

Middle English

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External history

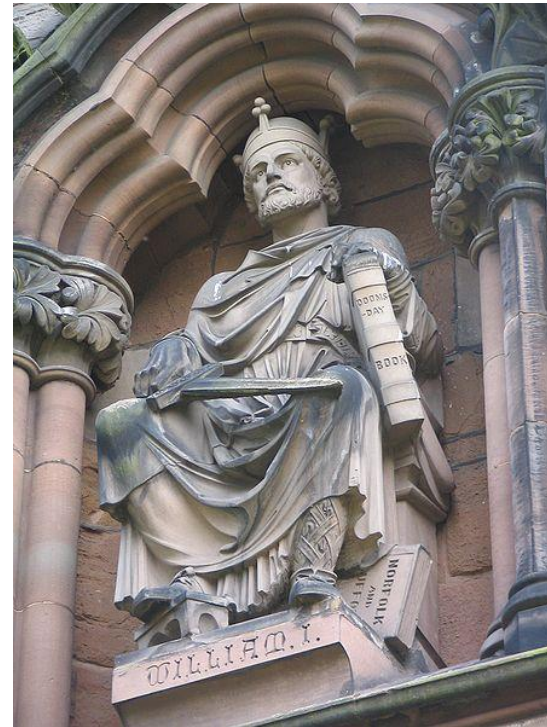
The Norman Conquest and the Subjection of English
1066 - 1200

The Re-establishment of English 1200 - 1500. The
Middle English Literature
Middle English Dialects

The Norman Conquest and the Subjection of English 1066 - 1200

- * At the beginning of the 11th century the whole of England came under the Scandinavian rule – the Scandinavian invasion was completed and the Danish king was seated on the English throne.
- * In 1042 England was back under English power, the English king who came to the throne – Edward the Confessor – was to be the last English king for more than three centuries.

- * In 1066 King Edward the Confessor died, and the Norman Duke William, profiting by the weakness of King Harold who succeeded King Edward on the English throne, invaded England.
- * He assembled an army, landed in England and in a battle of Hastings on October 14, 1066 managed to defeat Harold and proclaimed himself King of England.



Nobility and government

- * The lands of the Saxon aristocracy were divided up among the Normans, who by 1087 composed almost 10% of the total population.
- * Each landlord, in return for his land, had to take an oath of allegiance to the king and provide him with military services if and when required.
- * The Saxon machinery of government was immensely reinforced, with a Norman monarch and his officials.
- * The 13th century witnessed the appearance of the first Parliament, or a council of barons, which later was changed to a national Parliament.

The Linguistic Situation in England 1066 - 1200

The French language - The English language - The Latin Language


Thus came, lo! England into Normandy's hand.
And the Normans didn't know how to speak then but their own speech
And spoke French as they did at home, and their children did also teach;
So that high men of this land that of their blood come
Hold all that same speech that they took from them.
For but a man know French men count of him little.
But low men hold to English and to their own speech yet.
I think there are in all the world no countries
That don't hold to their own speech but England alone.
But men well know it is well for to know both,
For the more that a man knows, the more worth he is.

The Position of English

- * In the period up to 1200 the attitude of the king and the upper classes toward the English language may be characterized as one of simple indifference.
- * They did not cultivate English—which is not the same as saying that they had no acquaintance with it—because their activities in England did not necessitate it and their constant concern with continental affairs made French for them much more useful.

The Re-establishment of English

- * A feature of some importance in helping English to recover its former prestige is the improvement in the condition of the mass of the people and the rise of a substantial middle class.
- * The rise of another important group—the craftsmen and the merchant class. By 1250 there had grown up in England about two hundred towns with populations of from 1,000 to 5,000; some, like London or York, were larger. These towns became free, self-governing communities, electing their own officers, assessing taxes in their own way, collecting them and paying them to the king in a lump sum, trying their own cases, and regulating their commercial affairs as they saw fit.

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- * 1258 – Proclamation of King Henry III was published besides French also in English
 - * 1362 – the English language became the language of Parliament, courts of law; later, at the end of the century – the language of teaching
 - * The rule of King Henry IV (1399-1413) – the first king after the conquest whose native tongue was English.
 - * The end of 14th century also saw the first English translation of Bible
 - * Chaucer was writing his English masterpieces in English

Middle English Dialects

- * The Southern group included the Kentish and the South-Western dialects
- * The group of Midland (“Central”) dialect – corresponding to the OE Mercian dialect – is divided into West Midland and East Midland as two main areas
- * The Northern dialects had developed from OE Northumbrian

SOUND SYSTEM 1350–1400

By 1400 the sound system emerging in the south-east of the country (as used by the Chancery and Chaucer) would have had the following inventory. (There is continuing controversy over the number and phonetic quality of the diphthongs.)

