



AGINCOURT
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**The Pastons and social life in the Middle Ages:
a Key Stage 3 resource**

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Introduction

These resources were developed to introduce Key Stage 3 students to the Paston family, to consider what we can learn from their letters about social life at the end of the Middle Ages and to enable students to see that social life did change across the Middle Ages.

The resources consist of three items, each of which could be an individual lesson, depending on your timings:

1. How did the Paston family rise from being farmworkers to knights?
2. What can we learn from the Paston family's letters?
3. How much had life changed by the end of the fifteenth century?

A family tree, map and other material is provided on the linked PowerPoint presentation.

The Paston family

Most people have heard of the Pastons and their letters but it may help to set out their story.

On the surface, they are a fifteenth-century success story, rising from being small landowners at best to being a successful and wealthy gentry family in Norfolk. John Paston III being knighted after the Battle of Stoke by Henry VII seems to top off that rise to riches and influence. However, their story had many twists and turns, and at the heart of it is their struggle to retain their status as gentry and their lands when local rivals saw opportunities to take over Paston estates, by legal means or by force.

In brief, William Paston, a lawyer and judge, built up their lands though the money he made as a lawyer, but his death left his young, inexperienced heir, John I, struggling to fight off rivals who claimed to be the real owners of the lands that William had bought. What John lacked was a powerful lord to support him, but changes in politics and individuals meant that he had to fight his legal battles largely by himself. Some of their lands were taken by force. John then added to his problems when he claimed that Sir John Fastolf had, on his deathbed, left John Paston his estates, a significant inheritance. This led to more quarrels and lost friends, as John's stubbornness prevented him from finding a way to work with other people. Imprisonment for debt left the family in fear of losing their status as gentry. John I's death in 1465 left his eldest sons, also both called John, to defend the family lands, both in the courts and in sieges. Their hopes increased when they won the support of the Earl of Oxford, who returned to power in the region in 1470, when Henry VI was restored to the throne. The two Johns fought in Oxford's retinue at the battle of Barnet in 1471, but that defeat, Oxford's exile and the deposition of Henry VI by Edward IV left them again without a powerful ally. It was another 14 years of anxiety, ups and downs, before Oxford returned as one of Henry Tudor's key supporters at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485. This victory meant that at last the Pastons had, in the Earl of Oxford, a powerful patron securely in power, hence John III fought for Oxford and Henry VII at Stoke in 1487 and was knighted, securing the Pastons' status as influential gentry.

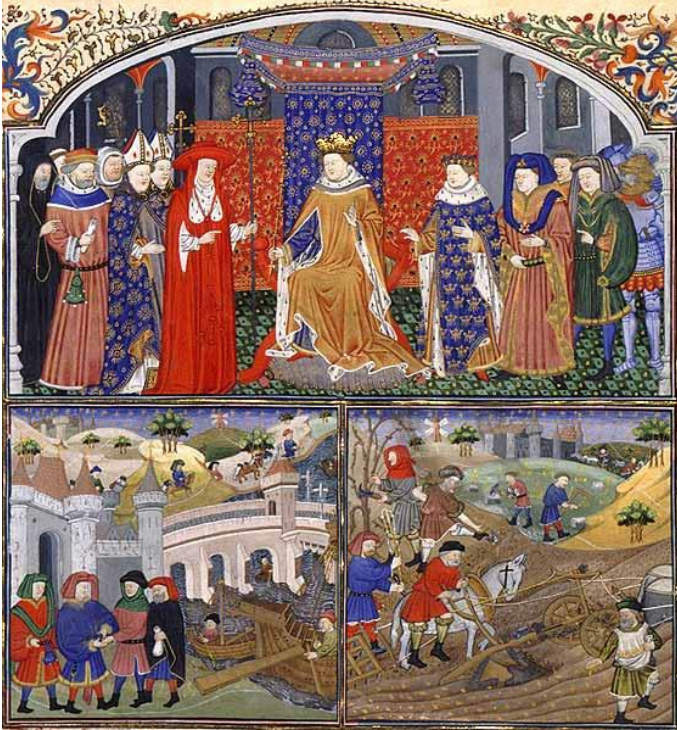
Much has been left out of this summary, but hopefully it helps teachers see the outline story.

