

that the autumn saw us looking at food and farming within a modern day ethos — you know, plenty of shopping, harvesting, environmental investigation, etc., and then this term comparing and contrasting farming and food in an historical context linked to the Saxons and Viking invaders. However concurrently running with this comparison would be an in depth study of the Saxons and Vikings, and so it was that class 3's great historical adventure began.

In preparation I had gathered simple history topic books, slides and tapes, the Essex Invaders display, and contacted individuals for information on music and manuscripts of the period. An investigative approach utilising food and literature launched the topic.

The story of the Battle of Maldon and the legend of Beowulf posed all the questions we needed to start with. How did we know there was a battle? Where did it occur, when, between what forces, what happened? and so on. And the story of Beowulf — who was this brave chief, how



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LEFT: Invaders collage

BELOW: Saxon ploughing team

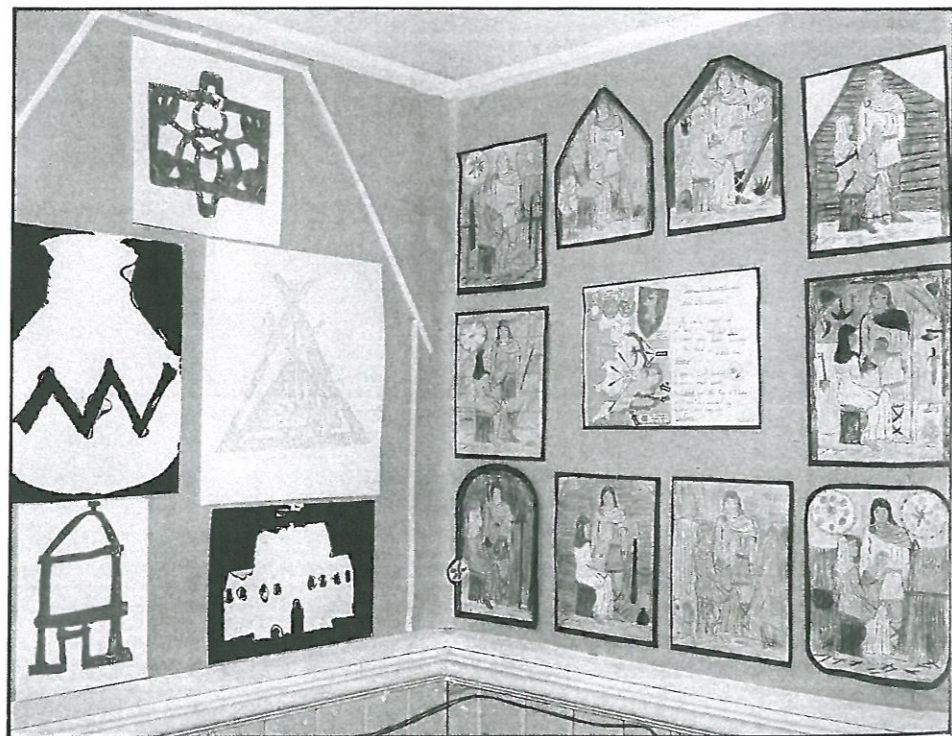


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ABOVE: The Saxon Hut  
RIGHT: Screenprints and colouring work

did he fight Grendell, what did he fight with, how did he eat, live? How can we differentiate between fact and fiction? The information about the battle was investigated, as were the books and replica artefacts. Skills of research, identification, observation, recording were all coming to the fore — or having to be taught and reinforced all the time. Maps were drawn, Essex, Wessex, Belgium, Germany all identified, and a hundred more questions posed. Why did the Saxons invade when they did? Why did they settle, avoid Romano-British towns? How did they survive? — questions, questions. And then the Vikings, why did they battle at Maldon, what did they want? What about the sea battle off the coast of Harwich, and later, how did Alfred keep the Danes at bay?

As for Beowulf, how did the story survive, could it be true? What qualities did the chief show? Is the story relevant to 1992? Could it be extended by the children?



