively in battle, it all required a lot of training. If was a full-time job. Horses also had to be trained to carry the knight. And land was required to raise and train those horses. And then there was all of that equipment. The knight needed chain mail or armor and a helmet. He needed a variety of weapons. Of course, he needed a horse. And he needed to feed and maintain that horse. The bottom line is that very few people could afford all of that. The only way a class of knights could exist is if a prominent and rich noble chose to maintain him.

But the monetary economy we have today didn't exist at that time. The nobles couldn't just go to the bank and withdraw some money to pay those knights. Most of the lord's wealth was tied up in land. So if the lord wanted to secure the secure the services of knights, he had to find a way to use his land.

And this is where the Franks turned to an old Roman concept. Sometimes, when the Romans wanted to secure a particular service from someone, they would grant that person some land, or an office or other privileges. The property or privilege that was granted was called a *beneficium*, and it became known as a *benefice* from the same root as the words *benefit* and *beneficial*. And that was because the property or privilege was usually granted on relatively easy or favorable terms to secure whatever services were required.

One type of especially favorable grant was called a *precaria*. A precaria was a type of Roman land grant where the tenant had very few, if any, obligations in return. For example, a landowner might have some undeveloped land that wasn't ready for cultivation, so he would basically give it to the tenant with an expectation that the tenant would clear it and prepare it for crops.

The precaria was typically granted for the tenant's lifetime, and it would then revert back to the landowner. It was such a good deal for the tenant, that there was always a risk that the lord might renege on the deal. And because of that, the Latin word *precaria* ultimately gave rise to the English word *precarious*. Today, the word refers to something uncertain and dependent on the favor of another person.

So the Romans had this idea of granting land to a tenant to secure some service in return. And that seemed like a perfect solution for the Frankish lords who had lots of land and needed to find a way to retain the services of knights. So all of these pieces came together, and the Franks started to grant land to the knights and other prominent nobles in exchange for their agreement to provide military services to the lord.

This created a new and different type of relationship between the lord and his tenant. Under the earlier system, a peasant received land in exchange for an agreement to provide agricultural services. Now a knight or lesser noble received land in exchange for an agreement to provide military services. Under the prior system, the peasant could walk away, perhaps find another lord. But under this new relationship, the lesser noble or knight was effectively locked into place. If the knight wanted to walk away, he had to give up the property. But it also made the knight a mini-lord. He became the master of his own little domain, as long as he met his obligations to the lord who granted him the land.

Now there was one problem with this arrangement. How were knights supposed to be landowners and professional warriors at the same time? How were they supposed to be able to train and provide miliary service and oversee the property and peasants simultaneously? Well, the knight was basically his own mini-lord at this point. So all he had to do was turn around and grant some of his newly acquired land to peasants who would then agree in turn to work the land for him in return. If he had enough land, he could even grant land to other knights would agree to provide military services to him. So rather than personally fighting for the lord, he could have his own knights who would satisfy that obligation for him. Over the course of many generations, this type of arrangement continued to expand.

The key to all of this is that the knights started to become tied to the land. They were no longer mercenaries free to fight for whoever paid them the most money. They were now bound to a specific lord and a specific piece of land. And what bound them together was a sacred oath. And that oath was a fundamental part of the whole arrangement.

The person who granted the land, or the use of the land, was the *lord*. As we've seen before, *lord* is an Old English word. The Old French equivalent was *seignor* from the same Latin root as the *word* senior. It survives in the term *monseigneur*, which is an Anglicized form of a French word which literally means 'my lord.' French took the same term and shortened it to *monsieur*, which is basically the French equivalent of English *mister*. So *monsieur* again is literally 'my lord' if we trace it back to its roots.

But to describe that senior landholder, English generally uses the native term *lord*. And in fact, Old English even had the compound term *landlord* to describe the owner of a piece of land.

The person who received the land from the lord in exchange for a set of promises was the *vassal*. And that term has been retained into English. The word *vassal* is ultimately derived from a Celtic word which meant a young boy or servant. The Romans picked up that word very early on from the Celtic tribes in Gaul. They borrowed the word, and it became *vassus* in Latin. During the early Frankish period, the word came to mean a slave. But by the 700s, it was being applied to free men who were dependent upon a lord. And that produced the term *vassal*. In later French, the word *vassal* produced the word *valet*, which meant a man servant. And that word *valet* has also passed into English.

