



Press Release

Major Backing for Jewish Heritage Project in Wales!

The Foundation for Jewish Heritage has successfully secured major funding for the next stage of its flagship project to preserve and re-purpose the former Merthyr Tydfil synagogue in Wales. This follows on from the Foundation purchasing the site last year.

Funding will go towards urgently needed repairs to the synagogue building as a result of grants received from Cadw - the Welsh Government's heritage agency, and three major Foundations – The Pilgrim Trust, The Los Angeles-based GRoW@Annenberg and the Philip King Charitable Trust.

In addition, leading UK heritage body the Architectural Heritage Fund, which has been advising on the project, has given a grant to enable the commissioning of a consultant to carry out research and prepare a detailed business plan. This will provide crucial information on the Synagogue's future use and its long-term viability.

In another boost, comedian David Baddiel and philanthropist Sir Michael Moritz KBE have both agreed to become Patrons of the project.

Merthyr Tydfil synagogue is a stone structure designed in Gothic Revival style, and the oldest purpose-built synagogue still standing in Wales. Today it is considered architecturally one of the most important synagogues in the UK and has been awarded Grade II listed status.

Merthyr Tydfil itself was the industrial powerhouse of Wales in the 19th century and its largest town. There has been a Jewish presence in Merthyr since the 1830s and the construction of the synagogue in the 1870s reflected a community that was growing and prospering.

The Jewish community came to an end in 1983 when the synagogue was sold and, from that time, the building was used for various purposes. However, since 2006 it has been lying empty, its condition deteriorating, and the very fabric of the building has been compromised with a gaping hole in the roof and broken windows. The seriousness of the threat was recognised when the synagogue became formally designated as a Welsh heritage site at risk.

The Foundation for Jewish Heritage purchased the building in 2019 in order to save it, with the vision to create a 'Welsh Jewish Heritage Centre' that would present the 250+ year history of the Welsh Jewish community, promote inter-cultural dialogue and provide a new cultural venue for Merthyr. The idea was universally well received, with strong support coming from Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council, local politicians, and the Jewish and heritage communities of Wales.

Gerald Jones, Member of Parliament for Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney and Shadow Minister for Wales commented, "I'm delighted that this exciting regeneration project is progressing. The Synagogue is an important part of the history of Merthyr Tydfil and I look forward to this building, which has so much character, being brought back into use. I will continue to work closely with the Foundation for Jewish Heritage and offer whatever support I can to ensure that the Synagogue is fully restored for this and future generations."

Dawn Bowden, Member of the Senedd/Welsh Parliament for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney remarked, “this is great news for the town as this significant building moves ever closer to being restored and can therefore play a part in our future, as it did in the past. I am particularly pleased that Cadw has been able to provide funding and my thanks to the other organisations who are also funding to bring this important project forwards.”

Cllr Geraint Thomas, Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Public Protection, said, “the Council has long been in talks with the Foundation of Jewish Heritage about the future of the Synagogue. Our officers have worked with the Foundation to provide support and advice, and will continue to do so throughout the restoration project. The Synagogue is a prominent landmark building within the Thomastown Conservation Area and an extremely important part of the town centre’s historic landscape. So we’re delighted that funding has been secured to ensure its future is looking very bright - and that it will become another feature in our ever-growing tourism offer.”

Kelcey Wilson Lee, Head of Programmes and Impact at The Architectural Heritage Fund added, “we have been advising the Foundation for three years and we’re delighted to be able to support the Foundation as it embarks upon this first phase of emergency works. Our funding will focus on the Synagogue’s future use and viability for the benefit of the people of Merthyr Tydfil.”

Dame Helen Hyde, Chair of the Foundation for Jewish Heritage commented, “we are hugely grateful to Cadw, the Architectural Heritage Fund, The Pilgrim Trust, GRoW@Annenberg and the Philip King Charitable Trust for their financial support which has enabled us to move to the next stage of this exciting and important initiative. The backing of Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council has also been crucial to enabling this project to go forward. Merthyr synagogue is a beautiful building that must be saved.”

Michael Mail, Chief Executive of the Foundation for Jewish Heritage added, “the listed Victorian Merthyr Tydfil synagogue is an important piece of Jewish and Welsh heritage. Its very future has been in doubt, which is why the Foundation decided to intervene. We hope to preserve the building and, while respecting its past, give it a meaningful role for today’s society.”

This significant funding from leading heritage bodies ensures that the project will continue to develop, and represents a strong endorsement.

For further information, please contact Michael Mail, Chief Executive of the Foundation for Jewish Heritage on +44 7968 529609 at michaelmail@foundationforjewishheritage.com

The Foundation for Jewish Heritage works internationally on the preservation of Jewish heritage and its website is <https://www.foundationforjewishheritage.com/>



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