

## = Peasants ' Revolt =

The Peasants ' Revolt , also called Wat Tyler 's Rebellion or the Great Rising , was a major uprising across large parts of England in 1381 . The revolt had various causes , including the socio @-@ economic and political tensions generated by the Black Death in the 1340s , the high taxes resulting from the conflict with France during the Hundred Years ' War , and instability within the local leadership of London . The final trigger for the revolt was the intervention of a royal official , John Bampton , in Essex on 30 May 1381 . His attempts to collect unpaid poll taxes in Brentwood ended in a violent confrontation , which rapidly spread across the south @-@ east of the country . A wide spectrum of rural society , including many local artisans and village officials , rose up in protest , burning court records and opening the local gaols . The rebels sought a reduction in taxation , an end to the system of unfree labour known as serfdom and the removal of the King 's senior officials and law courts .

Inspired by the sermons of the radical cleric John Ball , and led by Wat Tyler , a contingent of Kentish rebels advanced on London . They were met at Blackheath by representatives of the royal government , who unsuccessfully attempted to persuade them to return home . King Richard II , then aged 14 , retreated to the safety of the Tower of London , but most of the royal forces were abroad or in northern England . On 13 June , the rebels entered London and , joined by many local townsfolk , attacked the gaols , destroyed the Savoy Palace , set fire to law books and buildings in the Temple , and killed anyone associated with the royal government . The following day , Richard met the rebels at Mile End and acceded to most of their demands , including the abolition of serfdom . Meanwhile , rebels entered the Tower of London , killing the Lord Chancellor and the Lord High Treasurer , whom they found inside .

On 15 June , Richard left the city to meet with Tyler and the rebels at Smithfield . Violence broke out , and Richard 's party killed Tyler . Richard defused the tense situation long enough for London 's mayor , William Walworth , to gather a militia from the city and disperse the rebel forces . Richard immediately began to re @-@ establish order in London and rescinded his previous grants to the rebels . The revolt had also spread into East Anglia , where the University of Cambridge was attacked and many royal officials were killed . Unrest continued until the intervention of Henry le Despenser , who defeated a rebel army at the Battle of North Walsham on 25 or 26 June . Troubles extended north to York , Beverley and Scarborough , and as far west as Bridgwater in Somerset . Richard mobilised 4 @,@ 000 soldiers to restore order . Most of the rebel leaders were tracked down and executed ; by November , at least 1 @,@ 500 rebels had been killed .

The Peasants ' Revolt has been widely studied by academics . Late 19th @-@ century historians used a range of sources from contemporary chroniclers to assemble an account of the uprising , and these were supplemented in the 20th century by research using court records and local archives . Interpretations of the revolt have shifted over the years . It was once seen as a defining moment in English history , but modern academics are less certain of its impact on subsequent social and economic history . The revolt heavily influenced the course of the Hundred Years ' War , by deterring later Parliaments from raising additional taxes to pay for military campaigns in France . The revolt has been widely used in socialist literature , including by the author William Morris , and remains a potent political symbol for the political left , informing the arguments surrounding the introduction of the Community Charge in the United Kingdom during the 1980s .

## = = Background and causes = =

## = = = Economics = = =

The Peasants ' Revolt was fed by the economic and social upheaval of the 14th century . At the start of the century , the majority of English people worked in the countryside , as part of a sophisticated economy that fed the country 's towns and cities and supported an extensive international trade . Across much of England , production was organised around manors , controlled

by local lords ? including the gentry and the Church ? and governed through a system of manorial courts . Some of the population were unfree serfs , who had to work on their lords ' lands for a period each year , although the balance of free and unfree varied across England , and in the south @-@ east there were relatively few serfs . Some serfs were born unfree and could not leave their manors to work elsewhere without the consent of the local lord ; others accepted limitations on their freedom as part of the tenure agreement for their farmland . Population growth led to pressure on the available agricultural land , increasing the power of local landowners .

In 1348 a plague known as the Black Death crossed from mainland Europe into England , rapidly killing an estimated 50 per cent of the population . After an initial period of economic shock , England began to adapt to the changed economic situation . The death rate among the peasantry meant that suddenly land was relatively plentiful and manpower in much shorter supply . Labourers could charge more for their work and , in the consequent competition for labour , wages were driven sharply upwards . In turn , the profits of landowners were eroded . The trading , commercial and financial networks in the towns disintegrated .

The authorities responded to the chaos with emergency legislation ; the Ordinance of Labourers was passed in 1349 , and the Statute of Labourers in 1351 . These attempted to fix wages at pre @-@ plague levels , making it a crime to refuse work or to break an existing contract , imposing fines on those who transgressed . The system was initially enforced through special Justices of Labourers and then , from the 1360s onwards , through the normal Justices of the Peace , typically members of the local gentry . Although in theory these laws applied to both labourers seeking higher wages and to employers tempted to outbid their competitors for workers , they were in practice applied only to labourers , and then in a rather arbitrary fashion . The legislation was strengthened in 1361 , with the penalties increased to include branding and imprisonment . The royal government had not intervened in this way before , nor allied itself with the local landowners in quite such an obvious or unpopular way .

Over the next few decades , economic opportunities increased for the English peasantry . Some labourers took up specialist jobs that would have previously been barred to them , and others moved from employer to employer , or became servants in richer households . These changes were keenly felt across the south @-@ east of England , where the London market created a wide range of opportunities for farmers and artisans . Local lords had the right to prevent serfs from leaving their manors , but when serfs found themselves blocked in the manorial courts , many simply left to work illegally on manors elsewhere . Wages continued to rise , and between the 1340s and the 1380s the purchasing power of rural labourers increased by around 40 percent . As the wealth of the lower classes increased , Parliament brought in fresh laws in 1363 to prevent them from consuming expensive goods formerly only affordable by the elite . These sumptuary laws proved unenforceable , but the wider labour laws continued to be firmly applied .

