

DK findout! Castles



What do you want to **findout**?

Fun Facts, Amazing Pictures, Quizzes

 **findout!**
Castles



Author: Philip Steele
Consultant: Dr Jenny Benham



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DK CREATIVE, DELHI

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SEE ALL THERE IS TO KNOW

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Heraldic
shield



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Peregrine falcon



Château de Gisors



Farmer

What is a castle?

Rulers built castles between about 1,100 and 500 years ago, in Europe and parts of Asia.

Their massive stone towers loomed over places from valleys to seashores. Castles were built for defence but were also home to many people.



Regional power

A castle was a power base. It could be used to guard a route, to prevent an invasion, or to keep control over a rebellious region of the country.



Administration

Castles could be used to rule in ways that weren't military. Taxes were stored, law cases were heard, and meetings were held in castles. Some were part of a town.

Bodiam
Castle, East
Sussex, UK





Imprisonment

Castle dungeons were often used to lock up enemies of the king, such as traitors, rebels, or prisoners of war. It was hard for them to escape or be rescued.



Residence

A castle was a place to live. It might be the home of a king or a powerful lord. Some rulers had many castles and travelled between them.



Impress

Castles helped noble families show off their wealth and power. Some castles were painted white, to look even more splendid.



Defence

The soldiers inside the castle were called the garrison. They were there to defend it from attack. A well-designed castle could be kept safe by quite a small garrison.



Wooden castles

The Normans began building castles with timber in the 9th century BCE. This castle design is called “motte-and-bailey”. The first “keeps” or towers stood on top of a mound called a motte. Below the motte was an open area called a bailey. The whole site was protected by fences and ditches.

Bailey

The bailey was an enclosed flat area with a hall, an armoury, workshops, and stables and sheds for animals.

Palisade

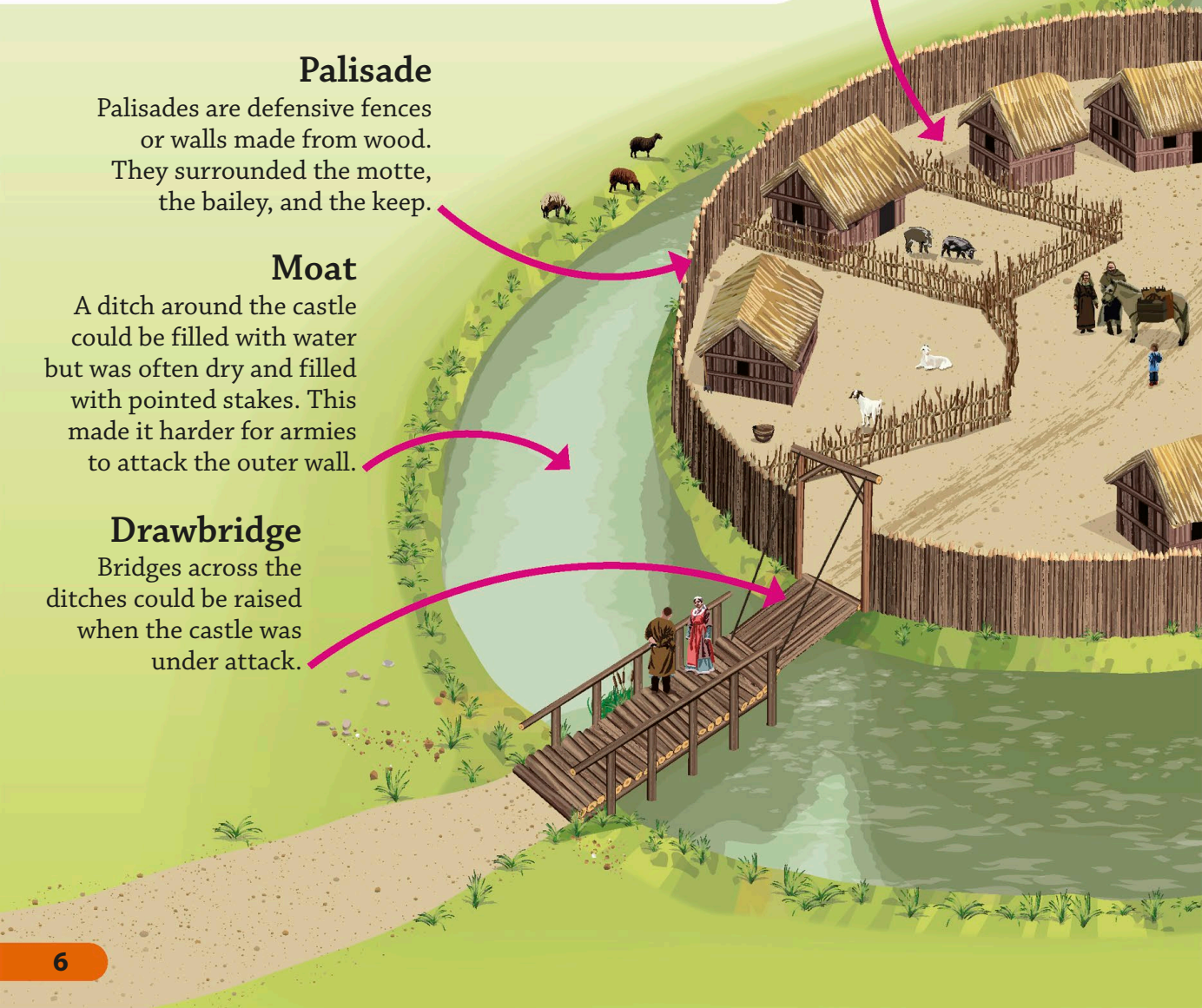
Palisades are defensive fences or walls made from wood. They surrounded the motte, the bailey, and the keep.

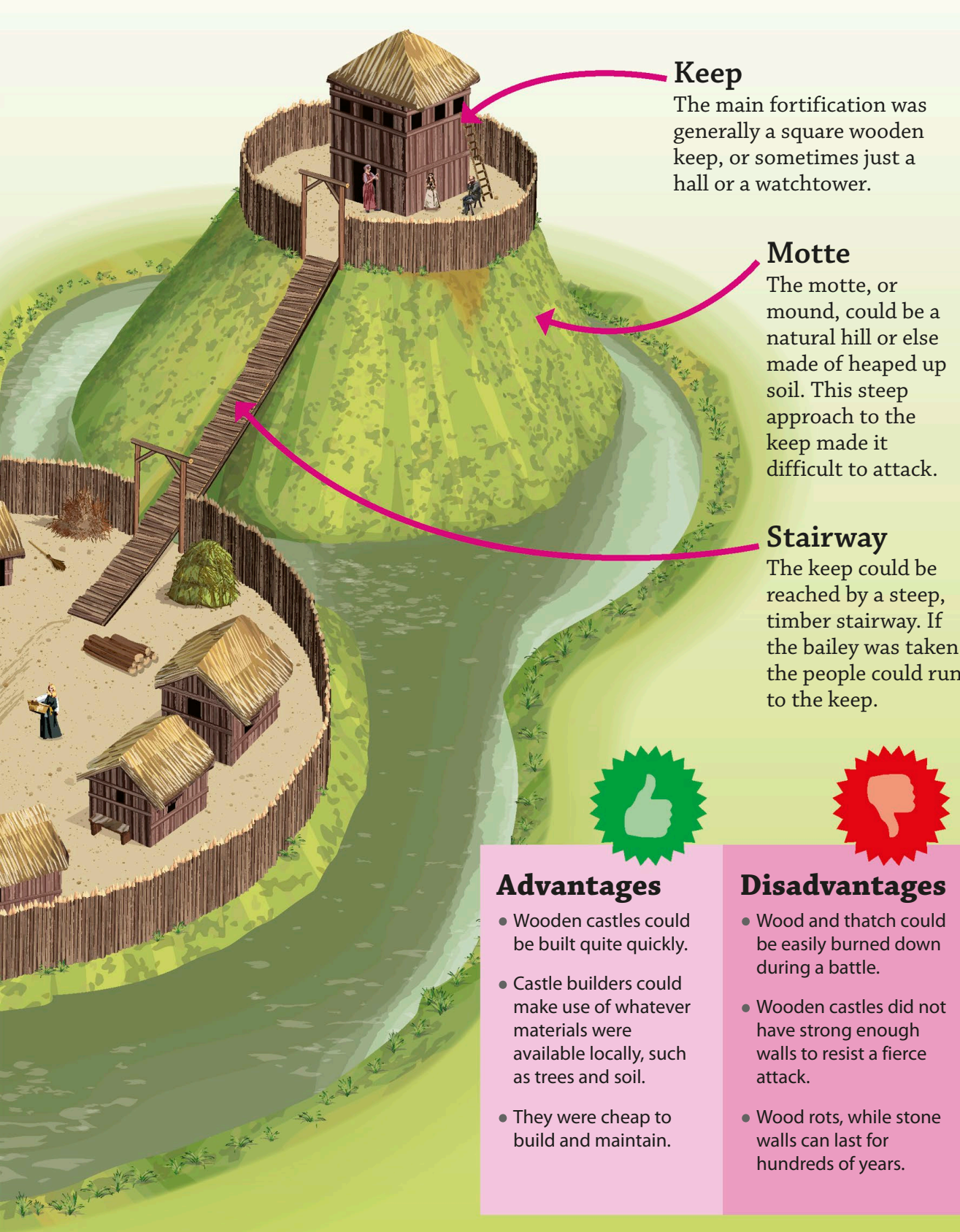
Moat

A ditch around the castle could be filled with water but was often dry and filled with pointed stakes. This made it harder for armies to attack the outer wall.

Drawbridge

Bridges across the ditches could be raised when the castle was under attack.





Keep

The main fortification was generally a square wooden keep, or sometimes just a hall or a watchtower.

Motte

The motte, or mound, could be a natural hill or else made of heaped up soil. This steep approach to the keep made it difficult to attack.

Stairway

The keep could be reached by a steep, timber stairway. If the bailey was taken, the people could run to the keep.



Advantages

- Wooden castles could be built quite quickly.
- Castle builders could make use of whatever materials were available locally, such as trees and soil.
- They were cheap to build and maintain.



Disadvantages

- Wood and thatch could be easily burned down during a battle.
- Wooden castles did not have strong enough walls to resist a fierce attack.
- Wood rots, while stone walls can last for hundreds of years.

Stone castles

From the 11th century, wooden castles were replaced with stronger, stone defences. The mound was now always topped with a stone keep, a high tower which was very hard to attack. Over the ages, more and more stone defences were built around the keep.

The keep at Goodrich was a square tower with thick walls built of sandstone.



! WOW!

Castle walls could be up to 6m (20ft) thick at the base.

Building a castle

Hundreds, or even thousands, of labourers and craftspeople worked to build a castle. They had no modern power tools or diggers, just muscle power. Stone had to be mined and transported to the site by boat or ox-cart.

Carpenters

Woodworkers used hammers, saws, chisels, and axes, to make beams, joists, and floorboards.



Axe



Chisel and hammer

Goodrich Castle, Hertfordshire

After the Normans conquered England in 1066, they built a wooden castle on this site. A century later it was replaced by a stone keep, followed by outer walls and a gatehouse.

This castle was attacked in 1646, during the English Civil War. It was badly damaged, but its ruins still stand today.



Château de Gisors

The Norman rulers of England built more than 25 castles to protect their original homeland of Normandy against the French. A wooden castle in Gisors was rebuilt in stone.

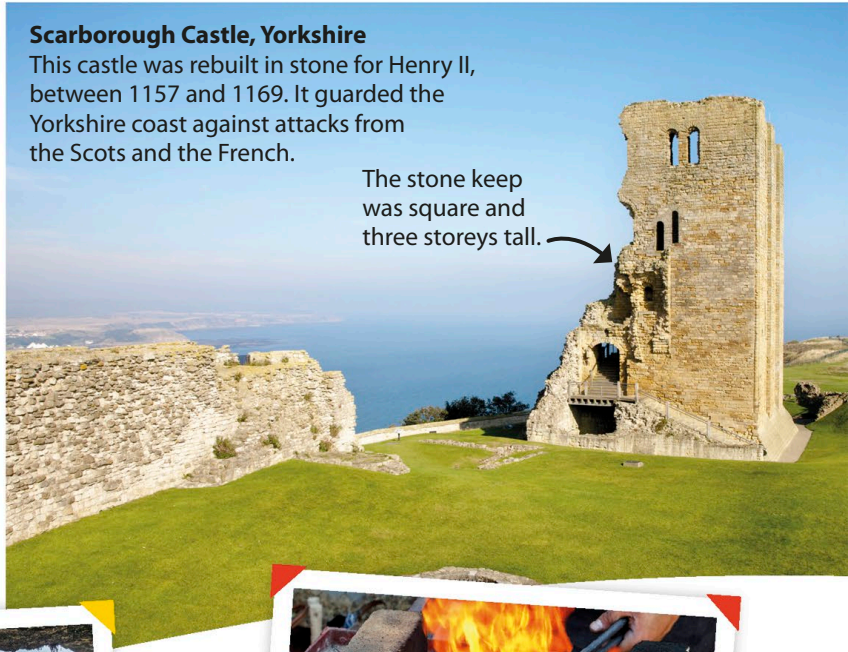
The eight-sided keep was built in 1123 by King Henry I of England.



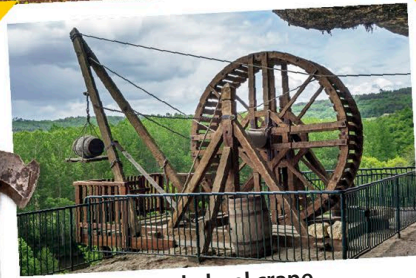
Scarborough Castle, Yorkshire

This castle was rebuilt in stone for Henry II, between 1157 and 1169. It guarded the Yorkshire coast against attacks from the Scots and the French.

The stone keep was square and three storeys tall.



Masonry tools



Treadwheel crane

Masons

Workers called masons shaped stones into walls and arches. Heavy lifting was done by wooden cranes, powered by treadwheels that people turned with their feet.



