Lacock Unlocked

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Wiltshire Council has received a grant of £492,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to acquire the archives of the Lacock Abbey estate and make them available to the public at Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre through a three-year project called 'Lacock Unlocked'.

The Lacock Archive dates back to the 12th century providing a fascinating glimpse into the evolution of the community, its landscape and environment over 800 years. There are more than 100 boxes of estate records including early deeds and charters, maps, letters, diaries, photographs and recipe books and naval records. Among the gems is an illuminated pardon of Sir Wiliam Sharington by Edward VI, dated 1549.

The collection sheds light on the many owners of Lacock Abbey such as the Talbot family, including William Henry Fox Talbot, a pioneer of photography. The Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, along with support from the local community, managed to secure the Heritage Lottery Fund investment to retain the valuable resource.

Stuart Wheeler, Cabinet Member for Heritage, said: "Hearing we had secured the HLF funding to keep this valuable archive within the local community for generations to come is an early Christmas present for us. These manuscripts detail hundreds of years of history and are of national significance and we will be working to ensure this is shared as widely as possible."

Alan MacRae, Chair of Corsham Area Board which helped secure the funding bid, said: “Corsham Area Board represents the local community and by providing a grant at the beginning we helped launch this lottery bid. We are proud to have helped keep this historical gem within Wiltshire. Any large estate or family archive is like a complex jigsaw puzzle and it is wonderful that this collection will be kept together for future generations to enjoy.”

Of the £492,000 funding, £420,000 will purchase the archive while £72,000 will be used towards conserving the archive, cataloguing it and making it accessible to the public. Future plans include making the collection accessible to schools as part of the curriculum, creating an interactive community archive website and a mobile phone app.

Claire Skinner, principal archivist at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, said: “We have exciting plans to ensure this historical treasure is as widely accessible as possible. We will also need volunteers to help us list and repair documents, work on the website and help with workshops and exhibitions. We want people to get involved and be a part of this exciting project. Please get in touch if you would like to find out more."

Richard Bellamy, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund South West, said: “The Heritage Lottery Fund is delighted to be supporting this project to preserve the Lacock Abbey collection for people of all ages to learn from and enjoy - many for the first time. By making this fascinating archive more widely available, particularly through the use of 21st century digital technology such as a website and a mobile phone app, Wiltshire Council will help to provide a real insight into the life of the people of Lacock over hundreds of years, ensuring these gems of our past are not overlooked or forgotten.”

Further information

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