

The current Lord Leycester Brethren. Credit: Kevin Fern

National Lottery funding – announced ahead of Remembrance Sunday – means former soldiers and their stories will continue to have a historic home in Warwick.

One of England's most intact medieval buildings – an almshouse for ex-soldiers – will be restored and opened up thanks to £1.42million National Lottery funding.

Nine hundred years of history

The Grade I listed Lord Leycester Hospital started life as a chapel in 1126. Between the 13th and the 15th century, it was expanded by Warwick's wealthy guilds to include two great halls, living quarters and public buildings surrounding a courtyard.



Lord Leycester courtyard. Credit: Kevin Fern

Statesman and military commander Robert Dudley, 1st Earl of Leicester, acquired the buildings in 1571 and founded an almshouse for those "maimed or hurt in the wars in service of the Queen’s majesty".

The Masters and the Brethren

An old photograph showing a group of elderly men in formal dress

The Brethren in 1897. Credit: Lord Leycester Hospital

More than 400 such people – known as the ‘Brethren’ or ‘Brothers’– have lived at the hospital over the 450 years since. They have fought in numerous battles and wars, including the Battle of Waterloo, the Crimean War and both World Wars.

The Brethren are looked after by a ‘Master’, who (since the Second World War) also has a military background. Together they have played a civic role throughout history, including by distributing poor relief to homeless people, travellers and ex-prisoners. Six Brothers and a Master live at the hospital today.

At 84-years-old, Gordon Hill is the oldest of the Brethen. He said: “I joined the RAF at 18 years of age and was stationed all over the world. I was lucky to get a place at the Lord Leycester Hospital and have lived here for the past five years. We are one big happy family. We give each other companionship, support, shared experiences and laughter. ”

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Brother Gordon Hill

Fit for the 21st century

National Lottery funding will pay for critical works to the ancient timber buildings, preventing the Brethren's home from falling into disrepair.

A new welcome space, restroom, café and gift shop will all be created, and the introduction of wider garden paths, ramps and a lift will improve access. Heating, lighting and ventilation will be upgraded, significantly improving sustainability and reducing costs.

Together, these works will enable the Brethren to live and host visitors in greater comfort. They will also generate increased funding for building upkeep – including through venue hire. Six full-time jobs will be created to support this.

Lots to see and do

Close up of two bullets and two medals

Bullets removed from James Herbert's leg, with his
?????medals received during the Crimean war either side.
Credit: Lord Leycester Hospital

New and improved exhibition spaces will help the Brethren better tell the hospital's fascinating story.

A remarkable collection of war memorabilia has been gathered down the years, including two bullets removed from Brother James Herbert's leg during the Crimean War and a cavalry sword brought home from the Battle of Waterloo by Brother William Lawton.

In total, 300 onsite objects and 2,000 archive items – many in storage – will be given a new lease of life within the building and on a new website.

Alongside tours, this rich history will be shared in talks, music performances, family days, school visits and more. Working with local charities, the hospital will offer wellbeing activities to support veterans, people with disabilities and people experiencing mental health issues. These include art classes, yoga, book clubs and gardening.

Thanks to National Lottery players

Anne Jenkins, Director of England, Midlands & East at The National Lottery Heritage Fund, said: "We are delighted to announce this funding on Armistice Day, as we remember all those who have fought in, and been affected by, wars across the world.

"Thanks to National Lottery players, the magnificent and historic Lord Leycester Hospital will begin a sustainable new chapter, enabling it to continue caring for ex-servicemen and women, and sharing the stories of Brethren past and present, long into the future."

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The Poppy story goes on the road



Buxton Crescent Credit: Ensana



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