Trade and Towns

By the 14th and 15th centuries, Europe entered into what is commonly known as the Late Middle Ages. The Late Middle ages was a period of great change where towns and trade grew and both the benefits and the problems associated with large numbers of peoples living together in close quarters became apparent.

As Kingdoms slowly became closer to becoming familiar nation-states that we recognize today, where people who share the same language, customs and forms of government, we also saw the expansion of what we would call towns and even cities. During the Early Middle ages, much of the population was **rura**l or meaning spread out in small villages or communities. The Late Middle ages saw people become more **urban** or living in towns and cities.

Towns and cities, with their larger populations could offer more services and a higher standard of living because towns and cities were the center of trade. Trade creates wealth and wealth attracts more people. It is important to know that the towns and the early cities of this time were small by today's standard. For example, the modern day population of London, England is 8.6 million, but in the year 1300 the population was estimated to be only around 50,000, approximately the size of Vernon, British Columbia. These (relatively) large populations would nonetheless create wealth which would attract invaders and increasingly, with the larger populations, disease.

It was during this time that many towns started forming around castles and even grew out of villages. Towns could offer more services that would increase the standard of living because it could be paid for as more and more people traded and created more wealth. As the towns and the wealth it created increased, so did the walls. Walls were the only protection against roving bandits and it was not uncommon for these walled towns to shut themselves tight for the night. As the populations increased, so did the rings of walls, but often not as fast as the population. As more and more people wanted to be within the walls, space became more and more cramped. Buildings began to build up (multi-stories) instead of across, and the streets became more and more narrow. As more and more people began to live closer together, simple things that we take for granted today such as clean water and adequate sewer systems became harder and harder to come by.

Rural – any small population or settlement living and working outside of a city centre (Cherryville 30mins. outside of Lumby, BC is a rural village).

Urban – any large population living and working in large cities centres (Vancouver is an urban city).

Charter Towns – towns granted their own right to collect taxes, some of which would be passed onto the Lord or King, but some would be kept for town

Charter Towns

Some towns grew from villages far away from castles and had no resident Lord or Noble to provide governance or protection. It was during the Late Middle Ages that we begin to see **Charter Towns** develop. Charter Towns were towns that were granted their own right to collect taxes, part of which would be passed onto the Lord and King, but some of which would be

kept to improve the town. For example, the taxes helped pay for the ever-expanding walls and for local governance such as courts and sheriffs. The same is true for today. As a community grows, it must apply to the government to be classified as either a municipality, a village, a town or city. In the North Okanagan, you can find the municipality of Coldstream, the village of Lumby and the City of Vernon. Each designation allows for greater responsibility of its governance and a greater ability to tax to pay for those responsibilities.

What was so special about charter towns was that they were given the right to govern themselves, and often it was the merchants who often controlled or heavily influenced the local laws and taxation that occurred within their boundaries.

Guilds and Tradesmen

Tradesmen or people who provided certain services such as blacksmithing, candle making or cloth making would form guilds or an organization that would regulate and support their members. These guilds would look after their members, set prices and could influence who could set up a business in a town. Guilds would also regulate or set standards as to what a person had to know in order to do business. This was the first type of educational standards in Europe. Masters would take on apprentices, who they would train. After a while, these apprentices could then take a test and become a journeyman. The same type of system works even today with people wanting to enter a **Trade** first receive education and then are given practical experience under the supervision of a licensed tradesman. After a while, they can take their final exam that gives them their official recognition of being a qualified tradesperson.

Medieval Carpenter Tradesman

Money Changes Everything

During the Early Middle Ages, wealth was measured most often in food and as the Middle Ages progressed the concept of money began to take hold and became more important. Money became the common currency that allowed people to trade items they had and then buy what they wanted. Towns, with all the services and goods they could produce began to shift wealth from the farm to the city. Soon people like the merchants could become wealthy without owning land or growing crops. During the Late Middle Ages we begin to see the emergence of a "**middle" class** of people. People who were not Lords or Nobles, but were not peasants tied to the land. Instead, this new "middle class" were a group of people who often created or earned their wealth in towns from the skills they possessed.

As more and more people began to make money off of the towns, and more and more people didn't need the Kings, Lords or Nobles to protect them and their towns, we would begin to see the end of Feudalism.

Trade – A type of career that requires a certain set of skills and education such as a plumber, electrician or a carpenter.

Middle Class – The term used to describe a group of people in a society that earned enough money to live a comfortable life. The Middle Class fall in-between the Working and the Upper Classes.

Trade and Towns

Directions: READ the handout entitled; "Trade and Towns" and then answer the following questions;

1. Use your handout to provide definitions for the following terms; (1 mark each)

Rural   Urban   Charter Towns

Trades   Middle Class

2. On a separate piece of paper, answer the following questions using **COMPLETE SENTENCES;**

   a. In your own words, describe why people started living in towns during the Late Middle Ages? Provide two reasons. (2 marks for quality of response and inclusion of details)

   b. In your own words describe why it was important for a Charter Town to be able to tax its own citizens? What was that tax money used for? (2 marks for the quality of your response and evidence of thought and effort)

   c. In your own words, describe who benefitted the most from people living in towns and how did this lead to the beginnings of the end of feudalism? (2 marks for quality of response and evidence of insight)

   3. Word Search – Complete the following word search

   You will receive 5 marks for your correctly completed word search.

Total: _____ /16

Manors, Kings and all things Medieval

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CATAPULT
JESTER
ARMOUR
MOAT
MEDIEVAL
KNIGHT
SWORD
FORT
COLLEGE
TUNIC
KING
CASTLE
COURT
DISCOVERY
QUEEN
TAPESTRY
CRUSADE