Historic glimpse of borough revealed in old plans

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A fascinating treasure trove of Richmond borough's built – and un-built – environment is to be made available for the first time thanks to a grant of £46,200 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

Richmond Local Studies Collection will be cataloguing some 22,400 sets of plans from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The records, from the former boroughs of Barnes, Richmond and Twickenham, are mostly hand-drawn and colour-washed providing a vivid insight into how the towns developed, not only in terms of their physical but also their social growth.

And documents revealing building schemes that were rejected provide a glimpse of an alternative Richmond that can now be imagined for the first time. The plans for the onion-domed café were submitted in the 1890s. The building would have stood in Hill Street. The unsuccessful Twickenham Theatre scheme was submitted in 1909.

Working in partnership with Richmond Museum and Orleans House Gallery, Twickenham, public exhibitions will be created as well as learning sessions with the support of the Workers' Educational Association and the University of the Third Age. Local schools and colleges will also be able make use of the material as an educational resource.

The collection of plans will be catalogued and a proportion digitised so making them available online. A CD will also be produced for use in school projects. As a first priority plans relating to buildings of historical or architectural interest, schools and domestic buildings will be digitised. The work of sifting through the mass of plans and deciding which will de digitised first and which are in most need of conservation will involve local volunteers.

The thousands of plans were discovered by Richmond Local Studies Collection during office moves about four years ago. Because of the sheer volume of them they have been in remote storage without public access. The HLF-funded project will at last make some of them available.

Ian Dodds, the Head of Culture at Richmond Council, which holds the local studies collection, said: "We are thrilled to have a grant from HLF for this project which will bring an important collection of building plans to a much wider audience. Over the next few months we will be recruiting volunteers to catalogue and digitise the plans and will be developing exhibitions and education resources for schools."

For the Heritage Lottery Fund, Head of HLF London, Sue Bowers, said: "This is an unusually comprehensive collection of original plans which charts the growth of this part of south west London, supplying a rich vein of research material for historians in the fields of architecture and design, economics, social history, planning and urbanisation."

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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