Regimental museum's towering achievement

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A museum charting the history of a regiment linked to the Tower of London for more than 400 years will receive a complete makeover, thanks to confirmation of a £300,000 grant* from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) it was announced today.

The Royal Fusiliers Museum, housed in a Grade I listed Officers Mess building built in 1845 and first opened to the public in 1962, will be expanded in size allowing more of its unique collection of artefacts to be exhibited for the first time. In addition, a new programme of learning activities for local Tower Hamlets schools coupled with community volunteering opportunities means that the museum's offer – under the project heading Fusilier Museum Advance! - will be transformed.

The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers was originally raised by James II in 1685 to guard the Tower's artillery, and they have remained connected with it ever since. The regiment is also one of those responsible for guarding the Crown Jewels.

New live interactive displays will be created at the new look museum, which will be up and running in 2011 to coincide with the Tower's year of celebration on the theme of Menagerie. This will include a Victorian soldier telling stories about the role of animals in warfare and the many exotic creatures housed within its walls over the centuries.

Sue Bowers, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund London, said: "The newly developed museum will add to the attractions that bring more than 2 million visitors to the Tower of London each year while providing the opportunity for local people, from a range of diverse backgrounds, to engage with their local army regiment."

Among the collection of artefacts at the museum are a Napoleonic Eagle, captured from a French regiment in 1809, and 12 of the Fusiliers' record 20 Victoria Crosses, one of which is the first VC to be awarded during World War I. The collections also document stories of National Service and of the regiment's involvement in both world wars, the Korean War, Northern Ireland, the Gulf, Bosnia, Iraq and now Afghanistan.

Prominent figures who have served in the regiment include Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery in WWI, the first prime minister of Israel David Ben Gurion, and actor Michael Caine in Korea.

Colin Bowes-Crick, Royal Fusiliers Museum Trust, said:
"The trustees of the Museum are delighted that HLF has approved a grant towards the Museum refurbishment. The finished product will significantly enhance the visitor experience within the Tower of London - especially for local residents who will benefit not only from visiting the museum but also from our proposed outreach programme. This exciting project will enable the Regiment to better depict our past and place in the social history of the Tower of London and Greater London.

One of the highlights of the new-look museum will be a major extension to the collections. Visitors will be able to experience a new medals gallery which will focus on Lieutenant Maurice James Dease VC, who was awarded the first Victoria Cross of the Great War in August 1914, and eleven other VC's held by the museum."

The project go-ahead follows a development grant of £32,000 given by HLF to the Royal Fusiliers Museum Trust earlier

this year. This enabled a detailed plan to be drawn up explaining how the museum space would be completely refurbished and extended and new learning activities created with the help of an outreach officer working with the local diverse community in Tower Hamlets.

The project will also permit free entry to the museum. Local residents and schools already get discounted access to the Tower of London for just £1 and will now be able to visit the Royal Fusiliers Museum at no extra cost.

Further information

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* The HLF grant to the project Fusilier Museum Advance! is for £300,000 (39% of project costs) and is a second-round pass, which means it is a confirmed award.