

Medieval People Titles, Positions, Trades & Classes

Introduction: The Medieval Feudal System

Life in the Medieval Castle was governed by the pyramid-shaped Feudal System. This was based on the belief that the land belonged to God - but that the Kings, who ruled by Divine Right, managed the land and used it as they wished. The Kings needed the good will and support of the Nobles and Knights so they granted them lands in return for their military services. The Nobles and Knights would in turn grant some of their lands to Freeman. Life lived under the Medieval Feudal System demanded that everyone owed allegiance to the King and their immediate superior. Everyone was expected to pay for the land by providing the following services:

- Work days - completing any chores required
- Providing trained soldiers to fight for the King
- Providing equipment - clothes and weapons - for the soldiers

Feudalism was based on the belief that the land belonged to God - but that the Kings, who ruled by Divine Right, managed the land and used it as they wished. However, under the Feudalism pyramid the King was answerable to the Pope. The Pope, as God's vicar on Earth, had the right to intervene and impose sanctions on an unjust King. Under the feudalism pyramid the Pope had the power to pronounce judgment against a King, depose a King, forfeit his Kingdom, put another King in his place or excommunicate a King. The power and pronouncements of the Pope played a major part in the History of England. The Pope declared the Norman Invasion as a Holy Crusade and declared his support of William the Conqueror against the claim of King Harold.

- At the top of the Feudalism Pyramid was the King
- The King claimed ownership of the land
- The King granted the land to important nobles - these nobles then pledged their loyalty by swearing to serve and protect the king
- The king also granted land to the less powerful military men (the knights) who were called vassals
- The vassals also agreed to fight for the king in exchange for their land
- The land was worked by the peasants or serfs. They belonged to the land and could not leave without permission - the bottom of the Feudalism pyramid.

The pyramid of power which was the Feudal system ran to a strict 'pecking order'. The order which the Medieval Feudal System was as follows:

Royalty

King

A king ruled large areas of land/country by divine right. To protect his land from invasion, the king gave parts of it to local lords, who were called vassals. In return, his vassals promised to fight to defend the king's land. The king reported to God and then the pope (and sometimes that was negotiable).

Queen

A female sovereign or monarch. The wife or consort of a king.

Prince

A non-reigning male member of a royal family.

Princess

A non-reigning female member of a royal family.

Queen Mother

A queen dowager who is mother of a reigning sovereign. The widow of a former king who is also the mother of the reigning sovereign.

Regent

A person who exercises the ruling power in a kingdom during the minority, absence, or disability of the sovereign. (For example: While Richard the Lionhearted was away fighting in the Crusades, his brother Prince John was left as regent.)



Clergy



Pope (Bishop of Rome)

The bishop of Rome is head of the Roman Catholic Church. In Western Church, “pope” applied especially to the Bishop of Rome since the time of Leo the Great (440-461) and claimed exclusively by them from 1073. The pope is believed by his church to be the successor to the Apostle Peter. He is bishop of Rome and lives in a tiny nation within Rome called the Vatican.

Bishop

Bishops were the leaders of the church, serving under the pope. Most bishops were noblemen. Bishops supervised the church's priests, monks and nuns and administered its business. In many parts of Europe the church owned vast areas of land and commanded a large number of knights. In the early Middle Ages, it was not unusual for a bishop to lead his own knights into battle.

Arch Deacon

An ecclesiastic, ranking next below a bishop and having charge of the temporal and external administration of a diocese, with jurisdiction delegated from the bishop.

Abbot

A man who is the head or superior, usually elected, of a monastery.

Prior

An officer in a monastic order or religious house, sometimes next in rank below an abbot.

Dean

The head of the chapter of a cathedral or a collegiate church. A priest in the Roman Catholic Church appointed by a bishop to take care of the affairs of a division of a diocese.

Priest

Priests provided spiritual instruction and conducted religious ceremonies in local, or parish, churches.

Monk

Monks and nuns were men and women who gave up their possessions and left ordinary life to live in monasteries and convents. They lived very simply, could not marry and devoted themselves to prayer, study, and helping the poor. They also served as doctors.

