

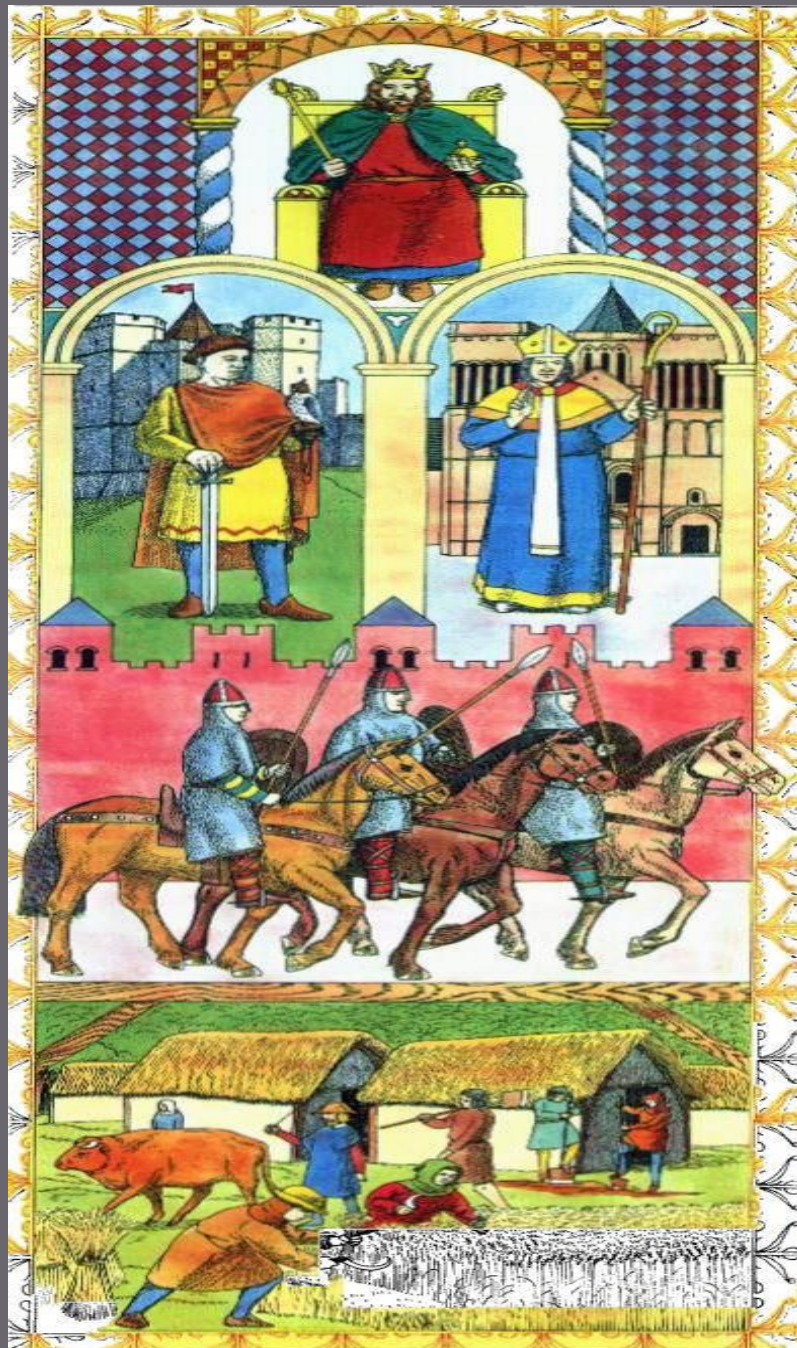
The Great Rising of 1381



MEDIEVAL SOCIETY in 14th Century

Everyone knew their place

- ▣ The Three Orders of Society
 - The King, Nobles, and higher society down to Manor level owned the land, fought wars, made laws, ruled the country
 - The Church, ruled from Rome, was outside civil jurisdiction; ruled people's spiritual lives/owned huge amounts of land/had their own militia and prisons.
CHURCH TEACHINGS WERE DOMINANT
 - The rest; most of the population who worked the land for the other two, who were tied to their Lords' in every respect
- ▣ Ordinary people had few rights, peasants (free men) worked the land; serfs were the property of their lords, most were little more than slaves.



The Manor, centre of everything Not as idyllic as this!



The Manor

- ▣ An Agricultural Society
- ▣ Manors were the economic and social units of life in the early Middle Ages. A manor consisted of a manor house, one or more villages, and up to several thousand acres of land divided into meadow, pasture, forest, and cultivated fields. The fields were further divided into strips; 1/3 for the lord of the manor, less for the church, and the remainder for the peasants and serfs.

