

Planning a site visit

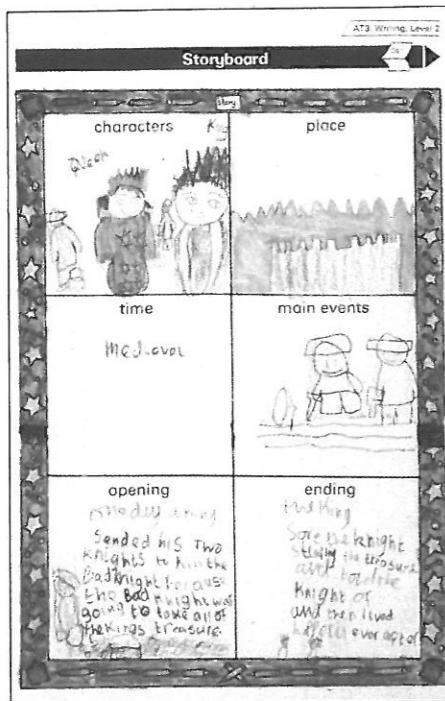
Once I had decided on this topic the next question was where could I take the children to bring the subject to life. A castle visit! But which one? Choosing an appropriate castle was a major problem for an inner-London school as most of the castles were too far away or otherwise they did not provide enough visual impact for young children. So after a lot of research, I discovered how wonderful Rochester Castle in Kent was as a historical resource for infants. It turned out that the travelling time was just right and it was so well preserved that it would provide the children with a good view of how castle life would have been. It was also in the country providing a link with the geography curriculum and would prove to be a learning experience for many of our children in itself.

At the time I had no idea that I would be entering the children for a national competition, let alone that they would win! I started the topic with a general introduction to medieval times via a display and through reading the stories mentioned earlier, and using as many different versions as possible. From this the children made a book based on the questions the children had about medieval times and castles. These ranged from 'Why did they build castles?' to 'How did people feel when they went to war?' We then looked at many different information books on the subject and put this research (and their CDT skills) to good use by getting them to plan and design a castle for the home corner and then to use these plans to build it. This included making a drawbridge 2m by 2m and making the moving mechanisms to go with it. From this a great deal of maths arose, namely counting chain links, matching 1 to 1, measuring and angle work. So a week or so later, we had a medieval castle right in the middle of the infant department and with the appropriate dressing-up clothes, the children were able to experience castle life via role-play thus encouraging the skills of empathy. It was clear that the children's enthusiasm was already hooked.

Classroom preparation

We then moved on to look at where medieval times fitted into the historical timespan. We made a massive time-line covering three walls, starting with dinosaurs and ending today. The children drew the pictures for each era and sorted the history books into the right historical periods. To encourage them to learn the historical order we played lots of sequencing games. The children were fascinated with this and used it constantly and could be heard questioning each other about it or repeating it to themselves.

After these activities we began preparing in earnest for our visit by looking at castles and their



Artwork for the project.

development in general. We looked at the different types of castles and why and how they changed and why they went out of fashion. Practically, the children produced time-lines illustrating the development and decline of castles. To consolidate this knowledge of the different castles the children spent a very long time making accurate models of the different types of castles, for which they had to do a great deal of research. The resulting models were superb and the children's pride in this work was very rewarding. After this the children could categorise any castle they saw. Further preparatory tasks included drawing and labelling parts of a castle - both inside and out.

The big day arrives

So by the time the day arrived the children were really excited and well prepared. They had known about the visit for a long time and were really



Sally Giovannelli

keen on climbing the 170 steps in Rochester and going to the battlements (while the adults built up their reserve for this task). Their excitement had grown stronger daily and one little boy was so keen, that he came in with his raincoat and packed lunch every day for two weeks before asking 'We go to Rochester today?' Their excitement erupted as they caught their first glimpse of Rochester. We could not keep them in their seats, standing up pointing it out or excitedly discussing what type of castle it was. Initially, we walked round the bailey looking at all its aspects, feeling the walls, identifying windows etc. Next the moment came to enter the castle and an excited hush settled on the children. We explored every inch of the castle, the children coping marvellously with the stairs. It was also obvious that all the preparatory work had paid off, as the children's observational skills and knowledge surprised everyone involved. Their sketches of both the castle and its parts e.g. well shaft, window, arches etc really showed how their historical skills had been developed. Finally we measured the perimeter of the castle using a trundle wheel. Then it was time for one last look and sadly but happily we made our way home.

