### A <u>Brief</u> History of the English Language and the landmass we call England

Part 3: Middle English

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#### This week 3 or 4

- 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 Modern English.
- 4. Modern English: 1500 to 2025 AD. Why is English so difficult to learn as a second language?

#### Just to confuse you further!

- I said that the term Great Britain was no longer widely used.
  - ✓ Great Britain was England, Wales and Scotland. The entire island.
- I watched the World Track and Field Championship on TV and the English team was called "Great Britain and Northern Ireland"
  - √ The official name is the United Kingdom
- In world football (soccer) there are separate teams for
  - ✓ England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland
- King Charles III is King of the United Kingdom and 14 other Commonwealth realms.

### 15 Commonwealth Realmsall have King Charles as their head of state -

<b>1.</b>	<b>Antigua</b>	and Bar	buda,
	- 0		/

2. Australia,

3. The Bahamas,

4. Belize,

5. Canada,

6. Grenada,

7. Jamaica,

8. New Zealand,

9. Papua New Guinea,

10. Saint Kitts and Nevis,

11. Saint Lucia,

12. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines,

13. Solomon Islands,

14. Tuvalu,

15. United Kingdom.

Commonwealth of Nations has 56 independent member states, only the 15 Realms above have Charles III as head of state.

#### Dates: Old, Middle and Modern English

- Pre-Historic English: 410 700 CE
  - √ No written records exist
  - ✓ The Germanic languages were developing into old English
- Old English: 700 1150 CE (Beowulf)
- Middle English: 1150 1500 CE (Canterbury Tales)
  - ✓ English was the Third Language after French and Latin
  - ✓ Includes the Black Death: 1348 1366
- Early Modern English: 1500 1700 (Shakespeare)
  - **✓ Printing Press: English Bibles, Book of Common Prayer**
  - ✓ London English / King's English is modern standard
- Modern English: 1700 2025 CE (World English)

#### **England just before 1066**

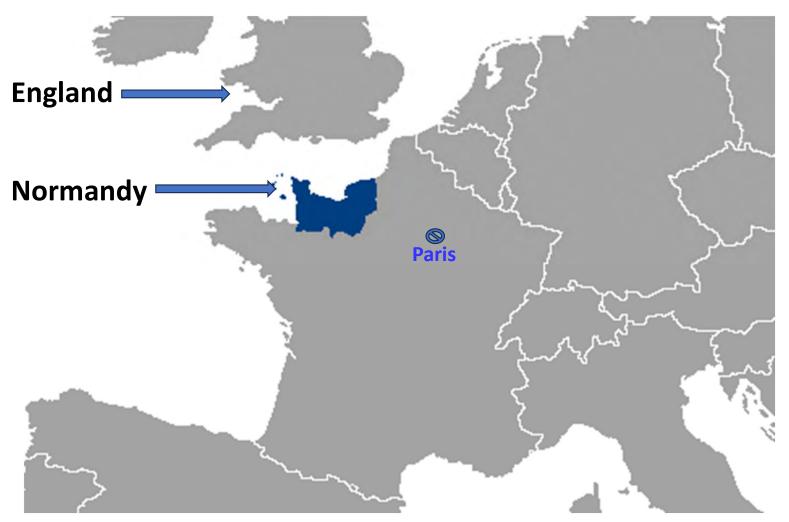
- Anglo-Saxon King ruled all of England
  - England is rural, basically feudal
- Everyone in England spoke English (Old English)
  - > Reading and Writing in Old English were very rare skills
  - Church and scholars wrote in Latin. Also very rare skills
- Anglo-Saxons held all government and church high offices
- •Then in 1066 EVERYTHING changed!

## Norman French Invasion and Settlement of England 1066 CE

Norman French is different from Paris French.

#### **Normandy**

- Normandy's name comes from the settlement by Vikings ("Northmen") of territory in modern France starting in the 9th century and confirmed by treaty in the 10th century between French King and the Viking leader.
- The Normans became quite French
  - √ adopted French (old French) as their language
  - ✓ intermarried with the area's native Gallo-Frankish inhabitants
    - Gallo: the dialect of French in the area
    - Frankish: the West Germanic language of the ancient Franks.
  - ✓ accepted Christianity



D-Day: June 6, 1944

# The Big Soap Opera of 1066 Who will be the next King?

#### 1066: an exciting TV Mini-Series

King Edward the Confessor (1003 – 1066) dies childless. Dead on January 5, 1066

Harold Godwinson was elected King Harold II by the nobles. January 6, 1066

Norwegian King Harald Hardrada invades England.

