

Steamboats saved

04 August 2006

On the 25 July 2006 the Lakeland Arts Trust (LAT) was awarded a grant of £465,596 by the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) in order to save a fascinating collection of boats of international importance.

This collection, at the Windermere Steamboat Museum, is the most significant of its kind anywhere in the world and includes the world's oldest mechanically propelled boat (Dolly, 1850), as well as several of the oldest, rarest and most elegant boats in Britain.

"Many thousands of people have enjoyed spending time on the Windermere Steamboats over the last one hundred and fifty years. The National Heritage Memorial Fund is delighted to be able to help secure the future of this wonderful collection, which so perfectly demonstrates the important part heritage plays in our leisure time." Stephen Johnson, Head of the NHMF.

For over a year, the charitable trust that runs Abbot Hall Art Gallery in Kendal and Blackwell, the Arts & Crafts House near Bowness, has been working on a project with the Windermere Nautical Trust to rescue the boats, which are in urgent need of conservation. Currently they are displayed on the water and, before they can be restored, the delicate and expensive operation of lifting them on to dry land has to take place. A certain amount of conservation work will then be carried out immediately, and a new temporary storage building will be erected on the Museum site.

It is this rescue operation that is being funded by the NHMF, and the grant will act as a catalyst to trigger a further series of grants and gifts which will allow the collection to be kept together. The Museum and its collections will become part of the Lakeland Arts Trust before the start of the salvage operation, and the LAT will continue to develop the project. The grant from the NHMF is offered subject to a number of legal, financial and conservation conditions being met, and will probably not come into effect until March 2007. However, it is the key piece in a complicated jigsaw which will enable this outstanding collection to be saved.

Once the boats are removed from the water and safely stored on the Museum site, money will then need to be raised for their restoration. The Lakeland Arts

Trust intends to recruit a team of specialist boatbuilders to restore the boats and use the operation to create a centre of excellence in the field of historic boat restoration. New jobs will be created and a training scheme will be established to give local people of all ages the skills needed to maintain the boats, once they are again on display to the public and being sailed on the lake. As the restoration nears completion, further funds will be needed for a series of new buildings, on what is one of the most beautiful and spectacular lakeside sites in Britain. This will create an opportunity for a new piece of architecture of a quality to rival Blackwell, the Trust's beautiful Arts & Crafts house by MH Baillie Scott, just a couple of miles down the lake.

The Museum is open, as usual, until the end of October and people will be encouraged to visit this year and see the boats on the water, before the restoration project commences next spring.

Further information

For photo opportunities, a media pack or to interview the Director, Edward King
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