

## The Middle Ages

### Key points

The centuries between the collapse of the Roman Empire and the late 1400's is called the Middle Ages or the Medieval period. In both Ireland and Britain, the most important development during this period was the way in which the Normans gradually extended control over large areas. If you were able to travel back in time to the Middle Ages and were able to fly over the countryside in a plane you would probably notice large areas of forest, lots of small country villages, large open fields divided into strips, no fences, great stone castles, large and very impressive looking churches and monasteries, a small number of towns and cities surrounded by stone walls and perhaps if you looked closely enough, Robin Hood!!

### Learning Objectives:

In this Unit you are expected to know the following:

- What is meant by **feudalism**?
- What life was like in one of the great **stone castles**?
- How a person trained to be a **knight**?
- What it was like to be a monk in a **monastery**?
- The life of a **serf/peasant** living on a manor.
- The life of someone living in a town or city.

### A lord living in a castle

You are **Lord John de Lacy**

- You are a very powerful person
- You own a large amount of land
- You had knights and foot-soldiers to protect you

You live in a great **stone castle**

- Main building called the **keep**
- Walls are very thick
- Keep 4-5 storeys high
- Area around keep called courtyard
- Outer wall surrounded by a **moat**
- **Drawbridge** used for security
- Special spiked gate called a **portcullis**

## Your **living area**

- Lord and family lived on top floor
- Also had a private chapel
- Very narrow **spiral stairs** to reach top
- Very narrow windows – very cold there
- **Solar** was warmest room – faced south.

## The **Great Hall**

- Important **banquets** held there
- Two huge open fires there
- Large **tapestries** hung on walls
- Soldiers also sometimes slept there

## Your **pastimes**

- You held great **banquets**
- Entertainment provided by **jesters** and **musicians**
- You also went **hunting** for deer
- In the summer you organised **tournaments**

## The Lord as a **judge**

- Courts held in the Great Hall
- Lord acted as judge
- Dungeons in basement of keep
- Prisoners held in dungeons
- Serious crimes punished by death

## Your greatest fear

- Castle could come under attack from enemies
- A **siege** could last for weeks
- Weapons such as **battering-ram** and **siege tower** used
- Might be forced to surrender if you run out of food

## A monk in a medieval monastery

You are Brother Francis

- Joined monastery at age of 17
- You are a **Benedictine** monk
- The head of your monastery is called the abbot

Your vows/promises

- You followed the "**Rule of Saint Benedict**"
- Promised to have no wealth
- Promised never to marry
- Promised always to obey God and your abbot

Your typical day

- Rose very early for prayer
- Put on your brown **habit**
- Prayed in church six times daily
- Mass held every day in church
- Ate three meals in **refectory**
- Ate usually in silence
- A monk read aloud from scriptures
- All food produced on monastery farm
- Had your own job to do
- Went to bed at 8pm
- Last prayer in church called **Compline**

Your particular job

- Worked as a **scribe**
- Created beautiful **manuscripts**
- Wrote on **vellum** with special inks
- Had special room called the **Scriptorium**
- Other monks worked as bakers, cooks, librarians, on farm etc

Main parts of your monastery

- **Church** was largest building
- **Chapter house** for daily meetings with abbot
- **Almonry** where food given to poor
- **Cloisters** where you walk around praying in silence
- **Dormitory** where all monks slept

## A Serf living in the Middle Ages

You live on a **manor**

- Largest house belongs to the **lord of the manor**
- Lord's land called the **demesne**
- Rest of land rented to serfs
- All belonged to the lord of the manor

Your **home**

- Very small house
- Wattle and daub walls
- Earthen floor and thatched roof
- No chimney, hole in the roof
- Animals also kept inside

Your **work**

- Most of time spent **farming**
- Crops sown in strips of land
- All work done by hand
- Had to work 2 days per week for Lord

Your main **crops**

- Barley, wheat, oats and flax widely grown
- Mill of lord used to ground the wheat and barley
- Had to give 10% of crops to Church (**tithe**)

Your **food and drink**

- Ate a lot of bread and porridge
- Dairy products also eaten – milk, butter, cheese
- Animals killed and meat salted for special occasions
- Ale made from barley

Your **clothing**

- Everything was hand-made
- **Wool** and **linen** used mostly
- Wild berries used as a dye
- Shoes and coats made of animal leather

## Your **fears**

- Afraid of **famine** caused by a drought or a war
- Great illness also spread – **Black Death**
- Many died, especially in towns and cities

## The **Law** and you

- Local lord made all the laws
- Serfs not allowed to fish in local rivers
- Not allowed to hunt in forests
- Could be put in **stocks** for minor crimes
- Serious crimes punished by death

