The background of the slide is a spiral-bound notebook with a light-colored, textured cover and a dark brown spine on the left side. The spiral binding is visible on the left edge. The text is centered on the page.

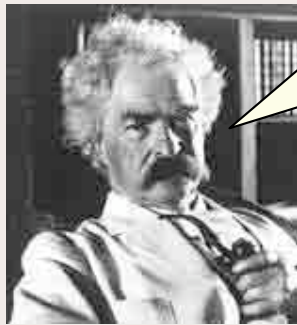
Why can't I spell?

(Why can't I spell?)

A History of English Spelling
A Social Practice Approach

by Tracy Mollins
©2005

I don't give a damn for a man who
can spell a word only one way.



Mark Twain

Did you know?

Until 1755 there was no such thing as a spelling mistake. There were no good spellers or bad spellers - there were just spellers.



People just spelled words the way they wanted to

- and they might spell them differently at different times.

quææn?



kwænæ?

cwæn?

Even their names ...



Hi my name is:

William Shakespear

Williem Shakespær

Willyum Shaksper

People have been writing in English for about 1500 years.

At first only a few people could write.
They were called scribes.
They worked in churches.

Primo pulcrum bibham in pergamento.
Item fideam fr̄e beati thome de aquino.
Item quam scripta maldē.
Item tractatū maldē de eccle facie et archie fidei.
Item Augustini de doctrina xpiana cum tabula
notabilis p̄dicando maldē p̄foca.
Item tractatū de rōne et olarina.
Item m̄grum solāne p̄focū de custodia lingue.
Item solāne n̄i de m̄gr̄e of̄ie venerabilis fratris
solāne m̄gr̄e f̄ere theologie p̄focū et xim.
Item tractatū maldē de tractatū m̄gr̄e.
Item bulla p̄p̄e fr̄e contra ab̄roce.

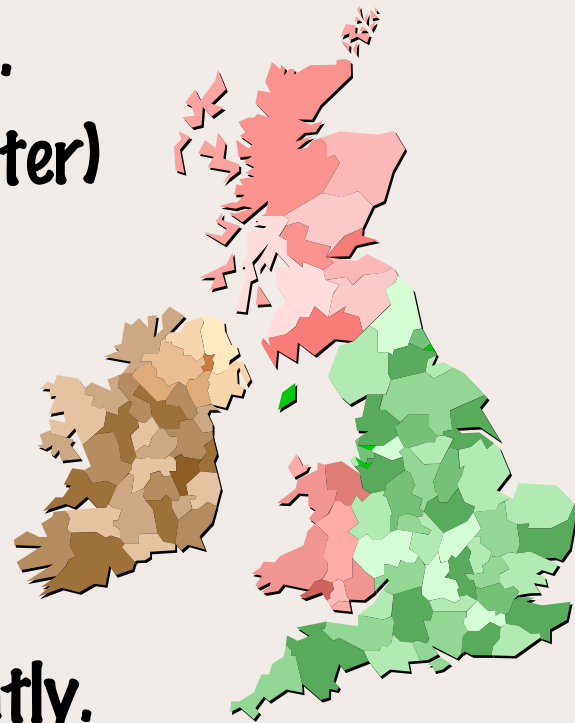


People spoke English in different ways in different parts of the country.

(more about this later)

And the scribes wrote the way they spoke.

So they all wrote differently and spelled the words differently.



There was no special alphabet for English.

The scribes used the Roman alphabet.



The Romans came from
what we now call Italy



AMO
AMAS
AMAT

and they spoke Latin.

And where did the Romans get their alphabet...

... they "borrowed" it
- among other things -
from the Greeks.



MY ALPHABET ...
MY ART ... MY
RELIGION...

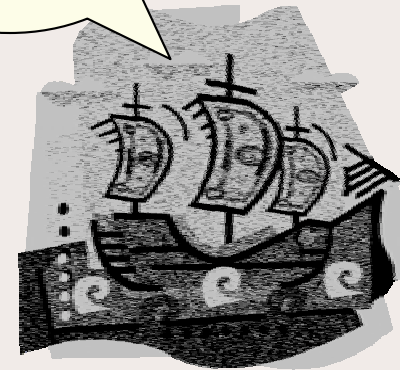
And where did the Greeks get their alphabet...

... the Greeks "borrowed" their alphabet from the Phoenicians (living in what is now Lebanon) ...

*Hey...
get back here
with that...*



THANKS FOR
THE ALPHABET



Anyway ... all this to say that the alphabet that the scribes used matched the sounds of Latin, not English, so sometimes they had to make up ways to write down certain sounds.

For example, Latin had no w:

Oh no ... how am I going to write "William" ... I guess I'll use two 'u's ... you know double u ...



