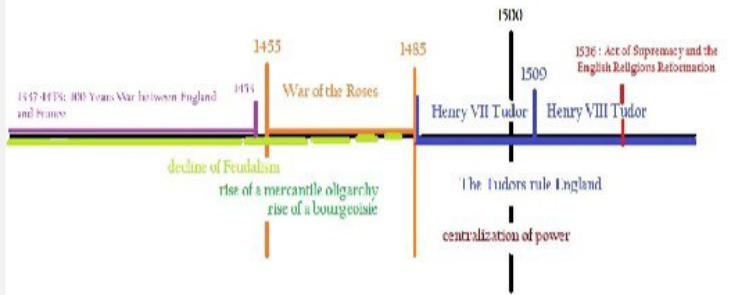


The 15th Century: An Era of Transition

Class: 1st year Licence – Semester 1
Course: Civilization of the Language

EVOLUTION OF 15TH CENTURY ENGLAND



Why was the 15th century important in English History?

- The 15th century was a period of **transition: from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance**
- It was also a period of contrasts between that development which went on and the **confusion and crisis in the feudal system. The Feudal system declined and started to disappear**
- Crises led to unrests, lootings and devastation. Some events led to a reshaping of the Monarchy and the society.
- However, the fundamental structure of the society was not affected.

Crisis and decline of the Feudal System

- Feudalism was a decentralized social and political system.
- **In the 14th century, the Black Death (plague)** hit Europe from 1346 to 1353. It created confusion and anarchy in the Feudal system. The chain of loyalty (duties, land, and protection) was broken. That process continued during the 1st half of the 15th century.
- Barons and Nobles started to become more and more autonomous and did not obey the King.
- Serfs and peasants had to rely on themselves and started to free themselves from duties towards their lords.

Development of the Black Death



- From 70 to 200 million peoples died in Europe, North Africa and the Near East.

Rise of a new social class

- But the social order and stability of the country were not deeply affected.
- the evolution depicted above encouraged **the prosperity of a mercantile and banking oligarchy.**
- A new class appeared. A class that started to challenge the aristocracy. A class that started to be involved in government (under the authority of the king).

Rise of a new social class

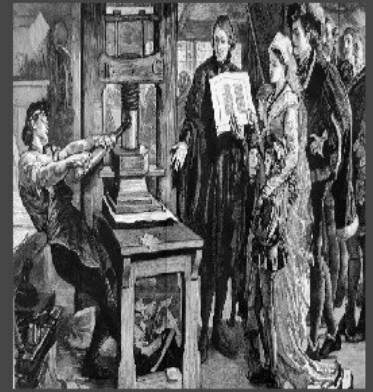
- By the end of the 14th and beginning of the 15th centuries, great trading companies developed: the **Merchant Tailors** and the **London Mercers**, for example.
- One the primary goal of that new bourgeoisie was the **expansion of education among its ranks.**
- That new bourgeoisie thus founded schools (the Merchant Tailors' is one of the finest) and **created scholarships to send its sons to universities.**

Rise of a new learned class

- Learning and knowledge were no more privileges enjoyed by the nobility or religious people
- **The diffusion of knowledge** led to progressive learning of those who were to become the **senior civil servant of the kingdom**.
- they were to constitute the most competent people to ensure an administrative reorganization for the future of the country.
- That task was to be assigned to them by the Tudors.
- Moreover, education achieved the cultural fusion necessary to the formation of a national spirit.

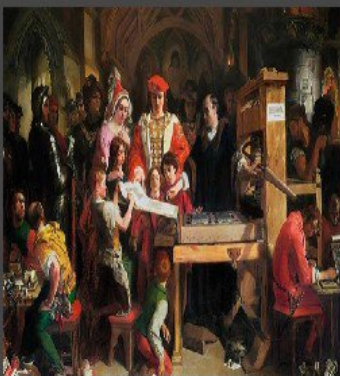
William Caxton

- William Caxton represented one of the products of that new **educated oligarchy**.
- He was a diplomat and businessman and he had spent thirty years in Netherland serving the *London Mercers*.
- Back to England in 1477, he brought with him the **movable type printing** which had been invented by **Gutenberg**.



Development of the English Language 15th Century

- **English** ceased to be regarded as a "vulgar" language. It conquered a place and a status to become a **"common language"** beside French
- **French** was the "noble" language.
- **Latin** remained during that period the International language used by scholars.



