

What were towns like?

ORGANISATION OF TOWNS

At the start of the Middle Ages, towns were controlled by the nobles or the monasteries, but they gradually became more **independent**. People who lived in the towns were **free** – they did not work for a noble. Kings often gave the towns special privileges in return for their support. This meant that the towns:

- could introduce their **own taxes** on the inhabitants and on trade
- could write their **own laws**
- **governed themselves** through a **town council** – the **councillors** were important people from the city like nobles and members of the guilds



Avila's medieval town walls

LIFE IN A MEDIEVAL TOWN

Medieval towns were surrounded by **thick, high walls**, with gates that were closed at night. The **streets were narrow**, with wooden houses. Only important buildings like the cathedral and the town hall were made of stone. This meant there was a **high risk of fire**. People **threw their rubbish out of the windows** into the street, and there were **no sewers**. Domestic animals like pigs and chickens wandered in the streets.



Ugggh! Medieval towns must have smelt bad! I thought the Romans invented sewers.



They did, but people had forgotten about that. Bad smells weren't the worst problem – there was also lots of disease.



THE BLACK DEATH

In the mid-14th century, Italian sailors brought a **terrible disease** back from Asia. It quickly spread to almost all the countries in Europe. People called it the **Black Death**, because people with the disease got black marks on their skin. Then they got a **fever**, and most of them **died**.

The disease was **spread by rats**, but people didn't realise this. They thought it was a punishment from God.



In ten years, **the Black Death killed about a third of the people in Europe**. It killed whole families, and even whole villages.

The **disease spread most quickly in the towns**, where there were many people living close together and hygiene was poor. People didn't know how to treat the disease or how to stop it spreading.

There were many more (smaller) outbreaks of the disease over the next 200 years.

When the **population fell**, wealth was shared between fewer people, so **some people got richer**. There were also **far fewer workers**, so they demanded **higher wages**. As the nobles didn't want to pay more, this led to **conflicts between the nobles and the workers**.

Questions

1 5

4. Which of these things were **factors that led to the Black Death** and which were **consequences** of the disease?
- a) people got a fever and died
 - b) there were lots of rats
 - c) the population fell
 - d) people lived very close together
 - e) hygiene was poor
 - f) some people got richer
 - g) workers demanded higher wages
 - h) sailors brought the disease back from Asia

Exercise 1

1 5 7 8

Work in pairs. Use the factors and consequences a-h in Question 4 above to **talk about the Black Death**.

Use **linking words and phrases** like "so" and "which meant that".

Here are some examples:

*Hygiene was poor, **so** the disease spread quickly.*

*The population fell, **which meant that** some people got richer.*