



**YE HAVE HEARD IT SAID, 'DO GOOD IN THIS WORLD
THAT IN THE WORLD TO COME YE MAY LIVE IN
JOY'. DO WELL THEN AND HAVE YOUR REWARD
BOTH ON EARTH AND IN HEAVEN. FOR I SAY THAT
EARTH AND HEAVEN ARE NOT TWO BUT ONE.'**

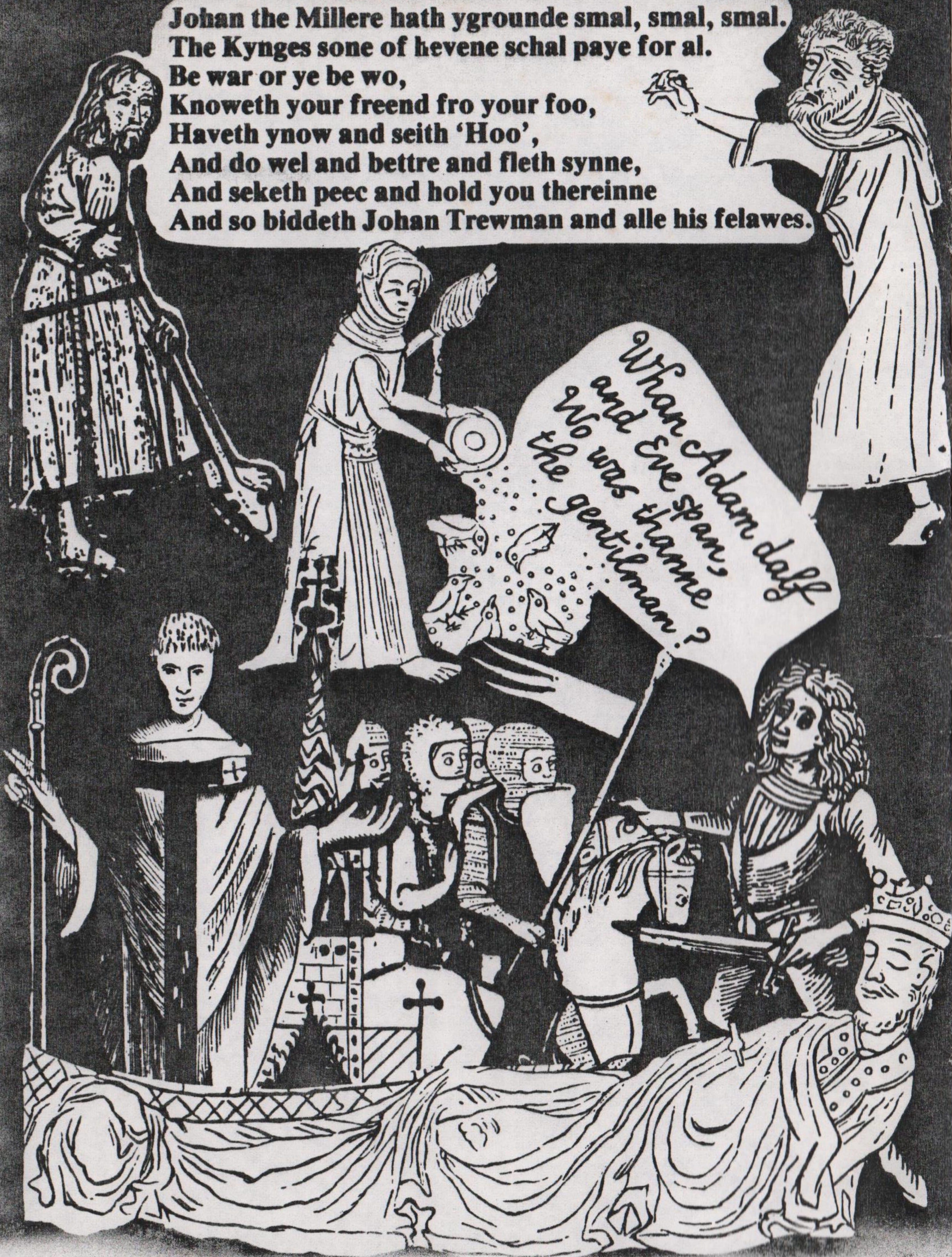
From a sermon by John Ball.

890
The POOR FOLK'S GUIDE
TO THE REVOLT OF



1381

Johan the Millere hath ygrounde smal, smal, smal.
 The Kynges sone of hevene schal paye for al.
 Be war or ye be wo,
 Knoweth your freend fro your foo,
 Haveth ynow and seith 'Hoo',
 And do wel and bettre and fleth synne,
 And seketh peec and hold you thereinne
 And so biddeth Johan Trewman and alle his felawes.



Richard of Bordeaux, King, son of the Black Prince, succeeded his grandfather, Edward III. In 1381 he was aged 14.

Simon of Sudbury, Archbishop of Canterbury and Chancellor, a gentle man who, for his times, was easy on freethinkers. His secular political office fatally identified him with the hated Poll Tax.

Robert Hales, Knight, Royal Treasurer, Grand Master of the Knights Hospitallers of St. John and known as Hob the Rob.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE



John Legge, Royal Sergeant-at-Arms, generally supposed to have bribed himself a fat piece of tax-farming.

Robert Tresillian, Knight, Chief Justice, fixed in his judicial savagery by a Cornish upbringing and an Oxford education.