Stanstead Bury

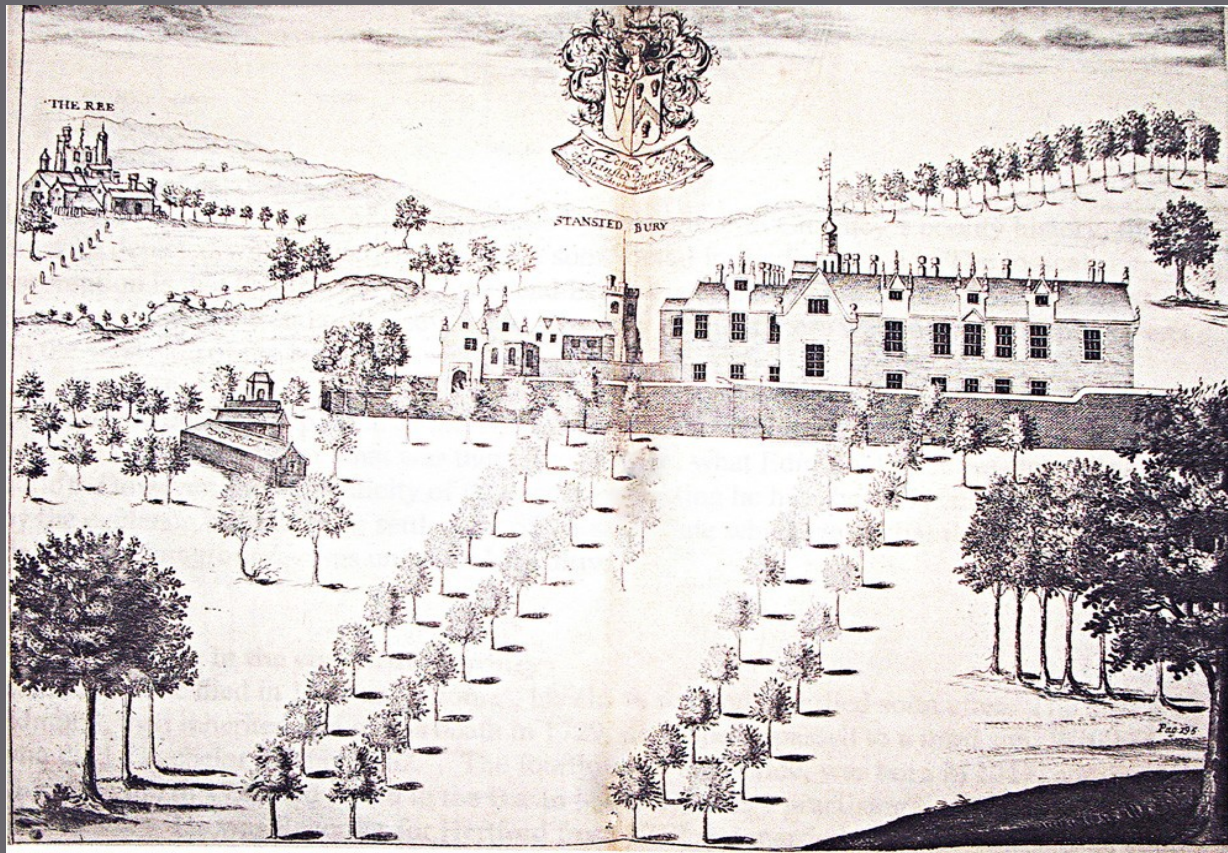


Figure 8. Stanstead Bury from the east, as depicted by Jan Drapentier at the end of the seventeenth century and published in the county history by Sir Henry Chauncy in 1700.

Control over local people came from the Manorial Court

- ▣ The manorial court was presided over by the steward or seneschal, and it was there that various officials — such as the Reeve, who acted as general overseer, and the Hayward, who watched over the crops and brought offenders to court — were appointed. Tenants were punished and often forced to pay fines for their offences; the manorial court thus provided the lord with a convenient source of income.
- ▣ Court records were a major target during the Rising.

The elite controlled the written word-and the law



14th century life?



Village Life

- ▣ Villages consisted of from 10-60 families living in rough huts on dirt floors, with no chimneys or windows. Often, one end of the hut was given over to storing livestock. Furnishings were sparse; three legged stools, a trestle table, beds on the floor softened with straw or leaves. The peasant's (free men and women) diet was mainly porridge, cheese, black bread, and a few home-grown vegetables. The lot of serfs was much harsher.

English Longbow men
Every Sunday after church...



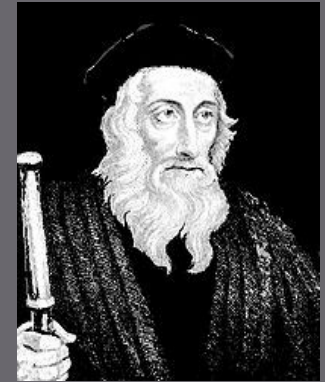
A Serf's life...

Although not technically a slave, a serf was bound to a lord for life. He could own no property and needed the lord's permission to marry. Under no circumstance could a serf leave the land without the lord's permission.

A Reeve and Serfs



The Church under attack...



- ▣ John Wycliffe, philosopher, theologian, preacher, reformer argued
 - The pope had no part to play in worldly affairs
 - The church was too worldly
 - The Bible should be available to everyone in their own language
 - 'Dominion is of Grace', that is, true power is God's, and attempts to use power for individual gain is therefore wrong
 - As human beings we are all brothers (this was well before modern politically correct assumption of 'sisterhood' as well)

‘When Adam delved and Eve span, Who was then the gentleman? From the beginning all men by nature were created alike, and our bondage or servitude came in by the unjust oppression of naughty men. For if God would have had any bondmen from the beginning, he would have appointed who should be bond, and who free. And therefore I exhort you to consider that now the time is come, appointed to us by God, in which ye may (if ye will) cast off the yoke of bondage, and recover liberty.

John Ball ‘The foolish priest of Kent’



