

'Touching the Past through the Language of our Senses'

The Surrey Heritage Tactile Book Project 2009

If you are a child with a visual impairment, what is your experience of a local museum, gallery or heritage visit? Are many stories lost behind glass walls, or left to be explained by another person? What if you could *read* some of our stories using your senses? These were the questions considered by several of Surrey's heritage organisations, families and schools this summer, as participants in the Surrey Heritage Tactile Book Project 2009.

Tactile books are similar to regular print books and are read, shared and enjoyed just as much as regular books, but they are specially adapted for blind and partially sighted children with images designed to be touched or smelt rather than looked at. Books with tactile illustrations are essential for children who cannot see printed pictures, yet all over the world the story is the same: there are few if any appropriate books produced for these children.

An international competition in 2008 creating tactile books for children worldwide became the inspiration for a groundbreaking competition in Surrey. In an exciting effort to improve visitor experiences for visually impaired children, 7 heritage organisations across the county challenged their own perceptions to create stunning sensory books about an aspect of their collection, with the involvement of local schools and families. Our 7 heritage organisations were: Brooklands Museum, The Museum of Farnham, Godalming Museum, Guildford Museum, The Lightbox, Watts Gallery and Surrey Heritage.

Creating the books

The key purpose of the Surrey Heritage Tactile Book Competition was to improve intellectual and emotional access to the heritage collections for visitors with visual impairments, and those who support visually impaired.

To ensure books were relevant and accurate, the project included training days from partners and involved Surrey visually impaired groups and schools in their creation.

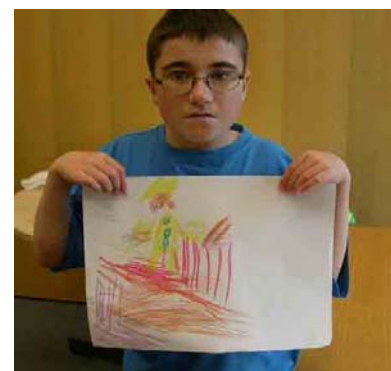
Several families enjoyed being part of their local book design and production, and one school in Farnham was so inspired, it was involved in the making of three books! Classes from Farnham's Abbey School worked with Watts Gallery, advised

The Museum of Farnham and also created their own personal record of favourite school experiences. An important part of the final judging process involved children from Sythwood Primary School for visually impaired children, whose opinions were invaluable. They selected the 'Children's Choice' Award.

Many are beautifully handcrafted fabrics, with a rich variety of contrasting colours, textures and clever devices (including sounds and smells!) to support a visually impaired child's understanding.

Why not have a look at the books on our Flickr page?

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/surreycountycouncil/collections/72157622887042099/>



Lewis, who is visually impaired, enjoyed helping to create the Heritage book.

Partner information

Surrey Museums Consultative Committee (SMCC) coordinated and funded the project in association with Surrey Heritage, and new partnerships were established with the Tactile Book Advancement Group, Surrey Association for Visual Impairment (SAVI) and Barefoot Books children's book publishers to ensure appropriate advice and training was offered. The project partners support and expertise were invaluable throughout.

(Further information on partners can be found at the end of this report.)

Awards Ceremony

A panel of experts judged the books, and winners were revealed at a special award ceremony in October 2009. The winning organisation was awarded a prize of £200 from SMCC toward the costs of further accessibility improvements and smaller financial contributions were also awarded to 2nd and 3rd place prizewinners. The evening was an opportunity to celebrate everyone's involvement in the project and to thank all staff, volunteers and children who participated. Certificates were presented to all, volunteers each received a book voucher and children received audio books provided by Barefoot Books children's book publisher.



The winners were:

1st prize – Brooklands Museum for 'Aircraft structures'

2nd prize – Guildford Museum for 'Princess Eleanor's Special Day'

3rd prize – Surrey Heritage for 'The Witch's Bottle'

The "Children's Choice" prize was awarded to Farnham's Abbey School Year 7 class for their 'Abbey School Experiences' book. The children were given audio books and certificates at a special assembly.

What next?

The project has created many new partnerships between organisations that we hope to build on. Heritage organisations have linked up with schools and plans for further projects have been started, for example, the Abbey School will work with Surrey Heritage for the 'Celebrating Surrey' arts festival in 2010.

SAVI has offered further training to the heritage organisations involved. This will provide thorough training on how heritage organisations can make their services more accessible to those with visual impairments.

The tactile books are being displayed in Waterstone's bookshops throughout the county to raise awareness of the project. They have been used at a disability fair, shown in 2 local schools and have been part of a consultation on how to improve access. Ultimately the books will be a feature at the organisation that created them to help increase accessibility to their collections.

Links

Surrey Museums Consultative Committee (SMCC)

<http://www.surreymuseums.org.uk/>

The Tactile Book Advancement Group

<http://www.tactilebooks.org/>

Surrey Association of the Visually Impaired (SAVI)

<http://www.surreywebsight.org.uk/home/>

Barefoot Books

<http://www.barefootbooks.com/uk/>

Detailed partner information

Surrey Museums Consultative Committee (SMCC)

SMCC is an umbrella organisation working on behalf of museums in Surrey working in partnership with the district and borough councils of Surrey and Surrey County Council. It provides advice, information and practical assistance to anyone connected with Surrey's museums and develops partnerships with those in tourism, arts, heritage, culture, education, archives, libraries and area museum councils.

