Heritage Lottery Funds £213,000 investment to help us delve into our colourful past

23/11/2012

Today, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) is announcing 26 successful projects in the North East which will be receiving a total investment of £213,000 to help people explore their community's heritage, through its All Our Stories programme.

This grant programme – developed to coincide with BBC Two's history series, The Great British Story: A People's History - aims to get thousands more people across the UK involved in exploring the local history, customs and traditions that are important to them.

And now, people in the North East will benefit from small grants that will help them to find out more about their own local heritage – often complex, sometimes quirky but always fascinating – at a truly grass roots level. A kaleidoscope of unusual stories of communities is already emerging, such as Jurassic plant fossils that include one never before found in England and Bedlington's cultural and historic links with the 11th-century St Cuthbert, the Industrial Revolution, the coal-mining industry and the world famous Bedlington Terrier.

Jurassic Plants at Marske Quarry is among 26 in the North East and 542 successful projects UK-wide being announced today. Forty species of Jurassic plant fossils, including one never before found in England, were collected in the late 19th century in Marske on the Teesside coast. But this rare collection is stored at the Dorman Museum in Middlesbrough with only two examples on display.

A new project will bring these fascinating specimens into full view and celebrate the story behind them. Tees Valley RIGS Group will work with the museum and Durham University to research and identify the fossils and hold handling workshops for local schoolchildren and visitors. Marske Quarry, where the fossils were found, is now part of a local nature reserve but is overgrown and difficult to access. Plans to open up the route will enable people to learn more about the geology of the area.

"People don't realise the extent of the collection, or the geological importance of the sandstone quarry," says Alan Simkins, chair of the RIGS group. "There may even be more fossils to add to our Jurassic story."

Also funded is Bedlington Our Heritage, a project that will see a new timeline film made by Bedlingtonshire Development Trust documenting the rich and illustrious but often forgotten history of the Northumberland town of Bedlington. The project will look at the town's cultural and historic links with the 11th century St Cuthbert, the Industrial Revolution, the coal-mining industry and the world-famous Bedlington Terrier.

The interactive project will research all the recorded local history and schoolchildren and local people will re-enact key events in Bedlington's history. These will include the miners' picnic, filmed for the BBC by Ken Russell in 1960. A mobile exhibition will be created from these re-enactments for local schools and old people's homes.

Malcolm Robinson, Chairman of the Bedlingtonshire Development Trust, commented: "It's about far more than nostalgia, Bedlington has no leisure facilities or heritage centre, so the project is the ideal opportunity to provide content and create a sense of civic pride."

All Our Stories, launched in April, was so popular that HLF has quadrupled the amount it had originally set aside for projects. Grants ranging from £3,000 up to £10,000 have been granted to all sorts of organisations, from small community groups, residents' associations and local history groups to larger heritage organisations and charities. The grants will bring communities together to explore the past, as well as providing those people with the skills and expert advice - delivered by top academics - to delve into their local community's history in a lasting and well-informed way.

Historian Michael Wood presented The Great British Story which was broadcast earlier this year, and encouraged people to get more personally involved with the heritage in their own backyard. He said: "We British love our history, and no wonder: few nations in the world, if any, have such riches on their doorstep, and so much of it accessible to all of us. It is fantastic that so many people have been inspired to get involved, both from The Great British Story series, and HLF's All Our Stories. Thanks to lottery players people can now dig deeper into their own past and I'm certain many surprising stories will be uncovered which will not only bring to life the excitement of local history, but will illuminate every community's connection with the national narrative."

Ivor Crowther, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North East, said: "It's often amazing what people don't know about where they live. We have been bowled over by the response to All Our Stories and the great news is that we have been able to find the money to support so many fascinating projects such as Jurassic Plants at Marske Quarry, Bedlington Our Heritage and The Home That Won The War. We're looking forward to hearing more about the colourful stories that emerge; they will create a unique picture of the North East and these islands as a whole at an important time in our history."

Other successful applicants today in the North East include:

- Our railway in years gone by - The story of the extensive railway network that was created as part of the industrial expansion of Tyneside.
- The Home That Won The War: An intergenerational Pilot Project - the story of Sunderland during the period 1939 -1945, focusing on how war affected 'ordinary' people in extra-ordinary times.
- The Cyrenians A Home is not just a House - Tales from historic Cyrenian owned or leased properties in the North East of England which are used to house and support people with complex problems such as homelessness, addiction, abuse or mental health issue.
- Sea Birds in Marsden Rock and Marsden Valley - exploring different kinds of sea birds that live in Marsden Rock and Marsen Bay at South Tyne cost.
- Sharing Stories - Seaton Park - Exploring the history of Seaton Carew Park, and people's stories and memories of the park from years gone by.

To support All Our Stories, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) is providing funding so that projects can work closely with universities and benefit from the professional support of heritage experts. The AHRC funding will be encouraging early career researchers to work with community groups to share and develop their research skills. HLF will also be commissioning The Media Trust to help projects create a new type of digital record of the work they do.

Although the All Our Stories programme is now closed to further applications, HLF will be launching a new £3,000 - £10,000 community heritage grants programme, 'Sharing Heritage', in February 2013. It will use a similar, simple to access application process and will also be designed to reach new applicants working at grass roots.

Notes to editors

- All Our Stories was developed in response to HLF's Strategic Framework consultation with the public and heritage sector which encouraged HLF to make applying for funding simpler and easier for first time applicants and community groups.
- All Our Stories featured in five BBC Learning events at flagship heritage locations and regional events across the UK which ran in tandem with The Great British Story: A People's History TV series to get people involved with their local heritage. These events provided opportunities for people to discover their place in history, learn about their surnames and uncover the history of their local area.
- The funding has been made available through the AHRC's Connected Communities programme whose aim is to understand through research the changing nature of communities and the role of communities in sustaining and enhancing our quality of life.
- The NCCPE support universities to engage with the public. It works with all the beacons to promote best practice in public engagement and provide a single point of contact for the whole higher education sector. The NCCPE also works strategically with key national partners to help develop work across the higher education sector.
- The Media Trust believes in the power of media to change lives. It works with the media industry to empower charities and communities to have a voice and be heard. This is achieved by providing communications skills and resources, helping access audiences, and harnessing creative industry talent. For more information visit Media Trust's website, or follow on Twitter @Media_Trust
- The National Lottery: Lottery funding has been changing people's lives for 18 years - 19 November is the National Lottery's 18th birthday. Every week National Lottery players raise over £30 million. From funding our Olympic and Paralympic athletes to grass roots sport, the National Lottery has invested in museums and galleries, local parks, artists, theatres, film, charities and local communities. National Lottery Good Causes' website

Further information

HLF Press Office: Robert Smith on 020 7591 6245.
Images and further project examples are available on request.

Jurassic Plants at Marske Quarry: Beth Andrews on 01287 636 382 or mobile: 07713 985 450, email: tvrigs@googlemail.com

Bedlington – Our Heritage: Malcolm Robinson on 01670 457 485, email: Malcolm.robinson23@yahoo.com