et fut une mer

me labourer les terres des

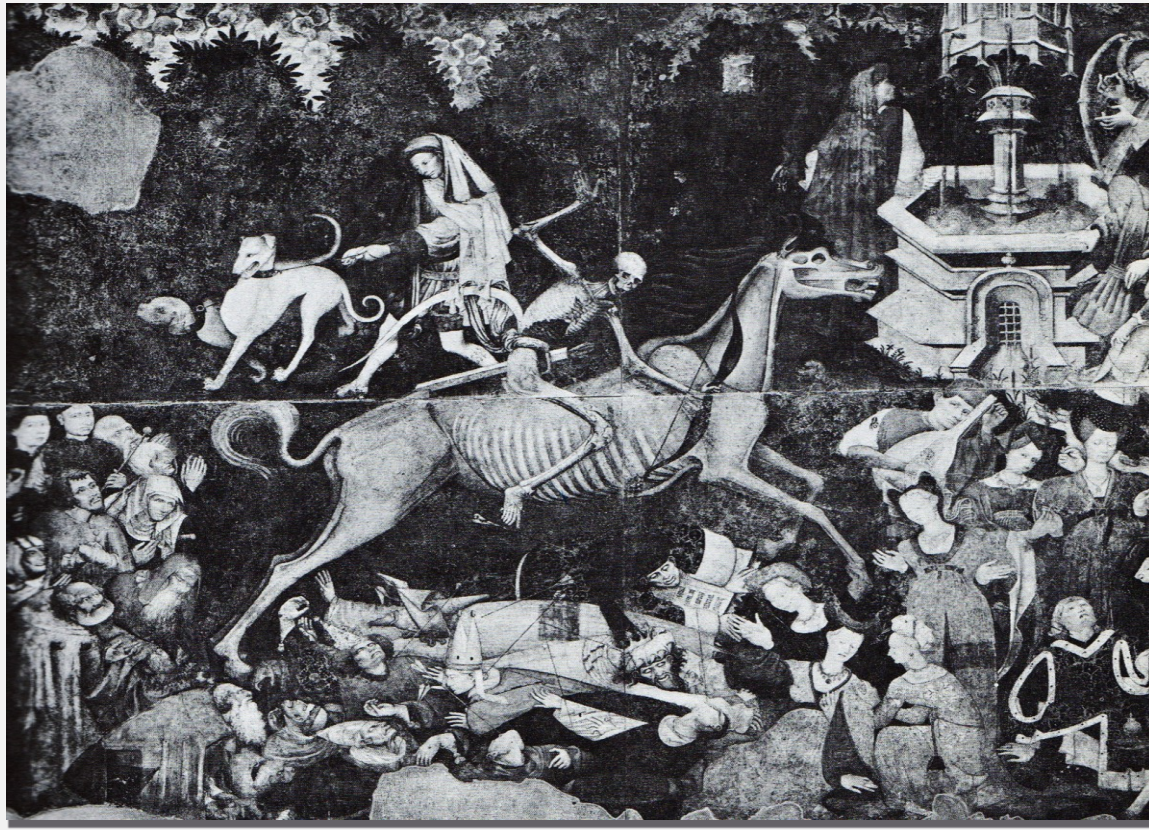
‘14th Century, a bad time for humanity’

- ▣ ‘The Calamitous 14th Century’ all over Europe
 - Flooding on a level compared with the biblical floods
 - 1346 and 1347, crops failed, prices rose
 - Too many people, too little food, famine
 - 100 years war (starts 1337) 1344, English Longbow men win the battle of Crecy
 - Taxes
 - Bad government
- ▣ And then, if things weren't already bad enough, a ship landed its deadly cargo in Melcombe in 1349

KING DEATH

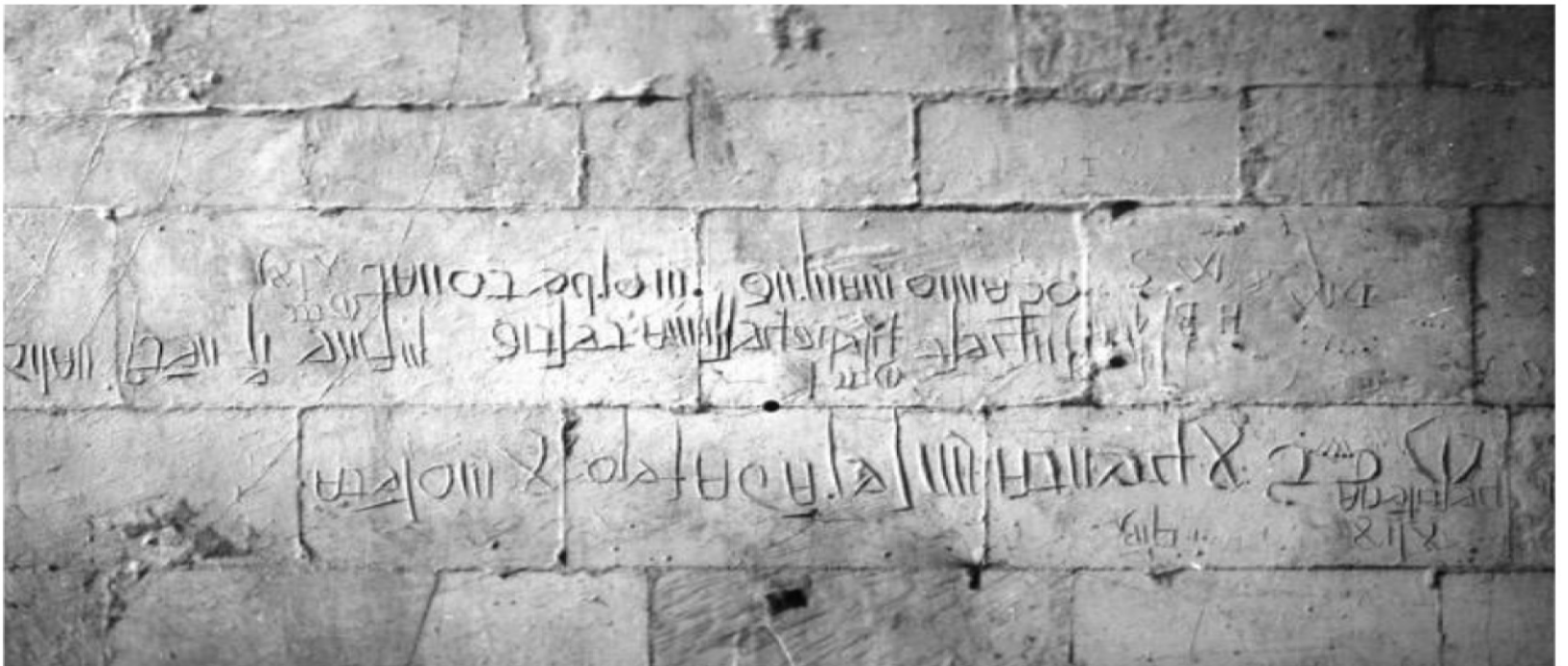
Apocalypse

There before me was a pale horse, its rider was
named Death



‘The beginning of the plague was in 1350
minus1, wretched, fierce, violent
pestilence...only the dregs of the population
live to tell the tale’

The stone carver's despair etched in the church
in Ashwell, Hertfordshire



What must it have been like?

