

Masterpiece monuments future set in stone

26/09/2013

Four monumental statues, considered masterpieces of exceptional significance, spanning the Georgian era from 1749 to 1829, are to undergo urgent repair work following a £318,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Situated in Warkton near Kettering, the monuments are housed in the 12th century Grade I listed St Edmund's Church which has been part of the Montagu family's estate since the 1530s. The church was later extended to include a chancel with four niches. In the years following the second Duke of Montagu's death, four monuments, spanning three successive generations, were put in place dedicated to John, the second Duke of Montagu (1752), Lady Mary Churchill, wife of the second Duke and daughter of the Duke of Marlborough (1753); John and Mary's daughter, Mary (1775); and her daughter Elizabeth (1827).

The monuments to John, the second Duke and his wife were created by Louis Francois Roubiliac, widely considered the greatest sculptor in England in the 18th century. The monument to John and Mary's daughter, Mary, is thought to have been designed by the hugely influential architect Robert Adam; it was executed by Peter Mathias van Gelder, and is considered the greatest work produced by their partnership. Elizabeth's monument was sculpted by Thomas Campbell, who also designed sculptures for the Dukes of Wellington and Devonshire.

"Francois Roubiliac's sculptures are considered to be surpassed only by the monument to Lady Elizabeth Nightingale at Westminster Abbey," commented Vanessa Harbar, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund East Midlands. "Problems with the monuments were first highlighted in the 1970s, and we understand they have worsened in the last four years. These monuments should not be allowed to deteriorate any further."

The conservation project is being led by the Parochial Church Council of St Edmund's Church, Warkton and Buccleuch Living Heritage Trust and will include the employment of a learning and outreach officer, student placements organised by East Midlands Heritage Skills Hub and comprehensive training for volunteers as guides.

Gareth Fitzpatrick, MBE, Director of Collections for the Buccleuch Living Heritage Trust, said: "We are delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund is supporting the efforts of the trust and St Edmund's Church to ensure the long term survival of these superb monuments which are an important community asset and of such world class importance."

Edward Lamb, Church Warden at St Edmund's Church Warkton, said: "the church community has always been proud of these fine monuments and, through the partnership and support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, we are looking forward to sharing them with a wider and more diverse audience."

Notes to editors

The Heritage Lottery Fund recently announced new research showing that heritage-based tourism is now worth £26.4bn to the UK economy - £5.8bn higher than the previous estimate published in 2010.

Further information

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