Newbridge Memorial Hall

27/07/2010

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) has announced confirmed funding of £2.9 million to fund the restoration of the Newbridge Memorial Hall and open up the venue for community use.

The Grade II listed ‘Newbridge Memo’ as it is affectionately known, won national recognition when it narrowly missed out on winning the UK final of the BBC2 Restoration programme. Built in 1925 to commemorate those in the local community who had given their lives in the First World War, it houses the largest Ball Room in the South Wales Valleys. It is also one of the UK’s finest surviving early 20th century Art Deco cinema theatres.

Dan Clayton Jones, Chair of HLF, said: “We’ve supported this project as it will bring a nationally important building back into use by a community who have worked hard to show how much they value it. What’s more, it will safeguard a living monument to the Welsh mining community and increase opportunities for people to learn about our industrial heritage.

“We should not under-estimate the time and effort that volunteers have played in bringing this project to the position it is in now. Without the skill and dedication of the Memo team, this building would be facing a very uncertain future.

Heritage Minister, Alun Ffred Jones, said: "It is great news that Newbridge Memo has received funding from HLF, not only for the local community, but also for visitors to the area. The dedication and commitment of the community has to be applauded. Communities across Wales play a vital role in telling the story of their local areas and safeguarding their heritage for future generations.”

The funding will support extensive repairs and restoration of the interiors and exteriors to the much loved building which has become gradually more dilapidated since the demise of the mining industry. Physical access to the whole of the ‘Memo’ will be improved with a new link building.

The project will fund a Learning and Outreach Officer to oversee a diverse programme of heritage learning and train up to 25* additional local people to help run the centre as visitor numbers increase.

The aim is to create a ‘Newbridge Memo Experience’ tour which will be an interactive interpretation of the significance of the building, the miners who built it, its role as a Memorial to those who died in WWII and its theatrical history. The aim is to train local people as guides and provide at least 5,000 educational visits annually.

On top of this the Newbridge Hall of Fame will explore the social history of the area showcasing and celebrating the local heroes such as influential photographer Angus McBean and James Dean Bradfield. It is hoped 200 community members and school pupils will get involved in collecting this information and creating a permanent record of the people who made the area what it is today.

The dancehall has been used by Joes Loss to Clara Novello, from Tom Jones to the Stranglers and the Manic Street Preachers. It is still used as a music venue and currently it houses a wide range of local groups and societies including fitness classes, an African drumming group and the Royal British Legion continuing the tradition of promoting community activity. Once work is complete it will be able to welcome more and recreate the community hub it was made to be.

Geraint King, 19, has been a Newbridge Memo supporter since 2004 and in 2008 developed a new website for the campaign. Geraint, said: “I thought we needed to take advantage of the internet as both a platform for providing people with news and information as well as communicating the history of Newbridge and the Memo to a wider audience. Since launching last year the website visitor numbers have increased month to month and content continues to expand. The next stage is to involve local young people in documenting the restoration campaign online as a lasting record for the future.

“Over the past few years I have met so many interesting people and been able to develop skills that may help me with future employment. I hope I can encourage other young people to get involved as the opportunities are so vast. Anybody with any skill or area of interest will have something valuable to offer to the project, even if it's only for a couple of hours a month. Being part of such a large successful team is a great experience for anyone!”

Commenting on the award, Howard Stone, Chair of the Newbridge Institute & Memorial Hall, said: “This is a huge boost not only for Newbridge, but the wider community of South East Wales.

“It is the culmination of seven years of campaigning to save these magnificent buildings - a testimony to the determination of all our volunteers, who have never lost the will to fight for what they believed in. It shows that communities can make a difference, it takes hard work and tenacity and the dedication to go on even through the tough times.

“We’re very grateful to the Heritage Lottery Fund, in making what was once a dream into a reality.”

Notes to editors

Diane and Bill Tilley who have been married for 55 years after meeting at the Memo ballroom and help to run the tea dance.

Geraint, 19, has volunteered at the Memo for the last six years wants to get more young people involved in the project and help take this historic venue into the future.

Community groups including Kristie’s Dance Institue use the ballroom at the Memo every week. Molly Kelly (10), Tyler Morgan (9), Onyekachi Uwandulu (9) and Alisha Evans (9) with dance teacher Kristie.

*Additional 1,173 hours is allocated for volunteers, which is an estimated 25 additional volunteers.

Further information

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