



Life for ordinary people in the Middle Ages

KS3 Ages 11-14 ⌚ 4 min read

Who were ordinary people in the Middle Ages?

The **Middle Ages** lasted roughly from **1066 to 1485** in England. Most ordinary people were **peasants** who worked on farms owned by nobles and the Church. They had very little freedom and had to give a large part of what they grew to their lord. Life was hard, but it was all they knew.

Think of it like being part of a giant family business where you own none of the company but must work there your whole life.

Where and how did they live?

Peasants lived in small, simple houses made of **wood and mud** with roofs of straw or thatch. These homes had just one or two rooms and no windows—only small holes for light and smoke to escape. There was no running water, electricity, or toilets as we know them. Families shared their homes with their animals, who provided warmth in winter.

In villages, homes were clustered together near the **manor house** where the lord lived. Most people never traveled more than a few miles from their birthplace in their entire lives.

What did they eat and wear?

Ordinary people's diet was basic and repetitive. Bread, **pottage** (a vegetable and grain stew), and ale were staples. Meat was rare and usually only eaten at special times by common folk. They grew vegetables in small gardens and kept chickens or pigs if they were lucky.

Clothes were made from **wool or linen** and were uncomfortable, heavy, and rarely washed. People wore the same outfit most of the time, and children were dressed like tiny adults.

Think of it like wearing your school uniform every single day for your whole life without ever changing it.

What was their work like?

Life followed the farming seasons. Spring meant ploughing and planting; summer meant cutting hay; autumn meant harvest. People worked from sunrise to sunset and rested only on **Sundays and holy days**. They also had to spend time working on the lord's land without payment—this was called **labour service**.

Children started working at age **five or six**. Education was almost unknown among peasants, though the Church taught reading and writing to a tiny number.

Health, entertainment, and beliefs

Life was short and dangerous. Diseases like the **plague** could kill entire villages. People had almost no medical knowledge and often died from infections or childbirth complications. **Religion** was the centre of life—the Church provided hope and community.

Entertainment was limited: village gatherings, storytelling, and occasional fairs were special treats. Music, dancing, and games were simple but important for keeping spirits up.