

**THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPTS**

EPISODE 79: ANARCHY

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 79: Anarchy. In this episode, we’re going to look at Anarchy in England. We’ll see how England descended into chaos and warfare. And we’ll look at the horrible consequences for the people of England. These were also the final years recorded by the Peterborough Chronicle. And the scribe who recorded those entries famously concluded that Christ and his saints were asleep. He summarized this history with some of the most vivid imagery in the entire Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The passages are moving and they describe horrible acts. But more importantly for our purposes, those passages illustrate some major changes in the English language. So, while English politics were descending into chaos and anarchy, the English language was experiencing a revolution of its own.

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](https://twitter.com/englishhistpod).

Also, I continue to collect voice samples for future episodes. I mainly intend to use them when we get to the Modern English period. So, that’ll be a while. But you can go ahead and submit a sample of your accent or dialect at the Voice Samples page of the website. And I haven’t really mentioned it before, but you can also leave other feedback there – questions or comments. And I may use those as well.

And also remember that you can support the podcast by becoming a member at patreon.com. I post a bonus episode there with each new episode of the podcast. And if you donate at least \$5 a month, you can access all of the bonus content there. As always, you can just go to historyofenglishpodcast.com and link to patreon from there.

So, with that, let’s turn this episode and what were truly some of the darkest days in the history of England. Last time, we looked at the outbreak of civil war. Stephen claimed the English throne, but his cousin Matilda soon arrived to assert her own claims. She found an important ally in her half-brother, Robert of Gloucester. So, that left England with two rival courts. And that meant that the nobles had to take sides. Throughout England, the nobles built castles at a rapid rate and they used those castles and their knights to dominate the land around them. This was the beginning of that extended period of conflict known as the Anarchy.

I should note here that the term ‘Anarchy’ is a relatively modern label for this period. It was first used by historians in the 1800s. And it was an attempt to capture the sense of lawlessness that took place during this war. This was a period in which there was general breakdown of law and order and powerful lords were able to act on their worst instincts. But again, the word *anarchy* is a relatively recent term used by some modern historians.

In fact, the word *anarchy* didn’t enter the English language until the 1500s. It came in from French and, like most French words, it can be traced back to Latin. But it has its ultimate origins in Greek. The Greek word *arkhos* meant ‘ruler.’ And that root ultimately produced the suffix

archy to describe a type of rule. So, *monarchy* is a system of government with one primary ruler. *Oligarchy* is rule by a small group of people. *Patriarchy* is rule by men and *matriarchy* is rule by women. But to express the idea that there was no ruler at all, the Greeks combined the word *an* meaning ‘without’ with that word *arkhos* meaning ‘ruler.’ The result was *an-arkhos* – literally ‘without a ruler.’ And that word eventually became *anarchy*. So, *anarchy* reflects a condition where there is no ruler who can impose law and order, where it is basically every man for himself. And that was why that term came to be used by many historians for this period of conflict in the 12th century.

By the way, the Greek root that gave us *anarchy* also produced a lot of other words in English. And I explore the etymology of those words in the new bonus episode at Patreon.

So, *anarchy* is literally the absence of a ruler or leader. And that process began when the leadership of England was split between Stephen and Matilda. The result was the creation of two rival courts – with Stephen’s base in the east and Matilda’s base in the west. The various barons were encouraged to choose sides, but some chose to play one side against the other.

Late in the year 1140, Stephen got into a conflict with the Earl of Chester who was named Randolf. Randolf wanted some specific lands, but Stephen gave the lands to someone else. And Randolf responded by seizing the castle at Lincoln, and that forced Stephen’s hand. Stephen headed to Lincoln to besiege the castle and force Randolf out.

At Peterborough, the scribe who maintained the local chronicle recorded these events in the entry for the year 1140. He begins the entry by noting that the country experienced a solar eclipse early in the year. Then he notes that war broke out between Stephen and Randolf. He writes:

*After this waxed a very great war betwixt the king and Randolph, Earl of Chester;
Perefter wæx suythe micel uuerre betuyx þe king 7 Randolph eorl of Cæstre*

Note that the scribe says that the conflict between the two men ‘waxed’ meaning ‘to increase.’ This is the same meaning we have when we use the phrase ‘wax and wane’ to mean ‘increase and decrease.’ “Wax and wane” are Old English terms; ‘increase and decrease’ are French terms. By the way, the noun form of *wax* – as in bee’s wax or candle wax – is also an Old English word, but it comes from a different root and is completely unrelated to verb *wax*.