**And if that was not complicated enough ...
the whole thing became even more of a
mess after the Normans invaded in 1066.**

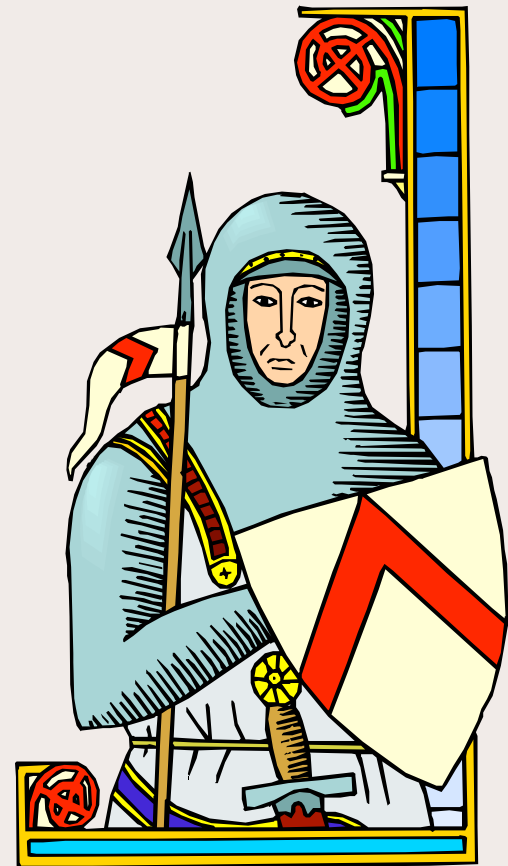
@#\$%# Normans!!!



A short history of English...

Who were the Normans
and why did they drive
the scribes so crazy?

Let's go back a bit...
(or skip to page 41)

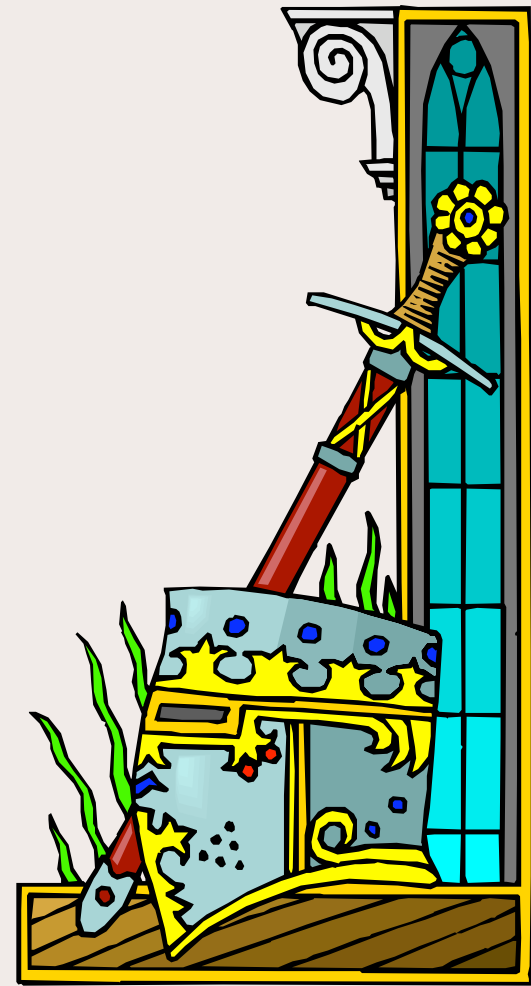


Language and power

Languages change over time as the people who speak them change.

The people who have the most power can force change.

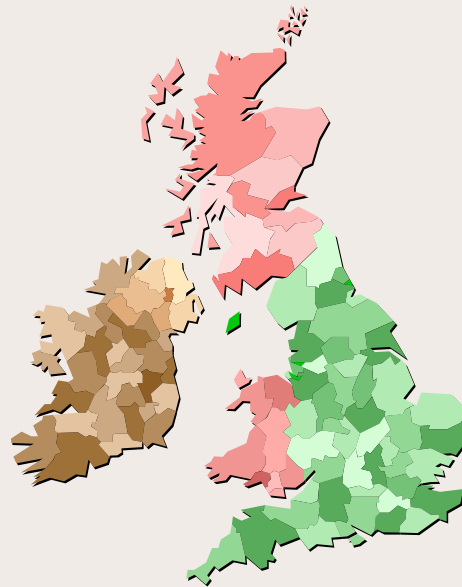
The history of English is the history of the people who took power in England.





... to the year 43 CE ... the Celts

For several hundred years, Celtic tribes lived in the British Isles.



(today England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales)



They spoke different Celtic languages.

Would you
like to share
my spoon?



HUH?



43 to 410 ... the Romans

In the year 43, the Romans invaded Britain.



VENI,
VIDI,
VICI*

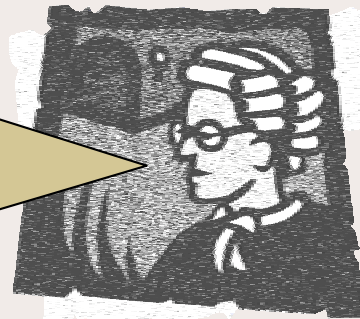
*I came, I saw, I conquered



They stayed and ruled parts of Britain for almost 400 years.

The official language of the government was Latin.

VENI,
VIDI,
VICI ...
SUCKERS





Some people did not have much contact with the Romans and continued to speak Celtic.

Would you like to share my spoon?

