Schools' Suffragette history wins ministerial approval

08/11/2012

Culture Secretary Maria Miller, who is also the cabinet minister for women and equalities, said about the project by pupils from Kings Norton Girls School and Waverley School: "Learning about politics and the journey that women have made and continue to make in politics is something that all young people should engage with. Projects that encourage students to engage with the political system and its history are an important part of this."

The schools' students will be exploring women's history and how campaigning and protesting has developed over a period of more than a century. The project has been made possible thanks to a £19,400 grant from the Young Roots programme run by the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

Ms Miller added: "Birmingham was central to the suffragette movement, and I'm delighted that this HLF grant will help young people to learn more about this important aspect of the city's history."

From the early 1900s Birmingham came to the forefront of both suffragette and the less militant suffragist movements. Winson Green prison was where prominent campaigners were gaoled and where the notorious procedure of force feeding suffragettes on hunger strike was carried out.

One local suffragette was Nellie Hall, god-daughter of the movement's leading light Emmeline Pankhurst. In 1913 Hall achieved notoriety by throwing a brick through the window of a car carrying prime minister Herbert Asquith during his visit to the city.

Working with Birmingham Archives & Heritage (BAH) the young researchers will look at social and political change affecting women's rights from late Victorian times, they will tour sites in Birmingham associated with suffragette activities and travel to London to visit the Houses of Parliament and The Women's Library.

Using their discoveries the young people will create a series of short films to re-enact aspects of Birmingham's suffragette and suffragist heritage as well as a documentary covering the research project and opinions from the young women that have taken part. These will be donated to BAH to be used as a teaching resource for other city schools and to be generally accessible online.

The films and documentary will also be screened at both schools and at Birmingham Central Library to celebrate Women's Day on 8 March next year.

Reyahn King, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund West Midlands, said: "This project will provide a valuable addition to the young peoples' understanding of the city's history and its role in a crucial aspect of social and political change in the UK. It's a pleasure to see young women taking an interest in those whose commitment enabled the choices that we have as women today. Those taking part will also gain a range of skills from academic research to scripting and producing documentary films. Birmingham is a priority area for HLF and this project will make a significant addition to local archives."

Nicola Gauld, project manager, said: “While the young people involved in this project have some knowledge of the suffragettes, they wanted to know more about local women who were part of activities in Birmingham, some of which took place very near to where the students live. The Fight for the Right project will provide an exciting opportunity to learn about the Birmingham suffragettes using the collections held at the city archives and to interpret that material through film. Focusing on debate and campaigning, the young people will develop their own ideas and opinions about voting systems, politics and protesting. We are extremely grateful to the HLF for agreeing to support this project.”

Further information

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