What was life really like in England in the later middle ages? This comprehensive introduction explores the full breadth of English life and society in the period 1200–1500. Opening with a survey of historiographical and demographic debates, the book then explores the central themes of later medieval society, including the social hierarchy, life in towns and the countryside, religious belief, and forms of individual and collective identity. Clustered around these themes a series of authoritative essays develops our understanding of other important social and cultural features of the period, including the experience of war, work, law and order, youth and old age, ritual, travel and transport, and the development of writing and reading. Written in an accessible and engaging manner by an international team of leading scholars, this book is indispensable both as an introduction for students and as a resource for specialists.

Rosemary Horrox is Fellow in History, Fitzwilliam College, University of Cambridge, and lectures and writes extensively on later medieval English history. She is the author of Richard III: a study of service (1989) and The Black Death (1994), and editor of Fifteenth-Century Attitudes (1994) and Beverley Minster: an illustrated history (2000).

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF ENGLAND, 1200–1500

edited by
ROSEMARY HORROX
and
W. MARK ORMROD
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List of illustrations</th>
<th>page vii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of contributors</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of abbreviations</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1 | Introduction: Social structure and economic change in late medieval England  
S. H. Rigby | 1 |
| 2 | An age of deference  
Peter Coss | 31 |
| 3 | The enterprise of war  
Michael Prestwich | 74 |
| 4 | Order and law  
Simon Walker | 91 |
| 5 | Social mobility  
Philippa C. Maddern | 113 |
| 6 | Town life  
Richard Britnell | 134 |
| 7 | The land  
Bruce M. S. Campbell | 179 |
| 8 | A consumer economy  
Maryanne Kowaleski | 238 |
| 9 | Moving around  
Wendy R. Childs | 260 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 Work and leisure</td>
<td>Mavis E. Mate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Religious belief</td>
<td>Eamon Duffy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 A magic universe</td>
<td>Valerie I. J. Flint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Renunciation</td>
<td>Janet Burton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Ritual constructions of society</td>
<td>Charles Phythian-Adams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Identities</td>
<td>Miri Rubin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Life and death: the ages of man</td>
<td>P. J. P. Goldberg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 The wider world</td>
<td>Robin Frame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Writing and reading</td>
<td>Paul Strohm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Conclusion</td>
<td>Rosemary Horrox</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Further reading* 480

*Index* 505
Illustrations

FIGURE

7.1 Agricultural prices, agricultural wages and real wages in England, 1208–1466 (five-year moving averages) 216

TABLES

6.1 The twenty wealthiest English towns in 1524, with changes in ranking since 1334 154

7.1 Estimated English seigniorial landed incomes in the early fourteenth century 202

8.1 The changing labour cost of a basket of consumables, 1220–1500 241
Preface

This book is intended as a comprehensive and accessible account of the society of England between the early thirteenth and the late fifteenth centuries. The dates 1200–1500 conventionally describe the ‘later middle ages’ in England, but are obviously not impermeable: some of the contributions that follow necessarily take certain matters back to the eleventh and forward to the sixteenth centuries. The book is organised around five large chapters which provide analyses of the historiographical background and the debate about demography (chapter 1), the social hierarchy and attitudes towards it (chapter 2), the experience of life in towns (chapter 6) and in the countryside (chapter 7), the forms of religious belief current in the society (chapter 11) and the other kinds of identity, individual and collective, that built on and helped to inform social organisation (chapter 15). Around these chapters is a series of shorter, more specialised studies that develops further some of the major themes from war to work, law to literacy, consumerism to magic.

The book thus aims to respond to a new agenda of social history which has extended the range of the sub-discipline from a preoccupation with the material existence of the lower orders to include a range of non-material aspects of life including attitudes to work and to crime, the development of ideas about nationality, and the existence (or otherwise) of self-consciousness or ‘individualism’. As such, this book draws no distinction between ‘social’ and ‘cultural’ history, and tries to represent the experience of those who lived in the later middle ages in as broad a manner as possible. An important part of this holistic approach involves an understanding that interpretation of historical evidence is often unstable, reflecting in turn the patchy nature of the evidence. This is particularly evident with regard to the estimates of the population of England before and after the Black Death, and we have aimed not
to impose arbitrary figures but to allow different contributors to set out their own arguments on this important and still controversial theme.

In the notes the place of publication is London, unless otherwise stated.
Contributors

Richard Britnell  
University of Durham

Janet Burton  
University of Wales, Lampeter

Bruce M. S. Campbell  
Queen’s University of Belfast

Wendy R. Childs  
University of Leeds

Peter Coss  
Cardiff University

Eamon Duffy  
Magdalene College, Cambridge

Valerie I. J. Flint  
University of Hull

Robin Frame  
University of Durham

P. J. P. Goldberg  
University of York

Rosemary Horrox  
Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge

Maryanne Kowaleski  
Fordham University, New York

Philippa C. Maddern  
University of Western Australia, Perth

Mavis E. Mate  
University of Oregon

W. Mark Ormrod  
University of York

Charles Phythian-Adams  
University of Leicester

Michael Prestwich  
University of Durham

S. H. Rigby  
University of Manchester

Miri Rubin  
Queen Mary, University of London

Paul Strohm  
Columbia University, New York

†Simon Walker  
University of Sheffield
Abbreviations

Ag. Hist. Rev.  Agricultural History Review
AmHR  American Historical Review
BL  British Library
EcHR  Economic History Review
EETS  Early English Text Society
EHR  English Historical Review
JEH  Journal of Ecclesiastical History
JMH  Journal of Medieval History
P&P  Past and Present
PRO  Public Record Office (The National Archives)
RS  Rolls Series
TRHS  Transactions of the Royal Historical Society