Making the Ordinary Extraordinary:  
Agriculture in Medieval Times

A partnership project designed and delivered by  
The Abbey School and the Museum of English Rural Life to develop  
understanding of agriculture and the seasons and its impact on  
Medieval life with Year 7 students

Project report by:  
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This project undertaken as part of Stronger Together, a regional partnership development project  
for Museum Learning in secondary schools led by the River & Rowing Museum and  
The Langley Academy

Stronger Together Project supported by a major grant from
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1. Executive summary

About the project

The drivers:

- Year 7 students find it difficult to relate to the physical hardship of medieval life. This project aimed to improve students’ awareness of medieval agricultural processes and its interconnectivity with religion in medieval England.
- For the Museum of English Rural Life the project aimed to develop its work with secondary learners and act as a pilot for its development of an object handling collection.

Project overview:

The project aimed to adapt an existing scheme of life on Medieval Life to enable pupils to engage in depth with object handling (two separate sessions) and then use their knowledge to produce an exhibition in school. This required students to research in greater detail in lesson time before presenting ‘their’ object in a debate for inclusion/rejection from the exhibition. Following a debate and class vote, six items from the original 16 MERL artefacts were selected for the exhibition. Students then produced posters, exhibition guides and exhibition labels. The project culminated with a Private View attended by key stakeholders who were shown around the exhibition by students.

Impact of the project on participants, project managers and supporting organisations

- The project demonstrated the effectiveness of collaborative working both between schools and museums but also for student learning.
- It presented substantial evidence for the benefits of object-based learning and acted as a useful pilot for the development of an Object Handling Collection at the Museum of English Rural Life.
- It led to the review and improvement of an existing scheme of work.
- It highlighted the benefit of sharing and involving wider museum and school colleagues.
- It presented the opportunities to participate in a broader multi-school and multi-museum project with pioneering objectives: to shape how the museum sector understands secondary education.
Conclusion and key learnings

• The students clearly enjoyed the project and made excellent progress in their learning through the examination of objects, research, debating and voting, and then celebrating their achievements with other stakeholders when the project came to an end. The Abbey has now bought a display case so that future ‘mini-exhibitions’ can be staged by different departments.

• Providing substantial evidence of the value of object handling in secondary learning, the project has also clearly demonstrated the relevance of The Museum of English Rural Life collections to this audience.

• The project managers benefited substantially from the opportunity to work collaboratively and the students valued the added perspective that the ‘museum voice’ gave to their lessons.

• Both project managers recognised that the project might need to evolve and adapt based on the tight timeline and, therefore, adopted a flexible approach.

• Being mindful of what is realistic and achievable in the timeframe is something that has come out as a key learning from the project. The aims and outcomes were ambitious (particularly the final exhibition) and replication of the project in its full form may be challenging, especially in the absence of the ACE project grant.

• Both organisations are confident and hopeful that the project will act as a foundation for future collaborations between The Abbey School and the Museum of English Rural Life.
2. Introduction and context

About the Stronger Together project

Making the Ordinary Extraordinary: Agriculture in Medieval Times was part of a wider regional project to enable museums and schools to collaborate in developing and delivering museum learning partnership projects. The umbrella project, Stronger Together, was set up and run by The River & Rowing Museum and The Langley Academy and funded by a major grant from Arts Council England.

The purpose of the Stronger Together project was to understand how the Museum Learning developed at The Langley Academy could be replicated in other contexts. At the core of this project were 30 bursaries for museum and education professionals from across the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire region. The grant has been primarily awarded on the basis of the project’s potential to shape how the museum sector understands secondary education.

About The Abbey School and the Museum of English Rural Life and the Project Managers

The Abbey School

The Abbey School is an academically selective independent day school for girls. The school currently has 1105 pupils aged from 3 – 18. The school aims to empower girls to become active, happy and successful students equipped to lead creative, fulfilled and productive lives in a rapidly changing world. It was founded in 1887 and moved to its current site in 1905. Pupils travel to the school from Reading and the surrounding area and come from a broad range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. There are 715 pupils in the senior school including 172 in the sixth form. The school has identified 57 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), of whom 29 receive learning support. There are 36 pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL) and a range of support is offered to them according to their needs however most needs are minimal as almost all of these girls are bilingual. The average ability of pupils at all stages in the school is above the national average. In the senior school two-fifths of pupils have ability that is well above average.
The Museum of English Rural Life

Our Country Lives
Transforming views of rural heritage
for a new generation

The Museum of English Rural Life (MERL) is part of the University of Reading’s Museums and Special Collections Services.

Founded in 1951, MERL holds a collection of over one million objects, archives, photographs, film and other library materials relating to the history of food, farming and the countryside. Having been awarded Designated status, MERL’s collections are considered of national and international importance and, as a University museum, it has built up a reputation as a leading authority in its field and as a centre of excellence in teaching and learning. Attracting c 30,000 visitors per year, MERL is managed by a team of c.40 staff and supported by a large number (c.100) of volunteers. Stronger Together came at an interesting time for MERL. As a result of funding from HLF, the museum is currently undertaking a major redevelopment project, Our Country Lives, which will see the reinterpretation and redisplay of its collections, alongside increased consultation and engagement with its local and national audiences.

About the Authors

Project manager, Sarah Henderson teaches History at The Abbey School including A level and International Baccalaureate. Additionally she supports students seeking to read History at University and helps to prepare Oxbridge candidates. Sarah has been responsible for innovative History projects at The Abbey including creating and managing a World War 1 Day for Y9 students. This was a day of activities for 215 students, including 100 students from Reading School, across two school sites. It was designed to engage students in a local history project and to recognise the role of Reading in supporting the war effort 1914 – 1918. Students investigated the lives – and deaths in combat – of boys from Reading School in World War 1. She is interested in developing History projects which encourage ‘students’ to ‘think beyond the classroom’ and was attracted to Stronger Together because it offered the opportunity to develop a project that would incorporate museum learning and object handling.

Project manager, Phillippa Heath, is a museum learning and audience development practitioner. During her management of the Stronger Together project her role at MERL changed from working as Public Programmes Manager (maternity cover) to, more recently, working in the capacity of Audience Development Project Manager. Prior to her work at MERL, Phillippa has had experience of working with a number of museum collections including the National Portrait Gallery, the Theatre Museum and the Museum of Richmond. As this project effectively fell between her two MERL roles.
(as Public Programme Manager and Audience Development Project Manager) Phillippa worked on Stronger Together on a freelance basis as a Learning Consultant.

Having had significant experience of engaging primary learners in museums, Phillippa was most attracted to applying for the Stronger Together bursary due to its focus on working in partnership with teachers to develop a scheme of work for secondary students. The project was supported by management at the Museum of English Rural Life who recognise secondary learners as a priority audience with whom they are keen to engage more extensively in the future as a result of the Our Country Lives project. It also acted as a pilot for seeing the potential for object handling with secondary learners, taking place alongside its development of an Object Handling Collection.

About the Making the Ordinary Extraordinary: Agriculture in Medieval Times project

The Driver

The project focussed on developing and enhancing the existing History scheme of work for Year 7 students at The Abbey. The History department was pleased with its ‘Medieval Life’ topic but it was recognised that, increasingly, students are disconnected from the agricultural process and that from a historical perspective would benefit from a more detailed understanding of the agriculture process in medieval times. It was anticipated that, by making the topic more tangible through the inclusion of objects, that students would increase their understanding of the importance of the seasons and agricultural processes on Medieval lives. For MERL, the topic presented an interesting opportunity for its collections to be interpreted in a different manner. Although the vast majority of objects in its collection date from the 19th Century, many of these would have been largely unchanged from their Medieval equivalents.

The main drivers therefore included:

- Students’ lack of knowledge of agriculture and seasons, and their interconnectivity with medieval religion and how this underpinned life in medieval England
- To develop MERL’s work with secondary learners and act as a pilot for its development of an object handling collection

Activity Summary and Timeframe

The final design of the scheme of work was inspired by the Book of Hours in the University’s Special Collections: a beautiful, illuminated devotional book written in Paris and dating from the 15th Century which includes a calendar of Church feasts alongside the agricultural tasks carried out at particular time of year. It was felt that through seeing this alongside the types of objects similar to those depicted, would be a powerful tool for understanding agriculture in the Middle Ages. As well as this, the project aimed to build on students’ knowledge of Medieval life, stimulate discussion and voting skills, to develop research and presentation skills and extend their IT skills.
For the students, the main project outputs included:

- An opportunity to explore and research artefacts from MERL collections
- An opportunity, during a voting session, to prepare and present an argument for the selection of artefacts
- A pop-up exhibition at The Abbey linking agriculture, seasons and Medieval life

**Figure 1: Timeline of Activity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2014</td>
<td>• Bursary awarded&lt;br&gt;• 2 inset sessions at Langley Academy&lt;br&gt;• 3 project manager meetings to plan scheme of work including one with the MERL collections team&lt;br&gt;• Research including research visit to Reading Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autumn 2014</td>
<td>• 1 inset session at Langley Academy&lt;br&gt;• Delivery of sessions with students from October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2015</td>
<td>• Installation of exhibition&lt;br&gt;• 1 inset session at Langley Academy&lt;br&gt;• Writing up of the evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Engagement</td>
<td>• Post project conference&lt;br&gt;• 1 day visit to Weald and Down Museum&lt;br&gt;• Museum Social History Curators Group Conference (to include a paper on establishing the museum’s Object Handling collection and to use this project as a case study) TBC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Our Stakeholders**

At the heart of the project were 26 Year 7 (UIIII) students. Other stakeholders included:

- The Abbey staff (Rosanna McGee, Head of History, Mel Pople, Director of Academic Studies, Rachel Dent, Head))
- The Abbey sixth formers
- MERL staff (Kate Arnold-Forster (Head of University Museums and Special Collections/ MERL Director), Isabel Hughes (Curator), Dr Oliver Douglas (Assistant Curator), Felicity McWilliams (Collections Officer), Liz McCarthy (UMASCS Librarian) and Adam Koszary (Our Country Lives Project Officer)}
The special viewing of the students’ exhibition: ‘Making the Ordinary Extraordinary: Agriculture in Medieval Times’
3. Planning the project

The project planning was a collaborative process beginning in July 2014 with a meeting at MERL involving the two project managers (Phillippa Heath and Sarah Henderson) and the wider involvement of Rosanna McGee (Head of History at The Abbey), Kate Arnold-Forster (Head of University Museums and Special Collections/ Director, MERL) and Katherine Rose (Langley Academy). As neither organisation had worked collaboratively prior to this project, this meeting was an opportunity to learn about each other and to carry out an initial brainstorm regarding the possible direction that the bursary would take and its potential focus. The first reaction to the partnership between the museum and school was one of excitement. Even at this early stage, due to the close geographical proximity of the two organisations (The Abbey backs onto MERL’s gardens), it was eagerly hoped that, if successful, this project might lead to the establishing of a partnership beyond the project’s timeframe. Early discussions revolved around the issue of how to adapt an existing scheme of work, rather than creating an entirely new one and how to incorporate museum learning for one class (out of four in the year group) in a way that could then be rolled out to the rest of the year group. Sarah talked through the curriculum areas that students study in the lower school (Y7 – Y9) to enable MERL to consider whether there were any obvious links that had not been identified. Both partners discussed various possible projects, including Y9 World War 1 projects. However it was agreed that MERL’s collections particularly lent themselves to supporting the Medieval Life scheme of work which had been the original proposal from The Abbey to Museum Champions.

Finalising the project

By August 2014 the project managers had finalised the overall project but were conscious that it would continue to evolve. The process of finalisation was very much a dialogue between both organisations with Sarah identifying and talking through the scheme of work existing structure and learning outcomes, and Phillippa suggesting potential ways that the museum’s collections could be used in the existing framework but also how changing the structure of the scheme of work might allow further opportunities for museum involvement. As a result of this discussion the scheme of work was adapted to start with the subject of towns, particularly focusing on Reading. The focus on the local story, it hoped, would make the topic immediately relevant but also allowed us to introduce objects straight away using artefacts from Reading Museum’s loan boxes. This involved adjusting the original scheme of work to ensure that the overall content delivery still covered all areas of The Abbey syllabus.
Deciding on project objectives

Figure 2: Project Objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Success Criteria [Define your objectives]</th>
<th>Output (s) [i.e. what is produced]</th>
<th>Outcome (s) [i.e. learning]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent learning</td>
<td>Description of use of objects visually and exhibition caption</td>
<td>Debate and discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
<td>Identifying commonality between objects</td>
<td>Prioritisation/causation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative engagement with objects</td>
<td>Online exhibition</td>
<td>Awareness of range of agricultural activities during medieval year and their link to religious calendar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Display exhibition at school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended learning opportunities</td>
<td>Participating in Norman trail around Reading</td>
<td>Local History opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum developing a handling resource around an unexplored curriculum link</td>
<td>Identifying museum artefacts which link with medieval topic</td>
<td>Students: active engagement with museum artefacts and learning through them. Museum: developing its experience of using collection pieces to link with medieval scheme of work and having it as a resource for future engagement with schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing museum staff experience and expertise (impact on professional practice)</td>
<td>Engaging with Year 7 students (a new audience for the museum)</td>
<td>Innovative experience for museum personnel with considerable potential for learning and skills development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Project objectives were identified collaboratively beginning with Langley inset. Vital to this process was that both project managers worked together, drawing on their respective knowledge of both their organisations (including limitations and restrictions as well as possibilities). The finalised objectives include ones that might have been expected from the scheme of work (in its original conception) but also new ones, resulting from the inclusion of the museum elements (as conceived by the project).

The project managers also brought in wider museum and school colleagues to assess the viability of certain aspects (most notably the timetable and proposed activity eg for Museum of English Rural Life object handling and the prospect of the off-site exhibition and use of portable case).

Planning process

The planning process involved a combination of the following:

- Meetings (taking place at both at the Museum of English Rural Life and The Abbey. Meetings between project managers but also between project manager and their respective colleagues)
- Visits (eg Reading Museum and Langley Academy support sessions)
• Email exchanges
• Phone calls (between the project managers and also with Katherine Rose and Helen Cooke)
• Additional independent reading and research
• Additional lesson planning

The form that this planning process took was successful. Meeting every two weeks in the early stages of the planning, it was a collaborative process; involving sharing ideas and bringing in different perspectives as a result of our different areas of expertise. It also witnessed ideas being challenged, debated and occasionally having to reach a compromise. As a model of working it was incredibly stimulating and, as the project progressed, the development of the partnership became evident, almost tangible.

Probably one of the most significant challenges that this process presented was the timeframe. Having this more collaborative approach to working was affected by the fact that the planning stage was over the Summer. Thereby it restricted the ability of the project managers to meet with each other and also to convene with wider colleagues who needed to be consulted and, sometimes, authorise and ‘sign things off’. That said, conversely, having the planning taking place over the Summer holidays may have, potentially, been beneficial as it allowed time to think about the project and the form it might take before the Autumn Term got underway. Both Sarah and Phillippa were supportive of individual different working styles and this flexibility undoubtedly helped to support the collaborative process. In particular Sarah appreciated that Phillippa recognised the heavy time demands on teachers and was able to schedule for this and be flexible to last minute changes.

Resources identified

The resources which were identified for delivery of the project have been outlined in Figure 3 below. This comprises detail on project management time, additional staff time, money spent and equipment required.

Figure 3: Resources required for delivery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>People</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SJ Henderson, Phillippa Heath – Project Managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isabel Hughes (Curator), Dr Ollie Douglas (Assistant Curator), Adam Kozsary (Project Officer), Felicity Macwilliams (Collections), Elizabeth McCarthy and Fiona Melhuish (Special Collections Librarians), Fred van de Geer (Conservator), Rosanna (Head of History), (IT), (Marketing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>With additional involvement (attendance of exhibition) Kate Arnold-Forster, Abbey Head, Rhi Smith, Helen Cooke, Katherine Rose,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>2 x £40.00 for Reading Museum loan boxes (Abbey School budget) Cost for Weald and Down Museum visit and coach travel. We will not put in for this because will be out of project delivery dates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall planning review

The planning stage of the project, overall, was successful. As the project developed, initial proposals for resources needed to be added to and adapted. In other words, the project involved more time (particularly for the Project Managers) and input from more people than had initially been anticipated.

Further complication was added to the planning process as MERL, which had successfully been awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund grant for redevelopment in June 2014, was to be closed at some
point during the Autumn Term. The exact timetable however was, at the point of planning, unconfirmed. The impact of the closure was significant on planning, dictating the point by which the visit to MERL would have to take place but also meaning that wider colleagues at MERL were to have a number of pressures on their time. This situation required regular communication with colleagues at MERL (particularly having conversations around the closure and access to objects), and necessitated being flexible with the scheduling of the scheme of work. If repeated in different circumstances (i.e., without the museum closure) this may impact on the structure of the scheme of work still further.

Tips:

- **Flexible approach**: Being able and willing to adapt
- **Frequent and regular communication**: Finding the methods of communication which suit all project partners and also ensuring that colleagues are kept up-to-date and informed
- **If possible, set regular meetings**: During this project, project managers met fortnightly during the planning stages
- **Beware of mission ‘spread’ and set boundaries for your project**: as the project continued we could see many more potential opportunities which would have been very exciting to include but we had a finite timeline and needed to be disciplined to achieve everything in the limited time available! This became very clear given the students’ enthusiasm for preparing for the debate and exhibition: they would have enjoyed additional lessons researching and expanding their knowledge of objects and how they related to medieval religious festivals but we had to stay on schedule
- **Plan to monitor student learning regularly**: This project did this by using ‘learning mats’ at regular intervals throughout the project which enabled us to adapt/check on knowledge and to put right any misconceptions
- **Plan to involve other subject teachers and staff where possible**: The Abbey did this by inviting an ICT teacher to join the trip to MERL. Her feedback suggests that she really enjoyed participating in another subject area and also gave us very useful feedback on the object handling session. Similarly, colleagues in collections and curatorial departments at MERL were involved in every stage of the project and made a substantial impact.
- **Share your progress with colleagues**: it opens up museum learning in a very natural way. Most notably, to involve curators in helping to identify objects that would be useful in our handling sessions that we did not know existed!
4. Delivering the project

Project activities

Like the planning of the project, the delivery – in the main- was carried out collaboratively (as can be seen in the Activities and Delivery Project Plan (Figure 4 overleaf)).

Although this method of working involved more resourcing than might always be possible, the advantages were significant as it ensured that both parties were involved and both were aware with how the students were responding to the content. In relation to this Phillippa Heath, Project Manager, writes:

‘It was hugely beneficial to be involved in the delivery stage of the project. So often as a museum learning officer, you meet a school group and deliver them a ‘session’ and then the group return to the classroom. As a result it is difficult to fully ascertain the context for the visit and what exactly the students and teachers got from the experience. Working with The Abbey students in the build up to their visit, during it, and also afterwards post-visit, was incredibly rewarding and gave a real understanding of the part that the MERL visit and the objects played in the scheme of work as a whole’.

