
Case Study: North Denes Primary School, Great Yarmouth

A Primary School which has been involved with Heritage Schools since the start of the programme

Heritage Schools in Great Yarmouth

This case study provides a longitudinal review of North Denes' involvement with Historic England's Heritage Schools programme, since the programme started in 2012. North Denes Junior School (as it was then, with pupils from Year 3 to Year 6) joined Heritage Schools along with 11 other schools in Great Yarmouth. In the first year of Heritage Schools in Great Yarmouth, the Local Heritage Education Manager (LHEM) worked with the schools to pilot local heritage projects, as this was a new way of working for Historic England and for the schools themselves. This was a learning process for Heritage Schools, to find out what would work successfully, as well as for the schools to find out how they could use their local heritage. The LHEM delivered CPD sessions on how to use local heritage, carried out research for the schools' projects, provided resources, and put schools and heritage organisations in touch with each other. Schools may not know what museums, archives, and other heritage venues have to offer, and the heritage organisations may not know how best to make contact with schools. These introductions by the LHEM have been beneficial to the schools and the heritage organisations.

The LHEM continues to provide CPD (for the History Leads of the pilot schools together, as well as for each individual school), advice, resources and research for the teachers, so that they can continue to extend the use of local heritage in the History curriculum.

North Denes Primary's involvement with Heritage Schools

North Denes has remained involved with Heritage Schools since 2012, and received the Heritage Schools Award in 2016. The school is now a Primary School with 373 pupils from Reception to Year 6. North Denes had amalgamated with another Primary School in 2018 and moved to a new building in 2020. Throughout all these changes, the school has continued to use more local heritage wherever possible across the curriculum and the LHEM has supported the History Lead to do this, providing advice and resources for new heritage projects, and delivering CPD sessions for all the teachers.

As Heritage Schools was a completely new programme, in 2012 the LHEM worked with the participating schools to develop projects with a local heritage focus. North Denes' pilot project was with Year 5, who studied Admiral Nelson (who had lived in Great Yarmouth) and Invaders and Settlers (Anglo Saxons and Vikings) in Norfolk. To study

Nelson, the pupils carried out a series of enquiry questions to explore his significance nationally and locally; used artefact boxes and workshops from the local Nelson Museum; had a visit with artefacts from the Nelson Society. For the Anglo Saxons and Vikings, they looked at Norfolk finds in the online gallery of artefacts from Norwich Castle Museum and took part in a workshop with Norfolk Archaeological Service. The LHEM had liaised between the pilot schools and the heritage organisations, to develop these activities. As part of the Heritage Schools case study carried out with North Denes in 2013, the pupils said that learning about their local heritage made them want to learn more about history, it made events in history easier to understand and it made them feel more pride in where they live.

In 2015 the History Lead from North Denes and teachers from the other pilot schools took part in the creation of a session at the Elizabethan House, based on the story of Cinderella. The children could experience the Victorian kitchen where Cinderella might have worked, and learned dances which she might have danced at the ball. This session is still used by the Elizabethan House today, and the North Denes Reception class attend it.

The LHEM introduced enquiry-based learning to the teachers, which was a new approach for the History Lead:

“Kate taught me about enquiry questions, how key questions drive the learning, for example, how did life change when the Romans arrived? Did they settle in our local area? How did houses change when the Romans arrived?” – History Lead

Schools which joined the Heritage Schools programme when it began in 2012 received a grant from Historic England for three years to cover costs of visiting heritage sites, and for heritage organisations making visits to the school. The History Lead commented that this funding had been so beneficial; many of the North Denes families are not very well off so they are not able to contribute towards visits, etc. The funding enabled pupils to visit places beyond Great Yarmouth, such as Grimes Graves and Gressenhall Workhouse. Unfortunately this funding is no longer available, which restricts North Denes to arranging visits locally because of the high cost of transport.

The school continues to take part in pilots of new sessions at several heritage venues. During 2023/24, Year 5 took part in a session being developed by Time and Tide Museum about the recently-discovered shipwreck of HMS Gloucester which sank off Great Yarmouth in 1682 carrying the future James II. Year 3 have taken part in a session about the Great Fire of Norwich, at the Strangers Hall in Norwich.

Developing a locally-focused curriculum for North Denes

In 2014, the History Lead created a new whole-school History curriculum for North Denes, with advice and research support from the LHEM. Local heritage was included in each topic where appropriate. As part of this new local focus, the Year 6 pupils took part in To End All Wars at the Theatre Royal, Norwich, a drama about soldiers and conscientious objectors in World War 1⁶. The show involved several Heritage Schools working with drama practitioners, and was hosted by actor John Hurt. It gave North Denes pupils an opportunity to work with pupils from other schools:

"It has been an amazing experience being able to connect with other people, doing different things, learning about the past which is amazing – it's something I can get to do which is an honour" - Year 6 pupil

In 2015 North Denes began using a published curriculum scheme for all subjects, to be sure that all the teachers were covering all the necessary skills in the right year groups. Although this was satisfactory for some subjects, the History curriculum was generic and did not provide many opportunities to incorporate local heritage: for example, in the Romans unit there was no scope to find out whether the Romans had been in the vicinity of Great Yarmouth – in fact Burgh Castle Roman Fort is just six miles from the school. In 2020 it was decided to stop using this curriculum scheme, and the History Lead wrote new History units with a local focus for all the year groups, all with an enquiry-led approach. Local heritage is now included in all the other curriculum subjects.

