



National Heritage Ironwork Group

Final Progress Report - summarised

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Submitted to Jenny Dadd, Grants Manager, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

Compiled By Bethan Griffiths and Caroline Preston

Tel: 01845 501072 or 07941 127024

Email: bethan@nhig.org.uk
caroline@nhig.org.uk

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this final progress report is to provide the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation (EFF) with an overview of the grant awarded to NHIG for the 'Establishment and Staffing of an Office'.

The report covers the period between the start of the grant in July 2012 and its completion in July 2014 and builds on the reports submitted to the EFF during this time.

2.0 PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

2.1 AIMS OF THE PROJECT

The primary aim of the grant was to create a foundation block on which to underpin NHIG as an organisation. This project therefore set out to;

- Establish an office
- Appoint personnel
- Create a focal point for the group
- Develop NHIG's ability to handle day to day core activities and administration
- Research routes to enable the core activities of NHIG to become sustainable

2.2 BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

The National Heritage Ironwork Group was established in 2009 by a group of experienced professionals from a broad range of related fields. Together they recognised that due to the sheer quantity of architectural wrought ironwork within the heritage sector there was a need for;

- A representative body
- A focal point for the discussion and dissemination of information
- A reference point for expertise or consultation
- Training routes for professionals

NHIG was set up with the objective of providing these and is currently leading the way worldwide in creating a representative body for the conservation of heritage ironwork through discussion, formalisation, lobbying and distribution of information.

Although off to a promising start within two years it became apparent that the core work needed to support the running of the NHIG was already in excess of what can be expected from volunteers. This project was initiated therefore as a direct response to the need for NHIG to find a sustainable way of addressing the needs for which it was started and continuing to develop its work.

2.3 WHAT THE PROJECT PLANNED TO DO

This project was designed to provide NHIG with the resources and infrastructure needed to establish and develop itself as a representative body for heritage ironwork.

2.4 WHAT DIFFERENCE THE PROJECT WAS EXPECTED TO MAKE

With no existing representative body for heritage ironwork, the difference this project planned to make was that of bringing people together and therefore enhancing the capacity of the sector to work together. By doing this the intention was to establish a co-ordinated approach to the discussion, formalisation, lobbying, development and distribution of heritage ironwork information.

3.0 PROJECT DELIVERY

3.1 CORE ADMINISTRATION

The areas of general core administrative activity within this project included;

1. **Premises;** establishment and furnishing of and office
2. **Personnel;** the appointment & renewal of terms for;
 - NHIG Directors
 - NHIG Council
 - NHIG Committees
 - Office Manager
 - Administrator
 - Bookkeeper
3. **General Administration;** including for example all enquiries, communications, co-ordination, liaison, project management, meetings, governing documents, management structure and all informal and formal record keeping etc.
4. **General Bookkeeping;** notwithstanding the ongoing requirement to keep up to date, accounts work included a complete overhaul of the accounting system for management, reporting and efficiency purposes.
5. **Publicity;** including for example mailing lists, newsletters, press releases, networking and event speakers etc.
6. **CPD Courses;** including the organisation, administration, advertising and further development.

3.2 KEY AREAS OF ACTIVITY

The key areas of activity and development within this project included;

1. **IT;** establishment of an infrastructure for recording and sharing information including for example cloud storage, mailing list management, mailshots and social media, etc.
2. **Website;** establishment of a new website that has the potential to grow and develop with NHIG and become NHIG's focal point of the dissemination of information.
3. **Membership;** research and development of a membership scheme.
4. **Fundraising;** research and development of a strategic approach to the financial sustainability of NHIG.
5. **Resources;** researching and compiling information in order to populate the resources page of the website and therefore develop this as a hub for heritage ironwork information.
6. **Consultation/Events;** encouraging the discussion and development of heritage ironwork information.
7. **Education;** development of opportunities & nationally recognised qualifications
8. **Accreditation;** research into to the development of an appropriate accreditation scheme for Heritage Blacksmiths which will give recognition to this sector as professional conservators.

3.3. FINANCE

Overall this project was delivered on budget at a cost of £40,000. In addition to this NHIG was granted and extra £250 to cover networking costs, at the Construction History Society annual conference, bringing the total project cost up to £40,250.

