

Wanted: KNIGHTS

Must be strong, fearless, loyal, clever, kind and humble. Bring own shining armour and trusty horse. Experience with fire-breathing dragons a plus. Please apply at the castle...

It's St George's day on 23 April – you know, that knight who slayed the dragon? Well, believe it or not, the patron saint of England wasn't a beast-slaying knight at all...

George was a very brave Roman soldier who protested against the Romans' torture of Christians – and it cost him his life.

But there were many real knights from about A.D. 1100 to the 1500s. These heroic men fought for and defended kingdoms in what is now Europe.

Would you like the job of being a brave knight, too? This is what your boss would be looking for...

You must be clever

Knights didn't just throw on armour and start fighting. Boys from rich families trained for years to be promoted from page to squire to official knight.

PAGE At about the age of seven, a boy was sent to the castle of his lord or king. There, he learned manners, singing, dancing and the super-important skill of horseriding.

SQUIRE Between 11 and 14, pages were usually promoted to squires. They would polish another knight's armour, care for his horses, and train with weapons. Squires followed their masters into battle, carrying heavy back-up gear as they went.

KNIGHT With a tap of his master's sword on each shoulder, a squire was knighted after learning the required skills. He would be about 21 years old by then.

You must be nice

You know that phrase 'a knight in shining armour'? It may have come from a code of conduct called 'chivalry'. Knights basically made pledges (promises) to be loyal and good. They did brave things, charmed damsels (women), and protected the weak. That gave knights the reputation of being heroic kinds of guys.

You must be brave

Medieval battles weren't for scaredy-cats. A knight on a horse could slam his lance (see 'You must fight' box) into the enemy at about 50km/h, and his well-trained warhorse could crush men beneath its hooves. The battlefield must have sounded like hundreds of metal garbage cans crashing together!



You must be strong

Forget the fact that you're often fighting against just-as-big, just-as-strong men. A knight also had to do it wearing more than 20kg of armour – that's like carrying a grown pig! Luckily, the plate was hinged so that a knight could move freely.

The following fashions show why knights had to be musclemen...

DOUBLET This bulky, cushioned 'underwear' was worn between a knight's body and his armour.

MAIL Made of thousands of linked iron rings, this flexible metal shirt (some incorrectly call it 'chain mail') could blunt a blade's cutting edge.

HELMET The inside was padded – and sweaty! The bevor shielded a knight's chin and throat.

CUIRASS The breast and backplates protected the knight from swords, lances and arrows.

GAUNTLET These metal hand guards were worn over leather gloves.

SABATON Wearing these pointy iron shoes, knights never worried about stubbed toes!

You must fight

A knight was basically a warrior who promised to fight at his ruler's command – no matter what. He had to be an expert in using many weapons, such as these...

SWORD A knight's most prized weapon, his sword, was a symbol of justice.

LANCE When mounted knights galloped into battle, they usually led with lances – long, steel-tipped spears.

MACE This metal-tipped club could crush bones and crack armour. Yikes!

DAGGER In close combat, this knife was thrust through openings in enemies' metal armour.