

Social unrest and the law in Sutton in the 1800s

HANDOUT 1 THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN SUTTON

The advent of water power

Sutton Old Mill was really impressive to look at and the people in the town were very pleased because it created lots of jobs and some of them got new houses to live in. The new mill attracted people to Sutton. In 1700 there were 95 families recorded as living in Sutton, but in 1793 there were over 3000 – a six-fold increase.

Many more mills were built or converted along the River Maun in the early 1800s to produce yarn for lace making and clothing. Some of them also bleached fabric, tanned leather and processed mustard. People carried on working in their homes alongside the new factories for a while, although they started to get paid less as new machinery could do the work more quickly. In 1840 the most popular job of people in Sutton was making stockings (long socks) on hand frames. These people were known as stockingers.

HANDOUT 2 RADICAL THINKING

The harsh laws to keep social unrest under control

As more people learnt to read ideas were spread quickly in pamphlets. The Radicals also held meetings in pubs, where they made speeches and sang songs about their hardships. They had to be very careful though, as sedition was punished very severely. If caught you could be fined jailed or transported abroad. Harsh punishments did not stop social unrest and there were riots, protest and demonstrations to make things fairer and improve the quality of life for the working people.

The Luddite riots (1811-1816) were the first big, organised uprising by a group of Radicals. They were angry about the new machinery, which was now doing their work, and had resulted in them losing their jobs.

HANDOUT 3 THE LUDDITES

The Luddite riots were the first time poor people had dared to use violence as a way of showing people in charge that they had enough of living a miserable life.

In November 1811, Luddite rioters, led by their charismatic leader Jeremiah Brandreth, marched from Nottingham to Sutton, smashing up 70 of the new wide frames.

In 1817 another protest to attack Nottingham Castle was thwarted by government spy, William Oliver. Brandreth initially evaded capture but was later executed for high treason.

There were two differing views of the social unrest - one that law and order should be maintained at all costs, the other that the rights of the working man should be considered.

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HANDOUT 4 THE CHARTISTS' PETITIONS

At the time that the petitions were submitted there were outbreaks of rioting and demonstrations and the local magistrates wasted no time using the army to catch those taking part.

HANDOUT 5 RADICAL THINKING

The harsh laws to keep social unrest under control

The Whig government responded to social unrest, fuelled by events in France, with the introduction of a number of laws which they hoped would keep poor people in their place:

- The government suspended Habeas Corpus in 1793 (a law which prevented unfair imprisonment) – which meant that people could be thrown in jail for several days without good reason.
- The Combination Acts between 1799 and 1800 prevented meetings of workers and effectively made Trade Unions illegal. You could get three months in jail or two months hard labour for trying to get an increase in wages or a decrease in hours.
- There was a tax on the press to control the Free Press. In the early 1800s lots of political newspapers were launched to promote Radical (if not, revolutionary) ideas and many refused to pay the tax.
- The Six Acts (Gagging Acts) were passed in December 1819 in an attempt to restrict the Free Press, speed up the judicial system and make large scale protest meetings illegal.
- The introduction of the Corn Law in 1815 guaranteed wheat prices for landowners competing against wheat imported from abroad but resulted in higher prices – further evidence that Parliament passed legislation to benefit large landowners. A dreadful harvest in 1816 resulted in a demand for higher wages and food riots.
- The Income Tax Repeal in 1816 reduced tax for richer people but was backfilled by indirect tax on popular items such as beer and sugar, which hit the common man's purse.
- The Game Law in 1816 made poaching punishable by imprisonment for up to seven years, or transportation to Australia. Poaching was often a way of supplementing income and feeding a family in times of economic difficulty.

The Chartist's petitions

There were three petitions by the Chartists to parliament between 1839 and 1848. By May 1839 the first petition had received 1.2 million signatures. The government rejected the petition 235 votes to 46. The Second petition in 1842 contained 3.3 million signatures. It was rejected 287 votes to 49.

