Barn raising benefits

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Traditional barns are found all over Cumbria, but local tithe barns with historical features and comprehensive documentation are harder to find. Which is why the old Musgrave ‘Tythe’ Barn, close to St Theobald’s Church on the banks of the River Eden, has particular heritage value.

Musgrave Church Field Trust, which owns the field where the old threshing barn, byre and stables are sited, has been awarded a £13,500 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) towards essential repair and restoration works.

The Musgrave ‘Tythe’ Barn project (the alternative spelling comes from the historic documents) aims to put the buildings into good repair for basic educational and community use, while renovating and conserving the historical features. These include a beaten earth floor with a cobbled section in the barn, and old cattle stalls with tethering posts, separated by stone slabs and wooden ‘boskins’ or partitions, and a cobbled floor in the byre. The stables were added in 1937.

The beaten earth floor is a rare survival. They were made from a mixture of sand, clay and straw, and the Musgrave barn floor retains a link to the old custom of rushbearing, when reeds and sweet-smelling herbs were strewn on the church floor. St Theobald’s Church may have lost its own beaten earth floor long ago, but the custom survives as an annual rushbearing procession in July.

The renovated buildings will be used as a venue for visiting groups to learn about historic building conservation, local history and our natural heritage.

Local schoolchildren already visit the field to learn about natural history, the river Eden, and farming methods, and the barn will now provide shelter and a venue for talks and displays for other groups such as history societies, local community groups and conservation students.

Musgrave ‘Tythe’ Barn is also noteworthy because the history of the field, the buildings and the parish can be traced through dozens of historical documents, including Taxation and Church Surveys, two Tithe Books from 1727 to 1751, Probate Inventories and Glebe Terriers (inventories of glebe lands attached to a parish church) in the Cumbria archives and elsewhere. Documents date back to 1248 with detailed records from 1663. For instance, the annual income for the church, including tithes, dropped from £13/6/8 in 1291 to only £1 in 1318, following Scottish raids in 1314.

The Trust will work with the Cumbria Archive Service, which looks after many of the glebe documents, to bring some of them to the village for talks and displays alongside costume enactments. Permanent display panels will be erected inside the barn documenting its history.

“The Heritage Lottery Fund grant will support both the building works and the educational programme we want to instigate,” says Michael Lea, one of the trustees. “We can now secure the barn’s future as a heritage site, maintaining its historical value while also making it good for activities.”

The Your Heritage grant comprises a quarter of the cost of the total project, with the majority of the funding from Natural England, with some smaller grants from other heritage charities. Musgrave Church Field Trust has a 10-year Higher

Level Stewardship agreement, which will ensure the benefits continue beyond the life of the HLF-funded project.

Sara Hilton, Head of the Heritage Lottery North West, said: “The Musgrave Tythe Barn and surrounding buildings are of extraordinary heritage value and date back to the 1200s. We are proud to be supporting its restoration and helping to ensure the sites long-term future, this is just what Heritage Lottery Fund money should be used for. This project will provide wide-reaching benefits for the local community, particularly schoolchildren, giving them a dedicated space to learn about and enjoy this important part of their heritage.”

Further information

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