Ever wondered about the day-to-day existence of our medieval predecessors, of the builders and occupants of medieval houses, castles, or churches? What did they eat? Or wear? What inspired them? Was life harsh and hard? Explore their lifestyle and culture through a variety of sources.

The medieval world is all around us in our cities, towns and villages: in our timber-framed houses and barns, castles, churches and cathedrals – these buildings are an integral part of today’s landscape. But what do we know of the daily-lives of the people who lived or worshipped in them? Of the lifestyle of the builders who fashioned these magnificent structures with the simplest of tools? Or the craftsmen who have left us complex painted illuminated manuscripts? In a society where working on the land and the seasons determined productivity of food and the very survival of individuals, what inspired people? And what were the creative challenges that the workers faced in a world without our modern amenities?

This course will delve into these questions using a wide variety of sources. We will examine contemporary writings, including personal correspondence, such as that from the Paston family letters; medieval manuscripts, books and literature; we will look at examples from the extant buildings and enquire into the architecture; using the work of research experts in the field of medieval culture, we will consider the English household finding out about food, clothing and travel. The medieval year was structured around the many religious festivals and feast days - consider how celebrations gave a lively basis to the lives of the men and women of all social strata. By exploring the day-to-day activities of our medieval forebears we will gain a wider appreciation of life and the vibrant creativity of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Suggested reading


Woolgar, C.M., *The Great Household in Late Medieval England* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1999) – ‘It is no exaggeration to see in the historical landscape of the British Isles, in the houses, castle and religious houses, ruined or otherwise, a physical reminder of one of the most potent forces of the […] Middle Ages, the great household.’
Additional information

- This course is suitable for all levels; no prior knowledge is assumed.
- This course allows you to spend time exploring a subject for interest, among like-minded people, without formal assessment.
- There may be optional research/discussion activities during the course.

Intended learning outcomes

- To ‘read’ history through an appreciation of the lives lived during the medieval period.
- To consider how the creative skills of the medieval craftsmen continue to influence our culture and artistic endeavours today.
- To discover the vibrancy of the many varied sources available to aid the study of this period, including written primary and secondary sources, pictorial evidence from, for example, illuminated manuscripts and to enquire what and how web sources can enable research into the medieval period.
- To enable students, if they wish, to embark on their own research and exploration of the Middle Ages.

About the tutor

Julia Cruse has a PhD in Medieval and Early Modern Studies and has taught undergraduates at the University of Kent. As a mature student she graduated from the University of Kent with a degree in History; her BA dissertation focused on the Paston letters. Her doctoral thesis continued her research into late medieval letter-writing and looked at gentry identity and the politics of letter-writing. She is currently continuing her exploration into the Tudor period with a focus on the Tudor palaces and the lives of the courtiers who lived in them. An ambition is to write her first novel based on her discoveries.
Short Course Programme

General information, terms & conditions

How to book a place
These courses are usually very popular so you are advised to apply as soon as possible. Places cannot be held without payment of the course fee.
- Online Booking is preferred. Please visit www.kent.ac.uk/tonbridge
- By post to us at the address below, using the application form in the programme booklet. Please note that you will not receive an acknowledgment of your paper application; your payment will usually be processed when the course becomes financially viable, otherwise we will notify you of cancellation approximately seven days prior to the course. A paper application affirms acceptance of our terms & conditions.

Course cancellation
As these short courses are self-financing, each course can only proceed if there are sufficient enrolments. Therefore, if a course is cancelled due to insufficient enrolments we aim to notify applicants approximately one week before the course start date; if there is no suitable alternative course, we will refund the appropriate course fee in full. The University of Kent reserves the right to cancel a course for this or any other reason in which case the relevant course fee will be refunded in full. We advise that you do not buy books or other course materials until that particular course has been confirmed as taking place: please contact us if you are unsure.

If you find it necessary to cancel your place on a course, please let us know as soon as possible. Refund requests, including the reason, should be made by email or in writing to us at the address below. We reserve the right to retain all or part of the course fee if you request a refund after 14 days of your online booking being made or paper application being received. Discretionary, partial refunds may be made, after the deduction of an administrative handling fee as follows:
- a course fee of up to and including £42 will incur an administrative handling fee of £10.00
- a course fee of £43 and over will incur an administrative handling fee of £12.50.

The University reserves the right to:
- a) exclude any student if the student’s presence is making it difficult for the class to function properly
- b) cancel or amend the length of any course if the circumstances so warrant.

Neither the University of Kent, nor its staff, can be held responsible for any damage, loss or injury, however sustained, suffered by participants attending courses. Insurance is the student’s responsibility.

University Centre Tonbridge
For details of our other courses, news, events and location visit www.kent.ac.uk/tonbridge.
- Parking. There is plenty of public pay and display car parking locally, but please note that only selected car parks permit parking in excess of four hours; detailed information is available from www.tmbc.gov.uk. No parking is available here on site.
- Refreshments are not provided; food and drink can be purchased from any of the nearby café outlets - we are closely situated to the High Street and town centre. A hot drink vending machine is usually available on the ground floor of this building.

Mailing List and data protection
Those attending our courses are automatically included in our postal mailings, to update you about new courses. This information is not released to outside organisations. Please write to us if you do not wish your details to be kept on our database.

Please contact us if you have any queries or would like to register your email address to receive our course information updates. We look forward to welcoming you here soon.

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