So this specific type of land grant was a agreement between two parties – a lord and a vassal. The key here is that these terms *lord* and *vassal* were relative terms. A king might grant land to a vassal. The vassal might turn around and grant part of the land to another person in exchange for certain promises. And that might continue on and on down the line. So there were a lot of potential links in the chain. And depending on where you found yourself in that chain, you might be a vassal to the person above you who granted the land to you. And at the same time, you might be a lord to the person below you who received the land from you. One person's vassal was another person's lord.

But ultimately, every link in that chain was secured by a solemn oath which linked that particular lord to that particular vassal. Every time one of these lord-vassal relationships was created, there was a mutual exchange of promises between the lord and the vassal. And there was a specific ceremony which formalized this. This ceremony was known as *commendatio* in Latin and became known as the 'commendation ceremony.' Another term for the ceremony was *investitura* which became *investiture*.

The ceremony itself consisted of two parts. In the first part, the vassal would kneel before the lord and place his hands together in a praying position. The lord would place his hands around the vassal's hands. The vassal would then announce that he wished to become the lord's man, and the lord accepted the vassal's request. Now when the vassal expressed the desire to become the lord's 'man,' he didn't use the word *man*, which is an English word. Instead, he used the French word *homme* – spelled 'h-o-m-m-e.' So since the vassal expressed the desire to the 'homme' of the lord, this part of the ceremony became known as the 'act of homage' (/oh-MADʒ/) from that word *homme*. And we still use that term today, but it has been largely Anglicized over the centuries as *homage* (/HAH-mij/).

Depending on how it's used today, you can hear it pronounced both ways in English. But regardless of how you pronounce it – whether we pay *homage* (/HAH-mij/) to someone or we perform some act as an *homage* (/oh-MADʒ/) to someone – we're using an old feudal term which goes back to the first part of this feudal ceremony.

Now I noted that the act of homage required the vassal to put his hands together in a praying position before the lord. This is essentially what many Christians do when they pray to God. They put their hands together in a praying position. But it is important to note that the feudal ceremony did not borrow that act from Christianity. In fact, it was the other way around. This gesture of putting one's hands together as part of this act of homage was later appropriated by the

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church, and was used by worshipers to show their personal allegiance to God. That's how sacred and important this feudal ceremony was. It was so important that people began to apply it to their religion.

And this really brings us to the second part of the ceremony – the oath. Once the vassal had shown his act of homage, he would then place his hands on a Bible or other holy relic and swear an oath of allegiance and loyalty to the lord. When the vassal swore this oath of allegiance, a solemn bond was created between the lord and the vassal. This was a time when agreements were not usually written down. So these rituals in the presence of witnesses served the purpose of a legal record. And the culture deemed them to be unbreakable.

The oath that a vassal swore to lord was the *fidelitas* or *fides*. That word ultimately gave us the word *fidelity*. So it was essentially a promise of fidelity reinforced by a specific oath. Another word from that same root is *fealty*, so this is sometimes described as an oath of fealty. Fidelity or fealty was a type of devotion. So if *fidelity* was a type of devotion, then lack of devotion was *infidelity*, and someone who lacked devotion was an *infidel*.

The same root word which gave us *fealty* and *fidelity* also gave us the word *faith*. So those words are fundamentally connected. To show fealty or fidelity was to be faithful. In the twentieth century, radios were produced with an extremely clear sound. The manufacturers claimed that the sound was faithful or true to the original sound of the music. So those radios were said to have 'high fidelity' – of *hi-fi* for short. But the basic idea was that the sound was faithful or devoted to the original sound.

So all of that means that *faith*, *fidelity*, *fealty*, *infidel* and *hi-fi* are all cognate.

Now once this commendation ceremony was completed, the lord and the vassal were bound together in what was theoretically an unbreakable contract.

This system of lords and vassals continued to grow and expand over time, as more and more lords acquired more and more vassals. By the time of Charlemagne, this series of hierarchical relationships had become the norm. At the top of the totem pole was the king who actually owned all of the land, or at least had a claim to all of the land. He parceled it out to his supporters who agreed to provide certain services to him in return. Those supporters then turned around and did the same thing with a new group of people below them. And on and on.
At the bottom of the totem pole were the peasants and serfs and slaves who actually worked the land and didn't own any property. But in between the king and the peasants was this series of lord-vassal relationships. And this was the essence of the system that later became known as *feudalism*.

So where did that term *feudalism* come from? Well, as I said, it didn't really exist as a term until the 1600s – long after feudalism itself had faded into history. But the term was based on the word for the property right that was conveyed from the lord to the vassal.