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LEFT: Invaders collage

BELOW: Saxon ploughing team

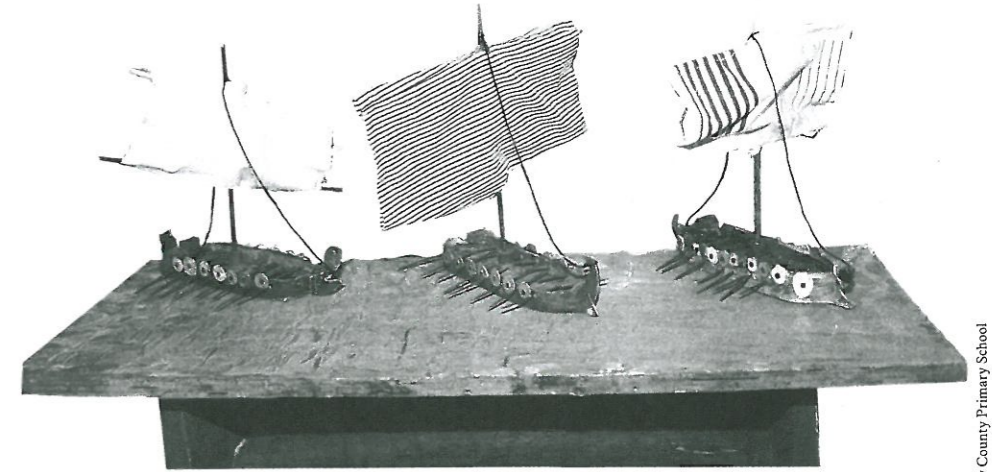
Like a thousand ripples, real excitement flourished as the tasks multiplied. We decided to make a play of Beowulf for the Easter concert, so I wrote one. We needed costumes and weapons so we made them. The shield designs began crudely, then symmetry and tessellation helped us balance them. The weapons needed to be cut — so parents helped with sawing and fixing. Banners needed stitching and hanging; jewellery needed making, baking, and thonging; a feast needed planning, recipes making and food cooking (vegetable soup, honey oat-cake, honey apple mead, — delicious!)

Then into this hiatus of activity, the challenge. How did the Invaders live? We had made a wood and straw model hut, but what was needed was the real thing. A good friend had some scout orienteering poles, so we brought them into the class. We collected lots of card boxes, another

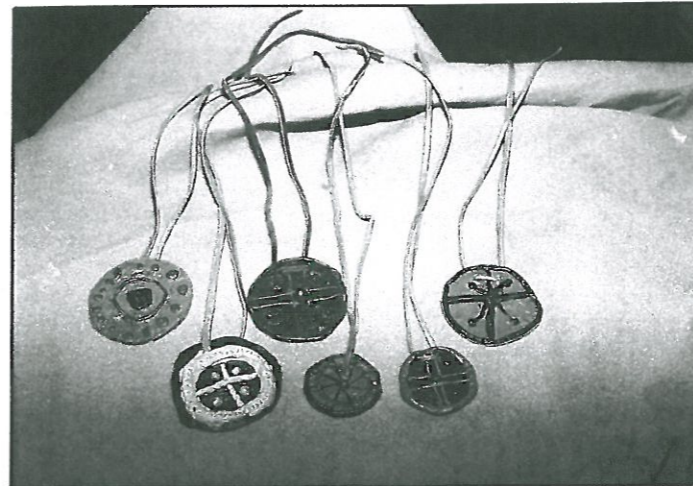


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ABOVE: Saxon cross from a screenprint design  
RIGHT: King Alfred's navy models — note Saxon bench!

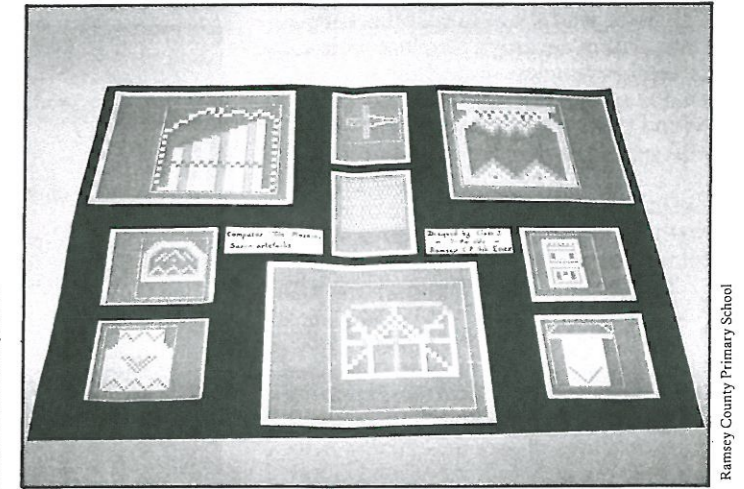


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Saxon brooches — Fimo made with leather thongs



