Acorns

Acomb Primary School

Magazine
2014

120 years of Acomb Primary School

Exploring our history

Celebrating ten years of Shakespeare at Acomb

(in the year of his 450th birthday!)

INSIDE • Early Years • Bewerley Park adventures • Sport • Clubs

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Always a lot going on at Acomb

Introduction by Mr Lee Haynes, headteacher

I am incredibly privileged to work at Acomb Primary School and am proud to say that during the past ten years, six as deputy and four as headteacher, I have seen the school go from strength to strength.

One of my first roles, back in 2004, was to revamp the school curriculum and inspire creativity amongst staff and pupils. There are so many examples of how this is done – from themed weeks based on science, art, enterprise and Shakespeare to trips out and visitors coming in to school.

Whenever we are planning anything at Acomb we always ask ourselves what the benefit for the children would be and how it fits into their understanding of the world. If it doesn't, we don't do it.

Our motto: 'Putting Children First – Always Aiming High' sums up this approach to learning and that high standards and expectations are always at the forefront of our minds.

We have a thriving school community at Acomb, where parents, grandparents and other relatives and friends are always welcome to be part of our children's education.

I'm delighted to be leading such a great school and look forward to a very bright future for the school and our community.

Days

The year was 1894. Queen Victoria had ruled the UK and beyond for 57 years... the first British four-wheeled motor car with an internal combustion engine took to the streets... Blackpool Tower was built...

And Acomb Primary School was formally opened as "Acomb Board School" on Monday 27 August – some 120 years ago – on Front Street. At that time there were 230 children already enrolled but only four teachers, with their total salaries amounting to £375 in the first year.

Although it opened in 1894, it wasn't completed for a further five years, with space for over 500 children, infants and juniors.

It was the 1870 Education Act that stipulated that in areas lacking decent education, a "School Board" be set up and in 1880 it was compulsory for children up to the age of ten to go to school. York's school board came into being in 1889 and by the end of the century there were 12,000 pupils in York classrooms – double the number 30 years before.

Further legislation in 1893 extended the age of compulsory attendance to 11, and in 1899 to 12.

In 1920, West Riding County Council opened a branch of the public library within Acomb school, but it became so popular it had to be moved, to the Friends' Meeting House, overlooking Acomb Green.

A prefabricated classroom was added in 1940, bringing total accommodation up to

The name "Acomb" is derived from the Saxons and means "at the oaks" – the whole district was forest until the time of King John (1199-1216).

Left, the courtyard at West Bank takes shape. Right, the oldest class photo discovered from Front Street days

# of Queen Victoria and new schools

some 580 children in 12 classrooms.

A steep increase in local population resulted in the building of extra primary and secondary schools in the area: Carr County Infants School, in Ostman Road, in 1948 and Carr County Junior School in 1950. Westfield County Infants School, Askham Lane, opened in 1951, with its junior school opening a year later.

Acomb Secondary Modern School opened in Cornlands Road in 1954 and immediately had transferred to it the senior department of Acomb County Primary School. Lowfield Secondary Modern School opened in 1961.

In 1995, following a successful campaign for new school premises, with the Front Street site considered unfit for purpose, Acomb Primary School moved to its present site in West Bank. Up until ten years previously, the area had been used as playing fields for Mill Mount School.

The move was not without its challenges.

Acomb only became part of York in 1937. Before then it was a township, part of Ainsty in the West Riding.

Some other local primary schools were concerned that the appeal of a brand new building might entice parents away from their schools; and some objected to the fact that "Acomb" Primary School was now strictly speaking in Holgate. While accepting the need for change, some regretted the move away from the heart of the Acomb community.

In 1996 York became a unitary authority, breaking free from North Yorkshire County Council control, which looked after many services, including education, and Acomb County Primary School became Acomb Primary School.

