

History

Year 8 - Lesson 13

The Peterloo Massacre

Mr Arscott



What can you see?

This British cartoon was created in 1819. This is four years after Napoleon had been defeated at the Battle of Waterloo and the French Revolution could definitely be said to have ended. Can you see any clues which suggest that some people in Britain were still scared of the French Revolution? The monster on the left is meant to look like a guillotine and is wearing a revolutionary cap. The people on the right are meant to represent the wealthy and powerful people of Britain.



Attitudes to revolution

In the early stages of the French Revolution, British people had different reactions to the radical changes. Whilst Britain was at war with France most Britons agreed that firstly they did not want Britain to experience a violent and chaotic period like the terror and secondly, that Britain should be proud that it was helping to defeat Napoleon. However, once Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo, British disagreements about revolutionary changes started to reappear.



A changing Britain

By 1815, Britain was experiencing huge changes. More and more people were living in cities and working in new **industries**. In fact, entire new cities had developed which a hundred years before had been villages. Manchester was the clearest example of this. Between 1750 and 1800 the population increased from 18,000 to 90,000 people. In these growing cities, new social groups had developed. These included the wealthy **middle classes** who owned their own property. An even larger social group was the **working class**. These people were poorer and earned wages working in factories.



Calls for change

Once war was over, some people in the middle and working classes thought that the way Britain was governed should now change too. Britain already had a parliament but only a small number of wealthy men could vote for the members of parliament. After 1815 middle and working class people started asking to have the vote as well. Britain's rulers were unsure how they should respond.

In 1819 a large meeting took place in an open space in Manchester called St Peter's Fields. The crowd was mainly made up of poor workers and other members of the working class who had recently lost jobs. They wanted the vote so they could elect rulers who would help the poor. The local government in Manchester was worried this crowd might turn into a violent mob so asked the army to watch the meeting.



The 'Peterloo' Massacre

It's unclear exactly what happened next but for some reason the army rode into the crowd on horseback.

400 people were wounded and eleven people were killed including two women and a child. At the time this was seen as a shocking use of violence by a government against its

own people. The event became known as the 'Peterloo Massacre'. This name was used to criticise the soldiers who used unnecessary violence as a contrast to the brave soldiers who fought at Waterloo.



Glossary

Industries: types of work which normally manufacture (make) things using machines.

Middle class: a social group who are relatively wealthy and often work as doctors, lawyers or merchants. During this period some members of the middle class became very wealthy as factory owners. (Also known as the bourgeoisie.)

Working class: a social group who live in cities and towns. During this period they often earned so little money they lived in poverty. (During the French Revolution this group was known as the sans culottes.)



Comprehension Questions

1. Who was defeated at the Battle of Waterloo?

Sentence starter: At the Battle of Waterloo....

2. What happened to the population of Manchester between 1750 and 1800?
3. What were the differences between people from the middle class and people from the working class?
4. What happened at St Peter's Fields in 1819?
5. Challenge question: Why did the massacre in St Peter's Fields become known as 'Peterloo'?



Extension sources

When Mr Hunt arrived the crowd clapped loudly. Soon there was confusion. There was a crush and people cried out and shouted. An army officer was hit on the forehead by a brick. The soldiers were not to blame for these deaths. No one thought people would bring weapons to the meeting but they did. Many people had their pockets full of stones.

Manchester Chronicle, a pro-government newspaper

I saw no one lift up sticks to the soldiers. If any stones had been thrown I would have seen it. I am over six feet high and I was able to see everything that happened. I heard no swearing and no violence from the crowd. Mr Hunt had just started his speech when the soldiers charged into the crowd forcing them to the ground and crushing people.

John Smith, a journalist who worked for the Liverpool Mercury newspaper which wanted to give working class people the vote

Extension Question

6. What does Peterloo tell us about British attitudes to political change in 1819?

Use the sentence starters and key words below to answer this question

Sentence starters:	Key words
<p><i>Some British people wanted Britain's political system to change. For example...</i></p> <p><i>These people are likely to have seen Peterloo as...</i></p> <p><i>Other British people were scared of political change. For example...</i></p> <p><i>These people were likely to see Peterloo as...</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Working class-Middle class-Upper class-Massacre-Blame-Fear-Revolution-Riot-Crowd-Violent

