



CHILTERN

OPEN AIR

MUSEUM

*Where buildings come
alive through history*

Medieval Farming

Location:

- Arborfield Barn.

Purpose and content of the activity session:

- During this session the children will learn about the importance of agriculture to society.
- They will also learn about the types of jobs to be done during each season.
- There will also be a display covering such topics as the Open field system, the farming year and the influence of the wool trade on small villages in the Chilterns.

Historical Background:

The foundation of Western Europe's economy and society during the medieval period was agriculture, as 80-90% of Europe's population worked the land. The medieval period was also the scene of some of the most influential and interesting changes in England's agriculture and society, forming the basis of the 18th and 19th Centuries Enclosures of Common land.

Feudal Society

When the Normans invaded in 1066, William the Conqueror replaced the Anglo-Saxon lords of the manor with Norman lords, using the Norman legal system to overturn all other rights of inheritance, ensuring that his men were in positions of power, although this legal system in turn continued the English feudal system that had originated with the Anglo-Saxons.



The King owned all of England but he gave almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of England's land to lords and knights in payment for services given to him. Arborfield Barn originally came from land that had been given as a liberty from a lord to a knight in payment for loyalty.

The lord of the manor (or in many cases the Church) in turn had many tenants that worked the land for him and themselves. This was the basis of the feudal system.

Tenants paid dues and services to the lord of the manor depending on their class.

Free tenants lived and worked on the manor, working the land as if it were their own, paying rent to the lord of the manor. Rents could be monetary, services to the lord (e.g. military service or representing the village at the Royal Courts) or an acknowledgment (e.g. a pound of wax or a percentage of the crop).

Unfree tenants were agricultural labourers for the Lord of the Manor, consisting of three classes:

- *virgators* held a virgate or yardland (approximately 30 acres).
- *half virgators* held half a virgate or yardland (approximately 15 acres).
- *bordarii or cottarii* held between 2 and 5 acres.

The amount of land they held depended on the amount of work that they did for the Manor. The more work they undertook the more land they held.

The Domesday Book:

In 1086, William I commissioned the Winchester Chronicles (known today as the Domesday Book); this chronicle recorded the amount of land in each manor, how many ploughs, livestock and other features of the land in great detail, which indicated how much tax and other income could be collected from lords, knights and peasants by the Crown.

From this chronicle it is known that at this time there were approximately 1 million cattle and 2 million sheep in England, using approximately a third of England for grazing. We also know that there were numerous small and well-managed woodlands throughout England, which produced more income than ploughland. The woodland was managed in different ways, from leaving tall stands of trees for timber for buildings and ship's masts, coppicing for treen (small wooden items such as rolling pins, bowls and spoons) or pollarding so that the grazing animals could not reach the branches. In fact the beech woods were already a dominant feature of the Chilterns, with the name

Buckinghamshire thought to derive from 'Boc' an Anglo-Saxon word for beech.

Chalfont St. Peter and Chalfont St. Giles are both mentioned in the Domesday book under the name *Celfunde* (meaning chalk spring). From these records we know that Chalfont St. Peter was owned by the Bishop of Bayeux

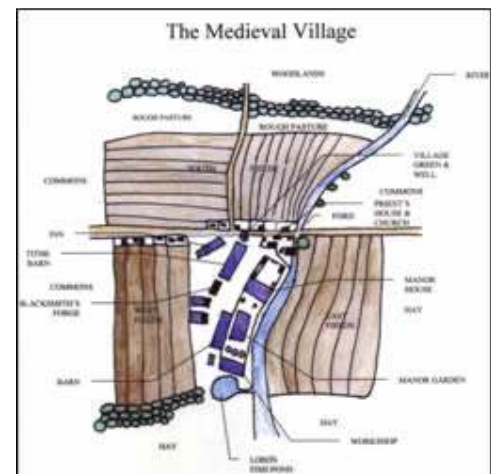
“Roger holds 4 hides and 3 virgates from the Bishop. Land for 15 ploughs; in lordship 1. 14 villagers with 4 smallholders have 14 ploughs. 2 slaves; 1 mill at 6s; meadow for 2 ploughs; woodland, 600 pigs; a hawk’s eyrie. Total value 110s; when acquired 60s; ...”