Members of special male groups whose lives are devoted to the service of the church, especially in Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Orthodox denominations. A MONK is properly a member of a monastery, under a superior; he is bound by a vow of stability, and is a co-owner of the community property of the monastery. Since the Reformation, MONK and FRIAR have been used as if they were the same. A FRIAR is, however, strictly speaking, a member of a mendicant order, whose members are not attached to a monastery and own no community property.

Friar

Friars were traveling preachers who lived by begging and spread the teachings of St. Francis of Assisi. A member of a mendicant order, whose members are not attached to a monastery and own no community property.

Cleric

A member of the clergy.

Vicar

A word from the Latin "substitute" it was a clergymen paid to act in the true parish priest's stead. A vicar was often very corrupt.

Barber-Surgeon

A monastic who shaved faces/heads and performed light surgery.

Chaplain

An ecclesiastic attached to the chapel of a royal court, college, etc., or to a military unit. a person who says the prayer, invocation, etc., for an organization or at an assembly.

Confessor

A priest authorized to hear confessions.

Scribe

A person who copied books by hand before the invention of printing.

Culdees

Meaning "servant of God," they were Irish/Scottish preservers of old Gaelic customs.

Nobility



Peerage

Hereditary titles (such as Count, Duke, and Earl), often linked to lands, powers, or responsibilities. For instance, English and Scottish peers had the right of summons to parliament. the whole body of peers; aristocracy . The position, rank, or title of a peer. A book listing the peers and giving genealogical and other information about them.

*The following titles are listed in “pecking order” from highest to lowest. Some titles are particular to a country and not “across the board.”

Viceroy & Vicereine

The governor of a country or province who rules as the representative of a king or sovereign. a person appointed to rule a country or province as the deputy of the sovereign: the viceroy of India.

Archduke & Archduchess

A sovereign prince. A title of the sovereign princes of the former ruling house of Austria.

Grand Duke & Grand Duchess

The sovereign duke of any of various European states. The sovereign of a territory called a grand duchy, ranking next below a king.

Duke & Duchess

A nobleman of the highest hereditary rank. A member of nobility; historically the highest rank below the reigning monarch. A British nobleman holding the highest hereditary title outside the royal family, ranking immediately below a prince and above a marquis; a member of the highest rank of the British peerage. In England, the title was reserved for members of the royal family.

Marquess & Marchioness

A member of the British peerage ranking below a Duke and above an Earl. Lords responsible for guarding border areas, known as "marches." In some cases, the eldest son of a Duke was known as a Marquess.

Marquis & Marquise

A nobleman ranking next below a Duke and above an Earl or Count. In some instances, used interchangeably with Marquess.

Margrave & Margravine

A member of the German nobility corresponding in rank to a British Marquess. A German nobleman ranking above a Count. Margraves were originally Counts appointed to govern frontier provinces, but all had become princes of the Holy Roman Empire by the 12th century

Count & Countess

A European nobleman whose rank corresponds or is equivalent to that of a British Earl.

Earl & Countess

A member of the British peerage ranking below a Marquess and above a Viscount. The highest title attainable by an English nobleman who was not of royal blood. Also known in earlier times as Ealdorman.

Viscount & Viscountess

A member of the peerage in Great Britain ranking below an Earl and above a Baron. The fourth level of peerage, a Viscount was a lieutenant or deputy of a Count (from "vice-count"), or the title of courtesy for the eldest son of an Earl or Marquess.

Baron & Baroness

One of a class of tenants holding his rights and title by military or other honorable service directly from a feudal superior (as a king). A vassal who served as a member of the king's great council. It was not, of itself, a title, but rather a description of the Tenants-in-Chief class of nobility.

Baronet & Baronetess

The holder of a rank of honor below a baron and above a knight. Originally English Barons who had lost the right of their individual summons to Parliament. Often these titles were sold to gentlemen willing to set up plantations in Ireland or Nova Scotia.

Knight & Dame (Lord & Lady)

Knights were warriors who fought on horseback. In return for land, they pledged themselves as vassals to the king. Only the sons of lords could become knights. Candidates for knighthood began training as pages at the age of 7, learning social graces and skills such as fencing and hunting. At 13 or 14 they became squires and began



to practice fighting on horseback. Squires served as assistants to knights both in the castle and on the battlefield. At 21 a squire could become a knight himself, kneeling before the lord of the manor to be "dubbed" on the shoulder with a sword. Kings, local lords, and knights were all part-of a ruling class that called itself noblemen.