William Courtenay, a Devon man born at Powderham Castle, Sudbury's successor as Archbishop but who resigned the Chancellorship in revulsion from the cynical royal revocation of promises made on oath to villein petitioners. He insisted on a two day stay of execution whilst vainly labouring to bring John Ball's soul to a state of grace.

William Walworth, Mayor of London, a Darlington fish-monger who shed skins as rack-renter and property tycoon to emerge as a respectable and titled city financier. His fatal dagger is displayed at Fishmongers Hall. The reputation of this wily, violent man is ameliorated by a single act of environmental conservation—he refused planning permission to horizontal inn bush-poles projecting more than seven feet.

Wat Tyler (Walter the Tiler). His past is obscure, his history eight brief days, his apocrypha memorable—a passionate income-tax inspector, insisting that a well-developed girl was 15 and liable to Poll Tax, pressed his examination too hotly and had his skull shattered by her father's tiling hammer.

John Ball, a hedge-priest without a parish first heard of in York in 1361 and, for the rest of his life, hounded by civil and ecclesiastical authority as he roamed the land doggedly preaching that Christ's dominant message had been economic and social equality. To bring to pass his vision of a Great Society he may have established an underground chain of freedom-fighter cells. A circular found on a rebel reads

Jon Balle gretyth you wel alle and dothe yowe to understande he hath rungen youre belle. Nowe ryght and myght, wylle and skylle. God spede every ydele. Nowe is tyme. Lady helpe to Jhesu this sone, and thi sone to his fader to make a gode ende in the name of the Trinite



NOISES OFF-STAGE.



John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, the King's uncle, a property hypermagnate who was popularly identified with military disaster abroad and greedy corruption at home. During the crucial week he hung about the Scots border.



John Wyclif, a Yorkshire guru. Like most successful revolutionaries he was humourless, argumentative, self-opinionated and wily. His best-circulator, an English translation of the Bible, was as explosive as Marx's *Das Kapital*. Itinerant graduates of his teach-ins agitated for strict application of the least comfortable of Christ's sociological pronouncements, abolition of magic mumbo-jumbo such as divine trans-substantiation and the de-nationalisation of the Church and consequent salutary impoverishment of ecclesiastical professionals. He died in his fifties and a lapsed trendy who had got on, the Bishop of Lincoln, had his bones dug up, cremated and tossed into the stream of his last parish, Lutterworth.

MEDIA COMMENTATORS, CONJECTURAL SPECULATORS AND POP PROPHETS.

Thomas Walsingham, a St. Albans monk, an Establishment man.

Geoffrey Chaucer, pop poet and (had the post been invented) Laureate. Although he was 41 in 1381 he mentioned the rebellion with cynical brevity—

*Certes Jack Straw and his meinie
Ne maden never shoutes half so shrille
Whan that they wolden any Fleming kille.*

William Langland, a Cleobury Mortimer poet and hard-liner, who migrated from the Malvern district to London. His moral diatribe, *Piers Plowman*, strips the fancy dress from the Middle Ages.

- *The poorest folk are our neighbours—the prisoners in dungeons and the poor in their hovels, overburdened with children and rack-rented by landlords . . . men who go hungry and thirsty and strive to hide it, ashamed to beg or tell their neighbours of their need.*
- *But whilst hunger was their master there would none of them chide,
Not strive against the Statute however sternly he looked.
But I warn you, workmen, win money whilst ye may,
For hunger hitherward hasteth him fast
And shall awake with the water-floods to chastise the Wasteful!*

* If you find your name here, you may have a distant relative who didn't stay at home.

(George) Donnesby, a Great Society courier in Lincolnshire, (hanged); John Starling, an Essex fuller turned public executioner who, having been absolved by Archbishop Sudbury, made a seven stroke hash of the job, (hanged); William Gildeborne who farmed 600 acres and owned 72 beasts in Fobbing. (hanged); John Brux who farmed 200 acres at Caxton, (hanged); William Gore of West Wycombe; John Covehurst who had land in three parishes near Lamberhurst, (hanged); Thomas Fletcher, arrowmaker and small-holder of Bergholt, (hanged); Henry Baker, the Tendring bailiff; Adam Clymme, Great Society courier in the Ely area, (hanged); John Berwold, a Cottingham rhymer; John Battisford, the Bottisham parson, a John Ball liason-officer; Robert Galoun of Scarborough; Richard Middleton, a Beverley aldermanic feuder; Thomas Engilby of Bridgewater; Hugh Hervey of Chester.

1381

MAY 25 Thomas Brampton, Poll Tax investigator, his staff and a nominal military escort were set upon by Fobbing, Stanford-le-Hope and Corringham tax-defaulters, who murdered three clerks and took to the Essex woods.

MAY 26 John Legge, Royal Sergeant-at-Arms and tax-farmer, began to crop Kent.

JUNE 2 Robert Bealknap, a trailbaston commissioner, retreated to London and declared Essex unsafe for tax-collectors.

JUNE 3 Simon de Burley claimed a highly thought-of Gravesend townsman as his runaway serf and dragged off his property to Rochester Castle. A flying-picket led by Abel Ker crossed the Thames Estuary from Dartford and recruited seasoned Essex activists to stiffen the Kent resistance.

