

Houses during the Middle Ages

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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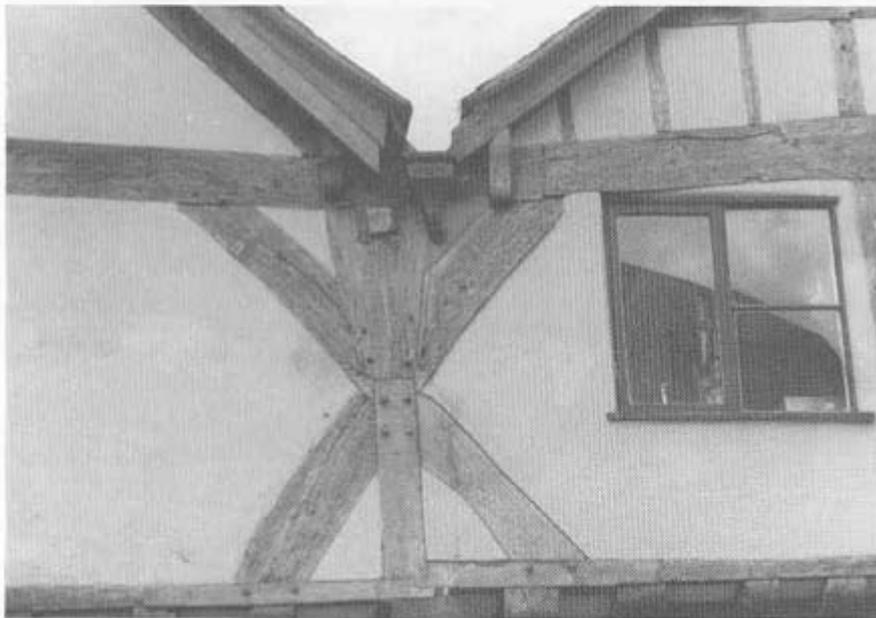
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Houses

Because there was a limited amount of space inside the town walls, houses tended to be built close together, and the streets were usually very narrow. Most towns had laws that decreed that householders were responsible for keeping clean the piece of street directly outside their property. This often led to disputes between neighbours, and quite often the job was not done. Many householders threw their rubbish into the street, which became a very messy place, especially in the wet weather.



▲ Houses in medieval towns often overhung the narrow streets and lanes.

◀ How were the timbers of medieval buildings held together?

The houses were often two or three storeys high, with the bottom floor often used as a shop or a workroom if the owner was a merchant or a tradesman. The houses were wooden framed and the walls were filled in with clay or laths and plaster.

Windows were kept small because they were made from glass, which was still very expensive. The house was lit inside by candles, often in iron lanterns. By comparison with modern houses there was very little furniture: a large table and some stools, a pair of big chairs for the householders and a four-poster bed which had curtains hanging around its sides to keep out the draught. Most rooms had a fireplace, but these were dangerous as so much of the house was made of material which would easily burn. The biggest worry was the thatched roof, which





Shopkeepers at work.

A rich merchant's wife.

caught fire very easily. Some towns insisted that people have a large barrel of water near the front door in case of fire. This became so much of a problem that in certain towns the use of thatch was banned altogether.

Richards, P.D., English, F.W. (1992), *Out of the dark*, Nelson, South Melbourne, pp. 178-180.