So, the scribe tells us that the conflict between King Stephen and Earl Randolf ‘waxed’ or grew more intense. He writes:

*The Earl held Lincoln against the king, and took away from him all that he ought to have.
Þe eorl heold Lincol agænes þe king. 7 benam him al ðæt he ahte to hauen.*

Benam meant to ‘take away from’ – again, it was an Old English word. *Benam* and the related word *niman* were both eventually replaced with the Norse word *take*. And in fact, by this point, the word *take* was already being used alongside those words in the Peterborough Chronicle.

So, the earl ‘benam’ – or ‘took away’ – the castle which rightly belonged to Stephen. So, Stephen tried to take it back. At that point, the earl appealed to Matilda and her brother, Robert of Gloucester. The Peterborough scribe writes that:

*the earl stole out, and went after Robert, Earl of Gloucester, and brought him thither with a large fyrd (or militia).
te æorl stæl ut 7 ferde efter Rodbert eorl of Gloucestre. 7 brohte him þider mid micel ferd.*

When Robert’s forces arrived, they squared off against Stephen’s army. A great battle then ensued – a battle known to history as the Battle of Lincoln. Robert’s men eventually got the upper hand and Stephen’s men fled the battlefield and abandoned him. Stephen was soon captured and taken into custody by Robert’s forces. But he was not executed. Instead, Matilda chose to put him in prison.

With the rival king in prison, it looked like Matilda was finally in a position to claim the throne for herself. So, she headed to London to make it official. The plan was to go to London and have a formal coronation at Westminster. The Peterborough scribe recorded these events. He wrote:

Thereafter came King Henry’s daughter who had been Empress in Germany and now was Countess of Anjou.

Perefter com þe kynges dohter Henries þe hefde ben Emperice in Alamanie. 7 nu wæs cuntesse in Angou.

Now, a couple of things about this passage. First of all, he calls Matilda the ‘Emperice in Alamanie’ – which meant ‘the Empress in Germany.’ Remember that Matilda had previously been married to the Holy Roman Emperor, so she was commonly known as the Empress. And this is actually the first known use of the word **empress** in the English language. Of course, **empress** is derived from the word **empire**. And it’s also related to words like **emperor** and **imperial**. But all three of those words – **empire**, **emperor** and **imperial** – came in about a century later. So, **empress** came in first – here in the mid-1100s. Now, I should note that this is based on the surviving English documents. It is certainly possible that words like **empire** and **emperor** were being used much earlier, but they aren’t actually attested until later on in the Middle English period.

I should also note that the scribe refers to Germany as **Alamanie** – the same root that’s still used in many Romance languages. The word **Germany** comes in later – from the word **Germania**. So, Matilda is referred to here as the ‘Empress of Alamanie’ and the ‘Countess of Anjou.’ And now she came to London with the intention of adding ‘Queen of England’ to that list of titles. But that didn’t happen.

Other chronicles written in Latin tell us that Matilda entered London like a conqueror. She wore the insignia of the empress. We’re also told that she made the local militia leaders in London show their allegiance to her by kissing the stirrup of her horse. So, she alienated some of the city leaders as soon as she arrived. Then she offended even more people by levying a tax on the city. This

actually violated her father's policy, who had largely exempted London from royal taxes. So, she didn't exactly get a warm welcome in London. We also have to keep in mind that London had supported Stephen up to this point, so Matilda was viewed with some scepticism even before she made those decisions.

And we always have to keep in mind that the people of that era weren't accustomed to a female monarch. So, if a king levied taxes and made people kiss his stirrups, it might have been seen as a sign of power and strength. But when Matilda did that, it was viewed as arrogance, especially among people who weren't really sympathetic to her to begin with.

While Matilda awaited her coronation, the people of London started to rise up against her. And at the same time, King Stephen's wife was now on the scene. Her name was also Matilda. And she had started to rally the men who still supported her husband. She put together a new army and she advanced toward London. So, it was now Matilda against Matilda. At this point, the uprising in London reached such a fever pitch that Empress Matilda could no longer stay there. On June 24 of 1141, she fled the city. So, she left before her coronation and she never officially became the queen.

Once again, the Peterborough scribe captured these events in a brief passage. Writing of Matilda, he wrote,

"She came to London; but the London folk attempted to take her, and she fled, and lost many of her followers."

