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Against God, Good Faith, and Reason:

The 1381 Peasants' Revolt in Cambridge

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wife Haylee, my sisters Maggie and Rachel, my parents Troy and Kathy, and my grandparents Nyle, Trish, Hans, and Mary. I would also like to thank my advisor Dr. Matt King, as well as my committee members Dr. Jennifer Knight and Dr. Matt Knight. I am indebted to Dr. K. Stephen Prince for his guidance and instruction. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Randy Wood, Dr. Matthew Melton, Dr. Tom Pope, Dr. Jared Wielfaert, Dr. Aaron Johnson, Dr. John Coats, Dr. Jason Ward, and Dr. Chad Schrock, who each in their own way directed and encouraged me on my academic journey.

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 as it occurred in the university town of Cambridge. The historiographic understanding of the Cambridge wing of the Peasants' Revolt has categorized it as foundationally motivated by town and gown resentment. Using legal records and chronicle accounts, this thesis demonstrates that the crowd did not exclusively target the university. As one of the town's wealthier and increasingly authoritative institutions, the university and its constituents were targets in the uprising—but this was in addition to several attacks on local churches, monastic institutions, and manors. These attacks against higher authorities reflect a loss of faith in authorities amid the uncertainties of the fourteenth century. Some landowners used this context of uncertainty to their advantage, seeking to further upset the tenuous balance of authority in Cambridge by leading targeted attacks. The organizers of the revolt were moderately wealthy opportunists rather than peasants, though they rallied a crowd of the peasantry against wealthy and powerful institutions across Cambridge. The uprising was less a collective address of a grievance against the university and more a legal gamble by those who hoped to garner social and political authority amid instability, using quasi-legal methods in the hopes of legitimizing their attacks and enacting lasting justice in their favor.

INTRODUCTION

An uneasiness had gripped the rolling hills and vast fens of East Anglia in the late Spring of 1381. The newly decreed Poll Tax, which would require a tax of four pence from every adult in England, disproportionately burdened the common people.[1] Rumors were spreading of a coming reckoning, one that many in England had been anticipating for decades - and one that would reach every level of society, including scholars in their tenements and monks in their cloisters. When the so-called Peasants' Revolt of 1381 finally reached Cambridge, it lay bare divisions between those who worked in the town and those who were members of its esteemed university.

Although the uprising in Cambridge has been remembered as a conflict born of animosity between "town and gown," this description does not do justice to the complex historical reality. Admittedly, among the many fractures that developed in Cambridge during the 14th century, there were significant tensions linked to the increasing authority of the university. This resulted in the university and its constituents being main targets in the uprising, and scholars have fixated on this dimension of the revolt. This preoccupation partially derives from historical interest in the university as one of humanity's longest standing and most revered institutions. Yet, this fixation has ultimately led to an eclipse; town and gown has been exalted at the expense of attacks on ecclesiastical institutions, manors, and individuals. A thesis of anticlericalism might contextualize the narrative of the Cambridge uprising in the larger late-fourteenth century trend of anticlerical sentiment and explain the attacks on colleges, churches, and the cloisters of monks

[1] *Rotuli Parliamentorum: Ut et Petitiones, et Placita in Parliamento*, vol. 3 (London, 1767), 88-90.

and mendicants. Still, it would be incorrect to describe this as the "essential" motivation of a unified revolting crowd. King Richard II and Parliament condemned the revolts as "Against God, good faith, and reason."[2] Fortuitously, this short phrase does encompass several critical characteristics of the motivations of revolt in Cambridge. The uprising of 1381 in Cambridge was not an attack of town against gown, as many scholars have supposed. Resentment of many wealthy institutions, including the university, local churches, monastic institutions, and manors, was held by peasants and burgesses alike. The organizers of the revolt were moderately wealthy opportunists rather than peasants, though they rallied a crowd of the peasantry against wealthy and powerful institutions across Cambridge. The uprising was less a collective address of a grievance against the university and more a legal gamble by those who hoped to garner social and political authority amid instability.

[2] "Contre Dieux bone foi & reson." *Statutes of the Realm*, vol. 2 (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1963), 20.

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORIOGRAPHY

This examination of the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 draws on a handful of historiographical traditions – especially the reality of mass violence conducted by those whose perspectives are not otherwise featured in contemporary sources. George Rudé's seminal 1964 work *The Crowd in History* demonstrates how scholars have allowed the study of violent crowds to be dominated by language which suppresses analysis. Rudé's foundational notion is that there is a difference between presenting rioters as "the people" or the "rabble/mob."[3] Scholars should resist the temptation to allow group language to smooth over the diversities, eccentricities, and human dignities of individuals. This paper will not unilaterally avoid language that conceptualizes those who participated in the violence of the uprising as a group. But it seeks to use the language of "crowd," "uprising," and even "insurgents," in a way that allows room for individual motivations and actions of resistance within the broader context of violence.

Concerning historical violence, one relevant approach comes from David Nirenberg in his book *Communities of Violence* (2015). Nirenberg argued that it is imperative to study the contexts in which violence happens and that "words such as 'irrational' suppress analysis broadly. If violence…is without reason, then there is no need to study the contexts in which violence occurred or look for contexts that might have caused it."[4] Violence, though unseemly, cannot be dismissed from study on that basis. Thus, when talking of a "town," scholars must

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[3] George Rudé, *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England 1730-1848* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1964), 8.
[4] David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 43.

consider its inherent diversity. Scholarship on the Peasants' Revolt broadly has shown that, "It was not a spontaneous rising of an angry peasantry. It was, moreover, led by men of standing in their local communities: jurymen, bailiffs and stewards."[5] Yet, this nuanced approach has largely been ignored in scholarship on the Cambridge uprising.

Scholars make active choices to include and exclude individuals from the group and the larger historical narrative. This is particularly evident in writings dealing with town and gown, where scholars have allowed the framework to dictate the tone and content of their scholarship rather than allowing their tone and content to be shaped by the evidence. Alan Cobban, the late historian of medieval English universities, claims there was a "climate of resentment" between town and gown.[6] Scholars have allowed the negative connotation of town and gown to limit their analysis of the narrative, using instances of violence to prove and add to preexisting tensions within the "climate of resentment," creating a circular trap that eludes critical investigation. Juliet Barker describes the University and Barnwell Priory as "ancient adversaries" of the town.[7] Alastair Dunn writes "This was not just an anti-ecclesiastical resentment by the poorer inhabitants of Cambridge, but a general hatred of the University that united all."[8] Likewise, Rowland Parker claims, "What happened at Cambridge had more to do with the Town and Gown war than with the aspirations of Wat Tyler or the preaching of John Ball."[9] These quotes demonstrate the assumption of a negative bifurcation between the University and the townspeople. Such a bifurcation simplifies the historical narrative, but this paper will

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[5] Caroline M. Barron, "The Reign of Richard II," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History, c.1300-c.1415*, ed. Michael Jones (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 6: 305.
[6] Alan Cobban, *The Medieval English Universities: Oxford and Cambridge to c. 1500.* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1988), 259.
[7] Juliet Barker, *1381: The Year of the Peasants' Revolt* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 325.
[8] Alastair Dunn, *The Peasants' Revolt: England's Failed Revolution of 1381* (Stroud: Tempus, 2004), 157.
[9] Rowland Parker, *Town and Gown: The 700 Years' War in Cambridge* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 45.

demonstrate that it is an oversimplification that misrepresents the interests of the people of Cambridge.

