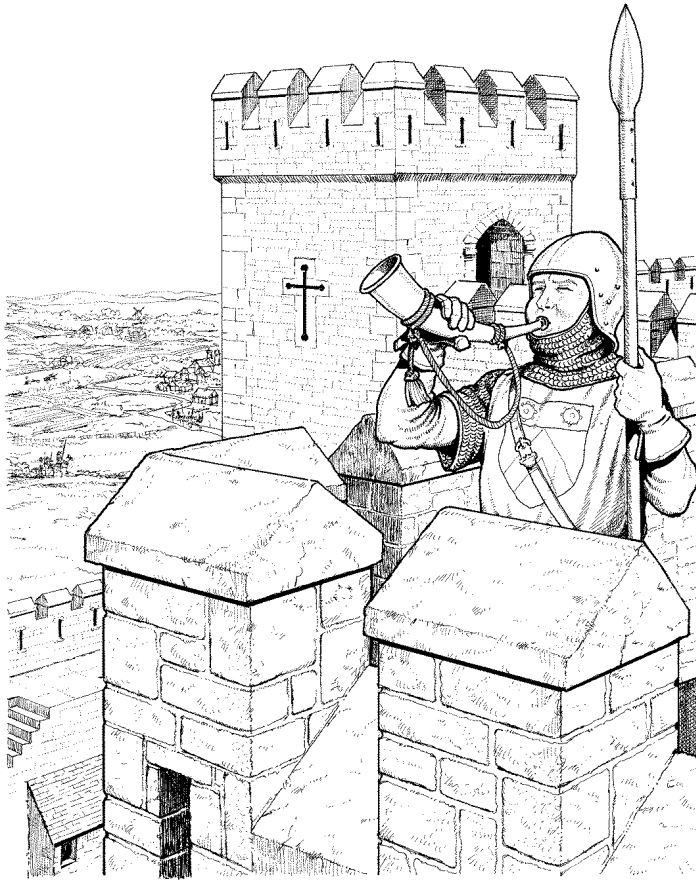


# The Rose and the Dragon



## The Rose and the Dragon

This detailed setting brief for *The Rose and the Dragon* provides information about England in 1221 and the setting of the game that you can use to enrich your characters.

### Our approach

We want *The Rose and the Dragon* to take you to another era, so we've tried to stay fairly true to history. However we've also taken some liberties and our knowledge of the Middle Ages is not perfect, so please forgive any shortcomings in accuracy. Ultimately this isn't a historical re-enactment, having enjoyable game is the main focus.

You're welcome to flesh your character out with any additional details you find about this milieu from other sources such as history books, historical fiction or Wikipedia.

## England in The Year of Our Lord 1221

### Medieval Christianity

England in the Middle Ages is Christian, and anyone who speaks against Christianity is regarded as evil. The Church has significant influence over everyday life and politics. Most people attend church every Sunday. They confess their sins to their priest at least once a year and do penance. People believe in a fiery Hell that sinners will go to. Most villages have a church, and there are also religious communities of nuns and monks who are often the children of nobility and usually live an isolated life. Pagan worship has been largely stamped out, and the Church is vigilant against its return, but some traces of pagan spiritual beliefs do remain.

### Gender

Sexism is the norm in this era, however some women do hold positions of power. In order to keep the game fun for everyone, we've placed a special emphasis on historical ways in which some women were empowered. Players who are not interested in interacting with the sexism of the culture will usually be able to avoid or ignore this theme.

### Folk magic

This is a superstitious era. Many people know magical charms to help ward off evil and bless their lives, and mix them with Christian prayers. Some people specialise in magic, and these are believed to come in two types: witches and cunning folk.

**Witches** are evil people who use magic from the devil to curse others. **Cunning folk**, on the other hand, use magic to help. They are also known as wise-women or wizards, and they can find missing things, ward off curses and use healing remedies. Some priests are suspicious that cunning folk are witches, but most people consider it normal to seek their help, and see witches are obviously different because they curse people.

In this game magic works if your character believes in it, and most people do. If your character thinks a curse could make them sick, then it will. Magic can only affect your character if they hear about it. Some cunning folk may also use potions that contain active ingredients, such as poppy seed oil to help with pain. Potions will usually have their intended effect, and some may have side-effects if you choose. Characters who use magic should describe the intended effects in character.

### Persecution of "sodomites"

We are including the persecution of "sodomites" in order to explore the drama of this aspect of medieval society. Players who are not comfortable with this theme should be able to largely avoid it. Sex between men is regarded in this time as "sodomy", a mortal sin and a crime punishable by death. Naturally this doesn't stop it taking place. However, men who actively love each other do risk persecution.

## Serfdom and freedom

Society is divided into those who work, those who fight and those who pray. The bulk of the population are “those who work”, meaning peasants. Within the peasantry there is a fundamental distinction between serfs and free men. **Serfs** are unfree peasants, bound to the land. They are not exactly slaves, but they have no freedom of movement, cannot own property and cannot even marry without their lord’s permission. Serfdom is hereditary, and the child of a serf is also a serf. However, a serf can buy their freedom by paying a fine to their lord, and many do. Others flee to towns, where they can become free by living there for a year and a day.

