William Tyler | Languages and Borders: An Introduction to French History

– Welcome everyone to a new series on the history of France. And well here we are, with an Englishman talking about the history of France. There's a love hate relationship of course, between these two close neighbours of France and England. And I love the comment of a French feminist, visiting London in 1840, who wrote a book a called "Walking Around London", in which she said, "The Englishman is under the spell of his climate and behaves like a brute." And she went on to say, "The general atmosphere of London is so melancholic that it creates an irresistible desire to end one's life by suicide." Well, that's what the French think of the English, and we shall find more of that and what the English think of the French as we go through the history of France because of course the interrelationship between the two countries has been before most of the centuries a fraught relationship and then a close relationship in the 20th century, but nevertheless, still a tension between Britain and France or England and France in the days gone by. And continuing this theme of England and France, I want to go back to the film "Goodbye Mr. Chips", which starred Petula Clark, an English woman who is a Francophile and lived in France for a long time. And in the film "Goodbye Mr. Chips," Petula Clark sings a song, "London," and the final line of the song is "London, is London is England." The fact that you could not have a French song about Paris with the line, Paris is Paris is France, is a good way to emphasise the difference between the two countries. England has been unified since the Saxon age, since 927, and its capital has remained London. And that uniformity and unification in England was underwritten very ironically by a Frenchman or to be precise by a Norman Frenchman, William the Conqueror in 1066. And William the Conqueror made the centralization of the English state even more centralised than it had been under the Saxon kings. And the reason was that, in France, there was no centralised control. And on gaining the English throne, William realised that he had to do something different and that he could not, because he would not survive, if he introduced a French system and allowed these Saxon Lords or even Norman Lords to rule large parts of the country. It all had to be ruled by William. And so it is strangely because France was so disunited that England became so united because William the Conqueror wanted to impose his rule here, unlike the French king, who was unable to impose his rule in France. France was throughout the Middle Ages and later, and in many ways still is formed of a variety of several provinces. It's a provincial country with strong provinces, who have a strong identity in themselves. And Paris is less dominant than London has been since the, well, actually since Roman Times, let alone since the 10th century in England. And this situation in France, of a country that is really a grouping of provincial regions, lasted right up until the French Revolution of 1789. And many of you remembered de Gaulle's famous phrase about governing France using the example of cheese. De

Gaulle said, "How can anyone govern a nation that has 246 different varieties of cheese?" And what he meant was, how can anyone govern France, when it is so disunited, when the provinces are so powerful that in Paris it's so difficult to govern the country as a whole? There's an interesting piece in a book I put on my list, which I think is a really good book by the historian Graham Robb. It's called "The Discovery of France." And in this book, he tells this story from the 19th century. He writes this, actually from the 18th century, I'm sorry. I said 19th, I mean 18th century. "The man could take in at a glance, several small regions whose inhabitants barely knew of each other's existence."

Now the man, we don't know his name, he was an anonymous cartographer. So he is gone up on a hill to draw the map of the region. "To walk in any direction for a day was to become incomprehensible, for the Massif range to which the mountain belonged was also a watershed of languages. The people who saw the sun set behind the Gerbier de Jonc spoke one group of dialects, the people on the evening side spoke another. 40 miles to the north, the wine growers and silk weavers of the Lyonnais spoke a different language altogether, which had yet to be identified and named by scholars." 1740 this is. "Yet another language was spoken in the region the traveller had left the day before and though his own mother tongue French, was a dialect of that language, he would've found it hard to understand the peasants who saw him pass." Very different from England, where English, Anglo-Saxon, old English, merging with Norman French became what we know as modern English in the Middle Ages spoken by everybody, except the Cornish, whose peasantry still spoke a Celtic language, Cornish, but England had one language. If you think about it, that's a really important thing. It's why it's difficult in the European Union, where every language has to be translated. So if an Albanian, I'm sorry, not an Albanian, if, shall we say, a Bulgarian is speaking in the EU, then it has to be translated into Finnish. Goodness knows where they get translators to do that. Whereas the Council of Europe only has French and English, which makes life a lot easier. If you have multiple languages, it makes governance much, much more difficult. And that was a problem that France had right up until the revolution of 1789. It's the sheer size of France, and I gave you all a map, which I hope you've all received in your package for this evening or today. It was the sheer size of France that hit both French and foreign visitors to the country. If you see your map, it shows it in kilometres. So from east to west or west to east, in mileage it's 590 miles. And from north to south or south to north, at its longest, it's 621 miles. It's a massively large country, and- Excuse me. This was heightened, this size of France, heightened by the fact that the population, although large and for much of the Middle Ages, for all of the Middle Ages, was the most highly populous country in Europe. It didn't mean to say that it felt full, it felt empty, because the size of the country was so large, you could lose so many people in it. Very different again from England. Having different languages, emphasised the differences. So in

the piece that I've just read, you could go only a day's walk and meet quite a different culture because culture is increased, is encapsulated in the language. So the sheer size of France is something that we have to take into account, when we are looking at French history. Indeed the size of France continue to pose problems right up until, well, if we were meeting in our classroom, I would ask you what changed, and you all know what changed. That distances become shortened with the introduction of railways. Before railways, you could only travel as fast as a horse could ride, you could ride a horse, or sail a boat or row a boat or run. You couldn't travel faster than that. The railways come and therefore it made it possible, to be able to go around France and across every other country around the world far faster. It's a link. Just think of the British India, the giving of railways to India made it possible for India in 1947 to be one country and not split up in the way it was, when the British arrived in the 18th century under the East India Company.

