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BASILDON AND ITS CONNECTION TO WAT TYLER

INTRODUCTION.

We probably all know, or are aware, that Wat Tyler was one of the leaders of the Peasant Revolt of 1381 but are less aware of the connection to which Basildon has to this period of English history. It is important that we try to explain, or document, some of that history, not only associated with him, and his legacy, but also of the period of time which includes Barstable Hundred through to the creation of the Wat Tyler Country Park.

The River Thames in prehistory.

The River Thames has played a vital role in the development and story of London for the last 600,000 years. It is only 352 kilometres from source to sea, but throughout time it has shaped and re-shaped the local landscape. It has been used by humans as a highway, a boundary, a food store, and a sacred stream. In prehistory, the river was wider and shallower, and probably flowed in a number of different channels. It is a tidal river and in AD43 Roman London was founded at the point where fresh water met the incoming sea. To Julius Caesar the river was known as Tamesa – 'the flowing one.'

At the beginning of the Ice Age, the Thames was much longer and ran through a different part of the UK. It started in the Welsh uplands, flowed across the English midlands, and eventually joined the river Rhine in the southern part of what is now the North Sea. Nearly half a million years ago it was diverted into its present valley by ice sheets. During that glacial time, much of the southern part of the North Sea was land, known to palaeogeographers as Doggerland. At this time, the Thames, the Meuse, the Scheldt, and the Rhine probably joined before flowing into the sea, in a system known as the Loubourg or Lobourg River. There is debate as to whether this river would have flowed south-west into what is now the English Channel, or north into the North Sea close to modern Yorkshire. Scientific research favours the former, with the Thames and Rhine meeting in a large lake, the outflow of which was close to the present-day Straits of Dover. Since then, it has changed course many times because of changes in global climate and sea level. Each time the sea level dropped, the river had to cut its way down through the land to reach the sea, leaving behind a dry flood plain.

This river and its tributaries formed a river system draining the Welsh mountains and bringing some of their characteristic volcanic rocks into this area. The evidence for this is a substantial thickness of what is called Kesgrave Sands and Gravels which represent the bed of the river. These old Thames gravels contain a variety of distinctive pebbles from as far away as North Wales, evidence of the ancient drainage catchment. The gravels also contain large boulders of puddingstone and sarsens, which are very hard conglomerates and sandstones, respectively. They are believed to be derived from pebble and sand seams in the Reading Beds (subsequently cemented by quartz). They have been put to use by man as ancient way markers at road junctions. The gravels have great commercial value and are worked in numerous pits between Harlow, Chelmsford, and Colchester, where the ancestral Thames flowed at least 600,000 years ago. During this time, the River Medway flowed north across east Essex to join the Thames near Clacton, leaving behind a ribbon of distinctive gravel which can be found between Burnham-on-Crouch and Bradwell-on-Sea. There were also other northward-flowing tributaries of the early Thames. Evidence of these are the patches of gravel that are found near the tops of the modest hills in south Essex, principally the Langdon Hills, Warley, and High Beach in Epping Forest

As well as fresh water, the Thames provided prehistoric people with a wide range of natural resources such as reeds, rushes, and timber for building. The riverbed was also full of flint nodules (large lumps), which were vital for making sharp tools. The fertile riverbanks were farmed and the grain, along with other local produce, was exchanged for other necessities such as stone, metal and salt. Wildlife was also plentiful. There were many types of fish and birds, and small mammals like beavers and otters. Harpoons made of antler and were used to catch both fish and birds. Larger animals, including deer and cattle, also came down to the river to drink. Seasonal runs of salmon, migrating birds and the occasional beached whale would have supplemented this diverse diet. Together, this made the Thames Valley a very prosperous place to live. The Thames provided direct access into the heart of southern Britain and to the North Sea. During prehistoric times, it played a key role in moving people, goods, and ideas. Many of the objects found in the river were from distant places, including Ireland, the Lake District, Cornwall and even Europe. Local communities used wooden boats and rafts, alongside skin-covered coracles, kayaks, and canoes to get about. In the years before the Roman conquest, high-sided, flat-bottomed boats appear on coins. These could be beached on the shelving river foreshores and unloaded easily. Large numbers of objects have been recovered from the Thames during dredging. These include human remains, particularly skulls, as well as weapons, tools and ornaments made from stone, bone, and metal.

Settlements built on its islands used the water as a first line of defence. The remains of a number of wooden bridges have been found along the Thames. In the medieval period, ferries plied the stretches of river, as presumably they would have done in prehistoric times. In the last century BC, the Thames also acted as a

tribal boundary. Archaeologists have mapped out prehistoric territories using coins, such as the one shown. Their conclusions suggest the river might have represented the boundary between neighbouring groups.
According to Julius Caesar, the river was 'fordable at one point only, and even there with difficulty.' There have been many suggestions made for the site of the ford and the battle that ensued as Caesar's troops crossed it. It has never been found!

Marsh Land and Creeks of the area in Saxon and Medieval times.
From what is now Hole Haven Creek and onto Vange Creek, Fobbing Marshes and Vange Marshes around what is now wat Tyler Country Park and onto Pitsea Marsh and a creek leading to what was The Barge area.
Archaeological evidence tells us of the Saxon seaborne activity around the whole of the Essex coastline and as the entrance to the developing London, was a focus of maritime activity, both pre-roman through the Saxon to Viking wars. The Battles of Maldon and Benfleet are already well documented in history.

There is also a cluster of Minsters including Barking, Tilbury, South Benfleet, and Southminster with royal sites at Brightlingsea, Colchester and Maldon. Timber Fish-traps have been recorded in the River Blackwater, Colne and Stour estuaries and dated to the middle Saxon period. By the late Saxon period, the coastal marshes appear to have been used for sheep-pasturage without any evidence of banking protection.

Medieval period.
The saltings of the coastline are comprised of silts washed down to the sea by rivers, dispersed by the tides along the shore-line. Saltwater vegetation then establishes itself and the soft mud formed gradually develop into saltings. On the ebb tides, sediments are trapped, further raising the ground levels until only the higher tides are able to immerse. At this stage, the vegetation is well enough established to become good course grazing pasture, rich in iodine and other minerals, which sheep in particular, thrive on. It is at this stage that should the salt-marsh be enclosed by protective embankments, rainwater will gradually wash the salt deposits, gradually allowing the replacement of salt-water vegetation with fresh-water plants. These coastal marshlands generally lack trees or other deep-rooted plants due to the lower salt levels a few feet below the surface.

Throughout the late Saxon and Medieval periods, Essex Marshland Sheep were a prized source of dairy produce, in particular, cheeses. However, the decline in dairy farming had begun by the middle of the sixteenth century and appears to be largely due to changing fashions of food with dairy produce and in particular sheep's milk dropping in the social scale in favour of meat consumption. The rich marshland grazing was also used for the fattening of livestock during the summer months before being taken to London for slaughter. Subsequent mention of the cultivation of marshland crops, particularly Hay, indicates some flood protection of the Essex marshes had been embanked to a certain extent. However, it is difficult to establish when or if this occurred during the medieval period, but potential place names commonly associated with this time of 'cote' and 'wick.' Wickes were dairies, cheese making sheds and shepherds huts. The name occurs in considerable numbers particularly in this part of the county. They often exist on slightly raised ground. The distribution of names associated with meadows, such as 'mead' and 'ham' are more common west of Corringham. The term 'cote' appears to have two meanings in the context of coastal marshes, either as a dairy or a raised refuge for sheep and cattle, or as a salt-producing site. The place name 'worth' or 'ward' and 'wood' is also quite common and derives from the old English (Saxon) 'warod' meaning a coast or bank. They are largely found to the east of Corringham and Fobbing and are mainly thirteenth century or later and suggests they reflect on the reclamation of marshes occurred rather later than the Thameside marshes.

The coastal position and proximity to the huge market in London for agricultural produce, including fresh dairy and meat, expanded the development of many small creeks, ports, hythes and quays, well over a hundred in Essex. The meat trade with London from this part of Essex was established in the fourteenth century followed by cereals and hay to feed both the expanding London population of both people and horses. Of particular note, there was a direct trade from Thameside manors to the continent as in 1367 when John Burgeys of Fobbing obtained a Royal Warrant to ship sixty weys of cheese to Flanders. Catastrophic flooding is known to have occurred at irregular intervals, including the Great Martinmas Tide of 1099. It seems that the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries were a period subjected to a series of storms which precipitated the regularisation of sea-defences. By 1210 the 'law of the marsh' set out the important principle that each man should contribute to the upkeep of the defences from which he benefited, in proportion to has land or rights on the marsh.
This principle lasted until the Land Drainage Act of 1930. In addition to the 1099 flood, the was also a Great Martinmas tide of 1236.

It rained almost constantly throughout the summer and autumn of 1314 and then through most of 1315 and 1316. Crops rotted in the ground, harvests failed, and livestock drowned or starved. Food stocks depleted and the price of food soared. The result was the Great Famine, which over the next few years is thought to have claimed over 5% of the British population. It was the same or even worse in mainland Europe.

The shortage of crops pushed up prices of everyday necessities such as vegetables, wheat, barley, and oats. Bread was therefore also expensive and because the grain had to be dried before it could be used, of very poor quality. Salt, the only way at that time to cure and preserve meat, was difficult to obtain because it was much harder to extract through evaporation in wet weather; its price rose dramatically. In the spring of 1315 Edward II decreed that the price of basic foodstuffs be limited. This did not however do much to mitigate the crisis: the traders simply refused to sell their goods at these low prices. In the end the act was abolished at the Lincoln parliament in 1316. The situation got worse and worse as the rain continued to fall. It was reported that there was even no bread in St Albans for the king and his court when they stopped off there on 10th August 1315.
Things were particularly bad in the north of England and especially in Northumbria, where the people were already struggling due to looting by Scottish raiders. The population here resorted to eating dogs and horses.
Everyone was affected, from nobles to peasants. Things got so bad in the winter of 1315/1316 that the peasants ate the seed grain they had stored for planting in the spring. By 1316 there were even rumours of cannibalism. In their misery and starvation, many people begged, stole, and murdered for what little food they could find. Even law-abiding people resorted to criminality in order to feed themselves.

Parents who could no longer feed their families abandoned their children to fend for themselves. Indeed, the fairy-tale of Hansel and Gretel may have originated at this time. In the story, Hansel and Gretel have been abandoned in the woods by their parents during a time of famine. They are taken in by an old woman living in a cottage. The old woman starts to heat the oven, and the children realise she is planning to roast and eat them. Gretel manages to trick the old woman into opening the oven, and then pushes her in.

As the cold, wet weather continued, the famine reached its height in spring 1317. Finally in the summer of that year the weather patterns returned to normal, but it was 1322 before the food supply recovered completely. So what caused year after year of severe winters and cold, rainy summers? The onset of the Great Famine coincided with the end of the Medieval Warm Period and the beginning of a Little Ice Age.

The European climate was changing, with cooler and wetter summers and earlier autumn storms. These were far from ideal conditions for agriculture and with a large population to feed, it only took one failed harvest for things to get very bad very quickly. Some historians think that this terrible weather may have been caused by a volcanic eruption, perhaps that of Mount Tarawera in New Zealand which is known to have erupted around 1314. Unfortunately, the Great Famine was only the first of a series of severe crises to hit Europe in the 14th century; the Black Death was just around the corner…
The winter of 1376 into 1377 was also particularly bad, the Abbey of Barking recorded that ' by the flooding of the Thames, they have lost a great part of the profit of their possessions at Barkying and elsewhere in Essex.'
By the end of the thirteenth century, supervision of the coastal defences was in the hands of the king's justices and other dignitaries appointed to temporary commissions on walls and ditches. In the fourteenth century, the Essex Commissions were largely concerned with the banks on the upper reaches of Thameside with the power to compel negligent land-owners to fulfil their obligation to repair and maintain their share of the defences.

Post Medieval.
The sixteenth century was marked by a series of catastrophic tides, two in 1551 and others in 1552, 1564, 1565 and 1570. There was more limited flooding in 1663 and 1690, but the next really serious tide was on 16th February 1736, when the Gentleman's Magazine recorded ''A general inundation covered all the marshes and lowlands in Kent, Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk and Lincolnshire and some thousands of cattle were destroyed with several of their owners in endeavouring to save them.

The tide was the highest of any for 135 years past. The little isles of Candy (Canvey) and Fowlness were quiet under water, not a hoof was saved thereon, and the inhabitants were taken from the upper parts of their houses into boats."

The second half of the eighteenth and nineteenth century saw further embankment, often distinguishable from preceding periods of enclosure, by their rectilinear drainage pattern. Not all of these were successful, as at Bradwell-on-Sea where nothing remains of the late eighteenth century reclamations. There was serious flooding along the Essex coast on 'Black Monday' 29th November 1897 and again in 1901, 1903, 1904, 1906 and 1928. However, it was on the 31st of January to 1st February 1953 that the worst flooding recorded to date occurred on the low-lying coastal areas of eastern England and Holland. In Essex alone more than 76 square miles were flooded, drowning some 119 people with some 21,000 made homeless.

Vange and Fobbing Marshes

The marshes are unimproved coastal grassland, dykes, and creeks, with a wide variety of maritime herbs and grasses, some of them nationally rare. The site is the main British location for least lettuce. Insects with restricted distributions include the scarce emerald damselfly and Roesel's bush cricket. There are birds at Vange Marsh such as avocets, common terns, and black-tailed godwits. Now also triple SI site. There is access to Fobbing Marsh by footpaths from Corringham, and Vange Marsh is 600 metres from Pitsea railway station.

MUTE SWANS – (Pitsea and Vange Marshes 1950s.)

The marshes were my home - the creek's eternal
Silver - and the sun - singing of summer
And the silent swans. Leda - as yet – unheard of:

The gods were gentle - swans had the wings
Of angels and the fleets were rich with eels
And golden Rudd. Remembering such things -

Such light defined - can make me feel
The past is still alive - that summer lingers.
You'd think that - now - in honesty - was real:

The past as dead as frankincense and myrrh -
The memory as muted as a mummer.
But no - the swans of summer - still return -

Connecting past and present - though they're dumb -
With every myth - and moment: that reveals.

A poem by Mervyn Linford – Author (Basildon Borough Heritage Society member).

Pitsea Marsh.

Now a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The southern half is the Wat Tyler Country Park, and the northern half is private land. The site has a variety of habitats, such as grassland, scrub, reedbed, fen, ponds, and saltmarsh. It was reclaimed in the seventeenth century, when Pitsea Hall Fleet was excavated to construct sea walls.

Looking upstream past the Port of London Authority sign. The tide is out, and the creek is mainly mudflats with the occasional gull and Oystercatcher braving the heavy rain to feed.

The map on the sign could be misleading to the casual visitor as it gives the impression that the land across the creek is Canvey Island. In fact this is taken from Pitsea Wharf and we're looking towards Vange and Fobbing Marshes.

NOAH'S WIFE – (Houseboats Pitsea Creek and Timberman's Creek 1950s).

She lived in a houseboat on the creek -

a frail old lady as weak as the willowy reeds.

Winter or summer she wore
wellingtons and a mackintosh -
was witness to the shelduck and the geese.

Pushing a pram to market
she was followed by her tribe of dogs -
mongrels with a touch of mange.

She had an arrangement with the butcher -
bought lights and was given bones
to feed her whining multitude.

Children giggled in her wake:
were rude to the point of cruelty -
taunting and merciless.

Back on her boat she was at peace:
soothed by the salty wind -
calmed by the call of curlews.

Water from the farm
and driftwood for her range
she had ample for her needs.

Time and tide were her friends:
the skittering, sunlit waves -
as welcome as doves - an olive branch.

CREEKS – (My childhood playground in the 1950s).

I remember creeks like this from long ago:
Vange and Pitsea, Benfleet, Fobbing Horse -
serpentine and silver through the marsh
until they slithered gently to the sea - beyond Hole Haven.

A haven too for us:
children from the bombsites and the docks
where clanging trams and horse drawn carts would pass
amongst the rubble.

When I hear the laughing shelduck and the geese
across the flats from Two Tree's sacred isle
my mind is taken back along those creeks
with bladder wrack and glasswort and the frieze of summer skies.

We swam in those small 'side pools' where the sun
has stoked the saline waters with its heat
and listened as the redshank and the gulls
announced the church at Fobbing on its ridge of wheat and barley

and even now the cumuli that climb
into the blue traversed by these two swans
remind me of the tenor and the time
when tides were high on lavender and light and swathes of purslane.

But now the moon and all its starlit phases
can only shine its glade across the ebb
as winter's cold migration predisposes
all thoughts towards the stiffening of ice
and light's debacle.

Three poems by Mervyn Linford (Author) A former resident of the Borough and an active member of the Basildon Borough Heritage Society sharing the memories of his youth in and around the creeks.

THE BLACK DEATH

Satan Triumphant: The Black Death

I say, then, that the years of the fruitful Incarnation of the Son of God had attained to the number of one thousand three hundred and forty-eight, when into the notable city of Florence, fair over every other of Italy, there came to death-dealing pestilence, which, through the operation of the heavenly bodies or of our own iniquitous doings, being sent down upon mankind for our correction by the just wrath of God, had some years before appeared in the parts of the East and after having bereft these latter of an innumerable number of inhabitants, extending without cease from one place to another, had now unhappily spread towards the West.
---Giovanni Boccaccio, Decameron.

In October 1347, twelve Genoese trading ships put into the harbour at Messina in Sicily. The ships had come from the Black Sea where the Genoese had several important trading posts. The ships contained rather strange cargo: dead or dying sailors showed strange black swellings about the size of an egg located in their groins and armpits. These swellings oozed blood and pus. Those who suffered did so with extreme pain and were usually dead within a few days. The victims coughed and sweat heavily. Everything that issued from their body -- sweat, blood, breath, urine, and excrement -- smelled foul.

The disease was bubonic plague, and it came in two forms. In cases of infection of the blood stream, boils and internal bleeding were the result. In this guise the plague spread by physical contact. In the pneumonic phase, the plague was spread by respiration (coughing, sneezing, breathing). The plague was deadly -- a person could go to sleep at night feeling fine and be dead by morning. In other instances, a doctor could catch the illness from one of his patients and die before the patient.

The Italian poet, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) has left a chilling account of the plague as it struck Florence in 1348. His Decameron relates the story of seven ladies and three gentlemen who leave the city for their country villa for a period of ten days. They each take turns telling stories, one hundred in all, in the garden. Many of these are licentious while others are full of pathos and a poetical fancy. The backdrop of the first story is the plague, and it is here Boccaccio relates that in men and women alike there appeared, at the beginning of the malady, certain swellings, either on the groin or under the armpits, whereof some waxed to the bigness of a common apple, others the size of an egg, some more and some less, and these the vulgar named plague-boils.

Rumours of a plague supposedly arising in China and spreading through India, Persia, Syria, and Egypt had reached Europe in 1346. But no one paid any attention. Of course, there have been plagues throughout European history. Homer relates one such plague in the Iliad. Athens was struck in the 5th century, Arabia in the sixth and seventh centuries, and more recently, a plague in India raged from 1892 to 1910.

By January 1348, the plague had penetrated France by way of Marseilles and North Africa by way of Tunis. Both Marseilles and Tunis are port towns. The plague then spread west to Spain and North to central France by March. By May, the plague entered Rome and Florence. In June, the plague had moved to Paris, Bordeaux, Lyon, and London. Switzerland and Hungary fell victim in July.

Jean de Venette, a French friar, has left us a chronicle about the progress of the plague as it moved through Europe. ‘In any given period, the plague accomplished its work in three to six months and then faded from view. The plague came and went like a tornado -- its appearance and movement was totally unpredictable. In northern cities, the plague lay dormant in winter and then reappeared the following spring. In 1349, the plague reappeared at Paris and eventually spread to Holland, Scotland, and Ireland. In Norway, a ghost shipped drifted offshore for months before it ran aground with its cargo of death. By the end of 1349, Sweden, Denmark, Prussia, Iceland, and Greenland felt the full effects of the plague. The plague left nearly as quickly as it had appeared. By mid-1350, the plague had completed its deed across the continent of Europe’.

In enclosed places like monasteries, nunneries and prisons, the infection of one person usually meant the infection of all. Of one hundred and forty Dominican friars at Montpellier, only one man survived. Watching family and friends suffer and succumb to violent deaths, men could not help but wonder whether this pestilence had been sent to exterminate all sinners. After all, hadn't this happened once before? By the middle of the 14th century, the largest cities of Europe were Paris, Florence, Venice, and Genoa. These were cities with populations in excess of 100,000 people. London, Ghent, Milan, Bologna, Rome, Naples, and Cologne all had around 50,000 people. Smaller cities such as Bordeaux, Toulouse, Marseilles, Barcelona,

Seville, and Toledo contain 20 to 50,000 souls. The plague raged through all these cities killing anywhere between thirty and sixty percent.
To make matters worse, in January 1348 -- remember, this is the month the plague first appeared on the continent -- a serious earthquake hit an area between Naples and Venice. Houses and churches collapsed, villages were destroyed, and foul odours emanated from the earth. The death rate from the plague was erratic and ranged from twenty percent to one hundred percent. For the area extending from India to Iceland, it can be assumed that between thirty and thirty-five percent of Europe's population disappeared in the three years between 1347 and 1350. This meant about 20 million deaths out of an estimated population of 70 million.

Rich or poor, young, or old, fit, or ill, man or woman -- the plague made no distinction when it came to choosing its victims. The plague, like a tornado, will strike when and where it wants. For every case in which a healthy child was the only survivor of a family of twelve there are other cases in which the family elder was the only survivor. The plague could take out an entire side of one street or the entire street or just one house on the street. It oftentimes happened that a victim would catch the plague but recover. On the other hand, most people who caught the plague were dead within a few days. "To the cure of these maladies," wrote Boccaccio:
neither counsel of physician nor virtue of any medicine appeared to avail or profit aught. . . . Not only did few recover thereof, but well-nigh all died within the third day from the appearance of the aforesaid signs, this one sooner and that one later, and for the most part, without fever or other complication. . . The mischief was even greater; for not only did converse and consorting with the sick give to the sound infection or cause of common death, but the mere touching of the clothes appeared of itself to communicate the malady to the toucher.

Of this my own eyes had one day, among others, experienced in this way; to wit, that the rags of a poor man who had died of the plague, being cast out into the public way, two hogs came upon them and having first, after their wont, rooted among them with their snouts, took them in their mouths and tossed them about their jaws; then, in a little while, after turning round and round, they both, as if they had taken poison, fell down dead upon the rags with which they had in an ill hour intermeddled.

Trying to determine the number of people who died with any accuracy is difficult given the status of record-keeping at the time. However, historians do have some records at their disposal which shed some light on the numbers of people who met this awful fate. In Avignon, 400 people died daily over a period of three months (36,000 out of a population of 50,000). A single graveyard received more than 11,000 corpses in six weeks. In a three-month period in 1349, 800 people died daily in Paris, 500 daily in Pisa, and 600 daily in Vienna. In Frankfurt 2,000 people died over a period of ten weeks in 1349 and in that same period 12,000 lost their lives in Erfurt. Marchione di Coppo Stefani, who wrote his Florentine Chronicle in the late 1370s, related that: ‘Now it was ordered by the bishop and the Lords of the city government that they should formally inquire as to how many died in Florence. When it was seen at the beginning of October that no more persons were dying of the pestilence, they found that among males, females, children, and adults, 96,000 died between March and October 1348.

Amid the accumulating death and fear of contagion, people died without being administered the last rites, in other words, they were buried without prayer. Such an act terrified other victims since there seemed to be nothing worse in the Age of Faith than to be buried improperly. How did men and women react to the plague? What was their response? You would expect those who remained to join together for mutual support. What happened was the exact opposite. The plague forced people to run from one another. Lawyers refused to witness wills, doctors refused to help the sick, priests did not hear confessions, parents deserted children, and husbands deserted their wives. In the words of the Pope's physician, "charity was dead." Boccaccio tells us that "various fears and notions were begotten in those who remained alive . . namely, to shun and flee from the sick and all that pertained to them, and thus doing, each thought to secure immunity for himself."

In some villages it was reported that several villagers danced to drums and trumpets. They believed that after seeing their family, friends, neighbours and perhaps their priest die each day that in order to remain immune, they must enjoy themselves. "They lived remotely from every other," recorded Boccaccio. Taking refuge and shutting themselves up in those houses where none were sick and where living was best; and there, partaking very temperately of the most delicate viands and the finest wines and eschewing all incontinence, they abode with music and other such diversions as they might have, never allowing themselves to speak with any, nor choosing to hear any news from without of death or the sick. Flight from infected areas was the most basic response, especially among those who could afford to flee. The idea was simple enough -- remove yourself from those areas which were affected. This usually meant fleeing from the city to the countryside, as did the

wealthy storytellers in Boccaccio's Decameron. But things could be just as bad in the countryside. Peasants fell dead in their homes, on the roads and in the fields.
Wheat was left unharvested, and oxen, sheep, cows, goats, pigs, and chickens ran wild, and according to most contemporary accounts, they too fell victim to the plague. English sheep -- the primary provider of wool to Europe -- died in great numbers. One report specified that five thousand lay dead in one field. All this led to a sense of a vanishing future and created what historians have referred to as a "dementia of despair." One German observer wrote that "men and women wandered around as if mad and let their cattle stray because no one had any inclination to concern themselves about the future."

General ignorance about the causes of the plague did nothing to dispel fear and terror. The carriers of the plague -- rats and fleas -- were not suspected for one very simple reason: rats and fleas were common and familiar to the 14th century. Fleas are not mentioned in the records of the plague and rats only incidentally. The actual plague bacillus, Yersinia pestis, was not discovered until the middle of the 19th century, 500 years too late! Living in the stomach of the flea or in the bloodstream of the rat, the bacillus was transferred to humans by the bite of either the flea or the rat. The plague's usual form of transportation was the Rattus Rattus, the small medieval black rat that was a constant companion of sailor's on-board sailing vessels. The death of the rat caused the relocation of the flea, and if its next host just happened to be a human, then contagion was the result. Medieval men and women were quite resourceful, however, in determining the cause of the plague. The earthquake of 1348 was blamed for corrupting the air with foul odours, thus precipitating the plague. The alignment of the planets was specified as yet another cause: Saturn, Jupiter and Mars aligned in the 40th degree of Aquarius on March 20, 1345.

For almost everyone, the plague signified the wrath of God. A plague so sweeping and unforgiving could only be the work of some species of Divine punishment upon mankind for its sins. Popes led processions lasting three days and which were attended by two thousand followers, according to some accounts. The people prayed, wept, gnashed their teeth, pulled their hair, imploring the mercy of the Virgin Mary. The majority of people were convinced that the plague was certainly the work of God. And in September 1348, the Pope agreed.

In a papal edict he specifically referred to "this pestilence with which God is affecting the Christian people."
The widespread acceptance of this view created an enormous sense of collective guilt. If the plague had descended upon mankind as a form of divine punishment, then the sins which created it must have been terrible: greed, usury, worldliness, adultery, blasphemy, falsehood, heresy, luxury, irreligion, fornication, sloth, and laziness. Beneath all of this was the matrix of Christianity itself -- nothing escaped the psychological and social control of the Church. Even the boiling of an egg was timed according to the time it took to say a prayer.

Efforts to cope with the plague were fruitless. Both the treatment and prevention offered little in the way of immunity, cure, or hope. The physician's primary effort was to burn aromatic herbs and purify the air. Their role was to relieve the patient since each victim's fate was in the hands of God alone. Victims of the plague were treated by blood-letting, purging with laxatives and the lancing of the plague-boils. Victims were washed in vinegar or rose water, given bland diets and told to avoid excitement. Regardless, if a patient suddenly recovered, his recovery owed less to the care of the physician that it did to luck.

People looked for answers. They needed answers to questions: where did the plague come from? why is it here? why am I alive? A scapegoat was needed since anger and frustration had to be focused. And Europe was full of scapegoats. On charges that they had poisoned the water with the "intent to kill and destroy all of Christendom," the extermination of European Jews began in the spring of 1348. Jews from Narbonne and Carcassonne in France, were dragged from their homes and thrown into bonfires. It was commonly accepted that the plague was God's punishment. But anger could not be directed toward God. The Jew, as the eternal stranger in Christian Europe, was the most obvious target. He was the outsider who willingly separated himself from the Christian world.

