

**THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST  
TRANSCRIPT**

**EPISODE 95:  
OLD SCHOOL AND NEW SCHOOL**

## EPISODE 95: OLD SCHOOL AND NEW SCHOOL

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 95: Old School and New School. In this episode, we’re going to look at an important development in the early 1200s. And that was the rise of universities including Oxford and Cambridge. These institutions offered a new type of higher education, and they reflected certain changes that were taking place at the time. Western Europe was becoming more urban, more bureaucratic, and more literate. And the old educational system simply couldn’t meet the demands of this new society. So ‘old school’ learning was supplemented with these brand new universities. And along the way, the English language acquired lots of new words to express these emerging ideas and concepts. So this time, we’ll explore those developments.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is [historyofenglishpodcast.com](http://historyofenglishpodcast.com). And you can sign up to support the podcast at [Patreon.com/historyofenglish](https://Patreon.com/historyofenglish). And as always, you can reach me by email at [kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com](mailto:kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com)

So let’s turn to this episode. And let’s pick up the story where we left off back in Episode 93. In that episode, we saw that King John lost control of Normandy and most of the rest of northwestern France in the year 1204. After that, John’s realm was restricted to the British Isles and Aquitaine in the southwest of France. And since Aquitaine was so far away, he was largely confined to the British Isles. In fact, John not only had the title of ‘King of England,’ he was also officially the ‘Lord of Ireland.’ He had actually held that title since he was young boy.

And in the same year that John lost control of Normandy, he authorized a great fair to be held in Ireland. He granted a license for an annual eight-day fair to take place in Donnybrook, which today is part of Dublin, but back in 1204, it was small town just outside of the main city. The Donnybrook Fair was held every August for more than six centuries. It was very popular, and lots of people showed up every year. But when they showed up, they tended to drink lots of alcohol. The fair became known for its drunkenness and the large number of fights and brawls that took place there every year. Eventually, the fair’s reputation for lawlessness became so bad, that it was finally shut down in the mid-1800s. And by that time, the word *donnybrook* had become a euphemism for a melee, or a riot, or a heated argument. And even today, you might hear a fight or brawl described as a *donnybrook*.

I mention this etymology for a couple of reasons. First of all, the ultimate origin of that term can be traced back to this well-known fair that began around the current point in our overall story. But the other reason I mention that fair is because that type of lawlessness was actually common at the time. Whenever people congregated with lots of alcohol nearby, there was always a risk of brawling and rioting. That could happen at a fair or a festival, but it could also happen wherever lots of young men congregated looking to let off a little steam. And one place where that tended to happen a lot was in a university town.

That included the small town of Oxford – west of London – which was home to a burgeoning university. With lots of young men congregating there – there was an uneasy relationship between the students and the townspeople. And sometimes this spilled over into the streets. These types of conflicts were so common that the relationship between two groups became known as ‘town and gown.’ And it was very often ‘town versus gown.’

That was often the case in Oxford, and it nearly brought an end to the university in the year 1209. In that year, a young man who was attending Oxford killed a local woman, and then he fled town. The townspeople demanded retribution, and the missing student’s roommates were arrested. By all accounts, the three roommates were completely innocent, but nevertheless, they were taken to the outskirts of town and hanged.

The students and teachers at the school were so shocked and outraged by what happened that most of them left town. And a large contingent of them headed to a small town north of London called Cambridge. There, they started a new university which became the University of Cambridge. So by the early 1200s, both Oxford and Cambridge had been established. But these major institutions of higher learning were still in their infancy. There were only a small handful of universities in all of Europe. In fact, the entire concept of a university was still brand-new. But it was a concept that was destined to change the nature of education throughout the Western world.

So in this episode, I want to trace the developments that led to the creation of the university as an institution of higher learning. Let’s begin with the state of education in Western Europe before these changes took place. That system was basically the same educational system that we’ve explored since the early episodes about the Anglo-Saxons. It was a system that was primarily tied to the church. Almost all formal education in Western Europe was provided by monasteries and churches.

Now I should note that there were other types of education that were less formal. It was very common for a young person to learn a particular trade or skill by serving as an apprentice under an older, more experienced person. That was common for basic trades like carpentry and iron working. Even knighthood worked on that same basic principle with a young squire serving under a knight in order to learn how to ride and fight and behave at court. So apprenticeship was very common. And I should note that the word *apprentice* is a French word that entered English in the early Middle English period. It was first attested in the 1300s, and you might notice a connection between the words *apprentice* and *apprehend*, and that’s because an apprentice was someone who acquired or grasped or ‘apprehended’ knowledge.

Of course, this type of vocational training is different from the formal education offered by schools. If you wanted to learn how to read and write – if you wanted to become literate and work as a scribe or record-keeper or bureaucrat – you really needed to go to school. And again, that meant that you had to a church school.

Now way back in Episode 40, I introduced you to this basic form of education in an Episode I called “Learning Latin and Latin Learning.” And I chose that title because this type of education was administered by the Church, and that meant that it was offered in the language of the Church – which was Latin. And even today, many of our words associated with education come from Latin and French, and quite a few come from Greek. But very few come from Old English. And that’s partly because English wasn’t really used in most of these schools.

There are a few exceptions. The word *teach* is an Old English word. Of course, a person who teaches is a *teacher*, and that makes *teacher* a native English word as well, even though it doesn’t actually appear in any surviving Old English documents. The noun *teacher* first appears in the 1300s.

Another common Old English word related to education is the word *learn*. That was really the main word used in Old English to describe various aspects of education. So a student was a *leornung-cild* – literally a ‘learning child.’ A teacher was a *leornung-man* – a ‘learning man.’ And a school was a *leornung-hus* – a ‘learning house.’

