

**THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPTS**

EPISODE 151: SICK TO DEATH

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 151: Sick to Death. In this episode, we’re going to continue our look at the reign of Henry VIII. We’re also going to revisit a topic that I touched on back in the Anglo-Saxon period – the issue of sickness and disease. Several important developments in the treatment of disease took place during Henry’s reign as the practice of medicine started to move out of the Middle Ages and into the Modern era. Those developments are especially important as it relates to Henry because he was plagued with injury and illness during the latter part of his reign. Henry was often sick and tired, and he was also sick and tired of his new wife Anne Boleyn. His marital problems were remedied by Anne’s execution followed immediately by yet another marriage. But there were no simple solutions to his physical problems, which continued to plague him throughout this tumultuous period. So this time, we’ll look at those developments, and we’ll see how the events of this period 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 at Patreon.com/historyofenglish.

Now I concluded the last episode with the deaths of Thomas More and William Tyndale. As we saw over the past couple of episodes, More and Tyndale were engaged in a heated debate with each other over the use of English in the Church. More opposed it, while Tyndale risked his life to translate the Bible into English. Eventually, they both ran afoul of the king, and they were both executed in the mid-1530s.

Well, the debate over the proper role of English wasn’t limited to the Church. It also extended into other areas like medicine. In fact, there were some remarkable parallels between religion and medicine when it came to the use of English. Physicians were trained in Latin, just like priests. And they felt that they were the only ones who had the expertise to consult those Latin textbooks and interpret the contents for the common people. Physicians opposed the translation of those medical books into English, just like most priests opposed the translation of the Bible into English. They both felt that English translations would be misused by the common people who wouldn’t fully understand what they were reading. And in both cases, the printing press changed everything by overruling those objections and providing the people with English translations anyway. As we’ve seen, people really wanted books that they could read for themselves in English. They wanted to read the Bible in English for their spiritual health, and they wanted to read medical books in English for their physical health.

This was an era when plague and disease were constant threats. Even minor illnesses could cause severe pain and death. So it isn’t surprising that books related to medical treatments were some of the most popular books in the early era of printing. It is estimated that about a thousand different books related to medical treatments and cures were published in Europe in the first half century of printing. [*SOURCE: The Book in the Renaissance, Andrew Pettegree, p. 299.*]

When William Caxton brought the printing press to England in the late 1400s, one of his early publications was a book called the ‘Governayle of Health.’ *Governayle* meant ‘guide,’ and more specifically meant ‘a regimen to promote good health.’ As other presses were established in England, more and more medical books were printed. Many of those books contained traditional treatments like herbal remedies, special drinks and foods, salves, charms, and so on. But they were almost all based on the underlying concept of the four humors – the idea that the body was made up of four fluids or humors: yellow bile, black bile, blood and phlegm. It was thought that sickness occurred when those four humors were out of balance. And most remedies were designed to bring those humors back into balance. We explored this idea way back in Episode 63 because it was the view of medicine that dominated the Middle Ages. In fact, it goes all the way back to ancient Greek physicians like Hippocrates and Galen who lived during the time of the Roman Empire. Their writings formed the basis of medieval medicine in Europe, and translations of their works were very popular in the early era of printing. Over 600 editions of Galen’s writings were published during the 1500s. [SOURCE: *The Book in the Renaissance*, Andrew Pettegree, p. 300.] And those very old ideas were still widely accepted in the 1500s.

Part of the reason why medical books were so popular in the age of print is because most people treated their ailments at home, so they wanted a book that they could consult if they or their family members were sick. Of course, people sometimes sought more professional help for serious conditions, but getting that help was far from guaranteed. With little or no regulation of the practice of medicine, anyone could claim to be a healer. That meant that there were far more quacks and frauds than actual trained physicians. And that was part of the reason why physicians were concerned about people having access to medical books in English. They felt that it would only make matters worse.

In the 1540s, an author named Thomas Phayer translated a medical book from French into English. He called it the ‘Regiment of Life.’ In the preface, he took aim at physicians who criticized English translations of medical books. Here is the passage in contemporary Modern English:

‘How long would they have the people ignorant? Why do they begrudge the translation of medicine into English? Would they have no person know such things other than themselves? What does that make them – merchants of our lives and deaths that we should buy our health only from them and at their prices? No good physician is of that mind.’

Here is the same passage in the original English of the 16th century:

“How longe wolde they haue the people ignoraunt? Why grutche they phisike to come forth in Englysche? Wold they haue no man to knowe but onely they? Or what make they themselues? Marchauntes of our lyues and deathes that we shulde bye our healthe only of them, and at theyr prices? No good phisicion is of that mynde.”

Again these arguments are very reminiscent of the arguments made by supporters of the English Bible. They were both arguing that it was good for people to have access to the material in their own language. [SOURCE: *Words, Stones & Herbs*, Louise M. Bishop, p. 208.]

You may have noticed that the passage I read a moment ago used the word *physician*, and not *doctor*. Well, that was because *physician* was the more common term in Tudor England. *Doctor* usually referred to a scholar or someone with an advanced degree from a university – the same way that we might refer to someone with a Ph.D. as ‘*doctor*’ today. That’s ultimately how the word *doctor* came to be applied to someone with an advanced medical degree, but that didn’t really become common until the 1600s. You might remember from an earlier episode that the Old English word for a doctor was a *læce*, which became *leech* in Middle English (‘l-e-e-c-h’). But that word had largely disappeared by the 1500s. Again, it was replaced by the word *physician*. You may have also noticed in that passage that the practice of medicine was referred to as *physick*. So rather than ‘doctors’ engaging in the practice of ‘medicine,’ the people of Tudor England would have referred to ‘physicians’ engaged in the practice of ‘physic.’

Now Henry VIII believed in the importance of trained physicians, and early in his reign, he established the Royal College of Physicians, which was an attempt to bring some order to the practice of medicine. The College of Physicians was comprised of trained physicians, and it was given the authority to license and regulate the profession. Licenses were issued to qualified physicians who had received a medical degree from a university. It was an early attempt to make it clear who was qualified to give medical advice and who wasn’t. [*SOURCE: Medical Downfall of the Tudors: Sex, Reproduction & Succession, Sylvia Barbara Soberton, p. 20.*]

But the creation of the College of Physicians was merely the first step in the long process that gradually brought order to the practice of medicine. The organization did issue licenses to physicians, but there simply weren’t enough physicians to satisfy the overall demand for medical care. Furthermore, many common people couldn’t afford the fees charged by those physicians anyway. So most people continued to rely upon other healers. Those healers included surgeons who were distinct from physicians during this period. Surgeons performed a variety of surgical procedures – from lancing boils to amputations, but they were not held in the same high regard as physicians. They were considered manual laborers, and their experience came from serving as apprentices in trade guilds. They were supposed to perform the surgeries that the physicians recommended, but very often, they acted on their own and provided their own medical services.

