

British History Series: Episode 14: Black Death and Peasants Revolt

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Welcome to this recap of British History Part 14, focusing on the Black Death and the Peasants' Revolt. This session covers a pivotal period in England's history during the 14th century, exploring the devastating plague and its societal consequences.

The Black Death Arrives (1348)

- **Arrival in England:** The Black Death, or bubonic plague, arrived in Melcombe Regis (now part of Weymouth) in Dorset on June 24, 1348. It was carried by ships returning from France and the Mediterranean.
- **Symptoms and Impact:** The plague caused high fever, convulsions, vomiting, and the development of black lumps (bubos) on the body. It was highly contagious and deadly, with estimates suggesting it killed between a third and half of England's population (1.5 to 2.5 million people).
- **Spread:** The plague spread rapidly through Bristol, the Midlands, London, York, Scotland, and Ireland. It affected all classes, including nobility and clergy.
- **Long-Term Effects:** The Black Death dramatically reduced the labor force, leading to economic shifts. Workers began demanding higher pay, challenging the traditional feudal system.

The Peasants' Revolt (1381)

- **Causes:** The revolt was triggered by a combination of factors:
 - The Statute of Laborers (1351), which attempted to cap wages.
 - Enclosure of fields, restricting common land use.
 - Ongoing wars with France and heavy taxation (including a poll tax).
- **Escalation:** Resistance began in Fobbing, Essex, when a tax commissioner was met by an angry mob. Protests spread to East Anglia and Kent.
- **Key Figures:** Watt Tyler led the Kentish rebels, and John Ball, a radical priest, preached social equality, inspiring the revolt.
- **Events in London:** Rebels entered London, burned properties (including the Savoy Palace), and attacked the Tower of London. Archbishop Simon Sudbury and Treasurer Hales were executed.
- **King Richard II's Role:** The young King Richard II met with the rebels twice. He initially promised to end serfdom, which led many Essex rebels to return home. He later quelled the revolt after Watt Tyler's death.
- **Aftermath:** Although Richard II broke his promise to end serfdom, the poll tax was abolished. The feudal order gradually declined, and a wage economy emerged.

Key Takeaways

- The Black Death was a catastrophic event that had profound demographic and economic consequences in England.
- The Peasants' Revolt, though initially suppressed, marked a significant challenge to the existing social order and contributed to long-term changes in labor relations.
- King Richard II's actions during the revolt, particularly his meetings with the rebels, were notable.

For Further Consideration

- Consider the long-term societal changes brought about by the Black Death and the Peasants' Revolt.
- Reflect on the role of taxation and social inequality in historical uprisings.
- Think about the courage and complexity of King Richard II's actions during this tumultuous period.

This recap aims to provide a clear overview of British History Part 14. We hope it helps those who missed the talk to catch up and offers a useful summary for all.