So the words *teach* and *learn* both come to us from the Anglo-Saxons. And notice that they have very distinct meanings. A teacher ‘teaches’ or imparts knowledge. And a student ‘learns’ or acquires knowledge. But I should note that it became common in Middle English to use the word *learn* both ways. It was often used as a synonym for *teach*. So a teacher might ‘learn’ his students some important lessons. Even Shakespeare used the word *learn* in that way from time to time. But in the 1700s, grammarians were able to stamp out that usage which they deemed improper. It still survives today. You might hear someone say something like “That’ll learn you” to mean “That’ll teach you.” It’s considered bad English today, and it would have been considered bad English in the Anglo-Saxon period as well, but again, during the Middle English period, it was very common and it was considered acceptable at the time.

Also, around this time in early Middle English, it became common to use the phrase “lernid and lewid” to refer to educated and uneducated persons. It specifically meant ‘literate and illiterate.’ *Lernid* was of course the modern word *learned*. And *lewid* was an early version of the word *lewd* – L-E-W-D. Even though “lernid and lewid” meant ‘educated and uneducated,’ it acquired a broader sense over time. It came to mean ‘church officials and the laity’ because church officials were usually educated and literate, and the laity usually were not. And that helps to explain how *lewd* acquired its modern meaning as ‘profane or vulgar.’

In fact, *lewd*, *profane* and *vulgar* all have a similar history. At one time all three words simply referred to common people or common things, as opposed to members of the church. The ‘Vulgar’ Latin dialects were simply the dialects of the common people, as opposed to the official Latin taught in the church schools. But over time, *vulgar* came to mean ‘crude and indecent.’ I also discussed the etymology of *profane* in an earlier episode. It was literally *pro* meaning ‘in front of’ and *fanum* which meant ‘temple.’ So *profane* meant ‘in front of or outside of the temple.’ So again, it meant common, but it eventually acquired a negative connotation over time. And *lewd* worked the same way.

As I noted, it originally meant illiterate or uneducated which was the case for most common people outside of the church. And again, just like *vulgar* and *profane*, it acquired a negative sense over time. So those three words show a fundamental connection in the Medieval mind between church, education and proper behavior on the one hand – and commonness, illiteracy, and lewdness on the other hand.

As I noted earlier, the church and monastery schools taught their students in Latin – not in English. And that helps to explain why certain Latin words associated with education entered English very early on – even before the Normans arrived. Old English had actually borrowed several Latin words to describe the educational process. For example, Old English had the words *school* and *scholar*, which were both derived from the Latin word *schola*, which itself was derived from a Greek word that meant ‘leisure.’ During your leisure time, when you weren’t engaged in physical labor, you could sit around and discuss the nature of the world. And that’s how the word evolved from a sense of leisure to a sense of education. And from that root word, we got the word *scholar* meaning a ‘young student,’ and the word *school* meaning ‘the place where the student was educated.’ And again, both words were borrowed by the Anglo-Saxons.

Old English had also borrowed the Latin word *master* which meant a ‘teacher.’ And in fact, around the current point in our story – in the early 1200s – the compound word *schoolmaster* appeared for the first time in an English document.

During the period after the Norman Conquest, these local church schools continued to spread. Most towns of any size had some sort of local school. The students in those schools mostly came from the upper classes because they had to pay a fee to attend. So poor peasants were not usually able to send their children to school.

Now even though we call these places *schools*, they didn’t offer the broad curriculum that modern schools offer. In fact, in many respects, the schools were focused on one primary subject – and that was Latin. The main goal of most students was to try to learn Latin because it was a skill that was in high demand. And that was the focus of the most of the teachers as well.

The typical school day was hard. It began early in the morning – as early as 6 or 7 o’clock. And it didn’t end until late in the day – usually around 5 or 6 o’clock in the afternoon. There were just a couple of breaks in the middle. The students sat on the floor – all ages together. And the instruction was mostly oral and almost entirely in Latin. Keep in mind that this was the era before the printing press. So books were still rare and expensive. That meant that much of teaching was done through oral drills. The teacher or master would state something in Latin, and the students had to repeat it together – over and over again – until they had learned it by heart.

And that brings up an interesting phrase – to “learn something by heart.” When we memorize something, why do we learn it ‘by heart’? Why don’t we learn it by brain? Well, the answer lies with the Greeks. The Greeks didn’t fully understand how the brain works. They actually thought that the heart was the center of memory, and intelligence and emotion. And some modern scholars think this ancient link between the heart and emotions contributed to the use of the heart as a symbol of love. In fact, the idea of lovers giving their hearts to each other can actually by

traced back to around the current point in our story. A French manuscript from the mid-1200s contains a love poem that is illustrated with several scenes of lovers. One of the pictures shows a young man kneeling and giving his heart to a woman. This is the first known depiction of someone giving their heart to another person as a symbol of love. And of course, today we use the heart symbol as a sign of love. Well, this idea can apparently be traced back to the 1200s. And it may be based on that more fundamental idea of the heart as the source of emotions which goes back to the Greeks.

Well, again, the Greeks also thought that the heart was the center of memory and intelligence. So if you learned something – or memorized something – you did it with your heart. And that is apparently the source of the phrase “to learn by heart.” It may have been around in some form in the 1200s, but Geoffrey Chaucer is actually the first known person to use the phrase in English in the 1300s.