There were also barbers. And that may seem like an odd group to include here, but you might remember from earlier episodes that barbers not only cut hair, they also performed minor surgeries – like blood-letting and removing teeth. After all, they had access to sharp razors and knives. So they also provided medical treatments, and since they had their own guild, they didn’t have to be licensed by the physicians either.

There were also apothecaries who made herbal remedies and other medicines. Again, they usually provided the medicines that the physicians prescribed, but very often, they gave out their own medical advice and recommended their own treatments. They were affiliated with the grocer’s guild, so they were not formally licensed either.

These various groups often argued with other and competed for influence, but they made up a large share of the medical marketplace in Tudor England, so much so that they limited the

influence of the licensed physicians. But one place where physicians did have a great deal of influence was in the royal court, especially in Henry's court. Throughout his reign, Henry suffered from a variety of illnesses, and his doctors were some of the few people who kept his trust and loyalty throughout his reign.

Henry had several doctors, but one of his most prominent physicians was William Butts. Henry trusted Dr. Butts' advice, and Butts remained by Henry's side until they both died within a couple of years of each other. In fact, a book was published in the year 1540 which contained many of the cures and treatments that were used by Henry's doctors. It even included a large number of treatments that were specifically attributed to Henry himself. It is sometimes called 'Dr. Butts' Diary' or the "Prescription Book of Henry." The treatments and remedies contained in the book provide a great deal of insight into the illnesses that Henry experienced during his reign.

Dr. Butts actually got his start by serving as the physician to Henry's daughter Mary. In 1525, Mary had been sent to Ludlow Castle in the Welsh Marches. She had her own court there with Dr. Butts as her personal doctor. Even though Wales was a territory of England, it was still a dangerous place for Englishmen, and that included Mary's English court. After a couple of years, they all returned to London, and that's when Dr. Butts became one of Henry's personal physicians. [SOURCE: *Bloody Mary*, Carolly Erickson, p. 59, 62.] Over the next few years, Butts not only treated Henry, he also treated Henry's closest advisors, and Henry's wife Anne Boleyn. He quickly became one of Henry's favorite physicians.

I mentioned that Dr. Butts got his start in Wales with Princess Mary. Well, around the current point in our overall story in 1535, there was a very important development in the relationship between England and Wales. And it was a development that impacted the history of English. In that year, Parliament enacted a law which began the process of unifying the two regions – under English rule of course. Henry wanted to bring Wales in line with England by requiring Wales to use English law, and by organizing the local governments along English lines. The Welsh were also given representation in Parliament.

The reason why this union is so important to our story is because the act adopted in 1535 also designated English as the official language of Wales. English had to be used for all governmental purposes, and all government officials in Wales had to speak English. Up until this point, most of the common people in Wales spoke Welsh – the native Celtic language. But now that started to change.

I should mention that the provisions that imposed the English language in Wales were actually repealed later, and by 'later' I mean in 1993 – in the Welsh Language Act of 1993. That 1993 act was part of a larger effort to preserve and protect the Welsh language. But the laws requiring the use of English had been maintained in Wales for nearly five centuries, and that meant that English became firmly entrenched in the region over the course of that time.

Now Princess Mary returned to London after her time in Wales, but she had a very rocky relationship with her father Henry VIII. Mary was close to her mother Catherine of Aragon, who

had been kicked to the curb when Henry married Anne Boleyn. The annulment of that first marriage also raised the issue of Mary's legitimacy since the annulment meant her parent's marriage never actually existed. Nevertheless, Mary was the eldest of Henry's two daughters, and as such, the selection of her future husband became a matter of strategic importance. Over the years, many different options were explored. At one point, she was formally engaged to the Hapsburg Emperor Charles V, whose realm included Spain and the Spanish New World. But that engagement was later rescinded. Henry also entertained the idea of having her marry the son of the French king, or perhaps even the French king himself.

Those negotiations reflect the delicate balance of power in Europe at the time. The two dominant powers were France and the Hapsburg Empire. And Henry found himself flirting with each of them in order to check the power of the other.

Meanwhile, the French king Francis I had come to realize that the Habsburg Empire had a major advantage thanks to its territories in the New World, so he began to look to the New World as well.

In the 1520s, he had funded an expedition by an Italian navigator named Giovanni da Verrazano to determine if there was a passage through the northern part of the New World that would allow French ships to reach Asia without having to sail all the way around the southern tip of South America. This was part of the search for the elusive 'Northwest Passage.' By the time of this particular expedition in the 1520s, the Spanish had explored the North American coast from Florida up to the modern Carolinas, and the English had discovered Newfoundland in the far north. But it still wasn't clear what lay in between in what is today the northeastern coast of the United States. So Verrazano was sent to explore the region to see if a Northwest Passage could be found. Verrazano sailed to the coastal region of the Carolinas and then headed north. He traveled through the Chesapeake Bay and eventually reached the western tip of Long Island. Of course, that's where New York City is located today. Verrazano then continued up the coast past Cape Cod to Newfoundland. Along the way, he became the first known European to explore the northeastern coast of the New World. And you may know that there is a major bridge in New York City today called the Verrazzano-Narrows Bridge. It connects Staten Island and Brooklyn, and it is named after this early explorer – Giovanni da Verrazano.

About a decade passed after Verrazano's expedition. Then around the current point in our story in the mid-1530s, the French king authorized another expedition – this time by a French explorer named Jacques Cartier. He explored part of the same region, specifically the region along the St. Lawrence River in eastern Canada. Again, Cartier initially thought the river might be the elusive Northwest Passage, but it wasn't. But Cartier's expedition is important because it led to France laying claim to the region. Cartier encountered indigenous people along the river who called their settlements *kanada* in their native Iroquoian language. And that word *kanada* is the ultimate source of the modern name of the region – *Canada*. [SOURCE: *Empires of the Word: A Language History of the World*, p. 412.]

During this same time period, the Spanish were continuing their expansion across South America with the conquest of the Inca civilization in Peru. The Spanish had already conquered

the Aztec civilization in Mexico in the prior decade. And both conquests were accomplished in part because of something the Spanish brought with them – smallpox. The disease reached Mexico in 1520, and it is estimated that it eventually killed nearly half of the Aztec people there. The same thing then happened to the Inca in South America in the 1530s. [*SOURCE: Guns, Germs And Steel, Jared Diamond, p. 210-1.*]

The indigenous people of the Americas had never encountered smallpox before, so they had little or no immunity to the disease. They also had no immunity to other European diseases like measles and bubonic plague. So they were highly susceptible to those diseases. But sometimes that process worked in reverse. As I noted in an earlier episode, it appears that Europeans acquired syphilis in the New World and took it back to Europe.