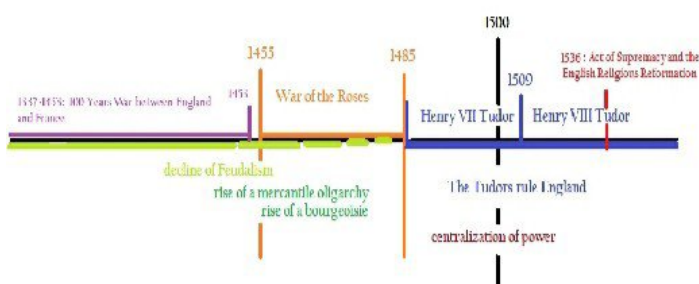
- **William Caxton printed the first-ever book in English (1473-74)**

- During that century, **the crisis within the feudality** led to the establishment of the **House of Tudors** with a **monarchy more centralized and administrative**
- England started to shift from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance.
- It was also the period of the **Wars of the Roses**,

The Wars of the Roses (1455-1485)

- a series of **dynastic civil wars** in England fought by the rival houses of **Lancaster** and **York** between 1455 and 1485.
- **Cause: competing claims to the throne of England**
- The wars were named many years afterward from the supposed badges of the contending parties:
 - the **white rose** of York
 - the **red rose** of Lancaster

EVOLUTION OF 15TH CENTURY ENGLAND



- The House of York
- White rose



- The House of Lancaster
- Red rose



The House of Tudors (1485-1603)

The Tudors put an end to the Wars of Roses

Henry Tudor became King **Henry VII**. He married a York.

- Henry VII (1485-1509)

His son:

- **Henry VIII (1509-1547)**

Henry VIII's children:

- Edward VI (1547-1553)
- Mary I (1553-1558)
- **Elizabeth I (1558-1603)**

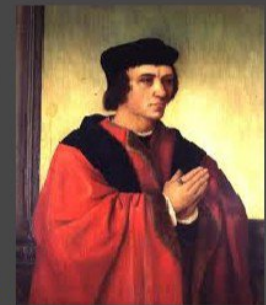


New ideas in how to govern: Sir John Fortescue (1394-1479)

- His main goal was the good management of the kingdom.
- That task required of course a strict and enlightened political authority, i.e. a good constitution.

Sir John Fortescue

- John Fortescue, who was the **first English constitutional theoretician**.
- He served as chief justice (at the top of the judicial system) for the House of Lancaster.
- **He did not belong to feudal nobility but to the new class of civil servants** : educated and competent.

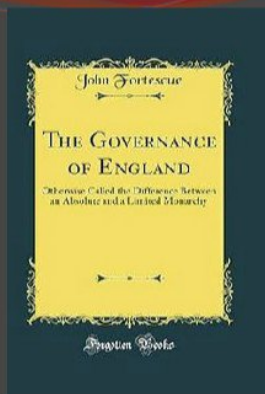


- His first treaty on the domain, ***In Praise of the Laws of England***, (1470)



- Fortescue analysed the decline of Feudality in England.
- At the apogee of the system, the king is supported by the leaders of the nobility who form the Council and who are his immediate vassals.
- However, when the system collapses, the court becomes the battlefield of fighting aristocratic factions which clash to preserve their respective interests.
- Fortescue suggests **reforming the council, to appoint men not selected according to their rank or origin but according to their value and merit**. Those civil servants would be appointed by and responsible before the monarch.

- Fortescue offered his services to the House of York.
- His second work, ***The Governance of England***, (written between 1471 and 1476) passes judgment on the errors, abuses, corruption that led to fall of the previous dynasty.
- According to him, the royal power should be "political."
- the power of the king should be limited by laws so that it does not become a harmful tyranny.
- taxation should be controlled by the parliament and the burden of which should be equally shared by the entire population.



To sum up

- End of the 100 years War between England and France.
- Crisis and decline of the Feudal system
- Crises and conflict within the aristocracy and the monarchy: the War of the Roses (1455-1485)
- rise of a bourgeoisie: a mercantile oligarchy with an expansion of learning among its ranks.
- Coming of a new ruling house: The House of Tudors (Henry VII and his heirs) with a new powerful and centralized government, more and more based on civil servants that do not belong to the

References

- Ellis Sandoz .(2012). **Sir John Fortescue: Securing Liberty Through Law**. <https://voegelinview.com/fortescue-and-liberty-through-law-pt-1/>
- William Caxton. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/William-Caxton>