Take off for ‘Yeovil’s Magnificent Flying Machines’



Westland factory workers

Radio Ninesprings - Yeovil’s new community radio station - has been awarded £45,000 funding by the Heritage Lottery Fund to create a permanent spoken archive of Westland by recording interviews with people discussing their memories of the factory from 1915 to the present day.

Radio Ninesprings is now searching for people to tell their stories of how a business that started by making oil engines has grown to become a world leader in the design, development and manufacture of helicopters. The project called ‘Yeovil’s Magnificent Flying Machines’ will provide a range of learning opportunities for students at Yeovil College. They will record and edit oral histories and present them on a new community-led website to bring the story of Westland to life. The students will also make a film using clips of home cine film of Westland built aircraft.

Project Director of Radio Ninesprings, Steve Haigh, said: “"We are delighted to have the Heritage Lottery Fund's support for this project. Westland has been manufacturing aircraft in Yeovil for 100 years and its activities remain in living memory. We want to capture those memories through recorded interviews to ensure the story of Westland is available for future generations to learn about and understand. Without those memories an important piece of Yeovil history will be lost with time."

John Ponsonby, Managing Director at AgustaWestland, said: “As we conclude our centenary celebrations it is great to see this exciting community project underway. It will provide a unique record of the aircraft manufacturing activities that have taken place here in Yeovil since 1915 and the important contribution those that have worked for the company over the last 100 years have made to make it the success it is today.”

Head of Curriculum for Creative Industries at Yeovil College, Adrian Ponter, said: “We are delighted to be part of such an exciting project covering local history in the town. It’s a great story for Yeovil and a terrific opportunity for our students to hone their skills on such an interesting community project.”

Nerys Watts, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South West, said: “Companies and industry have always helped to define a place and over the last 100 years, Westland has played a key part in Yeovil life. This National Lottery investment will help to preserve the company’s story and create a lasting legacy from its centenary year.”

The project will train volunteers to learn new skills to enable them to gather and share the spoken memories. The involvement of volunteers will be a key part of the success and on-going legacy of the project. The final versions of the interviews and the film will be made available to the public through Yeovil Library, Fleet Air Arm Museum and via a dedicated community website.

Anyone who would like to be interviewed about Westland, has cine film of Westland aircraft or, to volunteer for the project, please get in touch through the project's website.

Further information

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