

supplemental material for the **Sir Kaye Series** by Don M. Winn



Life in the middle ages

The following information is designed to help students enjoy an immersive experience during their reading of the *Sir Kaye, The Boy Knight* series of books. Historical material and drawings will provide a frame of reference for a lifestyle so different from the digital existence so prevalent today. There are abundant opportunities for class projects, such as creating coats of arms, experimenting with medieval food, storytelling assignments, knitting demonstrations, field trips to look for herbs in your local area, watching falconry videos from online libraries, and more.



From *The Knighting of Sir Kaye*

castles

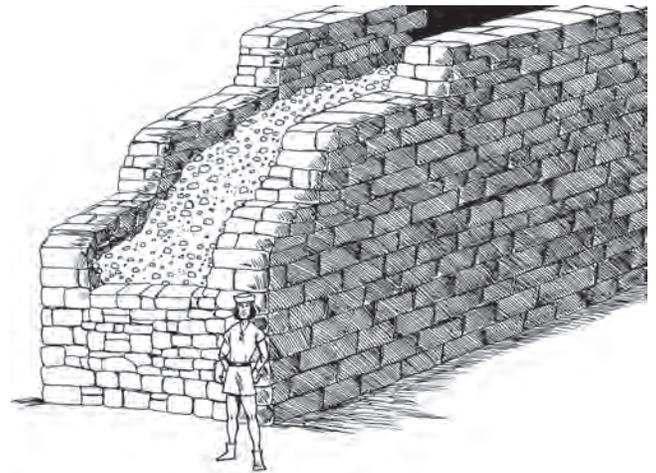
During the Middle Ages, castles were primarily owned by the rich and powerful. This would include royalty (kings and queens), nobility (barons, marquesses, earls, and dukes), and some knights. It was not uncommon for those who were especially rich to own more than one castle. They would divide their time throughout the year among the different castles, traveling from one to another on an extended vacation they called 'going on progress.'

First and foremost, castles were built for protection. However, they served many other purposes. In medieval times, land equated to power. The more land someone had, the more powerful they were. And richer, because they could charge other people rent to live on their land, as well as demand that they help with planting and harvesting crops, thereby increasing the owner's wealth.

Additionally, if someone wanted the owner's power and money, they had to take the owner's land. Castles were a way of protecting one's land and family from anyone who might want to try and take it. They were built to withstand enemy attacks.

castle walls

Castle walls played a huge role in protecting the castle in the Middle Ages. The large wall that would surround the entire castle was called the curtain wall, and it was typically built as two parallel walls with a space in between. The area between the two walls was filled with stones (or other leftover building materials they needed to get rid of) to add even more protection and make the wall dense and heavy. When building the walls, the builders would not only build the walls up, but they would dig trenches for deeper foundations, sometimes all the way to bedrock, in order to provide the wall with a sturdy base and to prevent attackers from digging under it.



Castle walls could be up to 28 feet thick. To put that into perspective, an average dinner table is around 8 feet long, so a castle wall would be as thick as 3.5 dinner tables lined up end to end.

Side note: When a castle was under attack, one thing the attackers might do was dig a tunnel starting far away from the castle wall. They would tunnel underground toward the castle wall, building wooden supports to hold up the roof of the tunnel as they went, so it wouldn't fall on them as they were digging. Because they were underground, no one from the castle could shoot arrows at them to stop them, so they could get very close. When they had dug far enough to be right under the castle wall, they would fill the end of the tunnel with straw, hay and pig fat, set it on fire, then run out of the tunnel. The fire would burn through the wooden supports and the tunnel would cave in. When the section of the tunnel right under the castle wall collapsed, many times the castle wall would fall down as well, creating a way for the attackers to get inside. This is where we get the word "undermine." Once the castle wall was down in that spot, the attackers had a way to get inside.

castles as homes

Castle courtyards were like a small village inside the safety of the castle wall. This worked as a way of helping and protecting people when there was an attack or siege on the surrounding area. A siege is when an attacker surrounds a city and cuts off access to outside resources and travel-ways, like roads and rivers. When an attack occurred, all of the villagers would retreat into the confines of the castle walls for safety. In the courtyard area, there were gardens, orchards, animals and even fishponds, to provide everyone with food. Additionally, there was a well where the villagers could get drinking water. Along with food and water, the courtyard also had workshop areas to repair weapons, a blacksmith, and stables to take care of livestock.

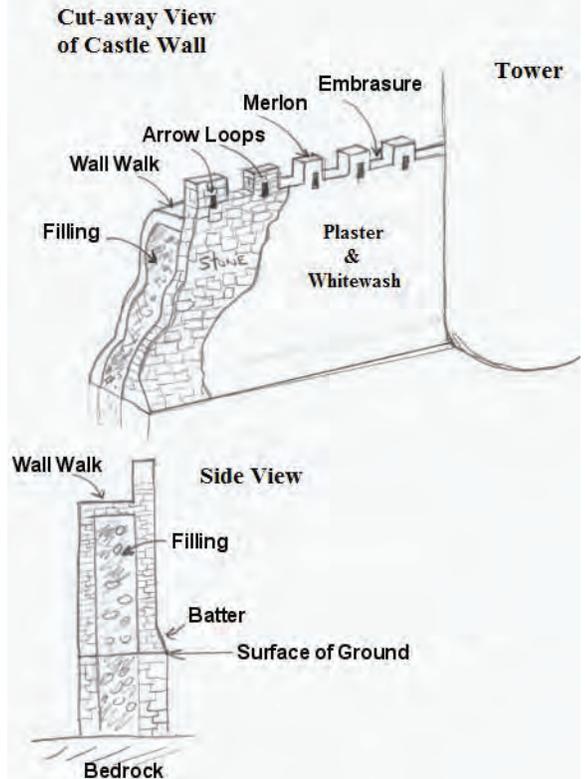


From *The Knighting of Sir Kaye*

When not under attack, castles were simply homes. Cold and drafty homes, since the only heat came from fireplaces, but impressive in their scale and size.