Why were the Paston family able to rise from being farmers to knights?

Objectives

- To identify key members of the Paston family and their overall story.
- To familiarise students with vocabulary, e.g. knights, gentlemen, gentry, nobility.
- To identify factors that could change social position.
- To explain why the Paston family were able to rise from being farmers to gentlemen.

Starter



15th century – *Le Régime des princes* (Gilles de Rome)

- What are the people doing in this picture?
- What social positions can you see? (Point at which medieval hierarchy could be included if not already taught.)
- How easy do you think it would be to move from one position to another?

Task 1: Familiarity with the Pastons

Split the class into two and give each a full set of names (see list below) and, ideally, named tabards. Ask students to use the Paston family tree (see PowerPoint) to sort themselves into a physical family tree. Students then explain their relationships to each other and to the teacher, prompted by questions if needed.

Names: Clement Paston, Beatrice Paston, William, Agnes, John I, Margaret, William II, John II, John III, Margery Brews, Margery Paston, Richard Calle.

Task 2: Plotting the family story

- Students read cards 1-16 and place them in chronological order onto a living graph, showing the changing pattern of the Pastons' status.
- Discussion questions:
 - Option 1: Where are the turning points in the Pastons' story? This can lead into identifying the factors that caused the family's fortunes to change – both positively and negatively.
 - Option 2: Can you find examples of when marriage/patronage/deaths/property was a turning point, and was it positive or negative?
- How quickly did the family's fortune change? How would you describe parts of your graph? Key words – rapid, slight, steady, positive, negative.
- Which family member was the most important in changing the Pastons' status? (Optional extra of bringing in the physical family tree again, where family members could argue over their relative importance; alternatively, students could debate and vote on who was the most important in changing the status of the family.)

Task 3/plenary: Written explanation

Answer enquiry question: Why were the Paston family able to rise from being farmworkers to knights?

Students could also do this by explaining which reason (marriage, patronage, deaths or property) was the most important in the Pastons' rise.

<p>1. Clement and Beatrice Paston lived in the village of Paston in Norfolk in the late 1300s. Enemies of the family later said that Clement was a villein (a villager who was not free and could not own property). There is no evidence that he was a villein but his family had been farmworkers. After nearly half the population died from the Black Death in 1348-9, Clement did buy a good deal of land because there was plenty for sale cheaply. When they died, Clement and Beatrice were buried <u>inside</u> the local church, which is evidence that they were among the most important and wealthy villagers.</p>	<p>2. Clement and Beatrice's son William was born in 1378 and was educated at a grammar school before he studied law in London. His uncle Geoffrey (who was also a lawyer) probably paid for William's education. William had a very successful career as a lawyer, starting in 1406. He was a legal adviser to important nobles and became one of the leading judges in the country. This success was due to his ability and also to his connections with powerful lords such as the Duke of Norfolk. This support from someone high in the social hierarchy to someone below is called patronage.</p>
<p>3. William's work as a lawyer made him wealthy and he used his money to buy more land in East Anglia, including the manor house in Gresham. Buying land made him look powerful and he also gained more money from renting parts of it out to farmers. It was also important for him to be Lord of Paston, the village he was named after, because it made him look important – William was keen to hide his common background! Buying these lands increased William's status because land ownership was the main sign of being a gentleman.</p>	<p>4. William married late, aged 42, in 1420. His wife Agnes was no more than 20. She came from a wealthy family and her family gave her land in several more villages to add to the growing Paston estate. This late marriage was a gamble – it meant that William was rich enough to marry a woman from a wealthy gentry family, but he risked dying when his son was still young and couldn't defend the family. If this happened, the Pastons might lose their status and lands again.</p>
<p>5. William and Agnes's eldest son was called John. William arranged an excellent marriage for John to Margaret Mautby, a Norfolk heiress who brought more land to the Paston family. Margaret was also related to Sir John Fastolf of Caister, the most important landowner in the area and a famous soldier in the wars against France. John's marriage to Margaret made the Pastons' position seem even stronger.</p>	<p>6. When William died in 1444, however, his eldest son John was just 22, and didn't have the experience or powerful friends his father had had. This allowed other families, who were jealous of the Pastons' growing power, to claim that some of the Pastons' property was really theirs. For example, the manor at Gresham was seized by Lord Moleyns, and John struggled for years to get it back.</p>

