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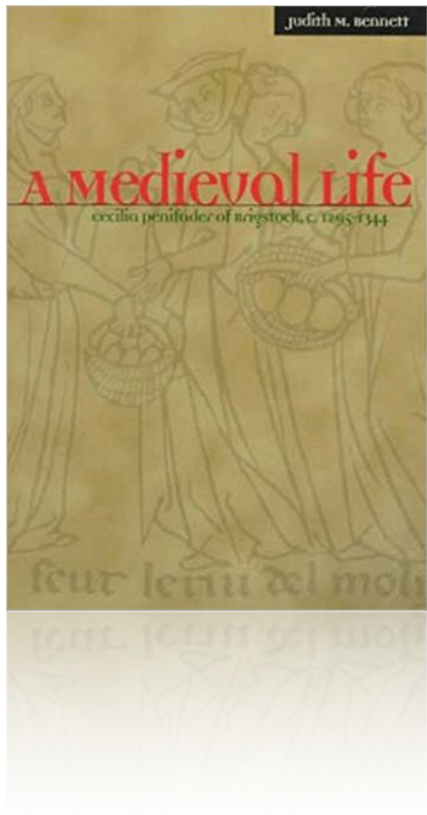
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# A MEDIEVAL LIFE

*Cecilia Penifader of Brigstock, c. 1295-1344*

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*A Medieval Life: Cecilia Penifader of Brigstock.*

Judith M. Bennett.

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# **A MEDIEVAL LIFE**

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# NOTES

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## *Chapter 1 - Introduction*

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Most people not knights, kings, churchmen, even though we immediately imagine them. Most were peasants, and this book tells of one: Cecilia Penifader. Likely born around 1297. Peasants just beginning to pass surnames. Name from penny-father (perhaps a bit more well off for a peasant). Better conditions and more siblings. Acquired land at Brigstock. Cissa. Got into trouble sometimes. Never married. No diaries, letters, or personal writings. Most peasants were illiterate, even those few were mostly men. Robert Grosseteste is an exceptional case. Therefore, we know things indirectly. Three orders.

### **Manors and Manorial Records**

Courtly songs, sarcastic proverbs, nasty jokes, and pious sermons. *Pastourelles* (songs of how easy a knight could have sex or rape a peasant woman). Clergy joked at their foolishness. Negative attitudes.

Manorialism, peasants supporting a landowning elite. Working lives and financial needs. Lord (*dominus*) and Lady (*domina*), land for their direct use: *demesne*. Early Middle Ages. Originally slave-system. Moved to free-peasants and serfs, determined at birth. Half and half. Profit from crops, goods, and rents. Also demesne crops, extra rents, and manorial court fees. Fines to use manorial facilities (mill, ovens, etc.). Fines when married, traveled, and even in death.

Little other choice. Elites controlled the other orders. Warrior elite — feudalism. Wield power efficiently, but also manage them efficiently. Most developed record keeping for manors in England. Stewards, bailiffs, reeves, clerks, etc. keeping records. *Custumals* — records of manorial customs. Rentals and surveys. Court rolls — a lot for Brigstock.

Elites' food produced by peasants. their money from rents. King had some right over all peasants, even in manors he did not own. Edward I, II, III heavily relied on peasants for money, men, and food for wars. Clergy needed them too, tithes. Ecclesiastical courts. Their labor was important to those writing about them. No specialists needed for their manorial courts. Gathered together at their local

church. Eventually peasants used these courts for their own purposes. Peasant traditions could actually override decisions. Essentially running their community themselves.

### **Brigstock and Cecilia Penifader**

Tremendous regional variation. Brigstock of England does not represent The Medieval Manor. Even unique to England. Therefore, even Cecilia does not represent the average. No single person ever could. She is well-documented. Case study, not universal.