= = = War and finance = = =

Another factor in the revolt of 1381 was the conduct of the war with France . In 1337 Edward III of England had pressed his claims to the French throne , beginning a long @-@ running conflict that became known as the Hundred Years ' War . Edward had initial successes , but his campaigns were not decisive . Charles V of France became more active in the conflict after 1369 , taking advantage of his country 's greater economic strength to commence cross @-@ Channel raids on England . By the 1370s , England 's armies on the continent were under huge military and financial pressure ; the garrisons in Calais and Brest alone , for example , were costing £ 36 @,@ 000 a year to maintain , while military expeditions could consume £ 50 @,@ 000 in only six months . Edward died in 1377 , leaving the throne to his grandson , Richard II , then only ten years old .

Richard 's government was formed around his uncles , most prominently the rich and powerful John of Gaunt , and many of his grandfather 's former senior officials . They faced the challenge of financially sustaining the war in France . Taxes in the 14th century were raised on an ad hoc basis through Parliament , then comprising the Lords , the titled aristocracy and clergy ; and the Commons , the representatives of the knights , merchants and senior gentry from across England . These

taxes were typically imposed on a household 's movable possessions , such as their goods or stock . The raising of these taxes affected the members of the Commons much more than the Lords . To complicate matters , the official statistics used to administer the taxes pre @-@ dated the Black Death and , since the size and wealth of local communities had changed greatly since the plague , effective collection had become increasingly difficult .

Just before Edward 's death , Parliament introduced a new form of taxation called the poll tax , which was levied at the rate of four pence on every person over the age of 14 , with a deduction for married couples . Designed to spread the cost of the war over a broader economic base than previous tax levies , this round of taxation proved extremely unpopular but raised £ 22 @,@ 000 . The war continued to go badly and , despite raising some money through forced loans , the Crown returned to Parliament in 1379 to request further funds . The Commons were supportive of the young King , but had concerns about the amounts of money being sought and the way this was being spent by the King 's counsellors , whom they suspected of corruption . A second poll tax was approved , this time with a sliding scale of taxes against seven different classes of English society , with the upper classes paying more in absolute terms . Widespread evasion proved to be a problem , and the tax only raised £ 18 @,@ 600 ? far short of the £ 50 @,@ 000 that had been hoped for .

In November 1380 , Parliament was called together again in Northampton . Archbishop Simon Sudbury , the new Lord Chancellor , updated the Commons on the worsening situation in France , a collapse in international trade , and the risk of the Crown having to default on its debts . The Commons were told that the colossal sum of £ 160 @,@ 000 was now required in new taxes , and arguments ensued between the royal council and Parliament about what to do next . Parliament passed a third poll tax ( this time on a flat @-@ rate basis of 12 pence on each person over 15 , with no allowance made for married couples ) which they estimated would raise £ 66 @,@ 666 . The third poll tax was highly unpopular and many in the south @-@ east evaded it by refusing to register . The royal council appointed new commissioners in March 1381 to interrogate local village and town officials in an attempt to find those who were refusing to comply . The extraordinary powers and interference of these teams of investigators in local communities , primarily in the south @-@ east and east of England , raised still further the tensions surrounding the taxes .

= = = Protest and authority = = =

The decades running up to 1381 were a rebellious , troubled period . London was a particular locus of unrest , and the activities of the city 's politically active guilds and fraternities often alarmed the authorities . Londoners resented the expansion of the royal legal system in the capital , in particular the increased role of the Marshalsea Court in Southwark , which had begun to compete with the city authorities for judicial power in London . The city 's population also resented the presence of foreigners , Flemish weavers in particular . Londoners detested John of Gaunt because he was a supporter of the religious reformer John Wycliffe , whom the London public regarded as a heretic . John of Gaunt was also engaged in a feud with the London elite and was rumoured to be planning to replace the elected mayor with a captain , appointed by the Crown . The London elite were themselves fighting out a vicious , internal battle for political power . As a result , in 1381 the ruling classes in London were unstable and divided .

Rural communities , particularly in the south @-@ east , were unhappy with the operation of serfdom and the use of the local manorial courts to exact traditional fines and levies , not least because the same landowners who ran these courts also often acted as enforcers of the unpopular labour laws or as royal judges . Many of the village elites refused to take up positions in local government and began to frustrate the operation of the courts . Animals seized by the courts began to be retaken by their owners , and legal officials were assaulted . Some started to advocate the creation of independent village communities , respecting traditional laws but separate from the hated legal system centred in London . As the historian Miri Rubin describes , for many , " the problem was not the country 's laws , but those charged with applying and safeguarding them " .

Concerns were raised about these changes in society . William Langland wrote the poem *Piers Plowman* in the years before 1380 , praising peasants who respected the law and worked hard for

their lords , but complaining about greedy , travelling labourers demanding higher wages . The poet John Gower feared England might see an uprising similar to the French Jacquerie revolt of 1358 , in which the peasants had risen up against their masters . There was a moral panic about the threat posed by newly arrived workers in the towns and the possibility that servants might turn against their masters . New legislation was introduced in 1359 to deal with migrants , existing conspiracy laws were more widely applied and the treason laws were extended to include servants or wives who betrayed their masters and husbands . By the 1370s , there were fears that if the French invaded England , the rural classes might side with the invaders .

The discontent began to give way to open protest . In 1377 , the " Great Rumour " occurred in south @-@ east and south @-@ west England . Rural workers organised themselves and refused to work for their lords , arguing that , according to the Domesday Book , they were exempted from such requests . The workers made unsuccessful appeals to the law courts and the King . There were also widespread urban tensions , particularly in London , where John of Gaunt narrowly escaped being lynched . The troubles increased again in 1380 , with protests and disturbances across northern England and in the western towns of Shrewsbury and Bridgwater . An uprising occurred in York , during which John de Gisborne , the city 's mayor , was removed from office , and fresh tax riots followed in early 1381 . There was a great storm in England during May 1381 , which many felt to prophesy future change and upheaval , adding further to the disturbed mood .

