

Life in Fifteenth-Century England

Imagine living in England more than five hundred years ago, in the late 1400s. For many, daily life was a struggle. In the city of London, most people lived inside the city walls, which created a high population density. Filth and overcrowding made London an ideal breeding ground for diseases such as the plague, which resurfaced throughout the century.

The experience of living in London differed dramatically depending on one's wealth. The wealthy lived in large, extravagant homes and followed the latest fashions, whereas the poor lived a life of hardship where survival was a daily struggle. Children often began working as young as seven, either with their parents or as servants in wealthier households.

During this time, kings and nobles held great power, and battles for the throne were common. One of the most famous struggles in English history happened during the short reign of King Edward V.

The Mystery of Edward V

Edward V was only twelve years old when his father, King Edward IV, died in 1483. Because Edward was so young, he needed an adult to help him rule until he came of age. That person was supposed to be his uncle, Richard, Duke of Gloucester. Richard promised to protect Edward and his younger brother, Richard, Duke of York. But many historians believe that he had a different plan.

Richard of Gloucester wanted the throne for himself. He claimed that his nephews were not the rightful heirs and had them placed in the Tower of London, supposedly for their safety. Soon after, the boys disappeared. No one knows exactly what happened to them, but many believe Richard had them killed so that he could become king. He did indeed take the crown, ruling as King Richard III.

This mystery—the fate of the two young princes—has fascinated people for centuries. Some think Richard was guilty, whereas others believe that he was blamed unfairly. Even today, historians continue to search for answers.

The Tower of London: A Fortress of Secrets

The Tower of London is one of the most famous landmarks in England. It has stood on the banks of the River Thames for nearly one thousand years. Built by William the Conqueror in 1078, the Tower was first designed as a fortress to protect London from invaders. Its tall stone walls and thick defenses made it a powerful symbol of the king's authority. Over time, however, the Tower became much more than just a castle.

The Tower of London has served many purposes throughout history. It has been a royal palace, a prison, a treasury, and even a zoo that kept exotic animals such as lions and elephants. Perhaps its most mysterious and frightening role was as a prison for those who opposed the king. Important figures—nobles, soldiers, even queens—were locked inside its walls. Some prisoners were later executed, often on nearby Tower Hill. Because of this dark past, the Tower earned a reputation as a place of fear.

Despite its grim reputation, the Tower of London is also a place of great treasure. The British Crown Jewels—glittering crowns, swords, and scepters used in royal ceremonies—are kept there under heavy guard. Today, the Tower is one of London's most visited tourist sites, drawing people from all over the world who want to explore its history and mysteries.

When you read *Sent* by Margaret Peterson Haddix, you will notice how this time period comes to life. The story takes you into the dangerous world of fifteenth-century England, where family loyalty, power, and survival were at the center of everyone's lives. It also gives you a chance to imagine what it might have been like for Edward V and his brother to be held inside this massive fortress, where danger and secrets were always just around the corner.

- Look at the Map of the Tower of London drawn in 1597.
- Take a virtual field trip to the Tower of London (optional). Visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUEnhDBJCqw>.