In 1848 the final petition was submitted by Feargus O'Connor and there was talk of a new Republican constitution with O'Connor as President. The final petition contained just under 2 million signatures. Sadly, for the Chartists, only 15 MPs supported O'Connor's motion to adopt the Charter.

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LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. KS1 - Discuss whether the actions of the Luddites were right or wrong

What you will need

- Worksheet 1: The Industrial Revolution in Sutton
- Worksheet 3: The Luddites
- BBC Radio 4 iPlayer: The Luddite Lament

What you will need to do

- Read Worksheet 1: The Industrial Revolution in Sutton
- Read Worksheet 2: The Luddites
- Teachers read the Historical Resource: Opposing Views and discuss with pupils, as they choose, to deepen their understanding
- Listen to: Radio 4 iPlayer, The Luddite Lament from 21 minutes in, Hunting the Loaf song

How long will it take

50 minutes:

- 30 minutes for reading, listening to radio clip and clarifying any questions; 20 minute discussion using the prompts

Discussion

We have learnt about the cottage industries in Sutton-in-Ashfield, in particular the hand-loom weavers. When bigger machines were introduced and people started working in workshops, many people lost their work, or were unable to make a fair wage.

1. Was industrial progress good or bad?
2. Why were the Luddites so angry?
3. Were the Luddites right to smash up the knitting frames?
4. Were the Luddites brave or foolish – after all many of them ended up being transported or dead?
5. Were the punishments for Luddites caught smashing up knitting frames too harsh?

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LEARNING ACTIVITIES

2. KS1 - Protest songs to promote the cause

What you will need

- Worksheet 2: Radical thinking
- Worksheet 3: The Luddites
- BBC Radio 4 iPlayer: The Luddite Lament

What you will need to do

- Read Worksheet 2: Radical activity
- Read Worksheet 3: The Luddites
- Listen to: BBC iPlayer, The Luddite Lament from 21 minutes in, Hunting the Loaf song

How long will it take

50 minutes:

- 35 minutes for reading time, and listening to radio clip, and clarifying any questions; 15 minute song-writing. You could make this an hour long session and get pupils to read out lyrics.
- You could have a follow up session recording/performing protest songs

Discussion

Having read about how tough life was for the working man in Sutton at the turn of the 19th century and in particular the hardship of unemployed textiles workers, use the following prompts to stimulate discussion:

1. Why were the punishments for anyone trying to bring about change so harsh?
2. Why do you think songs were written and sung in the public houses by the Luddites?
3. Was singing a song enough evidence that you were planning to take part in unlawful activity?

Write a protest song

Write a protest song about something you're angry about. Don't worry about the music (unless you want to come up with a tune as well!).

Just write 2-3 verses about whatever makes you really angry, or what you would like to change in the world.

If there is time pupils could read out their lyrics.

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LEARNING ACTIVITIES

3. KS1 - I predict a riot!

What you will need

- Worksheet 2: Radical thinking
- Worksheet 4: The Chartist movement
- Historical Resources: Two different accounts of Edward Unwin's actions

What you will need to do

- Read Worksheet 2: Radical thinking
- Read Worksheet 4: The Chartist movement
- Teachers can read Historical Resources: Accounts of Edward Unwin's actions and discuss with pupils to deepen their understanding

How long will it take

1 hour: 25 mins reading time; 15 minutes to define roles and dress up/obtain props; 20 minutes performing 'the angry mob' freeze frame action

Recreate a Chartist riot

After reading about the Radical's motives and the Chartists, discuss the different characters you need to create a performance based on the accounts of the Chartist uprisings. The action might involve people plotting in a pub before taking to the streets and subsequent arrests made by the army under the direction of a local Justice of the Peace.

Discuss the sequence of events and agree any script you may wish to include.

Once you have assigned roles pupils should get dressed up in the appropriate costumes and select the props they need from the dressing up boxes in the Heritage Centre.

Now stage your performance.

Freeze frame the action when the mob are doing most damage and shop owners are locking up their shops.

Now resume action and freeze-frame as the cavalry appear on the scene and the rioters disperse.

