

# 9. Chalk hill figures

## Investigating some of Kent's chalk hill figures

### Activity description:

The variety of unusual designs cut into the chalk of the Kent Downs provide exciting opportunities for creative cross curricular investigations and activities. Included within our pack are case studies of some of the chalk figures which lie within or just outside of the Old Chalk New Downs project area. The activities can be undertaken in the classroom, within the school grounds or out in the field.

### Activity 1: Telling tales from the landscape

Although Kent cannot claim to have the oldest or most famous of hill figures, even those that no longer exist provide interesting local history studies.

Most of Kent's chalk figures are modern commemorative memorials to historic events and battles. The Shoreham and Lenham Crosses are memorials to those who lost their lives fighting during the World Wars. The Wye Crown celebrates the Coronation of King Edward VII and the Detling star or cross was cut into the landscape to celebrate the 1951 Festival of Britain.

Using our case studies and additional research, encourage the children to become landscape historians.

Challenge them to discover:

- Why the chalk figures were constructed?
- Who created them and how?
- What they represent?

### Did you know?

During the First and Second World Wars some of the hill figures were covered with wood to camouflage them from enemy aircraft and stop them being used as a landmark.

Why not encourage the children to investigate historical links to local place names. The place name 'Shoreham' may have got its name because of its location at the foot of a steep slope. Steep slope was from the Saxon word 'scor', pronounced 'shor', but written 'sore' by Norman scribes.

### Equipment

- **Case Studies** (included within the education pack)



A view of the Kent Downs

# Activity 2

## 'Figuring' out fieldwork!

### Activity description:

The Ordnance Survey maps and aerial photographs within each case study can be used to prompt discussions about land use and develop understanding of maps, contour lines, physical and human landscape features and symbols. Use the 'language of the landscape worksheet' to set the scene and introduce geographical vocabulary.

Ask the children if they can use the Ordnance Survey maps to evidence why the figures were most likely to have been located where they are. What do the contour lines tell us about the landscape of the chalk downs?

Is the land gently sloping or very steep?

Are the chalk figures located on hills or mountains?

Do the children think the chalk figures were designed to be seen from afar or above?

What are hill figures made of?

The figures in our case studies are chalk, but why not research which other materials have been used to make hill figures. There are examples of figures from other counties made from concrete, brick, pottery, limestone, quartz, flint and granite. The Red Horse of Tysoe, South Warwickshire gets its name from the red clay soil on which it was carved.



### Equipment:

- Case studies (Included within the education pack)
- Language of the landscape worksheet

**Chalk hill figure case studies**

**The Detling Star or Cross**

The Detling star or cross was cut into the landscape in 1951 by local villagers for the Festival of Britain. It depicted the symbol of the Festival of Britain which was a four-pointed star. It was lost sometime in the 70s and 80s but was believed by local people to have been restored as a cross, possibly so its location was not lost. This would account for its re-emergence in 1994 aerial photographs but absence from 1998 ones. The star shape can just about be seen from 1945 aerial photographs, the accompanying 305 lettering corner. No trace of it survives today on the site, underwent extensive earthworks in 2004.

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**The Shoreham Cross**

Samuel Cheeseman was one of the men who created the 1 00ft (30m) landmark in the 1920s in memory of villagers killed during World War I. With the help of David Madge the vicar of St Peter and St Paul, he came up with an idea for the chalk cross. On 24 May 1920, the Shoreham United Brass Band played Louis McFadden as the villagers set off to erect the first stone. It took 16 months to complete and was constructed of compacted chalk, edged with concrete blocks. The cross was unveiled in September 1921, along with a memorial stone by the river Darenth inscribed with the following: Remember as you look on the cross on the hill those who gave their lives for their country 1914-1918. The cross was covered during the Second World War with earth to prevent its use by enemy aircraft as a navigation aid. It was uncovered for VE Day 1945 and a service of thanksgiving was held. Ann Palmer, a member of Shoreham Historical Society, moved to Shoreham village in 2004, dismayed to discover the cross was obscured by trees. She set about raising money and obtaining permission to open the view of the cross once again. Ann Palmer describes how: "The cross on the hill is a landscape feature and the village is known as the 'village with the cross on the hill'."