Everyone ate together at the same time, in a room called the great hall, this included the lord and lady, other household members, servants, and workers (except for those serving the meal, of course). It was considered very rude to sneak off and eat privately. The lord and lady of the castle sat with their family at a raised permanent table (on a dais or platform, rather like a stage) at one end of the hall. They sat in big chairs, sometimes with a canopy above their chairs to show how important they were.

Everyone else ate at trestle tables (temporary surfaces that could be put away when it wasn't mealtime). All tables had white cloths on them, and the floor was covered with rushes (dried plants, like straw or hay), sometimes with sweet-smelling herbs like lavender or thyme mixed in. These were added because the floor covering could start smelling pretty bad, since people spilled food, dropped bones leftover from the meat, and spat on the floor. There were always dogs and cats looking for scraps to eat, and they left things behind, as well. The rushes were changed only a few times a year.



People ate and served themselves with their hands, so it was considered polite to wash before eating, often in bowls of scented water that were brought to the table. There were no knives, forks, and spoons like we have in our kitchens today. Everyone had a personal knife they carried with them everywhere, rather like a pocket knife, which they used to cut off chunks of meat. Plates were called trenchers. Sometimes they were made of wood or a kind of metal called pewter, but many times they were made of thick slices of stale bread. The bread would soak up the juices of whatever was put on them and after the meal, the bread trenchers were sometimes given to poor people as food.

Sleeping arrangements

Beds were very important, and said a lot about a person's wealth and status. Only the wealthiest of the people had them, and they were so important that sometimes they would mention them in their wills so that their children would be sure to inherit such an important piece of furniture.

Beds were made to be easily taken apart and put back together again, so the castle owners could take them to their different castles as they moved between them throughout the year.

Beds were constructed of wood, with ropes crisscrossed through holes in the sides of the bedframe to support the mattress. Then there was a feather mattress on top (a big cloth bag filled with feathers). Only the very rich had feather beds, the poor would stuff their mattresses with straw. Sheets, quilts, animal furs, and pillows completed the setup. There were no pillow cases, however. Instead, they had a little piece of cloth that was fastened to the top side of the pillow for their faces to rest on.

Side note: The expression "sleep tight" came from the need to tighten the ropes supporting the mattress from time to time. Saggy ropes did not make for good sleeping. Tight ropes did. However, the expression was not used until the early 1900s.

Some beds also had curtains around them to provide both warmth and privacy. Sleeping arrangements were very different than they are today, and oftentimes, families and servants would share the same room. Sometimes servants slept on a little bed that could be pushed under the Lord's and Lady's big bed during the day. This is what we know today as a trundle bed.

Baths and toilets

In the Middle Ages, the toilet was referred to as a garderobe. It could be built to project out of a side wall of the castle that was like a balcony over a river, so the sewage would fall into the river and get washed away. However, what usually happened is that the toilet was built into the thickness of the wall, where a chute was hollowed out so the sewage could fall down into a cesspit built into the base of the wall. The cesspit had to be cleaned out every so often because it smelled. The man who cleaned out the cesspit was called a gong farmer, and he emptied it through an opening in the wall near the ground. Hay was used in the way we use toilet paper today.

As you can imagine, garderobes were quite smelly, and people in those times often thought that keeping their woolen clothes in the garderobe would protect them from being eaten by moths. Whether that actually worked or not is debatable, but it certainly couldn't have had a positive effect on the way the clothes smelled.

Side note: Richard the Lionhearted had a castle in France (Chateau Gaillard) that was attacked by enemies (Philip II of France – c. 1204). They got into the castle by getting into the cesspit, climbing up the shaft inside the wall and entering the castle from the garderobe.

Baths were taken in a wooden tub lined with cloth or sheets so the people wouldn't get splinters. It was a lot of



work to take a bath because servants had to heat the water, then carry it up many stairs to fill up the tub. Every gallon of water weighs eight pounds, and it might take 50 gallons to fill a tub.

Side note: Henry III of England (c. 1216) even had a bath house with hot and cold running water. The water was stored in tanks and could run into a tub for bathing.

Sometimes herbs or perfumes were used to make the water smell nice. Because it was so much work to set up and fill a tub, sometimes family members would take turns in the tub, using the same water.

peasants

Peasants lived close to each other, for protection, in a village, or near a castle. The lord of the castle gave them land to farm for themselves and their families, but in exchange, they had to pay rent and some of them had to work in the castle fields two or three days each week. They could only work their own fields on their days off.

Peasant houses were usually one room, and their animals lived inside with them at one end of the house. Sometimes there was a loft.

Houses were built of wattle and daub. Builders used wattle, which was a woven lattice of wooden strips and daub, a sticky mixture of straw, soil, clay, sand, and animal manure, to create earthen walls.

Sometimes everyone in the family shared the bed, which was basically a cloth bag filled with straw, just lying on the floor. This wasn't very nice. It could have bugs or even mice in it, and the straw was only changed about once a year. Little kids might have their own mat to sleep on, or sometimes slept in a loft. They were allowed to sleep in the big bed when they were older.

Peasants didn't usually take baths, especially in cold weather. They would wash their hands and faces regularly, though.

Instead of toilets, they might have had an outhouse or a pit outside. Inside, they had a bucket to use for a toilet. It had to be emptied outside, into a pit or a river.

Transportation usually meant walking, however, sometimes an ox with a small cart could be used. Horses were not typically ridden by peasants.

HORSES

While we have no doubt that Kaye's horse, Kadar, was a big and strong steed, typically in the Middle Ages, horses were generally smaller than most of the horses we see today. They were also a very important part of medieval life and were used for war, farming, and transportation. Medieval horse owners rarely differentiated horses by breed, but instead, they were set apart and identified by the job they did.

The three main horse types in the Middle Ages were "chargers" (war horses), "palfreys" (riding horses), and cart or packhorses.



From *The Knighting of Sir Kaye*

knights

A knight's primary job was to help their lord defend his land. And since land was power, the knight's job was very important. A knight defended the castle, his lord, and the people of the area. He was also responsible for fighting off invaders.

