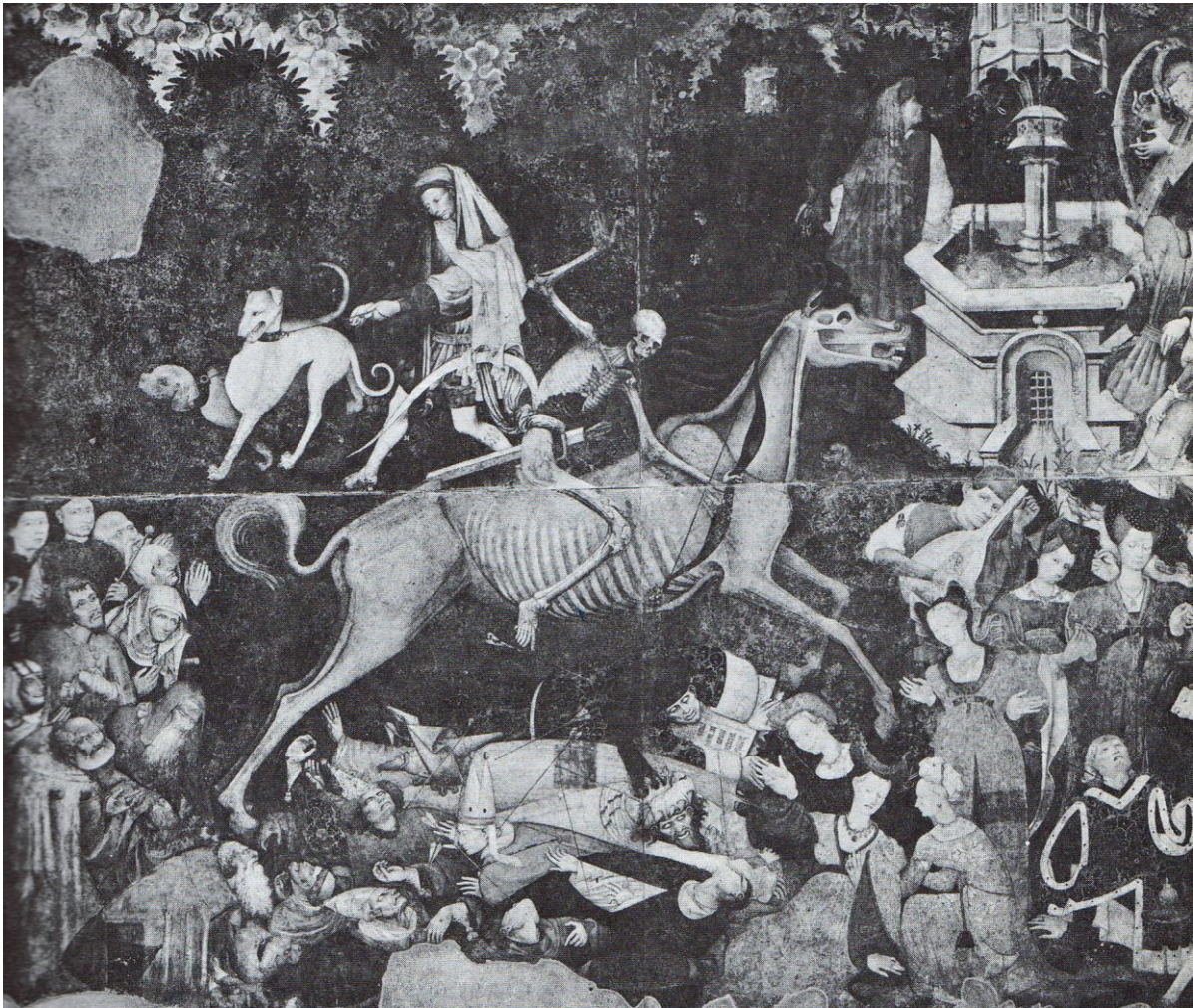


## The Black Death, Economic and Social Change and the Great Rising of 1381 in Hertfordshire



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Cover

*'Death rode as triumphantly over nobles and churchmen as the poor'*

(Mansell Collection)

Introduction

*'for who would have believed that such rustics, and inferior ones at that, would have dared enter the chamber of the king and his mother with their filthy sticks; rebels who had formerly belonged to the most lowly condition of serf went in and out like lords; and swineherds set themselves above knights'*<sup>1</sup>

England's first great rebellion erupted in June 1381; a fourteen-year-old King Richard 11 and his nobles came within a hairsbreadth of being overthrown; Sudbury his Chancellor and Archbishop of Canterbury was murdered; Hales, his Treasurer suffered the same fate. Across the south east of England, 'king's men' such as County Sheriffs and Escheators were captured and executed, manors were ransacked and legal documents were destroyed. Walsingham<sup>2</sup> simply could not understand what had happened.

Acts of rebellion erupted right across the country, as far apart as Cornwall and northeast England but it was the people of the southeast counties and London who nearly brought the government down. Rebel leaders in East Anglia and Kent raised thousands of supporters, attacked manors and prisons, marched and rode substantial distances during the two weeks of the rising, before arriving in London and surrounding the city. Sympathisers in London opened the gates of the city allowing them to enter. The Savoy, John of Gaunt's home, the Temple, the centre of the legal system and other property was ransacked; the Fleet prison was stormed and the Tower occupied; it was only the concessions made by the king at Mile End together with the execution of Wat Tyler at Blackheath that concluded the so-called Peasants Revolt.

What drove medieval people to such desperation that they felt they had no other course of action other than revolt? Was this a spontaneous reaction to a perceived injustice or a desperate response to years of simmering resentment? What were people trying to achieve that was so important that they were prepared to risk their lives, their belongings and those of their families? Were the rebels' objectives really the same or did some use the rising as an opportunity to pursue their own ends?

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Walsingham, *Chronicon Angliae*, ed. E M Thomson, (Rolls Series 1874)

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Walsingham was a monk of St Albans and one of the foremost Chroniclers of the time. His *Chronicon Angliae* is one of the significant accounts of the Rising.

Who were these 'peasants', country yokels, illiterate hotheads, people with nothing to lose or people of some standing prepared to face the ultimate sanction?

Historians have different views about the reasons for the Rising and Dobson's wry comment that 'the Peasants Revolt remains and should remain a 'free for all, a topic upon which every reader can come to their own conclusions...' <sup>3</sup> suggests that no definitive analysis might ever be agreed upon. Yet the Rising deserves continuing analysis particularly as historiography progresses beyond the traditional texts and chronicles of the time.

This paper examines two propositions as a contribution to this history. First that the demographic consequences of the Black Death of 1348/9 (and its successor visitations) created the conditions for the emergence of a new economic and social order and that it was a determination to achieve political freedom to secure these gains that finally drove people to rebellion. Second, that the Rising in Hertfordshire had similar characteristics and objectives to the national uprising but that it also had its own social and political dynamics that drove the rebellion in the county 1381.

For some historians, the reason for the Rising was bad governance, the poor prosecution of the 100 years war and financial corruption. For some, the non-conformist teachings of Wycliffe were a significant factor; others argue that the levy of the third poll tax and the crude and oppressive work of the Poll Tax Commissioners in Essex was the spark that ignited the protest. Some argue that it was a 'dash for freedom', 'the fundamental grievance being the bonds of villeinage and the lack of legal and political rights of rural people, bound by duties of servitude.' <sup>4</sup> Others argue that villeinage was a social structure, more in name than reality and that 'the Revolt was a very mild affair.' <sup>5</sup>

Modern historiography accepts that single explanations are usually not good enough to explain complex issues; this paper therefore examines the Rising from a multi disciplinary perspective, something that 'unites the historian, the economist, the

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<sup>3</sup> R B Dobson, *The Peasants Revolt of 1381*, Macmillan Books, 1983, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, p xix

<sup>4</sup> Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror, The Calamitous 14<sup>th</sup> Century*, Penguin Books, 1980, p 373

<sup>5</sup> A Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism*, Oxford 1978, p185

political scientist, the anthropologist, the sociologist and agriculturalist in a common interest.<sup>6</sup> The paper considers five perspectives.

First, that the economic effects of the Black Death and its subsequent visitations in 1361/2 and 1369/70 created a 'tipping point'<sup>7</sup> which ultimately led to the Rising. The economic changes which followed the plague allowed people to significantly improve their personal economic positions to such an extent that, a generation later, they were willing to take up arms to protect those gains.

Second, that economic change led to the emergence of a different social structure. The disease visited itself on the country for the first time in the autumn of 1348. Fifty percent or more of the population perished. The new demographic profile reflected a society that had reaped the benefits of economic change to create a new social order.

Third, that the Rising was an overt political act, a determination to achieve political changes to secure the new economic and social order.

Fourth, that the attacks on the legal profession was evidence of a determination to wreck the systems of social control which threatened their new found freedoms. The evidence from Essex and Kent in particular suggests rebels destroyed specific manorial records, (documents sealed with green wax)<sup>8</sup> as a way of destroying evidence of their villeinage status. The capture and execution of Sheriffs and Escheators (as representatives of a repressive legal system) was carried out with great coordination.

Finally, that definitions of 'peasant' do little to describe the actual participants of the Rising and that by understanding who and what the rebels were gives its own understanding of why they were prepared to rise against the government.

Sources vary in their reliability and availability. The early chronicler's records are arguably unreliable yet their very availability forms a starting point for assessing the

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<sup>6</sup> Hilton, Rodney, 'Medieval Peasants-any lessons?' *Journal of Peasant Studies* (1) 1974

<sup>7</sup> Malcolm Gladwell *The Tipping Point*, Abacus, 2003; Gladwell's proposition is that a tipping point is 'that moment when ideas, trends and behaviours cross a threshold, tip and spread like wildfire'; something sets off a 'domino effect' which may be deliberate or not, but which results in significant and unpredictable change.

