THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPTS

EPISODE 137:
A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 137: A Rose By Any Other Name. In this episode, we're going to turn our attention to the origins of civil war that divided the nobility of England in the late 1400s. At the time, it was called the 'Cousin's War,' but later writers called it the 'Wars of the Roses.' And they called it that because the war was fought between two branches of the Plantagenet family, each of which was represented by a rose – one red and one white. As we'll see, the real story isn't quite that simple, but roses were very important symbols in the Middle Ages. They were grown in gardens throughout England, and during the period when the Wars of the Roses were getting underway, a guide to gardening was composed in the English language for the first time. So this time, we're going to turn our attention to roses and gardening in the late Middle Ages. And we'll explore the origins of a war named after one of the world's most popular flowers.

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.

Before we begin, let me also mention that the Intelligent Speech Conference will be held on Saturday, June 27. It is entirely online this year, and I'm going to be joining a lot of other podcasters who will each be giving presentations and appearing on panels together. I'm going to be talking about the original Proto-Indo-European language. Specifically, I'm going to look at the true nature of that language. What it is and what is isn't. Whether it was actually spoken by real-life people or whether it is just a theoretical concept invented by linguists. So if you're interested in checking out that presentation and the many other presentations and panels, go to intelligentspeechconference.com for more information.

Now this time, I want to talk about gardens, and especially one particular flower that is often found in gardens – the rose. And I want to begin this discussion by making note of a very old name for the island of Britain – a name that was sometimes used more specifically for England itself. That name was Albion. The name was coined by the Romans during the period when Rome controlled most of the island. It isn't entirely clear where the Romans came up with the name, and even some Roman writers were confused by the name. It may have been based on a Celtic name for the island, but most scholars think it was probably derived from the Latin word ***albus*** meaning 'white.' But what was the connection between Britain and the color white?

Well, the Roman writer Pliny the Elder speculated about the name. He thought that it might have been based on the prominent white cliffs found along the southeastern coast of Britain which the Romans would have encountered as they crossed the English Channel. But he also suggested an alternate theory – that the island got its name from white roses. He wrote that "The isle of Albion is so called from its white cliffs washed by the sea, or from the white roses with which it abounds." [*SOURCE: 'Albion: the Origins of the English Imagination,' Peter Ackroyd*].

Now modern scholars aren't sure if the white rose was common in Britain when the Romans arrived or if the Romans themselves actually introduced it to the island. What is known for certain is that it was a very popular flower, and it was a favorite among gardeners in both the British Isles and continental Europe. In fact, various varieties of roses were grown throughout Europe and the Near East.

Wild roses are native to the northern hemisphere, and historically they could be found throughout much of that hemisphere from China to Europe and all the way to North America. [THE ROSE, Jennifer Potter, p. 3]

Now those are wild roses, which were tall, thorny bushes almost like small trees. They had small flowers with a much more subtle fragrance that most modern roses. But at some point, humans learned to cultivate roses, and they gradually began to evolve into the roses we know today, even though most of the roses of the Middle Ages resembled the wild variety more than the rose you would buy in a modern florist. The earliest reports of rose cultivation can be traced all the way back to the ancient Persians. And even though the word ***rose*** was borrowed from Latin, some scholars have suggested that the word may have even older Persian roots.

Whatever the ultimate source, if you love roses, then you probably consider a rose garden to be paradise. And the ancient Persians also considered it to be a paradise because the word ***paradise*** is an ancient Persian word for a garden. And at one time, it was also common within English to use the word ***paradise*** as a synonym for garden.

Today, we associate the word ***paradise*** with a state of supreme beauty or perfection, and that's because the original Greek translation of the Bible used the word ***paradise*** in reference to the Garden of Eden. It was a word that had been borrowed into ancient Greek, and from there, many Europeans came to associate the word ***paradise*** with the Garden of Eden. And thus, they came to associate it with a state of bliss or beauty or perfection. But the word ***paradise*** originally had a much more basic meaning.

If we look a little closer at that word ***paradise***, we find something very interesting. The word reflects a very basic and fundamental fact about a traditional garden – that it's an enclosed area. It was the enclosure that separated a traditional garden from the fields and open land that surrounded it. Let's keep in mind that the Persian language was also an Indo-European language. And the 'para-' part of ***paradise*** referred to a border or edge that extends around a particular area. It comes from the same Indo-European root found in Latin words like ***perimeter*** and ***periphery***. The '-dise' part of ***paradise*** comes from a root word meaning 'to form or build.' So a ***paradise*** was literally an area with a wall or barrier that had been built around the perimeter.

People built those barriers to keep out animals, and maybe more importantly, to keep out people who might want to take something for themselves. So gardens provided a degree of privacy and seclusion. Those barriers separated the garden from the surrounding fields or forest, and they represent one of the most fundamental aspects of a traditional garden. It was a small controlled natural area within a larger uncontrolled natural area.

This idea can be traced all the way back to the original Indo-Europeans. As we saw in the early episodes of the podcast, the original Indo-Europeans were nomadic herders on the Eurasian steppes. But that didn't mean that they were always on the move. From time to time, they apparently settled down for a while in a fixed location. And that can be discerned because the original Indo-European language had a word that meant 'to enclose.' And it apparently referred to the process of enclosing a plot of land within a fence or other fixed barrier. That word was something like ****gher***, and that ancient root word has filtered down into English in many different ways from many different sources. In fact, we've acquired this word in so many different ways that the various forms of the word within Modern English reflect all of the major influences on the early history of the language. Yet, in almost every case, the various words have retained their original meaning as an enclosed piece of land.

That word ****gher*** passed into the Germanic languages as something like ****gard***, and it then passed into the Old English language of the Anglo-Saxons. As we saw in the earlier episodes of the podcast, the hard 'G' sound at the beginning of many Old English words shifted to a softer 'Y' sound. So within Old English, that word evolved from ****gard*** to ***yard***.

