THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

EPISODE 102:
A MEDIEVAL GLOSSARY

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 102: A Medieval Glossary. In this episode, we're going to look at the interaction of English and French in the early 1200s. As we know, English borrowed a lot of words from French during the Middle English period. But much of that borrowing occurred after the mid-1200s. In the early 1200s, as English documents started to reappear, French loanwords were still few and far between. During this period, English and French existed side-by-side, but they didn't tend to invade each other's space. For the most part, English manuscripts used English words. But French was starting to encroach on the margins – and 'in' the margins. Some of the first evidence we have of the changes that were about to take place can be found in the notes and translations left behind by scribes who were trying to manage the growing interaction of English, French and Latin. This is the story of Medieval glosses.

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

Now this time, I want to continue looking at developments during the first half of the 1200s. We're still in the early part of the reign of Henry III who reigned as king for 56 years in total. As I've noted before, this was a period in which English writing was starting to make a comeback, but English documents were still rare. Most manuscripts were composed in Latin, and increasingly, French was being used as an alternative. But in England, most of the scribes spoke English as their native language, so they had to learn Latin and French as foreign languages. And some of them only acquired a basic working knowledge of those languages.

As they worked with documents composed in those other languages, they would often scribble little notes in the margins. Those notes were often in English, and they were usually translations of foreign words or summaries of specific passages. These notes not only helped the scribe who made them, but also helped anyone else who might read the manuscript in the future and might also be stumped by the same obscure words in the document.

Now this was not a new development. I've alluded to these types of notes or translations in earlier episodes. They were essential for any scribe who was working with a document that was composed in another language. In fact, these types of notes can be found in the earliest writings composed by human beings. The ancient civilization of Sumer in modern-day Iraq produced some of the oldest human writing. That writing was done on clay tablets, and those tablets show that the Sumerians often wrote down and kept extensive word lists. In 2340 BC, the Sumerians were conquered by the Semitic-speaking Akkadians. And after that conquest, the Akkadians had to interpret the tablets written in the language of the Sumerians. So they started to put together word lists in both languages to help with the translation.

They would take those old Sumerian word lists, and they would translate them by putting the equivalent Akkadian word beside the Sumerian word. Some scholars consider these bilingual word lists to be the first dictionaries. One of those surviving lists has over 9,700 separate words recorded on 24 tablets. Again, those lists were essential to scribes who were trying to work with both of those languages.

If we jump forward a couple of thousand years to the Greeks, we find that they also had to deal with a similar problem. Classical Greek was divided into several regional dialects, and it could be difficult for a Greek speaker in one part of Greece to understand a Greek speaker in another part of Greece. And Greece was a very literate world which produced a lot of documents. In fact, like all languages, the Greek language evolved over time. When Greek scribes in the second century BC looked back to the original version of the Iliad and the Odyssey – which had been composed about five centuries earlier – they had a tough time working through that earlier form of the language. So those early Greek scribes had a lot of the same problems as the later English scribes. They were dealing with a language that had changed quite a bit, and they were dealing with a lot of regional dialects that were quite different from each other.

When those Greek scholars tried to update those old texts like the Iliad and the Odyssey, they would often make notes about the changes that had taken place in the language over the centuries. They would include explanations or translations of words that were no longer understood by most Greek speakers. Those obscure or foreign words were called *glossai* in Greek. The word was actually derived from a Greek word for the 'tongue.' The term was later extended to words, so it could mean 'words' or 'language.' The sense of the word as 'language' exists in the second part of the term *polyglot* which literally means 'many languages,' but specifically refers to someone who speaks several languages.

In the more restricted sense of the term as 'words,' the Greek term was applied to obscure words – words that required a translation. And over time, the term was extended to include the actual translation or explanation itself. The term passed into Latin as *glossa* and then into English as *gloss*. So those little notes in the margins of manuscripts became known as *glosses*.

I should note that this word *gloss* is completely unrelated to the other word *gloss* meaning shiny or bright. That's actually a separate word of Germanic origin, and it's probably related to words like *glass* and *glow*. But here, I want to focus of the other meaning of *gloss* – the Greek version – the word meaning a translation of an obscure word or term.

Outside of the literary field, we don't use this word *gloss* in reference to manuscripts much anymore. But we do use it in other contexts. As I noted, a gloss was a translation or an explanation. And sometimes, when we're explaining something, we focus on one aspect of the explanation and ignore the other parts. In that case, we are said to 'gloss over' the part that we downplay or ignore. So today, we use that word *gloss* as a verb, usually in the phrase *gloss over* to mean that we are intentionally ignoring or obscuring some underlying meaning or intent. And again, that usage is derived from the original meaning of the word *gloss* as an explanation or translation.

Depending on the document and the scribe, the gloss could be added just about anywhere on the page. At the top or bottom, on the side, or even between the lines of text directly above or below the word being translated.

