

John Stakepoll

Historians don't know anything about my early life; however, I probably became a soldier. I would have been a 'man-at-arms', a position that formed a large part of the army. I would have had armour and fought with a range of weapons, such as a sword, lance, spear or axe. I wasn't noble, so I may have joined the army as a career or perhaps I was a servant first who went to war with my lord. Either way, it could be a good way to make money! Some men-at-arms earned the same amount of money as a lord on a small manor, and there were chances to advance yourself if you did well.

I was a soldier in Ireland, where various expeditions were sent to make sure that the Irish were paying their taxes to the English king. I was due to be sent to Brittany to fight the French in the Hundred Years' War, but then everything changed when my 2,000-strong unit was sent to London on 16 June 1381 to help the government put down the revolt.

I wasn't going to fight against my fellow countrymen! I was sympathetic to their cause and deserted the army to go and join the rebels in Middlesex. I wish that historians could know what I did, but no records remain besides my possessions when I was arrested and executed on Wednesday 12 June 1381 as 'one of the principal insurgents against the King'. When I was executed, my clothing was brightly coloured (a red gown, a cloak of red and green cloth, three hoods, a pair of worn-out stockings and a pair of worn-out thigh-high boots) and I had my two musical instruments with me: a harp and a gittern [a stringed instrument a bit like a guitar]. Historians like to think that maybe I was also a minstrel or a musical entertainer, as well as a soldier! Maybe I roused the rebels with protest songs? I didn't have any armour when I died, but I did have an overslop [a cover that went over your chainmail over your head and neck].

And so I was beheaded. I died being known by many, however. A year after my death, the Mayor of London, John Northampton, even used my name to try to add credibility to his claim that leading fishmongers and grocers had let the rebels into London! It seems that he was just doing this to try to get rid of his enemies, but it still shows that people remembered me as a leading rebel. You can see where my name came up below:

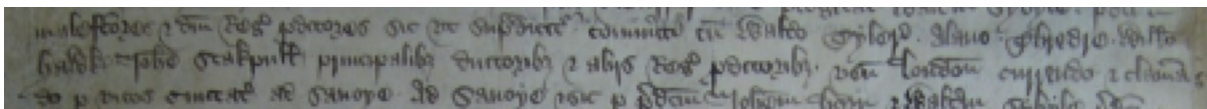


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