THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 118: TRADE NAMES

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 118: Trade Names. In this episode, we're going to continue our look at the development of English surnames in the 1300s. Specifically, we're going to explore the rise of occupational surnames. Like other surnames, names based on specific jobs or trades became common in the period after the Norman Conquest. And they were really an outgrowth of the changing job market during the Middle Ages. Towns and cities were growing, and jobs were becoming more and more specialized. And it was increasingly common to refer to people by their occupation. A job title helped to distinguish people who otherwise had the same first name. And many of those occupational surnames still exist today. In some cases, those surnames still exist even though the original word for the job or trade has largely disappeared. So those names serve as relics of time when the job market was very different from today.

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 and get bonus episodes and transcripts at Patreon.com/historyofenglish.

Also, if you missed my recent announcement, I had the opportunity to sit in on the Lexitecture Podcast when I was in Boston for the Sound Education conference. In keeping with the format of that show, we each introduced a word and discussed its etymology. That episode is Episode 26, and again, it's the Lexitecture Podcast. Also, while I was at the conference, I sat down with Mark and Aven of the Endless Knot Podcast, and we talked about the history of English and the history and future of this particular podcast as well. So if you have time, be sure to check out that episode as well. It is Episode 64 of the Endless Knot Podcast. That's ENDLESS KNOT Podcast. While I was at the conference, I also spoke on a panel about language podcasting, and I gave a short talk about the history of English. That audio should also be available in a few weeks, so I'll post some of that audio as well when its ready. So with that, let's turn to this episode.

Last time, we looked at the adoption of surnames in the wake of the Norman Conquest of England. At first, the names were largely descriptive – identifying the person by reference to his or her parents, or place of residence, or some personal characteristic. So the earliest surnames were unique to the individual who bore the name. They were not hereditary. They didn't necessarily pass on to the person's children and grandchildren. But that started to change around the current point in the overall story of English in the 1300s. During this period, those names became family names, and it became common for them to pass from generation.

Together with the descriptive names that I described last time, there was one other type of surname that was extremely common, and that was a name based on the person's job or occupation.

Those types of surnames are fascinating because they reveal a great deal about the culture in which they evolved. They indicate the types of jobs and careers that were common at the time. But they also reflect how the job market had changed by the High Middle Ages. A quick survey of occupational surnames reveals just how specialized many occupations had become during this

period. Most common trades like cloth making, carpentry, iron working, and leather making were all divided into numerous sub-specialities. And the surviving names reflect just how specialized those jobs had become.

This part of the story is fundamentally tied to the growth of towns and cities in the Middle Ages. In England, this growth was especially notable in the period after the Norman Conquest. There were lots of factors that came together to allow for that growth during that period.

One of those factors was an increase in agricultural production. Farm tools and machinery had improved and had become more widespread. Farmers had started to master crop rotation practices to produce a greater yield on the same land. More land had been cleared and drained which made more land available for farming. So England was producing more food, and that meant that the country could support a larger population. And in fact, the overall population of England was growing in both the urban areas and in the countryside. At the time of the Norman Conquest, the population of England was probably no more than two million people. But by the year 1300, the population had tripled to around six million.

In addition to the overall growth that was taking place, there was also a significant amount of migration from the countryside into the towns and cities. For many peasants, there were more opportunities in the urban areas. Also, many rural peasants essentially lived as serfs – tied to the land they farmed. Some of them escaped that burden by leaving for the city and hiding out among the urban population. So towns grew in size as more and more people moved in from the countryside.

Let's look at some numbers to get an idea of how much towns and cities grew in the two centuries after the Conquest. As we know, the Domesday Book was compiled shortly after the Conquest in the year 1086. It provides a wealth of knowledge about the population of England at the time. It indicates that only about 10% of the population lived in urban areas. But over the next two centuries, that percentage essentially doubled. By the current point in our overall story in the early 1300s, the percentage of people who lived in urban areas had increased from 10% to around 20%. This urban growth is also reflected in the changing population of London. Around the time of the Domesday Book, the population of the city was about 25,000 people. But by the early 1300s, it had quadrupled to about 100,000. *[Source: "Life in the Middle Ages," Whittock, p.55.]*

As more and more people moved to towns and cities, a subtle cultural shift started to take place. Self-sufficiency started to give way to interdependency. In rural areas where people lived on farms and manors, there was a great deal of self-sufficiency. Many rural communities largely lived on the products they produced locally. Peasants worked the fields, tended the flocks, spun yarn, mended clothing, and did whatever else they needed to do. Jobs were a bit more basic, and a rural peasant was more likely to be a 'jack of all trades.'

But as towns grew – with more and more people living together in confined quarters – there wasn't enough room for people to grow their own crops and tend their own flocks. They had to rely on other people to provide those necessities. And their income had to come from other sources.

So the economy of the city was very different from that of the country. The urban economy relied on trade and commerce for survival. People made their living by providing whatever goods and services their skills allowed them to provide. They served as builders and day-laborers. They sold bread and other basic food items. They sold a wide variety of hand-made consumer products. If adequately trained, they provided administrative services to the government or the church. And after many years of training, some urban residents could provide more specialized services. That included workers who made sophisticated products from iron, wood, glass, leather and other materials.

So urban life required people to focus on a particular job or profession, and that job or profession didn't usually involve traditional agriculture. In fact, a town could be defined as a place where a sizeable portion of the population made their living in an occupation other than agriculture.

The key to all of this was the local market. Farmers from the countryside traded with the local townspeople, and the townspeople traded with each other. Townspeople bought food products from the countryside, and rural peasants bought a wide variety of consumer items made in towns and cities. So the market was the lifeblood of the city.