Tournaments were used as a way for the knights to practice their swordplay and other skills.

There were two ways to become a knight. The first involved a process of training and learning.

The steps toward knighthood:

- **Become a Page:** At age seven, a nobleman's son began training for knighthood. They were sent away to the castles and homes of wealthy lords or relatives to embark on their knighthood training. As a page, a boy learned how to fight, how to use weapons, and how to ride a horse into battle. He learned manners from the nobleman's wife. Like everyone, pages had a strict rule of conduct, and a certain way of behaving that they had to follow.
- **Become a Squire:** At age 15, a page could become a squire, and each squire was assigned to a knight. A knight could have several squires and each assisted the knight to whom he was assigned. Squires continued to learn how to fight as well as how to behave chivalrously.
- **Be Knighted:** Once a squire proved himself in battle, and his knight felt he was ready, he could become a knight himself. Squires were knighted in elaborate ceremonies.

The second way a person could be made a knight was for a king, queen or even another knight to bestow knighthood as a reward for a courageous act.

chivalry

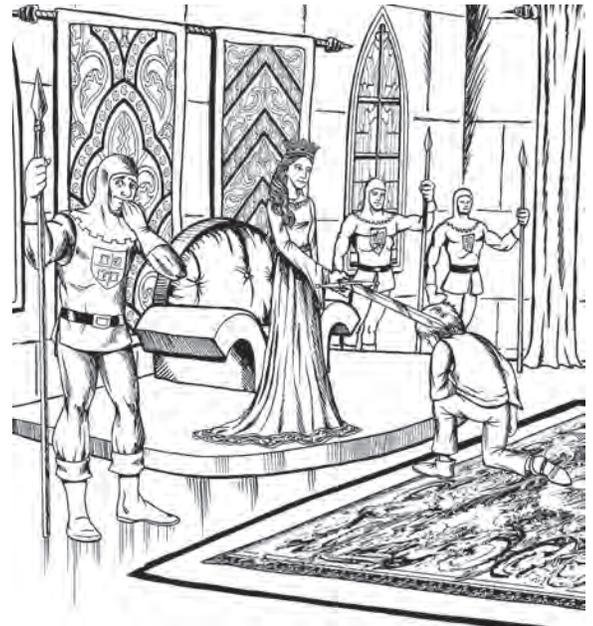
Chivalry was the medieval code of conduct that a knight was expected to follow. Chivalry included such things as bravery, honor, courtesy, respect, protection of the weak, generosity, and even fairness to enemies.

Many may ask if chivalry exists today. While the statement that "chivalry is dead" is typically made as a reference to men not holding the door for women, the concept of chivalry goes much deeper than that. As we see above, the definition of chivalry encompasses all of the attributes necessary to be a good citizen, friend, family member, sportsman, and person. The need for chivalry can be seen in all aspects of modern life.

medieval food

In medieval times the poorest of the poor might survive on garden vegetables, including peas, onions, leeks, cabbage, beans, turnips (also called swedes), and parsley. A staple food of the poor was called pottage—a stew made of oats and garden vegetables with a tiny bit of meat in it, often thickened with stale bread crumbs. Brown bread made from rye, barley, or oats was eaten in most homes on a regular basis. When it got stale, it was crumbled and used to thicken soups and stews. The stale bread could also be cut into thick slices and used as plates called trenchers. Nothing was wasted. Manchet, or white bread made from wheat, was usually only eaten by the wealthy.

Fresh milk did not last long in the Middle Ages because there was no refrigeration. So milk was made into cheese that had a shelf life of several months. Instead of fresh milk, some wealthier households used nut milk—ground almonds or walnuts boiled and strained through a sieve. The liquid collected was used as a substitute for milk in soups, main dishes, and desserts.



From *The Knighting of Sir Kaye*

Many households raised chickens, ducks, or geese for eggs and eventually for meat, but only after the bird had stopped laying eggs. These birds were far more valuable as egg-producers than as meat for the table.

The homes of the nobility often had “deer parks,” which were wooded areas where the gentry could hunt for sport and food. Peasants who poached game (hunted without permission) on these reserves were punished severely, or sometimes even put to death if caught. One exception to this severe punishment was the hunting of rabbits—a peasant caught poaching rabbits was subject to only a small fine.

Poor people could not afford spices. Spices were rare and very expensive because they didn’t grow in England or nearby Europe, coming instead from far islands that were many months away by boat. Peasant foods were more often flavored with onions, garlic, and herbs like parsley and sage that they could grow in their garden or forage for in the fields and woods.

The more well-to-do would enjoy spices such as pepper, cinnamon, mace, nutmeg, saffron, grains of paradise, cloves, ginger, and galangal. Do some of those sound exotic? Grains of paradise are seeds that have a pepper-like flavor. Galangal is similar to ginger.

Spices were precious, and were guarded like jewels. Wealthier people that had spices kept them locked up, and the lady of the house carried the key attached to her belt at all times. Once a day she would venture to the kitchen to measure out the day’s ration of spices for the cook.

Experimentation with varieties of herbs and spices was not a well-established art; instead, spices were frequently used in combinations that would be unlikely for today’s palates. For example, in our day, when we think of cinnamon, we think of cinnamon rolls, cinnamon toast, or maybe oatmeal cookies. But in the past, cinnamon was mainly used for flavoring meat dishes. Spices were something of a status symbol, and the more you had, the more you used and combined, and people were duly impressed.

Honey was the most common sweetener in the Middle Ages. Although sugar was available in many forms in medieval times, it was used sparingly because of its expense as more of a spice than a sweetener, especially for meat sauces. If you think it’s gross to have sugar in your meat sauce, think for a minute about ketchup and barbeque sauce—both of those have plenty of sugar in them. Sugar was also stirred into wine to make it more palatable.

knitting

While knitting is considered a hobby among women in contemporary culture, back in Kaye’s day, knitting would have been an activity and profession of men. Men even had their own knitting guilds, or professional associations, so it makes sense that Kaye would have learned his knitting skills from his grandfather. Knitted goods were also the most popular among men, as knitted tights had more stretch than the alternatives, and were less likely to sag around the knees. Women were still wearing long skirts, so they had less of a need for fashionable hosiery.



