

## Case Study: St Cuthbert's RC Primary School, Seaham, County Durham

### Background

St Cuthbert's RC Primary is a smaller than average Primary school with around 200 pupils, almost all of whom are from a White British background. 2017/18 is the first year in which the school has taken part in Heritage Schools. The History Co-ordinator (who is also the Reception teacher) attended a training session for History and Geography Co-ordinators in Seaham, organised by the Heritage Schools Local Heritage Education Manager (LHEM). They learned how to use historical maps and documents, where to find further resources, and how to plan a history trail around the local area.

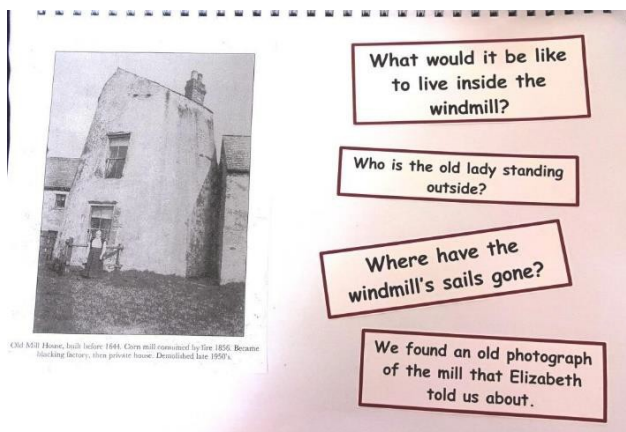
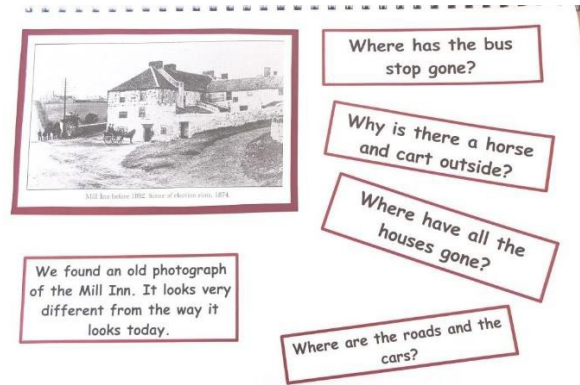
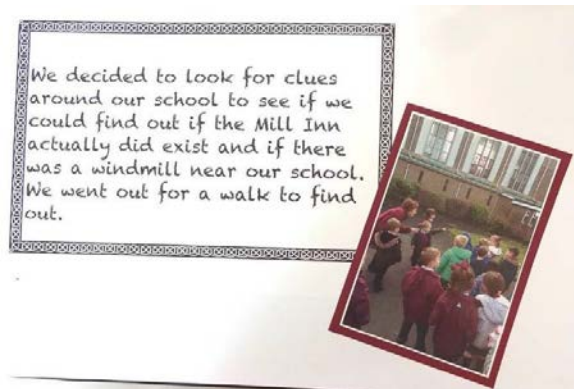
The History Co-ordinator at St Cuthbert's wished to plan a whole-school heritage project, which she based on a Newcastle school's project which the LHEM had told her about. The History Co-ordinator wanted to do a whole-school project so that the Reception class would be included, and to increase the amount of History and Geography in the curriculum. The school had done some local history studies in the past, but Heritage Schools seemed to be a perfect opportunity to encourage more depth in local history learning, particularly to use maps and primary sources as these had been identified by the school as an area for improvement.

*"It sounded really, really interesting and it sounded like something we could adopt in our school, a very hands-on approach using primary sources, using different methods of finding out information and using the senses. It inspired me"*

"Mill Inn to The Ranch"



The whole school spent a week studying Seaham's heritage. The History Co-ordinator devised a hook to attract the interest of all the pupils: an elderly lady called Elizabeth would arrive at the school in Victorian costume saying that she was very confused and wanted the children to help her find some places nearby which she could not locate – buildings which had changed their use or name over time, for example the former Mill Inn is now called The Ranch. The grandmother of one of the members of staff played Elizabeth which was very effective; the children did not recognise her, and wanted to be able to help her.



### Reception's investigation

Each year group studied a different topic:

Reception: how the area around the school had changed, street names, the old windmill, the people who lived in the Mill Inn

Year 1: toys and games which their parents and grandparents played

Year 2: Seaham as a mining community

Year 3: the George Elmy lifeboat disaster

Year 4: how building and land use around the school has changed

Year 5: Seaham's industrial past

Year 6: how Seaham was affected by World War I and World War II

Reception and Key Stage 1 visited Beamish Museum; other classes visited the George Elmy exhibition, did a heritage walk around Seaham and visited war memorials. Members of staff from the Durham Light Infantry Museum and Durham Records Office came into the school, as did former members of staff, parents and grandparents to share their knowledge of Seaham's past. The Heritage Schools funding enabled the pupils to make visits and the heritage providers to come to the school, which the teachers appreciated very much as the school would not have been able to afford these activities otherwise.



*Reception's windmill experiments*

The project was extended into other subjects, for example Reception made paper windmills to find out how they turn in the wind, and learn how the technology is used today.



