A Brief History of the English Language and the Landmass now called "England"

Part 1: Introduction

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Marist CLS
Fall 2025

HELP!

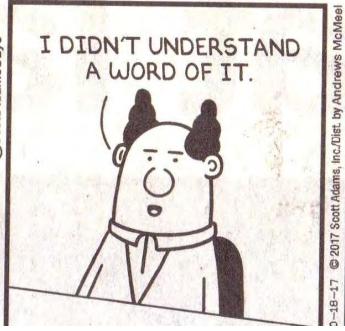
- If you notice any mistakes please speak up.
- Ask questions, make comments.
- Tell us about the languages you speak.

My language background

- Native Bronx-Irish language dialect
- Latin: four years in High School and one college course.
- Russian: 4 years: two in H.S. and two at CCNY
 - ➤ Went to USSR in 1973: "Please speak slowly and make believe I'm 8 years old!"

Dilbert by Scott Adams







This course will be 4 weeks

- 1. The landmass we call England before the English Language
- 2. Old English: 450 to 1150 AD. A foreign Germanic language.
- 3. Middle English: 1150 to 1500 AD. Looks sort of like English.
- 4. Modern English: 1500 to 2025 AD.
 - Why is English so difficult to learn as a second language?

I Googled "History of the English Language"

- Old English (c. 450–1100): This earliest form of English, also called Anglo-Saxon, developed from the dialects of the people who migrated from modern-day Germany and Denmark to Britain.
- Vocabulary and grammar: Old English is a West Germanic language that is almost unrecognizable to modern English speakers due to its complex grammar and largely Germanic vocabulary.
- Influences: Latin was an early influence, primarily through Christian missionaries. Later, Viking invasions introduced numerous Old Norse words, including "sky," "leg," and "take".

I Googled "History of the English Language"

Middle English (c. 1100–1500): The Norman French Conquest of 1066 marked the start of the Middle English period.

- The Norman French influence: With the new Norman rulers, French became the language of the court, government, and upper class, while English was spoken by the common people.
- Grammatical changes: The influx of French and Old Norse further simplified English grammar. Many old case endings were lost, and word order became more important for conveying meaning.
- Chaucer and literature: English re-emerged as a prestigious language in the 14th century, most famously in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury* Tales.

I Googled "History of the English Language"

Modern English (c. 1500-Present): This period is marked by the Great Vowel Shift and the introduction of the printing press.

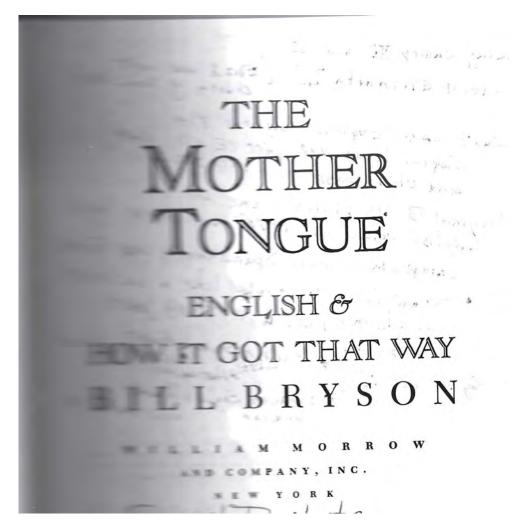
- Early Modern English (c. 1500–1800): A distinct change in the pronunciation of long vowels, known as the Great Vowel Shift, further separated English from its Germanic roots. The advent of the <u>printing press</u> in the 15th century and the publication of works by writers like William Shakespeare helped standardize spelling and grammar.
- Late Modern English (c. 1800–Present): The main difference between Early and Late Modern English is a significant expansion of vocabulary, driven by the Industrial Revolution, the rise of science, and the growth of the British Empire.
- English today: The English language continues to evolve, with new vocabulary constantly entering the language through technology and cultural exchange.

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Books, DVDs, Britanica

1990 PBS Series and Book



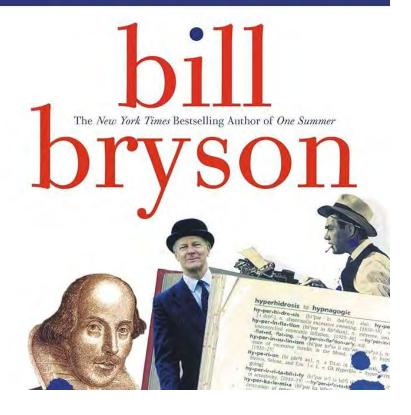
"English is spoken by more than 900 million people around the world....

Its story has been told before, but seldom as deftly or as memorably."

