

# What Was Life Like In Medieval England?



There was little in the way of scientific thinking as we would recognise it today.

The **Catholic Church** was the authority in most matters, including health and treatment of illness. The Catholic Church used ancient texts written by the Ancient Greek thinkers **Hippocrates and Galen** to explain disease and illness.

It was generally accepted that it was '**God's will**' when disease came to a person and there was little control anyone had against it.

People in medieval England were very religious. They attended mass every Sunday and would give **tithes** as part of the service. These were taxes given to the Church. In return, monks and nuns would provide **basic medical care** for those who needed it. This care would usually be in a monastery or a convent.

The Catholic Church owned huge amounts of land across England and built many churches, convents and monasteries which acted as important **community centres**, where those in need could receive medical treatment. The Church was a pivotal part of life.

Most people in medieval England worked as **villeins** (peasants/farmers) in rural villages and settlements. They would work for wealthy Norman landlords to produce crops. **Famines** were a constant threat as people were entirely dependent upon the land and weather.

The combination of back-breaking hard labour and poor nutrition and diet meant that people would not be in the best of health. Sickness and disease would be a common feature of life for most people.



Homes were heated and lit by open fires. This would lead to lung disease due to the long-term exposure to smoke in confined and poorly-ventilated spaces.

Damp and cold homes would worsen any illnesses and could cause pneumonia.



Nearly **half** the population died before reaching adulthood at the age of 18.

Very few villeins could read or write.

The most dangerous time for women was **childbirth**. Limited understanding of midwifery meant that many died in childbirth or soon after due to heavy bleeding or infection.

Some people lived in medieval **towns and cities**. Though away from some of the dangers of medieval villages, the towns were crowded and public health was not considered. Open drains and crowded streets meant disease spread very quickly.

The popular belief was that God used disease as **punishment** for **sinful** behaviour. This was a widely-accepted view in society.