This is Robb writing again about this point, about distance. He writes this, "The 200,000 square miles of Europe's biggest country, France were magnified by mediaeval time on the eve of the French Revolution. France was still three weeks long from Dunkirk to Perpignan and three weeks wide from Strasbourg to Brest. Journey times have barely changed since the days of the Romans." Well, they've got worse of course, because the Romans at least had an efficient road system. But by the time of the revolution, the roads were in a terrible state. Well, not only in France in the 18th century, but across Europe. He writes on "Journey times, therefore had rarely changed since the days of the Romans, when wine merchants could reach the English channel from the Mediterranean port in less than a month. When speed increased in the late 18th century." That is to say when roads began to be improved, "They did so only for a handful of rich people. And luck still played a big role. Marseille was less than two weeks from Paris, but only if certain conditions were met, such as perfect weather, a recently repaired road, a modern coach with full suspension, healthy horses, and a fast but careful driver, who was never thirsty and never had an accident." Well, if you can put all those things together, you've made it. "These times, moreover, refer only to the transport of human beings. Goods transport was even slower and less predictable. In 1811, for example, overseas produce entering France, through the Port of Nantes, would not be expected in Paris for another three weeks. A merchant in Lyon would be surprised to receive it in under a month." So the distances in France are very important. The language differences are very important. All of this indicating that to have central control in France is really impossible for much of French history. That's for example, if France is attacked from the South, Spain, from the East, Germany, Italy, from the North, Germany and from the West, England, you have problems in moving troops around. It's why Napoleon built such good roads in France, to move troops. The distances were horrendously large and horrendously difficult to cover. The languages made it very difficult to impose central rule. I said,

despite the large population, the size of the country made France feel to visitors almost empty. And if I use Robb again, he says this, "In 1787 and 1788, the English farmer, Arthur Young" Arthur Young wrote a lot of books about farming. He wrote them about England, but he also wrote them about France. This is at the time of the Agricultural Revolution in England, no such equivalent in France. "In 1787 and 1788, the English farmer, Arthur Young, was amazed to find the wastes, the deserts, the heath, ling, furze, broom and bog that I have passed for 300 miles continuing to within three miles of the great commercial city of Nantes." It was empty, but not only empty of people but empty of agriculture. Empty of agriculture, at a time when in England, we were getting every piece of territory we could under farming. One might even say, in 18th century terms, under intensive farming. Let me just read you one more thing. "As late as 1867, after more than a century of agricultural improvement—" Agricultural improvement began far later in France than it did in Britain, and by no means to the same extent. "As late as 1867, a national census estimated that 41% of land that could be cultivated was quote dominated by the forces of nature, grasslands, forests and morte." It really was a wild territory and to an English visitor interest in farming, even wilder. Being told that there were rules around, rules had disappeared here in England in the 10th century at the latest, but they're in France in the 19th century, they were a serious problem. 20th century and 21st century, they remain an issue, but in the 19th century, a serious problem. So we're looking at a country that is massive in size that although it has a large population, it feels in many places an empty land. A land where agriculture hasn't imposed itself, all of which is very important to the history of France. After all Mary Antoinette is reported, although the history doesn't really support the view that she said, "Let them eat cake." Well they had to eat cake, if we take it literally because there wasn't anything else for them to eat because French farming couldn't cope with the population size in 1780s. As I say, French agriculture was barely impacted even by the middle and end of the 19th century by the improvements in agricultural methods in Britain.

In particular, French agriculture remained small based farms, whereas here in Britain, it changed completely into large farms. Now that is important. It's important in terms of the European Union and it's important in terms of Britain's withdraw from the European Union cause a large proportion of the EU budget was spent supporting French agriculture. Of what doesn't actually say French agriculture, it says agriculture, but it was driven by France to support small farmers. Something we didn't have here and there was a great concern that we were paying, we were paying large sums of money for inefficient farming, particularly in France. Which was a great source of resentment, we might say, other of course when it comes to Eastern Europe joining the EU then that was even worse. But for Britain it was the fact that we were supporting inefficient French agriculture. Why could it not be made efficient, was the argument. So all of these