In many cases, towns and cities were established by barons or landholders mainly because they could collect a fee for the right to have the market.   Markets generated a lot of revenue for landholders, so they were more than willing to set aside some of their land for a new town or city which would include a market to fuel the local economy.

Markets were so important that many people made their living as traders. They bought and sold goods for profit. You might remember from earlier episodes that the Anglo-Saxons called a market a *ceap* which ultimately is the source of our modern word *cheap* meaning inexpensive. And a trader or salesman was called a *ceapman*. That old word has largely disappeared from English, but it still survives as the surname *Chapman*, as well as the name *Chipman*. These surnames became common and widespread throughout the 1200s.

During this same time period, that old word *ceapman* started to be replaced with the French word *merchant*. *Merchant* has also survived as a surname. Another variation of *merchant* was *mercer*, and *Mercer* is an even more common surname today. If there was any difference between a *merchant* and a *mercer*, it was that a *mercer* was usually a dealer in textiles and cloth – especially fine cloth like silk, satin and velvet.

It is important to keep in mind that names like *Merchant* and *Mercer* were descriptive names. They weren't fixed hereditary names yet. So the same person could be identified in some records as "Chapman" and in other records as "Merchant." We actually have examples of this. A survey from the village of Elton north of London identifies a man as Robertus Chapman with the Old

English term for a trader. But in a separate record composed in Latin, the same man is identified as Robertus Mercator with the Latin version of the word *merchant*. So these weren't fixed surnames yet. They were merely descriptive. *[Source: "Life In a Medieval Village," Gies, p. 69-72.]*

Now today, I think we tend to think of merchants as salespeople. But in the markets of the Middle Ages, merchants were both buyers and sellers. Sometimes the merchant would buy small items or commodities from people who were looking to sell those items. And then the merchant would turn around and sell those items to someone else.

We might call that type of merchant a broker today. And in fact, the word *broker* was a brand new word in the English language in the mid-1300s. It was borrowed from French, where the original sense of the word was more of a wine dealer. *Broker* is actually related to the word *broach*, and the original sense of the word *broker* was the person who broached or tapped a cask with wine in it. The broker would buy the barrel or cask of wine, and then tap it for resale to the public.

Once the word *broker* was borrowed into English, the meaning expanded. The term acquired a more general sense of one who buys a commodity and then resells it. So it was no longer limited to wine. It could refer to anyone who bought an item and then resold it, and it could also refer to a person who coordinated that type of transaction. So it could mean a middleman – a person who coordinated a transaction between other parties – which is more of the modern sense of the word. But *broker* was new in the language in the 1300s, and it also contributed to the surname *Brooker*. The name *Brooker* was also coined as a place name meaning someone who resided near a brook. So the name was derived from two different sources. But one of those sources was a broker or merchant.

Now a broker or merchant who has a stall in a town market had to be careful when buying items from the general public. There were lots of people running scams even back them. They would often bring their goods in a sack or bag. Sometimes, the person was trying to sell a live animal – like a piglet or a chicken or rabbit or other animal. Of course, the merchant usually checked the merchandise, but if it was a live animal, it could jump out and run away. So the merchant sometimes bought the animal without opening the bag – sight unseen. This type of transaction gave English two common phrases.

One of those phrases refers to a scam where a peasant purported to sell a small animal to a merchant like a rabbit or chicken, but the peasant was actually selling a common animal like a cat. In a busy market, the merchant might not bother to check the sack for fear of releasing the animal. But a prudent merchant would take the time just to make sure. Since cats were often used for this type of subterfuge, this type of check became known as "letting the cat out of the bag." Over time, the phrase came to mean an important discovery or revelation. The phrase isn't actually found in an English document until the 1700s, but most scholars think the phrase is much older than that.   For example, French, Dutch and German all had similar expressions which applied to merchants who weren't so prudent. In those cases, it was said that the merchant had "bought a cat in a bag." It meant that the buyer had purchased false goods – and had been

scammed by the seller. The English phrase "let the cat out of the bag" is just a different take on the same idea. Instead of 'buying a cat in a bag' and being scammed, the English phrase is "let the cat out of the bag" meaning to reveal the scam or to otherwise disclose a secret.

English also developed another expression as a warning to careless buyers. And that phrase was "Don't buy a pig in a poke." That expression makes a lot more sense when you realize that *pig* actually meant a small piglet in Middle English, and a *poke* meant a bag or a sack. So "Don't buy a pig in a poke" literally means "Don't buy a small piglet in a bag."

The idea is that some sellers would try to pass off a small piglet or a runt as an older pig. When the merchant didn't check the bag or poke to make sure, he was sometimes stuck with a piglet in the bag – or a "pig in the poke." So the phrase "Don't buy a pig in a poke" meant "Don't get taken advantage of." In other words, "Buyer beware."

Evidence of this warning can be found in a manuscript that was composed in the early 1300s called The Proverbs of Hendyng. It's a collection of proverbial sayings, and one of them reads: "Wan man ȝevit þe a pig, opin þe powch." In Modern English, it reads, "When a man gives you a pig, open the pouch." By the 1500s, this old proverb was being rendered in its modern form with the word *poke* instead of *pouch*. So the phrase "Never buy a pig in a poke" can be traced back to the early 1300s.

Now that word *poke* is important for another reason. Outside of that phrase "pig in a poke," only a few dialects still use the word *poke* for a bag. But it is much more common in a slightly altered form as the word *pocket*. And that was another brand new word in the mid-1300s.

