

1

The Origins and the Middle Ages

700 B.C.-1485 A.D.

Key points

- The gradual settlement and colonisation of Britain.
- Pagan societies valued physical strength, pride of birth and loyalty.
- The Romans, Celts, Saxons and Vikings were each in turn converted to Christianity.
- The English language developed and the East Midlands dialect became the vernacular tongue.
- Feudal society was based on lands both in France and England.
- In literature, the warrior hero of Old English was replaced by the knight.
- A stable agricultural society grew up and commerce increased.
- The Christian faith and the Church were central to everyone's life.



30

► **Stonehenge** is a prehistoric monument in the English county of Wiltshire, close to Salisbury. One of the most famous prehistoric sites in the world, Stonehenge is composed of earthworks surrounding a circular setting of large standing stones. The surrounding circular earth bank and ditch, which constitute the earliest phase of the monument, have been dated to about 3100 B.C.

700

York

The city of Eborac was the Roman capital of the province of Britain. It was governed for many years by the city of Eborac. After the city was captured by the Northumbrians, it was renamed Eborac. It was the capital of the kingdom of Northumbria. Around the city became



700 B.C.-409 A.D.

11 The first invasions

► A Celtic cross is a symbol associated with Celtic Christianity, although it has older, pre-Christian origins.

1. The Iberians

Britain was first settled in the Neolithic period by Iberian people who spread slowly from the south. We find out about them from archaeological remains. Grave mounds contain 'beakers', or cups of early pottery. The most famous structure is the megalith of Stonehenge in the South West of England (📄 Dossier 1).

2. The Celts

Around 700 B.C. the Celts began to arrive from north-west Germany. Today their language remains in 'Welsh' in Wales and 'Gaelic' in Scotland. The Celts were tall and muscular, had fair skin, blue eyes and blond hair. They were farmers, hunters, fishermen and metal workers. They constructed defensive earthworks, which were built on top of hills and used as refuges and tribal centres. They traded iron, tin and silver goods, pottery and cloth between tribes.

The Origins and the Middle Ages

32

3. 📝
The 'Druids' were the priests of the Celts; they were

build up your language Conquest

1. Match the words with their Italian equivalent.

- | | |
|----------------|-----------------|
| 1. to invade | a. abitante |
| 2. to conquer | b. predone |
| 3. inhabitant | c. invadere |
| 4. citizenship | d. ritirare |
| 5. border | e. cittadinanza |
| 6. to withdraw | f. confine |
| 7. raider | g. conquistare |

guided study

2. Write headings to the paragraphs in the spaces provided.

3. Answer the following questions.

1. What evidence is there of Britain's first settlers, the Iberians?
2. What remains in modern times which is still Celtic?
3. What made the Druid an important person in the tribe?

important not only in religion, but also justice, education and medicine. They held their ceremonies in the heart of the forest and not in temples.

4. 📝
The Celts worshipped the natural elements such as the sun, the moon, the trees and the rivers. They believed in immortality and in the transmigration of the soul from one person to another. It was thought that life after death was still spent on the earth in caves, hills or lakes, and this idea contributed to giving nature a magical connotation.

5. 📝
Britain was invaded by the Romans in 55 B.C., but really conquered in the years 43-47 A.D. under Emperor Claudius. The Romans brought their culture and language with them. They built towns and connected them with roads. There were three different kinds of towns: the 'coloniae', peopled by Roman settlers; the 'municipia', where the inhabitants were given Roman citizenship; the 'civitates', which were the old Celtic tribal capitals. Many of these towns were originally army camps, and the Latin name, 'castra', has remained in many modern town names ending in 'caster', 'chester', or 'cester', such as Lancaster, Gloucester, and Manchester.

6. 📝
In 122 A.D. Emperor Hadrian ordered a wall to be built to mark the border between the conquered Britons and the Scots and Picts in the north.

Roman control of Britain came to an end as soldiers were withdrawn to defend Rome against the barbarian raiders. The Romanised Celts were left alone to fight against the Saxon raiders from Germany.

4. What information is there about Celtic culture which shows that they were not uncivilised?
5. What did the Celts worship? What were their beliefs about the afterlife?
6. What evidence of the Roman occupation can still be found in Britain today?
7. Why did the Romans leave Britain? To what consequences?

▼ Accord
scholars, th
Stonehe
the Old En
meaning 'st
meaning 'ha
'instrument
Medieval g
two upright
joining the
Stonehenge
than looking
L-shape mo



410-1066

The Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings

12

1. Anglo-Saxon England

In the 5th century three Germanic tribes, the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes, came by sea. They gave Britain its new name: *England*, 'the land of the Angles'. We know where the Saxons settled because the modern place names are still in their language. The ending *-ing* meant 'folk', or family; so *Reading* is the place of the family of 'Rada'. *Ham* meant 'farm', and *-ton* meant 'settlement'. The modern city, Birmingham was once a Saxon 'farm of the family of Birm'.

2. Anglo-Saxon society

The Anglo-Saxons were organised in family groups, called *clans*, where the most important social bond was loyalty to the other members and to the lord of the tribe. They exalted physical courage and personal freedom and they had also a highly developed sense of beauty. They made fine ornaments and enjoyed feasting and drinking. Laws were not created. Law was custom – what had been done in the past. Most Anglo-Saxon invaders were farmers looking for richer lands, but many of them were also deep-sea fishermen, hunting seals and whales in the ocean.

3. During the period of Anglo-Saxon power, Pope Gregory I the Great sent Augustine to bring Christianity to England. However it was the Celtic monks, from small communities in Wales and Ireland, who brought Christianity to the common people.