He is defeated and killed by Harold II. Dead on September 20, 1066

William of Normandy invades England on September 28, 1066
He defeats and kills Harold II on October 14, 1066
He is crowned William I, King of England, on December 25, 1066

#### King William I of England and Duke of Normandy

- The lands of the Anglo-Saxon elite were confiscated; some fled into exile.
- To control his new kingdom
  - ➤ William granted lands to his Norman French followers in a feudal manner. William owned the land, but let you use it for a pledge of loyalty.
  - > built castles, commanding military strong points, throughout the land.
  - > new Norman administrators and priests took over <u>all</u> the jobs formerly held by Anglo-Saxon elite

#### King William I: Domesday Book

- William inventoried <u>all</u> of England (<u>The Domesday Book</u>, a manuscript record of the "Great Survey") completed by 1086. It was written in Latin. He used this survey for taxation and other things
- "Domesday" refers to the Last Judgment, a concept from Christian theology, where God judges all people.
- The name "Domesday" was applied to the book because its detailed records of land ownership and resources were seen as definitive and unappealable.
- William was King for 20 years.

#### The Three Languages of England after 1066

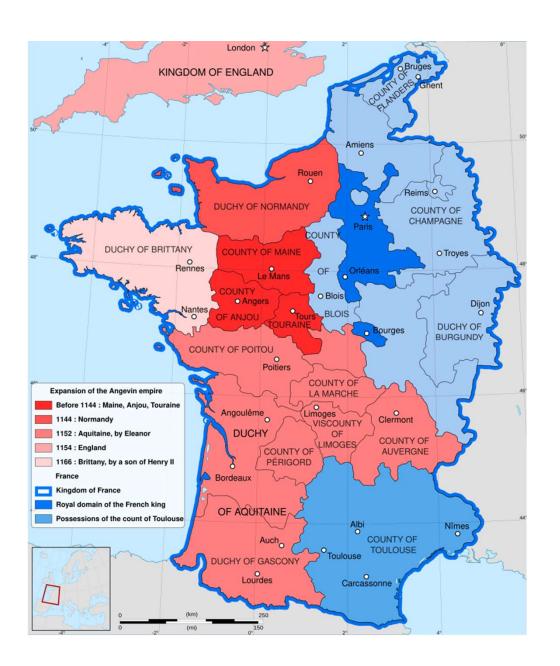
- 1. Norman French (a dialect of Old French)
  - ✓ the royal elite language: spoken and written.
- 2. Medieval Latin:
  - ✓ the language of the Church, scholars and of royal record keeping: spoken and written.
- 3. Old English: the spoken language of the 90% of the people.
  - ✓ Writing in English was almost unknown.

**English** became a third-class oral language of the peasants.

#### King Henry II (1154 – 1189)

- The Norman Kingdom became very large -
- 1150: Duke of Normandy: named by his father
- 1151: Count of Anjou, Maine, and Nantes by inheritance
- 1152: Duke of Aquitaine by marrying Eleanor Of Aquitaine
  - > "Lion in Winter": Peter O'Toole and Katharine Hepburn, 1968
- 1154: King of England.
  - Feuded with Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, who was murdered in 1170
  - ➤ "Becket": Peter O'Toole and Richard Burton, 1964
  - "Murder in the Cathedral", a play by T.S. Eliot, 1935