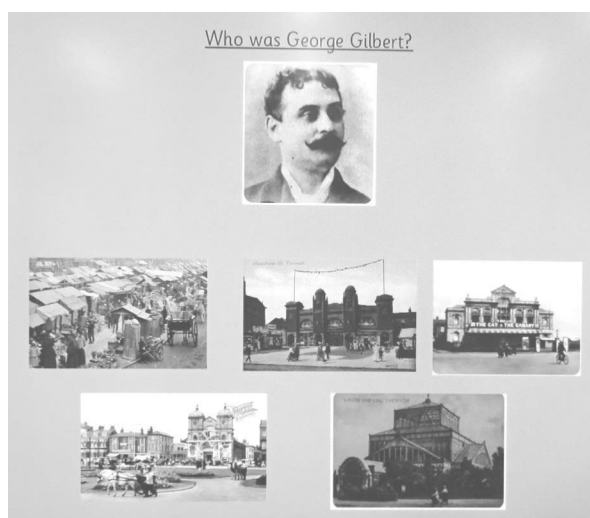
"Each medium-term [History] plan is underpinned by an overarching enquiry question which drives the learning and ensures the teaching is focused with the children working towards a clearly defined and meaningful outcome. The overarching question is broken down into small sub-enquiry questions, giving children a sense of incremental progression and making large chunks of content more manageable" - North Denes History Statement of Intent, Implementation and Impact

Current heritage activities

"Where possible, each unit of work is enriched by a school trip or by a visitor coming into school. This offers a range of rich historical experiences to evoke the children's interest, creating memories and positive attitudes towards the subject" - North Denes History Statement of Intent, Implementation and Impact

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7kRkPvmZshM>

During the case study visit to North Denes, it was possible to visit the classes which were doing their local studies work that day. The Year 1s were learning about circus showman George Gilbert, and the Hippodrome Circus building which he designed in 1903. The LHEM had carried out research about Gilbert and the Hippodrome, and provided a comprehensive PowerPoint resource. One of the Year 1 class teachers, who is an Early Career teacher, and the History Lead both commented on how helpful the LHEM's research is, because she has the skills and more time to carry out the research than the teachers do.



George Gilbert and the Hippodrome; part of the resource provided by the LHEM



Year 3 pupils learn about the herring fishing industry at Time & Tide Museum

Some of the Year 3s who had visited Time & Tide museum and the Lydia Eva steam drifter talked animatedly about what they had learned about the herring fishing industry in Great Yarmouth, and about the hard lives of the fishermen and the herring

girls who travelled the East Coast gutting and packing herrings for export. Fishing had been the main industry in Great Yarmouth until fish stocks declined in the 1960s.

Year 4 were studying the town walls and Rows (narrow passageways with houses on each side) of Great Yarmouth. The pupils visited the walls and Rows, and in class they looked at historic maps and 16th century illustrations of Great Yarmouth to compare features and landmarks with what can be seen today.

When pupils study topics about other civilisations, a connection is made with local heritage. For example, when Year 3 learn about Ancient Egypt, they compare it with the Bronze Age Must Farm in Cambridgeshire, and Year 5 compare the Mayans with the Viking presence in the Great Yarmouth area.

Current CPD for teachers

The LHEM continues to provide CPD sessions for the Great Yarmouth Heritage Schools' network, which teachers from North Denes attend, and whole-school CPD for all the teachers in individual schools. North Denes' most recent whole-school session covered how the area has changed over time using historic maps, starting with Doggerland (Mesolithic and Neolithic periods) up to the present day. Teachers learned the Memory Markers technique: identifying locations on present day maps (such as main roads and churches), then locating them on earlier maps to see how routes, buildings, etc have developed.



