

NHMF's Silver Jubilee

01 March 2005

In 2005 the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) celebrates its silver jubilee and the rich inheritance it has given to the public through its role as fund of last resort for the UK's heritage.

The NHMF was set up in 1980 to save the best of our national heritage as a lasting memorial to those who gave their lives for the UK in armed conflict.

There is much to celebrate. Since 1980, the fund has spent £220million on more than 1,200 emergency acquisitions.

From the British Museum to the Wildlife Trust, many organisations will be helping the NHMF to celebrate this important anniversary.

A new NHMF website will be launched celebrating the 25th anniversary celebrations and detailing the history of the fund.

Without the NHMF, many treasured items and places would have been lost. The recently saved Macclesfield Psalter joins a diverse range of iconic objects, places and landscapes which have been safeguarded by the NHMF in the last 25 years, including :

- The Mappa Mundi
- The Mary Rose
- Flying Scotsman
- The last surviving World War II destroyer, HMS Cavalier,
- Brecon Beacons National Park
- Orford Ness nature reserve in Suffolk.
- Beamish Exhibition Colliery
- Sir Walter Scott manuscripts
- Antonio Canova's 'The Three Graces'
- Picasso's 'Weeping Woman'

"From icons like the Flying Scotsman to our world famous landscapes, the treasure trove of heritage that we have saved for the nation acts as a lasting reminder of the rich history of the UK and a poignant memorial to those who gave their lives for this country. Every item saved is part of our shared inheritance - whose loss would be a national tragedy." Stephen Johnson, Head of the National Heritage Memorial Fund

The National Heritage Memorial Fund and its own History

After the Second World War, public appreciation of our national heritage was gradually forming against a backdrop of the loss of many country houses and the break-up of their estates. Despite this, the 1946 National Land Fund lay largely unused in the Treasury. The Fund was originally set up by the visionary Chancellor Hugh Dalton with a massive £50million* to purchase land and buildings as:

"...a thank-offering for victory, and a war-memorial which many would think finer than any work of art in stone or bronze" Chancellor Hugh Dalton, 1946

By 1957 it had been reduced to only £10million and the trigger which led to its revitalisation was the disastrous sale in 1977 of Mentmore House and its contents.

A new National Heritage Act was passed in 1980. It set up an independent board of Trustees, gave them the money remaining in the Land Fund as well as an annual grant. The National Heritage Memorial Fund was born.

This new Fund was for grants to help acquire, maintain or preserve any land, building or structure, or any object or collection which is opinion of outstanding scenic, historic, aesthetic, architectural, scientific, or artistic interest. The 'memorial' title was kept to show that these grants are made to preserve in memory those who gave their lives for this country.

For the last 25 years, the Trustees of the Fund have followed these instructions. Their difficult task is to decide what should be saved within the limited resources, from within the very broad span of our National Heritage of land, buildings, documents, objects and works of art.

The Future of the National Heritage Memorial Fund

NHMF currently receives an annual income of £5million from the government. In recognition of the vital role it plays, the government will be doubling NHMF's income to £10million from 2007.

The National Heritage Memorial Fund and the Heritage Lottery Fund

In 1994, the NHMF and its Trustees were also given the major task of distributing the heritage share of Lottery money for good causes, which it now operates through the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

The NHMF continues to act as the fund of last resort, being able to act very quickly in emergencies. In contrast, HLF is funded by lottery money and offers opportunities for conserving our heritage with an even greater emphasis on improved access, learning and engagement.

Further information

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