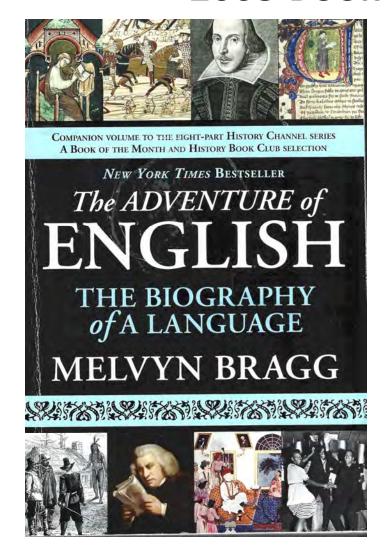
—New York Times Book Review

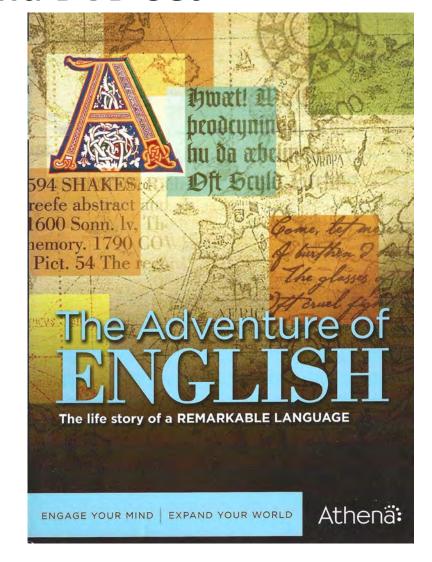
The Mother Tongue

English and How It Got That Way



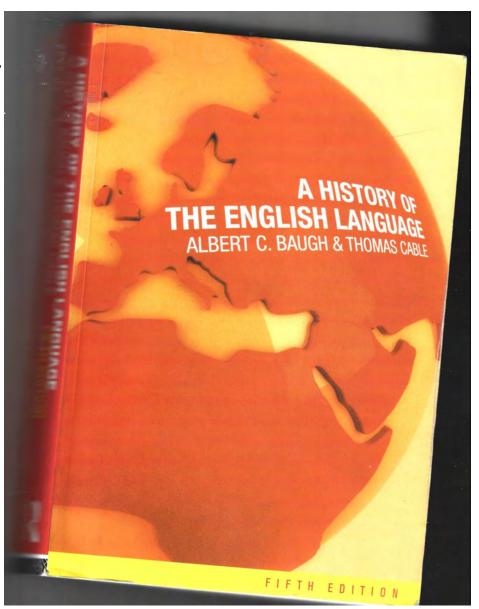
2003 Book and DVD Set





A history of the English Language by Abert C Baugh & Thomas Cable

- The Textbook Bible of the Subject -



The Great Mortality An Intimate history of the BLACK DEATH John Kelly 2006

Outstanding!

The GREAT MORTALITY

An intimate history of the

BLACK DEATH

Their has some been a terror researched, better wrones for more engaging account of the worse epidemic the world has rise account for the world has rise account.

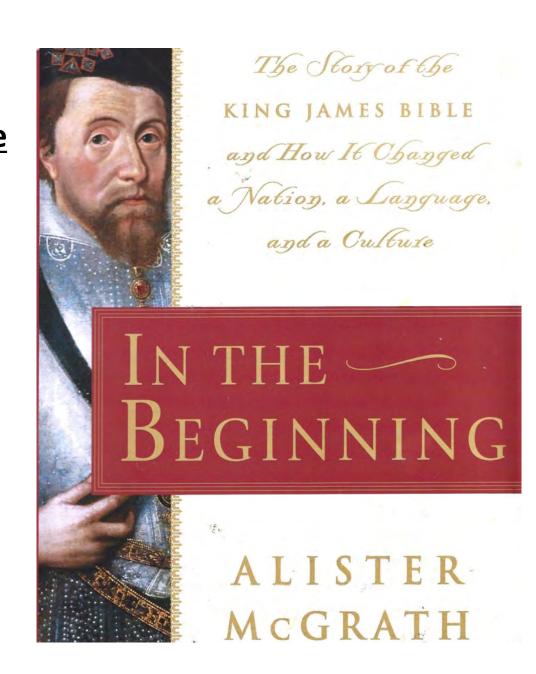




In the Beginning The History of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a

Language and a Culture by Allister E McGrath 2001

Outstanding!



Introduction

selfish, shellfish no outlet no standing stand pipe

Key Points in this course

- England has had the same basic boarders since the Romans ruled Britania.
 - ✓ At that time everyone spoke Latin or Celtic until the Romans left in 410 CE
- Old English is the earliest form of the English language (German).
- Middle English evolved after the Norman French Invaded in 1066
 - ✓ All government, military and church offices were held by French speakers.
 - ✓ Middle English was the spoke language of 90% of the people.
- Modern English evolved and standardized by the Printing Press and Schools
 - ✓ In 1600, England was the only place in the world where English was the dominant language.
 - ✓ Then came the Pilgrims and Jamestown, Australia and the British Empire.

The evolving Political and Language History of England are closely linked

- You can't understand how the English Language developed unless
 - > you understand a little about how English Political History unfolded
 - This is the key to this course: English Political & Social History and the History of the English Language are tightly linked.
- <u>Time Period</u>: 450 CE until today: more than 1500 years
- This course will not be a list of names, dates and details, but of concepts and trends

Language is a Spoken Skill that disappears into the air, but Written Language can Survive

Spoken Language

- Modern Humans have been <u>speaking</u> languages for 50,000+ years ???
- But Voice recording was not invented until 1877
 - ✓ No one knows what George Washington sounded like. He probably sounded like an Englishman.

