

**A Brief 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 Realms

- all have King Charles as their head of state -

- 1. Antigua and Barbuda,**
- 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

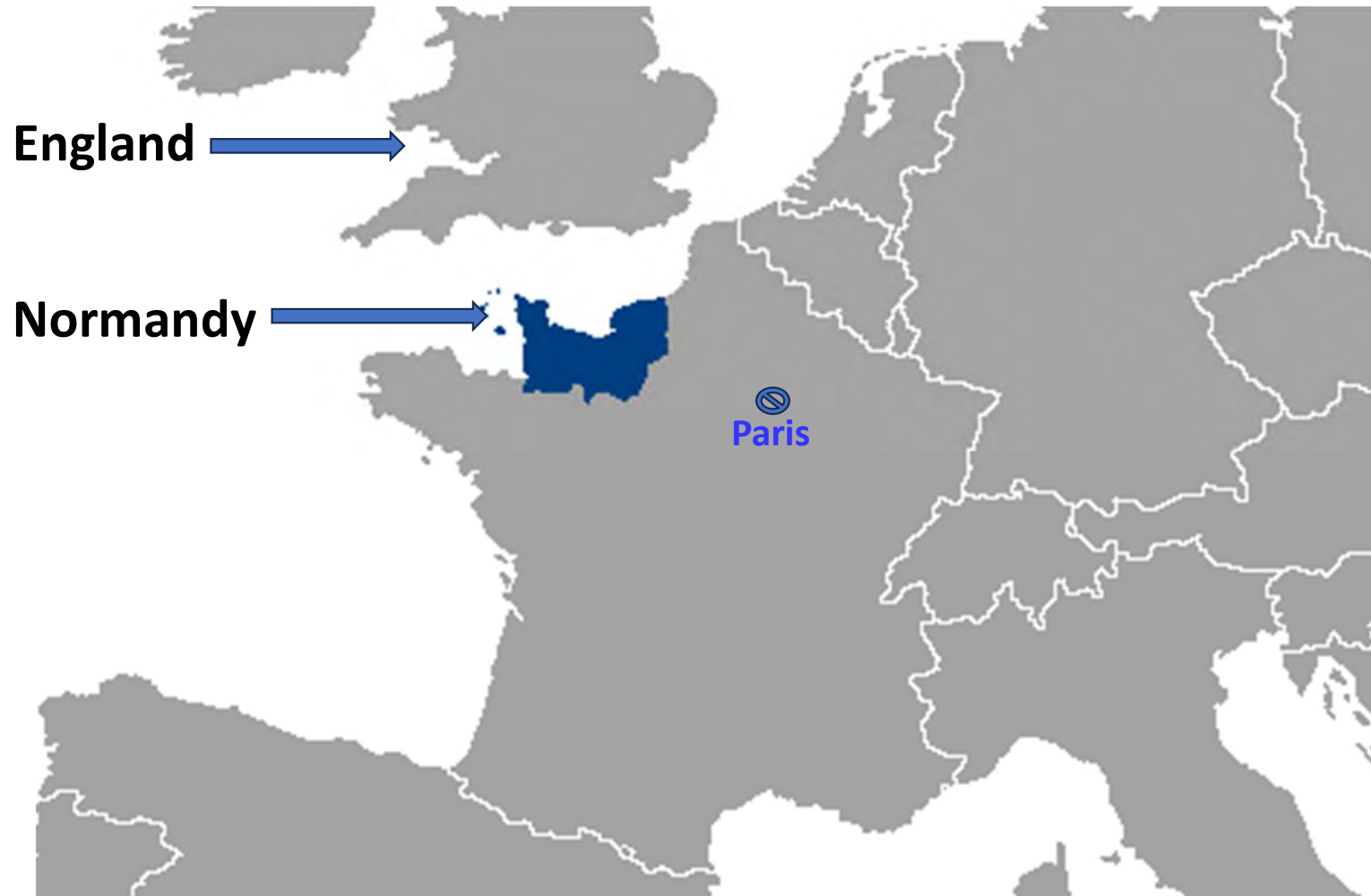
- Anglo-Saxon King ruled all of England
 - England is rural, basically feudal
- Everyone in England spoke English (Old English)
 - Reading and Writing in Old English were very rare skills
 - Church and scholars wrote in Latin. Also very rare skills
- Anglo-Saxons held all government and church high offices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

