

# MIDDLE ENGLISH



Esta obra está bajo una [Licencia Creative Commons Atribución-NoComercial-CompartirIgual 4.0 Internacional](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).



# Introduction


Old English: 405 - 1150

Middle English: 1150 - 1500


Modern English: 1500 - ...

**WÆT FE GARD**  
 na mæra dæm. þad cunnig  
 þam of þam on huda æpelungas alle  
 þe medon. of seald seapung searþe  
 þætum mone gū mæghum meode seald  
 of ceab esode eopl syddan aqurt þæt  
 þæt seapung fundon. he þæt æppre se ba  
 þæt undri polenun þæt mæghum þæt  
 dæþ him æghpyle þæt searþe searþe  
 of þæt huan. þæt searþe searþe searþe  
 gylðan þæt god cunnig. þæt searþe þæt  
 æppre ceapung searþe mæghum þæt god  
 searþe þæt searþe searþe searþe on  
 searþe þæt searþe searþe searþe. Lange  
 hyle þæt þæt searþe searþe searþe searþe  
 þæt searþe searþe searþe searþe searþe  
 þæt searþe searþe searþe searþe searþe  
 þæt searþe searþe searþe searþe searþe  
 London in. Searþe searþe searþe searþe  
 searþe searþe searþe searþe searþe

Here begynneth the myther tale



**W**hiton thes was dweling in Wyenfoode  
 A riche knyght that bestis hadde to boorde  
 And of his craft was he a carpentre  
 With hym thes was a poure scole  
 Had lerned art but all his fantesye  
 Was turned to lere astrologye  
 And coude a certayn of confusions  
 To demp þe interrogaciouns  
 If that men asked hym certeyn soures  
 Whether they schuld have droughe or flouris  
 Or if that men asked hym what stonde befallē  
 Of fewer thing þe may nat reþen alle



**B**ISHOP Atterbury's Sermons 8vo  
 Athensgoras's Apologeticks for the  
 Christian Religion, &c. Done in  
 to English by Mr. Humphreys  
 Bennet of Schism, 8vo  
 Boyse on the 39 Articles  
 Bp. Bull's Life & Works, 4 Vols. 8vo  
 Barrow's Works, 2 Vols. Folio  
 ----- On Contentment, 12mo  
 Bp. Beveridge's Sermons, 2 Vols. Fol  
 ----- private Thoughts, 2 Vols.  
 ----- On the Articles  
 ----- Theaurus Theologicus, 4 Vols  
 Bp. Blackhall's Sermons on the Beatitudes; 8 Vols. 8vo.  
 Burkitt on the New Testament, Folio  
 ----- Poor Man's Help  
 Broughton's Nature of the Rational Soul  
 The Cambridge Concordance to the Bible.  
 London.

# Historical background

## Roman Empire

- 55 BC: Julius Caesar tries to invade Britain.
- 43 AD: Emperor Claudius invades Britain - Introduction of **Latin**
- 410: End of Roman power in Britain - **Germanic tribes** invasion (Angles, Saxons, Jutes) - **OLD ENGLISH**
- 597: Pope Gregory the Great sent Saint Augustine - **Christianisation.**  
Churches and Monasteries built: Schools, vernacular literature
- 8th century: **Viking** invasions, decline of Church. **Beowulf** (first epic poem in English)
- 1066: **Norman Conquest** - **MIDDLE ENGLISH.** Latin words enter English through French or directly from Latin
- 15th century: **MODERN ENGLISH.** Renaissance. English assumes the functions of Latin.



# NORMAN CONQUEST

- **Normans:** Descendants of the Viking who had settled in Northern France while other tribes had arrived in England. They had abandoned their native culture and language and became French.
- **1066:** Edward the Confessor dies childless - need of a successor - **Battle of Hastings**
- William of Normandy (William the Conqueror) becomes king.
  - New nobility (old English nobles killed or treated as traitors). Normans introduced into important positions in the Church.
  - Normans brought their language (a rural French dialect)

Battle of Hastings:

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/cb/The\\_Battle\\_of\\_Hastings\\_in\\_1066.JPG](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/cb/The_Battle_of_Hastings_in_1066.JPG)

# AND WHAT HAPPENED TO THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE?

- Norman  
French became  
the language of  
governing a...

**14th century:**  
- 1337 - 1453:  
Hundred Years'  
War betwe...

- Norman French became the language of governing and upper classes, and also the language of the government and administration.
- English people started to learn French because English was considered socially inferior, the language of ordinary people.
- Latin remained the language of religion, learning and international communication.

