



Mirie it is while sumer ilast:

decoding the earliest surviving secular song in English

A workshop led by
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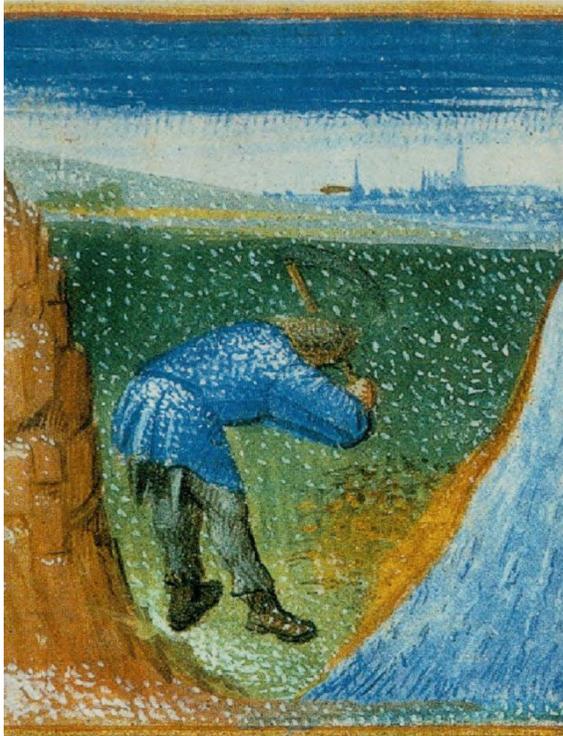
Friday 7th September 2018, 5.00-6.30pm
Medieval Music in the Dales
Queen Mary's Chamber, Bolton Castle
(with the option to also use Lord Scrope's above and the Solar below)

This booklet includes the music for the workshop.
Please print this and bring it on the day, with a pencil.

If you're not a confident reader of music, do not be concerned about the medieval notation in this booklet — all will be explained in the workshop.

It may be helpful to be familiar with the ideas in the article at
www.earlymusicmuse.com/performingmedievalmusic2of3/
— but not obligatory.

The workshop aims to be accessible for all.



The now standard version of *Miri it is*, as interpreted by E. J. Dobson, Professor of English, and F. LI. Harrison, Professor of Ethnomusicology, in their *Medieval English Songs*, London: Faber and Faber, 1979.

Words in red will be explained in the workshop.

Mi-ri it is whi-le su-mer i-last_ with fu-ghe-les song oc nu ne-heth win-des
 bla-st and we-der strong E-i e-i what this niht_ is long And_ i- _-ch with wel
 mi- _-chel wrong so- -regh and mu-r n and_ fast

Miri it is while sumer ilast with fugheles song
 oc nu **neheth** windes blast and weder strong
 Ei ei what this **niht** is long
 And ich with wel michel wrong
 soregh and **murn** and **fast**

Merry it is while the summer lasts with birds' song
 but now, close by, the winds blast and the weather is powerful.
 Oh, oh, I exclaim, this night is long
 And I also am done much wrong
 sorrow and mourn and go without food.



Above: The only surviving copy of *Mirie it is*, found on a damaged flyleaf in a manuscript Book of Psalms, which is dated to the second half of the 12th century, MS. Rawl. G. 22. The flyleaf is dated c. 1225.

Below: The neumes (note shapes) of Franconian square notation, named after Franco of Cologne, who wrote *Ars Cantus Mensurabilis* (*The Art of Mensurable Music*), 1250–1280.

The music starts with a movable clef.

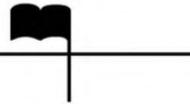
We see a C clef on the top line, indicating that this is where the note C is.

On the second line is an F clef, indicating where F is.

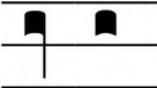
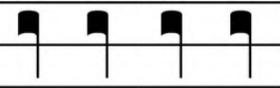
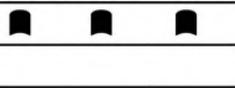
Clefs could appear anywhere, the point being to keep all notes within the staff, to avoid notes above or below the lines.

There follows 4 neumes or note values, their duration indicated by shape. Since there were no bar lines or time signatures, rhythm was indicated by the notes' relative value to each other.

There were other, more complex neumes in Franconian notation, to indicate movements of notes. They can be seen over the page.

