

# the outdoor classroom

## mereway bathing place

Curriculum focus: History

Keywords: Local History, Land Use, Victorians, Swimming, Rivers, Maps

Skills learnt in this worksheet include:

- Undertaking field work
- Observing and questioning
- Using and interpreting maps
- Understanding physical and man made features
- Investigate the local area
- Collecting and recording evidence
- Representing and interpreting data
- Using primary and secondary sources
- Historical research
- Developing an argument

Resources required for this activity:

- Timeline
- Sketch map based on the 1896 Ordinance survey map
- Working maps
- Summary sheets
- Frame sheets
- Newspaper articles and letters (optional)

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### Background Information

**The Bathing Place at Mereway opened in 1895, and closed, apparently due to pollution in the river, in 1930. At the time that Kneller Gardens opened in 1932 there were still hopes that it would re-open.**

**Read these reminiscences of pupils who swam at the Bathing Place.**

“This was a narrow strip of water perhaps some 15 yards wide and less than 100 yards long in the river, ideal for swimming. Twickenham Urban District Council provided 4 or 5 sheds with benches for clothes and drying along some hard standing on the North East side of the water. On the other was nothing but trees. It was a lovely spot.”

“The great feature of this waterhole however was the gradually rising river bed from upstream which made a convenient shelf along the whole of the pool. This allowed diving from the bank into the deep water at one end and for the learners to be able to stand up at the shallow end. There was one fixed diving board and four sets of wooden steps into the water. The pool was open to the public at specified times during the summer, but was reserved during school hours for private sessions.”

(William Drake, a pupil at Archdeacon Cambridge's School 1914-1924, quoted from *Archdeacon Cambridge's School 1842-1992: a record of living memories*, 1992).

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“We used to have swimming galas down at the Mereway every year. I look back and I had seven brothers all who swam down there”

(Mrs Doris Baker nee Thatcher a pupil at Archdeacon Cambridge’s School 1921-1929, quoted from *Archdeacon Cambridge’s School 1842-1992: a record of living memories*, 1992).

### Ideas for activities on site

#### 1. Discussion

**Discuss and record on the summary sheet.**

Using role play the teacher could encourage the children to ask questions about an imagined day out at the Bathing Place. What it felt like, what the children were wearing, what the surroundings were like could be areas for discussion. Children could either ask questions or be in the ‘hot seat’.

Alternatively discussion could also focus around reasons why the Bathing Place was built in the River Crane at Mereway. Suggested areas for discussion could include:

- The shape of the river at this point. The derivation of the name Mereway is a clue. Mere is a word from Old English meaning lake or body of water.
- The growth of Twickenham. There were a significant number of new housing estates built by the Victorians as the population of the town grew. Other civic facilities were also developed e.g. the Sewage Works and Dust Destructor at Mereway.
- The need for leisure activities in the developing town. Unlike other towns, in Twickenham, there were no public swimming baths built. Outdoor swimming was considered to be very healthy.  
Look for examples of Victorian bathing costumes.  
[www.victoriana.com/library/beach/fashionablebathingsuits](http://www.victoriana.com/library/beach/fashionablebathingsuits) and  
[www.victoriana.com/swimsuit/bathingsuits](http://www.victoriana.com/swimsuit/bathingsuits) have a brief history of the bathing suit.
- Discuss Victorian segregated swimming.  
This was practiced at Mereway. The superintendent stated that the numbers were so great that it was becoming difficult to separate male and female swimmers (see the Timeline for details).
- A developing education system for children demanded an all round education and the health of the pupils was considered to be important. The timeline and quote show that schools attended the Bathing Place for lessons and that swimming galas were held there.



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### 2. Looking at maps

**Stand on one of the bridges and look carefully at the landscape around you. Now look at the 1896 sketch map.**

Record your findings on the summary sheet or map.  
Take photographs of your findings or draw illustrations.

- What has changed in the landscape since the map was drawn?
- What features are the same?
- Is there anything new that is not on the old map?
- Is there anything on the map that is no longer there?
- Look at the land use. Is it the same today as in 1896?
- Can you identify the dates relating to these changes using the timeline?

### 3. Newspaper article, persuasive letter, balanced argument or debate

*This could be a follow on activity in class*

**Write a newspaper article or persuasive letter to Twickenham Urban Council about the closure of the Mereway Bathing Place.**

- Consider whether you agree with the closure or are against it.
- Give reasons why.
- Illustrate your work.

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### 4. Story writing

**Imagine that you are going swimming in Mereway Bathing Place.**

Write some sentences or a story about the Bathing Place.

- What did you see?
- What did you feel?
- What did you wear?
- Who did you go with?
- How much did it cost?

**Imagine you were taking part in the schools swimming gala at Mereway Bathing Place and write a story or newspaper report about the event.**

*See the quotes above.*

### 5. Poetry

**Read the poem by Gareth Owen 'Come in the water's lovely'**  
from *Read me and laugh: a funny poem for every day of the year/ Gaby Morgan (ed.)*  
MacMillan, 2005 ISBN 0330435574

Look for poems about water or rivers [www.poemhunter.com](http://www.poemhunter.com)  
Write your own poem about swimming.