

Town streets

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

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Medieval people lived in dirty and smelly towns. The houses were crowded into narrow streets. The upper storeys of the houses stuck out over the lower, which made the streets rather dark. After 1419, all houses in London had to be built with the upper storey at least nine feet above the ground. Many had been lower, which made it difficult and dangerous for people riding along the streets on horseback.

The streets were used as a general rubbish dump, despite efforts by the town councils to clean them up. People were supposed to cart away all rubbish from in front of their own houses and shops. The city council of London, in 1419, fined people who did not do this. Coventry had an official carter who was paid a penny for each house and a halfpenny for each shop from which he cleared rubbish.

Rivers, too, were used as rubbish dumps. A sanitation act, passed in 1388, forbade the pollution of rivers. The people of Beverley, in Yorkshire, were concerned about industry polluting the air. They were angry when fruit trees were killed by the smoke from local brick kilns. After 1467 anyone who built new kilns near the town could be fined £5—worth at least £100 today.

In medieval times there was no sharp division between town and countryside as there is today. The towns were small, and country districts were very close to town walls. Many townsmen had fields outside the walls. They grew crops and raised cows and sheep which they sold in the market or kept for food.

Davies, Penelope (1975), *Town life in the Middle Ages*, Wayland, East Sussex, Great Britain, p. 19.