7 com to Lundene 7 te Lundenissce folc hire wolde tæcen. 7 scæ fleh 7 forles þar micel.

Now, this is a very important passage for a couple of reasons. First of all, note that the scribe says that the people of London 'hire wolde tæcen' – 'her would take' or tried to take her. So, here the scribe is using that Norse word *take*, whereas before he used that Old English word *benam*, which meant the same thing. So, we see this word *take* being used as a synonym, and being used interchangeably with the native English word. And over time, *take* pushed out the other English words – *benam* and *niman*.

But there is another word in this passage that is very important to the history of English. In the last part of the passage, the scribe wrote that 'scæ fleh' – literally 'she fled', meaning she fled the City of London. So, what's so important about that passage? Well, this is the first known use of the word *she* in the English language. Yes, the incredibly common pronoun *she* makes its first appearance in this passage written by the Peterborough scribe. So, if you've ever wondered about the first use of the word *she* and who exactly *she* referred to, now you know. The first known use of the word was in reference to Matilda – Empress of Germany, Countess of Anjou and almost Queen of England.

From these humble beginnings in the mid-1100s, the word *she* was destined to have a great history. In an early episode of the podcast, I presented a list of the 50 most common words in the

English language and the word *she* was on that last. It actually came in as the 46th most common word in the language. And of course, it is a common word because it is a basic pronoun. So, all of this raises some interesting questions. Where did the word *she* come from? And why did it all of sudden appear at this point? And how did it become one of our standard pronouns? Well, the answers to those questions are not entirely clear. Again, this is where the general lack of English documents from this period is really frustrating. With more documents, it would be easier to trace this history. But without those documents, we don't really have specific answers. Now, I've actually discussed the word *she* before. I mentioned it briefly in Episode 54 – the episode I did about pronouns. So, let me briefly re-visit that history.

The first question is why did English speakers suddenly decide to adopt a new pronoun at this point. Now, most scholars agree that the word *she* was adopted because the old pronoun forms were too similar and created a lot of confusion. And during a time when the language was undergoing a lot of changes and a time when formal education in English had disappeared English speakers were looking for ways to simplify the language.

So, why were the old pronouns confusing? Well, you might remember that all of the Old English pronoun forms began with the same 'H' sound. So, whereas today we have *he, she, it, him, her, they* and *them*, in Old English, the equivalent forms were: *he, heo, hit, hine, hie, hie* and *hie*. And yes, that's correct, three of those forms were identical – *her, they* and *them* were all pronounced the same way – *hie* (/hee-eh/). So, most scholars think that English speakers were looking for ways to clear up that confusion.

One way they did that was to borrow the Norse pronouns for the plural versions. In the north of England, people were using the Norse words *they, them* and *their* beside the English equivalents. And of course, all of those Norse plural forms began with a 'th' sound. And over the course of several centuries, those Norse 'th' forms started to spread south. They were still considered more of a Northern form even during the time of Geoffrey Chaucer. Chaucer used them in the *Canterbury Tales*, but he only used them in the speech of characters who were from the north of England. So, words like *they*, and *them*, and *their* were considered Northern variations of the traditional Old English plural pronouns.

But that initial 'th' sound made those plural forms distinct and they were gradually adopted in the south as well. And by the time we get to Shakespeare, those 'th' forms had become the standard forms throughout England.

Well, at the same time that words like *they*, and *them*, and *their* were replacing the native forms, the word *she* was also replacing the native form, which was *heo* (/hay-oh/). *Heo* was the standard feminine pronoun when used as the subject of the sentence. And note the similarity between that female form and the male form *he*, which would have been pronounced /hay/ in Old English. So, the male form was /hay/ and the female form was /hay-oh/.

So, most scholars think that speakers were looking for ways to distinguish these male and female forms. So, it was part of the same process that brought in the Norse 'th' forms to distinguish the

singular pronouns from the plural pronouns. If that helps to explain why the word *she* pushed out the word *heo* over time, it doesn't really explain where the word came from.

One theory is that it was also borrowed from the Vikings like those 'th' forms. But Old Norse didn't have the word *she* or a form of the word *she*. So, unless it was a slang word or part of some Norse dialect in England that wasn't recorded elsewhere, it's hard to trace it back to the Vikings.

