

Hidden heritage of City Cemetery to be revealed

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Historic fountain at Belfast City Cemetery Belfast City Council

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant will enable Belfast City Council to restore Belfast City Cemetery's historic features, raise awareness of its rich heritage and reconnect people to it as a useable green space.

Announcing the award, Head of HLF Northern Ireland, Paul Mullan, said: "Belfast City Cemetery is a place of immense heritage value. It was the city's first municipal cemetery, it is the final resting place of many influential figures from the city's past and it is one of the largest green spaces in west Belfast.

"We often think of cemeteries as places for the dead, but our parks and cemeteries provide vital connections to our history, our community and our natural heritage and are also very much for the living. Thanks to

National Lottery players this grant will support vital restorations right across this extraordinary cemetery; saving monuments at risk and maximising its potential as a green space for people to visit, use and enjoy.”

Belfast City Cemetery was opened in 1869 and contains a wealth of historic features, monuments and memorials in the Greek and Roman styles that were fashionable during the Victorian era. The graves and tombs of many prominent Industrial figures and pioneers of education and social justice can be found there, including Sir Edward Harland, co-founder of the Harland and Wolff shipbuilding company; Margaret Byers, educational campaigner and founder of Victoria College, and Sir William Whitla, physician and former Pro-Vice Chancellor of Queen's University.

But it also has areas of lesser-known but significant heritage that remain unmarked. These include the Jewish cemetery with its separate walls and entrances which dates from 1871; the Poor Ground where around 63,000 people are buried in unmarked graves, and the hidden underground wall which was designed to separate Catholic and Protestant graves.

The new project will see the restoration of important historic features such as the Central Steps and Victorian fountains. New signage and interpretation will be installed to raise awareness of this hidden heritage and a dedicated programme of live events, tours and workshops will be used to attract more visitors and share the heritage with new audiences.

Native shrubs and trees will be planted to improve the biodiversity of the area and a new visitor and education space will be developed to provide a hub for exhibitions and events.

Welcoming news of the award, Alderman Jim Rodgers, chair of Belfast City Council’s Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, added: “We are absolutely delighted to have been awarded this funding by the Heritage Lottery Fund as it will allow us to ensure the unique heritage of this part of the city is protected for future generations.

“By developing the site, we will be opening it up for people to explore and discover more about Belfast’s history, which has been something of a hidden gem at City Cemetery. But now, thanks to this money we have the opportunity to create a site that is fit for purpose in the 21st century, and accessible for all, whilst ensuring it is properly preserved.”

Further information

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