During the epidemic of 1320-1321, hundreds of lepers died, and it was believed that the Jews had caused the deaths of these unfortunate souls. When the plague came twenty-five years later, the Jews were once again the target of blame. Why did this occur? According to the Church, the Jews had rejected Jesus as their saviour -- they refused to accept the Gospel in place of Mosaic law. In the early 4th century, the Church denied Jews their civil rights. But the Jews maintained a role in medieval society as moneylenders. They were excluded from all crafts and trades. There was also the belief that Jews often performed the ritual murder of Christians, in order to re-enact the Crucifixion. Throughout the 13th and 14th centuries the Church issued laws that

isolated the European Jew. Jews could not own Christian servants, could not intermarry, and could not build new synagogues.
They were, furthermore, barred from weaving, mining, metalworking, shoemaking, baking, milling and carpentry. At the 4th Lateran Council of 1215, Pope Innocent III forced the Jews to wear a yellow badge in the shape of a coin. By the following century, other outcasts such as Muslims and prostitutes were also forced to wear a similar badge. The Inquisition stepped in and in Savoy in September 1348, the first trial was held against the Jews. Their property was confiscated while they remained in jail. Confessions were obtained by torture and eleven Jews were burned at the stake. At Basle in Switzerland (January 9, 1349), several hundred Jews were burned alive in a house specially constructed for this purpose. A decree was passed that ordered that no Jew could settle in Basle for two hundred years. In February 1349, the Jews of Strasburg, numbering two thousand, were taken to the burial ground, and burned at the stake en masse. And, in early 1349, at Mainz in Germany, Jews took the initiative and killed two hundred Christians. The Christian revenge was horrible -- 12,000 Jews were slaughtered.

When the Black Death subsided in 1351, so too did the persecution of the European Jew. But for a year or two following the appearance of the plague, the massacre of Jews was exceptional in its extent and ferocity. Coupled with the plague, the persecution of the Jews nearly wiped-out entire communities. In all, sixty large and 150 smaller Jewish communities were exterminated. Between 1347 and 1351, there were recorded more than 350 massacres which ultimately led to permanent shifts of the Jewish population into Poland and Lithuania. It is a curious comment on human nature that European men and women, already overwhelmed by one of the greatest natural calamities, should seek to rectify the situation with their own atrocities.

The Flagellant Movement

One of the more interesting and bizarre episodes of the Black Death was the Flagellant Movement. In 1348, processions of men, initially well-organized, walked two by two, chanting their Pater Nosters and Ave Marias, passed through Austria, Hungary, Germany, Bohemia, the Low Countries and Picardy, summoning the townspeople to the marketplace. At the head of the procession was the Master and his two lieutenants who carried banners of purple velvet and cloth of gold. The marchers were silent, their heads and faces hidden, and their eyes were fixed on the ground before them. Word would travel ahead, and the news of the procession usually brought out all the townspeople. The church bells would ring and announce their arrival.

The marchers, once they had arrived, would strip to the waist, and form a large circle. The flagellants marched around the perimeter of the circle and at the order of the Master, would throw themselves to the ground. The Master walked among them, beating those who had committed crimes or who had violated the discipline of the Brotherhood. Following this ceremony, the collective flagellation took place. Each brother carried a heavy leather thong, tipped with metal studs. With this they began to beat themselves and others. Three Brethren acted as cheerleaders while the Master prayed for God's mercy on all sinners. During the ceremony, each Brother tried to outdo the next in suffering. Meanwhile, the townspeople looked on in amazement -- most quaked, sobbed and groaned in sympathy. The public ceremony was repeated twice a day and once at night for a period of thirty-three and a half days!

The Flagellant Movement was well-regulated and sternly disciplined. New entrants (mostly laymen and unbeneficed clergy) had to make as confession of all sins since the age of seven and then flagellate themselves for thirty-three and a half days.

Each member also vowed never to bathe, shave, sleep in a bed, change their clothing or converse in any way with members of the opposite sex. If that wasn't enough, they also had to pay a small fee! The payment of a fee tells us that membership in the Brethren was not for everyone. Excluded were those people who could not afford to pay a fee; therefore, the Brethren was clearly an exclusive organization and membership to the poor was out of the question. The public usually welcomed the procession of flagellants into their villages and towns since it served as a major event in the otherwise drab life of the peasant. But the flagellants also served as an occasion for celebration. Those who attended the processions could work off surplus emotion in a collective fashion. Although we may tend to laugh at the flagellants and read them off as lunatics, they did help medieval men and women cope with the ravages of the plague. After all, taking part in a procession served as an inexpensive insurance policy that God would forgive them.

"Before the arrival of the Death," writes historian Malcolm Lambert, "flagellation was one of the few outlets open to a fear-ridden population; after it had arrived, the worst could be seen, and there were practical tasks, such as burying the dead, available to dampen emotions." (Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation.)

By 1349, the flagellant movement came into conflict with the Church at Rome. This clash was perhaps inevitable. After all, the Masters' were claiming that they could purge sinners of their sins, something the Church claimed it could do alone. The German flagellants began to attack the hierarchy of the Church in direct fashion. In mid-1349, Pope Clement VI issued a papal bull denouncing the flagellants as a heretical movement. The flagellants had formed unauthorized associations, adopted their own uniforms, and had written their own church statutes. Numerous princes in France and in Germany began to prohibit the entrance of the Brotherhood into their provinces. Masters were burned alive, and the flagellants were denounced by the clergy. By 1350, the flagellant movement vanished almost as quickly as it had appeared.

It is easy to make fun of the flagellants as misguided fanatics but in general they did accomplish something. In the towns they visited they brought spiritual regeneration for people who needed it. Suffering the anguish of losing your family and friends in rapid succession, medieval men and women needed some sort of mechanism to purge themselves of both guilt and anger, and the flagellants provided one such path. Adulterers confessed their sins and thieves returned stolen goods. The flagellants also provided a kind of diversion for the public and held out the promise that their pain might bring an end to the greater suffering of the living victims of the plague. "We all recognize the late Middle Ages as a period of popular religious excitement or overexcitement, of pilgrimages and penitential processions, of mass preaching, of veneration or relics and adoration of saints, lay piety and popular mysticism," wrote William Langer in 1958. "It was apparently also a period of unusual immorality and shockingly loose living," he continued, which we must take as the continuation of the "devil-may-care" attitude of one part of the population.

This the psychologists explain as the repression of unbearable feelings by accentuating the value of a diametrically opposed set of feelings and then behaving as though the latter were the real feelings. But the most striking feature of the age was an exceptionally strong sense of guilt and a truly dreadful fear of retribution, seeking expression in a passionate longing for effective intercession and in a craving for direct, personal experience of the Deity, as well as in a corresponding dissatisfaction with the Church and with the mechanization of the means of salvation as reflected, for example, in the traffic of indulgences. These attitudes, along with the great interest in astrology, the increased resort to magic, and the startling spread of witchcraft and Satanism in the fifteenth century were, according to the precepts of modern psychology, normal reactions to the sufferings to which mankind in that period was subjected.

When the Black Death swept Europe in 1348-1351 it left about 30% of the population dead. This greatly affected the English peasants because there was a labour shortage and food was scarce. Even some thirty years later, life had not returned to normal -the settled and structured country life of the Middle Ages was disrupted, and discontent was rife amongst the poor.

In the Wake of the Black Death.

The 14th century in Europe has often been

called the Calamitous Century and rightly so. The primary disruption of that century was obviously the appearance of the Black Death. As we've seen, the Black Death was ultimately responsible for the gruesome death of more than 25 million people, a figure which represented at least 30 percent of Europe's total population. Whole villages and towns simply ceased to exist as the plague raged across Europe at mid-century. To make matters worse, Europe suffered a series of crop failures and famines which, while less deadly than the plague, persisted for several years. There were three such famines which occurred just before and after the plague.

These famines were usually result of poor climatic conditions. Regardless of the cause, times were indeed difficult for 14th century men and women. Perhaps Europe was over-populated in at the start of the 14th century -- perhaps there were simply too many mouths to feed given the status of medieval agricultural techniques. And even in years of good harvest, most people had to survive on the slim margin of existence. The 14th century was not an age of plenty. The declining population at the end of the 14th century had a number of important effects. Many people touched by the plague moved away from medieval cities and towns to unaffected areas. This was the negative impact. On the positive side, some landlords began to concentrate on improving the fertility of the soil. And back in the cities, the declining population of workers meant that masters sought out new ways to produce which required less manpower. That is, they began to construct labour saving machinery. In other words, an act of God produced a greater need for technological innovation.

Meanwhile, the prices of agricultural products increased. This inflation of prices stayed high until the end of the century when prices began to fall. But because agricultural labourers were scarce, having been wiped out by famine or by the plague, they began to demand higher wages which were necessary because of the high price of goods. Landlords sought new ways to increase their incomes. One way was to increase rents, which they did. Another way was to find a crop which would yield higher returns, and they found this crop in the raising of sheep. So landlords in England began to convert land which was traditionally held by the peasants in common into enclosed property upon which sheep would be raised. And the raising of sheep, though lucrative, is not a labour-intensive proposition.

One reason why the number of farm labourers decreased was the plague. But another, equally important reason, was that many serfs now chose to commute their labour services by money payments, to abandon the farm altogether, and to pursue more interesting in rewarding jobs in the skilled craft industries in the cities. This new vocational option was made possible by the Black Death. Agricultural prices fell because of lowered demand, and the price of luxury and manufactured goods -- the work of skilled artisans -- rose. The nobility suffered the greatest decline in power from this new state of affairs. They were forced to pay more for finished products and for farm labour, and they received a smaller return on agricultural produce. Everywhere their rents were in steady decline after the plague.

Masters and merchants petitioned their governments to intervene and around 1350, the governments of England, France and Spain began to fix prices and wages which, of course, was favourable to employers and not to workers. For instance, in 1351, Edward III of England instituted the STATUTE OF LABOURERS which forbade employers to pay more than customary wages and require that all labourers accept those wages.

The decline in populations and inflation deeply disturbed 14th century Europe. The previous two or three centuries had been remarkably stable on the part of the labouring classes but the 14th century began to witness numerous peasant and urban revolts against the oppression of the propertied classes. This was something completely new and developed from a local circumstances made worse by famine and the plague. Jean Froissart on the Jacquerie In 1323, the landlord's attempt to impose old manorial rights and obligations infuriated the now free peasants of Flanders. As a result, the peasants revolted, a revolt lasting five bloody years. In 1358, French peasants took up arms in protest against the plundering of the countryside by French soldiers during the 100 Years' War. Perhaps 20,000 peasants died in this uprising known as the JACQUERIE.

CAUSES OF THE REVOLT

1. The Statute of Labourers 1351.

This was a law passed at the end of the Black Death to stop the peasants taking advantage of the shortage of workers and demanding more money. Peasants were forced to work for the same wages as before, and landowners could insist on labour services being performed, instead of accepting money (commutation). This meant that the landowners could profit from shortages, whilst life was made very much harder for the peasants.

Edward by the grace of God etc. to the reverend father in Christ William, by the same grace Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of all England, greeting. Because a great part of the people and especially of the, workmen and servants has now died in that pestilence, some, seeing the straights of the masters and the scarcity of servants, are not willing to serve unless they receive excessive wages, and others, rather than through labour to gain their living, prefer to beg in idleness: We, considering the grave inconveniences which might come from the lack especially of ploughmen and such labourers, have held deliberation and treaty concerning this with the prelates and nobles and other learned men sitting by us; by whose consentient counsel we have seen fit to ordain: that every man and woman of our kingdom of England, of whatever condition, whether bond or free, who is able bodied and below the age of sixty years, not living from trade nor carrying on a fixed craft, nor having of his own the means of living, or land of his own with regard to the cultivation of which he might occupy himself, and not serving another, if he, considering his station, be sought after to serve in a suitable service, he shall be bound to serve him who has seen fit so to seek after him; and he shall take only the wages liveries, mead or salary which, in the places where he sought to serve, were accustomed to be paid in the twentieth year of our reign of England, or the five or six common years next preceding. Provided, that in thus retaining their service, the lords are preferred before others of their bondsmen or their land tenants: so, nevertheless that such lords thus retain as many as shall be necessary and not more; and if any man or woman, being thus sought after in service, will not do this, the fact being proven by two faithful men before the sheriffs or the bailiffs of our lord the king, or the constables of the town where this happens to be done, straightway through them, or some one of them, he shall be taken and sent to the next jail, and there he shall remain in strict custody until he shall find surety for serving in the aforesaid form.

And if a reaper or mower, or other workman or servant, of whatever standing or condition he be, who is retained in the service of anyone, do depart from the said service before the end of the term agreed, without permission or reasonable cause, he shall undergo the penalty of imprisonment, and let no one, under the same penalty, presume to receive or retain such a one in his service. Let no one, moreover, pay or permit to be paid to any one more wages, livery, mead or salary than was customary as has been said; nor let anyone in any other manner exact or receive them, under penalty of paying to him who feels himself aggrieved from this, double the sum that has thus been paid or promised, exacted or received and if such person be not willing to prosecute, then it (the sum) is to be given to any one of the people who shall prosecute in this matter; and such prosecution shall take place in the court of the lord of the place where such case shall happen. And if the lords of the towns or manors presume of themselves or through their servants in any way to act contrary to this our present ordinance, then in the Counties, Wapentakes and Trithings suit shall be brought against them in the aforesaid form for the triple penalty (of the sum) thus promised or paid by them or the servants; and if perchance, prior to the present ordinance any one shall have covenanted with any one thus to serve for more wages, he shall not be bound by reason of the said covenant to pay more than at another time was wont to be paid to such person; nay, under the aforesaid penalty he shall not presume to pay more.

Likewise saddlers, skinners, white-tawers, cordwainers, tailors, smiths, carpenters, masons, tilers, shipwrights, carters and all other artisans and labourers shall not take for their labour and handiwork more than what, in the places where they happen to labour, was customarily paid to such persons in the said twentieth year and in the other common years preceding, as has been said; and if any man take more, he shall be committed to the nearest jail in the manner aforesaid. Likewise let butchers, fishmongers, hostlers, brewers, bakers, pullers and all other vendors of any victuals, be bound to sell such victuals for a reasonable price, having regard for the price at which such victuals are sold in the adjoining places: so that such vendors may have moderate gains, not excessive, according as the distance of the places from which such victuals are carried may seem reasonably to require; and if any one sell such victuals in another manner, and be convicted of it in the aforesaid way, he shall pay the double of that which he received to the party injured, or in default of him, to another who shall be willing to prosecute in this behalf; and the mayor and bailiffs of the cities and Burroughs, merchant towns and others, and of the maritime ports and places shall have power to enquire concerning each and every one who shall in any way err against this, and to levy the aforesaid penalty for the benefit of those at whose suit such delinquents shall have been convicted; and in case that the same mayor and bailiffs shall neglect to carry out the aforesaid, and shall be convicted of this before justices to be assigned by us, then the same mayor and bailiffs shall be compelled through the same justices, to

pay to such wronged person or to another prosecuting in his place, the treble of the thing thus sold, and nevertheless, on our part too, they shall be grievously punished.

And because many sound beggars do refuse to labour so long as they can live from begging alms, giving themselves up to idleness and sins, and, at times, to robbery and other crimes-let no one, under the aforesaid pain of imprisonment presume, under colour of piety or alms to give anything to such as can very well labour, or to cherish them in their sloth, so that thus they may be compelled to labour for the necessaries of life.

2. Prices.
Prices had risen since the Black Death. Wages had not risen as fast, so the peasants suffered from hunger and shortages.

3. The young King.


Richard II

During the course of the Black Death and the years following it, England had a strong and warlike king, Edward III. However, his son, the Black Prince, died before him, leaving his grandson as heir to the throne. In 1377, Edward III died, and this boy of ten became king. The true power lay with the powerful barons, in particular the boy's uncle, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. The barons, hated already by the peasants, began to take advantage of the situation.

4. The Poll Tax.
England was involved in the Hundred Years War. This had left the treasury empty, and the barons were tired of paying for the war. In 1377, John of Gaunt imposed a new tax, the Poll (head) Tax, which was to cover the cost of the war. Unlike normal taxes, this was to be paid by the peasants, as well as the landowners. Although this was meant to be a "one-off" event, it was so successful that it was repeated three more times. The first tax was 4d from every adult (adult: 14yrs+), then it was raised to 4d for the peasants and more for the rich, and finally in 1380, it was raised to 12d per adult.

The barons liked the idea of the peasants helping to pay taxes, especially if they were acting as tax collectors, as some of the money was siphoned off into their pockets. It was much harder on the peasants, who could ill afford to pay, especially as the tax was collected in cash and not in farm produce. By 1380, many were hiding from the collectors, and avoiding payment. For this reason, the amount collected dropped away, despite the fact that the tax had been increased.

5. John Ball and the Church.

The Church was badly hit by the Black Death, and many of the clergy were poorly educated, thus reducing popular respect for the Church. The Church was also a major landowner, and the abbots and bishops sided with the barons against the peasants. This made the church hated, as the peasants felt betrayed by an organisation that should help, rather than exploiting them.

This situation was made worse by a number of rebellious priests who preached against the Church and the barons. Foremost amongst these was John Ball, who coined the famous verse; "While Adam delved (dug) and Eve span, who then was the gentleman?" i.e. There had been no group of non-working layabouts in that time, so why should they be tolerated now? So dangerous was this teaching that the Archbishop of Canterbury had arrested John Ball and confined him in Maidstone Castle.

John Ball* was born in St Albans in about 1340. Twenty years later he was working as a priest in York. He eventually became the priest of St James' Church in Colchester. Ball believed it was wrong that some people in England were very rich while others were very poor. Ball's church sermons criticising the feudal system upset his bishop and in 1366 he was removed from his post as the priest of the church. Ball now had no fixed job or home, and he became a travelling priest and gave sermons, whenever he found "a few people ready to listen, by the roadside, on a village green or in a market place, he would pour forth fiery words against the evils of the day and particularly the sins of the rich." Ball was "a preacher, a poet, a maverick thinker and a natural rabble-rouser" and the authorities saw him as "being an incessant, heretical

nuisance, preaching in churchyards and in public places across the region, railing against inequality, the corruption of the established Church and the tyrannies of the powerful against the powerless."

John Ball was highly critical of the way the church taxed people and urged them not to pay their tithes. He also believed that the Bible should be published in English. It is claimed that Ball was influenced by the 14th century preacher, John Wycliffe.
For example, Thomas Walsingham* a Benedictine monk at St Albans Abbey, stated that Ball "taught the people that tithes ought not be paid" and that he was preaching the "wicked doctrines of the disloyal John Wycliffe." Some historians have disputed this claim because no evidence that Ball and his followers "showed any signs of Wycliffite tendencies". However, Bishop William Courtenay is understood to have said that Ball told him that he was a disciple of Wycliffe.

While preaching in Norfolk, Henry le Despenser*, the Bishop of Norwich, ordered the imprisonment of John Ball. After he was released he began touring Essex and Kent. During this time he became known as the "mad priest of Kent". He was released but it was not long before he was once again back in prison. Jean Froissart pointed out: "John Ball had several times been confined in the Archbishop of Canterbury's prison for his absurd speeches... It would have been better had he locked him up for the rest of his life, or even had him executed."

Ball preached that "things would not go well with England until everything was held in common". At these meetings he argued: "Are we not all descended from the same parents, Adam and Eve? So what can they show us, what reasons give, why they should be more the master's than ourselves?" It is in Ball's words that we find the early concept of the equality of all men and women, "as opposed to the rigid class divisions, privileges and injustice of feudalism; equality as justified by scripture and expressed as fraternity, which was to continue as a basic ideal of the English radical tradition."

John Ball also complained about laws that were passed telling people what to wear and what to eat. He especially objected to a law that forbad peasants from sending their children to school or to go into the Church to become priests. He also objected to "the law, which also stopped the children of serfs going into the towns to become apprentices... this was done in order to maintain the supply of agricultural labour."

John Ball at Mile End from Jean Froissart, *Chronicles* (c. 1470)

Ball argued that the feudal system was immoral: "Why are those whom we call lords, masters over us? How have they deserved it? By what right do they keep us enslaved? We are all descended from our first parents, Adam, and Eve; how then can they say that are better than us... At the beginning we were all created equal. If God willed that there should be serfs, he would have said so at the beginning of the world. We are formed in Christ's likeness, and they treat us like animals... They are dressed in velvet and furs, while we wear only cloth. They have wine, and spices and good bread, while we have rye bread and water. They have fine houses and manors, and we have to brave the wind and rain as we toil in the fields. It is by the sweat of our brows that they maintain their high state. We are called serfs, and we are beaten if we do not perform our task."
The king's officials were instructed to look out for John Ball. He was eventually caught in Coventry. He was taken to St Albans to stand trial. "He denied nothing, he freely admitted all the charges without regrets or apologies. He was proud to stand before them and testify to his revolutionary faith." He was sentenced to death, but William Courtenay, the Bishop of London, granted a two-day stay of execution in the hope that he could persuade Ball to repent of his treason and so save his soul. John Ball refused and he was hanged, drawn, and quartered on 15th July 1381.

Jack Straw.
Jack Straw (probably the same person as John Rakestraw or Rackstraw) was one of the three leaders (together with John Ball and Wat Tyler) of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, a major event in the history of England. It has been suggested that Jack Straw may have been a preacher. Some have argued that the name was in fact a

pseudonym for Wat Tyler or one of the other peasants' leaders; all of them appear to have used pseudonyms, adding to the confusion.

Several chroniclers, including Henry Knighton, mention Straw, though Knighton erroneously confuses him with Tyler.
Thomas Walsingham stated that Straw was a priest and was the second-in-command of the rebels from Bury St Edmunds and Mildenhall. This story is most likely a result of confusion with a John Wrawe, an unbeneficed priest who was formerly the vicar of Ringsfield near Beccles in Suffolk, and who seems to have led the Suffolk insurgency. Walsingham also states that Straw and his followers murdered both notable local figures in Bury and, after reaching the capital, several of its Flemish residents, an accusation also made by Froissart. However, according to information in the church of St Mary in Great Baddow, in Essex, England, Jack Straw led an ill-fated crowd from the churchyard there to the risings, and he is elsewhere referred to as the leader of the men from Essex (as opposed to Tyler, who led the rebels from Kent).
Straw is generally supposed to have been executed in 1381 along with the other main figures of the Revolt. Froissart states that after Tyler's death at Smithfield, Straw (along with John Ball) was found "in an old house hidden, thinking to have stolen away", and beheaded. Walsingham gives a lengthy (and most likely invented) 'confession' in which Straw states that the insurgents' plans were to kill the king, "all landowners, bishops, monks, canons, and rectors of churches", set up their own laws, and set fire to London. The later chronicles of Raphael Holinshed and John Stow, in addition to detailing the 'confession', repeat a story, originating in the 15th-century account of Richard Fox, that Jack Straw, alias John Tyler, was provoked into his actions by an assault perpetrated on his daughter by a tax collector.

JEAN FROISSART* (1337 – 1410).
HOW THE COMMONS OF ENGLAND REBELLED AGAINST THE NOBLEMEN (AS CHRONICLED).

IN *the mean season while this treaty was, there fell in England great mischief and rebellion of moving of the common people, by which deed England was at a point to have been lost without recovery. There was never realm nor country in so great adventure as it was in that time, and all because of the ease and riches that the common people were of, which moved them to this rebellion, as sometimes they did in France, the which did much hurt, for by such incidents the realm of France hath been greatly grieved. It was a marvellous thing and of poor foundation that this mischief began in England, and to give ensample to all manner of people I will speak thereof as it was done, as I was informed, and of the incidents thereof. There was an usage in England, and yet is in divers countries, that the noblemen hath great franchise over the commons and keepeth them in servage, that is to say, their tenants ought by custom to labour the lords' lands, to gather and bring home their corns, and some to thresh and to fan, and by servage to make their hay and to hew their wood and bring it home. All these things they ought to do by servage, and there be more of these people in England than in any other realm. Thus the noblemen and prelates are served by them, and especially in the county of Kent, Essex, Sussex, and Bedford.*

These unhappy people of these said countries began to stir, because they said they were kept in great servage, and in the beginning of the world, they said, there were no bondmen, wherefore they maintained that none ought to be bond, without he did treason to his lord, as Lucifer did to God; but they said they could have no such battle, for they were neither angels nor spirits, but men formed to the similitude of their lords, saying why should they then be kept so under like beasts; the which they said they would no longer suffer, for they would be all one, and if they laboured or did anything for their lords, they would have wages therefor as well as other. And of this imagination was a foolish priest in the country of Kent called John Ball, for the which foolish words he had been three times in the Bishop of Canterbury's prison: for this priest used oftentimes on the Sundays after mass, when the people were going out of the minster, to go into the cloister and preach, and made the people to assemble about him, and would say thus: 'Ah, ye good people, the matters goeth not well to pass in England, nor shall not do till everything be common, and that there be no villains nor gentlemen, but that we may be all united together, and that the lords be no greater masters than we be.

What have we deserved, or why should we be kept thus in servage? We be all come from one father and one mother, Adam, and Eve: whereby can they say or shew that they be greater lords than we be, saving by that they cause us to win and labour for that they dispend? They are clothed in velvet and camlet furred with grise, and we be vestured with poor cloth: they have their wines, spices and good bread, and we have the drawing

out of the chaff and drink water: they dwell in fair houses, and we have the pain and travail, rain and wind in the fields; and by that that cometh of our labours they keep and maintain their estates: we be called their bondmen, and without we do readily them service, we be beaten; and we have no sovereign to whom we may complain, nor that will hear us nor do us right.

Let us go to the king, he is young, and shew him what servage we be in, and shew him how we will have it otherwise, or else we will provide us of some remedy; and if we go together, all manner of people that be now in any bondage will follow us to the intent to be made free; and when the king seeth us, we shall have some remedy, either by fairness or otherwise.' Thus John Ball said on Sundays, when the people issued out of the churches in the villages; wherefore many of the mean people loved him, and such as intended to no goodness said how he said truth; and so they would murmur one with another in the fields and in the ways as they went together, affirming how John Ball said truth.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, who was informed of the saying of this John Ball, caused him to be taken and put in prison a two or three months to chastise him: howbeit, it had been much better at the beginning that he had been condemned to perpetual prison or else to have died, rather than to have suffered him to have been again delivered out of prison; but the Bishop had conscience to let him die. And when this John Ball was out of prison, he returned again to his error, as he did before.

Of his words and deeds there were much people in London informed, such as had great envy at them that were rich and such as were noble; and then they began to speak among them and said how the realm of England was right evil governed, and how that gold and silver was taken from them by them that were named noblemen: so thus these unhappy men of London began to rebel and assembled them together, and sent word to the foresaid countries that they should come to London and bring their people with them, promising them how they should find London open to receive them and the commons of the city to be of the same accord, saying how they would do so much to the king that there should not be one bondman in all England.

This promise moved so them of Kent, of Essex, of Sussex, of Bedford and of the countries about, that they rose and came towards London to the number of sixty thousand. And they had a captain called Water Tyler, and with him in company was Jack Straw and John Ball: these three were chief sovereign captains, but the head of all was Water Tyler, and he was indeed a tiler of houses, an ungracious patron. When these unhappy men began thus to stir, they of London, except such as were of their band, were greatly affrayed. Then the mayor of London and the rich men of the city took counsel together, and when they saw the people thus coming on every side, they caused the gates of the city to be closed and would suffer no man to enter into the city.

But when they had well imagined, they advised not so to do, for they thought they should thereby put their suburbs in great peril to be Brent; and so they opened again the city, and there entered in at the gates in some place a hundred, two hundred, by twenty and by thirty, and so when they came to London, they entered and lodged: and yet of truth the third part of these people could not tell what to ask or demand, but followed each other like beasts, as the shepherds did of old time, saying how they would go conquer the Holy Land, and at last all came to nothing. In likewise these villains and poor people came to London, a hundred mile off, sixty-mile, fifty mile, forty mile, and twenty mile off, and from all countries about London, but the most part came from the countries before named, and as they came they demanded ever for the king. The gentlemen of the countries, knights and squires, began to doubt, when they saw the people began to rebel; and though they were in doubt, it was good reason; for a less occasion they might have been affrayed. So the gentlemen drew together as well as they might.