Having both project managers present at the sessions, as well as the involvement of colleagues from both The Abbey and MERL, gave the project different voices and perspectives and seems to have been well received by students. In their end of project quiz, when asked how the project could be improved, comments included: ‘I would have liked to have spent more time with the MERL curators' and '(to have) had more sessions with the MERL person'.

Another student commented on the value of having the sixth form history students involved (having attended the MERL visit). They noted that having ‘more sixth formers’ would have improved the project.

Sarah Henderson, Project Manager, writing on the benefits of collaborative delivery states:

‘It became clear that there were great benefits to delivering the project collaboratively. It was helpful for them to build a relationship with the MERL curators over different sessions (in the museum, at the debate and at the exhibition opening). Most importantly, it meant that we were able to continually adapt and refine our programme to maximise the learning opportunities (for example we extended the towns lesson to cover two lessons rather than the originally scheduled one). It was good to have the opportunity to ‘team teach’ over a number of lessons given that teaching is, essentially, a single adult in the room!’

Although the delivery was very much a collaborative process, each of the project managers took the lead on certain activities within the project plan. This involved overall responsibility for preparing the resources, planning the session/ activity, booking spaces, liaising with wider colleagues as necessary and leading on the delivery. In many ways, these ‘divisions’ came quite
naturally with Phillippa taking the lead on the planning those activities which were object based and Sarah, taking the lead on the lessons which responded to or prepared students for those object based activities to move the scheme of work forward. Figure 4 (overleaf) details the overall structure of the delivery including, in bold, the lead project manager. As can be seen, although the delivery was a more collaborative process frequently involving both project managers, Sarah still had the lead for the majority of the activities.

*Figure 4 (Overleaf): Activities and Delivery Project Plan*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timetable</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Delivery Team and Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01.10.14 Towns</td>
<td>Location: in the classroom. Using the image of the Medieval resource as an opening discussion point to focus in on Reading during the Medieval period. Students to have access to artefacts from Reading Museum loan to decipher what Reading was like at the time and will draw on the Norman map to discover what remains from the period. Bringing together all these resources to explore the concept of how towns such as Reading were sustained during this period and, therefore, the importance of the countryside.</td>
<td>PH and SJH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08.10.14 Villages and Towns</td>
<td>Location: in the classroom. A session introducing Medieval villages to the students and comparing them to the towns of the last session. An opportunity to revisit and continuing analysis of Reading Museum objects.</td>
<td>SJH and PH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.10.14 Villages /Religion</td>
<td>Location: onsite visit to MERL and Special Collections Class split into 4 working groups of 7. Each group given a group of related objects. Students had to think to think about what it is and how it linked with other objects in group. The groups were thatching, seed sowing, harvesting and pig management. Students then have to match their item with the relevant image from the Book of Hours introducing the concept of agricultural seasonality linking to the Church calendar. Plenary: Librarian gave overview of Book of Hours which girls had an opportunity to view</td>
<td>PH and SJH (with additional MERL staffing: AK, FM and EM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.10.14 Villages ICT lesson</td>
<td>Location: in the classroom. To explore the process of selection for the display and developing storylines for interpretation. Students to work in their MERL groups to further research their object (link to online book of hours) <a href="http://www.reading.ac.uk/GCMS/Book-of-Hours/gcms-book-of-hours-virtual-vellum.aspx">http://www.reading.ac.uk/GCMS/Book-of-Hours/gcms-book-of-hours-virtual-vellum.aspx</a> and begin to write their descriptions of objects for debate and exhibitions</td>
<td>SJH and PH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half Term</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05.11.14 Villages /reductive lesson from online to physical display</td>
<td>Location: in the classroom. To prepare for Debate – Groups to discuss reduction from 7 items to 2 items for display box at The Abbey – which items will they keep and why, how will they present a large object that doesn’t fit in to the box? Justify in caption and possible class debate.</td>
<td>SJH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.11.14 Debate/ Vote Lesson</td>
<td>Location: in the classroom. Students to be introduced to system of voting and to deliver their research on objects and the case for their inclusion in the display.</td>
<td>SJH and PH (with AK, FM, EM, Helen Cook in attendance)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.11.14</td>
<td>Project suspended for end of term assessment lesson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.11.14</td>
<td>Project suspended for end of term assessment lesson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.12.14</td>
<td>Project suspended for end of term assessment lesson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.1.15</td>
<td>Location: in the classroom Students prepared exhibition guide, object labels, posters and invitations for exhibition</td>
<td>SJH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.01.15</td>
<td>Location: in the Hardcastle Hall, The Abbey School Installation of the exhibition.</td>
<td>SJH, PH, OD and two students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.01.15</td>
<td>Location: in the Hardcastle Hall, The Abbey School Special viewing of the exhibition with invited guests.</td>
<td>SJH, PH, FM, AK and Rosanna McGee, Isabel Hughes, Kate Arnold-Forster, Rhi Smith, Helen Cook and Katherine Rose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.01.15</td>
<td>Location: in the Hardcastle Hall, The Abbey School Exhibition take-down</td>
<td>SJH and OD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-SOW visit (timing tbc)</td>
<td>Weald and Down Open Air Museum (March 2015)<a href="http://www.wealddown.co.uk/Schools/Medieval-farming">http://www.wealddown.co.uk/Schools/Medieval-farming</a></td>
<td>SJH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reviewing the activities
The delivery of the activities presented a number of successes, challenges and involved unexpected changes. In summary:

The successes

1. **Collaboration:** The collaboration in delivery was a great success as both an opportunity to bring in different specialisms, but also as a development opportunity. Phillippa Heath, Project Manager, writes: ‘I learned so much from co-delivery with Sarah. She has an incredibly engaging teaching style, a great rapport with her students and I particularly appreciate how she embraced the opportunity to work with objects in her teaching’.

2. **Opportunities for new resources and approaches:** The activities used a combination of resources including some which came from The Abbey’s existing scheme of work including medieval town image, BBC Reading local history walk and the story of peasant life. Others were developed specially for the project (eg student questionnaire, the hire of the Reading Museum loan boxes, MERL objects and activity sheet, and label writing). Other resources such as the weekly mind map were introduced as an evaluative tool but proved to be an effective way for the students to capture their knowledge and understanding in a very visual way as the scheme of work progressed.

3. **Enthusiasm from wider colleagues:** Undoubtedly a heartening aspect of the project was the interest and support from colleagues at both MERL and The Abbey. There was a genuine excitement about the project and the manner in which it was delivered. This support was, on reflection, vital for the project’s delivery which required not only the involvement of the project managers but also (especially with regards to MERL objects, the visit to MERL and the exhibition at The Abbey) wider participation of other colleagues.

The challenges

1. **More time for delivery:** It became evident the project required more time for delivery than had been anticipated. In part this was because students were still adjusting to life in a senior school. Ideally the project would have been delivered in the Easter Term when they had fully settled into their new school. As a result, the schedule was adjusted and adapted as time went on. In addition, many of the activities would have ideally benefitted from additional time. In particular the visit to MERL which involved the students engaging with the objects and the Book of Hours was difficult to fit into an hour lesson. One MERL colleague in their evaluation commented that: ‘There was obviously quite a tight time schedule as the session was timed to fit in with a lesson. If the session were to be run again, however, I think it could be beneficial if a little more time could be found. The last part of the session (looking at the Book of Hours) ended up being a little rushed’. As a result we were unable to include full lessons on religion and the Black Death as part of the project. They are, however, covered elsewhere in the scheme of work.
2. **Online exhibition:** We had hoped to include an online exhibition as part of a cross-curricular project with the ICT department. However, the ICT department required that all students in the year used the same materials and so therefore, at this pilot stage of the project, we were unable to progress this.

3. **Using MERL’s artefacts to deliver Medieval History:** With the exception of the 15\textsuperscript{th} Century Book of Hours housed in Special Collections, the vast majority of MERL’s objects date from the 19\textsuperscript{th} Century although there use was justified in as much as the agricultural tools and techniques which were focused on had been largely unchanged for centuries. Successfully using 19\textsuperscript{th} Century to tell the story of medieval agriculture while avoiding anachronisms was, therefore, a challenge. Great care was taken on behalf of the project managers to reiterate to students that, although the objects dated from a later period, they represent the tasks that those living in Medieval times would have carried out.

4. **MERL’s closure:** The closure of MERL for redevelopment presented certain challenges. Not only in terms of the MERL visit (which we were keen to organise for pre-closure) but also in terms of the exhibition stage of the project (ensuring that the objects were still accessible).

   It required regular communication with colleagues and a flexible approach to the timetabling.

**The unexpected**

1. **Unforeseen circumstances:** The delivery phase was amended as the project progressed. In part this was due to unforeseen circumstances (for example the visit to MERL had to be rearranged for reasons beyond the project managers’ control). That said, the additional session which resulted (focusing on Villages and Towns) was useful to focus, in more detail, on the interrelationship between town and country during the Medieval period. It also allowed further opportunities for exploration of the artefacts from Reading Museum.

