

# MEDIEVAL Feasting

# HANDS ON HISTORY THE NORMANS

Few records of Norman food have survived, but we can see their influence on food and feasting throughout the medieval period. This set of activities leads up to holding a medieval feast with family or friends, including dressing the room, getting into character and preparing your menu.



**Key to icons**



Estimated time



Indoors



Completion

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ENGLISH HERITAGE

# Activity 1



## SET THE SCENE

**Great for: Families to work together taking different roles, or adults can challenge the kids to create a feast for them to attend. Parental guidance needed for some elements.**

### **Decorating your feasting hall:**

- Most feasting tables would have been covered by a white cloth. Cover your table with a tablecloth or a sheet – an old, patterned curtain can be very effective.
- Medieval castles would have tapestries and wall hangings hung around the room. This was for insulation during winter, as well as for decoration. If you have colourful sheets, hang them on the walls to create a medieval feel.

- The walls would also have had swords and shields on them to represent the power of the family. Draw the shape of two swords on thick card, cut out and paint silver or grey. Cross them, one over the other, and hang on the wall with string. You can also design your own shields decorated with patterns, dragons or a family crest to hang on the wall.



(For more detailed instructions for making shields, see the Hands on History Castle activity pack online: [bbc.co.uk/history/handsonhistory](http://bbc.co.uk/history/handsonhistory).)

- Norman houses and castles had very small windows and no electric lights, so turn the lights down low and light some candles (parental supervision required) before people enter.
- You won't want to do this in your house! – but remember that in Norman times, the floors would have been covered with rushes and grasses. This was to warm up the cold stone floor. It would also be used to cover bones chucked on the floor during feasting, as well as spilled beer, grease and even spit and animal dung! Eurgh!



**You have prepared a medieval banqueting hall.**

# Activity 2



## WHO WOULD COME TO YOUR FEAST

**Great for:** getting into the spirit of the feast to come.

**You can either pick your roles yourself, or pull names out of a hat to see who you and your guests will be for the evening – lucky people will become the Lord or Lady, but others won't be so lucky and may be peasants!**



### The Lord and Lady

These are the most important people of the house. They need to dress in their finest clothes and wear their most impressive jewellery. They would sit at the head of the table and would always be served first.

### Entertainers

Singers, jugglers and musicians would perform throughout the feast. Your entertainers can perform before you begin to eat to create a feasting atmosphere.



### Pages

Pages would live in a castle, training to become knights. They would often have to take on tasks around the house, including serving the food at feasts. You can find out more about the life of a page by watching the Hands on History animation: [bbc.co.uk/history/handsonhistory](http://bbc.co.uk/history/handsonhistory)



### Peasants

Peasants would be the poorest people living in huts around the castle. They might come to beg at the feast and would sometimes be given scraps. (People who pick the peasant could begin the feast in this role and then become another character later. Or you may decide to remove this character from the hat!)



If you have a large group, your other guests can take the roles of noblemen and noblewomen or knights invited to the feast by the Lord and Lady.



**You have taken on a medieval role.**

# Activity 3



## FEASTING FOOD – COOKING FOR KIDS

**Great for: Kids (with supervision) to take over the cooking for the day!**

**The Normans ate their food on stale bread. This was called a ‘trencher’ and the food was placed on top of it. The most important people were given the top of the loaf and that’s where the expression ‘Upper Crust’ (meaning posh) comes from.**

Even though the bread was stale, when soaked in the juices of the food it would have been quite tasty (and a lot easier than eating a dinner plate!) So in a way, if you’ve ever eaten baked beans on toast, you’ve eaten Norman style!

The Normans wouldn’t have used a fork – they would only have used a spoon and a knife. Try eating your next meal without a fork – it’s tricky.

Create your own simple, tasty food and eat off a trencher. Use toast as your trencher and prepare plenty of toppings for your guests to help themselves. Here are some Norman foods to try:

- Fish (the Normans would have chosen eel or tench, but you could pick up some tuna or fish paste)
- Fruit jams and honey (castles would have had their own beehives)
- Cheese (the Normans ate lots of cheese – Wensleydale, a popular cheese today, can be traced back to the Norman times)
- Cold meats, such as ham



**You’ve eaten from a Norman trencher.**



### Do you know?

Before the Normans arrived, the Saxons used the same words to describe animals when they are in the field as when they are meat on your plate. It was the Normans who gave us words such as beef and pork – so if the Normans hadn’t arrived, we might now say ‘cow burger’ instead of ‘beef burger’.



[bbc.co.uk/history](http://bbc.co.uk/history)

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# Activity 4



## QUICK GINGERBREAD

**For kids who want to get their hands dirty, here's a simple no-cook, medieval-style gingerbread recipe to try out.**

Medieval Gingerbread was very different to the modern version. It was much more like a sweet and was eaten by people as a treat. It was moulded into beautiful shapes in a variety of colours before being presented to guests. It was also eaten by the rich as it contains a number of expensive spices that only the wealthy could afford.

