

# White Rook Projects



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## Interactives and Activity Boxes for museums, galleries and historic sites

White Rook Projects designs and manufactures interactive installations and collections to encourage learning in museum and heritage environments. Every setting has different needs depending on audiences, surroundings, staff input and budget and we specialise in providing bespoke activities. Our aim is to produce activities which link the learner to the setting or object, to provide interpretive methods to suit a range of learning styles and to achieve pre-defined learning objectives. The following projects provide an insight into our approach.

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### Dorset and the Sea

Dorset County Council commissioned two activity sets to travel around the county's 40 museums. The sets were linked to an educational website called 'Dorset and the Sea', which explored the county's history of smuggling and shipwrecks. They were in two specially made containers – a 'smuggler's barrel' and a 'sailor's chest', each containing some 15 separate activities – and were designed for use by families with children between 3 and 11 years old. Before production, the activities were evaluated with family groups. In addition to more 'regular' activities such as bespoke costumes, jigsaws and handling collections, the sets included more unusual activities, listed here:

#### **Smugglers' barrel**

##### **Modern smuggler's suitcase**

A suitcase containing items to show some of the techniques which modern small-scale smugglers use to bring contraband into Britain – a hollowed out shoe heel, book and a 'walkman' with contraband in the battery compartment.

##### **Smugglers' 'call my bluff' card game**

In the history of smuggling it's hard to separate fact from fiction! On one side of the cards is a picture of a person, activity or object and on the other a description. One person reads out the description and the other(s) have to decide if it is true or false.

##### **18<sup>th</sup> century Dorset dialect**

A CD player in the barrel with local oral



history recordings of dialect as spoken at the time of the smugglers.

### **Smuggler's job interview**

A 'smuggler chief' is recruiting members of his/her gang. There is an interview card giving the requirements for the job and 14 character cards. Two or more people can play the game.

## **Shipwreck activities in the 'sailor's chest'**

### **Wreck detective**

A box with real items brought up from the wreck site of the 'Earl of Abergavenny' (1805), with an information booklet containing documentary evidence and questions and handling activities. A fictionalised account of the wreck based on historical sources made specific reference to the items in the handling collection, and was designed to be read out to children by parents.

### **Hold fast!**

Sailors had to know how to tie knots. Using instructions in the box, users tie knots with the cord. A red and a green cord is attached to the chest for reef knots.

### **X marks the spot**

A map of the Dorset coast in the 18<sup>th</sup> century from the Dorset Record Office showing the wreck sites, with ship models and rock samples. You have to place the right ship on each wreck site, and put rock samples at the right places along the coastline.

### **Signalling flags**

Bring the gallery to life by hauling up a message on a rope, using naval signalling flags. The activity uses authentic chandlery including pulleys, cleats and shackles.



*'Thanks again for all your hard and creative work on the boxes - I think they're great and I'm sure they will be a success'* – Janet Bell, Dorset County Museums Officer

*'My overall view, and that of all the stewards participating in the scheme, is that the exhibit was a resounding success. A great many visitors came to the museum who otherwise may not have visited, particularly children, and many of them were local residents as opposed to tourists.'* – Peter Andrews, Curator, Blandford Museum

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## **Dorset County Museum, Dorchester**

The county museum commissioned three project carts to encourage family learning in the galleries. Each cart was intended to stand out in the (rather traditional) galleries and make the statement that children were welcome and learning and fun were encouraged. The museum already had a strong LEA-funded education service and the carts were aimed at family visitors. The list below shows some of the more unusual activities, but there were also costumes, spelling games, jigsaws and handling sets.

### **Victorian gallery**

#### **Cast iron**

To encourage children to look at the architecture of the gallery. They use an example of ironwork from the building make a mould in a tray of modelling dough, or create their own 'ironware' from a hard mould based on a local 19<sup>th</sup> century wooden pattern. They can also use a range of nuts and bolts to join two drilled and tapped pieces of cast iron.

#### **Then & now**

A trail with photo cards of modern appliances etc. and activities. Children have to search the gallery for the equivalent Victorian artefact. Supported by a jigsaw of a Victorian scene.

### **Archaeology gallery**

#### **Patterns**

Using a pot-shaped tray of modelling dough, children select stamps based on designs on Neolithic, Bronze Age and Roman pottery in the gallery to create their own design.

