

# The Peasants' Revolt

England, 1381





# Why did the Peasants' Revolt?

**By the end of the lesson, you will be able to...**

- **Explain** why the peasants revolted
- **Examine** what happened before the revolt
- **Evaluate** which reason was the most important in making the peasants revolt

# Why did the peasants revolt?

What does this peasant tell you about how he felt life had changed?

Look at me, I survived the **plague** when many did not.

Why should I be afraid of the lord of the manor when I faced down King Death!

I want more **money** to farm the lord's land, I want to pay **lower rent** and I want more **freedom**.

If the lord does not agree I'll walk away. After all, there are others who need men to work – perhaps they will not be as silly!







# Why did the peasants revolt?

Kings were used to the threat of rebellion, it was almost part of the job, but they tended to be from barons or lords, not from the ordinary people!

## Until 1381.



In 1381 the peasants of England were angry and threatened to revolt and cause trouble for the king.

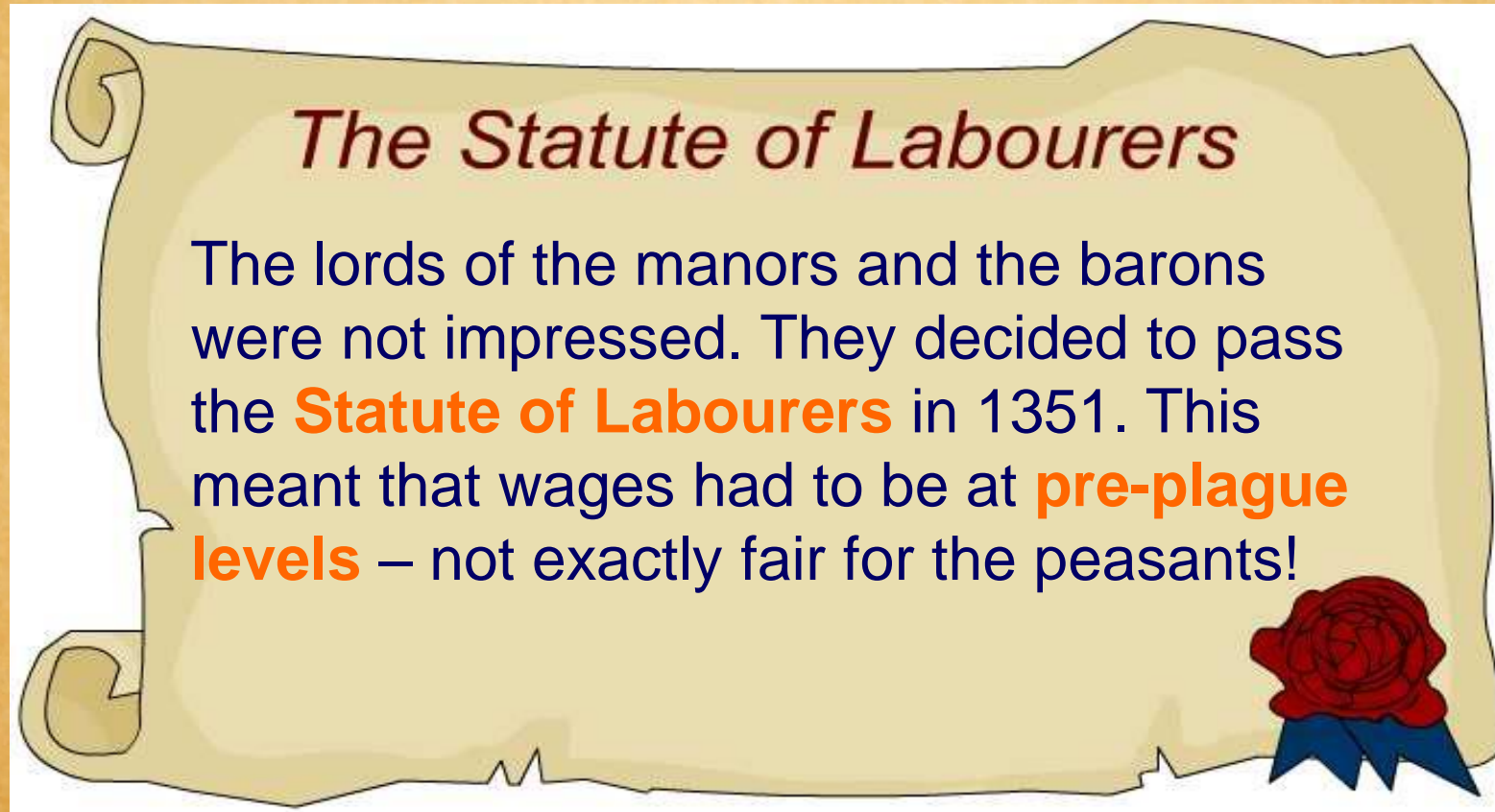
**What made them want to revolt?...**



# Why did the peasants revolt?

Not everyone was in favour of the peasant having the power to ask for higher wages and better standards of living.

Who do **you** think might disagree with the peasants?





# Why did the peasants revolt?

There were also **changes in beliefs**. Many who had survived the plague decided that religion should change too!

One new idea was **sharing the wealth**. The Church said it was God's will that there be rich and poor – the peasants didn't think that this was very fair!



If you think the situation was bad then, it gets worse ... for the peasants, that is. In 1377 King Richard decided to try out a new tax called the **poll tax**.

How might these new ideas make the peasants revolt?



# Why did the peasants revolt?

Under the **poll tax** everyone paid the same, regardless of how rich/poor they were.



This meant that if you were a peasant you would pay the same amount as the lord you worked for. How would that make you feel?



Men such as **John Ball** gave sermons (speeches) to ordinary people, saying that the answer was to go to the king and say that they were being treated unfairly.



