SEVENOAKS MUSEUM

Medieval & Tudor Box

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Activity 1 resources: Red modelling clay

Activity 2 resources: Embossing foil and toothpicks

Activity 3 resources: Foam blocks, wooden sticks, paper straws

Discussion topics/ activities

Origins of Sevenoaks

There is an entry for Otford (now part of Sevenoaks district) in the Domesday Book, which was commissioned by William the Conqueror in 1085 to provide a full survey of his new kingdom. The manor of Otford cover 20 square miles, including what was to become Sevenoaks.

 Pass around **Picture G**

The earliest record of the parish of Sevenoaks is from the Textus Roffensis, a medieval manuscript made at Rochester Cathedral in the 1120s. It contains a list of churches overseen by the Bishop of Rochester. In the text, Sevenoaks is spelt 'Seouenaca', a Saxon name.

(In 1964, historian John Dunlop decided that the original seven oak trees were probably in the area between Park Grange, St Nicholas Church, The Red House and Sevenoaks School.)

The earliest mention of Sevenoaks market was in 1287, and the first market house was built in the 1400s. A regular market took place in Sevenoaks until the 1990s.

Administration, education and religion

 Pass around **Picture I**

William the Conqueror implemented a structured social hierarchy in England known as the feudal system. As king, he granted land to individuals in exchange for their services. These nobles would grant some of their land to knights and peasants who would provide farming and military service in return.

William also increased the influence of the Catholic Church, rapidly building more churches and monasteries.

 Pass around **Picture E**

Though its history goes back to c.1120, the current shape of St Nicholas Church in Sevenoaks dates from the 1200s. The main part was rebuilt in the 1400s.

At a time when there was no government healthcare or education, the monasteries took on some of that role. In the early medieval period, very few people but the clergy (those with religious duties) could read or write.

Peasants had to pay a kind of tax called a tithe to the Church which was 10% of their produce.

 Pass around **Objects 1** and **Picture H**

Seal matrices were used for making an impression on a hot wax to authenticate a document without a signature or to seal a document closed. They were a signifier of the authority, status, and personality of the sender. The more intricate the design, the wealthier and higher status the sender.

Picture H is a medieval bronze seal matrix from the Sevenoaks Museum collection. It was found on St Botolph's Road in Sevenoaks town.

Q: What do you think the symbol could represent? Who might it have belonged to?

A: We do not know, but the design appears to show a cross and a branch extending from a central line, which are Christian symbols.

Literacy increased amongst the nobility in the later medieval period. This helped with the administration required in owning land and property.

The growth of towns and trade in the late medieval and Tudor period saw a rise in literacy amongst ordinary people, though most people were still agricultural workers who did not require such skills.

Pass around **Picture A**

These are plaster casts of the seal of William Sevenoak. Legend goes that an abandoned baby was found in Sevenoaks by local landowner William Rumstead in 1378, who adopted and named the child.

William Sevenoak rose to become Mayor of London in 1418. Upon his death, his will was that his money go to a grammar school for poor boys (now Sevenoaks School), and housing for the two men and women 'in greatest want' (Sevenoaks almshouses).

Activities

1) Pretend wax seal:

Split into two groups. Taking it in turns, use small blobs of red modelling clay to try out the seal matrices you have been looking at.

(This works best with clay stored in the fridge. Please return the clay and check the matrices are clean for the next group.)

2) Engrave a seal matrix:

Cut embossing foil into a circle. Use a toothpick to emboss your design, using a card mat underneath to absorb pressure.

Flora and Fauna

Pass around **Object 4**

In the medieval period, Sevenoaks was surrounded by dense forest, part of a larger area known as the Weald (from the Old English word *wald* meaning a 'forest' or 'high forest land'). Wild boars and wolves lived in these woods. The first recorded hospital in Sevenoaks in 1292 was located in the forest, a sanctuary for those travelling on pilgrimages. Imagine travelling through the woods where these potentially dangerous animals lived!

Q: What features of these creatures do you think made woodland their preferred habitat?

A: One answer is they can forage for food (such as fallen acorns and crawling insects) in the damp soil with their snouts.

Q: Why do you think they went extinct in the 1600s?

A: Increased human activity, deforestation, hunting.

