

Case study: “What can Liverpool’s buildings tell us about the city’s links with the British Empire?”

Developing a new teaching resource for KS2 about the British Empire

Background to creating “What can Liverpool’s buildings tell us about the city’s links with the British Empire?”

This resource “What can Liverpool’s buildings tell us about the city’s links with the British Empire?” has been created as a partnership between Heritage Schools and Dr Jody Crutchley, (Senior Lecturer in Modern History, Liverpool Hope University), Ailsa Fidler (Senior Lecturer in Primary Education, Liverpool John Moore’s University; formerly at Liverpool Hope University) and the International Slavery Museum. The team also consulted with a number of other organisations and individuals to ensure the content, language and tone was appropriate for Key Stage 2 pupils.

Dr Jody Crutchley had created a walk for MA History students around historic buildings in Liverpool, revealing the city’s links with the British Empire and its connections with the transatlantic slave trade. Ailsa Fidler approached Dr Jody Crutchley, and suggested that they work together to recontextualise academic knowledge for primary school pupils. The Heritage Schools Local Heritage Education Manager (LHEM) for the North West was already providing training for Ailsa Fidler’s BA and PGCE students in how to use local heritage in their teaching. Ailsa contacted the LHEM for the NW, who could see the value of a resource for Liverpool’s primary pupils which helped them to understand a globally significant topic by focusing on its impact on their local area, and thus the partnership was formed to create “What can Liverpool’s buildings tell us about the city’s links with the British Empire?”, funded by Heritage Schools.

During 2021, Dr Jody Crutchley led workshops at Liverpool Hope University where second year BA Education, MA History students, a History PhD student and various experts and specialists met to create and develop the walk. The students selected sites, from Dr Jody Crutchley’s MA walk, which would be the most accessible for Key Stage 2 pupils with regard to content, walking distance and safe places where a class of children could gather to look at and talk about the building or monument. They also explored the ways in which this content linked to the KS2 curriculum and learning objectives. After the initial eighteen months of the project’s design phase, teacher focus groups were convened by Ailsa Fidler and led by her and Dr Jody Crutchley. The teachers advised on the content and the teachers’ script which provides an essential part of the resource, as the British Empire can be a complex and challenging topic to deliver. The final resources were designed and created between the LHEM, Dr Jody Crutchley and Ailsa Fidler, with the help of a graphic designer to produce the accompanying walk hand-out and classroom cut-outs. Once finalised, the content was then reviewed by staff at the International Slavery Museum and the Director of

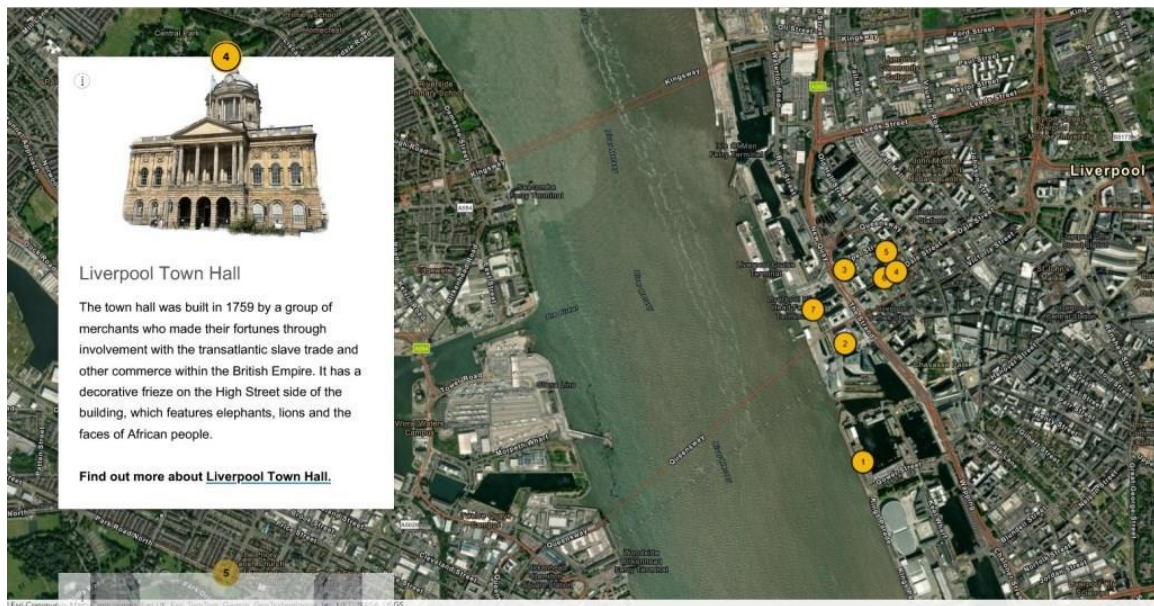
Diversity and Inclusion at Wolverhampton University, who knows Liverpool well. Their expertise in this subject ensured that the content would be correct and appropriately presented. A group of fifteen Year 5 children from Smithdown Primary School in Liverpool piloted the walk.