Sometimes, a scribe would take all of those terms that had been translated or explained, and the scribe would put them together in a separate list. This list could then be attached to the front or back of the manuscript. And this type of list of glosses became known as a ***glossary*** which is a term we still use today. So a ***glossary*** is just a list of glosses or translations, usually words associated with a particular text.

As documents were copied by scribes, these glossaries were also copied along with the rest of the text. But over time, some scribes started to take these various glossaries and put them together to create a master glossary independent of any particular manuscript. So it was a master list of common terms encountered by scribes who were working with different languages or dialects. These master glossaries were sort of like those long lists of terms used by the Akkadians back in ancient Babylonia. And again, they are the direct ancestor of our modern dictionaries.

These early master glossaries were usually organized by themes or categories. So words for parts of the body were put together. And words for precious stones were put together. Other categories might include words for plants or animals, or medicinal herbs. But some scribes decided to take a broader approach and put all the words together and organize them based on their first letter. So all of the words that began with an A were put together, and all of the words that began with a B were put together, and so on. But the order didn't extent beyond the first letter. So all the A words were put together, but beyond the first letter A, the words were listed in random order. So it wasn't the full alphabetical order that we use today. It was limited solely to the first letter.

These types of early glossaries existed in many languages – including Old English. Several Anglo-Saxon scribes maintained them to aid with translations. In fact, the four oldest surviving English glossaries date to the Anglo-Saxon period. The oldest one probably dates to the early 700s. And the words are arranged in that 'sort-of' alphabetical order that I just described. Words were grouped together by their first letter, but just the first letter. Alphabetical order didn't extend to any of the other letters. But as the glossaries grew, scribes needed to provide more order and structure to make the words easier to find. So they started to extend the alphabetical order to the second letter as well as the first. And then, by the 900s, it was extended to the third letter in some glossaries. But that was as far as Anglo-Saxon glossaries went.

Most of those early English glossaries consisted of long lists of Latin words with an English translation. And those lists were intended to help English scribes who didn't speak Latin very well and needed help translating those Latin words. So the Latin words came first, followed by the English translation. But around the current point in our story, we finally got the opposite – an alphabetic list where the English words appeared first followed by a Latin translation.

In the early 1200s, a scribe in the West Midlands of England started to put together some of these English word lists with Latin translations. It may seem like English word lists would have been used before, but there is no evidence of such lists until this point.

The man who made these lists was almost certainly a monk, and he apparently lived in the Priory and Cathedral at Worcester in the West Midlands. His name is unknown, but scholars are fascinated by his work because he glossed manuscripts in the Cathedral for many years. His glosses and translations are found in over 20 documents, and during his lifetime he translated about 50,0000 words. The reason why scholars know that all of this work was carried out by the same man is because he had a very distinctive handwriting style. He apparently had a tremor because his handwriting was very shaky. And it was very distinct from the handwriting of all the other scribes in the region. For this reason, he is known to modern scholars as the Tremulous Hand. And since that is his given moniker, that's how I'll refer to him.

It appears that the scribe's tremor prevented him from working as a regular copyist. Instead, he spent most of his time working with old Anglo-Saxon manuscripts that were composed before the Norman Conquest. As he poured through those old documents, he made little notes and translations in the margins. Those glosses are priceless to modern scholars, because they reveal a lot about how the English language had changed in the century and half since the Conquest. And that's why this scribe's work has been studied so much by modern scholars.

It appears that his tremor worsened over time as he got older. And based on that change, modern scholars have pieced together a rough chronology of his glosses and documents he worked with. And it appears that early in his career, he glossed or translated those Old English documents into his West Midlands dialect of Middle English. His glosses were substantial, especially given that he was theoretically working with documents in the same language. In some documents, he glossed or translated as many as one out of every four words. Very often, he would pick out the old words that he didn't know or understand and he would jot them down in the margins of the manuscript. Those were the words he tried to translate or define.

In some cases, he recognized the word but the pronunciation had changed so much since the Anglo-Saxon period that he had to revise the spelling to reflect the current pronunciation. Sometimes the Old English words had inflections that had either changed or disappeared. So he had to update those words as well. But very often, the Old English word had completely fallen out of use. If he could figure out what the old word meant, he would gloss the old word with a modern translation. If there was another English that meant the same thing, he would use that contemporary English word as a gloss. But sometimes there was no other word in English that meant the same thing, so in those cases he would use a Latin or French word as a translation. Scholars find this fascinating because the Tremulous Hand was not translating from one language to another – as was normally the case. He was actually working in what was theoretically the same language. He was glossing Old English documents for Middle English readers. That was how much the language had changed over the past couple of centuries. And scholars use those glosses to verify that Old English was essentially a dead language by the early 1200s.

