THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPT

EPISODE 107:
PARLEZ-VOUS ANGLAIS?

EPISODE 107: PARLEZ-VOUS ANGLAIS?

Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 107: Parlez-Vous Anglais? In this episode, we're going to continue our look at the re-birth of English writing in the early Middle English period. This time we'll explore the political events that led to the first major political document issued in English since the Norman Conquest. It is an important document not only for the English language, but also for the English government because it laid the foundation for Parliament. And interestingly, the term ***Parliament*** is based on a French word meaning 'to speak.' So from its very beginnings, Parliament was a place where people went to speak. But speak what language? English? French? Latin? This time we'll explore the complicated interaction of those three languages in the English government during the 1200s.

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 over the past few episodes, we've looked at several important developments that took place in the late 1100s and early 1200s. If there is one constant theme that has emerged though those episodes, it is the gradual re-emergence of English after more than a century in the wilderness. We saw it return in the form of epic poetry in Layamon's Brut and in the debate poetry of the Owl and the Nightingale. We saw it endure in the oldest surviving songs composed in English. And we even saw it being used in important religious documents like the Ancrene Wisse and the related group of documents composed in the West Midlands known as the Katherine Group.

However, there was one place where English had yet to make an appearance, and that was in legal and government documents. Those were still the exclusive domain of Latin and increasingly French. This was an area where English met some of its strongest resistence. For most of the post-Conquest period, the English language was largely unknown in the English government.

So up until now, evidence of early Middle English has to be found elsewhere. Over the past few episodes, we've found some of that evidence in the Ancrene Wisse – an important religious text composed in the early 1200s. I've mostly focused on the French influence in that document, but the changes weren't limited to a bunch of new French words. The English language itself was also evolving and growing. And we can find that evidence as well.

The Ancrene Wisse uses a lot of Old English words in new ways to create new phrases and new figures of speech. Several very common phrases and compound words appear for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse and the related group of documents called the Katherine Group.
Again, these are not loanwords. They're new constructions using native English terms.

For example, we find the first use of the phrase "at once" rendered as ***et enes***. The phrase "as often as" appears as ***ase ofte asa***. "As much as" appears as ***ase muche ase***. "Whosoever it be" appears as ***hu se ever it beo***. "Once a week at the least" is rendered as ***enes a wike ette leste***. We also find new terms coined for the first time from existing words. That includes terms like "sometime" – ***sumetime***. "Albeit" – ***al beo***. "Beforehand" – ***bivorenhond***. "Everywhere" – ***eauer ihwer***. "Over take" – ***ouer token***. And "overturn" – ***ouerturneð***.

These were terms that would have been understood, and would have probably been used, by the recluses and anchorites who read the Ancrene Wisse. And given that this guide was written for them in English, we can assume that they mostly spoke and conversed in English. Now you may be wondering how a recluse living in solitude in an enclosed cell could converse with other people. Well, anchorites did have access to visitors, and they did make confessions to priests. But they didn't usually leave their cell. Instead, they had windows which they could open to speak with visitors. Actually, according to the Ancrene Wisse. They had three windows.

The cell was often attached to a church, so there was a window between the cell and church itself. There was also a window between the cell a separate servant's quarters which was also attached to the church. So that window was where a servant or maiden who worked at the church could bring food or otherwise attend to the anchoress. And there was also a third window open to a separate room where outside visitors could speak with the anchoress. This separate room was where visitors gathered and where conversations could be held. To describe this room adjacent to the cell, a French term was used. It was the word ***parlur***. This is an early form of the word ***parlor***, and it appears for the first time in English in the Ancrene Wisse.

Now the word ***parlor*** is based on the French word ***parler*** meaning 'to speak.' Even if you don't speak French, you're probably familiar with the phrase "Parlez-vous Francais" which means "Do you speak French?" – literally "Speak you French?" You might know another variation of that question. "Parlez-vous Anglais?" – "Do you speak English?" Those phrases come in very handy if you're visiting France or a French-speaking country.

