

Music Hall stars to shine once more

01/08/2009

They trod the boards throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries as singers, dancers, comedians, acrobats, animal trainers and clowns. Memories of these music hall and variety artistes may have faded over the years but now, the more than 200 who lie buried in Streatham Park Cemetery will be in the spotlight once more, thanks to a £50,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

A restoration project by The Music Hall Guild of Great Britain and America will recall those who were part of the golden age of vaudeville in a project that will restore to its former glory the faded white marble memorial stone erected by the Variety Artistes Benevolent Fund in 1924. In addition a new enhanced setting will ensure greater public access to the memorial.

Volunteers are being invited to take part in a research programme that explores the lives and careers of these artistes and their findings will be displayed in a permanent onsite exhibition in the Variety Artistes Benevolent Fund Chapel. The information will also form the basis of an online database.

Among the host of performers who lie buried in the cemetery are Tom Leamore, the famous comedian and singer of 'Percy from Pimlico', together with Tom Costello, renowned for his songs 'Comrades' and 'At Trinity Church I Met My Doom'. The actress Lily Long rests not far away from Strongman Atlas and his strong lady Vulcana and close by is Joseph Tabrar, the composer of 'Daddy Wouldn't Buy Me A Bow Wow'. Surrounding this memorial are an array of stage and screen stars including Will Hay, Lupino Lane, and Queen of the Chorus Songs Florrie Forde, the Australian-born entertainer who made her London debut in 1897 and soon became a firm favourite with her rendering of such popular numbers as Down at the Old Bull and Bush and I Do Like To Be Beside The Seaside.

Commenting for The Music Hall Guild of Great Britain and America, chairman Neil Morkunas, said: "This project is a wonderful opportunity for us to shine a light on these extraordinary performers, whose contribution to our collective cultural history must never be forgotten. The Music Hall Guild of Great Britain and America is indebted to the Heritage Lottery Fund for their support and encouragement with this project."

For the Heritage Lottery Fund, Head of HLF London Sue Bowers, said: "These largely forgotten performers from music hall's golden age will once more be thrust into the limelight, thanks to this project."

Notes to editors

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported more than 28,800 projects, allocating over £4.3billion across the UK, with over £850 million granted in London alone.