



## British Hills Knowledge Base: Manor Houses

### What is a manor house?

The manor house was a part of the **feudal system** of England. The earliest manor houses were made in the Anglo-Saxon era (beginning around 500 CE). It was the main home of the **lord of the manor**, a lord who controlled the local area. This local area was called a **manor**, and was the smallest unit in the feudal system.

While the church was the centre of religious life, the manor house was at the centre of village politics. The large great hall of the manor house held the **manorial court**. The manorial court was where the lord held trials, judging and punishing those he found guilty of breaking the law. The lord of the manor made some of his money from this court.

The power of the lord of the manor and the importance of manor houses increased in 1066. In 1066, **William the Conqueror** became king, and the owner of all England. Private ownership was not allowed, and the law became "no land without a lord". This meant that all land was owned by the king, who gave it to people who helped him.

Manors were made of 3 sections:

- *Demesne*, the lord's personal land. His family's home, the manor house.
- *Serf holdings*, where peasants lived and had to supply the lord with work and cash.
- *Free peasant land*, where peasants paid rent and were subject to the manorial court.

Early manor houses were designed for defense and protection during war. This did not really change until the 1400s, after the **War of the Roses**, an English civil war. After this time, manor houses became more decorative, as England became more peaceful.

Also, by the 1600s and the **English civil wars**, the power of the king/queen became weaker, and manor houses became aristocratic houses for rich nobles, more comfortable than earlier versions. They are also known as **castles, palaces, and mansions**. By the 18th century, the importance of the manor was less, and manor houses became more like country houses for relaxation, not centres of political power.



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Read about manor houses in England, and choose whether these statements are **true or false**:

- |  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| The manor was the largest unit in the feudal system. | <b>True/False</b> |
| The lord of the manor lived in the manor house.      | <b>True/False</b> |
| William the Conqueror owned all the land in England. | <b>True/False</b> |
| After the 1400s, manor houses were designed for war. | <b>True/False</b> |
| Manor houses became places for relaxation.           | <b>True/False</b> |

