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St Mary & St Giles Church Willis Pipe Organ wins Heritage Lottery Fund support

Today, the PCC of the Parish of Stony Stratford with Calverton has received £82,700 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for its project, Willis Pipe Organ Restoration & Reach-out, in St Mary & St Giles Church, Stony Stratford, Milton Keynes.

Led by volunteers from the local community, the project focuses on restoring the 3 manual Willis Pipe Organ, researching and interpreting its history, producing audio visual, print and online learning resources to enable exploration of the organ and its history; creating and delivering an Education and Activities programme, recruiting and training more volunteer organ guides and delivering a Community Music Programme using the organ.

The HLF grant also funds the education and outreach activities of the new project and enables the commissioning of the work on the organ. The project starts in April; the organ will be restored during 2014-15 and brought back into use in 2015-16, in time to be used in Milton Keynes' 50th birthday celebration in 2017.

The project will enable people of all ages to find out more about the Willis Pipe organ, to research its historical, musical and technical significance and will help organ scholars develop their playing skills. This rare 1882 Willis Pipe Organ will be restored to its 1932 state, to enable players and listeners to experience and enjoy its unique 50-year evolution of pipe sound and technology. A new Digital Information Source will be created to tell the story of this Pipe Organ and its contribution to community life since its installation in Stony Stratford almost fifty years ago in 1967, the year Milton Keynes was designated a New Town. The project will also deliver Learning Resources created with professional support, to enable people of different ages and interests to learn about all aspects of the Willis Pipe Organ and a Reach-out Education Programme for learners of all ages, to extend knowledge and experience of playing a heritage Pipe Organ. As part of the project, the Parish will implement a maintenance plan to ensure a sustainable future for the organ. There will be many different opportunities to get involved in the project – we'll be looking for historians, teachers and musicians as well as fund-raisers.

This Willis Pipe organ was originally built by 'Father' Willis in 1882, one of the most famous Victorian organ-builders, and remains a shining example of the excellence of his work. It was enlarged and enhanced by his son and again by his grandson Henry Willis III in 1932. It was moved from its original location in St George's Church, Charlotte Square in Edinburgh to Stony Stratford by Starmer Shaw Organ builders in 1967. Henry Willis III used modern technology to expand the instruments built by his grandfather, yet retained their tonal character, for modern musical and liturgical purposes without destroying their original sound. The instrument at Stony Stratford is a fine example of the Willis dynasty of organ building, with a superb console (restored by F. H. Browne & Sons Ltd in 2011), but in need of

much restoration of the basic mechanism and the pipework. When the organ is restored, Stony Stratford will be one of only a very few parishes in the country to have a fully functioning Willis III church organ.

Commenting on the award, Fr Ross Northing, Rector of the Parish of Stony Stratford with Calverton, said that the HLF grant was: "not only good news for the Parish Family, but for all the people of Milton Keynes; especially present & future musicians."

Come to find out more about this exciting project at an open meeting on Saturday 5th April at 3:00 pm in the Parish Hall adjoining St Mary & St Giles church for all members of the community to learn more about the organ project and how to get involved.

Stuart McLeod, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund South East, said:

"We are delighted to be involved in this truly community based project to save this historic Willis Pipe organ. The restoration and preservation of the instrument and its history will ensure current and future generations will be able to enjoy this special heritage feature in Milton Keynes for years to come."

ENDS

Notes to editors

About St Mary & St Giles Church and Music@SMSG

The Church of St Mary & St Giles exists to worship Almighty God and to serve the people of the Parish, and further afield, whether they worship or not. For more information about the church see the Parish website at <http://parishstonystratfordcalverton.com/>

Music at St Mary & St Giles (Music@SMSG for short) is an increasingly important part of our regular activities, as one of the ways in which we serve the wider community. We founded the Pipe Organ Restoration Action Group in 2006 and this has run nearly 150 fundraising events with results which demonstrate local support for our Pipe Organ far beyond the church family. We organise a variety of concerts and musical events for the enjoyment of the wider community, as many as possible of these using the Willis Pipe Organ. We also encourage other local musical groups to make use of our church because of its good acoustic and lovely Grade 2* listed setting. For more information see the Music@SMSG page on the organ fund website <http://www.smsg-organ-appeal.co.uk/MusicSMSG.htm>

About the Heritage Lottery Fund

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) aims to make a lasting difference for heritage, people and communities across the UK and help build a resilient heritage economy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported almost 36,000 projects with more than £5.9bn across the UK. www.hlf.org.uk.

For further information, images and interviews, please contact

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