THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 132:
FOOD FOR THOUGHT

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 132: Food for Thought. In this episode, we're going to talk about food. Specifically, the first cookbook composed in the English language. This collection of recipes was composed by the personal chefs of Richard II – the king of England in the late 1300s who enjoyed a rich and opulent court. This cookbook is fascinating on many levels, not only for the language used to document the recipes, but also for the insight it provides about the nature of food in the late Middle Ages. So in this episode, we'll explore how people ate in medieval England, and we'll see how the language of food shaped the English language.

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.

Now this time, we're going to look at the language of food and the first collection of recipes composed in the English language. For food historians, this is an important development because it really provides the first detailed account of what people actually ate in medieval England – at least what people in the royal court ate. Prior to this point, historians have to piece together that information from scattered resources. The Church imposed dietary restrictions regulating what people could eat on specific days of the year. And the government occasionally passed laws called 'sumptuary laws' that restricted what people could eat. Those types of regulations shed some light on the diets of the period. A certain amount of information can also be gleaned from archeological finds, and pictures and illustrations of people eating, and occasional references to food in various accountings and government records.

But one of the best ways to discern the nature of medieval food is to examine the surviving literature from the period. Poems and stories occasionally mentioned what people were eating, and sometimes they provided elaborate details. In Piers Plowman, the poet – William Langland – described the plowman's food as green cheeses, curds and cream, oat cake, beans and loaves of bread. He also said that Piers had parsley, and leeks and cabbage. But the plowman didn't have enough money for a hen, or eggs or salted meat. In the Canterbury Tales, Geoffrey Chaucer wrote about a poor widow in the Nun's Priest's Tale. He said that she ate milk, brown bread, bacon and the occasional egg. The heroine of his Clerk's Tale survived on porridge made from various greens she gathered by the roadside. These types of passages give us a glimpse into the diet of an English peasant in the 1300s.

But we tend to get even more detailed accounts about the food eaten by the nobles. Writers often described elaborate banquets and feasts, and there is no better example of that than the poem we looked at in the last episode – Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. As we saw in that poem, the hero Gawain found himself at a large feast on several occasions. The story opens with a Christmas and New Year's feast in King Arthur's court. Later, when he goes in search of the Green Knight, he ends up at a castle where he is wined and dined.

He arrives at the castle on Christmas Eve, which any reader of the period would have understood was the last day of Advent – the period of fasting leading up to Christmas Day. In the Middle Ages, the Church didn't allow its followers to eat meat or eggs during that period, but they could eat fish. So the poet describes the meal at the castle as an elaborate fish dinner. The poet says that the tables were covered with white table cloths with napkins and salt containers and silver spoons placed on top. He writes that servers served the meal "Wyth sere sewes & sete, sesounde of þe best" – 'With various stews and satisfying dishes, seasoned of the best.' "Double felde, as hit falleȝ, & fele kyn fischeȝ" – 'Double portions were served, and many kinds of fish." He then writes that "Summe baken in bred" – 'some were baked in bread' – "summe brad on þe gledeȝ" – 'some grilled on embers' – "Summe soþen" – 'some were boiled' – "summe in sewe, sauered with spyces" – 'some in stews flavored with spices' – "& ay sawesȝ so sleȝeȝ, þat þe segge lyked" – 'and all the savory sauces that the knight liked." "Þe freke calde hit a fest ful frely & ofte" – 'The knight called it a feast freely and often." So as the poet describes it, the Advent 'fast' had been turned into a 'feast.' (ll. 889-894)

That passage is interesting in the way it describes the elaborate meal that was served, but it is also interesting in the specific choice of words. In one line, the poet says that dishes were "sesounde of þe best" – 'seasoned of the best' – but it meant 'well seasoned' to bring out the most flavor. This passage is actually the first recorded use of the word ***season*** in the sense of adding flavor to food. Now the word ***season*** wasn't a brand new word. It was a French loanword, and it had been around for about a century, but previously, it had only referred to the four periods of the year – Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall or Autumn. Those were the four seasons. And the French word ***season*** actually comes from the same Indo-European root as the native English word ***sow*** as in sowing and planting crops. So the word had to do with the growing periods. Well, a crop that was 'seasoned' was a crop that had been in the field for an entire season or for several seasons. So it was an older crop – one that had been around a while. And we still have some of that sense of the word ***season*** when we refer to a 'seasoned professional' or a 'seasoned politician' meaning someone who had been around for a long time and has a lot of experience. Well, a 'seasoned' crop was one that had been around for a while and was fully ripened. And for many foods – like fruits – it meant that they had reached the peak of flavor. So the word ***season*** came to mean a food that had a lot of flavor. And from there, it came to refer to the process of enhancing the flavor of a meal with herbs and spices. And that gave use the culinary sense of ***seasoning***, which we see used for the first time in that passage from Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. From then on, meals that were packed with flavor were said to be 'seasoned.'

And speaking of flavor, the Gawain poet also gave us the first recorded use of the word ***flavor***. I noted last time that the manuscript that contains the Gawain poem also contains three other poems, and all four poems in the book are thought to be the work of the same author. One of those other poems is called Pearl, and it contains the first known use of the French word ***flavor*** in an English document.

So you seasoned a dish in order to maximize its flavor. And of course, you did that in the process of cooking. ***Cooking*** was certainly not a new word in the 1300s, but it is actually a loanword.

Cook is one of those very old Latin words that was borrowed by the Anglo-Saxons during the period of Old English. But the Anglo-Saxons only used it as a noun to refer to a person who cooks. But around the current point in our overall story of English in the late 1300s, the word also started to appear as a verb – 'to cook.' The original Latin root was ***coquere***, and via Modern French, it has given us other words ***cuisine*** and ***culinary***. And in the late 1300s, it gave us another word meaning 'cookery.' That word was ***cury***. Now this isn't the word ***curry*** in the sense that it's used in Indian food. That's a different word borrowed from the Tamil language of southern India. I'm talking about a different word that was used in Middle English, but has since disappeared from common use.

