

NHMF: 30 years of saving our most important heritage

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2010 marks the 30th anniversary of the National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF).

Over the last three decades the Fund has safeguarded thousands iconic heritage treasures for the nation that were at risk of being lost forever including The Flying Scotsman, Henry the VIII's flagship Mary Rose and more recently the Staffordshire Hoard.

Since 1980, NHMF has made over 1,200 grants and awarded over £300million to help protect and build what is an outstanding national collection, ranging from historic houses and works of art to industrial and maritime heritage and exquisite landscapes.

NHMF was set up as a 'fund of last resort' to provide grants and loans to help acquire the UK's most precious heritage at risk of loss, as a permanent memorial to those who have given their lives in service to the country. Rather than creating new monuments, the Fund safeguards the very fabric of the nation, its heritage, as a permanent memorial dedicated to the men and women who have paid the ultimate price to protect this country.

NHMF has provided grants to save a range of heritage that specifically reflects its memorial nature including the Royal Navy's WWII c-class destroyer, HMS Cavalier, now docked at Chatham Historic Dockyard; the personal archive of First World War soldier, poet and author Siegfried Sassoon; and Wimpole Avenue in Cambridgeshire, a spectacular 3,500 metre avenue lined with trees which was used by pilots during the WWII to navigate their way home.

These treasures join a heritage cornucopia characterising our nations including the rare Anglo-Saxon Coenwulf Coin, depicting Coenwulf, King of Mercia; Sir Walter Scott's annotated manuscripts which were retrieved from the USA; the gothic-revival mansion and estate, Tyntesfield, complete with its contents; JMW Turner's painting - *The Blue Rigi*, saved from export; the last two surviving operational Second World War motorboats, High Speed Launch 102 (HSL 102) and Motor Gunboat 81 (MGB 81); along with a number of historic landscapes and

areas of outstanding natural beauty such as the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Historian, MP and broadcaster, Tristram Hunt commented: “The importance of the National Heritage Memorial Fund and the vital role it plays in safeguarding our heritage cannot be over-stated. Without it, so many of our beloved castles and historic houses, our historic ships, our industrial innovations, our great masterpieces and spectacular landscapes would have been lost forever.”

The National Heritage Memorial Fund was established thirty years ago, but its roots lay in the 1946 National Land Fund, set up by the Chancellor Hugh Dalton with £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”. By 1957 the Fund had been reduced to only £10million, and lay largely unused in the Treasury.

It was the sale of Mentmore House and its contents in 1977 that triggered a revitalisation in the public’s interest in its heritage and prompted the Government to establish a new mechanism to deal with national heritage emergencies. The National Heritage Act was passed in 1980, setting up the National Heritage Memorial Fund. It was given the remaining money in the Land Fund and annual grant-in-aid, so that it could step in at times of crisis, saving national heritage at risk. NHMF maintained the philosophy and continued the work of the Land Fund by saving precious heritage as a lasting memorial for those who have given their lives for the UK.

NHMF has achieved a great deal in its 30th years and it is sobering to reflect on what might have been lost without it. The work of the Fund will never be completed and it will continue to be called on to save national treasures.

These are financially challenging times and its role as the Government ‘fund of last resort’ may well become increasingly important as NHMF is the only financial resource to support the Export Control system, the Treasure process and, in certain circumstances, contribute to the Acceptance in Lieu scheme. NHMF can act quickly and decisively, stepping in when other private and public fundraising has been exhausted.

Since 2007, the Fund has received £10million per year in grant- in-aid and, although demand for NHMF support has consistently outstripped resources, it continues to act as a bulwark to secure the future of our heritage for generations to come. The Government has now confirmed this will be reduced to £20million over four years from 2011 – 2015. It is envisaged it will have a budget of

£4million - £5million per annum, including in 2011/12.

Dame Jenny Abramksy, Chair of the NHMF, commented: "The National Heritage Memorial Fund has achieved a great deal over the last thirty years, saving a truly extraordinary diversity of treasures that form part of our national identity and stand as a fitting and lasting memorial to those who have died for the nation. There is much to be proud of and enjoy, but we know that there are challenging times ahead. We will do our utmost to continue the work of investing in the most important and priceless heritage, which once gone is lost forever."

The NHMF is the 'fund of last resort' and currently receives annual grant-in-aid from the Government of £10million. It was part of the October review of arms-length bodies and will be retained to continue its work, independent of Government. It will receive grant-in-aid totalling £20million over the four years 2011 - 15. The Fund envisages a budget of £4million - £5million per annum, including in 2011/12.