In the Middle Ages, people didn't really have pockets on their clothing. So in the markets of these growing towns and cities, people carried their money and other valuables in a pouch or poke that hung from their belt. Since this was usually a small bag, it was given the '-et' ending which was used to indicate something small. So instead of a *poke*, this type of bag was called a *pokete*. But the problem with the *pokete* is that it hung from the belt which was exposed to the public. And that meant that a thief could grab it and steal it. So people started to wear the *pokete* under their clothing. And over time, the pokete was sewed into the clothing itself to make it more secure, at which time it actually became part of the clothing. And that gave us the modern sense of the word *pokete* – or *pocket*.

Men were much more likely to have these types of early pockets since men's clothing was bulkier and the sewed-in bags could be more easily concealed. Women's clothing tended to be tighter and more form fitting, so there wasn't enough room for a bulky bag or pokete to be added as an early type of pocket. So women continued to carry their valuables in a bag or poke. And that's is still common to this day, at least when men and women dress formally. Men are more likely to carry their money or valuables in a pocket, whereas women are more likely to carry it in a bag or purse. And to a large extent, that has to do with traditional fashions and the bulky nature of early pockets which were really just bags or pokes that were sewed into clothing.

Again, these sewed-in pockets came along in the 1600s and 1700s. So at the current point in our story, merchants and market patrons still carried their valuables in a bag on their belt. Though pockets in the modern sense didn't exist yet, the word *pocket* – or *pokete* – was being used to refer to those bags. And interestingly, the word was also being used as a surname. Names like Adam Poket and Robert Poket were being used in the 1200s. The exact meaning of those surnames is unclear. It may have referred to a person who made those types of bags.

Now we've seen that the Medieval English market was really the lifeblood of most towns and cities. And in the first couple of centuries after the Norman Conquest, those merchants and peddlers began to organize themselves into groups that became known as Merchant Guilds.

I've mentioned these Merchant Guilds before. Back in Episode 74, I discussed how they became the first governing bodies of most towns and cities in the Middle Ages. Rather than individual residents paying rent to the lord who owned the land where the town was located, these Merchant Guilds would collect the rent from the tenants and then pay it to the lord in a lump sum each year. And for an extra fee added in, the Merchant Guild was given a degree of independence to run the town without interference from the lord. These were really the first guilds.

But over time, as jobs became more specialized, specific occupations began to organize themselves in a similar manner. So bakers, carpenters, clothworkers, butchers – they all eventually formed their own guilds. This process began in the 1100s, but the heyday of the craft guilds was really the late 1200s and early 1300s. The various guilds essentially operated as a cartel in the cities by restricting competition and protecting the quality of the goods and services that were being provided. The guilds were dominated by masters – or people who had practiced the particular craft for many years. In order to join a guild, a person had to serve several years as an apprentice under the supervision of a master. Then he or she could become a journeyman working for other masters. Eventually, after many years, the worker could be accepted as a master in his or her own right. The guilds regulated the prices of their products, as well as the quality of the goods and services provided. They prevented outsiders from competing. And if a member became disabled or died, the guild would step in to provide assistance to the master or the master's family.

So guilds controlled specific occupations. And they ensured that the elite masters kept control over their particular craft or occupation.

The young apprentices who studied under the masters usually did so with little or no compensation. The apprentice might be given food and a place to sleep, but he didn't have the rights or benefits of a modern-day employee. He was a type of indentured servant, and in fact, this type of apprenticeship arrangement was called an *indenture* using that newly borrowed word from French and Latin. The indenture was the contract between the apprentice and the master, and the terms usually meant that the young apprentice gave up his freedom for a certain period of time essentially agreeing to a type of forced servitude.

That word *indenture* has an interesting etymology which reflects the nature of these Medieval contracts. And believe it or not, an *indenture* is actually related to the word *dentures*. They both come from the same Latin root word, and they both have to do with teeth. An *indenture* is also a variation of the word *indent*. The ultimate connection is the Latin word *dens* meaning tooth. Of course, this is the root that gives us words like *dentist*, *dental*, and *dentures*. But teeth often have a jagged appearance – especially the teeth of animals with sharp canines or a person with a few missing teeth which was common in the Middle Ages. And that produced the word *indent* meaning to notch something or create a mark or offset that resembles a tooth mark.

So what did teeth and notches have to do with an indenture – the type of contract executed by an apprentice? Well, that type of contract between the master and the apprentice was usually written down on a piece of parchment, and the parchment was the cut down the middle with a jagged, zig-zag line. As a result, each piece of the contract was left with a jagged edge that resembled teeth. Thus the name *indenture*. And the reason that was done was to ensure that the two portions of the contract fit together at the point of the cut. The matching edges proved that each person's portion of the contract was authentic and part of the original document. The word *indenture* is still a common term in law and finance. It usually refers to specific types of contracts today.

So a young apprentice was a type of indentured servant. After a certain number of years, the apprentice was freed from the restrictions of the indenture and was able to become a journeyman. Journeymen were skilled and trained workers, but they didn't have their own workshops. They worked for other masters. At the top of totem pole were the masters, and the masters typically had their own shops or workshops. They also owned their own tools and equipment. And this points to another important development of this period. The rise of the free-standing shop.

In many cases, the person's shop was also his or her home, but it was still a notable development because most commerce had previously been conducted in the local market or the local fair. Now, workers were starting to open their own shops in town. So the town itself was starting to develop a business district.

Today, we might call these businesses 'retail' outlets, and the word *retail* was a another new word in the language in the mid-1300s. A person who made articles of clothing might have a shop in his or her home where clothing was made to order. That person was a *tailor* – another new word in the language having been borrowed from French. So a tailor might have a retail shop. And you might notice some similarity between those words *tailor* and *retail*.

They both appeared in English in the early to mid-1300s, and they are both derived from the same Latin root word. The root word was *taliare* meaning to split or cut. So a *tailor* was someone who cut cloth or fabric to make articles of clothing. Within French, the word *tailor* could also refer to a stonemason – someone who cut stone. That word *tailor* also gave us the surname *Taylor* – usually spelled T-A-Y-L-O-R today.