Metal tongs



Blacksmith's furnace

Blacksmiths

Smiths hammered away on their anvils as they made and repaired tools, chains, and nails.

The Great Hall

The largest room in the castle was called the Great Hall. It was the centre of the household, where meetings, war conferences, or sometimes trials for criminals took place. It was a reception hall for important guests and was where banquets and entertainments were held.

Servants

Household servants such as pantlers, who took care of the food pantry, attended the feast to serve the nobles.

Salt vessel

The nef was an ornate table decoration shaped like a ship. It was used to hold salt or spices. People on the less important tables were said to be "below the salt".

High table

Royalty, nobles, or other important visitors dined here, while lesser ranks ate at lower tables.



! WOW!

A seven-course banquet held at Tours, France, in 1457 entertained 150 guests.

Carved beams

The ornate beams and roofs of the Great Hall were masterpieces of carpentry and woodwork.

Entertainers

Musicians might play at a feast or accompany a dance.

Tapestry

Wall hangings such as rich tapestries showed off the wealth and good taste of the lords and ladies.

Give the dog a bone!

Favourite hounds might be treated to a scrap during the meal.



Concentric castles

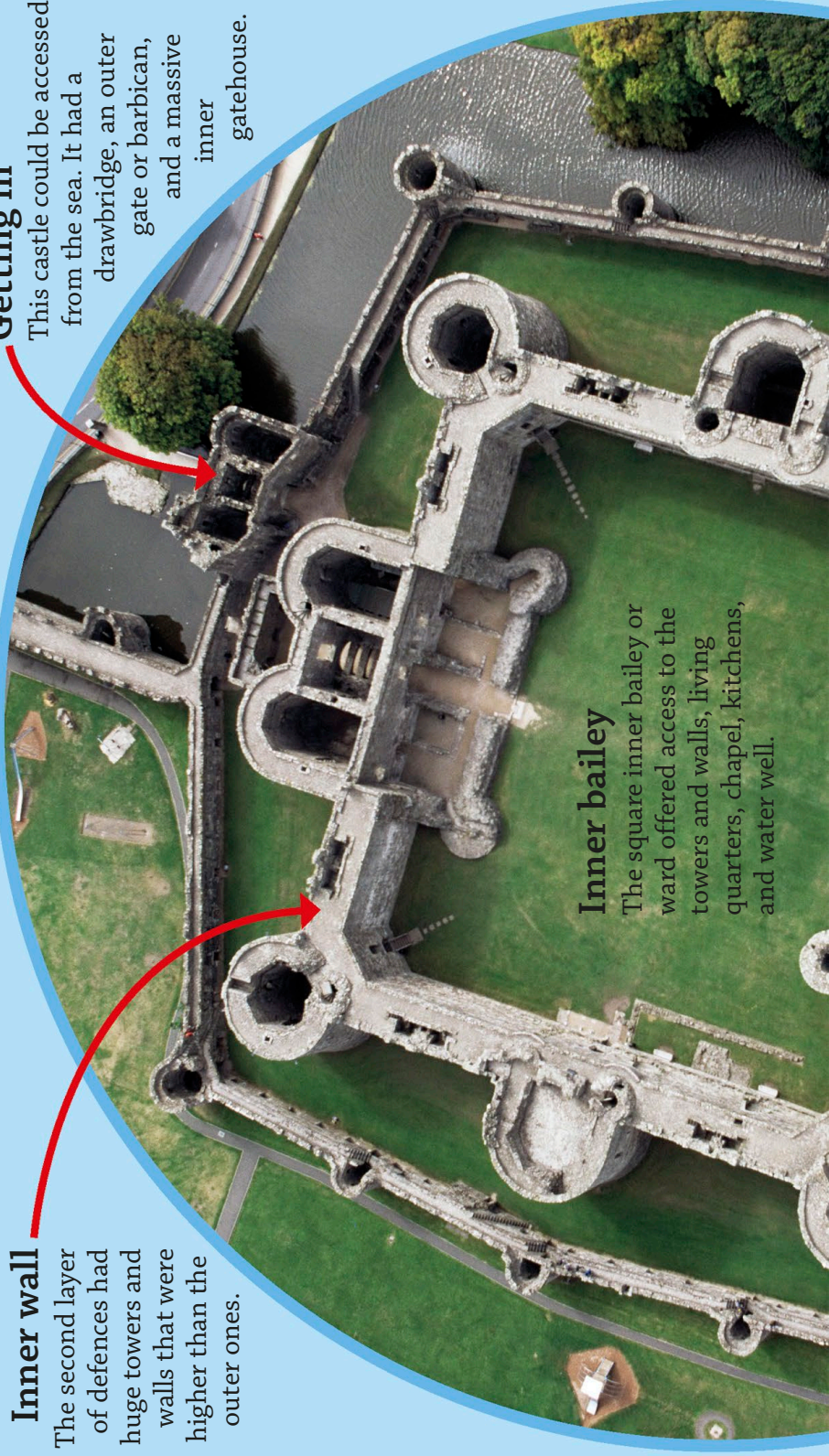
Over time, castle builders added more and more defences. These made it harder for the enemy to swarm over walls, smash through walls, or dig under them. By the 1300s the best castles were ringed by moats and outer walls, with high inner walls and towers. We call these ring designs “concentric”.

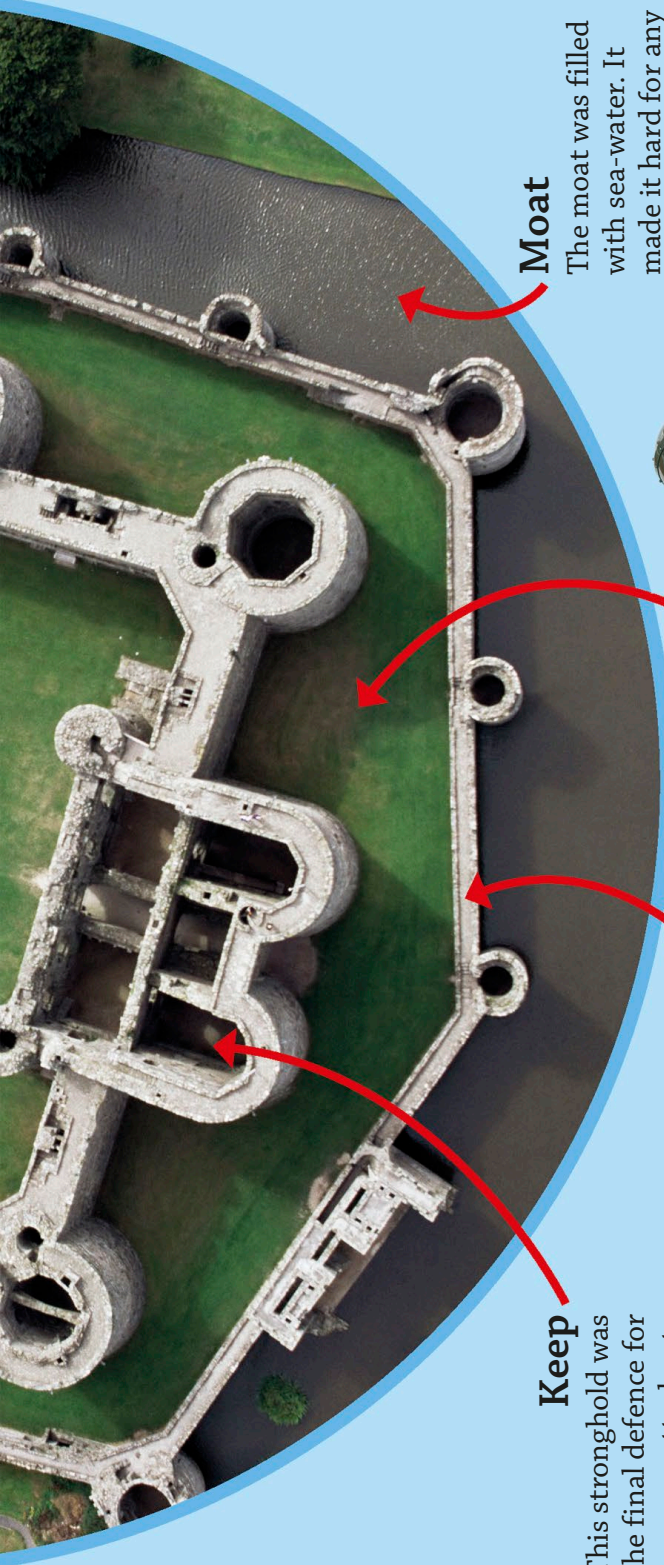
Beaumaris Castle, Anglesey
King Edward I of England defeated the Welsh in 1282. He built a ring of castles around North Wales to prevent rebellion. The last of these was Beaumaris.

Inner wall
The second layer of defences had huge towers and walls that were higher than the outer ones.

Getting in
This castle could be accessed from the sea. It had a drawbridge, an outer gate or barbican, and a massive inner gatehouse.

Inner bailey
The square inner bailey or ward offered access to the towers and walls, living quarters, chapel, kitchens, and water well.





Keep

This stronghold was the final defence for any attacker to overcome.

Curtain wall

The outer or "curtain" wall was the first ring of defence, topped by a walkway.

Outer bailey

The area between walls and the towers with their archers was called the outer bailey or ward.

Moat

The moat was filled with sea-water. It made it hard for any attacker to get close to the castle walls.



Crossbows fired a short arrow called a quarrel.

Crossbowmen

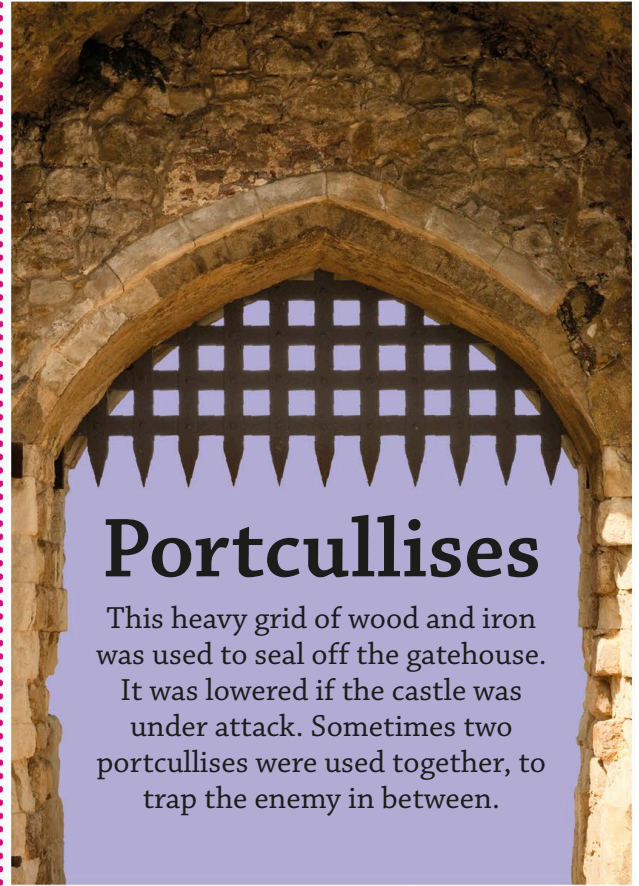
A well-designed castle didn't need many troops to defend it. Concentric castles were designed so that every inch of ground could be covered by crossfire from crossbowmen. They could easily spot attackers from the top of towers and walls.

! WOW!

Castles were built with narrow windows called **loops** for archers to fire through.

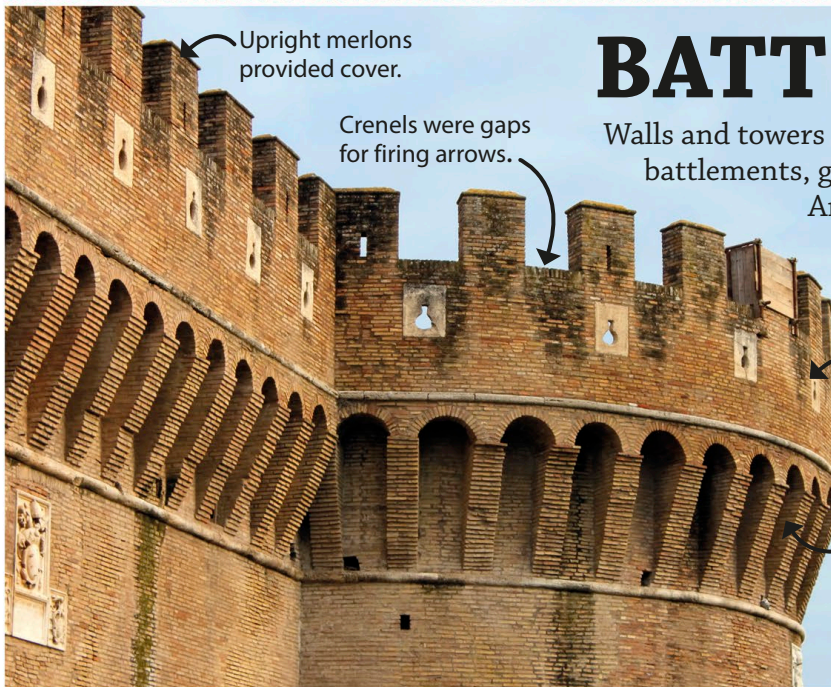
Castle defences

The power of a castle depended on its physical strength and how fierce it looked. The building needed to be able to resist attack or capture in times of war or rebellion. Its whole structure was designed to slow down or kill any enemies who dared to attack it.



Portcullises

This heavy grid of wood and iron was used to seal off the gatehouse. It was lowered if the castle was under attack. Sometimes two portcullises were used together, to trap the enemy in between.



Upright merlons provided cover.

Crenels were gaps for firing arrows.

Parapet

This overhang had chutes called machicolations, for dropping stones or hot sand onto the enemy.

BATTLEMENTS

Walls and towers were topped by walkways called battlements, guarded by walls called parapets. Archers stood behind the parapet to fire at the enemy.

MURDER HOLES

Holes in the ceiling of the gatehouse were used for dropping nasty things such as rocks on any enemies below. There were slits in the sides for arrows or spears.



