

# Chaucer and the 2nd Amendment

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### Introduction

I recommend to you a very interesting and excellent book, “Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales”, by John Saunders, published in England in 1894.

Geoffrey Chaucer is known as the Father of English Literature and as the greatest poet of the Middle Ages. He lived from 1343 to 1400, and he flourished during the reigns of Edward III and Richard II of England. He was contemporary with, and probably a friend of, John Wycliffe; at least John Foxe identified him as a friend and schoolmate of Wycliffe at Merton College.

For a good bio of Chaucer see Wikipedia.

Now, this book (by Saunders) is an excellent study, although it is challenging in its prose. It takes a steady heart to make one’s way through it. But it is well worth the effort, as I think my excerpt here will show.

I have created a Grace Notes course for this book, and there are 20 lessons, with quizzes, to take you through the whole thing. If you have high school students, or home schoolers, who are saying that they feel unchallenged by their daily work, start them on this course! Though it will make their brains sore, I believe they will end up appreciating the study.

### The Second Amendment

Now, what does Chaucer have to do with the American Constitution and the Right to Bear Arms? Well, not much, really. The connection comes in

John Saunder’s “Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales”, Section II, The Yeoman.

One of the strong features of this book is the development of the historical, social, and cultural aspects of the characters and scenes in Canterbury Tales. And this section has a very interesting description of the attitude in 14th Century England towards bearing arms.

Many of us conservatives in America defend very vigorously our “right to bear arms”. In medieval England, bearing arms by the citizenry was mandatory. Everyone who could afford it was required not only to keep weapons handy in the house but to undergo regular training in weapons and small unit tactics (much as Swiss citizens are today).

Here is the text from the book:

“Chaucer’s Yeoman is evidently one equipped for”real service“, according to the statutes of his time; which required a bow of the archer’s own height, with arrows a yard in length, notched at the extremity to fit the string, and fletched with the feathers of the goose, the eagle, or the peacock.

“The use of this instrument was taught with exceeding care. Bow and arrows entered into the education of children; and would have been the favourite sport of youth, but that it was too much forced on them by edicts of kings, and the authority of nobles.

“By a law of the thirteenth century, every person having an annual income of more than one hundred pence, was obliged to furnish himself with a serviceable bow and arrows. In the reign of Edward II all persons were compelled by proclamation to practice archery on a certain number of days in the year, excepting during the hours of divine service; and at the same time a number of rustic sports were strictly forbidden, that they might not, we suppose, waste the time or energies required for this important exercise.

“In every village were three kinds of marks set up: (1) the butt, or level mark, in the form of a target with a bull’s eye, shot at up and down, and on either side, and requiring a strong arrow with a very broad feather; (2) the prick, a”mark of compass“, requiring strong light arrows, with feathers of moderate size; and (3) the rover, a mark used at various distances, therefore requiring arrows proportioned in weight and feather.

“Sports similar to that of the popinjay, so admirably described by Scott in ‘Old Mortality,’ had of course a most important effect in keeping alive the national love of the truly national weapon, and developing the matchless skill and dexterity, for which the English archers or yeomen became so renowned throughout Europe.

“No wonder, therefore, they gloried in the bow, as the knight gloried in his lance, and the squire in his sword. Many of the great victories that are emblazoned in our national annals, may be ascribed chiefly to the stout old English archers; and especially the greatest of all, that of Agincourt, where we scarcely know which to admire most, the”bright consummate” military genius of Harry the Fifth, by whom that marvellous encounter was directed and stimulated, or the heroic daring and astonishing skill of the archers, by whom virtually it was won.”