

# The Swing Riots

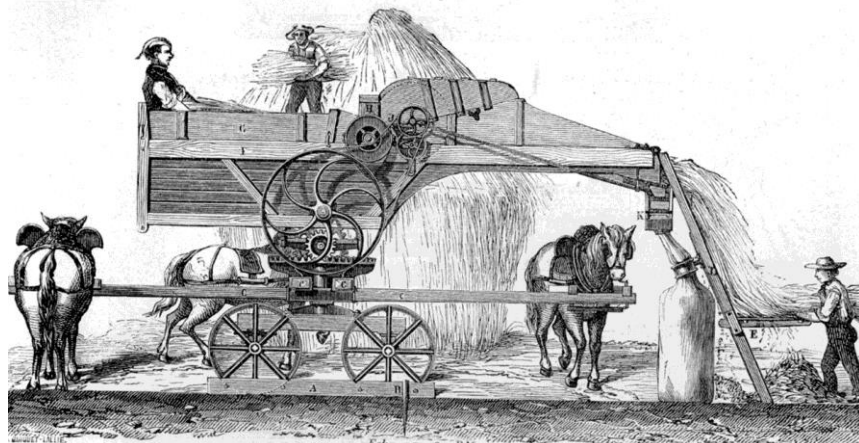


Fig. 349. — Batteuse Darney à manège direct placé sous la batteuse.

*Drawing of a horse-powered thresher from a French dictionary (published in 1881)*

The Swing Riots were a widespread uprising by agricultural workers; it began with the destruction of threshing machines in the Elham Valley area of East Kent in the summer of 1830, and by early December had spread throughout the whole of southern England and East Anglia.

As well as the attacks on the popularly hated, labour-displacing, threshing machines the protesters reinforced their demands with wage and tithe riots and by the destruction of objects of perceived oppression, such as workhouses and tithe barns, and also with the more surreptitious rick-burning, and cattle-maiming. The first threshing machine was destroyed on Saturday night, 28 August 1830, and by the third week of October more than 100 threshing machines had been destroyed in East Kent.

The anger of the rioters was directed at three targets that were seen as the prime source of their misery: the tithe system, the Poor Law guardians, and the rich tenant farmers who had been progressively lowering wages while introducing agricultural machinery. If caught, the protesters faced charges of arson, robbery, riot, machine breaking and assault. Those convicted faced imprisonment, transportation, and ultimately execution.

The Swing Riots had many immediate causes, but were overwhelmingly the result of the progressive impoverishment and dispossession of the English agricultural workforce over the previous fifty years, leading up to 1830. In parliament Lord Carnarvon had said that the English labourer was reduced to a plight more abject than that of any race in Europe, with their employers no longer able to feed and employ them.

The name "Swing Riots" was derived from the name that was often appended to the threatening letters sent to farmers, magistrates, parsons, and others, the fictitious Captain Swing, who was regarded as the mythical figurehead of the movement. The Swing letters were first mentioned by *The Times* newspaper on 21 October 1830.

*(Wikipedia)*

## Codford & the Swing Riots

*Wiltshire Machine Breakers* (Volume 1 - Riots and Trials) makes mention of the riots in Wiltshire in the form of a diary of events, from the first fire at Maddington on 8<sup>th</sup> November, 1830 and a threatening letter received by Mr Slade, a farmer at Codford St. Peter.

*Codford Wool & War in Wiltshire* (John Chandler) mentions an Overseer, Thomas Slade Whiting, of Codford St. Peter, overheard mutterings of discontent after paying out the weekly dole, and had the ringleader arrested.

Also, James Raxworthy, a farmer & Wool stapler (as listed in 1849 Post Office Directory), found his house targeted with an arson attack by a former disgruntled employee, William Mussel (alias Olding).

Also, a skirmish took place in and around the river and water meadows at Codford during the day of 25<sup>th</sup> November, 1830. Around 300 rioters on their way from Heytesbury came face to face with constabulary & yeomanry who were taking captives to send to trial & imprisonment. No one from Codford was prosecuted in this incident.

### From the Newspapers:

**William Mussel** (otherwise Olding) - Charged on suspicion of having written a letter threatening to murder James Slade & James Raxworthy, of Codford St Peter and to burn & destroy their corn & hay.

(*Salisbury and Winchester Journal* - 22nd November, 1830)

**Sarah Wheeler** - Of Codford St. Peter, charged with having feloniously and maliciously set fire to certain out-buildings belonging to the premises in which she resides, the same being the property of James Slade, of that place. The offence was charged to have been committed with intent to injure the overseers of the parish of Codford St. Peter.

\*Outcome – Guilty with 12 months at Devizes Corrections

(*Salisbury and Winchester Journal* - 11th April, 1831)