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**The Wye Crown**

In the early twentieth century, Wye was home to an agricultural college. The college's principal came up with the idea of carving a crown into the hillside above the village to celebrate the coronation of King Edward VII in 1902. Tommy Young, the college's lecturer in surveying was tasked with putting the idea into practice. He was responsible for the design and engineering the digging. Not an easy feat as he had to work out how a symmetrical design would sit on an undulating surface. It is thought that Young sketched the outline of the crown onto the landscape by signalling to students from a vantage point below the hill. The students would position flags until Young was satisfied they had achieved the right shape. The accuracy of his design was attributed to a 1907 flax (a coin worth 1 Op in modern terms) which Young kept with him. Once the outline had been plotted, a team of 35 students spent four days removing 7,000 barrow-loads of turf. Soil and chalk in time for the coronation in the spring of 1902. Although the coronation was postponed, it was re-scheduled on 9th August 1902 and the crown was illuminated by fairy lights. Since its creation the Wye crown has been used for many celebrations including being lit by electric lights for the coronation of King George VII in 1957. Like many other of Kent's chalk hill figures, it was covered up to ensure it could not be used as a landmark by enemy aircraft during the first and second world wars.

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**The Lenham Cross**

The Lenham cross was designed by Mr CH Groom the village school headmaster and constructed in 1922 by a Mr F Baldock along with volunteers from the village. The volunteers excavated the shape by hand using spades to cut through the turf and reveal the chalk soil below. The memorial hill figure was created to remember those from the parish who died during the First World War. It was unveiled in September 1922 by Major-General Sir Arthur Lynden-Bell KCB KCMG DL JP (1862-1963). In need of restoration, it underwent works in 1994. The cross now commemorates the dead of both world wars. To avoid its use as a navigation aid by the Luftwaffe, the cross was covered up between 1939 and 1945.

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# Activity 3

## Becoming architects and 'landmark' landscape designers!

### Activity description:

After introducing some of the chalk hill figures in our case studies and investigating local landmarks, why not encourage the children to become architects or landscape designers?

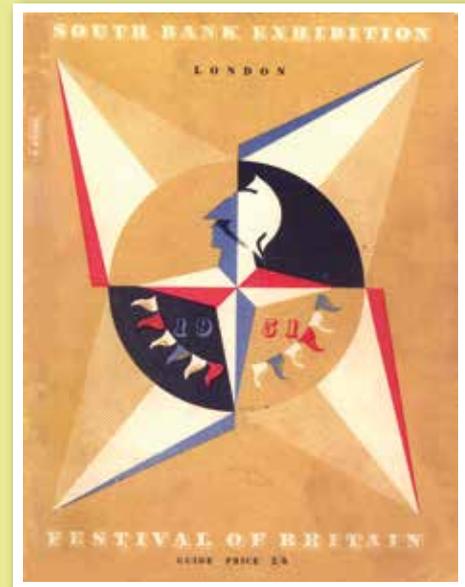
Can the children take inspiration from British graphic designer, Abram Games OBE, RDI (29 July 1914 - 27 August 1996) who designed the Festival Star emblem which in turn inspired the creation of the Detling star or cross chalk figure?

As our talk is all 'chalk' why not provide the children with some chalk to sketch their designs, ideally on black paper or card.

Can the children design and make their own sculptures (landmarks)?

This challenge could take the form of an indoor or outdoor activity.

The complexity of the design, materials used, scale and symbolism can be adapted according to the key stage and developmental requirements.



Festival Star emblem

### Equipment:

- Case studies (included within the education pack)
- Chalk
- Black paper or card
- A range of materials to create sculptures and landmarks. If outdoors, natural materials or rope could be used.



# Activity 4

## A bird's eye view of scale, measurements and positioning



### Activity description:

The chalk figures provide many opportunities to develop maths vocabulary and expressions, particularly if the children become architects or landscape designers and create their own landmarks within the school grounds. Encourage the children to develop their vocabulary by asking questions related to the aerial photographs, Ordnance Survey maps and if possible, their own landmarks.

Directional vocabulary can be adapted according to key stage and developmental requirements, and could include:

Above, below, right, left, under, over, east, west, north, south, next to, near, far, close, forwards, backwards, inside, outside, close, straight, symmetrical, parallel etc.

Is the hill figure located **above** or **below** the river?

Is the chalk figure located to the **east** or **west** of the woodland?

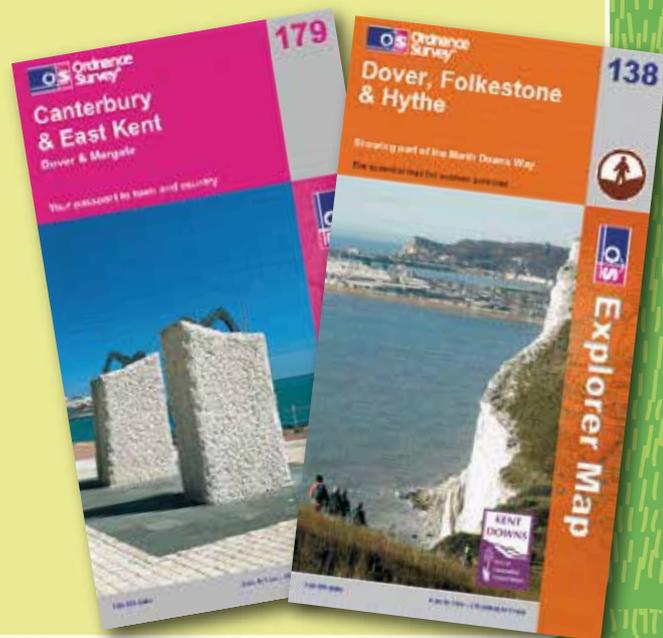
Do the children think the chalk figures were designed to be viewed from **near** or **afar**?

