A Handbook of Trades
Entering a Trade

Various sources describe over one hundred trades that are known to have been practiced in Medieval Towns across Europe; and there are likely even more. But, from the Stonemason to the Ropemaker, the Baker to the Shoemaker, in order to be successful in a trade, a person must prove himself to have attained a level of skill that enables him to create a product that is of the highest quality available in a particular area or town. A person who has attained this level of skill is called a Master. Only the Masters are considered qualified to teach others the unique, highly specialized, and often secret, techniques of their particular trades.

The first stage in acquiring a trade is an apprenticeship. Apprenticeship begins at a very early age, approximately 7 to 11 years old, and is the equivalent of a child’s education. A family will pay a Master, and in return the Master will feed, clothe and shelter the child for up to 7 to 12 years while he or she acquires the skills necessary to practice the trade. Boys and girls can both enter into apprenticeships, but in the case of girls, it is generally the Master’s wife who will take responsibility for her training. Women frequently participate in the trades of their husbands and are known to be especially successful in the crafts of brewing, dyeing, weaving and cloth making. When a woman is widowed, under the law of femme seule, which permits unmarried women to trade in their own right, she will often continue the business of her husband.

An apprentice lives in the household of the Master, eats with the Master’s family, performs household chores, and will often spend from sunrise to sunset learning and refining his skills, until he is able to demonstrate that he knows the craft well enough to earn a salary; by this time the apprentice has usually come of age. He will then be given a letter from his Master to go and learn skills and techniques from other Masters across the countryside, and be paid for his work. An apprentice who advances to this stage is called a Journeyman. Journeymen are still apprentices, they are not permitted yet to open their own shops, or practice their trades independently of a Master, nor are they permitted to marry, except occasionally, with the Master’s permission.

A Journeyman is in the final stage of his apprenticeship but is still up to 7 to 10 years away from becoming a Master. A Journeyman must create an exceptional piece of work, a “Masterpiece”, to prove to the Masters that he has attained the level of skill required to carry the title that gives him the right to open a shop. This can be very difficult because a Journeyman regularly works 6 days a week from sunrise to sunset and only has one day to work on his own piece, which can take years to complete. Furthermore, an apprentice is permitted to use the tools of his Master, but a Journeyman must possess his own tools, which are very costly. Therefore, many Journeymen never become Masters because they are not able to find the time or the money to work on their own Masterpieces. Journeymen in this situation continue to work as skilled craftsmen, working for other Masters. Sometimes, especially in towns with poor economies, Masters will purposely prohibit Journeymen from becoming Masters to control the amount of people who are skilled in their trade.

Under the right conditions, a Journeyman who is successfully able to demonstrate exceptional skill will become a Master, and, if he has enough money, will open a shop.
The Guilds

Guilds are organizations for members only, that are formed as a way for Merchants (sellers of goods), and the Masters of the skilled trades (makers or manufacturers of goods), to regulate the economies of their towns. Merchants are interested in importing goods to sell within a town, and the Masters make, or manufacture, goods to sell within a town. Both groups aim to control who is allowed to make and sell goods in the town. There are two types of guilds, Crafts Guilds, headed by the Masters of the skilled trades, and Merchant Guilds, headed by the Merchants. It is not possible to, legally, participate in trade in a town unless you are a member of a Guild, or have the consent of one or more Guilds.

There is generally only one Merchant Guild in a town, whose members are all the merchants of the town. But there are as many Crafts Guilds as there are trades in the town: The Baker's Guild, the Butcher's Guild, The Tanner's Guild, The Candle Maker's Guild, and The Tailor's Guild, are only a few examples of the many Crafts Guilds that can exist in any town. The leaders of the Merchant Guilds are the Merchants, in the town, shop keepers who sell things they have brought in to town from elsewhere. The leaders of the Crafts Guilds are the Masters of the skilled trades, who make the items that they sell themselves.

A Crafts Guild is formed when the Masters of a skilled trade unite. The Masters will swear an oath to be loyal to each other, and then they will draft a charter outlining the terms of membership: Fees for membership, regulations for trade, obligations of members, and advantages for members, and also punishments for members who fail to honor the terms of the charter (Refer to the example on the next page which is a charter for the Guild of Tanners in the town of Bristol).

When forming the Guild, the Masters will choose a Patron Saint, a Saint who it is believed watches over the members of specific trades, who is a guardian of their good fortune. The members will then usually organize an annual celebration in honor of their Patron Saint, inviting everyone who lives and works in the town.

