

A Tale of One City

The Dickens Community Archive Project

NEWS

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Never a dull moment with Charles Dickens family fun!

A group of parents and children from Charles Dickens School have become the latest converts to the local history bug after joining A Tale of One City – and they may be the fastest to finish, too!

The Adult and Family Learning Group meet regularly, bringing together parents and their children to improve learning and skills, including English and Maths. This intergenerational project brings parents and children together to learn about the city's history

"I completed my English qualification," group member Sam told us, "And I learn about the way my son, Hugh, is taught English – it's very different from when I learned!"

Parents and children chose each project together after a visit to the archives at Portsmouth History Centre and this has made for some of the most original projects that we've seen yet.

"Even though I've lived here all my life, there are so many things I didn't know about the city," said Michelle, who is making a map of the island.

The group have been working with Chris Bennett, a community artist from arts organisation Orange Apples, over 3 sessions of 3 hours each.

"I'm here to help with the practical skills needed to bring each project to life," said Chris, "There's been a real passion for model-making in the group and that's also an interest of mine, so it's been a lot of fun!"

Adult Learning Tutor for Adult and Family Learning Sue Parkes is impressed with the enthusiasm of the group.

"Everyone has been so enthusiastic, the group have seen the city in a whole new light. A few families have carried on exploring local history in their own time, too."

Ellie and other families visited Southsea Castle to follow up their work with the group. The visit inspired



Charles Dickens School Adult and Family Learning Group celebrate completing their projects

Ellie to build a model castle inspired by Southsea Castle, with images of Portsmouth through each window, while fellow group member, Lucy, was busy decorating a map of the city.

Tracy, who moved to Portsmouth from Glasgow 2 years ago, and her son Kaidan are making a funfair Big Wheel. "I've learned so much about Portsmouth," said Tracy, "And we're decorating the big wheel with photos from Portsmouth and Glasgow."

Group member Lucy is making a map of the city, while expecting mum Sarah is building a model family tree, tracing four generations of her Portsmouth/Bournemouth family.

"I've got a photo here of my great grandfather stood next to his fruit and veg stall on the pier in Southsea, and that will go on the tree," said Sarah.

Lisa and her son Jamie are making a 'time-travelling' model train, while Kelly and her son Leon worked on a model car. Both vehicles will be decorated with pictures of some of the boys' favourite local places, past and present, including Canoe Lake and Victoria Park.

Sam and her son Hugh are making a local history calendar and pack of history cards. Meanwhile,

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Kate wowed the group with her 3 ft high model of Portsmouth's Spinnaker Tower, decorated with new and old images of Portsmouth architecture.

"I didn't know what I wanted to do," said Kate, "And then it came to me one night that what I was really interested in was buildings."

Sarah is making a Portsmouth places 'Before and After' collage. She said, "I wasn't sure I would enjoy a history project at first. I thought it might be boring, but I was so wrong!"

Fratton-made mice meet the Mayor

Mayor Frank Jonas was delighted to award 10 lucky prize winners with a Dickensian mouse on 15 September at a special prize giving ceremony at the City Museum.

The mice were handmade by the Fratton Live at Home group and have been 'hiding' around the museum since Dickens birthday in February as part of an interactive trail for visitors. The A Tale of One City exhibition finishes in November so competition winners were delighted to give the Dickens birthday mice a new home.

Each mouse is named after a character from Dickens' novels, including Dodger, Pip, Nancy, Barnacle and even Mr and Mrs Cratchit!

Members of the Fratton Live at Home group came along to wave the mice off into their new homes. Lifelong Portsmouth resident and leader of the Fratton Live at Home group, Diane Brown, said "A lot of hard work and time have gone into the mice. I think it's great that several generations have got involved in A Tale of One City."



A knitted mouse hiding in the exhibition

Frank Padgham – a correction and an apology

Mayor Frank Jonas was delighted to award 10 lucky prize winners with a Dickensian mouse on 15th October at a special prize giving ceremony at the City Museum.