# Do they speak the truth?

A lord and a peasant will tell you an opinion. You have to decide whether they are telling the truth!



START

Truth

Lie





# Why did the peasants revolt?

## The poll tax

The introduction of the poll tax was the final straw for the peasants, who saw it as the rich trying to make the lives of the poor even harder.



Few peasants could afford the tax. When officials came round they hid or lied about the number in their family. So many peasants avoided paying that in 1381 commissioners were sent out to catch tax dodgers.

Would you have avoided the tax if you had lived then?

If so, what would have been your reason?



## Why were the peasants so fed up?

Before the Black Death, there were lots of workers about. If I didn't work for low wages, there was always someone who would. Now there are far fewer peasants and the lords have to pay me what I ask for. If they don't, there is no one who will do the work! But this new law says I can't earn more money than before the Black Death, and if I ask for more money I will be arrested!

I'm not scared of hard work, but I don't know why I should work for free! I have to work on my lord's land for a couple of days a week and I get nothing for it. This **Work Service** is the law and the lord records all of the hours that I do. If I don't work, I will be arrested!

Never mind the low wages and the Work Service, my problem is the poll tax! The king needs money to pay for his war with France and this year he wants 5 pennies off everybody - rich or poor. Last year it was 1 penny and I struggled to pay that.



**... I'M A PEASANT - AND I'M FED UP WITH THE KING! ...**



# Why did the peasants revolt?

How important do you think each of the causes of the revolt were?

1. Increased confidence after the plague
2. Fear of losing new rights gained after the plague
3. Wanting to keep and make more money
4. New ideas about sharing the wealth
5. Hatred of the poll tax





# TASK

Which reason do you think was the most important for making the peasant's revolt? You are to evaluate which reason you think was the most important with reasons why.



**Evaluate** which reason was the most important in making the peasants revolt



# TASK: SHARE

You are to turn to the person beside or behind you and share your evaluation with them.



