

## The Peasant's Revolt

700 years ago, England was having a very hard time. King Edward III and his son, the Black Prince, had been fighting lots of wars with France. Lots of people had died in the battles and there were not enough people to farm the land to grow food. As if that wasn't bad enough, then came the Black Death. This was a very nasty disease and it swept through the country killing thousands and thousands of people.

Each square below is a house. Imagine that all the people in every black house died. You can see, there were not many people left. It was a lot worse than the disease that we are having at the moment.



Now there were even fewer people to farm the land and so many fields were left with nothing growing, but weeds, and the people began to go hungry. The little food there was became very expensive. Everyone was very unhappy.

In those days, the poor people (who were called peasants) worked for the lords of the manor who owned lots of land. The lords paid the peasants to work for them. The peasants began to ask the Lords for higher wages for their work.

Although the King passed a law to say that no one could ask for higher wages, the lords of the manor had to pay the peasants higher wages, or they had nobody to farm for them.

Then the Black Prince died and shortly afterwards, his father, King

Edward died too. The Black Prince's son, Richard II became king. He was only 11 years old. Think how hard it must be to become king when you are so young and the country is in such a mess. He was far too young to rule the country himself, and so his Uncle Richard II ruled with the help of the nobles. The people had hoped that with a new king things would get better, but sadly, this did not happen. The nobles did as they pleased and the people had to pay more tax to the King to pay for even more wars. Rough, rude men were sent all over the country to collect the money. They treated the people very badly.

We will leave the peasants there for a moment while we learn about a man called Wycliffe who lived at that time. He was a Christian and he could see wrong things being taught in the churches. The church was cheating people out of their money. He began to preach that this was wrong and that the clergy should live as the apostles did and give up all their property. The more he read his Bible and looked at what was happening in the churches he saw more and more that was wrong. The clergy were asking the people to pay them to forgive them. Wycliffe wanted the people to hear about God's free offer of salvation if we turn from our sin.

Wycliffe formed a small band of men who went around the country telling the people the Good News. The people were glad to hear it! In those days the Bible was written in Latin, and most people could not read it. It was easy for the clergy to cheat them. Wycliffe translated the Bible into English so that people could read it for themselves.

Meanwhile, the peasants were not happy. Both in the country and in the towns things were rather unsettled. Some of the men became robbers. One day, the rough rude men went to collect the taxes in Gravesend in Kent and they were beaten away. The villagers stirred up others in the villages around to join them and

soon peasants from all counties around were flocking to London, to Blackheath. Here they listened to another preacher called John Ball. John Ball did not preach the same message as Wycliffe. Instead, John Ball preached that everyone is equal and therefore there should not be any nobles and lords. This message pleased the angry peasants. By June 10th the whole country was in an uproar. They made many demands for wages and caused much trouble, even killing the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Chancellor in the Tower of London.

Many blamed John Wycliffe for the trouble, but he had never supported it.

The nobles arranged meetings with the peasant leaders. They faced each other and the leader of the peasants went forward to speak to the Royal party, but he was killed. The peasant mob surged forward in anger towards the Royal party. The young king wishing to protect his men rode forward and said to the peasants, "Sirs, will you kill your king? I will be your chief and captain and you shall have from me all that you seek."

The peasants believed the king and trusted him and rode off to their villages hoping things would now get better. Alas for the poor peasants, the king did not keep his promise and sent his men to hunt after them and many were killed.

These were sad days indeed.

Adapted from:

Adapted from Owen, Evan, *What Happened Today* Volume 2 Available on the *Mothers' Companion* Flash-drive.

<https://motherscompanion.weebly.com> and *The Story of God's Dealings with our Nation* Volume 1 which is available here: <https://blogaboutbritain.co.uk/product-category/history>.

and

*Our Island Story* by H.E. Marshall



John Ball speaks to the peasants (Picture: Clip Art)