DUXFORD’S AMERICAN AIR MUSEUM REDEVELOPMENT FUNDING

An announcement was made on 15th January 2014 to the effect that the Imperial War Museum (IWM) Duxford in eastern England has received a grant of £980,000 from the national Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for the American Air Museum redevelopment project.

The American Air Museum was built at IWM Duxford in 1996-67 to present for public display the best collection of American military aircraft outside the United States. The Museum tells the story of American air power and the integral relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom.

History presented in the American Air Museum has a relevance to everybody living in Britain, particularly those in the eastern counties, the Museum reflected in a statement on the grant award which will enable the This will inspire people to relate objects in the collection to their own lives and to the world in which they live.

Visitors will be asked to become actively involved in the project by contributing recollections from their own personal and community past so that the museum can create an impressive collection of memories, knowledge and information for current and future generations.

There are three main aspects to the American Air Museum’s redevelopment. The first is a dynamic website based around The Freeman Collection, a compilation of approximately 15,000 prints and slides assembled by Roger Freeman (1928-2005), a hugely respected aviation historian and a native of East Anglia. Many of these images have not been publicly available.

The Freeman Collection shows the many and varied experiences of the United States Army Air Forces (USAAF) in Britain during the Second World War. Images depict the different roles undertaken by members of the USAAF and also off-duty leisure time, the aircraft, the combat missions, events and the local communities in which the USAAF served.

Using The Freeman Collection of photographs as its core, the website will link each photograph to the serving group or unit it represents. It will show the geographical location in which the photograph was taken, the type of aircraft the group operated and may also give the personal story of a man or woman shown.
With thousands of images in the collection, the museum will be asking people to help uncover the stories behind the photographs by logging on and telling what they know. It is hoped that the first phase of the website will be live from summer 2014.

Secondly, the American Air Museum will be refreshed and re-energised to ensure that it has an impact on the next generation of visitors and will help audiences to understand the co-operative relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom, which was forged in the region during both World Wars and which has shaped the modern world ever since. Visitors will discover this theme from a personal, regional and national perspective.

Thematically, key objects will be displayed in new ways and existing displays redeveloped by layering new interpretive material to help visitors see objects in a new light. There will be greater emphasis placed on the individual stories of war and conflict to show events from a range of personal perspectives.

Furthermore the American Air Museum exhibition will be brought up to date with material covering the last two decades of conflict, looking at the personal stories and political context of that period.

Thirdly, detailed conservation work will be undertaken on the aircraft and objects in the Museum to ensure that this important collection is kept in good historical condition for future generations to enjoy.

This large-scale conservation project will involve lowering suspended aircraft from inside the roof of the museum and taking out the large plate glass wall from the rear as well as removal of all aircraft from the building.

Said, Diane Lees, Director-General of Imperial War Museums, “I am delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has supported the American Air Museum redevelopment. This exciting project will bring to life Anglo-American relations past, present and future, in a way that enthralls and engages. Whoever we are, wherever we live, this is our story and one that we can work together on for the benefit of future generations.”

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund for the East of England concluded by saying, “The American Air Museum has possibly the best collection of US military aircraft outside the USA. This project will give IWM Duxford the opportunity to overhaul the displays and galleries and bring many of the fascinating stories of the First World War, Second World War, and more recent conflicts to life in new and exciting ways which will give many people the opportunity to get involved. We look forward, in particular, to the museum’s
interpretation of the Freeman Collection of photographs, many of which have never before been seen by the public.”

Picture captions

*Exterior of the American Air Museum.*

*Image copyright IWM.*

*Interior of the American Air Museum, showing the B-52 Stratofortress, around the dimensions of which the American Air Museum was built.*

*Image copyright IWM.*