From gentry manor to servant quarters: improving the visitor experience at Llancaiach Fawr

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Llancaiach Fawr, which was built in 1550 by the prominent Prichard family, is considered to be one of the most important gentry houses to have survived from the 16th and 17th century period. And thanks to the HLF funding, visitors will now be able to live life on both sides of society at the manor, completing the overall experience.

The grant, which was awarded to Caerphilly County Borough Council (CCBC) to support the project, will fund the restoration of a stone roof, removal of inappropriate modern features and repair and opening of the attic. An external staircase tower and platform lift will also be installed to allow access to the upper floors for wheelchair users.

As well as conservation work, the manor will benefit from improved physical and sensory interpretation, including open fires, sound and lighting, to create an atmosphere of 17th-century domestic life and provide a better experience for people with learning difficulties. It's hoped that Llancaiach Fawr will attract 80,000 annual visitors by 2020 as a result of the improved access and interpretation.

Young people will be given an opportunity to get involved and learn about their local history. Plans include developing an archive and exhibition with Welsh Baccalaureate students from Ysgol Cwm Rhymni, and creating a filmed interpretation tour and 360º digital images of the interior with students from the University of Glamorgan. Students from the Welsh School of Architecture and construction students from Coleg Morgannwg will receive practical training placements at the Manor to gain conservation skills.

The grant will also fund the position of a Development and Outreach Officer, who will be responsible for managing community activities, developing the skills of current volunteers and attracting new audiences. Training in skills such as costumed interpretation, historic costume design and events and workshop management will be offered to around 30 volunteers.

Jennifer Stewart, Head of HLF Wales, said: "Llancaiach Fawr is a fascinating building that really captures the past and brings history to life for a wide range of audiences to enjoy. Through interactive displays and improved access the project will strengthen the manor's visitor offer to attract additional visitors which will be of benefit to the local economy as well as Wales's heritage tourism industry as a whole.

"As well as helping to conserve Llancaiach Fawr and opening up the building in its entirety, we were particularly impressed with the plans to get young people involved in learning about their heritage, while getting the chance to develop new skills and the opportunities offered for volunteers to play their part in sharing the story of the manor."

Cllr Ken James, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Planning and Sustainable Development at Caerphilly County Borough Council, said: "I am absolutely thrilled that Llancaiach Fawr's bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund has been successful. This funding will undoubtedly help transform the way we present the past to a modern audience, and enable visitors to explore more of the historic Manor House than ever before.

"This funding, together with the continued commitment from Caerphilly County Borough Council, means that visitors of all ages to Llancaiach Fawr can continue to discover the rich heritage and history of this flagship attraction for many

years to come."

Diane Walker, General Manager of Llancaiach Fawr Manor and project leader for the plans to improve the visitor experience of the manor, added: "When we began work on this project we wanted to make sure that we told a complete story of the all the people who lived and worked in the manor but also to ensure that everybody who wanted to explore this wonderful place could do so.

"With the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, not only will we will be able to show the difference between the living conditions of the servants, as well as the gentry owners, for the first time, but we will also be able to open up the vast majority of the building to visitors with mobility difficulties who have formerly only been able to access the ground floor."

Notes to editors

HLF has made 96 awards in Caerphilly amounting to more than £7.03m of funding.

History of Llancaiach Fawr

- Built in c1550 for Dafydd ap Richard, the manor was designed to be easily defended during the turbulent reigns of Tudor kings and queens and is one of the finest examples of a semi-fortified manor in Wales today.
- The original defensive design incorporated a single entrance, four foot thick walls enclosing spiral stone staircases for access between floors and stout wooden doors. When these were securely closed they split the Manor in two and ensured that the inner east wing provided a safe and secure place of refuge during troubled times.
- By the beginning of the Stuart dynasty the Prichard family had prospered and the house was extended in 1628 to demonstrate their status. The Grand Staircase now allowed easy access between floors and two of the rooms used by the family were panelled in oak.
- When civil war broke out between King and Parliament in 1642 Colonel Edward Prichard was appointed Commissioner of Array to the King, raising men and money for the Royalist cause in Glamorganshire.
- By the middle of 1645 support was waning and King Charles I came on a rallying tour through South Wales and visited Llancaiach Fawr for lunch on 5 August. Shortly afterwards the Prichards and many other Glamorgan gentry changed sides to support Parliament and Colonel Prichard subsequently defended Cardiff Castle against the Royalists.
- Visitors today step into the Manor House restored and furnished as it would have been in 1645. All the furnishings in the rooms are accurate reproductions of items from the time of the Prichards and many of the originals can be found in the Museum of Welsh Life at St. Fagans.
- For more information about Llancaiach Fawr, visit the Llancaiach Fawr website.

Further information

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