

# THE MECHANICS INSTITUTION & SWINDON RAILWAY VILLAGE

Working with archives & local studies collections – lesson ideas & activities

This resource pack contains several different resources taken from the Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre's archives and local studies collections. The main resources are photos, maps and census returns which can be used individually, together and in conjunction with the stories and images on the *Sharing Swindon's Story* website. Together they provide a detailed picture of life in the Railway Village from its foundation in 1843.

Swindon's Mechanics' Institution and Medical Fund Society were pioneering in their provision of education, leisure, health and welfare services to the newly arrived, industrial working class families moved to the Railway Village to work in the GWR workshops. These organisations, while supported by the rail company, were organised by the workers for the workers.

## RESOURCES & LESSON IDEAS

PHOTO RESOURCES **Health & Welfare; Mechanics Institution; Railway Village; Swindon**

**History:** Use historic photographs as a starter activity: use in an Inference Grid; alternatively mask whole or part of the image and reveal gradually or ask pupils to suggest what might be in the rest of the picture; ask pupils to imagine what sounds and smells might be experienced if they were present in the photo.

**Art:** Variety of art activities – get pupils to colour black and white photocopies; make collages using photocopied images torn or cut; complete partial images; imagine what is going on beyond the image.

**English:** Creative writing – prose or poetry in response to images; use of adjectives, metaphors and similes. Factual writing – newspaper report about GWR coming to Swindon; the building of the Railway Village; living and working conditions; market day in Swindon. Persuasive writing – from an historic or present-day perspective, e.g. a new school building was needed in the 1870s or campaigning to save Swindon's heritage buildings.

WRITTEN SOURCES *Jefferies' Land – a History of Swindon and its Environs*; School log books

*Jefferies' Land*

**Extract 1:** This extract could be used in **History / Geography / PSHE** to show the changes brought about by industrialisation, urbanisation and migration; the advantages and disadvantages of such rapid urban/industrial growth; pros and cons of planned new towns; the changing economic & social aspirations of different generations / communities and how these might influence migration, nationally and internationally.

**Extract 2:** Use this extract to support **SMSC learning** – the value of lifelong learning; of people working together to improve their communities; what are people in Swindon doing today to encourage social, cultural wellbeing; what are they doing to preserve their heritage.

In **History / Geography / Economics / Politics** consider the links between the Mechanics' Institute movement and adult education e.g. the London Mechanics' Institute became Birkbeck College, part of the University of London; the GWR Medical Fund Society and the modern NHS. In the primary curriculum, if you study Brunel make sure you also study Daniel Gooch as he was the driving force behind the development of Swindon.

**Extract 3: History** – use Swindon as an example of industrialisation & urbanisation; of innovation and technology; of great lives Brunel and Gooch; of workers organising themselves through the Mechanics' Institution and Medical Fund.

In **English / Literacy** this extract could be the stimulus for descriptive writing or you could link with novels and poetry from the late 18<sup>th</sup> / 19<sup>th</sup> century e.g. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or Dickens.

**Art / Design / Design Technology** – what would you put in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Great Exhibition; study architecture and engineering of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Brunel's stations, bridges and ships; the Crystal Palace itself); make a piece of art inspired by the description; study 19<sup>th</sup> century artists – Turner or the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood and sisterhood Effie Millais, Georgiana Burne-Jones; caricaturists such as Cruikshank.

### **School log books**

**English/Literacy/social history:** Diary writing; creative writing; empathy and understanding of what life was like for children in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; explore how life, school and leisure activities have changed for children over the past 100-150 years.

**Dance/Drama/Music:** Use the log book entries as stimulus for creating performance pieces – script and song-writing; choreography.

### STATISTICAL & CENSUS RESOURCES **population statistics 1851-1911; A moment in time; Who is Ebenezer Ford**

**Swindon Population figures** show the growth of Swindon from 1851 to 1911 and where people were born. The table can be used to show rate of population growth; the relative growth rates of Old and New Swindon; the pattern of migration of workers coming to Swindon. Old and New Swindon were counted separately until the 1911 census.

**Geography/History** – this example of 19<sup>th</sup> century regional migration for work could be linked to modern migration; as an introduction to industrialisation; globalisation; trade and transport. Use the stats in conjunction with Census returns and teachers' notes on the census. Introduce what a census is and how the information collected can be used – by planners who need to decide how many schools, hospitals, doctors, houses etc. are needed and by local/family historians.

**Maths and Geography** – could use the information to create graphs and maps showing where people are coming from and how it changes over time.

### **Census Returns**

There are teachers' notes on how to read a census return plus the history of the census. The census has been used in two resources in this pack: *A Moment in Time* which shows who was living in London Street on the night of the 1851 census; and *Who is Ebenezer Ford?*

The London Street returns are typical of the Railway Village and are a good introduction to the idea of migration and urbanisation.

The census returns for Ebenezer Ford and his family follow him from birth to death and allow students to begin to understand an individual story. There are other source documents in this resource.

**History / geography / numeracy / statistics** – census returns are a primary source. Returns show where people were born so are evidence of migration. They also show employment. The returns are good for highlighting the problems with primary sources as well as collecting and recording data – mistakes are made, especially with spellings; there are problems reading the handwriting; families did not always recall precise birth dates, so ages can be wrong; house numbers can change.

#### MAPS & PLANS **Swindon maps 1901-1942; Railway Village Redevelopment Plan 1965/66**

**Geography:** map work, identifying Old Town and New Town; commercial, residential and industrial areas of the town; phases of development; 1960s plans to redevelop the Railway Village – why redevelop? Poor condition of the housing stock; what would Swindon have gained/lost? These resources provide the stimulus for discussion about planning for a sustainable future and a practical task of designing and building a model of a new town/city. As well as using higher order thinking skills, students can explore themes of sustainability, leisure, social/cultural activities, wellbeing, transport, climate change. Over a series of lessons, they should plan, build and evaluate a model city.

PLAN Discuss needs/wants; list; decide – based against agreed criteria.

BUILD Execute plan using construction straws, paper, card etc.

EVALUATE peer evaluation (judge the best new towns) WWW/EBI; self-evaluation; teacher assessment and self-evaluation against success criteria/PLTS