JUNE 5 Leaving a skeleton patrol to keep an eye on French raiders, a horde of North Kent peasants, fishermen and townsmen moved eastwards towards the Medway where on

JUNE 6 Sir John Newenton surrendered Rochester Castle.



JUNE 7 Turning south to Maidstone, the swelling bands elected Wat Tyler military commander and chief negotiator.

JUNE 8 Picking up crude military organization from veterans of the French Wars, the rebels turned east towards Thanet.

JUNE 10, Monday In Canterbury, the Mayor and bailiffs came to heel, John Ball was freed from jail, a demo happened in the Cathedral and local opportunists paid off old scores and ancient grudges.

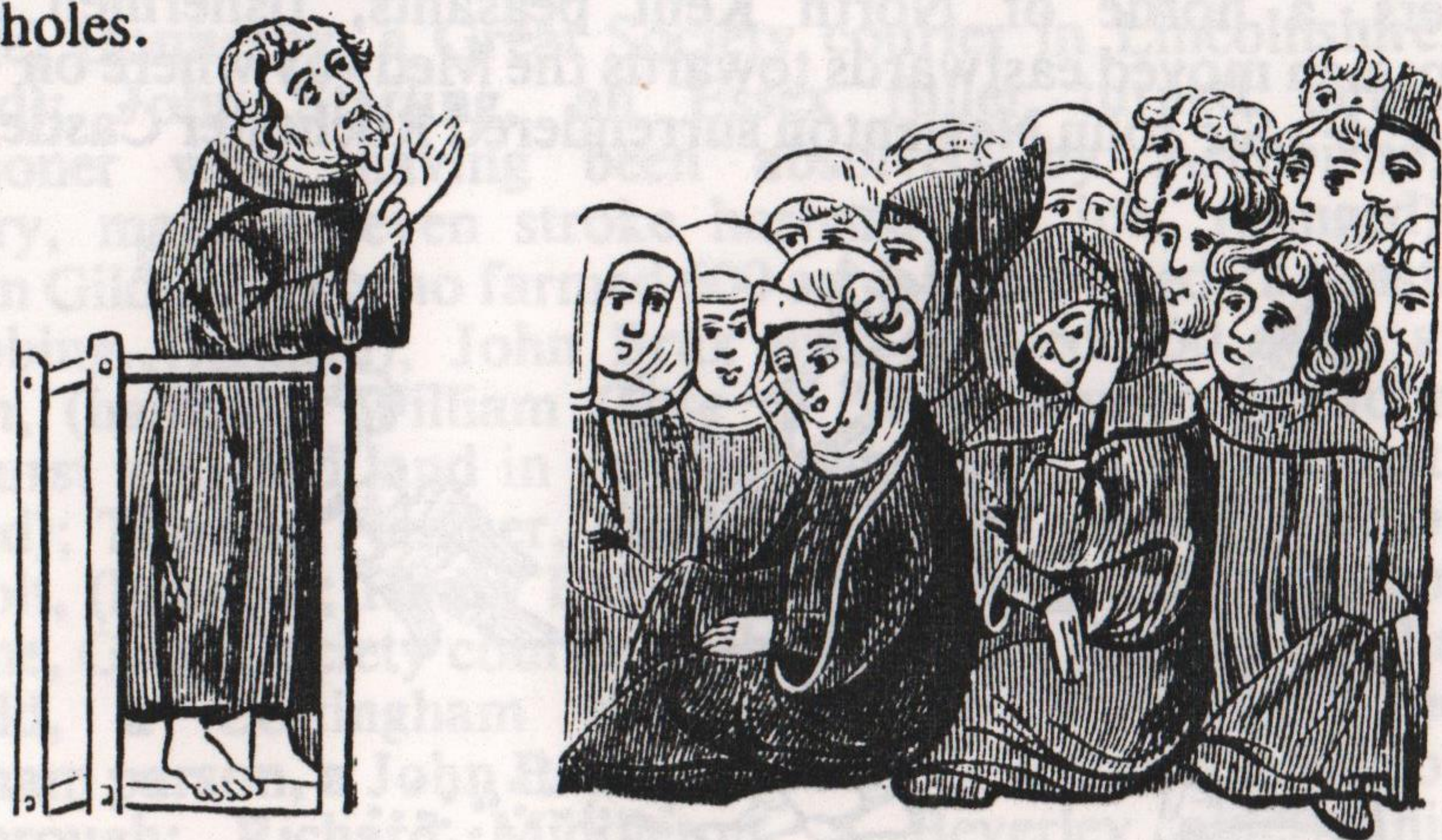
JUNE 11, Tuesday Essex rebels advancing westwards, recalling that the Royal Treasurer was Grand Master of the Order of the Hospitallers of St. John, attacked its Cressing Priory.