<p>7. At the same time, the Pastons' important friend the Duke of Norfolk lost some of his power to the Duke of Suffolk, who became the most important man in the area. The Pastons tried to ask the king for help in getting their land back, but without support from a Duke it was very difficult.</p>	<p>8. In 1459, Sir John Fastolf died. John Paston claimed that Fastolf had changed his will just before dying to give John Paston all of his land. Naturally this annoyed a lot of people who had expected the land to be theirs! John Paston tried to claim the land but he had a lot of opposition and he lost the most important place, Caister Castle, in a siege in 1462.</p>
<p>9. John's eldest son John II, who had been living in the king's court, was knighted. This was an honour, but it didn't help the family in their struggle to take control over Fastolf's land or stop other landowners taking over the Pastons' lands.</p>	<p>10. The fighting to keep Fastolf's land cost a lot of money – and John was imprisoned in Fleet Prison in London in 1464 and 1465 for not paying his debts! He did not live with the ordinary prisoners but in his own private room, and was treated quite differently – he even had a servant with him. However there was a real danger of the family losing their status and not being regarded as gentlemen any longer.</p>
<p>11. John died in 1466, leaving his son John II to continue the battle. However, there was scandal when John II's sister Margery secretly married Richard Calle, the manager of the family's land (and so a servant!), who owned no land himself. The family was afraid that this marriage was evidence that they were not a real gentry family. As punishment, Margery was ignored by the Pastons for the rest of her life.</p>	<p>12. As the family continued to fight to own Fastolf's land, they struggled to find enough money. This caused a lot of arguments between John II and his mother Margaret; she often accused him of not being as good as his father was at managing their land. The family only survived because of loans given by John II's uncle, William.</p>
<p>13. A much better marriage was made by John II's younger brother John III in 1477. He married Margery Brews, who came from an old, distinguished family. The family's fortune seemed to be changing: the year before, they had finally gained control over Caister Castle.</p>	<p>14. Disaster struck the family in 1479, when plague killed both John II and his grandmother Agnes. John III now needed to take control, as the Pastons needed more and more money to fight off the competition for Fastolf's lands.</p>

15. Henry Tudor (the first Tudor monarch) became king, as Henry VII, in 1485. John Paston fought for King Henry against rebels at the Battle of Stoke in 1487, and he was knighted on the battlefield, becoming Sir John and an important man in the King's court. John also supported the Earl of Oxford, who was now the most powerful man in the region, and in return Oxford helped John. With the support of the King and the Earl, the Paston family finally had money, land and status.

16. While the family's position was now secure, not everyone saw them as important. When Margaret died in 1484, she chose to be buried with her own family (the Mautbys) and not with her husband. She also chose decorations for her tomb showing the importance of her own family's ancestry – not the Pastons'.

What can we learn from the Paston family's letters?

Objectives

- To analyse primary sources as evidence of life in the Middle Ages.
- To develop understanding of the skills historians use when handling evidence.

Starter

(This may be one lesson, depending on length of lesson and how long you want to spend on this task)

Students translate original letter (on PowerPoint and transcribed below on separate sheet).

After the correct translation has been revealed, model the process of exploring what can be learned from the letters as an introduction to the second task in the main part of the lesson. Break the letters down into sections, using the glossary as needed, drawing out what can be learned from this letter – if necessary, category by category.

Points to draw attention to:

- What is the relationship between John Paston and the 'gentilwomman'? What does it mean about negotiations? What does this then tell us about some marriages in the Middle Ages?
- What evidence do we have that religion was important to the Pastons?
- What can we learn about the period from the gown that Agnes is asking for?
- Why might Agnes be saying that she could not find a good secretary to write her letter? What does the letter suggest about Agnes' education?

Main activity (or follow-up lesson)

What can we learn from these letters about...?

Students gather information on to mind-map/under subheadings with the following headings:

- Women
- Clothing
- Medicine
- Education
- Religion
- The Paston family and their relationships
- Other

Plenary

Feedback and discussion on what information has been gathered.

- Given what we have found out, what questions do you now want to ask about the Pastons or these topics?
- What kinds of sources could we look at to investigate these questions?

