Daily Life of a Peasant in the Middle Ages

The daily life of a peasant in the Middle Ages was hard. Medieval Serfs had to labor on the lord's land for two or three days each week, and at specially busy seasons, such as ploughing and harvesting. The daily life of a peasant in the Middle Ages can be described as follows:

- The daily life of a peasant started in the summer as early as 3am
- A peasant would start with breakfast, usually of pottage
- Work in the fields or on the land started by dawn and the daily life of a peasant included the following common tasks
  - Reaping - To cut crops for harvest with a scythe, sickle, or reaper.
  - Sowing - the process of planting seeds
  - Ploughing - To break and turn over earth with a plough to form a furrow
  - Binding and Thatching
  - Haymaking - cutting grass and curing it for hay.
  - Threshing - To beat the stems and husks of plants to separate the grains or seeds from the straw.
  - Hedging - creating boundaries
- Outside work finished at dusk, working hours were therefore longer during the summer months
- Peasants made some of their own tools and utensils using wood, leather and the horns from cattle
- Women generally ate when her husband and children had finished and had little leisure time

So ended the daily life of a Medieval Peasant during the Middle Ages.

The average peasant in the feudal structure could be grouped into two main professions: farmer or craftsmen. The farmers worked the fields daily, planting, harvesting, and fertilizing the plants. They paid for their rights to use the land directly in the form of their harvest, and kept the excess to be sold or for their own family use. Most farmers were not free and were bound to their land. Some were free and were known as villeins. These people were theoretically allowed to leave and go where they pleased, however, that was often not the case. The craftsmen were usually trained in the home by a parent who was in the profession, or by going into an apprenticeship with another skilled craftsmen in the town. The craftsmen built their goods to sell, and paid a tax to the lord for their right to use the land. Their life mainly consisted of making their goods and services available to the public of the town, coming to help when the town or castle needed repairs, or training the younger generation with their craft. Their profit from the sales was used to buy food from the farmers, and other items which kept the cycle of sales and purchases flowing to keep the medieval economy going.
Most of the peasant had a few meager possessions, including benches, tools, pots and wooden bowls, cups and spoons. Many households also had a simple wooden chest to keep valuables in. Beds were not a common thing, and most slept on a sort of straw mattress on the floor. They slept in their work clothes, covered by an animal skin usually. Some houses had linen towels, woolen blankets, and livestock were also a common possession for them to own, normally chickens, cows, or a pig. If the wife in the family was not helping with the craftsmanship or the farming, she usually occupied her time with raising the children and having a small garden, called a croft. This was usually located next to the house. Some of the farmers lived in town and made the daily commute to their farms, but others lived outside of the protection of the walls on the farms. Generally, farmers did not merely subsist on the crop they grew, and could also produce a cash crop which would be sold. The money from this was used to pay their taxes and buy the necessary supplies for living.

Religion was an important part of the life for the peasants, and it was taken very seriously. In fact, before the strong, tyrannical government emerged in the tenth to thirteenth with the king as its ruling figure, the church could also be considered a contending force with the king, sometimes overthrowing the king and placing a puppet of the church in command. The church had strict laws which were carefully followed, and a severe punishment was usually guaranteed if they were broken. The hierarchy of the church was most often mixed with the feudal system of the town. The bishops had great power, were usually involved in politics, and were even occasionally granted fiefs by the king or his ministers. And so, religion became a ever-present facet in the lives of the medieval world. Most villagers practiced religion by observing holidays and the Sabbath when necessary. They practiced many religious rites, such as baptisms, burial Masses, and communion, when they could afford to, that is.

Famines were frequent and plagues depleted the livestock. Crops were destroyed by frosts, floods, and droughts. Fields and harvests were burned when the lords had bursts of warfare across the countryside. Thus, the peasants life was a hard one. However, peasants of the middle ages enjoyed many holidays, both religious and non-religious, which meant that the peasant worked for about 260 days a year. The life of the peasant was extremely difficult, but enjoying holidays kept spirits high.

Serfs were bound to the manor. They were not slaves. These people could not be bought and sold. But they could not leave the manor without permission.

If they did not work, they were punished. If the manor land was sold or reassigned to a new owner, the serfs stayed with the land.

Serfs had many jobs on the manor including craftsmen, bakers, farmers, and tax collectors - serfs did all kinds of jobs. Their job were assigned. They had to do the job they were assigned to do.
Serfs could buy their freedom from the manor, but where would they get the money? Besides, in these violent times, being part of the land offered a certain amount of protection. If a new lord took over the manor, he would need the serfs for labor.

