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# Our village in 1500

In 1500, most people lived in countryside villages. Over the next few pages we'll take a look at what one such village might have been like.

Our village is very old. It might have been founded hundreds of years earlier by **ANGLO-SAXONS** or **VIKINGS**. Since then the village has grown a bit, and a new church was built a couple of hundred years ago. By and large, however, it hasn't changed very much since **MEDIEVAL TIMES** (picture ①).

▶ ① Our village is next to a river. The route across the river is still guarded by a castle. The biggest building in the village is the church. All other buildings are small. Few are made of good-quality materials.

The chimneys were added to this hall house in later Tudor times. The barn (to the right) has also been made part of the house.



The houses are a single room with earth floors and thatch roof. The wooden frame is filled in with twigs and plastered with mud, cow dung, hair and straw (wattle and daub).

Large fields surround the village. They are divided into strips, and each farmer has a number of strips in different fields. One field is always left unploughed, or fallow, to give the soil a chance to recover after producing a crop. Beyond the fields is forest.

The mill is important because it is where people grind their grain.

The church is the largest building. It might still have an Anglo-Saxon tower. Most likely, however, it would have been rebuilt during **NORMAN TIMES** and all traces of the Anglo-Saxon church would have been destroyed.

Because the roads are very poor, most people prefer to travel by boat to nearby towns and villages.

The 'hall house' – the biggest house in the village – is home to a rich **YEDMAN**.

The paths in the village are muddy and covered in animal and human waste.

From time to time, markets are held in an open space in the village.

Many homes are long and thin and used for people and animals (longhouses, see page 13). They have a small patch of land behind, for growing vegetables and keeping pigs and chickens.

Nearby is a castle, where the rich lord lives.

Imagine walking from the river through the village to go to the market?

What would you see and hear along the way?

How would it be different to walking around Ludlow in modern times?

Would anything be similar?



# Homes in the village

Most people lived in poorly built hovels. Only a few had fine houses.

In our village most of the houses and land are owned by the **LORD OF THE MANOR** and an **ABBOT**. These powerful people take rents from the **PEASANTS** who live in their houses, and they also get a tenth part (called a **TITHE**) of everything the peasants grow.

The lord lives in a large hall house in the village. But the abbot lives a long way away in an abbey. The Church owns lots of land.

Our village also has a few better-off people. They are called **YEOMEN**. They own

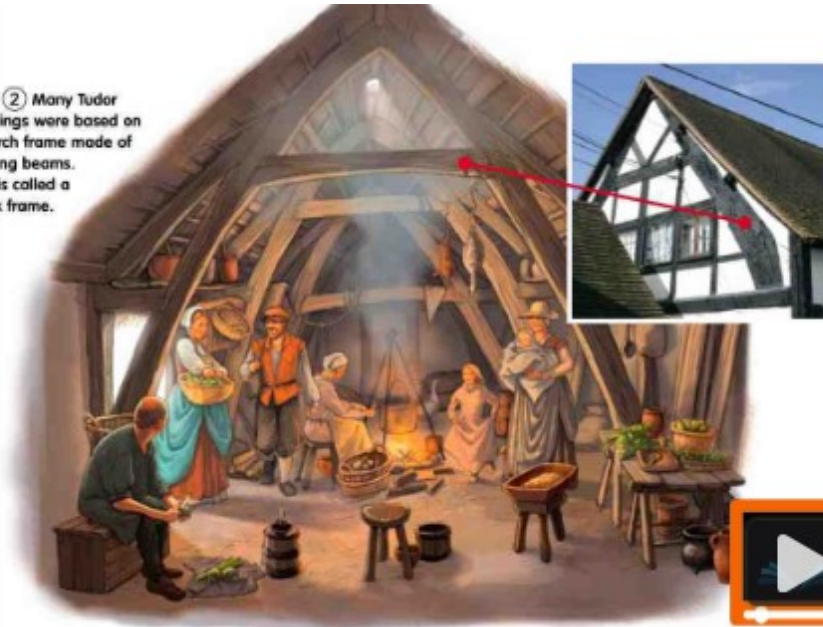
their own houses (picture ①). You can spot where they live in picture ① on pages 10 and 11 – their houses are much larger and better kept than the others. The houses the yeomen rent out to peasants are very different – most of them are falling into ruin.

