

Potting the Past An Evaluation

A report for Surrey Museums Consultative
Committee

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SUMMARY

1. The project has been a great success in a number of ways:
 - Children have enjoyed themselves and there is evidence that there had been development of skills and of knowledge¹
 - The teachers and museum staff spoken to felt it had been successful
 - New links had been made between schools and museums
 - Work with schools has developed a wider curriculum base
 - Work has developed opportunities for museum visits for children and their families who would not normally visit.
 - New links had been made with a local artist.
- 2 The use of evaluation provides evidence of this success.
- 3 Museums have been introduced to a new range of visitors.
- 4 Continuing all these new links will be critical to the project working in the long term as part of a sustainable programme. Funding will also be critical to support similar projects in the future.
- 5 This type of work takes much time to organise and administer. Future projects will need to use either contract co-ordinators (as was used here), or a time commitment from museum education staff.
- 6 Success in the wider sense will depend on the project being promoted in museums and schools around Surrey.

¹ Many (according to the teacher) showed improved techniques in pottery and some showed use of designs seen in the museum in their own work. Several had also improved their observation and drawing skills at the museum.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The evaluation falls into two halves. One is the recording of feelings of those attending ie staff and pupils, while the other is more overarching evaluation. This overview was undertaken by an external evaluator to aid objectivity. It aimed to gain an overall picture of the project. For this the external evaluator visited a number of the sessions, both within the museum and the classroom. She also interviewed a number of key people involved in the project. These included the artist, the co-ordinator and museum staff.

2.0 AIMS OF THE EVALUATION

The overall aims of the project² were to:

- i) Provide opportunities for museums to develop relationships with local schools by working with an artist in residence, and to develop a wider use of museums across the curriculum
- ii) Enable young people to make links between historical ceramic collections and contemporary practice
- iii) Introduce the children to techniques, designs and aesthetics of the museum collections
- iv) And encourage children to appreciate the development of the pottery
- v) For the children to explore their creative response and develop new skills
- vi) Provide teachers and children with the opportunity to work alongside one of West Surrey's leading ceramicists
- vii) To end with an exhibition and family workshop juxtaposing contemporary work with pottery from the past

South East Arts grant funding criteria also set out the need to be cross-curricular, commitment to equal opportunities (especially special educational needs) and highlight diverse cultural influences in the pottery seen.

The desired impact of the project³ was to:

- i) Demonstrate the value of working with artists, to schools and museums through out Surrey
- ii) Demonstrate the benefit of a cross-curricular approach, and will be used as a model for further projects
- iii) Inform the work of other museums in Surrey, as very few have education staff
- iv) Raise awareness of the richness and diversity of arts and crafts in Surrey Museums' collections
- v) Enable staff to explore their collections in new ways and for new audiences

² As described in the grant application

³ This project was a pilot to assess the effectiveness of this approach

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The aims are numerous and frequently broad sweeping. With only a small evaluation budget it has been necessary to focus on those more easily assessed. Staff and Children were surveyed at the end of sessions as to their feelings about the project. The external evaluator wrote the questionnaires with the support of both Bronwen Griffiths and Sharon Bristow⁴. The analysis of the questionnaires will be left to them, as the questions were simple and quantitative. The questionnaires are included in the appendix. This report, though, will concentrate on the overall picture and concern itself with advice for future projects.

Methods used to gather evidence for this were:

- Observations of a museum and a classroom session
- Informal conversations with museum and teaching staff, the artist, pupils
- Interviews (by phone) of key workers eg the co-ordinator, the artist, museum education staff and the Museums Life Long Learning Development Officer for the Surrey Museums Consultative Committee

Questions used for the interviews are also listed in the appendix

The following discussion is split into sections that relate to the original aims of the project. Only brief comment is made on the aims relating to the children and teachers. More developed discussion occurs in section 6.0 on the museum (and more all encompassing)

4.0 DISCUSSION: Children's development

Much of the evidence for the children's response was gained from the completed evaluation forms from children. However we only received a small number of responses from schools. It needs to be made clear that evaluation is an essential part of such development work and one the teachers and pupils need to be involved in.

4.1 Skills and creativity

From observations and discussions with pupils and teaching staff it is clear that children developed new skills from working with the clay. Evaluation feedback from pupils showed an understanding of the technical aspects of the clay work they were doing. A number of pupils mentioned glazes, slab development and making a relief, all aspects of the workshop. Work concentrated on making a pot and lid from a slab produced cylinder, with later design and painting. Many children had hardly ever used clay before. Some of the results were very creative.

Creativity was stimulated and extended by using the museum collections as a stimulus (see below). Pupils obviously enjoyed their experience with a

⁴ Bronwen Griffiths is the co-ordinator and Sharon Bristow the Life Long Learning Development Officer for the Surrey Museums Consultative Committee

number of pupils mentioning the workshop as “amazing”, “my work looked really good” and one child who said of making a pot “it felt like I was making history”.

