Activity: Comparing Past and Present: Changing language

People use different words to describe the same thing. Sometimes this is because the words used are different dependent upon where people live. In addition or alternatively, the words used have changed over time and can be dependent on when you were born. Some words are no longer commonly used.

Below is a list of words, all of which have been taken from the 'stories' section of this website which features recordings of elderly people. For each of the words answer the following questions.

- What do the terms/words mean?
- If you don't know, listen to the speakers in the 'stories' section and see if the story helps you work it out. You could also find out from internet searching; or ask an older person you know and note their answers or ask the older person to write their answers down.
- Would you still use this term/word? What about other family members?
    - Perhaps you'd use a different word or perhaps the thing the word refers to no longer exists.
- If not what would you say instead (if the thing referred to still exists)?

1. Alevio (in the 'Childhood Games' story)
2. Back green (in the 'Cinema Tour' story)
3. Bevin Boys (in the 'Labour Strikes' story)
4. French jumping ropes (in the 'Leisure' story)
5. Kick the can (in the 'Childhood Games' story)
6. Peever (in the 'Leisure' and 'Childhood Games' stories)
7. Picture house (in the 'Town Planning' and 'Cinema Tour' stories)
8. Pig bin (in the 'Childhood Games' story)
9. A stank (in the 'Childhood Games' story)
10. Swimming bath (in the 'Town Planning' story)

More information:

This activity has been worded in such a way that younger people not yet able to read and write competently can also carry it it out with the help of an adult. It introduces research and allows the student to think about how the words used for some things have changed or not over time.

How words change in meaning (or not) or fall out of use altogether, is of great interest to historical linguists and lexicologists in particular.