

Advanced English: How the History of England formed the English Language

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This course is meant for students of the advanced C1 and C2 levels. Theme-based language classes aim at developing written and oral skills through the study of a specific topic.

Course Objectives

This is a 12-week philology course about the English language.

The main objectives of this course are:

- (by looking at key cultural-historical changes) to understand how the English language developed over the centuries
- (in terms of language skills) to develop a deeper cultural and etymological understanding of a large number of words and expressions.

Background

England has always had a complex and vexed relationship with the rest of Europe, being numerous times conquered and gradually transformed by the cultures and languages of its invaders prior to the 1066 Norman Conquest.

The English language is the result of all this. We can make sense of what it's like by exploring its pre-Norman origins.

Course Description

In each section we'll explore both history and language development.

In sessions 1, 2 and 3 we look at:

- Proto-Indo-European - a language from which languages as diverse as Sanskrit, Hindi, Russian, French and English have developed - to explore the underlying meanings of words and how they change over time
- Celtic and pre-Celtic Britain - its climate changes, agrarian development, monoliths, and its links to continental Europe
- The Roman Empire's take-over of most of Britain and its legacy.

In sessions 4, 5, 6 and 7, 8 we look at how:

- Angles, Saxons, Jutes and Frisians and then Augustinian missionaries take over the country from the departing Romans and the marginalised Brythonic Celts, England's 'Dark Ages', but also the beginnings of a new language, Old English
- The core of today's English can be found and - with a little effort and study - understood in Old English texts. We'll learn a bit about what that language was like and read some of its texts.

In sessions 9, 10, 11 and 12 we see that:

- Waves of Vikings or Norsemen violently invaded, transforming the rule of the country and the language, simplifying it grammatically but greatly enriching it lexically
- Their beliefs and mythologies were substantially similar-to but different-from the already-present Celtic mythology, Anglo-Saxon ('pagan') mythology and Christianity. Exploring these differences will tell us a lot about the English character and imagination
- King Alfred, having withstood the Vikings, reunified and constituted the country, prior to the 1066 Norman conquest and the vast input (into English) that Norman French would have.

Organization

The classes will be run as activities and in-class projects with a lot of interactive learning and in-class group work.

In terms of assessment, we will deal with several key written and audio texts and do related in-class comprehension tests (CCs), as well as two (in-class) writing tasks.