Mummers

16/02/2009

The Mummers Foundation received the award to promote and develop the art of mumming in Fermanagh and Tyrone through a programme of outreach and educational activities that will involve the whole community.

Mumming is a centuries old tradition that focuses on people's connection to the land by marking the change of the seasons on key calendar dates throughout the year. Dressed in traditional straw disguises the mummers perform a symbolic folk drama routine involving a hero combat re-enactment, singing, dancing and music before calling on each local house to bring good luck, health and prosperity for the new agricultural year. The end of the mumming season is marked by the Mummers Ball, also called "spree, a join or blow out", where all of the donations received during the house performances are returned in the form of hospitality, and the straw performance masks are burned to symbolise closure.

The 'Art of Mumming' project will raise awareness of the tradition and provide opportunities for the local community to learn about and become involved in a range of mumming activities. Working with communities that once had a mumming tradition, the project will revive the art through the creation of new adult and junior mumming troupes. Local school children, youth organisations and community groups will be invited to take part in educational activities to learn about the cultural and historical significance of mumming. They will receive training in folk drama to enable them to stage a series of mumming performances and participate in a programme of cultural events that mark the changing seasons and community organized gatherings such as bilberry Sunday which were common place for upland communities.

Community based workshops and demonstrations will also be held to share and conserve the tradition of straw craft, particularly the making of mummer's costumes, and highlight the folk customs associated with the sowing and harvesting of straw.

Jim Ledwith, Programme Manager with the Mummers Foundation, said: "We have ambitious plans to develop and sustain this ancient folk tradition as a living heritage and we are really grateful to HLF for their interest and support. We are keen to involve as many people from all communities as possible in the programme of activities and I would invite any school, youth organisation, community group or workplace that would be interested in learning more about mumming to get in touch."

HLF has invested £120 million in over 1000 local projects that explore, protect and conserve our diverse heritage. Stella McDermott from HLF, said: "Mumming was once practised as a highly popular folk custom in communities across Northern Ireland's rural landscape but it is now an unbroken tradition known to only a few areas. This distinctive project will revive and sustain the art of mumming by sharing the customs and traditions of our past with new generations and an increasingly diverse population and we are truly delighted to be involved in supporting the Art of Mumming project."

Further information

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Groups and organisations should register their interest in the outreach and activity programme by contacting Jim Ledwith on 07971 075955.