Old Man River ready to roll along

07/07/2010

The Old Man River project, run by Big Fish Arts, will uncover stories from Sheppey and Gravesend associated with the Thames, the Medway and the Swale from 1660 to 1960. Yarns involving hulk family dwellers, bargees, old salts, heroes and villains will be woven together to create an exhibition and a series of dramatic performances.

One particular aspect will be the histories of tenants and families that have occupied the seaside row of houses known as Shrimp Terrace in Sheerness. This will span the years from 1880 to the present focusing on individuals whose lives were linked into both local and national history. It was, for example, home to naval captains up to WWI and taken over by Wrens in WW2.

Historic images and photographs will be gathered from the various coastal areas being studied and pictorial guides created matching present day photographs of the same locations.

Local communities are being encouraged to get involved with all aspects of the project, as researchers, scriptwriters, actors and directors mentored by professionals in these skills. Historic costumes will be created and a series of street theatre performances mounted in various locations as well as several in a property in Shrimp Terrace. The performances will be filmed by local arts students to be screened at separate events. A unifying theme for the dramas will be Old Man River himself in the form of an old sailor recounting historic events, salty yarns and sea-shanties. A touring exhibition featuring the imagery and information discovered is planned for summer 2012.

For the Heritage Lottery Fund, Head of HLF South East England, Stuart McLeod, said: “This project will uncover a wealth of stories derived from the rich maritime heritage of the area. They will be presented in imaginative and entertaining ways drawing in local community members, as both participants and audience.”

For Big Fish Arts, Project leader Chris Reed, said: “The trustees and current volunteers are delighted to have been awarded this very welcome grant. We hope this will attract many more members of the community to join us in our historic research, workshops, events and performances. We have ambitious plans to work with many schools and other organisations both on Sheppey and in other areas of North Kent over the course of the next two years to bring our maritime history to 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 more than 33,900 projects, allocating over £4.4billion across the UK, with over £428 million granted in the South East alone.

Further information

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