What can we learn from the Paston family's letters?

Translation challenge!

To my worshepefull housbond Wiliam Paston be þis lettere takyn.

Dere housbond, I recomaunde me to yow. Blyssyd be God, I sende yow gode tydynggys of þe comyng of þe gentylwomman fro Redham þis same nyght. And as for þe furste aqweyntaunce be-tween John Paston and þe seyde gentilwomman, she made hym gentil chere in gyntyl wyse and seyde he was verrayly yowre son. And so I hope þer shal nede no gret treté be-twyxe them. þe vicar of Stocton toold me yif ye wolde byin her a goune, here moder wolde give her a furre. þe goune nedyth to be had, and of coloure it wolde be a blew or ellys sanggueyn. Yowre stewes do weel. The Holy Trinité have yow in gouernaunce. Wretyn at Paston in haste þe Wednesday three weeks after Easter, for lack of a good secretarye. Yowres, Agnes Paston

Your task is to modernise this medieval letter so that it makes sense. Use the spaces below each line to write your translations.

1. Wherever there is the letter 'þ' it is actually a 'th' – so replace 'þe' with 'the', 'þat' with 'that' and 'þer' with 'there'.
2. Read aloud with your partner – what do some of the words *sound* like they could be? The Pastons would have had an accent similar to the West Country accent, so try it out! Any ideas, write them in the space below each line.
3. Use the glossary below for the unfamiliar words.

Glossary

Aqweyntaunce – acquaintance, meeting

Be-twyxe - between

Blew - blue

Chere - entertainment

Goune – gown

Sanggueyn – blood red

Stews – fish ponds

Tret - negotiations

Tydynggys – tidings, news

Verraly – truthfully, honestly

What can we learn from the Paston family's letters?

Margaret Paston to John Paston I, 1448

After the death of John Paston's father, William, other families saw a chance to seize some of the Pastons' land. Margaret is living in the village near to the first house to be seized, Gresham. She is in danger here in case the men defending Gresham (Partridge and his fellowship) decide that they don't want her quite so nearby!

Right worshipful husband, I recommend me to you, and ask you to get some crossbows, and windases to bend them with, and quarrel; for your house here is so low that no man can shoot out with a long bow, though we really need to. I suppose ye should have such things of Sir John Fastolf if ye would send to him. And also I would ye should get two or three short battle axes to keep inside, and as many jacks, as ye may.

Partridge and his fellowship are so frightened that you would seize the house again that I have been told they have made great ordinance within the house. They have made bars to bar the doors cross-ways, and wickets on every quarter of the house to shoot out at, both with bows and with hand-guns; and five holes have been made knee-high from the plancher that must be for hand-guns, as no man could shoot out of them with a handbow...

I ask that ye will to buy for me 1lb. of almonds and 1lb. of sugar, and that ye will buy some frieze to make clothes for your children. Ye shall have best cheap and best choice of Hay's wife, as it is told me. And that ye would buy a yard of broadcloth of black for a hood for me, of 44d. or 4s. a yard for [there] is neither good cloth nor good frieze in this town. As for the children's gowns, when I have the cloth I shall make them.

The Trinity have you in his keeping and send you good speed in all your matters.

What can we learn from the Paston family's letters?

Margaret Paston to John Paston I, 1443

Right worshipful husband, I recommend me to you, desiring heartily to hear of your welfare, thanking God of your recovery from the great disease that ye have had; and I thank you for the letter that ye sent me, for by my troth my mother and I were so worried from the time that we knew of your sickness until we knew you were better. My mother ordered another image of wax in your weight to Our Lady of Walsingham, and she sent money to the four orders of friars at Norwich to pray for you; and I have promised to go on pilgrimage to Walsingham and to St Leonards for you. By my troth I have never been so worried as I was from the time that I knew of your sickness till I knew you were better, and yet my heart is in no great ease and will not be until I hear that you are completely well again.

What can we learn from the Paston family's letters?

Elizabeth Clere to John Paston I, 1449

Elizabeth Clere was a close family friend. She is writing to John I on behalf of his sister, Elizabeth, who does not want to marry the man that her family were organising for her to marry.

