What kinds of things mattered to people in the Middle Ages?

Where do people get their ideas about the Middle Ages? When I was a boy I got mine from my favourite TV programme, *The Adventures of Robin Hood.* Every week, Robin won his battles with the Sheriff of Nottingham and King John. What mattered to Robin was defending the poor against the greedy Sheriff. What mattered to the Sheriff and the King was getting rich and being powerful.

That TV programme was very misleading. For example, not all kings were like King John in the programme. Yes, some were greedy and cruel on occasions but many were very different. A lot more things mattered to them than just getting richer and more powerful – such as religion and helping the Church, trying to make the country more peaceful and winning glory in battle.

This enquiry however isn't just about Kings and queens. You are going to explore what kinds of things mattered to them also what mattered to other people, including the people who worked hard in the fields and the towns. There are three important questions to investigate:

- Did the same things matter to everyone?
- Why did religion matter so much to people in the Middle Ages?
- Did the same things matter to them that matter to us today?

Why is it important to know what mattered to people? It's important – essential – because knowing what mattered to people helps us work out why they did the things they did and made the choices they did.



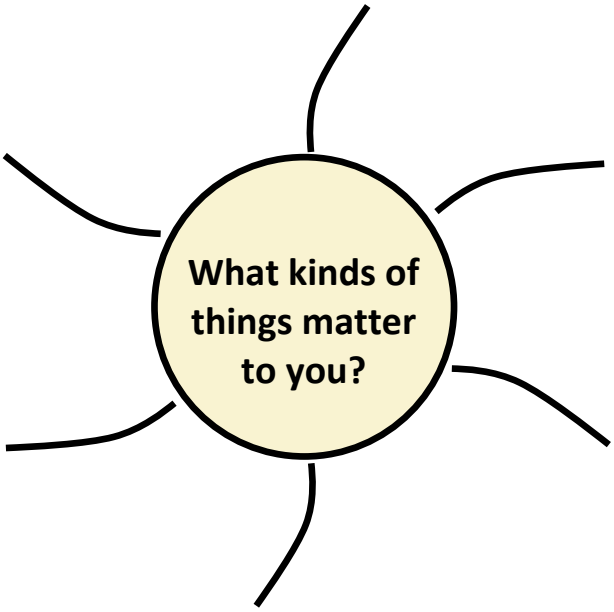
About me, Ian Dawson, I'm the author.

History has always been the subject that felt like home to me.

I've spent 40 years studying and reading about history, especially about the Middle Ages, as a teacher in schools and in a university and writing lots of books for use in schools.

Exploring what mattered to people in the Middle Ages may also help you think about what matters most to you.

1. So begin this investigation by filling in your own version of this chart with all the things that matter to you.



What matters to you? It might be your friends, or your pet, or something very different. This is personal to you.

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What kinds of things mattered to people in the Middle Ages?

Fill in the boxes with the things that you think mattered to each group of people.

Kings and Queens



They ruled their countries.

They took the most important decisions but were expected to listen to advice from nobles and other advisers

KINGS AND QUEENS

Wealthy people



Noblemen and women who had lands in many parts of the country

Knights and their ladies with lands in just one county

Rich merchants and their families in the towns who employed lots of people.

WEALTHY MEN AND WEALTHY WOMEN

The commons



The 'ordinary' people – all those who were not nobles or wealthy landowners.



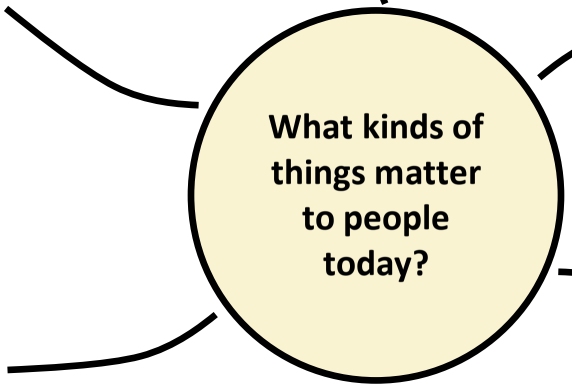
They included everyone from well-off villagers and merchants in towns to the poorest people in villages and towns.

COMMONS: MEN AND WOMEN

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What kinds of things matter to people today?



1. Survival

Having enough food and water

Housing, warmth and cleanliness

2. People

Family and love

Friendships

Feeling part of groups and communities

3. Safety and security

Being healthy and fit and being cared for when sick

Having enough money to live on

Security from violence and crime

4. Respect

Being respected and valued by other people

5. Beliefs and Ideas

The opportunity to follow your religion in peace

To be treated fairly

The chance to live without suffering because of people's prejudices

6. The chance to achieve your ambitions

Having an education

The chance to work and to travel

Being able to make your own choices and decisions

What kinds of things mattered to Margaret Paston?





This memorial to Margaret Paston was set up in 2019 at Mautby in Norfolk, her family home, 600 years after Margaret was born.

Why is Margaret still remembered? Did she invent something important? No. Was she famous at the time that she lived? No.

The reason she's remembered is that she wrote letters. Even that was not unusual. Many people wrote lots of letters in the 1400s but, very, very unusually, Margaret's letters still exist. That's why we know more about Margaret than about any other woman of her time. These letters help us find out some of the things that mattered to Margaret.

Margaret was the only child of the wealthy Mautby family. Their family name came from the village where they lived. When she was about 20 years old, around 1440, Margaret married John Paston, a young man of about the same age, who lived in another part of Norfolk. John's father was a wealthy lawyer. Many of Margaret's letters were written to John and to their children, 5 boys and 2 girls, when they were away from home. John died in 1466 so Margaret had a long widowhood before her death in 1484 when she was about 64.