Google Satellite view of North Denes, annotated to show key features

"We have already used Memory Markers to see how the seafront has changed. We used to just look at photos, but since the CPD session I have found an 18C map and compared it with 2024 to see how the seafront has changed. [The pupils] enjoyed it" - Year 2 teacher

Year 3 had also used historic maps. While they were walking to the Lydia Eva, the pupils were looking at the buildings they passed:

“One of them spotted a building dated 1910 and said “It would have been on this map, but not on this one.” They were having the conversations as they were walking” - Year 3 teacher

“I used the CPD training for our Geography Field Study week, to see how different types of building on the seafront have changed. The old school building was on the previous map. We went back to before the schools and houses were built – there was just one windmill here in 1907. They were amazed by how much the coastline has changed – it was very straight but the land has built up” - Year 6 teacher

Impacts on pupils of the Heritage Schools programme

“They are more invested in learning about [local heritage] because it’s about them. A lot of them have stories to tell about their families” - Year 6 teacher

Studying their local heritage, by going out of school and in the classroom, has increased the pupils’ attainment and engagement. Visiting historic buildings has made them more aware of their environment, and they will now look up at buildings to see what details are above the ground floor. They know what the places are (or were) used for and can tell their families about them. For example, one of the Year 3 pupils said that he had often walked past the Lydia Eva, but had not known of the vessel’s importance until his class had visited.

Teachers commented that pupils are often more confident to contribute to discussions because they already know a bit about the place and topic which they are studying, because it is local to them. Many of them talk to their families about what they have learned; for example, some families walk their dogs at Burgh Castle Roman Fort but they did not know about its history and importance until the children had learned about it at school.

The pupils enjoy learning more when they can relate to what they are learning about, for example using the school’s location when learning about 6-figure map coordinates; using a map of Norfolk to locate place names of Roman, Anglo-Saxon and Viking settlements; hearing about the Head Teacher’s childhood experiences growing up in Great Yarmouth; learning that the Deputy Head of the school had been killed while serving in World War 2.

The current History units, developed by the History Lead with support from the LHEM, progress from year to year so that the pupils can connect new knowledge with what

they have already learned. For example, Year 6's study of the impacts of the World Wars on Great Yarmouth builds on the Hippodrome unit in Year 1, tourism and the coming of the railways in Year 2 and the fishing industry in Year 3.

"It's like weaving, linking between different years and making it cohesive. It reminds them of what they have learned" - History Lead



Year 6 enquiry: "Which war had the greatest impact on Great Yarmouth?"

Impacts on teachers and the school as a whole

The History Lead commented that before their involvement with Heritage Schools, local heritage had been an add-on rather than integrated into their curriculum. The training has given her the tools to use the local environment and so she could plan History units more easily, and was less reliant on worksheets – the children could find out information for themselves by using resources such as historic maps, photographs and census documents, which is more engaging for them and more effective for their learning.

"We plan and teach much differently now; it's skills-based, linked to knowledge. It's a hundred times better than before we started with Heritage Schools" - History Lead

The LHEM continues to provide support through CPD sessions and researching and creating PowerPoint presentations for the Local Studies topics which the pupils study. This is of great benefit to the teachers because the LHEM already has the contacts, knowledge and research expertise to create these resources, whereas it would take them very much longer to do the research themselves. One of the Early Career teachers said she found it particularly helpful because her degree was not in History,

and during her school-centred initial teacher training she had only had two sessions specifically about teaching History.

Teachers now take a more local view of national topics, such as Boudica leading the Iceni in revolt against the Romans, the impacts of the World Wars or local figures such as Howard Carter, who discovered Tutankhamun's tomb. Local heritage is included in all subjects where possible, such as Geography (the beach, local farming), Science (local species of trees), Art (paintings and drawings of Great Yarmouth) and RE (visiting Great Yarmouth Minster).

During the recent OFSTED inspection, there was a deep dive into History which was very successful. The OFSTED inspector was particularly impressed that the local heritage was used throughout the history curriculum.

Summary

"It used to be fact-giving, not exploring - that's what's different about our teaching now" - Year 3 teacher, who has been at North Denes since before the school started with Heritage Schools

Having visited North Denes for the Heritage Schools case study in 2013, and returning again in 2024, it is clear how effective local heritage learning, and the training, resources and support provided by the LHEM, has been across the curriculum and the impact it has had on the pupils and teachers. In 2013, Year 5 were piloting the Heritage Schools approach by visiting local places, using local resources, and having visits from local experts in their study of Nelson. The three years' grant funding, for visits to heritage sites and for specialists to come into school, enabled North Denes pupils to have experiences which they would not have done otherwise. In 2014 the school created a new History curriculum, with the LHEM's support, which incorporated enquiry-based learning and local heritage throughout.

The school began using a published curriculum for all subjects in 2015, but it only gave a limited opportunity for including local heritage in the History topics. As a result, in 2020 the History Lead created new units for all the History topics in all the Year Groups. The local studies focus on particular aspects of Great Yarmouth, other topics (such as the World Wars) link the local with the national and international, and topics focusing on other civilisations (such as Ancient Egypt) compare what was happening at that time in the local area. Now, local heritage is incorporated wherever possible into other curriculum subjects.

The current teachers all endorsed the value of the training, resources and support provided by the LHEM. Some of the teachers without a History background said that they would find it very difficult, and very time-consuming, to carry out the necessary

research themselves. All the teachers have found that the techniques they have learned for using local heritage across the curriculum have transformed their teaching, and thus the pupils' learning.