But the word *retail* is a much broader term referring to shops that sell all kinds of goods. So what's the connection between tailors and retailers? Well, a retailer took a large group of items and then split them up into small parts for sale. So a baker would bake many loaves of bread, and then divide them up for sale. And a butcher would take a large animal, and then cut it up into small pieces for sale. So the word *retail* literally means to cut or divide a large item or a large group of items into smaller parts for sale to the public.   And this makes even more sense when we compare that term to the word *wholesale* which appeared a few years later in the early 1400s. *Wholesale* was literally 'to sell the whole.' So a wholesaler sold a bundle or whole group of items, and the retailer divided those items into small parts for sale. And again, retail is derived from the same Latin root word meaning to cut or divide just like the word *tailor*.

Now I said that the word *wholesale* entered English in the early 1400s. And it is not a loanword. It is actually a native construction. Both *whole* and *sale* are Old English words. So people started to combine those native words in the 1400s to form the compound word *wholesale*. But in addition to that natively formed word, there was another word that expressed a similar idea, and it was a loanword from French. That was the word *grocer*. It referred to someone who sold items in bulk, so it was basically a wholesaler.

Now today, we think of a *grocer* as a person who sells food. We go to the grocery store to buy groceries. But the word originally meant something quite different. The word *gross* meant large or a large amount. Today, in the realm of numbers, it has a very specific meaning of 144 – or a dozen dozen. You might remember from the recent episode on numbers that the word was acquired from the French phrase a 'gross dozen' which literally meant a 'large dozen,' but came to mean a dozen dozen. So *gross* meant a large amount. And someone who sold items or commodities in large quantities was therefore called a *grocer*. So again, it basically meant a wholesaler. And then the retailer would cut or divide that bulk quantity into smaller units for resale.

Well, the word *grocer* is recorded for the first time in English in the early 1400s, but it was almost certainly being used by English speakers in the early to mid 1300s. And we know that in part because it was being used in that earlier period in Latin and French document composed in England. But more notably, the grocers guild was founded in England in the year 1344. That guild was called the Company of Grocers. *Company* was another new loanword from French in the 1300s. And a closer look at the Company of Grocers explains how the word *grocer* acquired its modern sense over time.

The Company of Grocers – or the grocer's guild – was made up mostly of wholesalers who bought items in bulk from international traders, especially spices and other foreign foodstuffs like dried fruits and sugar. So these early grocers were selling all types of items, but they were mostly selling imported food items. So naturally, over time, the word *grocer* became associated with the sale of foodstuffs. And by the late 1400s and 1500s, the word had been largely restricted to that modern sense.

As the meaning of ***grocer*** became more and more restricted to food-sellers, English needed a word to fill the gap that was left behind. In other words, English needed a new word for traders who sold all kinds of items in bulk – not just food items. So that's why that newly-coined word ***wholesaler*** came in to fill in that gap that was being left behind.

Now before that digression into retailers, wholesalers and grocers, I noted that many merchants were operating their own shops by the mid-1300s. I alluded to this development back in Episode 106 about illuminated manuscripts. In that episode, I mentioned that booksellers were called ***stationers*** because they operated shops that were stationary – in fixed locations usually near universities. And that ultimately gave us the word ***stationery*** referring to certain types of paperwork.

Well now that we are a little deeper into the Middle Ages, more and more merchants operated out of fixed locations. Again, that location was often their home, but it was still a notable development.

As shops began to become more common, shop owners needed to promote their shops to the public. They needed to let everyone know what type of goods or services they provided. Today, shop owners just put up a sign that says what they are selling. But in the Middle Ages, most of their potential customers couldn't read. So they had to find other ways to describe or distinguish their businesses. So they tended to use objects or pictures in their signs.

The use of pictures or symbols on Medieval signs helps to explains the creative names often used by pubs. Pub owners tended to use names that could be represented with pictures like The Fox and the Hound, The Golden Dove or The Boar's Head.

Many shop keepers created signs that incorporated a common tool of the trade. So for example, tailors often used signs that contained a picture of scissors. And shoemakers marked their shops by hanging a large shoe outside of their shop, or sometimes they used a sign with a shoe on it. You didn't have to read to figure out that a shoe represented a shoemaker's shop.

Over time, as literacy spread, shop keepers started to use more words in their signs. And a lot of those old occupational symbols disappeared, but a couple of those old occupational symbols have survived into the modern era. For example, pawnbrokers still use a symbol that contains three hanging balls, and that symbol goes back to the Middle Ages. It was originally a symbol adopted by the money lender's guild of Florence, Italy, and it was associated with the famous Medici family of Florence. Over time, pawnbrokers throughout Europe adopted that symbol, and as I noted, it is still widely used today.

Another occupational sign from the Middle Ages that still exists today is the red and white barber's pole. You're probably familiar with those poles, but you might not know that they have their origin in England at a time when barbers were also surgeons.

In the Middle Ages, barbers didn't just cut hair and trim beards. If there was any kind of cutting to be done to the human body, the barber was usually the person who handled it. They had access to razors or other cutting tools, so if you had a boil that needed to be lanced, or a tooth that needed to be extracted, you went to the barber.

Also, as I noted in an earlier episode, blood-letting was a common treatment for a variety of illnesses. So if you needed someone to cut you and drain some blood, you went to the barber. Whenever barbers let blood, they had their patients grab a pole and squeeze it tightly. That made the veins swell. But as the blood drained, some of it would inevitably get on the pole. So barbers tended to paint the pole red to hide or conceal the blood that ended up on the pole. And this became the standard symbol of those barber surgeons. They would hang that red pole outside of their shops in the same way that a shoemaker would put out a shoe or a pawnbroker would place a sign with three hanging balls.