The same day that these unhappy people of Kent were coming to London, there returned from Canterbury the king's mother, Princess of Wales, coming from her pilgrimage. She was in great jeopardy to have been lost, for these people came to her chare and dealt rudely with her, whereof the good lady was in great doubt lest they would have done some villany to her or to her damsels. Howbeit, God kept her, and she came in one day from Canterbury to London, for she never durst tarry by the way. The same time king Richard her son was at the Tower of London: there his mother found him, and with him there was the Earl of Salisbury, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Sir Robert of Namur, the lord of Gommegnies and diverse other, who were in doubt of these people that thus gathered together, and wist not what they demanded. This rebellion was well known in the king's court, or any of these people began to stir out of their houses; but the king nor his council did provide no remedy therefor, which was great marvel. And to the intent that all lords and good people and such as would nothing but good should take ensample to correct them that be evil and rebellious, I shall shew you plainly all the matter, as it was.

THE EVIL DEEDS THAT THESE COMMONS OF ENGLAND DID TO THE KING'S OFFICERS, AND HOW THEY SENT A KNIGHT TO SPEAK WITH THE KING (AS CHRONICLED).

THE *Monday before the feast of Corpus Christi the year of our Lord God a thousand three hundred and eighty-one these people issued out of their houses to come to London to speak with the king to be made free, for they would have had no bondman in England. And so first they came to Saint Thomas of Canterbury, and there John Ball had thought to have found the bishop of Canterbury, but he was at London with the king. When Wat Tyler and Jack Straw entered into Canterbury, all the common people made great feast, for all the town was of their assent; and there they took counsel to go to London to the king, and to send some of their company over the river of Thames into Essex, into Sussex and into the counties of Stafford and Bedford, to speak to the people that they should all come to the farther side of London and thereby to close London round about, so that the king should not stop their passages, and that they should all meet together on Corpus Christi day. They that were at Canterbury entered into Saint Thomas' church and did there much hurt, and robbed and break up the bishop's chamber, and in robbing and bearing out their pillage they said: 'Ah, this chancellor of England hath had a good market to get together all this riches: he shall give us now account of the revenues of England and of the great profits that he hath gathered sith the king's coronation.' When they had this Monday thus broken the Abbey of Saint Vincent, they departed in the morning and all the people of Canterbury with them, and so took the way to Rochester and sent their people to the villages about. And in their going they beat down and robbed houses of advocates and procurers of the king's court and of the archbishop and had mercy of none.*

And when they were come to Rochester, they had there good cheer; for the people of that town tarried for them, for they were of the same sect, and then they went to the castle there and took the knight that had the rule thereof, he was called sir John Newton, and they said to him: 'Sir, it behoveth you to go with us and you shall be our sovereign captain and to do that we will have you.' The knight excused himself honestly and shewed them divers considerations and excuses, but all availed him nothing, for they said unto him: 'Sir John, if ye do not as we will have you, ye are but dead.' The knight, seeing these people in that fury and ready to slay him, he then doubted death and agreed to them, and so they took him with them against his inward will; and in likewise did they of other counties in England, as Essex, Sussex, Stafford, Bedford and Warwick, even to Lincoln; for they brought the knights and gentlemen into such obeisance, that they caused them to go with them, whether they would or not, as the Lord Moylays, a great baron, Sir Stephen of Hales and Sir Thomas of Cosington and other.

Now behold the great fortune. If they might have come to their intents, they would have destroyed all the noblemen of England, and thereafter all other nations would have followed the same and have taken foot and ensample by them and by them of Gaunt and Flanders, who rebelled against their lord. The same year the Parisians rebelled in likewise and found out the mallets of iron, of whom there were more than twenty thousand, as ye shall hear after in this history; but first we will speak of them of England.

When these people thus lodged at Rochester departed, and passed the river and came to Brentford, always keeping still their opinions, beating down before them and all about the places and houses of advocates and procurers, and striking off the heads of divers persons. And so long they went forward till they came within a four mile of London, and there lodged on a hill called Blackheath; and as they went, they said ever they were the king's men and the noble commons of England: and when they of London knew that they were come so near to them, the mayor, as ye have heard before, closed the gates and kept straitly all the passages. This order caused the mayor, who was called Nicholas Walworth, and divers other rich burgesses of the city, who were not of their sect; but there were in London of their unhappy opinions more than thirty thousand.
(Note: Froissart calls him John: his name was really William.]

Then these people thus being lodged on Blackheath determined to send their knight to speak with the king and to shew him how all that they have done or will do is for him and his honour, and how the realm of England hath not been well governed a great space for the honour of the realm nor for the common profit by his uncles and by the clergy, and specially by the Archbishop of Canterbury his chancellor; whereof they would have account. This knight durst do none otherwise, but so came by the river of Thames to the Tower. The king and they that were with him in the Tower, desiring to hear tidings, seeing this knight coming made him way, and was brought before the king into a chamber; and with the king was the princess his mother and his two brethren, the earl of Kent and the Lord John Holland, the Earl of Salisbury, the Earl of Warwick, the Earl of Oxford, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the lord of Saint John's, Sir Robert of Namur, the lord of Vertaing, the lord of Gommegnies, Sir Henry of Senzeille, the Mayor of London and diverse other notable burgesses.

This knight Sir John Newton, who was well known among them, for he was one of the king's officers, he kneeled down before the king and said: 'My right redoubted lord, let it not displease your grace the message that I must needs shew you, for, dear sir, it is by force and against my will.'

'Sir John,' said the king, 'say what ye will: I hold you excused.' 'Sir, the commons of this your realm hath sent me to you to desire you to come and speak with them on Blackheath; for they desire to have none but you: and, sir, ye need not to have any doubt of your person, for they will do you no hurt; for they hold and will hold you for their king. But, sir, they say they will shew you divers things, the which shall be right necessary for you to take heed of, when they speak with you; of the which things, sir, I have no charge to shew you: but, sir, it may please you to give me an answer such as may appease them and that they may know for truth that I have spoken with you; for they have my children in hostage till I return again to them, and without I return again, they will slay my children incontinent.'

Then the king made him an answer and said: 'Sir, ye shall have an answer shortly.' Then the king took counsel what was best for him to do, and it was anon determined that the next morning the king should go down the river by water and without fail to speak with them. And when Sir John Newton heard that answer, he desired nothing else and so took his leave of the king and of the lords and returned again into his vessel, and passed the Thames and went to Blackheath, where he had left more than threescore thousand men. And there he answered them that the next morning they should send some of their council to the Thames, and there the king would come and speak with them. This answer greatly pleased them, and so passed that night as well as they might, and the fourth part of them fasted for lack of victual for they had none, wherewith they were sore displeased, which was good reason.

All this season the earl of Buckingham was in Wales, for there he had fair heritages by reason of his wife, who was daughter to the earl of Northumberland and Hereford; but the voice was all through London how he was among these people. And some said certainly how they had seen him there among them; and all was because there was one Thomas in their company, a man of the county of Cambridge, that was very like the earl. Also the lords that lay at Plymouth to go into Portugal were well informed of this rebellion and of the people that thus began to rise; wherefore they doubted lest their viage should have been broken, or else they feared lest the commons about Hampton, Winchester and Arundel would have come on them: wherefore they weighed up their anchors and issued out of the haven with great pain, for the wind was sore against them, and so took the sea and there cast anchor abiding for the wind. And the duke of Lancaster, who was in the marches of Scotland between Moorlane and Roxburgh entreating with the Scots, where it was shewed him of the rebellion, whereof he was in doubt, for he knew well he was but little beloved with the commons of England; howbeit, for all those tidings, yet he did sagely demean himself as touching the treaty with the Scots. The earl Douglas, the earl of Moray, the earl of Sutherland and the Earl Thomas Versy, and the Scots that were there for the treaty knew right well the rebellion in England, how the common people in every part began to rebel against the noblemen; wherefore the Scots thought that England was in great danger to be lost, and therefore in their treaties they were the more stiffer against the duke of Lancaster and his council.
Now let us speak of the commons of England and how they persevered.

HOW THE COMMONS OF ENGLAND ENTERED INTO LONDON, AND OF THE GREAT EVIL THAT THEY DID, AND OF THE DEATH OF THE BISHOP OF CANTERBURY AND DIVERSE OTHER.

IN the morning on Corpus Christi day king Richard heard mass in the Tower of London, and all his lords, and then he took his barge with the Earl of Salisbury, the Earl of Warwick, the Earl of Oxford, and certain knights, and so rowed down along the Thames to Rotherhithe, whereas was descended down the hill a ten thousand men to see the king and to speak with him. And when they saw the king's barge coming, they began to shout, and made such a cry, as though all the devils of hell had been among them. And they had brought with them Sir John Newton to the intent that, if the king had not come, they would have stricken him all to pieces, and so they had promised him. And when the king and his lords saw the demeanour of the people, the best assured of them were in dread; and so the king was counselled by his barons not to take any landing there, but so rowed up and down the river. And the king demanded of them what they would, and said how he was come thither to speak with them, and they said all with one voice: 'We would that ye should come a'land, and then we shall shew you what we lack.' Then the earl of Salisbury answered for the king and said: 'Sirs, ye be not in such order nor array that the king ought to speak with you.' And so with those words no more said: and then the king was counselled to return again to the Tower of London, and so he did.

And when these people saw that, they were inflamed with ire and returned to the hill where the great band was, and there shewed them what answer they had and how the king was returned to the Tower of London.

Then they cried all with one voice, 'Let us go to London,' and so they took their way thither; and in their going they beat down abbeys and houses of advocates and of men of the court, and so came into the suburbs of London, which were great and fair, and there beat down divers fair houses, and specially they break up the king's prisons, as the Marshalsea and other, and delivered out all the prisoners that were within: and there they did much hurt, and at the bridge foot they threat them of London because the gates of the bridge were closed, saying how they would burn all the suburbs and so conquer London by force, and to slay and burn all the commons of the city. There were many within the city of their accord, and so they drew together and said: 'Why do we not let these good people enter into the city? they are your fellows, and that that they do is for us.' So there with the gates were opened, and then these people entered into the city and went into houses and sat down to eat and drink. They desired nothing but it was incontinent brought to them, for every man was ready to make them good cheer and to give them meat and drink to appease them.

Then the captains, as John Ball, Jack Straw and Wat Tyler, went throughout London and a twenty thousand with them, and so came to the Savoy in the way to Westminster, which was a goodly house, and it pertained to the duke of Lancaster. And when they entered, they slew the keepers thereof and robbed and pilled the house, and when they had so done, then they set fire on it and clean destroyed and Burnt it. And when they had done that outrage, they left not therewith, but went straight to the fair hospital of the Rhodes called Saint John's.

[Note: This is called afterwards 'l'Ospital de Saint Jehan du Temple,' and therefore would probably be the Temple, to which the Hospitallers had succeeded. They had, however, another house at Clerkenwell, which also had been once the property of the Templars.] l'ospital.

…and there they burnt house, hospital, minster, and all. Then they went from street to street and slew all the Flemings that they could find in church or in any other place, there was none respited from death.

Clerkenwell Priory of the Order of Saint John, January, 2020.

And they brake up diverse houses of the Lombard's and robbed them and took their goods at their pleasure, for there was none that durst say them nay. And they slew in the city a rich merchant called Richard Lyon, to whom before that time Wat Tyler had done service in France; and on a time this Richard Lyon had beaten him, while he was his varlet, the which Wat Tyler then remembered and so came to his house and stroke off his head and caused it to be borne on a spear-point before him all about the city. Thus these ungracious people demeaned themselves like people enraged and wood, and so that day they did much sorrow in London.

And so against night they went to lodge at Saint Katherine's before the Tower of London, saying how they would never depart thence till they had the king at their pleasure and till he had accorded to them all [they would ask, and] that they would ask accounts of the chancellor of England, to know where all the good was become that he had levied through the realm, and without he made a good account to them thereof, it should not be for his profit. And so when they had done all these evils to the strangers all the day, at night they lodged before the Tower.

Ye may well know and believe that it was great pity for the danger that the king and such as were with him were in. For some time these unhappy people shouted and cried so loud, as though all the devils of hell had been among them. In this evening the king was counselled by his brethren and lords and by Sir Nicholas Walworth, mayor of London, and divers other notable and rich burgesses, that in the night time they should*

issue out of the Tower and enter into the city, and so to slay all these unhappy people, while they were at their rest and asleep; for it was thought that many of them were drunken, whereby they should be slain like flies; also of twenty of them there was scant one in harness. And surely the good men of London might well have done this at their ease, for they had in their houses secretly their friends and servants ready in harness, and also sir Robert Knolles was in his lodging keeping his treasure with a six-score ready at his commandment; in likewise was Sir Perducas d'Albret, who was as then in London, insomuch that there might well [have] assembled together an eight thousand men ready in harness.

Howbeit, there was nothing done, for the residue of the commons of the city were sore doubted, lest they should rise also, and the commons before were a threescore thousand or more. Then the earl of Salisbury and the wise men about the king said: 'Sir, if ye can appease them with fairness, it were best and most profitable, and to grant them everything that they desire, for if we should begin a thing the which we could not achieve, we should never recover it again, but we and our heirs ever to be disinherited.' So this counsel was taken and the mayor countermanded, and so commanded that he should not stir; and he did as he was commanded, as reason was. And in the city with the mayor there were twelve aldermen, whereof nine of them held with the king and the other three took part with these ungracious people, as it was after well known, the which they full dearly bought.

And on the Friday in the morning the people, being at Saint Katherine's near to the Tower, began to apparel themselves and to cry and shout, and said, without the king would come out and speak with them, they would assail the Tower and take it by force, and slay all them that were within. Then the king doubted these words and so was counselled that he should issue out to speak with them: and then the king sent to them that they should all draw to a fair plain place called Mile-end, whereas the people of the city did sport them in the summer season, and there the king to grant them that they desired; and there it was cried in the king's name, that whosoever would speak with the king let him go to the said place, and there he should not fail to find the king.

Then the people began to depart, specially the commons of the villages, and went to the same place: but all went not thither, for they were not all of one condition; for there were some that desired nothing but riches and the utter destruction of the noblemen and to have London robbed and pilled; that was the principal matter of their beginning, the which they well shewed; for as soon as the Tower gate opened and that the king was issued out with his two brethren and the earl of Salisbury, the earl of Warwick, the earl of Oxford, Sir Robert of Namur, the lord of Vertaing, the lord Gommegnies and divers other, then Wat Tyler, Jack Straw and John Ball and more than four hundred entered into the Tower and brake up chamber after chamber, and at last found the archbishop of Canterbury, called Simon, a valiant man and a wise, and chief chancellor of England, and a little before he had said mass before the king.

These gluttons took him and strake off his head, and also they beheaded the lord of Saint John's and a friar minor, master in medicine, pertaining to the duke of Lancaster, they slew him in despite of his master, and a sergeant at arms called John Leg; and these four heads were set on four long spears and they made them to be borne before them through the streets of London and at last set them a-high on London bridge, as though they had been traitors to the king and to the realm. Also these gluttons entered into the princess' chamber and brake her bed, whereby she was so sore affrayed that she swooned; and there she was taken up and borne to the water side and put into a barge and covered, and so conveyed to a place called the Queen's Wardrobe; and there she was all that day and night like a woman half dead, till she was comforted with the king her son, as ye shall hear after.

[Note: The Queen's Wardrobe was in the 'Royal' (called by Froissart or his copyist 'la Reole'), a palace near Blackfriars.]

HOW THE NOBLES OF ENGLAND WERE IN GREAT PERIL TO HAVE BEEN DESTROYED, AND HOW THESE REBELS WERE PUNISHED AND SENT HOME TO THEIR OWN HOUSES (AS CHRONICLED).

WHEN *the king came to the said place of Mile-end without London, he put out of his company his two brethren, the Earl of Kent and Sir John Holland, and the Lord of Gommegnies, for they durst not appear before*

the people: and when the king and his other lords were there, he found there a three-score thousand men of divers villages and of sundry countries in England; so the king entered in among them and said to them sweetly: 'Ah, ye good people, I am your king: what lack ye? what will ye say?' Then such as understood him said: 'We will that ye make us free for ever, ourselves, our heirs and our lands, and that we be called no more bond nor so reputed.' 'Sirs,' said the king, 'I am well agreed thereto. Withdraw you home into your own houses and into such villages as ye came from, and leave behind you of every village two or three, and I shall cause writings to be made and seal them with my seal, the which they shall have with them, containing everything that ye demand; and to the intent that ye shall be the better assured, I shall cause my banners to be delivered into every bailiwick, shire, and countries.'

These words appeased well the common people, such as were simple and good plain men, that were come thither and wist not why. They said, 'It was well said, we desire no better.' Thus these people began to be appeased and began to withdraw them into the city of London. And the king also said a word, the which greatly contented them. He said: 'Sirs, among you good men of Kent ye shall have one of my banners with you, and ye of Essex another, and ye of Sussex, of Bedford, of Cambridge, of Yarmouth, of Stafford and of Lynn, each of you one; and also I pardon everything that ye have done hitherto, so that ye follow my banners and return home to your houses.' They all answered how they would so do: thus these people departed and went into London. Then the king ordained more than thirty clerks the same Friday, to write with all diligence letter patents and sealed with the king's seal, and delivered them to these people; and when they had received the writing, they departed and returned into their own countries: but the great venom remained still behind, for Wat Tyler, Jack Straw and John Ball said, for all that these people were thus appeased, yet they would not depart so, and they had of their accord more than thirty thousand. So they abode still and made no press to have the king's writing nor seal, for all their intents was to put the city to trouble in such wise as to slay all the rich and honest persons and to rob and pill their houses. They of London were in great fear of this, wherefore they kept their houses privily with their friends and such servants as they had, every man according to his puissance. And when these said people were this Friday thus somewhat appeased, and that they should depart as soon as they had their writings, every man home into his own country, then king Richard came into the Royal, where the queen his mother was, right sore affrayed: so he comforted her as well as he could and tarried there with her all that night.

Yet I shall shew you of an adventure that fell by these ungracious people before the city of Norwich, by a captain among them called Guilliam Lister of Stafford. The same day of Corpus Christi that these people entered into London and burnt the Duke of Lancaster's house, called the Savoy, and the hospital of Saint John's and break up the king's prisons and did all this hurt, as ye have heard before, the same time there assembled together they of Stafford, of Lynn, of Cambridge, of Bedford and of Yarmouth; and as they were coming towards London, they had a captain among them called Lister. And as they came, they rested them before Norwich, and in their coming they caused every man to rise with them, so that they left no villains behind them. The cause why they rested before Norwich I shall shew you. There was a knight, captain of the town, called Sir Robert Sale.

He was no gentleman born, but he had the grace to be reputed sage and valiant in arms, and for his valiantness King Edward made him knight. He was of his body one of the biggest knights in all England. Lister and his company thought to have had this knight with them and to make him their chief captain, to the intent to be the more feared and beloved: so they sent to him that he should come and speak with them in the field, or else they would burn the town. The knight considered that it was better for him to go and speak with them rather than they should do that outrage to the town: then he mounted on his horse and issued out of the town all alone, and so came to speak with them. And when they saw him, they made him great cheer and honoured him much, desiring him to alight off his horse and to speak with them, and so he did: wherein he did great folly; for when he was alighted, they came round about him and began to speak fair to him and said: 'Sir Robert, ye are a knight and a man greatly beloved in this country and renowned a valiant man; and though ye be thus, yet we know you well, ye be no gentleman born, but son to a villain such as we be. Therefore come you with us and be our master, and we shall make you so great a lord, that one quarter of England shall be under your obeisance.'

When the knight heard them speak thus, it was greatly contrarious to his mind, for he thought never to make any such bargain, and answered them with a felonous regard: 'Fly away, ye ungracious people, false and evil

traitors that ye be: would you that I should forsake my natural lord for such a company of knaves as ye be, to my dishonour for ever?

I had rather ye were all hanged, as ye shall be; for that shall be your end.' And with those words he had thought to have leapt again upon his horse, but he failed of the stirrup and the horse started away. Then they cried all at him and said: 'Slay him without mercy.' When he heard those words, he let his horse go and drew out a good sword and began to skirmish with them, and made a great place about him, that it was pleasure to behold him. There was none that durst approach near him: there were some that approached near him, but at every stroke that he gave he cut off other leg, head, or arm: there was none so hardy but that they feared him: he did there such deeds of arms that it was marvel to regard. But there were more than forty thousand of these unhappy people: they shot and cast at him, and he was unarmed: to say truth, if he had been of iron or steel, yet he must needs have been slain; but yet, or he died, he slew twelve out of hand, beside them that he hurt. Finally he was stricken to the earth, and they cut off his arms and legs and then strake his body all to pieces. This was the end of Sir Robert Sale, which was great damage; for which deed afterward all the knights and squires of England were angry and sore displeased when they heard thereof.

Now let us return to the king. The Saturday the king departed from the Wardrobe in the Royal and went to Westminster and heard mass in the church there, and all his lords with him. And beside the church there was a little chapel with an image of our Lady, which did great miracles and in whom the kings of England had ever great trust and confidence. The king made his orisons before this image and did there his offering; and then he leapt on his horse, and all his lords, and so the king rode toward London; and when he had ridden a little way, on the left hand there was a way to pass without London.

[Note: Or rather, 'he found a place on the left hand to pass without London.']

The same proper morning Wat Tyler, Jack Straw and John Ball had assembled their company to common together in a place called Smithfield, whereas every Friday there is a market of horses; and there were together all of affinity more than twenty thousand, and yet there were many still in the town, drinking and making merry in the taverns and paid nothing, for they were happy that made them best cheer. And these people in Smithfield had with them the king's banners, the which were delivered them the day before, and all these gluttons were in mind to overrun and to rob London the same day; for their captains said how they had done nothing as yet. 'These liberties that the king hath given us is to us but a small profit: therefore let us be all of one accord and let us overrun this rich and puissant city, or they of Essex, of Sussex, of Cambridge, of Bedford, of Arundel, of Warwick, of Reading, of Oxford, of Guildford, of Lynn, of Stafford, of Yarmouth, of Lincoln, of York and of Durham do come hither. For all these will come hither; Baker and Lister will bring them hither; and if we be first lords of London and have the possession of the riches that is therein, we shall not repent us; for if we leave it, they that come after will have it from us.'

To this counsel they all agreed; and therewith the king came the same way unaware of them, for he had thought to have passed that way without London, and with him a forty horse. And when he came before the Abbey of Saint Bartholomew and beheld all these people, then the king rested and said how he would go no farther till he knew what these people ailed, saying, if they were in any trouble, how he would rappease them again. The lords that were with him tarried also, as reason was when they saw the king tarry. And when Wat Tyler saw the king tarry, he said to his people: 'Sirs, yonder is the king: I will go and speak with him. Stir not from hence, without I make you a sign; and when I make you that sign, come on and slay all them except the king; but do the king no hurt, he is young, we shall do with him as we list and shall lead him with us all about England, and so shall we be lords of all the realm without doubt.' And there was a doublet-maker of London called John Tycle, and he had brought to these gluttons a sixty doublets, the which they ware: then he demanded of these captains who should pay him for his doublets; he demanded thirty mark. Wat Tyler answered him and said: 'Friend, appease yourself, thou shalt be well paid or this day be ended. Keep thee near me; I shall be thy creditor.' And therewith he spurred his horse and departed from his company and came to the king, so near him that his horse head touched the croup of the king's horse, and the first word that he said was this: 'Sir king, seest thou all yonder people?' 'Yea truly,' said the king, 'wherefore sayest thou?' 'Because,' said he, 'they be all at my commandment and have sworn to me faith and truth, to do all that I will have them.' 'In a good time,' said the king, 'I will well it be so.' Then Wat Tyler said, as he that nothing demanded but riot:

'What believest thou, king, that these people and as many more as be in London at my commandment, that they will depart from thee thus without having thy letters? ' 'No,' said the king, 'ye shall have them: they be ordained for you and shall be delivered everyone each after other. Wherefore, good fellows, withdraw fair and easily to your people and cause them to depart out of London; for it is our intent that each of you by villages

and townships shall have letters patents, as I have promised you.' With those words Wat Tyler cast his eye on a squire that was there with the king bearing the king's sword, and Wat Tyler hated greatly the same squire, for the same squire had displeased him before for words between them. 'What, said Tyler, 'art thou there? Give me thy dagger.' 'Nay,' said the squire, 'that will I not do: wherefore should I give it thee?' The king beheld the squire and said: 'Give it him; let him have it.' And so the squire took it him sore against his will. And when this Wat Tyler had it, he began to play therewith and turned it in his hand, and said again to the squire: 'Give me also that sword.' 'Nay,' said the squire, 'it is the king's sword: thou art not worthy to have it, for thou art but a knave; and if there were no more here but thou and I, thou durst not speak those words for as much gold in quantity as all yonder abbey.'

[Note: The full text has, 'for as much gold as that minster of Saint Paul is great.']

'By my faith,' said Wat Tyler, 'I shall never eat meat till I have thy head': and with those words the mayor of London came to the king with a twelve horses well-armed under their coats, and so he brake the press and saw and heard how Wat Tyler demeaned himself, and said to him: 'Ha, thou knave, how art thou so hardy in the king's presence to speak such words? It is too much for thee so to do.' Then the king began to chafe and said to the mayor: 'Set hands on him.' And while the king said so, Tyler said to the mayor: 'A God's name what have I said to displease thee?' 'Yes truly,' quoth the mayor, 'thou false stinking knave, shalt thou speak thus in the presence of the king my natural lord? I commit never to live, without thou shalt dearly abye it.'

And with those words the mayor drew out his sword and strake Tyler so great a stroke on the head, that he fell down at the feet of his horse, and as soon as he was fallen, they environed him all about, whereby he was not seen of his company. Then a squire of the king's alighted, called John Standish, and he drew out his sword and put it into Wat Tyler's belly, and so he died.

Then the ungracious people there assembled, perceiving their captain slain, began to murmur among themselves and said: 'Ah, our captain is slain, let us go and slay them all': and therewith they arranged themselves on the place in manner of battle, and their bows before them. Thus the king began a great outrage; howbeit, all turned to the best:

[Note: 'Outrage' here means 'act of boldness,'

for as soon as Tyler was on the earth, the king departed from all his company and all alone he rode to these people, and said to his own men: 'Sirs, none of you follow me; let me alone.' And so when he came before these ungracious people, who put themselves in ordinance to revenge their captain, then the king said to them: 'Sirs, what aileth you? Ye shall have no captain but me: I am your king: be all in rest and peace.' And so the most part of the people that heard the king speak and saw him among them, were shamefast and began to wax peaceable and to depart; but some, such as were malicious and evil, would not depart, but made semblant as though they would do somewhat.

Then the king returned to his own company and demanded of them what was best to be done. Then he was counselled to draw into the field, for to fly away was no boot. Then said the mayor: 'It is good that we do so, for I think surely we shall have shortly some comfort of them of London and of such good men as be of our part, who are purveyed and have their friends and men ready armed in their houses.' And in the meantime voice and bruit ran through London how these unhappy people were likely to slay the king and the mayor in Smithfield; through the which noise all manner of good men of the king's party issued out of their houses and lodgings well-armed, and so came all to Smithfield and to the field where the king was, and they were anon to the number of seven or eight thousand men well-armed. And first thither came Sir Robert Knolles and Sir Perducas d'Albret, well accompanied, and divers of the aldermen of London, and with them a six hundred men in harness, and a puissant man of the city, who was the king's draper, called Nicholas Bramber, and he brought with him a great company; and ever as they came, they ranged them afoot in order of battle: and on the other part these unhappy people were ready ranged, making semblance to give battle, and they had with them divers of the king's banners.

[Note: 'Qui estoit des draps du roy.' He owned large estates in Essex and also shops in London. He became one of the councillors of Richard II.]