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Brookes, 'The Organisation and Achievements of the Peasants of Kent and Essex in 1381', in *Studies in Medieval History*, ed Harting and Moore, Hambledon Press, 1985, p260

events under discussion. Walsingham, Knighton, Froissart, Reville and the Anonimale Chronicle all provide their own interpretations of the events yet significant criticism has been levelled at their accounts of the Rising.<sup>9</sup> Other records offer a somewhat more accurate picture. Data on tax records is found in formal documents such as calendars of close rolls and calendars of fine rolls. Evidence of whom the rebels were and where they were from together with accounts of the damage wrought during the Rising are found in King's Bench records, trespass records and other indictments. Records providing information about the working of the economic system, prices and wages, are found in manorial records although their availability is variable. Records from Essex and Suffolk, for example, provide a rich source of data; Stitt's analysis of the manors of Wymondley and Tomkin's analysis of the records of Park help set a Hertfordshire context.

Demographic, economic, social, legal, and political evidence therefore forms the framework of this analysis. The analysis is predicated on the proposition that no Rising of this scale and ferocity would happen without a series of events building pressure up to crisis proportions. The Black Death was the starting point.

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Strohm for one suggests the chronicles employ a broad range of strategies designed to discredit the social standing, judgement and objectives of the rebels at every level of representation. Paul Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow, The Social Imagination of 14<sup>th</sup> century Texts*, Princeton University Press (1992) p 34

## King Death

*'The beginning of the plague was in 1350 minus one, wretched, fierce, violent pestilence...only the dregs of the population live to tell the tale'<sup>10</sup>*

The stone carver's despair at Ashwell Church in Hertfordshire is obvious and many would have agreed with him but there are also those who argue that the arrival of the plague was also an opportunity for survivors to improve their lives. Bridbury for one suggests that 'so much of the rural population was surplus by the 14<sup>th</sup> century that the famines of 1315-17 and the mid-century pestilences of 1348-49 were more purgative than toxic.'<sup>11</sup> He introduces us to a century 'of violent contrasts which witnessed in the unprecedented famines and epidemics an assault on the social system which was infinitely deadlier than any, which it has sustained..., by way of military loss or political subversion. Yet the result was to inaugurate a century of prosperity for the vast majority of the population, the like of which was not known again for generations to come.'<sup>12</sup>

The Black Death first swept through England during the later months of 1348 and the first part of 1349. It left behind devastated villages, manors, towns, monasteries and churches. It was indiscriminate in its attack; rich and poor, young and old fell foul of the disease. Mortality rates varied across the country but an average of 40-50% appears to be an accepted figure for all deaths. Data from Durham, for example, shows that out of 28 communities which had an overall loss of 50%, 2 had death rates of 30%, 8 had death rates of between 50-59% and 8 had death rates of 60%+ and the remainder above these levels.<sup>13</sup> The reduction in tenants on the estates of the Bishop of Worcester was as high as 76% in Bidbury, and 80% in Aston.<sup>14</sup> Poos' analysis of four Essex communities shows that in Market Roding, average mortality was 25%, in Great Waltham, it was 44%, at Clatham Hall, it was 44% and at High Easter, it reached 54%.<sup>15</sup> Data such as this indicates the absolute devastation

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<sup>10</sup> Bruce Dickens, *Historical Graffiti in V Pritchard, Hertfordshire, English Medieval Graffiti*, Cambridge University Press 1967, p 181

<sup>11</sup> A R Bridbury 'The Black Death', *Economic History Review*, 26, 1973, p591

<sup>12</sup> Ibid p577

<sup>13</sup> Richard Lomas, 'The Black Death in County Durham', *Journal of Medieval History* 15, 1989, p 129-130

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Dyer, *Lords and Peasants in a Changing Society, the estates of the Bishopric of Worcester, 680-1540*, Cambridge University Press 1980, p238

<sup>15</sup> L R Poos 'The Rural Population of Essex in the later Middle Ages', *Economic History Review*, 38, pp529-30



wrought on the country, resulting in major disruption to the social and economic fabric of the country. Henry Knighton<sup>16</sup> noted that 'many buildings of all sizes fell into total ruin for want of inhabitants. In the following winter there was such a lack of workers...that it was thought that there had hardly been such a shortage before; for a man's farm animals and other livestock wandered about without a shepherd and all his possessions were left unguarded. And as a result all essentials were so expensive that something which had previously cost 1d was now worth 4d or 5d.'<sup>17</sup>

The survival of young people was crucial; they were the people who worked the land. Income and the continuation of the economy depended upon their availability. The survival of women of an age capable of bearing children was also crucial if communities were to recover their numbers. Despite their survival, population levels did not recover quickly; the return of the plague in 1361 and 1369, migration and falling marital fertility were all factors working against population recovery.

In Suffolk, at Waltham le Willows, some 64% of the children perished, 50% of people over 40 years died as did over 90% of older people. Yet of the parish's working males, only 14% in their twenties died and just 20% of those in their thirties died.<sup>18</sup> For these younger people, 'the plague presented an unlooked for opportunity to rise at once into the privileged tenant class. In a society previously characterised by over abundant labour, by soil exhaustion and by declining productivity, the time had come for Malthusian checks.'<sup>19</sup> Whilst the plague figures are enormous, the survival rates of younger people go some way to explain the rapid social and economic recovery that followed; '82% of plague vacated holdings were taken up by new tenants within a year in Halesowen, most young and locally born, 42% being the sons and daughters of the dead.'<sup>20</sup>

Many villages saw their population decimated, some ceased to exist and many of the others were granted relief. The lay subsidy rolls of 1354 in the East Riding of Yorkshire lists ninety-nine vills receiving such help from the proceeds of the Statute of

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<sup>16</sup> Henrici Knighton, canon of Leicester whose chronicles chart amongst other things the movement of wages and prices and the effect of the Black Death on the country.

<sup>17</sup> Chronicon Henrici Knighton Rolls Series 1889-95 II 58-65

<sup>18</sup> Ray Lock, *The Black Death in Waltham-le-Willows*, Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History 37, 1992 pp319-20

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*

<sup>20</sup> Colin Platt, *King Death, The Black Death and its aftermath in late Medieval England*, UCL Press, 1996, p10



Labourers. Parishes without priests were handed over to religious houses or merged for similar reasons. Some priests refused to work for the pre plague wages on offer and like their fellow parishioners used the opportunities open to them to improve their condition by negotiating from a stronger position.

The Black Death turned the demographic profile of the country on its head. What was left was a population suddenly not overcrowding the land, employed and increasingly less 'beholden' to their masters. It was a younger population who gradually discovered they could negotiate new wage rates and other benefits with their landlords, people who for the first time in their lives could seriously improve their standards of living. It was the survivors of the plague that benefited from the new economic order that followed and many of them were the rebels of 1381.

## A new economic order

*'So goes the world from bad to worse when they who guard the sheep or herdsmen in their places, demand to be rewarded more for their labour than the master bailiff used to be. And on the other hand it may be seen that whatever the work may be the labourer is so expensive that whoever wants anything done must pay five or six shillings for what formerly cost two.'*<sup>21</sup>

John Gower, poet and friend of Richard II reflected a widely held view amongst the King and nobility about the way land workers were using the scarcity of labour to negotiate higher wages and working conditions. This was a threat to the personal wealth of government and landowners and to the established order, 'in the eyes of the elite, the forces of supply and demand might make labour scarce but they could not be permitted to make it expensive.'<sup>22</sup>

If the church and lords had the ear of the king, the knights and lower nobility were able to voice their concerns about rising wage demands in parliament. They were swiftly acted upon. The Ordinance of Labourers was issued in 1349 followed by the Statute of Labourers two years later; 'the entire tone of the Ordinance was one of reproach towards labourers and artisans seeking a competitive wage for their labour. The new legislation ushered in a generation of prosecution and harassment. In the first ten years of enforcement 671 justices were employed and all relied on the testimony of local royal and seigniorial officials such as bailiffs, reeves, constables and stewards.'<sup>23</sup> These agents of the crown paid a heavy price in the revolt.

With a substantial decline in population, land values should have dropped as its scarcity reduced; rents would fall dragging prices after them; wages would rise. Yet paradoxically, and despite the criticisms of Knighton and others, 'the statistics of wages and prices do not indicate by the slightest movement that there was any change in the relative scarcities of land and labour until near the end of the

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<sup>21</sup> John Gower, *Mirrou de l'omme, II The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed G C Macaulay, Oxford 1899-1902, p 293

<sup>22</sup> John Hatcher, 'England in the Aftermath of the Black Death', *Past and Present Society*, no 144 (Aug 1994) p10

<sup>23</sup> Alistair Dunn, *The Great Rising of 1381*, Tempus, 2002, p26

century.<sup>24</sup> This inconsistency is at the heart of the economic argument; on the one hand chroniclers and writers lament the rising cost of labour whilst on the other, economic theory and data suggest the opposite. How can these two positions be reconciled?

