

Embargoed until 00.01, Wednesday 29 November

The Portico Library awarded £453,964 development grant by The National Lottery Heritage Fund to transform its historic building in the heart of Manchester

The Portico Library in Manchester has successfully received initial support* through a Development grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund for their project, *Reuniting the Portico Library, Uniting People*. The project, made possible by National Lottery players, will enable the Portico to develop detailed plans to transform the unique historic library and secure its future by creating an accessible and sustainable space for arts, books, food, learning and history for Manchester's residents and visitors.

The Portico, a much-loved cultural destination in the heart of Manchester, was established in 1806 as a ground-breaking newsroom and library, and will now work with experts and a range of community stakeholders to trial plans for the bold £7 million capital development project that will transform the building and preserve the historic book collection.

The £453,964 development grant will contribute to the production of environmentally sustainable architectural plans, mapping out how the Library can reunite all three original floors of the Grade II* Listed building for the first time in more than 100 years.

During the development phase, which will start immediately, the Library will invite local communities to work with them on testing how to transform the ground floor and basement into an open and welcoming area with dining and exhibition areas, a 'Northern Bookshop', educational activities, a collections-care lab, plus flexible and high-quality event and meeting spaces. The upper floors will conserve and enhance the existing heritage, showcasing the unique book collection, manuscript archive and architecture. The technical access requirements, such as a lift, will be supported by creative consultation to establish how best to make the building fully accessible for all.

The Portico's founding aim was to further knowledge by combining resources to make books, periodicals and newspapers available to more people in Manchester. These resources initially came from founding Portico Members, who were doctors, lawyers, merchants, factory owners and other members of the professional classes who profited from the lucrative and exploitative cotton trade and expanding industrial city. The project will collaborate with partners and a Critical Friends group to examine the Library's radical roots and complex legacies today.

The Library, built in the style of a Greek temple, played an historic role in the information revolution that swept across Europe during the 19th century, supporting the rapid expansion of literacy and the diffusion of knowledge. Membership was initially limited to those men who could afford it (women could only become members after the Married Women Property Act of 1870), though many pushed for free public access to books. Early Portico members also campaigned for conditions in factories to be reformed, founded the *Guardian* newspaper after Peterloo in response to press censorship, took

part in innovations in medicine and climate science, created the first English thesaurus and advocated for radical political change. Early members and users included the celebrated Manchester author Elizabeth Gaskell and more recently the footballer Eric Cantona and writers Gary Younge and Val McDermid.

At a time of rapid expansion of information dissemination (and disinformation), the Portico looks to revitalise itself as a creative space that explores its complex history while learning from shared knowledge and lived experience. Its collection of well-thumbed books is testament to Manchester's literary heritage and passion for reading and writing. Led by its skilled and experienced Board of Trustees, this project will enable the Portico to preserve its historic books, from a first edition of Jane Eyre to Portico Prize winners, while identifying those voices which have not been collected and need to be heard.

Commenting on the award

John Carpenter, the Portico Library's Chair, said:

"The news that The National Lottery Heritage Fund is supporting the Portico Library's bold scheme to open up and share its extraordinary heritage and collection, to Manchester residents and visitors, is a major cultural signal to Manchester, the North and the UK.

"This visionary project, years in the making, fulfils our mission of working with the many people in Manchester to explore, share, and celebrate their diverse stories and the city's literary and global heritage. Embracing creativity, collaboration and inclusivity, the project will unlock the Library's past to plan for the future. We would like to thank the National Lottery players who have made it possible to realise our vision."

Dave Moutrey, Director & Chief Executive at HOME and Director of Culture for Manchester City Council, said:

"2023 has been an exceptional year for culture in the city: the reopening of the Manchester Museum, the launch of Aviva Studios – the permanent home for Manchester International Festival, and now news of substantial funding to transform the historic Portico Library. A bright and exciting future lies ahead for our ever-expanding culture corridor."

How you can support the project

We need your help! The Portico will be embarking on a range of fundraising activities to realise its ambitious plans so find out how you can get involved via the Portico website, make a donation, take out a membership, volunteer and sign up for updates on the latest news.

www.theportico.org.uk/support-us

Notes to the Editor

About the Portico Library and Newsroom

The Portico Library is a 218-year-old independent subscription library and exhibitions space in Manchester city centre where past, present, and future are unlocked through creativity and collaboration. Still housed in its original building on Mosley Street, it is currently open free to the public five days a week for an eclectic calendar of exhibitions and events, complementing the unique collection of books, archives and illustrations spanning over 450 years.

Follow the Portico Library on Instagram: @porticolibrary, X: @ThePortico, Facebook: @ThePorticoLibrary, and LinkedIn @the-portico-library

About The National Lottery Heritage Fund

* National Lottery Heritage Fund grant applications over £250,000 are assessed in two rounds. *Reuniting the Portico Library, Uniting People* has initially been granted round one development funding of £453,964 by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, allowing it to progress with its plans. Detailed proposals are then considered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund at second round, where a final decision is made on the full funding award of £4,488,594.

As the largest dedicated funder of the UK's heritage, The National Lottery Heritage Fund's vision is for heritage to be valued, cared for and sustained for everyone, now and in the future as set out in our strategic plan, Heritage 2033.

Over the next ten years, we aim to invest £3.6billion raised for good causes by National Lottery players to bring about benefits for people, places and the natural environment.

We help protect, transform and share the things from the past that people care about, from popular museums and historic places, our natural environment and fragile species, to the languages and cultural traditions that celebrate who we are.

We are passionate about heritage and committed to driving innovation and collaboration to make a positive difference to people's lives today, while leaving a lasting legacy for future generations to enjoy.

Follow @HeritageFundUK on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram and use #NationalLotteryHeritageFund www.heritagefund.org.uk

Further information

For further information, images and interviews please contact Jane Acton at jane@janeactonpr.co.uk / 07971 661576 or Dr Thom Keep at the Portico Library on Librarian@theportico.org.uk / +44 (0)161 236 6785.

Additional Images



Photograph by Esther Clarke

The Portico's vision is to be the most accessible, sustainable, and dynamic historic library, where past, present, and future are unlocked through creativity and collaboration.



Photograph by Jill Jennings

The Portico's collection and archive is at the heart of its successful public programme. It seeks to work with Manchester's diverse communities and visitors to explore, share and celebrate their stories and the city's literary and global heritage.



Photograph by Joe Fenn

The Portico Library and Newsroom building, on the corner of Mosley and Charlotte Street