

Medieval Town Planning

Introduction to Middle Age

- The medieval or middle age is a period of European history from the 5th century through the 15th century.
- The period followed the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476, and preceded the Early Modern Era.
- It is the middle period in a three-period division of history: Classical, Medieval, and Modern.
- During this time, there were key advances in society, government and religion.
- The medieval period can be divided into the Dark Ages, the High Middle Ages and the Later Middle Ages, the period which preceded the Renaissance.

Introduction to Middle Age

- The time span between fall of the Roman empire till the start of renaissance is termed as DARK AGES as no great construction or development was carried out during this period.
- Economy was rooted in agriculture and the feudal system was the new order.
- Merchants & craftsmen formed guilds to strengthen their social & economic position.
- Wars among the rival feudal lords were frequent.

Feudalism of Medieval Times

- Feudalism continued to develop, reaching its height during this period. Since there was little unity or regional boundaries outside of the large cities, the feudal system began to form to give this societal climate a basis for governmental structure.
- Under the feudal system, individuals were bound to serve a superior. The king was at the top with the nobles, barons, lords and knights below him.
- In return for service, individuals received protection from their superiors and in return would provide men to fight if the need arose.
- Most people lived in manors in feudal days. It included castle, huts and fields.

Manor Houses



Crusades of Medieval Era

- **Following the rule of Charlemagne, Christianity spread throughout Europe which served as a unifying force for the continent.**
- **A major part of medieval history were the Crusades. Following the split of the church and the expansion of the Christianity, the Crusades were launched to defend Christianity from Islam.**
- **Thousands of Europeans traveled to Jerusalem to wage war with the Islamic forces, to settle the area and to regain the Holy Land.**
- **For a period of time, their quest was successful; however, with the fall of Acre in 1291, the Crusades effectively ended. In total, the Crusades lasted more than 200 years.**

Crusades of Medieval Era

- While tens of thousands died in the Crusades, Europeans were enlightened to many new technologies and developed many new trade routes.
- Improvements in navigation were discovered and new items such as silk, gunpowder and navigation aids were introduced. As a result of this, the Age of Exploration was possible.
- Much positive came from the medieval times, but the period was not without problems.
- Population explosions caused poor sanitary conditions which led to the Black Death where nearly half of Europe's population died.
- Much enlightenment could be found in the Church, but there was much injustice done in the name of religion.

Trade in Middle Age

- A new class emerged during the Middle Ages; the merchant.
- The growth of trade and the merchant middle class went hand in hand with the growth in towns.
- Town populations swelled during this period, particularly after the Black Death (1348 – 1350).
- Trade routes grew, though roads remained poor and dangerous, so most goods were transported by water.

Trade in Middle Age

- Towns were built on trade, and the elite of towns were the merchants.
- Merchant guilds controlled town government, though they often clashed with craft guilds for power.
- Merchants needed stability for trade, so they supported the king and the establishment of a strong central government against the rule of individual nobles.
- The king, for his part, encouraged the growth of towns and trade.
- Town charters became a major source of royal revenue. Eventually the growth of towns and guilds led to the breakdown of the manor-centered feudal society

Development of New Towns

- The collapse of Roman civilization saw the end of their urban planning, among many other arts.
- Urban development in the Middle Ages, characteristically focused on a fortress, a fortified abbey, or a Roman nucleus, occurred "like the annular rings of a tree" whether in an extended village or the center of a larger city.
- Since the new center was often on high, defensible ground, the city plan took on an organic character, following the irregularities of elevation contours like the shapes that result from agricultural terracing.

Towns of Early Middle Ages

- Early medieval town was dominated by church or monastery & castle of lords.
- For protective measures, towns were sited in irregular terrain, occupying hill tops or islands. Towns assumed informal & irregular character.
- Church plaza became a market place.
- Roads generally radiated from church plaza & market plaza to gates with secondary lateral roadways connecting them.
- Castle was surrounded by wall & moat as a protective elements.
- Irregular pattern in planning was devised to confuse enemies; as enemies unfamiliar with town.
- Open spaces, streets, plazas developed as an integral part of site.
- Streets were used for pedestrian while wheels were restricted to main roads.
- The city of middle ages grew within the confines of the walls.
- While the population was small, there was space in the town, but when it increased the buildings were packed more closely and the open spaces filled.
- Result was intolerable congestion, lack of hygiene and pestilence.

