A town unearthed – Heritage Lottery Fund helps Folkestone discover its roots

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Folkestone People's History Centre (FPHC) will work in partnership with Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) and Canterbury Archaeological Trust (CAT) to recruit volunteers for the three-year project. The aim is to raise awareness of the town's fascinating ancient history in a community archaeology project called A Town Unearthed: Folkestone Before 1500, which will explore evidence of Bronze Age, Iron Age and Anglo-Saxon settlements as well as Roman and medieval remains in the area. A key focus of the project will be the site of the Roman Villa overlooking East Wear Bay. Last excavated in 1989 it has since suffered from erosion and even an earthquake.

Stuart McLeod, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in South East England, said: "This exciting project provides an opportunity for local people to get involved hands-on with Folkestone's rich historical landscape as well as learn new skills in the process. Whilst doing so they will also add valuable knowledge to our understanding of an important archaeological site threatened with destruction."

The development phase for the project** revealed a high level of interest among residents, schools and businesses in local history. The local community will have the chance to take part in a professionally supervised archaeological investigation of parts of the villa that have been largely unrecorded in earlier digs. Local schools will also be provided with archaeological research kits (or ARKS) containing artefacts and teaching resources as a prelude to guided visits to the excavation sites.

Schoolchildren will also help create a Folkestone Treasure Map of the town's heritage sites. Community outreach work will feature walks, talks, historical re-enactments and exhibitions and displays featuring local archaeological finds. The volunteers taking part will learn how to search for, handle and interpret the finds.

Senior Lecturer at Canterbury Christ Church University and Director of the Folkestone People's History Centre, Dr Lesley Hardy, said: "We very much welcome support from the Heritage Lottery Fund. This funding will enable significant work to be undertaken by the partnership to ensure that the rich and ancient heritage of Folkestone is further explored and celebrated."

Colin Stephens, a volunteer and secretary of the Folkestone People's History Centre, said: "We are all eager to start the project in the New Year. In anticipation of winning the funding, some volunteers have already started digging test pits in the gardens of houses in the vicinity of the Roman villa, supervised by CAT and much has been learnt. When we start on the exploration of the Villa we look forward to uncovering even more of the early history of the town and helping to make it widely available to the local community and schools with walks, talks and exhibitions."

Partnership funding of £50,000 for the project has come from The Roger De Haan Charitable Trust.

Roger De Haan, Chairman, said: "I am delighted that my Charitable Trust has been able to play an important part in the success of the bid to the HLF. The funding we have helped secure will enable people in Folkestone to get actively involved in discovering the rich history of the town so that we can develop our understanding of the area's heritage."

Notes to editors

* The HLF grant to the project A Town Unearthed: Folkestone Before 1500 is for £298,700 (57% of project costs) and is a second-round pass, which means it is a confirmed award.

** In March 2009 HLF awarded development funding of £5,000 to enable Folkestone People's History Centre and Canterbury Christ Church University to work up details of the proposed project. This included an extensive survey among the public as well as educational and commercial sectors. The results showed high levels of interest in local history and archaeology.

Archaeology in Folkestone

The landscape, archaeology and early history of Folkestone provides an extensive range of sites and sources for project activities and research, including:

- The Iron Age and Roman sites in the East Cliff area, including the scheduled ancient monument site of the Roman villa at East Wear Bay. Permission for archaeological work on this site has been obtained from English Heritage.
- The Bayle Conservation area on the western headland, incorporating the sites of the Anglo-Saxon minster and evidence of Neolithic occupation.
- Castle Hill, a scheduled ancient monument which incorporates a substantial medieval earthwork castle
  The Folkestone Museum collections and archives held by Canterbury Archaeological Trust and Eurotunnel relating to fieldwork ahead of the construction of the Channel Tunnel and Channel Tunnel Rail Link, including major Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon settlement and funerary sites.
- Roman ceramic building materials and pottery collected from the foreshore at East Wear Bay, local metal detecting collections, collections of photographs and memorabilia associated with earlier archaeological projects in Folkestone.

This year HLF is celebrating its 15th anniversary. Using money raised through the National Lottery, since 1994 it has not only revitalised hundreds of museums, parks, historic buildings, landscapes and wildlife sites, but has also given new meaning to heritage itself. People from every walk of life are now involved with the heritage that inspires them, making choices about what they want to keep and share from the past, for future generations. HLF has supported more than 33,900 projects, allocating over £4.4billion across the UK, including £428million to more than 3,000 projects across the South East England region alone.

To date, grants worth just under £6million have been awarded to 37 projects in Shepway.

Further information

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