

WINE • WEATHER • WATER • WOOL

Medieval Times

Tuesday 28th February 1337

Special feature – Wine in Winchelsea



1250, when freak weather conditions devastated the area.

The old town of Winchelsea was built close to the sea, on a bank of shingle. At this time there were many storms. Some of these happened at the same time as very high tides, creating huge waves. The wind, rain and rough sea together caused the shingle to move and change position along the shore, until eventually the old town was lost to the sea. The harbour also became blocked.

Luckily, help was at hand from King Edward I. He needed the harbour for his navy, so in the 1280s he had a new harbour AND a new town built for Winchelsea. The streets are broad and laid out in a grid, just like some of the newest towns in France. And most importantly, the new Winchelsea is on a hill out of the reach of the sea.

Winchelsea's new port is better than ever and many ships can land their goods at once instead of having to wait their turn in the harbour. In 1307, when records began, 737,000 gallons of wine (3,350,468 litres) had been landed in just eight months!

And now I am going to try a few of them. *Santé!* (That's CHEERS in French).



Our wine expert **Ozymandias Cluck** visits the Winchelsea home of Geoffrey de Boudreau – one of England's leading wine importers – and samples some of the latest French wines from Gascony

Before I get carried away tasting the wine, I'd better tell you about Winchelsea – England's most important port for importing wine. Oh dear, I sound a bit tipsy already!

Winchelsea harbour sits below the town at the mouth of the river Brede, which flows into the English Channel.

Many importers and wine merchants live in the town, as can be seen by the number of stone cellars here – cool places to store the wine beneath their houses.

But things looked rather worrying for the wine trade during the second half of the last century, from around



Smallhythe and Reading (near Tenterden) on the river Rother were important centres for ship building in the Middle Ages. Henry V's warship, *The Jesus*, Henry VII's warship, *The Regent*, and later, Henry VIII's warship, *The Grand Masters*, were all built here.

In the Middle Ages, wool was one of England's most important products. English wool was of good quality, with tough, long hairs which made it easy to spin. It was in demand on the continent, where it would be woven into cloth.

The best cloth was made by expert weavers in Flanders (part of today's Belgium). Woollen cloth made in England wasn't so good as the weaving process was less advanced, so anyone who could afford to bought their cloth abroad.

To keep money in this country Edward III made it illegal to wear clothes made from foreign cloth. He banned the export of wool and encouraged Flemish weavers to come to work in England so the best woollen cloth could be made here.

Some of the Flemish weavers settled in the High Weald, particularly in Cranbrook and Tenterden. This area became an important and wealthy centre for cloth production. The natural features of the High Weald made it an ideal place for the industry, with woodland supplying timber to build mills and weaving looms, and streams to power the mills. Fuller's earth, a type of clay used in the cloth-making process, was found here. And of course, the High Weald had plenty of sheep!

Medieval Hoodies

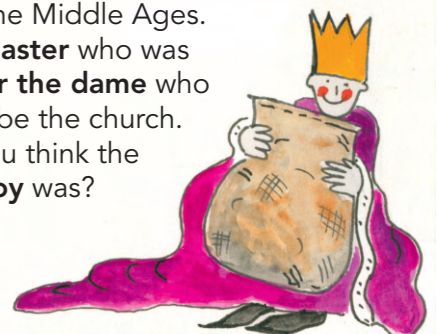
Woollen hoods were fashionable at this time. A type of hood especially popular with young people was called the liripipe. This could be more than 180cm long! Do you think they were easy to wear?



The nursery rhyme "Ba-Ba Black Sheep" is thought to be about a tax on wool in the Middle Ages.

One for the master who was the king, **one for the dame** who was meant to be the church.

Who do you think the **little boy** was?



In the Middle Ages, wool would have been coloured using natural dyes made from leaves, flowers, berries, bark and roots of plants.

Make your own natural dyes

Please ask an adult to help – you need to use very hot water!

What you need

You can find dyestuff in the kitchen – try a handful of vegetable peelings, onion skins, carrot leaves; a tablespoon of coffee or one or two teabags. If you have a garden, experiment with leaves, flowers or grass (marigolds are good). Faded flowers work better than fresh ones.

Small pieces of fabric. Natural fibres like wool or cotton work best.

What you do: Damp your fabric first.

Put dyestuff into a saucepan and cover with water. Simmer for 10 minutes, turn off heat and leave to cool. Strain the cool liquid into a larger saucepan. Add your damp fabric and just enough extra water for the fabric to move around (not too full). Bring to a low simmer again. Stir from time to time very carefully to make sure the fabric is evenly dyed. Leave the fabric dyeing for up to 15 minutes. Turn off the heat and let the dye cool before straining off. Squeeze the fabric scraps and hang them up to dry where they won't drip colour on anything else.

Rivers and ships

In the 14th century, High Weald firewood would be loaded at a dock at Float Farm, Udimore. It was then carried down the river Brede to the harbour at Winchelsea, then shipped to London or the continent.

High Weald

1086 The Domesday Book recorded 150,000 pigs being driven into the woods of the High and Low Weald

1176 Robertsbridge Abbey founded

1234 Timber from Ashdown used to build Chichester Cathedral

1287 Great storm diverted course of River Rother

1360 Winchelsea raided by French

1385 Castle built at Bodiam

1414 New wall built at Winchelsea

1450 Kentish rebellion against taxes. Leader Jack Cade killed at Heathfield

EVENTS

1066

1066 Norman invasion

1100

1086 Domesday Book

1200

1170 Thomas Becket murdered

1225 English take control of Gascony

1300

1286 Spectacles invented in Italy

1348 Black Death, 30-40% of population of England died

1400

1381 Peasants Revolt against poll tax

1415 Battle of Agincourt

1455 Wars of the Roses

1485

1485 Henry Tudor defeated Richard III at Bosworth