

How far did the Black Death change the Medieval World?

KS3 History - Lesson 3 of 4

Enquiry: How far did the Black Death change the Medieval World?

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Peasants

The Black Death caused a shortage of workers to farm the nobles' land. This meant the peasants' farming skills were now in high demand. This gave peasants more power. The peasants could ask for more pay knowing that if the nobles disagreed, then they risked having a poor harvest. As their wealth improved, peasants enjoyed having more spare time. In Walsham, the nobles reported seeing more peasants drinking in **alehouses**, gambling and organising football matches. Peasants were even spotted pretending to be nobles by going hunting. Events like this appeared to challenge the feudal system. The overall quality of life for surviving peasants improved following the Black Death.



Nobility

Many nobles grew angry as the peasants started to stand up for themselves. Some peasants in Walsham had broken their oath of loyalty to Lady Rose as they stopped farming her land. Instead some of the peasants had joined William Ward in walking to nearby villages in search of higher pay for their hard work. The nobles also suffered as crime rates increased. Not only did Lady Rose lose her workers but her grain was stolen by greedy (hungry) peasants. Before the Black Death, the local **reeve** would have found the criminals and punished them, however, the old reeve had died of the disease and the new one was inexperienced. This lack of law and order made the nobles aware that their authority over the peasants had weakened.



The Church

To prevent the Black Death from reaching Walsham the church told people to confess their sins to God so that they would be spared. Yet even as people prayed for forgiveness they were still not spared as 750-900 people in Walsham died of the disease. This caused some people to question the Church. Why had the Church failed to save them from God's punishment? Some peasants went against the Church's teachings to gain God's protection. People used **supernatural** methods, as they turned to magic and omens for safety. Others joined the **Brotherhood of Flagellants** who asked for God's forgiveness by whipping themselves rather than praying in church.



Glossary

Alehouses – A pub/ public house, somewhere that can sell alcohol.

Reeve – An important peasant who made sure everyone followed the rules given by the nobility.

Supernatural – Something that cannot be explained by science or nature. Supernatural remedies include reading out spells or wearing lucky charms.

Brotherhood of Flagellants – A group that went against the Church's teachings by saying that you can only avoid the Black Death if you show God you are willing to punish yourself for your sins. They travelled throughout Europe, violently whipping themselves for forgiveness.



Comprehension Questions

1. What could peasants spend more time doing after the Black Death?
(Choose at least three)
2. Why did the worker shortage increase peasants' power?
3. What did William Ward encourage peasants to do?
4. In what ways was the feudal system being challenged after the Black Death?
5. How did the Church's power change following the Black Death?

