

# The impact of the Black Death and the Peasants' Revolt (Making Sense of History, 1066 – 1509)

## Did rats and rebels change people's lives completely?

It's time to sum up the changes and continuities you've been investigating in this chapter. The rats that brought the Black Death and the rebels (though it's fairer to call them protesters) who stood up to the king and lords in 1381 did change people's lives in very important ways. If we'd been living in the fifteenth century we'd have been very grateful to them! But not everything had changed as you can see below.

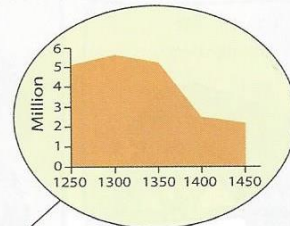
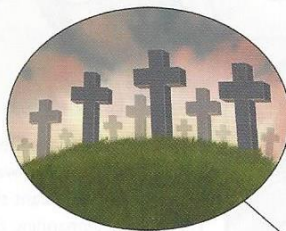
### Activity

- 1 Draw your own version of the spider diagram below but summarise each leg of the diagram in no more than five words.
- 2 Can you think of any connections between people having shorter lives than they do today and any of the other three spokes of the spider diagram below?
- 3 What kinds of developments would have to happen in the future to change these aspects of everyday life?

## Continuities in everyday life – what had NOT changed since 1066?

People's lives were still much shorter than ours in the twenty-first century. More than one in five babies died before their first birthday. Many women died in childbirth. Fifty was a good age.

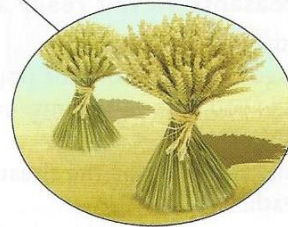
Only 2 million people lived in England in the 1400s. Since 1066 the population had grown to around 6 million but then fell rapidly in the 1300s because of famine, the Black Death and frequent outbreaks of other epidemic diseases.



Some things never seem to change.



Nobody understood that bacteria (germs) cause disease. People believed God sent diseases as a punishment or they blamed the Devil or bad air or the positions of the planets.



Nearly everyone still worked as farmers. They still needed a good harvest to have enough to eat so there was always the danger of hunger. When there was a run of bad harvests between 1315 and 1319, people starved to death.

## What had the rats and rebels changed by 1500?

Life does change. Things are much better than in our grandparents' days.



### Freedom!



By the 1400s everyone was free. They could move around the country to find higher-paid work. The lords could no longer control people's everyday lives.

### Activity

- 4 Draw your own version of the boxes on this page but summarise each section in no more than ten words.
- 5 Do you think that the changes were more important than the continuities in people's everyday lives? Choose one of the descriptions below and explain why you have chosen it. To help you decide, think about what would have been important to you if you had been living in 1500.
  - a) The changes were far more important than the continuities.
  - b) They were of roughly equal importance.
  - c) The continuities were far more important than the changes.
- 6 If we look ahead into the sixteenth century we'll see that the population began to grow. What effects do you think this had on people's everyday comforts? Look carefully at the section headed 'Life was more comfortable'.

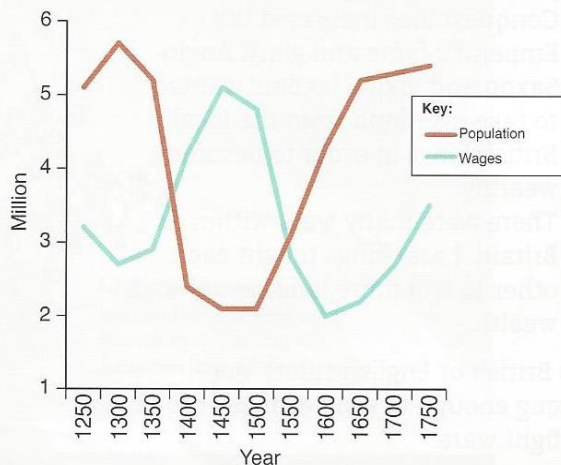
### Opportunities for women

There were a lot fewer people so more workers were needed. This created more opportunities for women to do 'men's work'. More women ran their own businesses in towns. In Sheffield two women became blacksmiths. Women also married at a later age and many chose their own husbands instead of marrying a man chosen by their fathers.



### Life was more comfortable

After the Black Death there were far fewer people to work in the fields. Eventually landowners had to pay higher wages to their workers to persuade them to stay, so many ordinary people had more money to spend. This graph shows how wage rates went up in the 1400s.



What did people spend their money on?

- Rebuilding warmer homes.
- More colourful clothing.
- More varied food – more meat and better quality bread.
- Schooling for their children. About half the people in London could read in 1500.