Coffin Works restoration to bring 100 years of funeral fashion alive

21/07/2011

Just under £1million has now been confirmed from Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) so that the Birmingham Conservation Trust (BCT) (previously responsible for restoring top city-centre heritage attraction the Back-to-Backs) can carry out urgent conservation and repairs to the Grade II* listed building and its contents.

Once the maker of the world's finest coffin furniture, including fittings for the coffins of Churchill, Chamberlain and Diana, Princess of Wales, the Coffin Works was at the centre of the coffin trade in Birmingham, with the city itself the industry market leader in the 19th-century. Reaching the finals of BBC Restoration in 2003 for its unique interiors, the site can now look forward to a bright future with a four-year project, which represents the first phase in a larger scheme to provide new uses and a long term vision for the Coffin Works as tourist attraction. There will also be lots of opportunities for the community to get involved either through volunteering or a varied programme of events, tours and education activities for people of all ages.

Built in 1894, the Coffin Works is described as a typical example of a late 19th century Jewellery Quarter factory, yet today it is the last complete historic building remaining on Fleet Street. With its contents remaining in situ when the building was sold in 2003 – including vast quantities of coffin fittings such as handles, breast plates, crucifixes and shrouds as well as documents including sales ledgers, clock cards, photographs and catalogues – the disused factory not only gives us a unique insight into changing rituals and attitudes towards death, but it also paints a remarkable picture of over 100 years of manufacturing and life in a Victorian factory in Birmingham.

Anne Jenkins, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in the West Midlands said: "This exciting project will see the Coffin Works – leader in its field and one of only three remaining in the UK at the time of closure – preserved for future generations. When complete it will present the public with a rare opportunity to explore the modern heritage of death in the UK, a fascinating subject set to become an enduring attraction for Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter."

The Jewellery Quarter where the Coffin Works is located is considered by English Heritage to be of international significance and was recently put forward for World Heritage status by Birmingham City Council. Elizabeth Perkins, BCT Trust Director explains further what the HLF money will mean: "After ten years of working on this project this grant makes all the difference. HLF's support means we will now be able to attract the remaining funds we need to rescue this fantastic building and its remarkable contents from crumbling decay. We can set about transforming the Coffin Works into a place where people can come to find out more about its intriguing past, learn new skills, meet new people, take part in activities and even carry on their businesses. Once repaired, the building will be the new home for Birmingham Conservation Trust and we are really excited about involving people in all aspects of the project from the meticulous repairs and conservation work on the contents, to fun events such as Gothic suppers in the Shroud Room!"

Shabana Mahmood, MP for Ladywood, Birmingham, also offered her support for the project: "I am pleased that the Newman Brothers Coffin Works has been awarded a Heritage Lottery Fund award for restoration, as it will add vibrancy to the Jewellery Quarter and allow generations to come to experience a bit of Birmingham history. I am encouraged to see that it provides opportunities for community involvement, education and tourism, which are all important to an area

such as Birmingham Ladywood. I look forward to working with the Coffin Works."

Notes to editors

As pictured, Anne Jenkins, Head of HLF West Midlands, with Cllr Bob Beauchamp, and Elizabeth Perkins - Trustees for the Birmingham Conservation Trust (BCT) - in the Stamp Room at the Coffin Works.

The HLF grant to the project Coffin Works Project Phase One is for £999,400 (49% of project costs) and is a confirmed award.

To date, HLF have made 480 awards in Birmingham amounting to just over £62.2million. Birmingham is a Priority Development Area within the West Midlands as HLF has historically received fewer applications from this area compared with others within the region.

Birmingham Conservation Trust
Established in 1978, Birmingham Conservation Trust is a charity created to preserve and enhance Birmingham's threatened architectural heritage. We are here to promote an enjoyment and understanding of the city's historic buildings.

Newman Brother Coffin Works
Find out more about the Coffin Works factory and the Jewellery Quarter**.**

Further information

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