= = Events = =

= = = Outbreak of revolt = = =

= = = = Essex and Kent = = = =

The revolt of 1381 broke out in Essex , following the arrival of John Bampton to investigate non @-@ payment of the poll tax on 30 May . Bampton was a member of Parliament , a Justice of the Peace and well @-@ connected with royal circles . He based himself in Brentwood and summoned representatives from the neighbouring villages of Corringham , Fobbing and Stanford @-@ le @-@ Hope to explain and make good the shortfalls on 1 June . The villagers appear to have arrived well @-@ organised , and armed with old bows and sticks . Bampton first interrogated the people of Fobbing , whose representative , Thomas Baker , declared that his village had already paid their taxes , and that no more money would be forthcoming . When Bampton and two sergeants attempted to arrest Baker , violence broke out . Bampton escaped and retreated to London , but three of his clerks and several of the Brentwood townsfolk who had agreed to act as jurors were killed . Robert Bealknap , the Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas , who was probably already holding court in the area , was empowered to arrest and deal with the perpetrators .

By the next day , the revolt was rapidly growing . The villagers spread the news across the region , and John Geoffrey , a local bailiff , rode between Brentwood and Chelmsford , rallying support . On 4 June , the rebels gathered at Bocking , where their future plans seem to have been discussed . The Essex rebels , possibly a few thousand strong , advanced towards London , some probably travelling directly and others via Kent . One group , under the leadership of John Wrawe , a former chaplain , marched north towards the neighbouring county of Suffolk , with the intention of raising a revolt there .

Revolt also flared in neighbouring Kent . Sir Simon de Burley , a close associate of both Edward III and the young Richard , had claimed that a man in Kent , called Robert Belling , was an escaped serf from one of his estates . Burley sent two sergeants to Gravesend , where Belling was living , to reclaim him . Gravesend 's local bailiffs and Belling tried to negotiate a solution under which Burley would accept a sum of money in return for dropping his case , but this failed and Belling was taken away to be imprisoned at Rochester Castle . A furious group of local people gathered at Dartford , possibly on 5 June , to discuss the matter . From there the rebels travelled to Maidstone , where

they stormed the gaol , and then onto Rochester on 6 June . Faced by the angry crowds , the constable in charge of Rochester Castle surrendered it without a fight and Belling was freed .

Some of the Kentish crowds now dispersed , but others continued . From this point , they appear to have been led by Wat Tyler , whom the Anonimale Chronicle suggests was elected their leader at a large gathering at Maidstone on 7 June . Relatively little is known about Tyler 's former life ; chroniclers suggest that he was from Essex , had served in France as an archer and was a charismatic and capable leader . Several chroniclers believe that he was responsible for shaping the political aims of the revolt . Some also mention a Jack Straw as a leader among the Kentish rebels during this phase in the revolt , but it is uncertain if this was a real person , or a pseudonym for Wat Tyler or John Wrawe .

Tyler and the Kentish men advanced to Canterbury , entering the walled city and castle without resistance on 10 June . The rebels deposed the absent Archbishop of Canterbury , Sudbury , and made the cathedral monks swear loyalty to their cause . They attacked properties in the city with links to the hated royal council , and searched the city for suspected enemies , dragging the suspects out of their houses and executing them . The city gaol was opened and the prisoners freed . Tyler then persuaded a few thousand of the rebels to leave Canterbury and advance with him on London the next morning .

= = = = March on the capital = = = =

The Kentish advance on London appears to have been coordinated with the movement of the rebels in Essex , Suffolk and Norfolk . Their forces were armed with weapons including sticks , battle axes , old swords and bows . Along their way , they encountered Lady Joan , the King 's mother , who was travelling back to the capital to avoid being caught up in the revolt ; she was mocked but otherwise left unharmed . The Kentish rebels reached Blackheath , just south @-@ east of the capital , on 12 June .

Word of the revolt reached the King at Windsor Castle on the night of 10 June . He travelled by boat down the River Thames to London the next day , taking up residence in the powerful fortress of the Tower of London for safety , where he was joined by his mother , Archbishop Sudbury , the Lord High Treasurer Sir Robert Hales , the Earls of Arundel , Salisbury and Warwick and several other senior nobles . A delegation , headed by Thomas Brinton , the Bishop of Rochester , was sent out from London to negotiate with the rebels and persuade them to return home .

At Blackheath , John Ball gave a famous sermon to the assembled Kentishmen . Ball was a well @-@ known priest and radical preacher from Kent , who was by now closely associated with Tyler . Chroniclers ' accounts vary as to how he came to be involved in the revolt ; he may have been released from Maidstone gaol by the crowds , or might have been already at liberty when the revolt broke out . Ball rhetorically asked the crowds " When Adam delved and Eve span , who was then a gentleman ? " and promoted the rebel slogan " With King Richard and the true commons of England " . The phrases emphasised the rebel opposition to the continuation of serfdom and to the hierarchies of the Church and State that separated the subject from the King , while stressing that they were loyal to the monarchy and , unlike the King 's advisers , were " true " to Richard . The rebels rejected proposals from the Bishop of Rochester that they should return home , and instead prepared to march on .

Discussions took place in the Tower of London about how to deal with the revolt . The King had only a few troops at hand , in the form of the castle 's garrison , his immediate bodyguard and , at most , several hundred soldiers . Many of the more experienced military commanders were in France , Ireland and Germany , and the nearest major military force was in the north of England , guarding against a potential Scottish invasion . Resistance in the provinces was also complicated by English law , which stated that only the King could summon local militias or lawfully execute rebels and criminals , leaving many local lords unwilling to attempt to suppress the uprisings on their own authority .

