

# The old school

*A study of an Oxfordshire village school, 1858 to 1949, now a private house, a new school having been built in 1966 about 300 yards away from the original site.*

The old school, flint walled, slate roofed, with tall narrow arched windows, catered for all village children and was the only form of schooling for the vast majority of them. It was a National School originally and the church influence was maintained throughout. The demise of the school was due to the dilapidated state of the buildings (which nevertheless are still standing!) and a decline in the number of school-age children. The gradual decrease was due to the return of evacuated children to London and also the division of the large landed estates which had provided the main source of employment and housing for the villagers. In the 1960's new estates of houses were built, due to high employment prospects in nearby towns, and the school situation was reversed. A new county primary school opened in 1966.

Why choose a school study for a topic? Firstly because children have an enduring curiosity about the lives of other children, especially when visitors to the present school can describe their own school days to our children and exchange views or make comparisons.

Secondly, information about schools is usually obtainable, both locally and at Record Offices. One of our 'finds' was an old tin box, which held building extension plans dated 1871, Teacher's Agreements, H.M.I. Reports and many bills, invoices and miscellaneous correspondence. We also had our Victorian Log Book annotated and published in book form. The whole project presented a wonderful opportunity to use first hand evidence in a discerning manner.



*Studying the site at the old school.*

Thirdly, thanks to the generosity of the present owners, the old school site was laid open to us to visit as many times as we liked. The smallness of the playgrounds and separate entrances for boys and girls provoked comment, and the close proximity of a high chalk cliff meant that one classroom was badly illuminated even with candle or gas light (so the log book describes).

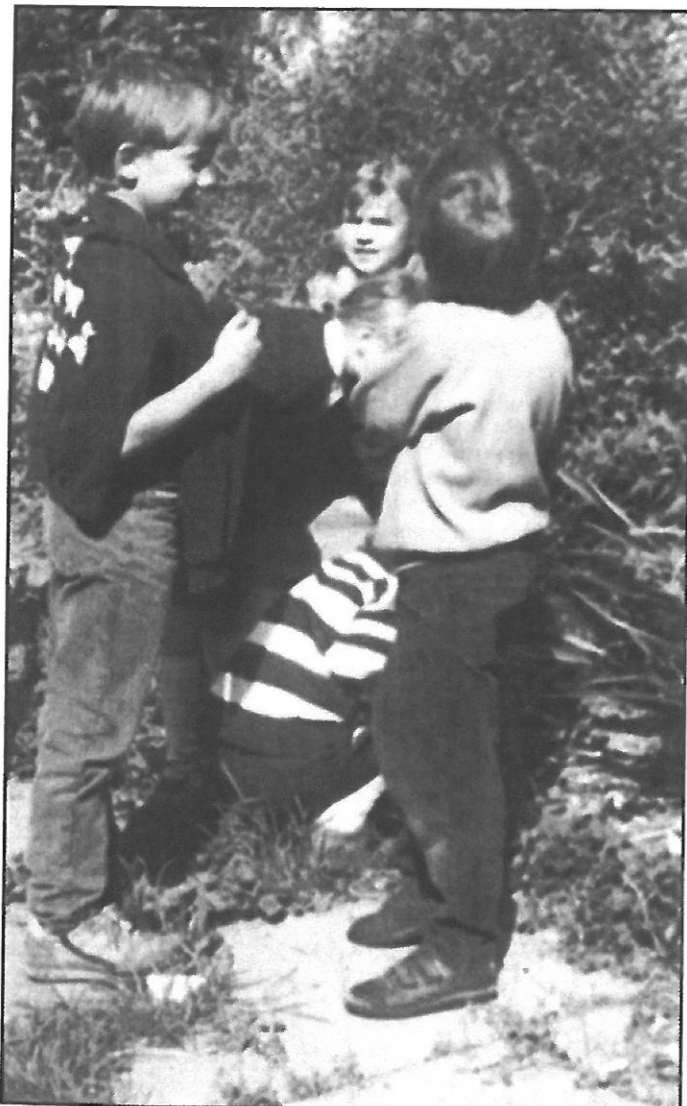
The aims of the project were centred around a desire to promote in children a deeper understanding of the way their village functioned. Our visitors lingered on the range of social activities in pre-War years; the regatta, football, Church Lads, Women's Friendly Society... now regarded as anachronisms. Most villagers now seek both work and entertainment outside the village. Some things stay the same; the river, bridle paths, woodland walks, but many of the children at the school are unfamiliar with the immediate environment. We aim to encourage children to become active participants in learning about their village, their surroundings, hopefully to want to retain what is left of the original village spirit. We have a commitment to developing a sense of belonging to a place, and feeling responsible for it. The old school may have become an anachronism, but the new school must become part of the village.