The Lords (knights) ruled over the fiefs or manors. They rented their land to peasants who worked for them. The trained knights were bound by oath to serve the nobles who had granted them their fiefs.

The warrior (on retainer) who owed military service to his lord in exchange for payment of money, titles, and/or fief (land). Knights also aspired to the ideals of loyalty, generosity and courtesy, known as chivalry.

Vassals

(in the feudal system) a person granted the use of land, in return for rendering homage, fealty, and usually military service or its equivalent to a lord or other superior; feudal tenant. Vassals ruled lands granted to them by their king. Those lands were called fiefs. Within fiefs, a vassal acted as a local lord and could give portions of it to vassals of his own. Someone might be the vassal of one person, but the lord of another.

Noblewomen were the wives and daughters of noblemen. They were in charge of the household servants and supervised the upbringing of children. They also helped take care of the sick and the poor. In certain cases, noblewomen themselves could own land. They could inherit it from their parents or from their husbands. When a nobleman was away, his wife ruled the manor. This meant that the noblewoman, if called upon by her lord, could send knights into battle, just as a man would.

A free man who held land (fief) from a lord to whom he paid homage and swore fealty. He owed various services and obligations, primarily military, but he also advised his lord and paid him the traditional feudal aids required on the knighting of the lord's eldest son, the marriage of the lord's eldest daughter, and the ransoming of the lord, should he be held captive.

Armiger

A person entitled to bear heraldic arms.



Gentry

Wellborn and well-bred people. In England, the class below the nobility. An upper or ruling class; aristocracy. Those who are not members of the nobility but are entitled to a coat of arms, especially those owning large tracts of land.

Tenant-in-Chief

A lord or institution (the Church being most common) holding land directly from the king. All Earls were Tenants-in-Chief.

Tradesmen, Merchants

Moneyer

A person licensed by the crown to strike coins. He received the dies from the crown and was allowed to keep 1/240 of the money coined for himself.

Thane

Originally meaning a Military Companion to the King, a thane was a man holding administrative office.

Sherriff (from "Shire Reeve")

The chief administrative and judicial officer of a shire. He collected taxes and forwarded them on to the Exchequer, and was also responsible for making sure that the King's table was well stocked.

Apprentice

A boy studying a trade from a skilled master. Apprenticeship was a sort of bonded servitude in which a young boy is given to a master of a trade. The master is usually highly skilled at his job. The boy then learns the trade from the master. In return he does the master's grunt work. An apprentice had to pay a large sum of money just to start. His apprenticeship would last 7 years. Then he would become a journeyman.

Journeyman

A person who has served an apprenticeship (generally 7 years) at a trade or handicraft and is certified to work at it assisting or under another person. As a journeyman they worked for a daily wage. A journeyman could one day become a master, as long as he paid the right fees.



Master Craftsman

A person who practices or is highly skilled in a craft; artisan.

Artiffator

Maker of bows, arrows, and other archery goods.

Bowyer

Bow maker.

Fletcher

Arrow maker.



Merchant

Merchants set up businesses in the towns that began to grow in the later Middle Ages. The most commonly traded items were salt, iron, and textiles. There were also rarer items, such as silk and spices, that came from the trade with China and the Middle East. As trade grew, a new class of highly skilled crafts- people developed. These artisans produced cloth, shoes, beer, glass and other goods that required more expertise than was available on many manor farms. Other artisans cut and shaped the stones. Women plied several of these crafts, and in some, like weaving and brewing, they played the leading role. Traveling merchants brought much-desired items to small towns and villages far from the major trade routes.



Peddler

Travelling merchants who sold their goods from town to town.

Castle Workers

Court officials

Court officials or office-bearers (one type of courtier) derived their positions and retained their titles from their original duties within the courtly household. With time such duties often became archaic, but titles survived involving the ghosts of arcane duties, generally dating back to the days when a noble household had practical and mundane concerns as well as high politics and culture. Such court appointments each have their own histories. They include:



Chamberlain

An officer of the royal household responsible for the Chamber, meaning that he controlled access to the person of the king. He was also responsible for administration of the household and the private estates of the king. The Chamberlain was one of the four main officers of the court, the others being the Chancellor, the Justiciar, and the Treasurer.

