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# THE PRESENTED PAST

## Heritage, museums and education

Edited by

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London and New York



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## 27 *The teaching of the past in formal school curricula in England*

MIKE CORBISHLEY & PETER G. STONE

### Introduction

This chapter outlines the development of teaching about archaeology and prehistory within schools in England and uses the English Heritage Education Service as a contemporary example of the support offered to those teaching these subjects. At the outset it must be noted that the curriculum within which the teaching of archaeology and prehistory takes place has been written, since its first appearance in the mid-nineteenth century, by those predominantly interested only in *documentary* history (Stone 1991, pp. 63–108). The result has been an overall lack of success in introducing archaeology and prehistory into the curriculum (Alexander 1989).

### Historical review

#### *Within archaeology*

One of the first archaeological commitments to the wide-ranging teaching of the past came in 1943 when Grahame Clark argued that, despite the fact that 'up to the present, educationalists as a body have ignored the story of men as completely as did the scientists of the pre-evolutionary era', education after the Second World War would have to be 'nothing less than the universal experience of man' (Clark 1943, p. 115). For Clark, the essential role of post-war education would be to stop further war by creating 'an overriding sense of human solidarity such as can come only from consciousness of common origins' (Clark 1943, p. 113) and he argued that once such 'consciousness' had been aroused 'there seems no limit to the possibilities of human betterment' (Clark 1943, p. 113).

This call for a new role for archaeology and prehistory within education went largely unnoticed, as it remained hidden away in the archaeological literature, but public interest in archaeology did increase after the war and into the 1950s, in part because post-war urban reconstruction brought the practice

of archaeology to the notice of developers and 'officialdom' (Cleere 1989, p. 2) and in part because of the success of the television programme 'Animal, Vegetable, Mineral?' (see Frost 1983, pp. 4–6; Hoare 1983, pp. 7–8; Cleere 1984, p. 61). This interest coincided with the 1950s movement in curriculum reform that encouraged schools 'to look at the interaction between man and his habitat – to understand how his habitat has influenced man, but also to see how man has affected his habitat' (Harris 1976, p. 95).

By the end of the 1950s, however, fundamental differences had already emerged between the attitudes of archaeologists and those of educators about the educational role of the subjects. In 1956 a conference on schools and archaeology, jointly organized by the Council for British Archaeology (CBA) and the London Institute of Education, had been called because of 'the growing interest of school children in archaeology' (CBA 1956, p. 1). Educators wanted to make children 'aware that they were living in a time sequence, a conception best illustrated through the teaching of history and prehistory' (CBA 1956, p. 1); archaeologists were more concerned with how school-children could help within the existing framework of amateur archaeology, rather than how they, as archaeologists, could help to increase awareness of the subject within the education system (CBA 1956, pp. 1–3; and see Zimmerman, Dasovich, Engstrom & Bradley 1994, for a current discussion of this attitude).

The conference discussed whether archaeology should aim to become a subject in its own right within the school curriculum – but the only reported contributions from this part of the meeting came from educators who stressed problems such as overcrowded curricula, lack of suitable resource materials, and, especially, lack of trained teachers with a background in archaeology (CBA 1956, pp. 1–3; and see MacKenzie & Stone 1990 where these same points have been identified as factors contributing to an 'excluded past' from school curricula around the world).

Since the 1956 conference, discussion of this issue within archaeology has been limited to brief articles reporting successful classroom-based projects (see, for example, the CBA's *Schools' Bulletin*, renamed *Education Bulletin* in 1986, *Popular Archaeology* and *Archaeology Today*) as well as the almost passing reference to school education in a number of professorial inaugural lectures (e.g. Alcock 1975; Evans 1975; Dimbleby 1977; Renfrew 1982). Even the occasional conferences organized specifically to discuss aspects of archaeology and education have been essentially descriptive (e.g. Richardson 1989; Southworth 1993, although see Ucko 1989).

