

Dupe in the Middle Ages...

Most people got married in June because they took their yearly bath in May and were still smelling pretty good by June. However, they were starting to smell, so brides carried a bouquet of flowers to hide the b.o.

Baths equaled a big tub filled with hot water. The man of the house had the privilege of the nice clean water, then all the other sons and men, then the women and finally the children. Last of all the babies. By then the water was so dirty you could actually kiss someone in it. Hence the saying, "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water."

Houses had thatched roofs. Thick straw, piled high, with no wood underneath. It was the only place for animals to get warm, so all the pets... dogs, cats and other small animals, mice, rats, bugs lived in the roof. When it rained it became slippery and sometimes the animals would slip and fall off the roof. Hence the saying, "It's raining cats and dogs."

There was nothing to stop things from falling into the house. This posed a real problem in the bedroom where bugs and other droppings could really mess up your nice clean bed. So, they found if they made beds with big posts and hung a sheet over the top, it addressed that problem. Hence those beautiful big 4 poster beds with canopies.

The floor was dirt. Only the wealthy had something other than dirt, hence the saying "dirt poor." The wealthy had slate floors which would get slippery in the winter when wet. So they spread treesh on the floor to help keep their footing. As the winter wore on they kept adding more treesh until when you opened the door it would all start slipping outside. A piece of wood was placed at the entry way, hence a "thresh hold."

They cooked in the kitchen in a big kettle that always hung over the fire. Every day they lit the fire and added things to the pot. They mostly ate vegetables and didn't get much meat. They would eat the stew for dinner

leaving leftovers in the pot to get cold overnight and then start over the next day. Sometimes the stew had food in it that had been in there for a month. Hence the rhyme: peas porridge hot, peas porridge cold, peas porridge in the pot nine days old."

Sometimes they could obtain pork and would feel really special when that happened. When company came over, they would bring out some bacon and hang it to show it off. It was a sign of wealth and that a man "could really bring home the bacon." They would cut off a little to share with guests and would all sit around and "chew the fat."

Those with money had plates made of pewter. Food with a high acid content caused some of the lead to leach onto the food. This happened most often with tomatoes, so they stopped eating tomatoes... for 400 years.

Most people didn't have pewter plates, but had trenchers - a piece of wood with the middle scooped out like a bowl. Trenchers were never washed and a lot of times worms got into the wood. After eating off wormy trenchers, they would get "trench mouth."

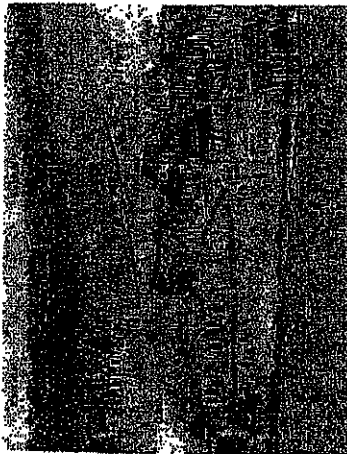
Bread was divided according to status. Workers got the burnt bottom of the loaf, the family got the middle, and guests got the top, or the "upper crust."

Lead cups were used to drink ale or whiskey. The combination would sometimes knock them out for a couple of days. Someone walking along the road would take them for dead and prepare them for burial. They were laid out on the kitchen table for a couple of days and the family would gather around and eat and drink and wait and see if they would wake up. Hence the custom of holding a "wake."

England is old and small, and they started running out of places to bury people. So, they would dig up coffins and would take their bones to a house and reuse the grave. In reopening these coffins, one out of 25 coffins were found to have scratch marks on the inside and they realised they had been burying people alive. So they thought they would tie a string on their wrist and lead it through the coffin and up through the ground and tie it to a bell. Someone would have to sit up in the graveyard all night to listen for the bell. Hence on the "graveyard shift" they would know that someone was "saved by the bell" or he was a "dead ringer."

Mind Your Manors

The manorial system was built around the lord, his lands, the peasants who worked for the lord and the main house or manor. The manor, which was often a castle, served as the heart of the manorial system. The purpose of the manorial system was to be a self-sufficient community. In order to do this the lands of the manor covered hundreds and sometimes thousands of acres. This land was used for farming, pasture for animals, hunting and for timber. The part of the land on which the manor house itself was built was called the lord's demesne (pronounced di-mane). Nearby were the stables, barns, a bake-house, cockhouse, and sometimes a windmill. There was also a chapel and rectory or priest's house a short distance away.



