The peasants’ revolt

Sum up the causes of the revolt

Historians have identified a number of factors which caused the Peasants’ Revolt. Read carefully the text below, underline the word you do not know and look in the vocabulary to find up their meaning. Then, do the exercise, crossing the box of the right answer.

Three hundred years after the Norman Conquest, peasants were still villains who belonged to their lords under what some people think of as the feudal system.

The Black Death (1348 - 1350) had killed many people. This meant there was a shortage of workers and wages went up. Parliament passed the Statute of Labourers (1351), which set a maximum wage and said that people would be punished with prison if they refused to work for that wage. This meant poor people stayed poor.

Since 1360, a Lollard priest called John Ball had been preaching that people should ‘throw away the evil lords’. In a famous sermon, he asked, ‘when Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?’ meaning all people are born equal.

After 1369, the war against France began to go badly. This would have made people despise the government.

In 1377 Richard II – a boy of 10 – became king and his uncle, John of Gaunt, ran the country. This meant that the government was weak.

John of Gaunt introduced a Poll Tax to pay for the war against France. The Poll Tax had to be paid by everyone over the age of 15 no matter how much money they earned. In March 1381, the government demanded the third Poll Tax in four years. When people avoided paying this, Parliament appointed commissioners to make them pay.

On 30 May 1381, Commissioner Thomas Bampton entered the village of Fobbing in Essex. His brutal methods made the villagers angry and – led by Thomas Baker - they rioted. Soon both Essex and Kent were in revolt.