JUNE 12, Wednesday At the Kent rebels' Blackheath Camp, John Ball preached his popular sermon, the Poor Man's Guide to Christian Communism, his text—

*When Adam dalf and Eve span
Wo was thanne a gentilman?*

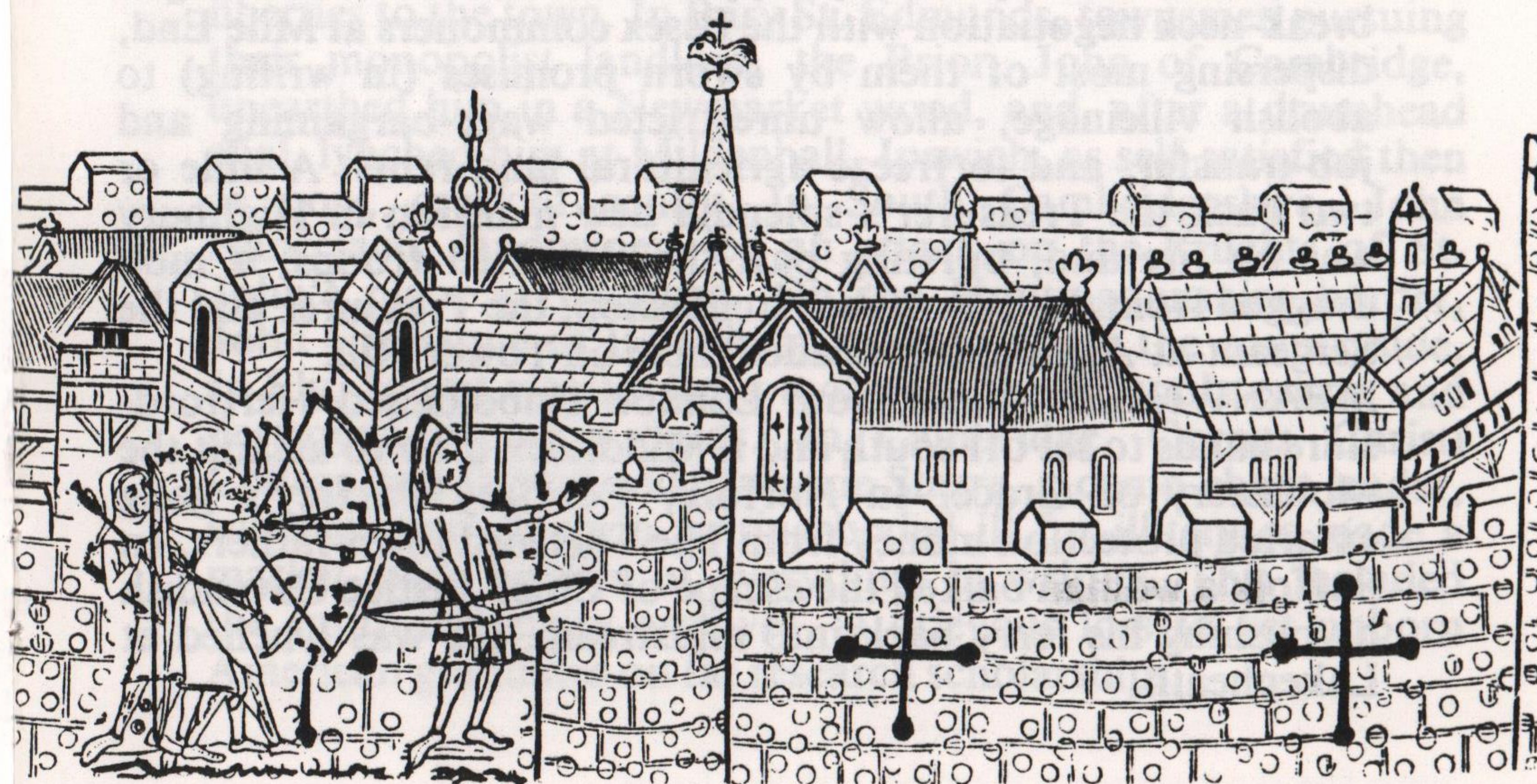
Non-attenders improved the time by throwing open the Marshalsea Jail.

MEANWHILE—A Suffolk gang led by John Wrarwe, an unemployed parson, burnt down Overhall Manor, luxury home of Sir Richard Lyon, an over-adept exploiter of tax loopholes.



