

The icing on the cake

School children across Scotland are gearing up for the biggest birthday party ever. Millions of guests are invited, there will be 250 candles on the cake and the birthday boy is famous worldwide. But instead of Happy Birthday they'll be singing Auld Lang Syne. **Kerry Thomson reports**

January 2009 marks the 250th anniversary of poet Robbie Burns's birth, the 'party' is called Homecoming Scotland, and everyone's invited. Running from Burns Night to St Andrew's Day, Homecoming Scotland 2009 is a unique celebration which will encourage Scots, and those who love Scotland, to come home and make the most of Scottish culture. For those who already live here, it's a chance to take a fresh look at the heritage and history which first inspired Scotland's bard.

Schools have an important part to play, and over the coming months Learning and Teaching Scotland is working in partnership with local authorities to bring together examples of good practice and share experiences. Working collaboratively with schools in its area, one local authority is setting the pace and helping young Scots to experience the reality behind the relics.

"For every well-worn Scottish cliché, there's an exciting, living story, and in the

run-up to Homecoming 2009 we're working closely with schools in Aberdeenshire to bring our shared heritage to life," says Ingrid Turner, Cultural Co-ordinator, Heritage and Environment, at Aberdeenshire Council.

"This means getting out and about and seeing the stories the history books don't always tell, sharing experiences and learning from others in our communities."

EXTENDING HORIZONS

With this in mind, Aberdeenshire Council is piloting the 'Heritage Fairs Programme' – a series of partnership events with local schools, promoting a cross-curricular approach to learning. Led by the children's own ideas, the emphasis is firmly on celebrating local cultural heritage. Two fairs have already taken place, with schools in Banchory and Peterhead

contributing, and with four more in the pipeline it's hoped the model will be rolled into 2009 to coincide with the Homecoming celebrations. Ingrid explains:

"The fairs bring the whole community together and give pupils the chance to work with a range of organisations, from local businesses and arts centres to libraries and heritage resources. We've been really impressed with the pupils' creativity and we've seen things like a 3D art

installation, live theatre and even a newly penned Scottish song put to the tune of Cliff Richard's hit, *Summer Holiday!*"

The Heritage Fair model originated in Canada in the early nineties, but it's one which works well in Scotland and complements schools' work on





Above: art on display at Banchory Heritage Fair. Right: Stained glass artwork created by St Fergus School

a 3D artwork showing interactive landscape scenes. The 27 children were also joined for a morning by storyteller Maggie Fraser, who inspired the children with tales based around this magnificent castle.

GETTING ARTY

Further north, at the Peterhead Heritage Fair, after carefully preparing questions, P3 children from St Fergus School visited a local sheltered housing complex to interview residents who had lived in St Fergus since childhood. Based around the interviews, which were edited by the Cultural Co-ordinator at the Council's Media Unit, the children developed what they had learnt and created project work about St Fergus, which included written research and artwork. The July project culminated with the children working together with an Aberdeenshire artist, William Moulding, to create a large-scale reproduction of the stained glass window from the local church.

Budding artists were also on show at Burnhaven School, where P4 and P5 pupils based their Heritage Fair project work around 'Women in the Fishing Industry'. The children welcomed local resident, Margie Davidson, to share her wealth of knowledge and familial links with this industry. Tapping into the North East Folklore Archive, as well as an episode from the BBC's *Trawlermen* series, the children produced their own artwork – a set of 'Fisher Quines' drawn in charcoal and an accompanying creative diary based around their research.

NEW LIFE FOR OLD TOPICS

Behind the fun and creativity, Ingrid says there are serious educational outcomes. "These projects are giving teachers the



opportunity to breathe local relevance into the curriculum. It's also a chance for teachers to re-invent the actual delivery of standard topics," she explains.

Bruce Robertson, Director of Education, Learning and Leisure at Aberdeenshire Council, agrees: "Aberdeenshire Council has an aim of our pupils learning 'in, about and through the unique natural, cultural and economic environment of Aberdeenshire and the north east'. This Homecoming project gives us a platform to begin to realise that ambition."

For the pupils, it develops a deeper connection with their own area. Feedback from parents has been extremely positive, with one parent remarking: "I think it's fantastically beneficial for the children to know about their local area. I certainly knew nothing about the local area and now I do!"

As Burns's birthday 'party' draws closer, local authorities and schools are showcasing a shared heritage that inspires them to look to the future with confidence. Through sharing best practice, they're showing Scotland in its best light, not just to 'Homecomers' in 2009, but to the people who live here. And, perhaps, in the words of the Bard himself, helping us to "see oursels as ithers see us".

Curriculum for Excellence. "Our Heritage Fairs give teachers the perfect opportunity to extend children's horizons of time and place – a key objective of *Curriculum for Excellence*. By allowing them to think creatively and encouraging pupils to tap into a vast range of information from so many different sources in their local community, pupils are gaining a real sense of what has shaped not only their own identity, but the lives and identities of their entire local area and indeed of Scotland," says Ingrid.

In Banchory, at the first of Aberdeenshire's Heritage Fairs in June, Drumoak School's P2–P4 classes travelled 100 years back in time. Scouring archived photographs, old parish records and maps, the pupils delivered an informative performance based on their village's history, entitled 'Old Drumoak'. Banchory Library and the Council's Local Studies HQ in Oldmeldrum helped with sourcing the relevant material. At Hill of Banchory School, pupils made the most of the expertise on their doorstep. Working with staff at Crathes Castle, P3 pupils toured the castle grounds and created

Pupils are gaining a real sense of what has shaped not only their own identity, but the lives and identities of their entire local area and Scotland