Why not use the scale image of the Lenham Cross to challenge the children to work out its area or perimeter?

The chalk figures can be used to provoke discussions on 2D and 3D shapes, symmetry, angles, rotation and positioning of shapes.

### Equipment:

- Case studies (included within the education pack).



# Activity 5

## A landscape of stories

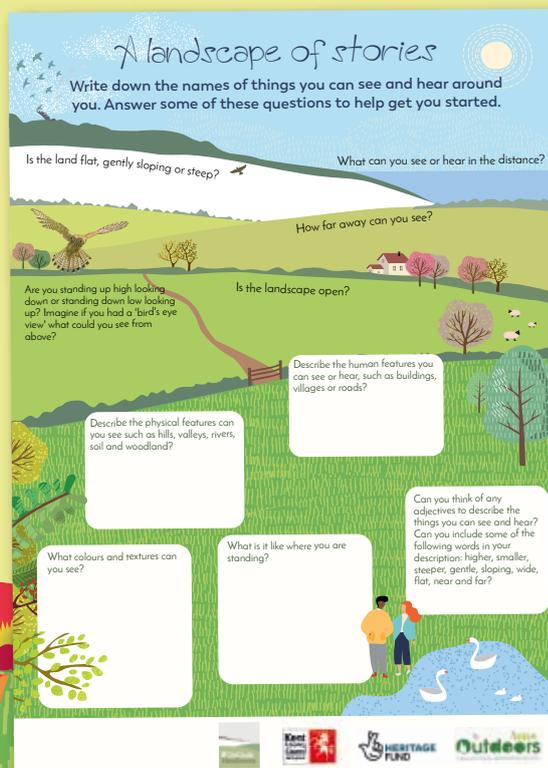
### Activity description:

Ideally a visit to an existing chalk figure, a walk within the school grounds or outing to a local landmark will provide the stimulus needed to spark a piece of descriptive writing or poetry. Use our 'A landscape of stories' worksheet to encourage the children to start gathering the names of things they can see and hear around them. Hopefully the questions on the worksheet will provoke discussions to enable them to create a descriptive piece of writing inspired by their surroundings.

Challenge the children to put on their geographer hats and include some geographical vocabulary: higher, smaller, steeper, gentle, sloping, wide and flat in their descriptions of the landscape.

### Equipment:

- Chalk hill figure case studies
- Language of the landscape worksheet
- A landscape of stories activity worksheet





## Curriculum links:

### KS1 Art and Design

Use a range of materials creatively to design and make products.  
To use drawing, painting and sculpture to develop and share their ideas, experiences and imagination.  
Learn about the work of a range of artists.

### KS2 Art and Design

To improve their mastery of art and design techniques, including drawing and sculpture with a range of materials.  
Learn about great artists, architects and designers in history.

### KS1 Geography

#### Human and physical geography -

Use basic geographical vocabulary to refer to key physical and human features.

#### Geographical skills and fieldwork

Use aerial photographs and plan perspectives to recognise landmarks and basic human and physical features.

Use simple fieldwork and observational skills to study the geography of school grounds and human and physical features of the surrounding environment.

### KS1 English

#### Writing - composition

#### Develop positive attitudes towards and stamina for writing by:

Writing narratives about personal experiences and those of others (real and fictional).

Writing for different purposes.

#### Spoken language -

Give well-structured descriptions, explanations and narratives for different purposes including expressing feelings.

### KS2 History

#### A local history study -

A study of an aspect of history or a site dating from a period beyond 1066 that is significant in the locality.

### KS2 Maths

#### Geometry - properties of shapes -

Identify lines of symmetry in 2-D shapes.

Identify acute and obtuse angles. .

Identify lines of symmetry in 2-D shapes presented in different orientations.

Recognise angles as a property of shape or a description of a turn.

#### Measurement -

Measure the perimeter of simple 2-D shapes.

Measure and calculate the perimeter of a rectilinear figure in centimetres and metres.