

**THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPTS**

**EPISODE 74:
HEAD CITIES AND HOME TOWNS**

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast - a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 74: Head Cities and Home Towns. In this episode, we're going to look at an important development that was taking place in England in the years after the Norman Conquest. It happened very gradually, so it's easy to miss it. But it is very important to the history of England and the overall story of English. That development was the growth of towns and cities. Most of the people still lived in the countryside, but new towns and villages were dotting the landscape. And the existing towns were starting to grow even larger, and they were starting to acquire a greater degree of independence. A new capital city was also emerging at London. So this time, we'll see how the growth of towns and cities shaped the future of the English language. But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can always reach me directly by email at kevin@historyofenglishpodcast.com. I'm also on twitter at englishhistpod.

So, let's turn to this episode. And let me begin by noting that I've looked at life in the English countryside in few prior episodes. I've looked at life on manors and farms. And I've looked at the new royal forests that were established in the countryside. But I haven't said very much about the towns and cities of England after the Conquest. And part of the reason for that omission is the fact that relatively few people lived in towns and cities. As you may recall, it is estimated that about 90% of the population of England lived in rural areas at the time of the Conquest. So there wasn't much urban life. Of course, there were small towns and settlements, and there were even some cities like London and York and Winchester. But other than London, none of them had more than 5-10,000 people. And London itself barely exceeded that number. So, those 'cities' were tiny towns by today's standards.

But the period after the Norman Conquest coincided with a population explosion in England, and that contributed to the growth of those settlements. And as those towns grew, the country started to change. There was a subtle shift in the balance of power from the barons in the countryside to the inhabitants of those towns and cities. And some of those cities even acquired a degree of independence.

Those towns and cities were incubators for a new type of English. And they were essential to the process by which English borrowed so many French words. In the countryside, the peasants still spoke English. And they rarely traveled beyond the manor or the local village where they lived. They occasionally encountered French-speaking officials. But for most of them, they didn't really need to know any French words to get by on a day-to-day basis. But things were different in the towns and cities. Trade and commerce was an essential part of daily life there. And after the Conquest, many French speakers from the continent had settled in those towns. Many towns even had separate French sections where those French traders and craftsmen lived and worked. They sold their goods and services to both Frenchmen and Englishmen. At one time, there were separate English and French markets, but over time, those communities and their markets blended together. So Englishmen who lived in the towns and cities were far more likely to encounter French speakers. And given that French was the more prestigious language at the time, there was more of an incentive for English speakers to learn French, rather than the other way around.

So given those developments, it probably isn't surprising that our language reflects that. Today we refer to 'towns' and 'cities.' At one time, in early Middle English, the words *town* and *city* meant pretty much the same thing. *Town* is a native Old English word, and *city* is a word borrowed from French shortly after the Conquest. And notice how the words have evolved over time. Today, we think of towns as being smaller and more intimate – more familiar. Even if you are from a large metropolitan area, you might refer to that place as your 'hometown' because it seems more quaint and inviting. Both *home* and *town* are Old English words.

By contrast, we tend to think of cities as larger communities – less intimate and less familiar. But here's the part that may surprise you. The *home* in *hometown* is actually cognate with the word *city*. They both came from the same Indo-European root word, at least according to some etymologies. So if we dig into that history, we find that the ultimate meaning of both words was home, family and loved ones.

So, let's begin with that ultimate root word. That root word takes us back to the Indo-European tribes on the Eurasian steppes over 4,000 years ago. As we know from earlier episodes, those tribes were nomadic herders. They didn't really have fixed settlements. So there were no towns or cities at that time. But even nomads had to occasionally stop to make camp, and that camp became a temporary home for them.

When they made camp, they would lie down and sleep together, and this process produced the Indo-European word **kei*. It had several related meanings which reflected various aspects of this process. It could mean 'to lie down and rest or sleep,' and it could also refer to those who joined you when you rested or slept, so your family or loved ones – those who were close to you. That camp was basically your home, so the word could also mean 'to make camp or make a home.' Now, I should note that some etymologies suggest that this later meaning of 'making a home' was a separate Indo-European word. Rather than **kei*, they say that this root was **tkei*. But other scholars dispute that and say that it was ultimately the same root word. For purposes of this episode, I am going with the view that there was in fact was one common root word – **kei* – and it had all of those related meanings.

Now, I said that one meaning was 'to lie down and rest or sleep'. When the Indo-European tribes migrated, some of them settled in Greece and ultimately gave us the Greek language. And that root word passed into Greek with the meaning of 'lying down or resting.' It ultimately produced the Greek word *komatos* meaning 'deep sleep.' And that word passed into English as *comatose* and *coma*.