Written Language

- Written languages first appeared in Sumer and Egypt about 5,000 years ago
- Prehistoric: If there are no surviving written records, then the people and their languages are <u>prehistoric</u>.

A word on how we write historical dates

- Traditional Christian Method
 - > AD: Anno Domini, year of the Lord (Jesus)
 - **BC:** Before Christ
- More modern and less Christian Method
 - **CE:** Common Era
 - **BCE:** Before the Common Era
- I use both methods: old habits die hard.

Key Points: England and English Language

- Geography: Today England is part of a country called the United Kingdon (UK)
- English Language: there was no English-like Language before 500 AD
 - > English doesn't look like the language we speak until about 1500 AD
- <u>Language</u> is a spoken (oral) concept.
 - ✓ Language is an agreed upon code for communication
 - ✓ Certain grunts, groans and hisses mean "CAT" in English
 - ✓ Spoken Language changes / evolves quickly (think computers and cell phones)
- Language can be written and then read
 - ✓ Written language requires another code called an Alphabet
 - ✓ Reading and Writing were very rare skills before 1500 AD (Printing)
 - ✓ Written Language changes slowly due to education and printed material.

Key Point: Written Language - Spelling Difficulties

Here is the mathematics:

- 26 Letters in our Alphabet
- 45 Sounds in Modern English (International Phonetic Alphabet)
- 200+ ways to Spell those 45 Sounds using our Alphabet

Pronunciation and spelling are confusing

- When you speak a word, you can't be certain how to write (spell) it
 - > dark NIGHT / KNIGHT in shining armor
- When you see a written word, you can't be sure how to pronounce it.
 - > There was a MINUTE layer of snow. I'll be there in a MINUTE.
 - > I READ a book. The RED car.
- The sentence (the context) provides the clues to interpret the meaning.

And AWAY WE GO!!!!

PS: God bless Spell Check!!!!

Background before we get to the English Language

- 1. Language in general
- 2. Two types of languages:
 - a) Inflected languages: lots of endings on nouns, adjectives, verbs,
 - b) Word Order languages (Subject, Verb, Object)
- 3. Language Families
- 4. Prehistoric England
- 5. Geography of England: same shape since Roman rule

Language: from Wikipedia

- Language is a structured system of communication that consists of grammar and vocabulary.
- Language is the primary means by which humans convey meaning in spoken (oral) language. A Language may also be written.
- Human languages possess powerful properties:
 - > you can create an infinite number of sentences,
 - > you can refer to objects, events, and ideas that are not immediately present or even theoretical.
- The use of human language relies on social convention and is acquired through learning.
- The group must agree on what the "grunts" mean. We've been doing it so long, It's inbred in us.

Dialect: from Wikipedia

- A dialect is a variety of language spoken by a particular group of people.
- Dialects of Modern English
 - > British English: including Scottish English, Welsh English, Irish English
 - > American English: including Boston, Brooklyn, Alabama and Texas English
 - > Australian, Canadian, New Zealand, Caribbean English
 - Indian, Sri Lankan, Pakistani, Nigerian, Philippine, Singaporean, and South African English.
- High Prestige Dialects of English
 - BBC English (King's English: aka London English)
 - > Evening News English in the USA
 - > Job Interview English
- A language is a dialect with an army and a navy!

Two Major Categories of Languages

- Inflected Languages: nouns, adjectives, verbs etc. have word endings that tell you how to interpret a sentence.
 - ✓ Old English (Latin, French, Russian,)
- Word Order Languages: the order of the words in the sentence tells you how to interpret the sentence
 - ✓ Modern English
 - ✓ Subject / Verb / Object: "SVO"

Two Types of Languages: Inflected Languages

- <u>Inflected Languages</u>: use word endings (inflections) and changes to the root word to communicate the meaning of a sentence.
 - Word Ending: dog / dogs, provide / provides / provided / providing
 - > Changing the root word: woman / women, sing / sang / sung
 - > Latin and the Romance languages are inflected languages.
 - > Old English was an inflected language, as was its German root.

Two Types of Languages: Word Order Languages

- Word Order Languages: use word order to communicate the meaning of a sentence.
 - Modern English uses word order to convey meaning
 - > SVO: Subject Verb Object
 - > Examples: English, Chinese, Vietnamese, ...
 - English uses auxiliary verbs and prepositional phrases instead of word endings, but a many word endings have survived.

So →

- Old English was an Inflected Language. The word endings tell you who is doing what to whom.
- Modern English is a Word Order Language that uses auxiliary verbs and prepositions to tell you who is doing what to whom.

Modern English has retained a few inflections (word endings) to reflect tense, number, person, case, ...

