



A personal selection of Salisbury, Wiltshire, Wessex, British and world, history

EDITOR: Mark Brandon:

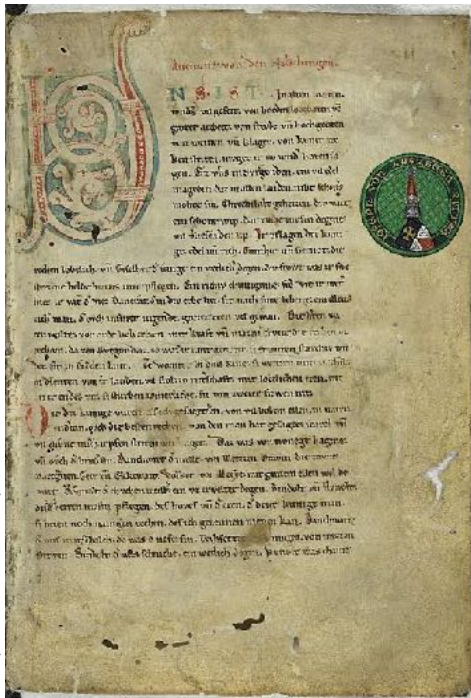
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EMAIL: [jandthistory@outlook.com](mailto:jandthistory@outlook.com)



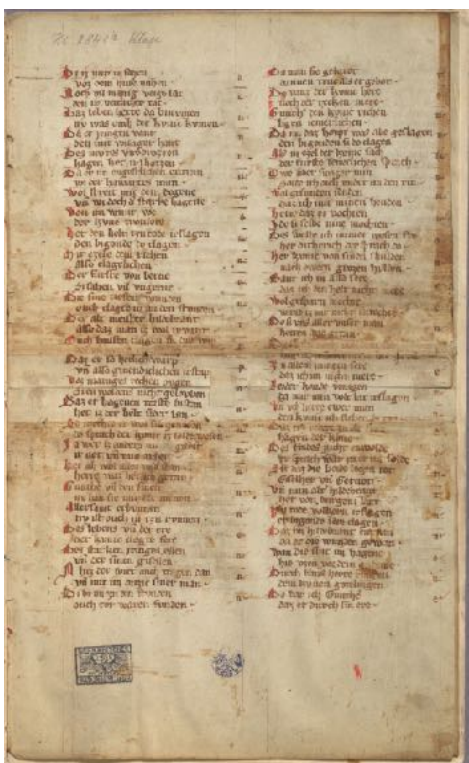
## THE NIEBELUNGENLIED

An epic poem written about 1200 in Middle High German and based on the oral tradition of German heroic legend. It also parallels the Scandanavian heroic lays of the *Poetic Edda* and the *Völsunga Saga*. As with the Mabinogion I have plundered my copy of the Penguin Classics book of 1965 and Wagner did much the same for his Ring Cycle although I believe he probably used the Scandanavian version. The c1230 manuscript, right, belongs to the Landesbank Baden-Württemberg but is on permanent loan to the Badische Landesbibliothek, Karlsruhe (Codex Donaueschingen 63). It is in the *Public Domain*. For those unfamiliar with German, the country comprises states called *Lander*. *Badische* refers to Baden and *bibliothek* is of course a library. Karlsruhe is a city northeast of Stuttgart.



The poem is split into two parts. In the first part, the prince Siegfried comes to Worms to acquire the hand of the Burgundian princess Kriemhild from her brother King Gunther. Gunther agrees to let Siegfried marry Kriemhild if Siegfried helps Gunther

acquire the warrior-queen Brünhild as his wife. Siegfried does this and marries Kriemhild; however, Brünhild and Kriemhild become rivals, leading eventually to Siegfried's murder by the Burgundian vassal Hagen with Gunther's involvement. In the second part, the widow Kriemhild is married to Etzel, king of the Huns. She later invites her brother and his court to visit Etzel's kingdom intending to kill Hagen. Her revenge results in the death of all the Burgundians who came to Etzel's court as well as the destruction of Etzel's kingdom and the death of Kriemhild herself.