Now back on the continent, the Franks spoke a Germanic dialect that was closely related to Old English. And the Franks retained that hard 'G' sound at the front of the word. That Frankish version of the word passed into the northern French dialects as ***gardin***, which later passed into Middle English in the 1200s as our modern word ***garden***. So ***garden*** and ***yard*** are ultimately derived from the same Germanic root. ***Garden*** has the original hard 'G' sound preserved by the Franks, and ***yard*** has the softer 'Y' sound used by the Anglo-Saxons. But both words originally referred to an area enclosed by a fence or barrier.

I should note that those words have evolved within modern British English, and today, American English and British English use those words in slightly different ways. In American English, a ***yard*** is the open area surrounding a house, and a ***garden*** is an smaller enclosed area – usually within a yard or adjacent to a yard. Within British English, the word ***garden*** generally refers to the open area surrounding a house – what Americans would call a ***yard***. And in British English, the word ***yard*** tends to refer to either a paved area or an area used for some type of commercial activity like a shipyard, or junkyard or lumberyard. Again, those are broad generalizations, but when I use the word ***garden*** in this episode, I'm using the word in its more traditional sense as an enclosed area where plants are grown and cultivated.

So the English words ***yard*** and ***garden*** are both derived from the same Germanic root word. Modern German also inherited that word, and it produced the German word ***Garten*** with the same general meaning. English has borrowed that word in the term ***kindergarten*** – literally a 'child's garden.'

The same Germanic root word also passed into the Norse language of the Vikings. There the word became ***garðr***, and that word passed into the Danelaw region of England as the word ***garth***. Again, it meant an enclosed garden. It isn't very common in modern standard English, but it can still be found in some regional dialects around England, especially in the north of England.

So via the Germanic languages, this old Indo-European root gave us ***yard*** from the Anglo-Saxons, ***garden*** from the Franks, and ***garth*** from the Vikings. That root also passed into Russian where it produced the word ***grad*** meaning 'a group of houses enclosed in a wall or other fortification.' So there, it came to mean a town or city, and it's still a common suffix in Russian place names like the old Soviet-era names Leningrad and Stalingrad.

That root also passed into Latin. But in Latin, the initial sound shifted to an 'H' sound. We've encountered that Latin sound change before. You might remember from an earlier episode that the words ***guest*** and ***host*** are cognate. ***Guest*** is the native English version and ***host*** is the Latin version. The Indo-European 'G' sound shifted to an 'H' sound in Latin. Well, the same thing happened here, and where the early Germanic language had ****gard***, Latin had ***hort*** or ***hortus***, again meaning an enclosed garden. That Latin root gave us the word ***horticulture***.

As I noted, gardens offered a degree of refuge and privacy. And in large manors, the host would meet with guests in the garden. In Latin, that produced a new word combing the Latin prefix ***com*** meaning 'with' and that word ***hortus*** meaning 'garden.' This particular combination can still be found in the word ***cohort***, literally a person who joins you in the garden. But that term was slurred within French to simply ***court***, which came to mean the people gathered around the king. The king's advisors and attendants became known as his ***court***.

The word ***court*** was one of the earliest French words to be borrowed into English after the Norman Conquest, and within English, the word was often combined with its English cousin – the word ***yard***. That produced the word ***courtyard*** to describe an enclosed area near or adjacent to a house.

So all of that means that ***yard***, ***garden***, ***garth***, ***horticulture***, ***cohort***, ***court*** and ***courtyard*** are all cognate. They all derive from the same Indo-European root word meaning 'to enclose.'

As we can see from those words, they all relate to gardens in some way, and that implies that the early Indo-Europeans maintained some type of basic gardens as well. So the idea of enclosing a piece of land to cultivate plants is very old. Gardens were common among the earliest civilizations. They were a necessity for people who needed to grow their own vegetables and herbs. While most early gardens were very basic plots, some civilizations developed very fancy gardens. And one of the first civilizations to do that was ancient Persia. I noted earlier that those gardens were called paradises, and the first reports of wild roses being grown and cultivated in gardens came from Persia. Their gardens were designed in a very deliberate way with geometric designs, water features, and other aesthetic elements. They were admired by visitors, and over time, similar gardens could be found throughout the Mediterranean. Meanwhile, those early cultivated roses also spread to the Mediterranean, and then into Western Europe. And it's very likely that the spread of cultivated roses was linked to the spread of those fancy pleasure gardens. [SOURCE, '*The Rose,' Jennifer Potter, p. 61-4.*]

Within Greece and Rome, roses became associated with specific deities, especially the goddesses of love – Aphrodite and Venus. The symbolism was eventually extended to Christianity where the rose became a symbol of the Virgin Mary. That connection is most apparent today in the

word ***rosary***. A general collection of prayers was called a ***hortus deliciarum*** in Latin, literally a 'garden of delights.' And a specific group of prayers was called a ***rosarium***, literally a 'rose garden.' Many of those prayers were hymns of praise dedicated to Mary, and in the 1500s, that Latin word ***rosarium*** became the English word ***rosary***. Later, a collection of Hail Marys recited with prayer beads became known as a ***rosary***, and then the word ***rosary*** was extended to the beads themselves. And through that process, the word ***rosary*** – literally a 'rose garden' – came to refer to prayer beads. [SOURCE, 'Medieval English Gardens,' Teresa McLean, p. 132]

We also see this connection is the name of the common herb ***rosemary***. The original Latin name was ***rosmarinus*** – a combination of ***ros*** meaning 'dew' (D-E-W) and ***marinus*** meaning 'the sea.' So in Latin, the name literally meant the 'dew of the sea.' The word passed in late Old English as ***rosmarine***. But English speakers didn't really understand that meaning, and to them, the name ***rosmarine*** sounded sort of like a combination of ***rose*** and ***Mary***. And since people associated roses with the Virgin Mary, there was already a connection between those words in the minds of many people. So they gradually converted the name of the herb from ***rosmarine*** to ***rosemary***. In fact, the modern form of the word as ***rosemary*** appeared for the first time in that early English cookbook called the Forme of Cury which we looked at in an earlier episode.

We also find a connection between the Virgin Mary and flowers in the name of the common flower ***marigold***. It was simply called a ***gold*** in Old English, which reflected its color. But much like the rose, it became associated with Mary, and in the early 1400s, it started to appear in documents for the first time as ***marigold***.

