

Two weeks to find £250,000



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Rosemary Rigby in a race against time

Rosemary Rigby is in a race against time.

She has a fortnight to find at least £250,000 that makes her unique self-founded museum complete.

That museum, at Wormelow, is dedicated to Second World War heroine Violette Szabo.

The medals, including a George Cross, that Szabo won fighting behind the lines as a Special Operations Executive (SOE) agent in occupied France are up for auction on July 22.

As a collection, the medals are expected to sell for between £250,000 - £300,000.

But to Rosemary and her museum they are priceless.

Rosemary says she was “devastated” to hear that medals were being put up for auction by Szabo’s daughter.

“I’ve been contacting everyone I can with an interest to see if we can secure the medals for the museum, we need a wealthy benefactor who could buy them,” she says.

The story of Violette Szabo and her exploits with the SOE has been well told.

Opened in 2000, the Violette Szabo museum is in the grounds a house called Cartref, where Szabo spent childhood holidays and sometimes stayed between missions.

The museum was founded by Rosemary after many years of fundraising and collecting Szabo related memorabilia.

Since opening it has had further help from other organisations including the National Lottery Fund and individual donations to attract visitors from all over the world.

Rosemary says the museum is somewhere "Violette's spirit stays alive."

But the medals, she says, will make it complete.

Captured by the Nazis, Szabo was executed at Ravensbruck concentration camp just months before the war's end and aged just 23.

She was immortalised in the 1958 film *Carve Her Name with Pride*.

Under the hammer, her medals - and an accompanying archive of documents and photos - are described as one of the most important collections of its kind ever offered for sale in Britain.

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The collection is expected to fetch between £250,000 and £300,000 when Dix Noonan Webb hosts an auction at the Washington Mayfair Hotel, London, on Wednesday, July 22.

* A Lloyds bank account has been set up for donations towards purchasing the medals. Sort code 309414, account number 00542564