#### **Bronze axehead**

A tray for casting a Bronze Age axehead. Axeheads and casts are on display in the gallery.

*'Wonderful! The museum looks like a circus!' – Richard de Peyer, Curator*



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## **Royal Albert Memorial Museum , Exeter**

A set of 10 activity boxes for use by 3-7 year olds, either within school groups or on family visits. Besides extending its informal learning facilities, the museum wanted to develop the educational use of three of its galleries which were underused by children: the World Cultures gallery, Natural History gallery and Decorative Arts gallery. The museum wanted to use items on the open market where possible so that replacement was easier. The boxes had just been installed when the museum was nominated for the Guardian's 2003 'Kids in Museums' award.

### **Decorative Arts gallery**

**Gears and clocks** to study mechanisms and time in the clocks gallery.

**A tea set** to play with next to the display of 18<sup>th</sup> century silver tea services.

**Colour paddles** for children to interpret the glass displays by playing with coloured light.

**Collecting sounds** in the clocks gallery – children put pictures of various clocks into boxes labelled with sounds ('ding', 'tick', 'whirr').

### **World Cultures gallery**

**Storytelling** activities – parents are given a variety of stories related to objects on display and children are encouraged to make up their own, using a 'wand' as their storyteller's staff.

**Felt faces** – getting young children to make up their own 'mask' design using felt noses, ears, eyes etc. on a colourful face template.

Make your own **Indian bead design** – an activity for parents while children are involved with something else!

**Language cards** – the same words and phrases in English and 7 ethnic languages represented in the galleries.

Genuine African **musical instruments** to play in the galleries.

### **Natural History gallery**

**Follow the footprints** – children put animal footprints on a trail around the gallery leading to their owner.

**Animals in rôle** – children dress up as animals and parents have discussion sheets about 'are humans animals?' looking at arms, feet, eyes, bones, etc.

**Camouflage collage** – a game in which photo cards of a range of animals in the gallery chosen for their camouflage are placed against the right natural background.

**Colourful animals** – children create a brightly coloured bird or butterfly in a template, using acetate and iridescent film.





Comments from parents:

*'Thank you! 2 hours just flew by! Well worth paying council tax for!'*

*'These were exceptionally good boxes suitable for both my six year olds and my two year old – thank you!'*

*'This is great! My children have never spent so much time in this gallery, while the five year olds played my 9 year old sat and sketched – for the first time!'*

Evaluation report 2005:

**Findings:** *'there is no doubt that the activities enhanced [family] learning experiences and positively influenced the way they regard the museum as a good place to visit both for the children to learn through play and – for most families observed - for all the family to share learning experiences together.'*

**Recommendation:** *'To maintain the Activity Boxes for future use, as they support and enrich learning in the museum and encourage family visits and return visits, and to build on the excellent reputation that the Boxes are acquiring among families.'*

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## ***'Wrapping the Globe' at the Royal Albert Memorial Museum , Exeter & The Museum in the Park, Stroud***

Two activity boxes to provide interactive learning opportunities for Key Stage 2 children visiting the 'Wrapping the Globe' temporary exhibition (2004-5), which explored the impact of the West Country textile trade (especially the fine woollen cloth used for British army 'redcoat' uniforms) on native peoples and the evidence of this trade in today's ethnographic museum collections. The activities were designed to meet National Curriculum requirements in Design & Technology.

**Weaving loom** – a small frame loom and range of fibres to experiment with.

**Carding** – hand carding combs to try out carding with two different types of fleece.

**Handling collections** – materials available to Native Americans; examples of historic processed textiles and goods; examples of modern textiles.

**Choose a costume** – design a costume for a British soldier and a Native American, using a range of textiles beneath a costume template.

**Shrink the world** – using a world map, children measure the time taken to travel from England to other parts of the world in 1850 and today.



## ***St. Nicholas Priory, Exeter***

Two family learning chests in the Great Hall of this superb Tudor town house, converted in the 16<sup>th</sup> century from a medieval priory. The chests and the activities themselves had to fit in with the integrity of the historic building. A unique Exeter fretwork design was even included around the lid of the chests.

### **Highlights**

- Tudor music activities with a replica psalter and tabor, and an MP3 player with period music;
- Tudor table – replica eating and drinking vessels for rôle play activities;
- Tudor air fresheners – herbs and pomanders, with a trail to link smells to different parts of the building.