There the king made three knights, the one the mayor of London Sir Nicholas Walworth, Sir John Standish, and Sir Nicholas Bramber. Then the lords said among themselves: 'What shall we do? We see here our enemies, who would gladly slay us, if they might have the better hand of us.' Sir Robert Knolles counselled to go and fight with them and slay them all; yet the king would not consent thereto, but said: 'Nay, I will not so: I will

send to them commanding them to send me again my banners, and thereby we shall see what they will do. Howbeit, other by fairness or otherwise, I will have them.' 'That is well said, sir,' quoth the Earl of Salisbury. Then these new knights were sent to them, and these knights made token to them not to shoot at them, and when they came so near them that their speech might be heard, they said: 'Sirs, the king commandeth you to send to him again his banners, and we think he will have mercy of you.' And incontinent they delivered again the banners and sent them to the king. Also they were commanded on pain of their heads, that all such as had letters of the king to bring them forth and to send them again to the king; and so many of them delivered their letters, but not all. Then the king made them to be all to-torn in their presence; and as soon as the king's banners were delivered again, these unhappy people kept none array, but the most part of them did cast down their bows, and so brake their array and returned into London. Sir Robert Knolles was sore displeased in that he might not go to slay them all: but the king would not consent thereto, but said he would be revenged of them well enough; and so he was after.

Thus these foolish people departed, some one way and some another; and the king and his lords and all his company right ordinately entered into London with great joy. And the first journey that the king made he went to the lady princess his mother, who was in a castle in the Royal called the Queen's Wardrobe, and there she had tarried two days and two nights right sore abashed, as she had good reason; and when she saw the king her son, she was greatly rejoiced and said: 'Ah, fair son, what pain and great sorrow that I have suffered for you this day!' Then the king answered and said: 'Certainly, madam, I know it well; but now rejoice yourself and thank God, for now it is time. I have this day recovered mine heritage and the realm of England, the which I had near lost.' Thus the king tarried that day with his mother, and every lord went peaceably to their own lodgings. Then there was a cry made in every street in the king's name, that all manner of men, not being of the city of London and have not dwelt there the space of one year, to depart; and if any such be found there the Sunday by the sun-rising, that they should be taken as traitors to the king and to lose their heads. This cry thus made, there was none that durst brake it, and so all manner of people departed and sparkled abroad every man to their own places. John Ball and Jack Straw were found in an old house hidden, thinking to have stolen away, but they could not, for they were accused by their own men. Of the taking of them the king and his lords were glad, and then strake off their heads and Wat Tyler's also, and they were set on London bridge, and the valiant men's heads taken down that they had set on the Thursday before. These tidings anon spread abroad, so that the people of the strange countries, which were coming towards London, returned back again to their own houses and durst come no farther.

A Catalyst for Rebellion.

Social unrest afflicted workers in towns and cities as well as the peasants in the countryside. Governments, controlled as they were by the wealthiest nobility, made every attempt to fix prices and wages as well as regulate the movement of workers in their country. The most typical and most significant of these urban revolts was the Ciompi rebellion of 1378.

Florence was the wool manufacturing centre of Europe. Perhaps one-third of the city's population was engaged in a trade directly related to the manufacture of wool. Florence was also one city hit hard by the Black Death and it was because of this that manufacturers cut back on production thus putting workers out of a job. The poorest workers were denied entry into guilds and when connected with price and wage fixing, the situation for these poor souls grew intolerable. The name Ciompi was given to those skilled workers who were engaged in the carding of wool (carding is that process in which were raw wool is cleaned and straightened prior to twisting into yarn and was at this time, a hand process). As skilled workers, the carders demanded various reforms of their masters. For instance, they demanded that employers had to insure them work, that they would not do anything injurious to the workers and finally, that employers would permit workers their right to enter a guild. By 1382, the wealthy manufacturing families of Florence put down this rebellion of skilled workers by force and the Ciompi or forced to accept all previous arrangements.

The primary issue of these revolts, both those of the countryside and the city, was not misery, hunger, or poverty. Instead, the primary motivation for these revolts was specifically moral -- peasants and skilled workers were routinely denied certain rights. What we are beginning to see in these episodes is the emergence of the worker's right to enter into a collective bargaining agreement with their employers, a right which we perhaps take for granted today.

There is one final event which marks the 14th century as a Calamitous Century. If plague and famine weren't enough, 14th century Europeans also suffered from numerous wars, lengthy wars which destroyed both town and countryside. To deprive an invading army of food, it was not at all unusual for the peasants to burn their

fields. The invading armies also destroyed farms in order to destroy the morale of the peasants. Plunder by discharged soldiers was also common. The Hundred Years' War Resources In earlier centuries, wars have been generally short and small in scale. In the 14th century, a new trend developed. The most destructive war was a series of conflicts between the English and the French known as the Hundred year's War, a war which raged off and on from 1337 to 1453.

Because of increasingly complex feudal contracts, English kings and ruled parts of France and conflict between the two monarchies was common. The arrival of feudalism in the eighth and 9th centuries had been a major step toward European stability after the fall of Rome. But feudalism, based as it was on a legal contract, rested on a delicate balance. The personal relationship between lord and vassal would only succeed if all members of the partnership remained faithful to their obligations. By the 14th century, there were a number of forces which upset this delicate balance.

In 1328, the Capetian dynasty in France came to an end with the death of Charles IV, the son of Philip the Fair. An assembly of French barons gave the crown to Philip VI of Valois, the nephew of Philip the Fair. Of course, Edward III, king of England, asserted that he in fact had a superior claimed to the throne because his mother was Philip the Fair's daughter. This, then, was one of the primary causes of the Hundred Years' War. Imagine -- an English king the king of France as well! Another cause of the Hundred Years' War was clearly economic conflict. The French monarchy tried to squeeze new taxes from towns in northern Europe which had grown wealthy as trade and cloth-making centres. Dependent as they were on English wool, these towns through their support behind English and Edward III.

To make matters worse, war had become a more expensive proposition in the 14th century. Larger, healthier, and better-trained armies were needed. Most governments began to rely on paid mercenaries to do their fighting for them. The problem with mercenaries is that they were expensive to obtain an even more expensive to retain. More often than not, the mercenary had no allegiance to anyone king and fought for the highest bidder. Furthermore, mercenaries were a competitive and quarrelsome lot. To counteract the high price of war, European monarchs imposed even more taxes upon the people. The French were most adept at this: there were taxes on salt, bread, and wine as well as taxes on the rights to use wine presses, grindstones, and mills. And of course, there was the poll tax.

The last cause of the Hundred Years' War was factional conflict. By the 14th century the European nobility had become diluted with men who had entered the nobility not because they had a claim by virtue of birth but because of their wealth. Meanwhile, the older nobility was losing income due to declining rents. Many older nobles joined forces with mercenaries in order to maintain their position and status. Other nobles married into wealthy families while still others tried to improve their situation by the buying and selling of royal offices. What all this boiled down to was conflict. Nobles tended to join factions united against other factions. These factions included a great family, their knights, servants and even workers and peasants on the manorial estate. They had their own small armies, loyalties and even symbols of allegiance. The bottom line is that these factions were beginning to form small states within a state and contributed not only to the overall violence of the 14th century but also to the need of monarchs to keep their nobility under constant surveillance. This explains why Louis XIV, the Sun King, housed his nobility at Versailles -- it was so he could keep an eye on them.

The most pressing issue during the Hundred Years' War was the status of Aquitaine, a large province in southwestern France. According to feudal law, Edward III held Aquitaine as part of his fiefdom. Philip attacked this territory, claiming it was rightfully his. Edward's response was to join forces with the Flemish in 1337 and this was the principal cause of the war.

The war, fought entirely on French soil, raged off and on for more than 100 years. English victories were followed by French victories, then a period of stalemate would ensue, until the conflicts again rose to the surface. During periods of truce, English and French soldiers -- most of whom were mercenaries -- would roam the French countryside killing and stealing.

After the battle of Agincourt in 1415, won by the English under Henry V, the English controlled most of northern France. It appeared that England would shortly conquer France and unite the two countries under one crown. At this crucial moment in French history, a young and illiterate peasant girl, Joan of Arc (c.1412-1431), helped to rescue France. At the age of 13 she believed she had heard the voices of St. Michael, St. Catherine and St. Margaret bidding her to rescue the French people. Believing that God had commanded her to drive the English out of France, Joan rallied the demoralized French troops, leading them in battle. Clad in a suit of white armour and flying her own standard she liberated France from the English at the battle of

Orleans. Ultimately captured and imprisoned by the English, Joan of Arc was condemned as a heretic and a witch and stood trial before the Inquisition in 1431. Joan was found guilty and was to be burnt at the stake but at the last moment she broke down and recanted everything. She eventually broke down again and faithful to her "voices," decided to become a martyr and was then burnt at the stake and became a national hero.

THE OUTBREAK OF THE REBELLION.

Having examined the Poll Tax returns for 1380, the Royal Council headed by John of Gaunt were upset to discover that less money than ever had been collected. Tax collectors were sent out again, with instructions to collect the full amounts. One of these men was Thomas Bampton, who arrived at Fobbing in Essex, and summoned the villagers of Fobbing, Stanford and Corringham to appear before him. Those law-abiding villagers who turned up were shocked to discover that they would have to pay the hated tax a second time, and that they would also have to pay for the people who had failed to turn up. Not surprisingly, a riot followed, and Bampton and his men were beaten and driven from the village.

Sir Robert Belknap, a Chief Justice was sent to calm the situation, but he suffered a similar fate. Word spread, and peasants all over Essex banded together and turned on the landowners. Manor houses were burnt down, and any records of taxes, labour duties and debts destroyed.

John of Gaunt (1340-1399)

The first point to note is that most of the rebels were not peasants. The rebels included innkeepers, alewives, labourers, craftsmen (such as carpenters), widows carrying on a business, and clerics. Most were landholders, and some held large holdings. Some held positions of responsibility in their locality: one was a hundred juror, another was a bailiff, and another was a reeve. Some of them were from the alderman class in London.

They all had in common a grudge against the status quo. Many rebels held by disadvantageous customary or servile tenures; while they themselves were moving up in the world, they were still restrained by age-old, out-dated laws that attempted to restrict their lives. Others felt that they had been mistreated by the law of the land. The rebels did not want to overthrow the king; in fact, they claimed to have his support and to be acting on his behalf. This seems to have been a significant factor in the king's decision to pardon the great majority of the rebels. Soon peasants in Kent rebelled also, and risings took place in many other areas of the country. Some unpopular landowners were killed, others fled and others captured and humiliated, having to act as servants and perform menial tasks. Although the revolt spread to many areas of England, the two risings in Essex and Kent became the focus of the revolt.

A timeline of events in 1381.

THOMAS BAKER OF FOBBING

May 30th 1381.

Essex peasants led by Thomas Baker, a landowner, chase Thomas Bampton out of Fobbing and arguably it was he who started the revolt. Robert Belknap, Chief Justice of Common Pleas, was sent to investigate the incident and to punish the offenders uprising.

June 1st 1381.

Essex rebels kill three of Bampton's servants (Tax Collectors) and their heads were put on poles and paraded around the neighbouring villages. After releasing the Chief Justice, some of the villagers looted and set fire to the home of John Sewale, the Sheriff of Essex in 1380. The people responsible sent out messages to the villages of Essex and Kent asking for their support in the fight against the poll tax. Many peasants decided that it was time to support the ideas proposed by John Ball and his followers. It was not long before Wat Tyler, a former soldier in the Hundred Years War, emerged as the leader of the peasants in Kent. Tyler's first decision was to march to Maidstone to free John Ball from prison. "John Ball had been set free and was safe among the commons of Kent, and he was bursting to pour out the passionate words which had been bottled up for three months, words which were exactly what his audience wanted to hear." The revolt spreads through Essex, Hertfordshire, and Suffolk.

June 2nd 1381.

Bampton, commanded Baker to make a full investigation into the tax evasion he suspected in Fobbing. Baker and his associates, however, refused point blank. They saw the investigation as just an excuse for another tax since Bampton had only recently accepted their total. Bampton was furious at this insubordinate lack of cooperation, threatening Baker, and the men of Fobbing by reminding them of the presence of his royal thugs.

With a misguided arrogance only the aristocracy could possess, Bampton ordered his two henchmen to arrest the dissidents, even though they were outnumbered by around 100 Essex villagers. The villagers advanced, flinging rocks and arrows, and the royal collectors fled. The men of Essex fled, too, but only to the woods, and the next day returned to their homes with accounts of what had taken place at Brentwood. That was all it took. Soon riders were traveling far and wide to gather like-minded men to join the protest against the abuse of royal authority and the inquisition into tax receipts. When the messengers returned, they brought news that hundreds of others were willing to rise up against the powers that be. By this time, the violent discontent had spread, and the counties of Essex and Kent were in full revolt. Soon people moved on London in an armed rebellion.

WAT TYLER IN KENT.
June 5th 1381.
On 5th June there was a Peasants' Revolt at Dartford and two days later Rochester Castle was taken. The peasants arrived in Canterbury on 10th June. Here they took over the archbishop's palace, destroyed legal documents and released prisoners from the town's prison. More and more peasants decided to take action. Manor houses were broken into and documents were destroyed. These records included the villeins' names, the rent they paid and the services they carried out. What had originally started as a protest against the poll tax now became an attempt to destroy the feudal system.

June 7th 1381.
The revolt is now widespread. The Kent rebels besiege Maidstone Castle, which surrenders. John Ball is freed, and Rochester Castle surrenders also. Freeing the prisoners of Rochester and the county's other jails (including John Ball from Maidstone) under the new command of Wat Tyler, the Kentish rebels also took control of the important road linking Canterbury, seat of the most important churchman in the country, and London. They took oaths from anyone passing by. Simultaneously, the pattern of organized mobs targeting the legal profession and the property of unjust gentry was mirrored in Essex. The rebels from the counties met at Cressing Temple, near to where the Sheriff of Essex had just managed to escape with his life, if not his power.

They had caught the authorities underprepared. It seems royal intervention was forced when Tyler captured Canterbury Castle, freed the prisoners, had a bonfire of legal records, and murdered judges and gentry alike. At last, royal messengers came from Windsor with the incredible news that King Richard II had requested an audience with the rebels in London.

June 10th 1381.
The Kent Rebels march on Canterbury, and capture the city, Rich pilgrims are attacked in the town, Finding the Archbishop away, the rebels appoint a humble monk as the new Archbishop, and hold a service in the Cathedral, promising death to all "traitors" they capture. The peasants arrived in Canterbury on 10th June. Here they took over the archbishop's palace, destroyed legal documents and released prisoners from the town's prison. More and more peasants decided to take action. Manor houses were broken into and documents were destroyed. These records included the villeins' names, the rent they paid and the services they carried out. What had originally started as a protest against the poll tax now became an attempt to destroy the feudal system.

Both the Kent and the Essex rebels now set out to march on London. The simple peasants believed that they were going to explain their grievances to the King, who had been badly advised, and that all would be set right. However, some of the more intelligent figures, such as Wat Tyler and John Ball had a much clearer idea of the situation, and were planning to gain as much as they could. The King and the council were caught completely by surprise, and there were only a few hundred troops in London. The city was virtually defenceless.

June 12th 1381.
Both groups of peasants had reached London. The Essex peasants at Mile End, north of the River Thames. Their numbers are hard to estimate, but both groups could have been made up of up to 50,000 people. A message was sent into the city, demanding a meeting with the king. It was arranged that he would meet them at Rotherhithe, on the Thames, that afternoon. Richard travelled downriver in the royal barge, but at the sight

of the huge crowd of peasants, Richard's advisers would not let him land. He returned to the Tower of London, leaving the peasants angry and frustrated.

That night the peasants closed in on London. They were able to enter because the gates of the city, and London Bridge were opened by townspeople sympathetic to their cause, although they later claimed they had been forced to do it. It has been estimated that approximately 30,000 peasants had marched to London. At Blackheath, John Ball gave one of his famous sermons on the need for "freedom and equality".

My good friends, things cannot go on well in England, nor ever will until everything shall be in common; when there shall neither be vassal nor lord, and all distinctions levelled, when the lords shall be no more masters than ourselves. But ill have they used us! And for what reason do they hold us in bondage? Are we not all descended from the same parents, Adam, and Eve? And what can they show, or what reasons give, why they should be more the masters than ourselves? Except, perhaps, in making us labour and work, for them to spend. . . . They had handsome manors, when we must brave the wind and rain in our labours in the field; but it is from our labour they have wherewith to support their pomp. We are called slaves, and if we do not perform our service we are beaten, and we have no sovereign to whom we can complain or who would be willing to hear us. Let us go to the King and speak with him; he is young, and from him we may obtain a favourable answer, and if not we must ourselves seek to amend our condition.

The king had advised Simon of Sudbury, Archbishop of Canterbury, and Chancellor, to seize the opportunity to escape. But as the plan unfolded Sudbury was recognized by the rebels and the London mob smashed their way into the Tower. One historian has described the event in the following way:
“In the Chapel of St John the shouting rabble came upon the Archbishop, Sir Robert Hales, the Lord Treasurer, John of Gaunt's physician, and John Legge who had devised the poll tax. They were all at prayer before the altar. Dragged away from the chapel, down the steps and out of the gates onto Tower Hill, where traitors were executed, they were beheaded one after the other. Their heads were stuck on pikes and carried in triumph around the city.”

Also on 12 June, the Kent peasants gathered at Blackheath near London under the leaders Wat Tyler, John Ball, and Jack Straw. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Simon Sudbury, who was also Lord Chancellor, and the king's Lord High Treasurer, Robert Hales, were both killed by the rebels, who were demanding the complete abolition of serfdom. The king, sheltered within the Tower of London with his councillors, agreed that the Crown did not have the forces to disperse the rebels and that the only feasible option was to negotiate.

Wat Tyler also spoke to the rebels. He told them: "Remember, we come not as thieves and robbers. We come seeking social justice." Henry Knighton records: "The rebels returned to the New Temple which belonged to the prior of Clerkenwell... and tore up with their axes all the church books, charters and records discovered in the chests and burnt them... One of the criminals chose a fine piece of silver and hid it in his lap; when his fellows saw him carrying it, they threw him, together with his prize, into the fire, saying they were lovers of truth and justice, not robbers and thieves."
Richard II gave orders for the peasants to be locked out of London. However, some Londoners who sympathised with the peasants arranged for the city gates to be left open. Jean Froissart claims that some 40,000 to 50,000 citizens, about half of the city's inhabitants, were ready to welcome the "True Commons". When the rebels entered the city, the king and his advisers withdrew to the Tower of London. Many poor people living in London decided to join the rebellion. Together they began to destroy the property of the king's senior officials. They also freed the inmates of Marshalsea Prison.

Part of the English Army was at sea bound for Portugal whereas the rest were with John of Gaunt in Scotland. Thomas Walsingham tells us that the king was being protected in the Tower by "six hundred warlike men instructed in arms, brave men, and most experienced, and six hundred archers". Walsingham adds that they "all had so lost heart that you would have thought them more like dead men than living; the memory of their former vigour and glory was extinguished". Walsingham points out that they did not want to fight and suggests they may have been on the side of the peasants.

John Ball sent a message to Richard II stating that the rising was not against his authority as the people only wished only to deliver him and his kingdom from traitors. Ball also asked the king to meet with him at

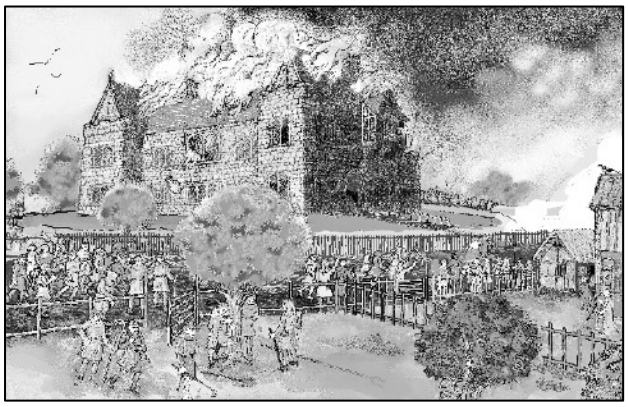
Blackheath. Archbishop Simon Sudbury and Robert Hales, the treasurer, both objects of the people's hatred, warned against meeting the "shoeless ruffians", whereas others, such as William de Montagu, the Earl of Salisbury, urged that the king played for time by pretending that he desired a negotiated agreement.

Thursday June 13th 1381.

On the evening of Thursday 13 June 1381 a large armed band broke into the Hospitallers' priory at Clerkenwell and set it and the many houses around it on fire, beheaded several people, and plundered documents, goods, and money from the house. The leader of this band was one Thomas Farndon or Farringdon of London, one of the leaders of the rebels who had ridden down from Essex on the previous day after plundering and burning Cressing Temple and the house at Coggeshall of Sir John Sewale, Sheriff of Essex.

The King arrives at Rotherhithe on a barge. The rebels demand that the king's leading advisers, John of Gaunt, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Hales, John Legge, should be executed. The king is unwilling to leave his barge and after a few minutes he returns to the Tower of London. Earlier on that Thursday Farndon had led the rebels in an attack on the New Temple, London, which was burned; and on the Savoy Palace, the property of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, and uncle of King Richard II. The Savoy had been plundered and then deliberately blown up with gunpowder. After sacking Clerkenwell priory, Farndon and other rebels spent the night drawing up a 'black list' of those in the government that they wanted dead.

13th June, 1381 (afternoon): The Kent rebels arrive at the Southwark entrance to London. Supporters of the rebels inside the walls lower the drawbridge. The Fleet Prison and Savoy Palace are also set on fire.



On Friday 14 June Jack Straw and other rebels, including some of those who had attacked Clerkenwell, burned down Highbury Manor, the property of the prior of the Hospital in England, and looted it, taking from it and Clerkenwell 'rolls and other muniments and goods and chattels'. King Richard II (then aged fourteen) rode out to negotiate with the rebels at Mile End, where Thomas Farndon seized his bridle and declared: 'Avenge me on that false traitor the prior for my property which he falsely and fraudulently stole from me. Do me justice because otherwise I will get justice done myself.' The king agreed to do him justice.

Highbury Manor (known as Jack straw's Castle).

Farndon and his associates then went to the Tower of London. The Chancellor of the kingdom, Archbishop Simon Sudbury of Canterbury, the treasurer Robert Hales prior of the Hospital in England, John Cavendish the chief justiciar, and other leading royal officials were cowering in the Tower – their attempted escape through the postern gate opening on to the River Thames had been foiled by a woman who was keeping guard on it.

Farndon and his associates seized Sudbury, Hales, and the other leading royal officials, marched them out to Tower Hill and beheaded them. The following day the king met the rebels under Wat Tyler of Kent at West Smithfield. Wat Tyler was killed by the mayor of London, and the king assumed leadership of the rebels. The rebels then went home with the king's promise that their demands would be met.

This was not done, and the legal investigations into the revolt occupied the king's bench for a long time afterwards. A large number of people were given pardons; only ringleaders of the revolt were executed. In March 1383 Thomas Farndon was given a personal royal pardon, which included both his surnames to ensure that there was no doubt over the matter.

WAT TYLER

The rebels were loose in the city. Fleet Prison was broken open, many lawyers were killed in the Temple, and foreign merchants massacred. Despite this, most peasants were peaceful, and little damage was done to the city, on the orders of Wat Tyler. A group of peasants marched west from the city to the magnificent Savoy Palace, home of John of Gaunt. It caught fire as they ransacked it. Fortunately, John of Gaunt was in Scotland at this time, and escaped the rebels. As the flames lit the sky, Richard agreed to meet the rebels at Mile End the following day. He hoped that this would draw the peasants out of the city.

Savoy Palace from the Thames.

Friday June 14th 1381.

14th June, 1381 (morning): Richard II agrees to meet Wat Tyler and the rebels at 8.00 a.m. outside the town walls at Mile End. At the meeting Wat Tyler explains to the king the demands of the rebels. This includes the end of all feudal services, the freedom to buy and sell all goods, and a free pardon for all offences committed during the rebellion.

Wat Tyler put forward the peasants demands:

- land rents were reduced to reasonable levels.
- the Poll Tax was to be abolished.
- free pardons for all rebels.
- charters would be given to the peasants laying down a number of rights and privileges.
- all "traitors" were to be put to death.

Richard agreed to all these demands, but added that only a royal court could decide if a person was a traitor or not. He thought that this was the best policy, in order to allow the peasants to go home. A group of thirty or so clerks began to copy out charters for the peasants to take home.

However, the King had been outwitted by Wat Tyler. A group of peasants, taking advantage of the King's absence at Mile End, raided the Tower of London. Here, they found three of their most hated people; Simon Sudbury, (Archbishop of Canterbury), Sir Robert Hailes (King's treasurer) and John Legge (the creator of the Poll Tax). They were dragged out onto Tower Hill, and beheaded.

14th June, 1381 (afternoon): About 400 rebels led by John Starling, enter the Tower of London and capture Simon Sudbury, archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Hales, the king's treasurer and John Legge. Sudbury, Hales and Legge are executed at Tower Hill.

Rebellion in East Anglia

Friday 14th June 1381.

Sir John Cavendish (before 1340 – 15 June 1381) was an English judge and politician from Cavendish, Suffolk, England. He and the village gave the name Cavendish to the aristocratic families of the Dukedoms of Devonshire, Newcastle, and Portland. John Cavendish was descended from the Norman Robert de Guernon, who lived during the reign of Henry I and who gave a large amount of property to the Abbey of Gloucester.

Robert's son, Roger de Gernon, of Grimston Hall, in Trimley St Martin, Suffolk, married the heiress of John Potton of Cavendish and obtained a landed estate in the lordship and manor of Cavendish. In consequence, his four sons exchanged their father's name for that of the estate each inherited. Until about 1500 this family are recorded as Gernon alias Cavendish. Sir John Cavendish married Alice de Odingsells, became a lawyer, and was appointed as a Justice of the Common Pleas in 1371 and Chief Justice of the King's Bench in 1372. As Chief Justice he was obliged to suppress the Peasants' Revolt in 1381. Although Wat Tyler, the leader of the revolt was struck down by William Walworth, mayor of London, during negotiations on 15 June, John Cavendish the younger, second son of the Chief Justice, gave the finishing stroke to Wat Tyler, the lord mayor having only wounded him in the neck.

Saturday June 15th 1381.

Following the granting of charters the previous day, many peasants began to leave London and return home, believing that their demands had been met. However, Wat Tyler and a hard core of peasants remained behind, and they demanded another meeting with the King, to deliver even more demands. The King agreed to a meeting at Smithfield, an open space within the city walls.

William Walworth, mayor of London, raises an army of about 5,000 men. Richard II sends a message to Wat Tyler asking to meet him at Smithfield that evening. At Smithfield, the king ask Wat Tyler and his rebels to leave London. Wat Tyler makes further demands such as the end of tithes, the abolition of bishops, the redistribution of wealth, equality before the law, and the freedom to kill the animals in the forest.

William Walworth, mayor of London, begins to argue with Wat Tyler. William Walworth stabs and kills Wat Tyler. The rebels obey King Richard's instructions to leave.

Wat Tyler's death (left to right: Sir William Walworth, Mayor of London (wielding sword); Wat Tyler; King Richard II; and Sir John Cavendish, esquire to the King (bearing lance}

When the King's party arrived, Wat Tyler rode up and greeted them in an insolent manner. What happened next is unclear, but was probably a pre-arranged plot. Tyler was rude to the King, refusing to dismount, and spitting in front of him. The Lord Mayor of London, William Walworth, drew his sword and attacked Tyler, wounding him. A squire finished him off as he lay on the ground. Walworth sent news to the wards of London that though the hated Wat Tyler was badly injured, the king was in danger and needed their aid, and they loyally took arms. Walworth then sought out the moribund Tyler, finding him prostrate at St Bartholomew's Church, Smithfield, and beheaded him as a traitor.

This was a crucial moment, before the peasants realised what had happened. The young King rode forward, shouting out that all their demands were to be met, and that they should follow him out of the city, where charters would be forthcoming. Trustingly, the rebels followed him, and most were persuaded to return home.

Rebellion in East Anglia.
Saturday 15th June 1381.
Prior John Cambridge of the Abbey of St. Edmunds beheaded along with the Monk John Lakenheath in Bury. Richard de Leycester leads a revolt in the City of Ely. In Cambridge, burgesses' alliance with county rebels leads to a night of violence. In his testimony Wrawe admits to being present at the murders of Cambridge and Lakenheath and, in the latter case, he says his rebel company gave "help and advice." Unlike the earlier events of the rising, though, he specifically names the individuals who he claims led the acts. The other two murders go unmentioned in his testimony, implying that he claimed not to have been involved in any way at all. In this respect, Wrawe's version differs greatly from the secondary literature, which tends to describe all of the first three murders as being orchestrated by Wrawe himself. The death of the unidentified "worthy person" has only been considered worthy of one mention in a single work of secondary literature.