The objects of the study were to involve whatever curriculum areas were appropriate without losing sight of the original aim. Although guidelines were followed fairly closely, room was left for the unexpected discovery or focus of interest. We were presented with old school uniforms, pens, ink wells, books, games and a bell from various other schools, which enabled us to widen the topic and show that Whitchurch School was not unique, and a picture could be built up of rural education and also a contrasting lifestyle to the present generation. Many social factors came into the picture, particularly from Victorian times, such as the prevalence of illness and disease among children; the limited range of their learning and the overall level of poverty.

In conclusion, the objects were fulfilled to a large extent and a file of maths, art and various forms of writing has been built up. Computer programming of information was begun, and recordings kept of our visitors' comments for the archives. Whether the original aim was reached, only time can tell.

In spite of being divided into a private residence, the old school is recognizable immediately for what it was. Physically it was possible for the children to take a step back in time. I found it very easy to imagine the boys throwing their caps around in the tiny playground, and the girls chanting skipping songs in theirs. One can almost hear the school bell summoning them in...

Lesley Crimp, Whitchurch Primary School.



*Lesley Crimp*



## Information for Teachers



English Heritage has over 350 monuments and historic buildings spread throughout England. Educational visits to any of these sites are absolutely free provided you book the visit in advance.

You will want to construct your visit in your own way — and to help you do this an exploratory visit is also free.

As you will appreciate, the preparation for visits, the activities that take place on the visit, and subsequent follow-up have to be planned carefully.

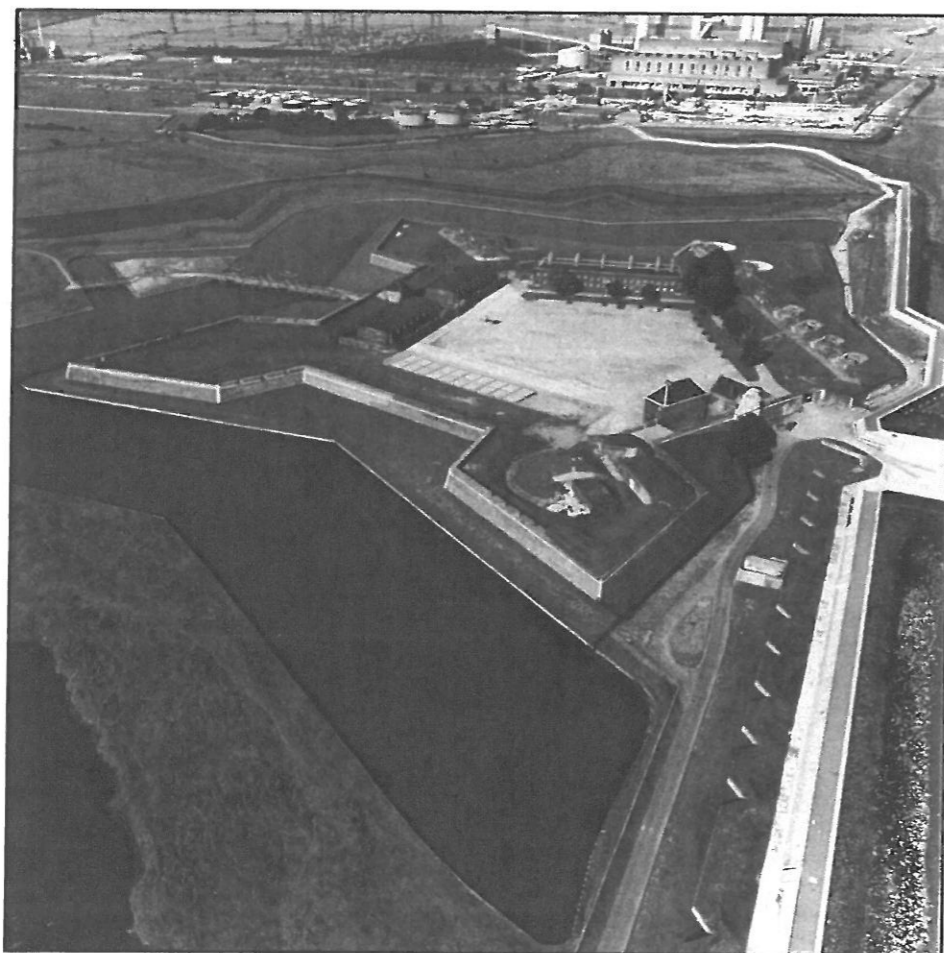
The Education Service at English Heritage has a staff of advisers who have worked in schools and who will help wherever possible.

