

Mind Your Manors

The manorial system was built around the lord, his lands, the peasants who worked for the lord and the main house or manor. The manor, which was often a castle, served as the heart of the manorial system. The purpose of the manorial system was to be a self-sufficient community. In order to do this the lands of the manor covered hundreds and sometimes thousands of acres. This land was used for farming, pasture for animals, hunting and for timber. The part of the land on which the manor house itself was built was called the lord's demesne (pronounced di-mane). Nearby were the stables, barns, a bake-house, cookhouse, and sometimes a windmill. There was also a chapel and rectory or priest's house a short distance away.



Everything that was needed for life was produced on the manor. From the fields came the main crops of grains, such as wheat or rye, as bread was the staff of life. The forests provided game. In most cases, however, the peasants were allowed to kill only small animals, such as rabbits. Deer and other species of larger game were reserved for the lord and his family, as hunting was as much a way of entertaining as it was a necessity.

Most of the farm animals were slaughtered in the fall since more often than not there was not enough food to feed them over the winter. The main beverages were beer, wine or cider, as water was not always fit for drinking and most of the milk was made into cheese.

The peasants of the Middle Ages were called serfs. They did most of the work on the land of the lord in exchange for protection and a right to live on the manor. They were considered to be part of the lord's property and ranked little above his sheep and cattle. A small number of people called freemen rented land from the lord and could leave the manor. Serfs could not.

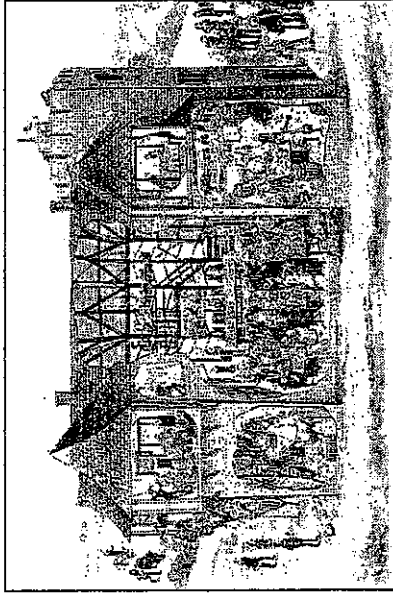
Many serfs spent their entire lives without ever leaving the manor on which they were born. The years of their lives passed, each one as the one before it, the monotony of a serf's life was broken only by war, church holidays, hunting, and athletic contests.

Life on the Manor

As you have heard already, a manor was a self-sufficient town. At the heart of the town was the lord's house. Depending on how rich he was it was a larger house or a small castle. If there were ever problems, the manor's people would run to the safety of this small castle. Outside the manor was a church. Here was where all community-wide functions would take place. Along with the church there was a blacksmith's shop and the village well. Huddled around these main structures were the peasant's houses. These were small and made of mud bricks and thatched (straw) roofs. Outside each house would be a small garden where the serf would grow personal crops (vegetables). When they were not working on the lord's fields they would tend this plot for

extra food. If they were really lucky they would have a pig or two or some other animal (Get this, when it was cold, the animals would come sleep in the house with the people on the straw that was their bed). In the house there would only be one or two chairs, maybe a table or bench and the straw bed that everyone slept on. Needless to say there was very little privacy.

Outside of the village were the fields. The fields were split into three sections. One section grew a spring crop, one a late-summer/fall crop, while the last section lay fallow (nothing planted so the soil could regain nutrients for the next year). Each peasant had to farm strips of land in these fields. The lord owned most of these strips: this was how he was rich (remember food and land were money back then). The serfs had small sections for themselves. The serfs would have to spend a certain amount of time working on the lord's strips each week. The amount of time would vary from manor to manor.



The final part of a manor was the mill (often by the church, blacksmith's shop and well). This was a very important building. At the mill, the Miller ground the grain into flour and also had an oven to bake bread. You had to pay the lord for this service. It was another moneymaker for the lord. Some peasants made their own small hand-driven grinders but had to be careful not to get caught with them. The mill was located on a stream so that a water-wheel could drive the grinder.

YOUR TASKS

1. Design a manor. Make sure you include all the buildings, fields and everything else you think is important from above.
2. Cut off the roof of one of the serf's houses to show what is inside.
3. Show the peasant's at work. What are the men doing? What are the women doing? Add captions with explanations in them to describe the work.

10/9-All buildings are included and described. I can see exactly, with great detail what the peasants do all day. It is very clear what is the peasant's house and you have lots of detailed boxes explaining yourself.

8-All buildings except one are there, you describe what everything is and what the peasants do all day. It is clear what is in the peasant's house and most things are explained with writing.

7-Two to three buildings are missing or it is unclear what the peasant's do. You only explain a couple things in writing.

Inc-You just draw a couple buildings or people and it could be anytime, anyplace.