Handy for the cake shop: Acomb Primary School on Front Street in 1965. Right, headteacher Howard Robinson at the opening of the new school in 1995

Rat-infested and no longer fit for purpose – but happy days at the old school

Pots of memories: Mrs Quinn, above, with her leaving present and, left, as a teacher in the old school premises

A teacher with 27 years service: Generations of children have been in Ann Quinn's classes at Acomb Primary

Teachers at the Front Street site knew it was time to leave when children used to come back from the outside toilets saying they had seen "a big brown mouse" in there. What they had actually seen was a rat. And there were more than one.

"Either rats, or little old ladies who had popped in from the street when the public toilets were closed," remembers Mrs Ann Quinn, who was a teacher at the Front Street school from 1983 to 1995, when they moved, and then at West Bank until 2010.

Mrs Quinn's 27-year stint with Acomb Primary School, over two sites, has made her realise that a good school is more than bricks and mortar. "Acomb has a family feel to it. It's very welcoming," she said. The move to West Bank was overdue and when it finally happened: "We all thought we'd died and gone to paradise!"

The infants department, which is now occupied by Boots and Peacocks on Front Street, had high windows that the children couldn't see out of. There were no playing

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fields, only a concrete playground and frozen toilets in the winter meant the school had to be closed, as it was during elections, when the school became a polling station.

But Mrs Quinn maintains an affection for the old school as much as she does for her time at the new site. "There are definitely positives and negatives at both – maybe things are easier to do at the new school."

Sports day used to mean a trek to the Lowfield Secondary Modern School sports fields, carrying equipment they needed in buckets. "Sport on grass rather than a hard surface was a whole new experience," she said.

Early years was Mrs Quinn's area, mainly reception but occasionally Years 1 and 2. "I loved teaching and enjoyed the enthusiasm when children first arrived. It was a privilege to see them blossom and get a taste for independence. Young children are such good company and have a thirst for learning – they can be excited about anything."

Mrs Quinn keeps in touch with the school and did worry she might miss the children when she left. She keeps busy these days with occasional trips to London where she is a volunteer for St Paul's Cathedral, showing around schoolchildren and young people from Years 3 to 11. "It's marvellous to be able to keep my hand in. And I have a whole new circle of friends."

Bare necessities: at the new school, left

Centenary celebrations: children at the former site dressed as Victorians to celebrate the school's 100-year existence, in 1994. Left, a year later the for sale signs went up as the school found a new home in West Bank

Acomb is mentioned in the Domesday Book (a survey of the country in 1086) but has been spelled in a variety of ways: Achu, Acun, Akum, Akam and Acombe.

Best days of our lives...

Match of the day: Acomb Primary School's successful football team – league champions 1931-32. The faces and the kit may be different but the enthusiasm's the same in our picture of the 2011-12 league champions, on page 8

We asked for memories of former pupils' time spent at Acomb – the result is a tantalising glimpse of a bygone era

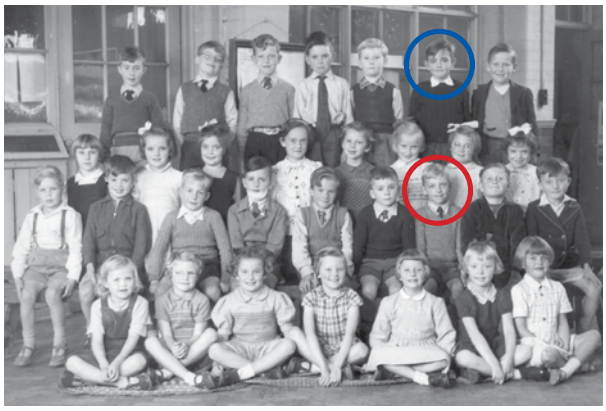
Kathleen Rose was a pupil between 1946 and 1953. As a prefect in her final year at Acomb, she helped organise a Coronation tea party, complete with games and entertainment. "Those were the days of joined desks and seats," Kathleen recalls, "and outside toilets and multiplication tables."

She was in a school choir which sang in a competiton at the Salvation Army citadel.

