## Having Fun through Time:

## Planning a unit to 'Extend pupils' chronological knowledge past 1066'

This article was published in *Primary History 77* (published by The Historical Association) in autumn 2017. HA members (and possibly others) can buy this edition of *Primary History* through the HA website, which includes the numerous illustrations used with this article.

At the end of this website version of the article I have included an extended list of links to websites which provide information for teachers on pastimes at different periods of history and there are obviously many more to be explored. I have not included anything on the recent past – as you will see below I have suggested that pupils carry out oral history interviews to find out about pastimes in the twentieth century.

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On Christmas Eve 1459 Margaret Paston wrote to her husband John:

*I sent our eldest son to Lady Morley to find out what games and activities were played in her house at Christmas after the death of her husband. She said there was no acting, no playing the harp or lute or singing, just playing backgammon, card games and chess. I sent our younger son to Lady Stapleton and she said the same.*

The Pastons were a wealthy Norfolk family though John was often away in London on legal business, as he was at Christmas 1459. Margaret was worried about the correct etiquette because Sir John Fastolf, a close friend, had recently died and she did not want to offend anyone by allowing inappropriate activities to take place in her household over Christmas. As a result we can identify some of the things people enjoyed doing for fun at a medieval Christmas.

This article is about planning and teaching about 'having fun across time' for use in the later years of Key Stage 2 (or possibly Year 7) – investigating questions such as 'Were people having fun in the same ways in the Middle Ages as in the Roman or Victorian periods?' What did our parents and grandparents do for fun when they were children and how different are our activities?' 'When were

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the greatest changes and why did they happen?' However there's a deeper purpose too, using the theme of 'having fun' to reinforce pupils' chronological understanding and knowledge.

## Linking chronological understanding and knowledge to the theme of 'having fun across time'

The 2014 National Curriculum expects pupils to undertake:

> *A study of an aspect or theme in British history that extends pupils' chronological knowledge past 1066*

Inclusion in the National Curriculum does not make an idea good in itself and many schools do not follow the National Curriculum. However, this item is helpful because studying a theme across a long stretch of time should help pupils develop their chronological knowledge and understanding, a key element in studying history. This emphasis on chronological knowledge and understanding leads to two linked and, hopefully, reassuring points:

1. You do not need to be an expert on the topic so don't get 'hung up on' knowing every detail about how people had fun in each period within the theme. It's more important to have:

> a) an overall sense of the pattern of changes and continuities in leisure activities
>
> b) enough resources to enable pupils to identify some of the ways people had fun in each period.

2. Pupils' chronological knowledge and understanding will get more reinforcement across Key Stage 2 by doing two or three themes (e.g. having fun, diet, clothes, travel and transport) briefly than by studying one theme in great detail. The aim is not to make them into experts in the history of 'having fun' but for them to be able to travel across time, looking into each of the periods briefly and developing their overview of history.

## Identifying the chronological objectives within 'having fun across time'

'Chronology' is a very broad term used to cover the range of skills and understandings listed below. It's these individual facets that need to be the focus for teaching within a theme such as 'having fun'.

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a) **Language and terminology** – from words such as ‘before’ and ‘after’ to AD, BC, century, Roman, Tudor to the language of concepts such as change, continuity, turning point

b) **The big picture of events across time** – also known as ‘a chronological framework’ or ‘the long arc of development’. This means building up a sense of how periods and events fit together in sequence.

c) **Sequence** – knowing the chronological sequence of periods and major events but also understanding why putting events in the correct sequence is important for explaining why events took place.

d) **Duration** – developing a sense of the length of time, for example that the era of Roman Britain was nearly six times longer than the Victorian period.

e) **Sense of period** – understanding what’s distinctive and typical about a period of history, not simply what happened during that period.

The development of such chronological understanding is slow so can be difficult to see as a teacher. Knowing whether a pupil knows the date of the battle of Hastings in easy but it’s far harder to determine the development of e.g. a sense of duration or a sense of period. Even so, they need to be taught for explicitly. Chronological understanding doesn’t just happen because events are covered in order – it develops because teachers identify the component understandings above and teach explicitly to develop them. The enquiry structure below identifies the most relevant chronological objectives for each section of the plan.

## An enquiry structure for ‘having fun across time’

This structure outlines a sequence of activities which focus on developing the facets of chronological understanding identified above. At the heart of this is an enquiry question ‘When were the greatest changes in how people had fun?’ which helps pupils remember that studying History is based on carrying out enquiries through which we go from knowing little or nothing about a topic to a good deal more, enough to be able to put together a decent answer to our enquiry question or questions.