2. **Accommodating compulsory school events:** The students had to take an end of term assessment which meant breaking the project to teach a new topic so that they were able to take the same assessment as their peers. For the students, the continuation of the topic in the Spring Term (with the exhibition) was an aspect for improvement. When asked what would have improved the project in their end of project quiz, comments included: ‘I think it would be better to start the subject earlier, so that it is completed before Christmas, therefore you won’t forget things after the holiday’

3. **Planning for the display:** The exhibition had specific administrative requirements which, in turn, added to the delivery stage in a way that we had not necessarily anticipated at the project’s outset. Involving both organisations, these are outlined in Figure 5.
This process involved conversations and compromise on the part of MERL and Abbey staff in particular with regard to the placement of the exhibition in school. Both parties recognised that it was essential that the case was in a high-traffic area but somewhere that did not impede school activities and that the light level was appropriate for the preservation of the objects. For this reason, the dining room hall was rejected because although high traffic there was the potential for the case to be knocked and, so, the main hall (Hardcastle Hall) was selected. After initial concerns that the light levels could compromise the object preservation but on balance, given it was winter months with weaker light meant that MERL’s curatorial team were satisfied on the loan agreement. MERL Assistant Curator, Dr Oliver Douglas certain valued The Abbey’s openness to discussion around the placement of the exhibition and the objects which were to be included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MERL</th>
<th>The Abbey</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2014 – Speaking to the curator regarding the outcomes for the project and schedule</td>
<td>Summer 2014 – Speaking to colleagues regarding the outcomes for the project and schedule</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October/ November 2014 - Booking the portable exhibition case</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2014 – draw up list of the objects student voted for and feedback to curator</td>
<td>November 2014- student object election/ voting on objects to include</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2014 – draw up conditioning report and suitability of objects for external display</td>
<td>December/ January 2014 – securing permissions for display (based on condition reports)</td>
<td>December 2014 – visit by MERL curator to assess a suitable location for the exhibition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>January 2015 – conversations between both organisations regarding insurance of artefacts whilst on display (and suitability of the objects for display from a school point of view)</td>
<td>January 2015 – firming up installation and take down (and timing of special viewing event)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
‘The Abbey School were fantastically receptive and accommodating in relation to the Museum’s requirements for safe and secure object display. The process was undeniably structured and well-planned but also came at a time when time pressures meant a limited amount of object collections and curatorial side of things’.

In addition The Abbey and MERL discussed the suitability of some of the objects for display given that they were sharp agricultural tools! Health and safety considerations were discussed and both parties were in agreement that given the siting of the case and the fact that it was locked that it was important for the integrity of the exhibition that they were included. As can be seen above, loan itself required a formal Loan Agreement and The Abbey School had to know the insured value of the items.

Lessons learned

• **Initial planning:** Invaluable; this ultimately saved a great deal of time because the lesson series had been planned in such detail.

• **Communication:** Keep talking to a range of stakeholders. It was vital that all stakeholders (across school maintenance and finance, museum curatorship and collections) were aware of the project’s progress and its challenges (eg sharp objects!) and were sufficiently informed to support the project.

• **Expect the unexpected:** With exciting collaborations involving multiple stakeholders like this there is the risk of project creep. Two project managers are able to agree things quickly but their respective institutions might require longer to implement!

• **Enjoy it and celebrate the outcomes!** Having a ‘Private View’ enabled everyone involved (including students) to appreciate the success of the project. Everyone in the two institutions wanted the project to succeed and it was an exciting and different opportunity.
5. Impact on students of participating in the project

Extract from Figure 2: Project Objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Success Criteria [Define your objectives]</th>
<th>Output (s) [i.e. what is produced]</th>
<th>Outcome (s) [i.e. learning]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent learning</td>
<td>Description of use of objects visually and exhibition caption</td>
<td>Debate and discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group work</td>
<td>Identifying commonality between objects</td>
<td>Prioritisation/causation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative engagement with objects</td>
<td>Online exhibition Display exhibition at school</td>
<td>Awareness of range of agricultural activities during medieval year and their link to religious calendar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended learning opportunities</td>
<td>Participating in Norman trail around Reading</td>
<td>Local History opportunity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Our aim was for students to undertake analysis of agricultural objects from MERL and to present these in their final exhibition and object project plan. This would enable them to develop higher order thinking skills independently and to gain knowledge of agricultural activities which took place throughout the year. To measure this at the beginning of the first session we gave each student a questionnaire to assess their existing knowledge of medieval agriculture. Given that the school in an urban setting we also included questions about modern day agriculture to assess knowledge of modern day agriculture. At the end of the project we then gave out the same questionnaire (with some additional questions) to measure improved knowledge. In addition we asked students to add to a mind map mat every other lesson to measure recalled knowledge from previous lessons. Other ways in which we assessed students included debating skills and presentation of their objects, visitor book comments from the exhibition and an extended writing homework on the Reading Museum object handling session.

Results and Analysis

Success Criteria: Independent Learning

Output: Description of use of objects visually and exhibition caption
Outcome: Debate and discussion

We aimed for students to be able to describe objects visually and to assess their possible use. This was achieved by encouraging discussion via a directed question sheet which then enabled them to research the objects online in preparation for debate and discussion about which objects to include in an exhibition. Students made excellent progress in developing historically accurate vocabulary and in fluently describing tools and their usage both verbally and in writing. This was evident in their enjoyment in engaging with the objects which was reflected in their homework task and
mindmapping. There was clear progression in their confidence in handling objects between the initial lesson using objects from Reading Museum to their subsequent visit to MERL.

The debate represented an opportunity for students to prepare a powerpoint presentation and formulate an independent argument and present it to their peers but also to Abbey and MERL staff. This experience therefore developed their public speaking and their writing skills. As Figure 13 shows, the debate and preparing for the powerpoint presentation was identified as a particularly enjoyable aspect of the project.

The voting aspect to the debate also empowered students to have their say in what objects were included in the exhibition. Also enabling cross-curricula links, this aspect of the project touched upon the UK’s democratic system and their future roles as voters. The results of the voting were as follows:

*Left: Students and other stakeholders at the debate lesson*

**Results of student voting**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bacon hanger</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Carcass hanger</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fleem</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pig stick</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cleaver</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>Quern stone</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thatching spar</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thatching bat</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bill hook</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>Seedlip basket</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seed fiddle</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crow clacker</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 4</td>
<td>Scythe</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sickle</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fruit basket</td>
<td>10 first vote (13 second vote)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flail</td>
<td>10 first vote (10 second vote)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Independent voices also came across strongly in the labels produced for the exhibition (as Figure 6 shows).

*Figure 6: An example of a student label produced for the exhibition*

**Crow Clacker**

This was used to scare off any birds that tried to eat the seed in the fields. Children would have to stand in the fields for eight hours a day and shake the clacker. It would make a loud sound that would scare off the crows.

I think that the crow clacker should be included because it shows how important the crops were in Medieval farming so that people could eat.

**Success Criteria: Group Work**

*Output: Identifying commonality between objects*

*Outcome: Prioritisation/causation*

Group work was encompassed in the project from its outset with the following elements all requiring collaborative working on the part of the students:

- Handling and engaging with the Reading Museum handling artefacts, with group discussions around the identification of the objects
- The visit to MERL and examination of the objects. Working collectively to identify commonality between the objects
- Using IT to research and discover more (both independently and as a group)
- Preparing for the debate and working together in project groups
- To host the exhibition special viewing and (in pairs) acting as stewards and tour guides to show visitors (including fellow students) around the display

As Figure 13 shows, ‘working as a team’ was identified by one student in their post-project questionnaire as the most enjoyable part of the project.
Success Criteria: Creative engagement with objects
Output: Display exhibition at school and online exhibition
Outcome: Awareness of range of agricultural activities during medieval year and their link to religious calendar.

Output: Display exhibition at school and online exhibition

The exhibition was a significant output of the project. On display for a week in January 2015, the exhibition was, in many ways, a tangible manifestation of the collaborative process as a whole. Using MERL’s portable display case the exhibition comprised objects from the collection which had been selected and researched by The Abbey students; effectively they were the curators. Two of the students were nominated to work with MERL Assistant Curator, Dr Oliver Douglas to install the exhibition, and most of the class took on the role of tour guide over successive break and lunchtimes.

MERL Curator, Dr Oliver Douglas, installing the exhibition with the student curators

The fact that the exhibition was on display in the school meant that the project was opened up to a range of other audiences including:

- Other students (approx 750)
- The Abbey staff (not involved in the project)
- The Abbey visitors (including parents attending parents evenings)
- MERL staff
Outcome: Awareness of range of agricultural activities during medieval year and their link to religious calendar.

For the majority of the students (20 out of 24) this scheme of work was the first time they had studied the Medieval period. Of those who had studied the period for, their knowledge of the topics that they studied was confused. Of the 4 who had studied the period before, their response to the question "can you remember any topics?" responses included 'Romans and Vikings', 'We did a little bit in Y5 but I can't remember', 'We did a little bit in year 5 and 6 but I can't really remember'.

It is therefore unsurprising that when asked when the Medieval period was, 75% (of the class of 24) answered don't know and, of those who did answer (6 students) 4 were incorrect. By the end of the scheme of work, there was a marked improvement in knowledge levels. In the post-project questionnaire, when asked when the Medieval period was, 70% of students answered and of those 85% were correct in the responses that they gave.

The questionnaire also explored student knowledge of agriculture and land ownership in the Medieval period. Again, the results of these questionnaires highlight a marked increase in knowledge and understanding as a result of the scheme of work. At the outset of the project, when asked who owned the farming land during the Medieval period, 70% answered don't know. When the same question was asked at the end of the project, 70% were able to answer with responses including: 'Rich people', 'The Lord of the Manor', 'only richer people like lords or barons or knights', 'Lords, Ladies, Kings, Queens', 'The King/ Queen', 'The Mayor/ landlord', 'the farmers'.

Figure 7: Lady Bell, Governor of The Abbey School and MERL volunteer (left) and Rachel Dent, Head of The Abbey School (right) with curator students viewing the exhibition
With its exploration of agricultural process, the questionnaire also revealed a diverse range of knowledge about how farmers went about tasks in the Medieval period and the type of equipment they used.

