

## MAKING A CULTURAL DIFFERENCE



**Above** / Advance preparations underway for "The Seeing Project", Phase I – "Windows on Your World"

How prepared are architecture students for the reality of their working lives? Concentrating on designing buildings they would be forgiven for thinking their role will be all about the new - and not much about the old. Ironically, in today's economic reality, it's increasingly the other way round.

Across the country there is an acknowledged, severe skills deficit among the construction professions and trades, to adequately care for and repair our old buildings. Relative to other parts of Europe, wider Northern Irish society has a low awareness of the latent potential of our unique natural and built heritage for sustainable economic regeneration.

One of the primary grant sources for repairing run down heritage assets, Heritage Lottery Fund [HLF], regards heritage education as crucial.. In 2011, Walled City Partnership, funded by HLF, became Northern Ireland's first Townscape Heritage Initiative [THI] to take on a dedicated education role raising awareness and appreciation of built and natural heritage within the Walled City THI area, and wider city.

Its dynamic, opportunistic education strategy uses live heritage issues locally as a vehicle for rapid, meaningful learning. This effectively engages key decision makers, influencers, the wider community, and all educational levels.

Influential briefings by Walled City Partnership, circulated to key stakeholders, politicians and leading pressure groups, informed the debate and case for bringing back into use, Derry's listed, at risk, John Lanyon designed Victorian train station. The outcome of the Translink /Ilex funded Options Appraisal into the location of the city's 21st century station is eagerly awaited.

Unwitting removal of some old cast iron streetlights in Derry last summer prompted Walled City Partnership research that revealed these to be the last remaining historic street light collection in Northern Ireland. Possibly the oldest on this island these have national significance. Circulation of the WCP findings generated widespread regional media coverage..

Key WCP education programmes include: 'A Taste of ▶



**Above** / P3 children from Long Tower PS drawing their favourite classical windows at Long Tower Church, Derry

▶ Traditional Building Skills'. This series of half day, heritage site based workshops offers mixed clusters of students, construction professionals and tradespeople, opportunities for hands on experience with high calibre, specialist crafts men and women.

Invited to work with the Year 10 Geography class at St Joseph's College, Derry on the 2012 NIEA 'Open Doors to the Future' competition, involved WCP in devising and delivering a series of interactive workshops to help the boys develop a conservation plan for an old building near their school. Focusing on nearby Rosemount Shirt Factory, St Joseph's entry achieved first prize in its age category. The boys received their prize from Minister Alex Attwood, DoE.

Recognising the need to instill in our next generation of citizens (and architects) a deep love of heritage as well as creative design Walled City Partnership's Education Officer, Mary Kerrigan devised, developed and delivered a unique, interactive, cross-curricular education project to 'prop up the eyelids of young children on matchsticks'. Using 'Appreciative Inquiry as

the basis for lively engagement, 'The Seeing Project' teaches seven year olds to recognise and describe two major western, architectural styles; and five types of old windows - as well as any architect - also creating the heritage of the future.

Partnering with Culture Company and John McDaid (design/film), WCP has turned Phase I - 'Windows on Your World' for P3 children into an exciting online learning resource and archive gallery for teachers, parents and children worldwide. Whether in New Buildings, or New Zealand this provides everything needed to explore and share our unique heritage with that of cultures worldwide.

As Mrs Edel Connolly, P3 class teacher at Long Tower PS said 'This is a great project for so many reasons. Get stuck in and enjoy it!' ●

**For further information go to [www.seeingproject.co.uk](http://www.seeingproject.co.uk)**

**Mary Kerrigan**  
Education Officer, Walled City Partnership