The other popular theory is that *she* is related to the loss of grammatical gender. And this theory has actually become the more popular theory because this was the period when grammatical gender largely disappeared. So, what's the connection between *she* and the loss of grammatical gender?

Well, it has to do with all of those various forms of the word *the* before *the* was adopted. A few episodes back, I noted that Old English didn't have the word *the* as an article. It had lots of different forms depending on the gender of the noun and how the noun was being used in the sentence. So instead of *the*, Old English had *se*, *seo*, *ðæt*, *ða*, *ðæs*, *ðære* and so on.

And I noted in that episode that the form used with feminine nouns was *seo*. So, instead of 'the queen' it was 'seo cwen.' But we know that this final Peterborough scribe ditched all of those various older forms and he just used the word *the*. So, *seo* fell out of use. Or did it?

Some scholars think *seo* became *she*. Remember, this earlier pronoun form was only used for feminine nouns. So, some scholars think it may have been preserved as a generic feminine pronoun in the form of *she*. It's possible that the scribe was simply indicating this new use of the word. And this new use was increasingly popular because it helped to distinguish the male and female pronoun forms. So, from *he* (/hay/) and *heo* (/hay-oh/) to *he* (/hay/) and *shæ*, and then to Modern English *he* and *she*. Anyway, that is the most popular theory today, but there is still some uncertainty.

While the ultimate origin of the word *she* may be uncertain, the oldest known use of this word is not. We now know that it was used in reference to Matilda. And it was used in reference to the fact that she was forced to flee from London. So, at this point in our story we have Matilda on the run and we have King Stephen in prison. So, neither leader was doing very well. We also have Stephen's wife, also named Matilda, who was leading his forces in his absence. So, at this point, for all practical purposes, the civil war was being fought between two women – both named Matilda. And Stephen's wife now had the upper hand.

It is now that events turned to the south to Winchester, the old capital of Wessex. I've noted previously that King Stephen's brother was the Bishop of Winchester. And he was a very important cleric. But he had turned against Stephen after Stephen arrested several other prominent bishops. So, at this point, Stephen's brother swore his loyalty to Matilda and he invited Matilda and Robert of Gloucester to Winchester.

But word of this invitation quickly reached the other Matilda – King Stephen’s wife. And she decided to lead the king’s army down to Winchester to confront Robert and his men. The Peterborough scribe wrote:

When they were therein, then came the king's queen with all her strength, and beset them, so that there was much hunger inside.

Ƣa hi Ƣær inne wæren. Ƣa com Ƣe kinges cuen mid al hire strengthe. 7 besæt heom. ðæt Ƣer wæs inne micel hungær.

So, we have King Stephen’s wife leading his forces to Winchester and besieging Robert of Gloucester. Ultimately, Robert’s forces gave up and fled, and this time Robert was taken prisoner. So, Matilda’s brother Robert is now in prison and King Stephen is still in prison. So, the leading men on both sides were incarcerated. And that meant that Matilda fought Matilda on their own terms. And Stephen’s wife Matilda proved to be the superior leader. Empress Matilda suffered a series of defeats and, without Robert by her side, she struggled to hold her own.

With both leading men imprisoned, it was eventually decided that a prisoner exchange was in order. Each Matilda would release their prisoner to the other. So, Empress Matilda would release Stephen and, in exchange, she would get back her brother Robert. The Peterborough scribe writes the following:

Then went the wise men between the king's friends and the earl's friends; and settled so that they should let the king out of prison for the earl, and the earl for the king; and so they did.

Ƣa feorden Ƣe wise men betwyx Ƣe kinges freond 7 te eorles freond. 7 sahtlede sua ðæt me sculde leten ut Ƣe king of prisun for Ƣe eorl. 7 te eorl for Ƣe king. 7 sua diden.

This exchange reinvigorated Stephen’s forces. When Stephen was in prison, some of his supporters had started to negotiate with Matilda. But now, with his release, they went back to war. By the fall of 1142, Matilda had retreated to Oxford and was taking refuge in a castle there. Stephen’s forces surrounded her and besieged the castle.