Another flower associated with the Virgin Mary was the lily. To many medieval Christians, it was the most important devotional flower. Many depictions of Mary featured her with either roses or lilies or both. The rose was a symbol of her love, and the lily was a symbol of her purity. There was a traditional association between the color white and purity, so the white lily helped to draw that connection. And in fact, the term ***lily-white*** appeared for the first time in English documents in the late 1300s. [*SOURCE: 'Pleasures and Pastimes in Medieval England,' Compton Reeves, p. 136, and 'Medieval English Gardens,' Teresa McLean, p. 162*.]

Now given these basic connections between certain flowers and Christianity, it probably isn't surprising that monasteries placed a heavy emphasis on gardening. Most monasteries, especially Benedictine monasteries, maintained elaborate gardens for meditation and prayer. [*SOURCE: 'Medieval English Gardens,' Teresa McLean, p. 16-17.*] In fact, the Benedictine rule specifically required the cultivation of gardens. And like most common gardens, they served a variety of purposes.

Today, we tend to think of gardens as places where people grow pretty flowers and places where people grow a variety of plants to eat. Well, those were two of the basic uses of gardens in the Middle Ages. Monasteries, for example, had lots mouths to feed, so they grew vegetables and herbs in the gardens. And since gardens were places of meditation and prayer, the monks also tended to focus on beauty and aesthetics by growing flowers and shrubs. But it's also important to keep in mind that flowers were often used as food ingredients in the Middle Ages – much

more so than today. So flowers were grown for their beauty and fragrance, as well as for their culinary value.

Garden plants also served other important purposes in the Middle Ages. Remember that modern science didn't exist yet, so people relied heavily on plants and herbs as medicines. Every monastery had an infirmarer who was in charge of the infirmary and was responsible for making salves and other medicines. And that monk relied on those plants and herbs as basic ingredients. [*SOURCE: 'Medieval English Gardens,' Teresa McLean, p. 28.*] The herbs were often dried so they could be preserved and used throughout the year, and that may be how we got the word ***drug***.

The word ***drug*** appeared in English for the first time in poems like Piers Plowman and the Canterbury Tales. The word was borrowed from French, but its ultimate origin is disputed. One theory suggests that French borrowed it from a Dutch version of the word ***dry***, which was related to the English word ***dry.*** That connection implies that the word ***drug*** was derived from dried herbs that were often used as medicines, and if that theory is true, it means that the word ***drug*** is cognate with the English word ***dry***, meaning they both evolved from the same root word.

In addition to beauty, aesthetics, food and medicines, medieval gardens were also important because they cultivated plants used for dyes and inks. That was especially important in monasteries where illuminated manuscripts were produced. Elderberries and mulberries produced a common blue dye, while iris flowers produced a popular green dye, and saffron was used to make a yellow ink that was cheaper than gold leaf. [*SOURCE: 'Medieval English Gardens,' Teresa McLean, p. 35.*]

So as you can see, medieval gardens served a lot of different functions, and that was why they were such an important part of English society. Some monasteries maintained separate gardens – one for edible plants, one for medicinal plants, and one for meditation and prayer. Other monasteries combined all of those elements into one single garden, but divided the garden itself into separate sections for each type of plant. Common household gardeners didn't have that luxury. They tended to mix all of their plants together into one common plot. But regardless of layout, most people had access to some type of garden.

Of course, that included the nobility as well. And after the Norman Conquest, elaborate gardens became much more common at royal palaces and castles. Remember that the word ***court*** comes from the same root as the word ***garden***, and during the period of Norman rule, not only was the word ***court*** introduced to English, but its meaning also expanded from the king's 'co-horts' or 'garden mates' to the more varied senses that we have today, including the sense as a courtyard. It was during this same period that heraldry also became very important to the European nobility as kings, queens and other nobles adopted various symbols to represent their household or their family. Those symbols sometimes included animals and plants.

Geoffrey of Anjou was the Count of Anjou and Duke of Normandy in France. His tomb depicts him carrying a shield decorated with lions, and that is considered to be one of the earliest examples of European heraldry. But Geoffrey not only had an association with lions, he also had

an association with a particular plant. Supposedly, he often wore a bright yellow blossom of the broom plant in his hair or in his hat. In Latin, that plant was called ***planta genista***, and in French and English, it became known as ***Plantagent*** – the name for the family dynasty that he founded. He famously married Matilda, the granddaughter of William the Conqueror, and their descendants ruled England from the mid-1100s all the way through the Wars of the Roses, ending with the arrival of the Tudors at the end of the 1400s. So almost all of the kings we've encountered during the Middle English period were part of this family dynasty – a dynasty named for a common garden shrub.

By the way, I noted that the name of that plant in English was the broom plant. Well, as it turns out, that the plant had branches that were ideal for sweeping, and sometimes, people would bind several loose branches together for that purpose, and that is in fact where the get the modern word ***broom*** meaning a tool used for sweeping. It comes from the same shrub that produced the name of the Plantagenet Dynasty. ***Broom*** comes from the English name, and ***Plantagenet*** comes from the Latin and French name.

Now Geoffrey Plantagenet's great-grandson was Henry III. He was the king of England for over 50 years in the middle part of the 1200s. And he is important to this episode because he ruled at a time when nobles were putting a major emphasis on elaborate gardens. The English kings maintained a royal palace at Woodstock near Oxford. And Henry oversaw a major expansion of the gardens at that palace. He had two new gardens built, and another garden for his wife enclosed and improved for her enjoyment. The palace became a collection of royal gardens, and the new enclosures apparently included a rose garden. [*SOURCE: 'Medieval English Gardens,' Teresa McLean, p. 100*.] And that was a significant development because Henry's wife was the person who introduced the rose as a symbol of English royalty.