...Cousin, I let you know that Scrope hath been in this country to see your sister, and he hath spoken with your mother. And she wants him to show you the indentures made between the knight that married his daughter and him: whether that Scrope, if he were married and had children, if the children should inherit his land or whether his daughter will.

[...] cousin, meseemeth ye might get her a better husband. And if ye can get a better, I would advise you to do it quickly and well, for she was never in so great sorrow as she is nowadays; she may not speak with any man, whoever comes, nor may see nor speak to my man, or with servants of her mother's, without her mother accusing her of behaving badly. And since Easter she has been beaten once or twice a week, and sometimes twice in one day, and her head broken in two or three places.

Therefore, cousin, she hath sent to me in secret and prays that I would send to you a letter of her unhappiness, and pray you to be her good brother, as her trust is in you...

Cousin, I pray you burn this letter and that your men nor any other man shall see it; for if your mother knew that I had sent you this letter she should never love me.

What can we learn from the Paston family's letters?

Errands to London of Agnes Paston the 28 day of January the year King Harry the Sixth 36

Elizabeth Paston is in London at this time, at Lady Pole's house. Here, she would be helping the household but also learning: manners, music, dancing, needlework and other things.

To tell Greenfield [her son's tutor] to send me word by writing how Clement Paston does his devoir in his learning. And if he doesn't do well tell him to whip him until he does do well. And say Greenfield that if he will bring him into good rule and learning, I will give him 10 mark for his labour; for I had liefer he were dead than lost for lack of discipline.

Item, to see how many gowns Clement hath. He has a short green gown, and a short musterdeuillers gown; and a short blue gown that was made from a long gown, when I was last at London; and a long red gown, furred with beaver, was made this time two years ago; and a long murrey gown was made this time twelve months ago.

Item, to do make me six spoons, of 8 ounces of troy weight, well fashioned and covered with a double coating of gold.

And say Elizabeth Paston that she must work hard, as other gentlewomen do, and help herself with that.

Pay the Lady Pole 26s. 8d. for her board.

What can we learn from the Paston family's letters?

John Paston III to Margery Paston, after 1486

Mistress Margery, I recommend me to you. And I pray you as quickly as possible to send me by the next trustworthy messenger that ye can get a large plaster of your *flos unguentorum* for the King's Attorney, James Hobart; for all his disease is but an ache in his knee. I had liefer than £40 ye could with your plaster help his pain to go. But when ye send me the plaster ye must send me writing how it should be laid to and taken from his knee, and how long it should stay on his knee, and how long the plaster will last good, and whether he must wrap any more cloths about the plaster to keep it warm or not. And God be with you. Your

John Paston

What can we learn from the Paston family's letters?

William Paston III to Sir John Paston, 1479

... letting you weete that I received a letter from you, containing 8d. with which I should buy a pair of slippers...

Also, ye sent me word in the letter of 12lb. figs and 8lb. raisins. I have not had them delivered, but I am sure they will come, for Alweather told me of them and he said that they were arriving after in another barge.

And as for the young gentlewoman, I will tell you how we met. Her father is dead. There are two sisters and I was at the wedding of the elder sister who told her mother that I was a good man. So it was my good fortune that her mother commanded the younger sister to entertain me, and she did.

And if it pleased you to enquire of her, her mother's name is Mistress Alborow. The name of the daughter is Margaret Alborow; I think she is 18 or 19 year at the oldest. And as for the dowry, the money is ready whenever she got married; but as for the house and land, I think not till after her mother's death, but I cannot tell you for certain... but you may know by asking. And as for her beauty, judge that when ye see her, and especially look at her hands, for if it's true what I've been told, she is likely to become fat...

What can we learn from the Paston family's letters?

Margaret Paston to Sir John Paston, 1475

... I'm shocked that I have heard nothing from you since you sent me the answer about the £20 for which I have borrowed from my cousin, Clere... And as for the money, I will have to repay it at Midsummer or a fortnight after... By my troth, I don't know not what to do [for money]: the King is so hard on us in this country, both poor and rich, that I don't know how we shall live unless the world improves. God improve it when it is his will. We can neither sell corn nor cattle at any good price. Malt here at but 10d. a coomb, wheat 28d. a coomb, oats 10d. a coomb; and there is little to be got here at this time. William Pecoock will send you a bill of what he has paid for you for two taxes at this time.