*Figure 8: How did a Medieval Farmer Sow a Crop in student words*

**Pre-project Questionnaire: How did a Medieval Farmer Sow a Crop**
- Don’t know
- By hand
- Different materials
- Use tools and big animals to carry the weights

**Post-project Questionnaire: How did a Medieval Farmer Sow a Crop**
- Don’t know
- By grinding it
- With a scythe
- With animals
- By hand
- Use a seedlip
- Seed fiddle
Although Figures 8 and 9 indicate that there was still a degree of confusion around the agricultural processes of sowing and harvesting by the end of the project (suggesting that it remains a difficult subject to grasp for this age group), some students did demonstrate an increased understanding of how these tasks were carried out. What is evident when comparing the pre and post-project charts is the change in vocabulary in the student responses. Use of technical terms such as scythe, seedlip, seed fiddle, sickle, fruit basket in the post-project questionnaire all correspond to the objects that the students saw at MERL and, therefore, highlight the influence that the visit (and the later analysis of and research into the objects) had.
The text prepared for the debate and the labels written by the students for the exhibition provide an indication of the knowledge and understanding that the students had gained over the course of the project, particularly around the objects and how they were used as Figure 10 shows.

*Figure 10: An example of a student label produced for the exhibition*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fruit basket</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woven from thin strips of wood and in the shape of a cone with a handle on the top to carry it. Many people in medieval England would have had a fruit basket for carrying soft fruits such as apples, grapes and berries and also plums. You would have it attached to you or on your clothes by the handle on the top of the basket. Most rich people would not have had it but their workers would have had it to collect the fruits. It was important because otherwise the workers would have had to carry all the fruits by hand and it would be unhygienic and more likely to drop onto the floor because they would have full hands. This is a small replica of a fruit basket from the medieval period.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By HB

The scheme of work also aimed to allow the students to make connections between religion and the agricultural calendar. Due to time constraints, this was not explored to its full potential yet, even so, questionnaire results suggest that some students had made the link, one referencing the Book of Hours that they saw during their visit to MERL as demonstrating the connection.

*Figure 11: How does a Modern Day Harvest Festival Connect Farming and Religion in student words (overleaf)*
Pre-project Questionnaire: How does a Modern Day Harvest Festival Connect Farming and Religion

- Don't know
- Sharing
- Giving
- Being thankful to God
- What they are I aren't allowed
- Harvest crops from farms and you get them whatever your religion
- To raise money for farmers
- Farmers grow food and at Harvest the food is brought

Post-project Questionnaire: How does a Modern Day Harvest Festival Connect Farming and Religion

- Don't know
- Some religions believe Gods are the reason harvest goes well
- Giving
- Being thankful to God
- It is what people did when the harvest had come
- Jesus feeds the five thousand
- The Book of Hours would connect
Success Criteria: Extended learning opportunities

Output: Increased knowledge of local History and role of Reading in Medieval times.
Outcome: Increased Local History awareness

Students with the project managers exploring the Reading’s Medieval history

The existing scheme of work already focused on Reading but this was expanded using objects from Reading Museum’s handling collection. This enabled students to explore Reading’s significant role in the Medieval period with Reading Abbey and the town’s development as a centre of cloth production. In an extended writing homework students were encouraged to reflect on the object handling session. Their comments included:

‘Best History lesson ever!’

‘I liked trying to work out what objects they were’

‘Tactile...being able to handle the artifacts was [also] very helpful as we could feel how heavy they were’

The BBC History Norman trail around Reading was suggested as an extra-curricular opportunity to reinforce this learning. Interestingly although no students did the trail, one mother in the group did – an unexpected outcome! This focus on Reading as a thriving Medieval town allowed a smooth and effective transition into the exploration of how it was sustained by the outlying countryside.
**Other Examples of Success**

**Raising awareness of the Museum of English Rural Life and its collections**

Despite being a museum which is in close proximity to The Abbey School (the museum’s garden adjoins The Abbey’s grounds), at the project outset most of the students had never heard of the museum nor visited. This lack of awareness is evident in the pre-project questionnaire results which reveal that nearly 40% of students did not know what to expect to find in the Museum of English Rural Life. By the end of the project, awareness of the Museum’s collections had increased significantly as *Figure 12* shows.

*Figure 12: What do you think you would find in the Museum of English Rural Life?*

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**Pre-project Questionnaire: What would you expect to find in the Museum of English Rural Life**

- Objects to do with countryside
- Objects to do with nature and England
- Medieval objects
- Historic objects
- Pottery
- Farming objects
- Don’t know

---

**Post-project Questionnaire: What would you expect to find in the Museum of English Rural Life**

- Things that were used in the countryside and show how rural life was different
- Objects which represent English culture
- How people lived
- Historic objects
- Farming objects
- Don’t know
**The benefits of object handling and learning from objects**

Anecdotal evidence such as conversations with the students highlighted the popularity of object handling for the students, with the object handling of both the Reading Museum handling collections and the MERL artefacts during the students’ on-site visit. This anecdotal feedback was reinforced by the students’ post-project questionnaire which revealed object handling as being the most enjoyable aspect of the project (*see Figure 13*).

**Figure 13: What have you most enjoyed about this project?**

![Post-project Questionnaire: What have you most enjoyed about the project?](image)

- Handling and learning from objects
- Preparing the powerpoint and presenting in the debate
- Visiting the museum
- Creating the exhibition
- Working in a team

Interestingly, the student exhibition labels which described the objects were written in a manner which highlights the impact of the object handling. One label, describing the billhook, reads:

‘This knife-like object would be dragged across the top of a hedge to make the hedge nice and neat. The twigs could be used for firewood or to make things. The blade was very sharp and made from heavy metal. It would be used by a farmer. The blade was 8-10 inches long and the wooden handle would be able 6-8 inches long…..’

From the incredibly descriptive language used, it is evident that its author had handled the object before writing her label and, therefore, the influence of the experience. It also appeared that part of the students’ enjoyment was leaving school and visiting the museum for the object handling session this added to the ‘novelty factor’ for students and demonstrated that a ‘new’ environment can stimulate learning.
The involvement of other School year groups and exhibition visitors

The involvement of other year groups and exhibition visitors was an unexpected aspect of the project.

It was decided to invite sixth formers who were intending to read History at University to join the students when they visited MERL to support their younger peers. The visit also gave them the opportunity to talk with curators about a career in museum management as well taking part in the object handling session. Looking at the questionnaire results, evidence suggest that this was a beneficial experience for those students. When asked how they benefitted from the session answers included:

‘(It) increased my interest in the medieval period.’
‘(It was) interesting to talk to recent graduates to gain more of an idea about the different paths a history degree can lead to.’

On installation, the exhibition was situated in the most highly-trafficked area of the school. This meant that other students from school all had the opportunity to look at the objects. Additionally it was promoted in a school assembly. This meant that parents attending Parents Evening were also able to view the exhibition as well as other school visitors.

Exaining visitor feedback in the exhibition Visitors Book, it is evident that those people who viewed the exhibition not only enjoyed the experience but also learned something new (as the quotes below illustrate):

‘Super exhibition, labels giving just the right amount of content to inspire you to find out more...’
‘A very nice display, ED and M? Knew a lot about the items so their talk was very interesting.’
‘Fascinating objects explained very imaginatively. Thank you’

Left: visitors being shown the exhibition by the student curators
Summary of key benefits and lessons learned

- **Knowledge and Understanding**: the questionnaire results, mind map, labels and homework suggest that there was a correlation between the project and an increase in student knowledge and understanding of the Medieval period. Evidence indicates that other users (such as visitors to the exhibition) also increased their knowledge and understanding of the period as a result of the exhibition, the accompanying booklet and the student ‘tour guides’.

- **Enjoyment, Inspiration and Creativity**: Evidence from the questionnaires and visitor book clearly demonstrates that students enjoyed the project. The enjoyment was not just restricted to the students; many different stakeholders enjoyed the outcomes of the project.

- **Skills**: The students gained skills throughout the project in object handling, research, debate, label writing, exhibition installation and exhibition promotion.

- **Attitudes and Values**: Evidence also suggests that the students had a great sense of pride in the exhibition and were proud to show it to visitors during the ‘Private View’ and when stewarding the exhibition throughout its duration. Sixth Formers who took part in the MERL session, as well as finding it a learning experience, also found conversations with recent History graduates helpful potentially, therefore, informing future career decisions.

Lessons learned

- It is essential to be respectful of each other’s institutions and priorities. For example there was an initial concern that the exhibition site in school could be detrimental to the objects because of the light levels but on balance it was felt that given the low winter light level it was important to have the case in a high traffic area.

- The work sheet for the MERL object handling session focused very much on individual responses whereas students approached this activity very much from a group perspective. In future it would be more effective to develop a way of students to record their engagement with objects in a collective rather than an individual manner.
6. Impact on project managers of running the project

Project Manager, Phillippa Heath

With one of the project’s success criteria being the development of museum staff expertise, probably the easiest way of assessing this is in the first instance is by looking at its impact on my own professional practice. Not only has the project provided me with the opportunity to develop my professional experience of working with secondary learners, it has also been the chance to run a school project in a truly collaboratively manner with Sarah.

To summarise the main impacts on my professional practice:

- **Working with secondary learners**: The opportunity to work with the Year 7 students at The Abbey has enhanced my professional experience of working with secondary learners in museum contexts. Not only this, it also gave me the chance to work within classroom settings and witness how museum visits are structured within schemes of work. The fact that I was lucky enough to work with students throughout the duration of the project, it has been possible to build a rapport with them and to see how their knowledge developed.

- **Working on a new subject area**: Despite having studied history to graduate-level, I had never studied the Medieval period in particular depth. This project presented an opportunity to research and build on my knowledge of the period and, in particular, of the significance of agriculture and religion.