Faced with a significant change to the availability of labour, landowners replaced hired labour or customary work with rent and sale. Free and unfree began renting or buying land. Postan confirmed the shift to tenant farming recording 'that falling rents attract wage earners into tenant farming with the result that the supply of wage earners is depleted more sharply than the supply of labour.'<sup>25</sup> In Coltishall, 'nascent yeoman farmers engrossing their neighbour's lands bought more heavily and pushed up the size of each purchase. Half acre plots had been the norm pre plague, an average of 1.4 acres was common by the end of the century.'<sup>26</sup> Landowners similarly moved to secure income from their lands by offering new terms. The Abbott of Eynsham 'made a new agreement with two tenants remaining at his manor, on more favourable terms.'<sup>27</sup> Other landlords found great difficulty in finding and keeping tenants. In the Durham Hallmoot Book of 1350/55 no less than thirty one cases are listed of land lying waste, vills arguing they were so weakened they could not pay anything; in one case, a vill uses the situation to renegotiate terms 'in secret so as not to set a bad example to other villages!'<sup>28</sup>

Land transfer involved transferring villeinage land as well as other holdings. Hilton<sup>29</sup> records examples in Gloucester, as does Watson<sup>30</sup> in Minchinhampton. The importance of Hilton's research is that Gloucester transferred villein land to general rental at much higher premiums and even more surprising is that 'the majority of peasants who came forward to bid for these leases seem to have been villeins, but

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<sup>24</sup> Bridbury, *The Black Death*, p 588

<sup>25</sup> M Postan, 'Economic Evidence of Declining Population in the Later Middle Ages', *Economic History Review*, 1950 p243-244

<sup>26</sup> Platt, *King Death*, p11

<sup>27</sup> Horrox, *The Black Death*, p285

<sup>28</sup> Ibid p 326

<sup>29</sup> R H Hilton, Gloucester Abbey, Leases of the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, in *English Peasantry in the later Middle Ages*, Oxford University Press, 1979 pp139-60

<sup>30</sup> C W Watson, *The Minchinhampton Custumal*, Bristol and Gloucester Archaeological Society 1932

they must have been wealthy villeins keen to profit from the possession of extra lands.<sup>31</sup>

Beverage's work analysing the estates of Winchester describes two trends. First, that 'from 1290-1379 money wages and the price of wheat move decade by decade always in the same direction, rising and falling together.'<sup>32</sup> Second, that following the Black Death, wage rates continued to rise and those demesne farmers not relying on customary tenants would have found profit margins squeezed; those with customary tenants would have been more able to protect their profits from the higher prices that accompanied the rise in wage costs. The position of landlords with demesne land was further weakened with the move away from land work by their rural workers and it is no surprise therefore that it was the larger landlords with demesne land whose cases are found in Kings Bench court records as bringing suits under the various labour statutes to try and control wages.

Demesne farming began its decline after 1349. The continuing movement of wages and prices combined with the social changes to the rural population made it increasingly difficult to attract labour. By the later 14<sup>th</sup> century, manorial records are 'full of despondent reckonings of decayed rents, abandoned holdings and demesne farms surrendered to tenants on almost any terms.'<sup>33</sup> Feiling's study of the records of Hutton Manor in Essex suggests that 'by 1389 times are changed, at what cost to the tenants we can only infer from the 30% rise in rents and the empty holdings. The acreage of crops sown on the demesne is not half that of 1342 and greatly diminished since 1369; no full villein holdings are leased.'<sup>34</sup>

Stitt's work in Wymondley<sup>35</sup>, Hertfordshire, emphasises these changes. Manorial records show that 'the acreage cropped dropped by over 50% between 1334 and 1352/3 and that the reduction in the workforce made the alternative of sheep farming a positive policy. In 1352, the demesne supported a flock of over three

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<sup>31</sup> Hatcher, 'English Serfdom', p 17

<sup>32</sup> W Beverage, 'Wages in the Winchester Manors', *Economic History Review* vii (1936) p 23

<sup>33</sup> Bridbury, *The Black Death*, p586

<sup>34</sup> K G Feiling, 'An Essex Manor in the Fourteenth Century', *English Historical Review*, vol 26, no 102 pp333-338

<sup>35</sup> 'The Manors of Great and Little Wymondley were part of a lay estate; their geographical position lies between St Albans and Cambridge and between Dunstable and Bury St Edmunds, points where the unrest in the county produced violent repercussions in 1381, F B Stitt, *The Manors of Great and Little Wymondley in the later Middle Ages*, (Unpublished Ph.D thesis 1951), Hertfordshire Record Office, p1

hundred sheep.<sup>36</sup> The following table indicates the impact of reduced labour availability on the demesne land at Wymondley;<sup>37</sup>

Units of labour	1333/4	1352/3	1366/7
General Labour available	20	10	5
Hoeing works	237	99	42
Harvest works	578	282	154

Table 1 The impact of labour availability on demesne land in Wymondley

Stitt's analysis suggests that alongside a shift to sheep rearing, demesne land was increasingly given over to tenant farming. Thirty acres at le Leye (a sub manor) were leased out in 1352, a year later it was forty-eight. Wymondley clearly reflects the national trend.

Some studies of wage rates and their purchasing power appear not to support the hypothesis that the opportunities open to the survivors of the Black Death led to substantial improvements in their incomes. Farmer's analysis below is a case in point and Hatcher sums the position up in observing that 'although money wages rose in the generation after the Black Death, so too did the prices of almost all basic goods. The net result was that in a period of seemingly scarce labour resources, real rewards improved only marginally...'<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Stitt, *The Manors of Great and Little Wymondley in the later Middle Ages* p76

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*, p86

<sup>38</sup> Hatcher, 'England in the aftermath of the Black Death', p7

Agricultural Workers Piece Rates; Units of work needed to buy one quarter of wheat and one quarter of barley<sup>39</sup>

	Cost of Grain (d)	Threshing Pay per unit	Winnowing units needed	Reaping pay per unit	Binding Units needed	Mowing pay per unit	Spreading units needed
1290s	133.7	4.55	29.4	4.9	27.3	4.65	28.7
1300s	111.7	4.73	23.6	5.45	20.5	4.97	22.5
1310s	163.4	4.82	33.9	6.65	24.6	5.46	29.9
1320s	139	5.27	26.4	6.4	21.7	5.82	23.9
1330s	109.9	5.32	20.7	6.16	17.8	5.56	19.8
1340s	101.4	5.38	18.8	5.87	17.3	4.95	20.5
1350s	146.8	6	24.5	7.22	20.3	6.32	23.2
1360s	167.8	6.46	26	8.17	20.5	6.96	24.1
1370s	136.8	7.56	18.1	9.22	14.8	7.58	18
1380s	105.2	7.77	13.5	9.14	11.5	7.6	13.8

Table 2. Agricultural worker's piece rates

Manorial records in Wymondley suggest different occupations received different (or no) improvement in payments as the table below shows. Whether the gaps in information are the result of damage to the records or a deliberate attempt to mask payment information is unknown.

<sup>39</sup> D L Farmer, Crop Yields, Prices and Wages in Medieval England, *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, vi 1983 p146

	1352/3	1354/5	1366/7	1369/70	1372/3
Carter	2s in winter	illegible	2s half year	2s half year	2s half year
Ploughman	1s6d in winter	illegible	No entry	No entry	No entry
Carpenter	2d/day	3d/day	No entry	3.75d-5d/day	4-5d/day
Thatcher	No entry	3d/day	No entry	5-6d/day	5s/week
Thresher	3d/quarter	3d/quarter	3d/quarter	3d/quarter	3d/quarter
Mower	5d/acre	8d/acre	6d/acre	6d/acre	6d/acre
Reaper	6-7d/acre	6d/acre	6.5d/acre plus food	No entry	7d/acre plus food

Table 3. Selected wages from 1352 to 1373<sup>40</sup>

Analysis of the wages and earnings of other groups show a different picture. Penn and Dyer describe the 'daily wages of skilled building workers in southern England increasing by 66% between 1340 and 1390, from 3d to 5d a day and those of the unskilled almost doubled from 1.5 to 3d a day. Real daily wages of craftsmen were 45% higher in 1390 than fifty years earlier and those received by unskilled workers rose by a larger margin.'<sup>41</sup>

The rural employment profile changed. People pursued multiple occupations, 'a well known feature of the published poll tax records of the eastern and northern counties of Essex, Suffolk and Yorkshire.'<sup>42</sup> Analysis of 419 records describes '19 occupations including spinners, weavers, retailers of food stuffs, and fuel.'<sup>43</sup> Essex records confirm this diversification of occupations. Thirty years after the Black Death, there were many smallholdings not producing enough corn to feed a family and cover taxes and rents; 'in the 1381 poll tax records, almost a quarter of all heads of household were listed as craftsmen, mainly smiths, carpenters and textile workers...or as brewers, butchers and bakers.'<sup>44</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Stitt, *The Manors of Great and Little Wymondley*, p73

<sup>41</sup> Thorold Rogers, 'A History of Agriculture and Prices', pp252-325 and others in Penn and Dyer, *Wages and Earnings in Late Medieval England; Evidence from the Enforcement of the labour Laws*, *The Economic History Review*, vol 43, no 3 pp356-376

<sup>42</sup> Charles Oman, *The Great Revolt of 1381*, Greenhill Books, London, 1906

<sup>43</sup> Penn and Dyer, 'Wages and Earnings in Late Medieval England; Evidence from the Enforcement of the Labour Laws', *Economic History Review*, vol 43, no 3, (Aug1990, p 360

<sup>44</sup> C C Dyer, *The Causes of the Revolt in Rural Essex*, ed Liddell and Wood, Essex Record Office Publication no84, p21



The workforce became 'increasingly flexible. Occupational descriptions derived from cases describe people with multiple occupations such as carpenters, threshers and fishermen, and so on, which suggests workers drew their income where they could throughout the year. Judicial records also give numerous examples of people leaving employment on the land as ploughmen and turning their hand to other occupations; 'individuals are also known to have taken on a more permanent basis such varied occupations as carpenter, weaver, fuller, butcher, fisherman, thatcher and shipwright.'<sup>45</sup>

People became increasingly geographically mobile (something that highlights the rigidity of the labour laws being at odds with the reality of the emerging 14<sup>th</sup> century economy). Thatchers and building workers moved from town to town following their trade, harvesters would have followed crops as they ripened. In addition, craftsmen and tradesmen had a much larger degree of labour mobility than did land workers; the land workers were clearly more tied to their landlords and their requirements.

There is evidence that 'medieval workers were capable of a collective defence of their interests'<sup>46</sup> in the way they negotiated annual contracts. Clearly, they shared information and 'intelligence' and used it to negotiate their annual contracts. Rural people understood the idea of solidarity, something that stood them in good stead in 1381.

