London's First World War ‘battlebus’ leads capital’s grant windfall

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The anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War is rapidly approaching and now an historic B-type bus – one of over a thousand driven from the streets of London to the trenches of the Western Front – will be restored to full working order thanks to a £750,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). It is one of a rich mix of awards just announced for London, and which also includes restoration of two of the capital’s magnificent houses – a Gothic fantasy and a Tudor mansion.

Wesley Kerr, Chairman of HLF’s Committee for London, said: “For London’s heritage Spring has really arrived with this prodigious inflorescence of projects across the metropolis. The B-type battlebus makes physical connection with the heroism and trauma of World War. Two fabled houses; Strawberry Hill - the aesthetic masterpiece of a quirky 18th century bachelor spawned a world architectural style and the Gothic novel, and Lauderdale - an amazing survival. Middlesex market gardens will be remembered and recreated. A lost photographic history of early 20th century Black Britons recovered, and a new home for a unique collection of masterpieces created by people with psychiatric illness. I am proud and delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund is once again supporting the wonderful immensity of London.”

Revered as the Routemaster of its day the open-top B-type bus was pressed into military service at the beginning of the war. Swapping their bright red London General Omnibus Company livery for sombre army khaki the buses – numbering some 1,500 – were commandeered to act as troop and equipment transports, ambulances, and even mobile pigeon lofts enabling messages to be sent from the frontline back to headquarters.

And it was not only the vehicles that were used, their civilian drivers and mechanics went with them as well, often into dangerous territory in France and Flanders. The B-type’s unique design, using for the first time standardised interchangeable components, made them ideal for rigorous wartime use, and also makes the task of rebuilding one more straightforward.

The project will be undertaken by the London Transport Museum making use of surviving original parts and replica components. It will also fund a five-year programme of learning and participation activities with volunteers and apprentices across the entire centenaries of the war. Once completed, in August 2014, the vehicle, finished in its wartime livery, will take part in a programme of commemorative events and a touring roadshow. The project will also underline the fact that while the men were away at war women were employed for the first time by the London General Omnibus Company as conductresses and clerks, striking a blow for the social revolution that followed the conflict.

Sam Mullins, Director of London Transport Museum, said: “As the centenary of the start of the Great War, 2014 will be an occasion for remembrance and a watershed in commemorating both the sacrifice and social impact of these years on London and the UK.

“From 2014 to 2018, both at the museum and at events around the Capital, we will recount the forgotten stories of civilian Londoners. Our project will restore a B-type ‘Battle Bus’ to its wartime condition when over one thousand

London bus drivers ferried troops to the Western Front and brought the wounded home. We will tell how women were involved in the transport workforce for the first time, how the Underground was first used for to shelter from bombs and how the sacrifice of so many Londoners was memorialised. The B-type was the first standardised motorbus for London and through this project one of the last known surviving examples will be returned to working order as wartime troop transport."

Also announced this week are grants to enable restoration work at two magnificent residences – Horace Walpole's Strawberry Hill at Twickenham and Lauderdale House at Highgate Hill where Charles II entertained his mistress Nell Gwynn.

Strawberry Hill: Restoration of house and grounds Phase Two - £821,100 confirmed grant
Of national and international importance, Horace Walpole's Grade I-listed Strawberry Hill Villa is the most significant example of Gothic revival architecture of the 18th century. Now that a prize-winning HLF supported restoration of the historic building is complete and open to the public, this Phase Two of essential works will restore private rooms in the extraordinary villa and its Grade II listed garden at Twickenham to complement the rest of the building.

Walpole's Bedchamber, the Green Closet, the Blue Breakfast Room, John Chute's Bedchamber and the Holbein Chamber will be restored. A new visitor orientation point will be created at the site, and there will be improved facilities for staff, volunteers and visitors including office, storage facilities, workshop and toilets. The project plan includes training for students and volunteers in a variety of skills from NVQ to graduate level.
Contact: Nick Smith, Director at nicholas.smith@strawberryhillhouse.org.uk.

Lauderdale House Transformed - £800,000 confirmed grant
Lauderdale House is a Grade II* listed Tudor building situated in the 26-acre Waterlow Park on Highgate Hill. The house, which has historical links with the early Quakers and Methodists, was once owned by the Earl of Lauderdale during whose time Charles II, Nell Gwynn and diarist Samuel Pepys all visited. The park was restored thanks to an HLF grant in 1997 and the house has undergone a partial restoration to repair damage caused by a serious fire in 1963.

The money will enable the Lauderdale House Society to continue the restoration by transforming the fire damaged Long Gallery into a heritage centrepiece of the building. Visitor facilities include a new learning centre, improved access, especially for disabled people, and conservation of features including an oak panelled dresser known as Nell Gwynn's Bath. A Heritage Education Officer will also increase public awareness and understanding of the house over a three year period, and add to its already dynamic programme of events. In particular they will work with local young people to involve them in heritage and cultural activities and make connections between the house and their own communities.
Contact: Katherine Ives on 020 8348 8716 / 07929 798782 or kives@lauderdale.org.uk.

Completing the batch of six major heritage projects for the capital are:

Bethlem's Museum of the Mind – a £550,000 grant will fit out a museum for a remarkable collection of artefacts, records and amazing works of art created by and about those with psychiatric illness. It sits on the current site of one of the world's oldest institutions for the treatment of mental illness, Bethlem Royal Hospital now at Beckenham, originally founded in 1247, which gave the word 'bedlam' to the English language.
Contact: Victoria Northwood on 020 3228 4227 or victoria.northwood@slam.nhs.uk.

Jam Yesterday, Jam Tomorrow – a £293,000 grant will fund a major learning project to chart the little-known history

of the extensive market gardening that covered much of the county of Middlesex during the 19th century. It will involve many volunteer and educational opportunities, bring back lost plants and recreate a model market garden at Marble Hill House.
Contact: Angela Kidner on 020 8892 6474 or angelakidner@blueyonder.co.uk.

Missing Chapter - £397,800 grant will help create the first comprehensive photographic record of Black, Asian and mixed race individuals and communities living in, moving to and working in Britain from the mid-19th century onwards. Partnering with other institutions Autograph ABP will foreground forgotten archive images through direct engagement with a wide range of audiences.
Contact: Renee Mussai on 020 7729 9200 or renee@autograph-abp.co.uk.

From May 2013 HLF will launch First World War: Then and Now, a £6m small grants programme to help communities mark the centenaries of First World War. There will be £1m available every year of the programme, which will run until 2019, providing grants between £3,000 to £10,000 to projects exploring the impact of the conflict on their communities.

Further information

Heritage Lottery Fund: Vicky Wilford, Communications Manager on 020 7591 6046 / 07973 401 937 or vickyw@hlf.org.uk.

London Transport Museum: Wendy Neville, Head of Marketing and Communications on 020 7565 7266 or wendy.neville@ltmuseum.co.uk.