

Knowledge Map: Conflict and Upheaval 1337 – 1381: 1. Life in the 14th Century

Summary: The Norman Conquest of England in 1066 had started a process of change for English society that had a considerable impact upon every aspect of people's lives. Fundamentally, England in the 14th Century [1300s] was an agricultural society based upon the open-field system of farming. The wool trade would come to be a major source of revenue for the country. Society was very structured and rigidly controlled through the feudal system and the Church would have an all-encompassing role to play in people's lives. Women were seen as subordinates of men

English Society in the 14th Century: Structure

Summary

The structure of society was based around the Feudal System and life was very different for the peasants in comparison to the nobility. The country had a prosperous agricultural system and prior to the Black Death the population was increasing.

Key knowledge

1.	Norman Conquest	In 1066 the Normans (from Normandy in France) had successfully invaded England.
2.	The Feudal System	The Feudal system organised land in England. It was a four-tier system involving the monarchy (at the top), the Nobles/Barons/Church, the Knights, and the Peasants. It worked by distributing land to the various classes in return for services and commitment.
3.	The King	At the top of the Feudal system. They gave the nobles land, justice and protection.
4.	Nobility	Below the King at the top of the Feudal System. Between them and the king they owned about 75% of the land in England. Senior churchmen were of equal status to them. There were about 200 of them.
5.	Knights	They were below the nobility in the Feudal system and there were about 1000 of them in the 14 th Century..
6.	Peasants	They made up the rest of the population and were at the bottom of the Feudal System. About 1/6 of the population were freemen but the majority of peasants were not. Peasants who were not free were also known as villeins, cottars and serfs.
7.	The Black Death	Arrived in England in 1348 and had a huge impact on society.
8.	Population	Before the Black Death the population of England was approximately 2.5 – 4 million. Around 90% of the population lived in the countryside.
9.	Agriculture	The vast majority of people worked in agriculture (farming).
10.	Open field system	The most common method of farming.
11.	Towns	They were rare. The only ones with a population of over 10, 000 were York and London.

The role of the Church

Summary

The church played an incredibly important role in life in the 14th Century and dominated every day life. After the Black Death the church began to face some challenges.

Key knowledge

12.	The Pope	The head of the Catholic Church. His authority was rarely challenged in the first part of the 14 th century.
13.	The Church	It was central to village life. Marriages, baptisms, burials, confession and the mass all took place here.

14.	Priests	Looked after the sick and the dying and would play important roles in villages and towns.
15.	Tithes	Taxes that supported the church and clergy. They were about 1/10 of annual produce or earnings.
16.	Education	Due to the need to perform administrative tasks the majority of educated men and women came from the church. There were about 17, 500 monks and nuns.
17.	Challenges to the Church	The Black Death led many to question why God had not stopped the spread of the disease. The Lollardy movement, founded by John Wycliffe challenged the supremacy of the church. They were declared to be heretics.

The Wool Trade

Summary

Many relied financially on the wool trade, and it had grown during the Medieval period to become the main export of England, with around 35,000 bags exported each year.

Key knowledge

18.	Flanders	The place where the majority of the wool trade took place with, especially in the first half of the 14 th century.
19.	Monopoly	This was where English wool merchants were given exclusive control over the trade of wool by Edward III in the 1350s. It allowed Edward to gain more taxes, but did cause some damage to the wool trade.
20.	Revenues	Revenues from the sale of wool financed war, in particular the Hundred Years' War. The industry was also responsible for large scale employment.

The role of women in the 14th century

Summary

The role of women was one of subordination to men, they were either the possession of their fathers or husbands. However they played a key role in everyday life.

Key knowledge

21.	Domestic roles	Most women worked in the fields, or in weaving, in addition to looking after their husbands and children. Women were not usually allowed to work in skilled jobs.
22.	Widows	Able to take control of their late husbands land and businesses so gained some independence.
23.	Wealthy women	Life was easier for rich women and they tended to live longer, however they were still expected to have children. They were often taught to read and write, but no further education.
24.	Nuns and abbesses	These would be the most well educated women, and abbesses held considerable power. However the Catholic Church still considered women to be weak and sinful.