4. Scandinavian invaders, known as the Vikings, attacked the monasteries and

villages near the water and robbed them.

They defeated nearly all of Saxon England, but not Wessex. Once again, we know where they lived because of the place names. Viking places end with the suffix *-by* or *-thorpe*, meaning village, and they are found only in the north and north-east.

5. King Alfred of Wessex was the only Saxon to stand against the Vikings. He was not only a military leader – he also made a significant contribution to Saxon culture. He encouraged education and scholarship, both as a way of placating God for the punishment of the Viking attacks and also as a way of promoting strength and unity. He ordered the translation of various Latin works into Anglo-Saxon and encouraged the writing of a history of England, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, which was to be continued until 1154.

6. The last Anglo-Saxon king was Harold, Earl of Wessex. Harold had to fight William, Duke of Normandy, who also claimed to be king. At the famous battle of Hastings, Harold was killed and the Saxons were conquered.

The Normans – the men from the north – descended from the Vikings who had previously settled in northern France. They had begun to speak French and had become Christian but were still well-known for their fighting skills and were essentially military.



▲ **Heptarchy** is a collective name applied to the Anglo-Saxon ancient kingdoms of southern, eastern, and central Great Britain during late antiquity and the early Middle Ages which eventually unified into Angle-land (England). At this time the regions now known as Scotland and Wales were also divided into several smaller political units.



Text bank
1

guided study

- Write a heading to each paragraph in the spaces provided.
- Answer the following questions.
 - Explain why the Anglo-Saxon language is still evident in place names in Britain.
 - Say what you know about the Anglo-Saxon economy and way of life.
 - Explain who brought Christianity to Britain.
 - How can you recognise Viking place names?
 - Why was King Alfred called 'the Great'?
 - Who did King Harold have to fight?

build up your language Verbs

- Look up the meaning of each verb in the dictionary and write it down.
 - to settle;
 - to defeat;
 - to stand against;
 - to encourage;
 - to promote;
 - to descend.

1.3 The Norman conquest and feudalism

1066-1154

The Origins and the Middle Ages

36

1. On Christmas Day 1066, William I the Conqueror (1066-87) was crowned in Westminster Abbey. He had conquered the south-east, but it took 5 more years to subjugate the rest of England.

2. First, William created a new aristocracy. All the conquered lands were his. He kept the best lands, the towns and forests. He distributed the rest to his Norman followers and to a few trusted Saxons. The feudal system was established: the barons obtained their land by becoming the king's tenants and they paid their 'rent' in military services to the king. These tenants-in-chief (barons, bishops and abbots) built castles to demonstrate and keep their power.

3. The chain of agreements of the feudal system enabled a minority to dominate a majority. The tenants-in-chief were able to sub-let their lands to lesser tenants (knights) in return for their services. The military service given by the barons and knights, and the agricultural labour given by the peasants, who belonged to the land of all the tenants, guaranteed security and food, and so peace and prosperity.

4. Twenty years after the conquest, William sent his men throughout England to make a complete survey of the economic life of the country. The survey, which was written down in the *Domesday Book*, had two objectives: first to provide the necessary information for collecting the 'geld', or property tax, and second, to give the king a detailed understanding of the extent and distribution of the wealth of his tenants.

build up your language Feudal society

1. Match the words with their Italian equivalent.

- | | |
|------------|---------------|
| 1. tenant | a. vescovo |
| 2. baron | b. cavaliere |
| 3. bishop | c. contadino |
| 4. abbot | d. vassallo |
| 5. knight | e. abate |
| 6. peasant | f. feudatario |

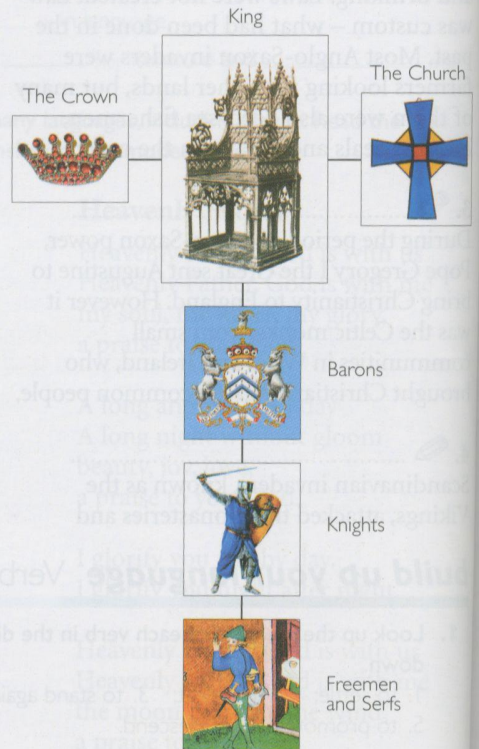
guided study

2. As you read, match each key point with a paragraph.

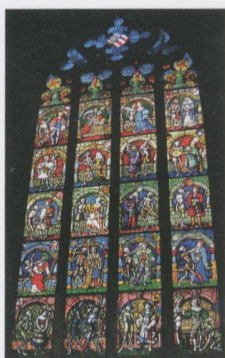
- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| a. Social structure | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Succession | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Chronological and geographical collocation | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Political structure | <input type="checkbox"/> |

3. Answer the following questions.

- Where and when was William I crowned?
- What did the king own?
- What did the barons obtain from the king? What did they have to pay the king?
- How did the Normans succeed in keeping peace?
- What was the *Domesday Book*? Why was it carried out?