- **Working collaboratively and redefining museum learning**: It has been a very rewarding experience to work in collaboration with Sarah. To be able to share ideas and have open discussions has evolved into a very successful partnership. It has reinforced how effective these partnerships can be and has made me reassess my opinion of Museum Learning as not only being something that is restricted to the sphere of museums or to the staff who work in them but, rather, it can be greatly enhanced and lead to far more successful outcomes if schools and museums work together.

- **Reinforcing the benefits of object based learning**: I was heartened to see how much the students enjoyed and learned from the object handling aspects of the project. This has served to greatly reinforce my own perception of the value of object based learning.

- **Increasing my understanding and appreciation of schools and teachers**: Although I always understood how busy teachers are, this project gave me a real appreciation of how incredibly hectic the school term is and the pressures that teachers are under. It has also shown how, with very little notice, teachers have to respond to unexpected circumstances beyond their control thereby reinforcing that flexibility is vital if museums are to be able to work effectively with teachers and secondary schools.
Project Manager, Sarah Henderson

- **Working collaboratively:** It was exciting to work with a partner from outside school and to look ‘beyond the school gates’. It was extremely beneficial that Phillipa had previous experiences of working with students and that she was prepared to push the boundaries. For example, I did not expect that we would be able to show students the Book of Hours, from the University’s Special Collections and that the Librarian would enhance this experience with other exhibits. I also was nervous that some of the more dangerous aspects of medieval life would be sanitised but in fact our students were able to appreciate the full arena of agricultural implements! The museum’s flexibility in presenting objects from the collection to support medieval life and their willingness to maintain the historical integrity of the project was very important.

- **Reinforcing the benefits of object based learning:** This was a revelation. It was the first time that I had used objects for a whole lesson and it was extremely exciting to see how this brought History to life for the students. I had always been put off by the cost of renting boxes but now realise that this is a wise investment and well worth the cost for the interest that it generates. It enhanced our existing work on towns and villages to use the objects from both Reading Museum and MERL.

- **Reviewing and improving a scheme of work:** The project challenged me to review our Year 7 scheme of work from a different perspective. Whilst we constantly review our materials, it was interesting to do so with the support of an external partner and I valued their perspective.

- **Sharing with school colleagues:** There has been genuine interest and support for the project in school as evidenced in the exhibition Visitor’s Book comments.

- **Realising the support and expertise museums can provide:** The project, and the accompanying inset sessions at The Langley Academy, demonstrated to me that museums can offer learning support across the academic curriculum.

**Summary of key benefits and lessons learned**

- The benefits of collaboration were considerable.
- The project reinforced the benefits of object-based learning.
- Don’t be scared to share with colleagues across departments and other users (such as parents and other year groups): results are all the richer for it.
- The wider support network of Katherine Rose (Langley Academy) and Helen Cook (River and Rowing Museum) was invaluable. Both proved to be excellent mentors and have provided incredibly useful tools for the effective planning, delivering and evaluation of the project.
7. Impact of the project for The Abbey School and the Museum of English Rural Life

The Abbey School

• The project was considered a great success to the extent that the school has purchased a display case which can be used in future to display interesting items from all subjects.
• The History Department were very pleased with the outcome of the project. The department already encourages students to work together across age groups and it was evident that taking mixed age groups on school trips is very effective.
• The History Department does not intend to fully replicate the project in future (due to pressures of time) but does intend to integrate object handling into a range of schemes of work.
• It is hoped that MERL will attend a Learning Innovation Group meeting at The Abbey to share and build upon opportunities for museum learning with teachers from other departments. This is scheduled for April.

Museum of English Rural Life

Extract from Figure 2: Project Objectives (Museum of English Rural Life)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Museum developing a handling resource around an unexplored curriculum link</th>
<th>Identifying museum artefacts which link with medieval topic</th>
<th>Museum: developing its experience of using collection pieces to link with medieval scheme of work and having it as a resource for future engagement with schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing museum staff experience and expertise (impact on professional practice)</td>
<td>Engaging with Year 7 students (a new audience for the museum)</td>
<td>Innovative experience for museum personnel with considerable potential for learning and skills development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Success criteria: museum developing a handling resource around an unexplored curriculum link

One of the most significant outcomes of the project for the Museum of English Rural Life has been the creation of a new handling resource which links with a Medieval scheme of work. Despite the initial challenge of framing MERL’s collections within a study of Medieval life, the project was delivered to sensitively manage this process. MERL Curator, Isabel Hughes, views this as one of the project’s greatest successes:

‘This has been a very valuable project for the Museum. It has provided us with a means of thinking about how to use our collection to cover a medieval theme. We have been able to use both a part of our special collections library and our object collection to support a secondary school to address medieval life’.
The project allowed MERL to develop its experience of using collection pieces with secondary learners and has resulted in the creation of resources which can be used and adapted for future engagement with secondary schools. This outcome is made all the more significant in that MERL, at the time of the project, could be considered unusual in that it did not have a handling collection. Running alongside the Stronger Together project was the development of an Object Handling Working Group which has put into place a strategy for developing and administering an object handling collection. The project with The Abbey has proven to be an effective pilot for identifying objects for handling, organising handling activities and the potential impact that handling might have on users. MERL Assistant Curator, Dr Oliver Douglas writes:

‘I think the project has been a great success. It has served to strengthen collaborative partnerships and has significantly aided the Museum in shaping and devising its new approach to handling’

It is also hoped that the project will be one of the case studies presented to the Social History Curators Group meeting (Summer 2015) as an example of good practice.

**Success criteria: Developing museum staff expertise**

As has been detailed elsewhere in the report, the project received much-valued support from colleagues especially those in curatorial departments. This support came in the form of help with the identification of suitable artefacts and information on their use, but also involved colleagues assisting with The Abbey visit to MERL. Two out of the three colleagues involved in this element of the project felt that the experience impacted upon and developed their professional practice and was a learning experience with feedback including:

‘It has made me more comfortable working with students and handling objects’

‘I haven’t had much experience working with school groups before, so it was really useful to participate in this session. It will help if I am involved with similar sessions in the future, as I now have a much better idea of the right ‘level’ to pitch a session at for this age group’

For another colleague, the session challenged their preconceptions of the types of objects that would be suitable for handling with this age group:

‘The session was useful as a trial of object handling, which is something I’m currently working on. I think that, before the session, I was a little nervous about the students handling some of the objects (particularly the bladed objects and those with moving parts) but I was reassured by how sensible they were and might be more inclined not to exclude interesting but ‘risky’ objects in future’
In one instance, the experience highlighted potential future research that could be carried out in future when working with this audience. When asked *is there anything that you have learned as a result of the session?* one colleague responded:

‘Nothing entirely new, but I am going to have a think about how to encapsulate basics on early book production for a younger audience’

One of the unexpected and unplanned aspects of the session at MERL was the students’ use of their own devices to record their museum handling experience. This was identified by one colleague as something that they learned during the session and which might have a lasting impact on the future work of the museum:

‘The opportunities in engaging students through their own devices (phones, tablets etc) which may be useful for co-created content in the museum’

Although recognising therefore that the project did involve a number of staff from across the museum and, therefore, was more heavily resourced than might always be possible, at the same time, the experience of being involved was positive and, in some cases, considered as a professional development opportunity. Recognising this, MERL Assistant Curator, Dr Oliver Douglas comments:

‘(The project) offered new opportunities to several members of staff to gain further experience of working with school groups and audiences. This will not only stand them in good stead in terms of their future careers but has been of benefit in terms of boosting their understanding of the audience needs of these groups in advance of our forthcoming redisplay’.

**Reaching a new audience**

Although MERL has had a strong history of working with primary schools, its role as a University museum means that it is keen to increase its work with secondary schools to support the University’s widening participation strategy. Stronger Together has enabled MERL to establish a relationship with a local secondary school, to build on its experience of working with secondary students but also to pilot a collaborative way of working with secondary schools that it can potentially continue in the future. MERL Curator, Isabel Hughes when reflecting on the project describes:

‘I think it has given us confidence that our collection can be made relevant and stimulating to secondary history students. We don’t have a significant number of secondary school visits currently and this project has shown us a helpful methodology for developing the secondary schools market’
MERL Assistant Curator, Dr Oliver Douglas comments:

‘I think the project has opened up new avenues of potential for engagement with secondary school groups. The interdisciplinary character of the students written (label text) responses to the artefacts they worked with highlights their ability and capacity to embrace a far less silo-focussed way of thinking about museum objects. This bodes well in terms of broadening the ways in which the Museum of English Rural Life can hope to serve and deliver content to secondary school audiences’.

**Legacy of the relationship and potential for replication**

The project has resulted in a strong partnership which has, in turn, opened up the chance for further collaboration in the future with The Abbey, not solely around history but also potentially within different curriculum areas. Isabel Hughes, MERL Curator, when reflecting on the successes of the project comments:

‘We were very fortunate to have a school adjacent to the Museum with whom to work. However, we have not always had such an active relationship and this project enabled us to make stronger connections’.

Although resource limitations will dictate the nature of the legacy of the project and its potential for replication, the success of the project and strength of the partnership which has resulted, means that there are high hopes for the relationship be sustained into the future.
Summary of key benefits and lessons learned

For The Abbey:

- The project inspired the school to purchase a display case to continue exhibitions as a way of celebrating the culmination of student projects.
- The project reinforced the value of group work for student learning.
- Although recognising the difficulties of replicating the project in its full form, the school will continue to embrace object based learning in their schemes of work for history and are enthused by the potential of it being rolled out to other subject areas.