The Tactile Book Advancement Group

The Tactile Book Advancement Group (TBAG) is made up of a group of people from the Royal National Institute of Blind People, the ClearVision children's tactile library, the Reginald Phillips Research Programme, plus teachers and parents. TBAG works to promote the design, production, use and enjoyment of tactile books for children who are blind or partially sighted.

Surrey Association of the Visually Impaired (SAVI)

SAVI is committed to working with blind and partially sighted people in Surrey, and to provide services so they may lead fuller, more independent lives. We asked SAVI to be partners in the project as we recognised that we would need to understand the needs of visually impaired people in order to produce the tactile books. Stella Black from SAVI offered us training, introducing us to different disorders that cause visual impairment and giving us a chance to explore the afternoon partially sighted. SAVI's help and advice has been invaluable in the project and SAVI have kindly offered us further training after the project has ended.

Barefoot Books, children's book publisher

Barefoot Books began with two mothers who wanted their children to have books that would feed the imagination, while instilling a respect for diversity and a love of the planet. They create beautiful books that feed the imagination. Their core values fitted well with our project and we asked Barefoot books to be involved. They provided us with information on how to create books that would appeal to children and the type of language we should use.

PROJECT GENERIC LEARNING AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES

Project Aim

- Project Aim:
- To improve awareness of the needs of visually impaired users
 - To build links with visually impaired communities
 - To develop an area of access to heritage collections
 - To encourage the sharing of ideas, resources and expertise in the creation of tactile books for visually impaired children

Outcome:

- Purposeful and enjoyable experiences between local heritage sites and visually impaired visitors
- A tangible, reusable product conveying an aspect of heritage collection
- Staff training for meeting the needs of visually impaired visitors
- Improved emotional and intellectual access to heritage collections

What some of those involved thought of the project?

This project met many of the Generic Learning and Social Outcomes as explained in a more detailed report.

Here is a summary of what those involved in the project thought:

Nick Booth, Guildford Museum: *'It is hoped that the tactile book will be used as the first steps in making the medieval collections more accessible to visitors'*.

Anna Hennings, The Watts Gallery: *'The children have learned to have a better understanding of the needs of visually impaired classmates and have shown greater consideration for their needs as a result'*.

Kate Stuart, Surrey Heritage: *'I had to learn to change my way of thinking to consider those who can not see as well as me'*.

Nansi Taylor, Godalming Museum: *'One little boy had never ever sewn before- he did the fossil!'*

Julie Ties: *'It was nice to be involved in a project that helps to increase access'*.

Penny Philips, The Abbey School: *'It really helps the pupils self-esteem to be involved.'*

Nansi Taylor, Godalming Museum: *'We were greatly impressed by the children's ingenuity and interest in the concept of tactile books'*

Kathryn Salter, Visual Impairment Teacher, Sythwood Primary School: *'The children really enjoyed looking at the books'*.

Penny Philips, The Abbey School: *'The children really enjoyed working with Anna (the artist) and were very excited about it afterwards'*

Penny Philips, The Abbey School: *'The exploration of the books proved to be an enlivening experience for the pupils but also for the staff at the school who benefited from pupils reacting in a way they had not experienced before'*.

Generic Learning Outcomes achieved through the project.

Generic Learning Outcome	Learning Outcome
<p>Knowledge and Understanding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Learning facts or information</i> - <i>Making sense of something</i> - <i>Deepening understanding</i> - <i>How museums, libraries and archives operate</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Awareness of the needs of visually impaired visitors to museums ▪ Understanding how to create a resource for visually impaired children ▪ Increased public awareness of the needs of visually impaired people ▪ Understanding of how different materials can be utilised to create a tactile book ▪ Allowing visually impaired children to make sense of stories from the archive ▪ The books explain elements of the museums collections <p>Nick Booth, Guildford Museum: <i>‘It is hoped that the tactile book will be used as the first steps in making the medieval collections more accessible to visitors’.</i></p> <p>Anna Hennings, The Watts Gallery: <i>‘The children have learned to have a better understanding of the needs of visually impaired classmates and have shown greater consideration for their needs as a result’.</i></p>

