

Was the Medieval landscape of England one of fear and decay?

- Timeline:
- **1300: Serfdom** remains a feature of England's feudal society.
- **1315-16: Great Famine** – 10% of the population died.
- **1348: Black Death** arrives in Britain
- **1351: King Edward III** introduces the **Statute of Labourers Law**. Wages have to return to pre Black Death levels.
- **1360s Priest John Ball** declares that **villeins should be freed**.
- **1381 – King Richard II** introduced the **Poll tax – 5p for all**.
- **1381 – May – Peasants Revolt**



Life of a peasant

- 90% of villeins lived in a Medieval village
- Peasants paid a **tithe** to the church and to the Lord – 10%
- Peasants could not leave the village or marry without the permission
- Peasants were subsistence farmers.
- The average life expectancy was 32, although the medium age of people was just 21! Today it is 38.
- Nothing mattered more than a good **harvest**. It meant both health and comfort. A dreadful wet summer and terrible harvest led to the **Great Famine of 1315-1316** – where **10% of the population died of starvation**. These bad harvests lasted to 1322.
- Common diseases = ergotism caused by damp rye. Also called St Anthony's Fire.



Medieval Town

- When William conquered England there were only **15 towns**, with an average population of **1000** each. 8 had a **pop of 3000+**.
- **London** was the largest, **10,000 people & became the capital**. By **1400** London had **45,000+** and **England had 300+ towns**.
- Castles, rivers and the church was all a key feature of a town.
- **New French communities** in towns like **Southampton**
- Towns were **growing up by the new castles** like **Newcastle** –
- 300 towns had charters. This meant the King had freed them.
- Church ran over 500 hospitals across England.
- Towns public health was poor. Government & local councils had laws preventing filth but people forced to dump as there was no infrastructure just gong farmers and muck rakers.



Key words to use in this unit:

- **Labourers** – someone working manually.
- **Villein** = a peasant tied to the land by their need to work for free for their Lord.
- **Serfdom** – the system that bound them.
- **Subsistence** – only growing enough for themselves.
- **Charter** – when the monarch grants rights and privileges to a town.
- **Bubonic plague**. The name of the disease nicknamed the Black Death.
- **Yesinia Pestis** – the Black Death virus.
- **Statue of Labourers** – a law that forced the wage to return to pre Black Death level.
- **Revolt** – when people rise up against a leader, government or ruler.

The Black Death – Called the bubonic plague.

Arrived from China to Britain in 1348 from the trade routes.

Real Cause

Yesinia Pestis virus lived in the rats blood & transmitted by fleas. **What did they think was the real cause?**

Miasma's – bad smells

God – sent as a punishment for their sins & poor behaviour.

Imbalance of the 4 humours – an Ancient Greek idea.

Movement of the planets.

How did they respond?

Burnt incense & Edward III cleaned streets to remove miasma's.

Flagellants whipped themselves to be saved by God.

People prayed & made blessings in church.

Balanced their humours by blood letting or purging bile.

Effects of the Black Death

Death rate estimated to be between 30% and 60%.

Psychological: Felt freedom. Some lived wild immoral lives.

Social – many peasants no longer accepted their place at the bottom of the feudal system. Diet improved – more meat.

Economic – wages increased & many peasants could experience freedom as Landlords were desperate for their labour.

The Peasants revolt, 1381

Cause 1: King Edward III introduced the Statute of Labourers. The King forced wages to return to pre Black Death levels.

Cause 2: Peasants were told to they had to continue their work service to their Lord.

Cause 3: King Richard II introduced the poll tax. Both rich and poor have to pay 5p a year.

Events:

-Leader Wat Tyler and Priest John Ball were angry about the above and also how the tax collector Thomas Bampton had behaved. So they marched 100,000 angry peasants to London. The city gates were open for them.

-King Richard II met them at Mile End and agreed to their demands, probably in fear of London being burnt down.

-Meanwhile at the Tower the Archbishop & treasurer were beheaded.

The next day the King met Wat Tyler & 25,000 peasants at Smithfields.

-The King appears to have ordered the murder of Wat Tyler by the Mayor.

-The revolt collapsed, peasants returned home & John Ball was quartered.

Results: The King broke all his promises. But within 50 years the next Kings granted their demands. The power of the peasants together was shown!



Ian Mortimer: 'The Landscape of Medieval England is one of fear and decay.'