‘In Melcombe,(Weymouth) two ships came alongside. One of the sailors had brought with him from Gascony the seeds of the terrible pestilence’. So recorded the Grey Friars of Lynn. The disease had spread from the far east like wildfire and decimated world population.

- ▣ The disease rapidly spread from the West Country across the whole country.
- ▣ 40-50% of the population perished in 18 months, predominantly the old and young
- ▣ Hertfordshire suffered badly.

14th C depiction of Plague Deaths



Destruction on a huge scale

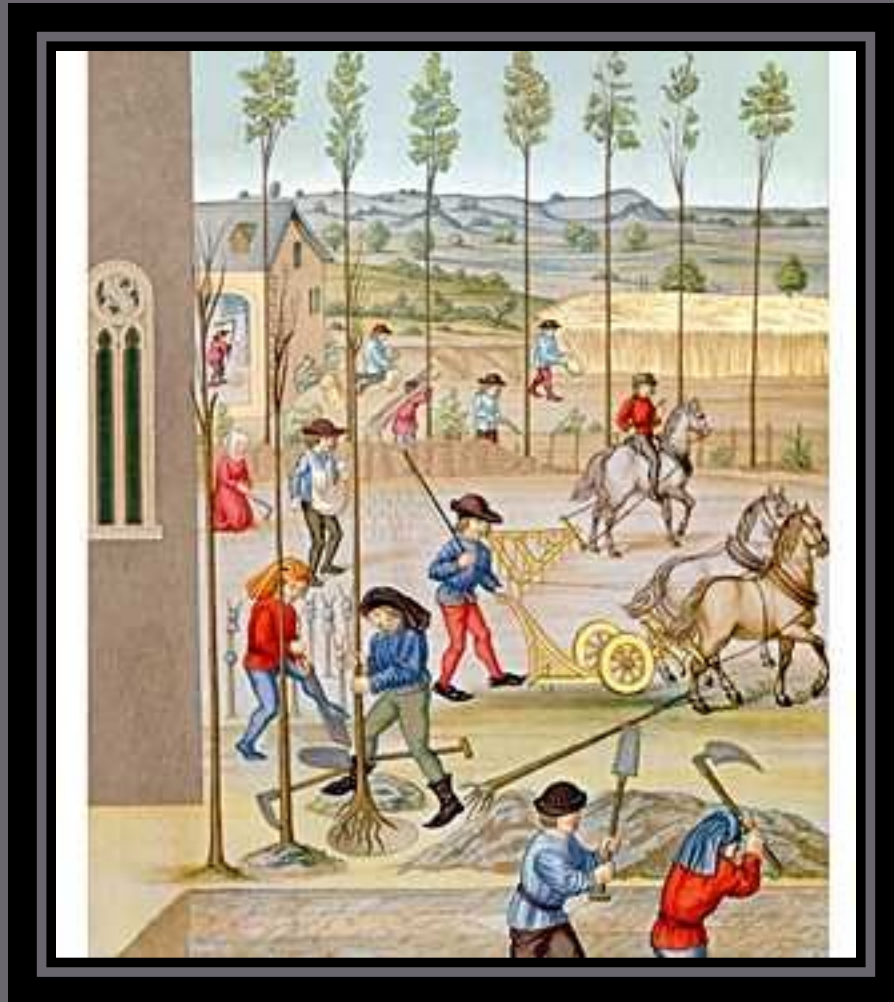
- ▣ The reduction in tenants on the Bishop of Worcester's estates was as high as 80%
- ▣ In Market Roding, Essex, 25% died; in Great Waltham it was 44%
- ▣ One of the Chroniclers wrote that 'many buildings fell into total ruin, there was such a lack of workers, animals and livestock wandered the countryside; as a result essential foodstuffs rose in price by 5 times'
- ▣ What was left was a smaller population, younger, fitter men and women

OUT OF THE RUINS
EMERGES A NEW
ECONOMIC ORDER

Rapid Economic and Social Change

- ▣ Workers now started demanding (and getting) higher wages to work the land for the Manors.
- ▣ In East Anglia, some pay rates went up by 66% between 1340 and 1390
- ▣ Workers followed multiple occupations something they were forbidden under the previous regime; when not working the land they became weavers, retailers, spinners and more
- ▣ People moved around, previously they were confined to their villages; and there is evidence that 'medieval workers became more capable of a collective defence of their interests'
- ▣ People left the land for new occupations further reducing manorial manpower
- ▣ The unfree owned chattels and property and could leave it to their families
- ▣ They could buy and sell land, even employ people-'some peasants owned large quantities of livestock, some individuals having herds of up to 120 sheep or 20 cattle

A new social order



The Manor of Wymondley

- ▣ Hertfordshire had less people per square mile than the national average
- ▣ The Black death had decimated the population by 47%
- ▣ Acreage cropped dropped 50% between 1334 and 1353
- ▣ The availability of workers plummeted by 25%
- ▣ Pay went up by 50%! Example, In 1340, a thresher got 5.3p per unit, in 1380, 7.7p; a mower got 4.9p/unit in 1340, 7.6p in 1380
- ▣ Payment in kind
- ▣ Workers from Wymondley joined the revolt in St Albans on June 16th

Political tension

- ❑ Despite great economic progress, the 30 years after the plague left people uncertain of their political and social rights
- ❑ By late 14th century, records from the Hundred Rolls suggest a ratio of 3:2 in favour of the unfree in the counties between Suffolk and Oxfordshire
- ❑ 'An explosive mix of peasants holding new contractual arrangements and others pre black death tenure'
- ❑ People had no political influence or legal rights therefore living in a system favouring the Establishment
- ❑ The ESTABLISHMENT was threatened-reduced income, loss of control over rural people
- ❑ They were warned! 1377 petition to Parliament 'feared that war might easily break out...villeins and tenants will avenge themselves...'