And while I’m discussing the phrase “learn by heart,” I should also mention another interesting word that is based on the same idea. And that’s the word *record*. The word was borrowed into English from French around the current point in our story in the early 1200s. The word combines the Latin prefix ‘*re*’ meaning ‘again’ with the word ‘*cor*’ – meaning ‘heart.’ We find that same root in words like *cordial*, *accord*, and *discord*. We also have it in the word *courage*. The Indo-European root of that word also passed into Greek and gave us the word *cardiology*.

So in the word *record*, we have a word that combines the idea of repeating something with the heart. And that’s how you memorized something. You repeated it over and over until your heart committed it to memory. That was the original sense of the word *record*. Over time, it referred to any attempt to preserve something in a fixed form – from memory to parchment or paper. And of course, as technology developed, it came to refer to efforts to preserve something in audio or video form. But ultimately, to *record* something was to literally learn it by heart.

Now as I noted, this is how students learned in those church schools – through memory and repetition. And the basic subject matter covered in all of those schools was more or less the same. Since those schools were tied to the Church, students were taught about the Bible and the official Church decrees. But they were also taught the basic courses called the trivium and quadrivium.

I discussed the trivium and quadrivium back in Episode 40, but just to refresh your recollection, the trivium consisted of three courses – grammar, rhetoric, and logic. These were considered the easiest and most basic courses. And since there were three of them, they were called the *trivium*. And since they were the easiest courses, the word *trivium* ultimately produced the word *trivial*. And those words also produced the word *trivia* meaning a collection of acquired knowledge.

Beyond the basic three courses of the trivium were the four courses of the quadrivium – arithmetic, music, astronomy, and geometry. These were considered the more advanced courses. Together these seven courses were called the *artes liberales* in Latin, but we know them better by the Anglicized version of that term – the *liberal arts*. The structure of these courses can be traced back to the late Roman period – so that should tell you something. The basic education

taught in schools in the 1100s hadn't changed much over the prior six or seven centuries. These courses were called the *liberal arts* – because in Rome, an education was only available to free-born Roman citizens. The Latin word *liber* meant 'free.' Of course, we have the word *liberty* from that word. And we also have the liberal arts – the subjects which a well-to-do free man would be expected to learn. These were in contrast to the *servile arts* – or the *artes serviles* as they were called in Latin. That term referred to the manual chores that a Roman slave had to learn. So you had servile arts and liberal arts. And the liberal arts were the seven main subjects taught in the Church schools.

Ultimately these seven liberal arts have their roots in Greek philosophy and study, but it was the late Roman writer named Martianus Capella who laid out the framework of the curriculum. Over the next few centuries, the Church schools standardized the content taught in those classes.

Now it is important to note that these were very basic courses compared to modern standards. The actual level of knowledge was very limited. This was the period before the scientific revolution, so students weren't really learning science in the sense that we know it today. For example, in the course on astronomy, they would learn the constellations. Astronomy and astrology were not considered distinct disciplines yet, so the astronomy class included a lot of astrology as well. The course on arithmetic covered the basic math that could be handled with Roman numerals. So there was no algebra or calculus. Just rudimentary math. The course on geometry covered circles and triangles and some basic geometry concepts. But again, it was very basic. And that's because the overall level of knowledge at the time was still very basic.

As I noted earlier, the real education provided in those Church schools was in language – specifically Latin. That was the real practical knowledge that a student could acquire and use as a basis for a career.

Remember that the basic course was the trivium – logic, rhetoric and grammar. All three of these subjects were focused on different aspects of Latin. At first glance, logic may not seem like a language subject. But it was at the time. It was the study of reasoning, but it was also the study of how to express that reasoning with words. So it trained students how to make logical arguments. And specifically, how to make logical arguments in Latin.

In fact, the word *logic* is based on the Greek word *logos* – which meant 'word, or idea, or speech, or discourse.' In fact, we find that same root in other words borrowed from Greek – like *apology*, and *dialogue*, and *monologue*, and *prologue* – all words related to speech. Those words are also cognate with Greek words like *lexicon* and *dialect*. The same Indo-European root also appears in Latin words like *intelligent* – which is what you hope to become when you go to school – and *lecture* – which is what your teacher gives – and *legible* – which is what you hope your words are when you write them down. So the word *logic* shares a common root with all of those words – and we can start to see how *logic* itself was rooted in the use of language.

In fact, the logic course wasn't always called 'logic.' Another common word for it at the time was *dialectic*, which as you may notice sounds a lot like *dialect*. And that's because they are both derived from the same Greek root. Again, *dialectic* was just another word for *logic*, and it

meant a philosophical discussion or conversation. So again, logic or dialectic was rooted in language and the use of language to formulate arguments.

So I've covered logic, which is one branch of the trivium. So what about the other two – rhetoric and grammar? Well, obviously, those two courses are also about language and the use of language. *Rhetoric* is the art of the speaker or orator. Students were taught how to use words to seize and hold the attention of an audience. Again, the word *rhetoric* is ultimately a Greek word. But check this out. Believe it or not, *rhetoric* is actually cognate with the words *word* and *verb*. They all came from the same Indo-European root word which meant 'to speak.' That word has been reconstructed as *\*were*. One variation was *\*wre-tor-* which passed into Greek, and there the initial 'w' sound was lost, and that produced *rhetoric*. That same root word *\*were* also passed into the Germanic languages where it eventually acquired a 'd' sound at the end. And that produced the native Old English word – *word*. The same root also passed into Latin, but in Late Latin, the 'w' sound at the front of words shifted to a 'v' sound. And that produced the Latin word *verb*. So that makes *rhetoric*, *word* and *verb* cognate. They represent a Greek, a Germanic and a Latin version of the same root word. So again, the course on rhetoric was fundamentally rooted in the use of language – specifically Latin.