When I say that the language had changed, I'm referring to the changes we've explored over the course of the podcast since the Norman Conquest. The structure and grammar and syntax of the language had changed substantially. English still had relatively few loanwords, but a lot of Old English words had already started to disappear and were replaced by Norse or French or Latin words. Old English words themselves were often pronounced differently, and that meant they

were spelled differently. And they often had different inflections or no inflections at all. So it was very difficult for an English scribe in the 1200s to read an Old English document without the help of glosses and translations.

It appears that at some point the Tremulous Hand came up with novel way to translate some of those Old English words that he didn't recognize or understand. He probably realized that many of those old documents had been translated into Latin during the Anglo-Saxon period. So he went in the Worcester Cathedral library and pulled out those Latin translations and he started to use them as a guide for his translations. He used the Latin version to figure out what those Old English words meant. Again, this shows how much the English language had changed. He had to use a Latin translation to figure out the earlier English vocabulary.

He then went back and glossed those Old English manuscripts with those Latin translations. In the margins, he started to keep lists of English and Latin word pairs. And from there, he started to compile a master word list with the English word first followed by the Latin translation. The English words were arranged by first letter only since full alphabetical order was still rare. This alphabetical English word list is the oldest surviving glossary of English words with Latin translations. And that was a notable development because the list was used to decipher Old English manuscripts – not Latin manuscripts. So Old English was essentially being treated as a foreign language.

Now I mentioned that the handwriting of the Tremulous Hand was so shaky that he didn't tend to copy or compose entire documents. But one manuscript does exist in his handwriting. It is part of a set of documents which are known as the 'Worcester Fragments.' His work includes a copy of his word list and two separate poems. It isn't clear if he composed the poems himself or he simply copied them from another source. Either way, the first of the two poems is well-known to scholars of this period. And it is notable because it laments the fact that English school students were no longer being taught in the English language.

In fact, I mentioned this poem way back in Episode 37 when I talked about Old English poetry. I talked about the structure of Old English poetry and the way that it used alliteration in a very specific way. And at the very end of that episode, I mentioned how that type of traditional Germanic poetry disappeared in the wake of the Norman Conquest. And a few years later after the Conquest, an English poet composed a poem based on that traditional style which was disappearing. And the poem lamented the loss of English learning after the Conquest. Well, that poem is preserved in the handwriting of the Tremulous Hand. I should note that in the earlier episode, I said that his poem was composed about a generation after the Norman Conquest. But it was more like a century and a half after the Conquest.

Again, we don't know if the Tremulous Hand actually composed the poem, but many scholars think that he did because he spent so much of his life studying and translating Old English documents. So obviously he had an interest in those old manuscripts, and he was apparently fascinated by the older form of the language and how much it had changed. Back in Episode 37, I just gave you the Modern English translation of the poem. Well, here is it is in the Middle English of the Tremulous Hand. I am going to delete a section in the middle where he includes a

long list of Anglo-Saxon bishops, but otherwise, this is the poem – first in Modern English and then in the Middle English of the West Midlands:

Saint Bede was born here in Britain with us
And he wisely translated books so that the English
People were taught through them

Sanctus Beda was iboren her on Breotone mid us
And he wisliche bec awende thet theo Englise
leoden thurh weren ilerde

Abbot Aeflric whom we call Alcuin
Was a writer and translated five books
Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Numbers, Leviticus
Through these were our people taught in English

Aelfric abbod, the we Alquin hoteth,
He was bocare, and the fif bec wende,
Genesis, Exodus, Vtronomius, Numerus, Leuiticus,
thurh theos wæren ilærde ure leoden on Englisc

These people taught our people in English
Their light was not dark but it glowed fairly
Now is that teaching forsaken and our people lost
And another people teaches our folk
And many of our teachers are damned
And that folk with them

theos lærden ure leodan on Englisc,
Nes deorc heore liht, ac hit feire glod.
Nu is theo leore forleten, and thet folc is forloren.
Nu bes othre leoden the lereth ure folc,
And feole of then lortheines losiæth
and thæt folc forth mid.

I should note that the poem mentions a couple of Anglo-Saxon writers, Aelfrich and Alcuin, and it says that they were the same person. Well, they were not. They were two distinct people. Aelfric translated the writings of Alcuin, and it appears that the poet was confused by that fact since he suggested that they were the same person.

Beyond that mistake, the poet is addressing the fact that English had been relegated to the background during the period after the Conquest. It had largely disappeared as a written language. Formal education was in Latin, and French was making inroads in official documents and literature. But English itself had ceased to be language of learning and education.

For scribes like the Tremulous Hand, this was considered to be a great loss. Even if he didn't write that poem, he certainly felt strongly enough about the loss of English learning that he preserved the poem for posterity.