I mentioned earlier that the Romans had a similar concept called a *beneficium*, and that produced the word *benefice* to describe the property that was granted. In the late 700s and into the 800s, the Latin term *benefice* was gradually replaced by the Germanic term *feod*. And *feod* was given a Latin inflectional ending, and it became *feudum* (/FAY-o-dom/). *Feudum* eventually came to be pronounced as *feudum* (/FEUD-um/).   And since the property granted to the vassal was called the *feudum*, later historians used that term to create the word *feudalism*.

Now that word *feudum* (/FAY-o-dom/) or *feudum* (/FEUD-um/) came to England with the Normans. And the Normans often rendered the word as *fief*. So in English, we often describe the property held pursuant to a lord-vassal agreement as a *fief*. So *feod*, *feudum* (/FAY-oo-dom/) or *feudum* (/FEUD-um/), and *fief* are all variations of the same root word, and they all describe the property held pursuant to a lord-vassal arrangement.

Again, that ultimate root word was *feod*– a Germanic term used by the Franks. And if that word sounds familiar to you, it should. Old English had the same basic word which was *feoh*. We've seen that word on several occasions, and it meant money or property in Old English. And it later produced the word *fee*. And many scholars attribute the Modern English word *fee* to both sources. They think that Old English *feoh* and Norman French *fief* merged in Middle English and produced *fee*. And that would make sense because they were basically just two different versions of the same Germanic root word – one was Anglo-Saxon and one was Frankish. So English just merged them back together as the word *fee*. So today, we may have to pay a 'fee' or 'fees' to someone. So it still has a sense of money which is a type of property.

So the English word *fee* goes back to the Old English word *feoh* and the Frankish word *feod*. And both of those words meant property. But we can actually trace those Germanic words back further to their Indo-European origins. And if we examine the Indo-European root, we find that the word originally meant 'cattle.'

Since the original Indo-Europeans were nomadic herders, they didn't really own land. And there is no evidence that they used coins or money. Their cattle and livestock were the primary source of their wealth. So the original root word referred to livestock, and it also had a more general sense of any type of moveable property.

So what was the Indo-European root word. Well, it was the **peku*. And **peku* is a classic example of Grimm's law at work. We know from earlier episodes that the early Germanic speakers changed the pronunciation of certain consonants. The 'P' sound became an 'F' sound. And the 'K' sound became an 'H' sound. And if we apply those basic sound changes to **peku* , we get the original Germanic word *fehu*. And *fehu* produced Old English *feoh*, and Frankish *feod*. And not only did the pronunciation change, but the meaning shifted along the way from cattle or moveable property to a more general term for property.

Well, guess what, the same basic shift in meaning also occurred when that Indo-European root word passed into Latin. The Germanic sound shifts didn't apply, so Latin took the word as **peku*, and then created the Latin word *pecunia* which meant 'money, property or wealth.' And that Latin word gave us the English word *pecuniary* which is a term referring to money or

monetary wealth. So Latin developed that same shift of meaning from cows to money that we see from *feoh* to *fee* in English. So *fee* and *pecuniary* are ultimately cognate – one is English and one is Latin – but the original root word meant 'cattle.'

I should also note that Latin also gave us the word *peculiar* from the same root. *Peculiar* originally referred to the property of a particular person. So it was something unique to that person. And over time, that led to the sense of the word *peculiar* as anything unique to a particular person. So it might refer to a unique personality trait. So it was something uncommon or unusual. And that led to the modern sense of the term as something strange or unusual. But again, *peculiar* once referred property, and its original root referred to cows.

Now the connection between cows and property also appears in another pair of words in English – the words *cattle* and *chattel*. *Cattle* refers to cows, and *chattel* refers to property. And once again, both words have the same root. Only in this case, the process went in reverse. The original meaning of the word was 'property,' and it later came to be restricted to 'cows.' So what happened here is that Late Latin had the word *capitale*, which was a general word for 'property.' And it ultimately gave us the Modern English word *capital* as in *capital goods*, *capital gain* or *capitalism*.