Everything that was needed for life was produced on the manor. From the fields came the main crops of grains, such as wheat or rye, as bread was the staff of life. The forests provided game. In most cases, however, the peasants were allowed to kill only small animals, such as rabbits. Deer and other species of larger game were reserved for the lord and his family, as hunting was as much a way of entertaining as it was a necessity.

Most of the farm animals were slaughtered in the fall since more often than not there was not enough food to feed them over the winter. The main beverages were beer, wine or cider, as water was not always fit for drinking and most of the milk was made into cheese.

The peasants of the Middle Ages were called serfs. They did most of the work on the land of the lord in exchange for protection and a right to live on the manor. They were considered to be part of the lord's property and ranked little above his sheep and cattle. A small number of people called freemen rented land from the lord and could leave the manor. Serfs could not.

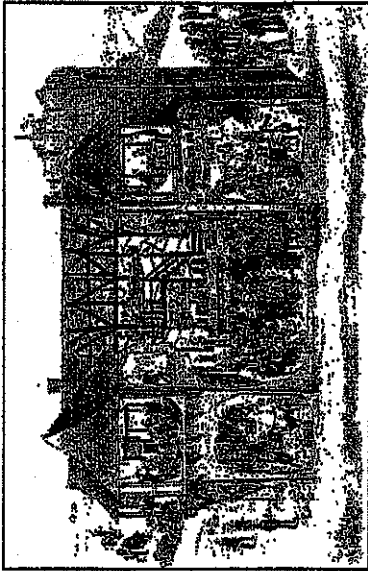
Many serfs spent their entire lives without ever leaving the manor on which they were born. The years of their lives passed, each one as the one before it, the monotony of a serf's life was broken only by war, church holidays, hunting, and athletic contests.

Life on the Manor

As you have heard already, a manor was a self-sufficient town. At the heart of the town was the lord's house. Depending on how rich he was it was a larger house or a small castle. If there were ever problems, the manor's people would run to the safety of this small castle. Outside the manor was a church. Here was where all community-wide functions would take place. Along with the church there was a blacksmith's shop and the village well. Huddled around these main structures were the peasant's houses. These were small and made of mud bricks and thatched (straw) roofs. Outside each house would be a small garden where the serf would grow pease (vegetables). When they were not working on the lord's fields they would tend this plot for

extra food. If they were really lucky they would have a pig or two or some other animal (Get this, when it was cold, the animals would come sleep in the house with the people on the straw that was their bed). In the house there would only be one or two chairs, maybe a table or bench and the straw bed that everyone slept on. Needless to say there was very little privacy.

Outside of the village were the fields. The fields were split into three sections. One section grew a spring crop, one a late-summer/fall crop, while the last section lay fallow (nothing planted so the soil could regain nutrients for the next year). Each peasant had to farm strips of land in these fields. The lord owned most of these strips; this was how he was rich (remember food and land were money back then). The serfs had small sections for themselves. The serfs would have to spend a certain amount of time working on the lord's strips each week. The amount of time would vary from manor to manor.



The final part of a manor was the mill (often by the church, blacksmith's shop and well). This was a very important building. At the mill, the Miller ground the grain into flour and also had an oven to bake bread. You had to pay the lord for this service. It was another moneymaker for the lord. Some peasants made their own small hand-driven grinders but had to be careful not to get caught with them. The mill was located on a stream so that a water-wheel could drive the grinder.

YOUR TASK

1. Design a manor. Make sure you include all the buildings, fields and everything else you think is important from above.
2. Cut off the roof of one of the serf's houses to show what is inside.
3. Show the peasant's at work. What are the men doing? What are the women doing? Add captions with explanations in them to describe the work.

10/9-All buildings are included and described. I can see exactly, with great detail what the peasants do all day. It is very clear what is the peasant's house and you have lots of detailed boxes explaining yourself.

8-All buildings except one are there, you describe what everything is and what the peasants do all day. It is clear what is in the peasant's house and most things are explained with writing.

7-Two to three buildings are missing or it is unclear what the peasant's do. You only explain a couple things in writing.
Inc-You just draw a couple buildings or people and it could be anytime, anyplace.