

## The Somerset Peasants' Revolt

Thomas Waryn, our lost and found Rector, lived in stirring times. 1377 saw the *Great Rumour* when discontent gave way to protest. Peasants in Somerset organised themselves and refused to work for their lords. They claimed the *Domesday Book* exempted them from such labouring.



Wat Tyler's death (Sir William Walworth, Mayor of London (with sword); Wat Tyler; King Richard II; Sir John Cavendish King's esquire Froissart *Chroniques*

They took their case to court and, of course, lost. The climax came in 1381 with the *Peasants' Revolt*.

Binegar would have been awash with rumour of what was happening in Bridgwater, the focus of local revolt. Nicholas Frampton, Parish Priest, revived a row between town and Abbey over who controlled what. He had lost two elections to become Abbey Prior, which may just have played a part in his mischief.

Violence in London prompted Frampton to adopt strong-arm tactics. He had no trouble in recruiting allies from the local gentry. One such was Thomas Engilby who was prepared to murder to settle private grudges.

On June 20, they broke into the Abbey, seized the Prior, stole all the loan bonds, forced the Prior

hand over all his rights and profits to Frampton and extorted 200 marks (£100,000 now) protection money.

Rampaging through the town, Engilby burnt writings and court rolls. He beheaded Walter Baron, the tax collector. He went off to Ilchester gaol, seized prisoner Hugh Lavenham and beheaded him too. He displayed both heads on lances on the bridge at Bridgwater. In two days, Engilby rid himself of his debts, his taxes and his enemies.

If not a peasants' revolt, it is important as the most serious case of lawlessness in the south-west and as an outbreak prompted by the example of the collapse of government authority in London.

Of course, with the King's peace restored, both Frampton and Engilby had to flee justice, becoming outlaws for treason and murder. Amazingly, the King pardoned both men on condition of good future conduct. What then became of them? Engilby hung on until 1406 when a Bridgwater Commission of Inquiry by MP Thomas Gosse seized his lands. Hoist with his own petard! As to Frampton, who knows?

*When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the Gentleman?* asked radical priest John Ball in 1381. Who indeed?