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Computer tile mosaic

friend gave two bales of straw, then I threw out the challenge. How could we fasten the poles, and thatch the roof? The two Kevins in the class solved the problem. Kevin S. lashed two twigs together with a crude piece of rope. Kevin B. showed how the straw, once separated into layers, could be skewered on to cord. We put these ideas into practice, and a quarter of the room was enclosed as half a hut was built. The walls were painted card, showing a wattle and daub construction, but the main frame was as near to the reconstructions, based at West Stowe Saxon Village, as we could get them. The children were thrilled. Straw was scattered everywhere, but the finished edifice looked great! The shields hung outside, antlers over the doorway added realism, even the stuffed pigeon on the roof-top did its bit! Inside the hut the banners were hung, models placed, and the Invaders display erected. A bench and wicker basket were added, and a model bench, constructed with no nails, like the hut, finished the scene.

Meanwhile play rehearsal passed by. The feast, on Open Day, was a huge success — yes, children did role play in order of character importance. Yes, speeches were made. Yes, no modern cutlery was used. Yes it was messy! But it was so successful!

A mini-topic then grew up around

Alfred's navy. Interest in the vessel's design prompted research and model making. So a fleet of three ships were made, and a collage of one, too. I thought they looked realistic, and the interest they stimulated encouraged further investigation.

It was at this point that the contribution of the church, and monks, towards writing came to the fore. The story of Beowulf was extended by the children using their own imagination. Concertina books were made and decorated using Saxon patterns as observed in jewellery, etc. In this whole class activity, handwriting became a craft unto itself as did the illumination. The language used resulted in a booklet of real merit.

Our computer did not remain idle. Every child designed a Saxon artefact in colour, utilising the Mosaic 'Tile' programme. Choices ranged from a bowl to a tunic, and showed the skill the children had in interpreting what they had seen in books or as real evidence, and translating that to be meaningful in their design.

There is more I could add, like mentioning the trials and tribulations with Alfred's candle clock — it kept blowing out, then there were the water experiments which flooded the classroom (— no, water does not flow up a string.)

The debacle with the screen prints is best forgotten, and so on, but still we ended with the promised excitement of learning how to weave, Saxon style.

The Invader topic has nearly run its course. Summer term and **Food and farming** with environmental studies, beckons. I don't think we'll ever forget this topic though. I suppose I'll soon demolish the hut (I owe it to the cleaners,) but one thing is for sure, National Curriculum History can work in a class topic based approach, and be flexible enough to allow freedom for the individual to research that which is appealing to them, as well as to be challenging enough to get basic concepts across. Above all else, I feel that the individual must be allowed to challenge evidence, to research, to observe, to record, to experiment and to imagine, for imagination can fire enthusiasm to explore history. It is through enjoyment that our children will be well disposed towards this intriguing, sometimes infuriating, yet totally infatuating area of the curriculum.

Like the contents of this article — its all History!

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# Castle Music

A recent music week at Dover Castle showed how a historic setting can provide a model for composition exercises in line with the Music National Curriculum.

A disembodied wail seeps through ancient stonework . . . a second long, low moan is followed by a longer silence. Brighter sounds next spark off the vaulted ceiling and a muted arabesque seems to answer from the undercroft or a distant passageway.

Disjointed snatches gradually become more melodic and intricate; there is a sense of 'call and answer' to the music. The assembled group of nine year olds begin pointing towards an arched opening high in the wall above them, others are gesticulating towards a fireplace with a cavernous chimney, some think the sounds are coming from the spiral stairs behind them. The cool, castle air is filled with excited chatter and a continuing cascade of sourceless sound. The music of two instruments now combines in a joyful, rhythmic improvisation which seems to come from every direction.

Thus began Castle Music, a session by Angels of Horseback (Peter Cook and Robert Jarvis), a peripatetic pair of self-employed musicians who have made it their job to bring practical music-making to schools, residential homes, theatres, pubs and clubs all over the country. After a full ten minutes dodging around Dover Castle's labyrinth of galleries, staircases and interconnecting rooms, and with more than a little help from Napoleonic speaking tubes — the musicians made their appearance (still playing) to a spellbound class from a local primary school. 'There's only two of 'em!', one child gasped.

The two musicians went on playing increasingly exciting, jazz-based improvisation and led children, pied piper-like, to a variety of large, small, stone, brick spaces in the keep. In each space their instruments sounded different. They led the group upstairs again and revealed how they had used the speaking tubes and the galleries to disorientate the children as to the source of the music. Despite the duo's obvious delight in using the physical properties of the building to inspire their own improvisations, the demonstration suddenly stopped. Angels on Horseback were really there to encourage the children to make music; to compose pieces which reflected physical aspects of Dover Castle. Since composition will form an important part of the Music National Curriculum it seemed useful to record carefully how an historic building could be used as both inspiration and method of making music.

