

News release

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National Heritage Memorial Fund gives nearly £1 million to create UK's first national memorial to Women of World War II

The National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) announced today an award of nearly £1 million (£934,115) for the creation of a national memorial to honour over seven million service and civilian women who made such an important contribution to the war effort during World War II. The memorial, the first of its kind in the UK, will be placed on Whitehall near the Cenotaph, and is expected to be unveiled in June 2005.

The bronze memorial, measuring 22ft high, 16ft long and 6ft wide, represents the uniforms and working clothes worn by women during World War II. Designed by the celebrated sculptor, John Mills, the design won an open competition judged by a panel of experts*.

There are already monuments to women from World War II in Canada, the United States of America, New Zealand and Australia but 60 years after the end of the War, the UK has yet to commemorate the role of UK women.

Conscription for women began in 1941 and by 1943 nine out of 10 single women aged between 20 and 30 were working in factories, on the land or in the armed forces. Huge numbers of women were involved in the war effort: 640,000 in the armed forces; 55,000 serving with guns and providing essential air defence; thousands in the Land Army; plus many more who flew unarmed aircraft, drove ambulances, worked as nurses and worked behind enemy lines in the European resistance.

The campaign for a memorial has been supported by the Rt. Hon. Baroness Boothroyd of Sandwell PC, Patron of the Memorial to the Women of World War 2 Fund, and Vice-Patrons, HRH the Princess Royal, Dame Vera Lynn DBE, John Grogan MP for Selby, Hugh Bayley MP for York, Professor the Baroness Finlay of Llandaff, and Robert Crawford CBE.

The National Heritage Memorial Fund was set up in memory to those who gave their lives in war for this country. Traditionally the fund saves important heritage under threat, for future generations to enjoy. Exceptionally on this occasion it was decided to support the creation of a new memorial.

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Liz Forgan, Chair of the National Heritage Memorial Fund, said:

“It is particularly fitting that we are able to help fund this special tribute on behalf of the nation. The memorial will be publicly unveiled in a very significant year as 2005 is both the 60th Anniversary of the end of World War II and the 25th Anniversary of the founding of the National Heritage Memorial Fund.”

The Rt. Hon. Baroness Betty Boothroyd, said:

“I cannot tell you how proud I am to finally see a memorial to the wonderful women who contributed so much to the war effort. John Mills’ design will make a symbolic and dramatic tribute to the impact that women made during this important part of our nation’s history. I would like to thank the National Heritage Memorial Fund for all their support and also Major David Robertson who has been the driving force behind this project.”

Major David Robertson, Chair of the Memorial to Women of World War II Fund, added:

“This has been a huge team effort and one that has taken six years to come to fruition. I am grateful to both the National Heritage Memorial Fund and our many other supporters for their enthusiasm in helping realise this vision. I am extremely pleased that we will finally have a national memorial as a tribute to the many brave women who contributed so selflessly to the war effort.”

Dame Vera Lynn said:

“I was delighted when I heard that the money had come from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and it is now full steam ahead. In 1990 I wrote a book myself about unsung heroines and women who won the war because I didn’t think they had been recognised.”

Hugh Bayley MP for the City of York will today table an Early Day Motion, thanking the National Heritage Memorial Fund for its grant of £934,000 towards the cost of the national memorial and congratulating the Memorial to Women of World War Two charity.

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Note to editors

The National Heritage Memorial Fund

The National Heritage Memorial Fund (NHMF) was established in 1980 as a memorial to those who gave their lives for this country and it continues to operate as a fund of 'last resort', focussing on saving heritage which is under threat, whether from sale overseas, the break-up of collections, or, in the case of land, from unsympathetic development. The Fund's current budget is £5million which comes from government grant-in-aid.

The Memorial to Women in World War 2 Fund

The Memorial to Women in World War II Fund was established in 1998 and comprises four Trustees and a Chairman Trustee. In response to the lack of a tribute to women in World War II, the charity agreed that a memorial should be created to represent all the women, not just service women, who played a role during that time. The charity has worked in consultation with and is supported by the WRNS Association, WRACE/ATS Association, WAAF Association and the Women's Land Army.

* The judging panel was made up of Professor Philip King CBE, President of the Royal Academy of Arts, Dr Judith Collins and James Butlery.

Also attending today's photocall were war veterans, Freda Seltham from Norfolk (formerly in the Land Army) and Edna Selby from North Yorkshire (formerly a gunner) who is also a trustee of the Memorial to Women of World War II Fund.

Further information

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