The Masters will also create a Coat of Arms with symbols indicating the craft, or trade that The Guild represents, and sometimes also has a symbol representing their Patron Saint. Because most people are illiterate the trades must be represented by symbols (Refer to examples at the back of the Handbook).

Merchant's Guilds are formed in the same way except there are fewer of them in a town.
Charter of the Bristol Tanners Guild A.D. 1346

1. All members do solemnly declare loyalty to the Charter of the Bristol Tanners Guild and to the brethren, family and society of the craft.

2. The members of the trade are to provide a candle to be kept burning before the shrine of Our Lady in the Church of All Hallows near Bristol Wall, And a feast to be held annually in celebration of the Blessed Mother. Contributions toward the cost shall be put in a box.

3. All members shall pay an annual fee of 20 silver pieces to be put in the box.

4. From this box a weekly pension is to be provided for any member of the trade who is of good repute who shall fall into poverty due to illness or any other unforeseeable event, and for any widow and children of a member. (Wives of deceased members shall maintain the work of their husbands if they have learned the craft)

5. If a member dies and leaves no money for the funeral expenses, all members shall contribute to the cost.

6. If any member has so much work that he cannot finish it and is in danger of losing the work, the others shall help him.

7. No member of the guild shall charge higher or lower prices than any other for working up hides.

8. Any Master, Journeyman or Apprentice who is proven to have revealed secrets of the trade shall be severely punished.

9. Persons from outside the town, except apprentices, are not to work as Bristol Tanners.

10. No one who has not served an apprenticeship in the trade shall practice it unless four members of the trade testify that he is sufficiently skilled in it.

11. No Journeyman shall practice the trade independently of his Master.

12. No Journeyman shall become Master before 10 years practice of the skill of the trade. After 10 years, upon the presentation of a masterpiece, approved by all members, the title shall be granted.

13. No apprentice shall be made Journeyman before 5 years.

14. The weekly fee for apprenticeship shall be 5 silver pieces (girls shall be trained by the wife of the Master).

15. If any Journeyman acts rebelliously or improperly, no one shall hire him till he has made amends.

16. If any member of the trade speaks or acts inappropriately in regard to the regulations of this charter, he shall not follow the trade until he has made amends.

17. If any member disobeys these regulations and is convicted by his fellows, he is to be fined 2 silver pieces the first time, 3 silver pieces the second, 6 silver pieces the third, and 10 silver pieces the fourth. For the fifth offense he shall be expelled from the trade.

18. A general meeting shall be held each year to discuss all things connected with the trade. Any defaults in any member's practice of the trade shall be reported to all members, sparing no one, not even our closest friends. Anyone found disobeying the regulations for the standards of craftsmanship set forth in this charter shall be fined 4 silver pieces the first time, 8 silver pieces the second, 10 silver pieces the third, and 20 silver pieces the fourth. For the fifth offense he shall be fined 30 silver pieces and be expelled from the trade forever.

19. Members shall confiscate any skins falsely or deceitfully worked, which they find on sale, and the worker thereof shall be fined in the same manner.

20. Failure to attend the annual meetings shall result in punishment.
The Tailor/Dress Maker
Designs, makes, repairs and alters garments. Is knowledgeable in all methods of fitting, patterning, cutting, and sewing in the construction of clothing for men and women. Patron Saint: St. Paul the Hermit, sometimes represented by a bird.

The Bookbinder
Also called “Stationer”. Gathers, cleans, assembles, and stitches leaves of manuscripts to wooden bindings. Handles fragile, handcrafted material without tearing, smudging, folding or wrinkling. Patron Saint: Saint Bartholomew, sometimes represented by a cross or a tanner’s knife.

The Shoemaker
Also called “Cobbler”. Designs, makes and repairs footwear. Is knowledgeable in all methods of fitting, patterning, cutting, carving and sewing cloth, burlap, hide, leather, reptile skin, and wood in the construction of shoes and boots. Patron Saint: Saint Peter, sometimes represented a key.

The Apothecarist

The Hat Maker
Also called a “hatter”. Designs, makes and repairs hats. Is knowledgeable in all methods of fitting, patterning, cutting, and sewing a variety of materials such as felt, straw, leather, fur and silk. Patron Saint: Saint Barbara, sometimes represented by a tower or a chalice.