So thanks to the work of the Tremulous Hand, we know that Old English had essentially become a dead language that had to be glossed and translated to be fully understood. And English itself wasn't considered fit for a proper education in England. But even though Old English had disappeared, a new type of English had emerged like a phoenix rising from the ashes. And the influence of this new type of English was rapidly expanding.

The first piece of evidence we have for the ascendancy of this new type of English is the re-emergence of English writing during this period. The other piece of evidence we have is the fact that English was replacing French as the native language of the nobility. And that was a big deal. For the past century and half, the nobility of England had spoken French as their first language. Early on, most of them only spoke French. After a few generations, they were probably bi-lingual – speaking both French and English as first languages. But now we have evidence in the early 1200s that most of them no longer spoke French as a first language. They only spoke English as their native language. So French had to be learned. And we know that this change had taken place because surviving documents from this period mention that many nobles were sending their children to Paris to learn how to speak French or to improve their French. But more importantly, this period saw the production of textbooks and guides that were designed to teach English children how to speak French. These guides were specifically intended for the children of nobles. And that suggests that these noble children weren't speaking French as a first language anymore.

I noted a few episodes back that Henry III invited many French nobles to England during his reign. And the arrival of those nobles reinforced the role of French among the nobility, and it contributed to the use and acceptance of Parisian French over Norman French. Well, that was partly because many of the English nobles weren't speaking Norman French as a native language anymore. And as we'll see in an upcoming episode, this created a conflict between the native English nobles and Henry's new French nobles.

English may have expanded among the nobility, but it isn't clear if it extended to the young king himself. Henry certainly spoke French, but there is some evidence that he also spoke English – at least as a second language. This evidence is based on the fact that Henry's brother was elected as the King of the Germans in the year 1257 – a little later in Henry's reign. Henry's brother was named Richard and he was the Earl of Cornwall. He was elected as King of the Germans by the German princes who had the authority to choose to a king, even though the title didn't really mean very much or grant him much authority. So what does Richard's election as the German king have to do with Henry's ability to speak English? Well, Matthew Paris was a well-known chronicler who lived during this period, and he wrote that Richard was chosen as German king partly "on account of his speaking the English language, which is similar in sound to German." So Henry's brother Richard could speak English which was still seen as a close relative of German.

And if Richard could speak English, then that suggests that Henry could also speak English either as a first language or a second language. But again, we don't have any real direct evidence to confirm that.

Even if English wasn't spoken in the royal court, it appears that it was spoken by most of the nobles, and their children only knew English as a first language. So they needed those new guides and textbooks that were designed to teach them how to speak French.

The most well-known of these early textbooks was a manuscript composed by a nobleman named Walter of Bibbesworth. It was composed in the 1230s, around the current point in our overall story. It's really an extended poem, but it was intended to serve as a guide to help children learn French. Many copies of this text have survived the centuries, and there were several different versions produced by later writers who edited and modified the original text. Based on the large number of surviving copies, it appears that the guide was quite popular at the time, apparently because it was in high demand.

The preface of the poem says that it was composed for Lady Dionysia de Mounchensy, and some versions contain a dedication that says that the poem was composed at her request to help her children learn French. It isn't really clear how Walter knew Lady Dionysia, but we know from other sources that "de Mounchensy" was part of her husband's name, and she married him in the year 1234. So that is a clue as to the date of the poem.

Now you may be wondering what Walter's popular manuscript has to do with glosses. Well, that is actually how Walter structured his manuscript. The poem itself was composed in French, but he glossed the difficult French words with English translations. In other words, he wrote out the lines in French, but in certain places, above the French words, he would write in the English translation. And Walter said that he did that intentionally. He wrote that "everything [I] say you will find first the French and then above the English." Of course, that in an English translation of his original French text.

The manuscript was designed to teach French, but more specifically, it was designed to teach the words that a noble was expected to know. The text begins with parts of body, and then moves on to include things like clothing, animals, food, and eating utensils. It also includes terms associated with falconry.

Along the way, many of the French words contain English glosses, but not all of them do. In fact, Walters' glosses are fascinating because they shed some light on which French words were commonly known and didn't need a translation versus the ones that were unfamiliar and did need a translation.

Apparently the French names for birds were not widely known in England because Walter glossed those terms with English translations. In one passage, Walter mentions larks, but since he writes in French, he uses the French word. The modern French word is *alouette* which you might know from this popular children's son: [Song Clip].

In case you're curious, that's:
Alouette, gentille alouette,   (Lark, gentle lark)
Alouette, je te plumerai.   (Lark, I will pluck you – or I will pluck your feathers off)

Anyway, Walter used that French word *alouette* in his manuscript.   He actually used an earlier Anglo-French version of the word – *alouues*. But then, above that word, Walter wrote "*larkes*" – or *larks*. So he glossed the French word with an English translation.