1.5 Social change in the 14th century



▲ Stained glass window from **Bern Cathedral**, in Switzerland. The scenes depict death claiming people from all walks of life. This kind of image was very common during the Black Death in Europe.

The Origins and the Middle Ages

38

1. The Hundred Years' War received a severe check from the 'Black Death', the bubonic plague which spread all over England in 1348. It was caused by fleas living on black rats which infested the ships trading with Europe. The mortality was very high; some villages were completely depopulated. Food prices doubled in a single year; the rise in prices caused a demand for higher wages by the labourers.

2. Paying money for agricultural labour was a complete change from feudalism. The old relationships and ties of loyalty began to change. The peasants could even bargain with their lords for their freedom and move to the towns more easily. Lords began to use more of their land for sheep farming, which used less labour and made the wool trade even more important.

3. The Black Death was also a catalyst in changing relationships between people and the Church. The monasteries were great sheep farmers and profited from the wool trade. The 14th century was marked by the rise of a religious reformist movement, which attacked the power and worldliness of the Church. The leader of this movement, called 'Lollardy', was John Wycliffe (ca. 1320-84). The movement began at Oxford University, where Wycliffe taught, but thereafter included non-academics, merchants, lesser clergy, and a few members of Richard II's court.

4. When Richard II (1377-99) came to the throne, the first Parliament of the reign decided to levy a new tax on every person, called 'poll-tax'. This tax led to widespread discontent which in 1381 exploded in the 'Peasants' Revolt'. The rebels left London with promises of help from the king and the barons. However they had no desire for change and punished the rebels severely.

5. By the 14th century a new middle class, both rural and urban, existed. War involved the merchants who loaned money to the king for mercenaries. This gave the merchant financiers, based in the ports and towns, more power. The freemen who owned land, called 'yeomen', profited from higher food prices, and those who farmed sheep made money from wool.

6. The artisans and tradesmen in the town organised themselves into groups called 'guilds' – from the Old English 'geld' meaning 'payment'. They were based on the payments of their members, they controlled the quality of goods, they regulated prices and wages and the rules concerning apprenticeship. They organised fairs where their members sold their products and, on particular feast days, prepared a series of biblical plays to be performed in the town.

guided study

build up your language Economy

1. Match the words with their Italian equivalent.

- | | |
|------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. price | a. salario |
| 2. demand | b. contrattare |
| 3. wage | c. manodopera |
| 4. labourers | d. prezzo |
| 5. to bargain | e. mercato della lana |
| 6. sheep farming | f. domanda, richiesta |
| 7. wool trade | g. pastorizia |

2. As you read, write a key point to match each paragraph.

3. Answer the following questions about social change in the 14th century.

- List the causes and effects of the Black Death.
- Explain how the Black Death speeded up the decline of feudalism.
- What did the Lollards condemn? Who was their leader and who supported them?
- What was the poll-tax and what did it lead to?
- Who made up the new 14th-century middle class?
- List the activities of the guilds.

1. Geoffrey Chaucer

CA. 1343-1400

Biography

Hundreds of documents tell us about Geoffrey Chaucer's life, although little is recorded about him as a man and a poet. He was born about 1343, the son of a London wine merchant. He led a very busy life: from the age of seventeen he served three kings – Edward III, Richard II and Henry IV – as an esquire of the royal court, a controller of the customs for the port of London, and took part in important diplomatic missions. During the decade between 1368 and 1378, his journeys also brought him to Italy where he became interested in Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio and enlarged his readings in Latin to include Virgil.

He was also well-informed on the politics of the day, which included support for the religious views of John Wycliffe and Lollardy (© 1.5).

Since little is known about Chaucer the man, perhaps the best way to know him is through his works, where he is a lively presence. They show Chaucer as a curious and sociable character, rather like the man who met the twenty-nine pilgrims at the Tabard Inn in his masterpiece, *The Canterbury Tales*.

He died in 1400 and was the first poet to be buried in what is known as Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

The father of English literature

Chaucer is regarded as the father of English literature and as the first major secular poet. His language, the dialect of his native London, gradually became standard English, thus becoming the basis of Modern English.

The main feature of Chaucer's works is their great variety. Though their chronological order is fairly well established, their dates are not certain. His poems are usually divided into three periods: the French, the Italian, and the English.

1. The French period is so called because it includes poems modelled on French romance styles and subjects such as:

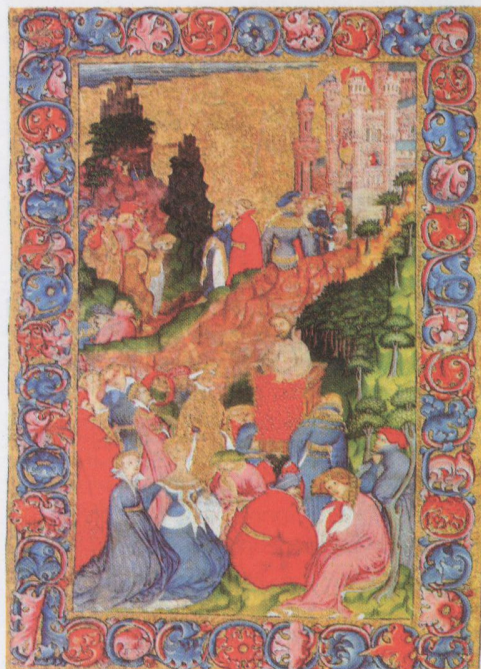
- *The Romaunt of the Rose* (before 1373) which introduces the reader into medieval court behaviour in relation to courtly love.
- *The Boke of the Duchesse* (ca. 1369), a personal elegy in which the knight in black tells of his grief for the loss of his wife and this grief is transposed, becoming the universal grief of all men for the death of all young, good wives.