Back at school

The next day the children could talk about nothing else. First of all we collected all the work they did on site and discussed it and compared it with all the pictures of castles we had looked at previously. This work was then incorporated into the next phase of the project.

The most wonderful work that arose from this visit was the children's Guidebook to Rochester Castle. In this book the children wrote about the history of the castle, its location and then gave directions and

BELOW: The children planned, designed and then made this castle in our home corner.

information about every part of it. They typed up text using a medieval typeface and illustrated it with a mixture of watercolour paintings and drawings. The children were also involved about every decision of its publication - the cover, colour of the pages and their order. This task took a long time, but more than any other it consolidated both their knowledge about the castle and facilitated their book publishing skills.

To help the children understand more about the properties of the kinds of stone they used at Rochester, they did observational drawings of different types of stone and described and compared them. Stories based around castles were also an important part of the follow-up work, as the children could use the live experience of the visit to bring their stories to life. We used these stories to look at the techniques of story writing such as the structure, characters and setting.

From this we moved on to look at the domestic life of castles and compare it with how the peasants may have lived. The children were split into groups and each looked at one aspect of life such as clothing, homes (apart from castles), food, leisure and education. They began by researching their subject using books and pictures and



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doing then and now work. To consolidate these ideas every group produced some artwork, for food we had a medieval banquet made out of junk, and had children-sized collages of medieval dress, a peasant's house that opened to reveal the insides and a 3-D collage of a medieval fair.

Open and closed

Sadly, the project was now coming to a close, but because of the excellence of the work I decided to invite all the parents to see it. So we arranged a medieval open day where all the work was put out and the play castle was turned into a medieval cafe selling chicken legs and red wine, served by wenches. Each child had a medieval costume and learnt to bow and curtsy to everyone they met. This open day was the culmination of the project and the children poured into it all their excitement and enthusiasm for medieval history which they had acquired throughout this topic.

It was then time to pack away the castles and costumes and to reflect on a project that had been an outstanding success both from the adults and children's point of view. The children had achieved so much in this topic and the pride and success they had in their history work spilt over into all areas of the curriculum. Even now six months later you can hear the children discussing Rochester castle and the topic. In the words of one children who would say every time we asked how did you like Rochester Castle - It was a-m-a-z-i-n-g. So well done year 2 and thank you to Rochester Castle for providing the children with a wonderful experience and setting up an interest that will last a very long time.

Sally Giovannelli
St George the Martyr C.E. Primary
School, London WC1.

LEFT & BELOW: The open day.

Rochester Castle in Kent was built by the Normans soon after the Battle of Hastings to guard the point where the Roman road of Watling Street crossed the River Medway. Today its massive stone keep is one of the largest and best-preserved in England. To book a free educational group visit and to check opening times ring 0732 778000.

A teacher's handbook, price £3.95 including postage and packing is available from English Heritage, PO Box 229, Northampton NN6 9RY
Quote **Product code** XN 13052



Mannings Photographers

The runners-up for the English Heritage prize this year were Gateway School, Great Missenden, Bucks whose project was based on a visit to Cleeve Abbey in Somerset.

Young Historian Prize 1994

English Heritage will be sponsoring a Young Historian Prize again in 1994. This competition is open to all schools and educational bodies, limited to one entry per institution per year. Pupils and students of all ages from 5-16 are eligible to enter. Entries should be based on the use of an English Heritage property. The work may relate to any National Curriculum subject or be cross-curricular. The Regional Education Officers at English Heritage can offer advice on request.