From *Legend of the Forest Beast*



From *The Lost Castle Treasure*

HERALDRY

In simplistic terms, heraldry is the study and creation of coats of arms. Just as modern sports players have their names and numbers on the backs of their jerseys, knights decorated their armor with designs so that people could recognize them. Historically, there doesn't seem to be any reliable explanation for why certain designs or animals were chosen to be part of a coat of arms. It seems that the owner of the coat of arms just chose whatever they liked. For example, one person could include a lion in their coat of arms, saying that it stood for bravery and courage, while another person could have a lion on theirs and say that it stood for nobility and royalty. And both of them would be right.

Sometimes shields had patterns on them. These patterns are called variations. A shield could have variations over the whole shield or only on part of it. The patterns are usually made with two colors.

- Barry – horizontal (sideways) stripes
- Paly – vertical (up and down) stripes
- Bendy – diagonal stripes
- Chequy – a pattern of squares, like a checkerboard
- Lozengy – a pattern of diamonds, like a diagonal checkerboard
- Chevronny – a stripe-like pattern of upside-down v-shapes



From *The Knighting of Sir Kaye*

FALCONS



From *The Lost Castle Treasure*

Falconry is the art of training birds of prey (raptors) such as falcons, hawks, or even eagles to hunt along with a person. It was an important part of medieval life—a well-trained goshawk could be a main contributor to the family diet. At the beginning of the Middle Ages, falconry was less of a sport and more of a means of providing food for the table.

Note on falconry terminology: Birds of prey are known as raptors. Raptors commonly used in hunting include both falcons and hawks. Today the term falconry refers to the training and flying of any type of raptor. Falconers (those who practice the art of falconry) call their raptors hawks even if their raptor is technically a falcon.

A hawk, even a trained hawk, is not a pet but a wild animal. A falconer may love the hawk, but the hawk doesn't love the falconer back. The hawk sees it as more of a working relationship. The hawk tolerates the falconer because there is a benefit in doing so. The benefit is that the hawk is well fed and well cared for. That is why a hawk, despite being completely free to fly away at any time during a hunt, usually returns to the falconer. The hawk knows it would be giving up an easy meal ticket if it left.

STORYTELLING

Storytelling was probably even more important in medieval society than it is now. There were no movies or television. There were no newspapers or radio to get the news, no computers or internet. Most people learned about their world by telling each other about it. Story books were very rare, so kids would look forward to hearing stories, even more than they do now!



From *Legend of the Forest Beast*

Professional storytellers were people who traveled from town to town. Because they were very good at telling stories, they could receive food, lodging and items of value in exchange for the stories they would tell.

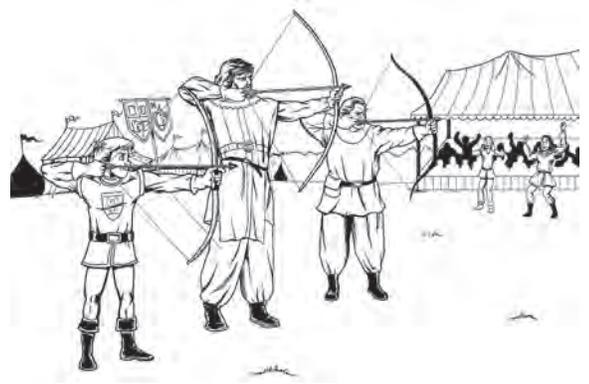
Every storyteller was different. Some could also sing, play a musical instrument or recite poetry. Each one had their own style and talents.

There are different names for storytellers, depending on their skills and what country they came from. English or Welsh storytellers may have been known as bards, while storytellers in Scandinavia may have been known as skalds. Musical storytellers in France may have been known as troubadours.

Medieval storytellers would seek out noble families with a castle or a large country manor. They sought wealthy people who had the means to reward them for their stories. A good storyteller always had an honored place by the fire or near the dinner table. They were welcome guests!

ARCHERY

The training of a medieval bowman was very time-consuming, as the archer had to learn to be very precise. The first arrows used were called “broad heads.” These arrows, like the name suggests, had a very large head that would provide an impact over a large surface. These arrows did not work well to pierce armor or chain mail, and would often break upon impact. This problem was solved with the smaller and sleeker “bodkin” arrows that worked to pierce armor and chain mail easily. However, with new arrows came a whole new method of archery, and all master archers had to relearn their craft to properly use the new arrows.



From The Knighting of Sir Kaye

Ladies' maids

The primary job of the ladies' maid was to look after the lady of the house. On an average day, typical chores would be to lay out her clothes, help her dress, run her bath, do her errands, comb and arrange her hair, and serve as a confidant and friend. Ladies maids were seen as a cut above the rest of the household servants, and were often allowed much more freedom with their choice of dress than the rest of the household servants.

They also spent a lot of time sewing. All clothing was made by hand, and while the garments of the rich were usually made by special dressmakers, ladies' maids often made undergarments for the family or sewed shirts to donate to the poor. Needlepoint was an important skill for women as well. Tapestries, altar cloths for churches, and decorative pillows were made to contribute to the creation of a beautiful environment, wherever they were.

CHILD LABOR

In the middle ages, it was not uncommon for a child as young as ten to begin pushing a plow in his father's field, or to begin an apprenticeship. Apprenticeships were when a young person went to work side by side with someone skilled and experienced, perhaps considered a master of their craft. Blacksmiths, draftsmen, stonemasons, shoemakers, dressmakers, musicians, and toolmakers were all desirable as mentors to an apprentice.

education

In the Middle Ages, only about 5% of the population was literate. Some lords actually liked it that way and would create laws forbidding their servants from reading and writing. Education was typically only for the sons of rich families. Grammar schools were usually part of a large church. There, boys would learn to read and write, and be schooled in logic (defending their viewpoint on a topic) and rhetoric (public speaking). Girls were either taught by tutors at home or by their mothers, or a hired woman called a governess. Common areas of study for girls were writing, music, dancing, conversation, elegant manners, and needlework.

