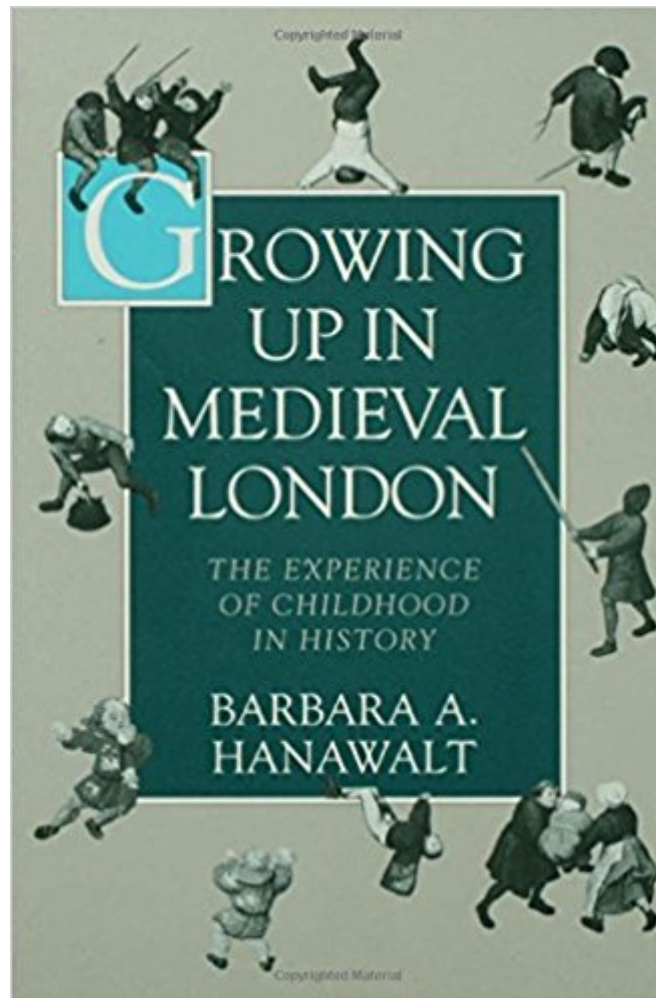




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# Growing Up In Medieval London: The Experience Of Childhood In History



## Synopsis

When Barbara Hanawalt's acclaimed history *The Ties That Bound* first appeared, it was hailed for its unprecedented research and vivid re-creation of medieval life. David Levine, writing in *The New York Times Book Review*, called Hanawalt's book "as stimulating for the questions it asks as for the answers it provides" and he concluded that "one comes away from this stimulating book with the same sense of wonder that Thomas Hardy's *Angel Clare* felt [:] 'The impressionable peasant leads a larger, fuller, more dramatic life than the pachydermatous king.'" Now, in *Growing Up in Medieval London*, Hanawalt again reveals the larger, fuller, more dramatic life of the common people, in this instance, the lives of children in London. Bringing together a wealth of evidence drawn from court records, literary sources, and books of advice, Hanawalt weaves a rich tapestry of the life of London youth during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Much of what she finds is eye opening. She shows for instance that--contrary to the belief of some historians--medieval adults did recognize and pay close attention to the various stages of childhood and adolescence. For instance, manuals on childrearing, such as "*Rhodes's Book of Nurture*" or "*Seager's School of Virtue*," clearly reflect the value parents placed in laying the proper groundwork for a child's future. Likewise, wardship cases reveal that in fact London laws granted orphans greater protection than do our own courts. Hanawalt also breaks ground with her innovative narrative style. To bring medieval childhood to life, she creates composite profiles, based on the experiences of real children, which provide a more vivid portrait than otherwise possible of the trials and tribulations of medieval youths at work and at play. We discover through these portraits that the road to adulthood was fraught with danger. We meet Alison the Bastard Heiress, whose guardians married her off to their apprentice in order to gain control of her inheritance. We learn how Joan Rawlyns of Aldenham thwarted an attempt to sell her into prostitution. And we hear the unfortunate story of William Raynold and Thomas Appleford, two mercer's apprentices who found themselves forgotten by their senile master, and abused by his wife. These composite portraits, and many more, enrich our understanding of the many stages of life in the Middle Ages. Written by a leading historian of the Middle Ages, these pages evoke the color and drama of medieval life. Ranging from birth and baptism, to apprenticeship and adulthood, here is a myth-shattering, innovative work that illuminates the nature of childhood in the Middle Ages.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Hanawalt, in her edifying, spirited book, shows that contrary to accepted scholarship on the subject, the middle ages acknowledged that childhood and adolescence were stages of life and that youngsters were to be protected and educated. Researching documents pertaining to apprenticeship contracts, wardship arrangements, wills and the like, and in manuals on child-rearing and deportment, the author, a history professor at the University of Minnesota, presents caregivers' concerns toward their charges. If beating was considered more effective than scolding, and males had a higher social value, childhood, at least among the gentry and merchant classes, was not markedly different from our own day. Female-headed households were common, as were families with stepchildren; climbing the social ladder was encouraged. For both sexes, the transition from childhood to adolescence was denoted by entry into service or apprenticeship--by the 15th century, at ages 16 to 18. Documentation on the less privileged classes is scant, but among the affluent, children, in Hanawalt's reading, were allowed to be children. Illustrated. Copyright 1993 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

