Lost musical mecca’s fame to be relived

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But despite this unrivalled roll of honour, Nuneaton’s Co-op Hall fell into disuse and was demolished in 2008.

Now a local community arts group is setting out to capture the memories of those heady days with the help of a £38,200 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

Locally based not-for-profit organisation Art Alert is to work with local people of all ages to piece together an archive of the Co-op Hall through its heydays when it played host to wartime big bands and then so many icons of the British pop music scene.

The two-year project will make use of young volunteers who will discover how their parents and grandparents spent their leisure time by interviewing older members of the community. These memories, together with photos and memorabilia, will be used to produce an archive to record the historical and cultural importance of the impressive Art Deco building built in1938 by the town’s Co-operative Society.

The volunteers will work alongside local historians, artists, musicians, a graphic designer, film maker and web designer to create the archive, as well as a touring exhibition that will be displayed at venues throughout the community. These will include schools, shopping centres, libraries, a hospital, museum and local theatre.

Recognised as a musical mecca by three generations of Nuneatonians, the Co-op Hall hosted big band sounds from the likes of Jack Parnell and Joe Loss creating precious memories for locals who first met on its polished oak dancefloor. But it secured its place in pop music history when in October 1962 it welcomed, as a supporting act, 'the fabulous new recording group, The Beatles'. Then in November 1963 the Stones played two shows, the afternoon slot before an audience of children who greeted the musicians with a barrage of cream cakes thrown at the stage.

Head of Heritage Lottery Fund West Midlands, Anne Jenkins, said: “This lost building has a special place in the hearts of many of Nuneaton’s residents who now have a once and for all chance to preserve this important part of their social history.”

For Art Alert, Chair Joanne Lole, said: “We are delighted to have the opportunity to deliver the project The Co-op Hall- an era gone but not forgotten. The inspiration developed from conversations between young people and their grandparents, and how music and fashion are a common link. Initial support and interest has been fantastic.”

Further information

If you would like to be involved in the project contact Corinne Davies on 07792 053 757 or corine.davies@ntlworld.com.

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