This earlier word ***cury*** – sometimes rendered as 'kewery' – was borrowed from French, and as I noted, it meant cookery. It appeared around the year 1390 at the current point in our overall story of English. And it appeared in what is considered to be the oldest cookbook composed in the English language. This collection of recipes were compiled by a group of cooks working in the household of the king Richard II. The original manuscript has been lost, but it was copied over the centuries in various fragments. Some fragments contain recipes that were not included in the other fragments. In the 1700s, a collection of the recipes was assembled and published under the title 'The Forme of Cury,' which literally meant 'The Forme of Cookery' or 'The Proper Manner of Cooking.'

That first publication contained well over 200 recipes all preserved in the original Middle English. They are the oldest known recipes to be written down and preserved in the English language. Other versions of the book were subsequently printed which included additional recipes from the other surviving fragments that weren't included in the first publication. So there are actually different versions of the book today, but all of the recipes were apparently compiled and preserved during the reign of Richard II, and they describe dishes that were apparently prepared for the king and his guests on a regular basis. They also point to the importance of cookery in the royal court at the time.

Before we go any further, I should probably refresh your memory a bit about this particular king Richard II. You might remember from prior episodes that he became king as a boy because his father the Black Prince had died at an early age, so Richard inherited the throne when he was still a young teenager. He initially faced the uprising known as the Peasant's Revolt, but he handled that crisis effectively and put down the revolt.

He then had to deal with rebellious nobles who didn't like his opulent spending and his high taxes, and they didn't like the fact that he launched a failed invasion of Scotland and couldn't manage to defeat the French across the Channel in the ongoing conflict that became known as the Hundred Years War.

In the late 1380s, he had to deal with two Parliaments which restricted his powers. This was the period when Geoffrey Chaucer served in Parliament – presumably in an attempt to pack the assembly with Richard's supporters since Chaucer was close to Richard and the royal court. But you might remember that it didn't work. Chaucer ended up losing his government job, and he

headed down to Kent to begin work on the Canterbury Tales. Meanwhile, several of Richard's close advisors were accused of treason and were killed.

But after that, everything settled down a bit. In 1389, at the age of 22, Richard declared himself to be old enough to rule in own right without the supervision of others. And for a while, it looked like he would have a successful reign. He agreed to a temporary truce with France, which meant that he no longer needed to spend a lot of money on the war effort across the Channel. As a result, England's finances improved, and the economy prospered.

But despite that, Richard is not regarded by historians as a particularly good king. Richard was not a warrior like his father and grandfather, but he loved the trappings of kingship. He maintained an opulent court. He entertained lots of guests. And he spared no expense in doing so.

A chronicler named John Hardyng was a young man during Richard's reign, and in the next century he composed a history of England. He wrote that Richard's court often entertained and fed ten thousand people, and it had the staff to do that. He wrote that the court had "in the kechin three hundred servitours." So he maintained 300 kitchen servants to feed the people at court. These same numbers were repeated in the late 1500s by the writer John Stow in his history of London called 'A Survey of London.' Now modern historians doubt that the court actually fed ten thousand people on a regular basis, if ever, but there is no doubt that it was an opulent court that entertained a lot of people, and it functioned with a large kitchen staff that produced a lot of high quality food with some of the most exclusive ingredients that were available at the time.

And that was the context for this collection of English recipes that were assembled during his reign. The collection includes recipes from relatively simple soups and snacks to very elaborate main courses. The text begins with the following introduction or preamble – first in Modern English:

'The form of cury was compiled by the master chefs and cooks of king Richard the Second of England after the Conquest, who was accounted and considered to be the best and noblest diner of all Christian kings, and it was compiled with the assent and advisement of the Masters of medicine and philosophy that dwelled in his court.'

Now in the original Middle English:

"fome of cury was compiled of the chef Maister Cokes of kyng Richard the Secunde kyng of Englond aftir the Conquest. the which was acounted þe best and ryallest vyand of alle csten ynges and it was compiled by assent and avysement of Maisters and phisik and of philosophie þat dwellid in his court."

Now there are a couple of interesting things about that passage. First, you'll notice how close the language is to Modern English. Most of the Middle English manuscripts we've explored recently have been poetry where the language is a little looser, but here we have a prose text written in plain English. And we can see that the language seems somewhat modern. The other thing that stands out is the reference to the 'Masters of medicine and philosophy.' The preamble states that

the cooks prepared the recipes with the advice and consent of the doctors and physicians who advised the court. So why did they consult with the doctors, and why did they feel the need to mention that in the preamble?

Well, it was because there wasn't much of a difference between food and medicine in Middle Ages. Food was medicine, and medicine was food. To a certain extent, we still have some of that sentiment today. We've all been told that we are what we eat. And most of us have comfort foods that make us feel better when we're sick.

But the link between food and medicine was more fundamental in medieval England. In an earlier episode, I talked about the old idea that the human body was made up of substances called humors and that sickness was caused when the humors were out of balance. Well, the humors could be brought back into balance by eating certain foods. So the foods essentially served as medicine. But in the same way that certain foods could cure sickness, they could also cause sickness. It was thought that every single item of food had a fundamental nature as either hot or cold or moist or dry. And when different foods were combined in a recipe, they had to be balanced so the dish wouldn't disturb the humors and make people sick. [SOURCE: 'A Cultural History of Food in the Medieval Age,' Montanari, p. 116-7] So an ingredient that was deemed to be hot and moist had to be balanced with an ingredient that was deemed to be cold and dry. And those terms didn't literally mean hot or moist or cold or dry. It had to do with how the ingredients were classified by medieval doctors. And that's why the physicians had to be consulted when formulating these recipes.

We can still see vestiges of this old idea if we look around us and if we know what we're looking at. Today, of you go to a pharmacy or drug store or chemist's shop, you'll probably encounter the symbol 'Rx' which is a standard symbol for a medical prescription. But what you might not realize is that 'Rx' is really an abbreviation, and it's an abbreviation of the word ***recipe***. ***Recipe*** is a Latin loanword, and it shares the same root as words like ***receipt*** and ***receive***. So a ***recipe*** was something you ***received***. When you were sick, you received instructions from a doctor that told you how to get better. In fact, medieval doctors often wrote down their instructions much like modern doctors do, and they almost always began their instructions with the word '***recipe***' which meant 'receive' or 'take this.' The word ***recipe*** was often abbreviated with the letters R-C, but instead of writing the C as a separate letter, it became common to just write the C as a little stroke across the leg of the letter R, which made it look like an X. And that produced the symbol Rx. But originally, it just meant ***recipe*** – the instructions to receive or take a prescribed food or herb. So it was originally a verb, and that's how the word first appeared in English in the early 1300s. Interestingly, the word didn't acquire its modern meaning as the instructions for making a meal until the 1600s, but the original sense of the word still survives in that symbol Rx.