9/26/2025



#### 1144 to 1166 AD

**Red: Norman Ruled** 

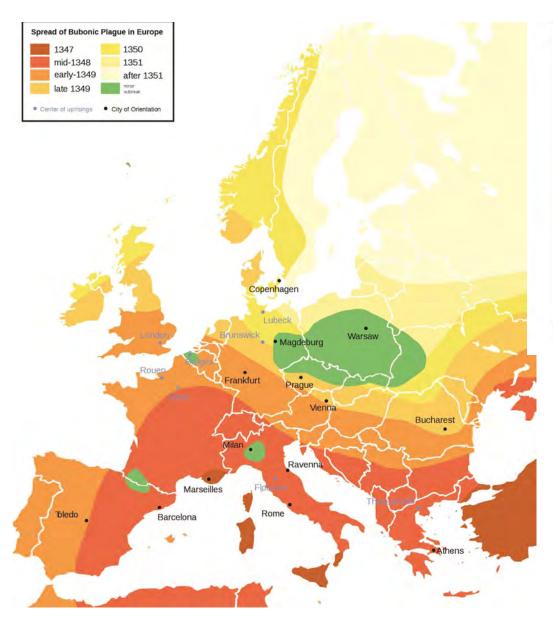
**Blue: Kingdom of France** 

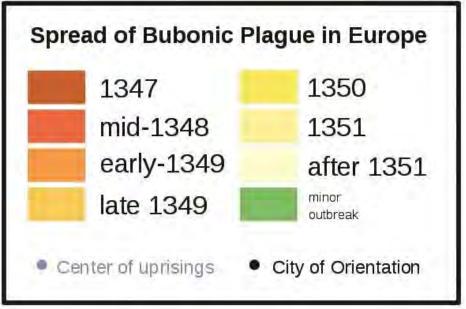
#### Norman French Kings of England lose French lands

- For almost 150 years, Normandy and England were linked by having the same person reign as both Duke of Normandy and King of England. All the land in England and all the major Church offices were held by Norman French
- Norman French kings lost their land in France in 1204 CE
  - Norman England is on its own
  - > England's attention: no longer split between England & France
  - > France becomes the enemy (Hundred Years War: 1337 1453)
  - But English kings continue to speak French
- England gradually begins to become "English".
- Henry IV (King 1399 1413) was the first English king in over 300 years who learned English as his native language.

#### Black Death: the plague, the Great Mortality, the Great Pestilence.

- The Plague affected all of Europe (map to follow)
- The Plague peaked in England between 1348 1350
  - > At least 30% of the English population died. Yikes!!!!
  - USA population is 340 million. Suppose 100 million died.
- Why is God punishing us?
- No one knew what caused the Plague until 1894.
- Result: must have caused utter panic and complete social breakdown
- Result: peasant labor shortage. Lack of monks and priests.
- Result: the Norman French language had become almost a foreign language to the Norman elite. The plague probably resulted in the triumph of the English language.





#### **Academic Debate**

- 1. Why did it kill so many?
- 2. How did it move so fast?

# English Language Old English → Middle English

### Old English 600 – 1100 evolves into Middle English 1100 -1500

- English was the spoken language of the peasants after 1066.
  - > Very little writing in English.
  - > French was the language of government.
  - Latin the language of the Church and scholars.
- French was used by those in power. There was no longer a need for the old German (Old English) vocabulary of government, church, etc.
- Later in the period, Middle English overtakes French
  - > London, Oxford and Cambridge English dominate. Printing Press.
- <u>Canterbury Tales</u>: a famous story. It can be read with a lot of help!

#### The First Fifty (blue = Norse, red = French)

about	get	make	say	time
all	give	man	see	to
also	go	many	she	two
and	have	me	so	up
as	he	more	some	use
at	her	my	take	very
be	here	new	tell	want
because	him	no	than	way
but	his	not	that	we
by	how	now	the	well

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Black = from Old English (48)
Red = from Old French (1)
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#### The Second Fifty (blue = Norse, red = French)

can	1	number	their	what
come	if	of	them	when
could	in	on	then	which
day	into	one	there	who
do	it	only	these	will
even	its	or	they	with
find	just	other	thing	would
first	know	our	think	year
for	like	out	this	you
from	look	people	those	your

Black = from Old English (45)

Red = from Old French (2)

Blue = from Old Norse (3)

#### Middle English Language

- Simplification of Word Endings (Inflections) → SVO Subject-Verb-Object
  - ✓ use of prepositions helped reduce the Word Endings
- Old Germanic vocabulary melts away and is replaced by the ruler's French vocabulary, especially in law, government, and religion.
- Loss of grammatical gender → natural gender
- Decline of Latin: maybe because of the Plague
- Spoken Middle English: distinct regional dialects existed and continue to exist
  - Something called the Great Vowel Shift (1400s and 1600s[) changed the pronunciation of vowels, but spelling had already been standardized and did not change.
- Written Middle English: gradually evolved into a standard written London language. (Printing Press and schools such as Oxford and Cambridge.