The Greeks also used that same root word to refer to the place where people slept like a dormitory. That word was *koimeterion*. The Romans borrowed that word, and they applied it to the location where people are placed when they die, so their final resting place. Within French, that initial 'hard k' sound shifted to an 's' sound as we've seen before, and that produced the word *cemetery*. So *coma* and *cemetery* both come from the Greek version of that original Indo-European root word **kei* meaning to lie down and rest with loved ones.

Of course, as we know, other Indo-European tribes migrated further westward, and they made their way to Italy and gave us Latin. And Latin also had this same Indo-European root word **kei*. But in Latin, the focus was more on the ‘loved ones’ part than the ‘lying down’ part. So in Latin, the word came to refer to a person’s close family or friends. And we have to keep in mind that at this early stage, there were no large cities. People lived in small settlements and villages. Everyone knew each other and over time, as their children married each other, they became interrelated. Everyone in town was either family or like family. So, this word **kei* meaning ‘family or loved ones’ was extended to mean the people of the town – your family and friends and neighbors. It produced the Latin word *civis* meaning townspeople. And that Latin root produced a lot of words that passed through French into English. And once again, when those words went through French, that initial ‘hard k’ sound shifted to an ‘s’ sound.

So, from Latin *civis*, we got French words like *civic* and *civics*. We also got the word *city*. A *city* was literally a group of townspeople. And one of those people was called a *citizen* from the same root. That root also produced the word *civil*, which was an adjective describing things associated with the townspeople. So, ‘civil law’ was the law of the townspeople. Someone who lived in town and didn’t go off on a military campaign was a *civilian* from the same root. As towns grew, it was believed that the people who lived in towns had more culture than those barbarians who lived out in the countryside. And that led to the term *civilized* to describe someone who had been exposed to the sophisticated lifestyle of the city. And of course, that led to the term *civilization* to refer to areas where towns and cities existed.

So, that’s Greek and Latin, but as we know, some of those original Indo-European tribes also spread into northern Europe – into Scandinavia. And their words ultimately contributed to the early Germanic vocabulary. But now we have to account for Grimm’s Law because Jacob Grimm noted that certain Indo-European sounds shifted to new sounds in the early Germanic languages. And one of those sound changes was the shift from the ‘k’ sound to the ‘h’ sound. So Indo-European words that began with a ‘k’ sound like that word **kei* ended up with a new ‘h’ sound in the Germanic languages.

Now, I noted that the original Indo-European root word referred to ‘loved ones making camp and lying down together to rest or sleep.’ The Greeks have focused on the sense of the word as ‘lying down.’ And the Romans had focused on the sense of the word ‘the loved ones with whom you shared camp.’ And that was later extended to mean fellow villagers or townspeople. Well, the Germanic tribes took that same root word – now with an initial ‘h’ sound – and they focused on the sense of the word as the actual place where you made your camp – the place where you and your loved ones rested and slept. And in Old English, that produced the word *ham* – the original version of the word *home*. So thanks to that etymology, the Old English word *home* is cognate with the Latin and French word *city*. So, *home* and *city* share the same root.

By the way, the Germanic version of that Indo-European root word also produced some other words in English. The word *hide*, as in a parcel of land, came from that same root. It was often the land associated with a person’s home, and it was technically a piece of land large enough to support a family. It also produced the word *hiwan* which meant the members of a household. Closely related to the word *hiwan* was the Old English word *hired*, later shortened to *hird*. It was

also another term for a household, but over time *hired* acquired a more specific meaning. It came to refer to the king's household, so it was basically the Old English word for the king's retainers or court.

That same Indo-European root word produced one other Germanic word that is very important to our story. Just as the Anglo-Saxons had the word *ham* meaning 'home,' the Old High German language of Germany has the word *heim*. And they combined that word with the word *ricci* meaning 'ruler.' And that produced the name *Heimerich* meaning literally the 'home ruler.' That name passed into Late Latin, and then into French, and the Normans brought that name with them to England where it was Anglicized to *Henry*. So the name *Henry* literally means the 'home ruler,' and it has the same root as the word *home*, and ultimately it has the same root as the word *city* via Latin. All of those words came from the Indo-European word **kei*.

The reason why that name *Henry* is so important to us is because the last couple of episodes have focused on the very first Henry to rule England – Henry I, the youngest son of William the Conqueror. And Henry is important to our story of towns and cities because he played a crucial role in the emergence of London as the new capital of England during his reign. So, let's return to our historical narrative for a moment.

I concluded the last episode by noting that Henry brought an end to his wars in France in the year 1120, and he headed back to England with his son William. William was Henry's only legitimate son and he was the designated heir to the throne. But William traveled on a separate ship, and that ship hit a rock and sank off the Norman coast, killing all on board.

After Henry arrived in England, he had to deal with the personal loss of his son. But he also had to deal the practical loss of his only male heir. A succession crisis started to brew in the background, especially back in Normandy. We'll explore these events in some detail in the next episode, but for now, Henry remained in England while conditions in Normandy started to deteriorate. The year was now 1121.