Well that word ***parler*** meaning 'to speak' was used to describe the room where visitors would gather to speak with the anchoress – the ***parlor***. The Ancrene Wisse specifically instructed the anchoress how to use the three windows in her cell. I'm going to read you that passage, but let me remind you that the word ***window*** is a Norse word, and it appears for the first time in the Ancrene Wisse. But as a general rule, the text prefered the traditional Old English word which was ***thurl***. ***Thurl*** meant an opening, and we still have it in the word ***nostril*** which is literally 'the nose thurl' or 'the nose opening.' So in this passage from the Ancrene Wisse, that word ***thurl*** is used instead of ***window***. Here is the passage. First a Modern English translation, then the original Middle English:

Do not talk with anyone through the church window, but revere it because of the holy sacrament that you see through it.

Ut thurh the chirche-thurl ne halde ye tale with na-mon, ah beoreth ther-to wurthmunt
for the hali sacrement thet ye seoth ther-thurh.

And use the house window for talking sometimes with your women; for others, use the parlor window. You should not speak except at these two windows.

ant neometh other-hwile to ower wummen the huses thurl, to othre the parlur. Speoken ne ahe ye bute ed tes twa thurles.

Now, if an anchoress was to receive a visitor, the manuscript advises her to determine the identity of the person before going to speak with him or her. Here's the passage:

First of all, when you have to go to your parlor window, find out from your maid who it is who has come, for it might be someone you should excuse yourself from seeing.

On alre earst hwen ye schulen to ower parlurs thurl, witeth ed ower meiden hwa hit beo thet beo i-cumen. For swuch hit mei beon thet ye schule essinien ow.

Again, these are the first recorded uses of the word ***parlor*** in the English language – meaning a room specifically set aside for speaking or carrying on a conversation. Over time, the word ***parlor*** came to mean any room in a house where guests were inviting to speak and have discussions. Sometimes it referred to a separate private room away from the main room. Other times, it referred to the main room for entertaining. In American English, the term was extended to certain types of businesses like an ice cream parlor, or a beauty parlor or a funeral parlor. But originally, a ***parlor*** was a place where people spoke to each other from the French word ***parler***. And it was first used in the Ancrene Wisse.

The French word ***parler*** was also being used in another word that was starting to pop up in England around this same time. That was the word ***parliament***. Whenever a king met with his nobles and leading church officials to discuss important political matters, the gathering was known as the ***Magnum Concilium*** in Latin – literally translated as the ***Great Council***. But since the meeting was an opportunity to speak and exchange thoughts, the meeting was also called a ***parlement*** using the French term.

The first time the word ***parliament*** appeared in a document in England, it was in a Latin record dated to the year 1236. The document called for a meeting of the Great Council. And this is the first time that a meeting of the council was specifically called a ***parliament***. Now this record was not in English. And in fact, we don't find the word ***parliament*** in an English document until around the year 1300, but we also have to keep in mind that government and legal documents weren't generally composed in English. So even though the word doesn't appear in an English document for several more decades, it is increasingly found in Latin and French documents from this period.

Again, the word ***parliament*** didn't refer to the Great Council itself. It simply meant a meeting of the Council. So each meeting of the council was called a ***parliament***. And the reason why a French word started to be used for those meeting is because the meetings were usually conducted in French. The king and his royal council spoke French, and the barons and major church

officials also spoke French either as their first language or as a second language. So as far as we know, French dominated those meetings.

That first meeting of the Great Council to be referred to as a ***parliament*** took place in January of 1237. King Henry had just gotten married in what turned out to be a very expensive wedding. Meanwhile, his sister Isabella had just married the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II, who had demanded a dowry from Henry in the amount of 20,000 pounds which was a very large sum of money at the time. So part of the reason why Henry had called that meeting was to get approval for a tax to help pay those expenses.

This tradition went back to Magna Carta. The original version of Magna Carta specifically required the consent of the barons when the king wanted to impose a tax. That requirement was later dropped, but King Henry still followed that tradition since the tax burden tended to fall heavily on the barons. When Henry called them to that meeting in 1237, they agreed to the tax, but they demanded that Henry reaffirm and reissue Magna Carta in return. And that became the standard practice going forward. Whenever Henry wanted new taxes, he would call the barons to a meeting, they would consent, and Henry would re-issue Magna Carta. As we'll see, the barons eventually grew tired of that arrangement.

