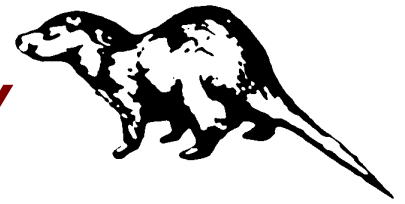


# NUFFIELD PRIMARY HISTORY



## MAGDALEN ROAD

### LOCAL HISTORY / BRITAIN SINCE 1930

The topic was a local study incorporating history and geography. The class teacher, Pam, particularly wanted to develop the children's historical understanding. Time was short – we had only one afternoon a week for four weeks – so we decided to focus on changes in one local set of shops (in Magdalen Road) and also to look at the impact of the Exeter blitz on the area.

To develop as fully as possible the children's sense of time and place, we used a variety of resources (artefacts, books, pictures, TV, street directories, map, buildings, people) and approaches (detective work, handling artefacts, questioning, oral history, story, observational drawing, reading documents and pictures, fieldwork, comparing now and then, correlating different sources of evidence).

In week one we introduced the children to the idea of evidence with a dustbin game detective exercise: I had collected several items of 'rubbish' from shops in Magdalen Road. These I put into a black bin liner, telling the children that they were 'rubbish' clues about our mystery road. Working as detectives, the children identified both the shop from which each item came and the name of the road.

This initial lesson set the scene for the following three, described here.

#### **Year group/class**

Year 2, 33 mixed ability children. The approach can equally well be used throughout Key Stage 2, incorporating a larger area or greater span of time.

#### **Teaching time**

Three weekly lessons, of approximately two hours each.

## Learning objectives

For the children to:

- use a range of different sources to learn about their local area
- develop their sense of chronology through investigating one street at three points in time
- develop their questioning and listening skills
- begin to understand how we find out about the past.

## Key questions

What was our local area like during the war?

How have the shops in Magdalen Road changed since the war?

## Resources

Kelly's Exeter Street Directory, five years old

Kelly's Exeter Street Directory, 1943

Ordnance Survey map showing Magdalen Road, blown up to A3 size. (I obtained this map from the Exeter Record Office. You can also find a map of Exeter showing Magdalen Road at:

<http://www.streetmap.co.uk/streetmap.dll?grid2map?X=292500&Y=92500&arrow=N&zoom=1> .)

Various World War II artefacts, including a children's gas mask in its box (borrowed from parents, friends and Exeter Museum)

Various topic books, photographs and posters relating to the war

Mrs Dolbear, an elderly resident of the area

*Watch* video about shopping just after the war

**You can find street directories for your area, in your local archives, library or record office, for both the 19th and 20th centuries.**

**Maps of all areas of Britain can be downloaded from**  
<http://www.streetmap.co.uk>

## The teaching [Lesson 1]

### Episode 1

*Focus: Preparing for fieldwork*

This was fieldwork day. Using the five-year-old Kelly's Street Directory for Magdalen Road, we counted the shops, then gave each child in the class a shop number – we told them that this was 'their' shop. There were only 26 shops, not enough to go round, so some were given out twice. We only gave out the shop numbers, ignoring the numbers of private individuals.

We assembled the children in groups of five, each group was assigned to a parent volunteer, and we set off to walk the two blocks to Magdalen Road, the children clutching clipboards, pencils, paper, rubbers and their shop numbers.

### Episode 2

*Focus: Observation – recording architectural features of shop buildings*

At Magdalen Road, each child squatted opposite his or her shop and drew it. Most of the shops were in Victorian buildings, still intact above the modern shop facades. We asked the children to draw carefully and accurately, and encouraged them to record architectural details (window shapes, roof pitch and decoration, fancy brick or wood work).

One thoughtful parent had brought her camera, and she kindly photographed each shop being drawn. Half an hour later we headed back to school.