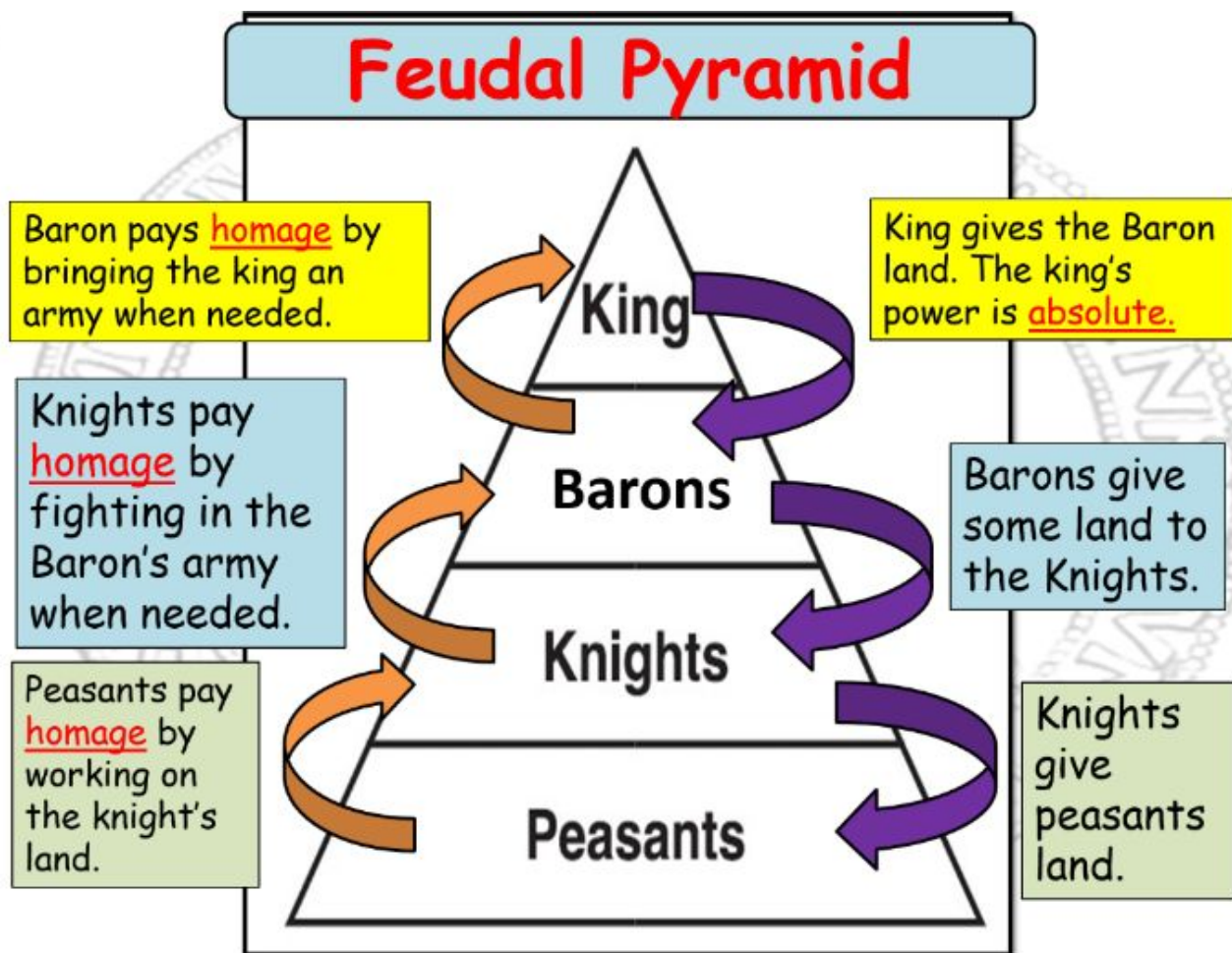


Jolly story isn't it! Well the Medieval Germans thought much the same, which may explain why a second manuscript was written shortly afterwards (1280 - 1320) called the *Niebelungenklage* (*Klage* meant lament or complain). The manuscript (left) is in the Library of the Germanic National Museum Nuremberg and is in the *Public Domain*.

