George Clarke helps cathedral find Lego Makers

03/05/2013

Sunderland born architect and television presenter George Clarke, visited the cathedral on Friday 3 May to see how plans were progressing. He had a lesson in stonemasonry from the cathedral's team of expert stonemasons. The Very Reverend Michael Sadgrove, Dean of Durham, and Ivor Crowther, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) North East, also attended.

Visitors and supporters of the cathedral will soon be able to donate a pound and receive a brick to place on a scaled down model of what is often described as Europe's greatest Romanesque building. All levels of donation will be recognised with the equivalent value in Lego bricks. Money raised will go towards the cathedral's HLF-funded Open Treasure project, which aims to transform the way visitors experience the cathedral and how they are inspired by it. In order to build the Lego cathedral, help is required.

George Clarke has kindly agreed to be a Champion of Open Treasure and act as an advocate for the project. George has said on a number of occasions that Durham Cathedral is his favourite building and it inspired him to be an architect.

The Very Reverend Michael Sadgrove, Dean of Durham, says: "We are delighted that George Clarke is to be a Champion of Open Treasure. The aim of the project is to enhance the cathedral's welcome to visitors by transforming historic buildings round the cloister into outstanding exhibition spaces. Our marvellous collections of manuscripts, books and religious artefacts from Saxon times to the modern era deserve to be seen by a far wider public. Alongside the exhibitions, we intend to open up new opportunities for people of all ages to discover and enjoy their heritage with a stimulating programme of activities and events. Building a Lego cathedral as part of our public appeal will help make Open Treasure possible.

Ivor Crowther, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund North East, says: "Durham Cathedral is a local heritage treasure of international importance and we at HLF are delighted to be supporting these exciting plans. Creating a Lego cathedral is a great way to get everyone involved and encourage them to play their part with this important fundraising drive. Once completed, this project will ensure that more people than ever will be able to appreciate and enjoy the cathedral and its treasured collections.

Lego Maker briefing sessions will take place at the cathedral on Monday 20 May at 3.00pm – 5.00pm and at 7.00pm – 9.00pm, where anyone interested in becoming a Lego Maker will be briefed about the build and what exactly is required of them.

No experience of Lego building is required, however if you are already an enthusiast for Lego or model making your skills will be fully utilised. If you would like to get involved but not sure if your Lego building skills are up to it, please still get in touch. Training will be given, and there will be regular visits by a Lego expert to make sure the build goes according to plan. If you are interested please contact events@durhamcathedral.co.uk indicating which session you can attend or if you would like to know more but can't attend either of the sessions.

Open Treasure has received a first-round pass from the Heritage Lottery Fund. This means that HLF supports the project in principle and will welcome a more detailed application for the full amount of £3.5million.

To date, grants for Open Treasure have been awarded from The Banks Community Fund, The Friends of Durham Cathedral, The Hobson Charity, The Liz & Terry Bramall Foundation, Allchurches Trust, The Paul & Louise Cooke Endowment, The Journey Consortium, and Graham and Joanna Barker.

Notes to editors

Durham Cathedral is a Christian Church of the Anglican Communion, the shrine of St Cuthbert, the seat of the Bishop of Durham and a focus of pilgrimage and spirituality in North East England. It inhabits a treasured sacred space set in the natural and human landscape of the World Heritage Site. Durham Cathedral website.

Its purpose is to worship God, share the gospel of Jesus Christ, welcome all who come, celebrate and pass on its rich Christian heritage and discover its place in God's creation.

The building of Durham Cathedral commenced in 1093 and took around 40 years to complete. It replaced a Saxon cathedral built by the Community of St Cuthbert after it arrived in Durham in 995 following its flight from the 'Holy Island' of Lindisfarne 80 miles north of Durham. The body of St Cuthbert is enshrined in the Feretory at Durham Cathedral and the Tomb of the Venerable Bede is in The Galilee Chapel. The cathedral existed as a Benedictine Monastery until 1539 when it became one of the Church of England's major cathedrals.

It continues to be a focus for pilgrimage and attracts over 600,000 visitors each year from all over the world. The cathedral has internationally important collections of artefacts, manuscripts and books that include St Cuthbert's coffin and his pectoral cross, superb examples of Anglo-Saxon craftsmanship. Durham Cathedral is often referred to as the best example of Romanesque architecture in Europe, or as American writer Bill Bryson put it, 'the best Cathedral on planet earth'.

Since its construction Durham Cathedral has been alive with people and a centre for community activity. The cathedral is home to a vibrant worshipping community and continues to celebrate the English Choral Tradition with sung services by its highly acclaimed Choir. As a new century unfolds Durham Cathedral aspires to enrich the many different ways in which it engages with people and organisations. It is cherished equally by those who live, work and study in the region and by those who come to visit.

The next phase of Open Treasure has received a stage one pass for £3.5m from the Heritage Lottery Fund, this means that HLF supports the project in principle and will welcome a more detailed application for the amount proposed.

Open Treasure: Durham Cathedral is undertaking a project called Open Treasure – a major development which will transform the way in which the cathedral buildings are experienced, understood and used to the glory of God, both as working buildings and to the benefit of those who visit. This first phase of Open Treasure focuses on the monastic claustral buildings was completed in Autumn 2012. New Choir Vestries are now in use and a new Cathedral Shop with a fully accessible Foyer was opened by Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson in November. The Treasures of St Cuthbert exhibition is not on display at present but as Open Treasure progresses a new exhibition that includes these wonderful Anglo-Saxon artefacts will be created in the Monastic Great Kitchen.

Further information

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