Margaret never made a list of what mattered to her. A list would have made finding out very easy for us! Instead we have to work out what mattered to her from what she wrote in her letters. This means making 'inferences' – working out what she thought or felt even though she did not say it directly in her own words. Here's an example, from a letter Margaret wrote to her husband, John, in April 1465:

> 'there are several of your tenants' houses in Mautby that are in great need of repair and the tenants are so poor that they are not able to repair them. If it pleases you, I would like the tenants to use rushes from your marshland to repair their houses. There is also wood on your land that is of no great value which would help them with repairs.'

Tenants: these were families who lived and worked on a landowner's land. They were free people so they received wages and paid rent for their homes.

1. I infer from the letter that Margaret thought it was important to look after people who worked for her and that she may have been kind-hearted. What evidence in the letter suggests this?

2. Do you agree with my inferences or would you make different inferences?

3. Now you know a little about Margaret, what kinds of things do you think might have mattered most to her?

Infer, inference: working out what a person thought or felt from what they wrote even though he or she did not say.

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What can you infer about what mattered to Margaret Paston?

These extracts all come from much longer letters written by Margaret.

We do not know what Margaret looked like but we do know about the kinds of clothes she would have worn.

The pictures on pages 5 and 6 show the kinds of hats that ladies like Margaret wore. Married women covered their hair at that time.

A. Margaret to her husband John, September 1443

I wish with all my heart to hear of your welfare, thanking God for your improvement from your serious illness. Your mother and I have not been easy in our hearts from the time we knew of your illness until we knew for certain of your improvement. I have promised to go on pilgrimage to Our Lady of Walsingham and to St. Leonard's to pray for you. I would rather you were at home than have a new gown, even if it were a scarlet gown.

B. Margaret to her husband John, May 1448

I entreat you with all my heart to go to church and hear mass and the other services with a devout heart. Trust truly in God and love him and serve him and he will not deceive you.

C. Margaret to her husband John, 1448

The Pastons' home at Gresham was about to be attacked by Lord Moleyns who claimed that he owned Gresham.

I beg you to get some crossbow and bolts, because your houses here are so low that no-one can shoot out with longbows though we have never had such need. You could get them from Sir John Fastolf if you send to him. And I would like you to get two or three short poll-axes to defend the doors with and as many armoured jackets for our men to wear as you can.





D. Margaret to her husband John, April 1453

As for news, Queen Margaret came to Norwich late Tuesday afternoon and stayed until 3 o'clock on Thursday afternoon. When the Queen was here, I borrowed my cousin Elizabeth Clere's jewellery because I dare not, out of shame, go amongst so many lovely gentlewomen in my own beads. I entreat you to spend some money on me so I have something to wear about my neck.

E. Margaret to her son John II, November 1463

About Jane Walsham

I want you to speak to Wykes and find out how he feels towards Jane Walsham. She has said that unless she can marry him, she will never marry. Her heart is very set on him. She told me he told her that there is no woman in the world that he loves so much. I would not want him to deceive her and if he will not marry her let me know quickly and I can arrange something else for her.

Your grandmother would be glad to hear some news from you. It would be good if you can write to her as hastily as you can.

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What can you infer about what mattered to Margaret Paston?

These extracts all come from much longer letters written by Margaret.

F. Margaret to her son John II, September 1469

Margaret's daughter Margery shocked the family by wanting to marry Richard Calle, who worked for the Pastons. This ruined Margaret's plans for Margery to marry someone wealthier and of higher status.

Her behaviour has pierced our hearts painfully. Remember that in losing Margery from our family we have only lost a wretch and so we should take it less to heart. Even if Calle were to fall down dead at this very hour she would never be in my heart as she used to be.



Worship: respect or honour.

G. Margaret to her son, John III, November 1471

I greet you warmly and send you God's blessing and mine. I have a letter from your brother in which he says he is in debt. Now we cannot help each other without doing something of great disworship such as selling wood or land or possessions from our houses. I do not know what to do without destroying our worship. It is the death of me to think of it.

It is shameful and much talked about in this district that your father's gravestone has not been made. For the love of God let it be arranged quickly.

H. Extracts from Margaret's will, February 1482

I commit my soul to Almighty God and to Our Lady, His blessed mother and to all the saints and my body to be buried in the aisle of Mautby church where rest the bodies of my ancestors in the Mautby family.

I leave 20 shillings to the high altar of Mautby church and I would like the aisle where my body is buried to be newly roofed and glazed. I would like a marble stone to be laid on my grave within a year of my death. In the middle of this stone I would like the coat of arms of the Mautby family and the words 'In God is my trust.'

I leave 20 marks to Constance, illegitimate daughter of Sir John my son; I leave £20 to John Calle, son of my daughter Margery;

I leave 12 pence to every household in Mautby, 8 pence to every household in Basingham, 6 pence to every poor household in Gresham and in Sparham, 3 pence to each leper man and woman at the gates of Norwich.

I leave 20 shillings to each of the four friaries in Norwich and to the four friaries in Yarmouth.

These items are followed by a long list of Margaret's possessions which she has left to her children, grandchildren, god-children and servants. Margaret's servants are to continue to be paid for three months after her death.



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Conclusions: What mattered to Margaret Paston?

Margaret Paston lived over 500 years ago but thanks to her letters we can almost hear her thinking and speaking. This means that we can work out what made her happy, what angered her and what mattered to her, as if she was someone alive today who we know quite well.

Here are some of the words I think describe Margaret:

Brave	**Loyal**	**Busy**	**A worrier**	**Independent**
Loving	**Sometimes unforgiving**	**Nagging**	**Kind**	**Determined**

Margaret Paston's landmarks

c. 1421 – birth

c. 1441 – she married John Paston

1456 – her husband John died

1479 – two of her sons died, John II and Walter

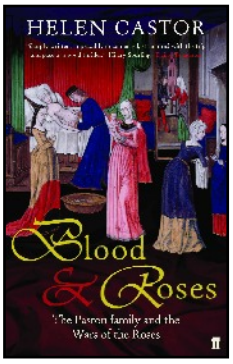
1484 – Margaret died

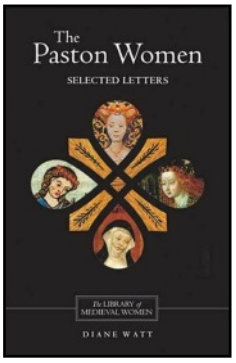
In many ways I like Margaret, especially because of her determination and loyalty, but I think she may have been quite scary sometimes too!

