

Annual Report summary April 2020 – March 2021

Thames Explorer Trust Objectives and activities

The Thames Explorer Trust is an innovative educational charity; its work is overseen by seven Trustees who, along with our Director and Manager, ensure that the aims of the charity are fulfilled. Over a 32 year period the charity has taught a diverse cross-section of adults and young people, delivering lessons and events about the river's history, archaeology, geography and biology. Our learning programmes are intended to promote an understanding of the issues and challenges the Thames faces and to engender a sense of ownership and responsibility about the future of the river. The Trustees have paid due regard to guidance issued by the Charity Commission in deciding what activities the charity should undertake.

We operate our programmes at eight different venues along the Thames between Greenwich and Kew. They are open to all, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, gender or disability. With the aid of sponsorship, we have been able to run an outreach programme helping us to work with people who would not otherwise be able to afford to visit us or who would find it hard to travel to us. Our website and its resources are open to all members of the public as a free service. In addition, we work with a variety of other river-related organisations.

For the public benefit, Thames Explorer offers:

- river learning programmes for schools, adults and family groups
- training in river studies for teachers, schools, teacher training students and others
- project work, sometimes in partnership with other bodies
- talks and conferences, some of which we organise ourselves
- consultancy and advice on river-related matters and environmental education

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Financial review

At the end of the last financial year and in the grip of the pandemic we took the decision to furlough our staff under the government's job retention scheme until such time as we were able to re-establish our audience. The first of our furloughs came on April 1 and was followed by a cycle of lockdowns and furloughs throughout the year. Preserving our finances was key to our continued operation and, faced with no viable audience, furloughing our staff was the best way to achieve this. Towards the end of this series of lockdowns we began to un-furlough our staff for an increasing amount of time. It was during these periods that we were able to secure government grants to pay for our core costs as well as developing new and innovative ways of working. Firstly, the Heritage Emergency Fund (HEF) was able to offer £40,300 support. This was followed by the two Cultural Recovery Funds, CRF1 for £64,400 and CRF 2 for £30,300. Securing this funding was crucial to successfully helping us navigate this very precarious time and we were fortunate to be able to draw heavily on the experience and expertise of our board members, both at the application stage as well as throughout the administration and reporting stages.

Discovering the river at Chiswick



Funding overview

Heritage Emergency Fund: £40,300 support 1.10.2020 to 31.1.21

Cost heading	Funded
New Staff	£18,398
Digital outputs	£12,140
Event costs	£800
Other	£8,962
Total	£40,300

Cultural Recovery Fund round 2: £30,300 1.4.21 ending 29.6.21

Cost heading	Funded
New Staff	£18,500
Professional fees	£2,800
Digital outputs	£6,000
Equipment & materials	£3,000
Total	£30,300

Cultural Recovery Fund round 1: £64,400 6.11.20 ending 29.6.21

Cost heading	Funded
New Staff	£27,400
Professional fees	£7,500
Digital outputs	£8,700
Equipment & materials	£9,800
Travel	£300
Event costs	£6,400
Publicity & promotion	£3,000
Evaluation	£1,300
Total	£64,400

Kusuma Trust: £9,200 25.9.20 ending 23.7.2021

Cost heading	Funded
Legal advice	£2,100
Advertising	£5,100
School transport subsidies	£2,000
Total	£9,200

Grants allowed us to not only secure our immediate future through core funding, they importantly allowed us to investigate a number of potential opportunities to deliver education in new ways and to new audiences. We were keen to develop strategies that would not only see us through the pandemic but would be enduring beyond this time. To this end we developed remote learning packages: converting two of our most popular programmes into a format where they could be delivered remotely. These innovative re-worked programmes combined the talents of our freelance staff delivering a live session via remote media, with new, unique resources and materials. Development of these also allowed us to give much needed employment to members of our freelance team. We believe developing these programmes will be useful beyond the pandemic in their ability to teach pupils about the need to manage and maintain river environments in general, not just the Thames. As such they have the potential to reach an audience well beyond our usual geographical area - there is no reason why a class learning about the Mersey or the Clyde should not be interested in these learning packages.

During this time we were also able to investigate learning programmes and partnerships with higher education groups. The opportunity of delivering outdoor fieldwork sessions for higher education groups in the heart of London, an area with some of the world's leading universities, is something we had long thought would be of interest. To this end Christmas 2020 and Queen Mary University of London where preliminary sessions were devised and delivered to undergraduate students. Grant income played a key role in allowing us to secure a range of equipment for use during the sessions. Equipment was chosen carefully to be reusable, long-term assets which would offer great flexibility and a range of potential opportunities to future learning groups. Next year we plan to continue developing relationships with these new groups, in particular undergraduate students of biology, history and geography.

