BRITISH MEDIEVAL HISTORY (1066-1485)

The middle Ages encompass one of the most turbulent periods in English History:

* Starting with the Battle of Hastings and the [Norman Conquest](http://www.google.com.pe/search?hl=es&q=Norman+Conquest&btnG=Buscar+con+Google&meta=) - when William the Conqueror effectively took all of the lands from the Saxon English and gave them to French nobles.
* The English Middle Ages then saw the building of the great English castles, including the Tower of London, which helped the Normans to retain their hold on England.
* The start of the Crusades and the knights of the middle ages, including the founding of the Knights Templar.
* The Domesday Book and the [Magna Carta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magna_Carta).
* The Kings and Queens of the Middle Ages including Richard the Lionheart and great Plantagenet Kings from Henry II (1154-1189) to 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 Middle Ages [Feudal System](http://www.historyonthenet.com/Medieval_Life/feudalism.htm) and the terrible Black Death which really did plague the period of the Middle Ages

# The Norman Conquest

In 1042, **Edward The Confessor**, became King of England. He spent so much time in religious work that he failed to carry out his royal duties. As a result, the nobles increased their hold of the country. The most powerful noble was **Harold.** When Edward died in 1065 without a heir, Harold became the new king.

**William Duke of Normandy**, a cousin of Edward The Confessor, claimed that before Edward died, he had promised him the English throne.

In 1066, William led an army of 5,000 Norman archers and knights across the sea to England. They met Harold’s army in battle near **Hastings**, a town on the coast, south of London. King Harold was defeated and **William The Conqueror** was crowned **King of England**.

**The Feudal System.**

After defeating the Anglo-Saxon king Harold, at the battle of Hastings in 1066, William of Normandy introduced the Norman Feudal System, rewarding his French- speaking followers with land in return for their support.(Feudalism was a social system that existed during the middle ages, in which people were given land and protection by a nobleman, and had to work and fight for him in return.)

**Language and customs.** French remained the language of the upper classes, educated people and administration until the 14th Century. English nearly ceased to be a written language but continued to exist as the spoken tongue of the common people. King William maintained many English laws and government practices but also brought continental ways to England. Under his rule, the English learned Norman customs and the French language. The wealthy built castles, cathedrals, and monasteries in the French style. **Geoffrey Chaucer**, who lived in the second half of the 14th Century, was the first great writer to use the English language instead of Anglo-Saxon or Norman French.

# The Magna Carta (Great Charter)

**John** became King in 1199, when his brother **Richard ‘The Lionheart’**, died. He lost most of his lands in France and gained the name of ‘**John the Lackland’**. When he increased taxes and began to ignore the law, the nobles became angry. They refused to obey him unless he agreed to give them certain rights and privileges, which resulted in King John being forced to sign **The Magna Carta** (in Latin) of English liberties, in 1215. This notable document contained a long list of limitations to the King’s power and increased that of the nobles. These rights obtained by the Barons were eventually extended to the entire population. Some of these rights are:

* A King could no longer collect taxes without the consent of the Great Council.
* A freeman accused of a crime had the right to a trial by his peers.
* The king himself had to obey the laws.

Although the Magna Carta was written by nobles for nobles, it was an important step towards **Democracy**. It brought to the government the new idea that not even a king is above the law.

# Flowering of English Medieval Life

The 13th. Century was a time of great enthusiasm for **art** and **learnin**g. In **architecture**, the Norman style period gave place to the delicate spires and pointed arches of the **Gothic style**. New learning was brought into England by scholars from the rest of Europe. **Oxford university** won renown all over Europe. One of its teachers, **Roger Bacon** urged the study of nature and the experimental method in seeking knowledge. The Crusades opened up commerce with the Orient and brought new ideas.

# The Hundred Years’ War and the Black Death

**Edward III** was the King when the long struggle between England and France began. In the early 1300s, the English still held a small part of southwest France. The Kings of France, who were growing more powerful, wanted to drive the English out. In 1337, Edward III, declared himself King of France. This angered the French even more. In 1339, the French and the English fought the first in a long series of battles known as the **Hundred Year’s W**ar. The war was brought to a temporary halt when the **Black Death** swept over western Europe (a plague in 1348 that killed a third of the population of England). After many battles, by 1453, the English held only the French seaport of Calais, and the war came to an end.

The Hundred years’ War had a devastating effect on the English economy. The high taxation necessary to finance the war and the **Black Death** led to severe difficulties for the peasant class that there was a revolt in 1381. Although the **Peasants’ Revolt** was soon put down, it led to greatly improve conditions for the peasant class and was the first step towards the ending of the feudal system in England.

## The Wars of the Roses and the End of the Middle Ages in England

No sooner was the Hundred Years’ War over than a long power struggle (1455-85) began for the English Crown between two noble families: **the House of Lancaster** and **the House of York.** The York symbol was a white rose, and the Lancaster symbol was a red rose. For this reason the struggle between York and Lancaster was called **The Wars of the Roses**.

During this period the feudal system was in the process of dying. The nobles were weakened, and their fortified castles were no longer impregnable after the invention of  **gunpowder**. A new aristocracy and a capitalist class appeared. The new aristocracy began to seek political power. French, the speech of the governing classes, had become blended with Anglo-Saxon into an English speech somewhat similar to the language used today. The War of the Roses ended when **Henry VII (Henry of Tudor)** united the two rival houses, giving origin to the Tudor Dynasty.