This is also the year that the monks in Peterborough re-created their version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle that had been lost in a fire a few years earlier. By this point, they had obtained a version from somewhere else, and they copied it down. Based on the handwriting, it appears that the scribe who made this copy continued to make annual entries in the chronicle for the next nine years.

For that year 1121, the scribe recorded that Henry spent Easter at Berkley in the southwest of England. Then he held a full court at Westminster during the Spring. The passage reads:

And the king was at Easter at Berkley
And se cyng wæs to Eastran on Beorclea.

and thereafter at Pentecost he held a full court at Westminster
and þæræfter to Pentecosten he heold mycelne hired on Westmynstre.

Now I mention this because, the tradition of the Chronicle was to record where the king was throughout the year. It typically mentioned where the king was at important holidays like Easter and Christmas. And it also tended to mention if the king held a court elsewhere. Part of the reason why that was so important is because there wasn't really a formal capital of England at the time. The government was wherever the king and his court happened to be, and the king's court moved around throughout the year.

Now, the word *court* had not entered English yet. That word actually appears for the first time in the final entry of the Peterborough Chronicle in the year 1154. So, for now, the scribe continued to use the traditional Old English word for the king's court – the word *hired*. The passage I just read said that Henry 'heold mycelne hired on Westmynstre' – 'held a great court at Westminster.' I noted earlier in the episode that this was one of those Germanic words that came from the same root as the word *home*. It originally meant the king's household or retainers. And as we now know, *hired* and *home* are both cognate with the French word *city*.

Now, most people have a fixed home, but, as the old saying goes, 'Home is where the heart is.' It doesn't have to be fixed in one place. And that was certainly the case with the king's *hired*; it didn't have a fixed location yet. It moved around with the king. As the king moved around the country, he and his court would stay at a royal residence if he had one nearby. But often, there wasn't a royal residence. So the king would stay with a local baron. That meant that the baron had to feed and house not only the king, but also all of the soldiers and government officials that accompanied him. Several centuries earlier, this had been a relatively small group of people, but by now, it was a huge retinue.

If the court stayed with a local baron for an extended period of time, it could cost the baron a lot of money. It could even ruin him financially. So there are reports of some local landholders hiding in the woods when the king's court approached. They hoped that by hiding the court would move on to the property of the next landholder.

As the court grew in size, it became increasingly difficult for it to move around the country. And as we saw last time, Henry significantly expanded the English bureaucracy. The offices of the Chancery and the Exchequer grew by leaps and bounds. So it became necessary to find a fixed location for some of these departments. But where?

One option was Winchester – near the southern coast of England. That had been the traditional home of the Wessex kings. It was where they spent most of their time, and so it was where the royal court typically met. But several decades earlier, Edward the Confessor had built that fancy cathedral up at Westminster just outside of London. And increasingly, that became the preferred alternative. That was where all of the kings since Edward the Confessor had been crowned, including Harold Godwinson, William the Conqueror, William Rufus, and even Henry himself. Shortly after the Conquest, William the Conqueror had also built a residence near Westminster. And that was where the English court routinely met.

So those were the two primary options when Henry took power. And as we peruse the entries in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle during Henry's reign, we notice something very interesting. In the first four years of Henry's reign, the Chronicle mentions that Henry held court at both places. He

typically spent Easter in Winchester and Christmas at Westminster. But after 1104, his trips to Winchester became less and less frequent. He tended to hold his courts at Westminster or Windsor – both just outside of London. So, as historians look at these developments, they notice that the capital of England started to become more and more fixed at London during Henry's reign. So Henry, whose name meant 'home ruler,' was now starting to make London his home, at least his home when he was in England.

The office of the Exchequer was established there and the treasury was eventually moved there from Winchester. There was never a specific date when London became the capital. It was a gradual process. But by the end of Henry's reign, most of the government's business was being conducted around London. And so, it is usually said that London became the capital of England during his reign.

Now, I should note that the court often met at Westminster or Windsor, rather than London proper. Westminster and Windsor were distinct towns. Over time, London expanded and Westminster became part of the city. Windsor remained distinct, but it was so close to London that it was basically a suburb. So, when I speak of the capital being at London, I am really referring to the city and the surrounding area.

So, why did London beat out Winchester as the capital? Well, the most likely reason is because London was larger. It was by far the largest city in England. It was a primary center for trade and commerce. And given its economic importance, it made sense to locate the government offices near there.

Now I said that London emerged as the 'capital of England,' but it wasn't called the *capital* yet. *Capital* is a French term, and it wasn't used to mean the center of government until the 1600s. During this earlier period in the 1100s, the Old English terms were still in use. Old English had several different words for a city that was the seat of government. One word was *cynesetl* – literally the 'king settle', the place where the king settled or resided.