For God's love, if your brothers go over the sea, advise them as best you can about their safety. For some of them are only young soldiers, and know very little what it means to be a soldier, and to suffer as a soldier should do. God save you all, and send me good news of you all. And quickly send me word of how you are, for I shall worry about it for a long time until I hear from you...

What can we learn from the Paston family's letters?

Edmund Paston to John Paston III, 1471

... I pray you to give this money as so: to the Principal of Staple Inn 5s. in part of payment; also I pray you to buy me three yards of purple chamlet, prices the yard 4s.; a hat of deep murrey, price 2s.4d.; hose cloth of yellow, I think it will cost 2s.; a girdle of plunket ribbon, price 6d.; four laces of silk, two of one colour, and two of another, price 8d.; three dozen points, white, red, and yellow, price 6d.; three pairs of pattens – I pray you let William Milsent provide them for them... They must be low pattens; make sure that are long enough, and broad around the heel...

Also, sir, my mother greets you well, and sends you God's blessing and hers, and prays that ye will buy her a runlet of wine out of the galley; and if you have no money she says that ye should borrow from our brother Sir John, or of some other friend of yours, and send her word as quickly as ye have it and she shall send you the money. And if ye send it home, she says that it should be wrapped in strong cloth, to stop the carriers from drinking it on the way...

What can we learn from the Paston family's letters?

Glossary

by my troth	I swear
chamlet	A kind of fabric
devoir	Duty
dowry	The amount of money or property that a bride brings to the marriage
<i>flos unguentorum</i>	Ointment made from flowers
friars	Monks
frieze	A rough woollen cloth
girdle	Belt
hose	Clothes that covered men's legs – they are most similar to tights today
indentures	Legal contracts/agreements
jacks	Padded or plated leather jacket
liefer	Rather
meseemeth	It seems to me
murrey	A purple red cloth
musterdevillers	A grey woollen cloth
ordinance	Warlike preparations
pattens	Protective overshoes mainly made of wood
pilgrimage	Travel to a religious place to ask for help from God or the saints
plancher	Floor
points	Laces that attach to hose and keep them held up
pray/prays	Ask
quarrel	Bolt for a crossbow
runlet	Cask or barrel
troy weight	A measure of weight used for precious metals and stones
weet	Know, find out
wickets	Loop holes
windases	Winding devices for drawing crossbows

How much had life changed by the end of the fifteenth century?

Objectives

- To compare aspects of life in the twelfth to the fifteenth century.
- To judge the extent of change in these different aspects.
- To make and justify a judgement on the amount of change overall.

Starter

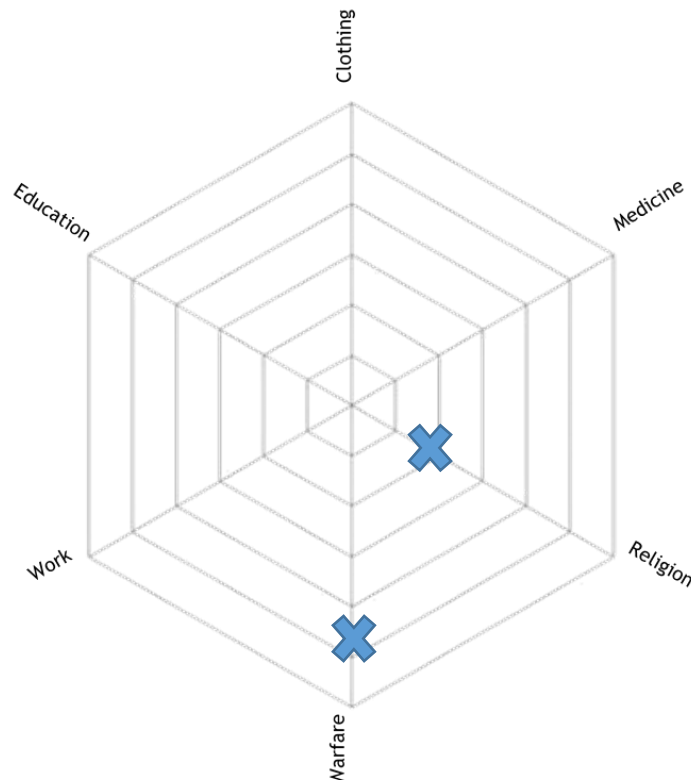
Paired discussion – using what students already know about the early Middle Ages, discuss and then write down five things that they think are key features of life at this time (e.g. very religious). Then discuss whether they think that any of these things have changed by the later Middle Ages. The aim is to find out their preconceptions (and any misconceptions) of the period.

