

KS3 History

Lesson 1 of an enquiry of 4 lessons

What were the causes of the Peasants' Revolt?

Enquiry: How big a threat was the Peasants' Revolt to the power of monarchs?

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Overview of England in the fourteenth century.

England changed massively during the fourteenth century. Kings and barons were in competition over who had power over what. England entered The Hundred Years War against France. Furthermore, the population of England fell dramatically as a result of the Black Death. All these changes contributed to the feudal system beginning to change under pressure.



Consequences of the Black Death

It is believed that around one third of England's population died during the Black Death. Before the Black Death there had been too many mouths to feed. After the Black Death there were houses left empty and fields left bare. Lords desperately needed labourers to come and work their land. They were even willing to offer pay to work. The Black Death affected how much money the lord's had so things had to change.

The **Statute of Labourers** was created in Parliament. **Labourers** now had to accept the wages and working conditions of 1348. This was before the Black Death. This meant peasants had more work to do but lower or no wages. Any peasant found breaking the law would be jailed.



War

To make matters worse a new tax was introduced. It was called the Poll Tax and was created to fund the war with France. The king, Richard II, was only fourteen years old so was too young to rule. This meant he had a **regency council**. This was led by his uncle, John of Gaunt. John had fought alongside Richard's grandfather against the french. He had seen English armies crush the French. The war in France had helped to make some of the barons very rich from **plunder**. As a result, the barons wanted the war to continue despite the fact that things were going badly. To pay for the war, the regency council needed to raise taxes.



Money

The peasants wanted higher wages or to be paid for working their lord's land. Some lords were doing everything to stop this. Some were willing to use their own courts to keep wages low for the peasants. This made the peasants poorer..

The problems facing the peasants grew steadily worse. In 1381, the **Poll Tax** was demanded at a higher rate. The Poll tax was first created in 1377, by John of Gaunt. Anyone over fourteen had to pay it. With little money, the peasants' anger at being forced to lose what little money they still had finally spilled over. Some began to attack the tax officials or refuse to pay. The revolt had begun!



Glossary

Statute of Labourers - The law forcing peasants to work for the same pay and conditions from 1348, before the Black Death.

Labourer - Someone who worked the land. Most labourers were peasants.

Poll Tax - A tax paid by all. In 1381, this was to be paid by anyone over fourteen.

Regency council - A council of lords that helped rule England until the king was old enough to do it himself.

Plunder - Valuable goods stolen when an army captures a village, town or city.



Comprehension Questions

1. After the Black Death, what did the peasants want?
2. How did the lords try to reduce wages?
3. What was the name of the tax that was collected in 1381?
4. What caused taxes to rise?
5. Who was John of Gaunt?

Extension:

What was the most important cause of the Peasants' Revolt?

