Birmingham Reps 100-year history comes to life

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From photographs of a young Laurence Olivier making his stage debut in Birmingham to the personal correspondence of the theatre's founder Sir Barry Jackson, a new website is set to celebrate the Birmingham Repertory Theatre’s 100th birthday next year.

Over 3,000 records of The REP’s historic productions - including photographs, letters, documents and other fascinating ephemera from its history - will be made available to the public, many for the first time, to coincide with the theatre’s centenary in 2013.

The REP 100 website will feature images taken from the archives of Birmingham Repertory Theatre and its founder Sir Barry Jackson which are currently held in Birmingham's Central Library. It will tell the story of the thousands of creative people - from writers to costume makers and actors to administrators, as well as paying audience members - who have been involved with the theatre during its remarkable history from 1913 to the present day.

The REP 100 project has been made possible by a grant of £175,300 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and will form part of the theatre's wider centenary celebrations. In addition to the digital archive, the project plans to bring The REP’s heritage to life with the creation of oral histories from audiences, actors, writers, directors and audience members.

Celebrations will also include an exhibition, audio tours of the Old Rep theatre on Station Street and The REP's current home on Broad Street, which is currently undergoing redevelopment as part of the Library of Birmingham, and a range of heritage activity days. There will also be many opportunities for the public to volunteer and learn skills such as archiving, curating and cataloguing.

Trina Jones, General Manager, Birmingham Repertory Theatre, says that the project will not just be a celebration of The REP, but of the city and its place in British theatre history: "REP100 will illustrate unique aspects of The REP's history. Our archives are of local, national and international importance and so the new online digital archive will allow people across the globe to learn about theatre history, Birmingham and British culture."

Reyahn King, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund West Midlands, explains the importance of the award: "Birmingham Repertory Theatre holds a special place in many people’s hearts and is an important part of the city’s cultural history. Now, with this grant REP 100 will enable people of all ages to get involved and explore its remarkable stories of the stage so that they can be preserved for everyone’s enjoyment for many years to come.”

Describing the significance of The REP's heritage playwright David Edgar, says: “The importance of Sir Barry Jackson and The REP is underestimated. The REP was the first purpose built repertory theatre in Britain. Beyond the dazzling array of actors whose careers started at the theatre, Sir Barry and his successors presided over many path-finding innovations in writing, production and design. From its groundbreaking modern dress Shakespeare productions in the 1920s and1930s to its impressive programme of new writing from the 1970s onwards, The REP has reflected the changing character of the city and the country. Its archive tells that story and its digitisation will prove vital to historians, theatre-makers, scholars and students alike."

The REP 100 website will go live in September and full details of The REP's centenary celebrations will be announced in the Autumn. For anyone interested in getting involved in the REP 100 project and learning new skills such as archiving, cataloguing, curating and recording oral histories

The REP are offering opportunities for volunteering. For more information call 0121 245 2000 or email REP100VOLS@birmingham-rep.co.uk.

Further information

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