Since the Blackheath negotiations had failed , the decision was taken that the King himself should meet the rebels , at Greenwich , on the south side of the Thames . Guarded by four barges of

soldiers , Richard sailed from the Tower on the morning of 13 June , where he was met on the other side by the rebel crowds . The negotiations failed , as Richard was unwilling to come ashore and the rebels refused to enter discussions until he did . Richard returned across the river to the Tower .

= = = Events in London = = =

= = = Entry to the city = = =

The rebels began to cross from Southwark onto London Bridge on the afternoon of 13 June . The defences on London Bridge were opened from the inside , either in sympathy for the rebel cause or out of fear , and the rebels advanced into the city . At the same time , the rebel force from Essex made its way towards Aldgate on the north side of the city . The rebels swept west through the centre of the city , and Aldgate was opened to let the rest of the rebels in .

The Kentish rebels had assembled a wide @-@ ranging list of people whom they wanted the King to hand over for execution . It included national figures , such as John of Gaunt , Archbishop Sudbury and Hales ; other key members of the royal council ; officials , such as Belknap and Bampton who had intervened in Kent ; and other hated members of the wider royal circle . When they reached the Marshalsea Prison in Southwark , they tore it apart . By now the Kent and Essex rebels had been joined by many rebellious Londoners . The Fleet and Newgate Prisons were attacked by the crowds , and the rebels also targeted houses belonging to Flemish immigrants .

On the north side of London , the rebels approached Smithfield and Clerkenwell Priory , the headquarters of the Knights Hospitaller which was headed by Hales . The priory was destroyed , along with the nearby manor . Heading west along Fleet Street , the rebels attacked the Temple , a complex of legal buildings and offices owned by the Hospitallers . The contents , books and paperwork were brought out and burned in the street , and the buildings systematically demolished . Meanwhile , John Fordham , the Keeper of the Privy Seal and one of the men on the rebels ' execution list , narrowly escaped when the crowds ransacked his accommodation but failed to notice he was still in the building .

Next to be attacked along Fleet Street was the Savoy Palace , a huge , luxurious building belonging to John of Gaunt . According to the chronicler Henry Knighton it contained " such quantities of vessels and silver plate , without counting the parcel @-@ gilt and solid gold , that five carts would hardly suffice to carry them " ; official estimates placed the value of the contents at around £ 10 @, @ 000 . The interior was systematically destroyed by the rebels , who burnt the soft furnishings , smashed the precious metal work , crushed the gems , set fire to the Duke 's records and threw the remains into the Thames and the city drains . Almost nothing was stolen by the rebels , who declared themselves to be " zealots for truth and justice , not thieves and robbers " . The remains of the building were then set alight . In the evening , rebel forces gathered outside the Tower of London , from where the King watched the fires burning across the city .

= = = Taking the Tower of London = = =

On the morning of 14 June , the crowd continued west along the Thames , burning the houses of officials around Westminster and opening the Westminster gaol . They then moved back into central London , setting fire to more buildings and storming Newgate Prison . The hunt for Flemings continued , and those with Flemish @-@ sounding accents were killed , including the royal adviser , Richard Lyons . In one city ward , the bodies of 40 executed Flemings were piled up in the street , and at the Church of St Martin Vintry , popular with the Flemish , 35 of the community were killed . Historian Rodney Hilton argues that these attacks may have been coordinated by the weavers ' guilds of London , who were commercial competitors of the Flemish weavers .

Isolated inside the Tower , the royal government was in a state of shock at the turn of events . The King left the castle that morning and made his way to negotiate with the rebels at Mile End in east London , taking only a very small bodyguard with him . The King left Sudbury and Hales behind in

the Tower , either for their own safety or because Richard had decided it would be safer to distance himself from his unpopular ministers . Along the way , several Londoners accosted the King to complain about alleged injustices .

It is uncertain who spoke for the rebels at Mile End , and Wat Tyler may not have been present on this occasion , but they appear to have put forward their various demands to the King , including the surrender of the hated officials on their lists for execution ; the abolition of serfdom and unfree tenure ; " that there should be no law within the realm save the law of Winchester " , and a general amnesty for the rebels . It is unclear precisely what was meant by the law of Winchester , but it probably referred to the rebel ideal of self @-@ regulating village communities . Richard issued charters announcing the abolition of serfdom , which immediately began to be disseminated around the country . He declined to hand over any of his officials , apparently instead promising that he would personally implement any justice that was required .

While Richard was at Mile End , the Tower was taken by the rebels . A force of rebels , separate from those operating under Tyler at Mile End , approached the castle , possibly in the late morning . The gates were open to receive Richard on his return and a crowd of around 400 rebels entered the fortress , encountering no resistance , possibly because the guards were terrified by them .

Once inside , the rebels began to hunt down their key targets , and found Archbishop Sudbury and Robert Hales in the chapel of the White Tower . Along with William Appleton , John of Gaunt 's physician , and John Legge , a royal sergeant , they were taken out to Tower Hill and beheaded . Their heads were paraded around the city , before being affixed to London Bridge . The rebels found John of Gaunt 's son , the future Henry IV , and were about to execute him as well , when John Ferrour , one of the royal guards , successfully interceded on his behalf . The rebels also discovered Lady Joan and Joan Holland , Richard 's sister , in the castle but let them go unharmed after making fun of them . The castle was thoroughly looted of armour and royal paraphernalia .