We were also grateful to be able to secure a grant from the Kusuma Trust which allowed us several new opportunities including the ability to subsidise coach transport to and from our sites. We considered this to be particularly important as many schools had shown reluctance to travel on public transport. These subsidies were taken up in increasing numbers as the pandemic began



Assessing wildlife as an indicator to water quality

PLA outreach

Our highly successful PLA outreach programme, extending to the Isle of Sheppey and Southend, had to be cancelled for the entirety of the 2020-2021 year. This was hard news for the schools who had booked sessions, our staff who were forced to cancel over 40 pre-arranged bookings and our funders who have shown great vision in the need to raise awareness of the issues and opportunities faced by the Thames. In addition to the immediate cancellations a great deal of effort was put in the months leading up to April into promoting the sessions and we anticipated a many bookings throughout the year. Part of the money from this grant goes towards paying a dedicated PLA member of staff at our Trust, however as no programmes were delivered we took the decision that no money should be spent from the funding until our audience returned. The end of the year saw schools show the beginnings of interest in our teachers visiting them and we anticipate a renewed interest in this sought-after programme in the coming months.

Thames Explorer Challenge

After successfully completing the first year, City Bridge Trust agreed to fund a second year of this programme which utilizes the banks of the Thames as a learning area and exercise opportunity. We were greatly disappointed by the series of lockdowns and travel restrictions which prevented us from completing the proposed work. Thames Explorer Trust had been keen to see the fruition of this project and see the three new assets uploaded to our website. These would have been a self-project, free to all, innovative and fun way of experiencing the Thames and would have formed a great complement to our work done on the foreshore. Over the year the project was rebooted several times but thwarted on each occasion by either travel restrictions, lockdowns or in some cases other commitments from key members of our freelance team. Towards the end of the year City Bridge made the decision that the funding could be put towards our core costs to stabilize the organization and we are grateful to them for this offer. In the coming year it is hoped that we may be once again able to secure funding to complete this project.

Adult and Family Learning Visits to the Foreshore

There has been a steady increase in people wanting to learn about the Thames and the history of London through our scheduled programme of walks on the Thames foreshore. These proved to be highly resilient over a difficult year and participants were keen to take part at the first opportunity. Adhering to government guidelines we initially ran these outdoor sessions for five people. Although this was a very small audience it had several benefits: the income generated was sufficient to cover our teaching staff's pay thereby giving them some much-needed income; it allowed us to maintain our presence on the foreshore; it gave our audience a safe place to gather and meet new people; it afforded us the opportunity to get across our core message of preserving the historic nature of the Thames and maintaining its ecological balance. Gradually, as restrictions were lifted, attendance numbers increased and have been maintained at the current level of 20 participants. This number has enabled us to generate some surplus income which we have been able to use to offset our core costs.

Thames Explorer works from Brentford in the west to Greenwich in the east



Our team

Our charity is hugely reliant on its reputation, with many organisations and individuals coming to learn about the Thames with us year after year. This reputation is built directly from the people working with us and their commitment, enthusiasm and sheer hard work. This year we tried to employ as many of our freelance team as possible on alternative work although opportunities were very limited. Inevitably, faced with such a long period of uncertainty, some of our freelance team were forced to move out of London. To this end we aim to recruit 4 new freelancers in the very near future. We would like to take the opportunity to thank our office team, who all remain in place, for their flexibility and resourcefulness over such a difficult year.

Thames Explorer venues & partners

We are delighted to announce that we have a new partnership with the Bubble Theatre who are providing an indoor venue for trips to Rotherhithe. Trafalgar Rowing Club, who we started working with last year, continues to be popular with schools and we are grateful to Tom Yu and the club for making us so welcome. Our gratitude to all the following partner organisations cannot be stressed highly enough. Without these we would not be able to deliver our full day sessions. In particular, we thank the Chiswick Pier Trust who work with us on a daily basis to ensure our organisation runs as smoothly as possible.

- Kew Bridge - London Museum of Water and Steam
- Chiswick - Chiswick Pier Trust
- Fulham - Fulham Palace Trust
- Southwark (no indoor venue)
- Westminster - Museum of London
- Isle of Dogs - Museum of London Docklands
- Rotherhithe - Bubble Theatre
- Greenwich - Old Royal Naval College
- Greenwich - Trafalgar Rowing Club



An Egyptian Goose, one of many species of birds found along the Thames corridor

Reserves policy

It is the policy of the charity that unrestricted funds which have not been designated for a specific use should be maintained at a level equivalent to between three and six months' expenditure. The Trustees considers that reserves at this level will ensure that, in the event of a significant drop in funding, they will be able to continue the charity's current activities while consideration is given to ways in which additional funds may be raised. This level of reserve has been maintained throughout the year thanks to various funding streams and government initiatives. The Trustees have assessed the major risks to which the charity is exposed, and are satisfied that systems are in place to mitigate exposure to the major risks.

Structure, governance & management

The charity is a company limited by guarantee and governed by the memorandum and articles of association. It is also registered with the Charity Commission. The Trustees, some of whom are also the directors for the purpose of company law, who served during the year and up to the date of signature of the financial statements were:

- Valerie Bott**
- Dave Brown**
- Mariene Johnson**
- Janet Peek**
- James Wisdom**
- Michael Woodmore**

Clay smoking pipe - a common find on the Thames foreshore



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