- d, ed to show that a verb is talking about the past.
 - > I raked the leaves yesterday.
 - > I talked to Jane yesterday.
- <u>s, es</u> to show that a noun is plural (more than one)
 - > kings
 - > tomatoes, arches, churches, latches, stitches
- er, est: Comparative and Superlatives: fast, faster, fastest and large, larger, largest
- 's, s': used to show possession. The Tom's backpack. The soldiers' formation.
- There are many exceptions to the above due to traditional spelling and words from other languages.
- Changes to the root of the noun for plurals: man men, foot feet
- Changes to the root of a verb: sing, sang, sung

Word Order (Subject Verb Object)

Cases

- Nominative = Subject of Sentence
- Genitive = Possession
- Accusative = Direct Object
- Dative = Indirect Object (the recipient of the verb)

The girl gave the books to David.

- girl: subject of sentence (singular, feminine)
- gave: verb of sentence (singular, past tense)
- books: direct object of sentence (plural, neuter)
- David: indirect object of the sentence (recipient, singular, masculine)



Inflected Languages: use word endings for

"The girl gave the books to David"

<u>Inflected Language</u>: word endings

Thexx girlxx gaveyy thezz bookzz Davidbb

- xx: subject, singular, feminine
- yy: past tense, singular
- zz: object, plural neuter
- bb: indirect object, singular, masculine

You could put the words in any order. The inflections give meaning.

Davidbb bookzz thezz girlxx thexx gaveyy

Inflected Language: Latin noun for "girl" - 1st Declension Feminine -

<u>Case</u>	<u>Singular</u>	<u>Plural</u>	Function	Example Sentence	Translation
Nominative	puella	puellae	Subject	Puella amat puerum.	The girl loves the boy.
Genitive	puellae	puellārum	Possession	Librum puellae video.	I see the book of the girl.
Dative	puellae	puellīs	Indirect object	Donum puellae do.	I give a gift to the girl.
Accusative	puellam	puellās	Direct object	Puer puellam videt.	The boy sees the girl.
Ablative	puellā	puellīs	"By, with, from	Cum puellā ambulat.	He walks with the girl.
Vocative	puella	puellae	Direct address	Ō puella, veni!	O girl, come!

There are completely different declensions for Masculine and Neuter nouns.

Memorize, memorize!

<u>Inflected Language</u>: conjugation of the Latin Verb "to love" - Present Tense -

Person & Number	Ending	<u>Example</u>	<u>Translation</u>
1st Person Singular	-ō	Amō	I love
2nd Person Singular	- S	A mās	You love
3rd Person Singular	-t	A mat	He/she/it loves
1st Person Plural	-mus	A māmus	We love
2nd Person Plural	-tis	Amātis	You love
3 rd Person Plural	-nt	Amant	They love

The past and future tenses have completely different endings Plus

There are four other major categories of verbs that also have different endings.

Memorize, memorize, memorize!

Final Jeopardy

- In Old English, plurals were often formed by adding "en"
- Can you think of a rare example in Modern English?

Final Jeopardy Answer

- In Old English, plurals were often formed by adding "en"
- Can you think of an example in Modern English?

Answer

- > child children
- \rightarrow ox oxen
- brother brethren

Modern Personal Pronouns: you must memorize

Personal Pronouns	Subject of Sentence	
	Singular	Plural
1st Person	I	we
2nd Person	you	you
3rd Person	he, she, it	they

Personal Pronouns	Direct Object of Sentence		
	Singular	Plural	
1st Person	me	us	
2nd Person	you	you	
3rd Person	him, her, it	them	

Possessive Pronoun	Singular	Plural
1st Person	mine	our
2nd Person	yours	yours
3rd Person	his, hers, its	theirs

Possessive Adjective	Singular	Plural
1st Person	my	our
2nd Person	your	your
3rd Person	his, hers, its	their

Reflexive Pronoun	Singular	Plural
1st Person	myself	ourselves
2nd Person	yourself	yourselves
3rd Person	himself,	themselves
	herself, itself	

Humor of the English Language

We'll begin with box, and the plural is boxes; But the plural of ox is oxen, not oxes. Then one fowl is goose, but two are called geese, Yet the plural of moose should never be meese. You may find a lone mouse or a nest full of mice, Yet the plural of house is houses, not hice. If the plural of man is always called men, Why shouldn't the plural of pan be called pen? I speak of my foot and show you my feet, If I give you a boot, would a pair be called beet? If one is a tooth, and a whole set are teeth, Why shouldn't the plural of booth be called beeth?

Humor of the English Language

So our English, I think, you all will agree, Is the craziest language you ever did see. And dead; it's said like bed, not bead; For goodness sake, don't call it deed! A dreadful language? Why, man alive, I'd learned to talk it when I was five, And yet to write it, the more I tried, I hadn't learned it at fifty-five!