Acomb was something of a family affair for **Alan Powell**, who was a pupil between 1941 and 1947 and whose dad and his aunties and uncles were there between 1906 and 1920. He recalls the school was referred to as the "Board School" in those days. Alan kindly supplied the very old picture on page 3.

He remembers, during a World War II air raid, an unexploded bomb dropping on Manor Farm, Front Street where the Conservative Club is today. As the school was close by, pupils were told to stay away for a few days until it was safe to return.

Of these six year olds in the autumn term 1956, Chris Acomb, circled in red, says that classmate John Andrews (circled in blue) went on the play a few matches with York City



Winter-time meant looking forward to playing on frozen patches of ice, used as slides. There was no playing field, so sports took place behind cottages on Green Lane.

Headmaster was Mr Hutchinson, the only male teacher during the war. Alan was caned by Mr Hutchinson for eating, in class, some chocolate he had found melting in his pocket.

Mary Wilson (formerly Thorpe), remembers starting Acomb Primary School in September 1935 at the age of four and three-quarters. Miss Lees was headmistress and lived in Severus Avenue.

A regular routine was for the infants class to rest on camp beds for half an hour after the lunch break.

At the start of the war, in 1939, Mary recalls having to practice hurrying to the boiler house – a makeshift air raid shelter – in the event of any air raids.

She swam her length at the age of ten at St George's baths, but, as it was war-time, there were no medallions issued.

Lauren Heels (formerly Griffin) was at the old site up until Year 5 when she moved with the rest of her class to the new school.

"I remember celebrating the 100th year at the old school, in 1994," she said. "We all dressed up as Victorians.

"I met some of the nicest friends and teachers at Acomb Primary and enjoyed some of the best days of my life there!"

Sarah Martindale (formerly Mason) attended Acomb Primary School 1984-1990. She remembers that playgrounds were separated into infants and juniors and in terms of play equipment – there was one wall with a circle painted on it.

"Underneath the circle there was a stone ledge protruding from the wall. We would take a run up and try and jump up to touch the circle. I would love to know what it was really intended for.

"Due to having outside toilets, school would often close for a few days in winter because of the toilets freezing up! I also recall seeing a rat with some friends and being scared of going to the loo for weeks!"

Joy Richardson (formerly Davison) was at Acomb from 1945 and remembers how cold it was in the winter: "The only warmth we had was a central stove in the classroom. We had to go outside to play whatever the weather. Mr Netherwood was our headmaster – a fair man but strict. I asked a silly question one day. I wanted to know why coal was black. He had me out at the front and told me off for wasting time with stupid questions. School was hard in those days, but we had respect for the teachers."

Back to the present and our future in early years

No grim-faced Victorian mistresses here: Mrs Bradley, top, and above, spending time in the reading corner

Starting school at the age of just four can be a testing time for children – but even more so for their parents.

That's the view of Mrs Kathryn Bradley, in charge of early years and foundation stage at Acomb Primary School. "We know it's a massive thing," she said, "which is why reception classes are very much like nursery or preschool. It's what they are used to and it helps settle them in."

The early years curriculum extends from nursery to the end of reception and this, together with a staggered intake of small groups in the first few weeks, mean Acomb staff get to know children more quickly than if they all joined at the same time.

"We allow parents to come in with them and they can spend as long as they need to, to be sure they're OK when they leave," said Mrs Bradley. "Some go after a minute, for others it's more like 15 minutes. It tails off naturally after a few weeks as confidence grows."

Coming up for 2014/15 are two reception classes, one of 23 and one of 22 children. They will spend a lot of time together and thanks to the classroom layout, adjoining doors can be opened and closed according to the activities.

Mrs Bradley is in her 14th year at Acomb and is an advanced skills teacher. This means she has been into a number of schools to offer her support and is well-placed to consider Acomb's many benefits. "We're very lucky to have the space we have. Early years is also joined-up with the rest of the school and we're very much involved with all that's going on.

"Children feel they are welcomed and it's a happy and secure school. There's a great sense of a calm atmosphere that's just right for learning."