2. The Italian period shows a greater maturity of perception and skill in the manipulation of the metres. To this period belong:

- *The Parlement of Foules* (ca. 1380), which introduces the reader into one of the most popular genres of medieval literature, the Bird and Beast Fable.
- *The House of Fame* (ca. 1383), a masterpiece of comic fantasy, dealing with the contemplation of the vanity of human wishes.
- *The Legende of Good Women* (ca. 1385), which speaks of the unhappy fate of the women who suffered in the cause of love. The poem is the first known attempt to use the couplet in English.
- *Troilus and Criseyde* (ca. 1380-5), a long poem adapted from Boccaccio which reveals a subtle psychological insight into the development of the characters.

3. The English period is marked by greater realism and includes Chaucer's masterpiece:

- *The Canterbury Tales* (ca. 1387).



◀ Chaucer reciting *Troilus and Criseyde*. Early 15th-century manuscript at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

The p
The pl
simple
people
memb
merch
himsel
are tra
shrine
journe
gather
host of
should
Canter
that th
as well
up. All

The st
The co
juxtap
within
the pilg
order o
values,
road. T
Prolog
are intr
The tal
prolog
the tale
an epil
very hu
pleasur
Canter
city itse
the pilg
course
remain
not rea
planne
anothe
return
the visi
would
and, pr
reality.

CR. 1387

The Canterbury Tales

The plot

The plot of *The Canterbury Tales* is quite simple. It is spring (☉ 1.8) and thirty people – men, women, monks and other members of the clergy, artisans and merchants and also the narrator, Chaucer himself – are going on a pilgrimage. They are travelling to Canterbury in Kent to the shrine of Thomas Becket (☉ 1.4), a journey which will take several days. They gather at the Tabard Inn in London. The host of the inn suggests that every pilgrim should tell two stories while going to Canterbury, and two coming back. He says that there will be a prize for the best story as well as a penalty for anyone who gives up. All the pilgrims agree and set off.

The structure

The collection is characterised by the juxtaposition of styles and subject matters within the lively and dynamic frame of the pilgrimage. It contains no logical order of events or explicit hierarchy of values, but all remains in flux and on the road. The work consists of a General Prologue (☉ t2-t5), where the pilgrims are introduced, and twenty-four tales. The tales are usually preceded by a prologue, which introduces the theme of the tale, and are sometimes followed by an epilogue. The point of departure is very human and linked to worldly pleasures, while the destination is holy. Canterbury is the symbol of the celestial city itself, the end of life; the journey of the pilgrims becomes the allegory of the course of human life. However, the work remained unfinished, and Canterbury is not reached by the pilgrims. Chaucer had planned to continue the tales with another cycle which would follow the return to London, the terrestrial city, after the visit to Canterbury. The pilgrims would have returned from meditation and, presumably, illumination towards reality.

The General Prologue: a double view

What kind of framework does the Prologue define? The pilgrimage is set in the calendar of seasons as well as in that of piety. In the opening lines (☉ 1.8, t2) springtime is connoted in terms of rebirth through the marriage of water and earth, of air and earth. In this context the Prologue treats the pilgrimage first as an event in the calendar of nature, one aspect of the general surge of human energy and desire. There are suggestions of the renewal of human mobility after the forced confinement of winter. The horizon extends to distant shrines and foreign lands before the vision focuses upon the English shrine at Canterbury. The power of the saint is presented as restorative of the sick, so the seasonal restoration of nature parallels a supernatural kind of restoration that knows no season.

The characters

Chaucer wanted to give a portrait of English society, including representatives of feudal society, members of the clergy (☉ t3) and the middle classes (☉ t4, t5). He did not portray the aristocracy or peasants. This is because no nobleman would have travelled with commoners, but instead with their own entourage. On the other hand, lower-class people could not afford the expense of such a trip. In the General Prologue Chaucer did not follow the social hierarchy of presentation of the time and mixed female and male characters to underline the new importance women were assuming within the growing middle classes.

The new factor in *The Canterbury Tales* is that there is individualisation: the character exists because he has reactions and is in movement. His individualisation is therefore dynamic in contrast with the conventional medieval character portrait which was generally rather static. The descriptions of the pilgrims vary in length, point of view and tone; some



Text bank
3

► A representation of the character of **the Summoner** in *The Canterbury Tales*. Summoners were usually lower-class characters whose job was to bring people before the ecclesiastical court for sins such as illicit intercourse.



emphasise what the pilgrim wears, some what he does or thinks. Chaucer listed and described tools, clothes and personal qualities. The names given to the pilgrims refer to their professions, and suggest a society in which work conditioned the personality and the individual's view of the world.

Realism and allegory

Chaucer exploited all the main genres of medieval narrative: the parable, the beast-fable, the fabliau, the romance. As a matter of fact, the central achievement of *The Canterbury Tales* is its stylistic variety, since each tale is a unique work as regards the narrative technique, imagery and vocabulary. Realism is the most distinctive feature of the work; however Chaucer writes realistically in a medieval sense, that is, not merely by observing and selecting

materials from life around him, but also using the conventions of exaggeration, caricature and the grotesque. It is the frame of the pilgrimage which gives reality to *The Canterbury Tales*. The pilgrimage is also a key metaphor for life from the religious sphere. We are all pilgrims on the way to the heavenly city, and every journey reflects the basic pattern of existence. Therefore a report of a pilgrimage is also a true report of an experience.

