Why is it spelled that way? A ghotiun* expedition

There are a variety of ways that a word can come to have a significant difference between spelling and pronunciation, and often more than one has affected a given word:

Why	For example
When the spelling was set, it matched the pronunciation reasonably, but the pronunciation moved on (one way or another) and the spelling didn't.	hate, head, heat, heart, daughter, laughter
The spelling was set using a non-phonetic convention that had arisen because of pronunciation shift.	colour, metre
The spelling was altered to match standards of another language held in higher esteem at the time.	queen, fiend
The spelling was altered for reasons related to its printed form: legibility in the Gothic script, ornamentation, distinction between other words spelled the same way, availability of specific letter forms in type faces (including misconstrual of substituted characters).	son, Menzies
The spelling was altered to match its etymology, or what was thought to be its etymology, and the pronunciation didn't change.	debt, people, island
The spelling was altered by mistake or ignorance, as for instance when set by typesetters whose first language wasn't English.	ghost
The spelling was altered to match etymology, or just by mistake, and the pronunciation changed to match it.	schedule, fault
The word was borrowed from another language and not respelled, and the pronunciation was adapted to English pronunciation.	yacht, yoghurt, sauna, ski
The word was borrowed from another language and partially modified or respelled, and is pronounced under the influence of English phonotactics.	analyse, creation
The word was borrowed from another language and not respelled, and the pronunciation was kept as in the source language, or as close as possible to it.	corps, ballet
The word was borrowed from another language and respelled or transliterated to match the standards and/or pronunciation of the time it was borrowed, and then the standards and/or pronunciation changed.	Genghis Khan
The word was borrowed from another language and transliterated by conventions taken from a third language that matched a pronunciation of the source language at one time but didn't match by the time the word was borrowed and don't now either.	physic
The word was borrowed from another language and transliterated suitably, but is typically mispronounced by analogy with the pronunciation of words taken from other languages.	Beijing
The word was borrowed from another language and the spelling retained, but the pronunciation has commonly been changed to match standards from a third language.	bruschetta
The word – whether Anglo-Saxon or loan – is written in a way such that it could be pronounced as it originally was, but the pronunciation has changed, perhaps by analogy with other words that aren't pronounced just as they're spelled.	vacuum, sew
Nobody's completely sure exactly what the heck happened. Sometimes language change is capricious.	busy

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* "fishing": *gh* as in *laugh*, *o* as in *women*, *ti* as in *motion*, *u* as in *busy*, *n* as in *think*

450	449	*Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Frisians move into Britain and take over. Local Celtic language loses.*
500		
550		
600	597	*St. Augustine of Canterbury begins conversion of English by baptizing King Ethelbert of Kent. Latin becomes smart investment.*
650		
700		
730		Ecclesiastical History of the English People *(Venerable Bede)*
750		
800		
850		
871		*Alfred becomes King of Wessex and rallies English against Scandinavians.*
900		
950		
991		*Olaf Tryggvason invades. English get butts kicked at Maldon.*
1000		

Example of Old English:

On angynne gesceop God heofonan and eorðan. Seo eorðe was soðlice idel and æmtig, and þeostra wæron ofer ðære nywelnysse bradnysse; and Godes gast was geferod ofer wæteru. God cwæð ða: Gewurðe leoht, and leoht wearð geworht.

Some highlights:

Sounds it had that we don't:
- y, ʏ, x, ɣ, ç; true long/short distinction; k and h before some consonants

