school. This was to be a key factor in our planning.

We decided to undertake a full term project covering many areas of the curriculum using Thornton Abbey, our local English Heritage site, as a focus. I discussed our plan at some length with Nigel Aspinall, the Custodian. His knowledge of the site and obvious enthusiasm for our project were invaluable.

We agreed to use the visit to the abbey by Edward I in 1304 as a central theme within our topic because at that time the main abbey buildings were complete, but the additional chapels and guesthouse had not yet been built. It was therefore a good example of the layout of a typical abbey.

I have always believed that any school visit must have clear educational aims, be well planned and thoroughly researched and prepared. Despite this I have often felt frustrated because, following a visit, so many questions arise which really need a subsequent visit to answer satisfactorily. Usually financial constraints prevent such a follow up visit. With the aid of the Rural Schools Support Team, however, we were able to plan a series of short visits to Thornton and to other English Heritage sites.

We began by giving the children some background information about the life of monks and a general idea of life in the fourteenth century. We then made our first half day visit to Thornton Abbey. Nigel showed the children round the site and told them a little of its history. He took a great deal of trouble to involve the children and to encourage them to look for clues to the past in the evidence all around them.

We returned to school and it was decided that the only way to get a clear idea of what the abbey had looked like in its heyday would be to make a model. In the abbey guidebook is the usual plan, shaded to show the dates when different parts were completed. This was a start, but a lot more information would be required to plan and build an accurate model. The children realised this so we began some serious research into monastic buildings of the Middle Ages using reference books. The children soon discovered that there were many different kinds of monks, and that building styles changed over the many years that were always needed to build an abbey.

At this stage we paid our second half-day visit to Thornton Abbey armed with sketch pads, rulers, tape measures and protractors. The children divided into groups to measure the site, make rubbings of masons' marks, examine the tile patterns and make sketches of details of the building and the one remaining significant part of the original abbey, the corner where the south transept meets the chapterhouse. The children were able to measure the height of this feature by triangulation.

This information helped a little with planning the model but the children still had no idea how tall to make the central nave and presbytery aisles and the central tower of the abbey. They had become more observant since the first visit and had begun to notice features that they had not previously seen. They noticed that the base of the presbytery pillars were square but those in the nave were octagonal. They realised that this was evidence of building work begun at different times, and that a doorway step was worn on only the right hand side, evidence of double doors. Already some of our aims in the project were being achieved, to encourage the children to ask themselves questions and try to find their own answers based on evidence. All the time the children were using reference books to gather background information on life in the early fourteenth century. We were now ready for our next visit.

We found that Beverley Minster was built at about the same time as Thornton Abbey. The Minster church is still used and in good condition. When we approached the Verger he was very helpful and agreed to take the children up a spiral staircase into the roof space. There the children could examine leaded windows at close range and were able to see a tread wheel crane in operation. They examined the roof structure and the vaulting, looking down through a hole to the floor twenty five metres below, and began to understand some of the difficulties of the medieval builders working with wooden scaffolding and hurdles.

Outside the Minster building the children began to use their new observational skills to notice roof lines and blocked doors and windows — evidence showing where abbey buildings had once stood and where alterations had been made. They noticed and sketched the elaborate decoration for a later reference when decorating the scale model.

They made sketches and took photographs of the interior of the Minster noticing especially the different patterns of windows built at different times. They studied the Minster floor plan and compared it with the existing building. All of a sudden they had a much better understanding of the Thornton Abbey plan. They realised that the pillars gave important clues to the shape of the building, making the positions of the aisles and the central tower. They realised that the size of a buttress gives a clue to the height of the wall it supports.

Construction of the model began. The building plan was broken down into mathematical tiles. Cabolets and transepts were made by different children from scrap cardboard. Careful and accurate measurement to the nearest millimetre was essential to ensure that the different parts fitted each other. When the structure of the abbey church was completed it was covered with photocopies of brick paper drawn by one of the children. Other children designed and drew scale size windows based on the design of the existing windows. Some of these windows were in the south transept and chapterhouse. Other groups constructed the other abbey buildings.

By now words such as 'presbytery', 'western range', 'frater', 'dorter' and 'transept' were a part of every day conversation. Serious discussions were held and even arguments on matters such as whether the Abbot stayed in the western range after the guesthouse had been built, and whether or not faint lines on the aerial photograph were evidence of the site of a small cloister fountain and a walled orchard or garden.

While all this was going on we had also been working on secular life in the fourteenth century. To give the children a wider experience of life in the Middle Ages we took them to another English Heritage site, Gainsborough Old Hall. Once again the Custodian was extremely helpful when I explained what we wanted from the visit and she went to great lengths to meet our specific needs.

Concurrently with this work the class had been preparing a play based loosely on the visit to Thornton by Edward I in 1304. This gave the opportunity for children to act the roles of monks, royalty, aristocracy, soldiers and villains. Staff and parents worked on costumes for the secular characters. English Heritage lent us costumes for the monks in our re-enactment. One of our parents and some of the staff agreed to prepare food for a feast to follow the re-enactment. Recipes from the English Heritage book 'Food and Cooking in Medieval Britain' were used.