4.2 Making links with historical and contemporary ceramics

Introducing children to the design aesthetics of the museum collections

There is some evidence that children used designs they had seen in the museum. Decoration techniques in particular were clearly taken from pots they had seen and drawn. Although only a few examples showed this, this does hint at the impact the museum visit had on the children. Children had obviously seen pots from a diverse range of periods and cultures, local to the area and from far a field (eg Cyprus). Evaluation from letters from pupils also showed a number of pictures of pots seen in the museum.

4.3 Making wider curriculum links

In the past, much of the schoolwork done at both the museums has been with regard the history curriculum. It was intended that this project should widen that subject base. It is clear that the sessions with schools have covered new areas (including art and design) but have also helped make links between the arts and history, making a much more cross-curricular approach. Many pupils remembered detail from the history talk they had had at the museum. Occasionally these historical aspects were related to their art-work, for example one child mentioned the use of Victorian colours in their clay-work.

5.0 DISCUSSION: Teachers/schools opportunities

Much of the evidence relating to the teachers’ responses should have come from the evaluation forms. However we have only received two forms back from a participating teacher. **In future projects it should be made clear to those involved that taking part in the evaluation is part of their commitment to making a successful pilot.**

5.1 Cross-curricular approach

Several classes’ linked work they had been doing on local history with this artistic project. The links through the pottery seen in the museum made a clear cross-curricular story and one that the artist and teacher thought particularly successful. This approach was not originally thought of and was only taken up as an adaptation of the project to suit individual needs⁵.

5.2 Working with museums

The schools targeted for this project at the Museum of Farnham and Haslemere Educational Museum have either not normally used either of the museums normally used them for history studies. The education officer at Haslemere also included a secondary school so that new links across the key stages could be achieved. **For these new partnerships to develop and be maintained it will be important for the education officers at each site to**

⁵ This illustrates the need to be flexible in such projects

continue communication. One teacher was clear that the pupils had benefited from the experience and now had more positive attitudes towards museums.

5.3 Working with artists

Both pupils and teachers clearly benefited from working with a practising artist. The returned evaluation forms showed complete satisfaction with the artist and his ability to teach as well as create art. The children respected him and responded to his direction and creative challenge. Teachers were very pleased with the outcomes from the sessions, in particular the development of skills, visual information from first-hand experience, and the exploration of their own ideas. Teachers benefited from the INSET course and from seeing him work in different ways⁶. One teacher described that the INSET had provided opportunity to develop her own skills and “finding out how the children feel”.

6.0 DISCUSSION: Museums

6.1 Develop relationships with schools including SEN

Working with several new schools, the museums made new links that will hopefully continue in the future. It has also been demonstrated that curriculum areas other than history are easily developed in museums in an interesting approach. The need to continue to pay for education posts within museums is clear, without the skills and time available projects such as this would be difficult to run and manage so successfully. **The investment in such staff doing this type of work will clearly reap benefits in the future.**

6.2 Inform other museums of project and success

The Life Long Learning Development Officer for Surrey Museums Consultative Committee will be reporting on “Potting in the Past” to the next Museum Education meeting in Surrey. This will provide an opportunity for others to be informed and to consider similar work at their respective museums. **The evaluator would recommend further dissemination using the evaluation report and the co-ordinators report so that museum staff elsewhere can be as informed as possible.** They may also need support in grant application and in skills development (for example education project management). **It might be useful for funding to be found to offer a training session for other workers, lead by the co-ordinator, Bronwen Griffiths.**

6.3 Raise awareness of arts in Surrey

This aim is less easy to evaluate⁷. Evidence of local people actually having a greater awareness of arts in Surrey would be difficult to collect. However

⁶ From discussion with teaching staff at one of the schools

⁷ When writing aims it is useful to consider whether and how they can actually be evaluated

those visitors to the exhibitions will be introduced to elements of art today and in the past. More importantly, perhaps, the pupils will have worked with a practising artist and thus will be more aware of professional art making in the locality. They will also be provided with a useful role model.

6.4 Enable staff to explore their collections

The curatorial staff have found opportunities to help develop new ways of using the collections with young people. Staff showed enthusiasm for the project, with some curatorial staff actively helping with sessions. The education officer at Haslemere also felt she had developed skills and learnt new pottery techniques, which she intends to use in the future⁸.

6.5 Develop new audiences / Exhibitions

The introduction of new school users to Haslemere Educational Museum has initiated the development of new audiences here. New approaches to different curriculum areas with pupils who might otherwise not visit have also been clearly demonstrated at the Museum of Farnham. Work by the respective education officers will be needed to develop these new and developing partnerships and approaches. The exhibitions planned by both museums also extend the opportunity to develop links with new audiences, in the families and friends that visit as a consequence. The exhibitions will also be advertised to schools, providing another opportunity for new users to visit and will highlight to other schools and teachers the possibilities of using museum collections to inspire creative projects. An exhibition of children's work (in relation to the ceramics within the museum) provides "an opportunity to promote the museum in a different way"⁹ to different audiences. Press coverage has provided wider promotion of the museums too. **It is essential that the exhibitions do go ahead.**

Having now run the "Potting the Past" project museum staff will be able to use new skills to develop other events such as out of school activities and holiday workshops. These future workshops will reach other audiences as well.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS AND POINTERS FOR FUTURE PROJECTS

7.1 Critical to the success of the project is the need for education officers (or staff with education responsibilities) and/or a co-ordinator to spend *time developing the project and making the initial contacts with the schools*¹⁰ and artist. Project management included contacting teachers (not always easy), sorting out problems with resources and co-ordinating four schools, two museums and one artist! Someone with less experience than the staff in this project would have found it perhaps over-ambitious and needed support and probably more time to make the project work.

