

FOOD AND DRINK

Subsistence and Trade

Lots of people in medieval societies lived **subsistence** lives. This meant that they produced only enough food to feed themselves and their family. However, if they were able to produce more than they needed (for example, if the weather was good and their crops grew well), they **traded** food in exchange for money or other goods (such as cloth or animals).

Measurements

Food had to be measured in a regular way so that people could always get a fair swap for their goods. For example, grains were measured in quarters (quarts) and liquids were measured in tuns (and usually kept in casks). The measurement of the goods related to how much money it was worth: think about why today we have 'pounds' in money (£) and weight (lb).

Medieval Diets

The **diets** of people depended on how rich they were. Royalty and nobles were able to afford luxury food and drink from the European continent, such as wine from France, whereas the lower classes of people ate food produced locally, such as fish and vegetables.

Food Supplies

Records from the War of Independence give us details about the kind of food and drink being sent to castles as supplies for the people. Here is a short list of some items.

Food: corn, flour, oats, wheat, bread, salt, beans, peas, onions.

Animals: cows, sheep, deer, pigs (ham).

Fish: herring, salmon, hake, smoked fish, dried fish.

Drink: wine, beer, malted barley (for making beer).

Other: hay (for horses to eat), wax (for candles), tallow (animal fat used for candles), coal (for fire).

FOOD AND DRINK SUPPLIES IN CASTLES

Berwick: 16 August 1292

List of stores found in Berwick Castle when it was handed over to Edward I's officer.

These are the things found in the castle of Berwick-upon-Tweed, in the keeping of Sir John Potthow, handed over to Sir John Burdon, sheriff of Berwick, by the officers of Sir John Potthow, in the presence of Sir Walter of Amersham (the king's chancellor in Scotland) and Sir Richard of Bromsgrove (the king's clerk) by the king's command.

That is:

In the hall, a very large table.

In the sheriff's room, 3 tables, 2 pairs of trestles

In the larder, 3 worn-out napkins, 3 old towels, 2 old pieces of canvas, one stone basin and two tin pitchers, each of one quart.

In the kitchen, one great cauldron, one pot of brass of two gallons, and one boiling-pot of half a gallon, and two grates.

In the butlery, the third part of a cask of Rhenish wine, putrid.

In the wardrobe, five iron dish-covers, some light chain-mail coats without hoods, three heavy chain-mail coats without hoods, two pairs of iron leg-armour, one iron cap, two pairs of firepans, five sacks for armour, three bench-covers, old and torn, one green carpet with a red border, much worn, two boxes, one chest, six old bucklers [small round shields], one old buckler, one leather buckler, a chess board, three crooks and four bars of iron for the gates, five baskets full of iron.

In the smith's forge, four large anvils and one little anvil, and four anvils with a pickaxe, three large hammers and three small, five pairs of tongs and two pairs of bellows and two hammers, and an iron for forging nails, and one pair of wheels bound with iron.

They also found seven crossbows with winches, and three winches, and six crossbows for two feet, and eight for one foot, and eight belts, and five hundred quarrels [crossbow bolts], and a chest in which the crossbows are kept.

In the chapel they found one chalice [cup] of silver gilt; one chasuble, one alb, one amice, one stole, one fanon [all priestly robes], two towels, three crosses, an image of Our Lady [the Virgin Mary, mother of Christ], and two little images [probably pictures of saints].

Afterwards they found four siege-engines, each of which is lacking a cord for drawing it. Afterwards they found four springalds [catapults], three of which are fit for service; for these springalds there are one hundred quarrels and bullets.

In the bakehouse and around the court, six lead cisterns, one great vat and eight smaller ones, one trough, two tubs, two tuns.

In the larder they found 300 quarters of beef, of the new stores, and six of the old stores; nineteen bacons of the new store, and five hams of the old store; and three sheep's carcasses, and nineteen lines of herrings from the new store,

and 700 fish from the new store, and three of the old store, 80 dried fish of the old store, and 44 fish of Aberdeen of the old store, and eighteen salmon of the old store, and thirty-six lampreys in a salt vat.

In the granary they found eighty-three and a half quarters of wheat, and sixty-four quarters and a half of peas, and fifteen quarters and one boll and a half of barley-malt, and thirty-six quarters of salt. And in a chamber near the postern gate are eight hundred and seventy-two pieces of iron, and four heads for pickaxes, eleven iron hammers, one large hammer, six iron bars for windows. And in the bottom of an engine they found three hundred pieces of iron. Also they found thirty chalders of sea coal.

Also they found one live pig.

Berwick: Wednesday 22 October 1298

List of supplies found at Berwick Castle on this date.

