

Life in a castle

A castle was not only a fortress. It was normally the home of a community of men, women, children and animals. Though a castle may be a ruin nowadays, without a roof or floors to the rooms, we must not forget that those same rooms once had the fittings, furniture and atmosphere of a home and echoed to the daily noise of a community of people.

In the Great Hall there were long trestle tables, with benches to sit on. If there were any chairs, the two largest would be placed at one end of the room to be used by the lord of the castle and his wife. Lesser people sat either on hard, wooden stools or on wooden storage chests. There were no carpets on the floors, just rushes or straw on the wooden boards or stone slabs.

In the sleeping quarters most people slept on straw mattresses on the floor. A bed was a most important and valuable piece of furniture in those days, and only the lord and his wife were likely to have one.

Sanitation in castles was relatively good, though perhaps not quite as convenient as it is made by our pipes, taps and tanks. If you wanted to take a bath, water was heated and then poured into a wooden tub (as it was until quite recent times in many houses). There were probably curtains hanging down from a pole to pull around you if you were shy or felt the draughts.

The castle lavatories, or garderobes, were generally set in small rooms built into the thick outside walls. They were reached down a short passage, so that they were apart from the living quarters. Usually there were some on each floor. There was a simple stone seat, and sewage went down a chute on the exterior wall into the moat or a convenient river or into a pit at the base of the wall.



The important rooms in early castles were heated either by a fire in the centre of the room or by portable braziers. That is why ceilings were often high - they had to allow room for the smoke to circulate. In the twelfth century, however, it became more usual for fireplaces and chimneys to be built into the walls of rooms.



Answer in sentences.

- 1 What were the two main uses of a castle?
- 2 What was used to cover the floor?
- 3 What furniture would you find in the Great Hall?
- 4 Where did most people sleep?
- 5 How was having a bath different from in our times?
- 6 There were no flush toilets in a castle. Explain how the castle lavatories worked.
- 7 What is another word used in the passage that means "lavatory" or "toilet"?
- 8 What does "a portable brazier" mean?
- 9 Why did ceilings have to be high in the days when fires were in the centre of the room?
- 10 Write down two ways in which the lord of the castle and his wife lived a more comfortable life than other people in the castle.