Used to be in a forest and used for hunting. Hunting lodge. Could use the forest in some way, but not to hunt. diverse and flexible economy. Mostly farmed and raised livestock, but some peasants crafted. Three institutions: village, manor, and parish. Village was oldest — Roman activity from Anglo-Saxon settlement. Middle Ages formed a nucleated village. Various types of settlement. Manor was bigger than the village. Parish as well. St. Andrew. Pre-Christian customs and practice mixed within. These three did not neatly coincide. Different purposes and different logic.

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### *Chapter 2: The World Around Her*

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1316, Cecilia's first mentioning in court record. Parents: Robert and Alice. Alice bore 8 children in 20 years, which is pretty impressive for a peasant woman. They did know ways to prevent births too. Most of her children grew to a full age, which is atypical. Most cases only half do.

### **House and Farmyard**

Cecilia was 7 of 8, 3 brothers and 5 sisters. Small house, maybe large roof and some windows. Rubble for foundations, weak walls, thatch roofs. One floor, packed dirt perhaps covered with straw. Little else, maybe benches and some chests. simple diet (mid-page 18). Essentials. Most farmyard behind the house. A social place, for fun and games. Also storage. Place for work — women and children

(mid-page 19). Not the best hygiene. Baths were bad. Dung heap. Simple clothing (page 20).

### **Arable, Pasture, Stream, and Forest**

Diverse community. Royal hunting lodge in Brigstock (William II and Henry I). Kept in good repair. Nucleated, close together homes in the middle. Economy of makeshifts — ready for anything. Most reliable were arable lands and pastures. Open fields. Lands spread all over the manor. Strip farming (spread out land not always together). Spread risk. Sharing resources. Easier to divide for children. Open fields not fenced, but strips were (usually stones). Cooperation. Three-field system (High Middle Ages). Two-field system. Fallowing. Common lands — for animals and grazing (certain number per household). Arable land important and closely regulated. Only one-fourth of the manor. Most else was for pastures. Many uses for animals (mid-page 23). Mixed farming — crops and animals, support one another. Newsets or assarts. Family lands. Newly cultivated lands, created when a family cleared land. Harper's Brook — fish, washing, playing, but also drowning. Lore around forests. Used often. Could not hunt though.

### **The Wider World**

Brigstock, Stanion, and more. People passing through, such as pilgrims, knights, and more. Many came and stayed. Spreading of ideas and culture. Most peasants went about 15 miles radius around their village. Various markets nearby. Her brother left to get educated, but she didn't. Nonetheless, she met many people. Significant crimes tried outside of the village (death or rape). Exchequer, royal financier, taxes. Met foreigners. Multilingual culture.

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### *Chapter 3: Lords, Ladies, and Peasants*

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Eleanor of Castile procession — Geddington (nearby). Eleanor Cross. Revered royalty. Edward I was particularly respected. Brigstock's manorial lord, a royal manor. Usually for queen's dowery. Transferred a lot. Leased out

management. Manor most removed institution. Extraneous entity. Mainly for profit. 41 pounds and 10 shillings a year of profit (6500 days of work for peasants).

### **Seigniorial Powers**

Remarkably unencumbered by manorialism (some removed from the system). Never saw owners. Even able to manage things on their own mostly. Never bowed before any lord of Brigstock. Most lived in much closer proximity, especially if *Gentry* (knights). Usually very active and treated as lords. Most had more supervision and direct administration. Institutions could hold manors. Clerical literacy was often regarded as Seigniorial authority — parchment and ink, very detailed. Again, Brigstock not like this.

Serfs different from free in three major ways:  tied to land  (could not marry outside of manor without permission, annual fee —  *chevage*  — to live off manor),  rent in labor  (week-work on demesne land, boon-works — special work on demesne lands during harvest, or other petty tasks), and various fees (their serfs their mills,  *leyrwite*  — fee for sex before marriage,  *merchet*  — fee to marry,  *heriot*  — valuable animal paid when tenant dies, or  *tallage*  — the right to levy taxes on serfs). Nothing was really their own. Petty work kept them from personal work. Aggressively sought freedom. Dangerous to make distinctions. Free had obligations as well. Serfs only did what parent's did, no more. Protected by rules. Regularly intermarried. Weak social meaning for them.

