Florrie to rise from the Ashes

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The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has announced today an award of £3.7million for Liverpool's pioneering Florence Institute for Boys, to fund extensive repair and conservation work, restoring the building so that it again can be used by the local community.

Closed for over 20 years, the 19th-century Jacobean-style building in Toxteth is one of the oldest surviving purpose-built youth clubs in the UK. For nearly a century 'The Florrie' was at the heart of the community, providing a centre for young people in the local area. The Institute's alumni includes Tommy Bache, a boxer who won medals at the 1958 Empire Games, and Gerry Marsden (of Gerry and the Pacemakers fame) who held his first gig there in the 1950s.

Gerry Marsden commented: "It's great news to hear of the Florrie being restored and brings back many great memories for me. It was where I learned to play the guitar, and where our skiffle band started out. The Florrie was a place for kids to go, it was the centre of the community – something to look forward to. I'm sure the new Florrie can do the same and young people will learn a lot and be able to give something back"

Once completed, 'The Florrie' will be a multi-purpose community centre and a focus for young people in Toxteth and neighbouring Dingle, run by the Florence Institute Trust which has been campaigning to save the building for the last decade. The new centre will offer space for a wide range of activities, including workstations for start-up businesses and a heritage centre providing activities for people to learn and explore the history of the local area. Displays telling the story of The Florrie will be introduced throughout, turning the building into living museum of local social history.

Louise Ellman MP welcomed the news of the HLF award, saying: "This is an excellent decision and I congratulate the local team for their hard work and determination. This investment will enable The Florrie to become, once again, the Centre of the Community."

Sara Hilton, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund North West, said: "Thanks to this Heritage Lottery Fund investment, the Florrie can once again retake its rightful place at the heart of the community. Over the years this iconic building has played such an important part in so many people's lives. This restoration helps preserve our links with our social history, whilst providing much needed resources to support local people."

Denise Devine, Chair of the Florence Institute Trust, said: "We hope to restore our Beloved Florrie by Summer 2011 when She will once again become a thriving and vibrant hub in the south end of Liverpool. She will offer a fantastic range of quality facilities, services and activities to the good people of Liverpool - and beyond. On behalf of the board of Trustees, staff, volunteers and fellow Florencians, we would like to convey our sincerest of thanks to the Heritage Lottery Fund, and to our Patron, The Right Reverend Bishop James Jones for he has been a constant and active supporter."

The Florrie owes its existence to former Mayor of Liverpool and West India merchant, Bernard Hall in memory of his daughter Florence Bernadine who died aged 22. Built in the 1880s, and officially opened in 1890, the Florrie was used continuously for nearly a century until it closed in 1988. An extensive fire in 1999 rendered it inaccessible to the general public.

As a magistrate Bernard Hall knew all too well the product of poverty and lack of recreation for youth in the area, and as stated by the plaque on the building, he created what he hoped would be 'an acceptable place of recreation and instruction for the poor and working boys of this district of the city'.

Notes to editors

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported 33,900 projects, allocating £4.4billion across the UK. .

Further information

HLF Press Office, Roland Smith on 020 7591 6047 / 07713 486 420 or Katie Owen on 020 7591 6036 / 07973 613820.

Colin Taylor, The Florence Institute Trust on 07990 971 190.