

The Survivors and Land Ownership

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

KS3 History - Lesson 3 of 4

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New Landholders

Some peasants in Walsham were lucky enough to be **landholders**. Landholders did not have to farm the noble's land but could make their own money from farming their land and selling the crops and animals on it. When the Black Death hit Walsham, however, many of these landholders died. The land was then **inherited** by a relative. Some peasants went from being happy to receive just a penny or two for a day's work to inheriting **acres** of land and having many animals to look after. This would have brought a lot of wealth to some villagers as they gained new land to farm. In Walsham, Nicholas Deneys gained 15.5 **acres** of land and a cottage from losing his relatives to the Black Death, making him a very wealthy landholder.



Landless Peasants

Some Walsham villagers remained landless either through choice or bad luck. These landless peasants still needed to work on other people's land to earn their living as they had done before the Black Death. These landless peasants, however, still benefited from surviving the Black Death because there were fewer workers. Resultantly, the nobles paid higher wages to attract people to farm their land. The wage increase meant that the landless peasants could now earn the same amount working 3-4 days a week compared to 5-6 days before the Black Death. Plus, with less people in Walsham, farming could now easily feed everyone. Food became cheaper and the landless peasants enjoyed more expensive foods like meat and cheese.



However...

Many members of the **nobility** panicked that peasants were gaining too much wealth after surviving the Black Death. Those at the top of the **feudal system** felt they could be overthrown if the peasants at the bottom started to become wealthier and rise up the ranks. The King tried to stop peasants gaining power by issuing the **Ordinance** of Labourers in June 1349. The King told peasants to work whenever it was needed and that wages could not go any higher than wages used 5-6 years before the Black Death. Some peasants had enjoyed some consequences of the Black Death, but they would remain at the bottom of the **feudal system**.



Glossary

Nobility – The second wealthiest group in the feudal system that owned a lot of land that peasants rented and farmed.

Landholders - Someone that holds land and makes their living from working the land and/or renting it out to others.

Inherited – Where a relative receives (money/ land) due to the owner dying.

Acre – A large measurement of land (about $\frac{2}{3}$ the size of a football pitch).

Feudal System – How different groups in the Medieval Period were organised based on power.

Ordinance – A rule or law given by the King.



Comprehension Questions

1. What caused some peasants to become landholders?
2. What was the law called that stopped peasants gaining too much wealth?
3. Why did gaining more land improve life for the peasants?
4. Why did landless peasants still benefit from surviving the Black Death?
5. How did the Black Death threaten to disrupt the feudal system?