### Episode 3

*Focus: Using documents and maps*

We settled the children back in their desks, then put them in pairs. We gave each pair a copy of the five-year-old street directory for Magdalen Road. We explained that this list of shops was made five years ago, when they were toddlers. Would the shops still be the same? We asked them to look hard at the list and find their shop's number and name. Was it the same shop as they'd drawn today, or had it changed?

We also distributed an Ordnance Survey map to each pair. Together we traced our journey from school on the map. They found their shop on the map, filled in its number, coloured it and made a key showing its name now (and five years ago, if different). We helped the strugglers.

## Episode 4

*Focus: Looking at change and continuity*

When the pairs had finished coding their maps, we gathered the whole class together on the carpet and asked whose shop was the same as five years ago. Fourteen hands shot up. Whose shop is different from the directory list? Twelve this time. We were astonished – almost half the shops had changed their name and business in just five years. Alex said: *I remember when the flower shop moved into the hardware shop, I was in Year 1.*

In the days before the next session, the children finished off their shop drawings, colouring them in with care. They used the photographs the kind parent had taken to make sure their pictures were accurate. Pam mounted the drawings as a frieze along the classroom wall, reconstructing the shopping street. It looked splendid.

## The teaching [Lesson 2]

### Episode 1

*Focus: The local area during the war*

We began with a general class discussion to introduce the war period. Many of the children had grandparents who had been alive during the 1940s. Most knew that Britain was at war with Germany about 50 years ago. Pam had told them how as a baby she was put under a Morrison shelter during air raids. She had a helmet and a real children's gas mask in the classroom, which all the children had tried on. They had also discussed with Pam the war photographs and posters and browsed through the war books on the display table.

So, most of the children could tell us something about the war, gleaned from the classroom sources and from stories told them by older members of their families.

We told them we had a special visitor arriving in an hour's time: Mrs Dolbear, who lived in this area during the war. She is coming into our class to tell us about it.

But first, let's be detectives again and try to find out what Magdalen Road was like 50 years ago. We are going to investigate 'our' shops during the war.

## Episode 2

*Focus: Reading and interpreting documents*

We put the children into their pairs and gave out the 1943 Magdalen Road directory. We told them this was the list of shops from 50 years ago, during the war. We asked them to look at the directory to see whether ‘their’ shop number was there. If so, was it the same shop as nowadays?

The children scanned the list eagerly. The 1943 directory abbreviated several shop names, e.g. tob., confection., so we circulated, helping the affected children to decipher them. At the same time, several children cried out : *My shop isn't there!*

JD: *Why, do you think?*

Will: *Maybe it was bombed in the war. There's a picture of a bombed street on the table.*

JD: *How do you think we can find out?*

Lauren: *Ask the lady who is coming in.*

This was a perfect cue for starting to think about questions for Mrs Dolbear.

## Episode 3

*Focus: Questioning – generating questions about the war*

We asked the children: What do you want to find out?

We set each child to think of three questions about the war to ask Mrs Dolbear and discussed what kind of questions they would like to ask. We gave out cards to write the questions on. The children shared their ideas with their partners and wrote their questions. Here are Nicola's:

*Where was the Midland Bank 50 years ago?*

*Why did they queue up a lot 50 years ago?*

*What way are the shops different 50 years ago?*

## Episode 4

*Focus: Oral history – listening to an eye-witness account*

Mrs Dolbear arrived and the children gathered round, clutching their cards of questions. Taking turns, they started interviewing her, and she explained about war conditions, told of gas masks, bombs and rationing (she had brought in a ration book to show the children). She

confirmed that a bomb had dropped on Magdalen Road during the Exeter blitz.

Then, in answer to a question about what had happened to her in the war, Mrs Dolbear told of her home being hit by an incendiary bomb, of the cat's miraculous survival, of the family's sojourn in a large chicken house for the next eight years, until their home could be rebuilt. The children were spellbound.