BOOKS

Medieval books were all handmade, so each one was different. The covers were often made of leather or wood and may have been decorated with paint or gems. The pages were made from a thin form of leather known as vellum. Later, books had paper pages.

Many books were liturgical (religious), medical, scientific or philosophical; and others included famous stories, poems or legends of the past. Many were written in Latin, and others were written in the local languages of the time.

Medieval books were expensive, so they were usually purchased by the church or noble families. There were no public libraries. Most people could not read, even those who owned books!

Those who could read might become teachers, physicians, geographers, astronomers, engineers or mathematicians. Reading was a doorway to the universe, just as it is today.



From *The Lost Castle Treasure*

medieval medicine

First Aid: Common first aid in the middle ages typically consisted of washing the wounded area in whatever was nearby. This included water, beer, wine, and vinegar. Minor cuts were smeared with honey, which is now known to have strong antibiotic properties. However, most minor injuries were usually left alone.

Injuries and Wounds: Major wounds were flooded with water or vinegar, packed with herbs and poultices, and then wrapped in strips of cloth. Ligation (sewing) of the wound was not unknown, and was practiced with regular sewing thread before the invention of catgut. Catgut was not made, as it sounds, from the guts of cats. It was actually made from sheep, cow, or goat intestines, which contain a collagen fiber that was used, along with a needle, to sew wounds closed. Honey, again, might be smeared onto the wound. Caution (touching the wound with red-hot metal) was sometimes used to seal wounds and stop bleeding, especially after amputation.

The setting of broken bones was an art practiced throughout generations. Sometimes a Barber-Surgeon did bone setting, but most often it was an art unto itself. If broken bones were not properly set, infection could set in and cause early death. King Tut, the ancient Egyptian Pharaoh, is one example of such an early death, and it is widely held that England's King Henry VIII with his never-healed jousting wound might be as well. A bonesetter would carefully palpate (feel by hand) the area first to size up the situation, and then draw and pull the limb to align the bones. Then the broken limb would be wrapped in flannel strips and sometimes packed in comfrey paste (which formed a hard cast when dried) or cast with mud or wheat paste.



From *The Lost Castle Treasure*

Treating Infections: Local healers or wise women grew or found herbs to make soothing teas or tisanes (herbal remedies.) Common ingredients were mint, licorice root, willow-tree bark (the basis for modern aspirin) and others, depending on the area and time of year. Unfortunately, it was common to treat fevers as a “chill” and smother the patient under blankets in a stuffy room with a hot fire in the fireplace. Many died of dehydration. Leeches were sometimes used to draw the “evil humours” from the patient’s body.

Side note: “Evil humours” were the ancient Greek basis for medicine, the belief that blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile were the four fluids responsible for controlling a person’s health. These were in turn associated with the fundamental elements of air, water, earth and fire. It was further proposed that each of the humours was associated with a particular season of the year, during which too much of the corresponding humour could exist in the body. Blood, for example, was associated with spring. A good balance between the four humours was essential to retain a healthy body and mind, as imbalance could result in disease. Many diseases were considered to be caused by an excess of blood, creating a need for “blood-letting.” The instrument used to draw the blood was called a fleam, and it is can still be seen today on many medical symbols. Blood-letting was also used to treat fevers. Medicine didn’t change until the 1800’s when germs were discovered.

Dental Care: Barber-Surgeons would extract rotten teeth by first wiggling them loose and then pulling them out with plier-like forceps. Otherwise, people would clean their teeth and try to freshen breath by chewing herbs like peppermint and rosemary, rinsing the mouth with vinegar or a solution made of herbs, and rubbing the teeth with coarse material like cheesecloth. There were no toothbrushes or toothpastes. They used twigs as toothpicks.

