Downloaded by GOVEY at St Botolph's Church of England Primary School on 10/12/20. © Copyright 2020 Cornerstones Education Limited

Peasants, Princes and Pestilence

Life in the 14th century

The 14th century was a difficult time for the people of England. The kings of England fought expensive, and usually unsuccessful, battles. Cold weather and bad harvests at the beginning of the century led to famine. A disease called the Black Death spread through Europe to Britain and killed millions of people. The poor rebelled over expensive taxes and terrible working conditions.

The feudal system

At the beginning of the 14th century, society was organised into a feudal system, which split people into groups based on their roles. The king was at the top of the feudal system and peasants, serfs and villeins were at the bottom.

The king ruled and protected the country.

↓

Nobles and bishops were rich landowners who helped the king to rule England.

↓

Knights were brave fighters who worked for the nobles and fought for the king. They followed special rules called the code of chivalry.

↓

Craftsmen, freemen and merchants were skilled workers who owned small pieces of land.

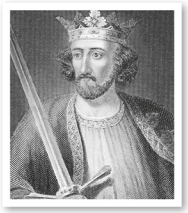
↓

Peasants, serfs and villeins worked the land and had very few rights.

Kings

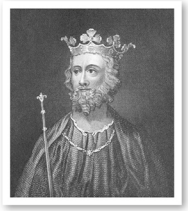
Edward I, 1272–1307

During Edward I's reign, England fought a war against Wales and eventually took control of Wales. Edward I also made many changes to the law and how England was ruled.



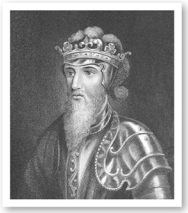
Edward II, 1307–1327

Edward II tried to conquer Scotland but he was defeated by Robert the Bruce. He was not a very good ruler and was very unpopular. He was forced to give up the throne and was replaced by his 14-year-old son.



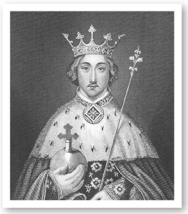
Edward III, 1327–1377

Edward III ruled England for 50 years and tried to conquer France. His actions started the Hundred Years War, a series of battles between England and France over who would rule France. France eventually won.



Richard II, 1377–1399

Richard II was involved in calming down the peasants during the Peasants' Revolt in 1381. He was only 14 but bravely led the angry peasants away from the scene.



The Black Death

The Black Death was the name given to a type of plague that spread from Asia in the 1330s and across Europe in the 1340s. The Black Death reached England early in the summer of 1348. By 1350, it had spread through most of Britain and had killed almost half of the population.

Causes of the Black Death

The Black Death was caused by a type of bacteria called *Yersinia pestis*. It is thought to have been carried by fleas that lived on black rats. The fleas then transferred the bacteria to humans.

Symptoms

The first symptoms of the Black Death were usually a high fever, headaches, vomiting and general aches and pains. Next, many victims developed lumps called buboes under their arms and on the inner thighs. Red and black boils and spots would then appear all over the body. These spots gave the Black Death its name. The buboes would split and the victim would usually die. This process could take between 12 hours and three days.



Treatments

At the time, doctors had no idea what caused the Black Death or how to treat it. Treatments included rubbing onions, herbs, snakes, pigeons or frogs on the body. Doctors also suggested drinking vinegar, urine or eating different mixtures of herbs or flowers. None of these treatments worked.

Images used from: Wikimedia Commons/Public domain

Tip: Print in A3.

Copyright © 2018 Cornerstones Education Limited

Downloaded by GOVEY at St Botolph's Church of England Primary School on 10/12/20. © Copyright 2020 Cornerstones Education Limited

The Peasants' Revolt 1381

Life was hard for peasants after the Black Death. When the government made everyone over the age of 15 pay an expensive poll tax to fund the war against France, the peasants became very angry. They protested by marching to London, killing government officials and destroying property. This was called the Peasants' Revolt.

30th May	A tax collector, Thomas Bampton, tries to collect taxes from the people of Fobbing, Essex. Thomas Baker leads a revolt against Thomas Bampton. Other villages revolt when news of Fobbing spreads.
7th–12th June	Wat Tyler becomes the leader of a group of peasants in Kent. They join peasants from Essex and Suffolk and march to London.
13th June	The gates of London open and the peasants attack the houses of some advisors of King Richard II.
14th June	King Richard II meets with Wat Tyler and a group of peasants at Mile End and agrees to their demands. While the meeting is taking place, another group of peasants kill the Archbishop of Canterbury. The king spends the night in hiding, fearing for his life.
15th June	King Richard II meets the peasants again in Smithfield. Wat Tyler is killed during a scuffle. King Richard II calms the situation and promises to help the peasants.



Wat Tyler is killed by the Mayor of London



After the death of Wat Taylor, King Richard II promises to help the peasants

After the Peasants' Revolt

The peasants did not stay together and the revolt ended after the death of Wat Tyler. King Richard II did not stick to his promises and he ordered that many of the peasants should be hanged. Parliament realised that they had asked the peasants for too much and no more poll tax was collected. The demands of the peasants were mostly met over the next 50 years so peasants were able to earn more money and gain more freedom.

Glossary

bacteria	Microorganisms that can cause disease.
bishop	A high ranking priest in the church who is in charge of other priests.
chivalry	The rules that knights lived by, based on courage, kindness and honour.
famine	An extreme situation where there is little or no food available to feed many people.
merchant	A person who buys and sells goods.
noble	A person who belongs to the highest social class.
parliament	A group of people who make laws and run a country.
plague	A disease caused by bacteria that spreads very quickly.
poll tax	A set amount of money that must be paid by every adult to the government.
revolt	A violent action taken against a government or ruler.
serf	A servant or labourer who had to obey and work on the land of a lord.
villein	A peasant who pays a lord or manor for land.

Images used from: Wikimedia Commons/Public domain

Copyright © 2018 Cornerstones Education Limited