Chancellor

The officer of the royal household who served as the monarch's secretary or notary. The Chancellor was responsible for the Chancery, the arm of the royal government dealing with domestic and foreign affairs. Usually the person filling this office was a Bishop chosen for his knowledge of the law. "Keeper of the barrier, secretary, usher of a law court," so called because he worked behind a lattice at a basilica or law court.

Justiciar

The head of the royal judicial system and the king's viceroy, when the actual viceroy was absent from the country.

Treasurer

The chief financial officer of the realm and senior officer of the Exchequer.

Constable

An officer of high rank in medieval monarchies, usually the commander of all armed forces, especially in the absence of the ruler. the keeper or governor of a royal fortress or castle. An officer of a hundred in medieval England, originally responsible for raising the military levy but later assigned other administrative duties

Master of the Horse

The third official of the royal household. The master of the horse is the third dignitary of the court, and was always a member of the ministry (before 1782 the office was of cabinet rank), a peer and a privy councilor. All matters connected with the horses and formerly also the hounds of the sovereign, as well as the stables and coach houses, the stud, mews and previously the kennels, are within his jurisdiction. The practical management of the Royal Stables and stud devolves on the chief or Crown Equerry, formerly called the Gentleman of the Horse, whose appointment was always permanent.

Almoner

A person whose function or duty is the distribution of alms on behalf of an institution, a royal personage, a monastery, etc.

Butler

The chief male servant of a household, usually in charge of serving food, the care of silverware, etc. a male servant having charge of the wines and liquors.

Cofferer

One who keeps treasures in a coffer. a coffer is a box or chest, especially one for valuables.

Cup-Bearer

A servant who fills and serves wine cups, as in a royal palace or at an elaborate banquet.

Dapifer

One who brings meat to the table; hence, in some countries, the official title of the grand master or steward of the king's or a nobleman's household.

Doorward

Was an office in medieval Scotland whose holders, eventually hereditary, had the theoretical responsibility of being warden of the king's door, i.e. protecting the king's property.

Falconer

A person who hunts with falcons or follows the sport of hawking. a person who trains hawks for hunting.



Gentleman of the Bedchamber

A Gentleman of the Bedchamber was the holder of an important office in the royal household of the Kingdom of England from the 11th century, later used also in the Kingdom of Great Britain. The duties of the office involved waiting on the king when he ate in private, helping him to dress, guarding the bedchamber and closet, and providing companionship.

Gentleman Usher

The Gentlemen Ushers occupied a level intermediate between the steward, the usual head, and the ordinary servants; they were responsible for overseeing the work of the servants "above stairs", particularly those who cooked and waited upon the nobleman at meals, and saw to it the great chamber was kept clean by the lesser servants. He was also responsible for overseeing other miscellaneous service, such as the care of the nobleman's chapel and bed-chambers. It was traditionally the gentleman usher who swore in new members of the nobleman's service.

Grandmaster

The head of a military order of knighthood. A person at the highest level of ability or achievement in any field.

Grand Master of the Hunt

Responsible for organizing hunts and guarding royal forests against poachers.

Groom of the Stool

The Groom of the Stool (formally styled: "Groom of the King's Close Stool to King (name)") was the most intimate of a monarch's courtiers, whose physical intimacy naturally led to him becoming a man in whom much confidence was placed by his royal master, and with whom many royal secrets were shared as a matter of course. This secret information he was privy to, whilst it would never have been revealed, to the discredit of his honor, in turn led to him becoming feared and respected and therefore powerful within the royal court in his own right

Herald

A royal or official messenger. In the Middle Ages, it was a herald who arranged tournaments and other functions, announced challenges, marshaled combatants, etc., and who was later employed also to arrange processions, funerals, etc., and to regulate the use of armorial bearings.

Pursuivant

A heraldic officer of the lowest class, ranking below a herald. An official attendant on heralds.