And then there was the third branch of the trivium which was grammar. Now today, when we think of grammar, we think of the technical rules that govern how we speak – the way we use words to convey specific meaning. But during the Middle Ages, the concept of grammar was very different. First of all, grammar was a specific course taught in schools, but Latin was the only the only language that was taught. So grammar was synonymous with Latin. There really was no such thing as English grammar or French grammar or Norse grammar – at least not in schools. When teachers spoke of grammar, they meant the rules of Latin. In fact, it didn't just mean the rules of Latin, it was broader than that. It included a general study of Latin and Latin literature.

This also helps to explain why grammar schools were called 'grammar schools.' They didn't just teach the rules of grammar. Originally, the term 'grammar school' simply meant a school that taught its students in Latin which was standard practice in the Middle Ages. So almost all basic schools were grammar schools because they taught in Latin. And we still use the term 'grammar school' in that more general sense today.

So the trivium of grammar, rhetoric, and logic was really designed to teach students how to speak Latin and how to formulate arguments in Latin. And as I noted, that was really the main reason students wanted to attend school. They wanted to acquire that special skill. And knowledge of Latin really was considered a special skill at the time. To learn Latin was to unravel the mystery of this ancient and revered language that no one spoke as their native language anymore. It was like a secret code that was only available to a select few scholars. Learning Latin was like having a magician tell you how he performs his magic tricks. And I make that comparison because it helps to explain a very interesting bit of etymology. It helps to explain the connection between *grammar* and *glamour*. Believe it or not, they are cognate. Not only did they come from the same root word, they are really just two different versions of the same word, and they didn't become distinct until the late Middle Ages.



Now we don't tend to think of grammar as being glamorous, but we have to think of the word *glamor* in a slightly different way. We have to think of the word with its original meaning which was 'to charm or enchant or cast a spell.' In fact, if you're a fan of vampire stories, you've probably encountered this use before. When a vampire casts a spell over a person, the victim is said to be 'glamored.' Well, that was actually the original meaning of the word. It was only in the last century that the sense of the word started to change to its modern meaning – as something beautiful or extravagant. And that was because it was thought that a very beautiful person who dressed up in fancy clothes had the ability to enchant people and cast a spell over them.

Well if we go back to the original meaning of *glamour* – as a charm or a magic spell – we can start to see how the word is related to the word *grammar*. Most common people didn't really know what took place in those Church schools. There was a secret nature to them. Most people didn't understand the educational process, and they weren't sure what those young boys were learning in those schools. And I say "young boys" because girls were not generally allowed to attend schools in the Middle Ages. So young illiterate boys went to those schools, and soon, they were speaking and writing in this special language called 'Latin.' A lot of people just assumed that they were also learning astrology and magic. If the students could speak Latin, then they could probably recite special charms and incantations as well. It was assumed that those educated boys and men could cast spells and work charms. So the word *grammar* had a VERY broad meaning. It could refer to anything that was taught in the schools or was believed to be taught in the schools. So it not only referred to a knowledge of Latin, it also referred to a knowledge of magic, witchcraft and astrology.

Over time, in the south of England, the word *grammar* became restricted to a Latin education and ultimately to the structural rules of a language. But in the north, in Scotland, the word had a different history. The Scots dialect had this same word, and over time, the 'gr-' sound at the front of *grammar* evolved into a 'gl-' sound. And the word appeared as *glamour* – meaning 'magic or a spell.' That version of the word made its way south over time, and it was later borrowed into the standard English of England in the early 1800s primarily through the writing of the Scottish writer Sir Walter Scott who really popularized the word *glamour* in his writings.

I should also mention that the British linguist David Crystal has written lots of books about the history of English, and he has just completed a new book about the history of English grammar. He titled it: "Making Sense: The Glamorous Story of English Grammar." So he also tapped into this little bit of etymology for his title. And, by the way, I recommend the book if you're interested in the history of English grammar.

If the connection between learning and magic seems a bit odd, it wasn't really all that strange during the Middle Ages. Think about the connection between *wisdom* and *wizard*. Both words are derived from the Old English word *wise*. A wizard was literally a 'wise man.'

Also think about the connection between being a good speller – and casting a spell. One version has to do with education – and one has to do with magic. The word *spell* is ultimately an Indo-European word – and it originally meant 'to speak or tell a story.' So once again, the word originally had to do with speech. Within English, it developed a sense as a short saying or

utterance – and then, a short saying that induced magic. So it came to mean a charm or incantation. And that is where we got the sense of putting a spell on someone.

Well, the Frankish version of the word passed into French and was then borrowed into English in the 1300s. And that version of the word *spell* meant ‘to explain something’ – specifically to explain an idea or process in a step-by-step manner. It’s sort of like when we say, “I am going to spell it out for you.” What I’m really saying is that I’m going to break it down piece by piece. Well, this French version of the word was applied to students who were trying to read all of those difficult passages in Latin. They often had to break it down word by word to make sense out of it. And that process was called *spelling*. It meant that they were reading a passage very slowly and deliberately. Well over time, by logical extension, the word *spell* came to refer to the process of breaking down individual words letter by letter. To make sense of a word, you had to ‘spell’ it. In other words, you had to break it down. You had to identify each individual letter, and then put them all together in the right order. And thus the modern sense of the word *spell* as in a ‘spelling bee.’

So between *grammar* and *glamour* – and *wisdom* and *wizard* – and a ‘spelling bee’ and ‘witch’s spell,’ we can see that education and Latin fluency were held in such high regard that common people were in awe of that knowledge, and many common people even thought that those scholars had magical powers. So we can start to see why young men wanted to receive a formal education if their family could afford it.