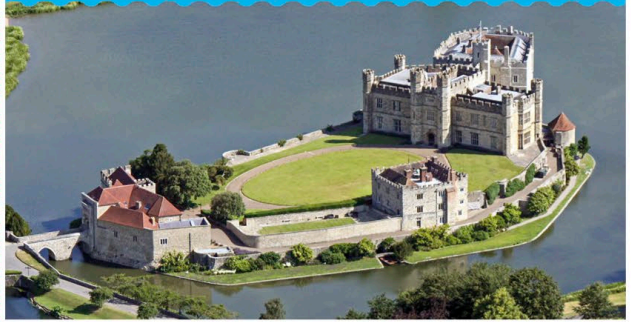
Drawbridges

Drawbridges across moats and ditches could be raised to stop any unwelcome guests getting into the castle.



MOATS

Water stopped the enemy from getting too close to the walls. Moats were large ditches, often filled with water and sometimes the contents of the toilets!



TOWERS

Towers were good lookout points, and were very strongly built. They were awkward for invaders too – just try fighting your way up these narrow, spiral stairs with a sword!

Besieged!

The best way to capture a castle was to surround it with troops and then cut off its supplies of food and water. This was called a siege. Heavy weapons called siege engines were used to attack the castle's walls and the people inside.

Battering ram

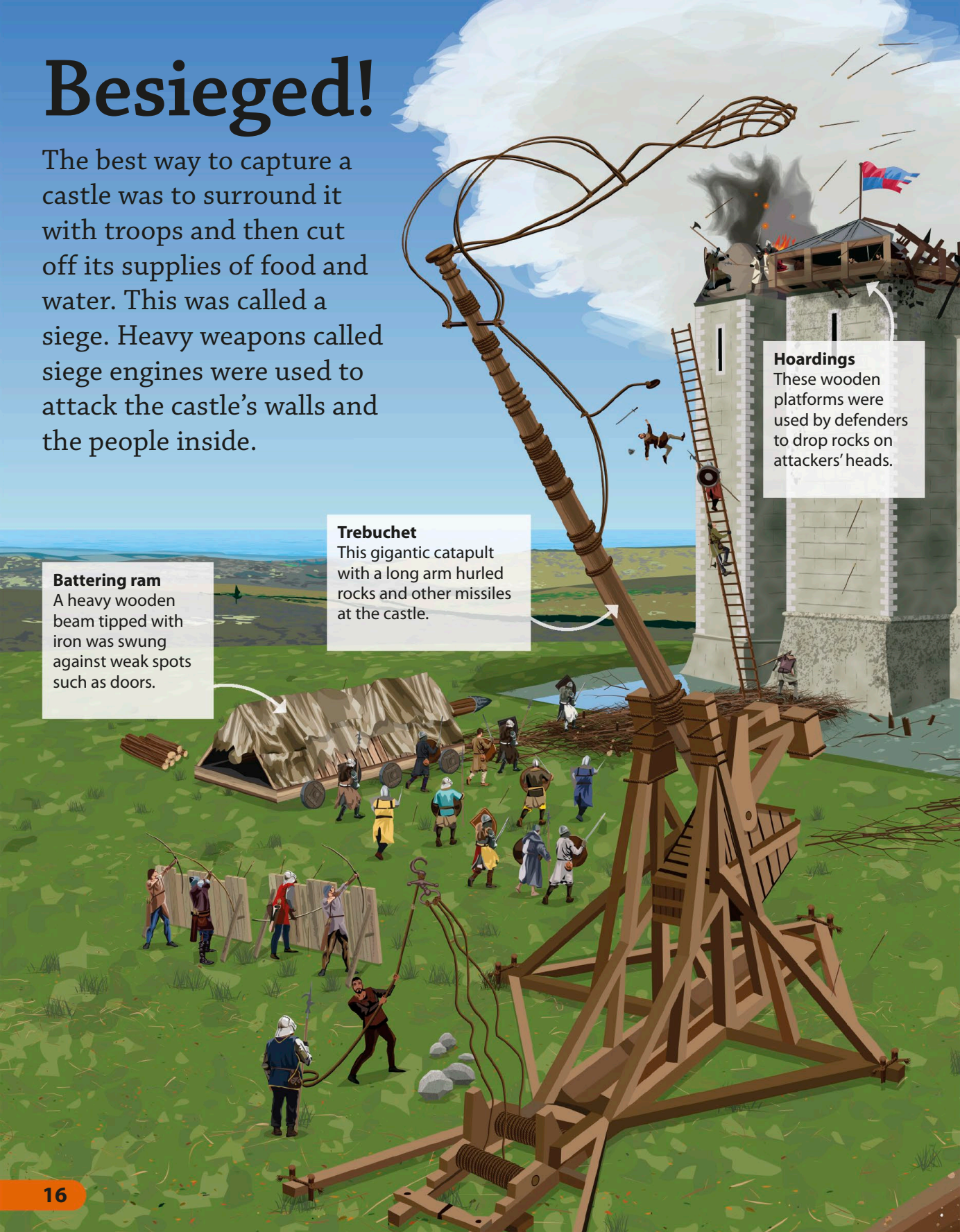
A heavy wooden beam tipped with iron was swung against weak spots such as doors.

Trebuchet

This gigantic catapult with a long arm hurled rocks and other missiles at the castle.

Hoardings

These wooden platforms were used by defenders to drop rocks on attackers' heads.





Arrow loops

These slits allowed defending archers to fire down at the enemy without becoming a target themselves.

Belfry

This tower on wheels made it easier for attackers to climb the walls.

Combat

Attackers climbed the walls using ladders. They faced fierce fighting at the top – if they made it!

Reaching the walls

Attackers filled in sections of the moat so that they could get close to the walls.

Undermining the walls

Tunnels were dug under the castle's defences. The roofs were held up with wooden props. When these were set on fire, the tunnel – and the tower above it – collapsed.

Pavis

Attackers fired longbows or crossbows from behind these big ground shields.

Meet the expert

Libby MacInnes is the Trebuchet Master at Warwick Castle, Warwick, UK. She tells us about what it takes to build a real-life war machine, the mighty trebuchet.



Q: What exactly is a trebuchet?

A: A trebuchet is a type of siege engine used in the medieval ages. It uses a lever (the arm) to lift a heavy counterweight in the middle. When the lever is released, gravity causes the counterweight to fall downwards, lifting the lever quickly and launching its load into the air.

Q: How big was a trebuchet?

A: Trebuchets were made in many different sizes. The trebuchet at Warwick Castle is the biggest in the world at 18 m (60 ft) tall and weighing 22 tonnes (24 tons). This would have been a large trebuchet in the medieval period.

Q: How do you know what a medieval trebuchet would have looked like or how it worked?

A: Weapons were of course top secret technology and so there is very little evidence of what they looked like. However, we do have a few drawings and descriptions from history. The oldest known drawing dates from 1187. We were able to work out how trebuchets looked and worked using these sources.

Q: How did you build the reconstructed trebuchet at Warwick Castle?

A: Trebuchets were made from around 300 pieces of wood. These were made in carpentry (woodworking) workshops and transported using carts and boats, then constructed at the castle. It took around 15 people two weeks to build.

Q: What is your favourite part of your job?

A: I would have to say it is pulling the trigger for the trebuchet! We can have hundreds of people watching at our daily shows. I love to hear their sound of awe as the rock is flung at 250 km an hour (150 miles an hour).

Q: Do you have a favourite story from Trebuchet history?

A: King Edward I built the largest trebuchet in history, called "Warwolf". He planned to use it in 1304 when he attacked the Scots at Stirling Castle. When his enemy surrendered, he refused to accept it. He destroyed the castle gatehouse before letting them surrender. He then charged the Scots for rebuilding the castle that now belonged to him!



Libby preparing the trebuchet to fire.



War machine Libby watches the Warwick Castle trebuchet, called "Ursa", fire its missile.

Arm

! WOW!
A trebuchet could fire a rock up to **300m (1000 ft)**.

Dungeons

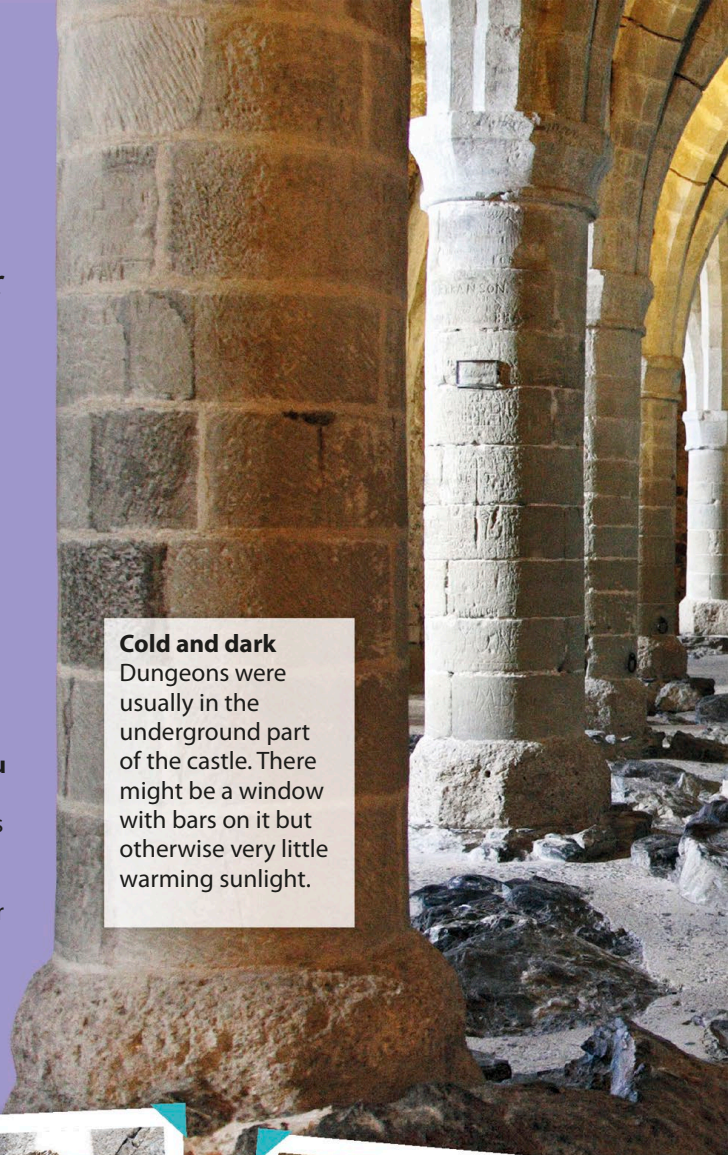
Many castles throughout history have served as prisons. With their thick walls and armed guards, escape or rescue was difficult or impossible. People who defied the king or the Church were thrown into damp, underground dungeons, full of rats and with very little light or food.

The dungeon of Château de Chillon, Switzerland

This castle dungeon dates back to 1005. In 1816 the poet Lord Byron wrote a poem called "The Prisoner of Chillon" about a monk who was imprisoned in its dungeons.

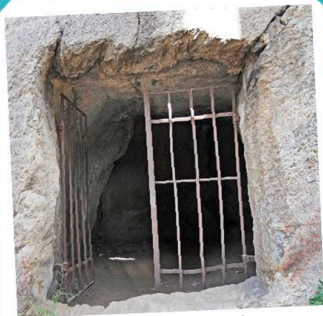
Cold and dark

Dungeons were usually in the underground part of the castle. There might be a window with bars on it but otherwise very little warming sunlight.



Prison castles

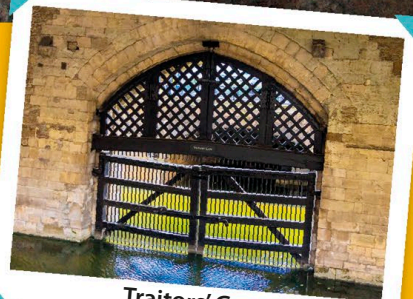
Some castles became more famous as prisons than as places for lords and ladies to live. These fearsome fortresses held prisoners for the lords of other castles without a dungeon of their own.



Dürnstein Castle,
Austria

Dürnstein Castle

Richard I of England was held captive at Dürnstein Castle and Trifels Castle, Germany. His ransom was 100,000 pounds of silver.



Traitors' Gate

Tower of London

The Tower of London was used as a prison up until the 20th century. Prisoners who had rebelled against the monarch were taken into the dungeons by boat through the Traitors' Gate.



REALLY?

A dungeon where prisoners were forgotten forever was called an **oubliette**.

Chained up

Heavy chains attached to an iron ring could be used to restrain the prisoner. These manacles could cause injuries and make it difficult to rest.



Princes and princesses

Noble or royal prisoners were often well treated. Their families would pay huge ransoms to get them back. However, some unlucky royal prisoners died in prison.



Princes in the Tower

Princes in the Tower

Edward V and his younger brother Richard were held in the Tower of London. They disappeared in 1483.



Lady Jane Grey

Would-be queen

Lady Jane Grey, at the age of only 16 or 17, was caught up in plots to be Queen of England. She was executed at the Tower of London in 1554.

Feudal society

About 900 years ago, European society was organised in a strict order called the feudal system. Land was granted to people in return for services and loyalty to the person above you in society. The castles were power bases that helped to enforce this social order.

! WOW!

If a knight didn't want to fight for the king, he had to pay a hefty fine.

Both nobles and poor people took up a religious life and became part of the clergy. Some lived well, while others took vows of poverty. The clergy had their own law courts.

Law and order
As the better kings improved law and order, lawyers and court officials such as bailiffs were kept busy. A lot of laws were to do with buying and selling goods, made by craft workers.

Servants
Some poor people worked as servants and maids at the castle and in wealthier people's houses.

Monarch

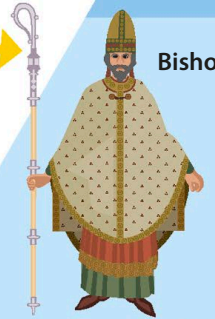
A king or sometimes a queen ruled. This monarch granted castles and land to nobles, in return for loyalty and military support.