Nobility and Church respond...

- ▣ One law after another was passed trying to impose price and wages freezes. The same people who passed the laws were also the landowners who needed workers; laws were flouted, a 'black market' erupted
- ▣ Prosecutions ensued further enraging the people- even the carpenter who made the stocks to punish wrongdoers was paid the illegal rate of 5.5d a day!
- ▣ Taxation including poll taxes were inflicted on the population by John of Gaunt to pay for the 100 years war

John of Gaunt



Let us go to the king...

- ▣ John Ball (born and lived in St Albans) an itinerant priest preached his famous sermon
- ▣ 'Let us go to the king, he is young, 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 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'
- ▣ (Froissart Chroniques)

A Boy King, Richard II

- ▣ Grandson of Edward III, (d. 1377) who had ruled for over 50 years; (son of the Black Prince who died before becoming king);
- ▣ Uncle was John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster
- ▣ England was 'ruled' by the 14yr old King – a weak succession.



A DASH FOR FREEDOM..

Treason

- ▣ Yet another (poll) tax is announced by the king-the final straw
- ▣ On 30 May 1381, Villagers in Fobbing, a marshland village just north of the Thames attacked the King's Commissioners and drove them away. Similar actions erupted all over Essex, Kent and other Home Counties including Hertfordshire.
- ▣ England's first Revolution had started; it spread from Cornwall to Yorkshire

The countryside in chaos



Meet the rebels

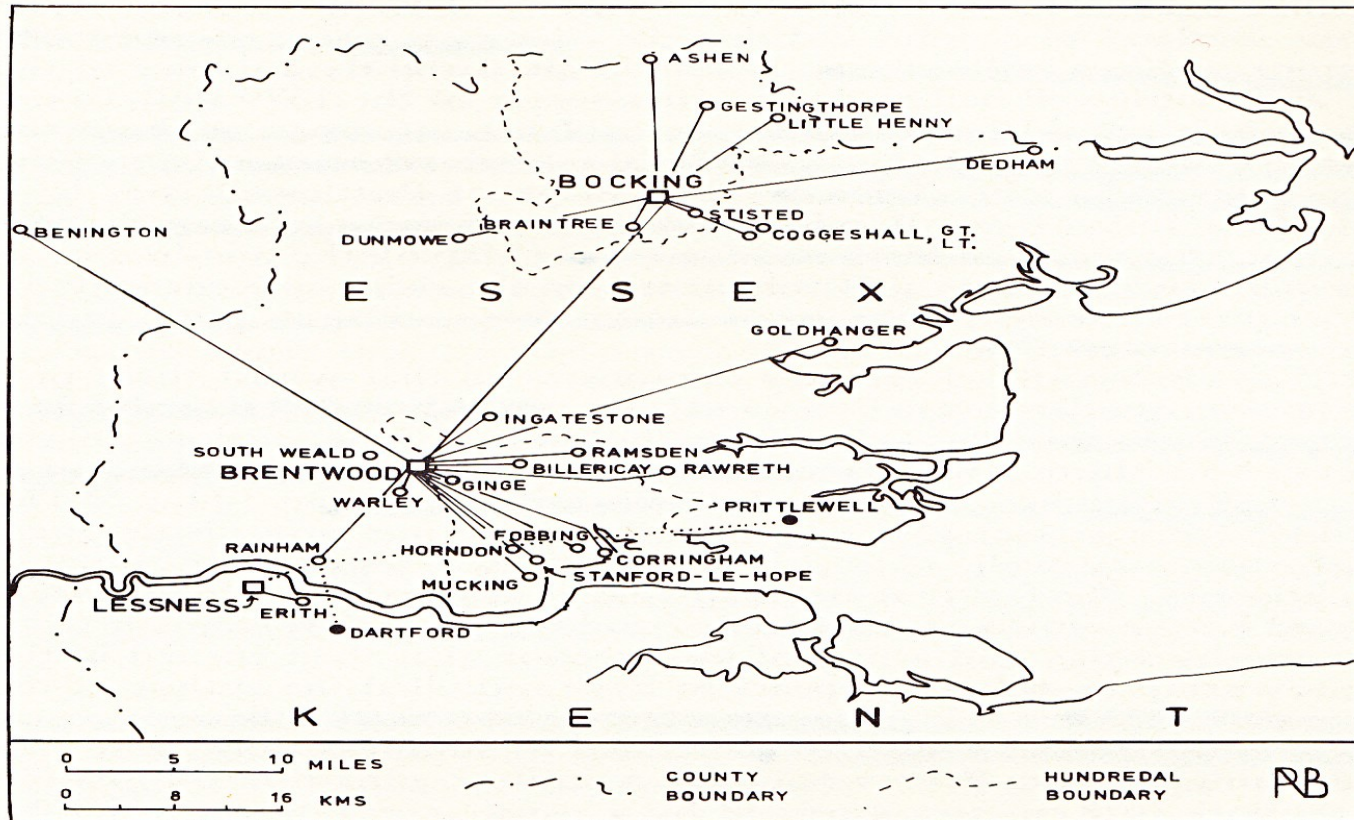
- ▣ They held positions of responsibility-as jurors, bailiff, reeve, ale tasters, farmers, tailors, cordwainers, skimmers fullers, dyers and glovers. 75 of the Essex rebels were even responsible for collecting the poll tax- William Field was responsible in North Weald alone
- ▣ Merchants in the towns
- ▣ They held manorial or Judicial Office-jurors, reeves, ale-tasters, constables, Bailiffs even
- ▣ Many were middle aged, survivors of the plague
- ▣ Most held land- James Benorth had 10 acres, James atte Ford, 18 acres
- ▣ Some were very prosperous; William Gildebourne had sheep and cattle worth £40
- ▣ John Summer was worth 400 marks

- ▣ 'The Leaders include the odd knight, two lords of the manor, a farmer, three Franklins, 22 tailors, five skinners, three fullers as well as a dyer and glover'
- ▣ Hardly the Yokels depicted in the Chronicles. They and their families had a huge amount to lose.