#### **English Language Evolution: the printing press**

- <u>Printing Press in England</u>: between 1500 and 1600 CE hundreds of titles and thousands of books were printed, including English Bibles
- Spoken English: everyone spoke evolving Middle English
- Written English: printed books encouraged wider literacy
  - > 30% of men & 10% of women could read and write
  - > London English became the standard written English
  - Schools and government promoted the use of standard written English
  - > Spelling was standardized and frozen by printing.
  - But spoken English pronunciation continued to change!

#### John Wycliffe's English Bible (1328–1384)

- John Wycliffe was a catholic priest and professor of theology at Oxford U.
- Very radical step long before Martin Luther (1483–1546 )translated the Bible into German
  - ✓ Both were condemned as heretics by Rome
  - ✓ The Bible should be in Lain and only trained priests could read it and explain it to the populace.
- Wycliffe Middle English
  - "And God seide, Lizt be maad; and lizt was maad"
  - "For God lovede so the world, that he 3af his oon bigeten sone, that ech man that bileveth in him perische not, but have everlastynge lijf."



#### **Dialects of Middle English**

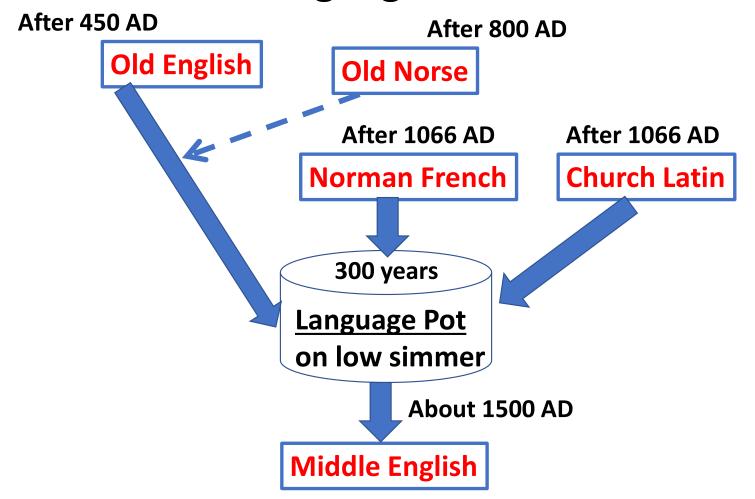
Today there is standard BBC written and spoken English, but people in the North and South of England speak very differently.

**London English** became the Standard written Middle English

#### **Changes to English Writing (simplification)**

- 1. the old letters of and became "th" (so be became the)
- 2. the letter 3 became "g" or "gh"
- 3. cw became "qu", cwene became queen, cwic became quick
- 4. sc became "sh" or "sch", scip became ship
- 5. initial letters hw became "wh", as in when, where
- 6. c was often replaced by "k", cyning/cyng became king
- 7. trailing "e" was no longer pronounced but retained in spelling to show a long vowel: name, nine, nose
- 8. Interchangeable letters: The letters "i" and "j" were often used interchangeably, as were "u" and "v".

#### **Language Pot**



Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer 1387 – 1400

Note: this is fancy poetic language, not a friendly letter or a high school essay.

Dip our toes into Middle English!
Only a few lines.

#### Middle English: Canterbury Tales' Prologue

- 1 Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
- 2 The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
- 3 And bathed every veyne in swich licour
- 4 Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
- -
- 16 Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende
- 17 The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
- 18 That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.

#### Middle English: Interlinear Canterbury Prologue Lines 1 to 6

- When April with his shoures soote with its sweet showers
- The droghte of March <u>hath perced</u> to the roote, the drought of March <u>has pierced</u> to the root,
- And bathed every veyne in swich licour And bathed every vein (of the plants) in liquid
- Of which vertu <u>engendred is</u> the flour; by which power, the flower <u>is created</u>;
- When the <u>West Wind</u> (blew) with its sweet breath,
- 6 <u>Inspired hath</u> in every holt and heeth <u>has breathed life</u> into every wood and field

#### **Interlinear Canterbury Prologue Lines 7 - 13**

- 7 The tendre croppes, and the yonge <u>sonne</u> The tender new leaves, and the young sun
- 8 Hath <u>in the Ram</u> his half cours <u>yronne</u>, has run half its course <u>in Aries</u>,
- 9 And smale foweles maken melodye, And small fowls make melody,
- 10 That slepen al the nyght with open <u>ye</u> that sleep all the night with open eyes
- 11 (So <u>priketh</u> hem Nature in hir <u>corages</u>), (So Nature <u>incites</u> them in their <u>hearts</u>),
- Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages, Then folks want to go on pilgrimages,
- And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
  And pilgrims to seek foreign shores,

#### **Interlinear Canterbury Prologue Lines 14-18**

- To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
   To distant shrines, known in various lands;
   And specially from every shires ende
   And specially from every shire's end
   Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,
   Of England to Canterbury they travel,
- The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
  To seek the holy blessed martyr,
- That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.