By the way, I should mention that the second line in that children's song I played is "Alouette, je te plumerai" – 'Lark, I will pluck your feathers.' Well, we actually have a version of that French word *plumerai* in English. We have it as the word *plume* meaning 'an ornamental feather or a group of feathers.' By extension, the word is also used to describe other things that float in the air like 'a plume of smoke.' Well, Old English also had a version of that word which was *fleece*. So *plume* and *fleece* are actually cognate. And this is another example of the P-to-F sound change identified by Jacob Grimm. *Plume* comes from French and Latin with its original Indo-European 'p' sound, and *fleece* comes from Old English with its Germanic 'f' sound.

Now returning to Walter's manuscript for students of French, he not only glossed the French word for 'larks,' he also glossed the French word for 'cranes.'   The Modern French word for 'crane' is *grue*. Walter wrote it as "*gruwes*," and above that French word, he wrote "*cranes*" – or *cranes*. By the way, French *grue* and English *crane* are also cognate. This is another one of the sound changes identified by Jacob Grimm – specifically the shift from the 'g' sound to the 'k' sound. That's how we got Latin *agriculture* with a 'g' sound and Old English *acre* with a 'k' sound from a common root. And here, French got *grue* where English got *crane*, again from a common root.

There are lots more examples of these types of glosses or translations in Walter's manuscript. For example, in a passage where he discusses curly hair, he uses the Anglo-French term 'les cheveuz recerciliez,' but he glosses it with 'lockes crispe' – literally 'crisp locks.' *Lock* is an Old English word for 'hair,' and we still use that term today when we refer to a 'lock of hair,' or someone's 'curly locks,' or the fairy tale character Goldilocks – literally 'golden-haired.'   But Walter's translation was 'lockes crispe' – or 'crisp locks' – not 'curly locks.' So why did he describe curly hair as *crisp*?   Well, because the word *curly* or *curl* didn't exist yet in English. It doesn't appear in an English document until around the year 1400. So Walter used an Old English word that meant 'curly,' and that's the word *crisp*. Believe it or not, the original meaning of *crisp* was 'curly.' And even though the word was used by the Anglo-Saxons, they had actually borrowed it from the Romans, so it has Latin roots.   The word *crisp* didn't come to mean 'brittle' until the 1500s. It isn't clear why the meaning changed, but one theory suggest that when something starts to burn, it quickly dries out and tends become wrinkled and curly. So it is 'crisp' in the original sense of the word as 'curly.' But then, it also starts to become brittle. So perhaps, over time, the meaning of the word *crisp* shifted from the curliness of the object to the brittleness of the object. Anyway, that's just a theory. But either way, Walter used the word to gloss the French term for curly hair.

Walter's guide helped to teach that kind of basic French vocabulary, but it went far beyond that. It also emphasized subtle distinctions between words that sounded very similar. Walter noted that the words needed to be spelled properly in order to clearly indicate the differences in pronunciation. And in fact, his text is the first English document to use the word *spell* to mean the process of putting letters together in their proper order. And Walter includes the word *spell* as a gloss for a phrase written in French. In the Anglo-French of the early 1200s, Walter wrote, "Espau nautrement ki les lettres ensemble prent," which roughly translates as 'put the letters together in their natural order.' But above that French passage, Walter wrote the word "*spelieth*."

Now this particular gloss or translation is interesting because the word *spell* is an old word, but generally speaking, it wasn't used in the modern sense of putting letters in proper order until the late 1300s and 1400s. So Walter's textbook suggests that the word was being used with that modern meaning at least a century earlier – in the early 1200s.

I've talked about the word *spell* before. Back in Episode 95, I noted that the word is a Germanic word that meant 'to speak or talk.' So the original meaning of *spell* is actually very similar to the original Greek meaning of the word *gloss*. The word *spell* is found in Old English, but the Franks also had a version of the word. And the Frankish version passed into French and then into English. So English ended up with two slightly different versions of the same word – one native and one from French. Within Old English, the word *spell* had a sense of something spoken. That could include a story or an important message. And in Old English, a 'god spel' meant a 'good story' or 'good news.' And that term 'god spel' became the word *gospel* as used in the Church. The word also became associated with magical charms and utterances. And that led to the sense of the word *spell* as in 'to put a spell on someone.'

As I said, the Franks also had that Germanic word, and the Frankish version passed into French where it meant to explain something – usually in a step-by-step process. So it's like when we say, "I am going to spell it out for you," which means I'm going to break it down piece by piece. That version of the word started to appear in English documents in the 1300s, and it meant 'to read a difficult text word for word.' So if you were an English speaker trying to read a Latin text, you might have to break it down word by word. So you would 'spell' the text. But over time, by extension, the word *spell* came to refer to the process of breaking down individual words letter by letter. You had to put the letters in the right order. And that led to the modern sense of *spell* as in a 'spelling bee.' But again, even though this evolution in meaning is documented in later English documents, Walter of Bibbesworth uses the word *spell* in this same sense as a gloss in the early 1200s. So that suggests that the word had that modern sense even earlier that the later documents suggest.