As I noted, these meetings or parliaments were conducted in French. And most formal legal and government records were maintained in Latin. So there wasn't much room for English. But English was there, and it was trying to break through.

It might not have been the language used in formal gatherings of the Great Council or in formal government documents, but otherwise, many of the barons and church officials and scribes and other officials were conversing in English. And we get some evidence of that in the year 1241.

The evidence comes from legal records of a court case brought by King Henry against one Gilbert the Marshall. Henry claimed that he was owed 10,000 marks by Gilbert. The amount seemed so excessive to the clerk keeping the plea role that he wrote that it was 'illud namels fremeles' – roughly translated as "it was nameless and pointless.' [Curia Regis Rolls, vol 16, p. 290] What is so interesting is that the roll was maintained in Latin, but it uses that word ***namles*** which is the English word ***nameless***. Here it was used in the sense of 'unspecific or pointless.' Apparently the scribe couldn't find a suitable Latin word to express the idea, so he just used an English word. The reason why that is notable is because it is first evidence we have of an English word appearing in a Latin document. For all the Latin and French words that were pouring into English, here we find an English word going in the opposite direction and being borrowed into an official document maintained in Latin.

The year after that legal proceeding was recorded in Latin with an English word, Henry decided that he wanted to make another effort to recover the lost region of Poitou in northern Aquitaine. We saw a few episodes back that several missions had been launched to recover the territory from the French king, but to no avail. This time, Henry didn't consult with the barons, and the mission once again ended in failure. When Henry called another Great Council and asked for new taxes to pay for the failed mission, the barons refused. They were annoyed by the request, in

part because they had not been consulted about the mission in the first place. And for the first time, Henry had to pay out of his own pocket.

The following year, Henry had to deal with an uprising in Wales, and once again, he had to fund the Welsh campaign out of his own resources.

The barons were becoming more and more frustrated with Henry's bad military decisions and constant requests for money. But all of that was compounded by Henry's invitation to various French nobles to come to England and receive English titles of nobility – and English lands. The entrenched English nobles didn't like having titles and lands doled out to foreigners. I discussed this in some detail back in Episode 99, so I won't revisit all of those developments here. But you will probably remember that a lot of those French nobles were Henry's in-laws and other relatives. First, there were his wife's relatives. And then, after his father died, his mother had returned to Aquitaine and re-married. When she died, her in-laws were also invited in. And those relatives were especially despised because they were cruel to their English subjects, and Henry repeatedly protected them in part because they loaned him money when he was in a bind.

But not all the French nobles who arrived in England during this period were Henry's relatives. Another visitor from across the Channel during this period was a man named Simon de Montfort, and he is very important to this story.

Simon was from a prominent French family, and he had a claim to the Earldom of Leicester in England through his father and his grandmother. The claims to that earldom were shaken up when Normandy was lost and the nobles had to choose between England and Normandy. Simon returned to England early in Henry's reign to press his claims to the earldom. Simon had a lot of connections to the French court in Paris, and early on, Henry was enamored with him and the two became friends. Simon then married Henry's sister Eleanor. So Simon ended up becoming a relative of Henry as well thanks to that marriage. Simon eventually secured his claims to the earldom of Leicester.

The great irony of Simon's political rise in England is that he was Frenchman who spoke little or no English – and was one of Henry's favorites. Yet he ended up becoming the leader of the English barons against the French nobles that Henry had invited to England. And in the process, he became the leader of the English barons against Henry himself.

So why was Simon de Montfort from France embraced by the English nobility against the other Frenchmen? Well, part of the answer lies in the fact that Simon was from northern France and shared a French dialect and culture that was similar to those of the Norman nobles in England. This was in contrast to most of the French nobles invited by Henry who were from Poitou, Aquitaine and other parts of southern France. As we've seen before, the language and culture of southern France was very different from that of northern France. It was more of a Mediterranean culture closer to the Italians and Spaniards. So they stood out among the traditional English nobles who had ties to northern France.

