New digital archive of Yorkshire memories launched

16/01/2013

Settle Stories today launches the first phase of the WR Mitchell Archive, a new online resource containing the newly digitised interviews of famous Dalesman and writer WR ‘Bill’ Mitchell. The digital archive currently holds 17 stories. In time, Settle Stories hopes to make all of Bill’s interviews available.

When Bill Mitchell joined The Dalesman magazine, his editor told him to put people before things. This he did by recording hundreds of hours of interviews with the men and women of the Yorkshire Dales which formed the basis for his written work. This library of cassette recordings, now being digitised, will enable a new generation not only to read history - but listen to it. It is thought that Bill recorded over 600 cassette tapes of his interviewees – from Dales folk to more famous personalities such as Wainright and James Herriot.

Settle Stories director, Sita Brand, said: “Bill has a storyteller’s ear for a good yarn and is a master at teasing out the funny, gripping and sometimes tragic stories of everyday Yorkshire life. With our new archive, the stories of John Geldard from Malhamdale, Annie Mason from Wensleydale and ‘Big Bill Up t’Steps’ – and many more – will live on forever.”

Fiona Spiers, Head of HLF Yorkshire and the Humber, said: “This is an excellent project for the community of Settle and the Yorkshire Dales. It will make available a significant, but hidden archive of Yorkshire to the public, allowing them to have access to a window on the past and learn from days gone as well as provide training and skills in research and archiving for local volunteers.”

Notes to editors

Bill Mitchell was born in Skipton in 1928. After gaining journalistic experience on the "Craven Herald", he joined "The Dalesman" in 1948, later becoming editor. He retired in 1988, but continued to write about Yorkshire, producing over 100 books, and many articles for other journals and local newspapers. In 1996 he was awarded the MBE, and, in the same year, the University of Bradford awarded him the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters. WR Mitchell is a well known figure in Settle and Yorkshire. These recorded interviews from the 1980s and 90s capture a social and cultural history which is dying out. Many of the people interviewed have now died.

Settle Stories exists to lift the spirit, engage the mind and stimulate the imagination as well as build community through stories and storytelling. We promote and encourage excellence in traditional and modern forms of storytelling through the annual storytelling festival in October as well as workshops and artist residencies. We collect and document stories including life stories, and storytelling techniques. We nurture a storytelling in the community through our regular storytelling club.

Further information

Sita Brand, Settle Stories on 07748 960 776 or info@settlestories.org.uk