



Judge's Report for

*Chiltern Open Air Museum*

The Sandford Award for Heritage Education  
2014



## Judges' Report and Recommendations

The report should include a concise assessment of the service offered and the visit shadowed against the Sandford Award criteria, together with any recommendations for future development.

The Chiltern Open Air Museum was opened in 1981 by members of the Chiltern Society. Currently, there are 33 rescued historic buildings on site together with a replica Iron Age Roundhouse. Many of the buildings are not merely static exhibits but are used to carry out archaeological experiments within, and as part of, their structures. Of particular ongoing interest is the experiment in thatching with a variety of materials that would have been available to the original thatchers. It is safe to claim that the whole site is an experimental area. There is also a lively attempt to introduce crafts and skills of the past by utilising the knowledge of local craftsmen and women. For example, during Blacksmith Experience Days, Heavy Horse Experience Days, Historic Cooking Days, are all set in appropriate historic areas and buildings.

### 1. Assessment of how the services offered meet the criteria

Please provide an assessment of the services offered against each of the criteria below:

#### 1. The education programmes are delivered in a way that engages, informs and inspires visitors

	Not Met	Partially Met	Mostly Met	Fully Met
Judge's assessment				*

**Supporting evidence:** from the initial Meet and Greet contact, members of staff established a rapport with the observed groups that set the tone for all subsequent activities. Explanations about what the group members should expect from the day's visit inspired early excitement that carried on until the point of departure. Within this scene-setting children were given explanations of what behaviour was expected, together with clear reasons regarding why such behaviour was necessary. Further, children came to understand that they were to be fully engaged in their own learning where questions and observations would be welcomed by staff members. The confidence gained was to cause interactive comments and discussions throughout the two sessions seen as different groups carried out practical tasks in the replica Iron Age Roundhouse and learned about the early stages development of lighting.

## 2. The education programmes at the site contribute to an understanding of the local and national heritage

	Not Met	Partially Met	Mostly Met	Fully Met
<b>Judge's assessment</b>				*

**Supporting evidence:** the programmes examined display a good mix of specific and generic approaches to local and national history. There are laudable practical elements within each programme - each of which is carried out within buildings that match the period under study. Each is accompanied by an enviable array of original and replica artefacts covering times from the Iron Age to the 1947 prefab. The skills displayed by the Learning Team enable the same artefacts to be examined on differing levels of knowledge and understanding by persons of all ages and experience.

### 3. The education programmes have been developed through consultation with educational customers and advisers

	Not Met	Partially Met	Mostly Met	Fully Met
<b>Judge's assessment</b>				*

**Supporting evidence:** this is very much an on-going area where regular staff evaluation meetings have responded to the possibilities of drawing in new bands of people to gain help and advice. Buckinghamshire School Improvement Officers have been consulted over the past 10 years on the development of school learning programmes to support the changing requirements of the National curriculum. Teachers from local schools, together with volunteers with teaching backgrounds, are also consulted. During 2013, the site's Learning Officer and the Community Learning Officer worked together to create three teacher focus groups to cover provision from Early Years to Key Stage Three. The result of these groups' deliberations have informed the learning team's current strategies for developing the 2014 programmes and beyond. As theme days are developed, for example the Iron Age day, a local school is used to trial the experience with staff and pupils' evaluation informing any required changes. As a perceived sensible follow-up to this partnership, two local schools have been invited to be Partnership Schools - providing a regular consultation process and pupil evaluations. In return the schools receive reduced rates and provide publicity opportunities. From discussions held with the staff, it is clear that the consultations are effective.

In its application form (12<sup>th</sup> February 2014) the site stated that the provision for Key Stage Three was a developing area. Since that time, work and consultation with the relevant focus group has brought about a programme within the Lighting Workshop to challenge students within this key stage. In addition, a draft document Medieval Theme Day and outline programme has been produced that displays a very real knowledge and understanding of what can interest and challenge students within this age group. It is worthy of note that an earlier draft, based on the Victorians, had been written but that this was abandoned following consultation in favour of the medieval document.