The resource is available at <https://historicengland.org.uk/education/schools-resources/teaching-activities/liverpool-buildings-empire/> . It comprises a walk route "We Need to Walk about Empire", teacher's script and pupils' worksheet looking at seven buildings and monuments which highlight Liverpool's role in the British Empire and show the impact which the Empire has had on the city. There is a digital StoryMap version of the walk, created by the LHEM, which can be used in the classroom in addition to, or instead of, doing the walk on foot. There are pre-visit, post-visit and extension activities too. It was important that the resources supported teachers in setting the trail in context and allowing pupils to explore and understand the concept of empire before they went on the trail. Equally it was fundamental that the resource provided space for, and encouraged teachers and their pupils to, reflect on, and deepen, their learning after they had experienced the trail.

The resource was launched at the Schools History Project conference in Leeds in July 2024, with a CPD session to find out how best to use it. This was followed by an online launch event in September 2024 attended by 15 primary teachers from Liverpool and the surrounding area, and a further in-person CPD day was held in Liverpool in July 2025, which was attended by 11 primary teachers. The day comprised a guided walk around the sites and monuments included in the tour, led by Dr Crutchley. The LHEM presented an introduction to the broader history and importance of the project, and demonstrated the online resources. Up to the end of September 2025, the resource landing page on the Historic England website had been viewed 393 times.

The online StoryMap

The interactive online ArcGIS StoryMap version of "We Need to Walk about Empire", funded by Heritage Schools and designed by the LHEM, comprises the route of the walk, with photographs and information about each of the buildings and monuments. Classes can use the StoryMap before and after doing the walk, or by itself if they cannot do the walk on foot. It enables schools elsewhere in the country, or schools in Liverpool for whom it is impracticable to do the walk on foot, to use the resource effectively. Using the StoryMap gives pupils a new experience in digital skills, using digital mapping to explore Liverpool and find out locations and information about buildings which were significant in the city's connection with the British Empire. The content can be adapted for SEND pupils according to their needs, to make it easily accessible for them.



Screenshot of part of the “We Need to Walk about Empire” StoryMap

“The StoryMap is just brilliant. It allows the children to work on it pre- or post-visit. Now that it includes recordings of the BEd students reading the text, it reduces reading barriers. So the StoryMap is vital to make sure that [the resource] has an impact on a wider scale than just doing a walking tour. I don’t think [the resource] would be so successful without it” – Ailsa Fidler

Impacts of “What can Liverpool’s buildings tell us about the city’s links with the British Empire?” on the project partners

Dr Jody Crutchley commented that she would have been unable to make her original research into a resource suitable for Primary pupils, and have it promoted to schools, without the partnership with Heritage Schools. In addition to the funding from Heritage Schools, the LHEM helped to lead the project, designed the StoryMap, provided the graphic designer, promoted the resource to schools and delivered CPD for teachers so that they could use the resource effectively.

“The benefit for me is that Historic England is a really well-respected organisation and it has such good contacts. Loads of teachers are involved, Primary teachers who are interested in History which is a hard demographic to get to if you are trying to do it yourself” – Dr Jody Crutchley

As the Primary History Subject Lead at Liverpool John Moore’s University, Ailsa Fidler uses the resource in some of her teaching sessions. Having seen the effectiveness of a walking tour as a pedagogical method, she now encourages her students to consider using walking tours to teach other History topics. She plans to write an article about the resource for Primary History (the Historical Association Journal), and to work with another academic Historian to develop a walking tour about the Irish heritage of

Liverpool. Thus the original research behind Liverpool's buildings and their connection with the British Empire, and the methodology of the walking tour, will reach a very wide audience of teachers who can use it to enhance their teaching practice, and it will further raise the profile of Heritage Schools.

The International Slavery Museum reviewed the content of the resource before it was launched. When the museum re-opens after redevelopment, scheduled for 2028, it will host QR codes which link to the resource so that visitors to the museum can use the walking tour too, further increasing the reach of the resource beyond schools to adults and families.

Impacts of "What can Liverpool's buildings tell us about the city's links with the British Empire?" on the University students involved in its development

All the BA and PGCE students who worked on the resource now know how to design a safe walking tour for their pupils, and how to make topics more accessible to pupils. They have increased their knowledge of Liverpool, the British Empire and the transatlantic slave trade and how to deliver this to pupils in an appropriate way. They will be able to use this knowledge and skills throughout their teaching career. In addition, the PhD student has developed his skills in recontextualising academic knowledge for Primary students, which he will also be able to use in his future teaching career.

One of the current second year BA(Hons) Primary Education students at Liverpool John Moore's University (not one who had worked on developing the resource) used "We Need to Walk about Empire" for her assignment about teaching a Foundation subject. Whilst on teaching placement, she had used the walk with her pupils. This indicates that the resource is starting to be used successfully in local schools.

