

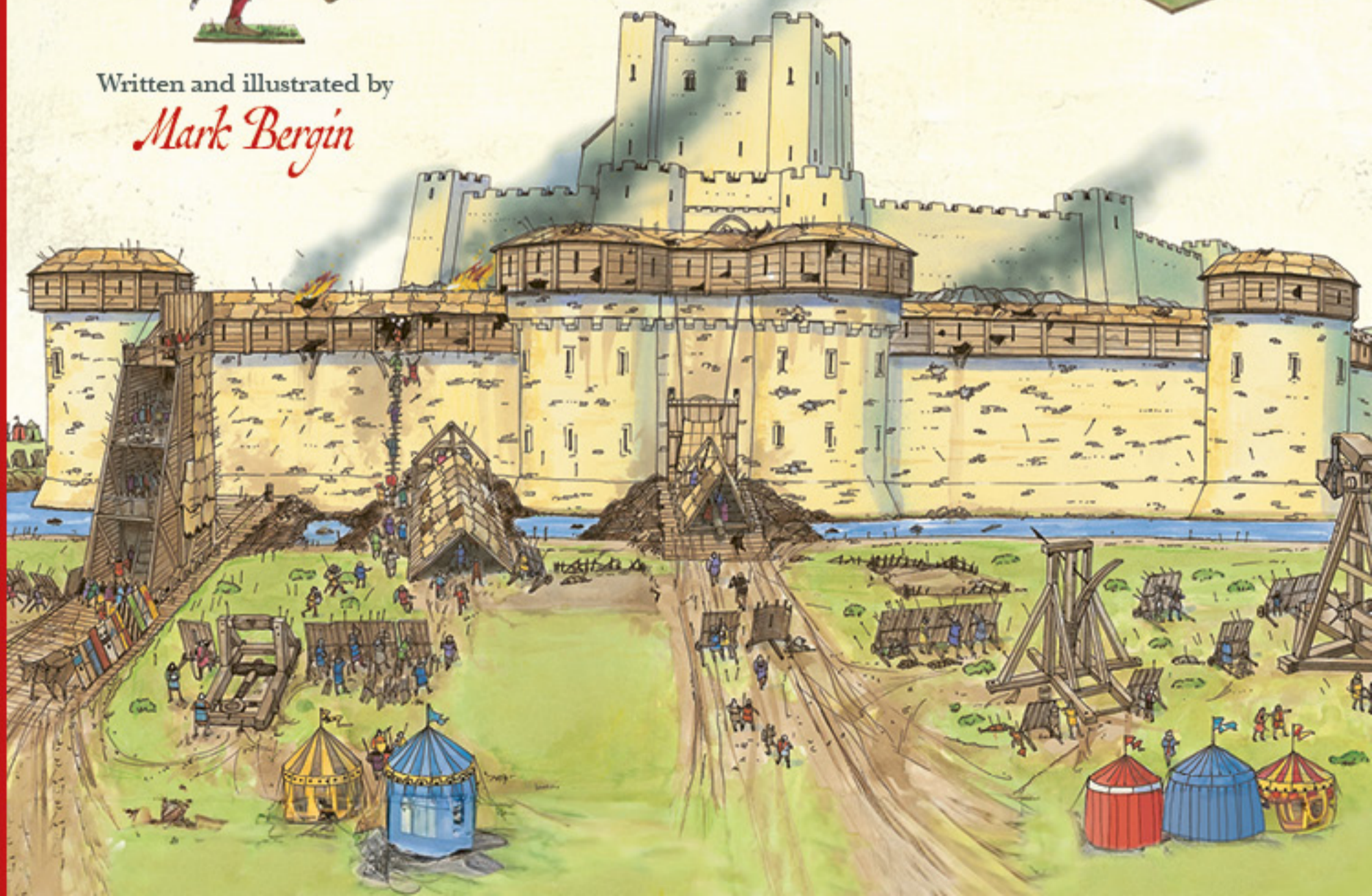


# A Medieval Castle



Written and illustrated by

*Mark Bergin*





Those born into a noble family had a privileged upbringing. Music and servants saw to their every need.



