



## Down Our Street

In Down Our Street, eight children from Durham Gilesgate Primary School were given the opportunity to explore the stories behind street names in the Gilesgate area of Durham. The stories discovered were celebrated creatively and shared with the wider community through an exhibition and website. Ten local schools also received learning packs with the resources needed to run their own version of Down Our Street.

The project took place from January 2013 to June 2013 and was run through Off The Page Drama CIC with John Castling (Project Coordinator and Facilitator) and Christina Maiden (Facilitator). It was a privilege to work closely with the DLI Museum and Art Gallery to deliver the project.

'Down Our Street has been a fantastic project to work on. The pupils from Durham Gilesgate Primary School have worked exceptionally hard and produced a wonderful, creative exhibition! Personal highlights for me have included seeing the children stunned with excitement when the exhibition was first revealed to them, hearing conversations between older residents and children taking place through Oral Histories, and knowing that many of these children have caught a first-glimpse of how entralling and exciting historical research can be. We've managed to show that primary school children aren't too young to analyse complex historical material, and that the confidence to engage meaningfully with information requires very little encouragement to flourish. The project has highlighted that, under supervision, children can participate actively in inter-generational learning. Finally, Down Our Street has reinforced my conviction that heritage is all about stories, and that the best way to engage with that heritage is by exploring stories through dramatic and creative ways!'

*John Castling, Project Coordinator*

The Down Our Street team was made up of eight children from Durham Gilesgate Primary School.



## School workshops

Down Our Street consisted of a series of 15 workshops (the majority taking place as an afterschool club and two as school holiday sessions). Broadly these workshops fell into two blocks:

- 1) Exploring stories
- 2) Who would you name a street after?

The first sessions focused on exploring the stories from the local area, specifically seven streets near to the school:

- Bradford Crescent
- Annand Road
- Wakenshaw Road
- Heaviside Place
- Mill Lane
- Sherburn Road
- Station Lane

The children looked at a wide variety of source material relating to each of the streets, including censuses, marriage certificates, newspaper reports, photographs and letters. From this material, they pieced together the stories behind the street names in their area. They also visited the DLI Museum to find out more information about the winners of the Victoria Cross (Roland Bradford, Richard Annand, Adam Wakenshaw and Michael Heaviside) and to consider how exhibitions work. This block of workshops came together with a creative interpretation of the stories the children had discovered. The children used drama, filmmaking, creative writing and drawing to present the stories they found most interesting.

In the second block of workshops, the children focused on the question, 'Who would you name a street after and why?' They developed oral history skills and practiced their interview techniques on each other. They then interviewed family and friends and finally, spent a session with older people from Sherburn Hospital Care Home who answered their questions. The children, then, considered how to present the discoveries made during Down Our Street and this led to designing their exhibition.

## Exhibition

The Down Our Street exhibition ran at the DLI Museum for six weeks starting on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> April 2013, on which date a special launch event took place for the children and their families. The exhibition was a great success and many visitors left extremely positive feedback.

The exhibition was designed by the children and incorporated a variety of different features specifically chosen by them. These included:

- Seven displays focusing on the streets explored
- A large map of Gilesgate on the floor, matching up with the wall displays
- A small tree (linking to the opening ceremony for Annand Road at which a tree was planted)
- A wheelbarrow (linking to the story of Richard Annand's heroic act)
- Feely boxes to correspond with audio recordings from oral histories
- A projection of the children's film and the Down Our Street documentary
- An area of dressing up in clothes from the period

We worked closely with Spot On Displays who brought the children's ideas to life in an exciting and professional way.

## Evaluation

The children who took part in the extracurricular workshops and their class teacher filled out evaluation forms at the end of the project. A feedback book was also filled in by visitors to the exhibition.

### The Children

For six members of the group, this project was the first time that they: looked at old maps and photographs, read old documents and thought about how to plan an exhibition. For five members of the group, this project was the first time that they spoke to older people about the past.

'My favourite part was seeing the finished exhibition'

'It would be better if it was a bit longer'

'Down Our Street was great, especially learning about Brigadier General Bradford'

'To make Down Our Street better you could look at one street per week, not all at once'

'Down Our Street has been the best afterschool club I have ever been to!'

'My favourite bit was going to the museum'

'Down Our Street was great and if I could do it again I would'

### Durham Gilesgate Primary School

'A fantastic project which made learning fun. Brilliant opportunities for engaging children in local history... Children have enjoyed all of the lessons and often spoke about it in class. They loved interviewing people and did not realise that this was researching. They have been given a wonderful opportunity.'

*Sheena Matthews, Class Teacher at Durham Gilesgate Primary School*

### DLI Museum

'Working in partnership with Off The Page Drama on the Down Our Streets project has been a very positive experience for the DLI Museum as a whole and for me as Learning Officer. The centrality of the community of Gilesgate, through the schools, has been a key feature of this project and the learning programme remains with the schools for the future. Our learning programme is usually generated from within the museum, but we could not have covered the diverse range of content and delivery methods that Off the Page used. However the project also confirmed to us that our collections offer something unique, so the partnership was very important. The resulting exhibition reflected the ownership the young people had over their learning. We were also delighted with the interest in the exhibition shown by the community in Gilesgate, who are not generally our regular audience. We are already working with another Gilesgate School to help deliver their version of the project - and I can see how the process and the results offer individual learning paths which have a long lasting impact on the young people.'

*Ros Evans, Learning Officer, DLI Museum and Art Gallery*

### Comments from visitors to the exhibition

'A great exhibition. Everyone in Durham should come and see it then go away and learn about their own local history and street.'

'This is superb; the children have done an excellent job researching and presenting their work. The film shows real learning going on. Excellent!'

'What a lovely idea. I will try something similar with my class!!! Well done all concerned.'

'Well done people. There has obviously been a lot of time and effort producing this. A nice demonstration of how a team can work together and the value of diligent research.'

'Excellent fun for whole family.'

'Fantastic exhibition! Well done to all those involved. I'm sure the pupils will remember this project for a long time to come and value the research skills they will have developed. Fab!'

'Absolutely fabulous – every school should have John and Christina (Off The Page) helping them explore local history!!'

'Excellent exhibition of what these children achieved. They will have got a lot out of it as well as putting a lot into it. Well done.'



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