That also explains why the English cooks who compiled the Forme of Cury didn't call the instructions ***recipes***. The word ***recipe*** didn't have that meaning at the time. They just referred to the 'form' of making certain dishes.

Now The Forme of Cury was part of a trend that was sweeping Western Europe in late Middle Ages. Around that time, cooks were starting to write down and preserve their recipes for the first time since the fall of the Roman Empire almost a thousand years earlier. The oldest German cookbook was compiled around the year 1350, and the oldest cookbook from France was composed around the year 1375. Fifteen years later, the English cooks compiled The Forme of Cury

I should also note that there is a collection of recipes from England that actually pre-dates all of those cookbooks I just mentioned. It was compiled around the year 1300 – almost a century before The Forme of Cury. That makes it one of the oldest surviving cookbooks of the Middle Ages, but it wasn't composed in English. It was actually written in French, specifically the Anglo-Norman dialect of French, but I mentioned that earlier text because it allows scholars to compare the recipes that were used at the beginning of the 1300s with those in The Forme of Cury at the end of the 1300s. And, for the most part, the recipes are very similar in both collections.

Now it isn't entirely clear why recipe collections started to pop up around this time throughout Western Europe, but it probably had to do with a general change in eating habits, especially among the upper classes and royal courts where these collections were preserved. As we saw in earlier episodes, a lot of new foods and spices had started to flow into northern Europe from the Mediterranean during the Crusades. They were brought in via the extensive trading networks that reached from England all the way to the Far East. Those were the same trading networks that had brought the Black Death a few years earlier, but they also brought other things like fruits and vegetables and herbs and spices. And the nobles who could afford those new foods, especially those new herbs and spices, experienced a culinary revolution.

Those new foods were also combined with new cooking techniques from other cultures. That was especially true in England where French influences had contributed to English cooking – at least among the nobles. And that's really the key here. These cookbooks and recipe collections were assembled by the cooks working in those upper-class kitchens, and they reflect the cuisine that was being served there. Meanwhile, the food eaten by the peasants probably didn't change very much at all after the Norman Conquest. Those passages from Piers Plowman and the Canterbury Tales which I mentioned earlier suggest that the peasant diet was still very basic.

And that points to one of the most important distinctions when we're talking about English food in the Middle Ages – the distinction between upper-class food and lower-class food, which often meant the difference between French-influenced cuisine for the nobles and native English cooking for the peasants.

This led to what many people consider to be the classic example of Norman French influence on the English language, and that's the difference between the name of an animal in the field and name of the animal's flesh when it was served at the table. So as we've seen before, ***cow*** is an Old English word, and that's what the Anglo-Saxons called the animal when it roamed the fields tended by English-speaking peasants. But when that cow was butchered and served at the noble's dinner table, it was called ***beef*** using the French term for a cow. Similarly, the peasants tended to

pigs and called them ***pigs*** and ***swine*** using those Old English words. But when they were served at the noble's table, those pigs were called ***pork*** using the French word for a pig. Along the same lines, the Old English ***deer*** became French ***venison*** when it was served. And the Old English ***calf*** became French ***veal*** at the dinner table. And the Old English ***sheep*** became French ***mutton*** when it was cooked and served.

By the time the Forme of Cury was composed, all of those French words were being used in English. ***Venison***, ***pork***, ***beef*** and ***mutton*** all appeared around the year 1300. And the Canterbury Tales gives us the first recorded use of the word ***veal***. But the living animals were still known by the Old English names – ***deer***, ***pig***, ***swine***, ***ox***, ***cow***, ***calf***, ***sheep*** and ***lamb***.

Traditionally, these distinctions have been attributed to the fact that the Anglo-Saxons and the Normans encountered these animals in different places. The Anglo-Saxon peasants encountered them as living animals in the pastures and fields, while the Norman nobles encountered them as meat at the dinner table. So the Anglo-Saxon word was used for the animal, and the French term was used for the meal. And that basic reality was certainly a factor in creating these distinctions, but it was likely only part of the story.

First of all, the meat wasn't always given a French name. People still used the Old English word ***lamb*** for the cooked meat of a young sheep as in a 'rack of lamb.' And people still used the Old English word ***ham*** for the back portion of a pig. The same is true for ***chicken***, ***goose***, ***duck*** and most kinds of fish. In those cases, the Old English word was retained for both the animal and the meat. Sometimes it worked the other way – a French word was adopted for the living animal. For example, ***cow*** is Old English, but ***cattle*** is French. And even though we think of words like ***beef*** and ***mutton*** as food terms, I noted that they were originally the French words for the living animals. And it wasn't unusual for English speakers to actually use those same French terms for living animals well into the Modern English period. It is common to find English manuscripts from the 1800s that still refer to a living cow as a ***beef*** and living sheep as a ***mutton***. So as we can see, the real history behind these terms isn't as clean and precise as it sometimes seems. Nevertheless, there really was a social difference in the way people ate, and that social difference probably contributed to the way those words evolved over time.

There was also a more general factor at work, and that was the fact that cooking was one of those areas of English life where people borrowed heavily from French. I noted in an earlier episode that the borrowing of words from French became more specialized over time. As the centuries progressed, the loanwords tended to come from specific activities or functions like government, law, fashion and art. Those were areas where there was still a great deal of French influence, or least French linguistic influence.

Another one of those areas was cooking and the culinary arts. French influence was especially strong in the kitchen – both in the way foods were cooked and the terms that were used.

