**Wat Tyler's Rebellion - 1381 A. D.**

**The Court of Common Pleas (the civil court, as opposed to the Court of King's Bench, the criminal court) decided early in the 14th century that it "didn't have time for the affairs of peasants."  The peasants immediately recognized that they had no rights enforceable at law.**

**In 1348 the Black Death reached England.  As many as half of the people in the country died.  The feudal lords, short of peasants, tried to make those remaining work even harder.  Most of the people in England were treated no better than animals.**

**The common people had another barrier in their quest for rights.  All English court documents from 1066 to 1500 A. D. were written in what is today called "law French."  Most of the men who could teach the language were dead of the Plague.**

**In 1381 the effort to strictly enforce the collection of taxes created discontent throughout England.  Wat Tyler's rebellion was ignited when a tax collector tried to make a determination that Wat Tyler's daughter was of taxable age (15) by assaulting her.  Tyler, who was working close by, heard the screams of his wife and daughter, came running and smashed in the tax collector's skull with a hammer.  He was cheered by his neighbors and the commoners of the western division of Kent were brought together by his courage.  Wat Tyler was elected their leader.**

**The Peasants' Revolt, Tyler’s Rebellion, or the Great Rising of** [**1381**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1381) **was one of a number of** [**popular revolts in late medieval Europe**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Popular_revolts_in_late_medieval_Europe) **and is a major event in the** [**history of England**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_England)**. The names of some of its leaders,** [**John Ball**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Ball_(priest%2529)**,** [**Wat Tyler**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wat_Tyler) **and** [**Jack Straw**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Straw_(rebel_leader%2529)**, are still familiar even though very little is actually known about these individuals.**

**Tyler's Rebellion is significant because it marked the beginning of the end of serfdom in medieval England. Tyler's Rebellion led to calls for the reform of** [**feudalism**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feudalism) **in** [**England**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England) **and an increase in rights for the serf class.**

**Wat Tyler's group joined another group led by two priests named John Ball and Jack Straw, and rose 100,000 strong to invade London.   The enraged mob broke open every prison and beheaded every judge and lawyer they could capture.  They were not allowed to enrich themselves in their rioting.  Valuables found in their midst were destroyed.  One man who hid a silver cup on his person was thrown into the river as punishment for his misdeed and as an example to others to refrain from such behavior.**

**The king met the rebel army at** [**Mile End**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mile_End)**, and promised to address the peasants' grievances, which included the unpopular** [**taxes**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tax)**.**

**Twenty thousand people assembled at** [**Smithfield**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smithfield,_London)**. Richard II, who was 15 years old at the time, met them there. Wat Tyler decided to go and speak to the King and went alone. "King," said he, "do you see these men?" "Yes; what do you ask?" was the reply. "And thinkest thou, King, that these people, and as many as are in the city under my command ought to go without having had thy letters? Oh! no, we will carry them with us." Wat gesticulated frantically. At this time the** [**Mayor of London**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Mayor_of_the_City_of_London)**,** [**William Walworth**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Walworth)**, came forward and addressed him. "Scoundrel! how dare thou thus behave in the presence of the King, and utter such words? It is too impudent for such as thou." "Lay hands on him," said the King. "Hey, in God's name," replied Wat to the Mayor, "what I have said does it concern thee? What dost thou mean?" "Truly," answered the mayor, who finding himself supported by Richard, grew bold, "does it become such a slinking rascal as thou art, to use such speech in the presence of the King, thy natural lord? I will not live a day if thou pay not for it." The Mayor quickly drew his sword, and slashed the unarmed Wat Tyler to the ground. In the next instant, the body was stabbed by one of the King's esquires -** [**Ralph de Standish**](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ralph_de_Standish&action=edit&redlink=1)**. Immediately, the King declared that he was now the leader of the rebels and told them to return to their homes, promising them charters of freedom. He broke his promise of freedom, however, and had the rebel leaders rounded up and killed.**

**The rebellion ended shortly after Tyler's death and had little to do with the disappearance of serfdom. Wat Tyler's name, however, served to become a watchword and a rallying cry during public demonstrations and rebellions throughout the later medieval period.**

**(They surrounded Richard II, who asked them what they wanted.  Their answer was, "We will be free forever, our heirs and our lands."  Richard II agreed.**

**In a face-to-face meeting with Wat Tyler a short time later, Richard II ordered the Lord Mayor of London to "set hands on him."  Tyler was stabbed through the throat with a short sword and, as he lay in agony on the ground after falling off his horse, he was stabbed through the belly again.**

**Watching from a distance the peasants instantly arranged themselves in order of battle with their longbows.  Richard II rode up to them and said, "Wat Tyler was a traitor.  I'll be your leader."  Confused, the peasants followed the king until his soldiers met them and dispersed the crowd. )**

**Without their leader, the peasants went home.  Richard hanged 1500 of the rebels after "jury trials."  Those trials were presided over by Judge John Tresilian, who told the jurors in each case that he would hang them if they didn't convict.**

**Tresilian was hanged himself seven years later.**

**Richard II was forced to abdicate in 1399.**