A more common term was *heafodburg*. You might remember that the Old English word *heafod* became Modern English *head*. So *heafodburg* was literally the 'head burh' or the 'head city.' Another variation of that word was *heafodstol*. *Stol* was a term that's cognate with words like *stand* and *still* and *stead*, and it ultimately gave us the word *stool*, meaning a seat or place where you rest. So the term *heafodstol* was literally the 'head stool,' but it meant the 'head seat' or 'head place.' It was the same type of formula that ultimately gave us the phrase the 'seat of government.' It was where the king's court sat.

So the native English terms meant the 'head city,' or the 'head town,' or the 'head place.' Well, as we know from earlier episodes, the Latin word for head was *caput*. And in fact, *head* and *caput* are cognate; they came from the same Indo-European root word. So within Late Latin and early French, that word *caput* produced the adjective *capital* to refer to things associated with the head. So it was a descriptive term for something at the top. And in Middle English, that French word *capital* replaced the English word *head* when describing a place. So the 'head city' became the 'capital city' – meaning the 'primary city.' And by the 1600s, that phrase was shortened to just *capital*.

Now as I noted, we've seen that Latin word *caput* before. It also produced words like *captain* and *chief*, which both mean the 'head person.' And when we look at *captain* and *chief*, we should be able to see a familiar development. As we know, the Normans tended to retain the 'hard K' sound at the beginning of Latin words that began with the letter combination [ca]. So, words like *capital* and *captain* came in via the Normans. But in the French dialect around Paris, which became the standard French dialect, that pronunciation shifted to a 'ch' sound. So, it was standard French that gave us words like *chief* and *chieftain*. And in earlier episodes, we also saw that that 'ch' sound continued to evolve in standard French, and it later became an 'sh' sound. And in Modern English that word *chief* was borrowed again. But this time, in the 1800s, it came in as *chef*, meaning the head of a kitchen. So, from Latin *caput*, to Norman *captain*, to Middle French *chief*, to Modern French *chef*, we can hear the development of that sound. And once again, this is a good example of how English often serves as a time capsule, capturing and preserving the sounds of those words at the time they were borrowed into English.

And speaking of the word *chief* and preserving certain sound changes, there is another way in which English serves as a time capsule. Think about the word *chief* and the word *thief*. Outside of the initial sound, they're identical. But notice what happens when they are made plural. We have several *chiefs* and multiple *thieves*. So, in the case of *chiefs*, we retain the 'f' sound at the end and just stick an [-s] after it. But in the case of *thieves*, we convert that final [-f] to a 'v' sound before we put on the [-s].

So, *chiefs* and *chefs*. But then we have *thieves*, *leaves*, *wolves*, *lives* and *elves* – all with a 'v' sound. So what's going on there? Why do some of those plural versions retain the [-f] and others use a [v]? Well, if you guessed that it has something to do with French, you would be correct.

As a general rule, the words that switch to the 'v' sound are older words that go back to Old English because that's how you pronounced those plural forms in Old English. But the words that retain the 'f' sound in their plural form are newer words that were borrowed from French or some other source. So *thieves*, *leaves*, *wolves*, *lives*, *elves* – those are all Old English words. So that helps to explain the distinction, but why is there a difference? Well, the answer has to do with linguistics and something very specific that happened in Old English. So let me digress for a minute and explain what happened in Old English. First of all, we have to keep in mind that the 'f' and 'v' sounds are very closely related. Mechanically, they are the same sound, but one is voiced and the other is voiceless. The 'v' sound is voiced, and the 'f' sound is voiceless. In fact, if you make both sounds with your mouth, you'll notice that they are basically the same, except the vocal chords are more engaged with the 'v' sound.

So the 'f' sound is voiceless, but in certain situations, that sound tends to get voiced, so it switches to a 'v' sound. It's a subtle difference, but it happens. And one situation where it is likely to happen is when the [f] is surrounded by vowels on each side. So, you have a vowel, then an [f], then another vowel. Vowels are always voiced, so if you stick an [f] in between two vowels, there is a natural tendency to voice all three letters. And when that happens, the 'f' sound switches to a 'v' sound. And that's what happened in Old English when words ending in an [f] were made plural. But why?

Well, before the word was made plural, there was a vowel before the [f], but not after it because the [f] was the final letter. But many words were made plural in Old English by adding the ‘as’ sound to the end of the word – spelled [-as]. That was an inflectional ending, and it is ultimately the original version of our modern [-s] ending that we use today. But it was [-as] in Old English – ‘a-s.’

So, when you put [-as] after the [f] to make the word plural, now the [f] was surrounded by a vowel on each side. And in that situation, the [f] also became voiced, so it switched to a ‘v’ sound. So, take the word *thief*, which was *þeof* in Old English. It ended in an ‘f’ sound. But to make it plural, you had to add that [-as] ending. So it became *þeofas*. But now, with the addition of that plural ending, that meant the unvoiced [f] was surrounded by vowels on each side – [ofas]. So in that environment, the ‘f’ sound also became voiced, and it became a ‘v’ sound. So /thay-o-fahs/ became /thay-o-vahs./ And we still have that word today as *thieves*.

