Thames tapestry will be record achievement

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Thames Heritage Trust working with the Millennium Tapestry Company is contacting a total of 240 schools from the source of the river in Gloucestershire down to the estuary with the aim of creating a unique record of Thames history, architecture, industry, nature, sport and recreation. The plan is for it to be completed by 2012 as part of the cultural component of the London Olympics.

Each school is being asked to complete a one square metre panel depicting aspects of the Thames in their area. The pupils will be supplied with carpet canvas and all the yarns, materials and implements needed to complete their panel, and trainer sessions will be held to provide the practical know-how needed for the project.

The Thames was once described as ‘liquid history’ and the project aims to engage the estimated 50,000 children in researching and understanding the impact of the river on life, work and the environment as well as getting them involved in the artwork needed to create the project.

Lizzie Owen, Chief Executive of The Millennium Tapestry Company has extensive experience of running large-scale school art projects, says: “The Thames Heritage Tapestry project will be a totally joyful celebration of everything that makes the river so iconic. It will be purely educational and wholly inclusive, providing everyone involved with a basis for acquiring new skills that will lead on to a lifelong learning adventure. We can’t wait to see the young people’s work displayed during the London 2012 Olympiad.”

Paul Coleman, Chairman of The Thames Heritage Trust, says: “We have been seeking a way of encouraging young people and their families along the River Thames to learn more about the river. Each school will contribute a metre square artwork portraying how the Thames has shaped and now influences their local communities. The finished tapestries will reflect a multifaceted portrait of the Thames, from its source to the sea through the eyes of the children of all abilities who live along its banks.”

The completed one metre panels will be mounted on wooden frames and displayed in the schools that have produced them before the whole tapestry is assembled at a number of venues along the Thames, and finally, in London to coincide with the Olympics.

For the Heritage Lottery Fund, Head of HLF South East England Stuart McLeod, said: “This imaginative project mobilises thousands of children and their families to tell the ever-flowing tale that links thousands of communities both physically and throughout history.”

Notes to editors

Schools in Kingston upon Thames that have registered to become involved in the project include: St Philips, Chessington; Robin Hood Primary School, Tiffin Girls School, Tolworth Infants School, Latchmere Primary School.

The Thames Heritage Trust was formed in 1979 and is a registered charity that provides grants for improving leisure, education and cultural facilities to stimulate use and interest in the River Thames.

The Millennium Tapestry Company runs collaborative arts projects for schools that support and enrich the National Curriculum. The company delivered the UK Millennium Tapestry in 2000.

The planned Thames Heritage Tapestry will measure 240 metres in length. This will make it more than three times the length of the world-famous Bayeux Tapestry which measures 70 metres long. The longest tapestry in the world is the Apocalypse Tapestry which dates from the 14th Century and depicts scenes from the Book of Revelations. It was originally 140 metres in length but only 100 metres survive and are displayed in Angers, France.

The expression ‘liquid history' was coined by trade unionist and politician John Elliot Burns, after whom one of the Woolwich Ferries is named.

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 28,800 projects, allocating over £4.3billion across the UK, with over £428 million granted in the South East alone.

Further information

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