



Historic England

Education

Author:

Location:



Heritage School Case Study

Subtitle: Belle Vue comes back to life at St Richard's Primary School, Manchester.

Summary: A whole school project in which students discovered the amazing story of Belle Vue entertainment complex – “showground of the world!”

Where: St Richard's Primary School, Longsight, Manchester

Who: Whole school – Nursery – Year 6

Belle Vue Gardens opened in 1836 in an area of Manchester not far from the city centre and very close to the location of St Richard's Primary today. At first it was simply a public garden, but over time it developed to include a zoo, funfair, circus, dog racing track and speedway stadium. There were hotels, pubs and restaurants, dance halls and nightclubs on site and it was considered Manchester's premier concert venue. In its heyday people from all over Britain flocked to Belle Vue and even today, those over a certain age remember the time they spent there!

The majority of the attractions that made up Belle Vue closed in the 1970s. St Richard's Primary School is only a short walk from the venue but very few of the original features remain and the area has become relatively run down. The Lead Teacher, Lucy Rhodes, set out to provide students with a sound knowledge and understanding of Belle Vue, to develop a range of skills covering different areas of the curriculum, and to instill in the children a sense of pride in the history of where they now live.

All students investigated primary and secondary sources. They used existing oral testimonies and carried out interviews with people from their community. They formulated their own opinions about the impact of Belle Vue on the area and whether or not they thought it should still be open today. The activities were designed to develop academic skills whilst also exploring the history of Belle Vue. Students in Year 6 developed their map work skills, using archive maps and plans of Belle Vue to explore how it grew and designed a Belle Vue heritage trail. Students in Year 5 took part in artefact handling sessions in collaboration with Archives+ at Central Library, Chethams Library and private collector Brian Selby. They gained Arts Award Discover through their local history study.



Intended Outcomes:

- Learn about the history of Belle Vue which, until the 1970's, was located around the corner from the school.
- Investigate memories of local people about Belle Vue and allow students to make their own opinions.
- Develop historical skills as well as provide alternative opportunities for literacy, numeracy, drama & art.
- Create a sense of pride in the history of the area, as home to Belle Vue: Showground of the World!

What we did:

- Investigated primary and secondary sources linking to Belle Vue.
- Interviewed people in the community to find out opinions about Belle Vue. Formulated opinions about the impact of Belle Vue on the area and whether or not they thought it should still be open today.
- Compared past and present in their local area.
- Took part in workshops and activities designed to develop academic skills whilst also exploring the history of Belle Vue.
- Showcased findings in a range of formats including art, drama and dance along with written pieces of work.

Challenges:

- Compiling the resources so that each class teacher felt confident to deliver the lessons took time.
- Tempting to get carried away with arts based activities. There were, however, lots of opportunities for literacy and even numeracy and science based activities.
- There is little left of Belle Vue entertainment complex so teachers and children had to work hard to use the historical documents to imagine and recreate an image of what it was like.

Successes:

“Our Belle Vue Project has been developed and delivered with lots of support from the Historic England, Heritage Schools Programme, and couldn’t have been done without the enthusiasm of staff, pupils and their families. Involving the community, parents and grandparents really enhanced the interest and enjoyment of the children and the contacts and bank of resources we have created will be used for years to come to engage children in our school about the history of the local area.”
Mrs Rhodes History Co-ordinator, St Richards.



“It was great that a history project could also incorporate other areas of the curriculum like geography. The mapping activities were really successful as the children not only enjoyed mapping out their own version of Belle Vue around the school, they also learnt a range of enquiry and map skills. Hands-on activities enabled the children to design, plot and create their own maps and models.”
Mrs Willars, Geography Co-ordinator, St Richards.

“Other schools should learn History like we do because it is exciting, hands on, fun and has helped us learn lots of skills and have pride in where we live.”
Rumai, Year 5 student, St Richards Primary School

“My Granddad worked at the circus and I have talked to him about everything to do with Belle Vue. I have enjoyed sharing my Granddad’s stories with my class and learning lots of facts to talk about with my Granddad.”
Corey, Year 2 student, St Richards Primary School

Resources and web links:

- [Belle Vue Revisited](#)
- Search 'Belle Vue' on [Britain From Above](#)
- Search “Belle Vue” in the top left hand corner of Manchester images page on [Flickr](#)
- [Belle Vue Collection](#) at Chethams Library

Next steps/extension activities:

- The Belle View study will now be repeated each year. As students move through the year groups they will study different aspects of the venue and develop different academic skills
- Children in Year 5 completed “Arts Award Discover2 through their study of Belle View. This is to be extended to other years groups in KS2. There are plans for “Arts Award Discover” to be carried out by lower KS 2 pupils, with “Arts Award Explore” rolled out to older students. See Heritage Schools Vimeo for a film about Belle Vue Arts Award <https://vimeo.com/114865540>