Recent scholarship has approached the Peasants' Revolt in Cambridge from new angles.[10] Sylvie Federico brought to light the prominence of women across England during the revolt. Federico has established that women were sometimes used as surrogate victims, attacked in place of men in their lives.[11] They also were leading voices, representatives of the crowd, exemplified through the aged Margaret Starre.[12] Starre's cry "Away with the knowledge of the clerics, away with it," has been used as representative evidence for both "town versus gown" and anticlerical sentiment of the crowd at large in Cambridge.[13]

Hannah Skoda, a leading scholar on historical violence and universities, writes, "Chronicle accounts of the revolt, while predictably hostile to the rebels themselves, when read against the grain, reveal the logic of rebel violence: rebels focused on the destruction of legal documents, upon the freeing of prisoners, and the exaction of popular justice upon those who had abused their positions of legal or governmental authority."[14] Skoda's interest in the rebel appeal to law or higher authorities as justify their actions laid the foundation for this present paper. The significance of the legal battles played out in physical actions embodies the trend towards the centrality of common law in England.[15] Following Skoda's methodology, this paper has sought to investigate how the rebels of Cambridge emulated a legal aesthetic to legitimize their actions. They viewed the destruction of legal documents as the destruction of the laws themselves, and

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[10] See Sylvia Federico for an approach on women's history in the Peasants' Revolt. Sylvia Federico, "The Imaginary Society: Women in 1381," *Journal of British Studies* 40, no. 2 (2001): 172.
[11] Federico, "The Imaginary Society," 172.
[12] Federico, "The Imaginary Society," 159.
[13] Oxford, Christ Church MS 138, fol. 2v: ""Et vetula quedam nomine Margareta Starre cineres collectos in ventum sparsit clamando abcedat clericorum pericia abcedat"; see also British Library Arundel MS 350, fol. 17v.
[14] Hannah Skoda, "Collective Violence and Popular Justice in the Later Middle Ages," in *Global Lynching and Collective Violence*, ed. Michael J. Pfeifer (University of Illinois Press, 2017), 15.
[15] Skoda, "Collective Violence and Popular Justice," 13.

attacks on the powerful as an exercise of justice. This paper's historiographic contribution is its application of Skoda's methodology to a historical setting which she has not written on; namely, the town of Cambridge in 1381.

Mingjie Xu has also recently published an article analyzing the revolt across Cambridgeshire.[16] Xu's study tabulates and quantifies data from the record. This novel approach helps scholars to understand where and to what scale the uprising was focused. Xu writes that, countywide, "attacks in this region were overwhelmingly directed against political and judicial officials operating at a national and local level, and that attacks against landlords arising from oppressive manorial lordship constituted less than one-tenth of recorded violent incidents."[17] This identification of the victims of the assault notably includes the university while contextualizing it as one institution among many. Xu also identifies that, from the sources consulted, over 55 percent of the violent acts involved damage and property looting.[18] Xu's main emphases are on the nature of the attacks and the victims, though he notes that attackers such as John Hanchach were free landholders.[19] In a similar fashion, this paper will investigate the wealthy who perpetrated violent acts, and those who were victims, in the town of Cambridge. This localized approach allows the current paper to speak to the historiographic construction of town and gown more pointedly.

[16] Mingjie Xu, "Analysing the Actions of the Rebels in the English Revolt of 1381: The Case of Cambridgeshire," *The Economic History Review* 75, no. 3 (2022). One must keep in mind that depending on government manuscripts documenting the revolt to provide quantifiable data may bias findings towards the middle and upper classes.
[17] Xu, "Analysing the Actions of the Rebels in the English Revolt of 1381," 881.
[18] Xu, "Analysing the Actions of the Rebels in the English Revolt of 1381," 891.
[19] Xu, "Analysing the Actions of the Rebels in the English Revolt of 1381," 895.

CHAPTER TWO: A NOTE ON SOURCES

The sources available that discuss the content and consequences of the revolt are themselves mainly legal sources. The *Statutes of the Realm* documents Parliaments' statutes and ordinances, including those from after the revolt. The *Rotuli Parliamentorum* contains the petitions brought before Parliament in the wake of the revolt. The patent rolls containing charters and grants and the close rolls containing letters close are essential resources for understanding the legal causes and effects of the revolt. Charles Henry Cooper's *Annals of Cambridge* also has a distinctly socio-political flavor, drawing heavily from these other sources.[20]

Hannah Skoda points out, however, that even chronicle accounts convey profound descriptions of law and politics for both royalty and rebels. For example, Froissart's chronicles are preoccupied with the great men and political leaders in their historical narrative. The account from R.B. Dobson tells another side of the narrative excerpted from parliamentary petitions, with townspeople emulating the powerful, electing burgesses, and enacting symbolic violence.[21] The sources from the chief justice's roll (CP 40/487) and the general oyer and terminer roll (JUST 1/103) in the UK National Archives uncover the involvement of wealthy landholders and politically powerful men in instigating and directing the violence. The previous two sources are digitized and cataloged in the online database 'The People of 1381'.[22] This new resource has

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[20] Charles H. Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1852). Cooper's *Annals* is a multivolume chronological history, drawn from a variety of legal records.
[21] R. B. Dobson, ed. and trans., *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381* (London: Macmillan, 1970).
[22] The People of 1381 database was started in 2019 and recently completed in September of 2022. It is organized into sources, participants, and incidents. It is one of the most ambitious scholarly projects on the Peasants' Revolt to this date.

compiled most of the documented incidents, people, and locations affected by the Peasants' Revolt. This paper also makes use of the Christ Church MS 138, an excerpt from an unidentified source, describes how the destruction of university muniments brought a sense of victory to rebels like Margaret Starre.

