HLF creates cultural centre for Blaenau Gwent

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The money has been awarded to Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council for its Blaenau Gwent Access to Heritage project to bring together 15 community museums, archive groups and history organisations in the Borough.

There are currently 300 volunteers involved in Blaenau Gwent's heritage organisations and the project hopes to attract a further 75 who will be trained in IT skills, cataloguing, collection care oral history skills and working with educational audiences.

Through sharing resources, hosting joint community events and working with schools and adult learners, the project will provide local people to research and explore their local heritage.

Current collections include photographs, paintings and taped interviews that have been collated by volunteers and many of the artefacts were donated by local people but are largely out of public view due to a lack of expertise and equipment.

From prehistoric and Roman materials through to items made and collected during the Miners' Strike of the 1980s, the collections capture the social history of Blaenau Gwent, particularly the area's industrial heritage. And with 40% of tourists claiming to visit South East Wales for its industrial heritage (further information available through the Wales visitor survey 2009, the opening up of these collections will be a welcome development to south Wales' tourism industry.

A dedicated Access to Heritage website will allow visitors from Wales and beyond to view previously inaccessible historic artefacts and community archive materials; and find out more about the borough's industrial past. The grant will also fund the employment of two members of staff, a full-time Access Heritage Officer and a part-time Documentation Officer.

Dan Clayton Jones, Chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Wales, said: "This project will bring together the area's industrial and social past, while creating a brilliant cultural experience for local people and visitors to the area. The grant will offer the resource needed to support the wide range of small heritage groups operating in Blaenau Gwent and encourage them to work in partnership.

"Hundreds of volunteers will receive expert training as part of the project, not only helping local people to develop new skills and confidence, but also ensuring that the volunteers can work together and learn from each other."

Shirley Meyrick, one of 10 volunteers at Blaina Museum, has been managing the Museum for the past 14 years. She said: "We get visitors from across the UK to America and New Zealand coming to the Museum. People are really keen to learn about the industrial revolution of The South Wales Valleys, as well as people wanting to explore their family history, so this grant could help to establish Blaenau Gwent as a key cultural destination.

"Although Blaenau Gwent has so many brilliant heritage groups and attractions, sadly many people are not aware of them. Bringing these together will strengthen all that the area has to offer, encouraging local communities to explore their past while keeping the area's heritage alive for future generations to enjoy."

Cllr. Jason Owen, Executive Member for Leisure at Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, said: “The County Borough Council is delighted with the grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the Blaenau Gwent Access to Heritage Project. The Blaenau Gwent area is very lucky to have a wealth of heritage organisations run by dedicated volunteers who look after collections of artefacts, documents and photographs.

“This project will make all these local heritage resources accessible to as wide a range of people as possible. It will create a vibrant partnership between the heritage organisations and the council that will make the most of the unique heritage of Blaenau Gwent. It will allow local organisations to realise their full potential and will unlock a wide range of exciting and inspirational learning opportunities for the people of Blaenau Gwent and beyond.”

Notes to editors

As of January 2011, HLF has made 52 awards in Blaenau Gwent, amounting to over £5.1m.

Further information

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