Brigstock part of the  ancient demesne  — William the Conqueror. Special legal status. Did not have to pay tolls or customs in England, not obligated to attend county courts, royal writs to court (power of king in disputes). Leasing of manor by tenants in Brigstock. Still paid rents and everything else — to pay the lease now. Loved this. Dignity and economic relief. Not profit for profit's sake, but to pay the lease. Could relax a bit after making money for the lease. Profit-taking was the heart of the manorial system. Dependency and dominion all played a role in gaining profit.

## **Peasants and their “Social Betters”**

Tenants typically came up short in their obligations. If anything, they were done with little care or effort. Often resisted these demands outright. New turn after Black Death — full-scale revolts. Won in long run. Anger toward manorial lords, not the king. Their resistance slowly brought change. Yet, manorial power was only one aspect by which peasants were beneath. Three orders. Either way, peasants fared poorly. Peasant women as “natural prey” for elite men. Rape cases rarely prosecuted. Pious yet never found careers in the Church. Clever, but no education. Pitied, but rarely appreciated. Cecilia was in a well-off position. Church to manage morality and tithes, King of profits and secular crimes, and Knights the same.

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### *Chapter 4: Parish, Belief, Ritual*

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Very different atmosphere surrounding St. Andrew Church. Crowded, busy, darker, etc. Yet, more different was her belief and ritual from today. Only knew Catholic Church. Even different from Roman Catholicism (two reforms, Trent and Vatican II). Her world was rather homogenous — facts of life to her. Folk practices, but under the “roof” of Christianity. Mixed heavily with natural world. Understanding through listening and observing, not reading. Mother played important role for that.

### **Peasant Piety**

Peasants very devoted to traditional beliefs, yet still very Christian. Sometimes even encourage (familiarity). Only aristocrats could study and be pious independently. Career in the Church not often available to them. At best a deacon, priest, friar, or monk — but rarely, and usually boys if so. A pious girl could only aim for the regular clergy, or *regula* — monastic life. But these required dowries. More monks than nuns. Sometimes lay sisters, doing chores and helping nuns. Anchor-hold, anchorites, anchoress.

## The Parish and its Clergy

Long buildings, with a *chancel* (for mass — east) and *nave* (for parishioners—west). Oriented towards east (Jerusalem), center of the medieval world. People of Brigstock carved onto the church. Sexes did not mingle in Church. Stood or squatted. Medieval paintings. Last Judgement, Mary, Last Supper, Crucifixion, St. Christopher, St. Catherine, St. Margaret of Antioch. Parish priest had to keep the chancel repaired. The rest the parishioners. Money-raising festivals. Appointment of parish priest was complicated business. *Advowson*, control of appointment, not always local. Usually, in such cases, the family who built the church did this — usually the lords or ladies. Other complications arise when gifting parishes — i.e. and Abbey afar as *rector* (parish priest) of Brigstock. A *vicar*, an appointed parish priest, would solve this. Used economically.

These vicar were still assisted by others — a deacon or two and probably a parish clerk. Deacons assisted parish priests, helped mass, read scriptures, and instructed parishioners. Mainly did documents. Bother William referred to as *Magister* (Master), oddly so, but likely due to his education level. He was still not much different though, still worked like everyone else. Served as a juror, or *aletaster*, in manorial court. Still a peasant, but also with clerical status. Often minimally trained, but still more so than the rest. William did not marry. Many did anyway. He did have a bastard son though, apparently. Alice of Kingsthorpe, “priest concubine.” Vulnerable to criticism. His family generally left alone though. John, his son, well respected among Penifaders. Special legal status. Crimes in ecclesiastical courts. Becket vs. Henry II. Sacerdotal powers in Brigstock. Critical intermediary for people. His words powerful.

