

What was it like to be an 'alien' or an outsider in medieval England?

TASK: Read the story of the unit, to find out more about what we're going to study in the next eight lessons. Then, answer the questions at the bottom of the page (use a separate piece of paper).

In the medieval period (just like today) there are groups and individuals who don't quite 'fit in': they are considered outsiders.

Sometimes this was because they looked or behaved differently to the 'insiders'; sometimes it was because they came from abroad.

Over time, the experiences of some 'outsider' groups improved and they began to be accepted by members of society. Other outsider groups faced discrimination, which sometimes got worse.

One group whose experiences changed over time was **Jewish people**. Jews were invited to settle in England by William the Conqueror (who became king in 1066): this was because they were known for being **moneylenders**, and William was carrying out lots of big building projects that needed the Jewish people's money. However, many Jews faced jealousy and discrimination. Finally, they were **expelled** from England in 1290, and up to 16,000 Jews were forced to leave the country.

Generally, **disability** was not well understood in the medieval period. Those with learning difficulties and mental health problems were often cut off from society: some people - like a woman called Emma de Beston - lost all of their land and property, because it was decided they were too unwell to be responsible for anything of their own. The Church was supposed to help those with physical disabilities, but often this was not enough - and the disabled were



forced to become **beggars** or **vagrants**.

Some people had more of a choice when it came to being 'outsiders'. **Hermits** like Julian of Norwich chose to live in seclusion from others, whilst criminal gangs like the Folville family took on the status of **outlaws**, as they were on the run from the law. Followers of new religions or branches of Christianity also **alienated** themselves from society. **Lollardism** emerged in the 1300s, and followers could face harsh punishments for their '**heretical**' beliefs.

There was lots of **migration** to England in the medieval period, and migrants' experiences differed depending on where they came from and what they seemed to offer when they arrived. Textile weavers from parts of Europe were welcomed for their unique skills, and it was possible for some migrants to receive **letters of denization** (which meant they were legally considered 'English'). However, many migrants faced additional taxes, discrimination and the prospect of being labelled for the rest of their lives as 'aliens'.

TASK: Answer the questions below:

- 1: How did the experiences of Jewish people change over time?
- 2: How were those with learning difficulties and mental health problems treated?
- 3: Who was responsible for helping those with physical disabilities?
- 4: What were 'hermits'?
- 5: What positive experiences did some migrants have?
- 6: What negative experiences did some migrants have?