So smallpox and syphilis were exchanged between the two regions in the early 1500s. And though the diseases are different, they do have at least one thing in common – pockmarks. Both diseases caused pockmarks on the infected person’s skin, and for that reason, both diseases were referred to as *poxes*. And interestingly, both diseases arrived in England for the first time in the early 1500s.

As I noted, syphilis was new to Europe, but smallpox had existed in parts of Europe for centuries. However, there is no evidence that smallpox had ever made it across the Channel to England. But in the early 1500s, both diseases were recorded in England for the first time – and both were called ‘poxes’ since they produced pockmarks and pustules. The blisters and pustules produced by smallpox were a little smaller than those produced by syphilis, so people in England started to refer to those marks as the ‘small pocks.’ And that’s how the disease acquired its name in England. Meanwhile, the pockmarks produced by syphilis were a little larger, so that disease was initially called simply ‘the pox’ or ‘the Great pox.’ At the time, many people thought that syphilis originated with French troops in Italy. So it was sometimes referred to as ‘the French pox’ or ‘the French disease.’ The term *syphilis* was coined in Italy in the 1530s, and was eventually adopted within English in the late 1600s.

By the way, smallpox and syphilis weren’t the only diseases that caused pockmarks. Another common disease that produced similar marks was known as *swinepox* in the early 1500s, but we know that condition today as *chickenpox*.

So there were a lot of poxes around in the early 1500s. As I noted, smallpox was new to England, and interestingly, one of the first known victims of the disease in England was Henry VIII. He acquired smallpox in the year 1514 when he was 22 years old. [*SOURCE: Medical Downfall of the Tudors: Sex, Reproduction & Succession, Sylvia Barbara Soberton, p. 4.*] We know he had the disease at that time because the Venetian ambassador in England wrote back to his colleagues in Italy and informed them Henry had acquired smallpox and recovered. That letter has survived the centuries, and it is actually one of the first references to smallpox in England. [*SOURCE: Pustules, Pestilence and Pain: Tudor Treatments and Ailments of Henry VIII, by Seamus O’Caellaigh, p. 10.*]

Several decades later when Henry's younger daughter Elizabeth was queen, she also acquired smallpox. And it left pockmarks on her face. And supposedly, that's why she wore heavy white makeup after that point – an image which we still associate with her to this day.

Elizabeth's pockmarks might have been noticeable, but some people were completely disfigured by them. In fact, when Elizabeth got smallpox, one of her young nursemaids also acquired the disease, and she was so disfigured by the disease that she retired from public life after that point. But at least she survived. About a third of the people who acquired smallpox died from it. Fortunately, a person only acquired smallpox once. If the person survived, he or she had a lifetime immunity to the smallpox virus going forward.

Interestingly, smallpox was one of the first contagious diseases to be completely eradicated by vaccines, and in fact, the word **vaccine** is derived from those events. Here's what happened. In the 1700s, another type of pox became common in England called **cowpox**. A lot of these poxes originated in animals and then passed to humans, and that's what happened with the cowpox. It originated in cows, and then it started to appear in milkmaids who picked it up from the utters of cows. But then an English physician named Edward Jenner noticed something very interesting about those milkmaids who had acquired cowpox. It turned out that none of them ever became sick with smallpox. And he realized that the cowpox virus was similar enough to the smallpox virus that immunity from one form of the virus extended to the other as well. Since cowpox had much milder symptoms, it turned out to be a very effective way of preventing smallpox. Jenner began giving people small doses of the cowpox – which then provided immunity to both diseases. [*SOURCE: Medical Downfall of the Tudors: Sex, Reproduction & Succession, Sylvia Barbara Soberton, p. 7.*] The Latin word for cow was **vacca**, and the Latin term for cowpox was **variolae vaccinae** – or **vaccinae** for short using that Latin word for 'cow.' People received that **vaccinae** – or cowpox – to give them immunity from smallpox. And **vaccinae** evolved into the modern word **vaccine** within French and English in the late 1700s. So **vaccine** literally means 'cowpox' or 'something associated with cows.' Other vaccine techniques were developed over the course of the 1800s and 1900s, and in 1980, the World Health Organization officially certified that smallpox had been eradicated from the planet.

But it took five centuries to get to that point. In the early 1500s, smallpox was still spreading across England causing a lot of suffering and death. And of course, smallpox wasn't the only ailment that afflicted people. As I noted earlier, people clamored for medical books in English because sickness and disease were so rampant in Tudor England. Some of those illnesses are still common today, but others were unique to the period with names that have largely disappeared over time. A full list of all of those ailments is too long to cover here, but let me mention a few of the common illnesses that 'plagued' Tudor England.

First, speaking of 'plague,' there was the plague itself – the Bubonic Plague. It never completely went away after the Black Death in the 1300s. It continued to reappear from time to time. In fact, it was once-again raging in London around the current point in our story in 1530s. And that's how the word **plague** came to be used as a verb – 'to plague' someone. It referred to a constant nuisance or danger that kept recurring.

Another common disease of the period was known as *consumption*. It often involved a type of lung infection, and one of its main long-term symptoms was excessive weight loss. The person would become thin and gaunt, and many victims eventually died from it. It was as if the person's body was being consumed, and that's why it was called *consumption* – a term first recorded in English in the late 1300s. The term might have been used for a few different diseases, but over time, it specifically became associated with tuberculosis, and today *consumption* is considered to be an old word for tuberculosis. By the way, over the last couple of episodes, I've mentioned that Henry VIII had an illegitimate son named Henry Fitzroy – literally Henry 'son of the king.' Well, around the current point in our story in 1536, he died of consumption. Now King Henry did a legitimate son in the following year, which we'll get to a little later in the episode. And that son survived long enough to become king after Henry, but he also died very young from tuberculosis. And Henry's father, Henry VII, also died from the disease. So this was still a very deadly disease in the 1500s.

By the way, in the 1500s, someone who lost a lot of weight and became thin and gaunt was said to be *brawn-fallen*. That's 'b-r-a-w-n-f-a-l-l-e-n.'

