23 ‘Knights were Born to Fight’

The first knights were just servants on horseback. That is what the word ‘knight’ means. But soon the knights came to be landowners themselves. Their land was given as a reward for fighting in the king’s army.

In return for the land, a knight had to find men to fight for the king. And he had to spend forty days himself serving in the king’s army. He had to bring his own horse and weapons.

His duty was to fight his lord’s enemies. Not that he expected to die. If he was captured, his family or villagers would pay money to get him freed. This was called a ransom.

The knight was a trained fighter. As a page and as a squire, he had been prepared for a life spent fighting. His problem was to find something to do when there was no fighting to be done. It could get very dull living in a cold, damp castle. So, when there weren’t any wars, the knights started a small one of their own.

They called it a tournament. It was just like a real battle, except that only blunt weapons were used. The knights did not try to kill each other, but these war games were dangerous. At one German tournament, sixty knights were killed. Many were trampled to death.

So the mock battles gave way to a new sport called jousting. In a joust, two knights rode straight at each other. Each held a lance which was about three metres long. The lance was used to try and knock the other knight off his horse.

This was a task needing great skill. If you were clever at it, you could make a good living at jousting. Any knight who was knocked off his horse had to give up his horse and armour. And he paid a ransom to the winner.

However, it was a dangerous sport so new rules were introduced to make it safer. A high fence was built to protect people who came to watch. A rail was put up to stop the knights actually riding into each other.

The great age of the knights was at the time of the Crusades. By the 14th century, many knights were no longer fighting out of duty. A new breed of knights had appeared. They would fight for anyone, if the pay was good.

Their aim was to make a living from ransom money and from theft. These armed thugs were very different from our modern idea of the brave and noble medieval knight.

Once a knight put on his armour, you could not tell who he was. So each knight had his own coat of arms which he wore on his shield and on his clothing.

The design of the shield could use up to five colours. They were purple, red, blue, black and green. There were also gold and silver, which were called ‘metals’. There was a simple basic rule. You could not put a metal on a metal, or a colour on a colour. You could have:

- Red, gold, silver, blue, brown

But not:

- Gold, silver, gold, blue

Here are some of the basic shapes used on shields:

- These are some of the designs which people had on their shields. (Look for others in your library.)

1. Write one sentence about each of the words in the word box.
2. Describe in detail the tournament scene in the picture on page 78.
3. Read the column on the right and design a new coat of arms for your school. Make sure that it does not break the basic rule. When you have drawn it, make a large painting of it. If these are all displayed in your classroom, you could hold a vote on which is best.

4. This is a coat of arms of a well-known organisation which still exists today. Draw it in your book and find out the name of the people who wear it. Then, use your library to find out more about how this organisation started. A book on the Crusades would help you.
The Knights Go to War: The Hundred Years War

The English won some dazzling victories at the beginning. Edward himself led the English to win a battle at Crécy in 1346. His son, the Black Prince, won a fine victory at Poitiers in 1356. He even captured the French King.

But a country must do more than win a few great battles if it is to win a war. It must hold on to the land it has won. This was what the English could not do.

By this time, gunpowder had been discovered. Cannon had been invented. The French used both to capture English castles in France.

Defending them became very expensive for the English. Extra taxes had to be introduced. One of these was the tax which helped to start the Peasants' Revolt.

As the war dragged on, it got more brutal. On each side, ruthless professional soldiers formed themselves into 'companies'. These men made their living by robbery and violence.

They stole food and raided houses for valuables. It did not matter to them whether the countries were officially at war or not.

After one interval of nearly twenty years, Henry V began the war again. In 1415, he won a great victory at Agincourt and it seemed as if he was close to success. In 1420, the French accepted him as heir to the French throne. He even married a French princess.

In 1337, war had broken out between France and England. There was a number of reasons why fighting started. One of them was very simple. Some of France was ruled by the French; some was ruled by the English. Each side also wanted the land owned by the enemy. And they went to war to get it.

The King of England at the time was Edward III. His mother was a French princess, so he claimed that he had a right to be King of France. The French disagreed. The English merchants supported Edward III. They were worried about their wool and wine trade with France.

In 1340, they began fighting. They continued fighting, off and on, until 1453. So the wars have become known as The Hundred Years War.

English lands in France at the start of the wars.

In 1337, war had broken out between France and England. There was a number of reasons why fighting started. One of them was very simple. Some of France was ruled by the French; some was ruled by the English. Each side also wanted the land owned by the enemy. And they went to war to get it.

The King of England at the time was Edward III. His mother was a French princess, so he claimed that he had a right to be King of France. The French disagreed. The English merchants supported Edward III. They were worried about their wool and wine trade with France.

In 1340, they began fighting. They continued fighting, off and on, until 1453. So the wars have become known as The Hundred Years War.

In 1337, war had broken out between France and England. There was a number of reasons why fighting started. One of them was very simple. Some of France was ruled by the French; some was ruled by the English. Each side also wanted the land owned by the enemy. And they went to war to get it.

The King of England at the time was Edward III. His mother was a French princess, so he claimed that he had a right to be King of France. The French disagreed. The English merchants supported Edward III. They were worried about their wool and wine trade with France.

In 1340, they began fighting. They continued fighting, off and on, until 1453. So the wars have become known as The Hundred Years War.

In 1337, war had broken out between France and England. There was a number of reasons why fighting started. One of them was very simple. Some of France was ruled by the French; some was ruled by the English. Each side also wanted the land owned by the enemy. And they went to war to get it.

The King of England at the time was Edward III. His mother was a French princess, so he claimed that he had a right to be King of France. The French disagreed. The English merchants supported Edward III. They were worried about their wool and wine trade with France.

In 1340, they began fighting. They continued fighting, off and on, until 1453. So the wars have become known as The Hundred Years War.