They would have been better tolerated had they slipped into England and tried to fit in. But they didn't. They took advantage of their new positions and tried to squeeze every penny out of their subjects. That was especially true of Henry's in-laws from Poitou. They were considered ill-mannered and violent. They sometimes looted and stole to fill their coffers. And Henry protected them. So there was no recourse to be had against them in the English courts.

During this period, the Bishop of Lincoln was Robert Grosseteste, and he was one of Henry's biggest critics. And he railed against the new nobles and church officials from southern France. Here is a quote from the Bishop from the year 1252. This is an English translation of the original Latin passage. "The Church is being worn out by constant oppressions; the pious purposes of its early benefactors are being brought to naught by the confiscation of its ample patrimony to the uses of aliens, while the native English suffer. These aliens are not merely foreigners; they are the worst enemies of England. They strive to tear the fleece and do not even know the faces of the sheep; they do not understand the English tongue, neglect the cure of souls, and impoverish the kingdom." So among the Bishop's many complaints against the intruders, he specifically points out their inability and unwillingness to speak English. And this shows that English identity was increasingly associated with the English language. And that had not really been the case since the Norman Conquest.

Opposition to the foreigners tended to unite the English barons, and it also allowed them to forge an alliance with the slowly expanding middle class of England.

What they really needed was a leader, and around this point in the mid-1250s, Simon de Montfort emerged as that leader. Simon had been put in charge of Gascony in the far south of France, but he and Henry fell out with each other over the administration of that region. Simon was eventually recalled to England and relieved of his command. He then became one of many barons frustrated with Henry's decision-making.

The following year, Henry launched another campaign in Gascony to put down rebellions there. It was expensive, and once again, Henry had to pay for the campaign out of his own resources. And as we've seen, he had doled out lands and revenues to his southern French relatives. So Henry's finances were in a perilous state. And then he made the situation even worse.

This final straw stemmed from events in Sicily in the Mediterranean. For several years, control of Sicily had been disputed between the Papacy and the Holy Roman Empire. The Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II claimed Sicily as part of his domain, but the Pope claimed it as a papal fief. Well, Frederick died in the year 1250, and the Pope wanted to cut off any claims to Sicily by Frederick's heirs. So the Pope started to shop around the throne of Sicily to anyone in Western Europe who might be interested in it and might be willing to pay for it. And Henry up in England was the perfect mark.

He agreed to assume the enormous debt that the papacy had incurred in its campaigns against the Holy Roman Emperor in Sicily. It was a sum in excess of 90,000 pounds which was an incredible amount of money as the time. In exchange for assuming that debt, the Pope agreed to recognize Henry's second son Edmund as the King of Sicily. It was all part of Henry's attempt

to become a major player in continental politics. But there was one major problem. Sicily was still controlled by Frederick's heirs, specifically Frederick's illegitimate son. So not only did Henry agree to assume a massive debt, he then had to mount a military campaign to go to Sicily and defeat the forces that actually controlled the island. At some point, Henry must have realized that he had bitten off more than he could chew and more than he could afford, but he couldn't back out. He didn't want the personal embarrassment of reneging on a promise, but more importantly, the Pope threatened to excommunicate him if he rescinded the agreement. And the Pope threatened to put England back under interdict.

Henry had no choice but to go to the barons with his tail between his legs. His finances were in a mess. He had assumed debts that he couldn't pay. And he had put the whole country in jeopardy through his poor decision-making.

Another meeting of the Great Council was called in May of 1258 in Oxford. At that meeting, Henry asked the barons to consent to a new round of taxes to pay all of Henry's obligations. Specifically, he asked for a tax equal to a third of all the goods in the country – both moveable and immoveable. So the tax was to be levied on everything from land to livestock. This time, the barons gave Henry an ultimatum. The king could have his taxes only if he agreed to a series of sweeping reforms – reforms that were so broad that they effectively turned Henry into a mere figurehead. Henry had little choice but to agree to their demands.