So what mattered to Margaret? Like all of us, different things mattered to her as her life changed but some things were always important to her, especially her family.

We can infer from her affectionate letters that Margaret loved her husband, John. She loved her children too and worried about them a good deal. For example, she always hoped her eldest son, John II, would come back from London to live near her in Norfolk. Sadly for Margaret he never did. However her love for her children didn't stop her being angry with them at times, especially with her daughter, Margery, when she married Richard Calle, a family servant.

Historians have written a lot of books about the Paston family, using their letters as evidence





Why was Margaret so angry about her daughter's marriage? She was afraid it damaged the family's 'worship'. To be a person or family of 'good worship' meant to be well-respected. Margaret was afraid that other wealthy families would not respect the Paston family if their daughter married a servant. Margaret defended the Pastons' 'worship' and their status as an important family in other ways too. She even stood up bravely to attackers who tried to steal some of the family's lands and property. She also looked after the people who worked for them because she wanted the Pastons to be seen as 'good lords'. Having the reputation of being 'good lords' was another way for a family to be respected and be of 'good worship'.

Like most of us, Margaret also sometimes worried about her appearance. When the Queen and the ladies of the royal court visited Norfolk, Margaret wanted to look good by wearing fashionable clothes and jewels. And like nearly everyone else, Margaret's religion was very important to her. In her letters she reminds her husband and children about how important it was to pray regularly. She went on pilgrimage to pray for her husband, John, when he was ill and she left money in her will to monasteries and churches.

Finally, Margaret chose to be buried in the church in the village of Mautby, the centre of her parents' lands and where her parents were buried. She also asked for the Mautby coat of arms to put on her tomb. She had worked hard to make sure that people respected the Pastons but she never forgot her birth family, the Mautbys. Maybe the Mautby family, her ancestors, mattered to her even more than being a Paston?

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What kinds of things mattered to wealthy people?

Who were the wealthy?

- noblemen and women with lands in many parts of the country
- knights and their ladies with lands in just one or two counties
- merchants and their families who employed lots of people in towns.

The diagram below shows the kinds of things which mattered to them.

The family's lands or business

Owning lands was the most important sign of being wealthy and important.

People wanted to pass on as much land or more land to their children. Other wanted to be a lot richer.

Wives played a big part helping their husbands run their lands or businesses and took over when their husbands were away.

Living in a peaceful country

If there was a civil war or lots of crime people could lose their wealth or their lives. Therefore people wanted the country to stay peaceful.

'Good worship': being well-respected by others

Four ways in which wealthy people won respect:

1. Loyalty to the king

- Fighting for the king in wars
- Advising the king on important decisions
- Helping the king keep law and order

2. Behaving honourably

- Showing bravery in battle
- Having good manners; treating others well
- Being loyal to relatives and friends

3. Good lordship

- Treating their workers and advisers well
- Supporting them in quarrels or law cases
- Helping their children with education or making a good marriage.

4. Appearance: looking the part

Wearing fashionable clothes, having large, up-to-date houses, eating the best food and having plenty of servants.

Enjoying their lives

Life wasn't all politics and business. Enjoyment was important too.

People enjoyed hunting and hawking, singing and dancing, their gardens, embroidery, story-telling and reading, playing games and lots more.



The wealthy

Making sure their souls went to Heaven

They did not want to go to Hell or to spend a long time in Purgatory, suffering the pains of Hell. They wanted to go to Heaven as soon as possible. That's why they went to church, prayed regularly and went on pilgrimages to holy places locally or far away in other countries.

Learning Warning: beware of generalisations

A generalisation is a statement such as 'wealthy people wanted to be powerful'. We call these statements generalisations because they're very 'general' – they make everybody sound the same.

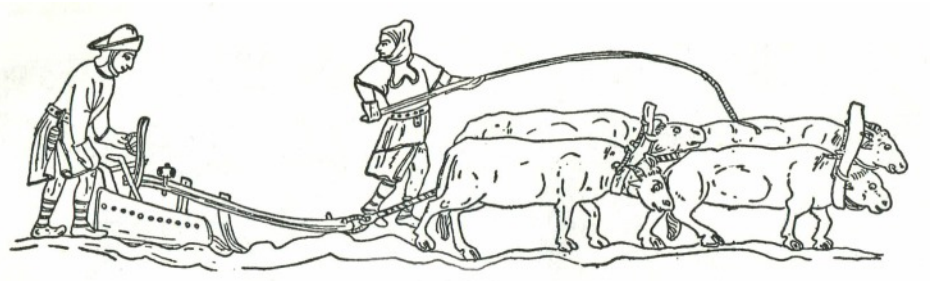
People were not all the same. Some were ambitious to be powerful but others were not. This page helps you understand the things that mattered to some wealthy people but they didn't matter to everybody.

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What kinds of things mattered to the commons?

The commons: the 'ordinary' people – all those who were not nobles or wealthy landowners.

They included everyone from well-off villagers and merchants in towns to the poorest people in villages and towns.







Life could be hard for the commons, especially the poor. Many of the commons could not take having food and drink for granted because there were times when they were in danger of going hungry or of starving. If heavy rain and frosts lasted for weeks on end, then the crops growing in the fields were ruined. When less food grew, people went hungry.

Villagers and their lords did plan ahead, keeping supplies to tide them over a bad harvest and keep everyone alive. But if there were two or more years of poor harvests those food reserves ran out. When that happened between 1315 and 1318, 10% of people starved to death. The weather and the quality of the harvest therefore mattered a very great deal indeed. Bad weather was not just a disappointment. It was dangerous and frightening.

