

Knowledge Map: Life in the 14th Century

Summary:	Life for peasants in 14th century England was challenging. They followed strict Church rules, set by the Catholic Church and the Pope. They also were part of a rigid feudal system, many of them working as poor serfs who could not leave their Lord. War impacted them too, especially with the Hundred Years' War against France starting in 1337. But the Black Death around 1348 changed everything, wiping out half of England's population. This disaster meant fewer workers, so surviving peasants found they were in demand and could ask for better pay. However, the government tried to stop this, passing laws to keep wages low. In response, peasants took a stand, as seen in the Peasants' Revolt in 1381, when they marched on London demanding fair treatment and improved conditions, marking a significant moment in their fight for rights.
-----------------	---

Key Terms

Agriculture	Farming, which was the main job for peasants
Feudal System	A social system where people worked and fought for lords who gave them protection and the use of land in return.
Heretic	Someone who is seen as an enemy or an outcast for disagreeing with the beliefs and practices of the church
Homage	The respect that a vassal owed to their lord in the feudal system.
Levy	The requirement for vassals to provide military service under the feudal system.
Lollard	A follower of John Wycliffe in the 14th and 15th centuries, who criticized the Catholic Church and called for reform.
Lords	Powerful people in the feudal system who owned land and had vassals and serfs working for them.
Miasma	The belief that bad air caused diseases.
Monastery	A catholic institution where monks and nuns live and work. They would often provide medical care
Serfs/Villeins	Workers in the feudal system who weren't free to move or marry without their lord's permission.
Statute of Labourers	A law passed by the English Parliament in 1351 to control wages during the labour shortage following the Black Death.
Vassals	People in the feudal system who pledged service to a lord and received land in return.

Religion

Summary

Religion was a big part of life for ordinary people in 14th century England. The Catholic Church was very important, even playing a key role in caring for the sick, running hospitals to look after those in need. The church bells rang out daily, guiding people's routines and marking events. Education was mostly done by the Church, with stories about heaven and hell teaching people right from wrong. However, not everyone agreed with the Church's teachings. Heretics, like the Lollards led by John Wycliffe, questioned the Church's power and wealth.

Serfdom

Summary

Serfdom was the way of life for many in 14th century England. Under the feudal system, lords owned large estates, and vassals pledged their service, giving homage to their lord. Some serfs were freemen who rented their land, but most people were serfs or villeins, working the land to provide food and other products. They had little power, lived in poverty, and couldn't move or marry without the lord's permission. Their life was one of hard agricultural work, controlled by the seasons and the demands of their lords.

Warfare

Summary

Warfare was a common part of 14th century life, particularly with the start of the Hundred Years' War against France in 1337. Knights led the fight in battles, but ordinary people were also called to fight for their Lords' armies. Under the feudal system, lords could call on their vassals for military service, known as a levy. They had to provide their own arms and fight when required. The ongoing war disrupted the serfs' lives, as peaceful farmland often turned into bloody battlegrounds.

Disease

Summary

Medical knowledge was limited in the 14th century and disease was widespread. People believed bad air, or miasma, caused disease and tried using herbs and prayers as protection. Many viewed disease as divine punishment from God. In 1348, the Black Death swept through England, causing high fever and painful swellings, and killing about half the population. However, this tragedy meant fewer workers, giving surviving peasants leverage to demand better pay.

The Peasants Revolt

Summary

The Peasants' Revolt in 1381 was a significant event in the lives of 14th century English peasants. Fuelled by oppressive tax laws following the Black Death and the government's attempts to control wages, the peasants, led by figures like Wat Tyler and John Ball, stood up against their harsh conditions. They marched on London, presenting a list of demands including lower taxes, an end to serfdom, and fairer treatment. Despite the violent end of the revolt and the execution of its leaders, it did bring some change. It marked a shift in peasants' attitudes, as they realised their importance in society and their potential power. While the revolt didn't immediately end serfdom, it did set in motion changes that led to its eventual decline, a significant step towards the rights and freedoms of ordinary people.