Unfortunately, we misspelled Mr Padgham's surname. We would like to apologise for this mistake and, by way of an apology, we are also delighted to feature another extract from Frank's autobiography, *Roses in December*.

"On Saturday 2nd September the day after Hitler had invaded Poland "the boss came round to the flats to tell us to pack up our tools and the 3 of us were instructed to go to Champions Cake Shop,

Cosham and dig a large hole and erect an Anderson Shelter, hundreds of which had been held in store for such a day," writes Frank.

"Unknown to me mobilisation of all Auxiliary Firemen had been put into operation and I learnt that I was to report to the fire station in Guildhall Square at 2.00 pm that Saturday afternoon. All excited I put aside my pick and shovel and set off on my cycle to the fire station in the Guildhall Square and with the minimum of fuss became a Full-Time Auxiliary Fireman..."

Don't forget, you can read more of Frank's diary on the website at <http://www.ataleofonecity.portsmouth.gov.uk/>

BBC recognises A Tale of One City as 'online gem'

The A Tale of One City website has been officially recognised by the BBC as an 'online gem' in its 'Who Do You Think You Are?' magazine.

The magazine, aimed at family history buffs, placed the website in the top 10 of a list of fifty local history websites in the country.

"We're really excited that our website has been noticed by the BBC," said the project leader, Anna Delaney, "Particularly as the site is still quite young and we're still getting the word out there to bring in new users."

Once word about the site has spread, the BBC says it could be "a goldmine... it invites visitors to add pictures, memories and stories to build an online archive of Portsmouth's history."

Local resident Alby has posted a black and white picture of him as a child, playing on an old toy rocking horse.

"My auntie paid 20 cigarettes for this rocking horse and brought it back from Belgium in 1944. She was in the army and ended up as Regimental Sergeant Major."

The website is free and very easy to use, so get surfing!

Online archive – web update

The A Tale of One City exhibition at the City Museum ends, and the Charles Dickens Birthplace closes on 4th November as this year's Dickens 200 celebrations draw to an end.

However, don't despair, as the A Tale of One City website will keep running, offering Portsmouth residents - past and present - the chance to keep bringing local history to life.

You can post stories and images to the website in a range of categories including people, places and topics.

And don't worry if you're not a web expert, you can find your feet just by surfing the website and

leaving comments about the memories, pictures and posts already up on the site.

For example, one local resident was recently inspired by a post on the website about the old Verrecchia's ice cream parlour near the Guildhall Square, a 'courting' booth from which can be found on display in the City Museum.

"My Dad used to ride the Walls ice cream carts. It was the same sort of cart as the one in the City Museum. Then when they brought the vans in, he stopped because he couldn't drive."

Do you have your own memories of Verrecchia's ice cream parlour to share?



Verrecchia's in Guildhall Square

Would you like to get involved in sharing your experiences and pictures of life in Portsmouth, past and present?

Then make sure you visit <http://www.ataleofonecity.portsmouth.gov.uk/> to get involved today!

Bangladeshi women make film on local life

Ladies from Ogroshor Bengali Women's Group have been making a film exploring their lives since coming from Bangladesh to Portsmouth.

The Ogroshor (which means 'Moving Forward') group totals over 180 women across Portsmouth, some of whom are currently working with City Eye filmmaker Antony Batchelor on the film as

part of A Tale of One City.

"Our ladies have been interviewed for the film about their life in Bangladesh and their life here in Portsmouth," said Treasurer Chumki Mitra, "The film shows people all about Bangladeshi food, culture, festivals and even clothes!"

Many of the women taking part have spoken

about their personal journeys from Bangladesh to Portsmouth in the interviews and their experiences of living in Portsmouth. The finished product will also highlight the unique culture of Bangladesh and the festivals, flavours and colours that make it unique, including clips of Bangladeshi folk dancing and music.

