



Historic England

Education

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Heritage School Case Study

What Was Life Like In Anglo-Saxon Bristol?

Summary: Year 3/4 children discover how their local area could have been settled by the Anglo-Saxons and what archaeology can tell us about the past.

Where: Victoria Park Primary School, Bristol

Who: mixed Year 3 and 4 cohort of 150 children

Our enquiry began with a starter of an 'indoor excavation' created and led by the archaeologist Julian Richards. The children gradually uncovered layers of an artificial archaeological dig until an Anglo-Saxon house was revealed. The children discussed how artefacts from different time periods tell us about people's lives in the past.

Next the children undertook a settlement activity in a local park. This involved looking at maps and the local landscape and determining the best place for Anglo-Saxons to settle in the area, taking into account issues such as food, water, shelter, protection and trade routes.

The children then made model replicas of what Anglo-Saxon Bedminster may have looked like. These models were displayed at the local library over the summer holiday.

The enquiry also included an Anglo-Saxon day in which the children undertook a series of workshops exploring daily life in Anglo-Saxon times and an Anglo-Saxon food tasting.

The literacy text for the enquiry was Beowulf and the children made Anglo-Saxon mead and biscuits which were eaten around a campfire and Beowulf told for the first time.

Intended Outcomes:

- Understand what archaeology can tell us about the Anglo-Saxons
- Understand what an archaeologist does
- Learn about daily life and buildings in Anglo-Saxon times
- Know who the Anglo-Saxons were and when and where they lived
- Identify features on a local map that might influence the position of an Anglo-Saxon settlement



What we did:

- Activity in local park to identify local features which would influence Anglo-Saxon settlement
- A model of Anglo-Saxon Bedminster for display at a local library over the summer holidays
- Creative writing using Beowulf as a stimulus
- Anglo-Saxon food and drink and dressing up day

Challenges:

- Arranging indoor excavation for five classes with an archaeologist
- Arranging for a parent who is an archaeologist to be interviewed by children
- Contacting residents of a C16th house close to the school on the site of an Anglo-Saxon farm and arranging to visit

Successes:

"I found this enquiry really interesting because I didn't know anything about the Anglo-Saxons before. Now I would like to be an archaeologist when I'm older and find my own Sutton Hoo." Jack (year 4)

- The school hall was full of parents who were invited to view each child's model building which we arranged to demonstrate what Anglo-Saxon Bedminster may have looked like.
- Links made with local residents who live in oldest property in locality thought to date back to Anglo-Saxon times. Visits to the house for the children to assess whether the original part of the building could be an Anglo-Saxon hall.

Resource and web links

- [Anglo-Saxon images](#) on Historic England Education website
- [Anglo-Saxon resources](#) from the BBC
- [Video clips](#) from BBC history programme Meet the Ancestors

Next steps/extension activities

- Explore the idea of children as curators in partnership with Bristol Museums Galleries and Archives.
- An outcome for a future Anglo-Saxons enquiry might be to curate an exhibition at the MShed museum in central Bristol.