Sounds we have that it didn't:
- phonemic v, ð, ŋ, ʒ

Letters it had that we don't:
- æ, ð, þ; a different character for w that looked rather like p
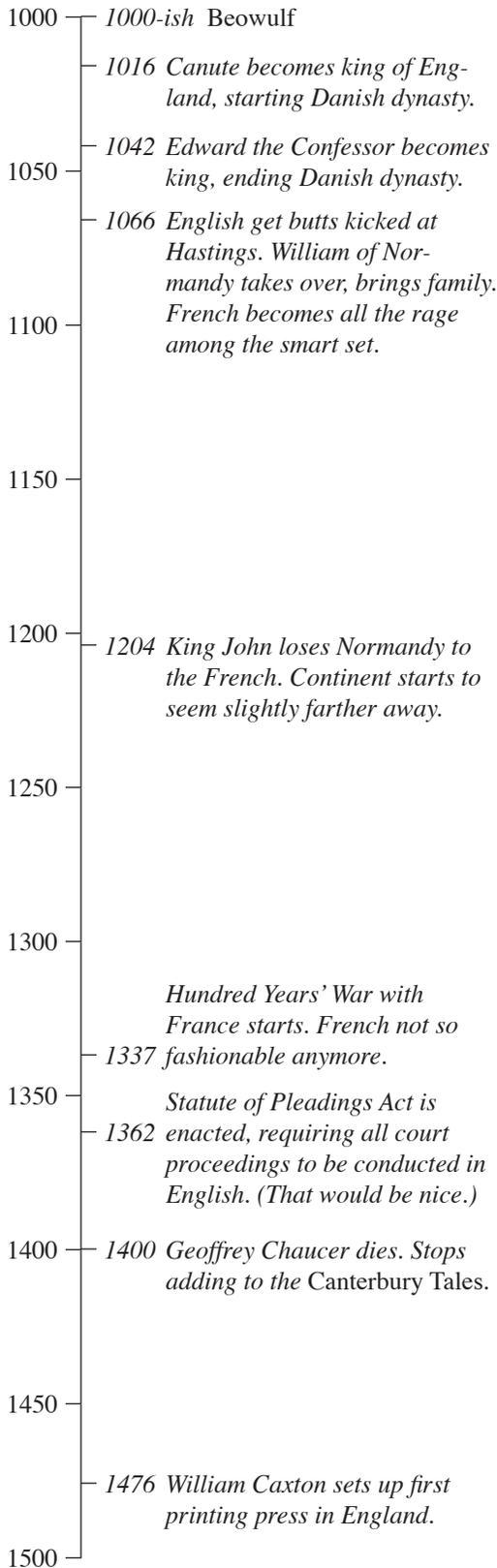
Letters we have that it didn't:
- j, q, u (as distinct from v – but note that v was the original shape for what is now u)

Inflections it had that we don't:
- 3 genders (m, f, n) and 4 cases (nominative, accusative, genitive, dative)
- several classes of each gender of noun, each with its own inflection patterns
- dual number in pronouns
- many more "strong" verbs, with productive "strong" inflections (new words could be inflected according to them)
- agreement of adjectives with nouns and inflection of adj.s for definiteness
- use of infinitive for passive (*heo heht hine læran* "he ordered him to teach" = "he ordered him to be taught")
- more common use of subjunctive and in more circumstances
- much more common use of impersonal verbs: e.g., *swa me þyncþ* "so [it] seems to me" (from which "methinks")
- preference for parataxis (indication of relation through juxtaposition) rather than subordinate clauses
- freer word order and more inversions
- double negatives and double superlatives

Inflections we have that it didn't:
- articles (an, the) – OE could use demontratives, but those were more emphatic
- heavy use of auxiliaries in verb phrases (have, would, etc.) – OE used these less and had fewer of them, and consequently used the two main tenses (present and past) to cover more (e.g., simple past to cover pluperfect)
- standard post-verbal (or post-auxiliary) negative – OE used pre-verbal *ne* and formed contractions that way (e.g., *nille* "will not," *næfþ* "has not")

Middle English

1000	*1000-ish* Beowulf
	1016 Canute becomes king of England, starting Danish dynasty.
1050	*1042 Edward the Confessor becomes king, ending Danish dynasty.*
	1066 English get butts kicked at Hastings. William of Normandy takes over, brings family. French becomes all the rage among the smart set.
1100	
1150	
1200	*1204 King John loses Normandy to the French. Continent starts to seem slightly farther away.*
1250	
1300	
	Hundred Years' War with France starts. French not so fashionable anymore.
1337	
1350	*Statute of Pleadings Act is enacted, requiring all court proceedings to be conducted in English. (That would be nice.)*
1362	
1400	*1400 Geoffrey Chaucer dies. Stops adding to the* Canterbury Tales.
1450	
	1476 William Caxton sets up first printing press in England.
1500	

Example of Middle English:
In the first made God of nought heuen and erth. The erth forsothe was veyn withinne and voyde, and derknesses weren vp on the face of the see. And the spirite of God was yborn vp on the waters. And God seid, "Be made light," and made is light.

