

Life in a Medieval Village

What is a Manor?

A typical manor consisted of a village surrounding the home of the lord of the manor. The lord's own land, the *demesne*, was worked by the villagers in return for their own holdings of land in the fields beyond. Their fields, normally three in number, were enormous, often up to 100 acres and unbounded by hedges. They were worked in rotation, one remaining fallow each year, and divided into curving strips about a furlong (220 yards) in length. Each peasant had several strips which were scattered amongst the fields.

They would have grown crops such as wheat, barley, rye, peas and beans. Land unsuited to arable farming was cleared and held in common by all the villagers for grazing animals. Beyond were the woodlands and 'waste' - valuable areas where fuel and building materials were gathered, pigs allowed to forage and wild animals hunted and snared. Most of these activities were privileges however and any peasant who overstepped the mark would be liable to a fine imposed by the Manor Court.

Who's Who on the Manor

Lord of the Manor - In 1363 Tatton's lord was Sir Hugh Massey. He held land from the King and his peasants held it from him in exchange for agricultural and military service.

Steward - The lord was often absent on royal service and left the manor in the charge of his Steward, the highest ranking manorial official.

Bailiff - A free man appointed by the lord to direct agricultural work on the demesne. The Bailiff lived at the hall and because of his direct management of the peasants, was often unpopular in the village.

Reeve - A servant of the lord of the manor who was always elected from among the peasants. He had the job of organising and overseeing their labour on the demesne, attending the manor court and keeping financial accounts.

Free Man - A villager who had bought his freedom from the lord and did not have to labour on the demesne. He was not tied to the land and was free to move away from the village.

Villeins - Villagers who held land from the lord of the manor in exchange for their labour on his demesne. They could not move from their native village without special permission and a considerable payment.

The Life of a Medieval Peasant

The life of a medieval peasant was ruled by the cycle of agricultural work on both his own land and the lord's demesne. Although life was hard, a number of feast and holy days gave Hugh Massey and his countrymen and women a chance to relax and enjoy themselves. Common pastimes in Cheshire were dice, quoits, casting the stone (bowls?), ninepins, bear-baiting, cards and dancing. The king banned football to encourage archery practise!! English archers were the best.

What did a Medieval Peasant Eat?

Bread	Made from barley, rye or oats. Rarely from wheat.
Pottage	A thick soup or porridge of oatmeal, peas and beans.
Ale	Home brewed from barley.
Cheese	Most villagers kept a cow to supply milk for butter and cheese.
Meat	A rare addition to the diet, except for hares and other wild animals.



Costume Information Sheet

Medieval Peasants at the Old Hall

Date: 1363, Edward III is King of England

Where are you going?

The Old Hall at Tatton Park is a typical late Medieval manor house. The Lord of the manor at the time of your visit is Hugh Massey and his wife Alice. Hugh lived in an earlier house on the other side of the stream but the inside of the Old Hall is probably very like his house. We know there were farmers working on the manor at that time. Some of them may have had small cottages near the Old Hall and the sunken road which led to nearby Rostherne from Knutsford.

By the fifteenth century the Old Hall passed from the Masseys to the Stanleys and then to the Breretons, who built the present Old Hall. Eventually it came to the Egertons, who built the big Mansion at Tatton in the 18th century.

Life as a Peasant

Life for most people in the fourteenth century was extremely hard. The country was at war with France. Death and disease were a constant threat as conditions were unhygienic and food not always plentiful and peasants worked long hours in the fields for little reward, paying for their land by labouring and fighting for their lord.

What to Wear

We find that some sort of costume, however simple, helps you enter into the spirit of the occasion. You should remember though, that being warm and dry is more important than authenticity.

If you have time before your visit, why not try dyeing your clothes using natural materials as your ancestors might have done? Boiled onion skins produce a bright yellow colour. You could also try blackberry juice, beetroot, bark or moss. Experiment with different combinations to get a good colour.

Boys

You can either make a simple tunic and wear it over a sweater or cut the collar off an old shirt of your parents and use that (but ask first!). Make a liripipe out of a piece of fabric

Use plaited strips of material to make a belt. A cloth pouch tied to the belt adds a touch of style! If you have a wide leather belt that will do.

Wear dark trousers (not jeans).



Girls

Long hair should be neatly plaited or tied back. Use a piece of fabric to cover your head and shoulders like a liripipe.

You can either make a tunic by folding a rectangle of material in half and cutting a hole for your head, or wear a long, plain dress with a sweater underneath for warmth.

Gather the dress or the tunic at the waist with a strip of cloth or use a long plaited strip. A chain belt also looks good.

Make sure that your feet are warm! Short boots are best, but flat shoes will do if you wear thick, warm socks.