

Forging community spirit at Chidham Parochial Primary School

There was great excitement, and plenty of muscles at the ready, at Chidham Parochial Primary School in April when journalist, filmmaker and blacksmith **Jake Bowers** arrived with his working forge. Pupils were thrilled at the opportunity to see traditional blacksmithing up close, with everyone getting a chance to have a go.



Jake is currently working on a national project with the **University of Glasgow** to create twelve statues representing different aspects of Traveller culture, to be sited around the country. Following contact from headteacher **Seb Olway**, it was agreed that one of these statues, representing **Mother Earth**, would find a permanent home in the school's eco garden.



Jake began the visit by leading a school assembly, where he spoke about the project and shared stories of his own Traveller heritage. He described growing up locally, having spent many happy childhood years living on the **Priors Leaze site**, creating an immediate connection with the children. Pupils were then invited to suggest ideas for additions to the half-finished statue, which Jake will incorporate before it is galvanised. This final stage will protect the sculpture from the elements and give it a distinctive silvery finish.

The statue depicts Mother Earth holding the outline of the **Romany flag**, with the words "*Dai Poov*", meaning *Mother Earth* in Romani, inscribed on her skirt. After the assembly, sleeves were rolled up as pupils experienced the forge first-hand, making the visit both educational and memorable.

Seb Olway commented that the statue fits perfectly with the school's strong commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility, which runs as a golden thread throughout the curriculum. He also highlighted the visit as a valuable opportunity to celebrate the culture, history and skills of the Traveller community, saying he was proud that it demonstrated the school's commitment to inclusion.



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The completed statue is expected to return to Chidham by **July**, when she will be unveiled in the school's flower garden — a space that also serves as a prayer garden and place of quiet contemplation. With her strength and grace, Mother Earth will stand watch over the surrounding area of outstanding natural beauty for many years to come.



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