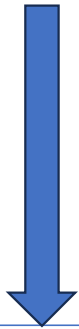
King Edward the Confessor (1003 – 1066)
dies childless. Dead on **January 5, 1066**



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 **all** the jobs formerly held by Anglo-Saxon elite

King William I: Domesday Book

- William inventoried all of England ([The Domesday Book](#), 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.

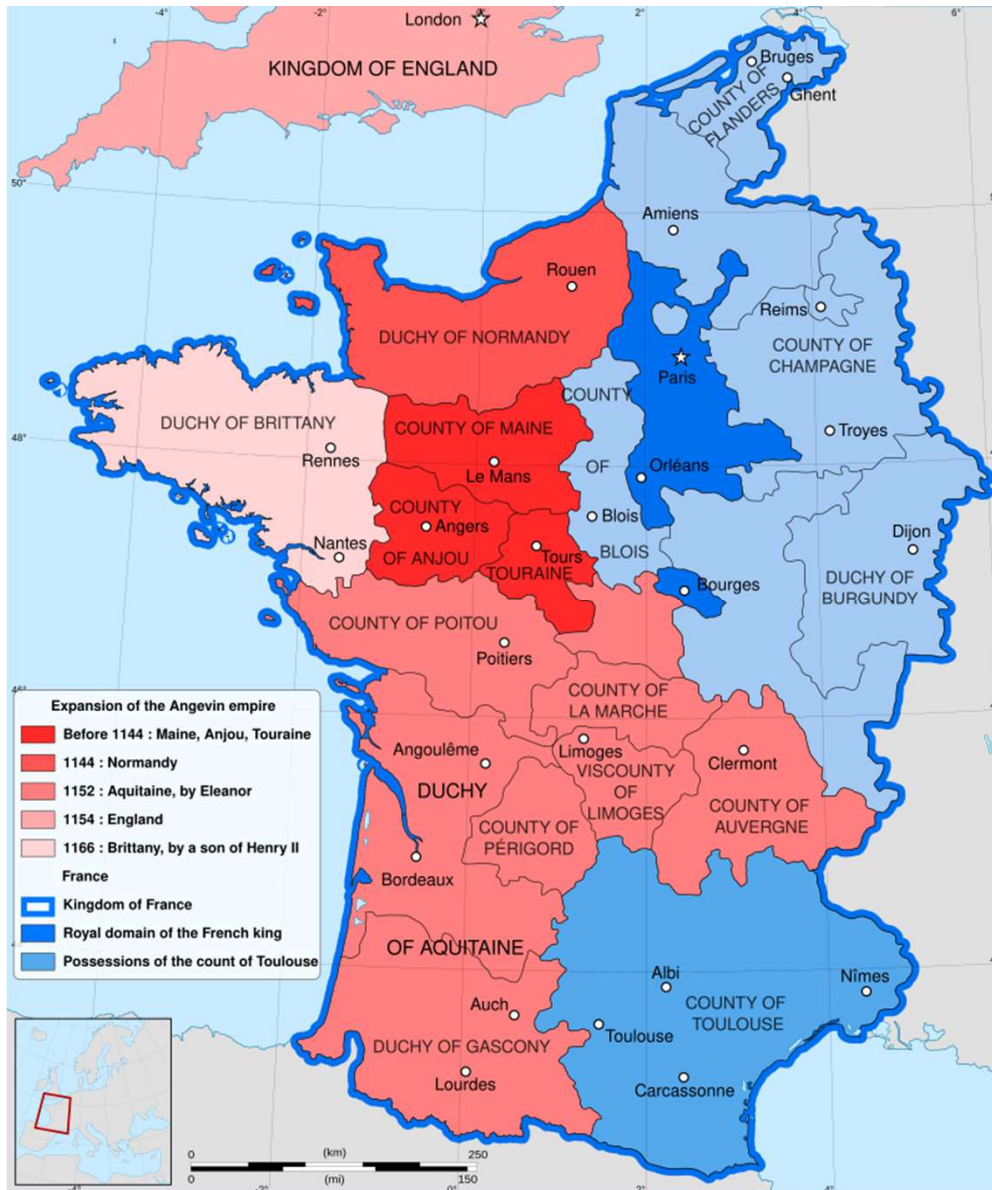
- ✓ Writing in English was almost **unknown**.