Now so far, we’ve explored the basic nature of a church school education in the early Middle Ages – up to the 1100s or so. But then, that traditional structure started to change. And the impetus for that change came from the Mediterranean.

As we saw back in Episode 90, Muslim scholars had discovered lots of Greek manuscripts – especially in the eastern Mediterranean where Muslims came into contact with the Byzantine Empire. The Muslims embraced those ancient Greek scholars, and they translated many of those old texts into Arabic. Those Arabic translations spread across the Mediterranean to southern Spain which was still under Muslim control at the time. And from there, Western Europeans started to encounter those texts for the first time. Many of those manuscripts were then translated into Latin – and they started to filter into Western Europe.

Now at one time, the common view of European history was that Greek learning came to Western Europe after Constantinople fell to the Muslim Turks in the mid-1400s, and the Byzantine scholars then fled into Western Europe and carried those Greek manuscripts with them. That was considered to be one of the major factors contributing to the Renaissance. Well, modern scholars have modified that view a little bit. They now acknowledge that Greek scholarship had started to enter Western Europe a few centuries earlier in the 1100s from Muslim Spain. This initial wave of scholarship contributed to an earlier – smaller – renaissance. Today, it is commonly known to as the Twelfth Century Renaissance. It was a smaller revival of classical learning that took place before the major Renaissance of the 1400s and 1500s. One of the consequences of this earlier mini-Renaissance was the creation of universities which were a completely new type of educational institution.

So let's shift our focus to this new scholarship – from 'old school' to 'new school' – and the new universities that were starting to pop up. We've seen that the normal curriculum taught in church schools was the trivium and the quadrivium – grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, astronomy, geometry and music. But even though that list sounds impressive, the actual knowledge conveyed in those classes was very limited.

Most of those particular subjects had their ultimate roots in Classical Greece, but Western Europe received their knowledge of those disciplines from the Romans. And over time, those original Greek subjects had been limited, edited and abridged, and had passed through Roman and Church filters. In fact, most of the original Greek texts had been lost to time, and they weren't available to Western European. So the full extent of classical Greek knowledge was unknown in the most of Europe.

But in the 1100s, Europeans started to discover those Muslim libraries in Spain with those Arabic translations of those classical Greek works. Over the next couple of centuries, most of those works were gradually translated into Latin, and for the first time, Europeans had access to all of those ancient Greek ideas and concepts.

They discovered the geometry of Euclid which was far more advanced than the basic circles and squares that were being taught at the time. They discovered the astronomy of Ptolemy which included a mathematical model of the universe, and which contained for some of the most advanced astronomical calculations known at the time. They discovered the medicine of Galen and Hippocrates which helped to revolutionize the study of medicine. Of course, they also discovered Arabic numerals which were much more versatile than Roman numerals, and that allowed for an expansion of mathematics.

But the biggest discovery may have been the writings of Aristotle. Prior to this point, only two of Aristotle's works were generally known in European schools – a text called 'Categories' and another called 'On Interpretation.' But Muslim scholars had found and preserved dozens of his works, and they had also included a great deal of commentary about his works.

When those texts started to be discovered by Europeans, they also became fascinated by his writings and philosophy. The entire collection of Aristotle's writings was gradually translated into Latin. I should note that it wasn't just Aristotle's works that had been lost over time. Most of Plato's works had also been lost. You might remember that Plato was Aristotle's teacher. Well, it took even longer for Plato's works to be rediscovered. It would be another two centuries before his works were fully translated into Latin and made available to western scholars.

All of these new Greek texts provided new insights, and they sparked an interest among scholars and students throughout Western Europe. More and more people wanted to find out what these ancient philosophers and scholars had to say about the world. But there was one problem with all of this new scholarship. It was pre-Christian. And in some respects, it flat-out contradicted traditional teachings of the Church. So these new texts were not generally available in those traditional Church schools. First of all, there simply weren't enough copies to go around. Even if there were copies, most of the teachers in those schools hadn't read them, or they didn't

understand them well enough to teach from them. And even if the teachers were willing and able to teach from them, the Church itself restricted access to many of the texts, especially those composed by Aristotle. It would take many years for Western scholars to reconcile some of these Greek writings with Church teachings. So for now, if you wanted to learn about all of this new scholarship, you had to go find someone who could teach you about it. And there were only a handful of those scholars in Western Europe.

They were mainly congregated around a few cathedral schools located in prominent cities. These were places where some of these old Greek manuscripts were being translated. And these were places where some of those leading scholars and translators had taken up residence. This included places like Bologna in northern Italy and Paris in France. Students sought out those scholars – and soon, large numbers of students were traveling across the continent to learn from them.

You might remember that teachers were sometimes called the *magistri* in Latin – which became *masters* in Old English. So these early Medieval professors were generally known as ‘masters.’ And these Masters soon realized that their knowledge and skills were in high demand.

The number of students arriving started to exceed the capacity of the Cathedral schools. So those prominent masters began to offer their services outside of those church schools for a fee. A snowball effect ensued. Prospective students came to where the masters taught. And then other teachers saw an opportunity to charge for their services, so they also headed to where the students had gathered. And then even more students came to those burgeoning educational centers where the leading scholars had assembled.

These were the first universities, but they weren’t called *universities* yet. This gathering of masters and students was originally called a *studium generale* – in other words, a ‘general study.’ But it meant a gathering of scholars who sought to study various subjects. And those were ‘general’ subjects. They went beyond the trivium and the quadrivium, and focused on topics like law, and medicine and the arts. So these new institutions represented a break from the traditional church schools, and a break from the control of the Church.