Collectively, these sources demonstrate that the university was indeed a key target but was far from the only one. Instead, many politically powerful institutions were targeted. Admittedly, this documentation of grievances mainly against wealthy institutions may be slanted by extant sources. Wealthier victims would have better means and influence to document and raise grievances to the proper people. Nevertheless, the sources also indicate a thorough investigation took place for the purpose of identifying the attackers. On July 28, 1381, the king officially appointed a local commission of justices to arrest, imprison, and punish those involved in the uprising in Cambridgeshire.[23] This indicates that these sources are reliable for documentation of the violence incited and enacted by those who hoped to capitalize on the popular frustration with political authorities and influential institutions.

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[23] *Calendar of the Close Rolls: Preserved in the Public Record Office*, vol. 2 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1920), 8.

CHAPTER THREE: CAMBRIDGE IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

The fourteenth century – often called "calamitous" in modern discourse – brought more than a fair share of suffering to the people of Cambridge. Early in the century, the Great Famine starved people across Europe. The Black Death ravaged Cambridge from April of 1349 through the end of the year.[24] After a decade-long respite, it returned to Cambridge in 1361. In the event of a plague, it is likely that the university suspended lectures and dismissed students dismissed from campus, though no extant source confirms this.[25] Therefore, it is likely that the plague had a greater impact on the members of the town itself. Is it estimated that, north of the river Cam, the town was entirely depopulated.[26] Current estimates of the mortality rate for the first wave of the Black Plague range from 54% to 60% of the English population.[27]

To contextualize this narrative, a brief introduction to the town of Cambridge is in order. Fueled economically by the northeast-flowing river Cam, Cambridge was in many respects similar to other medieval towns. "Open sewers, rats, filthy streets, drafty rooms, floors strewn with soiled straw, and shared, flea-infested beds. These were compounded by the surrounding stagnant waters of the King's Ditch, and its location near the yet undrained Fens."[28] The rebuilt Norman castle towered over the town from the northwest.[29] Dotting the town were various

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[24] Evelyn Lord, *The Great Plague: A People's History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 2.
[25] Damien R. Leader, *A History of the University of Cambridge*, ed. Christopher Brooke, vol. 1, *The University to 1546* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 211.
[26] Leader, *A History of the University of Cambridge*, 211.
[27] John Aberth, *The Black Death: A New History of the Great Mortality in Europe, 1347-1500* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 47.
[28] Leader, *A History of the University of Cambridge*, vol. 1, 212.
[29] *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of Cambridge*, vol. 1 (London: Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments, 1959), xlviii.

colleges, halls, churches, convents, and tenements. Also resident in the town were several guilds, such as the guild of Corpus Christi.[30] Indeed, the university itself was essentially founded as a guild of scholars. All students entered some level of canonical orders, obtaining clerical status. Many students were friars, or less commonly monks, sent to the university for education.[31] Indeed, by the late fourteenth century, nearly half of the scholars and masters were mendicant friars. This intimate connection between the university and the Church should not be minimalized.

Despite its challenges, the fourteenth century was still a time of expansion for the university, with King's Hall, Michaelhouse, University Hall (Clare College), Pembroke Hall, and Gonville Hall founded before the arrival of the Black Death. Even the arrival of the plague did not slow this growth, with Trinity Hall founded in 1350 and Corpus Christi (Benet's) in 1352. However, it was nearly a century until another college was founded. Although the university was seemingly thriving, the diminished population was causing severe economic instability across England. The Crown-implemented legislation of the Ordinance of Labourers in 1349 and the Statute of Labourers of 1351 attempted to freeze wages where they had been before the plague and stabilize England's economy. Christopher Dyer notes that, "there is now general agreement that the conditions of peasants as well as wage-earners tended to improve after the plague of 1348-9."[32] Nevertheless, scholars have viewed the Ordinance and Statute as unsuccessful, placing further stress on the commonality of England. Mark Bailey notes that the English economy struggled to recover from its population loss in the following decades for a wide

[30] Catherine P. Hall, "The Gild of Corpus Christi and the Foundation of Corpus Christi College: an Investigation of the Documents," in *Medieval Cambridge: Essays on the Pre-Reformation University*, ed. Patrick Zutshi (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 1993), 73.
[31] Leader, *A History of the University of Cambridge*, vol. 1, 25.
[32] Christopher Dyer, "The Social and Economic Background to the Rural Revolt of 1381," in *The English Rising of 1381*, eds. R. H. Hilton and T. H. Aston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 9.

variety of reasons, but namely, "the worst succession of extreme epidemiological and environmental events in recorded history."[33] So, the struggles of the fourteenth century were cumulatively detrimental to the health and finances of the English population.

England was primed for a riot. In Oxford, England's only other university town, a minor squabble between students and a local taverner exploded into the infamous St. Scholastica's Day riot of 1355, which left dozens of townspeople and scholars dead.[34] It is beyond the scope of this paper to explain why a revolt on a similar scale did not simultaneously occur in Cambridge. Indeed, several squabbles between town and gown had occurred throughout the fourteenth century.[35] Yet in the coming decades, worsening tensions would bring violence to the whole of southeastern England, Cambridge included. Perhaps the most infamous and inflammatory causes of anger for peasants across England were the newly instituted poll taxes of 1377, 1379, and 1381. The poll tax, levied by the Crown to fund military excursions abroad, universally taxed English adults. This was a war which had no direct impact on the English people, and now they were being forced to fund it from their own shallow pockets. To top it all off, Pope Gregory IX's death in 1378 ruptured the ecclesiastical polity of the Catholic Church. In what became known as the Western Schism, dueling popes ruled from both Avignon and Rome, an unprecedented calamity for Christendom. England decided to support Pope Urban VI over antipope Clement VII, yet this was a decision that had to be made without foresight or guidance.[36] If a climate of hostility did exist, it would not have been limited to frustration with universities.

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[33] Mark Bailey, *After the Black Death: Economy, Society, and the Law in Fourteenth-Century England* (London: Oxford University Press, 2021), 168.

[34] The St. Scholastica's Day riot of 1355 resulted in the deaths of nearly one hundred students and townspeople in Oxford. The severity of the revolt speaks to the combustible social situation of the post-plague university town. In the wake of the revolt, King Edward III sided with the University of Oxford, extending its privileges, and arranging an annual Mass for penance.

[35] Leader, *A History of the University of Cambridge*, vol. 1, 216.

[36] Aubrey Gwynn, *The English Austin Friars in the Time of Wyclif* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), 240.