There will be up to three prizes awarded, an overall winner and two runners-up. The winning institution will receive a trophy, a certificate and a selection of English Heritage resources. The pupils will also receive a certificate each. Completed entries must be submitted by 8 July 1994.

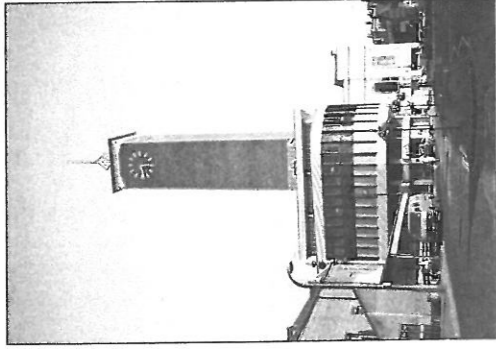
For further details of the Young Historian Scheme including other 1994 prizes, or to submit an entry for the English Heritage Prize please write to:

Emeritus Professor G.R. Batho
Young Historian Prizes
School of Education
University of Durham
Durham
DH1 1TA.

Everyone knows what clocks are for, but there are not many around where telling us the time is their only message.

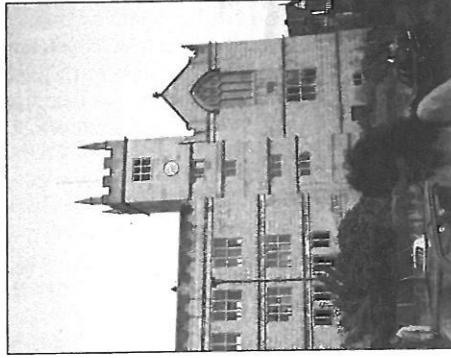


Churches and railway stations are some of the few places where clocks are there to tell you what you want to know - are you late? This sundial on a church tower is the oldest method of recording the time.



Watch It!

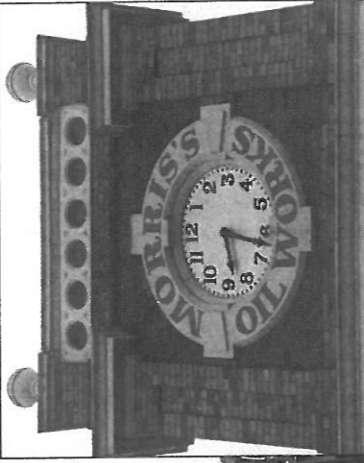
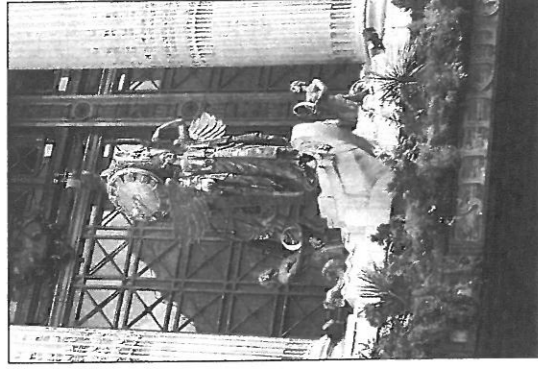
In some places clocks are used as an excuse to stand out from the crowd.



Time is a serious business and clocks lend an air of importance and dignity to a building, which is why they are so often found on town halls and other civic buildings.



And elsewhere the ulterior motive is not hard to find! Some clocks are works of art. This one, called the Queen of Time, is by Gilbert Bayes, and adds a final dynamic Art Deco flourish to the already impressive facade of Selfridges in London.



In others they add interest to a grand but otherwise bland facade.



Plaque clocks are a favourite for memorial and commemorative structures. Everyone has heard of Big Ben, but what about Little Ben? Little Ben was restored as a good will gesture to Anglo-French relations, and stands in Victoria to greet new arrivals from the continental boat trains.