King

Bishop

Bishops were powerful and some had their own castles, too. They sometimes argued with kings about powers held by the Church.



Bishop

Clergy

Friar

Nun



Seamstress

Court bailiff



Servants





Queen



Nobles



Vassal lords

Even powerful lords were vassals, which meant that they had to swear loyalty to the monarch.



Knight

Knights

Some knights became very powerful, but others were less well off. Knights fought in the service of their lord, rather than for a national army.



Merchant's wife



Tradesman

Craft workers

Male merchants and craft workers were organised into clubs called guilds, which controlled the trade. Many women also made trade goods but weren't allowed in the guilds.



Farmers



Peasants

Almost all poor people worked to make food. They paid their taxes by sending the lord grain or flour. Some peasants had their own land to work on, but many were serfs.

Serfs and villeins

Some peasants called serfs and villeins had very limited rights. They could not leave the land they worked on without permission from the lord of the castle. Being a serf was like being a slave because you did not get paid for your work.



Serfs harvesting under the eye of a supervisor

Lords and ladies

The lord and lady were the most powerful people in the castle but they did not have complete power over their lands. A lord's right to own a castle was only granted to him by the king on condition of his loyalty and his military support. In turn, the lord demanded loyalty from his own followers.

Lords

A lord's power and rank was shown by the way he dressed. There were strict laws about who had the right to wear certain materials, such as furs or silks.

Tunics

Embroidered tunics were worn over a linen undershirt.

Headress

Hair was tucked under a cloth called a coif. A linen strap called a barbette went under the chin.

Ladies

A lady's rights were limited and she had to dress according to strict laws and fashions. She did not get to choose who to marry. Marriages were arranged to increase a noble family's power.





Waist belts with decorative buckles

Belts were worn to hold in loose tunics and tuck in extra fabric.

Hose

Woolen leggings called hose were worn by both men and women.

Leather shoes

Nobles' shoes would be made of the finest leather.



Keys of the castle

A lady took care of the castle while her husband was away at war. She was then called the châtelaine.

Pouch

A pouch hanging from the belt could be used as a pocket.

Long dresses

Full-length dresses were worn throughout the Middle Ages.

Working in a castle

All sorts of people worked in a castle, from people who made weapons, to cooks, maids, and cleaners. When the lord or king was there, it was very busy. When an enemy army came near, many ordinary people hid within the castle walls.

Cook

Cooks and their assistants toiled away in the kitchens before a big banquet. Boys called scullions fetched water from the well and did the washing up.

Cauldrons

Stews were prepared in iron cauldrons hung from pot hooks.



Nurse

A nurse fed and looked after the children for the lady of the castle. Children were sometimes sent to live with other families when they were older.

Child

Children wore small versions of adult clothes.



! WOW!

The smelliest job in the castle was cleaning out the toilet shafts and cesspits!

Spit

Meat for roasting was rotated on a metal rod called a spit.

Goose feathers set at an angle



Fletcher

A fletcher's job was to fit feathers (called fletchings) to the arrows. These made the arrow spin in flight, which made them more accurate.



Arrowhead

Wooden war arrows were about 7.7 cm (3 in) long and had long, narrow points made of iron.

Embroidery

Ladies often spent many hours working on beautiful embroidery. They made rich wall hangings and coverings for use in castles and churches.



Stitching

Embroiderers stitched dyed woollen thread onto linen cloth.

Butler

A butler was in charge of the buttery, where butts (casks of wine or ale) were stored. He reported to the lady of the castle before a banquet.



Lady of the castle

A châtelaine's duties included giving orders to the servants about what food and wine to serve.

Peasant life

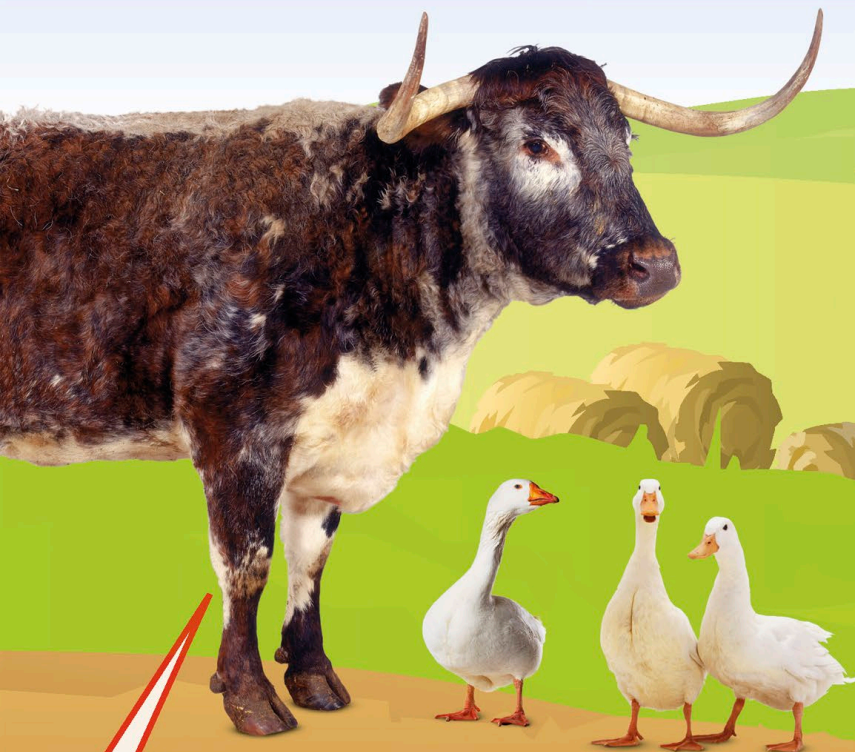
Life for poor people in medieval times was hard, especially for serfs, the poorest kind of peasant who had very few rights. Ordinary men and women had to work hard in the fields to produce food for the nobles in the castle, as well as for themselves. In the 14th century, peasants across Europe rebelled against the nobles.

! WOW!

In 1381,
the mighty
Tower of London
was captured
by peasants!

Harvesting

Farming work followed the seasons. The peasants ploughed long strips of land in April, sowed the seed in May, made the hay in June, and harvested crops in August and September.



Animals

In November, cattle, pigs, and sheep would be killed for their meat. The meat was salted to make it last, as fridges had not yet been invented. Geese provided eggs and meat, and were cared for by young peasant girls.



Castle

The castle often controlled a huge area of land, including all the peasants who lived there. Nobles became rich by selling the food grown by the peasants.



Windmill

From the 1180s, more and more windmills were built in northern Europe. Water and wind power were used to grind grain to make bread.



Flail

A flail was used to beat stalks of wheat until the grains separated from the inedible stems and husks.



Chapman

Merchants or pedlars, known as chapmen, travelled from village to village, selling small items such as ribbons.



Taxes

Taxes were sums of money or food that people had to pay to the lord, the king, or the Church. The king might demand extra taxes to pay for a war.



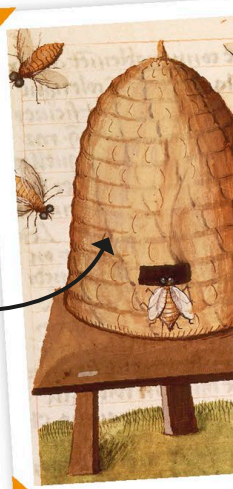
Medieval coins

Animals

Animals played an important part in everyday castle life. Horses were used for riding into battle, as transport, and when hunting. The king and nobles hunted animals such as deer or wild boar in the forests. Oxen hauled heavy loads and ploughed the fields.

Beekeeping

Beehives were kept so the castle always had honey and beeswax.



Friesian horse

These heavy horses are descended from medieval warhorses.

Horses

The best warhorses were called destriers. Everyday riding horses were known as palfreys. Merchants used baggage horses called sumpters.

Dogs

Dogs were bred for hunting, herding animals, and guard duties. Small pet dogs were also popular.



Irish wolfhound



Bees

Bees provided honey, the only way to sweeten food at the time. Honey was also used in making medicines. Candles were made from beeswax.



Falcons

Falcons and hawks were trained to hunt rabbits and other small creatures. The birds were kept in a wooden building known as "the mews".



Carrier pigeon

Pigeons

Pigeons were kept in huts called dovecotes and bred for eating. They were also trained to carry messages over long distances.



English longhorn cow



Stags

The male red deer, or hart, was hunted by nobles for sport. Its meat, called venison, was shared amongst them with higher-ranked people getting more.



Hunting party

In some places, only the king was allowed to hunt deer.



Cows and oxen

Cattle were raised on the castle lands, providing meat, milk for making cheese or butter, and skin for making leather.



Dressing a knight

Knights were soldiers who rode on horseback. From the 1000s they became valued as troops and also as high-ranking members of society. They fought in suits of armour. At first this was mail, a mesh made from interlinking iron rings. By the 1400s the whole body was covered in close-fitting plates of steel.

Protective layer

Padded shock absorbers cushioned the body against blows from axes, maces, lances, and shields.

Padding coat

This quilted undercoat was called an aketon or gambeson. It was made of linen or wool.

Coif

This hood protected the head inside the helmet.

Helping hands

A servant or perhaps a squire (a trainee knight) might help the knight get kitted out before the battle or joust.

Chausses

Mail leggings protected the legs and thighs from slashing swords.



Sword

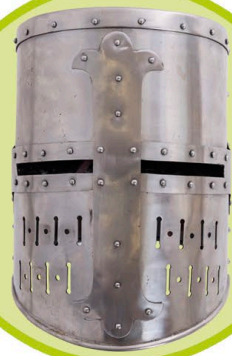
The sword was designed for slashing. It had a flat, double-edged blade, with a central groove.

The great helm

A typical European helmet looked rather like a bucket. Inside, it was padded with cloth and leather.

Mail gloves

These were mittens made from fine mail, with the four fingers together and a separate thumb.



Outer layer

This knight wears a short mail jacket, or haubergeon (how-bur-jon). A tunic, with a split for mounting a horse, was called a hauberk.

Armoured knight

Mail was tough and flexible, but it could be pierced. A heavy blow from a mace could cause severe bruising and injury.

Putting on the armour

Mail fabric was made up of iron or steel rings. Each ring was linked to four others and hammered together.

Battlefield ID

A knight's coat-of-arms was shown on the shield and on the surcoat. It helped battlefield officials called heralds identify a knight, even when his face was hidden.

Shield

A shield could deflect blows in battle, or be used as a weapon itself.

Surcoat

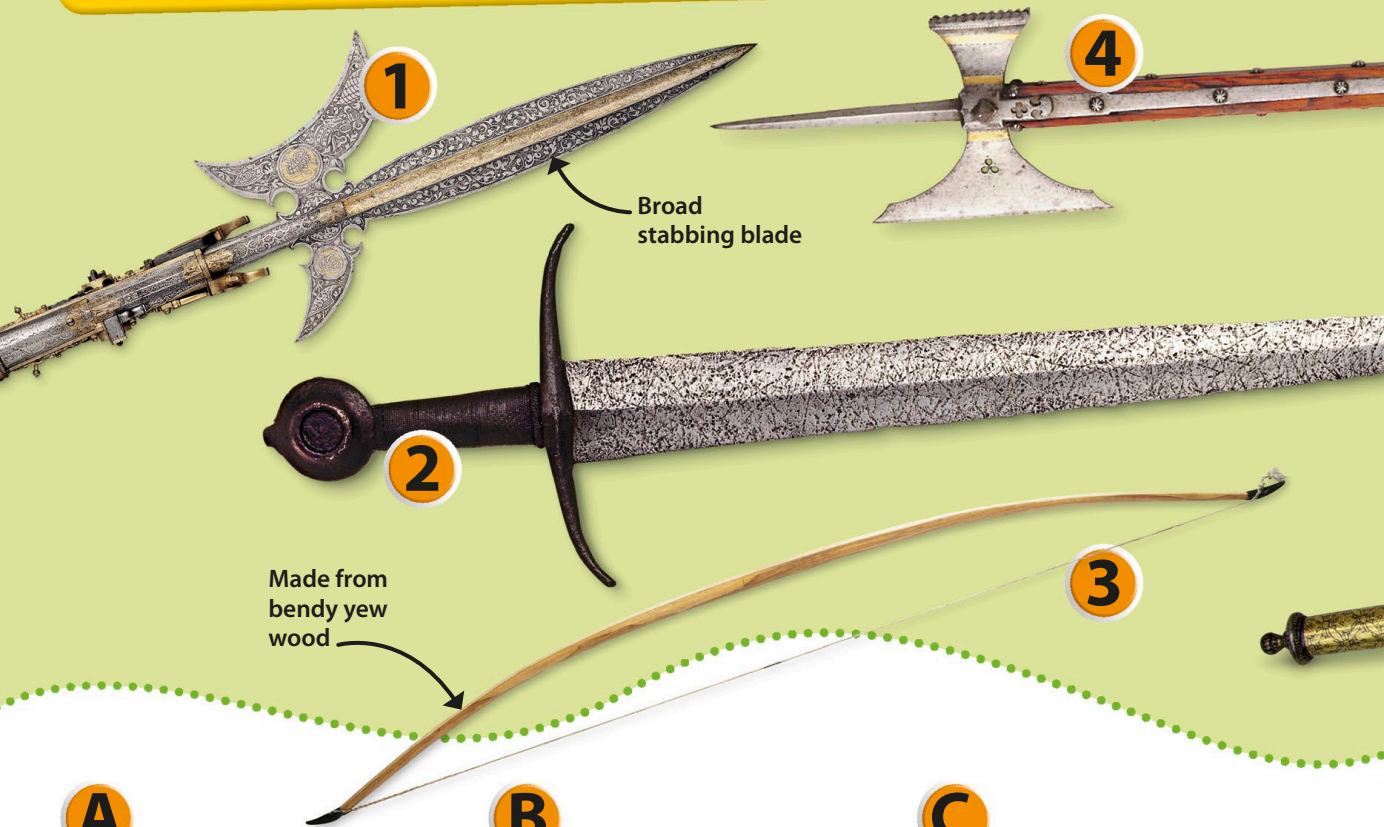
A loose robe called a surcoat could be worn over the mail shirt.