Some highlights:
What changed in vocabulary:
• A large number of words were taken from French. There was also some Scandinavian influence.
What changed in spelling:
• þ, ð were dropped in favour of *th* (although þ was retained in some common words such as þe and þat)
• æ was dropped
• The OE shape of *g* (ʒ) became a distinct character from *g* and stood for [j], [x], [ç] – ultimately became *g* or was misconstrued as *z*
• A new shape, *u*, for the vowel [u] (then written as *v*), was imported and the two shapes were used interchangeably for [u] and [v]; the old character for *w* was replaced with *w*
• [ʃ] was represented by *sh* rather than OE *sc*; [dʒ] was represented by *g* or *gg* rather than *cg*; *c* could stand for [s]; *o* was sometimes used for [u], and *ou* for [u:]
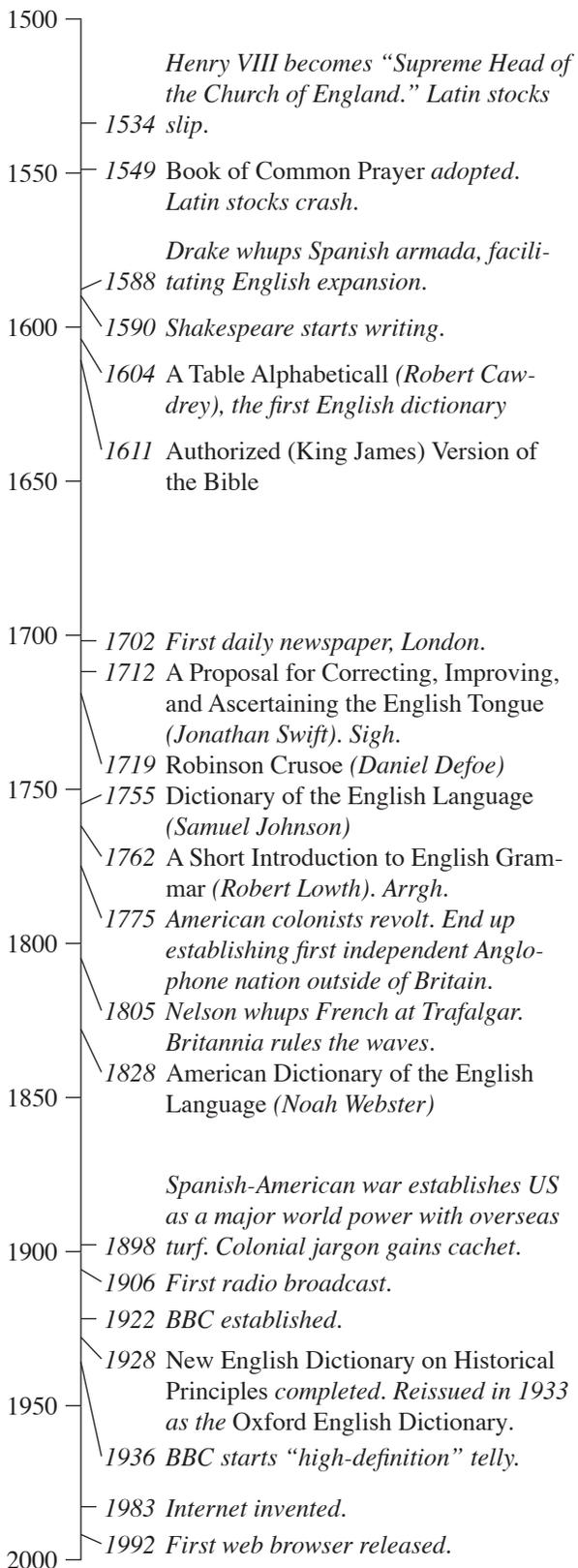*What changed in sound:*
• [v] became phonemic, rather than just a positional variant of [f]
• [ɣ] became [w]
• [ʒ] became phonemic
• A qualitative distinction emerged in mid-height long vowels ([ɛ]/[e], [ɔ]/[o])
• Unstressed vowels fell together as [ə], written *e* or sometimes *y*
• [y] and [ʏ] became [i] and [ɪ] or [e] and [ɛ]
• [a:] became [ɔ:] (but not in the North; compare "home" and "hame")
• [æ:] became [ɛ:] and [æ] became [a]
• [h] was lost before consonants
• [w] and [v] were lost in some contexts, and [tʃ] was lost in unstressed endings (*-lic* became *-ly*)
• The final *n* in inflectional endings was dropped
• [f], [s], and [θ] were voiced in some contexts
• There were assorted changes in diphthongs
• There were several changes in vowel length, including lengthening before some consonant pairs, lengthening in open syllables, and shortening in closed syllables, unstressed syllables, and syllables followed by two unstressed syllables
• Final [ə] was often dropped
What changed in grammar:
• Thanks to sound changes (due to lazy tongues) as well as to influences from French and Scandinavian, noun and verb inflections were greatly reduced and simplified
• Adjectival agreement and definite/indef. distinction were reduced, then lost altogether
• Grammatical gender was lost
• Most noun inflections fell together, and a few things were generalized: *-s* became universal for the singular genitive, and *-s* also became universal for the plural genitive and was applied to most nom/acc plurals
• Word order became more fixed
It would be a mistake to characterize ME as a unitary, consistent language. There were many dialects, and it changed considerably over 400 years.