Henry's wife was Eleanor of Provence from the south of France. I talked about that marriage back in Episode 99. When she came to England, she was accompanied by a large retinue including many uncles and cousins from the south of France. The native English nobles didn't particularly like or understand all of the new foreigners at court who spoke a version of French that was very different from the Norman French they were accustomed to. But the new queen and her retinue came from the south of France where beautiful cultivated roses were held in high regard, and Eleanor decided to adopt the rose as her personal emblem. It was a white or gold colored rose, and Eleanor and Henry's eldest son also adopted the same rose as his personal emblem. He was Edward, and he eventually succeeded his father as king, thereby becoming Edward I. He was sometimes known by the nickname Longshanks. And again, he also used that white or gold colored rose as his emblem.

But he also had a younger brother named Edmund. And Edmund also wanted a rose as his emblem. But since his elder brother Edward had adopted the white rose, Edmund decided to go with the red rose as his emblem. And in that selection of the white rose by Edward and the red rose by Edmund, we can find the original use of red and white roses to distinguish different branches of the royal family.

Again, the elder brother Edward went on to become king, but the younger brother Edmund did receive a small consolation prize. He received a brand-new title – the first Earl of Lancaster. And just as Edward's descendants bore the title of King, Edmunds descendant's bore the title of Earl and then Duke of Lancaster. Those later generations stopped using the red rose as their emblem, but that historical connection remained.

Over time, Edmund's descendants became further and further removed from the main line of kings. But in the mid-1300s, Edmund's branch of the family tree reconnected with Edward's branch. That happened when Edmund's great-granddaughter Blanche married Edward's great-grandson John of Gaunt. I've talked about that marriage before in earlier episodes. It was John of Gaunt's first marriage, and he and Blanche were actually distant cousins, but that wasn't really unusual when it came to these types of marriages. As we know, John of Gaunt was the son of the king – Edward III. He was actually the third son to live to adulthood. And when he married Blanche, he married into the Lancastrian family line. That allowed him to eventually take the title of Duke of Lancaster for himself. So once again, a junior branch of the royal family bore a Lancastrian title.

And when Gaunt's son, Henry Bolingbroke, usurped the throne and became Henry IV, the House of Lancaster became the ruling family of England. Even though the Lancastrians now ruled England, the red rose originally associated with the family had been largely forgotten. The 1400s saw a succession of Lancastrian kings – Henry IV, Henry V and Henry VI – but none of them actually used the red rose as an emblem. However, writers and historians occasionally noted that historic connection between the House of Lancaster and the red rose, and that connection became fodder for later writers like Shakespeare. But more on that later.

Now when we left off with our historical narrative a couple of episodes back, we were still in the reign the third of the Lancastrian kings – Henry VI. He was the great-grandson of John of Gaunt, and he was the somewhat inept king who saw England fall into bankruptcy while losing the Hundred Years War. As we saw, the situation worsened when Henry started to experience mental illness and became largely unresponsive.

There had always been a cloud hanging over the House of Lancaster. As a junior branch of the family, there were always other nobles who had a better claim to the throne. The Lancastrians were descended from John of Gaunt, but remember, Gaunt was the third brother out of five. As I've noted in prior episodes, he had an older brother named Lionel, and even though Lionel was long dead, he did have living descendants. They had been skipped over when the Lancastrians usurped the throne, so they always posed a potential threat. But they had never really pursued their claims.

A few episodes back, we saw that Lionel's heir was his great-grandson Edmund. And based strictly on descent, Edmund actually had the best claim to the throne, but Edmund spent much of his spare time gambling and playing cards. We saw that one of the first references to playing cards in England came from his household accounts. So he was never really a threat to his cousins – the Lancastrians.

Now I should also note that John of Gaunt also had two younger brothers who I haven't really mentioned before in the podcast, and they had descendants. And even though those descendants were behind the Lancastrians in terms of descent, they now start to emerge as a very important part of our story.

Gaunt's next youngest brother was named Edmund, and he was given the title of the Duke of York. And it's here that we find the origin of the House of York who battled against the Lancastrians in the upcoming civil war. Now after becoming the Duke of York, Edmund did something very important in regard to the overall theme of this episode. He decided to use a rose for his personal emblem. Specifically, he chose a white rose – essentially the same rose that had been used by Queen Eleanor and Edward I back in the 1200s. That white rose had largely fallen out of use for personal emblems, but Edmund the Duke of York decided to bring it back. And that white rose continued to be used by his descendants who became known as the House of York.

Now you may be wondering how the Yorks had any kind of claim to the throne since they were behind the Lancastrians in the overall pecking order. Well, the answer to that has to do with a strategic marriage that brought Lionel's descendants, who had the best claim to the throne, into the House of York. In essence, the two lines were merged together by marriage. Here's what happened.

Edmund the card gambler, who never pursued his claim to the throne, had a younger sister named Anne Mortimer. Remember, they were the direct descendants of Lionel, so they represented the senior line of the Plantagenet family. Well, the sister Anne Mortimer married into the House of York. She married the son of Edmund the Duke of York. So Anne and her husband were cousins, but again, that wasn't really all that unusual with these royal marriages. And together, Anne and her husband had a son named Richard. So when Richard was born, he was a direct descendant of Lionel through his mother and a direct descendant of Edmund Duke of York through his father. And when his mother and his uncle Edmund died, he became the nearest living relative of his great-great-grandfather Lionel. So he now represented the senior branch of the Plantagenet family. So through his mother, he inherited a claim to the English throne. And through his father, he inherited the title of Duke of York. And he also inherited that white rose as personal emblem. And by the 1430s, he was starting to emerge as the major rival of the Lancastrian kings. For the first time, nobles who opposed the Lancastrians had an another option to turn to. They could look to Richard, the new Duke of York, who arguably had a better claim to the English throne than the Lancastians themselves. And the inheritances Richard had received from his mother and father had made him the greatest landholder in England. [*SOURCE: 'The Wars of the Roses,' Alison Weir, p. 84*.]

Again, the Lancastrian king was Henry VI – the somewhat inept king who inherited the throne as a baby, and who was unable or unwilling to stamp out the corruption which was rampant among his close advisors. His advisors took money, land and titles while the rest of England teetered on the verge of bankruptcy. [*SOURCE: 'This Realm of England: 1399-1688,' 8th ed., Lacey Baldwin Smith, p. 49.*] Meanwhile. England lost one battle after another during the final years of the

Hundred Years War in France, on its way to its inevitable defeat in the war. With every one of these developments, more and more people looked to Richard of York as an alternative to Henry.

