

Table of Contents

London Riot Re-enactment Society 1

London Riot Re-enactment Society

Byanathematician

Speaks for itself, in devastating earnest

Join the London Riot Re-enactment Society now!
just send an email to join

The London Riot Re-enactment Society will stage re-enactments of noted riots from London's history, with some attempt at historical accuracy. You are no doubt aware of the widespread popularity of historical re-enactment societies, you may also be aware of moves to re-enact more recent events in history. The London Riot Re-enactment Society was inspired by the idea that we can re-enact not the distant past, but events that we remember and may actually have taken part in. We have chosen to define our re-enactment society not by choosing a period of time, but by choosing a theme. We will tap London's rich history of rioting, and make these riots live again, in our re-enactments.

If you read a bit about the Gordon Riots or Wat Tyler's peasant revolt you will see that the re-enactment of these riots will take vast numbers, and a lot of planning or luck, so we may start with a smaller, more recent riot, such as the Poll Tax riot. But don't worry, the numbers will grow, so far 100% of Londoners who have heard about the LRRS have expressed an interest in joining.

Join now, or find out more:

Which riots? When to re-enact?

What to re-enact? Practical concerns

The First Re-enactment International Rural re-enactment

Global re-enactment Rapid Re-enactment Force

Re-enacting the future Fictitious riots

What riots will we re-enact?

London's history offers a wide range of riots to choose from, these ones are just a few possibilities, feel free to send in your own suggestions.

The Peasant Revolt (1381)

100 000 re-enactors dressed as peasants angry about the imposition of poll tax (and other concerns such as the fact that they had no rights) will march from Kent and occupy London for two days, opening all the prisons and ransacking the Tower and Lambeth Palace and demolishing Savoy Palace completely (this part will be easy as it isn't there), throwing looted treasure into the Thames and beheading judges and lawyers. In a dramatic climax which will take place at Smithfield a re-enactor dressed as the 14 year old King Richard II will meet a re-enactor dressed as Wat Tyler, who will then be murdered by a re-enactor dressed as the mayor.

Jack Cade's rebellion, 1450

Re-enactors, led by a re-enactor dressed as Jack Cade, will gather in Kent, concerned by rumours that Kent is to be turned into a forest, defeat a government force sent to disperse us (either more re-enactors or an actual government force), occupy London and storm the Tower. Re-enactors will kill the Archbishop of Canterbury and put his head on a pole. At first Londoners will support us, but our violent behaviour will turn them against us. We will eventually accept a pardon issued by the king and return home.

South Sea Bubble Riots, 1720

Hundreds of re-enactors dressed as failed investors will gather at the House of Commons to lobby MPs. When our pleas are ignored, re-enactors will then begin to attack individual MPs. We will only disperse after a third reading of the Riot Act.

Gin Riots 1743

Re-enactors will dress as 18th London workers unhappy about the increased tax on gin. We will ignore the reading of the Riot Act by a re-enactor dressed as a magistrate.

St George's Field or Wilkite Riots 1758

Re-enactors will gather at Borough High Street, site of the King's Bench Prison in which John Wilkes was imprisoned for attacking the king. (Incidentally, King's Bench Prison was at the time a private prison run for profit, much as many US prisons now are, and British prisons probably will be again soon.) We will shout 'Damn the King! Damn the Government! Damn the Justices!' until troops open fire. Disturbances will then be re-enacted all over London. Re-enactors will smash every window and lamp of Mansion House.

Gordon Riots or Great Liberty Riot 1780

In a week of looting and rioting several thousand re-enactors will systematically destroy the prisons in London one by one. Prisoners will be taken to re-enactors dressed as blacksmiths to have their chains struck off. We will demolish the Old Bailey and attack Buckingham Palace. We will raid a huge gin distillery in Holborn and literally drink ourselves to death. We will attack the Bank of England, led by a re-enactor on a cart horse decorated with the broken chains of the liberated debtors. One lucky re-enactor will dress as William Blake, aged 23, who was in the front of the crowd (costume could include a bow of burning gold and arrows of desire). If this is your idea of a good night out, then you are the kind of person the LRRS needs.

Spa Fields Riot, 1816

We will dress as followers of Thomas Spence, who argued that "if all the land in Britain was shared out equally, there would be enough to give every man, woman and child seven acres each" and encouraged the formation of small groups who met in public houses and walked the streets at night writing slogans such as "Spence's Plan and Full Bellies" and "The Land is the People's Farm" on walls. We will assemble at Spa Fields, Islington. Eighty re-enactors dressed as police will attempt to disperse the crowd of re-enactors, and one re-enactor dressed as Joseph Rhodes will be stabbed.

Reform League Riots, 1866

A vast crowd of re-enactors will attempt to "take possession of Hyde Park, and interfere with the enjoyments of those to whom the Park more particularly belongs." Over a thousand police will be unable to stop us from tearing down the railings and entering the park. We will vindicate our "right to meet, speak, resolve, and exhort in Hyde-park" and will round the night off with "a series of wanton outrages on private property" in the West End.

Bloody Sunday 1887

A peaceful group of re-enactors will gather in Trafalgar Square and be attacked by police on horses. Dozens of re-enactors will be injured.

Suffragettes, 1914

Re-enactors dressed as suffragettes (one dressed as Flora Drummond in a dog-cart) will proceed to Hyde Park, where a demonstration by the Ulster Union Militants has been permitted. We will drown out their demonstration with unauthorised speeches until the police rush to suppress us.

Hunger March, 1932

About 100 000 re-enactors will converge on Hyde Park from all parts of London. We will be attacked by special constables, we will then turn on them and the fighting will continue all afternoon. We will tear up railings and use them as weapons and barricades. Repeated charges by mounted police will fail to dislodge us. Many re-enactors and police will be injured.