**Evaluate** which reason was the most important in making the peasants revolt



# Who was involved?

The rebellions started among peasants in Essex and Kent. The two main leaders were **John Ball** and **Wat Tyler**.



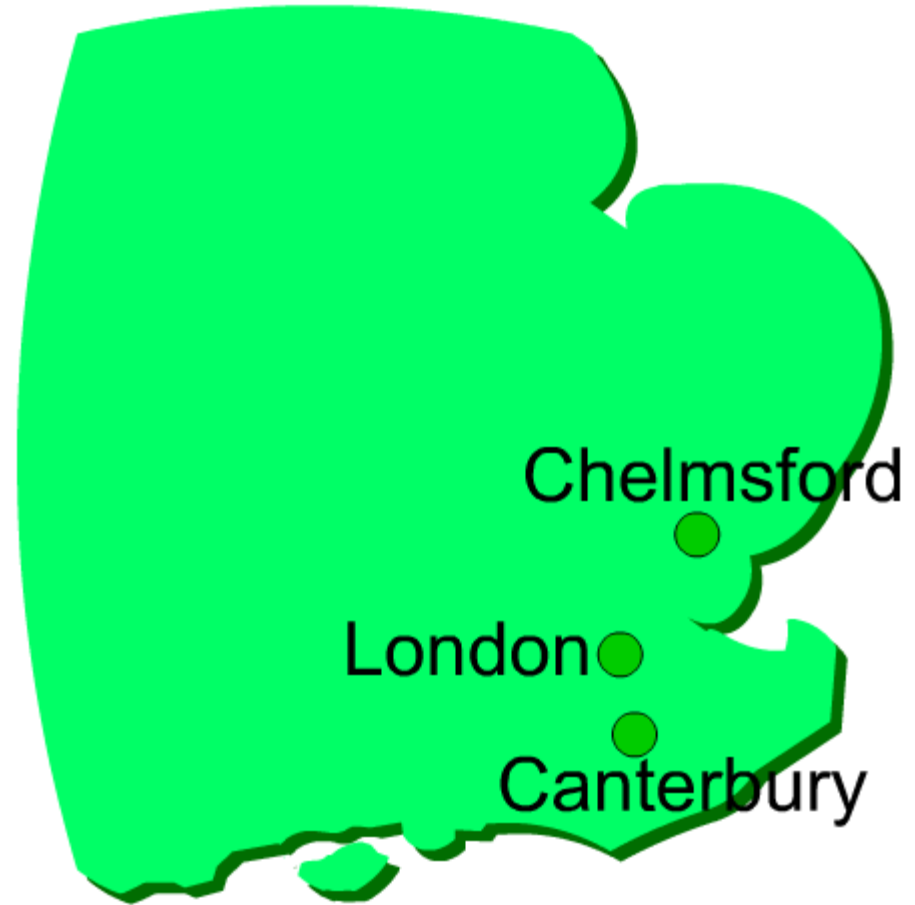
**John Ball** had started out as a priest in York, but had been thrown into prison by the Church as it did not like what he was preaching.



**Wat Tyler** was chosen by the rebels to lead them. Little is known about him.



# What happened?





# The Peasants' Demands:



## The peasants demanded:

- **The end of serfdom** (being tied to the land)
- That everyone who had taken part in the rebellion should be given a **free pardon**
- That **labour services should be abolished**, and landholders should pay a low, fixed rent
- That the king's **advisers should be punished**.

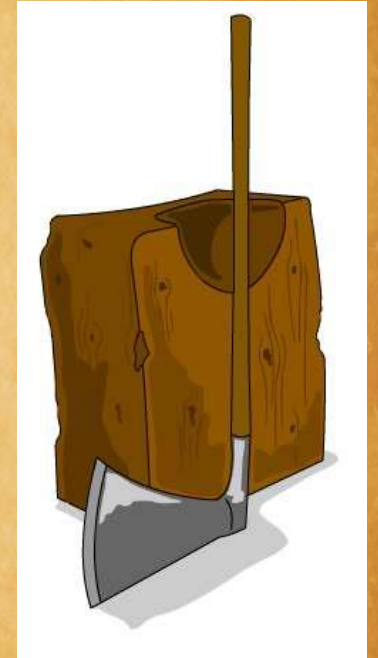
King Richard was only 14 years old at the time.  
Why do you think the rebels did not blame him for their problems?



