Press release
13 Feb 2020

St Peter’s Church in Portishead secures National Lottery support for Storyboat 700+ project

Today St Peter’s Church in Portishead, has received a grant of £99,300 from The National Lottery Heritage Fund for an exciting heritage project in Portishead.

Made possible by money raised by National Lottery players, the ‘Storyboat 700+’ project celebrates the 700th birthday of St Peter’s Church in Portishead, through a creative programme of engagement in the community that shines a light on the role of the church in Portishead and the part it has played over the centuries in the town’s rich history.

The initiative aims to both preserve the heritage of the physical building of St Peter’s and to highlight its importance as a focal point of local stories and memories.

‘Storyboat 700+’ is being supported by pioneering North Somerset arts organisation Theatre Orchard to bring an inspiring and uplifting range of activities to the parish, including storytelling, drama, dance and music.

Working alongside a wide range of local groups and uniting different communities, 700 individual stories will be gathered to create a flotilla of tales from the town. The stories will each be written up on 700 paper boats that will form a wave-shaped artwork assembled by a collective of local artists who will turn the story boats into a stunning aerial sculpture. The Storyboat 700+ Flotilla will be displayed in the nave of the Church and the final installation will be launched in a public event at St Peter’s on Sunday 21 June 2020.

This will lead to a journey of heritage and cross-arts initiatives embracing the whole community in creative activity and culminating in a series of Storyboat events across Summer and Autumn with St Peter’s Church symbolic ‘harbour’ at the project’s heart.

The funding will also celebrate heritage through an Oral History initiative that will produce a downloadable audio-guide with stories of Portishead linked to names and places found in the church and graveyard.

Theatre Orchard will bring local stories to life through drama, creating a series of workshops and story-telling events based around St Peter’s. This activity will culminate in a community-based, professionally led performance, ‘Port and Starboard’ incorporating a mass promenade to the Church, to be showcased at the June launch.

Building works will carry out essential repairs to the Grade 1 listed building, ensuring safety and longevity at this local heritage site.
The celebrations will continue in October (16 – 18), with a ‘Harvest Feast of Stories’ weekend of performance, storytelling and Harvest feasting, including a specially devised drama performed by children from MultiStory Drama Academy with support from Theatre Orchard.

In November, the Storyboat 700+ Flotilla will be dismantled, with the boats upcycled into a Community Prayer Coracle in a giant weaving-together of the town’s stories.

Commenting on the award, Verity Eastwood Dewing said: “We’re delighted that we’ve received this support thanks to National Lottery players. St Peter’s Church is at the heart of the community and as one of the oldest building in Portishead is steeped in local heritage and is of huge, historical importance. This funding enables it to continue to be a beacon of light for future generations and a place open to all.”

Fiona Matthews, creative director at Theatre Orchard added: “St Peter’s has held stories of personal and communal significance in Portishead for centuries. It is wonderful to be involved in such an exciting project that will unite the community through stories - past, present and future - giving a collective voice to St Peter’s Church as it celebrates 700 years of extraordinary life.”

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Notes to editors

About St Peter’s Church
St Peter’s Church of England is a local heritage site located in Church Road North, Portishead BS20 6PS. www.portisheadparish.co.uk, www.facebook.com/portisheadCofE.
St Peter’s Church is part of Explore Churches - www.explorecurches.org

The building is used both by the church and community and is open 7 days a week during daylight hours, as a place to visit or meet together – both for the worshipping community but also for regular groups from ‘church tots’ to Mother’s Union.

The Grade I listed Church building is owned by The Church of England, Diocese of Bath and Wells. The present church stands on the site of an earlier C11 church building - the font from the earlier building is still in use today. The church is set in a conservation area next to Court House Farm (Grade 2 listed) with its 15th Century manor house which was an active farm until recently.

There are many stained-glass windows dating from the mid 1800s, including one with a small section of medieval glass and memorials relating to local families. There is also a large churchyard which was the main place of burial for the town until the early 20th Century and is the resting place of many of the old Portishead families.

The church has connections with Fred Weatherly – lyricist of many Victorian and Edwardian songs including “Danny Boy” and “Roses of Picardy” - whose family provided a stained-glass window. The mother of composer George Butterworth is buried in the church yard.
It is the home of the town’s war memorial, commemorating those killed in the First and Second World Wars.

**About Theatre Orchard**

Theatre Orchard is a professional arts organisation that both produces and presents inspiring, professional live performance and creative opportunities in a diverse range of places and spaces in North Somerset. Theatre Orchard’s Outdoor Arts and Engage programme is a vital part of the company’s work, ensuring that exceptional creative experiences are part of everyday life for everyone.

In 2018 Theatre Orchard became the first organisation in North Somerset to join Arts Council England’s National Portfolio - the collection of leading arts and cultural organisations that receive regular funding and form the backbone of the Arts Council’s work. [http://www.theatreorchard.org.uk/](http://www.theatreorchard.org.uk/)

**About The National Lottery Heritage Fund**

Using money raised by the National Lottery, we *Inspire, lead* and *resource* the UK’s heritage to create *positive and lasting change* for people and communities, now and in the future. [www.heritagefund.org.uk](http://www.heritagefund.org.uk).

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