Locally, the town was struggling to maintain the industry standards for goods set forth by the Crown. With the strength of the university waxing, the king transferred supervision of these goods from the town to the university. On the sixth of November in 1378, the king made a provisional statute that, should the mayor grow negligent in his management of local industries, the university would manage them in his stead.[37] The shift in the inspection of bread, wine, beer, flesh, or fish from local officials to university officials would have been unnatural for Cambridge's guild members. What had once been one guild among many was now given provisional authority. But the town had lost a significant portion of its population, making it difficult for the town government to properly manage its industries. The university took on the economic responsibilities and authority of the local government. While this was meant to be a temporary provision lasting until the next Parliament, it was extended several times.[38]

Local economics were only the beginning of the town government's struggles. The Crown recognized the devolving situation in Cambridge and called on the local leaders to rectify it. On the fifth of December 1380, the king issued a letter patent to the mayor and bailiffs stating, "many malefactors and disturbers of the king's peace made confederacies, congregations, and illicit conventicles in the town, and daily resorted to and came from the town armed and committed great depredations on the persons and property of the king's subjects."[39] So, organized violence was already gripping Cambridge. On the fourth of February 1381, the king demanded that the organizers of these crimes (John Barbor, Henry Cayser, John de Trumpington, John Asshewell, and Nicholas Hede) submit to the king's local authorities, cease assembling, encourage their neighbors to be equally peaceable, and pay recognizances of £100 each, half to

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[37] Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, vol. 1, 117.
[38] Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, vol. 1, 117.
[39] Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, vol. 1, 119.

the Crown and half to the university chancellor.[40] Three of these men—John Barbor, John de Trumpington, and Nicholas Hede were later accused of violence during the Peasants' Revolt.[41] Mayor Lyster was outraged at the subversion of his authority. He obstructed the investigative sessions of the itinerant justices of the peace in Cambridge and was also forced to enter into recognizances of £100.[42] The mayor's resistance to the legal authority of the king foreshadowed his involvement in the riot later than June. This tension between local and monarchical authorities was only increased by the conspicuous absence of the king's uncle—the earl of Cambridge—Edmund de Langelee.[43] In May, with tensions high, a group of townsmen forced the surrender of the deeds of university privileges.[44] These deeds were seized from sir John Cavendish, then both university chancellor and chief justice of King's Bench.[45] This overlap of authority is indicative of broader interconnections between local institutions, but it also demonstrates that there seemed to be a confusion of authority that compromised legal integrity. Even before the revolt, townspeople were taking legal disputes with the university into their own hands.

[40] Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, vol. 1, 119.
[41] Barbor: TNA JUST 1/103 m. 12; Trumpington: TNA CP 40/493 m. 314; Hede: TNA C 67/29 mm. 38-25, all from the AHRC-funded 'The People of 1381 Online Database' www.1381.online.
[42] Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, vol. 1, 119-120.
[43] Besançon BM, ms. 864, f. 69v, trans. Keira Borrill, The Online Froissart.
[44] Dunn, *The Peasants' Revolt: England's Failed Revolution of 1381*, 157.
[45] Dyer, "The Social and Economic Background to the Rural Revolt of 1381," 38.

CHAPTER FOUR: AN OVERVIEW OF THE EVENTS AND THOSE INVOLVED

This section will briefly detail an overview of the attackers, the nature of their violence, the places these incidents occurred, and the victims. This section will serve as a summary of the revolt and a reference point for its details. From the evidence, those accused of violence during the revolt included peasants, free landowners such as John Hanchach, and civic authorities, such as the burgesses and Mayor Lystere.[46] Caroline Barron identifies the perpetrators in the Peasants' Revolt as being, "men of standing in their local communities: jurymen, bailiffs and stewards."[47] The precise composition or size of the crowd cannot be determined. One testimony claims that there were over a thousand people assembled at the Tollbooth, though this is more hyperbole than an accurate estimate.[48] The attackers did not commit murder during the revolt. Instead, threats of death, extortion, destruction of muniments, property damage, and larceny were all used against the people and institutions being resisted. The victims of the revolt included local officeholders put in place by the king, landholders, university officers, and leaders of religious communities. It might seem that non-academic victims were only targeted due to connections to the university. Yet, the reverse may be just as likely—for example, the unpopularity of John of Gaunt led to attacks on the properties associated with him, such as the College of Corpus Christi, but also the manor of his associate Thomas Haselden.[49] Notably, individual scholars were not targeted, as they were usually quite poor. These attacks took place within Cambridge in the

[46] Dobson, *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, 239.
[47] Barron, "The Reign of Richard II," 305.
[48] TNA JUST 1/103 m. 12, People of 1381.
[49] Xu, "Analysing the Actions of the Rebels in the English Revolt of 1381," 893.

tenement housing and personal properties, colleges, churches, and convents. Outside the city, manor houses were frequently targeted. The picture that this paper will set forth is that of an uprising with many moving parts. It involves men and women, commoners and lords, academics, mendicants. It tells the story of people who understood the legal system and parodied it due to loss of faith in their local leadership and higher authorities.

CHAPTER FIVE: AGAINST REASON

To speak of the Cambridge uprising as a singular unit is to draw a complex network of groups and individuals into a single unified banner. As mentioned previously, caricatures of the revolt have tended to illustrate it as an unthinking, exceedingly violent, and singularly purposed "mob." And what was this one supposed purpose? To attack the university and all it stood for; to win the centuries-old war now that the opportunity had so tantalizingly presented itself. Was the mob truly "against God, good faith, and reason"?[50] This paper will take each of these accusations in reverse order.

Historian Hannah Skoda uses the term "quasi-legality" to describe the rebels' actions in the Peasants' Revolt.[51] This was not the frenzied violence of an irrational mob but a three-day settling of grievances. In many ways, this quasi-legality indicates a deference to reason which many have not previously granted to those involved in the violence of 1381. As the current legal process was not yielding favorable results to town members, members of the revolt emulated the legal process while awarding themselves ultimate decisiveness in jurisdiction. Yet this resort to quasi-legality led to an ultimate failure to obtain lasting justice. This section will try to uncover the identity and the logic, in its coherence and incoherence, of the rebels.

The account in the Rolls of Parliament begins: "The bailiffs and commonalty, by the advice and consent of the mayor Edmund Redmedwe, met together and went to Shingay Hospital, and to the house of Thomas Haselden, where they joined certain traitors of the

[50] *Statutes of the Realm*, vol. 2, 20.
[51] Skoda, "Collective Violence and Popular Justice," 22.

county."[52] Haselden, then in the employment of the Duke of Lancaster John of Gaunt, lived in a manor six miles outside of town.[53] He had moved to Cambridgeshire in 1372, quickly becoming involved in local politics.[54] The crowd, made up of people from across Cambridgeshire, attacked the building, stole his belongings, and drove off his animals.[55]

Just as interesting as the motivation for the attack on Haselden's manor is the procedure which the crowd undertook to arrive there. Scholars have not emphasized the spatial function of the crowd. This dispersing and regrouping at designated destinations positions the crowd as its own institution, composed of town members but not entirely subject to its legal or geographic constraints. The crowd assembled first outside of town, attacked a manor, then traveled to the Cambridge Tollbooth. The crowd then dispersed, with plans to reassemble at the Tollbooth at ten o'clock at night.[56] It was at the Tollbooth that local town "business" was conducted; the election of a captain and the organization of a hunt for the university bedel. Likewise, on Monday morning, the crowd assembled in fields outside of Cambridge and from there, attacked Barnwell Priory. This pattern of disbanding and regrouping was both for the sake of convenience and a symbolic designation of *loci* of authority.

