The extraordinary 18th century women inspiring



The Botanical Young Women of Hounslow project runs arts workshops to engage young people in heritage. Photo: Hounslow Action for Youth.

Hounslow Action for Youth is using the untold stories of Marina Dellap and Catharine MacCartney to help a new generation explore botanical history.

Marina Dellap was an enslaved African-Jamaican runaway. Catharine MacCartney was an Indian servant. When these women were transported to Hounslow in the 18th century they brought knowledge of botany and memories of the plants they grew up with, contributing to the area's rich heritage of horticulture.

Participants in the Botanical Young Women of Hounslow project – which we awarded £74,970 – are researching the stories of these women and the plants that played a role in their lives. Meanwhile, workshops with artists and authors are giving young people the chance to explore Hounslow's heritage in creative ways.

We spoke to Jacqueline Crooks, Programme Lead and award-winning author, about how Marina and Catharine's stories are helping young people living in the area today to connect with heritage.

Heritage belongs to everyone

“We want to help young people to see that heritage belongs to them, whatever their background,” Jacqueline says. “Hounslow is a very diverse area, predominantly Asian, African, Caribbean, so the lives of these young women really speak to the people we’re working with.

“Peopl eritage means



Participants transformed archive documents into textile art using natural dyes. Photo: Hounslow Action for Youth.

Taking inspiration from another Heritage Fund supported project, Dig Where You Stand, participants are developing a new digital archive. The archive will share the stories of Hounslow’s diverse communities, who have often been left out of traditional historical records.

“We want people to question what the archives are and who controls them, and empower them to create their own archive that's relevant to young people today,” Jacqueline says.

Botanical young women

Hounslow Action for Youth is also working with Chiswick House & Gardens, Chelsea Physic Garden and Kew Gardens to get young people excited by natural heritage.

“Our participants are engaging in nature and the environment through botany, through valuing plants and flowers and seeds and looking at their history and how some have become extinct.

“Horticulture is an important area of heritage, especially now. With the cost of living and climate crises, growing your own food and sustainability are more and more relevant.”



Getting hands-on with the plants. Photo: Hounslow Action for Youth.

Reaching new audiences

To engage as many people as possible, the Botanical Young Women of Hounslow project has recruited a group of youth ambassadors.

“We've got six amazing young people who know the project inside out. They’re helping us to deliver presentations and interactive sessions using the archive data and stories that young people have written about Marina and Catherine. We’re using lots of visuals, tactile objects and performance to get people really interested.”

The project has also been working with a charity that supports refugee children with special educational needs to deliver accessible workshops.

Jacqueline says: “I think that's a big achievement for us to be engaging all these people who perhaps haven’t had opportunities to take part in a heritage project before. Our youth ambassadors have played an important role in that.”



The project is empowering young people to take ownership of heritage. Photo: Hounslow Action for Youth.

Bringing history alive

“It can be very difficult to get young people excited about heritage projects,” Jacqueline says, “but this one has really captured their imagination.

“I think there's something about historical figures that look like them, whose lives perhaps parallel theirs, that really resonates. Marina and Catharine had difficult lives and overcame challenges. Young people now can relate to that.

“There's something about hidden histories or lost lives that sparks the imagination too. The young people we’re working with want to recreate these lives, to almost bring them back to life. I think that's what they're most inspired by.”

Inspired to read more?

Discover some of our other projects getting young people involved in heritage.



Ancestral Futures by Eelyn Lee and collaborators, commissioned by Dig Where You Stand. Photo: Anh Do.



l fill gaps in the archives



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