Early Modern English

1500

Henry VIII becomes "Supreme Head of the Church of England." Latin stocks slip.

1534

1550

1549 Book of Common Prayer *adopted. Latin stocks crash.*

Drake whups Spanish armada, facilitating English expansion.

1588

1600

1590 *Shakespeare starts writing.*

1604 A Table Alphabeticall *(Robert Cawdrey), the first English dictionary*

1611 Authorized (King James) Version of the Bible

1650

1700

1702 *First daily newspaper, London.*

1712 A Proposal for Correcting, Improving, and Ascertaining the English Tongue *(Jonathan Swift). Sigh.*

1719 Robinson Crusoe *(Daniel Defoe)*

1750

1755 Dictionary of the English Language *(Samuel Johnson)*

1762 A Short Introduction to English Grammar *(Robert Lowth). Arrgh.*

1775 *American colonists revolt. End up establishing first independent Anglophone nation outside of Britain.*

Modern English

1800

1805 *Nelson whups French at Trafalgar. Britannia rules the waves.*

1828 American Dictionary of the English Language *(Noah Webster)*

1850

Spanish-American war establishes US as a major world power with overseas turf. Colonial jargon gains cachet.

1900

1898

1906 *First radio broadcast.*

1922 *BBC established.*

1928 New English Dictionary on Historical Principles *completed. Reissued in 1933 as the* Oxford English Dictionary.

1950

1936 *BBC starts "high-definition" telly.*

1983 *Internet invented.*

1992 *First web browser released.*

2000

**Example of Early Modern English:**
In the beginning God created the Heaven, and the Earth. And the earth was without forme, and voyd, and darkenesse was vpon the face of the deepe: and the Spirit of God mooued vpon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

Some highlights:
Changes from ME to EModE were for the most part fairly small and gradual. This is even more the case for changes between EModE and ModE.
Biggest change from ME to EModE:
The Great Vowel Shift! Over a period of a couple of hundred years, the long vowels shifted, though not all at once and not to the same degree everywhere. The general end results (change between ME and current English) may be depicted as follows:
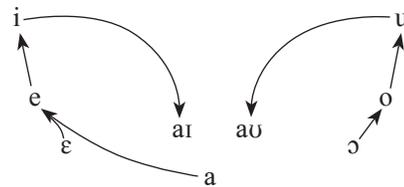
There wer also changes to short vowels (including shifting of [a] to [æ]) and to dihpthongs, but they were less dramatic.
Some other things of note:
- Printers fixed spellings more consistently, but they fixed it according to ME textual usage rather than current pronunciations
- The imported type from the continent forced the use of *y* for the few remaining instances of *þ* (giving *yᵉ* and *yᵗ* as short forms for "the" and "that")
- In the 18th/19th centuries, *j* became a separate character from *i* and *v* from *u* rather than in each case there being two forms for one letter than had two sounds, one a vowel and one a consonant (with each form usable for either sound)
- Some words were respelled on the basis of etymology, accurate or misconstrued
- Some respelled words changed pronunciation on the basis of the new spelling (e.g., *faut* became *fault*, and the *l* came to be pronounced)
- Other spelling pronunciations also took hold, e.g., [ɪŋ] for *-ing* although [ɪn] had been standard even in the most proper educated use
- The sound [x] was dropped or changed to [f]
- Grammatical prescriptivism wrought many changes, some based on Latin, some based on "logic" and often a misunderstanding of the functions and origins of the construction in question; "rules" about infinitives, prepositions, superlatives, and negatives, among others, were invented in the 18th century
- Many longstanding uses of words have come to be condemned, often in a mistaken belief that they are innovations
- The *-s* inflectional endings for genitives were misconstrued as coming from *his* and apostrophes were consequently inserted
- Inflected forms of strong verbs changed variously and not altogether consistently
- Many new words were added