Task 1

This requires the cards and the change diagram. Students are given one card from the six aspects of life (education, work, medicine, clothing, warfare, religion), which they read in pairs before discussing the extent to which there was change in this topic. They then plot their findings on their diagram, with limited change being towards the centre and extensive change being towards the outside; for example, in the diagram below, it shows that religion has experienced less change than warfare. They then need to annotate around the edge a few key points about why they placed their mark where they did.

Before starting this task, there could be a discussion of words used to describe the extent of change, with the whole class coming up with what each line, from centre to outside, signifies, e.g. limited change, significant change and moderate change.

Students then rotate information cards until they have a completed diagram.



Task 2

Feedback and discussion. Example questions:

- Which aspects saw the most/least change? What evidence supports those judgements?
- Why do you think these topics saw the most change?
- Which areas do you think would be the most noticeable to people at the time?
- Are there any links/connections you can make between the different areas?
- Was change always positive?
- Would any changes be more significant **after** the medieval period?
- Overall, how different do you think life was in the later Middle Ages? Has your opinion from earlier (in the starter) changed?

Plenary

Written answer to the enquiry question, utilising the vocabulary of change that was emphasised during the lessons.

Warfare

As castles became common after the Norman Conquest, a new type of fighting also developed: siege warfare, where the aim was to surround the enemy and cut off their supplies, forcing them to surrender. Medieval kings did not have a full-time army (called a standing army); in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the nobles agreed to bring their men to fight for the king for an agreed number of days a year. This was in return for the land that the king gave the nobles. By the fourteenth century, kings still had no standing army but now raised armies for wars abroad by making contracts with their nobles, agreeing how many men would join the army and how much they would be paid. In terms of weapons, longbows were proving very effective by the thirteenth century, firing many more arrows a minute than the previously used crossbows. Armour improved hugely from the twelfth to the fifteenth century, and became very effective against longbow fire; however, there were new developments that it couldn't protect a soldier against – for example, gunpowder weaponry, such as handguns and canons. These were used more and more in the fifteenth century, although usually in sieges rather than on the battlefield. Overall, in the twelfth century what mattered was having well-armed and well-trained men to fight; in the fifteenth century, equipment like projectile weaponry was becoming more important, and the style of fighting was beginning to change, from hand-to-hand combat to attacking your enemy from a distance.

Religion

Religion was important to people throughout the whole of the Middle Ages. In the twelfth century there was a huge increase in the number of monasteries, where monks or nuns would live a life of prayer. People supported these places because of their belief in purgatory; monks and nuns could help your soul get to heaven more quickly by praying for you. People also went on pilgrimages where they could ask for forgiveness for their sins, and crusading was also popular throughout the Middle Ages, although the largest and most famous Crusades took place in the twelfth century. Not everyone was a 'good' Christian though; some questioned what the Church was teaching. These people were known as heretics – for example, the Cathars in the twelfth century and the Lollards in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These people were severely punished by the Church (some by burning). However, most people continued to believe in the teachings of the Christian Church. In the later Middle Ages, the ritual of dying and having a 'good death' became even more important to people because of their fears of the Black Death. Pilgrimage was still popular but the fashionable locations changed; for example, Canterbury (where Henry II had gone on pilgrimage after the murder of Thomas Becket) became less popular than the shrine of the Blessed Virgin at Walsingham in Norfolk. There was also a new religious movement, the friars, who did not live in monasteries but instead lived alongside ordinary people, and preached to teach them about the Bible.