### *1. What’s this History enquiry about?*

Give pupils 3 or 4 pictures of people having fun at different times e.g. Victorians at the beach. Ask pupils to put them in chronological sequence and identify or suggest the periods of history they

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show. Then ask what the pictures have in common – draw out or identify they're about having fun which is what they're going to investigate. [At this stage you could also ask them to list half a dozen things they do for fun to establish a base for comparison – or leave this til later.]

Chronological objectives: sense of period, language, sequence.

### *2. How does the past all fit together?*

Explain to pupils that they're going to tackle a very challenging enquiry, looking right across 2000 years of history, all the way back to the Romans (or earlier if you wish). To help them feel confident with the centuries and time periods use an activity such as The Big Human Timeline (see Useful Links box) where each pupil represents a century and labels or tabards show the names and duration of periods. This kind of visual activity reinforces their knowledge and increases confidence that they do know when each period was.

Use the timeline to pose the enquiry question 'When were the greatest changes in how people had fun?' Ask students to use their existing ideas to suggest an answer (hypothesis) – help them make suggestions by reminding them of periods they have studied and what happened then. Record any answers you get so everyone can see e.g. 'We think that the greatest changes happened ….'. If you don't get any answers then it just shows how much they can all look forward to learning!

Chronological objectives: Big picture, language, sequence, duration.

### *3. What do you think people did for fun?*

Split the class into groups – each takes a different historical period e.g. Roman, Saxons and Vikings, Middle Ages, Tudors and Stuarts, Georgian and Victorian, World War Britain. This leaves the opening for later using oral history with relatives to investigate more recent decades. The emphasis is on thinking at this stage – what do the groups think people did for fun in their period? (If no specific ideas then ask whether they have done the same as children and adults today or different things?). Ask pupils to compile a quick list and report back their ideas.

Chronological objectives: diagnosis of sense of period.

### *4. Research time!*

This isn't a lengthy phase, nor is it trying to be encyclopaedic. Pupils work in their groups to find an answer to 'what did people do for fun in your period?' The aim is to identify up to half a dozen

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leisure activities for their period – when they've done this you and they can fill out the picture using a summary diagram such as the one shown in Chart A at the end of the article. If they suggested ideas in the previous stage then they can check if they were right and what to add to their list. They will need information or historical evidence to work on but bear in mind again that they do not need a great deal for each group. The brief modernized extracts from Samuel Pepys' Diary at the end of this document shows how much can be revealed by a short piece of text.

Chronological objectives: sense of period.

### *5. Reporting back on their research*

Each period group can report back on what they have discovered, creating an overall class-list, and add to it from the Summary Chart if necessary to build a fuller picture. One way to add variety is to have each group mime one of the activities from their period so the others have to guess what it is. As pupils report back there is the chance to ask questions to get them thinking more deeply – possible questions are:

> Why did activity X start in this period and not earlier?
>
> Why was activity Y enjoyed in every period of history?
>
> Did everyone take part in activity Z or just some kinds of people?

Once this overall picture has been created, return to the enquiry question 'When were the greatest changes in how people had fun?' and any suggested answers pupils put forward in stage 2. Ask students if they were right earlier or if they have a new answer – build in important vocabulary use such as 'change' 'continuity' 'rapid change' 'slow development' 'turning point'.

Chronological objectives: Big picture, sense of period, language, sequence

### *6. A chance for some oral history*

This is where pupils can identify what they do for fun and ask their relatives what they did when they were younger. To make this more of a coherent enquiry pupils can co-operate in building up a questionnaire to use with their relatives so everyone is reporting back on the same issues. Questions should identify changes in what people do for fun but also ask how great the changes have been and about how people see the pace of changes. Pupils can also compare their relatives' activities with their own and identify recent differences.

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Chronological objectives: sense of period, language.

### *7. The Big Finish*

Now the research has been completed and pupils have thought about the answer to their enquiry question they deserve the satisfaction of creating a good answer to that question, perhaps in writing, perhaps orally, maybe on film – and include their own ways of having fun, perhaps as a starting point. This could be done individually, in groups or as a class, the latter re-using the period groups from earlier but requiring pupils to go beyond describing having fun in their period but explaining how much, if anything, was changing.

This process allows pupils to see how much they have learned since starting this enquiry, a very important part of the process for helping them feel confident about their ability to learn in history. Asking 'what have you learned?' is another important question in conclusion – there's information about the topic but also vocabulary about change and continuity - and their knowledge of chronology will be stronger too!

Chronological objectives: Everything!

## Having Fun across time – A Summary (Chart A)

The chart overleaf is not intended to identify every possible way of having fun but it may help you getting started with your own version!