**Free men** are able to travel, own property and marry at will, although marrying a serf means buying their freedom or accepting serfdom. Townsfolk are all free, and fit uneasily into the social structure as they have no lord.

## Justice

People accused of major crimes such as murder and treason are brought before the King’s Court. As it happens, there is a King’s Justice present in the Great Hall on this day, **Robert de Vere**, who can decide such cases. Minor crimes fall under the authority of the local lord, in this case the **Baroness Thamesly**. People accused of a crime can be handed over to her guardsman **Darren Pole**, who will take them to the appropriate authority. For very minor crimes peasants sometimes dispense their own justice.

The accused may choose either trial by combat against their accuser (optionally using champions) or trial by jury, which usually consists of local nobles.

The punishment for crimes such as armed robbery, murder and treason is usually death. For lesser crimes the punishment may be a fine, being put in stocks or branding. Criminals may also be outlawed, which often amounts to death as you are no longer protected by the law.

## Money

There is only one coin, the silver **penny**. When paying more than one they are called “pence”, as in “I paid him four pence for this useless hammer!”

A penny coin can be cut into quarters, each called a **farthing**. Larger amount of money are all just collections of penny coins. A **shilling** is 12 pence, and a **pound** is 20 shillings – which makes it 240 penny coins.

## Gambling

Betting on dice games is a popular pastime throughout society. If your character would bet, you’re welcome to bring a set of three dice to use. Bets can be money or valuable items.

A popular dice game is **Raffle**. Everyone places their bet then rolls three dice. Three of the same number beats a pair, and higher numbers are better. If the best rolls are pairs of the same number, the highest number on the third dice is used to determine the winner. In the event of a tie another round is played, sometimes requiring everyone to add more money to their bet to stay in the game. There is also a variation of Raffle requiring more skill. Each person rolls two dice, then further bets can be made before each person rolls their third dice.

# Recent history in brief

## The Norman conquest of England

One hundred and fifty years ago England was invaded by **William the Conqueror**, the Duke of the lands of Normandy in France. His **Norman** forces defeated the **Saxon** people and William became King of England. Today most lords are still Norman, and Saxons are usually peasants. However, with time the distinction between the two peoples is becoming less clear.

## King Richard’s crusade

Thirty years ago **King Richard** led the Third Crusade to bring Christianity to the Holy Land. Richard “Lionheart” is remembered as valiant knight and noble king, and his crusade as a virtuous but expensive endeavour that required special taxes to pay for it.

## The rise of King John

King Richard died twenty years ago and his brother **King John** seized the throne of England. His rival for the throne was his young nephew **Arthur of Brittany** who died while a prisoner of King John, some say by foul murder. Arthur’s sister **Eleanor of Brittany** survived and has been kept as a prisoner in various locations around England ever since. She is said by some to have a better claim to the throne than John or his son Henry.

## Magna Carta

The English barons were unhappy with how King John was ruling and the taxes he imposed. Six years ago they marched on London and forced him to sign a charter to limit his powers and guarantee the rights of free men, which came to be called **Magna Carta** - the Great Charter.

## The Baron’s War

King John did not implement the agreements in Magna Carta, so the barons quickly began a war with the King and those lords who supported him. The **Barons’ War** raged all over England, and King John appeared to be winning until the barons invited **Prince Louis** of France to lead them. Prince Louis’s invasion turned the tide of the war. A stalemate ensued, until King John unexpectedly passed away from an unpleasant illness while campaigning.

## The boy king Henry III

By the end of the war the barons had become dissatisfied with Prince Louis. Rather than accept him as their new king they sent him packing back to France, and King John’s young son Henry was allowed to ascend the throne. **King Henry** is still only 14 years old, so the affairs of England are largely managed by his regent **Hubert de Burgh**, an old crusading companion of King Richard’s. It is now five years since the end of the Barons’ War, and many of the barons still chafe to have Magna Carta fully recognised. Some even speak of forming a parliament of lords to manage the details of ruling England rather than leaving it to the fiat of the king and his regent.

# The Barony of Thamesly

Thamesly is a small area in the county of Wiltshire in southwest England, about 50 miles west of London. Through it passes a busy road known as the Bath Road (because it leads to the spa town of Bath to the west), or the King’s Road.

## The Rose and the Dragon

One hundred and fifty years ago, Thamesly was held by a Saxon lord called **Æthelric the Dragon**. He strongly resisted the Norman conquest, but was eventually defeated by one of William the Conquerer’s knights.

This knight’s name was **Sir Reynold**, and his symbol was a rose in honour of his beautiful wife **Rousalie**. After Æthelric died, his brother **Leofric** admitted defeat, and his descendants the Ayling family are now the richest of the peasants in the village.

King William named Sir Reynold as Baron of Thamesly and granted him the land as his fief, in recognition of his victory.