Chaucer as narrator

The tales are narrated by the different pilgrims, but the reporting pilgrim is the Chaucer figure. He tells us directly, or sometimes ironically, what he sees and what he thinks about it. This creates a sort of interplay between real and unreal so that the reader is left to decide whether what he is reading is true or not. As a matter of fact, the tales have subtle meaning, and often have realistic elements, but in almost every case they have a strong ideal and moralising base.

Chaucer's verse

The Canterbury Tales is a long narrative poem written in verse. Chaucer used rhyming couplets made up of iambic pentameters, that is, ten-syllable lines alternating unstressed and stressed syllables.

guided study

1. Answer the following questions about *The Canterbury Tales*.

1. Who are the protagonists of *The Canterbury Tales*?
2. Where do they meet and where are they going?
3. How is *The Canterbury Tales* organised?
4. What is the pilgrimage an allegory of?
5. What parallelism does the General Prologue present?
6. In what sense can *The Canterbury Tales* be regarded as a portrait of medieval English society?
7. What is its new factor?
8. What method of description did Chaucer adopt?
9. What are the most distinctive features of Chaucer's style?
10. What is Chaucer's function in the story?

2

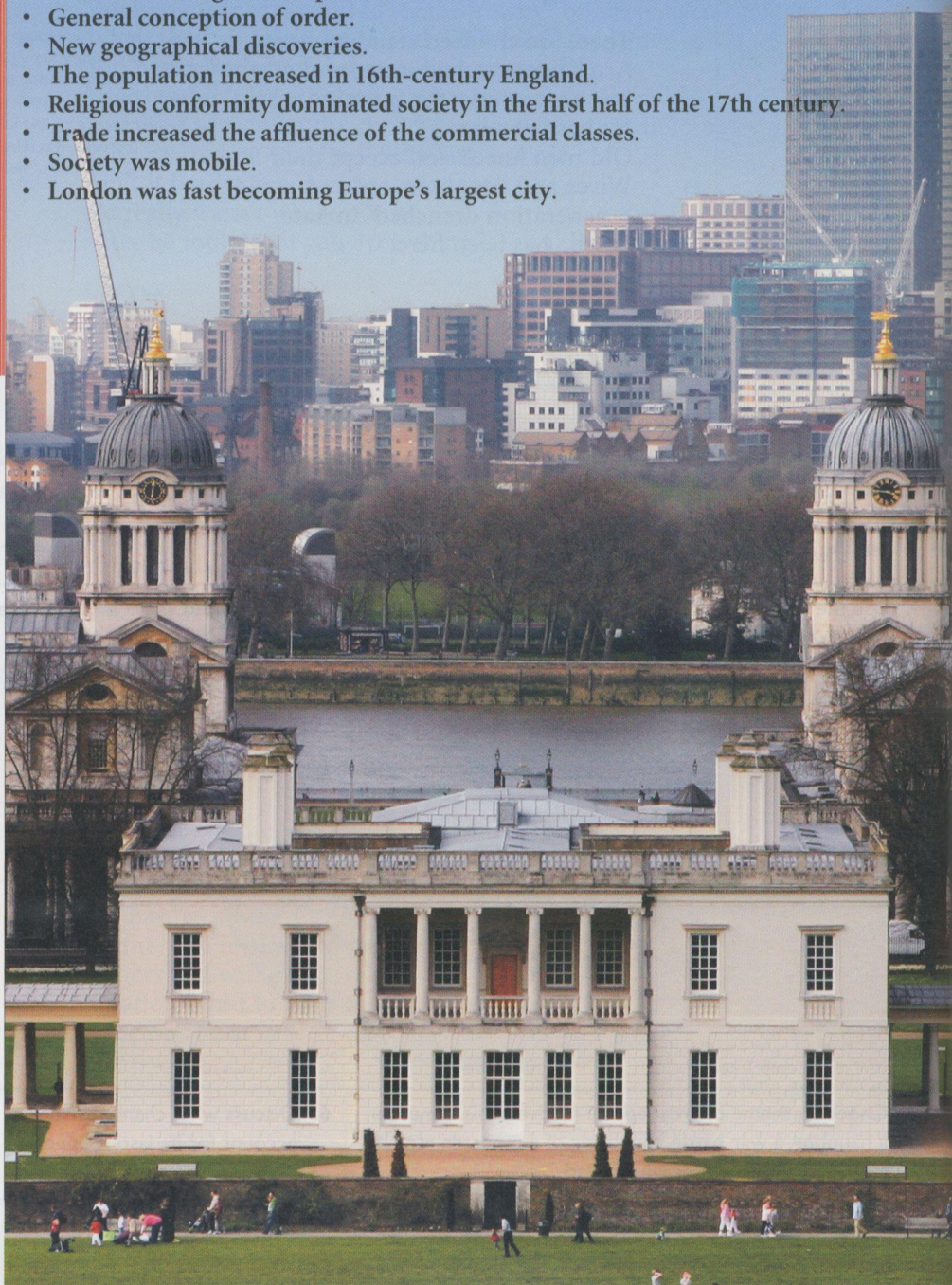
From the Renaissance to the Restoration 1485-1660

Key points

- Humanist thought triumphed over medieval scholasticism.
- General conception of order.
- New geographical discoveries.
- The population increased in 16th-century England.
- Religious conformity dominated society in the first half of the 17th century.
- Trade increased the affluence of the commercial classes.
- Society was mobile.
- London was fast becoming Europe's largest city.

