Warrington Museum to open a 'Cabinet of Curiosities' thanks to award

17/11/2011

This HLF investment will support the refurbishment of Gallery 7, or the Bird Room as it became known, which is one of the original 1850s museum spaces. Originally home to Warrington School of Art it now displays part of the museum's natural history collections.

The planned works aim to restore the historic fabric and the gallery to its original appearance by removing many of the unsympathetic alterations made in the 1960s and 70s. This will include exposing and repairing the original roof lantern, and opening up the gallery so more people can enjoy the displays.

The project will also conserve many of the museum collection items that will feature in the gallery, including the rare 17th century virginal and natural history specimens.

As part of the redevelopment, Warrington Museum and Art Gallery will be reviving its Victorian Honorary Curators scheme, enabling people from across the community to work alongside staff to research and select objects for display in Gallery 7. These volunteer curators will also develop activity trails, act as gallery guides, help with writing for the website and help create education activities.

Young people will also get the chance to get involved as young curators and through the museum’s Nature Detectives scheme, where they will work with local expert natural historians to learn how to identify and record animal and plant species in the field.

Sara Hilton, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund North West, said: "We at HLF are really pleased to be able to support this fantastic project at Warrington Museum. The redevelopment of this gallery will help open up these wonderful collections to more visitors from across the community, whilst preserving the original character of this much-loved local museum. Alongside the restoration itself, this project will also create some great opportunities for people to get directly involved in the working of the museum itself."

Councillor Kate Hannon, the council's executive board member for leisure and community and culture, said: "This is great news for Warrington and we are very grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund for their generosity which will be a welcome addition to our investment in the town's cultural resources. The museum is an important part of many Warringtonians' experience of the town and the Honorary Curator's scheme will ensure that it remains at the heart of our community for many years to come."

Work on the gallery will start in mid 2012 and is expected to be completed by the autumn of 2013. Further details will be appearing soon on the Warrington Museum website.

Warrington was one of the first local authorities in the country to establish a museum under the 1845 Museums Act. The building, which the museum shares with the Central Library, was built between 1855 and 1857. The museum building has developed piecemeal over the last 150 years, with the art galleries being added in 1877.

The permanent galleries now feature a wealth of material on the natural world, including Warrington's very own dinosaur, alongside the very popular local and social history galleries which feature displays on the industries that shaped Warrington.

Other popular exhibits include the beautifully decorated Egyptian painted coffin of Priest Paikhmennu from the temple of Amun in Thebes.

In addition to the permanent displays the museum provides an award-winning programme of events and temporary exhibitions. Recent shows have featured work by Banksy, Tracey Emin and Sam Taylor-Wood.

Further information

Roland Smith, Heritage Lottery Fund, on rolands@hlf.org.uk or 020 7591 6047 / 07973 402 854.