By the early 1300s, English had already borrowed French terms like ***bacon***, ***biscuit***, ***grape***, ***mustard***, ***lettuce***, ***vinegar***, ***cream***, ***fry***, ***boil***, ***roast***, ***taste***, ***appetite***, ***dinner*** and ***supper***. That process continued on throughout the 1300s and 1400s as English added more and more French

terms for food and cooking. And that process has never really stopped. Just within the past couple of centuries, English has added terms like ***souffle***, ***eclair***, ***croissant***, ***flambé***, ***bouillabaisse***, ***mousse***, ***ratatouille***, ***fondue***, ***fondant***, ***foie gras***, ***filet mignon***, ***gourmet***, and even the very common word ***chef***. In fact, one of the most recent updates to the Oxford English Dictionary added the word ***chef de cuisine***. So the process continues to this day. And as a result, cooking terms in English are dominated by French loanwords. Native English terms tend to be limited to the basic foods and cooking techniques used by the Anglo-Saxons. But most of the developments in English cuisine over the past thousand years are represented by terms borrowed from other languages – most of them from French.

So we have this interesting distinction in English where native words are used for certain animals, but loanwords are used for the meat. As we saw, that's especially true for certain animals like cows, sheep and deer. And interestingly, peasants didn't tend to eat those animals. Most of the meat from those animals was consumed by the upper classes. So maybe that had something to do with the distinction that arose over time. The reason why peasants didn't tend to eat cows and sheep is because those animals helped to sustain life. A cow could provide a peasant family with milk, butter and cheese, and a sheep provided wool. So it was usually better to keep those animals alive. If those animals were slaughtered, the meat was so expensive that it was usually better to sell it in the local market and use the money to buy other basic food stuffs. And as far as deer were concerned, those generally belonged to the local lord who also owned the forest land. Peasants weren't allowed to hunt in the forests and take the lord's deer. So most of the meat from cows, sheep and deer ended up on the tables of the nobles and the upper-class. And there, that meat was called ***beef***, ***veal***, ***mutton*** and ***venison***.

But peasants did have access to other animals like chicken and fish. And they ate those animals on a regular basis – especially fish. And that may help to explain why the native words were retained for the cooked version of those animals. A cooked chicken is still called a ***chicken*** and a cooked fish is still called a ***fish***. So today we have Kentucky Fried Chicken and not Kentucky Fried Poulet. And McDonald's sells a 'filet-o-fish' sandwich and not a 'filet-o-poisson' sandwich.

Now one animal that doesn't fit neatly into these general rules is the pig. Most of our words associated with pigs come from Old English – like ***boar***, ***sow***, and ***swine***. ***Swine*** was actually the main word for the animal in Old English. The words ***pig*** and ***hog*** are also found in Old English, but they weren't very common at the time. They didn't really become common until the Middle English period, but they do appear to be native words. So most of our words for pigs come from Old English.

And the peasants of England raised and ate pigs. In fact, pigs were such a staple of the peasant diet that the upper classes of England associated pigs with peasants. The Norman lords sometimes referred to the peasants as 'hogs' and 'pigs' and 'swine.' And some of those words are still used as derisive terms today. Since peasants had access to pigs, that may explain why the Old English word ***ham*** has survived as a word for part of the pig. But the more general word for pig flesh is a French word – ***pork*** – as in 'pork chops,' and 'pulled pork,' and 'pork loin' – ***loin***

being another French loanword from the 1300s. So here we have a case where the peasants routinely ate the animal, but a French word was adopted for the cooked meat.

Another term for pig flesh is ***bacon***, and that's another French loanword from the same time period. The word came from French, but it actually has Germanic roots. ***Bacon*** is related to the English word ***back*** – because bacon came from the pig's back.

Now when a pig was slaughtered, it wasn't consumed all at one time. It was eaten over several weeks or months, and that meant that the meat had to be preserved so it didn't go bad. Keep in mind that there was no refrigeration, so you couldn't just put the meat in a freezer. You had to find another way to preserve it, and there were several ways to do that. One technique – especially for fruits – was to dry them. Water contributes to the growth of bacteria, so drying the fruit or other foods removed much of the water and inhibited the growth of bacteria. Another technique for meat was to smoke it. Exposing the meat to smoke for a long period of time pulled moisture from the meat, and it provided an acidic coating which helped to block the growth of bacteria.

But the most common technique for preserving meat was to salt it either by literally covering it with salt or by soaking it in a salt water solution called brine. That process also removed water from the meat and preserved it. That's why salt was such an important commodity over the centuries. You might remember that the word ***salary*** is based on the Latin word for salt – which was ***sal***. Soldiers were often paid in salt since it was such a valuable community, and that payment became known as a ***salary*** from ***sal*** meaning salt. It's also how we got the phrase 'worth one's salt' meaning that the person is competent or of high value.

By the way, the word ***salt*** is actually the native Old English word. As I mentioned, Latin had the word as ***sal***. So obviously, they're very similar, and as you might suspect, both words came from the same Indo-European root. And that explains the similarity.

So salt was a very important commodity both as a seasoning and a preservative. And given the fact that England was an located on an island, it meant that the country had direct access to salt from ocean water and other deposits. So there was plenty of salt to go around. And it was therefore easy to preserve meat. And for peasants, that mostly meant salted pork or bacon.

Now, while the meat was being preserved, it had to be stored somewhere – usually in a separate building or smokehouse. And that meant that dogs or other animals could break in and take it. And sometimes people would break in and steal it. And that was big deal for peasants who relied on the salted meat in the winter month, so it was very important to protect or save the bacon from intruders and thieves. And that ultimately produced the phrase 'save the bacon' or 'save one's bacon' to refer to the process of protecting oneself from a loss.

The salting of meat to preserve it also explains another common food term – the word ***sausage***. ***Sausage*** is another French term borrowed around the current point in our overall story of English. It first appeared in English in the 1400s, and it came from that same Latin root word for salt. So ultimately, ***sausage*** and ***salt*** are cognate. So what's the connection? Well, to make

sausage, the meat was ground up with other fillings and salted, and then placed into the casings which were usually intestines that had been cleaned. The salting of the meat in the casing helped to preserve it, and thus that little tube of meat became known as ***sausage***.

Salt was such an important ingredient in medieval cooking that it also gave us other words like ***sauce*** and ***saucer***. Both of those words were adopted from French, and both appeared in English in the mid-1300s. Sauces were common in the fancier dishes prepared for the upper classes, and salt was a key ingredient in those sauces. That's why the word ***sauce*** is derived from that Latin root word for salt. And sauce was often served in a separate bowl which became known as a ***saucer***. Saucers also held the salt which was used as a condiment at the table. So ***salt***, ***salary***, ***sausage***, ***sauce***, and ***saucer*** are all cognate.