The Engraver
Specialist in the art of etching messages and designs into swords, shields, armor and wood and metal plaques. Is knowledgeable and skilled in the use of custom tools and techniques. Patron Saint: Saint Eligius of Noyon, sometimes represented by a hammer or a ring.
**The Carpenter**
Highly skilled elite tradesmen; gifted builders of homes, wagons, tables, furniture, tools and utensils. Knowledgeable in mathematics, woodworking and the use of tools. **Patron Saint:** St. Joseph, sometimes represented by a branch, a chalice, a ladder, or a lily.

**The Astronomer**
Gifted scientist. Knowledgeable in the movements of the planets and the stars. Skilled interpreter of weather and seasonal patterns. **Patron Saint:** Saint Dominic, sometimes represented by a flame, a globe, a lily, or a star.

**The Painter**
Masterful interpreter of color and light. Skilled and knowledgeable in the art of drafting and sketching. **Patron Saint:** Saint John, sometimes represented by a serpent, an eagle or a chalice.

**The Clockmaker**
Highly skilled in the assembly of intricate mechanisms. Knowledgeable in the movements of the Sun, the Moon and the Earth. **Patron Saint:** Saint Peter, sometimes represented by keys, a reversed cross or a scroll.

**The Printer**

**The Wheelwright**
The Barrel Maker
Also called "Cooper". Skilled in art and practice of chopping, cutting, hollowing, carving, and arching wood. Knowledgeable in techniques of assembly: notching, fitting, tightening. Patron Saint: Saint Florian, sometimes represented by a stone or an eagle.

The Baker

The Tanner

The Musician

The Surgeon

The Barber
The Weaver
Skilled maker of clothing, tapestries, blankets and baskets.
Knowledgeable in arts of creator of pattern and design making. **Patron Saint:** Saint Maurice, sometimes represented by wings.

The Brewer
Skilled maker and mixer of colorful dyes, inks and stains that at hue to clothing, furniture and fabric.
Knowledgeable in the use of berries and plants for creating pigmentation. **Patron Saint:** Saint Helena, sometimes represented by a cross.

The Dyer

The Blacksmith

The Merchant

The Lantern Maker
Below is a more complete list of Medieval Trades: If your group would prefer to pursue a trade that is not described in the handbook, you are welcome to, however, you will have to research its characteristics on your own.

- Apothecaries
- Armourers & Brasiers (armour-makers and workers in brass)
- Bakers
- Barbers (also surgeons and dentists)
- Basketmakers
- Blacksmiths
- Bowyers (longbow makers)
- Brewers
- Broderers (embroiderers)
- Butchers
- Carpenters
- Chandlers (candle makers)
- Clothworkers
- Cordwainers (workers in fine leather)
- Curriers (dressers of tanned leather)
- Cutlers
- Drapers
- Dyers
- Falconer
- Farriers (shoers of horses)
- Fishmongers
- Fletchers (arrow makers)
- Furriers
- Girdlers (girdles and belts as clothing)
- Goldsmiths
- Grooms
- Loriners (stirrups and other harness for horses)
- Masons
- Mercers (general merchants)
- Miller
- Needlemakers
- Pages
- Pattenmakers (makers of wooden clog-style footwear)
- Plaisterers (plasterers)
- Plumbers
- Poulters
- Saddlers
- Salters
- Scriveners (writers of court letters and legal documents)
- Skinners
- Squires
- Tallow chandlers (Candle makers)
- Upholders (upholsterers)
- Vintners
- Wax Chandlers (candle makers)
- Weavers
- Wheelwrights
- Woolmen (winders and packers of wool)

Alimentary crafts included butchers, malters, millers, bakers and gingerbread bakers. Textile crafts were represented by cloth makers, tailors, weavers, hatters, dyers and stocking makers. Leather crafts included cobblers, tanners, furriers, saddlers and belt makers. Stonemasons, bricklayers and carpenters dealt with Construction and Building crafts and cooperated with other Related crafts of joiners and cooperers, locksmiths, gun makers and cutlers, blacksmiths and wheelwrights. Other crafts united potters, ropemakers, glassworkers, soap boilers and candle makers, shopkeepers, tradesmen and purchasers.
Examples of Guild Coats of Arms

- Smiths
- Tailors
- Bakers
- Butchers
- Cobblers
- Fishermen
References

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http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Das_St%C3%A4ndebuch_%281568%29.

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