

Name of project/group
Hackney Historic Buildings Trust
Type of project
Social action / community empowerment
Location
Hackney, London
What was involved
<p>St. Augustine's Tower in Hackney is all that remains of the old church of St. Augustine, built at the end of the thirteenth century. The Tower is Grade I listed, situated in the historical churchyard of St John at Hackney and is the oldest building in the borough.</p> <p>Prior to this project the Tower had opened infrequently on Heritage Open Days and for pre-booked groups at special request. Through the Heritage Lottery Funded project, Hackney Historic Buildings Trust delivered essential restoration enabling the Tower to be opened to local residents and providing volunteer opportunities, a new learning space and accessible interpretation on the ground floor.</p> <p>Over two years, the project aimed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out restoration works and improve physical access • Develop the interpretation of the building and learning opportunities for schools and general visitors • Develop the first floor into a informal and flexible learning space • Produce a learning and teacher resource packs.


Achievements
<p>Without this project, the local community would have continued to have limited knowledge, access to this unique building. The Tower needed physical repairs to the stonework and flat level access to the ground floor to ensure continued use and care of the building.</p> <p>The Friends of Hackney Tower and Churchyard are a voluntary group of local people sharing common interest in the Tower. Representatives from the group were involved in the plans for the restoration and sat on the steering management committee along with trustees.</p> <p>The restoration of the Tower enabled it to be opened up and used in a new and exciting way, ensuring its long term future. The arches and stonework of the Tower were repaired and cleaned, and a flexible learning space has been created on the first floor helping to make the building sustainable. Visitors now have safe roof access to a panoramic view.</p> <p>Supported by members of the friends group, eight local volunteers were trained to give guided tours about the history and repair programme for the Tower. They were trained in safety</p>

procedures; the history of the building; running interactive displays and day to day opening of the building and security.

The volunteers and members of the friends group were also responsible for opening up the Tower for education groups and on Sunday's on a monthly basis.

Learning packs were produced in consultation with local teachers to support self-led visits at the Tower and aid delivery of literacy in school. This was complimented by a CD of local history resources including photographs and oral testimonies.

Regular activities for families were provided during 26 open days. Open days also gave visitors and local residents an opportunity to learn more about the Tower and share their views on how it should be used in the future.

New Interpretation panels on the history of the Tower are located on the accessible ground floor with touch screen terminals providing local information and displaying the 360 degree panoramic view from the roof.

An updated English version of the visitors leaflet was produced, complimented those produced prior to the project in Urdu, Bengali and Turkish reflecting the local community.

Quotes

'Heritage based projects have a universal appeal that people don't understand till they engage with it. Appeal to those from 5 to 80 years old.'

'Hackney is a place of changing and sometimes transient population. The Tower is something from the past that has always been there, and gives a root or focus to all. This approach was the main focus of the education pack.'



Future plans

A diverse community learnt about the local history on the doorstep. The project helped develop a sense of ownership through the friends group and volunteer programme.

Educational projects and cultural activity such as storytelling and art exhibitions added to the understanding for future generations and a consequent valuing of such important parts of our heritage.

Through consultation, partnerships were created with local schools, local historians and other heritage organisations. For example, the trust worked with Sutton House, a local National Trust building to offer a more rounded learning experience to local schools.

The Friends Group remain active with a keen interest in the future of the Churchyard Gardens and St Augustine's Tower.

Lessons Learnt

- It was essential to bring in relevant experience where it did not exist in the Trust. An education consultant was recruited to make local links, develop the learning programme and design the teachers pack
- Activity costs were under-estimated. To get good quality educational and interpretative materials it is necessary to build in sufficient funding for research, consultation and trialling
- The learning programme would have benefited from having more time to develop. This could have been done by starting earlier in the project and running the programme in parallel with the building work
- The trustees' assumptions were challenged that as a historic building the Tower could only be explored through the history curriculum. By investing in a thorough consultation with teachers and local education services they created an education pack supporting the literacy curriculum, which has proved comprehensive and practical to use in schools.

Project contact

Hackney Historic Buildings Trust

<http://www.hhbt.org.uk/>

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