A short-term labour economy also developed. Kenyon's work examining a group of cases brought under the Statute of Labourers and the Statute of Cambridge indicates 'that workers preferred the freedom of short term engagements to annual contracts and thereby gained higher wages. She too detected a movement of workers from agriculture into crafts.'<sup>47</sup> In Lincolnshire for example, 'ploughmen, carters, servants, fishermen departed after 2 days, 3 days, 2 weeks, 20 days, 21 days, 1 month, 11 weeks, 3 months and 7 months despite being offered longer and more stable

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<sup>45</sup>R Sillem, ed *Sessions of the Peace in Lincolnshire 1360-73*, Lincoln Record Society, 30 1937 p 63-4

<sup>46</sup> R H Hilton, 'Popular movements in England at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century', in *Class Conflict and the crisis of Feudalism*, Verso Books, 1990

<sup>47</sup> N Kenyon, 'Labour conditions in Essex in the reign of Richard II' in E M Carus-Wilson, ed *Essays in Economic History* ii 1962

contracts.<sup>48</sup> The main attraction of short-term work was its higher rate of pay; Penn and Dyer calculate that 'a ploughman working full time for a year in Suffolk in the 1360s might earn £2 which would include additional gifts, food and basic pay. A labourer not tied to a lord might earn nearly 30% more (including food) and consider himself free.'<sup>49</sup> Whilst short-term employment may have been preferred by workers, it was increasingly in the interests of the landowners too. Much of the work available from landowners was seasonal; tasks were time limited such as getting the harvest in; craftsmen such as thatchers were not required on a permanent basis, all of which freed landowners from long-term customary commitments.

If the analysis of manorial records indicates little real increase in wage payments, how is it possible to reconcile this with the experience of Knighton and others? Knighton's chronicle is just one instance of many lamenting 'bitterly of the high cost of workmen, their arrogance, their over indulgence in leisure and of course their contempt of the labour laws.'<sup>50</sup> The common consciousness represented by literature of the day supports Knighton's views. Langland's *Piers Plowman* tells of 'labourers drinking, singing, and arguing illness instead of working hard to the ideals of some imagined rural idyll.'<sup>51</sup> Gower's work, *Mirroure de l'omme* written sometime before 1378 'rebukes labourers for their laziness and receiving wages more than three times than their work deserves.'<sup>52</sup> Langland and Gower 'are broadly representative of observations contained in the literature, chronicles and sermons of their age.'<sup>53</sup>

A 'black economy' had emerged. Despite supporting the Statute of Labourers, employers needed labour and had to compete with other employers for it. In doing so, they had to find a way of circumventing the very legislation they had supported. Their official manorial records recorded prices and wages at a legal level to avoid prosecution yet with a shortage of workers they had to find a way of paying wages at a level that recruited the workers they needed. A Commons petition in 1376 remarkably admitted such collusion between employer and employee stating that

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<sup>48</sup> Sillem, *Sessions of the Peace in Lincolnshire*, p 63-4

<sup>49</sup> Penn and Dyer, 'Wages and Earnings', p370

<sup>50</sup> Hatcher, 'England in the aftermath of the Black Death', p11

<sup>51</sup> W Langland, *The Vision of William concerning Piers the Ploughman* ed W W Skeat 2 vols. Oxford 1886

<sup>52</sup> Hatcher, 'England in the aftermath of the Black Death', p144

<sup>53</sup> Owst, *Literature and the Pulpit in Medieval England*, Cambridge University Press, 1966 pp363-5

*'a greater mischief is the receiving of such of such vagrant labourers when they have fled their masters services; for they are taken into service immediately in new places at such dear wages that encouragement is afforded to all servants...and go from master to master as soon as they are displeased about any matter...for fear of such flights the commons now dare not challenge or offend their servants but give them whatever they wish to ask in spite of the statutes and ordinances to the contrary.'*<sup>54</sup>

The fears and confusion amongst the petitioners were prescient; five years later their workers rose against King and government.

Evidence of the evasion of the Statute is found in manorial records and in the proceedings of courts hearing cases of abuse of the labour laws. Beverage's team discovered that workers 'received an appreciable addition to their money wages';<sup>55</sup> and they later added a postscript to his article claiming that 'extra payments for threshing over and above the stated piece rates in fact occur in most of the manors investigated in a good many years between 1348 and 1373.'<sup>56</sup> Farmer acknowledged the existence of 'gifts' of cash and corn given to workers, 'currall wheat worth 30s in 1363/4 and a cash bonus of 11s 11d the next year...and even a Christmas party to encourage workers to come the next season in Apuldram.'<sup>57</sup> Stitt found 'that permanent servants, whose wages after 1350 are apparently the same as those received in 1334 in fact received higher rewards because half of their issues consisted of wheat as against a figure as small as a tenth in earlier years. In brief there is little in the account rolls to conflict with the conclusions of Thorold Rogers that after 1350 the cost of hired labour had risen by as much as 50%.<sup>58</sup> Rogers had seen evidence in manorial rolls of wage entries being struck through and lower rates inserted. He commented that, 'I cannot help thinking that that these changes point to evasions of the statute, and that the labourer was perhaps remunerated to the full extent of the previous entry but in some covert way, or by some means which would not come within the penalties of the statute.'<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Rotuli parliamentorum: Edward I-Henry VII, 6 vols. (London 1783)

<sup>55</sup> W H Beverage, 'Wages in the Winchester Manors', *Economic History Review* vii 1936-37 p37

<sup>56</sup> *ibid* p37

<sup>57</sup> Farmer, 'Crop Yields', p470

<sup>58</sup> Stitt, *The Manors of Great and Little Wymondley*, p76

<sup>59</sup> J E T Rogers, *A History of Agriculture and Prices in England* Oxford University Press 1902 p 300

Other evidence can be found in prosecutions brought under the Statute. Putnam found that in the East Riding of Yorkshire in 1362/63, 'harvesters were given 3d, 4d and 6d a day and that unlawful threshing rates ranged from 1.5d to 4d a day, both 'with food.'<sup>60</sup> 'Even the carpenter who made the stocks with which to imprison those workers who refused to swear obedience to the Statute of Labourers was paid at the illegal rate of 5.5d a day.'<sup>61</sup> Thomson<sup>62</sup> lists examples of craftsmen receiving excess payments, of accepting liveries of corn and wheat and other inducements in Wiltshire

It seems safe to conclude that by the time of the Rising, the workforce had put many of the financial hardships of the first half of the century behind them. They had employment, they were able to save, their employment diversified and the ability to negotiate short-term contracts of different kinds meant that their income levels improved over the whole year and that traditional winter shortages were reduced. Importantly, the economic changes ushered in a psychological change in the relationship between landowner and worker. Power was being rebalanced, economic freedom was being experienced; a new confidence and a determination not to be held back became embedded in the working population. Yet, political freedom eluded them. This new order was insecure and unrecognised by king, government, chroniclers and even the poets of the time. They had no means of exercising political choice. The potential for future tension increased as the changes took hold.

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<sup>60</sup> *Yorkshire Sessions of the Peace, 1361-1364* ed B H Putnam (Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Record series c, Wakefield 1939

<sup>61</sup> Farmer, *Crop Yields*, p484

<sup>62</sup> E M Thomson, *Offenders against the Statute of Labourers in Wiltshire, 1349*, *The Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* XXXIII, 1903/04 pp403/6

## An uncertain social order

*'All men, free and of one condition'*

The balance of economic power had shifted between worker and landlord yet the old legal structures of medieval control remained in place. Political freedom was out of reach. Villeins 'could not plead in court against their lord, no one spoke for them in Parliament, they were bound by duties of servitude which they had no way to break except by forcibly obtaining a change of rules.'<sup>63</sup> Economic progress had left people uncertain of their rights and fearful that lords might try to enforce traditional rules of serfdom. Their positions were legally precarious.

Hatcher suggests that studies of serfdom have been dominated by two distinct approaches; 'one establishes the position of the serf under the law, particularly the common law, the other seeks to trace the nature and weight of seigniorial duties and obligations.'<sup>64</sup> The rhetoric of the legal position of people and the reality of their lives was now obvious. Economic change had left many people 'de facto' as free yet in law still subject to seigniorial control. Their position was legally ambiguous..<sup>65</sup>

The legal position of villeins was far more complex than the position set out in the common law. Hatcher suggests that 'the source of much confusion is the conflict between the testimony of legal treatises and proceedings in crown courts and that of innumerable manorial documents.'<sup>66</sup> Whilst it is clear that under common law, the unfree had no rights, 'in practice, lords almost invariably recognised the restraints which custom imposed on them...and because the unfree were outside of common law, they fell within the purview of private seigniorial tribunals...which operated according to customary rules'.<sup>67</sup> In other words, the legal framework of villeinage gave lords the power to circumvent national common law, which they needed to be able to do if their labour supply was to be secured.