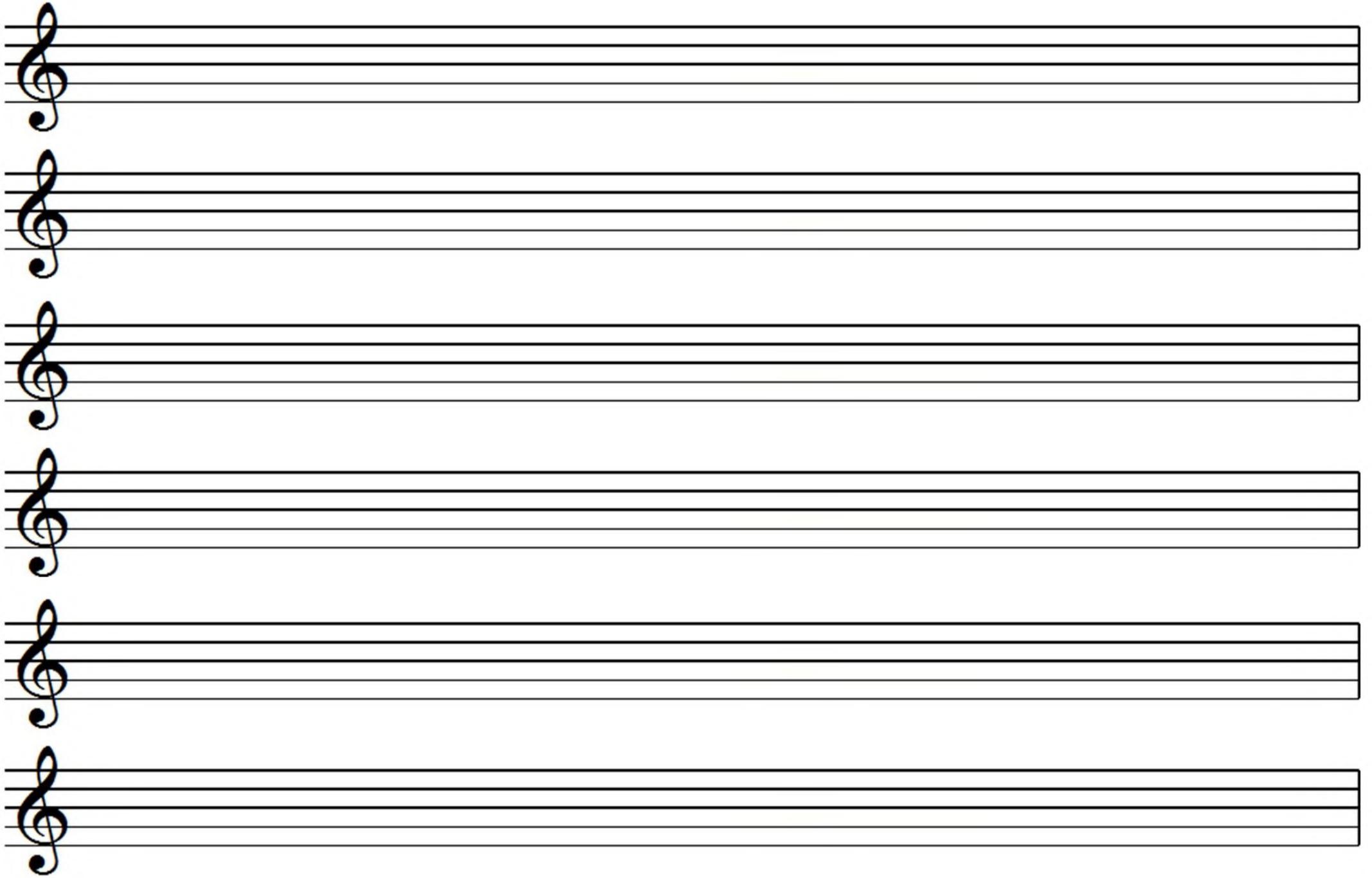
| clefs | | neumes | | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| C clef | F clef | double-long or maxima | long | breve | semi-breve |
| | | Double square head with downward tail. The longest note. | Single square head with downward tail. Half a double-long. | Square head without tail. Half a long or a third of a long, depending on context. | Diamond head. Half a breve. |

