

Tasglannan Coimhearsnachd: Cothroman agus Dùbhlain / Community Archives: Opportunities and Challenges Conference at Lews Castle, Stornoway

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Martyn Wade, Heritage Lottery Fund Committee Member for Scotland

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues and friends, thank you for inviting me to be part of this conference. I'm delighted to be able to join with you to celebrate the diverse and innovative community archive projects that are taking place across Scotland.

As a professional librarian of almost 40 years and an active heritage group member, I'm a passionate advocate of the value of historic library and archive collections.

And I am particularly looking forward to hearing about the many different projects which help to break down barriers to the use of library, collection and archive services and widen their use, understanding and enjoyment.

The value and diversity of community archives, their collections and activities and the nature of the organisations involved, is truly remarkable. And they offer opportunities for everyone, to engage with community heritage, inspiring learning and enhancing understanding.

Nowhere, is this active engagement with heritage better seen to be the case than in the Western Isles, where we cannot fail to be astounded by the beauty of its heritage, and where understandably, local history societies are thriving.

As a Committee for Scotland member, I know that the Heritage Lottery Fund is delighted to support a conference that brings together so many excellent examples of communities engaging directly with the heritage on their doorstep.

A conference which also showcases the impact of the Heritage Lottery Fund's investment in places and people – both in Lews Castle, and the achievements of its Skills for the Future programme – brought to life through the enterprising young men and women which have been taking part in the Opening Up Scotland's Archives project, led by the Scottish Council on Archives.

Thanks to National Lottery Players, Heritage Lottery Fund invests money to transform and sustain the UK's heritage, making a lasting difference for heritage, people and communities. In Scotland, it has distributed over £830 million to over 4,000 projects since its inception in 1994.

It gives priority to projects which set ambitious and credible targets for the recruitment of trainees, with the aim of broadening the demographic profile of the heritage workforce.

To this end, the Skills for the Future programme helps organisations deliver paid training placements to meet skills shortages in the heritage sector. Since 2010, the programme has awarded nearly £8 million (£7.7) in Scotland and supported over 3,000 people to undertake work-based training in heritage skills across the UK.

Under the programme, Heritage Lottery Fund granted over £500,000 towards the Scottish Council on Archives, whose traineeship scheme has actively sought to improve skills and develop our archives sector for the long-term.

As you will learn over the next two days, many of the eighteen traineeships over the past three years have focussed on engagement and outreach, and connecting communities to their heritage through archival collections.

Trainees benefit from an annual bursary, mentoring and work on a range of exciting projects – including outreach and community engagement, digital preservation, collections development and traditional archive skills – enabling them to develop a variety of skills they can take with them to their future career and training opportunities.

This conference marks the culmination of this exemplary three-year project and as we listen to the experiences of its trainees, I'm sure you will join with me in acknowledging it to be a great success and a shining example of collaborative efforts in this area.

I can't think of a better setting in which to showcase this conference than the historic Lews Castle - home to Scotland's first Gaelic-led museum and Tasglann nan Eilean (Hebridean Archive).

Heritage Lottery Fund granted over £4.8 million of National Lottery funding to its conservation and regeneration. The castle now provides a safe home for photographs, documents and artefacts that have been collected by passionate individuals and community heritage groups.

The positive impact on tourism and subsequent economic regeneration that the castle provides also helps to strengthen the identity of Stornoway and the wider Western Isles. And in doing so, presents itself on the world stage as an enticing heritage destination for visitors from Scotland and further afield.

The Heritage Lottery Fund, alongside Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar and community groups, has helped to regenerate Stornoway itself, with over £15 million of funding going towards its townscape - repairing and restoring landmark buildings, removing unsympathetic features, improving the public realm and bringing historic buildings back into use.

Training in traditional building skills was given to young people and a series of awareness events across local schools, businesses and community groups have all contributed towards preserving Stornoway's built heritage and historical value for future generations.

As we will see over the next few days, heritage projects such as these, use collaboration and partnership to their advantage.

They help to establish networks between archive organisations and individuals working together, to share their history with the world. They provide an opportunity for isolated communities to become better connected.

They also enable forgotten stories to be recalled, and for historical treasures to be re-discovered. And, in doing so, they make sure that heritage is sustained to enrich people's lives and experiences.

Heritage is so much more than looking inward to the past. With people at its heart, it's a sector that is revealing new opportunities in the narrative of its history and is looking firmly to the future.

I am sure that like me you are looking forward to hearing about the work that is being done to make this future a reality.

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