Clothing

Over the whole of the medieval period, what you wore would mostly be down to how much money and status you had: only the rich could afford to be fashionable. Men tended to wear a tunic (a kind of long top) with a shirt and pants underneath, with hose (a cross between tights and trousers) tied onto them. Over the top, a cloak would be worn. Women wore a linen shirt and short-sleeved under-dress (called a kirtle) and hose under a long gown, which was fastened with a belt called a girdle. Fashions changed more quickly as time went on. The sleeves of gowns became longer and looser towards the fifteenth century, and the shape of the dresses became much slimmer. Women's headdresses changed, from being relatively simple and often made of linen, to being tall, 'steeple'-style headdresses. For most people, clothing was made of wool; however, those who could afford it enjoyed imported cloth (foreign trade increased towards the later Middle Ages) like silk and velvet. After the Black Death, people's wages increased, so more people were able to afford bright, colourful and luxurious fabrics. Laws called sumptuary laws were passed by medieval governments from the 1300s onwards, which made it illegal for the less wealthy to wear luxuries such as fur. However, they had to keep renewing these, so people clearly ignored them and wore what they wanted!

Education

It is likely that very few people were literate in twelfth-century England; literacy was limited to monarchs, those who needed it for their work or those rich enough to afford an education. However, in the thirteenth century, monarchs and the Church began to keep a huge number of records for all sorts of things - letters, accounts, planning for war, land ownership - which required huge numbers of clerks to write. This shows that literacy was increasing. Schools existed during the Middle Ages for the education of men who would become priests; however, by the fifteenth century, new schools were being founded that were not just attended by people who would work for the Church. One of the most famous of these schools was Eton. There was also a huge increase in the number of colleges at Oxford and Cambridge, and nobles increasingly sent their sons there for an education, especially in law. This growth in literacy (around 40% of people could read by 1500) increased the demand for books, which included books on prayer, the law, poetry, romances and history. At first, these were copied by hand and were very expensive, but in the late fifteenth century, William Caxton brought the first printing press to England, making books cheaper and more common. In the middle of all this there was also an important change in language, from French and Latin (for records) to English, both spoken and in writing. The education of girls outside of the house was very rare across the whole period, but some girls were well-educated and owned and wrote books.

Medicine

Medicine was still strongly influenced by the work of the Greeks and the Romans, and this continued throughout this period and long after. Medicine in the twelfth century was often viewed with suspicion that people were attempting to undo God's work, although this was also when students began to study medicine in universities. There were many diseases with no cure because the role of bacteria in causing disease was not discovered until the late 1800s. The most devastating disease was the Black Death, the plague of 1348, although there were many outbreaks after this time. By the fifteenth century, the science of medicine had not advanced a great deal, although there were many practical experiments to identify anaesthetics and find out more about anatomy, including some dissections of dead bodies. As in earlier times, most medical treatment was provided by women, who used treatments passed down from mother to daughter, some of which were helpful. An alternative was to go to a barber surgeon, a new type of craftsman who learned from experience, pulling teeth and performing minor surgery, as well as cutting hair. Bleeding was a popular remedy throughout this time (as it was until the 1800s). While treatments remained similar, public health however saw a lot of change, especially after the Black Death, as individuals and town councils worked hard to keep towns clean, with rakers keeping streets clean and the addition of public latrines (toilets). Exeter was one town that built aqueducts to provide clean water.

Work

At the start of the twelfth century, almost all of the 'common people' worked as farmers. Some were 'freemen', who were independent and could own land, but others were 'serfs' or 'villeins' who were owned by the local lord. Serfs had to work for three days a week on their lord's land before they could farm food for themselves, and had to ask permission before marrying or leaving the land. From the middle of the fourteenth century, however, repeated outbreaks of plague (the Black Death) and bad harvests halved the population, and meant that there was a shortage of workers. Fewer workers meant that farmworkers could demand higher wages, and serfs could demand their freedom. Additionally, it meant that families like the Pastons could buy some of the surplus land and move higher up the social hierarchy. There was also an increase in other types of work. For example, there was a rise in the number of towns so that by the end of the thirteenth century, almost everywhere was within two hours' walk of a market, meaning that people could sell their excess produce and buy things that were too complex to make themselves (such as belt buckles, knives and nails). This meant that some people began to specialise in making certain products, and others became traders. In these new markets, it was hard to trade by bartering (exchanging products), as people had done before, so coins became common, and soon paying in money became the normal way of doing business.