## Village homes

No matter what their size, most houses in our village consist of a single room.

Each home is made using a frame of timber posts (picture ②). They are cut from the nearby forest. The walls of the poorer

▼▶ ② Many Tudor buildings were based on an arch frame made of leaning beams. This is called a **cruck frame**.



homes are made with straw, dung, mud and twigs. It is called **WATTLE AND DAUB**. The richer villagers have walls made with strips of wood, called **LATHS**, covered with **PLASTER**.

Inside, the floor is earth. There is no built fireplace and no chimney. The fire is simply made on the floor in the centre of the room. Its smoke makes the whole house black with soot. There is no ceiling. You look straight up to the roof.

In a few houses there is a loft over part of the room to store food out of the reach of rats.

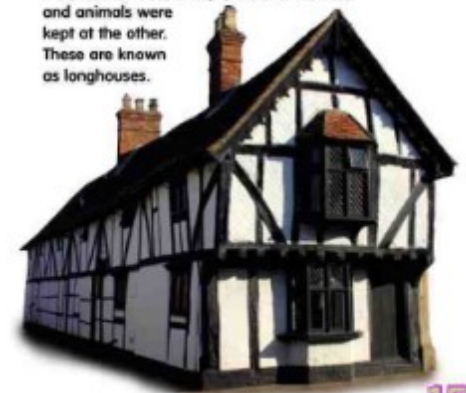
Behind each house is a kitchen garden for growing vegetables and keeping animals. There is also a dung heap, which stinks!

## Using the room

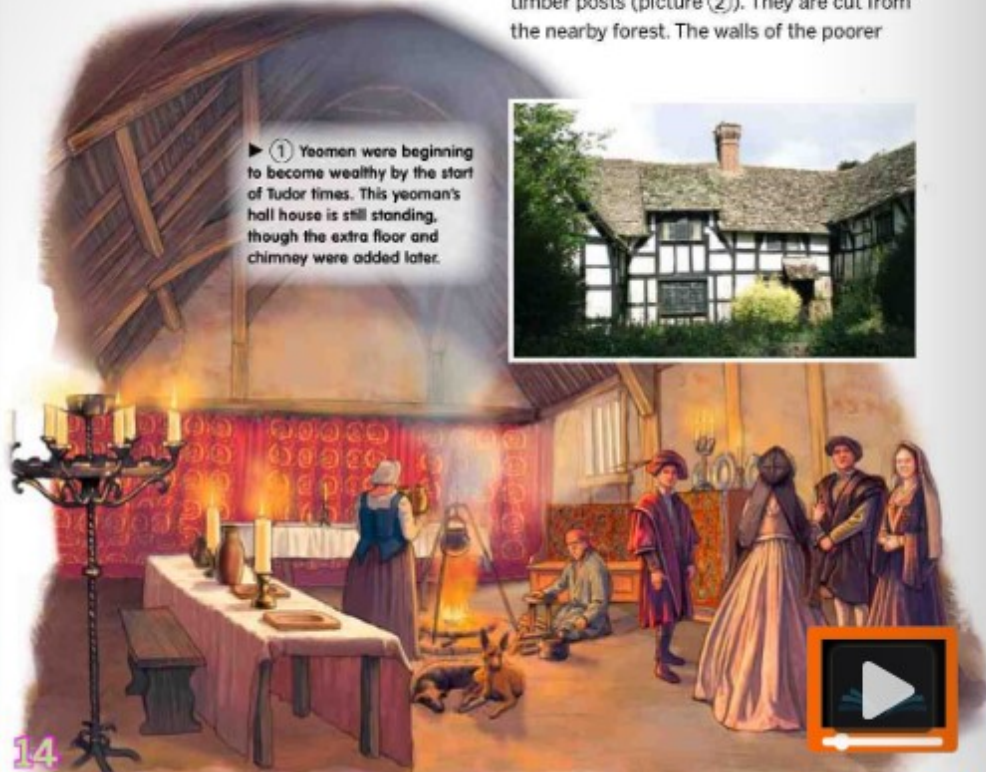
The room is used for sleeping and eating as well as for jobs like weaving and keeping animals (picture ③).