things relate to the history and we all know people have been writing about this quite a lot in recent years. The link between geography, landscape for example, and history and the use of the land by us, by humans. And that link with history, land and history is important. I've mentioned war, the difficulties moving troops around. I've mentioned already the centralization of France was not possible given the size of it and the independence of it and the separate languages underline the cultural differences too. In addition to the map of France that I sent out, which measured it, so that you've got an idea of size, I also put out a map which gave the languages. Now the map I sent gives you the major regional languages that still exist today in the 21st century. What is interesting is that they survived at all because when the French Revolution came in 1789, it was clearly stated it that the Republic of France, there was only one language, that is French. And there was a considerable movement from 1789 right through to 2021 to suppress regional languages. It was thought to be conservative. It was thought to be a means of dividing France and to unite France was a language. Now we know that languages are really important in terms of bringing people together and I've said how a language, modern English formed from Old Saxon and the Norman French Saxon mixture into middle English, giving us the modern English of Shakespeare. It was absolutely essential. We know the importance of English in terms of the internet. We also know that one of the reasons in the 19th and particularly in the latter part of the 20th century and into the 21st century that the French resisted the regional languages and emphasised French is because they were concerned about the growth of Anglo-Saxon culture. That is predominantly from the middle of the 20th century onwards American culture. They were anxious that American films, for example, Hollywood was destroying French films and French culture. They got upset about the introduction of Anglo-Saxon words like the weekend, a Lu weekend, and they wanted the purity of the French language. It's a very strange concept to us who speak English because we know that English has always changed and we know of course there are differences. Of course we do, between English, English or British English and American English, our language evolves. French wanted strictly controlled, well they actually changed the policy in May of last year, 2021. And for the first time recognised that there were regional languages and regional cultures. And the reason for that is there has been a renaissance in provincial France of looking back to their roots and their roots are obviously vested in their languages. And so instead of trying to erase them, as indeed in Britain, the English tried to erase the languages in Scotland and Wales and Ireland, Scottish Gaelic, Gaelic and Irish Gaelic and in Wales, Welsh. And you were punished in schools if you spoke those languages. The only language was English. Some of you who aren't English or Welsh may not know there was a term called the Welsh knot, K-N-O-T, knot, the Welsh Knot. And that was a, it was a dreadful thing made of wood and it was put over a child's neck and he wore it around the neck or she wore it around the neck for a day, if they were heard speaking Welsh. Even in the playground, they had to wear this

knot. So we aren't blameless in Britain, but the French were very anxious to stop it.

Now they had to come to terms with it and that's a very interesting change from the position that Francis held ever since 1789. Now if we look at the map, you can see those other languages. Now let me try and explain. At the top, you've got a language which says Flamand. This is Flemish, it is spoken not just in France, but of course it's spoken in Belgium and parts of the Netherlands. In France, sometimes it's recorded as Picard because the area of France in which Flemish is spoken is Picardy. And so they often call it Picard. There's thought to be 500,000 speakers of Picard or Flemish in northern France to this day. There's more of course, when you include Belgium and parts of the Netherlands, I'm simply talking about France. If you then come down the right hand side, you'll get to Frankek, now that is means Frankish. This is a German-based language, but the French very often refer it to Lorrain. That is the language of Lorrain. Beneath that is Alsacien, which is Alsace. And again is a language spoken both in France and Germany. And it's the language of Alsace, that is Strasbourg, and Strasbourg is one of these border cities that changed its allegiance between France and Germany and was finally only settled in 1945, at the end of World War II, and we should reach some history of Strasbourg. Strasbourg's history is fascinating and I should talk about some of Strasbourg's history in due course. Incidentally, Christmas trees first emerged in Strasbourg as we know them today, but we'll come to all of that. Oh, so did this, so did the French National anthem, we'll come to that as well. If you go further down, you come to Franco Province Sal, which is spoken in Italy and Switzerland. Now there's less than 15,000 French speakers. It's a mix of languages. It's a mix of sort of German and French, the Alsacien language spoken by 800,000 people. The Franco Provence Sal by less than 15,000. Then missing out the next big dark bit, come down to the bottom, and you've got Catalan, which obviously is spoken in Catalonia in Spain, but also in France around the city of Perpignan. I went on holiday a few years ago to Perpignan and I knew all about it, of course it was Catalan's. I didn't expect, when I went, there's a huge support in Perpignan and its area for an independent Catalonia in Spain, which of course is being fought for from Barcelona, the head of the capital of Spanish Catalonia. But French Perpignan, Catalonia, there's a move to join if Catalonia in Spain became independent. For, which is unlikely I think, there's a move that French Catalonia should join it. So Catalan is a really important language and as you walk around Perpignan, you see things written in Catalan. It's a fascinating place to go to. Then if you come round on the other side, you come to Basque, which is largely spoken of course in the Basque country of Spain. But there are, nevertheless, speakers of Basque here, about 50,000 or so in France. And we'll look at Basque area in the history. It's one of the last bits of what we call France today. Modern France to join France because these borders that we, from the border in the north where Picardy is, all the way through Alsace. We talked about Strasbourg,

being sometimes German and sometimes French all, the way through Catalonia and the Basque country are all bits that took centuries to be linked and be part of metropolitan France. The borders are fluid in France and this is quite difficult for Americans, Canadians, Australians, and indeed British people to understand, where we have absolutely clear borders. They do not have clear borders in France. And you say, well, yes, so, but there's the Pyrenees. Yeah, there is the Pyrenees, but that hasn't made the border any more secure, oddly enough, we will come to all of those stories, I promise. Then there's Gretton, which is the most interesting from a British point of view because this is language of Cornwall. It's the language of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. It's a Celtic language and there are about 200,000 speakers of Breton in Brittany and the story of Brittany linked with Britain, and we will come back to that in due course. One of the interesting things about Breton is that many Breton words have entered mainstream France. So a very common French word, la croissant, croissant, is in fact not a French word, but a Celtic word, a Breton word. But one of the most interesting is a verb, baragwenia. Baragwenia means to speak gibberish, to speak rubbish, nonsense. And it's made up of two Celtic words from Brittany, Breton words. One is barara and the other is gwen.