Early Medieval Towns



Noerdlingen & Carcassonne

Categories of New Medieval Towns

- Medieval new towns in Britain and elsewhere can be placed in two broad categories
- **Planned or Planted settlements** built in accordance with a development plan
- **Adaptive or Organic towns** that grew gradually over the centuries as the need arose.

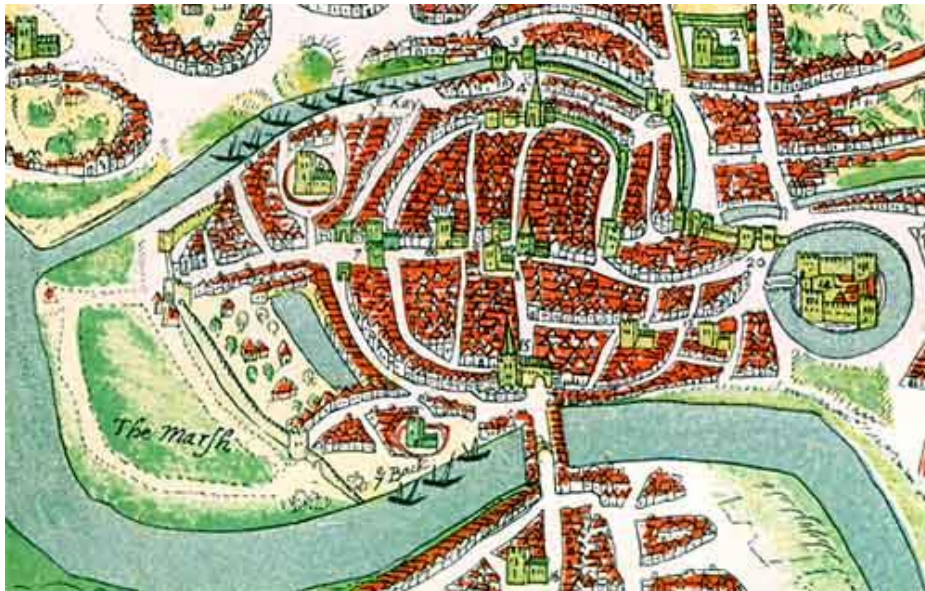
Planted New Towns or Bastides

- New towns of late 13th and early 14th centuries are also known as bastides.
- A **bastide** is a fortified town.
- They were built mainly in the south of France in the Middle Ages.
- Bastides were built mainly between 1229 and 1373.
- Today, there are about 400 bastides.
- They all have a central square, and a rectangular street layout.
- On the market square, the houses have arcades.
- They were usually built in places that were easy to defend, such as the top of a hill or on a plain.
- Newton, Novus, Burgus, Nova Villa, Villeneuve, Neustadt, etc are examples.

