Medieval Society

William the Conqueror brought with him to England - feudalism wherein, essentially, all the land and people belonged to the king who gave land to nobility known as barons.

Barons were bound to be loyal to the king and show that by raising armies and paying taxes to support him.

Indebted to barons were lesser nobles, required to provide service and support for a piece of their land.

     Peasants (also called villains or serfs) lived and worked on the nobles' land and could not leave or even marry without permission

     Through exceptional service, a serf could earn freedom (becoming a freeman) - a class which grew to include merchants, traders, laborers, and artisans.

    During feudalism, people were bound by loyalties to the person above them by class, making them a vassalage or tenant.

    The mounted knight became a symbol of the court and chivalry and served to protect the king and the church.

    Chivalry involved an oath to the king which resembled the Anglo-Saxon "Warrior Code"

    This softened the harshness of Medieval life

    The knight was therefore bound to the king and later to a lady.

The improvement/development of weapons weakened feudalism along with the effects of the "Black Death" or bubonic plague that ravaged the population of England.

In 1381, The Peasants Revolt occurred marking the first fight for individual liberty and human rights for the common people. It involved a march on London with peasants using farming equipment and stones as weapons. The revolt was suppressed and the leaders were killed, as the government did not look kindly on rebellion.

Language and Literature

After the Norman Conquest, English became the language of the poor and powerless lower class.

The nobility of the time spoke Norman French

From 1066-1260, most non-Latin literature was made in Norman French and known as Anglo Norman Literature which tended to be very practical in nature.

Imported from France were two forms of entertaining literature; the romance and the fabliaux.

There was a shift in poetry from the Anglo Saxon alliterative verse to rhymed stanzas.

The Church

At no time was the church more influential than during the Medieval Period.

Based in Rome, the church was headed by the Pope.

Political leaders and clergy did not always agree, but they were the superpowers of the time.

From 1378-1417, the church suffered "The Great Schism," a fight over the papal succession which divided the clergy.

Church authority further waned when John Wycliffe translated the Bible into English against the Catholic wishes.

In 1453, the Guttenberg Bible became the first book to be published by means of moveable type (in Germany).

The Crusades which went from the 11th to the 13th century were church sponsored "holy wars" intended to recapture Jerusalem from Muslim control.

Men returned from the Crusades influenced by Persian love poetry which idealized women -  Also, devotion to the Virgin Mary as the ideal symbol of  womanhood raised the status of women in the culture.