56

► The **Queen's House** in Greenwich (built 1614-1617) was designed by the architect Inigo Jones for Anne of Denmark, the queen of King James I of England. The Queen's House is one of the most important buildings in British architectural history, being the first consciously classical building to have been constructed in Britain.



James
of Scot

Ja
of S
- Mar

Mar
Queen of
b.1542-d.

Henry

James
VI of

2.1 The Tudor dynasty

1485-1603

From the Renaissance to the Restoration

Henry Tudor defeated the last Yorkist, Richard III, in the Wars of the Roses and became King **Henry VII** in 1485. He restored the reputation of the monarch as one who rules, not merely reigns. He encouraged both trade, making advantageous commercial treaties, and the cloth industry. He also laid the foundations of English naval power by spending money on the building of ships so that England could have its own merchant fleet as well as increase its military strength.

Henry VII was succeeded by his son, **Henry VIII**, in 1509. The first half of **Henry VIII's reign** was that of a typical Renaissance prince presiding over a cultured and splendid court. Henry himself was an accomplished musician and linguist. The second half of his reign was dominated by the Reformation (2.2). Henry VIII had six wives: from his first three marriages he looked for a male heir; his 4th was for religious politics; his 5th due to aristocratic ambitions and only his 6th brought domestic peace.

58 On Henry's death in 1547, his son, Edward, a scholarly, devout but sickly 9-year-old, became king as Edward VI before his older sisters. His uncle, Edward Seymour, became Lord Protector. At his death, his half-sister and wife to the king of Spain, Philip II, became queen as **Mary I** in 1553. Both her attempt to return the country to Catholicism and her marriage proved unpopular. **Mary I** earned the nickname 'Bloody Mary' because of the number of Protestants that were burned for heresy during her reign.

Elizabeth I succeeded her sister Mary in 1558 and became England's most popular ruler. Her main achievement was the settlement of the religious question with the creation of the Church of England.

Catholics considered her illegitimate and preferred Mary Queen of Scots, who became a focus of rebellions. Elizabeth was well-educated and cultured and her court was more brilliant than her father's (2.4). With careful diplomacy, she balanced the rival powers of France and Spain, using her possible marriage as a weapon. Elizabeth avoided war for its expense, but, inevitably, there was war with Spain. The Spanish Armada was defeated by the weather and the superior design of the English ships. Trade expanded even further after this, enriching the merchants and towns.

Meanwhile, **explorations and overseas trade expanded**, making England a commercial and seafaring power. **Parliament had increased its role in the government** because of the laws to create the Reformation. However, by the 1590s, Elizabeth avoided calling Parliament, paving the way for the struggle between the crown and Parliament under the Stuarts.



▲ Anne Boleyn, the second wife of Henry VIII.

guided study

2. The key ideas of the text are highlighted. Use a wavy line to underline the secondary ideas linked to the primary ones.
3. Discuss Henry VII's achievements to justify the idea that he was a "monarch who rules, not merely reigns".
4. Was Mary I popular? Why was she nicknamed 'Bloody Mary'?
5. Examine Elizabeth I's government and find out:
 1. how she ruled;
 2. how the queen exploited her possible marriage as a political weapon.
6. Find out why the English fleet defeated the Spanish Armada.

build up your language Politics

1. Write the Italian equivalent for the following words.
 1. dynasty
 2. treaty
 3. heir
 4. court
 5. ruler
 6. government

1509-1559

The Reformation 22

The prelude to the breach with Rome was the anti-clericalism of the late Middle Ages (☺ 1.5). Humanism encouraged confidence in the power of human reason, unintentionally subverting medieval dogma. The Protestant Reformation in Germany had begun with the doctrines of Martin Luther (1483-1546), and the French theologian John Calvin (1509-64) in Switzerland. Indeed, **Henry VIII** did not wish to transform England into a Protestant country; in 1521 he was honoured by the Pope with the title *Fidei Defensor* (Defender of the Faith) for the pamphlet he wrote against Luther.

As a young man, Henry had been married by special dispensation to Catherine of Aragon, his brother's widow, who some years later had given him a daughter, Mary, but was now unlikely to bear him a son. He had fallen in love with Anne Boleyn, a lady-in-waiting, and asked the Pope for a divorce in order to marry her. When it was clear that the Pope would not declare his first marriage invalid, Henry broke with Rome and declared himself 'Supreme Head of the Church' in England. The king dissolved the monasteries and seized their wealth.

Ann Boleyn gave Henry another daughter, Elizabeth, and was executed. Finally, his third wife gave birth to a son, **Edward VI**, who succeeded his father. In his short reign, the Anglican Church became truly Protestant. The *Act of Uniformity* enforced the use of the *English Book of Prayer* instead of the Latin missal.



▲ Illustration depicting the **conflict between the Church and the reformed theologians** (in black).

Mary I tried to reverse 20 years of religious change by forcing people to attend mass again to accept the authority of the Pope over the Church of England.