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***Chart A: Having Fun across time – A Summary***

| **Roman Britain** | **Saxon & Viking England** | **Middle Ages** | **Tudors and Stuarts** | **Georgian and Victorian Britain** | **World War Britain** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Singing<br>Dancing<br>Story-telling<br><br>Board and dice games<br><br>Watching games and gladiators | Singing<br>Dancing<br>Story-telling<br><br>Board and dice games<br><br>Skating, sledging | Singing<br>Dancing<br>Story-telling<br><br>Card and dice games, chess<br><br>Cock-fighting<br>Bear-baiting<br><br>Hunting<br>Archery<br>Football<br><br>Taking part in and watching plays | Singing<br>Dancing<br>Story-telling<br><br>Cock-fighting<br>Bear-baiting<br><br>Card and dice games, chess<br><br>Hunting<br>Archery<br>Football<br><br>Going to the theatre | Singing<br>Dancing<br>Story-telling<br><br>Cock-fighting<br>Bear-baiting<br><br>Card and dice games<br><br>Theatres, music halls<br><br>Hunting<br>Football<br>Cricket<br><br>Horse racing<br>Boxing<br><br>Watching professional sport<br><br>Cycling<br>Travel on holiday | Singing<br>Dancing<br>Story-telling<br><br>Card, dice and board games<br><br>Football<br>Cricket<br>Basketball<br><br>Watching professional sport<br><br>Theatre, cinema<br><br>Listening to records, radio<br><br>Cycling<br>Travel on holiday |

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## Useful Links

Key Stage 3 textbooks often include sources and summaries of leisure activities. Borrowing material from your local secondary school may be a simple way of getting hold of such material.

A range of KS2 activities to develop chronological understanding such as The Big Human Timeline activity and some source material on the theme of 'Having Fun'

https://thinkinghistory.co.uk/ActivityKS/ActivityKS2.html

An account of growing up in Liverpool in the 1930s, including games, Christmas presents etc.

https://thinkinghistory.co.uk/Issues/FamilyHistories/downloads/FamilyMothers30s.pdf

The following web-links provide information on leisure in different periods of history. They provide a starting point for your own searches.

### *Roman Britain*

www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/romans/leisure/

https://www.romancircus.co.uk/

http://primaryfacts.com/1184/roman-entertainment-facts/

### *Anglo-Saxons and Vikings*

http://legacy.ashmolean.org/anglosaxondiscovery/Life/life_index.html

www.topicpod.com/vikings/viking_games_play.html

https://octavia.net/games-and-pastimes-of-the-anglo-saxons/

https://regia.org/research/misc/pastimes.htm

### *The Middle Ages c.1050-c1500*

www.lordsandladies.org/entertainment-middle-ages.htm

https://rosaliegilbert.com/recreation.html

http://www.castlesandmanorhouses.com/life_08_games.htm

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http://www.thefinertimes.com/Middle-Ages/games-in-the-middle-ages.html

***Tudor and Stuart period***

www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofEngland/Tudor-Sport/

http://irisharchaeology.ie/2013/02/a-hoard-of-16th-and-17th-century-childrens-toys/

http://www.historyextra.com/article/feature/tudor-games-chess-gambling-cards-indoor-pastimes

***Georgian and Victorian periods***

https://www.bl.uk/georgian-britain/articles/georgian-entertainment-from-pleasure-gardens-to-blood-sports

http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/story-of-england/georgians/daily-life/

www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/victorian_britain/children_at_play/

https://victorianchildren.org/victorian-toys-and-victorian-games/

http://www.victorian-era.org/victorian-sports.html

http://www.thesocialhistorian.com/leisure-historical-britain/

## Books Written for Children

Kaye Gardner, *Having Fun in Grandma's Day* (32 pages), 1998.

Anita Ganieri, *A Child's History of Britain*, 2014

Mike Corbishley et al., *The History of Britain and Ireland*, 2005 (OUP)

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## Extracts from Samuel Pepys' Diary from the 1660s

(These are modernised and taken from a variety of entries in Pepys' diary, not one single entry)

And so with much pleasure we to dancing, having the Duke of Buckingham's musicians, the best in town. By and by to a very good supper, and mighty merry and good music playing; and after supper to dancing and singing till about 12 at night;

One day I did go to Shoe Lane to see cock fighting - a sport I was never at in my life before. It is a very rude and nasty pleasure, like the Bear Garden where I saw the bull's tossing of the dogs. Tomorrow the King and Duke of York set out for Newmarket to some horse races but I to church.

At summer we travelled in our coach to Bristol. On the way we paid a guide to take us to Stonehenge which was as huge as I had been told and worth going this journey to see. God knows what its use was. You can hire a hammer from a blacksmith for a penny to take pieces off the stones but we did not. We visited Bath and saw the baths with all the people in them. I think it cannot be clean to have so many bodies together in the same water.

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