The day of our final visit to Thornton arrived. Jennifer Blanshard, our Chairman of Governors, Nigel and I started carrying tables, textiles and other paraphernalia up to the Great Hall at eight o'clock in the morning. Between us we went up and down that spiral staircase well over a hundred times! We discovered that medieval servants were very fit! A Radio Humberside reporter arrived at school at 9.15 a.m. He looked at some of the work and interviewed some of the children. Shortly after he left we had a phone call to say that the mobile van would be coming back to broadcast parts of our re-enactment live from Abbey in the afternoon.

Despite the presence of Radio Humberside, local press reporters and flashbulbs the re-enactment and feast went very well and the children had learned an enormous amount about local history, its importance and influence on the local community in the past. They had gained in mathematical, scientific, technological, reasoning and historical skills. They had talked, acted
Learning from Objects

English Heritage has recently published A teacher’s guide to learning from objects by Gail Durbin, Susan Morris and Sue Wilkinson, a further volume in our Education on Site series. It suggests ways of analysing objects and includes a number of practical activities for teaching the skills necessary to get the most from a visit to a site or museum.

INVESTIGATING AN OBJECT

ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT

PHYSICAL FEATURES  CONSTRUCTION  FUNCTION  DESIGN  VALUE

HOW DO WE THINK ABOUT?

OBSERVATION  RESEARCH  KNOWLEDGE  DISCUSSION

CONCLUSIONS

The following are extracts from the book.

This book aims to:
- show how the ability to interpret objects aids our understanding of the world
- show that specialist knowledge is not essential to learn from objects
- help teachers to make use of objects in the classroom and at sites
- make objects central to the curriculum not simply classroom decorations
- show cross-curricular applications and teaching techniques

Learning to Relate Structure to Function

The design of most artefacts is influenced principally by the use to which they will be put. Other influences are the aesthetic judgement of the designer, economic considerations and the availability and appropriateness of materials from which to make them. Current tastes and preferences also have an influence. Children need to understand these fundamental points in order to be able to move to the higher levels of thought about objects.

Horses for Courses

Before children can be critical about a maker’s choice of materials they need to distinguish and name different materials. Make a classroom collection of examples, eg. brass, iron, pottery, wax, wood, lead, marble, chalk, or ask the children to assemble one. Discuss the different characteristics of each material. You could experiment with them and test them for water resistance, hardness, conductivity, strength or weight. Discuss what each material might most efficiently be used for and then discuss the problems of finding suitable materials to perform specific tasks. This activity teaches an understanding of the characteristics of different materials.

What’s It For?

Make a collection of similar artefacts where the function is not necessarily known, for example, tongs (eyebrow tweezers, fire tongs, sugar tongs, old wooden washing tongs, ice tongs) or brushes (hair, dog, teeth, wooll-cards, hearth, bottle). Try to work out what each one was used for. Discuss the different materials used and why they have been chosen. Discuss the nature of the choices facing a maker.

The Conservation Game

This activity shows how some materials are more suitable for certain functions than others. It also illustrates the problems of conservation faced by museums and why some objects should not be handled. Make a collection of different materials, for example an eggshell, a piece of new white cloth, a piece of glazed cotton, a piece of white paper, a piece of clear plastic, a glossy photograph. Divide each thing in half and put one half in a safe place. Without explaining why you are doing it, pass the other halves round the class from hand to hand three times. Compare the two halves. What changes have occurred? Discuss how you might choose the material of something that was to be handled frequently. Night the class have handled things differently if they had been told to take care of them? Discuss the implications of your findings for museums that are trying to preserve objects for hundreds of years or to historians or archaeologists who are assessing evidence. The activity could be varied by burying objects to discover the consequences of damp or by leaving items exposed to the light.

Continuity, Change and Progress

Objects provide graphic illustration of continuity and change. The classic typological displays of flint tools, policemen’s helmets or embroidered samplers are based on demonstrating the changes and similarities to be found over the course of time. You can also use objects in a more challenging way. Ask why changes have occurred and why objects have become obsolete. Why do miners no longer use dasy lamps? Why did the penny farthing go out of production? Why do we no longer use feather mattresses? How much time passed between changes? Why? Changes are never isolated. Children can look for the causes and the consequences. Why were gas cookers introduced? What effect did this have on home life, women, the design of houses, cookery and cooking equipment?

Objects show that progress does not necessarily mean benefit. Lead pipes brought people water supplies but also poisoned them. Double-glazed windows cut out draught but create new problems of condensation. A change on one front may cause several fresh problems which have then to be solved.
History and the National Curriculum

In an issue of Remnants English Heritage Education Service commented on the Interim Report for History. Now that the Final Report has been published as last, we will be sending the following commending to the Department of Education and Science. We shall also be commenting in more detail to the National Curriculum Council.