Now I talked about the process of making sausage, and there's a modern proverb or idiom that refers to what happens when we pull the curtains back and see how something is really done behind the scenes. Sometimes it isn't as pleasant as we might have thought, so we say that it is like watching how the sausage gets made. In other words, sausage may taste good, but making it is a messy process, so you might not want to see what goes into it or how it's made.

Well, that brings up another issue – the various parts of pigs or other animals that were considered to be of lower quality like the organs or entrails. These were sometimes thrown away especially by cooks in the upper class kitchens. Today, we might say that they were thrown in the garbage. Well, those animal parts actually were garbage in the Middle Ages because the word ***garbage*** literally meant low-quality animal parts. Since those parts were often thrown away, the word ***garbage*** eventually came to mean anything that was thrown away. But originally, it referred to entrails and organs and animal parts, and it was borrowed from French around the current point in our story.

The word ***garbage*** is first recorded in English in the early 1400s, but it had probably been around since the 1300s, and I say that because the word was used in a London ordinance adopted in the year 1379 during the reign of the current king Richard II. The ordinance was written in French, and it specifically said that bakers were making pastries with "rabbits, geese, and garbage, not befitting, and sometimes stinking, in deceit of the people." It then directed that bakers could not use "any garbage from capons, hens, or geese to bake in a pastry."

So what was that all about? Well, apparently cooks in some of the upper class kitchens were taking the entrails and organs and other unusable meat and selling it to bakers who would then turn around and use it as filling for meat pies. But those pies were making people sick. So the ordinance was designed to protect the public health by preventing bakers from using that stuff that was often thrown away. The ordinance also prevented bakers from putting beef into the their pies and then passing it off to customers as venison. That was because beef wasn't considered to be of the same quality as venison. So selling a beef pie as venison was a type of fraud. [SOURCE: 'Fast and Feast,' Henisch, p. 78]

Now the cooks in noble kitchens might throw away this low quality meat, but peasants weren't so picky. They couldn't afford to throw anything away. To use a modern expression, they ate everything but the squeal. Not only were intestines used to make sausages, they were also fried or boiled to make ***chitterlings*** – a word which also appeared around the current point in our story around the 1400. It isn't entirely clear where the word came from, but it was later shortened to ***chitlins*** which many people still associate with rural and poorer communities.

Another word that was similar to ***chitterlings*** or ***chitlins*** was the word ***haslet***. It referred to the inner organs of a pig – the ones that were edible. And it first appeared in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. It appeared in the part where Gawain's host killed a boar during the hunt and slaughtered it. The poem says that he "hatȝ out þe hastletteȝ" – 'took out the hastlets.' The hastlets were usually grilled on a spit over a fire, and sometimes the word was applied to other foods that were cooked in a similar way. That's how the word was used in that early English cookbook The Forme of Cury. That book describes a dish made from figs, dates and almonds which were placed in a spit and roasted. The dish is called 'Hastletes of Fruit.' Both ***hastlets*** and ***fruit*** were French loanwords. And notice that this dish prepared for the royal court didn't actually use innards. It used fruit and prepared it in a way that was similar to haslets. That's why it was called 'haslets of fruit.' So this was a play on a type of food that was normally eaten by peasants.

Another word for animal organs or entrails was ***numbles***. It was another French loanword from the 1300s, and believe it or not, it's the origin of the term 'humble pie.' Again, peasants didn't tend to throw anything away, so they took those numbles and baked them in a pie. That type of pie was called a 'numbles pie.' But you might remember that nouns that began with an 'n' sound sometimes lost that sound in Middle English because they often followed the article 'a'. And people thought the 'n' was part of that preceding article.

I mentioned in an earlier episode that a type of snake was a ***nadre*** – 'a nadre.' But when people spoke, the sounds slurred together, and it sounded like 'anadre' – or 'an adre.' The N moved over to the article. And over time, the word became 'an adder.' So ***nadre*** lost its N and became ***adder***. That actually happened to quite a few words, including the word ***numbles***. Over time, 'a numbles pie' became 'an umbles pie.' So that was the first sound change – the N was dropped at the front of the word – from ***numbles*** to ***umbles***. But then there was another sound change when an H was added to the front of the word – from ***umbles*** to ***humble***. So why did that happen?

Well, in early Modern English, it was common for speakers in England to drop the initial H in words that began with an 'h' sound. So they said things like 'allo' instead of 'hello.' That was especially common in lower class and working class communities. So people started to think that 'umbles pie' was one of those terms where people were just dropping the H at the front. So they thought that 'umbles pie' was really 'humble pie.' And that confusion was encouraged because it was a type of pie that was usually eaten by poor people. So 'humble pie' came to mean a type of pie or food eaten by someone who was humble or poor. And today, if someone 'eats humble pie,' they are acting humbly or with humility. But again, it began in the 1300s as ***numbles*** – the innards of a pig or other animal.

Now, to be fair, I should mention that this royal cookbook – The Forme of Cury – also has a recipe for numbles. The recipe says to take the numbles of a deer or other animal and boil them, and take the broth and thicken it with bread. Then add vinegar and wine and cooked onions, and season it with salt and other seasonings, boil it well, and serve it. So this appears to be a slightly elevated version of the dish.

There was also a similar dish that was common at the time called ***hoggepot*** – or ***hotchpot***. The word actually appeared for the first time in Chaucer's writings. Again, it was a French term, and it combined the French word ***hocher*** meaning 'to shake' and the French word ***pot*** meaning a cooking vessel. A ***hotchpot*** was a thick broth made from a mixture of meat, vegetables, and anything else the cook had lying around. The cook just tossed it all in and cooked it. The Form of Cury has a specific recipe for it called 'Gees in Hoggepot.' You cut up a goose and boil it in water and wine. Add onions and herbs. Cook it for a while and pour it over a layer of bread and add seasonings. Again, this was an elevated version of the dish. For most people, it was more common to just throw in whatever you had available at the time. And that's how the word evolved from ***hotchpot*** to ***hodge-podge*** meaning a mixture or confused jumble.

