Remarkable life and work of Wiltshire poet, Alfred Williams to be told

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The award of £35,000 will allow the Alfred Williams Heritage Society to make more people aware of South Marston-born Williams, who died in 1930.

The grant will finance a part-time Project Co-ordinator for a full year, but there will be money left over to mount a permanent exhibit about Alfred, which will go on display locally. The Society will also use the grant to produce educational material and organise events for local schoolchildren, and they plan to set up a link between schools in South Marston and northern India, where Alfred served during the First World War. In addition the Society has an ongoing project to make all of Williams's works available online, including previously unpublished books.

Chairma, Dr John Cullimore, a consultant surgeon at the Great Western Hospital, founded the Society in September 2009, along with Caroline Ockwell and Adver columnist Graham Carter. "The three of us had never met before," said John, "but we all find Alfred's story an inspiration, and we decided to get together and spread the word to more local people.

"Despite a lifetime of poverty and having to write in his precious spare time, Alfred's work was often reviewed in The Times and was known to three prime ministers. He wrote six books of poetry and some beautiful descriptive books about the area, including Life in a Railway Factory, which was about his experiences as a hammerman in Swindon's GWR Works.

"He was one of us and a true local hero, yet today he's largely forgotten in Swindon. We want to show people that sometimes you don't need to look as far afield as you might expect to find somebody to inspire you."

John wrote and recorded a 'rock opera' CD based on Alfred's life in 2008, called The Hammerman, and this will form the basis for a musical presentation at the two-day Alfred Williams Festival on November 12-13, which will also involve other local history groups.

Commenting on the importance of the award, the Heritage Lottery Fund's Head of Region, Nerys Watts, said: "In addition to its literary merit the work of Alfred Williams provides an important record of the social history of the Swindon area of the early 20th century and of the labour movement in Great Britain. Through a range of original and exciting activities this project will provide the opportunity for local people, including young people, to better understand and appreciate an inspiring figure from a key period in their past. We are delighted to be able to support this project and hope that it will encourage other people in the Swindon area to explore their heritage and to approach us for funding support and advice. "

The Society's first event is a Folksong Evening, which will take place at the King and Queen, Longcot, on Tuesday, April 20, reflecting another of Williams's legacies – the lyrics to hundreds of English folk songs that he collected on his travels around the area. "We have received tremendous support from people who already knew of Alfred and his achievements," said John, "including Mike Pringle of the Swindon Cultural Partnership, whose help has been invaluable. Now we can get the message across to everybody else in Swindon about the local hero they didn't know

they had.”

Notes to editors

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) enables communities to celebrate, look after and learn more about our diverse heritage. From our great museums and historic buildings to local parks and beauty spots or recording and celebrating traditions, customs and history, HLF grants open up our nation’s heritage for everyone to enjoy. Since 1994 it has supported more than 26,000 projects, allocating over £4 billion across the UK.

www.alfredwilliams.org.uk.