Most historians assume that Wrawe's testimony is merely the words of a man keen to disassociate himself from the most serious crimes of the rising. Further cause for doubt arises from the verdict of jury from Lackford hundred which found Wrawe and fellow Sudbury vicar Geoffrey Parfay guilty of the murder of the prior. The sudden emergence of murder after two days of looting, however, is a curious change in the character of the rebellion. Another possibility is that this change was the result of a leadership role being assumed by the individuals named by Wrawe.

Wrawe claims that the prior was murdered by a rebel company under the leadership of three Bury townsmen: Thomas Halesworth, Robert Westbrom and Geoffrey Denham. Two of these men, Halesworth and Denham, were servants of the prior. Many other sources, however, indicate some truth in Wrawe's version of events.
The three individuals he names had appeared on parliament's exclusion list. It is possible, as Prescott suggests, that they were only included as a result of spurious allegations in the aftermath of the revolt. Yet five years after the rebellion Halesworth was still referred to as a "principal insurgent" in the patent roll entry that granted him a pardon. Furthermore, Gosford, whilst not naming individual rebels, describes the murder as being carried out by the town community rather than an outside leader, writing of a company "encouraged by the people
of Bury" (instigata per homines de Bury).

There is no obvious motive for Wrawe targeting the prior but one is readily identifiable for Halesworth and Westbrom. Halesworth was a townsman of high status, having held the post of alderman (the head of the guild) in 1379. In the same year, Halesworth and Westbrom had been key individuals backing Broomfield in the abbatial election dispute, with Halesworth even claiming to be his cousin. There is no definite evidence to confirm this, but Gosford describes one unnamed leading rebel as 'the brother of the papal nominee, a certain rich man of the town' (frater vero provisoris, quidam dives de villa). The abbatial dispute brought Halesworth and Westbrom into direct conflict with the prior, who was a leading figure amongst the Abbey officials on the other side of the dispute. The events in Bury in 1381 indicate the townsmen acting opportunistically to continue their existing dispute with the Abbey and the prior was an obstacle in this dispute.

Sunday 16th June 1381.
Far from demonstrating the scope of Wrawe's leadership, the murder of Cavendish is another example of how the revolt was shaped by local grievances within a community. The location of his death is significant, as it

points to a motive based on a local grievance. The people of Lakenheath had revolted against royal officials in 1371 over the collection of a parish tax. Four commissioners had been sent to handle this rising, one of whom was Cavendish. When he returned to Lakenheath in 1381 it was for the final time. His death was an example of a community expressing its anger at the enforcement of tax collection and at the interference of royal justice in the community.

Further evidence of the particular importance of the community in Bury is the way in which the town was punished after the revolt. In addition to producing the list of individuals, which included a number of Bury townsmen, parliament named six towns to be excluded from the pardon, one of which was Bury. The list was reiterated later in 1381, but this time Bury was the only town excluded from the pardon. The following year, the government imposed a fine of 2,000 marks upon the residents of the town. Even after Wrawe had been executed, parliament was pursuing a particularly severe punishment for Bury. This suggests they felt that leadership had come from within the town. It is also interesting that they selected a collective punishment rather than relying on trials against individuals. Their approach would have left the guild authorities responsible for organising a commission to levy and collect the fine. The punishment was directed primarily at the town elite, further evidence of the murders being carried out by a community under the leadership of high status townsmen.
In Cambridge, widespread looting, and a bonfire of University records. Rebel bands enter Ipswich and destroy property.

Table 1: Suffolk individuals excluded from the general pardon.

Sudbury and Essex: William Benington, Geoffrey Parfay, Thomas Underwood, John Wrawe.
Bury: John Clak, Geoffrey Denham, Thomas Halesworth, Robert Sad, John Talmage, Robert Westbrom, Thomas Yoxford.
East Suffolk: Edmund Barbour, John Batisford, Robert Prior, Thomas Sampson.
Unknown: Jacob Bedyngfeld, … Botemor, John Carter, John le Dene.

Monday 17th June 1381.
The Mayor and rebels of Cambridge assault Barnwell Priory.
In Ely Richard, de Leycester and his band execute Sir Edmund Walsingham a Cambridgeshire Justice.
A brief rebellion in Peterborough against the Abbott.
In Norfolk, a rebel assembly on Mousehold Heath and Lister's entry into Norwich.

Tuesday 18th June 1381.
Sir Roger Bacon and his company enter Great Yarmouth. Riots at Lowestoft led by Richard Resch of Holland.
In Suffolk, John Wrawe leads an assault on Mettingham Castle.
At Ramsey, the Abbott and Bishop Despenser disperse a rebel band from Ely.

Wednesday and Thursday 19th – 20th June 1381.
Bishop Despenser crushes rebels and beheads John Hanchach.
Thursday and Friday 20th – 21st June 1381.
Sir Roger Bacon still inciting risings north of Yarmouth.

Saturday 22nd June 1381.
Lister's envoys to Richard II are intercepted at Icklingham in West Suffolk.

Saturday 22ND June 1381.
The King set off at the head of an army and the next day reached Waltham, from where Richard issued a proclamation that set the tone for what was to come. He had not, he stated, and never did have any sympathy for those who broke the law and acted against Crown and Kingdom with their riotous and treasonable conduct. The pledges made on the 14 and 15th June counted for nothing, as they had been made under duress. They could tear up the promises he'd made: 'Villeins ye are still, and villeins ye shall remain!' he is said to have proclaimed.

Generally speaking, there had been few troubles in Chelmsford, though the Sheriff of Essex was threatened and assaulted during the unrest, and 'all writs of green wax' were burnt. Richard II and his court are thought to have stayed at Writtle.

Sunday 23rd June, 1381.
Richard II and his army arrive in Waltham from London. Richard II's announces that he has cancelled the charters that he issued in London on 14th June.

Rebellion in East Anglia

Sunday 23rd June 1381.
In West Suffolk, the Earl of Suffolk arrives at Bury to pacify the town.

Monday 24th June 1381.
Bishop Despenser enters and pacifies Norwich.
Lister still recognised as the chief leader in the county.

Tuesday and Wednesday 25th – 26th June 1381.
Bishop Despenser routs Lister and rebels at North Walsham.

28th June 1381
The Battle of Billericay took place on 28 June 1381 when the boy King Richard II's soldiers defeated the Essex rebels adjacent to a wood north-east of Billericay, part of the Peasants' Revolt. This is likely to have been Norsey Wood which maps of 1593 show to cover the same extent as in the early 20th century.

THE AFTERMATH: THE KINGS REVENGE.
July 1381.
As soon as the peasants had left London, messengers were dispatched throughout the country, summoning troops. The last members of the huge gathering of peasants were encamped at Billericay in Essex. They found themselves cut down by royal troops, vainly flourishing the pardons and charters that they had been given.

Royal forces toured the affected areas, hunting the rebels. Possession of a charter became a virtual death sentence. In Hertfordshire and Essex, some 500 died, very few with any form of trial, as the Earl of Buckingham carried out the King's demand for vengeance. In Kent, the toll of executions was even greater, with 1500 peasants sent to the gallows. The King and the army reached Chelmsford on 2nd July, revoking all charters, pledges and promises made during the uprising. There would be no amnesty either. A judicial inquiry would be set up, with powers to look into all actions of the rebels from the first day of the insurgency. With the King and his court officiating, and despatching orders, deeds, and declarations to all parts of the kingdom, for a short time Chelmsford was to all intents and purposes, the capital of England.

Essex men, in a body of about 500 addressed themselves barefoot to the King for mercy, and had it granted upon condition that they should deliver up to justice, the chief instruments of stirring up the rebellion; which being accordingly done, they were immediately tried and hanged, ten or twelve on a beam at Chelmsford, because they were too many to be executed after the usual manner which was by beheading. The judgement of Robert Tresilian* seems to permeate that account.

Ten Fobbing men were condemned at Chelmsford in the July and at least five were hanged. For his role in the uprising, Thomas Baker was hanged, drawn, and quartered on 4 July 1381 at Chelmsford along with William Gildebourne. Men from South Benfleet, Leigh, Hadleigh, Bowers Gifford, Rayleigh, Rawreth and Fobbing had joined in the attack of the Manor of Barnhall at Downham on 12 June. They, too, were tried before Judge Tresilian at Chelmsford.

A document from the time names the jurors, who: … say upon their oaths that William ate Stable, late servant of Geoffrey Dersham, Thomas Sprag (Spraggle) of South Benfleet, Richard Bertram, herdsman in South Benfleet Marsh, Robert Maryn of South Benfleet. Nichola Cartere who was lately taken as wife by William Dekne of South Benfleet, Thomas de la Leye, William Bocher of Hadley, Richard Belle of Hadley, John Symond of Hadley, Peter Pekok of Bures Giffard, John ate Merssh of Hadley and Henry Flecher of Ralegh, on the Wednesday next after the Feast of Trinity, in the fourth year of Richard II led and supported the commons to the manor of Geoffrey Dersham of Bernhalle (Barnhall) and feloniously and traitorously stole and carried off five cows priced at 5 marks, three calves priced at 20 shillings, one hundred and forty sheep priced at sixteen pounds and pots and pans and other goods and chattels of the same Geoffrey worth sixty shillings; and furthermore broke and levelled the house of the same Geoffrey and feloniously took and carried away one hundred and twenty chickens priced at forty shillings.

And furthermore, they all rode armed through the peaceful countryside raising the aforesaid commons against the King and his laws to the Temple of the Priory of St. John in England at Cressy (Cressing Temple) and to the house of John Sewale of Coggeshalle, and levelled the houses of the aforesaid Prior and John feloniously came and took away their goods and chattels. Moreover, they say that on Friday next after the Feast of the Holy Trinity in the fourth year of the reign of the aforesaid King Richard II, John Wiltshire of Lesser Burstede, freely and without compulsion, lopped off the head of a certain esquire of the Duke of Lancaster called Grenfield in the City of London.

Nineteen men were hanged, while another twelve were hanged, drawn and quarter. There is one woman listed among the accused but we don't know what happened to her. Perhaps Nichola Carter, new wife of William Dekne of South Benfleet, was able to claim pregnancy and so escape her fate? One source says of Tresilian and his 'Bloody Assize': 'He pressured jurors into giving up names of suspects, and to maximise sentences, contrived to have charges presented as Felony rather than Trespass.' By 14th July Tresilian had moved on to St. Albans, where he tried and sentenced the Priest John Ball, among others. In all, it is reckoned he sentenced to death some five hundred rebels.

Bread and Cheese Hill Thundersley.

During the troubled times of the Peasants Revolt in 1381, which began in south-east Essex, rebels patrolled the top of the hill at Thundersley, about one-and-a-half miles west of Victoria House Corner, Hadleigh, stopping any stranger that clambered up the narrow track, requesting him to repeat the phrase "bread and cheese". If it was not pronounced with a recognisable English accent the unfortunate person was put to death on the spot. The explanation is as follows: Flemish weavers had been invited here by Edward III because their cloth was improved by the use of English wool. As a result exports increased between the two countries but although the weavers grew rich the ordinary English labourer found that he had to work harder than ever for his pittance.

It is said the hill got its present name from the treatment meted out to the unfortunate Flemish. The Rev. W. E. Heygate in An Old Parson's Anecdotes and Tales (1893) makes a direct reference to it saying "A curious name this and supposed by some people to have been obtained from Wat Tyler's rebellion". Says Mr. Heygate, the rebels came to be known as Bread and Cheese men from "the steep hill down which the road near Jarvis Hall descends." The story of the revolt is well known, particularly in this part of the county. Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable refers to the term bread and cheese as being "the barest necessities of life" so it seems possible that the term can be applied to people of impoverished means. These words are also acknowledged as being the most difficult for a foreigner to speak.

The Anchor.

Apart from churches and castles, this is the oldest building in Castle Point and probably South East Essex. It was built in 1381 A.D., following the burning down of the original Manor House (near the site of the Methodist Church) during the Peasant's Revolt. The present "Moorings" buildings on the left were the stables – four horses being required to take a carriage up Vicarage Hill. Tom Bloom, Ned Clobbe, Walter Game, and other bondsmen of an Essex village are caught up in the movements of John Ball's Great Company.

4th July 1381.

Another minor rebellion broke out in St. Albans, where the abbot was a hated figure amongst the townspeople. This was ruthlessly crushed, and on 15th July, John Ball, whose preaching had done so much to cause the rebellion, was hung, drawn, and quartered in the marketplace, as an example to any other potential rebels. As far away as the city of York, over 200 miles north of London, aggrieved townsfolk were tearing down the city walls and destroying religious houses. Indeed, when John Ball fled from Smithfield, he was aiming for York, where he knew he could be sure of a sympathetic crowd. He was captured in Coventry, and hanged, drawn, and quartered in St Albans.

Across East Anglia and Cambridgeshire, the most feared rebel was John Wrawe. A former chaplain from Essex, instead of heading to London he moved north to stir up support for the revolt. Guilty of arson, blackmail, theft, and murder, Wrawe and his followers were especially brutal in their methods, and did not seem as ideologically driven as Ball and Tyler. They plundered the Priory of St Edmunds at Bury, stealing priceless treasures then quaffing wine with the proceeds, and murdering the prior, John of Cambridge. They also murdered Sir John Cavendish, Chief Justice of the King's Bench, for good measure. Wrawe's rebellion was decimated by another churchman, Henry Despenser, Bishop of Norwich. Despenser had been an accomplished knight before taking orders. He had fled Norwich after learning of the Norfolk rebels' intention to murder him, but when his safe-place at Burleigh was threatened by Wrawe, he acted decisively. With only eight lances and a few archers, Despenser found some of Wrawe's men at Peterborough, sacking the abbey, and personally slaughtered many of the sorry group, even those pleading sanctuary at the altar. He cut and stabbed his way back to Norwich, liberating Cambridge, Ely, and Huntingdon in the process.

8th July 1381.

As noted above, Thomas Walsingham reported that the appointment of Robert Hales as treasurer was not popular in the country. Walsingham's description of him as a great-hearted and active knight recalls his military career in the East but gives no indication that he was a pious man. In the country his military

reputation seems to have increased the distrust felt towards him: on 8 July 1381, the jurors at Hadleigh Castle in the Hundred of Rochford, Essex, presented that one John Buck had told the people of Great and Little Wakering and North Horbury that Robert Hales was coming with a hundred lances (i.e. a hundred men-at-arms) to kill all the people of the Hundred. The fact that some of Hales' own servants (including one of his grooms) were among those who pillaged and burnt Highbury house and Clerkenwell priory and participated in the murder of Hales does not suggest that he was a well-loved master. His behaviour during the revolt did not improve his popularity: he was blamed for preventing King Richard from going out to talk to the rebels when they first arrived in London, describing them as people without reason who did not know how to act sensibly. He may also have been disliked as a parvenu. Thomas Farndon was a member of a prominent and ancient London alderman family. The Farringdon's or Farndons were goldsmiths. In 1313, 1320, and 1323 Nicholas Farringdon was mayor of London. A Thomas de Farndon was Member of Parliament for Middlesex in 1377; this may not be the Thomas Farndon involved in Hales' murder, but it may have been. For Farndon, Hales was a 'new man' of no particular family who had, as Farndon told a gathering of rebels in Essex.

13th July, 1381.
John Ball is captured in Coventry and taken to be tried at St Albans.
15th July, 1381.
John Ball, is hung, drawn, and quartered at St Albans.
29th September, 1381.
Peasants under the leadership of Thomas Harding make plans to capture Maidstone.
30th September, 1381.
Leaders of planned rebellion arrested at Boughton Heath. Later, ten of these men are found guilty of treason and executed.

The Result of the Peasants Revolt.

1. On the surface, the peasants were crushed, their demands denied, and many executed. However, the land owners had been scared, and in the longer term several things were achieved.
2. Parliament gave up trying to control the wages the landowners paid their peasants.
3. The hated poll tax was never raised again. (Until the proposal by Margaret Thatcher in 1990).

4. The Lords treated the peasants with much more respect. They made more of them free men ie. they were not owned as part of the land. This benefited in the end, as free men always work much harder.
5. This marked the breakdown of the feudal system, which had worked well during the early Middle Ages, but was now becoming outdated as attitudes were beginning to change.

WAT TYLER – A RETROSPECT

Walter "Wat" Tyler (c.1320/January 4, 1341 - 15 June 1381) was a leader of the 1381 Peasants' Revolt in England. Not much is known of Wat Tyler's early life, although one source claims that he was born on January 4, 1341 , although another source claims he was born around 1320, although most historians agree that he was born c.1341. He was probably born in Kent. Born with the first name Walter, his original surname was unknown. It is thought that the name "Tyler" comes from his occupation as a roof tiler. Prior to the Peasants' Revolt it is probable that he lived in Kent; he has variously been represented as coming from Dartford, Deptford, and Maidstone, all in Kent, and from Colchester in Essex.

The Peasants' Revolt began in May 1381, triggered by a recently imposed poll tax of 4 pence from every adult, whether peasant or wealthy. The revolt was not only about money, as the peasants also sought increased liberty and other social reforms. They demanded that each labourer be allowed to work for the employer of his choice and sought an end to serfdom and other rigid social demarcation. There were uprisings across England, with much of the unrest focused on Essex and Kent. The uprising was opposed by a significant part of English society in those regions, including nobility and wealthy religious establishments. Many peasants and labourers were inspired by the teachings of John Ball, a radical priest who preached that all humans should be treated equally, as descendants of Adam and Eve, and who asked "When Adam delved and Eve span/Who was then the gentleman?"

How Wat Tyler became involved with the revolt is unknown, although a much later sixteenth-century source indicates that a man of similar name, John Tyler, was its initiator. This account suggests that a poll-tax collector had indecently assaulted John Tyler's daughter. It is suggested the poll tax collector "pulled up his daughter's cloaths to see if she was arrived at the age of puberty" In revenge he killed the miscreant and triggered the

insurgency. Regardless of the basis of that story, by June 1381, when groups of rebels from across the country began a coordinated assault on London, Wat Tyler had emerged as a leader of the Kentish forces.

On 13 June, the rebels reached the capital and crossed London Bridge. Once in the city, they attacked civil targets, including the Fleet Prison and John of Gaunt's Savoy Palace, destroying legal records, opening prisons, sacking homes, and killing individuals they thought were associated with the royal government. In response, the king, Richard II (then 14 years old), met with the rebels on 14 June 1381 and agreed to make many concessions and to give full pardons to all those involved in the rebellion. While some of the rebels were satisfied by the king's promises and dispersed, Tyler and his followers were not.

On 15 June 1381, Tyler and his Kentish forces met with King Richard at Smithfield, outside London. There, Tyler spoke personally with the king and put forward his demands. At first, the meeting seems to have gone well, with Tyler treating the king in a friendly, if overly-familiar, manner, and Richard agreeing the rebels "should have all that he could fairly grant". However, tensions quickly rose. According to a contemporary chronicler, Tyler acted contemptuously, calling for a flagon of water to rinse his mouth "because of the great heat that he was in" and when he received the water "he rinsed his mouth in a very rude and disgusting fashion before the King's face". Sir John Newton (a servant of the king) insulted Tyler by calling him "the greatest thief and robber in all Kent". Tyler attacked Newton, but was restrained and arrested by the Lord Mayor of London, William Walworth. Tyler then attempted to stab the mayor, who was saved by his armour. Walworth slashed Tyler across the neck and head with his sword, and another of the king's servants, possibly Ralph de Standish, stabbed Tyler again, severely wounding him. Tyler managed to ride thirty yards before he fell from his horse. In the disorder that followed, he was taken to a hospital for the poor, but was tracked down by the mayor, brought back to Smithfield and publicly decapitated. Tyler's head was placed atop a pole and carried through the city, then displayed on London Bridge. In the wake of their leader's death, his followers were driven from London and the movement was shattered. Subsequently Richard II revoked all the concessions he had made to the rebels and many were hunted down and executed. That effectively ended the Revolt.

The peasants were not just protesting against the government. Since the Black Death, poor people had become increasingly angry that they were still serfs, usually farming the land and serving their king.

Whipped up by the preaching of radical priest John Ball, they were demanding that all men should be free and equal; for less harsh laws; and a fairer distribution of wealth.

The Peasants' Revolt was a popular uprising. In its demands for rights and equality, it was similar to the Chartists of the 19th century and the Suffragettes of the 20th century - both of whom campaigned for greater political rights - except that, remarkably, the Peasants' Revolt happened six centuries earlier!

With the exception of his fame as the leader of the English Peasant's Revolt of 1381. According to popular accounts, the commons of Kent after taking Rochester Castle, chose Wat Tyler of Maidstone as their captain. Under him they moved to Canterbury, Blackheath, and London.

Then be King caused a proclamation to be made that all the commons of the country who were still in London should come to Smithfield, to meet in there, and so they did.

And when the King and his train had arrived there they turned into the Eastern meadow in front of St. Bartholomew's, which is a house of canons: and the commons arrayed themselves on the west side in great battles. At this moment, the Mayor of London, William Walworth, came up, and the King bade him go to the commons, and make their chieftain come to him. And when he was summoned by the Mayor, by the name of Wat Tyler of Maidstone, he came to the King with great confidence, mounted on a little horse, that the commons might see him. And he dismounted, holding in his hand a dagger which he had taken from another man, and when he had dismounted he half bent his knee, and then took the King by the hand, and shook his arm forcibly and roughly, saying to him, "Brother, be of good comfort and joyful, for you shall have, in the fortnight that is to, praise from the commons even more than you have yet had, and we shall be good companions." And the King said to Walter, "Why will you not go back to your own country?" But the other answered, with a great oath, that neither he nor his fellows would depart until they had cut their charter such as they wished to have it, and had certain points rehearsed and added to their charter which they wished to demand. And he said in a threatening fashion that the lords of the realm would rue it bitterly if these points were not settled to their pleasure. Then the King asked him what were the points which he wished to have revised, and he should have them freely, without contradiction, written out and sealed. Thereupon the said

Walter rehearsed the points which were to be demanded; and he asked that there should be no law within the realm save the law of Winchester, and that from henceforth there should be no outlawry in any process of law, and that no lord should have lordship save civilly, and that there should be equality among all people save only the King, and that the goods of Holy Church should not remain in the hands of the religious, nor of parsons and vicars, and other churchmen; but that clergy already in possession should have a sufficient sustenance from the endowments, and the rest of the goods should be divided among the people of the parish. And he demanded that there should be only one bishop in England and only one prelate, and all the lands and tenements now held by them should be confiscated, and divided among the commons, only reserving for them a reasonable sustenance. And he demanded that there should be no more villeins in England, and no serfdom or villeinage, but that all men should be free and of one condition. To this the King gave an easy answer, and said that he should have all that he could fairly grant, reserving only for himself the regality of his crown. And then he bade him go back to his home, without making further delay.

During all this time that the King was speaking, no lord or counsellor dared or wished to give answer to the commons in any place save the King himself. Presently Wat Tyler, in the presence of the King, sent for a flagon of water to rinse his mouth, because of the great heat that he was in, and when it was brought the rinse his mouth in a very rude and disgusting fashion before the King's face. And then he made them bring him a jug of beer, and drank a great draught, and then, in the presence of the King, climbed on his horse again. At this time, a certain valet from Kent, who was among the Kings retinue, asked that the said Walter, the chief of the commons, might be pointed out to him. And when he saw him, he said allowed that he knew him for the greatest thief and robber in all Kent. . . . And for these words Wat tried to strike him with his dagger, and would have slain him in the King's presence, but because he strove so to do, the Mayor of London, William Walworth, reasoned with the said Wat for his violent behaviour and despite, done in the King's presence, and arrested him. In because he arrested him, he said Wat stabbed the Mayor with his dagger in the stomach in great wrath. But, as it pleased God, the Mayor was wearing armour and took no harm, like a hardy in vigorous man drew his cutlass, and struck back at the said Watt, in gave him a deep cut on the neck, and then a great cut on the head. And during this scuffle one of the King's household drew his sword, and ran Wat two or three times through the body, mortally wounding him.

And he spurred his horse, crying to the commons to avenge him, and the horse carried him some four score paces, and then he fell to the ground half dead. And when the commons saw him fall, and knew not how for certain it was, they began to bend their bows and to shoot, wherefore the King himself spurred his horse, and rode out to them, commanding them that they should all come to him to Clerkenwell Fields.

Meanwhile the Mayor of London rode as hastily as he could back to the City, and commanded those who were in charge of the twenty-four wards to make proclamation round their wards, that every man should arm himself as quickly as he could, and come to the King in St. John's Fields, where were the commons, to a the King, for he was in great trouble and necessity. . . . And presently the aldermen came to him in a body, bringing with them their wardens, and the wards arrayed in bands, a fine company of well-armed folks in great strength. And they enveloped the commons like sheep within a pen, and after that the Mayor had set the wardens of the city on their way to the King, he returned with a company of lances to Smithfield, to make an end of the captain of the commons. And when he came to Smithfield he found not there the said captain Wat Tyler, that which he marvelled much, and asked what was become of the traitor. And it was told him that he had been carried by some of the commons to the hospital for poor folks by St. Bartholomew's, and was put to bed in the chamber of the master of hospital. In the Mayor went thither and found him, and had him carried out to the middle of Smithfield, in presence of his fellows, and there beheaded. And thus ended his wretched life. But the Mayor had his head set on a pole and borne before him to the King, who still abode in the Fields. And when the King saw the head he had it brought near him to abash the commons, and thanked the Mayor greatly for what he a done. In when the commons saw that their chieftain, Wat Tyler, was dead in such a manner, they fell to the ground there among the wheat, like beaten men, employing the King for mercy for their misdeeds. And the King benevolently granted them mercy, and most of them took to flight. But the King ordained two knights to conduct the rest of them, namely the Kentishmen, through London, and over London Bridge, without doing them harm, so that each of them could go to his own home.

Afterwards the King sent out his messengers into divers parts, to capture the malefactors and put them to death. And many were taken and hanged at London, and they set up many gallows around the City of London, and other cities and boroughs of the south country. At last, as it pleased God, the King seeing that too many of his liege subjects would be undone, and too much blood spilt, took pity in his heart, and granted them all pardon, on condition that they should never rise again, under pain of losing life or members, and that each of

them should get his charter of pardon, and pay the King as fee for his seal twenty shillings, to make him rich. And so finished this wicked war.

IN MEMORIUM

- In an episode of the comedy series Blackadder II, Lord Blackadder compares his servant Baldrick to Wat Tyler when he asks for the afternoon off.
- In the season five premiere of Downton Abbey, Mr. Carson accuses James the footman of being a Wat Tyler for stating that he is only a footman and therefore cannot mind his surroundings.
- A cultural history survey of Wat Tyler's portrayals in post-medieval literature down to the modern period has been written by Stephen Basdeo who argues that most of Tyler's appropriations in popular culture appear at times of political excitement.
- The English novelty punk band Wat Tyler was named after him.
- The Czech folk band Asonance have a song called "Povstání Watta Tylera" (Watt Tyler's rebellion).

Permanent tributes:

- A section of the A249 road passing through Maidstone is named "Wat Tyler Way" in his honour.
- “Tyler’s Causeway” running from Newgate street Village towards A1000 in Hertfordshire named for the route taken by some of his followers fleeing the capital following his death.
- A road on the western edge of Blackheath is called Wat Tyler Road.
- Swindon Borough Council's Offices are in Wat Tyler House.
- A memorial commemorating Wat Tyler and The Great Rising of 1381 was unveiled on 15 July 2015 in Smithfield, London.
- The Wat Tyler Pub in Dartford where he is reputed to have stopped on his way to London Bridge. An ancient tavern stood on this site.

CONCLUSION

Based upon the documented commentaries, it is a probability that Wat Tyler got no closer to Essex than the area of Mile End in which he met with King Richard II. The River Lee forming the boundary between Middlesex and Essex close to that point and Mile End being in Middlesex. There is mention of a meeting, crossing the Thames at Barking, but which way and who went or met?

PITSEA HALL FARM NOW CROMWELL MANOR.

Two arms of the River Thames, form a peninsula, of which the western branch is called Pitsey Creek and from this the parish extends north-eastwards. Before the Norman conquest, Ulueva, the wife of Phin, had this estate and appears to have retained possession till the general survey in 1086; but soon afterwards, belonged to Eudo Dapifer, who gave part of it to St. Johns Abbey in Colchester which in part afterwards believed to what was Pitsea Hall Manor.