**4. There is attention to good management and administration concerning all aspects of the visit**

	<b>Not Met</b>	<b>Partially Met</b>	<b>Mostly Met</b>	<b>Fully Met</b>
<b>Judge's assessment</b>				*

**Supporting evidence:** from the perspective of the judge, this aspect of the observed visits are fully met. Checks with the visiting groups' lead-teachers completely endorsed this view: praise was offered for the ease with which visits had been arranged, the friendliness of all members of staff and particular thanks were given for the care undertaken to ensure that the content of programmes fitted the needs of the teachers and children.

**5. Educational resources and facilities are provided which enhance the quality of the students' visits**

	<b>Not Met</b>	<b>Partially Met</b>	<b>Mostly Met</b>	<b>Fully Met</b>
<b>Judge's assessment</b>				*

**Supporting evidence:** this has a multi-layered content; the buildings as presented include resources and facilities that can be used within many contexts. For example, the replica roundhouse has been constructed using archaeological evidence, information gleaned from contemporary writers and depictions of roundhouses on Roman commemorative columns etc.. Such information was not required for the infant-age children during the session seen, but was available in discussion with the judge (who has built roundhouses). Further, a great deal of experimental archaeology is taking place throughout the site. For example, differing types of possible thatching materials are being explored and the possible interpretation of the construction of barn doors attempted. The skill of individual members of staff is to discover the needs and understanding of each group and to select from the available evidence those aspects that are useful. The array of artefacts - both original and replica - for use with each reconstructed building is impressive. The use of sound to give context to suitable buildings has been the subject of a separate award; another factor that gives context to additional understanding.

**6. The statutory and desirable domestic facilities are provided**

	<b>Not Met</b>	<b>Partially Met</b>	<b>Mostly Met</b>	<b>Fully Met</b>
<b>Judge's assessment</b>				*

**Supporting evidence:** all expected facilities are provided with an abundance of outdoor and indoor eating areas; toilet facilities are available around the site and these are clean, airy and tidy.



## 2. Summary of the visit shadowed

Please provide a short assessment (600 words maximum) of the key findings from your visit and the overall eligibility of the site for a Sandford Award.

*Include: welcome and orientation, management, quality of delivery, engagement of participants, curriculum links (for formal education programmes), informal learning (where applicable), overall quality of experience.*

Two visiting groups were observed during the judge's visit. Both groups were mixed Year One classes and each had been well prepared for the day's activities. The Meet and Greet for each group set the tone for the visits; members of staff who were to interact with the children were introduced in a suitably friendly manner; expectations of behaviour established; necessary health and safety requirements stated and explained with good examples offered of how to ask questions or state opinions and ideas.

Movement around the site was organised to expedite swift arrival at each working area - where all personnel and artefacts had been prepared in advance. Throughout the day, no group was kept waiting with activities carried out with good pace and efficiently. Admirable.

**Iron Age Roundhouse.** The initial sighting of the building, together with the two costumed tutors, was greeted with surprise and pleasure. A working rapport was quickly established as the costumed tutors asked questions of the children using the roundhouse as an artefact to be interrogated, "Have you ever seen anything like this before?", "What do you think that it might be?", "Of what is it made?" During this period children soon learned that their answers and observations were welcomed and that 'wrong' answers were accepted and explained away. Excellent use was made of methodological questioning (both closed and open) to enable children to offer their individual contributions based on ideas of Then and Now, Changes over Time, Similarities and Differences etc. Very good use was made of praise and respect was afforded to all answers. Explanations

about the life and living arrangements within the roundhouse were properly given in similarities and contrasts with children's own homes and this approach very much aided understanding. Practical activities were accepted with delight as the quern stone grinding, wattle weaving, bread-making and griddle-cooking over embers were undertaken. The important idea that modern man cannot fully understand how the dwellers in roundhouses actually lived was explained in accessible language, together with the idea of replicating the building using findings from archaeological digs and ethnological evidence.

**Lighting Workshop.** It is important to be aware that this workshop was conducted in the same manner as that in the Roundhouse, showing very clearly that the overall approach is integrated into all offered programmes. The group was greeted warmly and the outline plan for the session explained - so quickly gaining interest and a very positive response. The opening discussion/question-and-answer session established a rapport that was to last to the final moment of the session. The content covered sources of light from time of the roundhouse to Victorian oil lamps. During the session, rush lights, tallow candles, beeswax candles and early oil lamps were shown and demonstrated. Children were thereby helped to consider improvements in light quality and to compare and contrast with their own experiences of modern lighting. Flint and steel use - within a darkened barn - to provide the spark for a flame caused great excitement, especially when contrasted with the use of a modern match. By the end of the session, each child had made a beeswax candle to take home - each now confident that they could explain the process to others. The spontaneous burst of applause at the end of the session properly acknowledged the pleasure and learning that had taken place. Before leaving the group was left with a final conundrum: Iron Age people are known to have had access to honey, did they, therefore, use beeswax candles?