Now if there's any Welsh speakers listening tonight, they know those two words because they're Welsh words. Barara means bread and gwen means white, and they are incorporated into the modern French verb to speak gibberish, to speak rubbish, baragwenia. Languages are fascinating. I wish I was an expert in languages. It would be, it's the most interesting study. You can read a lot about these different languages, if you are so inclined. Now some of you are sitting there saying, but William you haven't talked about the really important language division in France. True, I haven't and I haven't for a reason 'cause I want to emphasise these regional differences that I've been harping on about since I began the talk. But you'll see from your maps, that in the north there is a land domain in France, D'oil, D' O-I-L, usually written as Langue D'oil, the language of D'oil. Oil? In modern French, oui, in English, yes. That language domain D'oil is now mainstream French. As Anglo-Saxon and Norman French merged to create modern English, so the Langue D'oil evolved to create modern French and the word D'oil disappeared. And you've got in back the word oui, O-U-I for yes. South of the River Loire, you get what on your map is called Aquitaine, but is often now referred to as Province Sal or Languedoc. Languedoc, Langue-doc, Languedoc. The language of the South. Och being the word for yes in the south, as oui was the word for yes in the north. Och was the word for yes in the south. So you've got Lang D'oil and Languedoc and Languedoc gives you the word Languedoc or the language today usually referred to in France as Province Sal. There are 200,000 speakers of this, but it's growing and it's growing interestingly. So I'm an adult educator. I'm fascinated when I go to Province to look at adult education prospectuses, and there you'll see the teaching of Province Sal and that's a really

important point. Why is it an important point? Well let me read you a piece from the French historian, wonderful series of books. I'll put this on my next book list "The Identity of France, Volume One" by Fernand Braudel. And Braudel writes this "As a rule, what happened in the north of France did not happen in the same way in the south of France and vice versa. What we think of as civilization, the way people are born, live, love, marry, think, believe, laugh, eat, dress, build houses, lay out fields or behave towards each other, was practically never the same in the south where the word for yes was och, as in the north where it was oil, later oui. There always has been and always will be another France in the South." Now we're used to thinking England, between the north and the south and the divisions between the north and the south, but France, the divisions are fundamentally different. Where rugby league is played, is played in the south, for example, the culture is different in the south than in the north, very different. Marseille is very different than Paris for example. This is a big cultural division originally based on this distinction in language. And despite the unifying desire of the revolutionaries after 1789, of the republic if you like, for unity, it has failed really to unify north and south. And increasingly, as I say with this new legislation about regional languages, the French have had to come to terms with the reality of the situation, which since 1789 has not being resolved. And although of course people will speak to you in standard French, well you can't bet on it. Let me tell you a story, which some of you will have heard me say before. I used to chair a meeting at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg and I needed to book a new hotel and over the phone and my French is not brilliant by any means. So I asked the Head of Languages, in the college where I was principal at City Lit in London, if she would come down to my office and make a call to France and they said, "Well, I'm sorry she's gone home, but the deputy is there." Now the deputy was German, ethnically German, married an Englishman after the war. She was German, but I knew she spoke fluent French as well. So down came Lenore to make the phone call. So I said to her, "Would you make this phone call for me to Strasbourg, to this hotel and book me this room for such and such? And because I don't think my French is good enough." So she dials the number and then she speaks in German. And I said, "But Lenore, this is France." And she said, "Oh no, it's Strasbourg, William, and they can jolly well speak in German 'cause they understand it. And I'm not speaking in French to Strasbourg." So I thought, this is going to set me off well when I arrive in this hotel, but fortunately it all went well. So the French are now coming to terms with these differences. This big difference between the north and south is really important in history. The whole concept of chivalry emerges from Provence, for example. Provence played an important part in English history and all of that, we will meet in the weeks to come.

What I'm trying to do this evening is merely to introduce you to some sort of core ideas if you like. So to recap, France was for centuries

a country made up of regions. Those regions often challenge the French king. They challenged the centralised state of France, which the King of France embodied. One of the most important of the regions to challenge the King of France were the Burgundians and the Burgundians are an important part of European history, which is really disappeared from sight. There's recently been a book produced on the Burgundians, which is I think is a really important historical work 'cause it puts the Burgundians back in the picture. Again, when we get to the Middle Ages, we will have to talk about the Dukes of Burgundy and the possibility that they could have created a kingdom for themselves between, what shall we say, central France and Germany, including what we now call Belgium and the Netherlands. So we will come to Burgundy in due course. So we, that's the first point. France was made up of regions, those regions still exist. Unification was first really, well, it's controversial, I would say that you could look at the unification of France really in the reign of Louis the 14th, Louis Soleil, the Sun King, but it was finally the revolution of 1789 that settled the question that France was France as we know it today. Give or take, still the changes around the borders, but France was France, one country, and the very concept of the republic was the unity of France. In a book, which again is on my list, like the one book is on my list by Cecil Jenkins called "France People History and Culture." Jenkins writes this about the French Revolution and the idea of a unitary state. "The French state is a construct with its own theoretical logic and internal coherence, as defined in the preamble to the constitution of the current republic." The current republic is the Fifth Republic, and this is the constitution approved by de Gaulle, can't get more French than de Gaulle. This is the constitution as it is today, quote, "France is a republic." Yes, well we know that, but what does the word republic mean to the friendship means? Let me read on, this is from the beginning of the preamble to the Constitution of the Republic of France today. "France is a republic which is indivisible," Indivisible. "Secular, democratic and social." And Jenkins writes "The terms of this declaration and indeed the order in which they are placed are significant in that they define the specific character of modern France." "Indivisible, secular, democratic, and social." Now democratic is pretty obvious after the revolution and the overtoe of the bourgeoisie, that's key, that's straightforward. Indivisible we've talked about and that of course led to this view that regional languages and regional differences should disappear. For example, there were different measurements until Napoleon established the metric system. So it's the revolution that made it indivisible, democratic, but secular. Well, that's a question which will crop up time and again in the history of modern France, is the clash between church and state. And the French have resolved it in a very different way than in Britain. France is secular. The church does not have a voice in the government. Some of you heard me talk about religion and politics, and we noted that the Church of England has bishop sitting in the upper chamber of Parliament in the House of Lords, that the position of the Church of England is still part of the