### **12th century:**

- French was used in England. The King and the landowners had land in France and spent time there.
- Gradually, English became more widely used by the Normans.

### **13th century:**

- 1204 king John lost Normandy - English families had to give up their land in France.
- Feelings of competition arouse.
- Norman French was not considered as good French by Parisian French speakers.
- Ruling class begins to see themselves as more English than French.
- French still used in government, law and business, but lost social importance.



## 14th century:

- 1337 - 1453: Hundred Years' War between England and France. National feeling grew.
- Black Death: 30% of the people in England died - Low men (who only spoke English) accessed social charges)

## 15th century:

- English language replaced French in the home, education and government.
- English language also replaced Latin as the language of written communication - people start to write letters in English.
- 1564: William Shakespeare was born. Wrote in early Modern English.



# CHARACTERISTICS OF MIDDLE ENGLISH



Changes were possible because there was little written in English, official documents were in French and religious ones in Latin.



# GRAMMAR

- Much simpler: Loss of inflections for nouns, adjectives and pronouns (some remained: –e, -est, –en, the -‘s and -s’.
- Loss of the grammatical gender.
- *The* became the only form of the definite article.
- Verbs lost their endings for tenses and person. Endings were reduced to –(e)s, -ed, -ing. Most verbs formed the past tense with -ed, others became irregular.
- Continuous tenses began to be used.
- Word order: **Subject – verb – object.**
- Wider use of prepositions instead of inflections or endings.

E.g: ***Ðone cyning** hī brōhton cucene tō losue.*

*They brought **the king** alive to Joshua.*

You could tell it was the subject due to its inflections. Now word order would make clear what noun was the subject of a sentence.

# SPELLING

- People used the words and pronunciations of their dialects. For example, the sound /x/ in the middle of words was spelt -gh- in the south and -ch- in the north, so night (pronounced /nixt/ at that time) could be spelt as night or nicht.
- The French were not familiar with some of the Old English runic and Celtic symbols that were used in English, so they replaced them by Roman symbols.
- They also introduced some diagraphs (e.g.: *ch*).
- 1476: William Caxton introduced the printing press to England. A standard spelling was chosen.



Today, some words are spelt in the way that they were pronounced in Caxton's time. Example: The *k* in *knee* and the *l* in *would* were pronounced at that time and have kept their original spelling even though they are no longer pronounced.



William Caxton's printing press:

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c8/Caxton\\_showing\\_the\\_first\\_specimen\\_of\\_his\\_printing\\_to\\_King\\_Edward\\_IV\\_at\\_the\\_Almonry%2C\\_Westminster.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/c/c8/Caxton_showing_the_first_specimen_of_his_printing_to_King_Edward_IV_at_the_Almonry%2C_Westminster.jpg)



# VOCABULARY

- English vocabulary became much richer. Between 1100 and 1500, about 10,000 French words were taken into English.
- 13th and 14th centuries: Many loan-words (when bilingual speakers began to use English for government and literature, they needed terms and borrowed them from French).
- Most aspects of life were affected by French loans: Relationship and Rank (ancestor, duke, baron), house and Furnishing (furniture, chair, curtain), food (cuisine, dinner), entertainment (tournament, dance, tennis), arts, music, literature (art, architecture, castle), education (study, science, reason, college, grammar), medicine (surgeon, pain, remedy), government and law (government, minister, crime, court), the Church (religion, ceremony), etc.
- Some French words replaced the Old English words (peuple (French) – people, replacing the Old English leód).

- Sometimes, both the French and the OE words survived, with small differences in meanings (e.g.: OE ask and French demand, or OE wedding and French marriage).



As a consequence, it is common to find three words – a Latin, a French and an English one - to refer to the same reality, but having slight differences in the connotation of their meanings (e.g.: *sovereign*, *monarch* and *king*). The Latin one is always the most formal, and the English one the most informal.

- Animals: the words for the living animals (cow, pig, and sheep) had their origins in Anglo-Saxon, and the words for the meat for the animals (beef, pork, mutton) have their origins in French –the Normans usually ate meat; the poor Anglo-Saxon peasants did not!

- New English words created from French words: the English -ly and -ful endings were added to French words to make gently, beautiful and peaceful.



# MIDDLE ENGLISH LITERATURE

- There were religious and secular works.
- Many works were anonymous (the author was not important)
- **Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400): *The Canterbury Tales*.** The most important writer before Shakespeare. Chose to write in English.
- **Sir Thomas Mallory (1405-1471): *Morte d'Artur*.** Wrote and compiled the story of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDqaamQ\\_Jil](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDqaamQ_Jil)