

Thoughts to inform the teaching of 'The People of 1381'

The research questions of The People of 1381 academic project were:

1. Who was involved in 1381? (As victims, rebels, etc.)
2. How were people involved? (In what form in the Revolt and aftermath?)
3. How was this influenced by the type of people involved?
4. Where did the Revolt take place?

We asked the academic team what they wanted people to know about 1381 and the people. Here is what they said:

'It should be an event that is widely known, as it is one of the major events in the European medieval world and THE biggest revolt in England to date.'

'Even in the Middle Ages, politics mattered to ordinary people.'

'1381 showed that people could make a huge difference. There was no poll tax in England until the 1980s.'

'There was a military aspect: military organisation and experienced soldiers taking part.'

'It's not as simple as a story of rebels and victims. The lives of the people are a way into the complexity.'

'Don't focus on the chronicles – medieval documents aren't boring!'

'This was an unprecedented event in the late medieval ages, covering 26 counties, including a concerted march on London. There was no one leader – more an Al-Qaeda-style distributed way of rebelling. The 'Great Society' was there – an underground. The story of 1381 is about the people of every town and village in England.'

What the teachers thought on hearing this:

'Our narrative has broken down – what replaces this?'

'Our problem is that the original, false story is easier to teach!'

'This seems like the first step from being a subject to a citizen in England. "Lower orders" of people are engaging in national politics. This is something fundamental – people power.'

'We mustn't get bogged down in causation.'

'How do we make the poll tax exciting? Children are part of the narrative. Children had to pay the tax. We could put children at the heart of it.'

'We could use the Revolt to teach wider life in England in the later Middle Ages. The Hundred Years' War is key too.'

'There is so much we can teach from this about how historians actually work – how they find out about the past.'