

Hands-on history

Mersey Vale Nature Park, Stockport.



Date: June 2009

Background:

The Heaton Mersey Village Conservation Group (HMVCG) wanted to attract more families to visit the new Mersey Vale Nature Park in Heaton Mersey, and to raise awareness of the area's heritage as a former bleachworks.

The group approached the Mersey Basin Campaign and Stockport Council's Mersey Vale ranger for help.



The project:

The idea was to organise a day of hands-on activities for local schoolchildren at the nature park.

How we did it:

A working group was set up to organise the project, including the Mersey Vale ranger, the Mersey Basin Campaign's Action Etherow and Goyt coordinator, and members of HMVCG.

A [Breathing Places](#) Phase 4 bid was submitted by the Mersey Basin Campaign, with help from Stockport Council and HMVCG. This had three elements:

- Production of education materials
- Running an activity day for 150 primary school children
- Producing 5000 copies of a new leaflet for Mersey Vale Nature Park showing the park's layout, giving heritage information and encouraging people to volunteer at the park.



HMVCG and the Mersey Vale ranger attended a meeting of local head teachers' to gain their support for the project. With their input, it was decided that the activity day would take place in June, and would be aimed at Year 6 pupils in the area.

HMVCG put together a resource pack for each child and teacher. The pack included historical information about the area, as well as



ecological material about the River Mersey. The packs also formed the basis for talks given by HMVCG to each class.

On the day:

Five craft activities were set up, each linked to the history of the site: printing, maypole dancing, willow weaving, green woodworking and a mini-beast pond safari (pond dipping and viewing on video microscope).

These activities were led by qualified crafts people supported by members of Stockport Council's ranger service, the Action Etherow and Goyt co-ordinator, HMVCG volunteers and volunteers from the Cooperative Bank. A trained first aider was allocated to each location.

All the participating schools were close enough that they could walk to the site. The school groups circulated between the available activities throughout the day, spending an hour at each station (this included the activity itself, and time to move to the next station). Extra time was allocated for lunch and a snack break. A timetable was drawn up for whole day, and everyone had a copy. Stockport's ranger ensured everything kept to time.

Gazebos, borrowed from HMVCG, were set up for each activity, as a wet weather contingency. Tables were borrowed from the local Scouts for the printing station, and portaloos were hired.

At the end of the day, certificates were presented to each child by the Mayor of Stockport.

Project value and funding sources:

(including VAT)

Fabric printing	£320
Mini-beast safari	£170
Willow weaving	£165
Maypole dancing	£120
Wood turning	In-kind
Toilet hire (4 units)	£391
Production of school packs	£247.38
Design and print Of A3 folded leaflet (5000)	£3099.25
Total	£4512.63

The project was funded by the Big Lottery through the BBC Breathing Places Programme.

Considerable in-kind help was given by Stockport Council rangers, Action Etherow and Goyt and HMVCG.

Who was involved:

Action Etherow and Goyt Co-ordinator
Heaton Mersey Village Conservation Group
Mersey Vale Nature Park ranger (Stockport Council)
Countryside rangers from Etherow Country Park and Vernon Park.
Mersey Vale Primary School
St Johns Primary School
Didsbury Road Primary School
Tithe Barn Primary School
Lesley Bardsley (willow weaver)
Chantelle Edwards (mini-beast safari)
Pat Taylor (Maypole dancing)
Kate Freeborough (printing)
Malcolm Topping and Dave Grimwood (green woodworking)
Cooperative Bank staff volunteers.

Future care

This was a pilot project which will be repeated in future if funding can be found.

Lessons learned:

- This was a very popular day and the children really enjoyed learning new crafts. Willow-weaving and maypole dancing were especially well received.
- The schools thought the education resources were relevant and valued the class talks given by HMVCG before the event.
- Clear leadership and communication is essential. The day worked well because everyone was well briefed.
- Keep the activity stations close together so that transfer time is kept to a minimum and the children don't get too tired.
- Tarpaulins for the children to sit on are very useful.

- Hot weather should be considered, with extra drinking water available and gazebos to sit under.
- Schools should be asked to inform parents about the need to provide sun-cream, hats and allergy medication (hayfever and asthma especially).
- Heavy/persistent rain would have made it almost impossible to run the event. This scenario should be considered in future.

Activities need to have a hands-on element to keep children engaged.