By the way, whenever I mention the word *spell*, I usually get questions about the use of the word in the sense of 'come over and visit for a spell.' And when referring to the weather, we might say that we're having a cold spell or hot spell. Well, that's actually a completely different word that was also found in Old English. It actually comes from a different root, so it doesn't have anything to do with the other senses of the word *spell* – as in speech, or charms, or putting letters in order.

By the way, Walter's warning to his readers to mind their spelling is emphasized in a passage where he distinguishes the word *rubie* and *rupie*. Of course, a *ruby* is a precious stone, but *rupie* was an Old French word for 'snot' or 'the drop of water that forms at the tip of your nose when you have a cold.' Walter includes the following passage, here translated into Modern English:

Great worth have rubies with a 'b',	Meuz vaut la rubie par .b.
Surpassing 'rupies' with a 'p'.	Ki ne fet le rupie par .p.
If this purse had as many rubies, let's suppose,	Car ci bource eut tant des rubies
As drops that fall from a runny nose,	Cum le nes ad des rupies,
With precious jewels rich he would be	Mult serreit riches de pirie
As he who possessed so many rubies.	Qui taunt eut de la rubie.

So Walter is teaching his students the difference between a ruby and a rupie, but he is also pointing out that the main difference lies in pronunciation, and therefore in the spelling of the words when they are written down. So the student has to pay careful attention to the way the words are spelled.

This is also a notable development because spelling was still very fluid during this period. As I noted before, modern dictionaries didn't exist yet. So words were spelled phonetically. And since pronunciations varied, spellings also varied. That was also why those early glossaries didn't use complete alphabetical order in the way we use it today.

I noted earlier that the first glossaries just grouped words together by their first letter. And then gradually that was extended to the first two letters – and then the first three letters. Well during this period, English glosses couldn't go much further than that because there were no standard spellings. When a word was spelled, most scribes would agree on the first letter. And depending on the word, they would probably agree on the second or third letter, but then the spellings would break down. So alphabetical order didn't really go beyond the third letter.

Over the next few centuries, a few writers experimented with full alphabetical order using every letter in a word, but that didn't really become standard practice in English until the 1600s – when English dictionaries finally started to fix the spelling of words. In fact, the manuscript that is considered the first proper English dictionary was composed in 1604 by a man named Robert Cawdrey. His was the first manuscript to list English words in complete alphabetical order and to define those words with English explanations or definitions. The alphabetical order was still so unique that he titled the dictionary "A Table Alphabeticall, Conteyning and Teaching the True Writing, and Understanding of Hard Usuall English Words." In his preface, Cawdrey felt the need to explain to his readers how alphabetical order worked. He wrote the following:

> If thou be desirous (gentle Reader) rightly and readily to understand, and to profit by this Table, and such like, then thou must learne the Alphabet, to wit, the order of the Letters as they stand, perfectly without booke, and where every Letter standeth: as 'b' neere the beginning, 'n' about the middest, and 't' toward the end. Nowe if the word, which thou

art desirous to finde, begin with 'a' then looke in the beginning of this Table, but if with 'v' looke towards the end. Againe, if the word beginne with a 'ca' looke in the beginning of the letter c, but if with 'cu' then looke toward the end of that letter. And so of all the rest.

Cawdrey's manuscript established the model for all future English dictionaries, but again, those developments took place almost four centuries later in our story in the early Modern English period. At the current point in our story, in the early 1200s, scribes only had access to glossaries that were organized by the first letter – or first few letters – and which usually consisted of a list of words in one language with a translation into another language. And again, those lists were an extension of the traditional glosses which had been used by scribes for centuries.

Now returning to Walter's glosses in his textbook for English students, he not only taught his readers French vocabulary, he also taught them grammar and, specifically, he taught the use of proper articles when using a French word. It was the distinction between masculine *le* and feminine *la*. Walter instructed his students to pay careful attention to this distinction and to make sure they used the correct article, because in French that was the main way to distinguish two words that were otherwise pronounced and spelled the same way. If one was masculine and one was feminine, you had to make that distinction clear with the correct article. So he distinguished 'la levere' from 'le levere.' The first word is glossed with the English word *lip*, the second word is glossed with the English word *hare* – H-A-R-E. He then distinguished 'la livere' from 'le livre.' The first term is glossed with the English word *pount* – or 'pound.' The second term is glossed with the word *book*. In these back-to-back lines, Walter explains the difference between the two pairs of words which are homonyms, and he notes that the only difference between them is the proper article to use. So the difference is that one is masculine and one is feminine.