In the aftermath of the attack , Richard did not return to the Tower but instead travelled from Mile End to the Great Wardrobe , one of his royal houses in Blackfriars , part of south @-@ west London . There he appointed the military commander Richard FitzAlan , the Earl of Arundel , to replace Sudbury as Chancellor , and began to make plans to regain an advantage over the rebels the following day . Many of the Essex rebels now began to disperse , content with the King 's promises , leaving Tyler and the Kentish forces the most significant faction in London . Tyler 's men moved around the city that evening , seeking out and killing John of Gaunt 's employees , foreigners and anyone associated with the legal system .

= = = = Smithfield = = = =

On 15 June the royal government and the remaining rebels , who were unsatisfied with the charters granted the previous day , agreed to meet at Smithfield , just outside the city walls . London remained in confusion , with various bands of rebels roaming the city independently . Richard prayed at Westminster Abbey , before setting out for the meeting in the late afternoon . The chronicler accounts of the encounter all vary on matters of detail , but agree on the broad sequence of events . The King and his party , at least 200 strong and including men @-@ at @-@ arms , positioned themselves outside St Bartholomew 's Priory to the east of Smithfield , and the thousands of rebels massed along the western end .

Richard probably called Tyler forwards from the crowd to meet him , and Tyler greeted the King with what the royal party considered excessive familiarity , terming Richard his " brother " and promising him his friendship . Richard queried why Tyler and the rebels had not yet left London following the signing of the charters the previous day , but this brought an angry rebuke from Tyler , who requested that a further charter be drawn up . The rebel leader rudely demanded refreshment and , once this had been provided , attempted to leave .

An argument then broke out between Tyler and some of the royal servants . The Mayor of London , William Walworth , stepped forward to intervene , Tyler made some motion towards the King , and the royal soldiers leapt in . Either Walworth or Richard ordered Tyler to be arrested , Tyler attempted to attack the Mayor , and Walworth responded by stabbing Tyler . Ralph Standish , a royal squire ,

then repeatedly stabbed Tyler with his sword , mortally injuring him .

The situation was now precarious and violence appeared likely as the rebels prepared to unleash a volley of arrows . Richard rode forwards towards the crowd and persuaded them to follow him away from Smithfields , to Clerkenwell Fields , defusing the situation . Walworth meanwhile began to regain control of the situation , backed by reinforcements from the city . Tyler 's head was cut off and displayed on a pole and , with their leader dead and the royal government now backed by the London militia , the rebel movement began to collapse . Richard promptly knighted Walworth and his leading supporters for their services .

= = = Wider revolt = = =

= = = = Eastern England = = = =

While the revolt was unfolding in London , John Wrawe led his force into Suffolk . Wrawe had considerable influence over the development of the revolt across eastern England , where there may have been almost as many rebels as in the London revolt . The authorities put up very little resistance to the revolt : the major nobles failed to organise defences , key fortifications fell easily to the rebels and the local militias were not mobilised . As in London and the south @-@ east , this was in part due to the absence of key military leaders and the nature of English law , but any locally recruited men might also have proved unreliable in the face of a popular uprising .

On 12 June , Wrawe attacked Sir Richard Lyons ' property at Overhall , advancing on to Cavendish and Bury St Edmunds in west Suffolk the next day , gathering further support as they went . John Cambridge , the Prior of the wealthy Bury St Edmunds Abbey , was disliked in the town , and Wrawe allied himself with the townspeople and stormed the abbey . The Prior escaped , but was found two days later and beheaded . A small band of rebels marched north to Thetford to extort protection money from the town , and another group tracked down Sir John Cavendish , the Chief Justice of the King 's Bench and Chancellor of the University of Cambridge . Cavendish was caught in Lakenheath and killed . John Battisford and Thomas Sampson independently led a revolt near Ipswich on 14 June . They took the town without opposition and looted the properties of the archdeacon and local tax officials . The violence spread out further , with attacks on many properties and the burning of the local court records . One official , Edmund Lakenheath , was forced to flee from the Suffolk coast by boat .

Revolt began to stir in St Albans in Hertfordshire late on 13 June , when news broke of the events in London . There had been long @-@ running disagreements in St Albans between the town and the local abbey , which had extensive privileges in the region . On 14 June , protesters met with the Abbot , Thomas de la Mare , and demanded their freedom from the abbey . A group of townsmen under the leadership of William Grindecobbe traveled to London , where they appealed to the King for the rights of the abbey to be abolished . Wat Tyler , then still in control of the city , granted them authority in the meantime to take direct action against the abbey . Grindecobbe and the rebels returned to St Albans , where they found the Prior had already fled . The rebels broke open the abbey gaol , destroyed the fences marking out the abbey lands and burnt the abbey records in the town square . They then forced Thomas de la Mare to surrender the abbey 's rights in a charter on 16 June . The revolt against the abbey spread out over the next few days , with abbey property and financial records being destroyed across the county .

On 15 June , revolt broke out in Cambridgeshire , led by elements of Wrawe 's Suffolk rebellion and some local men , such as John Greyston , who had been involved in the events in London and had returned to his home county to spread the revolt , and Geoffrey Cobbe and John Hanchach , members of the local gentry . The University of Cambridge , staffed by priests and enjoying special royal privileges , was widely hated by the other inhabitants of the town . A revolt backed by the Mayor of Cambridge broke out with the university as its main target . The rebels ransacked Corpus Christi College , which had connections to John of Gaunt , and the University 's church , and attempted to execute the University bedel , who escaped . The university 's library and archives



were burnt in the centre of the town . The next day , the university was forced to negotiate a new charter , giving up its royal privileges . Revolt then spread north from Cambridge toward Ely , where the gaol was opened and the local Justice of the Peace executed .