During the activities observed, there was a flow of opportunities for children to practise speaking and listening skills, to enhance their vocabularies and to utilise prior learning in (particularly) science and mathematics to explain their ideas.

### **3. Recommendations**

**Key Stage Three and the Iron Age Roundhouse.** Whilst the practical tasks given to the Key Stage One children can properly be shared with older students, there is a need to offer more challenging tasks that cause older students to analyse given evidence/facts and interpret them. For example, on archaeological sites the area outside the roundhouse post hole ring often contains archaeological evidence of various post hole arrangements. This evidence can be interpreted in a variety of ways, for example, a single post hole may suggest a central pole to support a hay stook. Ideally, time to construct interpretations should be available but sketches can be discussed successfully.

## **SANDFORD AWARD FOR HERITAGE EDUCATION**

Judges are required to make one of two recommendations for consideration by the Judges' and Directors' Panels, either a 'Sandford Award' or 'No Award'. Please delete below as appropriate

Below is a citation that can be used for publicity or in the event of 'No Award' the criteria which were not met:

***The Chiltern Open Air Museum fully merits this endorsement to its earlier awards. Visitors to the museum will quickly begin to appreciate that this is no static display area but a lively place that encourages experimental practical ideas aimed to shed light on the possible use of materials that have long been abandoned. Theme Days enable visitors to see and practise skills demonstrated by craftsmen and women and, thereby, gain some insight into the ways of life of their own ancestors. A major strength lies with the Learning Team all of whom exhibit the enviable ability to gain and retain the focused interest of the younger visitors.***

Name of Lead Judge: Eric Steed

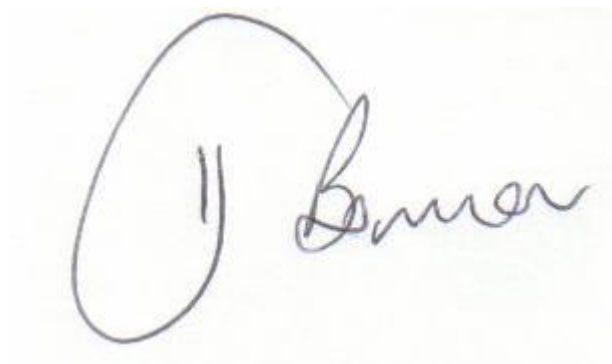
Signed :



JUDGES PANEL RECOMMENDATION:

**SANDFORD AWARD**

Signed (Chairman of the Judges Panel):

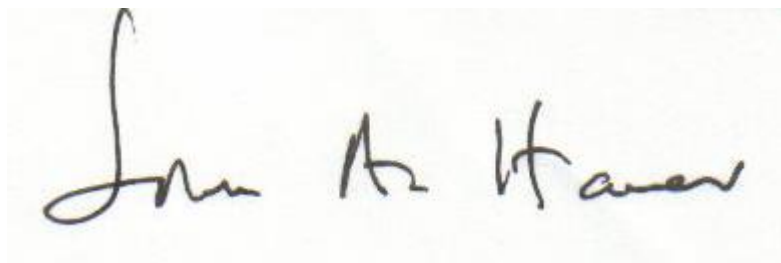
A handwritten signature in blue ink on a light-colored background. The signature consists of a large, stylized initial 'T' followed by the name 'Borman' written in a cursive script.

Tracy Borman, 8 July 2014

DIRECTORS' DECISION:

**SANDFORD AWARD**

Signed (Chairman of the Board of Directors):

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature reads "John A. Hamer" in a cursive, slightly slanted script. The first letter of "John" is a large, tall capital 'J'. The 'A' is a simple capital letter, and 'Hamer' is written in a fluid, connected cursive style.

John Hamer

Date: 8 July 2014