Each child was given an instrument from a motley collection of percussion and wind instruments. Children were then divided into groups of six and sent off in all directions to find large and small spaces to experiment with sound. These 'sounds'



Experimenting with sound and echo



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were transformed into 'music' when they were arranged by the group into a repeatable order and performed to the reassembled groups later.

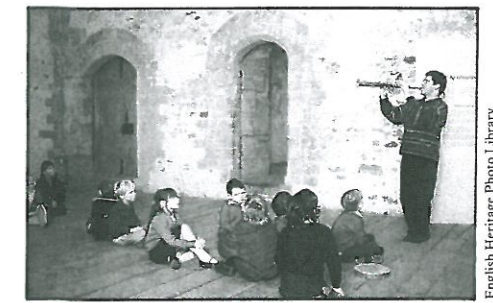
Next, the class was divided into larger groups and Peter and Robert took their groups to different parts of the keep to work on composing a sustained piece of music. When they arrived at their space they explored it. Touching the walls, feeling the damp, listening to the sound of a clap, looking for clues as to past uses and talking about what they felt like in the room now. They went on to discuss what story their music should tell.

The first group's room was small, light and airy — it had a narrow corridor leading off to a pit. There were alcoves, a fireplace and arched windows to hide in and the group decided to make music with musicians who could not see each other, only respond to a conductor and each other's sounds. They decided that the atmosphere was sunny, warm and gentle and that their music had to include a ghost. There were no 'wrong' answers to this part of their work — the group was responding to the objective physical characteristics of the place rather than relying on information given to them by an expert. The music, which was composed within twenty five minutes, was as unique as the room in which they gathered. It combined a carefully thought-

out progression of sounds suggesting (A) the movement of the sun through the window, (B) a gentle strumming, (C) snatches of recorder melody and (of course) (D) the rattling of chains. They practised these four elements separately and then put them together in a pattern: A-B-C-D-C-B-A

The second group also chose to hide themselves but this time around the Great Hall of the Castle. They all decided to choose recorders and whistles though none had ever played before. One of the group devised a simple, three-note fanfare and introduced it to the rest. They then proceeded to place themselves around the room and practice sending the fanfare motif all around the room, like soldiers passing a message along a line. After rehearsing this several times their 'message' passed from person to person smoothly and accurately. Someone suggested they should all play the same tune but decide for themselves when they played, so as to create a swell of sound still based on the same, simple figure. Another suggested leaving periods of silence to make use of the echo. Each idea was assimilated into the composition in an agreed order and thus a group of totally inexperienced children were able to compose a piece of music which expressed both the physical attributes of the building and the cooperation of the performers. References to the hall's historical associations were inevitable but not central to the music.

During the following week nine more groups made their own music at the castle without a single mention of sackbutts, horns or bagpipes. There were, however, impromptu dances, marches, more ghosts, a siege and a feast each portrayed in sound and silence. Each piece was unique and could not have been composed in any other place, yet once composed and



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recorded was repeatable in classroom or assembly. In recreating their music back at school, teachers consistently reported that children displayed how deeply their perception of the castle had been enhanced by their music-making.

This method of composition does not require a castle though it does need to be done outside the familiar environment of the classroom. Exploration of mood, space, echo and historical association can be made in the local church, or ruin, the town hall or the nearest barn. Each built environment has its own special effect on sound made within it; each room has a unique atmosphere and each can be a source of music. The Music National Curriculum will require every child to have experience of composition — here is an opportunity to let an historic monument do half the work for you!

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See Footnotes for details of our new Teaching on Site video, **Art, English and Music.**

## Fieldwork at A level - surveying history

Using the physical evidence of the landscape, this archaeological exercise gave an 'A' level group a chance to develop new practical skills.

The morning of Friday December 13th 1991 saw the fields by the River Trent outside Alrewas in Staffordshire frozen solid and carpeted in white. This was the morning that had been set aside for an 'archaeological activity' involving sixth form students from Codsall High School as the final part of an 'A' level history field week based at the Alrewas Outdoor Study Centre. The A.E.B. 673 History syllabus, which the students at Codsall undertake, places a very strong emphasis on the variety of evidence which the historian must study and specifically lists earthworks amongst its category of the visible evidence to be studied as part of the course.



Codsall High School