So that sound change was very common in Old English. And just as today, people pronounced the plural version of those words with a ‘v’ sound without even thinking about why that happened. Just like us, they knew that you had one *leaf* and several *leaves*. You had a lone *wolf*, but a pack of *wolves*.

But then the French came and words like *chief* started to come in. And by that point, Old English inflectional endings were breaking down. And the old [-as] ending had started to be replaced with a more generic [-es] ending. And since those new French words didn’t have an established plural form that followed the traditional Old English pattern, those new words were simply given that new [-es] ending. And the ‘f’ sound was left as it was. So French *chief* became *chiefs*, not ‘chieves.’ And later, *chef* became *chefs*, not ‘cheves.’ So that created the distinction we still have today.

Once again, Modern English preserves these sounds, and it serves as a time capsule. And if we know what we’re looking for and what we’re listening to, those sound patterns provide a clue as to when a particular word entered English and where it came from. So as a general rule, when a plural word switches that ‘f’ sound to a ‘v’ sound at the end, we know that it goes back to Old English. And when it doesn’t do that, we can usually assume that it came in later from somewhere else.

Of course, there are exceptions. Take the word *roof*. It is an Old English word. And at one time, it was common to refer to many *rooves*. But that word has lost its plural [v] in many Modern English dialects. So today, the more common pronunciation is just *roofs*. So time has created some exceptions to that general rule.

So now we know why *chief* begins with a ‘ch’ sound, even though it comes from the same root as *capital* and *captain*. And we know why the plural form ends in [-fs] instead of [-ves]. It all has to do with where the word came from and when it came in.

But at the current point in our story in the early 1100s, it hadn’t come in yet. *Chief* with its Parisian ‘ch’ sound didn’t come in until around the year 1300 when Parisian French started to replace Norman French in England. And all that’s a little later in our story, but to give away part

of the story, Parisian French did eventually replace Norman French as the preferred French dialect in England.

So before Parisian *chief* came in, English had Norman *capital*. *Capital* wasn't actually used in the Peterborough Chronicle, but it was used in some English texts soon afterwards. So English got a new word – *capital*. And it was also getting a new capital city at London.

As I noted, London was the largest city in England. Population estimates vary, but it probably had a little less than 20,000 people in the early 1100s. That seems very small today, but it was quite large at the time. And that population was about to explode. About a century and half later the population had grown to about 100,000 people. And that population growth wasn't limited to London. It was happening all over England and really all over Western Europe.

During this same period, the population of England as a whole grew from less than 2 million people to more than 4 million people, and that's a conservative estimate. Some scholars suggest that the population was nearly 6 million people in the 1300s. So the population may have more than tripled during that period.

Now as you may know, in the mid-1300s, the plague known as the Black Death swept across Europe and England. And that wiped out a lot of the population, probably about 1 ½ million people died in England alone. So those population numbers fell dramatically after this initial period of growth. But for now, the population was growing and small settlements were becoming villages, and villages were becoming towns, and towns were becoming cities. So let's look at this process, and let's begin with the smallest settlements.

Early on, the English countryside was dominated by small settlements with just a few families. As we saw earlier, the Old English word for this type of settlement was a *ham* – [ham]. And that ultimately became the word *home*. So the original sense of the word was a small, close-knit community of just a few people or families. We still see the original Old English version of the word – *ham* – in place names like Birmingham and Nottingham. It's also found in names like Northampton, Southampton and Hampshire. I should also note that the same root passed through the Frankish language into French. And via French, it produced the word *hamlet* – meaning 'a small village'.

Now as the population of England grew, those settlements also grew. Those small 'hams' and 'hamlets' started to become larger 'villages.' Of course, villages existed before the Norman Conquest, but now, with the population growth, there was a significant increase in the number and size of those villages.

As we've seen before, the word *village* was borrowed from French. It has the same root as the word *villein* meaning a peasant. So it was really a feudal term. And it passed into early Middle English to refer to a settlement that was larger than a hamlet, but not big enough to be considered a town. So you went from a ham or hamlet to a village and then to a town.

And there wasn't really a sharp distinction between those categories. It more a matter of size and degree. So it wasn't always clear if a settlement was considered a hamlet or a village. Now villages tended to have a church and hamlets didn't. So that was one way to distinguish the two.

Those villages were largely self-supporting, and the villagers rarely traveled beyond the boundaries of the village or the manor. And this lack of movement is important to our story, because it contributed to the rise of local dialects. People in one village didn't tend to interact with people in other villages. And most of those people received little or no formal education, certainly no English education. So the only form of English that most people ever encountered was the English spoken in their local village. So in that environment, local dialects became more and more distinct. And that contributed to the problem I discussed a couple of episodes back where people in different parts of England could no longer understand each other.