However there were times (In the early 1200s and again in the late 1300s and 1400s) when many of the commons were able to improve their lives. They had a more varied diet, bought better clothes and built larger homes. There are many examples of villagers bargaining with their lords to get higher wages or spend less time working on his land. By the 1400s nearly every villager had won his or her freedom from control by their lords. Freedom mattered because they could move to another place to earn higher wages and improve their lives.

People's health mattered to them too. Like all of us, they didn't want to be in pain or depressed. They wanted to feel fit and happy and to live long, healthy lives so people listened to advice or read books about how to avoid plague and other illnesses. Despite this, one in five babies died before their first birthday and 50 was a good age to live to.







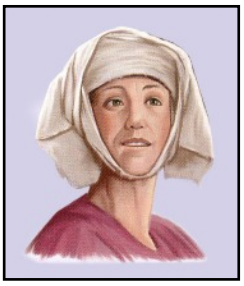
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It wasn't just their life on earth that mattered to people. What happened to their souls after death mattered just as much, maybe more. They did not want to go to Hell or to spend a long time in Purgatory, suffering the pains of Hell. That's why they went to church, prayed regularly and went on pilgrimages to holy places locally or far away in other countries.



Most people wanted their children to have a better life. By the 15th century more people were able to send their children to school. Many families also looked after elderly parents who could not work any more. The elderly parents gave their land to their adult children in return for having a house to live in and food and drink for the rest of their lives.

Many people wanted to be respected by their friends and neighbours so they gave help to people in their village or town. Their wills provide plenty of evidence of people leaving money to help their communities. For example, Joan Gregg left money to pay for building a network of pipes in Hull to bring fresh water into the town and Robert Holme left money to complete the network of pipes and to improve the roads around the town.



Married women wore head-dresses such as hoods or caps during the Middle Ages. They were expected to cover their hair in public and it mattered to them to be respected by their neighbours. Young women were free to wear their hair long.

Did the world outside their village or town matter to people?

Nowadays it's easy to assume that medieval people did not care about events happening in other parts of the country. This assumption is mistaken. Many people did care about what was happening in the country as a whole. Decisions taken by kings and the nobility did affect them a great deal.

For example, people had to pay taxes and they expected the king to spend those taxes on effective defence. This was especially important for anyone living near the borders with Scotland and Wales or on the coast. They expected the king to defend them from invaders who stole their animals and crops or burned their homes. In the late 1300s French attacks on towns on the south coast led to a lot of deaths and destruction. One reason why many people joined rebellions In 1381 and in 1450 was that they wanted to force the king and his advisers to rule the country effectively and defend them from enemies.

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What kinds of things mattered to kings and queens?

Many things mattered to kings and queens. Each snapshot below tells you about one or two of the things that mattered to individual kings and queens. Together they build up a picture of many of the things that mattered to each of them. Some of them may surprise you.

What does each snapshot tell you about what mattered to kings and queens?

William I 1066 – 1087

In 1069 there was a dangerous rebellion against William in the north of England. After he defeated the rebels, William ordered his army to destroy homes, farms and crops in the rebel area. Many English people died during this terrible destruction.

Matilda I 1066 – 1083

After William of Normandy conquered England he still ruled Normandy too. When he was in England, Matilda (his wife) played a big part in ruling Normandy. She was very successful in keeping Normandy peaceful and safe from enemies.

Matilda II 1100 – 1118

Matilda paid for building a bath house and public toilets in London and bridges over rivers. She was famous for washing and kissing the feet of lepers. Leprosy was a frightening disease which ate away people's skin and lepers were usually treated as outcasts.

Henry II 1154 – 1189

Walter Map, a writer who knew King Henry well, said that Henry 'reckoned his greatest glory was the peace of his kingdom and the prosperity of his people'. Henry worked hard at improving the laws so that people were safer from crimes.



Henry III 1216 – 1272

In 1247 Henry walked a mile barefoot, dressed in a simple cloak, to Westminster Abbey where he gave the abbey a glass tube said to contain the blood of Christ. Henry also paid for the hugely expensive task of rebuilding the Abbey.

Eleanor of Provence 1236 – 1272

Eleanor was well-educated, wrote poetry and owned many books, including stories about King Arthur's knights. A beautiful woman, she wore equally beautiful clothes – just what people expected of a queen. She was grief-stricken when her disabled daughter, Katharine, died.

Edward I 1272 – 1307

Edward sent 60 oak trees each year to his daughter, Mary, who was a nun. The trees were for burning in the fireplaces in Mary's rooms. He sent his children many other gifts, even when he was away leading his army in Wales or Scotland.

Eleanor of Castile 1272 – 1290

Eleanor travelled with her husband, Edward I, as often as she could. She went with him on Crusade to the Middle East, to his lands in France and on military campaigns to Wales. They also travelled a lot around England so people could see their king and queen.

Edward III 1327 – 1377

Edward was a great soldier who fought in many battles against French and Scottish armies. At the battle of Sluys in 1340 (a sea battle against the French), Edward was at the heart of the hand to hand fighting, his bravery inspiring his men.

Philippa of Hainault 1327 – 1369

In 1331 Philippa was watching jousting when the stand she was sitting in collapsed. Her husband, King Edward, was so angry he threatened to execute the men who built the stand but Philippa pleaded with him to forgive them to show he was a merciful king.

Note

The dates after each name tell you when each person was king or queen, not their birth date.

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What kinds of things mattered to kings?

This page explores the example of Henry V, who was famous because of his victory over the French army at the battle of Agincourt in 1415. Henry is usually described as a great king but historians have also criticised some of the things he did. Professor Tony Pollard described Henry as a 'mean, unforgiving and vindictive' man.

What ideas do you already have about what mattered to kings?

Where have those ideas come from?

Have they come from films, TV or stories?

What mattered to Henry V? Things that probably won't surprise you

Keeping England peaceful. Henry wouldn't let anyone cause trouble if he could stop them. When two wealthy knights quarrelled and fought battles Henry ordered them to come to his court. Then he told them to settle their quarrel before he'd finished eating – or he'd have them executed. They did not cause any more trouble.