There is no question of keeping it clean or keeping the rats out. So our village houses are filthy, inside and out. But as no one knows about hygiene and disease, this doesn't worry our villagers.

▼▶ ③ Many Tudor village houses were built long and narrow for use as both a barn and a house. People lived at one end and animals were kept of the other. These are known as **longhouses**.



▶ ① Yeomen were beginning to become wealthy by the start of Tudor times. This yeoman's hall house is still standing, though the extra floor and chimney were added later.



Make the inside of a Tudor house.

What would it look like? What would you include to make sure that it looks like a Tudor house and not a modern one?



## Village life

Our village has to look after its own affairs, including law and order.

The church is the biggest building in the village (picture ①). But it is not the clean, tidy building that we are used to today. Instead, the floor is strewn with straw because when there are no services, animals are kept in the church. The straw is also useful because during the long sermons people often go to the toilet just where they are sitting!

### The hall

Our village has a hall. This is not a grand building, but simply a room where the officials of the lord meet with the villagers when their rents are due.

Arguments between people or wrongdoings are also settled by a court held in the hall. It is run by the lord's **STEWARD**. The **BAILIFF** is there to carry out the decision of the steward.

### The market

Our villagers grow most of the food they want and make most of the goods they need (picture ②). But there is a space for a weekly market where bakers, fishmongers and butchers can bring their goods to be sold (picture ③).



▲ ① This church was built in the 13th century (1200s).

### Trades

Most people weave cloth or do some other kind of work after they come back from the fields. A few people have a full-time trade.

The water in the stream is polluted and cannot be used for drinking. As a result, people all drink weak beer, because brewing destroys the germs in the water. Not surprisingly, the most common trade is beer-making.

▼ ② The mill, powered by the river, was a very important building. Everyone's corn was ground here.



▲ ③ Our village has an open space with a covered area for a market. Punishments for wrongdoing are carried out here.

The village also has a tanner and a candlemaker. They boil up the hides and fat of dead animals to make leather and candles. This is a smelly job, and so they have to live on the downwind edge of the village.

### The streets

The streets are no more than paths. Their surfaces are made from beaten earth. They are so rarely mended that they are pitted with holes. In winter, the road is a sea of mud in which carts regularly get stuck.

There is nowhere to put rubbish and nowhere special to go to the toilet. As a result

everything finds its way into the gutter that runs down the middle of the street – and then into the stream. The stench in summer is terrible.

Some of the poorest people sort through the rubbish and pile it up when they have finished, so they know which piles have been sorted. These piles are called mire heaps.

Unfortunately, nobody realises that the dung and much of the other mess that litters the roads would make a valuable and free fertiliser. So no one thinks of taking it away to the fields.

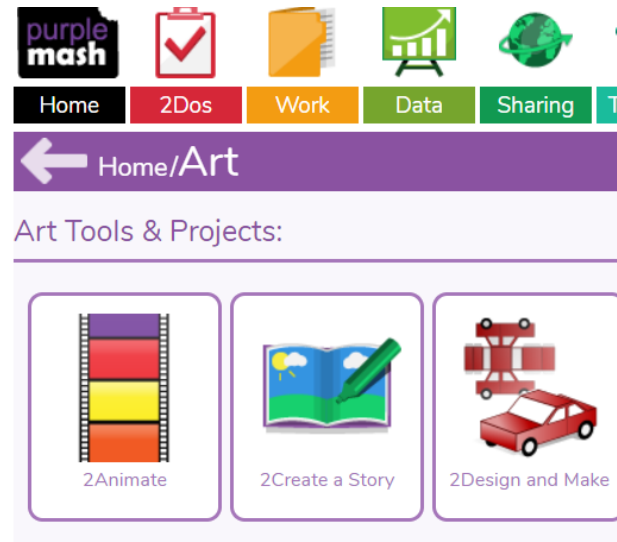
Make a Tudor village .

Recycled materials

Paper/card

Make a particular Tudor building from lego

Use PURPLE MASH 2Design and Make





## Our town in 1500

Towns were rare in 1500. But our town is set to grow.