Noble boys often became pages, waiting on tables and running messages for their lord.



Young noble ladies learnt French (which most people spoke in medieval Europe) and Latin.



Learning the rules of polite behaviour was required when living in noble society.

Tapestries (right) were large decorative wall-hangings made with brightly-coloured thread. They often showed hunting scenes, jousting, battles, the daily life of the lord and lady or the family's heraldic crest. Some of the best tapestries were created in the French town of Arras.



Tapestry

# THE CASTLE KEEP

**A**T THE HEART of the castle was the keep, or donjon. It was the first part of the castle to be built in stone. The rooms in the keep included a great hall for feasting and administration, a chapel, a treasury, an archive and a storeroom. The lord and lady lived in a combination of a bedroom and sitting room called a solar. There they enjoyed a grand lifestyle with lavish food and beautiful clothes. By the 1200s castles had well-furnished bed chambers and living rooms. These were heated by large open fires and were often decorated with signs of the zodiac, folktales or biblical stories. Richly embroidered wall hangings and curtains helped to keep out draughts. At each corner of the keep was a tower with a spiral staircase. The stairs rose in a clockwise direction so that an attacking soldier climbing the stairs would find it difficult to use his sword if held in the right arm.

In the bottom third of the keep there were many storerooms, a wine cellar, a dungeon, a well and an archive. The archive housed all the important documents, paperwork and books. Books were handwritten and very expensive so they were kept locked up.



Salt cellar

Salt may have been served to the lord in a ship-shaped salt cellar. Salt was expensive and was therefore a measure of social status.



Chaplain

The chaplain's room was where his robes and vestments were kept. The chapel was situated next to the lord's domestic quarters.

These two men (right) are measuring out spices. Imported from the Far East, spices were very expensive and used only sparingly.



Storeroom

Wine cellar

Archive

Well

Great hall

Solar

The solar was the lord's private room. The lord's bed was the most expensive piece of furniture in the castle. The tapestry curtains were drawn to keep out draughts.



The lady of the castle was usually an expert at needlework, as was expected of well-bred medieval women. Music, weaving, embroidery and cooking were all essential skills for a nobelady.



Taking a bath in medieval times was a rare event. Ladies-in-waiting had to haul up buckets of heated water to the solar. Even a king would usually have taken a bath only once every three weeks!

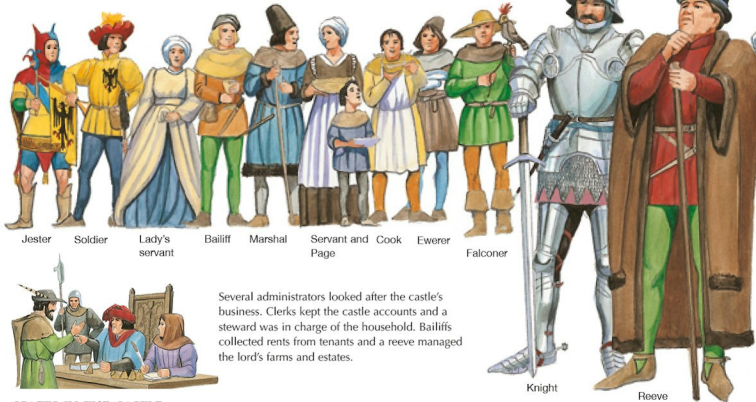
Marshal

The marshal was in charge of organising the lodgings around the castle. He had grooms, pages and serving maids to help him. They made sure rooms were ready for visitors.



# CASTLE RESIDENTS

**A** CASTLE WAS LIKE A SMALL TOWN and numerous people were needed to run it smoothly and to serve and protect the lord and lady. The constable was in charge of the castle garrison and the daily running of the castle when the lord and lady were away. A number of foot-soldiers and archers were retained, or garrisoned, to defend the castle. The chaplain held services in the castle chapel and may have acted as a secretary for the castle as he would have been one of the few people who could write. The panter was responsible for buying food and provisions, the butler dispensed wine and a ewerer provided clean linen for use in the great hall. Young noble boys came to live at the castle to become pages and they helped to serve meals. The horses and their stables were cared for by grooms. The worst job in the castle must have been the gong farmer's – he had to clean out the pit, or gong, under the lavatories! All these people kept the castle well maintained, safe and comfortable.