But these new educational collectives had lots of problems that had to be sorted out. Students were far from home and were vulnerable to those who might try to exploit them. A teacher might arrive and hold himself out as a master, but he might not have a clue what he was talking about. He could charge fees from the students and not really teach anything. Sometimes, he took their money and ran. Students also had to find a place to live. And there were always landlords looking to exploit the students by charging excessive fees. Students were sometimes robbed and attacked by locals. So students started to band together for mutual protection.

As a collective, the students could bargain with the teachers and members of the local community. They could threaten to boycott merchants that engaged in price gouging. And they could bargain with community leaders by threatening to leave and go elsewhere – which they sometimes did. This forced landlords and merchants and city leaders to deal with the students fairly, or risk losing the entire group. This was similar in many respects to modern trade unions.

The students had very little power as individuals, but they had a lot of power as a group. And it's important to keep in mind that this was an era dominated by trade guilds that regulated most professions. So in this respect, the students were just following the tradition of the various trade guilds.

Soon, this type of collective came to be known in Latin as a "universitas magistrorum et scholarium" which meant the 'community of masters and scholars.' The term *universitas* simply meant the community or the entire group of scholars. Since the group – or guild – included all of the teachers and students, it was a 'universal' organization. And that's why it used that word *universitas*. Over time, that long title "universitas magistrorum et scholarium" was shortened to just the first word – the *universitas*. And in English, that word became *university*.

So today, when many people think about the word *university*, they probably assume that it refers to some sense of a 'universal education' or a 'universal nature of learning.' Well, it sounds good, but that isn't really the case. The word really just means a collective, or guild, or student union. In fact, a university was basically an early type of union. And *union* and *university* are both based on Latin word *unus* meaning 'one.' So in its original sense, the word *university* basically meant a group of scholars who joined together into a single entity. It was all for one and one for all.

This arrangement really began with the first group of scholars to adopt this model in Bologna in northern Italy, and from there it was imitated throughout Western Europe. The Bologna university or student union helped to arrange lodging for the students, and they established the basic curriculum that had to be taught by the masters. They also made sure that the teachers adhered to certain standards.

It's important to keep in mind that these early universities were just groups of people – not a specific place or a specific group of buildings. There was no university campus early on. It was just a group of scholars who met wherever they could – at a church, at a master's home, at a rented building or hall, in open areas around town, wherever. Again, the word just referred to the collection of scholars, not any specific place.

Over time, the teachers started to form separate guilds or unions to protect their own interests. Again, this is how Medieval guilds worked. They restricted access to certain trades and professions. And the teachers didn't want to have a situation where anyone could just show up and claim to be a master. So they followed the model of other guilds, and they required anyone claiming to be a scholar to pass certain tests and meet certain standards. In the same way that a goldsmith had to serve as an apprentice, and then work as a journeyman before he could finally become a master craftsman, students had to follow a similar process to become a teacher.

They began as basic students – roughly the equivalent of an apprentice. When they completed that first stage, they then proceeded to a second stage where they could give practice lectures. This was roughly equivalent to a journeyman. And then finally, when they had proven their abilities at this second stage, they could advance to the third and final stage, and become a master of the trade. In order to become a full-fledged master, the student had to submit to an

examination before the other masters. Like any other guild, the masters had to give consent before someone could join their group.

This Medieval model is still followed by most universities to this day. And the degrees that a student receives reflects the fact that early universities were modeled after trade guilds. So let's take a closer look at the words used to describe that process.

Over the following few centuries, as universities spread and became more common, they developed a somewhat consistent structure. A typical student joined the university when he was around 14 or 15 years of age. The curriculum was still rooted in the liberal arts, but it also included some of the newly-acquired knowledge from all of those Greek texts. The first few years focused on the trivium – grammar, rhetoric and logic. After about three or four years, if the student had shown proficiency in the trivium or some other specific area of study, he was deemed a 'bachelor,' and he was then able to focus more on the advanced courses of the quadrivium or some other area of study.

I should note that the ultimate origin of the word *bachelor* is a little unclear. Latin had the apparently related word *baccalarius* – which had a similar meaning to *bachelor* – but that Latin word is only attested in the late Middle Ages. So it might have just been a Latinized version of *bachelor*. Anyway, the word *bachelor* came into English from French where it meant a 'young knight.' So it essentially meant an apprentice who was still learning the ropes. And from that sense, it came to mean a young student who was working his way towards being a master, but he was still in the apprentice stage.

That original sense of the word *bachelor* as a 'young man' still exists in Modern English. We still refer to a young unmarried man as a *bachelor*. But within the trade guilds of the Middle Ages – and especially within these burgeoning universities – *bachelor* came to refer to a young student who had completed the most basic level of university education, but had not yet become a master.

After the student became a bachelor, he was allowed to teach under the supervision of a master. So he had acquired the basic skills to teach, but he wasn't fully independent yet. He was still a student.

After a couple of more years, he could then apply to be a master. As we've seen, a master was a fully sanctioned teacher. The student had to submit to an oral examination before the other masters, and if he could prove himself, he was allowed into the guild or profession of the masters. At this point, the newly-minted master received a license to teach. And with that license, he could go to any of the other universities and teach. He could also go into the civil service or he could become a church official. The key was that license to teach, which was in many respects the first version of what became known as a *degree*. Today, universities still grant Bachelor's Degrees and Master's Degrees.