By December, the food had run out. Matilda and her men were starving and the ground was frozen and covered with snow. And Matilda started to realize that she had no choice but to surrender. It looked like the end of the road for the Empress and it seemed that the civil war was about to reach its final conclusion with Stephen and his descendants controlling the future of England. But Matilda made a decision that ultimately changed the history of the English monarchy. She decided to escape. She climbed out of a window in the castle and she slid down a rope. She was dressed in a long white robe so she couldn’t be seen against the snow that covered the ground. She then slid past the soldiers who didn’t realize who she was. It was so cold that the Thames was frozen over, so she was able to walk across the frozen river, and she disappeared into the night. Hollywood couldn’t have written it any better. Here’s how the Peterborough scribe captured these events:

*When the king was out, he heard of this, and took his fyrd, and beset her in the tower.
Ʒa Ʒe king was ute Ʒa herde ðæt sægen. 7 toc his feord 7 besæt hire in Ʒe tur*

*And they let her down in the night from the tower by ropes.
7 me læt hire dun on niht of Ʒe tur mid rapas*

*And she stole out, and fled, and went on foot to Wallingford.
7 stal ut. 7 scæ fleh 7 iæde on fote to Walingford.*

One quick note about that passage. We really get a sense here of how much those inflectional endings were disappearing. Most of the nouns lack any inflectional endings. ‘Fyrd’ is *feord* – ‘tower’ is *tur*, so there are no endings where traditionally there were endings. For the word ‘ropes’ the scribe uses *rapas* with the ‘-es’ ending that became standard over time. It should have been *rapas* – with an ‘-as’ ending. So, we have evidence of disappearing endings for singular nouns and the use of a standard ‘-es’ ending for plural nouns. All of this is getting us closer to the grammar we use today.

So, at this point, Matilda is once again on the run. Having fled from London earlier, now she fled from Oxford. And with Matilda’s escape, the war was destined to continue. Every time a resolution appeared to be in sight, it seemed to slip through everyone’s fingers. So, the whole conflict just dragged on and on.

In fact, after the prisoner exchange and Matilda’s escape, civil order largely collapsed around the country. The next five years or so are considered the worse period of the Anarchy. The war itself essentially became a stalemate with neither side making much progress against the other. Pitched battles were actually very rare. It mostly consisted of skirmishes and castle sieges. The real story at this point was the general breakdown of law and order.

Stephen still maintained a strong base in the southeast. Robert and Matilda maintained a base in the southwest. But in much of the rest of country, everyone was left to fend for themselves. And as I noted last time, the local barons filled that vacuum. They built castles and they ruled over their local subjects as petty kings. And the term ‘petty king’ is being very generous. In reality, they were more like warlords and gangsters. They fought with each other, but more importantly, they oppressed the people who were under their control. With no one to keep them in check, they ignored the rule of law, and they exploited the countryside.

This is where the story takes a really dark turn with tremendous violence and suffering and death. The primary victims of that violence were the peasants. The local barons demanded that the peasants pay them fees – as either ransoms or protection money. So, it was extortion. When peasants couldn’t pay, the barons tortured or killed them. They were basically gangsters, but it was worse than that.

A local noble would sometimes kidnap people and hold them for ransom. The victims were usually held in a jail or dungeon. And they were beaten and chained and tortured. They were left to freeze to the cold and sometimes they were suspended by the feet or hands with chain mail to

weigh them down. They were even placed over smoky fires so they could barely breathe. Eventually, so many peasants were extorted and imprisoned, that the old manor system started to fall apart. Crops were abandoned or, actually, destroyed. Manors and farms were neglected and others were intentionally ravaged and destroyed. And starvation soon set in.

And the local barons didn't limit their exploitation to the peasants. They even robbed and plundered the churches. There was no central power to keep them in check, so they just did as they pleased. Some even minted their own local coins. But those coins were of little use, except for paying ransoms. They didn't tend to buy very much because trade and commerce was also disrupted. People barely had enough to eat – much less to sell at a market.

One of the most moving accounts of this period comes from the Peterborough scribe. He not only describes the violence and anarchy of this period – he also does it in English, in the language of the peasants who were actually being exploited. So, the language is even more powerful. The scribe places his description of these events in the entry for the year 1137, but it is really a description of the entire period. As we know, he was writing at the end of this period and he was looking back on what had happened.

I want to conclude this episode by going through this particular passage because it is one of the most moving passages in the entire Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. And it also illustrates how the language was changing during this period. So, here is what the scribe wrote:

Then they took from those who worked and were thought to have any goods, both by night and by day, men and women, and threw them into prison for their gold and silver, and inflicted on them indescribable tortures; for never were any martyrs tortured as much as they were.

