

Guillotine blade, chloroform inhaler and even a prosthetic leg: artefacts from overlooked Age of Revolution period of history digitised and collated online for first time

- *'The Age of Revolution' digitally brings together objects from revolutions and rebellions, including the American Revolutionary War and the "Peterloo Massacre", for the first time*
- *Items not only tell the story of an era that shaped the world as we know it, but reveal its shocking parallels to today's politics and Britain's changing place in the world*
- *The collection features objects from a variety of museums across the UK, many of which have rarely or never been on public display*

Historians, museum educators and digital learning experts are bringing together for the first time a collection of artefacts from a period of history with stunning parallels to the present day.

Titled *The Age of Revolution*, the online collection tells the story of global developments between 1775 – 1848 with a UK focus. At the centre of this is a collection of digitised historical objects from a range of museums across the country, now accessible to all in one location.

The years covered by *The Age of Revolution* have a lot to tell us about our own times. Though underrepresented in schools, the period covers political, social, economic, and intellectual upheavals like the French Revolution, abolitionism and the "Peterloo Massacre". Much like 2018, this wave of challenges to power structures was driven in part by rapid progress in technology and the ability to share ideas.

Dan Snow, historian and ambassador for Waterloo200, explains: *"The issues that arose during The Age of Revolution have many parallels in the modern day – from waves of rebellion and startling elections, to questions about Britain's place in the world and fears about war, migration, and economic decline."*

The astonishing artefacts from the era include:

- **[French guillotine blade \(1792\)](#)** – *The guillotine is best known as a method of executing those condemned to death during the French Revolution. Although it delivered a grisly end – by slicing off its victim's head – death by guillotine was quick and somewhat humane. During the 'Reign of Terror' in France, as many as 40,000 people were*

executed by 'Madame Guillotine'. This object is in the collection of the National Maritime Museum.

- [Banner from the “Peterloo Massacre” \(1819\)](#) – The Peterloo Massacre was a bloody confrontation where fifteen died during mass protest driven in part by low wages and poor working conditions. More than sixty thousand people turned up to agitate for reform. A banner from the day, reading ‘Liberty and Fraternity’, forms part of the collection. This object is in the collection of Touchstones Rochdale.
- [Chloroform Inhaler \(1847\)](#) – Before the 1840s, major medical procedures took place without anaesthetic. In 1847, Dr James Simpson – who tested the theory on his himself and his friends after dinner – discovered that chloroform rendered people unconscious. Soon glass inhalers with sponges soaked in the chemical saw widespread use to aid operations, changing the face of medicine. This object is sourced from National Museums Scotland.

The programme is funded by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport in order to promote the extraordinary evolution of our collective creative culture and understanding of the difference that such culture has on children and young people’s education whilst also drawing attention to an overlooked yet highly relevant part of history.

Dan Snow, historian and ambassador for Waterloo200, continues: “Now is the perfect time to shed some light on a part of history that is too often overlooked in classrooms. We hope that seeing these objects collected online is just a starting point to inspire schools to get out there and tap into the learning opportunities at local museums too.”

The Age of Revolution will build on the existing Waterloo200 website, set up with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to celebrate the bicentenary of the famous battle. The expanded site will also serve as a valuable asset for teachers looking to cover a wide range of topics and themes within the period and tap into its relevance and timeliness. Starting off with 50 new key artefacts from the era, there is plenty on offer to engage young minds on the subject. The site includes everything from objects and paintings, to songs, and texts.

His Grace the 9th Duke of Wellington, OBE, DL, said: “I very much welcome the relaunch of the Waterloo 200 website on the 203rd anniversary of the Battle. *The Age of Revolution* is an exciting free educational legacy programme for all ages that combines the nation's wide-ranging cultural and heritage collections with the latest digital technologies, historical research and expertise in teaching and learning. I hope that all visitors to this site will find it interesting and



stimulating.”

The objects and activities available on the website are linked directly to elements of curricula in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in History, Art & Design, Computing and SMSC (Social, Moral, Spiritual and Cultural Development).

New ideas for teaching this period are being explored in partnership with The Historical Association, through the sponsorship of 30 teacher fellows. Ranging from Key Stage 2 to A-level, they have been working with leading historians and experienced teacher educators to develop their subject knowledge and create resources to help deepen student understanding of the period.

The Age of Revolution programme was developed by Waterloo200 – a charity dedicated to advancing education on the timespan around the Battle of Waterloo – in partnership with the University of Kent, Culture24 and the Historical Association. A wide range of museums and galleries across the UK have given valuable access to artefacts as well as wider support. Initial funding for Waterloo200 came from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Victoria Nielson, CEO for Waterloo200, added: *“This is not just a history project. It is a cross-curricular opportunity that is steeped in cultural connections with every element encouraged to work as hard as possible and be cohesive in its approach. That’s why we hope that educators from a range of schools across all kinds of subjects will find The Age of Revolution website useful for lesson planning and inspiration.”*

Rebecca Sullivan at Historical Association, said: *“We’ve seen first-hand the interest that The Age of Revolution has generated among teachers in the pilot schemes that have taken place. Now, with the range of resources available, this fascinating era of history can be made more accessible to schools. Using the objects to deliver lessons can really capture students’ imaginations. We hope to hear a lot more on how the materials are being used in the classroom as the programme continues.”*

To find out more, access resources and to see the first 50 objects visit ageofrevolution.org

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Notes to editors

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About The Age of Revolution

The *Age of Revolution* is an educational legacy project from Waterloo 200 Ltd – the official body recognised by the UK government to support the commemoration of the Battle of Waterloo during its bicentenary in 2015 and beyond. Following a successful commemorative programme, including the creation of the original online resource, built with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the five-year *Age of Revolution* project (to June 2020) is now underway for the organisation to broaden and deepen engagement in the subject of Waterloo and the period of revolution in Europe between 1775 and 1848. It aims to engage actively with over 2,000 national UK schools across the educational spectrum. This is through the provision of bespoke educational materials, multimedia technology and partnerships in the educational and cultural landscape so as to broaden the concept of education and form an education offering suited to all key stages, whilst promoting the evolution of our nation's collective creative culture.
<http://www.ageofrevolution.org>

