

Did you know?

- The plague was caused by *Yersinia pestis*, a bacterium carried by fleas living mainly on rats and other rodents that were common in medieval houses. Yuck!
- Medieval doctors believed the plague had several causes. Many thought it was a punishment from God for the sins of the people.
- Many doctors believed that bad smells could drive out the plague. That's why treatment for the disease included dung and urine. These 'treatments' would probably have spread the plague even faster!
- The children's rhyme *Ring a Ring o' Roses* is associated with the plague. The 'ring of roses' is said to refer to the red, rosy rings that formed around the infected sores. The 'pocket full of posies' indicates the sweet-smelling bunches (or posies) of herbs people kept in their pockets to ward off the disease.
- In 2009, Professor Malcolm Casadaban, molecular geneticist and plague researcher, died after accidentally coming into contact with the deadly bacteria in his laboratory.
- The flea might be small, but it has a BIG family. There are more than 2000 different species of flea around the world.
- One of Britain's oldest games can trace its origins to the flea. In approximately 15 different European languages, the word 'tiddlywinks' translates as 'the game of the flea'.
- A mating pair of rats can have five litters of 7–15 pups in a year, and the pups themselves can reproduce from the age of five weeks. In theory, a single pair of rats could, therefore, produce hundreds of thousands of descendants in just one year!
- Rats have a great memory. Once they learn a route, they never forget it.
- At the age of 14, a page became a squire – a knight's apprentice. As squires, boys trained constantly, to condition their bodies and perfect their weaponry skills. Many boys were dismissed during the squire stage because the training was so difficult.
- The word 'chivalry' is a knightly term, used to describe their strict code of honour, virtue and courteous behaviour. It comes from the word 'chevalier', which is French for 'knight'.
- Knights are still appointed today by the Queen! Sir Paul McCartney, Dame Judi Dench, Sir Elton John, and Sir Anthony Hopkins are all modern-day knights (they don't usually wear armour though!)
- Geoffrey Chaucer is also known as the 'Father of English Literature'.
- The Hundred Years' War actually lasted 116 years.