

The Virtual Georgian Interior: Revealing Heritage through Digital Innovation

Background

Benjamin Franklin House, located at 36 Craven Street in central London, a Grade I listed Georgian townhouse which is the world's only remaining home of Benjamin Franklin, one of America and the world's most iconic and respected historical figures. Since 2006, Benjamin Franklin House has been open to the public as a unique museum and educational facility, made possible with the support of the HLF.

What the project will do

Revealing Heritage through Digital Innovation will introduce a range of new digital offerings for Benjamin Franklin House, aimed at revealing new aspects of the House's heritage, attracting and educating new audiences, and enhancing the experience of our visitors. The new offerings will include:

Virtual Georgian Interior

The Virtual Georgian Interior – a virtual fly through of Benjamin Franklin House's Georgian interior showing, based on research, how the spaces might have looked during Franklin's tenure – will build on our existing approach to museum interpretation where the physical rooms are empty but time, place and story are evoked through performance, sound and digital projection. We have purposely left the Grade I listed interior spaces of 36 Craven Street unfurnished. Avoiding facsimiles ensures that the 18th century rooms are authentic and would be recognisable to Franklin were he to return today. Currently visitors to the House learn its important story through the Historical Experience, our main public offering, which blends drama and multimedia to tell Franklin's London story. The Virtual Georgian Interior will showcase a digital concept for filling the empty spaces, exploring the juxtaposition of period and personal: all 18 century houses versus what this one might have looked like during the tenure of one, albeit important, individual in its history. We will provide a reference model for other historic places that prioritise stories alongside collections.

Franklin illuminations for children

An updated children's Historical Experience show will feature a suite of new illuminations to add a crucial visual element to enhance young people's understanding of Franklin and his London household. Illustrations of Franklin will be projected directly onto the walls of each of the House's period room using gobo light technology to add colour and context to school visits. By providing these new visual details, children will engage more deeply with the heritage concepts and information shared in each room. The new visual content will also make Franklin a direct presence on the show, as currently he is spoken of by Polly, his landlady's daughter (played by an actress) but not 'seen.' The illustrations' modern colours and artistic style will help visiting children better absorb the historical information as it will be presented in an appealing medium created for them.

New, mobile-friendly website

A new website offering an exciting range of additional content will aid both those who will visit and those unable to access the House's important heritage, and ensure its unique story – one directly related to the foundation of the United States – reaches a global audience. New features will include: 1) bespoke podcasts, such as Benjamin Franklin House Author in Residence, George Goodwin, reading from his new book *Benjamin Franklin in London*; 2) a new section featuring the House's collection of historically significant artifacts, including a letter from Franklin to his sister Jane Mecom; 3) a 360 degree virtual tour, which will also be featured on Google maps, helping to attract new visitors. The website will also promote the House's new digital offerings including the Virtual Georgian Interior and the Franklin Illuminations. The website will be mobile-friendly, allowing the public to conveniently and comprehensively access the site from all devices.

Timeline

We have already done the planning and scoping and are ready to begin as soon as funding is available. Once funds are in hand, we expect that the project will take approximately 12 months to complete.

Total

We hope to be considered for an HLF grant of just under £100,000 which would build on the HLF's essential investment in Benjamin Franklin House since its inception, which allowed completion of the conservation, the development of our Student Science Centre, and educational/historical programming of the Robert H. Smith Scholarship Centre.

Funds will be used for professional fees, equipment and materials, educational materials and marketing, and staff time on the project.