

**PETER HOPKINS has been uncovering the secrets of
MERTON'S MEDIEVAL REBELS**

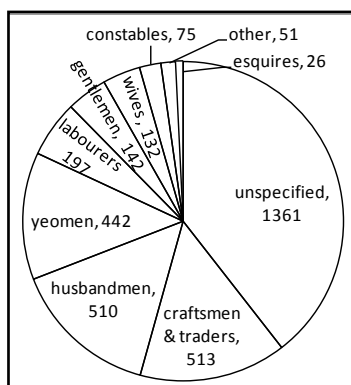
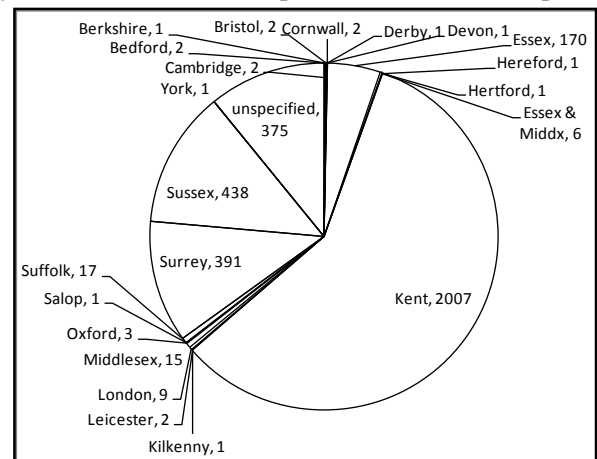
While checking an entry in the published *Calendar of Patent Rolls of Henry VI*, I glanced through the index to see whether there were any other local references. I was surprised to discover several inhabitants of Merton and Mitcham, and one from Morden, included among a list of 3449 named individuals granted a royal pardon in July 1450 for their involvement in Jack Cade's rebellion.¹

Cade, who also used the pseudonym John Mortimer, was the leader of a contingent of Kentish protesters who marched on London to petition the king about the corrupt and oppressive activities of the royal advisors and their agents. Henry was a weak, though stubborn, king who mismanaged affairs at home and abroad. The Hundred Years War between England and France was coming to an ignominious end, with most of Normandy having fallen to the French by the spring of 1450. At home there were complaints about high taxation to pay for the unsuccessful war, especially as poorly-provisioned English soldiers travelling to the Channel ports had become accustomed to helping themselves to whatever food they could find. This was a period of slow recovery from further outbreaks of plague and poor harvests, and of collapsing international trade, especially in wool and cloth. But the main outcry was against the king's advisors and their agents who abused their powers through the use of extortion, bribery and oppression.

In January 1450 the House of Commons impeached the king's most influential advisor, William de la Pole, duke of Suffolk – and incidentally lord of the manor of Ravensbury by right of his wife. To protect him from his enemies, the king sentenced the duke to 5 years banishment, but he was intercepted on his voyage to the Low Countries and killed. His body was washed up on Dover Sands and a rumour spread throughout Kent that the king intended to blame the whole county for the deed – the community was always held responsible for a murder if no perpetrator could be identified.

Meanwhile an order went out to muster the local militia forces – the medieval equivalent of the Home Guard – to resist threatened invasions from France. In every community across Kent men were paraded with their weapons and encouraged to defend the realm against its enemies. As one writer puts it, 'The government had enemies across the Channel in mind, but the militiamen knew that the kingdom's true enemies lay nearer at hand, just across the Thames'.²

The immediate cause of the rebellion is not known, but in May 1450 the Kentish rebels began to march on London, and by early June more than 5000 had assembled at Blackheath, 12 miles south-east of the capital, having been joined by supporters from Sussex, Surrey, Essex, and further afield. Of those who sought pardons, 58% were from Kent, 13% from Sussex, 11% from Surrey and 5% from Essex, while the origins of 10% were unspecified.

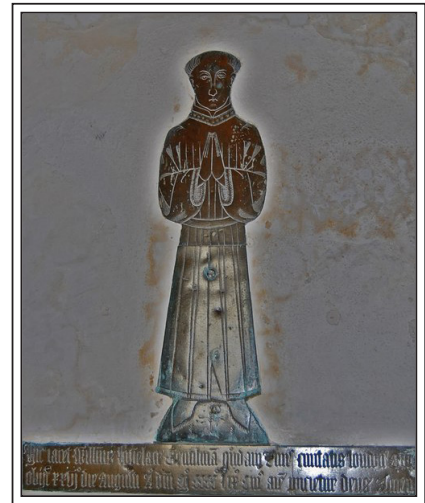


15% were craftsmen and traders – bakers, brewers, butchers, carpenters – but also merchants, goldsmiths, grocers and mercers, 15% were 'husbandmen' – tenant farmers – 13% 'yeomen' – small freeholders – and 6% 'labourers' – though unfortunately no description was given for 39%. 4% were identified as the 'constables' of the various hundreds – the administrative subdivisions of the counties – and it is significant that it was the elected constables of the hundreds who were responsible for mustering the local militia. 4% were wives, mostly accompanying their husbands though a few were widows. But another 4% of those seeking pardons were described as 'gentlemen' and three individuals were knights and 26 'esquires', while 13 were clerks, parsons or heads of monastic houses.

