Saving the story of Eastleigh’s strawberry fields forever

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Thanks to a £10,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) people will learn of the time, in the 1860s, when over 20,000 tonnes of berries a day were loaded up at Botley and Swanwick stations, bound for Covent Garden and top hotels in London.

The project will work with local schools using music and dance to bring a century and a half of strawberry farming in the locality alive. A community play will be devised and performed at the Berry Theatre at Hedge End, named in recognition of the local agricultural heritage, and opened just two months ago. The research work underpinning the project will be collected in an archive for future use and to help create a resource pack for local schools.

The play will look at the human stories of the time when strawberry cultivation was at its peak in the mid-1800s and when itinerant workers would come into the area during the summer months to help harvest the crop.

The strawberry trade also had a huge impact on the development and use of railways in the local area. Botley Railway Station (near Hedge End), would have been transporting thousands of strawberries every day during the picking season but today is a quiet, wayside halt.

Stuart McLeod, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund South East England, said: “Local people are being given the chance to discover a hidden agricultural heritage and turn the results of their research into drama and dance for the local community to enjoy.”

Director of The Berry Theatre, Sarah Brigham said: "Our vision is for The Berry Theatre to become a cultural hub for our local community. This project will use drama to bring to life and celebrate a unique and hidden piece of local history and provide an invaluable educational resource for our local schools."

Notes to editors

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported more than 33,900 projects, allocating over £4.4billion across the UK, with over £428 million granted in the South East alone.

Further information

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