

GRT History Month 2022 – Wagon visits!

Last June as part of the GRT History Month celebrations in West Sussex we were able to fund a visit from the Salford EMTAS team and their traditional Irish Traveller wagon. The wagon was constructed from scratch by the Salford EMTAS team and members of the Traveller community. They also created information boards and activities for visiting children.

The trip to West Sussex was the first time they had taken the wagon out of Salford. The team said they were thrilled at the warm welcome they received and the interest in their amazing creation. The wagon spent a day at Billingshurst Primary School and a day at Southbourne Junior School.

Day 1 - Billingshurst Primary



Helen Williamson the Headteacher of Billingshurst Primary School was very enthusiastic to have the beautiful Salford wagon visit. She positioned the wagon at the front of the school. This enabled the wider community to also have an opportunity to see the wagon as they passed. The school is on a busy road in the village which, is also used by the neighbouring secondary school.

The Salford team arrived very early in the morning and straight away the wagon captured the community's imagination and connected with their memories. In fact, almost straight away the visitors started to arrive for the wagon team. Passing neighbours admired the details and shared their stories and experiences. A family at school drop-off came in to look and were really interested in the cooking pot. They shared that they remembered their grandparents cooking in a pot on an open fire and how it is still important for them to do that now with their children.

At lunch time a staff member came out to look. She said:

"I had to come and look! My Nan used to tell me about travelling in a wagon like this and sleeping under the wagon with a tarpaulin to keep the children dry. It is so beautiful!"

All the children had time to visit the wagon and share in the activities during the day. They were really interested and had lots of questions. The day will be remembered by not only the children but, by the whole community for years to come.



Day 2 - Southbourne Juniors

Louise Gasser, Headteacher at Southbourne, commented that there was a great deal of interest from all the pupils and the wider community. She arranged for all the classes to investigate the wagon and some were able to participate in the activities to learn and understand a little about the history and culture of Travellers.

The feedback from many of the pupils showed how much they'd enjoyed themselves:



'I enjoyed the tour around the wagon and finding out the parts of it; especially the cage for chickens.'

'I've discovered the history and the detail of the wagon. I didn't expect that.'

'The wagon is so beautifully designed.'

'I think it looks so pretty and I like the cleverness of the S hooks and storage.'

'I thought the whole experience was exciting because we got to see the interior and because there is lots of attention to detail.'



'It was cool, the gold on the wagon was great. It was fun to go inside as this is the first time I have been in one.'

'I love the idea of travelling the country in it, I would love to see it again.'

'I have never seen an old-fashioned wagon, it was very interesting because I didn't know that they could store chickens, chicks and eggs in the side of the wagon. I liked the comfortable bed!'



After the visit, one pupil of Traveller background, felt confident and accepted enough to create her own presentation about Traveller culture and delivered it to her class. Her peers were genuinely interested and intrigued which created some great discussions. The class also had a go at making some traditional Traveller recipes like bacon pudding and joey grey.

This kind of response really highlights why celebrating Traveller culture in June, or any other month, is so powerful. Any child who feels their culture is understood, valued, and celebrated in school is more likely to feel confident and accepted. Experience and awareness of other cultures promotes inclusivity and equality for the whole school community.

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