Year 6 children are assigned as mentors to children in reception, providing one-to-one support at lunchtimes – an arrangement that works well and helps the older children, too, by giving them extra responsibilities.

The regular sharing assemblies, where the whole school meet to hear about what's going on in the different year groups, is a chance for Mrs Bradley to see how the children who come to her in reception, new to school life, are getting on.

"I see children who were once shy and nervous really come out of themselves," she said. "There can be a huge difference, not just in a year, but in a term. Some of them are almost unrecognisable!"

Lift off for Acomb

Main picture and top right: sports day is a highlight of the year and a chance for everyone to have a go. Top picture, left: a hockey tournament at York High School. Above, James Shimmin, PE teacher and left, boys' football league champions 2011-12

r sport at

You can't get more embedded in Acomb Primary School than PE teacher James Shimmin. He's a former pupil, following in the footsteps of his mum and his grandma, and his dad's on the board of governors.

"Acomb's been very good to me," he said. Mr Shimmin is happy to return the favours by doing all he can to make sure the children get the most out of the many sports options the school has to offer.

It's certainly a long list. Here, you can try your hand at basketball, hockey, football, tag rugby, netball, gymnastics, dance, rounders, cricket, dodgeball, athletics and, for the younger children, multisports.

Natural athletes are encouraged to make the most of their potential and there's a network of outside professional sports contacts James can turn to when someone starts to shine, in whatever activity. But for every child, regardless of ability, enthusiasm is the key.

"I do what I can to motivate the children, drilling it into them to have a go and to try their best. It's very rare that children don't like throwing a ball around."

It's the very keen that join the after school clubs and Acomb has enjoyed success in a lot of sports, playing against other schools. In 2012 Acomb were boys' football league champions and have been runners up for the last two years. There's also a separate girls football team.

The competitive streak is a good thing, says James, especially when channelled in an organised school environment.

James started with running a few sports clubs in 2007 and, with the odd break, has been at Acomb ever since.

However the summer of 2014 holds new challenges: he's setting off on an adventure of his own as he leaves his job and quits England for sunny Australia.

"I have a year-long visa – we'll see how it goes," he said. "It was a tough decision but for me, it's now or never."

Sh

All the world's a stage: clockwise, from this picture, Henry V, King Lear, Hamlet, Twelfth Night and Much Ado About Nothing

Shakespeare pioneers

A Shakespeare festival, featuring eight of his plays, was the cultural high point of Acomb Primary School's summer term.

The ambitious project marked the school's tenth anniversary of staging the Bard's work. Usually the Years 6s take on the challenging task but this year, children as young as four got involved as all years took part.

Mr Lee Haynes, headteacher, said: "This was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the life and works of William Shakespeare in this, the 450th anniversary of his birth. 2014 is the tenth year of Acomb Primary performing Shakespeare's plays and we wanted to mark this occasion with a special event. Involving the whole school showed that you're never too young to learn about him. Dances, songs and acting made it a very memorable event, something that will stay with the children for a long time."

The festival comprised acting, dancing and singing and took place in the hall, on the playgrounds and on the school fields. There were two performances, both open to parents and over 60 attended.

Plays performed were Twelfth Night, King Lear, The Tempest, Hamlet, Henry V, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Macbeth and Much Ado about Nothing.

But it wasn't just a case of learning a few lines. "You can't perform it effectively if you don't know what's going on," said Mr Haynes. "We created a unit of work around each play so the children knew the story, as part of the curriculum offer. Last year the entire school worked on Romeo and Juliet – this year we were more ambitious." ▶

Shakespeare pioneers

▶ Helping put the children through their paces was Mr Julian Ollive, Education and Young Actors Associate from York Theatre Royal. He said: "I am hugely impressed and inspired that the whole school have taken on performing part of a Shakespeare play this year.