A number of practical initiatives have, however, taken place within archaeology. In the 1970s the CBA appointed its first Education Officer to promote the wider use of archaeology in schools (Steane 1986; CBA 1991, pp. 11–12). The post has been seen as both (i) pro-active – for example, editing the *Education Bulletin*, writing and producing resources for teachers (for example, Corbishley 1982a, 1982b; Halkon, Corbishley & Binns 1992) and co-ordinating archaeological comment on national educational policies (CBA

1989) – and (ii) as re-active, acting as a source of information both for those involved in education and interested in using archaeology in their teaching and for archaeologists interested in education. Through its education committees the CBA has been central in the development of a number of examination syllabuses in archaeology (Corbishley 1983, pp. 57–63), most recently developing a new A-level archaeology examination (for 16-year-olds) (Halkon, Corbishley & Binns 1992, pp. 11–19).

Two university departments of archaeology have also supported the teaching of archaeology in schools. The 'Archaeology in Education' project at the University of Sheffield still produces a newsletter, information packs, slide sets and replicas, all aimed at assisting teachers to introduce archaeology into their teaching. The project also hosts an annual conference when the University departmental staff update teachers on recent developments within archaeology and provide the opportunity for hands-on experience in archaeological laboratories. The Department of Archaeology at the University of Southampton sponsored a three-year government-funded 'Archaeology and Education' project between 1985 and 1988. The project's aim was to assess the presentation of prehistory and archaeology in schools and to the general public and, in response to local demand, to prepare, provide and test support materials (Stone 1990). A number of archaeological field units have also developed strong links with local schools as part of the wider presentation of their work, and some produce cheap, easily readable publications about the prehistory and archaeology of their area (Johnson & Rose 1990) while a few provide a full education service (for example, Shaw 1993). In addition, there now exists the Education Service at English Heritage, the national organization with statutory responsibility for the preservation and presentation of the cultural heritage, which was created in 1984.

Despite the positive nature of the above initiatives (and with the exception of the English Heritage Service), all are – to some extent at least – condemned only to reach those educationalists and teachers who have already expressed an interest in teaching about archaeology and prehistory. Those responsible for education in England appear to remain oblivious to the reasons for widening the teaching of the past in formal curricula to include teaching about prehistory and, to a lesser extent, archaeology (Harris 1976; Slevin 1984; Stone 1991).

#### *Within education*

The existing lack of curriculum space allocated to prehistory and archaeology is in direct conflict with the expressed views of John Dewey, often referred to as one of the founders of primary education theory (see for example, Birchenough 1927; Dworkin 1959; Delaney 1986; Blenkin & Kelly 1987). Dewey argued strongly for the *inclusion* of prehistory within the primary-school curriculum and himself included it in his experimental Laboratory School on the campus of the University of Chicago around the turn of the century (Dewey 1899a; and see Stone 1991). Dewey believed that children should be educated through their own experience (Dewey 1896, p. 251). His

philosophy was at odds with the contemporary teaching practice that relied primarily on 'drill and other devices which secure automatic skill at the expense of personal perception' (Dewey 1916, p. 79).

Dewey initially based his belief in the importance of teaching about prehistory on 'Recapitulation Theory', in which a young child is believed to relive the prehistoric periods of human development (Dewey 1896, pp. 247-9; 1911, p. 241). However, even after he had rejected the basis of Recapitulation Theory (Dewey 1899b, 1916, pp. 85-6), he nevertheless continued to maintain that prehistory was a suitable subject to be taught to young children and he persevered with a chronological approach to the teaching of the past.

Dewey believed that the contemporary world was too complex – with too much available detail – for it to be easily understood by young children (Dewey 1899a, pp. 151-7). Instead, he argued that young children should be taught about prehistory, which would introduce them to everything in its 'simplest elements . . . the problem of society in its lowest and fewest terms, and therefore in a way most easily grasped' (Dewey 1899b, p. 263). For Dewey, therefore, the study of prehistory was 'indirect sociology' through which a child would begin to be able to 'unlock the meanings of his present complicated social life' (Mayhew & Edwards 1966, p. 313). Indeed, because of Dewey's belief that a child's education should be based on an understanding of society, the study of prehistory became the central focus of the whole curriculum (for children between 4 and 11) at his Laboratory School (see Stone 1991 for a full description of the course and its content). Its study was cross-curricula (Dewey 1900, pp. 29-30) and social-centred, with children learning by 'doing' (Mayhew & Edwards 1966, p. 313).

