



Teacher Fellowship Programme

Local history: untold stories of the people of Britain

Why was there so much unrest in 1840s Chard?

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The enquiry: Why was there so much unrest in 1840s Chard?

This enquiry explores the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the lives of people in the Somerset town of Chard during the mid-nineteenth century. The overarching question, 'Why was there so much unrest in 1840s Chard?', roots the enquiry in the events of the Chard Lace Riots in the year 1842. The intention of the study is to reveal to students the rich window of original source material that surrounds the period. Lessons are designed for Key Stage 3 students and illustrate how a local study from the mid-nineteenth century can enrich any curricular programme. The material may seem at times challenging for a Year 7 group, and teachers could well feel that the type of documents encountered would fit better with Year 8 or Year 9.

Rationale

Three ideas underpin the rationale for the planning of this enquiry. Firstly, the curriculum at Key Stage 3 was rewritten in 2020, with Years 7, 8 and 9 all following two broad historical concepts in an academic year. This includes a theme on protest over time, where this enquiry sits. Secondly, our curriculum design also determined that students should have an entitlement to the teaching of local history during each year of their education. In our Year 8 course on 'War, conflict and nationalism', students engage with the experiences of a local man, Charles Percy Mayne, who gave his life at the Battle of Loos in 1915. In our Year 9 course on 'Knowledge and learning', students interact with the story of James Gillingham, a pioneer of artificial limbs who worked in Chard. Therefore, there was a desire to uncover an engaging local enquiry at Year 7 that would bring our 'Protest' module to life. Thirdly, the local context of Chard relates wonderfully well to this concept, through the story of the 1842 Lace Riots: the 1820s led to a period of rapid growth in lace manufacture in the town, when mill owners deliberately relocated their businesses away from potential Luddite violence. Astute businessmen such as John Heathcoat moved their concerns to Tiverton, while others looking to escape the turmoil set their sights on Chard. The result was a violent encounter, with striking and window smashing.

Learning aims

The broad learning aim involved getting students to enquire into how unrest (exemplified by the Lace Riots themselves) was generated through many of the changes that the Industrial Revolution had brought to the lives of the working classes.

It was always the intention to provide a broad range of sources to illustrate to students how historians find out about the past and then construct their narratives.

The enquiry question chosen was 'Why was there so much unrest in 1840s Chard?'. The question was selected to allow the story of the Lace Riots to be taught within the first lesson. This would provide a hook for students to engage with and motivate them through the whole of the taught programme. The question also allowed for a broader investigation into the source material that would enable students to draw out reasons for the anger of the working classes within the decade prescribed.

The decision was taken that the final piece of student work would be an article written for the local museum, who regularly produce a newsletter with articles based on research. This end product felt 'real' and also offered an excellent degree of competition for the students.

Scheme of work

A decision was taken to design a local study enquiry that would be built around the narrative of the Chard Lace Riots of 1842. The investigation that the students should undertake would allow them to visit a wealth of rich contemporary material that provided reasons for the riot taking place.

The first session allows students to visit their locality and discover the events that shaped the Lace Riots of 1842. The lesson is very deliberately written to enable students to return to the speech made by Ruffy Ridley, the Chartist leader, towards the end of the enquiry, with the students imagining what themes he raised when making his speech to over a thousand people on 19 August 1842.

For Lessons 2 to 6, a series of PowerPoint presentations support the teaching, with all containing copies of original material – it would always be the intention for students to see these documents in original form (this is the delight of a local history enquiry), but consideration is made of accessibility throughout. A good example of how to use a transcription sensitively can be seen on Slide 26, allowing students to try to read as much of the document as they can before the actual text is revealed.

The final session provides students with a writing frame to help construct their end piece of work. Students at this point have access to all the source material that they have encountered during the programme of teaching.

Summary of lessons

Lesson focus and learning objectives	Learning activities	Resources for the lesson
<p><i>Lesson 1: The events that surrounded the Chard Lace Riots of 1842</i></p> <p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To establish the prominence of the lace industry in Chard • To give a narrative to the events of the Lace Riots in August of 1842 	<p>The teacher leads a tour of the locality, visiting prominent buildings that formed part of the story of the Lace Riots in 1842.</p> <p>The students use a worksheet to create a chronology of events.</p>	<p>PowerPoint slides 1–5</p> <p>Tour of the locality, using a worksheet entitled Lesson 1 worksheet, with a Victorian map of Chard and images of key buildings today</p>
<p><i>Lesson 2: The exploitation of child labour in Chard as a reason for unrest</i></p>	<p>The teacher explains the context for the report that was made by the government.</p>	<p>PowerPoint slides 6–9, with the testimony</p>

