

Child looking at a display of instruments in the Royal College of Music Museum Sheila Burnett, courtesy of the Royal College of Music

Today, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has announced support of £3.6m to redevelop the Royal College of Music Museum. This significant investment will kick-start a three-year project to create new displays and a performance space for the RCM's extensive and precious collection of historic instruments, including the world's earliest surviving guitar*. It will also give much wider exposure to the site which is located in the heart of South Kensington's 'Albertopolis' museum district.

[quote=Sir Peter Luff, Chair of HLF]"I think a round of applause is due to National Lottery players for helping open up this treasure trove."[/quote]

Sir Peter Luff, Chair of HLF, said: "The Royal College of Music is home to an extraordinary collection of instruments which deserve to have plenty of noise made about them! And these exciting proposals are just the thing to get them out of the storage cupboards and into a new, brighter space with increased opening times and instrument handling opportunities. Music should be for everyone's enjoyment and I think a round of applause is due to National Lottery players for helping open up this treasure trove for that very purpose."

The RCM's collection comprises instruments, manuscripts, sculptures, paintings, archives, books and programmes. Unique pieces that can be viewed are: the oldest known stringed keyboard instrument, Ulm's Clavicytherium dated c. 1480; a Venetian harpsichord c. 1531; and The Anne Boleyn Book, a choir book dating from 1530 and linked to Henry

VIII's second wife.

Colin Lawson, Director of the RCM, said:

"I am delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund supports our redevelopment plans for the Royal College of Music Museum. Our rare collection of instruments is of great importance to our students and enhances learning in a multitude of ways. This HLF grant will allow us to progress the vital work needed to establish a new Museum at the very heart of the RCM and offer greater public access than ever before."

The Royal College of Music Museum currently welcomes 8,000 visitors each year. This figure will rise to over 40,000 when the conservation and redevelopment programme is completed. Alongside structural work, opening days will be increased from four to six days and five new fixed-term jobs will be created including a learning and engagement officer and a conservator.

An extensive conservation project will be carried out on over 500 instruments, alongside documentation and digitisation of around 45,000 items that will be available online. Educational activities will include outreach sessions with schools, nurseries and adult care centres, temporary exhibitions and pop-up exhibitions to reach new audiences. The programme will also include training, volunteering and internship opportunities for conservation, digitisation and learning/engagement.

* This guitar was made by Lisbon-based instrument maker Belchior Dias in 1581.

Further information

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