

What was it like to live in a Medieval town?

KS3 History- Lesson 1 of 4

Enquiry: Who held power in medieval towns?

Mrs Badhan



Leisure

Some medieval citizens enjoyed their leisure time.

Archaeologists have found simple board games with discs made from bone. They also found that dice were used.

Simple musical instruments have been discovered, including whistles made from the leg bones of geese, as well as bone pegs, for tightening the strings of a harp.



Having fun

Musicians known as 'minstrels' wandered from town to town entertaining the crowds. Usually, they performed in the streets for people to dance around. They would usually expect a few coins in return for their performance.

Some common games and sports of the Medieval period included archery, bowling, hammer-throwing, wrestling, and more.



Hygiene

Public hygiene in medieval England was basic. Waste built up, both in and out of houses and littered the streets. Families had to get rid of their rubbish and often dumped it in their gardens. Thus **cesspits** were dug and deeper pits were made to act as wells. Towns might use pigs to eat what rubbish there was. The water in the wells had passed through foul conditions, so was unfit for drinking unless it was heated in the process of brewing.



Healthcare

Medieval people began to worry about the spread of a new contagious disease, **leprosy**. By the end of the Middle Ages, York had approximately 31 hospitals.

Other hospitals included St Leonard's which became the largest in the north of England. In 1399, 232 people were housed there. The hospital, soon became a place in which the elderly were also cared for as well as an orphanage.



Dangers

Walking in a town at night could also be dangerous. Though towns had a **curfew**- no town had a police force to deal with those who broke the law. No town had street lights – the only choice was candles but in a town made of wood, these ‘street lights’ could prove disastrous.

The streets of medieval towns were narrow and busy. They were noisy, with traders selling goods. There were many fast food sellers, selling such things as hot sheep's feet and beef-ribs.



Trading

Shops attracted people to a town. The shops also doubled as a home for the craftsman that worked there. A sign outside of the shop showed people what that person did for a living. Signs had to be used because so few people could read or write. International trade also took place from ports like Hull.



Glossary

Archaeologists: a person who studies the past through material evidence.

Minstrel: a medieval performer, usually a musician.

cesspits: a pit for the disposal of liquid waste and sewage.

Leprosy: a contagious disease that affects the skin. Medieval use of this term, however, covered a range of diseases.

Curfew: a time when everyone had to be in their homes.



Comprehension Questions

1. How did people have fun in the medieval period?

Sentence starter: In the medieval period, people have fun by...

2. What were some of the negative aspects of medieval life?
3. List the reasons why disease was common in the medieval period.
4. Why was there a curfew?

Challenge: Which of the following statements are TRUE about medieval towns?



Write a short description of a medieval town. Think about what you could hear, see and smell if you were walking through the streets of your medieval town.

Sentence starters:

The year is....

Around me, I can see...

All I can smell is....

I can hear...

Life in this town is....

Key words

Cesspit

Traders

Disease

Crowds

