



# Making a Living in the Middle Ages: The People of Britain 850-1520

*Christopher Dyer*

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## **Making a Living in the Middle Ages: The People of Britain 850-1520** Christopher Dyer

In his masterly new book, Christopher Dyer reviews our thinking about the economy of Britain in the middle ages. In analysing economic development and change, he allows us to reconstruct, often vividly, the daily lives and experiences of people in the past. The period covered here (850-1520) saw dramatic alterations in the state of the economy, and this account begins with the forming of villages, towns, networks of exchange and the social hierarchy in the ninth and tenth centuries, and ends with the inflation, population rise, and colonial expansion of the sixteenth century. This is a book about ideas and attitudes as well as the material world, and Dyer shows how people regarded the economy and how they responded to economic change. We see the growth of towns, the clearance of woods and wastes, the Great Famine, the Black Death and the upheavals in the fifteenth century through the eyes of those who lived through these great events. Changes were not always planned or directed by the rich and powerful, but arose from the uncoordinated ambitions and actions of thousands of ordinary people. Making a living in a changing world presented peasants, artisans and wage workers, as well as barons and monks, with dilemmas and decisions, which this book highlights. The lives of these people were also subject to impersonal forces, such as changes in the climate, but this book emphasises the choices that were made. This book will guide readers through the controversies on the impact of the Vikings and the Norman Conquest, the importance of population growth, the fourteenth-century crisis and urban decline. Dyer deals with issues in social history which had an impact on the economy, such as family structures, social control and social protest. He uses the evidence of archaeology and the landscape as well as the more conventional written sources. Clearly and robustly written, this book sets a new standard for the understanding of medieval life.

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