

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN THE MIDDLE AGES

How was the Church organised in England?

The Church was the largest and most powerful organisation in England. It owned one-third of all the land in England. Many thousands of people (clergy, clerics) worked for the Church. It had its own language (Latin) and its own law and courts (canon law). Most people in medieval Europe were very religious. They took their babies to church to be christened and they were buried in the churchyard. Unlike today, the Catholic Church was the only church in Europe and all Christians belonged to it. The Medieval Church played a far greater role in Medieval England than the Church does today. In Medieval England, the Church dominated everybody's life. All Medieval people - be they village peasants or towns people - believed that God, Heaven and Hell all existed. From the very earliest of ages, the people were taught that the only way they could get to **Heaven** was if the Roman Catholic Church let them. Everybody would have been terrified of **Hell** and the people would have been told of the sheer horrors waiting for them in Hell in the weekly services they attended. Many believed that even if they did make it to heaven in the afterlife they would have to spend a thousand years in **purgatory** to be cleansed of their sins on earth ready for the paradise of heaven. So many rich people would pay the church to say extra masses and prayers for them in the hope that it would reduce the amount of time in purgatory

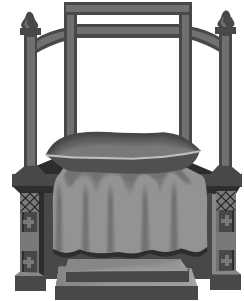
PARISHES

England was divided into around 10,000 parishes. Each parish was run by a **priest**, based in a parish church. Only certain men could become priests. Peasants were banned, as were the physically impaired although this rule was sometimes relaxed. No women could become priests and men who did become priests were forbidden to marry. Priests had considerable influence over the people. He could force them to attend church and punish them in the church court if they refused. Priests also collected a tenth of whatever the peasants had produced from their land over the course of the year called a "tithe". People also had to pay for baptisms (if you were not baptised you could not go to Heaven when you died), marriages (there were no couples living together in Medieval times as the Church taught that this equalled sin) and burials - you had to be buried on holy land if your soul was to get to heaven. Whichever way you looked, the Church received money and became very rich!



DIOCESES

The Parishes were grouped into 21 **diocese**. Each diocese was run by a **bishop**. Each bishop was based in a cathedral, a large church where he had his throne, or **Cathedra**. The **Cathedral** would be the largest building in any medieval town or city.



PROVINCES

The Diocese belonged to either of two provinces, **Canterbury and York**. Each province was run by an **Archbishop**. The Archbishop of Canterbury was the more powerful of the two.



MONASTIC HOUSES

About 5,000 of the clergy were monks, friars, nuns or canons. They lived by strict rules in about 300 monastic houses (monasteries, nunneries, abbeys, priories) Unlike priesthood this life was open to both men and women. Men became monks and women Nuns. Except in a few rare cases all abbeys were single sex communities. Like priests the monks and nuns were forbidden to have children or marry.



THE POPE

The English Church was just one of many Churches in Europe. At the head of them all was the Pope who was based in Rome. The Pope was a very powerful man. Many popes issued letters called Papal Bulls which stated that the pope had complete authority over not only the church but also over all the kings and rulers in the world. The bull declared that disobedience to the pope's wishes would result in the guilty going straight to hell. He has the power to excommunicate anyone including kings. **Excommunication** was where a person was forbidden to go to church and have their sins forgiven. The Pope could further extend excommunication by forbidding people to speak to the person who was excommunicated. Therefore if they died whilst they were excommunicated, they could not be buried in holy ground and would go to Hell. To medieval people this was the most serious of punishments.

Ambitious churchmen wanted to be pope. This eventually led to a **schism** (a split in the Church), where there were two popes, one living in Rome and the other (Antipope) in Avignon in France. The Popes also had the powerful to place an **interdict** on a country. This meant that all the churches were closed and no services including burials, baptisms or weddings were allowed to take place.



Parish Church

- Gave peasants a purpose and meaning in life
- The Church was the gateway to Heaven (reward for hard work on Earth)
- Could easily be seen by the peasants on the manor.
- Its bells could be clearly heard.
- To a peasant, the church was huge, spacious and peaceful.
- It reminded them of the nearness of God and death.
- It gave the peasants a sense of wonder in God.
- The threat of Hell made peasants obey the Church

Parish Priest

- Was unmarried - he devoted his life to the Church
- He tended the sick and helped the poor
- He taught about Christianity.
- He taught the Ten Commandments, Prayers and Bible stories.
- Sometimes, but not always, he could read and write.
- He taught some boys Latin and Scripture, particularly if they were training for the priesthood.
- He farmed his own patch of land known as the Glebe.
- He collected tithes (one-tenth of peasants' harvest) in the Tithe Barn. Most went to the Bishop.
- He charged for baptisms, weddings and funerals.
- He was usually poor and had more sympathy for the peasants than the lord.

Monasteries

- Fostered a life of prayer and praise.
- Were inns, hospitals, schools, strong rooms, centres of learning and art, farms particularly Cistercian monasteries (wool),
- Places of help for the local poor.
- Monasteries were great landowners ($\frac{1}{4}$ of England)

Pilgrimages

- Journeys to holy places helped people to atone (make up) for their sins.
- Rome, Compostella, Jerusalem and Canterbury were popular places.
- Canterbury Cathedral in England (Thomas Becket) was the most popular place.

Schools

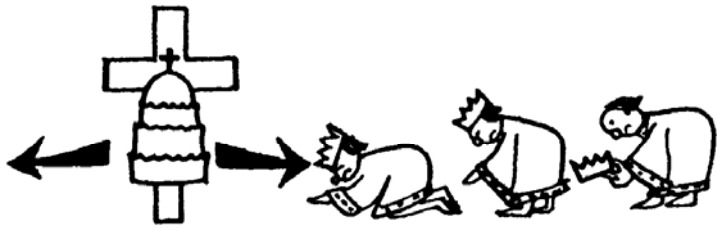
- Education was mainly in the hands of the Church, teachers being monks, friars and priests.
- The rich hired clergymen as private tutors.
- Grammar Schools taught Latin Grammar.
- Books were handwritten, therefore they were very valuable and kept on chains in libraries.
- Corporal punishment was usual - it was a good way to make people learn!
- After Latin had been mastered, then came Maths and Astronomy. Other subjects were left until university which started at 14.
- Pupils were taught to learn and accept (never to question!) what they were taught.

THE CHURCH IN THE MIDDLE AGES

THE POPE



WESTERN EUROPE CATHOLIC



ALL KINGS, PRINCES OR EMPERORS SUBJECT TO POPE



HELPED KINGS TO GOVERN THEIR COUNTRIES



BISHOPS
ARCHBISHOPS
CARDINALS

BECAME STATESMEN & DIPLOMATS



PARISH CHURCH AND
PARISH PRIESTS



SPIRITUAL
COMFORTS



RELIGIOUS
TEACHING



ENTERTAINMENT



MEETING PLACE
FOR PEOPLE



MONASTERIES
CONVENTS
PRIORIES

SHUT THEMSELVES
AWAY FROM THE
WORLD TO WORSHIP
GOD, BUT ALSO TRIED
TO HELP THE
COMMUNITY



FRIARS

MONKS WHO WORKED IN
TOWNS & VILLAGES
BEGGING FOR FOOD



HELPED
SICK IN
THEIR
OWN
HOMES



PREACHED IN
THE STREETS



CARRIED NEWS