Peasants were free to leave if they wished, but where would they go? War was everywhere. Peasants worked the land and made the goods in exchange for protection. They might own their own business or have room enough for garden of their own. Other than that, their life was just like a serf’s life. A few peasants escaped the hard work on the farm by joining the church. But most lived and died on the manor where they were born.

At the beginning of the Middle Ages a knight was originally a person of noble birth who was trained in a range of weapons, horsemanship and chivalry. A Knights Armor in the Middle Ages was extremely expensive to produce. It had to be tailor-made to fit the Knight exactly or the Knight ran the risk of an ill-fitting suit of armor hampering him in battle. In the early Middle Ages a horse played an extremely important part in the life of a knight. A knight would own several horses which were built for different duties. The Courser was the most sought after and expensive warhorse, but the more common warhorses were the Destriers. The wealthy noblemen who became mounted knights were worth the equivalent of ten foot soldiers. This changed with the emergence of feudalism. A successful soldier could become wealthy and knighthood conferred regardless of his background.

Feudalism and Knights - Grants of Land
Feudalism was based on the exchange of land for military service. A portion of land (called a fief) would be granted by the King to a successful soldier or knight who had performed well during battle. This reward would be granted in exchange for his services. The fief, or land, was granted to a soldier or knight following a Commendation Ceremony which was designed to create a lasting bond between a vassal and his lord. The knight would swear allegiance to his lord - the Oath of Fealty. Fealty and homage were key elements of feudalism.

Feudalism and Knights - The Feudal Levy
A knight who had been rewarded with land pledged his military services. This was called the Feudal Levy. When wars erupted during the Middle Ages soldiers and knights were raised by the Feudal Levy when there was a 'Call to Arms'. Under the Feudal Levy soldiers and knights were required to fight for a limited period of 40 days - under certain circumstances this could be increased to 90 days. Medieval nobles, lords and knights of the Middle Ages were expected to provide trained soldiers to fight for the King and to provide clothes and weapons for the soldiers. The limited time requirement of the Feudal Levy was designed to ensure that the land would not suffer from neglect.

Feudalism and Knights - The Feudalism Pyramid
Feudalism therefore allowed men to become knights and climb the Feudalism pyramid of power.
The King owned all of the land
The King granted land to important barons - these barons then pledged their loyalty by swearing to serve and protect the king
The king also granted land to the less powerful military men (the knights) who were called vassals
The knights (or vassals) also agreed to fight for the king in exchange for their land
The land was worked by the peasants or serfs who were bound to the land

Feudalism and Knights - Climbing the Feudalism Pyramid
The Feudalism Pyramid of Power made it possible for everyone to move higher up the ranks and this is what everyone aspired to do. Medieval Squires and Pages of the Middle Ages wanted to become knights. A Knight who proved valiant in battle could become wealthy. The most wealthy and powerful knights then joined the nobility. Powerful barons aspired to be King - and the Medieval history of the Middle Ages under the feudalism pyramid describes such coups.

Feudalism and Knights - Manors and Castles
The lands granted to knights in England were called manors. Dues and taxes were paid to the knights under Manorialism. A knight would live in a Manor House on his fief. A knight could bring in additional wealth by competing in jousting tournaments. These tournaments offered a substantial purse to the winner. Winners of such jousting tournaments became the Medieval 'superstars' of the Middle Ages. Knights became rich and famous. The tournaments were a necessary part of feudalism as they acted as a necessary training ground for the knights. The most successful and therefore wealthy knights were able to increase their land holdings and acquire their own soldiers to whom he might grant lands and who in turn swore an Oath of Fealty to the knight. Powerful knights under feudalism were therefore able to acquire their own substantial fighting forces. This in turn led to the construction of castles by knights - the great power bases of the Middle Ages.

Feudalism and Knights - Religious Orders of Knights
Fighting and the acquisition of new lands were the focus of the Middle Ages. Religious crusades were also a feature of the Middle Ages. Military men were made knights but had no land - a class of landless knights. These landless knights formed the great religious military orders of knighthood which included the Knights Templar, Knights Hospitaller and the Teutonic Knights.