<p>Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Knowing how to do something</i> - <i>Being able to do new things</i> - <i>Intellectual skills</i> - <i>Information management skills</i> - <i>Social skills</i> - <i>Communication skills</i> - <i>Physical skills</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Museum staff, volunteers and workshop participants have learnt a range of new skills in the creation of the book <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Storytelling ○ Book construction ○ Material selection ▪ Museum staff and volunteers have learnt how to consider visually impaired people in their service delivery ▪ Workshops have increased social skills within families and between families working together <p>Kate Stuart, Surrey Heritage: <i>'I had to learn to change my way of thinking to consider those who can not see as well as me'</i>.</p> <p>Nansi Taylor, Godalming Museum: <i>'One little boy had never ever sewn before- he did the fossil!'</i></p>
<p>Attitudes & Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Feelings</i> - <i>Perceptions</i> - <i>Opinions about ourselves (e.g. self esteem)</i> - <i>Opinions or attitudes towards other people</i> - <i>Increased capacity for tolerance</i> - <i>Empathy</i> - <i>Increased motivation</i> - <i>Attitudes towards an organisation</i> - <i>Positive and negative attitudes in relation to an experience</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The project has enabled museum staff, volunteers and workshop participants to consider the experience of being visually impaired ▪ The project has increased tolerance and awareness towards visually impaired people ▪ Families involved in the project feel positive that they have contributed to the project ▪ Workshops have promoted a feeling of confidence and belief that opinions and thoughts are valid ▪ The involvement of museums has promoted a positive attitude of that organisation to outsiders <p>Julie Ties: <i>'It was nice to be involved in a project that helps to increase access'</i>.</p> <p>Penny Philips, The Abbey School: <i>'It really helps the pupils self-esteem to be involved.'</i></p>

<p>Enjoyment, Inspiration, Creativity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Having fun</i> - <i>Being surprised</i> - <i>Innovative thoughts</i> - <i>Creativity</i> - <i>Exploration, experimentation and making</i> - <i>Being inspired</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The creation of the tactile book was enjoyable ▪ The project should increase creativity and encourage innovative thoughts ▪ Creation of the books is based on experimentation and exploration of designs and materials ▪ Those reading the book will do so through exploration of the tactile pages <p>Nansi Taylor, Godalming Museum: <i>'We were greatly impressed by the children's ingenuity and interest in the concept of tactile books'</i></p> <p>Kathryn Salter, Visual Impairment Teacher, Sythwood Primary School: <i>'The children really enjoyed looking at the books'</i>.</p> <p>Penny Philips, The Abbey School: <i>'The children really enjoyed working with Anna (the artist) and were very excited about it afterwards'</i></p>
<p>Activity, Behaviour & Progression</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What people do</i> - <i>What people intend to do</i> - <i>What people have done</i> - <i>Reported or observed actions</i> - <i>A change in the way people manage their lives</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visually impaired children visiting museums will be able to use the tactile book as an activity ▪ Visually impaired families may visit new museums involved in the project ▪ Sighted public who have participated in the workshops may change their behaviour towards those with visual impairment <p>Penny Philips, The Abbey School: <i>'The exploration of the books proved to be an enlivening experience for the pupils but also for the staff at the school who benefited from pupils reacting in a way they had not experienced before'</i>.</p> <p>Beck Clemons, mum of Jack Clemons, age 6, involved in the project and awarded a book for his involvement: <i>'My son, Jack really enjoyed the experience and got a lot out of it. He is chuffed to bits with his new book and read 10 pages last night. (He's not normally a keen reader!)</i>.</p>

Generic Social Outcomes achieved through the project.

Generic Social Outcome	Intended Social Outcome
<p>Stronger & Safer Communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Improving group and inter-group dialogue and understanding</i> - <i>Supporting cultural diversity and identity</i> - <i>Encouraging familial ties and relationships</i> - <i>Tackling the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour</i> - <i>Contributing to crime prevention and reduction</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This project has actively supported cultural diversity ▪ Improved understanding of those who are visually impaired ▪ Families who attended the workshops have worked together to increase familial ties and relationships ▪ The project helps to tackle anti-social behaviour towards those visually impaired by increasing understanding of their needs
<p>Strengthening Public Life</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Encouraging and supporting awareness and participation in local decision-making and wider civic and political engagement</i> - <i>Building the capacity of community and voluntary groups</i> - <i>Providing safe, inclusive and trusted public spaces</i> - <i>Enabling community empowerment through the awareness of rights, benefits and external services</i> - <i>Improving the responsiveness of services to the needs of the local community, including other stakeholders</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enabling visually impaired and non visually impaired users of the museum to actively shape delivery of the service ▪ The project is supporting small and voluntary run museums so that they can participate ▪ The project promotes museums as safe, inclusive and trusted public spaces ▪ Empowers visually impaired children to have a say in service delivery ▪ The project improves museums responses to the needs of the local community <p>Nansi Taylor, Godalming Museum: <i>'Although children were working with adults the interpretation of the item was based on their own observation of the item in the museum.'</i></p>
<p>Health & Well Being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Encouraging healthy lifestyles and contributing to mental and physical well being</i> - <i>Supporting care and recovery</i> - <i>Supporting older people to live independent lives</i> - <i>Helping children and young people to enjoy life and make a positive contribution</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The project contributes to physical and mental wellbeing ▪ The project helps to support visually impaired children needing extra care and who are recovering from treatment ▪ The project actively helps children and young people to enjoy life and make a positive contribution <p>Tracey Carter, mum of Jordan who is visually impaired: <i>'Jordan phone a friend of his when we got home and had to tell her all about it!'</i></p>

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