Chalfont St. Giles was owned by Mainou the Breton

“Mainou holds 4 hides and 3 virgates. Land for 15 ploughs; in lordship 1 hide; 3 ploughs there. 13 villagers and 8 smallholders have 12 ploughs. 4 slaves; 3 mills; one of them pays 5 ora and the other two pay nothing; meadow for 1 plough; woodland, 600 pigs; in this woodland, a hawk’s eyrie. Total value £6 10s; when acquired 100s ... ”

The medieval village:

The medieval village was usually located near a Manor house and farm, held by the lord of the manor. Near the Manor farm would be the village where the tenants would live. The average village would have had as much as 1500 acres divided



into three great fields with water meadows, woodland and “waste land” as well. The three fields would be divided into strips of about 1 acre in size called selions and each tenant farmer had one or more selions which were scattered over the open fields, over good and poor land. There were no hedges or fences between the strips and so weeds could spread easily between strips owned by different tenants and there were some boundary disagreements.

Only two fields were sown each year with crops and one field was left unseeded or fallow. The products of the fields were used for flour, grain for chickens, long straw was used for thatching and in the autumn the animals grazed the stubble.

An example of the open field system:

The West Field was sown with seed for winter crops in selions, with each tenant working one or more selions within this field.

The South Field was left fallow. This meant that every third year the field was rested to restore the land to “good heart”. The next year’s harvest would be better than the year before. With repeated ploughing during the year the weed seedlings were also reduced, hand hoeing of fields removed weeds such as thistles, which made the harvest difficult.

The East field was sown with seed for the spring crops in selions, with each tenant working one or more selion of the field.

The medieval farmer:

The ideal amount of land provided to *virgators* was a yardland or virgate (approximately 30 acres), although before the Black Death almost half of the peasants had only about $\frac{1}{4}$ of this land, which could not produce enough food to feed their families.

For peasants with a yardland a farmer could grow cereals and peas on his arable land, have one or more horses or oxen to pull a plough, two or more dairy cows, a few pigs, several dozen sheep, beehives and some chickens.

Many farmers would also have an acre or more for vegetables, hemp and flax crops and fruit trees.

Medieval crops

Many types of cereals, herbs and vegetables that we know today were grown in the medieval period, although many of the plants actually grown are old varieties which are rarely used today and may not be recognisable, for example carrots were white and cereal crops were taller than many varieties today.

Crops were divided into four main classes, which determined where or when they were to be sown.

Winter Crops: Wheat and Rye

Summer Crops: Barley, Oats, Peas, Beans and Vetches

Garden/cash Crops: Herbs (including sage, marjoram, rosemary, borage, fennel and rocket), Vegetables (including cabbages, spinach, parsnips, turnips, carrots, onions and leeks, Flax and Hemp (for rope, candle wicks and other household implements and tools), Fruit trees (including plums, apples and cherries).

Dye plants: Madder (red), Woad (blue), Weld (yellow) and Dyer's greenweed (green)

The Farming Year:






All farmers are affected by the changing seasons and the weather, but especially those with smaller amounts of land, the type of work done, the length of the working day and what they ate were all factors influenced by the seasons.




Thomas Tusser wrote in 1585 "A Description of Time, and the Yeare" in his book "Five hundred points of good husbandrie," providing a brief summary of the types of jobs undertaken in each season.

Of God to thy doings a time there is sent,

<i>which endeth with time that in doing is spent. For time is it selfe but a time for a time, forgotten ful soone, as the tune of a chime.</i>	
<i>In Spring time we reare, we doo sowe, and we plant, in Summer get vittels, least after we want. In Harvest we carie in corne and the fruit, in Winter to spend as we neede of ech suit.</i>	<i>Spring. Summer. Harvest. Winter.</i>

Many illustrated calendars were created depicting the farming year and from these we can ascertain the types of jobs undertaken during the year, for example:

January	This was a time of rest. Animals were cared for and some maintenance was carried out.
February	February was the time to start some digging of the fields for planting.
March	Those with vineyards would prune the vines, others would continue digging and planting.
April 	The ploughs would be taken to the fields as the ground would now be soft enough to turn. The fields were then sown for the spring crops.
May 	Children would defend the newly sown seed from birds with slings. Only the lord's doves could not be killed as there was a heavy penalty. Gardens also needed tending, the cows and sheep came back to full milk again and there could be time for hawking as well.
June 	Haymaking was the main event in June. Hay makers used a long handled scythe to cut the grass close to the ground. Men were expected to mow an acre a day with women and children following to collect the hay into bundles. In late June the sheep were also sheared.
July 	During July the main crop fields would be weeded. The many common weeds included thistles and corn marigolds. Towards the end of July, if the weather was good the harvesting could be started.
August 	The main grain harvest began in the beginning of August. The winter crops were harvested first followed by the spring grains. The harvest should finish at the end of this month.
September	If the harvest was delayed due to bad weather it would be finished during the first week of September. Then the harvest had to be processed. First it was

