By George: Watts Studios opens to public for first



Mary Watts and helpers preparing plaster panels for Limnerslease, the Watts' home and studio Watts Gallery Trust

Today, for the first time, the studios of Victorian artist George Frederic Watts and his wife Mary Watts will open to visitors. An HLF investment of £2.4million has helped fund major restoration work to make this possible.

Visitors to the Watts Gallery and the wider Artists' Village in Compton, Surrey, will be able to experience George Frederic Watts' studio exactly as he left it - a dramatic space with its original collection returned and conserved.

A highlight will be the return of *The Court of Death* (c.1870–1902, Tate), Watts' last major work, displayed upon a recreation of the original pulley system designed by the artist to allow him to work upon the vast canvas in its entirety.

The studio of designer Mary Watts has also been restored and remodelled to present key objects from the Mary Watts Collection. These include a highly decorative frieze, rescued from the Cambridge Military Hospital chapel in Aldershot. Visitors will learn more about Mary Watts and the neighbouring Grade I listed Watts Chapel, an arts and crafts masterpiece designed by Mary, and realised through a community arts project in the last decade of the 19th century.

[quote=Carole Souter, Chief Executive of HLF] "The opening up of the Watts Studios is set to benefit the local community...helping create a sense of confidence and pride."[/quote]

The Watts Studios will feature the new David Pike Conservation Studio – with a viewing window for visitors – in which conservators will work on the Gallery's collection on site; and the Clore Learning Space and Peter Harrison Community Learning Studio, enabling Watts Gallery Trust to extend further its pioneering 'Art for All' education and outreach activity.

Carole Souter, Chief Executive of HLF, said: “The opening up of the Watts Studios is set to benefit the local community, making a serious contribution to Surrey’s tourist economy and helping create a sense of confidence and pride in what Compton can offer visitors both domestically and internationally.”

Perdita Hunt, Director of Watts Gallery Trust, said: “We are grateful to HLF and to the Trusts, Foundations and many generous individuals who are enabling us to save this important part of our cultural heritage.”