

The Story of The Poll Tax

From the returns of the West Riding of the County of York, laid in the second year of the reign of King Richard the II
AD. 1379

The Poll Tax was first imposed in England in the year 1379.

Levied on every adult (on the head or Poll) it was one of the factors leading up to the Peasants Revolt, led by Wat Tyler in 1381.

It was re-imposed at intervals, notably in 1513, and in the reign of Charles I. The Poll Tax of 1698 being the last of its kind up to date. →

THE FIRST POLL-TAX.

Richard II was eleven years old when he began to reign on 21 June, 1377. His coronation took place on the 16th. July, and on the 17th. a council was chosen. The task of the council was not easy; the collapse of the military power of England had appeared complete and the French were burning the towns of the south coast. A supply of money was again needed and in the following year, with the parliament sitting at Gloucester, the then Chancellor resigned, a subsidy on wool and merchandise having proved insufficient.

At a further session held in April and May 1379 at Westminster, the demand was so urgent that the former grant was annulled and a graduated Poll-Tax substituted by which every man according to his position was rated for a direct contribution. The Duke of Lancaster was to pay ten marks, earls £4, barons and bannerets £2 and so on, down to the lowest rank, in which every person above the age of sixteen was to pay a groat (4d.). The proceeds were to be applied to the maintenance of the national defence. The subsidy on wool and merchandise was also extended for a year. The result was to produce one of the most important records of the state of the population of England that had ever been drawn up, the Poll-Tax Rolls of the year 1379.

No new expedient like the Poll-Tax was sufficient to meet the ever-increasing costs of the war, and it helped to increase the irritation produced by the constant demands. The imposts fell far below the amount anticipated, the graduated Poll-Tax producing not more than £22,000. Within eight months, during which no military successes had occurred to lighten the burden, Sir William Scrope, who had succeeded as chancellor in October 1378, had to explain to a new parliament that a greater effort was needed. (The Scropes, who came here at the Norman Conquest settled at Bolton Castle, Wensleydale, from the 11th. century.)

A commission was then appointed to devise ways by which the required amount of £160,000 could be raised. The Commons again chose a Poll-Tax to raise £100,000 of this money. The clergy, they declared, who possessed a third of the land, should pay a third of the sum, the rest to be raised by the Poll-Tax varying in the case of individuals from sixty groats to three. This Poll-Tax, which came into effect in 1380, gave rise to the rebellion of 1381. The revolt spread rapidly throughout the country, and in this area troubles occurred in York, Beverley and Scarborough. In many places rioters destroyed the Rolls, and apart from the tax, the disturbances were caused by many other grievances. Eventually, these were settled and peace returned to English rural society.

POLL-TAX ROLL FOR BERWYK (BARWICK).

Small Merchants and Craftsmen according to the value of their estates.

Willelmus Grenefeld', freeholder, & wife.	3s.4d.
Thomas Kynstane, carpenter, & wife.	12d.
Robertus Kynstane, cobbler, & wife.	12d.
Willelmus Smyth, smith, & wife.	6d.
Ricardus Longoe, tailor, & wife.	6d.
Philippus Britteby, cobbler, & wife.	6d.
Ricardus Webster, weaver, & wife.	6d.
Johannes Addy, fuller, & wife.	6d.
Robertus Boywill', tailor, & wife.	6d.

Other married men, for themselves and their wives, who are not of the classes named above, more than 16 years of age, not including beggars. (Each couple is assessed at 4d.)

Johannes Page.	Stephanus ffox.
Robertus Jolyf.	Robertus Ben.
Thomas Talour.	Ricardus Smyth.
Adam Barkar.	Johannes Pypier.
Willelmus Cok.	Ricardus Wodhouse.
Johannes Lyghtfote.	Hugo Spynk.
Willelmus Spynk.	Johannes Talour.
Johannes Pye.	Thomas son of Robertus.
Nicholaus Mercheden.	Robertus de Halton.
Willelmus son of Radulphus.	Willelmus Chapman.
Henricus Harpyn.	Johannes de Keswyck.
Johannes Elysman.	Willelmus Skercroft.
Johannes Personman.	Robertus Long.
Henricus Schepherd'.	Walterus Brabaner.
Willelmus Smyth.	Willelmus de Tadcaster.
Robertus at ye Well.	Willelmus de Thornour.
Johannes Syngaldon.	Johannes son of Agnes.
Willelmus Leker.	Johannes Webster.
Johannes Elynson.	Hugo Mott.
Johannes Chery.	Willelmus Schepyn.
Johannes Blayard'.	Robertus Swepstak.
Thomas Byging'.	Willelmus Morvill'.
Robertus Schepherd'.	Randolphus del Scholes.
Johannes Talour.	Johannes Denny.
Johannes Denny junior.	Willelmus Bowland'.
Ricardus Lome.	Adam Wyresdale
Willelmus Schepherd'.	Johannes de Swylyngton.
Johannes West.	Robertus Ryder.
Robertus Williamson.	Robertus Morvill'.

Johannes Schepherd'.
Willelmus Spenser.
Ricardus de Morwyk.
Johannes Liuersegh'.
Thomas Queldall'.

Johannes Morwyk.
Johannes Langlay.
Thomas de Walton.
Robertus Marshall'.

Other single men and women above the age of 16 years.
(Each person is assessed at 4d.)

Alicia Pye.
Elena Kychyn
Willelmus Kynstan.
Agnes ffyse.
Alicia Tadcastr'
Alicia Wryght.
Johanna Harpyn.
Agnes Brytteby.
Willelmus Schepherd'.
Agnes de Edlyngton.
Robertus de Ledston.
Elena Mott.
Elena Grenefeld'.
Thomas Addy.
Johannes Denny.
Agnes Lome.
Johannes servant of Alicia.
Alicia servant of Johannes.
Katerina Morwyk.
Radulfus de Poterton.
Johanna de Maner.
Johannes de ffryston.
Willelmus de Liuersegh.
Margareta servant of Johannes.

Isabella Milias.
Robertus Philipman.
Isabella Kynstan.
Agnes Kystan.
Agnes Tadcastr'.
Emma Batell'.
Magota Harpyn.
Johannes Dunyngton.
Henricus Smithman.
Robertus de Edyngton.
Alicia servant of Elene.
Agnes daughter of Alanus.
Johanna Grenefeld'.
Alicia Addy.
Magota Gildoghter
Alicia Lome.
Henricus servant of Alicia
Elisabet Morwyk.
Robertus de Birton.
Johannes serv. of Radulfus
Willelmus Joneman.
Alicia de Ledston.
Elena Liuersegh

Total 46s.4d. Number of inhabitants on list - 299. 199

In the Chronicon Preciosum it is stated that, in 1379, a quarter of wheat sold for four shillings, a gallon of white wine at 6d., and a gallon of red wine at 4d.

The evolution of surnames is nowhere better revealed than in this Roll of Barwick parish inhabitants. Many instances are seen where a person's occupation or birthplace forms the name by which he is known. Is your name included? How many present Barwick surnames are in the list? How many place names can you find?

BART HAMMOND.