

Case Study: The Churches Conservation Trust and Brooklands Farm Primary School, Broughton, Milton Keynes

Heritage Schools and the Churches Conservation Trust

The partnership between Heritage Schools and the Churches Conservation Trust is an effective way to engage more schools and communities with heritage learning. Since the Heritage Schools Programme began in 2012, the Churches Conservation Trust (CCT) has been a partner and Heritage Schools has funded 50% of the CCT's schools' programme. The CCT cares for around 350 historic churches in England which are no longer used for regular worship, and they work with local people to keep the churches available as vibrant parts of the community, and to use them as a learning resource for schools¹.

"Our vision is for historic churches to be enjoyed by everyone as places of heritage, culture, spirituality and beauty and for the significant contribution they make to communities, society and the economy" - Churches Conservation Trust



Pupils find out about St Lawrence, Broughton with the Heritage Learning Officer © CCT

The CCT has three Heritage Learning Officers who are each responsible for around 120 churches across England. Because each Heritage Learning Officer covers such a large

¹ <https://www.visitchurches.org.uk/what-we-do/learning/schools.html>

geographical area, they cannot work directly with schools with all the churches, so they identify churches which have Primary schools within walking distance, with a particular focus on schools which are in less-advantaged areas. The Heritage Learning Officers provide workshops in the churches or in school, which are free of charge thanks to the Heritage Schools funding. The CCT also provides a range of online resources, based on some of the churches in its care, which teachers can use themselves in the classroom or in addition to visiting a local church. In some cases, the Heritage Learning Officers also work with the families of children who attend the school.

“The advantage of offering free workshops is incredible. They can walk to the local church, and two or three classes can visit in the course of a day. They can feel a connection and sense of ownership of their local history. We want to encourage schools to visit by themselves, as they can arrange access with the key holder” - Heritage Learning Officer

During the academic year 2022/23, the CCT worked with 26 schools across the country. Since the covid pandemic, the CCT has found (as have many other heritage organisations) that fewer schools are making visits to heritage venues as they endeavour to catch up from the pandemic disruption. Before the pandemic, CCT worked with around 50 schools each year. The CCT’s online resources are available to all schools, whether or not the Heritage Learning Officers work directly with them.

Background to Brooklands Farm Primary School

Brooklands Farm Primary School has two campuses in Brooklands, Milton Keynes, and has around 1,200 pupils. Around the small, historic village of Broughton, where St Lawrence’s Church is located, there has been a huge amount of new house building in the last 10 years. As Brooklands is such a new community, its residents have come from elsewhere in Britain and from many other countries to work and live in Milton Keynes.

The school has welcomed many people from around the world. The school has found that as a result of global situations, families move to the new community and so over time, the school has welcomed several families who are asylum seekers or refugees. The school is proud of its diversity and believes that welcoming pupils from all over the world is an enriching experience for everyone. Over 50 languages are spoken in the school, over 60% of the pupils are bi-lingual and 9.6% of pupils are eligible for pupil premium.

The teacher who is currently involved with the CCT project is the History lead and the Equality and Diversity lead which includes helping new families settle into the local community as easily as possible. One of the ways to achieve this is the Wednesday Walks with parents, when they walk with the teacher to different community venues

such as the library, community centre and St Lawrence's church so they can familiarise themselves with local places.

Brooklands Farm's involvement with Heritage Schools

The Heritage Learning Officer first made contact with Brooklands Farm Primary in November 2019, and the first group of pupils visited St Lawrence's Church in January 2020. The pupils found out about the history of the church, what identifies it as a Christian place of worship, and what features are likely to be found in a typical parish church. St Lawrence's is notable for its medieval wall paintings, including one of St George and the dragon.

During the covid pandemic lockdown, the Heritage Learning Officer created an online learning resource based on the medieval wall paintings in St Lawrence's which had already been made into a 360° tour by Google Arts & Culture: <https://artsandculture.google.com/streetview/st-lawrence-s-church-broughton-various/8AF483JLiuJjoA> which the school has used.

Following the disruptions of the covid pandemic, in-person visits resumed in January 2022 when all six Year 6 classes (from each of the school campuses) visited the church to do workshops with the Heritage Learning Officer, and in the summer term eight Year 4 and Year 5 classes visited. They learned about the church's role in society at the time when it was built in the 14th century.

Feedback from the teachers about the visits to the church described what they had liked about the visit, and how it had helped the pupils increase their knowledge and understanding of the local area:

"Practical things for the children to do and feel. There was a great focus on the surrounding area and how it has changed" - Teacher feedback form

"By physically including the children in activities. It was very different to anything we have done at school and the children learned a lot" - Teacher feedback form

The Heritage Learning Officer visited all the Year 6 classes at school in January 2022 and 2023 for "Changing Places" workshops. They used historic maps and aerial photographs, centred on St Lawrence's Church, to find out how Broughton and Milton Keynes have changed over time and to compare the town with settlements in other countries. The maps and photographs were provided by Heritage Schools. They discovered the area around Broughton had changed very little until the M1 was built (opened in 1958) and Milton Keynes New Town was developed from the late 1960s.