# The London Riots

On 14 June the king agreed to have charters written granting the peasants' requests, except the one regarding punishment of his advisers.

Most of the Essex villagers went home, but some of those from Kent went to the Tower of London and executed the chancellor, treasurer and two others. Riots occurred throughout London.



The King invited the rebels to meet him again at Smithfield.



## Events at Smithfield

Imagine how Richard must have felt seeing the riots in London.

He probably thought his short life as king was pretty much over, but in the end it was rebel leader Wat Tyler who ended up dead!

No one for sure knows what happened. Some historians say Wat insulted the king and was killed by the **Mayor of London**. Other historians say it was planned all along that he would be killed – **an assassination!**



## After the revolt

As soon as the rebels had left, the King started to break the promises he had made. Rebels were rounded up and executed. John Ball was found and his head was cut off and displayed on a spike on London's Bridge.

**The King's words to the peasants he caught, according to Thomas Walsingham:**

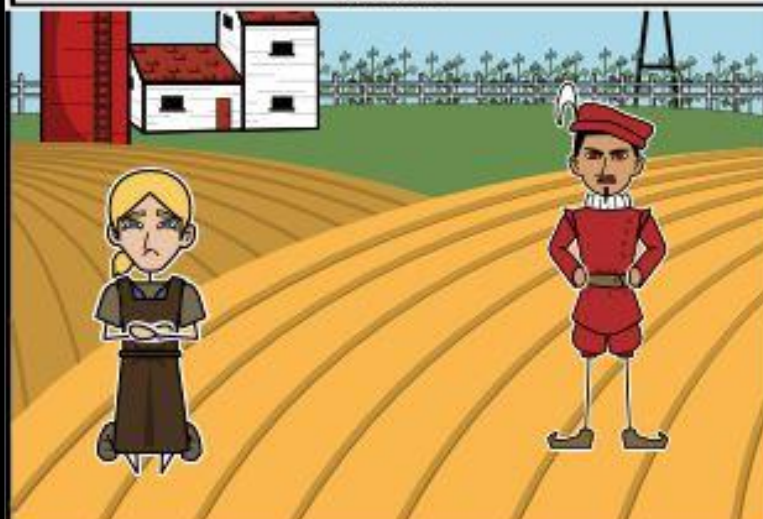
“Oh you wretched men ... Villeins you were and villeins you shall remain”.



the black death happened and some people survived



the people who survived had to work for half as much as they did before the black death



There was a long war in France which cost a lot of money. The peasants were very angry when in 1381 Richard II introduced a Poll Tax that made everyone pay 5p which was a great deal of money for them.

Many peasants had to work for free on church land which made it difficult to grow enough food for their families. They wanted an end to this burden and were supported by a priest called John Ball.



