

**Major Events in Medieval English History**  
**Dr. Brian McFadden**  
**ENGL 3302**  
**British Literature Before 1066**

**Celts and Romans**

- **c. 600 BCE** Prehistoric Celts inhabited British Isles (Q-Irish Gaelic; P-Brythonic, Welsh/Scots)
- **55** Julius Caesar invades Britain and is repulsed
- **54** Caesar returns, conquers area around the Thames and levies tribute
- **43 AD/CE** Claudius conquers the south of Britain
- **98** Tacitus publishes *Germania*
- **117-38** Hadrian conquers up to the neck of Scotland - builds fortified wall
- **142** Antoninus Pius builds Antonine Wall between Firth of Clyde and Firth of Forth
- **211-17** Carcalla makes all free British Roman citizens; unifies region politically, but Britons, Picts, Celts still at odds

**Romans and Germans**

- **376** First Gothic movement into Roman territory
- **410** Sack of Rome
- **420's** beginning presence of Germanic mercenaries in Britain
- **440's** Rome recalls legions to defend the city; England left without protection against Picts and Celts
- **c. 449** Britons invite Angles, Saxons, Jutes as mercenaries
  - Germanic peoples stay, begin migration to Britain
  - gradual establishment of the Heptarchy
- **476** Fall of the Roman Empire in the West

**The Apostle to the English**

- Legend of the slaves in the marketplace
  - Gregory the Great, while still a priest in Rome, sees some English slaves being sold in the marketplace
  - Angles - "non Angli, sed angeli"
  - kingdom of Deira - "de ira Domini"
  - King Ælle - "alle-luia"
- **597** Gregory the Great sends Augustine to convert English
  - Kent, East Anglia, Sussex, Wessex, Mercia convert first; Northumbria takes some time
  - struggles between Irish/Roman clerics over authority - Ireland had been cut off and developed its own ecclesiastical structure
- **664** Synod of Whitby settles several controversies, including the date of Easter

**The Vikings and Alfred**

- **c. 787** First Viking landings in Wessex
- **793** First invasion of the Vikings at Lindisfarne
- **878** Alfred the Great negotiates Viking withdrawal in Treaty of Wedmore

- **886** Alfred fixes boundaries of Danelaw
  - Rise of the power of Wessex in English rule; most poetry and a good bit of prose shows the influence of West Saxon dialect
  - **891** Approximate date of Anglo-Saxon Chronicle exemplar (very complex textual history!)

### **The Benedictine Reform**

- **c. 910** beginning of Benedictine monastic reforms on the Continent
  - Many monasteries had been founded on donated land; landowners wanted support of the church, but they did not want to lose influence by giving up land
  - Lay control of monasteries – local nobility often chose priors and abbots and set admission standards
  - Often staffed monasteries with secular canons (*clerici*) instead of regular clergy (*monachi*); educational standards often not as high
  - Movement to end lay control of monasteries and put land and staffing back into ecclesiastical control; also to improve clerical Latinity and education
  - Major reform centers in France: Cluny and Fleury
- Three English monks, Æthelwold, Oswald, and Dunstan, had been trained at Cluny; brought the ideas back to England
  - all three eventually become bishops and promote reforms
- Some initial resistance, but with the help of King Edgar (957-75), the reforms began in earnest with the forcible reform of Winchester
  - With monastic land back in Church control, Edgar uses the loss of landowner influence to consolidate his own power

### ***Regularis Concordia***

- *Harmony of the [Monastic] Rule* – supported by Edgar, Æthelwold of Winchester, Oswald, and Dunstan to get monastic practice into a standard form
- Æthelwold probably the main ecclesiastical writer – aided by monks from Fleury and Ghent
  - also translated the Benedictine Rule for English use
- Council of Winchester approved the document c. 973
- Manuscripts containing the text
  - London, BL, Faustina B.iii – composite manuscript with sections from the mid-11<sup>th</sup> century through the 15<sup>th</sup>; various religious texts in Old and Middle English and Latin
  - London, BL, Tiberius A.iii – 11<sup>th</sup> century with some 12<sup>th</sup> century additions; *Regularis Concordia*, Benedictine Rule, and several liturgical texts in Latin and English

