

# HEADLINERS

## Out and about

**Children's Express reporters examine six London attractions famed for their architecture, to see whether they measure up to expectations.**

*Six places of architectural note are explored by Children's Express*

### Legoland

Legoland opened its 60ha site in Windsor in March 1996. The £85 million park has more than 25 million Lego bricks built into famous sites from across the world, dinosaurs and motorbikes. The site has been designed specifically for children aged 2-13.

"When you first get in you can't see anything," explains Eugene Asare, 11. "I thought it would be the boring type of stuff that we learn at school. But now I'll pay more attention in history classes! It looks a bit boring. Then you get on a Lego train which takes you down into Legoland and you can see it all laid out," he added.

The park is divided into five different theme areas. The different sections are connected by paths and trains. The open spaces and the bright design made the park fun, friendly and inviting. All our reporters felt that the layout of the park was accessible and easy to follow. "It was attractive and well laid out," said Duane O'Garro, 11. "We could have found our way round on our own." "I think that it was good to walk from one place to another," added Eugene.

"They used the space well" said Daniel Blackwood, 14. "They really made it look like a Legoland. Everything that they could put in Lego was in Lego - even the bridges."

"They knew what kids wanted when they designed it," concluded Eugene. "They had rides for little children and rides for bigger children." "I think that they did a good job of doing things for all ages," added Daniel.

**Report by:** editor, Daniel Blackwood, 14, and reporters Eugene Asare, 11, and Duane O'Garro, 11.

### Royal Armouries Museum, Leeds

The Royal Armouries is one of the oldest museums in the world. Existing sites at the Tower of London and in Portsmouth were joined in March 1996 by a new £42.5 million showpiece in Leeds, designed by Derek Walker Associates.

Linking all levels is the magnificent Yorkshire Electricity Hall of Steel, the 40m-high architectural centrepiece of the museum.

"The first time I saw it I just thought 'Wow!'" said 12-year-old Mehrak. "The hollow inside the tower is full of hundreds of different weapons, swords and armour. It's amazing.

"They had lots of different stuff from different countries and different ages. It was really amazing that it was all in one place. It's weird looking at the weapons and thinking that they actually killed someone."

From interactive computer games and audio-visual displays to demonstrations of jousting and foot combat, the museum uses a wide range of presentation methods.

"It was very exciting when the knights started fighting," said Mehrak. "Then they walked us through the fight and explained all the moves they were making. It was really informative, and it's very rare that you get to see the weapons that are on show in action. It brings it to life much more than other museums. It's a hands-on experience of history and it's not too fuddy-duddy or old-fashioned.

"The museum has an energetic feel. It doesn't treat history as if it happened a long time ago. It treats the medieval periods as if they were happening now.

"Before I came here I thought it would be the boring type of stuff that we learn at school. But now I'll pay more attention in history classes!"

**Report by:** Mehrak Golestan, 12.

### South Bank

The South Bank Centre is a symbol of 1960s architecture and has been a centre of music, art and culture for over 25 years. Plans to renovate it have won both support and criticism from the adult world, but what does today's generation think?

The South Bank Centre is a frightening and alien place for our young reporters. It also illustrates a bygone era to children. The concrete walls, stained with age, tower above a grey pavement in front of the river. The subways and walkways have become a skateboarders' paradise.

"It looks old fashioned like the 1970s," said Eugene Asare, 11, describing his first impressions. "It was just concrete and the outside looked dirty," added Duane O'Garro, aged 11.

The complex concrete labyrinth of subways and walkways leading to the centre were scary and confusing. "I wouldn't like to go in the subway on my own, I'd be too scared," said Duane O'Garro. "Some of the signposts were hard to read and confusing," commented Daniel Blackwood, 14. "Others were covered in graffiti," said Eugene, adding, "It was dirty and it smelled."

"The Royal Festival Hall looked ugly from the outside but inside the architecture was really good. It was well designed and looked really modern," said Daniel. The Museum of the Moving Image also met with enthusiasm and approval: "It was much better designed for people my age than the rest of the South Bank," said Eugene.

The proposed plan by Sir Richard Rogers to bring the South Bank into the twenty-first century by constructing a glass canopy, the 'Crystal Place' over the buildings was met with support and enthusiasm. "The changes are a good idea," said Daniel. "It will make it stand out and be much more welcoming," said Duane. "It needs a facelift," remarked Daniel.