Keeping control of everything his government did. He read and signed as many government papers as he could. He sent orders on every part of government back to London even when he was fighting in France.

Defending his lands from enemies. He believed he was the rightful king of France so he went to war to win control of France. In battle he showed great bravery and wanted to be remembered as an honourable soldier.

His people being loyal to him. Henry believed that his nobles and knights should be loyal to him at all times. Serious disloyalty was punished with execution.

Living a very religious life. Henry believed that God had made him king and it was said that he lived more like a priest than a soldier. He punished severely anyone who criticised the Church's religious ideas. He wanted his soul to go to Heaven so he prayed very often and gave a lot of money to churches and monasteries.

Building up his wealth. Henry spent a huge amount of money on war so did his best to get more money. He expected parliament to agree to him raising more and more taxes and was very angry when parliament criticised him.



Henry V, king from 1413 to 1422.

This simple drawing is based on a 15th century illustration.

What mattered to Henry V? Things that might surprise you

Looking like a great king. People wanted their king to make England look a powerful and wealthy country. Therefore Henry wore expensive, stylish clothes. Henry may have been worried about his appearance as he had a scar on his cheek from an arrow. That may be why some paintings show him sideways to hide the scar.

Being well-educated. Henry owned many books about religion, the law and history. He enjoyed poetry, music and may have played the harp. He spoke French, Latin and English. Henry also planned gardens, a moat and a deer park at Kenilworth Castle.

And things that didn't seem to matter to Henry – but did to other kings

Having a son old enough to take over as king. Henry did not marry until he was 33. Most kings married much younger so their children would be grown adults when they took over. When Henry died suddenly, his son was only nine months old.

Other kings loved their wives and children. Edward III and his wife, Philippa, wrote letters, sent each other gifts when they were apart and called each other 'sweetheart'. They also played games with their children in the evenings. It is hard to imagine Henry V behaving like Edward – who was also a great soldier.

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What kinds of things mattered to queens?

How do you think medieval queens spent their time? Sewing beautiful tapestries? Listening to musicians? This page explores what mattered to queens through the life of Matilda II, a truly remarkable woman.

Matilda became queen of England in 1100 when she married King Henry I. Their marriage united the English and the Normans. Henry was a Norman, the son of William the Conqueror who had won the English crown at the battle of Hastings in 1066. Matilda was a member of the Anglo-Saxon royal family who ruled England before the Norman Conquest.



A drawing of Matilda made in the 1200s.

Her uncle was Edgar the Atheling, the boy who might have become king in 1066.

What mattered to Matilda II, Queen of England from 1100 to 1118?

Helping the king govern the country. Matilda attended important meetings and, when Henry was in Normandy, she was in charge of governing England. She ran royal council meetings, made decisions and welcomed important visitors.

Set a good example by living a deeply religious life. Matilda helped a group of monks called Augustinians settle in England and set up their monasteries. She gave money to other monasteries and convents. Every year during Lent she walked barefoot and went without most meals. (Lent is the period of 40 days leading up to Christ's resurrection)

Having children so King Henry had an heir to follow him as king. Matilda had two children, Matilda and William, in the first three years she was married. This quickly ended worries about who would follow Henry as king. Sadly William drowned when he was a young man so there was civil war over who should be the next ruler.

Helping the people. Matilda paid for a leper's hospital to be built outside London, gave money to other hospitals to pay for food for the sick and invited lepers into her rooms and washed and kissed their feet. She paid for the building of bridges and a public bathhouse which contained London's first public toilets.

Helping the king win the support of his people. Queens acted as 'peace-weavers' – an Anglo Saxon word for women who persuaded people to end quarrels. They also persuaded their husbands to help people in need and to be merciful, reducing punishments that were too severe. Matilda often persuaded Henry to give help to monasteries. In 1116, she ordered the release of a prisoner who had been unfairly found guilty and was about to be executed.

Making the royal court a centre of learning and art. Matilda helped artists by buying the work they created – jewellery, embroidery and metalwork – and giving it to monasteries. She also gave help to poets, musicians, writers and historians.





Drawings of Matilda and her husband King Henry I, drawn in the early 1300s.

Do the things that mattered to Matilda fit the ideas you already had or do they surprise you?

Beware of generalisations! The same things did not matter to all kings and queens

A generalisation is a statement such as 'kings wanted to be remembered as great soldiers' or 'queens worked hard helping their husbands govern the country '. The problem with generalisations is that they're very 'general' – they make all kings and queens sound the same. Most kings and queens were interested in the same kinds of things but they were not all the same. For example, some kings (Henry III, Henry VI and others) were more interested in religion than war. Most queens did work hard to support their husbands but some did not.

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Why did religion matter so much to people?



Hell's Mouth, Lincoln Cathedral.

You can see this carving at Lincoln Cathedral, over the entrance door. Everyone who walked into a church in the Middle Ages saw scenes like this, often painted on the wall in full, horrible colour. Many pictures showed details of people being boiled in pots or held down in fires by devils with forks. They were a terrible warning of how people would be punished for their sins after they died.

People believed that their life after death was far more important than their life on earth. They believed that Heaven, Hell and Purgatory were real places, just like the nearest village or town were real places.

This diagram shows what people knew would happen to them after they died.



HEAVEN

Only a few people – the saints – would go straight to Heaven when they died to join God and Jesus Christ.



PURGATORY

Nearly everyone would spend time in Purgatory where they would be punished for their sins. The pains and torments were as bad as those in Hell but when people had paid for their sins they left Purgatory and went to Heaven. How long a person spent in Purgatory depended on how sinful they had been and how much good they had done.



HELL

People whose sins were so terrible they could not be forgiven went straight to Hell. The pains of Hell were far worse than any pain suffered on earth.