I should note that the word *degree* is cognate with the words *grade* and *graduate*. The Latin word *gradus* meant 'a step.' And the various levels of advancement in schools and universities

were seen as steps toward the ultimate goal of becoming a master. So when you moved from one step or grade to the next, you were said to *graduate* – from that Latin root word *gradus*. And that accomplishment was marked with a certification called a *degree* – derived from the same Latin root. Interestingly, *degree* comes directly from the word *degradus* – literally ‘a step down.’ We still have that term as the word *degrade*. So *degree* and *degrade* are derived from the same word. But why does a *degree* indicate a step up, while to *degrade* something is to take a step down?

Well even though the word *degradus* originally meant ‘a step down,’ it eventually just came to mean ‘any kind of step.’ So it could refer to a step forward or backward – or up or down – or sideways. And that was the more general meaning of the word at the time French developed the word *degree* from that root. So a *degree* just meant ‘a step’ – one part of larger group. And that word was first attested in English around the current point in our story in the early 1200s. Again it meant ‘a step’ – like one step in a set of stairs or one part of a larger whole. We still have some of that original sense when we refer to the ‘degrees’ of an angle, or the temperature being a certain number of ‘degrees.’ We just mean smaller parts of a larger group. So that was the original sense of the word when it was borrowed by scholars to mean a step from one level of academic achievement to the next. And since a degree represented an advancement in education, it acquired a sense as ‘a step up’ in school, even though the original root word meant ‘a step down.’

So that explains *degree* and *graduate*, but what about *grade*? You advance from one grade to the next as you go through school. And you hope to get good grades along the way. Well, these are relatively recent developments. Even though *grade* obviously comes from the same Latin root as *graduate* and *degree*, these modern senses of the word *grade* didn’t appear until the 1800s. In fact, the sense of the word *grade* as a school year – as in 4<sup>th</sup> grade or 5<sup>th</sup> grade – that’s really an Americanism. It developed in North America in the 1800s.

So *grade*, *graduate* and *degree* are all cognate. Now having ‘graduated’ with a Master’s ‘Degree,’ a newly-certified master could then teach or pursue another prestigious career. But sometimes, the master decided to stay on and pursue his studies even further. During this early period, several universities developed specialized fields of study. I mentioned that early university at Bologna which is considered to be the first university. Well, it developed a speciality in law. And if you wanted to be a highly-trained lawyer, you would probably try to go to Bologna to learn from the legal masters there. In Salerno, the local university developed a specialty in medicine which trained aspiring physicians. Meanwhile, the large university in Paris specialized in theology, or as it was called at the time – ‘philosophy.’ And if you wanted to achieve a very advanced position in the Church, you might go to Paris to learn from the masters there. Some other universities also started to specialize in one or more of these three fields.

Well after a student had become a master, he could choose to continue his education in one of these three specialized fields. Very few students had the time or resources to pursue that advanced certification. It usually took anywhere from 8 to 12 additional years to achieve that ultimate level of academic achievement. But if the master made it, he could be deemed a *doctor*, which was just another word for a teacher. The word *doctor* is derived from the Latin word

*docere* meaning to ‘to show or teach or illustrate.’ By the way, it also gives us the word *document* which meant ‘written instructions or guidance.’ And a *doctor* was a teacher who provided instructions or guidance. And now, the word started to acquire a sense as the highest ranking teacher or master.

So if you wanted to be an ultimate master of law, you might go to Bologna to be deemed a doctor of law. And even today, a standard law degree is called a Juris Doctor degree – at least in the United States, Canada and Australia.

And if you wanted to become an ultimate master of medicine, you might go to a university like the one in Salerno and become a doctor of medicine. Of course, this sense of the word *doctor* has passed into Modern English, and today, when we think of doctors, we usually think of medical doctors. You might remember from an earlier episode that a physician was called a *læce* in Old English. But during the period of Middle English, the word *doctor* gradually replaced that word.

Now if you wanted an advanced career in the church, you might want to go to Paris where they specialized in teaching about philosophy, which again was just another word for theology or religion. If you rose to the level of doctor, you would be deemed a doctor of philosophy, and that is the ultimate origin of the modern Ph.D. The ‘Ph’ stands for philosophy.

Now I mentioned that early university at Paris because it was very important in the development of universities in northern Europe – especially in the British Isles. The University of Paris was another very early university, and it developed out of the cathedral school at Paris. Specific dates are uncertain, but at some point by the late 1100s, a university had developed within the city. In fact, in the year 1200, shortly before John lost Normandy to the French King Philip, Philip issued the first royal charter recognizing the university. Once again, that official recognition was the result of confrontation between students and townspeople. After some students were killed, Philip issued a charter to give the students some protection. The charter gave the students certain legal privileges. This essentially made the university a separate institution, independent from the cathedral school. In fact, the University generally cites that date as the official beginning of the institution, even though students had been assembling there for about 50 years prior to this official recognition. And we know that in part because there are references to the university at Paris in documents composed in the mid to late 1100s.

In fact, it is generally believed that the ultimate origin of Oxford University is tied to events in Paris in the late 1100s. I actually mentioned this back in Episode 84 in the context of the dispute between Henry II and Thomas Becket. You might remember that Becket was the Archbishop of Canterbury, and he was fighting with Henry over control of the church courts. When Becket fled into exile to Paris in the year 1167, Henry demanded that all clerics in France should return to England if they had revenues in England. If they failed to return, they would lose those revenues. It was partly designed to lure Becket back to England, but all it did initially was force some of the other clerics and students in Paris to return to England.



When they returned, many of those scholars settled in Oxford – west of London. The ultimate foundations of Oxford are not well documented, but it appears these returning students established the foundation for England’s first university.

