

Peering out, we saw a large gathering of people, all in medieval dress. Was that a knight sitting on a horse over there? "Maybe it's the set of a film", whispered Maisie. Only as we stepped out into the courtyard did we notice that our own clothes had also been transformed. We realized then that we were actually *INSIDE A CASTLE*. Somehow, we had travelled back in time 700 YEARS!

When an important-looking man started barking orders from a high platform, a boy standing nearby grumbled, "Just listen to that old fool. Doesn't he know everyone hates him because of the way he treats us?"

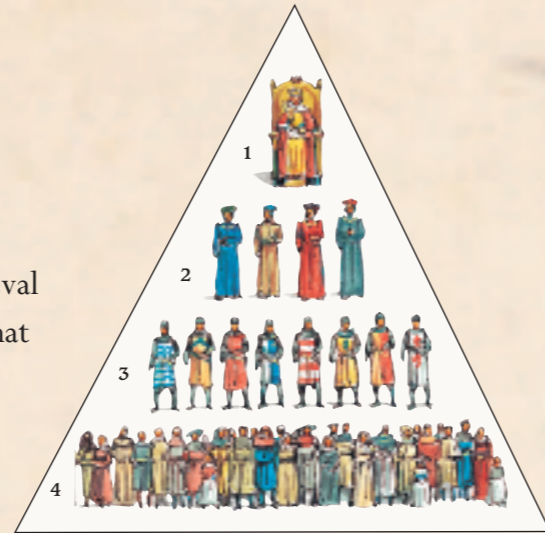
We looked around at the people in the crowd. Most appeared to be listening quietly, but many were also scowling as the man spoke.



A guide to the Middle Ages

THE MIDDLE AGES, also known as medieval times, was a period of European history that lasted from the 1000s to the 1400s. In those days, land was the key to power. The king allowed barons—noble lords—to hold land in exchange for their support in wars. The barons built castles on their land. In turn, the barons gave some of their lands to knights who promised to fight for them. All nobles had control over the peasants who farmed the land. This was called feudalism.

A baron's land was divided into manors and farmed by peasants. In return, they gave some of their crops to their landlord. As well as labouring in their lord's



This is a diagram of the feudal system. The king (1) was the most powerful person, followed by the barons (2), the knights (3) and finally the peasants (4).

fields, the peasants had small plots of land on which to grow their own food. Some manors had windmills for grinding grain into flour.

Most peasants were villeins. They had to stay on the manor where they were born. A few were freemen: they were free to move from one manor to another.



Sea ports were founded to handle this trade.

The Christian Church was very important in medieval Europe. Many people devoted their lives to the church, becoming monks or nuns. Huge cathedrals were built in a number of cities. The name comes from *cathedra* meaning “bishop’s throne”.



BEFORE the Black Death struck in the 1340s, medieval Europe was becoming wealthy. Food production grew and so did the population. Merchants started to trade goods from further afield. Wool, iron and furs from the north of Europe were traded for silks, spices and sugar from the south.