You will need the following characters:

1. Edward Unwin, Justice of the Peace
2. The Chartist mob 3-6 actors
3. Yeomanry 2-5 actors
4. Cavalry / dragoons 4-10 actors (they should outnumber the mob)
5. Frightened shopkeepers and onlookers - any number

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LEARNING ACTIVITIES

4. KS2 - Was the reaction to the Chartist uprisings too heavy handed?

What you will need

- Worksheet 2: Radical thinking
- Worksheet 4: The Chartist movement
- Historical Resources: Two different accounts of Edward Unwin's actions

What you will need to do

- Read Worksheet 2: Radical activity
- Read Worksheet 4: The Chartist movement
- Historical Resources: Two different accounts of Edward Unwin's actions.

How long will it take:

45 mins: 25 mins reading; 20 minutes discussion

Discussion

Read the worksheets and Historical Resources as a stimulus for discussion.

Here are a few prompts:

1. What were the motives for the Chartist riots?
2. Was the violence of the mob justified?
3. Did Edward Unwin overreact by entering Joseph Bryan's house, or was he doing his duty to keep the town safe and maintaining law and order?
4. Discuss whether Joseph Bryan was a good person or a bad person (for allegedly supporting the Chartists)
5. Was Edward Unwin a good person for maintaining law and order or were his actions about self-preservation?

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LEARNING ACTIVITIES

5. KS2 – Role play a Radical leader giving a rousing speech

What you will need

- Worksheet 2: Radical thinking
- Worksheet 4: The Chartist movement
- Historical Resource: The Poor Man's Guardian Front page of the Poor Man's Guardian, 9 July 1831

What you will need to do

- Read Worksheets 2 and 4 to your pupils, or ask them to read all or part of the worksheets
- Teachers can read the Historical Resource: The Poor Man's Guardian and choose to highlight words or sentences to pupils and discuss why the newspaper uses such persuasive language

How long will it take:

1 hour: 25 mins reading; 20 minutes writing; 15 minutes for performances

Write and perform a rousing speech to get across the Chartists' aims

You have read and discussed the reasons for the Chartist movement. Now ask your pupils to put themselves in the shoes of Feargus O'Connor and write a short speech to incite the angry unemployed in Sutton to take arms. Remind them that he was passionate about the plight of the working man, but funny too.

Now ask the pupils to read their speeches in front of a baying crowd. Fellow pupils can boo and hiss, or throw their fists in the air in agreement!

Use the props provided to create the scene... a soap box, items of clothing, working men's tools and weapons.

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LEARNING ACTIVITIES

6. KS2 - Write about the Chartist movement from different perspectives

What you will need

- Worksheet 2: Radical thinking
- Worksheet 4: The Chartist movement
- Historical Resource: Front page of the Poor Man's Guardian, 9 July 1831
- Historical Resources: Two different accounts of Edward Unwin's actions

What you will need to do

- Read Worksheets 2 and 4 to your pupils, or ask them to read all or part of the worksheets
- Teachers can read Historical Resources: Accounts of Edward Unwin's actions and highlight words or sentences to pupils and discuss the two different perspectives

How long will it take:

1 hour; 25 mins reading; 20 minutes writing; 15 minutes for performances

Write about the Chartist movement from different perspectives

After reading, pupils produce two different styles of writing - a personal letter and a newspaper article - to show different perspectives of the Chartist movement. Here are the instructions:

1. Write a private letter from, Edward Unwin, Justice of the Peace, to a colleague (perhaps a fellow mill owner) about the crimes he is dealing with and the importance of keeping law and order. You may want to ask for reinforcements, for example cavalry, to maintain law and order, or to exaggerate the threat of violence to justify the number of people you are sending to prison, or indeed the gallows.
2. Write an article for the Poor Man's Guardian describing the plight of an unemployed handloom weaver facing poverty. Describe the lack of employment, the high cost of basic provisions, and fear of being taken into a workhouse. Use language to urge your readers to support the Chartist movement and put pressure on the government to introduce laws to protect the working man.