Telling Tales: Halsway Manor's oral history project

'Telling Tales' is an oral history project which will uncover the hidden history of a unique folk centre based in an ancient Somerset manor house that has never been revealed before. Halsway Manor has played a significant role in the folk revival since the 1960s. Several generations of people – from the region and from all over the country – had their first experiences of participating in folk music, dance and song at Halsway Manor, including many well known folk musicians and singers.

Halsway Manor in the Quantock Hills in West Somerset was established in 1965 to promote participation in the folk arts through a year round programme of residential courses, events and activities - including a lively youth development programme. The centre has recently launched 'Our Future' – a major development project to expand the learning facilities at Halsway Manor. 'Telling Tales' is a key part of that wider project to develop a high quality national centre for the folk arts that is accessible for all.

The 'Telling Tales' project will engage 30 volunteers working together over an 18 month period to gather the personal stories of about 100 people who played a key role in the development of the West Somerset folk centre – including Mary Ireson, now 101 years old and still going strong, who has been coming to Halsway since the 1960s for folk dance weekends.

Commenting on the award, Halsway Manor Chief Executive Paul James said: “In England our folk heritage is not well understood and often exists under the radar. It is very strong, particularly in the South West and we are absolutely delighted to have received the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund to train our enthusiastic band of volunteers to research, record and publish a lot of new information about the people involved in Halsway Manor and its role in the post war folk revival. This will be of great value to future generations of people interested in our folk heritage.”

Nerys Watts, Head of HLF in the South West, said: “We are delighted to be able to support Halsway Manor with this exciting new project that will help to document the modern revival of the English folk tradition. Not only is the manor a fascinating historic building in its own right, it is also home to an important library of folklore, customs and music, and the ‘Telling Tales’ project will bring its story to light and enable local people and visitors alike to understand and value it even more."

Notes to editors

About Halsway Manor
Halsway Manor is a folk arts centre that provides courses, events and activities for everyone interested in traditional folk music, dance and song, storytelling, folklore and arts and crafts. Located in the Quantock Hills – an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – in West Somerset, Halsway Manor has a fascinating history that goes back over 600 years. The Manor has a warm friendly atmosphere, tranquil woods and gardens, great food, a bar, a range of overnight accommodation and camping in the grounds. The Kennedy Grant Library contains thousands of books and recordings of folklore, customs, traditional folk music, dance and song – an excellent resource for research and study.

Further information

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