Now during the Tudor period, there was also a common disease that killed a lot of people known as the 'sweating sickness. People who contracted the disease would get a high fever, then severe body aches, and then they would start sweating profusely. It was often deadly, and in fact, some historians think it is what killed Henry VIII's older brother Arthur. Anne Boleyn also came down with the 'sweating sickness' in 1528 before she married Henry. Henry sent his personal physician Dr. Butts to treat her. Henry was so scared of catching the disease that he fled to the countryside while Anne recovered. Anne did recover from the disease, and her recovery may have proven to Henry that Dr. Butts was a doctor that he could trust. Medical historians are still a little perplexed by this illness. It was mostly confined to England, and historians still don't know exactly what caused it. It was also very short-lived. It first appeared in the late 1400s, and it disappeared after the mid-1500s. But during the early Tudor period, it caused a lot of deaths. [SOURCE: *Medical Downfall of the Tudors: Sex, Reproduction & Succession*, Sylvia Barbara Soberton, p. 12.]

Another infectious disease of the period was the measles. Of course, we still have measles today, but it was a much deadlier disease back in the 1500s. Today, we have vaccinations and treatments that didn't exist back then. Around the current point in our story in 1535, one of Anne Boleyn's attendants came down with the measles, and once again Henry fled London and sent Anne away to the king's palace at Hampton Court. [SOURCE: *Medical Downfall of the Tudors: Sex, Reproduction & Succession*, Sylvia Barbara Soberton, p. 14.] So again, we see how much Henry feared these infectious diseases that were common around London. At the first sign of outbreak, he headed out of town.

Another common illness of the period was known as the 'falling sickness.' It was apparently called that because people who suffered from the condition often had seizures. They would collapse to the ground in convulsions. It was also called the 'falling evil.' Today, the condition is known as *epilepsy*, which is based on the Latin term for the disease. That term became common

in English in the 1600s. [SOURCE: *Maladies & Medicine: Exploring Health & Healing 1540-1740*, Jennifer Evans & Sara Reid, p. 10.]

Of course, the people of Tudor England also suffered from colds and flu. The word **flu** is of course a shortening of **influenza**. But you might be surprised to find out that **influenza** is just the Italian version of the word **influence**. There was once a widespread belief that diseases could be caused by the stars and by atmospheric influences, and in the early 1500s, it became common in Italy to refer to some disease outbreaks as **influenza** meaning ‘influenced by the stars.’ The word finally made its way into English in the 1700s in reference to a flu outbreak that began in Italy.

Colds were also common, and there are references to the ailment as a **cold** as early as the 1400s. Of course, it’s derived from the word **cold** in the sense of the word as ‘the opposite of hot.’ The illness might have been called a **cold** because it produced symptoms that resembled long-term exposure to the cold. Another theory is that colds tended to produce a lot of phlegm, and during this period, people associated phlegm with cold. So let me explain what I mean. As I noted earlier, phlegm was one of the four humors that were a basic part of medicine during this period. The four humors or bodily fluids were yellow bile, black bile, blood and phlegm, and it was thought that people became sick if those four humors were out of balance. Each humor supposedly had two specific qualities; it was either hot or cold, and it was either wet or dry. Well, phlegm was thought to have the qualities of coldness and wetness. So there was a basic medieval link between phlegm and those two qualities, and that link may have led people to think of excess phlegm as a state of excess coldness. So that may explain why such a condition was called a **cold**.

By the way, an accumulation of excess phlegm in the throat was sometimes referred to as **flobbage** in the early 1500s. That’s a term that was especially common in the north of England and Scotland.

Another general term for a cold in the early modern period was **rheum** – spelled ‘r-h-e-u-m.’ It could refer to both a cold, as well as the phlegm that was produced by the cold. It comes from the Greek word **rheuma** meaning ‘something that flows,’ and specifically, something that flows from the body. The word was used to refer to the phlegm and mucus associated with a cold because it seemed to flow from the nose and throat. The word is still used to refer to the dried gunk or crust that forms in the corner of the eyes while sleeping. Interestingly, the word also exists in modern medical terms like **rheumatism**, **rheumatic fever**, and **rheumatoid arthritis**. But those are all conditions that produce swollen and painful joints. So what’s the connection between a word that refers to the common cold and those words that refer to joint pain? Well, it was thought that rheum or mucus drained from the head down into the rest of the body, and it gathered in the joints where it produced swelling and pain. So that’s why all of those words share that word **rheum** – meaning ‘a flow or discharge.’

By the way, a version of that same root word also forms the final part of words like **diarrhea**, **gonorrhea**, and **hemorrhoids**. Those terms refer to the discharge of fecal matter, mucus and blood, respectively. All of those terms are also based on Greek roots. And the same Greek root also produced the Greek word **rhythm** – which refers to the flow of music.

By the way, that Greek root word also shares a common Indo-European root with the native English word *stream*, which refers to a flow of water. So all of that means that words like *stream* and *rhythm* are actually cognate with medical terms like *rheum*, *rheumatism*, *diarrhea*, *gonorrhoea*, and *hemorrhoids*. They all have to do with a specific kind of flow or discharge.

Another common medical condition that people have experienced across the centuries is a headache, and more specifically a migraine. The words *head* and *ache* are both Old English words, so it probably isn't surprising that the term *headache* goes all the way back to the Anglo-Saxons. That other term *migraine* appeared in the 1400s as late Middle English was evolving into early Modern English. And that word *migraine* has an interesting history. First of all, it's another Greek word. The reason why so many of these ailments have Greek names is again related to the idea of the four humors, which was fundamental at the time. Most medical concepts at the time were based on the theories developed by those ancient Greek writers, so the ailments tended to be given Greek names. And *migraine* is yet another example of that.

The Greek word *hemi* meant 'half' – like in the word *hemisphere*, which literally means 'half of a sphere.' And *kranion* meant 'skull.' It's the source of the modern word *cranium*. Well, when you put those two words together, you get *hemikrania* – literally 'half skull.' It referred to the fact that a bad headache usually occurred in one part or on one side of the head. Well, within French, the first syllable of that word was dropped, and *hemikrania* became *migraine* (/ME-gran/), and then it passed into English in the early 1400s where the Great Vowel Shift eventually altered the pronunciation to *migraine* (/MY-grain/). But interestingly, some English speakers developed a different pronunciation of the word. They altered the final syllable to 'grim.' So in the 1500s, the word was usually rendered as *megrin*. They may have substituted the word *grim* at the end because a severe headache was a 'grim' condition. Also, at the time, English had the native word *grame* which meant 'angry or fierce.' And since migraines produced fierce pain, that word might have also influenced the change. At any rate, in the 1500s, it would have been more common to hear someone refer to a *megrin* than a *migraine*. But over time, the use of *megrin* declined, and *migraine* re-established itself as the dominant form of the word.