**Report by:** editor Daniel Blackwood, 14, and reporters Duane O'Garro, 11, and Eugene Asare, 11. Edited by Rachel Bulford, 15.

### The Natural History Museum Earth Galleries

Each year, around 200,000 schoolchildren visit the Natural History Museum in Kensington. In July, the first phase of the new Earth Galleries opened, aiming to communicate the power and importance of earth science to non-specialists.

"It looks absolutely incredible," said 11-year-old Ruth. "When you walk in there's a huge rotating globe with an escalator going through the middle. It looks like a stairway to heaven.

"The supermarket where you actually experience a mild earthquake was quite good. I think they could have made it better by having things falling from the ceiling and stopping at about eight feet."

"It's interesting, and very educational," said 13-year-old Imran. "They had touch screen facilities which show you lots of different things, but sometimes they move on too fast. I think all this technology can be a bit distracting."

Shahi, 14, had similar reservations: "There was too much to take in at one time. The whole thing was too crowded and a bit too big."

"I quite like the way that they've used the space: said Ruth. "But I think this exhibition is mostly for older children. There's too much reading to do. A lot of the younger children wouldn't be able to get through it all."

Four further exhibitions are to be added to the Earth Galleries over the next 18 months, but the first phase seems to have earned the 'thumbs up'.

"I thought museums were for sad people," concluded Shahi. "This trip made me open my eyes a bit because I enjoyed it and I'm not sad."

**Report by:** editor Shahi Ahmed, 14, and reporters Ruth Sewell, 11, and Imran Hamid, 13.

### London Zoo

Campaigning under the banner 'Conservation in Action', London Zoo boasts nine listed buildings, some dating back to the early nineteenth century.

Opened two years ago and dubbed 'the perfect place for close encounters of the farmyard kind', the Touch Paddock in the Children's Zoo encourages young people to 'feel, hear and smell' domesticated animals.

"I know they want the kids to be close to nature, but it's dangerous," said 11-year-old Ruth. "Kids were shouting and chasing the chickens, and throwing stones at the rabbits. It's stupid, and we haven't seen any staff at all."

"The sign over there says, 'Animal area only, please do not enter', but children were actually climbing in," said Shahi, 14. "The barrier's just a rope and that's not going to stop anyone."

Nearly one million people visit London Zoo every year, and 35 per cent of them are children, many of whom are brought to the zoo on school trips.

"It looks incredibly boring, really," said 13-year-old Imran. "The different sections all look the same. It's just a stony floor and a few trees with a few twigs on the floor. Apart from a bit of shelter that's it."

"The goats have hardly got any space," said Ruth. "They can just about stand up in their hut and there's three of them squashed in there. It's pathetic. I'd like to lock the zookeepers up for a while in one of the cages, in the human habitat. Just put a telly in there and they'd be all right, wouldn't they?"

**Report by:** editor Shahi Ahmed, 14, and reporters Ruth Sewell, 11, and Imran Hamid, 13.

### Uppark House

Uppark House, a Stuart mansion near South Harting, East Sussex, was virtually destroyed by fire in August 1989. The National Trust, which administers the house and grounds, took on the astronomical task of restoring it to its former glory, and considers it to be the biggest challenge in their history.

Iain McLaren of The Conservation Practice oversaw the rebuilding of William Talman's 1690 house. National Trust employees and volunteers salvaged original wood and metal work, wallpaper and even nails, with over 3860 rubbish bins of debris collected. Traditional craftsmen and historians were employed to copy the remaining original pieces. The house reopened in June 1995.

The story of the resurrection of Uppark is an irresistible draw for young people and can create an interest in history and architecture. The importance of reconstructing the house has as much to do with using traditional methods of building as with protecting a particular historical heritage. Many buildings are built in a way to make it seem as though they are trying to rub nature out. They were very careful here.

"It was brilliant that they tried to reuse old-style design and techniques," said Majida Khatun, 14. "They couldn't get the same result from machines."

"Architects nowadays should make use of traditional designs and craftsmen - it is nice to have these details in things," said Selina Gibson, 13. "People coming home or going to work should have interesting designs to look at. More design and detail might combat stress."

**Report by:** editor Majida Khatun, 14, and reporter Selina Gibson, 13.

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### About the article

These reviews were published in the [Architects' Journal](#), in a special youth edition guest-edited by Children's Express.

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