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<sup>63</sup> Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror, The Calamitous 14<sup>th</sup> Century*, Penguin Books, 1980 , p 373

<sup>64</sup> John Hatcher, 'English Serfdom and Villeinage, Towards a Reassessment', *Past and Present*, no 90 p 4

<sup>66</sup> Hatcher, 'English Serfdom', p 7

<sup>67</sup> Ibid p 7

The balance between free and unfree people in the 14<sup>th</sup> century emerges from local records. Kosminsky's sample of the Hundred Rolls<sup>68</sup> in the counties between Suffolk and Oxfordshire found a ratio of 3:2 in favour of the unfree. However, 'data from the Northern Danelaw suggests the 'free' comprised approximately 60% of village tenantry; surveys of manors in the north west suggest the unfree may well have accounted for less than 20%; in the west midlands and Marches, free tenants frequently predominated...and in Kent villeinage was virtually nonexistent.<sup>69</sup> King's work suggests that 'a ratio of two villein households for every three free peasant households over the whole of England in the late 13<sup>th</sup> century is unlikely to underestimate the number of villeins.'<sup>70</sup> Taking into account people living in towns, those working in a trade, the clergy, the gentry and nobility, Hatcher calculates that 'households holding by unfree tenure may well have constituted little more than a third of total households.'<sup>71</sup>

'Unfreedom' was not a uniform status.<sup>72</sup> Wide degrees of unfreedom have been described as, 'each one dependent on the type and weight of servile dues expected.'<sup>73</sup> Locally negotiated examples of villeinage suggest a vague line between 'free' and 'unfree' was often the reality. Examples include an acceptance that villeins could own chattels; that the property of villeins were often not seized by the lord but secured by successors on the payment of a heriot. 'For a fine, villeins were permitted to buy and sell land, including their unfree holdings, lords frequently accepted the right of villeins to make wills...and everywhere as the 13<sup>th</sup> century progressed the obligations on tenants were increasingly defined. There can be no doubt whatsoever that the unfree that paid their rents and performed their services almost invariably enjoyed an absolute hereditary security of tenure that rivalled that enjoyed by the free.'<sup>74</sup> Finally, Harvey's work suggests that 'in view of the inflationary nature of the

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<sup>68</sup> E A Kosminsky, *Studies of the Agrarian History of England in the 13<sup>th</sup> century*, ed R H Hilton, trans, R Kisch, Oxford 1956

<sup>69</sup> Hatcher, 'English Serfdom', p 7

<sup>70</sup> Edmund King, *England 1175-1425*, Rouledge and Kegan Paul London 1979 p 50

<sup>71</sup> Hatcher, 'English Serfdom', p 7

<sup>72</sup> Rodney Hilton discusses the problems of definitions of 'free' and 'unfree' extensively in his paper Freedom and Villeinage in England, Past and Present number 31, Jul 1965

<sup>73</sup> Hatcher 'English Serfdom' p 8

<sup>74</sup> Ibid p 9

period, the annual dues for villein holdings ...changed little in the century that separated the making of the custumal c1225 and the Black Death.<sup>75</sup>

Customary duties had in many places, simply not been performed in the hundred years preceding the Black Death. Hatcher suggests a steadily weakening financial relationship between lord and serf; 'their control became steadily weakened as fees came to be regarded as patrimonies and as the services rendered came to be fixed and certain. The consequence was often declining real incomes from the villeinage and most enterprising landlords came to realise that the best opportunities for profit lay in the exploitation of market forces rather than the exploitation of their villeins.'<sup>76</sup>

The extent to which Customary responsibilities were oppressive remains in doubt as does the importance of customary labour as defining the relationship between lord and villein. Thorold Rogers asserted in 1886 'that only slight traces of the forced labour system remained by the eve of the Black Death.'<sup>77</sup> A large variability between theory and practice emerges from the study of manorial documents; 'it would appear that services of two or more days a week were performed in the 14<sup>th</sup> century by a relatively small minority of English villein tenants. Only in a few counties, including Hertfordshire, was regular week work rendered by a substantial proportion of the unfree; in a large minority of counties, services, with some exceptions, very light.'<sup>78</sup> Dyer estimates that perhaps 'half the peasants in Essex had customary holdings, they paid much higher rents than did freeholders (often about a shilling an acre) and were liable to do labour service and they alone paid entry fines.'<sup>79</sup>

Dyer's work establishes the employment profile in East Anglia and the evidence that is available, suggests the Hertfordshire population had similar characteristics. 'In the admittedly corrupt list of people paying poll tax in Hinckford Hundred 25% of the heads of household were craftsmen , mainly smiths, carpenters, textile workers such as tailors and weavers, and cobblers, whilst another source of income lay in the retail trade the most common being those of brewer, butcher and baker.'<sup>80</sup> Further

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<sup>75</sup> B Harvey, *Westminster Abbey and its Estates in the Middle Ages*, Clarendon Press Oxford 1977, p 219

<sup>76</sup> Hatcher 'English Serfdom' p 14

<sup>77</sup> Rogers, p 91

<sup>78</sup> Miller and Hatcher, *Medieval England; Rural Society and Economic Change*, Longman 1978 pp 121-8

<sup>79</sup> Dyer, *The Causes of the Revolt*, p26

<sup>80</sup> Dyer, *The Causes of the Revolt* p23



confirmation follows with evidence that, 'one indication of the relative prosperity is the high rate of wages reported at the time of the revolt' and that 'some peasants owned large quantities of livestock, with individuals having herds of up to 120 sheep or 20 cattle.'<sup>81</sup>

The rebels were not youngsters. 'Many of them were middle aged, for example John Filliol who must have been in his forties at the time of the revolt or John Benorth who had daughters of marriageable age in 1381 suggesting he too was over forty.'<sup>82</sup> Many were also relatively wealthy. Dyer suggests that the rebels 'were not rootless and without a secure source of income...most held land, John Benorth had 10.5 acres ...James atte Ford had 18.75 acres...a few rebels were very prosperous like Richard Baud who had land worth £5 per annum or William Gildebourne who owned cattle worth £40 and 79 sheep.'<sup>83</sup> Indictments issued after the revolt particularly in relation to trespass confirm this picture. 'Three rebels were described by a Jury as rich; a John Summer had goods worth 400 marks and extensive lands whilst a John Gernon was a trustee of a large estate in Mistley; all had sufficient influence to acquire the services of Robert Plesington, the Chief baron of the Exchequer.'<sup>84</sup>

Rebels held positions of responsibility in their area. 'William Gildeborn served as a hundred juror, John Geoffrey was a bailiff, William atte Marsh was a reeve, and others were chief pledges or even ale-tasters.'<sup>85</sup> Eiden's work confirms Dyer's picture. 'The leaders included the odd knight, two lords of the manor, a farmer, three franklins...fourteen rebels were free tenants, seven held customary land and five were bond tenants; twenty two were tailors, nine cordwainers, five skimmers, five tanners, three fullers as well as a dyer and a glover.'<sup>86</sup> Some of the rebels were even responsible for the collection of poll taxes; William Field certified the assessment in

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<sup>81</sup> Dyer, *The Causes of the Revolt* P 27

<sup>82</sup> *ibid* p29

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid* p 30

<sup>84</sup> A J Prescott, 'Essex Rebel Bands in London', in *Essex and the Great Revolt of 1381*, ed Liddell and Wood, Essex Record Office publication no. 84, 1982 p58

<sup>85</sup> Dyer, *The Causes of the Revolt*, p30

<sup>86</sup> Herbert Eiden, *Joint Action against Bad Lordship, The Peasants Revolt in Essex and Norfolk*, Historical Association, Blackwell, Oxford 1998 p 29

North Weald and a John Quentin was a sub collector in Magdalen Laver whilst a Richard Hunt was described as a constable of Navestock,<sup>87</sup>

Social progress in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century had been enormous. Land was owned or rented, people were able to own more, to have a better diet; demesne farming was in decline, the number of people with customary duties was declining, part time work was increasing and workers were diversifying into different occupations. A new social order that suited both landowner and worker had emerged. Increasing numbers of people considered they were free even if their strict legal situation had not been formalised. Yet this order was unclear and the political freedoms necessary to guarantee it were unattainable. The position was increasingly untenable; it is entirely unsurprising therefore that people were prepared to take their case directly to the king as a final desperate means of getting the political recognition they desired. Froissart recorded John Ball's<sup>88</sup> sermon to the rebels urging such a strategy;

*'Let us go to the king, he is young and shew him what servige we be in, and shew him how we will have it otherwise, or else we will provide us of some remedy; and if we go together, all manner of people that be now in bondage will follow us to the intent to be made free; and when the king seeth us we shall have some remedy, either by fairness or otherwise.'*<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Prescott, *Essex Rebel Bands* p58

<sup>88</sup> John Ball is said to have been an itinerant priest preaching Wycliffian values; he was imprisoned at the time of the Rising and released by Kentish rebels. Walsingham and Knighton included six letters that may have been written by him in their chronicles. Froissart described him as 'mad priest of Kent' and the extract above is part of a longer sermon to the rebels; others have described him as the 'Eminence Gris' of the Rising.

<sup>89</sup> Froissart, trans. Berners, ed. G C Macaulay, pp250-1 cf Froissart, *Chroniques*, x 94-7

## Rebellion

*Those who make peaceful revolution impossible, make violent revolution inevitable*<sup>90</sup>

As the 14<sup>th</sup> century progressed, tension increased. Epidemics in 1360/62 and 1369 continued to reduce the population and emphasise the economic and social changes underway. The 1370's were a 'disastrous decade. Edward III had become senile and had lost interest in the problems of government. The war against France dragged on and many of the English gains made earlier in the century were reversed. The English domain in France was almost wiped out. The French had carried the offensive to England and had made damaging raids on the south coast.'<sup>91</sup> There were allegations of widespread financial corruption at Court<sup>92</sup> and amongst royal officials locally. As early as 1364, an indictment accuses a Thomas Harding of organising 'wide scale corruption of food prices in Manningtree and to have defrauded the commonality of a great deal of money.'<sup>93</sup> Frustration with the political leadership of the country was widespread.

Richard II succeeded his father in 1377 at the age of ten and 'governed' supported by a council of ministers. John of Gaunt, the king's uncle, might have been expected to play a leading role in the transition but his hand lay behind the creation of the poll taxes and in disputes with the city of London. He was deeply mistrusted by the nobility, disliked by clergy (who for the first time were required to pay poll tax) and blamed by people for much of the poor government they had suffered during the later years of Edward's reign. 'Even before his father's death, he had become the 'bête noir' of the Commons due to his defence of corrupt courtiers and his heavy handed intervention into the politics of London.'<sup>94</sup> He was in Berwick at the time of the Revolt yet his properties were targets for rebels in both London and Hertford.