4.0 PROJECT ACHIEVEMENTS

NHIG have covered a great distance during the two years of this project. The EFF grant was made in order to allow NHIG to establish staff and run an office that would become the focal point of the group and handle all the day to day activities and administration. This has undoubtedly been achieved but so has a great deal more. Notwithstanding the general day to day core administrative work related to running this, or similar organisations, the more notable achievements of this project include;

1. **Support;** increased our pool of support through;
 - **NHIG Team;** eight new and active voluntary members added to the group through changes to the Council and the addition of Committee members and increase of just over 63%%
 - **Individual Supporters;** have increased by 96%
 - **Endorsement;** from distinguished organisations such as the National Trust, English Heritage & the Institute of Conservation (ICON).
2. **Management;** points of note including;
 - **Management Structure;** has been revised with clarification of the directors, council roles and the addition of committees.
 - **Directors Pack;** summarises key information, for new directors, relating to what then need to know before taking on this role. This is important in enabling changes to the directors of NHIG.
 - **Quarterly Reports;** have proved invaluable in the monitoring progress.
3. **Charitable Status;** successfully applied for and received charitable status. This work included changes to NHIG's Memorandum & Articles regards best practise for operating as a charity.
4. **Hub for Heritage Ironwork Information;** developed and built a new [NHIG website](#) as the first step in NHIG ability to provide a unique and vital core communication tool for the collection, publication, exchange and dissemination of heritage ironwork information. The new website is designed for growth with ability to add information as it becomes available.
5. **Membership;** the development of an appropriate membership scheme.
6. **Project Funding;** work has completed on several fronts including;
 - **Funding Sources;** completed research into funding bodies and now have a user friendly list of funding sources to hand which is suitable for future NHIG projects
 - **Project list;** developed a list of 17 NHIG projects that funding is to be sought for, all of which tie in with NHIG's overall aims and strategy.
 - **Funding Applications;** have developed in house guidance so that all members of the NHIG team are capable of writing applications as opposed to relying on one member as has been to date
 - **Grant;** successfully completed a grant application for a project to create an illustrated version of the NHIG conservation principles
7. **Consultation/Events;** In co-operation with the International Blacksmiths' Festival to be held in Devon from 13-16 Aug 2014 a forum has been organised on the subject of how to approach existing repairs
8. **Education;**
 - **Opportunities;** researched, compiled and published the first comprehensive list of educational opportunities relating to heritage ironwork.
 - **Apprenticeships;** are going through a huge amount of change at the moment, but the conservation units, developed as part of the NHIG Bursary Programme, have now been built into the conservation pathway in the advanced blacksmithing apprenticeship scheme. This training route receives mainstream funding and results in a nationally recognised qualification.
9. **Accreditation;** developed a feasibility study proposal with the aim of creating a pathway for an appropriate accreditation scheme for Heritage Blacksmiths.

Overall NHIG are extremely pleased with the progress made over the last two years and now feel that they are well established and recognised as the nation's only organisation focused solely on studying the care and conservation and restoration of historic ironwork.

5.0 LESSONS LEARNT

NHIG as a group, have learnt a number of things from this project including;