As we've seen before, villages were often tied to a local manor. Most of the peasants who worked on the manor lived in the nearby village. So the village was really an extension of the manor, and it was usually subject to the jurisdiction of the local manor court. So the lord of the manor had a lot of control over those villages.

As the population of the country grew, there had to be enough food to sustain the population. And that meant those manors and small farmsteads had to produce more and more food. And that was also occurring during this period.

It is probably no coincidence that this period of population growth coincided with a period of unusually warm weather in Northern Europe. For weather historians, this period is known as the Medieval Warm Period. It lasted from the 800s through the 1300s. And it was so warm that manors in southern England actually grew grapes for wine-making. The Domesday Book lists about 45 places with vineyards, so that illustrates just how warm it was at the time. With this warm period, the winters were milder. And that allowed for an increase in agricultural production. So farming expanded both in area and intensity. That increase in food production didn't necessarily cause the population growth, but it sustained it. It made the growth possible.

Now I mentioned that vineyards were being established in southern England for a reason because there is an interesting linguistic connection between wine-making and our earlier look at setting up a camp. There is also a connection to a long-lost word for the countryside where these villages were growing and expanding. And that connection can be found in the words *camp* and *champagne*. Both words come from the same root word which meant 'field' or 'countryside.' That root word was the Latin word *campus*. We've actually seen that word before. It passed into English in its original form as *campus*. And the original meaning of *campus* was a 'field.' *Campus* also gave us the word *camp* meaning a field where military troops made a temporary home or settlement. Both *campus* and *camp* came in later in Modern English – actually, early Modern English.

That Latin root also passed into the French dialect of Paris. And by now, we know what happened when words like *campus* passed into the speech of Paris. That 'k' sound at the beginning turned into a 'ch' sound. And just as *caput* became *chief*, here *campus* became *champagne*.

That word *champagne* continued to mean ‘a field or cleared land.’ So it meant the area that was distinct from wooded land. And that French word *champagne* passed into early Middle English as *champaign*. And at one time, it was common in Middle English to refer to the countryside as the *champaign*.

Well, back in France, that word was applied to a specific region of northeastern France where large, open fields were home to vineyards. As we know, that initial ‘ch’ sound continued to evolve within the Parisian dialect. It eventually shifted to an ‘sh’ sound. So just as *chief* became *chef*, here *champagne* (/cham-pan-yeh/) became (/sham-pan-yeh/). And this particular region of northern France became known as *Champagne*. And the name of that region was soon applied to the wine produced there, similar to the way Burgundy gave its name to the wine produced there. So in the 1600s, the word *champagne* (/sham-pan-yeh/) passed into English and was Anglicized as *champagne*. And today, it generally refers to a type of sparkling wine that is produced in that region of France.

Around the time the word *champagne* came into English meaning a type of wine, English also re-borrowed the original sense of the word to refer to ‘open fields,’ specifically ‘warfare in the open fields.’ And this word came in as *campaign*, as in a military campaign. It isn’t entirely clear why this version of the word came in as *campaign* with a ‘hard K’ sound. Most scholars think it was probably influenced by that original Latin root *campus*. The pronunciation difference also tended to distinguish *campaign* from *champagne*. But the bigger point here is that *campaign*, *campus*, *camp* and *champagne* all have the same Latin root, and they all have an original association with the open country where manors were built and where hamlets and villages were growing in the 12th century.

As those villages grew, villagers who lived in them acquired specialized skills. So rather than working on the farm, many were craftsmen like millers, or blacksmiths, or carpenters, or weavers. The appearance of these specialized trades was an indication that a settlement had grown large enough to support that type of skilled labor. There was enough demand for that type of specialized skill that a villager could earn a living based on that skill alone. Those types of craftsmen typically held no land, so they survived on the wages they earned from their craft. As villages grew, the number of those craftsmen also grew. And at some point, a village grew to a point where it became a town. And towns had lots of those specialized trades. In fact, few people in towns actually worked on farms. So as villages grew into towns, they tended to become independent of the manor.

Again, the distinction between a village and a town was a matter of size and degree, but towns were more independent and they had more of those specialized trades. So what did the Middle English call those towns. Well, French used the word *ville*, as distinct from *village*. A *village* was a small settlement, and a *ville* was a larger settlement like a town or city. But whereas English had borrowed the word *village*, it didn’t tend to use the word *ville*. Instead, English chose to use the native word *tun*, which became the word *town*. English also continued to use the native word *burh* for a town.

It isn't really clear why the word *ville* had such a hard time entering English, especially given that related words like *village* and *vilain* came in, but *ville* was never able to push out the native word *town*.

