

Royal Ballet's *Sleeping Beauty* in the large Lyric Theatre, I'm impressed by the range of activities on offer and the diversity of the audiences.

Three years ago independent publication the *Salford Star* took The Lowry to task for its failure to open up to the local community but that prompted a change in attitude. It now claims that 90 per cent of its theatre-goers and 58 per cent of its gallery visitors are local, one in 12 of them stepping into a gallery for the first time, and the new Our Lowry scheme has given over 4,300 Salford residents free or discounted theatre tickets in its first ten months. Its latest community project, Unlocking Salford Quays, aims to work with over 4,000 local people to uncover and

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preserve the area's heritage.

Shortly afterwards I visit a very different quayside regeneration project, also part-funded by the Millennium Commission.

The Cumbrian town of Whitehaven received lottery funds of around £11 million to develop tourism. A further £1 million was awarded to the site of the former Jefferson rum business to develop family attraction the Rum Story, which was Small Visitor Attraction of the Year in 2007 and celebrates its tenth birthday this year.

Manager Phil Haslehurst came to the Cumbrian coast as a research chemist for Sellafield but inherited the project to transform Jefferson's, one of the country's oldest wine merchants, when the shop bowed to competitive pressures after 200 years.

"At the time only the shop-front and commercial office were still in use, with much of the historic warehousing derelict, but Whitehaven needed multiple attractions to bring people in," he explains. "Its days as a trading port and mining town are far behind it and it's not really on the way to anywhere."

For this reason Haslehurst enhanced the venue's appeal to locals as well as tourists, positioning it as a community meeting place offering local produce.

The strategy seems to have succeeded, with 80 per cent of income coming from local trade, and the café certainly is busier than the exhibition during my visit. School groups are usually a mainstay, however,

Other Millennium Commission awards

Catalyst, Widnes. Chemical industry visitor attraction. Grant: £701,756

River Lune Millennium Park, Lancaster. Grant: £2,610,705

Vauxhall Community Centre, Liverpool. Grant: £2,183,385

SoundGarden, Eureka, Halifax. Early years natural world gallery. Grant: £232,504.

Millennium Galleries, Sheffield. Grant: £22,700,279

The Deep, Hull. Underwater visitor attraction. Grant: £24,256,803

The Lowry (facing page) and the Rum Story (above): both opened 10 years ago with Lottery funding.

Lowry photo: Len Grant



especially with slavery now on the curriculum, and this is the school holidays.

Clearly the rainforest illustrating the family's links with Antigua, where they stripped land to found sugar plantations, hasn't always been there but the spooky bonded cellars were used until 1973 and were discovered intact.

The exhibition is open about rum's past dependence on the slave trade, and its slogan, "Whitehaven's dark past", clearly has two meanings. The tale unfolds via information boards which, although serious when appropriate, become increasingly witty, supported by historical props, videos, touch-screens and room sets. Wandering the darkened route alone I feel pretty nervous, and indeed several mysterious happenings have been reported – a trend Haslehurst quickly capitalised on with overnight stays for ghost-hunters.

After a home-cooked lunch I head to the second tier of the exhibition which, for me, tries to tackle too many themes: from the Navy and barrel-making to pirates, smuggling, rum production, the American Revolution, Prohibition, Jefferson's re-branding and the restoration of the site. With the exception of the slightly bewildering Rustie's Fun Room, where a videoed Rustie Lee regales an empty room with rum-based recipes, it's also a tad wordy, and I wonder how suitable the exhibition would be for my pre-school nephews.

As I emerge, however, a girl who can't be more than two is asking her mother: "Do we really have to leave?" Interest in the dark stuff must start younger than I realised.

The venue also offers five self-guided "quest" trails around Whitehaven, and despite appalling weather I decide to have a go. I get a good feel for how Millennium money has helped enhance and even gentrify the quayside but after half an hour the driving rain gets the better of me and my umbrella. ■

Not a lotto money

With last week's Budget underlining just how gung-ho the coalition government is about public spending cuts, it seems unlikely that more money is to be channelled into arts, heritage and sport. That's because the rise will come at the expense of another good cause.

Lottery minister John Penrose is proposing to increase Lottery funding for arts, heritage and sport from 16.6 per cent to 20 per cent of the total raised. That's potentially good news for museums and sports clubs – but not so good for community groups and charities, which will lose out.

As part of Penrose's plan, the proportion of Lottery funding going to these groups will drop from 50 per cent to 40 per cent.

Penrose says the plan, out for consultation until August, will restore Lottery funding to its original purpose, which was to pay for public luxuries rather than essential services.

The Labour government's decision to fund charities and voluntary groups that work in the fields of health, education or the environment was seen as a break from this purpose.

But the arts cup is hardly likely to runneth over. More money from the Lottery may merely make up for cuts in the Arts Council budget. And that could apply to heritage and sport as well.