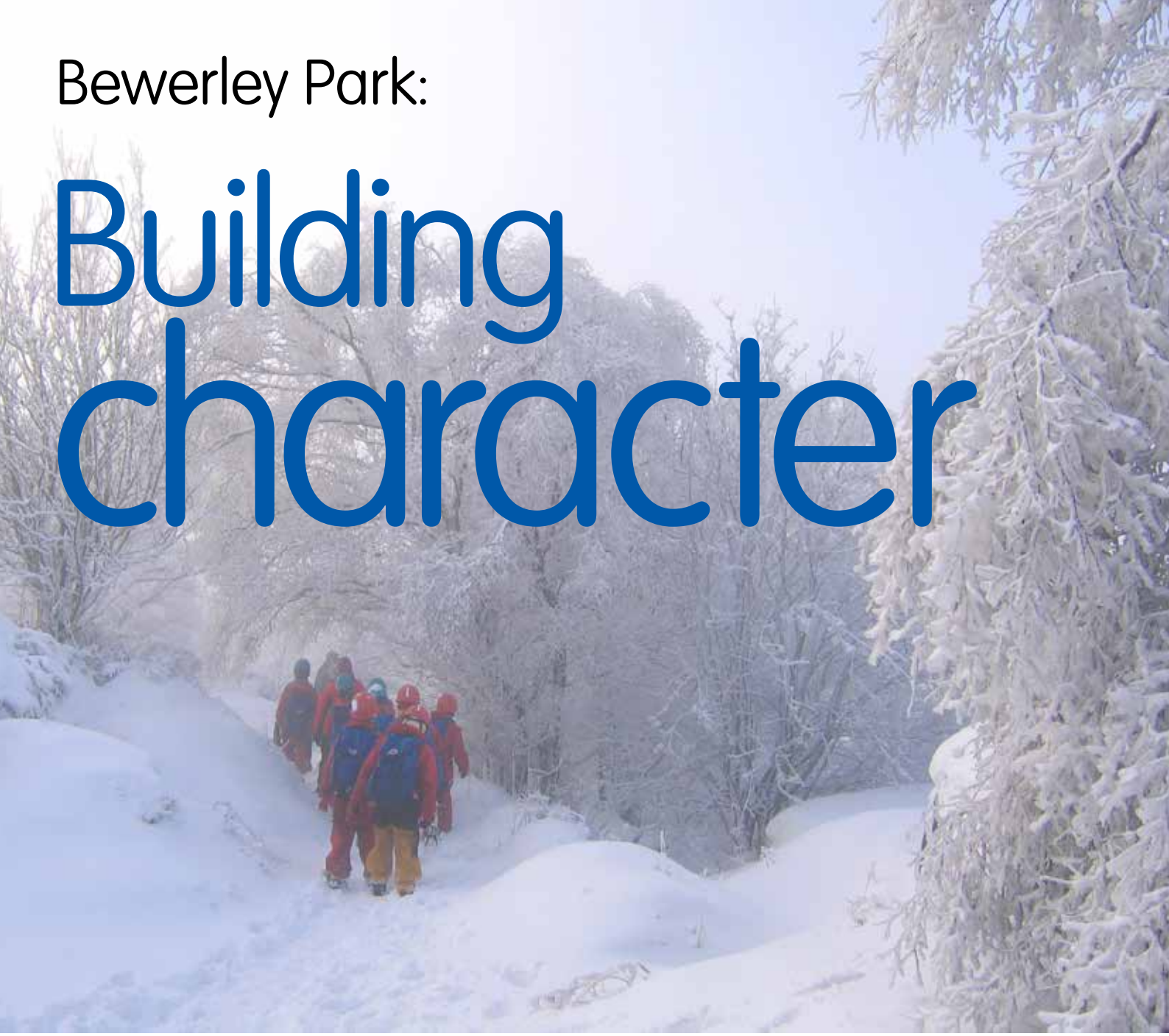
"Engaging the children with Shakespeare early on will create an understanding, familiarity and love of his work, fostered by performance, rather than just sit down study, that can only help them in their future education.

"This is such a positive culture to create and one which I think all schools should be modelling in their own practice. Acomb are indeed Shakespeare pioneers!"