During the following week, Pam showed the class a *Watch* video about shops and shopping in the 1940s.

## The teaching [Lesson 3]

### Episode 1

*Focus: Explanation, discussion, comparison and resolution*

We gathered the children in front of their frieze of the Magdalen Road shops. I told them that buildings could give us clues about how old they were: for example, that older buildings tended to have tall windows, fancy brickwork and gabled roofs, whereas newer commercial buildings, built after the war, were more likely to be flat-roofed and to have wide or square windows.

We examined the frieze closely and the children decided which buildings they thought were pre-war and which post-war.

We checked their hypotheses against the street numbers which had been bombed during the blitz and which therefore had post-war buildings. The children were pretty accurate in their observations, despite the confusion caused by several of the street numbers having changed since the war.

### Episode 2

*Focus: Writing – communicating learning and acknowledging sources*

The assessment task was done in the final hour of the afternoon. We asked the children to write about *what* they had learnt, and also to say *how* they knew what they were telling us.

I was keen to see which aspects of the war years the children would select to write about and which sources had been the most telling – i.e. would any particular source inform their accounts more than others?

Their accounts covered a range of subjects, painting a rich picture of the local area in wartime. Mrs Dolbear's personal story made the most impact, followed by gas masks. Many children also mentioned 'their' shop, while others pursued further information about Magdalen Road in

the blitz by scanning the street's 1943 directory for missing numbers as evidence of bomb damage. Some focused on food or architecture. Amazingly, given the supposed power of film, only Amy, Ben and Jonathan mentioned the *Watch* video. Pam had shown the video less than a week before the assessment task, so it would have been fresh in the children's minds. Indeed, shopping details (crushed biscuits, absent foods, rationing, shortages) – mentioned by seven children – originated verbally from Pam or Mrs Dolbear rather than from the video. This, and the general preponderance of stories about Mrs Dolbear, suggest that these children were more engaged by the vivid oral evidence of real survivors than by the television programme.

### Learning outcomes

The children:

- were able to use, and integrate the knowledge from, a range of different sources about the local area to build up historical understanding
- developed chronological understanding through investigating one street at three points in time
- developed their questioning and listening skills
- began to understand what historical sources are and how to go about finding out about the past, i.e. use of evidence
- gained a sense of the past as real.

### Reflection/evaluation

Overall, this short study went very well. The range of teaching approaches and sources used helped the children build up both a sense of what the area had been like during the war, and also an understanding of change and continuity since. They learned what kinds of evidence you can use for finding out about the past and where to go for it.

### Learning potential of the street directories

The children found it challenging to have to look through two different street directories, make connections, look at differences between them and examine why that should be so. From the children's questions to Mrs Dolbear and from the eighteen accounts which mentioned Magdalen Road shops in the war, the street directories did help the

children to appreciate and focus on the local effects of the blitz. A few children showed an early understanding of change over time in their references to their shops in 1943 and five years ago, and even, in Lauren's case, to the present as well.

### **Causation**

Piaget famously claimed that young children aged 7–8 hardly ever use 'because' spontaneously, yet over a third of these 6–7 year-olds did so in their accounts. Later studies have shown that the kind and level of thinking can vary according to the nature of the questions asked and the degree of involvement of the children in the task. In this case the children's involvement as well as the wording of the task (How do I know?) stimulated the use of 'because'. In almost every account, such use was mainly at the level of: I know because Mrs Dolbear told me. However, Emma went further and gave a reason *why* she regarded her source as reliable: I now this becose Mrs Dollbeer came in and *she was arand then*.

### **Constructing a picture of the past from different sources**

At the most sophisticated level, several children showed the ability to select from a story (Mrs Dolbear's) and to fit together pieces from the different sources over four weeks to give an evidence-based personal interpretation. Nicola and Will's coherent, lively narrative expositions and Lauren's tracing of the changes to her shop through three periods of time, place them at this level.

#### **Nuffield Primary History project**

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