The king sent heralds to order the protesters to withdraw, but they refused, declaring that they were not rebels but loyal petitioners seeking redress of their grievances. In response Henry moved his army to within sight of Blackheath and the protesters, unwilling to fight the king – which would have been treason – dispersed under cover of darkness. Henry then ordered a contingent of his army to pursue the retreating rebels, but the soldiers were defeated by the mob and several of the army commanders were killed. The king fled to Kenilworth castle while the rebels returned to Blackheath, where they were joined by many mutinous soldiers, and then entered Southwark. On 3 July they crossed London bridge and entered the City, but initial support soon faded after a

Thomas Carleton, John Semer, John Palmer, Ralph Carleton, John Carleton, together with John Salyng and John Bacheler, who had been in the previous group and can therefore probably be identified as the chief tithingmen of Merton. The Salyng family held freehold and copyhold properties in Merton later in the 15th century, and a William Salyng became prior of Merton in 1502, while another John Salyng was one of the last canons. Many of these names are familiar from the Merton court rolls which survive from the 1480s, while Malard, atte Wode, Lyghtfoot, Dyssher and Bele also held copyhold properties in Morden.

Perhaps the most intriguing Merton inhabitant to obtain a pardon was another gentleman, William Lovelace, who also had substantial property interests in Morden. He was a citizen of London, and originated from Bethersden in Kent, where his memorial brass of 1459 can still be seen. He seems to have been the eldest of three brothers, each of whom obtained their pardon, Richard (no.189), William (571) and the youngest, Robert, (2140). Among the famous *Paston Letters* is one describing the events of 1450 from a servant of the Pastons' patron, Sir John Fastolf, one of the hated officials.⁵ Fastolf sent his servant to Blackheath to obtain a copy of the petition that Cade had produced, but the man was recognised and nearly killed, before finding support from leading rebels, one of whom later married a Paston. He was taken to the rebel headquarters at the *White Hart* in Southwark, where Cade commanded a certain Lovelace to relieve the prisoner of his possessions. It seems likely that this leading rebel was one of the three Lovelace brothers, probably the youngest, though some have suggested it was Richard's son, who during the Wars of the Roses was to acquire 'the reputation of being the most expert in warfare in England' but, as he was only aged about 10 in 1450, that seems improbable!⁶ Robert and Richard were involved in a land purchase in Bethersden as early as 1414 while William was granting land there in 1417, so none of them were young men in 1450.⁷ In 1433 Richard, described as a citizen and mercer of London, and William, described as 'of Merton, gentleman', were appointed executors to Beatrice Hayton of Merton, widow of Thomas Hayton who held the sub-manor of Batailles in Ewell, and William was involved in litigation over her sheep, and also over his own wool exports, into the early 1440s.⁸



William Lovelace's brass at Bethersden. Photo downloaded from www.geograph.org.uk/photo/2943848. Image Copyright Julian P Guffogg, licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic Licence.

So, as well as being a hotbed of social and political unrest, mid-15th-century Merton seems to have been a magnet for wealthy individuals. William Lovelace died without issue, and his Kent estates passed to his brother Richard, but he left enough personal wealth to fund a chantry chapel for himself and his parents at Bethersden.⁹ Beatrice Hayton, who was buried with her husband at Merton priory, left legacies totalling in excess of £35, her husband's estates having already passed to their daughter. Thomas Codyngton, who is described in Morden records as a goldsmith, may have had financial problems as in 1430 he was leasing to a London grocer a messuage and 100 acres arable in Cuddington, perhaps his manor house and demesne lands, plus pasture rights in Sparrowfeld common for 60 cattle and horses plus 100 sheep, for the annual payment of a pair of spurs worth a mere 6 shillings, which might indicate that he was indebted to the grocer.¹⁰ And in 1452 and 1454 we find mention of a 'William Banyerd *alias* Banyard of Merton gentilman'.¹¹ But where did they all live? Church House was the only substantial freehold property, and the copyhold properties seem to have been quite small, but there were leasehold houses near the priory gate at the time the priory was dissolved,¹² and I suppose it is possible that West Barnes was already a leasehold estate before it is noted as such in the 16th century. Perhaps one day another chance discovery will provide further answers!

- 1 *Calendar of Patent Rolls Henry VI 5* (1909) pp.338-374, accessed September 2014 from <https://familysearch.org>. My Excel spreadsheet of all entries is available at <http://www.mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk/index.php?cat=morden&sec=!rebels>
- 2 Montgomery Bohna 'Armed Force and Civic Legitimacy in Jack Cade's Revolt 1450' in *The English Historical Review* 118.477 (2003) p.574; Bertram Wolffe *Henry VI* (1981) p.233
- 3 Mavis Mate 'The Economic and Social Roots of Medieval Popular Rebellion: Sussex in 1450-1451' in *The Economic History Review* n.s.45.4 (1992) pp.668, 670; R A Griffiths *The Reign of Henry VI: The exercise of royal authority 1422-1466* (1981) pp.620-622
- 4 I M W Harvey *Jack Cade's Rebellion of 1450* (1991) p.196
- 5 James Gairdner *The Paston Letters 1422-1509AD I* (1910) letter 99 pp.131-5
- 6 Montgomery Bohna 'Armed Force and Civic Legitimacy in Jack Cade's Revolt 1450' in *The English Historical Review* 118.477 (2003) p.579 citing Waurin *Croniques* (Rolls Series 1891) 5 pp.327, 334; J Hall Pleasants 'The Lovelace Family and Its Connections (I)' in *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 27.3/4 (1919) p.398
- 7 A J Pearman 'The Kentish Family of Lovelace' in *Archaeologia Cantiana* X (1876) pp.185-7
- 8 The National Archives PROB 11/3/347; C 1/11/125; C 1/43/50; *Calendar of Patent Rolls Henry VI 4* (1908) p.18
- 9 A J Pearman 'The Kentish Family of Lovelace' in *Archaeologia Cantiana* X (1876) pp.187-8
- 10 Westminster Abbey Muniment Room 27374, 27376 and 27377; Thomas Madox *Formulare Anglicanum* (1702) 485 pp.285-6
- 11 *Calendar of Patent Rolls Henry VI 5* (1909) p.491; 6 (1901) p.133
- 12 The National Archives LR 2/190