Last year English Heritage opened the 13th Century French wine merchant's house at 58 French Street. Now Southampton City Museums' Education Service have begun to use it as a setting for workshops for children.

As one of the Museums' teachers I wanted to take children's workshops on from the museums to the Medieval Merchant's House to let children see artefacts in our own Museum of Archaeology — and then to understand their place in a wealthy medieval merchant's house.

In medieval times rich merchants and their families (both men and women) lived in stone houses close to the lively port. Their wealth was made by exporting wool and cloth, and importing wine. Southampton was an international trading centre as the artefacts in our museums show. We have glass from Venice, pottery from France and an illustrated trading map (based on contemporary documents), showing imports from various countries of Europe; such as wax, leather and spices — brought into the port by the medieval ships called cogs. Much of the glass and pottery on display was excavated from a merchant's house between the Museum of Archaeology and 58 French Street, and this site is also available for school visits.

Aware that Southampton teachers hardly knew that the Merchant's House existed (at the time of its opening in the summer of 1988) I re-launched our usual workshop in God's House Tower Museum — 'Living In A Medieval Town' and then added a visit to the Medieval Merchant's House as part of the programme.
TEACHERS COURSES

Interpreting the Historic House
English Heritage is running a series of courses on the educational use of the historic house. They are intended to be useful to both teachers and people who work at sites and museums and they will introduce different approaches to helping people understand houses.

Screen Printing
12 October 1989, Boscoed House, Shropshire
18 October 1989, Rangers House, Blackheath, London SE10
Tutor: Nick Reading

Using Documents
17 October 1989, Marble Hill House, Twickenham
Tutors: Julius Bryant and Gail Durbin.

The Concept Keyboard
15 November 1989, Rangers House, Blackheath, London SE10
Tutors: Sue Bennett and Gail Durbin.

Using Portraits
17 November 1989, Rangers House, Blackheath, London SE10
Tutor: Susan Morris
Courses run from 10 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. You may book a single course or several. They are free but there will be a charge for materials for the screen printing course.

New developments at Birdoswald Roman Fort

As part of a teaching secondment arranged between English Heritage and Cumbria LEA, Diane Mortimer is working with schools to exploit fully the potential of Roman sites in the county.

Activity is especially focusing on Birdoswald Roman Fort, a major site on Hadrian's Wall dramatically situated above the Irthing Gorge near Brampton. Here new visitor facilities are being developed between the County Council and English Heritage, who have guardianship of the external walls. One of the best preserved length of Hadrian's Wall leads from the Fort to a milecastle overlooking the Irthing and the Roman bridge at Willowford.

Sections of the Turf Wall, the Vallum and several turrets can be examined in the immediate vicinity, and nearby Lanercost Priory was part-built of re-used Roman stone. The third season of the current excavations being carried out by English Heritage has started and continues until 8 September. An impressive granary, now consolidated, has been uncovered; a second granary, the fort's main road and west gate will be further examined.

Facilities available this year include an interpretation display which gives an introduction to the Roman phases of the site, and also the medieval and later history. The farmhouse was rebuilt to include a Gothic pele tower by a Victorian farmer who hired archaeologists to uncover romantic ruins to surround it. Present housed in the upper part of the exhibition building is a room for use by pre-booked educational groups. It has been equipped by the Education Service of English Heritage and offers seating and tables for groups of 30, and projection equipment. Other resources are being built up. Free use of this facility and free entry for groups should be arranged by application to the Site Manager, Adam Slade, Birdoswald Roman Fort, near Gilsland, Carlisle CA6 7DD. Tel: 06972 602, from whom further information can be obtained. Assistance with educational planning can be given by Diane Mortimer, Cumbria Heritage Project Officer, who can be contacted via the Manager.

Did you know... there are over 80 castles and 350 sites in all which you can visit free of charge as a group provided that you prebook? Our booklet Information for Teachers, contains a list of all our sites together with many practical ideas for getting the most out of school visits, and our new booking form. Our catalogue Resources is also still available on request. For copies of the above, further details of our teachers courses and any other information about our Education Service please contact:

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