When the film is completed, the group will be presented with their own copies as part of the legacy of the A Tale of One City project, which is due to finish shortly.

"We're hoping filming will be finished in November" said Chumki "We're providing a lot of photographs of Bangladesh for the film as well."

The ladies are looking forward to seeing the film, which will also feature dancing as part of recent Eid celebrations in Portsmouth.

"It's been great taking part in the film, we've all really enjoyed it," one participant said "It's been a great chance to talk about our lives in Bangladesh and our lives here – past and present."

Consider yourself at home in Fratton

On 25th October people flocked to Fratton Community Centre for a day of Dickensian-themed celebrations.

Calls of "Alms for the blind!" and "Prayers for the dead!" rang in the ears of visitors as they were greeted by costumed characters representing life in the time of Dickens. Soon the raised voices of Bill Sykes and Nancy from *Oliver Twist* rang through the centre too, as actors from Groundlings Theatre Company argued over Oliver's fate. The day included a Victorian School Room, storytelling by the fireside and a glimpse of life in the Fratton area in times gone past.

The Lord Mayor, Frank Jonas attended the event and said, "I'm a big fan of Dickens, so days like today are fantastic. I think it's very important to remember what Dickens' work was showing us about the lives of the poor: people living in some of the very worst physical and social conditions. There's

a lot of nostalgia about the time of Dickens these days. A lot of people wish for 'a Dickensian Christmas' for example, but I think sometimes they forget how very bad that would have been for the majority of us if we found ourselves back in those times!"

The Fratton Live At Home Group created beautiful Victorian-style love tokens which decorated the centre. FLAH group member Claire Rawlyk, read a poem called *The Factory Worker's Last Day* written by Michael Sadler, a well known factory reformer, in 1832, and reflecting the terrible conditions faced by workers at the time.

"I heard they were looking for a narrator for today and I volunteered immediately as I have lots of drama experience," said Claire, who set up a drama group in Gloucestershire some 50 years ago which is still running today. A keen craftswoman, Claire had crocheted a Victorian shawl for her performance.



A cast of Dickensian characters at Fratton Community Centre

Storyteller Mike Rogers from MikeRoTheatre told two stories to the children from the Bunny Warren Preschool that encouraged lots of noisy crowd participation. He also weaved Victorian crafts of spinning and sewing into his tale of the *Widow of Lymington* and the *Lady from the North of the Country*, which featured 3 mysteriously appearing old ladies...

"Storytelling endures throughout the ages because it's a communal experience, very like theatre or film. I think storytelling is actually better because the action is all taking place in your head!"

"I'll be telling that story to my own spinning group", said Centre Manager Celia Smith.

Archivist Anna Delaney and Project Assistant Edward O'Bryan brought a range of items reflecting Portsmouth in the lifetime of Dickens, including maps and a copy of *Slaters Directory* from 1851, which includes 'A List of the Nobility, Gentry and Clergy' of Portsmouth and local residents listed by trade. The list included one James Gasking, an Eating House Keeper at 79 Queen Street.

"We couldn't have done it without Anna and Edward's help" said organiser Georgette Benford, "I'm so happy with how the day, it's been a great success!"



Victorian-style love tokens

More to explore with Portsmouth Museums

Portsmouth City Museum,
Museum Road
Portsmouth PO1 2LJ
Telephone: 02392827261
Open 10am - 5.00pm (5.30pm April to September), Tuesday to Sunday and Bank Holiday Mondays.
Entrance is free
www.portsmouthmuseums.co.uk

Charles Dickens Birthplace Museum,
393 Old Commercial Road PO1 4QL
Telephone 02392827261
Open Tues 4 to Fri 7 December only, 10am to 5pm
www.charlesdickensbirthplace.co.uk

Portsmouth History Centre,
Central Library, Guildhall Square
Portsmouth PO1 2DX
Telephone 02392 688046
Email portsmouthhistorycentre@portsmouthcc.gov.uk