

Second formative assessment – The Peasants' Revolt (1381)

The Peasants' Revolt, also known as the Great Revolt or the 1318 Revolt, can be considered as the first riot of the general population of England against the poll taxes imposed by Kings Edward II and Richard II. Shortages of agricultural labour caused by outbreaks of the Black Death in 1348, 1361, 1369, 1374 and 1378 had shifted the balance of power between peasants and landowners, empowering peasants to negotiate on wages. The government sent out commissioners to investigate widespread failures to pay Richard's second Poll Tax in 1380 which caused widespread resentment and triggered bands of peasants to organise in Kent and Essex.

The National Archives (TNA) in London and various local archives, particularly in Kent and Essex, hold many documents which describe the events of 1381 and their aftermath. A useful starting point is a podcast on the National Archives website, in which archivists discuss the content and significance of manuscripts held at Kew relating to the Revolt.¹ For example, JUST 1/400 m.21 (General oyer and terminer, Kent, inquiry into the Peasants' Revolt 1381, file of indictments) documents one of several inquisitions which were held to discover what happened during the revolt, who was responsible and if any crimes, including treason, had been committed. This document does not assess the causes of the revolt, rather focussing on detailed descriptions of the events and makes accusations of crimes against named individuals.

C 67/29 holds details of pardons granted for low level crimes, not including murder, and includes names, aliases, jobs and addresses for those receiving pardons. As anyone with sufficient funds could purchase a pardon, this manuscript also provides information about the operation of the legal system and access to it.

The level of detail contained in JUST 1/400 m.21 and C 67/29 allows researchers to understand the geographical spread of the events in Kent and gain knowledge of the backgrounds of participants. JUST 1/400 m.21 names Wat Tyler, the leader of the Kentish rebels but also many lesser-known participants, including some women.

The People of 1381 website is a useful online resource for identifying archival material relating to the revolt.² The site contains a database which was developed in collaboration between researchers from the universities of Oxford, Glasgow, Reading and Southampton. The database is searchable by people or places and gives a summary of information contained manuscripts, a reference to and image of the original archival material (with English translation), as well as links to associated people or places. For example, the entry for Margaret Carpenter states that she was involved in burning manorial records in Moulsham, Essex and contains links to her

¹ [Revolt: The story of England's first protest | The National Archives](#)

² [Peasants Revolt - Home](#)

husband's record and to ERO D/DM m.30 which is held in the Essex records office and lists the indictments against Margaret and John Carpenter.

Archival Material

London

TNA

JUST 1/400 m.21 (General oyer and terminer, Kent, inquiry into the Peasants' Revolt 1381, file of indictments)³

C 67/29 (Chancery: Letters Patent for Pardons}

Online

People of 1381⁴

Essex Record Office

ERO D/DM m.30⁵

³ [General oyer and terminer, Kent, inquiry into the Peasants' Revolt 1381, file of... | The National Archives](#)

⁴ [People of 1381 Database](#)

⁵ [People of 1381 Database](#)