The spelling shown in the examples is in many cases just one of several possibilities. The asterisk identifies emerging phonemes (see above).

Consonants

p, b *pin, bit*
t, d *tente, dart*
k, g *kin, good*
tʃ *chirche* 'church'
dʒ *brigge* 'bridge'
m, n, ŋ* *make, name, song*
l, r *lay, rage*
w, j *weep, yelwe* 'yellow'
f, v* *fool, vertu* 'virtue'
s, z* *sore, Zephirus*
θ, ð *thank, the*
h *happen*

Long vowels

i: *ryden*
e: *sweete*
ɛ: *heeth*
ɑ: *name*
u: *houe*
o: *good*
ɔ: *holy*

Short vowels

ɪ *this*
ɛ *men*
a *can*
ə *aboute* (in unstressed syllables)
ʊ *but*
ɔ *oft*

Diphthongs

æɪ *day*
oɪ* *joye*
ɔɪ* *joinen* 'join'
ɪʊ *newe*
ɛʊ *fewe* 'few'
aʊ *lawe*
ɔʊ *growe*

Middle English Literature

(from 1150 to 1250)

- * Period of Religious Record
- * Period of Religious and Secular Literature in English
(from 1250 to 1350)
- * Period of Great Individual Writers
(from 1350 to 1400)
- * Imitative Period or Transition Period
(15th century)

Grammatical Changes in Middle English

The most important grammatical development was the establishment of fixed patterns of word order to express the relationship between clause elements. There was already tendency towards Subject-Verb-Object order

ME Noun


The plurals of nouns generally end in *-s* or *-es*.
However, some nouns end in *-n* or *-en* (like Modern English *ox*, *oxen*), especially in earlier texts.

Possessive forms end in *-s* or *-es*. There is no apostrophe; possessives are distinguished from plurals by context.

Middle English Verb

Principal Changes

- levelling of inflections
- weakening of endings in accordance with the general tendency
- serious losses suffered by the strong conjugation



New verbs formed from nouns and adjectives or borrowed from other languages were regularly conjugated as weak.

Thus the minority position of the strong conjugation was becoming constantly more evident. After the Norman Conquest the loss of native words further depleted the ranks of the strong verbs. Those that survived were exposed to the influence of the majority, and many have changed over in the course of time to the weak inflection

- * The infinitive form (e.g. ‘to go’, ‘to sleep’, ‘to sing’) ends in *-n* or *-en*: e.g. *goon*, *slepen*, *singen*. In later texts, the *-n* may disappear.
- * The *-n* or *-en* ending can also indicate a plural form of the verb: e.g. *they goon*, *they slepen*, *they singen*. In the past tense, the ending may be *-n*, *-en*, or *-ed*.
- * The *-n* or *-en* can also be a past participle (like Modern English *eaten*). In this case the word will generally be preceded by a form of *have* or *be*, or else it will function as an adjective describing a noun.

ME personal and possessive pronoun

<i>Singular</i>					
	<i>1 person</i>	<i>2 person</i>	<i>3 person</i>		
			<i>Masc.</i>	<i>Fem.</i>	<i>Neut.</i>
<i>Nom.</i>	I, ich	thou	hē	hē, shē	hit, it
<i>Obj.</i>	mē	thē	him	hir, her	hit, it

<i>Plural</i>			
	<i>1 person</i>	<i>2 person</i>	<i>3 person</i>
<i>Nom.</i>	wē	yē	hī, they
<i>Obj.</i>	ūs	you	hem, them

Word-Stock Changes

French Loans (about 3500 words)

- * **Administration.** Baron, court, royal, palace, duke, empire, government, liberty, manor, messenger, minister, noble, prince, treason, tyrant, sir, vassal, parliament, crown, reign, statute
- * **Law** arrest, arson, bail, bar, blame, crime, depose, evidence, felon, heir, jury, judge, legacy, pardon, plea, prison, punishment, sue, verdict
- * **Religion** abbey, baptism, cardinal, chant, charity, clergy, communion, confess, faith, friar, heresy, homily, mercy, miracle, novice, parson, prayer, religion, saint, sermon, solemn, temptation, virtue, prelate, ordain, divine.
- * **Military** army, barbican, battle, captain, combat, defend, enemy, lance, moat, navy, peace, retreat, spy, sergeant, guard.
- * **Food and drink** bacon, beef, clove, confection, cream, date, dinner, fruit, fry, gravy, jelly, lemon, mutton, olive, orange, plate, pork, roast, salad, salmon, sardine, saucer, sole, spice, sugar, supper, taste, toast, venison.
- * **Fashion** boots, brooch, button, cape, cloak, dress, fashion, flock, fur, garment, lace, ornament, rode, satin, tassel, train, vell, wardrobe.

