



What Were the Swing Riots?

Groups of farm workers and craftsmen led attacks on farm buildings and machinery in protest against low wages, high food prices and other grievances across southern England in 1830. Other English regions were also affected.

What happened during the Swing Riots?

By 1830, living in the countryside was getting harder and harder again.

- Wages had fallen because farmers were introducing new machinery.
- Bad harvests had driven up food prices.
- Poachers, who might make up for low wages by hunting on landowner's property, were severely punished. They either were given long prison sentences or transported to Australia.

Ordinary farm workers formed a movement to break machines, set fire to hayricks and property and cause riots in protest. In four months, from August 1830, there were about 1500 incidents. Even a Wiltshire MP, John Bennett had his threshing machines destroyed by a crowd of four hundred labourers armed with hammers and crowbars. The movement was named after a Captain Swing but, like General Ludd, he never existed.

How did the government react to the Swing Riots?

In July 1830, King Charles X of France was overthrown by a new revolution in Paris. Unrest spread throughout Europe. To the Tory Government of the Duke of Wellington, it was no coincidence that trouble followed in the English countryside only one month later. Despite long petitions, that pointed out that the rioters had only destroyed property and harmed no one, the government took harsh action. Hundreds of workers were arrested. 644 were put in prison, 505 transported to Australia and 19 executed. By December 1830, the movement faded away.