

Our Local School Project on Ilam Cross

At the local village school children in years 5 and 6 (ages 9-11) worked for three months on a history project around the local area, featuring the Mary Watts-Russell Memorial Cross as their inspiration and starting point.

This was a participatory project in which young people had a high level of decision-making power about how and what they should learn. Some of the activities undergone are included below:

- Children designed posters for the hoarding of the cross during restoration, and the chair of the Parish Council, Terry Prince, came to choose the four winning entries that would be displayed for the length of the restoration.
- They interviewed local people, including Ilam Cross Trustees, the Learning Officer at Ilam Hall, their own families.
- They met the architect involved in the restoration of Ilam Cross.
- They investigated information already available to them that had been gathered by historical researcher Philip Mottram, and they also used the Ilam Story Bonad, an 18 metre folk art painting on the history of Ilam.
- They engaged in philosophical enquiry (a key existing part of their learning) around the question: why is history useful and important?
- They spent time considering and then discussing why the cross had been restored, and what, if any, their responsibility and connection with Ilam Cross was.

Then, when research had been gathered, children used the popular Horrible Histories TV programmes and books to create their own exciting, dramatic and hilarious histories of Ilam, in print and on video.

Interactive Drama around Ilam

Based on our school project, you could do the following with your school or youth group:

- read and watch Horrible Histories to get ideas of style and content
- research some of the history of Ilam and Ilam Cross by reading local guides, www.ilam.org.uk and asking experts
- identify the best places to film around the village on a walk
- create your own historical drama sketches with funny bits
- film them using the school camera
- edit your videos using school software to create Horrible Histories
- write up your ideas to create a printed Horrible History to go on display or in a library (you could even send it in to be displayed on the Ilam website!)

Tips for Ilam Drama

You can take inspiration from the BBC Horrible Histories clips available to watch online, including drawing, dancing, the difference between real facts and made up ones for fun!

At the centre of Horrible Histories, so Terry Deary its creator has said in interviews, is that people are more interesting than events, and stories that have quirky things that you remember will live on and still be important and relevant to young people, and indeed all of us, in today's rapidly moving and changing society.

Although as a teacher you have a responsibility to ensure that the made up facts don't become the ones that the children learn, there is little danger of this when the children themselves create the myths, legends and fantasies around the history of Ilam Village.

Perhaps one group will choose to focus on a massacre in the 1100s, whereas another will focus on Prince Charles' visit this century. If you can afford to be broad and allow this to happen, encouraging children to do accurate research (acc-u-rat!) and follow the HH guidelines to create entertaining performances then their learning will be meaningful and long lasting, as well as meeting the key history and literacy objectives listed here.

You will probably find that because HH draws on its viewers' knowledge of other TV programmes that are popular, most children become experts at creating new ideas to adapt the history of Ilam into amusing, dramatic and exaggerated scenes which nevertheless facilitate their learning and the learning of others, at the same time as helping them to use their imagination, their research skills, their script-writing skills, drama and performance, and possibly filming and editing.