Two weeks in June; 'a dash for freedom'

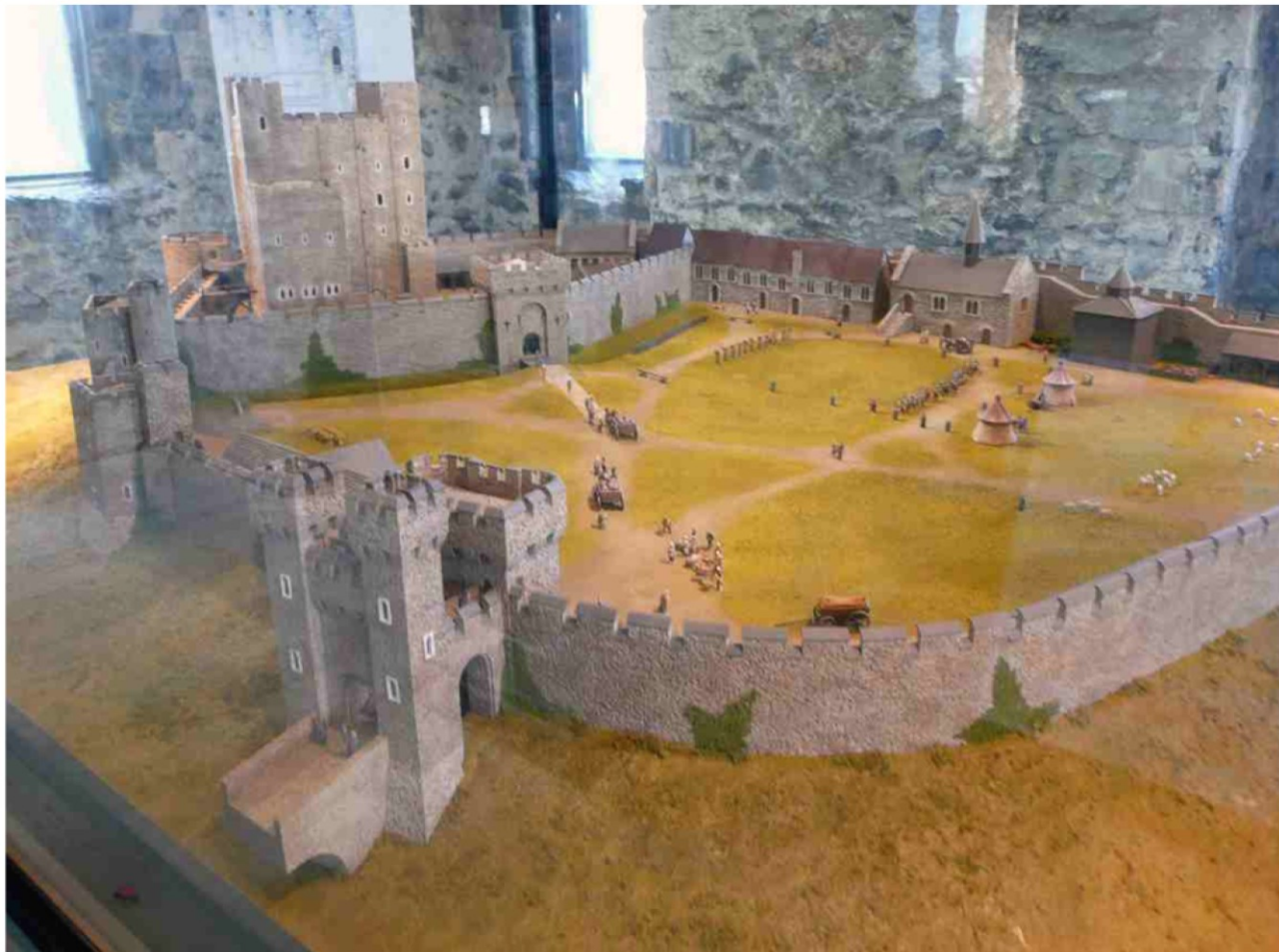
- ▣ 30th May Fobbing, the rebellion begins led by John Baker
- ▣ 2nd June meeting in Bocking agrees that they would 'destroy diverse lieges of the lord king and have no law except those they enacted'
- ▣ 3rd June Kent rebels led by Abel Kerr cross the Thames to meet men of Essex at Rainham
- ▣ 6th June, Essex attack the Sheriff, Kent take Rochester castle-'a vivid demonstration of the insurgents power'
- ▣ 7th June rebels enter Maidstone/Wat Tyler emerges as leader
- ▣ 8th June, Dartford/2 manor Houses sacked
- ▣ 9th June, ceremonial burning of records
- ▣ 10th June Essex capture Sheriff/seize and kill Escheator sack hospital at Cressing/Kent move from Rochester to Canterbury/storm the castle/capture Sheriff/move on to Maidstone

