St. Mary's 3R's Churchyard Project wins Heritage



St Mary's churchyard has a wealth of heritage

Led by local volunteers, the '3R's Project' will focus on the conservation and restoration of nine architecturally interesting and historically important tombs and the research and recording of details of old village families. The project will also include the creation of a wildlife garden providing a wide range of habitats for small endanged birds and animals and a new churchyard guide enabling visitors to enjoy the historically interesting area around the church. To help ensure the future of the churchyard, an 'Adopt-the Grave' scheme, providing volunteers with numerous opportunities to help maintain this beautiful area, is also planned.

Many of the unique monuments in St. Mary's Churchyard are in a poor state of repair and, in some cases, are in imminent danger of collapsing. Conservation work is due to start in November 2015 and will be completed by September 2016. The restoration work will be undertaken by Heritage craftsmen who will use old traditional methods of forging and casting iron and the damaged stonework will be repaired or replaced using locally quarried stone.

A local volunteer cameraman will record and follow the renovation process, from the initial site visit and the dismantling of the railings, the forging and making of the new ironwork and visits to the stonemason workshop to document the repairs to the stonework. A DVD will be produced and this will be available to the wider community, including the village school, church and local history society. A copy will also be given to the local archives' office, for wider public access, and will be available via the village website.

A significant part of the project will be undertaken by volunteers from the village genealogy group who will research and record information on the many old Hampstead Norreys families who are buried in the churchyard; to discover who they were, where they lived and what impact they had on village life. The new *Guidebook to the Churchyard* will enable locals and visitors to explore and enjoy the beautiful, peaceful area around the church whilst discovering something of its past history and heritage and pupils from the village school, together with members from the local youth club are planning a wildlife garden. It will incorporate a varied selection of indigenous plants, to attract bees and butterflies and many other insects. Additionally, it will provide a wide range of habitats for some of our smaller, endanged, birds and animals and will include bat boxes, hedgehog houses, bird boxes etc.

The 'Adopt-a-Grave Scheme' is recruiting volunteers to help maintain and look after many of the older Victorian graves. This is a very important part of the project and volunteers are being actively sought to help with this work.

Working with local historians, archivists and heritage professionals the whole village community will have the opportunity to be involved in the many different aspects of this community initiative New skills, in communication, research, media and project management will be taught and learnt as people from across all ages come together to work on this important historical project.

Commenting on the award, Sheila Craig, Project Manager said: “We are absolutely thrilled to have received the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund and we are looking forward to the start of this exciting new project. Without their support these unusual and unique tombs would, undoubtedly, collapse and if that happened a significant part of this beautiful village’s long history and heritage would be lost forever."

Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East, said: “Churchyards are a fascinating blend of social history and natural heritage, yet are often overlooked and unloved. We are delighted that, thanks to National Lottery players, we have been able to fund this exciting project which will protect both the monuments and the wildlife in the area, and allow local people to explore the history and heritage on their doorstep.”

Notes to editors

The small rural conservation village of Hampstead Norreys has a population of approximately 750 people. It is situated in an area of outstanding beauty on the lovely Berkshire Downs.

St Mary’s Church, is a Grade I listed building, which is located in the heart of the village and the churchyard dates from around the 13th century. It contains a large number of unique 18th and 19th century tombs which are of both historical and architectural interest and they importantly map the journey of village life from one generation to another and gives valuable insight into the past history of the village.

Further information

For further information, images and interviews, please contact Sheila Craig, Project Manager, 3R’s Churchyard Project, 01635 201 303 or email: sheilacraig@uk2.net.



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Volunteers will explore the history of St Mary's graveyard

Not just things that go bump in the night