

## **1800–1900**

### **What was seen as radical in society at this time?**

The change in views across Europe saw them become politically radical, starting with Napoleon's rampage across the continent from 1803 to 1815, which spread liberal ideas and dethroned monarchs. The Spring of Nations in 1848 continued to spread liberal and democratic ideas across Europe in a wave of revolutions to promote self-determination. In addition, the influence of Marx and Engels with the *Communist Manifesto* (published in 1848) called for the rejection of capitalism and its exploitation.

Economically radical changes also occurred. In 1834, the Poor Law was passed in England to place the poor in workhouses, where they would earn food and clothing for their labour. This aimed to encourage the poor to work for themselves and take the beggars off the streets. However, there was opposition to the law. Dickens reflected on the workhouses as prisons of the poor in his 1843 novel *A Christmas Carol*. In reality, conditions were harsh and punishments were often used, including the treadmill, where inmates would climb a staircase for hours to grind grain.

There were large amounts of unrest in this century. Socially radical movements can be seen in the Swing Riots of 1830, where agricultural workers rose up in protest of the mechanisation of agriculture and harsh working conditions. Chartism was also popular at the time; in 1838, the Chartist movement was the first mass movement of the working class, campaigning for universal suffrage (votes), annual parliaments, payment of MPs and other liberal policies. Multiple unrests were quashed by the authorities, as petitions signed by the Chartists were ignored.

Technology was radicalised in this period. Ideas on communications and connections led to the growth of railways – for example, in 1804, the first steam-powered train was introduced. Coal and steam power was used instead of water power, with the world's first coal-fired power station built in 1882 in London.

Ideas about slavery were changing. Slavery was abolished in England in 1833. However, in 1885, European countries divided Africa between them and controlled the individual nations as colonies.

### **What was radical in Stroud?**

#### **George Holloway**

Holloway was a Conservative Member of Parliament for Stroud from 1885 and a clothing manufacturer. He created the Stroud's Conservative Working Man's Association to protect workers' rights. In the 1890s, he was Stroud's top employer, having employed around 1,500 people. His company was the first in the world to use steam-powered sewing machines. Holloway was considerate of his workforce, as he created the Sick Benefit Society, built homes for working men and was the first employer to offer disability insurance.

## **Unrest**

The Stroudwater Riots in 1825 saw the mill workers join the Weavers Union in protest of low pay and unacceptable conditions. The strikes turned violent after the army was called in, and after reading the terms of the Riot Act, soldiers were pelted with stones and thrown into ponds while looms were burned.

In 1830, the Captain Swing Riots led to people marching under the chant 'blood or bread' against the mechanisation of agriculture. Farmers and workers destroyed machines for farming and many were arrested and later transported to other areas as punishment.

The Chartist movement was also evident in Stroud. On Selsley Common, people gathered to demand lower prices. This was in 1825, and around 6,000 people arrived for the demonstration – a very large number, considering the population of Stroud was under 10,000.

## **Industrialisation**

Trains and railways were the focus in order to transport goods in and out of the network of villages and towns. This meant that the canals in Stroud fell into disrepair, but they remained in use until World War II. Stroud train station was designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel, a well-known industrial architect.

## **Anti-slavery**

Stroud built the first anti-slavery memorial in the UK in 1834, after the abolition of slavery in 1833. Despite this, much of Stroud's development was funded by compensation money granted to the people who had previously owned slaves. As a result, the slave owners had been rewarded for freeing their slaves, rather than valuing them as people. Overseas, the East India Trading Company bought the cloth of the Stroud Red Scarlet business to clothe its workers.

## **The Poor Law and the working class**

The Stroud Poor Law Union was formed on 2 April 1835 to get the poor into workhouses. Stroud Union Workhouse was built between 1836 and 1840, and aimed to house 500 inmates. The poor were actively considered and encouraged to work for themselves, which was different from the work that they did to benefit the more wealthy.