

EMBARGOED UNTIL THURSDAY 25 NOVEMBER 10:00 BST

Digital volunteers set to make big impact for the Coleshill Auxiliary Research Team thanks to National Lottery funding

The Coleshill Auxiliary Research Team (CART) has been awarded nearly £30,000 of National Lottery funding to launch a digital volunteering initiative and break down barriers to heritage.

Today's funding is part of [The National Lottery Heritage Fund's Digital Skills for Heritage initiative](#), which aims to raise digital skills and confidence across the whole UK heritage sector.

Seventeen projects have been awarded funding to create digital volunteering opportunities, supporting volunteers to develop and contribute their digital skills. Some opportunities will be offered online – removing barriers such as place, mobility, time commitments and confidence in returning to in-person activities due to the pandemic.

In turn, heritage organisations will gain the perspectives and skills of 'at distance' and on-site digital volunteers including many who may not have had the chance to volunteer before. The impact of the new volunteering opportunities and ways of working will be shared across the heritage sector.

Ros Kerslake, CEO at The National Lottery Heritage Fund, said: "Volunteers play a crucial role in supporting and sharing the UK's heritage. Thanks to National Lottery players we are delighted to support these trailblazing projects, including the Coleshill Auxiliary Research Team as they create exciting new digital volunteering opportunities, helping to break down barriers and inspire the sector to get even more people involved in the heritage they love."

During the Second World War, Britain organised high secret, highly trained groups of civilians who would act, and in all likelihood, make the ultimate sacrifice for their country had the Nazis invaded. The two main groups of these civilians that volunteers research are the Auxiliary Units (civilian saboteurs, guerrilla fighters and assassins) and the Special Duties Branch (civilian spies, messengers and wireless operators). Had the Nazis invaded, the Auxiliary Units in particular would have disappeared to secret underground bunkers, hidden across the country.

These bunkers have often lay undiscovered for 80 years and are quickly deteriorating with age. The funding from the National Lottery will allow CART to train volunteers to record and monitor these hugely important sites using new digital technology. The funding also means that CART volunteers will have the training and capability to create 3D walkthroughs of Operational Bases across the country. This will mean that those who are unable to visit these often-inaccessible sites can experience and gain a real insight into these remarkable structures.

Nina Hannaford, Chair at CART said "We are absolutely delighted to have been awarded this funding. The story of the Auxiliary Units and Special Duties Branch remains one of the untold stories of Britain during the Second World War.

"Had the Nazis invaded Britain these highly secret groups of civilians would have done everything they could to hold up the invasion and pass information on as the invading forces came through their towns and villages. They would have disappeared to secret bunkers

(Operational Bases) from which they would have operated until they had died or been captured.

“With almost all of the veterans of both groups now sadly passed away most of whom took their secrets to the grave, these Operational Bases are the last tangible links to these remarkable groups. The structures are quickly deteriorating with age and this funding will allow us to train our volunteers in using digital technology to safely record and identify these hidden gems.

“The fact that there are hidden underground bunkers laying undiscovered is an exciting and tantalising one. The National Lottery funding will help find out more about them and ensure that they are recorded for posterity.”

ENDS

Notes to editors

About The Coleshill Auxiliary Research Team (CART)

CART is a volunteer group of researchers and enthusiasts who look into the Auxiliary Units and Special Duties Branch. The Auxiliary Units were highly trained civilian saboteurs, guerrilla fighters and assassins, who were to harass the invading army, at night from behind enemy lines. The Special Duties Branch were civilians who were to monitor the invading army, passing on critical information to GHQ. Both sets signed the Official Secrets Act.

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About The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Using money raised by the National Lottery, we **Inspire, lead and resource** the UK's heritage to create **positive and lasting change** for people and communities, now and in the future. www.heritagefund.org.uk.

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The National Lottery Heritage Fund's [2020 Digital Attitudes and Skills for Heritage \(DASH\) survey and report](#) identified an appetite to develop digital skills across the sector and informed the £3.5million Digital Skills for Heritage programme. [Find out more here](#).