



Historic England

Education

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Heritage School Case Study

What was the Watchet Tragedy?

Summary: Year 3 and 4 children visit a headstone and use the historic environment record and archive newspapers to uncover a tragic story.

Where: Victoria Park Primary School, Bristol

Who: Year 3 and 4,

In the corner of a small disused burial ground less than half a mile from Victoria Park Primary school, is a solitary headstone for a young couple who drowned in the nineteenth century.

On a Monday, the Year 3 and 4 classes visited the burial ground where they were met by Michael Gorely the Local Heritage Education Manager for Historic England. They learnt about the history of the burial ground and its association with the now demolished St John's church in Bedminster. At the site of the gravestone the children were asked to think of questions that they would like to investigate connected to the inscription. Through the rest of the week the children attempted to answer the questions they raised through their own historical research. This began with tracing both Sarah Jane Seymour and Henry Larcombe on the 1851 census using www.findmypast.co.uk. They then used 'Know Your Place' to identify where the couple and their families lived and where they worked.

During the week a small group of 5 ambassadors (one child from each class) walked to the Bristol Central Library where they looked at archive newspapers from 1859. These children then reported back to their classmates the story of what happened on the fateful day. The children undertook a variety of other activities based on the story, e.g. letter writing, diary entries, newspaper reports, book making, artistic impressions of the story. Their findings were presented to the Local Heritage Learning Manager in a special assembly on the Friday afternoon. After school on that day their work was displayed as part of a school local history 'museum' with questions for children and their parents to answer.

Intended outcomes:

- To create and follow own lines of enquiry.
- To use primary sources to research the past.
- To develop empathy with people in the past.
- To develop curiosity about their own local area.

What we did:

- Created Exhibits for a school local history museum.
- Made a floor book telling the story of the Watchet tragedy.
- Presented an assembly to re tell the story and to explain the process of the research undertaken.



Successes:

- Children learned about a fascinating local story using primary source materials
- Children learned that gravestones can reveal lots of information about their past
- Children made a connection with two people who lived in their locality in the past

Resources:

- [Find My Past](#)
- [Know Your Place](#)

Next steps/extension activities:

- The story makes an excellent starting point for a broader enquiry about Victorian Bristol.
- There are links with aspects of ordinary life such as transport, industry, housing and religion in Victorian England.