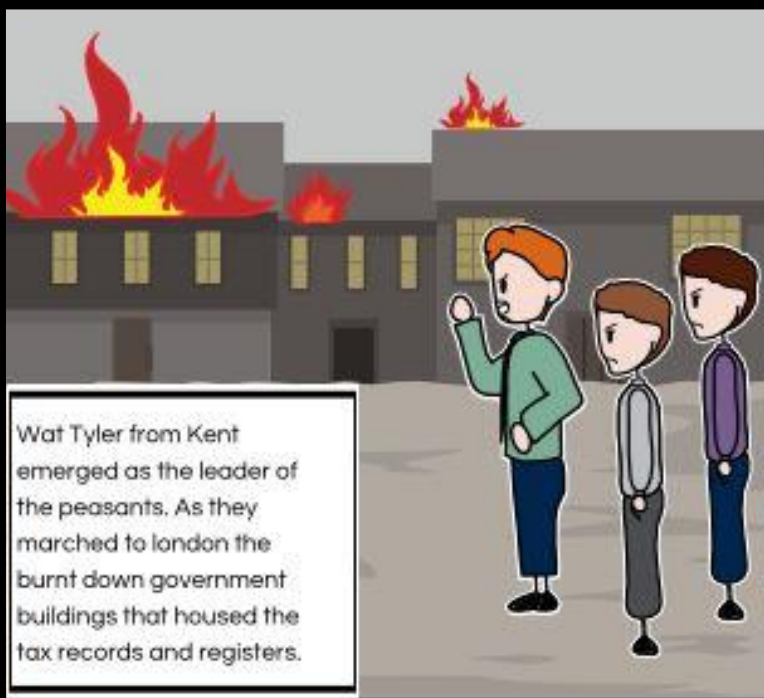
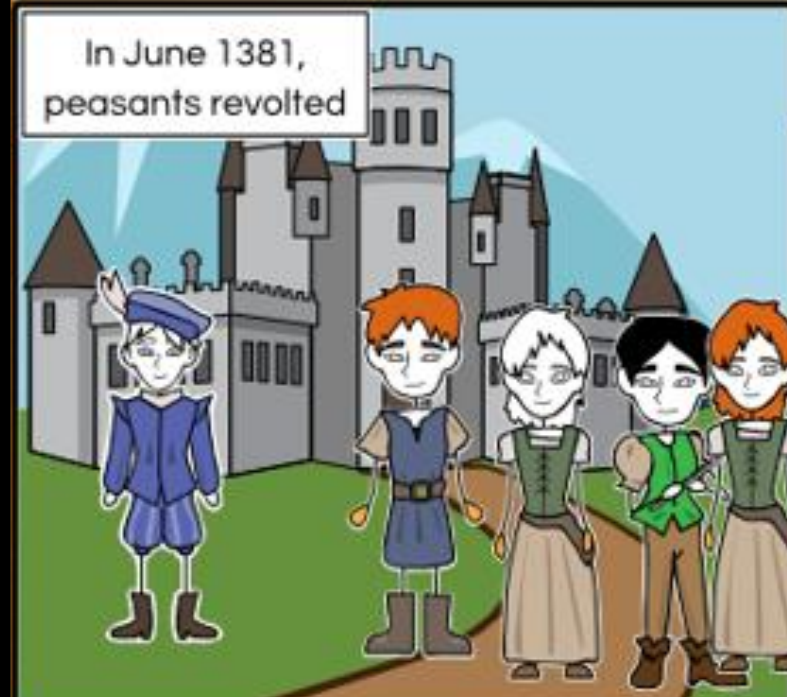
John Ball, a priest, offered his support



Sir it is time to pay your taxes to the king for the war against France.

Again! but I cannot even afford food for this month. Please have mercy!







