Story of a Royal childhood will be told

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The project will look at what a royal childhood was like at Victoria and Albert's family home, Osborne on the Isle of Wight, and has been made possible thanks to a grant of more than £766,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

English Heritage, which cares for Osborne on behalf of the nation, will use the money for a three-year project that will not only restore buildings but also provide more visitor information. It will be especially aimed at families coming to see the Swiss Cottage quarter in the grounds of the royal residence which is the island's foremost heritage attraction.

Victoria purchased Osborne in 1845 and the Swiss Cottage, which is Grade II listed, was presented to her children on the occasion of the Queen's birthday in 1854. The surrounding gardens were also laid out, on the instructions of Prince Albert so that their nine children could learn about domestic skills, animal husbandry and the works of nature.

Close by, the two princes Albert and Bertie (who would later become Edward VII) helped build a toy fort and barracks, also now listed Grade II. The children collected a range of artefacts and curiosities including natural history specimens. Originally kept in the Swiss Cottage they were relocated following Albert's death in 1861 to a small museum next door. Later during her reign Victoria would use the cottage as her personal office.

The project will restore the Swiss Cottage permitting improved public access. The museum will also be repaired and its displays improved. The fort and barracks will undergo repairs but, as the brick-built structure is now unsuitable for use for children's play, a new play structure will be erected nearby.

A wide range of new activities and events will be created to engage local people particularly families. These will include creating a nature trail along the Rhododendron Walk leading to Queen Victoria's beach at Osborne and a programme of outreach visits to schools, run by volunteers, will also be set up. Guided tours for groups of disabled people are to be organised and the Royal children's gardens at the Swiss Cottage will provide the inspiration for gardening projects with a number of local schools.

A training programme to recruit volunteers and help them to acquire new skills is to be established and a conservation apprenticeship will be developed. A children's forum will involve local young people in helping to review how the project can be made particularly attractive and informative for their age group.

Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East England, said: "Families, schoolchildren and local organisations will all have a chance to get involved in this project that will give a fascinating insight into the lives of the young princes and princesses who grew up in this idyllic environment."

For English Heritage, Tracey Wahdan, Historic Properties Director for the South East, said: "As well as conserving the buildings and collections within the Swiss Cottage Quarter, our project will ensure that families are once again at the heart of the space. We want to create a valued resource for local people as well as inspiring visitors from further afield with the magic of Osborne."

Further information

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