A celebration of nursing history in living memory opens at University of Edinburgh Main Library

14/09/2011

The exhibition, titled ‘Unsung Heroes’, is part of a Heritage Lottery funded project exploring nursing history in living memory and has involved a close working partnership between Lothian Health Services Archive (LHSA), NHS Lothian and Edinburgh College of Art (ECA). They have been supported by specialist advisors Amanda Game and Dr Elizabeth Goring. The project is managed by Jane McArthur, Ginkgo Projects for the Royal Infirmary Edinburgh Arts Committee (RIE).

‘Unsung Heroes’ focuses on LHSA’s collection of historic enamelled nursing and hospital badges and seeks to highlight the stories of nursing life from the 1930s through to the present day.

Volunteer interviewers have worked with current and retired nurses to learn about their working lives and the badges that they would have worn. This information has been used by eca researchers along with photographs and documents from LHSA, to make new enamelled badges in response to this wealth of information, thus bringing a contemporary response to the historic.

Kirsty Sumerling MA, ECA, who participated in the project, commented that she had no idea that personal documents such as letters could be found in a formal archive. “I have found it very inspiring to read these as well as to talk to different nurses and have tried to capture this in my work.”

Colin McLean, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland, said: “Nurses are, without doubt, unsung heroes and this project has brought many in the profession together to record and share their memories of how it has changed over the years. The Heritage Lottery Fund is proud to be involved in enabling the public to enjoy these fascinating badges, stories and interviews and delighted to see them in an exhibition for others to learn from and enjoy”.

The makers have worked with world-renowned enamel artist and researcher Elizabeth Turrell to develop their skills in the ancient and valued craft of enamelling. Elizabeth also held taster enamelling classes for NHS Lothian staff involved in the project.

Over thirty oral history interviews have been recorded. Selected extracts are available to listen to on the Tales of Things website. These will be added to as the project progresses.

Following the exhibition at CRC, the work will move to its final home later this year at the RIE, where it will be permanently installed in a public space just off the main mall in the Hospital for all to enjoy.

‘Unsung Heroes’ has been made possible through the generous funding of the Heritage Lottery Fund; the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh Volunteers and the time, freely given, by retired and current nursing staff from the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh Volunteers.

The ‘Unsung Heroes’ exhibition is free and runs until Friday 28 October 2011 at the Centre for Research Collections, Edinburgh University Main Library, 30 George Square, Edinburgh, EH8 9LJ, 9-5pm Monday – Friday**.**

Notes to editors

Additional images available of the badges and the exhibition at CRC from Laura Gould.

Further information

For further information about Unsung Heroes please contact Project Manager, Jane McArthur: Email: jane@ginkgoprojects.co.uk
www.ginkgoprojects.co.uk

Arts Activities and the RIE Arts Committee, please contact Jane McArthur, Email: jane@ginkgoprojects.co.uk, Tel: 01387 770 074 or 07814 307 507

Lothian Health Services Archives, please contact Laura Gould: 0131 650 3392, Email: laura.gould@ed.ac.uk
www.lhsa.lib.ed.ac.uk