Elizabeth I's *Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity* (1559) avoided the extremes of Catholic and Protestant. She was supreme 'Governor' of the Church, not 'Head'. Her *Book of Common Prayer* was written so that moderate Catholics and Protestants could both read into it what they wanted. She was lucky to live to reign for 45 years, so that her compromise settlement of the religious question had time to take root. Extreme Protestants, called Puritans, were not satisfied by Elizabeth's religious compromise. Many of them were successful merchants and Members of Parliament, so they had political and economic power, which they were to use in the next century.

build up your language Religion

1. Write the Italian equivalent for the following words.

1. doctrine
2. theologian
3. Pope
4. missal
5. the Bible
6. prayer

guided study

2. Match the changes in the church with the correct Tudor monarch.

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| 1. Break with the Pope, same dogma as Rome | a. Mary I |
| 2. Break with Rome, middle road between Catholic and Protestant | b. Henry VIII |
| 3. Reconciliation with Rome | c. Elizabeth I |
| 4. Protestant dogma introduced | d. Edward VI |

3. Which of these statements do you agree with? Can you justify them?

1. Henry VIII was not a Protestant.
2. The Reformation was a political act.
3. Mary was unpopular because she was a Catholic.
4. Elizabeth was the least religious of the Tudor monarchs.

The Elizabethan theatre

211



The architecture of theatres

Permanent theatres were circular or octagonal. Within the outer walls there were three tiers of roofed galleries, looking down on the stage and the yard where the poorer spectators, or 'groundlings', stood.

The internal layout

The stage itself, technically known as an 'apron stage', jutted out into the yard or 'pit', so that when the theatre was full the players were surrounded on three sides. No more than twelve actors could appear on stage at the same time due to the space restrictions. Over the stage the 'shadow', or thatched roof, protected the players from the rain. In the front of the stage there was a 'trap door' used for devilish apparitions and disappearances, and also for burials.

The actors' 'tiring house', that is to say, the place where the actors changed their attire, was presumably at the rear of the stage. There were two doors for entrances and exits. Behind the stage there was an 'inner stage', concealed by a curtain when not in use, which was clearly needed for several plays: for Juliet's tomb, for a hiding place for Claudius and Polonius in *Hamlet*. This inner stage was used not only for discoveries, but also for concealments. One major problem was the staging of the final scene of those tragedies, which ended with several corpses on the stage. Only two methods were available: either the body

◀ The interior drawing of **The Swan** by Johannes de Witt, circa 1596. The Swan Theatre was built by Francis Langley about 1594, south of the Thames. The Swan was one of the largest and most distinguished of all the playhouses in London.

The permanent playhouse

During the 16th century permanent playhouses were built in London. The Theatre and the Curtain Theatre were the oldest and belonged to a carpenter called James Burbage (ca. 1530-97); the Rose, the Swan, the Globe and the Fortune were built later.

The building of the Globe in 1598 marked the beginning of a new kind of association between the owner of the land, the two Burbage brothers, and the five players of the Chamberlain's company. One of these was William Shakespeare who became the owner of a share of the property.

From the Renaissance to the Restoration

build up your language The theatre

1. Provide a definition for the following words.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. tiers of galleries | 8. upper stage |
| 2. pit | 9. curtain |
| 3. groundling | 10. audience |
| 4. apron stage | 11. soliloquy |
| 5. shadow | 12. scenery |
| 6. tiring house | 13. prop |
| 7. inner stage | 14. to rehearse |

guided study

74

2. Answer the questions below.

1. When were the first permanent theatres built?
2. What did the building of the Globe mark?
3. Did permanent theatres have a roof?
4. How was the stage conceived?
5. What was the function of the inner stage?
6. Where was the trap door and what was it used for?

3. Say whether the following statements are true or false.

Correct the false ones.

1. As in the modern theatre, a curtain separated the Elizabethan audience from the actors. T F
2. The device of the soliloquy forced the actor to shout to make himself heard. T F
3. The poor scenery obliged the audience to use their imagination. T F
4. The location of the scene was very important and was carefully built. T F
5. The Elizabethan actor prepared his performance with great care over a long period. T F
6. Boys acted female roles. T F

4. Write some key ideas to describe the actor-audience relationship.

was carried off or else it was concealed within a recess, since the Elizabethan stage had no general stage curtain. There was also an 'upper stage' hidden by a curtain and an upmost area normally used by musicians. When a play was in progress a flag flew above the roof of the theatre with its emblem.

Elizabethan and modern theatres

The structure of the stage considerably affected the form of Elizabethan plays. In the modern theatre actors are separated from the audience by a curtain which conceals or reveals the whole stage. Moreover, they act in bright light before spectators hidden in a darkened auditorium. On the apron stage the actor came forward

in daylight into the midst of his audience. They were thus fused into a common experience. The device of the soliloquy was not artificial, as on the modern stage, but quite a natural form of communication as a character explained his thoughts and intentions to those immediately before him. As there was no need for him to shout, the greatest subtlety of voice, gesture, and expression was possible.

The scenery

Apparently there was no 'scenery' and plays were acted in daylight. The stage relied on conventions using a limited number of 'props': tables, chairs, swords, canvases of the sun and moon. For night scenes a simple candle or torch symbolically transported the audience into the night world.

The 'action' was continuous. A scene ended when all the actors had gone off the stage and a new set of characters came on. Usually, the exact locality of the scene was unimportant. When it was necessary, Shakespeare showed it in the dialogue. But for the most part a simple 'property' or garment was sufficient. Chairs or stools showed indoor scenes; a king wearing his armour was on the field of battle; a watchman carrying a lantern indicated the streets of a city at night.

The actors

The Elizabethan actor was a busy man, constantly rehearsing new plays. He had little time for long and elaborate preparations; but he belonged to a team and the trained actor was ready to improvise in an emergency.

In Shakespeare's time there were no actresses – the parts of young women were acted by boys. The Elizabethan acting company was a permanent 'fellowship of players', and they worked on the basis of a shared system. Since the actors were partners in the concern, the company remained constant.

1564-1616

William Shakespeare 2 12

Life

William Shakespeare was born at Stratford on Avon in April 1564, possibly on 23rd April, St George's Day, which is also said to be the date of his death in 1616.

