

Good news for Watts Gallery's campaign to save Limnerslease

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Since 1938, Limnerslease – the only remaining artist's house and studio designed by Ernest George, celebrated Arts and Crafts architect and tutor to Lutyens - has been in private ownership. The property was divided and modernisation resulted in many of the original features being lost.

For the first time, both parts of Limnerslease are now being offered for sale, presenting the Watts Gallery Trust with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to restore the extraordinary achievement and legacy of G.F and his wife, the artist Mary Watts.

The £5m project - which includes an endowment – will enable the Watts Gallery Trust to restore the east wing of Limnerslease. This will include the restoration and recreation of Watts's studio to the way Watts last saw it, the creation of the Compton Gallery to tell the story of G.F. and Mary Watts in Compton and the restoration of the Mary Watts Gallery to recognise the contribution of Mary Seton Watts through a permanent exhibition which tells the history of the Grade I listed Watts Chapel nearby, a community art project instigated by Mary in which she involved 70 local people.

The studio wing of Limnerslease will also house a conservation studio for an annual fellow from City & Guilds of London Art School and the Compton Studios will meet the needs of the growing Art for All Learning programme. The project will create a centre of excellence for developing skills in conservation, art, craft and design and will offer six apprenticeships in heritage collections, learning, estate management and visitor services.

Saving the Watts Studios will contribute to Compton becoming a unique Artists' Village, to exploring Victorian art, social history, craft and design and becoming a hub for an international network of artists' houses and studios.

Perdita Hunt, Director of Watts Gallery, said: "We are so very grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund, whose generosity means that we can achieve a further phase of bringing back the Watts story in Compton. We aim to leave intact a unique legacy of two remarkable visionaries, G.F. Watts and Mary Seton Watts, and to ensure that their Studios join the Gallery, Pottery and Chapel in being open to the public. Saving the Watts Studios provides a further opportunity for the Watts Gallery Trust to offer visitors the chance to explore the 19th Century through the eyes of G.F. Watts and Mary Watts, reaching new audiences and bringing even more visitors to Compton."

Carole Souter, Chief Executive of Heritage Lottery Fund, said: "This is a wonderful opportunity to show the full story of George and Mary Watts. The Watts Studios at Limnerslease were the backdrop to the couple's professional and home life. By acquiring the property, with the help of a Heritage Lottery Fund grant, the trust will be able to put their achievements in context. The plans to recreate the Mary Watts Craft and Conservation studios and provide training for people to learn practical heritage skills make this conservation project particularly exciting."

Perdita Hunt continued: "We could not have come this far without the huge generosity of our donors, volunteers and the local community. Many have shown real tenacity in supporting our efforts and share the vision for creating an Artists' Village. We are so very grateful, in particular to the HLF for the interest they have shown in our project and their continued support. However, we still have £800,000 to raise to Save the Watts studios and to secure their long-term future with an endowment."

Grade II listed Limnerslease was built between 1890 and 1891. In the Arts & Crafts style, the building was lovingly decorated by its artist owners who received visits from many illustrious guests, including William Gladstone, Alfred Lord Tennyson and Baden-Powell.

Watts Gallery is grateful to HRH The Prince of Wales, Patron of the Limnerslease Appeal and to Antony Gormley, Arts Patron. Former Culture Secretary Jeremy Hunt, Tate Director Nicholas Serota and artists William Pye and Alexander Creswell have also all pledged their support for the campaign.

Further information

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