Financial problems further contributed to the rising tension. In 1377, a good harvest drove grain prices down by 50% and with it incomes for both landowner and

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<sup>90</sup> John Fitzgerald Kennedy, US President, Speech at the White House, 1962

<sup>91</sup> A J Prescott, Judicial Records of the Rising of 1381, *Unpublished PhD Thesis*, Institute of Historical Research p28

<sup>92</sup> Edward Earl of March and Peter de la Mere, Speaker in the Commons sought 'to impeach those who were believed to be abusing the confidence placed in them by the senile Edward III and lining their own pockets at the expense of the national good.' Barron p 13 Three Aldermen were amongst those impeached.

<sup>93</sup> A J Prescott, *Essex Rebel Bands*, p58

<sup>94</sup> Alistair Dunn, *The Great Rising of 1381*, Tempus, 2002, p56

peasant. In addition, two general taxes were levied followed by three new poll taxes between 1377 and 1380, the last a levy of 1s per head of population to fight a stalemated war with France. People were experiencing a fiscal squeeze without any representation; the taxation had little support amongst the population and its methods of enforcement showed people how little the government recognised the new political mood in the country.

Prosecutions under the Statute of Labourers continued. The administration of the Statute of Labourers had added another dimension to the tension in the countryside. Significantly, 'the legislation represented a new level of governmental intrusion into the lives of ordinary peasants and townsfolk by requiring officers of the crown in the form of justices of labourers (later justices of the peace) to regulate terms of employment in every village and hamlet in the realm.'<sup>95</sup> Many village leaders found themselves placed in an untenable position by their lords, 'forced on the one hand to raise money from their neighbours and on the other their desire to soften the harshness of the lord's rule and conceal cases. Geoffrey Panyman had simply refused to serve despite the threat of eviction whilst other tenants acted collectively offering their lord a fine to be let off acting as Reeve in Wivenhoe.'<sup>96</sup>

The new social and economic order and the political grievances felt by much of the population were not recognised by government or in law. People below the highest ranks of society had no voice in government or in Parliament. Their grievances could not be heard. The result was a pressure cooker of tensions that built up and (at least in the southeast) the imposition and enforcement of the third poll tax became the spark for the revolt. Gower sensed the threat writing that '*the rebelliousness was so rampant that it threatened the merciless destruction of the higher estate; it seems to me that lethargy has put the lords to sleep so that they do not guard against the folly of the common people but they allow the nettle to grow which is too violent in its nature.*'<sup>97</sup>

On 30 May 1381, villagers in Fobbing, a marshland village just north of the Thames in Essex attacked poll tax commissioners and drove them away. Similar action

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<sup>95</sup> P J P Goldberg, *Medieval England, A Social History, 1250-1550*, Arnold, London, 2004, p168

<sup>96</sup> Dyer, *The Causes of the Revolt* p33

<sup>97</sup> Gower, *Mirroure de l'omme*, p 295

erupted all over Essex and Kent; bands of men attacked manors and destroyed selected manorial records, attacking and killing 'king's men' such as the Sherriff of Essex. Their campaign was coordinated across the Thames; that they were capable of such a strategy is not in doubt and detailed analysis of their movements makes such a strategy obvious. Evidence of planning and organisation in Essex and Kent can be found in 'judicial records of the Rising and indictments of rebels which provides a mass of information about what acts of insurrection occurred and about leading participants.' <sup>98</sup>

They arrived in London on the same day, 12<sup>th</sup> June, the Essex men at Mile End and the Kentish men at Blackheath. Both bands had covered over eighty miles in three days, a substantial achievement. Sympathisers let them into the city where they attacked targets, including John of Gaunt's palace, the Temple, stormed prisons and eventually gained entry to the Tower. Walsingham captures something of the panic that must have gripped London in his chronicle recording that 'crowds of them assembled and began to clamour for liberty, planning to become the equal of their lords and no longer be bound by servitude to any master.'<sup>99</sup> For the king and his advisers, the situation was desperate. He met the Essex men on 14<sup>th</sup> June and the Kentish men on 15<sup>th</sup>.

The objectives of the rebels became clearer in London. The Essex band demanded that 'named traitors be put to death, that there should be no law but that of Winchester and that no man should be a serf nor make homage or any type of service to any lord.'<sup>100</sup> The king issued 'charters of manumission (freedom from bondage), to all the king's lieges in the county of Hertford, as well as a general pardon for all treason and felonies already committed.'<sup>101</sup> They were carried by rebels back to their towns and villages and the effect in just one town, St Albans, is described below. Whether this was a 'divide and rule' strategy by the king or mistake on the part of the rebels to allow themselves to be separated is unclear.

The Kentish band, led by Wat Tyler, took their demands further next day. They demanded that there should be '*no law except the law of Winchester, that no lord*

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<sup>98</sup> Brookes, *The Organisation and Achievements of the Peasants*, p250

<sup>99</sup> Walsingham, Thomas, *Chronicon Angliae*, ed. E M Thomson, (Rolls Series) 1874

<sup>100</sup> Dyer, *The Causes of the Revolt* p 34

<sup>101</sup> Caroline Barron, *Revolt in London, 11<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> June 1381*, Museum of London, 1981, p5

*should have lordship in the future, but that it should be divided between all men except for the kings own lordship....the goods of the holy church should not remain in the hands of the religious...but should be divided amongst the people of the parish, that there should be only one bishop in England, ...that all men should be free and that there should be no more villeins in England.*<sup>102</sup>

Tyler was killed at the Blackheath meeting; the Kentish rebellion collapsed and shortly afterwards the king rescinded the charters he had issued. The rebellion was over.

This was not a 'peasants' revolt at all but one involving a wide spectrum of society; 'in a number of the worst affected areas, the Rising encompassed virtually every class below the aristocracy, most powerful members of the gentry and the mercantile oligarchs in the towns. It is likely that as the Rising developed, and the violence became more widespread, the social base of the revolt also widened.'<sup>103</sup> The importance of this profile is that many of the rebels 'were important employers of labour in their own right. Invariably they held manorial or judicial office; three quarters of one sample of rebels held offices such as juror, reeve, ale-taster or constable; in other words, a significant proportion of the rebels were of the village elite.'<sup>104</sup>

Nor was this only a rural revolt. About two thirds of all Londoners were not citizens at all. London was governed by a Court of Aldermen and a Common Council representing the merchant elite and crafts. The remaining population had as few rights as their rural counterparts. They too had used the opportunities open to them to renegotiate wage rates. They began to create their own guilds in an attempt to get recognition within the city. To complicate matters further, John of Gaunt had launched an attack on the city's leadership in retaliation for their involvement in allegations of corruption at court. By the time of the Rising, 'it was a deeply divided and fractious city.'<sup>105</sup> Trespass orders show the involvement of 'enfranchised and

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<sup>102</sup> Anonimale Chronicle 1333-1381, ed. V H Galbraith (Manchester 1927)

<sup>103</sup> Prescott, *Judicial Records*, p377

<sup>104</sup> Goldberg, *Medieval England*, p178

<sup>105</sup> Barron, p9

organised guildsmen and leading members of the smaller guilds of craftsmen all joined the Rising.<sup>106</sup>

How is the Rising to be assessed? Prescott suggests that 'one of the main difficulties in analysing popular risings are the way in which they draw together varied issues. These normally fall into three categories, the first being ideological concerns, programmes for the reform of society. Second, they are a protest against concrete political issues such as oppressive taxation. Third is the pursuit of personal grudges or local disputes.'<sup>107</sup>

Ideological concerns were behind the demands of the rebels in London. Their demands for the abolition of serfdom are clearly stated; all men were to be free; villeinage was to be removed. They wanted recognition of the new economic and social order. They wanted a rebalancing of power between themselves and their lords. There was also a philosophical thread running through the demands. It was egalitarian, even 'radical egalitarianism'<sup>108</sup>, reflecting not only the feeling in the country but reflective of the teachings of Wycliffe. Phrases such as 'only one Bishop in England' and the 'goods of the holy church should be divided amongst the people of the parish' reflect Wycliffe's teachings.<sup>109</sup> John Ball's sermon to the rebels at Blackheath reflects these ideas and it is unsurprising that a vicar of Ware argued this philosophy at the time of the Rising.

This was a political agenda. It was an attack on oppression of serfdom and the labour legislation that had been used against people for thirty years. The objective of 'seizing all traitors' refers to the crown's agents located in local communities to enforce the labour legislation, the legal machinery used against them as well as the Chancellor and Treasurer. It was no accident that king's men had been attacked, that John of Gaunt's palace in London was sacked or that the Temple, the centre of the legal system suffered the same fate. The 'Chelmsford bonfire' had symbolically destroyed not manorial records but the administrative archives of the senior

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<sup>106</sup> Prescott, *Judicial Records*, p 378

<sup>107</sup> *ibid* p8

<sup>108</sup> Melvyn Bragg, *The Peasants Revolt*, *In our Time*, BBC iPlayer, 2006

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p0038x8s/In\\_Our\\_Time\\_The\\_Peasants\\_Revolt/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/p0038x8s/In_Our_Time_The_Peasants_Revolt/)

<sup>109</sup> Wycliffe's treatise, *De Civili Dominio* proposed the disendowment of the temporal property of the church and the exclusion of clergy from temporal government. He argued all authority derived from God and in earthly matters, belonged to the civil powers alone. Tuchman, p 287



representatives of government in Essex. The Sheriff and Escheator together were charged with providing poll tax information which led to a new Commission to enforce payment.<sup>110</sup> Rebels clearly wanted their ideological, political and philosophical aims to be secured by the destruction of the political and legal system that controlled them.

Hertfordshire people had their own objectives. Their involvement emphasises Prescott's proposition that popular rebellion usually has a local dimension. Argument about freedoms had been constant for a hundred years.