Pass around **Object 3** and **Picture F**

Fallow deer are native to Asia but were first introduced to Britain by the Romans. Deer parks gained popularity after the Norman Conquest, with most created between 1200 and 1350.

These deer parks were primarily used for hunting but also provided food and resources for building and fuel. They usually contained a mixture of woodland and grazing pasture.

Knole's medieval deer park is the last of its kind in Kent. It was created in 1456 by Archbishop Bourchier, Knole's original owner. Fallow deer still roam the park today.

 Pass around **Object 11**

This is a real historic object from the Sevenoaks Museum collection, a horseshoe from a saddle horse, a horse used for riding/ transportation. It dates from the 1500s!

Blacksmithing and the skill of making horseshoes became an important trade in medieval and later times, advancing metalwork techniques. The Weald area was a big producer of iron in the 1500s, as the many trees providing fuel for forging.

Q: Why did people start nailing shoes on horses?

A: To protect their feet and allow them to travel faster, for longer. The wet, soft ground in northern Europe made horses' hooves particularly weak and porous. They often had foot problems and struggled to grip.

Traditionally, oxen (cattle) worked on farms as draught animals, pulling equipment. They were chosen for their cost effectiveness (strong but cheap to feed) and steady pace.

Q: A working ox would wear 8 shoes, why do you think that is?

A: Cloven hooves – each side of the hoof had a separate shoe.

In the 1500s, horses increasingly replaced oxen for farm tasks like pulling ploughs. King Henry VIII introduced regulations around horse breeding, primarily to increase their size and strength, especially for military use.

Pass around **Object 2**

Despite the devasting effects of The Plague in the mid-1300s, there was still little knowledge about disease prevention until the late 1700s. Several smaller outbreaks of disease affected England in this period. The Tudors believed that bad smells could spread disease. Some people would wear pomanders of dried herbs, spices and flowers around their necks.

Buildings, great and small

Pass around **Object 8**, **Pictures J** and **K**

Picture J is a drawing of The Shambles by local artist Vincent New. It is an old lane in Sevenoaks which still follows the medieval layout, though the buildings on the street have been altered over the years.

Wattle and Daub was a popular building method used in the medieval and Tudor periods, though the technique dates back even earlier. It is the material filled between panels of timber framed buildings. Woven wooden strips (wattle) are 'daubed' over with a sticky material, usually a mix of wet soil, clay, sand, animal dung and straw.

Chiddingstone village in Sevenoaks district has a high concentration of Tudor timber-framed buildings which would have been constructed with wattle and daub in their walls. **Picture K** is a drawing of Chiddingstone village by Vincent New.

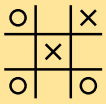
Ightham Mote, a large house in Sevenoaks district built in the 1300s, is a great example of medieval architecture where a timber frame is infilled with wattle and daub panels. The timber came from great Wealden oak trees. Other parts of the house were built with Kentish ragstone. The house is open to visit.

Object 8 is samples of Kentish Ragstone. It is a limestone from the Cretaceous period, found within the geological sequence known as the Hythe Beds of the Lower Greensand formation, which extends to the Sevenoaks area. Its geology includes glauconite, quartz grains and marine fossils.

Hard-wearing, and historically used for public buildings, ragstone was London's most popular building stone from Roman times through to the Tudor period.

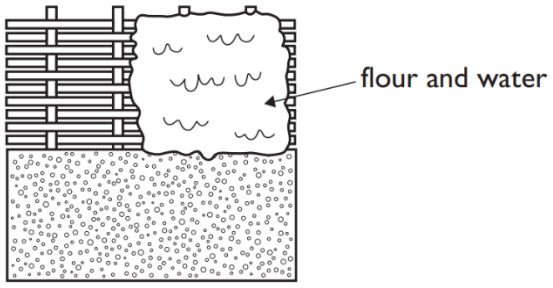
Knole House in Sevenoaks is primarily made from Kentish ragstone, originally built between 1456 and 1486. It is also open to visit. St Nicholas Church and the almshouses in Sevenoaks are also made from it.

Sevenoaks place names like Stonepitts and Quarry Hill indicate a long history of quarrying in the area.



Activity 3) Make a Wattle and Daub panel

Split into 2 groups. Stand 5 wooden dowels into a foam brick, equally spaced in a row. Weave the straw horizontally between the sticks, building up from the bottom in alternating directions around the dowels.



