More to Surbiton than The Good Life

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The project will be run by staff and students from Hillcroft College, with support from Kingston Council and NHS Kingston. The college and partners are now calling for community volunteers to help piece together a history of the town, centred on the Oakhill neighbourhood.

The area is close to Surbiton Station emphasising the fact that the town was the first major suburb to be linked by rail directly to central London. That was in 1838 and it shaped the area's growth from a few grand dwellings to today's town boasting a population of more than 40,000.

One of the original large mansions is the building that now houses Hillcroft College. Originally built for the owners of the Bryant and May match company, it went on to become the site of the first college in the UK established for working women. This was in 1926. Ironically, the earlier connection with Bryant and May recalled the so-called match-girls strike in the late 1880s when women employees went on strike to draw attention to their poor and dangerous working conditions.

The project will also trace the history of healthcare in the area because the nearby site of the former Surbiton Hospital is being redeveloped to provide a state-of-the-art community health centre.

The site also accommodates the brand new Lime Tree primary school that opened last September. Both the school and the health centre will be involved in the history project helping to find local people who will interview older residents about their recollections of the local area. The information gathered will feature in a new Oakhill Community Heritage Project website and will be included in permanent local exhibitions, parts of which will be displayed in the College, the primary school and the new health centre.

International artist Rana Begum will work with local volunteers and schoolchildren to create a permanent timeline to be installed along a new pedestrian and cycle path that will follow a route through the new development towards Surbiton station.

As well as those visiting their GP surgeries, the school and the College in the future, the timeline will be seen by some of the eight million commuters that use Surbiton Station annually.

Sue Bowers, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund London said: "This is an area with a rich history that has been largely overlooked but now aspects of its transport, education and health care heritage will be told thanks to a community effort involving volunteers of all ages."

Michael Wheeler, Hillcroft principal said: "We are thrilled that this project bid has been successful and see it as an excellent way to celebrate the wonderful local history in this area and to help to bring key partners and the local community together in a common aim."

Ian Nixon, NHS Kingston's Director for the Surbiton site redevelopment, said: "The local community fundraised for the bricks to build the original Surbiton Hospital so we're delighted that we can celebrate that legacy in the new health building for the benefit of future generations. If you're interested in volunteering we'd love to hear from you."

People who are keen to get involved in the project as a volunteer are asked to email OCHP@hillcroft.ac.uk and they will be sent further details.

Further information

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