Several administrators looked after the castle's business. Clerks kept the castle accounts and a steward was in charge of the household. Bailiffs collected rents from tenants and a reeve managed the lord's farms and estates.

## CRAFTS IN THE CASTLE



Glass was specially made for tableware on the lord's table and stained glass for decorative windows.



Tailors made the lord and lady fine clothes with imported silk or other expensive materials.



Silversmiths and goldsmiths worked on tableware and jewellery for the castle and its chapel.



Painters decorated the furniture and walls with tableware and jewellery for the lord and its chaplain.



Jewellers worked on special commissions for the lord and the chaplain.



Weavers made the cloth from which the castle staff's clothes were fashioned.



The blacksmith was always busy making and repairing horseshoes, tools and farm implements.



Potters created tableware and storage pots for the whole castle community.



Cobblers made beautiful shoes for the nobles as well as boots for the garrison soldiers.



Masons crafted the decorative stonework in the church and castle.



Stained glass was used in churches to portray biblical figures and stories.



Carpenters made complete frameworks for buildings. They also did the fine carving on church furniture.



Fine tapestries were skillfully handmade from brightly-coloured threads.



# BARRACKS, ARMOURY AND STABLES

**S**OME LATER CASTLE DESIGNS included barracks. The castle at Carcassonne, in France, in the 13th century included barracks. The barracks housed the castle garrison, made up of foot soldiers, archers and hired soldiers. They ate, slept and spent their spare time in the barracks. The captain of the guard had his own room but was close enough to keep an eye on the men under his command. Weapons and armour were made and maintained in the castle armoury. Both master craftsmen and apprentices worked in the armoury, cutting and hammering sheets of heated metal into swords, helmets and shields (below). If a knight was to survive in battle he needed good quality, well-fitting and often expensive armour. During this period the very best armour came from the German cities of Nuremberg and Augsburg or Milan in Italy.

Bowmen (right) were well paid, skilful and essential members of the castle garrison. Crossbows were lethal – bolts could pierce full armour at 50 m! Their only disadvantage was the time it took to reload. For this reason crossbows tended to be used in castle and siege warfare, where bowmen were able to shelter behind battlements while preparing to fire.



## FOOT-SOLDIERS

The foot-soldier was the lowest rank in the garrison. These men were from the peasant classes and were brought in by the lord to defend the castle or to go on campaign at times of war.



Horseshoes



Horses were tended and shod in the garrison stables near the barracks.



Captain of the guard preparing for duty



In the armoury workshop, a grindstone of granite was used to give swords, axes and lances a straight, sharp edge (below).



