Thirsk Young Curators explore medieval glass and ceramics

31/05/2013

This project will offer 15 young people aged 11-16 the opportunity to develop their skills in caring for historical collections and interpreting the heritage through the development of their own artwork. Visits to English Heritage store at Helmsley and the ruins of three important abbeys: Fountains, Byland and Rievaulx; will enable the group to learn more about the Cistercian order and associated ceramic and glass industries. The project runs from May until November and will culminate in a group exhibition at Fountains Hall at Fountains Abbey, which will enable the group to share their work with friends, family, the wider community and visitors. The group will also be undertaking the Silver Arts Award qualification.

Ceramic artist Gordon Broadhurst and glass artist Jane Littlefield will run 10 days of practical workshops throughout the summer at the Courthouse in Thirsk and the group will learn how to paint glass using traditional techniques as well construct ceramic tiles and sculptural jugs. The project will involve the construction of a traditional wood fired ‘Bee Hive’ kiln in which artwork will be fired.

By looking at the remains of monastic and domestic craft, archaeologists are able to put precise dates on sites that they are investigating, Hambleton is rich in resources and there are many examples of kiln sites within the region. At a recent trip to Helmsley store and Rievaulx Abbey, the art club were given an interactive and entertaining talk by English Heritage curator Susan Harrison and were able to sketch and photograph the stores collection of sculptural stone, ceramics and glass, including: beautiful green glazed Scarborough Ware jugs decorated with knights on horseback, rare drinking bowls from Hambleton containing stags heads and fine brown Cistercian ware with white slip decoration and decorative glass chards that had been excavated locally. British archaeology expert John Buglass who has recently undertaken excavation work at Fountains Abbey will also give a talk to the group about his work and the history of ceramics and glass.

Fiona Spiers, Head of HLF Yorkshire and the Humber, said: “The Rural Curators project will provide valuable insight into the heritage sector for a group of enthusiastic young people. Throughout the project opportunities will be provided for the group to develop new skills, investigate hidden treasures and get a behind the scenes look at heritage sites. Hopefully this will inspire a new generation as heritage ambassadors.”

Commenting on the award, Angela Hall Director of Rural Arts, said: “We are thrilled to have received the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund; it will enable our young people’s art club access to a magnificent collection of historical artefacts that have survived long term burial in the ground and tell a wonderful story about North Yorkshire medieval life.”

Notes to editors

Rural Arts is an arts organisation based in Thirsk and working across North Yorkshire and the Tees Valley. They provide an extensive outreach programme of taster sessions, workshops, courses and projects in visual and performing arts, whilst ON Tour delivers touring theatre to rural communities. Their venue in Thirsk, The Old Courthouse, holds a gallery, shop, café, studios, training rooms and and computer suite. Visit Rural Arts website for more information.

Further information

Rural Arts: Hannah Stroud, Courthouse Assistant on 01845 526 536, email: hannah@ruralarts.org for images and interviews.