

The Anderton Story

Anderton Nature Park, Northwich, Cheshire



Date:

2002 -2005

Background:

Anderton Nature Park is the home of the Anderton Boat Lift and is bordered by the Trent and Mersey Canal and the River Weaver.

The countryside ranger at the Nature Park wanted to involve Comberbach Primary School in a project exploring the history of the park and the wildlife that now lives there. This grew into a much wider arts project bringing together young and old.

The project:

The project happened in 3 stages:

Research:

- Pupils visited a range of local museums to research the history of the area and its waterways – Anderton Boat Lift, the Salt Museum, Lion Salt Works and The Boat Museum at Ellesmere Port.
- The visits were documented by a professional photographer, who also introduced the children to photography using disposable cameras.
- Action Weaver Valley contacted a range of people who had worked on the river or at the chemical works adjacent to the site. The children conducted taped interviews with them during a day-long boat trip on the River Weaver.
- A professional photographer was commissioned for the duration of the project to document the work, organise workshops and assist with exhibitions. She worked with local chemical manufacturer Brunner Mond to unearth old photos of the site from their archive.



Explaining the site's history creatively:

- This material, and the recorded interviews were used to inspire the children in their follow-up projects with writers, musicians, sculptors and textile artists.
- Later tapestry sessions were held in school and there were additional evening sessions for adults. Textile artist Jill Maguire put the adults and children's work together in a framework created by willow artist Geoff Allen.
- The research was also used to inspire further creative activities, for example textile workshops with local volunteers, mosaic workshops with Age Concern, photography, design, clay, music and drama workshops with the school, as well as poetry activities with Cheshire's Poet Laureate.

Exhibitions, publicity and celebration:

- A project leaflet was produced to publicise the project, explain the history of Anderton and promote the nature park.
- Two exhibitions were produced from the research material; of the children's photography and the tapestry and poems. These were held at the Salt Museum and the Anderton Boat Lift. The tapestry now resides at Comberbach Primary school.
- A poetry anthology was produced.
- A mosaic bench was made using designs from the workshops and the finished article can be found at Anderton Nature Park.
- A CD rom documenting all aspects of the project was made available on Cheshire County Council's website.
- A public performance of the children's play was held at the school.
- Poetry readings on the site by Cheshire Poet Laureate as part of a wider public event.

- A presentation evening was held at the Salt Museum to thank all involved.

Project value and funding sources:

- £31,000 cash funding.
- Core funding was from the Local Heritage Initiative. Additional funding came from The Waterways Trust, Action Weaver Valley and Cheshire County Council.
- In-kind support was provided by the Salt Museum, Friends of Comberbach Primary School, Brunner Mond and Age Concern.

Who was involved:

- The initial project idea was devised by Cheshire County Council and Action Weaver Valley. They jointly undertook project management. Action Weaver Valley carried out the financial management.
- Comberbach Primary School became a partner and the funding application was submitted by the Friends of Comberbach Primary School. They also acted as the accountable body for the project.
- A small steering group was set up with representatives of these three partners.
- A keen parent from the school helped out with the publicity.

Future care:

The only item requiring long-term care is the mosaic bench. This is maintained by Cheshire West and Chester Countryside Management Service.

Lessons Learned:

- The interaction between the children and the older people was widely enjoyed. Using a boat trip as the setting for this made the day special.
- The decision to run the project over 3 years allowed the school to involve 100 children. This required a

serious commitment by the three partners in order to maintain a lively programme throughout.

- Using a wide range of artists provided a varied programme that allowed participants to develop many different skills.
- The workshop format enabled people to teach each other. This was especially noticeable in the tapestry project.
- It was vital to have access to technical expertise in producing the CD Rom. This was not present amongst the partners in this project but was overcome by working with a very accommodating and dedicated production company.