The Lancastrians tried to marginalize Richard by giving him a military appointment in France during the war. It was intended to keep him out of English politics. And while the war kept Richard busy in France, it also gave him crucial military experience.

In 1445, King Henry married Margaret of Anjou – a cousin of the French royal family. It was a strategic political marriage, but Margaret turned out to be one of Henry's most loyal supporters and one of Richard of York's fiercest opponents. In the process, she eventually emerged as the de facto leader of the Lancastrian cause.

When Margaret became queen, she also adopted a flower as a personal emblem. Her flower was the daisy. [*SOURCE: 'The Last Plantagenets,' Thomas B. Costain, p. 296*] And the image of a daisy was embroidered on the robes of her attendants. Margaret may have chosen that flower because it is called a ***marguerite*** in French, so her name was the same as the flower. But, of course, the flower is called a ***daisy*** in English, which is literally a 'day's eye.' It's called that because the flower opens its petals during the day and closes them at night. So it basically opens it eyes during the daytime, and that's why English speakers called it the 'day's eye' – or ***daisy*** today.

The linguistic link between the names Margaret and Daisy was once very strong within English, and that connection helps to explain why the name Daisy is still a common nickname for Margaret.

Now as I noted, daisies acquired their modern name because they open in the daytime and close at night. Well, at nighttime, when the daisies are closed, birds will often nest in bushes and trees. And that fact gave us a very common phrase which has its origins during this period. In the Middle Ages, it was common for some people to hunt birds at night while they were nesting. They would take a torch or other light, and one person would hit the bushes with a stick while the other person would use the light to attract the fleeing birds. The hunters would either try to catch the birds in a net or strike them with a stick as they were flying away. And this activity gave us the common phrase to 'beat about the bush' or 'beat around the bush.' The phrase is recorded for the first time around the current point in our overall story of English in the mid-1400s. It appeared in an anonymous poem called 'Generydes' apparently composed around the year 1440. In Modern English the line reads:

But it has been said full long ago,
Some beat the bush and some the birds take.

Here's the same passage in the original Middle English:

Butt as it hath be sayde full long agoo,
Some bete the bussh and some the byrdes take.

The implication is that the person ‘beating the bush’ was doing something relatively easy and preliminary, while the person catching the bird the more difficult and crucial task. So to ‘beat about the bush’ or ‘beat around the bush’ came to refer to a preliminary activity leading up to the main event. Today, it has the sense of someone engaged in a needless delay rather than getting straight to the point. But it is a phrase related to bushes and shrubs, and it appeared in the mid-1400s.

Around the same time that poem appeared, another important poem was composed by a man identified as John the Gardener or simply John Gardener. That poem was called ‘The Feate of Gardening,’ and it is considered to be the first guide to gardening composed in the English language. The poem is usually dated to the 1440s, and it is served as a guide to anyone trying to maintain an English garden in the late Middle Ages.

The poem itself is not very long. It’s only about 200 lines. It’s divided into nine different sections dealing with different categories of vegetables, herbs, or fruits. It provides some practical gardening advice, but it’s mostly a guide as to the best time of year to plant certain items. Here are the opening lines of the poem – first in Modern English and then in the original late Middle English:

How so well a gardener be
Here he may both hear & see
Every time of the year & of the month
And how the craft shall be done
In what manner he shall delve & set
Both in drought and in wet
How he shall his seeds sow
Of every month he most know

Ho so wyl a gardener be
Here he may both hyre & se
Euery tyme of the ȝere & of the mone
And how the crafte schatt be done
Yn what maner he schatt delue & sette
Bothe yn drowthe and yn wette
How he schatt hys sedys sowe
Of euery moneth he most knowe

As a quick aside, I should note that gardeners probably had no problem keeping up with the months and the time of year, but like everyone else, they may have found it difficult to remember how many days were in each month. Some had 30 days, some had 31. One month had 28. Well around this same time, in the first half of the 1400s, we find the oldest known version of the common poem that many people still use today to keep track of those days. The poem was scribbled on a page in a Latin manuscript, but it was written in English. It reads:

Thirti dayes hath Novembir
April June and Septembir.
Of xxviij [twenty and eighte] is but oon
And alle the remenaunt xxx and j [thritti and oon]

Thirty days have November,
April, June, and September.
Of 28 is but one
And all the remnant 30 and 1.

Again, that mnemonic poem wasn't part of this gardening poem, but it was written and preserved around the same time. The gardening poem begins by stating that the grafting of apple and pear trees should be done between September and April. Grafting is the process of taking a limb or cutting from one tree and attaching to the limb of another tree. If done properly, the transplanted cutting will become part of the new tree. There were lots of reasons for grafting pear and apple trees. It could provide variety, or preserve the fruit of a weak or diseased tree, or repair a damaged tree. The first part of the 'Feate of Gardening' instructs gardeners how to graft trees successfully.

This part of the poem reminds us that apple and pear trees were common in English gardens and orchards in the Middle Ages. The words ***apple*** and ***pear*** have both been around since the Old English period, even though the word ***pear*** is ultimately from Latin and is one of those handful of Latin words borrowed by the early Germanic tribes from the Romans.

Apples and pears grew naturally in Britain. The wild apple was the ***crab*** or ***crab-apple*** – a term that appeared for the first time in English documents in the mid-1400s. Crab-apples were small and tart as were wild pears. But cultivated apples and pears were imported from the continent, probably first brought by the Romans. They were larger and sweeter, and they were the ones that people preferred to grow in their gardens or orchards. [*SOURCE: 'Medieval English Gardens,' Teresa McLean, p. 231*] People ate apples and pears in a variety of ways, but many people preferred to turn them into a drink. Apples were turned into cider, and pears were turned into perry. ***Cider*** and ***perry*** were both French terms borrowed in the 1300s. ***Cider*** replaced the Old English word ***æppelwin*** – literally 'apple wine.'