Now speaking of headaches and migraines, that takes us back to Henry VIII. As I noted in the last episode, Henry reportedly suffered from severe headaches during the second half of his reign. Some scholars think the headaches were caused or influenced by several accidents which may have produced injuries to Henry's head. Two of those injuries were incurred while jousting, which was one of Henry's favorite activities. I mentioned those injuries in the last episode, and I noted that the last injury was the most severe one. That was the jousting injury that occurred when Henry was knocked off his horse and his horse fell on him. According to some reports, it left him unconscious and unresponsive for two hours. In addition to the likely concussion he experienced, he also received a severe injury to his leg. Henry had experienced leg swelling and ulcers on his leg a decade earlier. So his leg may have already been a problem. [SOURCE: *Pustules, Pestilence and Pain: Tudor Treatments and Ailments of Henry VIII*, by Seamus O'Caellaigh, p. 58.] But regardless, after this particular jousting accident, his leg was never the same again. Many scholars think the chronic pain from his leg contributed to his brutal demeanor in the later part of his reign.

That jousting accident occurred in January of 1536. At the time of the accident, Henry's second wife Anne Boleyn was pregnant. Henry hoped that she would give birth to the male heir that he so desperately wanted. But five days after Henry's accident, Anne gave birth prematurely, and the baby was lost. The stillborn baby was a boy, so Henry's physical pains were compounded by the mental anguish of losing his son and future heir to the throne. Anne blamed the loss of the baby on the shock and stress she felt when she heard about Henry's accident. It was a common belief at the time that a sudden shock could cause a miscarriage or a premature delivery. [SOURCE: *Pustules, Pestilence and Pain: Tudor Treatments and Ailments of Henry VIII*, by Seamus O'Caellaigh, p. 72.]

But Anne didn't just blame the loss on Henry's accident. She also blamed it on the fact that Henry had a new lover. She had recently discovered that Henry was having an affair when one of her attendants named Jane Seymour.

It appears that Henry and Anne Boleyn's relationship had become strained over the prior year or so. And just like Henry's first wife, Anne had failed to produce a male heir. And the traumatic events of that January seemed to mark a breaking point in the marriage. Henry felt that God was punishing him for divorcing his first wife so that he could marry Anne. And he increasingly viewed Anne as a temptress and a curse. And he had already moved on to Jane Seymour, who would soon become Henry's third wife. All of that meant that Anne Boleyn's days were numbered.

But before Anne was pushed away, there was another very important development that impacted the story of English. Three months after Henry's accident, Parliament approved an act that Henry and his new chancellor had promoted to secure the religious reforms that had taken place over the prior decade. His new chancellor was Thomas Cromwell. Cromwell had replaced Thomas More in that position. Cromwell now became Henry's closest advisor, and together, they took aim at the many monasteries and nunneries that were located throughout England. It was felt that those institutions were still loyal to the pope, and Henry believed that their presence undermined his authority as the self-proclaimed head of the Church in England. Those monasteries also happened to possess a lot of wealth. The Church owned about a third of the land in England – and at least half of that was held by monasteries, nunneries and similar religious houses. [SOURCE: *A History of England, Volume 1: Prehistory to 1714*, Clayton and David Roberts, p. 256.] There were about 650 such houses in England and Wales. Henry and his new chancellor Cromwell planned to dissolve those institutions and confiscate all of their land and property. Henry could then turn around and sell the lands. It would make Henry incredibly rich. And there was also another benefit. It was felt that the people who bought the lands would embrace Henry's religious reforms and oppose any return to the old order because they would want to protect their newly purchased properties. That was the plan, and it was carried out with incredible efficiency after Parliament approved the process in April of 1536.

Initially, the law only authorized the dissolution of the smaller monasteries and nunneries – those with less than 200 pounds of income each year. [SOURCE: *Tudors*, Peter Ackroyd, p. 90.] But three years later, the process was extended to all monasteries and nunneries. What resulted was one of the largest re-distributions of wealth in the history of England.

When the religious houses were closed, the contents of the buildings were removed and destroyed, and the monks and nuns were kicked out live among the general public and make a living as best they could. The lead roofs on the buildings were dismantled and removed, and were used to make lead bullets for the firearms that were increasingly used by the English army. Much of the timber on the properties was cut down and used to build ships. Henry is generally credited with building up the English navy during this period, and the timber from monastic lands contributed to that process. The confiscated lands were also sold off to wealthy magnates, as well as to merchants, lawyers and other members of the rising middle class. [SOURCE: *The Last Divine Office, Geoffrey Moorhouse, Forward p. 193.*]

The dissolution of the monasteries is also very important to our story because of what happened to the libraries in those buildings. As we know, books were written and copied by hand before the printing press. And in earlier centuries, many of those copies were made by monks in monasteries because they were some of the few people who were literate at the time. So many of those religious houses had large libraries full of old handwritten manuscripts. Many of those books were old books going all the way back to the Anglo-Saxon period. And in many cases, those books contained the only surviving copy of Old English poems and early pieces of literature. But now, in the late 1530s, those libraries were raided, and most of those books were lost forever.

By way of example, Worcester Priory had 600 books in its library when the dissolution began. Only six of those books are known to exist today. The other 594 have been lost or destroyed. And the abbey of the Augustinian Friars at York had 646 books when it was dissolved. Today, only three of those books survive. [SOURCE: <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Monastery>.] Those numbers were repeated across the country.

Of course, many of those books would have been written in Latin. But certainly, there had to have been a significant number of English books as well. And it's very likely that many of those books were destroyed because they were written in Old English. Very few people would have been able to read Old English in the mid-1500s, and they may not have even recognized the language as an early form of English. So they probably saw no real value in those books. If they couldn't read them, and they didn't recognize the language, then why keep them?

And that may be the saddest part of the story. The parchment in those old books was valuable separate and apart from what was written on it. There are reports that many of those old manuscripts were taken apart, and the parchment used for drum skins, roof insulation, drink coasters and dust covers for printed schoolbooks. The parchment was also a good material for cleaning and polishing. So the pages were also used to clean gun barrels and polish candle sticks. The material was also used as liners and stoppers for barrels of beer. [SOURCE: *'Life in the Middle Ages,' Martyn Whittock, p. 180, and 'Tudors,' Peter Ackroyd, p. 119.*]

A book collector named John Bale traveled around to various monasteries before they were dissolved. He took an inventory of many of the books in those libraries before they were destroyed, and his work gives us a vague idea of what was lost, even though his inventory doesn't provide much information about the actual contents of the books.

Several years later, after the dissolutions were completed, he wrote of the people who purchased the properties, “A great nombre of them whych purchased those supertycuous mansyons, resrved of those lybrarye bokes, some to serve theyr jakes, some to scoure candelstyckes, and some to rubbe their bootes. Some they solde to the grossers and soapsellers.”

So in that quote, he mentions that the parchment in the books had been used to clean boots and candlesticks, but most insulting of all, it had been used to ‘serve their jakes.’ *Jakes* was a slang term at the time for a toilet. So the pages were used as toilet paper.

