

'Munitionettes' making shell casings at the Long Shop during the First World War Long Shop Museum

It put into motion a process now used by industries across the globe, but the world's first purpose-built assembly line building is a hidden gem in the heart of East Suffolk.

The Long Shop Museum, which celebrates this history, now has the opportunity to embark on a major transformation for the 21st century with support from HLF.

Museum to be revitalised

The Long Shop in Leiston has survived in its near-original condition for 163 years, although the passage of time has taken its toll. HLF has awarded initial support of £2m, including development funding of £161,200, towards a £3m project to revitalise the Museum and transform the site into a beacon of industrial heritage.

The restoration of the Victorian factory buildings is part of an overall project to showcase its unique collections, improve facilities and thereby attract new audiences and visitors from within and beyond the region.

[quote=Therese Coffey, MP for Suffolk Coastal]"It is so important we preserve our Suffolk heritage so we can continue to tell the story of the Industrial Revolution."[/quote]

Therese Coffey, MP for Suffolk Coastal, said: “I’m delighted that HLF has given the initial go ahead for £2m-worth of funding to revamp the museum and save the Leiston Long Shop for future generations to enjoy. It is so important we preserve our Suffolk heritage so we can continue to tell the story of the Industrial Revolution.”

Robyn Llewellyn, Head of HLF East of England, said: “Our industries are a huge part of our heritage – from the creation of products and processes we use today to the stories and communities which grew around them. Thanks to money raised by National Lottery players, we’re delighted to offer our support to the transformation of the Long Shop and the plans to ensure it takes its rightful place in the history books of engineering and of Suffolk life.”

The Garrett family's lasting legacy

Run by the Garrett family from 1778 to 1932, Leiston Works produced agricultural machinery and early portable steam engines, which powered the agricultural and industrial revolution in rural Suffolk. The Museum’s name reflects the length of its main building where a boiler on wheels would start at one end and have engine parts added as it moved from workstation to workstation.

After the age of steam, the company and its successors – which employed more than 2,500 people in its prime - continued to make pioneering electric-powered vehicles, Britain’s first diesel lorry and a range of other machines (and hundreds of thousands of shell casings during both world wars). It continued in business until 1980 when the site was rescued from demolition and established as a museum by the Long Shop Project Trust under the leadership of the Earl of Cranbrook.

New audiences

Alongside vital repairs, the project will help provide an enhanced visitor experience with new activities: the creation of a reminiscence café, a community hub and a Youth Shed where young people can gain basic engineering skills and find inspiration in the achievements of Richard Garrett, his descendants and those who worked at the site.

New displays will feature the Museum’s own extensive collections – from sickles to steam engines - and draw on the Garrett Archive at Suffolk Record Office to explore the history of industry and science, tell the stories of the workers and reveal more about the lives of the Garrett family – including Elizabeth Garrett who became the first woman in Britain to qualify as a doctor.

'The Cathedral' of Leiston

As well as its integral part in Britain’s industrial heritage, the Long Shop was a huge employer for the local community and made the town one of East Anglia’s few centres for heavy industry and a leading manufacturer of agricultural machinery in eastern England. The Long Shop building was known as ‘The Cathedral’ by those who worked there.

The news comes following the museum’s recent award of Family Friendly Museum of the Year at the Suffolk Museum of the Year Awards.

Anna Mercer, Curator at the Long Shop Museum, said: “We welcome the support of HLF and see this as an acknowledgement of the work of our staff and many volunteers to provide the best possible experience for the thousands of visitors we welcome here each year. Repairing, restoring and renewing the Long Shop will unlock its

unrealised potential as a unique and brilliant place which continues to generate interest, understanding and pride in our industrial and engineering heritage amongst people of all ages and from all walks of life.

“We also want to reach out to visitors within the wider cultural community which includes Aldeburgh Music and the ever popular coastline of East Suffolk. We hope that this commitment to and confidence in our plans will inspire individuals, trusts and foundations to support our campaign to make the Long Shop a fine example of a modern museum, inspiring young people and engaging new audiences within and beyond our community.”

Further information

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