ƿa namen hi ƿa men ƿe hi wenden ðæt ani god hefden. bathe be nihtes 7 be dæies. carlmen 7 wimmen. 7 diden heom in prisun efter gold 7 syluer. 7 pined heom. untellendlice pining. for ne wæren næure nan martyrs swa pined alse hi wæron.

So, a few quick comments. The scribe says that the warlords took 'ani god' or 'any goods' they could find. This sense of the word **goods** goes back to Old English. **Good** meant anything good and came to mean 'valuable assets or property'. But we also see Norse and French words mixed into this passage. The scribe refers to 'carlmen 7 wimmen' – **carlmen** is a Norse term for 'men'. And he says that the warlords threw the peasants in prison using the French word **prison**. He also says that the victims were tortured, but he doesn't use the word **torture**, which is a French word. Instead, he uses the Old English word **pine** or /pee-neh/. We still use that word when we refer to someone 'pining away' for a lost love. But the original meaning of the word was to 'suffer' or 'torture'. I've noted before that Old English didn't have very many words that began with a 'p' sound, so many scholars think this word **pine** was an early Germanic borrowing from the Romans. It is thought that **pine** comes from the same Latin root that gave us **penal** and **penalty** and **punish**. So, when the scribe says that the warlords **pined** or /pee-ned/ the victims, he is literally saying that they were punished. But they had committed no crime.

This passage also illustrates how speakers of early English weren't bothered by double negatives or even triple negatives. The scribe wrote that 'for ne wæren næure nan martyrs swa pined' – literally 'for not were never no martyrs so punished – or tortured.' So, he uses a triple negative. But again, in early English, that was often done for emphasis. It wasn't considered 'bad' English until many centuries later when Latin scholars gave their input. So, there's a lot going on in that passage. Then the scribe continues and he describes the nature of the torture or pining. He writes:

Some they hanged up by the feet, and smoked them with foul smoke; and some were hanged by the thumbs, or by the head, and coats of mail were hung from their feet.

Me henged up bi the fet 7 smoked heom. mid ful smoke. Me henged bi the þumbes. other bi the hefed. 7 hengen bryniges [/brü-nee-yes/] on her fet.

By the way, **bryniges** is the Norse version of an old Germanic word for chain mail. So again, these passages show a lot of Norse influences. The scribe then continues to describe the torture. He writes:

The men tied knotted strings about their heads, and twisted them till it went into the brains. Me dide cnotted strenges abuton here hæued. 7 uurythen to ðæt it gæde to þe hæernes

By the way, **hæernes** is another Old Norse word. It meant 'brains.' So again, we see a lot of Norse influences in these passages. The scribe then says the warlords put men into dungeons, where adders and snakes and toads killed them.

Hi dyden heom in quarterne þar nadres 7 snakes 7 pades wæron inne. 7 drapen heom swa.

Here the scribe uses the word **quarterne** instead of **prison**. It is a French word and is basically an early version of the word **quarters** as in **close quarters** or **headquarters**. What's so interesting about the use of this word is that it is spelled [Q-U-A-R-T-E-R-N-E]. Here the scribe uses the [QU] letter combination for the /kw/ sound. And that was a brand-new spelling in English. The Anglo-Saxons had used the letter combination C and 'wynn', which was the runic letter used for the 'w' sound. So, **queen** – or **cwen** – was originally spelled [C-wynn-E-N]. But now, the new French spelling was used. So, we see some of the first uses of the [QU] letter combination in the English language. And that also means that we see some of the first uses of the letter Q, which wasn't used by the Anglo-Saxons. The Roman letter Q had survived in the Romance languages, but it tended to be restricted to this [QU] letter combination. And that's how it passed into English. We see it here in this variation of the word **quarter**, and we'll soon see it in new spellings for words like **queen** and **quick** and **quake** and **qualm**, which were all Old English words that were about to get new spellings in Middle English.

Also, note that the scribe says that the warlords threw the men in prison – or 'quarters' – with adders, snakes and 'pades' – or 'toads.' **Pad** was an old word for a toad. This is actually the first use of the word in English. Once again, it came in from Old Norse. Over the next century or so, the word **pad** became **paddock** and that word is still used for toad in some English dialects. So, if

a warlord was trying to torture a peasant, it makes sense that he would throw him in a pit with adders and snakes, but why toads? Well, during this period, it was still a common belief that toads were poisonous. So, people were generally afraid of them. In fact, there's an old expression – 'a pad in the straw' – and it refers to something that has gone wrong or a hidden danger. It literally means a poisonous toad hiding in the straw. So, it goes back to this belief that toads were poisonous.