Daily Life of a Knight in the Middle Ages
The daily life of a knight in the Middle ages followed a similar schedule to that of his lord or the noble he served. The Daily life of a Knight during the Middle ages centred around castles or Manors or fighting for his lord and the King during times of war. Much of his time was spent on honing his weapons skills and keeping his levels of fitness high. The daily life of knights can be described as follows:
The daily life of a Knight started at dawn when Mass would be heard and prayers would be made.
The first meal of the day for the Knight was breakfast.
Knights would engage in weapons practise at the quintain and the pell.
The daily life of the Knights would include discussions on warfare strategy and increasing his knowledge of siege warfare and weapons.
Mid morning prayers and a meal
As the Medieval period progressed the culture changed becoming more refined and elegant. Knights were expected to understand the rules of Chivalry and courtly love. Time might be spent on dance practise.
In the afternoon the daily life of Knights turned to increasing their skills in horsemanship and would accompany their lord in hunting, hawking or inspecting the estate.
Evening prayer and then supper in the Hall of the Castle or Manor House.
After supper there might be some entertainment - music, dancing, jugglers, acrobats, jesters, etc.
Bedtime prayers

So ended the daily life of a Medieval Knight during the Middle Ages.

Daily Life of Medieval Nobles and Lords in the Middle Ages

Middle Ages Feudalism was based on the exchange of land for military service. King William the Conqueror used the concept of feudalism to reward his Norman supporters with English lands for their help in the conquest of England. Daily life of Nobles and Lords during the Middle ages centred around their castles or Manors or fighting for the King during times of war. The daily life of nobles can be described as follows:

The daily life of nobles started at dawn
Mass would be heard and prayers would be made
The first meal of the day was breakfast
Lords and nobles would attend to business matters in relation to his land. Reports would be heard regarding estate crops, harvests and supplies. Finances - rents, taxes, customs and dues. The lord would also be expected to exercise his judicial powers over his vassals and peasants.
Complaints and disputes regarding tenants would be settled, permission to marry etc.
The daily life of the nobles would include political discussions and decisions.
As the Medieval period progressed the culture changed becoming more refined and elegant. Time was spent on the arts - poetry, music etc.
Weapon practise
Mid morning prayers and a meal
In the afternoon the daily life of nobles turned to hunting, hawking or inspecting the estate.
Evening prayer and then supper in the Hall of the Castle or Manor House.
After supper there might be some entertainment - music, dancing, jugglers, acrobats, jesters, etc.
- The time for bed was dictated by the time the Lord or Noble retired
- Bedtime prayers

So ended the daily life of a noble during the Middle Ages.

Kings in the Middle Ages

Middle Ages encompass one of the most exciting periods in English History. Starting with the Battle of Hastings and the Norman Conquest in England - when William the Conqueror effectively took all of the lands from the Saxon English and gave them to French nobles. The Kings and Queens of England in the Middle Ages included Richard the Lionheart and the great Plantagenet English Kings from King Henry II (1154-1189) to King Edward III (1327-1377). The Hundred Years War between England and France, The Medieval Kings and Queens of the Royal Houses of Lancaster and York and the Wars of the Roses. The English Kings in the Middle Ages cover the periods from 1066 - 1485.

The Normans, at first, built castles of wood. In the early 12th century stone replaced them. Living in a stone castle was more comfortable as it was warmer and drier than a wooden dwelling. In the towns wealthy merchants began living in stone houses. (The first ordinary people to live in stone houses were Jews. They had to live in stone houses for safety).

In Saxon times a rich man and his entire household lived together in one great hall. In the Middle Ages the great hall was still the centre of a castle but the lord had his own room above it. This room was called the solar. In it the lord slept in a bed, which was surrounded by curtains, both for privacy and to keep out draughts. The other members of the lord's household, such as his servants, slept on the floor of the great hall.

At one or both ends of the great hall there was a fireplace and chimney. In the Middle Ages chimneys were a luxury. As time passed they became more common but only a small minority could afford them. Certainly no peasant could afford one.

About 1180 for the first time since the Romans rich people had panes of glass in the windows. At first glass was very expensive and only rich people could afford it but by the late 13th and early 14th centuries the middle classes began to have glass in some of their windows. Those people who could not afford glass could use thin strips of horn or pieces of linen soaked in tallow or resin which were translucent.

Furniture in the Middle Ages was very basic. Even in a rich household chairs were rare. Often only the lord sat on one so he was the 'chairman'. Most people sat on stools or benches. Rich people also had tables and large chests, which doubled up as beds. Rich peoples homes were hung with wool tapestries or painted linen. They were not just for decoration. They also helped keep out draughts.
In a castle the toilet or garderobe was a chute built into the thickness of the wall. The seat was made of stone. Sometimes the garderobe emptied straight into the moat!

A knight's home was a smaller version of a castle. They lived in fortified manor houses often with moats around them. A manor house was usually divided into a great hall with a kitchen at one and a solar above it. A rich merchant's house was similar but without fortifications.