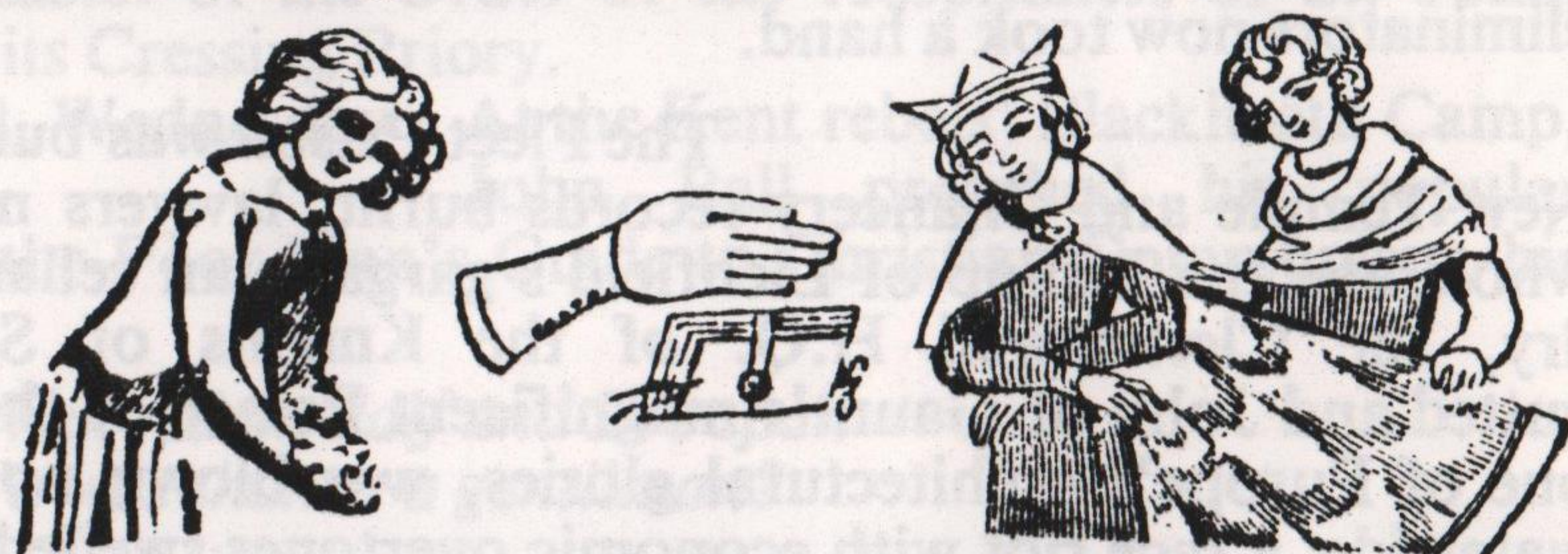
JUNE 13, Thursday John Horn, London aldermanic negotiator, lost his nerve and advised the Kent rebels to cross to the seat of power on the river's north bank. So, destroying business premises, substandard tenements housing brothels in the Southwark stews owned by Walworth the Mayor, the tremendous host appeared before London Bridge. Alderman Sybyle, in whose ward the bridge lay, betrayed it and released a human flood, only a little less dangerous than Scots football supporters, down the city's narrow streets. London anarchists, pyromaniacs, jailbirds, small-time gangsters, medieval skinheads and amateur eliminators now took a hand.

The Fleet Prison was burst open, New Temple and Chancery records burnt, lawyers murdered wholesale, the Bishop of Lichfield's gargantuan cellars drunk dry, the Clerkenwell H.Q. of the Knights of St. John gutted and John of Gaunt's magnificent Palace of the Savoy, one of Europe's architectural glories, was blown up. By the waterside, a race riot with economic overtones swelled into the cowardly slaughter of a colony of hardworking Flemings.



In the midst of this howling tumult, Sir John Knolles, a tough old ex-serviceman, defended his home by leading his Home Guard platoon in crunching forays through the smoking streets. The King? With the other Royals and 1200 troops, he lurked in the Tower. But when fiery Mayor Walworth urged a devastating night attack on the choked city centre, the Earl of Salisbury, senior military commander and mindful of painful French sieges and house-to-house guerilla fighting, vetoed it.

MEANWHILE—Warwe's Suffolk gang looted Chief Justice Cavendish's treasure hid in Cavendish village church. In York, the Mayor, Thomas Quixlay, and the ex-mayor, John Gisborne, set up a hullabaloo on the strength of some miserable backbiting row or other.



JUNE 14, Friday Abandoning Archbishop Sudbury, Treasurer Hales and Tax profiteer Legge as decoy bait, the Royal Party slipped from the Tower and began break-neck negotiation with the Essex commoners at Mile End, dispersing most of them by sworn promises (in writing) to abolish villeinage, allow unrestricted wage-bargaining and job-transfer, and to freeze agricultural land rents. A mile or two back the Treasurer's splendid new mansion in Highbury was on fire and, bursting past the stupefied troops, a mob dragged from the Tower the Archbishop, the Treasurer and the Sergeant-at-Arms and beheaded them on Tower Hill.

MEANWHILE—News from London emboldened Hertfordshire bands to set off south and a Middlesex mob to assault the Monastery of Grace. In Norfolk, Geoffrey Parfrey's gang extorted protection money from the Thetford town-fathers. In Suffolk a woman balked the escape of Chief Justice Cavendish by pushing his ferry back into midstream. He was lynched at Lakenheath.

JUNE 15, Saturday After a second night of terror in the streets, the Governor of Marshalsea Prison, a notorious tormentor, was hauled from sanctuary in Westminster Abbey through one door as the King entered another to pray for nerve to deceive and disperse the Kent rebels. At Smithfield he smartly agreed to their every demand and some moved off. Then, predictably, nerves snapped: the late Keeper of Rochester Castle loudly nominated Wat Tyler as the Biggest Thief in Kent. Tyler turned on him. Mayor Walworth, dagger-happy from the loss of his uninsured property, stabbed Tyler who, reeling in the saddle, was mortally sword-slashed by Robert Standish.

The royal schoolboy spurred forward, took command of the confused rebels, wheeled their vanguard from a confrontation and, repeating his earlier lies, managed to disperse many homeward. Walworth having ferreted out the dying rebel commander in St. Bartholomew's Hospital, murdered him and convinced remaining sceptics that 'East, west, home is best' by a bloody display of the bodiless head.

MEANWHILE—in St. Albans, townsmen led by abbey-educated William Grindecob opened the abbey jail, incinerated documents and compelled the resourceful abbot, Thomas de la Mare to grant manumissions to his serfs and a charter of liberties to the town. In Bury St. Edmunds, townsmen pursuing their monopolist landlord, the Prior, John of Cambridge, unearthed him in a Newmarket wood, and, after a drumhead trial, lynched him at Mildenhall. Ipswich, as self-satisfied then as now, creaked gently. In South Cambridgeshire, John Hancclach, landowner, led an attack on the Knights of St. John's place at Duxford. On the Huntingdonshire border, John Greystone of Bottisham, tried to rouse the countryside. In Ely, John Leicester led a mob into the Bishop's prison and destroyed property deeds. In Cambridge, Corpus Christi College was sacked and Marjorie Starre, a demo chant-leader, supposing anything in writing boded ill for illiterates made a market-place bonfire of everything in writing. This included the entire university archives—a grievous loss to yet unborn American graduates on fat research scholarships.