Another Example: close

- Close (near): I'm close to my destination.
- Close (shut): Close the door.
- Clothes (garb): I'm wearing new clothes today.
- Scotland: an alleyway or passage.
 - > Turn left at close number four. (Local dialect word)

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 - > LEAD LEAD homograph
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Language Families

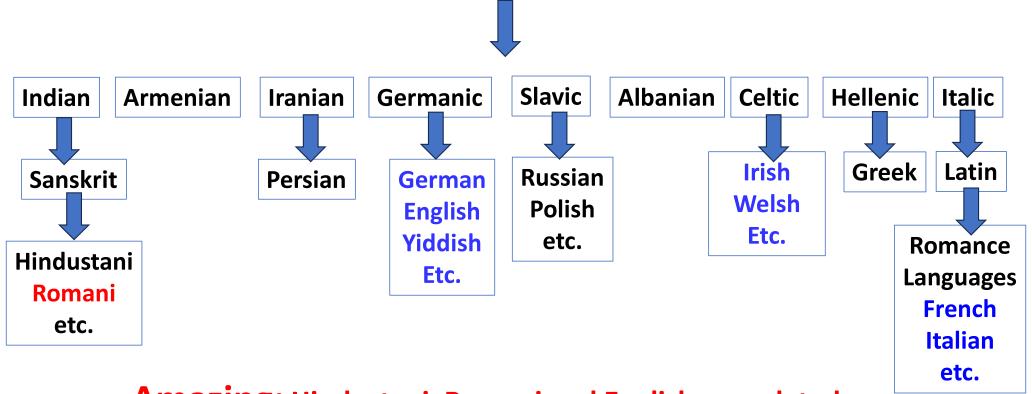
The Language Families we're interested in

- 1. Germanic Family → English, Dutch, German, ...
- 2. Latin Family Romance Languages (French, ...)
- 3. Celtic Family → Irish, Welsh, Scot's Gaelic, Breton

Sir William Jones

- William Jones was a language genius and an English judge in Bengal, India.
- He took up Sanskrit, a "dead" religious language, as a hobby.
 - ✓ Like Latin was in the Catholic Church
 - ✓ Like Old Church Slavonic and Church Slavonic
- 1786: Sir William Jones first lectured on the striking similarities among three oldest languages he knew: Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit
- He theorized that Latin, Greek and Sanskrit must have had a common ancestor language that no longer existed. Scholars later called this dead language Proto Indo European (a reconstructed language)
- Others had noticed this, but he studied and published it.

The Indo-European Family of Languages



Amazing: Hindustani, Romani and English are related.

North and West German Language Family



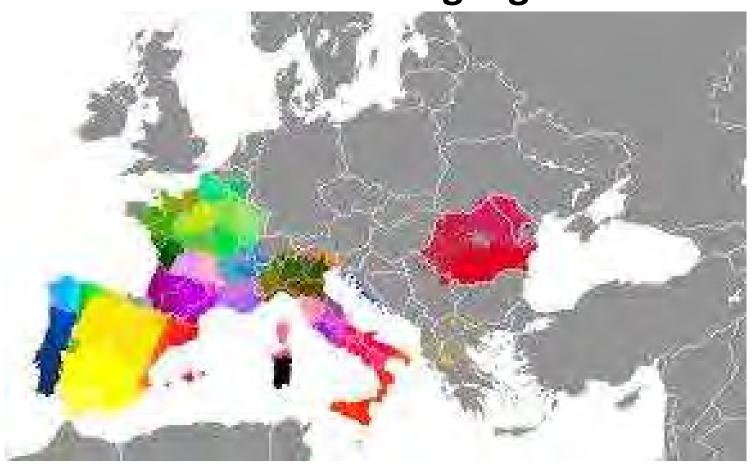
North German

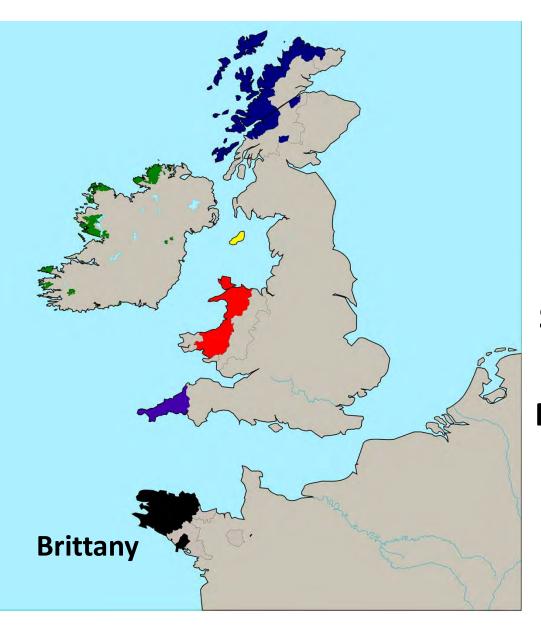
- Icelandic
- Norwegian
- Danish
- Swedish

West German

- English
- Scots
- Frisian
- Dutch
- Low German
- High German
 - Yiddish

Romance Languages





Celtic Languages Today

Irish Welsh

Scotts Gaelic Breton (France)

Manx (revival) Cornish (revival)

Primary Languages in this course

- all Indo-European Languages -
- <u>Celtic Languages</u>: the earliest documented language in England
- Latin
 - **✓** Roman Empire
 - ✓ Roman Catholic Church
 - ✓ European scholarship
- English and related Germanic Languages
 - ✓ Anglo-Saxon (a term invented by historians)
 - ✓ Old English, Middle English, Modern English
 - Many regional and national dialects
- Old French
 - ✓ Norman French: the French spoken in Normandy and England. This is not Paris French: the French spoken in Paris.