Intendant of the Civil List

The Intendant of the King's Civil List is responsible for managing the material, financial and human resources of the King's Household. He is assisted by the Commandant of the Royal Palaces, the Treasurer of the King's Civil List and the Civil List Adviser. The Intendant of the Civil List also advises the King in the field of energy, sciences and culture and administers the King's hunting rights.

Jester

A professional fool or clown at medieval court.



Keeper of the Seal

The title Keeper of the Seals or equivalent is used in several contexts, denoting the person entitled to keep and authorize use of the Great Seal of a given country.

King of Arms

A title of certain of the principal heralds of England and certain other kingdoms empowered by their sovereigns to grant armorial bearings.

Knight

The warrior (on retainer) who owed military service to his lord in exchange for payment of money, titles, and/or fief (land). Knights also aspired to the ideals of loyalty, generosity and courtesy, known as chivalry.

Lady-in-Waiting

A lady who is in attendance upon a queen or princess.

Maid of Honor

An unmarried lady attending a queen or princess.

Majordomo

A man in charge of a great household, as that of a sovereign; a chief steward.

Page

A boy servant or attendant (as young as age 7) given to a knight to be trained for knighthood. Generally the son of nobility.

Pantler

The servant or officer, in a great family, who has charge of the bread and the pantry.

Seneschal

An officer having full charge of domestic arrangements, ceremonies, the administration of justice, etc., in the household of a medieval prince or dignitary; steward.

Squire

At 13 or 14 pages became squires and began to practice fighting on horseback. Squires served as assistants to knights both in the castle and on the battlefield. At 21 a squire could become a knight himself, kneeling before the lord of the manor to be "dubbed" on the shoulder with a sword.

Standard Bearer

An officer or soldier of an army or military unit who bears a standard. A standard-bearer is a person (soldier or civilian) who bears an emblem called an ensign or standard, i.e. either a type of flag or an inflexible but mobile image, which is used (and often honored) as a formal, visual symbol of a state, prince, military unit, etc.

Steward

The man responsible for running the day-to-day affairs of the castle when the lord was absent. The steward organized farm work and kept accounts of the estate's money. Stewards were well-paid, powerful figures in the district. "House guardian," "overseer of workmen," "one who manages affairs of an estate on behalf of his employer" a person who manages another's property or financial affairs; one who administers anything as the agent of another or others. a person who has charge of the household of another, buying or obtaining food, directing the servants, etc.

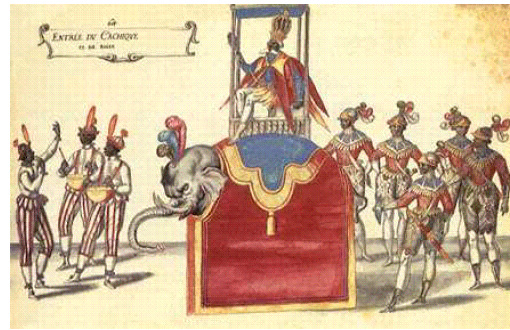


Entertainers

Entertainers

Minstrels were entertainers who traveled from town to town, often in groups. Most minstrels were singers or musicians, but some had other skills as well. They juggled, did acrobatics, or danced. Minstrels were known by different names in different parts of Europe. In

Germany minstrels were called minnesingers, in France jongleurs, in Ireland bards. The most famous minstrels were those of southern France. They were called troubadours, from the Latin word that means "to compose." Many of the love poems they composed in the local language, Provençal, are still read and admired today. The troubadours were so famous that we know 500 of them by name.



Minstrel

A medieval poet and musician who sang or recited while accompanying himself on a stringed instrument, either as a member of a noble household or as an itinerant troubadour. He lived and traveled off the largess of the aristocracy.

Troubadour

Composers of epic poems, such as the Chansons de Geste, and love songs, often sung by wandering minstrels. One of a class of medieval lyric poets who flourished principally in southern France from the 11th to 13th centuries, and wrote songs and poems of a complex metrical form in langue d'oc, chiefly on themes of courtly love. Compare trouvère.

Jongleur

French wandering minstrels (which included musicians, acrobats, jugglers, and clowns), usually from the lower class, who entertained with tales of epic battles and heroes.

Bard

A minstrel or poet who glorified the virtues of the people and his chieftains.