Now given the overall theme of this episode, here is something else you may or may not know about apples and pears. They are actually part of the rose family. In fact, many of the common fruits that we eat today are part of that same family. That includes plums, strawberries, peaches, and cherries, among many others.

Plum trees grew naturally in England, and the word ***plum*** is a native Old English word.

Strawberries also grew in the wild, but they were also cultivated in gardens. When cultivated, they produced a larger and sweeter berry. The word ***strawberry*** appears to be a native English word, but it isn't entirely clear how the name originated. Lots of theories have been proposed to suggest how strawberries might be related to straw, but again, there isn't really a definitive

answer. The more common Old English name was ***eorþ-berge*** – literally 'earth berry.' But the word ***strawberry*** became common in Middle English, and that was the word used by John the Gardener in his poem about gardening. Other berries like raspberries, elderberries, blackberries, and gooseberries could also be found growing in the wild. [*SOURCE: 'Pleasures and Pastimes in Medieval England,' Compton Reeves, p. 141.*]

Peaches are also a member of same rose family. Peaches are ultimately from East Asia, but they were introduced to Europe during the Roman period. They were actually grown in England in the Middle Ages, but they were difficult to grow and cultivate that far north, so they tended to be very expensive – and were mostly eaten by the wealthy. [*SOURCE: 'Food in Medieval Times,' Adamson, p. 21.*] The eastern origins of the peach is reflected in its name. Believe it or not, the word ***peach*** is actually a variation of the word ***Persia*** where the Romans encountered them. You might remember that Persia is also the place where we have the first evidence of rose cultivation. With respect to peaches, the Romans called the fruit a ***persica mala*** – literally a 'Persian apple.' The ***mala*** part was later dropped at the end, and as the word passed through French into English, it evolved from ***persica*** to ***pesca*** to ***peche*** to ***peach***. But ultimately, ***peach*** means Persian.

Another member of the rose family is the cherry. Cherries are native to western Asia, but again, the Romans introduced them to Britain. [*SOURCE: 'Food in Medieval Times,' Adamson, p. 21.*] The word ***cherry*** was borrowed from French and Latin, and ultimately from Greek. And the Greeks probably picked it up from some other language in the east. The interesting thing about the word ***cherry*** is that it was originally ***cherise***. So one individual cherry was a ***cherise***. But English speakers were confused by that 's' sound at the end, and they started to think of ***cherise*** as a plural noun. So during the 1400s, people started to drop the 'S' when they were referring to a single piece of the fruit. And ***cherise*** became ***cherry*** without the 'S' at the end. And today, we only use the 'S' at the end when referring to multiple ***cherries***.

By the way, the same thing happed with ***peas***. People ate a lot of beans and peas in the Middle Ages as well, but ***pease*** was both the plural and the singular form of the word. So you had a lot of ***pease*** or just one individual ***pease***. But again, people became confused by that 'S' sound at the end of the singular form. They started to think of ***pease*** as a strictly plural term, and based on that, they started to refer to an individual 'pease' as a ***pea*** – without the 'S'. So the cherry and the pea have one thing in common. They both originally had an 'S' at the end which was lost over time because people thought the 'S' should be reserved for the plural forms.

Now after discussing apples and pears, John the Gardener included a section on the maintenance of grape vines. Even though we tend to associated grapes and wine with France, some people in England also grew grapes in the Middle Ages. The wine produced from the grapes was not considered to be as good as French wine, so most of the wine consumed in England continued to be imported from France. In addition to wine, English grapes were often used to produce a liquid called verjuice, which was a substance somewhere between wine and vinegar. It was a very popular flavoring in the Middle Ages. It was added to many medieval dishes. [*SOURCE: 'Pleasures and Pastimes in Medieval England,' Compton Reeves, p. 142.*]

Like many of those other fruits, grapes were originally brought to England by the Romans. The Anglo-Saxons called a grape a ***win-berige*** – literally a 'wine berry.' But in the late 1200s, the word ***grape*** started to appear in English documents, and it eventually replaced the old word 'wine berry.' The word ***grape*** was borrowed from French, but it appears that French acquired the word from a Germanic source, perhaps from the Franks. Most scholars think that the word ***grape*** was derived from a type of grappling hook used to grab grapes from the vine. And that etymology suggests that the words ***grape*** and ***grapple*** are cognate, and both may also be related to the words ***grab*** and ***grasp***. And even though English grapes were not as common as French grapes, they were common enough to be included in John the Gardener's guide to English gardening.

Now after discussing the maintenance of grape vines, John the Gardener turned his attention to onions, leeks and garlic. And it was probably appropriate that those were the first vegetables he discussed because they were some of the most popular vegetables grown in medieval gardens and cooked in medieval kitchens.

Of course, all three are part of the same family of vegetables, and in Old English, they were all sometimes referred to as ***leeks***. They were so common in gardens that the Anglo-Saxons often called a kitchen garden a ***leac-tun*** – literally a 'leek town' or 'leek enclosure.' And a gardener was called a ***leac-weard*** – literally a 'leek warden' or 'leek guardian.'

Since the word ***leek*** was a very general term, English speakers tried to distinguish various types of leeks. As we've seen before in the podcast, the word ***gar*** meant spear, and a spear-shaped leek was called a 'gar-leek,' which became our modern word ***garlic***. Both ***leek*** and ***garlic*** are Old English words.

But what about an onion? Well, ***onion*** is a French loanword.. It was sometimes called a ***cipe*** in Old English, but the Anglo-Saxons were also influenced by that French word ***onion***, and they coined a word for the vegetable that basically meant an 'onion leek.' So let's look a little closer at that word ***onion***. I noted in an earlier episode that ***onion*** is basically a variation of the word ***union***. ***Onion*** and ***union*** are actually cognate, and they're still only separated by one letter today. Originally, an onion was thought of as a vegetable with many separate layers that were 'united' into one bulb. And that sense of 'unity' or 'oneness' produced the Latin word ***unio*** which became the French word ***onion***. And the Anglo-Saxons took that word ***unio*** or ***onion***, and they came up with the term ***ynne-leac*** – literally a 'union leek' or 'onion leek.' But by the mid-1300s, English speakers had just adopted the French word ***onion*** by itself – without the leek part at the end. And over time, the word ***leek*** became restricted to one particular type of vegetable within this larger leek family.

