

**Subject** □ Junior Cycle History  
**Teacher** □ Niall Lenehan

LESSON 5  
**Life and death in the  
Middle Ages**

**Learning Outcome 3.6**

Explore life and death in medieval times.

**Learning Intentions**

1. To understand the daily lives of people in medieval times.
2. Learn about how people lived in the countryside and in towns.
3. To understand the causes of death, and fear of death, in medieval times.

**Key words - Define these**

- ♦ Feudal system
- ♦ Peasant/Serf
- ♦ Fallow
- ♦ The Commons
- ♦ Bailiff
- ♦ Guild
- ♦ Knights
- ♦ Chivalry
- ♦ King
- ♦ Motte and Bailey castle

**What was the Middle Ages?**

- ♦ The Middle Ages was the period in European history from the **collapse of Roman civilization around 500 AD** to the period of the **Renaissance which began around 1500 AD**.

**Timeline**

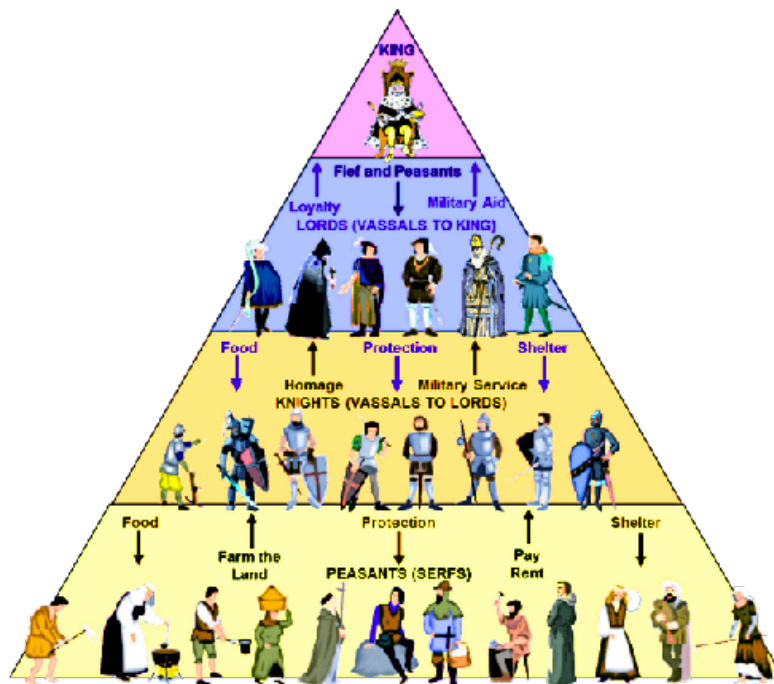
- ♦ 476 AD: Roman Empire collapses.
- ♦ **500 AD** until around **1500 AD** is known as **The Middle Ages**.
- ♦ 1350 AD: The Renaissance begins in Italy.

After the Roman Empire.....

- ♦ No one leader in Europe, but many different kings.
- ♦ Many Small kingdoms were formed.
- ♦ Result: No law and order and many wars between rival kingdoms.

**The Solution to war?****The Feudal System**

- ♦ The King
- ♦ Lords and Nobles
- ♦ Knights



# The Feudal System Pyramid of power

## Medieval Towns

- In the Middle Ages, many people lived in towns.
- They were usually built on a river or on the coast so people could trade and fish. They usually had a castle nearby.
- Towns had a list of rules called a **town charter**.
- They had **high walls** to defend against an attack.
- They had gates which were closed at sundown. Travelling merchants often had to pay a **toll**.
- Towns often contained a **high street (main street)** and a **market square**.

## A typical Medieval Town



Many houses in medieval towns and manors had **wattle and daub walls**.



### The life of a medieval peasant

Medieval peasants were also called Serfs. They belonged to the lord of the **manor**.

- The serf worked on the land for a lord.
- In return for a small plot of land, serfs worked for **free** on the lord's farm **three days a week**.
- Every year they gave **one-tenth of their crops** to the church – the **tithe**.
- Serfs lived in a **one-room cottage**.
- They needed the lord's **permission** if they wanted to **leave the town or get married**.
- They enjoyed pastimes such as **wrestling** and **cockfighting**.
- Serfs celebrated festivals at **Christmas** and on **May Day**.





## Medieval Craftsmen

Medieval Craftsmen were extremely **skilled workers**.

- They trained as **apprentices** and **journeymen** before they became fully qualified craftsmen.
- They had to produce a **masterpiece** before they could become a **master craftsman**.
- Craftsmen that worked in a similar trade set up groups called **guilds**.
- Guilds set down a set of rules for the trade.
- Craftsmen of a similar trade usually had their shops on the same street, e.g. **Baker Street**.