By the way, for what it’s worth, these events coincided with the first recorded use of the word *toilet* in the English language. It’s a French word that appeared for the first time in an English document in 1538. Previously, people referred to it as the *privy* (1225) or the *jakes* (1432). It was also sometimes called the ‘house of easement’ (1438) or the ‘house of office’ (1405). The words *latrine* and *bathroom* appear in writing for the first time in the following century. But whatever it was called, John Bale tells us that it sometimes contained pages from old books after the dissolution of the monasteries.

The bottom line is that a significant literary heritage was lost when the monasteries were dissolved in the late 1530s, and for many historians of English, that was one of the most significant developments during the reign of Henry VIII.

But the dissolution of the monasteries wasn’t the only important event that began in April of 1536. A little more than a week after Parliament passed the act which authorized the dissolution of the monasteries, the Queen of England was accused of adultery and treason. Of course, the queen was Anne Boleyn.

The accusations were made by various people with connections to the royal court, and they largely consisted of innuendo and hearsay. But eight men were soon arrested and accused of having affairs with Anne Boleyn, including Anne’s own brother. For centuries, historians have debated the extent to which there was any truth to these accusations.

On April 24, two separate commissions were established to investigate the accusations. Numerous people around the royal court were questioned, including Anne’s attendants and ladies-in-waiting. One made reference to Anne’s closeness to a court musician named Mark Smeaton. He was arrested, and soon confessed to having an affair with Anne. But it isn’t clear if the confession was voluntary or obtained through torture. [*SOURCE: Tudors, Peter Ackroyd, p. 93-4.*]

Then it was revealed that Anne had a private conversation with a prominent member of the royal court named Henry Norris. Supposedly, she had flirted with Norris and suggested that he might want to marry her if Henry died for any reason. It was treason to even discuss the king’s death. [*SOURCE: Tudors, Peter Ackroyd, p. 94-5.*]

Then the wife of Anne’s brother came forward and reported that Anne had insulted Henry behind his back by saying that he had ‘neither skill nor virility’ as a lover. Anne’s brother had also

alluded to this by openly joking that Anne's daughter Elizabeth might not be Henry's daughter – thereby implying that Henry was impotent. [*SOURCE: Medical Downfall of the Tudors: Sex, Reproduction & Succession, Sylvia Barbara Soberton, p. 166-7.*]

And that's really the key to this whole controversy. There was an extreme double-standard in the royal court. The king could have as many affairs as he wanted, but there couldn't even be a suggestion that the queen was having an affair because that brought into question the legitimacy of the queen's children, and therefore the legitimacy of the royal succession. People would start to wonder if the heir to the throne was really the legitimate child of the king. The mere suggestion of illegitimacy could lead to civil war. So it couldn't be tolerated, especially by Henry.

Today, most historians agree that there is no evidence that Anne actually slept with her brother, or most of the other accused men for that matter. It's very possible that she never had any affairs at all. But it also appears to be true that she was careless in her actions and her words, and she didn't use the discretion that she needed to use around court. There are also suggestions that Anne disliked Henry's new chancellor, Thomas Cromwell, and Cromwell orchestrated the whole investigation as a way of getting rid of Anne before Anne could convince Henry to get rid of him.

But the bottom line is that Henry was tired of Anne. He felt that he was cursed by having married her, and it is suggested that he even thought she was a witch. She didn't provide him with the male heir he wanted. And last but not least, Henry had already moved on to Jane Seymour. So it was time for Anne to go.

I should note that three of the eight men who were arrested and accused of having affairs with Anne were acquitted and released. But five were executed, including Anne's brother and the other two men I mentioned. Anne herself was arrested in early May. And she was beheaded a couple of weeks later on May 19.

Henry's eagerness to get rid of Anne seems to be confirmed by that fact that he married Jane Seymour just eleven days after Anne was executed.

Jane's formal coronation as queen was scheduled for September – four months after she married Henry. But the coronation had to be postponed because the plague was once again raging in London. [*SOURCE: Medical Downfall of the Tudors: Sex, Reproduction & Succession, Sylvia Barbara Soberton, p. 9-11.*] It was re-scheduled for the following month, but at that point, a rebellion broke out in the north of England, largely in response to the dissolution of the monasteries. The rebellion became known as the 'Pilgrimage of Grace,' and after some initial successes, it was brutally put down by Henry's forces.

That rebellion and the ongoing plague in London prevented the second attempted coronation of Jane Seymour in October, and in fact, she never had a formal coronation. But there was no doubt about her legitimacy as queen. Anne Boleyn was dead, and Henry's first wife Catherine of Aragon was also dead by this point. Catherine had died of natural causes earlier in the year. So

Jane was now universally recognized as Henry's legitimate wife. That was important because any male child born to the marriage would also be seen as the legitimate heir to the throne.

A few months later, Jane became pregnant, but the fetus wasn't considered healthy and viable until the mother felt it move. At the time, the term for that movement was **quickening**. It was based on the original sense of the word **quick** as 'living' or 'alive.' In an earlier episode, I talked about how the word **quick** evolved from the sense of 'alive' to the modern sense of 'fast.' That original sense of the word as 'alive' can still be found in the phrase 'the quick and the dead' meaning 'the living and the dead.' It can also be found in the term **quicksand** meaning 'living or moving sand.' And in the early 1500s, we find the first use of the term **quickening** to refer to a baby's first movement in the womb. For Henry, it was a cause for celebration. There was a Latin hymn of praise called 'Te Duem' – the name being derived from the opening lines of the hymn which meant 'Thee, God, we praise.' Well, Henry ordered the hymn to be sung in the churches of England to celebrate the baby's quickening. [*SOURCE: Medical Downfall of the Tudors: Sex, Reproduction & Succession, Sylvia Barbara Soberton, p. 33-4.*] The rumors that Henry was impotent proved to be wrong – at least for now.

Five months later, Jane gave birth. And it was exactly what Henry hoped for – a baby boy. Henry finally got the male heir he wanted. The boy was named Edward after Edward the Confessor. And for the first time, Henry seemed to have everything that he desired. He had a queen that he apparently loved. Of his six wives, she was the one he was eventually buried beside when he died. He had a male heir which he had wanted for over 27 years since he became king. And his power over the country and Church of England was unparalleled. He didn't have to answer to anyone. But his satisfaction was short-lived because sickness soon returned to the royal court.