For the Museum of English Rural Life:

- The museum successfully developed and piloted a handling resource around a medieval theme. The project has provided a methodology for the development of handling opportunities for a secondary audience.
- Members of staff from a wide range of museum departments were involved in the project and developed skills and experience from that involvement.
- The project results should give the museum increased confidence in working with a secondary audience and has demonstrated that the collections can be relevant for them.
- The grant allowed the museum to be ambitious in its scope for this project (in particular with the exhibition) and involved a number of staff and a high level of administration. Although the project may not be able to be fully replicated, without the additional resource that the grant provided, hopefully many of its successes (including the relationship with The Abbey School) can be built upon.
8. Conclusion and key learnings

Apprehensive yet excited, when a small group of museum educators and school teachers (who respectively became teacher and museum champions) congregated at the Langley Academy in the Summer of 2014 to begin their Stronger Together partnerships, little did they appreciate how much would be achieved over the next seven months and how the partnerships would evolve.

Underpinning Stronger Together was the ethos of school and museum working together. It is perhaps, therefore, understanding that, in the final analysis, one of the most striking things to have become apparent throughout Making the Ordinary Extraordinary was the effectiveness of the collaboration between The Abbey School and the Museum of English Rural Life. At every stage of the project - from planning through to delivery – collaboration and communication was key. Not only was this collaboration between the two Project Managers, but it also involved the much broader collaborative working with colleagues at both sites under the ‘umbrella of support’ which was provided by The Langley Academy and River and Rowing Museum’s mentorship.

When assessing the project’s impact on students, it is insightful that this aspect also came across in their evaluation. Working as a group throughout to collectively examine objects, to research, to debate and vote, and to then celebrate their achievements with other stakeholders when the project came to an end, was something that they particularly enjoyed. They also appreciated the collaborative nature of the teaching and the different voices which were brought to the lessons by the teacher and the museum learning consultant.

At an early stage it was recognised that for the collaboration to be successful having a flexible approach and being willing to adapt was fundamental. So too was the ability to communicate regularly, to respect opinions and to reach a compromise. The evaluation reveals that again, this was an important factor in the project’s success. It also is something that began immediately, from the project’s outset, when it was discussed what focus the project would have. That, in many ways, set the precedent for how the project continued to run. The planning stage involved regular communication over phone and meetings every two weeks but both Project Managers had the recognised that, in all likelihood, the project plan would continue to be a work in progress and be adapted and changed throughout the delivery phase. That said, although a flexible approach was paramount, so too was the ability to set boundaries for the project.

In many ways, and with the benefit of hindsight, the aims and outcomes for the project, were ambitious (particularly the final exhibition) and, thinking about future replication with the absence of the project grant, this aspect may be the most challenging to repeat. Being mindful of what is realistic and achievable in the time frame is something that has come out as a key learning from the project. That said the exhibition was an incredibly effective way of bringing the students work to a conclusion. In the words of one of the students regarding the aspects of the project that they most enjoyed they answered:
‘Preparing the exhibition in school because it is really fun and making all of the work worth it’

So although the exhibition was undoubtedly time-consuming and resource heavy and possibly something that took place because the ACE grant enabled it to happen, it ended up being an effective way of celebrating the completion of the scheme of work and will, in all probability, be something that the students will remember in the years to come.

It is clear therefore that the project’s successes can be said to have operated on a number of different levels. One of the most significant has been the reinforcement of object handling as, not only an enjoyable experience for students, but as an effective learning tool. The experience of handling made what was a rather distant concept – Medieval agriculture – more tangible and therefore more understandable for students. As one of them commented in response to the aspect of the project that they most enjoyed:

‘I have most enjoyed the exhibition because I loved finding out about the seed lip, the late seed fiddle etc and learning from other groups’ presentations’

It is surprising, and rather fantastic, that the students engaged so well with the objects which were after all, everyday objects. In fact, it is precisely this aspect that was to give the project its name Making the Ordinary Extraordinary: Agriculture in Medieval Times. This has given the Museum of English Rural Life increased confidence that its collections can be both relevant to (and exciting for) secondary school students and, hopefully, will mark the continuation of, not only the partnership with The Abbey School but also with other secondary schools, in the years to come.
9. Appendices

Please include all of the following, listing them A, B, C etc with a page-break between each

Appendix A: Project plan

(Overleaf)
### STRONGER TOGETHER PROJECT MANAGEMENT PLAN

**Project name:** Y7 History Medieval England exhibition project  
**Project partners:** The Abbey School, MERL

| Rationale | Students’ lack of knowledge of agriculture and seasons and how this drove life in medieval England  
From MERL’s perspective: to pilot its object-led work with secondary learners. This project will act as a pilot for its development of an object handling collection. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activity summary</strong></td>
<td>To analyse object use to create an online exhibition using materials from agricultural life and The Book of Hours that will link agriculture, seasons and medieval Church</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Purpose** | Build their knowledge of medieval life, stimulate discussion and debating skills, encourage presentation/display skills and extend ICT skills.  
To develop MERL’s relationship with secondary learners and The Abbey School in particular with the hope for further collaboration and close-working for the future. |
| **Key people** | Project Manager: Sarah Henderson, Phillippa Heath  
Project Sponsor: Katherine Rose (TLA), Helen Cook (RRM)  
End User(s): Y7 students (UIII) 26 students  
Stakeholder(s): Y7 students, MERL staff, Rosanna McGee, Head of History, The Abbey School, Isabel Hughes, Curator, MERL |
| **Results** | Success Criteria:  
**[Define your objectives]**  
Output (s)  
[i.e. what is produced]  
Outcome (s)  
[i.e. learning]  
Independent learning | Description of use of objects visually and exhibition caption  
Debate and discussion  
Group work | Identifying commonality between objects  
Prioritisation/causation  
Creative engagement with objects | Online exhibition  
Display exhibition at school  
Awareness of range of agricultural activities during medieval year and their link to religious calendar  
Extended learning opportunities | Participating in Norman trail around Reading  
Local History opportunity  
Museum developing a handling resource around an unexplored curriculum link | Identifying museum artefacts which link with medieval topic  
Students: active engagement with museum artefacts and learning through them. Museum: developing its experience of using collection pieces to link with medieval scheme of work and having it as a resource for future engagement with schools |
| Developing museum | Engaging with Year 7 students [a]  
Innovative experience for museum |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff experience and expertise (impact on professional practice)</th>
<th>New audience for the museum</th>
<th>Personnel with considerable potential for learning and skills development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### STAGE TWO: FURTHER PLANNING

**Resources**

**People**

- SJH, PH – lead members
- Isabel Hughes (Curator), Dr Ollie Douglas (Assistant Curator), Adam Kozsary (Project Officer), Felicity Macwilliams (Collections), Elizabeth McCarthy and Fiona Melhuish (Special Collections Librarians)

**Money**

- 2 x £40.00 for Reading Museum loan boxes? (Abbey budget)
- Cost for Weald and Down Museum visit? (with subsidy from Langley for coach travel – need to apply)

**Time**

- **Summer (3 days)**
  - Including:
  - 2 x inset sessions at Langley Academy
  - 3 x meetings (SJ and PH) including one with the MERL collections team (AK and FM)
  - 1 x Reading Museum research visit and meeting regarding possible collaboration for Reading town session (PH)
  - 2 x meetings with OD and IH (PH)

- **Autumn (6 days)**
  - Including:
  - 1 x inset session at Langley Academy
  - 2 days preparation for sessions (PH)
  - 6 x sessions with students (SJ – how many additional sessions were involved in the end? Including lunch times!)

- **Future (3.5 days)**
  - Including:
  - 1 day meetings/ finalising of exhibition schedule with MERL colleagues (PH)
  - 1 day installation and take down of exhibition
  - 1 morning special viewing
  - 1 day visit to Weald and Down Museum
  - 1 x inset session at Langley Academy
  - 2 days evaluation write up

**Materials/equipment**

- Display equipment
- Gloves
- MERL artefacts
- Reading Museum loan boxes (tbc)
- H16 Reading Abbey Box
- H17 Reading Town History Box

**Risk**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Likelihood (low/med/high) / Impact (l/m/h)</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MERL closure for period of renewal</td>
<td>High / High</td>
<td>Would make an on-site museum visit impossible but this can be planned for accordingly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to identify appropriate</td>
<td>Low / High</td>
<td>Early consultation with collection staff to ensure the relevant links.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
collection link

| Students not engaging with the subject matter | Low/ High | Constant monitoring of student engagement and being flexible to adapt and allow opportunities for additional support for any individuals who might not be engaging. |
| Lack of content for student exhibition | Med / High | Factor in sufficient planning time. |
| Inability to display MERL artefacts at The Abbey School due to environmental concerns | Low / High | Early liaison with curatorial staff to ensure suitability of artefacts for external loans. On-going negotiations as project progresses. Encouraging a creative/ open minded approach from students as they decide the form their display will take. |