Language Families of the World



Some languages have no relatives: **BASQUE**

Extremely Simplified Language families

- Indo-European
- IE and Native Languages
- Afro-Asiatic
- Kartvelian Caucasus
- Niger-Congo + Bantu
- Afro-Asiatic / Niger-Congo / Nilo-Saharan
- Khoisan / Niger-Congo + Bantu
- Nilo-Saharan
- Austronesian
- Sino-Tibetan
- Other
- Papuan / Austrone New Guine
- Altaic (Theoretical)
- Finno-Ugric

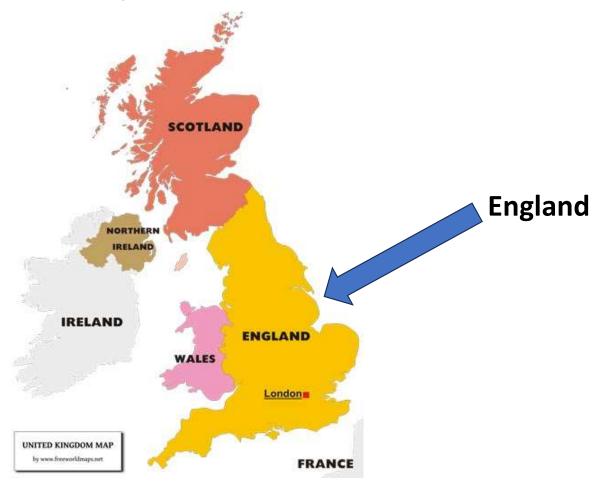
The Landmass Call "England"

England

- United Kingdom: England, Scotland, Wales & Northern Ireland
- Great Britain: a old term for the one island that contains England, Scotland, and Wales.
- British Isles: a geographic term for the two main islands (Great Britain and Ireland) and more than 6,000 smaller islands
- Until 1600, England was the only country where English was the dominant language
- Here come the maps → → →

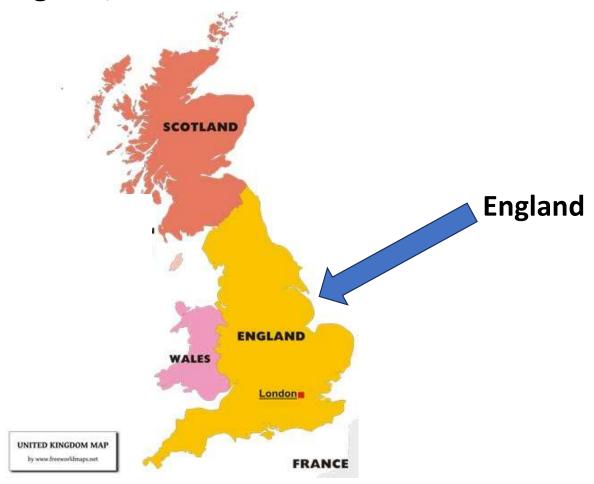
Today's United Kingdom

England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

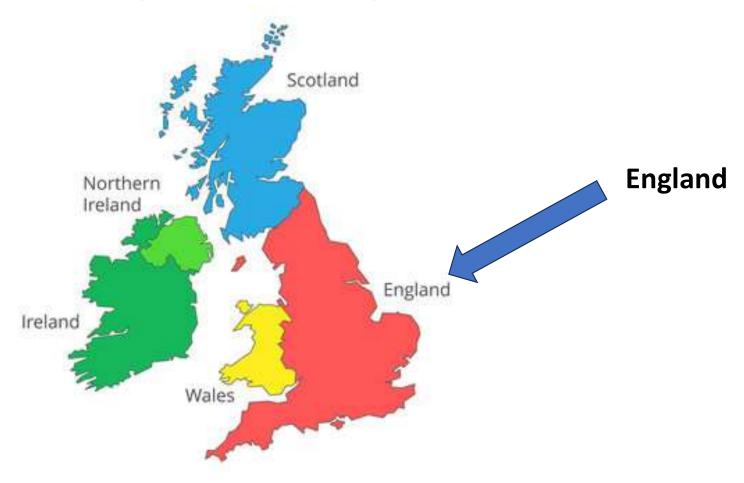


Great Britain: the one island

England, Scotland and Wales



British Isles (both Islands): two nations



Here is England

- basically, the same shape since the Romans



This is where the English Language evolved.