establishment, part of the constitution. The Catholic church in France is not, even if at times it's been powerful. For example, when after World War II or in the middle of World War II in 1944, after the liberation of France, women were given the vote, the story, because they did not have the vote before. They, so the vote for women comes in 1944 and the argument has been put that it was Mrs. de Gaulle, who persuaded Charles de Gaulle to extend the vote to women on the grounds that the women would vote in the way the priest told them to vote, and the priests were small sea conservative and therefore he would be gaining huge numbers of votes. And so he better give women the vote because they'd all vote for him because the priests would tell them to. So there is this element, of clash I've said between secularism and religion, Catholicism in France, and we will come again and again to that, and then he talks about France is republic being social. This is a tricky concept. It's a concept which really is not British. I'm not sure whether Americans feel it's American or not. "It was inevitable," says Jenkins, "that a republic seeking to unite freedom, equality, and fraternity should describe itself to quote the last term of the definition in the preamble to the Constitution as social. The linking notion here for those early Republicans looking for a middle way between 19th century German authoritarianism and British small tape liberalism, was that of solidarity."

Now solidarity is a word that crept into use in Britain, whilst we were members of the European Union. It is a French concept, it's not an English concept. We are far more individual than that, and the Germans far more authoritarian than that. Their concept of solidarity means the role, for example of the mayor in France, very different from here in England or indeed in Germany. Solidarity is a very difficult word in truth to translate from French into English. It's normally easy to translate French into English and English into French, except when you come to philosophical topics. And I met this, as I said, I went to the Council of Europe and we had real problems talking about adult education, talking about access. Education was extremely difficult because the French used the same words but meant something entirely different. And so it is with this word solidarity, which I don't really think is translatable into English. It doesn't relate. And we will come across that solidarity is in fact part of a sort of regional thing if you like. So that says a bit more that we need to carry with us about how the French see themselves and how the revolution of 1789 changed everything in France. It changed the way they thought in such a way that we really haven't had so dramatically in the Anglo-American world. We have evolved slowly and changed. And the easiest example of that, is how America evolved differently post 1776 than Britain evolved. What we remain, as we've said in I've said many times, we remain still united, the English speaking peoples of Churchill's history. But in France, the revolution of 1789 really was a huge divide. As Mrs. Thatcher said in an interview in France during the 200 Year Celebration of the French Revolution, she said, "You don't need to teach us because we had liberty well before you." It

didn't go down particularly well, I don't think, the interview in France. It went down very well in Britain. And she did have a point because the whole word, well, this is another question because English, whether American English, Canadian English or whatever, because English draws upon both Saxon and Norman roots, we often have two words for the same thing. And so we have a word freedom, which is Saxon, and we have a word liberty, which is Norman French. And actually in Anglo-Saxon societies, the concept of freedom is a bit different than the concept of liberty. The French don't have a concept of freedom, they have a concept of liberty, and there is a difference. We'll have to come to that as well. I feel sure I shall have to come to that at the later talk.

Now, before I finish, I'm looking at the clock and my clock's over there, I'm sorry. I find it easier to have it on the shelf over there. I want to an answer or begin to answer the question, who are the French? Now you think that was pretty obvious. Well, it isn't. Next week, I'm going to look at the Celts, that is the people who lived in France when the Romans first came and conquered the country. Celts belonged to different tribes, different tribal groups as they were in Britain, when the Romans invaded Britain. The Romans just thought of them as well, barbarians, but they also thought of them as Gauls. They called them one word Gauls. So all the Celts in France to the Romans were Gauls, hence the Roman name for the country of France, Dahlia the country of the Gauls. And I'll say something next week, I've got to say something next week, when I'm talking about Roman Gauls, then I shall talk about the Celts. So if the Romans called it Gaul, like they call Britain, Britannia, and we get the word Britain straight from the Roman word, Britannia. Why don't the French call themselves Gaul? That is because at the end of Roman rule, the fifth century, the Roman Gaul falls to invading forces from Germany, who we call the Franks. And it says from the word Franks that we get the word France. And interestingly in old German, the root of the word Franks meant the free. In other words, the people who lived beyond the Roman Empire, the free. And that word is used in Agricola, the book, Agricola, by the Roman historian Tacitus, when he writes about Britain and when the Celts defeat the Romans in the north of Scotland in Caledonia. And the British chiefdom is reported to say according to Tacitus and his father-in-law was actually there in the battle. The British leader said, "We are the last of the free." And the Celts had a very distinct sense of freedom, hence the Franks, and hence the word France. We don't work. See, excuse me. We don't find the word Frank's in use until the Romans used it in a Roman text, Latin text in the third century ad. So we've got Celts, we've got Franks, and we have all sorts of other people, who come into France to make France what it is today. To make the French what they are, in the same way that England is made up of various groups, like the Vikings and of course, France also has Vikings. They were in Normandy, the North men, the land of the North men, the land of the Vikings, which is Normandy. Just to go ahead a little bit to show some of the things that we will talk about,

