

## **Secret 17th-century Catholic chapel saved**

19 October 2016

The Welsh Georgian Trust is to acquire Gunter Mansion and its secret 17th-century Catholic chapel in Abergavenny thanks to grants from the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) and the Pilgrim Trust.

Image



One of the frescos in the Gunter Mansion chapel

NHMF has awarded £125,000 to purchase the building, whilst the Pilgrim Trust has contributed £25,000. These grants, together with our recent crowdfunding campaign, will enable the Trust to buy the building for £150,000 plus associated costs.

Gunter Mansion is a Grade II\* listed, largely 17th century, mansion house formerly belonging to the Gunter Family. It houses an incredibly important recusant Catholic chapel dating from the late 17th Century which was hidden for over two centuries and rediscovered in the early 20th century.

The chapel is an extremely rare survival of an intact recusant chapel from the 1670s, a pivotal time in British history. The Catholic activities at Gunter were so shocking that they were reported to Parliament and created the atmosphere for the Titus Oates plot which quickly followed, initiating a wave of anti-Catholic

paranoia, to which the king had no option but to respond.

In 1678 Charles II issued a warrant for the immediate arrest of all papists and Jesuits. The priests Philip Evans and David Lewis, who regularly held mass at the Chapel in Gunter were arrested by the end of the year and subsequently condemned to death for their religion. David Lewis then became the last Catholic martyr in Wales.

The resultant increase in sectarian tension effectively ruled out any accommodation of Catholicism within Britain, paving the way for the crisis over James II's Catholicism less than ten years later, which led directly to the Glorious Revolution.

As well as a particularly fine 17th-century plaster ceiling on the first floor, the second floor chapel contains important graffiti dating from the 17th-century Gunter ownership which gives incredible insight into the period. In recent years the building has been neglected and at risk of serious decay. Once the building is acquired an options appraisal will be undertaken to consult on future restoration and uses for the building to make it safe and sustainable.

Andrew Beckett, Chairman of The Welsh Georgian Trust, said: "On behalf of everyone involved in supporting this project we would like to make public our heartfelt thanks to the trustees of NHMF and the Pilgrim Trust. Without their help it is very doubtful that we would have succeeded.

"We now have a fantastic opportunity to make Gunter Mansion a great asset to Abergavenny and this part of Wales. We will use it to allow people to experience a fascinating and important part of our history, which will resonate with people on so many different levels."

Sir Peter Luff, Chair of NHMF, said: "Gunter Mansion's recusant catholic chapel is an almost incredible survival from a tumultuous period in the nation's history. At serious risk of loss, this is exactly the kind of heritage NHMF was set-up to save."

In addition to the NHMF and Pilgrims Trust grants, The Welsh Georgian Trust was able to secure Gunter Mansion following a successful crowdfunding campaign to raise funds.

For more details about the Gunter Mansion project and the Welsh Georgian Trust please visit the Trust's website or contact the Trust's chair Andrew Beckett on tel: 01600 714 985 or via email: [andrew@welshgeorgiantrust.org.uk](mailto:andrew@welshgeorgiantrust.org.uk).