This slow, deliberate timeline contradicts frenzied caricatures of the revolt. Indeed, it is more reminiscent of proper legal proceedings. This slower process also gave many residents time for preparations or escape. Other wealthy landowners besides Haselden, such as Roger Harleston and John Blauncpayn, were not found at their manors nor their other properties when rioters arrived at the houses. University bedel William Wykemere, one of the first targets of the mob,

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[52] Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, vol. 1, 120.
[53] Xu, "Analysing the Actions of the Rebels in the English Revolt of 1381," 893.
[54] Xu, "Analysing the Actions of the Rebels in the English Revolt of 1381," 893.
[55] Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, vol. 1, 120.
[56] Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, vol. 1, 120.

was not at home.[57] An attack on Wykemere was deeply symbolic as an overthrow of university leadership in the town. Neither was Roger Blaunkgren at home when John Coggeshall and others came to attack him for an unknown reason. In each of these cases, seizure and destruction of property was an alternative means of satisfaction of grievances. Rioters broke into Roger Harleston's manor and stole barley, corn, and other goods.[58] At Thomas Haselden's properties, John Hanchach plundered and auctioned off goods.[59] Homes and important legal documents were often burned in place of their owners. This justice through surrogacy speaks to the nuanced motivations and goals of the insurgents to provide a political commentary and effect political change in their community.

The framing of the insurgents as a mob with a singular hatred for the university has obscured the crowd's diverse motivational composition. Although the university was still a key target in the violence, individual stories display motivations of wealth disparity and resistance against authorities. The mayor propagated the idea that the king had supported the revolt, using this to justify his participation in the revelry, and thus that he should not be found guilty of treason.[60] His appeal is an example of a lesser authority claiming the authority of the monarchy to subvert the competing powers of lords and wealthy local institutions. Others claim to have been coerced into joining the revelry. Richard Farwel of Ashley, claimed in court that, "he was led into that very place by force and forced by deadly weapons," by Robert Tavell.[61] He was

[57] Wykemere would have been one of two bedels–administrative assistants to the chancellors and proctors–administrative assistants to the chancellors and proctors for the University. See M. B. Hackett, *The Original Statutes of Cambridge University: The Text and Its History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 206; see also Alan B. Cobban, *English University Life in the Middle Ages* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2021), 231-232.
[58] TNA JUST 1/103 m. 7, People of 1381.
[59] TNA JUST 1/103 m. 4, People of 1381.
[60] Edgar Powell, *The Rising in East Anglia in 1381: With an Appendix Containing the Suffolk Poll Tax Lists for That Year* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1896), 42.
[61] "Fuit ibidem ductus vi et armis mortis coactis." TNA JUST 1/103 m. 3, People of 1381.

acquitted of his role in the attack on John Sybyle's manor. Walter Colveys was likewise acquitted after he claimed he was forced to join the crowd and its violence by Robert of Corby.[62]

Additionally, to say that the crowd was uniformly composed of townspeople would be misleading, as the insurgents came from across the county. The elected captain Jakes and his brother Thomas, who were made town burgesses at the Tollbooth at the start of the violence, hailed instead from the nearby village of Grantchester two and a half miles south. One of the most notorious rebels, John Coggeshall, was a native of Haslingfield, six miles southwest. On Sunday, "The said burgesses and commonality assembled in great bands and rode out of the said town to meet the traitors and king's enemies in the county of Cambridge. They led them into the town, which the rebels would not have dared approach without the assent of the said burgesses and commonality."[63] This account from the Parliament Roll does not identify the "the traitors and king's enemies" with the townspeople, challenging the framing of town and gown as the key to understanding the crowd of 1381 in Cambridge. This is not to say that the extent of the university's influence was limited to the town walls of Cambridge proper. Rather, this evidence points to the flaws and limitations of the very word "town" in town and gown.

A robust legal critique can be identified in the chronicle accounts of the revolt. As the bonfire raged, an elderly woman named Margaret Starre spread the ashes of the burnt muniments, crying out, "Away with the knowledge of the clerics, away with it!"[64] This battle cry has transitioned into the folklore of the revolt. The incineration of statues and muniments was a symbolic overthrow of the institution and its recent legal victories. Starre's speech marries this

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[62] TNA JUST 1/103 m. 1d, People of 1381.
[63] It is interesting that this account from the Parliament Roll distinguishes between town members and rebels outside the town, when at this point, the burgesses had clearly acted against the Crown. See Dobson, *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, 241; see also Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, vol. 1, 121.
[64] Oxford, Christ Church MS 138, fol. 2v.

legal critique with strong anti-clerical sentiments. Indeed, this quasi-legal victory was a critique of both the university's legal authority and the scholars themselves. By the late fourteenth century, "about 40 percent of the recorded secular scholars were in law."[65] Starre's critique seems less against intellectual pursuit, and more against using knowledge as a legal weapon.

But the crowd fought the legal acumen of the scholars with its own legal claims, buttressed by the threat of violence. They, "compelled the said masters and scholars under threat of their death to enter into bonds by which large sums of money might be paid to the aforesaid burgesses…[and] a general acquittance…delivered to the mayor, bailiffs and commonality and placed in their treasury for safe-keeping."[66] The fact that these were given under duress did not compromise the result for the mayor and bailiffs. This reversal of debts placed the wealth of the university in the coffers of the town treasury, alleviating the pressure of the king's charter granting the university authority over food, drink, and measures. But they were not done. Dobson summarizes additional actions of the rioters:

> The mayor, bailiffs, burgesses, and commonalty compelled the University to execute deeds under their common seal and the seal of every college, renouncing all their privileges, and submitting themselves to be governed in future by the law of the land and the ancient custom of the borough, and releasing and discharging the mayor, bailiffs, burgesses, and commonalty, and every person of the commonalty, from all actions, real and personal, and all recognizances. They also compelled the masters and scholars, by menace of death, to deliver up their charters and letters patent, and publicly burnt the statutes, ordinances, and other evidences of the University in the market-place.[67]

This was a power struggle between town leaders and the university, played out in a quasi-legal arena that married legal grievances with the physical control that the rioters had over their previous superiors. Despite the circumstances of these transactions, though, town leaders believed this exchange was merited, maybe even legitimate.

[65] Leader, *A History of the University of Cambridge*, vol. 1, 195.
[66] Dobson, *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, 241.
[67] Dobson, *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, 241-242.

