

History in the making

Jo Nightingale hears from Manchester Histories Festival's Claire Turner about this week's event that aims to engage history buffs and novices



The Clarion bike ride will be commemorated at the festival

Reinvigorating public perceptions of history is no mean feat but the second Manchester Histories Festival, which opens this Friday at venues throughout Greater Manchester, aims to do just that. With more than 1,000 events planned across a ten-day period, festival director Claire Turner has her work cut out.

"Manchester has a unique and diverse heritage, and it's not just about blue plaques and historical archives," she says. "History embraces all areas of life and the region's people are a key part of it, so we want them to take part in celebrating and sharing it."

"There are a lot of communities in Manchester whose voices are never heard, and great stories from its history that are in danger of being lost. Many local people have links to those stories but just think of them as part of their own lives, so we want to encourage them to share their knowledge."

The festival is a partnership between Manchester's universities and Renaissance North West, and museums, galleries and history and community groups across Greater Manchester are set to take part. By increasing its duration and the geographical spread of its events MHF hopes to double previous visitor numbers.

"We don't want to alienate those who are already interested in history but we're keen to diversify its audiences as much as possible," Turner says. "We've got activities about changes to the city's football landscape, Manchester music – even

dogs – to bring people in through subjects they're interested in – and often already involved in."

The programme will mix talks, tours, theatre, debates and community projects, from a one-man play about Bert Trautmann, the German Manchester City goalie who completed the 1956 FA Cup final with a broken neck, to a Hyde exhibition on Britain's first Cotton Queen, Frances Lockett. A display at Manchester's RIBA bookshop will unveil the original designs for the Mancunian Way, as well as revealing unrealised plans for an underground rail link and heliport.

One open-air highlight will be this Sunday's family bike ride commemorating The Clarion, the socialist movement, societies and newspaper founded in Manchester in response to its slum conditions. Cyclists will converge in Stockport and Bolton and head to Manchester's



The Forgotten Fields food heritage project dates back to the 18th century

People's History Museum to join the Clarion Cycling Club, before crossing the Irwell to Salford for the Working Class Movement Library's Clarion exhibition.

Organisers are also harnessing more recent technologies in a bid to challenge expectations about engaging with history. "We're hoping that bringing in new approaches, like our digital treasure hunt and a smartphone-led tour of the city as it was 100 years ago, will get more people involved, and engage those who might not have thought they were interested in history," Turner says. Activities will peak at the festival's Celebration Day, when historical and cultural organisations take over Manchester Town Hall and a full programme of talks, discussions and workshops is scheduled.

MHF will also stage its inaugural Community History Awards on 2 March, where successful partnerships between schools or community groups and libraries, galleries, museums or educational institutions will be rewarded with cash prizes.

"Manchester's got an exceptional history, with a radical past and huge numbers of 'firsts', but the thing that will really make this festival stand out is its people. We don't have huge budgets but we're running over 100 events and most of them are free. It's all happening through the enthusiasm and commitment of the people of Manchester."

Manchester Histories Festival, various venues, 24 February-4 March. See www.manchesterhistoriesfestival.org.uk



ALSO SHOWING



MACBETH

23 Feb - 17 March, Octagon, Bolton

Following productions of *Romeo And Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the Octagon Theatre presents its 2012 Shakespeare production, *Macbeth*.

In a story of ambition and revenge, *Macbeth* (Robert Cavanagh) is obsessed by power and, empowered by demonic forces, his wife Lady *Macbeth* (Susan Sylvester) convinces him to seize the opportunity for ultimate authority. As they try to keep their grip on power and sanity, the pair must face the consequences of their crimes.



SOUTH PACIFIC

21 Feb-3 March, Empire Theatre, Liverpool

This reinvention of Rogers' and Hammerstein's classic musical is the winner of seven Tony Awards and has played to sold-out houses on Broadway for two years. After going on to sell out London's Barbican in the summer and receiving acclaim from UK critics, *South Pacific* heads up north. With a live orchestra, the score includes *Some Enchanted Evening*, *I'm Gonna Wash That Man Right Outta My Hair* and *There Is Nothin' Like A Dame*.