In the year 1308, the first Barber's guild was formed in England. It later became known as the Company of Barbers and Surgeons. As far as the red-and-white spiral design of the barber's pole, there are a few theories about that design. One common story is that the barbers would often wrap white gauze around the red barber pole that hung outside of the barbershops. This was the same white gauze that was used to tie up a patient's arm after the blood was let. Over time, it became common to simply paint the pole in this same manner with a red-and white spiral to represent the white gauze wrapped around the traditional red pole. Again, there are some other variations of this story, but that design was in common use until the guild of Barbers and Surgeons was finally disbanded in the 1700s. After that, the barbers and surgeons went their separate ways, but interestingly, it was the barbers who kept the pole even though its design reflected the surgical aspect of the profession. American barbers have tended to replace the traditional red and white pole with a red white and blue pole to reflect the national colors, but it has the same ultimate origin. And of course, the name *Barber* still survives as a common occupational surname.

Now so far, we've focused on some of the factors that led to the specialization of occupations. In the second half of this episode, I want to take you around a typical town or city in the Middle Ages to see what kind of occupations existed, and to see how those jobs contributed to the development of many modern surnames.

If you were to travel to a medieval town of city, you would encounter many different types of craftsmen. The common Old English word for a craftsman was a *wrihta* which became modern *Wright* – W-R-I-G-H-T. *Wright* is actually related to the word *work*. If something is 'worked,' it is said to be *wrought* like wrought iron. And from *wrought* to *wright*, we can start to hear that connection. So a *wright* was literally a worker, but it really meant a craftsman or builder.

The word *wright* still exists as a common surname, like the Wright Brothers who built bicycles and airplanes. But outside of names, we don't tend to use the word very much by itself anymore. We mostly use it in combination with other words like *playwright* – literally a 'play worker.' Other combinations were also common at one time like *wheelwright* meaning a 'maker of

wheels' and *shipwright* meaning a someone who made ships. A few of these combinations still exist as surnames. That includes *Wainwright* which meant a maker of wagons. *Wain* was a variation of the word *wagon*.

Another job that was very similar to a *Wainwright* was a *Cartwright* which meant a maker of carts. And *Cartwright* also survives as a surname.

Now carts and wagons were very important in the Middle Ages. They were essential to the movement of goods and commodities across land. Of course, they were usually pulled by oxen or horses. So they were pulled behind the animals. But to express the idea that someone was overly eager, one could say that they "put the cart before the horse." That expression still exists today, and we can find its origin in English in a document that was composed around the current point in our overall story. Around the year 1340, a writer named Dan Michel composed a text called "Ayenbite of Inwit" which literally translates as "Remorse of Conscience." It was a translation of an earlier French manuscript, and in one passage, he wrote "Moche uolk of religion zetteth the zouly be-uore the oksen." In Modern English, it reads, "Many religious folk set the plow before the oxen."   Over the next couple of centuries, this expression evolved into the more modern version – "put (or set) the cart before the horse." I should note that this concept is much older than that English phrase. The Romans even had a similar saying, but Dan Michel gave us the first known English version of the proverb in the mid-1300s.

Now cart drivers or wagon drivers didn't usually get the cart before the horse. If they did, that would have been a big problem. A cart driver was sometimes called a *carter*, and that term still survives as the surname *Carter*.   And I mentioned that the word *wain* was a variation of the word *wagon*, and a 'wain driver' or 'wagon driver' was one of the sources of the modern surname *Wayne* – W-A-Y-N-E.

So I began this discussion with terms like *wainwright* and *cartwright* and *wheelwright*. Those words referred to makers of wagons, carts and wheels, respectively. As you can see from these examples, the word *wright* often referred to a person who built things. So it was commonly used to mean a wood-worker or carpenter. Up to this point, English speakers didn't actually use the word *carpenter* because it wasn't a word native to English. But around the current point in overall story, the word *carpenter* was borrowed from French. It first appeared in an English document composed around the year 1325. And of course, the word *carpenter* also become a common surname over time.

Now as we might expect, carpenters or wood workers were in high demand. Many items were made out of wood – from houses, to carts, to furniture, to small utensils. Wood working began with the person who sawed timber into planks and boards. That occupation gave us the surname *Sawyer*. Some craftsmen specialized in carving wood or other substances thereby producing the surname *Carver*.

Some wood workers carved wood with a knife or other sharp object, but others used a lathe. A lathe would spin the wood allowing the craftsman to make circular or other rounded shapes. That was essential for making spokes and spindles used to make wheels, chairs, tables and other

objects. The person who worked a lathe was called a *turner* because the lathe turned the wood that was being shaped. And that ultimately gave us the surname *Turner*.

Some wood workers specialized in making smaller objects like boxes and chairs and other pieces of furniture. This required the worker to prepare the individual pieces and them assemble them into the finished product. The assembly required the pieces to be joined together, so these types of carpenters became known as *joiners* using the French term *join*. And that gave us the surname *Joiner*.

Some wood workers specialized in making fences. That profession came to be known by a French term – *paliser*. That word is related to the word *palisade*. So a *paliser* was a fence maker, and it was once a common surname, though it is pretty rare today.

Of course, carpenters and wood workers also built houses and other buildings. A person who made tiles was called a *tiler* which produced the surname *Tyler*. A worker who made or laid slate was called a *slater* which gave us the surname *Slater*. A person who thatched roofs was called a *thatcher* giving us the surname *Thatche*r.

Of course, construction didn't just depend on wood. Builders also used stone and brick. A person who worked with stone was called a *mason* which was borrowed from French in the late 1200s. We still use that word today, and we still have the surname *Mason*.