In Norfolk , the revolt was led by Geoffrey Litster , a weaver , and Sir Roger Bacon , a local lord with ties to the Suffolk rebels . Litster began sending out messengers across the county in a call to arms on 14 June , and isolated outbreaks of violence occurred . The rebels assembled on 17 June outside Norwich and killed Sir Robert Salle , who was in charge of the city defences and had attempted to negotiate a settlement . The people of the town then opened the gates to let the rebels in . They began looting buildings and killed Reginald Eccles , a local official . William de Ufford , the Earl of Suffolk fled his estates and travelled in disguise to London . The other leading members of the local gentry were captured and forced to play out the roles of a royal household , working for Litster . Violence spread out across the county , as gaols were opened , Flemish immigrants killed , court records burned , and property looted and destroyed .

= = = Northern and western England = = =

Revolts also occurred across the rest of England , particularly in the cities of the north , traditionally centres of political unrest . In the town of Beverley , violence broke out between the richer mercantile elite and the poorer townspeople during May . By the end of the month the rebels had taken power and replaced the former town administration with their own . The rebels attempted to enlist the support of Alexander Neville , the Archbishop of York , and in June forced the former town government to agree to arbitration through Neville . Peace was restored in June 1382 but tensions continued to simmer for many years .

Word of the troubles in the south @-@ east spread north , slowed by the poor communication links of medieval England . In Leicester , where John of Gaunt had a substantial castle , warnings arrived of a force of rebels advancing on the city from Lincolnshire , who were intent on destroying the castle and its contents . The mayor and the town mobilised their defences , including a local militia , but the rebels never arrived . John of Gaunt was in Berwick when word reached him on 17 June of the revolt . Not knowing that Wat Tyler had by now been killed , John of Gaunt placed his castles in Yorkshire and Wales on alert . Fresh rumours , many of them incorrect , continued to arrive in Berwick , suggesting widespread rebellions across the west and east of England and the looting of the ducal household in Leicester ; rebel units were even said to be hunting for the Duke himself . Gaunt began to march to Bamburgh Castle , but then changed course and diverted north into Scotland , only returning south once the fighting was over .

News of the initial events in London also reached York around 17 June , and attacks at once broke out on the properties of the Dominican friars , the Franciscan friaries and other religious institutions . Violence continued over the coming weeks , and on 1 July a group of armed men , under the command of John de Gisbourne , forced their way into the city and attempted to seize control . The mayor , Simon de Quixlay , gradually began to reclaim authority , but order was not properly restored until 1382 . The news of the southern revolt reached Scarborough where riots broke out against the ruling elite on 23 June , with the rebels dressed in white hoods with a red tail at the back . Members of the local government were deposed from office , and one tax collector was nearly lynched . By 1382 the elite had re @-@ established power .

In the Somerset town of Bridgwater , revolt broke out on 19 June , led by Thomas Ingleby and Adam Brugge . The crowds attacked the local Augustine house and forced their master to give up his local privileges and pay a ransom . The rebels then turned on the properties of John Sydenham , a local merchant and official , looting his manor and burning paperwork , before executing Walter Baron , a local man . The Ilchester gaol was stormed , and one unpopular prisoner executed .

= = = Suppression = = =

The royal suppression of the revolt began shortly after the death of Wat Tyler on 15 June . Sir Robert Knolles , Sir Nicholas Brembre and Sir Robert Launde were appointed to restore control in

the capital . A summons was put out for soldiers , probably around 4 @, @ 000 men were mustered in London , and expeditions to the other troubled parts of the country soon followed .

The revolt in East Anglia was independently suppressed by Henry le Despenser , the Bishop of Norwich . Henry was in Stamford in Lincolnshire when the revolt broke out , and when he found out about it he marched south with eight men @-@ at @-@ arms and a small force of archers , gathering more forces as he went . He marched first to Peterborough , where he routed the local rebels and executed any he could capture , including some who had taken shelter in the local abbey . He then headed south @-@ east via Huntingdon and Ely , reached Cambridge on 19 June , and then headed further into the rebel @-@ controlled areas of Norfolk . Henry reclaimed Norwich on 24 June , before heading out with a company of men to track down the rebel leader , Geoffrey Litster . The two forces met at the Battle of North Walsham on 25 or 26 June ; the Bishop 's forces triumphed and Litster was captured and executed . Henry 's quick action was essential to the suppression of the revolt in East Anglia , but he was very unusual in taking matters into his own hands in this way , and his execution of the rebels without royal sanction was illegal .

On 17 June , the King dispatched his half @-@ brother Thomas Holland and Sir Thomas Trivet to Kent with a small force to restore order . They held courts at Maidstone and Rochester . William de Ufford , the Earl of Suffolk , returned to his county on 23 June , accompanied by a force of 500 men . He quickly subdued the area and was soon holding court in Mildenhall , where many of the accused were sentenced to death . He moved on into Norfolk on 6 July , holding court in Norwich , Great Yarmouth and Hacking . Hugh , Lord la Zouche , led the legal proceedings against the rebels in Cambridgeshire . In St Albans , the Abbot arrested William Grindecobbe and his main supporters .

On 20 June , the King 's uncle , Thomas of Woodstock , and Robert Tresilian , the replacement Chief Justice , were given special commissions across the whole of England . Thomas oversaw court cases in Essex , backed up by a substantial military force as resistance was continuing and the county was still in a state of unrest . Richard himself visited Essex , where he met with a rebel delegation seeking confirmation of the grants the King had given at Mile End . Richard rejected them , allegedly telling them that " rustics you were and rustics you are still . You will remain in bondage , not as before , but incomparably harsher " . Tresilian soon joined Thomas , and carried out 31 executions in Chelmsford , then travelled to St Albans in July for further court trials , which appear to have utilised dubious techniques to ensure convictions . Thomas went on to Gloucester with 200 soldiers to suppress the unrest there . Henry Percy , the Earl of Northumberland , was tasked to restore order to Yorkshire .