Interestingly, the original meaning of the word *tun* or *town* was basically the same as *ham* or *hamlet*, which we saw earlier. It meant a small settlement. But around this point in our story in the 1100s, it came to be used to refer to these larger settlements that were bigger than villages. So, the English word *town* basically became the equivalent of the French word *ville*.

Of course, that Old English word *tun* or *town* gave us lots of place names that end in [-ton] like *Washington*, *Boston*, *Kensington*, *Brighton*, and so on. But note that there are relatively few town names in England that end in *ville*. There are a few, but they're pretty rare.

But notice the difference when we compare that to the US. In the US, that *ville* suffix is quite common. We have it in city names like *Louisville*, *Nashville*, *Jacksonville*, and so on. But that development really only took place after the American Revolution. The Revolutionary War had been won with French support. So it became popular shortly after the war to use that French suffix for town names in the US. So the US has lots of 'villes' where England has relatively few.

Now even though English towns didn't tend to use the word *ville*, some of them did use other French elements. The French words *beau* meaning 'beautiful' and *mont* meaning 'hill' produced the name of the town of *Beaumont*. That French name actually replaced an existing Old English name, which was *Fulanpettae* – literally the 'foul pit.' So from 'foul pit' to 'beautiful hill,' we can see why the residents might have preferred that name change. A small number of other towns also acquired some French names elements, but for the most part, French had relatively little influence on English town names, especially compared with Celtic and Norse influences.

So for a settlement larger than a village, English used terms like *burh* and *tun*, which became *town*. But about a century from the current point in our story, English borrowed another word for a large settlement, and that was the word *city*. As we saw at the beginning of the episode, the word *city* is cognate with words like *citizen* and *civilization*, as well as Germanic words like *home* and *hamlet*.

The word *city* originally meant a group of citizens, so it meant 'townspeople.' But in France, it soon acquired a more specific meaning. It was usually used to refer to a town or village that was also home to a bishopric. So if the town had a diocese under the supervision of a bishop, it qualified as a *city*. So the word *city* came to mean a 'cathedral town.' But that connection was soon lost after the word passed into English, and it gradually came to mean to any large or important town.

In fact, by the time the word *city* was borrowed in the mid-1200s, all of Western Europe had seen a tremendous increase in the number of new towns. This period from the 1100s into the 1200s was the greatest period of town growth throughout Western Europe. And in England, many of those towns were actually planned towns, laid out and organized by nobles or government officials. Between the Norman Conquest and the 1220s, more than 125 planned towns were established in England.

As towns and cities grew, the commercial activity in the towns also grew. Excess produce from the farms was sold at markets. And craftsmen produced a variety of products for trade and sale, like metal work, leather goods and fabrics.

With the growth of specialized trades, many of the craftsmen began to band together and organize to protect their interests. They formed associations that excluded outsiders. This was the beginning of the craft guilds that became so common during the Middle Ages.

And there is an important connection here between those craft guilds and the Henry's expanded bureaucracy and tax collection efforts which I discussed in the last episode. I noted that Henry was great at collecting fees and taxes, and he developed the office of the Exchequer to make sure that he was getting every penny that was owed to him. Well Henry permitted craftsmen to establish guilds, but he made them pay for it. They had to pay a fee for the guild, and that guild gave them exclusive control over their particular trade. So they essentially purchased a license to operate as a monopoly. No one outside of that guild could provide the same services. So Henry benefitted and the guild benefitted.

Now, we have to keep in mind that we are still in the midst of the feudal system. So even though towns and cities were growing, there was still a lord over the town. The people who lived in town were technically vassals. And they held their homes through the lord above them. So they usually had to provide some type of rent payment to that lord. And I should note that the word *rent* is a French word, and it appears for the first time in the English language in the Peterborough Chronicle in the entry for the year 1137. So that word was coming into English around this time.

Since many villages were associated with a local manor, the lord of the manor was also the lord of the village. So the rents were paid to that local lord. In fact, this because a great source of revenue for those lords. A lot of the small towns and villages that were established during this period were established by local barons who were looking to increase their revenue through those rents. And for many barons, the profits from their towns and villages far exceeded the profits from their farms.

Of course, not all towns were established by local lords. Some were pre-existing towns or towns that were not associated with a particular manor. In those cases, the king himself was the lord of the city. And that meant that the residents of the town paid their rents directly to the king.

But there was a point when a town grew so large that the king or baron couldn't really maintain it anymore. It's one thing to collect rent from 50 or 100 tenants, but when you have thousands of tenants, it starts to become a logistical nightmare. How do you collect rents from each person in the city? Well, you don't. And remember that Henry was a master at collecting fees and rents. So how did he deal with this problem?

