Heritage Lottery Fund’s £142,000 investment to help us delve into our colourful past

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Today, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) is announcing 17 successful projects in Northern Ireland which will be receiving a total investment of £142,000 to help people explore their community’s heritage, through its All Our Stories programme.

This grant scheme, launched earlier this summer was designed to get thousands more people involved in exploring the local history, customs and traditions that are important to them.

And now, people in Northern Ireland will benefit from small grants that will help them to find out more about their own local heritage – often complex, sometimes quirky but always fascinating – at a truly grass roots level. A kaleidoscope of unusual stories of communities is already emerging, such as the impact and tales of those forced to move from the Hazelbank area of Derry~Londonderry due to the troubles in the 70s and 80s; to the historical role and impact played by women through their working lives in Belfast.

Portavogie Maritime Culture and Heritage Project is among 17 in Northern Ireland and 542 successful projects UK-wide being announced today. This project plans to invigorate, educate and raise the profile of the area’s unique heritage. Through the gathering of previously untold and unrecorded stories, the project will leave a legacy sharing and respecting the hardships endured by the community over the years and paying tribute to the men who lost their lives to the sea.

The project hopes to produce two publications and a showcase event, achieved through an intergenerational approach. This will include the local youth club and school filming interviews with many of the older villagers to record information and tales that may be otherwise lost.

Catherine Coffey, Chairperson of the Portavogie Culture & Heritage Society,stated: "This funding is so important to our group as it will enable us to preserve our history and raise awareness of the current decline in our fishing industry and the knock on effect this has on the village as a whole. We have been inspired by stories passed down through the years and feel the recording and production of this literature and video diaries will serve as a true record of the history of Portavogie."

Another project to receive funding is Memories Allowed, led by the Cosy Club in Derry~Londonderry. The scheme will record the memories of some of the older generation who were native to the Hazelbank area of the city but were forced to move away due to the troubles in the 70s and 80s. Many of the houses and streets in this area no longer exist.

It will record and document valuable memories and tales of people who lived in the area, through personal interviews and sharing workshops. Many people worked in shirt factories at the time – and the club plans to bring people together in arts and crafts workshops, where they will make shirts. They will also make a symbolic quilt that will encompass different panels to represent different aspects of heritage.

Geraldine Fitzpatrick, the development officer for Cosy Club, added: "The deaths of three members of the club earlier in the year brought about the realisation that some of their great memories and tales, aspects of theirs and others heritage, had been lost with them. The Heritage Lottery Fund’s backing has provided something to be excited about for

those who have much to share, and a great opportunity for some of the older people who have never shared some of the history of how they lived before, during and after the troubles."

All Our Stories, launched in April, was so popular that HLF has quadrupled the amount it had originally set aside for projects. Grants ranging from £3,000 up to £10,000 have been granted to all sorts of organisations, from small community groups, residents' associations and local history groups to larger heritage organisations and charities. The grants will bring communities together to explore the past, as well as providing those people with the skills and expert advice - delivered by top academics - to delve into their local community's history in a lasting and well-informed way.

Historian and BBC presenter Michael Wood encouraged people to get more personally involved with the heritage in their own backyard. "We love our history, and no wonder: few nations in the world, if any, have such riches on their doorstep, and so much of it accessible to all of us. It is fantastic that so many people have been inspired to get involved;" he went on to thank lottery players adding that "thanks to lottery players people can now dig deeper into their own past and I'm certain many surprising stories will be uncovered which will not only bring to life the excitement of local history, but will illuminate every community's connection with the national narrative."

Paul Mullan, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund Northern Ireland, said: "It's often amazing what people don't know about where they live. We have been bowled over by the response to All Our Stories and the great news is that we have been able to find the money to support so many fascinating projects such as Memories Allowed, Portavogie Maritime Culture & Heritage and North Belfast's Women and Work. We're looking forward to hearing more about the colourful stories that emerge; they will create a unique picture of our local communities and these islands as a whole at an important time in our history."

Other successful applicants today in Northern Ireland include:

- Kilcoobin: the archaeological history of a townland - to explore the history of settlement and industry in the townland of Kilcoobin, near Bushmills.
- Loughgall Heritage Tales and Trails, County Down - with over 20 listed buildings and landmarks in Irish History this project will document the village history into a booklet and walking trail.
- The Changing Face of Time and Trade Unions - capturing the history of the Irish Trade Union movement from it's inception in Belfast in 1907. How they have changed the face of industry, from manufactory and shipbuilding to linen and car building.
- A Century of Boxing - investigating, depicting and celebrating the rich, cultural heritage of the sport of boxing in Banbridge over the past century.

To support All Our Stories, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) is providing funding so that projects can work closely with universities and benefit from the professional support of heritage experts. The AHRC funding will be encouraging early career researchers to work with community groups to share and develop their research skills. HLF will also be commissioning the Media Trust to help projects create a new type of digital record of the work they do.

Although the All Our Stories programme is now closed to further applications, HLF will be launching a new £3,000 - £10,000 community heritage grants programme, Sharing Heritage, in February 2013. It will use a similar, simple to access application process and will also be designed to reach new applicants working at grass roots.

Notes to editors

All Our Stories was developed in response to HLF's Strategic Framework consultation with the public and heritage sector which encouraged HLF to make applying for funding simpler and easier for first time applicants and community groups.

The funding has been made available through the AHRC's Connected Communities programme whose aim is to understand through research the changing nature of communities and the role of communities in sustaining and enhancing our quality of life.

The NCCPE support universities to engage with the public. It works with all the beacons to promote best practice in public engagement and provide a single point of contact for the whole higher education sector. The NCCPE also works strategically with key national partners to help develop work across the higher education sector.

The Media Trust believes in the power of media to change lives. It works with the media industry to empower charities and communities to have a voice and be heard. This is achieved by providing communications skills and resources, helping access audiences, and harnessing creative industry talent. For more information visit Media Trust's website, or follow on Twitter @Media_Trust

The National Lottery: Lottery funding has been changing people's lives for 18 years - 19 November is the National Lottery's 18th birthday. Every week National Lottery players raise over £30million. From funding our Olympic and Paralympic athletes to grass roots sport, the National Lottery has invested in museums and galleries, local parks, artists, theatres, film, charities and local communities. National Lottery Good Causes' website.

Further information

HLF press office: Robert Smith on 020 7591 6245. Images and further project examples are available on request.

Project contacts

Memories Allowed: Geraldine Fitzpatrick on 028 7137 0196, email: info@cosyclub.org.

Portavogie Maritime Culture and Heritage Project: Katherine Coffey on 07816 754 293, email: hazelhay@hotmail.com.