	<p>threshed and the grain collected. This then had to be winnowed to remove the chaff and straw. The chaff and straw was then kept for winter fodder for the animals. The sheep no longer needed to be milked after the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin (8th September) and the cows no longer needed to be milked at Michelmas.</p>
<p>October</p> 	<p>Winter crops were sown in the fields. Wild fruit and nuts were collected in the woods.</p>
<p>November</p> 	<p>Preparations for the coming winter were started. Firewood was collected, although peasants could only take dead wood and the amount was often limited. Reeds and sedges were cut to be dried for thatching, flooring and lighting. Herds were inspected and the weaker and older animals were slaughtered for their meat and hides. Food was preserved.</p>
<p>December</p>	<p>The weather confined people to their homes where they did what they could to while away the hours and earn extra money; for example women spun.</p>

Export trade, plague and social change:

The medieval period was the fascinating scene of the changing social and working structure. These working structures then remained almost exactly the same until reforms were made during the agricultural revolution of the nineteenth century.

Between 1200 and 1350 there was an increase in England's population, with the portions of land for tenants becoming smaller and smaller. At the same time an increase in the export trade, especially the wool trade, meant that many lords and free tenants became richer. More tenants were allowed to pay the Lord of the Manor instead of performing the services that they had previously owed. Lords could also now afford to pay labourers to work the lands and often the standard of work improved because the labourers were not forced to undertake the work due to fealty.

During the 14th and 15th centuries there were also a large number of outbreaks of plague (any epidemic that spread throughout the country quickly) in both livestock and human populations, and unusually bad harvests, which also helped to shape the social and agricultural changes to come. In 1313 a sheep plague devastated flock numbers and in 1319 the cattle plague devastated herd numbers. On top of that between 1314 and 1318 the weather was unusually wet and cold which resulted in bad harvests and caused mass starvation with 10-15% of the population dying (approximately 600 000 people). The worst plague to affect England however was the Black Death (1348-9) that cut the remaining population by half. Later plagues still devastated the population and therefore combined with the increased exportation trades had a great affect on the social structure of medieval England.

Concentrating on the effect of the plagues and bad harvests the great drop in the population size meant that the lord of the manor had fewer tenants and labourers to work his land and therefore livestock and crops were damaged, decreasing his income. Henry Knighton recorded the effect of the Black Death:

“... sheep and cattle were left to wander through the fields and among the standing crops, since there was no one to drive them off or collect them; for want of people to look after them they died in untold numbers in the hedgerows and ditches all over the country. So few labourers and servants were left that nobody knew where to turn for help.”

Many of the lords tried to force remaining tenants to perform the services that they had previously owed, such as working the land and military services; however laws were passed to stop this. With fewer people to work the land wages increased, as the tenants and labourers knew that the work needed to be done and that there were so few men to undertake it they could keep forcing the wages up and up. Again laws were passed to reduce the amount

of wages per worker to the sums that they were before the plagues but these laws were not enforceable. Sumptuary laws were also created throughout the 1300s and 1400s, as labourers were increasing in wealth due to high wages. These laws were created to help to maintain the social structure and the lord's power by controlling the type of dress, the apparel or livery, the type of food and the type of building materials that could be had or used by the labourer.

Sheep farming:

Due to increasing wages sheep farming became more popular in the late 14th century as it needed fewer workers than growing cereal crops, and the wool produced from the Chalk Downs and the Welsh and Scottish borders was thought to be the best in Europe. The Anglo-Saxons had started the wool trade with Flanders and the Low Countries, but before the plagues sheep were kept in small numbers on wasteland that couldn't be used for crops. With increased sheep rearing many open fields and common lands belonging to the manor were enclosed with hedges, forming the countryside that we now recognise, decreasing the amount land that could be used by the tenants and labourers to grow their own food. Serious disturbances were recorded in the late 1400s due to the enclosures in Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire and many medieval villages became deserted as fewer labourers were needed to raise sheep and with the enclosure of open fields and common land. The lack of work meant that people often had to move away from their village homes to find work elsewhere. There is still evidence today, in the form of aerial photography, of deserted medieval villages.