<p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To use the government report into child labour of 1842 to investigate the working lives of William Crouch and Robert Down 	<p>The students read the testimony from William Crouch and work in pairs trying to work out what questions Dr Stewart asked.</p> <p>Students are asked to volunteer to come forward and act out the interview, with one as Dr Stewart (the interviewer) and one as the child.</p> <p>This may be repeated for Robert Down’s testimony (a West Country accent is optional!).</p>	<p>given to Dr Stewart</p> <p>Lesson 2 worksheet, with the testimony of William Crouch and Robert Down</p>
<p><i>Lesson 3: The living and working conditions of the working classes as a further reason for unrest</i></p> <p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To use the personal diary of Arthur Hull to investigate living and working conditions To find out the strengths and limitations of using his diary for finding out about unrest 	<p>The teacher explains the life of Arthur Hull and how he structured his diary entries.</p> <p>Students receive a sheet with his entries for the month of August in 1842. Two sections are cropped out for the students to try to read.</p> <p>Students fill in their copy and, in pairs, feed back what they think the entries help us to understand about the causes of unrest in Chard.</p>	<p>PowerPoint slides 10–14</p> <p>Lesson 3 worksheet, related to the diary of Arthur Hull</p>
<p><i>Lesson 4: The Poor Law of 1834 and the building of the Chard Union Workhouse as a further reason for working-class anger</i></p> <p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand how the Poor Law Act proposed to deal with the problem of poverty To understand who may have entered the Chard Union Workhouse in 1840s Chard 	<p>The teacher explains the system for dealing with poverty that the 1834 Poor Law Act established.</p> <p>Students are introduced to the minute book from the Chard Union Workhouse, which demonstrates the system of applying for outdoor relief (slides 16 and 17).</p> <p>Students are then given copies of the 1841 census returns and asked to find the answers to the questions relating to each page. Red questions are points for discussion.</p>	<p>PowerPoint slides 15–21</p> <p>Students have a copy of the census entries from 1841 (Lesson 4 worksheet) to study in pairs on their desks</p>

<p><i>Lesson 5: The application of strict rules in the workhouse and working-class attitudes towards the Poor Law system</i></p> <p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To understand the strict system of rules and punishments in the Chard Union Workhouse • To consider why William Bowditch took the dreadful decision to end his own life 	<p>The teacher uses slide 23 to explain the system for regulating the behaviour of paupers in the workhouse.</p> <p>Students work in pairs to try to complete the gap-fill tasks from slides 24 and 25. Students then try to read the punishment given to George Hayball on slide 26.</p> <p>The teacher then directs the students to consider why William Bowditch took his own life in 1842, rather than entering a workhouse (slides 27 and 28).</p>	<p>PowerPoint slides 22–28</p>
<p><i>Lesson 6: The speech made by the leading Chartist Ruffy Ridley to the protestors</i></p> <p>Children should learn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To think about the key themes that Ruffy Ridley may have put into his speech to encourage further protest • To review the evidence for unrest provided up to this point 	<p>The teacher sets the scene for the speech already taught in Lesson 1. Students work in pairs, creating a list of what had caused working-class unrest in Chard (slide 30).</p> <p>Students fill in a copy of their gap-fill worksheet. The teacher at this point may wish to don a top hat or similar and read the speech in role as Ruffy Ridley, once the answers have been filled in. Prior to this enquiry, students have already gained knowledge of the Luddite attacks in central England.</p> <p>Students can be asked to write a short speech of their own in role as Ruffy Ridley.</p>	<p>PowerPoint slides 29–31</p> <p>Lesson 6 worksheet is a template of the speech in gap-fill form that students use</p>
<p><i>Lesson 7: Outcome task: Writing the article for the Chard Museum newsletter</i></p> <p>Children should complete a written piece for the Chard Museum newsletter that follows the line of enquiry so far</p>	<p>The teacher talks through the frame for their written work.</p> <p>Students write their articles, with the help of the teacher.</p>	<p>PowerPoint slides 32 and 33</p> <p>Students have access to all the original documents at this point, plus the writing frame on slide 33</p>

Reflections

The enquiry is a powerful one, as it allows students to consider the lives of people living in their locality. Connections are made throughout the enquiry to the places that the students recognise, or indeed the surnames that still reflect the make-up of their school. Students recognise where the workhouse was situated in Chard, still see the mill buildings and note the surnames of the paupers in the workhouse – familiar surnames, such as Doble, Denning, Hayball, Hounsell and Sparks. The opportunity to view contemporary evidence in its original form is also of great importance – the students really do feel like they are dealing with the past.

It is vital to reflect on the transferability of a similar enquiry into other school settings and to consider how similar contemporary material could be used to create a range of approaches. In terms of transferability, it would be useful to consider a list of sources that are always available when researching the mid-nineteenth-century period. These would include census entries, newspapers, maps and the historic environment as a starting point. This type of material could be used to investigate many other themes from the period other than unrest – for example, changes to transport or changes to housing. The practicality of such work is developed wonderfully well in the book by Geoff Timmins listed below.