- **When getting people involved**, it is important to;
 - Be inclusive of different groups of people so that a wide range of views are included. NHIG now promotes itself as an organisation established by a group of experienced practitioners from a broad range of related fields and encourages all those with an interest in ironwork to get involved.
 - It is important for people to feel actively a part of the group and have a sense of ownership. There must be therefore some sort of access to join. NHIG is therefore developing a membership scheme.
 - Ability to expand the core group of active volunteers while keeping the core management group at a manageable size. NHIG has now added committees to its management structure so that a wider core group of volunteers are involved.
 - Have a management structure where people can see where they and others are within the group and how it works as a whole. NHIG now has a flow chart which identifies both the management levels and roles and responsibilities.
- **With volunteers** it is important to;
 - Give those involved a personal responsibility. All NHIG team members now have items they are individually responsible for.
 - Make sure the work they have agreed to do personally inspires them. Tasks and team members are individually matched to ensure the best voluntary performance.
 - Where possible ensure work is related to events or group work. Both involve fixing deadlines and include social aspects which provide good inspiration for voluntary work.
- **When operating an office with part time personnel** expectations relating to the completion of tasks need to be managed. While good progress can be made in the work time available in calendar terms, progress can appear slow to those not directly involved. This was particularly noticeable with our bookkeeping, especially the overhaul of our system, whereby we had only hired on a one day per month basis.
- **The importance of Charity Status** regards opening up access to sources of funding. Despite being a not-for-profit group with projects that had charitable aims and objectives the vast majority of grant awarding bodies will not consider applications from those without the formal charity status. As a result NHIG have been held back in getting further project funding applications submitted.
- **The value of tailoring the accounting systems.** Above and beyond fulfilling all statutory requirements the effort of refining how and what information is kept and added to the system is abundantly rewarded in terms of financial management. Having now tailored the accounts to NHIG's individual needs;
 - Selective information, specifically that relating to individual project budgets, can be quickly identified and accurately exported out of the accounts software programme providing an efficient and powerful management tool.
 - All stages of the financial process can be efficiently linked. Now with a tailored master list of Departments (the individual budgets) and Nominal Codes (which identifies what it is i.e. wages, travel, etc.) there is a smooth flow of information between all stages of work from budget applications to finance management and of course the official accounts.
- **The value of tracking core administrative work** through timesheets has allowed NHIG to reasonably estimate the time core activities of the group take. This has been important because the underlying core work, especially the communications involved, takes up a surprising amount of time and it is far too easy to underestimate the work involved.

If doing a this project again, with the hindsight of the experience gained during delivery, NHIG would have;

- **Prioritised our application for charity status** as without it sources of future funding are severely restricted.
- Focused on a formal membership scheme as opposed to a 'friends of' which was concluded to be unviable. NHIG had initially been cautious of membership due to the potential to confuse with accreditation. However, following research into other accreditation schemes and advice set out by the Charity Commission, NHIG have been able to follow the example of others and put an appropriate membership proposal together.
- Overhauled the accounting system far sooner, tailoring it to NHIG's individual needs, as the new system is far superior in terms of efficiency.

6.0 THE FUTURE

6.1 ONGOING FUNDING

In the future NHIG foresees that the majority of its work, and therefore funding, will be for grant assisted projects. To date NHIG have developed a list of 17 projects that it wishes to seek funding for, all of which tie in with its overall aims and strategy. From this list 8 projects have been selected which are in the process of development including;

1. Feasibility study into a potential accreditation scheme
2. Colour and heritage ironwork – short guide
3. Conservation, care and repair of historic ironwork – short guide
4. Construction techniques for exterior forged ironwork – short guide
5. Continued professional development (CPD) courses – expansion of the existing courses to broaden access
6. Glossary of ironwork terms
7. Heritage ironwork book list
8. Repairing and restoring wrought iron fencing – short guide

Having just received confirmation of NHIG's registration as a charity it is anticipated that the funding applications for these projects these will be completed and submitted to carefully selected funding bodies shortly.

6.2 MEMBERSHIP

It is anticipated that NHIG will be able to launch the membership scheme it is working on during this project prior to the end of summer 2014. NHIG believe that this will help get people more directly involved with group activities and therefore is vital to the ongoing sustainability and development of the group.

6.3 CONSULTATION / EVENTS

In achieving NHIG's objective of encouraging the discussion it plans to use the grant assisted project work, as mentioned above, as the starting point for initiating discussions and events as appropriate to specific projects.

6.4 EDUCATION

With the education page of the NHIG website now complete, the shortage of training opportunities are highlighted and so the NHIG Education Committee are now in a position to assess what heritage ironwork training is needed with the idea of plugging existing gaps. They will specifically consider practical training, given there is currently a void here, and therefore the potential of organising master classes aimed at specific groups (i.e. beginners, intermediate or professionals).

7.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion the overall achievement of this project is that it was successful in transforming NHIG from an amateur group into a professional organisation – all be it fledgling!

The NHIG team would at this point like to take the opportunity to not only thank EFF for the grant but also in particular for the additional support of the Grant Plus Mentor, David Irwin. His support and help has been invaluable to our achievements.

For the NHIG team the following quote from Douglas Wilson, an artist-blacksmith in Maine, is an appropriate note to finish on;

*“I want to commend you on the hard work that has gone into creating NHIG
You have created an important and unique organisation.”*