JUNE 16, Saturday Flying pickets from Essex failed to provoke a rising in Guildford, where cricket had just been invented.



Bedfordshire men, slow on the uptake, got round to a half-hearted attack on Dunstable Priory. The Mayor of Cambridge led student militants against Barnwell Priory. Buckinghamshire bands ranged the Ashridge district. And a Huntingdon spigurnel* led a flying column of minor officials and their relations to the relief of Ramsey Abbey.

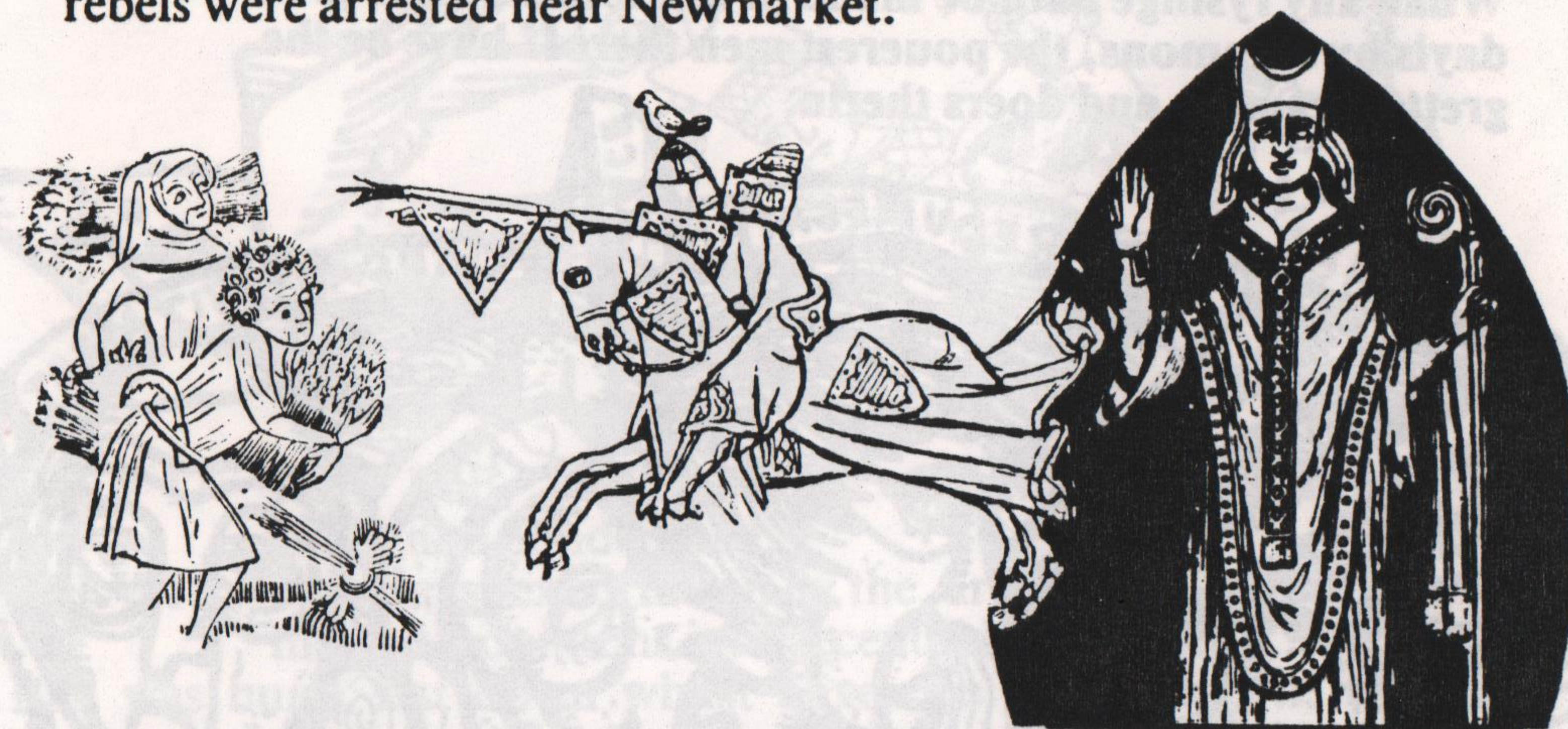
**Readers should not write to ask what a spigurnel was: I don't know either.*

JUNE 17, Monday The Mayor of Leicester turned out the Home Guard to protect John of Gaunt's property. A Peterborough riot went off half-cock. Local bigwigs clashed again in York. Judge Walsingham was lynched in Ely. Norfolk rebels led by Geoffrey Litster moved from Mousehold Heath into Norwich and he dined in state at the Castle.

JUNE 18, Tuesday In a subdued London, the King commissioned county sheriffs to put down rebellion with exemplary violence. In Suffolk lawless bands roamed: Wrarwe's near-bandits assaulted Mettingham Castle and Richard Resch alarmed Lowestoft. Yarmouth was host to Sir Roger Bacon and his rebel supporters.

