Sunday school children outside the old Copperfield Road Ragged School, 1909 Barnardo's

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has announced support of £4.3m for the Ragged School Museum in Tower Hamlets. National Lottery money will pay for extensive refurbishment work to the site which is made up of a group of three canal warehouses.

The project will also help bring out in much greater depth the inspiring story of the Ragged School movement – as championed by Dr Thomas Barnardo - which brought education to the poorest Victorian children.

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“As Christmas approaches, it’s timely to remind ourselves of the difference Dr Barnardo’s philanthropic vision made to London’s East End. Thanks to National Lottery players we will be able to help safeguard this legacy by giving the Museum a new lease of life for the future.”

HLF’s grant, including development funding of £338,500, will kickstart a number of urgent repairs, including fixing the leaking roof. It will also improve facilities, provide a home for an enterprise hub and bring new life to the current

displays.

Erica Davies, Director of the Ragged School Museum, said: “The Ragged School Museum is a witness to the movement for universal free education and a tribute to the men and women who struggled to achieve it. Local people saved these buildings from demolition in the 1980s and with National Lottery support the Museum’s future is both healthier and more financially secure.”

The Ragged School Museum was a school from 1877 to 1907; it is the only ragged school museum to survive and be publicly open. Current annual visitor figures come mainly from school trips: 15,000 students of all ages. An additional 9,500 members of the public come through the doors. However, the completed Museum should attract significantly more people to discover the delights – and in some cases stories of great hardship – of the Ragged School movement.

- By 1896 day pupils numbered over 1,000 with 2,400 Sunday School children
- Dr Barnardo ensured the Ragged School had fireplaces in every classroom
- The buildings in Copperfield Road survived the Blitz and wholesale redevelopment
- The Museum’s learning programme offers a Victorian lesson for Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils

Jim Fitzpatrick, local MP for Poplar and Limehouse, said: “The Ragged School Museum is one of the leading historical and educational resources in London. It brings vividly to life the world of children in Victorian East London, and how Dr Barnardo created a ‘free school’ to benefit some of the country’s most destitute families.

“The Museum has made a substantial contribution to the local area for over 25 years, but it cannot expand with no public funding and the largest section of the building still unrefurbished. A major award from HLF is set to transform the Museum, creating an enterprise hub on the Regent’s Canal to benefit the local economy with a restaurant and improved public facilities. The struggle for free universal education was long, but now the Ragged School Museum can tell this story to inspire generations to come.”

Further information

Katie Owen, HLF Press Office: on tel: 02075916036/07973 613820 or via email: Katieo@hlf.org.uk.