In many ways, this was repeat of what had happened to Henry's father John almost a half century earlier when he was forced to agree to Magna Carta. Once again, the barons had had enough and demanded political reforms

The gist of the baron's demands was that Henry turn over most of the government decisions to a new council of fifteen members. He had to agree to follow its decisions. So in essence, this new Council of Fifteen would effectively rule the country in Henry's name. Henry had operated without a chancellor, a treasurer and a justiciar for 14 years. Those were the three most important administrative positions in the English government. So the new Council of Fifteen was to choose persons to fill those offices, and those officers would also have to answer to the council.

The Council was also given authority over sheriffs and local officials in make sure that they were not abusing their authority. Henry's relatives from Poitou were also exiled. Ultimately, Henry had no choice but to agree to all of those reforms.

The membership of the new Council of Fifteen was heavily weighted in favor of the nobles who opposed Henry. It included five barons and seven earls. And one of those earls was the king's brother-in-law, Simon de Montfort. The council was rounded out with the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of Worcester and a royal clerk.

Again, the net effect of these reforms was to strip Henry of most of his power and place it in the hands of this new Council of Fifteen. These new reforms were known as the Provisions of Oxford. And they specifically required the Great Council to meet three times a year to supervise

the work of the smaller Council of Fifteen. The surviving summaries of those provisions specifically describe those regular meetings as ***parliaments*** – or ***parlemenz*** using the French term. Once again, the term referred to the meetings, not the council itself.

As soon as the general terms of the Provisions of Oxford were settled, the people of England were notified of the reforms though a letter that was sent to each shire. The shires were directed to obey the decisions of the council and were instructed to maintain a copy of the letter in the local archives. But here's the interesting thing. Those letters sent to each shire were written in French and English. For the first time in nearly two centuries, an official proclamation of the English crown was written in English. And there is little doubt why. Despite the fact that the letter was issued in Henry's name, it seems clear that the council directed it to be sent out. And it seems clear that the intent was to make sure that everybody in the countryside knew what was going on. And the only way to do that was to put it in English so everybody could read it, or have it read to them, in their own language.

Let me read the English version of that letter to you. As always, I'll give you a Modern English translation first, then the original Middle English. And I'm going to delete the final paragraph which is just a list of all the council members who joined in the execution of the letter.

Henry by God's grace, king of England, Lord of Ireland, Duke of Normandy and of Aquitaine and Earl of Anjou, sends greeting to all his subjects, learned and lewd, in Huntingdonshire.

Henri, thurgh Godes fultume King on Engleneloande, Lhoauerd on Yrloande, Duk on Normandi, on Aquitaine, and Eorl on Anjow, send igretinge to alle hise holde, ilærde and ileawede, on Huntendoneschire.

That you all may know well that we want and desire that our counsellors, the greater part of whom have been chosen by us and by the people in our kingdom, to act and should act according to the honour of God and loyalty to us, and for the good of the realm, according to the provisions of those aforesaid counsellors, that they be steadfast and firm in all things forever.

Thæt witen ȝe wel alle thæt we willen and unnen thæt, thæt ure rædesmen alle, other the moare dæl of heom, thæt beoth ichosen thurgh us and thurgh thæt loandes folk on ure kuneriche, habbeth idon and shullen don in the worthnesse of Gode and on ure treowthe, for the freme of the loande thurgh the besighte of than to foreniseide redesmen, beo stedefæst and ilestinde in alle thinge a buten ænde.

And we command and admonish all faithful and loyal men by the fealty that they owe us, firmly to hold and to swear to observe and maintain those statutes which have been made or shall in future be made by the council or by the majority thereof in the manner stated.

And we hoaten alle ure treowe in the treowthe thæt heo vs oȝen, thæt heo stedefæstliche healden and swerien to healden and to werien tho isetnesses thæt beon imakede and beon to makien, thurgh than to foren iseide redesmen, other thurgh the moare dæl of heom, alswo alse hit is biforen iseid;

And that all men help each other in doing this by the same oath against all men who either give or receive a bribe;

and thæt æhc other helpe thæt for to done bi than ilche othe agenes alle men right for to done and to foangen.

And that none shall take land or goods in any way which would infringe or impair this provision in any way.

And noan ne nime of loande ne of eghte wherthurgh this besighte mughe beon ilet other iwersed on onie wise.

