Museum of English Rural Life opens after multi



Hop pickers at Mordiford, Herefordshire, in the 1930s Museum of English Rural Life

The Museum of English Rural Life - established in the 1950s by the University of Reading to record the rapidly changing countryside following the Second World War - opens to the public today after a £3million revamp.

Now, the museum houses the largest and most comprehensive collection of agricultural and rural artefacts in the UK, with over one million items giving a snapshot into how country life has evolved over the centuries.

Thanks to National Lottery players, the museum galleries have been transformed as part of the redevelopment programme. The Our Country Lives project, awarded a £1.8m HLF grant in 2014, has enabled a redesign of the museum with new facilities, a fresh interactive layout and new digital exhibits designed to draw visitors in to experience rural heritage in new and exciting ways.

A museum for the people created by the people, the Museum of English Rural Life aims to reach out to new generations with lots of opportunities for students, volunteers and the local community to get involved with the stories of rural life.

Nine new galleries

Nine new galleries, curated around the concept of Our Country Lives, each explore a theme including: Making Rural England, A Year on the Farm, Forces for Change, and Wagon Walk and Digging Deeper. They aim to weave stories, memories, archive film and photographs from rural lives through new displays which aim to revitalise the way visitors engage with the Museum's extraordinary collections and show how this can deepen engagement with today's countryside.

Many items are on display for the first time, including huge wallhangings of farming scenes made for the Festival of Britain, and evocative images of farmhands going about their daily work.

[quote=Director of the Museum of English Rural Life, Kate Arnold-Forster]"We hope to engage new generations with the rural past and present, and promote debate about the production of food and its future."[/quote]

Director of the Museum of English Rural Life, Kate Arnold-Forster said, "The significant and much-needed redevelopment of the Museum and its displays aims to create dynamic visitor experiences that help to change perceptions about the countryside and agriculture. We also hope to engage new generations with the rural past and present, and promote debate about the production of food and its future."

Stuart McLeod, Head of HLF South East, said: "HLF has been a long-term supporter of the Museum of English Rural Life, having previously funded its relocation into central Reading in 2005. It contains an astonishing array of items which together tell an important part of the history of England. It's great to see the difference National Lottery money has made to this museum - creating a wonderful space that will enthral and educate visitors for many years to come."

The Museum of Rural Life is open to the public from Wednesday 19 October.

Find out more on the Museum of Rural Life website.