## Review Questions

1. Explain how feudalism worked.
2. What was chain mail?
3. What did a page learn?
4. What did a squire learn?
5. What happened during the knighthood ceremony?
6. What was a tournament?
7. What was an archer?
8. What was the main weakness of a motte and bailey castle?
9. What was a keep?
10. What was a portcullis?
11. What was a tapestry?
12. What was the Great Hall in the castle used for?
13. What were some of the main weapons used in a siege?
14. What was the difference between a serf and a freeman?
15. Describe the home of a serf on a manor.
16. Explain how the system of farming worked on the manor.
17. What was the land called the commons used for?
18. What was a tithe?
19. Name a famous Order of monks?
20. Who was the Abbot of the monastery?
21. What were the main vows taken by monks?
22. What was the almonry in a monastery?
23. What was the scriptorium?
24. What was the Chapter house?
25. What were the cloisters?
26. What were some of the main religious services that took place in the church?
27. What was a town charter and what did it say?
28. Why were towns surrounded by high walls?
29. What happened at the town gates at night?
30. Who had to pay tolls in order to get into towns?
31. How did some streets in towns get their names?
32. List five different types of craftsmen that you might find in a town in the Middle Ages
33. What was a guild and what power did it have?
34. What happened to a boy when he became an apprentice?
35. What was a journeyman?
36. How did a person become a master craftsman?
37. Why was fire such a danger in Middle Ages towns?
38. What was a curfew?
39. Explain what the Black Death was
40. How was the problem of the Black Death solved?

## Answers

1. A king was not able to control all the land himself, so he gave large pieces to men who were called Lord's. These lords promised to always obey the king and to provide knights to protect him if a war broke out.
2. It was iron rings linked together and worn by soldiers to protect them from arrows.
3. A boy was called a page at the age of seven and spent most of his time with the lady of the castle learning good manners and how to read and write.
4. At the age of fourteen a page became a squire and learned how to fight on horse back, how to wear armour and how to use weapons such as lances, swords and shields.
5. He fasted for twenty-four hours and then went to the church where he was given his own special sword and spurs by the lord in a special ceremony and after this he was ready to fight when required to do so.
6. It was a competition or a mock-battle between two knights on horse-back in which they tried to knock each other off with a lance.
7. Soldiers who used bows and arrows. Some used a cross-bow.
8. It was made of wood so that meant it could be burned down easily.
9. It was the main building in the castle in which the lord and his family lived. Usually 4-5 storey's high with battlements on top where guards kept watch during daytime.
10. It was a special iron spiked gate that could be dropped easily and quickly if enemies managed to get across the drawbridge.
11. It was a large piece of hand-woven cloth that was specially decorated and was usually hung on the wall of the great hall.
12. It was used for special feasts and also as a place where the lord acted as a judge and collected taxes.
13. Siege tower, mangonel and battering ram.
14. A serf was not free and even had to ask permission from his local lord to marry or travel outside the village. A freeman could move about freely and paid money rent to the lord for his land.
15. The walls were made of mud and wood and the roof was made of straw. No windows and only a hole in the roof for a chimney. Very smoky and smelly because animals were kept inside at night. Very little furniture.
16. Each person was given strips of land and the main crops grown were oats, barley and wheat. Every family kept some farm animals and a large common field was used for grazing these animals.
17. It was one large meadow and was used by the serfs of the village as grazing land for all their animals.
18. It was the money or the crops (10%) that the serfs had to give to their local church each year.
19. Benedictines who were founded by Saint Benedict.

20. The abbot was the monk who was in overall charge of a monastery and all monks had to obey him at all times.
21. Promise to obey abbot (obedience) to own no possessions except your own clothes (poverty) to never marry (chastity)
22. The place where the very poor and the sick could come for help.
23. The part where special manuscripts (hand-written books) were produced on calf-skin called vellum and where special inks and colours were used.
24. The place where the abbot had daily meetings to discuss the running of the monastery and to deal with problems that may develop. A chapter from the rule book was read and that is how it got the name.
25. This was a covered walkway in the centre of the monastery which surrounded a garden.
26. Daily mass, matins in the morning and vespers in the evening.
27. Towns were given charters by the king to have their own mayor and to select a special council to run the town or city.
28. To protect them from attack.
29. All town gates were closed at night and opened at dawn.
30. Traders who wanted to set up stalls in town markets had to pay a special toll before they got in.
31. Streets were named after the main activities that were carried out there. For example, Winetavern Street in Dublin
32. Tanner, goldsmith, baker, cooper, tailor.
33. Each craft had its own guild and the guild made sure proper standards were kept as well as the proper prices. Also looked after old and sick members.
34. He went to live with a master-craftsman to learn his trade for 7 years. He did not get paid but was given food and a place to live.
35. A journeyman had completed 7 years training and could then travel from town to town in search of paid work.
36. He had to produce a masterpiece for his guild to inspect and if it was passed he could then set up his very own workshop.
37. Most houses were built of wood and had thatch roofs.
38. The order given at night to put out all fires in towns.
39. A horrible disease caused by fleas which lived on rats and caused the death of one-third of the population of Europe.
40. A huge clean-up of all the major towns and cities.