

FROM PADIHAM GREEN, LANCASHIRE TO AACHEN, GERMANY

5 memorable days – from the 17th to the 21st November, 2014.

How it started:

Five years ago the East Lancashire Community Rail Partnership (ELCRP) worked with Padiham Green Primary school as part of its school educational programme. Following this initial contact Brian Haworth, Community Rail Development Officer for Lancashire County Council, was asked to work with the school to help with its involvement in the opening of the Padiham Greenway. This was a scheme which turned a disused and derelict former railway line into a community asset by creating a walking and cycling route linking Padiham with Rose Grove. Now fast forward to 2014 and with the fast approaching reopening of the Todmorden Curve and the introduction of a new Blackburn to Manchester rail service which will call at Rose Grove station the Greenway will become an important link between Padiham and Rose Grove.

What it led onto:

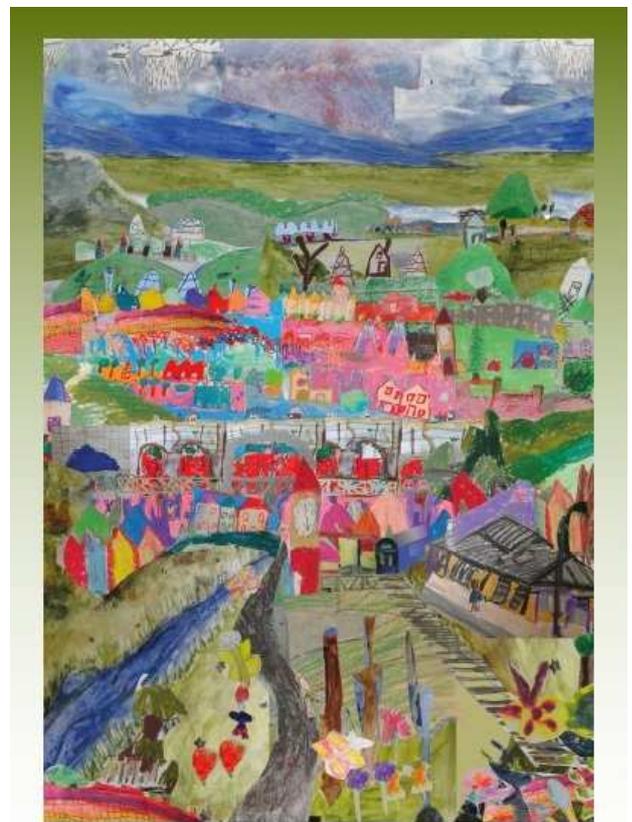
The journey from Padiham to Aachen started in May 2014 when Brian visited Janet Ennis, Deputy Head Teacher at Padiham Green School, Burnley, to see if she would like to involve her year 4 class in the opening of the new Burnley Manchester Road Station. The opening had been designed to coincide with a Citizens' Rail Partner's meeting taking place in July.

Citizens' Rail has been a major funder of the new station at Burnley Manchester Road through the European Union's, Interreg IVB programme. The new station building has been designed to provide an attractive and iconic gateway to the town. Other improvements have also been carried out around the station to improve the comfort and facilities enjoyed by a growing number of passengers. Citizens' Rail consists of partners from across Europe comprising Lancashire and Devon & Cornwall in the UK; the City of Aachen, Germany; the town of Heerlen, the Netherlands and Region Pays de la Loire, France who are looking at innovative ways to rejuvenate regional rail lines.

Janet was very keen to get involved. To start the process off Brian led an interactive session taking the class through the history of Burnley Manchester Road station and rail services in East Lancashire. This led on to the pupils getting very involved in finding out more about the station, the line it is on, the various partners involved in Citizens' Rail project and producing a colourful poster called 'Lancashire Landscapes'.

The culmination was the development by the pupils of a play about the history of the areas railways and a series of presentations about each of the home cities of the Citizens' Rail partners and this was performed in front of the Citizens' Rail partners on the 9th July, 2014.