A few days after giving birth to baby Edward, the queen became sick. Her condition gradually worsened. And a few days later, she died. Edward was only 12 days old when his mother died. And historians still debate the specific cause of death. The conventional view is that she died from bleeding or an infection associated with childbirth. But a letter from her attending physicians suggest otherwise. The letter indicates that Jane was doing well for the first four days after the delivery, but then she experienced a 'natural lax.' While some historians have interpreted that statement as bleeding, the word **lax** actually referred to loose bowels or diarrhea. It's derived from a Latin word that meant 'loose,' and the same root actually gives us the word **laxative**. The medical sense of the word first appeared in English around this time in the early 1500s. Previously, people in England referred to the condition as the **flux**.

The description the queen's symptoms as **lax** suggests that she was suffering from something other than postpartum bleeding. Some scholars have even suggested accidental food poisoning, which was quite common at the time. [*SOURCE: Medical Downfall of the Tudors: Sex, Reproduction & Succession, Sylvia Barbara Soberton, p. 184.*]

After Jane's death, Henry's physicians barely got any rest because, a short time later, Henry himself became sick. Henry's problem involved his legs. As I noted earlier, he had problems with his legs a decade earlier. Then his horse fell on his legs in that jousting accident. Now, a year later, Henry's legs began to swell, and he started to develop ulcers on both legs. [*SOURCE:*

Pustules, Pestilence and Pain: Tudor Treatments and Ailments of Henry VIII, by Seamus O'Caellaigh, p. 7.] The ulcers were large sores, and they soon became infected and started seeping. The condition was extremely painful, and it hindered Henry's ability to move around.

Henry's physicians tried to deal with the sores on his legs as best they could. That included Dr. Butts who I mentioned earlier. It was decided to open the infected wounds to let them drain. [*Ibid.*, p. 87.] And his physicians decided to keep the sores open to allow the drainage to continue on an on-going basis.

Henry's condition soon became known throughout the country. He had to delay a trip to meet with the Duke of Norfolk. Henry wrote to the Duke, and informed him "to be frank with you, which you must keep to yourself, a humour has fallen into our legs and our physicians advise us not to go far in the heat of the day." [*SOURCE: '500 years later: Henry VIII, leg ulcers and the course of history,' by CR Chalmers and EJ Chaloner, J R Soc Med. 2009 Dec 1; 102(12): 514-517.*]

Henry may have asked the Duke to keep the news to himself, but the news got out anyway. There are several surviving letters from foreign ambassadors and people close to the royal court that make reference to Henry's condition. They refer to Henry's 'sorre legs' or to 'fistulas' or open wounds in his legs. [*SOURCE: Pustules, Pestilence and Pain: Tudor Treatments and Ailments of Henry VIII, by Seamus O'Caellaigh, p. 58, 88.*] Around this same time, a couple of Henry's distant relatives were charged with treason and plotting to overthrow the king. One of the accused men reportedly referred to Henry's leg problems and poor health. The accused relative – one Henry Pole – also known as Lord Montague – reportedly said of Henry "he will die suddenly, his legge will kill him, and then we shall have jolly stirring." As you might have guessed, both of the accused men were executed. [*SOURCE: Tudors, Peter Ackroyd, p. 135.*] By this point, it was becoming difficult to keep track of all the people Henry had executed for treason, and the deaths showed no signs of slowing. So it's easy to see why so many people feared him. And his poor health wasn't helping his demeanor any.

As Henry's sores became infected, they filled with puss. Today, we refer to that condition as an **abscess** – a Latin term that is recorded for the first time in English around this point. When that type of sore seeped or leaked, the people of Tudor England called it 'the running of the reins.' And infected sores or wounds often produced a **fever**, which was a common term at the time. But a fever was also called an **ague**. **Ague** often referred to a fever produced by malaria, but it could also be used more generally. Another term for a fever, especially a malarial fever, was a **quartan**. That term was based on the Latin word for 'four' because it often re-appeared every fourth day.

And speaking of fevers, the people of Tudor England relied on a variety of treatments to reduce a fever. Of course, there were herbal remedies and special concoctions, but many people still believed in the healing power of words. And there was a very old word that was thought to have special healing powers, especially for someone suffering from a fever. That word was **abracadabra**. The use of the word to ward off sickness and disease goes all the way back to the ancient Romans. It can be found in Roman medical books as a cure for fever as early as the third

century AD or Common Era. Supposedly, the word had to be written out several times. It was written out fully on the first line. Then immediately beneath it, it was written out again, but without the final letter. Then underneath that second version, it was written out a third time without the final two letters. That process continued on each subsequent line – removing another letter each time until all that was left was the first letter A. So when written out in this way, the word *abracadabra* at the top was tapered down to just the letter A at the bottom, and it produced a triangle-shaped charm that was worn on the body to ward off a fever. Presumably, it was still being used in England in the mid-1500s because the first reference to the charm in English occurred around that time. In the year 1565, an English clergyman named James Calphill made reference to the charm in a book called ‘An Answer to the Treatise of the Cross.’ In a section of the book where he defended the use of certain holy relics or charms, he noted that the Church tolerated the use of holy trinkets because they gave people comfort, and it was a pagan tradition that the Church co-opted in order to convert the people to Christianity. Then, making reference to one of those charms, he wrote “May we not suspect that there is..some piece of truth more than we are aware of; some piece of secret operation..in the word Abracadabra, to heale one of the feuer...” That’s the first reference to the word *abracadabra* in English. Of course, it was later appropriated by magicians where it continued to be associated with magical transformations. The origin of word is disputed. Some think it’s derived from a Hebrew or Aramaic phrase. Others think it is derived from the Greek word *abraxas* which also had religious connotations. But whatever the origin, it’s been around for along time, and it was still being used as a charm in Tudor England.

Of course, King Henry’s physicians tended to prefer more reliable treatments like special ointments and salves to reduce the infection that caused the fever. And the recipe for one of those special salves is contained in that book of medical cures compiled by Henry’s physicians that I mentioned earlier in the episode. That was the book that is sometimes referred to as ‘Dr. Butts’ Diary.’ It contained the recipe for a variety of lotions, salves, ointments and related applications, which were called *plasters* at the time.

Several of the remedies are attributed to Henry himself. And it appears that many of the treatments were specifically designed for Henry’s ailments. That’s because there are lots of references to painful ulcers and sores. There are specific treatments for humors or open sores associated with swollen legs, and also remedies for pain and swelling in the ankles.[*SOURCE: Medical Downfall of the Tudors: Sex, Reproduction & Succession, Sylvia Barbara Soberton, p. 270-1.*] All of this suggests that the medical book was compiled around this time in the late 1530s when Henry was suffering from the open sores in his legs.