This also explains the phrase 'Gone to Pot' which appeared in the 1500s. Today, it means something that no longer has any value. It's worthless. It's gone to pot. Well, originally, it referred to the leftovers that were otherwise useless. The cook chopped them up and tossed them in the pot that was constantly simmering over a fire. If the items 'went to the pot,' it meant that they weren't good for anything else. And over time, it has come to refer to anything that has become useless or worthless.

The 1500s also gave us the term 'pot luck' which is based on this same basic idea. Since almost every household maintained a pot on the fire with something cooking in it, the contents of that pot was what was served when visitors came by. The visitors got whatever was cooking in the pot at the time. It might be a good day with a tasty soup full of quality vegetables and maybe even some meat. But usually, it was a bland broth with not very much of substance in it at all. So the visitor had to take whatever was dished out whether good or bad. So what the visitor got depended on luck or chance. That led to these sense of ***potluck*** as a random dish brought to a dinner party or gathering. Again, you don't really know what people are bringing to a potluck dinner. And eventually, the word ***potluck*** came to mean a 'random result' or 'whatever happens by chance.' [SOURCE, 'Bring Home the Bacon and Cutting the Mustard,' p. 137]

I should also mention the word ***potpourri*** which is a French term borrowed in the 1600s. Today, it means a medley of flowers or other aromatics. It's pronounced in the French manner /po-puh-ree/, even though it looks like /pot-purry/ because it has that word ***pot*** in it. Well ***potpourri*** was originally a French term for a type of stew or hotch-pot with a mixture of ingredients. And English initially borrowed the word with that same sense as a stew, but over time, it has come to mean a medley or mixture of other things.

And there was one other important term for a similar type of soup or stew made with random ingredients. That term was ***pottage***, again based on that same word ***pot*** because it was cooked in a pot. The word ***pottage*** is really the most common term for the soups and stews that people ate

in the Middle Ages, and well into the modern era as well. Again, it was made with random vegetables, cereals and whatever else was lying around. If peasants had a little pork or other meat, they would toss that in as well. During the 1500s, the pronunciation of ***pottage*** became slurred a bit, and it evolved into the word ***porridge*** which is probably the more familiar term today. Again, porridge was a basic food staple for peasants. It could be made with a thin watery broth or it could be thickened with breadcrumbs and cereals.

Even though peasants ate a lot of porridge or pottage, the dish could also be found in noble households and even on the dinner table of the king. The Forme of Cury has several pottage recipes like 'Cabbages in Pottage,' 'Rapes or Turnips in Pottage,' 'and 'Gourds in Pottage.' Again, these were elevated versions made with onions, saffron, salt and other spices. The gourd version also called for pork and egg yolks. So the king's version could be a hearty meal in itself.

And since I'm talking about pottages or porridges, I should mention another related dish – ***gruel***. This was another French loanword that appeared in English in the mid-1300s. So it was in use by the current point in our story. It was another type of pottage or porridge, but it usually had a base of oatmeal boiled in water or milk. Again other meats or vegetables could be added in, but it had a reputation as a dish that was filling, but not very appetizing. It was such a basic concoction that it was often given to people who didn't have any other food options. It was the food that was often given as a form of punishment or to those who were being punished. And through that association, the word ***gruel*** became an adjective. Today if we refer to a 'grueling' situation, it means a situation that is exhausting or punishing.

Nevertheless, even the king ate gruel from time to time, assuming he actually ate the dishes described in The Forme of Cury, because it contains a couple of gruel recipes. Here's one called 'Grewel of Almaundes;'

> Take Almaundes blaunched, bray hem with oot meel, and draw hem up with water. Cast þeron Safroun and salt.

In Modern English, it reads:

> Take blanched almonds, bray or crush them together with oatmeal, and draw them up with water. Cast thereon saffron and salt.

So by now we get a sense of how the common people ate. They consumed lots of stews or soups with mixed grains and vegetables and whatever else was available. If they had some pork, they would toss it in. But they didn't generally eat beef or mutton or venison. As I noted earlier, cows were preserved for milk and dairy. Sheep were preserved for their wool. And deer were hard to come by because they lived in the forests, and most of the wilderness and forest land belonged to the king or the local lord. Peasants weren't usually allowed to hunt on that land. Of course, some of them took the risk anyway, and they poached the deer or rabbits or other wildlife. In fact, that type of poaching had become quite common by the current point in our story in the late 1300s.

To deal with this problem, the English Parliament adopted the first set of game laws in England. The laws were adopted by Parliament and approved by the king in the year 1390 – the very same year that The Forme of Cury was compiled. Those new game laws prohibited people from owning or possessing hunting dogs unless they owned lands that produced more than 40 shillings of income per year. Since most peasants didn't have those types of land holdings, it barred them from owning hunting dogs, which effectively prevented them from poaching the animals in the forests.

The word ***poach*** in the sense of stealing wild animals didn't appear in English until the 1500s. It's origin is unclear, though one theory suggests that it is derived from the French word ***poke*** meaning a bag or sack. You might remember that I talked about that word in an earlier episode. A 'pig in a poke' literally meant a 'pig in a sack.' And a small poke or bag was sometimes sewn into the lining of clothing, thereby creating the word ***pocket***. The same root also gave us the word ***pouch***. And this theory suggests that people who stole small animals like rabbits put them in sacks and carried them away. Since they used pokes or pouches, they were called ***poachers***. Again, that's just a theory.

But we also have the word ***poach*** in the realm of cooking when we poach an egg. And that sense of the word ***poach*** appeared for the first time in English in The Forme of Cury. The recipe collection contains specific instructions on how to poach an egg. So is there any connection between a cook who poaches an egg and a thief who poaches an animal in the forest? Well, if the word ***poach*** in the sense of illegal hunting is actually based on the word ***poke*** or ***pouch***, then yes, there is a connection because to poach an egg is literally to envelop it in a sack of egg whites.

When you place a raw egg in very hot water, it starts to cook and the egg whites start to congeal. They actually envelop the yolk which remains at the center of the egg. You can actually remove the egg from the water in tact and place it on a plate. And if the yolk hasn't cooked all the way through, you can cut through the egg whites and the yolk will run out. So in effect, the egg whites become the pouch or poke that holds the yolk inside. And that's why it called a 'poached' egg. And again, that term is recorded for the first time in English in The Forme of Cury.

