

The English Language: Shaped by Invasions

Early inhabitants of these islands	The Celts are the earliest inhabitants of the British Isles to leave a mark on our language.
Celtic words	In fact, very few Celtic words have lived on in the English language. But many of our place names have Celtic origins, such as <i>London</i> , <i>Dover</i> and <i>Kent</i> , & the rivers <i>Thames</i> & <i>Wye</i> .
Romans invade and rule British Isles for over 400 years	Only around 200 Latin loanwords are inherited from the Romans - although by the 6 th century the Church will have brought many more.
Roman words	Many of the words passed on from this era are those coined by Roman merchants and soldiers. These include <i>win</i> (wine), <i>candel</i> (candle), <i>belt</i> (belt) and <i>weall</i> (wall).
Germanic tribes - Angles, Saxons and Jutes - begin to arrive	Anglo Saxon dialects form the basis of the language we now call Old English. About 400 Anglo Saxon texts survive from this era, including many beautiful poems - these tell tales of wild battles and heroic journeys.
Anglo Saxon words	Approximately one third of Anglo-Saxon vocabulary survives into modern English, including many of our most basic, everyday words: <i>earth</i> , <i>house</i> , <i>food</i> , <i>sing</i> , <i>night</i> and <i>sleep</i> . By the 7th century Latin speakers refer to this country as <i>Anglia</i> - the land of the <i>Angles</i> - a name that will later develop into <i>England</i> .
Christian missionaries arrive from the Continent	Christian missionaries, led by St. Augustine, move through the land, converting the Anglo-Saxons from their Pagan beliefs to a Catholic Christian faith. Throughout Europe, the language of the Church is Latin, and the missionaries inject hundreds of new Latin words into the English language. English is spoken differently in different counties, but four main dialects exist and resemble the English we know today. These dialects are Northumbrian, Mercian, West Saxon and Kentish.
Latin words	Many of the new words derived from Latin refer to religion, such as <i>altar</i> , <i>mass</i> , <i>school</i> , and <i>monk</i> , but others are more domestic and mundane such as <i>fork</i> , <i>spade</i> , <i>spider</i> , <i>tower</i> , and <i>rose</i> .

<p>The year 789 sees the first Danish invasion of Britain</p>	<p>For a hundred years the Vikings control most of Eastern England, before being pushed back into the North East of the country by King Alfred the Great. They remain in power in the North East until the late 900s, in an area then known as Danelaw. During this time King Alfred uses the English language to develop a sense of national identity amongst the English.</p>
<p>Norse words</p>	<p>These raiders and settlers bring almost 2000 new words into the English vocabulary. Words derived from Norse include <i>anger, awkward, cake, die, egg, freckle, muggy, reindeer, silver, skirt</i> and <i>smile</i>. Many Northern English dialect words still bear traces of Scandinavian languages, as do many place names such as Whitby and Grimsby.</p>
<p>The Normans invade</p>	<p>The Normans transform England, both culturally and linguistically. For over 300 years French is the language spoken by the most powerful people - royalty, aristocrats and high-powered officials - some of whom can't speak English at all. French is used in political documents, in administration, and in literature. Latin is still the language of the church and of scholars, but most of the general population speak English in their everyday lives.</p>
<p>French words</p>	<p>Thousands of French words become embedded in the English vocabulary, most of which are words of power, such as <i>crown, castle, court, parliament, army, mansion, gown, beauty, banquet, art, poet, romance, chess, colour, duke, servant, peasant, traitor</i> and <i>governor</i>.</p>

Source:
British Library, Language Change website