

Case Study: St John's Primary School, Rishworth, West Yorkshire

A school using their local history as a teaching resource to enthuse their pupils

Background

Rishworth is a small village, situated 7 miles from Halifax in the Calder Valley. For several centuries the area was important for the production of wool cloth, as evidenced by the Grade I Listed Piece Hall, built in 1779 and used for trading cloth produced on handlooms prior to the Industrial Revolution.

In the 19th century, the whole area saw an explosion of water-powered mills, changing the landscape as well as social life and the local economy. The Calder Valley became a centre for cloth production, with waterwheels and canals playing crucial roles in power and transport. The area was at the heart of the Industrial Revolution.

The Primary School is in a small picturesque village but even here there is a large Victorian mill (Rishworth New Mill), now converted into apartments.

The school has 148 pupils on roll, aged 4 to 11 years old, in five classes, two in EYFS & Key Stage 1 and three in Key Stage 2.

The school became involved in the Heritage Schools Programme as it is located close to Historic England's High Street Heritage Action Zone in Sowerby Bridge. As part of this initiative the Local Heritage Education Manager (LHEM) from Historic England delivered a programme of CPD teacher training events at and in partnership with the Calderdale Industrial Museum in Halifax, which the school attended.

From attending this CPD training, the school reviewed and has significantly altered its schemes of work to have a much greater focus on local history. St John's Primary School has recently been awarded the Heritage Schools Award from Historic England in recognition of the work they have put into enriching their history curriculum, by exploring, embedding and celebrating local history throughout all of their Key Stages.

Involvement with Heritage Schools

Initial CPD training provided new or different ways to utilise the heritage around the school. Training was provided on using old maps (provided by Historic England), doing local heritage walks, and accessing historical resources to help enquiry based lessons.

"It was a brilliant training course, showing us different ways of how we could use our local heritage. Things I didn't even know" – history co-ordinator

Staff at the school have gone on to attend other Heritage Schools teacher training sessions put on for the local cluster of schools covering curriculum planning, embedding local heritage into schemes of work, and subject specific workshops on the Stone Age, Romans, and Saxons.

The school has developed its history curriculum to use their locality and local heritage much more. Following the CPD training, more local heritage elements have been added into their history schemes of work, changing these to include where possible a more local focus as a way into introducing national historical topics.

"It has just lifted history, really. It's made it so personal to the children, but still ticking all those national curriculum objectives off" – history co-ordinator

The CPD training provided ideas, resources, and the impetus to enhance the existing history curriculum by adding in a greater use of what is local and on the doorstep.

Relevant history topics such as the Victorians now start with a local focus, before expanding to a national or global context, providing a relatable foundation for pupils.

At Key Stage 1, pupils investigate what their area looked like in the past, including using the school building itself, as well as Rishworth Mill and the Piece Hall as evidence.

At Key Stage 2, they study Halifax with a focus on significant local historical events, people, and places, its economic development, and how the area has changed over time. The focus is on answering a number of enquiry based questions.

The school actively engages with local heritage sites to enrich their pupils' educational experiences and deepen their understanding of history. By organizing visits to significant sites like the Piece Hall and the Calderdale Industrial Museum, the school provides pupils with direct insights into the region's rich industrial past. Visits enable pupils to visualise the living and working conditions of the Victorian era, fostering a connection to the lives of their predecessors.

Since being involved with Heritage Schools, St John's Primary has made greater use of the built heritage around the school, taking pupils to the Piece Hall, the Calderdale Industrial Museum and having visitors in to talk about Wainhouse Tower (a Grade II Listed building and the tallest folly in the world).

Having old maps, old photographs, and information provided by the LHEM has helped free up time for teachers to think about how best to use these resources with their pupils, rather than spending time trying to source these themselves. The LHEM continues to be a resource the school uses, providing additional resources and answering questions teachers may have.

Visits to the Piece Hall and Calderdale Industrial Museum, who themselves have worked with Heritage Schools to develop their education programme has provided impactful, interactive activities to bring to life what the local area was once like. Pupils learn about the transformation of Halifax from a rural area with fields to an industrial hub with mills and factories. The museum visit provides a tangible and immersive way to understand this historical change.



Key Stage 2 pupils visiting the Piece Hall and Calderdale Industrial Museum in Halifax learning about the industrial revolution through interactive experiences



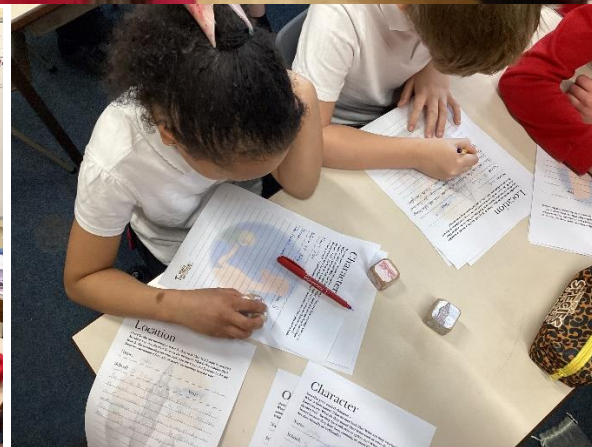
Reception & Year 1 learning about life living and working in a 18th Century weavers cottage – seeing how wool was teased and woven before mills were built



Key Stage 2 experiencing their local heritage (from school's Facebook page)

Studying local heritage has provided a vehicle to cover not just history but also other subjects such as English, art, and geography.