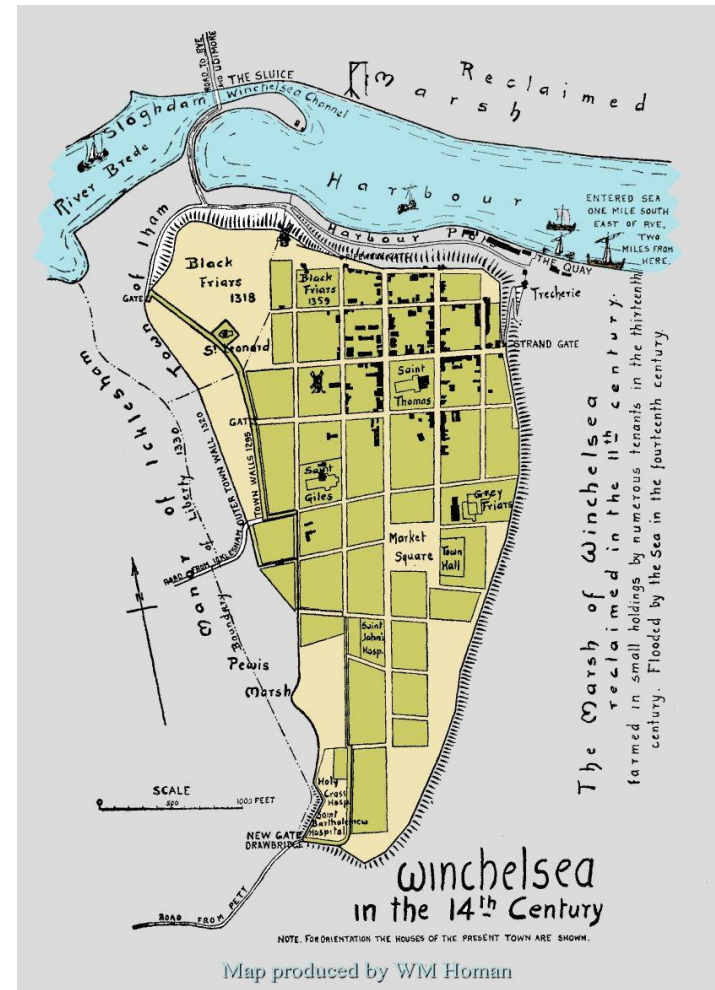
Layout Features of Bastides

- The town boundaries were first established first with stakes and then by wall and moat, demarcating the shape as nearly rectangular as site topography would permit.
- Then street pattern was set out as a rectangular grid with main streets 25' wide, minor roads 16' and 8' lane at the rear of the house plot.
- Commonly used plot size was 72x24 feet.
- Lessees covenanted to build their houses within a stipulated period of two years and delayed development was fined or plot forfeited.
- Ground rents varied according to location of plot in market or residential area.
- Except in very rare cases, the church was not on the central square
- The main feature of all bastides is a central, open place, or square. It was used for markets, but also used for political and social gatherings.

Layout of Bastides



Bristol and Winchelsea



Layout of Bastides



Chichester & Monpazier

Layout of Bastides



Creon & Aigues Mortes

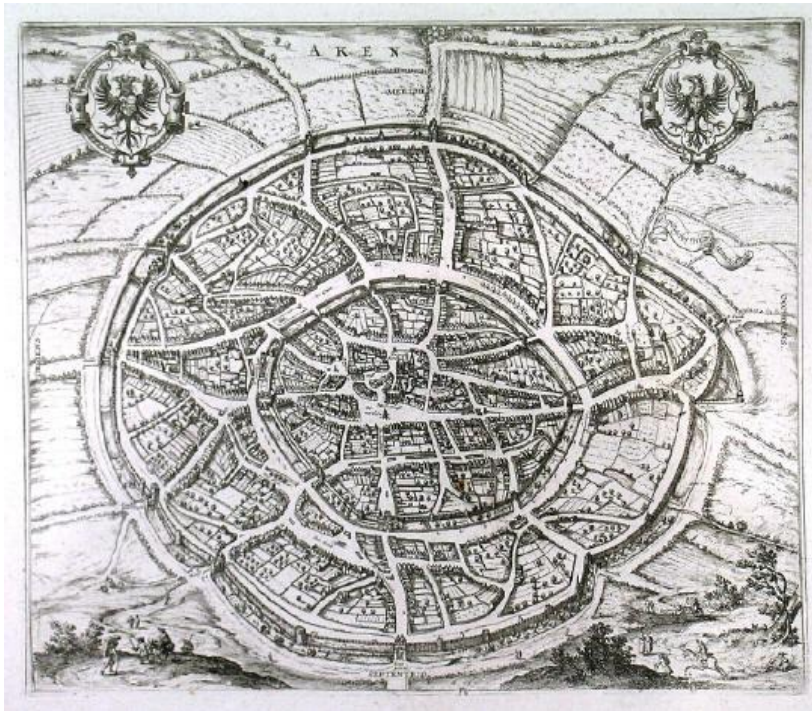
Market Place



Adaptive Towns of Middle Age

- These Medieval towns tended to grow around areas where people could easily meet, such as crossroads or rivers.
- Their shape was circular rather than rectangular and in star shape.
- Towns needed more water than villages, so a nearby water supply was vital.
- Rivers would provide the water used for washing and drinking and they were used for the disposal of sewage (if it had not been simply thrown into the streets).
- Village people came to towns to trade therefore those who were in charge of a town had to do what was needed to ensure that their town was safe.
- Many towns had large fences built around them and the gates of these fences were locked at night to keep out undesirables.
- Cities such as York and Canterbury had city walls that served the same purpose - but a town would not have had enough wealth to build such an expensive protection.