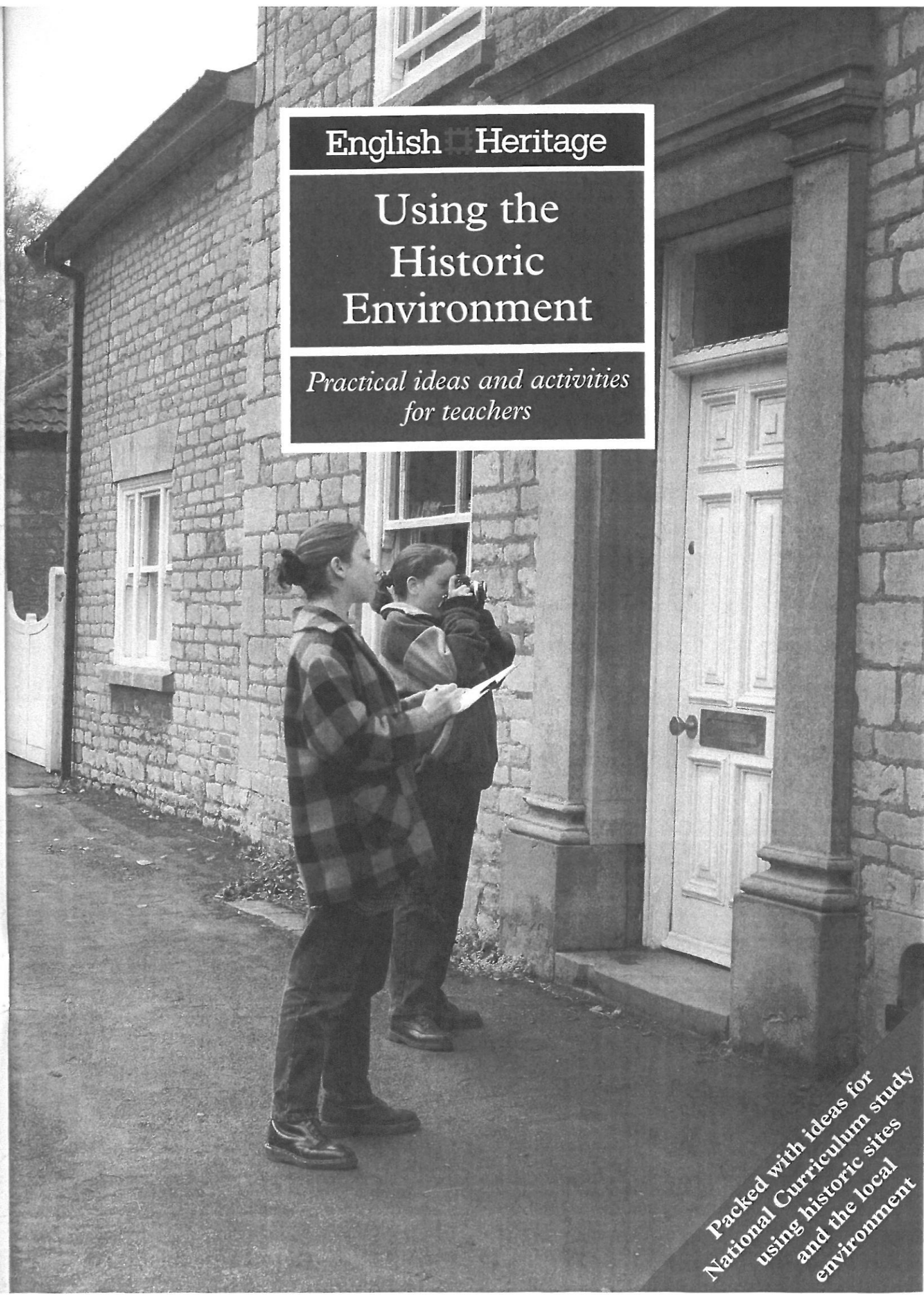
Text and photographs by Liz Hollinshead
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Streetwise investigates clues to the past that can often be found in the streets near your school!

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