Now, as we return to the chronicle, we find out that the warlords had lots of tortures for their victims. The scribe tells us that they sometimes used a *crucethur*. Now, you may be wondering what a *crucethur* is. Well, this is the only known use of the word in the English language, but the scribe was kind enough to tell us exactly what it was. He wrote:

that is, in a chest that was short and narrow, and undeepe – or shallow.
ðæt is in an cæste [‘chest’] þat was scort 7 nareu. 7 un dep

and they put sharp stones therein, and so crushed the man therein, that broke all his limbs.
7 dide scærpe stanes þerinne. 7 þrengde þe man þærinne. ðæt him bræcon alle þe limes.

It is interesting that the scribe felt the need to explain what this device was. So, this must have been a new form of torture. And the word is certainly unusual. As I noted, *crucethur* doesn't appear in any other English documents, and it's not clearly attested in any other language, either. It appears to be a variation of the Latin word *cruciator*, which meant a 'torturer or tormentor.' It comes from the same root that gives us the word *excruciating*.

The scribe then lists other torture devices like iron shackles that were placed around a man's neck. The man was then left to hang by the shackles – called 'lof and grin' using the Old English terms. The tortured victim didn't necessarily choke to death, he just hung there. He couldn't sit or lie down or sleep.

The scribe then writes the following passage:

I cannot, and I may not tell all the wonders and all the pines or tortures which they inflicted on the wretched men of this land.

I ne can ne i ne mai tellen alle þe wunder ne alle þe pines ðæt hi diden wreccemen on þis land.

Now, there is something very important about this sentence, and that's the word /ee/ or, as we know it today, *I*. This is the first known use of the pronoun *I* in the English language. According to my list of the most commonly used words in the English language, the word *I* is the number 1 word on that list. So, that's why I wanted to point out this sentence.

Now, just to be clear, we pronounce the word as /eye/ today thanks to the Great Vowel Shift at the end of the Middle English period. That's when the pronunciation of many of the vowels started to change. Prior to that change, the letter 'I' was pronounced as /ee/, as in the words

‘king’ and ‘bring.’ So, this pronoun was probably pronounced as /ee/. Now, this wasn’t a brand-new pronoun – it was just a new variation of the existing pronoun. Up to this point, the first-person pronoun was *ic* – spelled [IC]. But now, that /ch/ part was starting to be dropped, and it just became /ee/ rendered with the single letter I. We know from later texts that this was a development within northern English and it took a long time for it to be fully accepted in the south. In fact, *ic* survived until the 1700s in some southern texts.

It was also just a lowercase [i] at this point. But it tended to get lost in written texts, It sort of blended in with the words that preceded it or followed it. And so scribes looked for a way to make it stand out as a distinct word, not just a letter. And a few centuries later, it became standard practice to use an uppercase [I] instead of a lowercase [i] to make it easier to read. So, here in these passages, the Peterborough scribe has given us the first use of the word *she* and the first use of *I* as a shortened form of *ic*. And once again, we see the loss of inflectional endings. The final part of that sentence I just read is ‘on this land.’ In traditional Old English, it would have been rendered as ‘on þissum lande’, but now it is just ‘on þis land.’ So, the inflections are gone, and it reads just like Modern English. So, we see lots of changes towards Modern English in these passages.

The scribe then tells us that the local lords levied ‘guilds’ or taxes on the towns from time to time. He writes:

They laid guilds on the towns once in a while, and called it "tenserie"
Hi læiden gæildes on the tunes æure um wile 7 clepeden it tenserie.

Tenserie comes from the Old French word *tenser*, which meant ‘to protect.’ It was used in Latin documents of this period, and it was used here in the Peterborough Chronicle as well. From the other documents, we know that the word meant ‘protection money.’ So, this was basically extortion. The townspeople had to pay the lord for protection, not just from other lords, but also from the lord who extorting the money. If the towns people ran out of money, the lord would destroy the town. The scribe writes:

when the wretched men had no more to give, then they plundered and burned all the towns;
þa þe uurecce men ne hadden nan more to gyuen. þa ræueden hi 7 brendon alle the tunes.

