Uncovering Woking Palace’s Tudor past

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Woking Palace was a significant moated country manor in the 15th and 16th centuries acquired by Henry VII in 1503 and subsequently improved and expanded by both Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. It was eventually sold by James I and later demolished.

Although little of the structure remains standing the site has been the subject of archaeological excavations. Thanks to the HLF grant to the Friends of Woking Palace, these will now recommence in earnest.

Each summer for the next three years a series of surveys and digs will take place led by professionals from Surrey County Archaeological Unit supported by experienced volunteers from Surrey Archaeological Society and members of local communities, including up to 1000 young people. Volunteering and learning are key aspects of the project with opportunities for people of all ages to train for a range of accredited archaeological skills.

The work will be enhanced by newly devised learning activities and materials for local primary and secondary schools linked to the National Curriculum. Interpretation of artefacts is an important aspect of the project and this will be supported by the Lightbox which will be developing new temporary and permanent displays about the history of the palace.

As well as the on-site excavations a variety of other activities are planned, aimed especially at families. These will include Tudor costume and cookery workshops, heritage walks, Tudor re-enactments and demonstrations.

Other professional bodies supporting the project include Archaeology South East (survey work), the University of Reading (environmental and other scientific support) and the University of Nottingham (analysis of animal bones). A full report on the excavations and finds will be published at the completion of the project.

Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East England, said: "This project will be giving local people, and especially large numbers of schoolchildren, an invaluable opportunity to get hands-on experience in archaeology to unearth evidence that will bring to life stories of what was happening in Woking during Tudor times."

For the Friends of Woking Palace, Jean Follett said: "We are delighted that our application for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund has been approved. These funds will enable us to learn much more about the history of this beautiful moated site and its 590 acre Deer Park through documentary research and archaeological investigations. We hope the project will throw light on the development of the important early manor house from the 12th century through to its transformation into the Tudor Palace.

"We are thrilled that this HLF grant will allow us, with help from many volunteers, to engage in an extensive activities and outreach programme, taking the project to the local community and sharing our passion for Woking Palace with many more people, including local schools and clubs. The grant will also enable the creation of both temporary and permanent displays about the 400 year history of Woking Palace and its park at the Lightbox, Woking's Museum and Art Gallery."

The site of the palace has been owned by Woking Borough Council since 1988. The council has worked closely with the Friends of Woking Palace since the group was formed in 2003.

Notes to editors

The site of Woking Palace lies to the east of Old Woking. In the late 15th century Lady Margaret Beaufort was in possession of Woking manor which became an important centre for the Tudors during the Wars of the Roses. When her son was crowned Henry VII the palace was visited regularly by royalty.

Surrey County Archaeological Unit is part of Surrey County Council.

To find out more about Woking Palace and the Friends, visit the Woking Palace website.

Further information

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