After discussing onions and leeks, John the Gardener turned his attention to other types vegetables, but he didn't use the word ***vegetable***. He used the more traditional term ***wort***. That's because the word ***vegetable*** is a French loanword, and even though it eventually replaced the word ***wort***, it didn't really do so until the end of the 1400s. So when John the Gardener wrote his guide to gardening in the mid-1400s, he was still using the Old English word ***wort***.

That word still survives in the name of certain plants like St. John's Wort, so named because it supposedly flowered around the time of St. John's Day which was June 24. [*SOURCE: 'Medieval English Gardens,' Teresa McLean, p. 147.*] John the Gardener actually mentioned St. John's Wort in his guide to gardening, but he called it 'herbe Ion.' He didn't use the word ***wort*** for that plant, but he did use it for other plants like ***fieldwort***, ***ribwort***, ***motherwort***, ***spearwort***, and ***liverwort***.

Another plant with that name is ***colewort***. It's a term that goes back to the 1300s, and it was originally a generic term for any cabbage-like plant. In fact, the word ***cole*** was often used by itself with much the same meaning. It's derived from an old Latin root word that was borrowed by the early Germanic tribes. So it can be found in the name of a lot of related vegetables. It exists in the term ***cole-slaw***, which is actually derived from a Dutch version of the word. It also exists in the term ***kale*** which is a northern English form of the word. It can also be found in the first part of ***cauliflower*** which was borrowed from Latin.

But in early English, it became common to combine that word ***cole*** meaning 'cabbage' with ***wort*** meaning 'vegetable' to produce the term ***colewort*** meaning a 'cabbage-like vegetable.' It was a much more common word at one time, and it passed into early American English as well. In the southern part of the United States, the word ***colewort*** was slurred to 'col'ort,' and then became ***collard***. So the modern word ***collard*** is really just a different pronunciation of ***colewort***. Again, colewort would have been found in most gardens in the Middle Ages in part because it could be grown and harvested throughout much of the year. In fact, it was a staple of most gardens alongside onions, garlic and leeks.

During the Middle English period, the words ***cole*** and ***colewort*** started to be replaced with French loanwords. The word ***lettuce*** and ***spinach*** were borrowed from French, and John the Gardener actually used both of those words in his guide. English also borrowed the word ***cabbage*** which acquired much of the original meaning of ***cole*** or ***colewort***. ***Cabbage*** actually comes from the Latin word ***caput*** meaning 'head.' We've encountered that word before. ***Caput*** gave us words like ***cap*** and ***cape*** and ***captain*** and ***chaplain*** and ***chief***, even the word ***chef***. Well, it also gave us ***cabbage*** because these types of plants were originally leafy vegetables without a head. But during the Roman period, they started to be grown and cultivated with a ball-like head. And since that plant now had a head, they were named after that Latin word ***caput*** meaning head. And through French, the word became ***cabbage***.

For the most part, these types of cabbages or cabbage-like plants were eaten by cutting up the leaves and boiling them in a soup or porridge. So they were usually cooked until they were soggy and mushy. [*SOURCE: 'Medieval English Gardens,' Teresa McLean, p. 207.*] But some of those leafy vegetables had a firm root that could also be eaten. Those types of roots were called ***næps*** in Old English or ***neps*** in Middle English. And as they were cultivated and became more popular, people started to distinguish between different kinds of neps. One particular kind was round and bulbous, and it looked like a piece of wood that had been shaped and rounded by turning it in a lathe. And from that sense of turning, that particular nep started to be called a 'turn-nep,' which became our modern word ***turnip***. It's still called a ***neep*** in Scotland and parts of England. And it was a common vegetable in most medieval gardens.

Another common root vegetable was called a ***feld-more*** in Old English – literally a 'field root.' But the French called it a ***pasnaise***. That word was borrowed into English, but since English speakers considered it a type of nep, they changed the end of the word from '-naise' to '-nep.' So the ***pasnaise*** became a ***passenep***. And it eventually evolved into ***parsnip***. So the '-nip' at the end of ***turnip*** and ***parsnip*** represents this old word ***nep*** for a type of root vegetable.

Now John the Gardener listed most of his worts and root vegetables under the general category of herbs – or /herbs/ – depending on your pronunciation. During the Middle English period, there wasn't always a clear distinction between a vegetable and an herb. An ***herb*** could refer to any leafy vegetable. So John the Gardener included lettuce, spinach, and radishes under the general category of herbs. And he also included something else under that category. He included flowers – like violets, lilies, and red and white roses. Again, that wasn't really unusual because people actually ate different types of flowers in the Middle Ages.

Not only were certain flowers added to dishes, they also gave flavor to sauces and drinks. As raw salads became more popular in the late Middle Ages and the early modern period, people added flowers to salads, like Marigolds, violets, and hawthorne flowers. [*SOURCE: 'Sweet Herbs and Sundry Flowers,' Tania Bayard, P. 27.*] They were also added to soups and porridges. [*SOURCE: 'Food in Medieval Times,' Adamson, p. 14-15, and 'Medieval English Gardens,' Teresa McLean, p. 142.*] Several of these flowers, along with daisies, were also used as common medicines. [*SOURCE: 'Medieval English Gardens,' Teresa McLean, p. 162.*]

Roses were also consumed by people in the Middle Ages. Roses were used to add flavor to puddings and jams and preserves. They were also added to wines. [*SOURCE: 'Medieval English Gardens,' Teresa McLean, p. 169.*] Rose petals were steeped in water to create rose water. At medieval banquets, people would use the rose water to wash their hands. And roses were also used as medicines to heal certain eye diseases. [*SOURCE: 'Food in Medieval Times,' Adamson, p. 14-5.*]

So all of these flowers were common in medieval gardens, and John the Gardener specifically mentioned the 'rose ryde' and 'rose white' – the red rose and white rose – among a list of herbs at the end of his guide to gardening.

