Wooden world: Hadrian's Wall Roman time capsule

Vindolanda's ancient toilet seat The Vindolanda Trust

Rare preserved artefacts of everyday Roman life, including toilet seats and potter's wheels, could be seen by public for the first time thanks to National Lottery support for a new project.

Best known as the discovery place of Britain's oldest surviving handwritten documents, Vindolanda's oxygen-free archaeological make-up has resulted in the preservation of other organic material which usually doesn't survive the test of time.

As well as examples of leather, textiles and flora, 1,463 wooden objects have been excavated at the site – from water pipes and axles to a toilet seat and potter's wheels. Alongside the ancient Roman fort, the collection tells the fascinating everyday story of those who lived and worked on the Northern Frontier nearly 2,000 years ago.

The Unlocking Vindolanda's Wooden Underworld project will expand the museum by creating a gallery with special display cases allowing temperature and humidity to be kept at safe levels, enabling more of the wooden collection to be taken out of storage.

Visitors will also hear the incredible survival story of the collection – from the science behind how they lasted two millennia to their conservation and the research that is uncovering their origins.

Patricia Birley, Chair of the Vindolanda Trust's Development and Impact Committee, said: "We are thrilled that HLF is offering support to this project that will build a beautiful extension to the museum at Vindolanda. The fit for purpose facility will create a truly inspiring exhibition and activity area to enable a wide range of users to access the Trust's outstanding collection of wooden objects and the fascinating stories that they reveal about their part in everyday life at Roman Vindolanda."

Ivor Crowther, Head of HLF North East, said: "What an incredible collection, its size and scope of wooden Roman artefacts is unrivalled in Britain – but it's currently hidden away in storage! We're delighted to support these plans to bring the collection and its fascinating story into the public eye for the first time. We look forward to seeing the plans develop."

A development grant of £20,400 has been awarded by HLF to enable the Trust to develop the plans and apply for a full grant of £1,339,000 at a later date.

Notes to editors

The Vindolanda Trust is an independent archaeological charitable trust, founded in 1970. The Vindolanda Trust does not receive any annual funding and relies to the visitors to both Roman Vindolanda and the Roman Army Museum to fund its archaeological, conservation and education work. Roman Vindolanda is regarded as the most exciting archaeological site in Europe with its wealth of archaeological remains and ongoing excavations. Vindolanda is home to the world famous Vindolanda Writing Tablets, voted as Britain's top archaeological treasure by the British Museum. These thin handwritten wooden notes have revealed an astonishing amount of first-hand information from the people who lived at this site 2,000 years ago. For more information visit the Vindolanda website.

Further information

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