The Life of A Medieval Squire

During the Middle Ages, knights were the ultimate warriors, serving their lords with unwavering loyalty. The path to knighthood was highly coveted, with young boys dedicating over a decade to rigorous training, starting as pages and progressing to become squires. As squires, they not only assisted knights but also delved deep into the intricacies of knighthood. Clad in comfortable tunics bearing the distinctive livery of their knights, these young squires eagerly awaited their twenty-first year, when they would undergo the revered dubbing ceremony to officially become knights themselves.

Medieval Training Programs

The Middle Ages occurred approximately between 500 CE and 1500 CE in Europe.

Medieval times ran on the principle of feudalism. People were given land in return for labor and military support. The sovereign provided some soldiers with an elite status known as knighthood. Knighthood was an attractive position. It was a status many sought out.

People in medieval times spent many years training to be given the privilege of roles such as becoming established as master craftsmen. They served years as an apprentice, providing support (grunt work) and obtaining training.

Pages and squires were the two stages of apprenticeship in becoming a knight.

How Did You Become A Squire?

A boy would be taught at home until they were seven.

His family would send a boy to live with a knight and his family at age seven. The boys would be servants, or pages, to the knight. Pages had a range of tasks: running messages, cleaning clothing and weapons, and learning the basics of combat. Pages served for seven years.

Pages were usually the children of nobility. Others also sometimes were deemed to have the potential to be a page. It was a way to move up in the world. Girls could not be pages.

Knight’s Assistant

A page was considered a boy. After seven years of being a page, you became a squire. You were ready to be a man. A squire was a knight’s assistant. The word “squire” means “shield barrier.”

The Duties of A Squire

A squire had a diverse range of duties. A knight expected his squires to look after his weapons, take care of his horse, help him dress for battle, carry his flag, and provide any other assistance required. An assistant today knows their job description could cover a range of bases. A squire also had to be ready to satisfy the whims of his knight.
A significant role for squires was to serve knights in battle. A squire watched the baggage and horses. If a knight died, the squire had to remove him from the battlefield.

**Training To Be A Knight**

A squire also helped train and oversee the pages. Meanwhile, a squire obtained the training necessary to be a knight. A squire learned how to use weapons and ride a horse. They needed to be comfortable in the middle of battle. A squire was brave, strong, and trustworthy.

Squires also learned **chivalry**, the rules necessary to be a cultured gentlemen knight. Squires needed to learn reading and writing (in Latin and French), music, dancing, and good manners.

**Where Did A Squire Sleep?**

A knight lived in a castle or manor house. The knight’s family often had a personal bed chamber.

Squires had much more humble sleeping arrangements. Squires often slept outside the knight’s chamber, ready on a moment’s notice if necessary.

Other places squires slept would be towers, lower levels (basement), tables or benches, lean-to buildings, kitchens, and one big great hall with the other staff members.

**What Did A Squire Wear?**

Squires wore clothing with **livery**, distinctive colors, heraldic symbols, and coats of arms of their knights. Livery helped identify their allegiances, including at tournaments and battles.

Their clothes were simple and practical. Squires wore a tunic that covered their upper body and leggings and boots for the lower body. They were suitable for the physical duties of a squire.

Squires also wore weapons such as swords and shields.

**Becoming A Knight**

A squire spent about seven years being a knight’s assistant.

A squire became a knight in a **dubbing ceremony**. He would kneel at the feet of a lord or king, who would “dub” him on the shoulder with a sword. The new knight would take an oath to honor his lord and the church. He would get the knightly symbols (sword and spurs).

A squire became a knight at twenty-one. A squire might become a knight beforehand as a reward for bravery on a battlefield or for defending his knight’s castle.
Not all squires became knights, including those who could not afford a knight’s equipment, which was very expensive. Geoffrey Chaucer, a famous chronicler of medieval times, is an example of a squire who never became a knight. He did write *A Knight’s Tale*, a satire of a knight’s life.

**What About Girls?**!

Women had diverse roles in medieval times. They had fundamental roles at home and in business. Nonetheless, the Middle Ages were not known for their feminist values.

Being a knight was a military position. Women have served in military roles since ancient times in many cultures. Nonetheless, the medieval times were not a time for women soldiers.

Knights had other public duties, including serving local police functions. They also had special privileges and land grants. When a male knight died, wives and daughters sometimes inherited these duties and privileges. Female knights in England were “Lady” or “Dame” Jane.

Sometimes, including in France, all knights had the same title. A bit of early feminism?