### Ingredients:

- A mug of warm honey water (see below)
- 3 tablespoons of honey
- A mug of breadcrumbs
- A pinch of ground ginger
- A pinch of cinnamon



### Method:

- Pour the honey water into a mixing bowl.
- Quickly stir in the three tablespoons of honey.
- Add the ginger and cinnamon spices and stir.
- Stir in the breadcrumbs a dessert spoonful at a time.
- Keep going until you have sticky dough that can be moulded into balls.
- Take out small balls of the mixture and using your hands mould them into squares, circles or rectangles that are about 5cm thick.
- Place the shapes onto baking paper or in cake cases.
- Leave them to stand for at least 10 minutes while you clear up.
- Sprinkle with cinnamon and serve.



**You've made your own medieval treat.**

### Making honey water

– if working with small children, adults can prepare this in advance.

1. Put a tablespoon of honey in a mug.
2. You can also add a few drops of food colouring – red works well.
3. Fill with boiling water and stir.
4. Leave to cool down a little

[bbc.co.uk/history](http://bbc.co.uk/history)

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# Activity 5



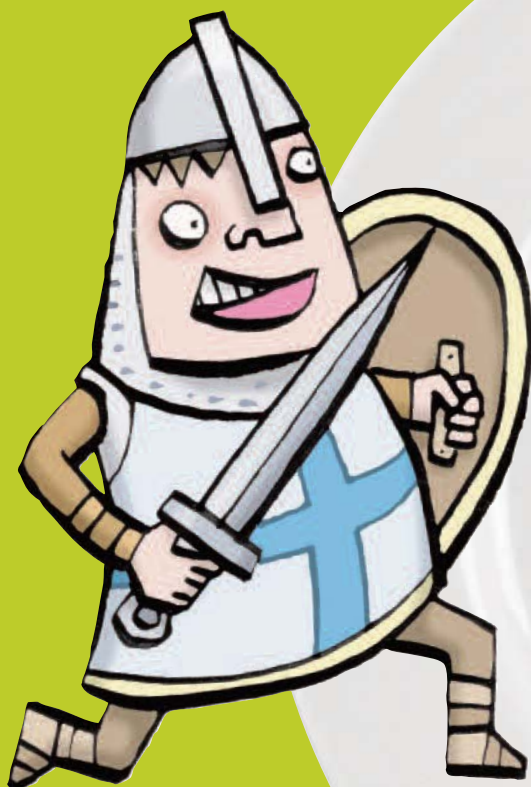
## SUNDAY ROAST – NORMAN STYLE

**Great for: Adults to take the lead, with kids helping.**

Take a look at the medieval menu on the next page. Much of it is similar to the traditional roast today. Click through to modern recipes on the BBC recipe finder and get cooking your own feast. You may want to choose just a few courses, as medieval feasters ate up to five courses in one sitting.



You've feasted like a Norman.



[bbc.co.uk/history](http://bbc.co.uk/history)

**To drink with your meal:**  
Most medieval meals would be washed down with lashings of ale, or simple water.

# Menu

## Sunday Roast – Norman style

### First course

#### Potage

A soup of meat and vegetables, boiled together to form a thick mush

#### *Ham, leek & pea soup:*

[bbc.co.uk/food/recipes/hamleekandpeasoup\\_84643](http://bbc.co.uk/food/recipes/hamleekandpeasoup_84643)

### Second course\*

#### Stuffed Peacock

A large peacock, stuffed with a goose, stuffed with a pheasant, stuffed with a hen, stuffed with a wild duck, stuffed with a partridge, stuffed with a quail, stuffed with a squab, stuffed with a snipe, stuffed with an ortolan, stuffed with a fig pecker, stuffed with an oyster and roasted over an open fire

#### *Chicken Ballotine:*

*It is tricky to find a modern recipe as complicated (or expensive) as a stuffed peacock!*

*However, you could make roast chicken with stuffing, or why not try a ballotine, a meat dish, often poultry, which is boned, stuffed, rolled and roasted?*

[bbc.co.uk/food/recipes/ballotineofchickenwi\\_93843](http://bbc.co.uk/food/recipes/ballotineofchickenwi_93843)

### Third course\*

#### Roasted Wild Boar

A whole wild boar, roasted to perfection and served with its head on and an apple in its mouth

#### *Roast pork with apple sauce:*

[bbc.co.uk/food/recipes/roastporkwithapplesa\\_84467](http://bbc.co.uk/food/recipes/roastporkwithapplesa_84467)

### Fourth course\*

#### Pears cooked in red wine

Halves of peeled pears cooked in a saucepan of red wine

#### *Pears cooked in red wine:*

[bbc.co.uk/food/recipes/pearspoachedinredwin\\_84931](http://bbc.co.uk/food/recipes/pearspoachedinredwin_84931)

### Fifth course\*

#### Selection of nuts

Sugared almonds & shelled nuts

*You can pick up selections of nuts at most supermarkets*

*\*These courses weren't available to peasants*