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



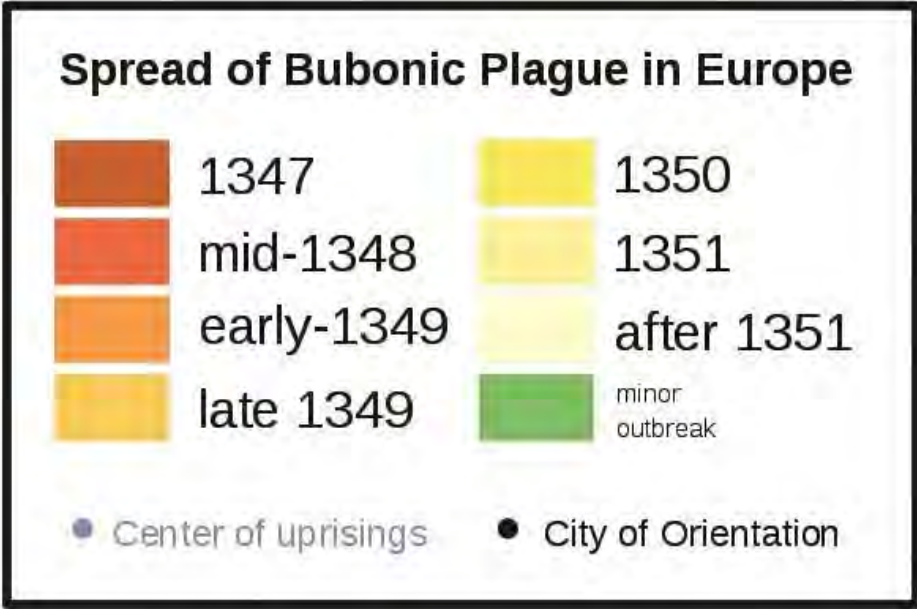
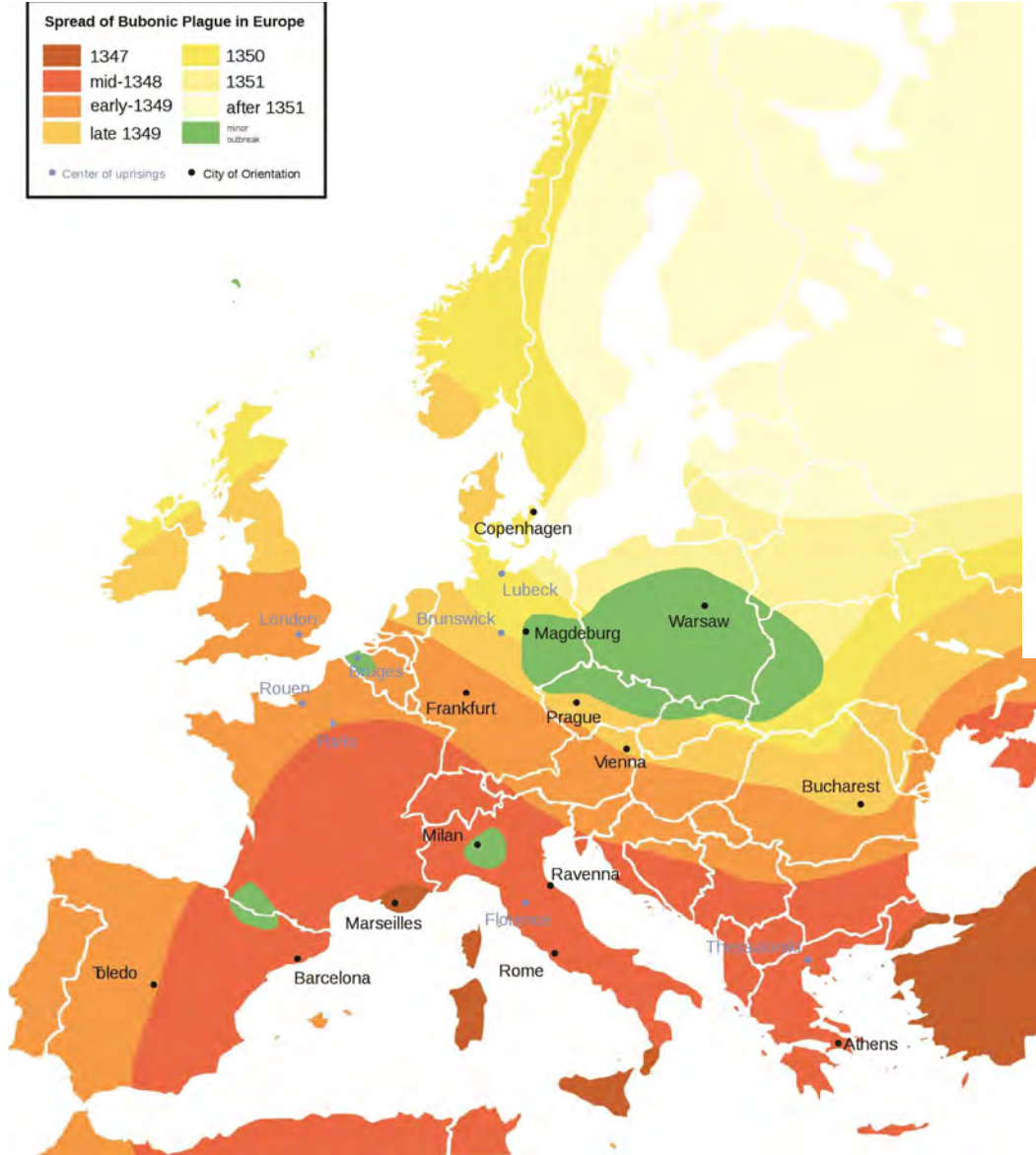
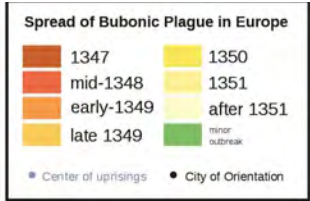
1144 to 1166 AD
Red: Norman Ruled
Blue: Kingdom of France