I've said we will talk about the Celts and Roman Gauls next week and the road system, which is so important, all of that we will do. Wine growing, everything, but the greatest of the Franks was one of these outstanding men in history, and his name was Charlemagne who ruled between 768 and his death in 814. And Charlemagne ruled, let me just read you a small piece about Charlemagne. "Charlemagne founded an empire that by the time of his death in 814 stretched from the Atlantic to the El and south the Rome." It was the first attempt to reconstruct the Roman Empire after it had fallen in the west. In the east, it continued in Byzantium we know, in the West the Roman empire went. And the theme of trying to recreate a united Europe has continued since. Charlemagne was the first attempt. The papacy tried to do it in the Middle Ages. We possibly can count Philip the 2nd of Spain is trying to do it. Napoleon certainly tried to do it. So did the Kaiser, so did Hitler. And so, is the European Union, and no one has managed to do it. No one has managed to do it. Why not? Well, largely because Rome had a culture which dominated local culture, and Rome had a language that dominated the other languages. So it had all the ingredients, a centralised rule, common language, all of these things and a road system which linked everything and we've never managed to recreate it. And the EU is a a thousand miles away from recreating anything looking like the Roman Empire. However, as obviously, Charlemagne's Empire did not survive his death in 814 and it split, and basically the bit of the empire which became France, was called West Frankia. There was a middle Frankia, which disappeared into the West Frankia, East Frankia. East Frankia became the Holy Roman Empire. West Frankia became France. So we'll look at Charlemagne because he's important, and strangely enough, both Germany and France today claim Charlemagne as their own. And they're right to, because he's both French and German. His empire was French and German, but it didn't survive his- Interesting to think if it had survived the how the history of Europe would be different, but it clearly didn't. Some historians say, well, that became a dead end Charlemagne's empire. And so if you are talking about France specifically, but then you have to go to Hugh Capet, C-A-P-E-T, who founded the Capuchin Royal House of France. And it was he who finally laid the basis of the France that's on our maps in the 21st century. And Jenkins writes a little piece about this, which I was going to share, if I can, where'd I put the book? Come on, where did I put them, you silly man? Here it is. The Jenkins wrote this about Hugh Capet and the centralised, the beginning of the idea of France. "It was not a strong kingdom that Hugh Capet 987 to 996 took over in France. It had no ethnic or linguistic coherence with Franks, Bretons and others speaking a variety of languages ranging from German in the Northeast to Basque in the southwest. Quite apart from the difference in the romance speaking areas between the Langue D'oil and the Langdoc. In practise, Hughes writ only ran in his own central area around Paris and Orleans. Indeed, if he ventured beyond it, he risked being kidnapped for ransom for the rest of the kingdom was controlled by the rulers of the virtually independent regions such as the Duke of Aquitaine, the Duke

of Normandy or the Count of O'ver. Add to that, the lack of a common currency or legal system and the general disorder of the times. And it is easy to imagine the problems of ruling over such a fragmented kingdom." That the Gaul made about how many cheeses they are in France. It's extraordinary when you think of the difference between England and France in the 10th century. We had a common currency all through England, one currency, one set of laws. Very different than France. So French history differs from our history because of circumstances. Many of those circumstances can be attributed to geography. We're all European, French and English people. This we don't look different. We are the same, except we're not quite the same. And we're not quite the same because history divides us and history divides us because geography divided us. I've got to stop in a moment. I'm enjoying this too much, I really should stop, but I just, I'm finished with this.

So a recap, one, French unity is a modern political concept derived from the French Revolution. Two, yet even given that France at heart remains divided certainly between the old lines of the languages of the Langue D'oil and the Languedoc between the north and the south of France. And thirdly, French borders, east, north and south have been fluid borders, right up until 1945, but French history is important. It's important because of the effect of French history upon Europe. Napoleon in particular, who has influenced modern Europe enormously because of the ideas of the French Revolution, has affected the globe, the world. France is a leading European country. And that is without saying anything about the quality of French culture in music, in drama, in literature, in philosophy, in all sorts of ways, France is central. You can't have Europe without France. You can't, I would argue, have the world that we live in without France. There's much for us to look forward to in the weeks to come. And I'm looking forward to talking about France at length. And from now on, the talks will be chronological, beginning with Roman Gaul and ending with Macron. And I hope the talks will prove informative, I think that's important. I hope they will also prove combative in the ways that some of you'll think, that's nonsense, I disagree fundamentally with what you say. That's part of what adult education about. But above all, I hope they're going to be fun. And I love this quotation from the American historian, who I love, Alan Axelrod and Axelrod wrote this in his forward to "A History of America." "History," says Axelrod, "is fun. It should never be approached like a dose of medicine, but like a big bowl of ice cream." I think that's fine from one ice cream lover to another. I think that's fantastic. So join me next week, which is going to be on a Thursday to look at because of holidays on Monday and Jewish holidays meet me next Thursday, same time when we will look at Roman Gaul. So another bowl of lovely strawberry ice cream will await us all.

Q & A and Comments

– Oh, that's nice of of people, saying thanks for coming back. Oh, Margaret, you ask,

Q: "How many languages are in France? I believe I'm right that the government does not allow local language dialects to be studied."

A: That's now not true. It was true, it isn't anymore. They had to give in to the reality.

