

The development of the English language

Celts	The earliest inhabitants of Britain from whom we have any language. The very few words left in English tend to refer to natural features or place names: eg 'tor' meaning 'high rock'.
Romans	55 BC - c.400 AD. Latin played little part in the beginnings of English except in place names but was later reintroduced through the church.
Angles, Saxons & Jutes	In the Dark Ages after the Romans, many new settlers came bringing their Germanic languages.
Vikings	These raiders and settlers brought more new words (789 - the first Danish invasion of Britain. Viking raids and settlements continued periodically over more than two centuries.)

Old English developed from the languages that raiders and invaders brought. Latin came back to Britain through the church during this period.

- c. 700** **The Lindisfarne Gospels** were written in Latin, but in 950 a Northumbrian priest called Aldred added an Old English translation, written between each line of Latin text.
- C8th** **Beowulf** - the epic story told in Old English alliterative verse - became part of an oral tradition around this time.
- 1000** The date of the Beowulf manuscript on display in the British Library.
- 1016** The Danes ruled England
- 1066** **The Norman invasion.** Over the following three centuries the French and Old English languages blended eventually to form Middle English, with a variety of different dialects developing across the country.
- Late C14th** **John Wyclif's** translations of the Bible into English gave the language greater power and prestige.
- c.1342 - 1400** **Geoffrey Chaucer:** a prolific writer in Middle English, he used the dialect of the South-East Midlands area which included London, giving this dialect added importance.
- c. 1469** **Sir Thomas Malory:** 'Le Morte Darthur'. The Arthurian legend with Sir Lancelot as the hero, derived from the French.
- 1476** **William Caxton** set up his printing press in Westminster, and printed Chaucer's influential 'Canterbury Tales'. He also printed Malory's 'Le Morte Darthur'.

From the C14th to the C16th, the **Renaissance** generated much interest in the classics and vocabulary derived from Latin and Greek proliferated. New words

were needed for the ideas and learning of the age. Many came from Latin via French.

1525	William Tyndale produced new translations of parts of the Bible using Greek and Hebrew sources.
1564-1616	William Shakespeare.
1607	The first permanent English-speaking settlers reached America.
1611	The King James or Authorised Version of the Bible was an important influence on the language right into the C20th.
C17th	Early newspapers began to circulate.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, colonists carried the English language across the world. The use of English spread, but the language also changed as local words were added.

Other influences on the development of the language include:

1755	Samuel Johnson: 'A Dictionary of the English Language'.
1770's	The British begin to settle in Australia.
C18th	The public was first able to use libraries, but had to pay.
Early C19th	The height of the Romantic poets: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley...
1837 - 40	The telegraph was invented and a postal service with pre-paid stamps began.
1812-70	Charles Dickens.
1875	The telephone was invented.