As Late Latin evolved into Old French, a variation of *capitale* emerged without the 'p' sound in the middle. In most of France, especially around Paris, it was pronounced as *chatel*. And that word still survives as the word *chattel*, which is another word for 'property.' But in northern France, in places like Normandy, the word *chatel* was often pronounced as *catel*. And that was because the Norman dialect of French often retained that hard 'K' sound at the beginning of certain Latin words. So from *capitale*, Norman-French had *catel* where the Old French spoken around Paris had *chatel*. And both of those words entered English. The Normans brought *catel* and other French speakers brought *chatel*. And that gave us *cattle* and *chattel*. And both words just meant 'property' in Middle English. But around the 1500s, the words started to become distinct. *Cattle* started to be restricted to livestock. And that gave us the modern distinction between *cattle* and *chattel*.

So in the prior examples – *fee* and *pecuniary* – the words developed from an original meaning of 'cattle' to an eventual meaning of 'money' or 'property.' But *cattle* went the other way. It originally meant 'property' and was later restricted to 'cows or livestock.' The bigger point here is that there is a connection between property and livestock, and we can see that connection if we look at the history of our words.

So that entire discussion about property and cattle goes back to the Indo-European word **peku* meaning 'cattle,' which produced the Frankish word *feod* meaning 'property,' and that word produced the Latin word *feudum*, and that word was later appropriated to create the word *feudalism*. And it also produced the word *fief* to describe a feudal grant of property. So from cows to feudalism, that's the linguistic history.

By the way, I should note here that the word *feud*, as in a rivalry between two people or two groups, is not related to the words *feudal* and *feudalism*. *Feud* is actually an Old English word which is related to the words *foe* and *fickle*. Those words come from a completely difference root word.

Now I noted earlier, that in the late 700s and 800s, the old Latin term *benefice* was often used to described the property granted to a vassal. But around that time, the term *benefice* was gradually replaced with the terms *feudum* and *fief*, which were really just variations of the same word.

But there was another Latin word used to describe a *fief*. It was basically a synonym for *fief*. And that was the word *tenementum*. It later French, it became *tenement* which became *tenement* in English. From this same root, a word was created to describe the person who took possession of the land. Instead of being called a *vassal*, he was called a *tenant*. And of course, *tenant* has survived into Modern English as a word for a person who takes possession of property pursuant to an agreement with a land lord. So *fief* and *tenement* became synonymous, as did the words *vassal* and *tenant*.

So let's look a little closer at the words *tenement* and *tenant*. The ultimate Indo-European root of those Latin words was the word **ten* which meant 'to stretch.' And that root produced the Latin word *tenere* which meant 'to hold, grasp, or have possession of something.' And the connection to the original root word is based on the fact that when you stretch something, you have to hold onto it tightly. So the Latin word *tenere* meant to 'hold or grasp something.'

And that Latin word then produced the word *tenant* meaning the person who holds or possesses land, and *tenement* meaning the land held by the tenant. Again, these were originally feudal terms, and they were basically the equivalent of *vassal* and *fief*.

If we look a little closer at the ultimate root of *tenant* and *tenement*, we find that the original Indo-European root word **ten* produced lots of words in English which have to do with holding or grasping or stretching something, and most of those words came in from Latin. If you grasp something and don't let go, you are *tenacious*, and you have lots of *tenacity* – both from the same root. If you hold on tightly, you probably use a lot of *tension*. And *tension* make things *tense*. Again, both words come from the same root. When you pull or stretch something, your muscles also get pulled and stretched. And they are connected to bone by *tendons* from the same root.

If you stretch something, it tends to become very thin. And when people are young, they tend to be thin and slender, and they get bigger and rounder as they get older. Well, Latin applied this same root word to describe someone who was young and thin like something stretched. That created the word *tender*, which originally meant 'thin, young and weak,' but over the centuries has come to mean 'soft and gentle.'

Sometimes cloth was stretched over a pole to provide shelter. And that type of shelter was called a *tent* from the same root.

And here's an interesting connection. Many medieval French knights had a favorite sport which used a ball. They would strike the ball with their palms in what was basically an early version of handball. Before a player would serve to the other player, the server would yell *tenez*, which meant 'hold or receive,' so it meant 'get ready to hold or receive the ball.' Over time, the sport developed the use of a racquet and that standard call *tenez* gave the sport a new name – *tennis*. So, *tennis* comes from that same root meaning to hold or grasp or stretch something.

Now when you hold or have possession of something, you *attend* to it from that same root. And something that is capable of being held or managed, it *tenable*. And one thing you can have possession of and manage is land. You might *tend* the land. And again, as we saw earlier, you might be a *tenant*, holding land with the approval and permission of someone else.