CHAPTER SIX: AGAINST GOOD FAITH

Insurgent burgesses and landowners used the outbreak of violence opportunistically, settling scores based on power, influence, finances, and personal grievances. Where authority was perceived as weak or corrupt, individuals sought to overthrow and claim this authority for themselves. Not every motive can be identified from the legal petitions, as many of the attackers' and victims' personalities and social standings are lost to the present. Yet, from the charges themselves, one can reconstruct a general picture of the types of crimes committed during the uprising. Thus, the Cambridge uprising was both vertical (those in authority manipulated the frustrations of the lower classes to accomplish their personal goals) and horizontal (those in authority saw and took the opportunity to claim power at the expense of other wealthy individuals and institutions in Cambridge). It is also clear that the motivations of individuals, rather than a hivemind, were the primary movers in the specific mechanics of the revolt.

For example, the property of one William Wykemere was broken into and ravaged. The attackers, bearing weapons, seized and destroyed Wykemere's documents.[68] Two charters described enfeoffments, or transfers of land. Another two charters noted debts from John Porter of Ditton (£40) and the porter John Smythe (40 marks).[69] Those who attacked Wykemere believed that the destruction of these legal documents would effect a real change. For them, the letter was the law—if the letter were destroyed, thus the law would be gone, too.

[68] TNA CP 40/487 m. 249, People of 1381.
[69] TNA CP 40/487 m. 249, People of 1381.

One of the key targets of the revolt was Roger Harleston, a man who had made many enemies of varied social standing throughout his life. Harleston was notorious for fraud and deception, which eroded faith in the courts and the official legal process. Prior to the revolt, he had been accused of several accounts of bribery and fraud, charges which Harleston did not deny and for which he was made to pay a fine of 250 marks.[70] To make matters worse, Harleston occupied a position of authority in the town, being a landowner, a burgess, and having supervised the most recent and inflammatory poll tax.[71] In Hilary term of 1380, "the mayor and bailiffs succeeded in claiming conusance of an action then pending in the king's Bench between Thomas Reder of Cambridge, plaintiff, and William Bayliff and Roger Harleston, defendants, for taking and unjustly detaining chattels."[72] People who had been negatively affected by Harleston's underhand dealings used the revolt as an opportunity for justice. Ultimately, several landowners were targeted, as they were representatives of local authority and its failures to sustain a just society.

Yet justice was ultimately served by opportunistic rivals rather than vengeful peasants. At the very least, influential landowners opportunistically directed (often actively) the frustrations of the populace in ways that were beneficial to their own social standing. John Hanchach led attacks at the manors of Thomas Haselden, William Bateman (Bishop of Norwich), the Hospital of Shingay, Edward Walsyngham, Thomas Torell, Roger Harleston and John Blauncpayn.[73] Blauncpayn's manor was the only one located in Cambridge proper.[74] Yet Hanchach was no peasant rabble rouser, but a landowner of considerable plots across Cambridgeshire. This was an

[70] Robert C. Palmer, *English Law in the Age of the Black Death, 1348-1381: A Transformation of Governance and Law* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 273-274n.
[71] Barker, *1381: The Year of the Peasants' Revolt*, 320.
[72] Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, vol. 1, 118.
[73] TNA JUST 1/103 m. 3, People of 1381.
[74] Blauncpayn's houses in the market and the nearby Petycure were assaulted by members of the Rifham family. See TNA JUST 1/103 m. 4d, People of 1381.

instance of a coup by one wealthy landowner against others. Of course, it is likely that Hanchach corralled the frustrations of the masses, but he directed them against his peers, avoiding the attack of the mob himself. These attackers falsely claimed to have been acting under the guidance of the king; the bishop and his men did not listen to these appeals, and Hanchach was executed.[75] Ultimately, this narrative demonstrates a loss of confidence in the true authority of the king. While still appealing to the king's power, these attackers undermined and circumvented it. The loss of good faith in Cambridge was not a development in 1381; it was rooted in the failures of authorities on all levels for decades. This loss was reciprocal, as the King had transferred authority from the local government to the university of local industries.[76] The Peasants' Revolt in Cambridge was a multithreaded gamble for power in which no person or institution was off limits.

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[75] Assize Roll 103. m. 3. Quoted in Powell, Edgar, 127.
[76] Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, vol. 1, 117.

CHAPTER SEVEN: AGAINST GOD

In the Peasants' Revolt in Cambridge, several ecclesiastical buildings and institutions were either settings of violence or targets themselves. These attacks indicate that there was something about ecclesiastical institutions that drew the ire of the crowd. Ultimately, a combination of several factors, such as anticlericalism, resentment against the wealth of ecclesial institutions, and a loss of respect for authorities led to these attacks. And yet, these attacks are not indicative of a secularizing wave in Cambridge. Indeed, the power of the Church was upheld during the revolt and even brought about its conclusion.

Did the situation in Cambridge reflect the broader trend of anticlericalism? Susan Crane certainly thinks so, writing of Cambridge that, "the rebels' dispute with the powerful was inextricably bound up with anticlerical sentiment."[77] In 1355, the year of the fateful St. Scholastica's Day riot in Oxford, Pope Innocent VI made Paris, Oxford, and Cambridge the *studia generalia* for the Austin friars.[78] Cambridge and Oxford would have been paragons for this critique, uniquely positioned with concentrations of academic clerics and mendicant scholars. This clerical status brought scholars primarily under the authority of ecclesiastical courts. This effectively gave clerics a level of legal protection that ordinary townspeople did not enjoy.

[77] Susan Crane, "The Writing Lesson of 1381," in *Chaucer's England: Literature in Historical Context*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt, 201-221 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992): 215.
[78] Gwynn, *The English Austin Friars in the Time of Wyclif*, 98.

In late fourteenth-century England, writers such as Richard FitzRalph and John Wyclif wrote vehemently against friars and clerics.[79] Not only did Wyclif challenge the excesses of the friars in the late 1370s and early 1380s, but he also challenged the dogma and authority of the Catholic Church.[80] As a master in the faculty of the arts, Wyclif frequently lectured on philosophical and theological matters such as the Eucharist, taking a stance that challenged Catholic doctrine and mirrored that of the future Protestant Reformers.[81] Either at the end of 1380 or the beginning of 1381, the doctrine concerning the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist that he had propagated in these lectures was condemned by a council of Oxford university theologians.[82] Chronologically, the dissemination of these teachings and controversies parallel that of the revolt. Nevertheless, the anticlerical argument does not fully explain the significance of religious spaces in the Cambridge uprising. There simply is much more to be said outside about the revolt that has little to no connection to clerics, whether it be in relation to secular issues or ecclesiastical ones. Indeed, many clung to religious institutions amid the instability of the revolt. But Wyclif's inflammatory writings and his challenges to key Catholic doctrines reinforced the broader trends of anticlericalism and loss of faith in authorities in the fourteenth century.