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.
- Canterbury Tales: 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 |

Black = from Old English (48)

Red = from Old French (1)

Blue = from Old Norse (1)

The Second Fifty (**blue = Norse, red = French**)

| | | | | |
|-------|------|---------------|--------------|-------|
| can | I | 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

- Printing Press in England: 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!**

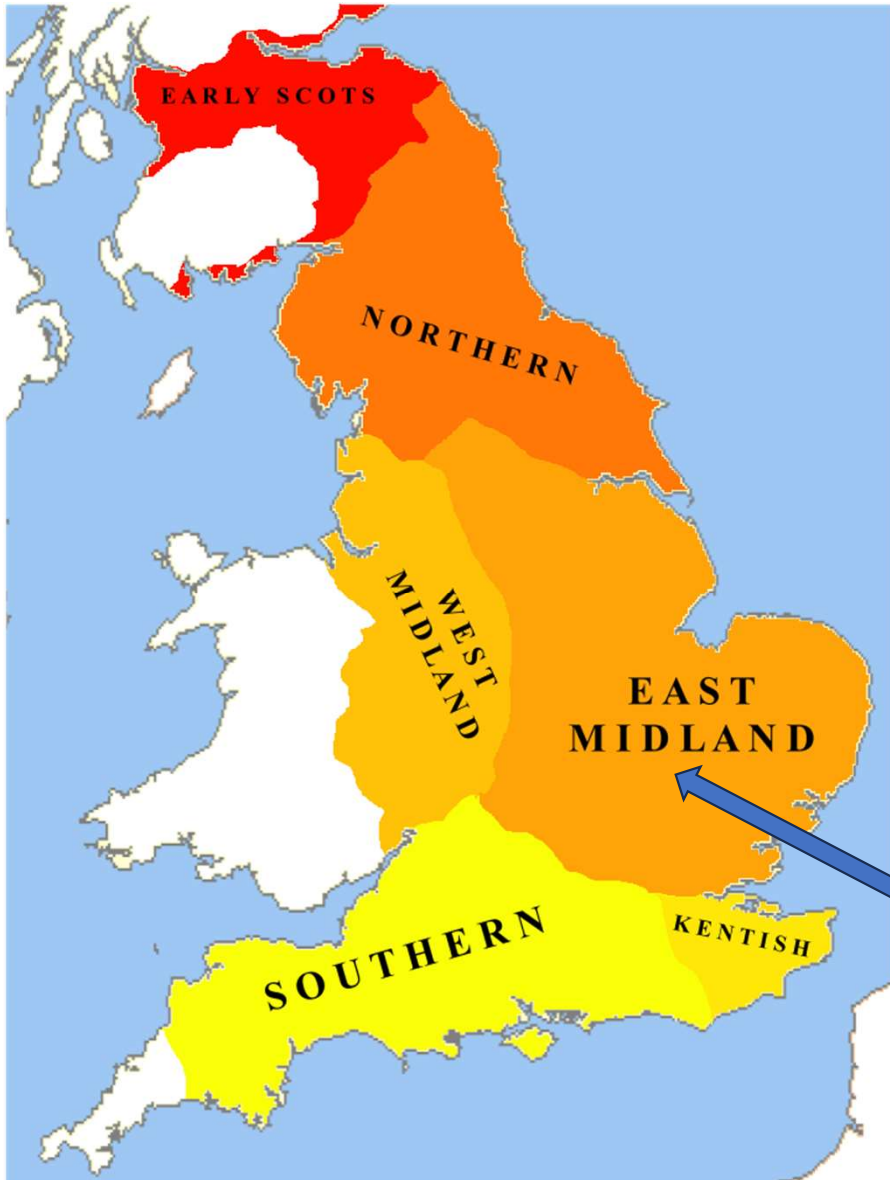
John Wycliffe's English Bible (1328–1384)

- **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 zaf 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.