**STAGE THREE: DELIVERY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Route</th>
<th>Timetable</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01.10.14 Towns</td>
<td><strong>Location: in the classroom.</strong> Using the image of the Medieval resource as an opening discussion point to focus in on Reading during the Medieval period. Students to have access to artefacts from Reading Museum loan to decipher what Reading was like at the time and will draw on the Norman map to discover what remains from the period. Bringing together all these resources to explore the concept of how towns such as Reading were sustained during this period and, therefore, the importance of the countryside.</td>
<td>PH and SJH (with input from resources in Reading Museum loan box)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08.10.14 Villages and Towns</td>
<td><strong>Location: in the classroom.</strong> A session introducing Medieval villages to the students and comparing them to the towns of the last session. An opportunity to revisit and continuing analysis of Reading Museum objects.</td>
<td>SJH and PH (using map of Medieval Chertsey and resources in Reading Museum loan box)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.10.14 Villages /Religion</td>
<td><strong>Location: onsite visit to MERL and Special Collections</strong> Class split into 4 working groups of 7. Each student to be given an object has to think about what it is. Then has to find objects that might group with it – this will be preselected by PH and SJH by seasons. Students then will have to match their item with the relevant image from the Book of Hours introducing the concept of agricultural seasonality linking to the Church calendar. Plenary: Visit to the Archives to see the actual Book of Hours</td>
<td>PH and SJH (with additional MERL staffing: AK, FM and EM)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.10.14 Villages ICT lesson</td>
<td><strong>Location: in the classroom.</strong> To explore the process of selection for the display and developing storylines for interpretation.</td>
<td>SJH and PH</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students to work in their MERL groups work to further research their object (link to online book of hours)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and begin to write their descriptions of objects for debate and exhibitions</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Half Term</em></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>05.11.14</td>
<td>Villages reductive lesson from online to physical display</td>
<td><em>Location: in the classroom.</em></td>
<td><em>SJH</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To prepare for Debate – Groups to discuss reduction from 7 items to 2 items for display box at The Abbey – which items will they keep and why, how will they present a large object that doesn’t fit in to the box? Justify in caption and possible class debate.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.11.14</td>
<td>Debate/Vote Lesson</td>
<td><em>Location: in the classroom.</em></td>
<td><em>SJH and PH (with AK, FM, EM, Helen Cook in attendance)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Students to be introduced to system of voting and to deliver their research on objects and the case for their inclusion in the display.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19.11.14</td>
<td>Black Death</td>
<td><em>Location: in the classroom.</em></td>
<td><em>SJH and PH</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Detail tbc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.11.14</td>
<td>Religion (Cathedrals and Politics)</td>
<td><em>Location: in the classroom.</em></td>
<td><em>SJH and PH</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunity to relate back to Reading case study and Book of Hours (significance of the religious calendar).</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Detail tbc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.01.15</td>
<td>Installation of the exhibition.</td>
<td><em>Location: in the Hardcastle Hall, The Abbey School</em></td>
<td><em>SJH, PH, OD and two students</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.01.15</td>
<td>Special viewing of the exhibition with invited guests.</td>
<td><em>Location: in the Hardcastle Hall, The Abbey School</em></td>
<td><em>SJH, PH, FM, AK and Rosanna McGee, Isabel Hughes, Kate Arnold-Forster, Rhi Smith, Helen Cook and Katherine Rose.</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.01.15</td>
<td>Post-SOW visit (timing tbc)</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>SJH and OD</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-SOW visit</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weald and Down Open Air Museum (<a href="http://www.wealddown.co.uk/Schools/Medieval-farming/">http://www.wealddown.co.uk/Schools/Medieval-farming/</a>)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### STAGE FOUR: EVALUATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Review</th>
<th>What do you want to know? What is the purpose? (i.e. link with success criteria)</th>
<th>How are you doing it? (Concrete questions and appropriate methodology and tools)</th>
<th>When are you going to do it?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Establish students’ prior knowledge of the Medieval period and map their knowledge gained throughout project.</td>
<td>Quiz</td>
<td>Pre-project and repeated end of project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mind map</td>
<td>At the end of each session, updated every</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing enthusiasm for the subject</td>
<td>Measuring anecdotal qualitative feedback regarding the extent to which students and their families are carrying out extended learning opportunities outside the classroom on a self directed basis</td>
<td>Throughout project’s duration</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summative evaluation to ask about students’ enjoyment of the project</td>
<td>End of project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Online and physical exhibition and its promotion</td>
<td>Labels produced by the students/ Students guides for parents evening/ Assembly/ work with the Junior School?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To ascertain to what extent museums and their objects and staff aid students’ learning of the Medieval period</td>
<td>Online and physical exhibition and its promotion</td>
<td>At the end of each session</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mind map</td>
<td>Compare end of project quiz responses with the one that was carried out at the beginning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quiz</td>
<td>Throughout project’s duration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anecdotal feedback</td>
<td>Throughout project’s duration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SJ Henderson’s feedback on impact of the project compared to previous years of teaching the scheme of work</td>
<td>Debate session</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Debate session (feedback to PH and MERL curatorial staff if possible)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent has museum staff experience and expertise been developed by the</td>
<td>PH to gather feedback with staff involved with the sessions</td>
<td>Post- MERL visit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>project (impact on professional practice)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Student resources created

i) Museum of English Rural Life Session Plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session Title: Medieval Life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Session Duration:</strong> 1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key Stage:</strong> Three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Objectives:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. To explore what MERL and Special Collections objects can tell us about Medieval Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. To consider the relationship between religious festivals eg harvest and the farming year and the importance for those living in Medieval times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. To develop an understanding of the museum’s role in preserving objects and how they can be handled safely</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activity One:</strong> Conference Room and Seminar Room: MERL objects (see handling temporary record form) and gloves for handling. Pencils and object recording sheet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activity Two:</strong> Conference Room: Book of Hours and other Medieval documents in special collections including Henry II charter, the 12th/13th century York charters from the Stenton archive plus two coins from the Stenton Coin Collection – a Henry II coin (Carlisle mint) and a William I coin (York mint). Digital projection of the Book of Hours.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session Plan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction (5 minutes – intro area)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Welcome to the Museum of English Rural Life: about us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Recap on last week’s session and explain format for today.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Divide students into 4 groups.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity One (25 minutes)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location: Conference and Seminar Room. Allocate group of students to a different table of mystery objects. Objects to be grouped as follows, 2 groups in the conference room, 2 in the seminar room:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Pig keeping and butchery (5 objects)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Harvesting and threshing (4 objects)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ploughing, sowing and bird scaring (4 objects)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Milling, thatching and coppicing (4 objects)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PH, AK or FM (one in seminar room, one in conference room) to deliver object handling guidance using Charlotte Dew’s powerpoint slide:

- Remember that these objects are real, old and precious
- Use two hands
- Support base of objects
- Don’t lift by handles
- One object at a time
- One person at a time
- Some of these objects have sharp edges and need to be handled with considerable care
- No food and drink
- Pencil only
- If you have any questions about handling a particular object, please ask a member of staff

Students to use object recording sheet (PH to provide) to record:

- Materials the object is made from
- Size and weight
- How the object was used
- Who used it
- Would it have been used at a particular time of year
- What has replaced it

If time, students to share their findings with their peers.

**Activity Two (20 minutes)**

Location: Conference Room.

Explain that the objects that they have just examined relate to different tasks which were, and continue to be, carried out in the countryside. The objects that they have seen – although they were made after the Medieval period – were the types of objects that Medieval people would have been using in their everyday life. How do we know? Introduce Liz McCarthy, University Librarian, and the Book of Hours.

Liz to explain a bit more about Special Collections, the significance of the Book of Hours and the challenges it presents as a Librarian caring for it. Liz to also show other pieces from the Medieval period which are in the collections. An opportunity for students to see the Book of Hours and the other items in their groups.

**Plenary (10 minutes) (SJ)**

Location: At the farming circle (or in the studio if short of time) Mind map.
Object Handling

Describe what you have in front of you.

- What does it look like?
- What does it feel like?
- How heavy is it?
- How big is it?
- Does it make a noise?
- Does it smell of anything?
- Does it have any marks or writing?

Explain

- How old is it?
- How was it made? What materials is it made from?
- Who might have used it and where?
- What is it used for?
- Would it have been used at a particular time of the year?
- What other questions do you want to ask?

Analyse

- Where can you go and find out answers?
- What further information do you need?
- What conclusions can you draw?

Link:

What does it tell you about life when it was made? What does it tell you about life now? What is similar and what is different?
## Objects at MERL: Handling Session

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<th>Describe what you have in front of you</th>
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Appendix C: Evaluation tools

i) Museum of English Rural Life and The Abbey Staff Post-MERL Session Questionnaire

Stronger Together

MERL and Abbey Staff Questionnaire (Post MERL Session)

1. How did you find the experience of working with The Abbey students?

2. What went well?

3. What didn't go well?
4. How could the session have been improved?

5. Is there anything that you have learned as a result of the session? This could include skills or experience.

6. Has the session had/ might it have any impact on your professional practice?
Stronger Together

Post-Project Questionnaire

1. Now it is drawing to an end, how would you sum up your overall impressions of the Stronger Together project?

2. What do you think have been the benefits/successes of the project?

3. What could have been improved?
5. Has the project changed your opinion of how MERL and its collections might engage with secondary schools in the future? What do you think the legacy of the project might be?

iii) Student mind maps

Examples of Mind Map filled in by students every two lessons as a technique to assess learning progress. This was so successful that it will be incorporated into other schemes of work with the intention that students can use it for revision at the end of a topic.
What do I know about Medieval farming life?

They had ploughs which were two pieces of wood. But to make the plough work all they needed was wind and a man.

They wore a big hat which used to be brown or green. But sometimes they wore a cap.

They used to use a plough with a long pole. They then could move the plough across the crops.

They grew wheat on farms.

They had sheep to make wool.

He had to shave his horse which had one eye.

He also found out about the lord and how physical hardships.

He had to wake up everyday at dawn.

A cross clacker was made of wood. But sometimes they had a stone.

Farming families made ice cube up at dawn and go to bed when it got dark.

They used a big rock to crush the grain. The rock had a big dip in the middle.

They had sea tides; they just tied a piece of rope round three necks. With a lot of force and then it out on the field.

The farmers shared their houses with their animals.

There was an object called a cross clacker. There was an object called a plough.

The corn clapper was a way of scattering crops away from the house.

A plough is made of wood and a metal.

Poor people’s shoes were made of leather.

The people in the medieval book were also told a prayer because they had to work according to the sun.

All the families except for the lord didn’t know what day it was.

The barns were made of wood and straw.

The farmers’ houses were made of wood and straw.
iv) Archive of photographs from the project

An extensive collection of photographs record the project and its outcome