Religion was important to people because it helped them spend as little time as possible in Purgatory. They could cut down their time being punished in Purgatory by believing in God and by going to church and praying to God as often as they could. Another way to reduce their time in Purgatory was to help others by giving them clothes, food and shelter and by visiting the sick. Many people left money in their wills to help the poor. They hoped this would cut down their time in Purgatory.

1. What did people think were their chances of going to Heaven immediately after they died?

2. What did they think their chances were of going to Purgatory?

3. Why was it better to go to Purgatory than Hell?

4. Why did religion matter so much to people?

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How did religion affect people's everyday lives?

Religion was linked to many aspects of people's lives in the Middle Ages. It wasn't just about going to church and joining in services. This page challenges you to work out some of the links.

1. Match each of the topics A to F with the correct box 1 to 6. Each box explains how religion was linked to one of the topics A to F.

2. Write down the two most important things you have learned from this page and explain why you've chosen them. They could be individual pieces of information or overall ideas about

Six topics or events affected by religious beliefs

A. Having fun

B. Roads, water-supplies, hospitals and the poor

C. Saying prayers on All Souls Day – November 2nd

D. Ideas about why people became sick with diseases such as the plague

E. Loyalty to the king; fear of rebelling against the king

F. One of the most common types of work

1. God controlled everything that happened to men and women.	2. Priests, monks and nuns had one of the most important jobs – to pray for the souls of everyone else so everyone had a chance of going to Heaven. So thousands of priests were needed and, at one time, there were 20,000 monks and nuns.	3. God decided the work that every person did and who was powerful. He chose who would be king and queen, who would be priests, who would work as farmers.
Six beliefs that people had about God and religion		
4. Wealthy people left money to pay for priests to pray for their souls. This would reduce the time they spent in purgatory. But the poor had no money to pay for prayers for their souls.	5. Everyone celebrated Christmas and Easter and had holy-days (holidays) on Saints' days to celebrate the lives of individual saints. Holy-days were times for singing, dancing or going to the fair.	6. Everyone knew that they would spend less time in Purgatory if they helped people in their community. Many left money to improve conditions in their town or to help the poor.

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Conclusions: What kinds of things mattered to people in the Middle Ages?

It's always important to pause at the end of a topic and reflect on what you have learned. You have much more chance of remembering the key points if you identify them carefully. The three tasks below will help you do this.



1. Choosing your take-aways

This task helps you to identify the most important things that you most want to TAKE AWAY and remember about what mattered to people in the Middle Ages?

Here is a list of possible take-aways. Choose the 3 that you think are the most important to remember and explain why they are important.

(or choose take-aways that are NOT in this list and explain why you have chosen them.)

A. Many of the things that mattered to people in the Middle Ages matter to us today.
B. The basics of life – food, housing, clothes – could not be taken for granted by the poor.
C. Many of the things that mattered to people in the Middle Ages mattered to everyone, whether rich or poor.
D. Everyone was human so children, families, love mattered to everyone, rich or poor.
E. Being of good worship - respected by other people - mattered to nearly everyone.
F. Everyone wanted their soul to reach Heaven – this was deeply important to people.
G. Everyone benefitted from the country being peaceful and safe.
H. What mattered to people varied from person to person. The same things did not matter to everyone.
I. Wills are an important source of evidence about what mattered to people.
J. We have far more evidence about what mattered to the wealthy than about what mattered to the commons and the poor.
K. It's important to understand what mattered to people so that we can explain why they did things.

2. What matters to you? Can history help us understand ourselves?

Studying history can help us understand our world today and ourselves a little better.

a) What kinds of things matter to you and your family?

b) Has your answer to (a) been affected by what you have learned about what mattered to people in the Middle Ages? Explain why or why not.

3. Your Overall Enquiry:
Are people right to be so negative about the Middle Ages?

a) The final question to ask yourself at the end of this enquiry is:

Has what you've learned about what mattered to people changed <u>your</u> view of life in the Middle Ages?

b) Now decide whether you want to change your first answer to the overall question or keep it the same. If you want to change it – change it!

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Conclusions: What kinds of things mattered to people in the Middle Ages?



One thing I've learned from writing this section is that the things that matter to us and mattered to medieval people are very similar, even though our world is very different from their world in many practical ways.

Here are some of those things that matter to us and mattered just as much to them:

- food and a warm, dry home
- loving families and good friends
- being of 'good worship' – respected for our helpfulness, skills or loyalty
- feeling healthy and free from the worry and danger of crime and violence
- the chance to have fun whenever we can
- our religions. Religion may not be so important to everyone today but is still centrally important for many people.



Did the same things matter to everyone?

No, they didn't – what mattered most differed a lot, depending on who you were (just as it does today). For many of the commons, just having enough to eat and a warm, dry home was what mattered most, which is why the weather and the harvest mattered so much to them. However the wealthier people could take good food and homes for granted. For them, keeping and passing on their lands and wealth to their children was one of the things that mattered most.



However we also need to remember that even amongst the wealthier people (the royal family, the nobles and lords, the rich merchants) what mattered to them differed. Some of them were like the Sheriff of Nottingham and King John who I watched in *The Adventures of Robin Hood* when I was young. They did only care about themselves.



But there were many others who I admire because of what mattered to them. Many people did look after their families, friends and neighbours. What mattered to them was their community. Many wealthy landowners, including kings and queens, looked after and supported the people who served them. They were concerned for 'the common good' which means helping everyone to live in a more peaceful country where they felt safe and had enough to eat. They had ideals such as loyalty that they wanted to live up to.

The big finish!

Our job in History to create as truthful a picture of the past as we can. This is hard because we don't have as much evidence as we'd like and, secondly, if we're not careful, we take ideas from films or computer games and assume that real medieval people were just like the fictional people in those films and games.