  Who helped them when they were sick.

Thomas Becket (Saint Thomas à Becket, 1119 - 1170). Lord Chancellor of England and later Archbishop of Canterbury until his martyrdom in 1170. He's the Holy Blissful Martyr.

### **Printing Press**

#### William Claxton (confusion in Middle English)

- William Caxton (c. 1422 c. 1491) brought a printing press to
   London in 1476 and printed / sold the first English printed books.
- A group of London sailors found themselves ashore in Kent after the wind had died and kept their ship from its journey.
- "He asked for mete; and specially he axyd after eggys. And the goode wyf answered, that she coude speke no frenshe. And the merchant was angry, for he also coude speke no frenshe. But wolde have hadde egges, and she understode him not. And thenne at laste another sayd that he wolde have eyren. Then the good wyf sayd that she understood hym wel"

#### William Claxton on Language

Loo what should a man in thyse dayes now wryte egges or eyren/
Lo, what should a man in these days now write: egges or eyren?
certaynly it is harde to playse euery man

Certainly it is hard to <u>please</u> every man

by cause of dyuersite 7 chauge of langage

because of diversity and change of language.

 Through his publishing activity, Caxton also helped to stabilize the English language by promoting a single dialect, and through print this dialect became more prevalent and helped to form the basis of modern English. https://kclcrawford.wordpress.com/papers-projects/william-caxton-and-the-shaping-of-written-english/

- Caxton's preface to his <u>Recuyell of the Historeyes of Troye</u> is relatively easy to read:
- "I was sittyng in my study [when] to my hande came a lytle booke in frenshe, which late was translated oute of latyn by some noble clearke of fraunce...." (60).
- By this time, Caxton realized the wisdom of using London's dialect in his printed works over his more familiar dialect of Kentish.
- But All formal education was done in Latin. There were only Latin dictionaries and Latin spellers. Clerks were taught to write in Latin and French. Religious writings and political briefs were only written in Latin and French.

## Middle English Example The Lord's Prayer, aka the Our Father Prayer

I picked this Christian prayer because it was used in England. You can understand it if you stare at it for a while.

#### Middle English: I replaced b and o with "th", a with "a"

- 1. Oure fadir that art in heuenes
- 2. halwid be thi name;
- 3. Thi reume or kyngdom come to be.
- 4. Be thi wille don
- 5. in herthe as it is dounin heuene.

#### Middle English: I replaced b and o with "th", a with "a"

- 6. yeue to us today oure eche dayes bred.
- 7. And foryeue to us oure dettis that is oure synnys
- 8. as we foryeuen to oure dettouris that is to men that han synned in us.
- 9. And lede us not into temptacion
- 10. but delyuere us from <u>euyl</u>.

### **Summary**

#### Old English → Middle English → Modern English

- It is estimated that up to 85% of Anglo-Saxon words were lost as a result of the Norman invasion
  - > But the most common words in Modern English are from Germanic
- 1362: English becomes the official language of the Courts and Parliament
- 1362: Edward III became the first king to address Parliament in English in almost 300 years
- The printer William Caxton (1422 1491) standardized English to London English and made it much easier for the modern reader to understand.
- Early Modern English starts arbitrarily in 1500

#### **Changes in English since 1066 AD**

- Inflections (word endings) are greatly reduced
- Word order in a sentence is now critical for meaning:
  - ✓ We use Subject Verb Object (SVO)
- Antique alphabet letters disappear
- Once English spelling was standardized by printing, English pronunciation changed due to the <u>Great Vowel Shift</u> (1400 – 1700)
  - ✓ long vowels and some consonants changed pronunciation
  - √ The Great Vowel Shift is difficult to explain.
  - ✓ the prime reason that English spelling and pronunciation are so crazy.

    Sounds changed but spelling stayed the same.

# The End Modern English next week!