Above, the witches of Macbeth, right, A Midsummer Night's Dream and below, The Tempest

Bewerley Park:

Building character



As traditions go, this is one of Acomb Primary School's most appealing and yet most challenging: five days and four nights at Bewerley Park, an outdoor activity centre near Pateley Bridge.

For many of the Year 6s, it's their first trip away from home. Coupled with it being in the bleak mid-winter, it's also possibly the greatest adventure of their young lives so far.

It's an educational lesson rich in resilience, teamwork, independence and friendship – and something they all remember for a very long time afterwards.

Acomb has used Bewerley Park for at least the past ten years and Mr Lee Haynes, the headteacher, says there are good reasons for the school to continue to be regular visitors. "The children have to look after themselves and be independent," he said. "In the first few minutes they have to make their own bed and set the table for lunch. They're outside their comfort zone, with no-one to run around after them."

At the same time, Bewerley Park is safe and because everyone is in the experience together, there's mutual support and reassurance. ▶

Greetings from Bewerley Park – wish you were here?

But why go when the weather is at its most bitter?

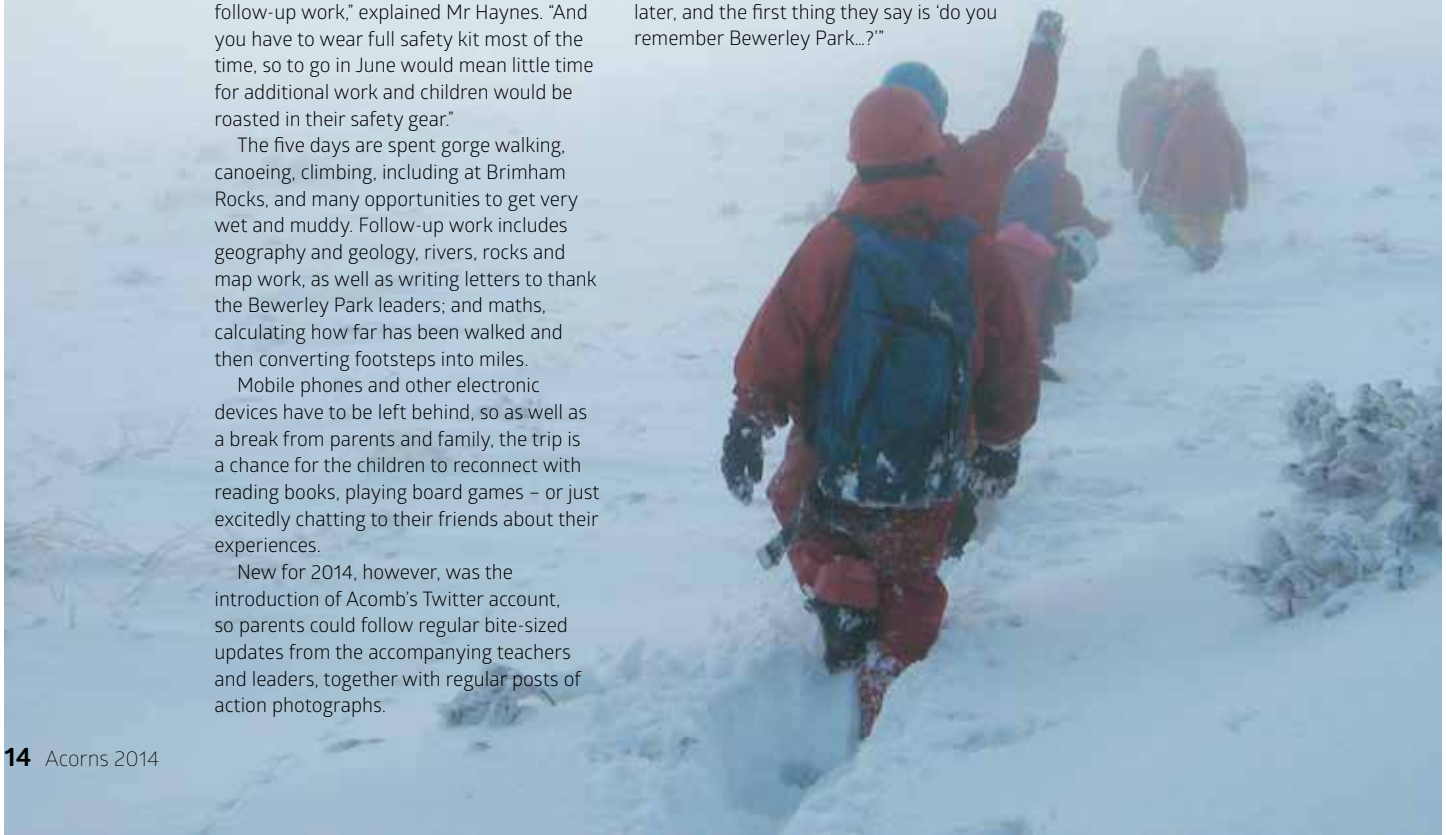
"Traditionally it has been January – although this next school year it will be December – as it allows a good six months of follow-up work," explained Mr Haynes. "And you have to wear full safety kit most of the time, so to go in June would mean little time for additional work and children would be roasted in their safety gear."