Scabbard

This sheath held the blade of a sword. It hung from a belt or a shoulder strap called a baldric.



Match the objects with the descriptions.



A

Pole-axe

This small, powerful axe was fitted to a wooden shaft. The spike could pierce armour and the blade could be used to slice and slash.

B

Halberd

A weapon with a wide blade used by footsoldiers against mounted knights. Soldiers used the hooked part to drag knights off their horses.

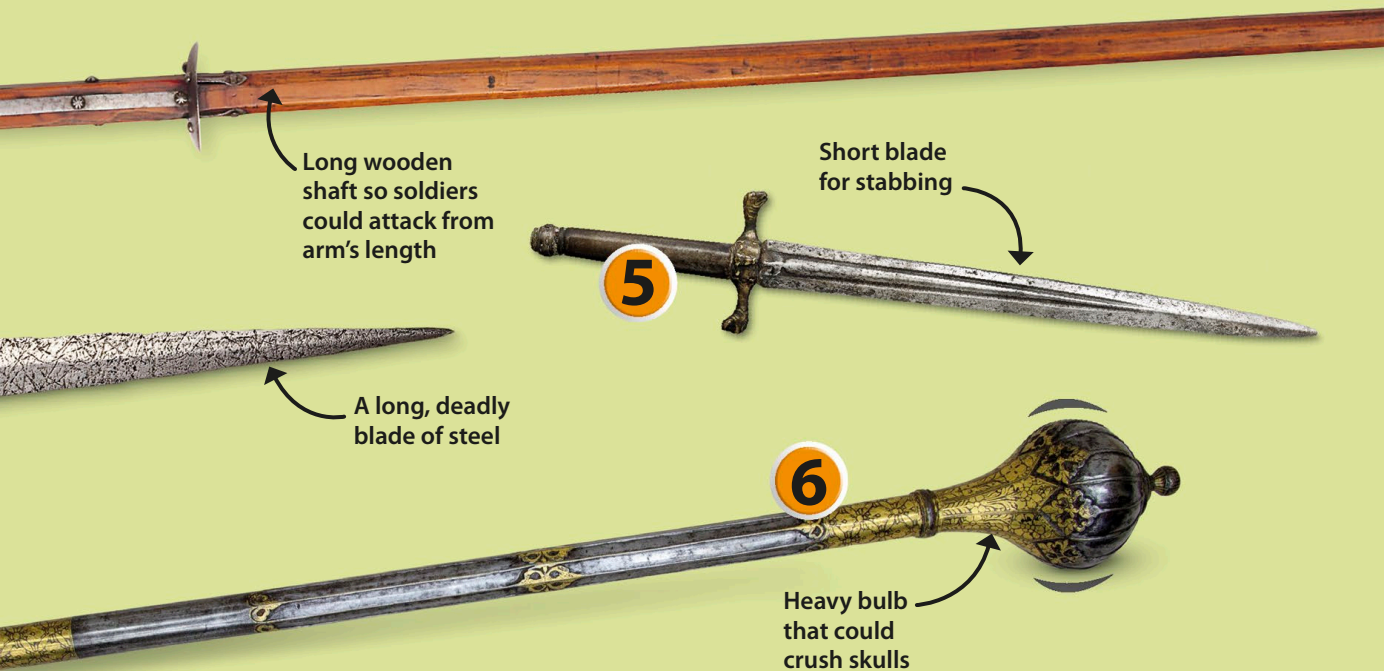
C

Dagger

A stabbing knife used in close hand-to-hand combat. It could be easily hidden for a secret attack.

Name your weapon!

A medieval battle was brutal. Longbows could injure an enemy soldier up to 200 m (660 ft) away. Mounted fighters, called the cavalry, used lances, slashing swords, battle axes, and maces. Footsoldiers used pole weapons to try to dismount the knights, whose heavy armour made them slow on the ground.



Long wooden shaft so soldiers could attack from arm's length

Short blade for stabbing

5

A long, deadly blade of steel

6

Heavy bulb that could crush skulls

D

Mace

The mace was a kind of club with a heavy, round head. It was used by both footsoldiers and knights.

E

Longbow

Medieval archers used the longbow to fire deadly showers of arrows into the enemy lines before the two sides closed in battle. Welsh archers were famous for their skills.

F

Sword

Swords could be used in close combat by both footsoldiers and knights. Some were designed for thrusting and stabbing, others for slashing.

! WOW!

At the Battle of Agincourt in 1415, English archers fired **1,000 arrows per second.**

Battle of the bows

Genoese archers were the masters of the crossbow. They fought for the French against the English at the Battle of Crécy. However, crossbows were much slower to reload than longbows, and the English triumphed.



Battle of Crécy, 1346

Tournaments

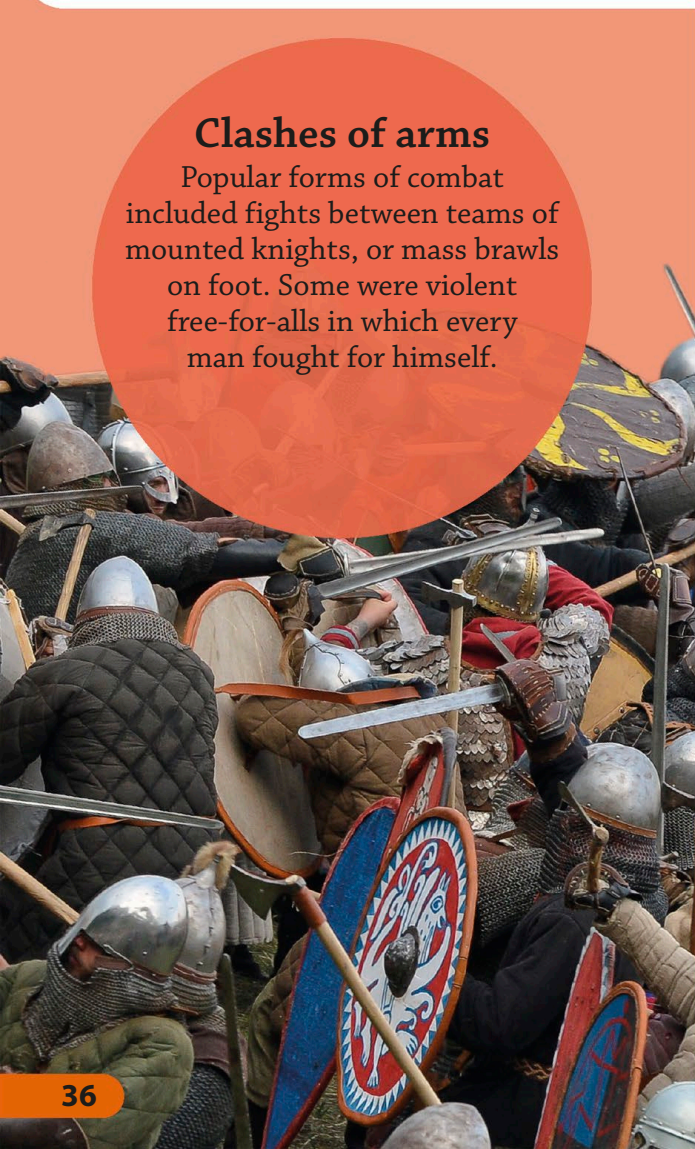
The medieval tournament was a display of riding and fighting skills. Knights competed to be the winners. The first tournaments were held at about the time stone castles began to be built in the 11th century. By the 1500s, they had become grand and colourful spectacles.

Clashes of arms

Popular forms of combat included fights between teams of mounted knights, or mass brawls on foot. Some were violent free-for-alls in which every man fought for himself.

Jousting

The joust recreated a real battle. Two mounted knights thundered towards each other in full armour. Their long, blunt lance might break on the opponent's shield, or a knight might be knocked off his horse. It was very dangerous.



Heraldic symbols

By the end of the Middle Ages tournaments were places to show off fancy armour, plumed helmets, and flags. Heraldic symbols were a noble family's favourite images of power, such as dragons and castles. They appeared on surcoats, shields, and horses' coverings.



Heraldic designs



Lady's favour

A lady might agree for a particular knight to fight as a champion of her honour, wearing her scarf or ribbon in the joust. This was part of the knight's code of honour, known as chivalry.



Food and feasts

In the Middle Ages, food was grown close to where people lived. Country people would often pay their taxes “in kind”, which meant sending in food to the castle. If bad weather or a marauding army destroyed the crops, many people went hungry.

Food for the peasants

Everyday meals might be just a crust of gritty bread with cheese, or a bowl of thin porridge. Peasants also caught fish and rabbits, and raised geese to roast for special feasts.

Cutlery
People took their own knives or spoons to a meal. Forks became popular in Italy in the 1300s and then spread to the rest of Europe.



Pottage

Stew

Pottages were thick stews of vegetables or meat.



Cheese



Trenchers

Food was often served on a trencher, a round, flat piece of bread.

In the days before refrigeration, foods were preserved by salting, smoking, pickling, or drying.



Pickled herring



Bacon

Food for the lords

A special banquet would be held in the Great Hall for a visiting lord or bishop. It might include wild boar, venison (deer meat), swan, wild birds, fish, and fine white bread.

Spices

Spices were beginning to be imported from Asia, at great expense.



Saffron



Peppercorns



Nutmeg



Cinnamon



Ginger

Boar's head with apples



Elaborate decorations

Food was served in all sorts of decorative ways to make it look as expensive as possible.



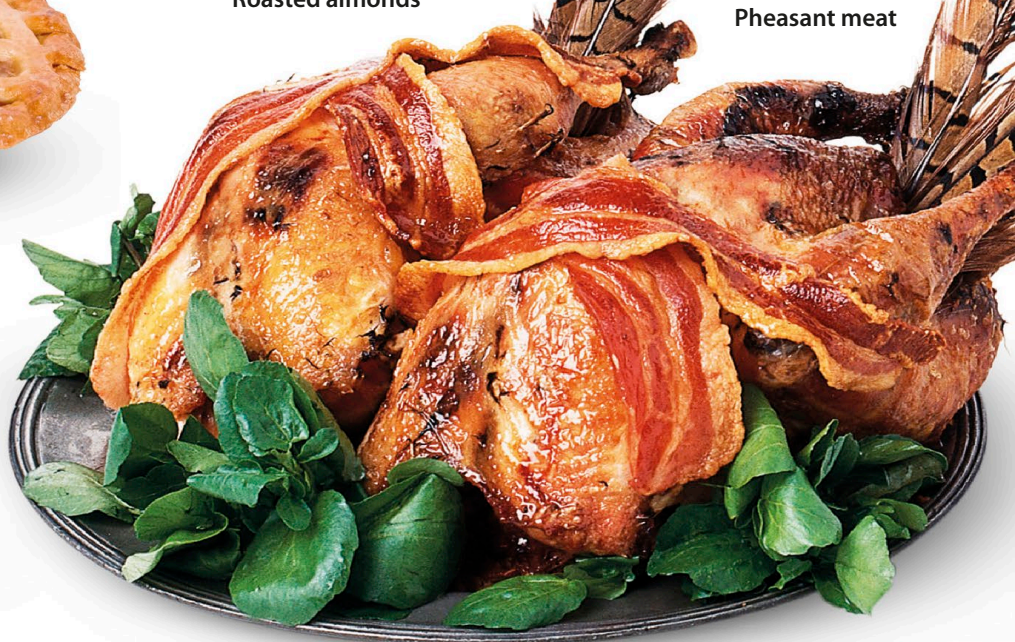
Roasted almonds



Apple pie



Berry and rose petal rice pudding



Pheasant meat

Entertainment

Medieval festivals such as May Day were celebrated with music and dancing. Entertainers such as acrobats and jugglers travelled from one castle to another to perform. The surrounding towns put on “mystery plays” in which local people acted out stories from the Bible.

INSTRUMENTS

Medieval people had no recorded music! It was performed live on harps, lutes, flutes, trumpets, drums, or bagpipes. Many of these developed over the ages into the instruments we know today.



The lute came to Europe from the Middle East.



A musical pipe called the recorder became popular in the 1200s.

Minstrels and troubadours

Minstrels (musicians) might perform in the Great Hall of the castle during a feast. From the 1100s to the 1350s, poets called troubadours toured the castles of southern France, singing of chivalry and courtly love.



Court jester

The jester was a bit like a modern stand-up comedian. He was kept by the nobles to make fun of powerful people, tell jokes, and talk entertaining nonsense.

MUMMERS

During winter festivals such as Christmas, performers called mummers would roam the streets or go from house to house, making music. They wore devil masks or headdresses shaped like animal heads.



DANCING

Country people liked jolly dances with a lot of spinning around, clapping, and stamping. Villagers might dance in a ring, holding hands. At the castle, the nobles preferred stately dances, pacing, pointing toes, skipping, and curtsying.



Indoor games

Chess was invented in India, but the European board game developed between about 1100 to 1475. Its pieces reflect medieval life, with castles, knights, kings and queens, and bishops.



Prayer and worship

During the Middle Ages, most of Europe, apart from Muslim Spain, was known as Christendom. Every part of daily life was affected by religious beliefs. The centre of religious life in a castle was the chapel, where people went to pray and hear readings from the Bible.