So we have lots of words in Modern English which derive from the Latin version of an Indo-European root word which meant 'to stretch or hold.' But for our purposes, we are mostly focused on the sense of holding land – the *tenancy* or *tenement*. That was what the vassal received from his lord.

Whether we use the term *benefice*, *fief* or *tenement*, we now know that we're using words which originated in the Middle Ages to describe the transfer of land in exchange for military service or other obligations. And those terms describe arrangements where the deal was sealed by an oath – the oath of fealty.

So we have most of the pieces in place which we tend to associate with feudalism. We have this hierarchy of lord-vassal relationships which extended throughout the society. And we have this professional class of highly-trained mounted knights wearing chain-mail and in some cases armored plating. And we have codes of conduct developing around those knights or *chevaliers*, which became known as *chivalry*.

And then in the late 800s and 900s, after the death of Charlemagne, we started to get the final piece of the puzzle – the castles. Around this time. Some of the local nobles and prominent knights began to build fortified towers on hilltops. And this was really a game-changer. It was one thing to attack a camp or unprotected manor. But once some of these nobles began to build fortified towers, it made it virtually impossible to kick them out. They were almost impenetrable. The tower could also be used a base. The noble could send out his knights to do their business and they could return to the castle for safety and security.

Now this idea was very similar to what had happened in England. In prior episodes, I discussed how Alfred the Great and his descendants built fortified towns or 'burhs' to protect the kingdom from Vikings and other invaders. And it was actually very successful. Well, castles worked on the same basic principal, but instead of being an actual fortified town, these were smaller private structures with their own private army.

Over time, the castle became the headquarters of the medieval feudal system. It evolved into a multi-purpose building. It was the home of a lord, his family, his servants and his knights. It was where local business was done. The lord met his vassals there, and the courts of justice met there.

But ultimately, it was also used a military base and a fortified building from which a whole region could be defended – or subjugated – depending on your perspective.

Now again, this was anther development which distinguished continental Europe from England. Prior to the Normans, the English didn't really use castles. Now recent archaeology has unearthed some primitive castles from the late Anglo-Saxon period, but they weren't built on the same scale as the French castles. And their overall impact as more limited. But all of that changed after the Norman Conquest in 1066. In fact, it was really William's construction of castles in England that made the conquest there permanent.

Of course, *castle* is a French word, which ultimately came from Latin. The original Latin word was *castellum*. And in its original Latin sense, it could refer to a fortified town, so it was basically the Latin equivalent of the Old English *burh*. Over time, this word was applied to a fortified tower, and it became known as a *castle*. In later French, it also produced the word *chateau*. Now there are some interesting things going on here with words like *castle* and *chateau*. And earlier, we looked at words like *cattle* and *chattel*. So you may hear a connection there.

Within French, old Latin words which began with a hard 'K' sound like *castellum* or *capitale* which we saw earlier, they sometimes kept that hard 'K' sound at the beginning. And we ended up with words like *castle* from *castellum*, and *cattle* from *capitale*.

But sometimes, that initial consonant shifted to a 'CH' sound or an 'SH' sound. So in those cases, we got *chateau* from *castellum*, and *chattel* from *capitale*. And earlier, I explained why that happened.

It was primarily because the Norman dialect of French called Norman French tended to retain that hard 'K' sound at the beginning. But the standard Old French dialect spoken around Paris shifted that original hard 'K' sound to a 'CH' sound. I actually gave examples of this back in "Episode 44: The Romance of Old French." You might remember that Latin *caput* meaning 'head' produced the word *cappa* meaning 'a head covering' or 'cloak,' and that produced the word *cape*. Well, St. Martin's famous cloak or *cappa* became a holy relic. And the place where it was stored was called a *cappella*. But then, within standard Old French, the initial 'K' sound shifted to a 'CH' sound. And *cappella* became *chapel*. And later, that 'CH' sound shifted again to an 'SH' sound. And that same root *cappa* produced the later French word *chapeau* with an 'SH' sound. And I mentioned how English captured those French sound changes from *cape* to *chapel* to *chapeau*. The initial sounds are pronounced differently in English because those words entered English at different times. And English retained the pronunciation which the words had when they first came into the language.

Now all of that had to do with the development of standard French, but the Normans spoke a slightly different dialect. And one feature of their dialect is that they didn't tend to make that sound shift at the front of those words. So they tended to retain the original Latin 'K' sound.