Mix the daub paste using flour and water, ensuring the mixture is thick enough to stick. Cover on both sides and leave to dry.

Pass around **Object 10**, **Pictures B**, **C** and **D**

Picture D shows the ruins of Otford Palace. In 1515, Archbishop Warham built one of the largest palaces in England, rivalling Hampton Court, on the existing Otford manor site. The palace was a short-lived extravagance, falling into disrepair by the 1600s.

Object 10 is a reproduction of an encaustic clay floor tile, like those which have been found on the site of

Otford palace. This type of tile was introduced from the late medieval period. To make it, a carved wooden stamp would be pressed into the wet tile then filled with a different colour clay. Master tilers created their own designs, and moved from place to place, taking their stamps with them.

Picture B and **Picture C** show real floor tile fragments found on the Otford Palace estate, now in the Sevenoaks Museum collection. The bicolour tiles date from the Tudor building, the others even earlier.

Local Links - Famous people, objects and events

Saxon King Harold likely marched through **Sevenoaks** on his way to Hastings in 1066, where he was killed in battle. **William the Conqueror** then camped in **Seal** on the way to London, where he became the first Norman King of England.

 Pass around **Pictures O** and **P**, **Objects 6** and **9**

The pictures show sections of the Bayeux tapestry which was made to document of the events of 1066. The embroidery was likely done by women. **Picture O** shows men in battle wearing chainmail.

 Try on **Object 9**, a replica medieval chainmail hat, called a coif, worn to protect the neck against

bladed weapons. It would have been worn with a padded cloth cap underneath and a helmet on top.

Picture P shows men wearing cloaks, fastened with round brooches. **Object 6** is a replica medieval annular brooch, the type used to fasten a cloak. Sevenoaks Museum has two small silver annular brooches in its collection which were found by metal detection and date from around 1300.

Saint Thomas Becket was a regular visitor to **Otford** before his exile and murder in 1170. As Archbishop of Canterbury, he rejected material wealth and challenged King Henry II's power over the church. Becket's Well is near the Otford Palace site. According to folklore, the well was created when he struck his staff (a big walking stick) on the ground. It became the fresh water source for the Tudor palace.

 Pass around **Picture M** (Content warning: Depicts decapitation, show at your own discretion)

In 1450 **Jack Cade's Rebellion** took place in Kent. Angry about high taxes and prices, thousands of men gathered to revolt against King Henry VI. The army split up the crowd and one group retreated to **Sevenoaks** where a battle took place. When the men marched again to London, they took the head of James Fiennes, the King's Lieutenant for Kent and

owner of Knole. The event triggered the breakdown of authority that led to the Wars of the Roses, the battle for the throne between the houses of York and Lancaster.

 Pass around **Picture N**

In 1520, **King Henry VIII** stayed at **Otford** with **Katherine of Aragon** and an army of 5,000 men, on their way to Field of the Cloth of Gold, a grand event held in northern France (on the border between English and French land) to strengthen the bond between the two kings.

Anne Boleyn lived at **Hever Castle**, just south of Sevenoaks, during her childhood. Anne grew up to be Henry VIII's second wife who he later had executed. His desire to marry Anne prompted England's break away from the Catholic Church.

 Try on **Object 5**, a head piece like those worn by ladies in Tudor court. Anne Boleyn is credited for bringing the French Hood into fashion in England, though this is not known for sure. The decorative pearled edges and jewels were known as 'billiments'.

Pass around **Picture L**, an embroidery sewn by a Sevenoaks woman in the 1800s, to commemorate Protestant martyr **John Frith**. Frith was burnt at the stake in 1533 as punishment for publishing **Reformation** writings. He was from **Westerham** and attended **Sevenoaks School**. He helped William Tyndale translate the bible from Latin into English because they wanted ordinary people to be able to read the words for themselves. Henry VIII made himself head of the Church in 1534, using the Reformation for his own gain. He did not really share the beliefs of people like John Frith. In 1536 Henry VIII took ownership of **Knole House** which had previously belonged to a succession of Archbishops. It eventually passed down to his daughter Queen Elizabeth I who gave it to the Sackville family, who still own some of the estate.