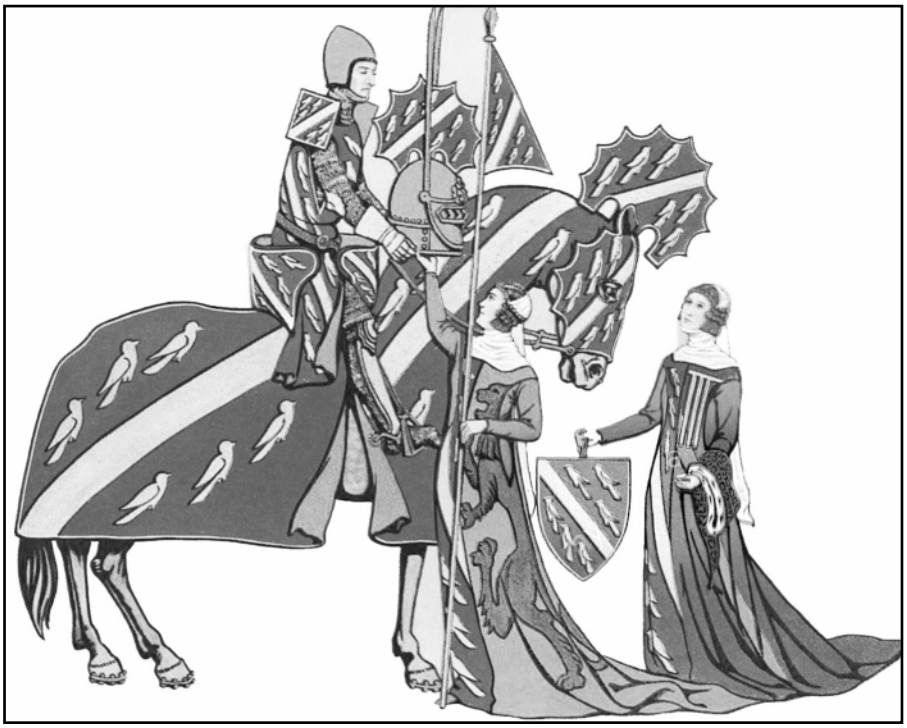
But if we do look at the evidence that survives – wills and letters, the books they read, their homes and the objects they made – we see that what mattered to people in the Middle Ages was surprisingly similar to what matters to us. If we just assume that what mattered to medieval people was selfishness and greed then we can't create an accurate picture of their lives or understand the choices they made.

We have to respect the people of the Middle Ages – 'good worship' (respect) was, after all, one of the things that mattered to them and matters to us.

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What kinds of things mattered to Geoffrey Luttrell?

I'd like you to meet Sir Geoffrey Luttrell. Here he is, wearing full armour, sitting on his warhorse. His wife, Agnes, is handing him the great helmet he wore in battle. His daughter-in-law, Beatrice, is holding his shield which shows the Luttrell family coat of arms. The decorated cloth on his horse also shows their coat of arms.



This drawing shows a full-colour picture in one of the most amazing books created in the Middle Ages. It's called the Luttrell Psalter. A psalter was a book of psalms. Psalms are religious poems or hymns sung during church services. Sir Geoffrey paid for this psalter to be made and his picture is on the most important page – the one with the first psalm sung at the main service every Sunday.

Geoffrey was born in 1276 in Irnham, a village in Lincolnshire. In 1297, when he was 21, Geoffrey married Agnes Sutton, and their marriage lasting over forty years until Agnes died In 1340. Geoffrey and Agnes had six children. Their heir, Andrew, married Beatrice whom you can see in the picture. Sir Geoffrey died aged 69 in 1345.

The contents of Sir Geoffrey's Psalter help us understand the kinds of things that mattered to him. However he did not write down a handy a list of those things. Instead we have to work out what mattered to him by making 'inferences' – working out what he thought or felt from the pictures and words in the Psalter and from other evidence.

1. I infer from this picture that Sir Geoffrey was proud of being a knight and of his family's history. What evidence in the letter suggests that?

2. Do you agree with my inference or would you make different inferences?

3. What other kinds of things do you think might have mattered most to Sir Geoffrey?

Infer, inference: working out what a person thought or felt from what they wrote even though he or she did not say.

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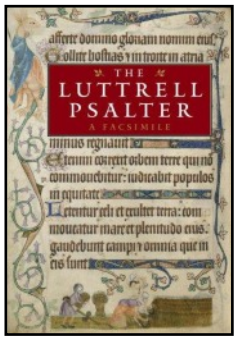
What can you infer about what mattered to Geoffrey Luttrell?

The information on this page tells you about the contents of the Luttrell Psalter and some events in Sir Geoffrey's life.

This is the cover of a modern copy of the Psalter.

It's huge!

It has 618 pages and is 14 inches by 10 inches.



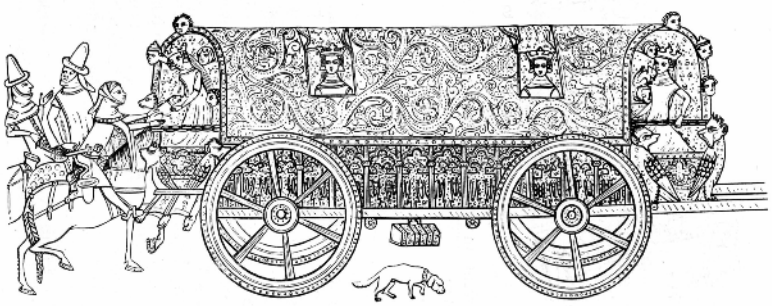
A. Sir Geoffrey put the large picture of himself as a knight ready for battle on the most important page in the Psalter. Government records show that Sir Geoffrey fought in the King's army against the Scots on at least twelve occasions.

His son, Andrew followed in his father's footsteps, fighting in Edward III's wars against France.

B. The Psalter contains pictures of the coat of arms of the Luttrell family. It also contains the coat of arms of the Sutton family (Geoffrey married Agnes Sutton) and the Scrope family (his daughter-in-law was Beatrice Scrope).