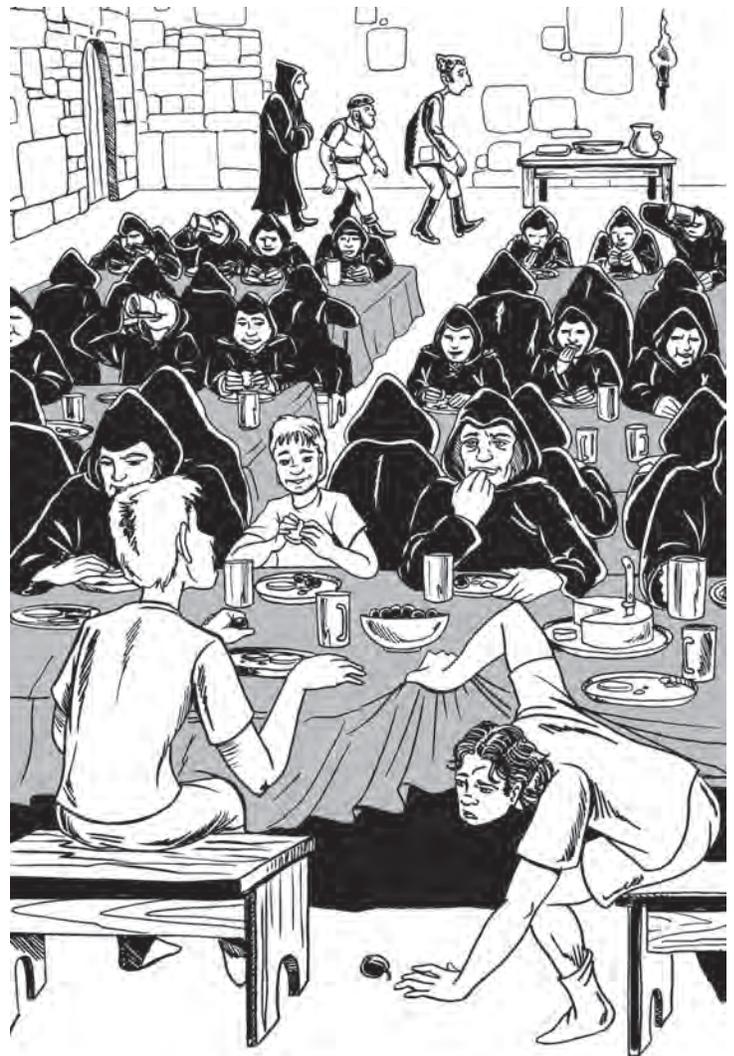
ABBEYS IN THE MIDDLE AGES

In the Middle Ages, an abbey was a group of buildings near a church that housed the monastics (the buildings were also sometimes called a convent, friary, nunnery, monastery, or priory). **Monastics**, or people who adopted the monastic way of life, were individuals who chose to renounce all worldly pursuits and devote themselves strictly to spiritual works. Typically, we hear them called **monks** or **nuns**. Commonly, abbeys were either inhabited only by females and run by an **abbess**, or they were strictly male and run by an **abbot**. Rarely, there were double monasteries, which housed men and women, and those were led by an abbess as well.

Life at the Abbey. Life at the abbey was very simple. Days consisted of worship services, reading the Bible, and hard labor. There was little staff; the monks or nuns were the staff, so everyone had to do their part to maintain the abbey. Days were spent farming and raising all of the supplies (farm animals, vegetables, grains) needed to feed everyone who lived there, or cooking, cleaning, sewing necessary garments and linen, and doing laundry chores. The first worship service of the day usually began around 2 a.m., and the last service would conclude the day at sunset.

Monastics would also spend time during the day or night reading the Bible, praying, singing or chanting, and meditating for hours.

There are modern-day monasteries, where the pattern of life is basically similar to life in an abbey during the Medieval era. In modern-day monasteries, monks do all of their own farming and cleaning and live very basic lives, so they can be sure to keep their priorities on spiritual things. Even their food choices are simplified in order to prevent greed or gluttony; they choose to eat bland things that work to sustain them and keep them healthy, rather than rich or highly spiced foods that many of us would prefer.



From *The Eldridge Conspiracy*



From *The Eldridge Conspiracy*

Uses for an Abbey. Abbeys filled many needs in their community, serving as farms, inns, hospitals, schools, and libraries. Abbeys would give travelers and pilgrims a place to stay for the night, and monks and nuns would never turn away a sick person who came to their door seeking help. Most abbeys had a skilled herbalist among its residents who could minister to the needs of the sick or injured. Additionally, the monasteries would provide education for young boys who wished to become priests. Some monastics spent time copying manuscripts of important books so that they could be preserved, and they kept records of important events that happened in their communities. Like Reggie, the residents of Abbeys were often chroniclers

Conspiracies in Abbeys. The following is a matter of history. Nearing the end of the Middle Ages, there was a problem with serious corruption in the church. All members of the clergy were supposed to be well-educated; however, many priests and leaders were illiterate. There were some who hardly knew how to perform the religious services. Many took advantage of their positions and used them to live materialistic and luxurious lives. They convinced pilgrims that the holy relics at their abbeys had the power to cleanse them of their sins, and then charged the pilgrims to see the relics. To

make it worse, some of these “relics,” which were said to be things like pieces of Jesus’ cross, Moses’ burning bush, or straw from Jesus’ manger, were nothing but things these monks and priests had found on the ground.

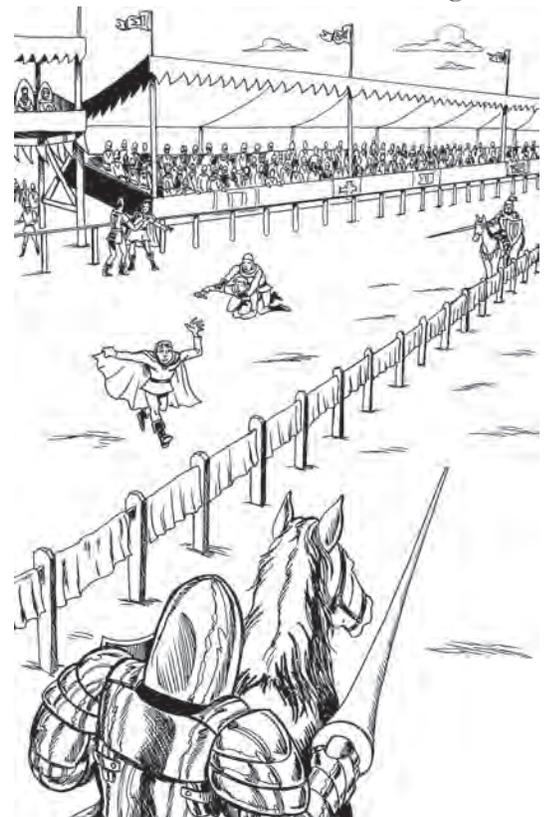
These corrupt leaders’ most profitable form of income was selling indulgences. An indulgence was a piece of paper signed by the Pope that was a “get out of jail free card” of sorts. A person could cash in an indulgence to be forgiven for one sin. Some clergy even taught that through indulgences, salvation could be attained—if one bought enough indulgences.

jousting

What is jousting and how did it get its start? Jousting is derived from Old French word *joster*, ultimately from Latin *inxtare*, meaning “to approach, to meet.” And “to meet” is exactly what happens in jousting. Jousting is the sport in which two knights fight on horseback while holding heavy lances, with each opponent endeavoring to strike his opponent while riding towards him at high speed, and if possible, breaking the lance on the opponent’s shield or jousting armor, or unhorsing him.

The lance was made of wood with a metal tip made of steel or iron and measured between 9 and 14 feet in length. The participants experienced over three times their body weight in G-forces when the lances collided with their armor.