– Oh no. Margaret said, "Oh, I put this in later. She said, you've now elucidated it." Go go. Well, I've elucidated it a second time. Michelle, "Lots of dialects are still spoken in France. Breton, Alsacien, Provence and Basque." Ah, now, sorry, I'll be a bit sort of academic. Breton and Provence Sal are not dialects. They're separate. Well, hang on. Breton and Basque are not dialects. They're separate languages. Breton is a Celtic language. Basque is a a very odd language on its own. Alsacien is a German language, that's true, and Provence Sal is a French language. Yes, yes. All business and government ministry has to be in French. Yes, it you are, you're absolutely right.

– Oh, that's Erica, "Loved you all from Armenia." I read that first of all as America, that's fantastic. "Loved you all from America. I don't miss a lesson." Oh, Erica, that's wonderful.

– Harriet writes "A massively large country, very humorous. A single province in Canada, Ontario is far more than 500 miles in every direction." Yes, I know, I know. Canada is very, very large. I can't think of anything else to say. I've got things buzzing in my head about size and history, but I think I'll leave that. Who says, Harriet, again, "And thank you Britain for laying the groundwork for an ungovernable Canada with provinces and territories amassing for themselves or sharing most of the real powers of a modern country, minus some foreign affairs, defend and cross water transactions. And who would want those?" Yes, always blame the British at some– It's we have a lot to be blamed for.

– Ruth. "I was told that a lot of the common market agricultural budget went to Germany where they had very small farmers." Yes, that is also true. But the main thrust of the agricultural policy was French. But it applied elsewhere. But it was French, it was the problem.

– Joan says, "I had a French teacher in high school who said that the last person speak proper French without bastardization was de Gaulle." Oh, I think that probably says more about her hero worship of de Gaulle. I have to say de Gaulle is one of my heroes. I think de Gaulle is absolutely fantastic. I met a lady who was a, worked for Britain in the far east on an island which was a condominium ruled half by France

and half by Britain. And she had to translate into English a speech by de Gaulle. And she knew de Gaulle spoke perfect English, but he refused to speak it. That was lovely. That's de Gaulle. So there she is translating for him, and she was petrified. She was quite young. And after she'd done the translation, de Gaulle came up to her because he'd found out that she, like he, had a child with medical problems and she said he was the most delightful man she'd ever met. And the other British officials couldn't believe that de Gaulle was so friendly on that occasion.

- Alfred and Eyona say, "The French desire to manage growth of otherwise natural systems is reflecting difference between English and French gardens." Oh, now that's a really, really good point. "The French desire to manage growth of otherwise natural systems is reflecting in the difference between English and French gardens." You're absolutely right. The French gardens of Lutra in the 17th, 18th century, these very formal gardens were disliked eventually by the English. And we go in for, well the more natural gardens. How, what an interesting thought that is. I've never had that thought before.

- Mona. Oh that's the, she says, "I like your tie." Well my tie was pinched for my son tonight 'cause it was a new shirt. I wanted a decent tie. So this is my son's tie. That, oh, thank you Barbara. That is really a nice comment to me. Thank you, because that's what I hope, I always hope my language is accessible and I know it's quite tricky, particularly if I'm talking to Americans because we use words in different ways and I can use phrases which may not. Please if I use something that you don't understand, ask. Because I'd be mortified if...

- "By the way, my cousin has a museum of languages in Paris called Mundolingua, maybe of interest you and others," but says Barbara, it is. How interesting. I didn't know that. And Jonathan says that well known phrase, "Britain and America, two countries separated by common language." Absolutely right.

- Jennifer says, oh, well that's nice. Thank you Jennifer. Mona. "The relationship of language, the culture of a country is my favourite subject. The French are obsessed with the purity of their language, which is hard to maintain in this technological society we live in now." Yes, it is. And you get into this weird, although you see the Celtic languages, like Welsh for example, are, use create a Welsh word very often for some of the modern technology, the French tend rather more simply to adopt. And that's what they don't like, to adopt an Anglo-Saxon word. And they use the phrase Anglo-Saxons mean England or Britain and America. So if I use Anglo-Saxon when talking about the French, they mean Britain and America.

- "In French-speaking Canada, they still do only reluctantly accept English words in the language." Well, yes, that, but the same is true

in France as well.

Q: "Why did the French Republic begin with the Gaul?"

A: Ah, well, and "will there be a sixth Republic?," Margaret. That is, those are such good questions. They're fascinating, and I will come to that. My, in brief, my own view is that de Gaulle brought the revolution to an end with the Fifth Republic. I think it was uncertain even up to de Gaulle what France was as a modern state. "Will there be a sixth Republic?" Well, if there is, I don't think there will be. I don't think there will be because we in the Fifth Republic has managed to go from left and to right, right to left. Presidents, Mitterrand as president broke the cycle. And so there, I don't think there needs to be a sixth Republic. The Fifth Republic can cope with change in ways that earlier republics couldn't. The reasons for it all, we will come to in due course.

– Now I don't use visuals. If I use visuals and illustrations and pictures, it simply confuses the issue for me. and I think for everybody else.

– Laura. There's lots of books with plenty of pretty pictures in. I will make sure you've got maps, but I don't think you need a modern picture of Charlemagne or anything like that.

– What does Susan– Susan, "Your comments on the United States are being led me to ask of you and the Lockdown University will consider a few lectures on the English Civil War, the King and Oliver Cromwell." Well, I'm always keen to talk about English Civil war. I began by being a, because I was taught by Victorians be a strong royalist. And I've since become a very enthusiastic supporter of Cromwell as well, because I think Cromwell was an interesting man. We could do a Cromwell today.