In 1297 one of England's principal exports was wool and this trade accounted for half of England's wealth, and seven years after the end of the Black Death (in 1356) an increased amount of 40 000 sacks of wool was exported, and by 1450 approximately 4 million acres of English land was being used to rear sheep.

The peasant's diet:

Thomas Tusser wrote the "The Farmers Dailie Diet" in 1585 in his book "500 points of good husbandrie", which outlines the fast days of lent and advent and Fish Days, where it was obligatory to forgo all meat and animal fats on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, that all people had to abide by during the medieval period.

*"A PLOT set downe, for fermers quiet,
as time requires, to frame his diet:
With sometime fish, and sometime fast,*

<i>that household store may longer last.</i>	
<i>Lent.</i>	<i>Let Lent well kept offend not thee, for March and Aprill breeders bee: Spend herring first, save saltfish last, for saltfish is good, when Lent is past.</i>
<i>Easter.</i>	<i>When Easter come, who knows not than, that Veale and Bakon is the man: And Martilmas beefe doth beare good tack, when countrie folke doe dainties lack.</i>
<i>Midsummer.</i> <i>Michelmas.</i>	<i>When Mackrell ceaseth from the seas, John Baptist brings grassebeefe and pease. Fresh herring plenty, Mihell brings, with fatted Crones, and such old things.</i>
<i>Hallomas.</i> <i>Christmas.</i>	<i>All Saints doe laie for porke and souse, for sprats and spurlings for their house. At Christmas play and make good cheere, for Christmas comes but once a yeere.</i>
<i>A caveat.</i> <i>Fasting.</i>	<i>Though some then doe, as doe they would, let thriptide doe, as doe they should. For causes good, so many waies, keepe Embrings wel, and fasting daies:</i>
<i>Fish daies.</i> <i>A thing needful.</i>	<i>What lawe commands, we ought to obay, for Friday, Saturne, and Wednesday. The land doth will, the sea doth wish, spare sometime flesh, and feede of fish.</i>
<i>The last remedie.</i>	<i>Where fish is scant, and fruit of trees, Supplie that want with butter and cheese.”</i>

Of course where food was scarce due to lack of land and bad harvests, these fasts and fish days had little bearing on the peasant's daily life and diet.

Before the Black Death:

The basis of the peasant's diet before the Black Death was pottage, maslin bread, butter and cheese.

Pottage is a type of thick soup or stew with the base made from oats, barley or dried beans or peas (depending on the harvest) that was then flavoured with leeks, onions, kale, other vegetables and herbs. Meat could be added to the pottage if there was any to spare or if the peasant illegally snared or trapped rabbits, birds and game on the lord's land. Thus Fish Days were very

easy to abide by for the peasant due to the lack of meat available for their diet.

Maslin bread is made from a maslin or maislin mix of cereal crops that could contain up to 30 different varieties of wheat, barley and rye, the poorer the peasant the higher the quantity of rye in the bread. In years of very poor harvests this bread was made from pea flour. This bread had to be taken to the manor house for baking and one tenth of the bread was left behind as payment. Thomas Tusser wrote of baking:

*“Newe bread is a drivel
Much crust is as evill*

*NEW bread is a waster, but mouldie is wurse,
what that way god catcheth, that loseth the purse.
Much dowebake I praise not, much crust is as ill,
the meane is the Huswife, say nay if ye will.”*

In fact peas and beans were the basis of the peasant's diet with early medieval bye-laws created to protect harvesting of the peas (coddling). The first bye-law stated that the poor must only gather pods on the verge of the field and not on the selion. The second bye-law stated that coddling could only occur between sunrise and sunset with everyone entering and leaving the field at the same time. It was also recommended that if there was room outside the dwelling, two 6'x3' beds of peas would make 12lb of dried peas, enough for a small family throughout the winter.

The cows were milked only from May until Michelmas and sheep from May until the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin on 8th September. Milk was a very valuable commodity and so only the whey was drunk and the rest was turned into cream, butter or cheese. It was estimated that during the medieval period 7lbs of cheese could be made from the milk of 1 cow or 10 sheep.

