

**Middle Ages Knowledge Takeaways**

*Richard McFahn and Marc Scruby, December 2019. Adapted from Ian Dawson c2014 & HA publication ‘Exploring and teaching Medieval History in schools’, Spring 2018*

**BELIEFS**

B1. The **afterlife** was more important than living – there was little option to not be religious.

B2. People were still deeply **superstitious,** including astrology.

B3. **Religion** continued to be of **central** importance, dominating many aspects of lives, courts, holidays, church ales etc.

B4. English church part of wider **Christendom**, under Pope – grew more **political**, **wealthy** and **separate** from ‘the mud of the world’.

Key terms:

Church, purgatory, superstition, Christendom, Pope, Archbishop, sanctuary, relics, monks, monastery, tithe, excommunicate, dissolution, absolved, alms, penance, alter, astrology, doom (judgement)

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**POWER**

P1. **Monarchs** remained dominant but power was *contingent*, depending on;

1. Being successful in **war,**
2. Support from the **Nobles,**
3. Having **authority** by producing an heir, be seen as religious/ righteous, constructing image.

P2. The **feudal system** was central. Power was *tangible* but based on loyalty, linked to land and physical environment. e.g. Castles helped the Normans keep power.

P3. Commerce emerged by 14th century, undermining the status quo; **governance** became more *diffuse*. Coinage and taxation started integrating estates into shires and eventually ‘the state’. Calls for rights and represented.

Key terms:

Monarch, Kingdom, Heir, Feudal system, Fealty, Homage, Oath, Allegiance, Crown, Revolt / Rebellion, Witan / Barons / nobles / tenants in chief, illegitimate, court (royal), reign, state, throne

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**SOCIAL/ ordinary life**

S1. Most people were farmers – hard, tough, short lives, but plenty of time off for holy-days. Lives were **precarious** and open to huge traumas to population, e.g. invasions, wars, weather, floods, plague.

S2. Despite horrors, e.g. 1348 – drop in population led to higher wages, living conditions **improved** for those who survived, more freedom so 15thC highest standards of living until late 19thC.

S3. 99.99% of the population were peasants. Finding out about their lives is an evidential challenge, and has led to simple stereotypes whereby their **complexity,** community, imagination, skill and sensitivityhas been oversimplified.

S4. The Growth of **towns** (markets were catalysts)provided different opportunities, experiences and ideas. Villagers saw people of other regions, nations, religions, new types of wealth and poverty.

Key terms:

Villein, peasant, knight, freeman, statute, charter, archaeology, wattle and daub, thatched, plague

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**International (cultural encounters)**

I1: multiple cultures and languages **co-existing** and interacting before and during C11th-C14th, e.g. interactions with Scandinavia heavily influenced Northern England.

I2: Opportunities in life (C12th-C13th) were very much influenced by **language**, e.g. an educated person might switch between English, French or Latin.

I3: Over time the French speaking elite (after Norman Conq) came to see themselves as English, these various groups intermarried and **mingled**.

I4: The rise of university: scholars **criss-crossed** Europe, traders

Key terms:

Culture, Viking, Scandinavia, Latin….

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**Overview / Overall**

Medieval life dominated by struggle to grow food, religion, work – roles of 3 elements of society unchanged.

Little change in who held power.

Many wars, both civil and abroad.