Near our village is a bigger place. We shall call it our town (picture ①). The town has grown up where two rivers meet. It was first settled nearly a thousand years before, just like our village.

### The town by the abbey

The main building in the town is an **ABBEY**. The abbot and the monks that live there need food, clothes, shoes, horses and many other things. This gives work to the townspeople.

Pilgrims frequently visit the abbey. Providing them with board and lodging gives more work to the townspeople.

### Living and working

Even though this is a town, each house has a long strip of land behind it. This is where people grow vegetables and keep animals such as pigs and chickens.

▼ ① Our town.



◀ ② Buildings had to serve as workshops and storerooms as well as homes. Look at the doors in the upper floor. This is where goods were loaded and unloaded on to carts.

weavers, bakers, tailors, **CUTLERS** and gunsmiths. They can all afford to own their houses.

Beyond this the houses are rented. They are smaller and more cramped, hardly more than thatched sheds. Here more sewage and filth build up. This is

The main street leads from the abbey to a ford across the river (in later years a bridge will be built).

If you are a wealthy merchant, a squire, a lawyer or a very skilled craftsman, you may be able to afford to live at the end of the town nearest the abbey (pictures ②, ③ and ④).

Houses become cheaper towards the outskirts. So next come the highly skilled

also where foul-smelling trades take place or those that can cause fire. This is where you can find potters, blacksmiths, butchers, brewers, coopers, skiners, tanners, candlemakers and brickmakers.

On the very edge of town live the poorest people of all – the 'night soil carriers' (sewage collectors).

At some distance outside the town you would see, but not go near, the **LEPERS**.



▲ ③ In prosperous towns, covered markets were built using massive oak posts. Nearby was the inn.



▲ ④ The street plans of Tudor towns still survive today in some modern town centres.



## Our town in 1600

As people left the villages, towns grew in size. But there was not always a better living to be found.

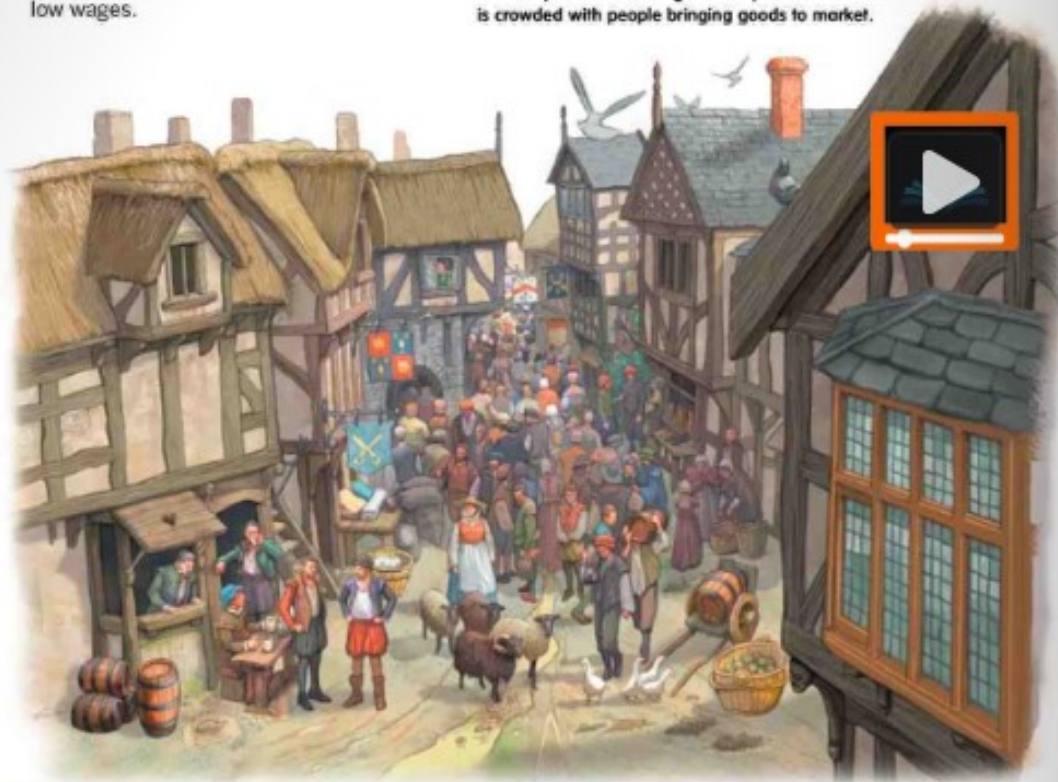
In our town new houses are being built by merchants, with workshops below and a place to live above (picture ①). Inns and other places for travellers are being built in the centre of the town because more people are now travelling about the country (pictures ② and ③).