The beginnings of jousting did not look like what we imagine today. Originally, there was no divider between the two competitors, and the jousts would run straight at each other with their lances. As one could imagine, this head-to-head combat on horseback led to many injuries and fatalities. However, the introduction of the divider created a more controlled battleground.



From *The Eldridge Conspiracy*



From *The Eldridge Conspiracy*

A list was the field or arena where a jousting event was held and a divider, which was initially just cloth stretching along the center of the field, eventually became a wooden barrier known as the tilt.

Jousting started as a form of weapons training that became popular in the Middle Ages as a result of heavy cavalry (armored men on war horses) becoming the primary weapon of the time. First, jousting was simply a way of training knights for battle in a controlled environment. The sport taught new knights horsemanship, accuracy, and how to react in combat. However, what was created as a military training exercise quickly became a popular form of entertainment.

The first recorded jousting tournament was said to be arranged by a Frenchman named Godfrey de Preuilly in 1066, and tournaments soon became so popular the king had to put a limit on how many tournaments could be held, so that not all of the knights would be busy jousting when a real conflict arose.

Jousting tournaments were considered highly formal events, and they were planned and arranged months in advance. After gaining the proper royal permits, nobles would challenge their neighboring landowners, and each would choose their best knights to fight. (Nobles owned the land during the middle ages. Knights served the nobles who owned the land, helping to defend and protect it. Some-

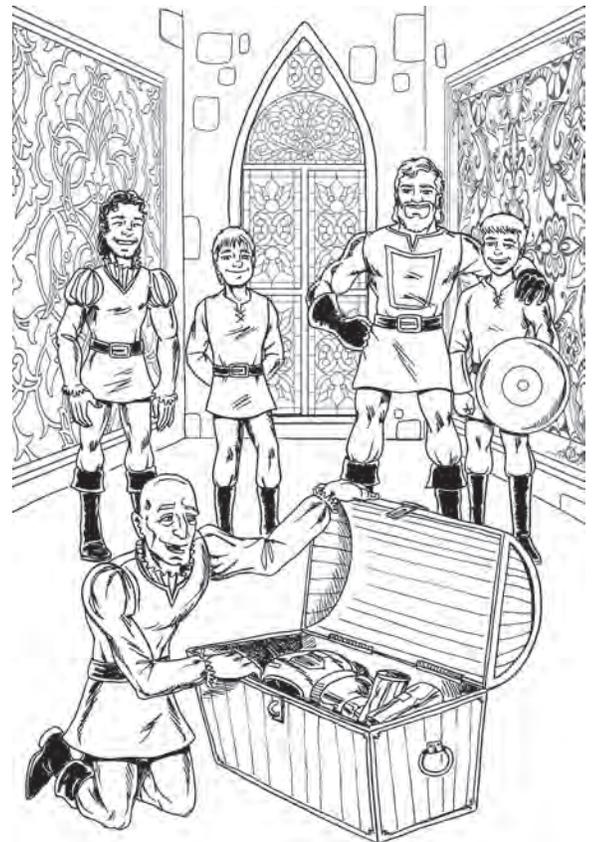
times a knight could own land himself. It was often granted as a reward for his good work as a knight.) Sometimes, during a tournament, a noble would hire a man to joust for his “team” who was not a knight committed to that noble’s land. These knights were called “freelancers,” which is where we get the term today.

By the 14th century, jousting became very popular with many members of the nobility, including kings. Jousting was a way to showcase their own skill, courage, and talents, and the sport was just as dangerous for a king as a knight. England’s King Henry VIII suffered a severe injury to his leg when a horse fell on him during a tournament, ending the 44-year-old king’s jousting career and ultimately leaving him with wounds from which he never fully recovered.

King Henry II of France was the most famous royal jousting fatality. During a jousting exhibition to celebrate the marriage of his daughter to the king of Spain in 1559, the king received a fatal wound when a sliver of his opponent’s lance broke off and pierced him in the eye.

Many aspects of jousting tournaments mirror the sports customs we still have today. For instance, medieval heralds would work similarly to sports journalists of the day, promoting the events and jousters. Many of the best jousters became very famous, like today’s sports heroes. It became such a popular form of entertainment that joust-ers would travel around on jousting circuits, fighting each other over and over.

Knights did not just compete for fame and bragging rights. They often competed for gifts, money, and possibly even land from a grateful noble.



From *The Eldridge Conspiracy*

SHIPS IN THE MIDDLE AGES

What were cog ships and what role did they play in medieval times? A cog ship, also simply known as a “cog” was a large, spacious transport ship used in the Middle Ages. The first written history of cog ships dates back to 948 AD in Amsterdam.

When cog ships were first created, they had open hulls (the body of the ship) and could only be rowed short distances. The 13th century saw great advancements in technology for cog ships, which resulted in larger ships with decks, raised platforms, bows, and sterns. Additionally, rudders began to appear on cog ships around 1240 AD. Cog ships gradually replaced the traditional Viking ships in northern Europe. The upgraded ships led to increased exploration, conquest, and military ventures.

Since there was no photography during the Middle Ages, no one is exactly sure what a cog ship looked like back in its day. Our best guesses come from images of the time, such as those that were found on seals (carved images that were used by pressing them into hot wax to make an impression) that featured cog ships. The best-preserved cog ship existing today, the Bremen cog, dates from 1380. The wreckage of the Bremen cog was found buried in a river in Germany in 1962. However, even on the Bremen cog, only the hull is preserved, while the rig (mast and mast machinery) is gone.

When cog ships were first created, they could only travel very slowly and for short periods of time. But gradually refinements and improvements were made, and by the 13th century, cog ships were strong enough to cross even the most dangerous of oceans, and were equipped to be protected from pirates. Some were even used as warships.

By the 14th century, cog ships had reached their capacity and were slowly phased out by a new kind of ship called the hulk ship.