JUNE 19 In Somerset, the Bridgewater parson, Nicholas Frampton, and his parishioners negotiated in force with the Augustinian Hospital of St. John.

JUNE 20 A Royal retaliatory force assembled at Blackheath. Negotiators from the Home Rule for Norfolk rebels were arrested near Newmarket.



JUNE 21 Leading a posse of cavalry, the bloodthirsty Bishop of Norwich, Henry Despenser, left his Rutland holiday home, terrified Peterborough back into its normal (and continuing) drab awfulness and disappeared into the east.

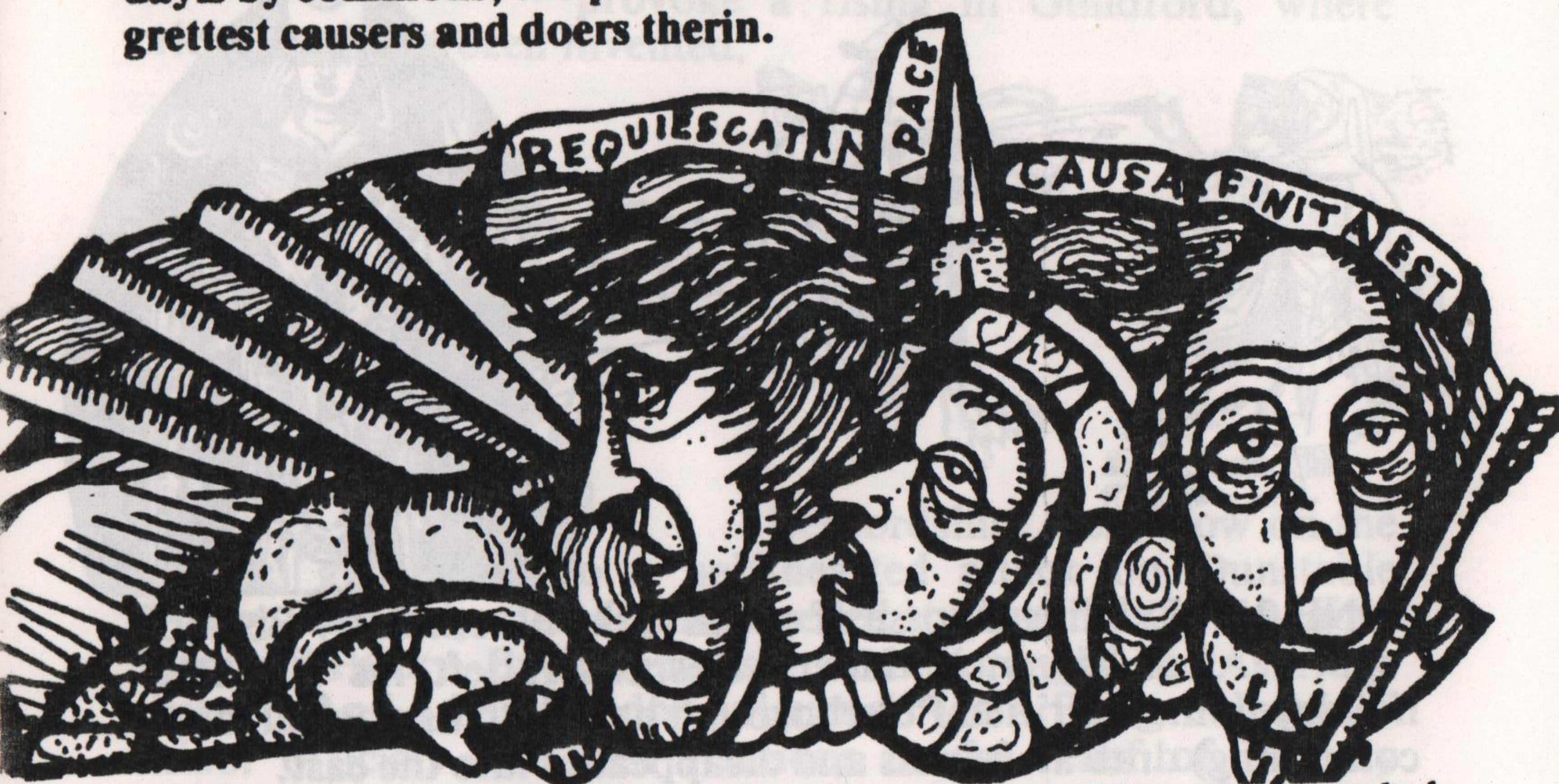
JUNE 22 Wrenching the arrested Norwich delegation from their custodians, the Bishop hung them at Wymondham. In Suffolk, its Earl cornered Wrawe and hung him in Bury St. Edmunds as a chilling and still-enduring example to its citizens. Rebels, stirring in the East Riding, studied the tidings from Down South and discreetly dispersed. In Scarborough there was some mild blood-letting between bands of coloured hoods.

JUNE 24 The Norwich rebels moved off to the friendlier neighbourhood of North Walsham and threw up a defensive wagon ring.

JUNE 25 The Bishop's cavalry crashed through the Walsham barricade and, after thoroughly shriving Litster's soul, Dispenser cut off his head.

