Nailing Bromsgrove’s world-beating past

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Thanks to a £100,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the nailer’s cottage will be carefully dismantled and reassembled at the museum’s nearby open air site. The two-up, two-down brick cottage with its single-storey nailer’s workshop projecting from the front, stands in Lickey End, near Bromsgrove.

Records show it remained in the same family from 1871 until 2008, since when the building has stood empty. The cottage is largely unaltered and it has been described by experts as a remarkable find, which is why saving it is a priority.

Avoncroft, which this year celebrates its 50th anniversary, will reconstruct the cottage to give a glimpse of the harsh living and working conditions of the people who, over 300 years, built up Bromsgrove’s reputation as the nailmaking capital of the world. It was said that a good nailer could turn out 24,000 nails per week but the trade was badly rewarded.

Whole families took part with as many male as female nailmakers and, according to the 1861 census, nailmaking accounted for a quarter of the child labour in England and Wales. In the mid-1800s it was estimated that 10,300 people in Bromsgrove were working in the trade.

As well as rescuing the building, Avoncroft Museum will enhance its education programme by running nailmaking courses for those interested is gaining heritage skills. It will also help local people to trace online whether ancestors were engaged in nailmaking.

Reyahn King, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund West Midlands, said: “This is a fascinating project that will save a fine example of the area’s world-beating cottage industry. Such a find is rare and provides the basis for an excellent education programme.”

It’s a view that’s shared by Simon Carter, Director at Avoncroft Museum. He said: “Regionally, when people think about working conditions in times gone by, they tend to focus on what life was like for people working in factories. This property is critically important because it gives us an insight into the day to day experiences of people working in a true ‘cottage industry’. It’s a valuable resource and thanks to the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, we’re delighted that we can now preserve it for future generations.”

Further information

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