And if any should oppose this decree, we will and command our faithful subjects to treat them as our mortal enemies.

And gif oni other onie cumen her ongenes, we willen and hoaten thæt alle ure treowe heom healden deadliche ifoan.

And since we wish this act to be steadfast and lasting, we are sending you this open writ sealed with our seal, to be held among you in your archives or hoard.

And for thæt we willen thæt this beo stedefæst and lestinde, we senden ȝew this writ open, iseined with ure seel, to halden amanges gew ine hord.

Now let me highlight a few parts of that proclamation. The first thing I should note is that the letter was drafted in Westminster, so it was composed in the London dialect of early Middle English, and it's the earliest example we have of that Middle English dialect. As we might expect, it has many features of southern dialects, but it also mixes in some other regional features. And that may be because people around the country were being drawn to London during this period so it was picking up a blend of linguistic features.

Also, as I noted earlier, this letter was sent out to the shires in French and English. So we can actually compare the two languages side-by-side. And in fact, most scholars agree that the English version is actually a translation of the French version. And it appears that the English verison intentionally used a more traditional, conservative form of English. It generally avoids French words, except for commonly accepted titles like ***duke***, ***count*** and ***marshal***, and the words ***sign*** and ***seal*** which were standard terms used to confirm the formal execution of a document. But in most cases, the letter avoids French words and prefers Old English words, even when the equivalent French term was already being used in English.

So the last word in the passage I read to you was ***hord*** (H-O-R-D), which we still have as the word ***hoard*** (H-O-A-R-D). Here it is used in the sense of an archive – a place where valuable objects are stored. But the French version of the letter uses the word ***tresor*** – or ***treasure***. And that French word was first found in English in the Peterborough Chronicle which was composed

north of London about a century earlier. So it seems likely that most English speakers would have understood that French term, but the Old English word was used instead.

Also, the men who comprised the new Council of Fifteen are identified as ***conseil*** in the French version. That's an early form of the word ***councillor***. Well, the word ***council*** is also recorded in the Peterborough Chronicle. In fact, it appears multiple times in that manuscript. And it also appears in the Ancrene Wisse. But in this letter, those councillors are referred as a ***rædesmen*** using that Old English word ***rædan*** which meant 'to advise or counsel.' We recently saw that ***ræd*** was also used as a suffix in words like ***hatred*** and ***kindred***. And we know that it was used in names like ***Alfred*** and ***Aethelred***. ***Alfred*** was literally 'elf counsel.' And ***Aethelred*** was literally meant 'noble counsel.' And we know that it created the Old English pun ***Aethelred Unread*** – literally 'noble counsel poorly counseled.' And here, the English translator used that very traditional Old English word in the term ***rædesmen*** rather than ***councillor***.

The opening of line of the letter begins, "Henry by God's grace, king of England, Lord of Ireland, Duke of Normandy and of Aquitaine and Earl of Anjou." So we can see that Henry still claimed his title to all of those French territories that had been lost. Well the French version reads, "Henri, par le grace Deu..." – "Henry by the grace of God...." But the English version translates that as "Henri, thurgh Godes fultume" – "Henry through God's fultume." So Old English ***fultume*** is used in place of the French word ***grace***. ***Fultume*** meant 'help or support' in Old English. But ***grace*** was already being used in English manuscripts. It appears in the Ancrene Wisse and several other religious texts written in English in the early 1200s. So again, we see the use of a traditional Old English word rather than a French word that was probably known by most English speakers.

Some scholars have suggested that those word choices were intentional. That this English proclamation was a fine piece of propaganda. That it was introducing some pretty radical political reforms, and it was intentionally written in English to appeal to the common people of England. They believe that it was designed to tap into a burgeoning anti-French sentiment in the English countryside by using a very traditional form of English that avoided French terms. If so, this is an early sign that politicians were starting to use English as a rallying cry to unite the English people.

We'll get a much more explicit example of this when we get to Henry's son Edward who once called his subjects to action by declaring that the French king wanted to wipe out the English language. So this letter may be some early evidence that an appeal to the English language was being used as a way to appeal to the English people. And that was a new development since the end of the Norman Conquest.

