

Heritage School Case Study

Rockcliffe Remembers: Researching the history of Rockcliffe First School and the surrounding area

KS2 pupils developed their historical research skills in order to uncover the history of their school and to find out about the impact of WW1 on the local community

Where: Rockcliffe First School, Whitley Bay, North Tyneside

Who: Pupils from year 3 and 4

In 2011 Rockcliffe First School celebrated its Centenary. A wealth of photographs, school log books and other documents were uncovered. This inspired teachers and pupils to find out more about the history of the school and community and to find out more about what life was like in Rockcliffe in years gone by.

The school held community heritage events to share their archives and collect oral histories from former pupils and local residents. Many members of the community remembered events from the school log book and were able to identify some of the teachers who once taught at the school from pictures found at the school

Workshops and lessons helped the children think more like historians. The children used census materials, architectural features of the school building, photographs, maps and even rubbish to discover the history of their local area

The pupils researched and photographed changes that had taken place in the local area over the past 100 years and followed individual stories. They discovered that the school building had been requisitioned by the army during WW1. Using the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, pupils identified local residents who lost their lives during WW1 and created a map showing households who had lost a loved one. They also made a film called ['Rockcliffe Remembers'](#) about their school and area during WW1 and created a local trail podcast about the history of significant buildings and features in the local area. They designed and produced interpretation boards for the school yard, summarising different aspects of the local history.

Intended Outcomes:

- Develop children's skills as historians through use of source materials
- Train children as collectors and archivists of oral histories
- Create permanent interpretation boards documenting the history of the school and its connection to wider historical events
- Research the school during World War I and link with the national centenary commemorations



What we did:

- Produced artwork (including paintings and textiles) to represent various aspects of local heritage
- Researched individuals' stories
- Produced a local history trail podcast
- Created a felted poppy banner and produced a 'map of the Fallen' to commemorate local men who died during WW1

Challenges:

- Making primary source materials available and user-friendly to the children. Teachers used photos and digitised the school log books to make resources more accessible
- Engaging parents in the project which was overcome by providing learning logs for home based research which parents and children filled in
- Engaging the local community in the project which was overcome by holding community events which were publicised on social media

Successes:

- Engaging and uniting the wider community in a shared interest and re-establishing the school at the centre of that community. *“The project has inspired many members of the community of all ages to attend events and find out more about our local history. As the school has been the venue for the events, it has made it accessible and indeed a heart of this community building work.”* (Parent and Chair of the local Community Association)
- Creating a sense of shared history and identity as a school. *“I feel like I’m part of a very long story!”* (Y4 Pupil)
- Enhancing children’s enquiry and historical skills. *“Since Martha has been involved in the Rockcliffe Remembers project it has encouraged her interest in her family’s history, and we even went to Hebburn cemetery to find the Marr family plot.”* (Parent)

Resources and web links:

- [Commonwealth War Graves Commission](#) website
- [Rockcliffe Remembers](#) website
- [Whitley Bay and Tynemouth Guide](#)
- [1911 census](#) website

Next steps/extension activities:

- Rockcliffe First School are producing a set of lesson plans and resources to complement the work they have done
- The school are designing a ‘dig for victory’ garden as a permanent memorial for WW1 and WW2
- Pupils and the community will continue to update their podcast and develop the local history website – www.rockliffemembers.co.uk