Along with school trips to explore local heritage, for World Book Day the school invited in Sarah Stone, author of *The Dragons of Wainhouse Tower*, who read parts of her book in assembly and then delivered some inspiring writing workshops for Key Stage 2, including using story dice to help develop their stories. Wainhouse Tower is a local landmark which the pupils have studied in their history lessons.



The author Sarah Stone working with pupils

The visit led to an unexpected opportunity for the school's Choir Club being asked to record the theme tune for the audio version of Sarah Stone's book *Dragons of Wainhouse Tower*.

Impact of Heritage Schools

Involvement with Heritage Schools and the CPD training provided has facilitated an evolution in the school's schemes of work for history, with a local heritage focus running throughout Key Stage 1 & 2.

Rather than downloading generic history resources from places such as Twinkl, access to the regional Local Heritage Education Manager from Historic England has provided access to written, visual, and physical resources relevant to the school's locality, along with training on how these can be used, making the school's curriculum really bespoke.

"I did a brilliant training course, showing us different ways we could use our local heritage. Things I didn't even know about such as the Stone Age stone circle that we have up in Rishworth. It's really lifted history, made it so personal to the children but still ticking all those national curriculum objectives off. It makes it so personal to them, they can go to all these places" – history co-ordinator

Teachers have responded well to changing schemes of work and adding in a much more local lens to how they teach history in the school, especially as it has come with a wealth of high quality resources they can use.

"They've really enjoyed it because I think it just brings more engagement when it's so real and you can see it and we can go around it" – history co-ordinator

Using historical buildings and local places known to the pupils has helped make lessons more relatable and therefore meaningful.

"Making their history learning more personal, it's more understandable for them. They can definitely get more out of topics. They're really enjoying being able to talk about where they live ... it's making them more aware of what we have around us and how it's changed" – history co-ordinator

"The children have got loads more out of it. I think when you talk about things they know, they know what it is you're talking about. They're more engaged so the quality of their work I think has been a lot better" – Key Stage 2 teacher

Using the heritage around the school to introduce topics such as the Victorians has helped make history more engaging and relevant for pupils. Working with Heritage Schools has enabled pupils to study and better appreciate the historical importance of their surroundings, increasing their knowledge, understanding, and sense of pride in their local area.

"The lessons are really fun. Being born in a place where such amazing things happen. I feel like it is fun to know" – Year 6 pupil

"It is good to know what has happened in other places, but it's just nicer to know that you're living in a place where things have happened that are really cool" – Year 6 pupil

Using local places and references pupils know or recognise has helped them better picture the past.

"It's very much an abstract concept, the Industrial Revolution. Whereas if it's taught through the local area that they've seen and they know about, it makes it a bit easier for them to kind of link things together" – Key stage 2 teacher

Learning about heritage buildings nearby has helped pupils appreciate them and their relevance more. The interactive, sensory nature of out-of-school visits, in particular, has helped pupils remember details and understand concepts more effectively.

"Wainhouse Tower, I just thought it was something that they made light up for no reason but now I realised that it's like something special" – Year 6 pupil

"A lot of them [pupils] have gone to the Piece Hall without actually realising what it used to be used for. Now they have a better understanding of why this place is important" – Key Stage 2 teacher

Many pupils had previously visited the Piece Hall with their family for events or shopping but few really knew the history or importance of the building. Going there, or to other local places, on a school visit has helped them better understand this, increasing their cultural capital, and showing the educational value of a well curated school trip. Visits to local historical sites have provided a deeper understanding of their significance, transforming familiar places into meaningful landmarks.

"When you go to the Piece Hall with your family, you go there to shop and stuff but then when we went with school, it felt more like you were learning more. It felt like you were enjoying every little thing about the Piece Hall and you were thinking about it more ... when you go you with school they tell you all this cool, interesting information. You just think so much more about it" – Year 6 pupil

"My mum went on the trip ... she's never known any of these things about it and she's lived so close to it like her whole life and it was just quite surprising to her" – Year 6 pupil

"The mill that's in our local area is now an apartment block. So for them to understand what happened in there, they need to come and experience it here [interactive experiences at the Industrial Museum]. They all know the Piece Hall, but they know it as a concert venue and a place to come for a nice meal" – Key Stage 1 teacher

St. John's Primary has received the Heritage Schools Award for embracing using local heritage as a teaching resource throughout all key stages.

Summary

The Heritage Schools programme helps link schools with local heritage providers and resources such as museums and school visitors, which in turn provides unique opportunity for pupils to experience their local heritage firsthand, inside and outside of the classroom.

Involvement in Heritage Schools is seen as very positive, with success attributed to the effective CPD training received, the provision of excellent tailored resources, the support of the LHEM and working with local heritage providers. The enthusiasm of both teachers and pupils in using local heritage is clear to see.

The focus on their own very local history has made the pupils' learning more relatable, personal, and meaningful, increasing their engagement and enjoyment. Local history and heritage is woven into each Year Group so pupils' knowledge builds as they progress through the school.

Pupils have first to be introduced to and understand what makes their local area different or special before they can appreciate the historical significance of their surroundings, and have pride in where they come from. Being involved with Heritage Schools has helped to enable this to happen.