In response to the Secretary of State for Education ‘s invitation for comments on the National Curriculum History Working Group’s Final Report, we offer the following comments:

As the body appointed by government to oversee the safety of England’s historic inheritance, English Heritage is committed to bringing about the long-term conservation and widespread understanding and enjoyment of the historic environment. English Heritage welcomes the Group’s positive approach to the use of physical evidence for the past in history teaching. We are particularly glad to see the following clear statements in its report:

‘It is important that field trips, and museum and site visits, form an integral part of the school curriculum for history’

(from 10.2).

The Group also speaks of ‘an uncompromising respect for the evidence’

(from 10.5).

We applaud the Group’s commitment to implementing these proposals, in particular through visit and instructor service teaching training. English Heritage already makes a contribution to teacher training, for example through its annual ‘Learning from the Past’ residential courses.

We feel that the PESC formula is an interesting approach to outlining the programme of study. We wish to see that two of the four sections are ‘social and religious’ and ‘Cultural and aesthetic’. We think the Group is right to give equal weight to each section. This will remove pupils from an imposed type of evidence for the past.

We feel, however, that the Group has not followed through its apparent commitment to its statement (in 1.7 viii) that, ‘History draws on the record of the entire human past’. There is little reference to prehistory – a period of the human past far less well documented than the time covered by written records.

On the Attainment Targets we are pleased to see that historic research is tested through each of the Attainment Targets and that knowledge has been isolated in a single Accomplishment Target that removes it from its context and framework of understanding. We do feel, however, that some of the statements and examples in the attainment targets will need careful reworking. They are often not properly hierarchical and we think

that some of the Targets are too difficult for the intended levels.

On the structure of the History Course:

The Design of History Study Units and

especially welcome the introduction of one to Key Stage 4. However, we wish that they were not so prescriptive in Key Stage 3 and 4. In Key Stage 3 we wonder why teachers could not be given the choice between a study based on British social history, for example, one based on a study of the local historic environment. In Key Stage 4 there is hardly a reference to the rich diversity of physical evidence for the periods covered. This could be corrected in a SMDHSU which specifically asks teachers to use their local historic environment. As it stands the instructions say ‘starting at least before 1500’. We think that the instructions could more specifically suggest that pupils are given the opportunity to ‘revise’ much earlier periods than that they will be studying in this Key Stage. Pupils could be studying the prehistoric and early historic periods in this Sixth Unit. This would support the Group’s repeated comments about early history such as, ‘... that earlier periods of history are more readily accessible to pupils than younger pupils, while recent events are intelligible only to pupils in the later years of school. We do not believe this correct.’

We regret the omission of the Greek and Roman Achievement proposed for Key Stage 4 in the Interim Report. This would have allowed pupils to study the Greek part of the physical evidence for our past which has had such an influence on present circumstances, for example from great historic houses to the design of the local banks and the buildings.

On the Detail of the Programmes of Study we like the PESC formula but feel that there is sometimes too much detail generally, at the expense of clear and precise guidance on the appropriate content of each HIU which could be better focused in the With a particular emphasis on between essential and exemplary information. For example, in HIU 13 Domestic life, families and children in Roman and Victorian times they list ‘toys’ as essential, yet ‘pottery as an extension’ that is the rationale for this? Does the word ‘information’ mean ‘fact’? Perhaps content might have been a better word to use.

On the Design of the Programmes of Study, we welcome the broader approach to HIUs which are not confined within a prescriptive timespan, for example HIU 9 Food and farming through history. We wonder, therefore, why the breadth given under Grassland is not reflected in the Programmes of Study. Were people not concerned with food before the ‘ancient near East’? Their definition of food and farming is cereal based. There is no opportunity here for the study of early food-gathering peoples or, indeed, those all the millions in other parts of the world who cultivated wild food and other crops. The introduction here (and in ships and seafarers through history and Houses and places of worship through history and Land transport through history) of earlier concerning and other parts of the world world would provide not only opportunities for multi-cultural links within the course but a more comprehensive approach to the study of the past.

On Chronology we feel that the Group was right to take a roughly chronological framework but that they have not carried through chronologies of the general statements they make in the report. For example, in 2.25 it says, ‘Key Stage 2 involves a broad chronological sweep from earliest times to the present day’. This is simply not the case. The Group’s view of the past must be interpreted, from this report, as starting no earlier than the Romans in the case of Britain and the first farming periods in the near East.

On Assessment we feel that this could be simplified by reducing the number of attainment targets to 3 re-allocating the time of Assessment Target 4 to other Attainment Targets. We feel that you cannot assess the presentation and information of Assessment Target 4: Organising and Communicating the results of a historical study. We note, however, that there will be no longer be Standard Assessment Tasks for Key Stages 1 and 2. We propose that the National Curriculum Council develops methods of assessment for those Key Stages. We would like to see continuous school assessment and methods of assessing pupils’ understanding of physical evidence developed.

English Heritage Education Service

This major series is intended to help teachers planning a site visit. Historical background is combined with a variety of possible study approaches, documentary sources, and photocopiable activity sheets for classroom and on-site work, together with practical information about the site.

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