The Laboratory School closed down as the result of administrative and financial pressures and there is no evidence that the specifics of Dewey's experimental curriculum were taken up again and Dewey's belief in the centrality of prehistory to the primary curriculum has been ignored ever since. At most, a few curriculum developers have accepted that the study of prehistory should retain a restricted role serving only to situate the place of documentary history:

Children . . . should be taught that history is concerned with man only after he has succeeded in creating a highly organized society, and after he has become conscious of himself, so that he records his achievements. The historian is interested only in events that lead somewhere and are the beginnings of greater things. Brief explanations of prehistoric remains . . . will serve to emphasise the time when history began.

(Bourne 1902, pp. 193-4)

A few others (e.g. Archer, Owen & Chapman 1916) have stressed other reasons for the retention of some elements of prehistory within the syllabus: 'just mention the period of prehistoric man, since some teachers may consider that the idea of progress will be best brought out if vivid impressions of the

most primitive conditions are created at an early stage' (Archer, Owen & Chapman 1916, p. 108).

Indeed, the 1931 government-appointed Hadow Committee saw the distant past as being of little real historical value – other than for keeping children's interest alive: 'we would refer to the almost universal interest in the recent Egyptian and Babylonian discoveries as an illustration of the romantic appeal which the past makes and will continue to make irrespective of its significance to the present' (Hadow 1931, p. 169).

It is a remarkable fact that Dewey's convictions about the importance of teaching about prehistory live on only in a curriculum pamphlet by the Historical Association (Dobson 1928, reprinted 1950), whose author seemingly still believed in recapitulation. Despite its unique position as the only educational publication specifically to emphasize the value of prehistory and archaeology for primary-school teaching to be published in the first half of the twentieth century, Dobson's pamphlet is not referred to in any of the basic references to the teaching of the past (Stone 1991, Ch. 3).

In England, therefore, at least until the 1960s, teaching about the past has been mainly concerned with the passing on of historical 'facts'. Where few 'facts' are available – as in the study of prehistory – the value of teaching about the past has been assumed to be limited (e.g. Unstead 1956).

Since the 1960s and 1970s, there has been a reaction against the fact dominated curriculum. This 'new' history encourages children to learn the concepts and skills of the historian rather than any preordained set of 'facts' (e.g. Coltham & Fines 1971; Slater 1984). One of the leading educationalists in this new movement suggested that prehistory is a better topic than documentary history to be taught to young children because it is not cluttered with the excessive detail of later history and because it was the 'behavioral sciences and their generality with respect to variations in the human condition that must be central to our presentation of man, not the peculiarities of his history' (Bruner 1966, pp. 36, 73-101). Bruner's upper primary and lower secondary course 'Man, A Course of Study' has been taught in a few English schools (Alexander 1984, p. 29).

In 1971, the Schools Council, a teacher-dominated curriculum development group formed several years earlier, produced the 'Time, Place and Society Project' (for students aged 8-13), which introduced the concept of archaeological enquiry into history teaching in primary education (see Blyth, Cooper, Derricott, Elliott, Sumner & Waplington 1976; Standen 1981). In this course children learn through experimentation in lessons based on archaeological excavations and by playing 'the dustbin game' in which they begin to see what can be learnt about groups by looking at what they have thrown away (Thompson 1982, p. 21).

At about the same time, in the early 1970s, some publications began to argue in favour of archaeologically based experimentation and fieldwork within primary education (Salt 1970; Preston 1971; Bowen 1972; Fairley 1977). Nevertheless, a survey of the journal *Teaching History* reveals that only six out

of a total of 528 articles were concerned with prehistory and only five others were concerned with archaeology (Stone 1991; and see Hodgkinson & Thomas 1979).