Gleeman

Saxon composer of songs

Mummers

Actors who re-enacted religious plays. Also used to refer to a masked or costumed merryman or dancer especially at a festival

Thespians

The ancient Greek word for an "actor," (hypocrites), means literally "one who interprets"; in this sense, an actor is one who interprets a dramatic character or personality. In the past, only men could become actors in some societies. In the ancient Greece and Rome and the medieval world, it was considered disgraceful for a woman to go on the stage, and this belief continued right up until the 17th century, when in Venice it was broken. In the time of William Shakespeare, women's roles were generally played by men or boys.

Mage

A magician.

Military

Landsknecht

A member of the infantry. Most often German, mercenary pike-men and supporting foot soldiers from the late 15th to the late 16th century, and achieved the reputation for being the universal mercenary of Early modern Europe. Landsknechts were trained in the use of the famous long pikes and used the pike square formations developed by the Swiss. The majority of Landsknechts would use pikes, but others, meant to provide tactical assistance to the pike-men, accordingly used different weapons.



Musketeers

A member of the infantry. Muskets were invented in China and were used as part of the military as early as 1368. They then made their way into Turkey and Arabia (1440), India (1519), and Spain (1534). The famous French Musketeers that King Louis appointed as his personal guard weren't commissioned until 1622, falling in the Renaissance Period of history.

Crossbow-men

A member of the infantry. The crossbow was a powerful bow whose quarrels could often penetrate shields and armor, making crossbowmen a formidable part of any army.

Longbow-men

A member of the infantry. Longbows could shoot for great distances. Longbow-men would often use their longbows to shoot flaming arrows into the enemy camp greatly increasing the destructive force of the approaching army.

Falconets

A member of the Artillery. The falconet or falcon was a light cannon developed in the late 15th century. During Middle Ages guns were decorated with engravings of reptiles, birds or beasts depending on their size: a snake for the culverin, as the handles on the early cannons were often decorated to resemble serpents. The falconet fired small yet lethal shot of similar weight and size to a bird of prey, and so was decorated with a falcon.

Bombarde

A bombarde is a large-caliber, muzzle-loading medieval cannon or mortar, used chiefly in sieges for throwing heavy stone balls. The name bombarde was first noted and sketched in a French historical text around 1380. The modern term bombardment derives from this. Bombards were usually used during sieges to hurl various forms of missile into enemy fortifications. Projectiles such as stone or metal balls, burning materials and weighted cloth soaked in quicklime or Greek fire are documented.

Trebuchet

A siege engine that was employed in the Middle Ages. It could fling projectiles of up to three hundred and fifty pounds at high speeds into enemy fortifications. Occasionally, disease-infected corpses were flung into cities in an attempt to infect and terrorize the people under siege, a medieval form of biological warfare. The trebuchet did not become obsolete until the 13th century, well after the introduction of gunpowder. Trebuchets were far more accurate than other medieval catapults.

Catapult

A catapult is a device used to throw or hurl a projectile a great distance without the aid of explosive devices—particularly various types of ancient and medieval siege engines. Although the catapult has been used since ancient times, it has proven to be one of the most effective mechanisms during warfare.

Battering Ram

A battering ram is a siege engine originating in ancient times and designed to break open the masonry walls of fortifications or splinter their wooden gates. In its simplest form, a battering ram is just a large, heavy log carried by several people and propelled with force against an obstacle; the ram would be sufficient to damage the target if the log were massive enough and/or it were moved quickly enough (that is, if it had enough momentum).

Lancers

A member of the Calvary. A lancer was a type of cavalryman who fought with a lance.



Dragoons

A member of the Calvary. The word dragoon originally meant mounted infantry, who were trained in horse riding as well as infantry fighting skills.

Calvary Archers

A member of the Calvary. A horse archer, horsed archer, or mounted archer is a cavalryman armed with a bow, able to shoot while riding from horseback.

Constable

An officer who commanded an army or an important garrison, or the officer who commanded in the king's absence.

Vintenaar

Man in charge of twenty soldiers.

