

## School Targets and the Future

Having firmly established the role of video conferencing as a way of achieving breadth in the school's Post-16 provision, the school will now ensure a regular tutor/mentoring session for half an hour every two weeks with the students to monitor progress, ensure work is done and be aware of levels of achievement. In addition, this will allay any fears and anxieties that students (and parents) may have.

Being convinced of the usefulness and effectiveness of this approach, further expansion will be explored, possibly through joint provision with other institutions. The establishment of a broadband connection within the school will support this.

Within the normal mentoring of students concerning their Post-16 option choices, the school must be sure that students wishing to follow a video conferencing course are able to sustain a regime of self study. This style of learning is not for all.

**Colin Manser, Deputy Head, The King's School, Ottery St Mary**

# 9.

## Link with Public Record Office, London

### School Involved:

**Sidmouth Community College, Devon**

**Background:** The Year 7 class taking part in the video conference session had been studying British history 1066-1500. The pupils knew about the Domesday Book within an overview of how William 1 established control over his new kingdom but had not yet done detailed work on village life or on how the Domesday Book was compiled.

**Curriculum Context:** Key Stage 3 history

### Aims of Video Conferencing Session

The primary aim established after consultation between Sidmouth College and the Public Record Office was to help pupils to deepen their understanding of how the Domesday Book was compiled and how the process affected Saxon perceptions of their new Norman rulers.

A further aim was to introduce pupils to some of the issues around the survival and safe keeping of historical documents such as the Domesday Book.

## Planning, Research and Preparation

Tim Arnold and Jamie Byrom, advisers with Devon Curriculum Services, contacted Philip Stanley-Berridge, Deputy Education Officer at the Public Record Office to establish possible video conference activities. We explored various possibilities and settled on one involving Sidmouth College, an 11-16 school.

The Head of History at Sidmouth, Miss Lelly Bebb, negotiated with the PRO to find the most appropriate focus, given distinct difficulties in finding a suitable date and time. The original idea would have involved the PRO staff in finding examples of 'raw' documents to help pupils to get beyond the naive assumption that historians only work with prepared extracts such as those they see in text books. However, it became clear that the PRO would need a good deal of time and regular dialogue with the school to be sure of finding appropriate material relating to topics that would constitute new territory. Time did not permit this sort of preparation on this occasion - but it is an approach that Sidmouth may well be keen to explore in future.

The activity eventually selected was something of an experiment for the PRO. It involved linking the class at Sidmouth with some actors at Kew, who played the parts of a village reeve and a Domesday commissioner. This sort of activity regularly takes place at the PRO with pupils physically present, but this video conference allowed a class to take part from a distance of over 150 miles.

Once he had defined the activity through telephone conversations with Lelly Bebb, Philip Stanley-Berridge sent some preparatory materials to Sidmouth. The Year 7 class was able to study these as a way of preparing for the roles they would take on during the actual video conference. This involved familiarising themselves with extracts from the Domesday Book relating to land around Putney and Mortlake. There was a half-term holiday between that lesson and the actual video conference. On the day of the conference pupils had to come out of their normal lessons to take part in the video conference at the appropriate time.

## The Video Conferencing Session

The class had to spend some time re-arranging furniture in the room where the video conferencing camera and monitor were set up. The camera could not easily cope with wider angles so it was fairly hard to ensure that all pupils could be seen. This may or may not have been a problem for those at the PRO.

It was hard to know where the teacher was best advised to sit. Ideally there should be room for the teacher to move from the back to the front depending on whether the class needs any prompting. The packed classroom made this impossible.

Pupils settled quickly once they saw that the link was established. There were some early difficulties with volume control, involving some confusion over where the problem lay: with the remote controlling the video camera, with the TV monitor or with the microphone at the PRO. This was put right after a couple of minutes although the volume of voices from PRO wavered at the Sidmouth end during the link.