Just as the educational literature has largely ignored prehistory, so have the official 'Guidelines' on teaching about the past, issued by most Local Education Authorities in England in the 1970s and 1980s. Here, 'the past' is usually assumed to begin in earnest with the Romans (e.g. Cleveland County Council 1981, p. 12). Indeed, some authors have explicitly attacked the idea of teaching prehistory: the 'effort of imagination' required to make anything of a visit to a prehistoric monument is 'something beyond the capacity of Junior School children' and is an activity that 'destroys our [the teachers] pupils' belief in us – maybe for life' (Pollard 1973, p. 5).

Ten years later, the picture is one of neglecting prehistory altogether. Thus, although Low-Beer & Blyth do suggest that 'teaching at least one distant period of history is useful', they only cite ancient Egypt and the Roman Empire as examples (Low-Beer & Blyth 1983, p. 9) and they actually define prehistory as 'the evolution of the earth before the arrival of man' (Low-Beer & Blyth 1983, p. 17), in spite of the fact that both the practical syllabuses they reference as good practice have topics on neolithic society (Low-Beer & Blyth 1983, pp. 50–9).

The peripheral position of prehistory was reaffirmed in 1986 by the Historical Association's submission to the Secretary of State for Education of 'Thirty British history topics from the earliest times to c. AD 1890' and 'Thirty world history topics from the earliest times to c. AD 1890'. These topics were all to be completed by children between the ages of 7 and 14 (Historical Association 1986). In effect, the Historical Association's suggestions confined the teaching of prehistory to one-third of one-thirtieth (i.e. 1.1 per cent) of their proposed entire history course.

Much the same result emerged from a listing by the Government Inspectorate of Schools that put 'Early civilization: hunter-gatherer societies, the discovery of fire and the development of agriculture' as the first of eighteen 'outcomes' that 'children should know of' by age 16 (HMI 1988, p. 12). All other 'outcomes' derived from documentary history (HMI 1988, pp. 12–13).

In apparent contrast to such quasi-official and official advice, there is some evidence of considerable interest in teaching about prehistory from classroom teachers (see Harris 1976; Slevin 1984; Stone 1991). For example, a survey in 1982 of 369 primary schools in one English county showed that 73 per cent of them would have been interested in using prehistory in their teaching had there been available support materials and guidance (Stone 1991).

England now has a National Curriculum (DES 1989, 1991). While its prescribed history content encourages the use of sites and buildings, and while it emphasizes the study of history as including the study of the whole of the human past (DES 1990), not one of its compulsory History Study Units (that make up the majority of the course) covers prehistory (DES 1991). Although there is limited scope for teaching about prehistory within some of its thematic

options – such as 'Food and Farming' and 'Houses and Places of Worship' (and see Stone 1992) – no readily available teachers' support material exists. This situation is compounded by the fact that prehistory is not covered within any of the history courses available in teacher-training colleges in the country.

It is in this historical context that the creation, in 1984, of the English Heritage Education Service must be viewed and assessed.

## English Heritage

### *The historic environment*

The role of English Heritage is to bring about the long-term conservation and widespread understanding and enjoyment of the historic environment for the benefit of present and future generations. Some of its responsibility towards the historic environment is fulfilled by giving grants – for example, to owners of historic buildings which are protected by law. Another is the provision of specialist advice, to the general public and to professionals such as archaeologists, architects and engineers. Annual grants are also given towards rescuing evidence from archaeological sites under threat.

English Heritage directly manages, and presents to the public, and to schools, over 350 sites, monuments and historic buildings which are of national importance. In 1992 nearly 5 million people visited English Heritage sites, of whom nearly 450,000 were school and college students. Educational visits to English Heritage sites are free. Among the sites in its care are most of those places which feature as landmarks in England's history: Maiden Castle in Dorset, for example, where future Roman Emperor Vespasian drove out the native tribes; Battle, near Hastings, where the history of England from 1066 was shaped; and the iron bridge in Coalbrookdale, the first of its kind in the world.

