

English changes from contact with Norse and French

At the end of the 9th century, Alfred the Great's truce with the Vikings (the Treaty of Wedmore) divided England along a line, from northwest to southeast, known as the Danelaw. According to Professor Tom Shippey, northeast of this line, the close contact between Old English (i.e., Anglo-Saxon) and Old Norse simplified the case endings of nouns and the definite article. Because Old English and Old Norse were so similar, it is difficult to reconstruct the influence of one on the other; however, some of the differences have survived in Modern English.

English-Norse couplets:

shirt, skirt; starve, die; rear, raise (a child); wish, want; craft, skill; hide, skin

In 1066, the French-speaking Norman French conquered England. Old French became the official language of England's king, government, and church. Many French words were borrowed into English at this time.

English-French couplets:

pig, pork; ox, beef; sheep, mutton; purchase, buy; start, commence; meet, encounter; fairness, justice; freedom, liberty

Scots English

The first kings of Scotland spoke Gaelic, but Scotland eventually became English speaking in the cities, and the Scottish kings eventually switched from Gaelic to English language.

Shortly after the Norman Conquest of England, many English speakers went to Scotland. Although parts of the Scottish Lowlands had spoken a variety of Old English since the 8th century, the use of Scots English (later called "Scots") became more widespread during the 12th century, when King David invited English speakers to settle in the major towns of Scotland.

The golden age of Scots literature is said to be from 1376 to 1603. In 1603, when James became the king of both Scotland and England, it could be said that both London and Edinburgh were the capitals of the English language.