Attackers exploited religious spaces as a symbolic revolt against higher authorities. One significant example is John Giboun Sr., about whom little is left extant. Yet the narrative contained in the petitionary records paints a dramatic, illuminating story of the place of a local church and its parishioners during the uprising. The setting is Sunday morning, and the revolt has

[79] Tim Rayborn, *Against the Friars: Antifraternalism in Medieval France and England* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co.: 2014), 143-161.
[80] Gwynn, *The English Austin Friars in the Time of Wyclif*, 258-259.
[81] Gwynn, *The English Austin Friars in the Time of Wyclif*, 258.
[82] Gwynn, *The English Austin Friars in the Time of Wyclif*, 259.

been going on since the night before. The smell of smoke might have been in the air from a burnt home. There might have been debris from smashed windows or doors in the lanes. One might have ducked behind a corner to avoid a band of people still giddy from the justice they had served the night before. A general unease sat like a pit in the stomachs of those in Cambridge, scholars and townspeople alike. John Giboun Jr. knew exactly where he wanted to be that morning—St. Mary's church.[83] He might have been worrying about his son, who was not with him at the Mass. He might have viewed the church as a beacon of safety and stability, taking comfort in the now-underway liturgy, the firm stone of the church, and the parishioners around him. But whatever his thoughts, they were interrupted with a jolt when his son burst through the door of the church. He watched in horror as his son and others seized the church's chest, breaking open its lock and pilfering its precious books and jewels.[84] John Giboun Sr. pleaded with his son to leave the chest alone, finally convincing him to leave it by paying him off with ten shillings.[85] What shame did he feel? Did the Mass continue after this attack? The extant sources do not say. Yet from this event, one can see how religious spaces were not viewed as sacred or immune from criticism. Indeed, their sacred nature was targeted. John Giboun Jr. waited until the Mass had begun, when there were as many parishioners present as possible to witness this desecration. Indeed, by waiting until the Mass had begun, Giboun Jr. had waited until heaven and Christ himself was near in the Eucharist to profane the church.

Anecdotes concerning the occupants of church buildings during the violence shows that townspeople were not singularly concerned with attacking the university. In general, churches are not merely buildings; they also house a particular community and set of values. John

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[83] TNA JUST 1/103 m. 6, People of 1381.
[84] TNA JUST 1/103 m. 7, People of 1381.
[85] TNA JUST 1/103 m. 6, People of 1381.

Coggeshall's manhunt for Roger Blaunkgren is one of the most riveting stories from the revolt, and one of its settings is a church. Nevertheless, churches were more than settings, providing a colorful window into a fuller understanding of the Cambridge uprising. Churches functioned as representative *loci* of power and authority over both town and gown. These churches did not merely serve as an empty setting for clashes, so it is important to note the connection between the buildings and the people who used them. Even before the attack on the bedel's house on June 15th, Coggeshall led a group of unnamed men on a hunt for Roger Blaunkgren.[86] Not finding Blaunkgren at his home on Bridge Street, the men next sought him out at the church of St. Giles across the river to the north. Whatever Coggeshall's imperative for seeking out Blaunkgren, he was taking justice into his own hands. Whether by hunch or by information they found Blaunkgren inside St. Giles' church and assaulted him. However, the story of St. Giles' church reflects a lesser told side of the revolt: those who resisted. The parishioners of the church fought back and prevented Coggeshall from seizing him.

The townspeople were not monolithic; they were made up of individuals who chose to participate—or not— for a multiplicity of reasons. Just as Giboun had attacked a church as a symbol of power above, these parishioners used their church as a symbol of human resistance from below. Rebuffed, Coggeshall went back to Blaunkgren's house to raze it, but was convinced by Mrs. Blaunkgren to spare the house in exchange for some large sum of money. It is unclear whether Mrs. Blaunkgren was with her husband in the church and had chosen to follow the mob to her home, or whether she had been home apart from her husband the entire time. Sylvia Federico notes that Mrs. Blaunkgren was a surrogate victim of Coggeshall's, extorting

[86] TNA JUST 1/103 m. 7, People of 1381.

money from her instead of killing her husband.[87] Coggeshall was hanged for his crimes.[88] These symbolic attacks within churches demonstrates frustrations with powerful institutions broadly beyond the university.

Critiques were also levied against the cloisters of religious orders. The most famous of the religious targets of the revolt was Barnwell Priory, two miles east of town. Barnwell was the dwelling of the Augustinian canons, but "by the close of the thirteenth century, it housed almost one-sixth of the town's overall population and had attained the legal status of a suburb."[89] Resentment against the priory for its increased wealth and land holdings made it a target for attack, even though it was outside of town. On Monday morning, the third day of the revolt, a crowd gathered in the Grenecroft meadow and from there traveled to Barnwell.[90] The Prior of Barnwell accused the mayor of leading a crowd that raided the Priory of its food, cut down and stole its trees, and broke down its fences and doors.[91] The mayor was acquitted due to his claim that he was coerced into involvement.[92]

Of course, the university was not exempt. Corpus Christi college was attacked on the 15th and 16th of June. Corpus Christi college had been approved to be built relatively recently, in 1352, three years after the first wave of the Black Death hit. The very founding of Corpus Christi was a bold move given the significantly diminished town population from the Black Death. Guilds such as the Guild of Corpus Christi and the Guild of the Blessed Virgin Mary were looking to consolidate their numbers.[93] On the same date that the union of these two town guilds

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[87] Federico, "The Imaginary Society," 172.
[88] TNA JUST 1/103 m. 7, People of 1381.
[89] Richard Newman, "From Field to Suburb: Investigating a Planted Monastic Settlement at Barnwell, Cambridge," *Archaeological Journal (London)* 178, no. 1 (2021): 53.
[90] Dobson, *The Peasants' Reovlt of 1381*, 242.
[91] TNA JUST 1/103 m. 12, People of 1381.
[92] TNA JUST 1/103 m. 8d, People of 1381.
[93] Hall, "The Gild of Corpus Christi and the Foundation of Corpus Christi College," 79; *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of Cambridge*, vol. 1, 48.

was recognized, November 7th, 1352, they were granted a license to found a new college, the first in Cambridge to be founded by townspeople. It was also an exceedingly powerful institution, at this time said to have been endowed with a sixth of the town's accommodation.[94] The influential John of Gaunt had just secured a royal license for the college to expand its landholdings.[95] Yet even this attack shows how the university was not an isolated target, but one situated within a deeply interconnected social context.

[94] Cooper, *Annals of Cambridge*, vol. 1, 120.
[95] Barker, *1381: The Year of the Peasants' Revolt*, 324.

