Loan of Great Bed of Ware a step closer thanks to award from Heritage Lottery Fund

20/10/2011

Alongside the HLF award, Ware Town Council has contributed £10,000, Ware Museum Trustees have given £15,000 from their reserve fund and donations, large and small, have been received from local people and institutions to support the project.

The Great Bed of Ware is one of the greatest treasures displayed at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), and this project will be the first time the bed has ever been on loan to another venue. It will be displayed from April 2012 to March 2013 at the Ware Museum.

Dating from around 1590, The Great Bed of Ware is thought to have been created as a tourist attraction for travellers on the pilgrim route from London to Walsingham, and those on their way from the capital to Cambridge University.

Over three metres wide, and publicised as being able to sleep 12, travellers were reputed to break their journey especially at Ware just to spend a night in the bed. It became so famous that Shakespeare has Sir Toby Belch describe a sheet as “...big enough for the Bed of Ware!” in Twelfth Night.

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East of England, said: “We at HLF are delighted to support The Ware Museum Trust and V&A in their work to show The Great Bed of Ware in the town where it was made. This is a fascinating historical artefact which offers a real insight into the Elizabethan life. Bringing the bed to Ware Museum will create a fantastic opportunity for people to learn about and explore the history of the town, and the way in which our society has developed over the last 400 years."

Kenneth Weeks, Chair of the Ware Museum Trust, said: “We are extremely grateful for the support that the HLF and V&A have given us throughout the development of the project. The Great Bed of Ware is woven into the DNA of the town, and through exhibiting it here we are able to get the heritage, history and the social history of the town to local people. This project is already making a difference to the community through the activities that are currently taking place at Ware Museum. We want to involve all local residents, both old and new, in exploring the history of the town.”

Martin Roth, Director of the V&A, said: “The Great Bed of Ware is one of the V&A’s most loved exhibits and has never before been off display since it was acquired in 1931. We are delighted that HLF has supported this project to enable the bed to be seen in the town of its origin in 2012. To remove the bed from the British Galleries, transport and reinstall it in another location is unprecedented, requiring much skill and dedication. We hope that the people of Ware will enjoy visiting this historic bed and that it will bring their local history alive.”

Mark Prisk, MP for Hertford and Stortford, said: "I am delighted that, after a great local effort, the Great Bed of Ware will once again return to our town during 2012. The Museum trustees and the Heritage Lottery Fund are to be warmly congratulated."

The award from HLF will also enable the museum to develop and produce an exhibition telling the story of the Great Bed of Ware in the context of Elizabethan social history. This will incorporate the display of artefacts from the time,

including Elizabethan wall paintings and tapestries.

Local young people will also have the chance to get involved, through a series of schools activities including workshops and heritage trails. Handling boxes will be created, so that they can be used in classes and the young people can compare domestic items through the 300 years of the Bed's time in Ware.

There will be tapestry and lace making exhibitions, leading workshops where people will be able to learn these crafts. The University of the Third Age (U3A) will undertake a research project to explore the Bed's history and build and understanding of the social context in which it was created. This will be made available to schools, museums and universities across the UK.

Notes to editors

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported 30,000 projects, allocating £4.7billion across the UK.

The V&A is the world's leading museum of art and design with collections unrivalled in their scope and diversity. It was established to make works of art available to all and to inspire British designers and manufacturers. Today, the V&A's collections, which span over 2000 years of human creativity in virtually every medium and from many parts of the world, continue to intrigue, inspire and inform. The V&A restored the Great Bed of Ware in 2001 and it is one of the highlights of the V&A's British Galleries, which tell the story of British art and design from 1500 to 1900. Information and images of the bed can be viewed online.

Further information

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