



CASE STUDY

Sandford Award Criteria 5

Educational resources and facilities are provided which enhance the quality of the learners' visit

The education resources at Verdant Works range from demonstrations of the deafening mill machinery to design and invention workshops using Mecanno.

Verdant Works, Dundee



Photo credit: Erika Stevenson

Verdant Works is a building of national architectural importance. It is a rare surviving example of a courtyard-type mill with its original building layout and many features remaining contributing to its unique atmosphere. Built in 1833, Verdant Works is the last working jute mill in Britain where people can see the processing of jute from the raw fibre through to the finished woven cloth. As a museum it tells the story of Dundee's textile industries from the early 1700s through to the present day.

The Session: Verdant Works Tour KS: P4

‘Go back in time to the working mills of 150 years ago and experience the deafening sounds of the mill machines as we demonstrate how jute is processed from its raw state to the finished product. Explore the living conditions of the people in Dundee in Victorian era.’

Exploring the sights and sounds of a 19th century factory floor

The session consisted of a tour of the mill, a demonstration of the Bolton & Watt steam engine that once powered the jute machines in the mill, a Mecanno invention workshop and a live demonstration of the jute machines in action by a fantastic and very knowledgeable volunteer. There are several large machines, as well as smaller objects on display in the factory and large-scale photographs, interpretation panels and touchscreens.

At the heart of the museum is the working machines gallery where some of the noise and atmosphere of a 19th century factory floor is brought to life. Industrial heritage with many unfamiliar buildings, machines and processes can be an alien subject for primary school age children, but the education service at Verdant Works places the active experience of working in a factory environment at the heart of their programmes.

Working in small groups, the children designed and made small Meccano structures in small groups that the Education Officer then hooked up to another small structure, which produced steam and made the children’s inventions come to life. It was very exciting for the groups, waiting to see their models move with steam power. There was lots of clapping and praise for the children.

Comparing life experiences with children in the past

There was also an opportunity to see the mill machinery in action. The pupils were able to touch and feel raw jute at different stages of production and to consider the properties of jute as a raw material. One particularly strong moment was when the volunteer demonstrating the machines at work shook out a piece of raw jute to show how much dust it created. The group had to imagine a factory floor atmosphere filled with tiny particles of jute. This experience was reinforced for the children when he went on to describe some of the illnesses suffered by jute mill workers who were as young as eight years old.

Throughout the programme, education staff were consistent in relating information to experience, whether that was getting children to imagine what it might have been like living and working in 19th century Dundee or encouraging children to compare life experiences of people in the past to their own.

The straightforward approach to the session made it very easy for teachers – and for parent helpers - to quickly understand what children are being asked to do.

Educational Resources and Facilities – What Impressed the Sandford Award Judge?

There is a wide range of resources available for schools, including trails and interactives. The trails for use on-site are simple and designed to encourage pupils' observation skills and to focus on specific objects. The site also provides online resources for teachers and loans boxes. Verdant Works is featured on the Go Industrial App which allows visitors to play a simple multi-choice online game as they move around the site. Other resources available on site are:

- Victorian dressing up clothing
- Touch screen interactive computer games
- A 15-minute cinema experience film
- Jute bale marker brass rubbing stations throughout the museum
- Audio interpretation, including office workers' conversations
- Smell, sound and tactile interactives with additional interpretation on the uses of Dundee jute around the world
- Interactive Victorian housing, classroom and holiday scenes which include hands on objects such as chamber pots and schoolbooks
- A purpose-built education room with a sink and a projector

Teachers are also able to access a wide range of materials online.