Classic skills and virtual discovery: The Tank

The Tank Museum has gained National Lottery support

With its world-class collection of armoured vehicles, exhibitions and live displays, the Bovington, Dorset, attraction is popular with servicemen and women, families and school groups. Now it is looking to a group museums often find hard to reach – 18 to 25-year-olds.

The Tank Museum has secured initial support from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for a £2.1million grant to build a 16,000 square foot, seven-bay workshop and launch a training scheme for young people. This will create more space to maintain its fleet and equip young people with the vital skills to work on them in the future.

Skilled apprentices are greatly sought-after in the heritage motor industry – which covers both tanks and classic cars. The scheme aims to provide young people, including those with no mechanical experience, with a springboard to future job opportunities as well as addressing the skills shortage within the industry.

At the same time, the museum will strengthen connections with a growing online audience. Its partnership with Wargaming, publishers and developers of the game World of Tanks and sponsor of the museum's annual TANKFEST, has seen an unprecedented number of young gamers turn a virtual interest for tanks into a fascination for the real thing. This interest means the sold-out event attracted 20,000 visitors as well as hugely popular online interest.

Working with students, vloggers and other online communities, the HLF-supported project will reimagine how the Tank Museum's story is shared on site, nationally and globally.

The funding news was announced in style to TANKFEST crowds. Stephen Boyce, Chair of HLF South West Committee was flown into the arena by Sioux helicopter.

He said: "Thanks to money raised by National Lottery players, the Tank Museum continues to go from strength to strength. Whether its boosting employment prospects or turning an interest into active participation, involving young people in the heritage that matters to them is a key priority for HLF, so we're delighted to see the opportunities these plans offer and look forward to seeing them develop."

The project is the final stage of a decade-long transformation, largely made possible by National Lottery players through support from HLF. A new display area, conservation centre and a number of exhibitions have helped to secure the future of the nationally important collection and attract increasing numbers of visitors and volunteers.

The Tank Museum Director Richard Smith said: "Sell-out events are rare in the Museum community – and TANKFEST provides the opportunity to shine a spotlight on how previous HLF support has allowed us to go from strength to strength as a museum that is succeeding in reaching new audiences.

"Our partners at Wargaming are assisting us to reach out to a younger generation, fostering in them an interest in our story and our artefacts. We hope some of these will be inspired to become apprentice engineers who will help ensure The Tank Museum can continue to hold events with running historic vehicles for generations to come."

A development grant of £71,800 will enable the Tank Museum to progress the ambitious plans and apply for a full grant at a later date.

Notes to editors

- The Tank Museum at Bovington in Dorset brings the story of tanks and tank crews to life
- The Tank Museum holds a national collection of tanks, with over 300 tanks from 26 nations. These range from the world's first ever tank, Little Willie, through to the British Army's current Main Battle Tank, Challenger 2
- Eight powerful exhibitions tell the story of armoured warfare spanning over 100 years of history. As you explore the Museum's seven large halls, you come face with face to face with tanks and hear incredible true stories from the last century
- Bovington is the 'home of the tank'. In October 1916 Bovington was appointed as the new 'home' of the Heavy Branch Machine Gun Corps, the title of the first unit to use tanks. It was here that the pioneers of armoured warfare were trained and it remains home to The Royal Armoured Corps
- Following the First World War, hundreds of redundant tanks were shipped back to Bovington to be scrapped. It is believed that Rudyard Kipling suggested the foundation of The Tank Museum following a visit to Bovington. He petitioned the War Office, and in 1923 one of each vehicle type was set aside. The fruits of this foresight form the basis of its collection today, but The Tank Museum wasn't officially opened to the public until the 1950s
- The Tank Museum is an independent museum and registered charity

Further information

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