Daily mass, sermons four times a year, fourteen points of creed, Ten Commandments, seven sacraments, and seven deadly sins. Confessions, communion, baptism of the young, marriages, and bury the dead. But, such tasks were really up to the vicar and not always checked. Vicar managed *glebe*, parish lands for his use, which was usually scattered. Parishioners paid *oblations* for priestly services. Voluntarily paid, but expected. Tithes were the required payments. *Mortuaries*, unpaid tithes of the dead, payment of family after a death. Assistants made money in various other ways.

Churches were familiar, comfortable gathering places. Lots of chatter and not always enough religious focus. Plenty of gossip. Holy but common space.

### **The Ritual Year**

No clear beginning or end. For clerics, the year changed on March 25th. Clerks and accountants, September 29th. Yet, year punctuated by many holidays. Mostly days of rest, and a hundred days worth out of their year too, generally scattered. Two primary axes: Jesus' life and Saints. For Brigstock, namely St. Peter (June 29th) and St. Andrew (November 30th). For Cecilia, St. Cecilia (November 22nd).

Special festivity for christmas. Fasted four weeks prior (Advent). Wealthy opened houses at christmas. Twelve festive days. In Brigstock, local talent. Twelve days ended on January 6th — Epiphany service (Magi).

Purification of the Virgin, February 2nd. New mothers purified in a bath several weeks after giving birth. *Churchings* (thanking god for safe delivery). Sometimes these were very festive. An especially important day for mother in Brigstock. Winter to Spring. Candlemas. Dark to Light. Candles to ward off demons. Feasting.

Easter season. Easter the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox (March 22nd — April 25th). Shrovetide, feast before Lent. Holy week at end. Rather grave. Return to normal and feasting on Easter.

May Day (important to young), maypole, dancing, feasting. Ascension, Rogation Days beforehand — Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday). Boys walk boundaries of parish, beaten at times to remembered boundaries. Whitsun (Pentecost — Holy Ghost's descent). St. John's Eve (June 24th), medieval people merged this with midsummer. Chase away dark with fire. Time between midsummer and Advent likely busiest in Brigstock. Big agricultural needs. All Saints (November 1st), beginning of winter. Remembering the human dead.

Different calendar than today. Less connected with nature and distant. Ritual year much more important than it is today.

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## *Chapter 5: Changing Times*

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As Cecilia reach adulthood, famine shattered her world. 1315-1322 were bad years. Indirect suggestions. Many petty crimes that indicate struggle. Cecilia lost her parents during this time.

### **The Great Famine, 1325-22**

Worst famine Europe had ever seen or has had since. Bad weather pattern — much rain and cold winters. Starvation from poor crop yields. Livestock as well. Better off than townspeople, who could not find food easily. Prices very high. Foraged for food. 10% of population likely died during this famine, mostly in the town and from disease. People somewhat turn against one another. Less charity. Some used shortcomings as opportunities for gain (Cecilia did, buying properties). Impoverished strangers.

### **The Wrath of God?**

Prayed with new vigor through bad times. Archbishop of Canterbury ordered the clergy to respond immediately, hoping to appease God before trouble begins. Overpopulated countryside from population growth. Land yielding less food. More land (not as arable), less food. Lower wages, higher rents. Economy stopped growing, population started falling. Elite forced out money from tenants when they needed it. Elite took advantage of peasants to get by, at the peasantry's expense of course. King launched military campaigns on top of this, taxing heavily to pay for it all. Feeding armies took away from countryside as well, demanding food from starving subjects.

### **The Aftermath of the Great Famine**

Cecilia now about 25, holding new lands and would soon purchase more. New opportunity afterwards. Weather still bad. Less trust in weather and less trust in neighbors. She had to be more cautious and guard her land. Not as safe. Economy still fragile, and crops still not up to par. Taxes yet again due to war (Hundred Years War, Eddy III).