I noted at the beginning of the episode that the Oxford students often found themselves in conflict with the townspeople, and I mentioned a riot in the year 1209 that resulted in the death of several students. After those deaths, most of students and teachers at Oxford fled to Cambridge or Paris or elsewhere. This ultimately led to the establishment of a separate university at Cambridge. Five years later, in the year 1214, King John issued a proclamation designed to get the students and teachers to return to Oxford. The proclamation was similar in some ways to the one that had been issued by Philip of France for the University of Paris a few years earlier. John’s proclamation stated that the students fell under the jurisdiction of the bishop at Lincoln, and the bishop was permitted to designate a chancellor at Oxford as his representative. So the chancellor had effective control over the students and teachers, and within a short period of time, the chancellor became independent of the local bishop. John’s order also forced the townspeople to defer to the chancellor’s authority. With the situation stabilized, students and teachers start to return, Oxford’s foundations were finally secured.

The northern universities like Paris and Oxford and Cambridge continued the tradition that had been started over a century earlier at Bologna. But there was a general difference between those northern universities and the universities in Italy and Spain and other parts of southern Europe. Whereas the student guilds tended to dominate the universities in the south, the masters guilds tended to dominate the universities in the north. In places like Oxford and Paris, the teachers or masters had much more control over the curriculum and selection of teachers and general administration of the university.

But there was still no official campus. These universities were still just groups of students and teachers who could leave and head elsewhere if the circumstances dictated, as had happened in Oxford in the early 1200s. But all of that started to change with the advent of the college. Today, we often use the words *university* and *college* interchangeably. But they once had very distinct meanings.

In these burgeoning university towns, there was a constant need to find and arrange housing for poorer students. And with the growth and expansion of universities, more and more students were flocking to those towns. Many of them could barely afford the tuition, much less the cost of lodging.

So in order to address this problem, some wealthy donors – who were usually prominent nobles – decided to donate the funds to construct a dormitory or residence hall for the students who needed a place to live and couldn’t afford to rent a place in town. These new buildings helped to fix the location of the university, and it was the beginning of the college campus.

Since these were often the only permanent buildings associated with the university, they were often used for other purposes as well. They were convenient places for teachers to give their lecture. And they became centers of student life – both academic and otherwise. So within each

of these buildings, a sub-group of students assembled and banded together. These were smaller collections of students. And I say “collections” because the word *collect* is based on the same two Latin roots as the word *college*. A *college* is ultimately just a ‘collection.’ It is a collection of *colleagues* – also from the same root.

In many respects, the individual colleges embodied much of what we think of as college-life today. And the ‘university’ was just the larger collection of students and teachers. So in many cases, a *university* was really just a collection of separate colleges. Today, we still tend to refer to smaller schools as ‘colleges’ and larger institutions as ‘universities,’ but the distinctions between the two have become blurred over time.

Many European universities had colleges, but they were the most prominent at Oxford and Cambridge. And they helped to distinguish those universities from the universities on the continent.

Now at the current point in our story – in the early 1200s – students in England who wanted to attend a university didn’t have to cross the Channel. They could stay at home and attend Oxford or Cambridge. But notice where those two universities were located. Oxford was located west of London – and Cambridge was north of London. But they were all located in the same general part of England – the East-Midlands.

So you had the largest city and the national capital in London, and you had the two most influential universities located nearby, all in the part of England where people spoke the same general dialect of English. So all of these important influences converged in this one part of the country, and that convergence ensured that the East Midlands that was dialect spoken there would eventually emerge as the standard dialect of English.

So the events of this episode not only shaped the future of higher education, they also shaped the future of the English language.

But keep in mind that English was not allowed in those new universities. Students could only speak Latin. And this was often a problem for new students who knew little, if any, Latin. If they were caught using their naive language, they were subject to various punishments. But how could new students communicate in a language that many of them barely knew?

Well, around the year 1220, an Englishman named John of Garlanda came up with a solution to this problem. He was teaching at the University in Paris at the time. And he decided to help his students by composing a book that contained a long list of Latin words, and most of the words related to objects that the average student would encounter as they walked through the streets of Paris. He then explained what each word meant, including some translations into French. John wanted to help his young students with their Latin diction. So he titled his book “Dictionarius.” Of course, in English, that Latin word was Anglicized to *dictionary*. And that is the first known manuscript to bear that name. So the word *dictionary* was actually invented by an Englishman who was teaching at the University of Paris around the current point in our story.

To be fair, dictionaries or lists words with definitions can be traced back to the earliest attested languages, but the word *dictionary* was only coined at this point. By the way, we won't get a proper English dictionary for four more centuries – in the early 1600s.

Of course dictionaries are designed to teach people the proper meaning of words, and I should note here that the word *teach* is actually cognate with the words *diction* and *dictionary*. *Diction* and *dictionary* come from Latin, and they have the initial 'd' sound of the original Indo-European word. But thanks to the 'd' to 't' sound shift under Grimm's Law, English acquired that same root word with a 't' sound, and that gave us the word *teach*.

I actually began this episode with that Old English word *teach*, and I'm going to conclude with the word *dictionary* – coined by an Englishman in Paris in the early 1200s. As we now know, those words are cognate, and they help to illustrate how our words have evolved over the centuries to reflect the changing nature of our educational system.

Next time, we're going to move the story forward and look at King John's conflicts with the Church – and specifically his conflict with the Pope. It was a dispute that weakened John's position in England, and fed the anger of the barons, and ultimately drew the country one step closer to Magna Carta.

So next time we'll look at those events. Until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.