

## Developing historical visits in your area

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The Peasants' Revolt of 1381 has often been boiled down to a series of events in the South East and the 'march on London' led by Wat Tyler and other rebels. The traditional narrative, however, belies the fact that it was a widespread series of risings across England. The following is a short description of the thinking behind my guided visit plan of St Albans, as well as the ways in which this might be replicated in other places. While not all locations will have a history as in-depth and well researched as that of St Albans, it is likely that there will be a number of local resources on which you can rely to help form a visit plan.

In my case, the most useful starting point for individual stories from the local area focused on the rising of 1381 was **The People of 1381 Project's** online database, which can be found at: [www.1381.online](http://www.1381.online). This is a collection of documents including poll tax records, manorial and parish records, as well as pardon rolls from the years of the Revolt, contained in one place for the first time. While not every town will have high-profile figures such as John Ball, there is likely to be a record for someone in your area or a town or village nearby. In the event that the local town or city in which you live was not in existence at the time of the Peasants' Revolt, consider looking for local villages or towns that are nearby. It would also be my recommendation to look for the older settlement or village that the new town was built to replace and highlight that as part of any guided visit.

My next port of call was the town's local library and local history resources, as well as local history organisations such as the **St Albans and District Historical Society** and the **St Albans Abbey Education Centre**, which provided secondary sources and willingly shared their own research. Of most interest in the case of St Albans was an unpublished translation provided to me by the Abbey Education Centre of the *Gesta Abbatum* (Achievements of the Abbey) under Abbot Thomas de la Mare, which offered a clear primary source for the timeline of the rising in St Albans. I also had other local resources from authors such as Elsie Toms and Cyril Martin, who had written their works after decades living in the town and surrounding villages.

I knew that the experience of the Peasants' Revolt would provide students with an invaluable window not only on the events of that time, but also on some of the ways in which towns such as St Albans still resemble the medieval designs, whether through the town plan, market squares or other relevant buildings. In St Albans, the development of the town and the Abbey, particularly the latter's role as landowner and controller of trade and milling rights, offered an additional lens through which to view the events of 1381. This is why I was keen that the visit, if possible, should take place on foot and encompass as much of the walk towards the Abbey as possible.

This led to events beyond the scope of the Peasants' Revolt being referenced, and a wider theme of popular protest emerging. The anger at the closure of the public right of way through Waxhouse Gate and the opening of the Vintry Garden took place centuries after the events of the Peasants' Revolt, but they were examples of the kind of organised action that took place and also met with some limited success. I know from my previous experience as a teacher in both central London and Southend that often students are fascinated by what was once in a place that is familiar to them, as well as showing them things that they might have walked past many times but which contain traces of something that had previously stood there.

Finally, the plotting of the route came from both my prior experience as a city guide and from my local knowledge as a long-time resident of the town. Students can be easily distracted, particularly if they are visiting a place with which they are familiar. I have attempted to ensure that the routes contain ample room for adaptation, including nearby public conveniences, disabled access and opportunities to stop for food. I have also tried to take care to leave places where one might stay for ten to 15 minutes as those locations with few shops, cafes or restaurants nearby to distract students. Such adaptations depend, of course, on local knowledge and an understanding of the students in their care.

### **Checklist for organising similar visits to local areas**

- Research the local library's local history resources, including secondary literature.
- Contact local museums, historical societies or local authority archives to see whether they have relevant and accessible primary resources.
- Consider popular locations that are familiar to students and include their historical function.
- If you do not live in a place mentioned on The People of 1381 database, consider a nearby location that is and include in your tour the reasons why your own town or city might have developed later.
- Try to include stops for all parts of the route on foot to maintain student focus and to highlight to students how the past has shaped our modern built environment.
- Ensure that there are regular opportunities for using the toilet, as well as accessibility for all.

To view the resources specific to St Albans, [please follow this link](#).