Again, in these passages, Walter is trying to explain the concept of grammatical gender. It is pretty much the same lesson that students would learn today if they were trying to learn French because English no longer has grammatical gender. And the fact that Walter felt the need to do the same thing in the early 1200s suggests that his English students didn't really understand this concept either. As we know, Old English had grammatical gender, and we saw that concept disappearing in some English manuscripts written shortly after the Norman Conquest. Walter's French textbook suggests that grammatical gender was completely gone by this point in the early 1200s. So even though the manuscript was designed to teach French, it actually tells us quite a bit about the state of English.

It tells us that grammatical gender was now a foreign concept. And when combined with the work of the Tremulous Hand, it tells us that English had changed significantly since the Norman Conquest. Walter's book also it tells us that this new form of English had spread into the nobility, and most of the noble children were no longer bi-lingual. They spoke English from birth and they had to learn French as they got older.

Walter's book also shows us how English students learned that French vocabulary. They did it in much the same way that we would do today. They learned the French word and its English equivalent. And in a society where both languages were spoken, there was a natural tendency to

use the words interchangeably. English speakers may not have been fully bi-lingual, but they could often recognize the French version of an English word. And increasingly, English speakers felt comfortable using the French word as a synonym – and usually the French word had a slightly more elevated sense. So it gave English speakers a better way to express nuance and subtlety. And this was to have major repercussions for the English language. It meant that English was acquiring two different ways of saying the same thing. One way in native English – and one way in French. And any differences in meaning allowed one to be used in common situations and the other in more formal situations.

If an English man or woman prepared a meal for family or friends, they could *eat* in English or *dine* in French. They might eat in an English *house* or a French *manor* or *castle*. Or if the host was a peasant, they might eat in an English *hut* or a French *cottage*. The host might prepare a meal to *feed* his guests in English or *nourish* them in French. If the person preparing the meal needed help, he or she could 'ask for help' in English, or 'request assistance' in French. The guests might be served English *cow* or French *beef*, English *sheep* or French *mutton*, English *calf* or French *veal*, English *pig* or French *pork*. The meat might be cooked over English *fire* or French *flames*. The liquid in the pots might *seethe* in English, or *boil* or *stew* in French. This might be part of an English *broth* or a French *soup*. The cook might work up an English *sweat* or French *perspiration*. When the guests arrived, the host might meet them with an English *kiss* or a French *embrace.* The host would give them a 'hearty welcome' in English, or a 'cordial reception' in French. After a while it might be time to *start* or *begin* the meal in English or *commence* the meal in French. The guests would be called to the English *bench* or the French *table*, which was located in an English *room* or a French *chamber*. The guests would 'go in' in English or 'enter' in French. During mealtime, the guests might tell stories that were described as *funny* in English or *amusing* in French. The guests would consume a lot of food, but when they were full, they would *stop* in English or *cease* or *finish* in French. At the end of the evening, the guests would *leave* in English or *depart* in French. So you get the idea. English gradually started to acquire two different ways of saying the same thing. One way with common native English words and another way with French words that were considered slightly more elevated.

And very often, they would use both of those words together to reinforce the point and to make sure that the person they were speaking to understood what they were saying. During the early Middle English period, as English documents re-emerged, we see the use of these types of French and English pairs. Writers referred to the 'nobyll and worthy' – 'noble' being French and 'worthy' being English. They would refer to "informacion and loore" – 'information' being French and 'lore' being English. They would speak of 'mervayls and wondres' – 'marvels' being French and 'wonders' being English.

This type of pairing became very common in English speech. In a sense, English speakers were doing what scribes had always done. They were glossing their own language. They were using a French word beside the English word to make the meaning clear.

During this same time period in the early 1200s, a very important manuscript was composed in the West Midlands in the same area where the Tremulous Hand lived and worked. The text is called the Ancrene Wisse, and I'm going to discuss it in more detail in the next episode. It is notable in part because it contains so many French words, most of which were used for the first time in a surviving English document. The manuscript suggests that the English flood gates were starting to open to French. But it is clear from the text that the author was working with two different languages, and he isn't always certain that the reader will understand the French word. So very often, he glosses the French word with an English synonym, but he does it within the text itself – not in the margins.

In one part of the text, the author mentions the importance of being humble and doing good deeds in secret – using the phrase "privite, ant dearnliche" – 'private and dearnliche.' *Private* is French word and *dearnliche* is an Old English meaning 'secretly.'

In one version of the manuscript, the text uses the phrase "mid ouerpreisunge and herunge." The first word *ouerpreisunge* is based on the French word *praise*. It literally means 'overpraise' or 'glorification.' And it's paired with its Old English equivalent *herunge*. So the author used an English word as a synonym to explain the French word that was being introduced.