And that takes us back to where we began, with the simmering conflict between the House of Lancaster and the House of York that was taking place around the same time that John the Gardener prepared his guide to gardening. Of course, that conflict became known as the Wars of the Roses because, supposedly, the House of Lancaster was represented by the red rose and the House of York was represented by the white rose.

But the reality isn't quite that simple. The Yorks did use a white rose as one of their many symbols, but the red rose of Lancaster only had a limited use in the 1200s, and it had long since fallen out of use. So why is the conflict called the Wars of the Roses?

Well, the answer is a little bit of revisionist history and the most revered playwright in the English language. To understand how the upcoming civil war came to be known as the Wars of the Roses, we have to consider the two key rivals in the mid-1400s in the lead-up to the war. On the one side we have Richard of York who we looked at earlier in the episode. He was descended from two different branches of the Plantagent family, and he possessed the best overall claim to the throne if we looked solely at descent from the eldest child. His great-great grandfather had been Lionel, the eldest child of Edward III with living descendants. But he was also descended from Lionel's younger brother Edmund who had been the Duke of York. So he had inherited Lionel's superior claim to the throne through his mother, and he had inherited Edmund's title of Duke of York from his father. He had also inherited wealth from both family lines. So as the head of the House of York, he was a very powerful figure to be reckoned with, and as I noted, he did sometimes use the white rose of York as his emblem.

Meanwhile, the king was the Lancastrain Henry VI. He was the weak and ineffective great-grandson of John of Gaunt. As we know, the Lancastrians were the descendants of Gaunt, and Henry was descended from Gaunt's first marriage. But you might remember that Gaunt was married three different times, and his third wife was Katherine Swinford – the sister-in-law of Geoffrey Chaucer. She was the sister of Chaucer's wife. And Gaunt also had children with Katherine who were known as the Beauforts. And one of those grandsons was Edmund Beaufort, also known as the Duke of Somerset. He was one of the king's closest Lancastrian relatives and one of his closest advisors. In fact, given that the king didn't have any children at the time, he was likely the next in line to the throne, assuming that the throne remained in the hands of the Lancastrians. But if the nobles looked outside of that family, Richard of York had the better overall claim based on his descent from his ancestor Lionel because Lionel had been the older brother of John of Gaunt. So those competing claims set in motion a bitter and deadly rivalry between of Edmund of Somerset and Richard of York. The two distant cousins competed for influence at Henry's court, and when Henry succumbed to mental illness in 1453, the two distant cousins competed for control of England itself.

And that's the context for a very famous scene in William Shakespeare's cycle of history plays that cover this period. The particular scene appears in the play Henry VI, Part I. It's a completely fictional scene, but it helped to established the idea in the popular imagination that each side in the rivalry was represented by a rose. And the scene was set, appropriately enough, in a garden. It was the Temple Garden located near the law courts in London.

In the play, Shakespeare tells us that the two main rivals, Somerset and York, retreat to the garden where they are accompanied by several other prominent nobles. The two argue over their respective rights to the throne, and Somerset turns to one of the gathered nobles and asks him to choose between the two men. The noble named Warwick defers, but York encourages the nobles to make a choice and take sides. He says:

If he suppose that I have pleaded truth,
From off this brier pluck a white rose with me.

Somerset counters:

Let him that is no coward nor no flatterer,
But dare maintain the party of the truth,
Pluck a red rose from off this thorn with me.

Warwick then plucks the white rose indicating that he has sided with York. The next noble chooses a red rose indicating that he has sided with Somerset. The various nobles make their respective choices with the majority siding with York, whereupon York asserts that he has won the argument. But Somerset counters by saying:

Here in my scabbard, meditating that
Shall dye your white rose in a bloody red.

The argument comes to a close with Warwick issuing the following prophesy:

And here I prophesy: this brawl today,
Grown to this faction in the Temple Garden,
Shall send between the Red Rose and the White
A thousand souls to death and deadly night.

Again, that scene was completely fictional, and it was designed to provide a dramatic background to the real-life war that followed. That war was known as the Cousin's War at the time, but Shakespeare's famous scene in the Temple Garden helped to foster the notion that each side was represented by either a red or white rose.

But that's not to say that Shakespeare made up that association. The House of York did use a white rose as one of its symbols, and the House of Lancaster did have a very old connection to the red rose. And that connection was alluded to by other writers before the time of Shakespeare in the late 1400s and 1500s. But it was the popularity of Shakespeare that really pushed the idea to the forefront. In the late 1700s, the writer David Hume published his account of the civil war called "The Wars of the Two Roses." And that was the first known reference to the war as a war of the roses. From there, the term passed into popular culture as the usual name for the conflict.

Now before I conclude this episode, I should note that the war ultimately ended when Henry Tudor became king about 30 years after the war began. He was from the Lancastrian family, but he married the Yorkish heir, Elizabeth of York. And that marriage effectively reunited the two families and gave rise to the House of Tudor. When Henry's son became king as Henry VIII, he also adopted the rose as his emblem, but he insisted a modified version of the rose. To reflect the unification of the two competing houses, the new design combined the two roses by placing a white rose inside of a red rose. That new rose symbol became known as the Tudor rose, and it is still used as a prominent symbol of England to this day. It was also adopted before Shakespeare was born. So again, when Shakespeare depicted various nobles plucking roses in garden, he was simply developing an idea that already existed in the culture at the time.

Next time, we're going to turn our attention to the actual conflict between the Houses of Lancaster and York. Historians who have studied this period have a lot of traditional resources to consult like historical chronicles and government records. But for this particular war, they also have something else that is unusual and previously unavailable. They have an extensive collection of letters written and maintained by a prominent family in the eastern part of England known as the Pastons. Occasional letters appear in the historical record prior to this point, but the so-called Paston Letters are the first extensive collection of letters from the same family of writers available in English. They cover several decades across much of the 1400s, and they are a goldmine for historians of this period. They are also a goldmine for historians of the English language because they capture not only the shifting fortunes of the Wars of the Roses, they also capture the shifting vowels of the Great Vowel Shift. So next time, we'll explore those two events through this very important collection of letters.

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