The Battle of Cable Street, 1936

Due to our re-enactment, Oswald Moseley's advertised march will never take place.

Notting Hill, 1958

Re-enactors will drive racists out of Notting Hill.

Brixton Riots, 1981

Among other things, re-enactors will set fire to an abandoned police car on Atlantic Road, throw petrol bombs, setting fire to police cars and private cars, set fire to pubs and drive police out of Brixton for most of the night. Re-enacting will spread to other parts of London. Over 200 police officers will be injured, and 83 premises and 23 vehicles damaged, at an estimated cost of £7.5m.

Broadwater Farm, 1985

In protest at the death of a woman during a police search of her home, re-enactors will attack the police, eventually re-enact killing one of them. (The re-enactor who re-enacts the killing will look like someone other than Winston Sillcott, who was framed for the murder and is still in prison).

Wapping, 1986-87

Re-enactors will picket Rupert Murdoch's News International's Wapping site for a year, and have numerous clashes with scabs and the police.

Poll Tax riots, 1990

Re-enactors dressed in authentic 1990 clothes (start searching in cupboards, attics and charity shops now) will assemble in Trafalgar Square for a demonstration that turns into an all-out riot. The next day, most of the self-appointed leaders will condemn the riot.

Criminal Justice Bill, 1994

J-18

Brixton 1996 / 2001

May Day 2000 / 2001 / 2002

And so on

When to re-enact?

Artangel and Channel 4 chose to re-enact the Battle of Orgreave on the anniversary of the original conflict. We could do this too, but there are other options. To list them, we can re-enact a riot on a) the anniversary of the day the riot took place b) on another day or c) whenever we want to. The possibilities are endless. For example, if we staged a re-enactment of May Day 2000 on May Day 2003, would people notice it was a re-enactment or would they think it was that year's May Day riot? And if we told them, and if the next year we re-enacted June 18 1999 on May Day 2004 would people notice the discrepancy?

What to re-enact?

One of the advantages of re-enactments is that although one should try to be historically accurate and not change what actually happened, you can decide where to begin and end the re-enactment. For example, we could re-enact the part of November 30th 1999 when the police van got set on fire, but not re-enact the part where we had to stand surrounded by lines of riot police for hours on end without a toilet, or we can re-enact May Day 2000 but not re-enact the aftermath in which many people got sent to prison. And of course we can re-enact the Poll Tax riots without the threat of a court summons for non-payment.

Practical concerns.

Having read their Rules of Association it appears that the London Riot Re-enactment Society may not be eligible to join the National Association of Re-enactment Societies. Re-enactors are however invited to join the LRRS, our rules do not exclude you. A knowledge of historical costume and weaponry AND some experience of rioting is the ideal combination for a LRRS member, but members can join with knowledge of one, or the other, or neither. After all, many participants in the riots that we are re-enacting had not a clue what they were up to, and we want historical accuracy, do we not? Neither will we, like some re-enactment societies, impose strict rules against the consumption of alcohol. Most of the top riots involve a bit of drinking. If, for example, you are involved in a re-enactment of the Gordon riots and you are very good at acting drunk for days on end, then feel free to just drink water, but if you think that only gin will do the trick, then drink gin, and we won't ask where you got it from.

Other re-enactment societies also point out that it is necessary to ask permission to use land for re-enactments. We are in the rather more complex situation of using London for re-enactments, therefore there are inherent difficulties in asking, or even informing, the relevant bodies of our plans. For example, if we asked the Corporation of London if we could use the City for a week or so to re-enact the Gordon riots they might charge us some considerable sum of money, which we don't have, and there is really not much point in writing to Mercedes Benz about using their showroom as part of a June 18 re-enactment, or to the monarch about our desire to sack the Tower dressed as Wat Tyler's army. It may be best to just go ahead and re-enact. Hopefully no one will mind.

The First Riot Re-enactment International

If you live not in London but in another town or city, maybe Oldham, or Seattle, and therefore cannot take part in LRRS activities, why not start your own affiliated Riot Re-enactment Society. Remember, the most important re-enactor is the one in the mirror.

Rural re-enactment

Riots are usually associated with urban life, but it doesn't have to be that way. If you live in a rural area you can still be part of the riot re-enactment movement. Look back in your history, there has always been a ruling class, and there has always been a resistance to their rule. Maybe you could re-enact a local peasant uprising, a bread riot, or the more recent fuel blockades. Or if you really want to surprise us, maybe YOU could dress up as Wat Tyler's army and march on London.

Our re-enactment will be as global as capital

Once the riot re-enactment movement has snowballed we will begin the lead up to our greatest plan, the first World Riot Re-enactment Day. Each affiliated group will re-enact a riot in their own area simultaneously. The time difference won't matter, you can riot by day, by night, or for several days

and nights. Imagine that, the Battle of Seattle, the February Revolution, the Storming of the Bastille, the Brixton uprising, the break-in party at Hackney Town Hall and Wat Tyler's army ransacking the Tower, all at the same time.

The Rapid Re-enactment Force

After a bit of practice expert riot re-enactors could form a Rapid Re-enactment Force which re-enacts riots immediately after they have happened (or even AS they happen), causing things to spiral out of control!

Re-enacting the riots of the future

We could re-enact riots that haven't happened yet. Or ones that might never happen.

Fictitious riots

We could re-enact riots that so far exist only in books or films. One idea would be to re-enact the riot at the end of Seaton Point. It involves police, bailiffs, vampires and a portal to hell under a tower block in Hackney. If you have any other suggestions for fictitious London riots to re-enact please send them in.

Join us now, or just send us your views: Email [anathematician2002 AT yahoo.co.uk](mailto:anathematician2002@yahoo.co.uk)