Man-at-Arms (also Yeoman)

A soldier holding his land, generally 60 to 120 acres, in exchange for military service. In English history, a class intermediate between the gentry and the laborers; a yeoman was usually a landholder but could also be a retainer, guard, attendant, or subordinate official. Most yeomen of the later Middle Ages were probably occupied in cultivating the land; Raphael Holinshed, in his Chronicles (1577), described them as having free land worth 6 (originally 40 shillings) annually and as not being entitled to bear arms.

Foot Soldier

A member of the Calvary. A person who serves in an army; a person engaged in military service. A person of military skill or experience who serves and fights for pay. A person who contends or serves in any cause: a soldier of the Lord.

Sergeant

A servant who accompanied his lord to battle, a horseman of lower status used as light cavalry, or a type of tenure in service of a non-knightly character who might have carried the lord's banner, served in the wine cellar, or made bows and arrows. Sergeants paid the feudal dues of wardship, marriage, and relief, but were exempt from scutage.

Peasantry



Villein

The wealthiest class of peasant, they usually cultivated 20-40 acres of land, often in isolated strips. In medieval Europe a peasant personally bound to his lord, to whom he paid dues and services, sometimes commuted to rents, in return for his land. A member of a class of partially free persons under the feudal system, who were serfs with respect to their lord but had the rights and privileges of freemen with respect to others.

Small Holder

A middle class peasant, farming more land than a cottager but less than a villein. A typical small holder would have farmed 10 to 20 acres.

Cottager

A peasant of lower class who owned a cottage, but owned little or no land.

Commoner

Lowest class of people. A person who does not belong to the nobility. A person who has a right in or over common land jointly with another or others.

Peasant

Farm laborers of low social rank; coarse, unsophisticated, boorish, uneducated person of little financial means.

Serf

Serfs lived in small communities called manors that were ruled by a local lord or vassal. Most peasants were serfs. They were bound to the manor and could not leave it or marry without the manor lord's permission. Serfs did all the work on the manor farm: they worked the fields, cared for the livestock, built and maintained the buildings, made the clothing, and cut firewood. Men, women, and children worked side by side. Serfs had small plots of land they could work for themselves; sometimes a serf saved enough money to buy his freedom and became a freeman.

A semi-free peasant (cottagers, small holders, or villeins) who worked his lord's land and paid him certain dues in return for the use of land, the possession (not ownership) of which was heritable. These dues ("corvee"), were in the form of labor on the lord's land, averaging three days a week. Essentially a slave in medieval times.

Steward

The man responsible for running the day-to-day affairs of the castle when the lord was absent. The steward organized farm work and kept accounts of the estate's money. Stewards were well-paid, powerful figures in the district.

Bailiff

A peasant, next in importance to the steward. The bailiff was not a serf but a freeholder who owned his own land. He was in charge of giving jobs to the peasants, overseeing the care of the livestock, and taking care of building repairs by hiring skilled craftsmen to do the job.

Reeve

The bailiff's right-hand man. A peasant chosen by the other villagers. He carried a white stick as a badge of office. He supervised work on the lord's demesne, checking that everyone began on time, and ensuring that none of the produce was stolen.

Burgess

The holder of land or a house within a borough.

Labourers

A person engaged in physical work, esp. of an unskilled kind, serfs.

Hinds

Farm workers

Maid

"A virgin, a young unmarried woman," a shortening of the word maiden. A female servant, girl or young unmarried woman.

Scullery Maid

In great houses, scullery maids were the lowest-ranked and often the youngest of the female servants and acted as assistant to a kitchen maid. The scullery maid reported to the cook or chef. Along with the junior kitchen-maid, the scullery maid did not eat at the communal servants' dining hall table, but in the kitchen in order to keep an eye on the food that was still cooking. Duties included the most physical and demanding tasks in the kitchen, such as cleaning and scouring the floor, stoves, sinks, pots and dishes. After scouring the plates in the scullery, she would leave them on racks to dry. The scullery maid also assisted in cleaning vegetables, plucking fowl, and scaling fish.

Cook

The person who oversees the kitchen and prepares the food. Taken from a blending of old words meaning “bend, stoop”.

Sewer

Servant serving food at table

Servant

Servants were peasants who worked in the lord's manor house, doing the cooking, cleaning, laundering, and other household chores.

Medieval People compiled by Tammy Pattie, 2011

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