

The Diggers

- ⊗ The Diggers are any group of agrarian communists.
- ⊗ Began in Surrey – just after Charles' execution
- ⊗ They flourished in England between 1649- 1650
- ⊗ The Diggers were lead by Gerard Win Stanley and William Everard
- ⊗ They believed that now Charles I had been executed, land should be available for the poor to cultivate
- ⊗ The numbers of diggers by 1649 had doubled
- ⊗ Their activities alarmed the Commonwealth government and roused the hostility of local landowners, who were rival claimants to the common lands
- ⊗ The Diggers were harassed by legal actions and mob violence, and by the end of March 1650 their colony was dispersed.
- ⊗ The Diggers also called themselves True Levellers, but their communism was denounced by the leaders of the Levellers.

Good
initial
overview

Winstanley

By 1648, Winstanley had begun to write religious and social pamphlets. He was intelligent and well read, but no formal university education. Winstanley had a unique philosophical train of mind which showed in his writings.

With the publication of his tract: *The New Law of Righteousness* (1649), Winstanley outlined his vision of a different social order. Winstanley would credits his inspiration from a message received in a trance, "Work together, Eat bread together".

Probably the most famous of the various Digger communities in England were the Surrey Diggers around St George's Hill (Surrey), and later at Cobham Heath (Surrey) only a short distance away. Digging started at St George's Hill on 1 April 1649 by a few local men at under a local, The Reverend Mr. William Everard

William Everard was a graduate of Clare College (Cambridge), an ordained minister, a writer, a New Model Army radical preacher, and now a local resident at Walton-on-Thames. Everard and a few other locals started to cultivate the public lands about St George's Hill, Surrey. The community quickly increased. The poor were hungry and destitute.

The Digger movement at St George's Hill provided an ideal venue for testing Winstanleys' new social experiment. Winstanley rejected the concept of private ownership of all land, and called for a peaceful return of all public lands to the People. Some have even characterized the Surrey Diggers' as a primitive Millennium movement. Later generations have called the social experiment an early form of communism.

Oliver Cromwell is reported to have said: "What is the purport of the levelling principle but to make the tenant as liberal a fortune as the landlord. I was by birth a

gentleman. You must cut these people in pieces or they will cut you in pieces." Instructions were given for the Diggers to be beaten up and for their houses, crops and tools to be destroyed. These tactics were successful and within a year all the Digger communities in England had been wiped out.

Threat to the new common wealth?

The Diggers at the time were posing a threat to the common wealth. They were a communist group who had radical ideas about social classes and religious beliefs, they believed themselves to be the true levellers and alarmed the Commonwealth government and roused the hostility of local landowners, who were rival claimants to the common lands. Their tactic in a sense was to take land from those who did not need it and give it to the poor.

These ideas alarmed the common wealth as they had not seen these radical ideas before, they were also willing to use violence to gain the land. They did not care how they seized it. The commonwealth had every right to be afraid of the Diggers threat. Although the radical group only lasted a short time, the radical beliefs they had, had the potential to cause great damage to the country. Destroying social classes, peoples view on religion. It would also mean that the poor would think they had the right to things of those of the rich, and therefore, destroying social order within England. Something which the commonwealth would not want to see.

Good -
clear
indication
of the
threat

Good
analysis

well presented with a clear introduction
and good section on significance
Did you find out anything about Winstabley's
views on women and marriage?

18
20th