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## **Salisbury & South Wiltshire Museum**

Two family learning boxes for the Roman and Archaeology galleries. The museum is enormously rich in archaeological material and was able to supply original finds for handling in the boxes, such as Roman pottery, slingstones, tiles and mosaic tesserae and Neolithic flint knives and scrapers.

### **Highlights**

- What lasts in the ground? – objects chosen to lead to discussion about how this limits our understanding of the full range of objects used at any period;
- Real or replica? – objects chosen to compare with modern replicas, and discussion activities about how we might feel differently about them;
- Speak like a Roman – flashcards with Latin words, linked to an MP3 player with spoken Latin verse; also Roman numerals puzzles.



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## **National Museum of Ireland, Dublin**

Handling collections project to improve gallery learning for family and school audiences in the Decorative Art and History museum. This was a wider research project including audience consultation and piloting leading to the production of three gallery handling boxes in the costume, silver and period furniture galleries, where experiential opportunities are limited and access to the collections restricted due to conservation factors. The handling boxes included a range of original and replica items with the aim of encouraging 'discovery without information', or 'learning labels'.



### **Highlights**

- Fibres and textiles which children can touch and match with the historic costumes on display, allowing for sensory, emotional and kinaesthetic learning without the need to touch the originals;
- Samples of bone, ivory, metal, bog oak and glass to provide opportunities to touch the raw materials which jewellers used to make their beautiful jewellery;
- Samples of wood to provide 'learning labels' in the period furniture gallery;
- A set of stunning close up cards for children to use for a treasure hunt in the silver gallery (*pictured*);
- Mini collections of original items used by a servant (iron, pegs, butter pats) and by a rich person (books, tea caddy) for discussion in the period furniture gallery.



## North Somerset Museum Service

An interesting project working with two schools and the local library in Pill, near Bristol, to develop a local history box which could be hosted by the secondary school and taken to other schools and centres in the locality. The theme and contents were decided by the pupils and followed a smugglers and treasure island theme, using a range of original and replica items sourced from antique shops.

### Highlights

- Treasure Island mapping and coded message (yes, Bristol Channel has its own treasure island);
- Bristol dialect and 'Voices from the Past' MP3 oral history recordings;
- Coin sorting game;
- Mariners' skills – sending messages with signalling flags.





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## **Art Deco loan boxes, Northampton Museum**

A straight loan box handling collection using high quality '5 Star' zinc trolley cases and Jiffycel packaging. The objects were fragile, and included ceramics, glassware, clocks, jewellery, cameras, electronic items and clothing.



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## ***Buckfast Abbey Education Centre***

As a living Benedictine monastery, Buckfast is strong on education and the monks opened a special centre for use by schools. This was fitted with some 30 interactives designed for supervised but independent learning activities by 7-13 year olds. The activities include:

### **Archaeology**

**Rebuild a medieval window** – beside stone tracery excavated at Buckfast, children use replicas, and the missing pieces, to rebuild the whole window, then use posters to date it.

**Piece together the past** – children reconstruct three broken (modern) plates and bowls inside casts made from the pottery before it was smashed.

**Tiled floor** – using designs from medieval encaustic tiles excavated at Buckfast, children design their own tiled floor, using individual and quarter-pattern tiles.

### **Building**

**Spiral Staircase** – children place steps inside a ‘turret’ to show that a spiral staircase is a very simple structure, made from identical self-supporting blocks.

**Build an arch** – using actual size wooden blocks and a ‘former’, children build an arch over a gap and then remove the former and walk over the ‘bridge’.

**Flying Buttress** – children build a model of a church which will only stay standing when flying buttresses are used.



### **Art, Music and Crafts**

**Organ** – a working model of a pipe organ, complete with bellows, perspex-fronted air reservoir, keys, stops and a combination of wood and metal pipes.

**Illuminated Letter** – on a ‘chained book’ in a ‘medieval stall’, children use attractively painted pieces of wood to create a letter of their choice.

**Gregorian Chant booth** – a booth containing headphones where a child can sit alone and listen to the beautiful sounds of Gregorian Chant.

**Beehive tessellation** – using hexagonal pieces, children ‘fill the beehive’, discovering how well the shapes tessellate at the same time as placing the pollen, larvae and honey in the right places in the hive.

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