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Derry heritage projects get £2m lottery fund boost

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Over £2 million of lottery funding is being given to seven heritage projects in Derry.

The projects include the restoration of two landmark city centre buildings, further funding for the city's new maritime museum and an expansion of Ulster University's archive of Northern Ireland's Troubles.

Dr Paul Mullan of the National Lottery Heritage Fund said the £2.2m was testament to Derry's commitment to heritage-led regeneration.

That initial package could rise further, to more than £10m, the National Lottery Heritage Fund said, through potential future funding

commitments.

“Thanks to National Lottery players, we’re helping to revitalise landmark buildings like Austins and St Columb’s Hall into accessible spaces with sustainable futures,” Dr Mullan said.

The restoration of the Austins’ building is to receive £459,000 – and the building’s owners can now apply for a further grant of £4.47 million from the lottery’s heritage fund.

Earlier this year it was purchased – with more than £1m of government funding – by the Inner City Trust, which works to inject commercial and social life into Derry’s city centre.

Helen Quigley, from the trust, said the funding would let work begin on “the essential restoration of Austins – carefully beginning the work needed to return it to its former glory while creating a vibrant, sustainable hub at the heart of our community”.

The building dates back to 1830 when Thomas Austin came to Derry and opened a drapery shop in the corner of the Diamond.

Austins closed in 2016 after going into liquidation.

Often referred to as “the people’s hall”, St Columb’s Hall was immensely popular in its heyday, attracting performers including Roy Orbison, Ruby Murray and Val Doonican.

Emmeline Pankhurst, who campaigned for women’s right to vote, made a keynote speech at St Columb’s Hall in 1910.

It is to receive initial funding of £243,000 – with the trust that is overseeing its restoration now eligible to apply for a further grant of £3.7m.

Funding of £246,344 has been awarded to St Augustine’s Church of Ireland, where there are plans to transform its 190-year-old Sexton’s cottage into tourist accommodation.

The church is thought to be the site of a 6th Century Columban monastery.

Three archive projects documenting various aspects of the city's history have also been awarded lottery fund grants.

The Home in Troubled Times project is an expansion of Ulster University's Cain – Conflict Archive on the Internet – which covers the history, key events and political issues concerning the Troubles.

It has been awarded funding of more than £250,000, while the North West Civil Rights Archive project has received £421,000.

St Columb's Park Reconciliation Trust has been awarded £177,000 for its Our Hidden Healers project, documenting healing and health through the ages.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund is also contributing a further £400,000 towards the council-run project for a Derry-Londonderry North Atlantic (DNA) Museum.

That takes overall lottery funding to date for the museum, which will explore Derry's maritime history, to £3.5m.

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