

Discovering the distant Dutch relative of Fantastic Mr. Fox and Disney's Robin Hood

20/08/2018



Reynard and the crow. From a manuscript of the Romance of Reynard the Fox and Isengrin Bodleian Libraries

National Lottery funding will help Brits uncover the heritage of Reynard the Fox, a distant Dutch cousin of some of our most well-loved characters.

Most of us remember the Disney adaptation of Robin Hood, portrayed in the cartoon as a sly trickster fox. But did you ever wonder why the Prince of Thieves was animated as a fox in the first place?

The answer is that Disney originally planned to adapt the story of Reynard the Fox, the vulpine star of medieval Dutch fables, but decided they were too dark for young fans and instead used the character they had created to portray Robin Hood.

North Sea Crossings

The Bodleian Libraries at the University of Oxford and the University of Bristol, working with Oxford-based educational outreach charity Flash of Splendour Arts have secured National Lottery funding to explore the heritage of Reynard, in a project looking at the heritage of medieval Anglo-Dutch

relations.

The North Sea Crossings project will see a landmark exhibition at the Bodleian Libraries combining literature, film, theatre and culture, thanks to a £163,100 grant. British children will be reintroduced to Reynard, a character better known in the Netherlands.

Fox on Film

Children with special educational needs and disability (SEND) in Oxford and Bristol will be given training in animation and filmmaking, mentored by experts at Aardman, the Oscar-winning studio behind Wallace and Gromit and Shaun the Sheep, so they can create their own films inspired by Reynard's adventures.

A major exhibition at the Bodleian's Weston Library will tell the story of Reynard the fox using the Bodleian's wonderful historic collections. The free exhibition will run over four months in the winter of 2020 and will be of interest to adults and children.

In addition to these activities, two books are to be published for younger and adult readers re-telling Reynard's stories and heritage, and Oxford will celebrate 'Reynard the Fox week' in 2021.

Blazing a trail

Underpinning this activity is research from the University of Bristol into the heritage of Anglo-Dutch cultural relations, which were influenced by factors including migration, trade and marriage.

Anne Louise Avery from Flash of Splendour, said "The Heritage Lottery grant will have a life-changing impact on the lives of the young people we work with. North Sea Crossings is a hugely ambitious collaborative project and we hope that it will blaze a trail for real accessibility and innovation within university outreach."

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