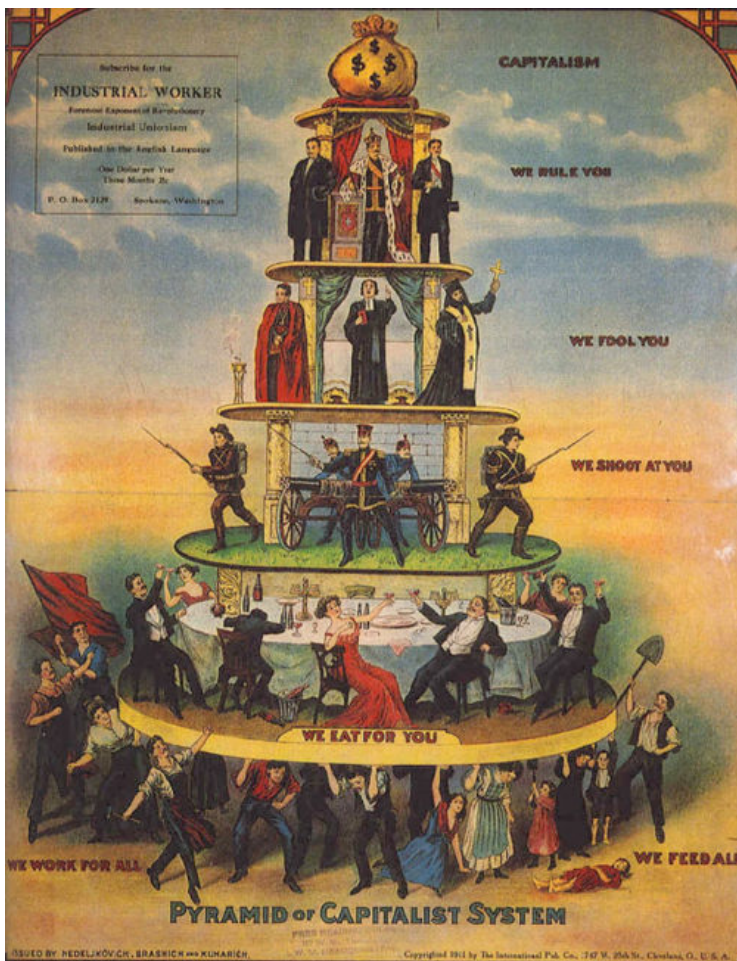
## WHAT IS THE FEUDAL SYSTEM?

Under the Roman Empire, the citizen was taxed and the money went to the Emperor. Out of the money he provided a civil administration and a large military force. Towards the end of the Roman Empire, peasants would put themselves under the biggest of the local landowners to avoid extortionate taxation. This in effect turned the peasant from a freeholder to a tenant. The landlord preferred rent in kind or labour as it wasn't taxable. Over time the landlord became the local authority as links with Rome weakened. Kings were temporary phenomenon to lead a tribe or war band in case of emergency but this new localised control over settled peasants called for a permanent king. The landlords also became more settled and owed military service to the King.

So in effect this amalgamation of the Roman and German systems resulted in law and money being replaced by obligation and tithes. So, in France, everyone held his *fief* (land or appointment) as a tenant, for to keep it he had to render dues to his overlord in terms of produce, labour, or military service, and unlike the Roman system, it affected every aspect of his life. As long as he rendered his dues he could not be evicted and could pass his property to his heirs. Barons were graded from lowly knights to regional powers who owed allegiance direct to the King. The King's power came from his personal land holding and those of his own knights.



This was a cheap system to run compared with the Romans but it did depend on the goodwill of each baron. In a way it was self-correcting, because if a King had two sons, the King's inheritance was divided. The system began to change around 1000AD as countries began to return to a more centralised government. The English being largely of Saxon origin tended to follow the German rather than the French version of Feudalism. When the Normans conquered



England they were in a similar relationship to the British in India; a small cadre controlling a large population by superior military ability.

The social hierarchy was in fact more complex if you added in the clergy and the merchants. For instance, a knight was at the same level as a city mayor and a cathedral canon whilst a Franklin or yeoman equated to a merchant with less than £500 capital and the vicar of a parish. And don't think that by comparison the Anglo-Saxons were more civilised, they were hierarchical and had slaves.

The Black Death killed some 25 million in Europe and that really saw the end of Feudalism.

We of course have evolved a much better system - see left (1911 Pyramid of Capitalist System, *in the public domain*).

I am indebted to John Woodcock and Colin McEvedy's *The 1966 edition of the Penguin Atlas of Medieval History*. Also, Ian Mortimer's *The Time Traveller's Guide to Medieval England* (Vintage 2009).

