Cracking the code: the Ulster way

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An exciting new project from the Somme Heritage Centre which explores the history of codes, ciphers, secret messages and spies from a Northern Irish perspective was launched by the Mayor of North Down, Mr Leslie Cree, MBE MLA.

‘Cracking the Code- The Ulster Way’ explores the history of codes and code breaking, from the ancient Irish Ogham writing to modern day PIN numbers, and combines a touring exhibition, an online code-breaking challenge and a fun coding competition for primary schools.

The exhibition takes an intriguing look at ‘who’s watching who?’ and brings to light the local influence in the history of code breaking, including that of Morse Code creator Samuel Finlay Morse, whose family originated in Co. Armagh, and the untold story of Gilnahirk Wireless Station that had links with Bletchley Park during World War II and continued to operate during the Cold War period. The exhibition will be housed at the Somme Heritage Centre for three months before travelling to selected National Trust and Northern Ireland Environment Agency properties across the country.

Amateur super-sleuths can become involved in the project by taking up the ‘Somme Challenge’. The online competition contains numerous coding puzzles that must be solved to reveal a final message, and those who successfully ‘crack the code’ will be entered into a prize draw and have the chance of winning one of the prizes that have been kindly provided by local organisations. To enter the competition.

The final element of the project is a fun and educational code-breaking exercise for primary schools. An enemy spy is operating from a heritage site in Northern Ireland and the pupils need to break several codes to establish the location. There are prizes for the winning schools.

Carol Walker, Director of the Somme Heritage Centre, said: "This is an innovative and exciting concept. This project is one of a number of recent developments undertaken by the Somme Heritage Centre and it will be appreciated by the increasing number of visitors to the museum.” She added: “We are confident that the topic of codes and spying will appeal to all age groups and the inter-active involvement will encourage a greater awareness of the rich heritage of Northern Ireland."

Speaking at the launch, Chairman of the Heritage Lottery Fund Committee for NI, Mr Ronnie Spence, said: “This exciting project delves into the world of espionage to uncover the significant role played by local people in this fascinating subject. The touring exhibition, primary school programme and the online ‘Somme Challenge’ will allow the widest possible audiences to engage with and learn about this heritage, and we are delighted to be involved.”

‘Cracking the Code- The Ulster Way’ is funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Further information

Richard Parkinson or Bob McKinley, Somme Heritage Centre on 028 9182 3202.