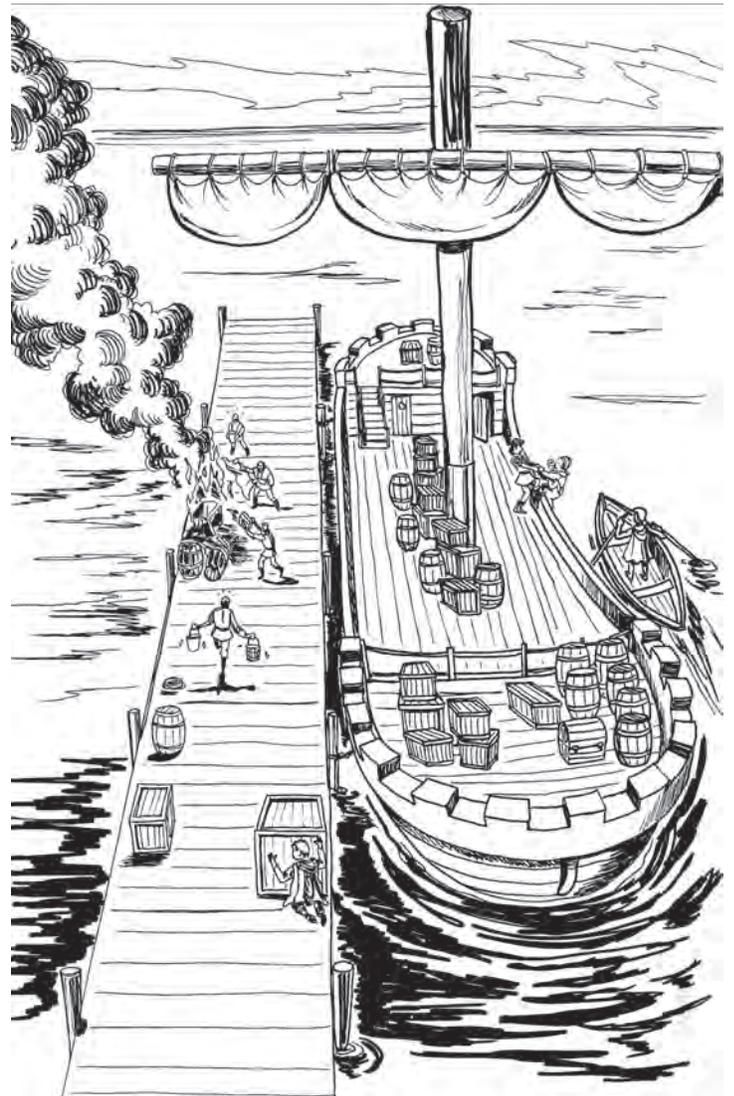
Features that are common for all cog ships include: One single square sail, clinker outer planking at the sides of the hull, straight steep stem and sternposts (opposed to the rounded Viking stem), relatively flat bottoms, and strong cross-beams, usually protruded through the ships’ sides, holding the sides together.

(Note: Clinker, also known as lapstrake, is a method of boat building where the edges of hull planks overlap, called a “land” or “landing.”)

The cog ship in *The Eldridge Conspiracy* is a merchant ship called the *Triumph*. Compared to older ships modeled after Viking vessels, the cog ship was well-suited for a merchant vessel because of its higher capacity for carrying cargo. The *Triumph* includes all the design advancements made by the 13th century.

Other than very old and rare cog ship wreckage that has been found, there are no actual cog ships still in existence from the time period. However, if you ever travel to Europe, especially Sweden and Germany, you can find some working recreations of cogships that actually sail, and you can pay to take a ride in them.

Video reference: You can search YouTube for a video called *Hanseatic Cog at Sea*. It’s a recording of a recreated medieval cog ship called *Twekamp af Elbogen* arriving at Falsterboro canal in Sweden.



From *The Eldridge Conspiracy*

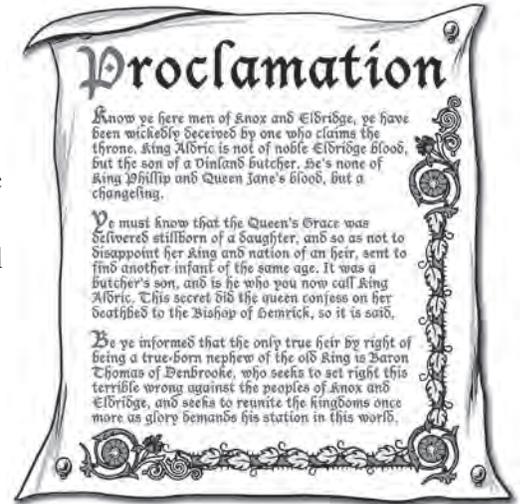
JOHN of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, a Historical Conspiracy

An actual historical event inspired an aspect of The Eldridge Conspiracy. In England, Parliament had assembled on January 27, 1377, with Crown Prince Richard of Bordeaux and his uncle, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, presiding. Disturbing rumors spread throughout Parliament that John of Gaunt was a changeling (not born of noble blood, but substituted as a baby for the real royal infant, who had died). These rumors were causing “great noise and great clamor” throughout the assembly.

The rumors were not true. They appear to have been spread by the banished Bishop William of Wykeham in an attempt to topple the duke. The duke was a target because of his power over the young prince.

The bishop asserted (falsely) that John of Gaunt’s mother, Queen Philippa, actually gave birth to a daughter but “overlaid and suffocated” her. Fearful of confessing this to King Edward, she had another infant smuggled into St. Bavoon’s Abbey and replaced her dead daughter with this living child, the son of a Ghent laborer, butcher, or porter. She named the child John and brought him up as her own. Philippa was said to have admitted this in confession to Bishop William of Wykeham on her deathbed in 1369, insisting that should there ever arise any prospect of John succeeding to the throne, the bishop must break the seal of the confessional and publicly reveal the truth.

In The Eldridge Conspiracy, Baron Thomas attempts to spread a similar rumor about King Aldric, hoping that it will help him in his attempt to take the throne from King Aldric.



From The Eldridge Conspiracy



Check out Don Winn’s Cardboard Box Adventures blog for more details and medieval research. You can access Don’s CBA blog from the www.donwinn.com website.

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