The first 5 Days



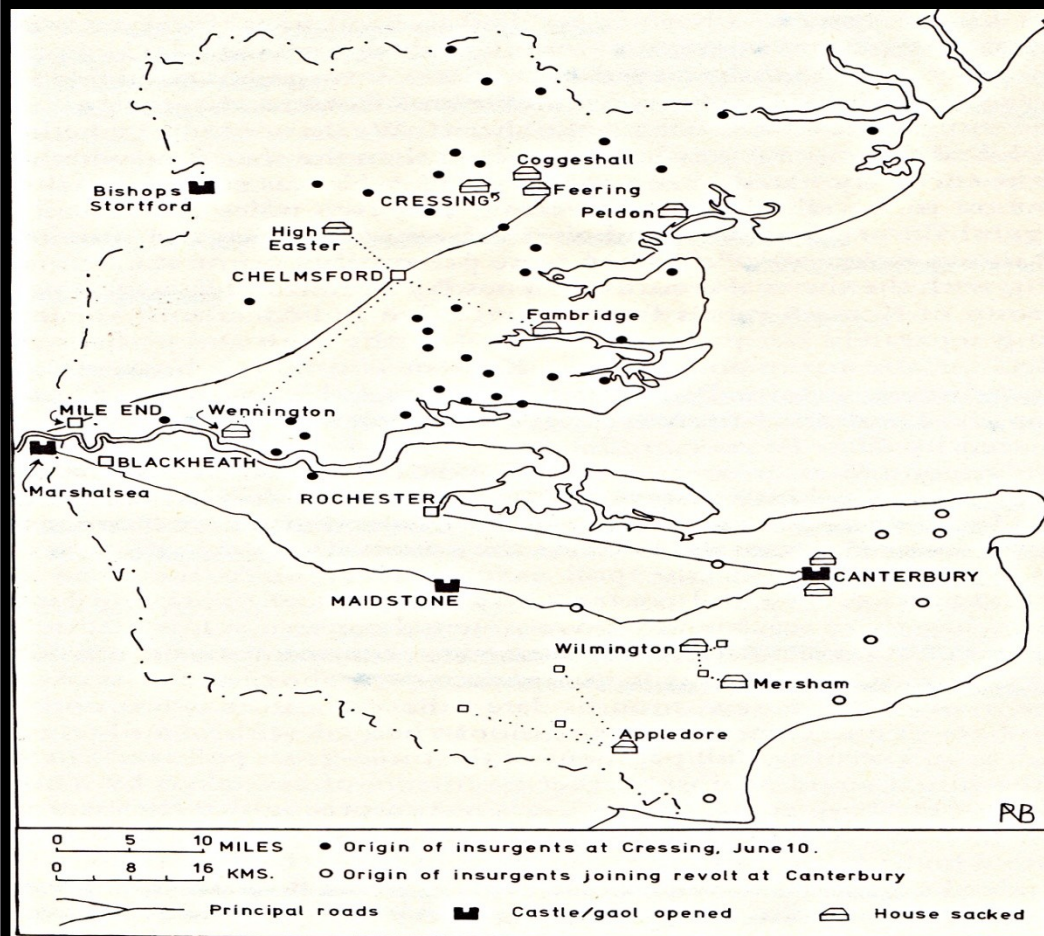
Map 6. The Beginning of the Revolt (30 May–4 June). Meetings at Brentwood (30 May), Bocking (2 June) and Lessness (2 June).

Rochester Castle



- ▣ 11th June, Essex take Chelmsford and sack Manor House/attack prison at Bishop's Stortford/Kent sack Maidstone Prison
- ▣ 12th June Essex march on Mile End, Kent reach Blackheath/sack Lambeth Palace attack Marshalsea Prison. 'Named traitors should be put to death'
- ▣ King Moves to the Tower!
- ▣ 13th June; Essex destroy Hospital of St John/London Bridge thrown open, Kent attack Savoy(John of Gaunt's Palace) and Fleet Prison
- ▣ Sudbury (Archbishop of Canterbury and Chancellor) and Hales (Treasurer of England), architects of the Poll Tax executed at the Tower

The Kent Revolt and the march to London



Map 8. The Approach to London (10-12 June).

How DID they do it...?

- ▣ 105 villages in Essex, 35 in Hertfordshire, 118 in Kent, 72 in Suffolk were involved
- ▣ 4000 people were ready
- ▣ Widespread use of letters sent between Kent, Suffolk and Norfolk urging people to rise
- ▣ Widespread communications across the river
- ▣ Ability to move at speed over considerable distance
- ▣ Between 10th and 12th June, Essex had travelled 70 miles , 40 Parishes involved.
- ▣ Same time scale, Kent travelled 85 miles

Hertfordshire



Christopher Saxton's County Map of 1577
courtesy Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies

The Hertfordshire Peasant!

- ▣ 'Working class and restless, toiling with great effort; he was capable of great resolve and tireless action; his senses were slow, his perceptions imprecise; he had no personal views on politics or religion; he had 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!'
- ▣ The Vision of Piers Plowman (William Langland)

St Albans Abbey, c 1539

- ▣ Walsingham, the Abbey Chronicler provides some of the propaganda of the Rising



