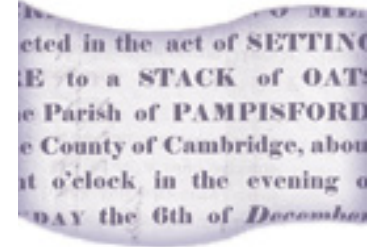


## Captain Swing

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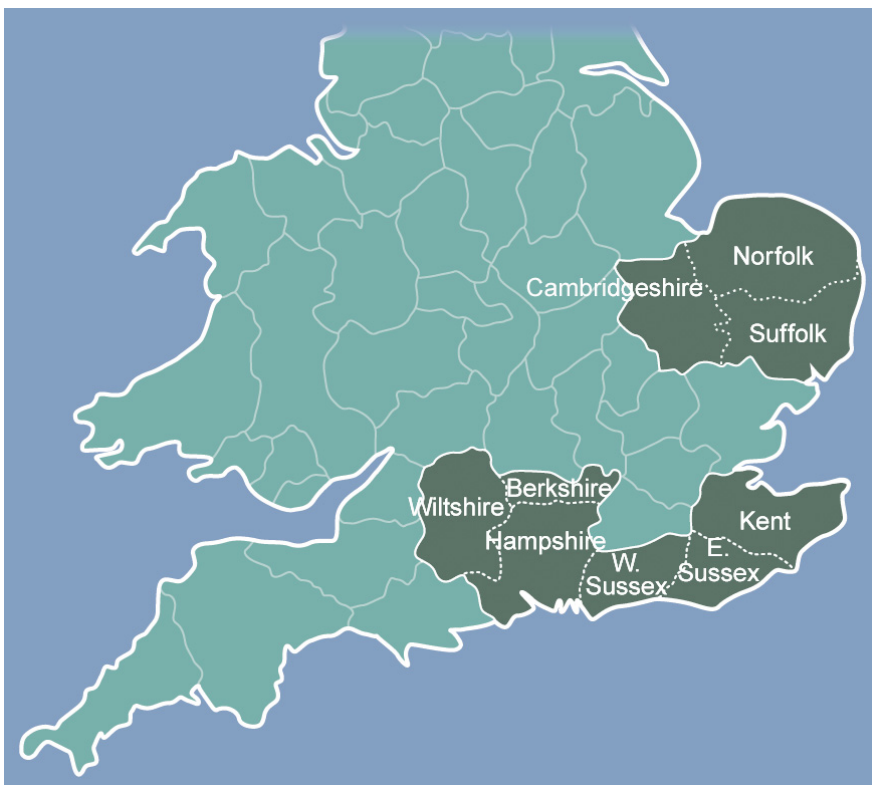
### How did the agricultural labourers of the 1830s try to protect their jobs?

In the eighteenth century, one of the main autumn and winter jobs for farm workers was threshing. This meant separating the grain from the stalks by beating it. In the late 1820s and early 1830s, farmers began to introduce threshing machines to do this work. This put large numbers of labourers out of a job and without the money to buy food, clothes and other goods for the winter months.



Low wages and unemployment, plus poor harvests in 1829 and 1830, resulted in hunger, protests and disturbances in many country areas, especially in the east and south of England. Farmers were sent threatening letters demanding that wages increase or at least stay the same. These letters often told farmers not to use threshing machines. Farmers and landowners also had their hayricks and farm buildings set alight.

The protesters used the name "Captain Swing". This was a made-up name designed to spread fear among landowners and avoid the real protest leaders being found out.



The reaction of the government to the Swing disturbances was harsh. Following riots, 19 people were executed, 505 transported to Australia and 644 imprisoned. The story of individual incidents can often be put together from handbills and posters that offered rewards for the capture of rioters (and pardons for those who helped in their arrest). The labourers did not gain very much from their protests.

Captain Swing

Find out more from these original sources:



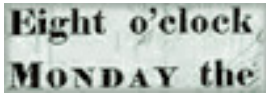
Letter about a suspicious fire, 1830



Reward poster from Kent, c.1830



Letter about destruction of threshing machines



Poster about men who set a fire, 1830



Poster distributed in Surrey, 1830



Poster produced in Dorking, Surrey, 1830



Swing letters, 1830