Notice how close England is to France, Belgium and Holland

The Way-Back Machine England before it was England Don't take any of these dates literally

"A History of Ancient Britain" with Neil Oliver, Archaeologist. On BRITBOX steaming channel

Way-Way Back in England

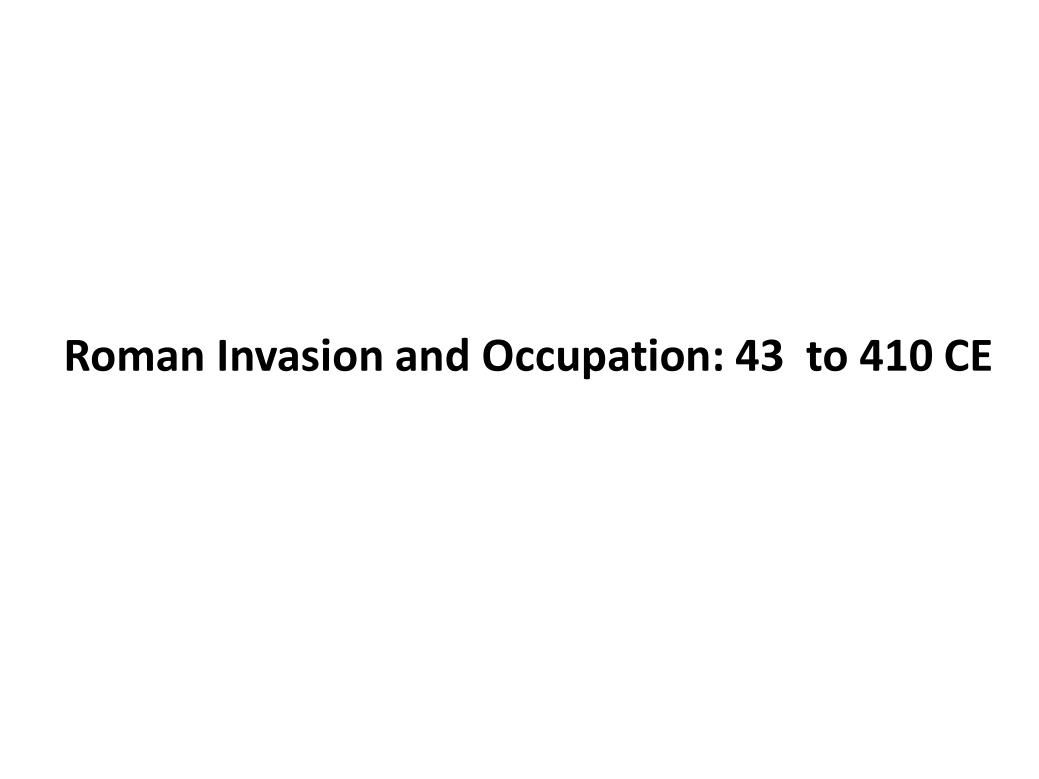
- Old Stone Age (Paleolithic): 500,000 to 10,000 BCE.
 - 500,000 years ago: Boxgrove Man. Not modern humans.
 - > 400,000 years ago: Neanderthals. Not modern humans.
 - 40,000 years ago: Modern Humans reached England
 - Very small population. Hunter / Gatherers
- Then there was a Major Ice Age, which ended around 10,000 BCE
 - > All humans in England probably died during the Ice Age
 - This Ice Age ended the Old Stone Age (Paleolithic):

The Ages Before The English Language

- Middle Stone Age (Mesolithic): 10,000 4000 BCE
 - > Permanent human settlement begins
 - > 6000 BCE: England becomes an island
 - > 4500 BCE: Farming and domestic animals
- New Stone Age (Neolithic): 4000 to 2200 BCE
 - > First Huge Stone Monuments built
 - > Stonehenge: 3100 to 1600 BCE
- Bronze Age: 2600 700 BCE (Celts). Bronze = 88% Copper + 12% Tin
- Iron Age: 700 BCE 43 CE (Celts). Iron is contained in rocks

Stonehenge: from the New Stone Age: Neolithic





Roman Empire (Britania in Red)

