



Historic England

# Education

## Authors:

Ashley Mackenzie-White &  
Martin Phillips

## Heritage Schools Case Study

### Building the London Central Mosque:

*Pupils used the John Laing Photographic Collection and an oral history approach to learn more about a significant place of worship.*

**Where: Gateway Academy, London and London Central Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre**

**Who: Year 6**

The project used images from the [John Laing Photographic Collection](#), held by the [Historic England Archive](#). The project introduced pupils to using archive photographs as primary sources and as a stimulus to generate questions about the construction of London Central Mosque in Regent's Park and the people who were involved in this historically significant construction. Based on the [Heritage Schools aims](#), the aim was to develop a sense of pride and curiosity around a building that many of the pupils have frequently visited. It was also important for pupils to see how the building of the Central Mosque relates to the national story. Pupils examined the photographs as sources of primary evidence about their local area. These visits and questions were filmed to provide a lasting legacy of the project.



The project took place over two days. The pupils explored images from the wider Laing Archive before focusing specifically on photographs of the London Central Mosque taken at different phases of its construction. The first workshop allowed pupils to learn what clues help us date a photograph, how to describe the images in accurate detail and how we make choices about what photographs we would keep when creating an archive. The photographs acted as a stimulus for pupils to devise questions in preparation for a Q & A session with three former Laing employees, all of whom had a different role in the construction of the mosque. Each class had a Q & A session with each of the Laing representatives.

### Intended Outcomes:

- Pupils to understand what a photographic archive is & how it can be used as a source of primary evidence
- Pupils to devise historically-valid questions to build an oral history based on London Central Mosque
- Pupils to develop greater knowledge about a familiar building and gain understanding of how important aspect of their local heritage relates to the national story
- Pupils develop a sense of pride in where they live

### What we did:

- Pupils studied images from the John Laing Photographic Collection and thought about “What makes a photo historical? What do you know/can you infer from a photograph?” Using these images, pupils learned about Laing’s importance in major building projects, across Britain, after 1945.
- Pupils studied images of the London Central Mosque under construction. They were asked to select just three images from the collection and explain their choices, using the same method Historic England had used to select images for the website.
- Pupils were asked to imagine interviewing someone that built the London Central Mosque and what would be interesting/ relevant / open questions? Pupils worked in small groups to prepare questions.
- Pupils interviewed former Laing employees: Thomas Lai, John McGuinness and Roger Bridgeman.
- Pupils and Laing employees went to visit the London Central Mosque where we were greeted by the Director of the Mosque and told a short history of the building and its context as a place of worship.
- Pupils were given a chance to explore the building further and some created their own artistic responses by sketching, taking photographs or using water colour pencils to colour archive images.

### Challenges:

- Taking 90 pupils, and a significant number of adults, required a lot of pre-planning and management.
- The Q & A session with the former Laing employees was planned as a carousel, with each speaker visiting a different classroom after 30 minutes. With time very limited, this posed a logistical challenge but worked remarkably successfully.
- The afternoon guided tours did not take place as had been expected. On the day, the Mosque was visited by 90 Italian Priests, which left us without a tour guide. The BNG Outreach Officer had some activities prepared, just in case, and the Heritage Schools Manager, HE staff and teachers took groups of pupils on short tours to study the architecture more closely.

### Successes:

- Most pupils were impeccably behaved in the Q & A session with the former Laing employees. Their questions were thoughtful and relevant. Most impressive was how they adapted their questions to the different guests and generated supplementary questions based on the answers they were given.
- The three former Laing employees were excellent speakers, each bringing a different perspective and set of experiences to share with the pupils. The students engaged with the Archive and enjoyed seeing a key local building - part of their own community - in a new light.
- The Mosque was flexible in allowing pupils and adults to choose whether to participate in prayers, observe from the back or not take part in that specific part of the visit

### Resources and web links:

- Film – [Breaking New Ground: The Story of London Central Mosque](#)
- Teaching Activity – [What makes a place of worship worth exploring?](#)
- [London Central Mosque Images](#)
- Interviews with Thomas Lai [at the school](#) at [the Mosque](#) and in [the Dome](#)
- [John Laing Photographic Collection](#)
- [Using the John Laing Photographic Collection for oral history projects](#)

### Next steps/extension activities:

- Pupils complete historical accounts of the Mosque, utilising their oral history notes and archive images
- Pupils interview other members of their local community
- Find out more about oral history from the [Oral History Society](#)
- Identify other important local buildings for the school to study – for example Lord’s Cricket Ground
- Find out more about [Local Heritage Curriculum Planning](#)