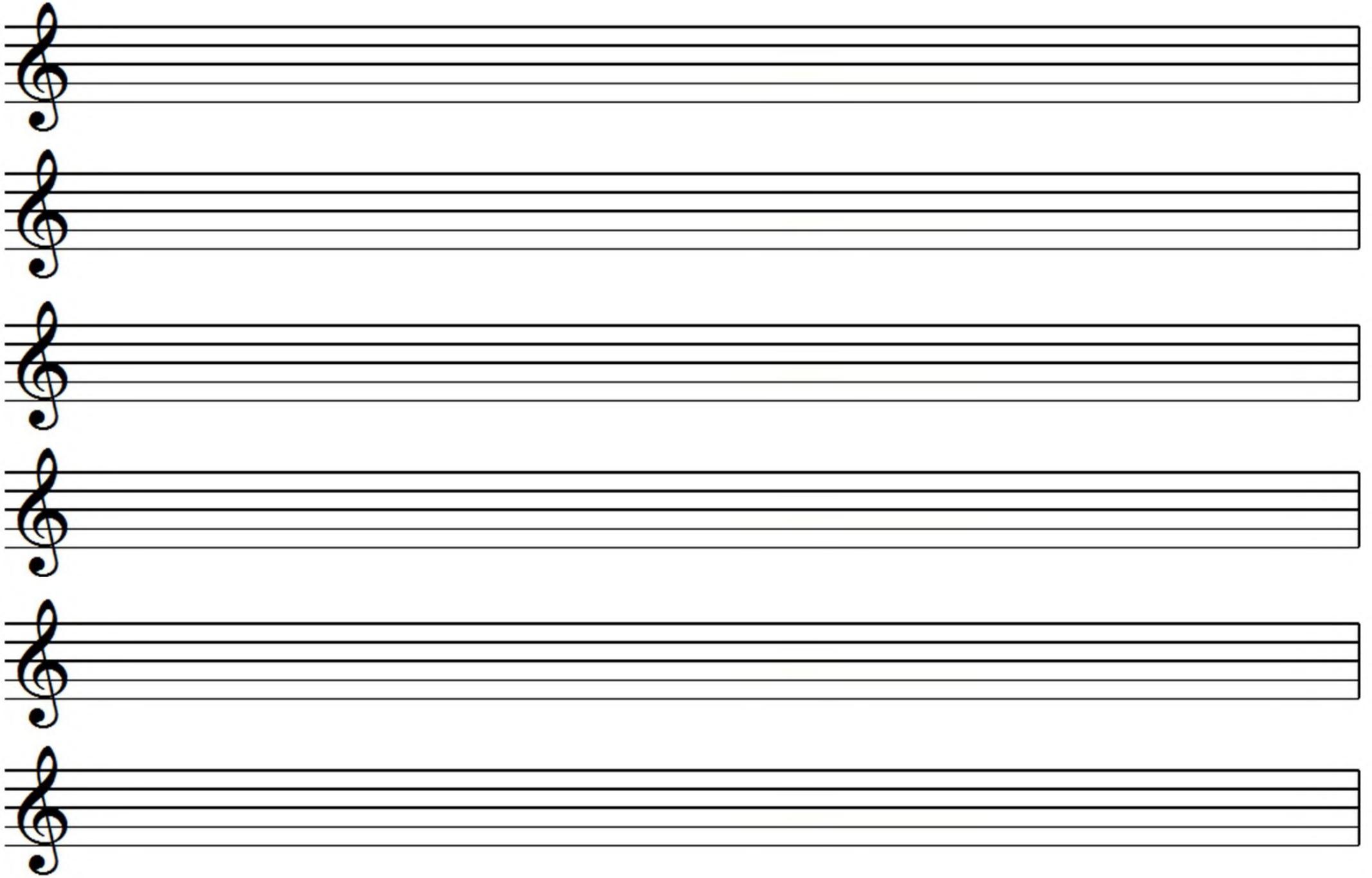
Below: The six rhythmic modes as described by Leonin, choir master and composer of the Notre Dame school, c. 1160.

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| long breve | breve long | long breve breve | breve breve long | long long long long | breve breve breve |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | |
|  |  |  |  | | |
| 5 | 6 | | | | |
|  |  | | | | |

EXAMPLE E. TABLE OF NEUMES

| NEUME NAME | 9TH TO 10TH CENTURIES | 11TH TO 13 CENTURIES | IN MODERN NOTATION |
|--------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Virga | | | |
| Punctum | | | |
| Podatus (Pes) | | | |
| Clivis | | | |
| Scandicus | | | |
| Climacus | | | |
| Tortulum | | | |
| Portectus | | | |
| Scandicus flexus | | | |
| Portectus flexus | | | |
| Tortulus resupinus | | | |
| Pes subpunctis | | | |





Middle English pronunciation guide – general

There wasn't just one way of writing and speaking Middle English. It would be many centuries before there was standardised spelling and, as today, regional accents and regional words abounded, and spelling had regional characteristics, too. This guide, therefore, is for general use only, not an indication of pronunciation in a specific year (as it was changing constantly) or a particular region (which varied), nor does it indicate later pronunciation in the 14th or 15th centuries (the latter being Chaucer's period).

Vowels Vowels in general are short when followed by a consonant alone, or by 2 consonants, such as modern *hat* or *father*. *Father*, therefore, is pronounced like broad Lancashire.
Try: miri, blast; fast, ilast, song

2 vowels of the same letter together doesn't alter the sound, just the length, so *speed* is exactly like *sped* but longer, as with *rot* and *root*.

There are no silent letters in Middle English, so an *e* on the end of a word was pronounced (though inconsistently so by the 14th century).
Try: windes

Vowels are long when followed by a consonant then a vowel.
Try: while

U is deep. A ME speaker would say *much* like a short version of modern *mooch*.
Try: summer, nu, murne

Diphthongs such as *ou* and *au* are pronounced as two separate letters gliding into one another, so each sound is heard.
Try: Ei, ei! Mirie

Consonants are generally as you're used to them, except that each sound is given its full value, so *s* is longer and fuller, as in *hiss*, so *is* sounds like *iss*; and *th* is pronounced as in *thing*. Consonants such as *wh* together are given their full value, as if the *h* is first. An *r* is rolled.
Try: is, this, while, sumer

Gutturals After *a*, *o*, *u*, CH and GH sounds are hard, as in guttural German.
Try: fugheles

After *e* or *i*, *ch* and *gh* sounds are soft: *ch* is like *ssh*; and *gh* like a soft Scottish *loch*.
Try: ich, nicht, michel, soregh