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We invite you to an open lecture
by **PROF. SIMON HOROBIN**
(Magdalen College, Oxford)

on
**WHEN DID MIDDLE ENGLISH END?
LATER THAN YOU THINK!**

to be held online on **May 13th 2022 at 1 p.m. CET.**

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Since the 1870s, scholars have recognized three major periods in the history of the English language: Old, Middle and Modern English. Deciding when Middle English begins and ends, however, has prompted considerable uncertainty, because of its transitional status. In an important paper published in 1992, Professor Fisiak considered the status of Middle English in histories of English, raising the question of whether it could be said to exist at all.

In this paper I want to consider this question from the perspective of the shift from Middle to Modern English, a change which is linked with the establishment of a written standard and the “purging of grosser provincialisms” – the elimination of the pronounced dialectalisms that mark Middle English writing. According to this narrative, the emergence of a prestigious London standard prompted members of the rural gentry, like the Norfolk Paston family, to drop their socially disadvantageous provincialisms in favour of those of the nascent standard. The success of this standard was further assured by William Caxton’s decision to adopt its forms for his printed editions, rather than the ‘brode and rude’ English of his native Kent. Reconsidering the data offered by these sources, I shall question the evidence for standardization they offer, and consider why scholars have stuck so resolutely to this narrative despite the abundance of conflicting evidence.

