

## **Facts on medieval castles to highlight Sept. 13 Bergren Forum**

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Linda Mitchell, professor of history at Alfred University, will provide her audience with everything it needs to know about medieval castles in "Why It's Good to be Upwind of the Garderobe and Other Interesting Factoids about Medieval Castles," when she presents the Bergren Forum on Thursday, Sept. 13, at 12:10 p.m. in Nevins Theatre, Powell Campus Center. Admission is free. (Garderobe -- Not a latrine or privy but a small room or large cupboard, usually adjoining the chamber providing safe-keeping for valuable clothes and other possessions of price.) "Everyone thinks that the Middle Ages were smelly, dirty, and that life was 'nasty, brutish, and short' (to quote Thomas Hobbes)," says Mitchell. "Not so fast! Medieval castles granted places where only a small percentage of the population lived had mod cons (conveniences) that Hobbes would have loved: toilets (some of them with multiple seats!), the likelihood of a hot bath by the kitchen fire, and other amenities that, for some reason, were abandoned along with castle life in the early modern period." "In fact," she explains, "Thomas Crapper's famous invention in many ways was a rediscovery of technology medieval engineers had already developed, albeit in a form the Victorians found more to their taste. So come and find out why I have spent the last five years investigating the construction and modification of castles in England, Ireland, and Wales from the 12th to the 14th centuries. Good slide show, too!" Mitchell came to Alfred University in 1991 from Indiana University, where she had just completed a Ph.D. in medieval history, with minors in ancient history and medieval studies. Since then, she has become involved in many programs and departments. She currently teaches courses in ancient, medieval, and early modern European history (everything from the ancient Greeks to the Enlightenment), in fine arts, in women's studies, and in critical discourse studies, the latter two being interdisciplinary minor programs in liberal arts and sciences, and in dance, where she teaches ballet. Mitchell's research and publications focus on noble families, law, and the structures of political culture in medieval Britain from the 12th to the 15th centuries. An active scholar who presents several papers a year at national and international conferences in history and medieval studies, she has also published three books, numerous articles and book reviews. Her most recent publications include "Family Life in the Middle Ages" (Greenwood Press, 2007), "Portraits of Medieval Women: Family, Marriage, and Politics in England 1225-1350" (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2003), and "Women in Medieval and Western Culture" (Garland Books, 1999). Currently, Mitchell is working on a project about the ways in which aristocratic families shaped the English medieval political community from the 12th to the end of the 14th centuries and co-writing a textbook entitled "Plantagenet England" for Longmans Press. The Bergren Forum, sponsored by the Alfred University Division of Human Studies, meets Thursdays during each academic semester at the University. Participants are encouraged to bring a lunch; coffee and tea will be available.