Twin heritage projects could catapult Lewes to international fame

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Now the recognition of this historical importance will be given a major boost thanks to two projects made possible by Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grants totalling almost £188,000.

The subjects of the grants are seen as being of national, if not international, significance. One is a ruined priory, the other the site of a hitherto unmapped Roman settlement.

Stuart McLeod, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East England, said: “Taken together, these projects shine a light onto centuries of history when the town of Lewes and its surrounding area was a witness to some pivotal moments in the development of Britain.”

Putting Lewes Priory on the Map aims to give much greater prominence to the Priory of St Pancras. It was founded in the 11th century by William de Warenne (who had fought alongside William the Conqueror at the Battle of Hastings) and his wife Gundrada. They persuaded the Abbot of Cluny, who controlled a network of hundreds of priories throughout Europe, to send four monks to Lewes and thus establish the first Cluniac Priory in Britain. Then, in 1264 the priory played an important role in the Battle of Lewes because it was there that Henry III surrendered to Simon de Montfort and agreed for the first time to an elected Parliament.

Finally in 1537, after Henry VIII became Supreme Head of the English Church, Lewes Priory was handed over to the crown and all the religious buildings were demolished.

A grant of £96,800 will enable the Lewes Priory Trust to work with local people of all ages to increase public awareness of the priory’s significance. Young people will play a key role, helping to draw up plans for educational visits and creating children’s guides to the site. Teacher training programmes will be created and lesson plans drawn up to ensure that the site’s importance will feature in the school curriculum. Students from a local college will translate guides into other languages and an archaeological dig will be organised.

Digital technology will be employed with a priory story podcast for visitors and the installation of QR attachments at specific points on the site.

The project continues into 2014 when the 750th anniversary of the Battle of Lewes will be commemorated.

Lewes Priory Trust Chairman, Sy Morse-Brown, said: “We are enormously encouraged that Heritage Lottery Fund has once again confirmed its confidence in the trust and enabled it to take the priory project forward with an ambitious programme of development.”

Roads, Rivers & Romans – A Roman Town on the Upper Ouse is an archaeological excavation which seeks to uncover new evidence about the site of a major Roman settlement at Bridge Farm, Barcombe, just three miles from the centre of Lewes. A grant of £90,900 has been awarded to Culver Archaeological Project to investigate a site surrounding Barcombe Roman Villa where surveys suggest there are previously unrecorded features. These include a Roman road, signs of industrial activity, housing plots, enclosures, and defensive ditches. There are many other unidentified features

which the project hopes to study.

The scale of the site suggests that it could be of national importance and may encompass the entire period of the Roman era in East Sussex, from the 1st to the 5th century AD. Experts believe that much of the buried archaeology at the site may still survive in a reasonable condition.

Local people of all ages will be invited to get involve in all aspects of the surveying, the dig itself and the assessment of what is found. The discoveries will help create a picture of how the settlement developed through time, how the ancient inhabitants lived their lives and how this shaped the growth of local villages and the landscape that can be seen today.

For Culver Archaeological Project, co-Director David Millum, said: “Since the discovery of Fishborne Roman Palace in West Sussex, East Sussex has appeared the poor relation in terms of Roman remains but this exciting new project just north of Lewes could well show that appearances can be misleading. Further investigation, including targeted excavation, is now crucial to see if this site is as exciting below ground as it looks in the geophysics. The survey has been interpreted as a substantial Roman settlement surrounded by a ditched enclosure which in this location could change the accepted picture of Roman occupation in Sussex.”

The site has had a full field walking survey carried out and an intensive metal detecting survey by local metal detecting clubs in liaison with Portable Antiquities Scheme.

Further information

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