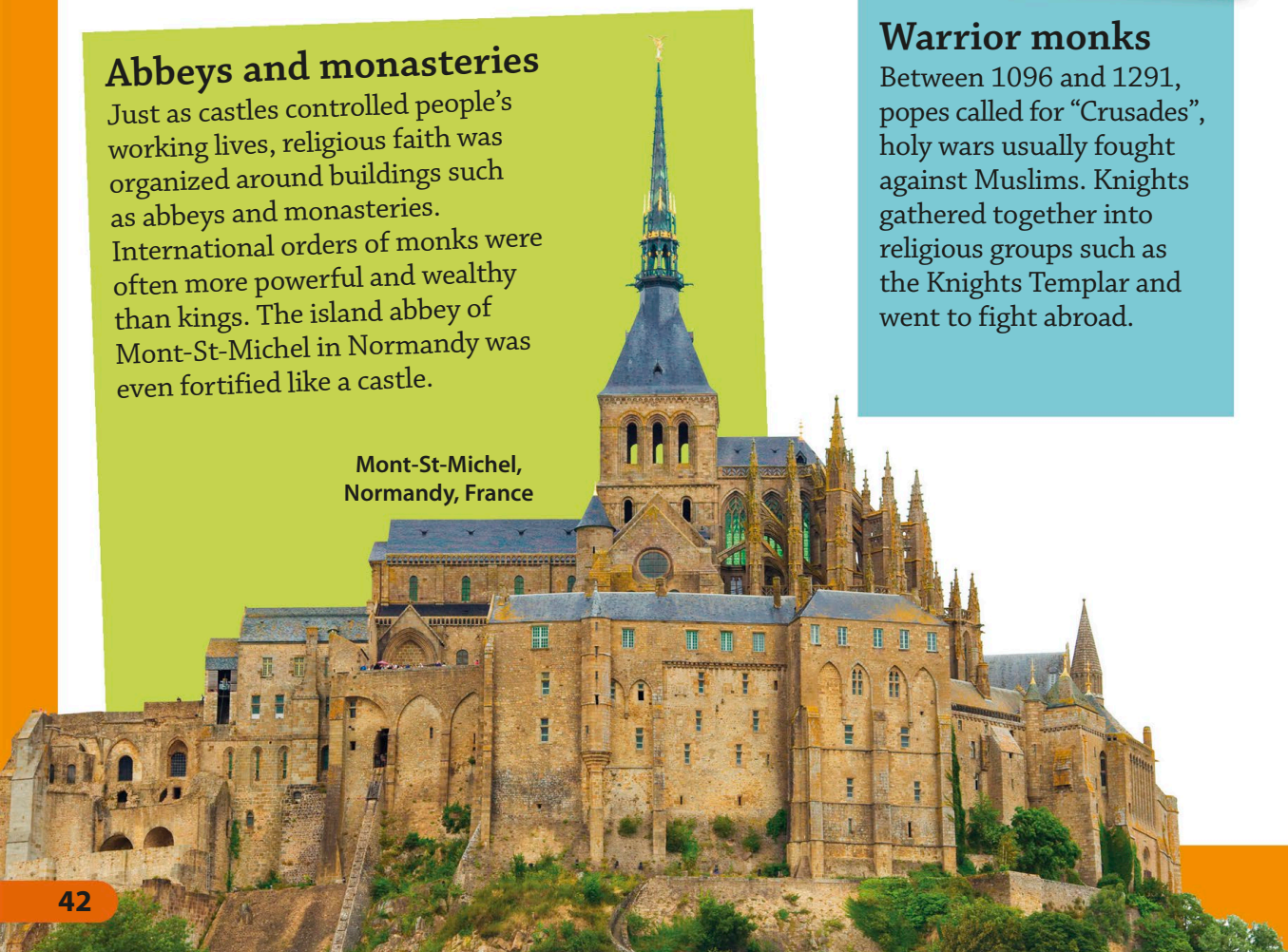


Hugues de Payens founded the order of the Knights Templar in 1119.

Abbeys and monasteries

Just as castles controlled people's working lives, religious faith was organized around buildings such as abbeys and monasteries. International orders of monks were often more powerful and wealthy than kings. The island abbey of Mont-St-Michel in Normandy was even fortified like a castle.

Mont-St-Michel,
Normandy, France



Warrior monks

Between 1096 and 1291, popes called for "Crusades", holy wars usually fought against Muslims. Knights gathered together into religious groups such as the Knights Templar and went to fight abroad.



Bible
Bibles were written in Latin.



Cross
The name "Crusaders" came from the Latin word *crux*, meaning "cross".



Chalice
Precious silver cups called chalices were filled with wine and used in the service.

Priest
Religious services were overseen by the castle's priest.

The chapel

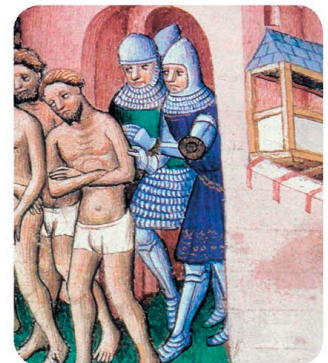
Most castles had their own chapels, where lords and ladies could pray and worship God. Before a squire became a knight, he had to take part in a "vigil", where he spent the whole night praying.

Religious wars

As well as wars against other religions, there were many bitter conflicts between Christians. From 1209 to 1229 the pope waged a crusade against the Cathars, a Christian group in southern France. Knights carried out massacres (mass killings) against the Cathars.



Carcassonne, a Cathar stronghold



Cathars are forced out of Carcassonne in 1209.

Castles in Europe

The Middle Ages were a time of brutal warfare, which meant that thousands of castles were built across the kingdoms of Europe. Castles were crucial during battles to be king, wars over land and religion, and peasants' revolts.

Marksburg Castle

This famous castle towers high above the River Rhine. It has seen many conflicts, up to World War II. It has been rebuilt several times – but never destroyed.

FACT FILE

- » **Built in:** 1117
- » **Location:** Braubach, Rhineland-Palatinate, Germany



Château Gaillard

This castle was built by King Richard I, “the Lionheart”. During a siege in 1203–1204 a French soldier managed to enter the castle by climbing in through a toilet chute!

FACT FILE

- » **Built in:** 1196–98
- » **Location:** Les Andelys, Normandy, France



Fénis Castle

With fancy battlements, Fénis looks more luxurious than many castles. In the 1390s, it had its own vineyard to provide wine.

FACT FILE

» **Built in:** 1242-1420

» **Location:** Aosta Valley, Italy



Będzin Castle

Before Będzin, there was a wooden castle which was destroyed when the Tatars invaded in 1241. The stone castle was built by King Casimir “the Great” of Poland.

FACT FILE

» **Built in:** 1348

» **Location:** Silesian Highlands, Poland



FACT FILE

» **Built in:** 1475

» **Location:** Community of Madrid, Spain



Manzanares el Real New Castle

This fine castle replaced an older fortress (the “Old Castle”). It was built when the Middle Ages were coming to an end, so it came to be used more as a luxurious palace than for defence.

Moorish castles

From the year 711, the Moors, a Muslim group from northwest Africa, invaded Spain and Portugal. They founded a country called al-Andalus and fought their way into France. They built many castles. By 1492, these lands had been reconquered by European Christian armies.

Salon de Embajadores

This square tower is 45 m (150ft) high. It contains a splendid throne room, built in 1334–54.



Alhambra, Spain

From 889 to the 1400s, this fort became a castle and a palace. It towers over Granada, Spain.

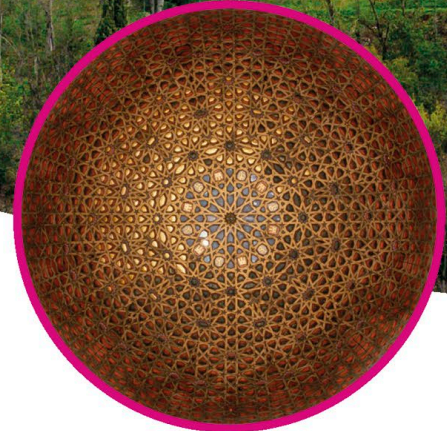
Beautiful defences

Many Moorish castles have strong, square towers, linked to city walls. Later, they developed into palaces, with beautifully decorated courtyards, fountains, and gardens.



Arches

The Moors were skilled architects and craft workers. Arches were built in curves and keyhole shapes.



Domes

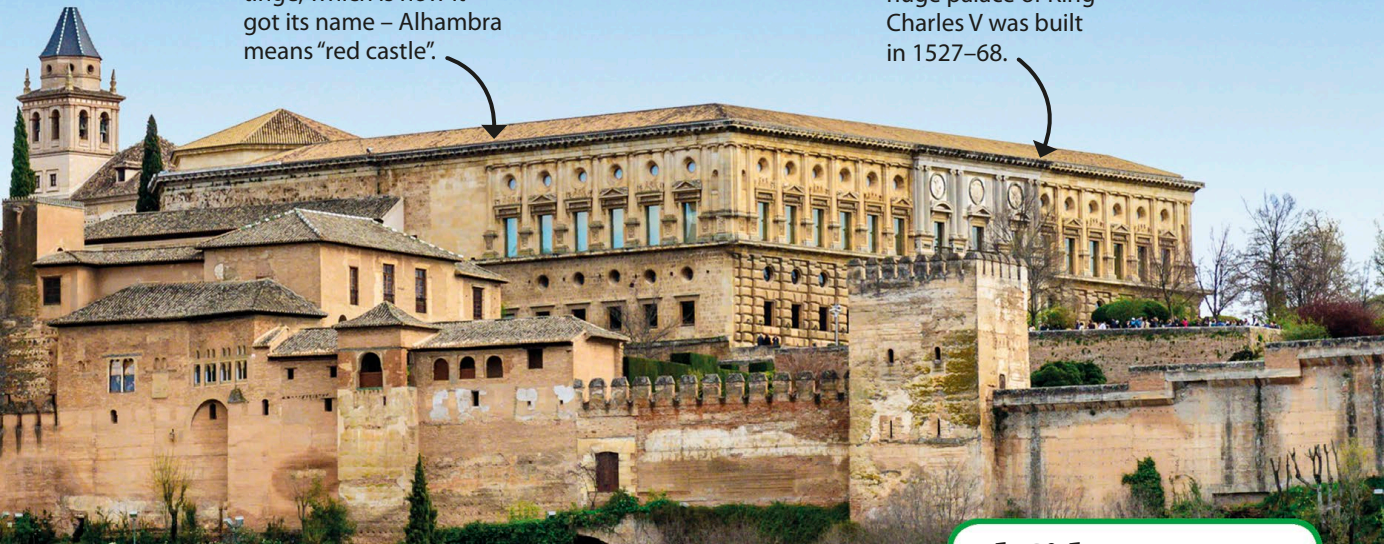
Domes and arched ceilings with intricate designs created wonderful spaces inside council chambers, throne rooms, and mosques.

Reddish bricks

The bricks of the castle have a reddish tinge, which is how it got its name – Alhambra means “red castle”.

Palace of Charles V

The Alhambra was surrendered to the Christian rulers of Castile in 1492. This huge palace of King Charles V was built in 1527–68.



El Cid

Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar (c.1043–99) was a nobleman of Castile and a great soldier. He sometimes fought against the Moors, but sometimes on the same side. The Moors called him “El Cid”, the Lord.

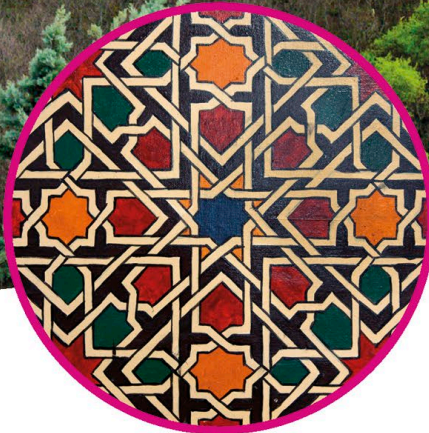


Statue of El Cid



Windows

Criss-cross latticework filtered out the blazing Spanish sun or allowed in a gentle breeze. Splashing fountains cooled the hot air.



Tiles

Inside walls were covered in colourful tiles, with complicated geometrical patterns to dazzle the eye. Some walls displayed calligraphy (beautiful writing).

Crusader Castles

Many castles still stand in southwest Asia and the Middle East from the time of the Crusades (1096–1291). These wars were fought between Western European Christians and Muslim armies. They were about religion and control of trade and land. Both sides used castles, which were often captured.

Krak des Chevaliers
This castle in Syria was first built by the Emir of Homs in 1031. It was captured by Crusaders in 1099.

Big slope

These steep walls or “taluses” shored up the towers against earthquakes and made it hard to undermine or climb.



Lands and knights

The Holy Land in the Middle East was sacred to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. New kingdoms created by invading Crusaders were referred to as Outremer (“overseas”). Crusaders called the Muslims “Saracens”, while the Muslims called the Europeans “Franks”.



Crusading orders
Religious orders of knights included the Knights Hospitaller, who held the Krak des Chevaliers, and the Knights Templar, who had their base at the Temple Mount, a holy place in Jerusalem.



REALLY?

Krak des Chevaliers could house a huge garrison of about 2,000 men.

Inner ward

Within the inner ward were living quarters, stores, a great hall, and a chapel.

Strong outer walls

This outer wall was added in the 13th century, making it a concentric castle.

Water supply

Droughts were common in Syria. An aqueduct channelled water into an inner moat, which also served as a reservoir for drinking water.



Saladin

Salah ad-Din

This Kurdish sultan of Egypt reigned from 1174 to 1193. He was a military commander who won the respect of many Europeans with his brilliance. They called him "Saladin".



Crusader king

King Richard I of England was known as the Coeur de Lion ("the Lionheart"). He spent most of his reign (1189–99) on the Third Crusade or in captivity. He fought against Saladin in the Third Crusade.

Richard the Lionheart

End of an age

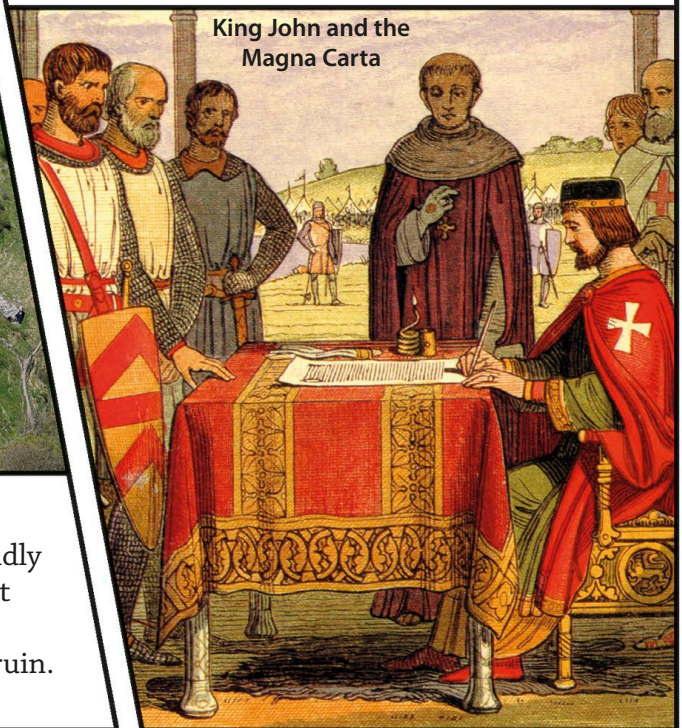
By the 1300s, the feudal system was breaking down in Western Europe. Under the feudal system, power had been based on how much land a person had rather than on money. As trade became more important, a banker could become richer than a king. During wars, the mighty stone walls of castles couldn't withstand powerful new weapons.