The Mansion of Pitsea Hall is at the bottom of the hill, near the creek. In 1539, the manor with the advowson of the church, was granted to Thomas Lord Cromwell; whose attainder in 1540, reverting to the crown, it was appointed for the maintenance of the Princess Mary; and afterwards, in 1562, was granted by Queen Elizabeth To Thomas Howard, duke of Norfolk; upon whose execution in 1572, this estate descended to Philip Howard, Earl of Arundel, his eldest son by his first lady, Mary, daughter and heiress of Henry Fitz-Alan, Earl of Arundel; from whom it was conveyed in 1581 to Roger Townshend esq. and Edward Cook, gent. and Bridget his wife, who held it of the heirs of the Duke of Norfolk.

In 1618, Sir Edward Cooke, Knight, held this manor and in 1630 presented to the living; in 1664 it belonged to Nr. Samuel Moyer and to his son Samuel, created a Baronet in 1701, who died in 1716. His nephew, Benjamin Moyer esq. was his successor in this estate; which now belongs to Mrs. Moyer.

In 1852 the London Tilbury and Southend Extension Railway Act was passed which allowed for a new rail route to Southend via Tilbury. During construction, a small portion of the grounds was acquired to enable the route

to pass through Pitsea where a new station was then built which opened in 1855 and it was probably at this time that excavations unearthed a Cromwellian helmet from the English Civil War (1642-1651). The hall, which now stands in around 23 acres, has been a listed building since 24th March, 1950 (now Grade II) and is now a licenced venue for weddings and hospitality functions.

LONDON, TILBURY, AND SOUTHEND RAILWAY.

The railway was authorised in 1852, and the first section was opened in 1854 by the London, Tilbury, and Southend Railway Company, which was a joint venture between the London and Blackwall Railway and the Eastern Counties Railway companies. The route was extended in phases and partnerships were formed with the Midland Railway and District Railway to provide through-services.

The main line now runs from Fenchurch Street to Shoeburyness via Basildon over a distance of 39 miles 40 chains (63.6 km). A loop line between Barking and Pitsea provides an alternative route via Grays and Tilbury, and there is a short branch line connecting the two via Ockendon.

Initial construction

The construction of the London, Tilbury and Southend Railway line was authorised by Parliament on 17 June 1852. The first section, built by Peto and Grissell, was opened between Forest Gate Junction on the Eastern Counties Railway line and Tilbury, via Barking and Grays on 13 April 1854. Services initially ran from Fenchurch Street and Bishopsgate stations over existing lines to Stratford and Forest Gate Junction. Further extensions opened in late 1854 to Horndon, to Leigh-on-Sea on 1 July 1855 and finally to Southend on 1 March 1856.

In 1858 a more direct route from Barking to London was constructed through Bromley, Plaistow, and East Ham, connecting with the London and Blackwall Extension Railway at Bow, and the service from Bishopsgate was withdrawn. Under the management of civil engineer Arthur Lewis Stride, the line was extended from Southend to Shoeburyness in 1884. A more direct route from Barking to Pitsea via Upminster was built between 1885 and 1888, completing the current main route. A single-track branch was constructed between Romford and Grays via Upminster in 1892–93.

In 1902 the Whitechapel and Bow Railway was constructed as a joint venture with the District Railway, connecting the London, Tilbury, and Southend Railway at Bow with the District Railway at Whitechapel. The connection allowed through-running of District Railway trains from the tunnels under central London to provide local services to Upminster from 2 June 1902. When the Metropolitan, District and Whitechapel & Bow Railway lines were electrified, an additional pair of tracks was installed between Bow and East Ham and the service was cut back to there from 30 September 1905. The electrified tracks were extended to Barking and that section opened on 1 April 1908. Delayed by World War I, the electric tracks were eventually extended to Upminster and District line services started to and from there on 12 September 1932.

The London Plan Working Party Report of 1949 envisaged as its Route G the LTSR electrified and diverted away from Fenchurch Street to Bank and onward through the Waterloo & City line tunnels to Waterloo and its suburban lines. Of course, the Waterloo & City tunnels would have had to be bored out to main-line size for this proposal to succeed. However, electrification went ahead from 1961 to 1962 under British Railways and direct passenger services from Bromley, Plaistow, Upton Park, East Ham, Becontree, Dagenham, and Hornchurch to Fenchurch Street were withdrawn. With the completion of electrification the remaining through steam services from St Pancras to LTSR destinations were removed.

The line was re-signalled between 1958 and 1961, starting in the Barking area in April 1958 and completed in August 1961 with the section between Purfleet and West Thurrock junction. Semaphore signals were replaced with 3- and 4-aspect searchlight signals. In 1972 the British Railways Board (BRB) proposed to construct a 1-mile freight-only spur line from the railway at Bowers Gifford between Pitsea and Benfleet to East Haven creek and thence to the proposed oil refineries on Canvey Island, to allow petroleum products to be exported from the refineries. Once the layout of the proposed refineries had been established, in early 1974 the BRB sought powers to extend the spur line a further mile from the creek to the site of the refineries through the British Railways Bill 1974.

The Bill was subject to considerable opposition in parliament, furthermore a public inquiry proposed to revoke planning permission for one of the refineries. The proposal was abandoned and the BRB removed the spur line proposal from the 1974 Bill. In 1974 a station was opened to serve the new town of Basildon and in 1995 a station was built at Chafford Hundred to serve the new community there as well as Lakeside Shopping Centre. Platforms were re-established and opened at West Ham in 1999 to provide interchange with the extended Jubilee line.

Stations between Upminster and Pitsea.

West Horndon.

West Horndon railway station serves the village of West Horndon and is situated on the boundary of the boroughs of Brentwood and Thurrock, Essex. It is 19 miles 15 chains (30.9 km) down the main line from London Fenchurch Street and is situated between Upminster and Laindon. The station was opened in 1886 as East Horndon on a new direct route from Barking to Pitsea, and the original station structure survives. It was renamed West Horndon in 1949. The history of East Horndon includes the Manor House of Heron Hall. Sir John Tyrrell passed the property to William Walton brother of Admiral Sir George Walton.

There were formerly three east-facing sidings to the north and east of the station, these closed in September 1964. An east-facing sidings to the north and west of the station connected to the premises of Brown and Tawse Limited. Previously in the latter part of the 20th century in about 1998 the station building on the London-bound platform had been demolished. A more modern structure was erected, which provides very little shelter, unlike the original building.

Laindon.

Laindon railway station is 22 miles 69 chains (36.8 km) down the main line from London Fenchurch Street and is situated between West Horndon to the west and Basildon to the east. It was opened in 1888 on a new direct route from Barking to Pitsea. The station and all trains serving it are currently operated by c2c.

The station has three platforms. Platforms 1 and 2 are the two faces of an island platform, accessed via a footbridge from outside the main ticket office.

Platform 1 is the London-bound platform and platform 2 is a reversing platform which can be used to divert trains from one line to the other. At one time this was the extent of the travel before the main line completion to Pitsea. Platform 3 is the Shoeburyness-bound platform, reached from Station Approach via the main ticket office. British actress Joan Sims (1930–2001), famous for her roles in the Carry On films, grew up in the station house at Laindon railway station where her father was the station master. A plaque in her memory can be seen near the entrance.

Basildon.

Basildon railway station serves the town of Basildon, Essex. It is 24 miles 26 chains (39.1 km) down the main line from London Fenchurch Street and is situated between Laindon to the west and Pitsea to the east. It was opened by British Rail in 1974 to serve the new town of Basildon, which was previously served by Laindon station.

Pitsea.

Pitsea railway station serves the small town of Pitsea in the borough of Basildon, Essex. It is situated at a junction where a loop via Grays re-joins the main line via Basildon. Down the main line it is 26 miles 42 chains (42.7 km) from London Fenchurch Street; via the loop it is 32 miles 37 chains (52.2 km) from Fenchurch Street. It was originally opened in 1855 but was replaced by a new station on an adjacent site in 1888. The station was renamed Pitsea for Vange in 1932, but reverted to the original name Pitsea in 1952.

The station is immediately south of the A13 road, adjacent to a level crossing which gives the main road access to the marshes area south of Pitsea and Basildon and to Wat Tyler Country Park.

ALFRED NOBLE AND THE EXPLOSIVES FACTORY

The ‘secret’ explosives factory of Pitsea produced dynamite, gelignite and other explosives based on nitro-glycerine for blasting rocks and for mining. It also made nitro-glycerine as an ingredient to be mixed with guncotton for producing cordite (a smokeless propellant used in ammunition).

In 1863 Alfred Nobel patented an invention called Dynamite. He had developed a safe way to handle the dangerous explosive Nitro-Glycerine. He wanted to sell to the huge markets of the British Empire but regulations kept him out of manufacturing in Britain. Through a ‘loophole’ in the law he built a factory in Scotland. In 1891 the British Explosives Syndicate built a Factory in Pitsea in which he was a secret partner to begin with, but eventually was able to trade under his own name. The Pitsea Explosives Factory mostly made explosives for mining.

The factory thrived during the First World War but struggled after the peace and eventually closed in 1929. Staff were kept on site to guard against accidents or sabotage by enemy agents during wartime. Explosives were a very profitable business, and the company had to keep its guard up against foul play by ruthless competitors. The Nobel business then went into chemicals becoming a household name as Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI). Nobel’s death in 1896 caused a sensation as he left no money to his family in his will. Instead he set up prizes for those “making the greatest contribution to mankind.” The Nobel Prizes have been awarded every year since 1901.

Far safer than Nitro-Glycerine, dynamite was used extensively for blasting as the industrial revolution called for more raw materials and easier paths around nature’s toughest obstacles. Nobel’s Extra Dynamite also known as blasting gelatine or gelignite was introduced in 1875 and made mining for coal more efficient and fuelled the boom in Victorian industry and engineering. The Pitsea factory sent explosives as far afield as Australia where people were mining everything from coal to gold.

In 1885 countries across Europe agreed on a “Permitted List” of explosives for mining. These had chemicals added that would lower the temperature of their explosion and prevent ignition of Methane gas.
Made at Pitsea, Britonite and Pitsea Powder No. 2 were on the Permitted List for use in coal mines. The 1920 Dictionary of Explosives lists them alongside a range of British brands some named after places like Sheppey and Barking and some with bizarre names like Good Luck!

In 1902 with tensions building up between the British and the Dutch over South Africa the Pitsea factory added buildings for the manufacture of Cordite a smokeless explosive used as a propellant in military shells. Cordite manufacturing buildings featured distinctive bays with dividing walls extending upwards between rooms above the roof to control the possible spread of fire. The RSPB Visitor Centre opposite the Wat Tyler Centre was once a cordite building.

Guncotton needed to be picked by hand to remove any impurities and was a primary ingredient of cordite, a mix of waste from the Lancashire cotton mills and nitro-glycerine. Its manufacture was highly dangerous. Accidents didn’t happen often but when they did, they caused massive damage and loss of life. Factories were designed to operate as safely as possible. At Pitsea Explosives Factory you were searched on your way into work. Anything that could make a flame or spark had to be left at the gate. Wooden walkways around the factory stopped your shoes picking up stones from pathways as the stones might cause a spark.
Work overalls had no pockets. They differed in colour according to your job so you could only access areas you knew enough about in order to work in safety. If there was an accident the colours helped the head-count to see who was missing in which area. Factories were built in remote places to protect nearby villages and towns. Buildings and the landscape around them were designed so that an explosion in one of them wouldn’t blow up the others. Dangerous materials like nitro-glycerine were moved around the site on rails to avoid bumps.

Dangerous areas in the factory were kept apart by heavy mounds of earth with steeply angled sides called 'blast mounds' and designed to deflect the force of an explosion upwards into the air instead of sideways into another building. These can still be seen in Wat Tyler Park.

On 28th March 1913 three men died and others were injured in an explosion in a guncotton drying stove at the Pitsea factory. The official government report covers the incident in great detail and presumes some carelessness but blames nobody. An alternative theory suggests both explosions could have been caused by a faulty batch of guncotton from Ardeer Scotland, part dried there and part shipped down by sea to Pitsea. In May 1916, a chemist and his assistant were killed in a laboratory on site when the chemist dropped a small bottle of nitro-glycerine. Highly unstable nitro-glycerine was the main ingredient of explosives made at the Pitsea factory and was very dangerous with concentrated acids being mixed with glycerine in huge vats. If too much glycerine was added too quickly the mixture would become unstable and a large valve would have to be opened quickly to dump the whole batch into a vat of water, failure to react could have led to a catastrophic explosion.

Mostly though, the process was very dull with the operator sitting at the mixing machine for long hours looking at the control dials. To avoid the potential of falling asleep a one-legged stool made sure the operator had to perch to stay awake and at Pitsea this seems to have been very effective as through the years of production, not one vat of nitro-glycerine mixture was ever wasted.

The explosives factory's laboratory after the original laboratory was destroyed in an accident in 1916.

Laboratory staff tested the strength of incoming chemicals to guarantee uniformity and safety, as consistent blends and strengths were vital for making reliable explosives that were safe to handle and use. Chemicals that fell below standard could lead to fatal accidents. Finished explosives were also tested here by igniting a small amount of the explosive on a bench top.

Expense magazine.

Electricity and gas were not used in the explosives factory site in dangerous areas, as they might ignite the highly flammable fumes created in explosives manufacture. This meant work in the factory was limited to the hours of daylight. If at the end of the day's work a batch of explosives wasn't finished, the unfinished batch would be stored here in the expense magazine until light returned, allowing the workers to finish the work the following morning. Fumes in the factory buildings could be so overpowering that workers would frequently pass out. Fellow workers would then pull their unconscious workmate out of the building and leave them in the fresh air until they recovered. As soon as they came round, they went straight back to work.

The natural-looking ponds here were actually man made. They were designed to capture waste water from washing guncotton, an explosive made by mixing cotton waste from the Lancashire mills with nitro-glycerine – the most frighteningly unstable and powerful explosive. Guncotton was washed in water to remove excess nitro-glycerine and to make it stable enough to be handled safely and easily. To get rid of any lingering traces of nitro-glycerine in these ponds once a week a worker was given the job of throwing a charge of dynamite into the pond. The building to the side of the pond was the laboratory magazine. It stored chemicals used for testing explosives ingredients and explosives in the laboratory.

Cartridge huts

A series of small wooden 'cartridge huts' followed the perimeter track here, where workers assembled ammunition for guns. Women workers took pre-cut explosive 'charges' and used machinery to press them into brass cylinders (cartridges) that held the explosive and allowed it to be easily loaded into a gun. The 'charge' would explode inside the cartridge case, forcing a lead bullet out at great speed through the barrel of a rifle or pistol.

Women at work in the cartridge huts

Liquids recycling & acid egg house'

The angular earthworks you see all around the park are called blast mounds. They were built around and between the buildings of the factory to contain accidental explosions and stop them spreading from building to building. Blast mounds were designed to deflect explosions in case of an accident. The recycling house stood within the blast mound here. It was used to recover as much of the precious acids used in the chemical processes as possible, as these represented a high proportion of the cost of manufacture. The challenges of acid production and distribution meant many larger factories would have their own acid manufacturing and distillation facilities on site. Further along this path are the remains of the acid egg house, where compressed air was used to remove sulphuric and nitric acid gently and safely from the large cast iron 'eggs' they were delivered in.

The magazines

Around this perimeter track there were five magazines, each holding about 1.5 tons of nitroglycerin based explosives. Magazines had brick walls and wooden roofs. In case of an explosion the blast would meet least resistance going upwards and out through the roof. Blast mounds around each magazine would also help direct the blast upwards instead of sideways, preventing damage to neighbouring factory buildings. Wooden floors were secured with copper nails to avoid causing sparks and possibly igniting the explosives.
Plans and sections for a typical explosives factory magazine

Nitrating house & flushing tanks

Producing nitro-glycerine the most volatile and dangerous of all explosives – was actually a very boring job. It happened here in the nitrating house, where nitric acid was carefully mixed with glycerine in a large vat with a
If the mixture in the vat got too hot then the worker would have to quickly flush the system with water to douse the chemical reaction, then release the mixture for recycling and start again with a new mixture. The nitro-glycerine produced here at the highest point of the factory site was piped by gravity to other buildings at lower positions around the site. Dynamite was made by mixing nitroglycerin with kieselguhr.

Nitroglycerin mixing house

Workers in the mixing houses mixed nitroglycerin with an inert paste to stabilise the explosive and make it easier to handle. Alfred Nobel pioneered this technique and called the explosive it produced dynamite.
Different mixtures were used to give different strengths and blasting qualities, depending on the intended use. Explosives for ammunition were blended to propel missiles at speed, whereas explosives for quarrying were blended to fracture even the hardest rock. Others were mixed to explode with very little flame to minimise the risk of igniting flammable gases in mines.

Gelatine mixing houses

The buildings that stood here at one time made gelignite, a newer type of nitroglycerin explosive that followed on from dynamite. It contained a higher concentration of nitroglycerin and was used extensively for blasting rock in mining and laying railways. Its experimental development cost the lives of many workers in Europe who died in accidental explosions. By 1913 four of the buildings were being used as "stoves" to dry gun cotton. In that year, the northernmost stove exploded, tragically killing two people.

Dangerous energy.

Whatever chemical process went on in the huts that would have stood inside these blast mounds we can't know for sure – but the earthworks here give us a clue.
These are two of the largest blast mounds on the site and are surrounded by double bonded blast mounds, suggesting that a very dangerous chemical process must have gone on here.
Concrete channels in the bases of these huts suggest they were used for handling acids, and were probably built to manufacture a new type of explosive using new techniques.
Blast mounds contain and separate dangerous processes

Cordite range

The buildings that stood here housed large machinery including presses that forced newly-mixed dynamite through circular dies to make tubes of dynamite in different diameters. These were then cut to length to make dynamite 'sticks' for mining, or 'charges' that went into military shells and ammunition for rifles and pistols.
Dynamite sticks would then be wrapped in greaseproof paper and packed into crates at the packing house, ready for use in mining. Charges went to the cartridge huts where they were pressed into cartridges for military use.

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Guncotton washing house

The Wat Tyler Centre building could have been where guncotton was 'washed' in nitroglycerin in huge open tanks to stabilise the explosive. The floors of all buildings on the site which dealt directly with explosives were covered in sheets of lead to avoid causing sparks and igniting the explosives. While the guncotton was wet it was safe to handle. The next stage, where the guncotton was heated and dried on the drying stoves, was one of the most dangerous processes on the site, and one that led to fatal accidents.

Guncotton drying.

Wet process storage.

Five corrugated iron sheds stood here. They were probably used to store the materials needed in the nitroglycerin washing house 'wet' process. Factory buildings were carefully separated between hazardous and non-hazardous processes, and staff were made to wear either red or green uniforms, depending on the kind of process their job involved.

Every explosive manufactured on this site was based on nitroglycerin. Different product names like Dynamite, Cordite and Blasting Gelatine were given to explosives with different characteristics developed using different manufacturing techniques, materials, and strengths.

Cordite room and non-hazardous store.

The entrance to the play area stands on the site of a building where Cordite was once made. Cordite was the British Government's answer to the Swedish Alfred Nobel's inventions of nitroglycerin and dynamite.
Nobel tried to take the government to court for patent breach, but the different wording on the British patent made it impossible for Nobel to sue, even though the chemical process was nearly identical.

Packing house

The packing house was supplied by the tramline (which the miniature railway now retraces in part), making it easier and safer for explosives to be off-loaded into the building. The building itself was used for packing explosives into boxes so they could be transported safely and securely to the client. Explosives were loaded onto barges from the wharfs and shipped to a special explosives mooring at Hole Haven (where the creek meets the Thames) and then onto larger ships.

Packing shed, supplied by rail.
Rail provided the smoothest way to transport sensitive explosives.

Tramway

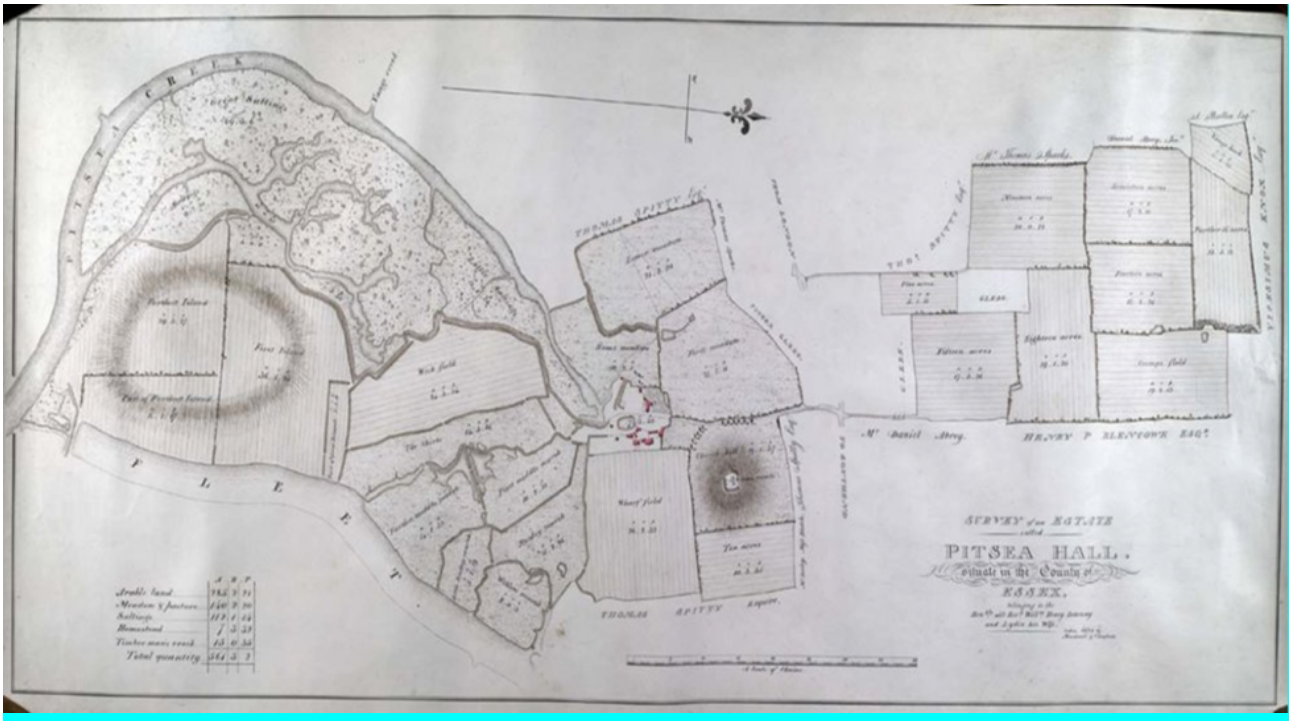
The current miniature railway stands in the place of part of the old tramline which supplied many of the buildings on site. Trams of several carriages were drawn by a horse walking to one side of the track. Wooden rails were used some distance before each building to prevent sparks.
The tramline still leads to the third of three wharfs (the other two were on the landfill site). This wharf, positioned close to a number of buildings, would have been used as a goods inwards wharf, for off-loading safe incoming materials. Finished explosives were dispatched from an isolated wharf that can still be seen next to the landfill site down the creek.
If a cargo exploded there it would be well away from the rest of the factory, limiting potential damage and disruption to production

Washing bowl
The unusual concrete bowl that sits behind the fence towards the creek was probably used to wash or drain guncotton. You can see where it would have been lined with bronze, chosen to prevent sparks and reactions with any of the chemicals being used.

On the far side of the concrete bowl you can see a channel for draining its contents

A bump in the landscape
This magnificent view from this spot looking out over the marshes towards the Thames shows the big drop in height from the middle of the park to its perimeter – one of the main reasons this site was chosen for an explosives factory.

The drop in height made the process of moving chemicals around from one building to another easier, safer, and cheaper. A sprawling network of pipelines criss-crossed the factory site supplying acids and water to all the chemical processes involved in explosives manufacture.



A map of Pitsea Hall showing the natural rise of the land. More than 90 interconnected buildings peppered the site in the factory's heyday.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

November 2018 saw the 100th anniversary of the Armistice of the First World War. It was a most terrible war with so many killed and such a great deal of suffering. Not only was it men, women and children who suffered but also animals, particularly horses.

Until the 1880s, Cavalry Regiments were responsible for buying their own horses. In 1887, the Remount Department was created to take over this role. Animals were bought from breeders, auctions, and private families. Officers at this time still used their own horses. During the First World War the Army could not have functioned without horses. They were vital for Cavalry roles, but also needed for moving supplies, equipment, guns, and ammunition and for transporting the wounded to hospital. The requisition, transportation and care of these animals was of huge importance.

Obtaining horses.

When the war broke out in 1914, the Army had only 25,000 horses at its disposal. By the end of the conflict, it had purchased over 460,000 horses and mules from across Britain and Ireland. Horses were heavily used in World War One. Horses were involved in the war's first military conflict involving Great Britain – a cavalry attack near Mons in August 1914. Horses were primarily to be used as a form of transport during the war. Horses were commandeered by the War Office from all over the country, some 120,000 in the first two weeks of war and some of the local hardships caused for example, were the 80 horses shipped from the Isle of Arran, ferried to the mainland saw trams stopped running as no horses were available to pull them and across the country farmers were particularly hit hard as working horses and thoroughbreds alike had to go, not forgetting also, the parting of much loved 'family' horses.

The wharf at Wat Tyler Country Park was used as a loading dock as well as the Rail station at Pitsea for arrivals and transfer of horses whilst other local areas including Canvey Island and Fobbing were used as training and feeding grounds.

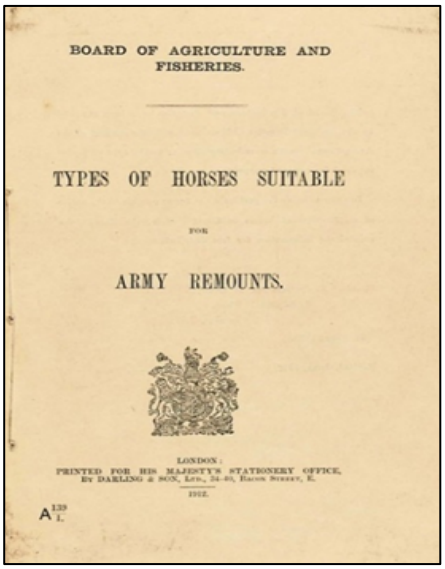
Miss Dorothy Gardner who was born at Marsh Farm at Vange in 1904, related her memories of the lead up to the war to the Basildon Heritage Group in 1985. She spoke of nearby Brickfields and mentioned her father had lots of horses and carts and used to carry the bricks for building local houses, including the farmhouse they lived in. She said Barges used to come up the nearby creeks to be loaded with bricks which were then taken to London. As a child, she used to swim in the creeks. On the day war was declared, she had returned home from the annual Horticultural Show held at All Saints Church at Vange, to find her mother in tears. The War Office had taken several horses and her mother's mare that she used to drive her trap, was one of these, for

the war effort. During the war, Dorothy, her sister, and her younger brother used to do a milk round before going to school. Dorothy and her sister used to go to Pitsea Station and put the milk churns on the 8.15am train for either Southend or Grays. This was then followed with the milk round in the Bowers Gifford area. Near the Bowers Gifford Rectory was a gun site and her brother and another sister delivered milk to the troops there. They had been given a one-hour morning session extension requiring them to be at school at 10am.

Horses pulling artillery.

When the war broke out in Western Europe in August 1914, both Britain and Germany had a cavalry force that each numbered about 100,000 men. Such a number of men would have needed a significant number of horses but probably all senior military personnel at this time believed in the supremacy of the cavalry attack. In August 1914, no-one could have contemplated the horrors of trench warfare – hence why the cavalry regiments reigned supreme. In fact, in Great Britain the cavalry regiments would have been seen as the senior regiments in the British Army, along with the Guards regiments, and very many senior army positions were held by cavalry officers.

Types of Horses Suitable for Army Remounts, 1912.


BOARD OF AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES.

TYPES OF HORSES SUITABLE

FOR

ARMY REMOUNTS.

LONDON:
PRINTED FOR HIS MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE,
BY DARLING & SON, LTD., 34-40, BACON STREET, E.