The partners were hugely impressed by the effort and imagination that the children had invested in learning about the culture, economy, food and history of each local area. The pupils in turn were equally excited to meet people from each of the countries they had been studying. Uwe Muller from Stadt Aachen said: "The children's work was really outstanding! I hope one day we can arrange for the children to visit our cities in person".



Artwork by children from Padiham Green C of E Primary school

Lancashire Landscapes from the Train





This was a fantastic offer which the pupils, the school, Citizens' Rail and Community Rail Lancashire were very keen to take up. However, a big question emerged how to turn the dream into reality? Funds were needed but Padiham is not an affluent area so sponsorship would be required. Who to approach? Well there were some obvious candidates such as Citizens' Rail and Community Rail Lancashire. Less obvious but equally keen to support this venture were the UK-German Connection (www.ukgermanconnection.org), Abellio (the international arm of the Dutch railway company NS) and the Designated Line Community Rail Development Fund which is looked after by ACoRP (Association of Community Rail Partnerships).

The school also set about raising finance to help support the visit with the children coming up with all sorts of ideas and a series of coffee mornings and other events taking place.

Our Citizens' Rail colleagues in both Germany and the Netherlands put in a tremendous amount of hard work planning a comprehensive itinerary for the week. This involved the children being greeted by Aachen's Mayor in the City Hall, spending a day in Domsingschule, a music school in Aachen, travelling by rail to Heerlen in the Netherlands, generally seeing daily life in both countries and using public transport as the main means of travelling around.

Community Rail Lancashire was represented by Brian Haworth, Marjorie Birch and artist Alastair Nicholson on the visit. Alastair was tasked with working with the joint German and English classes to facilitate art work for display at English, German and Dutch railway stations. The theme of the artwork is 'The distance between' and will be made up of paintings produced by both schools depicting the journey between Padiham and Aachen/Herleen. The joint school classroom sessions were extremely successful with the children easily overcoming language barriers to produce some excellent art work which will form the basis of the station displays.

A visit by train took the children to Aachen West Station, which is very close to Aachen University, and is one of the stations being improved as part of the Citizens' Rail project. Kai Mohnen from Stadt Aachen spoke to the pupils about the station plans and invited them to come up with imaginative designs for the new footbridge that will link the station to the University.

Young people can be very discerning customers and it was interesting to hear their views of German railways compared to our own. What caught their attention was the cleanliness of the trains; yes children notice these things (!!) but especially the big windows that gave great views of the passing scenery. They also preferred modern German trains to the older 'Pacer' trains in the UK.



Another train ride took the children to Heerlen where Paul Alzer, who works for the Dutch province of Parkstad Limburg, was on hand to show the children exciting developments at Heerlen station. Again the children showed real interest in the development and were allowed to view the major construction work taking place. Following this Paul led the children on a guided tour of Heerlen highlighting the history of this Dutch city. Later in the day Paul had arranged a visit to the zoo on the outskirts of the city which was much appreciated by the children.

The effort that our European partners from Germany and the Netherlands put into this visit cannot be understated, their planning and attention to detail was very impressive. The project, however, does not stop here; Alastair is now working on producing a piece of art work which will form a lasting legacy of this European adventure.

A visit to Padiham Green on the 10th December revealed the children working on the history of Aachen Cathedral, in particular the legend of the bronze doors and the school says that work coming from this visit will be continued into next term such was the detail and cultural content of the visit. This ensures the continuity of the project into 2015. In conclusion; the Head, Mark Dixon and Deputy Head, Janet Ennis both agreed that this visit has been the highlight of their teaching careers.

Further information can be found by looking at the following sites:

Padiham Green's Aachen blog at: <http://www.aachen2014.blogspot.co.uk>

The Community Rail Lancashire website at: www.communityraillancashire.co.uk and

The Domsingschule website at: www.domsingschule-aachen.de/ (translation required!)

Note:

The Designated Line Community Rail Development Fund (DCRDF) is sponsored by the Department of Transport, Network Rail and the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP) and helps provide funding for development of community rail lines that have been designated as part of the Government's Community Rail Strategy.