



# Teacher Fellowship Programme

## Local history: untold stories of the people of Britain

How has Stroud's radicalism changed over time?

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## **Enquiry question: How has Stroud's radicalism changed over time?**

Stroud is a town known for its radicalism and activism; however, the nature of this radicalism has changed over time, reflecting the national narrative. Though many attribute radicalism in Stroud to the 1825 riots, it seems to go back further than this into religious non-conformism and even the very landscape on which Stroud has been built. Interestingly, although Stroud is radical in the vernacular, with the term 'Stroudies' being used frequently to describe local people, many people living in Stroud cannot explain where their radical history comes from, nor how it reflects the changing nature of radicalism on a national scale. That being said, the people of Stroud are proud of their reputation as a radical town, notably being the birthplace of Extinction Rebellion, which was launched in the living room of Gail Bradbrook, a well-known local activist. However, the prevalence of radicalism in Stroud is not without controversy. Siobhan Baillie, the MP for Stroud, said that children should become the 'problem solvers of solutions for the future', instead of calling for government action and 'catastrophising' the climate crisis. On the divisive Blackboy clock debate, she says, 'I am also concerned that a certain minority of people with loud voices have an unquenchable desire to be constantly finding things to be outraged at.' Therefore, this enquiry needed to be sensitive to both sides of the discussion on Stroud's radical past. This enquiry also sought to encourage students to reflect on Stroud's apparent radicalism in relation to the national story and to question whether Stroud really was more radical in comparison.

We are lucky at our school to have our own archive and archivist, although we have not previously used this enough in our department. We are also fortunate to have an active sixth form history society, who are interested in developing their understanding of local history and using archives. I have previously found archive sessions very engaging with students, but think that there is scope to develop this further, while creating the physical evidence of radicalism in Stroud that is currently missing; therefore, this resource uses archives as the focus for the enquiry. In celebration of our own specific context, this resource has two strands. Strand one focuses on developing the history society as local history ambassadors and young archivists. In strand two, these skills are used to develop lessons using archive boxes on radicalism in Stroud for Year 8 students. In our case, using the archive boxes compiled by the sixth form history society, Year 8 students were able to curate their own museum panel, explaining how radicalism has changed in Stroud over time.

### **Scholarly and curricular rationale**

In the UK, local history has been considered a key element of history education since the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1908, the Board of Education issued a circular on the teaching of history in secondary schools, which said, 'It is essential that in each school attention should be paid to the history of the town and district in which it is situated.' In these early days, this was limited to highlighting important national events in a particular

locality or local associations with nationally important people. However, there is now a great amount of emphasis on maintaining a balance between local, national, European and world history. It has been suggested that one of the strengths of local history is that it secures partnerships with the local community and can help to break down the barriers between school and the world outside. One way of doing this is by establishing relationships with experts such as museum curators, archivists, archaeologists and members of local historical societies, and working with them to ensure that local history projects and field trips are as enriching as possible; this has been a key focus in this resource project. In addition, it has been argued that, instead of teaching a vague sense of time by simply referring to significant events, teachers should link past, present and future events to encourage the growth of an awareness of change and a sense of development over time. Therefore, the following principles were taken into account when considering how to move forward with this resource:

1. Local history is resource-led. Teachers should know whether there is sufficient or appropriate evidence to support an educational enquiry. Therefore, it is important that a certain amount of research is undertaken before the enquiry, as was the case with radicalism in Stroud.
2. Local history should be child-centred. The teacher should allow pupils to do more work than him/herself. This worked very well with the sixth form history society, as they became the archivists and researchers.
3. Local history should be enquiry-led. Researching familiar local areas can give students good opportunities to 'act as historians', and teachers should use this opportunity widely.
4. Use the widest range of historical sources possible. Local history studies can use different sources, such as museum and site visits, oral history, artefacts, maps, etc.
5. Find romance. Most children love a mystery and finding small clues such as 'faded lettering on a wall, a bump in a field, an entry in a school logbook, a name on a map'. Archive boxes work perfectly for this, rather than simply printing out the resources.
6. Evaluate evidence. Local history projects should evaluate evidence during the project – this can be done during the lessons and when selecting sources for the museum panel.
7. Involve local experts – local authors, amateur archaeologists, archivists, antique dealers, builders or architects, etc.
8. Involve the local community. Sources from the local community include record offices, libraries, websites, buildings, parish magazines or newsletters, letters home, etc.
9. Aim for an end-product. The results of any local history project can be shared in many ways: an exhibition, open evening, publication, school museum, radio programme or group presentation in assembly. In this case, for the sixth-form strand, it was to create the contextual overview sheets and archive boxes, and for Year 8, it was to create a museum panel.