*Heritage stone for the new school garden*



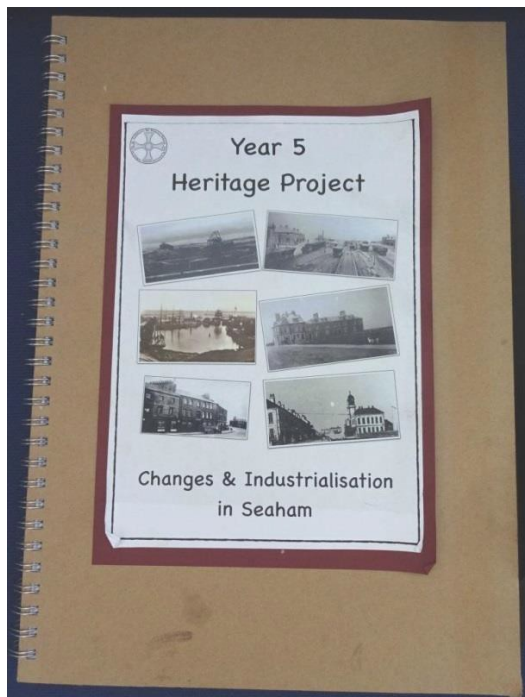
All the pupils decorated stones at home with their families, using images of aspects of Seaham which appealed to them. These stones will be placed in the school's new heritage garden. The Year 5 pupils decorated stones with heritage images and left them at various locations along their heritage walk, for other people to find. On the back of the stone is a hashtag, so that the finder of the stone can post a comment about it on social media – this has become a popular family outdoor activity, for example County Durham Rocks' Facebook group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1842173879131145/>. Disappointingly, none of the stones received a response.

At the end of the week, the pupils created a pop-up museum in the Town Hall for Elizabeth, parents and members of the public to visit. Each class presented a book about what they had found out during the week and the activities they had done. The LHEM presented the school with their Heritage School Award to reflect the outstanding work they had done.

A video and slideshow of the heritage week, including the award presentation, are here: <http://www.stcuthbertsprimary.com/heritage-week-2017/>

## Impacts

The most significant impacts of the heritage project have been on the pupils' increased pride in and understanding of Seaham, increased links with families and the community and how the school teaches history and geography. St Cuthbert's RC Primary School has achieved its Heritage Schools Award.



*Year 5's Heritage Project book*

10 Year 5 pupils took part in an evaluation discussion about the project at the end of the summer term. All of them were very enthusiastic about the project, and about the greater knowledge which they now have about Seaham. This has helped increase their pride in where they live and they said that during the summer holidays they would visit places they had not known about before. In a Trip Advisor-style review, the pupils gave Seaham an average of 4.7 out of 5 stars. Most of them said that their opinion of Seaham has changed a lot as a result of the project:

*“My opinion has changed a lot because I thought Seaham was good but not really interesting but now it is really interesting. I like exploring more history so I can share it”*

Pupils enjoyed learning about their local history because they could see places for themselves, rather than studying places far away.

*“You get it more if you see it”*

The pupils have been fascinated to find out about their families’ connections with Seaham’s past and places where grandparents and great-grandparents used to work: some of them were already familiar with the former coal mines, but they also found out about the bottle works and that Seaham Hall (now a hotel) used to be a hospital, where a number of their family members had been patients.

The pupils found out a lot about the history of Seaham from their parents and grandparents; the project was a prompt for the older generations to tell the children about the past. They brought objects and photographs from home into school, so the project increased the link between the school and the families. The grandfather of one of the pupils had been involved in the restoration of the George Elmy. He came into school to talk about the lifeboat, and has subsequently been back into school bringing World War I and II objects. During the project, the school worked with the local history group, whom they had not known previously. As a result, they were able to find out more about Seaham’s history from people with local expertise. These links will continue for future heritage projects.

These new ways of finding out information, and the information itself, inspired the pupils to write in more detail and more length:

*“The pupils did loads of writing, they were so inspired. All the teachers said the pupils were keen to learn. They were bringing in things from home. They were using primary sources – grandparents’ photos and the census and maps. There were so many ways of finding out, not just by going on the internet”*

The teachers enjoyed working towards a shared end product, and would often come into the staff room saying that they had had a “fantastic” lesson. They felt it was such a successful way to teach History and Geography that they would use those approaches again. The History co-ordinator said that some teachers had felt a bit scared of Geography because they did not have the necessary skills to teach it confidently, but Heritage Schools had shown an enjoyable and inspiring way of using maps, and it gave them confidence to use them in the future.

*“People were showing us enjoyable ways of using the maps and it was really inspiring. It gave people confidence more than anything”*

## Summary

*“I would recommend it to anyone and I will tell people in other Local Authorities. It was fantastic”*

A whole-school heritage project would not have taken place without the training, advice and support given by the LHEM. Basing the project on one which had been run successfully by another Heritage School gave St Cuthbert's RC Primary the confidence to do something which they had never done before. They will use the CPD and resources provided by the LHEM for future history and geography work across the year groups, and this will help the teachers bring more history and geography into an already crowded curriculum, without having to reduce other subjects

Involving all the year groups helped to bring the school together, and the contribution by families and local heritage organisations has helped to strengthen links between the school and the families and with the wider local community.

For pupils, in addition to the skills they have learned and the quality of the research and written work produced, they have gained a greater understanding of their town and how it has developed over time. They have made connections between the town's history and their own families' histories which has increased their pride in Seaham and their sense of belonging.

The school is very proud to have received its Heritage Schools award, for work which the LHEM described as “outstanding”.

This Case Study was produced by Qa Research, an independent full-service social and market research agency commissioned by Historic England to evaluate their Heritage Schools Programme.