Poet’s granddaughter welcomes major HLF investment in Swansea’s Dylan Thomas Centre

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The HLF grant will enable the expansion of the current Dylan Thomas Exhibition, allowing for unique memorabilia, previously kept in archives, to be placed on display. This includes a short, but sweet, love letter from Dylan Thomas to his wife Caitlin, hastily scribbled on the back of a pay-in bank stub. As part of this project, a collection of Thomas’ notebooks will be returned to Wales on loan for the first time since he sold them in 1941 to the University of Buffalo, in New York, where he later died.

During 2014 the Dylan Thomas Centre will be the focus of the centenary celebrations, in Swansea and beyond, reflecting its role as an international hub for Dylan Thomas sites worldwide. The grant awarded will ensure that the new-look exhibition can now be opened in time to mark the centenary of his birthday in October.

Hannah Ellis, Thomas’ granddaughter, has played a key role in securing funding for the project. Commenting on the significance of preserving this collection that tells her grandfather’s complex story, she said: “The Centre is home to the largest collection of Dylan Thomas related material in the world, a collection that provides a unique insight into who my grandfather truly was. I want young and new audiences to be able to learn about and discover my grandfather’s poems, his stories and his plays. This grant from the HLF will bring the exhibition into the 21st Century and open it up for future generations to enjoy.”

Manon Williams, Chair of HLF’s Committee for Wales, said: “Dylan Thomas is not only an iconic Welsh figure, he is also recognised as one of the world’s greatest literary figures whose life and works play a central part in our national consciousness. During a year of festivities marking his life, the Heritage Lottery Fund is thrilled to be able to play a part in anniversary celebrations by ensuring that his legacy is secured and revived.”

Celebrated Literary Figure
Born in Swansea in 1914, Dylan Thomas is regarded as an iconic Welsh figure, both in Wales and further afield. His work reflects much of Swansea’s history in the early 20th century and he is best known for his many great poems including: Fern Hill; The Hunchback in the Park; and Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night. Following his death in 1953 at the age of 39, his life and work have continuously been a source of interest and he boasts a large number of high-profile admirers, including former US President Jimmy Carter, who officially opened the Dylan Thomas Centre in 1995.

President Jimmy Carter, a lifelong fan of the poet said: “Dylan Thomas was one of the greatest poets of the past century and I have always felt an affinity to his poetry and literature. I have continuously advocated the importance of commemorating his life and work and having first opened this important centre in Swansea, it is great to see that this funding will ensure that the Dylan Thomas Centre can continue to thrive in years to come.”

The First Minister, Carwyn Jones AM, commented on the importance of securing Dylan Thomas’ legacy through the Centre’s work, “It’s really important that young people are able to understand Dylan Thomas’ legacy and to get

inspiration from what he did. Here was a young man from Swansea who became one of the most well known poets in the English speaking world and it's important that young people draw inspiration from that and follow their own ambitions."

International Heritage Centre

Cllr David Phillips, Swansea Council Leader, said "The current exhibition is 13 years old and limits our ability to be creative with the large number of Dylan Thomas artefacts that we have as part of our collection. This grant will help create a vibrant learning space and build an exhibition space that will not only help us to display more of our collection but will also enable us to attract unique Dylan Thomas-related artefacts from across the world, making it a truly international heritage hub.

"But as Wales's city of culture, it's important that the exhibition isn't the only point in Swansea where people can access our world class collection of Dylan Thomas materials. This grant will enable us to have an exciting offsite education and community engagement programme to ensure that schools and people of all ages and backgrounds across the city can benefit from learning more about Dylan and his life and work in ways that will inspire them."

UK Minister for Culture, Ed Vaizey said: "Dylan Thomas was one of our literary giants of the 20th century. He could breathe poetic life into the most mundane of situations and his work was deeply personal, extremely profound and accessible to people of all backgrounds.

"HLF share the government's desire to mark the UK's most important anniversaries and commemorative events and I'm especially pleased that they are helping to fund the Dylan Thomas Centre in Swansea this year, the centenary of Thomas' birth. This grant will help ensure his legacy, so that it can be enjoyed and understood by many generations to come."

Notes to editors

The £935,700 grant has been awarded by HLF to the City & County of Swansea for the redevelopment of the Dylan Thomas Centre.

About the Dylan Thomas Centre and project plans:

- The Dylan Thomas Centre is a Grade II listed building run in partnership with the University of Wales, Trinity St. David's, Swansea. The collection holds approximately 950 artefacts, around 140 of which form a permanent exhibition called Dylan Thomas: Man and Myth, which is free entry.
- The currently permanent exhibition which has been in place for 13 years offers a 'one size fits all' learning model that doesn't provide flexibility required to attract the varying audiences.
- The project will focus on refreshing the current exhibition and the creation of new education facilities including a multimedia AV room and education suite.
- A new Education Officer will develop and expand the learning offer of the centre with input from Dylan Thomas' granddaughter Hannah Ellis and in partnership with organisations including National Library of Wales to complement activities planned by the Welsh Government, including writing workshops, events and activity packs.
- Plans are already in place to use a collection of Dylan Thomas' notebooks, which he sold to the University of Buffalo New York in 1941, bringing them back on loan to Wales for the first time in over 70 years. The grant allows for the creation of suitable exhibition space to display the notebooks. This project is supported by DT100

and is in partnership with National Library of Wales and The Poetry Collection of the University Libraries, University at Buffalo, The State University of New York.

- An oral histories project during the development phase will aim to capture the memories of the few people still living who knew Dylan Thomas and will explore the social and political context of his writing.
- Digitisation of the collection will ensure high quality images are available for the future. www.dylanthomas.com will be updated and expanded to include more digitised items from the collection along with new interpretation

Further information

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