In terms of where this resource fits within the curriculum, we teach industrialisation and political change in Year 8, and therefore the 'Radical Stroud' resource sits at the end of this topic before moving onto empire. This works particularly well because the manufacturing of the Stroud Scarlet cloth in turn makes an excellent link to the introduction of the East India Company and the beginning of the British Empire. It also links the growth of industry to colonisation. The expectation of this resource is that it is taught within the context of national radicalism, perhaps, as we have done, as part of a wider nineteenth-century unit. The national context will then be discussed and revisited within the individual lessons provided.

Second, we have been 'diversifying' our curriculum over the last couple of years, and so this resource allows students to grapple with debates about colonialism and the controversy of the Blackboy clock in Stroud in a way that is relevant and not tokenistic, while telling the untold stories of working-class Stroud.

### **Learning aims**

The first challenge with this line of enquiry was narrowing down the large topic into smaller strands. This was done by time period, so that the students would be able to observe the changing nature of radicalism on both a national and a local level. Due to the nature of radicalism often referring more to the experiences of the working class, whose histories have often been neglected, the usual channels for conducting primary research can quickly lead to dead-ends. Therefore, to make the research process more accessible for the sixth form history society, we first established a number of case studies for each time period, which would yield a sufficient number of sources and a broad theme that reflects the national narrative. We shared the information below with the history society to help them to focus their research.

- 1500–1800 – religious issues: John Wesley preached in Stroud in 1742 and 1744 (commemorated on a plaque near the church) and made several visits to Wallbridge between 1746 and 1753. Nonconformist ministers settled in Stroud – they were possibly encouraged to do so by the tradition of nonconformity that is evident there from 1576.
- 1800–1900 – workers' rights: On 21 May 1839, 5,000 people joined a Chartist meeting on Selsley Hill common with John Frost to challenge Lord John Russell, MP and Home Secretary. The Stroudwater Riots took place in 1825.
- Twentieth-century Stroud – cultural issues: Jasper Conran called Stroud 'the Covent Garden of the Cotswolds'; The *Daily Telegraph* has referred to it as 'the artistic equivalent of bookish Hay-on-Wye', while the *London Evening Standard* likened the town to 'Notting Hill with wellies'. Stroud was one of the birthplaces of the organic food movement and was home to Britain's first fully organic café. There was movement to Stroud in the 1960s and 1970s.

- Present-day Stroud – ‘wokeism’: Extinction Rebellion, also known by the abbreviation XR, was launched in the Stroud living room of Gail Bradbrook, a well-known local activist. There is a Radical Book Club and a Radical Stroud movement. The Stroud vs slavery link is highlighted in the Blackboy clock debate.

### **Breakdown of lessons and scheme of work**

This resource was created in partnership with our school history society, a group of sixth form students who meet twice a week and who expressed an interest in developing the resource and learning more about local history. We created a programme of seminars to prepare them for becoming researchers and then supported them during the research process.

#### **Sixth form programme**

- Session 1: What is local history? Led by me
- Session 2: Stroud’s local history, led by Stuart Butler, local historian
- Session 3: Archiving, led by Zoe Wilcox, school archivist
- Sessions 4–8: Compiling the archive

The students then created archive boxes, which contained between five and ten primary sources; an information sheet on what radicalism meant for their time period, to provide historical context; and information about what radicalism looked like in Stroud at that time, to provide local context (sessions 4–8). These boxes were then used as the resources in the Year 8 history lessons and for the final assessment pieces.

#### **Year 8 scheme of work**

- Lesson 1: What is radicalism? In what ways is Stroud a radical town? Introduction to archiving and museum panels
- Lesson 2: What did radicalism look like in 1500–1800? In what ways did Stroud reflect the nature of radicalism in 1500–1800? (Reflection document)
- Lesson 3: What did radicalism look like in 1800–1900? In what ways was the nature of radicalism in 1500–1800 different to radicalism in 1800–1900? What have we learned about forgotten or ignored stories so far? (Reflection document)
- Lesson 4: What did radicalism look like in the twentieth century? In what ways was the nature of radicalism in 1900–2000 different to radicalism in early periods? (Reflection document)
- Lesson 5: What might be considered radical today? Is there anything that was not in our future archive that we could have included? In what ways has Stroud reflected the changing nature of radicalism over time? (Reflection document)
- Lesson 5: Final task – curate your own museum panel using the selected sources on your reflection document and explain your choices