7.2 Finding *funding for the artist*.

⁸ Maggie Monteath (telephone interview)

⁹ Sharon Bristow (telephone interview)

¹⁰ Prior to the project actually starting the Museums Life Long Learning Development Officer, Sharon Bristow held a meeting for interested teachers.

7.3 Further dissemination to museum workers in Surrey, perhaps through a training session by Bronwen Griffiths, the Co-ordinator. *Reports should also be sent to as many museums and schools as possible.*

7.4 Continuation of this type of work is difficult when the project has been funded by a grant. The author is not criticising the grant aid of new initiatives but in the long term Surrey Museums Consultative Committee are going to *need to develop education budgets for this type of work to continue.* The success of this project will hopefully illustrate that this type of work is an important element of museum work. It is possible that the “Potting in the Past” project will raise expectations for more similar activity next year.

7.5 Sadly *Haslemere Educational Museum was closed* for redevelopment through out the project. This was unfortunate but lead to pupils seeing the museum in an atypical situation. They attended a handling session/workshop in the museum classroom rather than having a look around the galleries. The co-ordinator felt that this experience had not been as useful as it would otherwise have been¹¹.

7.6 *All staff say they have learnt a great deal* and enjoyed working with a professional artist.

7.7 Co-ordination by a freelance worker has the benefits of using a specialist skills but it does create the problem of lack of continuity. *Developing the skills of officers in post would be a useful development from this project.*

7.8 *Adapting the sessions to suit the teachers’ needs is critical.*

7.9 *Evaluation of work is essential* to use the experience to learn and develop. Funding within the grant application for evaluation was good. I would recommend that this continue¹². It would also be useful to develop evaluation skills of museum staff so they are more able to use evaluation techniques through out their work.

¹¹ Bronwen Griffiths (telephone interview)

¹² In fact providing more funding would pay for a more comprehensive study

APPENDIX

Evaluation tools

Questions for Co-ordinator

- 1 Was an SEN school involved?
- 2 What sorts of publicity were sent out?
- 3 How do you intend to publicise this project to other Surrey Museums?
- 4 What were the outcomes for you?
- 5 What do you think the children got out of it?
- 6 What do you think the museum got out of it?
- 7 What were the good aspects of the project?
- 8 How could it have been improved?
- 9 Were links with the museum improved?
- 10 What references were made to the museum collections?
- 11 Was the approach taken cross-curricular?

Questions for Museums Life Long Learning Development Officer

- 1 How do you feel the project went?
- 2 What problems were there?
- 3 Do you think the museum's links with schools were made stronger?
- 4 Do you feel new audiences attended?
- 5 What references were made to the museum collections?
- 6 Was the cultural diversity referred to?
- 7 Was the approach cross-curricular?
- 8 Has the class develop arts skills?

Questions for Education Staff and Curators

- 1 Did it go well?
- 2 What was particularly good?
- 3 What needed improving?
- 4 Were new links made with schools?
- 5 Were you happy with how the collections were used?
- 6 Would you do again?
- 7 Have you and the museum benefited in any other way?

Potting the Past: Comments Card

1 Did you enjoy your trip to the museum (please circle how it made you feel)?



2 What did you enjoy the most?

3 What did you enjoy the least?

3 Have you been to this museum before?

Yes

No

4 Would you like to visit the museum again?

Yes

No

5 Did you find out anything new at the museum?

Yes

No

6 If so, what did you find out? _____

7 Draw a picture of your favourite pot in the museum.

Thank you

Class Workshop at the Museum

12 What aspects of the museum workshop were good?

13 What aspects of the museum workshop needed improving?

14 What did you want your class to gain from the museum workshop?

15 Was the museum workshop successful in achieving this?

Yes

No

16 Did the children develop new skills?

Yes

No

17 If so, what skills did they develop? _____

18 Was the artist a good communicator?

Yes

No

19 Is this your first visit to the museum with a school group?

Yes

No

Craft Workshop in School

20 What aspects of the class workshop were good?

21 What aspects of the class workshop needed improving?

22 What did you want your class to achieve in this practical session?

23 Was the workshop successful in achieving this? Yes

No

24 Did the children develop new skills? Yes

No

25 If so, what skills did they develop? _____

26 Was the artist a good communicator? Yes

No

27 Would you like more of this type of craft/museum workshop?

Yes

No

Any further comments

Thank you for your help

Please return this form to the museum in the addressed envelope