Now so far, I've talked a lot about meat – or the lack of meat – in the English diet of the 1300s. But it is important to keep in mind that this was a very religious period, and the Church restricted the eating of meat on many days of the year. Specifically, the Church prohibited the eating of meat or eggs on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. That's three out of seven days of every week. The Church also prohibited people from eating during Lent leading up to Easter and Advent leading up to Christmas. When you do the math on all of that, you realize that people were prohibited from eating meat for over half of the days of the year. And those restrictions applied to both the nobles and the peasants and everyone in between. [SOURCE: 'The Time Travelers Guide to Medieval England,' Ian Mortimer, P. 169] So that meant the people needed an alternative to meat, and as I noted earlier in the episode, they had one. Under the rules of the Church, fish was not restricted because it wasn't considered meat. So the restricted days when meat and eggs were prohibited were called 'fish days.' In fact, several recipes in The Form of Cury appear in two versions – one using meat and the other using fish. For example, the

collection includes a recipe for a dish called a chewetes which was a baked dish seasoned with salt and ginger. One version called 'Chewetes on Flesshe Day' was made with pork and egg yolks. The other version was called 'Chewetes on Fyssh Day,' and it was made with four different kinds of fish – turbot, haddock, cod and hake.

Now the people of England had easy access to fish. Britain is an island after all. But there was one fish that tended to dominate and that was the herring. I mentioned way back in Episode 108 that England was a major exporter of herring. They were abundant off the east coast of the country, and they were shipped all over Europe. They were also eaten throughout England, especially on fish days. They were a cheap source of protein, and they were a staple of the peasant diet. [SOURCE: 'England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings: 1075-1225,' Robert Bartlett, p. 366.] But since they were caught by the thousands, they had to be preserved as soon as they were caught, or they would go bad very quickly. They were usually soaked in a salt brine, dried and smoked. This process not only preserved the herring, it also changed the color of the fish from a silvery color to a reddish copper color. [SOURCE: 'A Cultural History of Food in the Medieval Age,' Montanari, p. 51] And that's how we got the term 'red herring.'

Originally, a 'red herring' was literally a 'red herring' – a preserved herring which was commonly found in England in the Middle Ages. Another term for a 'red herring' or a preserved herring was a ***kipper***. Both ***herring*** and ***kipper*** are Old English words. The etymology of ***kipper*** beyond that is not known for certain, but one theory is that ***kipper*** is related to the word ***copper*** because of the copper color of the kipper or preserved fish.

At any rate, the kipper or 'red herring' had a distinct aroma, and it could attract animals. It could also be used to train hunting dogs. By dragging a herring along a path, the dog could be trained to follow the scent. But it could also provide a distraction and lead the dog in the wrong direction. And that was apparently the origin of the modern term 'red herring' to mean a distraction or deception. If we refer to something as a 'red herring' today, we usually mean that it's a misleading clue or something that diverts attention from the real problem. And that figurative sense of the term appeared in the 1800s.

While herrings were common among the peasants, the upper classes tended to eat other fish. [SOURCE: 'Food in Medieval Times,' Adamson, p. 40] As I noted earlier, The Forme of Cury mentions fish like turbot, haddock, cod and hake. It also mentions pike, and several fish with French names like mackerel, plaice, loach, and salmon. ***Salmon*** replaced the native English word for the fish which was ***læx***. It came from the same Germanic root as the Yiddish word ***lox*** as in bagels and lox.

One particular recipe in The Form of Cury called 'Mortrews of Fyssh' (Mortress of Fish) was a type of soup or porridge made with a mixture of cod, haddock and hake. The recipe begins by directing the cook to "seeþ it wel in water" – 'seethe or boil it well in water' – and "pyke out þe bones" – 'pick out the bones.' And that raises another issue. If you eat a lot of fish, it means that you are constantly picking out the bones. And that led to a couple of other common expressions in English. If you have 'a bone to pick' with someone, it means you have a problem or issue with

that person. It comes from the fact that picking bones out of fish is a problem that has to be resolved before you can eat it.

Sometimes you might have the good fortune of eating or cooking a fish with very few bones. In that case, you might say that you 'found no bones in it.' That phrase appeared in the mid-1400s. And over time, it came to refer an easy situation. So today, if I say that someone 'made no bones about it,' it means that they didn't raise an objection or create a problem.

Now the recipe I just mentioned – 'Mortrews of Fyssh' (Mortress of Fish) – said to pick out the bones, and then "grynde smale the Fysshe" – 'grind small the fish" – before adding the fish to the broth and simmering it with various seasonings. Here the recipe uses the word ***grind***, but in other recipes, it uses the word ***mince***, and The Forme of Cury is one of the first English documents to use the French word ***mince***. ***Mince*** meant to chop finely or make small and comes from the same root as ***minute*** and ***minimum***.

A lot of the recipes in The Forme of Cury involve chopping, or mincing or grinding various ingredients and adding them to a broth or using them to create a sauce. As I noted earlier, the word ***sauce*** is related to the word ***salt*** because it was originally a broth that was well-salted and had a salty flavor. The Forme of Cury used the word ***sauce***, and it also introduced another very similar word – the word ***gravy***. The cookbook contains the first recorded use of the word ***gravy*** in the English language.

The word ***gravy*** was borrowed from French, and is apparently derived from the word ***grain***. In the same way that salt was a key ingredient in early sauces, grains of spices were a key ingredient in early gravies. And that is apparently the connection between ***grain*** and ***gravy***. In The Forme of Cury, the gravies were usually made with almond milk and seasoned with sugar and ginger. So it was sort of a sweet milk sauce. It wasn't until the 1500s that the meaning of ***gravy*** shifted to its modern sense as sauce formed from the juices of the meat being cooked.

Now I said that the word ***gravy*** was 'apparently' derived from the word ***grain*** because the link is somewhat obscured by common scriveners error. French had the word as ***grané*** which was very similar to the word ***grain***. ***Grané*** meant a sauce or stew. So it had an 'n' sound instead of a 'v' sound. But in The Forme of Cury and later English manuscripts, it appeared as ***gravy*** with a V instead of ***grané*** with an N. Now, this appears to be a misspelling by the cooks who wrote down the recipes in the original manuscripts. And then later cooks adopted this same spelling and the pronunciation that went with it.

