***The 14th Century***

***Think 14th century and think one of the most terrible times in Europe’s history, with terrible famine, the arrival of the Black Death. Was there anything good about it?***

**Power and conflict**

In England the dominating king of the period was Edward III. He began the so-called 100 Years’ war by claiming the throne of France. His eldest son the Black Prince was very brutal in the way he killed the people of French lands as part of this war. In 1381 the so-called Peasants’ Revolt was crushed after the betrayal of their leader Wat Tyler. It was actually an uprising of many of the less wealthy of society, including women. They were protesting about attempts to keep them as serfs and hold down wages, despite the labour shortage after the Black Death. Although the rebellion was crushed, serfdom (similar to slavery) did come to an end and from this era onwards people in England worked for wages and therefore were more free to move from place to place to find a better life. By the very end of the century, King Richard II, son of the Black Prince, had been deposed by Henry IV and this event would be written about by Shakespeare within 200 years.

**Faith and Fears**

The Black Death killed up to a half of England’s population in about one year from 1349. Remember that people in the Middle Ages believed this world was but a short step to eternal life, or eternal damnation. The Roman Catholic church provided that key to ensuring that your path was heaven and not hell. Therefore, it must have been terrifying that more priests and monks and nuns died than many other groups. Why were the holiest people of the church dying in such large numbers? Was this the end of the world? Was this the work of the devil and his agents? Today we know that this terrible disease is caused by germs, but that knowledge was still 500 years in the future for our terrified ancestors. People thought the end of the world was nigh, especially as the years 1315-17 had already seen millions of people die in Europe due to famine caused by harvest failure after endless rains.

**Home and health**

Just as we would, our ancestors tried everything and anything to halt the progress of the unexplained plague. They prayed, sold remedies, avoided the sick, cleaned rubbish from the streets, burned herbs to make the air sweet, went on pilgrimage and drove people they did not like from their towns. Despite the terrible events of 1349-50, this was also a century that saw advances in people’s homes. The survivors could increase their landholdings, make more money and build houses of brick, timber and even with glass in the windows.

**Art and Architecture**

This century sees the height of the Gothic. In Italy the frescoes of Giotto were the latest modern thing. The art of England was less advanced, but also beautiful, as is clear in this, the Wilton Dyptych.

**News and views**

Finally, almost 400 years after the Norman Conquest of England, the kings of England began to use English as their language. Meanwhile, men such as William Ockham held radical views. In Ockham’s case, the importance of faith, the need for keen and slimmed down argument (Occam’s razor) and about the individual. **Wider world**

The famous Ming dynasty began to rule China from 1368. Meanwhile in Europe, the Great Schism began in 1378. This was to result in a time where there were no less than three Popes. Also in Italy, Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio wrote works that are still in print today.

**Medieval remains**

One of the greatest works of English literature was written in this period by a courtier named Geoffrey Chaucer. His Canterbury Tales give a vivid picture of a varied society and added much love characters to English literature, from the Franklin to the Wife of Bath, and the Nun’s Priest to the Miller.