A person who made bricks was called *burner* because bricks had to be hardened by fire. During the Middle English period, *burner* became *brennar*, and that gave us the surname *Brenner*. So a *brenner* was a brick maker.

Builders also worked with iron and other metals – especially nails. Just as today, nails were essential to carpenters. Very often, a carpenter would drive a nail through two or more pieces of wood, and then he would take his hammer and bend the nail on the back side so it wouldn't come out. That was a clinching technique, but anytime a nail was bent in this fashion, it was said to be 'dead,' because bent nails can never really be used again. This technique was commonly used when building doors, and that helps to explain the phrase "dead as a doornail." It literally meant a doornail that had been bent during the construction of the door. The phrase is found in English for the first time in the mid-1300s in the well-known Middle English poem called Piers Plowman. It isn't clear why this particular phrase has endured the centuries, but it may have to do with the alliteration and the short rhythmic nature of the phrase "dead as a doornail."

Now nails were used by carpenters and wood workers, but they were made by other craftsmen. Sometimes they were made by specialist nail makers called *nailers*. They actually had their own guild, and the occupation produced the surname *Naylor* – N-A-Y-L-O-R.

Other times, nails were made by blacksmiths and ironmongers.   And of course, blacksmiths were in high demand. They made a wide variety of items like tools, swords, chains, weapons, armor and horseshoes. And their profession gave us one of the most common surnames of all – the name *Smith*. The name is ultimately derived from the same Germanic root as the word

smite. So a *smith* was literally a person who smites or cuts or forges. It was mostly used in reference to craftsmen who worked with iron and other metals.

In fact, early on, there were actually blacksmiths and whitesmiths. A *blacksmith* tended to work with darker metals like iron, whereas a *whitesmith* worked with lighter-colored metals like tin. Whitesmiths also made metal objects with a shiny luster. The smiths who worked with silver were sometimes called *silversmiths*, and the smiths who worked with gold were called *goldsmiths*. But *blacksmith* has endured as a somewhat generic term for all craftsmen who work with metals.

The word *smith* was also applied to other words to indicate a specific type of craftsman. For example, a craftsman who made or repaired locks was – and still is – called a *locksmith*. And a person who made knives was called a *knife-smith* which later produced the surname *naesmith*.

In addition to the native term *knife-smith*, English also borrowed a French term for a knife maker which was *cutler*. And *Cutler* also survives as a surname. The trade of the cutler was called *cutlery*, and that term is still used today for the knives and other related items made and sold by cutlers.

Now over the centuries, the word *cutlery* has acquired an even broader meaning, including forks and spoons as well as knives. It basically includes all kinds of eating utensils. Knives were common utensils in the Anglo-Saxon period, and the word *knife* was a common Old English word. The Anglo-Saxons also had the word *fork*, but they didn't really eat with forks. They only used the word fork in the sense of a farming implement like a pitchfork. The Anglo-Saxons used their fingers when they ate so they didn't really need forks.

For soup, porridge and other liquids, the Anglo-Saxons would usually drink out of a bowl. They didn't normally use spoons, but they were familiar with them. A couple of silver spoons were found in the old Anglo-Saxon ship buried at Sutton Hoo. And other Anglo-Saxon spoons have been uncovered over the centuries. But it doesn't appear that everyday Anglo-Saxons used them very much. They were mainly reserved for the nobles and the wealthy. There also isn't a clearly attested word for a spoon in Old English.

However, Old English DID have the word *spoon* – or *spon* – as it was probably pronounced at the time. That may seem like a contradiction, but the word *spoon* didn't refer to an eating utensil at the time. It actually referred to a chip or splinter of wood. In fact, these types of chips – or spoons – were used for tiles. So a person who worked with these types of tiles could be called either a *tiler* or a *spooner*. And both terms still survive as surnames.

But in the mid 1300s, around the current point in our overall story, the word *spoon* started to be used in its modern sense as an eating utensil. It appears that this new sense of the word came from the Vikings. As we know, the Viking spoke Old Norse, and Old Norse also had this same Germanic word for a chip or splinter. In Old Norse, it was more like *span*, and the meaning had evolved over time to mean an eating utensil used to eat soups and other liquids. English

apparently borrowed this sense of the word, and it became the primary meaning within English as well.

It isn't entirely clear why the meaning of the word evolved within Old Norse. One possibility is that Norse speakers used chips to eat soft foods in the same way that we dip potato chips or crisps into dip, or the way we dip tortilla chips into salsa or quacamole. Another possibility is that it evolved out of the sense of the word *spoon* as a splinter or piece of wood. We know that the Vikings carved spoons out of wood. And they probably began with large splinters or chips of wood. Either way, the word *span* or *spoon* evolved from a chip to an eating utensil.

Now Old Norse didn't just give English a new meaning for the word *spoon*. It also gave English a new expression – "span new." It literally meant 'spoon new,' but it was used to mean something that was new and unsoiled. Most eating utensils became dirty over time, but a newly made spoon was perfectly clean. That spoon could have been a newly carved spoon from wood or a new metal spoon forged by a blacksmith. Either way, it was clean and unused. That phrase "span new" is found in English in the early 1300s, and it continued to be used in that sense for several centuries.

However, in the 1500s, a variation of the phrase "span new" appeared. This new variation was "spick and span new." It had the same sense of the original, but it added the word *spick* to the front. *Spick* is just a variation of the word *spike*. It had the sense of a spike or nail newly forged in fire by a blacksmith. So "spick and span new" literally meant 'spike and spoon new' meaning the pure and unblemished state of a newly forged nail or spoon. About a century later, in the 1600s, the word *new* was dropped from the end of the phrase, and that left the phrase as simply "spick and span" meaning perfectly clean. But the major point here is that the phrase "spick and span" has an ultimate association with blacksmiths and the forging of metal utensils and tools in fire.