“The archive maps are amazing – the historic church is at the centre and it’s very obvious that this is the one thing which has stayed constant at the heart of the community” - Heritage Learning Officer



Family holiday activity: making and playing Three Men’s Morris © CCT

During the summer holidays and October half term in 2022, the Heritage Learning Officer organised two days of drop-in activities for the Brooklands pupils and their parents at St Lawrence’s, including historic games such as Three Men’s Morris, dressing up in medieval clothes, and crafts. The sessions were attended by children and their parents and was an opportunity for the families to find out more about the church’s heritage in an informal setting. The CCT has made this video about the families’ activities at St Lawrence: <https://youtu.be/2LQ9r9SX5bg?si=c7yXUdT9hmGIIT>

The Heritage Learning Officer organised a Christmas wreath-making workshop for the parents, to explore the church and Christmas traditions and discover the symbolism of holly, ivy and yew which grows in the churchyard. Several of the participants had recently moved to Britain and they enjoyed finding out more about Christmas and how it is celebrated here.

All these visits to the church are made with the help of the Friends of St Lawrence, who open the church and support the delivery of the workshops. The Friends do not have sufficient capacity to run workshops themselves, but are keen that Brooklands Primary continues to visit the church and the teachers can lead their own activities.



Parents made Christmas wreaths © CCT

The CCT has produced a video of the work with Brooklands Primary and St Lawrence's Church: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGSaUKBpUE>

Impacts on pupils

The teacher said that visiting the church and using the historic maps and aerial photographs has given the pupils an immediate sense of the history of where they live, and increased their understanding of and pride in Brooklands. It has given them more of a sense of belonging; because it is such a new and large community, hardly any of the pupils have grandparents who grew up in this wider area, so this project has helped to give them a connection to the past. The teacher said that the Year 6 pupils were used to seeing aerial photographs from using Google Earth, but holding the historic aerial photographs made their eyes light up as they were holding history in their hands. Using the aerial photographs and historic maps enabled them to see exactly how the area had changed over time from a small village to a very large New Town.



*Using the bespoke maps provided by Heritage Schools
(© Brooklands Farm Primary School)*

Because the pupils can visit the church often, it gives them a sense of ownership and an understanding of the importance of historic buildings. In addition to the CCT workshops, some of the younger year groups visit the church as part of the school's "Know Your Village" walks where they find out about the church and other historic buildings in the village such as the old school.

"The children learn about the church from an early age, and the value and importance of looking after it. The Friends of St Lawrence are older people; if we invest in children at a young age, they will become the supporters of the future"
- Heritage Learning Officer

The teacher commented on the Year 1 pupils' responses to the church:

"The Year 1s loved being in the church and seeing the wall paintings. You could tell the sense of awe from the expressions on their faces. Also the feel of the stone was so completely different to their modern school and homes" - Teacher

One of the Friends of St Lawrence agreed with the importance of introducing children to the heritage of where they live:

"There's so much history going on here in Milton Keynes – people think it's a new-build and there's not, but it's all going on under the surface and the children got a glimpse of it. Perhaps they will be our future historians. As dramatic as that may seem, it's got to start somewhere, hasn't it?" - Friend of St Lawrence

Impacts on teachers and the school as a whole

Following the first visit by pupils to the church in 2020, the Head Teacher considered it vital that the link with CCT was maintained because of the benefits which both the pupils and the parents gained from learning more about the history of Broughton and the church's role in the community, and thus gaining an increased sense of belonging to, and pride in, the area.

The teacher commented that using the Heritage Schools maps and photographs, and having made visits to the church with the Heritage Learning Officer, has opened all the teachers' eyes to different ways to teach History and Geography.

The school is currently developing its RE curriculum, across all the year groups, which will involve visits to the church. The teacher said that she and her colleagues are now confident to make their own self-led visits there. St Lawrence's Church is cared for on a day-to-day basis by the volunteer Friends of St Lawrence, and the school can arrange with the Friends to visit the church.

Impacts on families and the local community

The walks to the church for new parents which the teacher has developed as a result of the work with the CCT has enabled new families to settle into Brooklands more easily and helped them to understand more about the heritage of the area and British traditions. The teacher described the walk to the church which she leads for the parents, very many of whom are from other countries:

"We walk from school through modern housing and then we turn the corner and see the old village, the red phone box and the church. It's quintessentially English – there was an audible gasp of appreciation. It's an awe-inspiring moment. We enter the church through an ornate arch and people are lost for words, looking around. They really appreciate the heritage of the place and feel the sense of history. It sparks questions and curiosity about British traditions" - Teacher

Because the church is in the village of Broughton and most residents live in the new housing estates around it, some of the parents have lived in the area for some time but were not aware of the church's existence before they went on the walk.