### GATHER YE ROSEBUDS

According to Bill Laws' *Fifty Plants that changed the course of History* (David & Charles 2010), the Apothecary's rose (*R. gallica* var. *officinalis*) often had their petals compressed into beads to form a **rosary**.

Now the origin of the Catholic rosary is complex but the name in fact came from the Latin for a rose garden but was used in a figurative sense, perhaps as a garden of prayers. Many cultures and religions used beads for counting prayers and in medieval times, before the Reformation, prayer beads were known as *paternosters*. It came to be that a rosary consisted of fifty-five beads on a string, made up of five groups of ten small beads, for each of which you were reminded to say the Ave Maria. Every ten of these came a larger bead which was a reminder to say the Paternoster. The Creed was said when all beads had been counted. *Telling* the rosary three times was known as *Our Lady's Psalter*.



## FROM OUR FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT

**P**aul Butler writes: I had the good fortune to visit my daughter in Adelaide this Christmas, and while travelling around South Australia I realised that the main road back to Adelaide took me through Yankalilla. I remembered the widely-repeated story of how a font from Salisbury Cathedral ended up there.

The Adelaide Register Saturday 23rd June 1928 published a photograph of the font and reported that *The beautiful alabaster font which stands in the baptistry of Christ Church, Yankalilla, was given to that church 60 years ago by the Dean and Chapter of Salisbury Cathedral (England). In reporting the gift to the Yankalilla vestry, the incumbent of Yankalilla (the late Archdeacon Morse) stated that the font had been in use in the Cathedral for over 250 years. The vestry passed a hearty vote of thanks to the donors for their gift, which had a peculiar value for the congregation, many of whom were Wiltshire men, and therefore specially interested in anything coming from Salisbury Cathedral.*

*Archdeacon Morse, when on a visit to England, 1876-1877, found that the alabaster font had been discarded for a newer one in Salisbury Cathedral, and he induced the dean and chapter to give the old one to Yankalilla. The Yankalilla font has had a record of over 300 years [service] in both hemispheres. It first stood on a wooden platform just inside the church door, but when the baptistry was built in the nineties, it was shifted thither, and now stands on a tiled flooring. The first child baptized in it, after its move, was a son of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Roads, now of Burnside. The hexagonal font cover was made by the late Mr. George Roads, the veteran carpenter of Yankalilla, who though in his eighties, had such splendid eyesight that he did the minute inlaid work without the aid of spectacles.*

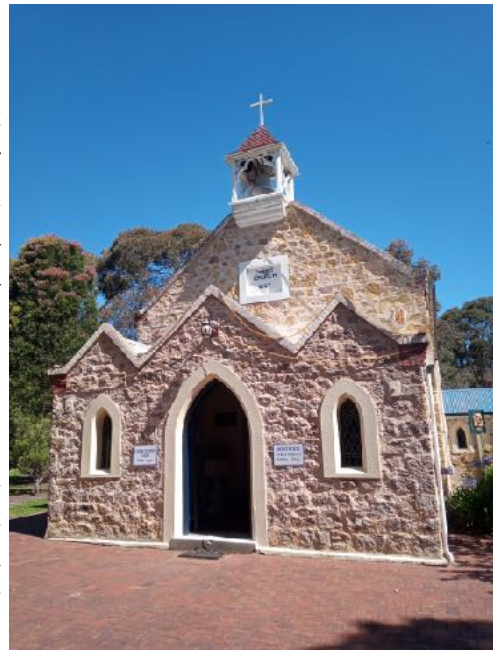
How did all this come about? According to Sumptuous & Richly Adorned, when the English monarchy was restored in 1660, the Cathedral Chapter was re-established “after twenty years of neglect and iconoclasm”. In 1661 or 1662 a new font was commissioned – there is no mention of what had happened to the previous one.



A view of the Cathedral interior dated 1754 show this font, mounted on a three-tiered square plinth, apparently sited centrally in the nave midway between the West door and the North Porch. There it remained until Giles Gilbert Scott's restoration (1869-78) when it was, presumably, discarded and found its way into one of the gardens of the Close, where the Rev. Morse came across it. It had by then lost its domed cover (maybe still in another close garden?). The Reverend gentleman presumably returned home by ship, untroubled by airline luggage restrictions. The print (left) is by J Biddlecombe, 1754 and is *courtesy of the Bodleian Library.*

And where is the font now? Yankalilla is a small Australian farming town about

eighty miles south of Adelaide. First established in 1839, the current population is about 800, (compare, e.g. Alderbury 2285), but as a centre for a large farming area it boasts a school, hotel, bakery, supermarket and a number of agricultural service companies. Christ Church, built in 1857 and one of the earliest churches in South Australia (right), stands on the main road through the town. It's a modest building in the English style built of local stone, with a typically Victorian interior of white-plastered walls and dark polished wood.



