

Working in a Castle

Five hundred years ago, the lords and ladies of Scotland lived in grand, stone-built castles. Inside the castle walls lived as many as 150 servants, making sure that castle life ran smoothly. Who were these servants and what was it like to work in a castle?

Who were the most important servants?

There were four key members of the castle team. They each had many people working for them. These were the four people:



The Steward was in charge of the entire household. He gave orders to the cooks, the musicians and storytellers, the servants to the lord and the ladies in waiting. These people were then in charge of other servants, like bakers, gardeners, tailors, washerwomen, carpenters and undercooks. If the lord was away, then the steward would be in charge of the castle. He would also keep a record of the rent that people living on castle land paid. The steward was often a member of a noble family himself.

The Marshal was in charge of everything to do with communication. This meant that he organised the people who looked after the horses, like the blacksmiths who made the horseshoes and the farriers who took care of the horses themselves. He was also in charge of the carters who made and drove the carts, the boatmen and the stable boys. It was his job to organise sending letters or messages to other people, maybe even the King, with a messenger on horseback. If the lord wanted to go hunting, the Marshal had to organise the hunt.

The Constable was also sometimes known as the Keeper. He was in charge of castle security. In the days when castles were sometimes attacked by armies, this was a big job! He was in charge of the weapons and the people who used them. This meant the gunners, the archers and other people who defended the castle, known as the men-at-arms. He also organised the team of porters who guarded every door and the bodyguards, who guarded important members of the family or important visitors. Most castles had a prison and the constable would organise the team of jailers.



The Chaplain was a priest of the church. He conducted services in the castle chapel and gave the lord advice about religious matters. He was in charge of the choirboys and other people involved in church services. Churchmen were among the few people who could read and write at this time, so the chaplain wrote any letters that the lord needed.



Where did the servants eat and sleep?

The steward, the keeper, the chaplain and the marshal would have their own rooms in the castle. All the other servants would have to find space where they could, many of them sleeping on the floor of the hall or in the kitchen for warmth. In the bigger castles there might be a separate dining area for the servants; otherwise they would just eat where they worked.

Were there different jobs for men and women?

Most of the servants in the castle were men. The lady of the castle had her personal servants, who were known as her ladies-in-waiting. Other jobs for women were the washerwomen, the alewives who brewed beer and nurses, who looked after any of the lord's young children.

Did children work in castles?

There was plenty of work for children to do in a castle. In the kitchen the cook always needed water carrying from the well, or a small boy might have the job of sitting right by the fire to turn the metal spits of roasting meat. He was known as the 'turnbrochie'. Children would be used to carry messages from one person to another.



What happened when the lord wasn't at the castle?

The lord spent a lot of time travelling: meeting with other members of the nobility, attending business meetings or parliament, meeting with the king or queen. When he was on the move, many of his servants travelled with him. Only a few remained in the castle with the lady to attend to any local business.