## **The Black Death**

Likely hit Brigstock in 1349. Old traditions were less secure, people we not confident in them, demanding “reform.” Left behind a devastated and empty landscape (of people). Low population and plentiful lands. Social change came, slowly though. Not all for the better (page 71). Cecilia never experienced any of this hardship or change. It is possible that the famine prior had a lot to do with the disasters of the Black Death (low-page 71). A community already weakened.

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## *Chapter 6: Kin and Household*

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Young: parents and siblings. Adulthood changes this straightforwardness. Marriage would have added in-laws and husband to the mix. Cecilia probably did not live with kin as much after her parents died. Extended kinship. Always important, but constantly changing. Household (*familia, familie*) was important to her as well, kin or not. Basic social organization. Group of people living, working, and eating together = household. Everything, taxes, tithes, etc., based on households, not kin. Head of household (usually husband or male). Shared everything, the intimacy of every-day life.

### **Kin and Household in Childhood**

For Cecilia, twice usual size. Otherwise typical. Nuclear family is most common (sometime sStem family households — with grandparents too). Perhaps had servants, not usually in court record. Options for help: hire or servant (provide food and lodging for a year rather than money). Servants were not uncommon. Poorer houses sent children to work as servants. Shared household life. Inheritance and kinship main dividers. These gaps could be small though. Size and shape of household varied with time, expanding and contracting.

Parents beat children when bad and put them to work at early ages. It is hard to envision modern perceptions of a loving household. Yet, to survive past infancy meant to be cared for with diligence. Closely watched even as a toddler. Unwatched children tended to find death in unfortunate ways. Adults were beaten as well. Many methods for this (page 78). Work was for family, not sweatshops. Work came

with song and merriment. Work was living. Parental love found in their attempts to provide futures for their children — inheritance. Women only inherited if they had no brothers. Parents often took great care in making sure that those who didn't inherit still had things well (top-page 79).

### **Kin and Household in Adulthood**

Cecilia lived as a single-woman. She was well off, having been left with properties. She even continued to acquire land. Bought property near kin. Kin helped her in court. Bilateral kinship in practice. She could pick and choose. A web of strong and weak strands. As a single-woman, kin was fairly significant and helpful. Single-women tended to live alone in small houses. If not, then with other single-women. Brother Robert and Cecilia eventually join lands. Neither of them married. Survivor to enjoy the lands.

Not being married did not mean they were celibate. Robert and William had children nonetheless. Not uncommon though, generally. If married, she would have experienced a different household — such as recreating the childhood household. Different uses of kinship. Some marriages loving, some terrible. Marriage was not always a couples decision alone. Circumstances can spark marriage, such as available land. A Good marriage needed parental consent as well. It also required the acquiescence of friends and neighbors. Also, the Church must approve. Even the manorial lord or lady somewhat needed to consent for a full “good” marriage. Unions in private often discouraged, but happened and could not be dissolved.

### **Kinship and Inheritance**

Cecilia picked her siblings' children rather than her most direct heir. She choose the less favorable situations, at least those that were not often chosen (illegitimates, girls, etc.). Her efforts fail though. Juries met to determine “proper” procedure of inheritance. Lease declared invalid and land moved to preferred heir. She was not able to leave her house, and so it was invalid because she was too near death. Tie between blood and land still strongest, in the end.

## *Chapter 7: An Economy of Makeshifts*

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Parents probably aided her in acquiring lands. New responsibilities to attend courts and cooperate with shared lands. Although better off and with more land and goods, she still had to juggle many things and make ends meet however possible.

### **The Household Economy**

Search for labor help when unmarried. More than she could do on her own. Land required constant attention. Animals required a lot of attention. Had to make use of common lands. Also processing labors. Typically divided these tasks. Sometimes based on gender, but not strictly so. Age and ability were other factors. Some tasks required special skills. Married life helped this a lot. Interdependent work. Married couples had many alternatives: children, servants, or hire. Strongest motivation for remarriage was economic. Without marriage, they relied on kin and purchased aid.

