**Religious orders**

***Monks***

Around 1% of adult males were monks by the 15th Century. Most of these lived in one of the 900 religious communities.

Benedictines were the largest and most common religious order. They were named after their founder, St. Benedict. Many Benedictine houses were large. Some of the largest, like Durham, operated as the cathedral churches of the diocese.

There were also Cistercians and Carthusians who were founded in the late 11th Century as a result of the lack of zeal by the Benedictines. Their monasteries were often in remote rural areas such as the Yorkshire houses of Fountains and Mont Grace.

Most monks were from wealthier parts of society and were often recruited from their own localities.

***Friars***

Friars worked among the lay people and were supported by charitable donations. There were 3 main orders of friars:

* Dominicans (black friars) – the preaching order
* Francusians (grey friars)
* Augustinians

Orders of friars were recruited lower down on the social scale than monks. As Christopher Harper-Bill argued, by the late 15th Century the great days of friars were over but orders still received general bequests in wills.

***Nuns***

Nunneries had less prestige because they were often women deemed unsuitable for marriage. Most nunneries were poor and inadequate as convents were a last resort. The exception to these was the Bridgettine foundation in Middlesex.