Let me mention a few other interesting things about that letter. We see another interesting translation in the English phrase ***deadliche ifoan*** – literally 'deadly foes.' Well, the French version used the phrase ***enemie mortel*** – literally 'mortal enemies.' Today, we use both phrases in English – 'deadly foes' and 'mortal enemies.'

Also notice that the word ***foes*** is rendered as ***ifoan***. So we see that the plural '-s' still hasn't made its way down to London from the north of England. In the final paragraph, the word ***words*** is rendered as ***worden***. And in another passage, the word ***things*** is rendered as ***thinge***. So again, this is a conservative form of English without the plural '-s' innovation which was gradually moving down from the north.

The letter also uses the word ***nime*** – a form of the Old English word ***niman*** which meant 'to take.' You might remember that ***take*** is a Norse word, and it replaced Old English ***niman***. Well, ***take*** was already in regular use in English. It was used in the Peterborough Chronicle, the Ormulum, and several other early Middle English manuscripts. But again, the translator sticks with an Old English word that was already on its way out.

A couple of other quick notes. We see the changing pronunciation of that Old English prefix 'ge-' (/ye/) – spelled G-E. In this letter, it appears as part of several words, but it is always rendered with a simple 'I.' So we have ***ichose***n rather than ***gechosen***. And the word ***learned*** is rendered as ***ilærde*** rather than ***gelærde***.

Let me also mention something about the spelling of some of those words. The word ***ilærde*** is spelled I-L-Æ-R-D-E. Æ was that Old English letter that looked like an A and an E pushed together. It represented the /æ/ sound. This old letter also appears in several other words in the proclamation. Now, as I've noted before, the French-trained scribes hated that letter because it wasn't used in French. And by this point, it had largely disappeared from English manuscripts. In fact, this letter is considered to be the last English document to use that letter.

However, it did re-appear in a few words in the Modern English period. You have probably seen the word ***encyclopedia*** spelled with that letter sometimes. And you might have seen the word ***archaeology*** spelled with that letter. Well those are loanwords that didn't become common in English until the Modern English period. And when those words were borrowed, some printers decided to bring that old letter back to represent a specific sound in those words. But in its original use as a regular letter to spell Old English words in English manuscripts, it was used for the last time in this proclamation confirming the Provisions of Oxford.

So once again, we see the scribe using an older feature of the language that had almost disappeared by that point. Whether or not these linguistic choices were intentional, it is clear that the parties involved thought that it was important to convey the message to the English people in English. And that was in part because the reforms radically changed the traditional role of the king in English government.

Despite the fact that Henry initially consented to the reforms, he soon became exasperated. The council sometimes met without even informing him of their meetings. When Henry did attend, they often ignored his advice. In one surviving record, the council responded to Henry's complaints by stating that they followed his advice "when he talks sense." [Making of England to 1399, Hollister, p. 275]

Soon, some of the barons started to have second thoughts about the whole arrangement. Henry's French relatives were now in exile. And the debt owed to the papacy was resolved by simply refusing to pay. The Pope backed down and looked for another candidate to assume the Sicilian crown.

With those major problems resolved, some of the barons started to prefer a return to the traditional order. They had no problem with the Council serving as advisors, but the council was acting independently of the king. And that was too much for some of the barons. In the year 1263, Henry took advantage of this split among the barons and withdrew his support for the reforms. He formally abolished the Council and brought back his French relatives and the abuses that they unleashed. This was the same thing John had done with Magna Carta. He initially supported it, then declared it null and void. And that led to a war with his barons. Well, the same thing happened here. When Henry rescinded the reforms, the barons took up arms.

Not only had the hated nobles from southern France returned, but Henry now had the open support of the French king. The barons who supported the reforms accused anyone who opposed them of being aliens or anti-English. By this point, Simon de Montfort had emerged as the clear leader of the barons. And he positioned himself as the defender of the English people against the French meddlers. Anyone who didn't speak with an English accent was viewed with scepticism and treated as a potential enemy. Of course, the great irony is that Simon himself barely spoke any English at all, but that just shows how good a politician he was.