Adaptive Towns of Middle Age



Aachen & Bruxelles

Adaptive Towns of Middle Age

- The adaptive town showed little evidence of planning.
- Its shape was circular rather than rectangular
- The disposition of its buildings, streets and spaces appears illogical and untidy.
- Streets conformed to no readily comprehensible system, were generally narrow and seldom kept for long to a straight course or a constant width or a regular building line
- Their direction changed restlessly at times slightly, at times abruptly at time curving gradually with the contours at times going steeply against them.
- Near circumferential walls , away from main roads buildings were few and far between with single storey houses on large plots and some wealthy families or religious communities in large houses in extensive grounds.
- Land near centers was most in demand and buildings might rise four or more storey high each storey overhanging the other.
- Buildings stood close to each other along the street giving a sense of continuity and leaving no draughty gaps, access to back land was often via narrow passage under archways.
- These streets had a practical advantage of breaking the force of cold and rainy winds and offering a measure of protection to the passerby.

Streets of Adaptive Towns



Adaptive Towns of Middle Age

- The market place lacked regularity of outline and symmetry in the placing of buildings
- It was formed of from widening of a main street or junction of streets or from a central open space set aside for the purpose
- It was occupied by town halls, lawyers and other offices, shops and houses
- Several streets and paths from all quarters of town led to the place their entry seemed to cause very noticeable interruption in the building frontage.
- This sense of enclosure was especially appropriate for the place that was the venue for so many community functions
- The medieval citizens were not conscious of being deprived of places of amusement like theatres, baths, they set great stores in civic centers, religious processions and public meeting of all kinds.

Adaptive Towns of Middle Age

- A successful town attracted many merchants to it.
- Many **towns** were owned by a lord and it was in his interest to ensure that his town was popular with merchants as they paid tax.
- The more merchants in a town, the more tax a lord could collect.
- As many people could not read or write, the system was open to abuse and corruption. This is why many people in **towns** wanted to get a **charter**.
- A charter gave people in a town certain rights that were clearly stated in the charter that town had. Many charters gave **towns** the right to collect their own taxes thus removing corrupt sheriffs from doing so.
- It was also common for a town to ask for its own law court so that legal problems could be settled quickly.