A medieval craftsman

## Medieval Knights

Medieval kings needed knights to maintain their empire. Only a select few became knights.

- It could take up to **15 years** to be trained as a knight.
- Young boys started their training at six or seven years of age as a **page**.
- At 14 they became a squire.
- At about 21 years of age, they became a **knight** following a ceremony called an **accolade**.
- Knights had to follow a code of conduct called **chivalry**.
- Knights wore **heavy armour** going into battle.
- They fought in religious battles called **crusades**.
- They took part in competitions called **tournaments**.



### Medieval Lords/Kings

- After the King, the Lord was the most important person in the Kingdom.
- They made sure peasants paid rents and knights stayed loyal.
- They acted as judges.
- His work was often carried out by an Estate Steward.

### The Lady of the Castle

- Lived a tough life compared to the Lord.
- Often married as young as 14.
- Sometimes their marriage to the Lord was arranged.
- In charge of domestic duties.
- In charge of upbringing of their own children and foster children.



#### Recap Exercise 5.1

- Q1. When did the middle ages begin and end?
- Q2. Why was the feudal system brought in? Who was on each level of the feudal system?
- Q3. What was a tithe?
- Q4. How did a craftsman become a master craftsman?
- Q5. What were the stages of a knight's training?

### Medieval Castles

The most important people in medieval society were **Kings and Lords**.

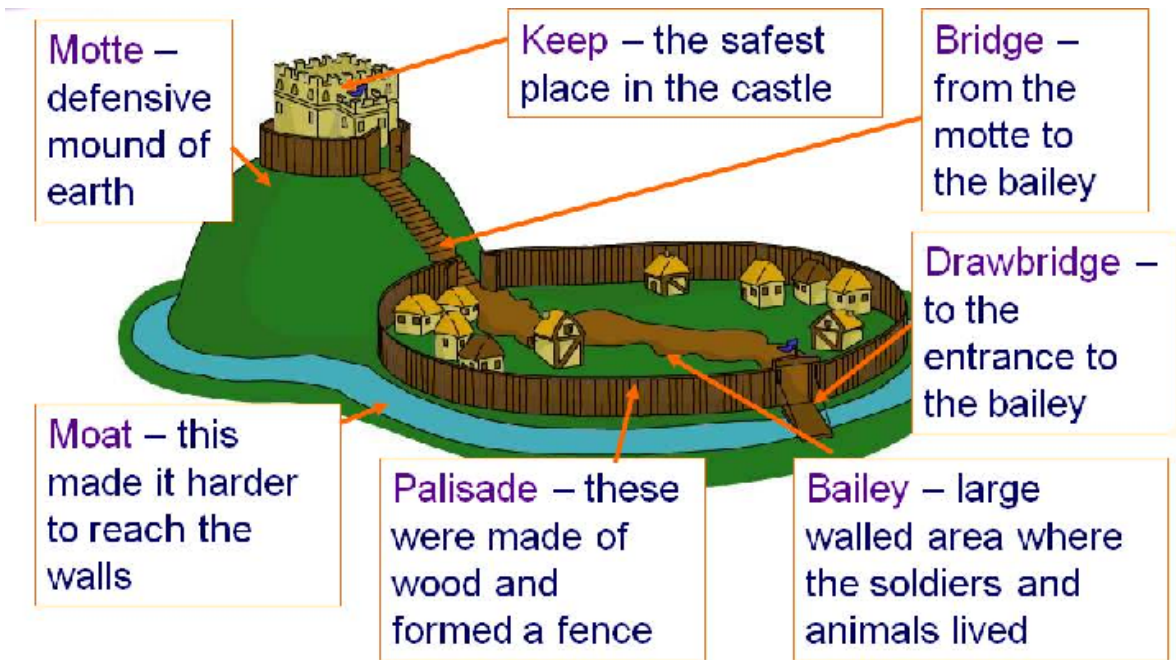
They lived in medieval castles. The castle also housed:

- The King and Lord's families
- Knights
- Servants

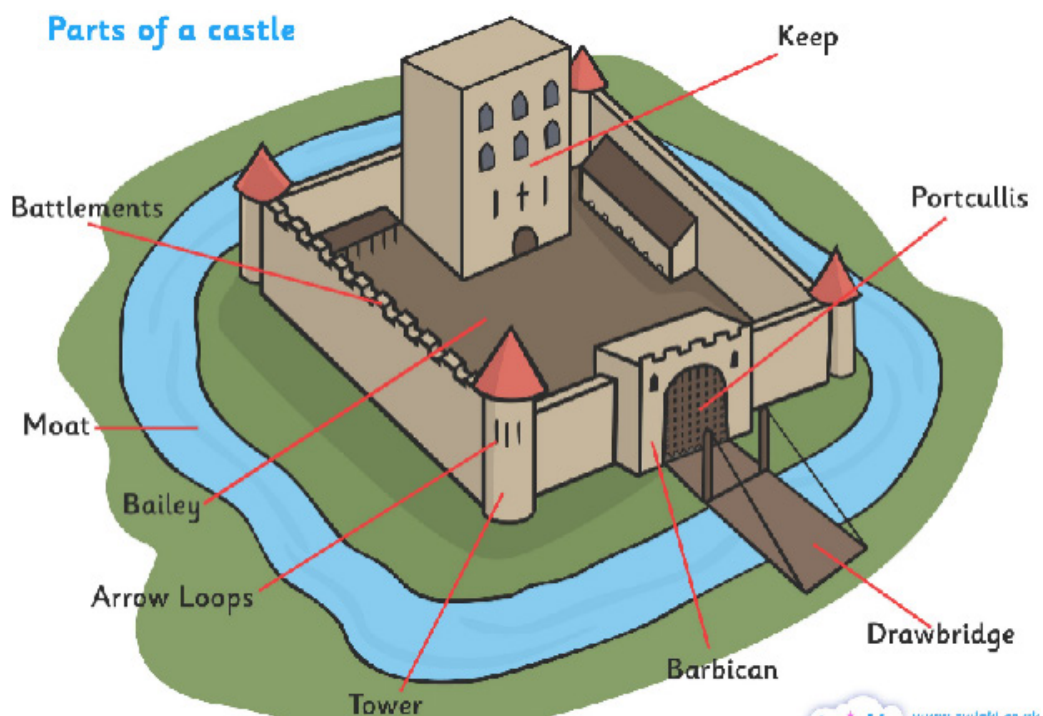
There were two types of castle:

1. **Motte and Bailey Castles**
2. **Stone Castles**

### Motte and Bailey Castle



### Stone Castles







**Trim Castle today**

### Attacking a medieval castle

When rival kingdoms went to war, they often attacked each other's strongpoints such as castles. But how did they do this?

- **Battering rams** were used to break down the main gate.
- A **mangonel** (a large catapult) was used to fire rocks at the castle walls.
- A **trebuchet** (a large sling) was used to fire '**Greek fire**' at the castle.
- **Rope ladders** and **siege towers** were used to scale the castle walls.
- **Sappers** dug tunnels under the castle foundations in order to collapse the walls.



### Defending a medieval castle

How did an army defend a castle?

- **Archers** fired arrows on the enemy from the battlements and turrets.
- **Heavy rocks** were thrown down the '**murder hole**' on attacking soldiers as they entered the castle.
- **Boiling oil** and **quicklime** were poured over those attempting to scale the walls.



## Crime and punishment



Dunking chair



The rack



A scold bridle



The pillory and stocks

### The Black Death

- The Black Death arrived in Europe from Asia in **1347**.
- It killed over **one-third of the population** of Europe.
- It consisted of two different types of plague:
  1. The **bubonic** plague was spread by bloodsucking fleas that lived on rats.
  2. The **pneumonic** plague was spread by breathing infected air.
- Some people blamed the Jewish people for spreading the disease.
- Others, called **flagellants**, whipped themselves, believing that the disease could be stopped if they punished themselves and asked God for forgiveness.
- The Black Death **ended the feudal system**.





### 5.3 Homework Correction

**Q1.** Write about the life of a monk from Early Christian Ireland. (Your answer may refer to how they lived, life in a monastery, prayer life, work etc.)

**A Monk in early Christian Ireland lived in a monastery.**

The Monk in charge of the monastery was called an Abbot. Monks live in rooms called a Beehive Huts and would spend most of the day praying to God, studying the bible and working. They studied handwritten books called manuscripts. A skilled monk called a scribe would sometimes work in a special room called a scriptorium. They wrote on very thin sheepskin called parchment or calfskin called vellum. They use a quill which was a tail feather of a goose or swan to write with. They used herbs and plants from the garden to make beautiful coloured ink to decorate the book. Monks wore a simple tunic over that they wore a cape and a hood and leather sandals on their feet. They also shaved their head in a tonsure style so they could be closer to God. There were many jobs to be done in a monastery. Some monks were trained stone masons. They spent most of their time making beautiful stone crosses known as high crosses. These crosses told stories from the bible. Other Monks were expert metal workers and they made beautiful chalices and brooches such as the Ardagh Chalice. Sometimes they worked in the fields around the monastery. They grew crops and kept animals. They only ever ate what they needed and usually only ate one meal a day. At dinner time and prayer time a bell on top of a round tower would ring out. Sometimes the bell was also rung when the monastery was about to be attacked. They would run to the round tower and bring their manuscripts and gold and silver objects with them. The door on the round tower was situated about three metres from the ground. It was reached by a ladder which was removed once every monk was inside.