### **The Labor Market**

Extra hand sin one house to another with too few hands. Three levels: unskilled (set wage), skilled (specific tasks), and servant (year-long). She probably did “mens” work anyway, because it was flexible and had to be done. Or employed. Local and traveling. She could always find someone. Servants for more stable help. For Cecilia only female servants.

### **The Commodity Market**

Plenty of goods to buy from neighbors. Both sold and bought. Produced what they consumed. Also for sale. Skilled products could only be bought (smith-related). Sometimes bought what they could produce. Ale as important as bread in medieval diet. Part of daily diet, different role. A lot of labor in making ale. Typically purchased ale then to avoid all that labor. It went sour quickly, so plenty sold ale they made. Not consistent sales. Alternating. Market worked reciprocally: bought and sold at same time. Simple local exchange could end up international. Importance of cash (to pay rents). Not self-sufficient nor isolated.

## **The Land Market**

Crucial aspect. Well off household have 30 or more acres. Poor with 7 and a half or less. Yet, management was the true key to prosperity. Plenty of land transfers done at courts. Bought and sold land. Could lease land as well. Minor landowners. Exploitation still a thing. Inflexible resource in some ways, but surprisingly could do much with it as well. Varied usage. Although better off, she still suffered like the rest. Most had too little for flexibility. Makeshift economy less pleasant for those with less variety to really upon.

### *Chapter 8: Community*

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Had to obtain permission to enter manor. Must establish self as law-abiding. *Tithing* — peacekeeping group (10 or more men), led by a *tithingmen*. Liable for one another. *View of Frankpledge*, special court that made sure men were in tithings and punishments. Collective effort. No police force. Household heads were tithingmen. Community of men. Strong sense of cooperation and community. A powerful idea.

### **Managing the Community**

All men over 12 years in tithings, women and children under household head's responsibility. Problems inevitably arose. Peace often broken, but often maintained. *Bailiff*, chief officer of the manor. Ensured manor ran smoothly and made expected profits. Literate and skilled in law and business. Needed for transferring land. A reminded that the manor owned the land, even if peasants bought and sold it. Everyone expected to obey. Other officers elected by the tenants. Most important was the *reeve*, managing day-to-day business of the manor, usually two of them for Brigstock. The reeve supervised the *haywards*, who kept track of fields and flocks. Together, they made sure land was honestly used.

*Jurors*, who reported wrongdoings and judged cases. Helped resolve arguments and disputes. Informal arbitration. Local men, local lore, local doings. *Aletasters* supervised the brewers, checking quality and prices. Usually two of them for Brigstock. *Affeerors* determined the prices for each action or offense. This was flexible and up to them. All officers were men and prosperous. *Electi sunt*, yet by small amount. Bailiffs only ones to be directly paid. Why serve? Indirect profits.

Serious matters before king's justice. Raise a hue (shout loudly) if seeing a crime. Customs and by-laws. Traditions and customs guided all.

### **Friends and Neighbors**

Knew everyone. To a peasant, there was much variety among them. Some more prosperous, with nearly 30 acres or more of land. Such as Cecilia. One in four families. Less land usually meant other trades or crafts. Definitely not a stagnant life between peasants. More prosperous peasants had more say in how the community ran. Larger land, larger families, longer lives. Not guaranteed though. Prosperity was not permanent for certain families. It changed often.

### **A Loss of Community Spirit?**

Not homogeneous. Cecilia enjoyed a more prosperous life than other around her, although a peasant. They worked together, but were also divided by their prosperities. Differences cause resentment. Community crossed many different jurisdictions — complicated sense. Extra stresses after Black Death. Community was never free from conflict though. Powerful in theory, yet fractured in reality.

### *Chapter 9: Women and Men*

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*Chapter 10: Medieval Peasants, Modern People*

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