The enquiry here used a range of contemporary material, but this need not be the case. Other approaches for teachers may be to study one document in greater depth. For example, the material within the Poor Law Union minute book was remarkably rich and could generate several enquiry questions, such as ‘What can we learn about Victorian attitudes to poverty in the 1840s in...?’ or ‘How can we find out about Victorian attitudes to poverty in... in the 1840s?’. This approach may also be successful within the Key Stage 2 environment.

Useful general resources for designing local enquiries

For an example of where to strike the balance between a local and national story, any teacher would benefit from reading Eamon Duffy’s *Voices of Morebath: Reformation and rebellion in an English village* (2003, Yale University Press).

The BALH guide *Exploring Local History: A practical guide for teachers in primary and secondary schools* (Timmins, G., 2018, British Association for Local History) provides an excellent starting point. It is split into part one, which generates thinking about types of sources, and part two, which presents a series of possible approaches to local study work. The practical application to school life in a locality is an excellent example of this.

The BALH also holds a lovely set of guides to many elements of local history research; any mid-nineteenth-century enquiry would be inspired through *Living the Poor Life: A guide to the Poor Law Union correspondence c. 1834–1871* (Carter, P. and Whistance, N., 2011, British Association for Local History). The guide opens up material beyond simply the workhouse; it also studies outbreaks of diseases such as smallpox and cholera.

The website www.workhouses.org.uk is an excellent starting point for contextual knowledge about workhouses, with comprehensive coverage of buildings, rules, daily life and legislation.

The National Library of Scotland provides superb access to high-resolution maps for the whole of the United Kingdom at <https://maps.nls.uk>.

The greatest resource is probably other people in the locality who are also fascinated by local history. Contact as many groups or institutions as you can. There are thriving local history societies that have an in-depth knowledge of the area, and local museums that can help. Building relationships between history communities in an area is always a great way forward.

PowerPoint of lessons

As detailed in the lesson summary.

Resources specific to the mid-nineteenth-century period

The report into child labour published in 1842 (used in this enquiry) investigated conditions in the potteries of Staffordshire, the counties of Devon, Dorset and Somerset, the manufacturers and trades of Nottingham, Derby, Leicester, Birmingham and many other places. Therefore, there is rich testimony readily available that could spark many local enquiries. It is also worth considering that the report made by Edwin Chadwick ('Report on the sanitary conditions of the labouring population of Great Britain') is also available and contains hundreds of vivid descriptions of living conditions at the time. Chadwick's report, from the Wellcome Collection, can be found at

<https://iiif.wellcomecollection.org/pdf/b21307313>, while both parts of the appendix to the report are available here (they contain the direct testimony):

<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/102676842>

Documents relating to any workhouse are usually available at a local record centre.

However, it is not the case that workhouses were only created by the 1834 Poor Law Act – a parliamentary report of 1776–77 established that there were 1,978 such institutions at that time. In other words, teachers who believe that their locality never had a workhouse may not be correct!

A similarly useful first point of reference is the study by Frederick Morton Eden, *The State of the Poor*, which recounts the treatment of the poor in over 170 locations. It exists in three volumes, the second of which, again provided by the Wellcome Collection, can be found at https://iiif.wellcomecollection.org/pdf/b28773135_0002. The information does not simply deal with the poor in isolation; however, the year of the study is 1795 and it includes details on population, trades, wages, religion, baptisms, burials and much more. Some of the findings appear in greater depth than others; the report on Epsom in Surrey is an example of a remarkably detailed account, with the poor described in dreadful detail – two girls are listed simply by reference to their age and this description: 'The father of these girls was a hairdresser but is now at sea on board a man of war. The mother is an idle, worthless woman.'

The account of the death of William Bowditch was uncovered using the British Newspaper Archive website. This is a subscription service but is invaluable, and the pages of the *Northern Star* are a wonderful resource to illustrate Chartist activity in a locality. Such dreadful stories as these can be cross-referenced with the coroner inquest documents into such deaths, which are also held at local heritage centres. Sometimes, much of this research work may have been achieved already; this is an excellent example where a selection of the Devon inquests is available from 1800 to 1845:

www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/DEV/CourtRecords/Inquests1840

Diaries such as the one written by Arthur Hull can be found by completing a simple search on a local heritage centre website. The timescale over which Arthur Hull wrote is quite astonishing! His accounts detail everything in the period from 1826 to 1880 that an historian could wish for – from the completely mundane to the Great Reform Act of 1832, the coronation of Queen Victoria, the opening of the workhouse, the opening of the Chard Canal, a visit to the Great Exhibition, the coming of the railways and much more.