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<sup>110</sup> Goldberg, *Medieval England*, p181

# HERTFORDSHIRE



Christopher Saxton's County Map of 1577

Courtesy Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies

## The Rising in Hertfordshire

*'they asked only for a charter setting out their rights, promising that if they obtained it there would be a permanent peace between the town and the monastery...the abbot signed it and sealed it without reservation.'*<sup>111</sup>

The East Anglian counties traded extensively with London, were nearer the political 'centre' and had many of the main communication routes running through them. News arrived quickly and communications between the capital and the area was relatively easy. Hertfordshire is particularly important in this respect with Watling Street, the main road to the North West running through St Albans and Ermine Street, the main road to the north and the eastern counties running through the main river crossings at Hertford and Ware. Ecclesiastical land holdings were extensive in the county. The abbey of St. Albans was one of the largest landowners in the country and its records, including those of its chronicler, Walsingham, provide a record of the events of 1381. The diocese of Westminster had land holdings and in the east of the county, Bishops of London had their palace in Much Hadham, their prison near Bishops Stortford and had significant land holdings across the whole of the east of the county.

The 1377 Poll Tax records<sup>112</sup> give a population of about 20,000 people in the county; adjusting for people evading the tax and adding children, an estimate of about 37,000 people lived in the county in 1377. Hertfordshire 'possessed 24 taxpayers per square mile compared with a national average of 27.'<sup>113</sup> Successive visitations of the Black Death had 'decimated the population by 47% between 1307 and 1377.'<sup>114</sup> Population density for the north and east of the county is estimated at approximately 51-75 acres per taxpayer whereas in the west and south, predominantly on the lands owned by the abbey of St Albans, that figure was 151+ acres per taxpayer.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Andre Reville, *Le Soulevement des Travailleurs d'Angleterre en 1381*, trans. Arthur Jones, *The Peasants Revolt in Hertfordshire, 1381*, Hertfordshire Publications, 1981, p97

<sup>112</sup> PRO E 359/8, B,C

<sup>113</sup> *An Historical Atlas of Hertfordshire*, ed David Short, University of Hertfordshire press, 2011, p50

<sup>114</sup> *ibid* p50

<sup>115</sup> See for example, the map of medieval population provided by Mark Bailey in *An Historical Atlas of Hertfordshire*, p51

The county is dissected with rivers mostly draining from the north-west in the Chilterns towards London. The Ver runs through St Albans and no less than six rivers merge at Hertford to create the Lea. Disputes over the control of river crossings was a major feature of medieval Hertfordshire. Maps of the county<sup>116</sup> inevitably describe an agricultural region and the rivers are dotted with mills all the way down their path. Disputes over milling rights were common with during the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

Stitt's picture of Wymondley is to some extent ambiguous. He suggests labour services in Wymondley were 'never heavy before the Black Death'<sup>117</sup> yet he records 'friction over conditions of tenure'<sup>118</sup> after 1360. The impression he leaves is one of a settled part of the county. 'By 1381 there were both a number of free and bond men who had the opportunity to obtain land in quantity and on conditions which left them, if not contented with their lot, then sufficiently prosperous to disregard the chance of leading a revolt.'<sup>119</sup> Elsewhere however, he records that 'possibly towards 1380 tension was increasing...uneasy relations might have found expression in the difficulty which the lord found in obtaining proper care of his buildings...'<sup>120</sup> One might reasonably conclude that even in the less populous north-central areas of the county, the impact of the economic and social changes of the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century were being felt; people from this area joined the revolt in St Albans on June 16<sup>th</sup>.

Malting and brewing was a significant industry in the east of the county using the Lea valley to supply London growing population with its ale. Most of the towns and villages in the east brewed their own ale; Ware had had a malt market since 1339. Control of the Lea and the main roman roads running through the town had been the source of outright discontent between the town and Hertford for many years. The Rising brought these tensions into the open.

Tension between the abbots of St Albans and local people had existed for over a century; 'abbots had asserted the town was part of their manor; townsmen considered themselves to be burgesses and autonomous of the Abbey; their ultimate

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid p 37

<sup>117</sup> Stitt p 139

<sup>118</sup> Ibid p 139

<sup>119</sup> Ibid p 139

<sup>120</sup> Ibid p 140

objective was official, external recognition of their autonomy.’<sup>121</sup> Edward III had confirmed the town’s free status in 1326 but after extensive lobbying by the abbot, the town lost its burghal status in 1331. Inevitably, tension continued. Successive abbots ‘would not allow free tenants to buy villein land or their serfs to buy freehold property, allowed no remission of rents or services and punished with the utmost severity anyone who hunted in the immense warrens reserved for the monastery...the population lived in a state of chronic tension and there were continual riots against the religious community.’<sup>122</sup>

Reville’s account records a history of disputes involving refusal to grind corn at the monastery’s mill, sieges of the abbey and disputes over access to woodland. Local records reinforce the point. The Park court book records that ‘in the decade of the 1380’s between seventy and eighty tenants were fined for trespass by their beasts, several of them over and over again...including a list of offenders including Gilbert Toby and Geoffrey Rook, men who were implicated in the attacks during the Rising.’<sup>123</sup> No adversary, said H T Riley, ‘was too exalted for Abbot Thomas to lose the opportunity of testing him with his legal rights; from kings, princes and archbishops to serfs and bondsmen...his hand was against every man and every man’s hand against his.’<sup>124</sup>

St Albans was a local uprising that reflected the rebel’s national demands. Disputes over the autonomy of the town, the refusal to let local people acquire land, work freely and acquire possessions and the policy of successive abbots in enforcing villeinage to maintain the pre Black Death ‘status quo’ created the conditions for revolution. Leon Slota’s work on land transfer suggests that ‘the issues in this conflict are readily identified; the tenants challenged the abbey’s claims to exclusive use of wood, pasture and pond, its monopoly of milling and the jurisdiction of its courts. The abbot’s control of land transfer emerges as an important cause of friction

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<sup>121</sup> Dunn, p59

<sup>122</sup> Andre Reville, *Le Soulevement des Travailleurs d’Angleterre en 1381*, trans. Arthur Jones, *The Peasants Revolt in Hertfordshire, 1381*, Hertfordshire Publications, 1981, p86

<sup>123</sup> The Manor of Park in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, M Tomkins, *The Peasants Revolt in Hertfordshire*, Hertfordshire Publications 1981, 56

<sup>124</sup> *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani*,



between the abbey and its tenants.<sup>125</sup> There is no doubt however 'that it was steady seigniorial pressure that produced the Rising under William Grindecobb and his fellows';<sup>126</sup> a century of dispute and disagreement had left the townspeople ready for revolt should the opportunity arise; 'the boldness of the peasants of Kent and Essex gave them that opportunity.'<sup>127</sup>

The Rising in St Albans began on 13/14 June with the arrival of a band of men from Barnet, urging the people of the town to rise and go to London. Their leader was a William Grindecob. Reville suggest that 'the opportunity had come to realise their ambitions to enlarge their rights to graze, to fish and hunt, to make hand querns and free their town from the dominance of the abbey.'<sup>128</sup> Knighton records that 'they met the king at Mile End and received the kings charter declaring that all men should be free and of free condition, that they and their heirs should be freed from the yoke of villeinage and servitude.'<sup>129</sup> Having received the king's charter; they must have thought their campaign had finally succeeded. They returned to their town to confront the abbot who eventually granted them their own charter of freedom, in fact, 'everything they wanted in order to avoid the death of his monks and turn aside the great malice which they felt towards the abbey.'<sup>130</sup> The charter granted, 'first, an absolute right of passage, of pasture and of hunting over certain large areas clearly defined; second a right of fishing in certain waters; third, he allowed each person to set up a hand mill; fourth he granted the town the right to self government, without interference from the abbey bailiff.'<sup>131</sup> The charter, drafted by the rebels themselves, dealt with the grievances of the local people going back over a century. It was a major achievement.

Other towns joined the uprising at St Albans. Between Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> June and the following Thursday, people streamed into the town from as far away as Berkhamstead, Coldecote, Hertford, Watford, Hitchin and Redbourne, Abbots

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<sup>125</sup> Leon Slota, 'Land Transfer and the Lordship of the Estates of St Albans Abbey in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries', *Law and History Review* Vol 6 pp119-138

<sup>126</sup>, M Tomkins, *The Manor of Park*, p 79

<sup>127</sup> Andre Reville, *Le Soulevement des Travailleurs d'Angleterre en 1381*, trans. Arthur Jones, *The Peasants Revolt in Hertfordshire, 1381*, Hertfordshire Publications, 1981, p87

<sup>128</sup> Ibid p 88

<sup>129</sup> Chronicon Henri Knighton II ed J R Lumby (Rolls Series 1889-95)

<sup>130</sup> *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii Sancti Albani*, III

<sup>131</sup> Tomkins, *The Manor of Park* p97

Langley, Walden, Norton, Hexton, Shephall, Newnham and Aston; 'all obtained charters from the Abbey.'<sup>132</sup> Some wanted their own charters of liberty, some the freeing of serfs, the removal of demands for forced labour and for rights to hunt and fish. 'In addition, 'each community threw in its own special grievance- the men of Tring gained exemption tolls, whilst those of Barnet sought to erase the history of their villeinage by burning the Abbey's book of manor court rolls. There was also widespread demolition of enclosures, hedges and other obstructions to the common land that had been erected by the abbey. The men of Redburn levelled an entire embankment protecting the abbey's meadow at Pondmead.'<sup>133</sup> The west of the county was in uproar for a week, freedom appeared to be within people's grasp.

Just across the eastern border of the county, the people of Thaxted took direct action. Newton explains how the rebels there sought to 'ensure the dissolution of the old economic order.'<sup>134</sup> The growth of the cutlery industry had led the lord of the manor to cede part of his land to create a borough, 'freeing burgesses from manorial obligations and allowing some to receive special tenurial rights.'<sup>135</sup> Yet the boundaries and freedoms remained unclear. As in many places, the rural chaos following the Black Death had created opportunities for the survivors; 'tenants on the agricultural manor made great gains, leaseholders at will began to replace customary tenure and other customary holdings were converted to burgage status.'<sup>136</sup> In the words of Newton, 'such men lived in a state of continual uncertainty whether the lord of the manor would someday turn back the clock and assert his undoubted legal rights over them.'<sup>137</sup> The uncertainties created by the new economic and social order were clear to everyone in Thaxted; the motivation of the rebels was to secure these gains.