### *Education Service*

The specific task of the English Heritage Education Service is to carry out projects, organize teachers' courses and publish materials to encourage the use of the historic environment in formal teaching for all ages, from the youngest pupils to adults. This work is carried out by a team of education specialists that consists of a Head of Education and four Regional Education Officers who are responsible for helping teachers make the best use of the historic environment in their regions. The team also has a national responsibility to comment on the teaching of the past and has been closely involved in monitoring, offering advice on and criticizing the proposed new syllabuses in the National Curriculum especially, but not exclusively, in the subjects of history and geography. English Heritage has worked closely with others in attempting to secure the inclusion of prehistory – as well as the last twenty years of the past – in the history study units (see, for example, CBA 1989; Corbishley 1989b; Stone 1992).

The Education Service believes that people need to discover that the historic environment belongs to everyone and that the past is an inheritance for future generations. Private or sectional interests must not be allowed to prevent general access to the historic environment nor must this environment be allowed to be destroyed. It is irreplaceable. The aim of the Education Service is, through education in schools and in the community, to create new generations of citizens who will understand the value of the historic environment much better than society does today and will, as a result, take better care of it.

Since the Service's policy depends on this belief that visits to sites are the most important element in learning from the historic environment, much effort is devoted to making sure that information about sites, and how to visit them, is available to teachers. This is accomplished by providing both free materials and publications for sale. Free publications include *Information for Teachers*, which gives practical help to teachers planning a visit; a tri-annual journal, *Remnants*, that is written almost entirely by and for teachers giving examples of good practice; and 'Information Leaflets' on specific sites and topics. Publications for sale include site-specific handbooks for teachers, guides to topic or project work in class, and videos.

#### *Making a site visit*

First of all, decide why you want to take a site visit. Write down your aims. What are your educational objectives? Do you intend your pupils to develop skills or ideas or to acquire information or do you have a combination of those in mind?

(English Heritage 1992, p. 2)

Courses organized by the Education Service for teachers stress that teachers should view site visits as a part of a larger programme of study. The teachers, therefore, need to:

- (a) plan their visit in advance, as part of a longer programme of curriculum work and decide whether more than one visit is essential;
- (b) make practical plans for the visit by going to the site in advance;
- (c) work out exactly what they are going to do on site during the visit;
- (d) devise classroom work to follow up the visit to make full use of the time spent out of school; and
- (e) evaluate their own as well as their children's work and decide whether to repeat the project in the following year.

#### Resources for the National Curriculum

As has been seen above, the National Curriculum has revealed many deficiencies in the provision of resources, especially for pupil-based project work. In addition, teachers and pupils have often had to use textbooks with incorrect information about the archaeological past (Planel 1990, pp. 273-4).

The Education Service has therefore commissioned two new book lists, one of which includes titles such as *A Teacher's Guide to Using Abbeys* (Cooksey

1992), which provides information and ideas for using particular parts of the historic environment in curriculum teaching in various subjects. For example, the architectural properties of abbey arches are used to illustrate mathematical and technological problems relating to forces and stresses; the tranquillity of many ruined abbey sites is developed as a stimulus for descriptive and imaginative writing in prose and verse as part of the English curriculum; and topics on location, weathering and pollution are linked to geography and science. The other list includes titles such as *Maths and the Historic Environment* (Cope-land 1992), which take as their basic 'text' the published National Curriculum instructions in English, geography and maths and apply them to parts of the historic environment which students can visit. English Heritage videos (e.g. Corbishley 1992) examine ways of using the historic environment in relation to the specific requirements of the National Curriculum. Each video deals with two subjects (e.g. history and geography), and follows classes of pupils in their preparation work in school, through site visits, and in their follow-up work back at school. The videos also contain interviews with experienced teachers who identify the strengths of the various approaches discussed in the video as an encouragement for those less experienced teachers towards whom the videos are particularly aimed.

