

# New Arts Project from the Heritage Education Trust

Martyn Dyer  
*Heritage Education Trust*

**Education Through Heritage and the Arts — ETHA** — is the latest project to be launched by the Heritage Trust (HET) the lively body dedicated to promoting the educational use of historic buildings.

The Trust is relatively young — it was founded in 1982 — and is a voluntary group registered as a charity. It's Chairman, Commander Michael Saunders Watson D.L., currently chairing the DES Working Group on the National Curriculum in History, owns Rockingham Castle in Northamptonshire and is strongly committed to education. He believes that historic houses and other historic buildings have a unique role to play in enriching the education of the nation's children. But to fulfil this role properly two things are necessary. On the one hand the property owners and administrators must brief themselves on the needs of schools and then provide a high standard of educational services and facilities on site for visiting school parties. On the other schools must seek out and use such properties and see the educational visit not merely as a one off 'jolly' but as a serious and on going part of classroom work.

## **HET and the Sandford Award**

When the Trust was founded in 1982 its main work was to take over from the Council for Environmental Education, the administration of the Sandford Award for Heritage Education. This awards scheme was the brainchild of Lord John Sandford, a past minister in the DOE and first Chairman of HET. The aim of the scheme was to lay down stringent educational criteria for properties wishing to promote school visits as part of their visitor programme and to recognise those where the standards were met by making an annual award — The Sandford Award. Properties holding the Sandford Award are listed in the annual guide, **Historic Houses Castles and Gardens Open to the Public**.

The Sandford Award is not a prize — no financial or other inducements are offered to the properties. It is a national recognition of educational standards. And

properties have to keep up to scratch. The Trust operates a quinquennial review system and if educational standards are not maintained the property is struck off the official HET listing. The Sandford Award is the 'Michelin Star' of the Heritage Educational world.

## **ETHA and Heritage Education**

Now, the Trust does much more than simply administer the Awards, and its latest project ETHA, sponsored by one of the Sainsbury Family Trusts will make its work much more widely known to schools.

ETHA is based on the belief that an imaginative use of the heritage enhances the education process and that the performing arts have a special role in bringing both to life. The project aims to encourage schools to turn to the resources of the heritage for inspiration, information and involvement. It creates a framework within which the lively teacher can do this in a wide range of subjects. Unlike many educational schemes it does not seek to overturn the subject base but it does require co-operation and co-ordination between teachers of different subjects. Art, dance, design, drama, history and music — all will find ETHA offering a challenge and an opportunity. They have been placed in alphabetical order to avoid any suggestion of subject priority.

## **National Curriculum Opportunities**

The ETHA framework will offer many opportunities for subjects to develop new and original approaches within the National Curriculum. It will stimulate ideas for both coursework and extra-classroom projects as part of that curriculum. And it will create validation opportunities for core subjects to help the non-core subjects.

As an important part of the project, the Heritage Education Trust has commissioned the composer, Michael Hurd, to write a cycle of three school cantatas inspired respectively by the domestic heritage of historic houses, the ecclesiastical heritage, and the industrial

heritage. Each will tell a story of British history. Schools will be invited to make submissions to HET in which they not only offer a performance of one of the cantatas, but also show how a range of other subjects have used the heritage to inspire creative work related to the story of the chosen cantata.

## **HET Receptions for Educationalists, Property Representatives**

Two of the three cantatas are now complete and the first is called **The Liberty Tree** and tells a simple story of the Civil War. The libretto draws for its story-line upon a number of historic properties where stirring events related to the conflict took place. **The Liberty Tree** received its first performance at the Deragate Royal Theatre, Northampton, on Sunday 5th November, when it was sung by a choir of over 200 Northamptonshire schoolchildren accompanied by a school chamber group. The Trust held a reception before the show for Senior Education Officers, Advisers, teachers, property owners, administrators and education officers to explain the ETHA project. This is the first of a series of regional events to promote and explain ETHA which HET will stage between now and the Autumn of 1990 when schools which have displayed an interest will be asked to register formally their intention to take part. The scheme will culminate in a Heritage Gala to be staged at a prestige venue in either London or the provinces. The detailed content of the Gala will be determined by the entries received, but part of the programme will be a performance of all three cantatas by the massed choirs of the participating schools, conducted by the composer.

For further details of the ETHA project the work of the Heritage Education Trust and its new publication NIMROD, send sae marked **ETHA** to **Martyn Dyer, Chief Executive Heritage Education Trust, St. Mary's College, Strawberry Hill, TW1 4SX. Tel: 01-892-0051 Ext. 202.**