His father was a yeoman, a successful tradesman, until he met financial difficulties. William was the eldest son and attended the local grammar school, which gave him a thorough grounding in the use of language and classical authors. He married Anne Hathaway when he was only eighteen and she was twenty-six and pregnant with their daughter.

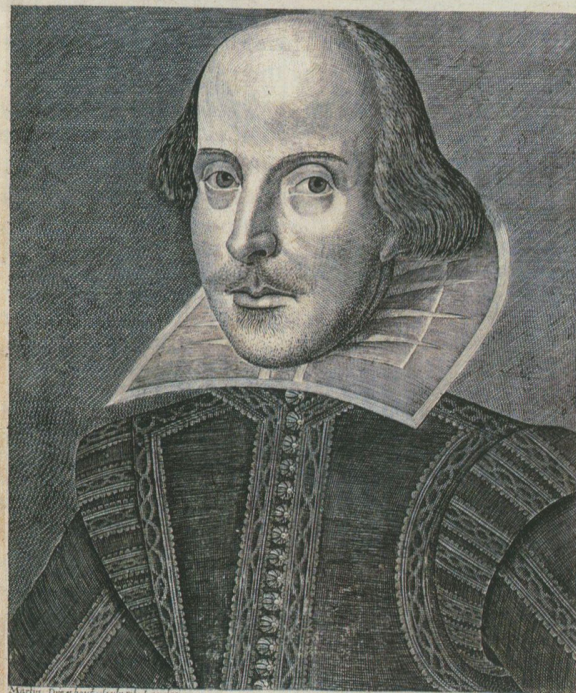
Some information about his life is merely conjectural. In 1584 he left Stratford and went to London. It was at that time that he first experienced the playhouse. He was received into one of the companies then in existence, at first in a very mean rank, but his admirable wit soon distinguished him – if not as a great actor, as an excellent writer. In 1593 the London theatres were closed because of the plague, and Shakespeare needed the support of a private patron. He got such support from a young nobleman, the Earl of Southampton, to whom he dedicated his poems. When the theatres reopened, Shakespeare became a shareholder and the main playwright of the most successful company of actors in London, the Lord Chamberlain's Men. In 1599 his company built the Globe Theatre, where most of his plays were performed.

Between 1590 and 1596 he mainly wrote historical dramas. Overlapping with the history plays, between 1593 and 1600, he put onto the stage ten comedies, ranging from farce to romance. The great tragedies were written between 1595 and 1605.

The latter part of his life was spent in retirement at Stratford. He died when he was 52 years old and was buried in the local church. Seven years after his death some of his friends and fellow actors

MR. WILLIAM
SHAKESPEARES
COMEDIES,
HISTORIES, &
TRAGEDIES.

Published according to the True Originall Copies.



LONDON
Printed by Isaac Iaggard, and Ed. Blount. 1623.

published an edition of thirty-six of the plays in one volume: the famous *First Folio*.

Dating the plays

Only half of Shakespeare's plays were printed during his lifetime, usually some time after being performed, so dating them is not easy because few necessary records

▲ A portrait of William Shakespeare.



Text bank
5-10



▲ Henry Fuseli, **Macbeth**, 1784. London, British Museum.

survive. Therefore the works must be dated combining three kinds of evidence:

- *External evidence*: this is the most valuable kind of evidence and it consists of a clear mention or reference to a particular play. External evidence seldom gives the date of the first performance of any play, but it shows that the play was written before a certain date.
- *Internal evidence*: there is this kind of evidence when the play itself includes a reference to an identifiable event.
- *Stylistic evidence*: this method of dating is the most difficult. However, the changes in Shakespeare's style are so noticeable that a play can logically be placed in a precise period of its evolution.

By a combination of the three methods most plays can be dated approximately and placed roughly in the order of their writing, so that it is possible not only to trace Shakespeare's development but also to see his plays against the background of his times.

A Shakespearean play: general features

The first striking feature of Shakespeare's plays is the variety of interpretations they allow. His language is so compact and full of meaning, so flexible and so expressive, that a text often requires complex literary analysis.

Characters

Shakespeare does not take his characters from one social class only. Heading the list there is almost always a man of royal or aristocratic blood – a king, a prince, a duke, a

statesman, or a nobleman. Hierarchy forms the background of every play. From the king or duke the list descends to nurses, rustics, and servants. The lower classes, however, are often designated anonymously, or in groups, because the emphasis is on the aristocracy.

Another important feature is the importance of family ties: father and children, mother and children, brothers and sisters. These relationships often occur in contrasting forms, suggesting conflict between the older and younger generations.

Finally there are symmetrical correspondences: three lords and three ladies, the heads of two hostile families and their households, two lovers, two princes, two brothers.

Stage directions

At the beginning or during a scene, the reader finds stage directions. Most of these were added by the editors, especially in the 18th century. Actually, it is the text to provide information about the atmosphere and feeling of a scene, about the way in which characters enter the stage and leave it. These directions and descriptions are often given indirectly, hidden in a question or a metaphor. Thus, Shakespeare asks for the active co-operation of the reader in making the play come alive in his imagination.

Double illusion

Shakespeare enables the reader to see the action both on the stage and in the distance by making him aware of memories, visions, presentiments, and associations which reach even into the sphere of supernatural and cosmic powers. In this way the play is given an unusual dimension of height and depth and the consciousness of a character is extended beyond everyday reality into a universal perspective.

The structure

Shakespeare does not give great significance to the division between the acts; sometimes