The Rising in West Hertfordshire

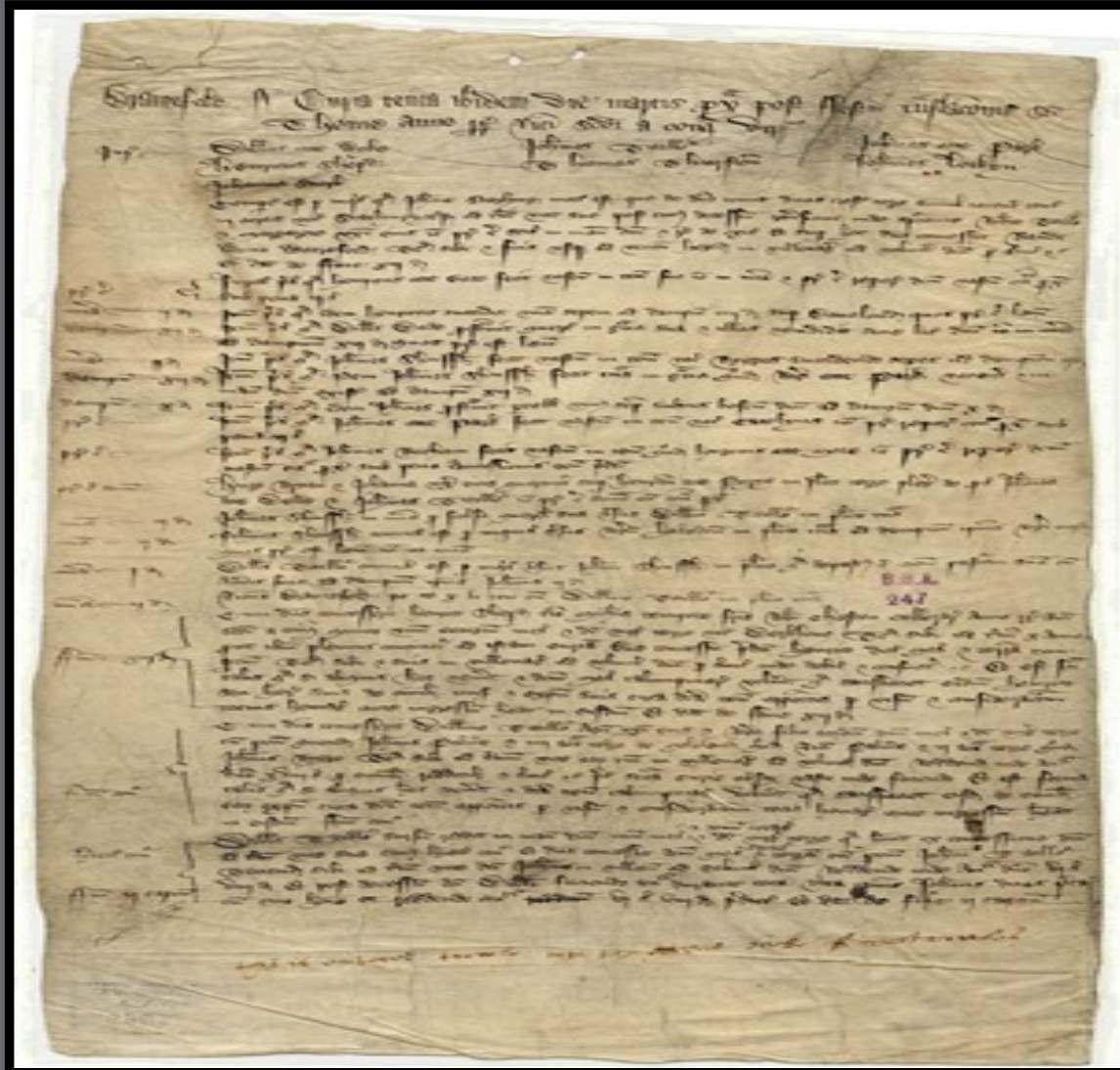
- ▣ The Abbey had for many years refused to let people acquire land, work freely, break the Abbey's monopoly on milling, use woods and rivers
- ▣ A century of dispute had left the townspeople ready for revolt; the boldness of the peasants of Essex and Kent gave them that opportunity
- ▣ The rising there began 13/14th June when men from Barnet arrived urging people to go to London. William Grindecob was their leader. The joint band of rebels went down to London and were part of the looting of the Savoy John of Gaunt's Palace
- ▣ 'They asked only for a charter setting out their rights, promising that if they obtained it there would be permanent peace between town and the monastery...the Abbot signed and sealed it without reservation

The St Albans Charter

The Charter granted

- ▣ 'an absolute right of passage, of pasture and of hunting; the right of fishing in certain water; each person could set up a hand mill; the town was granted a right of self government'

The Abbott's record of the Rebellion



Rebellion spreads

- ▣ Villages all over West Herts joined in; villagers streamed into St Albans demanding their own freedoms. Berkhamstead, Coldecote, Hitchin, Redbourne. They too received their charters of liberty.
- ▣ Rebels in Barnet burned the Abbey's book of Court Rolls to erase the history of villeinage in their village.

East Hertfordshire

- ▣ People in Thaxted marched into Hertfordshire; they sacked the Bishop of London's prison at Bishop's Stortford...'attacking prisons signalled a new regime where laws would be fair'; allegedly they freed John Ball
- ▣ They joined Ware rebels to attack Hertford Castle taking £1000 of possessions! They marched to London and were involved with the sacking of John of Gaunt's Palace.
- ▣ One of the insurgents was another vicar of Ware, Philip of Hertford

Local disputes flared up

- ▣ Hertford and Ware used the Rising to deal with old grievances!
- ▣ The towns had long been in dispute over control of the Lea crossing and the main roads running to York and Cambridge
- ▣ Hertford had used despised legislation to attack the activities of weavers and tanners in Ware . Severe rioting ensued.
- ▣ The Vicar of Ware and a local hermit were indicted for preaching legislation was wicked and that labourers should be paid what they pleased
- ▣ Ware supplied the most rebels who went to London –at least 50 names can be found in indictments
- ▣ Walter Mice, a rebel, a bailiff of Ware owned lands in Buntingford and Ware
- ▣ William Stortford attacked the Archbishop of Westminster's property in Amwell destroying charters/court rolls and other records
- ▣ Other rebels came from Hoddesdon and Standon; disturbances were recorded in Cheshunt and Waltham

King meets the Essex band

- ▣ Essex demanded that 'named traitors be put to death, there should be no law but that of Winchester and that no man should be a serf'
- ▣ King agrees and instructs that charters granting freedom from bondage should be issued immediately. Clerks worked all night.
- ▣ These were immediately carried back to towns and villages, the Essex revolt was over

Richard II meets the Essex band at Mile End



The King at Blackheath

- ▣ 15th June, the King meets the Kentish band.
- ▣ They demand ' There should be no Lords, the goods of the church should be disposed of, all land should be divided between people, that all men should be free and that there should be no more villeins in England'
- ▣ Mayhem breaks out, Mayor of London kills Wat Tyler, the Kentish revolution collapses.

Wat Tyler is killed



Aftermath

- ▣ Leaders were indicted, some executed, rebels slaughtered
- ▣ The Kings promises to the Essex men were rescinded as were the Abbott's in St Albans
- ▣ Serfdom lingered for many years, more in name than reality
- ▣ Economic change continued; social and political freedoms evolved slowly
- ▣ Richard II was deposed and died 18 years later

‘Long after their defeat, the echoes of their cries reverberated in the politics of the English and later, British State.’