Thus arose the local legend of “The Rose and the Dragon”, which has become the tale of how a ferocious dragon defeated several knights and then was tamed by a lady with a rose.

This fantastic version of the tale is enacted each year by the villagers and a lady of the manor as part of the festival of May Day.



## Rule

Thamesly is ruled by **Baroness Elaine Thamesly**, a descendant of the Norman knight Sir Reynold who conquered the area. She has under her three landed knights, who rule the northern and southern villages on her behalf, while she rules Thamesly Village directly herself.

## Features of the Barony

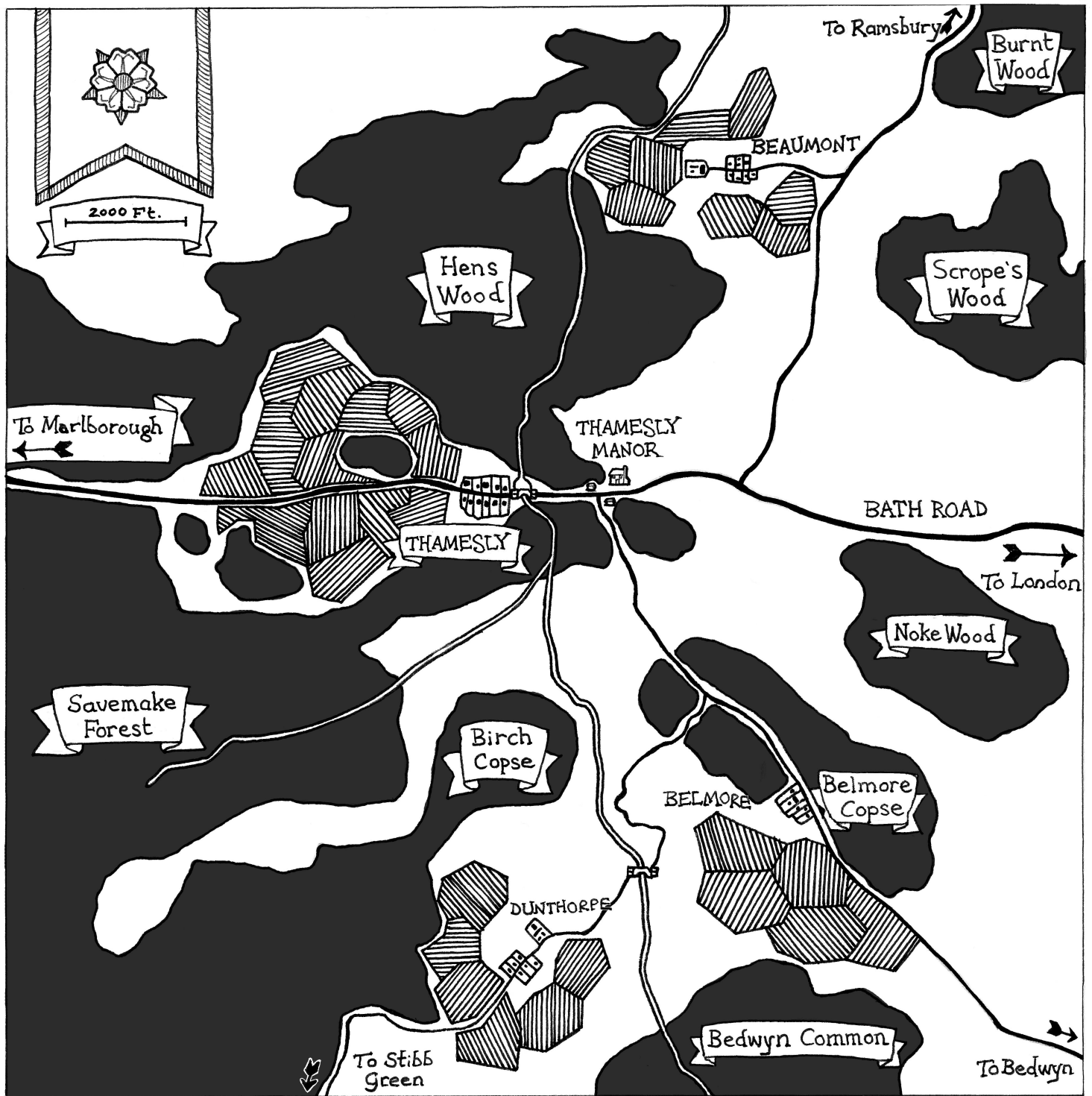
The barony lies inside the bounds of Savernake Forest. This area is a Royal Forest, so poaching or unauthorised taking of trees is a crime.

The Baroness rules from her manor house, where the Great Hall is located. The soldiers are camped out in a field to the north of the manor.

To the west along Bath Road is the village of Thamesly. The rich peasant family the Aylings have a small hall of their own along this road, where the villagers have gathered to celebrate tonight.

The people living in the Greenwood have gathered at a camp fire site in the Hen’s Wood, between the Ayling hall and the Great Hall.

# The Barony of Thamesly



Cass and Kale, Esq. Cartographers by royal appointment