Heath and church share New Year lottery windfall

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One focuses on the history and ecology of Hampstead Heath, the other will restore a series of statues on the wall of London's highest church.

A project by Tufnell Park based organisation, Yeast Community Centre, will look at three major aspects of Heath Life, thanks to a grant of £40,000. Highwayman Dick Turpin had his hide-out there, it is rumoured that Boudicea is buried there and Karl Marx took his children for walks there. It is now a treasured open space visited by an estimated ten million people each year. But its history is fragmented and its important role as a green lung for Londoners may be undervalued.

The Heath Life project will focus on local myths and legends and how the heath has been used for leisure purposes from the past to the present. A second strand will be the changing ecology of the 320-hectare heath with its remaining ancient woodlands and the impact of human activity. The third aspect is the diverse communities who use the Heath providing a microcosm for London as a whole.

Working with local community groups the project will collect recorded memories and historic images, create an interactive website, an audio tour of the Heath, a series of short films made by volunteers and a bank of archive material.

Nick Hillel, creative director of Yeast Community Culture, said: "Heath Life is a significant project which will join the dots between diverse communities and different generations. The link between them is Hampstead Heath and its fascinating history. All of us at Yeast Community Culture are extremely excited to have been given Heritage Lottery Fund support for this project which we have been developing for five years now. It's terrific to see it get off the ground and make an impact."

The second project, awarded a £49,900 grant, will permit the restoration of the east wall of St Michael's Church, Highgate. Dating from 1880, the wall was intricately decorated in 1903 and also displays statues of four of the early fathers of the Christian church. Carved in wood by Laurence Turner, painted and gilded, they depict Athanasius, Augustine, John Chrysostom and Jerome. Now covered in layers of accumulated dirt the wall and statues have not been seen in their original colours for more than a century. Research will also be carried out during the project to ensure that any inaccuracies in the currently published information about the architecture are corrected.

The project will specifically target young volunteers to be trained in a range of skills, including conservation work and communications. Local schools will be involved throughout east and north London and a Church Trail, aimed specifically at children and families, will look at the building's many unique features.

Commenting on the grant award, the vicar Revd Dr Jonathan Trigg, said: "It is wonderful that the Heritage Lottery Fund has provided the money to allow this important work to be carried out."

Sue Bowers, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund London, said: "Together these projects will augment the published information about this fascinating part of London, looking at two important aspects of local life."

Notes to editors

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported 33,900 projects, allocating £4.4billion across the UK.

Further information

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