CHAPTER EIGHT: RESOLUTION OF AUTHORITY

As revolts raged across England, men in leadership tried to take hold of the situation through the pen and the sword. After his letters to cease violence were ignored, the Bishop of Norwich lord Henry Despenser roused a group of men ready to fight the uprising with arms and arrows.[96] In Norfolk, his band, "captured many of [the rebels]. The said bishop made them confess and then had them beheaded for their evil deeds."[97] This new justice came from the bishop, whose canon authority was ultimately derived from the God and the Church. Yet this cannot be viewed as a strictly legal judicial process. Despenser's quasilegal solution to the violence occurring across England was to have the rebels repent and die. This was the way forward to the restoration of social order. Despenser led his victorious crowd southeast from Ramsey down to the borough of Cambridge, putting an end to the uprising and Hanchach.[98] Rebels who did not repent were excommunicated by the Bishop of Ely.[99]

The young King Richard II and his Parliament also responded to the revolts with a flurry of legislation. In the first statute produced at Westminster in the fifth year of his reign, Parliament condemned the revolts as being "against God, good faith, and reason."[100] It is also notable that this statute first condemns Lords and Gentlemen for their involvement rather than the peasants that the revolt has become synonymous with. The statute outlawed breaking and entering: "The King defendeth, That none from henceforth make any Entry into any Lands and

[96] Dobson, *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, 237.
[97] Dobson, *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, 237.
[98] Dobson, *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, 239.
[99] Leader, *A History of the University of Cambridge*, vol. 1, 218.
[100] "Contre Dieux bone foi & reson." *Statutes of the Realm*, vol. 2, 20.

Tenements, but in case where Entry is given by the Law."[101] The king also declared that those who lost, "Charters, Releases, Obligations, and other Deeds and Muniments, burnt, destroyed, or otherwise eloined," should present their case to the king so that he could restore these documents.[102] This would resolve the loss of documents that Margaret Starre had gleefully scattered the ashes of and extend the king's charter to give the university primacy in managing local commerce.

Although the rioters of Cambridge ultimately avoided using execution as retribution, many sources testify to victims' fear of death at the hands of attackers. In a petition from Corpus Christi College to Parliament, the scholars claim that attackers attempted to kill the master and scholars.[103] Whether this was attempted or merely threatened is unknown, but the college asked Parliament for the attackers to provide redress and restitution for the goods, buildings, muniments, and fees affected by their trespass and destruction.[104] Unlike the St. Scholastica's Day Riot of 1355 in Oxford, Cambridge's revolt was bloodless. Indeed, in many ways, the Cambridge revolt represents different interests, social contexts, and quasilegal solutions. But that does not mean that there was no fear of death, and those who presented petitions made this clear.

In the parliamentary petitions, victims declared the grievances committed and the names of the accused. The mayor and bailiffs defended themselves in parliament, claiming that the perpetrators were not townspeople, nor people from Cambridgeshire at all, but brigands from Essex, Hertford, and Kent (counties known for their own significant uprisings).[105] This supposed story of town and gown, from the desperate claims of the mayor and bailiffs, involved neither

[101] *Statutes of the Realm*, vol. 2 (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1963), 20.
[102] *Statutes of the Realm*, vol. 2 (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1963), 20.
[103] *Rotuli Parliamentorum.* vol. 3 (London: 1767), 128-129.
[104] *Rotuli Parliamentorum.* vol. 3 (London: 1767), 128-129.
[105] Dobson, *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, 242.

town nor county. Their claims were discounted. The borough's liberties were seized by the king, and the burgesses would not be pardoned until the autumn parliament of that year.[106]

The effects were not just issued from Westminster. There were local changes as well in Cambridge proper. Over the following months, there was an attempt to restore the documents and make wrongs right. On July 7, 1381, Hugh la Zouche, Roger de Harleston, and four others were on a committee that ruled in favor of the prior of Barnwell.[107] On August 10, one James de Grauntcestre was placed on a commission to inquire regarding the insurgents who carried off goods and burned charters of the university, likely the same who had been made the revolt's captain in the revolt's genesis.[108] We cannot know whether James the captain was a willing participant in the revolt, whether the chronicle account that cites his involvement is correct in doing so, or if are indeed these are the same individual. It is clear, though, that individuals such as James de Grauntcestre were part of the process of a return to normalcy in Cambridge. If indeed they were the same person, it is proof that both insurgents and victims collaborated to enact justice, legally. Examinations of forfeiture of possessions continued in August, and similar initiatives were carried out in the following months.[109] The university retained supervision over assizes of bread, wine, beer, weights and measures, victuallers, and more.[110] It seems that the very air had changed in Cambridge; the days of uncertainty were over, and the authority of the lords and bishops, the manors and abbeys, and of course, the university, was there to stay, underscored by the support of the Crown.

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[106] Dobson, *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*, 242.
[107] *Calendar of the Close Rolls,* vol. 2, 75.
[108] *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, vol. 2, 71.
[109] *Calendar of Patent Rolls*, vol. 2, 38.
[110] Leader, *A History of the University of Cambridge*, vol. 1, 218.

CONCLUSION

It is clear from the varied social standing of the members of the crowd in Cambridge that the modern label of “peasants’ revolt” is inadequate. The rioters in Cambridge were inspired by the events that were occurring across England, but it was not only peasants who revolted. Members of the lesser nobility (both from Cambridge and outside of it) managed to mobilize anti-elite sentiment in Cambridge to their own advantage. The character of the "mob" has been previously underexplored. A handful of enterprising young nobles managed to direct peasant anger toward institutions that they could loot - and in the process destroy legal documents testifying to unfavorable contracts. Some revolted against a wealthy college founded by a local guild. Others burned the university documents that had superseded the town authority over the previous years. Some decided to settle personal grievances amid the chaos. Still others challenged authority through attacks on religious orders and churches. But others resisted the violence, choosing to stay at home or in churches and resist.

Furthermore, the label “town and gown” may capture part of the historical narrative, but it has excluded other narratives at its expense. Although anticlericalism was a factor for part of the crowd, this was not a comprehensive motivation in the revolt. In the case of the Peasants’ Revolt, the label of "town and gown" is partially merited, but in practice, it minimizes other equally significant dimensions of conflict. Enterprising leaders and frustrated peasants in Cambridge led attacks on landholding collegiate, seigneurial, and ecclesiastical institutions in an attempt to reform the balance of local authority through quasilegal means. In response to these attacks, the government increased its oversight and involvement in the town through the

petitionary judicial process. Although this process reinforced the power of traditional bastions of authority within the town, it ultimately did embody a solution to the crisis of authority Cambridge had experienced throughout the late fourteenth century.

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