Over time, many of the towns were burned and destroyed in this manner. The scribe says that many of the towns were left without people and the adjacent farms were abandoned. He writes:

that well thou mightest fare all a day's journey, and thou should never find a man sitting in a town, nor the land tilled.
ðæt wel þu myhtes faren all a dæis fare sculdest thu neure finden man in tune sittende. ne land tilde.

This is another very important passage in the history of English. When the scribe writes that a person might fare ‘all a day’s’ journey, he uses the word *a* as an article – ‘all a day’s’ journey.

This is the first known instance of *a* being used as an indefinite article, in the way we use it today. So, I've noted previously that this scribe is the first known scribe to use the word *the* as a definite article. And he used it generically, just like we do today.

And now we see that this same scribe is also the first scribe to use the word *a* as an indefinite article. I've discussed the history of the word *a* before. Back in Episode 48, I noted that the words *a* and *an* began as the Old English word for 'one.' That word was *an* – [A-N]. And as I've noted before, Old English didn't really use articles like *a* and *the*. So, they wouldn't say, "I see a horse." They would just say "I see horse." But sometimes, they did indicate the number of something. So, they might say, "I see five horses," or "I see four horses." Or "I see one horse" – 'an horse.' And that is how *an* – meaning 'one' – came to be used as a generic article meaning one of something. So, if I say, "I ate an apple," I am literally saying "I ate one apple" because *an* – or /ahn/ – was the original form of the word *one*.

So, *an* was used to mean 'one', but now – for the first time – we see it shortened to just *a*. And that tells us that our modern article *a* was in use by this point in the mid-1100s, at least in the East Midlands. So, *ic* has been shortened to our modern *I*. And *an* has been shortened to our modern *a*. But, of course, /ahn/ or *an* has been retained in its original full form before vowels, so 'an apple', 'an onion', 'an elephant.'

Now, the scribe has told us that towns were plundered and farms were abandoned. That meant that crops failed and food became scarce. Corn – or grain – was hard to find, and when it could be found, it was too expensive for most people to afford. And flesh – or meat – was scarce. The scribe wrote:

Then was corn dear, and flesh, and cheese, and butter; for none was there in the land. Wretched men starved of hunger.

Þa was corn dære. 7 flec 7 cæse 7 butere. for nan ne wæs o þe land. Wreccemen sturuen of hungær.

A few lines later, the scribe writes:

Never yet was there more wretchedness in the land; nor never did heathen men do worse than they did.

Wes næure gæt mare wreccened on land. ne næure hethen men werse ne diden þan hi diden.

So, the scribe says that the 'heathen men' weren't as bad as the warlords who terrorized the country during this period. Most scholars agree that 'heathen men' is a reference to the Vikings. So, the scribe is saying that these warlords were worse than the Vikings. He writes:

If two men, or three, came riding to a town, all the township fled from them, assuming them to be robbers.

Gif twa men oþer .iii. (þreo) coman ridend to an tun. al þe tunscepe flugæn for heom. wenden ðæt hi wæron ræueres.

By the way, word *ræueres* meant ‘robbers’ and it later became *reavers* in Middle English. Even though *reavers* has largely disappeared from the language, the verb form *reave* still survives in words like *bereave* and *bereft* meaning ‘deprived of something’ or ‘to have something taken away’.

Having described the horrors of the Anarchy in vivid detail, the scribe then concludes with one of his most well-known passages. He writes:

they said openly, that Christ slept, and his saints. Such events, and even more than we can say, we suffered for nineteen winters for our sins.

hi sæden openlice ðæt Crist slep. 7 his halechen. Suilc 7 mare þanne we cunnen sæin. we þolenden .xix (nigontene) wintre for ure sinnes.

So, this particular scribe gave us a vivid description of life during the Anarchy. But the scribe’s hard work was nearly done. The civil war eventually came to an end. And with the end of the war and the end of the Anarchy, we also got the end of the Peterborough Chronicle – the last version of the Chronicle to be maintained in English.

Next time, we’ll look at how the civil war ended and how law and order was reimposed across the country. And for that part of the story, we have to return across the channel to France because even though Matilda couldn’t defeat Stephen in England, she was having a lot more success against him in Normandy. In fact, Normandy was soon conquered by her husband, Geoffrey. And that set the stage for Matilda’s son Henry to make a play for the English throne. These events in France had a tremendous impact on the history of England. And they also reinforced the French influence on the English language over the next couple of centuries. So, next time, we’ll look at those developments.

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