## Conclusions and reflections

Throughout this enquiry, we used Bage's principles of local history to ensure that it was as powerful for the students as possible. We wanted to create an enquiry that forced students to grapple with their own local identity and know where it comes from. We also wanted the students to understand that radical ideas change over time, and that radical history is found in the hidden, not the obvious. The lessons ask specific questions at specific times in order to probe these ideas further, based on students' learning from the lesson and the sources that they came across. For example, understanding the historical context in which the Blackboy clock was built and the fact that there were indeed Black people living in Stroud at the time really enriches the current debate on the issue. For the sixth form researchers, this project was invaluable to their understanding of what history is as a process and the fact that information about the past does not just simply appear in a textbook – it has to be searched for and, in order to look for it, you have to know that it exists. The project served as excellent preparation for their upcoming NEA, which requires the location and analysis of ten primary sources. Finally, working with Stuart and Zoe gave this enquiry a sense of purposefulness and direction, which would have otherwise been lacking, and triangulated perfectly with the final outcome of a museum panel.

This resource is transferable to other contexts in terms of running a sixth form history society and how to engage sixth formers as young archivists and researchers. The archive sessions are directly transferable, whereas the other sessions will have to be adapted to suit other local contexts and identities. The lesson format for the Year 8 lessons could either be taught as a case study or adapted for the local context; however, the contextual information on radical movements in Britain is directly applicable to any context as a point for comparison. The broader focus on change and continuity could also be applied in other contexts, with themes such as immigration, conflict, industry, education, architecture and crime. This resource is also transferable in its collaborative approach between schools, historians and archivists.

The success of this resource is due to the collaboration between and willingness of local experts and the sixth form history society. The creation of the resource for Year 8 students was very time-intensive for the sixth formers, but student buy-in was very good because:

- a) They knew that the resource was being published nationally and they were told that they would be credited
- b) The talks by Zoe and Stuart were incredibly engaging, with one student exclaiming, 'That's the best thing I've ever heard,' and another saying, 'I didn't realise archiving was so interesting'

We were also very clear on expectations with regard to lunchtime sessions and what needed to be produced from the outset. We set up a Google Classroom, which meant that we could communicate easily with the students, help them with source selection and ensure

that their information sheets were accessible to Year 8 students. That being said, the students maintained their sense of agency and we did not get too directly involved in their research, as we wanted to guide them rather than impose our own ideas.

Teachers have enjoyed teaching the resource, making their own adaptations to suit their own classes. One thing to note, however, is that the students' understanding of radicalism has grown in the course of the lessons, and so the first two lessons were quite challenging for Year 8 students. However, when questioned, students were able to clearly express how Stroud did and did not reflect national radicalism from 1500–1800, and then compare this to radicalism in later time periods. Feedback has also suggested that the reading element of the lessons can take a lot of time depending on the class, and therefore some teachers decided to set the reading as 'flipped learning' to allow more time for source analysis discussion in the lesson. Overall, the quality of the work that the students produced was to a very high standard and there was a noticeable buzz about creating the museum panels.

Accessing sources on this particular topic would have been extremely challenging, due to the nature of radical history; however, because we were working with Stuart and had Zoe's expertise, we were able to point the sixth form students in the right direction. We would always advise consulting local experts early on in your research process to make sure that your topic is feasible in terms of sources available and whether they are accessible. Some sources that we found particularly useful are:

- **Know Your Place:** This is a digital heritage mapping resource to help you to explore your neighbourhood online through historic maps, collections and linked information: [www.kypwest.org.uk/about-the-project](http://www.kypwest.org.uk/about-the-project)
- **Radical Stroud:** Run by Stuart Butler, this is a blog and event space for areas of radical history in Stroud. Stuart also includes some primary sources and the excellent scripts that he uses on his immersive walking tours: <http://radicalstroud.co.uk/about-us>
- ***The Stroudwater Riots of 1825*** compiled from historical records by John Loosley (1993, Stroud Museum Association): This was my starting point for this enquiry and gave an excellent insight into working-class struggles in the Stroud valleys.
- ***Mary Ann Sate, Imbecile*** by Alice Jolly (2018, Unbound): This is a novel recommended by Zoe Wilcox. It's a poetic, beautifully written account of a working-class girl growing up in Stroud. Fiction can often be an excellent gateway into wider historical enquiry.

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