We provide a range of resources for teachers and pupils to use on the site and in the classroom — videos and teachers' packs for various sites, for example.

The Education Service arranges courses for teachers about our sites and about using the historic environment. We also initiate a number of drama and role-play events each year.

Some monuments have a room set aside for schools: a base for exploring the site and for using the resources in them to help you understand the site and to enjoy it.

...so, if you have any enquiries, please write to us. We want to help and to discuss ideas — yours and ours.



Tilbury Fort, Essex: originally part of Henry VIII's coastal defences remodelled in the 17th century.  
OVERLEAF: Osborne House, Isle of Wight: Queen Victoria pays a visit.



Minster Lovell Hall, Oxfordshire: learning in the 15th century.

## Introducing the Education Service

One of the aims of English Heritage is to promote wider knowledge and enjoyment of England's heritage of ancient monuments and historic buildings. To help teachers at all levels in education make better use of the historic environment English Heritage has set up an Education Service.

The Education Service comprises a central staff and Regional Education Officers whose job is to provide a variety of services for education. The education staff have wide experience in schools, teacher training, archaeology and museums.

English Heritage has a very wide range of monuments in its care and has some responsibility for much of the archaeological and historic environment through the laws relating to ancient monuments and historic buildings. It also gives considerable grants each year for rescue archaeology and for the



Kirby Hall, Northamptonshire: a role-play event for special needs pupils based in the 16th century.





Maiden Castle, Dorset: the best example of an iron age fortified town in Britain.

conservation of listed buildings. Over 350 monuments in the care of English Heritage are open to the public, and of course to school parties.

Educational visits to any of our monuments are absolutely free. Enclosed with this booklet is an application form which gives details of this facility. You might also like to know that you may have a free exploratory visit to the site: it will help you plan your visit much better.

At some of our monuments we have provided an Education Room. These rooms can be used as a base for exploring and studying the monument but they are also being equipped with a range of resources. You will find further details in

this booklet. Also enclosed here are some suggestions for planning your visit.

One of the most important aspects of the work of the Education Service staff is to arrange, and teach, courses for teachers. Some are residential like the annual five-day course we run jointly with the Department of Education and Science. Many are one-day or linked day-schools on a variety of themes: using the historic environment, a detailed look at a particular site, planning a visit, historical cookery, practical on-site work, and many others.

We also produce a number of publications especially for teachers and their pupils. These include information leaflets and teachers' packs about particular monuments and guides to

aspects of using sites, such as our book on drama and role-play called *Living History*. As well as printed material, we also produce audio-visual resources especially for children and teachers. A full list of our publications is available on request.

The Education Service aims to provide teachers with as much help as possible; for any other information or enquiries, please write to us:

English Heritage  
Education Service  
Keysign House  
429 Oxford Street  
London W1R 2HD  
01-355 1303 Ext 230

## Planning a visit: Preparation

First of all, decide why you want to make a site visit. Write down your aims. What are your educational objectives? Do you intend your pupils to develop skills or ideas or to acquire information or do you have a combination of these in mind?

### Skills

A site visit might call upon the following skills:

- Observation and recording
- Comparison and deduction
- Reading, writing and comprehension
- Measuring and estimating
- Map and plan reading
- Number and scientific skills
- Social skills, sharing and communicating
- Have you taught your class the

necessary skills? The visual skills required on a site visit are often taken for granted but these need teaching just as much as do literary ones. Don't wait until you are at the site. Practise close observation in the classroom. Here is a game to develop both observation and the ability to categorise information.

