

Peasants' Revolt

- 1.** In 1381 there was a rebellion by the peasants against King Richard II. Richard was only 14 years old at the time of the revolt. The peasants were angry with him for several reasons. Read about why it happened and what happened.

Why it happened

- a.** Peasants wanted freedom from their lords. They wanted to rent land from their lord and be paid to work on it. They did not want to be part of the feudal system any more. The lords didn't like this and fought to stop it.
- b.** The Church owned a lot of land and they didn't want peasants to have their freedom. Peasants began to criticise the Church for having too much money.
- c.** Some people, such as John Ball, a priest in Kent encouraged the peasants to rebel by telling them that they were being unfairly treated and ought to be treated equally with everyone else.
- d.** Long wars against France had been going on for nearly 50 years. They always meant suffering for the peasants who had to pay big taxes they could not afford to fund the wars. This made them angry.
- e.** In 1380, Richard II invented a new tax called the poll tax. Everyone over the age of 15 had to pay 4p whether they were rich or poor. The peasants could not afford to pay their taxes so they refused. Villagers chased away the tax collectors so the king sent soldiers to collect the taxes instead. Whole villages got together and threw the soldiers off their lands in a revolt against the tax.
- f.** The Black Death had killed so many peasants. Those who survived were able to ask for higher wages. In 1351 a new law was passed that said no peasant could be paid more than they had earned before the Black Death. Anyone who asked for higher wages would be branded with a red-hot poker.
- g.** In 1377 Richard II became king. He was only 10 years old and could not run the country without help. The peasants felt that his advisers did nothing to help them at all which made them angry.

What happened

Hundreds of angry peasants marched from Kent to London and captured the Tower of London. They murdered the Archbishop of Canterbury and the treasurer and then demanded to meet the king.

The peasants met King Richard at Smithfield and demanded to know why they were being forced to pay taxes they could not afford. The peasants stood in a crowd and their leader, Wat Tyler, went forward to speak to the king. Tyler was given a jug of water by the king's men and took a drink, but he spat it out again because he thought it might have been poisoned.

The king thought Tyler might try to kill him so he ordered his soldiers to surround Tyler and the Mayor of London murdered him with his sword. The king told the peasants to return to their villages, promising them that he would think about their complaints and that they would be safe. When they returned home, however, they realised the king had betrayed them and broken his promises. The king's soldiers immediately hanged everyone who had taken part in the revolt from a tree.

2. Draw a spider diagram that shows the causes of the Peasants' Revolt. Write the long-term causes in a different colour from the short-term causes.
3. Answer the following questions in full sentence answers.

Who did the rebels kill when they reached London?

Where did the peasants meet the King?

Who murdered Wat Tyler and why?

Why do you think the King lied to the peasants?

4. Imagine you are a peasant called John in the year 1380. You suspect there might be a rebellion soon and decide to write a letter to the king to warn him that unless he does something about the peasants' complaints his life might be in danger. Tell him how bad your life is as a peasant and explain why you think he should do something about it.