The Reading Bus launches its first app at magical St Andrew's Day celebration

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The spectacular St Andrew's Day celebration featured a special guest speaker (Frank Gilfeather), a guest piper, Scottish country dancing recitals, and an art workshop. A special letter of support from Scotland's First Minister was also read out, highly commending the project.

With a foreword by Her Royal Highness the Duchess of Rothesay; Apardion, A Leopard's Quest, is the fifth publication from The Reading Bus which tells the story of a gentle leopard spirit from the Northern Lights. In his quest to discover if Aberdeen should be his place of birth, Apardion visits 14 heritage landmarks. Local schools have been working together to produce a hub of information on each site, creating pictures, animations, films and podcasts for other children to share and learn from.

The iPhone application accompanies the novel and upcoming website to enhance the user experience and assist in educating local children and their families about Aberdeen and its rich history. The app contains an interactive map, colourful characters and a wealth of information on Apardion's journey - all working to encourage tourism to the Granite City, as well as educating the younger generation via interactive and new media platforms.

Jenny Watson, Reading Bus Co-ordinator, said: "We were very excited to launch our first app at such a special event. Our enthusiasm to use new forms of digital communication platforms as a form of education has brought our latest novel to life, enabling real-time interaction between the story and families as they discover Apardion's journey.

"The book aims to be a springboard to engage over 3,000 pupils across schools in Aberdeen on a journey of discovery about the history of the Granite City. By combining this with a free downloadable iPhone application we are bringing the beauty, heritage and culture of our city to the forefront of the younger generations' thinking, in a new and exciting way. What better way to mark this occasion than on St Andrews Day - a day which celebrates Scotland's history and culture."

Alex Salmond MSP, First Minister of Scotland was unable to attend the event, however, he sent on a special letter of support which was very well received by all at the launch. Within this, he said: "As with many of the best children's books, Apardion: A Leopard's Quest will appeal to young and old alike. It's also a wonderfully illustrated and informative guide through the landmarks of the city of Aberdeen and its proud history.

"Of course, Apardion doesn't stop with the book and I'm extremely impressed by the innovative way in which you are combining new technology and the online environment with more traditional books to enhance the learning experience for the children you work with.

"More generally, I'm delighted to hear of the work that The Reading Bus is doing in the North East. In focussing on those who need the help most, involving parents and making the most of new technology, I am sure you have a recipe for great success. Certainly anything that instils a love of reading is of immeasurable benefit to children and Scotland as a whole."

The Heritage Lottery Fund is the major funder of the project with a grant of £42,000. The initiative has matched funding through support from the business community although there are still opportunities for other would-be sponsors to get

involved in the project. Each landmark will have a podcast created for the finished website and app and it is hoped sponsors will support individual landmarks.

Colin McLean, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Scotland, said, “This project has opened the door to Aberdeen’s history through this exciting new iPhone App and is a great way of celebrating the hard work of the young people involved. The Heritage Lottery Fund has been delighted to be able to support it.”

Notes to editors

The Reading Bus is an Aberdeen-based initiative, driving to promote reading as a source of lifelong pleasure, raising the attainment and achievements of children at risk of early failure. It aims to encourage family learning in a non-school environment, by involving and empowering parents in their children's learning. The Reading Bus began in the St Machar Community of Aberdeen and is now operating city-wide, with occasional journeys to Aberdeenshire and further afield. www.readingbus.co.uk

To download the free Apardion, A Leopard’s Quest iPhone application visit www.apple.com/itunes

The book Apardion, A Leopard’s Quest is written by Sheena Blackhall with illustrations from Julie Lacome. It will retail at £5.99 and can be purchased by going to the Reading Bus website.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. To date it has invested over £500million in Scotland’s heritage.

Further information

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