More goods are being made, so there is a need for more people to make them – provided they are willing to work for low wages.

### From village to town

A town hall has been built over the covered market. A growing town needs more and more food, so the market has changed from once a week to every day. But our town still has no shops – these will not come for 200 years.

▼ ① The main street in our town is a mixture of workshops and inns lining a muddy road. The town is crowded with people bringing goods to market.



### Crowding

To fit in more houses, people are building on the land behind their houses, which they once used for growing vegetables and keeping pigs.

To get to these new houses, narrow alleys are made from the roads. In these side alleys, houses are being built so close that people on opposite sides of the alley can lean out of their windows and touch each other (picture ④). It is a recipe for disaster if fire should ever break out. Crowded houses also make it more likely that disease will spread (see pages 38–39).

Despite these changes, in some ways the town is still part of the country. Some people still keep their cattle in byres behind their houses. They take them to the meadows by the river during the day and bring them back through the town alleys at night.

### Showing off your wealth

The rich show off their wealth by building more chimneys, using more glass and having larger windows than their neighbours. If you are very, very wealthy, you can now also get running water and a toilet.



▲ ③ A Tudor coaching inn. The horses and coaches would be kept in the stables of the back.



▲ ② The modern town of Ludlow, Shropshire, still has many Tudor buildings.



◀ ④ The closeness of Tudor-age buildings is shown here. Few survive like this in Britain and most remaining examples are found on the continent. Colouring schemes were a matter of fashion.



## Our village in 1600

During Tudor times England prospered. Villages and towns grew quickly, and many new buildings were constructed.

During the time of Queen Elizabeth I – the second half of the sixteenth century – our village changes quickly. This is because some people in England are getting much richer.

### The Great Rebuilding

As these wealthy people set about rebuilding their villages, so the face of our villages changes for ever. This is the time called the **GREAT REBUILDING** (picture ①).

▼ ① Compare our village now with the village at the start of Tudor times (pages 10 to 11). What do you notice?

Some people rebuild the inside of their houses or add an extra room to the back of their homes.

Others knock their houses down completely and start all over again. The new house is both bigger and better quality.

But most important, people begin to change what they use buildings for. Instead of using one room for everything, they keep their animals in a separate barn. For the first time, people live alone in their homes.

## Homes that stand the test of time

The time of the Great Rebuilding produced sturdy small houses. Many of the pretty thatched or tiled cottages we see today were built as yeoman's houses at this time (pictures ②, ③ and ④).

### What happened to the poor?

There was, however, no money for the houses of the poor. In our village their houses remain hovels. Within a century, they will have fallen down, which is why we see no trace of them today.



▲ ② Some people added an extra floor to their house by dividing the existing house. This is why some houses have very low ceilings.



◀ ③ This is a new yeoman's house built completely of stone. Its windows are bigger than those of earlier houses.

▼ ④ This is a yeoman's house rebuilt with a traditional wooden frame filled with brick. It has a stone base.





How is the town different to the village?

Why has the village grown and changed?

Which would you have preferred to live in—a Tudor village or a Tudor town? Explain why.

# Inside a Tudor town house

What was it like inside a Tudor home? This depended on whether the house was added to or built from scratch.

There were many ways in which homes changed towards the end of Tudor times. But perhaps the most important change was the building of a brick fireplace and chimney.

## The importance of a chimney

Without a chimney the upper part of the house filled with smoke and was unusable.

### Glass

Glass is now more affordable, and for the first time windows can be made bigger, letting more light into the rooms while keeping out the cold.

However, glass can't yet be made in large panes. To get over this problem the glass is stuck together with strips of lead. The result – leaded windows.

