

The Peasants Revolt

an original ballad by Maureen James

Come all you people listen well
Until my tale is done
Concerning the brave Peasants
Of thirteen eighty one
In all this half of England
From Kings Lynn, round the coast
across and up to Yorkshire
rebellion did the most.

All of the home counties
saw trouble of some kind
But it wasn't just the peasants
who stood up to speak their mind
'twas also local leaders
whose power had been shunned
who marched to meet the justices
in thirteen eighty one.

The rising so they tell us
started in an Essex vill
when a poll tax inspector
was set upon and killed.
The evil man had sought to prove
the age on one young maid
by ravishing her body
and for this his life did trade.

Wat Tyler, the maids father
with blood upon his hands
now became an outlaw
leader of a rebel band.
His targets were the officers
who'd imposed the dreadful tax
he had no grievance with the king
just the vultures at his back.

The behaviour of the leaders
of government, church and state
always quite corrupted
had become much worse of late.
They'd imposed the three poll taxes
to pay for the French war
a shilling a head was much too much
a tax upon the poor.

the war with France had lasted
for thirty years and more
King Edward he was dead and gone
and still we went to war
our coastal towns were threatened
by the ships of the French fleet
and all for what - control of land
and men we'd never meet.

The century had also seen
the pestilence arrive
we thought our days were numbered
it cut us like a scythe
a third of all our people
were sent off to their graves
as the Black Death did its evil work
in four successive waves.

So with the war and pestilence
Religion held our thoughts
no longer did we gad about
we all did what we ought
the fear of God's great vengeance
it kept us all from sin
and laws were passed to state our wage
and what we should dress in.

But as the years had rolled on by
the sun had shone as bright
no famine, flood or earthquake
had proclaimed the end in sight
A preacher called John Ball had come
to tell us of his plan
to make the world a fairer place
for every common man.

Wat Tyler, as our leader
marched us up to London's gates.
We set up camp at Blackheath
and planned to overthrow the state.
Many others soon did join us
Jack Straw and John Ball too
the latter fresh from prison
all were keen and angry too.

Next morning we did meet the king
he was at our command
he abolished unfree peasantry
and gave us rights to sell our land
But while all this was happening
on the field at Mile End
Some rebels at the Tower
were seeking our revenge.

On Tower Hill, the spectacle
of retribution loomed
as the Chancellor and Treasurer
prepared to meet their doom
Their power lopped off with their heads
we felt free to change the tone
next morning one of our demands
was to quell the power of Rome

With success so nearly in our grasp
we planned the biggest thing
abolishing all lordship
excepting to the king
we'd share all church and lords estate
throughout the population
eradicate the taxes,
liberate the nation.

Another meeting on the heath was planned
the King arrived once more
We were all amazed, that despite events
he still looked proud and sure,
But the attendants at his side, we found
were different from their Lord
They all looked grave and fearful
with their hands upon their swords.

Young Richard listened to our words
in his calm and fearless way
but Mayor Walworth at his side
couldn't keep anger at bay.
An argument did soon arise
harsh words and curses thrown,
A sword was drawn, Wat Tyler fell.
The crowd let out a groan.

King Richard seeing that things could turn
into riot or full scale war
Immediately took the crowd in hand
with words so clear and sure.
He agreed to all our new demands
and sent us on our way
but his words were just like autumn leaves
so light they blew away.

A Bishop called Despencer
quelled any final hopes
he was ready with his sword and lance
and prepared to use the rope
We knew we'd had our heyday
our glory it was gone
we'd be forever peasants
lowly, trodden on

But when we looked back over
just what we'd achieved
it is without the least regret
We'd brought them to their knees
there'd not be another poll tax
'til six hundred years had passed
and even then it would be brief
too damn unfair to last.

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