But why would they have confused an N with a V? Well, I've actually addressed this issue before in an earlier episode of the podcast. Those letters were often confused in medieval manuscripts. Remember that the printing press didn't exist yet, so manuscripts were handwritten in a flowing cursive style where one letter flowed into the next letter. And letters that had a series of vertical strokes were easily confused with each other. The letters I, L, M, N, U and V all tended to resemble each other because they were made up a vertical strokes linked at the bottom. So a word like ***minimum*** was just a series of up and down strokes when it was written in this style. That is part of the reason why words like ***honey*** and ***monk*** got their modern O's. They

were originally spelled with U's, but the U before the N in those words created so much confusion that scribes decided to drop the U and replace it with an O. And keep in mind that the letters U and V were not distinct yet. The letter was always written as a curvy U even though it represented different sounds. So again, it was easy to confuse an N with a U or V in this writing style, and that may explain why English cooks misread ***grané*** as ***gravé*** – which became ***gravy***. And if that is in fact what happened, then we can see the connection between ***grain*** and ***gravy***.

So again, ***gravy*** is apparently derived from grains of spice in the same way that ***sauce*** is derived from the Latin version of salt. And earlier, we saw that the Latin version of salt also gave us the words ***sausage*** and ***saucer***. Well, there's also another common food term from the same Latin word for salt, and that's the word ***salad***. A salad was a dish of mixed vegetables and herbs that was served raw. But to give it some flavor, it was seasoned with salt, so it became known as 'herba salata' in Latin, which literally meant 'vegetables salted.' And over time, that Latin name 'herba salata' was shortened to just ***salat*** – or ***salad*** in English. So ***salad*** actually comes from the Latin word for salt and is cognate with ***salt***, ***sausage*** and ***sauce***.

Now in the 1300s, salads were eaten around the Mediterranean where they were often flavored with a sauce or dressing made from olive oil and vinegar. But salads weren't really common in northern Europe at the time. Peasants might eat raw vegetables, but it wasn't prepared like a salad with olive oil and vinegar. In fact, olive oil had to be imported from the Mediterranean, so it was really expensive. (SOURCE: 'Food in Medieval Times,' Adamson, p. 98) And yet, this early English cookbook – the Forme of Cury – has a recipe for salad, and it's made with oil and vinegar just like in Italy. And in fact, that recipe is the first recorded use of the word ***salad*** in the English language.

This recipe points to something very interesting about The Forme of Cury. While it is dominated by recipes that were probably common in England and France, there are also a handful of recipes that appear to be derived from the Mediterranean, and several specifically from Italy. And at first glance, those recipes seem a little out of place for the British Isles in the 1300s.

In addition to a Mediterranean-inspired salad with oil and vinegar, the book also contains a recipe for 'loseyns' which is actually lasagna. It directs the cook to make a paste from flour and then roll it into thin sheets of pasta like paper. The pasta was to be cooked in water and then arranged in layers with cheese and spices in between. Now Europeans hadn't discovered the New World yet, so there were no tomatoes, and therefore no tomato sauce, but this recipe does describe an early form of lasagna.

In the same collection, there is also a recipe for an early version of macaroni and cheese. It directs the cook to take a think piece of dough, cut it into pieces, boil the pieces in water, and then finish by adding grated cheese and butter. The dish is called either 'Macrows' or 'Makerouns' in the various surviving copies of the cookbook. And that recipe name is the first recorded use of the words ***macaroon*** and ***macaron*** and ***macaroni*** in the English language. Now, you're probably saying, "Wait! Those are different things." Well, they are today. Today, a ***macaroon*** or ***macaron*** is a little sweet cookie or biscuit, and ***macaroni*** is a type of pasta. But originally, the Italian word ***macarone*** simply meant a paste made with flour and egg whites. The

paste could be made with or without sugar. The sweetened dough eventually produced a sweet cookie or biscuit, and the unsweetened dough eventually produced a type of pasta which was later made into small tube shapes. Now that's a vastly oversimplified version of a complicated and obscure history, but it is generally agreed that the sweet treat and the pasta dish stem from the same origin. So if that's how the foods became distinct, what about the names? Well, ***macaroon*** and ***macaroni*** are ultimately derived from the singular and plural versions of the same word. So you have one macaroon when you have a cookie or biscuit, but you have lots of macaroni in a dish of pasta.

And again, we get the first taste of macaroni in The Forme of Cury. So this ancient cookbook includes recipes for macaroni and lasagna, but that's not it. Some of the surviving versions of the manuscript also contain a recipe for ravioli. Again, it's an Italian pasta dish that pops up in an English cookbook in the late 1300s. And here's something else that's interesting. I noted earlier in the episode that there was an even earlier cookbook composed in England about a century earlier in the late 1200s, but it was composed in Norman French, so it doesn't have much to do with the history of English. But that earlier Norman French cookbook also has essentially the same recipe for ravioli. And the reason why that's so interesting is because that earlier recipe is the first recorded reference to ravioli anywhere in the world – even in Italy.

Now pasta was just starting to become firmly established in Italy around that time in the late 1200s. I should note that there are references to pasta dishes all the way back in the Roman period, but the art of pasta-making largely disappeared in Italy for several centuries after the Roman Empire fell. However, it started to make a comeback in the 1100s, perhaps due to Arab influence since pasta was still being eaten in the Arab world. But at any rate, we don't get regular references to pasta and pasta dishes in Italy until the 1300s. So to find a recipe for ravioli in England in the late 1200s is very interesting.

Maybe it came back to England with the Crusaders. Maybe it had to do with the fact that a separate group of Normans conquered and ruled Sicily in the twelfth century. Maybe it came to England with a chef who had spent some time in Italy and was familiar with the dish. It's impossible to say in retrospect, but we can assume from the presence of these recipes that the English nobles were some of the first people in northern Europe to enjoy some of the most popular pasta dishes from Italy.

So I'm going to conclude on that note. Next time, we'll continue to look at medieval cooking, but we'll focus on what happened after the meals were cooked. In other words, we'll look at mealtime – the way people actually ate in the Middle Ages. We'll explore the words we use for meal times, and eating utensils, and the various social rules that accompanied the meal. And that will complete our look at medieval food and the way it impacted the English language.

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