Ruins of
Corfe Castle,
England

End of feudalism

In 1215, English barons forced King John to give away many of his royal powers by putting his seal on a document called the Magna Carta. This began to break down the feudal system that was so important in running castles.



King John and the
Magna Carta

What happened to the castles?

Some castles were “slighted” which means badly damaged by the enemy so that they could not be used. Some were abandoned. Few castles were used after the 1650s and they fell into ruin.

The plague

In 1347, a plague arrived in Europe. The “Black Death” killed about 50 million people, so there weren’t enough left to work on the land. Peasants could now demand high wages, instead of working for the lord for free.

People bringing out their plague dead for burial



Louvre Palace, France

Rise of palaces

In 1360, King Charles V of France converted the Louvre Castle, which defended Paris, into a grand palace. Many kings now deserted their damp, draughty castles and moved into luxurious city palaces.

Gunpowder

Simple cannon were being used in Europe in the 1300s. By the 1460s, they were powerful enough to destroy stone walls. Castles became useless, as the people inside were no longer safe from siege.



Matchlock muskets, 1690s

Mortar,
1400s



Japanese castles

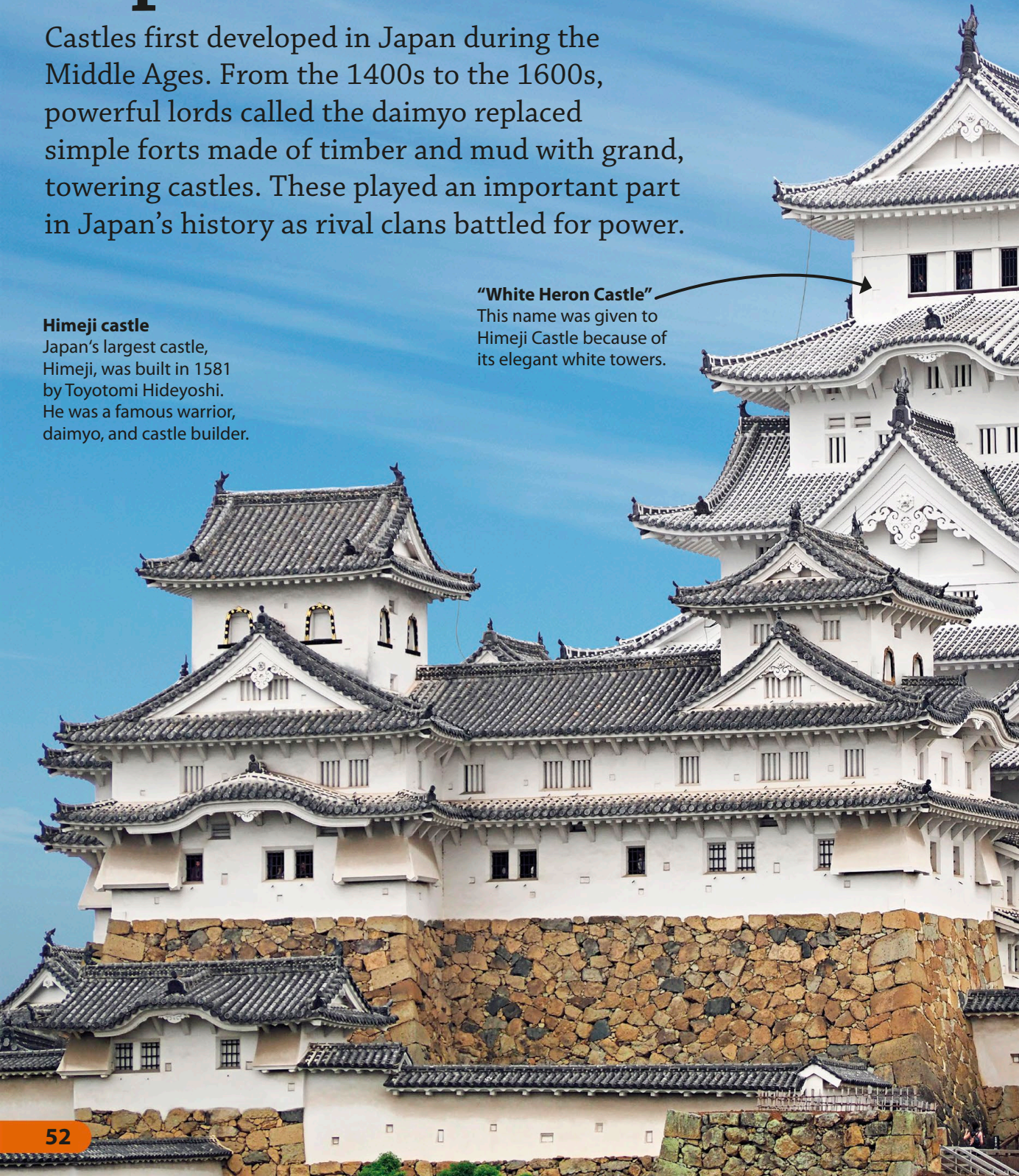
Castles first developed in Japan during the Middle Ages. From the 1400s to the 1600s, powerful lords called the daimyo replaced simple forts made of timber and mud with grand, towering castles. These played an important part in Japan's history as rival clans battled for power.

Himeji castle

Japan's largest castle, Himeji, was built in 1581 by Toyotomi Hideyoshi. He was a famous warrior, daimyo, and castle builder.

"White Heron Castle"

This name was given to Himeji Castle because of its elegant white towers.



Samurai warriors

The Samurai, or Bushi, were warriors who served a lord. From the 1100s to the 1800s they were elite troops with a high social status. They followed a strict code of honour, known as bushido.

Sumptuous quarters

The upper level of the castle contained the lord's living quarters. They would have been very luxurious.



Fantasy castles

In the 1400s, kings, queens, and nobles liked to imagine that they were living in magical castles with turrets and spires. Their minstrels and poets told stories about legendary castles. In the 1800s, some people actually built romantic fairy-tale castles.



Present day Château de Saumur,
by the Loire river, France



Neuschwanstein Castle

King Ludwig II of Bavaria, Germany, was a dreamer who loved music and architecture. His ultimate romantic fantasy was this hilltop castle, which was built in 1869–86.

Camelot Castle

It is said that the legendary King Arthur gathered together the greatest knights in the land at his castle, called Camelot. He seated them at a round table, so that everyone would be treated as equals.



Travelling to Camelot

Arthur's knights came to Camelot to sit at his famous round table.



Château de Saumur

A painting from 1410 shows the Château de Saumur, a real castle with soaring white towers. This is still the ideal castle seen in modern fairy tales and films.



Myths and legends

Every castle has its own amazing real-life story, but people love to tell fanciful tales about them too. Some of these are about knights and heroines, some about magical beasts and supernatural beings. Over time, the true stories have become legends.



Vlad III

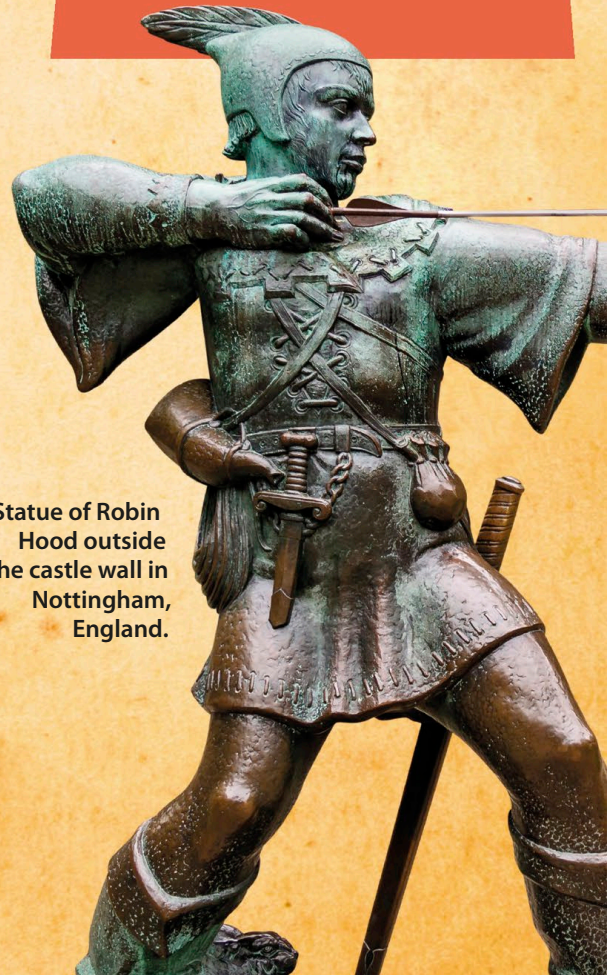
Legend of Dracula

A cruel medieval prince called Vlad III lived in the castles of Bran, Poenari, and Hunyadi in 15th-century Romania. In the 1800s, a writer called Bram Stoker based his vampire Dracula on Vlad.



Robin Hood

This legendary outlaw from England “robbed the rich to pay the poor”. His greatest enemy was the evil Sheriff who lived in Nottingham Castle.



Statue of Robin Hood outside the castle wall in Nottingham, England.



The dragon Ryujin

Dragon king

In Japanese folk tales, a castle belonging to a dragon called Ryujin lies under the sea. One day spent in this palace is the same as 100 years in the outside world.



The princess is rescued by her brother.

! WOW!

Robin Hood has featured in at least **78 films and TV series.**

Laidley Wyrm

A king was living at Bamburgh Castle when his wife died. He got married again, to a witch. She turned her new stepdaughter, the princess, into a dragon called the "Laidley Wyrm".

King Arthur

If Arthur ever existed, he was probably a war leader who died in about 537 CE. In the later Middle Ages, storytellers reinvented him as a great king. They said that the wizard Merlin was there when Arthur was born at Tintagel Castle.



The ruins of Tintagel, Cornwall, England.

Facts and figures

Castles impressed and intimidated the world for hundreds of years. Even though many of them are now in ruins, we still find them amazing. Read on to learn facts and figures about castles.

SUITS OF ARMOUR were given as top prizes in tournaments. German armour was considered to be the finest and was stamped with armourer's trademark.



Most people in the Middle Ages went without breakfast. The main meal of the day was around mid-morning, at about **10 or 11 o'clock**.

From the 1490s, the medieval great sword reached extreme lengths. Some could be as gigantic as **1.4 m (4.5 ft) long** and weigh more than **2 kg (4.4 lb)**.



Beaumaris Castle

BEAUMARIS CASTLE

in Wales cost about £15,000 to build, over seven centuries ago. In today's money that would be about £15.8 million (20.3 million USD).

10,000

castles are recorded to have been built in Spain over the ages. About 2,500 of them still survive.





Rumelian Castle dungeon,
Istanbul, Turkey

The word **DUNGEON** comes from the French word *donjon*, meaning keep. In English it came to mean a grim prison in a castle.



The medieval longbow was up to **1.8 m (6 ft)** long and had a range of over **315 m (1033 ft)**.

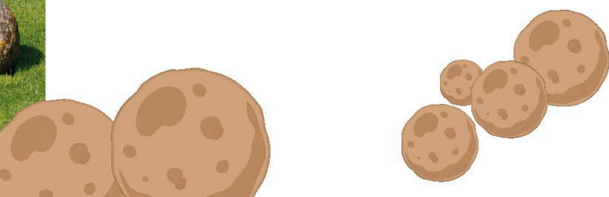


The path to knighthood

began with young boys who served as **pages**, in the castle, then as **squires** who assisted knights. When they learned how to fight they finally became **knights**.

140 KG

boulders (310 lb) could be thrown by the Warwolf, the biggest trebuchet ever built.



12 YEARS

was how long it took the Ottoman Turks to win the Siege of Philadelphia, in modern Turkey. It lasted from 1378–90.