I want to give you an example of the kind of treatments contained in the book. This is a recipe designed to treat a fistula or open sore. I’m going to read it in contemporary Modern English first, and then I’m going to read it in its original 16th century English. Here’s the modern version:

‘Take four ounces of hart’s suet – or deer fallow – and a half pound each of rosin and perosin, and four ounces each of white wax and frankincense, and one ounce of mastic – which is resin from the mastic tree. First mesle – or mix – the hart’s suet and the wax together, then reduce the gums to powder and put it thereto, and when they be relented all together, strain them thorough a

piece of canvas into another vessel, and put thereto a potelle – or half gallon – of white wine, and set it over the fire again, and boil them to the consuming of the wine, always stirring with a staff. Then take it from the fire, and when it is almost cold, put thereto four ounces of fine turpentine well washed with white wine, and two drams of camphor well powdered. Then make it up in rolls, and wrap them in parchment. This plaster is good for wounds both new and old, for bruises, and for aches, and it does mundify – or cleanse – ulcers and old sores without pain,... and is good both for fistulas and for causes that be ulcerate.’

Now here’s the original version in the English of the 16th century:

“Take hartes suett iiii vneces - Rosyn perosin of eche half an pounce, white waxe, frankensense of eche iiii vneces. mastique one vnice first mesle the hartes suytt, and the waxe toguether, Then pouldre the gumes, and putt therto, and when they be relented all to guether, strayne them thorough a pece of canvas into a nother vessell, and putt thereto a potell of white wyne, and sett it over the fyre agayn, and boyle them to the consumyng of the wyne. allwayes styrring wt a staff. Then take it frome the fyre, and when it is almost colde, put therto iiii vneces of fyne therebintyne well washed wt white wyne, and ij drames of camphere well powldered. Then make it vpp in rolles, and wrappe them in pchement, This plastre is goode for woundes both newe and olde for brusers, and for achers and it doyth mundifie ulcers and old sores wtout payne,... and is goode both for fistulas and for causes that be ulcerate.”

[SOURCE: Pustules, Pestilence and Pain: Tudor Treatments and Ailments of Henry VIII, by Seamus O'Caellaigh, p. 92]

Now it’s difficult to say just how effective these types of treatments were, but it does appear that Henry’s condition improved after a year or so. Nevertheless, his legs continued to bother him for the rest of his life. It was difficult for him to walk, and his physicians designed an early type of wheelchair which allowed him to be moved around with greater ease. He also gained weight at a rapid rate – presumably because he was no longer as active as he had been a few years earlier.

By 1540, the references to Henry’s sores decreased, and Henry was looking to marry once again for the fourth time. It was also in that year that Henry made one last important contribution to the development of medicine in England. In 1540, he combined the barbers’ guild and the surgeons’ guild into one combined organization called the Company of Barber-Surgeons. Now this development was significant for a couple of reasons.

First, as I noted earlier in the episode, there was a great deal of overlap in the services provided by the barbers and surgeons. In the competitive and largely unregulated environment that existed prior to this point, both groups routinely performed surgeries. Again, it was considered a type of manual labor. Physicians might recommend a specific surgical procedure, but they didn’t actually do the surgery themselves. They bought in a surgeon to do it because it was considered to be type of manual labor. Physicians worked with their minds. Surgeons worked with their hands.

[SOURCE: *The Book in the Renaissance*, Andrew Pettegree, p. 314.] And in fact, the word **surgery** literally means ‘hand work’ or ‘manual labor.’ It’s another Greek word. It combines the Greek words **kheir** meaning ‘hand,’ and **ergon** meaning ‘work.’ That Greek word for ‘hand’ is

also found in the word *chiropractor*. Well, by putting those two Greek elements together, it produced the word *chirurgery*, which was actually a common form of the word in early Modern English. It's the term that was generally used in many of the English medical books that were published during that period. The word had been borrowed into English from French, but as the word passed through French, the initial consonant sound was sometimes softened to an 's' sound and the initial syllable was sometimes slurred. As a result, the word *chirurgery* was sometimes pronounced as *surgery*. Both forms of the word existed in early Modern English, but over time, *surgery* replaced the older form *chirurgery*.

Well, again, surgery was performed by both surgeons and barbers. The procedures included a variety of operations like lancing boils and abscesses, removing cysts, amputating limbs, removing kidney stones, treating and closing open wounds, bloodletting, and extracting teeth. Well, the barbers and surgeons often argued with other over which profession should be performing certain procedures. Surgeons didn't think that barbers were qualified to do any kind of advanced procedures. But when Henry combined the two groups into one organization, it meant that they were all subject to the same governing board. That board was able to oversee and regulate both professions, and that meant that the services provided by each profession could be better regulated. And over time, the new organization restricted the services that could be provided by each group. Barbers were largely restricted to cutting hair, and surgeons were largely restricted to performing surgical procedures. There was some overlap though. For example, both groups could extract teeth. But the irony is that the merger of the two professions allowed them to become more distinct over time. And in fact, in the mid-1700s, the two professions had become so distinct that the surgeons once again split off and formed their own professional organization, which became the Royal College of Surgeons.

The other consequence of this merger orchestrated by Henry is that the organization of barber-surgeons was allowed to receive the corpses of four executed criminals each year. They were allowed to dissect and study the bodies to get a better understanding of how the body works. They were the only bodies that surgeons were allowed to dissect, but it was a new innovation that significantly improved surgical procedures and the overall study of medicine. [*SOURCE: The Book in the Renaissance, Andrew Pettegree, p. 306.*]

At pretty much the exact same time in Italy, a surgical professor named Andreas Vesalius was also dissecting human bodies, and he realized that traditional descriptions of the human anatomy in those ancient medical books was sometimes incorrect. And that was because those ancient descriptions were based largely on animal dissections. When Vesalius dissected human cadavers, he prepared detailed drawings of the organs and skeletal system, and those drawings were published in the 1540s. Physicians and surgeons throughout Europe soon had access to the illustrations, and they became standard tools of the trade. By proving that some of the traditional ideas about the human body were wrong, other traditional ideas also started to be questioned – including the concept of the four humors. Of course, those developments took time, but they point to a gradual evolution in the practice of medicine towards a more modern, scientific approach based on actual observation and study. [*SOURCE: The Book in the Renaissance, Andrew Pettegree, p. 309.*]

So as we enter the decade of the 1540s, physicians throughout Europe were re-imagining the practice of medicine thanks in part to the printing press. Meanwhile, the common people of England were reading books in English to improve both their spiritual health and their physical health. As for the king, his health was finally on the mend. And he was looking to marry for the fourth time.

In the next episode, we'll finally conclude our look at the reign of Henry VIII. We'll explore his final three marriages, and we'll also examine one of the greatest collections of proverbs ever compiled in the English language. That collection compiled by John Heywood contains the first known use of many of the common proverbs and idioms that we use all the time. So we'll look at that important book as well.

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