C. Sir Geoffrey paid £20 to have the Psalter made. This was a huge amount of money at that time. It was the income Sir Geoffrey received each year from his lands at Irnham – think of it as a full year's income for a very rich man. Geoffrey planned the details in the Psalter with a local churchman and employed at least six artists to write the words and draw the illustrations. These artists were monks from monasteries in the area.

D. The Psalter contains a picture of a royal coach. Four queens are travelling in the coach. When he was a young man, Geoffrey, was part of the escort of Blanche, Queen of Navarre, to France. The other queens may well be three queens of England during Sir Geoffrey's lifetime.



E. Many of the illustrations in the Psalter show scenes from the Bible. One set of pictures shows the story of Jesus, from his birth to the crucifixion to his ascent to heaven. Other pictures show scenes from saints' lives. Others show devilish creatures which are part-men, part-animal. They seem to be a warning of the terrors of going to Hell after death.

F. Some of the illustrations in the Psalter show the villagers at Irnham working hard in the fields. Their job is to grow the food all the villagers and Sir Geoffrey's family will eat. Other local people are shown working in Sir Geoffrey's kitchens and serving him a meal at dinner. Sir Geoffrey is shown sitting in the centre of the top table for dinner, with his family and the family's priests alongside him.



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What can you infer about what mattered to Geoffrey Luttrell?

This page tells you about the content of Sir Geoffrey's will. In his will he listed what would happen to his lands, belongings and his money after his death. He also described what he wanted to happen at his funeral and afterwards to help his soul reach heaven.

£20 was the amount of money that Sir Geoffrey received from his lands at Irnham each year.

So think of £20 as a rich man's income for one year.

G. 500 marks (£333) for 20 priests to recite prayers for Sir Geoffrey for five years

£20 for candles which were placed around his body at the funeral. Each candle was a 'living prayer' for Sir Geoffrey.

40 shillings for priests to say psalms at the funeral

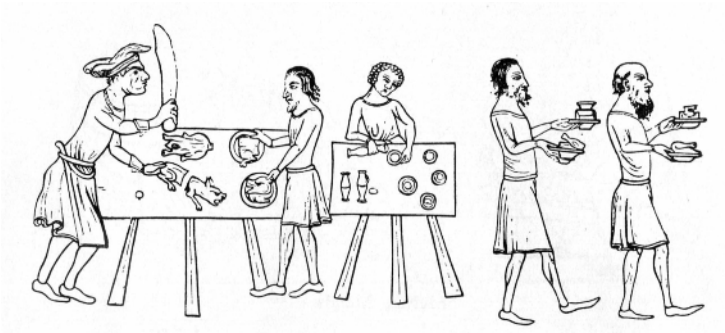
H. £200 for distribution to the poor on the day of his burial and on his week's mind and month's mind (7th and 30th days after his burial)

£20 for distribution to the poor on the anniversary of his death

Each mourner to receive one penny and a share of the funeral banquet

I. Sir Geoffrey's war-horse and its equipment were given to Irnham church. His warhorse was one of Sir Geoffrey's most valuable belongings. A historian, Michelle P Brown, described this as 'the equivalent of leaving the parish priest your Ferrari'.

5 marks (a little over £3) for repairs of Irnham parish church and the churches on his other estates; money to Lincoln cathedral, St. Paul's, York Minster, Canterbury cathedral and other religious sites including a number of abbeys in the region.



J. Sir Geoffrey left his lands to his eldest son and money and belongings to his other children. He also left money and household items to his servants:

£2 and the contents of the bedchamber to Joan of Meaux, the family's lady's maid

5 marks (about £3) plus the utensils in the pantry and buttery to John the butler

5 marks plus the brass and wooden vessels in the kitchen to John the cook

5 marks plus the soft furnishings in the hall to William the porter

5 marks to each of the following – Alice (chambermaid), John (clerk), William (chamberlain), John (servant), William and Robert (kitchen servants).

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Conclusions: What mattered to Geoffrey Luttrell?

We don't often know what mattered to individual people – each man or woman - in the Middle Ages. This is because there are very few letters or other kinds of evidence to tell us what an individual person cared about. However we can work out some of things that mattered to Geoffrey Luttrell thanks to his Psalter and his will.

Sir Geoffrey spent a very large amount of money on the Psalter and for his funeral. Why was he so extravagant? The answer is that he may have been terrified by some of the events he lived through. Terrible weather after 1315 meant that crops did not grow and so there was not enough food for people to eat. Many starved to death. In some places, villagers began to demand higher wages or the chance to move to another place to work.

These events seem to have made Geoffrey frightened of change. He believed that If people did not obey their lords this would lead to chaos, starvation and deaths. God had given everybody a place in the world and they should accept the work that God had given them and not try to change it. This was why the Psalter showed people working hard in the fields or as servants. Sir Geoffrey wanted them to see that God wanted them to do this work.

Geoffrey Luttrell's landmarks

1276 – born

1297 – married Agnes Sutton

1330s onwards – planned and organized the creation of the Luttrell Psalter

1340 – Agnes died

1345 – Geoffrey died

Here are the other things that we can infer mattered to Sir Geoffrey

Making sure his soul would go to heaven after he died

His family – including passing on his lands and wealth onto his son



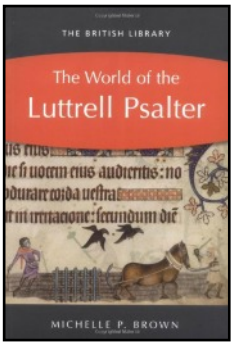
Being loyal to his king, including fighting in his wars

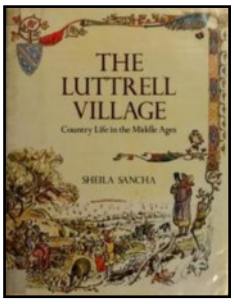
Being a good lord – looking after his workers and servants

Being a man of 'good worship' which meant being respected by other wealthy landowners

Making sure that life stayed peaceful and stable. This meant everyone had to do the work God had given them to do

Historians have written a lot of books about the Luttrell Psalter and the village





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