### **Æthelred and the Danes**

- Edgar dies suddenly in 975; brief anti-monastic reaction
- **978** Aethelred II Unræd (often called the “Unready,” actually “ill-advised”) takes the throne after murder of Edward (“the Martyr”)
  - pickup in Viking raiding – has a hard time dealing with it after some early success
  - OE poetry - Beowulf MS, Exeter Book, Junius MS, Vercelli Book all date between 950-1010

- **1002** St. Brice's Day Massacre - Aethelred orders murder of all Danes in England
- **1013** Aethelred flees; Canute the Dane controls England
- **1016** Æthelred dies 23 April; his son Edmund "Ironside" wins a few battles, but dies in November; Canute acknowledged as King of England
- **1035** Canute dies; his two sons, Harold and Hardacnut, both die early

### **The End of Early Medieval England**

- **1042** Edward the Confessor succeeds as king; his choice of heir is supposedly William of Normandy
- **1066** Harold Godwinson claims throne on Edward's death
  - William invades from the south; Danish Harald Hardrada invades from the north
  - 9/25/1066 - Battle of Stamford Bridge; Harold defeats Harald
  - 10/14/1066 – William defeats Harold at Hastings; Harold dies
- **1085** William orders census of the kingdom ("Domesday Book"); rise of "feudalism"

### **Key events in later medieval England**

- **1154** Henry II - disputes over taxes, boundaries of civil and ecclesiastical power
  - **1170** Murder of Archbishop Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral
  - Marie de France around Henry's court
- **1189** Richard I (Lionhearted) - goes crusading, dies 1199
  - **1254** Crusades end; greater contact with East, source of stories; rise of chivalry
- **1215** King John (1199-1216) signs Magna Carta; rise of parliamentary power
  - Loses a number of territories in France; French starts to decline as a court language
- **1216** Henry III (d. 1272) succeeds
  - rise of religious orders (friars) and merchant class
- **1272** Edward I (d.1307) - court/legal reforms; conquers Scotland
- **1307** Edward II - reputed to be weak, influenced by favorites, prefers court life to business; deposed and murdered by disaffected nobles in 1327
- **1327** Edward III (effective 1330 after exiling/executing rebels) - strengthens civil courts vs. ecclesiastical courts; raises taxes, aggravates peasants

### **The age of Chaucer**

- **1336** Beginning of Hundred Years' War (actually 119 years, series of small wars) with France
  - English claim French territory to remove English allegiance to France dating from Conquest
- **1348-49** Bubonic plague outbreak; one-third of England's population dies
- **1351** Statute of Laborers - restricts movement and freezes wages of free workers
- **1362** English officially becomes language of the court, replacing French
- **1377** Richard II succeeds at age 10 under regency of John of Gaunt
- **1380's** Peasant's Revolt (1381); rise of Wyclif, popular heresies, ecclesiastical reforms; Chaucer begins *CT*
- **1399** Henry IV (Lancastrian) deposes Richard; has difficulty dealing with rebellions and controlling Parliament
  - *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*
- **1400** Death of Chaucer; death of Richard II

### **The end of medieval England**

- **1413** Henry V - wins victories in France and a lot of territory
- **1422** Henry VI - succeeds as infant; has bouts of insanity
  - England ruled by regents
- **1453** Battle of Castillon – England loses last of French territory
  - Henry's leadership questioned
- **1455** Battle of St. Albans – first armed fight of the War of the Roses
- **1461** Edward IV (Yorkist), grandson of Edward III, deposes Henry VI
- **1470** Henry recovers his reason and rules briefly
  - deposed again by Edward IV and murdered, 1471
  - Malory writing *Morte Darthur* at this time
- **1483** Edward V (Yorkist) succeeds at age 13 and rules for two months
  - is deposed by Richard III (Yorkist), sent to the Tower of London, and is murdered with his brother, probably on the orders of Richard
- **1485** Henry Tudor defeats and kills Richard III at Battle of Bosworth Field, rules as Henry VII
  - marries Elizabeth of York, ending War of the Roses; politically astute, keeps nobility in check; often considered end of Middle Ages in England