### Kim's Game

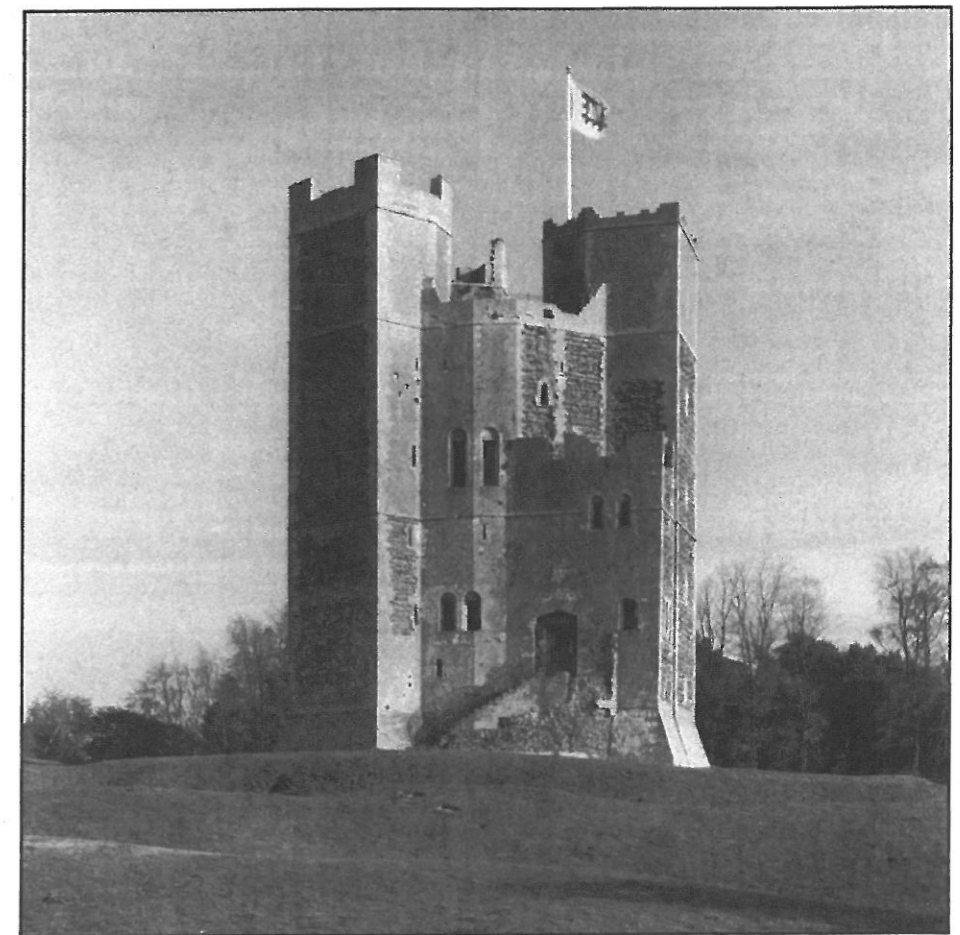
Put a number of objects on a tray. Let pupils look at it for a minute. Cover the tray. Pupils write down as many objects as they can remember. Now vary the game. Pupils look again but this time they must list all smooth objects or all tools, or all things made from metal.

Does your class know how to record what they see? Drawing is a valuable method of recording. Distinguish between drawing for recording and drawing for artistic expression. Emphasise that for recording, accuracy is important. Insist on careful work and avoid relegating drawing to a mere time-filling activity. Here is an exercise to underline to children the value of careful observation as an aid to drawing and drawing as an aid to observation.

### Bicycle Game

Ask the children to draw a bicycle from memory. Then ask them to draw a bicycle from observation. Compare the results. Which bicycle would work?

Have you taught your class to label their drawings? Choosing the salient features requires quite sophisticated powers of categorisation and a precise vocabulary. Try to get the class to understand that naming something alone is not sufficient in itself; labels can also show materials, size, method of construction and state of repair. Practise by drawing some classroom objects and labelling them.



Orford Castle, Suffolk: the keep and earthworks of this royal castle of the 12th century remain.

