Heritage Lottery grant reveals Bengal's impact on London ladies' fashion

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A £48,300 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) will help a dozen members of East London's diverse communities bring that little-known Bengal-British connection to light. Their efforts will be supported by the Victoria and Albert Museum.

The Stepney Community Trust will recruit local volunteers, some of whom will have traditional arts and craft skills, to carry out research and then recreate some of the dresses worn in polite society during the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries by London's fashion-conscious ladies. They will also create some of their own designs inspired by the fashions and fabrics of the period they have studied.

Sue Bowers, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund London, said: "This project will help create a better understanding of the long historical links between Bengal and London. At the same time, it will enable some of those taking part to showcase their traditional skills while gaining new ones."

The project, supported by the Victoria and Albert Museum, the London College of Fashion and the Museum of London Barbican, will see those taking part visiting the institutions and attending training and workshops over the course of the next year. They will also explore how individuals and companies in London decided what would be fashionable for the coming season, the original design methods used, and how the textiles were ordered, manufactured in Bengal and imported into Britain.

The Stepney Community Trust is also funding research in Bangladesh and West Bengal to develop a better understanding of the nature of the textile manufacturing industry of the period. The project gets underway during the 40th anniversary year of the founding of Bangladesh.

In addition to the two dozen finished costumes produced, the project will also create a website, an exhibition and a full-colour book. It is hoped that some of the recreated historical dresses will be displayed in prominent museums and galleries.

Bodrul Alom, secretary of Stepney Community Trust said: "We are delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has agreed to support this unique project through which will emerge new understanding of the links between Bengal and Britain and the role played in history by Muslins: the famous textiles of Bengal."

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 30,000 projects, allocating £4.7billion across the UK, with £868 million of that in London.

Further information

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