Investigating Our Local Past with Ellie

Learning objective: To understand how to use local historical sources to investigate changes in the local area over time.

Use your historical enquiry skills to answer the following questions. Think like a historian—consider why things have changed and what evidence remains in your community.

Ellie the elephant is visiting your local town. She has been looking through old maps from 1900, reading local parish records, and interviewing long-term residents to learn how the streets have changed. Historians use these types of evidence to build a picture of the past.

Word bank: Primary source · Secondary source · Chronology · Archive · Landmarks · Census · Oral history · Urbanisation

1. Ellie finds an old photograph of the high street from 1920 and a textbook written about the town in 2023. Which one is a primary source and which is a secondary source? Explain your reasoning. (2 marks)

2. If you wanted to find out what jobs people in your town did 100 years ago, which historical document would be the most useful to consult? (1 mark)

3. Explain why 'Oral History' (interviews with elderly residents) is a valuable way for historians to learn about local changes that might not be written down in official records. (2 marks)

4. Imagine a local shop that cost 5p to buy a loaf of bread in 1950. If the same loaf costs £1.20 today, calculate the difference in price and explain one reason why this might have happened. (3 marks)

5. Look at a local landmark (like a statue, a park, or an old building). What does this landmark tell us about the priorities or values of the people who lived here in the past? (2 marks)

Draw: Draw a 'Then and Now' split-screen image of a local street corner. On the left, show how it might have looked 100 years ago; on the right, show how it looks today, including details like transport and buildings.

Extension challenge: Visit your local library or online council archives. Find one specific building in your town and research its original purpose. Create a 'History Fact File' for that building, including the date it was built and how its use has changed over the last century.