

'People and Historic Places' in Scotland

Exploring multi-cultural heritage in historic houses

Historic Houses Association (HHA) and *Black Environment Network UK (BEN)* came together to formulate a project to increase ethnic community access to privately owned historic houses. The 'People and Historic Places Project' was a UK-wide pilot to stimulate groups to discover the facilities, events and resources available and together to explore their social and cultural significance.

Making it happen

Between April 2003 and October 2003, three ethnic community groups from Edinburgh and Glasgow went on educational visits to explore historic houses and gardens across Scotland. Groups were selected to include a range of characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity and religion. The owners of the historic houses were very enthusiastic to welcome their guests. *Kelburn Castle* hosted a visit by a multicultural group of women and children from the *Muslim Women's Resource Centre*; *Traquair House* welcomed a group of Filipino families from the *Scottish Filipino Association*; and *Drumlanrig Castle* greeted a group of elders and their family members from *Edinburgh Chinese Elderly Support Association*.

Cultural relevance

BEN offered Diversity Training to the owners and staff of the three historic houses. They learned about opening up their services to new audiences, including how to highlight multicultural features such as imported furniture or interesting garden plants, and to interpret these elements in an appropriate way. For instance, the Earl of Dalkeith's mother was born in China, so he was proud to point out the family's collection of Chinese lacquered boxes, and draw on her experience.

Community workers from each group met





with HHA staff before the outings to discuss details and relay information to their members, so that everyone on both sides could be well prepared for the event.

The groups all enjoyed their trips, and in some cases they recognised opportunities for deeper engagement in educational or volunteering activities in the future. The project strengthened participants' sense of identity and belonging in Scotland.

The Future

The visits have laid down the basis for building relationships between the groups and the historic houses and developing further programmes and initiatives.

BEN's Heritage and Access Environment Project (HEAP) will build on this positive work by involving more minority ethnic community groups in accessing opportunities in historic houses. Drumlanrig Castle has continued to build on their newfound relationship with the community group Rainbow People. The National Trust for Scotland are exploring other similar opportunities and during 2005 hope to develop a further project to increase the access of ethnic community groups to historic houses and gardens in Scotland.



FACTFILE

- **Funders:**

BEN UK, Historic Houses Association

- **Partners:**

Ethnic community groups: Edinburgh Chinese Elderly Support Association, Muslim Women's Resource Centre, Scottish Filipino Association.

Historic houses and gardens: Kelburn Castle and Country Centre, Traquair House, Drumlanrig Castle and Country Park.

- **Target group:** Ethnic community groups in Edinburgh and Glasgow.

- **Numbers:** 126 adults and children.

- **Resources:**

'People and Historic Places' Report and summary report, available to download from the BEN website at www.ben-network.org.uk

- **Key points:**

- Visits to historic houses and gardens can make a significant contribution to social cohesion. It enables ethnic groups to experience aspects of the holistic multicultural history of Britain, nurturing a sense of belonging.
- Careful planning will ensure that visits are socially and culturally relevant, and as rewarding as possible for everyone involved.



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