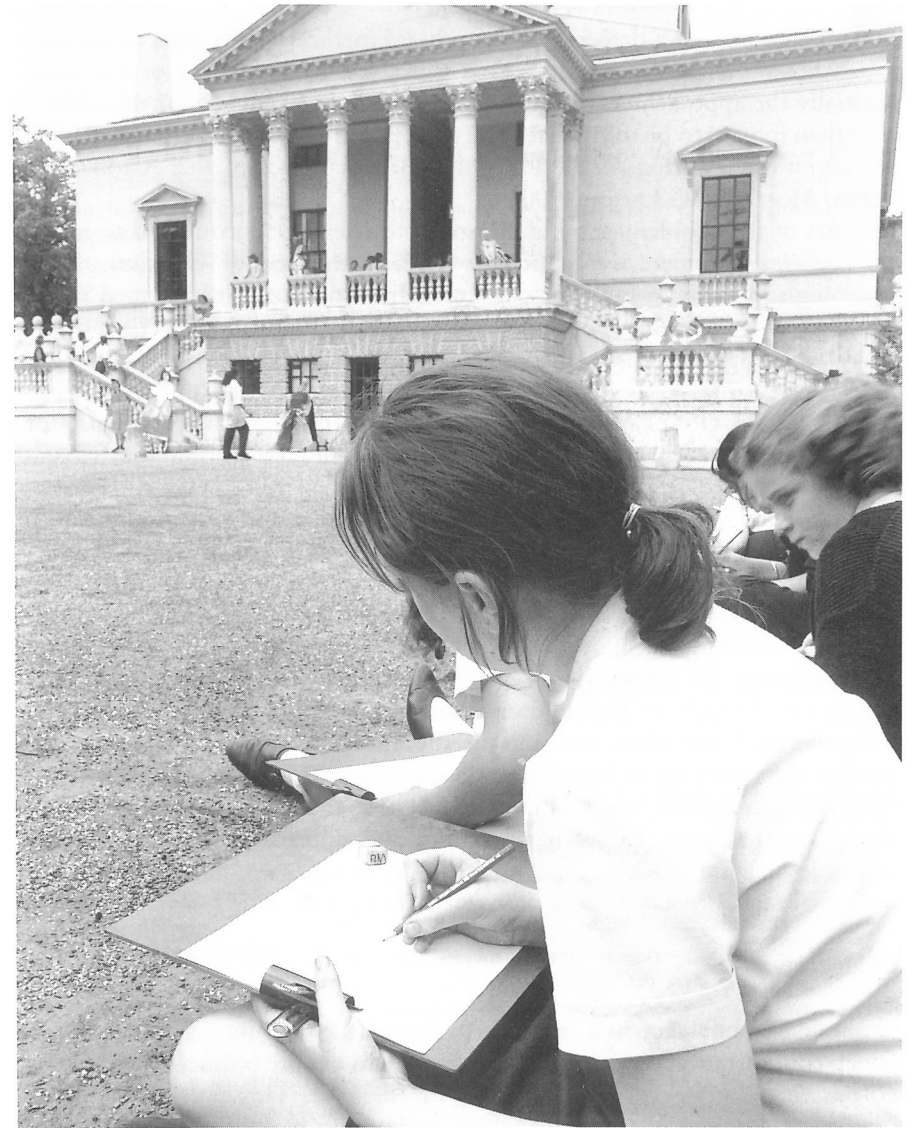
#### *Using all curricular subjects*

Teachers are encouraged to make use of the historic environment for all subjects taught in the school curriculum. A Roman project (Jeffries 1990, p. 3), for example, involved every part of a primary-school curriculum. One class took the theme of 'communication' – how the archaeological site and modern village communicated to the children and how they could communicate their findings and understanding to others. This involved the children in working with word processors, compiling questionnaires for local residents and finally helping to put all of their results together in an exhibition. Other children looked at similarities between the ruined site and the modern buildings which they saw and used everyday, while another group studied 'water' and compared modern water provision and use with the evidence for the provision and use of water from the site. All the children used their studies as the basis for all of their school work that term – not only in history but in mathematics, science, technology, art, geography, music and English. Another project involved Chiswick House, a villa built about 1725 in London, as the resource for an expressive arts project for multi-ethnic classes that included music, dance and art (Blandford 1990, pp. 4-5). In this project children developed their understanding of arts subjects by relating their theoretical artwork to the architectural features of the house (Fig. 27.1). Each child produced a costume based on the classical designs and shapes seen in the architecture of the house. Some children then co-operated to develop a dance that took its steps and form from the house while others produced a historic play set in the house. By being introduced to a multi-ethnic group of children through their artwork, the historic house became a stimulus for ideas and appreciation rather than an



**Figure 27.1** Children are taught the importance of interpreting apparently mundane items such as household rubbish. This photograph shows a section through a common dustbin. Photo: Mike Corbishley.

element of the past of only one minority group of children (Blandford 1990, pp.4–5). At Kirby Hall, a sixteenth-century house, a ‘living history’ project was organized for children with special educational needs, including some with severe learning difficulties. This project (Corbishley 1988a, pp. 5–8; 1988b) involved the children in a wide range of subjects over a whole school year and culminated in children living for a day ‘in the past’ on site – wearing period costumes, taking part in period activities and using the site as if they were there during its heyday. The value of such ‘living history’ events has been much debated (e.g. *Journal of Education in Museums* 9, 1988), but if they form part of a well-prepared project that is central to the historical curriculum being followed such days provide an additional way of getting children involved and interested in the past. While the particular event mentioned above involved working with special schools, the Education Service organizes such work across the age range and with all types of educational establishments.