1912.

A 139
L

This booklet was issued by the War Office in 1912 and gives details of the types of horses suitable for use in different units of the British Army. It outlines conditions that had to be followed as regards to age, colour, and soundness, for all horses accepted for remount purposes.

Prior to the war, a census of British horses had been taken, identifying how many were available, how much they ate and what type of work they were suitable for. Their nearest train station was also listed. In the first few weeks of the conflict, the Army requisitioned around 120,000 horses from the civilian population. Owners who could not prove that their horses were needed for essential transport and agricultural needs had to surrender them.

Requisition.

Dr Reginald Duke Hill (1866 – 1922) worked for the Army Remount Department. He used his stationery box on his travels around the country. It contains everything he needed to buy horses for the Army, including a chequebook, numerous official forms, and labels, as well as a branding iron. During the first year of the war the British countryside was virtually emptied of horses, from the heavy draft horses such as the Shire through to the lighter riding ponies.

Crucial to agriculture at the time, the impact of having their finest and beloved horses requisitioned by the Government was immense on farming families.

Transport

In some areas, especially around London, short connecting lines were built to allow the railway system to function more efficiently. Railways were crucial for conveying troops and their equipment, and many camps were provided with new branch lines and sidings as were new munitions factories. Canal transport remained important to local economies, but similarly suffered from a lack of investment.

The War Horse

Over six million horses played a role in World War I, more than any other conflict in history. The British Army alone used 1,183,228 horses. At the end of the war some 85,000 were sold for horsemeat and about a half a million to farmers in the war zones to help them rebuild the countryside. Only about 60,000 came back to Britain including the six black horses who pulled the body of the Unknown Warrior to its resting place in Westminster Abbey.

After the war, horses which had survived the horrors of fighting were brought home to be cared for by the charity now called “Blue Cross.” This charity has been in existence since 1897. In 1912 a ‘Blue Cross Fund’ was established during the Balkan War and reopened in 1914 to assist the horses of the First World War. It still functions today as “Blue Cross”

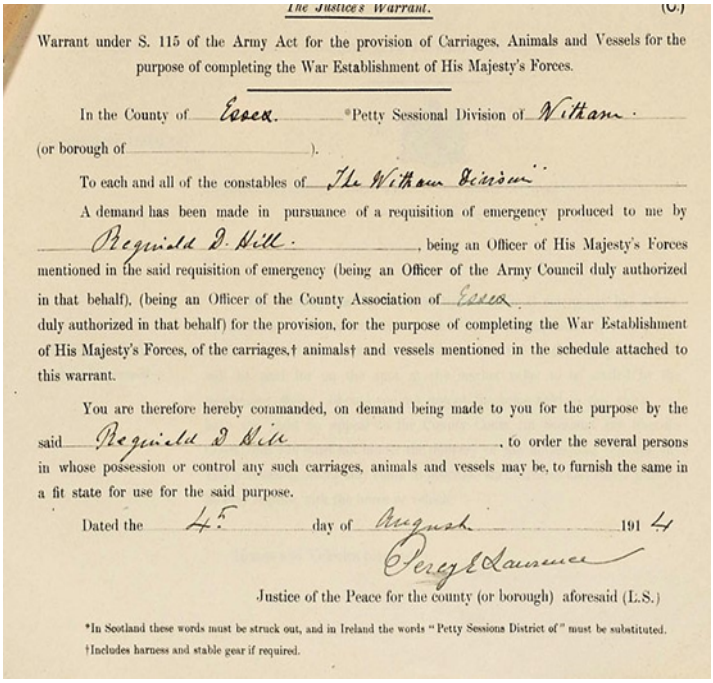
A document is held in the National Archives at Kew regarding the slaughter of horses and the sale and consumption of horseflesh as human food. Whilst it is recognised that Belgium and France were the main purchasers of horseflesh but also, as well as our butchers who undertook this work, both Great Britain and America also consumed post war horseflesh.

THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Conkers for Cordite.

When Britain's war effort was threatened by a shortage of shells, the government exhorted schoolchildren across the country to go on the hunt for horse chestnuts. In the autumn of 1917, a notice appeared on the walls of classrooms and scout huts across Britain: "Groups of scholars and boy scouts are being organised to collect conkers… This collection is invaluable war work and is very urgent. Please encourage it."

It was never explained to schoolchildren exactly how conkers could help the war effort. Nor did they care. They were more interested in the War Office's bounty of 7s 6d (37.5p) for every hundred weight they handed in, and for weeks they scoured woods and lanes for the shiny brown objects they usually destroyed in the playground game.



The Justice's Warrant. (G.)

Warrant under S. 115 of the Army Act for the provision of Carriages, Animals and Vessels for the purpose of completing the War Establishment of His Majesty's Forces.

In the County of Essex. *Petty Sessional Division of Witham.
(or borough of).

To each and all of the constables of The Witham Division.

A demand has been made in pursuance of a requisition of emergency produced to me by Reginald D. Hill., being an Officer of His Majesty's Forces mentioned in the said requisition of emergency (being an Officer of the Army Council duly authorized in that behalf), (being an Officer of the County Association of Essex duly authorized in that behalf) for the provision, for the purpose of completing the War Establishment of His Majesty's Forces, of the carriages,† animals† and vessels mentioned in the schedule attached to this warrant.

You are therefore hereby commanded, on demand being made to you for the purpose by the said Reginald D Hill, to order the several persons in whose possession or control any such carriages, animals and vessels may be, to furnish the same in a fit state for use for the said purpose.

Dated the 4th day of August 1914

Percy Laurence

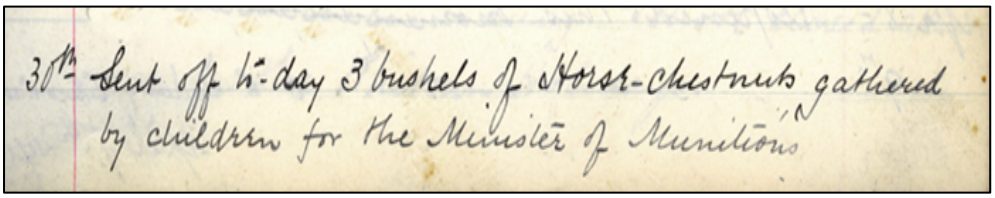
Justice of the Peace for the county (or borough) aforesaid (L.S.)

*In Scotland these words must be struck out, and in Ireland the words "Petty Sessions District of" must be substituted.
†Includes harness and stable gear if required.

Mr. Haylock, the Headmaster wrote an entry in the Willingdon School Logbook for 30 January 1917. 'Sent off today three bushels of Horse Chestnuts gathered by children for the Minister of Munitions.' Over the previous weeks there were notes in the Log that the children had been out in the parish during the school day collecting conkers as part of the war effort.

Many of the schoolboys belonged to the 1st Ratton Scout Troup founded by Lord Willingdon and the scouts were also seen around the parish busily searching in the grass under the Horse Chestnut trees and filling boxes and baskets with conkers.

Once collected the brought them back to the schoolroom to remove the green shells, leaving just the nuts. These were bagged up in sacks, put on a hand cart and wheeled off to Hampden Park Station ready for collection and transportation by train to London and from there to secret locations.



30th Sent off 4th day 3 bushels of Horse-chestnuts gathered by children for the Minister of Munitions

The children's efforts were so successful that they collected more conkers than there were trains to transport them, and piles were seen rotting at railway stations.

But a total of 3,000 tonnes of conkers did reach their destination – the Synthetic Products Company at King's Lynn – where they were used to make acetone, a vital component of the smokeless propellant for shells and bullets known as cordite. Local Railway Stations were used as a collection and dispatch point and of course one recipient of the refined chemical was the 'secret' factory her at Wat Tyler Park

Cordite had been used by the British military since 1889, when it first replaced black gunpowder. It consisted chiefly of the high-explosives nitro-glycerine and nitro-cellulose (gun-cotton), with acetone playing the key role of solvent in the manufacturing process. Prior to the First World War, the acetone used in British munitions was made almost entirely from the dry distillation (pyrolysis) of wood. As it required almost a hundred tonnes of birch, beech, or maple to produce a tonne of acetone, the great timber-growing countries were the biggest producers of this vital commodity, and Britain was forced to import the vast majority of its

acetone from the United States. An attempt to produce our own acetone was made in 1913 when a modern factory was built in the Forest of Dean. But by the outbreak of war in 1914, the stocks for military use were just 3,200 tonnes, and it was soon obvious that an alternative domestic supply would be needed.

This became even more pressing during the spring of 1915 when an acute shortage of shells – the so-called 'shell crisis' – reduced some British guns to firing just four times a day. The British government's response was to create a dedicated Ministry of Munitions, run by the future Prime Minister David Lloyd George. One of Lloyd George's first initiatives was to ask the brilliant chemist Chaim Weizmann of Manchester University if there was an alternative way of making acetone in large quantities. Weizmann said yes. Developing the work of Louis Pasteur and others, Weizmann had perfected an anaerobic fermentation process that used a highly vigorous bacterium known as Clostridium acetobutylicum (also known as the Weizmann organism) to produce large quantities of acetone from a variety of starchy foodstuffs such as grain, maize and rice. He at once agreed to place his process at the disposal of the government. In May 1915, after Weizmann had demonstrated to the Admiralty that he could convert 100 tonnes of grain to 12 tonnes of acetone, the government commandeered brewing and distillery equipment, and built factories to utilise the new process at Holton Heath in Dorset and King's Lynn in Norfolk**.**

Together they produced more than 90,000 gallons of acetone a year, enough to feed the war's seemingly insatiable demand for cordite. (The British army and Royal Navy, alone, fired 248 million shells from 1914 to 1918.)

But by 1917, as grain and potatoes were needed to feed the British population, and German U-boat activity in the Atlantic was threatening to cut off the import of maize from the United States, Weizmann was tasked to find another supply of starch for his process that would not interfere with the already limited food supplies

Royal Naval Cordite Factory, Dorset - Acetone Fermentation Tank

Fermentation VATS being erected at Rainham, Essex during the Autumn of 1912.

ACETONE PRODUCTION DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR.

'You can have my distillery,' and with these words in 1915–16 Colonel Gooderham generated the second largest fermentation process in the world.

THE SECOND WORLD WAR AND DEFENCE LINE.

Defensive ditches

The high land you can see across the water is a landfill site. It has risen up high above the surrounding flat landscape as more of the area's rubbish has been piled up here. The marshland now hidden beneath it was once criss-crossed by an extensive network of anti-glider and anti-tank ditches, dug by tractors as a measure to prevent gliders using the otherwise flat marshes as runways where they could land and attempt to capture the Pitsea Sea Transport Stores, which the Wat Tyler site was home to at the time.

The ditches were dug as the country was bracing itself for a Nazi invasion of Britain, and a massive ditch-digging programme began around south and east England in the anticipation that an invasion could begin at any moment.

Buildings to the left were the Guard House and the Supervisors accommodation, where trucks coming in and out would be stopped, searched, and directed to various buildings around the site.

This RAF aerial photograph of the Pitsea site clearly shows the distinctive cross patterns of glider ditches (picked out in orange) on the marshes to the north. Glider ditches were more extensively cut into the marshes to the East of the site.

Sea Transport Stores

During WWII, this site was used by the Ministry of War to store equipment vital for fitting out troop ships, and for reconditioning and servicing other vessels including hospital ships.

The sheer size and capacity of this building shows just why the Ministry of War chose this site as their Sea Transport Stores. With easy access to the River Thames for shipping and a huge volume of existing storage space the site was quickly, easily, and cheaply converted from a redundant explosives factory to the Sea Transport Stores.

Fragments of human bones have been uncovered around the Green Centre. They are thought to be the remains of amputated limbs from wounded soldiers treated on board hospital ships.

Washing blankets

The Wat Tyler Centre building was used to store flea-ridden blankets from troop ships, which were washed in a giant hand-powered wooden washing machine in a building opposite, not far from the site of Holly Cottage. Women folded and stacked clean blankets ready for the next time they were needed anticipating the order to pull them out of storage and into use in France. A variety of smaller buildings stood around the Wat Tyler Centre site, used for storing spare parts.

British soldiers & crew rescued from a troop ship that was torpedoed near the coast of N. Africa.

Pillbox and anti-tank blocks

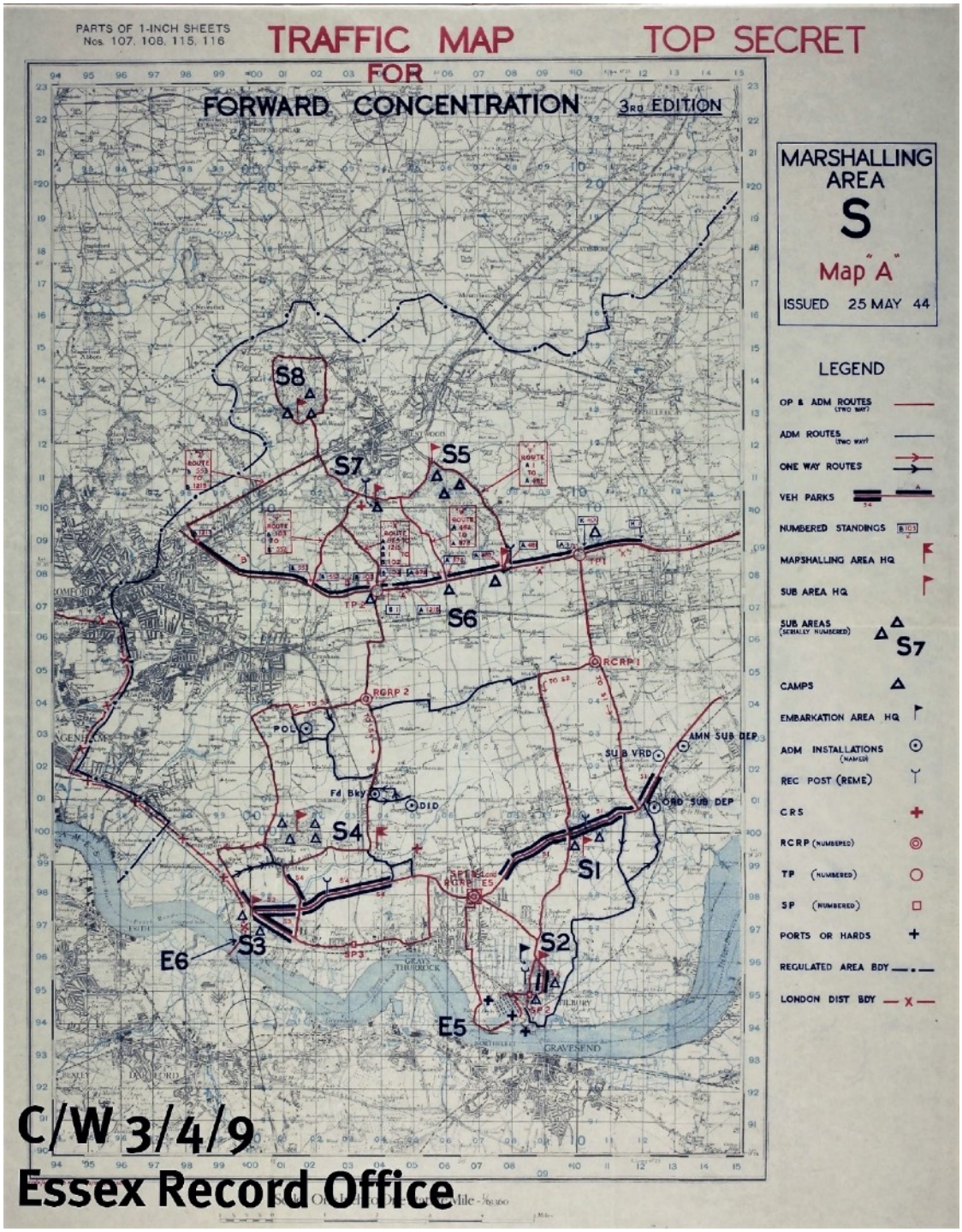
This concrete pill box was designed to defend the South Essex marshes from invasion from the sea. It's one of many defences still clearly visible all along the sea wall. The two large concrete block son the sea wall connecting Wat Tyler Country Park to the landfill site were constructed as a barrier to prevent enemy tanks pushing towards London. It was anticipated that tanks could have been delivered by air onto the flat marshland that is now the landfill site. The road up to the Wat Tyler Centre would have been lined along the left-hand side with a series of open fronted sheds, part of the Sea Transport Stores. The sheds stored fire-fighting equipment used on board Royal Navy ships.

Cement anti-tank barrier shrouded with barbed wire.

GHQ defence line

The pillbox was an important part of the GHQ (General Headquarters) defence line in South Essex – the first line of defence for London. The vantage point over vast stretches of the marshes made this site, and particularly the pillbox, a key element of the military occupation of the marshes. The GHQ line was one of many lines of defence around the country, each working independently of the others to provide maximum resistance to potential invasion. Camouflaged control rooms and bunkers along the defence lines coordinated a concealed resistance to the anticipated Nazi invasion.

The Essex section of the GHQ line between Great Chesterford (just north of Saffron Waldron) and Canvey Island included around 400 concrete pillboxes.



Brick pillbox

In the later years of the Second World War, wood became more and more scarce as a tightening German U-Boat blockade choked Britain's supply lines. This made construction of concrete structures difficult, because they needed wooden shuttering to hold the concrete in place as it set. The pillbox on the far side of the field was built as part of a second phase of defences in those later years of the war. Builders made these later pillboxes in brick, which was still readily available throughout Britain. This Pillbox (ref: SMR 20088) in in a thicket, on a high point in the park, is a brick and concrete , hexagonal type FW3/24, thin-walled pillbox. It faces NNE, there are seven loopholes and a central Y-shape pillar.

The length of the walls, clockwise from the rear wall are almost fourteen feet reducing to around seven feet. The walls are twenty-four inches thick.

The southern-most anti-tank obstacle. This concrete cube is one of two flanking a track which crosses a narrow neck of land between Pitsea Hall Fleet and Vange Creek at the extreme southern end of the GHQ Line.

THE MARINA.
Carnarvon Bay Light Vessel No. 44 – Trinity House Vessel Newarp.
The Wat Tyler Marina and the Erith Yacht Club links.

Resting and rotting in Vange Creek and gradually becoming more like a mudbank than a vessel. This is Trinity House Light Vessel LV 44, Newarp. She was built in 1869 by C. Hill and Sons of Bristol. Initially stationed outside Caernarvon Bay, she spent the majority of her service life at Newarp Station in the North Sea.

These Light Vessels were not designed for travel and often had no engines for propulsion. They were designed to be moored in the open sea, whatever the weather conditions. They would be towed to their selected moorings. LV 44 was such a vessel.

It is believed that she was one of the 'Nore' lightships. She had an iron deckhouse and carried the first ever revolving lantern on her mast.

The Nore is a sandbank at the mouth of the Thames Estuary. It marks the point where the River Thames meets the North Sea, roughly between Havengore Creek in Essex and Warden Point on the Isle of Sheppey in Kent. As the sand bank was a major hazard for shipping in and out of London, in 1732 it received the world's first lightship. This became a major landmark and was used as an assembly point for shipping. Today it is marked by Sea Reach No. 1 Buoy.

LV 44 was taken out of service in 1945 and eventually sold to Erith Yacht Club for £140, to become their new club house, it was renamed Garson II, taking its name from their first club house T.S. Garson. Over time the interior of the vessel was transformed into comfortable Headquarters, complete with Steward Accommodation including a Grand Piano. By 1981 the vessel was no longer suitable for the increasing membership of the Yacht club and a new ship the Folgefonn took its place. Garson II was moved to a temporary berth in bottom creek being eventually sold to Pitsea Sailing Club for £1800 in the spring of 1982.

The Pitsea Sailing Club in September 1982 held a riotous ship-warming party attended by visitors from various Yacht Clubs. Although she remained in service

afloat for a number of years, she was eventually abandoned. Another piece of the Boroughs Heritage disappearing.

NB: Trinity House is a charity dedicated to safeguarding shipping and seafarers, providing education, support, and welfare to the seafaring community with a statutory duty as a General Lighthouse Authority to deliver a reliable, efficient, and cost-effective aid to navigation service for the benefit and safety of all mariners.

Nore View' – The agricultural depression of the late 1870s resulted in a plotland era that was to last for 70 years, but it was not just humble dwellings that were built. There were one or two vary elaborate homes built. One such house was 'Nore View' in Langdon Hills. It is believed it got its name from the fact that you could see the Nore's lighthouse from its location. Certainly not possible today as its location was in the middle of today's nature reserve 'Marks Hill' but a century ago the tree line was nowhere near like today, so it is more than likely the Nore's lighthouse could have been seen. The name Nore View is still in use today as a Cul-De-Sac in the Great Berry area of Langdon Hills.

During the Second World War a series of defensive towers, known as Maunsell Forts, were built in the Thames estuary to protect the approach to London from air and sea attack. The Nore was the site of one of these, the Great Nore Tower. It was equipped with a battery of anti-aircraft guns and manned by a unit of the British Army. It was completed in 1943 but was abandoned at the end of hostilities. It was badly damaged in a collision in 1953 and dismantled in 1959-60.

She was subsequently bought by Pitsea Yacht Club. She was grounded here on an exceptional high tide circa 1990.

Arriving at Pitsea

From the Erith Yacht Club perspective.

During these years only minimum maintenance work was possible so that by 1944 it was becoming sadly apparent that Garson (the earlier Erith Yacht Club vessel) would soon need replacing. Fortunately, however, there was no shortage of suitable replacements and after some deliberation, an ex-Trinity House light-vessel LV No. 44 was purchased, and brought on station in 1945. Renamed Garson II, she was massively constructed of teak on oak (so close-framed, in fact that you could barely get your hand between them!) and in perfect condition. She was a true Thames boat, copper sheathed

THE COUNTRY PARK.

In 1969 Basildon District Council buys the site from the Ministry of Defence for £99,600 with the intent of developing it into Country Park. It was firstly known as Pitsea Hall Country Park, but local councillors decided to change the name to Wat Tyler County Park and in 1977 plans were drawn up for its use as a recreational space maintaining the buildings of its previous history. It opened to the public in the early eighties.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Thomas Baker of FOBBING (Died 4 July 1381)

The outbreak began in Essex on May 30. Thomas Bampton (also described as John of Bampton), one of the king's new commissioners, had ridden to Brentwood to revise the taxation returns of the hundreds of Barstable in the south of the county. He had three clerks and two sergeants-at-arms with him but was not expecting trouble. Perhaps he should have.

Villeins suffered a form of slavery, bonded to their lord, who had the right to decide what services he required of them and could levy fines and restrict their movements as he saw fit. The Black Death briefly raised hopes, as it tipped the balance in favour of agricultural workers by creating a labour shortage, thereby increasing their worth and wages. The Statue of Labourers (1351) attempted to put the genie back in its bottle by freezing wages and restricting labourers' movement. Ruinous wars with France led to heavy taxation, including three series of a hated poll-tax in 1377, 1379 and 1380. The final tax increased threefold from that of 1377 and was levied at a flat-rate of 1s per person over the age of 15. It would fall hardest on those least able to pay.

Bampton came into Essex to snare his portion of tax evaders (it was reckoned some 450,000 had 'disappeared' from the register all told). He opened by examining three marshland villages (Fobbing, Corringham and Stanford le Hope), but the peasants and fishermen came prepared to resist. Fobbing men informed Bampton they wouldn't pay an extra penny above what they'd already contributed ('fobbing him off' you might say). Their leader, a Thomas Baker (Tom the baker), had a trade, so was no peasant. Soon there were over 100 men involved, so Bampton was up against it, trying (unsuccessfully) to arrest the spokesman, only to be beaten and stoned out of town. The rebels retreated to the forest, a traditional refuge for outlaws. The government responded to the first signs of bother by sending in the Chief Justice of the Commons Pleas, Robert Belknap (or Belkneap), who headed for Brentwood to smoke out and punish the rioters. The Fobbing and Corringham men were a step ahead, however, having sent messages round south Essex, calling out their neighbours.

Come June 2, Belknap was in Brentwood to open his commission. He was set upon by an 'armed multitude' and forced to swear on the Bible that he would never hold another such session. His papers were destroyed, but he escaped with his life. He was lucky. The mob, its blood up, beat to death and beheaded three local jurors, called to present the original rioters before Belknap, also destroying their houses. Three clerks were also slain. The Brentwood murders were followed by a general outbreak of riot and plunder, which spread through Essex in June's first week. Letters went to other counties, asking them to rise also. The rebels' leaders, shadowy figures to us, were literate. The Peasants' Revolt had begun.

John Ball (c. 1338 – 15 July 1381).

He was an English priest who took a prominent part in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. Although he is often associated with John Wycliffe and the Lollard movement, Ball was actively preaching 'articles contrary to the faith of the church' at least a decade before Wycliffe started attracting attention. John Ball was the son of William and Joan Ball of Peldon near Colchester. We first find him mentioned in the Colchester Court Rolls of 30th January 1352, when, on coming of age in 1350 he had acknowledged the tenancy of a tenement between East and West Stockwell Street in the town. Ball trained as a priest in York and referred to himself, if Walsingham can be believed, as "Seynte Marie prest of York"), later moving to Norwich and then back to Colchester. The country was exhausted by death on a massive scale and crippling taxes; the Black Death was followed by years of war, which had to be paid for. The population was nearly halved by disease and overworked, and onerous flat-rate poll taxes were imposed.

Ball was imprisoned in Maidstone, Kent, at the time of the 1381 Revolt. What is recorded of his adult life comes from hostile sources emanating from the religious and political social order. He is said to have gained considerable fame as a roving preacher without a parish or any link to the established order by expounding the doctrines of John Wycliffe, and especially by his insistence on social equality. He delivered radical sermons in many places, including Ashen, Billericay, Bocking, Braintree, Cressing Temple, Dedham, Coggeshall, Fobbing, Goldhanger, Great Baddow, Little Henny, Stisted and Waltham.

His utterances brought him into conflict with Simon of Sudbury, Archbishop of Canterbury, and he was thrown in prison on several occasions. He also appears to have been excommunicated; owing to which, in 1366 it was forbidden for anyone to hear him preach. These measures, however, did not moderate his opinions, nor diminish his popularity, and he took to speaking to parishioners in churchyards after official services.

Shortly after the Peasants' Revolt began, Ball was released by the Kentish rebels from his prison. He preached to them at Blackheath (the peasants' rendezvous to the south of Greenwich) in an open-air sermon. When the rebels had dispersed, Ball was taken prisoner at Coventry, given a trial in which, unlike most, he was permitted to speak. He was hanged, drawn, and quartered at St Albans in the presence of King Richard II on 15 July 1381.

His head was displayed stuck on a pike on London Bridge, and the quarters of his body were displayed at four different towns.

Henry lee Despenser (c. 1341–23 August 1406).
He was an English nobleman and Bishop of Norwich whose reputation as the 'Fighting Bishop' was gained for his part in suppressing the Peasants' Revolt in East Anglia and in defeating the peasants at the Battle of North Walsham in the summer of 1381.
During the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, rebels from Kent and Essex marched to London and once admitted to the city, managed to capture the Tower of London. King Richard, who had promised to agree to all the demands of the peasants, met the rebels outside the city, where the leader of the peasants Wat Tyler was killed, and the rebellion was ended. The king's promises were retracted. The rebellion quickly spread to other parts of England, including the diocese of Norwich, where it lasted for less than a fortnight. On 14 June, a group of rebels reached Thetford and from there the insurrection spread over south-western Norfolk towards the Fens. At the same time the rebels, led by a local dyer, Geoffrey Litster, moved across the north-eastern part of the county, urging insurrection throughout the local area. Over the next few days, the rebels converged on Norwich, Lynn, and Swaffham. Norwich, then one of the largest and most important cities in the realm, was taken and occupied by Litster and his followers, who caused considerable damage to the property and possessions of their enemies once they managed to enter the city. The Norwich rebels then travelled to Yarmouth, destroying legal records and landowners' possessions; other insurgents moving across north-east Norfolk destroyed court rolls and taxation documents; there were numerous incidents of pillage and extortion across the whole county.

