Bentley Priory Museum secures Heritage Lottery Fund support

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The grant will be used to fit-out the museum, the learning centre and the museum displays. It will also fund specialist conservation work to the important historic fabric and to the collection of artefacts within the Grade II* listed building.

The project will provide a vibrant museum with broad appeal that will tell the fascinating story of Bentley Priory's history and, particularly, its significant role during the Battle of Britain. The project will include the recruitment and training for volunteers who will have a wide range of important roles in running the museum, ranging from hosting visitors care to horticulture in the stunning Italianate gardens.

The Bentley Priory Battle of Britain Trust will also work with community groups and other charities, including the Shaw Trust, to provide work-experience and a venue for their own activities in this iconic building. The project will include employment of a full-time learning officer who will lead a programme for schools covering curriculum areas including history, science, community cohesion and leadership.

The house was significantly extended in 1788 by Sir John Soane, one of the most important architects of the period; the Priory is one of his most significant buildings. It has had a long and rich social and political history, including time as a royal palace when Queen Adelaide (the widow of William IV and aunt of Queen Victoria) lived there from April 1846 until her death in 1849. The Priory's compelling role as Headquarters Fighter Command in the Battle of Britain makes it a site of national and international importance.

In 1940 when Britain stood alone against Nazi Germany and with invasion imminent, Air Chief Marshal Dowding, Commander of Fighter Command, masterminded the air defence of the country from Bentley Priory. The ensuing victory in the Battle of Britain enabled the nation to fight on for the rest of the war and allowed the Allies to achieve ultimate victory. Defeat in the Battle of Britain would have altered the course of world history.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Brian Burridge, Chair of Trustees, said: "We have worked hard for seven long years to provide a sustainable future for Bentley Priory that befits its enormous significance. Many would say that if the Battle of Trafalgar saved England, the Battle of Britain saved the World. We are delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has endorsed our plans with this award. We now look forward to fitting out the museum and telling the important stories of the Priory to a broad audience."

Sue Bowers, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund London, said: "This important listed building is associated with many historic figures and events in British history and this project will create a sustainable, vibrant museum and education centre that will attract a wide audience. The pinnacle of its fame is of course as the nerve centre from where the Battle of Britain was directed in 1940 so this project will secure the future of a building which made a major contribution to the outcome of the Second World War."

Notes to editors

In 2005, at the request of the Battle of Britain Fighter Association, the Bentley Priory Battle of Britain Trust was set up to ensure the preservation of key features of the site. Amongst the Trust's members are the survivors of 'The Few', aircrew

who fought in the Battle of Britain, who regard the Priory as their spiritual home.

Their aim is to establish an exciting museum and centre of education that will attract a wide range of visitors with a state-of-the art programme about the significance of the Battle of Britain and the example set by those involved in terms of leadership, courage and technological foresight. A special programme for schools will support the Citizenship, History and Wider Community Cohesion aspects of the National Curriculum.

Further information

For further information about the Bentley Priory Battle of Britain Trust, visit their website.

Images and interviews, please contact Erica Ferguson, Project Manager for the Bentley Priory Museum on 07813 856 719, email: bentleypriory@btinternet.com.