And that explains the pronunciation of all of those words I mentioned earlier in Modern English From *capitale*, the Norman-French kept the original 'K' sound and gave us *cattle*. But the Old French spoken around Paris made that initial sound change and gave us *chattel*. And from Latin *castellum*, Norman French again kept the hard 'K' sound and produced the *castel*. And that word gave us English *castle*, thanks to the Normans. But the Old French spoken around Parish changed that Latin word *castellum* to *chastel* with a 'CH' sound, and then later, that initial sound shifted to an 'SH' sound. So the word went from *chastel* (/CHAS-tell/) to *chateau* (/SHA-tow/). And since that particular word didn't enter English until the 1700s, it came in with that later 'SH' sound.

So within these words – *cape/chapel/chapeau* and *capital/cattle/chattel* and *castle/chateau* – what we are hearing there is the history of a French sound change, and we are also hearing the difference between the Norman-French of Normandy and the Old French of Paris, all of that having being preserved within English. And that's because English often serves as a time capsule. It preserves certain sounds from the time when words first entered the language.

So I hope you found that interesting. We're going to look much more closely at Norman French in the next episode. But for now, let's return to those castles which were being constructed throughout the French countryside after the death of Charlemagne.

As I noted earlier, those castles allowed small numbers of men to tie up a large numbers of opponents. It was virtually impossible to break through the fortified walls of the castle. And that meant that it was almost impossible to oust the lord who owned it. Even a small-scale lord could dominate his region with a castle and a relatively small band of knights. The castle allowed a local lord to rule the surrounding countryside.

And this starts to explain why the Carolingian Empire became so fractured after the death of Charlemagne. We know from an earlier episode, that Charlemagne's empire was ultimately divided among his three grandsons. And that division ultimately created the east-west division that produced the Kingdom of France in the West and the Holy Roman Empire in the east.

In earlier episodes, I discussed the state of France or 'Western Francia' after that division. I discussed how the Carolingian descendants of Charlemagne fought with each other after his death. And I also discussed how they had to fight the Vikings who started to invade from the north.

The grandson who inherited the western kingdom – what became France – was Charles the Bald. He was in constant warfare with his brother in the east, Louis the German. And he was now under threat from the Vikings. And he had the largest coastline to defend in northern France. To deal with all of those external threats, Charles the Bald ramped up those feudal grants. He increasingly gave out part of his own royal lands to local nobles who swore that oath of fealty to protect the lands they were given and to provide military service directly to the king when needed. This was the only way to deal with the Viking threats since no one knew when or where the next attack would occur. So Charles was forced to give the local lords the independence they needed to defend themselves and their fiefs. And as we've seen, they defended those fiefs with

mounted knights and with the construction of castles. That's why the construction of castles expanded so much throughout the 900s.

And this is why France became so fractured in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Those local lords effectively became mini-kings. They had their own warriors, and they had fortified castles. They issued their own edicts and laws. They punished criminals. Some of them even levied their own taxes and minted their own coins. The only thing that kept them from going rogue was that oath of fealty to the king. But that oath was starting to break down. Not everyone was willing to honor it. A few of those nobles did decide to go rouge. And Charles soon found himself at war with nobles in Aquitaine in the southwest and Brittany in the northwest.

Not only were local nobles starting to rebel against the king, in part because the could, but they were also starting to fight with each other. So lords were not only under threat from external invaders like the Vikings, they were now under threat from neighboring lords who were looking to expand their territory. What ensued was an arms race. If you were a lord, and a neighboring lord collected a force of knights and built a castle, you had better do the same thing or you were likely to be annihilated.

The only thing that was holding the society together were those feudal bonds secured by those oaths of fealty. But those oaths weren't actually written down. It was sort of like a verbal contract. Everybody's happy with a verbal contract until a dispute arises, and then nobody can agree what the specific terms were. And that started to happen as vassals claimed they weren't violating their oath to their lord, they just had a different interpretation of what that obligation was.

In other cases, a vassal had received property from two different lords. So the vassal had an obligation to both. But now the two lords were fighting each other, and both were calling upon the vassal to honor his agreement to provide military service. Well, he couldn't fight for both. So he had to break his oath to one of them. The result was a period of conflict and uncertainty. By the mid-900s, the king of France only had direct control over the region around Paris. Pretty much everything else was controlled by local lords, some of whom recognized the king's authority and some of whom didn't.

These various regional nobles went by a variety of titles. Some were dukes who oversaw a duchy. Some were counts who oversaw a county. Some were barons who ruled over a barony. And some went by the title of marquis to reflect the fact that they oversaw a march or border region. But these titles were not always precise. And some nobles went by a variety of titles. And that was the case in the new region of Normandy.

