Much Wenlock Museum wins lottery grant

23/05/2011

Work is due to begin at Much Wenlock Museum on Monday 23 May, and will see exciting changes and improvements to the museum, its collections and facilities.

The museum holds the archives of William Penny Brookes, widely regarded as the pioneer of the modern Olympics. The Much Wenlock resident founded the Wenlock Olympian Society in 1850 and held the first Wenlock Olympian Games in the same year.

He was also a highly regarded doctor, justice of the peace, botanist, and a keen advocate of the benefits of physical education – a factor that inspired Baron Pierre de Coubertin to visit him, witness the Games, and subsequently found the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1894.

The improvement project will broaden the appeal of Much Wenlock Museum to local visitors and beyond, creating new exhibitions, heritage walks and education opportunities for people of all ages. These will focus on the Olympian and geological heritage of the area, which centres on a limestone escarpment forming nearby Wenlock Edge which is so internationally famous that it has had a period of the Silurian period named after it – the 'Wenlock Era.'

Anticipated visitor levels during the 2012 Olympic year are expected to double from 25,000 to 50,000 due to Much Wenlock's heritage connection.

Anne Jenkins, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund for the West Midlands, said: "This is an incredibly exciting time for Much Wenlock Museum. With the Olympics just around the corner and such a fascinating historical connection to the Games, the whole town will benefit from the investment that this project brings to the area."

Councillor Keith Barrow, Shropshire Council's leader, said: "This is an important project for Shropshire which recognises the unique influence that William Penny Brookes and the town of Much Wenlock had on the development of the modern Olympic movement. We look forward to welcoming visitors from the UK and abroad in 2012 to discover the story and to enjoy the stunning landscape which so inspired Brookes and his contemporaries."

Councillor Mike Owen, Shropshire Council's Cabinet member for business growth and prosperity, said: "This is great news for the town and I would like to recognise all the support that the project team have had from the local community in developing the plans and getting the project this far."

Milner Whiteman, Shropshire Councillor for Much Wenlock, said: "I am very pleased that this Lottery Funding has been approved for the Much Wenlock Museum. The museum is a very important part of the visitor experience in the town and we shall have the improvements ready for the Olympic year and the full story of Much Wenlock connection will be there for all to see."

The project, which will be completed in December, will also feature installations representing other local heritage themes, including Wenlock Priory, the building's former history as a cinema, and the inspiration that the surrounding area has provided to numerous literary and artistic figures such as Housman, Mary Webb, and Vaughn Williams. In addition to the exhibitions, a local history resource will be created for residents, schools and community groups.

Notes to editors

*The HLF grant to the project Much Wenlock Museum Redevelopment Project is for £520,800 (87% of project costs) and is a confirmed award.

Much Wenlock Museum
Find out more about Much Wenlock and its Olympic heritage.

Further information

HLF press office: Vicky Wilford, 020 7591 6046 / 07973 401 937, email vickyw@hlf.org.uk.

Laura Owen, Shropshire Council communications and marketing officer, on 01743 255 618, or email laura.owen@shropshire.gov.uk.