

*"Now!"*

*With a flick of her thumb, Maisie released the catapult arm and the pencil rubber flew across the desk.*

*"Hey! It really works!"*

*We had built a small model of a mangonel, a siege machine used to attack castles hundreds of years ago.*



*My sister Maisie and I were staying in Granddad's big old house. He knew we were both fascinated by castles. He told us there was a book in his study about how to build a model siege machine. While we were testing it, a book fell out of the bookcase on to the floor. "That's odd," said Maisie. "We were nowhere near that shelf". It was an old book about the history of castles. A page had fallen out. It was about an evil baron whose castle had been besieged and captured.*

*As we were reading about the baron's wicked deeds, we felt a draught of cold air coming from the space on the shelves left by the fallen book. We took some more books off the shelf. There at the back of the bookcase was a tiny wooden door. I turned the key*



*and eased it open. "Looks like some kind of larder in there. It's a bit dark to see properly."*

*"Let's go explore, Josh!" whispered Maisie excitedly. It took only a few moments for us to squeeze through. We were stunned into silence. We were standing in a cold room with stone walls,*



*stone arches, stone columns and stone floor. It was like the cellar in Granddad's house, only here there were huge joints of meat and bundles of vegetables hanging from ceiling hooks. Through the open door we could hear a crowd of people chattering outside.*



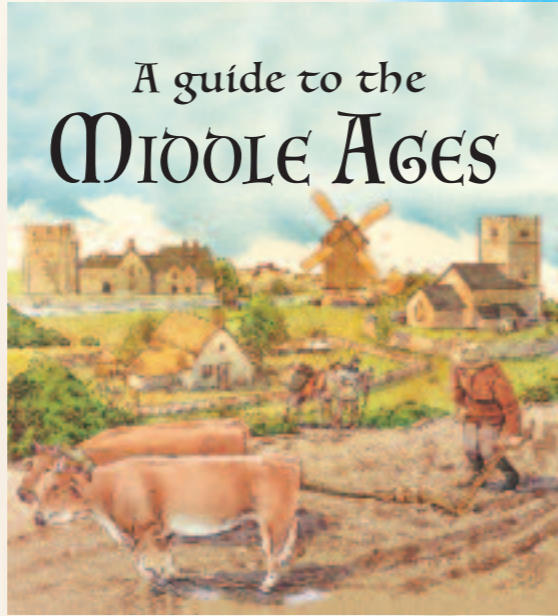
**A BARON OVERTHROWN**  
CASTLES had, by the end of the 13th century, become extremely strong. The only way one could be taken was to surround it with an army and prevent any food or water entering it. Such sieges could last several months or even years. It was a remarkable turn of events, then, that saw the successful capture of the castle belonging to one Geoffrey de Beauville, a powerful baron, in 1295. The baron had a reputation for exceptional cruelty. On one infamous occasion he ordered all the crops and livestock on his lands to be burned, so that every one of his tenants and their families would starve. His castle, widely reputed to be all but impregnable, fell to the besieging army of a neighbouring baron in a matter of hours. No one has been able to discover how this extraordinary feat was carried out, although it is strongly rumoured that spies in the castle played an important role.