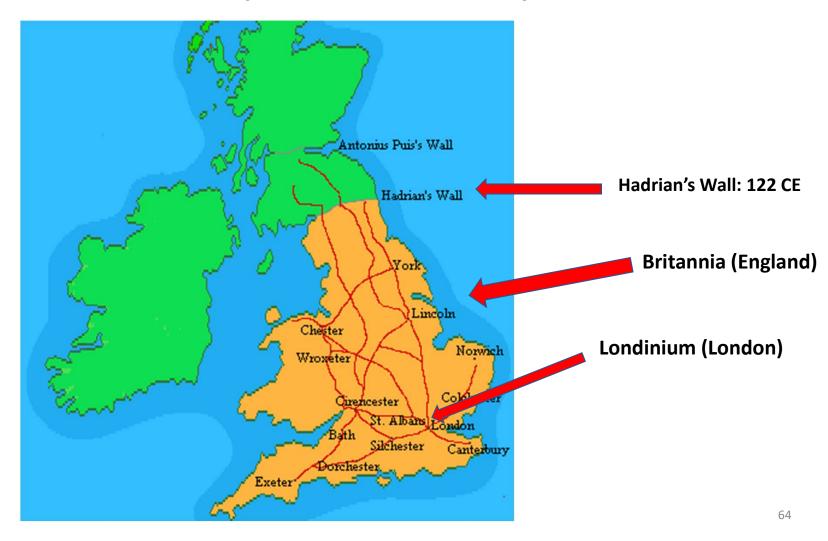


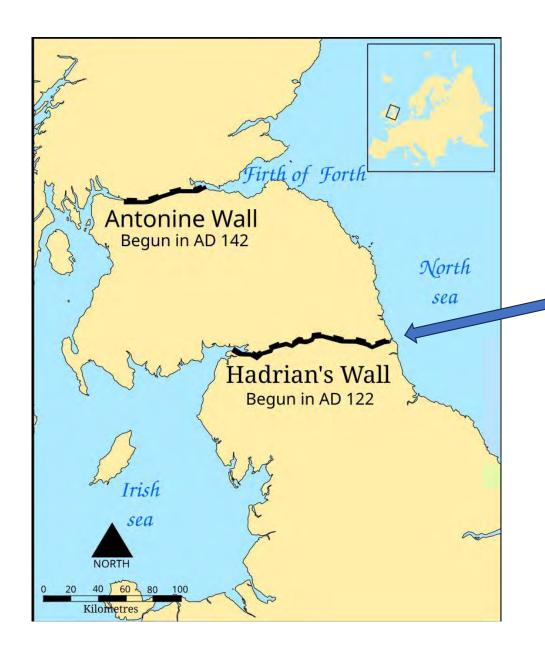
The Romans ruled and coexisted with the Celts

- Romans used Latin
- The Celts used Celtic
- Some were bilingual

Rome ruled Britania from 43 CE to 410 CE

Roman Britain (43 AD to 410 AD)





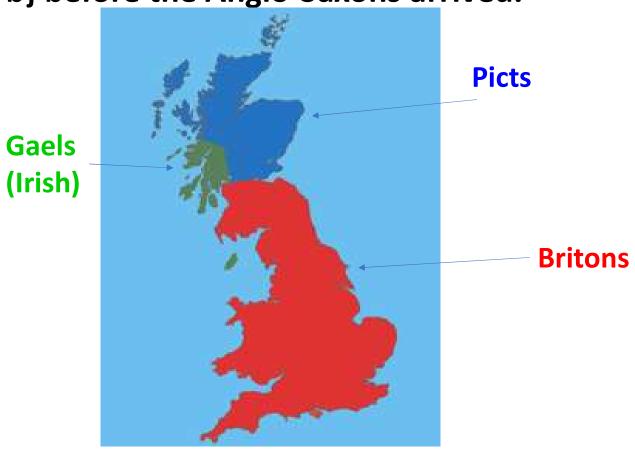
Hadrian's Wall is just south of the modern border of England and Scotland.



Celts in Great Britain (410 CE)

a) when the Romans left

b) before the Anglo-Saxons arrived.



Terminology: what is England?

- England has been a distinct geographic area since the Romans ruled the land.
 - ✓ Roman rule: 43 to 410 CE (almost 400 years)
 - ✓ No one in England spoke English at that time. They spoke some sort of Celtic or some sort of Latin
 - ✓ Almost all the major cities and roads in England were stated by the Romans.
- The later Germanic invaders and settlers (450 CE) spoke various West German languages, but there are very few written records before 700 CE
- You can say that Old English appeared in writing on or about 700 CE
- England: united under one king or queen since 927 CE

What the heck is the English Language?

- English is classified as a West Germanic language
 - > Our basic small common words come from Germanic languages
 - But our vocabulary is loaded with words that came from French, Latin and Greek

Review

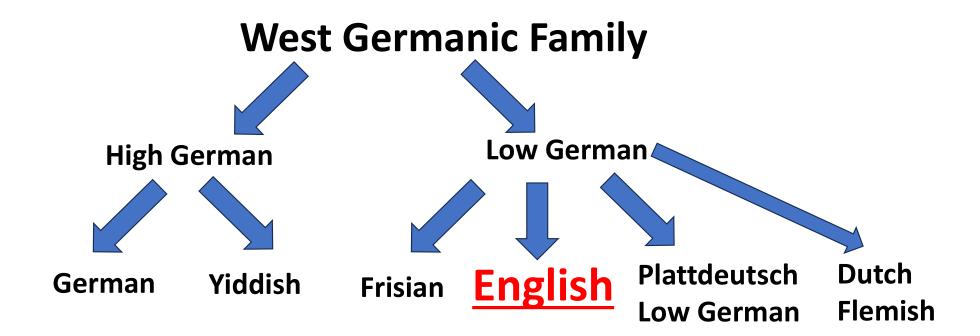
- 1. Language in general
- 2. Two types of languages:
 - a) Inflected languages: lots of endings on nouns, adjectives, verbs,
 - b) Word order languages
- 3. Language Families
- 4. Prehistoric England
- 5. Geography of England: same shape since Roman rule

This brings us to 410 CE and the story of England with the English Language is about to begin.

- Tune in Next Week -

Questions / Comments ?

Thank-you!!!!!!



Romance Languages