By the way, this is the same sense that we find in the term "brand new." "Brand new" is literally 'firebrand new' or 'branding iron new.' It means new like a metal object that has just been forged in a blacksmith's shop.

Of course, the work of a blacksmith has given us other phrases over the centuries like "Strike while the iron is hot," but most of those phrases were adopted during later periods of English.

Now I've talked about blacksmiths and wood workers, but some craftsmen specialized in combining aspects of both skills. For example, wooden buckets and barrels and tubs were very important in the Middle Ages. It required great skill to make those out of wood so that they would hold water. Buckets and barrels required the careful placement of metal hoops around wooden slats. The craftsmen who specialized in that trade were highly valued at the time, and they were generally called *coopers*, presumably from a word related to the word *cup*. Of course, *cooper* has also survived as a surname. These craftsmen were also sometimes called *hoopers* because of their skill in the use and placement of metal hoops. A *hooper* was also a person who made these types of hoops. And *Hooper* can still be found as a surname.

Another specialized profession was the making of bows and arrows. Those were essential to both hunting and warfare. The people who made bows were called ***bowyers*** which produced the surname ***Boyer***. And the craftsmen who made arrows were called ***fletchers***. The word was borrowed from French, but it appears to be a Germanic word, so it may be a Frankish word that passed into French and then into English. It probably has the same root as words like ***fly***, ***flutter*** and ***flee*** – F-L-E-E. Of course, the word ***Fletcher*** is still used as a surname.

Not all craftsmen worked with wood or metal. Some worked with pottery. Of course, a person who made pottery was a ***potter*** which is still a common surname as any fan of Harry Potter will attest.   But another common word for a potter was a ***crocker***. And ***crocker*** also still exists as a surname as any fan of Betty Crocker will attest. ***Crocker*** is derived from the Old English word ***croc*** which was a type of earthernware pot. Of course, we still have that word for the slow cooking pots called ***crock pots*** and the word ***crockery*** which refers to that type of glazed pottery or stoneware.

And speaking of 'glazed pottery,' a person who specialized in the application of glazes was called a ***glazer***. And a very similar word was used to refer to a craftsman who worked with glass. That person was a 'glass-ier' which became ***glazier*** (/glay-zee-er/ or /glay-zhure/). Of course, ***glazer*** and ***glazier*** are still used as surnames.

One specific profession that worked with glass was a bottle maker. The word ***bottle*** was borrowed from French in the early 1300s, and it gave English another common surname – the name ***Butler***.

Of course, ***Butler*** is an occupational surname derived from the occupation of the butler. And yes, ***butlers*** are related to ***bottles***. A ***butler*** was originally a person responsible for bottles. Specifically, in the household of nobles, the butler was the person in charge of the bottles of wine in the wine cellar. That also meant that he was usually the person who served the wine. And from that sense, the word ***butler*** was extended over time to the primary household servant of a wealthy person. The word ***butler*** became common in the 1300s, but it is found as a surname as early as the 1100s. In that earliest usage as a surname, it may have simply meant a bottle-maker.

So we seen lots of professions engaged in the manufacture of specific objects. Another one of those was the candlemaker who was also known as a ***chandler*** from the same French root as ***chandelier***. Technically, a ***chandler*** was either a candle-maker or a candle-seller or both. ***Chandler*** is of course another common surname. And I should also note that the French word ***chandler*** is derived from the same root as the Latin word ***candle***. ***Candle*** came into English directly from Latin with its original C-A sound at the front. But as we know, within early French, that C-A sound became a C-H-A sound. And that basic sound change helps us to see the connection between ***candle*** and ***chandler***.

Now before we conclude, let's turn to another important trade in the Middle Ages, and that was the leather or tanning industry. Leather was a very important substance used in a variety of goods, including clothing, footware, saddles, harnesses, sheaths, bags, cases, and lots of other items.

The production of leather required many different kinds of craftsmen who specialized in different aspects of the trade. And these various leather occupations were so important and widespread that a large portion of the overall population of England was involved in the production of leather. It has been estimated that in the city of York in the 1200s, as many as one-third of the freemen were involved in the leather industry. That was more than in any other trade or occupation. *[Source: "Angevin England," Mortimer, p. 174)]*

The process often began with butchers who sold the flesh of various animals and preserved the hides. Of course, we still have the word *butcher*, and it also survives as a surname. By the way, *butcher* is a French word that was borrowed in the early 1300s. It was probably derived from the Frankish version of the word *buck*. *Buck* is the Old English version of the word. So English gave us *buck* and the Franks gave us *butcher* – via French. Today, we use the word *buck* to refer to a male deer, but you might remember from an earlier episode that the original meaning of the word was actually a male goat. The word probably had the same meaning in the Frankish language. So *butcher* was probably derived from a word that meant the person who slaughtered goats. And again, butchers were one source of hides for making leather.

Another source of hides were the *skinners*. Skinners were workers who specifically dealt in animal hides. In the original sense of the word, they also removed the hides from animals that had been trapped or slaughtered. But the term was also used to refer to people who sold pelts and furs. Of course, *skinner* still exists as a surname.

Now once the butcher or the skinner had prepared the hides for sale, they were sold to the *tanner*. The tanner was the person who began the process of turning the hides into leather. One of the first steps was removing the hair from the hide. This required the hide to be soaked in a special solution for several days. When removed, the hair could be taken off with relative ease. This could be done by either the skinner or the tanner.

