

How did the Peasants' Revolt end?

On 14 June, many of the rebels had already gone home. Several of the king's closest advisers including the Archbishop of Canterbury had been brutally murdered. Wat Tyler, along with the 30,000 rebels who had stayed, demanded another audience with the king.

On 15 June, at Smithfield, just outside London's city walls, the two sides met once more. On one side were Wat Tyler, John Ball and 30,000 rebels, confident after extracting promises from the king the day before. On the other side were the 14-year-old king, Richard II, the Lord Mayor of London, William Walworth and a few hundred soldiers loyal to the king.

What happened next is unclear. Many sources give different accounts of what may have occurred. What all sources agree on is that Wat Tyler was killed.

After Tyler's death, Richard II addressed the crowd. He promised them their freedom if they would return home. The crowd dispersed and the Peasants' Revolt was over.

How and why did Wat Tyler die?

Source C: From *The Anonimalle Chronicle* (1381). This account contains a very detailed description of the uprising, but it is unknown who wrote it ('anonimalle' means 'anonymous'). It appears to have been pieced together by monks in York, hundreds of miles away from the events described.

At that time a certain valet from Kent... said aloud that Wat Tyler was the greatest thief and robber in all Kent... For these words Wat wanted to strike the valet with his dagger... but because he tried to do so, the Mayor of London, William of Walworth... arrested him... Wat stabbed the mayor with his dagger in the body in great anger. But, as it pleased God, the mayor was wearing armour and took no harm... he struck back at... Wat, giving him a deep cut in the neck, and then a great blow on the head. And during the scuffle a valet of the king's household drew his sword, and ran Wat two or three times through the body...

Source D: From Thomas Walsingham's *The History of England* (c. 1420). Walsingham was a monk at the Abbey of St Albans. He spent most of his life as a monk so it likely his information came from others.

Sir John Newton came up to him... to hear what he (Wat Tyler) proposed to say. Tyler grew angry because the knight had approached him on horseback and not on foot... Newton... replied, 'As you are sitting on a horse it is not insulting for me to approach you on a horse.' At this the ruffian brought out his knife and threatened to strike the knight and called him a traitor...

On this the king... ordered the mayor of London to arrest Tyler. The mayor, a man of spirit and bravery, arrested Tyler and struck him a blow on the head which hurt him badly. Tyler was soon surrounded by the other servants of the king and pierced by sword thrusts in several parts of his body. His death... was the first incident to restore to the English knighthood their almost extinct hope that they could resist the commons.



Source E: Illustration from *The Chronicles of Froissart*, around 1480. Wat Tyler is riding the small grey horse on the left.

Your turn!

Sometimes it can be difficult to be 100 per cent clear on what happened at certain crucial moments in history. Wat Tyler's death is a good example of that.

- Read Sources C and D. As a class, discuss:
 - who the sources suggest was responsible for the death of Wat Tyler
 - the differences between the sources.
- Look at the background, or provenance, of the sources. Suggest two reasons why they give such different versions of what happened.
- As a class, decide what you think really happened, based on the sources.
- Explore the reasons why the Peasants' Revolt failed. To answer this question, you will need to focus on a small number of key events and not get bogged down in detail. Use your work from previous lessons to help you. Below are some suggestions of what you could include.
 - Who was involved in the revolt, and why might this have been a weakness?
 - What aims did the rebels have, and why might these have been unrealistic?
 - What happened in London, and how might this have led to the failure of the rebellion?
 - How did Wat Tyler die, and what effect would this have had on the rebellion?

Checkpoint

- What caused the Peasants' Revolt?
- Why did the rebels want to meet with the king?
- What violent acts were committed by some of the rebels while they were in London?
- What had the king agreed to at Mile End on 14 June 1381?
- What happened when Wat Tyler met the king at Smithfield on 15 June 1381?