The restoration of Knockando Woolmill

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Knockando Woolmill in the Spey Valley has been awarded a grant of £1.3million from the Heritage Lottery Fund to conserve it as a sustainable working mill, tourist attraction and centre for training in traditional crafts. The almost derelict group of buildings conceal the last remains of the history of Scotland's textile industry, where cloth has been manufactured continuously on site since 1784.

Knockando, which will be a community asset owned by the residents of the Moray Council area, is already sparking interest from luxury trade markets in Japan, Italy and the USA, keen to import bespoke cloth designed and made with the provenance of this historic Scottish mill.

Interest in the UK is also growing as wool growers add value to small packets of wool by having it spun and woven into cloth, with the added benefit of the end-product being organic and traceable. The Woolmill will also increase the UK's modest spinning capacity – a boon to the country's five million knitters!

However, Knockando, which featured in the BBC Two series 'Restoration' is currently in imminent danger of collapse. School trips can no longer visit because of the risk. The original machinery, acquired over the centuries, is also badly in need of restoration.

The present weaver, Hugh Jones, using expertise passed down through generations, has managed to single-handedly sustain the traditions of the UK's oldest surviving district woollen mill but he is keen to ensure that his specialist knowledge and skills can be passed on to future generations.

Commenting on today's announcement, Colin McLean, the Heritage Lottery Fund's Manager for Scotland, said: "Knockando is a magical place, an astonishing fragment of our rural history which has stayed unchanged for over 220 years. The Heritage Lottery Fund is delighted to be able to give it a new lease of life. The Woolmill is not only set to become a major tourist attraction for the area but also a source of learning, where young people can touch the working looms of their ancestors and learn the skills of this traditional Scottish craft, which were in danger of being lost forever."

Commenting from the Knockando Woolmill Trust, Jana Hutt, Chair, said: "Our philosophy is to restore the site by doing as much as is necessary but changing as little as possible. We want to keep the unique 'feel' of the place – the sights, sounds and smells of a small working woollen mill. We want to share the thrill of seeing cloth grow as it is being made in the loom and know that a piece of history has been produced. The Heritage Lottery grant has been key to ensuring the Woolmill is saved for future generations as a piece of living heritage."

The site, which is currently inaccessible to the public, consists of the woolmill, which will continue as a working mill; the woolmill house, which will provide staff and trainee facilities; the cottage which will be used for interpretation; the old shop which will be used for display; and the byre which will be converted into a visitor centre with exhibition space, cafe and an education room. Features such as the water wheel and its lade will be reinstated and the tenter frames conserved. A new training workshop will be built to restore the machinery and provide training in traditional skills. A future for Knockando as a historic visitor attraction and a centre for commercial wool production lies ahead through this project.

In addition to the physical conservation, the Heritage Lottery grant will be used to fund an education officer for 5 years. Their role will be to ensure that every visitor takes away a level of understanding of the traditions of Knockando, from tours and interpretation to student placements and longer-term apprenticeships. There will also be education work carried out with local schools as they explore this important link to our industrial heritage.

Work on the project will start on site in August and is scheduled to be completed by October 2011.

Further information

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