Philip was very skilful at establishing a sense of 'contact' between the class and the PRO. He asked a few questions, several of which allowed him to comment on things he could see at Sidmouth. This definitely helped pupils to realise that they were being watched as well as being watchers!

After Philip's introduction, the actors took their places. It will be interesting to know how they perceived the event. They performed very well indeed but it must have been very difficult for them to 'sense' their audience. It was neither theatre (with a living, breathing audience in-house) nor film (where the actor performs for a camera). It was something in between. What followed felt to the pupils like a performance (one that they enjoyed and benefited from) but it was hard for the pupils to have to come out of 'audience' mode and into participant mode on the occasions when the actors asked them questions. It was particularly hard as most of the questions put to the class were 'right answer' questions based on the documents they had studied before half term. There are some constructive suggestions for other approaches in the final section below.

After the actors had finished their section, Philip appeared once more. In some ways what followed was the most successful part as he engaged pupils in discussions about the Domesday Book. These started as 'factual' exchanges about, for example, what the book was made from, but developed into a fascinating session in which pupils asked some very good questions which conveyed their emerging sense of just how special - and valuable - the Domesday Book is. Once again, Philip's skill in asking and answering questions and encouraging pupils engaged them so that they happily continued after the end of the lesson.

## Technical Issues

*See above about volume control and camera angles.*

## Evaluation of Outcomes

*These comments are based on pupil perceptions passed on in discussion afterwards and on teacher impressions. They are not based on any formal written assessment.*

Pupils did enjoy the acting and in particular noted the division and crafty interplay between the Saxon Reeve and the Norman Commissioner more clearly than mere text books could establish.

Pupils also had the chance to see how the counting of land and animals was done (although some aspects probably needed more visual reinforcement through for example, a map). Technical difficulties would arise if the camera had to cut between the actors and maps or other documents.

It is likely that the actors can establish the differences between Saxons and Normans more effectively when performing away from the camera. It must have been hard for them to sit still, facing the camera, when they can normally move around, whispering to the audience, or showing exasperation, etc. It was interesting, therefore, that some pupils in the question and answer session at the end were still asking whether the Saxons liked the Domesday Book!

Some pupils said afterwards that the role play did go on a bit. It was certainly hard for pupils to give factual information from the documents they had studied, partly because for long periods they were simply watching the acting and then suddenly had to adjust and answer a question. In this sense there needed to be a better rhythm to the performance, ensuring that pupils were involved more regularly. Once again, there would be more room for easy interplay between actors and audience in a more conventional setting.

In many ways the greatest successes came from the last few minutes where pupils simply asked Philip questions. Questions such as "Have you touched the Domesday Book?" showed a sense of awe about the document that a normal lesson would not achieve. There is a lot of mileage in this sort of work as pupils get so accustomed to seeing documents as pre-processed extracts.

### **Ideas for Potential Development**

There were many very positive outcomes from the activity, despite some of the comments above. Certainly Sidmouth College history team would be interested in exploring similar contacts with the PRO or other bodies such as the Imperial War Museum.

The PRO's own evaluation should be set alongside these comments. It is likely that they will have picked up the barrier that came down between performers and pupils. At the Sidmouth end, a greater sense of joint involvement could have been promoted by asking pupils to dress up in Saxon or Norman outfits.

Above all, the interaction between actors and pupils could have been kept alive by the use of a commentator who could freeze the action and ask questions or put in extra little anecdotes and explanations to keep everyone in the picture. This is an important aspect of sustaining role play in class but the video conferencing technicalities of the fixed camera, etc. may make this difficult.

The interplay was notably better when pupils did not feel they had to give right answers to factual questions. It flowed well at the end when they could ask their own open questions. Perhaps more of this type of questioning could be built into role plays? For example, could the pupils be set problems to solve such as suggesting some ways of pulling the wool over the commissioner's eyes? This type of activity is less likely to lead to the awkward silences caused by pupil fear of getting a wrong answer.

**Jamie Byrom, Adviser for History, Devon Curriculum Services**