The Thaxted band and the men of Ware joined forces in Hertfordshire. En route, the Thaxted men had attacked the Bishop of London's prison in Bishops Stortford before joining the Ware rebels in attacking Hertford Castle. John of Gaunt's trespass action charged them with 'entering his castle and removing goods worth a thousand

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<sup>132</sup> *Victoria County History*, Hertfordshire, p 15

<sup>133</sup> Dunn, *The Great Rising of 1381* p 119

<sup>134</sup> K C Newton, *Thaxted in the Fourteenth Century*, Essex Record Office Publication no 33, 1960

<sup>135</sup> Prescott, *Essex Rebel Bands* p58

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid* p 62

<sup>137</sup> Newton *Thaxted in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century*



pounds.<sup>138</sup> The joint force subsequently marched on London and 'according to Gaunt's trespass actions formed the largest single group from outside London to attack his property, the Savoy'.<sup>139</sup>

Apart from this joint action, much of the rebellion in East Hertfordshire centred on local action sometimes associated with the arrival of the main band of marchers, sometimes not. In the east of Hertfordshire, the towns of Ware and Hertford used the Rising to deal with old grievances. Both towns had for years competed for control over the lucrative trade that came from controlling the river crossing on Ermine Street. 'Disputes constantly arose with regard to obstructions in the river at Ware, made in order to block the passage of Hertford ships. Obstruction to navigation was frequently caused by the weirs, mills, pools, stakes and kiddles erected in the river and commissions were periodically issued for their removal...' <sup>140</sup> This longstanding animosity continued into the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The Statute of Labourers had been used by Hertford to attack Ware on and off for thirty years, alleging for example that 'dyers, weavers and tanners infringed the liberties of Hertford. They had also produced a long list of Ware tradesmen who allegedly charged excessive prices for their products'.<sup>141</sup> Actions such as these had led to extensive rioting in Ware; even the 'vicar of Ware and a hermit had been indicted for preaching that the Statute was wicked and that labourers should be able to take what wages they pleased'.<sup>142</sup> Ware was 'the single biggest contributor to the three bands of rebels from Essex and Hertfordshire. The rebels included two bailiffs of the town'.<sup>143</sup>

Prescott suggests that 'at least fifty of the Ware rebels are named in various private prosecutions and that they outnumbered the original band from Thaxted. Nicholas Blake was a representative of one of the most notable families and held the manor of Blakesware; Walter Mice was described as a bailiff of Ware and owned lands in Buntingford and Ware and even the vicar of Ware seems to have been in the forefront of the Ware forces.' <sup>144</sup> As in Essex, for example, a William Stortford attacked

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<sup>138</sup> Prescott, *Essex Rebel Bands*, p 64

<sup>139</sup> Prescott, *Judicial Records of the Rising of 1381*, p 377

<sup>140</sup> VCH Hertfordshire, p 16

<sup>141</sup> Prescott, *Essex Rebel Bands*, p58

<sup>142</sup> *ibid* p58

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid* p 63

<sup>144</sup> Prescott, *Judicial Records* p 377

the Archbishop of Westminster's property at Amwell destroying charters, court rolls and various other goods. Other rebels came from Hoddeston and Standon. There are records of disturbances in the villages around Thaxted, in Sawbridgeworth, Cheshunt and Waltham; it seems the Rising was a parochial affair except in Ware where some of the men of the town joined the march to London.

A number of conclusions suggest themselves from the analysis of Hertfordshire's involvement in the Rising. Hertfordshire people were in a minority in that a substantial number of them were still required to carry out customary work. They had been denied the opportunities to rent and buy land that other people had seized. Little wonder that they rose against the abbot of St Albans. Stitt's work has shown how in a different part of the county, the manorial economic system had the same characteristics as those found nationally; demesne farming had decreased, people had diversified their occupations, they had circumvented the labour laws and had improved their lives. The rebels seem to conform to the national and regional social profile of insurgents; some were wealthy, many were craftsmen; some held positions of authority; they were not all poor people. Hertfordshire people had as much to lose (or gain) as their neighbours in Essex and Suffolk. The county also illustrates Prescott's view that popular rebellion usually has a local dimension. Examples of this are extensive. Yet, even these local examples are broadly consistent with the rebel's demands put to the king in London. They too wanted recognition of the new economic and social order.

## Conclusion

*Long after their defeat, the echoes of their cries reverberated in the politics of the English and later, British, states.<sup>145</sup>*

The Black Death swept the country over the winter of 1348/9. Half the population died, particularly the very young and old. Survivors were young men and women some of whom would join the rebellion of 1381. After the plague had moved on, the entire rural power structure had been upended. The deprivations of the first half of the century became memories. Survivors had new economic power and their relationship with their masters changed significantly. They negotiated higher wage rates, different contracts, developed new occupations and were able to move beyond their manor lands. Landlords had no option but to adapt to these new conditions. Economic freedom was tasted for the first time.

Canute-like, the crown passed new labour legislation in an effort to control both prices and wages. A generation of prosecutions followed against both local lords and their workers. Its administration planted crown agents in every community, seeking out evidence of illegal payments and pitting local people against them. Huge resentment against the perceived injustice of the legislation and its use spilled out in towns like Hertford and Ware. Paradoxically, landowners who had supported the legislation found that they had to circumvent it or face losing workers. Stitt's work on the manorial records of Wymondley in Hertfordshire is but one example of evidence from manorial records showing lords following the requirements of the law yet at the same time supporting the 'black economy' that emerged.

Social change followed. Definitions of 'free' and 'unfree' became meaningless. Lords turned land over from demesne farming to tenant farming. Fewer people accepted work with customary responsibilities. Villeins bought or rented land, improved diet, expanded their ownership of personal possessions and many became wealthy. Others, as in the case of the people of Thaxted, agreed to take land and run their towns as Burghs; the people of St Albans grasped that freedom in 1326 only to have it snatched away five years later; fifty years of dispute and rioting followed. Other parts of the country resisted the change as long as possible. The people of St Albans

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<sup>145</sup> Dunn, *The Great Rising of 1381* p 152

clashed with successive abbots for a century over freedom to fish and graze cattle and the rights to mill their own flour. King and government did not understand or recognise the changes in society and the frustrations of their people. These social changes were held back by a lack of political freedom exemplified strongly by a lack of representation and the means to achieve those freedoms.

Discontent with successive governments further increased the sense of alienation between rulers and ruled. Corruption at court, the use of the labour legislation and increasing taxation followed. The war with France resulted in French attacks within southern England and the need for even more taxation. The levy of the three poll taxes was aimed at significantly increasing the crown's resources for the war. Widespread evasion of the first two taxes led not only to the third tax but also to a process of enforcement involving commissioners being sent to those areas suspected of fraud. .

The aims of the Rising captured the spirit of discontent. Rebels wanted recognition of their new freedoms, economic, social and political; they wanted the apparatus of control that tied them to their lords to be dismantled. They wanted permanent and guaranteed change. In Hertfordshire these aims were pursued in different localities in different ways. The people of the west of the county wanted their 'charter of freedom' to guarantee their rights against an aggressive abbey; in the east local issues predominated but every example can be interpreted in the context of the national demands made of the king.

Reville's description of Hertfordshire peasants is as inaccurate as his analysis of the reasons for the Rising previously discussed. His is the description of a patronising administrator wanting only to soften the edges of something too challenging to comprehend. His peasant was 'a tenant as represented in the Vision of Piers Plowman *'working and restless, as the world requires, toiling with great effort, labouring hard, capable of being dogged in his resolve and tireless action; his senses were slow, his perceptions imprecise; he had no personal view on politics or religion, no time for dreaming and no idea of reforming society; his notions were entirely*

*positive and practical and since his horizon was narrow, they all concerned himself and his property.*<sup>146</sup>

Reville is wrong on almost all counts. This was not a peasant revolution. The leaders of the Rising were survivors of the Black Death. They are known to have been leaders in their communities; many were relatively wealthy and certainly significantly more financially secure than their parents. They held judicial office and were employers in their own right.

Reville also argues that it 'was certainly not political ideals which incited the rebellion...nor had the Rising a religious character...nor was there an orgy of pillaging; above all it had a social objective, it was a rising of tenants against their feudal lords. Their sought objective was to improve the conditions under which the tenants were dependent on their lord.'<sup>147</sup> This is surely wrong too. Social change is political change; it was a political act to march on a king and demand political freedoms. It was a political act to demand a charter of freedom at Mile End. It was a political act to want land rights guaranteed and an end to prosecution. Hertfordshire was no different from elsewhere in the country in using the opportunity of rebellion to surface its own demands for change.

The two-week Rising in June 1381 unquestionably failed. Yet the social and economic changes in the country continued; the confused position of free and unfree people and their rights continued; their ambiguous legal and employment position continued. On the surface nothing changed yet everything had changed. A medieval paradox was the experience of the population.

The Black Death undoubtedly set in motion a train of events which contributed significantly, if not totally, to the Great Rising of 1381. Fear of a return to the conditions of the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, a determination to protect the gains made since the plague, frustration with their lack of representation and mounting disenchantment with successive governments became the reason for the revolt. The only option was to appeal to the king directly; 'denied any effective means of political

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<sup>146</sup> Arthur Jones, trans., *The Rising of the Workers in Hertfordshire*, p110

<sup>147</sup> Reville, Andre, *Le Soulevement des Travailleurs d'Angleterre en 1381*

representation and subject to royal misgovernance and seigniorial oppression, the people of England found their voice for the first time in June 1381.<sup>148</sup>

The Rising leaves enduring memories in British history; six centuries after the Rising, English people were once again rebelling against poll taxes.

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<sup>148</sup> Dunn, *The Great Rising of 1381*, p 152

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