He was also a great general, and in the year 1264, his forces defeated Henry's forces at the Battle of Lewes. Henry surrendered to the rebels and his eldest son Edward was taken hostage. Edward was the heir to the English throne, but for now, he was the prisoner of Simon de Montfort.

Simon was now the de facto ruler of England, and he re-instituted the reforms that Henry had revoked. But rather than being ruled by a Council of Fifteen, England was really ruled by Simon de Montfort for the next few years.

The following year Henry did something that may not have seemed like a big deal at the time, but it ultimately shaped the future of the English government. He decided to call another meeting of the Great Council. This was a parliament – an opportunity to discuss the important political issues of the day. But this parliament was different. Simon didn't just call the barons and earls and bishops. In order to generate widespread support for his rule, he called commoners as well. Every shire was directed to send two knights to give their views at the meeting. And several towns and cities were invited to send two representatives as well. Those representatives were to be elected and sent to Westminster. This shows the growing power base of the cities. And it also represents a major step in the direction of a type of representative government.

These knights and townsmen may not have been peasants, but they were commoners. The meetings of the Great Council were usually limited to the barons and earls and high church officials. But here, Simon de Montfort decided to include people outside of that traditional noble class. Simon probably realized that he was in a precarious position – essentially acting as the

king without actually being the king. It seems that he was trying to get the country behind him by appealing to all of the people of England – not just the barons.

Later scholars, especially the Victorians, considered this meeting in 1265 to be the first real parliament in England. And they also considered it to be ultimate origin of the House of Commons. The traditional barons and earls and bishops constituted what would later become known as the House of Lords. And the other invitees were the first version of what would eventually become the House of Commons. Of course, those two distinct houses were later developments. The knights and town representatives didn't set separately from the nobles until the 1320s.

Even though the House of Commons was a later development, Simon's 1265 parliament was the first major step in that direction. And for that reason, Simon de Montfort is sometimes called the "Father of Parliament." And believe it or not, a portrait of Simon de Montfort hangs in the United States House of Representatives. His is one of 23 portraits that hang over the gallery doors of the House Chamber. The portraits depict historical figures who contributed to the modern representative government.

Unfortunately for Simon, his time as the de factor ruler of England was short-lived. It was too much of a break from tradition for an earl to rule England. And his support eroded over time.

One of the reasons why the 1265 parliament was called in the first place was to discuss the terms for releasing Henry's son Edward from house arrest, but that issue resolved itself five months later when Edward escaped. He then proceeded to raise an army, and in August of 1265, his forces soundly defeated Simon's forces at the Battle of Evesham. Simon was killed, and his body was chopped to pieces. This grand experiment in baronial government came to an end. The Provisions of Oxford were once again annulled – this time permanently. And even though Henry III resumed his authority, he was getting pretty old by that point. He had reigned for nearly 50 years. So over the next few years, his son Edward assumed more and more power and responsibility. And Henry increasingly faded into the background.

In many ways, the events of this period mirrored the events associated with Magna Carta a few years earlier. And if Magna Carta laid the foundation for the House of Lords, the Provisions of Oxford laid the foundation for the House of Commons.

Going forward, the meetings of those nobles and representatives were known as parliaments, and eventually the institution itself became known as Parliament. As the etymology of the word ***parliament*** suggests, it was a place where nobles and representatives met to discuss the important political matters of the day. For most its history, Parliament was not a barrier in the king's way. It was actually an extension of the king's authority. It's role in English government was really secured by Henry's son Edward who used it in a skillful way to implement his royal policies.

Despite these important developments in English government, the English language continued to take a backseat in political and legal affairs. For now, almost all government records continued

to be kept in Latin. Soon, more and more records were maintained in French. And French became the official language of Parliament. But English was nowhere to be found. In fact, it would take nearly another century for English to be declared the official language of England for government and legal proceedings.

But that long road back to acceptance really began in 1258 with that letter to the English people in the countryside announcing a series of sweeping political reforms that ultimately led to Parliament.

Next time, we'll continue to look at events during this period. We'll turn our attention to a growing threat from the east, and the important role of trade and commence in the late 1200s. And as always, we'll see how these events shaped the English language.

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