Grain from the old garrison: 4 quarters

Grain and wheat in sheaves remaining in the chapel, from the provisions of John Burdon, from the king's estates: estimated at 12 quarters

Grain delivered by Richard Bromsgrove from the store remaining in the town of Berwick: 94 quarters

Malt and mixed grain to make beer, delivered by Richard Bromsgrove from the aforesaid store: 200 quarters

Oats delivered by Richard Bromsgrove for his horses: 100 quarters

Black peas from the old garrison: 64 quarters

Delivered for the castle to John Burdon: 6 large jars of wine

Salted meat: 77 beef carcasses from the old garrison, 16 bacons from the old garrison

100 muttons from the king's store (bought for 100s. by the said Sir John Burdon)

Salted fish from the old garrison: 1000

Salted fish from the king's store: 500

Herring from the old garrison

Herring from the supplies of Master Nicholas of Carlisle

Salt from the old garrison: 35 quarters

Sea coal: 100 quarters

Tallow [animal fat, used for candles]: 12 stones

Oil: 6 flagons

Iron: 20 stones

Arrows: 16 sheaves

31 July 1300

Record of the food sent to Dumfries Castle as supplies.

Let it be recorded that Ralph of Manton, keeper of King Edward's Wardrobe, released to Sir Arnold Guille of Pugey, constable of Dumfries Castle, for the fortification of the castle at Dumfries, these provisions:

6 loaves of bread

2 casks of flour

1½ casks of wine

2 bushels of salt

2940 pounds of onions
150 salted fish, which are called Hakes
4 bushels of hay
6 pounds of wax
20 beef cattle
5 quarts of malted barley
2 quarts of beans
6 quarts of oats
2 quarts of salt
30 bacons
2900 herring
200 salted fish

28 August 1300

Record of the food sent to Dumfries Castle as supplies.

Let it be recorded that John of Droxford, keeper of the King's Wardrobe, delivered at Dumfries to Sir Arnold Guille de Pogey, constable of Dumfries Castle, for the fortification of that castle, through Sir John of Merk, these provisions:

10 casks of flour
5 casks of wine
30 beef-cattle
80 mutton-sheep
6 deer
1000 herring
22 salmon

20 August 1306

Prince Edward writes to the keeper of food supplies at Perth Castle telling him that he needs food sent to Montrose and Aberdeen because he is going North on the King's business.

Edward, Prince of Wales, to the keeper of the food supplies at Perth, Richard of Bromsgrove: greeting.

As I am going beyond the mountains on the king's business, I command you to send food supplies to Montrose and Aberdeen for me and my army, as Henry de Luitegershale, my clerk, will more fully instruct you.

17 February 1312

Edward II orders to an English sheriff to send supplies to Perth Castle.

King Edward to the sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk: greeting.

I command you to send the following by ship with all speed to William Oliphant for the garrison of Perth:

200 quarts of wheat
200 quarts of malt
100 quarts of beans and peas
100 quarts of oats

RECEIPTS FOR FOOD AND DRINK

Between July and October 1306

Receipt of payment for beer to be brewed.

John of Bromsgrove, the keeper of Aberdeen Castle, paid the brewers of Aberdeen 26 quarts of malt from the king's store in order to brew 40 flagons of beer from each quart for the Prince of Wales.

November 1306

Receipt of payment to an English sheriff for good fish from Aberdeen.

28s. 6d. [about £740 today] paid to the sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk, for the provision of 6000 fish of Aberdeen [a type of especially well-cured fish], and other fish for the king's household.

Between 20 February 1306 and 7 July 1307

Receipt of payments for wine and corn sent as supplies to Aberdeen Castle.

As an advance to David of Brechin, keeper of Aberdeen Castle: 2 tuns of wine and 20 quarts of corn for that castle.

Between 20 February 1306 and 7 July 1307

Receipt of payments to ship masters for transporting malt and oats.

Payment to the master of a ship of Burton Stathel, taking malt from Perth to Aberdeen to the prince's household and others then at the siege of Kildrummy and returning.

Payment to John Baret, master of the ship 'La Godye' of Dundee, taking oats by the Prince's order from Perth to Blackness on 15 July.

Between 20 February 1306 and 7 July 1307

Receipt of payments for wine sent to the men in Lanark Castle.

Payment to Robert Clifford, in the garrison of Lanark with 15 men, for 3½ tuns of wine: £11 13s. 4d. [about £6,000 today].

Payment to John Seagrave in the garrison of Lanark, for 3 tuns of wine: £10 [about £5,000 today].

FOOD FOR THE KING'S HORSES

Stirling: 29 June 1304

One of Edward I's officials tells the keeper of stores at Berwick Castle to send food to Stirling for the king's horses.

I write from Stirling to you, Sir Richard Bromsgrove, keeper of stores at Berwick Castle.

The king has extreme need of oats and beans for his horses, and so I command you to send a vessel loaded with these goods to Stirling as fast as possible, because the king's horses have nothing to eat except grass. Therefore you should be quick about the business.