Teachers' responses to the CPD day

11 teachers attended the CPD day in July 2025, and provided feedback on the walk and the training. All the teachers said their confidence in teaching about the British Empire had increased, and they are now confident or very confident to do so. They said that the resource fitted well or very well into their curriculum and that they were very likely to use it with their pupils. They also praised the pre- and post-visit activities, and that the whole resource is easy to use for teachers who are not History specialists.

"I feel more confident in teaching a sensitive topic in a child-friendly / appropriate manner" – Primary teacher

"Great to have well thought out resources which can be used 'off the peg' for staff who aren't as informed but will accompany the trip" – Primary teacher

"This resource would really support the children's learning about British Empire – they would make clear links between their home city and the history in school. They'd gain a sense of belonging from this!!" – Primary teacher

Teachers commented that the walk and StoryMap would introduce the pupils to places they were not already familiar with:

"I think they will be aware of some of these places in their city, but not all. They will not be aware of the significance of the places and how they were important in Liverpool's history" – Primary teacher

Great Crosby Catholic Primary School uses "What can Liverpool's buildings tell us about the city's links with the British Empire?"

Great Crosby Catholic Primary School is a large four-form entry school with 748 pupils. Less than 10% of pupils are eligible for Pupil Premium and fewer than 10 children have English as an additional language. The school has an ITT link with Liverpool John Moore's University, and so the History Lead was invited to contribute, along with teachers from some other schools, to the development of the resource to ensure it was pitched at an appropriate level for Primary pupils. The History Lead had previously attended a CPD session about the resource, delivered by the LHEM, and she passed this knowledge on to her colleagues, who are not History specialists. This gave them the confidence to use the resource in their teaching.

As there are four classes in Year 6, it was not possible to take all of them into Liverpool to do the walk in person, so they used the StoryMap and the pre- and post-visit activities in the classroom. Letters were sent to the parents, along with the walk map and teachers' trail script, encouraging them to take their children to do the walk in Liverpool, and five or six children in each class did this. This meant that their parents and siblings also experienced and learned from the walk, thus further increasing its reach and their knowledge and understanding of Liverpool and the British Empire. The teacher said that feedback from the parents who did the walk with their children was very positive regarding the content and presentation of the walk.

Impacts on the Great Crosby Catholic Primary School pupils

The pupils gained a great deal of knowledge and understanding about the British Empire, the transatlantic slave trade and the city of Liverpool. The History Lead commented that the British Empire and the transatlantic slave trade are quite challenging concepts to teach, and that the pre-visit activities in the resource were very helpful in providing a foundation of knowledge. Using the StoryMap was very effective, and a new learning experience for the pupils. They looked at two or three sites per lesson so that they could study the buildings and monuments in depth. Each child

chose a building or monument to become an expert in, and wrote about it for the classroom display.



Year 6's display about buildings and monuments in "We Need to Walk about Empire"

The History Lead considered that the resource has given the pupils a wealth of knowledge about the British Empire, and linking it to their city gives additional impact for them. It has given the pupils a more nuanced view of Liverpool; they are proud of the city and its buildings, but now they know that some of them were funded by the profits of the transatlantic slave trade.

"They were shocked by the transatlantic slave trade. But you're able to have those discussions about whether [statues] are removed or not; I really like that we can have those discussions especially with Year 6s, and you hope that they take that forward into Secondary school and really start to think about it. Each year is bringing these challenges of engagement and connection, they're being lost to their phones and the power of social media. It's such a crucial thing to connect them to their community in their own behaviour, in their own lives and their choices, so this is part of our general work to do that, because at the end of the day you're trying to make them good citizens" – History Lead

One of the pupils did the walk with her family during October half term. During the discussion for this case study the following July, she remembered the visit clearly. She talked about the buildings they had visited and the value of using the StoryMap in class before seeing the buildings in real life, and having the trail script on the walk. Talking about the carvings representing aspects of the British Empire on some of the buildings, such as Liverpool Town Hall, she said:

"It was really interesting because if you didn't know anything about them and you just looked at them, you really wouldn't realise how much it meant" – Year 6 pupil

Having used "What can Liverpool's buildings tell us about the city's links with the British Empire?" successfully this year, the school will continue to use the resource for the Year 6 classes in the future.

Summary

This project would not have been achieved without the partnership between Heritage Schools, Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool John Moore's University and the International Slavery Museum. All the partners, including the University students, have benefitted from creating this resource and will be able to use the knowledge and skills they have gained in their future teaching careers.

Teaching about the British Empire and the transatlantic slave trade can be challenging for teachers and pupils. Teachers can be sure that they can use this Heritage Schools resource with confidence because it is based on rigorous academic research, and has been designed to be appropriate and accessible for Primary pupils.