JUNE 26 Identified ringleaders of the London racial murderers were hung in the presence of their victims' relations who were urged to officiate. In Winchester clothworkers rioted. The King's disciplinary force pushed into Essex as far as Havering-atte-Bower.

Whan any rysinge hath be made in this londs beffor theis dayis by commons, the pouerest men theroff have be the grettest causers and doers therin.



JUNE 28 At Billericay, the hard core of the Essex rebels made a last stand against the Earl of Buckingham's regulars and were over-whelmed.

JULY 1 Rebellion flared briefly in Canterbury. There was more heel-snapping in York.

JULY 2 Minor riots disturbed Worcester, Northampton, Scarborough and Beverley. Essex fugitives were hunted in the woods. The new Chief Justice, Tresillian, began a progress of bloody assizes. Richard II uttered the knell on the hopes of his too-trusting commons,

Serfs you are.

Serfs you shall remain.

JULY 4 The Earl of Salisbury left to overawe the West.

JULY 6 A local politician was murdered in Beverley.

JULY 12 Having proceeded through Suffolk, the King came to St. Albans. Grindecob and the Cambridgeshire captains were hung, Sir Roger Bacon pardoned.



JULY 13 John Ball, betrayed near Coventry, was found guilty and condemned.

JULY 15 Two days' exhortation by the Archbishop failing to move his opinions into acceptable orthodoxy, John Ball was hung, cut down whilst alive, his inside drawn, his corpse quartered and distributed as a warning to interpret the Bible only along official lines.

JULY 22 The King, progressing through Hertfordshire and Oxfordshire, reached Reading Abbey.

JULY 22 An anti-monastic rent rebellion flared and died on the Wirral.

AUGUST 30 The King ordered execution to stop.

SEPTEMBER 29 Bold Kent spirits seized Maidstone, slew its sheriff, made a last demand for a freer society and were put down. In Norwich a plot to murder the Bishop aborted.

OCTOBER 18 Recognizing that events in York, Beverley and Scarborough had been no more than miserable local grudgery, their quaking citizens were pardoned. And when Parliament met in the autumn, except for about 200 named offenders and the towns of Canterbury and Bury St. Edmunds (which ultimately purged its offence with a fine of 4000 marks), a General Pardon was issued. Officially the Great Rebellion was over. Almost . . .

IN 1382, William Gore, a highly respectable tailor, was identified as a self-rehabilitated bandit on the Royston range and hung.



The Grettest surete trewly and also the most honour that mey
come to the kyngs is that is reame be riche in every estate.
Ffor nothyng mey make is people to arise but lakke off gode
or lakke of justice.

Neither historian, philosopher nor even TV professional pundit can totally explain the inspiration which fired these Englishmen into brief, exuberant, explosive energy. It seems to me that manifold impulses set men marching and that, amongst the rebels of 1381, were—

- *men revolted by being born property of another man,*
- *well-to-do farmers forced to harvest their lord's crop whilst their own rotted, and who had been refused the convenience of paying rent in cash,*
- *tenant farmers hoping for an agricultural rent-freeze,*
- *landless labourers legally forbidden to sell their work to the best bidder,*
- *tenants sick of forking out the heriot fine (on inheritance), Teyrite fine (on a pregnant spinster), mercet fine (on a daughter's wedding), chevage fine (on changing tenancy), the monopolist compulsion to grind their corn at their lord's mill, have their heifer served by their lord's bull . . . and so on,*
- *aspiring intellectuals and would-be social science lecturers frustrated by being bound to the soil,*
- *distributionists of church land,*
- *parsons whose miserable stipends had been frozen by the Statute of Labourers,*
- *parishioners furious at their collections being part-diverted to out-of-town ecclesiastical institutions over-staffed by nationalised layabouts,*
- *town boosters balked by a monastic landlord,*
- *traders prohibited by a market monopoly,*
- *sermon-tasters excited by news that Man's Maker's original plan had been non-classification of His product,*
- *ex-students of John Ball's seminars where the theory had been debated that heaven and earth were one and that their only likely reward would be now and here,*
- *devout churchgoers whose belief that prayer could improve things had been dented by the Black Death,*

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KETTERING NORTHANTS

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- Home Rule for Norfolk, Kent, Holderness secessionists,
- ex-servicemen wistfully harking back to Good Old Campaigning Days,
- ex-servicemen maddened by the bad news from France,
- South Coast ratepayers whose roofs had been burnt about their heads by French raiders,

- sea-green incorruptibles pained by rumours of Establishment nest-feathering,
- born committee-chairmen disenfranchised at birth from committee membership,
- provincial bigwigs worsted in a local law-suit,
- opportunist feudists,

- disenchanted husbands/wives hoping for Better Times amongst the London jetset,
- amiable nincompoops come along for a change of scenery,
- reluctant well-to-do conservatives seeking the first safe chance to hare home again,

- dormant racists quickened by economic recession,
- rabid lawyer-haters,
- born anarchists,
- would-be bandits,

- Tax fugitives,
- outlaws on the run,
- Civil Rights marchers,

• and others.



There are 50 books in this series.

Front cover—Adam is drawn from a Cathedral window at Canterbury. The knight is Thomas Cheyne's brass at Drayton Beauchamp.

Back cover—The medieval Janus cross at Sherburn-in-Elmet (where the publisher was brought up). Some of the inside drawings are from the Luttrell family psalter (Lincs) now in the British Museum Library.

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KETTERING NORTHANTS

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