– Phil says "Solidarity forever remained an anthem of the labour movement through the middle of the 19th century. The idea behind this song gave right a later workers, more fiercely, the trade union uprising in Poland. Absolutely solidarity beginning in 1980." Yes, excellent point. James.

Q: "Has the 17th century Puritan revolution affected England in a way as significant as the French Revolution has France? And have we simply forgotten and internalised its changes?"

A: Yes, is the answer to the question, and what it did was to create a parliamentary monarchy in Britain, a democracy. So foundations of modern democracy. It is why, although American democracy is different from British, it is why Anglo-American democracy is not European democracy, which is an Napoleonic democracy. And that was the basic problem between Britain and the rest of the EU. It would be, as

Churchill once said, "It will be easy for Britain to become a further state of the United States, but it is very difficult for us to be a country within the EU because our whole basis of democracy is bottom up in Britain and in America. And it's top down in the Napoleonic concept of democracy." That's a big, big question.

Q: "Where does Corsica fit into the picture?"

A: Well, sorry, I shouldn't said, Corsica has a language which is Italian based as well. But the problem in Corsica is that Corsica wants independence from France. And so language has become a political issue in Corsica and there's been difficulties in Corsica, which perhaps don't get so reported in the English speaking world. But the situation is not an easy one for the French government to deal with.

– Oh, Margaret, "My family traces back to the Capets." Oh, well I need to bow.

– Kel says, oh yes –

Q: "Do you know Norman Davis's Vanish Kingdom?"

A: Yes, I do. It and yes, you are right. It does have an excellent treatment of Burgundy. That wasn't the book I was referring to because there is a separate book on Burgundy and I'll put that on my book list and due course.

– Oh, thank you. People said they enjoyed it. That's very good because I've been suffering from a very bad cold today. And I had to go to bed off because, you know, I do this at half past five. I went to bed at two o'clock, went sound asleep. My wife came in at half past four and I panicked because I thought it was half past five. And I was going to miss, I was missing the beginning of the talk. So I did have an hour to have a bath, change and get my head into gear. Oh, that's nice.

– Peter says, yeah, and that's nice and that he "hadn't thought about the disparity between the two countries." No, it's always interesting. Comparisons are difficult but important. Yes, and Muriel, you've made a really important point and we will come to that in due course. "France and its history is important to North America, particularly Canada. Well particularly to the United States actually, because if we had lost, that is to say if Britain had lost the seven years war ending in 1763, all your Americans would now be French. And good luck with that. And the fact that we won meant that you remained Anglo-Saxon and not French. And the fact that you won also led of course to many English people going to Canada. More English people going to Canada than French people went to Canada from what became the United States, thus ensuring that Canada remained Anglo-Saxon as well. So the defeat of the French, now's very interest, 'cause unlike myself living in Quebec. The Quebecois are very committed to the French language as

seminal source of their culture." Yes, that that's absolutely true. Language is central to culture. It's when, as in Corsica, it's being used as a political weapon that it can become difficult. And I understand that, I understand about Quebec and the politics of that and we will come to that when we come to de Gaulle as well, when he spoke in Quebec.

Q: "What system of laws?"

A: Well, I'll talk about that. Well basically the laws were very different in different parts of France. And it's only with the code Napoleon, both the civil code and the criminal code that we have one set of laws. But the Napoleonic civil and criminal codes are taken on the bares and Napoleon's army across Europe. It is why in legal, speaking as a lawyer, why law is different in America and other parts of the world, which were British, Australia and Canada than they are in Europe. When I read law at Oxford, I never ever looked at French or European law. But you were quite allowed to quote American law or Australian law. There was one case in Australia that came out whilst, I can't remember now, this is 50 odd years ago. There was a case that was society in Australia, which changed English law and we had to learn that, but, and we also had people coming to teach us. Oh, can I tell a story? When I was at Oxford doing law, we had one term, a visiting professor from Harvard and we were all told we had to turn up. He was very, very prestigious man. And we all had to turn up to his lecture. So we all religiously went to this lecture and basically couldn't understand a word that he was saying. It was way above our heads. And he told us that before we came back for his second lecture, we had to read the following cases and it was a huge list and we never had lists like that given to us normally. And the second lecture, we all turned up again and he asked people at random, students, undergraduates to explain various of these cases. And they all said, "oh, I'm awfully sorry," very English. "I'm awfully sorry, but I haven't actually read it, professor." And somebody else said, "Well, I did try, but I never quite got round to it." And he got so angry. He asked one of the Dons, one of the academics from the university, one of the staff to answer, and they said, "Awfully sorry, I haven't read it." He was furious and stormed out. And that was the last we saw the professor from Harvard, which is a difference between English and American university education. We, none of us would've survived at Harvard. That's quite sure.

– No, thank you, Susan, I like no comment.

– Oh, Harriet, "Way bottom up top down in West France. France's said to have an imperative economic planning system. England, a declaratory of planning system and Canada in interrogative planning system." Wow. That is fascinating, I've never come across that. I take it, Harriet, you are an economist. I'd have to, or our town planner. and a planner perhaps. What an interesting comment that is. It's really been great

tonight because not only have you asked questions, which I'm happy to try and answer, but you've made really interesting comments and comments that one has to think about. I'm really grateful for that. So thanks very much for joining me. See you all, I hope, next Thursday when we're in Roman Gaul.