YA-To refute the notion that childhood and adolescence were unknown as distinct stages in the 13th and 14th centuries, Hanawalt has mined evidence from public documents, wills, advice manuals, and literary works that children were treasured, protected, and allowed to pursue youthful pastimes-at least in medieval London. Education was a priority as the guilds often required literacy. Girls were not excluded; widows carried on their merchant husband's affairs and educated women were desirable as marriage partners. Some youngsters, particularly vulnerable females, were at risk from unscrupulous adults, but the records suggest that a clever adolescent often outwitted an evil master. The author embellishes court documents to create engaging narratives of the lives of

individual children in a manner so alive and illuminating that even the most bored history students will be enthralled. Jackie Gropman, Kings Park Library, Burke, VA Copyright 1994 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

High priced required reaging

Perfect buy.

arrived within the time frame, no complaints

Growing Up in Medieval London is not only an informative book, but interesting to read. By examining documents which still exist -- medieval court cases, censuses, parish registers, and tax listings -- Barbara Hanawalt reconstructs the lives of children and teenagers in medieval London. She dispels commonly held myths about this period of history -- for example, that medieval people did not recognise childhood as a distinct life stage, or that because of high child mortality they did not become psychologically attached to their offspring. The archival materials that Hanawalt presents tell a different story. Medieval Londoners were careful to protect the well-being of young orphans, and although corporal punishment of children, apprentices and students was tolerated to a degree we would find unacceptable today, cases of physical or sexual abuse were punished by the courts. Children in medieval London were less prone to accidental deaths, as demonstrated by the coroners' records, than children in villages, perhaps because in the close communities in which they were raised neighbours kept a closer watch on children playing in the vicinities of their homes. Hanawalt addresses the material environment in which young Londoners grew up, and explores the differing experiences of orphans and wards of the court, well-to-do heirs and heiresses, bastards, schoolboys, apprentices and servants. Girls' upbringing and opportunities were not the same as boys, and fewer documents exist to record their lives, but Hanawalt draws attention to those records that can illuminate their experience. This is an innovative, fascinating book for anyone with an interest in the Middle Ages.

Barbara Hanawalt's *Growing Up in Medieval London: The Experience of Childhood in History* is a highly valuable reference work for anyone interested in the subject. Hanawalt's research was very rigorous and is reflected by the book's extensive notes and bibliography, and she is careful at the beginning to note the difficulties and limitations on what can be determined, given the nature of the

medieval source materials; more is known about girls than boys, more about children of the upper and middle classes than children of the poor, and so on. There is a great deal to be learned from this book as to how medieval childhood differed from childhood as experienced in modern times. Some things were of course the same, and Hanawalt is quick to dismiss the mistaken belief that medieval parents were less attached to their children than modern parents are. She does, however, point out the differences that the high mortality rate of the period made in familial relationships. Not only could parents not count on all of their children making it to adulthood, children in turn frequently had to deal with the loss of one or even both parents before they themselves made it to adulthood. Some of the more interesting parts of the book are where Hanawalt covers how orphans and wards were dealt with, with laws and institutions in place to try and insure that they were cared for and that any inheritances they might have would be protected until they came of an age to inherit. Hanawalt notes interestingly that the definition what 'orphan' meant was quite different: a child who lost their father, i.e. the family provider, was considered to be orphaned, while a child who lost their mother was not. A lot of the focus of *Growing Up in Medieval London* is on adolescence for a number of reasons, the primary one being then, as now, it was viewed as a distinct stage between childhood and adulthood. Hanawalt notes that even in medieval times, it was as perplexing and difficult a stage of life to adults as it is now: "Moralists despaired of youths' behavior. Some were of the opinion that young people turned out so badly because they were not adequately beaten. Others opined that youth's rebelliousness was the result of too much beating and that young people became callous because of it. Still others felt that the home environment was so poisonous that young people lacked role models for how honorable people ought to behave. How could they be expected to behave better than their elders? The laws, customs, ceremonies, and contracts that marked the transition from childhood to adolescence likewise show a keen understanding of the disruptions that occur during adolescence. If adults seem as perplexed as modern moralists, psychologists, and parents about this stage of life, it is because they were fully cognizant that it existed and that it was different from childhood and adulthood. Medieval moralists came up with the same explanations that we moderns use because of the similarity between behavior then and now among adolescents and the expectations of those who had to deal with them." Adolescence in medieval times was when children were prepared to be able to earn a living. In the case of those growing up in London, unless they happened to be among the nobility, for most children this meant either going into apprenticeship with one of the guilds to learn a craft or going into service with some household and becoming a servant. One of the more interesting things I learned from this book was that the English believed in having contracts for everything, and that included contracts between apprentices and

masters and between servants and employers. The contracts would cover everything from wages and length of service to work conditions and behavioral requirements. Apprentices, for example, were forbidden to marry during their apprenticeships, and were also forbidden to frequent theaters or to dress in a manner inappropriate to their station. Disputes over contract terms and violations were handled by the guild to which apprentice and master belonged. Masters generally had the upper hand, but if a master was found to be abusive or failing to live up to his side of the contract, the guild could rule in favor of the apprentice and require the master to meet the contract's terms or release the apprentice from his contract. Highly recommended for anyone with an interest in the subject of medieval childhood in an urban setting, and for anyone with a particular interest in how apprenticeships in medieval guilds were handled.

I found this book by accident in my local bookstore as I was trying to find something on the history of childhood diseases. I am not a professional historian. Nevertheless, although it may sound silly, I literally couldn't put this book down. I read it at one sitting. So few history books give a true picture of what life was like in some earlier era and this book is really illuminating, covering a wide variety of topics, from birth to late adolescence. Because the historical record is a little thin as regards children's experience, the author in some cases must speculate, but always does so reasonably and with support from the data obtained from court proceedings and other sources. I enjoyed the book so much I considered writing the author a personal thank-you letter!

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