History of Scotland’s towns and cities to be investigated by amateur history sleuths

20/06/2014

Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) has been awarded the funding by HLF for a five-year project, Scotland's Urban Past (SUP).

The project builds on the success of the Scotland’s Rural Past (SRP) a community archaeology project which trained hundreds of volunteers in 60 local groups across Scotland, in recording historic settlements.

Now Scotland’s Urban Past (SUP) will focus on the urban built environment, working with 60 communities the length and breadth of Scotland, to explore the rich architectural, social and personal histories of their urban environments and to study how they have changed over time.

A call for participants and interested groups will be launched in spring 2015.

Commenting on the success of RCAHMS’ bid to for funding, Fiona Hyslop, Cabinet Secretary for Culture and External Affairs said: “It is easy to overlook the histories of our towns and cities as we go about our everyday lives. Now thanks to this significant grant, RCAHMS will be able to engage people the length and breadth of the country in telling the fascinating stories of the places where eight in ten of us now live.”

Speaking about the project, which will be taken forward by the merged RCAHMS and Historic Scotland body - Historic Environment Scotland (HES) - Rebecca Bailey, RCAHMS Head of Education and Outreach, said: “Social, economic and technological forces have shaped our towns and cities in profound ways. We want to directly connect communities with the place they live in, by getting them to explore the history that is quite literally, right on our own doorsteps.

“The scale of each project will range from investigations of a building, street or neighbourhood, to an entire urban area. We’ll train some people in survey and recording techniques while others may explore the personal histories of buildings and areas by gathering photographs, documents and oral histories from local residents.”

Colin McLean, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland, added: “HLF is delighted to give our support to a project which provides opportunities for people to learn new skills while building a detailed history of Scotland’s towns and villages. It builds on the earlier, highly successful Scotland’s Rural Past project which inspired people across Scotland to get involved in their community’s heritage for the first time.”

SUP will:

- Offer training courses in building investigation, photography, oral history recording and historical document research run by RCAHMS’ expert staff
- Encourage participants to actively research, record and promote awareness of their urban past
- Take information and personal memories gathered by participants into the RCAHMS Canmore website - the online database of Scotland’s national collection of the built environment
- Run events and hands-on activities to encourage people to get involved
- Help people of all ages to learn about the urban past

'Crowd-sourcing' activities will connect the wider public with their urban heritage and a website will enable people to upload information and access detailed architectural notes via mobile devices.

Some of the projects – particularly those targeting new audiences and young people - will involve creative input from artists, musicians, writers, actors and digital designers.

Notes to editors

RCAHMS is the National Collection of materials on Scotland's built environment that connects people to places across time. It is the first port of call for information about the built environment of Scotland, from prehistory to the present and records the changing landscape of Scotland and collects materials relating to it. For more information, visit the RCAHMS website.

Historic Scotland is an executive agency of the Scottish Government. Its statutory function is to protect and promote the historic environment, helping to ensure that the historic environment delivers economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits for Scotland. Historic Scotland cares for 345 historic properties and sites. Historic Scotland website.

The two bodies have worked closely together for many years and will be merged into a single new, Non-Departmental Public Body that will seek charitable status. The merger will enable the new body to provide more effective and efficient support for the historic environment of Scotland, investigating, recording, caring for, protecting and celebrating it. View the The Historic Environment Strategy for Scotland.

Following parliamentary process, the new Historic Environment Scotland body is expected to be launched in 2015. It will be established in two stages, with the inauguration of the body corporate and the Board appointed in April 2015 and the transfer of operational powers to the new body in October 2015.

The impetus for Scotland's Urban Past (SUP) stems from success of the HLF-supported Scotland's Rural Past (SRP) project. Evaluation emphasised the positive impact SRP had on individuals and communities across Scotland. Skills and experience gained through participation created a strong legacy, with many community projects developing further and spawning new ideas after SRP was completed. Information gathered by participants has enriched the national database, and project outputs have inspired wider understanding and awareness of the rural heritage.SUP aims to support 60 community projects in 20 urban areas over a five-year period.

Further information

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