The five days are spent gorge walking, canoeing, climbing, including at Brimham Rocks, and many opportunities to get very wet and muddy. Follow-up work includes geography and geology, rivers, rocks and map work, as well as writing letters to thank the Bewerley Park leaders; and maths, calculating how far has been walked and then converting footsteps into miles.

Mobile phones and other electronic devices have to be left behind, so as well as a break from parents and family, the trip is a chance for the children to reconnect with reading books, playing board games – or just excitedly chatting to their friends about their experiences.

New for 2014, however, was the introduction of Acomb's Twitter account, so parents could follow regular bite-sized updates from the accompanying teachers and leaders, together with regular posts of action photographs.

All in all, the memories it creates and the confidence it inspires is something that makes Bewerley Park much more than just another school trip. Mr Haynes said: "I've often bumped into former pupils, years later, and the first thing they say is 'do you remember Bewerley Park...?'"



Soggy: a playground with a difference, opposite page, top; and on this page, mud, ice and snow help make dramatic pictures – and long-lasting memories

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After school clubs are a great way to explore topics in some detail and smaller numbers than a typical class size of 30, means there's more time for everyone to get involved.

And as far as Acomb is concerned, it's also about looking round to try and offer something different, too. Archery, little chefs cookery, gardening, as well as all-time favourites such as football, cricket and rounders, make for a varied and interesting mix.

What's more, when it comes to sport, those keen to take part have the chance to go on and represent the school at the many inter-schools competitions that take place.

Clubs are often oversubscribed, such is their popularity, and staff enjoy working with different age groups as much as children like getting to know new teachers.

Parents can get involved too – the school is always prepared to consider new topics and if parents can contribute the time, knowledge and, importantly, commitment, they are asked to step forward.

Particularly popular at the moment is the gardening club, run by Mrs Jo Bedda. It's based literally at the heart of the school, in the courtyard area, where fruit and vegetables grow in abundance.

The latest crop of lettuce found its way to the school kitchen, where it is used in salads and currently being sown are pumpkins and turnips.

Sunflowers and various planters add a vivid splash of colour and, regardless of the season, there's always lots of gardening-related activity for the children to enjoy.

Little chefs is another favourite club that has been extended to allow more children to take part and prepare some tasty treats. As well as the luxury of chocolate hedgehogs, there are salad dippers and pitta pizzas to be made on a week-by-week basis in the hour-long club.

"It's a case of inspiring the children," said Mrs Sandra Fox, who runs the club. "Sometimes we're introducing them to food they've not tasted before, like kiwi. Then whatever we've ended up making, they take home to share with their family."

Tasty: little chefs, top, create fresh fruit salad and above, succulent lettuce is sent to the kitchen