After the murder of the Archbishop and Treasurer, they met again at Smithfield



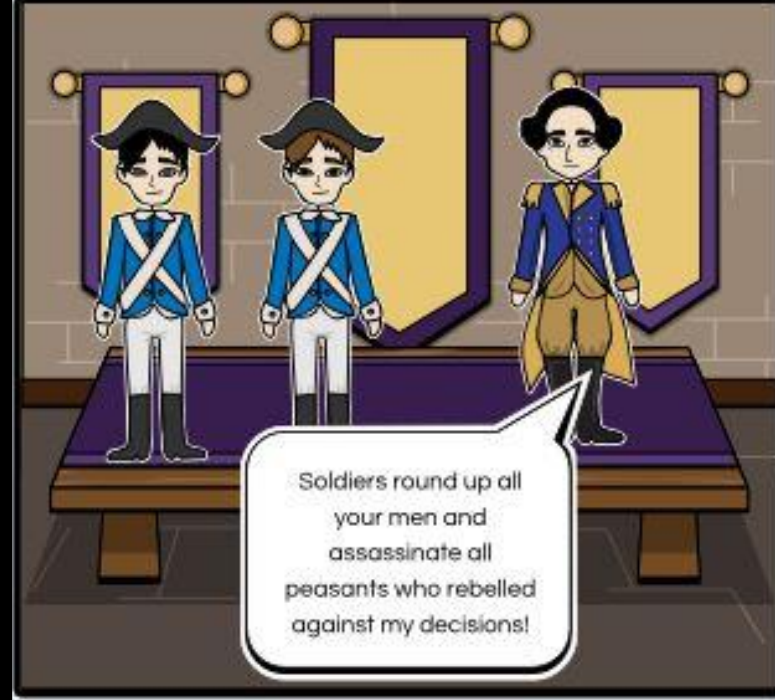
please keep the scum out of the city Sire

Thankyou!

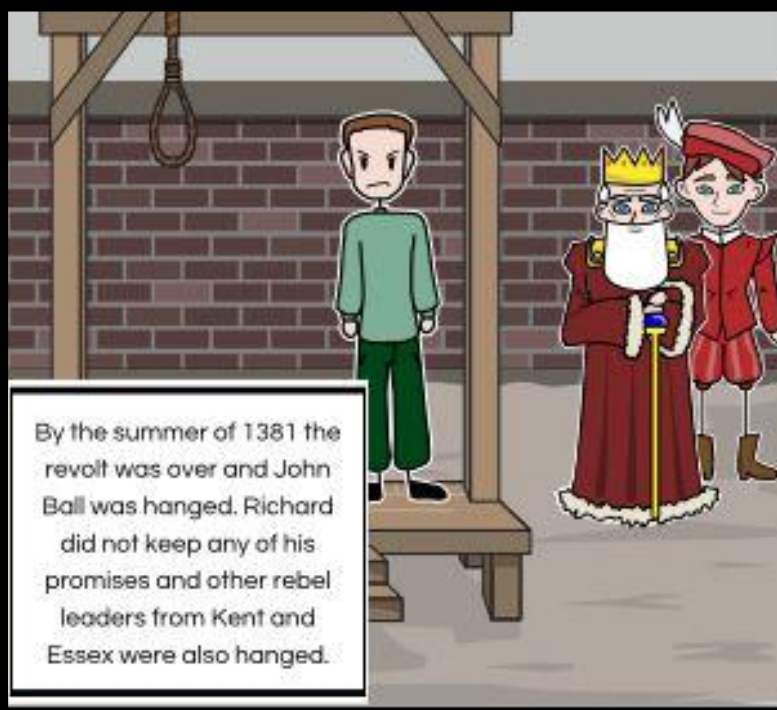


Well Done!

On 15th June, the young 14-year-old King ordered Wat Tyler to be called to learn his wishes. He had, secretly ordered William Walworth, the Lord Mayor of London to kill Wat Tyler.



Soldiers round up all your men and assassinate all peasants who rebelled against my decisions!



By the summer of 1381 the revolt was over and John Ball was hanged. Richard did not keep any of his promises and other rebel leaders from Kent and Essex were also hanged.

I am still a peasant. That King is a liar! Help!



However the Lords did not have it all their own way, due to the shortage of labour caused by The Black Death, the peasants asked for more money to do the harvesting and the lords had no choice but to pay it.



Introduction of the  
poll tax

Peasants felt the rich were taking from  
them with no good reason.

Death of W

work the land,  
er treated.

The Black

er and left

John B  
speeches

were being  
rich.

Click on an event on the  
left and then click on the  
outcome of that event on  
the right to link them.

**start**





# 1. What did the Statute of Labourers do?

Made it law to honour the king.

Cut peasant wages.

Introduced a tax on everyone.

Created a peasant criminal register.