"Not a lot of people know that the church is there, and it's so beautiful inside" - Friend of St Lawrence

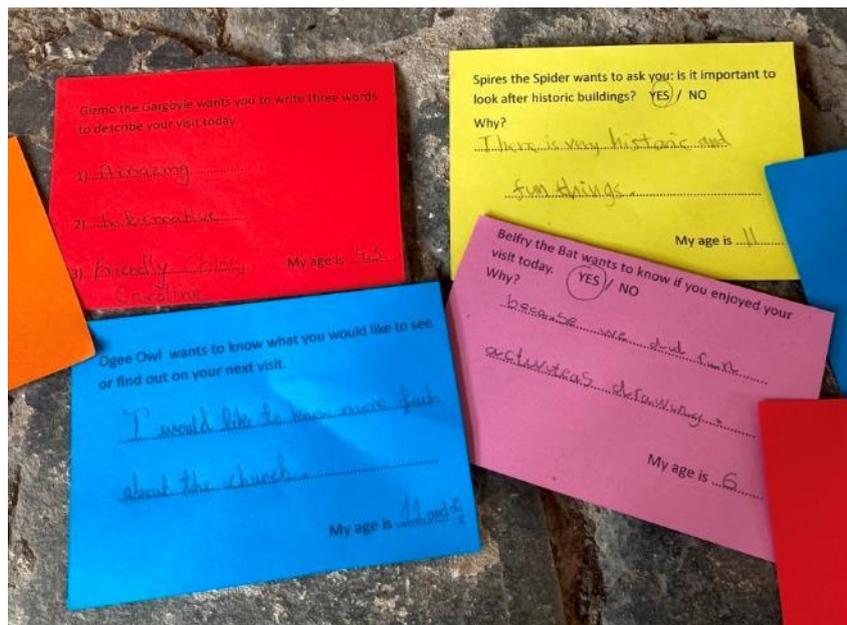
Churches can feel somewhat alienating for those not familiar with them, being able to visit, with the support of the Friends of St Lawrence and the teacher, has shown the parents that they can be part of the community which enjoys and cares for the church.



Families find out about St Lawrence, Broughton, with the Heritage Learning Officer © CCT

The holiday activities were also successful for reaching families:

“They were brilliant for reaching the community and giving them a sense of local connection with the area, especially in a community where so many people have come from somewhere else” - Heritage Learning Officer



Some feedback cards from family activities © CCT

Impacts on St Lawrence's Church

One of the Friends of St Lawrence commented on the value of the CCT's work with Brooklands Farm Primary School:

"We like it because the children are seeing the history, they are getting to see this beautiful old church and learning to respect it, and that's the thing, isn't it, and also diversity and all those things and that's why for me I think it's very, very valuable" - Friend of St Lawrence

The CCT's work with Brooklands Farm Primary has made a strong connection between the church and the school. Although the Friends of St Lawrence do not have the capacity to deliver workshops as the Heritage Learning Officer has done, they are very keen to welcome the school into the church and they can offer talks and worksheets in addition to teachers leading their own visits. The Heritage Learning Officer had made contact with two other local schools who now visit St Lawrence's from time to time, although they have not had so much involvement as Brooklands Farm Primary.

The Friends of St Lawrence hold occasional events in the church and bat walks for all the local community to raise money for CCT to maintain the church. Occasional services are held at the church (a carol service and Remembrance service, for example). As some of the parents have been introduced to the church through the school activities organised by CCT, it has encouraged them to attend these events. The Friends hope that in due course some of the parents will join the Friends. At present, the Friends are all of retirement age and they would welcome younger members.

Summary

"It's been absolutely fantastic. It has enriched our curriculum, and there have been so many other positives which we didn't anticipate, including the stronger links with the community" - Teacher

The CCT's work with Brooklands Farm Primary School and St Lawrence's Church has brought benefits to the pupils, the teachers, the families and the church.

The pupils have learned about the history and development of where they live, using Heritage Schools' historic maps and aerial photos, and supported by the CCT's Heritage Learning Officer. They have found out about St Lawrence's Church, its history and its current role in the community, as a historic building and as a place of worship. The teacher considers that this has helped to increase their pride in where they live.

Working with the Heritage Learning Officer, visiting the church and using the historic maps and aerial photographs has given the teachers new ways to teach History and

Geography. The school's RE curriculum is being revised to include using the church and other CCT resources. The teachers are now confident enough to continue visiting St Lawrence with the support of the Friends, even if the Heritage Learning Officer is not available to lead workshops.

Parents who took part in the walks and other events said that they enjoyed visiting the church, finding out about its history and the history of Broughton, and discovering more about British traditions. It has helped them feel more settled in the area.

The church has benefitted from the contacts which the Heritage Learning Officer has made with local schools, particularly Brooklands Farm Primary School. The church is used more often for learning activities and family events, and more parents attend events now that they are familiar with the church. The Friends of St Lawrence are keen to continue the relationship with Brooklands Farm Primary School and open the church for the school to visit. Even if the Heritage Learning Officer is unavailable to deliver workshops, teachers can organise their own visits with the support of the Friends.