

The Ranters

Origin of 'Ranters'

Ranters were an English radical group which became prominent from 1649-54. Some have referred to them as "religious libertines". Ranterism has roots in the medieval Brethren of the Free Spirit or the Beghards, a 14th century heretical group. Ranter activity may date from the mid-1640, but exact dates are uncertain. It is thought the Ranters appeared soon after the Levellers were crushed.



There is not much reliable evidence to tell us the truth about the Ranters. Many surviving sources were drawn up by enemies and are questioned by historians. ✓

Location

English Ranter activity centred primarily around London, but other groups were active and spread throughout England. There were reports and remains lasting evidence of references and experiences of Ranter behaviour in almost every part of England; however, unsurprisingly, most of the action took place in London.

Religious Beliefs

Ranters embraced the concept of the "indwelling spirit", a form of religious perfection. Whatever was done in the Spirit was justifiable to a Ranter. Man was free of Sin and the Law. This was commonly known as Antinomianism.

What exactly is this in your own words?

Ranters rejected most religious ideas that had been common up until then - they believed that every man was born free of sin and did not need a saviour to come and 'wash away their sins.' They rejected the Bible, saying even that was not the word of God.

Political Beliefs and Activities

Nudity - Ranters and some Quakers of the period were known to cavort in the all together. The shedding of outer garments by saints, holy men, and prophets has a long biblical context. Shock value, the rejection of worldly goods, and all men being equal in the sight of God were common motivations to undress. Nudity in all its forms was considered a major societal taboo during the period. Ranters and some Quakers paraded nude in public. Those who shed their clothing in public were not necessarily members of any specific sects.

key point

Attitudes to women - Christopher Hill sums up the Ranters' attitude to sex and work:

"Ranters, I am suggesting, gave ideological form and coherent expression to practices which had long been common among vagabonds, squatter-cottages, and the in-between category of migratory craftsmen." Some Ranters went as far as adultery and even wife-swapping.

Good use of the resources

What happened to them?

Ranter activity is thought to have continued into the Restoration in 1660, though interest decline before this, around 1654. - specifics as to why

Leadership and Ranter Writers:

John Robin was a prominent Ranter leader.
Laurence Claxson (1615-1667)
Abiezer Coppe (1619-1672)

Were they a real threat?

Ranters and Quakers are often compared to each other and sources suggest that Quakers were 'of a better quality' than Ranters. It is thought considering the continuing success of the Quaker movement to this day, that a group compared to them may have had significance, and possibly a threat, but as they were considered less in quality, the sexual nature of their beliefs were widely regarded as immoral and were unpopular, so it's possible that the opposite is also true.

Good alternative

The Ranters were acknowledged by the government who passed the Blasphemy Act in 1650, thought to have been a move against them. This would indicate the government felt threatened if they felt the need to do something about them, but general interest in Ranters declined after four years, and eventually completely disappeared. Their radical ideas were not widely well-received and their illicit sexual activities brought shock to the nation.

Conclusively, the Ranters held some position for a short period of time but held little against the government, and posed no real significant threat.

Good - with limited resources this poses a different problem to other issues, but these are well used here and part final section shows genuine understanding of their position.

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