Lottery grant to uncover Mourne heritage

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The two year community based project from Kilkeel Development Association was awarded a £70,400 grant, which will be used to research the history of life in the Mournes and create a record of the people who lived and died there. Kilkeel and the surrounding area has a unique heritage that is connected to many notable people and key historical events.

The Tracing your Mourne Roots project will allow the local community to become time travellers in Mourne, stepping back through history to explore and record the heritage of the area. Seven different time frames will be used to highlight this history, from the impact of famine and emigration during the early 19th century, through to the area's connections to the father of the Suez Canal and the more recent extension of Kilkeel harbour. The story of the local community and how they lived, including their work, diet and recreation activities, will also be explored.

A number of local history groups will work in partnership with Kilkeel Development Association to provide expertise and training to local volunteers to enable them to carry out the historical research and accurately record their findings. At least 30 volunteers will be recruited and trained in the skills required to conserve and digitally record the archives held by Mourne Local Studies Group and integrate them into the project. Digital maps and databases of five local graveyards will also be produced alongside a photographic record of the gravestones and associated church records.

The heritage will be presented in seven exhibitions which will be brought to life through music, literature, poetry, song and drama. It is hoped that more than 4,000 people will have access to, and enjoy viewing the exhibitions, one for each period of time explored, which will be displayed at the Nautilus Centre, Kilkeel harbour. A website and database of the findings will also be created to assist those wishing to trace their ancestors, and a series of events, talks and lectures will be held to engage the local community and visitors to the area with the heritage.

Commenting on the award, Head of HLF Northern Ireland, Paul Mullan, said: "We are delighted to support this project which will equip local people with the skills to enable them to research and record their unique heritage. The exhibitions and dedicated project website will help to share the findings with many more people than those directly involved in the activities, enabling new audiences to learn about the history of Kilkeel and the surrounding areas."

Welcoming the announcement, Mr Wesley Newell, chairperson from Kilkeel Development Association, added: "We are delighted to have been awarded this funding which will allow us to research and present the rich heritage of Kilkeel and the wider Mourne area. We would like to sincerely thank the Heritage Lottery Fund for supporting this project after the success of our last Families at Sea project. We are looking forward to uncovering new and interesting facts and stories about the area over the last two hundred years. Many people have interesting photographs, stories and records that we would love to see and preserve for future generations. If you are interested in getting involved in the project, please contact us by telephoning 028 4176 2525."

Further information

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