From a Reeve's or Bailiff's ledger of the period it is known that labourers were allowed 2 large loaves a week, ½oz cheese and ¼oz butter per day and 2

bushels of oats for pottage a year. Although at harvest time the worker's diet was augmented by the Manor with white meats (milk, eggs and cheese) and 3 fish a day for each man. This was the only time that the labourers tasted any food like that which the lord of the manor served at his table.

After the Black Death:

After the Black Death the wages for labourers increased, and as a result many changes occurred in the diet, which is the basis of many traditional country recipes used today. With increased land and money the diets of the peasants improved with more variety and better quality ingredients. With more land available more crops could be grown and the use of yeasty wheat flour in bread increased compared to the rye or pea flour bread before the plagues. Meat consumption also increased with new staples in the diet consisting of pies, sausages and black pudding. The drinking of ale also increased within the peasant population to such an extent that permanent ale houses with licences granted by the lord of the manor appeared in the villages, with villages starting to look like country villages today. With increased wages the peasants were also able to purchase the dried fruits such as raisins and prunes that were imported from Portugal and the spices that were imported from the East. The increased wages also meant that more household items could be bought and the kitchens of many cottages improved, with bread ovens (baking the bread in their own home), linen cloths, brass pots and pans, tripods, barrels and tubs.

Because of these changes the nobility thought that the peasants were usurping their position and aping the manners and status of their betters, and Sumptuary Laws were created which stated the types of food that a peasant could eat and that they could only have two courses!

Preserving food:

Preserving food for the winter was a very important task that was done by three main methods:

1. drying (herbs, vegetables, fruits)
2. salting (butter and meat)

3. pickling

Butter was so highly salted to preserve it that there were known techniques to de-salt it.

Meat was also salted but this took a large quantity of salt as a layer of salt was placed in the bottom of a barrel, salted meat (the salt had already been rubbed into the pieces of meat) was placed in a layer, then another layer of salt followed by another layer of salted meat and so on until the barrel was full. This only worked with large amounts of salt as it had to penetrate through to the middle of the meat. It was an extremely expensive preserving method as salt had to be imported into the Manor from the salt pans, which were mainly around the coast.

Another preserving method was used within the richer households, where fruits and petals were “candied” with sugar (another expensive import). These were called “sweet meats” when served at banquets.

Herbs and the four humours:

Many plants that have a multitude of uses are loosely termed as "herbs". These herbs have played an important part in many cultures around the world throughout history, and in fact the Anglo-Saxons had an immense knowledge of England's herbs for medicinal, culinary and other properties, many of which have been now been proven by modern science.



In Europe illnesses were explained by the "theory of the four humours" well into the 17th century, which holds that four fluids within the body correspond to the four elements, the four seasons and other aspects of the natural world. This theory was introduced by Galen (AD 131-201) who was a physician to the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius. He believed that vitality and health depended on the correct balance of the humours and the four elements (fire,

water, earth and wind) and that herbs could help to correct this balance.

Many people believed in the four humours and cooking methods were devised to enhance health and balance the humours. It was believed that opposites would balance the humours and so many dishes of the time, especially in the Manor House, had ingredients that were sweet and others that were sour.

It was also widely believed that roasting dries out food, boiling warms food and adds moisture whilst baking dries and warms food in moderation. From this it was thought that all vegetables were very dry as they were from the earth and so must be chopped finely and boiled. Different meats also had their own method of cooking; Beef (a dry meat) must always be boiled, Pork (a moist meat) must always be roasted and fish (a cold and moist meat) must always be fried. Veal, Poultry and Game could be baked as they were protected from the drying heat of the oven by the pastry.

Thomas Tusser wrote of the housewife in 1585:

*“GOOD huswives provides, ere an sickness doo come,
Of sundrie good thongs in hir house to have some.
Good Aqua composite, Vinegar tart,
Rose water and treacle, to comfort the hart.*

*Cold herbes in hir garden for agues that burne,
That over strong heat to good temper may turne.
While Endire and Suckerie, with Spinnage ynough,
All such with good pot herbes should follow the plough.*

...

*Good broth and good keeping doo much now and than,
Good diet with wisdom best comforteth man.
In health to be stirring shall profit thee best,
In sicknes hate trouble, seek quiet and rest.*

...”