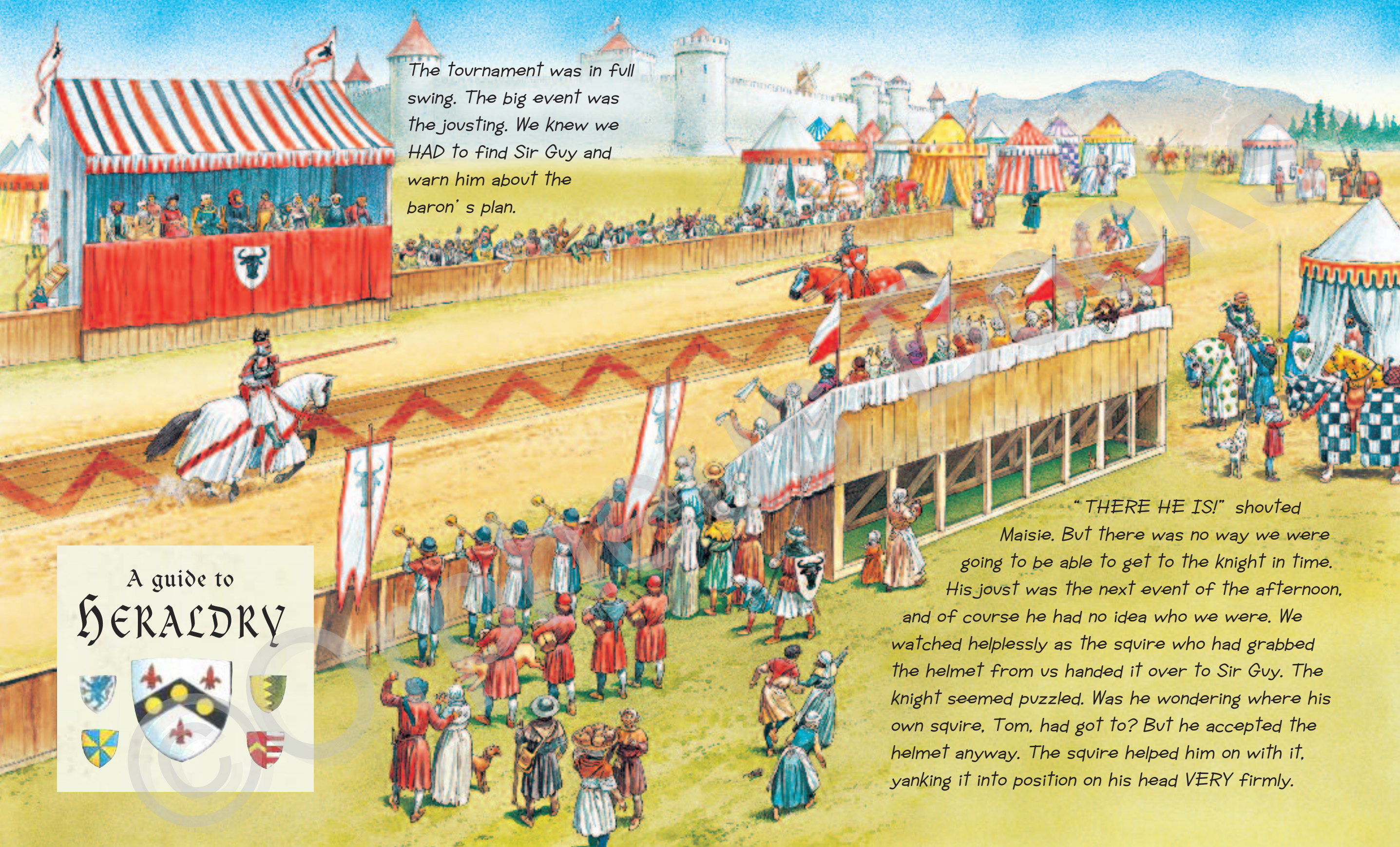


FIG 8. Geoffrey de Beauville ruled his castle and surrounding lands with a rod of iron.

We peered out. There was a large gathering of people, all in medieval dress (just as were ourselves, strangely enough). And wasn't that someone dressed as a knight sitting on a horse? "Maybe it's a film set," whispered Maisie. Only as we stepped out into the courtyard did we realise we were actually **INSIDE A CASTLE**. Somehow, we had travelled back 700 YEARS! A boy came over to us." Just listen to that old fool," he said when an important man started barking orders. "Doesn't he realise everyone hates him?"

## A guide to the MIDDLE AGES





The tournament was in full swing. The big event was the jousting. We knew we HAD to find Sir Guy and warn him about the baron's plan.

"THERE HE IS!" shouted Maisie. But there was no way we were going to be able to get to the knight in time. His joust was the next event of the afternoon, and of course he had no idea who we were. We watched helplessly as the squire who had grabbed the helmet from us handed it over to Sir Guy. The knight seemed puzzled. Was he wondering where his own squire, Tom, had got to? But he accepted the helmet anyway. The squire helped him on with it, yanking it into position on his head VERY firmly.

## A guide to HERALDRY