A wide range of laws were invoked in the process of the suppression , from general treason to charges of book burning or demolishing houses , a process complicated by the relatively narrow definition of treason at the time . The use of informants and denunciations became common , causing fear to spread across the country ; by November at least 1 @, @ 500 people had been executed or killed in battle . Many of those who had lost property in the revolt attempted to seek legal compensation , and John of Gaunt made particular efforts to track down those responsible for destroying his Savoy Palace . Most had only limited success , as the defendants were rarely willing to attend court . The last of these cases was resolved in 1387 .

The rebel leaders were quickly rounded up . A rebel leader by the name of Jack Straw was captured in London and executed . John Ball was caught in Coventry , tried in St Albans , and executed on 15 July . Grindecobbe was also tried and executed in St Albans . John Wrawe was tried in London ; he probably gave evidence against 24 of his colleagues in the hope of a pardon , but was sentenced to be executed by being hanged , drawn and quartered on 6 May 1382 . Sir Roger Bacon was probably arrested before the final battle in Norfolk , and was tried and imprisoned in the Tower of London before finally being pardoned by the Crown . As of September 1381 , Thomas Ingleby of Bridgwater had successfully evaded the authorities .

== Aftermath ==

The royal government and Parliament began to re @-@ establish the normal processes of

government after the revolt ; as the historian Michael Postan describes , the uprising was in many ways a " passing episode " . On 30 June , the King ordered England 's serfs to return to their previous conditions of service , and on 2 July the royal charters signed under duress during the rising were formally revoked . Parliament met in November to discuss the events of the year and how best to respond to their challenges . The revolt was blamed on the misconduct of royal officials , who , it was argued , had been excessively greedy and overbearing . The Commons stood behind the existing labour laws , but requested changes in the royal council , which Richard granted . Richard also granted general pardons to those who had executed rebels without due process , to all men who had remained loyal , and to all those who had rebelled ? with the exception of the men of Bury St Edmunds , any men who had been involved in the killing of the King 's advisers , and those who were still on the run from prison .

Despite the violence of the suppression , the government and local lords were relatively circumspect in restoring order after the revolt , and continued to be worried about fresh revolts for several decades . Few lords took revenge on their peasants except through the legal processes of the courts . Low @-@ level unrest continued for several more years . In September 1382 there was trouble in Norfolk , involving an apparent plot against the Bishop of Norwich , and in March the following year there was an investigation into a plot to kill the sheriff of Devon . When negotiating rents with their landlords , peasants alluded to the memory of the revolt and the threat of violence .

There were no further attempts by Parliament to impose a poll tax or to reform England 's fiscal system . The Commons instead concluded at the end of 1381 that the military effort on the Continent should be " carefully but substantially reduced " . Unable to raise fresh taxes , the government had to curtail its foreign policy and military expeditions and began to examine the options for peace . The institution of serfdom declined after 1381 , but primarily for economic rather than political reasons . Rural wages continued to increase , and lords increasingly sold their serfs ' freedom in exchange for cash , or converted traditional forms of tenure to new leasehold arrangements . During the 15th century the institution vanished in England .

= = Rebels = =

Chroniclers primarily described the rebels as rural serfs , using broad , derogatory Latin terms such as *serviles rustici* , *servile genus* and *rusticitas* . Some chroniclers , including Knighton , also noted the presence of runaway apprentices , artisans and others , sometimes terming them the " lesser commons " . The evidence from the court records following the revolt , albeit biased in various ways , similarly shows the involvement of a much broader community , and the earlier perception that the rebels were only constituted of unfree serfs is now rejected .

The rural rebels came from a wide range of backgrounds , but typically they were , as the historian Christopher Dyer describes , " people well below the ranks of the gentry , but who mainly held some land and goods " , and not the very poorest in society , who formed a minority of the rebel movement . Many had held positions of authority in local village governance , and these seem to have provided leadership to the revolt . Some were artisans , including , as the historian Rodney Hilton lists , " carpenters , sawyers , masons , cobblers , tailors , weavers , fullers , glovers , hosiers , skimmers , bakers , butchers , innkeepers , cooks and a lime @-@ burner " . They were predominantly male , but with some women in their ranks . The rebels were typically illiterate ; only between 5 and 15 per cent of England could read during this period . They also came from a broad range of local communities , including at least 330 south @-@ eastern villages .

Many of the rebels had urban backgrounds , and the majority of those involved in the events of London were probably local townsfolk rather than peasants . In some cases , the townsfolk who joined the revolt were the urban poor , attempting to gain at the expense of the local elites . In London , for example , the urban rebels appear to have largely been the poor and unskilled . Other urban rebels were part of the elite , such as at York where the protesters were typically prosperous members of the local community , while in some instances , townsfolk allied themselves with the rural population , as at Bury St Edmunds . In other cases , such as Canterbury , the influx of population from the villages following the Black Death made any distinction between urban and rural

less meaningful .

The vast majority of those involved in the revolt of 1381 were not represented in Parliament and were excluded from its decision making . In a few cases the rebels were led or joined by relatively prosperous members of the gentry , such as Sir Roger Bacon in Norfolk . Some of them later claimed to have been forced to join the revolt by the rebels . Clergy also formed part of the revolt ; as well as the more prominent leaders , such as John Ball or John Wrawe , nearly 20 are mentioned in the records of the revolt in the south @-@ east . Some were pursuing local grievances , some were disadvantaged and suffering relative poverty , and others appear to have been motivated by strong radical beliefs .

Many of those involved in the revolt used pseudonyms , particularly in the letters sent around the country to encourage support and fresh uprisings . They were used both to avoid incriminating particular individuals and to allude to popular values and stories . One popular assumed name was Piers Plowman , taken from the main character in William Langland 's poem . Jack was also a widely used rebel pseudonym , and historians Steven Justice and Carter Revard suggest that this may have been because it resonated with the Jacques of the French Jacquerie revolt several decades earlier .

