

The English Peasants revolt in 1381

Froissart's Chronicles

Here is a description, from a chronicle of the time, of the final meeting of **King Richard II** and the leader of the **Revolt - Wat Tyler**. It covers the years 1322 until 1400 and describes the lead up to and the progress of the first half of the Hundred Years' War. For centuries it has been recognized as the chief expression of the chivalric revival of fourteenth-century England and France.

- The Reign of **Richard II**: 1377 to 1399 - He came to power as a boy and presided over revolt, disease, and the outbreak of civil conflict in England. His kingly outlook showed itself in a number of ways. He insisted on grander forms of address like "Your majesty" instead of "My lord"
- **The Revolt**: The unrest in England started as a local rising in Brentwood Essex, when the first attack on a tax collector took place. From this, the revolt spread rapidly from village to village and tax collectors were attacked across south-east England. In a matter of days towns and villages in Kent, Suffolk, Hertfordshire, and Norfolk were involved. Soon, armed gangs of rioters were attacking and destroying churches and monasteries and the properties of some of the nobility. **Wat Tyler** was elected as one of the leaders of the revolt.

The King issued an order that all the people of the rebellion should come to meet him, and they did.

When the King arrived, the rebels formed themselves into large groups in the meadow outside the church of St. Bartholomew. The mayor London came up, and the King asked if he could talk to the leader of the rebels. Then the mayor called Wat Tighler from Maidstone, who came with great confidence on a small horse with a dagger in his hand which he borrowed from another man. The King shook his hand and said, "I've heard good things about you. I'm sure we can work this out and be good friends."

The King said to Wat, "Why don't you give all this up and go back home?" But Wat was angry and swore at the King and told him that neither he nor any of his followers were going anywhere

unless the King gave them what they wanted. It seemed like God had deserted the people. The King had turned against them and no-one knew who or what to blame and whether through fear or desperation, the peasants were turning against the state and the church. He told the King that not only would he be sorry, but all of the people in government would be sorry too if they didn't get what they wanted.

Wat then gave the King the details of what they wanted: That the law of the land in Winchester should be followed and no other laws, that no one should be in charge if they didn't act in a responsible way, that everyone except the King should be equals, that the property of the church should stay with the church and should not be stolen by the rich people in power, and that whatever property the church had that it didn't need should be divided equally among the people of the local church.

He also demanded that there should only be one bishop in charge of the church in England, and that all the lands held by the bishop should be confiscated and divided up among the people, except for a reasonable amount of good they needed to enjoy a reasonable standard of living. Added to this, there was the complication that the common people were losing respect for the authority of the church. There were many hardships and the effect of the catastrophe that was the plague cannot be made clear enough. The established church had lost the confidence, and through that, the faith of a large section of the population. That there should no longer be a class of servants in England, and that all men should be free and of the same rank.

To this the King gave an easy answer, that he would do all that he could, and he would give them what they wanted, except for what he would reserve for himself and the office of the King.