**Figure 27.2** Children using the stimulus of the historic environment in their artwork. Photo: English Heritage.



*Problem-solving and a detective approach*

Problem-solving and a detective approach are methods often used to encourage teachers to help children to look closely at the remains of the past. Essentially the approach encourages children to look and think for themselves rather than to wait to be told what 'really happened' or what an artefact can tell them about the past (Fig. 27.2) (Phillips & Bryant 1988, pp. 1-2; Aston 1990; Durbin, Morris & Wilkinson 1990).

As part of the problem-solving approach teachers are encouraged to introduce the idea of a detective approach to their children by explaining: 'An archaeologist's job is to hunt for clues to help find out what happened in the past. They work a bit like police detectives investigating a crime' (Corbishley 1990b). This approach (Corbishley 1986a, pp. 1-2; 1986b, pp. 3-8; 1986c, pp. 1-4) can be further developed in games (Corbishley 1989a, p. 15; 1990a, pp. 8-9); in exercises, for example based on street observation where evidence for iron railings, and other iron street furniture, removed during the Second World War for making into armaments, is identified and explained (Durbin 1990, p. 9); and in videos. 'The Archaeological Detectives' video follows two primary-school children as they explore two very different sites (a Roman archaeological site and a medieval castle) looking for evidence to show what the sites had been and how they functioned, while the 'Clues Challenge' video, which also follows two children, explores three different modern buildings - a furnished house, an empty house and the foundations of a new house on a building site. At each site the children look for clues to show who lives/lived in the houses and for clues to indicate the functions of individual rooms. Together the videos try to link the modern and historic environments, suggesting to children and teachers that they do not have to live next to an impressive historic site to begin to learn the skills and approaches of archaeology (Corbishley 1990b, 1990c).

**Conclusion**

The above has only sketched attempts to extend the teaching of the past from an over-concentration on documentary history to a more balanced curriculum incorporating all aspects of the study of the past. However, despite the initiatives mentioned above, archaeology and prehistory still exist on the edge of what is perceived - by those with responsibility for the curriculum - as the real stuff of history. Until such time as these decision-makers can be influenced, the subjects will continue to be marginalized and children will continue to receive a restricted view of the past. The influencing of these decision-makers must be the real goal for those involved in attempts to broaden the teaching of the past.

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