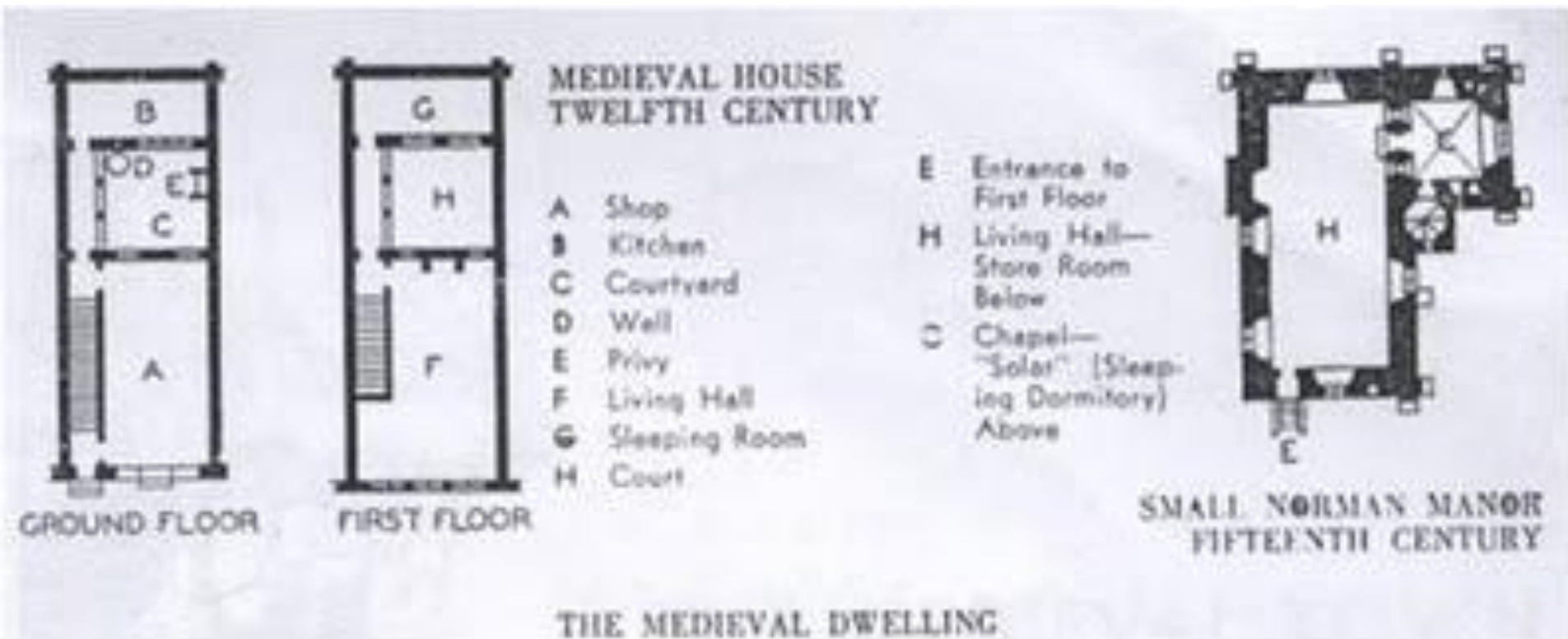
The Medieval Dwelling

- The medieval dwelling was conceived as an individual fortress.
- The average dwelling was two storey in height.
- The work- room and storage Were on the first or basement. Sometimes kitchen was also located here.
- Living , dining & sleeping took place on the second floor.
- Masonry was the usual construction , although wood frame filled with Wattle & clay & roofed with thatch for comparison, a small manor house is shown.
- It contains a ' hall' & cooking were perforated on this floor.
- A dormitory or solar was located in the tower above the chapel.
- A drain pipe was imbedded in the wall for disposal of waste.
- The window had no glass and were protected with shutters.
- Manor houses were extended in size and formed the nucleus of villages in many cases.

Medieval Houses



The Medieval Dwelling



City Life in Medieval Town

- As homes were made of wood, fire was another danger in a town or city.
- Walking in a town at night could also be dangerous.
- Though towns had a curfew (a time when everyone had to be in their homes) no town had a police force to deal with those who broke the law.
- No town had street lights - the only choice was candles but in a wooden city or town, these 'street lights' could prove disastrous.
- Building in a Medieval town was expensive as land cost a great deal.
- That is why many Medieval houses that exist today appear odd in that they have a small ground floor, a larger second floor and an even larger top floor as builders built up and out. This kept the cost down.

Streets of Medieval Towns

- Before Edward I all repairs to streets were the responsibility of adjacent householders.
- After Edward's time town councils began to take over more responsibility.
- New roadways were often built directly on top of the old with little attempt to clear it away.
- Thus repairs never lasted long. There was also the possibility that a citizen would build his section higher than his neighbour. Because of this practice street levels rose and rose. In London the original Roman roads are buried up to 20 feet beneath the street level of today.
- Roads were narrow, and tradesmen and householders were constantly encroaching on them.
- Traffic moved slowly, not least because tolls at the town gates were often paid in kind (that is, with goods rather than money), causing delays and long lineups.

Public Health Services

- Sanitation was a constant concern.
- Open drain channels ran along the sides or down the centre of streets.
- Many stables opened out onto the streets and muck heaps encroached on passage. People often threw dirty water out of windows in the general direction of the drains.
- Dyers vats were particularly noxious when they were emptied into the street.
- Again the onus was on the individual householder to keep the space in front of his house relatively clean.
- In practice the only real incentive to do so was an outbreak of the plague or a visit of the King.

Public Health Services

- Towns were dirty places to live in. There was no sewage system as we would know it today. Many people threw toilet waste into the street along with other rubbish.
- Rats were very common in towns and cities and lead to the **Black Death**.
- Water was far from clean as a local river would have been polluted with toilet waste thrown into it from villages both upstream and downstream.
- Therefore, as people would have used this as a source of water (they had no other choice) and because people knew little about health and hygiene, disease was common.
- Life expectancy could be short. Life for a poor person in a town or city was described as "nasty, brutal and short".