Well, around this time, some towns and cities started to make a deal with the king or baron by which they agreed to make a lump sum payment each year. The townspeople would estimate the total rent owed by the residents of the town, and they would just agree to pay that amount as a lump sum. Sometimes the king or baron would agree to this type of arrangement if the town agreed to pay an extra fee for that right. So in those cases where Henry was the lord, he not only

got all of his rents, he sometimes collected an extra fee on top of that. So why would the residents of a town agree to that type of arrangement? Well, because it left them free to function on their own – more or less independent from the king or baron. As long as the lord got his money, he tended to let the town or city govern itself. And that's how towns and cities started to become independent once they got large enough.

But who were the town officials who arranged that type of deal? Well, this takes us back to those guilds. One of those guilds was called the guild merchant. It was basically a group of the town's merchants who banded together to form their own guild. And they essentially became the first governing bodies of many of those independent towns. So as towns and cities grew and as they became more independent, the traditional land-based feudal system started to break down. For peasants in the countryside, town-life provided an alternative. For many, it was better than the hard life on the farm. But as we know, most of those peasants were beholden to a manor lord. So, they couldn't just up and leave, could they? Well, the answer is yes and no.

You may be familiar with the saying, "Town air makes you free." Well, if you've ever heard that saying, it comes from this period of history. The rule was that any peasant who left the farm and moved to a town or city was deemed to be free after a year and a day. After that point, he couldn't be reclaimed by his lord. He was thereafter bound to the city. So peasants could flee their feudal lords in this way. And this rule was the customary law throughout much of Western Europe. And it led to that phrase, "Town air makes you free." This rule also tended to encourage the growth of those towns and cities as peasants fled the countryside.

Now even though this was a period in which villages and towns and cities were growing, these developments varied from region to region. Not everyone experienced the same degree of growth. A lot of places continued to be dominated by smaller hamlets and farmsteads. That was especially true in places like Kent in the southeast and the west country of England. Those places tended to remain more rural.

But the region that saw the most growth and became the most densely populated was the eastern portion of central England. That was the region extending from London in the south all the way up to the Humber in the north, so basically eastern Mercia and East Anglia. This region had been the most densely populated for some time. In fact, a generation earlier, the Domesday Book had also indicated that this was the most populated part of England.

The surviving tax records from Henry's Exchequer allow us to gauge the relative size of the towns during his reign. And that's because the amount of tax paid by each town was based on its size. So, the larger the town, the more residents it had and the more tax it paid. London paid the most tax since it was the largest city. It was followed by Winchester, then Lincoln, then York and Norwich. Of those five largest cities at the time, three were located in the east-central part of England – London, Lincoln and Norwich.

So, what does all of this have to do with the history of English? Well, that region that I just described was the same region where the East Midlands dialect was spoken – the dialect that ultimately produced Modern English.

So that's why the development of towns and cities was so important to the ultimate development of English. Since this part of England was the most densely populated, the dialects spoken in that region had an advantage over the dialects spoken in the other parts of the country.

I also noted a couple of episodes back that people in the south of England had a hard time understanding the people in the far north of England and vice versa. But these dialects of central England could be understood by speakers in the far south and the far north. So, going forward, those central dialects had a practical advantage over the dialects spoken at each end of the country. And as we put these pieces together, we can start to see why this region of eastern England became so important to the ultimate development of English and why the dialect of this region eventually became the standard dialect of English.

The importance of this region is also reflected in the Peterborough Chronicle. As I've noted, Peterborough was located in this same region, and the final entries were written in the dialect of that region. So the Chronicle actually shows the early development of that particular dialect. The entries for the early 1120s also show how important this region was. Let's go back to King Henry for a moment. I noted earlier Henry returned from fighting in Normandy in the year 1120. He held a full court at Westminster near London in the spring of 1121. But at Christmastime, the Chronicle says that Henry held court at Norwich in the east of England. So he didn't hold court at London or Winchester. Then, at Easter of 1122, he held court at Northampton – also in the East Midlands. The following Christmas, he held court at Dunstable – about half way between London and Peterborough.

So, in the two years after Henry returned from Normandy, he held his regular courts at various towns and cities in the East Midlands. The Chronicle only records one brief trip to Gloucester in the West Country in early February of 1123. So, from Henry's movements, we can see how important this eastern region was.

But Henry's time in England was coming to an end. Shortly after that trip to the West Country, he headed to Winchester, and he made plans to embark for Normandy. The death of Henry's son and the lack of a successor had led to challenges across the Channel.

A few years earlier, Henry had taken Normandy away from his brother Robert – the prior Duke – and he had thrown Robert in prison. But Robert had a son, also named William. And William was claiming the right to rule Normandy. A lot of Norman barons were choosing to side with William, and so were the King of France and the Count of Anjou. So Henry headed to Normandy to put down the revolt. Next time, we'll look at what happened when Henry returned to Normandy. These events will set the stage for the anarchy that was to come, but it also set in motion the events that would ultimately lead to a new ruling family of England – the Plantagenets.

So next time, we'll explore those events. And we'll also continue to look at how those events were recorded in that last surviving English chronicle in Peterborough.

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