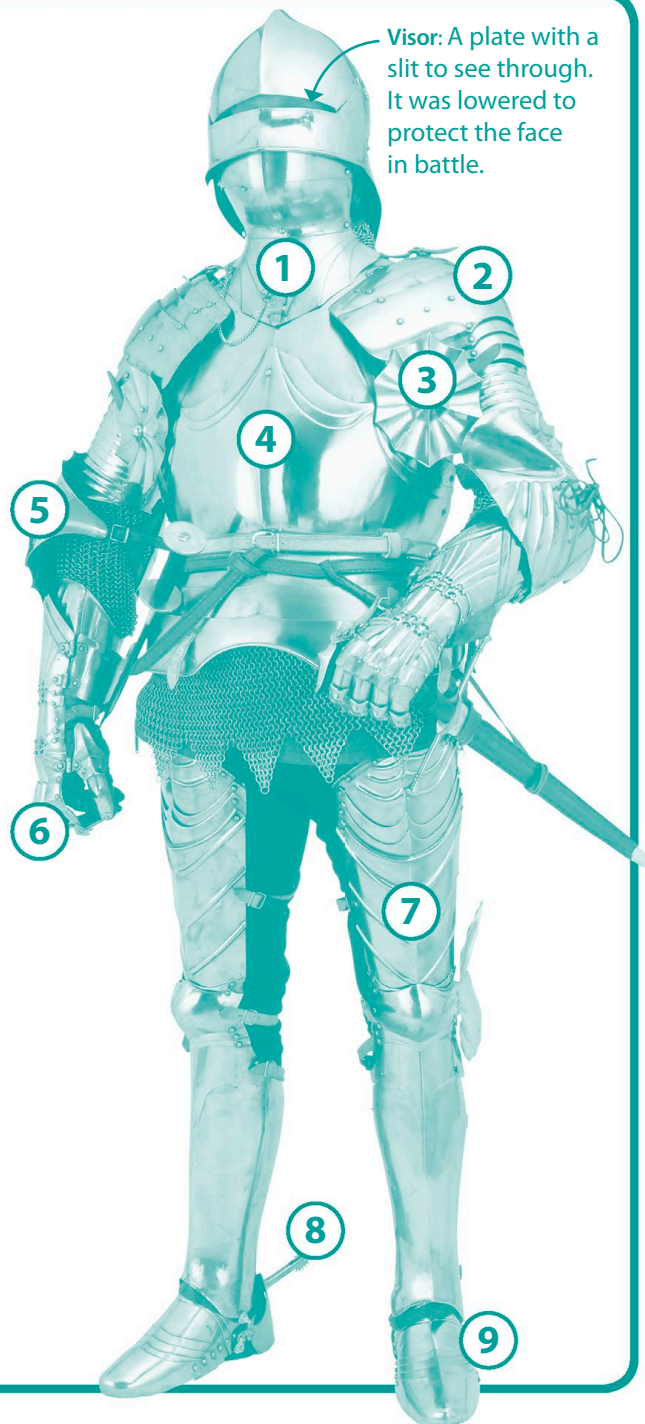
While the walls protected a knight's castle from attack, metal armour and helmets protected his body during a battle or a joust.

Armour-plated

By the 1400s a full suit (or "harness") of plate armour could protect every part of the knight's body. Each piece had a name.

KEY

- 1 Gorget** One or two plates that protected the throat and neck.
- 2 Pauldron** Plates that protected the shoulder and upper arm.
- 3 Besagew** A disc that protected the armpit.
- 4 Cuirass** The main armour that protected the knight's upper body.
- 5 Vambrace** The parts that protected the forearm.
- 6 Gauntlet** An armoured glove with a cuff to protect the hand and the wrist.
- 7 Greaves** Leg armour that protected the shin and the calf.
- 8 Spurs** Metal points or spiked wheels called rowels could be fixed to the heel to prod the horse forwards.
- 9 Sabaton** Armour shaped like a shoe, which protected the foot.



Armour and helmets

Helmets

Helmets protected part or all of the head and face in battle, and sometimes the neck, too. They were made in many different shapes over the ages.



MAIL COIF

The mail hood was fitted with a flap called a ventail, which protected the chin. It was worn under a conical or basin-type helmet.



NASAL HELMET

The conical helmet had a bar called a "nasal" to protect the nose. It was worn by the Normans in the 1000s and 1100s.



BASCINET

This was a basic helmet with added neck protection and a visor. Sometimes the visor was pointed like a snout, to deflect a blow from a weapon.



SALLET

A dish-like helmet was used in the 1450s. It had a leather lining and was often worn with a bevor, a metal plate protecting the lower face and throat.



BARBUTE

This one-piece helmet looks rather like a helmet from ancient Greece, but it was worn from the 1350s to the 1450s.



FROG-MOUTH HELM

The "great helm" was a bucket-like helmet covering the whole head and neck. This version with a front like a frog's mouth was popular from the 1390s.



CLOSE HELMET

This type of helmet from the 1500s included a protective bevor and visor, and was often topped with a feather plume.

Timeline of the castle age

Follow the timeline to find out about important events in the history of castles.



Walls of Jericho

A defensive stone wall is built around Jericho, in what is now Palestine.

Walled city

Huge walls are built around Constantinople. The walls include walkways, tower forts, gatehouses, and moats.

Stone castles

Motte-and-bailey castles are rebuilt with stone keeps and walls. These castles are built all over Europe.

Orford castle stone keep

Bigger castles

Castles grow bigger, with round towers and multiple defences.

8000 BCE

2700 BCE

270-400 CE

300-400

900

1000-1100

1095-1291

1200

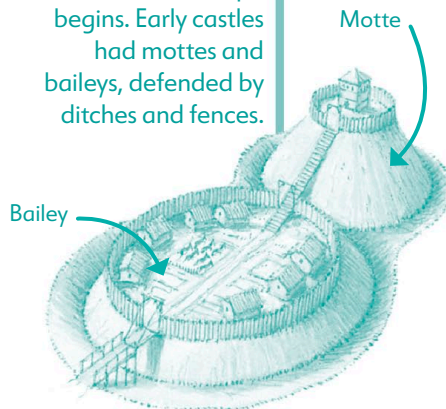


City of Uruk

Massive stone walls, gatehouses, and a moat surround the ancient Iraqi city of Uruk.

First castles

Castle building in northern Europe begins. Early castles had mottes and baileys, defended by ditches and fences.



Ruins of Roman Burgh Castle

Early forts

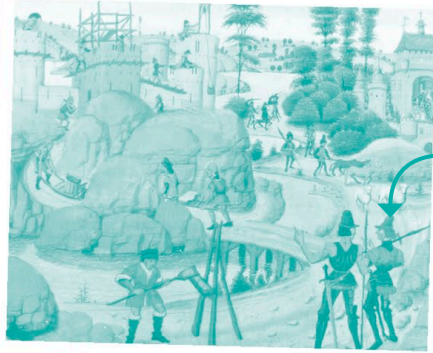
Romans build stone forts to defend English Channel coasts. Later, some were made into castles.

Wars of religion

"Crusades" are fought between Christians and Muslims across Western Asia and Europe.



The Siege of Acre, in what is now Israel, lasted from 1189 to 1191.



French manuscript showing building of a castle.

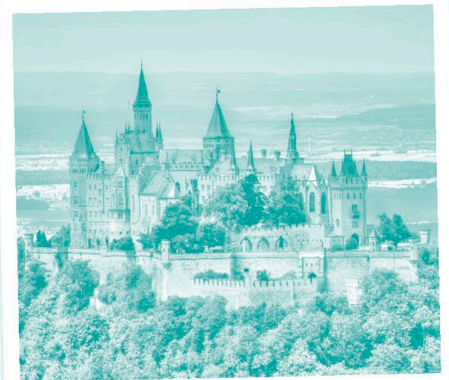
Disrepair and ruins

Many European castles see their last military action, and begin to fall into ruins.

Fantasy castles

Wealthy people build fairytale-style castles as homes.

Scarborough castle ruins



Hohenzollern Castle, Germany

Concentric design

Stone castles are perfected, using a concentric design with double walls. Castle builder Master James of St George builds them across Europe.

Artillery in wars

Bamburgh Castle in England is partly destroyed by cannons.

1290

1300

1464

1470

1640-1650

1667-1707

1800

1900-2000

First cannons

Cannons are first used in Europe, often hurting their own side more than the enemy.



Bastion forts

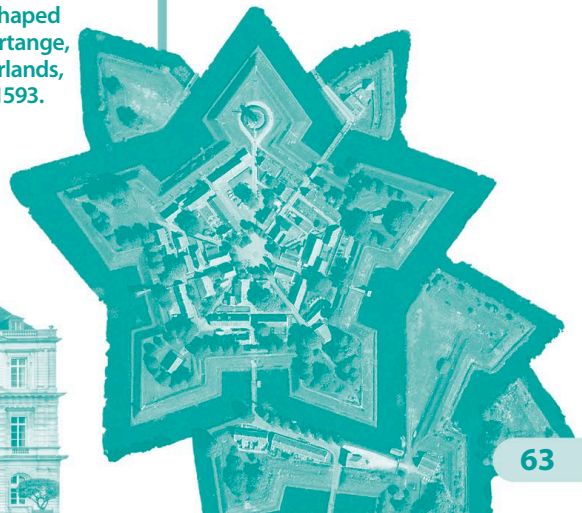
Special forts designed for artillery warfare replace castles. Marquis de Vauban engineers such forts.

Restoration

Many castles are restored and repaired, attracting historians, archaeologists, and tourists.



The star-shaped fort of Bourtange, the Netherlands, built in 1593.



Age of palaces

In Europe, the age of palaces begins, as kings and nobles give up their castles for luxurious homes.

Luxembourg Palace, Paris, France





Glossary

Here are the meanings of some words that are useful for you to know when learning all about medieval castles.

armoury Place where armour and weapons were kept

bailey Also known as a ward, this was an open space inside a castle's walls

battlement Walkway at the top of a castle wall, designed to help with defence

Bushido Code of honour used by Samurai warriors

butler Servant who took care of wine and ale

carpenter Craft worker who made things out of wood

chapman Merchant or salesman who went between villages selling small items

châtelaine Woman who took care of a castle where there was no lord

crossbow Medieval bow that could fire short bolts a long way

chivalry Code of honour used by medieval European knights

coif Close-fitting cap made of cloth or mail

concentric A type of castle with inner and outer walls

crusade Religious war agreed to by a Christian pope

Daimyo Japanese feudal lords

destrier
Warhorse of a medieval knight

Embroidery of a medieval invasion



drawbridge Bridge that could be pulled up to stop attackers from entering

dungeon Castle prison, usually dark, damp, and cold

feudalism System where people owed loyalty to those with more wealth and power

fletcher Craft worker who made arrows

garrison Group of soldiers living in a castle

halberd Type of long weapon used for both stabbing and cutting

heraldry Symbols and colours worn by a knight

invasion Large-scale attack by a foreign army

jester Court servant who told jokes and silly stories

jousting Sport where knights tried to knock each other off horses using long poles called lances

keep Most secure and fortified part of a castle

knight Warrior who fought on horseback

longbow Medieval bow that could fire arrows a long way

lute Stringed musical instrument

mace Hand weapon with a heavy or spiked head

mail Links of metal connected together to make armour

motte Mound of earth that made a good place to build a keep

moat Ditch around a castle, either dry or filled with water

munter Performer who travelled around villages playing music for money

murder hole Hole in a castle gatehouse that let defenders drop rocks on attackers

nef Salt cellar shaped like a ship

oubliette Tiny prison cell where prisoners might be forgotten about

palfrey Ordinary horses used for riding

palisade Wooden wall built to protect a motte-and-bailey castle

pantler Servant who took care of food stores and the pantry

parapet Wall along the top of a battlement

pavise Large shield that defended archers on the battlefield

pole-axe Weapon with a long pole and a stabbing and cutting blade on the end

portcullis Gate that could be lowered to cut off a castle entrance

pottage Thick vegetable or meat stew eaten by peasants



Heraldic shield

Samurai Japanese warriors

scabbard Sheath to carry a sword in

serf Medieval peasant who was not paid for their work

sumpter Horse that was used by merchants to carry goods

surcoat Tunic worn by a knight over his armour

tapestry Woven decorative cloth

trebuchet Giant catapult that could fire rocks hundreds of metres (feet)

trencher Piece of bread used as a plate in medieval times



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findout! quiz

Test your knowledge about castles
and find out even more fun facts!



1

What would you
do with a trencher?



2

What was a destrier?



3

Who was a chatelaine?



4

Who did Richard I fight
in the Third Crusade?



5

What would you
do with a lute?



6

What was a mace?



7

Where is the
White Heron castle?

8

What was a
murder hole?



9

What was a palise?

10

What was a fletcher?

Turn over to discover the answers

Quiz answers

1

Eat out of it. Find out more about medieval food on pages 38–39.

2

A warhorse. Find out more about medieval animals on pages 30–31.

3

A woman who ruled a castle. Find out more about noble ladies on pages 24–25.

4

Saladin. Find out about Saladin on page 49.

5

Strum it – a lute is a stringed musical instrument. Find out more about medieval music on page 40.

6

A heavy weapon. Find out more about medieval weapons on pages 34–35.

7

This is a nickname for Himeji Castle in Japan. Find out more about Himeji on pages 52–53.

8

A hole that castle defenders dropped rocks through. Find out more about defences on pages 14–15.

9

A huge shield that protected archers. Find out more about medieval battles on pages 16–17.

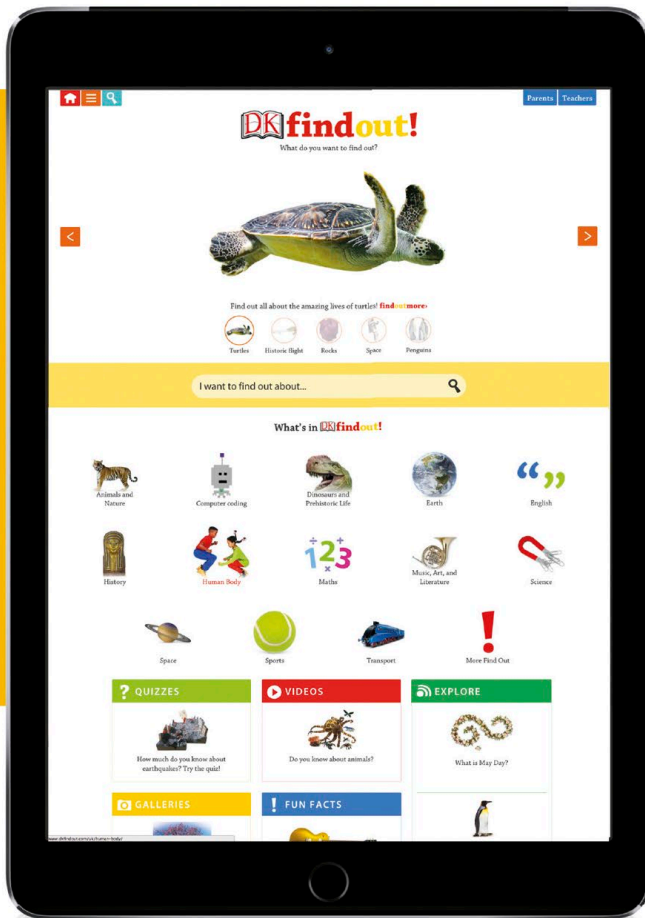
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A person who made arrows. Find out more about jobs in the castle on pages 26–27.



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