= = Legacy = =

= = = Historiography = = =

Contemporary chroniclers of the events in the revolt have formed an important source for historians . The chroniclers were biased against the rebel cause and typically portrayed the rebels , in the words of the historian Susan Crane , as " beasts , monstrosities or misguided fools " . London chroniclers were also unwilling to admit the role of ordinary Londoners in the revolt , preferring to place the blame entirely on rural peasants from the south @-@ east . Among the key accounts was the anonymous Anonimale Chronicle , whose author appears to have been part of the royal court and an eye @-@ witness to many of the events in London . The chronicler Thomas Walsingham was present for much of the revolt , but focused his account on the terror of the social unrest and was extremely biased against the rebels . The events were recorded in France by Jean Froissart , the author of the Chronicles . He had well @-@ placed sources close to the revolt , but was inclined to elaborate the known facts with colourful stories . No sympathetic accounts of the rebels survive .

At the end of the 19th century there was a surge in historical interest in the Peasants ' Revolt , spurred by the contemporary growth of the labour and socialist movements . Work by Charles Oman , Edgar Powell , André Réville and G. M. Trevelyan established the course of the revolt . By 1907 the accounts of the chroniclers were all widely available in print and the main public records concerning the events had been identified . Réville began to use the legal indictments that had been used against suspected rebels after the revolt as a fresh source of historical information , and over the next century extensive research was carried out into the local economic and social history of the revolt , using scattered local sources across south @-@ east England .

Interpretations of the revolt have changed over the years . 17th @-@ century historians , such as John Smyth , established the idea that the revolt had marked the end of unfree labour and serfdom in England . 19th @-@ century historians such as William Stubbs and Thorold Rogers reinforced this conclusion , Stubbs describing it as " one of the most portentous events in the whole of our history " . In the 20th century , this interpretation was increasingly challenged by historians such as May McKisack , Michael Postan and Richard Dobson , who revised the impact of the revolt on further political and economic events in England . Mid @-@ 20th century Marxist historians were both interested in , and generally sympathetic to , the rebel cause , a trend culminating in Hilton 's 1973 account of the uprising , set against the context of wider peasant revolts across Europe during the period . The Peasants ' Revolt has received more academic attention than any other medieval revolt , and this research has been interdisciplinary , involving historians , literary scholars and international collaboration .

The name " the Peasants ' Revolt " emerged in the 18th and early 19th centuries , and its first recorded use by historians was in John Richard Green 's Short History of the English People in 1874 . Contemporary chronicles did not give the revolt a specific title , and the term " peasant " did not appear in the English language until the 15th century . The title has been critiqued by modern historians such as Miri Rubin and Paul Strohm , both on the grounds that many in the movements were not peasants , and that the events more closely resemble a prolonged protest or rising , rather than a revolt or rebellion .

= = = Popular culture = = =

The Peasants ' Revolt became a popular literary subject . The poet John Gower , who had close ties to officials involved in the suppression of the revolt , amended his famous poem *Vox Clamantis* after the revolt , inserting a section condemning the rebels and likening them to wild animals . Geoffrey Chaucer , who lived in Aldgate and may have been in London during the revolt , used the rebel killing of Flemings as a metaphor for wider disorder in *The Nun 's Priest 's Tale* part of *The Canterbury Tales* , parodying Gower 's poem . Chaucer otherwise made no reference to the revolt in his work , possibly because as he was a client of the King it would have been politically unwise to discuss it . William Langland , the author of the poem *Piers Plowman* , which had been widely used by the rebels , made various changes to its text after the revolt in order to distance himself from their cause .

The revolt formed the basis for the late 16th @-@ century play , *The Life and Death of Jack Straw* , possibly written by George Peele and probably originally designed for production in the city 's guild pageants . It portrays Jack Straw as a tragic figure , being led into wrongful rebellion by John Ball , making clear political links between the instability of late @-@ Elizabethan England and the 14th century . The story of the revolt was used in pamphlets during the English Civil War of the 17th century , and formed part of John Cleveland 's early history of the war . It was deployed as a cautionary account in political speeches during the 18th century , and a chapbook entitled *The History of Wat Tyler and Jack Strawe* proved popular during the Jacobite risings and American War of Independence . Thomas Paine and Edmund Burke argued over the lessons to be drawn from the revolt , Paine expressing sympathy for the rebels and Burke condemning the violence . The Romantic poet Robert Southey based his 1794 play *Wat Tyler* on the events , taking a radical and pro @-@ rebel perspective .

As the historian Michael Postan describes , the revolt became famous " as a landmark in social development and [ as ] a typical instance of working @-@ class revolt against oppression " , and was widely used in 19th and 20th century socialist literature . William Morris built on Chaucer in his novel *A Dream of John Ball* , published in 1888 , creating a narrator who was openly sympathetic to the peasant cause , albeit a 19th @-@ century persona taken back to the 14th century by a dream . The story ends with a prophecy that socialist ideals will one day be successful . In turn , this representation of the revolt influenced Morris 's utopian socialist *News from Nowhere* . Florence Converse used the revolt in her novel *Long Will* in 1903 . Later 20th century socialists continued to draw parallels between the revolt and contemporary political struggles , including during the arguments over the introduction of the Community Charge in the United Kingdom during the 1980s .

Conspiracy theorists , including writer John Robinson , have attempted to explain alleged flaws in mainstream historical accounts of the events of 1381 , such as the speed with which the rebellion was coordinated . Theories include that the revolt was led by a secret , occult organisation called " the Great Society " , said to be an offshoot of the order of the Knights Templar destroyed in 1312 , or that the fraternity of the Freemasons was covertly involved in organising the revolt .