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Seven new heritage projects in Derry attracting over £10m investment across the City

By The Newsroom

9–11 minutes

The National Lottery Heritage Fund has announced more than £2.2million of funding to a range of heritage projects across the City with potential future funding commitments of over £8million* more towards the delivery of capital projects at Austins and St Columb's Hall.

Awarded in 2025, The National Lottery funding will:

- kick start plans to bring landmark buildings at Austins and St Columb's Hall back into public use;
- create and expand three archive projects exploring The Troubles, civil rights in the North West and healing and health in the City;





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Pictured in front of the former Austins building at the announcement of over £10m investment in heritage projects in Derry are Dr Paul Mullan, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, Grace Nelis, St Columb's Park House Trust, Conal McFeely, St Columb's Hall Trust, Minty Thompson, Vice Chair Bloody Sunday Trust, Reverend Nigel Cairns, St Augustine's Church of Ireland, Helen Quigley, The Inner City Trust and Dr Adrian Grant, University of Ulster. Credit: The National Lottery Heritage Fund / Lorcan Doherty. : Seven new heritage projects in Derry attracting over £10m investment across the City.

- deliver new tourist accommodation within the grounds of St Augustine's Church;
- increase the Heritage Fund's existing commitment to the DNA Museum by £400,000 to £3.5million.

Dr [Paul Mullan](#), Northern Ireland Director at The National Lottery Heritage Fund, was in [Derry](#) to meet the projects collectively attracting significant investment for the City:

“This is a place that's committed to heritage-led regeneration and the Heritage Fund is continuing its 30-year commitment to invest millions into a range of projects across the City. 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.





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St Columb's Hall. Photo: Lorcan Doherty.

"Three important archive projects are safeguarding and capturing people's lived experiences and new tourism offers are being brought forward with [Derry City](#) and Strabane District Council's DNA Museum and the establishment of new tourism accommodation within St Augustine's Church grounds."

Sustainable Futures for Landmark Buildings

Inner City Trust are building on their recent acquisition of the former Austins department store with an initial development award of £459,000 to embark on plans to restore the iconic five storey building. The Trust will then apply for a grant of £4.47million towards the costs of delivering and realising plans to rescue, restore and reimagine the

Grade A heritage building and re-open its doors to the public.

From 1830, Austins attracted shoppers to The Diamond for over 180 years and was reported to be the oldest family-owned department store in the world. The existing building opened in 1907.

Helen Quigley, Strategic Projects Advisor, Inner City Trust welcomed the initial investment:

“We’re thrilled to receive vital support from The National Lottery Heritage Fund and deeply thankful to the Department for Communities for enabling us to safeguard this landmark building for future generations. This development funding allows us to commence 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.”

St Columb’s Hall Trust is taking vital steps to secure the future of the historic Grade A listed St Columb’s Hall. The People’s Hall project will use an initial Heritage Fund award of £243,202 to appoint a team of experts to undertake urgent capital works, develop plans to improve accessibility and create a financial resilience plan for its long-term sustainability. The Trust will then be able to apply for a potential delivery grant of £3.7million to ensure St Columb’s Hall is welcoming, accessible and no longer at risk.

Welcoming the news, Conal McFeely, Chairperson, St Columb’s Hall Trust said: “The People’s Hall project is going to allow us to really open up this amazing building to the whole community. Heritage buildings can come with accessibility challenges and we’re currently only able to use about 25% of the space here. This funding will help us repair stonework, plan an inclusive

theatre experience and give people access to the entire building so that this is the People's Hall for all.”

Dynamic Collections and Hidden Histories

Two new archive projects based in the City will bring to life the many stories and perspectives of people and communities in the North West and across Northern Ireland. Both of the collections held by University of Ulster and Bloody Sunday Trust in partnership with Guildhall Press and Archive Ireland are evolving to become more accessible and reflect more people’s history and experiences.

Since the late 1990s, the University of Ulster has been working on the Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN) and are in the process of modernising the CAIN website and working to involve more people with its future. It covers all aspects of the conflict and includes reproductions of archive materials, photographs, videos, maps and oral histories - materials which give a deeper understanding of the conflict and the peace process.

On receiving a project award of £253,961 for the Home in Troubled Times project that will further develop the CAIN archive, Dr Adrian Grant, Lecturer in History, University of Ulster said: “Home in Troubled Times will cover housing histories and migration during and after the conflict.

Using the theme of “home” to engage people who've lived here all their lives, people who moved here during and after the conflict, or people who moved away either as a result of the conflict or for other reasons. It's a different take on those years, focusing more on our social history and the histories of everyday life rather than on the politics of the conflict.”

A three-year, North West Civil Rights Archive project has received £421,000 to unify and expand the rights-based archives of the Bloody

Sunday Trust / Museum of Free Derry, Guildhall Press, and Archive Ireland. It will include new oral and video histories, publications, and films on diverse issues such as language, women's, workers', immigrant, LGBTQ+, and disability rights. Two new roles have been created to manage, digitise, catalogue and professionally conserve the collections.

Minty Thompson, Vice-Chair of lead partner Bloody Sunday Trust and Museum of Free Derry, said: "The vital heritage work of collection and preservation of such important collections is an area that is generally under-resourced. To have this funding and be able to create new posts to carry out the work, is a testament to the importance of this project."

"The three partner organisations are delighted to receive this grant after years of dedicated work. It's right that we pay tribute to our late colleague and friend, Vinny Cunningham, whose own collection and expertise helped shape the project."

With an award of £177,448, St Columb's Park Reconciliation Trust is embarking on a new medical heritage project at St Columb's Park House called Our Hidden Healers: The Untold Heritage Beyond The Walls. It will explore themes of healing and health dating back to the onsite holy wells, the use of the 18th Century manor house and grounds during the Second World War and its time as a TB hospital through to today where the Trust hosts social prescribing activities.

Grace Nelis, Project Co-ordinator for 'Our Hidden Healers' at St Columb's Park Reconciliation Trust looked ahead to the new project: "We're proud to explore the hidden history of healing at St Columb's Park House and parklands and celebrate the vital role of women during the time of St Columb's Hospital. We

would encourage anyone to come forward with stories and artefacts from this time to help us preserve such an important part of our city's history.”

People will soon have the opportunity to undertake workshops and experience performances and art that bring to life past inhabitants of the house. A series of walking routes will be developed and a medicinal garden will be created using heritage planting and tools. Information on the Our Hidden Healers project will be shared on St Columb’s Park House Facebook.

New and Unique Tourism Destinations

St Augustine’s Church of Ireland is embarking on the refurbishment and preservation of its Sexton’s Cottage within the church grounds which are recognised as the former site of St Columba’s original monastery, founded in 546AD. Located within the Historic Walled City Conservation Area, the B2 listed Sexton’s Cottage was built around 1834. Thanks to an award of £246,344, it will be transformed into a unique, three bedroom tourist accommodation that will contribute to the sustainability and maintenance of the historic site.

Finally, ahead of contractors commencing work at the new DNA Museum, a grant increase of £400,000 was awarded to Derry City and Strabane District Council in June to enable the longawaited project to progress and address a shortfall in funding as a result of increased costs and inflation. In total, the DNA Museum – Derry on the North Atlantic project has been allocated £3.5million investment by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, thanks to National Lottery players.