Despenser first heard news of the rising in his own diocese at a time when he was absent at his manor of Burley in Rutland, 100 miles (160 km) west of Norwich. Armed, he hastened back to Norfolk via Peterborough, Cambridge, and Newmarket, with a company of only eight lances and a small body of bowmen. His followers increased on the way, and by the time he reached North Walsham, near the Norfolk coast, he had a considerable force under his command. There he found the rebels entrenched and defended by makeshift fortifications. According to Thomas Walsingham, in the Battle of North Walsham the bishop himself led the assault and overpowered his enemies in hand-to-hand fighting. Many were slain or captured, including the rebels' leader, who was hanged, drawn and quartered soon afterwards. Despenser personally superintended Litster's execution. In the following months he proceeded to deal with other rebels in his diocese. But the rigour with which he put down the rebellion made him highly unpopular in Norfolk and in the following year a plot was organised to murder him. The scheme was betrayed in time by one of the conspirators, and the plotters were dealt with by the authorities. Following his successful crushing of the rebellion, Despenser commissioned a reredos to sit on the altar in St Luke's chapel, Norwich Cathedral illustrating scenes from Christ's final days. His intention may have been to remind the peasantry to accept their lot in life as Christ had done.

In the aftermath of the rebellion Henry le Despenser appointed John Derlington, the archdeacon of Norwich, as his vicar-general on 5 February 1400 and then submitted himself to the custody of Archbishop Arundel who accompanied him to Parliament on 20 January 1401. There, his enemy Sir Thomas Erpingham falsely accused him of being involved in the plot. He was finally reconciled to Henry IV when the king granted him a pardon in 1401. Despenser died on 23 August 1406 and was buried in Norwich Cathedral before the high altar. A brass inscription dedicated to him was placed there but has since been destroyed.

Jean Froissart (c. 1337 – c. 1405)
He was a French-speaking medieval author and court historian from the Low Countries, who wrote several works, including Chronicles and Meliador, a long Arthurian romance, and a large body of poetry, both short lyrical forms, as well as longer narrative poems. For centuries, Froissart's Chronicles have been recognised as the chief expression of the chivalric revival of the 14th century kingdoms of England, France, and Scotland. His history is also an important source for the first half of the Hundred Years' War.

What little is known of Froissart's life comes mainly from his historical writings and from archival sources which mention him in the service of aristocrats or receiving gifts from them. Although his poems have also been used in the past to reconstruct aspects of his biography, this approach is in fact flawed, as the 'I' persona which appears in many of the poems should not be construed as a reliable reference to the historical author.
This is why de Looze has characterised these works as 'pseudo-autobiographical'. Froissart came from Valenciennes in the County of Hainaut, situated in the western tip of the Holy Roman Empire, bordering France. Earlier scholars have suggested that his father was a painter of armorial bearings, but there is actually little evidence for this. Other suggestions include that he began working as a merchant but soon gave that up

to become a cleric. For this conclusion there is also no real evidence, as the poems which have been cited to support these interpretations are not really autobiographical.

By about age 24, Froissart left Hainault and entered the service of Philippa of Hainault, queen consort of Edward III of England, in 1361 or 1362. This service, which would have lasted until the queen's death in 1369, has often been presented as including a position of court poet and/or official historiographer. Based on surviving archives of the English court, Croenen has concluded instead that this service did not entail an official position at court, and probably was more a literary construction, in which a courtly poet dedicated poems to his 'lady' and in return received occasional gifts as remuneration.

Froissart took a serious approach to his work. He travelled in England, Scotland, Wales, France, Flanders, and Spain gathering material and first-hand accounts for his Chronicles. He travelled with Lionel, Duke of Clarence, to Milan to attend and chronicle the duke's wedding to Violante, the daughter of Galeazzo Visconti. At this wedding, two other significant writers of the Middle Ages were present: Chaucer and Petrarch.

After the death of Queen Philippa, he enjoyed the patronage of Joanna, Duchess of Brabant among various others. He received rewards—including the benefice of Estinnes, a village near Binche and later became canon of Chimay—sufficient to finance further travels, which provided additional material for his work. He returned to England in 1395 but seemed disappointed by changes that he viewed as the end of chivalry. The date and circumstances of his death are unknown, but St. Monegunda of Chimay might be the final resting place for his remains, although still unverified.

Sir Robert Hales (1325 – 1381).
Sir Robert Hales, also called Robert de Hales, was Lord/Grand Prior of the Knights Hospitallers of England, Lord High Treasurer, and Admiral of the West in medieval England, and was killed in the Peasants Revolt. He was born about 1325 in Hales Place, High Halden, Kent, the son of Nicholas Hales.
In 1372 Robert Hales became the Lord/Grand Prior of the Knights Hospitallers of England. Richard II appointed him Lord High Treasurer, so he was responsible for collecting the hated poll tax. He was appointed Admiral of the West from 24 November 1376 – 24 November 1377. He was beheaded on 14 June 1381 on Tower Hill during the Peasants Revolt. His estate and assets were inherited by his brother, Sir Nicholas de Hales, the progenitor of many prominent English Hales families. Robert Hales was present at many latter-day crusader expeditions and is recorded as leading a contingent of Hospitaller knights at the sacking of Alexandria. Hales was described by the chronicler Thomas Walsingham as a "Magnanimous knight, though the Commons loved him not".

Sir Robert Knolles or Knollys (c. 1325 – 15 August 1407)
He was an important English knight of the Hundred Years' War, who, operating with the tacit support of the Crown, succeeded in taking the only two major French cities, other than Calais and Poitiers, to fall to Edward III. His methods, however, earned him infamy as a freebooter and a ravager: the ruined gables of burned buildings came to be known as "Knollys' mitres". Born in Cheshire, Knolles first appears as the captain of several castles throughout Brittany in the mid-14th century, including Fougeray, Gravelle and Chateau blanc. He was one of the English champions at the Combat of the Thirty in 1351, where he was captured. He then contributed himself and 800 men to the 1356 chevauchée of Henry of Grosmont, 1st Duke of Lancaster through Normandy, a diversionary campaign to draw King John II of France north and thus leave the Black Prince free to embark on the famous Poitiers campaign. With France in disarray after the Battle of Poitiers, King Charles II of Navarre assumed command of the rebellion in Paris, and Knolles joined up with the army of Charles's brother Philip as they temporarily held the capital against the Dauphin in 1358.

Knolles' finest hours were to come that autumn when he led a Great Company of 2,000–3,000 Anglo-Gascons into the Loire Valley, establishing several forward garrisons at important towns like Château neuf-Val-de-Bargis. He then advanced into the Nivernais, which was unsuccessfully defended for Margaret III of Flanders by the Archpriest Arnaud de Cervole, the adventurer who had raised the first Great Company the previous year.
In 1370 he was given a large grant of lands and money to raise an army to invade northern France. He landed at Calais in August with 6,000 mounted men and carried out a raid deep into French territory, burning villages on the outskirts of Paris but failing to bring the French King Charles V out to battle. He then turned towards Gascony and began capturing and fortifying castles and churches in the region between the rivers Loir and Loire. However he had to cope with much criticism from his younger subordinate commanders such as Sir John Minsterworth who were spoiling for a fight. When it became known that French armies under the command of Bertrand du Guesclin were closing in on them, Knolles proposed to retreat into Brittany but most

of the army refused. He therefore marched away with his own retinue, leaving the bulk of the army where they were, to be comprehensively defeated and slaughtered at the Battle of Pontvallain on 4 December.

Knolles passed the winter in his castle at Derval on the Breton March and afterwards attempted to evacuate his men and those of Minsterworth, who had managed to join him with his surviving troop, from the port of Saint-Mathieu. However, for lack of ships most of the English soldiers had to be left behind on the shore, to be wiped out by the French under Olivier de Clisson. In 1372 Knolles was found by the King's Council to bear the major responsibility for this disaster. He was stripped of the lands that had been given him as his fee for raising the army and fined 10,000 marks. He named Thomas Knollys as one of the executors of his estate in 1389. He died at his seat in Sculthorpe, Norfolk on 15 August 1407. He also founded Trinity Hospital, Pontefract and helped to suppress the Peasants' Revolt. Knolles' coat of arms decorates the postern tower of Bodiam Castle, Sussex. It was a statement of loyalty to Knolles by its builder, Edward Dalyngrigge who served under Knolles in a Free Company during the Hundred Years' War.

Sir Robert Namur KG. (1323 -1391).

Robert of Namur was a noble from the Low Countries close to King Edward III of England. He was made Knight of the Garter in 1369. His was the son of John I, Count of Namur, and Marie, Lady of Merode. As a young man, he participated in crusades in Prussia and The Holy Land. His uncle Robert III of Artois, which had English sympathies, made him journey in 1346 to Calais to meet Edward III of England, who was besieging the city. Robert made a good impression on the King.

On 30 August 1350, Robert and Henry of Grosmont commanded the English flagship Salle du Roy, at the Battle of Les Espagnols sur Mer, off Winchelsea. On 2 February 1354, Robert of Namur married Isabella of Hainault (1323–1361), younger sister of Philippa of Hainault, queen consort of King Edward III of England. Thus Robert became brother-in-law to Edward III. Robert captured the Escanaffles Castle in 1363. Robert brought Jean Froissart to England and introduced him to Queen Philippa. In 1369, Robert defended the English camp at Tournehem against French attack. He was made Knight of the Garter in 1369 after the death of Robert d'Ufford, 1st Earl of Suffolk. In 1370, Robert requested Jean Froissart to write a recent chronicle of the history of England. On 20 August 1371, Robert fought for Wenceslaus I, Duke of Luxembourg, and Brabant, commanding 2,000 men at the Battle of Baesweiler, but was defeated and released after paying a ransom. In 1373, Jean Froissart completed his first book of the Chronicles and dedicated it to Robert of Namur.

On 2 February 1354, Robert of Namur married Isabella of Hainault (1323–1361), sister of Queen Philippa of England and daughter of William I, Count of Hainaut, and Joan of Valois. On 4 February 1380, he married Isabeau de Melun (died 1409). Both marriages remained childless, but Robert is said to have had 9 illegitimate children.

Geoffrey Parfay

Vicar of All Saints Sudbury in Suffolk. At the same time Wrawe sent Geoffrey Parfay, vicar of All Saints at Sudbury, to Thetford with a party of 17 men. There they extracted 40 marks in gold under the threat of a visit by Wrawe and the mob. The Mayor of Thetford was Simon Barbour, and together with the Thetford burgesses, they decided to pay up at once.

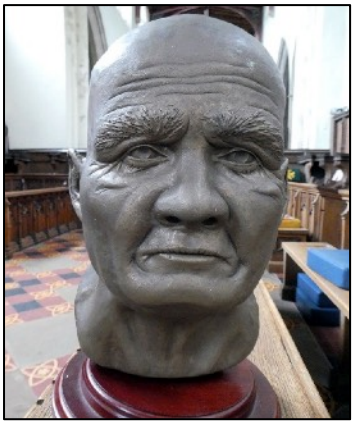
John Wrawe and Geoffrey Parfay of Sudbury, now apparently led the march to Over Hall at Liston, wrecking it and burning all the manorial records held by Richard Lyons. (Lyons himself appears to have been a particular target as he was killed in London on 14th June 1381.)

Simon Sudbury (1316 – 14 June 1381).

Simon Sudbury was Bishop of London from 1361 to 1375, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1375 until his death, and in the last year of his life Lord Chancellor of England. He met a violent death during the Peasants' Revolt. The son of Nigel Theobald, Sudbury (as he later became known) was born at Sudbury in Suffolk, studied at the University of Paris, and became one of the chaplains of Pope Innocent VI, one of the Avignon Popes, who in 1356 sent him on a mission to Edward III of England. In 1361 Sudbury was made Chancellor of Salisbury and in October that year the pope provided him to be Bishop of London, Sudbury's consecration occurring on 20 March 1362. He was soon serving Edward III as an ambassador and in other ways. On 4 May 1375 he succeeded William Whittlesey as archbishop of Canterbury, and during the rest of his life was a partisan of John of Gaunt.

In July 1377, following the death of Edward III in June, Sudbury crowned the new king, Richard II at Westminster Abbey, and in 1378 John Wycliffe appeared before him at Lambeth, but he only undertook proceedings against the reformer under great pressure. In January 1380, Sudbury became Lord Chancellor of England, and the insurgent peasants regarded him as one of the principal authors of their woes. Having

released John Ball from his prison at Maidstone, the Kentish insurgents attacked and damaged the archbishop's property at Canterbury and Lambeth; then, rushing into the Tower of London, they seized the archbishop himself.
So unpopular was Sudbury with the rebellious peasants that guards simply allowed the rebels through the gates, the reason being his role in introducing the third poll tax. Sudbury was dragged to Tower Hill and, on 14 June 1381, was beheaded after eight blows to his neck.



His body was afterwards buried in Canterbury Cathedral, though his head (after being taken down from London Bridge) is still kept at the church of St Gregory at Sudbury in Suffolk, which Sudbury had partly rebuilt. With his brother, John of Chertsey, he also founded a college in Sudbury; he also did some building at Canterbury. His father was Nigel Theobald, and he is sometimes called Simon Theobald or Tybald.

In March 2011, a CT scan of Sudbury's mummified skull was performed at the West Suffolk Hospital to make a facial reconstruction, which was completed in September 2011 by forensics expert Adrienne Barker at the University of Dundee.

Sir Robert Tresilian (died 1388)

He was a Cornish lawyer, and Chief Justice of the King's Bench between 1381 and 1387. He was born in Cornwall, and held land in Tresilian, near Truro. Tresilian was deeply involved in the struggles between King Richard II and the Lords Appellant and was eventually executed for his loyalty to the king.

Tresilian appears in the records for the first time in 1354. His early career took place in Oxfordshire and Berkshire; in 1367 he was a Justice of the Peace (JP) in Berkshire and in 1368 in Oxfordshire. He also worked in his home county; in 1369 he was recorded as acting counsel in a Cornish assizes case, was also returned to that year's parliament as a Knight of the Shire for the same county, and in 1370 was a JP for Cornwall. In the 1370s he began working in royal administration, and in 1378 he was made a Justice of the King's Bench. Shortly after he was also knighted. When Chief Justice Sir John Cavendish was killed in the Peasants' Revolt in 1381, Tresilian was appointed to take over the position.

After the rebellion was over, Tresilian was put in charge of punishing the rebels and did so extremely harshly. He followed King Richard II into Essex, where he led what was described as a 'bloody assize' against the rebels. He pressured jurors into giving up names of suspects, and to maximise sentences, contrived to have charges presented as felonies rather than trespasses. All in all nineteen men were hanged, while another twelve were hanged and drawn. There was a widespread belief in the localities that royal retribution had gone too far, and that reform of government was necessary as well as punishing the rebels, to prevent further uprisings.

In the following years, Tresilian became increasingly involved in politics, as a loyal follower of the king. In November 1386 Parliament appointed a commission to review and control royal finances. The king resented this infringement of his royal prerogative and, in the so-called 'questions to the judges', he received legal backing for the position that the commission was unlawful. It is largely assumed that it was Tresilian who drafted the 'questions', and thereby turned a political controversy into a legal dispute. The king's opponents went on the counterattack. On 17 November 1387 Tresilian was among a number of royal loyalists who were charged with treason by the group of noblemen known as the Lords Appellant. When Tresilian's case came up for trial, he had gone into hiding and was not to be found and was sentenced in absentia. Not long after he was discovered hiding in sanctuary in Westminster. He was dragged into court with cries of 'We have him!' from the mob and, as he was already convicted, was summarily executed, being hanged naked before his throat was cut.

The charges against Tresilian had consisted of more than simply treason. He was a highly unpopular judge, and among his crimes was also corruption. Several cases were presented from Cornwall and Devon, where the judge had abused his powers to advance his own fortune. Tresilian and his wife Emmaline (Emma) had a son, John, and at least two daughters.

Through his marriage, but also through corrupt dealings, he acquired great tracts of land in Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Cornwall. His land was forfeited at his death but, his son's objections notwithstanding, much of it was regained by John Hawley the elder, a merchant and pirate from Dartmouth who purchased the estates from the Crown. His widow Emma married John Colshull of Cornwall MP.

Thomas Walsingham (died 1422).
He was an English chronicler and is the source of much of the knowledge of the reigns of Richard II, Henry IV and Henry V, and the careers of John Wycliff and Wat Tyler. Walsingham was a Benedictine monk who spent most of his life at St. Albans Abbey, where he was superintendent of the copying room (scriptorium).
His works include Chronicon Angliæ, controversially attacking John of Gaunt, and Ypodigma Neustriæ (Chronicle of Normandy), justifying Henry V's invasion, and dedicated to him in 1419. He is no relation to Sir Francis Walsingham, spymaster to Queen Elizabeth I.

He became a monk at St Albans, where he appears to have passed the whole of his monastic life, excepting a period from 1394 to 1396 during which he was prior of Wymondham Abbey, Norfolk, England, another Benedictine house. At St Albans he was in charge of the scriptorium, or writing room, and he died about 1422.
Walsingham was a native of Norfolk. This is probably an inference from his name, as Walsingham is a village in that county. From an early period he was connected with the abbey of St Albans Abbey at St Albans, Hertfordshire, and was doubtless at school there. An inconclusive passage in his Historia Anglicana has been taken as evidence that he was educated at Oxford. The Abbey of St. Albans, however, maintained particularly close relations with Oxford, sending its novices to be trained at St. Alban Hall and its monks at Gloucester College. It is probable, therefore, that Walsingham was at the university.

Subsequently, as the register book of benefactors of St. Albans Abbey preserved in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, shows, he held in the abbey not only the office of precentor, implying some musical education, but the more important one of scriptorarius, or superintendent of the copying-room. According to the register it was under Thomas de la Mare, who was abbot from 1350 to 1396, that he held these offices.
Before 1388, he compiled a work (Chronica Majora) well known at that date as a book of reference. In 1394, he was of standing sufficient to be promoted to the dignity of Prior of Wymondham.

He ceased to be prior of Wymondham in 1396, and was recalled to St. Albans, where he composed his Ypodigma Neustriæ, or Demonstration of Events in Normandy, dedicated to Henry V, about 1419. His Historia Anglicana, indeed, is carried down to 1422, though it remains a matter of controversy whether the latter portion is from his pen. Nothing further is known of his life. Pits speaks of Walsingham's office of ‘scriptorarius’ at St. Albans Abbey as that of historiographer royal (regius historicus), and as bestowed on Walsingham by the abbot at the instance of the king. This king, according to Bale and Pits, was Henry VI, for both of them assert that Walsingham flourished A.D. 1440. The title of historiographer royal has probably no more basis than Bale's similar story of William Rishanger. Bale makes his case worse by adding that Walsingham was the author of a work styled Acta Henrici Sexti. This is now unknown. If the ‘Chronica Majora’ was written, as must be supposed, at the latest not long after 1380, Walsingham must have been of exceptional age for that period in 1440. It is quite inconceivable that he can have been writing histories after 1461, the virtual close of Henry VI's reign. The Acta regis Henrici Sexti is therefore probably apocryphal, and Bale and Pits have post-dated Walsingham.

John Wrawe (executed 6th May 1382)
A former chaplain from Essex, instead of heading to London he moved north into neighbouring Suffolk to stir up support for the revolt. Guilty of arson, blackmail, theft, and murder, Wrawe and his followers were especially brutal in their methods, and did not seem as ideologically driven as Ball and Tyler. They plundered the Priory of St Edmunds at Bury, stealing priceless treasures then quaffing wine with the proceeds, and murdering the prior, John of Cambridge. They also murdered Sir John Cavendish, Chief Justice of the King’s Bench, for good measure.

On 12 June, Wrawe attacked Sir Richard Lyons' property at Overhall, advancing on to the towns of 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 executed. 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 executed.

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 broke out in Cambridge with the University as its main target, backed up by

the Mayor of Cambridge. 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 agree 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.

As the revolt was suppressed, John Wrawe was captured and 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.

A Forgotten Festival.
The great medieval feast days of the saints were steadily whittled away in England in the course of the Reformation so that little was left of them by the end of Cromwell's Protectorate. One scarcely survived into modern times was evidently important enough in the Middle Ages to have earned the suffix -mas, along with Michaelmas, Hallowmas, Christmas, and Candlemas. This was Martlemas or Martinmas, the principle feast of that early Western saint, Martin of Tours, celebrated throughout Europe on 11th November. By sheer historical coincidence, the date continues to be honoured in present day England as Armistice Day, but the pacifist soldier-saint and monk-bishop is not the object of contemplation in the ritual minute of silence still widely observed thereon.

Suffolk - post rebellion.
After the army's summary justice, followed the judicial retribution. In August Commissions were sent out to the Sheriffs of affected areas to gather the names of the rebels. Lists were drawn up of the principal leaders. The list for London contained 152 names, but Suffolk's list was the 3rd longest, containing 20 names. The lists were soon ready, and the crown established a panel or jury of eight men to use the list in Suffolk as a basis for indictments and trial.

The Suffolk list of twenty names is contained in the Parliament Rolls, Volume 3, page iii. They were:
John Wrawe, Capellanus. (chaplain)
John Talmage. (or Tollemache, an esquire)
Galfrid Denham. (Burgess at Bury)
John Clack of St Edmunds. (labourer, villein of Drinkstone)
Robert de Westbrom of St Edmunds. (mercer or wool merchant, appointed 'King' of Suffolk)
John Cartere alias Robert Warner.
Robert Sad of St Edmunds.
William Benyngton of Bumpstead. (in Essex)
Galfrid Parfay, vicar of All Saints Church in Sudbury.
John Wrawe, formerly parson of Ringsfield Church. (Unclear if this is another Wrawe, or an error of repetition)
Edmund Barbour of Beccles.
John Batisford, parson of Bucklesham Church.
Thomas Sampson. (later pleaded he was forced to act as a leader)
John le Dene, peddere. (ie a peddlar. He was a chapman who sold packets of spices)
James de Bedingfield. (Of knightly class)
Robert Prior of Mendlesham.
Thomas Halsworth of St Edmunds. (Burgess)
Thomas Yoxford of St Edmunds. (Burgess)
Thomas Undirwode of Finchingfield. (in Essex)
Botemor.

Inclusion on this list of ring leaders did not guarantee a death sentence. Neither were some of the eventually executed Suffolk men to be found on the list. Executions known to have been held in Suffolk were as follows:

Executed at Bury St Edmunds
George de Dunsby, one of the Messengers of the Great Society
John Wright
Executed at Mildenhall
John Potter, a fuller from Somersham.
Executed at Hadleigh
Adam Rogers

One other.
Executed at Sudbury
Thomas Fuller of Bures.
Nick Roper of Sudbury.
Adam Bray of Sudbury'
William Pickard of Sudbury.

On November 3rd Parliament was called to Westminster. It was considered that all serious danger of rebellion was now over. The sitting began on November 13th for one month. Their first act was to indemnify Bishop Despencer and all other agents of the crown who dispensed death to the rebels without process of law during the uprising.
Eventually the Commons asked the king to declare a national amnesty for all rebels except for their leaders. This was declared on 14th December 1381. Of the 287 rebels personally excluded from amnesty there were 18 men of Suffolk specifically excluded. The Commons also suggested to the king that six towns should be specifically excluded from the amnesty. These were St. Edmundsbury, Canterbury, Beverley, Scarborough, Bridgewater, and Cambridge. The king did not accept the whole list, and all but St Edmundsbury were allowed to buy a royal pardon by way of a heavy fine. Parliament rolls stated, "The king excludes the burgesses of Bury from his grace, because of their outrageous and horrible misdeeds, long continued, and will not have them share in the general pardon, nor take part in it." This left the inhabitants of Bury in a state of outlawry, an impossible legal position, which was not adjusted until the following year.

Geoffrey or Galfrid Denham, esquire, was included on the first list of Suffolk ringleaders, as shown above, but he escaped execution. However, he was not pardoned until 1388, but only in return for contributing to the Bury town general fine. Hervey of Lackford was pardoned in March 1384. John Clack was pardoned on 6th June 1385. Robert Westbrom was also excluded from the pardon of 1381 but seems to have been pardoned in January 1383. He was apparently still causing trouble in Bury's borough court in 1399.

The 1327 charter was yet again revoked as the monks said it was exacted under duress.

1382. After the Christmas recess, Parliament resumed its sitting on January 27th until February 25th, 1382. In an attempt to suppress the ideas raised by John Ball which had helped to provoke the uprising in 1381, an act of parliament was passed to outlaw heretical preachers and their teachings. Such ideas were described as destructive of the laws and the estate of holy church. So strong was popular support for Lollards that Parliament eventually forced the king to withdraw the law passed to help the arrest of heretics.

John Wrawe, the man blamed for much of the destruction in Suffolk in June 1381, was finally executed on Friday 23rd May 1382.

A new Poll Tax was levied, but in view of the poverty of the country, it was imposed solely upon landowners.

The town of Bury had been in a precarious position since being excluded from the amnesty of December 1381. During 1382 the town was pardoned in return for a fine levied on the town of 2,000 Marks, of which 500 marks was to be allocated to the abbey as compensation. Of the six towns originally indicted, this left only Bury St Edmunds to face a heavy financial penalty because it was considered to be the worst case of rebellion in the country.

Not all the money could be raised at once, so the main burgesses at Bury were told to appoint a 24-man commission under the alderman to collect the money. As usual, they tried to squeeze it all out of the less well-off and less influential of their fellow townspeople. The poor appealed to the King's Sergeant for relief, and he had to send in two bailiffs to enforce some sort of fair play. Even two of the 24 commissioners were so outraged that they supported the lesser folk's demands.

John of Lydgate was taken into the almonry school of the abbey at Bury, as a young boy of about 12 years old. He would become a monk by 1389, and then one of the greatest poets of the next century.

By 1382 the old Manor of Kanewella at Long Melford was now called the manor of Lutons and was the property of Katherine Mylde. In about 1382 she married Thomas Clopton, and Kentwell Manor, as it is now called, started a long association with the Clopton family. Thomas Clopton died a year later, but left Katherine with a son, William Clopton. He died in 1446 but by then he would build a whole new section on Melford Church, now called the Kentwell Aisle.

1383. King Richard II made a pilgrimage to Walsingham to visit the shrine to the Blessed Virgin Mary. On the way he also visited the shrine of St Edmund at Bury. He adopted St Edmund as one of his personal royal patron saints, along with St Edward the Confessor and St John the Baptist. These saints would feature in the famous Wilton Diptych, or two panelled portable alter piece produced for King Richard II's personal use in around 1395. St George was much more popular on the Continent than in England at this time, although he was gradually later adopted as the sole patron saint of the country.

King Richard II and his Queen spent 10 days at the Abbey of St Edmunds, costing the Abbey over 800 marks.

The collection of the fine levied on the town of Bury for their part in the Peasants Revolt was still being extracted from the people. The distribution of the burden continued to be a source of complaint.

Things got worse when a new abbot, John Tymworth, was installed as he demanded the customary 100 marks from the town upon his inauguration. The king had to intervene to ensure that the better off also took a share of the load. Collection seems to have taken several years, well into 1385 or 1386.

There is some evidence that after the rising of 1381, and its subsequent repression, that the abbey of St Edmund exerted its manorial rights with renewed vigour. Edgar Powell quotes the manor of Barton Parva, whose income was owned by the Cellarer of the abbey. The court rolls show a small manor within it was held by Sir John Shardelow. He was a knight and chevalier who had to render service of 15 precariae each autumn. One precarious was a day's work, which the tenants of some Manors were bound to give the Lord at Harvest time. William R. Long writes "Why these days are called a precariae is not altogether certain unless by not doing the work one could get thrown off the land- i.e., one's tenure would be precarious."

Service at harvest time was one of the old labour dues which villeins had to suffer. Sir John had failed to provide this service for 30 years. Hitherto the matter had been noted that a fine was due, and no further action taken. In 1383 the Cellarer decided to distrain upon Shardelow's goods. Two of his horses were seized and he was ordered to pay 28 years of arrears. The rolls end at this point so the outcome is unclear, but the continued enforcement of such rights was the type of grievance which had led to the revolt in 1381.

1384. John Wycliffe died. He had been leader of the Lollards and had demanded religious reform.

At Bury the burgesses had still not yet paid off the last of their fine of 2,000 marks arising from the rebellion of 1381. They were now compelled to put up a pledge that they would never again engage in sedition. This pledge or bail was set at the enormous sum of £10,000, more than the value of the whole town. A list of 722 names were made personally responsible for this pledge, probably every householder in the town.

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