There was no-one around when I visited, but the church was open and it wasn't hard to find the font. It was just inside the porch, with a sign on the top which I hoped would have more information, but in fact said *Do not touch(!)*

Well, they seemed to be taking care of it, after a fashion, but the church itself has moved on from 1928. In August 1994 an image was thought to have become visible on a wall behind the altar of the church. It was interpreted as an image of the Virgin Mary, depicting her face and body and appearing to be holding the crucified Christ in the manner of a pietà. This led to the establishment of a Marian shrine to "Our Lady of Yankalilla" which is now a modest object of pilgrimage. The font is no longer mentioned on the church website.

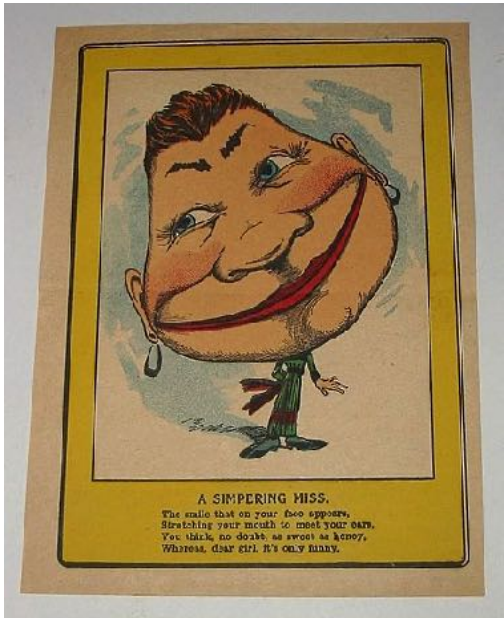


An intriguing footnote comes from Wikipedia (which mistakenly describes the font as mediaeval), where it states: *The former owners [i.e. the Cathedral] subsequently regretted their generosity and requested its return, but this was denied.* The source given by Wikipedia for this scurrilous suggestion is an Australian travel website, apparently now defunct.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

**T**he Victorians were potty about Valentine's Day but they did not just send them to their amours. Right is an example of a *Vinegar Valentine* - caricature and insulting poem - that originally started in the US. They were later printed in the UK by Rafael Tuck & Sons, printers to their Majesties. Up until the 1840s the recipient paid for the postage thereby doubling the insult. *Thanks to Sky History.*

My grandfather was a supplier to the Tucks and my father was sent to Clifton College (Bristol) between the wars, in order to foster relations with the younger members of that family!! He remembers one of the Old Boys speaking on Speech Day - Field Marshal Douglas Haig. Candidate for a Vinegar Valentine?



## CONTROVERSY

**M**aureen Frost writes: I was a bit alarmed on reading the section on Israel in the last edition (J&T No.132).

*Sarum Concern for Israel Palestine* was founded about 20 years ago and in that time has welcomed many speakers from all over the region. I think everyone on our mailing list (over 400) would not be surprised by what Wikipedia says but they would take issue with much of it.

Can I suggest that you take a careful look at the Balfour Project, which is much more scholarly, and maybe steer your readers in that direction in J&T? <https://balfourproject.org>

Ed: J&T does not of course take sides. My cousin, a retired Professor from the Technion, lives in Haifa and his family have lots of Palestinian friends - they are appalled at what is happening. In order to maintain a balanced perspective I have sent for Nur Masalha's *Palestine, A four thousand year history* (Published by Bloomsbury).

I have plunged into *Palestine* which I found quite indigestible. Nur makes a strong case for the very long heritage of the Palestinians and points out fairly in my view that the 'West' has been conditioned by Biblical teaching of which the Zionists took full advantage. I have come to the conclusion that both sides having a combined religious and political dogma there is no way I could make any sort of judgement from an historical perspective. I am sure though that Iran must be thrilled with what they have achieved in splitting the West. Do feel free to comment.

