

The Medieval World: showing loyalty

Aims

- To help students interpret seals and badges from medieval England.
- To help students use evidence to find out about loyalty and allegiance to the king
- To encourage students to consider a range of sources

Description

- A sequence of 9 slides to explore the overall questions: 'What can medieval seals and badges show us about loyalty to the king?'
- Slides 2-9 invite students to explore different examples of seals and badges from medieval Britain focusing on the idea of allegiance.
- Slide 10 asks the students to compare the examples they have investigated.

Teaching ideas

- The presentation can be used on a whiteboard with the whole class or could be followed by individual students or groups.
- After looking at the different seals and badges, invite the students to consider to what extent the evidence shows that knights were loyal to the king. Point out that the seal is that of a man who was an opponent of King John, but it demonstrates other allegiance. While the funerary badge carries the emblem of the Order of the Garter, it was a mass-produced item and so it was not only knights who could show loyalty by wearing a badge. Ask the students to do further research into levels of loyalty to the crown among different social groups at different points in the period.
- Why would it have been important for King Edward III to ensure the loyalty and support of his nobles during the Hundred Years' War?

Notes on the pictures

Slides 2-5: seal-die from England from about AD 1213-1219.

- We know who the seal-die belonged to by the inscription and by the heraldry on his shield and trappings of his horse. Inscription (back to front on the seal) reads: +SIGLLVM: ROBERTI: FILII: WALTERI: (seal of Robert, son of Walter). The words on the seal would be printed the right way round when it was pressed into the wax.
- Robert Fitzwalter played a key role in the barons' revolt that resulted in the signing of Magna Carta (1215) by King John. The additional shield is that of Sahar de Quincy who was one of Robert's political allies and an opponent of King John.
- The dragon probably represents evil and is being ridden over by the knight.

Slides 6-7: the Dunstable Swan Jewel is a livery badge from England and dates from about AD 1400.

- It is made of white enamel fused onto a gold base and is of very high quality. The chain and crown are also made of gold.
- The most notable family to use this symbol was the De Bohun family. The swan was adopted by the House of Lancaster when King Henry IV (1399-1413) married Mary de Bohun in 1380.

The Chiddingly Boar is a cap-badge from England from the late fifteenth century.

- The wild boar was the symbol of King Richard III (1483-1485).
- Court records tell us that thousands of badges in this shape were made as souvenirs of Richard's coronation in 1483, and also for the ceremony crowning his son as Prince of Wales.

Slides 8-9: funerary badge from England about AD 1376.

- The badge was made to commemorate the death of Edward, the Black Prince, Prince of Wales (1330-1376). It is similar to the pilgrim badges that were made in Canterbury for the pilgrim shrine to Thomas Becket.
- The cheapness of the material (lead), the ease of mass production and the popularity of the Black Prince make it likely that very many people of all ranks wore these badges at the time of the Black Prince's funeral to show respect and loyalty to the king.
- The badge shows Edward, kneeling before God and Jesus. Behind him is an angel holding a helmet and above, an angel holds Edward's shield. The scene is circled by a buckled garter with the words 'hony soyt ke mal y pense' which means 'shame on him who thinks evil on it'. The garter is the emblem of the Order of the Garter, a chivalric order founded by King Edward III (1312-1377) in 1348.

Background information

- The seal-die gives us a good idea of what a knight wore in the early 13th century. Medieval knights were expected to equip themselves for war which could be very expensive.
- Cap-badges and emblems were often distributed to supporters of rich and influential families including servants. To wear such an item was declaration of allegiance to a noble family or king. Badges and emblems were usually made of cheap bronze or pewter. Two of the badges shown in the slides are made of precious metals and are very unusual. The Dunstable Swan Jewell is the only known example of a livery badge of such high quality and the Chiddingly boar is unusual because it is made of silver.
- The Order of the Garter was founded by King Edward III in 1348 to reward the knights and nobility who had fought with him at the Battle of Crécy (1346) and to strengthen their allegiances to the throne. The Order promoted the virtues of knighthood and chivalry. Chivalric orders were created throughout Europe after the end of the Crusades.