As we know from prior episodes, Charles the Bald's grandson was also named Charles, so he is known to history as Charles the Simple. He was also King of Western Francia or early France. And in the year 911, he granted the region around the lower Seine to the Viking Rollo. In prior years, the Vikings had started to use the Seine as a direct route to Paris. And that had become a major problem. So Charles granted Rollo's Vikings some land near the mouth of the Seine so that they would protect the region and prevent any further Vikings incursions up the river.

Now I say that Charles the Simple granted the region of Normandy to Rollo, but let's be a little more specific. What Charles actually granted was a small region around the town of Rouen which was located on the lower Seine between Paris and the coast. That region was technically a county – the county of Rouen. And that's what Rollo got. And he didn't just 'get it.' Charles didn't say, 'Here, you can have it.' Charles did what the king always did in those situations. He made a feudal grant. Rouen was a fief. That same lord-vassal relationship that we've been exploring now applied to Charles and Rollo. Rollo received Rouen, but he was obligated to provide military service to Charles when called upon. So Rollo was now a vassal of the French king.

Now as I noted, this was originally the county of Rouen, so Rollo was sometimes referred to as the Count of Rouen. This region was also considered a march – a border region – using that old Germanic word *march* meaning 'borderland.' The ruler of a march was called a *marquis*. So Rollo is also sometimes referred to as 'marquis.' But he was not referred to as 'duke.' That was more prominent title. And it would take a few generation for the Rollo's descendants to lay claim to that title.

The fact is that Normandy had very modest beginnings. Rollo's Scandinavian 'northmen' – or Normans – settled around the lower Seine. And Rouen emerged as the early capital of Rollo's realm. But it was a relatively poor region of France. Rollo did the job he was asked to do. He kept watch over the Seine, and he prevented any further Viking attacks up the river.

In fact, Rollo was a good vassal. He had sworn an oath of fealty to the French king Charles the Simple, so he honored that oath. And that's why Rollo didn't really expand southward towards Paris into the king's realm. But events in the year 922 started to change all of that.

In that year, the French king Charles the Simple was deposed and held prisoner. This was the period in which many French nobles started to abandon Charles who was a Carolingian king. And they started to support the Robertians – the descendants of Odo who had been the Count of Paris and had briefly served as king in the 800s after he resisted one of those Viking sieges on Paris. I discussed him in a prior episode, so I'm not going to go back through his story here. But Odo provided an effective alternative to the ineffective Carolingian kings. However, the Carolingians soon regained power. But from that point on, Odo's descendants remained powerful nobles and they continued to be seen as a potential alternative to the weak and ineffective Carolingian kings in the 900s. And in 922, one of those descendants named Robert led a coup and deposed Charles the Simple. Robert got himself selected as king by the other nobles. He was actually killed in following year, but his son-in-law Rudolph – another Robertian – was selected as his successor. So the Robertians remained in power.

Now all of this is important to our story because Rollo up in Normandy had been a vassal of Charles. He had sworn an oath of loyalty and fealty to Charles, but he hadn't sworn an oath to the Robertian usurpers. So as far as Rollo was concerned, he was no long a vassal of the French king. So, soon after Charles was deposed, we see Rollo engaging in a period of expansion in northern France. He still didn't move southward to the king's territory. Instead, he expanded westward along the northern coast of France, effectively doubling the size of his original grant. As I said,

this was period in which local counts and dukes and other nobles were often at war with each other as they sought to expand their territory and influence at their neighbor's expense. And Rollo was especially good at doing just that. By the time of Rollo's death in 932, his lands had expanded considerably.

Rollo was succeeded by his son, William – known to history as William Longsword. William proved to be a worthy successor to his father. Shortly after he came to power, he supported the return of Charles the Simple's son Louis who had been in exile in England after Charles was deposed. So William was actually instrumental in returning the Carolingians to power as Kings of France.

Having secured his relationship with the French king, William set about continuing the expansion of Normandy. He continued to expand westward. He did face some opposition from Bretons in Brittany and even some native Normans or Vikings in the west, but he defeated the rebels and expanded anyway.

During this period, William had also continued to integrate the Normans into the Frankish aristocracy. His mother had been from a prominent Frankish family, and he also married a Frankish woman. The evidence from the this period is limited, but it appears that the early Normans quickly adopted Frankish culture and language. Over time, the Normans became as French as anyone else in France, and this conversion happened pretty quickly. The Normans quickly gave up their Old Norse language and within a couple of generations it appears that most of the Normans were speaking French.