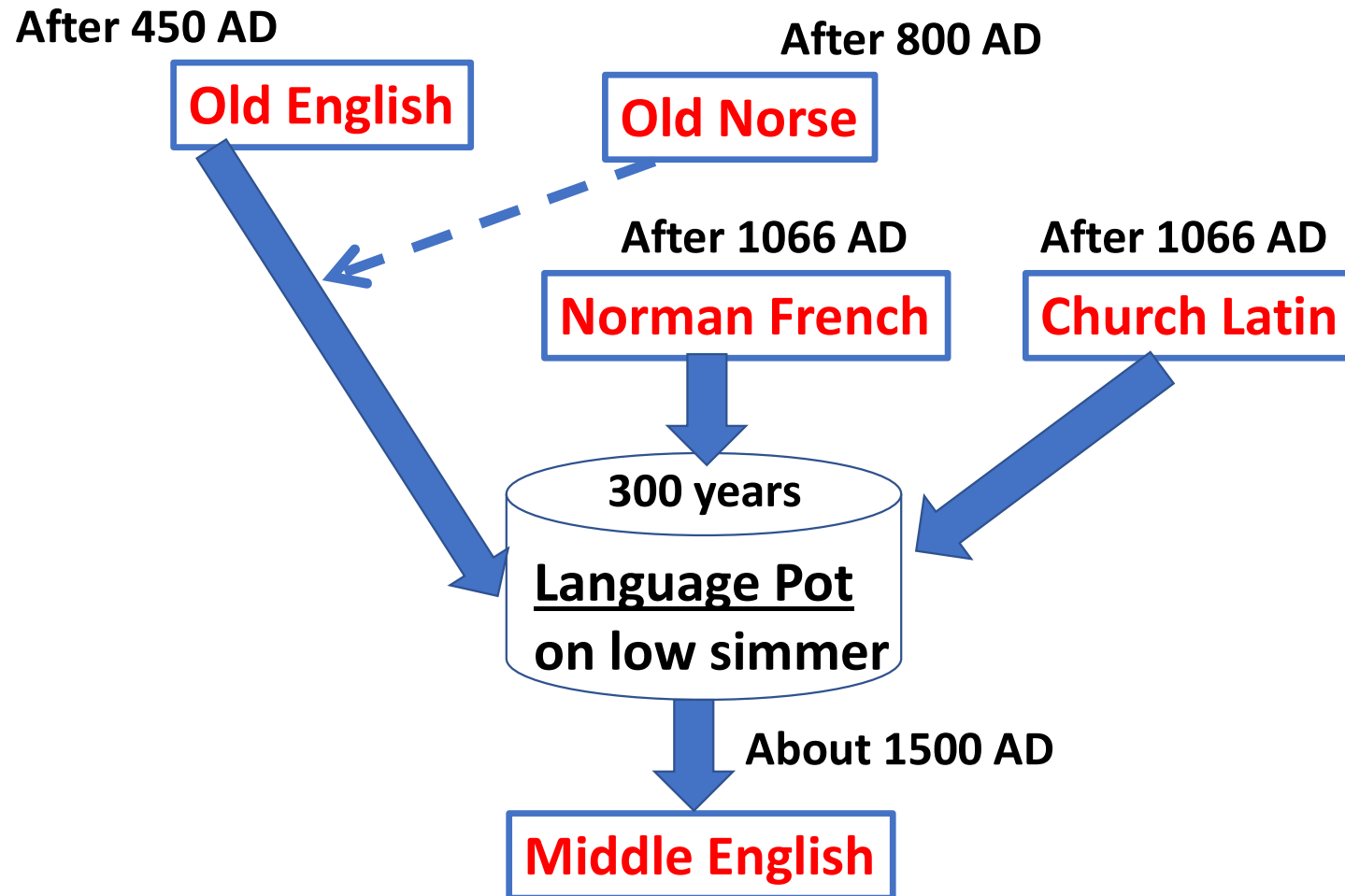
London English became the Standard written Middle English



Changes to English Writing (simplification)

1. the old letters **ð** and **þ** became **“th”** (so **þe** became **the**)
2. the letter **ȝ** 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

- 1 **Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote**
 When April with its sweet showers
- 2 **The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,**
 the drought of March has pierced to the root,
- 3 **And bathed every veyne in swich licour**
 And bathed every vein (of the plants) in liquid
- 4 **Of which vertu engendred is the flour;**
 by which power, the flower is created;
- 5 **Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth**
 When the West Wind (blew) with its sweet breath,
- 6 **Inspired hath in every holt and heeth**
 has breathed life into every wood and field

Interlinear Canterbury Prologue Lines 7 - 13

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

Interlinear Canterbury Prologue Lines 14 -18

- 14 To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
To distant shrines, known in various lands;
- 15 And specially from every shires ende
And specially from every shire's end
- 16 Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,
Of England to Canterbury they travel,
- 17 The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
To seek the holy blessed martyr,
- 18 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 fholde a man in thyle dayes now wryte egges or eyren/

Lo, what should a man in these days now write: egges or eyren?

certaynly it is harde to playfe euery man

Certainly it is hard to please every man

by caufe of dyuerfite 7 chaũge 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 Recuyell of the Historeyes of Troye is relatively easy to read:
- "I was sittynge 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 **þ** and **ð** with “th”, **æ** 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.

About the year 1300 AD

Middle English: I replaced **þ** and **ð** with “th”, **æ** 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 euyl.

About the year 1300 AD

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 **Great Vowel Shift** (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!