The King

The king was in complete control under the feudal system. He owned all the land in the country and decided to whom he would lease land. Therefore, he only allowed those men he could trust to lease land from him. However, before they were given any land, they had to swear an oath to remain faithful to the king at all times. The men who leased land from the king were known as barons; they were wealthy, powerful and had complete control of the land they leased from the king.

Barons (Lords or Nobles)

The land that barons leased from the king was known as a **manor** and the barons were known as the **lord of the manor**. The barons were in complete control of this land. They established their own system of justice, minted their own money, and set their own taxes. In return for the land they had been given by the king, the barons had to serve on the royal council, pay rent and provide the king with knights for military service when he demanded it. They also had to provide lodging and food for the king and his court when they traveled around the country. The barons kept as much of their land as they wished for their own use and divided the rest among their knights.

Knights

Knights were given land by a baron in return for military service when demanded by the king. They also had to protect the baron and his family—as well as the manor—from attack. The knights kept as much of the land as they wished for their own personal use and distributed the rest to peasants. Although not as rich as the barons, knights were quite wealthy.

Peasants (Villeins or Serfs)

Peasants, sometimes known as villeins or serfs, farmed land given to them by the knights. They had to provide the knight with free labour, food and service whenever it was demanded. Peasants had no rights. They were not allowed to leave the manor and had to ask their lord's permission before they could marry. Peasants were poor and generally miserable, with no education, political rights or few privileges. They were, however, essential to the success of the feudal system: they worked the land and provided the labour on which the wealth of the estate or fief was based. Without their contribution, the economic system would have collapsed.