We get some evidence of this when it comes to William's son, Richard. Richard eventually succeeded his father as ruler of Normandy. As a young boy, his father William sent him to the region around Bayeux in northwestern Normandy – one of the regions recently acquired by the Norman expansion. It is said that his father sent him there in part to learn the Old Norse language of his Scandinavian ancestors. And he had to go there apparently because Old Norse was no longer being spoken in Rouen, or it was in such limited use there that young Richard had to travel to the northwest to learn to speak it. All of this suggests just how quickly the Normans around the capital at Rouen had abandoned Old Norse, and integrated into the local Frankish culture.

So what happened there? Why did the Normans abandon their native language so quickly? Well, the answers are unclear. There are very few surviving documents from Normandy during this early period. The Normans weren't literate, and they appear to have had very little appreciation for writing in that first century. That makes it difficult to trace linguistic developments on the ground. Most of the early history of Normandy has to be pieced together from chroniclers who lived outside of the region.

So without written evidence from the region, scholars have had to look for other evidence like personal names and place names. Those provide some clues about the language that was being spoken early on. First of all, with respect to personal names, it interesting to note that all of the Norman rulers after Rollo used French names, not Norman names. From William Longsword, to

his son Richard I, to his son Richard II, to his son Robert, and to his son William (that being William the Conqueror), they all used French names, not Scandinavian names. So that suggests that they were speaking French, at least as a second language, by the time Rollo died.

Furthermore, place names also provide some clues. Unlike the Danelaw in Britain, where there are still lots of Scandinavian place names, that isn't really the case in Normandy. There are only a small handful of towns with Scandinavian names in Normandy. They tend to be grouped together and tend to be located near the mouth of the Seine. That suggests that when the first Normans settled around the mouth of the Seine, they were still speaking Old Norse. So they gave places Scandinavia names. But by the time they spread into the other parts of Normandy, they must not have been speaking Norse anymore, because we don't tend to find Scandinavian town names in other parts of Normandy. There are a few here and there, but not the concentration one would expect to see if Old Norse was being spoken in those regions.

So all of that suggests that Old Norse died out very quickly. By the time the Normans were expanding westward, within the first couple of generations after Rollo, Norse must not have been the primary language anymore. And it appears that the ultimate reason for the quick disappearance of Old Norse was simply matter of numbers.

Rollo and his Scandinavian supporters were a powerful band of Vikings, but compared to the overall population, they were relatively few in number. They were basically a small ruling elite. Furthermore, it is known that most of the prominent Norman leaders married Frankish women. So it is very likely that the second generation of Normans were speaking French, and probably speaking French as their primary language. Old Norse probably lingered on as a secondary language among the ruling elite, but it wasn't being widely spoken. So by the time we get to Rollo's grandson Richard I, he had to be sent to the northwestern coast to find enough people speaking Old Norse so that he could learn it. Furthermore, many scholars think that it is very likely that the Norse speakers in that western region around Bayeux weren't even Normans. The Vikings weren't traveling up the Seine anymore, but they were still using the northern French coast for refuge and shelter. So it is very possible that the Norse speakers around Bayeux near the coast were part of another Viking group who settled in that area separately from Rollo's Vikings. And we know that Richard's father William Longsword had to deal with an uprising in that general region by people who are sometimes described as being Normans, but who may very well have been a completely different band of Vikings who spoke Old Norse. At any rate, it appears that by the late 900s, the region around Bayeux in the northwest was the only part of Normandy where Old Norse was still being spoken with any regularity. But within another generation, even the Norse language in that region had largely disappeared.

The Normans completely assimilated into Frankish culture. In fact, the last evidence of Norse cultural influence was the presence of a Norwegian poet at the Norman court in the year 1025. But beyond that, it appears that the Normans were culturally and linguistically French by the turn of the eleventh century.

But as we saw earlier in this episode, the French spoken by the Normans was similar to the French being spoken around Paris, but it wasn't exactly the same. They had their own unique dialect which became known as Norman French. And that was the dialect which was brought to England in 1066.

So in the next episode, we're going to turn our attention to the Norman dialect of French. We'll examine some of the features that made it unique. And we'll see how some of those differences impacted English. And we'll also follow the story of Normandy from the death of William Longsword through the reign of William the Conqueror.

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