The British Deaf Association secures Heritage Lottery Fund investment

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The three-year project aims to digitise this collection and put it at the heart of a wide-ranging education and outreach programme that will address the significant lack of resources focussed on the cultural history of the Deaf community in the UK.

The project will carry out essential conservation work, digitise the collections and join them through a single web portal, allowing online public access to the collections for the first time. The BDA will work hard to encourage engagement with the films, enhancing their value by locating and interviewing people featured in the original footage. Lastly an educational outreach programme, reflecting the social history of Deaf people and promoting awareness of their rich heritage is planned to take place through local cinema screenings, community networks, and in formal education.

The BDA Film & Video Archive contains 136 film reels and 498 videotapes collected between 1931 and 2003 – many of which have not being viewed in over 50 years. This valuable collection of material captures the Deaf community participating in day trips, conferences, holidays, youth camps, campaign rallies and sporting events – including rare footage of the 1935 World Games for the Deaf (now called Deaflympics) held in London. The films cover a wide range of geographical locations both nationally and internationally, and reveal increasingly rare forms of British Sign Language.

Dr Terry Riley, Chair of the BDA's Deaf Heritage Project Steering Group, said: "We're delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has given us this support. Preserving and enabling access to the BDA Film and Video Collection will strengthen the Deaf community's ownership of their own heritage, and increase awareness of the rich history of the Deaf community in the hearing world. Furthermore, this project is about preserving our language, and is in keeping with the BDA's overall mission to empower Deaf people and to serve as a guardian of British Sign Language."

Carole Souter, Chief Executive of Heritage Lottery Fund, said: "We were really inspired by this project which will capture the stories of those who have lived through a period of significant change. The development of British Sign Language had a huge impact on the lives of many deaf, and hearing, people and the digitisation of the BDA's archive will create an important online resource for the future."

Notes to editors

About The British Deaf Association
The British Deaf Association (BDA) was founded in 1890, to work towards equality for Deaf people in the UK, with particular emphasis on ensuring appropriate recognition of British Sign Language (BSL). A member-led organisation, opportunities for member participation and interaction are at the heart of our work; which incorporates community development and advocacy projects, family and youth engagement, BSL development, policy and campaigning.

About British Sign Language
The BDA believes there are approximately 156,000 people in the UK for whom BSL is their preferred first language, and

research indicates that up to 250,000 people use BSL daily. This makes BSL one of the largest indigenous languages in the UK, despite not receiving the legal recognition awarded to otherlanguages such as Scottish Gaelic and Welsh.

Further information

For further information, images and interviews, please contact Jemma Buckley, Deaf Heritage Project Manager at the British Deaf Association on 020 7697 4140, email: hlf.films@bda.org.uk.