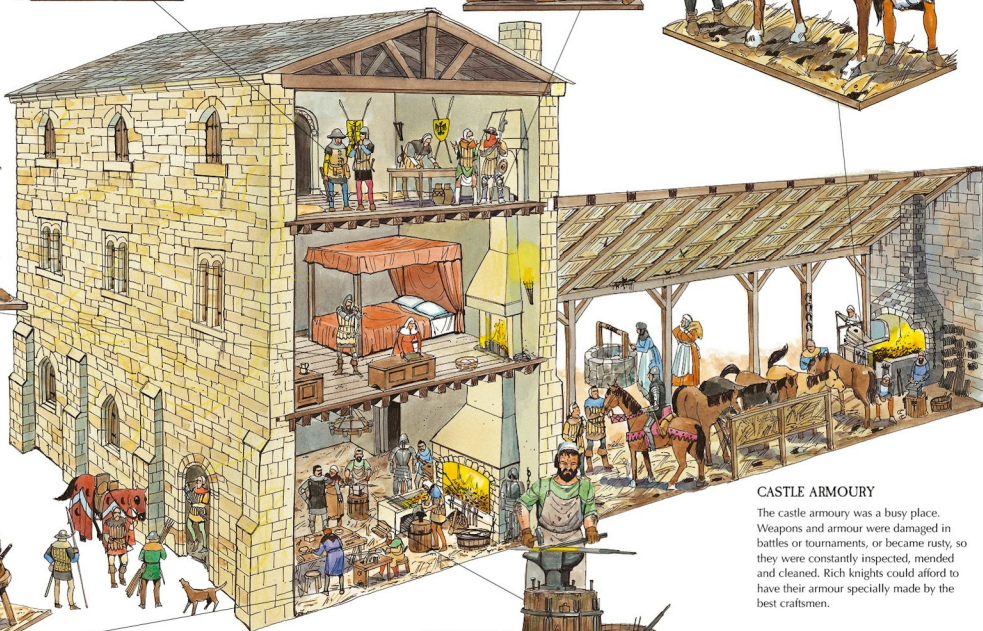
## CHAIN MAIL

Early chain mail was made up of many interlocking rings of iron, skilfully made into coats or leggings (below left). By the 13th century armoured coats were made from overlapping metal plates or sections (below right).

Chain mail from the 11th century



13th-century 'coat of plates'



## CASTLE ARMOURY

The castle armoury was a busy place. Weapons and armour were damaged in battles or tournaments, or became rusty, so they were constantly inspected, mended and cleaned. Rich knights could afford to have their armour specially made by the best craftsmen.

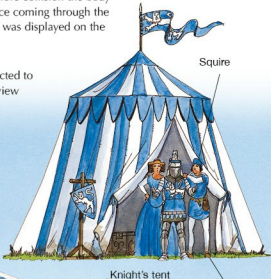
Armoury craftsman shaping a sword





The frog-mouthed jousting helmet (left) was popular across medieval Europe. A jousting knight could see his opponent by leaning forward during a charge. Before collision the body straightened to stop the opponent's lance coming through the helmet's slit. The knight's heraldic crest was displayed on the top.

Before tournaments, pavilions were erected to ensure nobles and judges got the best view of the action (below). The knights had tents for their servants and armour (right).



Knights wore specially strengthened armour to withstand the impact of a lance during jousting. Their heavy horses were bred especially for tournaments and were trained to charge.



# TOURNAMENTS

**T**OURNAMENTS were mock battles in which knights could show off and practise their fighting skills. By the 13th and 14th centuries these competitions were highly organised, with rules and judges. Tournament days were huge social occasions. The people of the castle manor came to watch their favourite knight, cheer him on and wear his colours. Rewards were high for the victors – defeated knights lost valuable horses or armour to their opponents.

The most common form of combat was the tilt, or joust. This contest featured knights charging at each other on horseback with lances. In later contests a tilt barrier was used, which prevented head-on collisions. Knights were often maimed or killed in a tournament. Contests between teams of knights were known as melees. There could be up to 20 on each team, all on horseback.



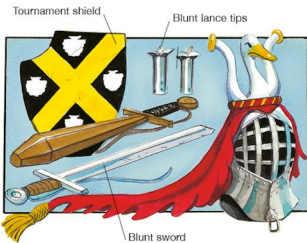
A knight on tour took with him his servants, squire and horses.



Heraldry was a complex system used to identify each knight. It used symbols and colours which appeared on every individual knight's shields and surcoats.



Squires handled out their knight's colours to supporters at tournaments. These small shields were worn in their hats before the games began.



Weapons and armour were specially made for tournaments. The metal tips of lances were splayed so that they would inflict less damage, swords were blunted and maces were made of wood. Shields had the top corner removed so that a lance could be held crossed over the horse (above).

Tournament games were strictly managed by judges (left). A knight who had cheated or dishonoured another could be forced to sit out a melee and so lose.



Jousting saddles were brightly coloured and made of wood and leather. They were raised at the front and back to give the rider additional support.



Judges could stop a fight with the help of heralds or men-at-arms who would step in and force fighters apart.

The prizes meant that tournaments were not just an opportunity for glory – a skilled knight could win horses, armour and money.