This process also gave us a common phrase. When we refer to nothing at all, we sometimes use the phrase "neither hide nor hair." We almost always use it in the negative today – 'neither' hide 'nor' hair. But when the phrase first appeared in the 1330s, it appeared in both its modern negative form and in an affirmative sense – as "in both hide and hair." 'Hide and hair' meant 'everything.' So it was a reference to the entire hide before the hair was removed. And "neither hide nor hair" meant 'nothing.' So there was neither any hide nor any hair at all. Again this phrase first appeared in English documents around the current point in our overall story in the early 1300s.

Now once the hair was removed from the hide, the tanner turned it into leather. He did that by soaking the hide in a substance that prevented it from decomposing. The substance eventually hardened and darkened the hide and turned into leather. Of course, the word *tanner* still exists as a surname. We also have that sense of darkening skin in the word *tan* – as in a suntan.

Now in the Middle Ages, one of the major ingredients used in the tanning solution for hides was tree bark. And that developed into its own occupation. There were craftsmen whose sole job was to strip bark from trees so the bark could be used for the tanning solution. Those bark-strippers were called *barkers*, and that word also still exists as a surname.

Now once the hide had been turned into leather, it could be sold to the various artisans who turned it into various products for sale. A leather worker who made saddles was called a *saddler*, and that occupation also survives as a surname. A person who turned leather into gloves was called a *glover*, and that's another common surname.

Of course, leather was also used to make shoes. And a person who made shoes was of course a *shoemaker* which is also a modern surname. Another term for a shoemaker was a 'shoe-man' which survives as the surname *Schuman*. Interestingly, both of those names appear to have been borrowed from German after the Middle Ages. In late Anglo-Saxon England, a shoemaker was usually called a *sutere* – a word apparently borrowed from Old Norse. That old word still survives as the surname *Suitor*.

Another word for a shoemaker – or a person who repaired old shoes – was a *cobbler*. That word appeared in the mid-1300s, but its origin is unclear. It is apparently related to the verb *cobble* as in 'to cobble something together' meaning to put together clumsily. But the verb actually appeared after the noun *cobbler*. The occupation of the cobbler still survives in the surnames *Cobbler* and *Coble*.

Another word for a shoemaker that appeared after the Norman Conquest was the term *cordwainer*.   That word was actually derived from the name of the city of Cordoba in southern Spain. That region produced a high quality leather, and even if the shoemaker didn't use that highly valued leather, he was still sometimes called a *cordwainer*. The term could actually be used for anyone who worked with that kind of leather – not just shoemakers. That old word *cornwainer* still survives as the surname *Cordwainer*, as well as the more common surname *Corden*. *Corden* could also refer to a seller of cord or ribbon. So it is derived from both occupational surnames.

So we have a lot of surnames related to shoemakers – *Shoemaker*, *Suitor*, *Cobbler*, *Coble*, *Cordwainer* and *Corden*. But there was another common term for a shoemaker that is especially important to the history of English. This other common term was a French word that was borrowed into English. That term was *chaucier*. And it produced the surname Chaucer – as in Geoffrey Chaucer. We'll soon be introduced to Geoffrey Chaucer who was born in the mid-1300s.

So shoemakers, and glove makers both used leather for their clothing accessories. And speaking of clothing accessories, that takes us to the makers of clothing in general. I talked about the cloth industry in Flanders and England back in Episode 110. And in that episode, I explained the origin of many common surnames related to that industry. I'm not going to go back through that discussion here, but I do want to remind you of a few common surnames derived from that

industry. Those surnames include ***Spinner***, ***Webb***, ***Webster***, ***Weaver***, ***Fuller***, ***Walker***, ***Sherman*** and ***Dyer***.

We can also add in the name ***Taylor*** which I mentioned earlier in the episode. The name ***Taylor*** is derived from the occupation of the tailor meaning the person who tailored clothing. A ***tucker*** was another word for a fuller who walked and trampled the rough cloth in a vat. A ***dexter*** was a female dyer. A ***hosier*** was a person who made or sold socks or stockings. A ***draper*** was a cloth dealer. Again, all of those occupations also survive as surnames.

So we've explored lots of occupations that gave rise to surnames. And I've only scratched the surface of all the occupational surnames that have their origin in this period. But I think you can get a sense of how specialized many of these occupations had become in the 1300s. And I think you can see how those occupations were often adopted as common descriptive surnames.

And by the current point in our story in the early to mid-1300s, those surnames were not only common, they were also becoming hereditary. Many of the businesses and professions that I described were family businesses with children following the same line of work as their parents – often at very young ages. So it made sense that children would use the same occupational surnames as their parents. And as these craftsmen and artisans got older, and left their property and wealth and tools to their children, their children inherited that property and tended to keep those surnames as a matter of convenience and record-keeping. So these names were no longer just descriptive terms. They were true family names – many of which still exist today.

These events also point to a larger development that ultimately contributed to the resurgence of English. All of these growing towns and cities allowed a middle class of merchants and artisans to emerge. This created a new power base within England that was starting to challenge the traditional power and authority of the nobility. We've already seen that representatives of these townspeople were now being included within Parliament, and a distinct House of Commons also emerged during this period. These commoners spoke English, and most of them only knew English. So the rise of the urban middle class also gave English a boost.

But that development was nothing compared to what was about to happen. The rest of the 1300s will see England racked by war, famine, and plague including the devastating plague known as the Black Death. All of these factors combined will wipe out somewhere between 1/3 and 1/2 of the population of England by the end of the century. The personal loss will be unimaginable, and it will turn English society on its head. It will hasten the end of the feudal system, and with it, it will hasten the decline of French of Latin. By the end of the century, English will be the undisputed language of literature, education, and government in England for the first time since the Norman Conquest.
Over the next few episodes, we'll explore those developments, and we'll see how English re-secured its position as the primary language of England.

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