Very often, the manuscript uses a French word, and then it introduces the English equivalent with the phrase 'that is.' So the text refers to "cherité þat is luve" – 'charity that is love.' And it refers to "desperaunce þet is unhope" – 'desperation that is unhope' or hopelessness. The text mentions "ignoraunce þet is unwisdom" – 'ignorance that is unwisdom.' Again, all of these examples introduce a French word and then follow it with an English synonym.

An Old English word for 'patience' was *þolemodnesse* or 'thole-mood-ness.' So one part of the text refers to "pacience, þet is þolemodnesse" – 'patience that is thole-mood-ness.'

And in an earlier episode of the podcast, I mentioned that *golnesse* was an Old English word for 'lechery.' So the text refers to "lecherie þet is golnesse."

In one part of the text, the author refers to *conscientia*, the Latin form of the word *conscience*. But he also explains the meaning of the word in English by writing "thet is cleane and schir inwit" – "that is clean and shining inner wit' or inner wisdom.

In another passage, the manuscript refers to the contemplation of a bird flying at night. It uses the phrase "contemplatiun thet is, with heh thoht, ant with hali bonen" – "contemplation, that is with high thought and holy prayers." Again, we have the French word *contemplation* followed by a short definition in English.

What we see here is a type of glossing – a technique whereby the writer introduces French words which may be very familiar to some readers but not others. So he pairs them with an English synonym or translation.

This became a standard technique in the early Middle Ages – and we can also see it in the writings of Geoffrey Chaucer in the late 1300s. In the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, he refers to sauces that are "poynant and sharp." **_Poignant_** is a French word and **_sharp_** is an English synonym. He also refers to an idle monk who objects to manual labor or having to "swinken with his handes and laboure" (l. 186) – literally 'work with his hands and labor.' 'Swinken or work with his hands' is an English phrase. **_Labor_** is a French synonym.

So in these examples, we see how writers were dealing with the challenge of having to communicate with a mixed vocabulary. They did it with glosses and translations. But rather than putting them in the margins, they just incorporated the synonyms into the text itself.

There was one profession where this approach was especially important – where words had very precise and specific meanings and where the choice of the right word was essential. And that was the legal profession. The legal profession was becoming standardized in England throughout the 1200s. Old English legal codes had been largely replaced with codes written in Latin. But French was starting to be used beside Latin in the courts and, by the year 1300, English courts were just using French. So all of this posed a challenge to English lawyers. They had to deal with Anglo-Saxon legal concepts mixed with Latin and french legal terminology. So if you were a Medieval English lawyer, which word did you use – the traditional Old English word or the French equivalent? For the most part, the lawyers decided to cover their bases by using both. They paired the English and French terms to avoid any ambiguities. This was what scribes had been doing for years, and it became essential in the legal writing of Medieval England. And it is a standard feature of modern legalese to this day.

The following legal phrases combine at least one word used in Old English with a French or Latin word. We have

law and order
goods and chattels
last will and testament
acknowledge and confess
breaking and entering
fit and proper
keep and maintain
pardon and forgive
bind and obligate
deem and consider
give and grant
indemnify and hold harmless
hide and conceal
lewd and lascivious
free and clear
sale and transfer
land and tenements
true and correct

make and enter into
every kind and nature
give, devise and bequeath
right, title and interest

So as you can see, this very old technique of combining English and French words survives to this day, even if we no longer recognize that that's what we're doing. And it also helps to explain why modern legalese can be so ponderous.

But it's not just legal documents. When we use phrases like 'wrack and ruin,' 'love and affection,' 'soft and gentle,' 'kind and generous,' 'bells and whistles,' and 'greetings and salutations,' we're combining Old English and French words. We're tapping into both vocabularies to express the same basic idea. Of course, today we would consider all of those words to be English words, but this approach can be traced back to the introduction of French words into English in the early 1200s. And in some respects, this approach is an extension of the glosses that were once used to translate Medieval documents – when scribes had to find a way to communicate with a mixed vocabulary.

Next time, we'll look more closely at the early interaction between English and French. We'll see how a group of writers in the West Midlands were composing a lot of new manuscripts in English during this period. Those works had similar religious themes, but one of them stands out among the others. It that manuscript I mentioned earlier – a guide written for female recluses or hermits called the Ancrene Wisse. This may seem like an obscure religious text, but for scholars of Middle English, it is one of the most important pieces of literature composed in the 13th century. Beyond the actual prose of the text, it is important because it contains the first known use of hundreds of French words in the English language. Even though they are loanwords, they are some of the most commonly used words in English today. And mixed in with those loanwords were lots of English words that were being used in new ways, in new compounds, and new expressions, and new figures of speech, all of which we can recognize today without any problem. In many respects, this is the transitional document that we've been looking for. It bridges the gap between the Old English of Beowulf and the Middle English of Geoffrey Chaucer. And that's part of the reason why it has intrigued so many scholars.

So next time, we'll see what this 800 year old manuscript can tell us about the development of Modern English. Until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.