### Cooking

Large fireplaces allow traditional cooking to take place, with cauldrons supported over an open fire.

By 1600, many people could afford to buy bricks to make a fireproof chimney. This resulted in two important changes. First, the fire could be moved from the centre to the side of the room. Also, the smoke was kept out of the house and people could use the upper parts of their houses.

By adding a ceiling just above head height, houses could be divided into two floors for the first time. As a result, during Tudor times, people doubled the amount of usable space in their homes.

## Parlours and bedrooms

So what did they do with their extra space? At the start of Tudor times, people slept downstairs in the **PARLOUR**.

But by the end of Tudor times, people were using their upstairs floor as bedrooms, leaving the downstairs parlour as a sitting room (picture ①).



① A town-house parlour in late Tudor times. For a description of the furniture and fittings see pages 32 to 33.

### Beams

Beams used for walls and ceiling are still not covered over. Richer people use straight beams, but the less well off use tree branches.

### Stairs

To get to the new upper floors, houses have a new feature – a staircase. It is steep and narrow so as not to use up more space than necessary.

### Floors

Earth floors are boarded over and the floorboards raised on beams. This makes the house much warmer in winter.



## Furniture and fittings

At the start of Tudor times, homes had little more than wood planks and a chest. By later Tudor times, people were buying proper tables and chairs.

In medieval times, before the Tudors, most people slept on planks of wood on the floor (picture ③) or used mattresses stuffed with straw. Only the very wealthy had beds.

Temporary tables would be made by placing sleeping boards on two trestles. Benches to sit on would be made of more planks and trestles. Only the very wealthy had proper tables and chairs. The only item of furniture might be a lockable clothes chest (picture ①).

In Tudor times, more people became wealthy enough to buy better furniture (picture ②). Our villagers tell us (from their will; see box) about how important a change this was by describing

### What Tudor wills tell us

If you were wondering how we know so much about what people owned and did in our village, then the answer is that much of it is written in their wills.

By looking at the will of a craftsman like a skinner, we can find out about the contents of a typical Tudor house.

Our skinner left his son his clothes, including:

a coat, a pair of trousers, a bonnet (hat), cloak, doublet, sword and dagger, and a saddle.

In the house he left his wife:

two cooking pots, a plate, a pewter dish, a pair of candle-holders, a silver spoon, bowls, a tub for brewing beer, a barrel, a trencher (cutting board), and a set of scales and weights; a bed 'joined', a feather mattress and pillow, two pairs of sheets, blankets, a desk, a table 'joined', a cupboard, a long wooden seat, a bench, a chair, a spinning wheel and a chest.

When the skinner died, all his possessions were regarded as his – not his wife's. If he wanted his wife to have anything, he had to say so in his will.



▲ ① Chest for clothing.



▲ ② A bed in late Tudor times. Most people thought their bed was their prize possession – even more so if it had a feather mattress.

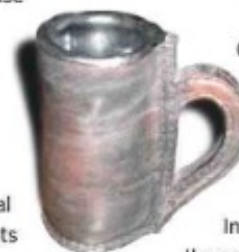
▶ ③ A bed in medieval times.



▶ ④ Mortar and pestle for grinding herbs and spices.



▼ ⑤ Leather tankard.



▲ ⑥ Wooden trencher and spoon.



their new furniture as 'joined up', meaning fixed permanently together. This could only be done because there was more room in the house (see pages 30–31).

### Cooking

In the kitchen, many utensils were still of wood, for example mortars and pestles (picture ④). However, villagers use metal cauldrons and other cooking pots hung over open fires from chains in fireplaces (picture ⑦). Metal spoons have been invented, but most people still eat from wooden platters (called trenchers) (picture ⑥), drink from wooden goblets or leather tankards

(picture ⑤) and use wooden spoons at table. Forks have not been invented and people ate with natural forks – their fingers!

### Keeping clean

In our village, people are keeping themselves slightly cleaner. They have basins for washing in. Baths, though, are rare. People who have a bath every few months are thought of as exceptional. The richer villagers wear perfume to hide their own stench.

▼ ⑦ Inside a Tudor kitchen.



## Make a Tudor Museum

Make artefacts (objects) to display

Write labels so visitors understand more about them.